Housing, Homelessness and the Young

BYHP Report into the Government’s Proposal to Scrap Housing Benefits for Under-25s

George Richards SEPTEMBER 2012
About BYHP – Working with Young People

BYHP works with young people aged between 13 and 25 and was set up as a multi-agency initiative in 1990 to respond to the problem of youth homelessness in North Oxfordshire. Since that time the scope of the work undertaken at BYHP has broadened, with BYHP now working in a holistic way to prevent homelessness. BYHP works with young people who are deprived and do not have the same life chances as others across Oxfordshire. They often need support and the opportunity to realise their potential and BYHP helps them identify and pursue their goals. BYHP supports around 400 young people each year.

BYHP provides family mediation to prevent homelessness, specialist advice regarding employment, education and training, and also advice and information on housing and benefit issues. Our work to find housing solutions and maintain housing for vulnerable young people lead us to be initially concerned that the proposals to limit housing benefit entitlement to under 25s could be very damaging for already vulnerable young people. We worked with George Richards to investigate the proposals in more detail and produce this research report, so that we could more fully formulate our position and thereby influence any eventual changes.

(Clare Norton, Chief Executive Officer, BYHP)
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Summary

This is primarily a report of the proposed changes to the housing benefit system for 18 to 25-year-olds, with a qualitative research section. The report seeks to engage with the proposal to explore the possible effects of the changes on young homeless people and their families. It asks: how would the proposals affect young people who are at risk of homelessness? Would the changes prevent or increase the likelihood of 18–25 homelessness? The research section poses the proposal to some young people who receive housing benefits to find out their views on the proposal and asks how they would be affected by this change.

The report is split into four sections: 1. is subdivided into seven sections, including: an overview, literature review and explanation of the background to this proposal, looking at the debate so far, what it means, and why it has come now. In addition, this section connects with the concept of homelessness, and looks at UK homelessness today. 2. The study itself consists of a qualitative group interview with some young people who receive housing benefits, questioning them on their view of the proposal and focusing on how they will be affected. Findings from the interviews are presented, and the proposal is evaluated. 3. In this section the report draws its conclusions. 4. Finally, the report makes some recommendations for other homelessness or housing organisations about what they should do in light of these findings, and looks to the future of this proposal.

The report finds that young homelessness across the country is increasing, the reasons for which include youth unemployment, increasing poverty, and reductions in household income. The proposal to cut housing benefits will only contribute to this trend, as young people are forced back into the family environment, many families of whom cannot afford such arrangements – itself a result of the current economic climate. The view from the young people in the report is similarly down-beat. They agreed that they would be worse off without housing benefits, and would not be able to support themselves without it. Also, they would all be unable to live with their parents, which is what the proposal suggests.

1. Background and literature review

As this is still only a proposal, the amount of information on the changes is limited, particularly in regards to scholarly sources on this specific issue. As a result, the literature on the specific proposal is nearly all confined to newspaper articles and government sources for information and statistics. What follows is an outline of the benefit changes and surrounding literature with a review of the debate so far. This will be analysed in the context of other economic and social changes in Britain, with particular focus on austerity and the economic downturn.
1.1. The Current housing benefit system for under-25s

Currently, to be eligible for housing benefits you must be at least 18 years old and not be in education. You are not eligible if: you have savings over £16,000, live with close relatives, are a full-time student or are an asylum seeker.\(^1\) Also, since 1 January 2012, if you are single and under 35 you can only receive the benefit for bed-sits or one room in shared accommodation.\(^2\) For anyone under 18, they are the responsibility of the social service, and therefore their housing arrangements would not be affected by this proposal.

1.2. The proposal

In an interview with the Mail on Sunday\(^3\) on 23 June 2012 the Prime Minister, David Cameron, signalled a further shake up of the welfare system,\(^4\) scrapping housing benefits for 16-to-25-year-olds, in a move that would save £1.8bn every year and affect 380,000 people under the age of 25.\(^5\) However, Cameron made it clear that the changes were not solely economic in nature. For him the shake-up has a moral underpinning, and is not simply about ‘getting the books in order’. It’s about ‘who we back, who we reward, what we expect of people, the kind of signals we send to the next generation’.\(^6\) Central to this shake-up is a re-understanding of the family. Cameron is calling for more family responsibility in welfare, drawing from procedures in other countries, specifically, the Netherlands, which doesn’t necessarily provide for under-21s on the issue of housing, and ‘where it does, it expects their family to contribute if they can.’\(^7\) The PM want’s to reverse what he sees is a culture of benefit dependency and state entitlement in a system that actually advantages those who do not work.\(^8\) It is a policy that will appeal to traditional Conservatives and Tory back-benchers, whose support has waned in recent months of this coalition government.\(^9\)

1.3. Reception of the proposal

In response to the Prime Minister’s speech, a number of leading figures and organisations dealing in the area of young homelessness and housing provision came

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\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2163773/David-Cameron-axe-housing-benefits-feckless-25s-declares-war-welfare-culture.html
\(^4\) This follows the changes to the benefit system, with the Welfare Reform Act, which achieved Royal Assent in 2010.
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/06/25/cameron-housing-benefit-under-25s-child-benefit_n_1623238.html
out with statements warning against changes to the housing benefit system. The following is a collection of these statements, bringing together their thoughts.

Campbell Robb, chief executive of the housing and homelessness charity Shelter stated:

At a time when youth unemployment is at record levels, these proposals would leave thousands with nowhere else to go. Currently over half of young people who rely on housing benefit to pay a private landlord will be on benefits for less than six months while they are unemployed and look for work. They would also present serious problems for vulnerable young people, for example care leavers and those who have experienced family breakdown.\(^\text{10}\)

Adding that:

While excesses in the system should be rooted out, abolishing the entire safety net for young people is not the way to go about it. Sadly it seems inevitable that we’ll see an increase in homelessness as a result.\(^\text{11}\)

For Mr. Robb, these cuts are making it ever harder to be young in 21\(^{st}\) century Britain.

Leslie Morphy, CEO of homeless charity Crisis on a similar note stated:

Everyday at Crisis we help vulnerable young people who have become homeless to get back on their feet and rebuild their lives by supporting them to move into accommodation. They will typically have escaped from violent or difficult homes – the Prime Minister's suggestion today that they be forced to return to stay with their families is just not an option.\(^\text{12}\)

However, David Cameron did hint that there would exceptions for people at risk of domestic violence, which Leslie Morphy alludes to in her statement. He said that the system should not penalise those young people ‘who genuinely have nowhere else to live’, reiterating that for those coming out of care or those with destructive home-lives ‘we must always be there for them’.\(^\text{13}\) Nevertheless, such statements from the PM, whilst promising, are evidently not enough to reassure those individuals and organisations that may be affected by the governmental proposal. Moreover, Crisis and Shelter were by no means the only organisations who raised their concern. The YMCA, Barnardo’s\(^\text{14}\) and Homeless Link (which represents and supports over 500 UK homelessness organisations) all released statements strongly criticising the proposal. Ian Green, chief executive of the YMCA, criticised what he perceived as an ongoing attack on young people by this current government and said that the housing benefit system should be based on need and not on some ‘crude measure of whether an individual is a certain age or not’.\(^\text{15}\) Similarly, Matt Harrison, interim chief executive of Homeless Link expressed particular concern that, without a credible

11Ibid.
13David Cameron number10 speech on welfare reform, 25/06/2012.
alternative, removing housing benefit might ‘risk damaging the life chances of thousands of young people and storing up problems for society in the long-run.’\textsuperscript{16}

In addition to releasing statements of their own, the five already mentioned organisations, along with The Children’s Society, St. Basils, Gingerbread, The Foyer Foundation and Centrepoint, came together to make a joint statement in a letter to \textit{The Times} expressing their concerns about what they referred to as ‘these ill-conceived proposals.’\textsuperscript{17}

Reflecting on these statements, the reception from housing and homelessness charities to the government’s proposal has been exceedingly negative; there appears to be a consensus within this charitable sector that cutting housing benefits to under-25s would result in an increase in homelessness and would put many vulnerable young people at risk. Nonetheless, these statements do not completely succeed in explicating why cutting housing benefits to under-25s at this time is something society should be worried about. The following section explores in more depth the context within which this proposal has materialised, and sheds light on the possible repercussions of these changes.

\textbf{1.4. Related effects of austerity on families and young people}

In a joint report by the NSPCC, Action for Children and the Children’s Society on the effects of the recession and austerity on vulnerable children it has been warned that the most vulnerable families\textsuperscript{18} will be the most affected by tax and benefit changes, spending cuts and the effects of the economic downturn, with a calculated fiscal loss of £3,000 on average per annum per family by 2015, representing a 7\% reduction in living standards. It is also projected that there will be an increase of 120,000 workless families between 2010 and 2015.\textsuperscript{19} The report concludes that:

\begin{quote}
The resulting evidence shows that the number of vulnerable families with children is often understated and on whatever definition that their number will grow substantially in coming years. It also shows that welcome measures put in place to mitigate the impact of the recession on vulnerable families with children are insufficient. These findings underline the urgent need to protect children from the impact of austerity and for particular consideration to be given to the needs of the most vulnerable children and families in our society. (p.6)
\end{quote}

This report makes clear that vulnerable families and children are amongst the hardest getting hit by the current political and economic climate of austerity, cuts and recession. They have less money, higher living costs and are more likely to be threatened by unemployment. Such vulnerable families are also more likely than average to have young adults who rely on housing benefits.\textsuperscript{20} These are the type of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Families usually with low socio-economic status ‘who are receiving little support in their family and parenting roles either from personal support networks or from community-based support services.’ Taken from: \texttt{http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB18_Vulnerable_families.pdf}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Reed, H. (2012) ‘In the Eye of the Storm: Britain’s Forgotten Children and Families’ Available online: \texttt{<http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/intheeyeofthestorm.pdf>}
\item \textsuperscript{20} See: Carbone et al. 2004; Vulnerable families include families ‘experiencing problems with housing’ In: \texttt{http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB18_Vulnerable_families.pdf}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
people for whom housing benefits are a lifeline, supporting their income and living arrangements. With even tighter incomes, many of these families might struggle to support their children in their living arrangements, and may find it hard to allow children to live rent free. This places parents (or as is often the case, lone parent) in a tough position, in which, on the one hand, they are forced with the responsibility of looking after their child for longer, and on the other, are hit by a fall in their gross income. This pressurised environment has all the necessary ingredients for family conflict and breakdown. Not only is the housing benefit proposal a raw deal for young people, it is also unfair on parents who are burdened by the prospect of many more years of care and responsibility as a result of this government’s redefinition of adulthood.

Furthermore, recent changes in the benefit system through the Welfare Reform Act 2012, with the under-occupation – dubbed ‘bedroom tax’ - benefit cut mean that many people may be forced to downsize once their children leave home. As a result, many households might simply not have the disposable space that is needed to re-house a child – which is what the housing benefit proposal hopes to achieve. For families facing this situation, the results of cuts to young peoples’ housing benefits could lead to over-crowding, further contributing to the current housing crisis. What’s more, not all children can rely on their parents providing them with a place to stay indefinitely. The experience of BYHP dealing with very large families is that sometimes the parents simply do not have enough space to accommodate their children. A common situation can be that teenagers sleeping on the sofa, and parents waiting for them to turn 18 so they can legally push them out of the family home.

Although David Cameron has made it clear that he supports families and that one of the impetuses behind the housing benefit changes is that he wants families to take more responsibility, this proposal would make life extremely difficult for families by cutting from both ends: limiting the autonomy of young people who want to leave the family nest and simultaneously limiting the strength and ability of families to support themselves. In an ideal world, parents support their children and are there for them when things go wrong, but the reality for many young people in Britain is that they cannot always rely on support from their parents. Likewise, for orphans and other children coming out of the care system, some people simply do not have a home to go back to.

1.5. The concept of homelessness

Under Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act 1824 it is made illegal to sleep on the streets. You may be committing an offence if you are:

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21 This will cut tenants housing benefit by 14% for one spare room and 25% for two (From: http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06272). Representing nearly 30% disposable income after other housing bills (From: http://www.affinitysutton.com/news_and_resources/article/housing_futures_network-1.aspx).
22 For a background on the housing crisis see, for instance, Shelter: http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/why_we_campaign/the_housing_crisis A 2011 Ipsos MORI survey for Channel 4 found that 76% of the public agree that there is a current housing crisis. See: http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2888/Threequarters-sense-housing-crisis-in-Britain.aspx
…wandering abroad and lodging in any barn or outhouse, or in any deserted or unoccupied building, or in the open air, or under a tent, or in any cart or waggon, [not having any visible means of subsistence] and not giving a good account of himself or herself.23

Whilst accurate figures are hard to assess, the majority of homeless people are not rough sleepers. It should be made clear that homelessness does not just refer to the stereotypical image of those individuals who spend their days begging on street corners, and sleeping under bridges on cardboard boxes – what Conservative MP Sir George Young infamously referred to as those ‘people you step over on the way out of the opera’. This is a common misconception and an enduring myth, which does not reflect the true scale of the problem. Homelessness is also the young person who is sleeping on their friend’s sofa, because their parents have kicked them out of their home, or the person relying on the goodwill of a landlord who has agreed to put them up rent-free, until they find a paying resident. These people, whilst technically in a house, are not in a home; they live under a condition in which at any time they could be arbitrarily forced back onto the streets. This describes the experience of the majority of people termed ‘homeless’. They are outside property laws, and constantly at the mercy of others who can use their ownership rights to arbitrarily prohibit and prevent any of the actions of the homeless person as long as they are within their property domains. Since every place is owned by someone, whether it is in private hands or property of the state, people with no legal accommodation are fundamentally un-free from coercion and in their ability of self-determination.24

1.6. The rise in homelessness

The number of people who are defined as homeless is rising. Government statistics show a rise in UK street homelessness of 23% between 2010 and 2011,25 with the latest National Statistics on Statutory Homelessness for the last quarter of 2011 showing a similar rise in England.26 Notably, young homelessness is on the rise, as a new study by Homeless Link has revealed. It found that 44% of homeless charities and 48% of councils have seen an increase in young people coming to them seeking help to avoid homelessness or find shelter.27

Taking Burnley as an example, there has been a reported 60% increase in young homelessness over the last 12 months, which has been attributed to the effects of youth unemployment and reduction in the purchasing power of families, as they struggle to maintain rent-free accommodation for their teenage children.28 For Shana Clarke of Calico’s Elizabeth Street project (a homelessness charity in Burnley) the economic strain on families is contributing directly to family and relationship breakdowns:

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Relationship breakdowns has always been a big reason for homelessness, but there has been an increase recently, especially surround parental evictions. Families are feeling the economic strain, and young people who cannot afford to contribute, and who cannot find work, are being asked to leave.\textsuperscript{29}

Moreover, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in a new report, has predicted that 81,000 young people will face homelessness by 2020 – an increase of 6,000 from 2008.\textsuperscript{30} One of the contributing factors is the poor housing market for young people. The report, on housing options and solutions for young people, outlines the need for affordable housing for the young and stressed the importance of housing support services. The report concludes that on the government’s current path, ‘by 2020 young people will be further marginalised within a badly functioning housing sector’.\textsuperscript{31} What it stresses is the importance of stability in the housing sector, something which a cut to housing benefits for young people is unlikely to achieve.

In the current economic and political environment, there appears to be an upwards trend in homelessness figures, for adult and young homelessness alike. One of the most important factors contributing to this increase is the economic downturn; particularly rising unemployment and tax and benefit changes. In addition, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, which highlights the need for more to be done in relation to housing for young people, demonstrates that the cutting of housing benefits for under-25s will only further increase the incidence of young homelessness in what they refer to as the ‘chaotic housing pathway’.

1.7. Literature review summary

Taken altogether, the response to this policy proposition has been largely negative. The criticisms can be summarised as following:

1. It will lead to an increased incidence of young homelessness
2. It will put a strain on families who are already suffering the effects of the economic downturn of recent years and other governmental policies, particularly the under-occupation benefit cut
3. The proposal does not take account that some people do not have families to go to
4. It hits working people hard – the majority of people on housing benefit are, in fact, in work

2. Research

Currently there is insufficient information on the details of this proposal and as such it is extremely difficult to make a quantitative analysis of the number of young people this proposal would make homeless and to reliably test the criticisms above. However, what is achievable is a qualitative analysis through interviews with a target group of

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. p.8
young people who have housing issues, to gather valid information about this issue from those the proposal would affect.

2.1. Procedure

An informal interview with three under-25 housing benefit claimants from the Banbury area, asking a set of 12 standardised questions. The interview was conducted by a BYHP councillor and housing advisor, whom the young people know and trust. This helped to facilitate them to speak openly and truthfully about their housing arrangements. For confidentiality reasons their names are not mentioned here. In the findings they are referred to only by their initials: RH (male), SS (female) and SB (male) and are aged 18, 21 and 24 respectively. Please see the appendices for the complete questions and answers. They are referred to in the findings by their corresponding numbers.

2.2. Findings

All of the young people asked were currently receiving housing benefits (Q.2) and were within the age bracket that the proposal targets. All were additionally receiving Job Seeker’s Allowance (Q.9). Their housing situation differed from one another (Q.3): SS was in a supported housing unit for young mothers, but relied on housing benefits to pay the service charges, whilst RH was in a young person’s accommodation, but like SS, relied on housing benefits to pay the service charge. SB was in private accommodation and relied on the benefit to pay rent. Their first impression of the proposal (Q.1) was rather negative. SB thought it ‘made sense’ but aired a worry, along with SS, that it would make it extremely difficult for them to pay rent. On how this would affect their living arrangements, worries were raised that this could lead to eviction (Q.4) and that without housing benefits all agreed that they would not be able to support themselves without some form of community support (Q.5). However, RH, who was in a supported accommodation unit, was unsure of the effects the proposal would have on his living arrangements, but like SS did use housing benefits to pay some of his accommodation costs. What they were in agreement on was that living with their parents was not a housing option (Q.7), with the prospects of living in a tent or on the streets a reality for them (Q.6). Additionally, they felt the Government did not give enough in housing benefits (Q.10).

When asked whether they thought they had been negatively affected by any other policies of this current government (Q.11, which was asked to corroborate the answer to Q.12 on whether they felt the government was ‘attacking the young’, something they thought was true) they could not give an answer. All felt that they did not know enough about recent government policies to have an opinion. This highlights something actually quite important: the kinds of people under-25 who receive housing benefit are not very involved or have very little knowledge of what is happening in politics. As such, they do not have the faculty to protect themselves when the government does something that harms them. They are not unified and are not organised. They unknowingly rely on others to protect them. This highlights the importance of charities and organisations that deal with young people, and illustrates why such organisations should approach this proposal with the upmost seriousness.
3. Conclusions

This report recognises that the proposal for housing benefit cuts to under-25s is more about starting a debate than pushing through a policy. The Liberal Democrats are likely to attempt to block the proposal if it was pushed in this parliament, and a Downing Street statement that the Conservatives might have to wait until after 2015\(^{32}\) means the success of the proposal would rely on them winning the next general election. As such, it cannot be said what the exact implications of this change might be, as the features of it may well change or it may not happen at all. However, one of the central features of welfare and the welfare system is that it deals with people who are vulnerable, poor and powerless. Thus, changes in this area can have a severe impact on the lives of high-risk people and resultantly, any proposals should be treated seriously, to ensure the protection of such individuals.

The view of BYHP from this report is that the proposal to cut housing benefits to under-25s, if successful, would be extremely damaging to the lives of young, vulnerable people and signals a step backwards in the fight against young homelessness and the rights of young people. This proposal would lead to a higher incidence of young homelessness and would put further pressure on to families already under an economic strain. BYHP is wary of using the phrase, but this proposal is consistent with what has been called an ‘attack on young people’ in recent years.

The government should be doing more for young people and the housing market, not less. Moves such as these only serve to ostracise and marginalise a segment of society who are bearing the brunt force of the economic downturn, particularly in terms of unemployment. Part of the problem, and perhaps the reason why this proposal has come about, is that this government has a rather confused understanding of the function of the housing benefit system. Housing benefits do not just serve to help the work-shy and the benefit-reliant. For many people on low salaries, housing benefits are an important safety-net, which acts to support them through work, filling the monetary gap between their incoming and outgoing expenditure, which their low income salary creates. In fact, this describes the experience of the majority of people on housing benefits, as recent statistics reveal: of the 300,000 new housing benefit claimants in the period January 2010 to December 2011, 93% came from household with at least one employed adult.\(^{33}\) Such a large increase over a short period of time more likely reflects escalating house prices and the general cost of living, which have been rising whilst wages have stagnated,\(^{34}\) rather than a culture of housing benefit dependency. Therefore, this proposal could end up disadvantaging the very people that David Cameron wants to reward: good, honest, hard-working people.

What’s more, such figures contradict the discourse that contributed to the foundation of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which talks of reintroducing a culture of work, a discourse that can also be found within this new housing benefit proposal. This government appears to be contributing to the fallacy that those who collect benefits –

\(^{32}\) http://www.publicservice.co.uk/news_story.asp?id=20092
\(^{33}\) http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/tenancies/majority-of-new-housing-benefit-claimants-in-work/6521183.article
\(^{34}\) http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13663778
particularly housing subsidies – do not work, when the reality is that the majority of benefit claiming households have at least one working adult.

Furthermore, this Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) report also observes that if housing benefit claims increase at this pace, the Department for Work and Pensions will not achieve its planned £2.25 billion savings. This perhaps explains why the proposed cut to under-25s housing benefits has come about. Despite Cameron stating that it is not about balancing the books, one cannot fail to notice that this government has whole-heartedly committed itself to reducing the UK’s substantial budget deficit. The Welfare Reform Act, as the BSHF report demonstrates, will not achieve the cuts it was designed to find. Consequently, the DWP is forced to find more savings, and where better to look than the young? This is a demographic that does not come out to vote in large numbers, compared to the baby-boomers and the elderly (the traditional Conservatives core) and therefore, they make themselves a viable political target for cuts (a similar argument could be made in relation to rising university tuition fees).

This proposal disadvantages individuals who sincerely want to go it alone, be responsible and make their first steps into the working world. In this sense, it stifles ambition and pigeon-holes all young housing benefit claimants as lazy, unaspiring, work-shy, benefit cheats. The position that these people find themselves in is in large part a result of lack of affordable private and rented accommodation, the fault of successive British governments who have failed to solve our housing crisis. As such, this proposal – to use an appropriate housing simile - is akin to the proverbial plasterer, shoddily plastering over the cracks in a wall instead of fixing the root of the problem: the weak foundations, which threaten to bring the whole house crashing down. This is what the proposal is to the UK housing crisis and the economic and social conditions that lead people unable to support their housing needs. It is a quick-fix; an untenable solution to a much larger problem.

4. Recommendations

This report concludes by suggesting a number of actions that can be taken by individuals and similar charitable organisations working with young people to make sure this proposal will never reach the table.

i. First and foremost, find out the current position of the government on this issue: Has their view changed? What is the likelihood of this proposal being pushed for? Write to the PM’s office for more information. (For charities and organisations working with young people, there needs to be clarity on this issue.)

ii. Write to local MPs asking them if they support this proposal and, if so, persuade them why they shouldn’t (create a dialogue on this issue with local persons of authority).

iii. Make an official statement as an organisation or, preferably, a joint statement from a number of organisations.

35 Voter turn-out for 18-24 year olds at the 2010 general election was 44%, compared to 76% for the 65+. Ipsos MORI (2010) UK Political Info. Available from: <http://www.ukpolitical.info/Turnout10.htm>
iv. Start a national petition against the proposal. Send this to your local MPs and to the PM. For instance, using e-petitions, such as the one through the Government’s website (http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/) or start a campaign through 38 Degrees (http://www.38degrees.org.uk/).

v. Create a community/network between housing charities and organisations dealing with young people to support each other on this issue.

vi. Stress that housing is a right – without it people are made un-free as an extension of the fact that it is against the law in many places, such as central towns and cities, to sleep rough. Therefore, this proposal is an attack on a fundamental human right (Article 17: No one should be arbitrarily deprived of his property and article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude – which homelessness achieves by making someone the mercy of everybody else).
Appendix 1: Structured interview transcript with young people who claim housing benefit

Names: RH (18yrs), SS (21yrs), SB (24yrs)
Interview conducted by Justin Donovan

1. What is your first impression of the proposal?
SB – it makes sense in a way, but on the other hand it can screw up a lot of young people.
SS – Complete utter rubbish. It worries me because I have no other means and ways of paying rent.

2. Do you currently receive housing benefits?
(Yes, for all three young people)

3. Why do you receive housing benefits?
SS – I am in a mother and baby unit as part of my support network and rely quite heavily on housing benefit to survive.
SB – I receive housing benefit because there are barriers that put up that prevent me from finding employment, like not having a CSCS card (these cost £30 for the card and £17.50 for the Health, Safety and Environment test).

4. How might these changes affect your living arrangements?
SB – I would be totally screwed because I would probably be evicted. Then where would I go?
RH – I’m not sure because I live in the Foyer, which is a more supported unit (*)

5. Would you be able to support yourself without housing benefits?
(All no, unless there was some form of community support)

6. Where would you live if you did not receive housing benefits?
SB – In a tent
RH – Same
SS – I don’t really know

7. Would you be able to live with your parents/guardians?
(All answered no)

8. Do you think this proposal could be the necessary push to your improve relationship with your family?
SB – It could be, but depends on circumstances. For instance, the nature of family breakdown
SS – No it could not
RH – No

9. Do you receive any other welfare benefits?
(All additionally receive Job Seeker’s Allowance)
10. Do you think the government spends too much on Welfare?
(They all felt that they spend too little on Welfare, because they do not give enough already for housing benefit)

11. Have you been negatively affected by any policies by this current government?
(Did not answer – did not know enough about recent government policies to have an opinion)

12. Do you agree or disagree with the statement: ‘This government is attacking the young’
(All said yes – However, none could think of an answer to the question as to whether they had been negatively affected by any other policies of this government)