

DEMOS

# WALL TO WALL SUPPORT

JOINING UP PUBLIC  
SERVICES AND HOUSING  
FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN,  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

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Supported by



GROSVENOR

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# RELATIONAL PUBLIC SERVICES

This research is part of Demos's programme on *relational public services*. Through this programme, we are advocating for public service reform that puts people and improving relationships at its heart, in order to empower communities, prevent problems and support the economy. Our public services need to be there for when people face difficulties in their lives. In this research, we have focused on the experiences of vulnerable young people and families who need accessible, joined-up and relational services. But public services do not operate in isolation: our local, social and civic foundations influence people's need for and ability to use other services, which means that what Demos has called 'foundational policy' is crucial. High-quality, secure and affordable housing is one of these foundational goods which enables individuals and families to flourish, and so in this research we investigated the links between public services and housing for young people and families. At the heart of the research and recommendations in this report are the experiences of young people and parents facing challenges in their lives, based on in-depth qualitative research with participants and a quantitative survey.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Our research finds that a lack of joined-up services is estimated to cost the government between **£1.5bn and £4.3bn** every year...



...due to additional use of public services (such as health care or the criminal justice system) by young people and families who **did not receive adequate support or early help.**

The failure to provide holistic support services for children and families is estimated to increase the number of children being taken into local authority care by **20%**, or an additional **16,000** children, every year.



An estimated **one in three** care leavers **become homeless** during their first two years after leaving care.



Over **130,000** children are currently living in temporary accommodation, almost **twice as many** as in 2011.



This report investigates the experiences of vulnerable young people and families as they relate to public services and housing. Despite the links between rising demand for public services and the housing crisis, they are often spoken about as separate policy issues. This report brings them together and argues that public services and housing need to be more effectively joined up to improve long-term outcomes for young people and families facing disadvantage.

### Across the country, there is a crisis in public services and wider support services

The steady drip-drip of service closure and reduction that we've witnessed over the past decade, alongside the rise of waiting lists caused by growing demand, are making it harder for people to make use of the public services their taxes are funding. And for those that are able to access public services, a transactional mode of delivery, staff shortages and poor communication often act to impede positive outcomes.

The crisis state of public services is something that affects the population at large - the challenges of getting a GP appointment, inadequate mental health care provision, crumbling and leaking school buildings, insufficient levels of social housing and patchy employment support are issues that impact every single person in this country, whether directly or indirectly. But for certain groups in the population, the effect of poor public service provision and delivery is especially damaging. Vulnerable children, young people and families – that is, those affected by adverse life experiences or forms of economic or social disadvantage, for example, poverty, homelessness, ill health, long-term unemployment or trauma – are more likely to need additional support. The stakes of public service failure are much higher for these groups who are more reliant on external support to help keep their heads above water and to find ways to improve their lives. That is why we chose to focus on the experiences of two specific groups for this research: vulnerable young people aged 18-24 and vulnerable families with children.

### A key problem for those needing to use services is that they do not work in a joined-up way

In this report we have taken one particular long-standing feature of the public service delivery model – that service providers tend to work separately from one another in their support of individuals and families – and explored the personal and wider economic impact that this has. It is our argument that siloed services stuck in 'firefighting mode' are missing the opportunity to take the joined-up and

holistic approach which would improve long-term outcomes.

For those people with high support needs, this model of service delivery can make it harder to find the 'front door' into support services; it can mean having to tell and retell traumatic experiences to different service providers; and it can force people into 'compartmentalising' aspects of their life that are very clearly related (for example, their housing situation and their mental health). In some cases, departments or services inadvertently work against each other's aims and interests.

### A lack of joined-up working also has a significant economic impact

We also make a strong economic case in this report: because services are not joined up around a young person or family, significant amounts of public money are being lost to inefficiencies and poor short-term and long-term outcomes. Original economic analysis in this report shows that the cost to government from a lack of joined-up services for vulnerable young people and families is between £1.5 billion and £4.3 billion every year. These costs are a direct result of additional use of government services, for example health care or the criminal justice system, by individuals and families who did not access adequate support or early help when they needed it. For comparison, the Child Poverty Action Group has estimated that removing the two-child limit within Universal Credit would cost £1.3 billion – a policy which would lift 250,000 children out of poverty.

There are also significant indirect costs that lie outside these headline figures. Because people's experiences as children and young people impact the rest of their lives, the long-term financial costs to government are even greater in the form of lost tax receipts and increased expenditure on social security.

### But it's not all about how services work together – not being able to access support in the first place is a major problem for vulnerable young people and families

When we asked people about the most important reasons they or their children couldn't access services, the top three reasons were long waiting lists, not being able to afford services which had a fee/charge, and a lack of awareness regarding what support services were available. This demonstrates that support services not being sufficiently accessible is a serious problem, regardless of how those services are delivered or how the providers work together. Young people and families are effectively excluded from the very services designed to help

them. It means opportunities to provide early support are missed, storing up problems for the future.

In our survey of young people and parents, we found significant gaps between the proportion who have support needs and the proportion accessing support. For example, eight in ten (79%) young people and parents said that advice on employment and work would be helpful for themselves or their children; yet only one in ten (12%) had in fact accessed any advice on employment and work in the last two years.

### Vulnerable young people and families are also facing significant housing-related problems, which are increasing demand for public services

Over one million households are currently on waiting lists for social housing, yet only 37,000 homes for affordable rent or social rent were built last year in England. There is a compounding shortage of properties in the private rented sector and increasing rents and no-fault evictions generate their own problems for tenants. In combination with the cost of living crisis, these factors are contributing to the rising number of families living in temporary accommodation: as of March 2023 there were over 100,000 households in temporary accommodation in England, including 130,000 children.

There are numerous links between the housing crisis and rising demand for public services. To give one example, children and families living in temporary accommodation will need more support from schools and from NHS services. Based on survey data from Shelter, almost half (47%) of families with school-age children have had to move their children to a different school, which has a negative impact on educational attainment; and six in ten (57%) parents reported that temporary accommodation was harming their children's health.

But despite the links between crises in housing and public services, the two areas are often spoken about as separate policy issues. In this report we explicitly bring these issues together to demonstrate their interdependence. We show how too often vulnerable young people and families are in such a difficult housing situation that it is having a negative impact on their quality of life and increasing their need for other services.

### The concepts of the preventative state and relational public services provide the framework for this report

The concepts of a *preventative state* and *relational public services* underpin our research at Demos on public service reform. In this report we build the evidence base further in support of a greater shift towards a *preventative state* which strengthens the foundations required for citizens to flourish in their lives alongside *relational public services* - local, tailored services which build trusting relationships and provide early help to those who need it. We argue that a model of delivery in which service providers work in silos, alongside funding cuts and reductions in provision for vulnerable young people and families, is only storing up problems for the future.

The damaging effects of this can be seen in the changing pattern of spending on children's services by local authorities in England. Since 2010/11, late intervention spending, such as child protection and support for children in care, has risen by almost half (47%). As a result, late intervention services now account for £4 in every £5 which local authorities spend on children's services. As Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education, has described it, 'resources have become trapped at the crisis end of the system, with not enough early support available'.

### Recommendations – Towards a new citizen-centred public service design

The research in this report makes clear that we need to join up public services in a system which puts citizens at the centre and is responsive to their individual needs and circumstances. Many attempts have been made to tackle the entrenched problem of silos in public services, but few have succeeded in achieving the radical change needed. In this report we set out the case not for a series of small interventions but for a new system, built on relational ways of working and supported by innovative digital infrastructure and insights driven by data.

In section 4 we set out eight 'building blocks' which together would help create a new, citizen-centred system. In this new system, key workers would provide relational support to young people and families who need it most, supported by multi-disciplinary teams including housing professionals. Joined-up data across local government and public services will support the provision of proactive and early help to young people and families, as well as enabling commissioning based on outcomes to help achieve a shift towards prevention. A new citizen-facing app will provide personalised information to citizens, so that public services can meet citizens'



needs and offer support in a way that matches people's wider digital lives. We recognise that joining up data and creating an app for citizens raise questions about ethics, data security and privacy, and trust in public services and in the state. Trust and public support are essential for our proposed system of citizen-centred public service design, as well as being key themes of Demos's wider research and policy work. We therefore recommend that central government should commission a national Citizens' Assembly on Data and Digital in Public Services to deliberate on the principles that should underpin this new approach.

**The eight building blocks included in section 4 are:**

1. Local authorities should ensure that key workers take on responsibility for joining up services for young people and families
2. Social and affordable housing providers should be part of multi-disciplinary teams to help join up services for young people and families
3. Local authorities and public services should use joined-up data to personalise and target support for young people and families
4. Commissioners should use Social Outcomes Contracts where practical
5. Deliver personalised information to citizens using a new app powered by joined-up data
6. Local authorities and other local organisations should co-locate support services in shared physical spaces
7. Local authorities should appoint a Director of Citizen-centred Services
8. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) should provide centralised investment in the digital systems required and the data standards needed to enable them

Although this new system does not need to be funded entirely by central government, it will require government investment. Providing the necessary funding will require at least one of raising taxes, increasing borrowing or cutting government expenditure in other areas. None of these are easy options. But the current status quo is costing the government at least £1.5 billion every year in short-term costs alone, and causing long-term scarring effects for children and young people for the rest of their lives. Demos has recently proposed a way of enabling preventative investment by creating

a new category of spending called Preventative Departmental Expenditure Limits (PDEL): this could be used to fund investment in early support for vulnerable young people and families. We echo the words of the *Independent Review of Children's Social Care*: 'The question is whether additional investment goes to reform and long-term sustainability or instead is spent propping up an increasingly expensive and faltering system.'

Our focus in this report is on moving towards a citizen-centred public service design. However, as our research shows, some of the most serious problems young people and families are facing relate to the issues of *supply*, *affordability* and *quality* of housing. The following could help address these challenges:

- On **supply**, building more homes, especially affordable homes, would help address the housing crisis in the long term. There is a widely-backed campaign to build or add 90,000 new social homes in England each year (which would be a huge increase on current levels).
- On **affordability**, low-income households are affected by the level of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which caps the maximum housing benefit available to private tenants. LHA has been frozen in cash terms since 2020 which is causing significant problems for low-income households. However, in the Autumn Statement 2023, the Chancellor announced that LHA will be increased in April 2024 to cover 30% of private rental properties. This is welcome: low-income households will be around £800 a year better off on average. However, the Chancellor decided to freeze LHA again after 2024, which in the future will cause the same problems to occur again by reducing affordability for low-income private renters. The government should learn from the problems caused by this policy in recent years and announce that LHA will be updated in line with rents on an annual basis.
- On **quality**, there is a need for action from housing associations and local authorities as well as government regulation of the private rented sector (PRS). The *Better Social Housing Review* (2022) made seven recommendations, primarily to housing associations, to improve the quality of social housing and to make tenants' experiences better. The government committed to reforming the PRS in the 2019 manifesto, but at time of writing the Renters (Reform) Bill had recently been included in the 2023 King's Speech, and so the precise details of the Bill remain uncertain at this stage.

# RESEARCH METHODS AND DEFINITIONS

## **For this research and policy project, we used the following methods:**

- A desk-based evidence review, focusing on existing research regarding the experiences of vulnerable young people and families using public services and support services; previous policy initiatives designed to join up services; and how housing and public services interact for young people and families.
- Longitudinal qualitative research with ten young people aged 18-24, and with ten parents with a child/children aged under 18. Most of our participants were living either in London or in North West England (primarily in and around the Greater Manchester area). We recruited participants with adverse experiences in the past (for example, having experience of homelessness or being care experienced) or facing challenges currently (for example, being on a low income, being unemployed or having a mental health condition). The majority of our participants were living in social housing (13 participants), with some living in temporary accommodation (4), in supported housing (2) or in the private rented sector (1). We also spoke to our participants about their previous housing experiences; for example, some of those currently living in social housing had previously been in temporary accommodation. We spoke to research participants over a period of four weeks in order to gain a deeper understanding of people's support needs, use of support services and housing situations. During this period we conducted four in-depth interviews with each participant via Zoom, and between these interviews we communicated with participants via WhatsApp. By conducting our research over a period of time and with multiple methods, we were able to get to know participants better which in turn enabled us to understand more about people's experiences and views.
- A non-representative survey of 200 young people aged 18-24 and 300 parents of children aged 11-17, all from social grades C2, D and E. The survey was conducted by Opinium in August 2023.
- Original economic analysis of the costs of siloed services for vulnerable young people and families. We commissioned WPI Economics to conduct this part of the project, and their analysis provides evidence of the potential economic and fiscal benefits of joining up services more effectively.

## **In this report we use the following terms:**

- 'Support services' or 'services', which we define broadly as all services which people may use to help them address needs in their lives. Primarily, these services are provided by public sector and third sector organisations. Our focus was particularly on those services designed to help people facing social and economic disadvantage.
- 'Vulnerable young people and families'. Although we recognise its limitations, we use the word 'vulnerable' to cover a wide range of adverse life experiences and forms of social and economic disadvantage. This includes economic factors (for example, living in poverty or parent(s) being unemployed), health and disability (for example, a mental health condition or special educational needs or disabilities), housing (for example, currently or previously living in temporary accommodation) and adverse experiences (for example, experience of the care system as a child).
- 'Young people' in this report refers to 18-24 year olds, unless otherwise stated.
- Where we use names to refer to research participants, these names are not real to protect participants' anonymity.

# SECTION 1

## SETTING OUT THE CHALLENGES WITH OUR CURRENT APPROACH TO PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

### INTRODUCTION

#### Vulnerable young people and families have needs that are under-served

Everybody is impacted by the crises affecting our public services. Most people have experienced difficulties getting an appointment with a GP, being on a long waiting list, or not being able to access a local service because it has closed down.

However, some vulnerable groups have higher needs for public services and will therefore be more adversely affected by the current problems. In this research project, we have focused on the impacts on vulnerable young people and families facing disadvantage or other adverse circumstances.

Our focus on young adults (age 18-24) reflects the fact that evidence suggests that as young people transition to adulthood they are more likely to need high-quality support services. This is especially true for young people facing disadvantage, for example young people who are care experienced, or who leave the family home due to relationship breakdown or conflict (as was the case for several of our research participants involved in this project).

Overlaying this, evidence continues to demonstrate the variability in development among young adults.<sup>1</sup> Areas of the brain responsible for impulse control and decision making can be some of the last to develop, leading to significant disparities in the maturity of young adults. This is particularly relevant in the context of children's social care ending or changing, often abruptly, when young people reach a particular age, meaning the transition to adulthood can be a difficult period of life for many.<sup>2</sup> Care-experienced adults have described a 'cliff edge' when support changed or ended at age 18, 21 or 25.<sup>3</sup> Given the characteristics of children in care, longer-term support is even more important as young people transition to adulthood due to the increased likelihood of adverse childhood experiences. There have been some recent efforts to improve support specifically for care leavers, such as the Care Leaver Covenant and additional duties for local authorities to support care leavers until they reach age 25.<sup>4,5</sup> However, young care leavers - and other young people facing disadvantage - continue to have needs which are under-served by our current approach to public service delivery.

1 Casey, B. J., Getz, S. and Galvan, A. The adolescent brain. *Developmental Review*, Volume 28, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 62-77. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2007.08.003> [accessed 04/11/2023]

2 Care Quality Commission. Areas of specific concern. 21 October 2022. Available at [www.cqc.org.uk/publication/state-care-202122/concern](http://www.cqc.org.uk/publication/state-care-202122/concern) [accessed 04/11/2023]

3 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. *The Case for Change*. The National Archives, June 2021, p. 56. Available at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230308122442/https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/case-for-change> [accessed 04/11/2023]

4 Care Leaver Covenant. About the Care Leaver Covenant. (no date). Available at <https://mycovenant.org.uk/about> [accessed 04/11/2023]

5 Foley, N. and Library specialists. *Support for care leavers*. House of Commons Library, 24 October 2023. Available at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8429/CBP-8429.pdf> [accessed 04/11/2023]

## Reactive services, crisis management and transactional relationships are symptoms of a broken paradigm

The concepts of *the preventative state* and *relational public services* provide the intellectual framework for this report.

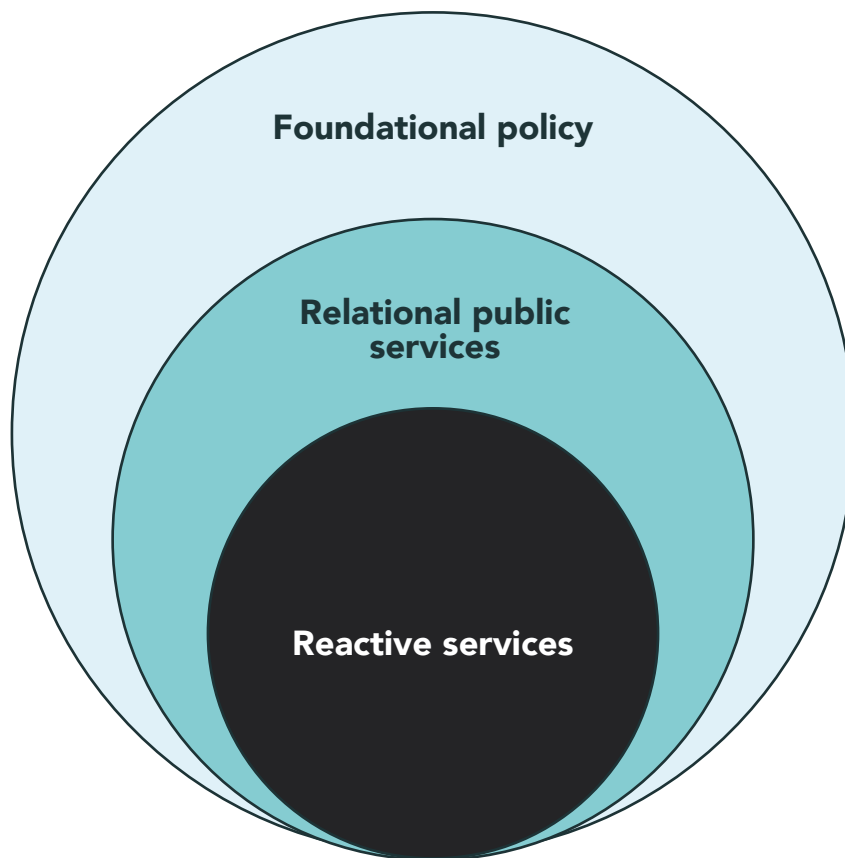
Demos's paper, *The Preventative State*, argues for a more expansive state, one which moves away from reacting when problems emerge to preventing them in the first place.<sup>6</sup> But public service demand management should not be the primary goal. We need to provide the foundations for flourishing and resilience within communities through what we call 'foundational policy', which includes investing in social infrastructure and providing foundational public goods such as high-quality and secure housing.

Underpinning this shift should be a movement from transactional to relational public services, as described in Demos's paper *The Social State*.<sup>7</sup>

This means recognising the positive impact of locally-based and tailored services which build trusting relationships with people using them, and which strengthen the social connections between citizens themselves. The relational state moves beyond seeing citizens as consumers and instead works with people holistically, taking time to understand them and working with them to tackle the root causes of problems they are facing or may face.

This leaves reactive public services as the last resort, the social safety net when things do go wrong which stops them getting worse. Reactive services currently dominate public service spending and activity, yet despite this we still see rationing and long waiting lists - for example, for NHS mental health services. A transition to relational, prevention-focused services will in time enable reactive services to be scaled back and in turn allow public and third sector organisations to be far more proactive, rather than only supporting people after they have reached crisis point.

**FIGURE 1**  
THE PREVENTATIVE STATE



<sup>6</sup> Curtis, P., Glover, B. and O'Brien, A. *The Preventative State: Rebuilding our local, social and civic foundations*. Demos, 25 April 2023. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-preventative-state-rebuilding-our-local-social-and-civic-foundations> [available at 04/11/2023]

<sup>7</sup> Mackenzie, P. *The Social State: From Transactional to Relational Public Services*. Demos, 28 July 2021. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-social-state-from-transactional-to-relational-public-services> [accessed 04/11/2023]

To provide an illustrative example from our primary research, Jack, aged 24 and from Stockport, spoke powerfully about the frustration and disappointment he felt from the unsatisfactory, transactional relationship he had with his GP:

**CASE STUDY: JACK, YOUNG PERSON (AGE 24), LIVING IN COUNCIL HOUSING, STOCKPORT**

*Jack experienced events as a child that required him to seek therapy through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Since then - four years ago - he has been in and out of the GP and on and off medication for anxiety and depression. Although this has helped somewhat, his doctor hasn't offered any kind of therapy or told him where he could find it. This is something Jack would like to explore but wouldn't know where to start. He doesn't feel like his relationship with his GP is strong - 'they just dish out any medication, they just want you in and out rather than tend[ing] to the needs of the younger generation.' He feels that he is constantly passed around different GPs and that they don't read his notes, meaning he has to constantly repeat details of his experiences. He would like a better relationship with his GP so they 'know you as an individual'. Jack feels let down, not looked after and not thought about. The research study itself prompted Jack to look into therapy options: he has since had an initial appointment with a counselling charity. He reported feeling relaxed talking to the person who showed care and said that he thinks it will really help him.*



**THE PROBLEMS WITH A SILOED SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL**

In this report, we are interested in the impact that the dominant and long-standing model of service delivery has on young people's and families'

experiences and outcomes. That model is one in which multiple services operate in silos and are delivered separately to an individual or family. We argue a lack of joined-up services contributes to the deep social inequalities which exist in the UK today.

**A fragmented and siloed model of service delivery is a long-standing problem**

Twenty years ago, the 2003 Green Paper *Every Child Matters* included measures designed to improve integration and join up services, noting that 'children may experience a range of professionals involved in their lives but little continuity and consistency of support'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, at the centre of the Troubled Families programme first introduced in 2012 was the introduction of a 'key worker' whose role is to co-ordinate services for children and families. As the programme evaluation described, 'the programme operates on the premise that public services have previously failed families who have multiple problems because those services operate in silos and mostly in a reactive fashion.'<sup>9</sup> (The programme was renamed as the Supporting Families programme in 2021.<sup>10</sup>)

Despite recognition of these problems, and policy initiatives to address them, siloed services persist. Josh MacAlister's *Independent Review of Children's Social Care* (2021) described the situation in very similar terms:

Each [public] service has its own footprint, objectives, accountability arrangements and inspectorates, which in turn leads to a system that is confusing and difficult to navigate for professionals let alone children and families. The review has heard that this siloed approach creates a bureaucratic labyrinth that prevents children from accessing the support they need.<sup>11</sup>

Turning a lens on current support provision for vulnerable young people and families, there are multiple services which can be seen to be insufficiently joined up, including housing, social care, education and skills, employment support and careers advice, health services including mental health services, early years and parenting support, the social security system, financial advice, policing

8 Department for Education and Skills. *Every Child Matters*. The Stationery Office, September 2003. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/272064/5860.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272064/5860.pdf) [accessed 04/11/2023]

9 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. *National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: findings*. GOV.UK, 19 March 2019. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-troubled-families-programme-2015-to-2020-findings> [accessed 04/11/2023]

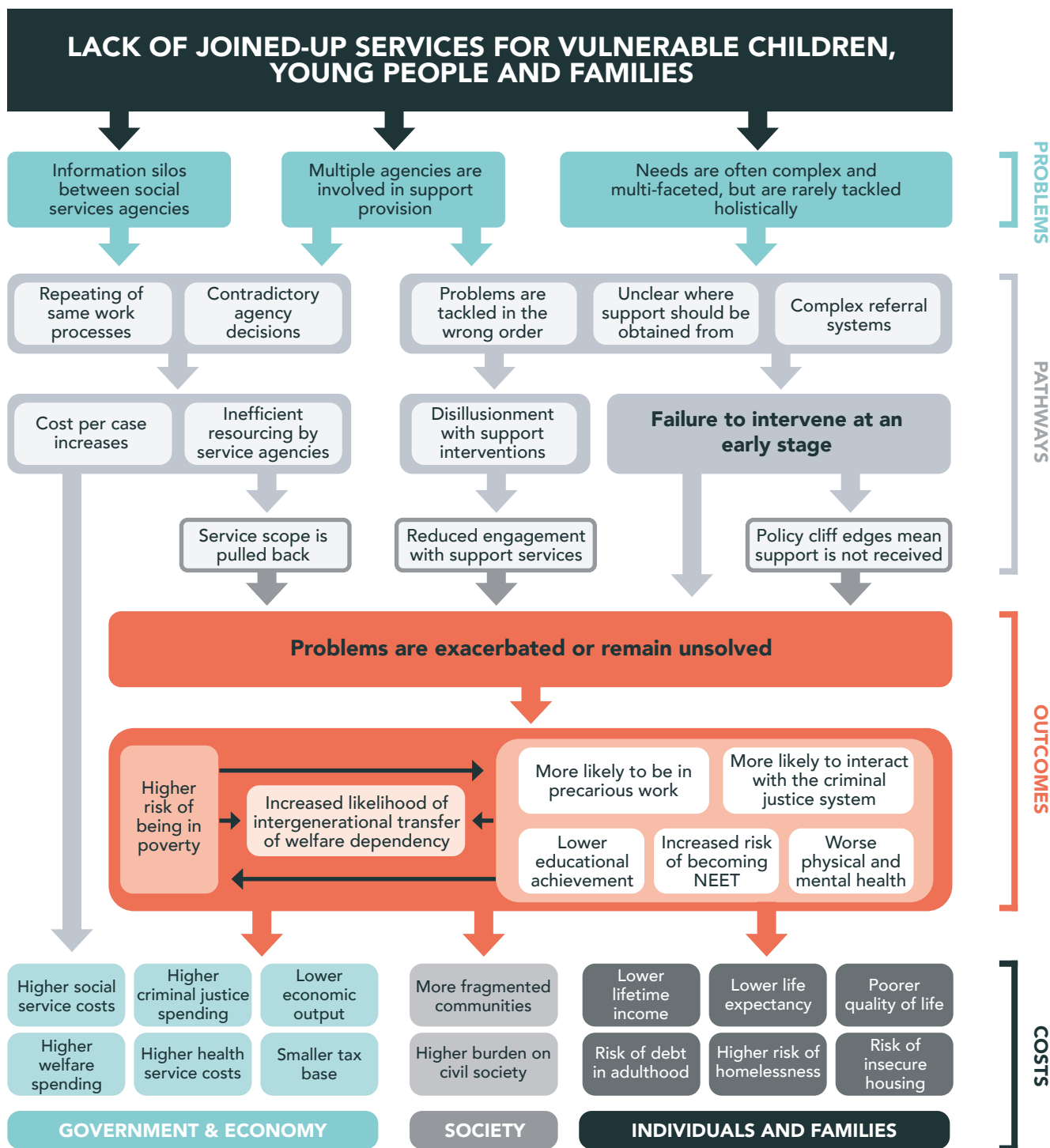
10 Foster, D. *Supporting Families Programme*. House of Commons Library, 31 March 2023. Available at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7585/CBP-7585.pdf> [accessed 06/11/2023]

11 *The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The Case for Change*. 2021. p. 76

and the wider criminal justice system.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of a holistic, joined-up approach to providing support services for young people and families with vulnerable children has large impacts on the outcomes for those individuals and families, as well as financial costs to government and the broader economy, as set out in the Theory of Change in Figure 2 below.

**FIGURE 2**  
THEORY OF CHANGE



12 The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care. The Case for Change. 2021. p. 28.

## A fragmented model of service delivery leads to poor experiences and negative short-term outcomes for individuals

Disjointed, siloed support services mean families must interact with multiple agencies, adding a layer of avoidable cost and complexity in obtaining the help that they need. In many cases, the needs of a vulnerable young person or family are complex, multi-faceted and interconnected, and the failure to tackle them holistically can mean that the support necessary to improve outcomes is not provided. Contributing factors include slow cross-agency referral systems and policy cliff edges where young people age out of eligibility for support.

For young people and families with multiple needs, this model of service delivery can mean it is unclear where they should seek support. And indeed, problems may be too multifaceted for any one service to resolve. For example, access to secure employment will be much more difficult for a young person who is also experiencing homelessness, poor educational attainment, financial insecurity, low confidence and mental health issues. Without any single service provider being able to see the whole of this person, the chances that the employment service they are using will be able to help them get a good job are greatly reduced.<sup>13</sup>

In this delivery model, it is also easy for services to end up working against each other. For example, a family may be given a house or temporary accommodation many miles away from a child's school; this may in turn necessitate changing school, which is associated with a negative impact on educational attainment.<sup>14,15</sup> Or perhaps the child ends up facing a long, disruptive and exhausting journey to school each day.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, a lack of service coordination can lead to poor sequencing of support. This can have a significant impact on the efficacy of the help received. For example, somebody experiencing mental ill health might need support before being able to properly engage with an employment support service; while another person might need financial/debt advice to reduce environmental stressors, before being able to engage with mental health therapy from the NHS. Sequencing support provision is recognised as being crucial in the Supporting Families (Troubled Families) programme.<sup>17</sup>

All these failures to provide holistic support can lead to families growing disillusioned with support services. The feeling of being passed between service providers or having to re-tell complex and traumatising experiences can unsurprisingly reduce their engagement with support agencies; it is also deeply inefficient. As Hilary Cottam wrote about in her book *Radical Help* (2018), one family with whom she worked had interactions with seventy-three different professionals and twenty different agencies and departments: 'working out of twenty departments - each with their own agenda - the professionals trip over themselves... the combined effect of overlapping effort driven by the timetables and goals of each agency is confusing and time-consuming for the families.'<sup>18</sup>

## There are longer-term negative impacts on individuals as well

These factors combine to create a situation where the problems that are faced by families are exacerbated or remain unsolved. For vulnerable children and young people this can lead to increased risk of lower educational achievement, worse physical and mental health and a higher likelihood

13 Buzzeo, J. and others. Experiences of homeless young people in precarious employment. Institute for Employment Studies, October 2019. Available at [www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/experiences-homeless-young-people-precarious-employment](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/experiences-homeless-young-people-precarious-employment) [accessed 06/11/2023]

14 Hutchings, H. and others. Do Children Who Move Home and School Frequently Have Poorer Educational Outcomes in Their Early Years at School? An Anonymised Cohort Study. PLOS ONE 8(8), 5 August 2013. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0070601> [accessed 06/11/2023]

15 Rodda, M., Hallgarten, J. and Freeman, J. Between the Cracks: Exploring in-year admissions in schools in England. RSA, 30 June 2013. Available at [www.thersa.org/reports/between-the-cracks](http://www.thersa.org/reports/between-the-cracks) [accessed 06/11/2023]

16 Evidence from the US suggests that long journeys to school are associated with teenagers exercising less and sleeping less. See Voulgaris, C. T., Smart, M. J. and Taylor, B. D. Tired of commuting? Relationships among journeys to school, sleep, and exercise among American teenagers. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 39(2), pp. 142-154. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X17725148> [accessed 06/11/2023]

17 Suffield, M. and others. Supporting Families Programme: Qualitative research. Kantar Public and GOV.UK, February 2022, p. 35. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62445f3d8fa8f5276d1f9f51/Supporting\\_Families\\_-\\_Effective\\_practice\\_and\\_service\\_delivery\\_-\\_Learning\\_from\\_local\\_areas.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62445f3d8fa8f5276d1f9f51/Supporting_Families_-_Effective_practice_and_service_delivery_-_Learning_from_local_areas.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

18 Cottam, H. *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships Between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State*. Virago Press, 2018, p. 49, 58.

of being taken into local authority care.<sup>19,20,21</sup> In the longer term, worse outcomes in adulthood become more likely as a result of not receiving early intervention from holistic support services: increased risk of precarious work and unemployment, lower lifetime income, higher risk of insecure housing and homelessness and a greater likelihood of interacting with the criminal justice system.

Although hard to definitively prove, it is likely that a lack of accessible and joined-up services is a *contributing factor* to social inequalities in the UK. For example, young people who are care experienced are far more likely than their peers to leave school without qualifications, experience the criminal justice system, experience poor mental health, and are three times more likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET).<sup>22,23</sup> One factor which influences these outcomes is likely to be the lack of joined-up support services for young people who are care experienced.<sup>24</sup>

These social inequalities have serious long-term impacts: adult outcomes for those who are care experienced are significantly worse than for those who are not. Longitudinal research has shown that, tracked over decades, they have on average higher rates of premature mortality, poorer health, lower qualification levels and lower employment rates.<sup>25</sup>

### For the government, this model leads to an inefficient use of resources

As each agency tackles its own siloed area, many of the same processes are repeated: for example, initial assessments of a family's needs when better sharing of information between agencies would enable cost savings and/or more resource to reach a wider spectrum of people. The impact of having to describe potentially traumatic situations repeatedly to different agencies can also severely impact the mental health of families seeking support. The information silos between agencies can also

lead to professionals issuing contradictory advice or decisions that either exacerbate the problems faced by families or lead to delays in receiving support while the contradictions are resolved. All of these issues lead to higher costs per case for the government, which can also have the unintended consequence of limiting the scope of service that they provide when working within fixed budgets - for example, rationing by using waiting lists.

These sorts of inefficiencies often result in high levels of spending on the 'acute' end of the spectrum of services, rather than early intervention spending which would be less expensive in the long term.<sup>26</sup> The effects of this can clearly be seen in the changing pattern of spending on children's services by local authorities. Since 2010/11, early intervention spending, such as support services for young people and for families, has fallen by almost half; meanwhile late intervention spending, such as child protection and services for children in care, has risen by almost half. As a result, late intervention services now account for £4 in every £5 spent (81%).<sup>27</sup>

19 McCallum, A. and Rich, H. The impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's education: A view from the classroom. Shelter, 2018. Available at [https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/AZvOBS2tanDweEV0cKiiP/71a9a9d622c24680c358fb49b7c7094c/Teachers\\_Research\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/AZvOBS2tanDweEV0cKiiP/71a9a9d622c24680c358fb49b7c7094c/Teachers_Research_Report.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

20 Garvie, D. and others. Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end. Shelter, 2023, p. 48. Available at [https://downloads.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/2tH1VaV0nD4E1yfkNVgZpd/18a40c539d3d6b8771c55c318f4c0a74/Still\\_Living\\_in\\_Limbo.pdf](https://downloads.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/2tH1VaV0nD4E1yfkNVgZpd/18a40c539d3d6b8771c55c318f4c0a74/Still_Living_in_Limbo.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

21 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Troubled Families Programme: local authority cost savings. GOV.UK, 17 October 2016. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-programme-local-authority-cost-savings](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-programme-local-authority-cost-savings) [accessed 06/11/2023]

22 Evans, S. Care leavers' experiences of the welfare system. Learning and Work Institute, 20 June 2022. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/care-leavers-welfare-system> [accessed 06/11/2023]

23 Learning and Work Institute. Care leavers. (no date). Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/what-we-do/social-justice-inclusion/care-leavers> [accessed 06/11/2023]

24 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The Case for Change. 2021. pp. 75-78.

25 Sacker, A. and others. The lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care: Findings from the Looked-after Children Grown Up Project. Nuffield Foundation, July 2021. Available at [www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-lifelong-health-and-wellbeing-trajectories-of-people-who-have-been-in-care.pdf](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-lifelong-health-and-wellbeing-trajectories-of-people-who-have-been-in-care.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

26 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The Case for Change. 2021.

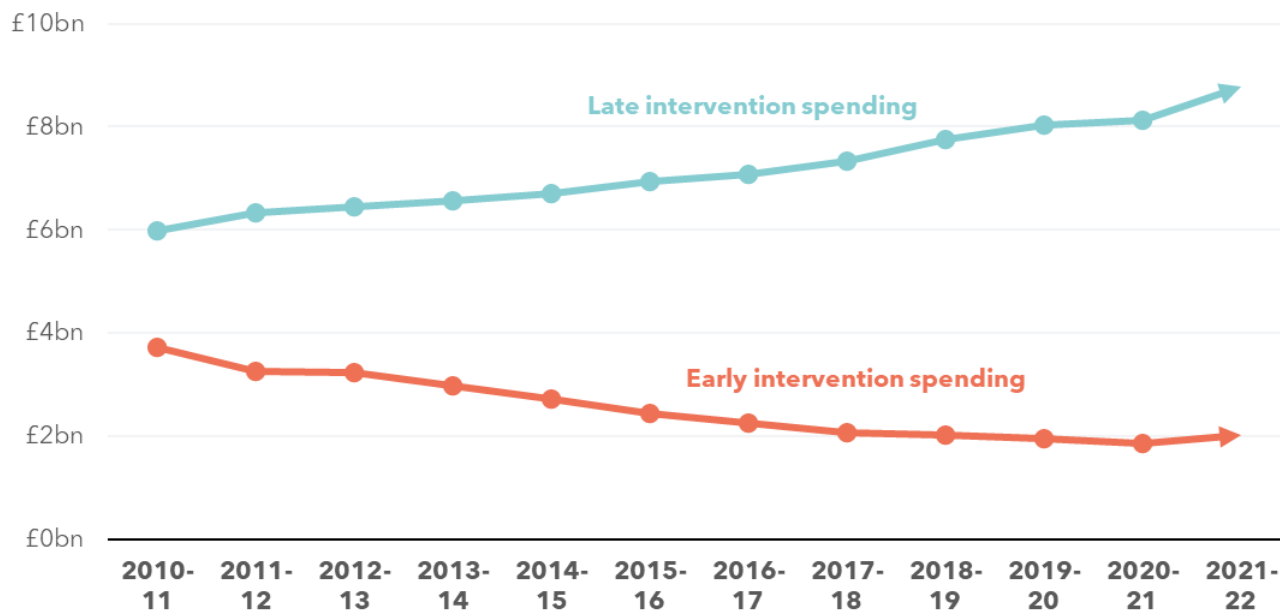
27 Franklin, J., Larkham, J. and Mansoor, M. The well-worn path: Children's services spending 2010-11 to 2021-22. Pro Bono Economics, 2023. Available at [www.probonoeconomics.com/the-well-worn-path-childrens-services-spending-2010-11-to-2021-22](http://www.probonoeconomics.com/the-well-worn-path-childrens-services-spending-2010-11-to-2021-22) [accessed 06/11/2023]



## Late intervention spending increasingly dominates expenditure on children's services in England

**FIGURE 3**

REAL TERMS IN SPENDING ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES, BY STAGE OF INTERVENTION (2021-22 PRICES)



Source: Pro Bono Economics analysis of local authority expenditure<sup>28</sup>

The increase in negative outcomes from a lack of joined-up services for individuals and families with multiple needs also leads to greater expenditure on social services, benefits, the criminal justice system and health care. They create a drag on economic output – mainly from a smaller labour force – and lead to a smaller tax base providing the revenues to fund the increased expenditure. As government budgets increasingly struggle to fund the services that are needed, there will be an increased burden placed on civil society groups, charities and other volunteer organisations to provide support for individuals and families. These costs are explored further in the economic analysis later in this report (section 3).

### Joining up services can improve outcomes for young people and families

There are a variety of different models designed to 'join up services', and there is some evidence which suggests that multiple models can improve outcomes for vulnerable young people and families.

One example is the Supporting Families (previously Troubled Families) programme, as mentioned

above. This programme uses a 'key worker' who takes responsibility for co-ordinating services for one particular family, and also emphasises multi-agency partnership working. An evaluation of the programme suggested that it reduced the proportion of looked after children by 32% between 19 and 24 months after joining the programme. After 24 months the programme also led to a 25% reduction in adults receiving custodial sentences, a 38% reduction in juveniles receiving custodial sentences and a 15% reduction in juvenile convictions. It also led to an 11% fall in adults claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.<sup>29</sup>

Another model is providing services along with housing, or otherwise joining up support services and housing together. Supported housing (also known as supportive housing) is one type in this wider category. The following list includes some examples where there is evidence that joining up support services and housing improved outcomes:

- Based on survey data, Imogen Blood and Associates with the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York estimated that the supported housing sector as a whole is preventing 41,000 people in England from

<sup>28</sup> Franklin, Larkham and Mansoor. The well-worn path. 2023.

<sup>29</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The Case for Change. 2021.

- becoming homeless by providing housing with support services. The researchers estimate that the average cost of a supported housing place is £21,000 per year, which is much lower than the estimated cost to public services of long-term homelessness, £43,000 per person per year.<sup>30</sup>
- A literature review published in the journal *Psychiatric Services* of supportive housing for people with mental health issues and/or substance abuse problems graded the overall evidence base as 'moderate'. This was based on Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) which found that supported housing 'reduced homelessness, increased housing tenure, and decreased emergency room visits and hospitalisation'.<sup>31</sup>
  - Analysis by Europe Economics for the organisation Look Ahead suggests that if Look Ahead's integrated mental health and supported housing provision were scaled up across England, it could save NHS England £950 million per year. The savings result from comparing joined-up housing and mental health services and in-hospital alternatives.<sup>32</sup>
  - An RCT in the US of supportive housing for families in the child welfare system found that supportive housing increased housing stability for families, and enabled them to access more services, compared to the control group: 'the families received more help and knew better what resources were available to them because of the additional support'.<sup>33,34</sup>
  - The 'Housing First' model aims to reduce homelessness by providing 'a stable, independent home and intensive personalised support and case management to homeless people with multiple and complex needs'.<sup>35,36,37</sup> Research, primarily in international contexts such as the US and Canada, suggests that Housing First reduces homelessness and improves people's health.<sup>38,39,40</sup>
  - The 'Jobs Plus' model in the US. This programme was implemented in 1998-2003 in areas of US 'public' housing (the equivalent of social housing in the UK), joining up a range of services to help people access employment. Jobs Plus was available to all public housing residents in areas where it operated, thus bypassing complex eligibility criteria. In the evaluation, seven years after the programme began Jobs Plus increased earnings among residents by 16% (or \$1,300 per year).<sup>41</sup> This suggests that linking housing with support services can have a positive effect on employment and earnings. Many social housing providers in the UK offer employment support to residents, but there is a lack of quantified evidence regarding their impact.<sup>42</sup>

30 Blood, I. and others. "Ultimately other services finish at 5pm": Research into the supported housing sector's impact on homelessness prevention, health and wellbeing. Imogen Blood & Associates, March 2023. Available at [www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/resource-files/imogen-blood-research-into-the-supported-housing-sectors-impact-on-homelessness-prevention-health-and-wellbeing.pdf](http://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/resource-files/imogen-blood-research-into-the-supported-housing-sectors-impact-on-homelessness-prevention-health-and-wellbeing.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

31 Rog, D. J. and others. Permanent Supportive Housing: Assessing the Evidence. *Psychiatric Services*, Vol. 65, Issue 3, March 2014, pp. 287-294. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201300261> [accessed 06/11/2023]

32 Drury, D. The financial case for integrated mental health services and supported housing pathways. Europe Economics and Look Ahead, February 2021. Available at [www.lookahead.org.uk/integratedmh](http://www.lookahead.org.uk/integratedmh) [accessed 06/11/2023]

33 Pergamit, M. and others. Does Supportive Housing Keep Families Together? Urban Institute, May 2019. Available at [www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100289/does\\_supportive\\_housing\\_keep\\_families\\_together\\_1.pdf](http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100289/does_supportive_housing_keep_families_together_1.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

34 Glendening, Z. and others. Supportive housing for precariously housed families in the child welfare system: Who benefits most? *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 116, September 2020. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105206> [accessed 06/11/2023]

35 Homeless Link. Housing First in England: The principles. 2017. Available at [https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Housing\\_First\\_in\\_England\\_The\\_Principles.pdf](https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Housing_First_in_England_The_Principles.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

36 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Mobilising Housing First toolkit: from planning to early implementation. GOV.UK, 3 September 2022. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-first-pilot-national-evaluation-reports/mobilising-housing-first-toolkit-from-planning-to-early-implementation](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-first-pilot-national-evaluation-reports/mobilising-housing-first-toolkit-from-planning-to-early-implementation) [accessed 06/11/2023]

37 APPG for Ending Homelessness. "It's like a dream come true": An inquiry into scaling up Housing First in England. 2021. Available at [www.crisis.org.uk/media/245348/appg-housing-first-report-2021.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/media/245348/appg-housing-first-report-2021.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

38 Baxter, A. J. and others. Effects of Housing First approaches on health and well-being of adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, Vol. 73, February 2019, pp. 379-387. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2018-210981> [accessed 06/11/2023]

39 Peng, Y. and others. Permanent Supportive Housing with Housing First to Reduce Homelessness and Promote Health among Homeless Populations with Disability: A Community Guide Systematic Review. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, Vol. 26, September/October 2020, pp. 404-411. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1097%2FPHH.0000000000001219> [accessed 06/11/2023]

40 O'Campo, P. and others. Health and social outcomes in the Housing First model: Testing the theory of change. *eClinicalMedicine*, Vol. 47, May 2022. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2022.101387> [accessed 06/11/2023]

41 Wilson, T. and McCallum, A. Developing a Jobs-Plus model for the UK. Learning and Work Institute, October 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Developing-a-Jobs-Plus-Model-for-the-UK.pdf> [accessed 06/11/2023]

42 Alexander, K., Evans, S. and Wilson, T. Building opportunity: How social housing can support skills, talent and workforce development. Learning and Work Institute, 1 December 2022. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/building-opportunity-how-social-housing-can-support-skills-talent-and-workforce-development> [accessed 06/11/2023]

## Organisational barriers can prevent joining up services

Siloed and fragmented services are a stubborn and persistent problem. Institute for Government research notes that, despite theoretical agreement on the benefits of joining up services, 'countless attempts to join up public services have demonstrated that it is not easy.'<sup>43</sup> The Institute for Government research highlights a number of challenges which can prevent joined-up working:<sup>44</sup>

- Short-term policy and funding cycles
- Misaligned geographies and the patchwork of commissioning, funding and regulatory processes
- A lack of financial incentives: the agency investing in preventative support services (for example, a housing association) will not necessarily be the same one reaping the benefits of preventative cost savings (which might, for example, be the NHS). This may make the support services unviable for the provider, despite being financially beneficial overall. Misaligned funding streams and siloed working compounds this issue.<sup>45</sup>
- Cultural differences between professions and organisations; in many cases, nobody sees it as their responsibility to join up services.
- Barriers to data sharing exacerbate siloed working and poor communication. There are examples designed to mitigate this for vulnerable young people developed by the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), with the MoJ leading a cross-government programme called Better Outcomes through Linked Data.<sup>46</sup>
- Lessons from effective models and practices being rarely built on due to limited knowledge sharing

- Capacity to engage in a mindset shift: organisations and individuals lack the time and space to think beyond their immediate duties
- High staff turnover: a new staff member replacing an outgoing one can mean progress is set back, especially since interpersonal relationships (citizen-professional and professional-professional) are key to joining up services.<sup>47</sup>
- A lack of rigorous evaluations regarding joining up services makes it more difficult to win the argument for funding

## PROBLEMS WITH HOUSING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

### The UK has a serious problem with housing supply

The number of households and children in temporary accommodation has increased significantly since 2012. With social housing provided by councils and housing associations becoming increasingly scarce, demand is outpacing supply.<sup>48</sup> Over one million households are on waiting lists for social housing.<sup>49</sup> Yet last year just 37,000 new homes for affordable rent or social rent were built in England.<sup>50</sup> As the social rented sector in England has reduced in size over time, fewer people on low incomes now live in housing at social rent prices. In 1979, almost half (46%) of 25 to 45-year-olds in the lowest-income third of households were in social housing; but the proportion fell to 40% by 2001, and then to 32% by 2019–20.<sup>51</sup> This means many more low-income households live in the private rented sector today than in the past, and therefore face higher housing costs and less security of tenure.<sup>52</sup>

The lack of social housing and other types of affordable housing has contributed to an increase in the last decade in the number of people who are

43 Wilson, S. and others. Joining up public services around local, citizen needs. Institute for Government, November 2015, p. 5. Available at [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/4564%20IFG%20-%20Joining%20up%20around%20local%20v11c.pdf](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/4564%20IFG%20-%20Joining%20up%20around%20local%20v11c.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

44 Wilson and others. Joining up public services. 2015.

45 Wood, C., Salter, J. and Cheetham, P. Under One Roof. Demos, 2012. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/under-one-roof> [accessed 06/11/2023]

46 Comptroller and Auditor General. Support for vulnerable adolescents. National Audit Office, 11 November 2022, p. 8. Available at [www.nao.org.uk/reports/support-for-vulnerable-adolescents](http://www.nao.org.uk/reports/support-for-vulnerable-adolescents) [accessed 06/11/2023]

47 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. December 2022. Available at [www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/the-report-and-recommendations](http://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/the-report-and-recommendations) [accessed 06/11/2023]

48 Crisis. Housing crisis in the UK. (no date). Available at [www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/housing/housing-supply](http://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/housing/housing-supply) [accessed 06/11/2023]

49 Shelter. Social housing deficit. (no date). Available at [https://england.shelter.org.uk/support\\_us/campaigns/social\\_housing\\_deficit](https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/social_housing_deficit) [accessed 06/11/2023]

50 Figure rounded down from 37,406. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Live tables on affordable housing supply. GOV. UK, 27 June 2023, Table 1000. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply) [accessed 06/11/2023]

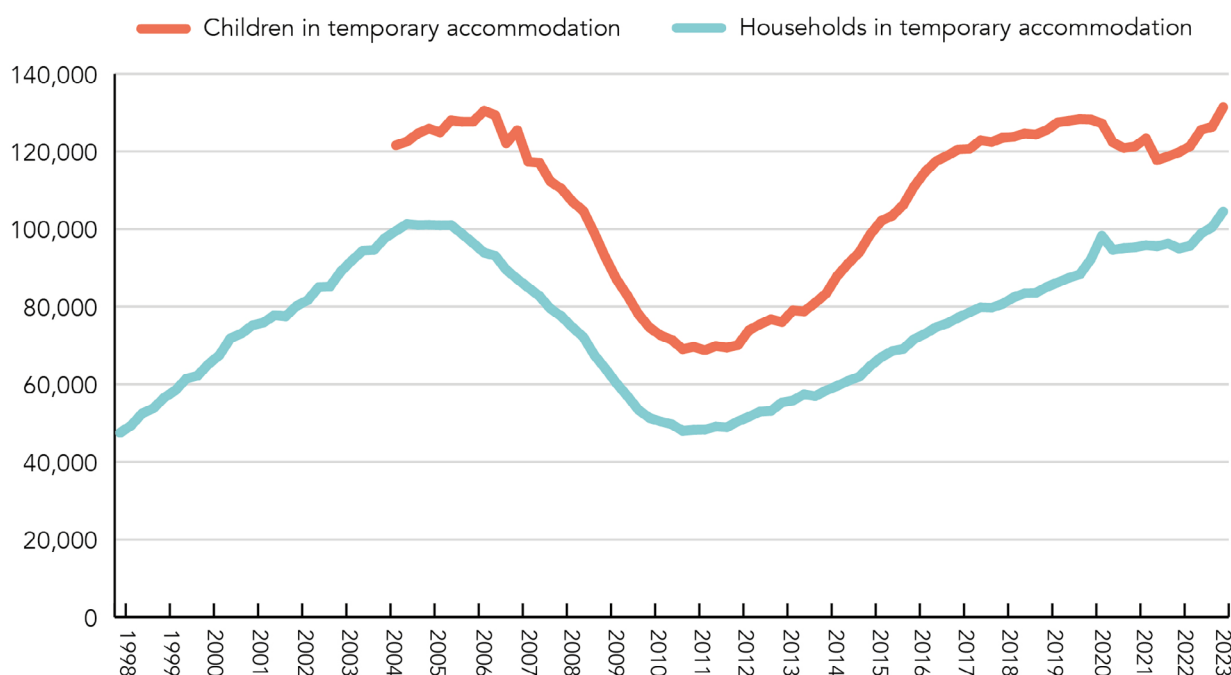
51 Mulheirn, I., Browne, J. and Tsoukalis, C. Housing affordability since 1979: Determinants and solutions. JRF, 18 January 2023, p. 8. Available at [www.jrf.org.uk/report/housing-affordability-1979-determinants-and-solutions](http://www.jrf.org.uk/report/housing-affordability-1979-determinants-and-solutions) [accessed 06/11/2023]

52 Waters, T. and Wernham, T. Housing quality and affordability for lower-income households. Institute for Fiscal Studies, 27 June 2023. Available at <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/housing-quality-and-affordability-lower-income-households> [accessed 06/11/2023]

homeless or living in temporary accommodation. In March 2023, 40,000 households were homeless and there were over 100,000 households in temporary accommodation, including 130,000 children (see Figure 4).<sup>53</sup>

## The number of households and children in temporary accommodation in England has increased significantly since 2011

**FIGURE 4**  
HOUSEHOLDS AND CHILDREN IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IN ENGLAND



Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities<sup>54</sup>

### Supported housing is one model for joining up support services and housing for people facing disadvantage - but is not widely provided to vulnerable young people and families

People with higher needs are sometimes provided 'supportive housing', also known as 'supported housing'. Drawing on the government's description of supported housing, we define it as *accommodation provided alongside support, supervision or care to help people live as*

*independently as possible in the community.*<sup>55</sup> For example, it includes group homes, hostels, refuges, supported living complexes and sheltered housing.<sup>56</sup>

This is particularly relevant for vulnerable young people who may need additional support, for example care leavers or other young people who might otherwise be at risk of homelessness. In 2015, there were approximately 650,000 supported housing units in Great Britain. However, an estimated 70% of supported housing is for older people; as of 2015, only around 3% of supported housing units in

<sup>53</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Statutory homelessness in England: January to March 2023. GOV.UK, 25 July 2023. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-january-to-march-2023/statutory-homelessness-in-england-january-to-march-2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-january-to-march-2023/statutory-homelessness-in-england-january-to-march-2023) [accessed 06/11/2023]

<sup>54</sup> DLUHC. Statutory homelessness in England. 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Department for Work and Pensions and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Supported housing: national statement of expectations. GOV.UK, 20 October 2020. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-housing-national-statement-of-expectations/supported-housing-national-statement-of-expectations](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-housing-national-statement-of-expectations/supported-housing-national-statement-of-expectations) [accessed 06/11/2023]

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, W. The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023: debate in parliament. House of Commons Library, 7 September 2023, p. 8. Available at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9668/CBP-9668.pdf> [accessed 06/11/2023]

Britain were for young people (aged 16-25).<sup>57</sup>

Although high-quality contemporary data on supported housing does not exist, there has been a decline in funding for this kind of provision since 2010.<sup>58</sup> According to 2023 research by Imogen Blood and Associates, in partnership with the University of York:

Supported housing operates within an increasingly challenging and financially insecure context. As local authorities continue to reduce their funding of housing-related support, some providers of supported housing are leaving the market due to high risks.<sup>59</sup>

Policy decisions have reduced funding available for supported housing since 2008:

The financing of revenue costs for housing-related support has become ever more inconsistent and uncertain, with dedicated budgets ceasing to exist and very deep expenditure cuts occurring from 2008 onwards. The key changes of the last 20 years have been the shift from the use of the national benefits system (Housing Benefit service charge element) to pay for supported housing, to a ring-fenced and capped 'Supporting People' central government grant being paid to local authorities, followed by a non-ringfenced grant integrated into general local authority funding in the context of deep cuts.<sup>60</sup>

WPI Economics analysed spending on homelessness and homelessness-related services by Local Authorities from 2008/09 to 2017/18. They found that:

In 2017/18, nearly £1bn less was spent on single homelessness than was spent in 2008/9

– a fall of more than 50%. This was entirely accounted for by reduced spending for Supporting People activity – which includes a wide range of types of support to help people maintain tenancies and keep their lives on track.<sup>61</sup>

### There are widespread issues with the quality of housing in both the social and private rented sectors

The dire state of huge swathes of the UK's housing stock is evidenced by a number of reports, recent media stories and campaigns; it also came out strongly in our primary research. There is strong evidence which shows that living in poor-quality, overcrowded, unstable or unsafe housing can have negative impacts on physical and mental health, and on educational and employment outcomes.<sup>62,63</sup> This is then likely to increase demand for already over-stretched public services, creating a vicious cycle.

Most of our qualitative research participants were living in social housing, and so this section focuses on the quality of housing in the social rented sector. However, there are also serious problems with the quality of housing in the private rented sector: indeed, according to the English Housing Survey 2021-22, 'the private rented sector had the highest proportion of non-decent homes (23%) while the social rented sector had the lowest (10%)'.<sup>64</sup> A large number of low-income (and therefore potentially vulnerable) young people and families live in the private rented sector, and as mentioned above the proportion of low-income households living in the private rented sector has grown substantially in recent decades.<sup>65</sup>

We heard many stories from our research participants about the poor quality of their housing including issues with extensive damp and mould, broken

57 Blood, I., Copeman, I. and Finlay, S. Supported accommodation review: The scale, scope and cost of the supported housing sector. Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Communities and Local Government, November 2016. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/572454/rr927-supported-accommodation-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/572454/rr927-supported-accommodation-review.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

58 Blood and others. Research into the supported housing sector's impact. 2023.

59 Blood and others. Research into the supported housing sector's impact. 2023.

60 Blood, I. and others. 'A Traumatized System': Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years. Riverside Group, March 2020, p. 10. Available at [www.riverside.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/A\\_Traumatized\\_System\\_FULL-REPORT\\_v8\\_webFINAL.pdf](http://www.riverside.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/A_Traumatized_System_FULL-REPORT_v8_webFINAL.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

61 Thunder, J. and Rose, C. B. Local authority spending on homelessness: Understanding recent trends and their impact. WPI Economics, 2019, p. 5. Available at <https://wpieconomics.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Local-authority-spending-on-homelessness-FULL-FINAL.pdf> [accessed 06/11/2023]

62 Marmot, M. and others. Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. The Health Foundation, February 2020, p. 108. Available at [www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on](http://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on) [accessed 06/11/2023]

63 Buzzeeo, J. and others. Tackling unemployment among disadvantaged young people. Institute for Employment Studies, March 2016, p. 15. Available at [www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/cpt0316.pdf](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/cpt0316.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

64 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: headline report. GOV.UK, 15 December 2022. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-headline-report/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-headline-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-headline-report/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-headline-report) [accessed 06/11/2023]

65 Waters and Wernham. Housing quality and affordability. 2023.

water pipes, and inadequate or broken heating. The impact on their physical and mental health was profound and their frustration ran deep.

*There's quite a lot of mould... people come round and can smell damp which is distressing. I get quite a bad cough because of it.*

- Male, young person (age 24), council housing, Stockport

*The council left me without hot water for five weeks at one point.*

- Female, parent, council housing, London

In some cases, people had been waiting months or even years for repairs or maintenance to be carried out. Many residents also expressed frustration with their housing officers, for example because they didn't respond to emails or phone calls.

*My housing officer is useless if you have any issues. Doesn't even reply to my emails. I've had to complain previously, and cc in the housing officer's manager, to get anything to happen.*

- Female, parent, council housing, London

This also has a direct impact on the trust residents have in their housing provider. Most of our qualitative participants were not accessing services through their housing provider; while in many cases this was because of a lack of provision, for some it was also because of a negative relationship with their housing provider. A number of participants expressed scepticism that their housing provider would be competent to provide any 'additional' services when they couldn't get the 'basics' right. This shows that any housing provider wanting to gain the trust of residents needs to start by providing high-quality housing and timely maintenance first.

Our research is comparable to the findings of the *Better Social Housing Review (2022)*, which was led by a panel of independent experts and commissioned by the National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing.<sup>66</sup> The Review reported that 'there are widespread and growing concerns about how too many housing associations manage the maintenance and repair of their housing stock and respond to concerns and complaints about this raised by tenants'.<sup>67</sup> The third recommendation of the Review was that 'housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to

develop and apply new standards defining what an outstanding maintenance and repairs process looks like'.<sup>68</sup>

The *Better Social Housing Review* also contained a section on housing officers, reporting that individual housing officers' workloads have increased in recent years, and that staff turnover is high. The Review stated that 'high staff turnover is contributing to what one stakeholder described as 'the snakes and ladders effect' whereby, as soon as a tenant makes progress on an enquiry or complaint, a new member of staff comes in to replace that departing staff member and tenants repeatedly have to start the process all over again'.<sup>69</sup> The Review's fourth recommendation was that the Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the housing officer role through a recognised programme of training and development.<sup>70</sup>

66 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. 2022. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

67 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. 2022. p.15. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

68 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. 2022. p.15. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

69 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. 2022. p.19. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

70 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. 2022. p.18. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

## CASE STUDY

### BECKY, PARENT, LIVING IN A HOUSING ASSOCIATION HOME, LONDON

Becky has really bad damp behind radiators in her hallway and bathroom. It's been like that for two years. Builders took the radiators off two years ago and haven't replaced them. She is distraught at the way she has been treated by her housing association and is adamant that they don't care about the conditions in which residents live.

She was told that she and her family would have to leave their flat for five days so it could be fixed, but was not warned or provided with any alternative temporary accommodation. Becky therefore contacted a solicitor causing the housing association to say, 'well we can't get out of [fixing] this one now'.

Because the radiators are gone, the heating doesn't work properly. In the winter Becky and her partner are unable to bathe their children properly because it's so cold – the housing association just told her to shut the window, but it doesn't make a difference because it's black and rotten. When they complain about the mould, they then say she should have the window open for better ventilation.

Becky describes how the building is so old that it's falling to pieces - there are pipes hanging off the wall and rotten windows - 'it's not safe'. She had thrown away her daughter's pushchair because it was covered in thick green and white mould and she refused to put her child into it. She tells us that over 20 people have been round and disappeared. 'They're useless, they just argue with me... they take the mick', she says.



# SECTION 2

## SETTING OUT THE KEY NEEDS OF VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

This section primarily draws on the original qualitative and quantitative research conducted for this project. We start by highlighting two overarching themes that emerged from our research: people's limited awareness of support services and their frustration at waiting lists and unresponsive services. We then focus on the needs of vulnerable young people and families, and to what extent these are being met, before briefly discussing what we can learn from people's positive experiences with support services.

### People's awareness of services is often limited and people know there are fewer services than there were in the past

We often heard from participants that they felt like they were 'missing things' due to 'not knowing what's out there'. Research participants also repeatedly told us that they felt there were no support services available to them. It became clear through the research that both of these experiences reflected reality for some people: there was limited awareness of services, but there was also an actual lack of services which were available/accessible for people to use.

There is a clear lack of awareness of where to go to look for services and people are therefore struggling to find out what is available. One participant for example has aspirations to start her own business but has never considered that there might be a service available locally to support her to do so.

With respect to awareness, the process of being involved in the research prompted some people to look for things which might be available to them, sometimes finding things of which they were previously unaware.

However, people also told us that in some cases there is simply a lack of service provision. For example, people reported geographical inconsistency, which meant they had to travel to other council areas to access services. This is particularly difficult for people living in temporary accommodation who have little stability or those who have to move home frequently for any other reason.

Another topic that participants mentioned frequently was the reduction in the number of services available in the local area. Sometimes this was due to reductions in funding since the 2007/8 financial crisis, and at other times it was related to changes since the pandemic, with participants noticing that services they used before Covid no longer existed. Some participants specifically mentioned Sure Start and council-issued vouchers as examples of services which had disappeared.

*The council doesn't really provide clubs or activities... they only have adventure playgrounds like a play centre, rather than set activities. I'd have to use my own resources for my kids to do the things I would like them to do. The council used to run Bright Start, we used to go every Thursday and it was my son's favourite thing to do but it lost funding.*  
- Female, parent, living in a housing association home, London



## People are very frustrated at waiting lists and unresponsive services

When people are on waiting lists for long periods they can feel stuck in limbo. This was an obvious source of frustration for many young adults who had been waiting significant lengths of time for services such as mental health support. People told us about similar frustrations with long waiting lists to access social housing. We also heard from parents who want to utilise free or subsidised activities for their children but cannot because they are oversubscribed, indicating that demand is greater than current supply.

Our survey results also show that waiting lists are a serious problem. We asked both parents and young people if anything had stopped them from accessing support services in the last two years, asking respondents to choose their most important three reasons. 'Long waiting lists for services' was by some margin the most commonly selected option, with almost one in three (29%) saying that long waiting lists had prevented them from accessing support services which would have helped them.

Other participants reported services being unresponsive, for example never answering queries or not actually providing a service when they were meant to do so. In one instance, a participant had been chasing Universal Credit to understand what benefits she was entitled to as a single mother with three young children. She spoke about continually being kept on hold, passed to other people and having to wait for paper forms to be sent to her. Another research participant told us about an unresponsive mental health service she tried to help her daughter access:

*The school recommended somewhere called [name withheld] for mental health after lockdown. I rang them, and they didn't answer even though I rang several times. I left the information on the voicemail and they never got back to me. I don't know what else I can do. I was in the dark about where you can get help for children's mental health, and then I lost faith as no one got back to me. It's not right that you get these places suggested to you, and then you don't hear anything.*

- Female, parent, living in council housing, Rochdale

It is not clear whether these services were unresponsive because they were poorly run or whether they were overwhelmed by demand (or a combination of both). However, one important theme that emerged from our qualitative research was that people's negative experiences, such as

long waiting lists or not receiving a response to an enquiry, changed their perception of support services in general. People felt reluctant to use services after experiencing such slowness and inefficiency or didn't think that any help would be available to them. This shows the potential long-term damage which may be done to people's trust if support services are not available when they need them.

## WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES?

### Sometimes it's hard to know what exactly you need

One aspect that became apparent while we were conducting the research is that *knowing what you need can be a need in itself*. For example, some young people were struggling financially or feeling stressed by the precarity of their employment but wouldn't necessarily have said that they needed 'employment support' or 'skills training' or 'careers advice'. A number of participants mentioned the importance of having advice or direction, and the need for 'someone to go to' for support.

*Me trying to find things on my own, I don't always feel like I know what I'm doing. When I had support workers [at hostels], they were quite proactive - that was really helpful to me. I would still find it helpful to have a support worker now [when I'm living in social housing].*  
- Female, young person (age 22), living in a housing association home, London

This is further illustrated by the research process itself. Simply having a facilitator talk to people about their use of support services prompted people to think critically about services and to look into what might be available to them.

*At the start of this, I didn't think there was much support there. I didn't know everything to access really. It's pushed me to contact council services, and [other service names withheld] to discuss with them what's on offer. Being able to find places we can go and feel safe and that [my son] feels comfortable with has been worth its weight in gold.*

- Male, parent, living in a housing association home, Bolton

This highlights the potential of a key worker / support worker role - where someone removed from an individual's or family's life can help them think through what their needs might be and how to address those needs.

## Young people need support to find secure and engaging work

One of the strong themes from our qualitative research with young people was demand for employment support or careers advice. For some people this was primarily related to getting a job in the first place and could mean accessing advice on job search or CV writing, while others felt stuck in a low-income job with no obvious progression route. We heard about the importance of engaging work - people want to like and be invested in what they do.

This need also came through very clearly in our survey. We asked respondents to choose their top three 'support needs', giving people a list of options, one of which was 'Employment and work advice (for example, advice on finding the right job, job search support or getting an apprenticeship)'. The 'employment and work advice' option was the second most popular among young people, with one in three (33%) selecting it among their top three needs. We also surveyed parents of children aged 11-17 and 'employment and work advice' was the single most popular option, with one in three (36%) selecting it as one of their children's top three needs.

Where people are in employment, some participants told us about experiencing in-work financial difficulties, for example where their income from work was insufficient to cover their outgoings.

Young adults also felt a need for a better transition between school and work and wanted support to adapt to the workplace:

*I felt like when I was at school I was really good at everything and now I've left school I'm really bad at everything. I don't know how to harness the skills I have into a work context.*

- Female, young person (age 20), living in a mobile home, Lancashire

*I would like to start a nail technician business. I would need support to do this, and a qualification but it's expensive. I wonder if there's a government scheme that could help me, but I haven't figured that out yet and don't know about anything relevant to me.*

- Female, young person (age 23), living in a housing association home, London

## There is a clear need for improved health support, particularly mental health support

In our survey, when we asked about people's needs, our respondents highlighted mental health as a priority. One in three (33%) young people said it was

one of their top three needs, and a similar proportion of parents (31%) said the same about their children.

When we asked our respondents what types of support they had accessed, if any, in the last two years, one in four (24%) said they had accessed some kind of mental health support. This was the highest of all the types of support we asked people about. It is worth emphasising that this covers a broad range of different types of support: among those who had accessed mental health support, two in three (63%) had done so through the NHS, with the rest accessing it through other organisations. Despite the relatively high proportion of children and young people accessing mental health support, there was still a need-access gap in our survey.

Our qualitative research suggests that people experiencing more serious mental ill health are particularly suffering because they are unable to access specialist support from the NHS. Long waiting lists are well documented, and we heard about these in our qualitative interviews. Waiting months or even years to access services is not acceptable in and of itself, but it has the added impact of potentially worsening mental ill health, which then in turn is a further barrier to accessing other support services.

*I was on [NHS] waiting lists for two years. I was put on multiple waiting lists. People never got back to me at all. When I contacted my GP, they just said I was on a waiting list, or put me on another waiting list. I've had a terrible experience [...] If I'd had any kind of support, when I needed it in the beginning, I'd be easier to help now. Because now, it's a lot worse, because so many things have happened because of my mental health being bad. Just the complete lack of anything needs to be changed. I understand it's an overstretched service, [and] people I've spoken to, they've been lovely. It's not anyone's choice for that to happen.*

- Female, young person (age 22), living in a housing association home, London

*I think I could have more support on mental health. I got diagnosed a few years ago with borderline personality disorder and as soon as I got [the diagnosis] they just threw me in at the deep end. I didn't get any therapy. there was nothing. I tried to access [the services] again but they're not interested. They're like, 'You've got your diagnosis, that's it.'*

- Female, young person (age 20), living in a mobile home, Lancashire

## Vulnerable young people and families need support in the cost of living crisis and want to access financial advice

People's precarious financial situations are being exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of the cost of living crisis. This is a primary cause of stress which negatively impacts people's health but can also block access to support services. For example, people are unable to travel to services if they are too far from their home; the cost of public transport and/or petrol can be unaffordable. Some parents spoke about social activities being too expensive for their children - in some cases even when these activities were subsidised by the local council.

In our survey, people highlighted financial advice as an important support service need; in our view this is likely to be related to the cost of living crisis. Among all survey respondents (parents and young people), eight in ten (79%) said they thought financial advice would be helpful to them or their children - the joint top answer along with 'employment and work advice'. Among young people, one in three (36%) selected financial advice as one of their top three needs - the single highest support need among young people. It is therefore particularly concerning that there is very a large need-access gap: in our survey, just one in ten (9%) young people said they had accessed financial advice in the last two years, suggesting that many young people want to access financial advice but either aren't able to do so or don't know where to find it.

*General support with bills would be helpful in the cost of living crisis. It would help if they offered financial advice from specialists to help with management of debt.*

- Female, parent, living in a housing association home, London

## Families want to access children's social activities and childcare, which can be hard to find locally

The financial barriers to service use are related to the geographical inconsistency in services. Participants reported having a short supply of services in their council area; we heard stories of people travelling to neighbouring council areas (if it was affordable) and being turned away for having an out of catchment postcode. Other parents explained that cost was a significant barrier and that they couldn't afford social activities (such as sports or summer activities).

*Money is a barrier. My son can only do a week of this summer club because that's all I could afford - it used to be free before.*

- Female, parent, living in council housing, London

We found a clear inconsistency in the supply of services. People reported their disappointment that many council-run services they used to rely on have been cut, particularly since the pandemic. We heard a clear need for more provision, particularly social activities for children during the summer holidays (related to the fact that we conducted our qualitative research during July and August). Where such activities do exist, they can be inappropriate for families with multiple children, as activities often don't cater for children of various ages which can cause difficulty for parents on low incomes. This also coincides with the need for more affordable childcare and after-school provision, particularly the case for single parent families.

## Parents need to be able to access additional educational support when their school is not supporting their child sufficiently

Where parents had concerns about their children's progress at school, educational support is not always accessible for those on low incomes. We heard about few other options for academic support other than private tutoring which is typically very expensive.

*My son has been struggling academically for a while and hasn't been offered any extra support, I'm just told to try my best at home... I've been looking at private tutoring but it's too hard to pay for it.*

- Female, parent, living in a housing association home, London

This was of particular concern to parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who told us that extra support at school is often insufficient. We heard concerning stories about long assessment waits and a lack of support even after an assessment or diagnosis. Some parents explained that they felt they really had to push for people to take them or their child seriously and to get support, especially when it came to schools/colleges.

## High-quality, stable and safe housing underpins all other needs

Our research participants made clear the importance of having high-quality, stable and safe housing. There are two important ways this interacts with public services and wider support services. First, a difficult housing situation can increase people's needs for using public services and support services: for example, somebody's housing situation can have a negative impact on their physical or mental health, which then increases demand for NHS services. The links between housing and health inequalities are numerous.<sup>71</sup> Second, a difficult housing situation can also make it harder for people to use or engage with other services: this is the case for someone experiencing homelessness, but also applies to people in other situations, such as moving address frequently. Conversely, a good housing situation can enable and facilitate better engagement with other services, providing a solid foundation for making progress with education or employment, for example. Anna's story below demonstrates the links between housing and other services.

### CASE STUDY

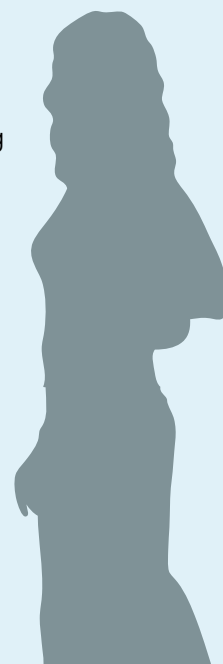
ANNA, YOUNG PERSON (AGE 22), LIVING IN A HOUSING ASSOCIATION HOME, LONDON

When we spoke to her, Anna had recently moved into a housing association home after living in temporary accommodation, mainly hostels, for four years. She was moved between different hostels multiple times during this period.

Anna had a mental health condition and explained that the instability in her housing situation had caused her mental health to deteriorate: 'It was really stressful. I got moved around a lot, and it had a really bad impact on my mental health. It was really unstable.' This meant Anna found it hard to engage with the limited support she was offered during this period: 'Because my mental health was taking a hit because of the instability etc., I really struggled to explain things, so they couldn't really help me. It just wasn't really working.'

However, Anna explained that having access to social housing had made a significant difference to her life: 'It's had a 100% positive effect on my mental health. I don't feel like I'm going to be kicked out at any moment and feel a lot calmer. I feel I can do things for myself.'

After being on an NHS waiting list for over two years, while we were speaking to her Anna was finally getting specialist clinical support for her mental health condition. With her housing situation stable, she was also exploring her options for returning to college to study.



71 Marmot and others. The Marmot Review 10 Years On. 2020. pp. 108-118

For many of our research participants, finding suitable housing is an ongoing battle. One person we spoke to had been bidding for social housing properties most weeks for nine years without success, causing a lot of stress:

*If it was permanent, I'd have peace of mind.*  
- Male, parent/guardian, temporary council housing

Another of our research participants had experienced a relationship breakdown, which meant she was temporarily moving between two houses in turn without a permanent home. She described how difficult it was to try to access social housing for her and her daughter, partly because she was categorised as Band C 'Low Housing Need' in her council area:

*I gave [the council] details of what had happened. They said they would get in touch five days after application, but I hadn't spoken to anyone for maybe two weeks. So, I kept ringing them. Explained the situation again. I had to explain the situation - can't remember how many times - three or four different people - which is repetitive and frustrating. I've been trying to bid [online] on a few places every week, but I'm in Band C because I have somewhere to sleep, which means I have no chance, because I'm [so far down] the queue.*  
- Female, young person (age 24), living between two houses, Wales

This experience reflects the council's housing website for the area, which states that 'due to the shortage of social housing [...] the waiting list is very long [...]. Even people in urgent housing need may have to wait a long time before they are allocated a property.'

The current housing crisis in the UK is making high-quality, stable and safe housing increasingly difficult to access. People are experiencing long waiting lists for social or affordable housing, and therefore also experiencing homelessness or long periods living in temporary accommodation. This is increasing people's support needs and making it more difficult for people to engage with services when they are able to access them.

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PEOPLE'S POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH SUPPORT SERVICES?

**Having a high-quality trusting relationship with at least one person can have a positive impact on people's experience of using services**

Although our research participants often faced challenges in their lives, including problems with housing and with wider support services, we also heard about some positive experiences.

A clear theme emerged that these positive experiences were very often linked to a high-quality trusting relationship with an individual who had supported them. For example, one participant spoke positively about the help she had received from support workers while living in temporary accommodation. Another participant said that he had appreciated the CAMHS worker who was supporting his son:

*[The CAMHS worker] was the most helpful [support service this week]. She gave us a full report on [my son] and how he was doing. Giving him things to cope. She's telling us what happens after this. Someone who feels like they care.*  
- Male, parent, living in a housing association home, Bolton

One of our research participants spoke very positively about the support he was getting from a youth worker at his youth club:

*[My youth worker] is supportive of me, if I need help with anything like jobs, I did my CV through my youth club, and if I have any issues I know I can go speak to them. I find them very helpful. I asked my youth worker to [help me with] my CV and also looked at apprenticeships for after college. I felt happy I'd got my CV finished and I had something to work towards, the apprenticeship. I've had the same youth worker the whole time... She's a kind person, and she'll help where help's needed. And she'll do what she can to help everyone the same.*  
- Male, young person (age 19), living with parents, London

## People appreciate personalised and tailored support

In addition to the strong *relational* theme which we heard about, another theme was that people appreciated *personalised* or *tailored* support which took into account their individual circumstances.

People feel that when support is tailored to them it is much more beneficial. People were particularly supportive of tailored support where it led to tangible, practical change, such as CV writing or advice on getting an apprenticeship. We heard about one participant's experience with a Jobcentre: they reported that a Work Coach made a concerted effort to understand their individual circumstances and provided bespoke advice. Another research participant talked about how her school had helped her when her relationship with her parents had deteriorated:

*The school helped me, they didn't have to, but they did. They made a referral to social services, to demand why they weren't helping me. They also called different orgs to get me somewhere to sleep when they found out I didn't have anywhere to go. They've done a lot of work on how best to help me, I do really appreciate them for that.*

- Female, young person (age 18), living in supported housing, London

## SUMMARY OF SECTION 2

Two important themes emerged from our research. First, many of our participants only had limited *awareness* of support services which were available to them. Second, people were frustrated at long waiting lists and unresponsive services. These negative experiences can change people's perceptions and make them cynical about the prospect of actually getting any help in the future.

Vulnerable young people and families have a range of needs. One aspect that became apparent while we were conducting the research is that *knowing what you need can be a need in itself*, which highlights the potential benefits of having a relational key worker to offer support. Other needs which appeared to be common themes were advice/support on employment, careers, education and training; mental health support; financial support; support with children's social activities and childcare; additional educational support for children and young people with SEND; and above all, high-quality, safe and stable housing.

People who had positive experiences with support services often spoke about the value of having a positive, trusting relationship with at least one professional or support worker. People also valued personalised or tailored support which took into account their individual circumstances.

Having examined people's experiences in depth, the next section provides analysis of the economic costs of siloed services which fail to provide adequate support to address the needs of vulnerable young people and families.

# SECTION 3

## THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF SILOED SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

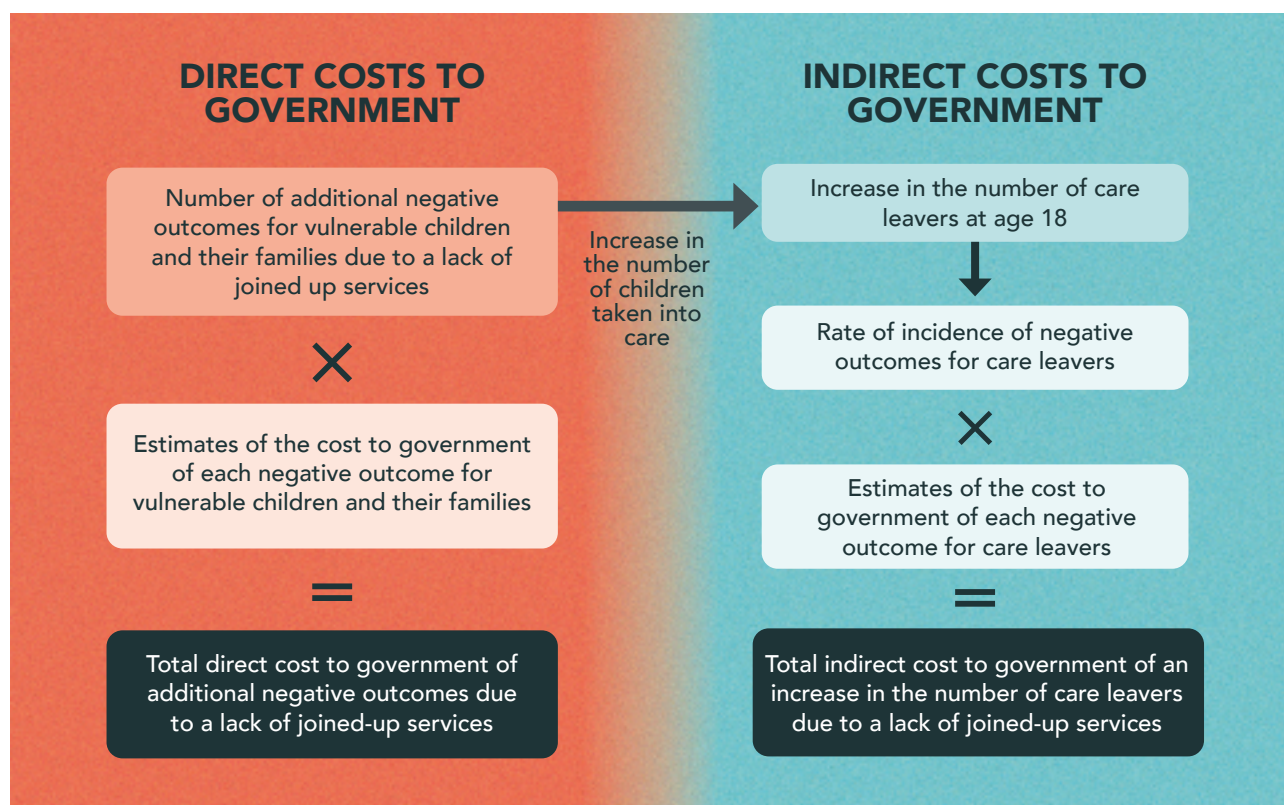
### **INTRODUCTION TO THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS**

This section sets out an economic analysis of the estimated costs deriving from the lack of a joined-up approach to providing support services for vulnerable children and young people and their families. It starts from our Theory of Change (see Figure 2) which maps how a lack of joined-up services impacts negatively on vulnerable families and leads to worse outcomes and additional costs to government. After outlining the methodological approach, the estimated short-term and long-term impacts and costs are presented. This analysis examines and estimates costs by taking a bottom-up approach, focusing on specific issues stemming from a lack of joined-up services. It can be built on with further work that considers the interactions between the different issues identified and how those interactions affect the costs, and by creating an analytical framework that brings quantifiable costs together, on a consistent basis, to provide an overall assessment of cost.

### **APPROACH TO ESTIMATING COSTS**

The costs to government, the economy and individuals and families impacted by a lack of joined-up support service provision are estimated as the unrealised beneficial impacts and savings of intervention through a holistic, joined-up approach to services – both short-term and long-term.

**FIGURE 5**  
 APPROACH FOR ESTIMATING COSTS TO GOVERNMENT OF A LACK OF JOINED-UP SERVICES



For estimating the direct short-term impact of joined-up services, the (as then) Department for Communities and Local Government's Troubled Families Programme (2015-2020) – which took an integrated approach to providing services to families with multiple problems – provides evidence of the rate of reduction in negative outcomes across a range of service areas for families with multiple problems.<sup>72</sup> Drawing on this evidence, and adjusting for inflation, we have estimated the cost savings resulting from a reduction in government services used by those families, on a savings per family per year basis. The total cost to government from increased service use due to a lack of joined-up services is estimated as a range depending on estimates of the number of families that would benefit from joined-up services.<sup>73</sup>

A holistic approach to providing services also has positive impacts that lead to indirect longer-term cost savings and benefits; most crucially, joined-up services reduce the likelihood of children being taken into care. Using the rate of reduction in children entering into care due to early intervention with a holistic approach, the costs to both the individuals

themselves and the government of not intervening can be estimated.

### **DIRECT COSTS TO GOVERNMENT FROM A LACK OF JOINED-UP SERVICES**

We estimate that due to a lack of joined-up services the additional cost to the exchequer of government services could range from £1.5bn to £4.3bn per year depending on the number of families who could benefit from more comprehensive and holistic service provision. These costs (which can be seen in Table 1 below) are derived from worse outcomes due to a lack of joined-up services for vulnerable children and young people (for example, entry into the criminal justice system, truancy and exclusion from school, being taken into care), adults in their family (for example, imprisonment, unemployment, alcohol misuse) and the family overall (for example, homelessness). In practice, as government departments often work within fixed budgets, this additional cost may materialise in the form of worse quality and reach of government services.

<sup>72</sup> Specifically, the areas covered are (1) Crime and anti-social behaviour, (2) Education, (3) Employment, (4) Health, (5) Housing, and (6) Children's services.

<sup>73</sup> For further detail on the methodology used for estimating costs, please see the Annex.



**TABLE 1**

**COSTS TO THE EXCHEQUER FROM VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES DUE TO A LACK OF JOINED-UP SERVICES**

	<b>LOW ESTIMATE</b>	<b>HIGH ESTIMATE</b>
Number of young people and families who would benefit from joined-up services <sup>74</sup>	140,000	400,000
<b>EXCHEQUER COSTS RELATING TO...</b>	<b>ADDITIONAL EXCHEQUER COSTS (PER YEAR)</b>	
Crime and anti-social behaviour	£640m	£1,830m
Employment	£350m	£1,000m
Education	£290m	£820m
Health	£200m	£580m
Housing	£60m	£170m
Children's services	-£30m	-£70m
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,520m</b>	<b>£4,330m</b>

Note: totals may not sum due to rounding.

### Direct costs related to vulnerable children and young people

Intervention with joined-up support services has a significant positive impact on outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. Listed below are examples of some of these potential impacts and costs to government resulting from them not being realised due to a lack of joined-up services.

#### Crime and anti-social behaviour

- A holistic approach to service provision has been shown to lead to a 77% reduction in the number of under-18s entering the criminal justice system for the first time, which we estimate costs the criminal justice system £4,800 per person in the year following the first offence and taking into account service costs and rates of re-offence among young people.<sup>75</sup>
- The amount of time spent in prison by under 18s, which we estimate costs the government £233,000 for each year spent in prison, can

also be reduced by up to 45% due to joined-up services.<sup>76</sup>

#### Education

- Intervention by joined-up services was also shown to reduce the number of children who were persistently truant from school by up to 59% and reduce by two-thirds the number who were permanently excluded from school.<sup>77</sup> We estimate that these two outcomes cost local authorities £2,500 and £15,200 per child per year respectively.

#### Children's services

Overall, intervention by joined-up services leads to improved outcomes for vulnerable children, who are more likely to receive the support they need as part of a holistic approach. Better and earlier interventions for vulnerable children and their families means that fewer children are taken into care as issues in the home are able to be resolved or improved. Furthermore, for children already in care there are better assessments of the family and home

74 The low estimate for the number of young people and families focuses on groups who are most in need of joined-up services and is calculated as the number of families with children in temporary accommodation plus the number of care leavers aged 18-24. The high estimate is the number of families that the second iteration of the Troubled Families Programme (2015-2020) estimated could benefit from joined-up services.

75 Department for Communities and Local Government. Local Authority Data on the Cost and Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme. GOV.UK, October 2016. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-programme-local-authority-cost-savings](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-programme-local-authority-cost-savings) [accessed 06/11/2023].

76 Department for Communities and Local Government. Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme. 2016.

77 Department for Communities and Local Government. Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme. 2016.

situations as a result of joined-up services, leading to better decision making on whether a child should remain in care. On average, joined-up services are expected to result in children spending longer in care, but – crucially – there are better outcomes for them as a result.

Consequently, in terms of impact on government spending in relation to children's services, there are offsetting factors. For example:

- Government costs can increase due to better identification of which children in care would be at risk if they returned home – and a corresponding uptick in the number of visits by social workers. As such, the period of time that children stay in local authority care can increase by up to 37%, which we estimate to cost local authorities £164,000 per child per year.<sup>78</sup>
- By contrast, government can make savings due to a reduction in the number of children taken into care of around 20% as a result of joined-up services, which we estimate saves government £79,000 per child per year.<sup>79</sup>

Overall, the short-term increase in costs relating to children's services, as a result of joined-up services, is between £30m and £70m. However, when looking at longer-term costs to government related to children in care (see next section), there are considerably larger savings made from better lifetime outcomes as a result of joined-up services and early intervention.

## Direct costs related to adults and the family overall

Intervention by joined-up services also significantly reduces costs associated with the adults in a family, and there are a range of positive impacts for families in general. Some of these positive benefits and the costs that derive from them not being realised are detailed below.

### Crime and anti-social behaviour

- Intervention by joined-up services can lead to a decrease of 57% in the number of adults in the families of vulnerable children who spend time in prison, which we estimate to cost the state

£58,000 per adult per year.<sup>80</sup>

- Joined-up services have also been shown to reduce incidences of domestic violence in the families of vulnerable children by 36%, which we estimate to cost the criminal justice system £3,800 per incident.<sup>81</sup>

### Employment

- Intervention by joined-up services can reduce the number of adults claiming unemployment benefits by a quarter, which we estimate costs the exchequer £15,800 per person per year.<sup>82</sup>

### Health

- Cases of alcohol and drug misuse in families of vulnerable children have been shown to decrease by 44% and 29% respectively following intervention under a joined-up services programme.<sup>83</sup> We estimate that the costs to the health service of a case of dependent drinking are £2,700 per year and a case of drug dependency are £4,700 per year.

### Housing

- A holistic approach to services for vulnerable children and their families also leads to a reduction in the number of homelessness application processed by local authorities by 29% and a reduction in the number of evictions by 55%, the latter of which we estimate to cost local authorities £9,601 per case.<sup>84</sup>

## LONGER-TERM COSTS RESULTING FROM AN INCREASED NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Intervention by a system of joined-up services can reduce the number of children being taken into care by 20% – or put another way, the lack of joined-up services for vulnerable children and their families increases the number of children being taken into care by 20%, or around 16,000 per year.<sup>85,86</sup> This is a serious policy consequence of not providing joined-up services since not only do children in care have worse outcomes in health, education and employment, but there is an intergenerational impact as well – 32% of children in care have a

78 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

79 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

80 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

81 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

82 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

83 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

84 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

85 Department for Communities and Local Government. *Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme*. 2016.

86 Department for Education. Children looked after in England including adoptions. GOV.UK, 17 November 2022. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2022> [accessed 06/11/2023]

parent who was in care.<sup>87</sup> The knock-on effect of an additional 20% of vulnerable children being taken into care is a corresponding increase of around 20% in the number of young people leaving care, around 9,000 annually.<sup>88</sup> Care leavers face significant risks and inequalities compared to young people who are not care-experienced across a range of domains, set out in Table 2 and explored in detail below.

**TABLE 2**  
OUTLINE OF LONGER-TERM COSTS RESULTING FROM ADDITIONAL CARE LEAVERS DUE TO A LACK OF JOINED-UP SERVICES

	FOR EACH ANNUAL COHORT OF ADDITIONAL CARE LEAVERS DUE TO A LACK OF JOINED-UP SERVICES...	
	...COSTS TO GOVERNMENT:	...LOST EARNINGS FOR CARE LEAVERS:
<b>Employment</b>		
Being NEET between ages 18-24	£56m (per year)	£201m (lifetime)
<b>Education</b>		
Not achieving 5+ good GCSEs		£286m (lifetime)
Not obtaining an undergraduate degree	£278m (lifetime)	£411m (lifetime)
<b>Housing</b>		
Becoming homeless	£49m (per year)	
<b>Health</b>		
Experiencing poor mental health	£4m (per year)	£16m (per year)

### Care leavers and occupational outcomes

Care leavers face a high risk of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) – 35% of care leavers aged 18-21 were NEET in 2022.<sup>89</sup> Our analysis shows that being NEET leads to lost earnings of £62,000 between the ages of 18-24, or £201m in lost earnings between the ages of 18 and 24 for each annual cohort of 9,000 additional care leavers that results from a lack of joined-up services.

Each annual cohort of additional care leavers who are NEET (as a result of a lack of joined-up services) also means that there is an estimated additional

£130m per year in lost economic output as a result of their economic inactivity. We also estimate a further £56m per year cost to the exchequer in lost tax receipts and additional welfare expenditure.

### Care leavers and educational outcomes

Care leavers also have significantly worse educational outcomes compared to those who have not been in care. Just 4.2% of care-experienced young people achieve 5+ good GCSEs, compared with 26.8% for those who have not been in care.<sup>90,91</sup> Having 5+ good GCSEs is estimated to provide an increase in

87 PwC. The investment of a lifetime: Delivering better outcomes for children in care. March 2021. Available at [www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/assets/documents/investment-of-lifetime-delivering-better-children-care-outcomes.pdf](http://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/assets/documents/investment-of-lifetime-delivering-better-children-care-outcomes.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

88 Some children who are taken into care leave before the age of 17 and are not counted as care leavers in official statistics, hence the difference between the number of children taken into care and the number leaving care.

89 Department for Education. Children looked after in England including adoptions. 2022.

90 Grades 4 or above, including English and Maths.

91 Department for Education. Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England. GOV.UK, 30 March 2023. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england/2022> [accessed 06/11/2023]

lifetime earnings of £138,000. Due to this attainment gap between care leavers and those who have not been in care there is a significant impact on future earning potential for care leavers. It is estimated that this gap in educational attainment leads to £286m in lost earnings over the collective lifetime of each annual cohort of additional care leavers from a lack of joined-up services.

There is also a far lower rate of advancement into higher education for care leavers – 14% compared to 47% – and a lower likelihood of graduating from higher education if they do enter.<sup>92,93</sup> This means that the lack of joined-up services results in an additional 2,800 care leavers who do not obtain an undergraduate degree. Current estimates are that the lack of an undergraduate degree will cost care leavers an average of £158,000 in lifetime earnings for men and £121,000 for women. This means that for each annual cohort of additional care leavers the total lost lifetime earnings from not obtaining an undergraduate degree is around £411m. There is also an additional cost to the exchequer over time in lost receipts and increased benefit spending of an estimated £278m for each cohort.

## Care leavers and housing

There is also a greater risk for care leavers of not having secure housing: approximately a third of care leavers become homeless during their first two years after leaving care.<sup>94</sup> We estimate that the additional 3,000 care leavers becoming homeless as a result of a lack of joined-up services will cost the government £49m annually in services and programmes targeting rough sleepers. Furthermore, this is only the direct cost of providing services to rough sleepers, including healthcare and accommodation services; there are also additional indirect costs that will develop in the long term, for example, due to

worse health and a lower likelihood of entering employment as a result of homelessness.

When they are not homeless, care leavers are also more likely to be in poorer quality housing: 32% are unsatisfied with their housing (compared to 20% of the general population); 36% do not feel safe at home (9% general population); and 17% have no internet access at home (7% general population).<sup>95</sup>

## Care leaver health and wellbeing

Care leavers have a greater risk of having poor mental health outcomes – 44.8% of children in care have at least one psychiatric diagnosis compared to just 9.5% of all children.<sup>96,97</sup> We estimate that providing mental health services for the additional care leavers due to a lack of joined-up services costs the government in excess of £4m per year. Furthermore, we estimate £5,000 per year in lost earnings for the care leavers themselves due to their mental health diagnosis.

In terms of general health outcomes, adults who spent time in the care system as children are 70% more likely to die prematurely than those who did not spend time in care, with the increased mortality primarily attributable to self-harm, accidents and mental health cases.<sup>98</sup> Care leavers are also more likely to have low life satisfaction – 26% compared to 3% of the population overall.<sup>99</sup> There is also evidence that care leavers are likely to struggle with managing low incomes – 57% have difficulties in avoiding debt.<sup>100</sup>

92 Department for Education. Widening participation in higher education 2021/22. GOV.UK, 13 July 2023. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education> [accessed 06/11/2023]

93 Harrison, N. Moving on up: Pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education. National Network for the Education of Care Leavers, November 2017. Available at <https://careleaverpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/HERACLES-Final-report.pdf> [accessed 06/11/2023]

94 All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness. Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence. July 2017. Available at [www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg\\_for\\_ending\\_homelessness\\_report\\_2017\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

95 Briheim-Crookall, L. and others. What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being: Key findings and recommendations. Coram Voice, November 2020. Available at <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1883-CV-What-Makes-Life-Good-Summary5.pdf> [accessed 06/11/2023]

96 Meltzer, H. and others. The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in England. Office for National Statistics, 2003. Available at [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/psychiatric-morbidity/mental-health-of-young-people-looked-after-by-local-authorities/2002-survey/mental-health-of-young-people-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/psychiatric-morbidity/mental-health-of-young-people-looked-after-by-local-authorities/2002-survey/mental-health-of-young-people-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

97 Meltzer, H. and others. The mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain. Office for National Statistics, 2000. Available at [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/psychiatric-morbidity/the-mental-health-of-children-and-adolescents-in-great-britain/1999-survey/mental-health-of-children-and-adolescents-in-great-britain.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/psychiatric-morbidity/the-mental-health-of-children-and-adolescents-in-great-britain/1999-survey/mental-health-of-children-and-adolescents-in-great-britain.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

98 Murray, E. T. and others. Association of childhood out-of-home care status with all-cause mortality up to 42-years later: Office of National Statistics Longitudinal Study. BMC Public Health, Vol. 20, 735, 20 May 2020. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08867-3> [accessed 06/11/2023]

99 Briheim-Crookall and others. Care leavers' views on their well-being. 2020.

100 Winterburn, M. Finding their feet: Equipping care leavers to reach their potential. The Centre for Social Justice, January 2015. Available at [www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Finding.pdf](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Finding.pdf) [accessed 06/11/2023]

# SECTION 4

## RECOMMENDATIONS - TOWARDS A NEW CITIZEN-CENTRED PUBLIC SERVICE DESIGN

The research in this report makes clear that we need to join up public services in a system which puts citizens at the centre and is responsive to their individual needs and circumstances. Many attempts have been made to tackle the entrenched problem of silos in public services, but few have succeeded in achieving the radical change needed. Here we set out the case not for a series of small interventions but for a new system, built on relational ways of working and supported by innovative digital infrastructure and insights driven by data.

Our research strengthens the case for building *relational public services* to help prevent problems and to manage them more successfully.<sup>101</sup> Vulnerable young people and families want personalised and meaningful support based on a strong, trusting relationship with a frontline professional with continuity over time. This relational model needs to be enabled by digital transformation and integrating data to improve services and free up frontline professionals' time to do what human beings can do best: help people when they are facing difficult circumstances through relational ways of working.

In this section, we set out a series of 'building blocks' which amounts to a new, citizen-centred system. In this new system, key workers will provide relational

support to young people and families who need it most. Key workers will be part of multi-disciplinary teams brought together to break down public service silos, crucially including relevant housing professionals. To complement this approach, we recommend that local authorities and other local organisations expand co-location of support services in shared physical spaces as a practical way of joining up services and making them easier for people to access.

This new system will be underpinned by joined-up data. It is of the utmost importance that safe and equitable approaches are taken to achieve this, including ensuring the highest standards of data privacy and security designed into the system from the beginning. Based on high standards of privacy and security, the new system would involve joining up each citizen's data to serve three purposes that would transform services by enabling them to focus on citizens' holistic needs:

1. The insights provided by joined-up data would enable key workers to use their time and resources to support citizens who most need it, when they need it, or even before they need it, in order to prevent problems spiralling further down the line.

101 Mackenzie. The Social State. 2021. p. 4

2. Long-term outcomes data would measure the impact of commissioned interventions in a rounded way and over longer periods of time, enabling commissioning based on outcomes (for example, Social Outcomes Contracts).
3. Changes in citizens' circumstances and engagement with services, recorded in their data, would be integrated into a citizen-facing app and drive tailored information about services to citizens more precisely and at moments when it is of most use to them.

This new system, using data insights to enable relational ways of working, will help break down existing siloed approaches. It will support public services and local authorities to understand and respond to citizens' needs and offer services in a way that matches their wider digital lives.

We recognise that our proposals regarding joining up data and creating an app for citizens raise questions about ethics, data security and privacy, and people's trust in public services and in the state. Previous schemes, such as identity cards and NHS data sharing, have been controversial. Trust and public support are essential for our proposed system of citizen-centred public service design, as well as being key themes of Demos's wider research and policy work. We therefore recommend that central government should commission a national **Citizens' Assembly on Data and Digital in Public Services**. This deliberative process can help the government understand what principles citizens prioritise and what policies they would, and would not, support. By bringing citizens into the policy making process, the Assembly can strengthen trust in any subsequent reforms or legislation designed to achieve our proposals.

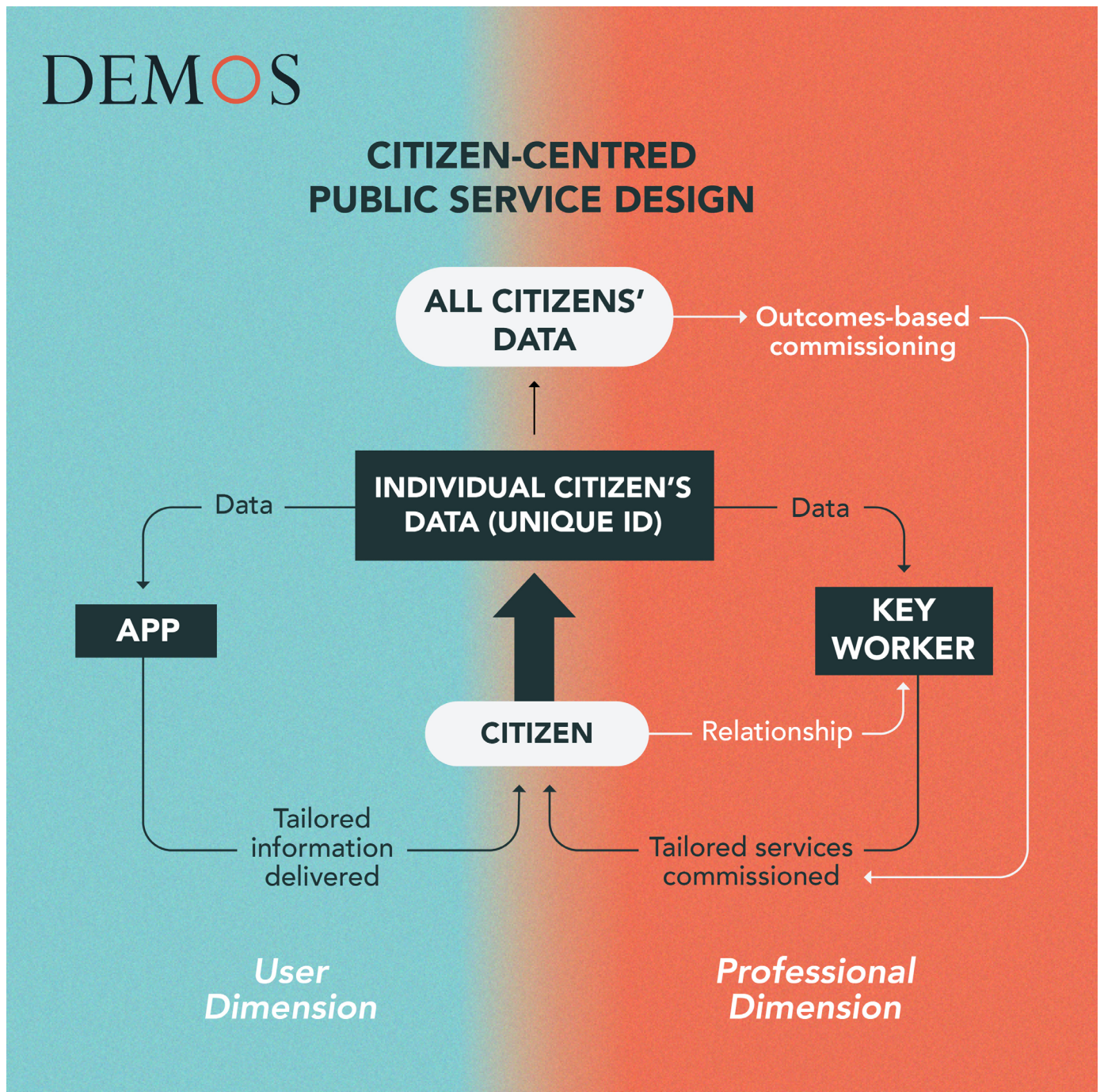
We also do not underestimate the technical and logistical challenges which will have to be overcome to implement our proposed new system. It will require sustained attention and effort from ministers, civil servants, councillors and local authority officers. Our argument is that even though it will be difficult to achieve, the benefits will be worth the effort in the long run.

Elements of our proposed system - key workers, relational approaches, information apps and social outcomes commissioning - can be achieved incrementally and are already being used successfully by some local authorities and public services. However, to establish a whole new system of citizen-centred public services will take a concerted approach to building the required digital infrastructure. This will need:

- **Digital leadership.** This includes commissioning the Citizens' Assembly on Data and Digital in Public Services. Leadership is also required to address the technical challenges: joining up citizens' data will require a national approach to establishing trusted data standards which allow an interoperable approach to how data is accessed and used. This must be a safe system with strong privacy and data security protections and must be rigorously tested to ensure that the insights driven by such data do not compound existing biases.
- **National leadership.** This will include centralised investment in the new data architecture and the citizen-facing app. This will fail if left to individual local authorities which lack the resources to invest in this; it also needs to fit the realities of people's lives as they move between local authority areas.
- **Local leadership.** Given the crucial role of local authorities in supporting young people and families in their local communities, we recommend that local authorities appoint a senior *Director of Citizen-centred Services* to drive this agenda forward within local areas.

The following diagram (Figure 6) is a schematic version of this new citizen-centred system. In the rest of this section, we set out the individual building blocks needed to create it.

FIGURE 6



## **BUILDING BLOCK 1: LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENSURE THAT KEY WORKERS TAKE ON RESPONSIBILITY FOR JOINING UP SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

In previous research at Demos, we have written about the importance of the relationship between a citizen/service user and a public servant/professional.<sup>102</sup> There is a wealth of evidence which shows that the quality of this relationship is crucial to improving outcomes. Yet too often, vulnerable young people and families don't have a consistent relationship with a public servant/professional, instead interacting with a large number of different people working in siloed departments or organisations. Therefore, we recommend that local authorities should ensure that 'key workers' take on responsibility for joining up services for vulnerable young people and families. This means clearly identifying an existing professional as a young person's or family's key worker - we are not recommending the creation of a new service. The key worker could be employed by the local authority, but in some cases it may be appropriate for the key worker to be employed by a different organisation (for example, a public service or a charity which has been commissioned to provide support services).

This building block is partly based on the Supporting Families programme (previously called the Troubled Families programme), which is designed to join up services around families with support needs.<sup>103</sup> In this programme, the 'key worker' (also sometimes known as the 'lead worker', 'lead practitioner' or 'lead professional') aims to 'co-ordinate services and build resilience' in an approach known as 'whole family working'.<sup>104</sup> The key worker can either be employed directly by the local authority, or by a different organisation, but is named and recognised as the family's key worker both by the family and other professionals. The programme's evaluation states:

*The relationship of the key worker with the family is consistently reported as a key element of success in case study research. It says that families value key worker support particularly in having a firm, challenging, non-judgmental and consistent point of contact who helped families to feel more confident. Over four in five (83%) families*

*responding to the survey reported that they found their key workers helpful.*<sup>105</sup>

Key worker support is particularly important for families and young people experiencing complex challenges who may need additional support. Many of our qualitative participants had experienced coordination failures and siloed working across public services, and in particular welcomed the idea of having a clear single point of contact to whom they could speak regardless of the specific issue they were facing, who would be willing to listen and who would take a holistic view of their situation.

We recommend that the key worker model be expanded to serve more people in two ways: first, by expanding the Supporting Families programme itself to reach more families; and second, by extending the programme's model to other demographic groups with multiple needs across different services. In the latter category, young people would clearly benefit from similar provision which facilitates breaking down public service silos. In principle at least, care leavers should already get similar support from their local authority, with the role of 'Personal Advisor' being comparable to that of a key worker.<sup>106</sup> However, our research shows there is a wider group of young people who find the transition to adulthood difficult, or face other challenges, but who are not care leavers, for whom access to a key worker would be beneficial. Several of the young people to whom we spoke for our qualitative research fell into this category, for example due to difficulties with housing or due to a breakdown in their relationship with their parents.

It is not necessary for every key worker to have a time-intensive and proactive role in supporting young people and families. The role of the key worker can be imagined on a spectrum: some young people and families may just need a consistent person to turn to for help with 'navigation' of services, while others will need a much greater level of proactive support.

Specifying eligibility for different levels of support from a key worker can be enabled by integrated and joined-up data (see building block 3). An example of this is provided by the Supporting Families programme in Sheffield, where school attendance data is used as a 'signal' that additional support may be needed.

102 Mackenzie. The Social State. 2021.

103 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: findings. GOV.UK, 19 March 2019. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-troubled-families-programme-2015-to-2020-findings](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-troubled-families-programme-2015-to-2020-findings) [accessed 07/11/2023]

104 MHCLG. National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. 2019. p. 9.

105 MHCLG. National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. 2019. p. 7.

106 Foley and others. Support for care leavers. 2023. p. 6.



*Example: Building Successful Families programme, Sheffield*

Sheffield City Council has used funding from Supporting Families to set up the Building Successful Families programme, which is delivered by multi-agency teams and through Family Hubs. The programme's mantra is 'one family, one plan'. Each family has a 'lead practitioner', recognised by the family and by other professionals. One 'signal' or 'trigger' for providing help is when a child's attendance at school drops significantly, or a child is excluded from school. In these circumstances, tailored support to help a child attend school is provided for 12-15 weeks. However, recognising that school attendance (or school exclusion) is not an isolated issue, support is also provided to access other services, such as child and adult mental health services, or financial advice to address problems with debt.<sup>107,108</sup>

Key workers can also help young people and families more effectively if they have joined-up data available to them. With the agreement of the young person or family, the key worker could have access to relevant information and notes from other public services, enabling the key worker to take a holistic view and provide more personalised support.

Key workers by themselves will not be able to break down public service silos unless they are part of multi-disciplinary teams, crucially including relevant housing professionals (see building block 2). Multi-disciplinary teams can be formed from within local authorities and/or include professionals from other public services.<sup>109</sup> Local authorities already do this in some areas; these examples of good practice need to be built on and spread further (see example below).

*Example: Cradle to Career, North Birkenhead, Merseyside*

*Cradle to Career is a programme currently running in North Birkenhead, Wirral. One part of the programme aims to improve support for*

*families in North Birkenhead, an economically deprived area. According to the programme's website, 'Wirral Council have committed a 17-person Cradle to Career multi-disciplinary team to the area, made up of social workers, school readiness workers, a health visitor, family support workers, youth and play workers amongst other roles.'<sup>110</sup> A joint inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission stated that, 'Children and families and professionals alike are particularly positive about the 'cradle to career' service that allows easy access to support across a wide range of multi-disciplinary services.'<sup>111</sup> 'Lead professionals' help coordinate multi-agency early help.'<sup>112</sup> Due to its success, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority recently announced that Cradle to Career will be expanded to five more areas across the Liverpool City Region.'<sup>113</sup>*

## **BUILDING BLOCK 2: SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROVIDERS SHOULD BE PART OF MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS TO HELP JOIN UP SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

We have argued that it is essential to think about public services and housing as intersecting policy issues affecting vulnerable young people and families. Therefore we recommend that social and affordable housing providers should be part of the multi-disciplinary teams designed to help join up services for young people and families.

Some social and affordable housing providers already provide support services to residents. Others provide spaces or hubs so that residents can access services provided by other organisations, or help residents access services through signposting or navigation advice. For young people and families with greater support needs, social and affordable housing providers may be well placed to provide key workers and wraparound support directly (sometimes known as 'supported housing' or 'supportive housing'). This could be enabled by innovative local authority commissioning, for example through Social

107 Sheffield City Council. Building Successful Families programme. (no date). Available at [www.sheffield.gov.uk/social-care/building-successful-families-programme](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/social-care/building-successful-families-programme) [accessed 07/11/2023]

108 Local Government Association. Sheffield: Supporting families through school inclusion. 5 August 2022. Available at [www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/sheffield-supporting-families-through-school-inclusion](http://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/sheffield-supporting-families-through-school-inclusion) [accessed 07/11/2023]

109 Smith, M. Gateshead Council case study. Human Learning Systems, March 2019. Available at [www.humanlearning.systems/uploads/Mark%20Smith%20%3A%20Gateshead%20Council%20Case%20Study.pdf](http://www.humanlearning.systems/uploads/Mark%20Smith%20%3A%20Gateshead%20Council%20Case%20Study.pdf) [accessed 07/11/2023]

110 Cradle to Career. What is North Birkenhead Cradle to Career? (no date). Available at [www.cradle2career.org.uk/north-birkenhead/what-is-north-birkenhead-cradle-to-career](http://www.cradle2career.org.uk/north-birkenhead/what-is-north-birkenhead-cradle-to-career) [accessed 07/11/2023]

111 Ofsted, CQC and HMICFRS. Joint targeted area inspection of Wirral. Ofsted, 16 February 2023, p. 3. Available at <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50208286> [accessed 07/11/2023]

112 Ofsted, CQC and HMICFRS. Joint targeted area inspection of Wirral. 2023.

113 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. £5m plan to extend pioneering community programme to Liverpool City Region's most deprived areas. 14 October 2022. Available at [www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/news/5m-plan-to-extend-pioneering-community-programme-to-liverpool-city-regions-most-deprived-areas](http://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/news/5m-plan-to-extend-pioneering-community-programme-to-liverpool-city-regions-most-deprived-areas) [accessed 07/11/2023]

Outcomes Contracts (see building block 4) utilising joined-up data so that housing providers can be paid for long-term positive outcomes.

Our research participants supported the idea of their housing provider helping to join up services in principle but were sceptical whether this would actually work in practice. This reveals the importance of trust in a young person's or family's housing provider. For example, a number of participants had poor experiences of repairs or maintenance; this caused them to be sceptical that their housing provider would be able to help join up services. This may explain why, in our survey, 'receiving tailored support services through your housing provider' was less popular than the other ideas we tested.

We also received feedback from stakeholders that some social and affordable housing providers would find it difficult to take on direct responsibility for joining up services for residents. This is partly because for many housing providers it would be a new responsibility, for which they do not currently have the experience or staff. In addition, stakeholders told us that funding would be a serious challenge.

Recognising both the fundamental importance of housing and the wide variety of social and affordable housing providers, our central recommendation is that housing professionals should be part of multi-disciplinary teams which help join up services for young people and families. This could look like senior staff from housing associations or frontline housing officers joining the multi-disciplinary teams. These teams can then support key workers to provide holistic and joined-up support for residents, including dealing with housing problems which they may be experiencing. As our research has shown, sometimes people's support needs are directly related to their housing situation and so it is crucial that key workers can help address housing-related issues.

Social and affordable housing providers, and local authority housing departments, must also be included in the overarching joined-up data infrastructure. For example, rent arrears data or council tax data can help target early support for young people or families who are facing financial difficulties.

### **BUILDING BLOCK 3: LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES SHOULD USE JOINED-UP DATA TO PERSONALISE AND TARGET SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

In order to enable citizen-centred services, personal data currently held separately by central government, local authority departments, public services and housing providers needs to be joined up. Achieving this transformation of public services will require some kind of unique identifier for each individual to enable data sharing and to assess long-term outcomes. One option - drawing on the work of the Tony Blair Institute - would be to use a digital identity system.<sup>114</sup> Such a system would enable the provision of proactive and early help for young people and families, as well as commissioning based on outcomes to help achieve a shift towards prevention (see building block 4). It is of the utmost importance that safe and equitable approaches are taken to achieve this, including ensuring the highest standards of data privacy and security designed into the system from the beginning.

This building block is a crucial part of our proposed system, but we recognise it faces some major challenges. Two are worth mentioning in particular: first, a set of questions relating to ethics, data security and privacy and public trust; and second, the technical and logistical difficulties of operationalising joined-up data.

First, we recognise that our proposals regarding joining up data raise questions about ethics, data security and privacy, and people's trust in public services and in the state. Previous schemes, such as identity cards and NHS data sharing, have been controversial. Trust and public support are essential for our proposed system of citizen-centred public service design, as well as being key themes of Demos's wider research and policy work. We therefore recommend that central government should commission a national **Citizens' Assembly on Data and Digital in Public Services**. This deliberative process can help the government understand what principles citizens prioritise and what policies they would, and would not, support. By bringing citizens into the policy making process, the Assembly can strengthen trust in any subsequent reforms or legislation designed to achieve our proposals.

Second, we do not underestimate the technical and logistical challenges required to join up data in a way which provides data security and privacy and which enables joined-up service provision. Joining up data

114 Innes, K., Kakkad, J. and Wain, R. The Great Enabler: Transforming the Future of Britain's Public Services Through Digital Identity. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 15 June 2023. Available at [www.institute.global/insights/tech-and-digitalisation/great-enabler-transforming-future-of-britains-public-services-digital-identity](http://www.institute.global/insights/tech-and-digitalisation/great-enabler-transforming-future-of-britains-public-services-digital-identity) [accessed 07/11/2023]

even in the public sector alone is notoriously difficult to achieve. Further research and implementation analysis is needed to understand how to make best use of tools such as decentralised data systems and data encryption, and how to ensure citizens feel empowered to access and control their data in a secure way. Our argument is that even though it will be difficult to achieve, the benefits will be worth the effort in the long run.

Joined-up data can help local authorities target support at vulnerable young people and families who need it most, and provide early support before people reach crisis point. Experiments with this kind of approach have shown promising results. For example, Gateshead Council has experimented with using the data 'signal' of people falling into council tax arrears. Taking this to be a signal which showed people might be experiencing difficulties in their lives, multi-disciplinary staff teams were formed who were given maximum flexibility to provide relational support, with the only constraints being 'stay safe and stay legal'. According to the case study of this experiment:

On one occasion this involved buying food for families who had nothing in the cupboards, and a winter coat for another. It paid for residential rehab for one client. The team helped clients to get the right benefit payments (all of the clients had incorrect benefits initially). Mostly, what the team did was to create a relationship with people which enabled them to feel that someone was genuinely listening and on their side.<sup>115</sup>

There are other examples of similar initiatives in local authorities. Luton Council 'uses household-level data to identify people facing a cash shortfall and en route to crisis', and then proactively reaches out to offer these households support.<sup>116</sup> Similarly LGA feedback on Barking and Dagenham's pioneering 'Community Solutions' initiative noted that 'use of data is strong – both to inform decisions about individuals and households, and strategic decision making [...] the council benefits from its data capability'.<sup>117</sup> This is

the kind of preventative and relational support which could be significantly scaled up across the country by joining up data both within local authorities and across public services and housing.

For citizens, joined-up data means not needing to tell their stories multiple times to different people and receiving support which is personalised to their specific needs and circumstances. Joined-up data would also enable a citizen-facing app (see building block 5) which would help young people and families access support when they need it.

#### **BUILDING BLOCK 4: COMMISSIONERS SHOULD USE SOCIAL OUTCOMES CONTRACTS WHERE PRACTICAL**

A Social Outcomes Contract (SOC) describes a method of commissioning whereby the commissioner pays for *outcomes* achieved, rather than, for example, *activities delivered* (such as the number of support sessions an organisation runs).<sup>118,119</sup> One benefit of this approach is that a commissioner, such as a local authority, can pay for the service out of the long-term savings, if the service successfully reduces costs, rather than needing to invest upfront. Another benefit is that it gives local delivery organisations greater flexibility about how they run services in order to meet people's needs. When paired with working capital provided by social investors, SOCs can also reduce the level of risk borne by either government or by local delivery organisations. This approach to funding has been pioneered in the UK over the last ten years, and research by Big Society Capital has shown that SOCs deliver to government £3 in savings for every £1 spent.<sup>120</sup> When Social Outcomes Contracts are used to invest in prevention - as with the example of the Positive Families Partnership below - they could be funded by the new Treasury spending category which Demos has proposed, Preventative Departmental Expenditure Limits (PDEL).<sup>121</sup> This would help classify and ring fence preventative investment, including Social Outcomes Contracts, injecting long-termism into public spending.

115 Smith. Gateshead Council case study. 2019.

116 Harkin, J. A tale of two councils: Luton and Barking and Dagenham use data insights to build residents' resilience. Policy in Practice, 3 April 2019. Available at <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/a-tale-of-two-councils-luton-and-barking-and-dagenham-use-data-insights-to-build-resilience> [accessed 07/11/2023]

117 Local Government Association. LGA Peer Challenge – Community Solutions: Feedback report. October 2021. Available at [www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/CS%20Peer%20Team%20Final%20Report.pdf](http://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/CS%20Peer%20Team%20Final%20Report.pdf) [accessed 07/11/2023]

118 Big Society Capital. Outcomes for all. (no date). Available at <https://bigsocietycapital.com/our-approach/social-outcomes/outcomes-for-all> [accessed 07/11/2023]

119 Johal, A. and Ng, G. Outcomes For All: 10 Years of Social Outcomes Contracts. Big Society Capital, 2022. Available at [https://bsc.cdn.ngo/media/documents/BSC\\_Outcomes\\_For\\_All\\_Report\\_2022.pdf](https://bsc.cdn.ngo/media/documents/BSC_Outcomes_For_All_Report_2022.pdf) [accessed 07/11/2023]

120 Johal and Ng. 10 Years of Social Outcomes Contracts. 2022.

121 O'Brien, A., Curtis, P. and Charlesworth, A. Revenue, capital, prevention: A new public spending framework for the future. Demos, 2 October 2023. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/revenue-capital-prevention-a-new-public-spending-framework-for-the-future> [accessed 07/11/2023]

#### Example: Positive Families Partnership

Positive Families Partnership is a Social Outcomes Contract which provides support to vulnerable young people and families across five London boroughs.<sup>122</sup> The specified outcome is preventing children entering residential care. The initiative helps families access family therapies. According to Big Society Capital, 'The outcomes contract has helped 410 families saving as much as £200,000 a year per child, which is the typical annual cost of residential care. Success and learnings from this contract have helped create similar services in Suffolk and Norfolk.'<sup>123</sup>

By design, Social Outcomes Contracts are designed to fund long-term outcomes. Therefore, long-term data for individuals is essential to enable this type of commissioning (with appropriate anonymisation and privacy). For example, the Greater Manchester Homes Partnership (see below) uses outcomes data to track the number of people sleeping rough. However, much of the relevant data is not currently joined up for specific individuals. As our system diagram illustrates (see above), our third building block on data therefore underpins this one: usable data on long-term outcomes for individuals will make it far easier for commissioners to use Social Outcomes Contracts because the data will establish the efficacy of interventions and measure outcomes. This will enable commissioners to harness the power of outcomes-based commissioning to improve the lives of citizens, including vulnerable young people and families.

Alongside joined-up data, there are a number of other elements which are also needed to make an SOC successful, including local organisations capable of delivery impact and social investors willing to provide the necessary working capital. Stakeholders also emphasised to us that these need to be long-term contracts in order to give local delivery organisations time to learn and improve - in the order of seven years, as opposed to a one or two year pilot which is much less likely to be effective.<sup>124</sup>

#### Example: Greater Manchester Homes Partnership

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) used a Social Outcomes Contract with the specified outcome of reducing the number of people sleeping rough. In the years 2017/18-2020, Greater Manchester Homes Partnership achieved 355 outcomes, almost twice the original target, and at a lower cost per person than using more traditional policy methods. Joined-up data underpins the initiative: according to Big Society Capital, 'Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) operates a detailed database (GM Think) which records the presenting needs of all participants, every frontline interaction with them, and their outcomes achieved at the end.'<sup>125</sup> Greater Manchester Combined Authority has subsequently used a Social Outcomes Contract to launch the Greater Manchester Young Person's Homelessness Prevention programme, designed to support young people aged 18-25.<sup>126</sup>

### **BUILDING BLOCK 5: DELIVER PERSONALISED INFORMATION TO CITIZENS USING A NEW APP POWERED BY JOINED-UP DATA**

Our research participants told us that they sometimes find it difficult to discover the support services available to them. We often heard from our research participants that they felt like they were 'missing things' because they 'didn't know what's out there'. In our survey of parents and young people, making it easier to find support services online was the most popular idea which we tested - two in five (39%) selected this as one of their top three options to help improve the provision of support services.

However, current sources of information tend to be generic - for example, local authority websites are not usually personalised. Our research participants told us they found it difficult to find support services online, for example on their local authority website. Based on our research, we found that, to generalise, young people or parents have to know what they need and then be able to find it for themselves. Even then, they are often faced with bureaucratic barriers

122 Big Society Capital. Positive Families Partnership. (no date). Available at <https://bigsocietycapital.com/impact-report-2020/people/families-friends-and-relationships/positive-families-partnership> [accessed 07/11/2023]

123 Johal and Ng. 10 Years of Social Outcomes Contracts. 2022. p. 13.

124 Demos roundtable attendee.

125 Johal and Ng. 10 Years of Social Outcomes Contracts. 2022. p. 12.

126 Cuffe, G. Homelessness prevention project awarded £4.85m to work with 10 Greater Manchester councils. Inside Housing, 20 May 2022. Available at [www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/homelessness-prevention-project-awarded-485m-to-work-with-10-greater-manchester-councils-75714](http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/homelessness-prevention-project-awarded-485m-to-work-with-10-greater-manchester-councils-75714) [accessed 07/11/2023]

such as multiple services which each require filling in separate forms. As the government itself found, 'currently, there are 191 different ways for people to set up a variety of accounts to access different services on GOV.UK, with 44 different sign-in methods.'<sup>127</sup>

A smartphone app with access to joined-up data could provide tailored and personalised information to citizens, making it much easier for them to discover what support services are available and relevant to them. Further discussions are required, but one option is that upper-tier local authorities could be responsible for providing the app. Central government should invest in the underlying platform, and then provide it to upper-tier local authorities with enough flexibility so that it can be adapted to suit local circumstances. A smartphone app could adapt information so that it is relevant for the individual or family: for example, it might provide information on skills, education and training opportunities to a young person, and information about free or subsidised summer holiday activities for children to a parent. This can help people know what is available for them in their local area, and make services easier to access. Generative AI tools offer the potential to allow citizens to interact with the app using natural language prompts and questions. A smartphone app also offers the possibility of a *proactive* approach to providing support services by enabling, for example, push notifications for people who may need support but might not be able to find it themselves.

## **BUILDING BLOCK 6: LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER LOCAL ORGANISATIONS SHOULD CO-LOCATE SUPPORT SERVICES IN SHARED PHYSICAL SPACES**

Alongside a smartphone app which can help increase awareness of support services and make them easier to access, it is vital to provide a comparable experience in the physical world. This is especially important for vulnerable young people and families who may face digital exclusion, for example due to a low income.<sup>128</sup>

Several of our qualitative participants preferred the idea of having a personal face-to-face conversation

or mentioned that they knew people who would not be able to use a smartphone app or website. In our survey, 'a drop-in service in a local community centre, hub, or library where you could speak to someone and get advice about what support services are available in the area' was the second most popular idea, with one in three (32%) selecting it as one of their top three options.

We therefore recommend that local authorities and other local organisations expand co-location of support services in shared physical spaces as a practical way of joining up services. Co-locating services can be an effective way of both making services more accessible and joining up services, for example by facilitating referrals from one organisation to another.<sup>129</sup> Co-located services can sometimes be called 'one stop shops' or 'hubs'.<sup>130</sup><sup>131</sup> Previous Demos research identified 'spaces for connection', including between citizens and service providers, as one of the three pillars of *relational local government*.<sup>132</sup> Often local authorities will be best placed to take on responsibility for managing co-located spaces, but in some contexts other organisations (for example, charities or housing associations) may be better placed to manage them.

It is important for local authorities, housing associations, charities and other organisations involved to consider the possible risks in co-locating services. One of these is that if citizens lack trust in one or more service providers, they may not want to access the hub/centre. This may be the case with young people and parents in most need of support. For example, co-locating social workers from a children's social care team might work well for some people, but might prevent other families accessing services because of a lack of trust. Local actors are best placed to assess these kinds of risks, and this emphasises the need for flexibility in, for example, central government or local authority funding for hubs/centres.

Many areas already have relevant co-located services, such as Family Hubs or Community Hubs. Our recommendation is to further promote these where they already exist, and to create them in areas where they do not.

127 Cabinet Office and others. New one stop service for GOV.UK unveiled. GOV.UK, 13 October 2021. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/news/new-one-stop-service-for-govuk-unveiled](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-one-stop-service-for-govuk-unveiled) [accessed 07/11/2023]

128 Good Things Foundation. Building a Digital Nation. 2023. Available at [www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/building-a-digital-nation](http://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/building-a-digital-nation) [accessed 07/11/2023]

129 Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships: A guide to improve practice and case study collection. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at [www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/what-works-youth-employment-partnerships](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/what-works-youth-employment-partnerships) [accessed 07/11/2023]

130 Local Government Association and Learning and Work Institute. Work Local: Our vision for an integrated and devolved employment and skills service. June 2017, pp. 30-32. Available at [www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WORK%20LOCAL%20FINAL%20REPORT%2005072017.pdf](http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WORK%20LOCAL%20FINAL%20REPORT%2005072017.pdf) [accessed 07/11/2023]

131 Barking and Dagenham Council. Community Hubs. (no date). Available at [www.lbbd.gov.uk/community-hubs](http://www.lbbd.gov.uk/community-hubs) [accessed 07/11/2023]

132 Cummins, C. Locating Authority: A vision for relational local government. Demos, 1 February 2022. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/locating-authority-a-vision-for-relational-local-government> [accessed 07/11/2023]

However - despite a number of recent initiatives to create new 'hubs' - overall there has been a reduction in the number of these physical spaces since 2010. For example, in England between 2009/10 and 2019/20, local authority spending on libraries fell by 44% in real terms and 33% of sites closed.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, the number of children's centres in England fell from 3,615 to 3,022.<sup>134</sup> In addition, the availability of physical spaces suitable for hosting hubs/centres varies across the country; some socioeconomically deprived areas lack 'social infrastructure' like hubs/centres, for example the 'left behind neighbourhoods' identified by OCSI and Local Trust.<sup>135</sup> It is therefore critical to ensure that there is additional funding for areas such as 'left behind neighbourhoods' which may lack suitable venues for co-located services.

#### *Example: Sure Start children's centres*

*Since 1999, the government has run the Sure Start programme, which reached its peak in 2010 with 3,500 Sure Start children's centres in England. The centres were 'one-stop shops' for families with children under the age of 5, 'offering health services, parenting support, early education and childcare, and parental employment assistance.'<sup>136</sup> They offered universal access to all families, but were originally targeted at disadvantaged geographical areas. Quantitative research conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that Sure Start centres were associated with long-term positive impacts. One additional Sure Start centre per thousand age-eligible children reduced hospitalisations by 8-9% across ages 11-15 (that is, five to ten years after families received Sure Start support).<sup>137</sup> Sure Start also had a substantial positive impact on 11-15 year olds' self-reported mental health and self-reported general health.<sup>138</sup> Impacts were strongest among children living in the 30% poorest areas of the country.<sup>139</sup> The government is currently providing funding for 'Family Hubs' which operate on a similar model to Sure Start centres.<sup>140</sup>*

For young people, consideration should be given to combining co-located services with aspects of 'youth centres' which provide activities and spaces for young people to socialise; this was a recommendation made by several parents of teenagers in our qualitative research. It is also relevant that mental health support was one of the most common needs that young people and parents alike selected in our survey; it is therefore important to consider how mental health support can be integrated with other services in co-located spaces. 'Early support hubs' are examples where local organisations are already providing co-located services for young people, including mental health support.

#### *Example: Early support hubs*

*Early support hubs provide early mental health support to children and young people aged 11 to 25 on a principle of universal access (that is, there is no need for a referral by a doctor or a school). There are currently around 60 early support hubs, and 'services provided include group work, counselling, psychological therapies, specialist advice and signposting to information and other services.' The government recently announced £5m in funding so that existing hubs can expand the services they offer.<sup>141</sup>*

This building block is also similar to a recommendation in the *Better Social Housing Review* specifically aimed at housing associations: 'Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working'.<sup>142</sup> The *Review* specifically mentions opportunities for making services more accessible and joining up housing and other support services:

*[Housing] association staff should be available in the hub at known times across a week, ideally alongside a cross-section of other agencies.*

133 Atkins, G. and Hoddinott, S. Neighbourhood services under strain. Institute for Government, 29 April 2022, p. 29. Available at [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/neighbourhood-services-under-strain](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/neighbourhood-services-under-strain) [accessed 15/11/2023]

134 Atkins and Hoddinott. Neighbourhood services. 2022. p. 22.

135 Local Trust. Left behind? Understanding communities on the edge. 5 September 2019. Available at <https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge> [accessed 15/11/2023]

136 Cattan, S. and others. The health effects of universal early childhood interventions: evidence from Sure Start. Institute for Fiscal Studies, 13 October 2022, p. 2. Available at <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/health-effects-universal-early-childhood-interventions-evidence-sure-start> [accessed 07/11/2023]

137 Cattan and others. Health effects of universal early childhood interventions. 2022.

138 Cattan and others. Health effects of universal early childhood interventions. 2022. pp. 37-40.

139 Cattan and others. Health effects of universal early childhood interventions. 2022. p. 4.

140 Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Education. Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. GOV.UK, 9 February 2023. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme) [accessed 07/11/2023]

141 Department of Health and Social Care. Earlier mental health support announced for thousands nationwide. GOV.UK, 25 October 2023. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/news/earlier-mental-health-support-announced-for-thousands-nationwide](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/earlier-mental-health-support-announced-for-thousands-nationwide) [accessed 07/11/2023]

142 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. 2022. p. 22. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

*This would build connectivity between housing workers and tenants and between staff across the different agencies. It would also improve access for tenants to the services of all the agencies involved.*<sup>143</sup>

## **BUILDING BLOCK 7: LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD APPOINT A DIRECTOR OF CITIZEN-CENTRED SERVICES**

It is difficult to break down silos within local authorities, and between local authority services, other public services and housing providers.<sup>144</sup> Although there are good examples of success in breaking down silos, in general these remain the exception rather than the rule. One of the lessons from successful examples of joining up services is the need for 'strong, collaborative leadership'.<sup>145</sup> Therefore we recommend that upper-tier local authorities should appoint a *Director of Citizen-centred Services* to provide senior leadership on joining up services. This role should include a focus on joining up services internally within the local authority and externally with other public services and with housing providers, as well as leading on joining up data at the local level (see building block 3). The Director of Citizen-centred Services would have some similarities to existing 'Director of Transformation' roles at local authorities which can include responsibilities such as innovation, change management, organisational development and digital services.<sup>146</sup>

An important area of focus for the Director of Citizen-centred Services would be breaking down silos *internally* within local authorities. We heard examples of these silos from our research participants: for example, the complete disconnect between local authority-owned housing and other services provided by the same local authority to residents, which people experienced as entirely separate services. At a Demos roundtable, we heard about silos within local government which affected young people: for example, we heard about 'rationing' within local authorities, designed to protect departmental budgets, whereby the children's services department would deliberately seek to avoid providing support to children aged 16-17 who present as homeless, with the aim of transferring them to the housing department when they turn 18. A recent report from the Children's Commissioner about 16 and

17 year olds who present as homeless highlighted similar problems, such as local authorities providing information in a biased way to discourage children from accepting 'section 20' support under which they would become looked after children and have subsequent support as a care leaver.<sup>147</sup> The Children's Commissioner's report also states that some children felt the local authority deliberately prolonged the assessment period in order to avoid providing support by 'waiting out the clock', and local authority data in the report shows that children closer to age 18 are indeed less likely to be provided care under section 20.<sup>148</sup> The role of the Director of Citizen-centred Services should include an aim to tackle this kind of 'rationing' or 'gatekeeping' caused by local authority silos.

The Director should also have strategic oversight of implementation of our other 'building blocks' as they relate to local authorities, ensuring they join up to achieve the system change we envision. In particular, the Director should help facilitate the creation of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams to address the needs of vulnerable families and young people including key workers (building block 1) and housing professionals (building block 2). To help achieve this, the Director should be involved in making decisions regarding staff roles to ensure there are officers responsible for operationalising joining up services in practice. The Director of Citizen-centred Services should also have strategic responsibility for joining up local authority services and wider services provided by other organisations. This could include, for example, a focus on how the activities of housing associations or NHS Integrated Care Systems can be more effectively joined up with local authority services.

There are further questions to consider regarding the role of Director of Citizen-centred Services - for example, how the Director would relate to the Cabinet (councillors) at a local authority, and how they would relate to the Chief Executive and other senior officers. Both sets of relationships would affect whether the Director of Citizen-centred Services would have authority within the organisation to drive change.

Appointing a Director should be achievable for every local authority. However, this could be seen as a first step towards more radical restructuring within a local authority. For example, Barking and Dagenham Council has brought together 17 frontline services

143 The Better Social Housing Review. The Better Social Review report. 2022. p. 23. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

144 Wilson and others. *Joining up public services*. 2015.

145 Wilson and others. *Joining up public services*. 2015. p. 14.

146 Local Government Association. Transformation Network. (no date). Available at [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation/transformation-network](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation/transformation-network) [accessed 15/11/2023]

147 Children's Commissioner. Homeless 16- and 17-year olds in need of care. 16 November 2023, p. 24. Available at [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/homeless-16-and-17-year-olds-in-need-of-care](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/homeless-16-and-17-year-olds-in-need-of-care) [accessed 18/11/2023]

148 Children's Commissioner. Homeless 16- and 17-year-olds in need of care. 2023. pp. 25-26.

into one directorate called Community Solutions with the aim being 'to use a holistic approach to resolve a person's or family's underlying issues'.<sup>149,150</sup>

the data standards and digital architecture provide a usable framework which is locally adaptable and can overcome existing barriers to data sharing across central government, local government, public services and housing providers.<sup>154</sup>

## **BUILDING BLOCK 8: THE DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY (DSIT) AND THE DEPARTMENT FOR LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES (DLUHC) SHOULD PROVIDE CENTRALISED INVESTMENT IN THE DIGITAL SYSTEMS REQUIRED AND THE DATA STANDARDS NEEDED TO ENABLE THEM**

Creating a new citizen-centred public service design will take a concerted approach to building the required digital infrastructure and establishing trusted data standards. Central government needs to provide national leadership and investment in order to achieve this. We recommend that this should be a joint team between the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This will bring together DSIT's priorities on data systems and innovation in public services with DLUHC's priority to support 'a strong and sustainable local government sector with resilient, connected and integrated communities'.<sup>151,152</sup> Staff from DLUHC's existing Local Digital unit, which provides digital and cyber support to local government, should join the team.<sup>153</sup> The team should also receive support from the Government Digital Service.

This joint team should lead centralised investment in the new data architecture and the smartphone app. This will fail if left to individual local authorities which lack the resources to invest in this; it also needs to fit the realities of people's lives as they move between local authority areas.

Ideally - at least from a citizen's perspective - this approach would apply across the UK, although there are differences in local authority structures and data collection in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; it may therefore be necessary to start with England only. Given the aim of the work, it is essential that the joint DSIT-DLUHC team works closely with upper-tier local authorities to ensure that

149 Local Government Association. Community Solutions: Feedback report. 2021.

150 Harkin. A tale of two councils. 2019.

151 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. About us. GOV.UK, (no date). Available at [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-science-innovation-and-technology/about](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-science-innovation-and-technology/about) [accessed 07/11/2023]

152 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Main Estimate 2023-24: Estimates Memorandum. Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee, 18 May 2023. Available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40210/documents/196383/default> [accessed 07/11/2023]

153 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Local Digital. GOV.UK, (no date). Available at [www.localdigital.gov.uk](http://www.localdigital.gov.uk) [accessed 08/11/2023]

154 Shepley, P. and Freeguard, G. *Data sharing between national, devolved and local government: Summary of a private roundtable*. Institute for Government, January 2023. Available at [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/national-local-devolved-data-sharing.pdf](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/national-local-devolved-data-sharing.pdf) [accessed 07/11/2023]



# CONCLUSION

This report sets out the essential need for reform in public services and housing for vulnerable young people and families. Too often, people don't receive support when they need it or experience siloed and disjointed public services. Too many young people and families are living in substandard housing or temporary accommodation, which is contributing to increased demand for public services. The negative impacts on people are clear, from poor educational attainment at school to worsening mental health. The fiscal case for change is also clear: as the economic analysis in this report shows, a lack of joined-up services is costing the government between £1.5 billion and £4.3 billion every year in direct costs alone.

The eight 'building blocks' included in this report are necessarily high level, designed to sketch out a new citizen-centred service design which would enable a shift towards a preventative state with joined-up and relational public services enabled by data-driven insights and a digital citizen-facing app. Of course, this raises questions which require more detailed answers than we can provide here in areas such as data standards, public trust and the relationship between central government and local authorities. However, our view is that incremental change will not deliver the transformation that is required to improve people's lives and to stop public spending being dominated by 'firefighting' services responding when young people and families reach crisis point.

Looking ahead to a general election next year, the incoming government will face a daunting set of problems in public services and in housing. Joining up public services and addressing the supply, affordability and quality of housing are long-term and structural challenges. They are not going to be substantially improved by minor policy tweaks. Politicians will need to be bold and commit their efforts to sustained long-term change - or else risk getting stuck in a continued spiral of rising need and rising crisis spending.

# ANNEX

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

### Estimating the direct costs of a lack of joined-up services

The framework presented by the Troubled Families Programme for assessing the impact on government finances of introducing joined-up services is used as a source for the positive outcomes that arise from a holistic approach to support services for vulnerable children, young people and their families. Based on a random sample of 16,820 families obtained from local authorities by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), for each outcome, for example, an arrest where the person was detained, we obtained the number of fewer cases in that sample that occurred per year as a result of the introduction of joined-up services.

We then obtained estimates for the cost to government of each outcome, for example, the service cost of an arrest where the person was detained, using (1) the *Unit Cost Database (v.2.3.1)* provided by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Research Team<sup>155</sup> with support from government departments who verify the robustness and accuracy of the estimates and the University of Kent's *Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2021*.<sup>156</sup> We then adjusted these costs for CPI inflation and multiplied by the reduction in cases to obtain the total savings to government from each outcome in the DCLG's sample.

The next step is to sum the total savings from each outcome together and divide it by the number of families in the sample (16,820) to arrive at a savings

per family from intervention with joined-up services. For our purposes, we interpret this figure as the cost per family that derives from a lack of joined-up services. We then multiply this figure by the number of families and young people that would benefit from intervention by joined-up services and provide a range of estimates with lower and upper thresholds.

### Estimating the indirect costs of a lack of joined-up services

Using data on the increase in the number of children taken into care due to a lack of joined-up services from the Troubled Families Programme, we estimate the number of additional young people who will become care leavers at age 18 based on Department for Education (DfE) statistics on care leavers.<sup>157</sup> We then find the rate of occurrence of various negative outcomes among care leavers in order to calculate the number of additional care leavers who are impacted by that outcome. Where possible we then estimate the cost to government, the lost earnings for care leavers and the lost (i.e. unrealised) economic output that derives from having additional care leavers due to a lack of joined-up services.

Data on the number of care leavers who are not in employment, education or training is taken from official DfE statistics and estimates of the fiscal cost to government of their economic activity is calculated using the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) *October 2021 Economic and*

155 Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Cost Benefit Analysis. (no date). Available at [www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/research/research-cost-benefit-analysis](http://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/research/research-cost-benefit-analysis) [accessed 08/11/2023]

156 Jones, K. and Burns, A. Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2021. University of Kent, 2021. Available at <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/92342/25/Unit%20Costs%20Report%202021%20-%20Final%20version%20for%20publication%20%28AMENDED%29.pdf> [accessed 08/11/2023]

157 Note, a very small minority leave care at age 17.

*fiscal outlook - ready reckoners*.<sup>158</sup> The lost economic output from an increase in unemployment due to additional care leavers is estimated using the OBR's production function approach<sup>159</sup> and data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the labour share of income,<sup>160</sup> the size of the employed population<sup>161</sup> and the UK's gross domestic product.<sup>162</sup>

Data on rates of educational attainment for care leavers is sourced from DfE statistics on children in care and widening participation in higher education. Estimates of the lost earnings for care leavers due to the educational attainment gap are based upon the GMCA's *Unit Cost Database* – as are estimates of lost earnings deriving from all outcomes.

Data on the rate of incidences of psychiatric diagnoses among care leavers is taken from research by the Social Survey Division of the ONS on behalf of the Department for Health. The fiscal cost to government of providing mental health services for care leavers is also calculated using the GMCA's *Unit Cost Database*.

Data on the increased risk of homelessness among care leavers and the cost to government of providing services to homeless care leavers is based on research by Crisis<sup>163</sup> and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness.<sup>164</sup>

158 Office for Budget Responsibility. October 2021 Economic and fiscal outlook – ready reckoners. 9 December 2021. Available at <https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-october-2021> [accessed 08/11/2023]

159 Office for Budget Responsibility. Production function approach. December 2012. Available at <https://obr.uk/box/production-function-approach> [accessed 08/11/2023]

160 Office for National Statistics. Labour costs and labour income, UK. 24 October 2023. 7 July 2023. Available at [www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/productivitymeasures/datasets/labourcostsandlabourshare/current](http://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/productivitymeasures/datasets/labourcostsandlabourshare/current) [accessed 08/11/2023]

161 Office for National Statistics. Number of People in Employment (aged 16 and over, seasonally adjusted):000s. 11 July 2023. Available at [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/mgrz](http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/mgrz) [accessed 08/11/2023]

162 Office for National Statistics. Gross Domestic Product: chained volume measures: Seasonally adjusted £m. 30 June 2023. Available at [www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/timeseries/abmi/ukea](http://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/timeseries/abmi/ukea) [accessed 08/11/2023]

163 Pleace, N. At what cost? An estimation of the financial costs of single homelessness in the UK. Crisis, July 2015. Available at [www.crisis.org.uk/media/20677/crisis\\_at\\_what\\_cost\\_2015.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20677/crisis_at_what_cost_2015.pdf) [accessed 08/11/2023]

164 All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness. Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence. July 2017. Available at [www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg\\_for\\_ending\\_homelessness\\_report\\_2017\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf) [accessed 08/11/2023]

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