

Residential Landlords Association
c/o The Public Affairs Company
Castlehill House
21 Otley Road
Leeds
LS6 3AA

9th June 2014

Dear Mr Colvile,

Re: YMCA England response to the inquiry into improving access to the private rented sector for under 35s

The YMCA was established in 1844 and there are 114 YMCAs across England serving over 530 different communities. Each year, the YMCA intensively supports over 228,000 young people right across England. In addition to this, the YMCA is the largest voluntary sector provider of safe, supported accommodation for young people, providing just under 10,000 beds every night.

Our philosophy of supporting young people holistically means that the YMCA provides not only a bed but also seeks to help them gain the training, skills and confidence to go on to lead independent lives.

This submission to the inquiry is based on information and evidence provided by YMCAs across England and sets out the housing preferences amongst the young people the YMCA work with, the impact of the Government's reforms are having on them, and finally a series of recommendations for consideration.

1. Introduction

1.1 Not all young people are the same, each having different preferences and needs when they are looking to find housing.

1.2 The YMCA provides support to all young people in a community, but particularly those in times of need. This includes care leavers, young people who have become estranged from their parents, young people who have been sleeping rough on the street and sofa surfing, and those who have faced abuse at home. For these vulnerable young people, the challenges they face accessing housing can be even more pronounced.



2. Young people's housing preferences and trend

- 2.1** When the young people we work with are looking to find housing, by far the most important factor they look for is its affordability. 83% of YMCAs responding rated this as being very important and a further 8% as being important when the young people they work with are looking to find accommodation.
- 2.2** Beyond affordability, the most important factors young people look for in housing are having that sense of security that comes from having somewhere they can call home and there being individuals around them that they can rely upon to provide support. 96% of YMCAs responding reported being close to family and friends, and having access to ongoing support as important or very important, while 92% suggested that the length and security of the tenancy was important to young people they work with when they are making a decision regarding where they wanted to live.
- 2.3** The actual type of housing is far less significant than the factors outlined above. However, related to the factors they identified as being important such as affordability and security, when YMCAs were asked what type of housing the young people they work with would prefer to live in, half (50%) of those responding suggested that social or council housing would be their preference.
- 2.4** Despite this desire amongst young people, the reality is that a much fewer of those leaving YMCAs actually move into social and council housing. Across YMCAs, only around 13% of those leaving our supported accommodation moved into social and council housing during 2013/14.
- 2.5** This is not only the case for those leaving YMCAs, the difficulties young people face accessing social housing is demonstrated by the increasing number of households on local authority housing waiting lists. The number of households on a waiting list for social housing was 1.69 million in 2013, an increase of 667,228 since 1997. The challenges faced by young people are also evidenced by the low proportion (4.9% - 187,000 households) of this age group currently living in social housing.

3. Private rented sector

- 3.1** Of the YMCAs responding, 38% suggested the young people they work with would prefer to move into private rented sector (PRS) housing by themselves, and only 17% suggested they would prefer to live in PRS housing when it involved sharing. Despite it being a less preferred option, a similar proportion of young people leaving a YMCA moved into private rented sector accommodation (15%) as did social and council housing during 2013/14.
- 3.2** By far the biggest barriers identified by YMCAs to young people moving into PRS housing related to cost, including the deposit, letting fees and the rent. 95% of YMCAs responding identified the cost of the deposit, letting fees and rent as being barriers to the young people being able to access the PRS housing.
- 3.3** After cost, the biggest barriers identified by YMCAs to young people looking to live in a PRS property were landlords being unwilling to let to them due to their age and them being on benefits (with 90% of YMCAs identifying these as being significant barriers), and the quality and condition of the available PRS accommodation (88%).



4. Reforms

- 4.1** Despite exemptions for young people having lived in supported accommodation for over 3 months, nearly two thirds of YMCAs (65%) identified the changes to the Local Housing Allowance and increasing the age at which the Shared Accommodation Rate is applied as having a negative impact on young people looking to access PRS housing.
- 4.2** Even before these reforms were introduced, young people's housing options were already extremely limited. As well as home ownerships proving too expensive for young people, as already demonstrated even for young people leaving supported accommodation social housing is also proving difficult from them to access. Given also that living with their parents is not an option for many of the young people that YMCAs work with, this has made the PRS the only non-supported housing option available to many young people.
- 4.3** The changes to the Local Housing Allowance and Shared Accommodation rate penalise those young people in most need by further limiting the housing options that are financially accessible to them and have meant that successfully moving people on from supported accommodation to appropriate housing within the community has become increasingly challenging for YMCAs.
- 4.4** While significant concerns were raised regarding the impact of the changes to the Local Housing Allowance, other reforms such as Article 4 Directions and reforms to bed-sits were considered by YMCAs to have had a much lesser impact on young people attempting to access PRS housing.

5. What YMCAs are doing in response?

- 5.1** Supporting young people to find a settled home and live independently is an integral part of the support YMCAs provide and at the same time one of the most challenging issues we face. YMCAs right across England provide young people with information, advice and support on how best to apply for available housing and through working in collaboration with PRS landlords are attempting to maximise the available options.
- 5.2** To increase the availability of housing for the young people they work with many YMCAs are developing and purchasing move-on accommodation, demonstrated by nearly 1,000 young people staying in our move-on accommodation every night during 2013/14. This includes more innovative approaches such as YCube in South West London where shipping containers are converted into low cost housing.
- 5.3** To help overcome some of the significant financial barriers described, each year YMCAs in England also provide 1,469 young people financial budgeting and planning skills. In addition to this, YMCAs have begun introducing initiatives and packages to support the young people they work with to save money. An example is YMCA Central Herts who are encouraging saving towards a deposit through an incentivised saving scheme in partnership with a local credit union. A number of YMCAs also operate deposit guarantee schemes to help young people when they are looking to access PRS housing.
- 5.4** To support young people to maintain living independently once they find somewhere to live, YMCAs across England provide young people with the essential skills they need, supporting nearly 9,000 young people each year to develop basic life skills such as cooking and how to look after a home. YMCA Cornwall has begun running a national recognised NOCN Award in Pre-Tenancy Skills which aims to prepare learners to obtain and retain a tenancy.



6. What needs to be done?

6.1 Based on the finding set out in this response, the YMCA wishes to make the following recommendations to the APPG for the PRS.

- **The YMCA proposes that the Government, private sector and social landlords work together to increase the availability of low cost housing, including innovative housing solutions such as YCube and renovating empty properties.**
- **The YMCA proposes that the Government improve regulations on the PRS to remove the current discriminatory practices and promote more secure tenancies for young people.**
- **The YMCA proposes that the Government work with relevant organisations to develop and promote financial products (e.g. rent deposit schemes) targeted at young people, in particular supporting young people to access funds when moving from supported accommodation.**

If you require any further information regarding our response, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the contact details included.

Yours faithfully,



Denise Hatton
YMCA England
Chief Executive

