

Appendix 4:



Scottish Borders Council

Housing needs and aspirations of young people

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Stakeholder consultation findings

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1. Introduction

Scottish Borders Council has commissioned The Indigo House Group to undertake a study on the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People in the Scottish Borders. Part of this work involves consultation with stakeholders who deliver services for young people across the Borders.

The consultation was undertaken with 14 people representing a range of statutory and third sector services including Education, Employment Services, Homelessness and Financial Support, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), and Youth Borders. The meetings were undertaken face to face or by telephone as diaries allowed. The consultation took place during August. The steering group overseeing the study has also provided feedback as the study has progressed, and so their feedback is also included in the main themes analysed below.

Young people have been surveyed separately through a wide scale quantitative survey (398 interviews), and qualitative telephone survey (23) and six focus group (48 young people). The other strand of work contributing to this study is secondary data analysis on demographics, economy, housing need, demand and affordability (all reported separately).

2. Consultation findings

2.1 Why do young people stay, and why do young people leave the Borders

Why young people leave - The strong, recurring view around the reason that young people leave the Scottish Borders is around **further education and employment opportunities**. There is a considerable pull from 'the big city' (mainly Edinburgh but also some other Scottish cities and Newcastle to the south) – for education, economic and social reasons, with the Borders seen as 'dull' by many young people. It is suggested that young people leave to access **better opportunities and to 'succeed'** but with some anticipating that they may return later to enjoy the quality of life and good environment for raising a family.

Jobs, housing and transport - There is a repeated theme around the **inextricable linkages** between **jobs, housing and transport**. There is a mismatch between affordable housing demand and supply, with inadequate supply of the right size of housing in the right place – where the jobs are, mainly in Galashiels but also in the Peebles area. There is a low wage economy which means incomes may be too low to support moving into private rented housing, and access to affordable housing in the right place is very difficult. Transport is poor and expensive and does not enable people that live further away to get to work. A number of examples were provided of the challenges young people face in securing a job or training, but then being able to sustain this with the **geographic challenges / large distances** involved across the Borders. It was noted that some people unwillingly have to leave their rural community due to the lack of affordable housing in the rural/remote communities. Taking all these aspects together **creates strong push factors to look for opportunities out with the Borders**.

Why people stay in the Borders – the majority view is that young people that stay in the Borders do so around **family connections and support**, rather than to access education and employment opportunities. It was identified that many young people **stay longer in the parental home** than may be found elsewhere, put down to local culture, but also due to lack of suitable and affordable housing in their local (particularly small rural) communities.

It was noted that there is a notable educational attainment gap in the Borders (between the highest and lowest achievers), and a sense of **social polarisation in the Borders culture**, reflected also in the young people that stay and leave the Borders. It was suggested this is also reflected in housing need and demand, with a perception of high levels of polarisation between people living in social housing

and private housing (although we can't say whether this is different to other areas in Scotland/ UK). There is an appetite from the Council to see development of a community wellbeing approach – how to build cohesion within communities, and to build/ nurture mixed communities, including mixed housing tenure/ income communities.

2.2 **Understanding / perception of the local economy, and the challenges and opportunities there are for young people looking for work in the Borders**

Low wage economy and limited employment options - All consultees identified the challenges with the Scottish Borders local economy associated with a low wage economy, opportunities being constrained due to travel/ geography especially for low wage earners, concentration of job opportunities around the west of the Borders (Galashiels), and that jobs/ industry is concentrated in the public sector, and traditional sectors of fishing, farming and forestry which many young people consider unattractive. It was noted that there is very little STEM based industries in the Borders (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), and that there has also been a reduction in public sector based opportunities due to reduction in public sector funding since the recession.

The **lack of a university** in the Scottish Borders is seen by most consultees as putting many young people at considerable disadvantage, particularly those who may not be able to afford to move/ travel to Edinburgh/ other cities. Consultees consider there is a need for a much greater range of further education opportunities based within the Borders.

Digital connectivity - The need to increase digital connectivity is seen as a potential opportunity to improve education, training and work opportunities for some, but consultees also note that young people need to work with other people, face to face when they are training and first start work, and so the potential for digital working should not be seen as overcoming the challenges of transport, and access to further/ higher education and jobs.

Positive aspects identified were the **increased opportunities via apprenticeships**, graduate placements, employers understanding of the benefits of employing younger people given the ageing population in the Borders, the **Borders railway** providing wider opportunities while retaining or attracting residents in the Borders

2.3 **Key housing issues for young people in the Borders**

The key housing issues identified for young people are:

Demand / supply mismatch of affordable housing – lack of affordable housing of the right size, in the right place, provided at the right time is seen as the core issue from all stakeholders. In particular consultees identified the high demand for housing in Galashiels (where most work, training and social opportunities are) but lack of one-bedroom affordable housing. Some service providers supporting young people are frustrated at lack of suitable allocations for young people to enable them to work, or to enable independence but with access family/ friends support. RSLs and the Homeless Service notes the mismatch between demand and supply and the difficulty in getting the right match. One option to address the shortfall of one bed accommodation is to allocate two bed properties, but this runs the risk of affordability issues if people are working. In order to create some movement in the social housing system it was argued that family sized housing needs to be freed up by older people – again going back to the need for smaller sized property, but that are suitable for older people.

Private rented sector – while this is an option for some, the low wage economy, and in some places relatively high prices of PRS this makes it a difficult option for many young people. It was also noted that despite legislative/ regulatory change there are still poor quality private lets, and poor landlords.

Welfare reform – this will continue to make affordability of housing more challenging and impact on sustainability of housing for young people and mean more financial inclusion support for young (and other) households is needed.

Range of supported options for vulnerable young people – there are few ‘transition’ (with concierge on site) or supported housing options for young people in the Borders, apart from Albert Place in Galashiels. Many consultees noted this gap in terms of volume and location of supported housing options for young people, especially for the east / Berwickshire. Others also suggested that there is lack of visiting housing support, and again there appears to be geographical challenges in some areas. While the call for more **generic housing support** is a widely held view, it is also argued that more housing support could be provided directly by housing officers. It is also suggested that the needs/ difficulties of young people are sometimes overstated and there may be a cultural resistance by some landlords to house vulnerable young people. More work needs to be undertaken on understanding the actual support needs of young people – what is low level, who needs medium/ higher level of support, and what/ who has complex needs with wrap around support requirements?

Holistic working between education, housing, social care and health - Regardless of who is providing what service, there is a call for greater holistic working across service providers. Many hold the view that there are professional silos, and that too many vulnerable young people are falling through service cracks. It was suggested there should be a generic housing support service which is provided regardless of issue/ diagnosis of the young person, and should be available across the board, not solely for homeless/ potentially homeless people. This is seen as an issue for resolution between the health and social partnership **and** education **and** housing partners – RSLs and the Council’s Homeless Team. It is felt that the Community Planning Partnership is a great umbrella group which could be used more for housing strategy. From housing providers’ perspectives, it would be better if there was a more planned intervention approach – rather than crisis response, so that housing responses are properly coordinated within a planned approach.

Disabled young people – it was noted that while housing, employment and transport solutions are challenging for young people, the obstacles faced by disabled young people are even greater – whether physical or learning disabilities, including those with complex needs. A number of consultees identified the shortfall of supported housing, and residential care options for young people with complex needs leading to the need on occasion for young people to live out of area and away from their family / their own communities.

2.4 Challenges and opportunities for housing providers

The key challenges and opportunities identified by housing and homelessness stakeholders in some respects repeated the key issues faced by young people. These key themes are:

- **Housing need and demand** – finding the right balance of supply in the right place to meet varying needs from young people, families and older people, is the most critical question for individual providers, and strategically for the Council. The geographic challenges in a large rural area are continuously raised – finding the right accommodation, in the right place and right price. This comes back to the high demand areas, demand and supply of work and higher/ further education opportunities and mapping this with supply of housing.

- **Holistic / cross sector approaches** - Questions were raised about the ability of SBC and its partners to take a corporate parenting approach including housing strategy, and take a holistic approach for services for young people - joining up all the different aspects of life that are important for young people – education, training, employment, housing, transport and social life. People suggested services could improve impact in service delivery via better coordination across partners.
- **Information sharing** – closely related to the point on strategy and holistic approaches, the housing sector consultees suggested the need for more sharing of information. It is noted that for the social rented sector the common housing register has gone by the wayside, and there is little sharing of data on a regular basis between providers on what type of housing is held where. It is suggested that there needs to be more involvement from the local authority in marketing / sharing information on Housing Options. This could include a more structured approach to information on housing options / education in schools.
- **Modernisation and service channels** – it is suggested that in order to meet the service needs of young people that housing providers need to modernise through ‘channel shift’ moving to digital methods of service provision. This include a change in methods of marketing properties, including those that may be low demand in some areas.
- **Housing support** – there are conflicting views around the need for starter tenancies, or transition flats where tenants are supported to get ‘tenancy ready’, compared to the view that young people should be supported in their homes through visiting support without the need to ‘prove’ their tenancy readiness. The critical question here is around the availability of housing support, and whether young people are willing to take up the support offered, and the risk of tenancy failure / lack of sustainability.

2.5 Other matters raised

The opportunity through land reform was raised by a few consultees. It was noted that other rural areas in Scotland, particularly the Highlands and Islands have promoted the use of land reform to enable local communities to access land, and develop small affordable housing development in rural and remote areas. This has been commonly used in areas where the school role is reducing and there is threat of school closure, and in these circumstances, new affordable housing (for rent and sale) is often the linchpin to maintaining, and possibly increasing the local population in small rural communities.

These consultation findings are incorporated into the **Interim Report, Key Findings Report** along with findings from all the other research elements.