

5.1.11 Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers

SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter seeks to promote the necessary joint working between the Children's Social Care and Strategic Housing departments to ensure that the diverse needs of care leavers are met, prevent homelessness and ensure the effective management of housing crises for young people where they occur.

RELEVANT CHAPTER

[Young Persons Housing and Homeless Prevention Protocol for 16 and 17 yr olds](#)

This chapter was introduced into the manual in July 2017.

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1. Legislative Framework

[The Children \(Leaving Care\)](#) and the [Housing Act 1996](#) Part 7 as amended are designed to ensure that local authority Children's Social Care and housing providers work together to ensure that the accommodation needs of care leavers are met and have priority need status.

The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation Order 2002 states that a young person has a priority need for accommodation if he or she is:

- A person under 21 who was (but is no longer) Looked After by the local authority between the ages of 16 and 18 (except relevant students);

- A person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been Looked After by the local authority.

The C(LC)A 2000 Regulations and Guidance also detail how the local authority strategy for care leavers should take into account:

- The diverse accommodation and support needs of care leavers;
- The capacity to offer young people a degree of choice of accommodation;
- Existing and planned provision of safe affordable accommodation;
- Gaps in provision;
- Priority setting;
- The need for contingency arrangements.

The role of the local authority as a **Corporate Parent** means that meeting the accommodation needs of care leavers requires partnership working across departments and agencies. This protocol will ensure that the Housing Options Service, Social Registered Landlords and children's services of Knowsley council each play a full role in providing the required resources and support to care leavers (1).

2. Aims of the Protocol

To ensure the effective discharge of corporate responsibilities between Strategic Housing and Children's Social Care by jointly addressing the diverse accommodation needs of young people leaving care.

Wherever practicable, to prevent care leavers becoming homeless thereby avoiding the need for care leavers to enter the homelessness system.

To support young people to become responsible and successful tenants.

Because of the diverse needs of care leavers and the way in which these will change over time, a range of accommodation options will be required. These may include the following:

- Enabling young people to remain living with former foster carers through conversion of these placements to supported lodgings (**Staying Put** arrangements);
- Other supported lodgings placements;
- Other transitional accommodation with varying degrees of support such as trainer flats or hostels;
- Specialist accommodation for young people with particular support needs (eg disabled young people, young parents);
- Self contained accommodation with housing related support;
- Independent tenancies.

The protocol will therefore work at a number of levels:

- Monitoring and reviewing the accommodation needs of care leavers;
- Undertaking joint Housing / Pathway team assessments of individual housing need;
- Recognising that the Housing Options Service have a role in ensuring that the best use is made of nomination rights with Social Landlords and that the Allocation Scheme is framed to provide reasonable preference to priority groups to enable them to access housing. To ensure that there is no use of bed and breakfast accommodation for care leavers in crisis situations;
- Joint work to ensure that young people are accommodated in safe environments which meet health and safety requirements.

3. Objectives

To jointly assess and meet the diverse housing and support needs of young people leaving care, through the application of a clear consistent process.

To ensure care leavers achieve a successful transition into independent living through support, preparation and provision of suitable accommodation.

To ensure young people are awarded care leaver priority status via the High Priority Resettlement Panel to prevent the need to go through the homeless route (3).

To identify gaps in service provision for young people and to work together with other agencies to address these gaps, feeding information into the relevant strategies (4).

To reduce the likelihood of a care leaver becoming homeless and where this cannot be prevented their homelessness application is assessed as soon as reasonably practical.

To jointly ensure that all staff are aware of the housing needs of young people leaving care and the obligations of each agency to address these needs.

4. Eligibility

Young people aged 16 to 21 (or up to 25 if in further/higher education), who have housing, or support needs and who have left or are due to leave the care of the Knowsley council.

5. Leaving Care Accommodation

For 16 and 17 year olds the leaving care tenancy support management agreement is in place This will consist of a licence to occupy the property being issued to the young person by the Registered Provider of Social Housing.

The licence agreement will include provisions which set out the Council's responsibility. The council will hold financial responsibility for the young person's rent until they are 18 years old.

Whilst accommodated the young person will benefit from their commissioned support worker visiting regularly to help them develop the necessary independent living skills which will ultimately enable them to cope with looking after themselves and sustain their home. The level of this support will be based on assessed need. This support will last until the young person is 18 years and will be co-ordinated by a Social Worker.

Once the young person reaches 18 years they will have the opportunity to hold a tenancy in their own right. This is subject to the success of the placement and the agreement of the housing provider. This would enable them to take on full responsibility for sustaining their home although they will continue to receive support from a **Personal Advisor** until they are 21 years old.

Any young person leaving care aged 18 years and above will be supported to make a housing application via the High Priority Resettlement Panel and will receive priority. They will be legally responsible for managing their own tenancy.

6. Service Outcomes

Strategic Housing and Children's Social Care will support each other, through the protocol, to ensure that care leavers are provided with suitable, safe and sustainable accommodation alongside the support to live independently.

This process will be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

The Social Worker will take responsibility for supporting care leavers with housing applications.

7. Allocation Policy

All care leavers who wish to have their own accommodation at age 18 years should be presented to Panel in advance of leaving care (at least 3 months) and will be awarded Band B priority status.(8).

Prior to allocation, agreement should be reached between leaving care services and housing regarding complex cases, taking into account the need for flexibility depending on the young person's circumstances, abilities and the level of support required. In the case of 16/17 year old care leavers, they will be offered accommodation through the management agreement following careful consideration at High priority panel to ensure their support needs are addressed. In the case of young people 18 years and over who are care leavers they will be consider under usual tenancy arrangement via the panel.

This protocol specifically applies to all young people aged 16 to 24 who meet the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 criteria including the following:

- **Eligible** young people aged 16 or 17 who are either subject to a **Care Order** or who are accommodated by the local authority for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday and on or after their 16th birthday;

- **Relevant** young people aged 16 or 17 who are no longer Looked After but for whom Children's Social Care are responsible for maintaining in suitable accommodation and providing financial support. These young people cannot, subject to some exceptions due to a disability or being a parent, claim welfare benefits;
- **Former Relevant** young people aged 18 to 24 who have previously been either eligible or relevant. These young people can access benefits, but continue to receive leaving care support services.

The protocol does not apply to **Qualifying** young people who may have been briefly accommodated but did not attain 'Eligible' status. There is a duty to advise and befriended but for the purposes of meeting housing needs their status is as that applied to any other homeless young person seeking assistance under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

8. Support

All young people aged 16 to 21 (or up to 25 if in further/higher education) leaving care who are eligible, relevant or former relevant will have an assessment of need and **Pathway Plan**. These are legal documents and the method by which their needs are identified and addressed. The Pathway Plan is reviewed at least every six months, and there is an expectation that the Social Landlord will make a contribution to this plan if and when appropriate.

The Pathway Plan will detail accommodation needs and the type of housing related support that the young person may require in order to successfully maintain a tenancy. All Pathway Plans must include a contingency plan.

The success of tenancies will be monitored closely and potential difficulties dealt with promptly involving the young person. If there is evidence that a tenancy is unlikely to be sustained, prompt communication between agencies is essential and a review of the pathway plan will be undertaken identifying current and future need. Additional tenancy review meetings should be arranged if required. The Pathway team accommodation officer will play a key role in monitoring tenancies, liaising with the Social Landlord Housing colleagues and focussing on early intervention to prevent tenancy breakdowns.

Young people leaving care will have different levels of support needs. This may range from intensive support from a number of agencies, to minimum advice and guidance from a leaving care support worker.

Both Social Landlord and the Pathway team must ensure that young people understand fully what is required of them as a tenant, who is to support them, and what they should do in a crisis. A 'sign-up' meeting will always be held with the young person, involving Social Landlord and the Pathway team. A multi agency agreement may be appropriate in addition to the pathway plan.

The prompt sharing of information between agencies is essential in order to support young people and address tenancy issues. The Data Protection Act (1998) requires that young people should give their written consent before any information about them can be shared. Consent to information sharing is covered in the Pathway Plan.

Consultation should take place between agencies, and agreement reached, prior to any formal action being taken to end a tenancy.

9. Process (16 – 18 years)

The young person will be supported to make an application to the High Priority Resettlement Panel. The Allocated Social Worker will attend panel to present the needs of the young person.

A suitable property will be identified and the appropriateness of this property discussed in the first instance with the Social Worker and Young Person's Team Manager prior to being discussed directly with the young person.

In the event of a property being allocated, support arrangements will be discussed and agreed by all those involved. This will be done via a 3 way 'sign up' meeting between the young person, the local Housing Officer, and the young person's social worker. Arrangements for tenancy support will be confirmed at this meeting and, if required, an additional support plan drawn up.

In the event of imminent or actual homelessness then the young person will be assisted to make a homelessness application, but this should be the exception and not the usual route into housing.

Any difference of opinion over areas of responsibility, proposed actions or exceptions to the above should initially be dealt with by the caseworker in each directorate. If the issue cannot be resolved at this level, the matter should be referred jointly to the housing provider team manager and the Young Person's Team Manager.

10. Review

This protocol will be reviewed annually or sooner if the legislation or policies underpinning it change.