

Joint Housing Protocol between Warwickshire County Council's Children Services and the five District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire



Response and Provision of Accommodation for Care Experienced Young People

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1. The purpose of this Protocol

The purpose of this protocol is to set out how Warwickshire County Council and Housing Services will work together to provide an effective, consistent, and coordinated response to care experienced young people to meet their housing needs. This policy will set out the procedures for achieving a transition to independent living for care experienced young people and how, as Corporate Parents, we take steps to ensure the wellbeing of our young people in relation to their housing needs.

2. Who does this protocol apply to?

This protocol relates to young people who have been looked after by Warwickshire County Council under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. Under the Act, Children's Social Care has a duty towards 'Eligible', 'Relevant' and 'Former Relevant' children and a duty to provide support (See Appendix A for definitions).

The Department for Education statutory guidance states that it is key for local authorities to establish joint working arrangements between children's social care, housing, and other specialist services to help care experienced young people prepare for independent living. These joint working arrangements should incorporate involving young people in planning for leaving care and making decisions about housing, assessing the individual needs of young people and plan for contingencies if things don't go as planned.

3. The Pathway Plan

The young person's Pathway Plan will identify their housing and support needs and what action is required to prepare the young person for independent living. The Pathway Plan must reflect the young person's current circumstances, provide a clear analysis of the needs of the young person, and set out how these needs will be met. The Pathway Plan is completed by the young person's Social Worker and reviewed every 6 months. After their 18th birthday, the Pathway Plan is reviewed six monthly by their Leaving Care Personal Advisor, until the age of 21.

4. Housing options for Care Experienced Young People

There are several different housing options for care experienced young people. The young person's Pathway Plan will include a plan for housing and which option is most suitable for each individual young person. The main housing options for care experienced young people are:

- Remaining with former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement. The possibility for a Staying Put arrangement is assessed by the young person's allocated Social Worker prior to their 18th birthday.
- Moving into supported accommodation – the Social Worker or Personal Advisor will make referrals to providers who can meet the individual needs of the young person.
- Moving into social rented housing e.g., council/housing association (via joining housing register from 16 although bidding can only commence at 18 unless Special Agency Referral* is approved 3-6 months prior to 18 depending on District or Borough.)
- Warwickshire County Council House Project - this is a peer programme that supports young people to develop the practical and emotional skills to live independently. They work on houses which become their homes to live in.

- Moving into other independent living situations such as shared accommodation with other young people or private rented (the local authority has a Rent Guarantor Scheme** for care experienced young people).
- Supported Lodgings (Warwickshire County Council will make an assessment if the potential provider is a family member or other potentially suitable person identified by the young person with the exception of a parent) OR Barnardo's have Supported Lodgings where existing hosts have been assessed and can offer a room and support.
- Shared Lives arrangements for young people with disabilities – this is an innovative scheme made up from carers who share their homes, family, and community life to offer a young adult with disabilities supported accommodation.
- Where a young person remains in full time education or is at University, Children's Social Care will support the young person to access adequate funds to secure accommodation suitable to their needs during term time and will support them to access accommodation during the holiday periods.
- Special Agency Referral - if a young person is identified as being "tenancy ready" (or at least ready with minimal support) then they should be referred to the relevant District or Borough via Appendix B & the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for that area notified. The referral should include as much detail as possible regarding independent living skills including areas for improvement and plans for extra support. Supporting evidence from foster carer/placement is also useful. It should be noted that if a young person is not ready and the tenancy breaks down, this can lead to intentional homeless decisions/rent arrears and potentially a cycle of homelessness.
- Depending on the District or Borough, the young person should be referred 3-6 months prior to age 18 and should remain in their existing placement throughout the process to provide a seamless route to independence without periods of homelessness.
- A Special Agency Referral can also be made for young people who have remained in their placements (e.g. Staying Put, Supported Lodgings, Supported Accommodation post 18). Young people who have remained in their placements for a period should not be disadvantaged.
- The local authority's Rent Guarantor Scheme can be applied for by care experienced young people who can demonstrate their readiness for independence, demonstrate robust budgeting skills and be engaging with their Social Worker/ Personal Advisor.

5.0 Emergency Situations

Sometimes emergency situations arise where a care experienced young person over the age of 18 becomes homeless or at risk of homelessness without prior warning. This may be due to their complex needs, a breakdown in current accommodation arrangements or other unforeseen circumstances. This will then trigger a Duty to Refer (DTR).

Duty to Refer

This is a duty placed on public bodies to complete a duty to refer if the young person has:

- No accommodation which is suitable for them.
- No accommodation which is available, nor do they have a legal right to occupy.
- Accommodation which is not reasonable to occupy if they are at risk of harm (eg.

- Domestic Abuse).
- Been threatened with homelessness and been served with Notice to Quit expiring within the next 56 days.

Once the Local Housing Authority (LHA) receives the DTR, they will contact the young person – this does not always trigger immediate response so the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for the LHA should also be notified.

Application

The LHA will contact the young person to advise if they have accepted a prevention or homeless duty. If the LHA is unable to contact the young person, they must reply direct to the referrer. The young person can give consent to the referrer to follow up with the LHA. Homeless duty will normally be taken, however if it's in the Notice To Quit (NTQ) stage then this will be only until the NTQ expires.

Priority Need

A young person is automatically Priority need if they are under the age of 21. The LHA is also under an obligation to assess those over the age of 21 and make inquiries regarding any vulnerabilities and consider their looked after history.

Temporary Accommodation

Once the duty is accepted the young person will be offered accommodation. This varies between LHAs but in most cases it will be a hotel or Bed and Breakfast and temporary supported accommodation, it could also be a house of multiple occupation. This is paid for via Housing Benefit and an application needs to be made to cover this via the Local Council.

Decisions

Once the Relief duty ends, which is normally after 56 days, the following decisions can be made:

- Not homeless – the young person has accommodation which they are currently living in and can continue to do so for 6 months.
- Not eligible - the young person is not eligible usually due to their immigration status.
- Not in Priority need – this may be given to young people over the age of 21 (can be given before the 56 days). In this case the young person can normally join the waiting list for housing (banding varies between LHAs).
- Priority need – is Pregnancy, dependent children, young people before their 21st birthday, severe and enduring health conditions, institutionalised i.e., prison leavers. These young people can normally join the waiting list for housing and the banding is higher than those who are non-priority.
- Fleeing Violence - normally given higher banding but if the LHA feels the young person is unsafe, it can refer them to another LHA or refuge.
- Emergency – example is fire etc.
- Intentionally Homeless – the young person has caused their situation themselves i.e., eviction for anti-social behaviour etc. *Please see below for more information.

- No local Connection – in this case a referral is normally made back to the area they do have a connection to.

It should be noted that rent arrears with another LHA, private landlord or Supported Provider can prevent main duty offers and the young person may remain in temporary accommodation for considerable time.

**Local Authorities should always avoid the impact of intentionally homelessness when it comes to care experienced young people. This includes taking into account all facts and the emotional and mental wellbeing of the young person. Any young person that is found to be intentionally homeless has a right of appeal where any extenuating circumstances should be included.*

6.0 Referrals to Homeless Prevention Advisors

The Leaving Care Team currently have three Homeless Prevention Advisors who work with care experienced young people to prevent homelessness and secure positive outcomes in terms of housing. A meeting should be arranged with a homeless prevention advisor as soon as the possibility of homelessness is identified. This can be up to 6 months prior to their 18th birthday if the young person's needs are complex or there is no clear housing plan in place. The Homeless Prevention Advisors are available to social workers and Personal Advisors for general advice and guidance around housing, however a formal referral should be made if the situation is more complex and requires the Homeless Prevention Advisor to work directly with the young person and/or housing providers. The social worker or Personal Advisor should consider making timely referrals to ensure adequate time is given to look at all housing options. Referrals are made on Mosaic and are sent to a Leaving Care Team Leader who will assess the need and decide.

A referral should always be made to a Homeless Prevention Advisor in the following circumstances:

- Two months before release from prison if no housing plan is in place or housing is only temporary e.g., bail hostel.
- Any notice that has been served regarding the young person's accommodation.
- The young person is living in unsuitable or unsafe accommodation.

Appendix A

Eligible children are those in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for a period to be prescribed. The age at which spells in care start to count towards eligibility will also be prescribed.

Relevant children are those aged 16 and 17 who meet the criteria for eligible children but who leave care. Regulations may exclude certain groups, such as children who return home permanently and children who receive respite care.

Former relevant children are those who before reaching the age of 18 were either eligible or relevant children.

Appendix B

Care leavers accommodation referral form to the local housing authority

To be completed by Asylum and Leaving Care Team:

Name of young person:	Gender:
Age:	Date of birth:
Leaving care worker details: Telephone number:	
Young person's current address: Telephone number:	
Care status of young person <input type="checkbox"/> Eligible <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Former relevant child	
Are they subject to immigration control? Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	
Current housing situation:	
Likely dates for move on accommodation to be needed:	
Is anyone else moving in with them? Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> Details:	
Are they pregnant? Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	

Previous housing information (address, dates, and type of accommodation):

	Address	Dates	Type of accommodation
1			
2			
3			

Important contacts:

GP Name: Address: Telephone no:
Young person's advisor Name: Address: Telephone no:
Other contact Name: Address: Telephone no: Relationship to young person:

Independent living skills.

Please describe the young person's experience/preparation for living independently:

Please indicate current ability in the following areas:

	Poor	Making progress	Good
Financial capability			
Cooking			
Healthy eating			
Keeping safe i.e. sexual issues, substance issues			
Personal hygiene			

Environmental hygiene			
Positive relationships			

Health

What is the young person's current state of health?
Give details of any significant previous physical or mental health history:

Education, training, and employment

What is the current situation?
Future plans

Support

What level of support is to be provided by the leaving care service during the move on process?
What level of support, if any, might be provided by friends and/or family?

Risk assessment

Please indicate if you consider the young person to present any of the following risks:

	High	Medium	Low
To themselves			
To staff			
To other young people			
To any significant others			
If you ticked any high or medium boxes please give further information:			

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Leaving care worker

I have read this form and agree to this referral being made. I give my permission for any relevant person or agency to be contacted for information to support this referral.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Young person