

**CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

*HOUSING
SOLUTIONS*

Joint Protocols between
Housing and Children's Services

September 2013



Caerphilly County Borough Council

Housing Solutions

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1. Care Leavers Housing Protocol

Context

Caerphilly County Borough Council aims to promote and support planned moves from care for all young people that it looks after. The ongoing Pathway Planning mechanism is the main tool for achieving this desired outcome. This protocol has been developed to support and to combine the different routes that currently exist for young people leaving care in accessing accommodation and support in partnership with the local authority housing department.

The Framework for Allocating Social Housing ensures care leavers receive a high priority status when applying for social housing. Care leavers under 18 should access supported lodgings or supported housing projects rather than mainstream tenancies **whenever** possible.

Care Leavers aged 16 and over are eligible to apply to the Local Housing Register but will only be referred to the Move-On Co-ordinator for assessment and support when deemed appropriately ready, prepared and have completed the required courses or activities as highlighted within the Pathway Plan Document. In addition referrals to Supporting People for floating Support will be appropriate for this client group when they access independent accommodation.

This protocol recognises the corporate parenting responsibility of the Council in partnership with social housing providers operating in the County Borough and wishes to improve the practical application of this.

Aim and Principles of the Protocol

This protocol aims to ensure that care leavers sixteen plus **do not** need to apply as homeless to the Council in order to access accommodation.

The protocols principles are to:

- To raise awareness amongst looked after young people and their Social Workers and personal advisors to ensure that decisions to leave care are fully informed by accurate and current housing options information.
- To support planned moves from care into suitable accommodation to prevent homelessness for this vulnerable service user group.
- To establish a single route of referral via the 16 Plus Service for young people aged 16-17 who wish to access either general needs social housing, or any of the floating support scheme's accessed via Supporting People.

Procedures

Raising Awareness

An allocated 16 Plus Worker will be responsible for working with the young people, foster carers, residential workers, family members and personal advisors to assess what the most appropriate housing option is. This **can** include:

- Supported lodgings.
- Supported housing project
- Social or private sector housing with the Floating Support Scheme involved.
- Social or private sector housing without support.

For further information on the above housing options, please refer to the overarching 16 Plus Accommodation Policy.

A representative from the Housing Advice Centre will be invited to the **second** Pathway Plan Review meeting held for each looked after young person who is **planning to live independently**. The housing representative will be invited to provide information about:

- Housing options available for young people in Caerphilly CBC, including supported housing.
- Advantages and disadvantages of each option, including likely costs, rights and responsibilities and how each option is accessed; and to answer questions about housing issues.

The Housing representative will **only** attend aspects of the meeting that involve discussions related to accommodation. One of the issues for this meeting is to consider timescales for the young person to leave care to live more independently and consider accommodation options.

Housing Applications

General Housing Application

The need to make an application to the Local Housing Register will be identified during the Pathway Planning process. The completed application will be forwarded to the 16 plus Accommodation officer for checking and data entry purposes. The application will then be sent to the Housing Department. Any changes relating to the Young Person's circumstances **must** be E-mailed to the Accommodation officer who will ensure the relevant information is passed to the housing department to ensure the application is kept active.

Planned Move On

Only Young People, who are deemed to be appropriately ready, prepared and have completed the required courses or activities (e.g. Tenancy Management, Fire Safety Course and other elements as highlighted within the Pathway Plan) will then be referred to the Move On Co-ordinator.

The Move-On Co-ordinator will visit the Young Person and assess their abilities to live independently. If the Move-On Co-ordinator is satisfied that the Young Person has acquired the necessary skills to sustain a tenancy, The 16 Plus Worker will be advised of the relevant housing applications that need to be completed. (e.g. housing associations). The Move-On Co-ordinator will take responsibility for checking, data entry purposes and forwarding the application onto the relevant Social Landlord.

The Move-On Co-ordinator will take responsibility for liaising between all registered Social Landlords and Local Authority Housing Department in respect of all applications.

The Move-On Co-ordinator in consultation with providers will provide the Young Person and their allocated 16 PLUS Worker the date of the relevant Move-On Panel they're expected to attend.

Crisis

The Housing Advice Centre will not accept a homeless presentation or provide temporary accommodation for a Young Person aged 16 or 17 who is currently looked after, unless the process set out below has been followed.

Should a placement be at risk of breaking down and the Immediate Response Team (See Appendix A) have become involved but are unable to resolve the issues; a further foster placement is not an option or a suitable match is unavailable, the 16 Plus Team will arrange a Planning Meeting, which should be held within 5 working days of contact wherever possible to identify the options available.

If the young person needs immediate accommodation prior to the Planning Meeting, The Housing Department's Young Person's Accommodation Officer **must** contact the Emergency Accommodation Manager (where appropriate) and the 16 Plus Accommodation Officer prior to a placement being arranged.

The Planning Meeting will be arranged by the 16 PLUS Team and will involve the following people:

- The young person
- The allocated 16 Plus Worker / Personal Advisor
- 16 PLUS Accommodation Officer
- The Housing Department's Young Person's Accommodation Officer who is fully aware of the range of housing options available
- A carer/foster carers or the Residential Manager (as appropriate).

- A NYAS worker (where appropriate)
- The IRT support worker (where appropriate)

The meeting will:

- Set out the current up to date position from the young person's perspective.
- Identify the range of possible housing and support options.
- Ensure that the young person understands the risks of unplanned moves from care.
- Identify solutions to manage the crisis and enable the young person to move to appropriate housing and support in a reasonably planned way.
- Agree a way forward which is documented and signed by the relevant parties to action.

Consultation will take place about whether the young person wants the Housing Department's Young Person's Accommodation Officer to remain in the meeting if there is discussion of personal issues, however, they will need to be present for the end of the meeting when the way forward is agreed.

If all options fail, as a last resort and in full knowledge of what the process involves, i.e. that the young person will spend time in temporary accommodation, **This placement will be funded by Social Services.**

2. PROTOCOL FOR THE PREVENTION OF HOMELESS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 16 AND 17 YEARS OF AGE.

This protocol outlines the agreed roles, responsibilities and practices within the framework of services for young people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The aim of this protocol is to ensure that any 16 or 17 year old, who presents as homeless receives an assessment of need and an appropriate level of support and temporary accommodation during their period of homelessness. This will include access to mediation services, referral to National Youth Advocacy Service (if agreed) and a planned process of resettlement, including support to ensure they are accessing their full financial entitlement, budgeting these finances and other life skills in order to promote their independent living skills in order successfully maintain a tenancy.

Context

Bed and breakfast accommodation is **not** a suitable accommodation option for young people in this situation; it is to **only** be used when all other alternatives have been exhausted.

16 and 17 year olds threatened with homelessness are an extremely vulnerable group and therefore provision of bed and breakfast accommodation is unsuitable. In order to reduce the vulnerability of these young people the prevention of homelessness is essential whenever possible. Homelessness preventative services and support will be the main focus of any intervention.

Accommodating a 16 and 17 year old (Under Sec 20 of The Children Act 1989) rarely leads to improved outcomes for young people so emergency accommodation is not seen as the first or the best solution.

16 and 17 year olds are best accommodated within their family home or with appropriate family members and homelessness can be prevented by facilitating a return to the family home whenever appropriate and when safe to do so.

The majority of young people become homeless due to breakdown of relationships within the family home. However the family of the young person must still be involved in planning to address why the relationship has broken down and establish whether the relationships can be repaired. A home visit by a Mediation worker should be carried out to every 16 and 17 year old where there is an imminent risk of homelessness. Homelessness can be prevented by a timely and proactive intervention. Co-operation and flexibility is required between services to work holistically to meet the housing and support needs of young people and prevent homelessness.

However, 16 and 17 year olds should **not** remain in the family home, with alternative family members or in any situation, which may place them at risk of harm for example, emotional, financial, sexual or physical abuse.

Children's Services will **always** offer each homeless 16 & 17 year old the option to be 'Accommodated' under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1989. A joint assessment will be ongoing throughout this period with the 16 PLUS Team providing 'Hardship' financial assistance (£30 per week) until benefit entitlement is awarded. Resources are available throughout the Caerphilly borough to assist in this interim period e.g. the Housing Advice Centre can provide emergency food packs if necessary and information for accessing the food banks can be provided via the Housing Advice Centre and Supported Accommodation Providers where appropriate.

If it established that a young person has been assessed and deemed as having no additional needs other than accommodation and are unable to return home or to the home of a responsible adult and no alternative options are available to them, accommodation will be arranged. This will be appropriate Temporary Accommodation whilst

they wait to be re-housed through the Local Housing Register or through Supported Accommodation Schemes. The Housing Advice worker will complete Housing Benefit forms for all young people who are placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

The relevant support providers are responsible for completing Housing Benefit forms and providing support to set-up benefit claims for all Young People placed in their Supported Accommodation projects.

Legal Framework

The lead responsibility for the implementation of this protocol is with both Children's Services and Local Authority Housing Services. Both agencies will strive to liaise with each other and the young people and their families.

The parties adhere to the specific legislation that covers their own service area and the processes determined in this protocol. (See APPENDIX B & C – Housing and SSD Legislation)

First Contact with Contact & Referral Team

In the instance of a young person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness who makes initial contact via the **Children's Services Contact & Referral Team** they will:

- Check ICS to determine if the young person is known to Children Services and establish whom the allocated social worker is. If young person is known (or was an open case within 3 months prior to the homeless presentation), details need to be passed to relevant social worker or Team, as they will be case responsible.
- If Contact & Referral are unable to resolve the homelessness issue through their own intervention, sign posting and referrals to other agencies contact will then be made with the Housing Advice Centre to provide the basic details and reason for presentation.
- If the Young Person is unknown to Children's Services basic details and reason for presentation will be taken and passed onto the Housing Advice Centre who will follow the process set out below.

First Contact with the Housing Advice Centre.

Where a young person presents as homeless at the Housing Advice Centre a representative will:

- Interview the young person and ascertain their circumstances and immediate needs. Housing Advice officer needs to confirm with Contact and Referral as to whether child is known and whether they have any relevant information.
- Gather basic information.

- Confirm any information that would affect the decision about the safety of a return home.

If it established that there is threat of homelessness preventative actions will be necessary.

If appropriate, contact will be made with young person's parents and others with whom the young person has been staying to confirm the reasons for them being asked to leave and to request that they be allowed to return home.

Where the parents are reluctant for the young person to remain at home, a referral will be made to both the 16 PLUS Team and Mediation Services with Mediation taking the lead initially. A home visit will be offered to the family by the Mediation Worker with the aim of ensuring the young person is being fully supported to remain at home. Mediation will also be offered to assist any ongoing family reconciliation. Where necessary and possible a joint visit will be offered to the family (16 PLUS Worker & Mediation).

Should the young person be able to remain at home Mediation and the Immediate Response Team could offer ongoing support for a short period of intense intervention with the aim stabilising of the issues at home.

Where additional support needs are identified, such as substance misuse or mental health issues etc appropriate referrals will be made to other services.

Where practicable; if the young person is homeless or cannot return home in the interim or long term, a joint assessment from each discipline will be undertaken by the Housing Advice Worker and a 16 PLUS worker. The 16 PLUS worker will determine the young person's housing and support needs. The officers carrying out the joint assessment will make recommendations as to the statutory duties owed. This will include assessing:

- If the young person is a child in need as defined in Section 17 of the Children Act 1989
- Accommodation should be offered under Section 20

All 16 and 17 year olds who are identified as needing accommodation will be provided (whenever possible) with the accommodation and support that best meets their needs and circumstances.

If an initial assessment of a young person identifies that the young person is both in need and at risk of significant harm, the 16 PLUS worker **with the young person's consent** will discuss the outcomes from the assessment with the Service Manager, who must give agreement for the Young Person to become "looked after".

If agreement is given by the Service Manager that the Young Person's needs are best met by looked after accommodation a placement request form must be completed and submitted to the Placement Panel.

If and when a placement is identified, the 16 plus worker will be notified. The 16 plus worker will then complete the LAC paperwork. Eg Care Plan, Placement Information Record (PIR), Medical Consent Form, Delegated Authority Form and Referral and Information Record. This will be passed to the placement unit.

If an emergency placement is required discussions will take place with the Service Manager who will give permission to the Placement Unit to commence the search for accommodation. The placement request will then be presented to the next Placement Panel meeting as a retrospective request. The LAC paperwork will then need to be completed (as stated above).

The provision of suitable social care accommodation can only be provided if the young person understands what will be expected from them and what services they can expect from the 16 plus team.

The young person must give their consent to this form of accommodation and therefore to becoming a “*looked after child/Young Person*”.

If a young person declines accommodation under Section 20 of the Children’s Act 1989, Children’ services must be satisfied of the following;

- The young person has been provided with all relevant information related to becoming ‘Accommodated’ by Social Services.
- The young person is fully aware of the implication of their decision.
- The young person is deemed competent to make such a decision.

Proof of this discussion and decision will be gained through signed documentation (See APPENDIX D-SEC 20 Letter).

A person accommodated under Section 20 of the Children’s Act 1989 has no recourse to statutory benefits including Local Housing Allowance/ Housing Benefit until they reach 18 years of age. Children Services are under a duty to meet the cost of any accommodation and living costs until 18.

If a young person is dissatisfied with the manner or outcome of an assessment or services provided they have the right to complain through the existing complaints procedures. (See Appendix E – Complaints Leaflet)

Temporary Accommodation

In cases where the young person is assessed as being in crisis and is;

- unable to return home
- not to be accommodated under Section 20
- in need of emergency accommodation, (pending the outcome of family mediation)

They will be placed by the Housing Advice Centre under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 into the most appropriate emergency

accommodation based on needs and availability. Housing Services will meet these costs.

Temporary (Supported) Accommodation Project's are listed below:

The Countryman (SOLAS)
Risca Safe House (Llamau)
Emergency Room (Llamau – Bargoed)

In cases where there is no availability in the above schemes then advice will be sought from Young Persons Accommodation officer in conjunction with Emergency accommodation manager.

The role of the Housing Advice Centre will be to;

- Assist the young person to complete a housing benefit form for the secured emergency accommodation.
- Ensure the young person understands and then provides written consent for information sharing.
- Ensure the young person understands any additional charges they are required to pay for accommodation and the consequences of not doing so.
- Liaise with the 16 PLUS Worker/Manager to arrange financial assistance under Section 17 if the young person has no funds for their immediate needs.

Breakdown of Interim Accommodation

If a temporary accommodation placement breaks down, it may be appropriate to consider if the young person should be moved to alternative accommodation. The decision on whether this would be appropriate would take into account the reasons for the breakdown and any risk posed to the young person.

When a placement has broken down a follow up meeting will be arranged with the 16 PLUS worker and all relevant agencies to review the information available and consider any additional support needs. The question of whether any further statutory duties towards the young person exist needs to be fully considered and an appropriate decision made and conveyed to the young person in writing.