

<b>5 September 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Strategic Lead CLA		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

This report sets out how the Local Authority meets its statutory duties and responsibilities to young people leaving care to support them into independent living as Adults.

Protocols should clearly lay out the processes followed by Local Authorities that support Care Leavers to transition to independent living and avoid homelessness.

The joint protocol is updated annually and has been reviewed between Housing and Children Social Care. The protocol has been updated this year:

- to ensure a smoother application journey
- to avoid care leavers being at risk of arrears and reduce risk of eviction
- to ensure that the position of our young people vulnerable to homelessness is clear and arrangements for emergency accommodation are in place
- To ensure that matters raised by officers are resolved quickly and joint meetings are used for continuous improvement

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **For the Committee to note the statutory duties of the Local Authority to support young people in obtaining suitable accommodation and how we plan to meet these duties.**
- 1.2 **For the Committee to have oversight of the joint protocols and be involved in the ongoing review of delivery across Children's Services and Housing Services.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 Local Authorities have a responsibility for developing and effectively delivering a joint protocol setting out how the authority will deliver the local accommodation offered to Care Leavers and prevent homelessness.

2.2 The Homelessness code of guidance was revised in 2018 to reflect changes introduced by the HRA. Chapter 22 of the Code focusses specifically on Care Leavers. The Code outlines the importance of joint working when planning housing options for Care Leavers and states that:

*By working together, Housing Services and Children's Services can better ensure that as a corporate parent, the appropriate accommodation and support is available to Care Leavers. (Homelessness code of guidance - Chapter 22: Care Leavers).*

2.3 Furthermore, the guidance also advises that authorities should have in place joint protocols which clearly outline jointly held corporate parenting responsibilities for Care Leavers. Joint protocols should cover:

- arrangements for achieving planned, supportive transitions to independent living
- identifying homelessness risk early and acting to prevent it
- providing a quick, safe, joined up response for Care Leavers who do become homeless

2.4 A copy of the updated Joint Housing Protocol is appended to this report in Appendix One for members reference. Key changes are:

- Early alert for arrears so support can be put in reduce the risk of eviction.
- Clarification of Thurrock Council's position on care experienced young people vulnerable to homelessness or presenting as homeless.
- Amendments to Procedural aspects and the Pathway Plan to reduce administration
- Updated escalation process

## **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 The Joint Housing Protocol has been reviewed and updated for the financial year 2023/24. The following sets out its operational impact and highlights the effect the changes are having. It reflects the current effective joint work between Housing and Children's Social care. Joint meetings between housing and after-care teams at an operational and strategic level are held so that there is regular oversight of young people's progress to being allocated a Council property. Working relationships are effective and these forums work to address needs.

- 3.2 Prior to being offered a Thurrock Council Property, young people must demonstrate a readiness for tenancy. This is an objective of the Pathway Planning process alongside joint work from the Personal Advisor and Housing Officers. The Pathway plan should identify what the post-18 arrangements are and young persons readiness to live independently in line with their wishes. It's recognised that for some young people, they will not be ready to live independently at 18 and there are a range of alternative provisions to support them<sup>1</sup>:
- Remaining with their Foster Carer under a 'Staying Put' Arrangement
  - Living in semi-supported accommodation
  - Living in 'Head-Start Housing'
  - Choosing to live within their own family
  - Attending university
  - Supported by Adult Services in a CQC registered home or Shared Lives arrangements (for young adults with significant additional needs)
- 3.3 Housing Officers and Personal Advisors support young people through the application process and offer training on tenancy maintenance. This supports young people with the information and advice they need to obtain and maintain a lease. There are additional practical offers on home maintenance. This training has been developed jointly and rolled out successfully in the last 12 months.
- 3.4 Since the last report on the Joint Housing Protocol to the Committee (September 2022). Thurrock Council's 'Head-Start Housing' Programme has moved to be led and managed within the Housing Service. Head-Start provides shared accommodation to care experienced young people. The aim of this accommodation is to act as a steppingstone on the journey towards achieving independent living. There are several properties in the local area. These properties are furnished and are provided with white goods and Wi-Fi access.
- 3.5 The Head Start housing staff are focused on building relationships with the young people, supporting them to live independently, to understand the expectations around paying rent and regular bills, providing guidance around practical tasks relating to living independently. We continue to work with residents in Head-Start and a residents meeting is planned for the 14 August 2023 to seek their views on what would assist them further.
- 3.6 Currently care experienced young people are unable to make an application for housing prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday. A number of young people may be ready to be responsible for a tenancy with the support available to them through the Aftercare Team at 18 and the service's aim is to work with Housing towards a position where young people are able to start their

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<sup>1</sup> The Corporate Parenting Committee was updated on these arrangements in detail in March 2023. Members can find the relevant report here:

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s37878/Housing%20Options%20for%20Care%20Leavers.pdf>

application earlier to allow them to access accommodation at 18 and reduce delay and a potential move for a young person before they move into their accommodation.

It is essential that preparation is made early for those aged 16-17 who are in a position to live independently at age 18. Others are supported post-18 until they are ready. Care experienced young people are awarded priority banding and have the right to bid by choice. From the end of Q1 2022/23 to the end of Q4 2023/24 22 care experienced young people have achieved a Council Tenancy. At the end of June 2023 there were 29 young people bidding for a property, one of whom has been offered a property. To support young people with bidding a lead Personal Advisor has access to the bidding system so any issues can be quickly raised.

- 3.7 There are a number of young adults already living in secured tenancies with Thurrock Council. Housing Colleagues have developed a pre-eviction process and identify young adults who are care leavers so that they can be jointly supported to avoid eviction. The Joint Housing Protocol has been updated to ensure an 'early alert' when Care Leavers with Thurrock Council tenancies are showing arrears. This is so financial advice, support from a personal advisor and intervention if required can be offered to a young person well before the arrears become overwhelming. Close joint working has been effective in stabilising tenancies.
- 3.8 Thurrock Council has continuing responsibility to support young people leaving care up to the age of 25 and we have a clear expectation that no care experienced young person eligible for After Care Services should be left street homeless. To this end, existing resources have been jointly pooled to provide a shared budget from which emergency accommodation can be provided to those over 21 years to the age of 25. This provides a safety net whilst their housing needs are assessed and plans for further accommodation are agreed whatever their entitlement.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 To inform members of and invite members comments on, the work being carried out jointly between Children's Services and Housing to meet the housing needs of Thurrock's Care Leavers.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 The protocol will be shared with Care Leavers and the Children in Care Council and their comments invited which will be incorporated into subsequent reviews

## **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

6.1 Young People who have been in care of the Local Authority are a corporate responsibility and will have an impact on wider corporate policies and performance.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance**

There are no financial implications to this report. The budget for children leaving care is included within the Children and Families 2023/24 £34.5m allocation.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal Social Care and Education**

The Local Authority is required under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to publish a local offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers.

The local offer should include information on how care leavers are supported to access suitable accommodation, including the support available from housing services. Joint housing protocols should be aligned with the local offer and can help to ensure that the commitments to support Care Leavers to access and sustain accommodation are met. Local Authorities should consider providing a link to the joint protocol within the local offer so that Care Leavers, advocates and other professionals can have access to the document.

The Local Authority is required to have regard to the Homelessness Code of Practice and this Code advises Children's Services and housing to have joint protocols for Care Leavers.

The Local Authority must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1 of the Children and Social work Act 2017 in the exercise of functions in relation to Looked after, relevant and former relevant children. The legal implications have also been reviewed from a housing perspective and there are no further implications to be added than those already stated.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project  
Monitoring Officer.**

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that a range of communities and groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and Housing services. A Community Equality Impact Assessment will be completed to assess any positive or negative impact as a result of the protocol. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access housing.

### 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

- None

### 8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Report on Housing Options for Care Leavers:  
<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s37878/Housing%20Options%20for%20Care%20Leavers.pdf>

### 9. Appendices to the report

- Joint Housing Protocol 2023/24

### Report Author:

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