

6 September 2022		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Ben Tovey – Strategic Lead, Housing Solutions Dan Jones – Strategic Lead, CLA		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon – Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy – Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report sets out how the Local Authority will meet 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.

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).

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.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Joint Housing Protocol has been in place since 2019. It has assisted in making responsibilities clear. Joint meetings between housing and after-care teams at an operational and strategic level are held so that there is regular oversight of the young people's progress to being allocated a Council property.
- 3.2 The allocations policy which dictates how social housing stock is allocated to those on the housing register, recognises that care leavers should be awarded a priority banding to secure independent accommodation by way of awarding a priority band 3. In recent years the Allocations team have gone further to offer support to those leaving care.

Care Leaver applications are fast tracked and so assessed within 2 working days. The team will support the care leaver and PA with documentation that is required and keep the PA updated at every stage. The team understand that some care leavers are unable to use the online bidding system, so we offer assisted bidding to ensure the care leaver does not miss out on any suitable properties and in some instances direct offers of accommodation have been made.

The housing service has also been supporting the After Care Team by providing monthly reports of care leavers housed and care leavers with a priority band 3 as well as having an active presence in the Readiness for Tenancy Panel and Care Leavers & Housing Joint Forum. These meetings have been invaluable for identifying individuals who require additional support as well as highlighting any hold ups in the process to make it smoother for everyone involved.

As a result of these interventions 36 care leavers have been rehoused into Thurrock social housing since 2021 with a mix of assisted and independent bidding and direct offers where circumstances dictated it. Currently there are 28 care leavers who are active on the housing register and have awarded a priority band 3. Out of those 28, 5 are under offer for a property, and are waiting for the void works to be completed.

3.3 Prior to being offered a Thurrock Council Property, young people must demonstrate a readiness for tenancy. They must also make the proper application via Thurrock's Housing system and in the vast majority of cases bid for a property. Currently care leavers are unable to make an application for housing prior to their 18th Birthday but they are encouraged to prepare the relevant evidence to support applications in advance of this date. Those who have just turned 18 are supported in other arrangements until they are able to find permanent housing, such as:

- 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)

Young people leaving care can stay in these arrangements for varying period. The ultimate goal is to move on to a permanent arrangement.

3.4 Young people leaving care are prepared for leaving care at age 18 years. Transitions planning starts at age 16 years, this includes identifying plans for housing post 18 and developing the independence skills to do so. Housing Colleagues and Children's Services are delivering new and additional training to looked after young people aged 16 and over. The Tenancy Management Team and Rents & Welfare Team have provided fact sheets with a workshop set up for care leavers to attend to talk about the initial stages of commencing a tenancy and tenancy sustainment. These workshops will continue quarterly with the first being held in early September, Housing Solutions Team will offer training to better enable them to access the choice-based lettings system.

3.5 Young people leaving care whose immigration status is uncertain, may not be able to apply for a Thurrock Council Property. These matters lie with the Home Office and can take some time to resolve. Thurrock Council Children's Services have access to a limited number of Council owned properties that can be used in emergency circumstances. We are developing a 'licensee' arrangement so the young people can live in these properties, jointly supported by both services until their status is resolved. This is similar to the 'Head-Start' programme. It has the benefit of being a longer-term option and will reduce Thurrock's reliance on the private sector.

- 3.6 Thurrock Council has continuing responsibility to young people leaving care up to the age of 25. 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. This process is being developed further to ensure that any potential issues which could impact adversely on a care leaver's tenancy are identified as early as possible into the tenancy in order to avoid, for example any unnecessary rent arrears building up.
- 3.7 The Thurrock Housing Allocations Policy is subject to review and a consultation has been undertaken with Children's Social Care. The recommendations from Children's Social Care are:
- The process of applying for housing should be accessible prior to the age of 18 for looked after children so they can progress as required.
 - The 'direct offer' should be reviewed to offer greater flexibility to young people who will struggle to manage the application and bidding process.
 - The policy should be 'Trauma Informed'.
- 3.8 The Joint Housing Protocol is due for review and will be reviewed alongside the Housing Allocations Policy.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To inform members of 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: **Michelle Hall**
Senior Management Accountant

There are no financial implications to this report.

7.2 Legal

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

Deirdre Collins
Prosecution Barrister

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 provision of social housing to Care Leavers is undertaken in line with the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme as set out at Section 8 of the attached protocol.

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: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes **equality, diversity and inclusion**, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, **Public Sector Equality Duty** 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. 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):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

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