

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Report subject:	Housing for Care Experienced Young People
Meeting date:	27 January 2026
Status:	Public Report
Executive Summary:	<p>This report updates the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on arrangements to support Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) as they move toward independent living. It responds to the committee's recommendation in June 2025; that the Committee seeks assurance that the new Joint Housing protocol has been successfully agreed and is working effectively to ensure our Care Experienced Young People are seeing an improved service and are in receipt of timely advice and safe housing that suits their individual needs and hopes for the future.</p> <p>It evidences the effectiveness of the Joint Housing Protocol review in improving partnership working, reducing homelessness, and ensuring priority access to housing options such as Staying Put, Supported Lodgings, Specialist Supported Housing, and independent accommodation.</p> <p>Governance has been strengthened through the BCP Youth Homelessness Board, embedding strategic oversight and accountability. Young people's voices have shaped improvements to housing information, pathway clarity, and pre- and post-move support, while specialist and supported housing commissioning continues to provide tailored assistance for those with higher needs.</p> <p>Support for planning independence is integrated across pathways, with recommissioned services to be focused upon enhancing life skills and resilience. Despite progress, challenges remain due to local housing market pressures and affordability, requiring continued learning from reviews and lived experience alongside implementation of the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing and Skills Bill to secure positive outcomes for CEYP.</p>

Recommendations:	<p>Members are asked to note the content of the report.</p> <p>Members are asked to consider how future updates of this area of work might be considered for scrutiny.</p>
Reason for recommendations:	The Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested an update on the arrangements in place to ensure effective working protocol is in place to plan for, support and provide housing options for Care Experienced Young People. This report responds to that request.
Portfolio Holder(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Kieron Wilson - Portfolio Holder for Homes & Regulation • Councillor Richard Burton - Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Service Directors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kelly Deane - Director of Housing and Communities • Juliette Blake - Director of Children's Social Care • Rachel Gravett - Director for Commissioning, Resources and Quality
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Wards:	Council wide
Classification:	For Noting

Background

1. Children's Overview and Scrutiny requested an update on the arrangements in place to support Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) plan for housing independence, including the support and choices available and how young people's feedback influences the arrangements. This report responds to that request.
2. The housing market in the BCP area faces significant pressures that affect all residents, including Care Experienced Young People. Demand for affordable housing consistently outstrips supply, with limited availability of one-bedroom properties in both the social and private sectors and rising rental costs. Affordability remains a critical barrier, particularly for young people on lower incomes or benefits, as private rents often exceed Local Housing Allowance rates. These market conditions create competition for suitable homes, lengthen waiting times for social & private housing options, and increase reliance on temporary or shared accommodation.
3. While the Council prioritises, Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) within its allocation policies for all housing typologies, these systemic challenges mean that even with additional priority, securing stable and affordable housing can be difficult. The lack of low-cost home ownership pathways and limited supported housing

capacity further compound these issues, making early planning and partnership working essential to prevent homelessness and promote sustainable independence.

4. Housing & Children's Services alongside other partner agencies and young people have been working to review and update the arrangements.

Joint Housing & CEYP Protocol

5. The Council has developed a comprehensive approach to supporting Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) as they transition to independent living. Central to this is the updated Joint Housing Protocol (Appendix A), which provides a clear framework for collaboration between Housing and Children's Services.
6. The Protocol is designed to prevent homelessness among Care Experienced Young People and ensure smooth transitions to independent living. The protocol is underpinned by key legislation, including the Housing Act 1996 (Parts 6 & 7), the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Children Act 1989, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. It sets out clear roles, responsibilities, and referral pathways, ensuring Care Experience Young People are treated as a priority group in housing allocations and receive timely, coordinated support.
7. A review of the protocol took place in 2025 and collaborative plans for implementation of the updated protocol significantly improved partnership working and operational clarity within the two services, demonstrating proposed efficacy. By establishing single points of contact, dedicated roles and embedding joint planning through pathway meetings, services have observed reduced instances of homelessness and improved housing outcomes for care experienced young people.
8. The protocol also supports compliance with statutory guidance and recent regulations, such as the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Victims of Domestic Abuse and Care Leavers) (England) Regulations 2025, which ensure Care Experienced Young People cannot be excluded from housing schemes due to local connection rules. This collaborative approach strengthens corporate parenting responsibilities and promotes stability for young people leaving care.
9. A Specialist Youth Adviser at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) reviewed the protocol against best practice and statutory code of guidance. They praised how the voices of young people have shaped the protocol and the clear commitment to continue learning from lived experience through the delivery of the protocol.
10. The option for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to remain involved post-18 as advocates is a strong feature as is joint Housing and Childrens Social Care oversight for situations where a young person is at risk of losing accommodation. There is a proactive approach ahead of the Childrens Wellbeing and Skills Bill.
11. The revised protocol was approved in January 2026 with joint training around implementation already begun.
12. The most notable change for young people will be the joint housing assessment itself, no longer is a stand-alone process, but now integrated within the young person's Child In Care Review that occurs closest to their 17th birthday. This prevents the young person from having to tell their story multiple times, it allows the housing

services and other relevant partners to get a fuller more holistic understanding of background and support needs more seamlessly.

13. Importantly, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) remain involved with the young person post 18 years if their housing situation remains unresolved.

Summary of Key Changes:

14. Expanded Scope and Terminology

The updated protocol explicitly includes Adult Services as a core partner, reflecting a broader cross-council commitment.

15. Recognition of Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic

The new protocol formally recognises care experience as a protected characteristic, emphasizing the need to address discrimination and disadvantage faced by care experienced young people and to empower their voices in service planning.

16. Enhanced Accommodation Planning and Risk Assessment

The updated protocol introduces detailed guidance on House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) placements, including risk assessments and contingency planning. It also strengthens the role of the Accommodation Planning Panel, adding operational decision-making and tracking mechanisms for oversight and strategic commissioning.

17. Intentionality Test and Homelessness Decisions

No longer makes intentionally homeless decisions for care experienced young people, anticipating legislative changes and ensuring that intentionality is not a barrier to support.

18. Performance Monitoring and Data Use

There is a new section on performance data review, with quarterly and monthly monitoring of homelessness applications, tenancy breakdowns, and outcomes for young people. This data is used to inform service delivery, commissioning, and continuous improvement.

19. Wider Partnership and Co-production

The updated protocol commits to a wider partnership approach, including voluntary and community sector involvement, and embeds regular consultation and co-production with care experienced young people to shape future practice and protocol revisions.

20. Extended emergency accommodation offer

When individuals over 21 become homeless, Children's Services provide emergency relief pending a full assessment. Initial trials show this approach is low cost, low risk, and requires no extra resources.

Children's Wellbeing and Skills Bill – Housing Protocols for Care Leavers

21. The forthcoming Children's Wellbeing and Skills Bill introduces several key provisions that will strengthen housing protocols for Care Experienced Young People. Whilst many are already embedded in current practice, the updated protocol will ensure BCP implement practice ahead of the requirement, strengthening this assurance and compliance.

22. Care Experienced Young People under 25 will no longer be deemed “intentionally homeless,” ensuring they cannot be refused housing support on grounds of fault. This change reinforces their entitlement to secure accommodation. The Council has not made such decisions for many years.
23. Local authorities will have a legal duty to assess and provide “Staying Close” arrangements where needed. This includes tailored move-on housing and ongoing support to promote stability after leaving care.
24. The Bill mandates that every local authority’s Local Offer for Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) must include clear information on housing support, alongside education, employment, and health services. This ensures consistency and transparency across different areas.
25. Corporate parenting responsibilities will be broadened to include housing departments and other public bodies, embedding joint accountability for housing outcomes and homelessness prevention.
26. These measures will underpin joint housing protocols by creating enforceable standards, improving coordination between services, and guaranteeing Care Experienced Young People receive priority and continuity in housing support.
27. Key developments with the BCP updated protocol includes formal dispute resolution mechanisms, enhanced training and support for staff, and improved monitoring of outcomes. These changes aim to ensure consistency across our offer and strengthens the safety net for vulnerable young people.
28. Support for planning independence is embedded throughout housing pathways. This includes proactive joint assessments, pathway planning, and regular visits by social workers or personal advisors. The recommissioning of housing-related support services will further enhance preparation for independent living, ensuring young people have the skills, confidence, and stability needed to thrive.
29. To remain effective, the protocol will evolve alongside policy and resource changes. Continued prioritisation of feedback from young peoples experiences, early intervention and housing planning, trauma-informed approaches, and data-driven reviews will improve housing stability.

Young Peoples Feedback on housing experiences

30. The voice of young people is integral to shaping the protocol, housing policy and practice. Feedback has highlighted gaps in information, unclear housing pathways, and inconsistent communication, which can lead to stress and unsuitable placements. Young people have also expressed concerns about inadequate preparation for independence and challenges with grants for setting up home. In response, both services are committed to providing clearer, accessible information, improving pre- and post-move support, and embedding trauma-informed approaches in service delivery.
31. Young people shared a range of feedback of their housing experiences to ensure new arrangements could be considered to improve their move to greater housing independence.
32. Some Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) find housing terms and processes confusing. Current information is not sufficiently clear or accessible, leading to stress

and misunderstanding. Whilst feedback also identified some housing offers were felt to be inconsistent and poorly communicated, young people often felt pressured to accept unsuitable accommodation often due to limited choices of housing options.

33. In response, updated clear, consistent, and accessible information on housing options and processes will be provided as part of the new protocol implementation. The updated protocol ensures that conversations regarding housing will be integrated into independent pathway planning.
34. Many young people feel unprepared for living on their own, as important skills like budgeting, setting up utilities, and managing a home are often not taught thoroughly. The tenancy training provided through AQA does not suit everyone's needs. In response, Housing and Children's Services are exploring new ways to help young people get ready for adulthood, such as developing drop-in workshops rather than sticking to the old formal methods. They also hope that having Housing Officers involved in Looked After Children's Reviews at age 17 will make sure each young person's pathway plan reflects their progress toward independent living, ensuring support is offered in a truly person-centred way.
35. The transition to independence causes high stress and affects mental health. Young people want clarity, consistency, and better communication. The support before and after moving, with proactive planning and communication will be considered as part of the recommissioning of the housing related support pathway for young people. Young people can access support from their personal advisor, with dedicated housing related support also available should they require it.
36. Embedding continuous learning from reviews, (including Serious Case Reviews) and the lived experiences of young people is critical to shaping housing policy and practice. Their feedback ensures that the protocols remain responsive to real challenges, promotes co-production in decision-making, and strengthens accountability across services—ultimately leading to better housing outcomes and smoother transitions to independence.

Housing Options Pathways for Care Experienced Young People

37. Providing a range of housing options and choices for Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) is challenging and often difficult to achieve due to the market conditions. However local policies and the local strategic housing approach which prioritises CEYP for accommodation means access to supported housing, shared living arrangements, independent flats, and access to social or private rented housing is achieved. Housing pathways are needs-led and designed to avoid crisis, with additional priority awarded to CEYP in social housing allocations.
38. The updated protocol ensures priority access to housing options and coordinated planning between Housing and Children's Services. Housing pathways are designed to be needs-led, avoiding crisis placements and promoting stability through early intervention and joint assessments. These pathways include a range of options tailored to individual circumstances, from highly supported environments to independent living arrangements.
39. One of the most successful options is Staying Put, which enables young people to remain in their foster home beyond the age of 18. This arrangement provides continuity and stability during a critical transition period, maintaining trusted relationships and reducing the risk of homelessness. Staying Put allows Care

Experienced Young People additional time to develop essential life skills—such as budgeting and household management—while benefiting from ongoing support. Evidence shows that this approach leads to improved outcomes in education, employment, and mental health compared to abrupt moves into unsupported accommodation.

40. Other housing pathways include Supported Lodgings, where young people live with a host family or individual offering light-touch support; Specialist Supported Housing, commissioned by the Council for those with higher support needs; and Independent Flats, often with floating support for those ready for solo living. Shared living arrangements and access to the private rented sector also form part of the offer, although affordability and supply remain significant challenges.
41. To complement these options, the Council commissions specialist and supported housing services that provide tailored housing-related support, including budgeting advice, education and employment assistance, and emotional support. These services are subject to robust contract monitoring and compliance checks to ensure quality and safety. Recent regulatory changes, such as mandatory Ofsted registration for providers of supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds, have strengthened oversight and improved standards.
42. Support for planning independence is embedded throughout these pathways. Proactive joint assessments, pathway planning, and regular visits by social workers or personal advisors ensure young people have the skills, confidence, and stability needed to thrive. The recommissioning of housing-related support services will further enhance preparation for independent living.
43. Comparison of Housing Options for Care Experienced Young People

Housing Option	Description	Key Benefits
Staying Put	Remain in foster placement beyond 18	Stability, trusted relationships, gradual independence
Supported Lodgings	18 yrs plus - Live with a host family or individual with light-touch support	Community integration, semi-independent living
Specialist Supported Housing	Commissioned services offering tailored housing-related support	Intensive support for complex needs, safeguarding assurance
Independent Flats, social or private rent	Self-contained accommodation with floating support	Promotes independence, suitable for those ready for solo living
Shared Living / HMOs	Shared accommodation with other young people, with support	Affordable option, social interaction, step towards independence
Private Rented Sector	Market housing accessed with financial and housing support	Wider choice, but affordability and security challenges

44. Youth homelessness in Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole spans housing, family support, education, mental health, substance use, youth justice, employment, and complex needs. Multiple agencies are involved, creating risks of duplication, gaps in provision, and inefficient resource use without coordinated leadership.
45. A cross-sector BCP Youth Homelessness Board (YHB) launches in January 2026, sponsored by HRH Prince of Wales's Homewards programme, led by an experienced independent chair, to provide strategic oversight, set priorities, monitor progress, and hold partners accountable, including commitments under the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. It will ensure young people's voices shape decisions and embed shared ways of working across sectors.
46. The YHB will improve coordination, efficiency, and outcomes for vulnerable young people—particularly those with care experience—while strengthening prevention through integrated early help and housing interventions. By fostering collaboration and shared accountability, the Board will drive systemic change and improve life chances across BCP.

Specialist and Supported Housing Strategy

47. To meet the needs of Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) requiring higher levels of support in accommodation, the Council commissions specialist and supported housing through a range of experienced Housing Support providers.
48. A Supported & Specialist Housing Strategy will be considered by Cabinet later this year, this will provide a ten-year commitment to developing specialist housing and commissioning appropriate support services to meet the needs of residents.
49. This is the first such strategy for BCP Council and outlines the projected requirements of a range of resident groups, including Care Experienced Young People, ensuring access to appropriate accommodation and support models that promote independence and community integration. Priorities within the strategy include a focus on Regulatory oversight, housing standards and quality; Co-commissioning; strengthen evaluation and housing delivery.
50. Delivery of the strategy will expect to achieve the following outcomes for young people:
 - Improved housing choice and accessibility for vulnerable groups;
 - Compliance with national standards and licensing requirements, ensuring quality of accommodation and safeguarding vulnerable individuals.
 - Better integration of housing and support services, reducing reliance on institutional care and promoting independence.
 - Enhanced pathways for prevention and move-on, reducing homelessness and improving wellbeing.

Housing Outcomes

51. In the past 12 months, 20% of all social housing allocations to one bedroom properties have been prioritised for Care Experienced Young People (CEYP), with priority for properties agreed jointly between services and the young person as part of their housing planning process.

52. Supported Housing commissioned for young people prioritises Care Experienced Young People (CEYP). Over two thirds of all bedspaces are currently occupied by Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) representing over 40 young people, where dedicated person-centred support is provided alongside accommodation, which can include budgeting advice, help with accessing education or employment, and emotional support. It acts as a stepping stone, reducing the risk of homelessness and promoting positive outcomes during a critical stage of life.
53. Despite improved coordination and housing pathway planning for many young people, Care Experienced Young People's experiences of homelessness remains high. On average 16 young people become homeless or threatened with homelessness each month, with around a quarter as a result of a looked after placement ending. Other notable reasons for homelessness included eviction or abandonment of supported housing and tenancy breakdown. It is expected that embedding the changes to the updated protocol will see this reduce. Instances of Care Experienced Young People rough sleeping continue to be extremely rare.
54. Despite a high rate of homelessness, at time of writing there is one Care Experienced Young Person in their own self contained temporary housing provided by the Council following their homelessness. This position has significantly improved following the recent collaboration in reviewing the protocol.

Summary of financial implications

55. Due to the variety of arrangements by which accommodation for Care Experienced Young People is provided, the financial envelop by which supported housing services are provided is prescribed within block gross contracts. Any temporary accommodation requirements are provided for within the overarching Housing Temporary Accommodation Budget.
56. Housing quality assurance standards are not impacted by the financial resources available to procure the accommodation. The Council ensures it has sufficient resources to discharge its statutory powers with the Housing service directorate.

Summary of legal implications

57. The Council has powers under a range of different housing related legislation to ensure the quality of accommodation provided to Care Experienced Young People is good. There is little evidence to suggest the quality of accommodation provided is not of an acceptable standard requiring enforcement.
58. Teams are trained to identify and respond to any complaints relating to housing legal duties owed to Care Experienced Young People, with practice demonstrated the Council providing support over the statutory minimum.

Summary of human resources implications

Not applicable

Summary of environmental impact

59. Poor quality housing can lead to increased energy consumption due to inadequate heating or insulation. It also often results in impacts on someone's mental and or physical health and safety. Responses to complaints are managed promptly, regular inspections and contract review meetings provide assurance of those standards.

Summary of public health implications

60. Research reveals that Care Experienced Young People encounter higher rates of mental health issues and poorer overall health outcomes compared to their peers. This encompasses elevated risks of mental health disorders, substandard physical health, and greater involvement in crime and unemployment. While many challenges may arise from the circumstances leading to their becoming looked after or during their time in care, the transition to independent living is identified as a critical juncture with significant implications for their overall well-being. Many Care-Experienced Young People lack robust personal support networks, resulting in feelings of isolation and loneliness. Consequently, securing and maintaining stable accommodation can be more challenging due to limited financial or social support. Homelessness or residing in unsuitable accommodations poses a risk to mental health and elevates the likelihood of poor health outcomes.

Summary of equality implications

61. Care Experienced Young People are more likely to face significant equality implications if accommodated in poor quality housing. Specifically experiencing health inequalities, including mental health or chronic illness if standards are not adequate. Poor housing will exacerbate feelings of instability and stress, making it harder to achieve educational and or employment success.

Summary of risk assessment

62. The environmental, health and equality implications discussed above require specific mitigation for care experienced young people when in resettling into accommodation. The provision of housing related support including that from a PA or other relevant partner, manages these risks and helps navigate and access bespoke support available for people, which is embedded within joint working housing plans agreed with a young person at their joint housing assessment.