



Joint housing protocol for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

bcpcouncil.gov.uk

Contents

1.0	Introduction and Overview.....	2
2.0	Legislative Framework	4
3.0	Eligibility	5
4.0	Suitability of Accommodation	5
5.0	Implementation & Development	6
6.0	Accommodation Planning Panel	9
7.0	Additional Support to Care Experienced Young People.....	9
8.0	Moving to Independent Accommodation.....	11
9.0	Responding to Care Experience Young People Leaving Custody.....	12
10.0	Care Experienced Young People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness....	13
11.0	Duty to Refer.....	14
12.0	Care Experienced Young People living outside of BCP	15
13.0	Care Experienced Young people from outside BCP	16
14.0	Local Connection for Care Experienced Young people from outside BCP	Error!
	Bookmark not defined.	
15.0	Escalation	16

Directors' Joint Foreword

This joint protocol sets out how BCP Council will work together to ensure that the housing needs of care experienced young people can be met in a planned and co-ordinated way. It aims to ensure that care experienced young people have access to the right homes and right support at the right time as they transition into adulthood.

Leaving care can be a worrying and uncertain time. BCP Council are committed to ensuring that young people leaving care should receive the same level of support that any young person would expect from a good parent. This joint protocol places care experienced young people at the heart of our work and outlines our commitments as corporate parents to ensure a seamless move towards independence.

Housing is a key foundation for a successful move into adulthood. BCP Council is committed to ensuring that young people leaving care have safe, secure and suitable accommodation with a smooth and well-planned transition. We understand that the journey from care into independence requires co-ordinated support underpinned by person-centred values.

Through effective pathway planning BCP are committed to preventing homelessness from occurring for care experienced young people, and where it does, we will ensure that it is rare, brief and unrepeated.

Through the adoption of this joint protocol, we are committed to working together to ensure that every young person leaving care has the opportunity to live a healthy, happy and fulfilling life.

Kelly Deane	Juliette Blake	Betty Butlin
Director of Housing & Public Protection	Director of Childrens Social Care	Director of Adult Care

1.0 Introduction and Overview

- 1.1 The purpose of this protocol is to set out how BCP Council, Children's Services, Adult Services and Housing Services will work together to provide effective, streamlined, consistent and co-ordinated accommodation and support planning for Care Experienced Young People, from 17 years.
- 1.2 A "care leaver" is legally defined as a young person aged 16-25 who has been in the care of the local authority at some point since their 14th birthday, including a period on or after their 16th birthday. This includes those who were in care immediately before being placed under a Special Guardianship Order, according to the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Care leavers in BCP have requested to be referred to as Care Experienced Young People, as such this is the terminology that will be used within this document.

- 1.3 BCP Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy: Brighter Futures for Our Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People (2023-2026) sets out our commitment and shared aspiration to support young people in their transition to adulthood. It is recognised that robust support and safe, suitable, and stable accommodation is fundamental to achieving this and sets out the expectation that the council will be committed to finding creative ways to allow children to remain in their communities.
- 1.4 Both Children's Services and Strategic Housing & Partnerships have a responsibility towards the practical application of this Protocol within their relevant services. The responsible senior leads are the Director for Corporate Parenting and Permanence in Children's Services and the Director for Housing and Public Protection, and they have overall responsibility for the implementation of this Protocol, with oversight from the Corporate Parenting Board and the Youth Homelessness Board.
- 1.5 The Youth Homelessness Board will review this Protocol annually and agree any changes, informed by feedback from young people, staff, learning from our work with individual young people and data which is provided to the Corporate Parenting Board and the Youth Homelessness Board on a quarterly basis

2.0 Protocol Aims

- 2.1 This protocol aims to support a successful transition to adulthood and independent living, as young people take the important developmental step of managing their own homes and living independently.
- 2.2 The following principles underpin this joint protocol:
 - Recognition that young people leaving care have varying needs and independent living skills.
 - Reduce the number of moves young people experience
 - Ensure well planned moves prior to care leaver's 18th birthday and 28 days before each accommodation move.
 - Increase choice and assessment of young people's needs
 - Reduce homeless applications through early intervention and prevention and through effective transition planning and ongoing support
 - Ensure early planning of support and accommodation options
 - Young people leaving care are provided with as much information, choice and control as possible over where they live
 - Young people leaving care are supported to reflect and learn from mistakes and are given more than one opportunity to succeed in securing and maintaining a home
 - Support is flexible and responsive, jointly provided by council departments to meet individual needs
- 2.3 The protocol aims to:

- Set out our commitment to developing services (our Local Offer) for young people leaving care
- Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of statutory agencies within the legislative framework
- Ensures that all officers understand the importance of joint working alongside the role of partner organisations in achieving positive outcomes
- Prevent homelessness amongst care experienced young people, upon leaving care and thereafter at key transition points
- Supports young people leaving care to become responsible and successful tenants

Recognises the diverse and individual needs of young people leaving care

- 2.4 This Protocol should be considered alongside the Accommodation Planning Panel Terms of Reference, the BCP CEYP Support and Accommodation Offer, and the BCP [Leaving Care and Transition](#) Procedures. Professionals using this protocol should also refer to [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations \(2010\)](#) and [Care Planning Procedures](#). And [The Children Act Guidance and Regulations \(volume 3\)](#).
- 2.5 For young people who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and who meet eligibility criteria under the Care Act (2014), refer to the Preparing for Adulthood Team within Adult Services to ensure the young person has the right expertise within their network. Adult Services work together to meet the needs of care leavers who have additional needs. ([Preparing for Adulthood Team - BCP Council](#))
- 2.6 This protocol has been informed by the views and experiences of young people through a series of workshops. The ongoing review and development of services is essential to meet the emerging needs of our young people. The annual review of the protocol will continue to be informed by the lived experience of our young people, collated through a variety of methods both directly and indirectly. Young people's feedback will be gathered on a quarterly basis and will be gathered through various mediums such as on-line and face to face.

3.0 Legislative Framework

- 3.1 The introduction of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and related initiatives sought to strengthen the Children Act 1989 and provided an opportunity for local authorities to review the services provided to Care Experienced Young People transitioning to adulthood. The following legislation and guidance emphasise the need for joint working between BCP's Housing, Children's and Adults Services, and other statutory, voluntary and private sector partners in preventing and tackling homelessness and meeting housing and support needs more effectively:
- Housing Act 1996 – [Part 6](#) and [Part 7](#), as amended by the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#)
 - Section 1 of the [Homelessness Act 2002](#)
 - [Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities](#)
 - [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

- Section 2 of the [Local Government Act 2000](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children Act 2004](#)
- Care Act 2014
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Joint Housing Protocols for Care Leavers: Good Practice Advice](#)
- [Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#)
- [Local Government Association Corporate Parenting Resource Pack](#)
- [Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers: statutory guidance for local authorities](#)
- [Care Experience Matters: a guide to how prisons, probation and local authorities can work together to support people with care experience in custody and on probation](#)

3.2 BCP Council recognises care experience as a protected characteristic. This recognition acknowledges that care leavers often face discrimination and disadvantage in various areas of life, as such this protocol must recognise the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by care leavers, empower care experienced young people to share their views and work to level the playing field ensuring care leavers have equal opportunities to access safe and comfortable housing.

4.0 Eligibility

4.1 This Protocol applies to all young people that meet the criteria listed below. There are specific statutory functions that apply, which each partner must abide by:

- Care Leavers who are aged 16-25 and previously a Child in Care as defined by the Children Act. This includes eligible, relevant and former relevant Care Leavers.
- Care Leavers in custody.
- Care Leavers from BCP residing outside of the area.
- Care Leavers from outside of BCP, living within the BCP area (subject to eligibility under the [Homelessness Code of Guidance](#))
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking care experienced young people who have leave to remain in the UK

More information around Care Leaver status can be found under [Leaving Care and Transitions](#).

5.0 Suitability of Accommodation

5.1 This Protocol recognises the need to ensure that young people are placed in suitable and safe accommodation.

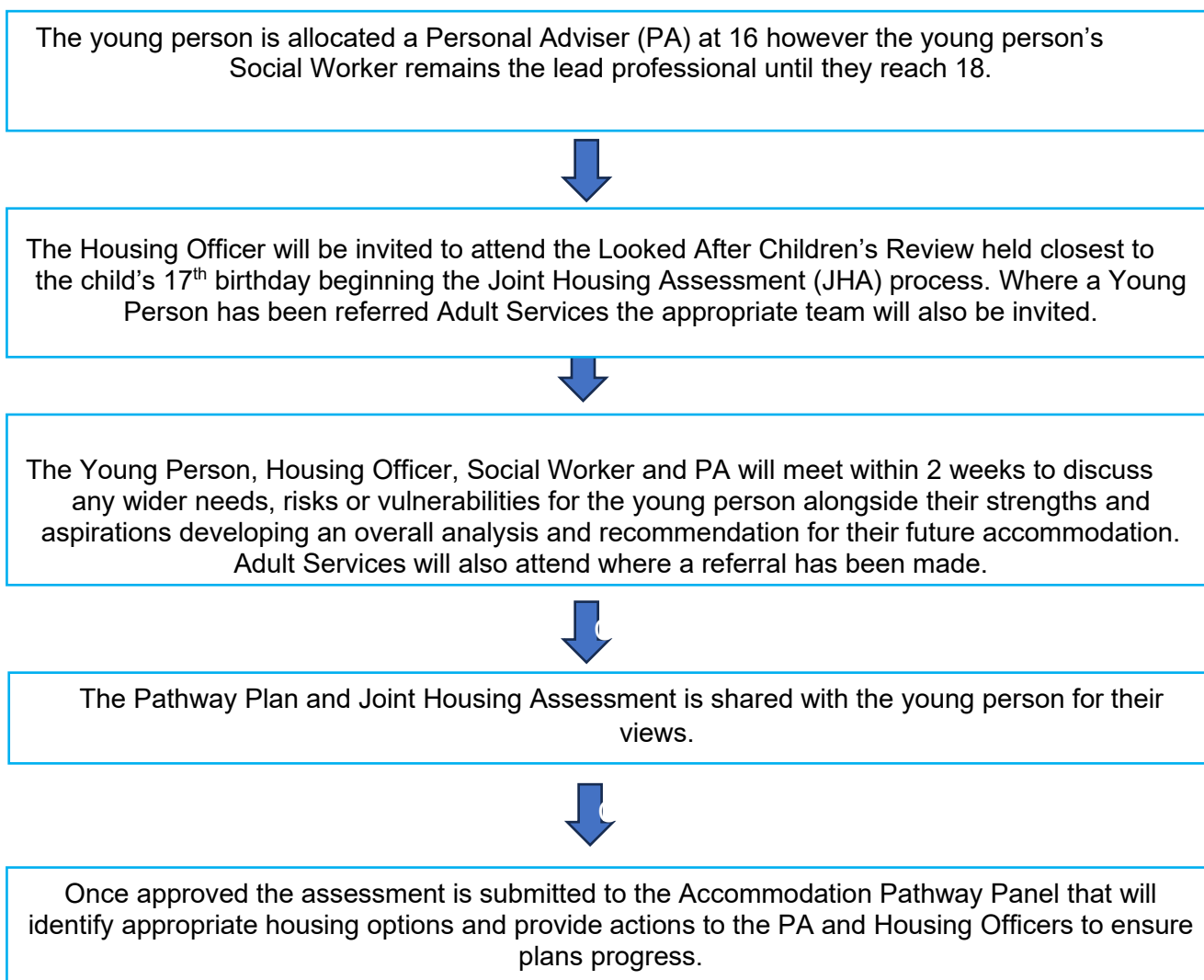
5.2 Pathway Plans and the Joint Housing Assessment shall inform the individual appropriate accommodation pathway for a young person. The multi-agency Accommodation Planning Panel facilitates this process as a single access point for professionals to gain joint

agreement and approval for the most appropriate accommodation pathway for a young person in need of accommodation and support.

- 5.3 The young person's voice is central to the success of their accommodation pathway; this is heard through the Joint Housing Assessment and Pathway Plan which reflect their needs and wishes.
- 5.4 The BCP CEYP Support and Accommodation Offer (Appendix 2) sets out the options which are available to young people. There is also an Accommodation Brochure (Appendix 3) for professionals to use when discussing options with young people.
- 5.5 BCP recognise that many Care Leavers will not wish to or may not have the necessary skills to live independently by the time they leave care. We also recognise that many young people may no longer wish to reside in foster care (Staying Put). We are committed to offering a range of accommodation options that can provide appropriate support to meet varying needs. This aligns with BCP's Corporate Parenting strategy: Brighter Futures for Our Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People (2023-2026).
- 5.6 BCP recognises that the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not appropriate for young people. BCP has access to a range of emergency accommodation services and whilst acknowledging that temporary and emergency accommodation is not ideal, when used Bed and Breakfast accommodation will be as a last resort, on a short-term basis, and agreed at Director level in both Housing and Children's Services. BCP Council are committed to making this safe for the young person whilst new plans can be made with them using immediate bespoke wrap around support.
- 5.7 A House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) is defined as a property occupied by three or more people from two or more households who share amenities such as a kitchen, bathroom, or toilet. This would include occupying a room in a shared house, living in a building that has been converted into multiple flats but do not have their own kitchen or bathroom facilities. Supported living accommodation is often considered an HMO as facilities are shared with other residents. In order to ensure the placement is both suitable and sustainable the teams will seek to match the young person with other suitable residents, although it may not be possible to create perfect matches due to pressure on the availability of accommodation. Whilst HMOs can offer Young People appropriate accommodation options and can address concerns of isolation as well as support needs identified, sharing communal spaces with other residents may present a risk. To mitigate this a risk assessment will be completed in advance of any placement and mitigations will be put in place where necessary, together with a contingency plan should issues arise. The young person will also be provided with safety advice by their PA about living in an HMO. The frequency of visits should be increased during their initial months to ensure they are safe, and their needs met.

6.0 Implementation & Development

- 6.1 Operational Flow Chart



- 6.2 The workflow above enables the multi- agency team around the young person to contribute to the assessment of their housing needs. The Pathway Plan scrutinised within the Looked After Child Review sets out the young person's needs and actions to be taken by the multiagency team to support the young people to develop in their independence and achieve their aspiration without them needing to retell their story.
- 6.3 Usually, a young person will cease to have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IROs), post 18 years, however IROs are responsible for reviewing the Pathway Plan and ensuring that the young person's support and accommodation needs once they leave care are being planned for and acted upon appropriately and without delay. As such if there are concerns that a young person's pathway plan is not progressing and the young person consents, the IRO will remain involved to provide oversight and advocacy.
- 6.4 The Pathway Plan and Joint Housing Assessment, sets out the support and accommodation needs of the young person and may make recommendations about how these needs will be met by services. Accommodation Planning Panel (APP) will provide a

slot for PAs and Housing Officers to discuss where it has not been possible to agree a housing solution and the panel will provide expertise and final oversight for these young people.

- 6.5 To prevent opportunities from being missed where the agreed option is private rented the affordability assessment must be completed by housing within 2 working days of a property being identified.
- 6.6 Where there has been a change of circumstances for a young person who has already had a JHA, a review or updated assessment will need to be completed to reflect their current situation. Significant changes include a young person becoming homeless, a young person being given notice on their property, a change in the young person's needs and new or emerging safeguarding concerns impacted by their housing situation.
- 6.7 It is recognised that some young people including those choosing to remain in staying put arrangements may not require a Joint Housing Assessment until a later point, in these circumstances PAs should make a referral to housing at the earliest opportunity to begin the process.
- 6.8 Contingency planning is essential to mitigate risk of accommodation breakdowns and to avoid homelessness. Early review and support planning provides the opportunity for professionals to review and change the accommodation pathway and support plans with a young person as needed. Contingency plans should be considered as part of the Joint Housing Assessment. Any changes will be documented within the young person's Pathway Plan.
- 6.9 According to Children and Social Work Act 2017, a "corporate parent" refers to the collective responsibility of the council, its members, employees, and partner agencies to ensure the best possible care and safeguarding for children in their care or leaving care. Essentially, it means the council takes on the role of a parent, with all its duties and responsibilities, for these children.
- 6.10 In practice this means our work with young people will uphold the following principles:
- **Collective Responsibility:**
Corporate parenting is not the responsibility of just one department or person, but of the entire council.
 - **Statutory Duty:**
Every member and employee of the council has a legal obligation to act in the best interests of the children, as a good parent would.
 - **Beyond Basic Needs:**
Corporate parenting goes beyond basic care; it involves promoting the child's well-being, encouraging them to reach their potential, and preparing them for independent living.
- 6.11 Housing and Children's Services will provide quarterly training to ensure the protocol is understood and embedded by all staff. The training will be trauma informed supporting

our workforce to recognise the additional Adverse Childhood Experiences of Care Experienced Young People and ways to adapt our communication and processes to support them to have views heard.

7.0 Accommodation Planning Panel

- 7.1 The Accommodation Planning Panel is a multi-agency meeting in which relevant professionals consider recommendations for a young person's accommodation and support pathway. Key representatives who can make operational decisions attend from Children's Commissioning, CEYP Service, Strategic Housing & Partnerships (including Commissioning), and the In-House Fostering Accommodation Support Team. Where relevant, other agencies such as Adult Services, Transitions Team, Health, Probation, etc will attend as required.
- 7.2 The Accommodation Planning Panel will consider available accommodation to meet our young people's needs outlined in the Joint Housing Assessment and where appropriate match the young person with available provision. The panel will be supported by a tracker enabling the panel to track the progress of agreed action, identify emerging needs and forecast future demand to support strategic commissioning.
- 7.3 The PA will keep the young person informed about the panel process and confirm the outcome of the panel's discussion around their accommodation plan.
- 7.4 In the event that a young person is not satisfied with the outcome of the Accommodation Planning Panel, the young person can appeal.

8.0 Additional Support to Care Experienced Young People

- 8.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires Children's Services to publish a Local Offer for Care Leavers, outlining services and support available. BCP Council's [Local Offer Updated Document .docx](#) is available online for Care Leavers and provides information on housing, financial and support services, accommodation options, planning and agencies to contact in the event of homelessness. Care Leavers may also be entitled to a discount on their Council Tax and further information can be found [here](#).
- 8.2 BCP has dedicated Support and Inclusion Officers for CEYP who work alongside other services to provide and co-ordinate support for young people in a range of accommodation options, helping to co-ordinate accommodation moves in a planned way and supporting other professionals to proactively address and mitigate against tenancies at risk, enabling young people to sustain their accommodation and preventing future risk of homelessness.

- 8.3 The use of the AQA model to evidence progress of young people enables informed assessment and planning to underpin any accommodation and support pathway agreed at Accommodation and planning panel.
- 8.4 A dedicated CEYP Housing Options Officer works closely with social workers, PAs and the Accommodation Support Team to carry out Joint Housing Assessments with young people. The Joint Housing Assessment identifies the appropriate housing and support pathway to meet the young person's needs when they leave care. This Housing Officer is a member of the Accommodation Planning Panel and acts as a 'champion' to support Housing and Children's Services colleagues in relation to Housing legislation, guidance and the CEYP Support and Accommodation Offer.
- 8.5 BCP recognises the need to support our Care Leavers in their aspirations and to achieve in life. BCP offers additional financial support to Care Leavers who require accommodation whilst completing higher education, as set out in the Local Offer for Young Adults Leaving Our Care.
- 8.6 There is a robust process in place with Revenue & Benefits to access Discretionary Housing Payments on behalf of CEYP in need of financial support to secure and sustain tenancies. All staff are prompted through the protocol training and local processes to ensure early review and intervention is key to ensure that care leavers can sustain their accommodation, and this includes financial viability and sustainability. The Accommodation Planning Panel considers these as part of the accommodation pathway discussion for every young person.

9.0 Support to Prepare for Independent Living

- 9.1 As corporate parents, we are dedicated to ensuring that our young people progress into adulthood in a planned and supported way. This includes equipping them with the skills to manage their own homes, care for themselves, maintain daily routines, engage with their communities, and pursue employment or further education. This transition is one of the most significant in any young person's life. It is our duty to ensure that young people leaving care feel well-prepared, optimistic about their future, and confident that we will continue to support them as young adults.
- 9.2 Preparing children for independence is a developmental process that takes time, and we recognise that all young people mature at different rates. As they approach the age of 18, our corporate parenting commitment is to provide the support, resources, and nurture needed to help them move into adulthood in the strongest possible position, guided by their Pathway Plan. We are equally clear that our responsibilities do not end at 18. Our young people can and should return to us for support whenever they need it.
- 9.3 To prepare young people leaving care for their first move into independent living, we must consider their emotional resilience, financial literacy, and practical independence skills. These are essential to help them maintain a tenancy and become confident, responsible adults in our communities.
- 9.4 The young person's Social Worker, alongside their Personal Advisor, will assess within a multi-agency team whether the young person is ready to take on a tenancy

of their own. This assessment will be documented in their Pathway Plan and will identify any additional support required as the young person approaches 17 years and 6 months. The assessment will also consider any potential barriers or concerns related to the young person's transition to adulthood and will clearly outline their post-18 plan.

- 9.5 Contingency planning is also essential to reduce the risk of accommodation breakdowns and prevent homelessness. Through strategic oversight within Children's Social Care, we will identify any young people who may be vulnerable to homelessness and apply additional management scrutiny to their Pathway Plans.
- 9.6 Financial support through a 'setting up allowance' to cover deposits and initial rent payments until benefits and bills are in place. In addition Council Tax will be covered up to the age of 25. Further support includes:
- Essential household items and personalisation support to help young people decorate and furnish their homes, fostering a sense of ownership and pride.
 - Independence skills development, delivered by trusted adults such as foster carers or commissioned services. This includes budgeting, managing bills, shopping, meal preparation, and home maintenance.
 - Semi-independent living placements for those assessed as ready before age 18, with tailored support focused on preparing for full independence and tenancy management.
 - Dedicated housing support from Personal Advisors and Housing Options Officer, who will guide care leavers through housing registration, applications, and bidding processes.
 - Pre- Tenancy Training Workshops

10.0 Moving to Independent Accommodation

- 10.1 Where an independent tenancy for a young person has been agreed as part of their accommodation pathway the PA and Housing officer will consider the skills, vulnerabilities and needs of the young person. It is unlikely that a young person will be able to access their own tenancy whilst they are under the age of 18 however where it is deemed necessary the support and legal arrangements will be agreed at panel and put in place.
- 10.2 When it is identified that a young person is ready to move onto the next stage of their accommodation pathway this will be planned with the young person, PA, Housing Officer and any other agencies involved, to ensure a move is successful and the young person receives the support they need with the move and thereafter in their accommodation.
- 10.3 Where the assessment recommends social housing, they will be supported to register and a priority banding will be awarded as per the [BCP Council Housing Allocations Policy](#) for care experienced young people. In some cases, owing to the level of needs and risks where it is deemed necessary by the CEYP team and Housing Options, a young person may be awarded a direct let. Please see the CEYP Support and Accommodation Offer document (Appendix 2) for more information.

- 10.4 Where the assessment recommends private rented accommodation the young person will be assisted with advice and guidance around affordability as well as support with upfront payments such as bonds or rent in advance payments. Please see the CEYP Support and Accommodation Offer document (Appendix 2) for more information.
- 10.5 The young person will continue to receive support when they move into their own accommodation. Their support will be delivered through their PA, Young Person Floating Support, and where required 'Always There' carers and an enhanced housing management service where they are a BCP Homes tenant. The levels of support will vary in line with what the young person needs and will include other stakeholders for specialist support. The support package will be reviewed by the PA with the young person and continue as necessary until it is agreed with the young person it is no longer needed.

11.0 Responding to Care Experience Young People Leaving Custody

- 11.1 BCP recognises the need to ensure appropriate pre-release planning is in place for young people who are due to be released from custody, to ensure a smooth transition into safe and suitable accommodation.
- 11.2 When a young person is sentenced to custody, the Pathway Plan will be updated to reflect the significant change. This is the first stage of pre-release planning regardless of the duration of sentencing. Efforts should be made by housing options officers from the offset to gather information alongside the young person's views to allow for sufficient time to plan and explore the likelihood of the options, for example, friends and family, in addition to supported or social housing.
- 11.3 Personal Advisors will be a key link for the young person in assessing the suitability of proposed arrangements including safety planning and potential impact on other householders. Conversations with Housing Options should be included in pre-release planning.
- 11.4 Before a young person is released (at least fifty-six days prior to release), the Personal Advisor should coordinate discussions between Housing Options and the appropriate prison/probation officer to identify accommodation needs early and ensure there is a clear accommodation plan in place. If all efforts to plan a smooth exit from custody are unsuccessful, a Duty to Refer (DTR) must be made to the local housing authority to prevent homelessness and ensure appropriate support is in place.
- 11.5 Both Probation Services and the Youth Justice Service also play a key role in pre-release planning and coordination. This includes contributing to the young person's resettlement plan and ensuring that housing needs are identified and addressed in advance of release.
- 11.6 A Joint Housing Assessment will be undertaken with the young person, their PA, allocated Housing Officer and their Probation or Youth Justice Officer. This will identify the young person's accommodation and support needs to inform the recommended accommodation pathway for agreement at the Accommodation Planning Panel. The young person's Pathway Plan and Personal Housing Plan will reflect the recommendations.

- 11.4 Where a Joint Housing Assessment and Pathway Plan were completed prior to the period of custody, these will be reviewed and updated with any necessary changes to reflect the young person's current needs and to inform a review discussion at the Accommodation Planning Panel.

12.0 Care Experienced Young People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

- 12.1 BCP Council has a duty under both Homelessness legislation and as a corporate parent to ensure the best interests of the young person are accounted for, encourage the young person to express their wishes and feelings and to promote high aspirations and seek the best outcomes for Care Leavers. Further information can be found in [Chapter 22 of the Homelessness code of guidance](#).
- 12.2 Former relevant Care Leavers aged between 18 and 25 (defined under the Children's Act (Leaving Care) who are owed a service by BCP Council may present at Strategic Housing & Partnerships if they are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Housing duty staff will carry out an assessment to determine homelessness. As a care leaver, the young person may be able to get assistance from the CEYP Team, depending on their circumstances. The Housing duty worker will make the young person aware of this and request consent for their circumstances to be shared with their PA. If consent is given, Strategic Housing & Partnerships will work in conjunction with the PA to review their accommodation plan and identify suitable accommodation or work to prevent homelessness.
- 12.3 As this would be a significant change of circumstances a renewed Joint Housing Assessment should take place.
- 12.4 Prevention work will include collaborative working alongside council agencies (such as the CEYP team, Strategic Housing & Partnerships) to:
- Provide support to help sustain a tenancy, including specialist services
 - Consider use of Discretionary Housing Payments / Children's Services funding to address rent arrears or use alternative Payment Arrangements to enable Universal Credit (UC) housing costs to be paid direct to landlords
 - Liaise with the young person's PA, landlord and other agencies to help address concerns.
- 12.6 Accommodation options within BCP's commissioned services will be considered in the first instance, to prevent a housing crisis. In some instances, it may not be possible for the panel to identify accommodation within existing services for young people in a planned way; in which case joint work and consultation with the Strategic Housing & Partnerships will be undertaken to determine appropriate, safe accommodation.
- 12.7 Strategic Housing & Partnerships will consider whether there is a duty owed to the young person under Part 7 of the 1996 Act to secure interim accommodation. Strategic Housing & Partnerships will consult with the young person's PA to discuss suitability and vulnerabilities of young people before making an offer of temporary accommodation.

- 12.8 When prevention or relief duties are triggered a Personalised Housing Plan (PHP) for the young person will be developed. Strategic Housing & Partnerships will align this with the young person's Pathway Plan and accommodation pathway plan, therefore discussing and sharing information about the Housing Plan with their PA. The PA will be included in ongoing reviews of the PHP for the young person.
- 12.9 If Strategic Housing & Partnerships places a young person in temporary accommodation in an emergency, additional support services will be put in place and reviewed thereafter at the Accommodation Planning Panel, along with an updated accommodation plan.
- 12.10 Strategic Housing & Partnerships must be aware of their duties to Care Experienced Young People and their priority need status in relation to the needs and experiences of Care Leavers. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill intends to disapply the Intentionality Test for all Care Experienced Young People in scope of corporate parenting duties. In practice BCP do not make intentionally homeless decisions for care experienced young people and have not done so since 2023. It is therefore critical that Housing and Children's Services work together to ensure Care Experienced Young People have the correct support to prevent them from becoming homeless. PA's should provide information that assists towards decisions about the suitability of accommodation, and in the event of a high risk tenancy breakdown (that would ordinarily have been subject to an Intentional Decision), Heads of Service in both Housing and Children's must continue to have oversight and sign off of new accommodation plans, considering any gaps in support need and agreeing the suitability of the next placement.
- 12.11 Whilst housing have a duty to offer appropriate provision to a Young Person the Young Person has the right to decline. If this occurs, prior to the discharge of any homelessness duties, the Housing Options Officer will write to the young person outlining the impact of their decision and the PA will support the young person to understand the offer and their rights. The offer will be held open for a reasonable period to allow the young person time to consider their decision and access advocacy support further assist them to understand their rights. Young people should be encouraged to accept an offer and exercise their right to a statutory review if they disagree with the suitability of any offer made to them under homelessness legislation.
- 12.12 Rough sleeping - Joint working between children's services, housing options and the local rough sleeping outreach services delivered by St Mungo's, will ensure that necessary steps are taken to identify care leavers sleeping rough and support them into suitable and sustainable accommodation with the required level of support. If through outreach St Mungo's identify a care experienced young person sleeping rough contact will be made with Housing Options to arrange for a joint assessment. Where the individual sleeping rough is from another local authority area, contact will be established with the parent authority (with the customer's consent) by their Housing Options Officer. Where there is a safeguarding concern, consent is not required but contact should be made via the local authority leaving care service to the parent authority. Where appropriate and safe to do so a supported reconnection will take place.

13.0 Duty to Refer

- 13.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places duties on local housing authorities to intervene at an early stage to prevent homelessness and provide homelessness services to all those who are eligible. The 'duty to refer' responsibility helps to ensure that services are working together effectively to prevent homelessness by ensuring that peoples' housing needs are considered when they come into contact with public authorities. All Duty to Refer are received by Strategic Housing & Partnerships within BCP Council.
- 13.2 A duty to refer should only be made for a care experienced young person where they require homelessness intervention and are not already open to Strategic Housing & Partnerships and don't have in place an accommodation and support pathway agreed through the accommodation planning panel.
- 13.3 Early review and support planning is detailed within the Accommodation Planning Panel documents and provides the opportunity for professionals to review and change the accommodation pathway and support plans with a young person as needed to prevent homelessness.
- 13.4 Where there is an immediate and unplanned loss of accommodation a duty to refer may have to be made and the young person's accommodation pathway reviewed and updated at the Accommodation Planning Panel as a result.
- 13.5 When a young person approaches a service outside of Housing and is at risk of homelessness, the service should ascertain details regarding their circumstances and consider, with appropriate consent, as to whether a Duty to Refer needs to be completed. The service should ensure that the young person is fully aware of the purpose of the duty to refer and gives consent to share and submit the required information.
- 13.6 Strategic Housing & Partnerships will ensure that the young person is made aware of the next step in the process and that a joint assessment will be carried out or an existing one reviewed with their social worker/personal advisor to agree the next course of action to be taken. This could include prevention work, a re-referral into the Accommodation Panel or further work by Housing to consider whether there is a duty owed to the young person, under Homelessness legislation.
- 13.7 Information on Duty to Refer received will be shared at the Accommodation Planning Panel for further action to be taken as necessary. For information and guidance on the Duty to Refer please access the government legislation via the link [A Guide to the Duty to Refer](#).

14.0 Care Experienced Young People living outside of BCP

- 14.1 In some instances, it may be beneficial or in line with the wishes and feelings of the young person, to remain or move to another local authority area. Reasons for moving out of area or remaining out of area are dependent on individual circumstances but examples include their care placement was out of area, family connections to another area or to attend education or employment.

- 14.2 If a young person wishes to remain in an area outside of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, planning is essential to secure appropriate accommodation and support to meet their needs. For all young people aged 17 and over cases should be presented at the Accommodation Planning Panel at the earliest opportunity where this has been identified through their Pathway Plan to ensure that the social worker / PA can make enquires as to housing options in the area alongside discussions with the Leaving Care Teams of both LAs.

15.0 Support for 21-25 year olds

- 15.1 If a care experienced young person becomes homeless at the age of eighteen, nineteen or twenty, they will automatically be viewed as being a priority need. If a care leaver becomes homeless at the age of 21 or over, they will be assessed to determine whether they are considered vulnerable under homelessness legislation. BCP Council applies a local commitment to support care leavers up to the age of 25 and Children's Services will step in support with immediate homelessness where this is assessed to be appropriate.

16.0 Care Experienced Young people from outside BCP

- 16.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act placed additional duties on local authorities to respond to housing needs of Care Leavers who live outside of the local authority that looked after them (or parent authority). The parent authority will owe the care leaver a duty as a former relevant young person and they will retain a local connection to their parent authority until their 21st birthday.
- 16.2 In addition, a Care Leaver can also have a local connection to the local authority where they were resident for a continuous period of 2 years, provided at least some of that time was when they were under the age of 16.
- 16.3 If a care leaver living in the BCP area, but away from the 'parent' authority presents as homeless, Strategic Housing & Partnerships will assess their circumstances and, if consent is given, contact the personal advisor from their parent authority to ensure the young person is aware of the Offer for care leavers in their 'parent' authority. If temporary accommodation is required, Strategic Housing & Partnerships will conduct an assessment of need around accommodation and support. If requested, BCP's CEYP team may be able to assist with duty tasks to help support the young person (i.e. arranging transport, monies, etc).
- 16.4 If the Care Leaver is found to not have a local connection to the BCP area, Strategic Housing & Partnerships will consider how to best support the care leaver, including consideration of short-term temporary accommodation, alongside discussion with the parent authority and relevant personal adviser.

17.0 Escalation

- 17.1 Where Housing Officers and PA's do not agree on the recommendations from the Joint Housing Assessment, they should request review at Accommodation Planning Panel for oversight and support.
- 17.2 Where there is disagreement between professionals about the needs and risks of the young person and what action should be taken the Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole (BCP) Multi-agency Escalation Procedure will be followed. ([Escalation Policy](#))
- 17.3 Pathway Plans and Joint Housing Assessments are undertaken collaboratively with young people and their views are paramount and should be clearly recorded. If, however, a young person is not in agreement with the recommended outcomes and this cannot be resolved, they can make a complaint under BCP's Complaints Procedures. There is a statutory process for young people to make a complaint and further information can be found [here](#).
- 17.4 In the event of a young person or their representative disagreeing with the outcome of a Housing decision under the Housing Act 1996 then the statutory appeal process will apply. What the applicant and/or their representative must do and by when is set out in the decision letter they receive. The young person's PA will support them with this process.
- 17.5 All Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People are entitled to receive independent advocacy. It is the responsibility of the social worker or PA to ensure this is offered and make a referral for advocacy support through ART. Advocacy should be discussed throughout the JHA process to ensure young people are aware of their entitlement to this support.

18. Monitoring and Implementation

- 18.1 This protocol will be reviewed annually by the Youth Homelessness Board. Children's Services and Strategic Housing & Partnerships will jointly oversee the monitoring, evaluation, and review of the protocol. If there are changes to legislation, policy, or roles and responsibilities, the protocol will be updated and agreed upon by all relevant parties.
- 18.2 Organisations, and services working in line with this protocol are encouraged to provide feedback, which will be used together with performance data and service user feedback to:
- Improve service delivery
 - Inform future commissioning decisions
 - Support strategic planning across BCP

The protocol will also help gather evidence on key issues such as:

- The number of care leavers at risk of homelessness.
- Tenancy breakdowns amongst care leavers.

This data will support the development of new services or the remodelling of existing ones. Data will be drawn from the Housing Performance Dashboard, which contributes to

the Homelessness Case Level Information Classification (HCLIC) quarterly statistics and annual HCLIC Care Leaver tables.

18.3 Performance Data Review: The following performance data will be reviewed quarterly via the Youth Homelessness Board, as well as through monthly internal Performance Monitoring reviews:

- Number of homeless applications from care leavers
- Number of applicants where last settled accommodation was a looked after placement
- Households owed a prevention duty (including reasons for loss/threat of loss of last settled home)
- Households owed a relief duty (including reasons for loss/threat of loss of last settled home)
- Reasons for the end of prevention and relief duties
- Accommodation secured at the end of each duty
- Decisions on duty owed at the end of the relief stage
- Reasons for the end of the main homelessness duty
- Number of care leavers placed in unsuitable accommodation
- Number of rough sleepers identified who are care experienced, broken down by age

18.4 To ensure the protocol is embedded across services, the following training and implementation activities will take place:

- Face-to-face and virtual training sessions covering statutory duties and key responsibilities across Housing Options and Children's Services
- Inclusion of the protocol in induction training for all relevant staff
- Team meeting briefings across all relevant service areas
- Service events to promote awareness and understanding
- The protocol will be made publicly available online for young people, officers, and partner agencies
- An easy read accessible version of this protocol will be developed and made available for young people

18.5 We will use the data to provide insights to inform and update our protocol and associated processes. This includes identifying areas of strength and those requiring improvement, ensuring that our approach remains responsive and effective.

18.6 We are committed to embedding a culture of learning and reflection, where feedback directly shapes practice. Crucially, we will incorporate the voices and lived experiences of care experienced young people throughout this process, ensuring their perspectives are central to any changes made. This will be achieved through regular consultation, feedback sessions, and co-production opportunities, enabling young people to influence the services that support them.

19 Wider Partnership Approach

- 19.1 BCP is committed to working in partnership to prevent homelessness and this is reflected in both our well-established Homelessness Delivery Board, Homelessness Partnership and Forum and the recently relaunched Youth Homelessness Board. We recognise the importance of a partnership approach in preventing homelessness and developing effective and sustainable pathways out of homelessness. As such we recognise the importance of working collaboratively with our wider partners, including housing providers and voluntary and community sector, to improve our understanding of the needs of care experienced young people and to both further develop and improve our offer and support.
- 19.2 We will take into account the views of wider partners when reviewing this protocol and work to strengthen our wider approach to the prevention of homelessness for care experienced young people through tenancy sustainment, targeted pre-eviction interventions and crisis prevention.