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Introduction

This is a protocol between Children's Social Care and Housing services covering the arrangements for care leavers transitioning to independent living. The protocol sets out how the services will work together to assess housing options and support care leavers into appropriate accommodation and ensure the effective management of housing crises for young people where they occur. It seeks to proactively identify care leavers at risk of homelessness and act to prevent it. Where care leavers do become homeless, the protocol seeks to ensure a swift, safe, and integrated response.

The protocol has been written for:

- Young people leaving Croydon's care.
- Young people up to the age of 25 owed a duty under the Leaving Care Act 2000
- Children's Social Care and Housing Teams
- Voluntary sector advice, support and accommodation providers
- Other statutory services, e.g., Youth Offending Service

1. Legislative Framework

- [Housing Act 1996](#) - Part 6 (Allocations) and Part 7 (Homelessness), as amended by the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#)
- [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) - sections 1, 2 and 3

The following is a list of relevant statutory guidance:

- [Homelessness code of guidance](#)
- [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers](#)
- [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#)
- [Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers](#)
- [Extending Personal Adviser support for all care leavers to age 25](#)
- [Local offer guidance](#)

The protocol has also been developed taking account of the non- statutory guidance 'Joint housing protocols for care leavers: good practice advice'.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (CSWA) strengthened the role of local authorities as corporate parents and applies to all local authorities as set out in section 1(3) of the Act.

Corporate parenting means local authorities doing the most they can for looked after children and care leavers, to give them the same opportunities as other children and promote the best possible outcome. As a corporate parent we are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were our own.

The Act sets out corporate parenting principles to be applied when supporting children in care and care leavers. In carrying out their functions, the local authority must have regard to the following needs:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and care leavers.
- to encourage those children and care leavers to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and care leavers.
- to help those children and care leavers gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and care leavers.
- for those children and care leavers to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- to prepare those children and care leavers for adulthood and independent living

The DfE statutory guidance on applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers stresses the importance of joint working in supporting care leavers to navigate their way through the transition to adulthood:

“Good preparation, a gradual transition and flexible ongoing support are key to helping care leavers achieve a successful move to independent living. The most effective local authorities establish joint working arrangements between children’s services, housing and other specialist services to help care leavers prepare for the realities of living independently, involve them in planning and decisions.

about their housing options, ensure suitable housing and support is in place and are ready to respond with contingency arrangements if things do go wrong. (Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers - Chapter 2).”

The CSWA also extended the provision of Personal Adviser support to care leavers up to the age of 25, whether or not they are in education or training, which the care leaver can choose to take up. Local authorities have a duty to provide care leavers with Personal Adviser support and a pathway plan up to their 21st birthday.

For care leavers aged 21 or over the duty to assess needs and develop and keep under review a pathway plan – apply only where the young person requests support.

It is therefore important that joint housing protocols cover the support available from a local authority area to care leavers up to the age of 25.

The Local Offer

All local authorities have a legal obligation to support young people making a transition from care to independence. Local authorities are required under section 2 of the CSWA to publish a local offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers.

The local offer should provide information about the Care Leavers statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support available. It should set out 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.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) amended the Housing Act 1996, introducing significant new duties for local housing authorities and partners. Particularly relevant for care leavers are:

- a duty to provide advice and information on homelessness free of charge to all residents, including advice to meet the needs of care leavers.
- duties to help prevent and relieve homelessness for those who are eligible irrespective of priority need or intentional homelessness. Provision of a Personalised Housing Plan to applicants threatened with homelessness or homeless, which sets out the steps the local authority and applicant will take to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- changes in local connection requirements for care leavers which provide more choice to those who have lived out of the placing authority area, or who are looked after by a county council within two-tier areas.
- a ‘duty to refer’ placed on specified public bodies, including children’s services, where their service users are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance was revised in 2018 to reflect changes introduced by the HRA with chapter 22 of the Code focusing 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 authorities and children’s services authorities 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.

The protocol sets out the processes that the council will follow to support care leavers to transition to independent living and avoid homelessness. This joint protocol is an opportunity to bring together staff from across services and to build shared responsibility for supporting care leavers through a successful transition to adulthood and independent living.

2. Aims and Objectives

Aims

To ensure the effective discharge of corporate responsibilities between Housing Services and Children's Social Care by jointly addressing the diverse accommodation needs of young people leaving care.

To prevent care leavers becoming homeless

To support young people to become responsible and successful tenants.

Due to the diverse needs of care leavers and the way in which these will change over time, a range of accommodation options will be required.

The protocol will work at a number of levels:

- Undertaking joint Housing / Young People's team assessments of individual housing need;
- Monitoring and reviewing the accommodation needs of care leavers;
- Ensuring that the right housing option is given to a care leaver recognizing their individual wishes but also understanding the provision available of different accommodation types;
- To ensure bed and breakfast accommodation is only used in exceptional circumstances;
- Joint work to ensure that young people are accommodated in safe environments which meet health, safety and wellbeing requirements.
- Ensuring that holistic tenancy sustainment is available for all care leavers for as long as necessary.

Objectives

- To jointly assess and meet the diverse housing and support needs of young people leaving care, through the application of a clear consistent process.
- To ensure care leavers achieve a successful transition into independent living through support, preparation, and provision of suitable accommodation.
- To identify gaps in service provision for young people and to work together with other agencies to address these gaps, feeding information into the relevant strategies.
- To reduce the likelihood of a care leaver becoming homeless and where this cannot be prevented ensure that a rapid assessment can be carried out.
- To jointly ensure that all staff are aware of the housing needs of young people leaving care and the obligations of each agency to address these needs.

3. Transitions planning for care leavers before they leave care.

The council is committed to supporting all our care leavers to ensure that they are provided with appropriate accommodation based on their individual needs. The transition to independent living includes preparation for independence with planned sustainable moves into supported or independent accommodation.

The journey out of care is a particularly important, and sometimes challenging transition where young people can become an adult in one area of their lives, but not in others. For many young people, their transition to adulthood can be extended and delayed until they are emotionally and financially ready, and they have the qualifications they need and aspire to. Securing suitable accommodation for care leavers is therefore much more than just finding them somewhere to stay.

Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a parent. Croydon Council is responsible for their care and should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need. It is important to remember that there is no one appropriate pathway for young people to move to independent living. Leaving care too early presents looked after young people with significant challenges which will impact on their life chances. Care leavers, like all young people, will make mistakes and require support to learn from their experiences. Young people leaving care may need longer to achieve some of their goals than their peers who have not been in care.

Care leavers need to be well prepared to live independently and their housing needs must be addressed before they leave care via pathway planning and joint assessment. The intention is to ensure well planned moves, which will involve care leavers and take account of their individual needs. Social Workers, foster carers and the professional network will begin transition planning with young people well advance of the expected date of leaving care and plans will be reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer as part of the looked after children's review process.

The pathway plan should be a comprehensive document that identifies the actions and services required to meet the needs and outcomes of the young person during his/her transition into adulthood and independence. Where young people have complex needs and a range of agencies (including for example adult Social Care, Mental Health Services, Housing related support providers, the Youth Justice Service and the National Probation Service) are involved in supporting their pathway plan it may be helpful to agree arrangements for information sharing at a multi-agency meeting to confirm or to review the pathway plan.

Working with the young person and Social Worker / Personal Adviser the aim will be to agree accommodation and support pathways when they leave care which may include:

- The local accommodation options for care leavers, including Staying Put.
- Living away at university and needing vacation accommodation.
- Living in supported lodgings/ Shared lives arrangements.
- Living in supported housing.
- Sharing a house with other people.
- Living in a self-contained social housing or private rented tenancy.
- Returning to live with family.
- Offer of a secure tenancy

4. Helping care leavers to prepare for independent living

A key principle of corporate parenting is a responsibility to prepare children and care leavers for adulthood and independent living. Care leavers who are well prepared and supported through the transition will have greater resilience and be less likely to become homeless after they leave care.

It is essential that young people are supported by the Young People's Team with active programmes which

will support them in their preparation for independent living. There will be a need to build personal and emotional resilience as well as practical knowledge and skills, such as financial confidence, budgeting skills, access to welfare benefits, tenancy rights and responsibilities.

Children Looked After Children's 0-16 Service

The Children Looked After Teams will support children and young people in care, until the age of 16. The children in care Social Workers are responsible for all aspects of the young person's care, including Children Looked After children's reviews, health, education, and future planning.

When a young person is 16, they transition to a Social Worker in the Young People's team who will continue to oversee children social care's statutory responsibilities and ensure a smooth transition to the leaving care service for the young person.

Young People's 16+ Service

The Young People's Service supports young people getting ready to leave care and care leavers up to the age of 25, whether they are in education/ training or not.

The service consists of Social Workers and Personal Advisers (PA) who help young to prepare to live independently and offer advice and support as they leave care.

Care leavers that have been residing out of the local authority area and those in custody are also entitled to receive the same support to prepare for independent living as any other care leavers within the LA.

Personal Advisers will be required to support care leavers in pursuit of their housing options with the local authority where a local connection applies. A young person entitled to leaving care duties under the Children Act 1989 has a local connection to the area of the children services authority that owed them the duties.

Under the Homelessness Code of Guidance - Where a care leaver is aged under 21 and normally lives in a different area to that of a local authority that owes them leaving care duties, and has done for at least 2 years including some time before they turned 16, the young person will also have a local connection in that area. This will entitle the young person to make an informed choice on where they wish to pursue their housing pathway. This should include the Personal Adviser contacting the local authority where the young person resides to explore what accommodation options may be available in advance of them leaving care.

5. Accommodation options for care leavers

The Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and the Secretary of State for Education consider that all young people leaving care should have safe and appropriate accommodation to meet their needs.

A young person's housing options will be considered on an individual basis and based on an assessment of need. For each of the potential options listed below a young person will be supported by their social worker / PA to make relevant applications.

a) Staying Put

A staying put arrangement enables a care leaver to remain living with the foster carer with whom they are placed with when they turned 18. It is an arrangement based upon both parties, that is the young person and the foster carer(s), expressing the wish to enter into such an arrangement when a young person becomes 18. As stated in the good practice guide: *'ultimately it is the young person and their foster carer who make the joint decision to establish the arrangement. This is based on their commitment to each other and applies in the same way whether the foster carer is approved by a local authority or by an independent fostering provider'*.

Staying put is referred to as an 'arrangement' to differentiate it from a foster 'placement'. The young person staying put is no longer a looked after child after they reach 18 years of age. They are a young adult and a care leaver. They are entitled to support as a care leaver up to the age of 25. A staying put arrangement is governed by the care leavers' legislation and statutory guidance which places a duty on the local authority to support this arrangement, meeting the financial costs attached to this.

b) Staying Close

A number of Staying Close pilot schemes are currently operating around England with support from the DfE, helping care leavers moving on from residential care to continue receiving support from their residential home after they have left care.

c) Friends or Family

Some care leavers choose to return to live with immediate or extended family when they leave care. A 'friends or family' arrangement can be an option for some young people. This arrangement can be a temporary one, acting as a bridge to the next accommodation, or as a longer-term solution, depending on what is right for the young person. Support can be provided to the young person and their family to build and maintain positive relationships.

d) Training/Taster flats

Although not currently in place in Croydon, short term training flats for care leavers can help care leavers to gain a sense of the responsibilities that comes with independent living, and experience the reality of living alone, which may identify other challenges such as loneliness, isolation and accessing support. This would ideally be part of the pathway planning and upskilling of young people prior to leaving care and administered by Young Peoples Team.

e) Supported Lodging

Supported lodgings involves a young person still living in a home, with someone there to support them. The living arrangement may involve living with a single person, a couple, and/or with other young people or children. Supported lodgings is normally for young people 16 and over.

Supported lodgings is often seen as a 'steppingstone' to independence, and often is a good opportunity to have a little more time to strengthen their independence skills in a supportive environment, before moving on to full independence

There is an expectation that the young person will financially contribute towards costs such as accommodation, food and bills, to help them prepare for independent living.

f) Commissioned Supported Accommodation

Many care leavers who do not 'Stay Put' or 'Stay Close' will need further accommodation and support beyond their 18th birthday, before taking on their own tenancy. Supported accommodation involves a young person having their own room, sometimes their own kitchen and bathroom with support on site from members of staff.

g) Supported Housing in Croydon

Croydon council currently provides accommodation for those young people in need of accommodation and support. In addition, a supported lodgings provision is available for those young people seeking more independence in a home environment.

h) Shared Lives

The Shared Lives Service in Croydon delivers safe and supported home environments for adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities or mental health needs. In addition, there is specific provision for homeless women who are pregnant or have a child under 5 years and need care and support in preparation for being able to live independently in their own accommodation.

i) Privately Rented Accommodation

The private rented sector can be a suitable option for some care leavers. It can provide the young person with choice regarding the area that they wish to reside in, who they wish to reside with and enables them to find a good fit for their individual circumstances.

In most cases young people leaving care will be ready to move into independent living with the support of Social Care service. If the young person is ready to move-on and have developed the required life skills, such as managing a budget, cooking, cleaning, the council can support them to find suitable private rented accommodation.

Accessing the private rented sector can be difficult without a deposit or previous experience of holding a tenancy. Financial support may be provided from a cash limited budget through a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). These payments can be awarded in addition to any housing benefit and universal credit.

DHP can be awarded for rent in advance and/or deposit but not service charges, gas, electric, food, water rates or shortfall in council tax. You can only receive a DHP towards your rent if you are in receipt of/or will be entitled to housing benefit or Universal Credit with a housing element.

In addition to DHP there is also the possibility of financial support from the Homeless Prevention Service in order to secure suitable and affordable housing in the private sector. The Homeless Prevention Service will discuss this option with the young person and their personal advisor if the young person consents, based on their circumstances at the time.

The shared accommodation rate (SAR) is applied to renters aged under 35 claiming support through Local Housing Allowance (LHA). It adjusts their benefit to the cost of renting a room in shared accommodation, but there is a higher, one-bedroom rate for people who need to rent solo housing who are over 35 years of age. Care leavers can now claim the higher one-bedroom LHA rate up until the age of 25 where rent allowance would revert to the SAR.

j) Social housing

Applications for social housing are based on the social housing allocation scheme operating in the local authority area. Applicants need to be aged 18 or over and comply with the eligibility and qualification criteria of the area concerned. Care leavers aged 18 or over can apply to Croydon or other local authority areas to join the housing register. The Social Worker or Personal Adviser can assist with this.

Croydon Council receives many enquiries from people looking to rent a home in the borough. Like other boroughs, there is a shortage of homes compared with the number of people who need them. Therefore, care leavers are encouraged to continue searching for privately rented accommodation in order to obtain suitable housing.

Applicants will need to demonstrate a local connection with Croydon. Local connection within the terms of the allocation scheme will normally mean that an applicant has lived in Croydon, through their own choice, for a minimum of 5 years up to and including the date of their application, or the date on which a decision is made on their application whichever is later. For purposes of continuous residence, care leavers housed outside the borough will also be considered as having a local connection with Croydon.

For some young people whose support needs are high and accommodation in the private rented sector would have a detrimental effect on their transition to independent living, their housing application will be considered by the Care Leavers Housing Pathway Panel (Section 9) who will determine whether to

award priority for social housing.

The Care Leavers Housing Pathway Panel consists of senior officers from Housing and Social Care Services. The panel assesses each referral individually to ensure the needs of any particularly vulnerable or at-risk young person is addressed.

To be considered for social housing, the care leaver must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Young people subject to Care Orders under section S31 of the Children Act 1989 where the council has parental responsibility (Looked after children).
- Young people with moderate learning difficulties or disability or those who are subject to a statement of educational needs or a psychological assessment.
- Young people with significant mental health issues – who have been involved with CAMHS or CMHT for a period of three months or longer and are continuing to receive treatment.
- Young people with a complex need assessed as requiring independent accommodation with/without support.
- Young people with significant offending behavior, which limits access to other types of suitable accommodation.
- Young people leaving care who are also parents and also meet one other criteria listed (e.g., they or their baby are especially vulnerable).
- Those with other mitigating circumstances.

Care leavers meeting the criteria will be awarded a Band B on the housing waiting list.

Additional priority (Band A) may be awarded to those who; have a local connection by living in the borough continuously for a minimum period of ten years or are in employment for a minimum of 24 hours per week.

Young people in Armed Forces

Croydon Council is committed to supporting forces personnel (including young people in armed forces) and their families settle into suitable accommodation. The council gives special dispensation for social housing to anyone who has served in the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and British Army and have not been dishonorably discharged.

Applications should be made within five years of discharge and could be awarded Band B.

k) University Halls of residence

Most universities can provide places for first-year students in their own halls of residence that are safe, comfortable and good value. These are usually furnished flats with a shared kitchen, toilet, bathroom, possibly a lounge area and en-suites. They can be either catered, part-catered or self-catered, mixed or single-sex.

Universities guarantee that care leaver and estranged students living in university accommodation will have the option to stay on campus for the full year and that you'll be placed in accommodation with the majority of new students. In addition, some of them will waive the usual deposit payment taken as part of the booking process.

As a care leaver, they could be given priority consideration for 365 days per year university student Hall accommodation throughout their academic term.

They will be required to provide a confirmation letter from the Leaving Care team to confirm that they're a care leaver and require accommodation.

For more information about university support for care leavers see [Propel | Become \(becomecharity.org.uk\)](https://propel.becomecharity.org.uk)

I) Shared accommodation for young people with no recourse to public funds

Where the young person's assessed needs at 18 years old and their status will not allow them to have recourse to public funds a focus on the possibility for staying put with their foster carers is considered. When this is not possible a request to housing is made for the allocation of shared housing, until the legal status of the young person is concluded. Continued support and advice is offered as part of the wider Care Leaver Local Offer.

Joint contingency planning

Most care leavers move on from care into independent accommodation without being put at risk of becoming homeless and can sustain their own accommodation with or without support. The pathway plan will detail accommodation needs and the type of housing related support that the young person may require in order to successfully maintain a tenancy.

However, there will always be a need for contingency planning and a readiness to respond to emergencies, including the loss of accommodation as part of the pathway plan.

The Homeless Prevention Service should always be included in the support plan that is put in place on the commencement of the tenancy, ensuring joint meetings take place regularly, between housing, leaving care and the young person, at least quarterly within the first year (during the probationary tenancy).

Both housing and leaving care services should ensure that young people fully understand what is required of them as a tenant, who is to support them, and what they should do in a crisis. The success of tenancies should be monitored by each service, where applicable, and potential difficulties dealt with promptly involving the young person.

Social Housing - New tenant visits will be made by a Tenancy Management Team within 4 – 8 weeks of tenancy commencement if a Croydon Council social tenancy is awarded. Housing associations will offer a similar initial visit. Specific requests can be considered for particularly vulnerable young people.

Private rented or supported housing - The Personal Adviser will make themselves known to the landlord and act as an intermediary if a tenancy is granted in the private sector. The Personal Adviser will also support the young people in maintaining the tenancy.

If there is evidence that a tenancy is unlikely to be sustained, prompt communication between agencies is essential and a review of the pathway plan will be undertaken identifying current and any future needs.

Consultation should take place between all associated services, and agreement reached, prior to any formal action being taken to end a tenancy.

Returning home to live with family does not always work out for young people in the way they had hoped. If a care leaver decides to move home and later decide to change their decision, they should speak to the care leavers service and will be supported to find alternative arrangements.

6. Care leavers leaving custody.

Care leavers leaving custody will need additional support to secure suitable accommodation on release. The Personal Adviser will be responsible for ensuring that accommodation needs are identified early and will work with the Homelessness Prevention Service to ensure care leavers do not leave custody without an accommodation plan in place.

The following public bodies, who may be involved with care leavers, are required to notify a housing authority of service users they identify who may be at risk of becoming homeless:

- Prisons
- Youth offending institutions
- Youth offending team
- Probation service

- Social service authorities
- The secretary of State for Defence

At the point of entry into custody, the Personal Adviser will assist the care leaver with ensuring that the Universal Credit Rent Element continues to be paid, provided the sentence (custodial) is under 6 months, to ensure easy return upon release.

When a young person has been sentenced more than 6 months, twelve weeks prior to release, there should be a meeting called, chaired by the Resettlement Team at the establishment (HMP¹ or YOI²), to discuss the care leaver's release, including discussion of accommodation and it would be expected that the Personal Adviser attends this, alongside other key partners. The Personal Adviser will make contact to confirm a meeting if arrangements have not been made. If the care leaver is a high-risk MAPPA³ offender, they will be able to be referred for and careful consideration given to planning and support for suitable approved Premises, to enhance the efficacy of their Risk Management Plan. This should be completed at least three months prior to release, by their Youth Justice Manager/Probation Officer.

56 days prior to release, the Prison Offender Manager or Resettlement Team, in community probation officer (if the young person will be released on license) responsible for the care leaver whilst in custody, should complete a referral to a Local Housing Authority on behalf of the care leaver. The Personal Adviser from Young People services should ensure that such arrangements/referrals have been made and reflected in the young person's pathway plan.

Throughout the final period of three months, the Personal Adviser can explore all the usual options, for example advice, guidance and offers of suitable accommodation, where appropriate, as for any other young person supported by Young People Services.

There will be greater focus on early joined up work to identify the needs of a young person in order to aid pre-release planning. The aim will be to identify suitable and safe accommodation for the young person in advance of their release to avoid the possibility of rough sleeping/street homeless.

7. Care leavers living outside the children's services authority area.

The Personal Adviser will be required to support care leavers in pursuit of their housing options with the local authority where a local connection applies. A young person entitled to leaving care duties under the Children Act 1989 has a local connection to the area of the children services authority that owed them the duties.

The Homelessness Reduction Act introduced amendments to the way local connection is assessed for care leavers who are homeless. Where a care leaver is aged under 21 and normally lives in a different area to that of a local authority that owes them leaving care duties and has done for at least 2 years including some time before they turned 16, the young person will also have a local connection in that area. This will entitle the young person to make an informed choice on where they wish to pursue their housing pathway. This should include the Personal Adviser contacting the local authority where the young person resides to explore what accommodation options may be available in advance of them leaving care.

Support should be made available to care leavers from other areas living in the borough and there will be an expectation to join up with the Parent LA to so that young people receive the support they want and are entitled to avoid homelessness or rough sleeping.

¹ His Majesty's Prison

² Young Offenders Institute

³ Multi-agency public protection arrangement

8. Croydon Care Leavers Housing Pathway Panel

A specific Housing Pathway Panel is held ensure that all care leavers in Croydon are smoothly transitioned between Children's Social Services and the Homeless Prevention Service, this panel will individually assess all care leavers as they become ready to lead independent lives.

The terms of reference for the pathway panel are set out in Appendix A and the panel meets on a monthly basis.

The purpose of the panel is to create a bespoke housing solution for each young person based on their individual needs. The panel, having due regard to this protocol, will set out the appropriate and available housing options and be the first step in securing a post care housing solution.

It is the intention that all care leavers go through the panel, but it is also recognized that in emergency or exceptional circumstances a young people may need referring to the Homeless Prevention Service outside of the panel set up. In these cases, they will be subsequently reviewed at the next available panel meeting.

All housing solutions provided by the Homeless Prevention Service are done so within a statutory homeless framework that is set out in Section 10. The only housing option that can be provided outside of homeless legislation is an allocation of social housing that may be made at the panel (Section 5j).

Priority need and Intentional homelessness

The application of the statutory homeless framework will consider the needs of Care Experienced young people up to the age of 25 years. The wider council and partnership corporate parenting approach will be applied to ensure that young people are safeguarded and given access to suitable accommodation and support.

The panel therefore acts as a conduit between services and ensures that the needs of care leavers are appropriately assessed before a decision on the type of move-on accommodation that will be offered.

The panel will at make initial determinations on the following housing options.

- a. Allocation of a priority banding on the housing register
- b. Referral for supported housing.
- c. Referral for private rented accommodation with a private landlord either inside or outside of Croydon

Option 'a' will require the care leaver to complete a housing registration application and will then be able to bid for suitable permanent properties.

Options 'b' & 'c' will require a statutory homeless assessment.

Although the panel will make recommendations for housing solutions it must be noted that this is still the first step in determining a young care leaver's housing options and therefore decisions can be changed if a young person's circumstances change. A young person can be brought back to panel at any time even after a housing solution has been given should it be necessary due to a breakdown of the placement or for any other reason.

9. A care leaver's accommodation preferences

There will be no blanket presumption that at 18 years old a young person who has left care will be ready for their own tenancy; this will be a matter of individual assessment.

Options will be based on the care leaver's individual preferences, needs, circumstances, and the local provision available.

The specific needs and circumstances of care leavers will be considered in determining suitability of accommodation in relation to its location. For example, in the absence of strong family support networks they may wish to live as near as possible to another significant adult such as a friend or ex-foster carer; or need to avoid certain locations due to childhood experiences or associations.

10. Statutory homeless assessments

For ease of reference the homelessness 'prevention' and 'relief' duties are described as follows –

Prevention duty – an applicant is threatened with homelessness.

Relief duty – an applicant is homeless.

Where a care leaver is directed to make a homeless application, they will receive a written assessment and a personalised housing plan. The housing plan will set out what housing options are available.

The Personal Adviser will also be involved in the homelessness assessment process and the personal housing plan with the care leaver's consent. The Personal Housing Plan will also be informed by the young person's Pathway Plan provided by Children's Social Care.

Advisory service provided by housing authorities under section 179 must be designed to meet the needs of care leavers in their area (section 179(2)(b)). The Homeless Prevention Service will work with children's services authorities and consult with care leavers themselves to ensure the advice and information is:

- designed and delivered in an appropriate format for the age of the client group.
- available through communication channels which care leavers are most likely to access.
- understood by children's services authority staff.

The initial homeless 'prevention' duty lasts for 56 days (just under 2 months) but it is expected that a housing option can be put in place before the 56 days has expired. Whilst the care leaver is being assessed they would usually remain in their accommodation that has been provided for them by Children's Social Services.

If a housing option has not been secured within the 56-day period, then the duty can be extended if it is likely that a housing option will be available in the near future (within a week or so of the expiry date).

It is not expected that the care leaver will become homeless and have to leave their current accommodation during this assessment period. The purpose of the panel and early notification of care leavers ready for move-on should ensure that there is sufficient time for a housing option to be secured. If, however a care leaver does have to leave their accommodation through an emergency, and no other accommodation can be secured by Children's Social Services, then a homeless 'relief' duty can be taken and emergency accommodation can be provided.

Referrals to other Local Authorities will be made where appropriate, for young people or their household who face domestic and gang related issues. Croydon will ensure that they are represented at MARAC by Children's Services and/or the Homeless Prevention Service.

11. Avoiding the use of Bed & Breakfast (B&B) Emergency Accommodation

It is very important to note that both the Homeless Prevention Service and Children's Social Care want to avoid the use of B&B accommodation for care leavers. Statutory guidance issued to both services sets out that this type of short-term accommodation is not suitable for young people leaving care.

B&B accommodation can be defined as emergency accommodation that can be allocated to homeless applicants as part of an initial homeless assessment duty. For single people it is often in shared accommodation where an applicant has to share facilities with other residents. It offers no support and can therefore be very isolating for a care leaver.

One of the aims of this Protocol is to reduce to zero the number of times a care leaver has had to be placed into B&B accommodation and this will be a key determinant of the protocol's success.

12. Homeless applications outside of the Pathway Panel.

Joint working arrangements between housing and the Young People's aim to identify homelessness risk early and act to prevent it. However, where a care leaver makes a homeless application outside of this protocol then a rapid & safe response must be provided.

Examples may include a prison discharge or eviction from their current supported accommodation due to significant Anti-Social Behaviour.

With consent from the young person, Children's Services will be informed if a young person known to be a care leaver or who says that are a care leaver and is under the age of 25 approaches the Homelessness Prevention Service.

The personalised housing plan should be reviewed and both services will work together with the young person to resolve the housing crisis. All homeless applications received in this way will be subsequently reviewed at the next available panel meeting.

In assessing support need the Homelessness Prevention Team will take particular care in assessing whether a care leaver aged 21 or over is vulnerable, and will consider whether, if homeless, they would be at particular risk of exploitation, abuse or involvement in offending behavior as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered.

13. Homeless application review rights

If a care leaver refuses an offer of accommodation which is made within the aims of this protocol, then they have the right to review the suitability of an offer and appeal any subsequent discharge of the homeless duty. They are required to do this within 21 days of receipt of the decision or offer. Ideally this should be done in writing including all the reasons and any information they think should be considered. The Personal Adviser or significant individual that the young person nominates may support them with this process.

14. Dispute Resolution

Any disputes should be raised with the respective Personal Adviser or Homeless Prevention Officer in the first instance. In the event the matter is not resolved, it should be then escalated to their own respective line managers to discuss, followed up head of service if applicable.

15. Monitoring and Review

The implementation of this protocol will be monitored at both an operational and strategic level and a progress report will be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Board annually. Initially this will take place after 6 months, thereafter, will be reviewed 12 monthly.

Appendix A - Terms of reference Croydon Care Leavers Housing Pathways Panel

Joint London Borough of Croydon Housing and Children's Social Care

Leavers Housing Pathway Panel

Terms of Reference

1. Core Membership

- Homelessness and Prevention Manager/Service Manager Young People's Service (Chair)
- Housing Register & Allocations Manager
- Senior Housing Register & Allocations Officer
- Senior Options & Homeless Prevention Officer
- Team manager from Young People's Service
- Service Manager Placements CSC

Additional Membership Request

- DWP
- Mental Health Practitioner
- Adult Safeguarding Practitioner

2. Purpose

The purpose of the Care Leavers housing pathway panel is to consider the housing needs of looked after children and care leavers and agree housing options to meet their current and future housing needs and facilitate the smooth transition into independence.

3. Objectives

To meet on a monthly basis and discuss cases referred which fall into the following categories:

- All Looked after children aged 17.5 or over who are ready for move-on accommodation as determined by their pathway plan.
- Care leavers at risk of, or are homelessness (aged 25)
- Care leavers that have in the preceding month made homeless applications directly to the Homeless Prevention Service outside of a referral by the panel.
- Care leavers in temporary accommodation
- Care leavers who may meet the criteria under the Council's Social Housing Allocations Policy and have evidenced to PA's that they can meet the responsibilities of a tenancy, and where Band B is advocated for by the relevant team manager.

4. Meeting format

- A shared list of relevant young persons will be provided prior to the meeting, and each case outcome agreed at the meeting.
- The meeting will agree pathways and options for each case.
- Review cases presented at previous meetings where review agreed.
- Review and recommend any policy or protocol changes that will enhance and support wider council strategic objectives.
- Review best practice examples from other LAs/housing organisations to identify opportunities to amend/improve local practice.
- To enable monitoring activity and data collation to inform future service development.

5. Chairing arrangements

Will be on rotation between identified Chairs.

6. Minute taking and administration.

Dedicated business support capacity will be jointly identified to run this panel.

7. Outcomes

The outcomes being sought through the work of the group is the following:

- A case-by-case assessment of care leavers who require suitable housing to enable the Council to meet its statutory duties.
- To provide advice, support, assistance and be committed to, and actively involved in helping to enable young people to move accommodation in a planned manner.
- Improved information systems including clearly documented outcomes of each case assessed and pathways agreed for each care leaver.
- Monthly reporting of case volumes /outcomes in both social care and housing performance reports
- Improved working relationships
- Collation of key themes, or challenges, for discussion at the Corporate Parenting

8. Governance & accountability

The panel will report into the Care Leavers housing pathways strategy task and finish group, and will be reviewed by the group, alongside the development of the joint protocol on a regular basis.

9. Escalation

In the event that agreement in respect of housing pathways for care leavers cannot be agreed at the panel meeting, this will be escalated to Head of Service in housing and children's social care. In the event that a HOS is present at the meeting, or cannot find resolution, this will be escalated to Director level.

10. Review

The effectiveness and membership of the group to be reviewed every 4 meetings.

Appendix B – Using ‘Duty to refer’

1. Overview

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 introduced a duty on specified Public Authorities/services to refer service users, with their consent, who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, to local Authorities.

This duty, s213B Duty to refer became effective on the 1st October 2018.

Public authorities that have a duty include:

- Prisons
- Young Offender Institutions
- Secure Training Centres
- Secure Colleges
- Youth Offending Teams
- Probation Services (including community rehabilitation companies)
- Jobcentres in England
- **Social Service Authorities (both Adult and Children’s)**
- Emergency Departments
- Urgent Treatment Centers
- Hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care.
- Secretary of State for defence in relation to members of the regular armed forces

All care leavers assessed at panel will automatically be treated as having been referred.

If a care leaver needs to be referred to the Homeless Prevention Service outside of the panel arrangements (as set out in 12 of the Protocol) then this process must be followed. If it is an emergency, then the referring officer in Children’s Social Care must also escalate through a team manager to ensure that the young person can be assessed rapidly.

To make the process as simple as possible, all public bodies can send referrals directly to the service through the Duty to Refer process.