

# Family Services

## Document control

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## 1. Introduction

Barnet recognises the value that a strong and stable family life provides to young people aged 16/17, particularly in relation to the quality of their relationships, education, financial security, preparation for adulthood and positive health; this is widely supported by research which tells us that children and young people do better when they remain living within their own families.

As such, we will always strive to find ways to help young people remain living with their families by ensuring they have access to early help services that focus on rebuilding their relationships with their parents/carers or exploring other members of the family who might be able to offer the security of a stable home into adulthood.

We recognise that for some young people, this type of stability and security may not be available to them within their own families, and when this is the case we will assess their needs thoroughly in order to decide the type and level of accommodation and support that will need to be provided to them.

This protocol sets out Early Help, Children's Social Care and Housing Options joint procedure for responding to 16/17 year old homelessness. It covers what will happen from the earliest point of need to the point young people present asking for help and longer term support arrangements.

Our commitment is:

- to ensure that all young people approaching our services for help are treated fairly, with respect and with sensitivity to their age, understanding individual backgrounds or circumstances
- to thoroughly assess a young person's circumstances without prejudice
- to seek to find the best outcome for young people by listening to what they have to say and working in their best interests and in collaboration with them
- to maintain a professional and calm approach towards young people at all times
- to ensure that is safe for young people to return home
- to ensure that accommodation provided to young people is of a good quality
- to ensure that young people are escorted to their accommodation and helped to settle in and/or introduced to those that will be providing day to day support to them; and
- to listen to young people's views and feedback about their experiences.

## 2. Out of hours/Emergency referrals

Outside of office hours, young people will need to call the Emergency Duty Team on (0208 359 2000), all young people who contact the service as homeless will be placed in foster care or in a high support placement until the next working day.

### 3. First Point of Contact

When young people present as homeless and ask for help, our first priority is to ensure that they are safe from harm. We will also make sure, where necessary, they have somewhere safe to stay, where there is an appropriate level of early help/support available to help them cope with living away from home, whilst we assess their needs and explore their circumstances fully.

All 16/17 year olds that are homeless or at risk of homelessness will need to present themselves at Barnet House between the hours of 9am – 5pm where they will meet with a Housing Needs Officer, trained in family mediation, who will ask questions about what has happened to them and obtain contact information for their parents/carers and any other relatives who might be able to support them.

The Housing Needs Officer will establish if the young person is homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. They will explore with the young person and their family if the difficulties that have led to the young person presenting at Barnet House can be resolved and attempt to enable the young person to remain at home, when it is safe for them to do so.

The Housing Needs Officer will consider:

- the young person's history of involvement with services
- family circumstances and composition
- support networks within and outside of the family
- the young person's particular vulnerabilities (i.e. health, mental health and learning needs) and immediate risks (i.e. gangs, safeguarding)
- the young person's education, training or employment status
- the young person's views; and
- the views of the young person's family, particularly those that hold parental responsibility.

If the Housing Needs Officer establishes that a young person can safely return home and is not in need of a statutory assessment of their needs, they will ask for consent to make a referral to MASH to enable early help options to be explored for the young person and their family, including the need for an Early Help Assessment.

All young people found to be in need of accommodation or at risk of imminent homelessness will be referred to MASH, without the need for consent, to enable the commencement of a single assessment by Children's Social Care and Housing Options.

### 4. Emergency Accommodation

Once a young person has been referred to MASH as homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness, the MASH will make a same day allocation to the Social Work Team on duty in Children's Social Care (Duty and Assessment Team). For young people in immediate need of accommodation, the allocated social worker will make an immediate referral to the Placements Service to source emergency accommodation with an appropriate level of support.

The Placements Team holds an approved provider list of supported accommodation options, including out of borough placements. At no time must young people be placed in temporary accommodation in an emergency unless there is also a high level package of support to wrap around them in place. Some young people, particularly 16 year olds and those with a higher level of vulnerability may need to be placed in an emergency foster or residential placement to ensure that they are safe and well cared for.

All young people placed in accommodation in accordance with a Children Act assessment will immediately become 'Looked After' pursuant to s20 Children Act 1989. The social worker must immediately commence 'Looked After' processes including referral for a LAC medical and make a referral to the Permanency Planning Panel.

A young person may also be placed in supported accommodation pending an initial assessment in accordance with s.188 of the Housing Act 1996. Once an initial assessment has been completed, it has been determined that s20 accommodation will be provided, and the accommodation is suitable for occupation for at least 6 months, the housing duty will cease and the young person will be accommodated under s20. A young person's vulnerability to harm and exploitation and risk to others must always be considered when considering the type and level of placement and support that is needed and provided.

Accommodation provided whilst an assessment takes place, ensures that young people are not left in unsuitable living arrangements before the extent of their needs are known. The provision of accommodation during an assessment does not automatically qualify the provision of longer term housing support for a young person.

#### **4.1. Young People at risk of/involved in Gangs, Offending and Exploitation**

Young people who are engaged in offending or who are gang-involved may be at risk of harm to others and still present with a high level of vulnerability to serious youth violence and exploitation. The Youth Offending Team must always be consulted when a young person is open to their service and is in need of emergency accommodation. This includes young people at risk of homelessness on release from a custodial setting. The highest priority is always to ensure a young person will be safe and risk of harm to others is minimized by making adequate checks to ensure that gang-involved young people are not placed in the vicinity of rival or other high profile gang affected areas, or that other very vulnerable young people are not sharing the same placement/accommodation. The same principal applies to young people who are at a high risk of going missing and are vulnerable to child sexual and other forms of exploitation.

#### **4.2. Young people in custody**

Young people who are in custody will require contingency planning for their release on bail into the community and/or following a custodial sentence. Resettlement planning must commence at the start of a sentence by holding a Family Group Conference which will help identify who in the family the young person can expect to receive support from whilst in custody and where they will live upon their release, whether this is planned or unplanned. If at any point, it becomes apparent that the young person may require accommodation on release, suitable accommodation and support provisions will need to be arranged in good time.

Planning for young people who have served a custodial sentence must commence no later than 4 weeks ahead of their known release date. Accommodation must be identified and an address confirmed in readiness for resettlement support and any community based support or restrictions to be adequately

planned for. Young people who were looked after or relevant children when they entered custody, or have become a relevant child by virtue of having been remanded into local authority care for more than 13 weeks will be entitled to services from Onwards & Upwards as a former relevant care leaver, if they require accommodation on release. They must be allocated to Onwards & Upwards as soon as the 13 week threshold has been met if their release date will occur before their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

## 5. Assessment

### 5.1. Section 17, Children Act 1989

All young people placed in emergency accommodation under s20 Children Act 1989, and those at risk of imminent homelessness who remain living at home or with a safe family member/friend, will have a full assessment of their needs undertaken by their allocated social worker. It is in the best interests of young people and their families for a full assessment to be undertaken in order to make timely decisions about what happens next; as such, single assessments will be completed within 45 days, from the point of referral, unless there are very good reasons to extend the length of the assessment. Manager agreement must be sought by the social worker and the reasons for extending the time period recorded by their manager to extend an assessment beyond 45 days.

In accordance with [Barnet's Local Assessment Protocol 2019](#), the assessment will explore the young person's life at home, in school and in the community; it will explore relationships with family and friends to understand what life is like for the young person. It will focus on individual and family strengths as well as any risks that the young person poses to others or may be facing.

A Family Group Conference must be convened to explore alternatives to care arrangements and to mobilise the support family members, family friends and other trusted adults including neighbours community groups and churches may be able to offer support to a young person who is living away from home.

All assessments must be undertaken jointly with the Housing Options team who will assess what duties are owed to the young person under Part VII, Housing Act 1996.

### 5.2. Assessment Outcome

The single assessment will determine if the young person is 'in need' as defined by s17 Children Act 1989. All young people who are found to be homeless will almost always be defined as Children in Need in accordance with the Act. The assessment must also determine whether the young person is in need of accommodation and if longer term accommodation and support is to be provided.

Once a young person has been determined to be 'in need' **and** 'in need of accommodation' they must be provided with information about their rights and the local authority's and Housing Options responsibility for them. Young people must be given written information and supported to access an advocate who can provide impartial advice. Young people can receive housing and support services under:

- **Section 17 Children Act 1989** – this will entitle a young person to support provided by the local authority. Any young person who is provided with support services pursuant to s.17 will be afforded a Child in Need Plan until they reach 18 years of age. If a young person, having made an informed decision, does not wish to be accommodated under s.20, they will be assessed for housing under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. If a young person is able to be accommodated with family members with support, accommodation may be offered under s17.

- **Section 20 Children Act 1989** - if as a result of being provided with accommodation under s20 the young person will become a Looked After Child (LAC) and thereafter will be eligible to receive all the services which the Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide Looked After Children, as set out in the Children Act 1989, including regular LAC reviews to ensure that their needs are continuing to be met. They may also be entitled to a range of services once they cease to be looked after, as a result of the Local Authority's leaving care duties, as set out in the Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010. Young people who are accommodated under s20 must be transferred to the Children in Care service, known as Onwards and Upwards in Barnet, at the end of the assessment and following ratification at Permanency Planning Panel.
- **Part VII Housing Act 1996** – entitles a young person to a personal housing plan and duties on the local authority to prevent and relieve their homelessness. This may lead initially to placements in temporary accommodation, followed by longer term options, which last for a minimum of 6 months. The young person will also be placed onto the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme for social housing. All young people who choose Housing Act accommodation will be afforded a Child in Need Plan and an outreach support package

For young people who are found to be homeless and have been living at home or in family/friends arrangements during the assessment period, a referral to the Permanency Planning Panel must be made followed by a referral to the Placements Team to identify suitable accommodation in accordance with their assessed needs and the panel decision.

An assessment may also determine that a young person:

- Is not 'in need' and therefore '*not*' in need of s20 accommodation.

In such circumstances, the social worker will ensure that the young person is supported to return home, if they have been provided with accommodation for the duration of the assessment and are referred on for early help services, where appropriate. Alternatively, if the young person does not wish to return home, they may be advised to approach the Housing Department who will determine whether they have a statutory duty to provide them with Housing. This will include an assessment of any identified risks at home and the parents willingness to have them return home. Children's Social Care will have no on-going involvement with the young person, although early help services may be required. If Housing Options, having assessed the child, believes that they may be in need of services, the officer should refer the matter back to Children's Social Care for further consideration.

- Is 'in need' but is *not* in need of accommodation

In these circumstances, the young person will be supported to return home, if they have been provided with accommodation for the duration of the assessment, and will be subject to a Child in Need Plan to ensure their needs are met to remain living in the family.

Following assessment, the Early Help Service will offer support to ensure young people are supported with education, career paths, managing finances and life skills.

Some 16 and 17 year olds in need may decide they do not wish to be accommodated under s20, for example that they do not wish to be supported as a looked after child. In these circumstances, it is important that the social worker is clear that the young person has capacity to reach a decision and has been properly informed and fully advised of the implications. If the young person is subsequently not owed an accommodation duty by Housing Options and remains homeless, the housing officer will inform

the social worker who may need to take further action. Children's services should, given the change in circumstances, ask the young person again if they wish to be accommodated under s.20.

If the young person still does not want to be accommodated under s.20 and has capacity to make this decision and if it is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the young person in need, the young person should be offered s.17 accommodation they no longer require the accommodation or they reach the age of 18,. In such circumstances, children's services and housing options must work together to ensure that the young person is not placed at risk of homelessness as they approach the age of 18.

## 6. Duty to Refer

Family Services are among the public authorities which are required to notify Housing Options Services of a service user that they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This duty applies to 16 and 17 year olds and if they approach Family Services they must obtain their consent before a referral can be made. The young person can choose which local authority in England the notification should be sent and they must agree that their contact details can be shared so that they can be contacted.

The referral does not diminish Family Services responsibilities under this protocol but enables early intervention and joint working with Housing Options to prevent young people from becoming homeless. It is not an alternative to carrying out early help or child in need assessments. Referrals to Barnet Homes Housing Options Service are made via [dutytorefer@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:dutytorefer@barnet.gov.uk).

More guidance on the duty to refer can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-duty-to-refer/a-guide-to-the-duty-to-refer>

## 7. Support Packages

All young people placed in emergency accommodation will initially receive a high level support package to ensure that they have access to the support they need from the accommodation provider, Early Help Service or another provider. This avoids the risk of young people being left in situations where they are not yet ready to manage the complex task of living independently. The support package must include daily visits to the young person until there is sufficient evidence that the young person has developed the skills and knowledge they need to manage independent living, without the need for high levels of support. It is acknowledged that some young people are better prepared for independent living than others and may only require high level packages for a short period. This will be decided on a case by case basis. (See Appendix 2 for checklist)

## 8. Advocacy



Young people should have access to independent advocacy and support to enable them to understand the housing process and make balanced and informed decisions in respect of their housing needs.

An advocacy advice service is available for young people who need support to attend appointments via Shelter UK. They provide advice and information 365 days a year, as well as emergency support. For further information visit [https://england.shelter.org.uk/get\\_help](https://england.shelter.org.uk/get_help) or call [0808 800 4444](tel:08088004444)

Early Help workers will also act as advocates at meetings and provide mediation where they are currently involved with a young person in order to avoid unnecessary layering of professional involvement.

## 9. Dispute Resolution

There may, on occasion, be disagreement between social workers in Family Services and officers in Housing Options on how the protocol is being administered or on how a young person is being advised and supported. If these cannot be resolved by duty managers then they should be escalated to the service manager for housing needs and the MASH manager. Lessons learnt will be shared with staff and the MASH Steering Group.

Further information on dispute resolution, can be found on the [Barnet Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) website.

## Appendix 1 - Related Guidance

**Factors to be considered by children's services when assessing 16/17 year olds who may be homeless children in need.**

	<b>Dimensions of Need</b>	<b>Issues to consider in assessing child's future needs.</b>
1.	<b>Accommodation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the child have access to stable accommodation?</li> <li>• How far is this suitable to the full range of the child's needs?</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Family and Social Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of the child's relationship with their parents and wider family.</li> <li>• What is the capacity of the child's family and social network to provide stable and secure accommodation and meet the child's practical, emotional and social needs</li> </ul>
3.	<b>Emotional and Behavioural Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the child show self-esteem, resilience and confidence?</li> <li>• Assessment of their attachments and the quality of their relationships. Does the child show self-control and appropriate self-awareness?</li> </ul>
4.	<b>Education, Training and Employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about the child's education experience and background</li> <li>• Assessment as to whether support may be required to enable the child to access education, training or employment.</li> </ul>
5.	<b>Financial Capability and independent living skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of the child's financial competence and how they will secure financial support in future</li> <li>• Information about the support the child might need to develop self-management</li> </ul>
6.	<b>Health and Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of child's physical, emotional and mental health needs.</li> </ul>
7.	<b>Identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of the child's needs as a result of their ethnicity, preferred language, cultural background, religion or sexual identity.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2 - 50 Point Checklist

For young people living in supported and independent living arrangements.

	Please consider:	Yes/No	What needs to happen? By Whom and when?
1.	Are the young person's independent living skills being consolidated?		
2.	Does further work need to be done and what resources are required to achieve independence?		
3.	Is a mentor/advocate engaged with the young person		
4.	Does the young person have copies of the documents they will need as an adult or do they know where to find them if they need them in the future? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birth certificate</li> <li>• NHS Card</li> <li>• Passport</li> <li>• Student card</li> <li>• Provisional Drivers licence</li> <li>• National Insurance Number</li> <li>• Bank Account</li> </ul>		
5.	Does the young person have sufficient identification documentation		
6.	Are the services currently engaged with the young person clearly outlined in their Plan		
7.	Is the young person providing input to the plan? And how are they kept aware of any changes to the plan		
8.	Are all stakeholders, including the young person, aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to tasks outlined in the Plan		
9.	Has a plan for keeping the young person's significant relationships connected and maintained been developed?		
10.	Does the young person have reliable support networks		
11.	Does the young person have regular contact with family or significant others		
12.	What community groups could the young person be linked with to help develop wider social and support networks		
13.	Are there any ongoing safety needs for the young person?		
14.	Does the young person know how to contact relevant people in an emergency?		
15.	Do they have a list of emergency contacts		
16.	What are the accommodation arrangements		

	<b>Please consider:</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>What needs to happen? By Whom and when?</b>
17.	Are all relevant people clear regarding these arrangements		
18.	What services are involved that may be able to provide ongoing or one off assistance to the young person		
19.	Do they currently have stable accommodation? How long is it likely to remain stable		
20.	Can the young person remain in their current living arrangement when they reach 18? If not, what is the Plan?		
21.	Has contact been made Housing regarding available options		
22.	What are the contingency arrangements should a placement breakdown occur? How will the young person be assisted to enact these arrangements?		
23.	What are the young person's ongoing medical and dental needs and how are they being addressed		
24.	Is the you person engaged with a therapeutic service to support their ongoing mental health		
25.	Does the young person have a GP, Dentist, Optician		
26.	Does the young person need ongoing medication? If yes, do they understand how to manage this, including obtaining repeat prescriptions from a Doctor and going to the chemist to collect these		
27.	Does the young person have a disability or special educational needs		
28.	Does the young person need help to read and respond to letters they receive		
29.	Does the young person understand their sexual health and how to manage this		
30.	Does the young person have alcohol or drug issues? If yes how are these to be managed		
31.	What are the young person's plans for the future in terms of education and employment?		
32.	Does the young person have an Education Plan?		
33.	Does the young person have a CV, and do they know how to write a job application?		
34.	Is the young person engaged with Education, Training and Employment support?		
35.	Has the young person been assisted to apply for relevant benefits		
36.	What are the young person's financial supports		
37.	Can the young person manage money		
38.	What is the plan if they run out of money		

	<b>Please consider:</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>What needs to happen? By Whom and when?</b>
39.	Does the young person know how to pay bills and rent?		
40.	Does the young person know how to budget for grocery and essentials shopping?		
41.	Can the young person cook?		
42.	Can the young person cope with loneliness		
43.	Does the young person have a network of friends		
44.	Are their friends a positive influence, if not has risk that their friends pose been considered		
45.	Is the young person involved in any religious or cultural groups in the community		
46.	What do you know about these and how can they support the young person to live independently		
47.	Is there a risk of radicalisation		
48.	Has the young person been ostracised by their cultural or religious community		
49.	Is the young person engaged in positive social activities with their peers		
50.	Is the young person clear about how and when you will stay in contact with them		