

Crib Sheet: Homeless 16–17-Year-Olds

For MASH & Assessment Social Workers – In line with the Southwark Judgement

Initial Screening (MASH) – Key Questions

- Is the young person **actually homeless** or **at risk of homelessness**?
 - Are they **able to live with family/friends** (even short-term)?
 - What is the **reason for homelessness** (family breakdown, eviction, abuse)?
 - Any **immediate risks/safeguarding concerns** (e.g. exploitation, mental health)?
 - Does the young person have **immigration issues or NRPF**?
 - Ensure the screening considers the whole family any siblings and considers holistic assessment in MASH for decision making.
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Legal Framework

Southwark Judgement (2009)

- A homeless 16–17-year-old is a **child in need** and **must be offered accommodation under Section 20**, unless:
 - They **refuse** this (must be fully informed).
 - They are **not actually homeless**.

Children Act 1989

Section Key Points

- S.17** Duty to assess and provide services to a "child in need". Doesn't confer accommodation rights.
- S.20** Duty to accommodate a child **in need** who **requires accommodation**. Becomes a **Looked After Child** (CfC) with care planning, IRO, etc.
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Assessment Process

Step 1: Immediate Safeguarding

- If **immediate danger**, **Section 47** strategy discussion and emergency accommodation.

Step 2: Child in Need Assessment

- Completed within 10 working days.
- Explore:
 - Capacity for safe reconnection with family.
 - Emotional/mental health.
 - Education, relationships, history.
 - Wishes & feelings of the young person.

Step 3: Offer of Section 20

- Clearly explain the **implications** of becoming CfC:
 - Social worker support.
 - Placement options.
 - LAC review process.
 - Impact on future (Leaving Care entitlement, pathway planning).
 - If young person **refuses Section 20**:
 - **Document informed decision.** Use Annex documents in updated policy 2025
 - Record explanation given (must be comprehensive and clear).
 - **Section 17 support** may be provided (e.g. housing, mediation, outreach).
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Accommodation Options

- If accepted under **S.20**:
 - Emergency foster/residential placement.
 - Ongoing care plan and placement stability planning.
 - If supported under **S.17**:
 - Supported lodgings or semi-independent.
 - Close monitoring and follow-up support.
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Key Practice Points

-  **No gatekeeping** – Must not automatically divert to housing services.
 -  Young person's **wishes must be heard**, but refusal of S.20 must be informed.
 -  Full **chronology of risks**, decisions, and offers must be documented.
 -  Involve **housing, CAMHS, YOS, education** as part of holistic assessment.
 -  **Southwark Judgement must be referenced** explicitly in case notes where relevant.
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Useful Phrases for Recording

"In line with the Southwark Judgement, [Name] has been assessed as a child in need due to homelessness. A Section 20 offer has been made to accommodate them as a Looked After Child. The offer and implications were explained fully. [Name] has chosen to [accept/refuse] the offer and is aware of the legal implications of this decision."

"While [Name] has refused accommodation under Section 20, support will continue to be offered under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. This will include [list support] and ongoing monitoring of safety and welfare."