****

LB of Hammersmith and Fulham Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers

January 2024

CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
	1. Corporate parenting
	2. Purpose
	3. Developing, embedding and reviewing the protocol
	4. Legislative background and framework
	5. Definitions and eligibility
2. **Transitions planning**
3. **Accommodation and support options**
	1. Staying Put
	2. Semi-independent living (SIL) accommodation
	3. Living with family, friends and relatives
	4. University halls/vacation accommodation
	5. Social housing
	6. Private rented sector, including house shares
4. **Leaving Care Accommodation Panel**
5. **Applying for social housing**
	1. Readiness for application
	2. Application submission
	3. Offers and property viewings
	4. Suitable accommodation
	5. Signing up for a property
6. **Moving into the Private Rented Sector (PRS)**
	1. Finding a suitable property in the PRS
	2. Signing up for a property in the PRS
7. **Move-in process**
	1. Termination of placement
	2. Lettable standards

7.3 Setting up home

**8 Tenancy support**

* 1. Support after move-in to social housing
	2. Support after move-in to the PRS
	3. Repairs and maintenance in council tenancies
	4. Repairs and maintenance with Registered Providers
	5. Repairs and maintenance in the PRS
	6. Support for rent arrears in council tenancies
	7. Support for rent arrears in tenancies with Registered Providers
	8. Support for rent arrears in the PRS

**9 Care Leavers leaving custody**

**10 Care Leavers living outside the children’s services authority area, including when a care leaver is not safe in Hammersmith and Fulham**

**11 Accommodation options for young people with SEND or complex mental health needs**

**12 Accommodation options for 21 to 25-year-old care leavers**

**13 Support to prevent and relieve homelessness**

13.1 Early intervention tools to sustain tenancies

13.2 Joint working to deliver Homelessness Reduction Act duties

13.3 Discharge of Main Housing Duty

13.4 Intentional homelessness

* 1. Rough sleeping

**14 Dispute resolution**

**15 Appendices**

1. **Introduction**
	1. **Corporate Parenting**

Hammersmith and Fulham Council is the corporate parent for our children looked after and care leavers. Corporate parenting is a collective responsibility, laid out in the Children Act 1989, and is about providing high-quality services that we would be happy for our own children to receive. Effective corporate parenting is about taking a multi-agency approach to enable young people to receive the support they need. Promoting equality of access and approach means that young people should receive a high quality of service regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith, or disability, whilst recognising the need to tailor services to different needs.

As a corporate parent, we pledge to do our best to help our young people to feel settled and develop a sense of belonging to be safe, happy and healthy; and to be supported to thrive as adults. It is therefore vital young people have a range of suitable accommodation where they have a stable base to prepare to live independently, alongside giving our young people the opportunity to hold their own tenancy where they can create a safe and stable home.

The Corporate Parenting priority areas in Hammersmith and Fulham consist of three overarching themes for our children, these are:

* to Feel Settled and Belong,
* to be Safe, Happy and Healthy, and,
* to Thrive as Adults

Ensuring we have a sufficient supply of high-quality local placements and accommodation options, both now and in the future, that meet the needs of all children in care and care leavers, that safeguards them from harm, and supports them to achieve the best possible outcomes is one of the mechanisms that enables us as good corporate parents to achieve this.

* 1. **Purpose**

This Joint Protocol is an agreement between Children’s Services and Housing Management to promote strong partnership working, as corporate parents, for the best outcomes for young people who are leaving our care. We are committed to providing our young people with the support they need to thrive interdependently as adults.

This document provides guidance to staff in Children’s Services and Housing Management. The protocol outlines the processes for supporting our care leavers to move into and sustain their own accommodation, and explicitly defines which department is responsible for providing each service to a care leaver.

* 1. **Developing, embedding and reviewing the protocol**

This protocol has been developed in partnership by colleagues in Children’s Services and Housing Management, with endorsement from key senior leaders including the Assistant Director of Housing Management and the Operational Director for Children and Young People’s Services (see Appendix 2 for stakeholder details).

We have consulted with our care experienced young people on our housing offer and processes, and their views and experiences have informed this protocol. Young people identified that they felt well supported with learning the skills necessary to manage a tenancy and understood the process of the housing panel. They identified though that it can be difficult to manage the move, given all of the tasks such as decorating and getting the flooring in, setting up bills and navigating living independently. The feedback from our young people has been pivotal in informing this protocol, and in updating our offer.

The practices and principles outlined in the protocol will be a working document to be utilised by frontline staff in Children’s Services and Housing Management, and feedback on how the work is delivered in practice will be relayed to the Care Leavers’ Housing Panel as part of the ongoing review process.

The Corporate Parenting Board will be responsible for receiving regular updates on the effectiveness and outcomes of this protocol, providing oversight and scrutiny, to ensure we continue to meet our corporate parenting responsibilities towards the young people leaving our care.

* 1. **Legislative Background and Framework**

This document refers to the following legislation:

* Housing Act 1996 - [Part 6 (Allocations)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/part/VI) and [Part 7 (Homelessness)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/part/VII), as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
* [Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2051/contents/made)
* [Children Act 1989](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents)
* [Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents)
* [Children and Social Work Act 2017](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents) - sections 1, 2 and 3

The following is a list of statutory guidance that this document refers to:

* [Homelessness code of guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities)
* [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers)
* [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-care-planning-placement-and-case-review)
* [Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers)
* [Extending Personal Adviser support for all care leavers to age 25](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/extending-personal-adviser-support-to-age-25)
* [Local offer guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-offer-guidance)

**1.5 Definitions and eligibility**
There are five different groups of young people who are leaving local authority care (care leavers) and receive support from Hammersmith and Fulham Local Authority which are broadly encompassed by the below:

1. Eligible Young People - A young person aged 16 or 17 and who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after.
2. Relevant Young People - Young people who have left care (ceased to be looked after), are aged 16 or 17, and were previously Eligible Young People.
3. Former Relevant Young People - Young people aged between 18 and 25 and were previously either Eligible and/or Relevant Young People.
4. Qualifying Young People Over 16 – Young people who have been in care (looked after) at some point after their 16th birthday but for less than 13 weeks since the age of 14.
5. Returnee care leaver – Young people between 21-25, previously classified as one of the above categories, whose cases were closed, but have returned to request a service from the Local Authority.

This protocol applies to all eligible, relevant and former relevant young people.

Qualifying Young People are eligible for advice, support and guidance from Hammersmith and Fulham. This can include entitlement to needs assessment and a pathway plan if requested, however, qualifying Young People are not entitled to housing from Hammersmith and Fulham. The below offer therefore does not apply to Qualifying Young People.

1. **Transition Planning**

We are committed to offering access to safe, stable and suitable accommodation to our care experienced young people that is able to meet their needs. We recognise that many of our young people will not yet have all the skills we believe are important to successfully live independently by the time they reach 18, and so the plan to transition to their own accommodation is based upon a needs led assessment. We therefore offer a range of accommodation options that can provide appropriate support and accommodation to meet varying needs.

As a corporate parent for our young people in and leaving care, Hammersmith and Fulham is responsible for supporting care leavers to transition to adulthood and independent living. Our full duty toward our care leavers lasts until they are 21, with additional support provided if required up to the age of 25, and includes the following:

* The care leaver offer is available once the young person turns 16 years old, and the young person will have an allocated social worker until the age of 21.
* Creating a **Pathway Plan** with the care leaver, in consultation with their wider network and other relevant professionals, which is:
	+ tailored to the needs and goals of the young person, setting out the support required to transition successfully into adult life, and reviewed and amended as appropriate,
	+ completed before the young person turns 16. If they were over 16 when they came into care then this will be within 3 months of the date of them coming into care.
	+ updated and reviewed at least every 6 months or within 28 working days of any significant change to the plan to encourage continuous progress and a clear move on plan.
* Ensuring the care leaver applies for the benefits they are entitled to, and assisting with applications.
* Assisting the care leaver to apply for a form of photograph identification (passport, driving licence).
* Assisting the care leaver to set up a bank account.
* Working with the care leaver and other relevant agencies – including placement providers, mental health services, education and training providers, and benefits advisors – to prepare the young person for independence before they leave care and jointly plan for, and support them in, their transition to independent living.
* Discussing contingency plans with the young person as part of the pathway planning process, particularly for young people at risk of homelessness. See further detail in Section 12.
1. **Accommodation and support options**

There are a number of different accommodation options for care leavers, depending on the needs and maturity of the young person. The Independent Reviewing Officer and Social Worker will work with the young person, alongside their placement provider and other relevant agencies, to agree their accommodation and support pathways on leaving care. The Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor can also support with identifying the best housing options for a young person on an individual basis.

* 1. **Staying Put**: This enables care leavers to remain with their former foster carer beyond the age of 18 and this will be discussed with the young person as part of the pathway planning process before they reach the age of 16. Where both the young person and their former carer wish to continue living together, the local authority is under a duty to support this arrangement, including financially.

There are three broad categories of need or placement type for which a Staying Put arrangement might be appropriate for young people in foster care and agreed, including:

1. To meet education or training needs
2. Because a young person is vulnerable
3. Planned Move-On.

Where it is felt that a young person needs such an arrangement but appears not to meet the criteria under each of these headings, a request should be made to the Care and Resources Panel who will review the request to make an informed decision.

Young people in Staying Put arrangements will no longer receive the allowances they were provided with as looked after children and will be expected to claim means tested benefits and Housing Benefit. The local authority will continue to provide a level of financial support to the foster carer, reviewed as part of the individual care package).

Although we would expect most young people to have moved to live independently by their 21st birthday, some young people may continue living with their foster carer if it is felt that this would be in their best interest. This would be a private arrangement between the young person and their carer and would unlikely be funded by the local authority. Social workers will continue to work with their young person to prepare them for move on, supporting the young person with the transition from a Staying Put arrangement to any other type of accommodation, and identifying what support is required.

* 1. **Semi-Independent Living (SIL) accommodation:** Care leavers who move on from foster care but are not yet ready to live in their own accommodation, will often move into SIL accommodation.

We commission local, in-borough SIL provision which includes a package of wrap around support to ensure young people are not only getting the support they currently need but also to develop life skills to enable successful transition to independence. We commission a combination of high support and flexi-support accommodation to ensure the provision meets the needs of each individual.

The contract is currently delivered by Centrepoint who we work closely in partnership with to deliver a quality service to our young people. Referrals into these services and room matching is managed at a regular allocations meeting and overseen by the Pathway Manager at Centrepoint, in consultation with Principal Social Workers and Team Managers in the Leaving Care Service. This ensures young people are matched according to their needs and taking into account the makeup of existing residents. These services have shared communal facilities and staff on site, with young people receiving regular key work sessions to prepare them to move on into their own accommodation.

Where our in-borough provision is not suitable for young people then an out of borough SIL placement will be commissioned by our internal placements team in consultation with the young person’s social worker.

* 1. **Living with family, friends and relatives**

For some young people, it might be the right option to return to living with a family member, or family friend. If the young person is under 18, then the social worker will complete an assessment of the suitability of this option and what support might be needed. The assessment will cover the wishes of the young person, and the family member’s ability to meet the physical, emotional and practical needs of the young person. Consideration will be given to any financial support (determined via a financial assessment), and if the family would benefit from emotional support and guidance to sustain healthy relationships. A referral for a Family Group Conference can also be made, to assist the family to fully consider and take part in the planning.

If the young person is over 18, their social worker will advise and support the young person to ensure that this is a suitable accommodation option, and work with the family members to plan for the young person to return living with them. The same practical and emotional support is also available to young people over 18, although they and their family will be expected to be financially responsible themselves, and the social worker will be able to assist with applying for any financial help such as housing benefits and subsidies.

* 1. **University Accommodation**

If a young person is at university, we will support them to access and fund suitable accommodation both during term time and over holiday periods. Most universities will offer accommodation in student halls of residence, and in some universities care leavers are able to remain there over the holiday period. Some young people may wish to do this, whilst others may return to their foster carer, a relative or friend, or go travelling. The social worker will support the young person to consider which is the best option for them through the pathway planning process.

We have a comprehensive support offer for young people attending university, including an annual parental contribution, which is a package of financial support towards rent and cost of living (subject to agreement by the 18+ panel). More details can be found in our [Care Leavers’ Offer](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section_attachments/366_9ds_care_leavers_offer_booklet-a5_rev1.pdf).

* 1. **Social housing:** We have a dedicated annual quota of 50 properties for care leavers to enable young people who wish to remain in the borough to transition to independence. We have a comprehensive offer to support young people with their transition including a setting up home allowance, council tax exemption (until the age of 25) and arranging flooring for their property prior to moving in. More details can be found Section 7.
	2. **Private rented sector, including house shares:** Where young people would prefer to go down the private rental route we will support access to this, acting as a guarantor and providing financial support including deposit and first month’s rent. More details can be found in Section 6. This option may be more suited to those who have settled out of borough.
1. **Care Leavers’ Housing Panel**

The panel facilitates joint working between Children’s Services and Housing Management to assess the accommodation needs of young people leaving care and preparing to live independently. The Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor attends the panel and a young person’s allocated social worker will attend the panel on behalf of the young person, providing insight on the young person’s readiness to live in their own accommodation and evidence that they have the necessary skills to maintain a tenancy; or would be able to live in their own accommodation if floating support were provided.

All proposed social housing nominations and proposals to secure accommodation in the private rented sector (PRS) will be brought to the Care Leavers’ Housing Panel by the young person’s social worker. The young person will be expected to fill out an application for panel, and provide further supporting information about their readiness for a tenancy (ie recommendation from support worker, proof of finances and rent statement). It is the responsibility of this panel to decide the most suitable accommodation that should be offered to them. In order to be brought to panel, the social worker must be confident that their young person is ready to take this step. Prior to applying for social housing or PRS accommodation, care leavers will need to demonstrate that they are ready to maintain a tenancy by:

* Completing the MyBnks and Preparation for Independence Living Skills booklet and workshops, and demonstrating these independence skills in their current accommodation.
* Demonstrating the ability to manage their money well, including paying rent and service charge or bills on time, and to not be in arrears.
* Evidencing being able to manage a tenancy, including being considerate to neighbours and not involved in anti-social behaviour, being able to book appointments for themselves and follow up on necessary tasks to support a clean and healthy living environment.
* Being involved in education, employment or training, or working towards this with support of professionals.

Where the Housing Panel decides that the young person is not ready to manage independent accommodation, they will receive further training and support to move into a more suitable alternative accommodation or prior to returning to the Panel in the future. If the Panel confirms that the young person is ready for independent accommodation, they will move into a final stage accommodation once available.

The Panel will use their judgement to recommend the best housing option for the young person. There are five possible decisions for the Panel to make, summarised below:

* To help the young person secure accommodation in the private rented sector;
* To nominate the young person to join the Housing Register through the Children Leaving Care (CLC) quota;
* To refer the young person to supported housing;
* To re-hear the young person’s case at a future date. This will be based on actions proposed by the Panel and to be integrated into a Pathway Plan;
* To explore the possibility of a reciprocal nomination with another local authority.

For each young person, the Panel will make a recommendation using the dedicated eligibility and assessment framework and the outcome recorded on the Care Leavers’ Housing Panel Decision Sheet; this will then be signed off by the Panel Chair and disseminated to Panel members, to be actioned as required.

Where required, the Housing Panel will include colleagues from other services to consider more complex issues for young people and where move on is more challenging. For these meetings, any relevant services are also invited to discuss the young person and feed into accommodation planning, such as the Gangs Violence and Exploitation Unit (GVEU) and Adult Social Care.

The Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor attends the Panel to ensure they have oversight of accepted nominations, as well as providing advice and support for young people with more complex housing issues and those not ready for independent living.

1. **Applying for social housing**

In Hammersmith and Fulham, there is an annual quota of 50 social housing nominations reserved for care leavers, known as the Children Leaving Care (CLC) quota.

When a young person is considered by the panel to be ready to be nominated to join the Housing Register through the CLC quota, they must also meet the qualification criteria for social housing as set out in the [Housing Allocation Scheme](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/housing/housing-register/housing-allocation-scheme). This decision is not within the authority of the Care Leavers’ Housing Panel, however, where they are aware a nomination would not qualify, they can make a recommendation and seek approval on an exceptional basis, through authority delegated to the Assistant Director of Housing.

The majority of social housing units available through the CLC nomination are studio properties, although 1-bedroom flats may be offered on occasion. These will predominantly be for single parents or young pregnant women, who would be accepting the property on the basis it is one room smaller than their need. If a larger property is required, or a single parent or pregnant woman, does not want a property one room smaller than their need, they can make a homeless application rather than be nominated through the CLC quota.

Care Leavers can make applications to join the Housing Register outside of being nominated through the CLC quota, through the same routes available to all other applicants (i.e. housing application or homeless application) but will not necessarily receive Band 1 priority via this route. This will depend on their circumstances and meeting the eligibility criteria.

Whilst the majority of care leavers nominated through the CLC quota will be under 21, there are some young people who will not move on in this time and will remain open to the Leaving Care service due to reasons such as being at university or issues in resolving their immigration status; a small number of young people who are over the age of 21 may therefore be nominated through the quota each year.

* 1. **Application submission**

If the Leaving Care Accommodation Panel agrees to nominate a young person through the CLC quota, the next steps are as follows:

* The Panel Administrator will email the Care Leaver’s Housing Panel Decision Sheet to the Senior Housing Solutions Assistant. This ensures the date of the Panel decision to nominate, is recorded as the registration date for the subsequent housing application form.
* The Care Leaver must complete a Housing Register Application Form (with assistance from the Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor if necessary) and return this to the Senior Housing Solutions Assistant, copying in housing.register.lbhf.gov.uk and the Panel’s Housing Representative. The email should be clearly marked ‘Nomination from Care Leavers Housing Panel’ and should correlate with the decision sheet already sent following the Panel decision.
* Applications should be received within 4 weeks of the care leaver being notified of the Panel decision. Any longer than this, and the Panel may choose to revisit the original decision.
* If the care leaver has any mobility needs or requires an adapted property, updated information should be provided with the application.
* The Housing Solutions team will then process and verify the care leaver’s application and add them to the Council’s Housing Register under Band 1 priority.
* If the young person has previously been nominated through the Children Leaving Care quota and has had to surrender their tenancy, they will no longer be eligible for LBHF’s offer of Band 1 priority for social housing allocated via the CLC quota. However, discretion to retain Band 1 priority may be made in exceptional circumstances if the young person is under 25 and it can demonstrated that the young person is capable of maintaining a tenancy e.g. had no issues in their tenancy prior to going into custody. This will be presented at and agreed by the Housing Director’s Discretion Panel.
	1. **Offers and property viewings**

Young people nominated via the CLC quota will be made up to two direct offers of suitable accommodation. This may be a Council or Housing Association property, based on availability and affordability, and is likely to be a studio flat. Housing Allocations will contact the young person and their social worker to offer property viewings; the young person’s social worker or keyworker will attend the viewing alongside the young person.

Young people should not be offered viewings of properties which require major void works and should be shown properties where these works have already been completed and are therefore nearing ‘ready to let’, with the expectation that the young person should be able to move in within 2 weeks of viewing the property. If it can be avoided, multiple young people should also not be shown the same property as this can be problematic.

Quarterly information sessions are offered between the Housing Allocations and Leaving Care service with all young people due to be brought to an upcoming Panel, or recently nominated at Panel, to prepare them for their offer of social housing. This helps young people to understand what a reasonable offer is, alternative options and the implications of refusing the offer. If the young person refuses the offer, then they should have a valid reason for doing so, and can be given one other offer. If the young person again refuses the second offer, they do have a right of appeal; however, if the appeal is not successful then they will lose their nomination and have to either move into the PRS or present as homeless.

Tenancies will initially be *introductory tenancies* but will convert to a secure tenancy once the probationary period has been completed. An introductory tenancy usually lasts for 12 months which, unless extended (or terminated) for tenancy breaches, automatically becomes a secure tenancy.

**5.4 Suitable accommodation**

It is our commitment that young people nominated via the CLC quota will only be offered suitable accommodation. This is defined as accommodation:

* Which so far as reasonably practicable is suitable for the young person in light of their identified and assessed needs;
* Which is genuinely affordable for the young person;
* Which the responsible authority has satisfied itself as to the character and suitability of the landlord or other provider;
* Which complies with Health and Safety requirements related to rented accommodation;
* In respect of which the responsible authority has so far as reasonably practicable taken into account the young person’s wishes and feelings.
	1. **Signing up for a property**

When a care leaver is invited to sign up for a property, the Care Leaver’s Housing Officer (or social worker/keyworker/foster carer) should accompany them to sign up, and ensure that all relevant documentation e.g. proof of income and/or benefits, is provided to the property provider.

The Care Leaver’s Housing Officer (or social worker/or keyworker) should support the care leaver to apply for housing element of Universal Credit and any other benefits they are entitled to.

1. **Moving into the Private Rented Sector (PRS)**

All young people should be informed and have a clear understanding of Hammersmith and Fulham’s offer of priority social housing nominations. Some young people may choose not to accept this offer, instead opting to move into a private rental and take on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST). If this is the young person’s preference, their social worker will refer them to the Care Leavers’ Housing Panel, following the same process as outlined above for social housing nominations, for this to be approved and appropriate support provided. This accommodation option tends to be more suitable for those who have low or no support needs, are independent and capable of dealing with a private landlord directly, as well as those choosing to settle outside of the borough.

The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) limits the level of housing costs through housing benefit or universal credit to the cost of a room in a shared house. Effective October 2023, care leavers are exempt from SAR until they reach the age of 25 (previously, this was only up until 22), making PRS accommodation more affordable for young people.

* 1. **Finding a suitable property in the PRS**

Care Leavers are encouraged to identify potential properties, although support can be provided by their social worker and/or key worker or foster carer to make sure the property is affordable and meets the young person’s essential needs. Whilst care leavers can exercise their choice of property and area, this will be determined by what they can afford; young people often end up living outside of the borough due to the high rental cost of PRS properties in Hammersmith and Fulham.

Social workers can also refer young people to the Council’s Property and Procurement team for support with accessing the PRS, using the AST Matching Referral Form (see Appendix 5) and submitting this alongside a supporting letter vouching for the ability of the young person to sustain their tenancy and a copy of their benefit cap exemption letter. The team works with private landlords to find properties in the PRS who are willing to accept care leavers, both within and outside of London. They can offer landlords one-off financial incentives to do this for studios or 1 beds. Alternatively, if the young person has already identified a suitable property through their own means, the team can support with negotiating the rent and tenancy term with the landlord.

If required, Children’s Services will pay for the deposit and one month’s advance rental payment for each young person accessing private rented accommodation. Children’s Services will also act as the damage and rent guarantor, up to the value of £5,000 for damages, non-payment of rent or costs associated with early surrender of tenancy, if this is required. The role of ‘guarantor’ will be for a maximum period of two years, or for 2 months after the tenancy has ended. An alternative to the guarantor scheme offered to landlords is the Transitional Insurance Scheme which covers the landlord’s contents, fixtures and fittings up to £20,000, £5,000 malicious damage by tenants and a rent guarantee of £2,000 per month up to £12,000 for 6 months, for a period of two years following tenancy commencement.

If the property has been sourced by the Property and Procurement team, they will undertake visits to inspect the property and check for the necessary health and safety legal compliance, to ensure that the accommodation is suitable for the young person. If the young person has sourced the accommodation themselves, the team will ask for photos, videos and check the legal compliance of the property.

* 1. **Signing up for a property in the PRS**

When a young person is offered a property, their Social Worker (or keyworker/foster carer) should support them with signing up, and ensure that all relevant documentation e.g. proof of income and/or benefits, is provided to the property provider.

Their Social Worker (or keyworker) should support the care leaver to apply for Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit and any other benefits they are entitled to. The young person should be encouraged to agree for the housing element of Universal Credit to be paid directly to the landlord when they submit their Housing Benefit application.

1. **Move-in process**
	1. **Termination of placement**

Once the young person is offered or signs up to a property, their social worker should give their placement provider notice of termination. If a dual rent situation cannot be avoided, the young person’s social worker or keyworker should support them to apply for dual housing benefit.

**7.2 Lettable standards**

For Council-owned properties, Hammersmith and Fulham should undertake any renovations required to bring the property up to the [Hammersmith and Fulham Lettable Standard](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/hf-lettable-standard#:~:text=H%26F%20lettable%20standard%20This%20is%20the%20standard%20you,leaks%20Roofs%20should%20be%20in%20a%20watertight%20condition), prior to the resident moving in. The properties shown to Care Leavers should be nearing a lettable standard and not requiring major void works.

For Housing Association properties, the lettable standard is set by the Housing Association. It is the responsibility of the Housing Association to prepare the property to ensure it meets their lettable standard.

For PRS properties, the Property and Procurement team are able to undertake property visits to quality check the accommodation standard and check for health and safety legal compliance.

* 1. **Setting up home**

Once the care leaver is offered or signs up to a property, their social worker will apply for their Setting Up Home Allowance (SUHA). The allowance covers up to £3,000, paid in instalments to the young person from the point of sign-up. The young person will be guided to spend this appropriately to furnish and decorate their new home. The Leaving Care Service will collect receipts for purchases made from the young person.

The Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor will arrange the delivery and installation of flooring for young people moving into social housing. This will be funded by Housing and is in addition to the SUHA.

If required, the Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor can assist young people to order white goods and arrange pre-paid gas and utilities bills; although if the care leaver has been accepted on to a floating support service, then the floating support provider can help them to arrange utilities bills instead. Where necessary, the social worker should order and pay for a taxi or moving van to assist the care leaver with moving in.

1. **Tenancy support**
	1. **Support after move-in to social housing**

The social worker and Housing Officer will undertake a joint visit to the young person in their new accommodation within six weeks of them moving in. The social worker will also, in consultation with the young person, update their pathway plan on commencement of tenancy to reflect any changes in the young person’s needs, goals and support required to settle into their new home and continue on their transition to adulthood.

* 1. **Support after move-in to the PRS**

The PRS Tenancy Relations Officer provides tenancy sustainment support to young people in the PRS. Once the young person has moved in, the Tenancy Relations Officer will reach out to the young person and their social worker to introduce themselves as a key point of contact and offer support with settling in, setting up benefits and any other tenancy-related needs. If the landlord has serious concerns about the young person, such as accumulating rent arrears or anti-social behaviour, they will contact the Procurement Officer in the first instance, who in turn will raise this with the PRS Tenancy Relations Officer and/or the social worker for them to provide appropriate support and intervention to promote tenancy sustainment.

* 1. **Repairs and maintenance in council tenancies**

Hammersmith and Fulham is responsible for undertaking major repairs; keeping in repair and working order gas, water and electricity supplies; managing hazards that may present a risk to health, such as damp and mould; and for upkeep of communal areas. The Council has a responsibility to carry out repairs within a reasonable time, with set times for certain urgent or ‘qualifying’ repairs.

As a tenant, the young person is responsible for upkeep of the property, replacement of furnishings and appliances, minor repairs and decorations, and reporting any repairs that are the Council’s responsibility. They are also responsible for any damage or repairs caused by them.

Care leavers should contact the Council’s repairs service to report any repairs or maintenance issues, with the assistance of their Housing Officer, social worker and/or floating support worker where necessary. Any issues with this should be escalated to the Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor.

* 1. **Repairs and maintenance with Registered Housing Associations**

The Housing Association is responsible for undertaking any required repairs. Care leavers should contact the Housing Association directly to report any repairs or maintenance issues, with the assistance of their social worker and/or floating support worker where necessary. Any issues with this should be escalated to the Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor.

**8.5 Repairs and maintenance in the PRS**

The private landlord or estate agent is responsible for undertaking any required repairs. Young people should contact the landlord directly, with the assistance of their social worker and/or floating support worker where necessary. Any issues with this should be escalated to the Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor who can provide additional support.

* 1. **Support for rent arrears in council tenancies**

All care leavers in council tenancies will be flagged on NEC as care leavers at sign-up, and the contact details of their social worker and/or the leaving care duty service included so that any concerns relating to tenancy sustainment can be escalated appropriately by the housing officer or rental income officer.

If a care leaver in a council tenancy is starting to accumulate arrears, the rental income support officer or housing officer should alert the young person’s social worker. The rental income support officer and/or housing officer should work collaboratively with the social worker to understand why the care leaver is in arrears and support them to reduce this. A housing plan should then be drawn up between the social worker, rental income officer and/or housing officer and the young person.

The housing officer, social worker or rental income support officer should refer the young person to the [Welfare Benefits Team](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/welfare-benefits-advice-council-tenants) by submitting a referral form to welfare.benefit@lbhf.gov.uk or calling the advice line on 0208 753 5566; the young person can also refer themselves. The support offer includes personal budgeting support, assistance with claiming the correct benefits, requesting reviews and appeals of benefit decisions, awarding fuel vouchers and foodbank referrals, small awards of financial support, support through eviction proceedings, negotiating with creditors and referrals to the specialist debt advice service. The team also liaise directly with the Rental Income team to agree personalised re-payment plans and, in a very small number of cases, to seek agreement on writing off rent arrears altogether.

* 1. **Support for rent arrears in tenancies with Registered Providers**

If a care leaver in a tenancy with a Registered Provider is starting to accumulate arrears, the Housing Officer should alert the young person’s social worker. The Housing Officer or social worker should refer the young person to the Link and Support team for further support.

The Housing Officer or social worker should refer the young person to the H&F Link and Support team (hf.link@lbhf.gov.uk / 0208 753 1587) for further support; the young person can also refer themselves. This could include support with escalating benefits-related issues, referrals for further budgeting support, access to fuel vouchers and other cost-of-living related financial support, and advocacy on behalf of the young person.

* 1. **Support for rent arrears in the PRS**

The landlord should notify the Procurement Officer if the young person is accumulating rent arrears. The Procurement Officer should then raise this with the PRS Tenancy Relations Officer and/or social worker to provide support to the young person to resolve this.

The Procurement Officer or social worker should refer the young person to the H&F Link and Support team (hf.link@lbhf.gov.uk / 0208 753 1587) for further support; the young person can also refer themselves.

**8.9 Floating support**

Care leavers who are moving into or have already moved into their own tenancies may be eligible to be referred to the floating support service directly commissioned by Children’s Services. This is a tenancy mentoring service aimed at supporting care experienced young people aged 18-25 years old moving into their first home, to increase tenancy success. Young people are entitled to up to six months of support via weekly 1-to-1 sessions. The young person’s social worker should send referrals using the floating support referral form to referrals@wearesettle.org.

Housing also offer a floating support service for those requiring general housing-related support in their own tenancies. The young person or their social worker should complete the referral form and send it to **housing.support@lbhf.gov.uk**

**9. Care Leavers leaving custody**

We recognise that young people leaving custody will need additional support to secure suitable accommodation on release.

Prior to release, a joint planning meeting should be held between the social worker, prison officer, resettlement officer (if there is one) and probation officer to identify accommodation needs early and ensure there is a clear accommodation plan in place. The suitable accommodation options that may be provided to care leavers, include:

* Supported accommodation
* Temporary accommodation
* Living with family or friends
* PRS accommodation.

If the social worker assessment identifies that the young person’s needs would be best met through a placement by Children’s Services, this recommendation will be presented at the Care and Resources Panel 18+ for approval by the Head of Service for Leaving Care.

If it is decided that the young person will not be accommodated by Children’s Services and the young person is potentially threatened with homelessness on release, the Probation Officer should complete the Duty to Refer form and make the social worker aware. This will then be picked up by the Probation Officer in Homelessness Prevention Assessment who will work with the young person, their social worker, and the probation service to decide on the right accommodation and support required for the young person. If a young person is subject to certain licensing conditions where they pose a risk in the community or are deemed too high a risk at MAPPA, Probation will consider suitable accommodation in accordance with their license conditions.

Where a secure or introductory council tenant is on remand for a period of more than 12 months or imprisoned for more than 13 weeks (including any time on remand), and would therefore either accumulate rent arrears due to their Housing Benefit claim being suspended, they can voluntarily give up their tenancy. On their release, discretion to retain Band 1 priority may be made in exceptional circumstances if the young person is under 25 and it can demonstrated that the young person is capable of maintaining a tenancy e.g. had no issues in their tenancy prior to going into custody. This plan would have to be presented at the Housing Director’s Discretion Panel for approval. Assessments should be made as to whether the young person will require more intensive support through floating housing support to help sustain their accommodation.

If the young person turns 21 and their file has been closed to social services while they are in custody, the social worker will provide both the young person and the Offender Manager with the details of the duty service which both the young person, prison and probation officers can reach out to prior to the young person’s release if they require further support. If the duty to refer is made for a young person and they are identified as a care leaver (under the age of 25), the Probation Officer in Homelessness Prevention Assessment should, with the consent of the young person, inform the Leaving Care duty service so that further support can be offered if needed.

**10. Care Leavers living outside the children’s services authority area, including when a care leaver is not safe in Hammersmith and Fulham**

As a local authority, we only have direct access to social housing within Hammersmith and Fulham. However, if a care leaver is intending to settle out of borough, the Leaving Care Move On Officer should also contact the local authority where the young person resides to explore what accommodation options may be available in advance of them leaving care, including joining the local housing register. If the young person is considering settling out of borough due to concerns about their safety, the social worker should give consideration as to whether there are any areas of Hammersmith where the young person may be safe and support them to access properties in specific parts of the borough.

The social worker can also work with the Housing Allocations team to explore reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities; the young person would still need to be approved at the Leaving Care Accommodation Panel for this to happen. For young people who are settled out of the borough and plan to remain there, reciprocal arrangements should be considered as an option within the pathway planning process once the young person turns 18, as brokering these arrangements can take a considerable amount of time. For those affected by serious youth violence or other community safety risks, referrals can also be made to Safer London’s Pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme.

Besides social housing, the young person could move into the PRS with support from the Property and Procurement team where needed. If the reason for them not staying in the borough is due to safety concerns, then the young person could consider making a homelessness application to another Local Authority of their choice.

The Leaving Care Move On officer will provide advice to the young person and their social worker on the options available to enable the young person to make an informed decision on their housing.

**11. Accommodation options for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and complex mental health needs**

Young people who have more complex needs (ie learning needs, a physical disability or mental health diagnosis), should be referred by their social worker to the Integrated Transitions panel by 16 years old (ideally at 14 years). A referral form and relevant documents (ie EHCP, Care Assessment, Support Plan, Mental Capacity Act assessment, and Risk Assessments) will need to be provided to the panel. The aim of the panel is to support decisions as to the most appropriate transition and referral pathway, to provide advice and guidance about what support is needed, and to track the transition into adulthood. The process includes considering what is the most appropriate housing accommodation that meets their independence needs, and as assessed within a Care Act assessment. Some young people may need more specialist residential care or supported housing accommodation provided by Adult Services, whilst others may be able to sustain their own tenancy, with additional support provided by Adult Services. The Transitions panel is not able to agree costs of any accommodation options, which will need to be presented at the Adult Social Care Best Outcomes Panel.

Hammersmith and Fulham care leavers living outside of the borough should also be presented to the panel, and Hammersmith and Fulham is responsible for completing the Care Act assessment to determine the housing needs.

**12. Accommodation options for 21 to 25-year-old care leavers**

For young people in supported accommodation who are not ready to move on by the age of 20, and if they are not eligible for support from Adults Services, then consideration will be made to as to whether a referral to the supported accommodation team in Housing is required. This team also currently commissions Centrepoint for provision, and is able to work with young people until the age of 25. They are also able to support young people into their own independent accommodation if appropriate.

For those planning to make a homelessness application, care leavers over the age of 21 will, as far as possible, be found as being in ‘priority need’ under homelessness legislation as a guiding principle. Nonetheless, the Council remains obliged by homelessness legislation to consider individual facts and circumstances in every case, and reserves the right to depart from these principles in appropriate cases. Those found to be in ‘priority need’ will receive the Main Housing Duty and be housed temporarily until permanent housing can be secured, either via social housing or the PRS. They would then be given Band 3 under the local allocations scheme, unless they meet the community contribution criteria, in which case the young person will be placed in Band 2. Any decision to not find care leavers in ‘priority need’ will be signed off at the Housing Director’s Discretion Panel.

**13. Support to prevent and relieve homelessness**

**13.1 Early intervention tools to sustain tenancies**

We have a number of tools and interventions available to prevent care leavers from becoming homeless, including:

* Floating support services to assist young people to settle in and provide support with any tenancy-related needs,
* Setting up Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs) to enable Housing Benefit, or the housing costs component of Universal Credit, to be paid direct to the landlord where appropriate,
* Early notification of social workers of potential risk to tenancy by Housing Officers, Rental Income Support Officers and PRS Tenancy Relations Officer,
* Multiagency working to ensure that young people have the right support in place, such as Community MARAC,
* Support with applying for benefits, budgeting, re-payment plans for arrears, and financial assistance for those struggling with the cost-of-living (provided by the Welfare Benefits and H&F Link team)

**13.2 Joint working to deliver Homelessness Reduction Act duties**

Wherever possible, care leavers will be supported through the CLC quota and will therefore avoid using a homelessness or duty to refer approach. However, where a care leaver is eligible for assistance and is threatened with homelessness within 56 days or has become homeless, they are entitled to receive support from the local authority to either prevent or relieve their homelessness.

The young person’s social worker should, with the consent of the young person, make a referral to the Homelessness Prevention and Assessment team as early as possible through the Duty to Refer process. The young person can also make a homelessness presentation directly to the local authority. If a direct presentation is made and the young person is under the 25, the Housing Advisor should, with the consent of the young person, inform the Leaving Care duty service.

Homelessness Prevention Assessment will investigate the referral and reach out to the young person to confirm eligibility, arrange an assessment, create a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) and intervene to prevent them becoming homeless in the next 56 days. If the young person is open to social services and consents, their social worker should be involved in this process and the PHP should be informed by the Pathway Plan.

If the young person’s situation is not resolvable prior to them becoming homeless, they will likely be found to be in ‘priority need’ and therefore owed the ‘Main Housing Duty’. They will be placed in temporary accommodation; this could be self-contained temporary accommodation or supported accommodation. The use of bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) is not suitable accommodation for care leavers and should only be used in exceptional circumstances as a last resort.

The young person will remain in temporary accommodation until permanent housing is secured, usually through joining the housing register and signing up to a social housing tenancy. Care leavers will likely be placed in Band 3 under the local allocations scheme, unless they meet the community contribution criteria, in which case the young person will be placed in Band 2.

**13.3 Discharge of Main Housing Duty**

If there is a risk of duties to the young person being limited due to their refusal of a suitable offer of accommodation or due to their deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate with the steps taken to prevent or relieve homelessness, Homelessness Prevention Assessment should ensure that the Leaving Care duty team is made aware of the risk of the Main Housing Duty being discharged and temporary accommodation ended. Alternative accommodation may be offered via the PRS, or the young person can request a review of their accommodation offer or PHP but there is no guarantee that this will lead to a different result.

If the care leaver has become ineligible for housing or homelessness assistance due to a change in their immigration status, the Leaving Care Service will refer them to the National Asylum Support Service who will provide them with accommodation.

**13.4 Intentional homelessness**

As a guiding principle, no care leaver up to the age of 25 should be found ‘intentionally homeless’ as part of a homelessness assessment. However, the Council remains obliged by homelessness legislation to consider individual facts and circumstances in every case and reserves the right to depart from this principle in appropriate cases. In the event that a homelessness assessment is likely to lead to an ‘intentional homelessness’ decision, the Leaving Care team should be consulted with and the decision signed off at the Housing Director’s Discretion Panel.

**13.5 Rough sleeping**

If a young person is found rough sleeping and identified as a care leaver under the age of 25, the Rough Sleeping Coordinator should notify the Leaving Care duty service. The young person will likely be placed in supported accommodation.

**14. Dispute resolution**

Where a concern is raised about an individual young and there is disagreement about the support to be provided to the young person, the two respective parties (social worker and housing officer) should seek to resolve the issue. If this does not address the specific issue, it should be escalated to the respective managers and then to the respective Heads of Service and Directors if required.

**Appendix 1: Housing Pathway Flowchart**

Ongoing support available from the PRS Tenancy Relations Officer if required

Not ready to maintain a tenancy and more support required

Referral to supported housing for homeless young people

Remain in placement with clear move on plan in place

Housing Register application to be submitted

Property sign-up and move in

Two direct offers of suitable properties made

Landlord incentive, damage/rent guarantor or transitional insurance scheme, deposit and one month’s advance rent to be considered

Once a property is identified, relevant suitability checks to be completed by the Property and Procurement team

Property sign-up and move in

Nominated to join the Housing Register through the CLC quota

Support to secure accommodation in the PRS

Completed AST Matching referral form to be submitted

OR care leaver to identify suitable properties themselves

Pathway plan to be completed before the young person turns 16, or within 3 months if they came into care after the age of 16. This should outline the young person’s housing plan.

Completed MyBnks and Preparation for Independence Living Skills booklet/workshops

Paid off rent arrears and demonstrated ability to manage a tenancy

Referral to Leaving Care Accommodation Panel

**Appendix 2: Key contacts responsible for delivering the protocol**

Operational Director of Children and Young People’s Services – Amana Gordon

Head of Children Looked After and Leaving Care Service – Sarah Sanderson

Team Manager (Leaving Care) – Mandy Ball

Team Manager (Leaving Care) – Sue Niemira

Commissioning and Transformation Lead – Sophie Veitch

Assistant Director of Housing Management –

Head of Homelessness Prevention and Assessment –

Housing Advice and Homelessness Manager – Stefan Bicknell

Head of Allocations and Lettings – Adam Stephenson

Allocations and Voids Manager – Mariana Stojanovic

Property and Place Manager –

H&F Link, Support and (Acting) Refugee Operations Manager – Joseph Pascual

Rough Sleeping Coordinator – David Hughes

Care Leaver’s Housing Advisor -

Rental Income Manager (Welfare Benefits) - Sonia Meikle

**Appendix 4: LBHF Guarantor Agreement**



**Guarantor for Care Leavers referred to AST Matching**

1. **The Agreement**

Children’s Service (Hammersmith & Fulham) will act as the Guarantor for Care Leavers referred to the AST Matching Team, through the Care Leavers Housing Panel, to assist young people to secure private rented accommodation.

This agreement is provided as an alternative to the Transitional Insurance Scheme. Landlords/Managing Agents will be able to choose between the Transitional Insurance Scheme or the Council acting as a Guarantor, for Care Leavers referred for assistance to secure private rented accommodation.

1. **The Offer**

As a Guarantor, the Council undertakes to provide:

* + Up to £5,000 cover for damage to the property caused by the referred young person, at the end of the tenancy. This would be payable following the provision of vatable receipts evidencing the repairs carried out;
	+ Up to two months non-payment of rent, evidenced through a documented rent account, and not exceeding a period of more than 2 months;
	+ Up to £5,000 costs associated with early surrender of the tenancy, without legitimate notice (eg removals, loss of rent). This would be payable following the provision of vatable receipts, rent accounts, etc;
	+ The combined total of damage to property, non-payment of rent and costs associated with early surrender of the tenancy covered as a Guarantor will not exceed £5,000;
	+ The provision provided as a Guarantor, will be for a maximum period of two years (commencing from the tenancy start date), or for 2 months after the tenancy has ended; whichever is the sooner.
1. **Making claims**

A Landlord/Managing Agent can seek compensation from the Council, where it has acted as a Guarantor up to 2 months after the tenancy has ended, and under the terms set out in **the Offer** (above).

This should be initiated by the Landlord/Managing Agent contacting the AST Matching Team (email: propertytolet@lbhf.gov.uk; phone: 020 8753 1241). Upon agreement with the presented evidence (eg vatable receipts of completed repairs, rent accounts, etc), and the provision of suitable BACS details, reimbursement will be made within 28 days.



**Approved by:**

Date

Amana Gordon (Operational Director – Children and Young People’s Services)

Date

Landlord/Managing Agent Name:

**Appendix 5:**

**AST MATCHING scheme - REFERRAL FORM**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **REFERRING OFFICER:** |  |
| **CLIENT NAME**:  |  |
| **Iworld/Locata ref (if applicable)** |  |
| **NI No:** |  |
| **AGE/DOB:** |  |
| **ADDRESS**: |  |
| **CONTACT:****(Tel No. / Email)**  |  |
| **HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION:****(Single/Couple/Children/Other – Gender/Ages)** |  |
| **INCOME:** E.g. Wages/ UC / benefits |  |
| **Benefit CAPPED: YES/NO?** |  |
| **AFFORDABILITY CHECK DONE?****Results** |  |
| **PREFERRED AREA:** **(Willing to move out of London?)** |  |
| **LANDLORD CONTACT DETAILS:****(if applicable)** |  |
| **ISSUES to Note:****(Medical issues/Rent Arrears/Drugs/ASB/Language difficulties etc)**  |  |