

Care leavers accommodation and support framework



Believe in
children
 Barnardos

St
Basils
Works with young people

For ease of use this is an interactive document. At the top of each page you can click on each of the coloured tabs to quickly navigate to the beginning of each section within this document.

Acknowledgement

The framework was developed in 2015 by Barnardo's and St Basil's and was updated in 2019, at the request of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Education. Many different organisations have provided support in developing the framework, through sharing their work and giving advice about the way the document could be improved. We are very grateful to the individual staff and also to young people who have taken the time to share their expertise.

Contents

5 Executive summary

8 Introduction

12 1. Prepare for reality of housing options

19 2. Plan young people's accommodation and support options with them

24 3. Reduce housing crisis

29 4. Access housing and support as needed

44 5. Access and successfully manage longer term move-on and support options

51 Annex 1: The legal framework

57 Annex 2 : Questions to ask your teams

58 Annex 3: Self-assessment: How joined up is your commissioning?

59 Annex 4: Summary for Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services

60 Annex 5: Engaging children and young people in using the framework locally

Executive summary

Young people leaving care need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition into adulthood. Good housing and tailored support around emotional well-being and life skills underpins success in other areas of life.

The framework has been developed for local authority commissioners, leaving care and housing managers, and for providers of housing and support for young people in England. It promotes working together to deliver services and support for young people leaving care and is designed to be used flexibly to suit local circumstances and needs, providing a model that local authorities can adapt to meet their shared aspirations as set out in their 'local offer' for care leavers.

Managers of leaving care and housing options services as well as commissioners can use this framework to support their work, informing local housing strategies and the supply of appropriate accommodation for care leavers.

By drawing together expertise from local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and young people across England the framework sets out the ways in which improvements can be made and the rationale for these. There are five stages to the framework which reflect the journey of a young person as they leave care:

1. Preparing for the reality of housing options

Young people still in care are given the opportunity to consider their housing options, including information about the housing market in their area. They are supported to gain the skills for increasing independence, including managing a household, finance and budgeting.

2. Planning young people's accommodation and support options with them

When young people are ready to leave care, they are supported to choose the accommodation that will best suit them, given the constraints on local provision. They are given as much notice as possible for their move out of care, including young people living in different settings such as residential care, in custody and young people with particular needs, for example on-going mental or physical health issues.

3. Reducing housing crisis

Some young people will experience problems with their housing and need emergency or short-term alternatives. They need to be accommodated in safe and appropriate housing options and receive support to help them resolve the cause of the crisis.

4. Accessing housing and support as needed

Young people in different situations will need different types of housing and support, ranging from a 'Staying Put' arrangement with foster carers, a 'Staying Close' arrangement near to their former residential children's home, 24/7 supported housing through to supported lodgings or their own independent flat with floating support. As their needs and circumstances change, young people should be supported to find accommodation that best suits them.

5. Accessing and successfully managing longer-term move-on and support options

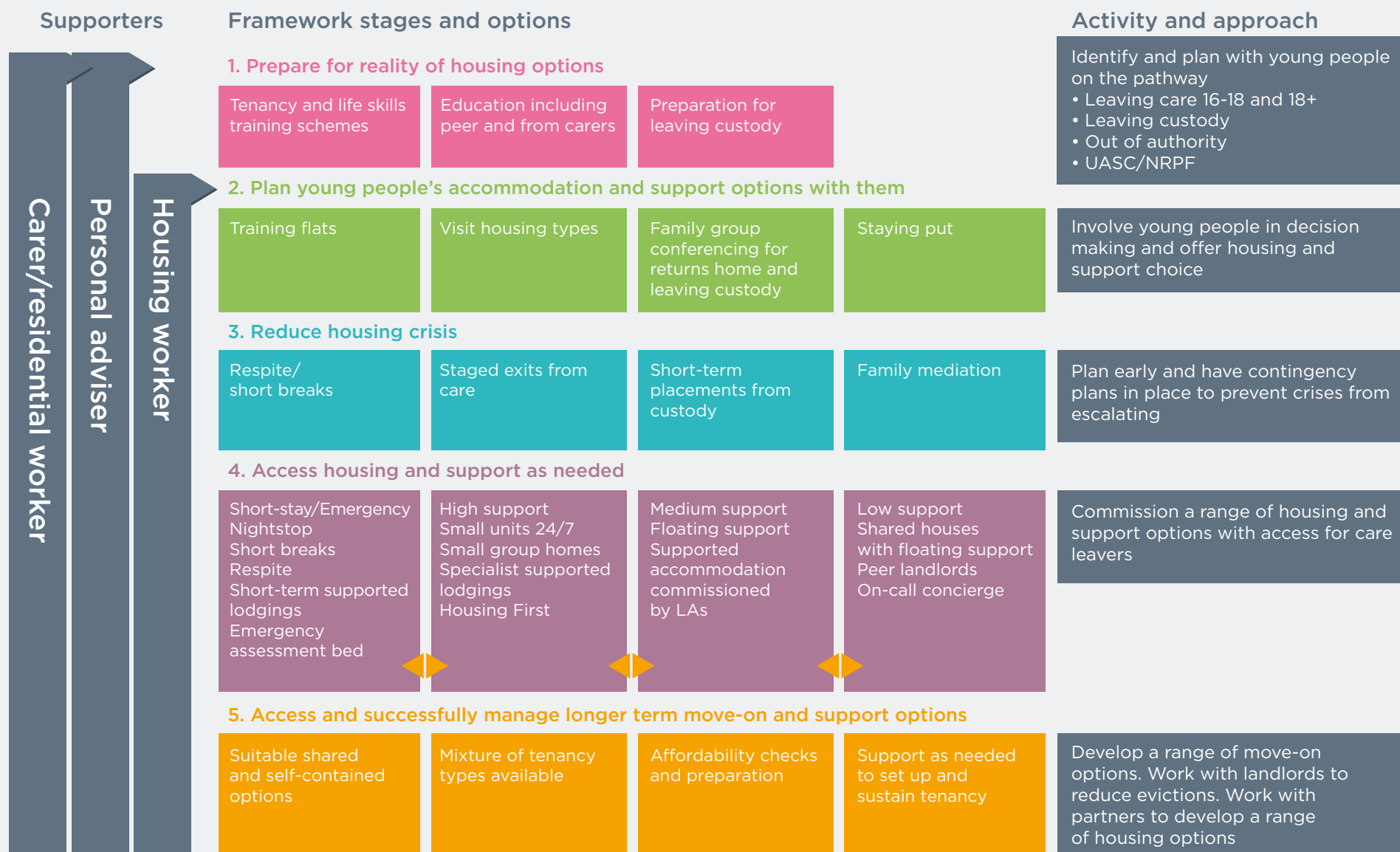
As they become ready, young people will need support to access longer-term housing, such as their own tenancy, a shared flat or long-term supported housing. They will need help to understand their options and know where to go if they need extra support in the future.

The framework is based on some key principles which also underpin the corporate parenting duties.

Young people leaving care are:

- given as much information, choice and control as possible
- able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the framework
- helped to succeed
- offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- offered supportive and unconditional relationships
- the shared responsibility of their corporate parent

Care leavers accommodation and support framework



Underlying principles - young people are:

- able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the pathway
- helped to succeed
- offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- offered supportive and unconditional relationships
- the shared responsibility of their corporate parent

Introduction

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework is a model which aims to help organisations that support young people in making their individual journeys to leave care in England. It has been developed collaboratively with a wide range of partners and care leavers who together have pooled their knowledge and ideas about what works well in helping care leavers transition to adulthood.

The framework is written for:

- local authority commissioners
- leaving care managers
- housing managers
- providers of housing and support for young people

It aims to assist local authorities improve outcomes for young people by supporting and strengthening the 'local offer' to care leavers¹. The model also encourages increased joint working around accommodation and support for care leavers, and will assist in developing and delivering local joint protocols between Children's Services and Housing Authorities.

Having somewhere safe and secure to live is central to young people having a positive exit from care. Young people highly value having choice about where they will live and being involved in decisions that will affect them. Young people's involvement in these decisions is a valuable learning experience as they make the transition to adulthood and more independence and, as well as reducing their anxiety about the future and how they will cope, it also makes them more likely to invest in sustaining their housing choice. A secure housing base is also critical to young people progressing in other areas of life, such as education, training or employment, improved mental health, relationships and building of social networks. However, there is no blueprint for success in terms of what needs to happen and when. Each young person's experience of being looked after is different, and their experience of leaving care will also be different.

The transition to adulthood for all young people, including care leavers, is about progression. For care leavers, this may be a series of small or larger steps, both within care and also leaving care and beyond. Some young people may get their own independent accommodation at 18 – which is recognised as a very young age to live alone – so if this is the case, they will continue to need significant support as they develop their skills, learn from experience and react to their changing life circumstances. Realistically, most young people at 18 – not only care leavers – will find it difficult to manage their own tenancy successfully even with some support, and any experience of 'failure' can damage them practically and emotionally so early on their journey to independence. As care leavers, young people need support from their corporate parents throughout and beyond this transition. In recognition of this, the Government has introduced duties giving former relevant care leavers entitlement to support from a personal adviser until they are 25.²

Alongside housing options, the emotional well-being of young people leaving care is a critical consideration for corporate parents. Too often young people's move from care to living more independently is rushed, not planned with enough consultation time, and assumes a care leaver can

1. See Annex 1 and also see the Government's 2018 'local offer' guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-offer-guidance>
Also see the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum's 'Care Leaver Local Offer Report', published in November 2019: <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/news/national-leaving-care-benchmarking-forum-release-toolkit-for-local-authorities/>. This provides practical information and advice on developing a Local Offer for care leavers.
2. See Annex 1 – The Legal Framework
Also see here for the Government guidance on this: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/extending-personal-adviser-support-to-age-25>

manage in a tenancy alone with a little bit of floating support. But with new responsibilities, little real experience of managing a tight budget, as well as being alone, most young people are likely to find this can impact on their emotional well-being and mental health. Engaging with help and making choices can then be even harder.

What brings young people into care?

Currently 46% of children who are ‘newly looked after’ are between the age of 10 and 17, with 18% entering care at age 16 or older.³ Many become looked after for the same reasons as younger children, but older teenagers are more likely to enter care through the following routes:

- as a homeless 16 or 17 year old
- as an unaccompanied asylum seeker
- because they were accommodated on remand

Young people leaving care have a wide variety of needs and wishes which will have been influenced by their childhood experiences of living with their family and also living in care.

In using this framework, it is helpful to keep in mind the diversity of experience that lies behind “leaving care”. For example, young people who have been in care since they were small children will be more familiar with having a social worker, Pathway Plans and personal advisers whereas, for those entering at 16 or 17 because they were homeless, all this may seem irrelevant and interfering. The range of young people’s pre-care and in-care experiences will mean that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to supporting care leavers.

The contexts for young people’s care experience is also shaped by the type and location of the placements they live in. 37% of young people live outside the area of the local authority which is responsible for looking after them. 15% live more than 20 miles away, with some living considerable distances.⁴

The accommodation framework aims to show a range of options for housing and support that care leavers may need as they move into adulthood. This reflects legal duties and Government statutory guidance relating to care leavers but goes beyond statutory requirements through highlighting what works well and is possible for corporate parents to achieve.

Who developed the accommodation framework?

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework was produced in 2015 by Barnardo’s and St Basils. This version is an update of the original document. It can be read alongside the St Basils Positive Pathway Framework⁵, which is a more generic document on young people and housing pathways, which has informed some of the content and the model itself.

3. Taken from the most recent Government statistics, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>

4. Department for Education first statistical release 2018

5. See <https://stbasils.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PositivePathway.pdf>

6. Positive Pathway Evaluation 2017 <https://stbasils.org.uk/files/2017-05-21/PositivePathwayEvaluation2017.pdf>

7. Homeless Link – Young & Homeless report 2018 See here: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research>

An independent rapid evaluation of the Positive Pathway in 2017 found that 47% of local authorities were using all or some aspects of the model to assist in their service improvements.⁶ A survey by Homeless Link (2018) found that 66% of the local authorities that responded were developing a Positive Pathway approach for young people or had one in place already.⁷ The care leaver framework builds on the Positive Pathway but also reflects the specific legislation and rights affecting care leavers in England as well as providing examples that are relevant to their housing experiences. Barnardo's and St Basils worked with a group of local authorities, leaving care providers, youth housing providers and central government representatives to develop a framework for care leavers which recognised their statutory entitlements as well as the additional challenges that they face on entering adulthood. Young people in and leaving care were also asked what support they wanted to see in the framework. All of these views and ideas were collated together and developed into this framework by Barnardo's and St Basils.

How should the accommodation framework be used?

The framework is not prescriptive but gives a model for how young people can be supported as they leave care. The framework itself is very simple and represented in the diagram on page 7. The rest of this report gives background information, examples, checklists and top tips to help in using the framework. Your own unique set of local services and partnerships - what's working well, your plans and your ideas - can be mapped on to this model. It is yours to use as flexibly as you want to.

For example, you could use the framework:

- to review the accommodation elements of your 'local offer' to care leavers
- to inform the updating of the joint protocol between Children's Services and Housing Authorities
- to carry out a needs analysis of care leavers in your area
- to review your existing services through a commissioning audit
- to identify your service strengths and gaps
- as a template for service re-design

The framework identifies five stages that young people may experience as they leave care. The stages are not always sequential and young people may move several times between different stages. They have been identified, however, to help you think through the range of areas in which young people will need support as they leave care.

The stages are:

1. Preparing for reality of housing options
2. Planning young people's accommodation and support options with them
3. Reducing housing crisis
4. Accessing housing and support as needed
5. Accessing and successfully managing longer-term move-on and support options

How can children and young people be engaged in using the framework locally?

As you develop the framework locally, a key to real improvement is the involvement of children and young people. Using your Children in Care Council and other participation groups will help to find out what care leavers want locally and what (often small) things make positive differences for them. This in turn will help to better shape your 'local offer' for care leavers.⁸

8. Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires that local authorities "must publish information about (a) services which the local authority offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989; (b) other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living".

You can also draw on the wealth of information available in young people's Pathway Plans. Drawing together the themes and issues within these plans can help you analyse the strengths and gaps in your current service provision. This approach will also make sure you hear the voices of all of the former relevant care leavers you are responsible for – not just those who are willing to join in with groups. It is also important to consider how to ensure 'qualifying' care leavers are able to inform this process.⁹ In addition, feedback from local providers and support services will be important too, giving different perspectives on what works well and areas for improvement.

What will make the framework work well?

The framework is based on some underlying principles to give young people the best start possible as they leave care. Although the framework gives practical ideas for delivering good services for young people, the attitude of their corporate parent is key to making it work well.

These principles are that young people leaving care are:

- given as much information, choice and control as possible
- able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the framework
- helped to succeed
- offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- offered supportive and unconditional relationships
- the shared responsibility of their corporate parent.

The framework also relies on different parts of a local authority working effectively together and aspiring to be the best possible corporate parent to young people who are leaving and have left care. Experience from all those already using an accommodation framework demonstrates that effective joint working between Housing Authorities, Children's Services, Housing Related Support commissioners as well as with health commissioners and providers, education, training and employment agencies, criminal justice partners, the voluntary sector and the private sector, is an essential driver of a successful approach. This is "corporate parenting" in action.

9. See Volume 3, Chapter 2 of the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations: Planning transition to adulthood for care leavers https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf

Supporters Framework stages and options

Activity and approach

Carer/residential worker

Personal adviser

1. Prepare for reality of housing options

Tenancy and life skills training schemes

Education including peer and from carers

Preparation for leaving custody

Identify and plan with young people on the pathway

- Leaving care 16-18 and 18+
- Leaving custody
- Out of authority
- UASC/NRPF

'[Living independently was] lonely, most young people really want to move to independent living but it's not the same as you think it will be. It's you and this house, if you don't have any savings or not enough money to buy a TV or something to entertain yourself, sometimes it can be really, really lonely.' (Young person, Barnardo's)

Young people in care need relevant and accurate information about what will happen when they leave care, where they might live and the pros and cons of various options. Foster carers, residential workers, social workers and personal advisers have a vital role to play in preparing young people for the reality of living more independently and making them aware of their housing options when they leave care. The preparation and intended next steps should be written into the young person's Pathway Plan.

Looking back, many care leavers have reflected that their expectations about living independently were unrealistic. Most advocate strongly that local authorities should give young people much better information, advice and practical preparation as well as contingency plans in case things go wrong. An important principle of this framework is its flexibility, so that young people can move back into more supportive options if they find they are not ready for greater independence.

Because young people who are looked after live in a variety of different arrangements, it is important to make sure they get bespoke information and tailored advice, based on their individual circumstances alongside more general information about housing options. For example, where a young person is going to have a Staying Put arrangement with their long-term foster carer, or is likely to go to university, there is no real benefit in giving them very detailed information on supported accommodation and tenancies whilst they are still in care. Should things change, then the level of advice and information can change.

Depending on a young person's circumstances, preparation for living more independently can start well before they leave care. Many local authorities have a life skills programme in place but how consistently these are used varies considerably. Below are two examples which are reported to be working well.

The Money House

The Money House (TMH) is a homelessness prevention programme for 16 – 25 year olds which helps young people in, or about to move into housing, manage their money and remain independent. Participants gain practical financial and digital skills to pay their rent, bills and living costs whilst making informed choices about their future.

Topics taught during the course range from:

- Tenancy agreements – Rights & Responsibilities
- Cost of moving in
- Avoiding eviction
- Paying household bills
- Choosing utility providers
- Banking – Accounts & Savings.
- Borrowing safely.
- Budgeting – Weekly & Monthly
- Spending habits – Good & Bad
- Shopping – Offers, consumer rights
- Benefits – Entitlements & Universal Credit
- What's next – Planning for the future?

Young people who complete the 5 day course are awarded with a Level 1 Money Management accreditation from ABC as well as an Entry Into Work Employability Module.

Sessions take place in a fully kitted out flat, not a classroom. Trainers help young people become more confident about money and living on their own by providing real-life skills in a unique setting that brings financial education to life and helps prevent homelessness.

TMH is part of the move on Pathway in four boroughs and has houses in Greenwich, Newham and Westminster.

Housing:

- 3 times less likely to have problem arrears.
- 64% drop in evictions for those 'at risk'
- 68% drop in arrears for semi-independent tenancies, 43% for fully-independent.

Financial Capability:

- 45% reduction in bank charges & missing bills.
- 22% increase in borrowing safely
- 54% increase paying off debt regularly
- 27% increase in confidence managing money – higher than national average.

Financial exclusion of those not banking / saving / budgeting:

- 22% increase in borrowing safely
- 54% increase paying off debt regularly
- 27% increase in confidence managing money – higher than national average

Evaluation includes NESTA Level 3 Standard of Evidence using comparison groups, independent assessment by ERS, a two year study of 839 individuals, intervention & control data from housing providers.

<https://mybnk.org/our-work/financial-education/the-money-house/>

Example ASDAN

ASDAN is a curriculum development and awarding organisation. In 2016 ASDAN developed the 'Living Independently Short Course' with assistance and expert input from Bristol City and North Somerset leaving care services and feedback from local authorities which are members of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum.¹⁰ This is a 60 hour course for looked after children and has 9 modules which cover:

- Earning and spending money
- Keeping track of your money
- Making financial choices
- A place of your own
- Health and wellbeing
- Cooking on a budget
- Practical cooking skills
- Career management
- Preparing for the world of work¹¹

ASDAN was originally developed to support the Government's 'Keep on Caring: Supporting young people from care to independence' strategy. It's reported that the course has been well received in the authorities which are using the materials with young people.

Joint working

As their parents, our children learn from us about the 'real world' – having a job, finding somewhere to live, managing money. But the housing market has changed so much in the last few decades that what was once common practice is often no longer an option. Are your foster and residential carers and personal advisers up to date about the realities of housing options for young people today?

There will be issues particular to your local area but here is some general information about the housing market:

- social housing waiting lists can be very long and no longer offer a tenancy for life
- care leavers aren't always given priority for social housing in all areas – allocations policies vary from area to area
- from age 22, single care leavers with no children living in self-contained private rented accommodation will find that if they are still claiming Housing Benefit, it is likely that it will reduce to the level of the Shared Accommodation Rate¹²
- private rented properties can vary hugely in quality

There are lots of different ways in which you can keep other 'corporate parents' – carers, personal advisers and social workers – informed.

Many local authorities have specialist advice on housing options for young people leaving care. The structure for how this is delivered varies. For example:

10. This national forum, run by Catch-22, is a network of over 100 local authorities promoting the development of quality leaving care services with member authorities and partner organisations through a process of benchmarking and shared learning on a national scale, to enrich outcomes for care leavers. See here for more information: <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/national-leaving-care-benchmarking-forum/>
11. <https://www.asdan.org.uk/courses/programmes/living-independently-short-course>
12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2015-march-2016>

In Stoke-on-Trent, two housing officers work within the leaving care service, allowing good sharing of up to date knowledge about the local housing market and housing options. One housing officer supports with the initial transition from care and is involved in the planning process in the six months leading up to the young people's 18th birthday. The other housing officer is available to support with any issues post 18 where the young people may be experiencing difficulties with their accommodation and to respond to any crises or changes in circumstances.

In Hull, the Leaving Care service works closely with the Young People's Housing Options Service, which is part of the Targeted Youth Support provision. Any care leaver who needs advice on housing or more in-depth specialist help can request a Housing Options appointment to discuss their housing needs. To prevent any housing crisis, including homelessness, care leavers can access the service on a daily emergency basis Monday-Friday.

The Targeted Youth Support and Leaving Care partnership offers advice and support to help young people develop a tailored housing plan to meet their individual needs and wants. The service jointly offers access to a range of supported and semi-independent accommodation options through to individual tenancies and aims to provide young people with the opportunity to move between varying levels of support to reflect changes in their circumstances and needs. The partnership also delivers an accredited Independent Living Skills programme to help young people develop the necessary skills to make a successful transition to independent living.

In addition, the Housing Authority ensures care leavers can access social housing if needed through additional priority in their allocations scheme as part of an agreed Move On protocol with the Leaving Care and Targeted Youth Support Service.

The London Borough of Wandsworth have a Housing Manager post within their 18+ leaving care service. The remit of the work is extensive, highlighting how much a position like this can contribute to improving outcomes for care leavers. Areas of responsibility include:

- For young people who are offered a Housing Association Property, the post holder is responsible for ensuring that the property is up to required standards to let to care leavers;
- Responsible for drafting and updating accommodation policy for care leavers;
- Works with the Placements and CLA teams to ensure that there is adequate planning for accommodation transitions with young people aged 16 and their social workers;
- Working with the Placements Team on planned and emergency moves for older teenagers aged 16 and 17;
- Liaising with commissioned accommodation providers and overseeing their reports on progress against agreed performance indicators;
- leading on developing and relaunching the 8 week 'Life Skills' workshops for care leavers, ensuring relevant practical and emotional aspects of living alone are covered and inviting in other agencies and services to deliver sessions'
- Leading on nominations of care leavers to housing associations when they are ready to manage in a social housing tenancy
- Acting as an advisor to Personal Advisors when there are issues between Young People and Housing providers, ensuring that the right information is provided to young people
- Is responsible for overseeing the Chessington Project and the RVs who run this.
- Is responsible for ensuring that University Accommodation arrangements meet the Local Offer and that fees are reasonable
- Is responsible for developing links with accommodation providers to expand the accommodation offers that can be made to Young People.

- Meeting regularly with Housing Associations to deal with strategic and operational thematic issues
- Acts as the link between Future First and HPU
- Maps areas of need and priority cases to ensure that young people are advocated for with Housing services.
- Sits on Care Panel to support accommodation planning for CLA aged 16+.

If there is no specialist housing provision for young people leaving care, a Local Housing Authority's Housing Options Service is usually keen to help other professionals to understand the local and national issues relating to housing choices. You could also ask a Housing Options Officer to speak at regular foster or residential carer training sessions.

Leaving care – checklist

Whatever their current situation, all young people will need to be prepared for what life will be like when they leave care. Have you considered how best to prepare young people across the wide range of placements below?

- In local authority foster care
- In agency foster care (which could be out of authority)
- In local authority residential care
- In agency residential care (which could be out of authority)
- Those planning to Stay Put
- Those who may be Staying Close¹³
- In “other arrangements” such as supported lodgings or supported accommodation projects

Young people all have their own unique circumstances – and one size does not fit all. Discussions will vary according to each individual young person because every local authority will have young people leaving care with very different experiences and individual circumstances and their own future aspirations. For example, you will be working with young people who:

- Are in long-term, settled care placements
- Have experienced a series of short-term placements
- Are unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- Are planning to go to university, join the Armed Forces or take up training or FE away from the local area
- Are in custody
- Are physically disabled or have learning difficulties
- Have only very recently become looked after
- Are young parents
- Are experiencing significant mental health difficulties
- Are in hospital for a long-term period of medical care

13. In July 2016, the Government announced the development of a “Staying Close programme” for care leavers leaving residential care. Pilots are running over the period 2018 to 2019 and in the period 2019 to 2020 across eight areas. Some other local authorities have developed provision akin to ‘Staying Close’ outside the Government programme.

In considering these questions, it may be useful to do an audit of your team's skills and knowledge in providing up-to-date and accurate information to young people about their housing options and discuss with Independent Reviewing Officers the range of options available and sorts of issues they might want to consider covering in Pathway Plan reviews.

Joint working – checklist

Different parts of the local authority will have different information and experience about the needs of care leavers locally. Bringing this together and having a joint approach helps to manage the transition to leaving care better, in terms of accommodation and support. Use this checklist and your 'local offer' for care leavers to see how well you are working together in this stage of the framework.

- Commissioning for leaving care support and housing is based on an evidenced needs analysis.
- All relevant parts of the local authority, other public sector agencies, voluntary agencies, Housing Associations and other local providers of relevant services feed into the needs analysis. As well as Leaving Care Services, this could include Housing Options Services, Public Health, Youth Offending Services, Probation and local providers.
- Leaving care commissioners and managers understand and are consulted about changes to the local housing allocations scheme.
- Leaving care commissioners and managers understand the supply and affordability of housing locally, including social housing and supply, affordability and access to the private rented sector (PRS).
- Housing and housing related support commissioners understand the range of needs of care leavers, any projected changes in needs and also any changes in the size of the leaving care population. Focused sessions, involving a range of agencies, will be helpful to ensure the development of suitable options and support for particular groups of care leavers, for example, young parents and young people leaving custody.
- Joint commissioning of supported accommodation and floating support is carried out wherever possible, to ensure widest range of quality options are available for care leavers, in diverse community settings, providing best value for all funders and commissioners.
- Access and referral policies for supported accommodation and floating support acknowledge the needs of care leavers.

Top tips

- Think about how you can harness the experiences of other young people to advise and guide care leavers. Often young people learn best from each other, particularly when they are being warned about challenges ahead. Peer training or mentoring, or even a short film they make to show other young people, can be very effective.
- Close working between Housing Options, Looked After Children and leaving care teams can help develop staff knowledge and their ability to offer good, realistic advice to care leavers. Having a member of staff from a Housing Options service located within a leaving care service has proved to be highly effective in a number of authorities.
- Foster and residential carers, social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) need realistic information about what housing options are available locally so that they can pass this information on to young people.
- A good understanding of the Looked After Children and leaving care data at a strategic level can improve long-term planning.
- Commission and consistently deliver accredited training courses on pre-tenancy awareness or life skills. This will allow young people to gain additional qualifications or credits towards study courses. Care leavers also need to know where they can go for more tenancy advice later on, whether that is directly from their leaving care service - which they can access support from until their 25th birthday - or they may need signposting to mainstream housing options and advice services.
- Ensure all looked after young people are being offered preparation and any accredited training, regardless of their placement type and location - for example, those young people in out of authority placements or in custody.
- When planning with young people for their individual accommodation options, try to give them choice but be realistic about what is possible and available in the local area.
- When preparing young people for the realities of their housing options, work closely alongside foster carers and residential workers. They are likely to know young people very well, dependent on how long the placement has been, and are often the best person to talk to care leavers about the future - but they need up to date information to be able to do so.

Supporters Framework stages and options

Activity and approach



'I've been very protected, for a very long time, and now moving out, it makes it even more scary because I've been so protected.' (Young person, Barnardo's)

Better planning and preparation will support better outcomes for young people, as well as giving them personal assurance about their next steps into adult life. Personal advisers and carers can help young people to understand or even try out different housing options for a short period of time. With a better understanding of the reality of living more independently, young people are empowered to make a well-informed choice.

Pathway Plans set out when a young person will formally leave care and the intended next steps. The Children Act 1989 stipulates that all eligible, relevant and former relevant children should have a Pathway Plan, which should be a live document that is reviewed regularly¹⁴ Pathway Plans should be completed within 28 days of a care leaver changing their accommodation. Social workers and personal advisers will have the information to be able to plan those moves well in advance.

As stated in statutory guidance,¹⁵ **contingency plans** – or a 'back up' plan – are a good idea for young people generally. For some young people, a more detailed contingency plan is needed, for example young people placed in a foster care or residential care setting in another area of the country, those coming out of custody as a care leaver or those seeking asylum and awaiting decisions from the Home Office. Some young people placed outside the local authority area may choose to stay where they were living as a looked after child and not return to their 'home' authority. It is really important for these young people that there is detailed planning about their accommodation needs as it may not be automatic or straightforward that they will have priority for social housing or that a local authority would recognise they meet the 'residency criteria' to be offered social housing.

Some local authorities find that having a regular '**panel**' meeting between Housing and Children's Services departments can effectively generate a shared agreement about the accommodation plan for some or all looked after young people who are preparing to leave care. This is in addition to individual Pathway Planning meetings. For example, panel meetings can consider the range of available accommodation options to avoid a care leaver being set up to fail in a tenancy which they are not yet ready for. Young people can be involved in any discussion, including panel meetings, if they want to be.

14. Department for Education, Children Act 1989: Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers, January 2015, Chapter 3

15. Department for Education, Children Act 1989: Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers, January 2015, paragraphs 7.74-7.79

Staying Put, which enables young people to continue to live with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday, gives young people more time to think about where they want to live when they do leave care.¹⁶ The numbers and percentages of care leavers opting to ‘Stay Put’ with foster carers continues to rise year on year. 26% of care leavers aged 19 - 21 were reported to be in Staying Put arrangements in 2018, a slight rise from 2017. And 55% of all young people who ceased being looked after on their 18th birthday continued to stay with foster carers for at least 3 months. Staying Put can bring greater stability for care leavers, particularly those who don’t yet feel ready to ‘move out’ or who have a very good relationship with their carer.

For young people living in residential care, **Staying Close** is being piloted in 8 areas of England (see page 15, footnote 13 on Staying Close). The carer(s) or residential worker(s) who will probably know the young person best of all, should be involved in helping them plan for their next step. However, having a Staying Put or Staying Close arrangement can lead to a change in relationships with a former foster carer or the residential home, so it is important to have a contingency plan in place in case it does not work out. Whatever the plans, the detail needs to be written into their Pathway Plan.

Some care leavers may plan to return to their birth parents: in 2017-18, 12% of 19 – 21-year-old care leavers were living with their parents.¹⁷ Young people can have unrealistic expectations of what returning to their family will be like, and often relationships can start to struggle. Where a return home is the plan, there needs to be substantial pre-move planning and on-going support to help both the young person and their parents or extended family to adjust. This can be a particular issue for care leavers returning home having been in custody.

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) can be a useful way to help the young person and their family make the best choices and to settle. FGC is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child or young person with their involvement. It is a voluntary process and, with an independent facilitator, can work through options that might not have been initially obvious, including the need for on-going support.

Focus on...

Young people leaving custody are particularly at risk of living in unsuitable accommodation or becoming homeless, and have often experienced poor accommodation or placements before their experience in custody. They may have additional challenges in accessing housing and the support to meet their needs, perhaps due to disruptive behaviour. Many supported accommodation projects do not accept young people if they have committed particular offences such as sexual offences or arson.

Planning for young people on short custodial sentences can be challenging, and young people often don’t know where they are going to live until the last minute before they leave custody. This can be very worrying for young people as well as leading to additional problems after they are released.

16. See the Government’s Staying Put guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above>

17. Taken from the Department for Education First Statistical Release 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018>

There have been some recent improvements in supporting care leavers whilst in custody and their planning for resettlement. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has increased its focus on identifying and supporting young people in custody who are care leavers. The work is led by an HMPPS National Care Leaver Champion and each prison in England and Wales now has a Care Leaver Lead and regional leads in community settings as well. Alongside this is a new HMPPS 'Strategy for Care Experienced People'.¹⁸

To help ease the transition out of custody, it is very important that leaving care services work with the Youth Offending Service, Probation staff and case managers to:

- Plan young people's accommodation options as soon as possible on entering custody; and
- Keep the young person informed about progress and their options.

Leaving care personal advisers or social workers will need to:

- Keep in touch with the young person throughout the time they are in custody, even if they are placed a long way from home
- Look for housing options for the young person as their release date approaches
- Keep the young person and the Youth Offending Service /Probation staff or case manager informed of progress
- Have in place a contingency plan if the first option does not work
- Put in place a package of support to assist the young person to settle back into their community.

Commissioners of leaving care and housing services need to take into account how easily young people leaving custody will be able to access existing services, and what additional services or support may need to be put in place specifically for them. This might involve a joint protocol between Housing, Children's Services and Youth Offending Services so that suitable accommodation is provided locally. It may also require agencies offering post- custody placements to travel to meet the young person in custody, or arrange to do pre-tenancy interviews via Skype (as happens in HMP & YOI Parc¹⁹).

For working with young people in custody who need accommodation on release, see also the St Basils 'Youth Justice Accommodation Pathway' <https://stbasils.org.uk/thepositivepathway>

Making well planned moves is in the best interests of young people leaving care. Crisis or emergency moves are much less likely to support good outcomes and may set young people back in other areas of their lives such as education, training or employment. There are different ways in which personal advisers or foster or residential carers can help care leavers make an informed choice about their move from care. Here are some examples:

18. See here for more information on care leavers in prison and the Probation Service <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/care-leavers-in-prison-and-probation>

19. See: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/our-community/resources-for-sharing/item/440-skype-project-parc-young-offender-institution-findings-from-the-pilot-may-2015-to-april-2016.html>

Training flats

Many care leavers say that they want to leave care so that they can get their 'own place'. The reality of living alone as the first move after leaving care can be very different from what young people expect. Care leavers often describe feeling lonely, unsure how to manage household problems or worried about finances and bills. Many local authorities are using training flats to help care leavers experience what it is really like to live on their own, without the risk of them losing their own first tenancy. A few weeks in a flat, but with some support, trying to manage money and experiencing living alone, can really assist young people in understanding more about living more independently.

Visiting different housing types

It can be hard for care leavers to know where they want to live if they don't have any experience of different housing types. Language is very powerful: for example, the term "hostel" often has negative connotations, suggesting night- shelters or large buildings in poor condition with little support. However, a locally commissioned supported accommodation scheme, which may locally be called a "hostel", could in reality be a small, high quality supported accommodation scheme and a good first move for a young person. Another example is "supported lodgings" which is likely to be an unfamiliar term, but in fact has many similarities with foster care though more suitable for older young people, as the focus is on more independence than foster care. Advice from other young people can be really helpful about the pros and cons of the various options available to them.

Some local authorities are offering care leavers the chance to visit or even stay in different options for a night or two to experience first-hand before they make their decision about where they want to live next. Giving young people the tools to make an informed decision can make a substantial difference to their commitment to their housing choice.

Leaving care – checklist

Young people leave care from a range of settings. Does your 'local offer' for care leavers reflect and address the challenge of meeting your duty to plan housing options and consistently support all young people leaving care, regardless of where they live? Are you working with young people in all these different settings to plan their accommodation and support:

- Residential care
- Foster care
- Out of area fostering or residential care settings
- "Other arrangements"²⁰
- Residential special schools
- Custody or secure units
- A family setting, with parents and/or other family members

Top tips

- Having a Housing Officer in the leaving care team can make a big difference through up-skilling personal advisers in housing knowledge as well as giving young people specialist housing advice and helping them to access various housing options. Many Housing Departments have placed officers in Leaving Care Teams as part of their contribution as a 'corporate parent' or made a 'virtual' arrangement.

20. For more information on how 'Other arrangements' is defined, Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 2: Care planning, placement and case review, points 3.117 – 3.120

- Consider setting up a ‘panel’ to look at all the cases of young people leaving care. This is also an effective way to promote joint working. Panels usually include staff from Leaving Care and Housing Options, but could also usefully join up with voluntary sector providers of accommodation and support in the local area. Provide short-term beds for young people leaving custody. If a longer-term housing and support option is not yet ready for them, they can stay in a supported environment for a few days prior to the move.
- Involve foster and residential carers and other trusted adults to help young people think about their options and make an informed choice about where they want to live.
- Wherever possible, give care leavers the opportunity to visit or try out different types of accommodation before they make their choice, such as supported housing, supported lodgings, a shared flat, their own tenancy etc.

EXAMPLE Blackpool Council

Having decided to adopt the Positive Pathway in Blackpool, the Housing Options Service, local housing providers, Children’s Services, Early Help and YOT worked together and drew up an action plan based on gaps in the pathway. The most obvious and critical gap was in the lack of planning for children leaving care, and the lack of suitable accommodation options.

All too often young people were reaching their 18th birthday with no plan or place to go and having to make homeless applications. The ‘Housing Clinic’ was set up – a monthly meeting of a transitions panel to begin planning around the 17th birthday of looked after young people. Team Managers from Children’s Services, Commissioning, Housing Options, and the key housing providers all attend.

A list is generated each month of all young people reaching their 17th birthday, with social workers and personal advisers invited to a slot on the clinic to start the discussion around future housing options. The clinic also manages transitions for young people leaving supported housing in exactly the same way, and can also pick up young people returning home from university, or leaving Staying Put arrangements. In the future it may also include young people leaving custody.

It has enabled the local authority to reduce the “cliff edge” at 18, and significantly reduce homeless applications and unplanned moves. All partners can see the real benefits that young people experience through this planned and joined up approach.

Supporters Framework stages and options

Activity and approach



'I went from not paying anything, and I mean anything, literally just my clothes and my cigarettes, to having water rates and light rates, TV licence, council tax and having these different cards to pay for different things. Wow, it was a bombardment! The one question I kept asking myself was, 'how will I cope?' and the answer is, you don't.' (Young person, Barnardo's)

Local authorities as corporate parents should purposefully design services and support to ensure young people leaving care do not become homeless or face any housing crisis. The experience of homelessness at a young age is not only stigmatising but can, without effective support and accommodation options, result in long-term poor outcomes.²¹

Many young people report their experience as traumatic, leading to dropping out of education, training or employment and resulting benefit dependency. Becoming homeless can result in significantly higher risks of developing mental health problems, getting involved in substance misuse, risks of sexual exploitation, involvement in crime and, in some areas, involvement in gangs. This can result in young people disengaging from services which could make them increasingly difficult to support appropriately.

For care leavers, homelessness can feel even more of a damaging experience as they often don't have family members able to help them and, despite the local authority being their 'corporate parent', many young people say they feel on their own. In some areas, without young people's emergency or short-stay accommodation, homeless care leavers describe staying in all-age hostels with older homeless people, who may be using substances or involved in crime, or living for long periods in inappropriate bed and breakfast (B&B) or hotel accommodation. This sort of accommodation is never suitable as an option. It is often not only inappropriate but is unsafe for young people and provides little or no support, so not helping them to deal with what has happened and to move on with their lives.²²

When a care leaver is facing a potential breakdown in their living situation, it is important that action is taken quickly to prevent them becoming homeless. Homelessness can happen in any form of accommodation. For example, they may have returned home to family, be in a Staying Put arrangement, living with a partner, in a supported lodgings placement, or a supported accommodation scheme. Some young people may be in their own tenancy, but be building up rent arrears or be involved in anti-social behaviour locally, which is putting their tenancy at risk.

21. G.Bramley and S.Fitzpatrick et al. 'Hard Edges - Mapping Severe and Multiple Disadvantage in England' published by Lankelly Chase Foundation 2015

22. See Chapter 7 of The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations - Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers (Department for Education)

Avoiding any risk of homelessness is one of the roles of the personal adviser and a housing related support worker play, as they will know how each young person is managing and should be visiting their accommodation regularly. Foster carers, independent visitors or other trusted adults in the young person's life should also take some responsibility in raising any concerns about how well a young person is managing or if their housing is looking at risk.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness. This is a significant change and means people at risk of homelessness get help much earlier. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the **Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities** in February 2018, which sets out how local authorities should exercise their homelessness functions under Part 7 of the Housing Act, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Within this is a chapter on care leavers.²³

The way the amended legislation works means there should be more intervention and support to prevent homelessness, and a reduction in intentionally homeless decisions for care leavers. Joint working will further reduce this risk as well.

Personal housing plans (PHPs) must be drawn up for each applicant who is homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. The PHP is based on an assessment of the applicants' housing circumstances, housing needs and support needs. The PHP sets out the 'reasonable steps' that the local authority will take to assist the applicant in retaining or securing accommodation, as well as the 'reasonable steps' that the applicant will take. The Code of Guidance states that where there is a duty to assess a care leaver's housing and other support needs and develop a PHP, arrangements should be in place to enable the personal adviser to be involved in the assessment process with the young person's consent. The personal housing plan should also be informed by the care leaver's Pathway Plan.²⁴ See Annex 1 for more information.

A range of homelessness prevention tools can be used to try and prevent the young person from losing their housing. They may need to move on from their accommodation in due course, but support and interventions which focus on preventing homelessness can be used to slow down a crisis, alleviate risks and enable a move to be made in a planned and sustainable way.

A major trigger for homelessness for all young people, including those in care and leaving care, is the breakdown of relationships. Losing contact with long-term foster carers or leaving residential care abruptly as a result of an incident is damaging for young people. Unresolved conflict and the emotional impact of fractured relationships can reinforce low self-esteem and an inner belief that no-one cares. For 16/17 year olds who are still looked after and living with foster carers or in residential care, a breakdown in relationship can sometimes result in an unplanned placement move into 'other arrangements'. With appropriate prevention activity – such as an offer of mediation – these unplanned placement moves may be avoided.

23. See: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-22-care-leavers>

24. Homelessness Code of Guidance (MHCLG) – Chapter 11 here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

For a care leaver the breakdown of a relationship could be with a partner or friend they are living with, with their parents or wider family, or with their former foster carer or supported lodgings host. Young people who have returned to family or carers from custody may be at particular risk.

Examples of homelessness prevention tools include:

Mediation

Whilst mediation services are usually targeted at young people who live with their parents, they can also be used with young people at risk of placement breakdown. Sometimes a different person, perhaps from a different agency, is viewed as more independent because they are removed from the dynamics of the placement. Mediation can be structured and delivered in planned sessions or be more immediate and informal.

Mediators usually help young people and their carers or families understand what the underlying tensions are about, what they want to achieve and support them in finding ways to resolve issues. There are several ways of measuring what a successful outcome from mediation might be, one of which may be moving from their current housing situation, but in a planned way.

At a point of real crisis, there is not much time to arrange more formal mediation nor is it likely to be an easy offer for young people and their carers to accept. But immediate mediation – someone with mediation and negotiation skills who can visit within a few hours – does not require a long ‘lead in’ period and deals with issues in the here and now.

Family Group Conferencing

Family Group Conferencing may be another option that local authorities might consider. It may well take longer to set up, so could be a very helpful follow up option after a crisis situation has passed. It could be adapted for care leavers and their carers, and still achieve a successful outcome.

EXAMPLE

St Basils provides a mediation option for young people in Birmingham, Solihull & Sandwell, as a homelessness prevention intervention. This is an option for young people and their parents/carers which can enable young people to remain at home if safe to do so or may mean the young person does not stay in the family or foster placement, but moves out in a more planned way, with the issues resolved and/or communication improved.

Top tips

- As an alternative or in addition to a specialist mediation service, consider how your staff can develop the skills and confidence to mediate and negotiate to help prevent homelessness.
- Some Housing Options Services have invested in accredited training on mediation skills, because it is so valuable in preventing homelessness. You could consider the benefits of commissioning some training and sharing costs between several different organisations or services, because these are generic skills that several services may want to train their staff in (for example, Youth Offending Services, Troubled Families Programme staff, Family Support and Early Help staff, social workers and Housing Options Services).

Respite/short breaks

If relationships are under strain, sometimes young people just need ‘time out’ to think about what is going on and to make a plan for the future. Offering a respite or short break service can help care leavers take their time over decisions and think about their next move. Respite services might just be a safe place to go for a few days or weeks, or it might offer a range of coaching or therapeutic support. Short breaks might be used in conjunction with mediation, to take the young person out of the crisis situation whilst working together to try and resolve the underlying issues.

Short-term moves from custody

Young people leaving custody are at particular risk of homelessness, in part because their initial moves are often insufficiently planned. With release dates often unknown until the last minute, and with the distance between custody and home, young people are often moved somewhere they do not know, do not want or that is not sustainable. Some local authorities are providing short-term accommodation that young people can access direct from custody as part of their resettlement plan. This might be a ring-fenced room in a supported housing project or a specialist supported lodging. The service can be used for a few weeks whilst they look at longer-term options available locally, rebuild relationships with family prior to moving back home, or until their chosen placement becomes available.

Joint working – checklist

To avoid housing crisis and prevent homelessness, the Leaving Care Service and local Housing Options Services need to work closely together. In some local authorities, there is a member of the Housing Options Service based within or linked to the Leaving Care Service.

A local authority could, as part of its corporate parenting responsibility and ‘local offer’ for care leavers, have an agreed set of prevention tools available and a shared understanding across Housing Authorities and Children’s Services regarding who would do what in a situation of housing crisis for a young person aged 16 or over who is looked after or a care leaver. This should be outlined in any Housing Authority and Children’s Services joint protocol regarding care leavers and accommodation.

How well are services and departments working together in your local authority? If you are in a two-tier authority, it is even more important that each of the District Housing Authorities comes together to work closely with Children’s Services at the County Council level.

Use the checklist below as well as your ‘local offer’ for care leavers to assess how well different services and departments are working together. Are the following areas addressed?

- Homelessness prevention services are accessible to care leavers and take account of the range of housing situations they may be in
- Leaving care teams are aware of the homelessness prevention support available locally
- Housing and homelessness officers are familiar with the needs of care leavers in their area and can offer accurate and tailored advice
- Youth Offending Teams are involved in commissioning short-term accommodation options that are suitable for young people immediately on release from custody
- A joint protocol is in place which outlines how you will all work together to avoid homelessness and housing crisis amongst care leavers

Top tips

- Contingency plans are helpful for all young people moving into new accommodation, but are particularly important for those assessed as being at more risk of losing their accommodation.
- Having a designated place or person where young people and their carers can go for early advice and support can help avoid crisis and reduce worry if things start to go wrong. This could be a Leaving Care Service or a local young people's 'one-stop-shop' or 'youth hub' with access to a range of services such as mediation.
- There is a duty to support care leavers who are living away at university or a residential FE college with accommodation over vacation periods, so that they do not face housing problems outside of term-time. This needs to be planned pro-actively, led by the young person and the personal adviser.
- Some Young Offender Institutions enable young people who are preparing to leave custody to use Skype to take part in assessment interviews with potential housing services. This can help ease the transition out of custody but also give the housing service assurances about how the young person will cope with living in a specific setting.

Supporters Framework stages and options

Activity and approach



‘It [supported lodgings] has prepared me a lot better, you get a family around you that can help wonders, it really can, and it helps you develop a lot better.’ (Young person, Barnardo’s)

Care leavers will need access to different types of accommodation and support at different times in their journey out of care. This may depend on diverse factors such as the age at which they leave care, their emotional health or resilience, life skills and experience, mental and physical health, disability, engagement with education, training or employment, any experience of substance use or offending, and a range of other factors.

Although this framework is presented as a structured model, there is no linear relationship between the types of accommodation and support that care leavers will need. Some care leavers will only need one type of accommodation and support, whereas others will have several moves before they progress to independence. They may move between different types of provision sequentially or more randomly, depending on how their needs change. For example, if a previously unidentified mental health need became apparent, a young person may jump from a low support to a high support setting quickly.

Whilst it is helpful to have a guideline for how long a young person might stay in a supported accommodation option (e.g. supported lodgings, a foyer or a ‘step down’ shared house with floating support), there does need to be some degree of flexibility built in to contracts to enable commissioners and providers to extend a young person’s stay if they are not ready to move on and run the risk of failure if they do move.

The personal adviser, and anyone who is supporting the young person day to day, will have a good idea of how a young person is getting on. By working together, staying in touch, and involving the young person directly in planning what the next move might be, a more positive outcome is likely. The accommodation decision – and contingency plan – should be agreed and written into a care leaver’s Pathway Plan.

It is helpful if personal advisers are familiar with the range of accommodation options available to care leavers locally, including how to refer young people into the various sorts of accommodation and support. This can be much simpler when there is a single integrated gateway to all supported accommodation options.

Effective provision of a range of accommodation options locally will meet requirements on local authorities for both sufficiency and suitability of accommodation. Local authorities report annually to the Department for Education on their ability to find 'suitable' accommodation for care leavers between the ages of 17 to 21. Ofsted also looks at the suitability of accommodation for care leavers. Defined in the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010,²⁵ suitable accommodation is accommodation:

- which, so far as reasonably practicable, is suitable for the child in light of their needs, including their health needs
- in respect of which the responsible authority has satisfied itself as to the character and suitability of the landlord or other provider
- 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 child's wishes and feelings, education, training or employment needs.

Although they need access to a range of provision, in reality care leavers will make up a relatively small proportion of the young people who need wider housing support. **It therefore makes sense that the housing options set out in this stage are jointly or co-commissioned by housing related support commissioners and Children's Services commissioners. This might mean drawing up specifications together, agreeing to pool some budgets, allocating specific beds in a scheme to care leavers, or having a shared protocol that sets out agreed access routes.**

Seeking advice all through the process from colleagues working within the local housing authority is essential as they have specialist knowledge, experience and contacts in housing – for example, understanding the realities of the local housing market; what is available and how to access the private rented sector; leasing of properties; tenancy types; what constitutes suitable accommodation in law.

In some local authorities, the element of the budget for housing related support which relates to young people 16-25 has been moved to Children's Services. In effect, this means that there is a single budget for all accommodation and support for young people who need additional housing support or are at risk of homelessness, including care leavers. It could be useful to undertake an options appraisal to understand the pros and cons of this approach. Wherever the budget sits, there are opportunities to consider the broader needs of all vulnerable young people, including care leavers, when commissioning accommodation and support. This could involve carrying out a needs assessment and commissioning solutions to meet young people's needs in a more comprehensive way, as an alternative to having separate funding and commissioning pots for young people according to their legal status.

Supporting young people leaving care who have multiple or complex needs

Many young people leaving care have a much higher level of support needs than their peers. Some may have learning or physical disabilities, or mental or physical health needs. Other young people may be involved in offending or anti-social behaviour or have substance misuse issues. Their needs cannot usually be met in more traditional supported housing schemes and they need a more bespoke or specialist service.

25. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2010/2571/regulation/9/made>

Learning from the Fair Chance Fund

The Fair Chance Fund was an innovative three-year programme, funded by the Government and designed to improve accommodation, education and employment outcomes for homeless young people aged 18 to 24.²⁶ The programme included some care leavers and was designed for young people who were likely to be at high risk of rough sleeping because local supported housing and general housing options were not available to them due to their high level of needs.

The importance of the Fair Chance Fund, in terms of learning is significant for all local authorities, especially commissioners of supported housing in terms of considerations for future commissioning for young people with multiple and complex needs. There are interim and final evaluations available on-line which give much more detail on this programme and the learning.²⁷

The criteria for entry into the programme was for young people:

- Aged 18-24 (21 and over if care leavers)
- Homeless and non-priority
- Not in education, training or employment (NEET)
- A priority for Local Authority support but unable to be accommodated in a supported housing scheme as a result of:
 - Previous difficulties in, or eviction from supported accommodation
 - Security issues e.g. for young offenders
 - Needs deemed too high/complex to manage within current schemes
 - Lack of specialist supported accommodation
- May be in priority need and intentionally homeless

It was funded on a 100% payment by results basis, with projects being backed by social impact bonds following a competitive bidding process. Social investors funded project providers to set up and deliver services, recouping their investments as and when outcomes were achieved, and triggering payments against a set of specific metrics and tariffs.

A total of 1,910 young people were recruited by the seven projects during the Year 1 recruitment period.

Accommodation outcomes included:

- 1,657 young people, or 87% of all participants, entered accommodation, of whom;
- 93% achieved a 3-month sustained outcome
- 86% achieved a 6-month sustained outcome
- 73% achieved a 12-month outcome
- 62% achieved an 18-month sustained outcome (53% of all participants).

Employment, education and training outcomes included:

- 33% entered employment – 623 young people. Most commonly this was in entry level posts in the retail, hospitality, construction and manual trades.
- 55%, achieved an entry to education or a training outcome – 1,042 young people. Most commonly this was short, internally delivered life skills or pre-employability provision.
- 13% undertook some volunteering work – 252 young people.

26. Evaluation of the Fair Chance Fund- Final Report https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793810/Fair_Chance_Fund_final_report.pdf

27. See here for the Fair Chance Fund evaluation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fair-chance-fund-evaluation-final-report>

Young people engaging with the Fair Chance Fund were less interested in taking up education and training opportunities than originally anticipated, as more young people wanted to enter employment. Most projects re-profiled their education outcomes downwards to reflect lower than projected demand.

The learning across the Programme was in part related to how different provider organisations running the 7 projects experienced the challenge of a new way of working - a Social Impact Bond with 100% payment by results. There is learning around some of the positives and the challenges this presented some agencies. There is also learning about delivery models to support positive outcome for young people with multiple and complex needs, including:

- **Dedicated key workers providing holistic bespoke support:** through providing more intensive and personalised support, the ability to engage, develop trust, and act as advocates was important. Young people valued the sustained, responsive, emotional and practical support received, often in contrast to support received previously.
- **A housing-led approach:** the focus on accommodation as a key outcome enabled young people to progress into education and employment outcomes. Unsurprisingly, given the client group, some young people were not ready for living more independently and needed time in supported housing before moving on.
- **The three-year duration of the project:** because the young people had support for a minimum of 2 years, with no new young people joining the programme after Year 1, this allowed time for relationships and trust to be established and for the long-term support required for progression.
- **Flexibility of approach:** the programme and the funding model actively encouraged providers to determine their own models or 'theory of change' and if necessary adapt their ways of working - as long as these changes fitted with the funding arrangements and organisational ethos allowed. In order to achieve outcomes - and therefore payment - the providers added in new provision or staff with specialist accommodation, education or employment remits.

Therapeutic and Psychologically Informed Approaches

Some supported housing providers have developed accommodation and support models which are "psychologically informed" and/or use a therapeutic framework to respond to young people who have experienced complex trauma in their early lives. The approach goes beyond provision of housing with a support plan, with greater ambition to transform young lives. Psychologically informed services ensure staff are well trained to understand the emotional, psychological and behavioural impact of negative childhood experiences and their contribution to homelessness. This understanding underlies how staff relate to service users, the way key work sessions are delivered and additional support is provided, and arrangements are in place for psychological input and reflective practice.

Creating and embedding a Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) approach takes time, it is not a model that can be introduced overnight, simply through staff training or re-decorating the building. There are some useful resources available: good practice guidance (funded by the then DCLG) on psychologically informed services for homeless people was published in 2012; Homeless Link have published a toolkit to support organisations adopt the PIE framework; and a case study of the implementation of a PIE at St Basils is available from the Housing LIN.²⁸

28. For DCLG guidance see here: <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/340022/>. For the Homeless Link toolkit see here: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Creating%20a%20Psychologically%20Informed%20Environment%20-%202015.pdf> For the St Basils case study see here: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/St-Basils-Psychologically-Informed-Environments-meeting-the-emotional-and-psychological-needs-of-young-homeless-people/>

EXAMPLE

West London Alliance Commissioning Service: accommodation and support for 16+ looked after children and care leavers

The West London Alliance Commissioning Service developed as a partnership between seven London boroughs in 2018, and now supports thirteen local authorities with an aspiration to bring together local authorities nationally to transform the markets for children's social care. The service, and its brokerage platform CarePlace, is trying improve the ways the social care market works for local authorities and the residents they support, in terms of consistent delivery of value for money and within this, quality of provision and service. They are doing this through a joined-up delivery approach, underpinned by scale of spend, competition between providers on the basis of cost and quality, as well as engagement across sellers and purchasers to find the best outcomes for young people.

This is in response to national trends in these markets; significant increases in demand for SEN and a 15% increase in the numbers of looked after children, as well as an increase in levels of complexity of needs and often a limited supply of quality provision. The current system sees local authorities bid against each other for placements. In London, where there are 33 Boroughs, the feedback from local authorities is that this not resulting in the commissioning of services which give value for money. The impact is spiralling costs, with 91% of local authorities exceeding children's services budgets in 2017/18, equating to overspends totalling £872m, forecasted to be £3.1bn by 2025.

The Commissioning Alliance is a combination of commissioning, contract management and brokerage capability utilising Dynamic Purching Vehicles (DPV), and a local authority developed and owned brokerage and data platform CarePlace to build an intelligent customer approach. The aspiration is big so there is plenty more to do, but the approach is working for local authorities and the Commissioning Alliance are now expanding to adult social care and temporary accommodation. In early 2020 the '16-25 Semi-Independent DPV' will be launched which incorporates supported accommodation, supported lodgings and housing-related support. The contract is dynamic with both providers and local authorities able to join at any time. The contract has been purposefully designed to maximise the number of providers on the DPV, to increase choice and ensure authorities get the right support for young people at the right cost. The options available include both spot purchasing and block contracting.

In addition to due diligence carried out through the procurement exercise, all providers on the DPV will be contract managed by a dedicated Contract Management Team. Given the lack of national regulation in this sector, the Commissioning Alliance have also established a standalone Accreditation Scheme. This Accreditation carries out checks at both the organisational level (i.e. policies, procedures, finance) but also 'fit and proper person' checks on Managers and all named Director/owners. Providers submit a range of supporting evidence, with those that pass visited by a dedicated Inspections Officer who carries out a site visit, interviews staff and undertakes a range of spot-checks to verify information submitted

The threshold for achieving the Accreditation will intentionally increase over time in order to actively shape the market, with the standard overseen by a panel of local authority commissioners, providers and young people.

EXAMPLE - Blackpool Council

Blackpool Council have developed a housing option for young people leaving care, in partnership within Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH), the organisation which manages all of the Council's social housing. This option prepares young people for independence with support from their Personal Adviser and a support worker from BCH. Young people are identified as being suitable for the model at the 'Housing Clinic' transitions panel when they are 17 and are introduced to a BCH support worker at this point. They work alongside the PA and accommodation provider to prepare them for independent living. At around 17½, independent accommodation will be identified for the young person and they will move in with support, initially from both Children's Services and BCH. At some point after their 18th birthday, they take over the tenancy and BCH continue to provide floating support. The 'cliff edge' at 18 is minimised and support is on-going. Young people progress in terms of their independence, but don't need to physically move in order to have their own tenancy.

This has resulted in a very significant decrease in tenancy failure, and allows the young person to develop a relationship with their "landlord", who is acting as a corporate parent, in a phased and supportive way.

EXAMPLE- Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes Council has a mixture of spot purchase, framework and block contract provision for young people who are looked after and leaving care.

Joint commissioning between Children's and Adult Services mean there is no 'cliff edge' at 18 for care leavers in supported housing placements, and they can remain until they are ready to move on into more independent accommodation.

Once a contract is awarded, whether this is a block contract or through the framework or spot purchasing, there is a strong focus on quality and compliance, which is managed by a team of officers.

Young people who are looked after and care leavers were involved in the commissioning process for the block contract of housing and support, contributing to the content of the service specification and evaluating part of the tender. Young people will also be part of quality reviews and inspections in the future, with a new Youth Participation Officer post based within the Corporate Parenting Team to support young people operate as youth inspectors.

To improve capacity under the sufficiency duty, plans for the future include reducing spot-purchasing through the use of the 16+ accommodation framework with a focus on outcomes, including health and employment, education and training.

A package of support is individually tailored and is responsive to the young person's needs. Within the main provision, young people typically enter a core service then progress on into cluster accommodation as their independence, resilience and ability to manage a tenancy improves. However, some young people may move directly into the cluster accommodation if this is deemed more suitable. Some young people may require a move from a more independent cluster property back into the more supported 'core' service if their needs would be met more appropriate in that setting. Similarly, some young people will move from the core service into a higher needs placement if this is more suited to their needs.

The commissioners believe that there has been improved value for money, compared to previous spot purchasing arrangements, and the quality of service delivery is high.

The commissioning model that has developed is a reflection of strong partnership working between the County Council and all the 7 District Councils in Nottinghamshire. This has led to a high level of consistency across the District Councils, which is expressed in the Care Leavers Offer²⁹, supporting care leavers to find suitable housing, and offer priority on Nottinghamshire housing waiting lists. Care leavers are also exempt from paying Council Tax in all the Districts and have access to free leisure facilities.

Joint working

Many local authorities that use an accommodation pathway have put in place a single integrated gateway to all supported accommodation in the local area. A gateway enables:

- a more consistent approach to needs assessment and understanding of provision, resulting in better matching of needs with services
- more choice of accommodation options for young people, including care leavers
- better use of limited resources, ensuring those with the highest needs access the services they need
- improved safeguarding, with a shared knowledge of potential risk, agreed approaches to managing risk and knowledge of who is placed where
- improved ability to continue with crisis prevention work, where relevant and appropriate
- improved ability to plan moves with care leavers themselves
- an overview of planned and unplanned move-on
- prompt and appropriate filling of voids

Ultimately using a gateway approach, as opposed to young people self-referring, or individual referrals from leaving care services to different providers with no overall co-ordination, ensures that priority is given to those who most need supported accommodation.

There are a wide range of different housing and support types that may be appropriate for care leavers. These are arranged in the framework into emergency/short-stay, longer-stay and step-down provision.

29. See the Nottinghamshire Local Offer to Care Leavers here:
<https://www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk/kb5/nottinghamshire/directory/site.page?id=gYfxAlgcFWA>

Emergency/short-stay provision

Nightstop is an accredited scheme run by Depaul UK. It provides safe accommodation for young people for a few nights in the homes of approved local host families. Young people who experience a sudden housing crisis are given a room for the night and a meal, in a family setting. It is a more supportive and positive alternative to using other forms of emergency accommodation, such as an all age, mixed hostel or bed and breakfast (B&B). It can be a particularly good option in more rural areas, where suitable emergency provision in a young people's accommodation project could be a long way away. Longer – but not long term – stays with hosts can be possible through 'Nightstop Plus'.

Short-term supported lodgings provide safe accommodation for young people in the family home of approved local hosts. These are similar to Nightstop in many ways but not part of the accredited scheme. The option is likely to be part of a local supported lodgings scheme, where most hosts are recruited for longer stays, but a few are willing or want to provide shorter stay options. Depending on the scheme, young people may be able to stay for a few nights or up to several weeks. With their own room and access to cooking and washing facilities, young people are given a supportive environment and opportunities to build up their lifeskills.

Ring-fenced beds are provided in some larger supported accommodation schemes. These may be quite basic single rooms, offering emergency access for young people at immediate risk of homelessness. Support workers may assess the young person whilst alternative accommodation is sought.

Assessment centres tend to be commissioned as part of a broader young people's accommodation pathway, usually in large urban areas. They provide a first stage point to the pathway, where young people can stay for a short period whilst they are assessed and their next accommodation decided. Whilst planned, non-emergency moves for care leavers would not usually require the use of an assessment centre, for those in an emergency, this is a useful option.

Local Housing Authorities have to provide interim **temporary accommodation** (TA) for single people and families under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 if there is reason to believe they may be eligible, homeless, and have 'priority need' and have no other place to stay. Care leavers aged 18 – 20 have 'priority need' so must be provided with TA if they need this. Care leavers aged 21 and over may be in priority need if they are 'vulnerable' as a result of being looked after and in most cases should be provided with TA whilst a full assessment is carried out (see Annex 1).

The type of TA available varies between local authority areas. Accommodation may be a self-contained unit, in a block of housing which is all designated as TA, and may or may not include housing management and support.

Often temporary accommodation does not have on-site support or additional housing management. This is likely to be a difficult and scary experience for a young person and should be avoided as an option. Local authorities should ensure they do not place care leavers into forms of shared accommodation with older adults who might present a risk to them, for example, a supported housing scheme which is for any adult aged 18 or over.

Where a young person is also a parent with their child living with them, or pregnant, it is important to ensure that the sort of TA offered is appropriate for their individual needs and circumstances in terms of their role as a young parent, as well as being a care leaver. If they need to be as near as possible to former foster carers, for example, this should be highlighted when decisions are made on the temporary accommodation offered.

Local authorities should always avoid using bed and breakfast (B&B) type accommodation for care leavers. This type of accommodation is not suitable for young people in any circumstances. In any instances where bed and breakfast accommodation is used, local authorities should provide additional support to young people and move young people as quickly as possible into short or longer term accommodation which meets their needs. Local authorities should ensure they do not place care leavers into other forms of shared accommodation with older adults who might present a risk to them.

Longer-stay provision

Supported accommodation is a generic term for accommodation where there is some sort of support provided on-site. There are many different models of supported accommodation, which are split here into (1) family-type support and (2) other types:

(1) Family-type supported accommodation

Staying Put arrangements are a statutory right for care leavers in foster care in England. They allow a young person to stay with their former foster carer from 18 to 21 if they and the carer want the arrangement to continue. The foster placement is usually converted into a tenancy-type arrangement, and the young person will carry on living in the household in the same way. Young people will be given support from their former foster carer to help develop life skills.

Supported lodgings are placements within a family or individual 'host' home in the local community. The host provides a room and cooking and washing facilities, as well as offering support and advice to the young person. Supported lodgings can be used as emergency placements but are usually a longer-term option. They can help care leavers to improve their life skills, such as managing money, cooking, shopping, cleaning, etc., and give them a family-based setting. Some supported lodgings are specifically for care leavers with high support needs, such as young parents, those coming out of custody, or those at risk of sexual exploitation.

EXAMPLE: Young Devon's Supported Lodgings and Plan B Scheme

Young Devon provides supported lodgings for around 75 young people at any one time and is one of several housing options Young Devon is able to provide. It is commissioned for young people aged 16 – 24, although most are aged between 16 – 19. It is for young people who are either care leavers or have been homeless aged 16/17.

Supported lodgings works well for many young people. Considerable work is invested in finding a good match between the family or individual person hosting and the young person's needs. Hosts are spread across rural and urban areas of Devon, so issues like proximity to college, family and public transport are all features which can be taken into account.

Support workers take the time needed to get to know the young person, their likes and dislikes, aspirations and understand who they are. Only by taking this time can the Scheme be confident of a good match.

Every young person living in Supported Lodgings has a Support Worker who is there for them and helps them move forward. The Support Worker isn't just someone to talk to if things aren't going so well. They help young people develop the skills that they need to live successful independent lives. That can be finance and budgeting; they can help them re-engage with education or find other learning and training options for them; or they might help them access any health or well-being advice and support that they might be looking for.

The 'Plan B' element of Supported Lodgings gives more intensive support to some young people. It's grown out of the more generic supported lodgings and gives some young people wrap-around support to help them develop healthy relationships and fulfil their potential. Plan B is delivered as a 'psychologically informed' approach to the whole placement, with clinical support for the whole team involved in the placement to ensure that the young person's needs are fully understood by the support workers, host family and other agencies giving support. This 'team around the placement' approach has the ability to deliver positive outcomes when other options haven't been successful. Hosts are paid more and need to be able to offer around 20 hours of support a week.

2) Other types of supported accommodation

Most local authorities have some supported accommodation schemes, which are often commissioned by housing related support (formerly Supporting People) commissioners, and sometimes jointly with Children's Services. Supported accommodation may be run by a charity, a Registered Provider (a social landlord) or a private provider. Generally supported accommodation will cover young people aged 16–21 or 16–25. Some schemes within a local authority may be specifically commissioned for younger teenagers only.

Commissioners are responsible for ensuring there is shared clarity regarding the difference between provision of care placements for 16/17s (which are regulated through the Care Act 2000 and which must be registered with Ofsted) and supported accommodation (which is not regulated but may be used as 'other arrangements' for some 16/17 year olds).

For the purposes of this part of the document, we are describing a range of supported accommodation options, not registered care placement options. Local commissioning of supported accommodation should be monitored against national guidance and any additional locally determined standards.³⁰

For some 16/17 year olds who are looked after or are 'relevant' care leavers, and some older care leavers supported accommodation may be commissioned via a framework agreement across several local authorities.

30. 29 The guidance on this from Ofsted and DfE can be found here:

Ofsted:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726907/Introduction_to_childrens_homes_180718.pdf

DfE: Volume 2, points 3.116 - 3.142

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf

Some local authorities make use of unregulated supported accommodation that is not commissioned and contract managed, usually through spot purchasing arrangements. Where such arrangements are used, and particularly for out of area placements, it is critical that local authorities are sufficiently assured of the quality of the accommodation and support provided. When placing young people in accommodation at distance from their family, PA and other support networks, a more comprehensive support package is likely to be needed. This type of placement can be as a result of a lack of planning and joint commissioning. It can present higher risks and is usually more expensive.³¹

Supported accommodation schemes can vary substantially in size. The accommodation can be bedrooms with shared facilities, bedsits or self-contained flats. Support may be available 24/7 on-site, in the daytime only or on-call support at night. Schemes can also include dispersed housing and may have step-down units attached to help young people prepare for a less intensively supported environment. Support workers (sometimes called Lead workers, Navigators or Progression Coaches) work individually with young people on their own support plan towards agreed goals, such as around education, training, employment, life skills, independent living skills, improving emotional well-being, confidence and physical health. Good provision will take a strengths-based personalised approach.

Floating support offers one to one support to help a young person identify and reach their goals. The support should be an approach tailored to the needs of the young person and flexible in terms of tapering up and down the number of hours a week a care leaver may need. A floating support worker should work closely with the young person's personal adviser. Floating support can include help with;

- o Finances, i.e accessing the right benefits
- o Obtaining work, i.e applying for jobs, writing a CV
- o Household skills, i.e shopping on a budget, meal planning and preparation
- o Health and hygiene, i.e registering with a GP
- o Social skills, i.e accessing support groups

Staying Close. This type of accommodation and support is in a pilot phase. In July 2016, the Government announced the development of a "Staying Close programme" for young people leaving residential care as an alternative to the Staying Put arrangements. The pilots aim to provide an enhanced support offer for those leaving residential care. The Staying Close option includes an accommodation offer close to the young person's former children's home alongside practical and emotional support from a member of staff from their former children's home whom they know and trust. Reports from the pilots show that 120 care leavers participated in the Staying Close pilots from January 2018 to July 2018.³²

Live, Work, Earn and Learn options. Many commissioned supported accommodation projects for young people will include a proactive focus on education, training and employment. The growing challenge of affordability of housing for young people means that preparing for economic activity is an important part of any stay in supported accommodation. It is important to ensure you are commissioning accommodation and support options which proactively encourage and support young people to engage in education, training and employment, including Further Education, volunteering and apprenticeships. Some local supported accommodation schemes may call themselves foyers, some of which are accredited by the Foyer Federation, and others are commissioned to provide a similar sort of service. Other developing models include Young Workers co-operatives and Live and Work schemes where rents are at a level which enable young people to live and work and be benefit free. Creative commissioning can help overcome the financial challenges in such schemes.

31. See a Commonweal and Spring Housing report about use of unregulated 'exempt' accommodation and the issues with this here: <https://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/unregulated-exempt-accommodation>

32. See Staying Close: Policy Brief (DfE and Spring Consortium) <https://innovationcsc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/StayingClose-policy-brief.pdf>

EXAMPLE

St Basils runs the 'Live and Work' scheme in Sandwell in partnership with Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust. The scheme offers apprenticeships with the Trust and affordable rents with light touch support to young people who need it.

Private rent prices are continuously rising which ultimately leads to young people finding it extremely hard to become independent. The Live and Work scheme provides shared accommodation for young workers for £44 per week inclusive. This scheme is open to 16 and 24 year olds in the West Midlands who are employed – and is particularly ideal for apprentices and those on a low income.

The scheme is totally benefit free, which means that young people get the opportunity to live and work without having to rely on welfare benefits. The independent evaluation showed that for every £1 of capital cost to develop the scheme, there is a £14 return to the public purse over 10 years. The accommodation, home to 32 young people, comprised of 8 flats. Each flat has 4 bedrooms, with shared kitchen, dining and bathroom facilities. Its location is only 20 minutes away from Birmingham city centre with reliable transport links and good local amenities.

Since opening in 2015, the scheme has won numerous awards, including two for NHS partnership work and one for 'Excellence in Education', as well as the 2018 national Housing award for 'Outstanding approach to tackling Homelessness'

To find out more <https://stbasils.org.uk/?s=Live+anD+Work>

Small group homes models tend to be commissioned for young people with physical or learning disabilities who will need on-going support from adult social services. Group homes might be commissioned jointly by Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Housing Related Support commissioners. Housing Benefit and elements of other benefits that the young person may be able to claim due to their disability should also be factored into the whole package. There are specialist providers who are able to provide young people with focused, small group living arrangements. This could be an option for very small numbers (maybe 2 or 3) of young people to live together, who have previously been living in specialist foster or residential care. A long lead-in time is needed in considering this option, in terms of the financial modelling, commissioning and matching of young people.

Housing First or 'housing led' solutions may be most appropriate for people with multiple and complex needs, and particularly those who have not managed within hostel or supported housing settings. Housing First provides an independent tenancy, through a social or private landlord, along with very intensive, bespoke wrap-around support. Whilst it tends to be a model that is used for older, long-term homeless people who have been rough sleeping, it is an option to consider for young people who are likely to struggle in larger schemes such as foyers or in family settings such as supported lodgings. Having your own front door can be a positive option for some young people who have higher needs, as long as there is commissioning of support through a dedicated, specialist floating support services, with some 24-hour call-out if needed. It is important to remember that, if the housing is in the private rented sector, and if the young person is claiming Universal Credit, then their exemption as a care leaver from the Shared Accommodation Rate will end on their 22nd birthday. The difference between the rent and the Housing Benefit payable will need to be bridged or the young person would need to move into shared accommodation or into social housing, which could be disruptive.

'Step-down' provision

Shared or self-contained provision with floating support gives young people some support whilst they are living in their own or shared accommodation. Floating support could be provided via housing related support or, if the young person is under 18, funded by Children's Services, as an additional support on top of the personal adviser from Children's Services. Floating support assists care leavers to settle into their accommodation and the local community, including accessing local services and dealing with bills and budgeting.

'Step-down' provision can be attached to more intensively supported accommodation schemes, and gives young people a next step towards independence whilst maintaining their link to the higher support scheme. Where this is the case, the young person may live in a shared house or their own small self-contained flat or bedsit near to the supported accommodation scheme, may have the same 'support worker' that they had previously, and still be part of the higher support scheme. Other 'step-down' provision can be commissioned separately, but with good day to day links with the local supported accommodation schemes.

Some young people leaving care will be ready for the more independent 'step-down' accommodation as their first move out of care, and do not need to go through the higher support accommodation first. Assessment and Pathway Planning are key to making decisions with young people about their readiness for such a move.

On-call or concierge schemes can provide very light-touch housing management support as needed. There are different local commissioning arrangements for this type of housing management model and some may provide support in the day and concierge support over the evenings.

Top tips

- Accommodation that is available to both care leavers and other young people is often good as it allows young people to mix; this can be another benefit of joint commissioning of services. However, schemes which do not mix young people with older adults work much better for young people.
- The size of scheme has to be relative to housing management and support on offer.
- Young people often say that it is the quality of relationships with significant people in their lives that makes a difference, including housing related support workers and personal advisers. The balance of weighting between quality and costs in any tendering process is a matter for commissioners, but lower hourly rates can equate to a higher staff turnover or less skilled or experienced staff .
- Having effective joint working and ideally joint or co-commissioning is critical to delivering a seamless accommodation pathway. Children's Services and Housing Related Support commissioners need to work together with colleagues in Housing Options and the leaving care service when planning the provision they want to commission. This can help to create a 'menu' of options and also avoid the 'cliff edges' of the 18th birthday, when funding changes and young people have to make a placement move, and at age 22 when their Universal Credit housing cost reduces to the Shared Accommodation Rate.
- In planning to commission a range of supported accommodation options, it is really helpful to have a full understanding of both the needs of care leavers locally and the outcomes that commissioners want to achieve. This will make it easier to plan accommodation and support around local needs and ambitions. It is critical to factor in adequate time for needs analysis and the developing of joint commissioning plans. This is particularly the case for commissioning of services for some groups of young care leavers, for example those with disabilities and complex needs.
- Take into account young people's education and employment activity and ambitions when working with them to choose the best supported accommodation option for them.
- Local authorities that have developed effective accommodation and support pathways for young people tend to work closely together, agreeing relevant budgets across the local authority (and other public sector agencies) and either pooling the budgets or managing them seamlessly across directorates or service areas.
- Effective use of this framework could involve a group led by Children's Services and housing related support commissioners which meets regularly to review, monitor and agree changes to commissioning of accommodation and support options.
- Commissioners should encourage providers to partner strategically with the local authority and recognise the added value brought through innovation, additional programmes and flexibility of working.
- Young people often say that it is the quality of relationships with significant people in their lives that makes a difference, including housing related support workers and personal advisers. The balance of weighting between quality and costs in any tendering process is a matter for commissioners, but lower hourly rates can equate to a higher staff turnover or less skilled or experienced staff.

EXAMPLE

Nottinghamshire County Council has two sets of arrangements in place for the commissioning of supported accommodation which young people experiencing homelessness, looked after children and care leavers aged 16 -21 can access as part of their transition to adulthood. The young people's element of the County Council's housing related support budget was pooled in 2015 with the 16+ placement budget to achieve the scale of the provision.

Underlining the planning for the new model was a recognition that new provision needed to be able to support all young people, including those with multiple and complex needs and young people with an offending background.

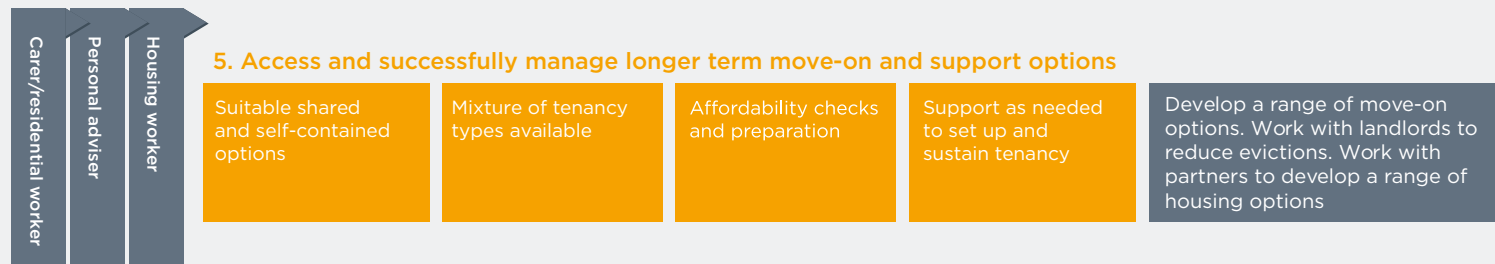
There are two types of placements available:

- The main 16+ provision has 227 units of accommodation for homeless 16/17 year olds, LAC and Care Leavers transitioning from residential or foster placements and vulnerable homeless young people aged over 18. These services provide choice around housing options for young people via the provision of 'core' and 'cluster' accommodation which is grouped into 6 areas of the county. The 'core' services are staffed 24 hours a day and have appropriate levels of staffing to support young people presenting with a range of needs. In addition to the core service, there are 'cluster' units of accommodation which may be self-contained or small shared houses where staff provide visiting support. The support provided is responsive to the young person's needs and may increase or decrease to meet the needs of the young person.
- Individual placement agreements commissioned via a Dynamic Purchasing System with approved providers that are able to provide support for young people who need a greater level of support than is readily available within the main 16+ provision. These placements are sourced as a step down from residential before moving into the main provision, or where it is clear the Looked After child would not be able to sustain their accommodation within the main provision. There are a range of accommodation options available which include solo placements with staff available 22 hours a day, and small settings with visiting support.

A package of support is individually tailored and is responsive to the young person's needs. Within the main provision, young people typically enter a core service then progress on into cluster accommodation as their independence, resilience and ability to manage a tenancy improves. However, some young people may move directly into the cluster accommodation if this is deemed more suitable. Some young people may require a move from a more independent cluster property back into the more supported 'core' service if their needs would be met more appropriate in that setting. Similarly, some young people will move from the core service into a higher needs placement if this is more suited to their needs.

The commissioners believe that there has been improved value for money, compared to previous spot purchasing arrangements, and the quality of service delivery is high. The commissioning model that has developed is a reflection of strong partnership working between the County Council and all the 7 District Councils in Nottinghamshire. This has led to a high level of consistency across the District Councils, which is expressed in the Care Leavers Offer³³, supporting care leavers to find suitable housing, and offer priority on Nottinghamshire housing waiting lists. Care leavers are also exempt from paying Council Tax in all the Districts and have access to free leisure facilities.

33. See the Nottinghamshire Local Offer to Care Leavers here: <https://www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk/kb5/nottinghamshire/directory/site.page?id=gYfxAlgcFWA>



“I found it easier to move myself on independently because of the skills that I had brushed up on. It was upstairs, I felt safer, I felt really safe and secure.” (Young person, Barnardo’s)

The final stage of the framework sets out the support needed to help care leavers move towards greater independence. For some young people, this transition will happen earlier, whilst others may need specific support from a personal adviser or housing worker beyond 21 or even after 25.

A young person’s long-term housing ambitions should be discussed and documented in their Pathway Plan. This will need to be kept up to date as circumstances and wishes change, and remain realistic given the local housing situation. Personal advisers will also need to get advice from housing officers about the long-term housing options locally.

There are a number of factors which impact on the availability of housing for young people. The supply of accommodation that is affordable for people on low incomes varies, with significant local and regional differences in the housing market. There is reported to be low landlord confidence in young people as tenants, in part due to general concerns on affordability and also due to the changes in Universal Credit, whereby rent is paid direct to the claimant unless a specific exemption is granted on the basis of vulnerability, called an ‘Alternative Payment Arrangement’. Whilst care leavers are a named group that are likely to be vulnerable and granted an exemption, this is not automatic and is done on a case-by-case basis.³⁴

Many local authorities have chosen to exempt care leavers up to the age of 25 from Council Tax as part of their corporate parenting role. Because affordability is such a critical issue in both social and private rented housing, exemption from Council Tax means care leavers have reduced risk of debt and the associated housing insecurity which can arise from this.

Living in social housing

Availability of social housing is severely limited in many areas. In terms of one-bed social housing, a combination of factors is limiting access:

- A general shortage of one-bed properties. This is a national issue: many units of one-bed accommodation are in sheltered housing, are designated for older people, or are specifically restricted to lettings to, for example, under 30s or under 40s through local lettings policies.
- Demand for this size of accommodation is increasing from tenants subject to the under-occupation penalty (‘bedroom tax’). Local authorities and Registered Providers need to reduce the risk of arrears and homelessness amongst existing tenants, and prioritise these households in allocation schemes, which further reduces access for most young people.

34. See the latest Government guidance on this here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-rented-housing--2/alternative-payment-arrangements?preview=3295352>

A tenancy in social housing could be in any of the following:

- housing that the local authority still owns and manages
- housing managed through an ALMO – stock is still owned by the local authority but run by an Arm's Length Management Organisation
- housing which is part of a 'large-scale voluntary transfer' (LVST) – what was council-owned stock has been transferred to a housing association
- housing which is owned or managed by a housing association, which they have built, bought or leased.

Allocations schemes

The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities the power to determine at a local level some of the groups of people who will or will not qualify to be allocated social housing in their areas. Waiting lists can be rationalised based on local policy. For example, those who are working, or actively seeking work or making a 'contribution to the community' could be qualifying groups, whereas those with anti-social behaviour convictions or previous rent arrears could be excluded. Length of local residency is usually a factor as well, with some exceptions.

The Housing Act 1996 sets out which groups must have 'reasonable preference' in allocations schemes, which includes homeless households and people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds. Government allocations guidance indicates that welfare grounds would include providing a secure base from which a care leaver can build a stable life³⁵. As corporate parents, housing authorities should work to ensure that where care leavers have access to social housing their route is through the 'welfare' preference group, rather than by becoming homeless or having to make a homelessness application for procedural reasons to gain priority for housing.

It is no longer the case that a social housing tenancy is for life. Housing associations can now issue 'flexible tenancies', which are usually for five years or sometimes three years. After that, a tenancy can be renewed but, again, may be for a fixed period of time.

Living in the private rented sector

The amount of affordable housing available to people on benefits or low incomes varies across the country, but wherever they live young people are finding it increasingly difficult to find and access affordable accommodation. This is due in part to a combination of rising rents and house prices in most areas and welfare policy changes over time that have limited the amount of money available for housing costs. A freeze on Local Housing Allowance have made all but the cheapest properties out of reach for young people.

Shared Accommodation Rate

The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) limits the amount payable to most young people living in the private rented sector to the cost of a room in a shared house. From April 2012, the SAR was extended from the age of 25 up to 35, which means that more people are competing for accommodation in shared housing.

35. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5918/2171391.pdf

There are some exemptions to the SAR, including for care leavers up to age 22. There is also an exemption for those who have lived in a hostel for homeless people for 12 weeks or more, but this only applies once they reach the age of 25. Care leavers could also be considered within this exemption group if they have lived in supported accommodation after leaving care, but this would only commence when they reached the age of 25.

Sharing as a housing option for care leavers

Some care leavers will want or need to live in a shared house with other young people, perhaps with some floating support. Given the demands on social housing, and the limited supply in many places, the reality is that many young people, including some care leavers, will need to share at some point. It is therefore important for personal advisers to discuss sharing with care leavers who are not likely to have their own social tenancy as an option.³⁶

There are positive aspects of sharing which young people leaving care may not have thought through, including affordability and the more social aspects of sharing.

'Houses in Multiple Occupation' (HMOs) can be viewed as negative and unsuitable, depending on the quality of the actual accommodation, its management and support arrangements. But HMOs can be a good option as well for some young people. An HMO is any property which is occupied by 3 or more people from more than one household, who share kitchen, bathroom or toilet facilities. If the property has 5 tenants forming 2 or more households and is privately owned, it must be licensed by the local authority.³⁷ Some local authorities have developed local licensing schemes through which a wider category of HMOs require inspection and a license to operate in the area. HMO landlords must ensure that the properties they let meet certain standards for health and safety, and are properly managed, and local authorities have powers to enforce standards, including through criminal prosecutions.

For care leavers living in self-contained private rented housing who are claiming housing benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit, their entitlement level will drop to the Shared Accommodation Rate when they are 22 years old and it could be at this point that sharing is considered.

Most sharing is in private rented accommodation but there are examples of shared social housing, where the Shared Accommodation Rate does not apply. Sharing in social housing could be developed by housing associations or a local authority as an option for some care leavers. It can help to address affordability and address isolation as well. Some examples of sharing accommodation for the longer term are outlined below as examples. Crisis has developed a toolkit for this called 'Spare to Share - A guide to letting and supporting shared tenancies in social housing'.³⁸

36. Both Ofsted and Department for Education guidance includes considerations for care leavers living in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). Not all shared housing is required to be licenced as an HMO, but this does vary so it is important to check. The legal minimum requirement for registration is 5 people forming more than 1 household, sharing cooking and bathroom facilities. See: <https://www.gov.uk/private-renting/houses-in-multiple-occupation>

37. Note changes from October 2018. See <https://www.rics.org/uk/news-insight/latest-news/news-opinion/new-hmo-rules-come-into-effect-in-england-on-1-october-20>

38. See: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/resources-for-practitioners/housing-centre-guides/sharers-toolkit/>

EXAMPLE Hull Shared Accommodation Project

The Shared Accommodation Project within Hull City Council is a partnership approach between Children's Services and the Housing Service to promote a wider choice and broaden the range of available accommodation options to young people who need accommodation because they are not able to stay at home or are leaving care.

The scheme forms part of an integrated pathway for young people to make more planned moves from home or care, avoiding the impact of homelessness. Providing safe, affordable and furnished accommodation in the city's social housing stock, the scheme offers city-wide locations to maximise the potential networks of support for young people in areas of their choice.

Each young person has a support worker and an agreed young person's plan. The scheme is part of a wider City Council young people's accommodation and homeless prevention hub, so young people benefit through access to wider co-located services and partners to make sure any support needs can be provided with a responsive multi-agency response where required.

Alongside the prevention of homelessness the scheme also aims, through maintaining rent level to the local equivalent of the Shared Room Rate, to enable young people to take up employment opportunities restricted by rent levels in other forms of supported accommodation.

Eligibility for the scheme is anyone threatened with homelessness and or in housing need aged 16-25 and currently provides 46 tenancies to young people from a range of backgrounds including young people leaving care, those threatened with homelessness and or other vulnerabilities including those at risk of offending. The scheme will extend further by 2020 to provide accommodation for 59 young tenants across 26 properties.

In each property, tenants each have a bedroom and share a lounge, kitchen and bathroom. Works are carried out prior to letting in accordance with the Crisis best practice guidance on sharing for young people. Properties meet the House of Multiple Occupation standards, although this is not a statutory requirement. In addition to this, in order to make properties more suitable for shared living, carpets are laid throughout and electric showers are installed. Additionally, all properties are fully furnished; with TV, TV licence and unlimited broadband. A weekly service charge of £9 - £15 per week (depending on property) allows the local authority to provide utilities.

The scheme to date has been positive, with reduced tenancy failure and a high level of engagement in education, training and employment, as well as improved levels of confidence and self-esteem.

EXAMPLE

The London Borough of Wandsworth have a long-standing agreement with 4 local housing associations, Wandle, Family Mosaic, the Peabody Trust and Optivo. Between them they provide approximately 300 one bedroom flats at any one time for single care leavers in Wandsworth. Housing related support is provided through the local authority and young people are advised that they must engage with this. There is no time limit for support and it is flexible, and it is usual for young people to have support over several years. Once a young person is settled and no longer needs support, the tenancy continues but is no longer counted within the agreed number the housing association has committed to provide. An empty flat will then be earmarked as a replacement for the leaving care service and offered to the local authority. The average length of a tenancy varies, but for most it is a long term tenancy, unless they have children or need to move for another reason. Young people whom are not eligible for the housing association accommodation can be referred to the local authority housing through an annual quota of rehousing opportunities made available within the Housing Allocation scheme and the annual lettings plan.

EXAMPLE

SnugBug Houseshare is run by Mosscafe St Vincent's Housing Association (MSV) in Manchester. It is open to any young person aged 18-35 who has a local connection, access to public funding if needed and is able to live independently. The model is shared social housing. The Scheme does not provide support to young people - if young people need support they need to bring it with them, e.g. floating support or a Personal Adviser. SnugBug Houseshare offers decent shared housing on six-month assured shorthold tenancies, with all young people needing to fill in an application form and then have an interview prior to being accepted. Applicants are then 'matched' to vacancies to ensure sustainability in the properties they are moving to depending on the current household composition. The scheme is now managed by Shared Habitat; an ethical property management company that does not charge any fees to tenants and manages the tenancies and properties using 'intensive housing management' as was previously offered in-house. The rent is slightly higher than the usual Local Housing Allowance rate because it covers things like a weekly health and safety check and the provision of furniture, white goods, carpets and all utility bills and council tax. This Scheme has 9 properties in a range of areas and houses 29 young people at any time.

EXAMPLE

Commonweal Housing, in partnership with Thames Reach, have been running a 'peer landlord' model for shared housing in London since 2012. The aim of the model is to provide 'supportive' rather than 'supported' housing for those with lower general needs who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless: individuals who do not need the intensive support associated with some hostels or mainstream supported housing, but equally for whom market PRS housing may not be available or yet the right option.

Company and support is provided by other residents rather than just by paid support workers. The 'peer landlord' is one of the tenants who is there to see the house runs smoothly, and has been trained in basic housing management and maintenance, as well as financial awareness and other relevant skills. They also provide informal peer support to their housemates.

Commonweal provides two houses under this model in partnership with Thames Reach, which runs a further three 'Peer Landlord' properties independently. The original supportive shared housing Peer Landlord model has been replicated by others notably Peter Bedford Housing Association in north London and Depaul UK who now have 5 shared houses from Commonweal and have ambitions for more offering move-on from their Nightstop and other services. Interest in Peer Landlord especially for those leaving the care system has come from a number of local authorities and housing providers.

See here for more information: <https://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/projects/peer-landlord>

Some options for providing support to care leavers as they become ready for more independence include:

Landlord accreditation - identifying private sector landlords who are prepared to work with a personal adviser to support care leavers as they take on their own tenancies. This might include assisting with budgeting, having some flexibility in the tenancy agreement, working with the local authority and young person to avoid eviction, and having lower rent deposit requirements. Accreditation could be a local authority-led scheme, or might be run by a housing support provider.

Working with Housing Authorities to ensure care leavers are able to access the private rented sector – most local Housing Authorities will have a PRS access scheme (sometimes called a Social Lettings Agency) which is either run in-house or they will commission a provider to run this. Rather than establish a separate ‘leaving care’ scheme, a Housing Authority could – in its corporate parenting role – ensure that care leavers are helped to access suitable, affordable and appropriate accommodation in the PRS via the general scheme. The scheme should offer landlords a range of incentives such as:

- bond and rent deposit schemes
- rent in advance
- rent paid direct to the landlord
- a named contact person and a 24-hour helpline
- floating support if needed
- giving landlords a choice of young people
- putting forward young people who have done some life skills or tenancy training
- providing assistance or advice with tenancy matters (e.g. HMO registering).

EXAMPLE Doorway – Private Landlords Scheme

Doorway is a youth homelessness charity in Warwickshire that has been developing relationships with private landlords to secure accommodation. Doorway provide a range of both housing management and property management services to the landlords, and support to the tenants. In some cases, the properties are leased by Doorway.

Services offered to landlords include:

- Preparation of license and tenancy agreements
- Inventories
- Risk assessments
- Health and Safety inspections
- Assessment of potential tenants
- Rent collection service
- Monitoring of rent accounts

The scheme has increased the confidence and willingness of private landlords to let to homeless young people and has delivered 64 units so far.

Dispersed/step-down housing – helping care leavers move gradually into independent living. Some supported housing providers have dispersed housing attached to their projects, usually as shared tenancies, that allow young people with higher support needs to try out managing their own tenancy within the safety of a housing project they already know. Tenancies can be available for several months or longer until the young person is ready to move out. In these arrangements, it may be that the local authority or the provider organisation has agreed a lease or license with a private landlord and is then sub-letting to young people. This can be a good way to establish longer term arrangements that can be closely managed by the local authority.

Support to use ‘setting up home’ allowance – care leavers are entitled to a one-off grant when they leave care, usually worth around £2,000. Depending on their living situation when they leave care, young people may need some of the money immediately but others are more likely to need it only when they are ready to furnish their own independent housing.

Top tips

- Housing teams are the experts in working with private landlords and are likely to have a private rented access scheme. Rather than develop a different, smaller scheme for care leavers, draw on Housing expertise and try to work with what is already there. This could include taking properties on lease or license and sub-letting to young people as part of their progression to independence.
- Housing teams also have significant expertise in social housing and allocations - joint working to increase or improve access for care leavers or consider changes in allocations policy is essential.
- Consider the option of shared social housing for some care leavers. It won't be right for everyone, but it's an option that can be positive if managed carefully.
- When assisting care leavers to find suitable accommodation, personal advisers are required to make sure that the choice is affordable within the young person's income. It is important that personal advisers help young people to work out how they will continue to pay for their accommodation if they are living in the private rented sector and require benefit support after their Housing Benefit reduces at age 22 to the level of the Shared Accommodation Rate. Otherwise, there is a real risk that care leavers could lose their housing. Advanced planning is critical and this is now easier, as care leavers can be supported by personal advisers up to the age of 25.
- A local policy decision to exempt care leavers up to the age of 25 from Council Tax is likely to impact positively on the ability of care leavers to manage their finances and sustain their accommodation. If this is not yet policy in your area, consider creating a business case for doing so.
- Some young people can lose items bought using their setting up home allowance if they lose the tenancy where they kept them. For care leavers who experience multiple moves, it may be necessary to provide some facility to store their belongings when they are not needed.

Annex 1: The legal framework

Leaving care legislation

Care leavers in England have a range of entitlements set out in legislation to ensure that they are properly housed. In addition, care leavers receive some additional support through the general homelessness legislation. This section sets out the key legislation and its interpretation through case law.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000³⁹ sets out various duties that local authorities have towards young people in and leaving care, including those relating to accommodation. The duties differ depending on care leaver status (i.e. eligible, qualifying, relevant or former relevant child) but the general requirements are that local authorities should:

- plan with young people and involve them in decisions
- avoid moving young people who are settled
- assess young people's needs and prepare them for any move
- ensure that the accommodation meets any needs relating to impairment
- consider education, training and employment needs
- where practicable, offer a choice of accommodation
- set up a package of support to go with the accommodation
- have a clear financial plan for the accommodation and a contingency plan.

The regulations and guidance also detail how the local authority strategy for care leavers should take into account:

- the diverse accommodation and support needs of care leavers
- the capacity to offer young people a degree of choice in accommodation
- existing and planned provision of suitable, safe and affordable accommodation
- gaps in provision
- priority setting
- the need for contingency arrangements.

The guidance⁴⁰ states that it is “good practice for local authorities to commission a range of semi-independent and independent living options with appropriate support, for example supported accommodation schemes, foyers, supported lodgings and access to independent tenancies in the social and private rented sectors with flexible support” (paragraph 7.2). It also advises that “provision and partnerships should be developed in such a way as to permit young people to move to other accommodation in a crisis, including returning to more supportive accommodation if appropriate” (paragraph 7.77).

It also states that “Children's Services will need to work with housing strategy, housing options, housing related support functions and other partners to secure a range of suitable housing and support options for young people leaving care” (paragraph 7.4) and that “Housing Services and Children's Services should adopt a shared strategic approach to the provision of emergency accommodation and housing and support pathways for young people in order to avoid the use of B&B accommodation” (paragraph 7.79).

39. See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

40. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers>

In January 2015, the Department for Education revised guidance to clarify that B&Bs were unsuitable accommodation for care leavers, and should be used for no more than two working days in an emergency (paragraph 7.12).

Statutory guidance following the Children Act 1989, **Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children**,⁴¹ sets out additional requirements on local authorities regarding looked after children's accommodation. Section 22G of the 1989 Act requires local authorities to:

Take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').

A 2010 judgement from the Court of Appeal clarified the duty on Children's Services authorities to provide accommodation for care leavers aged over 18 ("former relevant children") in certain circumstances. **R (on the application of SO) v Barking and Dagenham**⁴² concluded that:

...if the former relevant child is unable to access appropriate accommodation through some other means (such as through a combination of a council tenancy and housing benefit), and the provision of accommodation is necessary for that young person's welfare, then social services will be under a duty to provide or arrange suitable accommodation.

Since 2018, Ofsted's inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS) has used a framework which sets out the characteristics that inspectors will be looking at for care leavers:

- Care leavers have timely, effective Pathway Plans (including transition planning for children in care with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). These plans address all young people's needs.
- Reviews of plans for care leavers are thorough and involve all key people, including the young person, who understands their Pathway Plan and contributes to its development. Plans for their future continue to be appropriate, as well as ambitious.
- Care leavers develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood, including parenthood. Care leavers have trusted relationships with carers and staff from the local authority and develop supportive relationships within the community, including with family and friends. They receive the right level of practical, emotional and financial support until they are at least 21 and, when necessary, until they are 25.
- Care leavers move towards independence at a pace that is right for them. Young people are encouraged to remain in care until their 18th birthday when this is in their best interest. They can remain living with their carers beyond their 18th birthday or, if more appropriate, receive ongoing support to live in permanent and affordable accommodation that fully meets their needs.
- Care leavers have good education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers are progressing well and achieving their full potential through either being in further and higher education or in their chosen career/occupation.

41. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-sufficient-accommodation-for-looked-after-children>

42. <http://www.maxwellgillott.com/pdf/accommodation-former-relevant-children.pdf>

- Care leavers have accommodation that best meets their needs and helps them to develop their independence skills safely. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and addressed; alternative plans are put in place promptly when necessary. HMOs are only used when it is a young person's preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests.
- Care leavers are provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, such as national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.

The Children & Social Work Act 2017 includes new and extended duties for looked after children:

- Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act sets out 'corporate parenting principles' that English local authorities (including county, district, borough and combined authorities) must 'have regard to the need' to take certain actions in their work for children in care and care leavers. These are:
 - a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
 - b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
 - e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
 - f.) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
 - g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers. A Local Offer will provide information about services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in preparing for adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation; participation in society; See the link here for Department for Education guidance on development of a Local Offer: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683703/Local_offer_guidance_final.pdf
- Extension of local authority support to care leavers to age 25, including provision of personal advisers, assessment of the needs of former relevant children and preparation of a Pathway Plan. This includes corporate parenting support from other parts of local authorities, including Housing Departments. See the link here of Department for Education guidance on supporting care leavers until they are 25: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683701/Extending_Personal_Adviser_support_to_all_care_leavers_to_age_25.pdf

Housing and homelessness legislation

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has amended Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and places new legal duties on English councils so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for assistance.

The main measures introduced by the Act are:

- Improved advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness. LAs required to ensure services are designed to meet the needs of particular groups that are at increased risk of becoming homeless, including care leavers
- Extension of the period ‘threatened with homelessness’ from 28 to 56 days
- New duties to ‘prevent’ and ‘relieve’ homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need and intentionality. Both duties last for up to 56 days. The 56 day period can be extended for anyone under the ‘prevention’ duty where homelessness is still a threat and could be extended for anyone who is not ‘Priority Need’ under the ‘relief’ duty.
- Intentionality is assessed if homelessness is not ‘relieved’ within 56 days, which means there is a window of time to assist people who are likely to be found to be intentionally homeless with finding accommodation during the ‘relief’ stage.
- As before, interim temporary accommodation will only be offered to people who are or may be: eligible, homeless and ‘Priority Need’. Temporary Accommodation under the ‘Main duty’ is only offered to people who are eligible, homeless, ‘Priority Need’ and not intentionally homeless
- Assessments and creation of personalised housing plans, setting out the actions or ‘reasonable steps’ housing authorities and individuals will take to secure accommodation
- All care leavers under the age of 21 will be considered as having a local connection with an area if they were looked after, accommodated or fostered there for a continuous period of at least two years, which started at some point before their 16th birthday. If they are looked after by an upper tier authority, (a County Council) they will have a local connection to all the district housing authorities within the two tier structure.
- Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a new statutory ‘duty to refer’ placed on many public bodies:
 - o prisons;
 - o youth offender institutions;
 - o secure training centres;
 - o secure colleges;
 - o youth offending teams;
 - o probation services (including community rehabilitation companies);
 - o Jobcentre Plus;
 - o Social service authorities;
 - o emergency departments;
 - o urgent treatment centres; and,
 - o hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care.
 - o The Secretary of State for Defence in relation to members of the regular forces (Royal Navy, Royal Marines, the army and the Royal Air Force)

These public bodies must refer, with consent, someone who is or may be homeless to the housing authority of the person’s choice

The Act is about providing more statutory assistance to more people, including single people who are not assessed as having ‘Priority Need’. Note that care leavers do not have automatic ‘Priority Need’ automatically once they reach the age of 21, but will have priority need if assessed as being vulnerable as a result of having been in care.

The Act brings about a culture change from a perception of systematic 'gatekeeping' whereby people were denied the chance to explain their needs and access services, and there were a significant number of 'intentionally homeless' decisions

The emphasis on earlier intervention and prevention contained in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is not new to local authorities. Having arrangements in place to actively prevent homelessness was recognised best practice before the new legislation, but this is now on a statutory footing. New duties to provide advice, assessment and preparation of a housing plan for all customers at risk of homelessness constitute a significant change, aimed at improving the service and the outcomes particularly for non-priority single homeless applicants, including some care leavers aged 21 and over.

When combined with the duties on public bodies to notify local authorities of a person at risk of homelessness, the legislation provides a renewed impetus to improve pathways for young people who are at risk of homeless on leaving care.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the **Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities** in February 2018, which sets out local authorities should exercise their homelessness functions under Part 7 of the Housing Act, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Within the Code is more detail on all aspects of the homelessness legislation, including guidance on:

- Eligibility for assistance
- Duty to refer
- Homelessness or threatened with homelessness
- Assessments and personalised housing plans
- Preventing and relieving homelessness
- Priority need groups
- Intentionally homeless decisions
- Local connection and referrals to other local authorities
- Suitability of accommodation

The Code can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

Chapter 22 provides guidance on specific duties towards care leavers including:

- Housing authorities, children's services authorities and other relevant departments within local authorities, are advised to develop joint protocols or procedures to ensure that each department plays a full role in providing corporate parenting support to young people leaving care. In two tier areas all housing authorities in the county should be party to these arrangements.
- Advisory services provided by housing authorities' under section 179 must be designed to meet the needs of care leavers in their district
- It is recommended that housing options advice be made available to young people preparing to leave care to help them to make informed choices and avoid becoming homeless. Housing authorities may wish to provide training and information to social workers, Personal Advisers and others who have responsibility to support looked after young people, to ensure that the most up to date and accurate information on housing options is available to them.

- The Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government considers that all attempts should be made by housing authorities to avoid the impact of intentionally homeless decisions in relation to care leavers aged 18–25.
- Categories and definitions of people who have priority need include young people under 21 who were looked after between the ages of 16 and 18; and people aged 21 or more who are vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered.
- Housing authorities should take particular care in assessing whether a care leaver aged 21 or over is vulnerable, and should take into account whether, if homeless, they would be at particular risk of exploitation, abuse or involvement in offending behaviour as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation, including hotels and nightly let accommodation with shared facilities, is not considered suitable for care leavers aged under 25 and should only be used in exceptional circumstances and for short periods.

Priority Need and being a care leaver

- As before, care leavers aged 18 – 20, including qualifying care leavers, are automatically ‘Priority Need’. Once they are 21, they may be assessed as being in ‘Priority Need’ for another reason, such as being a young parent with a dependent child. But if not, they would need to be assessed to see if they were ‘vulnerable’ as a result of being a care leaver or for any other reason.

G v Southwark

In May 2009, the House of Lords made a landmark judgement in the case of R (G) v London Borough of Southwark which affects how local authorities provide accommodation and support for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. The judgement ruled that:

- the primary duty to a homeless 16- or 17-year old is under the **Children Act 1989** and the ongoing duty to accommodate and support that young person will fall to Children’s Services. This will include the range of support available as a looked after child and a care leaver.
- Children’s Services cannot avoid their duty to accommodate a homeless 16-or 17-year-old under section 20 of the **Children Act 1989** by claiming they were providing assistance under section 17 or by helping the young person to get accommodation through the homelessness legislation.
- a homeless 16- or 17-year-old who applies to a housing authority should be provided with interim accommodation under the homelessness legislation. They should then be referred to Children’s Services for an assessment of their needs under section 17 of the **Children Act 1989**.

Annex 2 : Questions to ask your teams

The legislation and case law relating to care leavers and their housing can be complicated and affect young people in different ways and at different times. How well do staff in your leaving care and housing teams know the legal context?

In thinking about what housing young people can access, what access do they have to finances? Young people may be entitled to different funding sources, depending on their past experiences and their current situation. Are your teams up to date on the funding sources available? They might include:

- Universal Credit including housing costs
- Housing Benefit
- Entitlements to tax credits
- Local welfare assistance
- Council Tax support schemes or exemption from Council Tax as a care leavers
- Child benefits
- Disability benefits
- Junior ISA
- Setting up home allowance (leaving care grant)
- Financial support as a student
- Funds from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Annex 3: Self-assessment: How joined up is your commissioning?

On a scale of 0 – 5 and using the suggested set of statements to guide you, rank where you think your local authority is on joint commissioning for support to young people as they learn to live more independently.

0 No progress at all and it's not looking possible currently

1 No progress and we haven't made a start yet

2 Yes – some early progress, we have agreed in principle but taken no practical steps as yet

3 Yes – we are beginning to work on this now with a clear aim of joint commissioning

4 Yes – it's well underway now

5 Yes – it's well embedded and it's positive

Statements relating to joint commissioning that may help your judgment

- There are agreed and shared corporate outcomes for young people who leave care that are used for commissioning of accommodation and support.
- All relevant services and stakeholders have contributed to a detailed needs analysis, which informs the commissioning process.
- Children's services, Housing and Housing Related Support commissioners (and any others) work together on service/pathway modelling, drawing up specifications for services and involvement in the commissioning process.
- Relevant budgets are agreed across the local authority (and other public sector agencies) and either pooled or managed seamlessly across directorates/service areas.
- The local authority consciously avoids 'cliff edges' based on age, e.g. young people having to make a placement move around their 18th birthday.
- There is a shared understanding of what accommodation options are suitable for care leavers and a locally agreed set of quality standards which are used to monitor all commissioned provision.
- Housing officers assist Children's Services in undertaking suitability assessments of accommodation.
- Access into the provision available is managed through a single point/gateway so we know who is in what provision and can better manage risk and meet needs.
- There's a body/group led by Children's Services and Housing Related Support commissioners which meets regularly to review, monitor and agree changes to commissioning of accommodation and support options.
- There is a process for agreeing move on/progression into more independent accommodation (e.g. a panel, an assessment, an accreditation achieved by the young person).
- There is a high expectation of providers of accommodation and support services (for example, having a theory of change, to partner strategically with the local authority, a co-investment approach, good standards of accommodation and support, strengths-based progression model, and youth voice and agency.)
- Funding is realistic for the standards and skills required and partnership working is genuine.

Annex 4: Summary for Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework has been developed by two charities that work with care leavers and homeless young people, Barnardo's and St Basil's. It has been developed collaboratively with a wide range of partners from local authorities and charities who together have pooled their knowledge and ideas about what works well in helping care leavers transition to adulthood.

The Framework is not prescriptive but gives a model – based on a wide range of expertise – for how young people can be supported as they leave care. It has been developed for commissioners and managers of leaving care and housing services, but can also be useful for elected members and senior officials to review existing or plan future provision in their local area. The Framework is flexible, reflecting current innovation and knowledge, and can be adapted to suit local needs and circumstances.

The Framework identifies five stages that young people may experience as they leave care. Although the stages are not always sequential, they have been identified to help local authorities and service providers think through the range of areas in which young people will need housing support as they leave care.

Whilst the five stages give practical ideas for delivering good services, the Framework is based on some underlying principles to give young people the best start possible as they leave care, and the attitude of the corporate parent is key to making the Framework work well. These include helping care leavers to succeed, allowing 'mistakes' without harsh penalties, offering flexible support and providing unconditional relationships.

The Framework also relies on different parts of a local authority working well together. Experience from all those using an accommodation pathway model demonstrates that effective joint working between Housing and Children's Services, as well as with health, education, training and employment agencies, criminal justice partners, the voluntary sector and the private sector, is an essential driver of a successful pathway approach. This is "corporate parenting" in action and will support your work on delivering your 'local offer' to care leavers and meet your sufficiency duties through providing different local options in terms of housing and support for young people leaving care.

Annex 5: Engaging children and young people in using the framework locally

Information to share with children's and young people's groups

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework has been produced by a group of charities that work with young people, including with care leavers. Although it's aimed at people who work in the local authority, young people have been involved in helping decide what should go in the Framework.

The Framework brings together lots of good ideas from across the country about what can help young people with their housing as they move out of care. It doesn't tell your local authority what to do, but it does give them a lot of suggestions about what works in other areas – and so what might be good for young people where you live.

For example, it gives ideas about what young people need whilst they are still in care and are starting to think about the next step for them. It also looks at what different sorts of housing choices might be available for young people leaving care, and it gives ideas for what support is most helpful if a care leaver finds themselves having a problem with their housing.

We want to know what you think about the Framework and how it could be changed for our area. We need to be upfront and honest with you because, like everywhere in England, there are some limits of the housing choices we have to offer young people. But based on what options are available, we would like to know more about what would work best for you, what we can do to improve things and also any ideas you have for changing things.

Ideas for engaging children and young people in use of the Framework locally

Share the one-page Framework diagram with existing participation groups, such as the Children in Care Council or care leavers' participation group. Ask children currently in care and those leaving care about:

- In which areas does our local authority do well for care leavers?
- Where are there gaps in what our local authority provides for care leavers?
- Which groups of care leavers in our area do you think would need particular support around housing?
- What do you think about some of the suggested services in the Framework and whether they would work locally? (Examples could include: training flats; mediation; peer landlord or shared housing schemes; Housing First).

Review care leavers' Pathway Plans to assess what is working well and where there are gaps in existing provision. This will assist with engaging those young people who are not involved in participation groups. Ask personal advisers as part of their regular catch-ups to find out what care leavers think about current provision and what could change.

Invite a group of children in care and care leavers to meet with the Lead Member and/or Director of Children's Services. With the Framework in mind, facilitate a guided discussion about what currently works and where there could be improvements in the local housing services for care leavers.

Carry out informal focus groups or discussions with young people about to leave care who are in different placement settings in your area. Do young people leaving foster care, Staying Put, in residential care, Staying Close, or living in 'other arrangements' have different views about what housing support they need? What about those who are or have been in custody, or with physical disabilities or mental health issues?

Barnardo's
Tanners Lane
Barkingside
Ilford
Essex
IG6 1QG

Telephone: 0208 550 8822

Fax: 0208 551 6870

www.barnardos.org.uk

Charity No: 216250 / SC037605



St Basils
71-75 Allcock Street
Deritend
Birmingham
B9 4DY

Tel: 0121 772 2483

info@stbasils.org.uk

www.stbasils.org.uk

Charity No: 1080154

Homes and Communities Agency No: H3994

Company Limited By Guarantee No: 3964376

Registered in England

