



## Lancashire Care Leavers' Joint Housing Protocol.

*Supporting Lancashire's Care  
Leavers into lasting homes.*

2024 – 2025



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# 1. Introduction

The Joint Care Leavers' Housing Protocol sets out the commitment by Children's Services, Local District Councils' Housing Authorities, Accommodation Providers and Support Services to meeting the accommodation and support needs of Children in our Care and Care Leavers who are the responsibility of Lancashire County Council and the 12 District Councils within Lancashire. This joint working approach is a commitment to Corporate Parenting across the range of agencies that support accommodation and contribute to the 'Local Offer'. The protocol has sought to adopt a consistent process and approach across all 12 districts, however there is some variation.

The Corporate Parenting of Children in our Care and Care Leavers extends to all agencies involved in their support. The seven key principles of Corporate Parenting are:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- 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
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

This protocol will offer a step-by-step guide to supporting Care Leavers into suitable and stable homes and outline the roles and responsibilities of each agency and the young person themselves.

## 2. Definition of a Care Leaver

A care leaver is someone who has been in care on or after their 16th birthday.

There are 4 different categories which dictate the rights and entitlements of a care leaver:

**Eligible** – Young people aged 16 and 17 who are children looked after and have been looked after for a period of 13 weeks from their 14th birthday.


**Relevant** – Young people aged 16 and 17 who are no longer looked after but have been a child looked after for 13 weeks or more from their 14th birthday, with at least 24 hours of that 13 weeks taking place on or after their 16th birthday.

**Former Relevant** – An adult aged between 18 and 25 who was either Eligible or Relevant upon their 18th birthday.

**Qualifying** – A young person between the ages of 16 and 25 who has spent at least 1 day in care from their 16th birthday. A previously Eligible young person who have been discharged from care into the care of someone with parental responsibility for a period exceeding 6 months prior to their 18th birthday. A young person who was made subject to a Special Guardianship order immediately following a period in care, this order could have been made at any point in the child's life. And any child who was subject to a private fostering arrangement until the age of 16.



# 3. Preparation for Independence



It is the responsibility of Children's Social Care to ensure that all Children in Our Care and Care Leavers are adequately prepared to live independently. Children's Social Care will need to provide evidence of a young person's ability to maintain a tenancy and what ongoing support will be in place to housing providers and district councils to ensure realistic and achievable plans are formulated.

Key areas for consideration in preparing a young person for independence:

- Pathway planning/multi-agency panel at 16 to support the young person in identifying what they want to achieve in regard to housing options at 18, what they want to do to achieve this, and what support they need to be provided with.
- PA to explore additional support from Housing Authority and other partners where necessary
- Young person to be registered for social housing at 16
- Young person to complete Renting Ready course or similar
- Young person to be supported in developing independent living and life skills
- CSC and partners to explore peer support options
- Clear outline of minimum levels of support from PA at point of moving in and duration of that level of support
- Young Person has all identification documents
- References for future properties are considered
- Young people are supported to become financially independent





## 4. Multi Agency Panels – Leaving Care Lasting Homes Panels

At 16 or if entry into care follows the 16th birthday at the earliest convenience, each child in our care will be presented at a multi-agency panel. Young people will be given the opportunity to attend panel or can choose someone to advocate for them. The panels will be held in different areas of Lancashire and will be attended by Children’s Social Care, Housing Authorities and other providers. The panel will focus on long term planning to achieve settled and suitable homes for Care Leavers in adulthood. All possible housing options will be explored and input from the relevant agencies will be required to ensure each young person is aware of the offer and what support they will receive.

The aim of the panel is to ensure that placement decisions made in the latter stages of a young person’s care experience are conducive with the young person’s long-term goals and that young people achieve as much stability in their home lives as possible, in the short and long term.

The terms of reference for the panel are found in the appendix.



# 5. Housing Options

Children in our Care and Care Leavers in Lancashire have access to a variety of housing options both through Children's Social Care and the Housing Authority. These will be discussed at the panel at age 16.

At age 17 and a half a young person will attend a housing options meeting at the local district council to make plans for their upcoming independence. The full range of Housing Options can be found in the appendix.



## 6. Local Connection

Children in Our Care gain a local connection under part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 in the housing authority area where they lived at the point, they became looked after (i.e. settled accommodation with a parent or a person with parental responsibility).

Children in Our Care in Lancashire can also gain a local connection within the housing authority they are placed, as long as this is within Lancashire County Council boundaries.

All Care Leavers who are the responsibility of Lancashire Children's Services have a local connection under part 7 (homelessness application) with all twelve housing authority areas in Lancashire.


Having a local connection under part 7, allows young people to make a homelessness application (if they are homeless or will become homeless within 56 days). An application under part 7 should always be a last resort, the aim of this protocol is to avoid instances where young people are at risk of homelessness.

Where a care leaver is placed outside of Lancashire prior to their 16th birthday, has lived in the same housing authority area for at least 2 years and is homeless or will become homeless within 56 days, they will also have a 'local connection' (under part 7) and are eligible to make a homelessness application in that area (part 7) as well as an application in Lancashire until the age of 21.

Section 22.4, Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018, emphasises the need for joint working arrangements and avoiding part 7 applications wherever possible.

“Any joint working arrangements between a children's services authority and a housing authority for care leavers' transition to independent living should include ensuring the delivery of effective preparation for independence with planned, sustainable moves into supported or independent accommodation. Local processes and/or practices should not involve care leavers routinely being treated as homeless when care placements come to an end in order to place the housing authority under an obligation to secure accommodation under Part 7 of the 1996 Act.

## 7. Joining the Housing Needs Register



All children in our care reaching the age of 16 should be supported to join their part 6 local connection housing needs register as soon as possible after their 16th birthday and within 3 months at the latest. Where a young person becomes looked after following their 16th birthday, they should join the register within 3 months of becoming looked after at the latest. The responsibility for undertaking this task rests with the Personal Advisor or the most appropriate person identified in the pathway plan. A part 6 application will enable young people to access housing via the local housing authority allocations scheme and will allow priority access via choice-based lettings/the local allocations approach.

Personal Advisor is to ensure the Care Leavers Pathway Plan part 2 is shared as part of the registration process and then provided again every 6 months. Consent should be gained from the young person.

Personal Advisors to ensure that Care Leavers registrations remain active through Pathway Plan reviews at least every 6 months. If the application has not been renewed every 12 months the Personal Advisor is to contact the local housing authority to reactivate the registration. Consideration to be made regarding what Banding is most appropriate for Care Leavers aged 16-18 who are registered and whether a specialist banding is needed for this group of young people. If specialist banding cannot be provided, housing authority is to consider backdating the registration date to when the Care Leaver turned 16 years old.

Housing authority managers to ensure Social Landlords are up to date with the Housing Protocol to promote registration of Care Leavers from the age of 16.

# 8. Joining the Housing Needs Register

- Placed in Lancashire
- Outside of their part 6 area
- Prior to the age of 16



Where a child in our care was placed (by Children's Services) into a housing authority in Lancashire that is not their part 6 local connection area (prior to their 16th birthday), they should be supported to make a part 6 housing needs register application in both areas (host and originating area). This applies to Care Leavers moving between districts in Lancashire and Care Leavers from districts outside of Lancashire.

In recognition that children in our care will have developed support networks and links in the host area, housing authorities have agreed to a reciprocal arrangement to avoid the need for young people to return to an area that they may no longer have links or connections with.

When submitting the host area application, social workers/personal advisors should set out what networks the young person has developed and the benefits of remaining in the host area and reasons why they could not, or it would not be beneficial to return to their originating area. Consideration will be given to young people who have developed or have durable networks and support in the host area or where there are safety and vulnerability issues which discourage a return to their local connection area.

Young people should also join their originating area housing needs register as part of contingency planning approach.

Where children in our care move to or are placed into an area that is not their part 6 local connection area after their 16th birthday (within Lancashire), they should be supported to join the new areas' housing needs register if the placement is due to be

- a) long term,
- b) is deemed settled and
- c) the young person will continue to reside in that area until (and after) their 18th birthday,
- d) they have been in the new area for at least 3 months.

The social worker/personal advisor should discuss the situation with the housing authority contact in that area. Evidence to be provided to the Housing Authority to show the continuity of the placement. The primary aim of the approach is to avoid making unnecessary housing applications and to avoid homelessness applications at or after age 18.



## 9. Children in Our Care

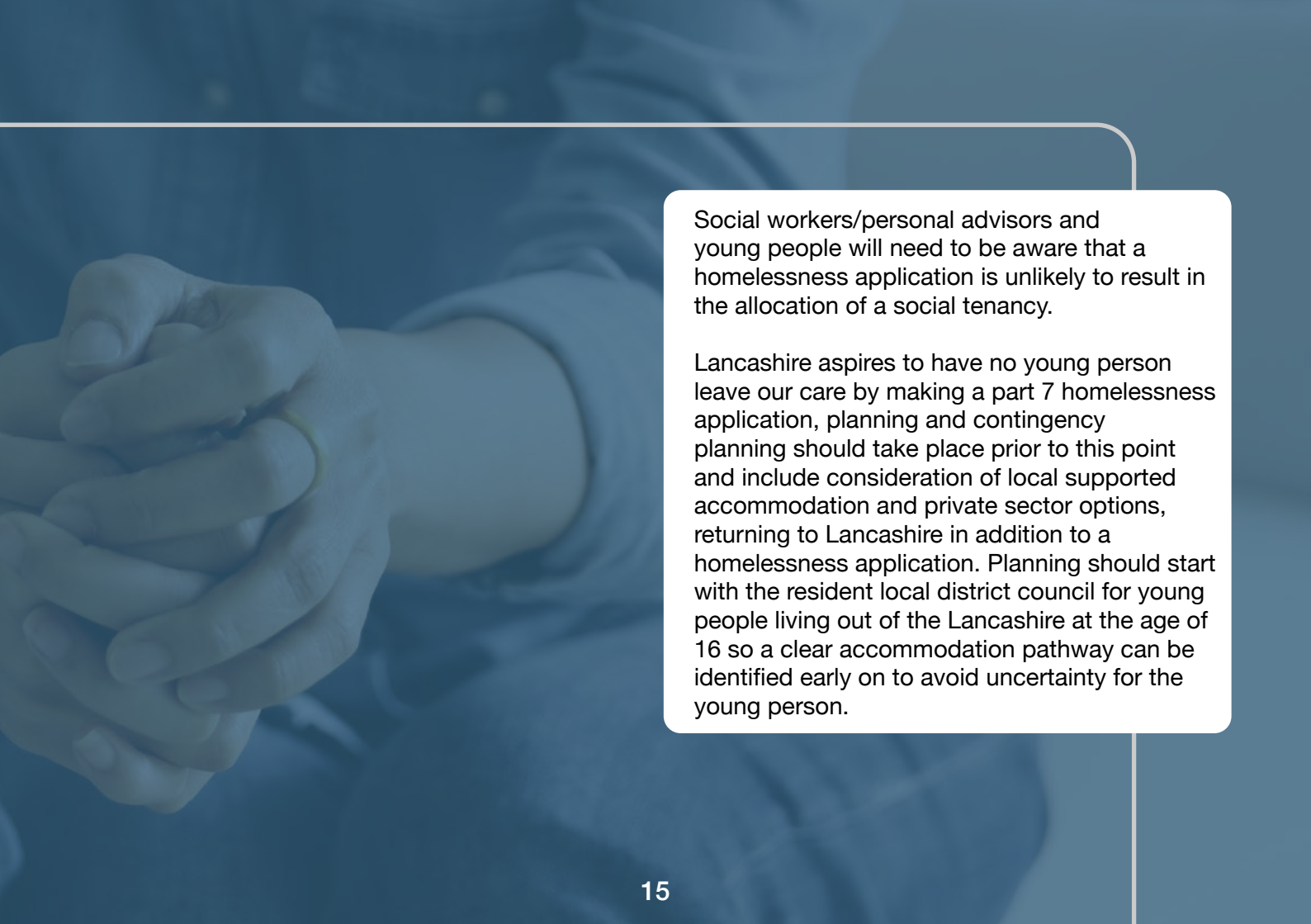
### - Placed Outside of Lancashire

### - Prior to the Age of 16

Where a child in our care is placed outside of Lancashire prior to their 16th birthday, the housing authority where they are placed (host authority) should be approached when the young person reaches the age of 16 to clarify if the young person can join the local Housing Needs Register. Consideration should be given to the length of time the young person has resided in this area, their links to the community and their engagement in education or employment in that area. Should early registration onto the Housing Needs Register and the above considerations not provide them with priority for social housing in that area then they may be required to make a homelessness application at age 18 or thereafter, rather than be given priority via the housing allocations/ housing needs register process.

The making of a homelessness application should be avoided and is not considered a primary transition for a young person leaving care.

Where children in our care are placed outside of Lancashire prior to their 16th birthday, remain in the same area for at least two years and are homeless, or will be threatened with homelessness in 56 days, they can make a part 7 homelessness application to the housing authority where they were placed/living on or after their 18th birthday and up to age 21.



Social workers/personal advisors and young people will need to be aware that a homelessness application is unlikely to result in the allocation of a social tenancy.

Lancashire aspires to have no young person leave our care by making a part 7 homelessness application, planning and contingency planning should take place prior to this point and include consideration of local supported accommodation and private sector options, returning to Lancashire in addition to a homelessness application. Planning should start with the resident local district council for young people living out of the Lancashire at the age of 16 so a clear accommodation pathway can be identified early on to avoid uncertainty for the young person.



## 10. Care Leavers placed out of area

Lancashire Care Leavers who are placed outside of Lancashire County Council boundaries will attend a housing options meeting with their Personal Advisor within the housing authority they wish to reside at the age of 17. Should the young person wish to reside where they have been placed the Personal Advisor will have to negotiate a local connection for the young person in this area. They will retain their local connection within Lancashire also.

It may be necessary to make a homelessness application for a young person who wishes to reside out of Lancashire to ensure the housing authority has a duty. However, this should be avoided where possible.


## 11. Priority Banding

All Lancashire Care Leavers will receive the highest priority for social housing as a default position, however should being placed in a different band provide swifter access to accommodation this should be considered. Priority banding and access to social housing will be dependent on all information required to be provided in a timely manner and a young person's readiness to manage a tenancy.

Care Leavers who have not accessed social housing previously but are currently 18-25 and are considered to be settled in accommodation will also be considered to be priority banded for social housing should this be a plan that would lead to better outcomes. These young people will be heard at local housing panels. This will include young people who are moving on from Staying Put arrangements, supported accommodation, supported lodgings, private tenancies and other private arrangements.







There are 5 Choice Based Lettings Schemes across Lancashire (see links below). Not all Choice Based Lettings policies provide automatic priority to Care Leavers. In districts where this is not provided discretion can be used and there will be consideration within those districts to amending existing allocation policies to provide priority to Care Leavers.

Allocation policies for each Choice Based Lettings Scheme across Lancashire:

- **Preston, Chorley and South Ribble:**  
<https://www.selectmove.co.uk/Data/Pub/PublicWebsite/ImageLibrary/Final%20Allocations%20Policy%2013th%20Sept%202013.pdf>
- **West Lancs:**  
<https://www.westlancshomefinder.co.uk/Data/Pub/PublicWebsite/ImageLibrary/Allocations%20Policy%20October%202018.pdf>
- **Fylde and Wyre:**  
<http://www.myhomechoicefyldecoast.co.uk/Data/Pub/PublicWebsite/ImageLibrary/MHC%20CAP%201.0%20Final%202018.pdf>
- **Lancaster:**  
<https://www.idealchoicehomes.co.uk/NovaWeb/Infrastructure/ViewLibraryDocument.aspx?ObjectID=265>
- **Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Hyndburn:**  
Allocations Policy (b-with-us.com)
- **Ribble Valley:**  
<https://www.onward.co.uk/find-a-home-in-ribble-valley/>

## 12. Second Chances

Care Leavers move into independent accommodation much sooner than their peers and have often experienced trauma and instability throughout their lives. As a result, their early tenancies may not have been successful.

If a young person has been housed in social housing previously and they wish to access this again, the Leaving Care Service need to update their needs assessment to ensure that the young person's current circumstances and skills are such that they are able to maintain a tenancy. The assessment needs to consider:

- Why previous tenancies have not been successful?
- How likely a future tenancy is to be successful?
- What impact another unsuccessful tenancy would have on future accommodation options?
- Is their evidence of change?
- What are the barriers to accessing social housing again and can they be addressed?

This assessment and any subsequent planning will be undertaken in conjunction with the housing authority. Any decision to provide access to social housing for a second time needs to be made by the housing authority, with the benefit of all the relevant information provided by the Leaving Care Service and any other agencies involved.

Any arrears preventing access to social housing will be considered and a plan will be put in place for them to be cleared prior to move on. This plan may include contributions from both the young person and Children's Social Care depending on the amount, the circumstances surrounding the arrears and the young person and local district council's timescales.

Should the young person be assessed as being able to maintain a tenancy, all barriers to housing can be addressed and the housing authority are in agreement the young person will again be priority banded for social housing.



# 13. Property Allocation and Tenancy Sign up

When a young person is allocated a social housing property, they are given 24 hours to accept the offer before it is withdrawn.

In recognition of the individual needs of care experienced young people and in liaison with the Personal Advisor, the housing authority can negotiate the acceptance period with the Registered Social Landlord to ensure that a young person has a reasonable amount of time to be contacted and accept an offer.

At the point a young person signs their social tenancy they will also sign a document that allows information sharing between the landlord and Leaving Care Service. This will allow information pertaining to the tenancy to be shared between the landlord and the Leaving Care Service to enable both parties to support the young person to maintain their property.

Should the young person not wish to consent to information being shared, this will be communicated to the landlord early on and may impact their decision to offer the young person a property. It will be fully explained to young people what information will be shared and they will be given the opportunity to identify the level of information each party can share in order to reach a workable compromise.

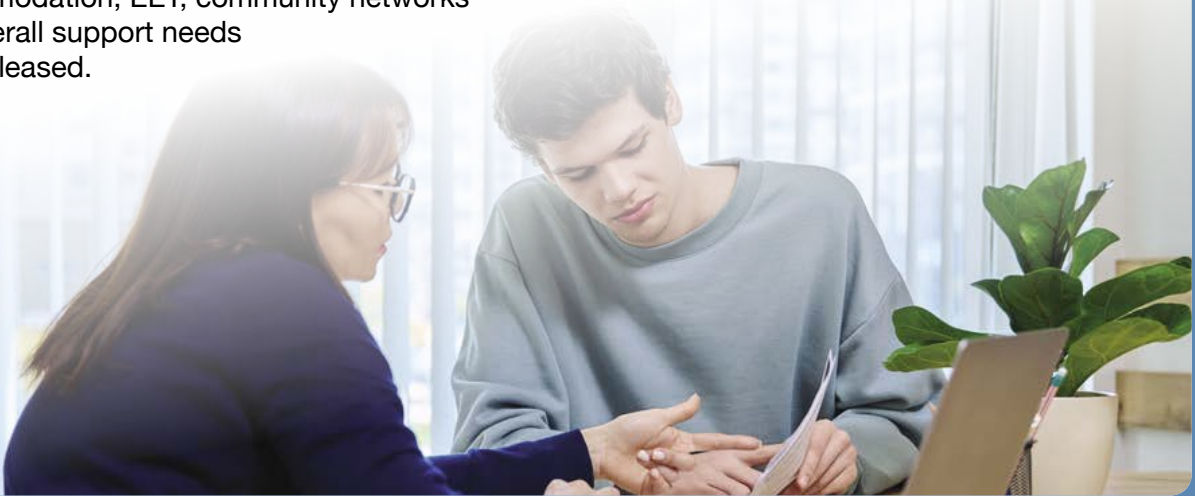
Personal advisors will be present during the tenancy sign up, providing the young person has agreed to this. The personal advisor will ensure that the young person understands the terms of their tenancy.

# 14. Resettlement Planning – Care Leavers leaving prison

The personal advisors will work closely with the Leaving Care lead within the prison and will remain in regular contact with the young person throughout their sentence.

The young person will be heard at their local housing panel prior to the pathway plan review that will formulate a resettlement plan.

The personal advisor will review the pathway plan and invite multi agency partners to the review 3 months prior to release. This review will focus on resettlement planning and will consider accommodation, EET, community networks and overall support needs once released.






## 15. In the event of Homelessness (Care Leavers over the age of 18)

A key aim of the Joint Housing Protocol is to avoid care leavers needing to make homelessness applications. However, under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 care leavers aged 18 to 21 who are eligible for assistance and homeless/ threatened with homelessness within 56 days are able to receive support from a local housing authority to help prevent or relieve homelessness. The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 sets out that where a care leaver presents as homeless, the housing authority should, subject to the young person's consent, liaise with the responsible Children's Service to ensure that the young person's Personal Advisor should be involved in the homelessness assessment process. Should a Care Leaver who is aged between 21 and 25 years present as homeless and is not open to the Leaving Care Service they should be supported to make a referral to gain the support of a Personal Advisor.

If a Care Leaver becomes homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, the Personal Advisor will submit a Duty to Refer to the relevant housing authority. The Personal Advisor should accompany the young person to any housing appointments or assessments. Should the young person not have a Personal Advisor or in the event that the Personal Advisor is not aware of the situation, any other key agency the young person is working with should complete the Duty to Refer and notify the Leaving Care Service of this. The housing authority and the Personal Advisor will formulate a Personalised Housing Plan alongside the young person. The Personal Advisor will be the lead professional for the Personalised Housing Plan, and this will be informed by the young person's pathway plan. With the consent of the young person, the Personalised Housing Plan will be shared with the Personal Advisor.



Should a young person require accommodation urgently the housing authority will seek to access temporary accommodation. A Care Leaver may access temporary accommodation across the county. The Personal Advisor will also complete a referral for accommodation through the Access to Resource Team. The accommodation offered through the Access to Resource Team can also be requested via the housing authority. However, this accommodation is prioritised for young people ages 16 -17 and often requires a thorough assessment which may prevent same day admission.



In the event that no Temporary Accommodation is available through the Housing Authority and The Leaving Care Service cannot source accommodation through the Access to Resource Team, the Leaving Care Service will consider Bed and Breakfast accommodation with approval from a Lancashire Children's Services Head of Service. Should the Housing Authority seek to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for a Care Leaver, they will not need Children's Service Head of Service approval, however this plan will need to be shared with Personal Advisor to ensure there is no other option available. This will be a short-term measure while the Leaving Care Service and the Housing Authority works jointly to source alternative accommodation. Lancashire County Council are committed to minimising the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and in circumstances where it is unavoidable, every effort will be made to ensure that an alternative is found.

Where a housing authority offer a property (via choice-based lettings, a direct let, or a discharge after a homelessness application) and the applicant rejects the 'offer' without reasonable grounds, the housing authority may deem this to be a 'Duty Discharge' and is likely to result in the housing authority owing no further duty. It is for the housing authority to deem what is a 'reasonable offer'. A 'reasonable offer' may involve some travel to education, training, employment, support networks etc, i.e. not being in an ideal location and may also involve being of a size and type of property that the applicant may not feel is ideal. Given the amount of accommodation available and the fact that the 'offer' will have been assessed before being made, the grounds for challenging a 'Duty Discharge' decision are limited. Prior to rejecting an 'offer', personal advisors should discuss the circumstances of a possible rejection and appeal with the young person and the housing officer. The 'offer' of a given property is also often time limited so the young person will need to respond as soon as possible.

A young person's Individual needs and circumstances will be taken into consideration when a time frame for accepting an offer is set.

Where the housing authority has withdrawn their duty to provide temporary accommodation as a result of being unable to engage the young person, the young person is able to reapproach the housing authority at a time when they are able to access services. The housing authority will, at this time, accept a duty and provide temporary accommodation.

In the case of most housing authorities, once the applicant has accepted and moved into the property, they can then apply for a review of the suitability of the accommodation they have been 'offered', if this review is successful, they could be relocated to more suitable accommodation. If this review fails and the property is deemed suitable, then the young person will be allowed to remain in the property that they have moved into. If they refuse to move into the property and the review finds the property suitable, they will find themselves homeless and the housing authority won't provide any further 'offers' of accommodation.

Should a young person be owed a relief duty and provided with temporary accommodation by the housing authority and subsequently be evicted from this accommodation, the housing authority's duty to advise remains, however they will no longer owe the young person a duty to provide temporary accommodation. If, after the relief period of 56 days and full assessments, they are declared not intentionally homeless (section 193 Housing Act 1996) and priority need then they can be reoffered temporary accommodation. If asked the leave temporary accommodation again, the full duty can be withdrawn.



The main housing duty can be carried out or discharged with an offer of either temporary accommodation or permanent accommodation. Most homeless applicants owed the main duty will be placed in temporary accommodation initially. The housing authority may require the young person to move from one temporary accommodation to another before a permanent offer is made.

Social workers/personal advisors should check the arrangements in the specific housing authority area, as there will be slight variations in how the 'offer' and 'duty discharge' process operates.

Intentionality decisions should be prevented where possible. The housing authority should involve the young person's Personal Advisor throughout all planning and decision making for the young person. Should an intentionality decision be considered, the housing authority needs to notify the Personal Advisor and the young person of this.



## 16.SPOCs

Each district council will identify a housing officer who will act as a single point of contact for Care Leavers. The SPOCS will take a lead on applications made by Care Leavers and would act as a single point of contact for the Leaving Care Service to support with queries or issues raised.

Children's Social Care will ensure that each SPOC has the details of the relevant managers and who to contact within the escalation process.

## 17. Leaving Care's Housing Officer

The Leaving Care Service has two Housing Officers. The function of this role is to improve the housing outcomes of Care Leavers across Lancashire. This will involve supporting the Housing Panels, delivering pre tenancy courses to Children in our Care and Care Leavers and ensuring the implementation of the protocol.

# 18. Concerns and Complaints - Escalation Procedure

Where a concern is raised about an individual young person, the two respective parties (social worker/personal advisor and housing officer) should seek to resolve the issue. If this does not address the specific issue, it should be escalated to the respective managers. If this does not address the specific issue, it should be escalated to the respective the Senior Manager lead for housing. If this does not address the specific issue, it should be escalated to the Head of Service for Children's Permanence.



## 19. Governance Arrangements

The Care Leavers' Joint Housing Protocol will be reviewed annually with the housing authorities and Children's Social Care. Operational issues will be discussed as part of the housing panels. The Corporate Parenting Board will monitor the implementation and impact of the protocol. The Housing Reference Group will be held quarterly to discuss all housing related issues between Children's Social Care and the Housing Authorities, with the Care Leavers' Protocol being a standing agenda item for each meeting.



