



Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers

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Foreword

As Corporate Directors of Housing and Community Safety and Children and Young People's Care and Protection Services, we are delighted to present our Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers. We are committed to promoting and continuing the essential joint working between Children's Social Care and Housing Services in Dorset. This is to ensure the diverse accommodation needs of our Care Leavers are met and that they are able to make good, realistic and positive choices about where they live. When things get tough, we work to ensure the effective management of housing crises for Care Leavers wherever and whenever they occur and to prevent homelessness. But more than all of that, as set out in our Children and Young People's Plan, we want Dorset to be the best place for our Care Leavers to live.

All Care Leavers should be able to expect as a minimum the same level of care and support as others would expect from a reasonable parent. As Corporate Parents, we are ambitious for our Care Leavers, and we want the best for them. We know how important suitable accommodation is to delivering that vision. And we know that good housing underpins success in all other areas of life. As leaders in housing and children's social care, we are committed to working together in partnership, and also in engaging and partnering with all other corporate and community partners who can help us to support Care Leavers to succeed and prosper.

We see this joint protocol as one key ingredient for delivering the above, and symbolic of our joint ownership and ambition to secure it.

Andrew Billany, Corporate Director for Housing and Community Safety, and Paul Dempsey, Corporate Director for Care and Protection

1. Introduction

Leaving care is a challenging and important transition into adulthood. The success or failure of this transition will have great impact on the outcomes throughout early adulthood and into the rest of the life of a young person leaving care. Ensuring Care Leavers have suitable accommodation is intrinsic to this and needs to be recognised as much more than just finding a place to live.

Care Leavers should be informed at an early stage about all options available to them and the advantages and disadvantages of each option whilst also thinking about their own wishes, aspirations and what support they need to succeed. To live independently requires a variety of skills, support and resources. Depending on earlier experiences, Care Leavers are likely to have had varying levels of opportunity to develop such skills.

Care Leavers generally assume responsibility for their own accommodation at a much younger age than their peers and are likely to make mistakes and require support from others to learn from experiences. This learning journey will be longer for some than others.

We acknowledge that Care Leavers may be taking up these responsibilities with limited support and social networks due to the disruption that is often associated with the care experience. The importance of a multi-agency approach is paramount to securing successful accommodation for Care Leavers.

Who does this protocol apply to?

The local authority is the corporate parent of children in care and therefore has a legal and moral duty to provide the kind of support that any good parent would provide to their own children.

This is a legal responsibility which extends to all departments within the council.

All local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure all eligible and relevant Care Leavers are placed in suitable accommodation when leaving care. This protocol applies to this cohort of young people and to be clear, the relevant definitions are:

Eligible child - A child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still looked after.

Relevant child - A child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g., in a youth offending institution or hospital) when they turned 16 but immediately before that were looked after.

Former relevant child - A young person (YP) over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Local authorities support this group at least until age 21, or some duties until age 25.

Qualifying Children – A young person under 21 who stopped being looked after, after the age of 16 and is in full-time higher or further education. This includes young people who are under a special guardianship order.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People - A young person who qualifies for a leaving care service from Dorset Council and who has been granted refugee status. Also, those who qualify and are given leave to remain up to the age of 21 years or who have an extension beyond the age of 18 for a minimum of one year

In addition, Care Leavers who are the responsibility of another local authority but who reside in the Dorset Council area and can show a connection with a local housing authority district will fall within the remit of this protocol.

For the purposes of this protocol, care experienced young people will be referred to as 'young people' throughout this document.

Legislative Framework

1. *Homelessness Order 2002 (Priority Need for accommodation)* outlined that a young person is in priority need for accommodation if they are:
 - Between the age of 16-18
 - Person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable because of having been looked after by the Local Authority
 - Person aged 18-21 who was formally looked after by a Local Authority
2. *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017*
 - This legislation was a significant reform of homelessness legislation placing much more responsibility on Local Authorities to intervene earlier and provide housing advice to all that are eligible.
 - Those threatened with homelessness within the next 56 days will be owed a 'Prevention' duty
 - Those who are homeless will be owed a 'Relief' duty and provided S188 interim accommodation if thought to be in Priority Need.
3. *The Children Act 1989*
 - a. Statutory guidance and regulations place a duty on local authorities to provide support
 - b. The Local Authority is the 'corporate parent' for Care Leavers and therefore has the responsibility for their wellbeing- this will vary dependent on need.
4. *Volume 3 of The Children Act (1989) -The Planning Transition to Adulthood guidance (2010)* states on page 4 that research and practice shows that

young people who have been looked after will have the best chance of success as adults if those providing transitional care and other support take the following principles into account in talking to the young person and when making any decision:

- ✓ Is this good enough for my own child?
- ✓ Does it provide for a second chance if things don't quite go as expected?
- ✓ Is it tailored to their individual needs, particularly if they are more vulnerable than other young people?

5. *Children and Social Work Act 2017*

- a. Duty on Children's Services to appoint a Personal Advisor to support Care Leavers and be available until their 25th birthday
- b. The support should be based on the needs of the young person that are set out in the Pathway Plan

Corporate Parenting Principles

When exercising their functions in relation to children in care and Care Leavers, Dorset Council has regard to the seven Corporate Parenting principles identified in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

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.*

Local Offer

Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its Care Leavers. The local offer

should provide information about all the services and support that is available to Care Leavers from the local authority including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide. For further information on the Dorset offer click on the link below:

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/childrens-social-care/children-in-care/local-offer-for-care-leavers/local-offer-for-care-leavers>

Duty to Refer

From 1st October 2018, the Duty to Refer places a duty on some public authorities to refer service users who think they may either be threatened with homelessness or are homeless to the local authority housing services. These public bodies are:

- prisons
- young offender institutions
- secure training centres
- secure colleges
- youth offending teams
- probation services (including community rehabilitation companies)
- job centres in England
- social service authorities (both adult and children's)
- emergency departments
- urgent treatment centres
- hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care
- Secretary of State - armed forces

Children's Services will meet the statutory duty to refer into Housing Teams (with consent from the young person) where the person is threatened with homelessness within 56 days, and *they have not been successful in resolving the housing situation*. Please note- this can be done to any local authority.

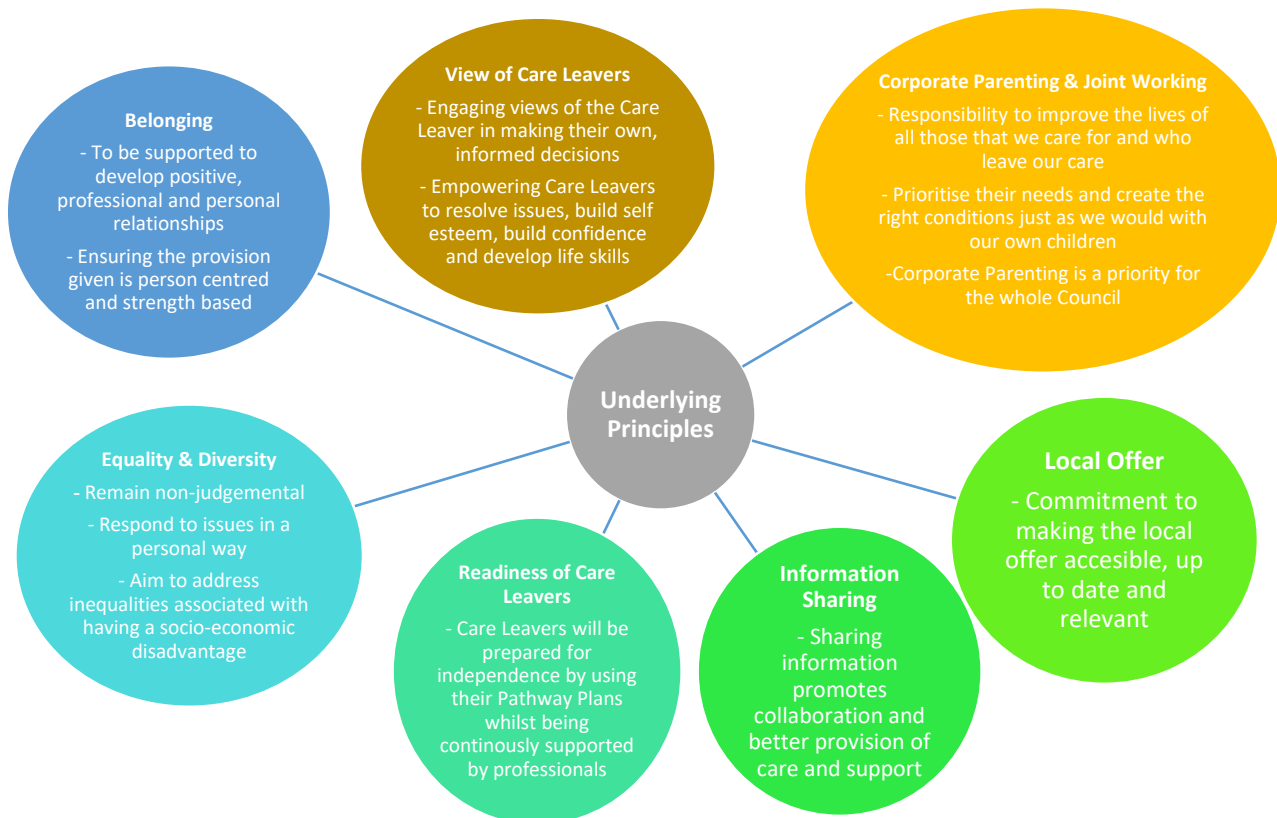
- Click for guidance and online referral forms:
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/duty-to-refer-for-public-authorities.aspx>

2. Purpose

This Joint Protocol is an agreement between Housing Services, Children's and Adult Social Services to:

- Promote arrangements for achieving planned, supportive transitions to independent living
- Promote early identification of risk of homelessness and a quick joined response for those who do become homeless

- Prevent Care Leavers being homeless upon a care placement ending
- Prevent Care Leavers presenting as homeless to housing services for emergency placements
- Ensure Care Leavers are accommodated appropriately and prevent the use of inappropriate placements
- Establish the roles and responsibilities towards Care Leavers and define the roles of the statutory agencies within the legislative framework
- Promote our corporate parenting responsibility towards our Care Leavers, providing a shared commitment from Children's and Adult Services and Housing Services to ensure our young people achieve the best outcomes possible
- Identify how Children's and Adults Services and Housing Services, by working together can meet the needs of Care Leavers, effectively discharge our duties in line with government guidance and benchmarked good practice.
- Ensure there are no gaps in services and that resources are effectively used
- Ensure all officers using this protocol are mindful of the roles and responsibilities of organisations working with young people and the need for multi-agency working to secure positive outcomes.



3. Planning for the Reality Before Leaving Care

From the age of 15 and a half years old, the allocated social worker will work with a young person to identify, develop, and review a holistic Pathway Plan. As part of this, the social worker should assess the young person's housing needs and discuss accommodation options in conjunction with housing colleagues where needed. Assessment should include others who know the young person well. ***For young people who become looked after following their 16th birthday, their Pathway plan should be completed within 3 months.***

The Social worker will explore the young person's eligibility for local authority housing and support the young person to apply for the register as the young person reaches the age of 16 and a half. Should a young person be assessed as suitable and offered an independent tenancy under the age of 18, children's services are liable for the rent until the young person reaches 18. Attention should be given to the cost of the rent to ensure young person can afford it post-18 in line with the local housing allowance.

All applications for local social housing should be made online via the Dorset Council Home Choice Website. If support is required, each housing team has dedicated officers able to assist. Lead professionals should ensure that applicants can present relevant supporting documents which may include photographic ID, birth certificates,

national insurance number, proof of address, proof of income, address history or medical evidence. More information can be found [here](#).

4. Helping Care Leavers Prepare

As looked after children and young people live in a variety of settings, 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 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, and this should be approached dynamically.

Development of independence skills are generally best supported in the home environment by those people they are currently living with. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Foster carers
- Residential care providers
- Semi- independent accommodation providers
- Supported lodgings providers
- Staying put providers

For a young person to be deemed as 'tenancy ready', every effort should be made to evidence their achievements and skills, and these should be evidenced through pathway planning. These skills should include but are not limited to:

- Making good financial choices including earning and spending money
- Keeping track of money
- Household tasks such as cleaning and laundry
- Addressing own health and wellbeing
- Practical cooking skills within a budget
- Preparing for the world of work including good education choices
- Being a good neighbour
- See appendices for an example of a training package

Benefits

Council Tax and Council Tax Support

Young people who have left the care of Dorset Council are exempt from Council Tax until the age of 25 if:

- ✓ They are living alone
- ✓ Living in the Dorset Council area

Even if they do not live alone, they will still be eligible to claim a 25% reduction in their council tax bill

After their 25th birthday Care Leavers will be liable for full council tax bills unless they meet the standard criteria for a reduced bill – support with applying for Council Tax Support should be given to a Care Leaver approaching their 25th Birthday should this be the case.

Housing Benefit

Housing benefit has largely been replaced with Universal Credit in most circumstances, however there are still a few exceptions whereby a young person will need to claim housing benefit (exempt supported accommodation, shared lives arrangement etc). Their Social Worker or Personal Assistant should ask the provider or landlord how their accommodation is categorised by housing benefit in order to support the young person to claim correctly.

Universal Credit

Young people will usually only be able to claim Universal Credit if they are aged 18 or over, but some people aged 16 or 17 may be eligible, depending on their circumstances. Young people should be encouraged to make an application for Universal Credit 4 weeks before their 18th birthday if they are on a low income or unemployed. Usually, young people cannot claim Universal Credit if in full-time higher education or training, but in exceptional circumstances they may still be eligible to apply. Universal Credit payments consist of a standard allowance and any extra amounts that apply, for example if you:

- have children
- have a disability or health condition which prevents you from working
- need help paying your rent

A young person will need the following documents to apply:

- bank, building society or credit union account details
- an email address
- information about housing, for example how much rent you pay
- details of income, for example pay slips
- details of savings and any investments
- details of childcare costs if applying for help with childcare costs
- proof of ID- e.g., passport or driving license

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

DHP may be available on a short-term basis to those with an active claim for Universal Credit (housing element) or housing benefit who have no other means to fund a shortfall.

For more information click [DiscretionaryHousingPaymentsPolicy.pdf \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](#)

Circumstances where examples of where DHP could be paid include when:

- the Local Housing Allowance is less than the rent you have to pay
- there is an overlap in tenancies
- a non-dependant deduction is being made from your Housing Benefit
(A non-dependant is an adult who normally lives with the young person, usually family or a friend. They are expected to make a contribution towards the rent and a deduction is made from your housing benefit to reflect this whether they actually make a contribution or not. This does not include partners, lodgers, joint tenants, occasional guests, family members away from home e.g. armed forces or in prison, someone under 25 who gets Universal Credit with no earned income, Job Seekers' Allowance (income based) or Income Support, or an older person who gets Pension Credit. Deductions are worked out on a sliding scale based on the other person's weekly gross income.)
- income is more than the government threshold (the applicable amount), and benefit is reduced as a result
- the young person has had to pay a rent deposit or rent in advance
- the young person has had to pay out money because of a housing need such as a moving expense
- where eligible rent has been restricted due to the social sector size criteria, that is, where the accommodation is too big for the assessed need

5. Accommodation and Support Options

The Department for Education (DfE) defines what is suitable accommodation for Care Leavers. This should be considered for each move and the pathway plan should be reviewed within 7 days of any move to ensure the appropriate support is in place. Regulation 9(2) of the Care Leavers Regulations defines 'Suitable accommodation' as follows:

- 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; and
- In respect of which the responsible authority has, so far as reasonably practicable, considered the young person's wishes and feelings; education, training or employment needs.

Accommodation Options Available via Dorset Council:

a) **Staying Put**

Staying Put is the preferred option for young people in foster care. Where the young person and the fostering household agree to continue to live together this is known as a Staying Put arrangement and is supported by the local authority, see [Staying Put \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

b) **Staying Close**

Dorset supports the notion of Staying Close and will seek to provide move on accommodation for those in residential care to remain within the same local community to enable established supportive relationships to continue.

c) **Shared Lives**

For young people with disabilities who have been looked after by the Local Authority, who transition from Children's to Adults services, this is an option to live within a family environment – [Shared Lives carer | Our Dorset Adult Social Care and Community Site \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

d) **Supported Lodgings**

This option provides for those who are leaving care to live within a family household other than Staying Put, with an individualised support arrangement.

e) **Supported Accommodation**

Generally, accommodation shared with other young people and support staff on site or visiting, with various levels of support being offered.

f) **Independent Tenancies with Social Housing Providers**

Dorset Council Housing Service has a nominations agreement arrangement with local registered social landlords that advertise properties through the Dorset Council Home Choice scheme. Dorset Council adopted a new Housing Allocations Policy in December 2021, following a period of detailed consultation. In this, the Council confirmed that its Corporate Parenting Responsibility allowed Care Leavers to be placed in the 'High Housing Need' band, giving priority for social housing lettings along with other people with high housing needs. Care Leavers who are able to demonstrate readiness for this responsibility and/or the

relevant support network will be placed in the 'High Housing Need' band and are in a strong position to bid for available social housing homes. It is acknowledged that the provision of affordable and social housing offers an important option in supporting Care Leavers. [Decision - Dorset Council Housing Allocations Policy 2021 - 2026 - Dorset Council](#)

g) **Independent Tenancies with Private Landlords**

Dorset Council Housing service works alongside the Leaving Care Team to link in with private landlords to offer tenancies for Care Leavers. We aim to develop a scheme of accreditation. Dorset Children's services will provide a Guarantor Scheme for those Care Leavers who are able to demonstrate established independent living skills- [Care Leaver Rent Guarantee Procedure](#)

h) **Additional Support**

Floating support should be offered and arranged should the young person require ongoing support to get settled into a tenancy. Often, social landlords will have dedicated teams set up to support those new to a tenancy. Other agencies to consider include but are not limited to:

- ✓ Food banks – these may accept self-referral or referral by agency
- ✓ Citizens Advice
- ✓ First Point floating support (The You Trust) – self-referral or referral by agency
- ✓ Using previous supported accommodation's floating support provision
- ✓ Universal Credit work coach

i) **Living with Family**

Several young people will have maintained or renewed contact with family during their care experience. For some, the circumstances will have significantly changed, and it may be appropriate for Care Leavers to live with family members. Subject to assessment and agreement from all parties, Children's services will support this move where it is in the young person's best interests.

j) **Home Ownership**

Shared ownership properties are accessed via the Help to Buy agency [here](#)
<https://www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en/articles/shared-ownership-housing-schemes-explained>

Help to buy schemes enable first time buyers to access home ownership with a deposit as small as 5%: <https://www.ownyourhome.gov.uk/scheme/help-to-buy-2021-2023/>

k) **Nightstop**

Dorset Nightstop provides safe, secure emergency accommodation for Dorset young people aged 16-25 (18-25 in Bournemouth, Poole & Christchurch) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. [Nightstop Dorset | Action for Children](#)

l) **Emergency Accommodation**

Emergency accommodation is the absolute last resort and should only be used when all other attempts have been made to source suitable accommodation. Emergency accommodation may be offered by Housing Services following housing options interview.

Types of Tenancies Care Leavers may be Offered:

- Probationary/Assured tenancies: Social landlords will initially offer a 12-month probationary tenancy to all new tenants, which if successful will then convert to an assured tenancy (lifetime tenancy)
- Fixed Term tenancies
- Private landlords may offer:
 - 6 month assured shorthold tenancies
 - 12-month fixed term (or longer)
 - Licence agreements
 - Lodging agreements
 - Tied accommodation tenancies (with a job)

Allocations Policy (Social Housing)

Care Leavers will be prioritised in the appropriate band as determined by Dorset Council's housing allocation policy. They will require evidence that they are ready to live independently prior to being banded.

Dorset Council works with Registered Providers in the local area to provide Social Housing. There is a high probability that suitable accommodation may be available or offered in the private rented sector.

6. Care Leavers in Special Circumstances

Young People in University

We have high aspirations for all our Care Leavers and encourage them wherever possible to progress to Higher Education. These students are not eligible for housing benefit or Universal Credit, and therefore alternative financial arrangements need to be made to pay for housing costs, such as, Student Finance.

Young people going to university are generally advised not to request their long-term housing offer, unless there is a specific reason that meets their needs. For those already living in their own long-term home who have the opportunity to go to

university, the allocated worker should support the young person to select an appropriate university and course, which they can manage alongside their long-term tenancy. Young people should be supported to fully understand the responsibilities they will have as a student with their own tenancy. Financial support for Care Leavers at university is outlined in the Care Leaver Finance Policy.

Young People Serving a Custodial Sentence

Where a Care Leaver who is serving a custodial sentence has a pre-existing tenancy, advice should be sought from the local benefits office (Housing Benefit or Universal Credit) to see how their individual sentence will affect their tenancy upon release. Sometimes it is not possible for a tenancy to be held for their release and support should be given for the young person to voluntarily give up their tenancy in this circumstance. A young person who is on remand can have their housing costs paid for up to 52 weeks and those who have been sentenced can have their housing costs paid for up to 13 weeks.

Pre-release planning is essential for Care Leavers leaving custody without accommodation. This discussion and planning process should begin as soon as a date is given for release and will include appropriate referrals to accommodation providers and/or a duty to refer to the housing team. An application for Dorset Council's Home Choice should also be made if appropriate for the young person. Specific advice should be sought from the Leaving Care Housing Officer for those leaving custody and not returning to Dorset. There is a statutory duty on the prison to refer to the Housing Options team within 56 days of release. The Personal Assistant (PA) should make sure there is joined up prevent release from custody with no clear destination.

Young People in the Armed Forces

When leaving the Armed Forces, Care Leavers can apply to join the housing register in an area of their choice and there will be an exception for them to join the register based on their employment with the Armed Forces. Each individual case should be explored directly with the relevant housing authority.

Support and advice should be sought by the care leaver from their PA and if appropriate a housing options meeting booked to discuss all options. There will also be an in-house welfare team within the Armed Forces who can provide advice.

Asylum Seeking Care Leavers

If the young person has No Recourse to Public Funds, then they will not be eligible for employment, Universal Credit or social housing until they have gained eligible status through a successful asylum or humanitarian protection claim. In these circumstances Children's Services will retain responsibility for locating and funding accommodation at least until the outcome of the asylum claim is known.

EU Citizens

Dorset Council has a role in ensuring that looked after children and Care Leavers, who are EU, other European Economic Area (EEA) or Swiss citizens, make an application to the EU Settlement Scheme. The UK immigration status granted to eligible applicants under the scheme will enable them to continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021, with the same rights and entitlements as they had before the UK left the EU.

The mandatory obligations on local authorities with respect to the EU Settlement Scheme for young people for whom it has corporate parenting responsibility include:

- To identify adequately trained resource to manage and make applications
- To identify eligible young people, including looked after young people for whom the authority has parental responsibility, looked after young people who are accommodated, Care Leavers and any other young people in receipt of local authority support, for example young people in need
- To identify key signposting responsibilities towards each eligible young person and put plans in place to ensure this signposting support takes place
- To determine, for each young person the local authority has parental responsibility for, who will be applying online and which process to follow
- To keep an adequate record of each application made, including the status granted and which email address and phone number were used, noting any memorable questions and answers in each case
- To record plans for monitoring the young person's status, including future actions, with deadline, to be carried out, in order, where the young person is granted pre-settled status (where they have been continually resident for less than 5 years) to apply to convert this to settled status at the appropriate time and record this in the relevant pathway plan.

The EU Settlement Scheme guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlementscheme-caseworker-guidance>

Dorset Council will ensure that consideration is given to the child's wishes and feelings and ensure that the child is aware of their right to access independent advocacy support.

Young People who are Parents

Dorset Council is committed to supported Care Leavers to be the best parents they can be. This extends to ensuring the place that they live is suitable and convenient for them and their children.

7. Care Leavers Living Outside of Dorset Council Authority

Care Leavers that are settled outside of the Dorset Council area and want to remain in the area where they have positive relationships and commitments should be encouraged to do so. The service they receive from the leaving care team should be the same as for those living in Dorset. Remaining out of area is likely to be appropriate if the young person is:

- already living in a foster or residential placement out of the area and being settled there
- being assessed as or presenting risk if accommodated in the local area
- requiring university vacation accommodation outside the authority area
- wanting to live nearer to a family member or former carer
- moving away to take up employment or training

The social worker, PA or housing officer should help the young person to contact the local authority Care Leavers and /or housing services where the young person resides to explore what accommodation options may be available to them.

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 a care leaver can claim a local connection to a local authority area in which they were normally resident for a continuous period of two years, at least some of which fell before their 16th birthday, as a result of being looked after by that local authority. This connection lasts until their 21st birthday. Where an approach is made to a separate local authority with which the care leaver has no valid local connection, then the case will most likely be referred to Dorset Council for assessment. It is important to understand the rules around local connection to avoid wasting the young person's time and to help them manage their expectations.

Dorset Council will work with other local authorities to facilitate Care Leavers having access to the housing register and local housing options in a Local Authority other than Dorset.

8. Options for 21–25-Year-Old Care Leavers

Options include:

- Private rented tenancies
 - House share
 - Lodging
 - Self-contained accommodation
- Social housing tenancies
- Home ownership
- Supported lodgings

9. Support to Prevent and Relieve Homelessness

Tenancy Sustainment

Most Care Leavers move on from care into independent accommodation without risk of becoming homeless and most can initially sustain their own accommodation with or without support. It is once the young person has been in their tenancy for a few months that risk most often emerges. PAs should be alert to all such risks and should tailor any additional support required to the young person's needs. In addition to this extra support, the PA should ensure their contact details are given to the landlord so that the landlord can advise the PA of any issues arising within the tenancy.

Personal Assistants should be alert to the need for contingency planning and a readiness to respond to emergencies, including the loss of accommodation.

- If there is a risk of a breakdown in the tenancy, the PA should contact the Care Leaver to work with them to try and establish what support is needed and how this will be actioned in order to prevent a crisis. This support may include mediation with the landlord, short term financial support, signposting for specialist advice services or a referral for ongoing floating support. The PA should contact the leaving care housing officer for further advice if required.
- Consideration of setting up an 'alternative payment arrangement' (direct payment of rent to landlord) should be considered where the risk of rent arrears is high or where rent arrears exceed 8 weeks or more. This should be discussed between the young person, landlord and universal credit/housing benefit.
- Pathway plan reviews should be utilised where there is a threat of homelessness, and all involved professionals should contribute to this, and the personal housing plan issued by Housing.
- Consideration should be given around the sustainment of the current housing and whether a planned move would be more appropriate- all accommodation options should be explored including referral to alternate provisions and discussion at the Young Person's panel. It should be discussed that Social Housing may not be available to all Care Leavers due to the increased demand and limited resources of the stock.
- If appropriate, and the threat of homelessness has not been resolved through the above mediation and support, the PA should contact the Housing Team immediately either by phone or through a duty to refer made with the young person's consent. The Housing Team should arrange a housing options meeting with the PA (where possible) and Care Leaver to discuss how best to remedy the issues or provide other advice. At the housing options meeting, the Housing officer should:

- Explore the current housing issues and any solutions proposed and agreed to
- Ensure the homeless application clearly states the applicant is a care leaver and the PA's contact details
- Discuss alternate Housing Options where necessary and offer rent in advance and deposit if required
- Explore the Housing Register process in full if applicable or book appointment for this to be discussed with a Housing Register assessment officer
- Explore affordability issues and assessments should be carried out if affordability is a current issue
- Signpost Care Leaver to other agencies if required
- Explain what 'applying as homeless' means to the Care Leaver so they are aware of their responsibilities
- Outline the implications of not following agreed proposed actions to remedy the issues need to be explained in relation to negative homeless decisions and consequences for the Care Leaver.
- A Personal Housing Plan (PHP) should be issued to the Care Leaver
- Provide temporary accommodation if the Care Leaver is eligible for services, homeless and in priority need (or reason to believe) pending a decision on the homeless application

For further information, see the Pre-Eviction Protocol for Care Leavers in the Children's Services Procedures Library.

The PA will make sure that each care leaver has a Pathway Plan to ensure they have enough knowledge, skills and support to be able to sustain a tenancy. The Pathway Plan needs to be shared, with the young person's permission, with housing services if a homeless application is made to ensure needs and risks are accounted for and assessed. The sharing of this information will ensure the best outcomes possible.

Emergency Accommodation

Every effort should be made to avoid a placement into emergency accommodation such as bed and breakfast (B&B); this is unsuitable accommodation for Care Leavers save in the most exceptional circumstances. All alternative options/mediation techniques should explored first, including Nightstop.

Should a young person become homeless or go into B&B or other emergency accommodation, the team manager and Leaving Care Housing Officer should be informed.

All young people under 21 who were looked after between the ages of 16 and 18 are automatically considered to have a priority need of accommodation under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended); young people aged 21 or more who are "*vulnerable*

as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered” are also considered to have priority need but establishing this will require a composite assessment of that young person’s needs to understand whether they would be *significantly more* vulnerable if street-homeless. The test of vulnerability within a housing setting is a very specific test set out in caselaw. Factors that the housing caseworker will consider will include:

- The length of time that the young person was looked after, accommodated or fostered;
- The reasons why they were looked after, accommodated or fostered;
- The length of time since the young person left care, and whether they have been able to obtain and maintain accommodation during that period;
- Whether the young person has any existing support networks, particularly family, friends or a mentor.

The housing officer will also consider whether they would be at risk of exploitation and 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. It is really important, therefore, that the Care Leavers Service provides the housing caseworker with as much information as possible to support their assessment of the young person’s needs.

A young person can be considered to not be in priority need only once the housing officer has fully assessed their case.

10. Intentionally Homeless Decisions

The Homelessness Code of Guidance (section 22.17) states that local authorities should do all they can to avoid the impact of ‘intentionally homeless’ decisions on Care Leavers. This would include considering the young person’s emotional and mental well-being, maturity and general ability to understand the impact of their actions. Dorset Council will follow the Code of Guidance and aim to resolve the young person’s situation through joint working between housing and young people’s services.

A finding of intentional homelessness by the Housing Options Team means that the young person is considered to have lost their accommodation as a result of something they have deliberately done or failed to do. This could include behaving in an anti-social manner, causing nuisance to neighbours or other residents in a supported housing scheme or simply not paying their rent.

In either of these situations, the Housing Options Team will normally only be required to accommodate them for a period of up to 28 days after making their decision.

If the care leaver is found to have an adverse decision on their homeless application, a copy of the decision letter will be shared with the PA who should be invited to attend the “minded to” meeting that the housing caseworker will offer the young person to explain their decision. The young person’s pathway plan should be updated in the event of an adverse decision and the Care Leavers Team should work proactively with the young person and the Housing Options Team to explore housing options following on from that decision. These may have become more limited by the decision itself. The PA should also work with the housing caseworker to explain the decision to the young person, including the reasons why the decision has been made and what options can be explored thereafter.

11. Dispute Resolution

If differences of professional opinion or other concerns arise, these should initially be dealt with between the PA and Housing Officer. If they cannot be resolved at this level, the case should be referred to the Service Manager for Homelessness Prevention and Housing Advice and Team Manager of the Leaving Care Team to resolve jointly.

12. Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing the Protocol

This Protocol brings together the best practice approach from both the Care Leavers Service and the Housing Options Team to ensure the housing needs of young people in Dorset are met. We are committed to listening to young people in care and Care Leavers and will continue to develop this Protocol in light of what they tell us.

We always need to be upfront and honest with young people about the housing choices across the county because options are limited due to the housing crisis affecting the UK, but we also need feedback from young people about what works for them, what doesn’t and how we can improve things.

We are committed to asking young people in care and those who have already left care:

- What does Dorset Council do well for those transitioning out of care?
- What areas could we improve upon from your experience?
- What do you see as the gaps in our service?
- What groups do you think need more help than others?

To ensure that it remains relevant and effective, this Protocol should be reviewed quarterly initially and then move to 6 monthly after 2 years (recommended by DLUCH adviser). This is done to ensure that the protocol meets the needs of both Care Leavers Service and Housing Options delivering the very best possible outcomes for young people and we know we might not get things right at the first attempt.

The Care Leaver's Service will initiate the review and will be responsible, alongside Housing colleagues, for the monitoring and evaluation of the Protocol. If there are any changes to roles and responsibilities, the Protocol will be reviewed, amended and agreed by all parties.

Organisations and services involved with this Protocol are asked to provide feedback and performance information that can be collated and shared to improve services and inform and support collective commissioning intentions in Dorset.

The Protocol can also help gather evidence to show, for example, the number of Care Leavers in Dorset who are at risk of homelessness or in need of housing, and the number of Care Leavers whose tenancies break down. This evidence may highlight the need for new services and/or the remodelling or replacement of existing services. H-Clic data will be shared to allow for ongoing reviews to remain relevant and current.

Appendix 1 - Framework Stages and Options

	Activity & Approach	Supported by
<p>Prepare reality of Housing Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving independent living skills and upskilling the YP Ensuring finances/benefits are set up or being worked towards being set up Explaining the realistic nature of living Independently Preparation for leaving custody Producing a 'back up plan' where placements are complicated or out of area 	<p>Encouraging participation in accredited courses to upskill YP</p> <p>Utilising YP panel meetings to provide a seamless transition</p>	<p>Social Workers Residential workers Foster Carers Support Workers Personal Advisers</p>
<p>Plan Young Peoples accommodation and support with them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilising the option of 'staying put' where appropriate to avoid multiple moves and promote settled accommodation Ensuring that the pathway plan is up to date and accurate in relation to their accommodation plans Ensuring the YP has a backup plan if the current accommodation is fractious/likely to break down Quality planning for return to home and leaving custody Providing YP's with in-depth information around each accommodation type e.g., supported lodgings 	<p>Provision of accredited courses to prepare YP for independent living</p> <p>Involving Care Leavers in the decision making to ensure an informed choice</p>	<p>PAs Social Workers Supported lodgings team Housing Officers Foster Carers</p>
<p>Reduce housing crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned exits from care into alternate accommodation Use of mediation where at all possible to prevent homelessness – this may be an urgent need Joint working with Housing Team to prevent homelessness Joint working with external agencies – could be a multi-agency meeting Planned moves to be used where possible 	<p>Planning early, avoids crisis and stress for both professionals and Care Leavers</p>	<p>PAs Social Workers Supported lodgings team Housing Officers</p>

<p>Access housing and support as needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency options such as Nightstop or temporary accommodation • High support options such as Housing First or specialist supported accommodation • Medium support options such as supported accommodation or floating support provided to enable YP to sustain own tenancy • Low support options • Alert Housing Services to any potential YPs that may be facing homelessness using the Duty to Refer form 	<p>Reacting promptly to changing needs of Care Leavers.</p> <p>Making services available to Care Leavers</p>	<p>PAs Social Workers Supported lodgings team Housing Officers</p>
<p>Access and successfully manage longer term move-on and support options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared accommodation such as HMOs • Self-contained accommodation • Ensuring accommodation is affordable • Sustaining support for the Care Leaver in their new accommodation • Informing Care Leavers of support services available to them 	<p>Ensure working relationships</p>	<p>Housing Officers PAs</p>

Contacts:

Housing Options DC: 01305 221900

18-25 Care Leavers Duty Team: 01305 225809, 18to25duty@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Appendix 2. An Example of Preparing for Independence Tool

How Am I Getting On?

These lists are designed to encourage you to start thinking ahead and support you as you transition into adult life.

1. Life Skills and Looking After Yourself
2. Know Your Rights and Having a Voice
3. Health
4. Relationships
5. Money
6. Accommodation
7. Education, Training and Employment

The lists in this pack are designed to enable you to plan ahead and work with your carers, professionals, and the people around you to ensure that as you reach adult life you become as independent as possible and reach your full potential. It is important that you have meaningful actions that will be useful for you and help you to progress.

It is really important that you, along with the people around you start thinking about, discussing and preparing for your future as you reach adulthood.

The lists can be a useful tool for you to use when you are preparing for meetings or discussions about your future.

The lists are aimed to be a starting point for discussions and considerations. They do not need to be completed in one go and they can be updated and reflected on as regularly as you decide.

1. Let's think about Life Skills and Looking After Yourself

This list is designed to support you to think about the life skills that you need as you reach adulthood. Being able to look after yourself and become as independent as possible will help to prepare you for adult life.

Check	Yes	No
Do you have photo identification?		
Do you have your birth certificate?		
Do you have a passport?		
Do you have a driving licence?		
Can you find your way around your local community?		
Can you safely find your way to other towns/locations?		
Are you confident using public transport?		
Do you know how much public transportation will cost you?		
Are you good at arriving on time for appointments?		
Do you think you have a good attitude towards people?		
Is it easy for you to sort things out with someone if you disagree?		

Could you safely stick up for yourself in a difficult situation?		
Do you know how to access support if you are abused/racially attacked/threatened?		
Would you know how to deal with practical problems, e.g., shower leak, dripping tap, a power cut, gas leak?		
Do you know how to get a replacement birth certificate, driving licence, passport or other formal document?		
Would you know how to book a holiday and get insurance?		
Do you know how to look after your body and keep clean?		
Do you ever have any problems with your appearance?		
Do you know what parts of your body you should check regularly?		
Do you know how to care for your clothes and do laundry?		
Do you know what to do to keep yourself safe when travelling?		
Do you know how to keep yourself safe when using the Internet?		
Do you know who you can ask for help about keeping safe?		
Do you know how to report a crime?		

1. Let's think about Life Skills and Looking After Yourself - Actions

What do you need to find out? What do you need to work on?	What will you do?	Where will you go to find out? Who will you ask for support?

2. Let's think about Knowing Your Rights and Having a Voice

This list is designed to support you to think about your rights as an adult and how to have a voice. Knowing how to find out your rights and being able to access support will enable you with achieving a more positive adult life.

Check	Yes	No
Do you know what your basic human rights are?		
Do you know your rights as a care leaver?		
Do you know how to join a Care Leavers group and Youth Voice?		
Do you know how to make a complaint?		
Do you know who to ask for help to ensure your voice is heard?		
Do you know about the voting system in England and how to vote?		
Do you know how to ask for help to find out about your rights?		
Do you feel confident enough to stand up and have your say?		
Do you feel safe and able to express your identity and/or beliefs?		
Do you know which organisations you can contact about legal issues?		
Do you know how to contact a solicitor or appropriate adult?		
Do you know how to access your file from the Council?		
Do you feel part of your care planning process?		
Do you know what plans are made with you to prepare for adulthood?		
Do you know what workers should do to ensure you are getting on okay when you are in care and have a voice?		
Do you know what a pathway plan is?		
Do you have someone to talk with if you have difficulties with: your social worker, carers, personal adviser or other professional?		
Do you know what each of the different workers that you have are responsible for?		
Do you know what age you can ride a moped and drive a car?		
Do you know what ages you can have sex?		
Do you understand consent and the right to say no to sexual acts?		
Do you know what ages you can get married?		
Do you understand what exploitation is and how to seek support?		

2. Let's think about Knowing Your Rights & Having A Voice-Actions

What do you need to find out? What do you need to work on?	What will you do?	Where will you go to find out? Who will you ask for support?
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3. Let's think about Health

This list is designed to support you to think about your health & wellbeing as you reach adulthood. Thinking about your health, how to access support and remain as healthy and active as possible can help you to have a better quality of life.

Check	Yes	No
Are you registered with a doctor?		
If you answered no, do you know how to register with a doctor?		
Are you registered with a dentist?		
If you answered no, do you know how to register with a dentist?		
Do you have regular health checks ups?		
Have you ever been for an eye test?		
Do you know how/where to book an eye test?		
If you wear glasses, do you have an up-to-date prescription?		
Do you know what a healthy and balanced diet is?		
Do you have a healthy and balanced diet?		
Can you cook for yourself?		
Can you cook a healthy meal on a budget?		
Do you get good sleep at night?		
Do you get regular exercise?		
Do you know who to talk to about addictions, including alcohol, drugs and cigarettes?		
Do you know who you can talk to if you are feeling down, worried or depressed?		
Do you get angry if things do not go your way?		
Do you worry about things a lot?		
Do you know what to do to help yourself relax?		
Do you know about Sexually Transmitted Infections?		
Do you know about the morning after pill?		
Do you have contact details for your health professionals?		

Do you understand which health professionals will continue supporting you as an adult?		
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3. Let's think about Health - Actions

What do you need to find out? What do you need to work on?	What will you do?	Where will you go to find out? Who will you ask for support?

4. Let's think about Relationships

This list is designed to support you to think about your relationships as you reach adulthood. Having positive relationships can lead to a more fulfilling adult life. Knowing how to keep yourself safe and identify positive groups can help you constructively fill your time and give a sense of belonging.

Check	Yes	No
Do you have good friends who you can trust?		
Do you see your friends often enough?		
Do you have a good relationship with your family or carers?		
Do you see your family as often as you like?		
Do you have professionals in your life who you can trust?		
Do you know about your life before you came into care?		
Do you know about your family, culture or religion?		
Do you attend any youth groups?		

Do you attend any activities including sports clubs?		
Do you know who will be there to support you when you leave care?		
Do you know who to ask about relationship issues?		
Do you know about safe sex and contraception?		
Do you understand consent in sexual relationships?		
Do you know where to go for support around sexual health?		
Do you know where to get advice about becoming or being a parent?		
Do you have anyone you can talk to about very personal issues?		
Do you know who your social worker or personal adviser is?		
Do you feel supported with your relationships?		
Do you have updated contact details for professionals that you work with?		
If you are going to live alone, have you thought about how you would deal with being lonely?		

4. Let's think about Relationships – Actions

What do you need to find out? What do you need to work on?	What will you do?	Where will you go to find out? Who will you ask for support?

5. Let's think about Money

This list is designed to support you to think about your financial security as you approach adulthood. Thinking about your finances could help you to better manage your money, stay out of debt and plan to save for things in the future.

Check	Yes	No
Do you have a bank account?		
If not, do you know how to open a bank account?		
Do you understand what budgeting money means?		
Do you know where your income will come from when you leave care?		
Do you know how much money you will get per week?		
Have you ever gone shopping for your weekly food?		
Have you ever saved up to buy something?		
Do you have any savings?		
Do you have a savings goal?		
Do you know how to budget your money?		
Have you had the chance to budget your money for the week?		
Have you had the chance to budget your money for the month?		
Did you manage to successfully make your money last for the week/month?		
Do you know how to read a bill? Phone bill Gas/electricity/water bills Council tax bill		
Do you know how to ensure bills are paid on time?		
Do you know what a Direct Debit is?		
Do you know about different types of credit and the problems these can cause?		
Are you worried about money?		
Do you have somebody that you can talk to about money if you are worried?		
Are you confident about budgeting to cover your bills when you live independently?		

5. Let's think about Money - Actions

What do you need to find out? What do you need to work on?	What will you do?	Where will you go to find out? Who will you ask for support?

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6. Let's think about Accommodation

This list is designed to support you to think about your future accommodation as you reach adulthood. Understanding your options and preparing for future living arrangements could reduce some of the worries that you might have.

Check	Yes	No
Do you know where you might live when you leave care?		
Is your name on the housing register?		
Do you understand the housing register and housing options?		
Do you know what kind of accommodation you can apply for when you leave care?		
Do you know how long you might have to wait for accommodation?		
Do you know what a tenancy agreement is?		
Do you know what utility bills you will have to pay?		
Do you know what you will need to set up your home?		
Do you know how much it will cost to set up your home? (e.g., buying furniture)		
Do you know what items are a priority for setting up your home?		
Are you good at basic DIY, like changing a light bulb, painting a wall, putting together flat-pack furniture?		
Do you know how to keep your home clean?		
Do you know how to save energy in your home?		
If something in your home needed fixing, would you know who to ask for help?		
Do you know who can help you with accommodation issues?		
Do you know what to do if you have a problem with your neighbour?		
Do you know what to do if you have a problem with your visitors?		
Do you know what the Environmental Health Agency is and what it can help you with?		
Do you know how to be a good neighbour?		
Do you know how to keep yourself safe at home?		
Do you know about insurances that you might want when you get a property?		
Do you have emergency contact details you would need? For example, for your landlord?		

6. Let's think about Accommodation – Actions

What do you need to find out? What do you need to work on?	What will you do?	Where will you go to find out? Who will you ask for support?

7. Let's think about Education, Training and Employment

This list is designed to support you to think about your Education, Training and Employment as you reach adulthood. Having aspirations and goals around your future education, training and employment will better prepare you for achieving a more positive adult life.

Check	Yes	No
Do you have a copy of your national insurance number?		
Are you currently in education, training or employment?		
Have you worked with a careers or employment advisor?		
Do you know where you can go for a job or career advice?		
Do you know where to go for education and training advice?		
Do you know what kind of job or career you would like?		
Do you know what education or skills you will need to get the job you want?		
Do you know how to write a CV?		
Do you know where to go for help writing a CV?		
Do you know how to find job vacancies?		
Do you feel confident about writing a job application?		
Do you know where to get help with writing a job application?		
Do you feel confident about going to a job interview?		
Do you know what to wear to a job interview?		

Do you know how to prepare for a job interview?		
Are you confident about using computers and the internet?		
Do you know what the minimum wage is?		
Do you know about different training opportunities?		
Would you know what to do if somebody was treating you unfairly at work or college?		
Would you consider volunteering in your local community?		

7. Let's think about Education, Training and Employment – Actions

What do you need to find out? What do you need to work on?	What will you do?	Where will you go to find out? Who will you ask for support?

The lists have been adapted using 'Get Ready for Adult Life' (2007, What Makes the Difference) and Dorset Council's Transfer Checklist for Care Leavers.

To find out about the local offer for Care Leavers please go to:

www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/young-people-families/young-peoples-social-care/young-people-in-care/local-offer-for-care-leavers/local-offer-for-care-leavers

Social Worker

Phone Number.....

Personal Adviser



Phone Number.....

Out of Hours

Phone Number.....

Advocate

Phone Number.....