

Children's Services

Accommodation Sustainment and Pre-eviction Protocol for 16-25 year olds

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This protocol applies to all providers of supported accommodation for Dorset's 16-25 year olds and other landlords that agreed to sign up to the processes outlined within this protocol.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 There is a common interest between Dorset Council and its partners providing accommodation to reduce homelessness in young people aged 16-25 years old.
- 2.2 Homeless reduction requires a focus and commitment to Tenancy / licence sustainment ultimately minimising evictions. The consequences of an eviction are not only damaging for the young person but also impact the local authority, including increased demand on social care, housing services and often associated high costs of providing temporary accommodation. There is a significant staff burden associated with evicting a tenant for the landlord and potential administrative, void and legal costs that can also be associated with evictions.
- 2.3 To minimise the number of young people who, for a variety of reasons, do not successfully manage their Tenancy / licence: To ensure that the Young Person is given the opportunity to understand how their behaviours are impacting on their licence and be given the chance to reflect and change to avoid putting their Tenancy / licence at risk. To enable the young person to modify their behaviour and for providers to understand and re-assess the support needs of the young person to prevent evictions from occurring and assist the Young Person to understand the impact of their behaviour and obligations under their Tenancy / licence/ agreement.

3. Aims

The key aims of this protocol are to:

- Ensure safe and stable accommodation for all to promote continuity of relationships
- Reduce the stress, disruption and trauma to young people
- Reduce homelessness and increase planned transitions for young people aged 16-25 years old

- Minimise the use of emergency B&B placements and the financial strain associated
- Minimise the negative impact on providers in relation to costs, resources and time
- Minimise the spend of the public purse and allow better use of local authority time to be spent
- Lessen the risk of long-term voids for providers

4. Duty to Refer – Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Responsibilities under the above act came into force on 1st October 2018 which extended the duties to specified public authorities – including children’s services (Section 213B) to make local authority housing departments aware of those threatened with homelessness or who are homeless.

Although supported accommodation providers are not statutorily obliged to refer, Dorset Council have introduced the Commitment to Refer to utilise the referral mechanism and extend this to our accommodation providers to adopt.

The referral can be accessed on:

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/duty-to-refer-for-public-authorities>

Referral form to be emailed to: dutytorefer@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

5. Corporate Parents

In order to thrive, children and young people have key needs that good parents generally meet. These corporate parenting principles set out what Dorset Council must consider when exercising their functions towards looked after children and young people. We expect all professionals and providers to follow the same principles when working with our children and young people:

- Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Consider children and young people’s views, wishes and feelings
- Help those children and young people to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and relevant partners
- Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people
- For children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- Prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

6. Tenancy / licence Sustainment and Pre-eviction protocol procedures

Dorset Council, the accommodation provider and partner agencies will work in collaboration to ensure the young person is provided with sufficient support to prevent eviction, or the young person abandoning a property.

6.1 Pre-Tenancy / licence support assessment and planning:

Prior to the start of a Tenancy / licence a comprehensive assessment should be conducted focusing upon Tenancy / licence sustainment, identifying support needs, existing support networks and risks to Tenancy / licence. The assessment will be conducted with the young person and relevant professionals to achieve a holistic understanding.

Topics to explore include but is not limited to:

- Previous accommodation experiences
- Understanding specific behaviours
- Disabilities
- Drug or alcohol use and misuse
- Previous non-engagement with services
- History of homelessness or rough sleeping
- Experience of violence
- Difficult managing money and debt issues
- Offending history

The holistic assessment will enable a realistic and enabling plan to be produced and agreed. The plan will be reviewed in line with each provider's protocols.

6.2 Stage one:

Tenancy / licence sustainment breaches and concerns:

The protocol is based on the principle that accommodation providers and professionals will work with young people to support them to maintain their tenancies wherever possible, viewing problematic behaviour as a potential support need rather than simply a breach of rules.

Any breach of, or concerns about the sustainment of the tenancy / licence agreement should be shared with the relevant worker involved at the earliest point.

Relevant workers can include:

- Social worker- children's or adult's services
- Personal Advisor- leaving care team

- Housing officer
 - Placing team e.g., Brokerage or Housing
 - Youth Offending Service / Probation
-
- A joint meeting with the young person, provider and professional must be arranged to take place within 3 working days of the breach or 10 working days of the concerns.
 - Mediation between young person and provider must take place to encourage honesty, openness and positive relationships.
 - Young person's voice and reasoning for behaviour should be listened to so that the context can be understood. This must also help with overcoming the problem, finding a resolution and planning support.
 - Outline that any repeated breaches will result in a formal written warning
 - The meeting should be documented using the proforma and any notes and actions should be shared with all present within 3 working days
 - Consider commitment/duty to refer (to housing)

Dorset Council's proforma for recording meetings must be used if you do not have your own preferred formal recording template.

6.3 Stage two: Pre-eviction:

Further breaches of the licence agreement must be addressed by way of both a written warning and a further meeting within 3 days to discuss with the relevant workers and young person.

Consideration must be given to:

- Agreeing on an acceptable behaviour contract
- Increasing support for the young person and / or provision
- Signposting for further specialist advice i.e., Debt or financial support
- Encouragement to raise any concerns the young person may have with their placement
- Multi-agency planning with other involved agencies such as Probation or Youth Offending Service

- The meeting should be documented using proforma and any notes and actions should be shared with all present within 3 working days
- Looking for an alternate, more suitable placement to enable planned placement transition
- Consider commitment/duty to refer (to housing)

Written warnings need to be copied to the lead professional supporting the young person.

6.4 Pre-eviction: Stage three

Where there are continual breaches and little success with previous attempts to resolve issues, any Notice to Quit issued should have had pre-approval within the providers organisation by senior management and a discussion with the lead professional around how to best serve this to the young person. The NTQ, where possible, needs to have a reasonable notice i.e., 28 days.

A duty to refer should be completed by the nominated professional from Dorset Council to Housing Services if not already complete, once NTQ issued.

Additionally, if there is risk of harm to self or others and a young person needs to leave on the same day the nominated professional should alert Housing Services directly via phone contact.

7. Move On and Evictions

- 7.1 Wherever possible, moving on and eviction must be carried out in a controlled and planned manner using person centred and multi-agency approaches to ensure the young person and provider receive support from professionals and ensuring alternate arrangements are made.
- 7.2 There are rare occasions where risk of harm leads to immediate evictions. These must be mitigated where possible and internal alternatives within the projects should be explored.
- 7.3 All immediate evictions/serious incidents require a learning log to be completed and shared with the professionals supporting that young person. This ensures that the opportunity for learning and development can take place.
- 7.4 All signatories to this protocol agree to:

- Work collaboratively to increase Tenancy / licence sustainment and reduce evictions across Dorset
- Effectively share information that supports and keeps the young person safe whilst adhering to GDPR
- Resolve disputes in a professional manner, collaboratively and with a full insight into the other professionals' limits and duties.
- Bring together providers / professionals to look at cases that have proved problematic and look at trends and learning.

This document can be provided in large print, braille, audio or other non-written format, and in a variety of languages on request.