

Children's Services

Respect for the belongings of children and young people

'I lost a lot of things when I moved but I didn't know they were missing until I was older.'

Quote from a young person cared for by Dorset Council

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Care-experienced young people have reported the distress and humiliation they have felt when obliged to use bin bags or other inappropriate holders for their belongings when moving from one home to another.
- 1.2 Unsuitable and inappropriate luggage holders include bin bags, plastic carrier bags and any other holders that devalue or stigmatize young people in care or might reasonably be seen to do so. Such holders may only be used if the young person has refused all more appropriate holders; that is, if it is their positive choice to do so.
- 1.3 Our Placements in Residential Care¹ and Placements in Foster Care² procedures now both state that:

'In all cases, the child should be accompanied to the placement by the social worker and helped to settle in. Suitable luggage should be used, and a child's belongings should never be transported in bin-bags or other inappropriate containers.'
- 1.4 This guidance sets out the arrangements for ensuring that young people have suitable holders for their belongings (especially when they move), and the steps that should be taken where, exceptionally, they do not have suitable holders.
- 1.5 It also sets out the steps to be taken when a Children's Services employee is asked to look after information or items belonging to a child or young person receiving our services.
- 1.6 The requirements of this procedure apply in all circumstances where a Children's Services employee helps a child or young person who is known to

¹ [Placements in Residential Care \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

² [Placements in Foster Care \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

Children's Services to move home, or temporarily looks after some of their belongings.

2. Helping young people to obtain suitable luggage holders

- 2.1 As soon as they know that a young person is likely to be moving as a result of coming into care or transferring between care placements, the young person's Social Worker should establish whether they have enough good quality, age-appropriate luggage holders to move all the belongings they want to bring with them.
- 2.2 If they do not, the Social Worker should collect enough Madlug bags for the young person's belongings from their locality office and provide them directly to the young person, or to the carers who will be helping them to move.
- 2.3 There is no charge for Madlug bags.
- 2.4 A young person may wish to buy their own choice of luggage holders, using their own money, and should of course be supported to do so if this is their wish.

3. If a young person is obliged to move without appropriate luggage holders

- 3.1 In absolute exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to ensure that the young person has suitable luggage holders before moving, and they may have to use bin bags or other inappropriate holders. This could happen, for example, when children move in to care from their family or if they face sudden eviction as an older care leaver.
- 3.2 Where this happens, their Social Worker or Leaving Care Personal Adviser should record this exception on the child's record and report it to their supervisor immediately.
- 3.3 At the earliest opportunity, the Social Worker or Leaving Care Personal Adviser should explain to the young person that what has happened is wrong and that we want to ensure this does not happen again. They will provide the young person with enough Madlug bags for their belongings in the short term, and in the medium term will ensure that the young person acquires their own suitable luggage.
- 3.4 All young people, once in care, should have their own luggage. This will need replacing as the child gets older and has more belongings.

4. Looking after the information or belongings of children and young people we support

- 4.1 Children's Services employees may occasionally be asked by a child or young person to look after items of personal information (life stories, photo albums) or other personal belongings for them.
- 4.2 Children's Service' should only agree to such requests where there are good grounds for them, and no suitable alternative exists. 'Good grounds' include, but are not limited to:
- The child may be at risk of significant harm if they continue to keep the information/belongings with them
 - The items have personal and/or financial value, and are at risk of damage or destruction if they continue in the child's possession
 - The items have personal and/or financial value, and are at risk of being lost as the child move's between homes
- 4.3 Lack of space in the child's home would not normally be a good ground for a Children's Services employees to look after their belongings.
- 4.4 Even where good grounds exist, the size and number of items stored for the child should be small and such as would fit into a standard shopping bag. For larger amounts, and for all items of high financial value, commercial storage options should be explored.
- 4.5 Before any items are accepted from the child, they (or an individual with parental responsibility if the child is not Gillick competent) should sign the form at Appendix 1 that details:
- The child's name
 - The date of the agreement
 - The name of the employee receiving the items
 - Each item by name
 - Why the employee is taking care of the items
 - When they will be returned to the child
- 4.6 The employee should upload the completed form to the child's Mosaic record and add an explanatory case note. The employee should report the storage of items at their next supervision.
- 4.7 Items of personal information should be deposited with the Records Management Unit. Other items may be stored in a Dorset Council tambour unit. Wherever items are stored, the location must be recorded on the child's Mosaic record.

Appendix – Form for confirming receipt of belongings from a child or young person

Name of child	
Date of receipt	
Name of Dorset Council employee receiving item(s)	
Number of items	
Description of each item	
Why child or young person needs help to look after the item(s)	
Date by which item(s) will be returned to the child or young person	
Signature showing young person's consent (for all those aged 16 plus, and for younger children who are able to give consent)	