



DARLINGTON
Borough Council



**Joint Housing Protocol
for Care Leavers
2026**

Protocol Name Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers

Document Descriptions	This protocol outlines the agreement between Darlington Borough Council Childrens Services, Housing Services and Revenues and Benefits to work together to provide the resources and support to care leavers to have a positive transition to independent living.		
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1.0 Introduction

The journey out of care is a particularly important, and sometimes challenging transition. Securing suitable accommodation for care leavers is much more than just finding them somewhere to stay. Good housing underpins success in other areas of life. Secure, safe and stable accommodation is an essential building block for success and achievement in education, training and employment, and has a direct impact on emotional health and wellbeing.

It is therefore essential that a multi-agency approach is adopted when securing accommodation for care leavers; agencies must work together to meet their statutory duties and corporate parenting responsibilities, to provide a safe and supportive pathway to independent living.

1.1 Corporate Parenting Key Principles:

The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that Darlington Borough Council is committed to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers as follows:

- 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 Darlington Borough Council and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations and to 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.

Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. Darlington Borough Council is responsible for their care and should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need. It is important to remember that owing to the individual needs of care leavers there are a range of different graduated support options for young people to progress to independent living. Leaving care too

early presents children in our care with significant challenges which will impact their life chances. Care leavers, like all young people, will make mistakes and require support to learn from their experiences. Young people leaving care may need longer to achieve some of their goals than their peers who have not been in care.

Research has identified that the following support helps care leavers to make a positive transition to independent living (Stein, 2010):

- Housing and Children's Services need to identify problems with accommodation early on, have clear contingency arrangements – to work with commissioning to maximise available and suitable emergency accommodation to prevent homelessness – and specialist accommodation for young people with higher support needs.
- Care leavers want and benefit from support services matched to their needs, including leaving care services, out-of-hours support, mentoring and positive family and kinship contact.
- Care leavers also need practical support with moving and setting up in accommodation.

Care leavers need to be well prepared to live independently and their housing needs must be addressed early before they leave care via pathway planning and joint assessment.

This protocol will ensure that every effort is made to avoid using the homeless route which is inappropriate when assessing and meeting the housing needs of care leavers.

1.2 Purpose of protocol

This Joint Protocol is an agreement between Darlington Borough Council Childrens Services, Housing Services (and their operational partners providing the homeless/housing advice services), and Revenues and Benefits to;

- Set out our commitment to developing services (our local offer) to care leavers.
- Establish the roles and responsibilities towards care leavers and define the roles of the statutory agencies within the legislative framework.
- Develop a “corporate parenting” approach towards care leavers, providing a shared commitment from Children Services, Housing Services and Revenues and Benefits to ensure our young people achieve the best outcomes possible.
- Identify how the Children Services, Housing Services and Revenues and Benefits can, by working together, meet the needs of care leavers, effectively discharge our duties in line with government guidance and benchmarked good practice, ensuring that 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 which include:
 - Promoting planned move on and smooth transition to independent living
 - Early intervention to identify risk of homelessness and preventing homelessness
 - Sustaining tenancies and avoiding the need of emergency accommodation.

1.3 Developing, embedding and reviewing the protocol

This protocol has been developed in partnership by colleagues in Children’s Services and Housing Services, with endorsement from key senior leaders including the Assistant Director of Housing Services and the Assistant Director for Children’ Services.

Feedback has been sought from care leavers in the development of this protocol. They have found that the document is quite long, so Children Services are developing a shorter leaflet for young people.

Training will be offered to all staff in implementing the protocol. All staff will receive a copy of the protocol and shadowing of the other services will be arranged as part of their induction process. Updates and briefings will be given in team meetings and supervision.

Implementation of this protocol will be monitored within the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Protocol can also help gather evidence to show, for example, the number of care leavers in Darlington 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 existing services to be reviewed. H-Clic data can be shared to allow for ongoing reviews to remain relevant and current.

Quarterly meetings will be held by managers in Children Services & Housing Services to ensure the protocol is being followed.

The protocol will be subject to review annually starting from Autumn 2025.

1.4 Legislative Framework

The **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000** and **The Homelessness Act (2002)** require local authority Family Services and Housing departments to work together to ensure the accommodation needs of care leavers are met.

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?
- Providing a second chance if things don't go as expected.
- Is this tailored to their individual needs, particularly if they are more vulnerable than other young people?

The Housing Act 1996 as amended states that a Young Person who is threatened with homelessness, has a priority need for housing if they are a person:

- under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after by the Local Authority between the ages of 16 and 18.
- A person 21 or over who is vulnerable as a result of being looked after.

The **Children and Social Work Act (2017)** sets out corporate parenting principles for the council as a whole to be the best parent it can be to children in its care. Local authorities are required to publish their local offer to care leavers. Significantly, the legislation requires local authorities to appoint personal advisers to provide support to care leavers up to the age of 25, except where the young person no longer wants a personal adviser. Such support should be based on the needs of the Young Person as per their statutory Pathway Plan.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) places a new duty on Local Authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness. Local Authorities are required to assess an applicant's case and develop a personalised plan to identify

appropriate actions to prevent or relieve the applicant's homelessness. In performing these duties, the Secretary of State considers that housing authorities should adopt a positive and collaborative approach toward applicants, taking account of their particular needs and making all reasonable efforts to engage their cooperation. Proof / hra170 Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers 2025 | 7 The Act includes a 'Duty to Refer' placed on specific public bodies where service users are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The full government guidance can be found here [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities)

Care Leaver Local Offer

Leaving home and setting out on a life path is daunting enough for any young person. For young people who have been in care, there is the extra stress and pressure of feeling that they do not have the family support their peers who have not been in care often have. We are committed to, and ambitious for, our care leavers and want to ensure that our looked after children and care leavers receive priority in our services. To make sure our care leavers have all the information they need, we created a Darlington Care Leaver's Local Offer. The document is a guide detailing all the services available for our care leavers (aged 16 - 25 years old).

The purpose of the Local Offer is to give care leavers local information about:

- advice and support groups
- financial and welfare support
- accommodation and housing
- employment, learning and career advice
- staying healthy and leisure activities
- participation in society
- useful contacts.

The local offer is published on our children in care website and can be found;

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/leaving-care-and-the-local-offer/our-local-offer-to-care-leavers/>

The **Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)** places a new duty on Local Authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness.

Local Authorities are required to assess an applicant's case and develop a personalised plan to identify appropriate actions to prevent or relieve the applicant's homelessness. In performing these duties, the Secretary of State considers that housing authorities should adopt a positive and collaborative approach toward applicants, taking account of their particular needs and making all reasonable efforts to engage their cooperation.

The Act includes a 'Duty to Refer' placed on specific public bodies where service users are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The full government guidance can be found here [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities)

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Under the Children Act 1989, asylum applicants below the age of 18 who arrive in the UK without close adult family members, either accompanying them or already in the UK who they can join, may be provided a service by the local authority social services departments, regardless of immigration status. This may be under s.17 of the Children Act 1989, and therefore the young person may or may not be looked after or former relevant child after as a result.

Unaccompanied young people that are former relevant children

When an unaccompanied asylum seeker that is an eligible or relevant child reaches 18 years of age, the local authority has the power to assist them as a Former Relevant Child to the extent that her/his welfare requires it, and this includes the power to provide accommodation.

In assessing the need for accommodation, the Local Authority cannot take account any accommodation that could be provided by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) as the UKBA are not required to provide accommodation if the asylum seeker (or failed asylum seeker) is entitled to accommodation under another statutory regime.

Unaccompanied young people who are not former relevant children

If the asylum seeker reaches the age of 18 and is not a Former Relevant Child when s/he turns 18, any duty to accommodate will fall to the UKBA, unless s/he is in need of care and attention and is 'destitution plus', when social services would have a duty to accommodate under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948.

Asylum seekers are not eligible for homelessness assistance from the Local Authority under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 unless granted some form of leave to remain that makes them eligible (e.g. humanitarian protection). If their asylum claim is accepted, they are granted refugee status and become eligible for homelessness assistance from the local authority.

Until a positive decision is received the responsibility to provide housing will lie with Children Services.

2.0 Key agencies for care leavers housing

Children in Care – Children in Our Care Team (CIOC)

Darlington Borough Council Children in Our Care Team (CIOC) supports children and young people in care, until the age of 18. The children in care social workers are responsible for all aspects of the young person's care, including annual reviews, health, education and future planning.

When a young person is 16 years old, they will be supported by a social worker from CIOC, alongside a leaving care Personal Advisor (PA). This helps ensure a smooth transition to the leaving care service for the young person.

The Leaving Care Service, within Children in Our Care Team.

The Leaving Care Service, supports all young people leaving care up to the age of 25,

The service consists of Social Workers and Personal Advisers (PA's) who help young people to prepare to live independently and offer advice and support as they leave care. PA's get involved in discussions about young people's needs and ensure they have an up-to-date Pathway Plan, putting in place the support young people are entitled to at the earliest appropriate stage.

[Darlington BC - Looked after children](#)

[Darlington BC - Leaving care](#)

Darlington Borough Council Housing Services

Care leavers will be assessed in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme if making an application for social housing.

Should the young person gain a tenancy with Darlington Borough Council, the Housing Tenancy Management Team will provide a housing management function to those households in its introductory or secure tenancies and understands the need to work with Children Services to support the needs of care leavers. The care leaver may also be eligible for the Housing Plus Service. [Darlington Borough Council - Housing Plus](#) – an intensive tenancy management service to assist the young person to maintain their tenancy. This service is chargeable but can be supported through benefits.

Darlington Borough Council Housing Options Team delivers the housing advice on all housing options/solutions available and provides a statutory prevention, relief and main duty for homeless cases on behalf of the Council.

Revenues and Benefits Service

As part of a Standardised Council Tax Arrangement for Care Leavers in the North East, council tax will not be charged or re-charged for young people aged 18 to 24 who are eligible for support under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, 'former relevant young people'. An application will need to be made, and the young person will be supported to complete this, if required.

[Darlington BC - Change of circumstances; DHP; housing benefits](#)

[Darlington BC - Council Tax Support](#)

[Darlington BC - Council Tax discounts](#)

3.0 Accommodation & Support Options

We recognise all care leavers have varying levels of need and therefore have different accommodation types and support options to suit the young person. What type of accommodation is suitable will be assessed through Pathway Planning process by the Social Worker/ PA. This is updated 6 monthly or more often if there is a significant change in circumstances.

All providers of supported accommodation for 16/17 year old looked after children and care leavers are registered with Ofsted. All services will have an Ofsted registered Service Manager who will oversee and be accountable for the service. The service must fulfil all the requirements of the mandatory national quality standards published by the government. The services will be inspected by Ofsted. For 16-17 year olds the Social Worker will complete a “Support or Care Checklist” which acts as a nomination form for different accommodation options dependent on need.

Below is the different accommodation and support options available for care leavers, and how they may be accessed:

3.1 Staying Put

This enables care leavers to remain with their former foster carer/s when they leave care. If both the young person and their former carer wish to continue living together, the Local Authority is under a duty to support this arrangement, including financially. At 17 years and 6 months a meeting is held to discuss financial and practical support required to convert the foster care placement to a ‘staying put’; arrangement at 18 years old. This arrangement is then continually reviewed by the PA post 18 to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the young person and plan for independence if required. Care leavers can remain in a staying put arrangement until their 21st Birthday.

[Staying Put \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

3.2 Staying Close

The Staying Close programme is in addition to our standard care offer to those leaving residential or semi-independent living. The programme offers tailored help to find somewhere safe to live, a job, education or training, give practical skills to help you live independently and gives support for good health and wellbeing.

We want young people leaving children’s homes to achieve their best and thrive living independently. Leaving home can be exciting, daunting, a little bit of both or anything in between so our Staying Close programme supports young people all the way, as little or as much as they need – here’s what’s available to young people who meet the criteria in addition to our standard leaving care offer:

- A dedicated Staying Close Personal Advisor to help you plan what you need to live independently and who will be available to support you, 6 days a week, so that you achieve your goals.
- Proactive help to find somewhere to live and a job, education, or training.
- Interactive life skills opportunities you can mix and match to your needs like practical help to make easy, tasty meals or strategies for growing up like how to deal with pressure or tips to manage stressful situations.
- Help to identify family and friends you want to connect or reconnect with and support to build those relationships.

3.3 Supported Lodgings

Darlington Borough Council is a direct provider of Supported Lodgings. This option enables care leavers aged 16 -21 to have their own room in a provider's home. The Supported Lodgings providers work with the young person to develop appropriate independent living skills to support them to move onto independence.

For Staying Put and Supported Lodgings, a referral and risk assessment are completed by a social worker or PA and sent to the Placements Officer/ supported lodgings officer.

3.4 Commissioned supported accommodation

Darlington Borough Council commission a 3 bedroomed supported accommodation option for care leavers aged 16-18 years old. Care leavers are supported to develop their independent living skills in this accommodation to prepare them for the next step. Referrals to this service are progressed by the young person's social worker or PA via the Placement Officers.

Positive Support Pathway (PSP)

This is a commissioned service arrangement for young people 16-25 years old, the service is provided by Teesvalley YMCA with a subcontracting arrangement in place with Waythrough. The service provides a combination of supported accommodation (Ofsted registered) in a designated building (currently 26 units due to expand to 30 during 2025), dispersed units of accommodation across Darlington, an Outreach Service, mediation support, drop-in support and short-term interventions. Care leavers can access all elements of the PSP and they are able to move up and down the pathway depending on their needs and situation.

These can be accessed through a gateway assessment completed by the Housing Options team with the support from the PA or directly by Children's Services.

3.5 ROC

ROC is an 11 bed Ofsted regulated supported accommodation option for young people aged 16-18. The service will over the forthcoming year develop move on accommodation options in Darlington. Young People are supported to develop their independent living skills in this accommodation to prepare them for the next step. Referrals are made via the placements team (following Head of Service approval).

3.6 Taster flats

The Leaving Care Team currently operate supported accommodation. We have several 1 and 2 bedroomed flats with Darlington Borough Council for care leavers aged 16 plus. These are short term taster flats for care leavers who are in residential care/ or supported accommodation with the purpose of helping care leavers to gain a sense of the responsibilities that come with independent living, and experience the reality of living alone, which may identify other challenges such as loneliness and isolation. Young people can access this accommodation via a referral and support plan to the Registered Manager.

It is important to note, other Housing Providers also offer taster flats; It may be that the CIOC team may need to source further properties in the future dependent on demand.

3.7 Living with family

Some care leavers choose to return to live with immediate or extended family when they leave care. The social worker would assess the suitability of this arrangement via the pathway planning process and ensure that appropriate support in place to manage this transition back home. This will remain under review. As a contingency young people are encouraged to register with Darlington Home Search.

3.8 Single Homeless Accommodation Programme

Working in partnership Darlington Borough Council and Waythrough were successful in securing funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to increase the supply of high-quality single person supported accommodation for young people aged 18-24 with complex needs. This has created twelve one-bedroom self-contained flats, close to the town centre. Young People will be referred by Housing Services following a Gateway Assessment.

3.9 Independent Living

Social Housing: All care leavers from 17 years and 9 months can register for social housing, to include properties with Darlington Borough Council, as well as other Housing Associations with properties in Darlington. Applications can be made via Darlington Home Search- the allocations system - [Darlington Borough Council - Applying for a council home](#) they will be supported to do so by their PA. Priority will be assessed on their current situation.

PA will need to provide a supporting letter advising that the young person is ready for move on from their current accommodation detailing their current living skills. Where there has been an independent living skills checklist or young person outcome star completed, this will be shared.

This should be sent to the allocations team for assessment and banding will be awarded as per the Allocations Policy. Application is made 'live' and the care leaver can actively bid. Their PA can provide support to the young person in applying for properties.

Care leavers under 25 can apply for social housing regardless of whether they have a local connection.

One Offer Policy:

The council operate around a 'One Offer Policy' in accordance with the Social Housing Allocation Policy. Therefore, if the young person does not want to accept the property, they risk losing their banding and therefore position on the Darlington Social Housing Waiting List. Discussions will be held with the young person and the PA around the reasons for refusal. The Young Person must be confident when applying for properties that this is appropriate and suitable for them.

Private rented: Young people will be supported to explore private rented accommodation if this is assessed as a suitable option as part of Pathway Planning. Financial support can be offered to help secure the property with a repossession loan from Housing Options.

Home Ownership: We would support any young person if they wanted to look at purchasing their own home. The PA would support them to look into suitable opportunities available to them.



4.0 Setting up Home

It is important that affordability checks are carried out before a care leaver moves into their new home. It is also important that the care leaver is supported to set up any benefit claims, and all utility bills to avoid any arrears or debt.

If the care leaver has been accepted on to a floating support service, they are able to support the care leaver with this.

All Eligible, Relevant or Former Relevant Care Leaver who are living independently are entitled to up to £3000 for items to set up their home. The setting up home allowance will be held by the CIOC and the PA will help the care leaver to budget for essential items.



5.0 Care Leavers in special circumstances

5.1 Young People in University

We have high aspirations for all Darlington care leavers, and wherever possible and desired by young person support them to progress to Higher Education. We want young people to reach their full potential and enjoy the full university experience.

It is important that care leavers are supported to financially plan for university. Students are not eligible for housing benefit or Universal Credit, and therefore alternative financial arrangements need to be made to pay for housing costs, considered in the local offer for care leavers in Darlington.

www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/leaving-care-and-the-local-offer/our-local-offer-to-care-leavers/

www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-and-students



5.2 Young People at risk of/involved in Gangs, Offending and Exploitation

Young people who are engaged in offending or who are gang-involved may be at risk of harm to others and still present with a high level of vulnerability to serious youth violence and exploitation.

Youth Engagement and Justice/ probation must always be consulted when a young person is open to their service and needs accommodation. This includes young people at risk of homelessness on release from a custodial setting.

The highest priority is always to ensure a young person will be safe, and risk of harm to others is minimised by making adequate checks to ensure that gang-involved young people are not placed in the vicinity of rival or other high-profile gang affected areas, or that other very vulnerable young people are not sharing the same placement/accommodation.

The same principal applies to young people who are at a high risk of going missing and are vulnerable to exploitation.

5.3 Young people on a custodial sentence

Any care leaver leaving custody would have a full assessment with Probation and Leaving Care team prior to release with regards to accommodation. Discussions and planning should be done as soon as a release date is given.

Where the young person is a Council tenant, each case will be considered within a Best Interest Meeting held with Leaving Care and Housing Tenancy Management.

Where a secure or flexible council tenant is imprisoned for a period of more than 12 weeks, and would therefore either accumulate rent arrears or possibly lose their tenancy, they can voluntarily give up their tenancy.

Dependent upon the custodial sentence consideration will be given to a further allocation of a secure or flexible tenancy upon release.

This will not apply to tenants who have been imprisoned in relation to a crime that would enable the Council to seek repossession of their accommodation.

If the care leaver has no accommodation, the prison should ensure a duty to refer is sent to the Housing Options Team up to 56 days prior to release. This can ensure joint working for completion of early assessments and referrals to ensure different options can be explored.

His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) Care Experience matters good practice guidance sets out beneficial practice for prisons, probation and local authorities to provide consistent and appropriate support for people with care experience whilst they are in prison, upon release, or under community supervision and should be referred to.

[care-experience-matters.pdf](#)

5.4 Young people in Armed Forces

Where a secure council tenant is enlisted within the armed forces for a period of more than 12 months and would therefore either accumulate rent arrears or possibly lose their tenancy, they can voluntarily give up their tenancy. Again, each case will be considered on its own merits.

6.0 Care leavers living out of area

Care leavers that are settled outside of the Darlington Borough Council area and want to remain in the area where they have positive relationships and commitments should be supported to do so. The service they receive from the leaving care team should be the same as for those living in Darlington. 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
- 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. Care leavers living out of area are able to apply for social housing without restrictions if it is an appropriate option for them.



7.0 Support to prevent & relieve homelessness

It is important that every effort is made to ensure that a tenancy does not break down as research shows that there is a higher risk of this happening in the first months of living independently.

If it is identified that the young person would benefit from tenancy support regardless of tenure, a referral for floating support can be made by the PA.

7.1 Young people in private rented accommodation or Housing Provider

Where a young person secures private rented accommodation or with a different housing provider, the tenancy agreement will stipulate the rules of their tenancy. It is important to note that tenancy agreements differ between landlords and the PA should ensure that the young person understands what is expected of them.

The allocated PA will make themselves known to the landlord with a view to being a point of contact, if the young person agrees to this. The PA will initially monitor the situation, but if there is a risk of breakdown in the tenancy, the landlord will notify the PA immediately. PA can then gain an understanding of how critical the situation is so that they can raise the issue with the Care Leaver and consult with the landlord and Housing Options as needed.

The PA should contact the young person immediately to ascertain what further support is needed and action this immediately in a severe crisis. A meeting will be scheduled by the PA with Housing Options and young person, to agree actions to resolve the situation and ensure that the young person is appropriately supported going forward so that the tenancy can be sustained. It may be that additional tenancy support can help sustain the tenancy.

7.2 Young people in Darlington Borough Council tenancies

Darlington Borough Council provides a housing management function to tenants in their tenancies. This includes responding to disrepair, antisocial behaviour and rental income enquiries. Care leavers will be flagged on the UDCs on the Housing ICT system so that any housing staff can identify that the tenant is a care leaver.

All young people will initially be offered an introductory tenancy- a tenancy for 12 months, which sets out the conditions of their tenancy. If these are adhered to, the young person will become a secure or flexible tenant. The council has the right to extend the introductory tenancy for a further 6 months.

A breach of tenancy conditions could lead to formal action being taken to end the tenancy with the service of a notice of seeking possession. Where the Housing teams identify any tenancy issues, the PA should be contacted immediately to see what support can be offered to prevent formal action being taken and deescalate any issues. This could include discussions with the care leaver or multi-agency meetings and putting tenancy support in place.

Formal action is only proposed after careful consideration and when alternative dispute resolution options have been exhausted. Where a formal notice is being proposed the Housing Management Officer, Enforcement Officer or Income Management Officer will initiate a multi-agency housing partnership meeting. The partnership will discuss cases and agree action plans around the young person to try and prevent escalation of any proposed eviction proceedings.

At any point, the care leaver may hand back the tenancy and return to supported tenancy, with the opportunity to make a new application for social housing in the future. Any housing debt must be addressed before making a new application and a positive reference needs to be submitted when making the application.

7.3 Young people in arrears

Living independently is challenging for all young people due to the high costs of living and relatively low incomes that they can obtain. Rent arrears in any form of tenure are a real risk and it is important that the signs that a care leaver is struggling are identified at an early stage.

Within a Darlington Borough Council tenancy, the Housing Income Team will advise the Leaving Care PA when arrears reach 5 weeks in arrears with no payment plan in place. The Income team will jointly engage with the young person and PA to put in place steps to reduce the debt and avoid notice being served.

Regardless of tenure, some young people may have multiple debts and, in these cases, should be referred to the Citizens Advice at the earliest opportunity for support around money management so they can be supported to put measures in place to pay off the debt owing. In more complex cases where the young person becomes at risk of possession action a multi-agency housing partnership meeting will be put into effect to agree joint action plans to try and prevent escalation of eviction proceedings.

7.4 Imminent risk: Joint working to deliver Homeless Reduction Act duties

If at any point, the care leaver is at risk of homeless, a Duty to Refer to the Housing Options Team needs to be made.

Darlington Borough Council - Duty to refer

- If this is a DBC tenancy and a warrant application is made to the court, it is the responsibility of the Tenancy Enforcement team, Housing Management Officer or Housing Income Management Officer to send a Duty to Refer.
- Any other accommodation would be the responsibility of the PA to send the duty to refer.

Upon receipt of the referral, a face-to-face appointment will be arranged at the Town Hall with a Housing Options Officer.

At the appointment, the Housing Options Officer, the PA and the care leaver will explore the most suitable options of accommodation available. A gateway assessment will be completed so needs and risk can be assessed, and a personalised housing plan will be created. Views of the care leaver will be taken into account. Referrals will be made to the most appropriate service.

The care leaver will be assessed under homelessness legislation.

The Housing Options Officer will:

- Review current housing issues and consider any solutions to resolve the issues.
- Complete homeless application as per the Homeless Reduction Act (2017) and clearly state that they are a care leaver, with details of all professionals involved taking a joint approach.
- Accept either a prevention or relief duty, depending on the situation, making sure the care leaver understands what this means.
- Assess whether or not the care leaver has a priority need for accommodation.
- Look at alternative housing options and ways that the care leaver can be supported, including different funding options.
- Signpost care leaver to other services where necessary.

- Complete an appropriate Personalised Housing Plan, considering the Pathway Plan the care leaver already has in place.

When assessing priority need, care leavers under the age of 21 will be considered priority need, whether or not they qualify for care services from the local authority. For those 21 or over, consideration will be given with regards to being vulnerable because of being looked after, accommodated or fostered which will include:

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

Housing Options will also consider if homeless they would be at risk of exploitation, abuse or involvement in offending behaviour because of being looked after, accommodated or fostered.

Where a young person is placed in temporary accommodation Housing Options will work alongside the PA and provide weekly contact to the young person whilst in their temporary accommodation. Visits will be carried out monthly as a minimum, but this will be assessed based on individual need.

If in the event Bed & Breakfast needs to be accessed for a care leaver over 18, a written request must be sent by email to the Leaving Care Team Manager along with a Housing Options Team Leader, detailing the full needs and risks of the care leaver. All placements will be recorded on a joint working document.

Bed and Breakfast accommodation with shared facilities should only be used in exceptional circumstances and if necessary for short periods.

Other options to move the care leaver to more suitable accommodation will be considered as quickly as possible. The PA and Housing Options Officer would remain in regular contact with the care leaver to offer support and advice around their next steps whilst they were living in Bed & Breakfast.

7.5 Intentionally Homeless

As a main principle, no care leaver up the age of 25, should be found intentionally homeless as part of a homelessness assessment. Housing Options will consider the fact that the Council has a corporate parenting duty for young people leaving care.

This will mean that providing all other eligibility criteria are met, a care leaver will be owed the main housing duty regardless of whether the loss of their previous accommodation could be attributed to a deliberate act of omission.

7.6 Rough Sleeping

If a care leaver is identified as rough sleeping, the Regional Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator should notify the Leaving Care Team. It is likely that the care leaver would be offered emergency accommodation.

A rough sleeper can be reported at [Tell us about someone sleeping rough - StreetLink](#)



8.0 Disputes

There may, on occasion, be disagreement between workers in Children Services and officers in Housing Options or Revenues and Benefits on how the protocol is being administered or on how a young person is being advised and supported.

If these cannot be resolved by team managers, then they should be escalated to the respective Heads of Services.

Lessons learnt will be shared with staff and the Corporate Parenting Panel

Appendix 1

Equality Impact Assessment Record Form

This form is to be used for recording the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of Council activities. It should be used in conjunction with the guidance on carrying out EIA in Annex 2 of the Equality Scheme. The activities that may be subject to EIA are set out in the guidance.

EIA is particularly important in supporting the Council to make fair decisions. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Using this form will help Council officers to carry out EIA in an effective and transparent way and provide decision-makers with full information on the potential impact of their decisions. EIAs are public documents, accompany reports going to Councillors for decisions and are published with committee papers on our website and are available in hard copy at the relevant meeting

Darlington Borough Council Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	
Name of Directorate and Service Area:	James Stroyan People Elizabeth Davison Resources & Governance
Lead Officer and contact details	Laura Broomfield laura.broomfield@darlington.gov.uk Janette McMain janette.mcmain@darlington.gov.uk
Assistant Director accountable for this EIA	Chris Bell Children Services Anthony Sandys Resources and Governance
Who else will be involved in carrying out the EIA:	Anna Ginsberg anna.ginsberg@darlington.gov.uk
When did the EIA process start?	May 2025

Section 2 - The Activity and Supporting Information

The Activity and Supporting Information	
Details of the activity (describe briefly - including the main purpose and aims) (e.g. are you starting a new service, changing how you do something, stopping doing something?)	
A protocol has been developed to ensure agencies work together to meet their corporate parenting responsibilities & statutory duties to provide care leavers with a safe and supportive pathway to independent living.	
Why is this being proposed? What are the aims? What does the Council hope to achieve by it? (e.g. to save money, meet increased demand, do things more efficiently)	
The need for the protocol has been identified because of recognised additional hardship for care leavers securing and maintaining a safe home, than young people who have not experienced care. The protocol addresses the support networks that care leavers may lack, when compared to their peers. The council hopes to achieve better outcomes for care leavers, with more care leavers supported into independent living.	
What will change? What will be different for service users/ customers and/ or staff?	
Overall the protocol should address gaps in services, improve multi-agency working and therefore improved outcomes for care leavers. Staff will work more closely together between departments.	
What data, research and other evidence or information is available which is relevant to the EIA?	
The below government guidance for protocols for care leavers has been used to design the protocol. These take into account the impact that having been in care has on young people. DFE - Local Offer for care leavers - Local Offer for care leavers MHCLG - Guidance - Joint housing protocols for care leavers: good practice advice - GOV.UK	
Engagement and consultation (What engagement and consultation has been done regarding the proposal and what are the results? What consultation will be needed and how will it be done?)	
Discussion with Care Leavers - this identified the document was quite long, so a shorter version, specifically designed for young people is being considered. Request to attend Housing Service's Tenant's Panel- attending 29th July 25. – input from this group will be incorporated into the protocol if required.	
What impact will this activity have on the Council's budget (e.g. cost neutral, increased costs or reduced costs? If so, by how much? Explain briefly why this is the case)	
The impact on budget will be limited. However, with better joint working, it hopes to have better outcomes for care leavers moving to more appropriate housing. This could reduce the costs to DBC due to lower emergency accommodation costs, but is unmeasurable.	

Section 3 - Assessment

How will the activity affect people with protected characteristics?	No Impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Why will it have this effect? (refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)
Age		✓		The protocol aims to provide support and opportunities available to the care leaver at all points through their pathway planning. Specific support is identified for care leavers in different age brackets Legislation is being followed
Disability (Mobility Impairment, Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Health, Long Term Limiting Illness, Multiple Impairments, Other – Specify)	✓			
Sex (Gender)	✓			
Race		✓		
Gender Reassignment	✓			
Sexual Orientation	✓			
Religion or belief	✓			
Pregnancy or maternity	✓			
Marriage or civil partnership	✓			

How will the activity affect people who?	No Impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Why will it have this effect? (refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)
Live in a rural location?	✓			
Are carers?		✓		For those in the Staying Put arrangement it supports both carers, and care leavers.
Are on a low income?		✓		A high proportion will be on a low income. The protocol addresses some of the income barriers young people may have to maintaining independent living and how these will be worked to be overcome.
Young people leaving care		✓		The protocol identifies the barriers faced by care leavers due to their situation and the steps that will be taken to mitigate those barriers, such as ongoing support, second chances with tenancies and options for supported living where appropriate. The protocol is solely focused on having a positive impact on care leavers

Section 4 - Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative Impacts

Will the activity affect anyone more because of a combination of protected characteristics? (e.g. older women or young gay men – state what you think the effect might be and why, providing evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)

Are there any other activities of which you are aware which might also impact on the same protected characteristics?

Care leavers are likely to face barriers due to their experience of care, their age and the higher probability that they will be on a low income. The protocol is designed with the aim of supporting them to overcome the barriers.

Section 5 - Analysis

Analysis

A) How will the activity help to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation?

The protocol is in place so all agencies offer a fair approach resulting with a positive impact on care leavers moving on to new accommodation.

Legislation has been followed and should help to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

B) How will the activity help to advance equality of opportunity?


It is intended to raise standards of working and improve outcomes for all care leavers. It aims to provide good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access to housing.

C) How will the activity help to foster good relations?

The protocol will improve relations with a range of services and hope for a better Darlington.

During the engagement/ consultation process were there any suggestions on how to avoid, minimise or mitigate any negative impacts? If so, please give details.

Section 6 - Sign-off when assessment is completed

Officer Completing the Form		
Signed 	Name:	Claire Gardner-Queen
	Date:	02/09/2025
	Job Title:	Head of Housing
Assistant Director:		
Signed 	Name:	Anthony Sandys
	Date:	02/09/2025
	Service:	Housing and Revenues

Section 7 - Reporting of Findings and Recommendations to Decision Makers

Reporting of Findings and Recommendations to Decision Makers
<p>Next Steps to address the anticipated impact (Select one of the following options and explain why this has been chosen – remember we have a duty to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can access services and work for us)</p>
<p>a. No negative impact on people because of their Protected Characteristics and therefore no major change is needed to the activity (There is no potential for discrimination or adverse impact identified)</p>
<p>b. Negative impact identified – recommend continuing with the activity (Clearly specify the people affected and the impacts, and providing reasons and supporting evidence for the decision to continue. The EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. Officers will advise to change the proposal to reduce or remove these adverse impacts, or the Council will achieve its aim in another way which will not make things worse for people. There must be compelling reasons for continuing with the proposal which will have the most adverse impacts.)</p>
<p>c. Negative impact identified - adjust the activity in light of the identified impact to avoid, minimise or mitigate the impact (The EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. The Council will change the proposal to reduce or remove these adverse impacts, or it will achieve the aim in another way which will not make things worse for people)</p>
<p>d. Actual or potential unlawful discrimination – stop and remove the activity (The EIA identifies actual or potential unlawful discrimination. It should be stopped.)</p>
<p>Explanation of why the option above has been chosen (Including any advice given by legal services)</p>
<p>a. The protocol is designed purely to improve outcomes for care leavers)</p>
<p>If the activity is to be implemented how will you find out how it is affecting people once it is in place ((How will you monitor and review the changes?))</p>
<p>Quarterly meetings will be held by managers in Children Services & Housing Services to ensure the protocol is being followed without discrimination, harassment and victimisation.</p>

