

# Care leavers accommodation and support framework

In partnership with



# Contents

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# Executive summary

Young people leaving care need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition into adulthood. Good housing underpins success in other areas of life. This framework draws together expertise from local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and young people across England on how to provide appropriate accommodation for care leavers.

The framework has been developed for local authority commissioners, leaving care and housing managers, and for providers of housing and support for young people in England. It is intended to be used flexibly to suit local circumstances and needs, and provides a model that local authorities can adapt. It can be used both to help individual young people find the best accommodation locally for them, but also by commissioners to inform housing strategies and the supply of appropriate accommodation.

There are five stages to the framework which reflect the journey of a young person as they leave care:

## 1. Preparing for the reality of housing options

Young people still in care are given the opportunity to consider their housing options, including information about the housing market in their area. They are supported to gain the skills for increasing independence, including around managing a household, finance and budgeting.

## 2. Planning young people's accommodation and support options with them

When young people are ready to leave care, they are supported to choose the accommodation that will best suit them, given the constraints on local provision. They are given as much notice as possible for their move out of care, including those in different settings such as residential care, those in custody and those with on-going mental or physical health issues.

## 3. Reducing housing crisis

Some young people will experience problems with their housing and need emergency or short-term alternatives. They need to be accommodated in safe and appropriate housing options and receive support to help them resolve the cause of the crisis.

## 4. Accessing housing and support as needed

Young people in different situations will need different types of housing and support, ranging from 24/7 supported housing through to their own independent flat with floating support. Some young people will want to stay in a family environment like supported lodgings. As their needs and circumstances change, young people should be supported to find accommodation that best suits them.

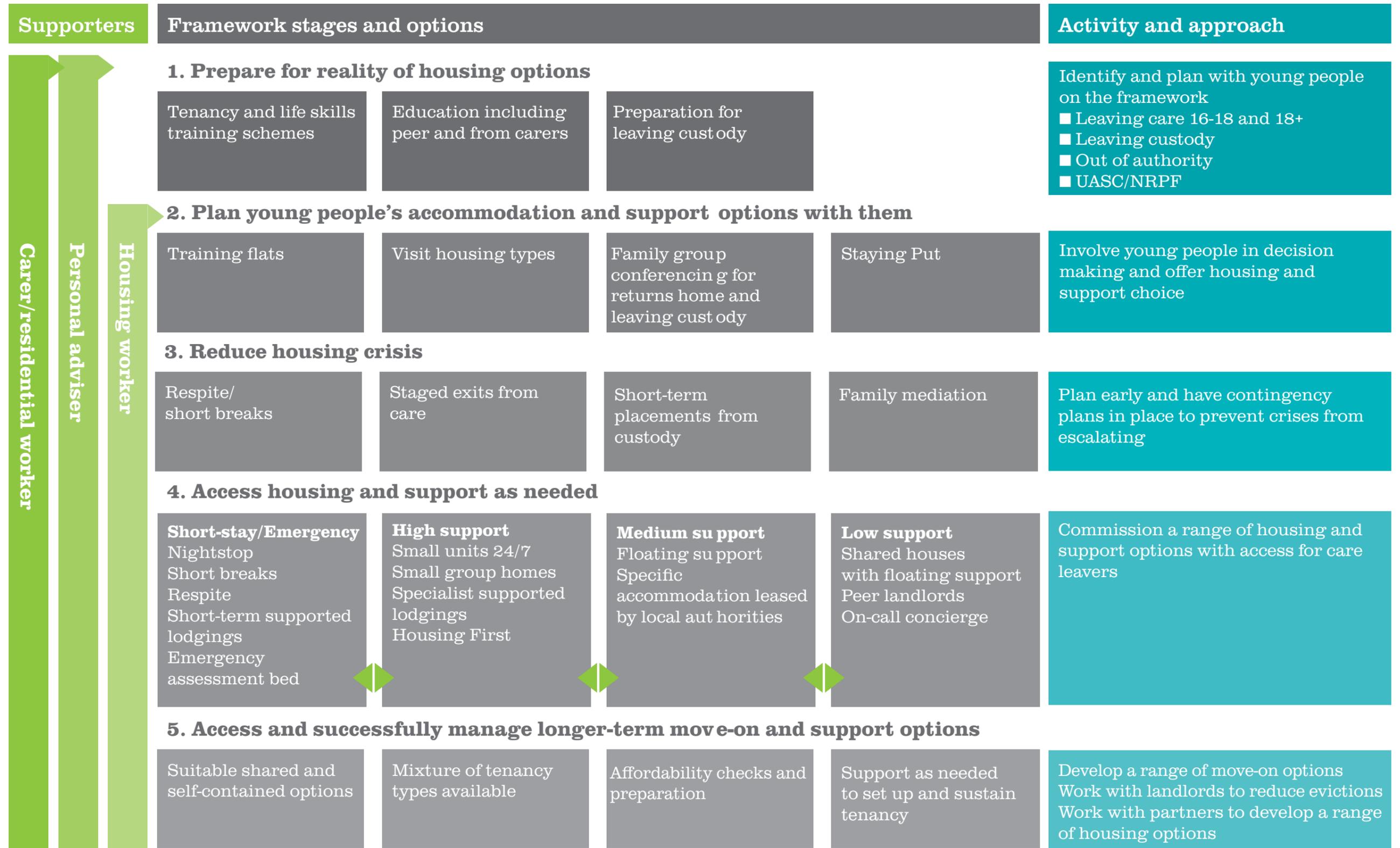
## 5. Accessing and successfully managing longer-term move-on and support options

As they become ready, young people will need support to access longer-term housing, such as their own tenancy, a shared flat or long-term supported housing. They will need help to understand their options and know where to go if they need extra support in the future.

The framework is based on some key principles which also underpin the corporate parenting role. Young people leaving care are:

- given as much information, choice and control as possible
- able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the framework
- helped to succeed
- offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- offered supportive and unconditional relationships
- the shared responsibility of their corporate parent.

# Care leavers accommodation and support framework



- Underlying principles – young people are:**
- given a much information choice and control as possible
  - able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the framework
  - helped to succeed
  - offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
  - offered supportive and unconditional relationships
  - the shared responsibility of their corporate parent.

# Introduction

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework is a model which aims to help organisations that support young people in making their individual journeys to leave care in England. It has been developed collaboratively with a wide range of partners who together have pooled their knowledge and ideas about what works well in helping care leavers transition to adulthood.

The framework is written for:

- local authority commissioners
- leaving care managers
- housing managers
- providers of housing and support for young people.

Having somewhere safe and secure to live is central to young people having a positive exit from care. Research<sup>1</sup> shows that young people highly value having choice about where they will live and being involved in decisions that will affect them. Young people's involvement in these decisions is a valuable learning experience as they make the transition to adulthood and more independence and, as well as reducing their anxiety about the future and how they will cope, it also makes them more likely to invest in sustaining their housing choice. A secure housing base is also critical to young people progressing in other areas of life, such as education, training or employment, improved mental health, relationships and building of social networks. However, there is no blueprint for success in terms of what needs to happen and when. Each young person's experience of being looked after is different, and their experience of leaving care will also be different.

The transition to adulthood for all young people, including care leavers, is about progression. For care leavers, this may be a series of small or larger steps, both within care and also leaving care and beyond. Some young people may get their own independent accommodation at 18 but they will continue to need support as they develop their skills, learn from experience and react to their changing life circumstances. Realistically, however, most young people at 18 – not only care leavers – will find it difficult to manage their own tenancy successfully even with some support, and any experience of 'failure' can damage them practically and emotionally so early on their journey to independence. As care leavers, young people need support from their corporate parents throughout and beyond this transition.

## What brings young people into care?

Although over half of children enter care before age 10, currently 43% have their first experiences of care as an adolescent or teenager, with 15% entering care

<sup>1</sup> [http://archive.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren/careleavers/files/increasing\\_care\\_leavers\\_in\\_safe\\_accommodation\\_full\\_knowledge\\_review.pdf](http://archive.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren/careleavers/files/increasing_care_leavers_in_safe_accommodation_full_knowledge_review.pdf)

at age 16 or older (Department for Education, Children looked after in England including adoption, 2014<sup>2</sup>). Many become looked after for the same reasons as younger children, but older teenagers are more likely to enter care through the following routes:

- as a homeless 16 or 17 year old
- as an unaccompanied asylum seeker
- because they were accommodated on remand.

Young people leaving care have a wide variety of needs and wishes which will have been influenced by their childhood experiences of living with their family and also living in care. For example, young people who have been in care since they were small children will be more familiar with having a social worker, pathway plans and personal advisors whereas, for those entering at 16 or 17 because they were homeless, all this can seem irrelevant and interfering. The range of young people's pre-care and in-care experiences will mean that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to supporting care leavers.

The accommodation framework aims to show a range of options for housing and support that care leavers may need as they move into adulthood. In using this framework, it is helpful to keep in mind the diversity of experience that lies behind "leaving care".

## Who developed the accommodation framework?

The care leavers accommodation and support framework was produced in 2015 by Barnardo's and St Basil's. It is based on the Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway that was developed in 2012 by St Basil's for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to support the housing needs of homeless young people. A survey by Homeless Link (2014)<sup>3</sup> found that 50% of the local authorities that responded were developing a Positive Pathway approach for young people or had one in place already. The care leaver framework builds on the Positive Pathway but also reflects the specific legislation and rights affecting care leavers in England as well as providing examples that are relevant to their housing experiences.

Barnardo's and St Basil's worked with a group of local authorities, leaving care providers, youth housing providers and central government representatives to develop a framework for care leavers which recognised their statutory entitlements as well as the additional challenges that they face on entering adulthood. Young people in and leaving care were also asked what support they wanted to see in the framework. All of these views and ideas were collated together and developed into this framework by Barnardo's and St Basil's.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption--2>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/201411%20-%20Young%20and%20Homeless%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

## How should the accommodation framework be used?

The framework is not prescriptive but gives a model for how young people can be supported as they leave care. The framework itself is very simple and represented in the diagram on page 7. The rest of this report gives background information, examples, checklists and top tips to help in using the framework. Your own unique set of local services and partnerships – what’s working well, your plans and your ideas – can be mapped on to this model. It is yours to use as flexibly as you want to.

For example, you could use the framework:

- to carry out a needs analysis of care leavers in your area
- to review your existing services through a commissioning audit
- to identify your service strengths and gaps
- as a template for service re-design.

The framework identifies five stages that young people may experience as they leave care. The stages are not always sequential and young people may move several times between different stages. They have been identified, however, to help you think through the range of areas in which young people will need support as they leave care.

The stages are:



## How can children and young people be engaged in using the framework locally?

As you develop the framework locally, a key to real improvement is the involvement of children and young people. Using your Children in Care Council and other participation groups will help to find out what care leavers want locally and what (often small) things make positive differences for them.

You can also draw on the wealth of information available in young people’s pathway plans. Drawing all of these plans together can help you analyse the strengths and gaps in your current service provision. This approach will also make sure you hear the voices of all care leavers in your area – not just those who are willing to join in with groups. In addition, feedback from local providers and support services will be important too, giving different perspectives on what works well and areas for improvement.

## What will make the framework work well?

The framework is based on some underlying principles to give young people the best start possible as they leave care. Although the framework gives practical ideas for delivering good services for young people, the attitude of their corporate parent is key to making it work well.

These principles are that young people leaving care are:

- given as much information, choice and control as possible
- able to make mistakes and never ‘fall out’ of the framework
- helped to succeed
- offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- offered supportive and unconditional relationships
- the shared responsibility of their corporate parent.

The framework also relies on different parts of a local authority working effectively together. Experience from all those already using an accommodation framework demonstrates that effective joint working between Housing, Children’s Services, Housing Related Support commissioners (often known as Supporting People commissioners) as well as with health commissioners and providers, education, training and employment agencies, criminal justice partners, the voluntary sector and the private sector, is an essential driver of a successful approach. This is “corporate parenting” in action.



# 1. Prepare for reality of housing options

Supporters	Framework stages and options	Activity and approach
Career/residential worker Personal adviser	<b>1. Prepare for reality of housing options</b> Tenancy and life skills training schemes Education including peer and from carers Preparation for leaving custody	Identify and plan with young people on the framework ■ Leaving care 16-18 and 18+ ■ Leaving custody ■ Out of authority ■ UASC/NRPF

'[Living independently was] lonely, most young people really want to move to independent living but it's not the same as you think it will be. It's you and this house, if you don't have any savings or not enough money to buy a TV or something to entertain yourself, sometimes it can be really, really lonely.'  
(Young person, Barnardo's)

Young people in care need sufficient relevant and accurate information about what will happen when they leave care, where they might live and the pros and cons of various options. Foster carers, residential workers, social workers and personal advisers have a vital role to play in preparing young people for the reality of living more independently and making them aware of their housing options when they leave care. The preparation and intended next steps should be written into the young person's pathway plan.

Looking back, many care leavers have reflected that their expectations about living independently were unrealistic. Most advocate strongly that local authorities should give young people much better information, advice and practical preparation as well as contingency plans in case things go wrong. An important principle of this framework is its flexibility, so that young people can move back into more supportive options if they find they are not ready for greater independence.

Because young people who are looked after live in a variety of different arrangements, 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 very 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.

Depending on a young person's circumstances, this preparation can start well before they want to leave care, and could form part of more general life skills training. You may be using a locally developed preparation for independence programme. Some examples of existing schemes are given on the next page.

### Example

Start Smart<sup>4</sup> is a peer mentoring programme in Merseyside to help young care leavers get ready to live independently. Developed and run by Barnardo's, the service trains older care leavers to become peer mentors, through an accredited training scheme, who then support younger adolescents to take their first steps towards independent living. The programme is supplemented by intensive support from staff to develop wider life and social skills.

### Example

The Money House<sup>5</sup> is delivered by The Hyde Group in partnership with the Royal Borough of Greenwich, MyBnk, Meridian Money Advice and Greenwich CAB. It is aimed at 16-25 year olds who are prospective social tenants in Greenwich or those who are already living as a young tenant in social housing but need more help around money and budgeting. 96% of young people complete the course and as a result get greater priority in the bidding process for move-on social housing in Greenwich. Young tenants who have attended the course are doing better in managing their rent accounts as a result, with graduates three times less likely to be in arrears of over £500 than those who didn't attend. Using a real flat, young people attend 5 days of training. It uses the real setting to deliver practical learning which looks at:

- tenancy agreements;
- costs of moving in;
- avoiding eviction;
- paying household bills and choosing utility providers;
- banking, saving, borrowing and budgeting;
- spending habits and shopping; and
- claiming benefits.

Young people who complete the course come away with an AQA in Budgeting and Debt Management.

### Example

Crisis has developed a training toolkit<sup>6</sup> aimed at support staff working with young people to educate them about living in the private rented sector. The toolkit explains about tenants' rights and clarifies some myths such as around eviction and rental increases. It also provides links to other pre-tenancy training programmes.

4 <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/start-smart-wirral/service-view.htm?id=221639502>

5 <https://themoneyhouseblog.wordpress.com>

6 <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/move-on-to-private-renting-.html>

## Joint working

As their parents, our children learn from us about the 'real world' – having a job, finding somewhere to live, managing money. But the housing market has changed so much in the last few decades that what was once common practice is often no longer an option. Are your foster and residential carers and personal advisers up to date about housing for young people today?

There will be issues particular to your local area but here is some general information about the housing market:

- social housing waiting lists can be very long and no longer offer a tenancy for life
- care leavers aren't always given priority for social housing in all areas – allocations policies vary from area to area
- from age 22, care leavers living in private rented accommodation will find that if they are still claiming Housing Benefit, it will reduce to the level of the Shared Accommodation Rate<sup>7</sup>
- private rented properties can vary hugely in quality.

There are lots of different ways in which you can keep these 'corporate parents' – carers, personal advisers and social workers – informed.

Many local authorities have specialist advice on housing options for young people leaving care. The structure for how this is delivered varies. For example:

In **Stoke-on-Trent**, a full time housing officer works within the leaving care team, allowing good sharing of up to date knowledge about the local housing market, problem solving and offering specialist advice to young people and their carers or personal advisers.

In **Hull**, the Leaving Care service works closely with the Young People's Housing Options Service, which is part of the Targeted Youth Support provision. Any care leaver who needs advice on housing or more in-depth specialist help to prevent housing crisis, including homelessness, can access the service on a daily emergency basis Monday-Friday or request an Housing Options appointment to discuss their housing needs.

The Targeted Youth Support and Leaving Care partnership offers advice and support to help young people develop a tailored housing plan to meet their individual needs and wants. The service jointly offers access to a range of supported and semi-independent accommodation options through to individual tenancies and aims to provide young people with the opportunity to move between varying levels of support to reflect changes in their circumstances and needs. The partnership also delivers an accredited Independent Living Skills programme to help young people develop the necessary skills to make a successful transition to independent living.

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2015-march-2016>

In addition, the Housing Authority ensures care leavers can access social housing if needed through additional priority in their allocations scheme as part of an agreed Move On protocol with the Leaving Care and Targeted Youth Support Service.

In **Gloucestershire**, a two-tier authority, a Youth Housing Advice Service is located within the Youth Support Team which is run on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council by Prospects Services. This offers a wide range of advice to all care leavers, their personal advisers and carers. The Service works with all the district authorities to support care leavers, plan moves and reduce risks of homelessness.

If there is no specialist housing provision for young people leaving care, a local Housing Options Service (sometimes called Homelessness Service) is usually keen to help other professionals to understand the local and national issues relating to housing choices. You could also ask a Housing Options Officer to speak at regular foster or residential carer training sessions.

### Leaving care – checklist

Whatever their current situation, all young people will need to be prepared for what life will be like when they leave care. Have you considered how best to prepare young people across the wide range of placements below?

- In local authority foster care
- In agency foster care (which could be out of authority)
- In local authority residential care
- In agency residential care (which could be out of authority)
- Those planning to Stay Put
- In “other arrangements” such as supported lodgings or supported accommodation projects

Young people all have their own unique circumstances – and one size does not fit all. Discussions will vary according to each individual young person because you are working with care leavers who, as well as having their own circumstances and future aspirations, are:

- In long-term, settled care placements
- In a series of short-term placements
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- Planning to go to university, join the Armed Forces or take up training or FE away from the local area

- In custody
- Physically disabled or have learning difficulties
- Teenagers who are newly looked-after
- Young parents
- Experiencing mental health difficulties (e.g. sectioned)
- In hospital for a long-term period of medical care

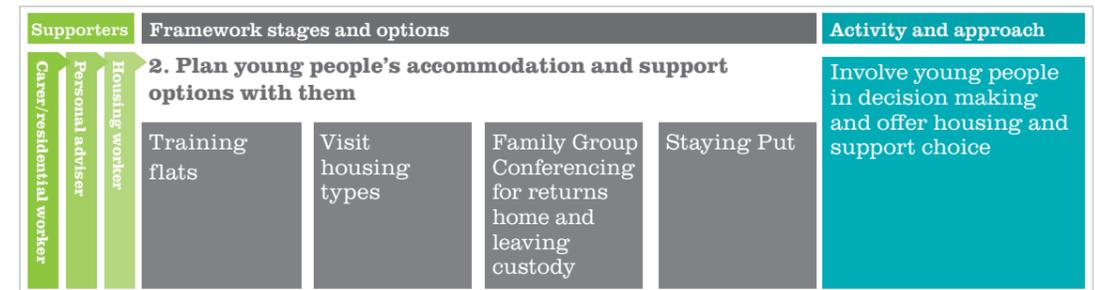
In considering these questions, it may be useful to do an audit of your team’s skills and knowledge in providing up-to-date and accurate information to young people about their housing options and discuss with Independent Reviewing Officers the range of options available and sorts of issues they might want to consider covering in Pathway Plan reviews.

### Joint working – checklist

Different parts of the local authority will have different information and experience about the needs of care leavers locally. Bringing this together and having a joint approach helps to manage the transition to leaving care better, in terms of accommodation and support. Use this checklist to see how well you are working together in this stage of the framework.

- Commissioning for leaving care support and housing is based on an evidenced needs analysis.
- All relevant parts of the local authority, other public sector agencies, voluntary agencies, Housing Associations and other local providers of relevant services feed into the needs analysis. As well as Leaving Care Services, this could include Housing Options Services, Public Health, Youth Offending Services, Probation / Community Rehabilitation Companies and local providers.
- Leaving care commissioners understand and are consulted about changes to the local housing allocations scheme.
- Leaving care commissioners understand the supply and affordability of housing locally, including social housing and supply, affordability and access to the private rented sector (PRS).
- Housing and housing related support commissioners understand the range of needs of care leavers, any projected changes in needs and also any changes in the size of the leaving care population.
- Access and referral policies for supported accommodation and floating support acknowledge the needs of care leavers.

## 2. Plan young people's accommodation and support with them



*'I've been very protected, for a very long time, and now moving out, it makes it even more scary because I've been so protected.'* (Young person, Barnardo's)

Better planning and preparation will support better outcomes for young people, as well as giving them personal assurance about their next steps into adult life. Personal advisers and carers can help young people to understand or even try out different housing options for a short period of time. With a better understanding of the reality of living more independently, young people are empowered to make a well-informed choice.

**Pathway Plans** set out when a young person will formally leave care and the intended next steps. The Children Act 1989 stipulates that all eligible, relevant and former relevant children should have a Pathway Plan, which should be a live document that is reviewed regularly.<sup>8</sup> Pathway Plans should be completed within 28 days of a care leaver changing their accommodation. Social workers and personal advisers will have the information to be able to plan those moves well in advance.

As stated in statutory guidance<sup>9</sup>, **contingency plans** – or a 'back up' plan – are a good idea for young people generally. For some young people, a more detailed contingency plan is needed, for example young people placed in a foster care or residential care setting in another area, those coming out of custody as a care leaver or those seeking asylum and awaiting the decision. Some young people placed outside the local authority area may choose to stay where they were living as a looked after child and not return to their 'home' authority. It is really important for these groups that there is detailed planning about their accommodation needs as it may not be automatic or straightforward that they will get any priority for social housing or that a local authority would recognise their 'local connection'.

Some local authorities find that having a regular **'panel' meeting** between Housing and Children's Services departments can effectively generate a shared agreement about the accommodation plan for some or all looked after young people who are preparing to leave care. This is in addition to individual pathway

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers, January 2015, Chapter 3  
<sup>9</sup> Department for Education, Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers, January 2015, paragraphs 7.74-7.79

### Top tips

- Think about how you can harness the experiences of other young people to advise and guide care leavers. Often young people learn best from each other, particularly when they are being warned about challenges ahead. Peer training or mentoring, or even a short film they make to show other young people, can be very effective.
- Close working between Housing Options, LAC and leaving care teams can help develop staff knowledge and their ability to offer good, realistic advice to care leavers. Having a member of staff from a Housing Authority or provider located within a leaving care service has proved to be highly effective in a number of authorities.
- Foster and residential carers, social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) need realistic information about what housing options are available locally so that they can pass this information on to young people.
- A good understanding of the LAC and leaving care data at a strategic level can improve long-term planning.
- Where possible, run accredited training courses on pre-tenancy awareness or life skills. This will allow young people to gain additional qualifications or credits towards study courses. Care leavers also need to know where they can go for more tenancy advice after they no longer receive a leaving care service (at 21 or at 25 for those in education or training), so they may need signposting to mainstream housing options and advice services.
- When planning with young people for their individual accommodation options, try to give them choice but be realistic about what is possible and available in the local area.
- When preparing young people for the realities of their housing options, work closely alongside foster carers and residential workers. They are likely to know young people very well, dependent on how long the placement has been, and are often the best person to talk to care leavers about the future – but they need up to date information to be able to do so.

planning meetings. For example, panel meetings can consider the range of available accommodation options to avoid a care leaver being set up to fail in a tenancy which they are not yet ready for. Young people can be involved in any discussion, including panel meetings, if they want to be.

The new right to **Stay Put** in foster care gives young people more time to think about where they want to live when they do leave care. The sector-led guidance<sup>10</sup> sets out how to plan for Staying Put well before a care leaver reaches 18, and guidance<sup>11</sup> from NCAS provides information for young people themselves. Staying Put can bring greater stability for care leavers, particularly those who don't yet feel ready to 'move out' or who have a very good relationship with their carer. The carer, who will probably know the young person best of all, should be involved in helping them plan for their next step. However, having a Staying Put arrangement can lead to a change in relationships with a former foster carer, so it is important to have a contingency plan in place in case it doesn't work out. Whatever the plans, the detail needs to be written into their Pathway Plan.

Some care leavers may plan to return to their birth parents: 2013-14 12% of 19-year-old care leavers were living with their parents. Young people can have unrealistic expectations of what returning 'home' will be like, and often these relationships soon start to struggle. Where a return home is the plan, there needs to be substantial pre-move planning and on-going support to help both the young person and their parents or extended family to adjust. This can be a particular issue for care leavers returning home having been in custody.

**Family Group Conferencing** (FGC) can be a useful way to help the young person and their family make the best choices and to settle. FGC is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child or young person with their involvement. It is a voluntary process and, with an independent facilitator, can work through options that might not have been initially obvious, including the need for on-going support.

### Focus on...

**Young people leaving custody** are particularly at risk of living in unsuitable accommodation or becoming homeless, and have often experienced poor accommodation or placements before their experience in custody. They may have additional challenges in accessing housing and the support to meet their needs, perhaps due to disruptive behaviour. Many supported accommodation projects do not accept young people if they have committed particular offences such as sexual offences or arson.

Planning for young people on short custodial sentences can be challenging, and young people often don't know where they are going to live until the last minute before they leave custody. This can be very worrying for young people as well as leading to additional problems after they are released.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1154341/staying\\_put.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1154341/staying_put.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Staying-Put-FINAL-WEB.pdf>

To help ease the transition out of custody, it is very important that leaving care services work with the Youth Offending Service, probation or Community Rehabilitation Company staff and case managers to:

- Plan young people's accommodation options as soon as possible on entering custody; and
- Keep the young person informed about progress and their options.

Leaving care personal advisers or social workers will need to:

- Keep in touch with the young person throughout the time they are in custody, even if they are placed a long way from home
- Look for housing options for the young person as their release date approaches
- Keep the young person and the YOT/probation staff or case manager informed of progress
- Have in place a contingency plan if the first option does not work
- Put in place a package of support to assist the young person to settle back into their community.

Commissioners of leaving care and housing services need to take into account how easily young people leaving custody will be able to access existing services, and what additional services or support may need to be put in place specifically for them. This might involve a joint protocol between Housing, Children's Services and Youth Offending Teams so that suitable accommodation is provided locally. It may also require agencies offering post-custody placements to travel to meet the young person in custody, or arrange to do pre-tenancy interviews via Skype (as happens in HMP & YOI Parc).

### Example

The Royal Borough of Greenwich provides a range of services to all young people in the borough via a one-stop-shop, The Point. A young people's housing options and homelessness prevention service, called 1st Base is located within The Point and has staff within it from Housing and Children's Services. There is a joint protocol between 1st Base and the Youth Offending Service which sets out how the services will work with young people at different stages of their custodial or community-based sentence and also around the transition to 18. The protocol sets out clearly the different responsibilities of agencies involved. The success of this joint working has been recognised by the Youth Justice Board.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.justice.gov.uk/youth-justice/effective-practice-library/first-base>

Making well planned moves is in the best interests of young people leaving care. Crisis or emergency moves are much less likely to support good outcomes and may set young people back in other areas of their lives such as education, training or employment. There are different ways in which personal advisers or foster or residential carers can help care leavers make an informed choice about their move from care. Here are some examples:

### Training flats

Many care leavers say that they want to leave care so that they can get their 'own place'. The reality of living alone as the first move after leaving care can, however, be very different from what young people expect. Care leavers often describe feeling lonely, unsure how to manage household problems or worried about finances and bills. Some local authorities are using training flats to help care leavers experience what it is really like to live on their own, without the risk of them losing their own first tenancy.

#### Example

Bradford Leaving Care service has a contracted scheme for supported tenancies that includes provision for a 'taster flat' where young people can experience two weeks of independent living while still in their care placement. This provides a reality check for young people as well as a focus for pre-tenancy work.

### Visiting different housing types

It can be hard for care leavers to know where they want to live if they don't have any experience of different housing types. Language is very powerful: for example, the term "hostel" often has negative connotations, suggesting night-shelters or large buildings in poor condition with little support. However, a locally commissioned supported accommodation scheme, which may locally be called a "hostel", could in reality be a small, high quality service and a good first move for a young person. Another example is "supported lodgings" which is likely to be an unfamiliar term, but in fact has many similarities with foster care though more suitable for older young people. Advice from other young people can be really helpful about the pros and cons of the various options available to them.

Some local authorities are offering care leavers the chance to visit or even stay in different options for a night or two to experience first-hand before they make their decision about where they want to live next. Giving young people the tools to make an informed decision can make a substantial difference to their commitment to their housing choice.

### Leaving care – checklist

Although currently 37%<sup>13</sup> of young people leave care from a foster placement, other care leavers could have been staying in a variety of other settings. Are you working with young people in all these different settings to plan their accommodation and support?

- In "other arrangements"
- In residential care
- Out of your local authority area in foster or residential care settings
- At residential special schools
- In custody or secure units
- Living with parents or family

### Top tips

- Having a Housing Officer in the leaving care team can make a big difference by up-skilling personal advisers in housing knowledge as well as giving young people specialist housing advice and helping them to access various housing options. Many Housing Departments have placed officers in Leaving Care Teams as part of their contribution as a 'corporate parent' or made a 'virtual' arrangement.
- Consider setting up a 'panel' to look at all the cases of young people leaving care. This is also an effective way to promote joint working. Panels usually include staff from Leaving Care and Housing Options, but could also usefully join up with voluntary sector providers of accommodation and support in the local area.
- Provide short-term beds for young people leaving custody. If a longer-term housing and support option is not yet ready for them, they can stay in a supported environment for a few days prior to the move.
- Involve foster and residential carers and other trusted adults to help young people think about their options and make an informed choice about where they want to live.
- Wherever possible, give care leavers the opportunity to try out different types of accommodation before they make their choice, such as supported housing, supported lodgings, a shared flat, their own tenancy etc.

<sup>13</sup> Department for Education, Children looked after in England including adoption, September 2014



# 3. Reduce housing crisis

Supporters	Framework stages and options				Activity and approach
Career/residential worker Personal adviser Housing worker	<b>3. Reduce housing crisis</b>				Plan early and have contingency plans in place to prevent crises from escalating
	Respite/short breaks	Staged exits from care	Short-term placements from custody	Family mediation	

'I went from not paying anything, and I mean anything, literally just my clothes and my cigarettes, to having water rates and light rates, TV licence, council tax and having these different cards to pay for different things. Wow, it was a bombardment! The one question I kept asking myself was, 'how will I cope?' and the answer is, you don't.' (Young person, Barnardo's)

The experience of homelessness at a young age is not only stigmatising but can, without effective support and accommodation options, result in long-term poor outcomes.<sup>14</sup> Many young people report their experience as traumatic, leading to dropping out of education, training or employment and resulting benefit dependency. Becoming homeless can result in significantly higher risks of developing mental health problems, getting involved in substance misuse, risks of sexual exploitation, involvement in crime and, in some areas, involvement in gangs. This can result in young people disengaging from services which could make them increasingly difficult to support appropriately.

For care leavers, homelessness can feel even more of a damaging experience as they often don't have family members able to help them and, despite the local authority being their 'corporate parent', many young people say they feel on their own. In some areas, without young people's emergency or short-stay accommodation, homeless care leavers describe staying in all-age hostels with older homeless people, who may be using substances or involved in crime, or living for long periods in inappropriate Bed and Breakfast or hotel accommodation. This sort of accommodation is often unsafe for young people and provides little or no support, so not helping them to deal with what has happened and to move on with their lives.

When a care leaver is facing a potential breakdown in their living situation, it is important that action is taken quickly to prevent them becoming homeless. Homelessness can happen in any form of accommodation. For example, they may have returned home to family, be in Staying Put arrangement, living with a partner, in a supported lodgings placement, or a supported accommodation scheme. Some young people may be in their own tenancy, but be building up rent arrears or be involved in anti-social behaviour locally, which is putting their tenancy at risk.

<sup>14</sup> Lankelly Chase, *Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage*, 2015

The roles of the personal adviser and a housing related support worker are both critical here, as they will know how each young person is managing and should be visiting their accommodation regularly. Foster carers, independent visitors or other trusted adults in the young person's life should also take some responsibility in raising any concerns about how well a young person is managing or if their housing is looking at risk.

A range of homelessness prevention tools can be used to try and prevent the young person from losing their housing. They may need to move on from their accommodation in due course, but prevention can be used to slow down a crisis, alleviate risks and enable a move to be made in a planned and sustainable way.

A major trigger for homelessness for all young people, including those in care and leaving care, is the breakdown of relationships. Losing contact with long-term foster carers or leaving residential care abruptly as a result of an incident is damaging for young people. Unresolved conflict and the emotional impact of fractured relationships can reinforce low self-esteem and an inner belief that no-one cares. For 16/17 year olds who are still looked after and living with foster carers or in residential care, a breakdown in relationship can sometimes result in an unplanned placement move into 'other arrangements'. With appropriate prevention activity – such as a skilled offer of mediation – these unplanned placement moves may be avoided.

For a care leaver who is 18 or over, the breakdown of a relationship could be with a partner or friend they are living with, with their parents or wider family, or with their former foster carer or supported lodgings host. Young people who have returned to family or carers from custody may be at particular risk.

Examples of homelessness prevention tools include:

### Mediation

Whilst mediation services are usually targeted at young people who live with their parents, they can also be used with young people at risk of placement breakdown. Sometimes a different person, perhaps from a different agency, is viewed as more independent because they are removed from the dynamics of the placement. Mediation can be structured and delivered in planned sessions or be more immediate and informal.

Mediators usually help young people and their carers or families understand what the underlying tensions are about, what they want to achieve and support them in finding ways to resolve issues. There are several ways of measuring what a successful outcome from mediation might be, one of which may be moving from their current housing situation, but in a planned way.

### Family Group Conferencing

Family Group Conferencing may be another option that local authorities might consider. It could be adapted for care leavers and their carers, and still achieve a successful outcome.

At a point of real crisis, there is not much time to arrange more formal mediation nor is it likely to be an easy offer for young people and their carers to accept. But immediate mediation – someone with mediation and negotiation skills who can visit within a few hours – does not require a long 'lead in' period and deals with issues in the here and now.

#### Example

The London Borough of Barnet has used Youth Mediation as the key prevention tool for youth homelessness. The youth mediator works with young people who live in the parental home or family network and will also work with those in care when requested to do so. The mediation worker is extensively trained and undertakes home visits quickly rather than asking people to come to the office or arrange more formal mediation as the first contact. The approach has a high success rate: usually somewhere between 75-80% of young people who have mediation remain in the family home every year.

#### Example

Llamau are a Welsh voluntary agency which works with homeless young people and those at high risk of homelessness. Their mediation model offers an immediate response, through a home visit. They work alongside Housing and Children's Services in nine local authorities in South Wales and have a high success rate with young people and families. Llamau have published a mediation toolkit<sup>15</sup> based on their extensive experience in this area of work.

#### Example

St Basil's provides a mediation service for young people and their families in Birmingham as a homelessness prevention option. Again this is mainly an option for young people and their parents but can also be offered to those living with carers. There is around an 87% success rate of positive outcomes for young people. This may mean the young person does not stay in the family home, but moves out in a more planned way, with the issues resolved and/or communication more open.

<sup>15</sup> Llamau Family Mediation Toolkit, October 2007, <http://www.llamau.org.uk/family-mediation/>

## Top tips

- If there is no option to use a specialist mediation service, do staff in your service have the skills and confidence to mediate and negotiate? If not, there are agencies that offer accredited training on mediation.
- Some Housing Options Services have invested in this sort of training because it is so valuable in preventing homelessness. You could consider the benefits of commissioning some training and sharing costs between several different organisations or services, because these are generic skills that several services may want to train their staff in (for example, Youth Offending Services, Troubled Families Programme staff, Family Support and Early Help staff, social workers and Housing Options Services).
- In 2011 Depaul UK published a useful outline<sup>16</sup> of the benefits of mediation for young people, based on their experience of providing family mediation in several projects in England. This includes a business case for investment on mediation based on detailed cost-benefit analysis and savings to the public purse.

## Respite/short breaks

If relationships are under strain, sometimes young people just need ‘time out’ to think about what is going on and to make a plan for the future. Offering a respite or short break service can help care leavers take their time over decisions and think about their next move. Respite services might just be a safe place for a care leaver to go for a few days or weeks, or it might offer a range of coaching or therapeutic support. Short breaks might be used in conjunction with mediation, to take the young person out of the crisis situation whilst working together to try and resolve the underlying issues.

## Short-term moves from custody

Young people leaving custody are at particular risk of homelessness, in part because their initial moves are often insufficiently planned. With release dates often unknown until the last minute, and with the distance between custody and home, young people are often moved somewhere they do not know, do not want or that is not sustainable. Some local authorities are providing short-term accommodation that young people can access direct from custody as part of their resettlement plan. This might be a ring-fenced room in a supported housing project or a specialist supported lodging. The service can be used for a few weeks whilst they look at longer-term options available locally, rebuild relationships with family prior to moving back home, or until their chosen placement becomes available.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.depauluk.org/\\_uploads/documents/homelessness-prevention-report-reconnect.pdf](http://www.depauluk.org/_uploads/documents/homelessness-prevention-report-reconnect.pdf)

## Joint working – checklist

To avoid housing crisis and prevent homelessness, what works well is for the Leaving Care Service and local Housing Options Services (sometimes called Homelessness Prevention Unit or Service) to work closely together. In some local authorities, there is a member of the Housing Options Service based within or linked to the Leaving Care Service.

A local authority could, as part of its corporate parenting responsibility, have an agreed set of prevention tools available and a shared understanding across Housing and Children’s Services regarding who would do what in a situation of housing crisis for a young person aged 16 or over who is looked after or a care leaver. This can be outlined in the joint protocol regarding care leavers and accommodation.

How well are departments working together in your local authority? If you are in a two-tier authority, it is even more important that housing departments from each district come together to work closely with Children’s Services at county level.

Use the checklist below to assess how well your departments are working together:

- Homelessness prevention services are accessible to care leavers and take account of the range of housing situations they may be in.
- Leaving care teams are aware of the homelessness prevention support available locally.
- Housing and homelessness officers are familiar with the needs of care leavers in their area and can offer accurate and tailored advice.
- Youth Offending Teams are involved in commissioning short-term accommodation options that are suitable for young people immediately on release from custody.
- A joint protocol is in place which outlines how you will all work together to avoid homelessness and housing crisis amongst care leavers.

## Top tips

- Contingency plans are really helpful as they can help reduce crisis points by offering an alternative option. They can be light-touch for those young people who are more settled, or go into greater detail for those assessed as being at more risk of losing their accommodation.

## 4. Access housing and support as needed

Supporters	Framework stages and options				Activity and approach
Career/residential worker Personal adviser Housing worker	<b>4. Access housing and support as needed</b>				Commission a range of housing and support options with access for care leavers
	<b>Short stay/ Emergency</b> Shared houses Nightstop Short breaks Short-term supported lodgings Emergency assessment bed	<b>High support</b> Small units 24/7 Small group houses Specialist supported lodgings Housing first	<b>Medium support</b> Floating support Specific accommodation leased by local authorities	<b>Low support</b> Shared houses with floating support Peer landlords On-call concierge	

*'It [supported lodgings] has prepared me a lot better, you get a family around you that can help wonders, it really can, and it helps you develop a lot better.'*  
(Young person, Barnardo's)

Care leavers will need access to different types of accommodation and support at different times in their journey out of care. This may depend on diverse factors such as the age at which they leave care, their emotional health or resilience, life skills and experience, mental and physical health, disability, any experience of substance use or offending, and a range of other factors.

Although this framework is presented as a structured model, there is no linear relationship between the types of accommodation and support that care leavers will need. Some care leavers will only need one type of accommodation and support, whereas others will have several moves before they progress to independence. They may move between different types of provision sequentially or more randomly, depending on how their needs change. For example, if a previously unidentified mental health need became apparent, a young person may jump from a low support to a high support setting quickly.

Whilst it is helpful to have a guideline for how long a young person might stay in a supported accommodation option (e.g. supported lodgings, a foyer or a 'step down' shared house with floating support), there does need to be some degree of flexibility built in to contracts to enable commissioners and providers to extend a young person's stay if they are not ready to move on and run the risk of failure if they do move.

The personal adviser, and anyone who is supporting the young person day to day, will have a good idea of how a young person is getting on. By working together, staying in touch, and involving the young person directly in planning what the next move might be, a more positive outcome is likely. The accommodation decision – and contingency plan – should be agreed and written into a care leaver's Pathway Plan.

It is helpful if Personal Advisers are familiar with the range of accommodation options available to care leavers locally, including how to refer young people into the various sorts of accommodation and support. This can be much simpler when there is a single integrated gateway to all supported accommodation options.

- Having a designated place or person where young people and their carers can go for early advice and support can help avoid crisis and reduce worry if things start to go wrong. This could be a Leaving Care Service or a local young people's "one-stop-shop" with access to a range of services such as mediation.
- Some YOIs are allowing young people who are preparing to leave custody to use Skype to take part in assessment interviews with potential housing services. This can help ease the transition out of custody but also give the housing service assurances about how the young person will cope with living in a specific setting.
- It is important to plan vacation accommodation for care leavers who are at university or a residential FE college, so that they do not face housing problems outside of term-time.

Effective provision of a range of accommodation options locally will meet requirements on local authorities for both sufficiency and suitability of accommodation. Local authorities report annually to the Department for Education on their ability to find 'suitable' accommodation for care leavers at age 19, 20 and 21.<sup>17</sup> Ofsted also looks at the suitability of accommodation for care leavers. Defined in the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010<sup>18</sup>, suitable accommodation is accommodation:

- which, so far as reasonably practicable, is suitable for the child in light of his needs, including his 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
- in respect of which the responsible authority has, so far as reasonably practicable, taken into account the child's wishes and feelings, education, training or employment needs.

Although they need access to a range of provision, in reality care leavers will make up a relatively small proportion of the young people who need wider housing support. It therefore makes sense that the housing options set out in this stage are jointly or co-commissioned by Housing Related Support commissioners (sometimes called Supporting People commissioners) and Children's Services. This might mean drawing up specifications together, agreeing to pool some budgets, allocating specific beds in a scheme to care leavers, or having a shared protocol that sets out agreed access routes.

### Example

Brighton and Hove City Council chose to take a joint commissioning approach because of a shared recognition that there were lots of barriers to accessing housing for young people, including care leavers. A thorough needs assessment was undertaken in 2011. Amongst many issues, it showed that Children's Services and Housing were holding different contracts for the same services/bed spaces and there was little 'join-up' in thinking, planning or delivery. Based on the national 'Positive Pathway' model and addressing the issues raised in the needs assessment, a joint commissioning strategy was drawn up in 2013 to develop a Young People's Accommodation and Support Pathway.

There are agreed joint performance measures and outcomes in place, which tie into the Corporate Parenting strategy and changes with Early Help. There

<sup>17</sup> To include 18 year olds from 2015 and 16 and 17 year olds from 2016; [https://www.gov.uk/government/.../Care\\_Leavers\\_Strategy\\_update.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/.../Care_Leavers_Strategy_update.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/2571/regulation/9/made>

is also a single point of access into provision through the Housing Advice Service, a Supported Accommodation Panel and a revised Care Leavers' Protocol.

Newly commissioned services include priority for care leavers and a clear route for care leavers leaving foster placements or other Children's Services accommodation through the Care Leavers' Protocol which ensures moves to accommodation are planned.

Joint Commissioning will ensure provision of support for care leavers in independent tenancies as well as in accommodation projects or supported lodgings. A challenge is designing the future shape of services with a decreasing budget but evidencing the impact through the Outcomes Framework, which includes specific care leaver indicators, ensures there is a good corporate understanding of the impact of the new approach.

In some local authorities, depending on the local context, the element of the budget for housing related support (what was "Supporting People") which relates to young people 16-25 has been moved to Children's Services. In effect, this means that there is a single budget for all accommodation and support for young people who need additional housing support or are at risk of homelessness, including care leavers. It could be useful to undertake an options appraisal to understand the pros and cons of this approach.

### Example

Camden has commissioned an accommodation framework that provides a range of supported accommodation for homeless young people, as a partnership between Housing Related Support (Supporting People); Housing Options; Children, Schools and Families; health; and third sector providers. Before the Young People's Pathway was implemented, housing services were commissioned by Housing Related Support alone and the grant conditions were a barrier to housing care leavers, meaning that the majority of care leavers were placed out of Camden.

In 2007, a joint funding arrangement was made to commission supported accommodation services for young people aged 16 to 21. It includes three assessment centres, progress and specialist services (including mental health; sexual exploitation; and teenage parents) and move through services so young people can demonstrate they are ready for independent living. Key to delivering a successful range of supported accommodation has been flexibility and responsiveness from providers; a referral co-ordinator into the Pathway; a Team Around the Child approach; and effective partnership working across the borough.

## Joint working

Many local authorities that use an accommodation pathway have put in place a **single integrated gateway** to all supported accommodation in the local area. A gateway enables:

- a more consistent approach to needs assessment and understanding of provision, resulting in better matching of needs with services
- more choice of accommodation options for young people, including care leavers
- better use of limited resources, ensuring those with the highest needs access the services they need
- improved safeguarding, with a shared knowledge of potential risk, agreed approaches to managing risk and knowledge of who is placed where
- improved ability to continue with crisis prevention work, where relevant and appropriate
- improved ability to plan moves with care leavers themselves
- an overview of planned and unplanned move-on
- prompt and appropriate filling of voids

Ultimately using a gateway approach, as opposed to young people self-referring, ensures that priority is given to those who most need supported accommodation.

There are a wide range of different housing and support types that may be appropriate for care leavers. These are arranged in the framework into emergency/short-stay, longer-stay and step-down provision.

## Emergency/short-stay provision

**Nightstop** is an accredited scheme run by Depaul UK. It provides safe accommodation for young people for a few nights in the homes of approval local host families. Young people who experience a sudden housing crisis are given a room for the night and a meal, in a family setting. It is a more supportive and positive alternative to using other forms of emergency accommodation, such as an all age, mixed hostel or Bed and Breakfast. It can be a particularly good option in more rural areas, where suitable emergency provision in a young people's accommodation project could be a long way away. Longer – but not long term – stays with hosts can be possible through 'Nightstop Plus'.

**Short-term supported lodgings** provide safe accommodation for young people in the family home of approval local hosts. These are similar to Nightstop in many ways but not part of the accredited scheme. The option is likely to be

part of a local supported lodgings scheme, where most hosts are recruited for longer stays, but a few are willing or want to provide shorter stay options. Depending on the scheme, young people may be able to stay for a few nights or up to several weeks. With their own room and access to cooking and washing facilities, young people are given a supportive environment and opportunities to build up their lifeskills.

**Ring-fenced beds** are provided in some larger supported accommodation schemes. These may be quite basic single rooms, offering emergency access for young people at immediate risk of homelessness. Support workers may assess the young person whilst alternative accommodation is sought.

**Assessment centres** tend to be commissioned as part of a broader young people's accommodation pathway, usually in large urban areas. They provide a first stage point to the pathway, where young people can stay for a short period whilst they are assessed and their next accommodation decided. Whilst planned, non-emergency moves for care leavers would not usually require the use of an assessment centre, for those in an emergency, this is a useful option.

Local Housing Authorities have to provide interim **Temporary Accommodation** (TA) for single people and families under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996, whilst a homelessness investigation is carried out, if they are deemed to be eligible, homeless, likely to be in 'priority need' and have no other place to stay. Care leavers are automatically 'priority need' up to the age of 21 so should be given access to TA. This option will vary between local authorities in terms of the types of accommodation available. This may be a self-contained unit in a block of housing which is all designated as TA, and may or may not include housing management and support. Often temporary accommodation is in isolated self-contained units with no on-site support or additional housing management. This is likely to be a difficult and scary experience for a young person and is best avoided.

## Longer-stay provision

Supported accommodation is a generic term for accommodation where there is some sort of support provided on-site. There are many different models of supported accommodation, which are split here into (1) family-type support and (2) other types:

### (1) Family-type supported accommodation

**Staying Put arrangements** are a statutory right for care leavers in foster care in England. They allow a young person to stay with their former foster carer from 18 to 21 if they and the carer want the arrangement to continue. The foster placement is usually converted into a tenancy-type arrangement, and the young person will carry on living in the household in the same way. They will be given support from their former foster carer to help develop life skills.

**Supported lodgings** are placements within a family home in the local community. The host provides a room and cooking and washing facilities, as well as offering support and advice to the young person. Supported lodgings can be used as emergency placements but are usually a longer-term option. They can help care leavers to improve their life skills, such as managing money, cooking, shopping, cleaning, etc., and give them a family-based setting. Some supported lodgings are specifically for care leavers with high support needs, such as young parents, those coming out of custody, or those at risk of sexual exploitation.

## (2) Other types of supported accommodation

Most local authorities have some supported accommodation schemes, which are often commissioned by Housing Related Support (Supporting People) commissioners, and sometimes jointly with Children's Services. For some 16/17 year olds who are looked after or care leavers, these may be commissioned via a framework agreement across several local authorities. Schemes may be run by a charity, a Registered Provider (a social landlord) or a private provider.

Supported accommodation schemes can vary substantially in size. The accommodation can be bedrooms with shared facilities, bedsits or self-contained flats. Support may be available 24/7 on-site, in the daytime only or on-call support at night. Schemes can also include dispersed housing and may have step-down units attached to help young people prepare for a less intensively supported environment. Support workers (sometimes called 'key workers') work individually with young people on their own support plan towards agreed goals, such as around education, training, employment, life skills, independent living skills, improving emotional well-being, confidence and physical health.

**Foyers** are supported accommodation projects for young people that focus on education, training and employment, and many are accredited by the Foyer Federation. The growing challenge of affordability of housing for young people means that preparing for economic activity is an important part of any stay in supported accommodation. Many local supported accommodation schemes do not call themselves foyers, but are commissioned to provide a similar sort of service, with a proactive focus on education, training and employment.

**Small group homes** models tend to be commissioned for young people with physical or learning disabilities who will need on-going support from adult social services. Group homes might be commissioned jointly by Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Housing Related Support commissioners. Housing Benefit and elements of other benefits that the young person may be able to claim due to their disability should also be factored into the whole package. There are specialist providers who are able to provide young people with focused, small group living arrangements. This could be an option for very small numbers (maybe 2 or 3) of young people to live together, who have

previously been living in specialist foster or residential care. A long lead-in time is needed in considering this option, in terms of the financial modelling, commissioning and matching of young people.

**Housing First** tends to be most appropriate for people with multiple and complex needs. It provides an independent tenancy, sometimes through a housing association or a private rental, at the same time as very intensive, bespoke wrap-around support. Whilst it tends to be a model that is used for older, long-term homeless people, it is an option to consider for young people who are likely to struggle in larger schemes such as foyers or in supported lodgings. Having your own front door can be a positive option for some young people who have higher needs, as long as there is commissioning of support through a dedicated, specialist floating support services, with some 24-hour call-out if needed. It is important to remember that, if the housing is in the private rented sector, and if the young person is claiming Housing Benefit, then their exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate will end on their 22nd birthday. The difference between the rent and the Housing Benefit payable will need to be bridged or the young person would need to move to shared accommodation or into social housing, which could be disruptive.

## 'Step-down' provision

**Shared or self-contained provision with floating support** gives young people some support whilst they are living in their own or shared accommodation. Floating support could be provided via housing related support or, if the young person is under 18, funded by Children's Services, as an additional support on top of the personal adviser from Children's Services. Floating support assists care leavers to settle into their accommodation and the local community, including accessing local services and dealing with bills and budgeting.

'Step-down' provision can be attached to more intensively supported accommodation schemes, and gives young people a next step towards independence whilst maintaining their link to the higher support scheme. Where this is the case, the young person may live in a shared house or their own small self-contained flat or bedsit near to the supported accommodation scheme, may have the same 'key worker' that they had previously, and still be part of the higher support scheme. Other 'step-down' provision can be commissioned separately, but with good day to day links with the local supported accommodation schemes.

Some young people leaving care will be ready for the more independent 'step-down' accommodation as their first move out of care, and do not need to go through the higher support accommodation first. Assessment and pathway planning are key to making decisions with young people about their readiness for such a move.

**On-call or concierge schemes** are relatively new, but provide very light-touch housing management support as needed. Young people are interviewed before being invited to apply for a house-share, and must pass a pre-tenancy course before they can take up their place.

### Sharing as a housing option for care leavers

Some care leavers will want or need to live in a shared house with other young people, perhaps with floating support attached. It is important for personal advisers to discuss sharing with care leavers who are not likely to have their own social tenancy as an option as, on their 22nd birthday, their Housing Benefit entitlement in the private sector will drop to the Shared Accommodation Rate. Given the demands on social housing, and the limited supply, the reality is that many will need to share at some point later in their lives.

Shared social housing can also be an option, although it is not widespread.

#### Example

SnugBug Houseshare<sup>19</sup> is run by St Vincent's Housing Association in Manchester. It is open to any young person aged 18-25 who has a local connection, access to public funding if needed and is able to live independently. The scheme does not provide support to young people – if young people need support they need to bring it with them, e.g. floating support or a personal adviser. SnugBug Houseshare offers decent shared housing on six-month assured shorthold tenancies, with all young people needing to fill in an application form, attend a pre-tenancy course and then have an interview prior to being accepted. The scheme is run using 'intensive housing management', which means the rent is slightly higher than the usual Local Housing Allowance rate because it covers things like a 24-hour call-out 'ranger' service and a weekly health and safety check. This Scheme has over 18 properties in a range of areas and houses 60 young people at any one time.

Peer or 'lead' landlord schemes tend to be for young people with low support needs, who are nearly ready to manage a tenancy on their own. Housing providers can either rent a private house or use their own housing stock to run these schemes, and sub-let to young people. One young person is identified as the lead tenant, who takes on some agreed responsibility, which could include offering advice in an informal way, collecting rent from others in the shared house, whilst helping them budget and role-modelling good tenant behaviour.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.snugbughouseshare.co.uk>

#### Example

Commonweal Housing has been running Peer Landlord London<sup>20</sup> since 2013 in association with Catch22 and Thames Reach. Peer landlords, who have often used homeless services in the past, are trained in basic housing management and maintenance awareness, as well as financial literacy. They act as a positive role model and provide informal support to other tenants to help the household run smoothly.

### Top tips

- Supported accommodation projects tend to be most effective when they are small and can offer more bespoke support to young people individually. Larger-scale schemes for young people with medium to high needs, or schemes for a mix of ages, are usually not as effective in supporting care leavers. Accommodation that is available to both care leavers and other young people are often good as they allow young people to mix; this can be another benefit of joint commissioning of services.
- Having effective joint working and ideally joint or co-commissioning is critical to delivering a seamless accommodation pathway. Children's Services and Housing Related Support commissioners need to work together with colleagues in Housing Options when planning the provision they want to commission. This can help to create a 'menu' of options and also avoid the 'cliff edge' of the 18th birthday, when funding changes.
- In planning to commission a range of supported accommodation options, it is really helpful to have a full understanding of both the needs of care leavers locally and the outcomes that commissioners want to achieve. This will make it easier to plan accommodation and support around local needs and ambitions.
- Local authorities that have developed effective accommodation and support pathways for young people tend to work closely together, agreeing relevant budgets across the local authority (and other public sector agencies) and either pooling the budgets or managing them seamlessly across directorates or service areas.
- When placing care leavers in accommodation or moving them on, try to think creatively about what the young person needs. Try to avoid 'cliff edges' based on age, e.g. young people having to make a placement move around their 18th birthday, or when their Housing Benefit entitlement reduces at age 22 to the Shared Accommodation Rate. Try also to take into

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/our-projects/peer-landlord-london>

## 5. Access and successfully manage longer-term move-on and support options

account young people's education and employment activity and ambitions when working with them to choose the best supported accommodation option for them.

- Effective use of this framework could involve a group led by Children's Services and housing related support commissioners which meets regularly to review, monitor and agree changes to commissioning of accommodation and support options.
- Commissioners should encourage providers to partner strategically with the local authority and recognise the added value brought through innovation, additional programmes and flexibility of working.
- Young people often say that it is the quality of relationships with significant people in their lives that makes a difference, including housing related support workers and personal advisers. The balance of weighting between quality and costs in any tendering process is a matter for commissioners, but lower hourly rates can equate to a higher staff turnover or less skilled or experienced staff.

Supporters	Framework stages and options				Activity and approach
Career/residential worker Personal adviser Housing worker	<b>5. Access and successfully manage longer-term move-on and support options</b>				Develop a range of move-on options Work with landlords to reduce evictions Work with partners to develop a range of housing options
	Suitable shared and self-contained options	Mixture of tenancy types available	Affordability checks and preparation	Support as needed to set up and sustain tenancy	

*"I found it easier to move myself in independently because of the skills that I had brushed up on. It was upstairs, I felt safer, I felt really safe and secure."  
(Young person, Barnardo's)*

As corporate parents, our ambition for care leavers is that they are eventually able to live as independently as possible, develop positive social relationships and have successful, happy and healthy lives as adults, with the resilience to cope with the inevitable ups and downs. The final stage of the framework sets out the support needed to help care leavers move towards greater independence. For some young people, this transition will happen earlier, whilst others may need specific support from a personal adviser or housing worker beyond 21 or even after 25.

A young person's long-term housing ambitions should be discussed and documented in their pathway plan. This will need to be kept up to date as circumstances and wishes change, and remain realistic given the local housing situation. Personal advisers will need to get advice from housing officers about the long-term housing options locally.

There are a number of factors which impact on the availability of housing for young people. The supply of accommodation that is affordable for people on low incomes varies, with significant local and regional differences in the housing market. But the amount of affordable accommodation available to young people under 25 in most areas is already limited and this is projected to become more challenging in the future, in part due to reduced availability but also due to affordability. There is reported to be low landlord confidence in young people as tenants, in part due to general concerns on affordability and also due to the changes in Universal Credit, whereby rent is paid direct to the claimant unless a specific exemption is granted on the basis of vulnerability. Whilst care leavers are a named group that are likely to be vulnerable and granted an exemption, this is not automatic and is done on a case-by-case basis.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/418485/personal-budgeting-support-guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418485/personal-budgeting-support-guidance.pdf)

## Living in social housing

Social housing landlords might be called 'Registered Providers' and are regulated through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

There are several recent changes and trends in social housing:

- Local Housing Allowance rates for both social and private rented accommodation are now uprated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than with reference to local rents, thus severing the link between housing support and actual housing costs. In addition, new legislation has allowed Registered Providers to charge higher rents in social housing, which can be up to 80% of the local market rent.
- availability of social housing is already severely limited in many areas and this looks likely to contract further for those on low incomes due to the 'right to buy', the introduction of affordable rents, and limited investment in building new social housing. In terms of one-bed social housing, a combination of factors are limiting access:
  - a general shortage of one-bed properties. This is a national issue: many units of one-bed accommodation are in sheltered housing, are designated for older people, or are specifically restricted to lettings to, for example, under 30s or under 40s through local lettings policies.
  - demand for this size of accommodation is increasing from tenants subject to the under-occupation penalty ('bedroom tax'). Local authorities and Registered Providers need to reduce the risk of arrears and homelessness amongst existing tenants, and prioritise these households in allocation schemes, which further reduces access for most young people.

A tenancy in social housing could be in any of the following:

- housing that the local authority still owns and manages
- housing managed through an ALMO – stock is still owned by the local authority but run by an Arm's Length Management Organisation
- housing which is part of a 'large-scale voluntary transfer' (LVST) – what was council-owned stock has been transferred to a housing association
- housing which is owned or managed by a housing association, which they have built, bought or leased.

## Allocation schemes

The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities the power to determine at a local level some of the groups of people who will or will not qualify to be allocated social housing in their areas. Waiting lists can be rationalised based on local policy. For example, those who are working, or actively seeking work or making a 'contribution to the community' could be qualifying groups, whereas

those with anti-social behaviour convictions or previous rent arrears could be excluded. Reasonable preference must still be given to those in housing need, including statutorily homeless households.

It is usual for care leavers to get some sort of additional priority (banding or points) but there is no statutory duty to give care leavers any priority over other groups.

It is no longer the case that a social housing tenancy is for life. Registered Providers can now issue 'flexible tenancies', which are usually for five years or sometimes three years. After that, a tenancy can be renewed but, again, may be for a fixed period of time.

## Living in the private rented sector

The 2011 change in calculation of the Local Housing Allowance (which sets the level of Housing Benefit payable in any area) from the 50th to the 30th percentile has restricted the pool of private rented accommodation that is affordable in any area to the lower end of the market. These changes will make all but the cheapest properties out of reach for young people, and this is most acute in more expensive parts of the country where there is already a shortage of accommodation, particularly London and the South East.

## Shared Accommodation Rate

The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) limits the amount payable to most young people living in the private rented sector to the cost of a room in a shared house. From April 2012, the SAR was extended from the age of 25 up to 35, which means that more people are competing for accommodation in shared housing. This is reported by both Crisis<sup>22</sup> and Homeless Link<sup>23</sup> to be having a significant impact on the availability of private rented accommodation, and in particular the under 25s age group, who are reportedly to be being displaced out of the market by the 26-35 age group.

There are some exemptions to the SAR, including for care leavers up to age 22. There is also an exemption for those who have lived in resettlement accommodation for three months or more, but this only applies once they reach the age of 25. Care leavers could also be considered within this exemption group if they have lived in supported accommodation after leaving care.

Some options for providing support to care leavers as they become ready for more independence include:

- Landlord accreditation – identifying private sector landlords who are prepared to work with a personal adviser to support care leavers as they take on their own tenancies. This might include assisting with budgeting,

<sup>22</sup> Crisis, *No Room Available, a study of the availability of shared accommodation, 2012*

<sup>23</sup> Homeless Link, *Nowhere to Move; Is renting on the Shared Accommodation Rate affordable in London?* May 2013

having some flexibility in the tenancy agreement, working with the local authority and young person to avoid eviction, and having lower rent deposit requirements. Accreditation could be a local authority-led scheme, or might be run by a housing support provider.

- Working with Housing Authorities to ensure care leavers are able to access the private rented sector – most local Housing Authorities will have a PRS access scheme (sometimes called a Social Lettings Agency) which is either run in-house or they will commission a provider to run this. Rather than establish a separate ‘leaving care’ scheme, a Housing Authority could – in its corporate parenting role – ensure that care leavers are helped to access suitable, affordable and appropriate accommodation in the PRS via the general scheme. The scheme should offer landlords a range of incentives such as:
  - bond and rent deposit schemes
  - rent in advance
  - rent paid direct to the landlord
  - a named contact person and a 24-hour helpline
  - floating support if needed
  - giving landlords a choice of young people
  - putting forward young people who have done some life skills or tenancy training
  - providing assistance or advice with tenancy matters (e.g. HMO registering).
- Dispersed/step-down housing – helping care leavers move gradually into independent living. Some supported housing providers have dispersed housing attached to their projects, usually as shared tenancies, that allow young people with higher support needs to try out managing their own tenancy within the safety of a housing project they already know. Tenancies can be available for several months or longer until the young person is ready to move out. In these arrangements, it may be that the local authority or the provider organisation has agreed a lease or license with a private landlord and is then sub-letting to young people. This can be a good way to establish longer term arrangements that can be closely managed by the local authority.
- Support to use ‘setting up home’ allowance – care leavers are entitled to a one-off grant when they leave care, usually worth around £2,000. Depending on their living situation when they leave care, young people may need some of the money immediately but others are more likely to need it only when they are ready to furnish their own independent housing.

### Example

Crisis’s training toolkit<sup>24</sup> gives useful information about accessing the private rented sector.

### Top tips

- Consider the option of shared social housing for care leavers or other young people.
- Housing teams are the experts in working with private landlords and are likely to have a private rented access scheme. Rather than develop a different scheme, try to work with what is already there. This could include taking properties on lease or license and sub-letting to young people as part of their progression to independence.
- When assisting care leavers to find suitable accommodation, personal advisers are required to make sure that the choice is affordable within the young person’s income. It is important that personal advisers help young people to work out how they will continue to pay for their accommodation if they are living in the private rented sector after their Housing Benefit reduces at age 22 to the level of the Shared Accommodation Rate. Otherwise, there is a real risk that care leavers could lose their housing. Many care leavers will no longer have a personal adviser when they are 22, so advanced planning is critical.
- Some young people can lose items bought using their setting up home allowance if they lose the tenancy where they kept them. For care leavers who experience multiple moves, it may be necessary to provide some facility to store their belongings when they are not needed.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/move-on-to-private-renting-.html>



# Annex 1: The legal framework

## Leaving care legislation

Care leavers in England have a range of entitlements set out in legislation to ensure that they are properly housed. In addition, care leavers receive some additional support through the general homelessness legislation. This section sets out the key legislation and its interpretation through case law.

The **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000**<sup>25</sup> sets out various duties that local authorities have towards young people in and leaving care, including those relating to accommodation. The duties differ depending on care leaver status (i.e. eligible, qualifying, relevant or former relevant child) but the general requirements are that local authorities should:

- plan with young people and involve them in decisions
- avoid moving young people who are settled
- assess young people's needs and prepare them for any move
- ensure that the accommodation meets any needs relating to impairment
- consider education, training and employment needs
- where practicable, offer a choice of accommodation
- set up a package of support to go with the accommodation
- have a clear financial plan for the accommodation and a contingency plan.

The **regulations and guidance** also detail how the local authority strategy for care leavers should take into account:

- the diverse accommodation and support needs of care leavers
- the capacity to offer young people a degree of choice in accommodation
- existing and planned provision of safe affordable accommodation
- gaps in provision
- priority setting
- the need for contingency arrangements.

The guidance<sup>26</sup> states that it is “good practice for local authorities to commission a range of semi-independent and independent living options with appropriate support, for example supported accommodation schemes, foyers, supported lodgings and access to independent tenancies in the social and private rented sectors with flexible support” (paragraph 7.2). It also advises that “provision and partnerships should be developed in such a way as to permit young people to move to other accommodation in a crisis, including returning to more supportive accommodation if appropriate” (paragraph 7.77).

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers>

It also states that “Children’s Services will need to work with housing strategy, housing options, housing related support functions and other partners to secure a range of suitable housing and support options for young people leaving care” (paragraph 7.4) and that “Housing Services and Children’s Services should adopt a shared strategic approach to the provision of emergency accommodation and housing and support pathways for young people in order to avoid the use of B&B accommodation” (paragraph 7.79).

In January 2015, the Department for Education revised guidance to clarify that B&Bs were unsuitable accommodation for care leavers, and should be used for no more than two working days in an emergency (paragraph 7.12).

Statutory guidance following the Children Act 1989, **Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children**,<sup>27</sup> sets out additional requirements on local authorities regarding looked after children’s accommodation. Section 22G of the 1989 Act requires local authorities to:

Take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority’s area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority’s area (‘the sufficiency duty’).

A 2010 judgement from the Court of Appeal clarified the duty on Children’s Services authorities to provide accommodation for care leavers aged over 18 (“former relevant children”) in certain circumstances. **R (on the application of SO) v Barking and Dagenham**<sup>28</sup> concluded that:

...if the former relevant child is unable to access appropriate accommodation through some other means (such as through a combination of a council tenancy and housing benefit), and the provision of accommodation is necessary for that young person’s welfare, then social services will be under a duty to provide or arrange suitable accommodation.

Since 2013, **Ofsted’s single inspection framework**<sup>29</sup> has included a sub-judgement for leaving care services. In terms of accommodation, the inspection framework sets out that a ‘good’ authority would have the following characteristics:

- care leavers are safe and feel safe, particularly where they are living, and are helped to understand how their life choices will affect their safety and well-being.
- care leavers succeed in their transition to greater independence and adulthood at a time that is right for them. Young people aged 16 and 17 are encouraged to remain looked after until their 18th birthday where (and this will usually be the case) this is in their best interest. They can remain in

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-sufficient-accommodation-for-looked-after-children>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.maxwellgillott.com/pdf/accommodation-former-relevant-children.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-framework>

placements beyond their 18th birthday or, where more appropriate, live in permanent and affordable accommodation that meets their needs and those of their children, where relevant.

- care leavers are helped to find housing solutions that best meet their needs. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and alternative plans are in place.
- accommodation for care leavers is appropriate for each young person to safely develop their independence skills. Houses of multiple occupancy are only used when it is a young person’s preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests.

## Housing and homelessness legislation

The **Housing Act 1996**<sup>30</sup> sets out requirements on local authorities to assist people who are homeless. Part 7 requires that local authorities secure suitable accommodation for a person who meets all of the four statutory tests:

- is eligible for assistance (broadly, their immigration status is not restricted);
- is homeless (or threatened with homelessness within 28 days);
- has a priority need for accommodation (specified categories of people); and
- is not intentionally homeless.

In addition, local authorities use their discretion regarding whether a household has a local connection.

The **Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002**<sup>31</sup> extended the priority need categories. Among others, they now include:

- homeless 18-20 year-olds who were in care at 16 or 17 except for those in higher residential or further education requiring vacation accommodation
- homeless people over the age of 21 who are assessed as vulnerable as a result of having been in care in the past.

The **Homelessness Act 2002**<sup>32</sup> places a duty on housing authorities to have a strategy for preventing homelessness and ensuring that accommodation and support will be available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – and places a duty on social services departments to assist in the development of the strategy. Both authorities must take the strategy into account in discharging their functions.

In 2006 the **Statutory Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities**<sup>33</sup> set out requirements on local housing authorities when discharging their homelessness functions. Aspects of this guidance also apply to social services authorities when exercising their functions relating to homelessness. The

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2051/article/5/made>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/contents>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-councils-july-2006>

Code states that care leavers are among the groups likely to be more at risk of homelessness than others and:

- social services departments' information about numbers of care leavers may assist housing departments in conducting homelessness reviews
- it is important that wherever possible the housing needs of care leavers are addressed before they leave care
- making arrangements for accommodation and ensuring that care leavers are provided with suitable housing support will be an essential aspect of a young person's Pathway Plan
- where necessary, arrangements should be made for joint assessment by social services and housing authorities as a part of a multi-agency assessment to inform the Pathway Plan.

Whether young people leaving care are accommodated by the social services authority or the housing authority is for individual authorities to determine in each case. Ideally, there should be jointly agreed protocols in place regarding the assessment of needs.

In 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published non-statutory guidance on **Joint working between housing and children's services**.<sup>34</sup> The guidance sets out good practice in working within local authorities to commission and provide appropriate accommodation for young people including care leavers and homeless 16/17 year olds. Additional guidance<sup>35</sup> was published in 2010 in relation to the *G v Southwark* Judgement.

#### **G v Southwark**

In May 2009, the House of Lords made a landmark judgement in the case of *R (G) v London Borough of Southwark* which affects how local authorities provide accommodation and support for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.

The judgement ruled that:

- the primary duty to a homeless 16- or 17-year old is under the **Children Act 1989** and the ongoing duty to accommodate and support that young person will fall to Children's Services. This will include the range of support available as a looked after child and a care leaver.
- Children's Services cannot avoid their duty to accommodate a homeless 16- or 17-year-old under section 20 of the **Children Act 1989** by claiming they were providing assistance under section 17 or by helping the young person to get accommodation through the homelessness legislation.
- a homeless 16- or 17-year-old who applies to a housing authority should be provided with interim accommodation under the homelessness legislation. They should then be referred to Children's Services for an assessment of their needs under section 17 of the **Children Act 1989**.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-working-between-housing-and-children-services-preventing-homelessness>

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/8260/Provision\\_20of\\_20accommodation.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8260/Provision_20of_20accommodation.pdf)

## **Local connection and homelessness**

Under Part 7 of the **Housing Act 1996**, which covers homelessness, local connection provisions allow one authority to pass the homelessness duty on to another. Local connection is a discretionary test in homelessness investigations but in reality all local authorities will apply the test in most cases, though not all (such as cases in which someone is fleeing violence).

Under section 199(1) of the **Housing Act 1996**, a person has a local connection with the district of a local housing authority if she or he has a connection with it:

- a. because s/he is, or in the past was, normally resident there, and that residence was of his own choice
- b. because s/he is employed there
- c. because of family associations
- d. because of special circumstances.

The Housing Act does not define what is meant in law by having a local connection due to normal residence, family associations or employment. The Homelessness Code of Guidance<sup>36</sup> sets out some detail on local connection. Local authorities use an agreement brokered by the local government associations in England which outlines how they might interpret local connection as follows:

- "normal residence" as six months out of the last 12 or three years out of five;
- "employment" as full, part time non casual; and
- "family associations" as mother, father, brother, sister, adult sons and daughters who have been living in the area for 5 years.

However, this is an agreement between local authorities and is not the law. Local authorities must consider local connection within the parameters of the legislation and Code of Guidance.

## **Local connection and allocation of social housing**

The allocation of social housing is covered in Part 6 of the **Housing Act 1996**. Section 167 (2A) requires a local authority through their Allocation Scheme to give applicants who fall within a "reasonable preference" category a head-start in the queue for social housing. Reasonable preference categories include those owed any homeless duty under the Housing Act, people living in unfit or overcrowded housing, or who have a medical or disability issue that is affected by their housing, and those applicants who would face hardship if they did not obtain social housing. Many local authorities include care leavers as a group that fall into a reasonable preference category but there is not necessarily a statutory requirement to do so as it depends on the local authority criteria set in their allocation policy as to whether hardship qualifies for an award of reasonable preference.

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7841/152056.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7841/152056.pdf)

# Annex 2: Joint commissioning to improve outcomes for young people

## What are the drivers for change towards a joint commissioning model?

Recent and on-going pressures on local authorities are making joint or co-commissioning an increasingly attractive proposition to support young people, including:

- reduced public sector spending generally requires a radical re-think in terms of how services are delivered to vulnerable groups
- increased looked after numbers has resulted in more young people becoming care leavers, with an estimated 50% rise in numbers since 2003/04<sup>37</sup> and anecdotal reporting of higher proportions of young people with multiple and complex needs
- the removal of the ring-fence around Supporting People funding in 2011 has meant reduced budgets for housing related support in the majority of local authorities
- the duty on local authorities since 2011 to provide sufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children in their area
- localism and moves towards more combined authority working are both enablers for more flexible commissioning across public service areas and local authority boundaries
- reduce the costs of tenancy failure, which fall on landlord revenues and increase burdens on services which help young people when tenancies have gone wrong.

## Why consider a joint approach?

We know from practice and research that young people do best with:

- practical and emotional preparation for independence
- gradual, supported transitions with choice, control and flexibility about where they live, how they are supported and how quickly things change
- follow up support as needed.

Services commissioned by different parts of an authority, where there is no join up strategically or operationally, are more likely to result in:

- 'compressed' transitions, such as a cliff-edge of support at 18th birthday
- minimal choice of options for young people tenancy breakdowns as young people move to their own tenancies before they are ready, poor contingency planning and 'burned bridges' resulting in a 'revolving door' scenario for the most vulnerable

<sup>37</sup> National Audit Office 2015 , <http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Care-leavers-transition-to-adulthood.pdf>

The **Localism Act 2011** has given local authorities additional powers to determine for themselves which groups of people will or will not qualify to be allocated social housing in their areas. A local Allocation Scheme or policy will set this out. For example, those who qualify for reasonable preference may include those who are working, actively seeking work or making a contribution to the community, or applicants who have lived in the local area for more than a specified period of time. People who often do not qualify might include those with anti-social behaviour convictions, no local connection or previous rent arrears. If someone qualifies to go on the housing register, local connection is then a factor that may be taken into account in an allocation scheme for determining who on the register gets more preference for social housing.

Young people who have been living in out of authority placements and wish to stay in that local area when they leave care (rather than return to the local authority area where they are looked after) may need to evidence that they have a local connection. However, unless the Allocation Scheme specifies how local connection is being interpreted beyond the four areas of residence, employment, family association and special reasons, then each case should be considered on its own merits. For example, a housing authority might consider that a family association could include being placed with foster carers in that local authority area, or that being in care and placed in that local authority area could be considered as 'special circumstances'.

### Questions to ask your teams

- The legislation and case law relating to care leavers and their housing can be complicated and affect young people in different ways and at different times. How well do staff in your leaving care and housing teams know the legal context?
- In thinking about what housing young people can access, what access do they have to finances? Young people may be entitled to different funding sources, depending on their past experiences and their current situation. Are your teams up to date on the funding sources available? They might include:
  - Housing Benefit
  - Low income benefits
  - Entitlements to tax credits
  - Universal Credit
  - Local welfare assistance
  - Council tax support schemes
  - Child benefits
  - Disability benefits
  - Junior ISA
  - Setting up home allowance (leaving care grant)
  - Funds from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

- costs associated with duplication and gaps, with common pressure points often not addressed (e.g. emergencies, high risk)
- poor value for money through spot purchasing of high cost housing and support options when all else fails.

Experience shows that, by joining up more, local authorities can achieve efficiencies and better outcomes for care leavers by Children’s Services and Supporting People/Housing Related Support commissioners undertaking joint or co-commissioning. This has several clear advantages:

- development of more options generally, based on the range of needs and progression
- creating options for young people that avoid the ‘cliff edge’ at 18 - moves are based on readiness not age
- sharing of procurement expertise including approaches to quality and standards
- reduced costs in undertaking procurement
- improved value for money.

This is an approach which could be considered across local authorities, in areas where a more devolved, combined authority structure is being developed. Building on the experience of framework agreements which many Children’s Services have developed on a sub-regional basis, these could involve Housing Related Support commissioners as well. This could be for all supported accommodation provision where the local market and context indicates advantages to this – or it could be for smaller schemes of more specialist provision.

### Approaches to joint commissioning

Partners will need to agree a commissioning strategy focused on:

- delivering agreed outcomes for young people, including education, training and employment. Future housing options and sustainability are increasingly predicated on young people being economic active
- contributing to local or combined authority strategic objectives
- enabling partners to meet their statutory duties.

This is all within a context of known and/or anticipated resource constraints.

It is critical that the right people are involved from the outset, so that any decision to go ahead has been informed by young people, families and other key stakeholders and has the support and understanding of those who will make its

implementation possible. Top level backing and explicit links to key local and, where appropriate, combined authority strategies and plans will be needed to get the process moving and help unblock any barriers to change further down the line.

Which young people are we talking about?	Most common main funding streams
Looked after children and care leavers aged 16 or 17	Children’s services
Children who become looked after at age 16 or 17	Children’s services
16 and 17 year olds who have experienced homelessness but do not become looked after	Supporting People/Housing Related Support (plus Housing Benefit)
Care leavers aged 18 plus	Supporting People/Housing Related Support, children’s services (plus HB)
Other young people aged 18-25 who have experienced or been at risk of homelessness	Supporting People/Housing Related Support (plus HB)
Young people provided with temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation	Housing authority temporary accommodation (TA) Budgets from General Funds (plus HB*)
Young people who experience tenancy failure	Social and private landlords and a wide range of agencies supporting young people
* A Housing Benefit Subsidy system is in place whereby DWP reimburses Housing Authorities for the rental costs of temporary accommodation up to set levels for different types of TA	

## What risks need managing to ensure effective joint commissioning?

Risk	Mitigation
Ensuring the suitability of accommodation for care leavers	<p>Clear contract management focused on outcomes for young people, including engagement in education, training and employment</p> <p>Joint working to agree service specifications</p>
Loss of flexibility (e.g. spot purchase) for those with particular needs which will not easily be met with the core set of options	Consider use of procurement tools like framework agreements for some more specialist provision
'Protectionism' of services	<p>Commission a range of types of accommodation to meet young people's varying needs</p> <p>Manage access through a single gateway</p> <p>Agree mechanisms for prioritising certain groups if necessary</p>
Logistical problems with different commissioning timeframes	<p>Short-term – negotiate contract variations with partners</p> <p>Long-term – map commissioning timeframes in your strategy then plan in stages to bring them in line</p>
Budget cuts	<p>Secure corporate, strategic buy-in through making long-term business case of continued investment based on outcomes and cost benefits</p> <p>Be transparent with core partners, ensuring financial pressures are clear and acknowledged</p>

Providers bring other resources or funding solutions into tenders to win on price but these may not be sustainable in the longer term	<p>Adopt realistic pricing expectations for the services required</p> <p>Test funding models and solutions at the commissioning stage against known or possible changes (for example, the future changes/direction of Housing Benefit costs for supported accommodation)</p>
Failure to link accommodation and support requirements	Involve strategic housing, social landlord and Housing Options Services from the outset

## Annex 3: Self-assessment: How joined up is your commissioning?

On a scale of 0 – 5 and using the suggested set of statements to guide you, rank where you think your local authority is on joint commissioning for support to young people as they learn to live more independently.

- 0 No progress at all and it's not looking possible currently
- 1 No progress and we haven't made a start yet
- 2 Yes – some early progress, we have agreed in principle but taken no practical steps as yet
- 3 Yes – we are beginning to work on this now with a clear aim of joint commissioning
- 4 Yes – it's well underway now
- 5 Yes – it's well embedded and it's positive

### Statements relating to joint commissioning that may help your judgment

- There are agreed and shared corporate outcomes for young people who leave care that are used for commissioning of accommodation and support.
- All relevant services and stakeholders have contributed to a detailed needs analysis, which informs the commissioning process.
- Children's services, Housing and Housing Related Support commissioners (and any others) work together on service/pathway modelling, drawing up specifications for services and involvement in the commissioning process.
- Relevant budgets are agreed across the local authority (and other public sector agencies) and either pooled or managed seamlessly across directorates/service areas.
- The local authority consciously avoids 'cliff edges' based on age, e.g. young people having to make a placement move around their 18th birthday.
- Access into the provision available is managed through a single point/gateway so we know who is in what provision and can better manage risk and meet needs.
- There's a body/group led by Children's Services and Housing Related Support commissioners which meets regularly to review, monitor and agree changes to commissioning of accommodation and support options.
- There is a process for agreeing move on/progression into more independent accommodation (e.g. a panel, an assessment, an accreditation achieved by the young person).
- There is a high expectation of providers of accommodation and support services (for example, having a theory of change, their ability to be flexible, to partner strategically with the local authority, a 'can do' attitude, innovation and bringing added value).

## Annex 4: Summary for Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework was developed in 2015 by two charities that work with care leavers and homeless young people, Barnardo's and St Basil's. It has been developed collaboratively with a wide range of partners from local authorities and charities who together have pooled their knowledge and ideas about what works well in helping care leavers transition to adulthood.

The Framework is not prescriptive but gives a model – based on a wide range of expertise – for how young people can be supported as they leave care. It has been developed for commissioners and managers of leaving care and housing services, but can also be useful for elected members and senior officials to review existing or plan future provision in their local area. The Framework is flexible, reflecting current innovation and knowledge, and can be adapted to suit local needs and circumstances.

The Framework identifies five stages that young people may experience as they leave care. Although the stages are not always sequential, they have been identified to help local authorities and service providers think through the range of areas in which young people will need housing support as they leave care.

Whilst the five stages give practical ideas for delivering good services, the Framework is based on some underlying principles to give young people the best start possible as they leave care, and the attitude of the corporate parent is key to making the Framework work well. These include helping care leavers to succeed, allowing 'mistakes' without harsh penalties, offering flexible support and providing unconditional relationships.

The Framework also relies on different parts of a local authority working well together. Experience from all those using an accommodation pathway model demonstrates that effective joint working between Housing and Children's Services, as well as with health, education, training and employment agencies, criminal justice partners, the voluntary sector and the private sector, is an essential driver of a successful pathway approach. This is "corporate parenting" in action.

# Annex 5: Engaging children and young people in using the framework locally

## Information to share with children's and young people's groups

The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework has been produced by a group of charities that work with young people, including with care leavers. Although it's aimed at people who work in the local authority, young people have been involved in helping decide what should go in the Framework.

The Framework brings together lots of good ideas from across the country about what can help young people with their housing as they move out of care. It doesn't tell your local authority what to do, but it does give them a lot of suggestions about what works in other areas – and so what might be good for young people where you live.

For example, it gives ideas about what young people need whilst they are still in care and are starting to think about the next step for them. It also looks at what different sorts of housing choices might be available for young people leaving care, and it gives ideas for what support is most helpful if a care leaver finds themselves having a problem with their housing.

We want to know what you think about the Framework and how it could be changed for our area. We need to be upfront and honest with you because, like everywhere in England, there are some limits of the housing choices we have to offer young people. But based on what options are available, we would like to know more about what would work best for you, what we can do to improve things and also any ideas you have for changing things.

## Ideas for engaging children and young people in use of the Framework locally

- Share the one-page Framework diagram with existing participation groups, such as the Children in Care Council or care leavers' participation group. Ask children currently in care and those leaving care about:
  - In which areas does our local authority do well for care leavers?
  - Where are there gaps in what our local authority provides for care leavers?
  - Which groups of care leavers in our area do you think would need particular support around housing?
  - What do you think about some of the suggested services in the Framework and whether they would work locally? (Examples could include: training flats; mediation; peer landlord or shared housing schemes; Housing First).

- Review care leavers' pathway plans to assess what is working well and where there are gaps in existing provision. This will assist with engaging those young people who are not involved in participation groups. Ask personal advisers as part of their regular catch-ups to find out what care leavers think about current provision and what could change.
- Invite a group of children in care and care leavers to meet with the Lead Member and/or Director of Children's Services. With the Framework in mind, facilitate a guided discussion about what currently works and where there could be improvements in the local housing services for care leavers.
- Carry out informal focus groups or discussions with young people about to leave care who are in different placement settings in your area. Do young people leaving foster care, Staying Put, in residential care or living in 'other arrangements' have different views about what housing support they need? What about those who are or have been in custody, or with physical disabilities or mental health issues?



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- Underlying principles – young people are:**
- given as much information, choice and control as possible
  - able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the framework
  - helped to succeed

- offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- offered supportive and unconditional relationships
- the shared responsibility of their corporate parent.



## Annex 6: Demonstrating the costs and benefits of housing options for care leavers

In making the case for funding, it is often very useful to be able to demonstrate the implications of not taking action to support care leavers to have a good housing pathway. This could be done through a formal cost-benefit or Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, or more informally using existing tools that are available.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has produced an Evidence Review of the Costs of Homelessness (2012)<sup>38</sup> which explores the costs to central government of homelessness in adults. This can be used to evidence some of the wider costs of homelessness to the welfare system, criminal justice system and health providers, amongst others.

Homeless Link's guide What's It Worth? (2013)<sup>39</sup> explains how to carry out simple financial savings analysis on services, including providing links to unit costs and sources of further assistance.

## Annex 7: Blank copy of the framework

This blank version of the framework (opposite) can be copied and used to map and develop your Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework locally.

38 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7596/2200485.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7596/2200485.pdf)

39 <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/What's%20it%20worth.pdf>

## **Care leavers accommodation and support framework**

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