



**Joint protocol for the provision of accommodation for care leavers  
in Middlesbrough**

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## Introduction

This protocol outlines how Middlesbrough Council and partners will work together to support care leavers as they transition from placements funded by Middlesbrough Council to independent living.

It is recognised that the journey from care can often be difficult for young people, and the degree of success can have an impact on outcomes well beyond early adulthood.

As corporate parents, the partners want to ensure young people are well equipped and understand their own level of skill and aspirations for their future. Having access to safe and appropriate accommodation is key to young people achieving positive outcomes, however this is much more than just finding them a place to stay.

We want to ensure care leavers are aware of the full range of options available to them, By doing so the hope is young people will be more likely to gain stability in other areas of their lives, such as relationships, education or work and improved physical, mental health and well-being

We will ensure that every effort is made to avoid using the homeless route to access accommodation that is inappropriate when assessing and meeting the overall needs of care leavers.

## Aims and objectives

1. To ensure all care leavers achieve a successful transition into independent living through support, preparation and the provision of suitable accommodation<sup>1</sup>
2. To jointly assess and meet the diverse housing and support needs of young people leaving care, through the application of a clear and consistent process
3. To ensure young people are not subjected to numerous assessment processes, and that they do not have to negotiate their way through the range of agencies
4. To jointly ensure that all staff are aware of the housing needs of young people leaving care and the obligations of each partner agency to address these needs. This will include on-going joint training, a robust induction process and opportunities for shadowing
5. To ensure care leavers are awarded priority status on local housing allocations policies at the time a young person is ready (as outlined in the Pathway Plan) to prevent the need to go through the homeless route
6. To provide clear guidelines on the management of difficult tenancies which will include contingency arrangements
7. To ensure that the accommodation needs of young people leaving custody are appropriately planned
8. To identify gaps in service provision for young people and to work together with other partner agencies to address these gaps feeding information into the relevant strategies

## Partner Agencies

This protocol involves the following key organisations, but it is recognised that other organisations will also play a part in addressing the overall needs of care leavers

Middlesbrough Council  
Changing Lives  
Home Group  
Thirteen Group  
North Star Housing  
Nacro

## Corporate Parenting principles

When exercising their functions in relation to children in care and care leavers, Middlesbrough Council recognise and have regard to the seven Corporate Parenting principles identified In the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

These are:

*(a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;*

*(b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;*

*(c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;*

*(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;*

*(e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;*

*(f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;*

*(g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

## Role of Corporate Parenting Board

It is the role of Corporate Parenting Board to advise, guide and provide leadership to the council on issues relating to looked after children, care leavers and its corporate parenting responsibility.

Corporate Parenting Board are required to work to ensure that the council and our housing partners have relevant key plans, strategies and associated resources identified and that they make explicit the contributions that they make to targets agreed for improvement.

Corporate Parenting Board are there to ensure that our looked after children receive appropriate opportunities, aspiration. The board need to ensure that there is correct membership in order to ensure that there is leadership in place to make budgetary decisions and create opportunities for better joint and better offers to children in care and care experienced young people.

## This protocol covers

- **Eligible children**  
A young person aged 16 or 17 and who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after
- **Relevant children**  
A young person aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in a youth offending institution or hospital) when they turned 16 and who were look after immediately before being detained
- **Former relevant children**  
A young person aged between 18 to 25 who were previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'.
- **Qualifying children**  
A young person under 21 who stopped being looked after, after the age of 16 and is in full time higher or further education<sup>2</sup>. This also includes young people who are under a special guardianship order
- **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people**  
A young person who qualifies for a leaving care service from Middlesbrough Council and has been granted refugee status. In addition, those who qualify and are given leave to remain up to the age of 21 years or who have an extension beyond the age of 18 for a minimum of one year
- **Care leavers who are the responsibility of another local authority but who reside in the Middlesbrough area, and can show a local connection with a local housing authority district will fall within the remit of this protocol**

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

## Early Planning and Preparation

This protocol will cover the journey for care leavers aged 16 years and over. However, preparation and support during the transition to adulthood should not only start on their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Planning for beyond their time in care should be integral to the care planning process throughout a young person's time in the care of the local authority.

Young people who are well prepared and supported through the transition will have greater resilience and be less likely to become homeless after they leave care.

- By the age of 16, all care leavers will have a Needs Assessment in place as to the advice, assistance and support they will need when leaving care. This should consider a young person's independent living skills, ability to manage own finances and their views and wishes to ensure they leave care at a time that is right for them.
- By the age of 16 years 3 months, the allocated social worker will prepare an initial Pathway Plan.<sup>3</sup> Each young person will be central to drawing up their own Pathway Plan and will be supported to set goals and how to achieve them.
- The Pathway Plan will be kept under regular review with a contingency plan in place in case the proposed plan breaks down
- Up until the age of 18, while they remain in care all young people will have an Independent Reviewing Officer whose role is to ensure goals set are being met in a timely way and that the care plan reflects the young person's needs.
- All care leavers will be eligible for support from a Personal Advisor from the age of 16 years until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday; this includes care leavers who return for support from the leaving care team after the age of 21 years.
- The role of the personal advisor is to support young people to prepare to live independently and offer advice and support. Sometimes for those young people under the age of 18 the role of the PA is undertaken by a social worker.
- From the age of 12 years all young people in care will start working on their '[Passport to Independence](#)' to develop their independent living skills. This toolkit will be used as evidence when applying to local housing authorities for social housing.
- Where providers of semi-independent accommodation have their own life skills toolkits, it will be important to ensure they cross reference with the Passport to independence. To ensure a joined-up approach the progress of the Passport to Independence will be reviewed and monitored at each statutory Looked After Child (LAC) review by the allocated Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Children's Services must ensure all 'eligible' and 'relevant' young people in Middlesbrough Council's care are provided with suitable accommodation until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Leaving Care Team will continue to support young people themselves to access suitable accommodation until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Young people who have been assessed under the Care Act as having a need for care and support, will be supported to work with the Preparation for Adulthood Lives (PFAL) team from the age of 14 onwards to ensure there is a smooth transition between services and appropriate support in place when the young person needs it

- The young persons allocated social worker or personal advisor will ensure, where appropriate all claims for [benefits](#) are submitted when the young person turns 18. To avoid unnecessary delays the young person will need to have appropriate ID, bank account and National Insurance Number in place
- Young people, who are of EEA nationality, will be supported to apply for settled status as early as possible to ensure no delay in their eligibility for public funds.

## The Transition Process and Housing Solutions

All partners to this protocol, recognise the importance of working together to ensure our young people feel well supported and able to access a range of accommodation options as they leave care.

Below outlines the process and details of the services available to young people who are entitled to support from the leaving care service in Middlesbrough.

- All Pathway Plans will outline the young person's accommodation pathway, taking into account their individual aspirations and support needs. The independent Reviewing Officer will ensure any goals set are achievable and happening within time scale, along with a robust contingency plan.
- Where it is recognised that a young person is not ready to move to independent living, their Social Worker will complete the referral form and risk assessment form to enable the young person's panel to seek suitable semi-independent accommodation a minimum of six months before a young person's 18th birthday.
- All accommodation options (outlined in section 8) will be discussed with the young person and where appropriate their foster carer/key worker. Young people will also be encouraged and supported to visit the different semi-independent provision available to them.
- If alternate suitable accommodation is not secured by the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday then a request will be made to an Assistant Director for an extension in placement, this will be reviewed regularly
- It is recognised that not all young people will be able to gain social housing at the age of 18 years or be ready for complete independence. It is important this is discussed during the housing solutions interview to ensure the young person has realistic expectations and the social worker/personal advisor can plan accordingly.
- The Personal Advisor (PA) will ensure the young person has an up to date Pathway Plan in place. The PA will obtain an information sharing [consent](#) form from the care leaver to share relevant sections of the Pathway Plan with local housing providers where requested.

- In Middlesbrough, care leavers are given priority banding when ready to move on from care placements or supported accommodation. It is recognised that young people need time to develop the skills for independence and semi-independent accommodation offers that gradual stepping stone towards sustainable tenancies. Where this is identified as a suitable option the Personal Advisor will support young people to complete the paperwork/online form necessary to join the relevant housing providers waiting list.
- It is important that young people have a degree of choice in where they want to live, young people will be supported to make an informed choice in where they apply for housing, taking into account local connection. This is especially important for those young people residing outside of the borough, ensuring they are supported in their decision to either stay in the area they are currently residing or return to Middlesbrough
- A coordinated approach will need to be taken for those care leavers who are due to be released from custody. The allocated social worker or personal advisor will ensure they work closely with the prison, probation and youth offending services and housing solutions team where possible at least 6 months prior to release, using the duty to refer route when necessary.

## Accommodation and support options

Young people will be encouraged and supported to remain in positive, supportive care settings until ready to move on. We want to ensure young people are given the time to build up the skills and knowledge needed to live independently

We will ensure that accommodation provided for care leavers is suitable<sup>4</sup> for their needs. All accommodation placements will be based on a thorough assessment of the young persons need which includes ascertaining his/her wishes, feelings and aspirations

- **Semi Independent accommodation**

There are a variety of supported accommodation types in Middlesbrough. This can include a hostel, shared house or self-contained flat with in house or outreach support. Young people can stay up to 2 years before moving on to independent living

All referrals for young people under the age of 18 must go via the Young Persons Panel

For young people over the age of 18, the allocated social worker or personal advisor will need to complete the Housing referral form for commissioned providers and send direct to providers. Referrals for those aged 18 to 24 can also be considered at the young Person's Panel.

- **Living with family, friends or relatives**

For some young people it might be the right option to return to living with family. All practitioners should consider this option using Middlesbrough Family Group Conferencing

- **Social Housing**

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All young people who are assessed as ready for independent living will be eligible to apply for social housing. The waiting time will vary in each area and so the pathway plan will need to reflect this, along with what will happen if the young person needs to move on from their current placement before a property is secured.

Before applying for social housing, the allocated social worker or personal advisor will need to take into account, does the young person

- understand the responsibility of managing their own tenancy
- Completed their Passport to Independence
- Have a local connection to the area they want to apply

▪ **Private Rented**

Another option to live independently is to rent privately from a landlord, this allows more flexibility in location and timescale. Accommodation can be found either through a letting agent, directly with a landlord or with support from the housing solutions team. Middlesbrough Council offers support with rent in advance.

To ensure the property is affordable, the allocated social worker or personal advisor will check the local housing allowance for the area <https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/Search.aspx>

Care leavers are eligible for the one-bedroom rate until their 25th birthday, where it will reduce to the shared room rate. The Pathway Plan needs to reflect this and outline what support will be available to the young person during this time

## Working together to enable successful tenancies

Young people often need support when they take on a tenancy, and this is even more important for a care leaver. Every partner's aim is to ensure tenancies are sustained; however, it is important to recognise that young people may find the transition to independence overwhelming. Where a young person is struggling to sustain a tenancy, they should be supported to secure more suitable accommodation with consideration given to their needs and vulnerabilities

- Prior to a young person taking on any tenancy, the social worker/personal advisor will take into account each young person's individual support needs. Ensuring appropriate support is available where needed. A financial assessment carried out by the social worker or personal advisor will help to ensure accommodation is affordable. The personal advisor can offer budgeting plan support.
- Ensure young people are aware of their tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Where requested, the young person's personal advisor, carer or other responsible adult will accompany young people to all viewings and tenancy signups. Young people will be encouraged and feel supported to not have to go alone
- For any young person moving into unregulated accommodation (including their own tenancy), a Pathway Plan review will be completed within 28 days of the young person

moving into their property. Any concerns (such as support needs/property condition) will be raised with the landlord

- With consent, the personal advisor will contact the new landlord within a month of the young person taking on the tenancy, to ensure joined up working and any problems with the tenancy can be addressed early on
- As part of the Pathway Plan review, the personal advisor will ensure young people are supported to register for all utilities, to ensure they get the best rates and tariffs and to avoid any unexpected bills (no later than 28 days of moving into the property)
- Young people will be offered the option of setting up an alternative payment arrangement with the DWP or if appropriate direct payments to the landlord for rent payments
- All care leavers, who are solely liable for council tax will be exempt of payment until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Leaving Care team practitioner will follow procedure to ensure exemption is applied for
- Where it is recognised that a young person is struggling to manage their tenancy, their personal advisor can look to request extra support from either the landlord (if social housing) or refer to Middlesbrough housing related support team.
- In the event a young person wants to leave their tenancy as the tenancy is at risk of failure, they will be supported by their personal advisor to surrender the property back to the landlord once a suitable alternative has been found. This will help reduce the level of rent arrears, potential damage and court costs to both parties as well as the mental and physical wellbeing of the young person

## Homelessness

Young people leaving care are some of the most vulnerable in society. Without support from parents, many will struggle to adapt to independent life. One of the most common features of a poor transition to adulthood is housing instability, risk of homelessness and actual homelessness

We want to ensure we are working together, and much earlier to prevent this outcome

- At the time a personal advisor is made aware of a care leaver who is homeless or at risk of homelessness within 56 days, with the consent of the young person a referral will be made to the housing solutions team of their choice as early as possible through the [Duty to Refer](#) process
- Following the referral, a joint planning meeting will take place within 7 working days. The meeting is to include the personal advisor, housing solutions officer and young person to look at how homelessness can be prevented or relieved. (Appendix 3 overview of Homeless Reduction Act 2017)

- No care leaver will be asked to make a homeless application without support from their Social Worker or Personal Advisor
- A Personalised Housing Plan (PHP) will be completed with all young people who make a homeless application, and (with consent) shared with the Personal Advisor. The PHP should outline the reasonable steps that the local authority and young person will take to prevent or relieve homelessness. Subject to consent the PHP should be informed by the young person's Pathway Plan
- Where homelessness cannot be prevented and interim accommodation is required, the housing solutions team will work with the personal advisor to secure suitable temporary accommodation inside of Middlesbrough before anything is considered outside of the border.
- Bed and Breakfast/temporary accommodation for care leavers aged 18 to 25 years, should only be used in emergencies and for short periods **Bed and Breakfast/temporary accommodation will not be used for any homeless 16 or 17-year-old.**
- Should homelessness not be able to be prevented or relieved, young people will be supported by the personal advisor to ensure the housing solutions team has all relevant information required to consider whether the young person is owed a full homelessness duty under the 1996 Act (S.184 decision<sup>5</sup>).
- Due to the impact a negative decision can have on a young person, if it is likely an 'intentional' decision is to be made, then a meeting will take place between the young person, their personal advisor and housing solutions officer following the 'minded to' letter being issued. Any decision will need sign off and agreement from a senior officer to the original housing options case worker.

## Escalation process

If any point in the practical working of this joint protocol, or associated procedure, there is disagreement between Children's Services and the Housing Solutions Service, then either or both parties should escalate this to their direct line manager, or where this is not possible, to the next management tier as appropriate.

Disagreements should be routinely dealt with via peer to peer management discussions to seek to resolve the issue, taking into account any safeguarding issues and keeping the young person as the focus. The Council will make available structure charts to enable discussions between the appropriate tiers of management.

Disagreements could arise in a number of areas but are most likely to arise around:

- Thresholds for services

- Roles and responsibilities
- The need for action and completion of assessments
- Communication

Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard and promote the well-being of children and young people. While often a positive sign of developing thinking within a dynamic process this can be reflected in the immediate term as a lack of clarity in procedures or approaches. Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion.

Attempts at problem resolution may leave one worker or agency believing that the child remains at risk of significant harm. This person or agency has responsibility for communicating such concerns through agreed channels.

**It is the responsibility of every professional to “problem solve”.** The aim must be to resolve professional disagreement at the earliest opportunity and as swiftly as possible always keeping in mind that the child and young person’s safety and welfare is the paramount consideration.

If a professional disagreement arises and the issue cannot be resolved between practitioners, the matter must be referred to the Line Manager who will discuss with their opposite number in the other agency in the hope that the issue can be resolved.

Failure to resolve disagreements between line managers must be further escalated to the Head of Service within the respective organisations. If there continues to be no resolution, then the matter should be escalated to the Director of Children’s Care for consideration.

A clear record of decision making should be recorded against the child’s file and the appropriate case management system in other agencies.

## **Reviewing this joint protocol**

This protocol will be reviewed annually or sooner if required due to changes in legislation and/or government guidance. Monthly operational reviews will be held between managers of Children’s Services and the Housing Solutions Service.

## **Training**

The Housing Solutions Manager will attend regular Children's Services team meetings to discuss the protocol and will meet with new/agency staff to make sure they are familiar with the protocol.

## APPENDIX 1

### Legislative Framework

This protocol refers to the following legislation

- Housing Act (1996) Parts 6 and 7, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002
- Children Act 1989
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Sections 1,2 and 3 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Equality Act 2010

Statutory guidance that this document refers to:

The Homelessness Code of Guidance (2018) - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

Statutory Guidance on applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers (2018) –  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers>

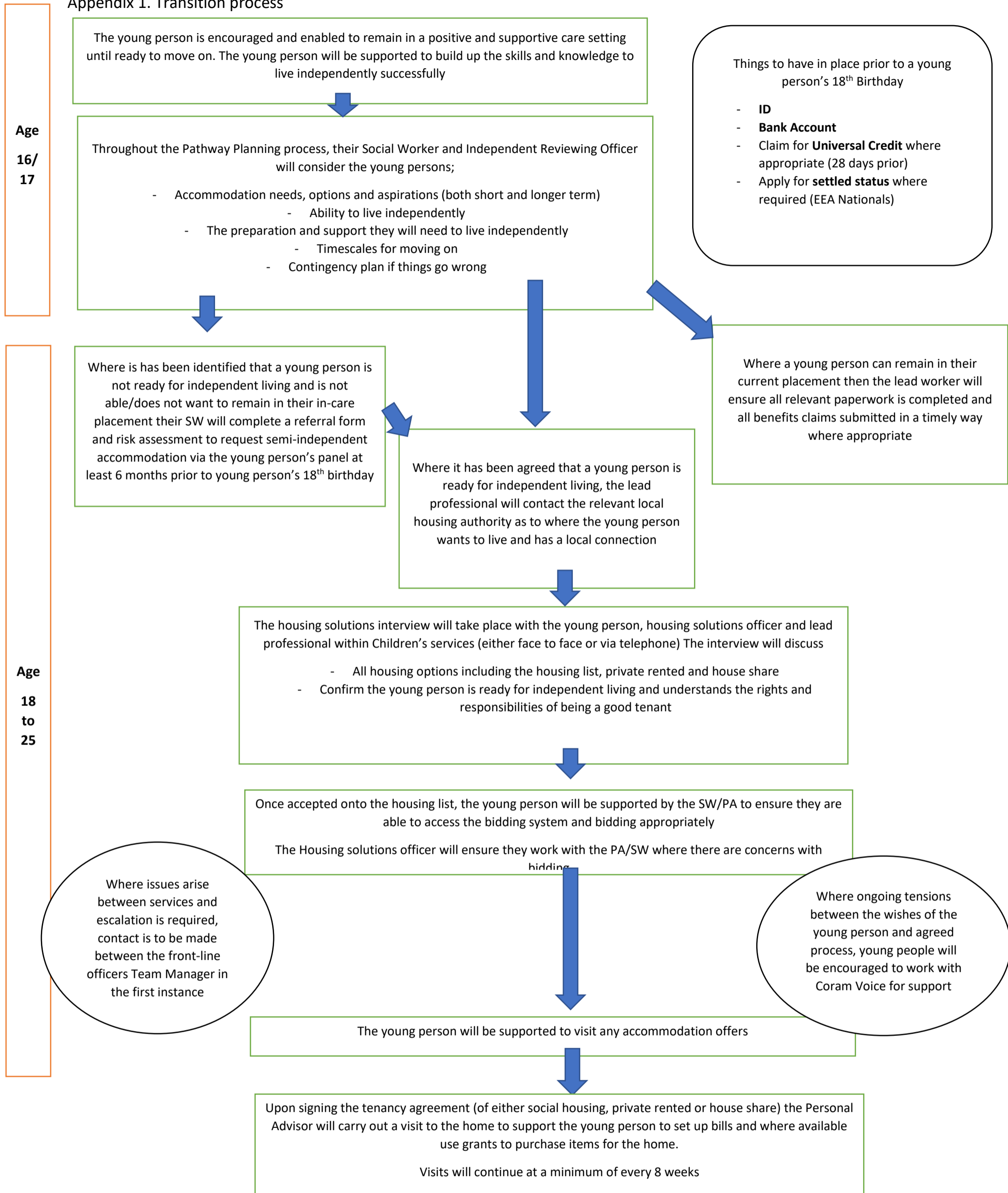
The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/441643/Children\\_Act\\_Guidance\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf)

The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers 4  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers>

Extending Personal Adviser support for all care leavers to age 25 (2018)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/extending-personal-adviser-support-to-age-25>

Local Offer Guidance – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-offer-guidance>

## Appendix 1. Transition process



Upon a young person moving into unregulated accommodation (including their own tenancy), a Pathway Plan review will be completed within 28 days of the young person moving into the property. Any concerns (such as support needs/property condition etc.) will be raised with the landlord/key worker



The Personal Advisor will support the young person or ensure they have support available to set up the tenancy and sustain it. (within 28 days of them moving in)

This support will include;

- Applying for Universal credit (where appropriate) providing a copy of their tenancy agreement for the housing element (housing benefit if in supported accommodation)
- Setting up/requesting direct payments to the landlord from UC where there are budgeting concerns
  - Applying for Council Tax exemption where applicable
  - Contacting relevant utility companies and providing metre readings



Where there are concerns during the tenancy and the young person is struggling, extra support will be explored. Where appropriate a multi-agency meeting with the landlord will take place to agree how to appropriately support the young person and they are aware of any concerns and what is expected of them before any legal action/steps to evict happens



Where it is agreed the young person is not coping, then 'safe surrender' should always be discussed as an option before any notice is served. If this was to happen the PA would need to ensure appropriate alternate accommodation is secured for the young person beforehand.

Where a notice is served, the PA will make a referral to the Local Housing Authority under Duty to Refer. This can be made up to 56 days prior to homelessness and made to the area of the young person's choice with consent



Following the referral, a joint meeting will take place with housing within 7 working days, to include the housing solutions officer, young person and personal advisor where,

- Accommodation options will be discussed
- Can homelessness be prevented/relieved?
- A Personalised Housing Plan will be provided and shared with both the young person and PA (where the young person gives consent)





### Appendix 3 Homelessness Reduction Act flowchart

