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# Young People and Care Experienced Joint Housing Protocol

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*August 2025*

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<b>Policy Name:</b>
Young People and Care Experienced Joint Housing Protocol
<b>Policy Description:</b>
This protocol outlines how Bedford Borough Housing, Children’s Services and other key agencies each play a role in providing the resources and support to care experienced young people to support a successful transition to independent living.
<b>Key Contributors:</b>
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Approved
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<b>Date Approved:</b>
11th August 2025 – CEF SLT
<b>Policy Review Date:</b>
Annually – August 2026

## Aim of the Protocol

The aim of this protocol is to outline how Bedford Borough Council and other key agencies each play a full role in providing the resources and support to Care Experienced young people to support a successful transition to independent living. The document aims to

- 1. Set out a framework for allocating housing in Bedford Borough.**
- 2. Clarify joint working procedures for young people leaving care in terms of their move on to permanent re-housing.**
- 3. Address the housing needs of Care Experienced young people who can transition to independent living in a planned and supported way..**

## Introduction

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This protocol between Bedford Borough Council's Children's Social Care and Housing Services outlines the arrangements for Care Experienced young people transitioning to independent living. It details how these services will collaborate to assess housing options, support Care Experienced young people young people in securing suitable accommodation and effectively manage housing crises if they arise. The protocol aims to proactively identify Care Experienced young people at risk of homelessness and take preventive action. In cases where Care Experienced young people do become homeless, the protocol ensures a swift, safe, and integrated response.

Our [Corporate Plan 2024-2028](#) and [Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2028](#) emphasizes the collective responsibility of all elected members, council staff, and partner agencies to provide the best possible support and safeguarding to children in care and those leaving care. Our priorities for Care Experienced young people young people include:

### Staying Put

Supporting young people to remain with their foster carers after 18 and up to the age of 21 if they wish.

### Education and Employment

Assisting young people in making the most of opportunities in training, further education, and employment, with the support of a personal advisor and access to our Virtual College until the age of 25.

### Housing Support

Ensuring Care Experienced young people receive priority in our housing allocations scheme, including the ability to bid for social housing and receive one supported choice offer for social housing. They will be supported to move and settle into their new home, ensuring they are happy, safe, and able to sustain their tenancy long-term.

### Independent Living Skills

Helping Care Experienced young people learn practical skills needed to live independently, such as managing budgets and applying for jobs, and providing ongoing advice as they gain independence.

### Corporate Parenting

Ensuring Care Experienced young people receive the same level of care and support as others would expect from a reasonable parent, recognizing that leaving care too early can present significant challenges.

### **Addressing Inequalities**

Committing to making a difference and addressing the inequalities faced by Care Experienced young people, who often have poorer outcomes compared to their peers.

### **Multi-Agency Approach**

Adopting a multi-agency approach to secure accommodation for Care Experienced young people, ensuring agencies work together to meet statutory duties and corporate parenting responsibilities.

### **Priority Need**

Presuming all Care Experienced young people are in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation until the age of 25, and ensuring no Care Experienced young people is presumed 'intentionally homeless' until the age of 25.

### **Lifelong Corporate Parenting**

Committing to lifelong corporate parenting and ensuring Care Experienced young people adults continue to receive bespoke support, including those aged 25 years and older. Providing information, advice, and guidance, and setting up services for Care Experienced young people aged 25 and over, including community hubs, peer support, and advice on debt management.

### **Housing Tenancy Support**

Providing access to a housing tenancy officer to support Care Experienced young people with specific issues related to social housing, particularly in the first 6 months of their tenancy, and coordinating support for issues stemming from anti-social behaviour.

This protocol should be read in conjunction with the following strategies, policies and protocols which inform our practice and support in relation to Care Experienced young people:

### **Housing**

- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

### **Children's Social Care**

- Staying Put Policy
- Progression to Adulthood Multi-Agency Transition Protocol
- Bedford's Care Leavers Local Offer

### **Adults Social Care**

- Shared Lives Scheme

The protocol has also been developed taking account of the Joint housing protocols for Care Experienced young people: good practice advice.

The legislation establishes the concept of the 'Corporate Parent' and requires the local authority to provide planned and 'joined up' services. Bedford Borough Council Children Social Care have the primary responsibility for accommodation, housing and support needs for all Looked after Children up to the age of eighteen at which point the primary responsibility for housing transfers to the Bedford Borough Council housing services.

### **The Local Offer**

All local authorities have a legal obligation to support young people making a transition from care to independence. Local authorities are required under section 2 of the CSWA to publish a [local offer](#), which sets out the services and the support available for Care Experienced young people.

### **Eligibility Criteria under this Protocol**

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- A young person has been looked after by Bedford Children's Services either on a Section 31 Care Order or Accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- Bedford is the 'Responsible Authority' as set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- A young person has submitted an on-line application to Bedford Borough Council's Housing Register at <http://www.myhomeoptions.org.uk/>.
- A young person is assessed by Children's Social Care, Supporting Futures Team as capable of living independently.
- A young person has demonstrated that they are able to make use of support networks including their current/previous carer/carers, their social worker and personal adviser.
- A young person has engaged in their Leaving Care Assessment of Need and subsequent practical skills programme as set out in their Pathway Plan including life skills and tenancy sustainment training.
- In most circumstances, a young person is over the age of seventeen and a half.

## Transitions Planning

### Accommodation and Support Options for Care Experienced Young People

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The Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and the Secretary of State for Education consider that all young people leaving care should have safe and appropriate accommodation to meet their needs.

A young person's housing options will be considered on an individual basis and based on an assessment of need. For each of the potential options listed below a young person will be supported by their Social Worker / Personal Advisor to make relevant applications.

#### Staying Put

A staying put arrangement allows a child to remain with their foster family after turning 18. Bedford Borough supports these arrangements if they benefit the young person's welfare.

The Children in our Care will organise staying put arrangements for those choosing to stay with their foster carer. Personal advisors should refer to the "[Staying Put](#)" policy for details.

Young people in these arrangements will be assessed for independence readiness by their foster carers.

#### Friends or Family

Some young people choose to live with family after leaving care. This can be temporary or long-term. Support is available to help maintain positive relationships, including mediation and family group conferencing.

Family member's views will also be incorporated within the Pathway Plan which will capture what family life looks like for the young person.

Direct visits (keeping in-touch) will continue once the move is completed and ideally in the family home.

#### Private and Voluntary Supported Accommodation

Care Experienced young people whose needs are not met with Staying Put or Friends and Family but still require support before taking on their own tenancy will be considered for an externally commissioned provision.

In these circumstances, the Local Authority will ensure that accommodation provided for Care Experienced young people is suitable for their needs.

#### Support for Young Parents

Young Parent Project: offering supported accommodation for young parents aged 16-25 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The support extends to subsidised nursery places and developing networks.

Young Parent Project Helps Support Young Parents to Live Independently ([chsgroup.org.uk](https://chsgroup.org.uk)). Parents may also access supported accommodation via In-Form (see below 'Supported Accommodation').

### **Support for Young People with Disabilities**

Young people who require an adapted property will be supported to complete a medical assessment form for consideration by the councils' medical advisers.

### **Supported Lodgings**

The [scheme](#) is available to young people aged 16-21 years.

The young person will reside in the home with the Supported Lodgings provider, with support given to help the young person develop skills for independent living.

### **Social Housing**

Social Housing Applications for social housing are based on Bedford Boroughs Housing Allocation Scheme. Applicants need to be aged 18 or over and meet with the eligibility criteria to join the council's Housing Register.

Our Housing Allocation Scheme gives Care Experienced young people aged 25 or under who can manage a social housing tenancy additional priority through the banding criteria.

These young people are then able to bid for a one-bedroom flat or studio in Bedford through the Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme and the One-Time offer.

## Procedure for Application and Allocation

### Supporting Futures Team / Children in OUR Care Team when a Young Person reaches the age of 17 years and 6 months\*

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*\*(In exceptional circumstances, where the Supporting Futures Team adviser deems it appropriate the young person may apply sooner from their 16th birthday, but a rent guarantor or trustee must be in place for any tenancy offered)*

All eligible young people should complete an on-line application to join Bedford Borough Council's Housing Register at <http://www.myhomeoptions.org.uk/>.

This should be undertaken as a joint task involving the young person and their leaving care social worker or personal adviser.

The form should also be used to assess a young person's housing needs and promote discussion about their housing options and choices.

To highlight the submission of the application form the social worker or personal adviser must email Bedford Borough Council's Housing Assessment Team at [dutytorefer@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:dutytorefer@bedford.gov.uk) confirming the applicants' full name and that they are registering to apply for move-on housing. Please state 'Care Experienced Young People' in the subject header.

A copy of the following documents must be sent by the Supporting Futures Team with the completed application form:

- Needs assessment / Pathway Plan.
- Notice of care placement ending from the Supporting Futures Team.
- Passport photo (endorsed by the young persons leaving care personal adviser).
- All other relevant information requested on the application form (please see Appendix 1 for evidence requirements).

### Action by the Housing Assessment Team on receipt of Application Form

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On receipt of the completed application form and supporting documents, the housing assessment team will register the young person's application. The application will be placed in 'Band B: Higher Level Housing Need with Reasonable Preference' under para 7.3.3 of the Allocations Scheme. The applicant's registration will be assessed but suspended at this stage and made live on their 18th birthday.

This assessment will be subject to confirmation by the Supporting Futures Team that the young person has been assessed as able to manage independent accommodation (see below).

## **Assessment by the Children in Our Care Team / Supporting Futures Team**

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In reviewing the Pathway Plan at 17 and a half years, the Supporting Futures Team will assess whether a young person is able to manage independent accommodation and provide a notice of care placement ending. The young person can stay in their placement up to the age of eighteen while suitable housing becomes available through the Bedford Borough Council Housing Register or other suitable rehousing options.

'Staying Put' (post 18 years) is available to young people up to the age of 21 years if both the former foster carers and the young person agree to this arrangement. Refer to Bedford 'Staying Put' Policy.

There are 3 likely outcomes from the assessment:

### **1. Ready for a tenancy**

If the young person is assessed as ready to live independently and capable of sustaining a tenancy, upon notification from the Supporting Futures Team, Bedford Borough Council's Housing Assessment Team will 'make live' the young persons housing register application, apply additional needs and place in the appropriate Band as detailed above.

### **2. Not ready for tenancy**

If deemed not ready for independent living or capable of sustaining a tenancy, the young person's application will remain suspended and the Supporting Futures Team will consider the needs of the young person and refer to appropriate supported accommodation through the relevant referral channels for each individual supported housing scheme, if a young person is not in a 'Staying Put' arrangement.

### **3. Unlikely to ever to become ready for a tenancy**

If the person is likely to never/not soon be able to access independent accommodation, then the Supporting Futures Team will need to consider a referral to Resources Panel to consider long term arrangements for their care/accommodation. A referral to Adult Social Care may also be required which the Pathway Plan Review will have highlighted.

## **Choice Based Lettings and Tenancy Offers**

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Once the assessment has been completed, the young person will be able to bid for suitable properties advertised on the 'My Home' Options choice based lettings system. The Supporting Futures personal adviser should advise and support the young person on considering their housing options and in identifying suitable properties on which to place bids. The young person must place bids on each advertising cycle from their 18th birthday. If they are unsuccessful or fail to bid over 5 bidding cycles the housing lettings team may make a single direct offer and notify the young person and the personal adviser that the young person will be offered a tenancy.

Direct offers can also be made to ensure Care Experienced Young People are prioritised to move into their own tenancies to reduce delays due to bidding process.

When nominating the young person to the registered social landlord of the property being offered, Bedford Borough Council's Lettings Team will provide the name of the allocated Supporting Futures Team personal advisor to ensure the young person is supported throughout the allocation process and transition from care to the tenancy.

If the young person is not yet 18, the Supporting Futures Team will ensure that Children's Social Care act as guarantor for the young person up to 18 years.

The Supporting Futures Team will ensure that all relevant benefit and universal credit applications are made from the date of the young person's 18th birthday. Rent due prior to the young person's 18th birthday will be paid by Children's Social Care, agreed at Placement & Resources Panel.

## **Accepting the Offer of Accommodation**

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If the Care Experienced Young Person accepts the accommodation offer, a "sign up" meeting will be arranged with the landlord, which the Social Worker or Personal Advisor should also attend. During this meeting, the landlord will explain the tenancy agreement, outlining the Care Experienced Young Person's rights and responsibilities as a tenant, as well as the potential consequences of breaching the tenancy conditions. The landlord will also provide their contact details and information about the social landlord's services. The Care Experienced Young Person will sign the tenancy agreement at this point.

As part of the "sign up" process, the landlord will typically assist the Care Experienced Young Person in completing a Housing Benefit application, for which proof of identity, income, and savings will be required. During the meeting, an agreement will be made regarding future meetings and home visits to be conducted by the landlord and Children's Services, with the support of the Personal Advisor or Social Worker. It is expected that the Social Worker or Personal Advisor will visit the Care Experienced Young Person's in their new home within ten days of moving in.

## **Refusing an Offer of Accommodation**

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If a young person believes that the allocated property is unsuitable, they should inform the housing officer during the viewing. It is vital at this stage that the young person is supported to express their views on the property and location, including having an opportunity to share their concerns or fears about moving home. It is recognised that moving into an independent tenancy may feel daunting and so support will be given. It is recommended that they still accept the accommodation offer and request a review of its suitability to ensure the offer is secured pending review to keep options open.

This review will be conducted by the Manager of the Allocations Team or another appropriate officer within the Housing Service working in partnership with the Supporting Futures Team/Allocated Personal Advisor/Team Manager. Support will be provided to the young person to address any concerns about the accommodation if the review concludes that the property offered is suitable and reasonable.

If the review determines the property is indeed unsuitable, a new offer will be made. Support through a review process must be solution focused with the aim of securing a suitable offer with tailored move in assistance. Each case will be considered on its merits taking into account the needs of the young person.

## Tenancy Sustainment

### Allocated Supporting Futures Team Personal Adviser

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The Supporting Futures Team will provide the Care Experienced young people support on starting their tenancy to ensure that they understand all the terms of their tenancy and have benefits and a budget plan in place and that they are able to set up home effectively and have all they need to make a success of the tenancy.

If a Care Experienced young person gets into difficulties with his/her tenancy, the Supporting Futures Team will take steps to assist/advise the young person and, if necessary, refer them for extra support externally.

A named Personal Adviser from the Team will continue to be allocated to each young person until they are 21 years old minimum but can extend to 25 years under The Children's and Young Persons Act 2008 Regulations - Transition to Adulthood vol 3 ) and Children and Social Work Act (Chapter 1). The Registered Social Landlord of the young person can notify the Personal Adviser of any tenancy difficulties on 01234 228395. If the Personal Adviser is not available, the Supporting Futures Team duty officer can be contacted on the same telephone number.

The allocated Personal Adviser from the Team will check on how the young person's tenancy is proceeding and will update the young person's Housing Provider at the following intervals:

- Within first week provide starter tenancy support
- 3 months after the start of the tenancy, then
- 6 months after the start of the tenancy, and then
- Every 6 months until age 21 (or up to 25 years in line with Pathway Plan for individual young person).

### Eviction from Accommodation

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If a Care Experienced Young Person who is under 21 years is threatened with homelessness or evicted from any accommodation the Supporting Futures Team will ensure a 'duty to refer' to [dutytorefer@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:dutytorefer@bedford.gov.uk) referral is made to the Housing Assessment Team as soon as the homelessness threat is known and will work in partnership with the Housing Assessment team to prevent the young person becoming homeless or support them in identifying alternative accommodation.

In the rare occurrence that it is necessary and where approved by Placement & Resources Panel, Children's Social Care will fund appropriate accommodation until the young person reaches 18 years. If over 18, the young person would be responsible for funding their own accommodation but will be supported by the Supporting Futures Team to find alternative accommodation for example, by applying to supported lodgings, hostels, looking at private rented property in partnership with the Housing Assessment Team.

## Homeless Application Review Rights

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If a Care Experienced Young Person refuses an offer of accommodation which is made within the aims of this protocol, then they have the right to review the suitability of an offer and appeal any subsequent discharge of the homeless duty. They are required to do this within 28 days of receipt of the decision or offer.

Ideally this should be done in writing including all the reasons and any information they think should be considered. The Personal Advisor or significant individual that the young person nominates may support them with this process

## Reviews

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The Supporting Futures Team will review pathway plans every 6 months or sooner if there is a significant change or at the request of the young person.

Personal Advisers will involve Housing providers in the review of the pathway plan as deemed necessary and enable them to contribute to the new plan giving an opportunity for feedback on progress or difficulties.

## Monitoring and Review

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Monitoring of the Protocol will take place quarterly at a meeting convened by the Lead Officer of the Supporting Futures Team. All Lead Officers to the protocol will be invited to attend.

Reports will be provided and issues of concern raised concerning young persons who have:

- Been referred by the Supporting Futures Team.
- A current live housing application.
- Been rehoused during the previous quarter.

Outcomes will be reported annually to Bedford Borough Council's Corporate Parenting Panel Partnership Group.

## Appendix 1: Key Legislation

The key legislation that informs this protocol:

- [Housing Act 1996](#) - Pat 6 (Allocations) and Part 7 (Homelessness), as amended by the [Homeless Reduction Act 2017](#)
- [The Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) - sections 1, 2 and 3

The relevant statutory guidance that informs this protocol:

- [The Homelessness Code of Guidance](#)
- [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers](#)
- [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#)
- [Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers](#)
- [Extending Personal Adviser support to age 25](#)
- [Local offer guidance](#)

## Appendix 2: Terms of Reference - Care Experience and Housing Panel

### 1. Purpose

The Care Experience and Housing Panel is established to ensure that young people with care experience have access to safe, appropriate, and sustainable housing options.

The panel aims to provide a multi-agency forum for reviewing complex cases, identifying barriers, and coordinating support to improve housing outcomes for care-experienced individuals.

The Panel will discuss and monitor:

- Children Looked after six (6) months before they are due to leave their current accommodation.
- Care Leavers up to their 25th birthday who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Issues with access to accommodation out of area.
- Any other complex cases.

### 2. Objectives

- To review and support housing plans for care-experienced young people, particularly those at risk of homelessness or housing instability.
- To review referrals and consider preventative measures to ensure tenancy sustainment.
- To ensure that the needs and personal circumstances of each service user is considered as part of the decision-making process.
- To ensure transparent and fair access to housing, use the Council's Housing Allocation Policy, housing options advice and Homelessness legislation.
- To promote collaborative working across services including social care, housing, commissioning, health, and third-sector partners.
- To identify systemic issues and escalate concerns to strategic boards or commissioning leads.
- To ensure that housing solutions are person-centered, trauma-informed, and aligned with the young person's aspirations and needs.
- To monitor trends and outcomes to inform service development and commissioning.

### 3. Scope

- Young people aged 16–25 who are care-experienced and require housing support.
- Cases where standard pathways have not resulted in suitable housing outcomes.
- Strategic issues affecting housing access for care-experienced individuals.

### 4. Membership

- Supporting Futures Team.
- Housing Services.
- Commissioning.
- Other relevant services as required.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Chair:** To facilitate meetings, ensure agenda items are covered, and actions are followed up.
- **Panel Members:** To bring case knowledge, contribute to solution-focused discussions, and take forward agreed actions.
- **Commissioning Lead:** To identify commissioning gaps and escalate issues to strategic forums.
- **Admin Support:** To coordinate meetings, circulate agendas and minutes, and track actions.

## 6. Meeting Arrangements

- **Frequency:** Monthly (or as agreed).
- **Duration:** 1.5–2 hours - Approximately 10-15 mins will be used to discuss each service user.
- **Format:** Hybrid (in-person and virtual options).
- **Agenda:** Circulated in advance with case summaries and discussion points.
- **Minutes:** Recorded and shared within one week of the meeting.

## 7. Governance and Reporting

- The panel will report to the Corporate Parenting Board and/or relevant strategic housing and commissioning groups.
- Key themes and recommendations will be shared quarterly.
- Confidentiality will be maintained in line with GDPR and safeguarding protocols.

## 8. Review

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually or sooner if required to reflect changes in policy, practice, or membership.

## Appendix 3: Housing Process Map



## Finding out more



### **Bedford Borough Council**

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