



## Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

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Our reference:

To Local Authority Chief Executives in England

3 May 2024

As Secretaries of State in the Department for Education and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities, we have seen the commendable work carried out by your teams in supporting those in care and care leavers. We have also listened to powerful representations made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, people working with care experienced young people and, most importantly, care leavers themselves telling us of the need for us to do more.

This government has set out a bold reform agenda in its response to the Care Review, [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#), including our mission to see an increase in the number of care leavers in safe, suitable accommodation and a reduction in homelessness for care experienced young people. This includes a commitment to strengthen statutory guidance and set out procedural expectations on intentional homelessness, to remove its use for care leavers under 25, and legislate if necessary.

[The Homelessness Code of Guidance](#) already provides guidance on how local housing authorities should exercise their functions relating to care leavers who are already homeless or are threatened with homelessness, and how to apply the statutory duties in practice. In recent months, our departments have worked with local authorities to meet the commitment set out in the Care Review through updating statutory and non-statutory guidance.

**We are writing to you today to inform you of our three-step approach to reducing the number of care leavers found intentionally homeless.**

### Preventing care leaver homelessness

DLUHC has updated the Homelessness Code of Guidance to strengthen our expectation that **all local authorities should develop a joint housing protocol**.

Joint housing protocols codify the practice of joint working between children's and housing services that is essential to support care leaver transitions to independent living and accommodation. Housing authorities, children's services authorities and other relevant departments within local authorities should have joint housing protocols and procedures in place so that each department can play a full role in providing integrated support to young people leaving care. This should help children's services and housing authorities deliver the local accommodation offer to care leavers and play a key role in preventing care leaver homelessness.

It should set out the commitments as corporate parents, and how these will be delivered in practice. It should include commissioning of suitable accommodation and support for care leavers to reduce the risk of homelessness. Our updated [Good practice guidance](#) can support local authorities with the development of joint housing protocols.

## **We expect that intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers are exceptional**

We expect that local authorities should avoid the impact of intentionally homeless decisions wherever possible. The Homelessness Code of Guidance has been updated to clarify that, when a housing authority is considering whether a care leaver has become homeless intentionally, they should be satisfied that the support and accommodation provided has met the care leaver's needs.

While we recognise that in rare situations, a decision of intentionality may be necessary where all other avenues have been exhausted, LAs must have regard to care leavers' vulnerability and the lack of parental support and stability that would ordinarily be provided to young people, when considering accountability. Intentional homeless decisions in respect of care leavers should therefore be exceptional.

## **Increasing governance around intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers**

When developing their joint housing protocols, local authorities should include arrangements for senior leader level sign off, for example Director or Assistant Director, from both housing and children's services for any intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers. This will increase governance around negative decisions and ensure that all appropriate checks are in place and interventions have been considered.

As part of this sign off, senior leaders should review the circumstances that have led to the decision. Our [Good practice guidance](#) on joint housing protocols has been updated to include a template to support discussions. Sign off may include consideration of, for example, the steps and support that have been put in place to prevent homelessness for the young person; interventions that can take place to support the care leaver into sustainable housing; and if an intentional homeless decision is agreed, an accommodation plan to provide ongoing housing and support.

## **Going forward**

Helping care leavers to make a successful transition from care to independence is a priority for the Government. That is why we are committed to increase the support to this vulnerable cohort of young people, to find safe and secure accommodation and to improve their life chances and outcomes.

We thank you for all your continued hard work and urge you to work together, across children's services and housing and homelessness teams, to reflect upon current practice and procedures and embed these changes to guidance in your service delivery. We ask that you, working with young people, take time to reflect on how you are being the best possible corporate parents to the young people in your care and meeting their accommodation needs.

With every good wish,



**RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP**  
Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing  
and Communities  
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations



**RT HON GILLIAN KEEGAN MP**  
Secretary of State for Education

## **Annex A**

### **Chapter 22: Care leavers**

#### **Joint working arrangements**

**22.5** The Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and 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. By working together, housing authorities and children's services authorities can better ensure that as a corporate parent, the appropriate accommodation and support is available to care leavers.

**22.6** The Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Secretary of State for Education expect all housing authorities, children's services authorities and other relevant departments within local authorities, to develop joint housing protocols and procedures to ensure collective responsibility from each department in providing corporate parenting support to young people leaving care.

**22.7** A joint protocol should cover arrangements for achieving planned, supportive accommodation transitions to independent living; identifying homelessness risk early and acting to prevent it; provide a quick, safe, joined up response for care leavers who do become homeless; and have in place joint arrangements for robust scrutiny when intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers are being considered.

#### **Intentional homelessness**

**22.17** The Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Secretary of State for Education expect that all attempts should be made by housing authorities to avoid the impact of intentionally homeless decisions in relation to care leavers aged 18 up to age 25. For further guidance on intentional homelessness see [Chapter 9](#). It will be a matter for the housing authority to determine whether or not a care leaver has become homeless intentionally, taking into account all relevant facts. To inform this assessment, housing authorities should consult with the relevant children's services authority and obtain advice and information as to the young person's emotional and mental well-being, maturity and general ability to understand the impact of their actions. Local authorities should be satisfied that the support and accommodation provided thus far have sufficiently met the care leaver's needs so as to consider they should be held accountable. Housing authorities should work with the Personal Adviser, young person or other relevant persons to make this assessment. In light of the vulnerability of care leavers and the instability they typically experience, it is expected that intentional homeless decisions are exceptional. It is a matter for local authorities to assess each case individually.

**22.18** The Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Secretary of State for Education expects authorities' joint housing protocols to include arrangements for senior leader level sign off, for example Director or Assistant Director, from both housing and children's services of any negative intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers. Before signing off a negative intentional homelessness decision for a care leaver, senior leaders should review the circumstances that have given rise to the decision, and take full account of their corporate parenting responsibilities, which must include considering any duties under the Children Act. This might, for example, mean that Children's Services provides accommodation as an alternative. Where a young person is living outside the children's services authority area, the authority in which they now reside should contact the relevant corporate parent to seek joint sign off.

**22.19** The personalised housing plan should be reviewed and, the housing authority and Personal Adviser, or other trusted and connected persons and other relevant officers should work together with the young person to try and resolve the issues as a priority, to avoid the impact of an intentional homelessness decision wherever possible.