

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

1 May 2014

Report by Director of Environment and the Director of the CHCP

CORPORATE PARENTING: HOUSING AND CHCP JOINT PROTOCOL
FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To seek the Cabinet's approval for the terms of a housing and CHCP protocol for responding to the housing and housing support needs of Looked After Young People, care leavers and other vulnerable young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Cabinet is asked to:
- (a) Approve the terms of the Joint Housing and CHCP protocol for housing Looked After Young People, Young Care Leavers and other vulnerable young people;
 - (b) Approve the new joint working arrangements aimed at meeting the accommodation requirements of these young people as set out in section 6 of the protocol; and
 - (c) Note that the outcomes delivered for young people will be monitored and formally evaluated, with the results being reported annually through the Local Housing Strategy and the Integrated Children's Services Plan monitoring frameworks.

BACKGROUND

3. On 30th May 2013 the Council considered a report outlining a series of proposed initiatives being undertaken to meet the wider housing and support needs of individuals and households who were either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

4. It was noted in this report that work was being undertaken by CHCP and Housing Services staff to develop a joint protocol which aims to improve the housing outcomes for young people and particularly for Looked After Young People and Care Leavers to whom the Council has particular corporate parenting responsibilities.

5. A draft joint protocol has since been completed and has been the subject of consultation with young people and other stakeholders.

6. The protocol will assist the Council in meeting commitments made to young people in its Single Outcome Agreement, Local Housing Strategy, Integrated Children's Service Plan and Homeless Prevention Plan.

REPORT

7. A draft Housing and CHCP protocol for responding to the housing and housing support needs of Looked After Young People is attached to this report as Appendix A.

8. The draft protocol was drafted by a small working group of officers from Housing Services and CHCP. As outlined in section 2.4 the document aims to ensure that young people leaving care are able to participate fully in the planning and decision making about their future housing options and the provision of good quality housing and housing support to help them succeed.

9. The protocol is consistent with new guidance published by the Scottish Government in October 2013 on Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers.

10. To help achieve this it is proposed that housing support staff will be invited to participate in a meeting with the young person 6 months prior to leaving care to discuss their housing options and needs and to contribute to the Young Person's Plan.

11. It is further proposed that a Housing and CHCP Accommodation Group be established. Chaired by the Senior Officer (Allocations and Sheltered Housing), the group will comprise representatives from Housing Services and the CHCP and will meet regularly to consider the housing options primarily of young impending care leavers but also of other vulnerable young people.

12. The opportunity will be given for young people to attend the accommodation group's meetings, supported by an independent adviser, and it will be remitted to the group to progress the young person's housing applications where they wish to consider social rented housing from the Council or Housing Associations with whom the Council has a nominations agreement. In addition the group will make recommendations for the allocation of any vacancies arising at Connor Road Supported Accommodation for Young People.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

13. There are no direct finance or efficiency implications in terms of the Joint Protocol which will be delivered within existing resources.

CONSULTATION

14. A number of looked after young people took part in focused interviews relating to the protocol with the Housing Service's Tenant and Customer Liaison Officer and a worker from Who Cares which provides advocacy services in East Renfrewshire.

15. The feedback provided by these young people was used to finalise the draft protocol and will be useful in determining the operational arrangements for the accommodation group. Every young person consulted felt the protocol arrangements would be helpful to them and wanted to be able to attend the accommodation group meetings if they wished and to get regular feedback on progress with their housing options thereafter. The involvement with housing officers at an earlier stage in the current process was also welcomed.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

16. The protocol has been developed jointly by staff from Housing Services and the CHCP. Drafts of the protocol have also been considered by the partners involved in developing East Renfrewshire's Integrated Children's Services Plan 2013 -18.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

17. Once implemented the terms of the joint protocol should have a very positive impact on the outcomes for young people moving on from the care system, ensuring that they are supported in their transition to independent living by well trained, professional staff in the CHCP and Housing Services.

18. Housing options in East Renfrewshire are significantly constrained by the very modest supply of affordable housing. The protocol will not in itself address this problem but it should assist in ensuring that maximum use is made of all available housing options to help meet the needs of vulnerable young people.

CONCLUSIONS

19. It is concluded that the establishment of a Joint Housing and CHCP Protocol for Responding to the Needs of Looked After Young People, Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People would be a welcome development, cementing the existing close joint working relationships between staff in housing and the CHCP's children's services teams and assisting young people to access good quality housing and housing support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20. The Cabinet is asked to:

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- (b) Approve the new joint working arrangements aimed at meeting the accommodation requirements of these young people as set out in section 6 of the protocol; and
- (c) Note that the outcomes delivered for young people will be monitored and formally evaluated, with the results being reported annually through the Local Housing Strategy and the Integrated Children's Services Plan monitoring frameworks.

Director of Environment

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KEY WORDS

A report seeking approval for the terms of a Housing and CHCP Joint Protocol for Looked After Young People. Housing, young people, looked after, protocol.

Draft

East Renfrewshire Council

Housing and CHCP Joint Protocol

- Responding to the Needs of Looked After Young People, Care Leavers, and Vulnerable Young People

April 2014

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Appendix 1 East Renfrewshire Information Sharing Protocol

1. Introduction

- 1.1 East Renfrewshire Council and East Renfrewshire Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) are committed to providing integrated and coordinated services to ensure that the accommodation and support needs of current and previously looked after young people are met. As a Corporate Parent responsibility is accepted for all children and young people in the Council's care, making their needs a priority and seeking for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.
- 1.2 The transition into independent living is a key milestone and a life-changing event for any young person however the preparation of young people for leaving care ("Throughcare") and support for them during their first few years of independence ("Aftercare") is crucial if they are to make this change successfully. Indeed leaving care, is probably the most important transition that a looked after young person will make and securing accommodation that meets their needs will impact significantly on how successful this life changing event will be. As we know looked after young people can often experience stigma throughout their lives but one way to reduce such stigmatisation is to ensure that relevant partners effectively plan a young person's transition from care to avoid unnecessary homelessness.
- 1.3 Moving onto independence is about more than simply finding a roof. Corporate Parents will want to satisfy themselves that young people leaving care have the necessary life skills and confidence to cope with independent living and the supports they need to sustain the move must be in place. Some young people will need more support than others and a range of services will need to be available. Of course a permanent, single person's tenancy may not be the best option for all young care leaver but through assessment and planning of their needs agreement will be reached about the most suitable accommodation choice for them.
- 1.4 This protocol outlines the legal and operational frameworks agreed between the services for assessing and planning for the accommodation needs of looked after young people, care leavers, and other vulnerable young people. The move from residential or foster care to independent living is a significant step and securing the appropriate housing and support to meet their identified needs will impact positively on many aspects of the transition to adulthood including education and employment. This protocol also provides for care leavers who have found themselves unexpectedly homeless or in significant housing difficulty.
- 1.5 The protocol reflects the priorities identified in East Renfrewshire's Single Outcome Agreement, Local Housing Strategy 2012 – 2017, the Corporate Parenting Policy, and Integrated Children's Services Plan and the legal duties of the council as set out in:
- Children's Scotland Act 1995
 - Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001
 - The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003
 - Housing (Scotland) Acts, 1987, 2001 and 2010
 - Homeless Persons Interim Accommodation (Scotland) Regulations 2002
 - Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003

The protocol is also written in anticipation of the new duties that will be introduced by new Children's Act in relation to extending support to care leavers to 25 years of age.

2. Aims

- 2.1 East Renfrewshire's vision for children and young people as indicated in the Integrated Children's Services Plan 2013-16 states that : *"We will work together to get it right for all our children and young people"*. The principal aim of this protocol is to advance this shared vision, ensuring an integrated and person centred response to assessing and meeting the accommodation and housing support needs of young people aged 16 to 25 who have been

looked after and accommodated or looked after at home or in the community and to prevent homelessness.

- 2.2 The vision from the national report “These are Our Bairns” (Scottish Government 2008) reinforces our view locally that “*Scotland’s looked after children and young people will live somewhere they feel safe and nurtured; a place they can call home, a place free from abuse and harm, a place where they feel supported and confident in expressing their views to develop into well-rounded, successful and responsible adults*”.
- 2.3 This protocol has been written to promote the achievement of good outcomes for looked after young people particularly in relation to the SHANARRI outcomes as demonstrated by the national Getting It Right For Every Child approach. The provision of appropriate accommodation for a care leaver supports the achievement of the following outcomes as highlighted in our framework in the table below:

Housing and CHCP Outcomes Framework Looked After Young People and Care Leavers	
Safe	Safe from neglect, abuse, violence, and exploitation Safe from bullying and harassment
Nurtured	Live in suitable housing Live in a stable home environment Feel secure and cared for
Included	Engage in decision making and planning Overcome inequalities and discrimination
Achieving	Be ready for employment, training, or further education
Respected/Responsible	Positively engage in their community Engage in law abiding and pro social behaviour

- 2.4 Specifically the protocol will achieve the following:
- i) Young people leaving care will participate in the assessment, planning and decision making about their future housing and housing support needs and will have a personal housing plan
 - ii) Young people leaving care will have access to the housing support they are assessed as needing during their transition to independence in the community and for as long as they may require it.
 - iii) Young people leaving care will reside in a safe home and community environment, in good quality housing accommodation
 - iv) Young people will be helped to understand and accept their responsibilities as a tenant as well as their responsibilities to the community that they live in and consider the potential consequences of their actions

3. Definitions

3.1 Looked After Young Person

Local authorities have a duty to carry out an assessment of needs and to provide advice, guidance and assistance for young people who have ceased to be looked after over school age (ie no longer subject to a supervision requirement). This includes those looked after at home, not just those provided with accommodation by the authority. The provision of regular financial support is limited to those who are under 18, have been looked after away from home for over 13 weeks since the age of 14 years and ceased to be looked after over school leaving age. For the purposes of this protocol a looked after young person is defined as someone who falls into one of the undernoted categories:

- i. Currently looked after persons. Young people who are over school age but less than 18 and who are being looked after and accommodated by East Renfrewshire Council.
- ii. Compulsory Supported Persons. Young people who are subject to support and assistance under Section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 who are no longer looked after and are less than 19 years old.
- iii. Prospective supported persons. Young people who are applying for assistance under section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 who are 19 or 20 years of age and who left care over school age.
- iv. Discretionary supported persons. Prospective supported persons who the local authority has agreed to support.

3.2 Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council, to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are looked after. The report "Looked After Children: We Can and Must Do Better provides the following definition": -

"Corporate parenting means the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of Looked After children and young people, and care leavers". (Scottish Executive, 2007).

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Housing and CHCP staff have distinct and individual responsibilities within the protocol, however staff will work together to assess, plan and resource the accommodation and housing support needs of care leavers.

4.2 Looked after and accommodated young people will have an assessment of their needs undertaken at least 6 months prior to their leaving care. As part of this process a Young Person's Plan meeting will be convened and a housing support worker will be invited to this early stage in the planning process to help explore some of the initial activity required to support a positive transition and also provide the Housing Service with an early indication of the possible accommodation/housing needs of the young person. The young person's plan will be subject to regular reviews to ensure it continues to meet their needs.

4.3 CHCP staff will support the operation of this protocol in the following way:

- Ensuring that CHCP staff understand the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities for looked after children, young people, and care leavers.
- Providing appropriate joint training opportunities for CHCP staff in relation to the particular needs of Looked After children and care leavers.

- Seeking the views of the young person in line with the Getting it right for every child Planning process
- Preparing a Getting it right Plan, detailing support for the young person
- Arranging for the young person to have an identified lead professional
- Ensuring the young person has access to advocacy services
- Ensuring that support, including housing support and financial support where appropriate, is provided to meet the young person's needs

4.4 Housing staff will support the operation of this protocol in the following way:

- Ensure that Housing staff understand the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities for looked after children, young people, and care leavers.
- Provide appropriate joint training opportunities for housing staff in relation to the particular needs of looked after children and care leavers.
- Work with housing associations to raise their awareness of corporate parenting and responsibilities to Looked After young people and care leavers.
- Ensure all parties are aware of the housing accommodation options available locally and housing related services, which might include the following:
 - Social rented housing (both Council and housing association)
 - Private rented housing
 - The East Renfrewshire Rent Deposit Scheme
 - Mid market rented housing
 - Supported accommodation (Connor Road for example)
 - Supported carers
 - Family mediation
 - Specialist Housing Support Services

5. Information sharing

- 5.1 Guidance in relation to the sharing of information between agencies and professionals is comprehensively covered by the local *East Renfrewshire Information Sharing Protocol* (see appendix 1) and the local *Getting it right for every child Information Sharing and Consent: A Practitioner's Guide*. The protocol and guide are written to meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act, Human Rights Act and the Common Law.
- 5.2 Confidentiality is an important factor in enabling service users to engage confidently and honestly with services. All services should respect the need for other professionals and agencies to protect their relationship with a service user and support the requirement to maintain confidentiality as far as possible.
- 5.3 However there will be times when it is important to share information and in accordance with the protocol and guide referred to in 5.1 social workers will always seek the young person's consent to share relevant and appropriate information with others as part of the Getting it right for every child Planning process. Where consent is refused the social worker can override this decision and go ahead and share with housing if the young person's welfare is at risk, they or others are at risk of harm, or their tenancy is at risk of failing.
- 5.3 Housing and housing support officers will also on occasions have a need to share information with Throughcare staff or the designated social worker who is supporting the young person and in such circumstances they too should gain consent from the young person to do so. Where consent is refused the housing officer can override this decision and go ahead and share with social work if the young person's welfare is at risk, they or others are at risk of harm, or their tenancy is at risk of failing.

5.4 Housing Officers will share contextual information about properties (and neighbouring properties) under consideration to ensure care leavers are not put at increased risk.

6 Housing & CHCP Accommodation and Support Partnership Group

6.1 The role of this group will be:

- To consider the accommodation requirements and options (across all tenures as outlined in section 4.4) primarily of young care leavers but also of other vulnerable young people who have housing support needs and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Decisions will be made based on the young persons Getting it right assessment and plan.
- To consider the housing support needs of young care leavers and other vulnerable young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and make arrangements to meet these needs
- To review, within Getting it right review timescales, the circumstances of young people who are experiencing difficulties in their existing accommodation and agree with them and their social worker how best to proceed
- To monitor and review the outcomes for young people previously referred to the group
- To monitor the performance of this protocol and report progress periodically to Housing and CHCP management

6.2 The group will meet as and when required but no less than once every two months. Its core membership will comprise:

- Throughcare Service Manager and Team Manager
- Housing Strategy Manager
- Housing Manager (Young Persons Supported Accommodation)
- Senior Officer (Allocations and sheltered Housing)
- As required the CHCP lead Professional and the named Housing Officer who has attended the young person's planning meeting approximately 6 months prior to their need for accommodation arising.

The opportunity will also be given to any young person wishing to make representation to the group to do so and they will be offered independent support to do so.

6.3 Where the looked after young person's preferred housing option is for social rented accommodation, and where appropriate housing support (if required) has been agreed, housing staff will consider the young person's preferences for area and/or specific needs identified in the Young Person's Plan and taking account of the young person's personal safety and vulnerability, balanced with availability of stock, the time required for rehousing and the requirement to support community sustainability.

6.4 Young people will be housed in a Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) unless the pathways assessment clearly indicates that a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) would be better and can give clear reasons for this. Young people housed in supported accommodation will be housed in a SSST and those in temporary accommodation will be given an occupancy agreement.

7. Sustainability and Support

- 7.1 Once the young person is about to sign up to a tenancy all partners will ensure that the support services from Housing and CHCP, including housing support, are in place and maintained to ensure that the tenancy can be sustained. CHCP staff will have continuing responsibility for co-ordinating all planning and reviews, ensuring that the appropriate housing staff member is invited to participate as appropriate.
- 7.2 Young people will be supported by CHCP and Housing staff to make the transition to becoming a financially responsible tenant. Young people will be signposted to Welfare Services at the earliest opportunity to allow financial advice and support to be provided.
- 7.3 In order to prevent a breakdown or termination in the accommodation arrangements or tenancy, staff within both services will work closely together to share information as early as is possible with a view to supporting the young person sustain their accommodation/tenancy.
- 7.4 Although account will be taken of a care leaver's status and the corporate parenting responsibilities of the council, if a young person accrues rent arrears or displays persistent anti-social behaviour, Housing Services reserves the right that they be treated in accordance with the terms of their lease and the council's policies in this respect.

8 Emergency Accommodation

- 8.1 Through this protocol both services aim to minimise the likelihood of young people finding themselves roofless. However from time to time situations will occur where this does occur and the young person will require to be accommodated for a temporary period in a safe and stable environment.
- 8.2 Any placement in emergency temporary accommodation will take into account the need for protection from exploitation and abuse. A risk assessment of the accommodation based upon the individual needs of the care leaver will be made and appropriate arrangements put in place to ensure that care leavers are offered protection. If appropriate protection cannot be given, alternative accommodation will be sourced..
- 8.3 If a care leaver presents as homeless and is offered emergency accommodation, the Throughcare Team will be informed on the first available working day. A co-ordinated planning meeting will be convened within 3 working days.
- 8.4 In emergency situations outwith 9-5 office hours, Housing staff will contact the out of hours service if the young person is known to CHCP social work. When a 16-18 year old presents as homeless but is not known to social work, housing will offer to support the young person with a referral to the CHCP for additional support.
- 8.5 Every effort should be made to avoid use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

9. Complaints and Appeals

- 9.1 Complaints from young people in relation to the operation of this protocol will be dealt with in line with East Renfrewshire Council's complaints policy. Appeals in terms of the allocation of housing and housing support will be dealt with in line with the appeals processes already established in allocation, homelessness and related policies.

10 Monitoring and Evaluation

- 10.1 Individual young people's plans will be reviewed at least every six months to ensure agreed outcomes are being achieved in relation to their housing and accommodation needs.
- 10.2 The Housing and CHCP Allocations and Partnership Group will publish a report indicating the impact of the new protocol on meeting needs and sustaining tenancies.
- 10.3 Young people's views on the operation of the protocol and of their housing outcomes will be sought routinely. This feedback will be used to inform the future development of the protocol and of housing and housing support services.
- 10.4 A new performance measure to increase the number of care leavers sustaining tenancies will be created as agreed in the new Integrated Children's Plan.
- 10.5 The use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for looked after young people, care leavers, and 16-18 year olds will be reported as required by the Local Housing Strategy.
- 10.6 Outputs from monitoring and evaluation will be reported to Housing & CHCP management, the CMT and through Integrated Children's Services Plan annual reporting framework to ensure the protocol is being effectively implemented and is meeting the needs of care leavers.