

CARE LEAVERS ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR WALES

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Mewn Partneriaeth â
Llywodraeth Cymru
In Partnership with
Welsh Government

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The care leavers accommodation and support framework for Wales is a model which aims to help organisations that support young people as they make their individual journeys towards leaving care in Wales.

It is based on the care leavers accommodation and support framework for England (2015), which was produced by Barnardo's and St Basil's and developed collaboratively with a wide range of partners.

Together these organisations have pooled their knowledge and ideas about what works well in helping care leavers transition to adulthood. This framework was first adapted for use in Wales in 2016 with support from the following organisations. It has now been reviewed and updated by Shelter Cymru at the request of Welsh Government.

We are very grateful to the staff and young people who have taken the time to share their expertise.



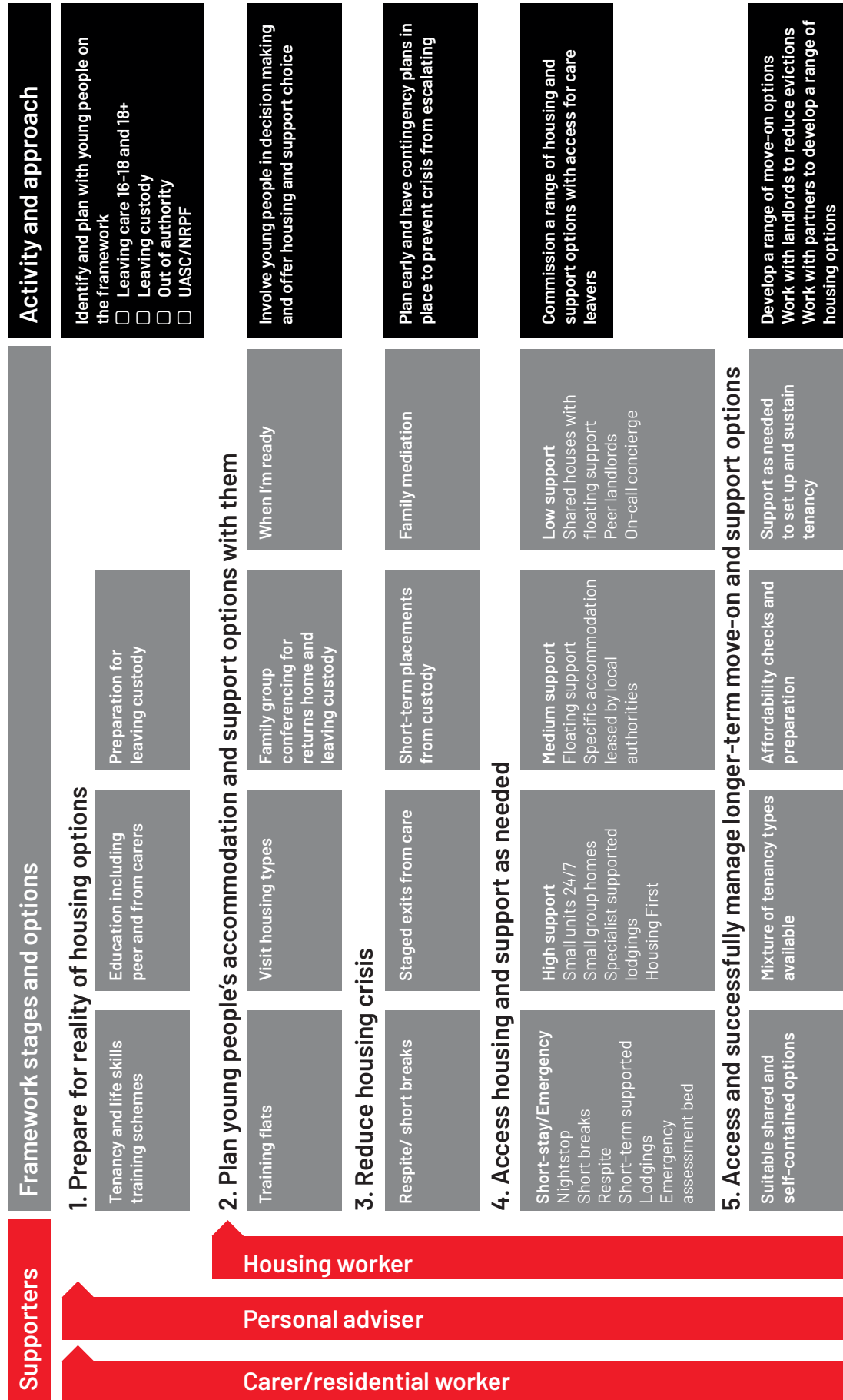
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CARE LEAVERS ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT FRAMEWORK



Underlying principles - young people are:

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



INTRODUCTION

The Care Leavers' Accommodation And Support Framework for Wales is a model which aims to help organisations that support young people in making their journeys towards leaving care in Wales. It is based on the care leavers' accommodation and support framework for England¹, which was developed collaboratively with a wide range of partners who pooled their knowledge and ideas about what works well in helping care leavers transition to adulthood. The main policy changes since the previous document are:

- the publication of version two of Part 6 of the Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children);²
- a new exemption from paying council tax;³
- introduction of a basic income pilot for care leavers
- the introduction of a higher rate of Housing Benefit from the age of 25 for care leavers;⁴ and
- the division of the framework into four documents (a summary document, the main framework document, a good practice guide and an explanation of the legal framework) for ease of use

The framework is written for:

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

Having somewhere safe and secure to live is central to young people having a positive exit from care. Research has shown that young people highly value having a choice about where they will live, and being involved in decisions that will affect them.⁵ Young people's involvement in these decisions is a valuable learning experience as they make the transition to adulthood and increased independence. As well as reducing their anxiety about the future and how they will cope, it is also likely to make them more invested in sustaining their housing choice. A secure housing base is also critical to young people's progress in other areas of life, such as education, training or employment, improved mental health, relationships and building of social networks. However, there is no blueprint for success in terms of what needs to happen and each care experienced person's experience of being looked after is different, and their

experience of leaving care will also be different. The transition to adulthood for all young people – including care leavers – is about progression. For care leavers, this may be a series of small or larger steps, both within care and also leaving care and beyond. Some young people may get their own independent accommodation at 18, but they will continue to need support as they develop their skills, learn from experience and react to their changing life circumstances. Realistically, however, most young people at 18 – not just care leavers – will find it difficult to manage their own tenancy successfully even with some support, and any experience of 'failure' so early in their journey to independence can damage them practically and emotionally. This is why the framework is designed to ensure that care leavers have the flexible support they need so that no care experienced person falls through the cracks. Young care leavers need support from their corporate parents throughout and beyond this transition.

How should the accommodation framework be used?

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

For example, you could use the framework:

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

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

1 Barnardo's and St Basils (2020) Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework. Available at: https://stbasils.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Finalframework2_CareLeavers_A4.pdf (Accessed 14 January 2022)

2 Welsh Government (2018) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children (Version 2) Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/part-6-code-of-practice-looked-after-and-accommodated-children.pdf> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

3 Welsh Government (2021) Council Tax discounts and reduction. Available at: <https://gov.wales/council-tax-discounts-and-reduction/care-leavers> (Accessed 14 January 2022)

4 Department of Work and Pensions (2021) Care Leavers Covenant Offer. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-work-and-pensions-care-leaver-covenant-offer/department-for-work-and-pensions-care-leaver-covenant-offer> (Accessed 26 Jan 2022)

5 Stein, M and Morris, M (2009) Increasing the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation'. C4EO, London. Available at <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/75159/1/Document.pdf> (Accessed 17 January 2022)

The stages are:

- Preparing for reality of housing options
- Planning young people's accommodation and support options with them
- Reducing housing emergency
- Accessing housing and support as needed
- Accessing and successfully managing longer-term move-on and support options

How Can Children and Young People be Engaged in Using the Framework Locally?

As you develop the framework locally, a key to real improvement is the involvement of children and young people. Using a participative, service-user-centred approach, as laid out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014,⁶ will help you to find out what care leavers want locally, and what (often small) things can make positive differences for them. You can also draw on the wealth of information available in young people's pathway plans. Drawing all of these plans together can help you analyse the strengths and gaps in your current service provision. This approach will also make sure you hear the voices of all care leavers in your area – not just those who are willing to join in with groups. In addition, feedback from local providers and support services will be important too, giving different perspectives on what works well and where there are areas for improvement.

Key principles to underpin success

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

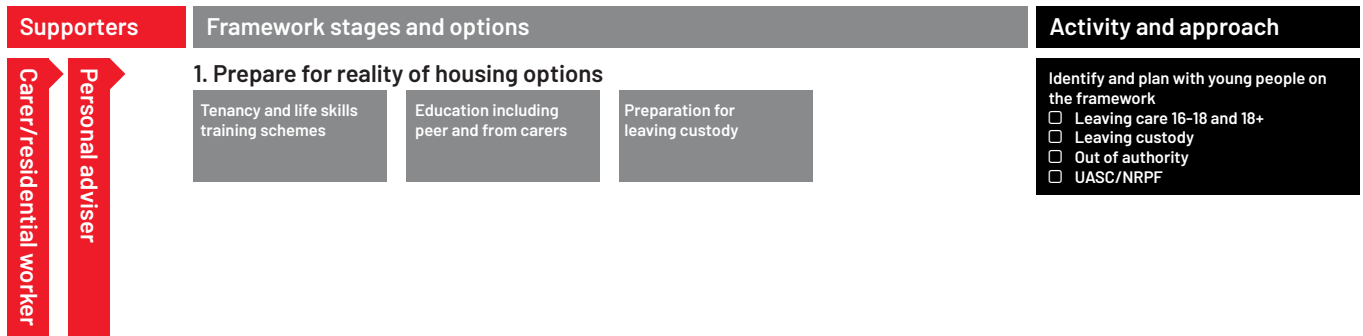
- Given as much information, choice and control as possible
- Helped to succeed and able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the framework
- Helped to succeed
- Offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- Offered supportive and unconditional relationships
- Supported by the shared responsibility of their corporate parent
- Different parts of a local authority working together effectively

The framework also relies on different parts of a local authority working effectively together. Experience from all those already using an accommodation framework demonstrates that effective joint working between partners from across the public and third sector is an essential driver of a successful approach. This is 'corporate parenting' in action.



⁶ Welsh Government (2014) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/contents> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

1) PREPARE FOR THE REALITY OF HOUSING OPTIONS



Young people in care need relevant and accurate information about what will happen when they leave care, where they might live, and the pros and cons of various options. Foster carers, residential workers, social workers and personal advisers have a vital role to play in preparing young people for the reality of living more independently and making them aware of their housing options when they leave care. This means they will need to ensure that they are properly informing themselves of the housing and support available to young people leaving care by consulting this framework and relevant legislation. The preparation and intended next steps should be written into the care experienced person's pathway plan.

Looking back, many care experienced people have reflected that their expectations about living independently were unrealistic.

"[I was] left to figure out things on my own"

Most care experienced people advocate strongly that local authorities should give young people much better information, advice and practical preparation, as well as contingency plans in case things go wrong. An important principle of this framework is its flexibility, allowing young people to move back into more supportive options if they find they are not ready for greater independence.

This is because young people who are looked after live in a variety of different arrangements. It is important to make sure they get bespoke information and tailored advice based on their individual circumstances – alongside more general information about housing options. For example, where a care experienced person is going to have a When I am Ready arrangement with their long-term foster carer, or is likely to go to university, there is no real benefit in giving them very detailed information on supported accommodation and tenancies while they are still in care. Should things change, then the level of advice and information can change. Depending on a care experienced person's circumstances, this preparation could start well before they want to leave care, and should form part of more general life skills training.

The social worker or personal adviser will take the lead in information provision on accommodation as part of the pathway plan. However, it is also important for young people to have access to a range of responsive support services in order to prevent and address the risk for homelessness.

Joint working

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

- Social housing waiting lists can be very long as they are over-subscribed⁷
- Private rented properties can vary hugely in quality, affordability and the services provided by the landlord

Consider accessing specialist educational resources on leaving home in a planned way and preventing homelessness (see the Good Practice Guide for examples). Some local authorities in Wales have co-located youth homelessness services together with their care leaver provision which ensures good access to specialist advice on housing options for young people leaving care.

If a placement breaks down

The framework sets out good practice and what a care experienced person's pathway out of care should be, but we know that placements can break down. Care experienced people need the correct support to stop a breakdown of a placement but also support for when a placement does break from services and third sector organisations. Shelter Cymru has a range of resources which can be found [here](#) and a young person's portal, which includes a Wales-wide directory of support services, can be found [here](#).

LEAVING CARE – CHECKLIST

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

- In local authority foster care
- In agency foster care (which could be out of authority)
- In local authority residential care
- In agency residential care (which could be out of authority)
- Those planning a When I am Ready arrangement
- In 'other arrangements' such as supported lodgings or supported accommodation projects

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

- In long-term, settled care placements
- In a series of short-term placements
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Planning to go to university, join the armed forces, or take up training or further education away from the local area
- In custody
- Physically disabled or with learning difficulties
- Teenagers who are newly looked-after
- Young parents
- Experiencing mental health difficulties (e.g. sectioned)
- In hospital for a long-term period of medical care

In considering these questions, it may be useful to do an audit of your team's skills and knowledge in providing up-to-date and accurate information to young people about their housing options, and to discuss with independent reviewing officers the range of options available and the sorts of issues they might want to consider covering in pathway plan reviews.

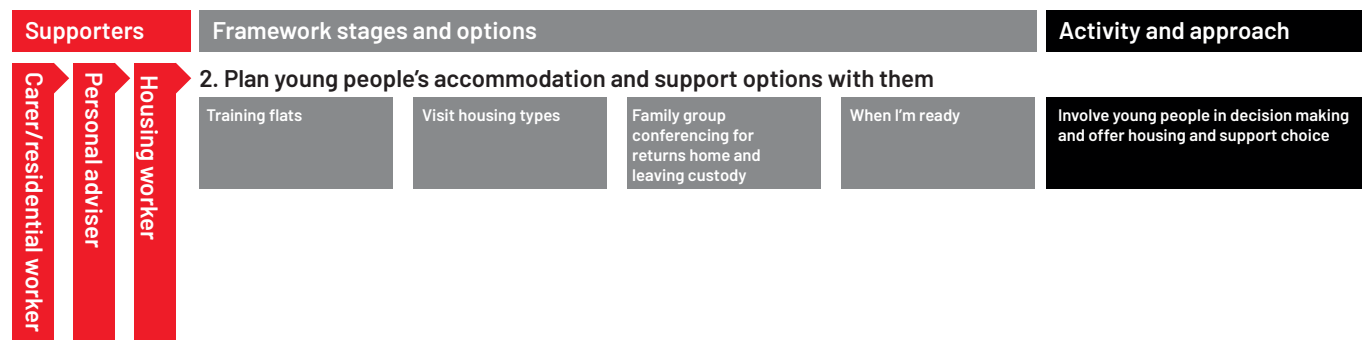
JOINT WORKING – CHECKLIST

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

- Commissioning for leaving care support and housing is based on an evidenced needs analysis
- All relevant parts of the local authority, other public sector agencies, voluntary agencies, housing associations and other local providers of relevant services feed into the needs analysis. As well as leaving care services, this could include housing options services, public health, youth offending services, youth services, probation and local providers
- Leaving care commissioners understand and are consulted about changes to the local housing allocations scheme
- Leaving care commissioners understand the supply, affordability and accessibility of housing locally – including social housing and the private rented sector (PRS)
- Housing officers understand the range of care leavers' needs, any projected changes in those needs, and also any changes in the size of the leaving care population
- Access and referral policies for supported accommodation and floating support acknowledge the needs of care leavers
- Codes of practice and guidance under the Welsh housing and social services legislation support the above and also emphasise the need for planning and joint working to prevent homelessness⁸

⁸ Welsh Government (2018) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children (Version 2)) Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/part-6-code-of-practice-looked-after-and-accommodated-children.pdf> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

2) PLAN YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT WITH THEM



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

Pathway plans set out when a care experienced person will formally leave care, and the intended next steps. Part Six of The Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014⁹ defines six categories of young people in respect of leaving care. Categories one to three encompass looked after children aged 16 and 17, care leavers under 18, care leavers aged over 18, and those reconnecting with care for education or training purposes.¹⁰ There is a legal requirement for these young people to have a pathway plan,¹¹ a live document that is reviewed regularly.¹² Each time the local authority accommodates the care experienced person, a review of the pathway plan must be carried out within the first 28 days of the new placement.¹³ Social workers and personal advisers will have the information to be able to plan those moves well in advance.

Under The Housing (Wales) Act 2014¹⁴ young people should also have a personal housing plan, though this is not a statutory requirement. The personal housing plan could be aligned with, or possibly subsumed within, the pathway plan.

Local Connection

As stated in statutory guidance,¹⁵ contingency plans – or a 'back-up' plan – are a good idea for young people generally. For some young people, a more detailed contingency plan is needed – for example young people placed in a foster

care or residential care setting in another area, those coming out of custody as a care leaver, or those seeking asylum and awaiting the decision. Some young people placed outside the local authority area may choose to stay where they were living as a looked after child and not return to their 'home' authority. Either way the Code of Guidance states clearly that care leavers can return to their local area to live, if they so choose, or stay in the area in which they have been accommodated. In either case they should be accepted as having a local connection with the area in which they wish to stay, even if they have been placed for a considerable time elsewhere. In assessing whether an applicant's household has a local connection with their area, an authority should also consider whether any person who might reasonably be expected to live with the applicant has such a connection.¹⁶

It is really important for these groups that there is detailed planning around their accommodation needs, and that practitioners develop a thorough understanding of requirements under the legislation.

Some local authorities find that having a regular 'panel' meeting between housing and children's services departments can effectively generate a shared agreement about the accommodation plan for some or all of the looked after young people who are preparing to leave care. This is where the personal housing plan could be formulated, if one is required, and it would be an additional planning meeting to the individual pathway planning meetings. Panel meetings can also be used to consider the range of available accommodation options, to avoid a care leaver being set up to fail in a tenancy which they are not yet ready for – whether a personal housing plan is required or not. Young people can be involved in any discussion, including panel meetings, if they want to be.

⁹ Welsh Government (2018) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children (Version 2) Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/part-6-code-of-practice-looked-after-and-accommodated-children.pdf> (Accessed 12/1/2022)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Welsh Government (2014) Housing Act. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/7/contents/enacted> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

¹⁵ Welsh Government (2018) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children (Version 2) Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/part-6-code-of-practice-looked-after-and-accommodated-children.pdf> (Accessed 12/1/2022)

¹⁶ Welsh Government (2016) Code for Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/allocation-of-accommodation-and-homelessness-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf> (Accessed 12 January 2022)



When I am Ready Arrangements

The right to When I am Ready arrangements for young people in foster care allows young people more time to think about where they want to live when they do leave care. The guidance sets out how to plan for When I am Ready well before a care leaver reaches 18.¹⁷ When I am Ready can bring greater stability for care leavers, particularly those who don't yet feel ready to 'move out' or who have a very good relationship with their carer. The carer, who will probably know the care experienced person best of all, should be involved in helping them plan for their next step. However, having a When I am Ready arrangement can lead to a change in relationships with a former foster carer, so it is important to have a contingency plan in place in case it doesn't work out. Whatever the plans, the detail needs to be written into their pathway plan. For further information and guidance on When I am Ready please refer to the Welsh Government's When I am Ready Good Practice guide found [here](https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/when-i-am-ready-good-practice-guide-march-2016.pdf).

Some care leavers may plan to return to their birth parents. Young people can have unrealistic expectations of what returning 'home' will be like, and often these relationships soon start to struggle. Where a return home is the plan, there needs to be substantial pre-move planning and on-going support to help both the care experienced person and their parents or extended family to adjust. This can be a particular issue for care leavers returning home having been in custody. It's also important to have contingency plans in place which can be mobilised in the event of a breakdown. Family Group Conferencing (FGC) can be a useful way to help the care experienced person and their family make the best choices and to settle. FGC is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child or care experienced person, with their involvement. It is a voluntary process and, with an independent facilitator, young people and family members can work through options that might not have been initially obvious, including the need for on-going support.

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/when-i-am-ready-good-practice-guide-march-2016.pdf>

Focus on...

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

Planning for young people on short custodial sentences can be challenging, and young people often don't know where they are going to live until the last minute before they leave custody. Specific guidance, however, is laid out in respect of Category Two young people (broadly defined as care leavers under 18 years old) in order to ensure that they have planned accommodation ready on their release, and that, where they are serving short sentences consideration should be given to holding their accommodation until their release. The national pathway for children and young people (and separately for adults) in the secure estate should be viewed alongside the pathways developed for offenders to have access to social care in line with their entitlements under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014²⁰ and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.²¹ These pathways provide guidance on how to ensure an integrated approach to preparing for the accommodation needs of children and young people when they leave the secure estate.

The pathway describes processes pre-custody, support in custody, the seven days prior to release, and the day of release and beyond, all of which should be carried out to ensure there is suitable accommodation available for the care experienced person when they are released.

A pre-sentence report will need to be completed, which includes an assessment of the care experienced person's living arrangements, health, education and involvement with social care. Within the first ten days of entering custody, a joint planning meeting between the secure

estate and the youth offending team should produce a sentence plan which includes details of accommodation on release. Leaving care personal advisers or social workers will need to:

- Keep the care experienced person informed about progress and their options
- Keep in touch with the care experienced person throughout the time they are in custody, even if they are placed a long way from home
- Keep the care experienced person informed of the stages of the process

Where a housing issue has been identified, but has not been resolved by the 66th day prior to the care experienced person being released, the youth offending team should submit a housing needs form to the local authority, and an assessment process should commence which identifies the care experienced person's care and support needs under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 – which may include accommodation. Once they are identified as eligible for support under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 then options for suitable accommodation should be made available and a package of support agreed with the care experienced person.

The arrangements should be reviewed again seven days prior to leaving custody. A contingency plan will need to be in place in case the first option does not work.

Commissioners of leaving care and housing services need to take into account how easily young people leaving custody will be able to access existing services, and what additional services or support may need to be put in place specifically for them. This might involve a joint protocol between housing, children's services and youth offending teams so that suitable accommodation is provided locally.¹⁹ It may also require agencies that are offering post custody placements to travel to meet the care experienced person in custody, or to arrange pre-tenancy interviews via Skype (as happens in HMP & YO1 Parc).



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

Training flats

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

Visiting different housing types

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

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

Different types of accommodation can have different rent and service charge structures, and some charge rents that are unaffordable without a benefits entitlement. If a care experienced person wishes to enter the workplace and earn independent income, this should be explored with potential accommodation providers, and consideration given with the young person to accommodation that does not present practical barriers to employment, alongside other factors relevant for that individual.

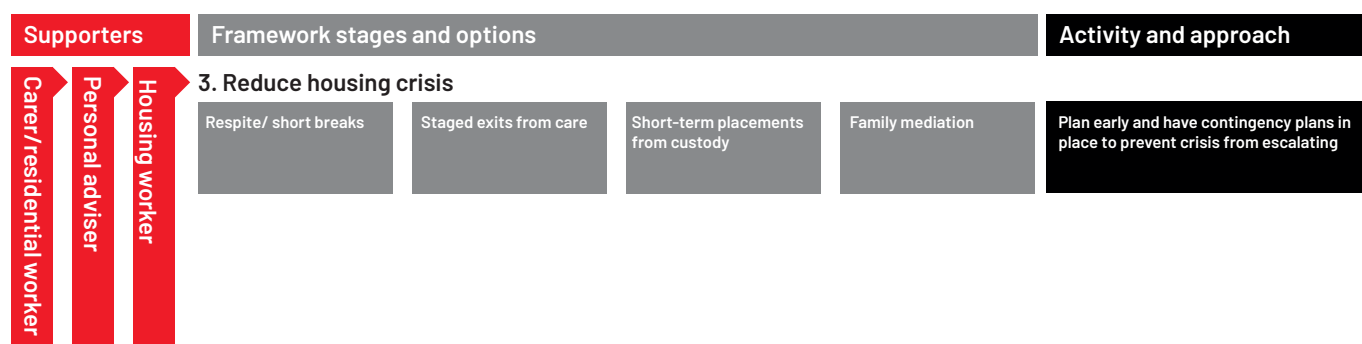
LEAVING CARE – CHECKLIST

Are you working with young people in all these different settings to plan their accommodation and support? Young people might be:

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



3) REDUCE HOUSING EMERGENCY



The experience of homelessness at a young age is not only stigmatising but can, without effective support and housing options, result in long-term poor outcomes.

¹⁸ Many young people report their experience of homelessness as traumatic, leading to dropping out of education, training or employment and resulting benefit dependency. Becoming homeless can result in significantly higher risks of developing mental health problems, getting involved in substance misuse, risks of sexual or other forms of exploitation, involvement in crime and, in some areas, involvement in gangs. This can result in young people disengaging from services which could make them increasingly difficult to support appropriately.¹⁹

For care leavers, homelessness can feel even more of a damaging experience as they often do not have family members able to help them, and despite the local authority being their 'corporate parent', many young people say they feel on their own.

"Depends on [your] personal connections whether you get help." Care experienced person's view on the system.

In some areas, without young people's emergency or short stay accommodation, homeless care leavers describe staying in all-age hostels with older people – who may be using substances or involved in crime – or living for long periods in inappropriate bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation. Bed and breakfast accommodation must be avoided and only used as a last resort; accommodation may lack basic facilities (eg for cooking) or rely upon sharing these with strangers, and can be costly to occupy.²⁰ Statutory guidance requires local authorities to make 'exhaustive efforts' to avoid the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds.²¹

When a care leaver is facing a potential breakdown in their living situation, it is important that action is taken quickly to prevent them becoming homeless. Homelessness can

happen in any form of accommodation. For example, they may have returned home to family, or be in a When I am Ready arrangement, living with a partner, in a supported lodgings placement, or a supported accommodation scheme. Some young people may be in their own tenancy, but be building up rent arrears or be involved in anti-social behaviour locally, which is putting their tenancy at risk.

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

A range of homelessness prevention tools can be used to try and prevent the care experienced person from losing their housing.²² They may need to move on from their accommodation in due course, but prevention can be used to slow down a crisis, alleviate risks and enable a move to be made in a planned and sustainable way. A major trigger for homelessness for all young people, including those in care and leaving care, is the breakdown of relationships. Losing contact with long-term foster carers or leaving residential care abruptly as a result of an incident is damaging for young people and can lead to street homelessness. Unresolved conflict and the emotional impact of fractured relationships can reinforce low self-esteem and an inner belief that no-one cares. For 16 and 17-year-olds who are still looked after and living with foster carers or in residential care, a breakdown in relationships can sometimes result in an unplanned placement move into 'other arrangements'. With appropriate prevention activity – such as an offer of a mediation service – these unplanned placement moves may be avoided.

¹⁸ Foundation. (2015) Available at: https://pure.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/7906947/Hard_Edges_Mapping_SMD_FINAL_VERSION_Web.pdf (Accessed: 17 January 2022)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Shelter Cymru (2022) Temporary Accommodation Survival Guide. Available at: <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/temporary-accommodation-survival-guide/> (Accessed: 16 December 2022)

²¹ Welsh Government (2016) Code for Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/allocation-of-accommodation-and-homelessness-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

²² Welsh Government (2016) Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/allocation-of-accommodation-and-homelessness-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf> (Accessed 21 February 2022)

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

Mediation

While mediation services are usually targeted at young people who live with their parents, they can also be used for young people at risk of placement breakdown. Sometimes a different person, perhaps from a different agency, is viewed as more independent because they are removed from the dynamics of the placement.

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

At a point of real crisis, there is not much time to arrange more formal mediation, nor is it likely to be an easy offer for young people and their carers to accept. But immediate mediation – someone with mediation and negotiation skills who can visit within a few hours – does not require a long ‘lead in’ period, and deals with issues in the here and now. Mediation may not always be appropriate if there are particular sensitivities or tensions in relationships that may further alienate the care experienced person if they feel forced into mediation.

Family Group Conferencing

Family group conferencing (FGC) is another option that local authorities might consider. It is used with care leavers and their carers in some areas, and can achieve a successful outcome. The benefit of using FGC is that it has the potential to draw on the sometimes considerable resources within the extended family and friends network, enabling a comprehensive longer-term plan to be put in place as a preventative measure.

Respite/Short Breaks

If relationships are under strain, sometimes young people just need ‘time out’ to think about what is going on and to make a plan for the future. Offering a respite or short break service can help care leavers take their time over decisions and think about their next move. A respite service might just be a safe place for a care leaver to go for a few days or weeks, or it might offer a range of coaching or therapeutic support. Short breaks might be used in conjunction with mediation, to take the care experienced person out of the crisis situation while working together to try and resolve the underlying issues. Under no circumstances should bed and breakfast accommodation be considered short break or respite accommodation.

Short-term moves from custody

Young people leaving custody are at particular risk of homelessness. The national pathway for children and young people in the secure estate (and separately for adults) should be viewed alongside the pathways developed for offenders to have access to social care, in line with their entitlements under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014²³ and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014,²⁴ to ensure an integrated approach to preparing for the accommodation needs of young people when they leave the secure estate. The pathways involve allocating responsibility and direct joint working between key agencies and individuals, including the youth offending team or probation service, the Youth Justice Board, the secure estate, the local authority, the local health board, social landlords.²⁵

Some local authorities are providing short-term accommodation that young people can access direct from custody as part of their resettlement plan. This might be a ring-fenced room in a supported housing project or a specialist supported lodging. The service can be used for a few weeks while they look at longer-term options available locally or rebuild relationships with family prior to moving back home, or until their chosen placement becomes available. Please refer to the good practice guide for examples.

Changes to Priority Need

Recent changes to legislation include:

- Adding ‘a person who is street homeless’ as an 11th category of Priority Need under Section 71(2)) under part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014
- Including public health emergencies in the list of emergency events (such as floods) under Article 6A

²³ Welsh Government (2014) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/contents> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

²⁴ Welsh Government (2014) Housing Act. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/7/contents/enacted> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

²⁵ Welsh Government (2018) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children (Version 2)). pp. 96-97. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/part-6-code-of-practice-looked-after-and-accommodated-children.pdf> (Accessed 12/1/2022)

4) ACCESS HOUSING AND SUPPORT AS NEEDED



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

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

While it is helpful to have a guideline for how long a care experienced person might stay in a supported accommodation option (e.g. supported lodgings, a foyer or a 'step-down' shared house with floating support), there does need to be some degree of flexibility built in to contracts to enable commissioners and providers to extend a care experienced person's stay, if they are not ready to move on and run the risk of 'failure' if they do move. With the implementation of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, from 1st December 2022 ²⁶ there is a new tenancy framework for supported accommodation. If you wish to learn more please refer to the Legal Practice document.

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

It is helpful if personal advisers are familiar with the range of accommodation options available to care leavers locally, including how to refer young people into the various sorts of accommodation and support. This can be much simpler when there is a single integrated gateway to all supported accommodation options. (A young person's portal can be found [here](#) on Shelter Cymru's website, including a Wales-wide directory of support services). This should also address the strategic planning of appropriate housing. Regulation 9(2) of the Care Leavers (Wales) Regulations 2015²⁷ defines suitable accommodation as accommodation:

- 'which, so far as reasonably practicable is suitable for the category two care experienced person in the light of their needs, including any health needs and any needs arising from any disability
- in respect of which the responsible local authority has satisfied itself as to the character and suitability of the landlord or other provider, and
- (c) in respect of which the responsible local authority has so far as reasonably practicable, taken into account the category two care experienced person's
 1. Wishes and feelings
 2. Education, training and employment needs' ²⁸

Although they need access to a range of provision, in reality care leavers will make up a relatively small proportion of the young people who need wider housing support. It therefore makes sense that the housing options set out at this stage are jointly or co-commissioned by housing services and children's services. This might mean drawing up specifications together, agreeing to pool some budgets, allocating specific beds in a scheme to care leavers, or having a shared protocol that sets out agreed access routes. As part of this process, allocation policies and any proposed exclusions criteria should be considered, taking account of the profile and needs of care leavers.

²⁶ Welsh Government (2016) Renting Homes Wales Act. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/1/contents> (Accessed 22 February 2022)

²⁷ Welsh Government. (2015) Care Leavers (Wales) Regulations. Available: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2015/1820/regulation/9/made> (Accessed 17 January 2022)

²⁸ Ibid, pp13-14.



Joint Working

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

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

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

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

Emergency/Short-stay Provision

Short-term supported lodgings provide safe accommodation for young people in the family homes of approved local hosts. These are similar to Night-stop²⁹ in many ways but not part of the accredited scheme. The option is likely to be part of a local supported lodgings scheme, where most hosts are recruited for longer stays, but a few are willing or want to provide shorter-stay options. Depending on the scheme, young people may be able to stay for a few nights or up to several weeks. With their own room and access to cooking and

washing facilities, young people are given a supportive environment and opportunities to build up their life skills.

Some beds may be made available specifically for care-experienced young people in larger supported accommodation schemes. These may be quite basic single rooms, offering emergency access for young people at immediate risk of homelessness. Support workers may assess the care experienced person while alternative accommodation is sought.

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

Local housing authorities have to provide interim temporary accommodation (TA) for single people and families under Section 68 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014³⁰, while a homelessness assessment is carried out, and if someone is deemed to be eligible, homeless, likely to be in 'priority need' or have no other place to stay. Care leavers are automatically 'priority need' up to the age of 21 so should be given access to temporary accommodation. This option will vary between local authorities in terms of the types of accommodation available. It may be a self-contained unit in a block of housing which is all designated as temporary accommodation, or it may be a form of house sharing, and may or may not include housing management or support. Either way, this is likely to be a difficult and daunting experience for a care experienced person. Support for a care experienced person in any form of temporary accommodation is essential.

Longer-stay Provision

Supported accommodation is a generic term for accommodation where there is some sort of support provided on-site. There are many different models of supported accommodation, which are split here into:

- Family-type supported accommodation
- Other types of supported accommodation

²⁹ Shelter Cymru (2020) Available at: <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/housing-advice/finding-a-place-to-live/emergency-accommodation/nightstop-schemes-for-young-people/> (Accessed 21 December 2022)

³⁰ Welsh Government (2014) Housing Act. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/7/contents/enacted> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

Family-type supported accommodation

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

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

Other Types of Supported Accommodation

Local authorities have some supported accommodation schemes, commissioned by the Housing Support Grant for 16 and 17 year olds who are looked after or care leavers. Schemes may be run by a charity, a registered provider (a social landlord) or a private provider.

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

Small group homes models tend to be commissioned for young people with physical or learning disabilities who will need ongoing support from adult social services. Group homes might be commissioned jointly by children's services, adult social care and housing related support commissioners. Housing benefit and elements of other benefits that the care experienced person may be able to claim due to their disability should also be factored into the whole package. There are specialist providers who are able to provide young people with focused, small- group living arrangements. This could be an option for very small numbers of young people (maybe two or three) to

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

Housing First: is a model traditionally used for people with multiple and complex unmet needs. It provides an independent tenancy, sometimes through a housing association or a private rental, at the same time as very intensive, bespoke wrap-around support. While it tends to be a model that is used for older, long-term homeless people, it is an option to consider for young people who are likely to struggle in larger schemes such as foyers or in supported lodgings. Having your own front door can be a positive option for some young people who have higher needs, as long as there is commissioning of support through dedicated, specialist floating support services, with some 24-hour call-out if needed. There are a number of Housing First for Youth projects now running in Wales.

It is important to remember that, whether they are living in private rented or social housing, if the care experienced person is claiming housing benefit, then their exemption from the shared accommodation rate for being a care leaver will end on their 25th birthday.³¹ The difference between the rent and the housing benefit payable will need to be bridged, or the care experienced person would need to move to, more affordable, shared accommodation, which could be disruptive.

'Step-down' provision

Shared or self-contained provision with floating support gives young people some support while they are living in their own or shared accommodation. Floating support could be provided via housing related support or, if the care experienced person is under 18, funded by children's services, as an additional support on top of the personal adviser from children's services. Floating support assists care leavers to settle into their accommodation and the local community, including accessing local services and dealing with bills and budgeting. Rents are often set at a rate that enables the care experienced person to afford the accommodation with independently earned income without having to rely on Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

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

31 DWP (2021) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/care-leavers-and-homeless-people-could-receive-extra-housing-support> (Accessed: 21 December 2022)



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

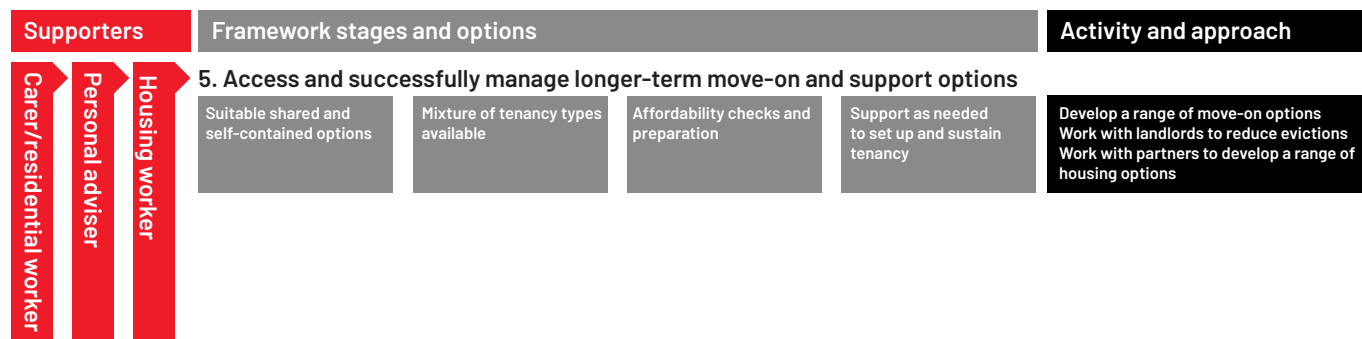
On-call or concierge schemes provide very light-touch housing management support as needed. Young people are interviewed before being invited to apply for a house-share, and sometimes are required to pass a pre-tenancy course before they can take up their place.

Sharing as a housing option for care leavers

Some care leavers will want or need to live in a shared house with other young people, perhaps with floating support attached. It is important for personal advisers to discuss sharing with care leavers who are less likely to have their own social tenancy as an option, as on their 25th birthday, their housing benefit entitlement in the private sector will drop to the shared accommodation rate of local housing allowance. Given the demands on social housing, and the limited supply, the reality is that many will need to share at some point later in their lives. Shared social housing can also be an option, although it is not widespread.

Peer or 'lead' landlord schemes tend to be for young people with low support needs, who are nearly ready to manage a tenancy without support. Housing providers can either rent a private house or use their own housing stock to run these schemes, and sub-let to young people. One care experienced person is identified as the lead tenant, who takes on some agreed responsibility, which could include offering advice in an informal way, collecting rent from others in the shared house, while helping them budget and role-modelling good tenant behaviour.

5) ACCESS AND SUCCESSFULLY MANAGE LONGER-TERM MOVE-ON AND SUPPORT OPTIONS



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

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

There are a number of factors which impact on the availability of housing for young people. The supply of accommodation that is affordable for people on low incomes varies, with significant local and regional differences in the housing market. But the amount of affordable accommodation available to young people under 25 in most areas is already limited, and this is projected to become more challenging in the future, in part due to reduced availability but also due to affordability. There is reported to be low landlord confidence in young people as tenants, in part due to general concerns on affordability and also due to the changes in Universal Credit, whereby rent is paid direct to the claimant unless a specific exemption is granted on the basis of vulnerability.³² While care leavers are a named group that are likely to be vulnerable and granted an exemption, this is not automatic and is done on a case-by-case basis.

Care leavers under 25 are currently exempt from the Local Housing Allowance shared accommodation rate, which means that they are able to access self-contained flats or other single-occupancy accommodation. Traditionally, care leavers have accessed social housing as a long-term option, however, this exemption from the shared accommodation rate has ended for all young people aged 25 and over, leaving them entitled to only the lower shared accommodation rate of benefit.^{33 34} Unless they are able to afford the higher cost of their self-contained accommodation, without relying solely on their reduced housing allowance rate, they will have little option but to move into cheaper, shared accommodation. Currently this presents challenges as there is very little shared social housing in Wales.³⁵

Living in social housing

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

- Housing that the local authority still owns and manages
- Housing which is part of a 'large-scale voluntary transfer' (LSVT) – where what was once council-owned stock has been transferred to a housing association
- Housing which is owned or managed by a housing association, which they have built, bought or leased

Social housing landlords might be called 'registered providers' and are regulated by Welsh Ministers under Part 1 of the Housing Act 1996: Regulatory Framework for Housing Associations Registered in Wales.³⁶ There are several recent changes and trends in social housing:

³² Shelter Cymru (2022) Can I get a home? Barriers to getting a private rented home in Wales. Available at: https://sheltercymru.org.uk/policy_and_research/can-i-get-a-home-barriers-to-getting-a-private-rented-home-in-wales/ (Accessed 16 December 2022)

³³ UK Government (2021) Housing costs and Universal Credit. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/housing-and-universal-credit/renting-from-private-landlord#if-youre-under-35-and-you-live-in-private-housing> (Accessed 17 January 2022)

³⁴ CHC & WLGA (2016) Viable Housing Model Research. Available at: <https://chcmru.org.uk/our-work/news-media/chc-and-wlga-viable-housing-model-research> (Accessed 17 January 2022)

³⁶ Welsh Government (2021) Housing associations registered in Wales: regulatory framework. Available at: <https://gov.wales/housing-associations-registered-wales-regulatory-framework> (Accessed 17 January 2022)



■ Local housing allowance rates for both social and private rented accommodation are now uprated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than with reference to local rents, thus severing the link between housing support and actual housing costs. In Wales, local authority rents are being brought back in line with housing association rents. In addition, forthcoming cuts to housing benefit will reduce payments to social tenants if their rent is currently higher than the amount of housing benefit they would receive in the private rented sector

■ Availability of social housing is already severely limited in many areas, in part due to historical under-investment in building new social housing. In terms of one-bed social housing, a combination of factors is limiting access:

1. A general shortage of one-bed properties. This is a national issue: many units of one-bed accommodation are in sheltered housing and are designated for older people, with those aged 55 years and over prioritised
2. Demand for this size of accommodation is increasing from tenants subject to the under-occupation penalty ('bedroom tax'). Local authorities and registered providers need to reduce the risk of arrears and homelessness among existing tenants, and prioritise these households in allocation schemes, which further reduces access for most young people

Allocation schemes

Part Six of the Housing Act 1996³⁷ regulates the allocation of social housing in Wales. Anyone who meets the criteria must be accepted onto the waiting list and can only be excluded from it if, hypothetically, a court makes an outright possession order against them for unacceptable behaviour (including rent arrears) if they are already the local authority's secure tenant. Local authorities do, however, have discretion over downgrading an applicant's priority, and the policies can therefore include conditions such as the length of residence in the local area. Reasonable preference must still be given to those in housing need, including statutorily homeless households unless they have had their priority reduced due to previous behaviour. It is usual for care leavers to get some sort of additional priority (banding or points), but there is no statutory duty to give care leavers any priority over other groups, unless they are homeless, in which case they must be given a reasonable preference.

³⁷ UK Government (1996) Housing Act. Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/part/VI> (Accessed 17 January 2022)

Living in the private rented sector

The 2011 change in calculation of the local housing allowance (LHA) (which sets the level of housing benefit payable in any area) from the 50th to the 30th percentile³⁸ restricted the pool of private rented accommodation that is affordable in any area to the lower end of the market. The lack of affordable properties has been further exacerbated by freezing of LHA since April 2020.³⁹

The inadequacy of LHA has been shown in research by the Bevan Foundation, which has found that a significant gap has developed between the LHA rate and lower priced properties (at the 30th percentile). The gap has grown from £2.04 per week in 2016/17 to £6.94 per week in 2019/20.⁴⁰ Their more recent research⁴¹ during summer 2022 highlighted that:

- Only 60 properties advertised across Wales were available at LHA rates
- This equates to just 5.9% of the market
- Seven local authorities did not have a single property available at LHA rate

Shared accommodation rate

The shared accommodation rate limits the amount payable to most young people living in the private rented sector to the cost of a room in a shared house. From April 2012, the SAR was extended from the age of 25 up to 35, which means that more people are competing for accommodation in shared housing.

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

- Landlord accreditation – Local authorities should identify private sector landlords who are prepared to work with a personal adviser to support care leavers as they take on their own tenancies. This might include assisting with budgeting, having some flexibility in the tenancy agreement, working with the local authority and care experienced person to avoid eviction, and having lower rent deposit requirements. Rent Smart Wales is responsible for the registration and training of landlords
- Working with housing authorities to ensure care leavers are able to access the private rented sector – most local housing authorities will have a private rented sector (PRS) access scheme (sometimes called a social lettings agency) which is either run in-house or commissioned from a provider. Rather than establishing a separate 'leaving care' scheme, a housing authority could – in its corporate parenting role – ensure that care leavers are helped to access suitable, affordable and appropriate accommodation in the private rented sector via the general scheme

The scheme should offer landlords a range of incentives such as:

- bond and rent deposit schemes
- rent in advance
- rent paid direct to the landlord (but only if agreed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on a case-by-case basis)
- a named contact person and a 24-hour helpline
- floating support if needed
- putting forward young people who have done some life skills or tenancy training
- providing assistance or advice with tenancy matters (e.g. HMO (houses in multiple occupation) registering)

Dispersed/step-down housing – helping care leavers move gradually into independent living. Some supported housing providers have dispersed housing attached to their projects, usually as shared tenancies, that

38 Housing Right (2021) LHA Rates Frozen at 2020/21 Levels. Available at: <https://www.housingrights.org.uk/news/LHA-rates-frozen-again> (Accessed 17 January 2022)

39 Bevan Foundation (2021) Wales' housing crisis: the role of LHA. Available at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Wales-housing-crisis-Bevan-Foundation-Report.pdf> (Accessed 1 February 2022)

40 Bevan Foundation (2021) Wales' housing crisis: the role of LHA. Available at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Wales-housing-crisis-Bevan-Foundation-Report.pdf> (Accessed 1 February 2022)

41 Bevan Foundation (2022) Wales Housing Crisis Summer 2022. Available at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Wales-Housing-Crisis-summer-2022-update.pdf>



allow young people with higher support needs to try out managing their own tenancy within the safety of a housing project they already know. Tenancies can be available for several months or longer until the care experienced person is ready to move out. In these arrangements, it may be that the local authority or the provider organisation has agreed a lease or licence with a private landlord and is then sub-letting to young people. This can be a good way to establish longer-term arrangements that can be closely managed by the local authority.

Support to use a 'setting up home' allowance – care leavers are entitled to a one-off grant when they leave care, usually worth around £2,000.⁴² Depending on their living situation when they leave care, young people may need some of the money immediately, but others are more likely to need it only when they are ready to furnish their own independent housing.⁴³



Care Leavers Basic Income Pilot

The Welsh Government's Basic Income Pilot focuses on care leavers who reach their 18th birthday, with the pilot started in financial year 2022/23. The pilot is planned to run for a minimum of three years with each member of the cohort receiving a basic income payment for a duration of 24 months from the month after their 18th birthday.

The purpose of the pilot is to build on the existing support offered to care experienced children in Wales and ensure young people who take part in this pilot get all the support they need to give them the best possible chance to make their way in life, making the transition out of care better, easier and more positive.

The Welsh Government has introduced additional investment in care experienced young people as a group: for example, the top-up of the Child Trust Fund payment; additional Council Tax exemption; and establishment of the St David's Day Fund. The Welsh Government is also linking the offer of the Basic Income support with other Welsh Government policy initiatives, such as the Care Experienced Person's Guarantee. This is the Welsh Government's key commitment to everyone under the age of 25, living in Wales, with support to gain a place in education or training, and help to get into work or become self-employed.

The young people who choose to participate in the pilot are supported throughout and receive access to wraparound support relating to education, work and broader financial advice. The payment is unconditional with no requirements attached. The payment is the same for everyone and it will not be altered during the pilot. Payments are made to individuals and not to households.

Conditions

All eligible recipients require a bank account to receive the basic income payments. The young people eligible to participate will be contacted and invited to take part in an engagement programme with dedicated advisors to find out more about the scheme. There is no action for them to take at this stage. Eligible applicants will be invited to attend sessions where they will have the opportunity to discuss the application/payment process and the effects this could have on their benefit entitlement.

Should a care experienced person wish to withdraw from the pilot, they can do so – **however, for the purposes of the pilot, this would be a final decision and they would not be able to re-join at a later date.**⁴⁴

⁴² UK Government (2021) Leaving foster or local authority care. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/leaving-foster-or-local-authority-care> (Accessed 17 January 2022)

⁴³ Please refer to the basic income pilot and council tax exemption for care leavers for guidance as the policy evolves.

⁴⁴ For further details please contact: BIPilotWales@gov.wales

ANNEX 1: JOINT COMMISSIONING TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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

Recent and ongoing pressures on local authorities are making joint or co- proposition to support young people. These factors include:

- Reduced public sector spending generally requires a radical re-think in terms of how services are delivered to vulnerable groups. An increased number of children looked after in Wales has resulted in more young people becoming care leavers, and anecdotal reporting of higher proportions of young people with multiple and complex unmet needs
- The duty on local authorities since 2011 to provide sufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children in their area
- Reducing the costs of tenancy failure, which fall on landlord revenues and increase burdens on services which help young people when tenancies have gone wrong

Why consider a joint approach?

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

- Practical and emotional preparation for independence
- Gradual, supported transitions with choice, control and flexibility about where they live, how they are supported and how quickly things change
- Follow up support as needed

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

- 'Compressed' transitions, such as a cliff-edge of support at 18th birthday
- Minimal choice of options for young people
- Tenancy breakdowns as young people move to their own tenancies before they are ready, poor contingency planning and increased frequency of placement breakdowns
- Costs associated with duplication and gaps, with common pressure points often not addressed (e.g. emergencies or high risk situations)

- Poor value for money through spot purchasing of high-cost housing and support options when all else fails

Experience shows that local authorities can achieve efficiencies and better outcomes for care leavers by undertaking joint or co-commissioning. This has several clear advantages:

- Development of more options generally, based on the range of needs and progression
- Creating options for young people that avoid the 'cliff edge' at 18, so that moves are based on readiness, not age
- Sharing of procurement expertise including approaches to quality and standards
- Reduced costs in undertaking procurement
- Improved value for money

This could be for all supported accommodation provision where the local market and context indicates advantages to this – or it could be for smaller schemes of more specialist provision.

Approaches to joint commissioning

Partners will need to agree a commissioning strategy focused on:

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

This is all within a context of known and/or anticipated resource constraints. It is critical that the right people are involved from the outset, so that any decision to go ahead has been informed by young people, families and other key stakeholders, and has the support and understanding of those who will make it.

ANNEX 2: SELF-ASSESSMENT: HOW JOINED UP IS YOUR COMMISSIONING?

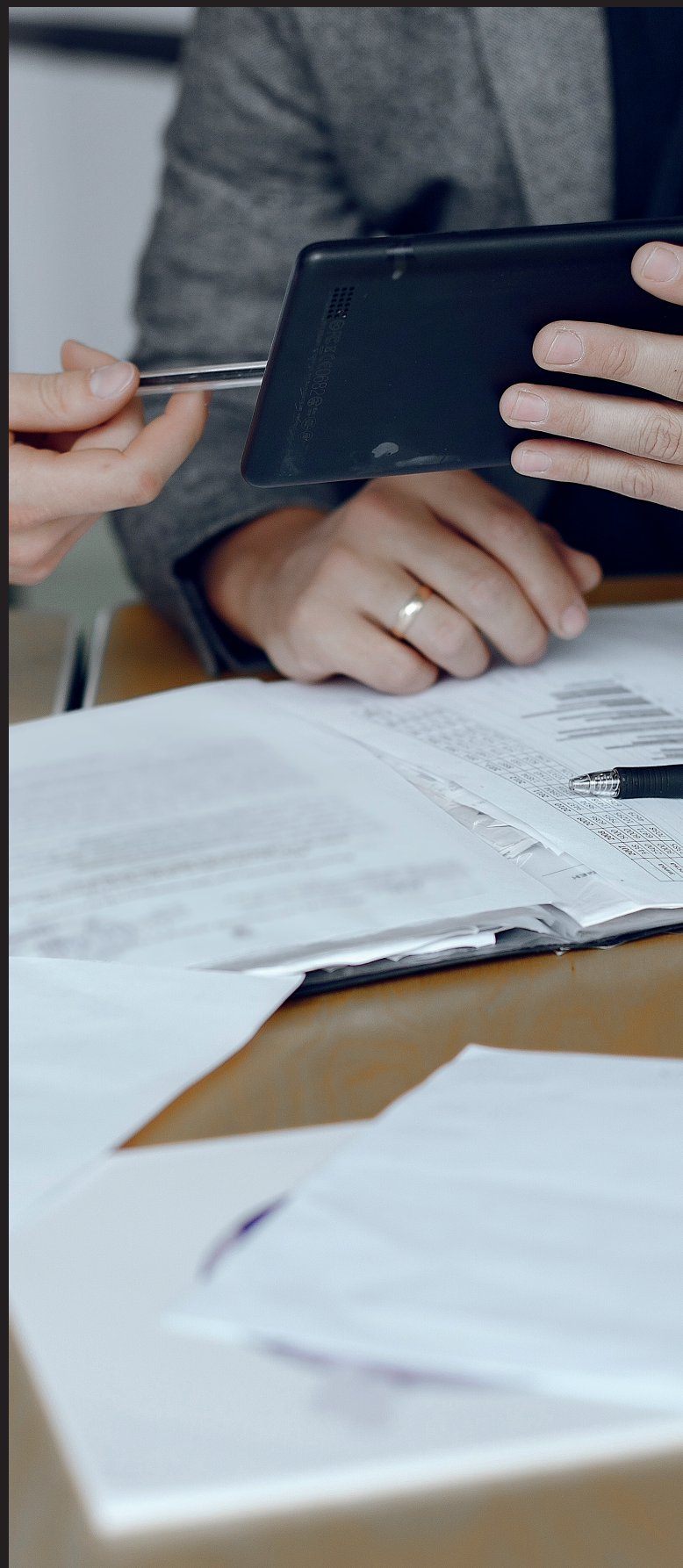
On a scale of 0–5, and using the suggested set of statements to guide you, rank where you think your local authority is on joint commissioning for support to young people as they learn to live more independently.

1. No progress at all and it's not looking possible currently
2. No progress and we haven't made a start yet
3. Some early progress. We have agreed in principle but taken no practical steps as yet
4. We are beginning to work on this now with a clear aim of joint Commissioning
5. It's well underway now
6. It's well embedded and it's positive

Statements relating to joint commissioning that may help your judgement:

- There are agreed and shared corporate outcomes for young people who leave care, and these outcomes are used for commissioning of accommodation and support
- All relevant services and stakeholders have contributed to a detailed needs analysis, which informs the commissioning process
- Children's services, housing and housing-related support commissioners (and any others) work together on service/pathway modelling, drawing up specifications for services and involvement in the commissioning process
- Relevant budgets are agreed across the local authority (and other public sector agencies) and either pooled or managed seamlessly across directorates/service areas
- The local authority consciously avoids 'cliff edges' based on age, e.g. young people having to make a placement move around their 18th birthday
- Access into the provision available is managed through a single point/ gateway so we know who is in what provision and can better manage risk and meet needs
- There's a body/group led by children's services and housing related support commissioners which meets regularly to review, monitor and agree changes to commissioning of accommodation and support options

- There is a process for agreeing move on/progression into more independent accommodation (e.g. a panel, an assessment, an accreditation achieved by the care experienced person)
- There is a high expectation of providers of accommodation and support services (for example, having a theory of change, their ability to be flexible, to partner strategically with the local authority, a 'can do' attitude, innovation, and bringing added value)



ANNEX 3: DEMONSTRATING THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF HOUSING OPTIONS FOR CARE LEAVERS

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

The Department for Communities and Local Government has produced an Evidence Review of the Costs of Homelessness⁴⁵ which explores the costs to central government of homelessness in adults. This can be used to provide evidence for some of the wider costs of homelessness to the welfare system, the criminal justice system and health providers, among others. Homeless Link's guide, What's It Worth?⁴⁶ explains how to carry out simple financial savings analysis on services, including providing links to unit costs and sources of further assistance.

⁴⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) Evidence Review of the Costs of Homelessness. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7596/2200485.pdf (Accessed: 14 January 2022)

⁴⁶ Homeless Link (2013) What's it worth? Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/search/sitedb?search=what%27s+it+worth%3F> (Accessed: 14 January 2022)



ANNEX 4: ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN USING THE FRAMEWORK LOCALLY

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

The care leavers' accommodation and support framework has been updated via a diverse group of stakeholders that work with young people, including care leavers. Although the framework is aimed at people who work in the local authority in particular, young people have been involved in helping decide what should go in the framework. The framework brings together lots of good ideas from across the country about what can help young people with their housing as they move out of care. It does not tell your local authority what to do, but it does give a lot of suggestions about what works in other areas – and so what might be good for young people for which your local authority is responsible.

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

It will be useful to think about the framework and how it could be changed for your area. There is a need to be upfront and honest because, like everywhere in Wales, there are some limits on the housing choices, which are available to offer young people.

Ideas for engaging children and young people in use of the framework locally:

- Share the one-page framework diagram with existing participation groups. Ask children currently in care and those leaving care about:
- In which areas do the local authority do well for care leavers?
- Where are there gaps in what the local authority provides for care leavers?
- Which groups of care leavers in the area do you think would need particular support around housing?
- What do you think about some of the suggested services in the framework and whether they would

work locally? (Examples could include: training flats; mediation; peer landlord or shared housing schemes; Housing First for Youth)

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



ANNEX 5: BLANK COPY OF THE FRAMEWORK

Supporters	Framework stages and options				Activity and approach
	1. Prepare for reality of housing options				
	2. Plan young people's accommodation and support options with them				
	3. Reduce housing crisis				
	4. Access housing and support as needed				
	Short-stay/Emergency	High support	Medium support	Low support	
	5. Access and successfully manage longer-term move-on and support options				

Supporters

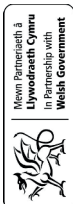
Carer/residential worker

Personal adviser

Housing worker

Underlying principles - young people are:

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







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