

Enfield's Multi-Agency Protocol for Preventing 16/17 year olds Becoming Homeless

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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that partners continue to work together to provide a consistent and coordinated response to 16 and 17 year old young people who present with threatened homelessness or as homeless and in need of accommodation and/or accommodation support services. The protocol includes an integrated pathway for referral,

assessment and planning for access to accommodation support services in order to streamline and make most effective use of existing resources.

This protocol reflects the government guidance '*Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation*', issued in 2010 following the House of Lords 2009 judgment in the case of *G v LB Southwark*.

The primary objective of the protocol is to promote and safeguard the well-being of the young person and to prevent homelessness, returning young people to their family wherever possible. To this end mediation is offered to young people and their families, to find a solution for the young person to help them remain in the home environment or remain a friend/ family member. If a return home is not possible, the objective is to find the most suitable accommodation for the young person (s.17 or s.20) and to support them to remain in and move on from their accommodation when appropriate.

2. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE PROTOCOL

- The safety and welfare of the young person is paramount;
- Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, the starting point will be that all children and young people are generally best supported in living with their immediate families where they can achieve the best outcomes. Every effort should be made therefore to mediate between young people and their families to negotiate a return home wherever possible;
- Where young people are unable or unwilling to return to their immediate families, young people should be supported to explore wider family members and community options where their needs can be met;
- Young people will be kept informed of progress and decisions made and will be fully engaged in their assessment and plans;
- Agencies will work together to assess and meet the needs of these young people and share information effectively;
- Whilst it is recognised that Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not suitable for 16-17 year olds, as defined in Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) SI 3326 2003, in some emergency circumstances young people will need to be accommodated in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in order to prevent street homelessness. These arrangements, however, will be exceptional, and only used as a last resort to prevent street homelessness, and will be short term

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1** Tackling youth homelessness is challenging. It requires an integrated approach involving a range of statutory and non-statutory partners including: Social Care, Education, Community Housing and Supporting People, Youth and Family Support Service, supported housing providers, Housing Benefits, Community Safety Unit, private sector landlords etc.
- 3.2** A young person may be ineligible for housing assistance if they are subject to some form of immigration control or, whilst not subject to immigration control, are still deemed to be a 'person from abroad'.
A young person may be considered to be ineligible for housing assistance on specific grounds. For example, if they are Asylum Seekers or they are EU nationals who are not working or financially self-sufficient. The duties set out in the 1989 Children Act, relating to homeless 16/17 year olds, supersede the provisions set out in the Part VII 1996 Housing Act (as amended) and therefore Children's Services will need to make an assessment as to whether the young person is a 'Child in Need' and requires accommodation.
- 3.3** Enfield have developed a service for young vulnerable people aged 16 /17 who are faced with homelessness. This service is known as the Family Adolescent Support Team. It is designed to provide a range of alternative solutions, including supported housing and mediation, to minimise the need for temporary accommodation or looked after status for these young people.
- 3.4** Enfield has on average 130 young people aged 16/17 presenting as homeless every year to the Family Accommodation Support Team (FAST) at Claverings Industrial Estate in Edmonton. The majority of these young people are reconciled with their families and return home, however a proportion of these young people will require further support including accommodation.
- 3.5** In the first instance the team will always try to mediate with young people and their families, to find a solution for the young person to help them remain in the home environment where this is safe to do so. To this end contact is made wherever possible with the parents of the young person. Preventing homelessness and offering mediation in order to support young people to live with their families is generally the best outcome for homeless 16/17 year olds.
- 3.6** Supporting these young people involves tailoring services specific to the young person's needs. If required a short-term service with the facilities to provide a "crash pad" for a young person for a few days is available (maximum 10 days) as long as a vacancy exists. This is to ensure that a young person is not street homeless and has a safe and secure facility to enable an assessment of their need to take place.
Theresa House, First Steps Centre provides support and help in preventing youth homelessness by enabling young people whom they offer accommodation, to develop skills to manage a licence, deal with budgeting and access employment and training and prevent anti-social behaviour.

4. INTEGRATED PATHWAY OF SUPPORT

- 4.1** The Family and Adolescent Support Team is managed within Schools & Children's Services (SCS) under the umbrella of the Youth and Family Support Service.
- 4.2** Most young people at risk of homelessness now present to FAST. Homeless young people also present to Children's Social Care and wherever they present first is where they are assessed to prevent them being moved from pillar to post and to expedite the service they need to receive. Social care may refer young people to FAST if they have assessed their need and determined that they do not require s.20 accommodation and can be provided with alternative support to either return home to family/relatives or live independently in the community.
- 4.3** Being 16 or 17 years of age is a mandatory priority need reason set out in the 1996 Housing Act (as amended). However precedence is given to the CA1989 over the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) which means that Children's Services become the lead agency in responding to the needs of the young person.
- 4.4** All young people aged 16/17 presenting as homeless to FAST will be seen by a qualified Social Worker who will undertake initial checks to determine whether the young person has been previously known to Enfield Social Care or another Local Authority Children's Social care and carry out a holistic Child and Family Assessment to establish whether the young person is a child in need and whether the young person requires accommodation under s20 Children Act 1989 or other services under s17 Children Act 1989. Young people seeking help due to homelessness or threatened homelessness are likely to have a range of concurrent needs and these should be assessed fully in accordance with the Signs of Safety assessment framework used in Enfield. The majority of young people seeking help because of homelessness cite the breakdown of family relationships as the reason for their homelessness. The assessment will determine whether the young person can return/remain at home with support for them and their family or whether this is not possible or safe to do so. Case recordings will be held within the Children's Services case management system (LCS).
- 4.5** Mediation is offered to all young people aged 15.5 - 18 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as part of the assessment process.
- 4.6** All pregnant 16/17 young people (who present to the FAST will be subject to an assessment as detailed above. Where there are no additional needs identified apart from homelessness and the young person cannot be re-unified with their family and do not want to be a Looked After Child, the young person will be referred to John Wilkes House for further housing assistance (at 24 weeks gestation or later).
- 4.7** If a pregnant 16/17 young person presents to John Wilkes House as their first point of contact John Wilkes House have a duty to determine their eligibility for

accommodation and make arrangements for such interim accommodation whilst they continue to make their enquiries. The young person will then be referred to the FAST offices to determine if the young person has any additional support requirements.

FAST do not accommodate families, which include 16/17 year olds who have children. If such young people present to FAST they will be asked to present at John Wilkes House. John Wilkes House will be contacted and all relevant information will be given before the young person and their family arrive.

As part of any assessment undertaken and support offered, contact should be made with the young person's midwife (details on the pregnancy confirmation/hospital letters) and other young parent services such as the Family Nurse Partnership if they are known.

FAST may also make a referral to the Young Parents Floating Support services if appropriate.

In light of the young person's age and pregnancy, it is likely that they will require an assessment via children's services, (not FAST) as it will be necessary to assess their unborn child's needs, their parenting capacity as well as their ability to meet their own needs and any family support that they have, given their current homeless circumstance.

If there are identified safeguarding concerns this should initiate a referral to Children's Social Care in line with usual procedures as further pre-birth or parental capacity assessments may be required.

- 4.8** The support available as described above in 4.4 in the form of s17 supported housing or section 20 accommodation will be clearly outlined to the young person and is essential that throughout the assessment period the social worker maintains a close relationship with the young person so that they are clearly able to articulate the differences and what the differences mean between s.17 and s.20 support and that the young person is able to understand this and make their wishes and feelings properly known so that these can be taken into account in the assessment process. It is also important that relationships are maintained with the family and those with parental responsibility for the young person. If the outcome of the child and family assessment indicates that the vulnerability of the young person coupled with their homelessness is such that they should be made a Looked After Child, this must be shared with the Service Manager for ratification. In addition if the young person on being advised of their available options; and these having been explored through the process of the assessment, in both instances (whether the outcome is s.17 or s.20 provision; this will be reviewed and quality assured with the Service Manager). Where it is agreed that s.20 is the appropriate outcome and the young person agrees this outcome of their assessment, the young person's case is to be presented to the Placement Panel.

- 4.9** A young person can make a decision whether they wish to receive support to make an application to John Wilkes House, under the homelessness legislation. They may prefer to do this if, for example, they were previously living independently and are now threatened with homelessness or homeless. These 16 and 17 year olds are in priority need under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, where they have been assessed as not having a s.20 need. However they are still likely to have identified support needs under s.17 of the CA1989.
- 4.10** Upon completion of the child and family assessment, John Wilkes House should be advised of the outcome where a s.20 duty has been deemed as **not** owed to the young person, whatever the reason, to enable the young person to approach Housing so that they can complete their enquiries under section 184 of the Housing Act 1996.

All young people presenting as homeless to FAST will be:

- expected to cooperate with the assessment process over a maximum of 35 working days, working in partnership with FAST and other service providers as appropriate.
 - will be consulted on their general health and offered a referral to 4YP for a sexual health screening and a referral to COMPASS for a drugs screen.
 - will be asked about their personal relationships including parents, partners and peers.
 - assisted to access family mediation services during the assessment period.
- 4.11** The First Step Service, provided by the Christian Action Group, provides short-term accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds who approach FAST, and meet

their requirements for eligibility (proven homelessness, local connection, eligible to claim public funds, identification, and intentionality).

The service provides 24-hour staffing coverage in order to maintain a safe environment for clients, visitors, staff and neighbourhood. It is not a Direct Access hostel – referral and admission procedures will take place over a 5 day period following a FAST referral. .

The expected stay is approximately 12- 16 weeks, in which time the service will have used structured interventions to identify, assess, and address gaps in skills and knowledge. Young people will be referred to The First Step Service, Theresa House, if they require emergency accommodation /are street homeless or as a result of a completed child and family assessment which has determined that the young person cannot return/remain at home **and** the young person does not wish to be accommodated by the Local Authority.

The Crashpad within Teresa House provides a very short-term placement for a 16 or 17 year old who has approached FAST and needs a place of safety.

- 4.12** Most homeless young people go into low/medium supported accommodation, but there are a minority whose needs are too great because of their vulnerability/disability or offending behaviour. There is limited specialist accommodation available for these young people offering a high level of on-site intensive support. These places (Deborah Tempest House, Roedean Close and Vincent House) have their own admissions procedures. Alongside FAST, other statutory services such as CAMHS, YOU and/or Social Care can refer directly to these specialist accommodations if appropriate.
- 4.13** In some situations, where mediation is not able to affect an immediate return to the family of the young person, or prevent the breakdown of the family relationship: short term emergency accommodation may be required whilst assessments are carried out as the crash pad in Teresa House may not be free. There is an expectation that all young people placed in temporary or emergency accommodation are referred to floating support services when there are no keyworkers provided by the accommodation.
- 4.14** When a young person is placed in supported accommodation the social worker will continue to work with the young person and their family to a resolution of the circumstances. A plan culminating from the young person's assessment will be shared with the young person. The keyworker will be as central to the plan as the young person and social worker. The keyworker will be in regular contact and communication with the social worker and provide regular reports to the social worker in relation to the progress of the plan. The plan will not only identify the needs of the young person and their family, but will also identify the outcomes expected to be achieved from the services identified to be put in place to support the young person and their family. The keyworker will be responsible for providing the social worker with regular monthly reports in relation to progress of the plan which the social worker will place on the child's file.

- 4.15** The social worker should meet with the young person and key worker within 3 days of the young person moving into the supported accommodation to discuss and agree how the plan will be implemented within the support hours provided. There will be 6 weekly review meetings which the young person and key worker (as well as any other involved professionals) will be expected to attend, to share information and review the plan and consider whether there continues to be progress toward the identified outcomes.

5. SAFEGUARDING YOUNG PEOPLE

- 5.1** Sometimes homeless young people may be assessed as too vulnerable to be offered supported accommodation from FAST at their first point of contact because their behaviour or needs require more intensive support. Examples include:

- A history of severe mental ill health or presenting mental ill health;
- A history of significant self-harm or harm to others;
- A history of child sexual exploitation (CSE)
- Vulnerable by virtue of serious previous abuse, for example sexual abuse
- Vulnerable because of significant learning disabilities
- Vulnerable because of recent serious physical assault
- Significant gang affiliations
- A history of offending behaviour

- 5.2** In all of the above situations it is expected that FAST will support the young person to access other services from statutory Children's Social Care, including as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Joint Service for Disabled Children (JSDC) as appropriate.

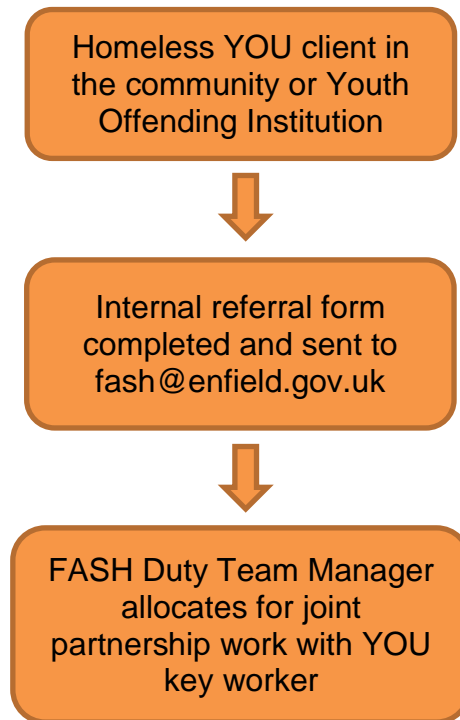
6. YOUTH OFFENDING UNIT (YOU)

6.1 Youth Offending Unit process

If a young person has an allocated key worker from the Youth Offending Unit (YOU), the key worker, wherever possible, will access mediation services to prevent homelessness as soon as the risk of homelessness is identified.

- 6.2** If a YOU client is homeless, the YOU officer, will make a referral to the FAST service using the internal referral form and send this to the FASH email inbox: fash@enfield.gov.uk. The referral will be loaded as a contact on Liquid Logic and passed to the duty manager for review and decision making. Working in partnership with the FAST, YOU will share information in order that an assessment of need can be undertaken to identify the most suitable support needs and accommodation.

Referral Flowchart



- 6.3** The Youth Offending Unit will be expected to continue to support the young person through the transition. It is important that there is a robust youth offending package of support in place otherwise the young person is unlikely to manage to live independently within supported accommodation.
- 6.4** Homeless young people may not be offered supported accommodation from FAST because they have been recently evicted from supported accommodation as a direct result of their behaviour. In these circumstances FAST may only be able to offer short term emergency accommodation while further assessments are carried out to ascertain the level of risks with particular emphasis upon whether or not living independently is a viable sustainable option.
- 6.5** If these young people are young offenders with an allocated YOU key worker, it is important that YOU complete further assessments and work in partnership with FAST in order to provide these homeless young people with accommodation. In some situations where the young people have been evicted there may be no further long term accommodation offered from FAST.
- 6.6** In some instances young offenders who are due to be released from a Youth Offender's institution are deemed to be at risk of homelessness. FAST must be informed, of these cases, as soon as possible, preferably at the point the local agencies, primarily YOU are informed of the release date. If referring to FAST for potential homelessness on release from custody, the YOU caseworker should invite the FAST social worker to the young person's final

review in the secure estate so that the plan for accommodation/family support/mediation can be discussed with the young person prior to their release.

7. SOCIAL CARE PROCESS

7.1 If a young person has an allocated social worker within Children's Social Care, it is expected that any request for supported accommodation as an outcome of their assessment is made to FAST directly by the social worker as part of the internal transfer process of cases. Best practice is that the allocated Children's Social Care social worker and FAST social worker meet with the young person together to formulate and agree the plans to support the young person including their housing need. Social work assessments must be completed and explicitly confirm or clarify that the needs of the young person does not meet thresholds for looked after status, or that the young person has declined to be a looked after person at the current time, after what this means has been explained thoroughly to them. This must be recorded on the social work case notes.

7.2 There will be occasions when young people, presenting as homeless, will be referred to the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) out of hours. If the young person does not have an allocated social worker, the EDT officer should advise the young person to present to FAST at Claverings the next working day. A contact should be completed in the normal way on LCS outlining the information from the EDT and sent to the FASH triage tray in LCS outlining the contact the EDT had with the young person and why the young person was placed in emergency accommodation.

8. MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND ESCALATION PROCESS

8.1 On occasions FAST may assess a young person and subsequently offer accommodation despite their parent wishing them to return home, for example if the family accommodation is overcrowded and sleeping arrangements have been assessed as not good enough. If this situation arises the FAST social worker should discuss the case with the team manager, to determine if there is alternative support available to the young person and their family. The wishes of the young person must be clearly recorded on LCS as well as the management decision, together with a clear explanation for the course of action.

8.2 Where there is professional conflict, this must be escalated to Service Manager level.

9. STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

The Young Person's Housing Support Steering group meets regularly to oversee the development of the single pathway for homeless 16/17 year olds and to consider homelessness issues for other young people in the Borough. Membership list can be found in Appendix 3:

APPENDIX 1

Mediation service for homeless 16/17 year olds

The mediation service operates from Claverings the service is offered via referral from the allocated social worker.

The Mediation Service is available to all young people threatened with homelessness. 16 and 17 year old young people and their families are specifically, provided with support who:

- are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- request support to resolve conflicts at home with their parents, carers or family members
- need 1-2-1 support while considering issues in their lives that relate to family conflicts, homelessness, and their domestic stability

Young people and their families will be offered mediation as part of the assessment process. The role of the mediator is to offer support to the young person in reducing family conflict in agreement with the underlying principle which is that most young people are best placed and supported living with their family thus preventing homelessness.

In **all** cases, the young person and their family must have expressed a willingness to engage with the mediation service before any assessment can be undertaken. If there is a conflict of interest between parents then the mediation service will work with the parent that the young person wishes to work with.

APPENDIX 2

Escalation Contacts list:

Family Accommodation Support Hub

Janet Black Heaven Service Manager FASH 020 8379 2568

Mary Murrill Deputy Service FASH 020 8379 2028

Family and Adolescent Support Team

Joseph Fitzgerald FAST Team Manager 020 8379 6830

Social Care

Referral and Assessment

Sarah Moran Head of Service Assessment Service and SPOE 020 8379 1454

Child Protection and Family Support

Nicole Gibson Service Manager Child Protection and Family Support 020 8379 2524

LAC and Leaving Care Team

Linda Hughes Head of Service 0208 379 8222

Karen Alderton Service Manager LAC and Leaving Care Deputy Head of Service
0208 379 2572

Youth Offending Unit

Samantha Boyce Service Manager 0208 379 5820

APPENDIX 3

Steering group membership:

FASH Service Manager
FASH Deputy Service Manager
Housing
Supporting People
Christian Action
Floating Support
The Foyer/Rodean Close