**Are You 16 – 17 Year Olds and Homeless or about to be Homeless**

Being aged 16 and 17 and facing the possibility of having nowhere to live or having to leave home suddenly can be a very stressful and confusing time and it is important you receive the right support and advice so you fully understand what your options are so you can make the right decisions.

There are 2 agencies that have a legal duty to help you. These are Wirral Local Authority, and Wirral Housing Options.

**What you need to know?**

You will undertake a Housing Assessment with a housing officer but also a staff member from Children’s Services. You will also be allocated a Social Worker

**Joint housing assessment:**

The law has an expectation that Local Authorities in the UK and Local Housing Authorities should meet with you together to carry out what is called a “Joint Housing Assessment”. This meeting is really important, and it gives you the opportunity to talk to a social worker and a housing officer together about what is happening and then agree on who will support you, both now and in the future.

Make sure you keep any appointments that are made for you. During your assessment there may be some things that are difficult for you to talk about but it is really important you give the social worker and the housing officer as much information as possible about why you are homeless and the reasons you can’t return home, as well as talking about areas where you do not feel safe, or do not want to live, e.g. if you have been experiencing violence or abuse at home or from gangs and need to be in an area away from this. You may want a friend, or someone you trust, with you during the assessment and this is absolutely fine.

Your views are important and will be taken into consideration, but you won’t necessarily have the final say in any choices that are made about your accommodation and support as your options are dependent on your individual circumstances and level of need; Age / family relationships / educational employment needs / social networks/ ability to live on your own and your consent and / or ability to consent

Your Social Care Worker /Housing Officer will make sure you have all the information you need and that your views are recorded and considered, you can also choose to have an independent advocate.

Your family will be included in your assessments and plan if it is safe to do so.

Some accommodation isn't free, but you will be supported to understand about benefits and budgeting.

Don’t sign the Joint Assessment until you have been through the full document with your Social Care Worker and are then able to make an informed decision on how you want to be supported.

If you make a decision to be supported as a Child in Care, you will then have to sign a Section 20 consent form, which the Social Worker will go through with you.

The support and possible accommodation you can expect from the two agencies will vary and will depend on your own unique set of circumstances. This guidance aims to explain how this all works and will be discussed with you during a Joint Assessment Interview.

The priority for both agencies will be to support you to return home, where safe to do so, or find alternative options for you so you can be settled and live safely.

**This is an information is to support young people in understanding their rights on being supported as a Child in Our Care or as a Child in Need**.

**What the Law Says**

Under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year old young people.

Provision of Accommodation under Section 20 or Section 17 of the Children's Act

It’s important that you understand the difference, as this will affect the help and support you are entitled to after you turn 18. You can choose the option that you think is best for you.

* You can be supported by Children’s Services as a **‘Child in Need’**
* You can choose to become a **‘Child in Our Care’**
* You can decline help and support from Children’s Services and ask the Housing Advice & Information Team to provide you with accommodation.

As a **Child in Need**, you will be supported by a Social Care Worker, working in partnership with your family. The Social Care Worker will consider who else needs to be involved in providing support to you.

This could include important people in your life, like relatives, or other adults that you know and trust, as well as professionals like youth workers, housing workers or people from your school or college.

Your support network will work together with you to create a plan to make sure you get the help and support that you need to live independently until you are 18, or to help you return to live with your family (this will depend on your circumstances).

Your plan will detail what support you will receive and who will be providing that support. Your plan will be agreed and discussed at regular meetings involving you and your support network.

**You will get help with**:

* Finding somewhere to live
* Accessing education, employment and training
* Learning the skills you need to live independently, like understanding a tenancy, practical skills to maintain your home and help with budgeting your money
* Support to keep up relationships with family members
* Your health and wellbeing
* Other advice and support as needed

**Who pays for my accommodation if I’m a Child in Need?**

If you are going to be living independently, you will be supported to make a claim for any benefits you may be entitled to. People over the age of 16 who are living independently can apply for Universal Credit. This includes money for day to day costs like food, bills and the cost of housing. It’s important to understand that if you have a job, even if it is just part time, this will affect how much benefit you receive and you will need to use your wages to pay for your housing and living costs. It can take time for benefits to be arranged, while you are waiting, Children’s Services will pay for your housing costs and provide money for day to day expenses like food and other costs. If your benefit is backdated you might need to pay some of this money back. You will get help and advice from your Social Care Worker and other professionals to budget and pay bills.

**How long will I be supported as a Child in Need**

You will receive help and support from a Social Care Worker until you are 18 or until you have developed the skills you need to succeed at living independently.

**What accommodation is available For “Child in Need” and “Child In our Care”?**

**Renting a home when you are 16 or 17**

To rent a home you need a tenancy agreement this is a contract between the tenant (you) and the landlord. The law says that someone under 18 can’t hold a tenancy agreement so this reduces the housing options available for 16 and 17 year olds. Most housing associations, social landlords that operate on a not for profit basis, do not let properties to under 18’s. The same applies to private landlords.

If a landlord is willing to rent a home to someone aged 16 or 17 it requires a responsible adult to hold the tenancy on your behalf until you reach 18 years old. This is called an Equitable Tenancy, if you need an Equitable Tenancy the housing provider will need to do some checks to approve the suitability of the responsible adult.

**Supported Housing**

Supported housing is any accommodation where support, usually to help the tenant live independently, is provided as part of the tenancy. There are different types of supported housing, it could be a scheme of flats or rooms with shared communal areas and a support worker who is based in the building or individual self contained flats with a support worker that visits for a few hours a week. Support might include help to manage your bills, budget and help to access other services. Examples of supported housing schemes in Wirral are …….

Bedford Gardens 10 bed spaces & 3 emergency beds

Caroline Place 6 core bed spaces & 1 emergency bed

Market Street 5 core bed spaces & 1 emergency bed

As a **Child in Our Care**, Wirral Council will be responsible for looking after you and making sure you are safe and well - we will do this in partnership with your family (where this is appropriate).

As a Child in Our Care, you will be supported by a Social Worker, they will consider who else needs to be involved in supporting you, like people from other agencies.

Your Social Worker will also speak to you about important people in your life and how they can help.

You and your Social Worker will complete a Care Plan. This will detail what you need and how different agencies can help you. Your Social Worker will coordinate the agencies that are supporting you. Your Social Worker will find you a ‘placement’ this is somewhere to stay with support, it could be a flat with a support worker(s) that visits, or with support workers who are based in the building and where other young people live as well, or you might stay with a foster family, it depends on what is best to meet your needs.

Your Social Worker will discuss this with you. As part of the Care Plan, there will be a more detailed Placement Plan, which will set out what the placement will provide for you and what is expected of you.

**You will get help with:**

* Finding somewhere to live
* Education, employment and training
* Learning the skills you need to live independently, like understanding your tenancy, practical skills to maintain your home and help with budgeting your money.
* Support in keeping up relationships with family members
* Your health and wellbeing
* Other advice and support as needed

There will be regular meetings and reviews, (known as statutory reviews) involving yourself and the services that are supporting you. The reviews will be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer who will check you are getting the help and support that you need. You will be offered regular health checks. This includes a general chat about how you are feeling and any health issues or worries you may have. You will get help to register with a Doctor and Dentist if you don’t have one.

**How long will I be supported as a Child in Our Care**

 You will receive help and support from a Social Worker including paying for somewhere to live until you are 18. If you have been a Child in Our Care for 13 weeks or more before turning 18, you are entitled to help and support as a Care Leaver.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**How long will a Children and Family Assessment take?**

The assessment can take up to 45 days but if you have nowhere safe to stay, Children’s Services must provide you with somewhere to stay while they complete the assessment.

**What happens if I want to stay living with my friend or relatives?**

This depends on your legal status, if you are living in an informal family arrangement you will be supported as a Child in Need with services as required. If, however you have decided to be a Child in Our Care your Social Worker will assess and consider if there are any family or friends who can provide care to you, if this is the case the Social Worker will consider their suitability by undertaking a fostering assessment. If approved as a foster, this would give you a legal right to stay with them until you are 18 if necessary.

**Can I apply for a Housing Association Property?**

To apply for a Housing Association Property you will need to make an application to go on the Housing Register. You can register at 16 but you will be non-qualifying until you are 18 unless you are a Care leaver or you have a trustee. However, if you will be turning 18 soon, the Housing Options Service or your Social Care Worker can help you apply. Please note though, there is a long waiting list for one bedroom homes in Wirral.

**Any questions?**

You probably have lots of questions. You can write them down here, ready to ask your Social Worker or the homelessness prevention officer when you speak to them next.

**For Help and Advice please contact...**

**Wirral integrated Front Door**

Phone 0151 606 2008 (option 2)

Email ifd@wirral.gov.uk **Response:** 0151 666 4123

**CAMHS**: 0800 145 6485

**Childline:** 0800 1111

**Emergency Duty Team (Outside of office hours)**

Phone 0151 677 6557 **Shelter**

0808 800 4444 england.shelter.org.uk (webchat and online housing advice available

**Housing Services (Housing Options Team) ZILLO**

Phone  0151 666 5511 <https://www.zillowirral.co.uk/about-4>

Email housingoptions@wirral.gov.uk

 **Wirral Sandbox**

**Other Services and Advice that can help:** [**https://www.wirralsandbox.com/**](https://www.wirralsandbox.com/)

**Barnardo’s Advocacy**

Phone 0151 228 4455

Email wirralservices@barnardos.org.uk

**Family ToolBox**

<https://familytoolbox.co.uk/contact/>Email

**Citizens Advice Wirral**

Phone 0808 2787848

9:30am - 4:00pm Monday - Friday

Email <https://citizensadvicewirral.org.uk/email-advice-form/>

**Domestic Abuse Support Services**

Wirral Family Safety Unit 0151 666 4914

Tomorrows Women 0151 647 7907

Involve Northwest 0151 644 1100