**Wirral Joint Pathway for 16 and 17 Year Olds who are homeless**

**or at risk of homelessness**

This Pathway has been developed jointly between the Children’s Social Care (CSC) and the Housing Options Service. It will set out the referral routes in relation to homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. This alongside the guidance and check-list will ensure continued close partnership working between Wirral Children’s Services and Housing Services to support local authority responsibilities under the Children Act legislation for meeting the needs of children in Wirral.

This Pathway is relevant to young people after statutory school leaving age.

**Joint Interview Process – Initial Contact**

Whilst the assessment will be jointly undertaken by a Social Care Worker and a Housing Options Officer, the Social Worker will take the lead in determining whether the need for accommodation is as a result of any of the criteria within Section 20:

• No one has Parental Responsibility for the young person;

• The young person is lost or abandoned;

• The person who has been caring for the young person is unable to provide suitable care and accommodation; or

• We consider the child’s welfare would be seriously threatened if accommodation is not provided.

A 16/17-year old not willing to live with parents is not sufficient on its own to warrant homelessness, but incompatibility and a breakdown in the relationship between parent and young person may be.

The Joint Assessment must be completed on all young people who present as Homeless. The young person may present at a variety of locations for example; at School/College, Housing, or directly to children’s social care. In all circumstances a referral must be made to the Integrated Front Door using the MARF (Multi Agency Referral Form) which can be found on the Intranet and the WSCB website. <https://www.wirralsafeguarding.co.uk/public/concerned-about-a-child/>

Following receipt of the MARF the IFD will undertake initial checks and screening and complete the joint assessment. The joint assessment **MUST** be completed within 72 hours. However, should emergency accommodation be required pending a joint assessment then the Housing Options Service will arrange temporary accommodation under S188 Housing Act.

Should the outcome of the joint assessment determine that the young person is in need by virtue of being homeless then accommodation will be offered by Children’s Social Care or the housing department. The provision of the accommodation will usually be under S20 of Children Act 1989 unless the outcome of the assessment is that the young person has sufficient understanding, knowledge and skills to live more independently and is explicit in their views and request accommodation support under S17 Children Act 1989.Young people should be given information about the full implications of both these options (see checklist).

Completion of this initial joint assessment does not preclude the need to then complete a Child and Family Assessment once the initial issue of legal status has been determined.

The rationale for the provision of accommodation under S20 or S17 should be clearly evidenced within the joint assessment and uploaded to the young person’s case file.

Any additional needs alongside accommodation that has been identified in the Joint Assessment and subsequent child and family assessment should be clearly outlined in the young person’s plan.

Following placement of the young person in accommodation the case must be presented to the AGM Panel at the earliest opportunity.

Should the young person refuse accommodation under S20 or S17 then advice and support must still be offered to the young person. The advice and support provided by Housing Options Service and Children’s Services will ensure the young person has the necessary information that informs them of how to access to support and services in the future should this be required.

**Approach to the Housing Options Services:**

In **ALL** cases where a 16/17 year olds approach Housing Options, they will be triaged by the Housing Officer. If the young person advises that they are homeless or at risk homelessness, basic information such as name, date of birth, address history, will be taken and contact made with Wirral’s IFD to ensure the young person is seen as soon as possible that day.

The Housing Options Officer will, if there are no immediate safeguarding concerns, seek consent from the parent/carer, or in the absence of parent/carer consent, from the young person, to refer to the IFD to request a Social Care Worker attendance at the initial interview. The referral is made via IFD phone line: 0151 606 2008 (option 2).

**Approach to Children’s Integrated Front Door Services:**

If an approach is made to IFD, either by the young person, or by another agency on their behalf, the IFD will screen all contacts within the same day and make enquiries with the young person and their parents/carers regarding the young person’s needs. If it is established that the young person is either homeless, or at risk of homelessness, IFD will co-ordinate the response as follows:

• If the young person is open to CSC the allocated social worker will be notified and will provide an appropriate response, inclusive of the joint assessment with the housing officer.

• If the case is not open to CSC, IFD will undertake the joint assessment and provide the immediate response that day.

• The relevant social care worker will approach Housing Options to request their attendance at a joint assessment.

If the young person is facing imminent homelessness, and regardless of which team were approached first, the outcome is to ensure an initial Joint assessment is commences on the day they present by the Housing Options Officer and the relevant Social Care Worker

**Approach to an allocated Social Care Worker:**

When a young person becomes homeless the allocated social care worker will complete an Incident/Significant Event Form that will alert IFD who will provide advice and support and ensure the correct processes are being followed.

Where a joint assessment has already been completed and the young person was not deemed homeless but is receiving support as a child in need and represents as homeless then the Child and Family Assessment can be used to inform placement needs.

Prior to the joint assessment, the young person will be offered an independent advocate. The role of the advocate will be to ensure that the young person fully understands:

* Rights and Entitlements
* Housing and Support Options

In Wirral, independent advocacy is provided by Barnardo’s

**Following the Joint Assessment and decision, there are 3 exit pathways for young people.**

* Return home (with or without support) or stay with family/friends;
* Support into appropriate sustainable accommodation (Section 17 Children Act 1989);
* Support into appropriate sustainable accommodation - young person becomes Looked After (Section 20 Children Act 1989).

Whichever pathway is decided, it is critical that an effective plan to support the young person is agreed and implemented, and that the young person is fully informed about the decisions made and why. Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 cannot be used to substitute the duty to provide accommodation under Section 20(1) of the Children Act 1989 to homeless 16 and 17 year olds who are assessed as children in need. Children's Social Care does not, therefore, have the option of choosing under which provision they should provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. Section 20 involves an evaluative judgment on some matters but not discretion.

**Referral Pathway for 16/17 year olds presenting as homeless who are not open to Social Care Services**

Young person presents as homeless / reports from youth custody as homeless

MARF sent to IFD for Triage

Is young person in need of accommodation?

**Yes**

IFD notifies Housing Options Service to arranged Joint Assessment. Emergency accommodation provided by HOS

**No**

Referral to Early Help who jointly with HOS will facilitate mediation and support to the Young Person returning home / placement

The Housing Prevention Officer will provide suitable advice and assistance decision in line with homeless legislation.

Joint Assessment to be undertaken within 72 hrs by Social Care/HOS to determine Homelessness

Is young person confirmed as homeless?

**No**

**Yes**

**If S17**

**If S20**

See Procedure on Pathway for CLA. Refer to AGM and ART to support independence/return home

Multi-Agency CIN Plan of support to include ART and HOS

**Referral Pathway for 16/17 year olds presenting as homeless who are open to Social Care Services**

Young person presents as homeless / reports from youth custody as homeless

Is young person in need of accommodation?

**Yes**

Social Worker notifies Housing Options Service to arranged Joint Assessment. Emergency accommodation provided by HOS

**No**

Referral to Early Help who will jointly with HOS assist with mediation and support to the Young Person returning home / placement.

The Housing Prevention Officer will provide suitable advice and assistance decision in line with homeless legislation.

Joint Assessment to be undertaken within 72 hrs by Social Care/HOS to determine Homelessness

Is young person confirmed as homeless?

**No**

**Yes**

**If S17**

**If S20**

See Procedure on Pathway for CLA. Refer to AGM and ART to support independence/return home

Multi-Agency CIN Plan of support to include ART and HOS