



Northumberland  
County Council

## **Placement Retention Protocol**

*Supporting Young People to remain in  
Supported Accommodation  
Placements*

*Reducing Placement Evictions*

July 2020

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Northumberland County Council is committed to providing the best possible opportunities for young people who are open to services and accessing supported accommodation by ensuring that commissioned services assist the wider County Council in meeting its obligations as a corporate parent.
- 1.2 This includes ensuring young people are supported to access appropriate supported accommodation and are supported to maintain this accommodation, preventing homelessness amongst this group through robust care planning and multi-agency involvement that can provide early and targeted support.
- 1.3 Eviction from accommodation should always be seen as a last resort and where necessary, alternative move-on accommodation should be in place prior to the young person leaving their current accommodation placement. This ensures that young people are accommodated in appropriate accommodation, suitable to their needs and are not placed in inappropriate accommodation such as bed and breakfast.
- 1.4 It is acknowledged that for some young people, their complex needs and behaviours do present a challenge for our partners within supported accommodation and it is not always easy to meet these needs. However, we also know that each time someone loses their accommodation, either because they are evicted or because they move out without a plan for what to do next, they risk becoming further excluded from accommodation, care and support services.
- 1.5 It is also evident that an eviction can compound existing problems or result in new ones making it hard for a person to become independent and make positive lasting changes. Eviction can often result in the following:
  - Undermine efforts to tackle alcohol and substance misuse
  - Undermine efforts to reduce re-offending
  - Negative impact on health and wellbeing
  - Financial problems
  - Disrupt relationships with family and friends
  - Reinforce individual negative beliefs such as no one is helping or they have no choice or control
  - Community problems such as anti-social behaviour
  - Exacerbate existing concerns regarding exploitation or act as a trigger for exploitation.

1.6 Within Northumberland we already have good working relationships in place that facilitate joint working between agencies to help young people access appropriate accommodation. These will be further cemented when the Joint Housing protocol for young people who are 16+ vulnerable need and the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Protocol are launched later this year.

1.7 The Joint Housing Protocol process for homeless 16+ young people will offer a multi-agency response that assists the young person to return home with support or access appropriate supported accommodation, with on-going input from services. For young people preparing to leave care, the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Protocol, will help support young people to prepare for leaving care and transitioning into adulthood.

1.8 However to further build upon these protocols, it is felt that a Non Eviction Protocol will help reach the small minority of hard to reach young people, who have faced multiple evictions due to their needs and behaviours in placement. The protocol will help to address the underlying issues, through additional intensive support and a multi-agency response to the potential crisis, averting the escalation of issues to the point of eviction.

The protocol will be supported by the following services:

- Supported Accommodation Providers
- Northumberland Adolescent Services - 14+ and 18+ Teams
- Youth Justice Service
- Accommodation Service
- Sorted - Substance Misuse Service
- Youth Service
- Participation Service
- Housing Services
- Commissioning Services for Children's Services

1.9 The intention of this Protocol is to build on the good practice and to formalise existing arrangements to ensure that there is a consistent and consensual approach to preventing young people losing their accommodation through eviction.

## 2. Objectives of the Protocol

2.1 The Protocol has been broken down into three separate stages:

### **2.2 Stage One:**

2.3 A multi-agency panel meeting/Care Team is to be held to identify support needs of the young person prior to placement. The panel should consider existing support networks and any additional support needs, as well as identifying any potential triggers that may impact on the placement and could lead to eviction in the longer term.

2.4 The purpose of the panel meeting is to ensure that young people are adequately supported in placement to minimise the risk of eviction in the future.

### **2.5 Stage Two:**

2.6 Regular care team meetings are to be held, which include attendance from the supported accommodation provision to identify the progress being made by the young person in placement. It is within these meetings, that any issues around the accommodation placement are discussed.

2.7 It is hoped by being proactive and addressing the issues at the earliest point, the young person can be supported and action taken to address the issues before it requires further intervention and the possible issuing of notice to young people to end their placement. This may require the need for the supported accommodation provider to request an urgent planning meeting.

2.8 Where issues have arisen, the young person should be made clearly aware of the issues and the support plan updated, identifying what additional support will be put in place to support the young person in placement.

2.9 The plan should follow a signs of safety model and outline what we are worried about, what is working well and what needs to be achieved, as well as outlining the young person's responsibilities as well as those of the agencies involved in offering support to the young person. This could include the use of a behaviour contract, which clearly outlines the expectations a young person needs to adhere too, in order to maintain their placement.

2.10 All agencies supporting the young person; should be present at the care team meeting providing a holistic approach to the needs of the young person. Agencies could include but is not limited to: Supported Accommodation Provider, Housing, Youth Justice Service, Youth Service, Sorted and the 14+ and 18+ Teams

## **2.11 Stage Three:**

2.12 At this point, the young person's behaviours are likely to lead to a possible threat of eviction and the longer term loss of accommodation.

2.13 In these instances the social worker or leaving care worker for the young person will reconvene the care team as an emergency meeting to look at and consider the situation and to try and salvage the placement through a number of measures; such as the use of ABC contract or more intensive support being offered.

2.14 The Accommodation Service should be invited to these meetings, as they will be involved in looking to source alternative accommodation options for the young person, if the placement is not retrievable.

2.15 Where it is felt by the care team, that the placement is not retrievable and not in the interests of the young person to remain in placement longer term; then the Social Worker/LCSW will work with the Accommodation Service to identify alternative move on provision for the young person within the notice period.

2.16 It is expected that no eviction will occur unless this discussion has taken place and all support options have been exhausted. Where it has not been possible to prevent an eviction, a review of the individual case will take place to learn lessons and identify opportunities to improve our responses.

2.17 The Protocol should help:

- Reduce the number of people being evicted from supported accommodation
- Reduce the number of people walking out of accommodation without a planned and positive move
- Prevent repeat homelessness
- Promote multi-agency working and accountability
- Ensure that immediate evictions are rare and are a last resort
- Reduce the use of Deed of Surrender by Supported Accommodation providers
- Identify unmet need and opportunities to improve our responses to young people with multiple and complex needs

## **3. Eviction Protocol Procedures**

**3.1 Stage One:** *An appropriate accommodation referral needs to be submitted to the Accommodation Service to try and identify the most appropriate accommodation option for the young person*

3.2 Access into supported accommodation is via the Accommodation Service in Northumberland Adolescent Services. The Accommodation Service referral should

help to identify support needs and any risks which might make a person more vulnerable to eviction prior to admission.

3.3 A person may be more at risk of eviction for the following reasons:

- Previous eviction or abandonment
- Drug or alcohol problems
- History of non-payment of rent
- Budgeting difficulties
- History or current dis-engagement
- History of rough sleeping or previous homelessness
- Problematic relationships with other residents
- Behavioural problems
- History of violence

3.4 It is essential that at the initial access point consideration is given to how someone can be supported to sustain their accommodation placement. It is appreciated that, whilst it is good practice to identify vulnerability at the start of a placement, it may not always be easy to spot at this point. However, it is essential that as soon as any concerns which could lead to eviction are identified action is taken.

3.5 The supported accommodation provider should identify other support services involved with an individual and ensure that they are consulted in the support planning process and kept up to date with how the young person is managing. It is important that there is a shared and joint focus in supporting people to sustain their accommodation across all providers of support and care. Getting the support right at the beginning of an accommodation placement can make all the difference.

**3.6 Stage Two:** *action to be taken when the person is placed within supported accommodation to deal with any problems which arise.*

3.7 In general most of the supported accommodation providers in have their own internal policies and procedures for managing service users and recognise the signs and triggers that can lead to an eviction

3.8 Providers use a range of sanctions and formal warnings to give service users an opportunity to address the issues which might result in the loss of accommodation through eviction. Most providers have a simple system with a small number of verbal or written steps so that people can see what will happen if they do not change their ways. For example some providers use an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (see Appendix 1) to encourage a service user to modify his/her behaviour to prevent eviction.

**3.9 Recognising and understanding behaviour and actions which can result in the breakdown of an accommodation placement is essential in preventing an eviction from occurring.**

3.10 The table below gives examples of potential problems that commonly arise throughout an accommodation placement and some suggestions as to how they can be dealt with.

<b>Warning Signs</b>	<b>Possible action to alleviate problems and prevent eviction or abandonment</b>
Not engaging with support on offer	<p>Informal contact or building relationships at meal times or during other activities. Use opportunities such as room checks for engagement Whole team approach – young may respond better to certain members of staff than to others. Be persistent and link engagement with sanctions.</p>
Spending a lot of time outside the supported accommodation	<p>Engagement contracts where young person agrees to spend certain amount of time in the supported accommodation Discuss where a young person goes – is there opportunity for positive move on? Discuss reasons for not being here – is it lack of support needs or environment? Could the young person make an appropriate sideways move?</p>
Mounting Arrears	<p>Ensure all communication about arrears is done in a way that clearly identifies support offered, and all contact is recorded.</p> <p>Ensure that opportunities to maximise income have been explored and that all HB entitlement is fully utilised (including DHP's).</p> <p>Explore opportunities for direct payments through the DWP.</p> <p>Review support needs around drug and alcohol misuse and seek to address if there has been an increase.</p>
Unhappy with Environment	<p>Encourage complaints, and plan changes based on these where possible.</p> <p>Encourage participation through residents meetings</p> <p>Consider possible move on and ensure that the service user is linked into the Accommodation Service</p>

No social networks in area	Help the person to get involved in social events within the supported housing or elsewhere. Link the person to positive social networks and activities outside the supported housing Consider a planned move to another area.
Never lived in similar environment	Produce materials for potential residents on what the service can offer and distribute through referrers At interview or booking in develop a coping strategy plan Provide more intensive support in first few weeks Develop a 'buddy system' to help new residents integrate
At risk of offending	Engage in positive diversionary activity. Work closely with the Youth Justice Service
potential Substance Misuse	Where concerns arise around substance misuse, services to seek advice and support from Sorted and to refer the young person to Sorted for support following discussions with the young person

**3.11 Stage Three:** *action to be taken where there is a threat of eviction and loss of accommodation is likely.*

3.12 If despite the use of internal warning systems and sanctions it is becoming increasingly likely that an eviction will happen all providers must ensure that the Accommodation Service and the young person's worker is aware of the issue and an urgent care team meeting to be called to discuss the situation.

3.13 For young people open to 18+ Team; their leaving care worker will call a CLASP meeting. For those young people who are open on a CIN basis, a Joint Housing Protocol meeting will be held.

3.14 Work will need to start early and in advance of the end of the notice period so it is essential that providers notify the Accommodation Service before total breakdown of the accommodation placement occurs. Wherever possible services are asked to work flexibility with NAS to ensure a planned transition for the young person and to consider; wherever possible an extension of notice periods where appropriate.

### **3.15 Immediate Evictions**

Whilst it is rare, there have been occasions due to the severity of the incident that a young person has needed to leave their placement with immediate effect. Whilst this protocol's aim is to try and prevent this happening; it is acknowledged that on some rare occasions, a supported accommodation provider may be left with no choice but to implement an immediate eviction for the safety of others (both staff and other residents).

In these circumstances, there should be discussions between the supported accommodation provider and the Accommodation Lead for NAS to determine if there is any alternative to an immediate eviction before a final decision is made.

## **4. Outcomes following notification of impending eviction.**

### **4.1 Spot Purchasing**

If the standard package of support and accommodation is not working for an individual, but the place is thought to be right for them, it may be possible to identify additional support or care services to meet their needs for a short period, to see if this makes a difference. The Accommodation Service in conjunction with the relevant team manager for the young person, will agree possible interventions and make suitable arrangements.

### **4.2 Finding an alternative placement**

It is hoped that in the majority of cases, other accommodation will be identified before the person has to leave the current placement. Sideways moves may help where the person is in conflict with another resident or a staff member or it is thought they require more supervision. A new accommodation referral will need to be submitted by the young person's worker from NAS and the Accommodation Service will determine where best to direct the referral, on the basis of which service is likely to meet need.

### **4.3 Rent or Service charge arrears**

It may be possible to secure financial support around arrears in order to prevent an eviction, other support e.g. support to resolve benefit issues.

### **4.4 Setting and reviewing exclusion periods.**

Where someone is evicted, they will need to be advised what they can do in order to be given another placement there and whether there is an exclusion period. All exclusions should be time-limited and should be shared with the accommodation

service, so this can be recorded appropriately. All Exclusions should be reviewed on a regular basis.

## 5. Monitoring Arrangements

5.1 The protocol will be monitored by the Accommodation Service in conjunction with partners within supported accommodation.

### **Appendix 1: Sample Acceptable Behaviour Contract**

## Acceptable Behaviour Contract

### Service User Name and address

This Contract is made on the (*date*) and will continue until (*date*)

Contract has been set up in accordance with the licence / tenancy agreement offered by ( *Service name* )

I (*service user name*) agree to:

*Insert clauses here*

*Insert clauses here*

We aim to support you to keep your accommodation here.

If you have any problems sticking to this contract,  
please talk about them with your Keyworker.

We will help you to stick to this contract by:

*Insert clause here*

*Insert clause here*

I have been made aware that if I fail to keep this contract,  
it could mean that I will be given a further warning.

This could lead to my landlord taking action to evict me from the property.

**Declaration –I confirm that I understand the meaning of this Contract  
and that the consequences of breaking it have been explained to me.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed on behalf of service:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Length of contract:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of review:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Detail of warning removed:** \_\_\_\_\_