

## **JOINT PROTOCOL BETWEEN CHILDRENS' SOCIAL CARE & HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

### **PLACEMENT OF HOMELESS FAMILIES INTO TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION / PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR ACCOMMODATION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. This protocol applies to families who are homeless or in urgent housing need, who have children under 18 years old, or are pregnant.
- 1.2. The protocol also applies where the council may not or no longer owe a housing duty under the Housing Act 1996. The council however has a duty to assess the family's needs under Section 17 of the Children Act.
- 1.3. This may include households who are about to be evicted from the council's temporary accommodation (TA) due to the council not owing them a housing duty.
- 1.4. The council will provide support in emergency and temporary accommodation, to support child development and health.
- 1.5. The council will deliver trauma support interventions to build resilience and improve mental health outcomes.
- 1.6. The council will work with accommodation providers to improve accommodation standards and provision and implement a re-procurement process. Islington Council will consistently use the temporary accommodation standards previously agreed at the Housing and Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Executive meetings to improve the quality of temporary accommodation offered to homeless families.
- 1.7. We will ensure Children's services are embedded within the Homes and Neighbourhoods service to support the most complex families on their journey through homelessness.
- 1.8. The council will work in partnership with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Households in Temporary Accommodation and with Justlife to ensure families experiencing homelessness is tackled at a national level.

- 1.9. The council will work alongside schools, health visitors, the faith sector, general practitioners to improve coordination of care, health improvement and improved education attainment for homeless families living in temporary accommodation.
- 1.10. We commit to minimising the use bed and breakfast or hotels to accommodate homeless families with children.
- 1.11. Ensure homeless children to have similar rights to education and health as those in corporate parentship (Looked After Children is an example)
- 1.12. Provide wrap around support for Homeless Families living in temporary accommodation.
- 1.13. Locate homeless families with children as close as possible to the schools attended by the children.
- 1.14. When a homeless family with children are placed into temporary accommodation the property will meet the families specific housing needs and no overcrowding will be permitted.
- 1.15. The safeguarding risk in mixed accommodation cannot be ignored. Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is of significant concern and should be at the forefront of minds, especially considering the recent scandals which underline the dangers for vulnerable young people in mixed environments.
- 1.16. Housing and Children's services will work together to alert schools and GP'S to changing family situations. This would allow support systems to be put in place early and awareness of potential child anxiety, hunger, and behaviour changes. Standardised offer of parental support and understanding. Expectation of cross school communication if children are displaced into new education environment. This will also help families to ensure they are not struck off GP lists for being moved out of the area, or so that they are not penalised for missing appointments due to other issues with Temporary Accommodation.
- 1.17. The purpose of this joint protocol is to improve the lives and experiences of families and young people living in temporary accommodation who Islington. The protocol applies to families and young people towards whom Islington Council does not have a housing duty but does have a children's services duty.
- 1.18. Information given to families and the communication with them that help them know the housing process, what to expect and where to go for things like laundrette, GP, travel etc. The council needs to ensure the protocol is understood as a joint agreement between housing, children's

services and the family themselves and this protocol improves people's lives.

**Children's social care process when Homes and Neighbourhoods do not have a housing duty towards the family.**

- 2.1. When a family present at Children's services a check should be made with housing to ensure housing have fulfilled their responsibilities under the Housing Act 1996. If there is nowhere for them to stay e.g. with friends whilst the assessment takes place a referral will be made to the temporary accommodation officer to seek temporary accommodation and arrange for housing benefit to fund the rent where applicable. This will only be a temporary solution and there will be a need to find permanent accommodation via the private rented sector. It is widespread practice when finding private rented permanent accommodation to provide a financial incentive. The Housing service will arrange this temporary accommodation and funding for this can come from an application to the RSS fund or section 17 of the Children's Act where applicable.
- 2.2. The assessment will need to consider the needs of children, parents and the issues that led to the family being homeless, to ascertain if this gives concern about the ability of the parents to provide for and meet the needs of their child/ren. There are four feasible options at the end of the assessment period.
  - i) Outcome of the assessment is that the children are seen as children in need and require a Children in Need plan to meet their needs.
  - ii) The children need protection and need a protection plan to safeguard them.
  - iii) The children require some support but do not reach the threshold for Children's services and can be supported by step down targeted or universal services.
  - iv) Alternatively, it could be decided that there are no other needs apart from the need for housing.
- 2.3. Once a decision has been made at the end of an assessment, if the family are to receive ongoing support e.g. a Children in Need plan, and are living within Islington, Islington will be the responsible authority to implement the plan.
- 2.4. However, if the family are placed in another local authority a referral needs to be made to the borough that the child is living in. If this is the

case please follow the chapter in the [London Safeguarding Procedures](#) about families who move across LA areas.

- 2.5. Where a client is not or no longer subject to any of above, the relevant Children's services team will close the case, but will continue to fund the costs of temporary accommodation not met by HB, until the client is rehoused into settled accommodation with a minimum tenancy of 12 months.
- 2.6. For the duration of the period that the client is in temporary accommodation, the Housing service will endeavour to maximise Housing Benefit to cover the rent.
- 2.7. The Housing and Children's Services will continue to seek permanent accommodation, in the private rented sector, for the family regardless of whether they are living within Islington or another borough. It is widespread practice when finding private rented permanent accommodation to provide a financial incentive to the landlord. The Housing team will arrange this and funding for this will come from an application to the RSS fund if the family are living within Islington and eligible. If the family are living outside of Islington regardless of status e.g. non-CIN/CIN, housing, will organise funding for the incentive and re-charge Islington Children's services to this amount.

### **Housing and Children's Services responsibilities**

- 3.1. When Children's services refer to the Housing Team in the Housing Needs service, accommodation sourced will either be temporary accommodation (TA) or settled accommodation in the private rented sector under an assured shorthold tenancy.

**Appendix 1** describes the expected "**Quality Standard for people living in temporary accommodation and private rented sector accommodation**".

**Appendix 2** describes the "**Location and search parameters of accommodation sourced by the council.**"

- 3.2. The costs of the accommodation will be met by housing benefit and / or the clients themselves. Any costs not met will be paid by Children's services. The Housing Service will be responsible for the following activities including:
  - sourcing appropriate accommodation- in addition to maintaining a comprehensive record of all placements
  - booking the family into the accommodation
  - getting housing benefit (HB) claims into payment

- in the case of temporary accommodation, collect the rent, and manage and monitor the placement.
  - Providing accommodation for the family which meets the council's quality standards.
- 3.3. Children's services will be responsible for submitting a fully completed Referral Form to Housing Services, providing all necessary information to ensure suitable accommodation can be sourced.
- 3.4. Children's services will be responsible for managing the support for the families in temporary accommodation.

### **BOOKINGS PROCESS**

- 4.1. Children's services may contact Housing services for assistance with sourcing temporary or private sector accommodation in the following circumstances:
- Where Children's services need to place a family in temporary accommodation whilst they carry out a Section 17 assessment under the Children Act
  - Where Children services, following a Section 17 assessment, accepts a duty to accommodate the family.
  - Where a family has already been placed in (temporary) accommodation and Children's services requests that the family be moved to an alternative private sector tenancy due to safety or risk concerns.

Families may already be known to Children services or may present for the first time. Families may also include those already living in temporary accommodation and are being evicted due to the council not or no longer having a housing duty towards them under the Housing legislation.

- 4.2. A Social Worker in CSC will:
- assess the family's housing needs and options open to them e.g. return to an existing address with support or mediation, accommodation within extended family or friends' network, etc.
  - whether the family is eligible for public funds and if not, ensure a referral to the No Recourse to Public Funds Team.
  - If the family is eligible for public funds, a referral to the Housing services may be made.
- 4.3. If temporary accommodation (TA) or Private Rented Sector Accommodation (PRS) is required, the Social Worker will complete a request for TA / PSA document from Children's services,
- 4.4. The Social Worker scans the authorised SSF form to the Temporary Accommodation team; [temporaryaccommodat@islington.gov.uk](mailto:temporaryaccommodat@islington.gov.uk)

- 4.5. Where temporary accommodation is required, paras 4.6 to 4.14 below will apply. Where private sector accommodation is required paras 4.15 to 4.18 will apply.

#### **Process for placement into a temporary accommodation property**

- 4.6. The Housing Officer will identify TA and liaise with the referring Social Worker as to the suitability of the accommodation. If the placement is suitable [in line with the council's Temporary Accommodation policy], the Housing Officer will confirm the booking with the TA Provider.
- 4.7. **NB:** If the household is already residing in one of the council's temporary accommodation units, consideration will be given to extending their accommodation rather than sourcing alternative accommodation.
- 4.8. The Social Worker will:
- ask the client to sign the SS129 and TA Occupancy Agreement
  - return the signed forms to [Temporaryaccommodation@islington.gov.uk](mailto:Temporaryaccommodation@islington.gov.uk)
  - ensure the client retains the original copy.

**NB:** The SS129 form is also a recognised housing benefit application form for clients placed in TA by the council. In order for the claim to be processed, it needs to be accompanied by the following documents: 1) Proof of ID 2) Proof of Income (POI) 3) Proof of National Insurance Number (NINO).

- 4.9. The housing Officer will advise the Social Worker of the arrangements for the family to meet with the TA provider, and to be booked into the accommodation and the Social Worker will relay this information to the client.
- 4.10. The client would meet the TA provider as agreed above. The TA Provider will issue keys / fobs, contact telephone numbers, show the client around the property, and explain how appliances work, etc.
- 4.11. The TA Provider will confirm to the TA Team by 12 pm the following day whether the client took up the accommodation. The TA officer will confirm by email to the Social Worker that the booking has been completed, and that the client has taken up occupancy.
- 4.12. Whilst the client remains in TA, Children's services will be liable for any shortfalls of rent not met by Housing Benefit or the client themselves.

#### **Process for placement into a private rented sector (PRS) property**

- 4.13. If the household is to be placed in a private rented sector tenancy, the Officer or an officer from the Housing Needs team will acknowledge receipt of the referral from Children's services and liaise with the social

worker over potential areas, timescales etc to then identify a suitable property.

**NB: due to the shortage of affordable private sector accommodation in London (particularly within central London), it may take some time to source a suitable PRS property.**

- 4.14. When a potential suitable property has been found the Officer will notify the Social Worker and arrange a viewing date and time between the landlord and the client.
- 4.15. If the client accepts the property, the Officer will.
  - co-ordinate arrangements for the client to be signed up on an assured shorthold tenancy by the landlord.
  - Support family in making a claim for housing benefit.
  - ensure the incentive payment is paid to the landlord to secure the property.
- 4.16. Once a client has been placed with a private landlord on an assured shorthold tenancy, the council no longer owes any duty to the client and their case will be closed. The client is then required to actively search for affordable accommodation.

## **5. PLACEMENT MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING**

- 5.1. In the case of a TA placement, the Officer will create the placement on the housing application (NEC), ensure a tenancy, rent account is set up and a rent card ordered.
- 5.2. The Officer will liaise with the Housing Benefit Officer and the client to ensure the client's HB claim is processed.
- 5.3. The Officer will aim to contact the client within two working days, to ensure they have settled into their accommodation, check in on their well-being and ensure that their rent is being paid.
- 5.3. Where a placement has been made pending a Section 17 assessment, Children's services will aim to complete the assessment within fifteen working days and inform the Officer of the outcome.
- 5.4. The Housing Officer and Social Worker will liaise regularly over the future housing options and move-on plans for the client.
- 5.5. The Housing Officer and Social Worker will notify each other of any changes in circumstances within the household.

- 5.6. In the case of any problems arising from the placement that may impact on the tenancy, the Housing Officer and the Social Worker will liaise closely to agree appropriate action to be taken to resolve any issues or move forward.
- 5.7. Regular quarterly call overs will be held to review all cases in TA, these will be attended by the Housing Officer, and Children's services. These will be organised by Children's services. Additionally, the Housing Officer will keep an up-to-date record of all Children's services placements.



## **Appendix 1- Quality Standard for people living in temporary accommodation and private rented sector accommodation.**

We will offer a property that:

- Is in your name
- Is self-contained
- Is clean & free from pests
- Is in a good, safe state of repair and decoration
- Has good condition floor coverings/finishes throughout
- Has safe and working electrics, gas, heating, hot water, and plumbing.
- Has a working smoke alarm on every floor
- Meets or exceeds current energy performance standards.

We will not place families in accommodation that has been converted from office to residential use through permitted development rights.

We will not place families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for any period longer than 72 hours. We aim to eliminate all forms of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless households in the future.

Before the family moves in, we will ensure there is a:

- A written agreement, including clear details of how much your rent will be
- An up-to-date Gas Safety Certificate (less than 12 months old)
- An up-to-date Electrical Safety Condition Report (less than 5 years old)
- An up-to-date home Energy Performance Certificate
- Information on fire safety in your home, including for example whether the stay put policy applies to your home or not.
- Details of how to contact the landlord, including in the case of any out of hours emergencies
- Details of how and when to contact the council, including a named council officer
- Clear guidance on claiming any benefits you may be entitled to
- Clear access to information about their case, and consistent support from Islington Council for the resident's well-being.

Before the family moves in, we will request that the landlord inspects the property and provides a report confirming:

- That the property is in a good, clean condition throughout and free from pests and hazards.
- That the following are in good, clean working condition including:
  - floor coverings
  - doors and door locks
  - windows
  - taps, sinks, baths, showers, and toilet flushes
  - heating and hot water and their controls
  - lights
  - fitted cupboards and draws
  - any electric ventilation
  - any appliances & cookers
- The details of any furniture, furnishings or appliances provided and its condition.
- The meter readings and contact details for all current utility suppliers, including water, gas, electricity, internet, telephone, and digital TV.
- Cots will always be provided for babies.

Should of the above have not been satisfied as part of the initial tenancy sign up process, concerns may be escalated to the Housing Needs service and Childrens Social Care.

## **Appendix 2- Location and search parameters of accommodation sourced by the council.**

1. The council aims to offer accommodation within the borough. However, Islington is one of the most expensive and highly sought-after places in the country to live and this means that there is not enough accommodation available here for everyone.
2. Where it is not possible to offer a family accommodation in-borough, we will offer a home that is as close as reasonably practicable to where the family were living before, they became homeless. The council will aim to identify a suitable property in Islington or as close as possible to Islington.
3. The following are examples of the types of households who we would assess as needing to be housed in-borough, as needing accommodation within a specified travelling distance to Islington and those who could be housed further afield.

### **Band 1 – Islington and adjacent boroughs**

- Children with a Statement of Special Educational Need, Children Leaving Care, Child in Need or Child Protection Plan receiving such a significant package of care from a variety of providers that transferring them elsewhere will create significant risk to the safety and sustainability of the caring arrangements.
- Households with complex needs who are engaged with services and where a move out of borough may severely disrupt this engagement thus creating significant risk to the safety and sustainability of the caring arrangements.
- Households who have a longstanding arrangement to provide care and support to another family member in Islington who is not part of the resident household and would be likely to require statutory health and social support if the care ceased.
- Any other special circumstance will also be considered.

### **Band 2: In borough or the rest of Greater London**

- Applicants who have been continuously employed in Greater London for a period of six months, and for 24 hours or more per week. Women who are on maternity leave from employment and meet the above criteria would also be prioritised for placements in Greater London.

- Applicants who have as part of their household, a child or children who are enrolled in public examination courses in Islington, with exams to be taken within the next six months.
- Relocation of families at risk of exploitation.
- Any other special circumstance will be considered.

### **Band 3: In borough or further afield**

- Non-working households.
- Households with children at nursery, primary or secondary school, who are not sitting public exams.
- The household is receiving services locally, but support could be transferred to another area without severely disrupting caring arrangements.

### **Vulnerabilities**

- The council has a duty to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. If your child has a statement of Special Educational Need or is currently the subject of a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan, we will liaise with Children's Services to ensure that any offer we make is suitable and meets the child's needs.
- Where a child is currently in a public exam year, we will ensure that any accommodation offered is within reasonable travelling distance of school so they can continue their studies uninterrupted.
- We also have a monthly liaison meeting with Children's Services where we discuss the needs of those families, we know are threatened with homelessness so we can jointly plan how best to meet their housing and support needs in the future.
- The council recognises that in many cases it may be in the best interests of children to remain at existing schools where they are settled. Unfortunately, due to the difficulties in procuring accommodation referred to above it is not always possible to offer accommodation which avoids the need for parents to consider moving their child's school and we must prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable children.

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