

Young People's Housing Strategy

To provide safe, secure and affordable accommodation for our Care Leavers, 16/17-year-olds at Risk of Homelessness and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

2024-2028

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Strategy on a Page

Summary of Young People's Housing Strategy 2024-2028

Strategic Priority	1. Expanding Housing Options	2. Developing Clear Housing Pathways	3. Supporting Tenancy Sustainment	4. Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
Over the last 4 years we have:	<p>Built a Semi-Independent Living home for 7 Care Leavers.</p> <p>Purchased two Children Homes in the Borough.</p> <p>Completed the Transitions House project for those with additional requirements assisting their transition into adulthood.</p>	<p>Created a Young People's Housing Panel.</p> <p>Commissioned and implemented a report into how to improve our housing services for our young people.</p> <p>Improved collaborative working between Housing and Children Services.</p> <p>Implementation of Rent Guarantee Scheme to support move-on into the Private Rented Sector.</p>	<p>Successfully applied for the Staying Close project.</p> <p>Introduced the Rent Guarantee and Rent in Advance Schemes to assist residents moving into the Private Sector.</p> <p>Revised our Allocations Policy in 2022 to better suit the needs of our residents, including for our Care Leavers and young people.</p>	<p>Successfully applied for Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme.</p> <p>Recruitment of a Young Person's Housing Navigator in 2021.</p> <p>Duty to Refer embedded in the Young People's Housing Protocol and in the Council's housing services.</p>
In the next 4 years we aim to:	<p>Securing specialist accommodation through affordable housing negotiations.</p> <p>Expanding the Private Sector Landlord Forum to increase move-on options.</p> <p>Partnership working with Registered Provider Partners to encourage delivery of more specialist accommodation.</p> <p>Monitoring and application of any external grant funding opportunities.</p> <p>Assessment of existing Council assets to increase housing stock.</p> <p>Commission the Council's Housing Companies to deliver specialist accommodation.</p>	<p>Evaluation of the joint strategic needs data assessment of young people's housing pathways.</p> <p>Ensure that when a young person becomes looked after at aged 16/17, they are assigned a Personal Advisor and a Social Worker.</p> <p>Continued assessment of the Young People's Housing Panel's effectiveness between Children Services and Housing.</p> <p>Continue our commitment to not place young people in temporary or emergency accommodation.</p>	<p>Delivery of Staying Close grant funding.</p> <p>Improve communication with Care Leavers whilst they are waiting for their offer of social housing.</p> <p>Explore the delivery and implementation of trainer apartments.</p> <p>Explore whether the HRA can fund additional support to increase young people's tenancy sustainment.</p> <p>Ensure that a young person is assigned a Social Worker and a Personal Advisor when they become looked after aged 16/17.</p> <p>Sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant so best practise is embedded.</p>	<p>Delivery of the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme funding.</p> <p>Undertake an annual cross-service snapshot to identify young people aged 14+ who are at the highest risk of homelessness at 16/17.</p> <p>Increase support for Early Intervention to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Commitment to ensure young people do not present as homeless in order to be accommodated.</p> <p>Lobby government in partnership with partner Local Authorities for more funding and support.</p>

Foreword

Introduction

At a time of national economic turbulence and a cost-of-living crisis, it is important to ensure that the Borough's young people, and those young people coming into the Borough, have the necessary support to navigate these challenging times. This strategy will outline the Council's strategic priorities to provide innovative solutions and consolidate resources to enable us and our partners to address the key challenges facing our young people.

This document sets out the strategic direction for the Council's priority groups in the Borough. These have been identified as Care Leavers, 16/17-year-olds at risk of homelessness and former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Care Leavers (UASCs). The Council's strategic needs data forecasts that by 2025/26 we will have responsibility for an additional 25 former UASC Care Leavers and an additional 22 Care Leavers which, if not addressed, will lead to exponentially rising costs to find alternative private accommodation placements. The four strategic priorities that this strategy will commit to deliver to improve outcomes for our young people priority groups are:

Strategic Priority 1 - Expanding Housing Options

Strategic Priority 2 – Developing Clear Housing Pathways

Strategic Priority 3 – Supporting Tenancy Sustainment

Strategic Priority 4 – Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

The Council is the Corporate Parent for those in care and leaving care. This means that we have a responsibility to provide safe, secure, and affordable accommodation with accompanying support. An increase in the number of young people that require our support increases the financial outlay for the Council to provide this support. Therefore, this strategy will commit to increasing housing options and supported placements to ensure the Council increases its quality and quantity of accommodation placements.

This strategy has been co-produced with young people, residents, partner agencies and the Council's expert officers. Partnership working is fundamental to the success of this strategy to address the challenges faced by these priority groups. To this end, it is important that every stakeholder this strategy supports can own their objectives within the strategy and that this is a living document owned by all involved.

An Action Plan is included within this strategy which will monitor and evaluate the progress of this strategy against the strategic priorities. This will enable us to track our progress and any blockages in delivering these strategic objectives including regular reports and feedback from the Care Leaver Council, Youth Council and the Council's tenant engagement groups. This will ensure the strategy is held to account by those who will be directly affected by it.

National and Local Context

The last four years since the COVID-19 pandemic have had an adverse and disproportionate impact on young people. A national study completed by Homeless Link in 2021 demonstrated that the pandemic had an impact on youth homelessness as the pressure of lockdowns led to an increase in family breakdowns and services reporting worsening mental health and drugs and alcohol misuse.¹ The subsequent cost-of-living crisis has also contributed to a decrease in the quality and value of the private rental market nationally. Consequently, Centrepont estimates that 129,000 approached their council to avoid homelessness in 2022, this figure excludes a significant number who do not present but would meet the homelessness or rough sleeping definition.²

Locally, a similar picture is forming with 200 homelessness approaches from young people in the 12 months up to October 2023. There is a causal link between this increase and national economic turbulence, with private rents and evictions at an all-time high. This decreases housing security for families and strains relationships leading to a rise in family breakdowns, the leading cause of 16/17 year olds being at risk of homelessness.³

In 2023, Children Services commissioned a joint strategic needs assessment to understand anticipated demand of our young people and their expected housing pathways. Over the last 6 years there has been a significant increase of 70 in the number of Care Leavers from 2017 to 2023. The number of Care Leavers is forecasted to rise by an additional 52 to 169 by 2027. This is largely driven by an increase in the number of former UASC Care Leavers. Coupled with Wokingham being an area of high unaffordability and a small and expensive private rental sector, this increases pressure on Council services and budgets as more young people require assistance, leading to a funding gap of £3 million by 2027/28 if not mitigated.

Due to this increasing need, in the past 6 years, the Council has developed two Semi-Independent Living (SiLs) schemes at Reading Road and London Road in Wokingham. From January 2022 to January 2023 these placements supported 8 and 11 new placements respectively. Both SiLs provide drop-in sessions on support and independent living, employment and education. The Council also has 2 x Supported Lodgings and runs the Shared Lives scheme which enables a young person with a learning disability to live in a family setting as a young adult. There is also floating housing support available across the Borough through our provider Transform Housing. These measures have mitigated some of the impacts of the rising number of young people requiring assistance. However, the size of the forecasted increase requires strategic direction to pool Council resources to improve outcomes for our young people. This data has informed the creation of this strategy and will be used to tailor affordable housing commissioning for our priority groups to develop housing options that will increase provision for a variety of needs and contexts.

¹ 'Young and Homeless', Homeless Link, 2021.

² 'End Youth Homelessness', Centrepont, 2022.

³ Young and Homeless, Homeless Link, 2021.

Partnership Working

The Council is committed to co-production through increased collaborative working with our young people, internal departments, Registered Provider Partners (RPs), Local Housing Companies (Loddon Homes and Berrybrook Homes), our third sector partners and government agencies. Due to the Council's limited resources and assets, improving efficiencies through joined up working is the most effective way to increase provision and service quality for our young people. Therefore, this strategy seeks to integrate partnership working as a golden thread running through the Council's approach to improving its housing offer for our young people.

In 2022, the Council created the Young People's Housing Panel to ensure Housing and Children Services had holistic input into forming pathways for those the Council has a Corporate Parenting responsibility for. This has improved outcomes by providing an intersectional view from all services on the individual pathway plans relevant to the context of each young person. This commitment to this collaborative working is embedded throughout this strategy with a focus on emboldening the good progress already made to further improve processes and outcomes.

In 2023, the Council renewed and expanded our Registered Provider Partnership to include 9 RPs to unlock an increase in the delivery of affordable homes to further the Council's strategic directions for our priority groups. The action plan for this partnership requires each partner to deliver at least 1 development with a portion of specialist housing. This could include Care Leaver accommodation or bespoke accommodation for young people with additional requirements. We also work closely with the South-East Strategic Migration Partnership and other Local Authorities to share best practise and innovation with partners experiencing a similar level of increased need in relation to our responsibility to accommodate UASCs.

These initiatives have laid the foundation for the Council to build on our commitment to partnership working. This strategy encourages cooperation to fulfil the direction outlined in the four strategic priorities. This includes a commitment to lobby government, in tandem with other local authorities, for more funding to empower the Council's provision for young people. Finally, we also aim to sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant to ensure best practice and latest guidance is embedded throughout the Council and its partners services.

Strategic Priority 1 – Expanding our Housing Options for Young People

Over the last 4 years, the Council has delivered 928 affordable housing dwellings across a range of tenures including for social rent and discounted home ownership products such as shared ownership. This has increased the number and range of options for all our residents but the numbers on the housing register have persisted at approximately 1,500. Linking to our young people priority groups, the number of Care Leavers and former UASCs Care Leavers that require affordable housing over the next 4 years is forecasted at 172 placements. These placements have been identified across a variety of provisions to meet identified need. This data is taken from the joint strategic needs data assessment which used predicted housing pathway plans to form this anticipated need:

Placement	Total Expected Demand up to 2027
Semi-Independent	43
Staying Put	11
Supported Lodgings	20
Independent Tenancy/HMOs	93

A significant portion of this number relates to UASCs. In Wokingham, this number has increased significantly since 2022 following the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) becoming mandatory. From 15 February 2022, all local authorities in the UK were directed to participate in the NTS. This meant that local authorities are required to take 0.1% of their child population which translates to a total number of 41 UASCs for Wokingham up from 28 previously. Whilst this may not seem a large increase initially, it creates an exponential increase in the number of former UASC Care Leavers the Council has a responsibility to provide accommodation for. These children tend to enter care late, ageing out to Care Leaver status quickly. On average, UASC accommodation costs £100,000 over their Care Cycle with the difference in grant subsidy from government increasing significantly once they become a Care Leaver. It is predicted that this will place an additional unfunded financial cost to the Council of £1,100,000 by 2025/26 if we do nothing to mitigate these increases.

These UASC placements are in addition to an anticipated increase in the number of young people leaving care. Since 2016/17, the Council has experienced an increase year on year in the number of Care Leavers we are responsible for. Each year, between 12 and 15 young people leave care in Wokingham Borough. From 2016/17 to 2022/23 the Council saw an increase of 41 Care Leavers. We are anticipating that the number of non-UASC Care Leavers the Council is responsible for will continue to increase up to 99 by 2026/27. Each young person priority group will have different requirements for their accommodation needs, requiring a flexible and adaptive approach to procuring and commissioning additional accommodation.

Not all Care Leavers will require supported accommodation. Therefore, we also need to increase the supply of smaller properties for young people with a focus on social rented accommodation, with additional support where appropriate. In addition, there is a need to increase options for emergency and short-stay accommodation within the Borough as a lack of suitable supply has led to an increase in out of area placements. These placements often do not offer value for money and are more likely to lead to a 'cliff-edge' of support and accommodation. Therefore, there is a commitment in this strategy to procure additional short-term placements in Borough wherever possible. Increasing our locally managed placements will increase the quality of support on offer, help immerse our young people in the local community, and enable them to access localised support.

For the reasons outlined above, there is a critical need for additional options for the young people identified in this strategy. A variety of options will be promoted in this strategy including the commissioning of HMOs, acquisition of more children's homes, Staying Put placements and foster carers. This includes expanding and strengthening our Private Sector Landlord Forum to give confidence to landlords to accommodate young people leaving care through Rent Guarantee and Rent in Advance schemes. Currently, there are limited options in the private rented sector for young people so this will create independent placements for those who are ready, supported by the outcomes of strategic priority 3.

In addition, continued assessment of the Council's stock and development pipeline will be undertaken to ensure that, where appropriate, we are maximising accommodation options for our Care Leavers. The Council will also apply for any grant funding opportunities that could assist that are released from government, such as an anticipated new round of the Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund (CASSH) or any other capital or revenue opportunities to increase our sufficiency and provision for young people with additional needs.

The Strategic Housing team is working closely with Children Services to expand provision through assessing the Council's existing assets, securing affordable housing through developer contributions, encourage delivery of bespoke housing for young people through our Registered Providers, accessing government grant initiatives and exploring the delivery of HMOs and children's homes. The Strategic Housing team negotiates designations for suitable dwellings with developers on new developments as part of their affordable housing contribution. On-site delivery of the affordable housing is prioritised where appropriate for young people in urban locations with good transport links and municipal facilities. However, where impractical, a commuted sum is sought which is used to help fund additional affordable housing, including for young people.

The Council's development pipeline includes a delegation for 5 x Care Leaver designated dwellings as part of a new development in Wokingham Town Centre. This will provide additional accommodation placements with close proximity to the Reading Road SiL. The Council will also monitor other emerging challenges and opportunities throughout the period of the strategy. Finally, a new commissioning model and process has been outlined in Appendix I of this strategy to define roles and responsibilities between departments to improve partnership working when commissioning new accommodation placements.

In the next 4 years, we aim to:

- Encourage and monitor young people specialist housing delivery amongst our Registered Provider partners.
- Actively improve relations with landlords in the private rented sector to increase move-on options for young people through the Private Sector Landlord Forum.
- Negotiate specialist young people housing as part of affordable housing negotiations with developers and monitor the number of properties achieved through this mechanism.
- Explore the delivery of HMOs, Children Homes, Staying Put placements and temporary accommodation.
- Assessment of the Council's existing assets to increase provision of affordable or specialist housing.
- Deliver 5 x 1-bed apartments at the Wellington Road development in Wokingham.

Strategic Priority 2 – Developing Clear Housing Pathways

A clear housing pathway is critical to the success of the young person's housing journey as it enables them to have confidence in their housing security and prepare for their onward accommodation pathways. This will enable the Council to commission the right placements in the right locations whilst enabling our young people to benefit from having a stable home.

Care Leavers are currently supported by Here 4 U and Children Services to create a housing pathway plan in conjunction with their overall care and support plan. Currently, up to the age of 18, Care Leavers will receive support from a Personal Advisor (PA) as well as a support worker. After their 18th birthday, support will come purely from the PA who will assist with creating a pathway plan for replace their care plan when they turn 16. Pathway planning usually begins before the young person's 16th birthday and are bespoke to the individual needs and context of the young person's situation and personal circumstances.

The planning of our young people's housing journey should involve different discussions with family members, carers, social workers, Personal Advisors, the Young People's Homelessness Prevention Officer, the Preparing for Adulthood Team, the Community Mental Health Team and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. It is important to be aware of all relevant cases at the earliest opportunity, usually at 14 years old, to enable the planning and commissioning of support and accommodation. Commissioners in Housing and Children Services being able to anticipate the pathways of our young people enables the Council to have a range of options for different scenarios. This also ensures the young person has greater confidence in their housing security, both through care and into their future accommodation pathways.

To this end, this strategy commits to embolden the joint strategic needs data, completed by Children Services, that maps out the expected housing pathways and needs of our priority groups. This will enable improved commissioning of an accommodation pipeline through the methods outlined in strategic priority 1, as well as creating an expected pipeline of demand from our young people currently in the care system. By intertwining the strands of accommodation provision and analysis of upcoming demand, we can match each young person to a housing pathway that best suits their individual circumstances.

The Council has a statutory duty to undertake a needs assessment and develop pathway plans for all eligible children aged 16/17. This must be reviewed every 6 months until the young person is 21. One way to improve partnership working and understand the needs of our young people is through the development of joint assessments between Housing and Children Services of young people aged 16 or 17 who are at risk of homelessness. This new approach will be embedded as part of this strategy's review of the Young People's Housing Panel.

As part of the Council's Corporate Parenting Duty, Care Leavers are given more than one chance to sustain their tenancy. This could mean overlooking actions that would usually result in eviction. This strategy commits to strengthening and expanding this commitment to encourage our RP partners and private sector landlords to adopt a similar approach wherever possible. The Council has also committed not to use Bed and Breakfast temporary or emergency accommodation for 16/17-year-olds due to its unsuitability for this cohort. These processes are managed by the Young People's Housing Panel. Introduced in 2022, this panel has already improved outcomes for young people's housing pathways through improved communication and inter-departmental collaboration enabling a holistic approach to each Care Leaver's accommodation pathways. Critically assessing the progress and impact of the Young People's Housing Panel will improve outcomes and partnership working by ensuring each stakeholder is accountable to the priorities and objectives outlined in this strategy.

Most placements for former UASC Care Leavers are outside Wokingham Borough because of the limited supply of suitable placements. The fact that London has the greatest density of diverse placement options which is more likely to meet the young person's cultural identity needs is another contributing factor. The impact of placing out of area is that, in line with the forecasted increase in former UASC Care Leavers, they will have less access to local education, training and health support or obtain local authority affordable housing. We can address this challenge by recruiting and training more local fostering and supported lodgings carers alongside developing community links and specialised staff and resources. This is in addition to the commitment to increase local provision for this group in the form of HMOs outlined in strategic priority 1. This process will be managed by the inception of a new UASC Steering Group to enable the mapping of appropriate housing pathways for this cohort. In turn, more young people placed within or close to Wokingham will allow us to develop more 16+ accommodation and support options.

The Young People's Housing Panel has improved pathway creation for young people with additional learning, mental and physical needs who have additional challenges in securing safe, secure, and affordable accommodation. The level of support required for each young person will vary based on their circumstances. However, it is important that we have a range of options to cater for a variety of different needs. The transition into adulthood presents additional challenges which may require support from the Council. Partnership working between the various agencies responsible for the young person's transition is vital.

As of August 2023, the Preparing for Adulthood team manages 220 young people with some level of additional needs. Residents are provided with a care plan from the age of 14. Therefore, it is vital that information sharing between the Council and third-sector agencies is completed to ensure these young people are provided with available support. This involves improved partnership working between Young People's Housing Panel, Specialist Housing Panel, Adult Social Care Housing Panel and Sexual/Exploitation Multi-Agency Conferences (SEMRAC). This strategy commits to ensuring housing pathways for our young people with additional needs are appropriately addressed. This process will be monitored at the Young People's Housing Panel.

In the next 4 years, we aim to:

- Ensure that when a young person becomes looked after at aged 16/17 that they are assigned both a Social Worker and a Personal Advisor.
- Identify how we can accommodate young people without them approaching as homeless.
- Continue our commitment to not place young people in temporary or emergency accommodation.
- Continued assessment of the Young People's Housing Panel's effectiveness between Children Services and Housing.
- Evaluation of the joint strategic needs data assessment of young people's housing pathways.
- Increase the provision of local fostering and supported lodgings carers, specifically for UASCs to enable them to Stay Put.
- Creation of a UASC Steering Group to commission and plan strategic placement of new accommodation options.

Strategic Priority 3 – Supporting Tenancy Sustainment

Young people under the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility should expect the same level of care and support that other young people receive from their parents. To receive support, they must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 or for 13 weeks after their 16th birthday as well as some additional qualifying factors outlined in the Local Offer for Care Leavers. The Local Offer contains information about services which may assist in preparing for adulthood including support for: accommodation, education, training, employment, health and wellbeing, finances, relationships, participation in society. The Council recognises that Care Leavers leave care at a significantly younger age than their peers would leave their family home. This strategic priority focuses on ensuring each young person has a successful transition into their first independent tenancy or move-on placement. One example of how this will be achieved is delivery of the Staying Close pilot outlined in Case Study 1 below.

Care Leavers have lower rates of tenancy sustainment and higher rental arrears than the Council's general needs residents. In the Council's stock, the difference in average debt between these groups is £609. This significant difference can be attributed to adverse childhood experiences among other factors outside of the Council's control. However, by having a clear housing pathway, the Council can provide tenancy sustainment support and signpost to our third-sector partners. By ensuring our young people are tenancy ready, we expect to reduce rental arrears amongst our, and our RP Partner's stock, as well as giving more confidence to private sector landlords to accommodate Care Leavers.

Appropriate housing and support services play a crucial role in our preventative strategies to enable young people to live successfully in the community. The encouragement of self-reliance and independent living will positively contribute towards increasing our young people's tenancy sustainment and reduce the likelihood of requiring expensive care services. Therefore, the Council has a responsibility to ensure Care Leavers are tenancy ready, equipped to work, have access to education and are sign-posted to develop key life skills. This strategy introduces a range of processes to ensure our young people enter their housing pathways with an understanding of the expectations and skills required to live independently. This includes ensuring children on the edge of care receive early housing advice and guidance and have a defined housing pathway. In turn, this will increase tenancy sustainment and reduce rent arrears, with the young person aware of expectations in their new placement.

The Council also commits to continuing the policy of giving young people more than one chance to sustain their accommodation, recognising that a flexible approach is the best way to increase tenancy sustainment. We will also encourage our RP partners to adopt a similar approach where appropriate. Wraparound support is critical to preventing failed tenancies through early intervention of the causes of any tenancy sustainment issues. To this end, the HRA will explore business cases to increase specialised tenancy sustainment support for Care Leavers. This will be completed in conjunction with an exploration into the benefits

and practicality of completing Wokingham's first trainer apartments to provide young people with a short-term tenancy to trial living independently in a safe and supported environment.

A proven method to develop independent living skills is through a Staying Put arrangement.⁴ These provide both accommodation and support to help young people develop the skills and behaviour necessary to make a successful transition into independent adult life. This strategy commits to exploring the expansion of these placements. However, not all young people will require a supported accommodation placement. Therefore, we also need to increase tenancy sustainment support for those who are moving into independent tenancies. We can do this by signposting our young people to the suite of support on offer from both the Council and our third-sector partners once we have created their clear housing pathway. In addition, we will explore the creation of a 'Setting Up Home' budget to ensure that no Care Leavers move into a tenancy without essential white goods and furniture.

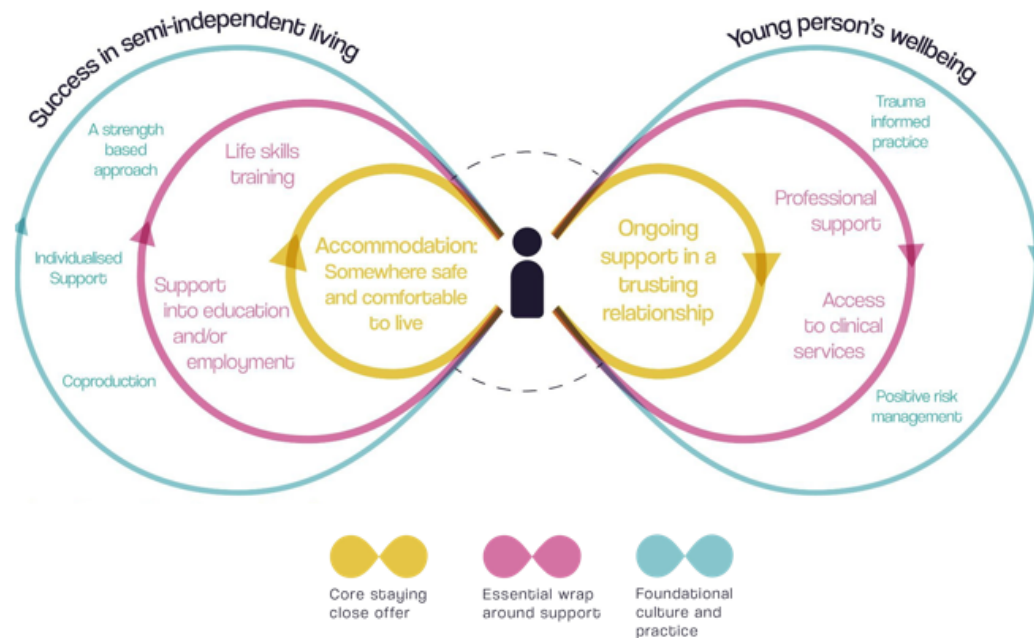
To embed these commitments throughout the activities of the Council and its partners, there is an ambition to sign-up to the Care Leaver Covenant to ensure that every agency the Council partners with is committed to the ensuring the best provision and service for Care-Leavers. This golden thread will be a standard that each agency can refer to when supporting our Care Leavers and will homogenise standards in line with national best practise.

⁴ Staying Put – The young person will stay with their foster parent and make a contribution towards rent and bills.

Case Study 1 - Staying Close

To promote tenancy sustainment amongst our Care Leavers the Council was successful with a funding application for the Department of Education's Staying Close pilot initiative. Staying Close is a new initiative that provides funding to ensure Care Leavers have access to a trusted person once they have moved into an independent tenancy. The Council secured revenue funding for 2 years up to 2025 to assist 14 Care Leavers with additional support with a trusted person once they have moved on from one of our two Semi-Independent Living provisions.

The Staying Close Framework



In the next 4 years, we aim to:

- Review the quality and accessibility of information available on the Council's website for young people. Especially in terms of signposting options for parents' of 16/17 year olds.
- Successful delivery and implementation of the Staying Close grant funded project.
- Avoid any Care Leavers moving into empty properties with no essential white goods and furniture. Either allow more time for these purchases or furnish the property to a basic level from the leaving care 'Setting Up Home' budget.
- Lobby government in partnership with other Local Authorities for more funding and support to empower the Council's provision for our young people priority groups.
- Sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant and National Care Leaver Benchmarking Forum to ensure best practise is embedded throughout the Council and encourage our partners to do the same.
- Explore whether the HRA can fund additional support for Care Leavers to increase tenancy sustainment.
- Explore the delivery of trainer apartments for young people.

Strategic Priority 4 – Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Homelessness and rough sleeping can have a significant and disruptive impact on the lives of anyone who experiences it, especially with young people. The causes of rough sleeping are varied and contextual to everyone who experiences it. However, young people who have led traumatic lives are more likely to experience homelessness or rough sleeping. For example, if a young person experiences significant adversity in the form of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), then they are 16 times more likely to experience rough sleeping.⁵ Homelessness is disruptive to people's lives and causes insecurity and instability in our communities. The Council has adopted to DLUHC's definition of ending rough sleeping: 'to ensure any rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible and, where it does occur, it is rare, brief, and non-recurrent'. We aim to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping wherever possible using creative solutions, maximising grant opportunities and providing the right level of support to enable our young people to thrive in their housing journeys.

This strategy also seeks to increase the Council's ability to intervene at the earliest possible stage. Early intervention is essential to reduce the number of children that experience homelessness or rough sleeping and that enter the Council's care system. Homeless Link's 'Young and Homeless' study shows that family breakdown is the leading cause of youth homelessness and support is usually received too late.⁶ Early intervention is also important in ensuring the prevention of repeat homelessness, minimising disruption to children's education, mitigating the loss of family support networks and reducing debt and poverty.

Our approach to early intervention provides targeted support once a young person has been identified as at risk of homelessness. This support includes anticipating what support the context of each individual situation requires. This involves a three-step process:

1. Signposting families to support services to keep them in control of resolving issues.
2. Stepping in to prevent issues escalating and requiring specialist services or accommodation.
3. When appropriate, using specialist intervention to deliver permanent resolutions.

By targeting support and signposting families to information on addressing the fundamental causes of homelessness, we can mitigate the number of 16/17-year-olds at risk of homelessness. The Council employs a Homelessness Early Intervention Officer covering all homelessness cases who has a success rate of 99% in their cases in ensuring residents do not experience rough sleeping. Building on this will be critical to preventing the number of

⁵ Homelessness and Childhood Adversity, Public Health Wales, 2019.

⁶ Young and Homeless, Homeless Link, 2021.

young people who rough sleep in Wokingham. One way to improve the Council's early intervention services is through the undertaking of an annual cross-service 'snapshot' to identify young people aged 14+, not in the Council's care, who are most at risk of homelessness at 16/17. This will be completed as part of the improved partnership working arrangements between Children's Services and Housing and monitored at the Young People's Housing Panel.

Early intervention support is critical to reducing the impact of homelessness and rough sleeping on our young people. However, inevitably some young people will present to the Council as homeless. Focusing on early intervention will reduce the number who present as homeless, but we need to respond to these cases creatively and sensitively to each individual situation. Therefore, we need to create responsive and adaptable solutions, combined with an increase in the range of accommodation placements, to improve our ability to respond to homelessness presentations.

To support our response to homelessness, there will be cases when additional support is required. To this end, the Council has successfully applied for funding to deliver the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) outlined in Case Study 2. This is a significant step towards increasing our accommodation options for our most vulnerable young people who need intensive interventionist support to avoid rough sleeping and increase their tenancy sustainment. However, we will continue to monitor external grant opportunities to provide additional accommodation and support options. Furthermore, we will also lobby government to provide additional funding to increase the Council's options when assisting young people in the most challenging circumstances. This will be completed in partnership with other local authorities who are experiencing similar pressures to strengthen the call for additional funding opportunities.

Case Study 2 – Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP)

The Council has been awarded capital and revenue funding to deliver this programme aimed at assisting 18–25-year-olds at risk of homelessness. Homes England and the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) co-produced this funding application which will increase the Council's housing stock by 4 x 1-bed apartments and provide Housing First support for 3 years through our partner agency Two Saints. The Council and Two Saint's successful delivery and implementation of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) with a 100% tenancy sustainment, 25% above target, and the learning gained from the delivery of this programme will feed into our delivery of SHAP. This will add a further option for our allocations team for our most vulnerable young people who have proven difficulties with tenancy sustainment in our SiLs, temporary accommodation and move-on placements. By providing bespoke and high-intensive support, as well as an accommodation first approach, we will be able to produce better outcomes for our most vulnerable young people.

In the next 4 years, we aim to:

- Complete the successful implementation and evaluation of the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme with an aim for a 75% tenancy sustainment rate.
- Continue to monitor and apply for grant funding opportunities to provide interventionist support for young people at risk of homelessness.
- Undertake an annual cross-service 'snapshot' to identify young people aged 14+ who are most at risk of homelessness at 16/17.
- Ensure that early intervention is prioritised at the earliest stage we are aware of a young person who is at risk of homelessness.
- Continue to focus on the prevention of homelessness and find creative solutions to prevent and reduce homelessness approaches.
- Lobby government in partnership with partner Local Authorities for more funding and support to empower the Council's ability to fulfil its Corporate Parenting Duty.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Progress against the objectives, actions and strategic priorities outlined in the Young People's Housing Strategy will be assessed and held accountable through a combination of different forums and groups to ensure successful outcomes. This includes evaluation at the Young People's Housing Panel with representatives from Children Services and Housing as well as the Housing Advisory and Implementation Group (HAIG) which is a cross-party forum of councillors designed to provide insight to the Council's housing strategies and the Tenant Landlord Improvement Panel.

Furthermore, an Action Plan has been developed and included within this strategy. This Action Plan will be a live document which will be subject to quarterly review to ensure those who have committed to actions are being held accountable to the timeframes and objectives outlined herein. This will ensure that the strategy continues to evolve over the next 4 years and remains relevant, responsive and up to date.

Action Plan 2024-2028

Strategic Priority 1 – Expanding our Housing Options for Young People					
No.	Priorities	Outcomes	Lead Service Area	Anticipated Achieved By	RAG
1.1	Secure specialist accommodation for young people in new developments through affordable housing negotiations.	Track the number of properties negotiated for the use of specialist accommodation through this mechanism.	Strategic Housing	Ongoing	
1.2	Partner Registered Providers (RPs) to provide at least 1 supported housing project in the Borough with consideration to young people through RP Partnership 2023 – 2026.	Number of dwellings designated for young people that our RP partners have delivered.	Strategic Housing	2026	
1.3	Delivery of 5 x 1-bed apartments for Care Leavers as part of the Wellington Road development.	Completion of development and occupation in 2026.	Strategic Housing	2026	
1.4	Re-assessment of the Council's existing assets to explore the possibility of re-purposing for young people's accommodation.	Establishment of a Housing Projects board to assess need and provide through innovative use of Section 106 commuted sums.	Strategic Housing	Ongoing	
1.5	Enabling the use of the 'crash-pad' at the SIL at London Road for emergency accommodation.	Resolution of the legal barriers.	Children Services	2024	

1.6	Use of the Private Sector Landlord Forum to increase placements in the private rented sector, also utilising the Rent Guarantee Scheme.	Increase in quantity of options for Care Leavers and UASCs to access in the private rented sector.	Housing Needs and Options	Ongoing	
1.7	Provision of Houses of Multiple Occupation and support with group tenancies for UASCs.	Delivery of our first HMO for UASCs and assessment of its effectiveness and whether to expand beyond this.	Strategic Housing	2024	
1.8	Robust contract management of the Council's Supported Housing Lodgings.	Introduction of a maximum void period for Supported Housing Lodgings.	Children Services	2024	
Strategic Priority 2 – Developing Clear Housing Pathways					
No.	Priorities	Outcomes	Lead Service Area	Anticipated achieved by	RAG
2.1	Ensure that when a young person becomes looked after aged 16/17, a Personal Advisor is allocated alongside a Social Worker.	Continue commitment to assign looked after children with a Personal Advisor and a Social Worker from 16/17.	Children Services/Housing Needs and Options	Ongoing	
2.2	Lobby government in partnership with other Local Authorities for more funding and support to empower the Council's provision	Increased funding or changes to the number of UASCs the government assigns as part of the NTS.	Children Services	2024	

	for young people and Care Leavers.				
2.3	Creation of a UASC Steering Group to commission and plan strategic placement of new accommodation options.	Set-up of this group and ongoing assessment of its impact in improving outcomes for our UASCs.	Strategic Housing	2024	
2.4	Recruitment and training of more local fostering and supported lodging carers to offer former UASC Care Leavers the opportunity to 'Stay Put'.	Increase of Staying Put placements for former UASC Care Leavers leading to a reduction in out of area placements.	Children Services/Housing Needs and Options	Ongoing	
2.5	Encourage partnership working between Housing, Children Services, Preparing for Adulthood and Registered Providers to identify risk of arrears at an early stage to reduce the risk of eviction.	Continuation of the Young People's Housing Panel and assessment of its effectiveness and collaborative working with our Registered Provider partners.	Young People's Housing Panel	Ongoing	
Strategic Priority 3 – Supporting Tenancy Sustainment					
No.	Priorities	Outcomes	Lead Service Area	Anticipated Achieved by	RAG
3.1	Delivery of the Staying Close grant funded project.	Assessment in 2025 of the impact of the funding and whether to apply for an extension.	Children Services	2025	
3.2	Avoid any Care Leavers moving into empty properties	Analysis of the success of this commitment as	Housing Needs and Options	2024	

	with no essential white goods and furniture. Either allow more time for these purchases or furnish the property to a basic level from the leaving care 'Setting Up Home' budget.	part of the Action Plan review.			
3.3	Join the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum	Explore the benefits of joining this forum and embed best practise of this forum into the Council's practises.	Children Services	2024	
3.4	Sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant to ensure best practise is embedded throughout the Council and our partners including our Registered Providers.	Embedding of the Care Leaver Covenant through the Council's practises.	Children Services	2024	
3.5	Explore whether the HRA can fund additional support for Care Leavers to increase tenancy sustainment.	Additional support for young people leaving care to increase their tenancy sustainment skills.	Strategic Housing	2024	
3.6	Explore the delivery of trainer apartments for young people.	Self-contained apartments designed to provide essential skills for independent living with additional support, on a short-term basis.	Strategic Housing	2025	

3.7	Improve communication with Care Leavers whilst they are waiting for their offer of social housing and helping them to understand what might be suitable for them and what to look for in any property.	Creation of an accessible and standardised housing information pamphlet so all Care Leavers receive the same high-quality information whilst awaiting social housing.	Housing Needs and Options		
Strategic Priority 4 – Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping					
No.	Priority	Outcomes	Lead Service Area	Anticipated Achieved by	RAG
4.1	Delivery of Housing First support through Two Saints for 7 residents up to 2027 including delivery of 4 new properties through the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme.	<p>Delivery of the funding by the March 2025 deadline and tenancy sustainment of 75%.</p> <p>Assessment of the project’s impact in 2027 and decision whether to extend the Housing First support if financially viable.</p>	Strategic Housing/Housing Needs and Options	Annual evaluation and review prior to funding decision in 2027	
4.2	Continue to monitor and apply for grant funding opportunities to provide interventionist support for young people at risk of homelessness.	Liaison with government agencies and other local authorities to ensure we are aware of all opportunities to increase our support for young people at risk of homelessness.	Strategic Housing	Ongoing	

4.3	Ensure that early intervention is prioritised at the earliest stage we are aware of a young person who is at risk of homelessness.	Measure progress in line with the Action Plan review on prevention rates.	Housing Needs and Options/Children Services	Ongoing	
4.4	Review the quality and accessibility of information available on the Council's website for young people. Especially in terms of signposting options for parents' of 16/17 year olds.	By preventing the main cause of youth homelessness, family breakdown, we expect to reduce the number of young people who present as homeless.	Housing Needs and Options/Children Services	Ongoing	
4.5	Continue to focus on the prevention of homelessness and find creative solutions to prevent and reduce homelessness approaches.	Monitor progress in line with the Action Plan review on the number of homelessness approaches and rough sleepers amongst young people.	Housing Needs and Options	Ongoing	

Next Steps

This strategy will run for 4 years up to 2028 when a full evaluation and review will be undertaken of the impacts, successes, and limitations of our recommendations. Every year, an Action Plan review will be undertaken to assess progress against each of the above objectives co-produced with the Council, residents, young people and external partners.

Appendix I – Young People’s Housing Commissioning Flowchart

