

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 which has reduced use of temporary accommodation and increased social housing offers for Care Leavers.</p> <p>Improved collaboration between Housing and Children Services which has increased tenancy sustainment whilst reducing evictions and wait times for housing.</p> <p>Implementation of Rent Guarantee Scheme to support move-on into the Private Rented Sector.</p>	<p>Successfully applied for the Staying Close funding from the DfE to provide bespoke support for tenancy sustainment. This will lead to more successful transitions to independent living for our Care Leavers.</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 to better suit the needs of our residents, including for our Care Leavers and young people.</p>	<p>Successfully applied for the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme.</p> <p>Recruited a Young Person's Housing Navigator.</p> <p>Duty to Refer embedded in the Young People's Housing Protocol and our housing services.</p>
In the next 4 years we aim to:	<p>Secure accommodation for our young people through affordable housing negotiations.</p> <p>Expand the Private Sector Landlord Forum to increase move-on options.</p> <p>Encourage our Registered Provider Partners, including our Local Housing Companies, to deliver more accommodation for our young people.</p> <p>Monitor external grant funding opportunities.</p> <p>Assess existing Council assets to increase housing stock for our young people.</p>	<p>Evaluate the Young People's Housing Needs Assessment to help plan 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>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 additional support to increase young people's tenancy sustainment.</p> <p>Sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant to embed best practise in our, and our partners, processes.</p>	<p>Deliver 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>Explore how to increase support for early intervention to reduce homelessness.</p> <p>Commitment to ensure young people do not present as homeless in order to be accommodated.</p> <p>Lobby government for more funding and support.</p>

Glossary

Care Leaver - Someone who has been in the care of the Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.

Duty to Refer – Public authorities to notify the Council that a person who has engaged with them might be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Personal Advisor – Appointed from the age of 16 to support and prepare for independence up to the age of 25.

National Transfer Scheme – A government initiative re-introduced in 2021 to ensure an even distribution of UASCs across local authorities across the country.

Registered Provider – Housing Associations or Local Authorities that provide social housing.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs) – Children and young people who are seeking asylum but who have been separated from their parents or carers. Whilst their claim is being processed, they are cared for by a local authority.

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Foreword – Cllr Stephen Conway

Increasingly young people are being held back by the housing crisis and are frequently locked out of the social rented sector in this country, having to turn to an unaffordable private rented sector, live in temporary accommodation or risk homelessness. As a local authority we want to try and change that narrative and help provide stable and suitable accommodation options for those vulnerable young people who live in and come into our Borough. This strategy focuses particularly on those vulnerable groups (Care Leavers, 16/17-year-olds at risk of homelessness and former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Care Leavers), but this does not come without acknowledgement of all those young people who are finding it harder to access affordable housing or get themselves onto the housing ladder. Our Affordable Housing Strategy 2024- 28 provides strategic direction for affordable housing generally, with one of our main aims to maximise the delivery of affordable housing and housing options so that all residents can access stable and suitable accommodation when they are in need.

We are already a Corporate Parent for those children and young people who are looked after by us, and it is our responsibility to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for these young people. Throughout the last few years, we have seen a number of factors contribute to make it harder for young people to access affordable housing with an accompanying increasing demand for accommodation and support services.

As well as having a roof over their heads, many of our young people will require additional support for tenancy sustainment, education, employment and beyond. This needs to be tied into a clear housing pathway that is built in collaboration with the young person by the people that they trust. We have already had great success in securing grant funding to provide additional and innovative support to assist with life skills as well as more complex support for those who require it. This will ensure that we have a range of accommodation and support packages to enable the pursuing of healthy and independent living regardless of the young person's individual situation. This strategy seeks to continue to source and expand our options for supporting our young people on their housing journey.

More generally, by increasing our options of local, good quality and sustainable housing, we can provide an improved housing service, mitigate against expensive out of Borough placements, and take ownership of the quality of accommodation and services provided.

Finally, I would like to underline our commitment to partnership working with our Registered Providers and the third sector in Wokingham to provide the best possible housing pathway to the young people this strategy focuses on. At a time when demand for housing, and the cost of meeting this demand is at an all-time high, it is more important than ever before to seek creative solutions to the myriad of issues we are facing. I am committed to delivering this strategy with our partners, and supporting the opportunities it will create, to improve outcomes for young people's housing and strengthen our resilience to the increasing challenges faced.

Councillor Stephen Conway

Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing and Partnerships

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 our 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 our 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). We have significant financial pressures, partially caused by the increase in cost and quantity of placements for our young people. Currently, we do not have enough suitable placement and cost-effective housing options to meet the needs of our young people. Our Young People's Housing Needs assessment 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

We are 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 our financial outlay to provide this support. Therefore, this strategy will commit to increasing housing options and supported placements to ensure we are able to increase the quality and quantity of accommodation placements with a view to reducing the overall financial impact and improving outcomes.

This strategy has been co-produced with young people, residents, partner agencies and our 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 has been developed alongside 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 our young people and our 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

National Picture

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 cost-of-living crisis has also contributed to a decrease in the quality and value of the private rental market nationally. Consequently, Centrepoin 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.¹

Local Picture

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.¹ With increased demand for our services, at a time of significant financial pressure, it is important to evaluate how we can continue to improve outcomes for our young people.

In 2023, Children Services commissioned the Young People's Housing Needs Assessment to understand anticipated demand of our young people and their expected housing pathways. 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 Young People's Housing Needs 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	94

FIGURE 1 - FORECAST ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENTS

A significant portion of this number relates to former UASC Care Leavers. 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 the previous year but only 6 the years preceding. Whilst this may not seem a large increase initially, it creates an exponential increase in the number of former UASC Care Leavers we have a responsibility to provide accommodation for (see Figure 1). 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 of £1,100,000 by 2025/26 if we do nothing to mitigate these increases.

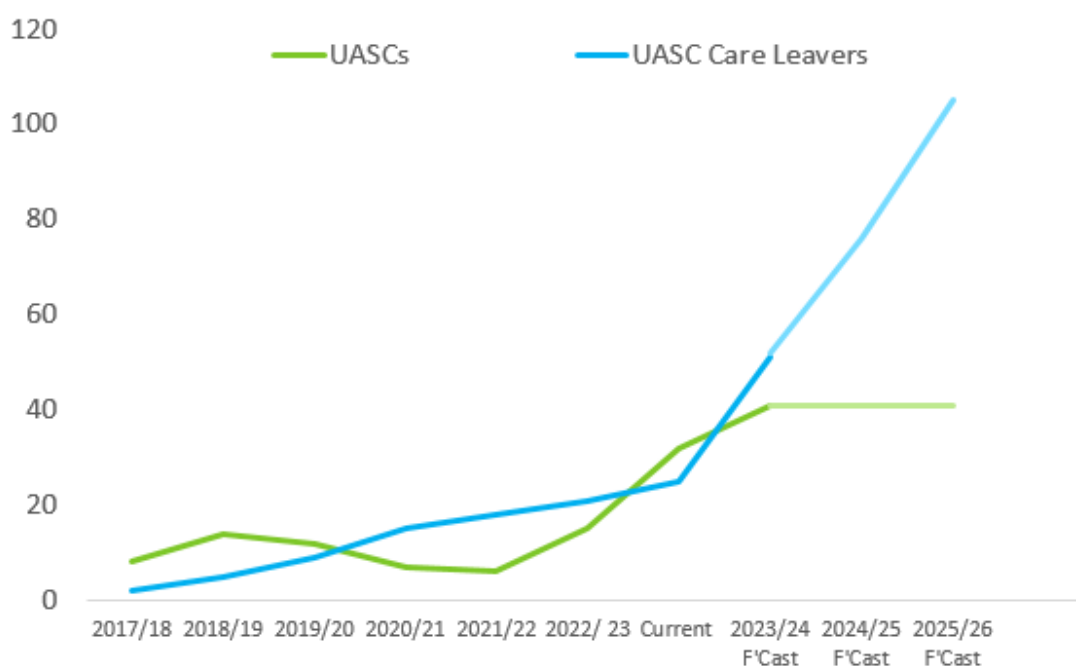


FIGURE 2 - FORECASTED INCREASE IN UASCs

These UASC placements are in addition to an anticipated increase in the number of young people leaving care:

- Since 2016/17, we have experienced an increase year on year in the number of Care Leavers
- Each year, between 12 and 15 young people leave care in Wokingham Borough
- From 2016/17 to 2022/23 we saw an increase of 41 Care Leavers (see Figure 3)
- We are anticipating that the number of non-UASC Care Leavers we are responsible for will continue to increase up to 99 by 2026/27

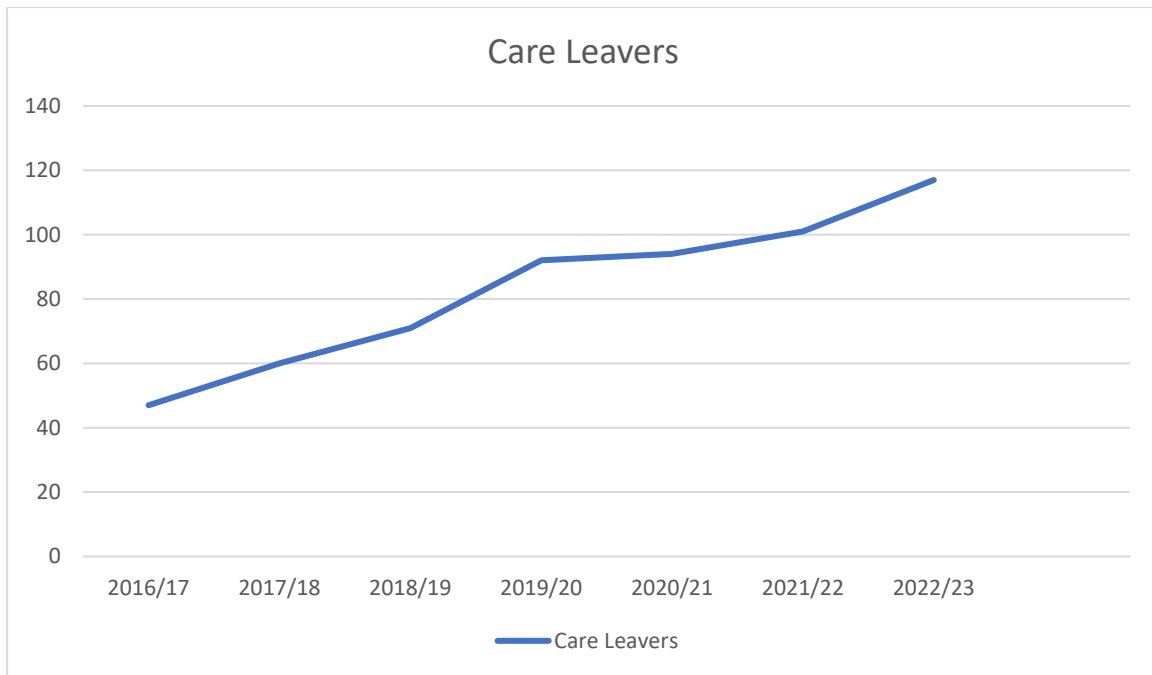


FIGURE 3 – NUMBER OF CARE LEAVERS OVER THE LAST 7 YEARS

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.

Due to this increasing need, in the past 6 years, we have developed two Semi-Independent Living (SiLs) schemes at Reading Road and London Road in Wokingham. From January 2022 to January 2023 these placements supported 9 and 7 new placements respectively. Both SiLs have staff on-site 24/7 who support with independent living, employment, substance misuse, emotional wellbeing, finances, and develop a bespoke support plan for each young person. We also have 2 x Supported Lodgings and run 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 young people priority groups to develop housing options that will increase provision for a variety of needs and contexts.

Partnership Working

We are 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 our 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 our approach to improving our housing offer for young people.

In 2022, we created the Young People's Housing Panel to ensure Housing and Children Services had holistic input into forming pathways for those we have 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 includes a 77% reduction in the number of Care Leavers being placed in temporary or emergency accommodation since the panel's inception. 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, we renewed and expanded our Registered Provider Partnership to include 9 RPs to unlock an increase in the delivery of affordable homes to further our strategic priorities for our priority groups. The action plan for this partnership requires each partner to deliver at least 1 development with a proportion of specialist housing. This could include Care Leaver accommodation or bespoke accommodation for young people with additional requirements. This includes exploring how we can work with RPs to convert new developments into affordable housing for our young people. We also work closely with the South-East Strategic Migration Partnership and other Local Authorities to share best practice 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 us 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 our 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 our, and our partners', services.

Strategic Priority 1 – Expanding our Housing Options for Young People

Over the last 4 years, we have 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. In addition, we anticipate that we require 172 placements to accommodate our young people priority groups over the next 4 years up to 2028. Therefore, it is critical that we commit to expanding our housing options across a variety of different placements to accommodate the range of needs of our young people.

We 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 move-on options from emergency and short-stay accommodation within the Borough. This is because a lack of supply has led to an increase in out of area placements as well as residents staying in expensive and unsuitable short-term accommodation. This issue is exacerbated by UASCs not having leave to remain which prevents the claiming of benefits or being able to hold a tenancy, so their only option is to remain in supported short-stay accommodation despite not needing the support on offer. 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. 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.

Due to increasing need and pressure on our housing resources, there is a 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 children's homes to keep our children in care locally, Staying Put placements and increase in SiL provision to keep our young people local and close to their networks. 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 our stock and development pipeline will be undertaken to ensure that, where appropriate, we are maximising accommodation options for our Care Leavers. We will also apply for any grant funding opportunities that could assist that are released from government 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 our 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 access to municipal facilities. However, where impractical, a commuted sum is sought which is used to help fund additional affordable housing, including for young people.

Our development pipeline includes a delegation for 5 x Care Leaver designated dwellings as part of a new development in Wokingham Town Centre which is expected to be occupied by 2026. This will provide additional accommodation placements with proximity to the Reading Road SiL. In addition, we have commissioned a 12-bed Supported Lodgings placement including 2 x emergency beds to increase provision for young people who require additional support. We will also monitor other emerging challenges and opportunities throughout the period of the strategy.

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.
- Increase local semi-independent accommodation for our care leavers and former UASCs to ensure that they are able to remain local and connected to their networks.
- Review emergency/short term assessment accommodation needs.
- Commission and establish a contract for Supported Lodgings beds.

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 us to commission the right placements in the right locations whilst enabling our young people to benefit from having a stable home.

Care Leavers are supported by Here 4 U and Children's Services to create a housing pathway plan in conjunction with their overall care and support plan. Care Leavers are supported by a Social Worker up to the age of 18. At 16/17, they are assigned a Personal Advisor who provide support and assist with creating a pathway plan. Pathway planning usually begins before the young person's 16th birthday and is bespoke to the individual needs and context of the young person's situation and personal circumstances. At 18, Care Leavers stop receiving support from their Social Worker and the Personal Advisor now supports them in their housing pathway, education, and employment.

The planning of our young people's housing journey involves different discussions with family members, carers, social workers, Personal Advisors, the Young Person's Housing Navigator, the Preparing for Adulthood Team, the Community Mental Health Team and the Children in Care 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 us 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 Young People's Housing Needs Assessment data 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 care. 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.

We have 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 for 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. The Young Person's Homelessness Prevention Officer role was changed to the new Young Person's Housing Navigator job description in October 2023 and moved into the Rough-Sleeper Team. This has enabled greater resilience and support for Care Leavers, their

PA's and wider Council services through providing expert homelessness and housing advice, emphasising our role as Corporate Parent and increasing the quality and consistency of 16/17 year old's Joint Assessments.

As part of our Corporate Parenting Duty, Care Leavers are given more than one chance to sustain their tenancy. This could mean working with the young person on actions that would usually result in eviction to ensure that they don't happen again. 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. We have also committed to not use Bed and Breakfast temporary or emergency accommodation for 16/17-year-olds due to its unsuitability for this cohort. 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 be able to 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 Young People's Housing Panel 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 was created to improve 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 us. 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 us, and third-sector agencies is completed to ensure these young people are provided with available support. This involves improved partnership working between the 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:

- 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 effectiveness of the Young People's Housing Needs Assessment in planning 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.

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Strategic Priority 3 – Supporting Tenancy Sustainment

Young people under our 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, and participation in society. We recognise 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 our other residents. Amongst our stock, the difference in average debt between these groups is £609 in total debt. This significant difference can be attributed to adverse childhood experiences among other factors outside of our control. However, by having a clear housing pathway, we 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, we have 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.

We also commit 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, we 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.¹ 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 Staying Put placements to increase the variety and quantity of housing options for our young people. 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 us and our third-sector partners once we have created their clear housing pathway. In addition, we will explore how to improve access to furniture and essential white goods so that our young people move into furnished properties.

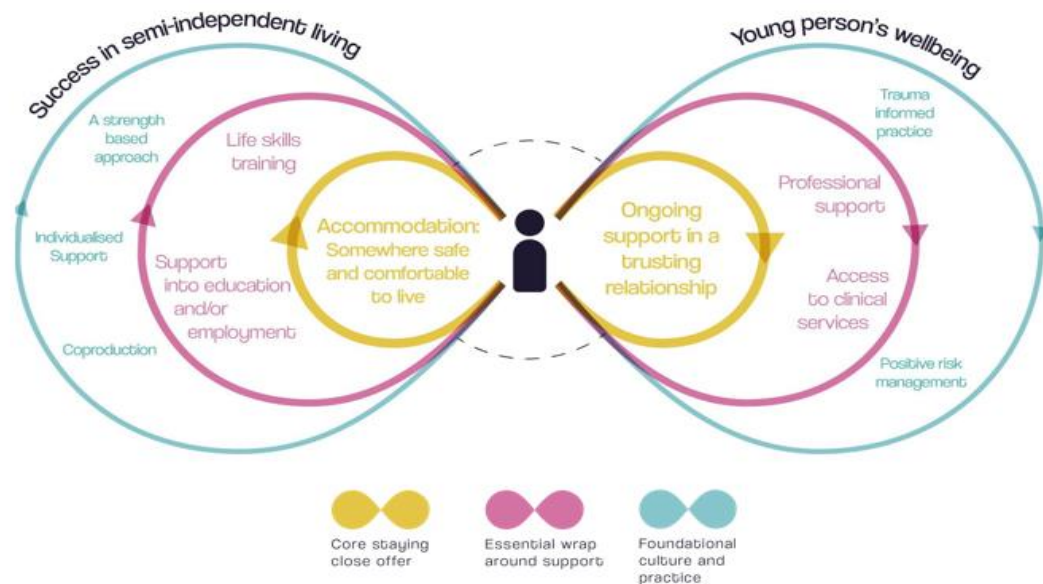
To embed these commitments throughout our, and our partners' activities, there is an ambition to sign-up to the Care Leaver Covenant to ensure that every agency we work with is committed to ensuring the best provision and service for Care-Leavers. This golden thread will be a standard that each agency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

¹ 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 our 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 explore options to furnish the property to a basic level.
- Lobby government in partnership with other Local Authorities for more funding and support to empower our provision for our young people priority groups.
- Sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant to ensure best practise is embedded throughout the Council and encourage our partners to do the same.
- Explore whether we can fund additional support for Care Leavers to increase tenancy sustainment.
- Explore the delivery of trainer apartments for young people.

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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.² Homelessness is disruptive to people's lives and causes insecurity and instability in our communities. We have adopted 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 our 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 our 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.³ 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. We employ 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 young people who rough sleep in Wokingham. One way to improve our early intervention

² Homelessness and Childhood Adversity, Public Health Wales, 2019.

³ Young and Homeless, Homeless Link, 2021.

services is through the undertaking of an annual cross-service snapshot to identify young people aged 14+, not in our 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 us 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, we have 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 our 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.

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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, the Tenant Landlord Improvement Panel, and the Housing Advisory and Implementation Group (HAIG) which is a cross-party forum of councillors designed to provide insight to our housing strategies.

Furthermore, an action plan has been developed alongside 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.

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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 our residents, young people, and external partners.

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