

# Accommodation Options for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Aged 16 and Older

The aim of this leaflet is to explain your accommodation options while you are living in care and choices once you reach the age of 16. It is always best to talk about these options with your social worker, carer/keyworker or independent reviewing officer, who can give you more information and help decide the best plan for you.

From April 2020

## Options for 16 and 17 year olds

### **Remaining in Foster Care age 16 & 17 and Staying Put at 18**

You can stay with your foster carers until your 18th birthday. If both you and your foster carers feel it would be good for you to remain after your 18th birthday and Children's Services is in agreement, you can be considered to remain under a Staying Put arrangement. Ask your social worker about the requirements for Staying Put arrangements. In order to get everything in place by your 18th birthday, planning starts for Staying Put when you reach age 16.

The following types of placement are deemed semi-independent as they are focused on helping you to develop the skills you need for independent living.

### **Supported Lodgings**

From the age of 16 you have the option of moving to a supported lodgings placement. (There is a separate leaflet all about this which your social worker can give you.) Supported Lodgings is a bit like foster care but gives you more independence. You will be living in a family home but there will be more focus on developing your independence skills, e.g. cooking some of your own meals, managing your own money etc. You can stay in supported lodgings until the age of 21, if everyone agrees this is the best plan for you.

### **Supported Accommodation**

Other kinds of semi-independent accommodation could include a foyer or a housing association supported living unit. This could be shared with other young people or self-contained. You can generally live in one of these settings for up to 2 years, but it can be extended if you need more time. If you are aged 16 or 17 the rent costs will be paid by Children's Services.

After your 18th birthday you will be responsible for paying the rent through your wages or housing benefit. Catalyst, Hightown

Praetorian, the YMCA and Paradigm Housing Associations have a number of schemes across Hertfordshire. They all have leaflets explaining where the schemes are and what level of support is available. Ask your worker for more information.

### **Semi-Independent Private Placement**

This can be either shared or self-contained accommodation and is only funded by Children's Services for young people up to the age of 18. Alongside the accommodation you will receive support to help develop your independent living skills.

## **Accessing Permanent Accommodation**

### **Housing Authority and Housing Association Accommodation**

When you reach the age of 16 your social worker will make sure your name is added to your local housing department housing register (council or housing association). You will need to apply to the area you have a 'local connection' with and also the area within which you live (if different). There are 10 district or borough councils in Hertfordshire who manage a social housing register. Generally, extra priority is given to care leavers so that you can be offered housing more quickly. The majority of the councils operate a 'choice based lettings' system. This means applicants 'bid' (apply) for available housing which meets their needs. Your worker will support you with the 'bidding' process. As a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (applied from April 2018) you may have a 'local connection' (only for a homelessness application) with a number of housing authority areas, for more details talk to your social worker or personal adviser.

You can access social housing from the age of 18 as long as you've shown you're ready to manage your own tenancy. Managing a tenancy comes with a number of responsibilities such as paying your own rent and bills, keeping the flat clean and tidy, and not causing a nuisance or being anti-social to your neighbours.

You can lose your flat if you don't meet the conditions of your tenancy. You will be supported by your leaving care personal adviser in the Leaving Care Service who can help you with housing issues. If you need extra help Herts Young Homeless (HYH) can provide a support worker; this is called 'floating support' and can be accessed through your personal adviser.

Social housing generally provides you with a secure tenancy, which means it will be for a much longer period than private accommodation. This type of accommodation is also viewed as 'affordable' with rents being set by the government.

### **Privately Rented Accommodation**

Private accommodation is normally available through letting agents, newspaper adverts or by word of mouth. This type of accommodation is where you rent a property from a private landlord. The rent is usually more expensive than social housing. You will generally have a 6-month tenancy which may be renewed or extended. Rent will either be paid by yourself or through you claiming Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit) there is a maximum limit to the amount of LHA that will be paid. The deposit and rent in advance may be paid by Children's Services. The deposit has to be returned to Children's Services at the end of the tenancy.

### **Homelessness**

If at any stage you are faced with homelessness, you can make a homeless application to your local housing authority. They will undertake an assessment of your situation and may be able to help you with temporary accommodation; this may lead to a longer-term tenancy if you meet all the criteria.

### **Owner Occupier**

People over the age of 18 can talk to their bank about getting a mortgage to buy their own home. A deposit will be needed to secure a mortgage – this is something you could start saving for, there are also several government schemes that help people with the deposit.