

YOUNG OFFENDERS HOUSING AND RESETTLEMENT PROTOCOL

**A framework to reduce homelessness amongst young offenders
returning from Young Offending Institutions,
and to reduce admission to YOIs in the North East**

April 2007

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1. Introduction

Overview

“Ensuring young people have suitable, stable accommodation is a critical factor in preventing offending. Accommodation is vital for young people to maintain consistent attendance at school, gain employment, engage with health services and benefit from programmes to address offending behaviour. It is a core component of resettlement post custody. Lack of suitable housing options contributes to overuse of the secure estate.”¹

This statement, made in the introduction to the section of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) website on Accommodation, describes the importance of accommodation to young offenders and therefore to those agencies, such as Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), who are working with them.

The YJB produced its accommodation strategy² in September 2006, following a draft published in 2005. The strategy notes that “providing accommodation and support for vulnerable people is a complex and challenging task”. It focuses on three key areas of work: improving strategic organisation; prevention of homelessness; and improving access to suitable accommodation.

In order to achieve these improvements, YOTs have been set a performance indicator which expects them to have a named accommodation officer, and to report on progress on performance relating to obtaining suitable accommodation. They have also been recommended to include local housing representatives on their Board, to develop, along with their partners, local accommodation strategies which focus on prevention and enabling access to suitable accommodation and support. YJB has also committed itself to strengthening the prevention of homelessness as a core theme in its prevention strategy, to making housing advice available to all young people in custody, and to ensuring that, within 3 years, no young people are remanded in custody as a result of a lack of accommodation, and the use of B&B for young offenders is phased out.

The perspective of the Department for Communities and Local Government is similarly pointed. The Homelessness Code of Guidance (2006) notes that YOT accommodation officers are expected to play a strategic as well as operational role. It recommends that steps are taken in partnership between the homeless service and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and YOTs to prevent homelessness, by, for example:

- having a single contact point within the housing authority to provide housing advice and assistance for offenders
- Probation staff offering information on securing or terminating tenancies prior to custody

¹ **Youth Justice Board website:** Introduction to section on Accommodation www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk

² **Strategy for the provision of suitable and sustainable accommodation for children and young people at risk of offending and re-offending**, YJB, 2006

- running housing advice sessions in local prisons to further enable prisoners to access advice on housing options prior to their release
- prisons granting prisoners Release On Temporary Licence to attend housing interviews with landlords
- developing tenancy support services for those who have experienced the criminal justice system

Many of these developments are in place in relation to adult offenders. This Protocol will help to implement these recommendations in relation to young offenders from Newcastle.

It should also be noted that, in November 2006, DCLG announced that it intended to make it unlawful to accommodate under 18s year olds in B&B, other than in emergencies.

The development of this Protocol

This Protocol has been developed with the homelessness prevention agenda in mind. It is based on the Housing and Returning Prisoners (HARP) Protocol developed across the Northern Region between housing and criminal justice services working with adult offenders.

The Protocol has been produced through collaboration between the Newcastle YOT, Strategic Housing Service, Leaving Care Team, Your Homes Newcastle, Castington Youth Offending Institution, Newcastle Supporting People, and several voluntary sector organisations working with young homeless people in the city. That process has itself been useful, but it is hoped that this Protocol will enable both young offenders and those working with them to have a greater degree of assurance that accommodation problems can be resolved, through effective collaboration between agencies and good planning.

The purpose of the Protocol

The overall purpose of the Protocol is to prevent homelessness amongst people aged 16 and 17 returning from Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) to any area in the North East or who may be at risk of being placed in custody because of a lack of accommodation. It does this by developing a common approach to planning the return from detention, which should also help to prevent homelessness amongst other young offenders.

The protocol also supports:

- The statutory duties of Authorities towards the prevention of homelessness
- The commitment of the Prison and Youth Offending Teams to effective resettlement of people leaving Youth Offending Institutions
- The objectives of Community Safety Partnerships

- The contribution of Housing Associations and the voluntary sector in providing housing and support for offenders and in developing and implementing support plans for each individual
- The role of the commissioners of housing and support for offenders, and commissioning decisions about young offenders who are not in suitable accommodation at the end of their order

Who is the Protocol to be used by?

The Protocol describes explicit roles for the following organisations, who are expected to follow the steps and procedures set out in the 6 stages (Section 2) of the Protocol:

- Youth Offending Team - staff working in Newcastle and within Youth Offending Institutions
- Supported housing organisations
- Homelessness services
- Your Homes Newcastle
- Leaving Care Team

In addition, the Protocol will be of use to a wider group of agencies working with young offenders from Newcastle, including:

- Housing Associations
- Teenage pregnancy team
- Drug services for young people
- Connexions
- Youth Offenders Institutions and other prisons or secure premises

The benefits of working within the Protocol will be:

For **housing organisations**, the Protocol will help to make more efficient use of limited housing stock, by ensuring that homes are not left empty unnecessarily, where a young offender has had their own accommodation before going into detention. It will also help to manage risk, by providing better information for assessing the risk posed by an individual, and better planning and co-ordination to avoid and manage those risks.

For **criminal justice agencies**, the Protocol clarifies their role in relation to housing, and the stages at which contact should be made with housing agencies, as well as providing information about housing and housing providers in the area. It also simplifies the referral route into supported housing in the region.

For **all agencies**, the Protocol helps to clarify responsibilities, and therefore to ensure that, where there are shared responsibilities when a young offender is housed in ordinary accommodation after leaving a YOI, agencies know who is doing what and who to call on when things are not going well.

The principles contained in the Protocol

Agencies commit their organisation and their staff to the provision of the good practice, as set out in this Protocol, by virtue of their services being commissioned by one or more of the Supporting People Commissioning Body, Social Services, or the criminal justice system.

This Protocol sets out the **principles** for establishing good practice in all the organisations signed up to it, described in more detail within the 6 stages of preventing homelessness for a young offender with housing need. The principles are:

- ◆ Making sure that the young offender is at the centre of all actions concerned with their housing, keeping them, and their parents/carers, informed and involved, and helping them to share responsibility for resolving their housing problems, without setting them up to fail, and balancing their interests with those of the communities they live in
- ◆ Working jointly with other agencies, and with parents/carers, to help prevent homelessness amongst this group, through the earliest identification of housing difficulties
- ◆ Planning to avoid episodes of crisis homelessness for people leaving YOIs
- ◆ Sharing information with other agencies, in a way that will help offenders to secure appropriate housing or not to lose their accommodation
- ◆ Following the six stages set out in the Protocol
- ◆ Building on the housing pathways and protocols for preventing homelessness developed by Strategic Housing, Your Homes Newcastle, and Supporting People, to help vulnerable people move from homelessness, or a stay in institutional settings, into supported and independent accommodation
- ◆ Working with others to identify the level of risk that might be associated with the young person moving into either supported or mainstream rented housing, and to put in place a risk management plan
- ◆ Putting in place and making use of support plans for working with people to identify support needs and develop skills for successful independent living
- ◆ Making sure that all their staff are trained to use the Protocol, and are committed to making it work
- ◆ Identifying when things are going wrong, and working with others to try to prevent an offender losing their home as a result
- ◆ Raising general issues and problems at meetings where any shortfalls in meeting housing, support or other needs for young offenders in Newcastle can be identified and directed towards policy makers and commissioners of services

Format of the Protocol

The core of the Protocol is contained in the pages setting out the **six stages** to be followed, from the pre-remand stage to living in settled accommodation in the community. These pages also include **information on the law and how systems and processes work in Newcastle**.

The last section of the Protocol looks at **how to make it work smoothly**. This will depend on agencies being able to communicate easily with each other, and being committed to effective joint working, by sharing information to help each young person, by identifying named staff to liaise with other agencies, and by identifying what is working, as well as when things are not going so well. In addition, it is important that organisations working with young offenders are able to pass information on in order to influence the provision of services, where it has become clear that existing services are not able to meet all the housing, support, or other needs of young offenders in Newcastle.

The **Information Pack** contains supporting information, some of which may change over time. In particular, we have tried to make life easier for staff working in this field by: explaining some of the technical terms, including information about what else is happening to help prevent homelessness and provide better routes into accommodation and support, and providing some contact details and referral forms.

If you have any comments about this Protocol, please direct them towards the Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Project (part of the City Council's Strategic Housing Service), which can be found at:

112-114 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle NE1 6SQ

Tel: 0191 277 1733/1725

2. THE PROTOCOL: THE SIX STAGES

Stage 1: Pre-remand pre-sentence

When a young person is first brought before the court, the case is usually adjourned and the court may place the young person on remand until the next hearing. This is likely to be at home with their parents or carers.

A young person who has no accommodation to go to may be remanded to live in one of the following:

- in local authority accommodation
- in accommodation decided by the local authority, or
- in custody (Young Offender Institutions)
- in secure remand (secure children's homes or secure training centres)

The Youth Justice Board is working to ensure that remands to custody are made only on the most serious and persistent young offenders, and has set targets to reduce the number of young offenders going into custody.

Aim: to prevent young offenders going into custody or looked after accommodation because of a lack of accommodation		
Task	Agency with key responsibility	Who else to involve
1. Check with the young person at the earliest opportunity whether they have accommodation they can return to	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/carers • Other family members and friends, as appropriate
2. If there is no accommodation the young person thinks they can go to, explore the following options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Family or close friends – Emergency accommodation provided by the local authority – contact the Housing Advice Centre or Homelessness Duty Team – Direct access hostels – contact through HAC (during working hours), Homelessness Duty Team (outside office hours), or through the monthly Nominations meeting. 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Advice Centre • Newcastle Homeless Liaison Project
3. If no direct access accommodation can be found in supported housing or Hill Court, HAC will locate appropriate accommodation for the young person,	Housing Advice Centre (HAC)	

<p>based on information about their needs, and any risks they pose to themselves or others. B&B accommodation will be used in as few cases as possible. Where at all possible, this will be within the Newcastle area.</p> <p>If B&B is the only option, HAC will try to ensure that support is available and that the young person is visited within 24 hours of moving into B&B (to include weekends). Support would be provided by a support worker with young homeless people or a Pathways Advice and Support Worker.</p>		
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Stepping Stones

HAC and YOT have had in the past an agreement that all vacancies are offered first to HAC or YOT. This is co-ordinated by NHLP within office hours. This arrangement is currently being reviewed and it is likely that all vacancies will be offered to HAC in the first instance. YOT referrals will be made through HAC.

Risk Assessment

Section 4 in the Information Pack explains how risk is assessed by both the YOT and by supported and other housing organisations. If there are different views on what risk might be posed by any individual, a meeting should be quickly convened to discuss the matter, and to gauge what risk the person might pose in the future, based on what is known about their behaviour in the recent past.

Stage 2: Remand pre-sentence stage

If the young offender has gone into custody because there was no other accommodation for them to go to, the aim must be to make their stay in custody as short as possible. At this stage, the YOT supervising officer and remand team in the YOI will work together to try to identify a source of accommodation which can be reported to the courts.

This will need to be done quite quickly in preparation for the next court hearing, with a maximum time set by the Youth Justice Board of 5 days in which to set up a bail plan.

Aim: to minimise the length of stay in custody where it was arranged because of a lack of other suitable accommodation		
Task	Agency with key responsibility	Who else to involve
1. Establish with the young person and their parents/carers as early as possible why the option of going back home was not possible	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remand staff
2. Identify the most suitable options for accommodation: <i>(see Glossary in the Information Pack for the YJB definition of "suitable")</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Other family or close friends – Temporary accommodation - contact Housing Advice Centre (during working hours) or Homelessness Duty Team (outside office hours) to initiate a homeless application – Other supported accommodation Permanent accommodation, with support if needed 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remand staff • HAC / Homelessness Duty Team
3. If the young person needs to have a "tag" (an electronic curfew), discuss this with the supported housing provider (see below)	YOT Court officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported housing provider • Group 4 Securicor
4. If the young person has their own tenancy, the following actions are essential: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Alert the landlord to the fact that the young person is going into custody – Check how the rent will be paid 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/carers, and any partner • Landlord • Advice & Support Workers

<p>whilst the young person is in custody: will someone else be staying there and able to claim HB and pay the rent, will someone else pay the rent, or (if time spent in custody is to be less than 13 weeks), will HB continue to be paid?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If the tenancy needs to be terminated, check that this is completed in writing and keys are handed in, and arrangements made about electricity and gas supplies (see sample termination notice) * <i>see note below</i> – Try to ensure that belongings can be stored and that young person knows where they are being stored – Ensure landlord informed about decision about tenancy (unless someone at YOI terminated the tenancy) – Identify whether landlord will offer replacement tenancy on release – Ensure YOI informed about all these actions 		
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Homelessness prevention and mediation

The Government's aim is for homelessness and housing advice services to prevent homelessness in as many cases as possible. This can most easily be done with young people by working with them and their families to avoid the loss of a home with their parents or other carers, through mediation, or by helping them to plan to leave home other than through a move at a time of crisis.

In Newcastle, Strategic Housing Service and Supporting People together engage teams of staff who are experienced in working with young people to provide homeless prevention work and mediation from the Housing Advice Centre. Currently, staff from the Your Homes Newcastle Inline Team provide a service within HAC which means that they see all under 18 year olds calling at HAC who are homeless, threatened with homelessness, or have a housing need. The Inline worker will:

- Assess the housing and support needs of the young person, and what options might be best for the future
- Unless there was violence or other abuse involved, contact parents or carers to see if it is possible for them to return home, and do a visit to discuss the options, and how the relationship between the family and the young person might be improved
- Help the young person to access the most appropriate housing and support
- Work with the young person to develop skills for living independently

If a homeless application needs to be completed, the Inline worker works with a Homelessness Prevention Officer, who will decide (as quickly as possible) if the person should have a homeless priority. The Inline worker will carry on working with the young person, once they move into settled housing (which could be in council housing or with another landlord).

Intentional homelessness

If the young person is considered to be intentionally homeless, following the decision made by a Homelessness Prevention Officer at HAC on a homeless application, accommodation should be provided by HAC for at least 28 days (or longer if the person needs it). Someone can be considered to be intentionally homeless if they have done something deliberately, and knowing all the consequences, which has led to them losing accommodation they could have stayed in. The council can also be considered to have discharged their homeless duty to someone if they lose temporary accommodation because of their behaviour (e.g. violence, or arson, or breaking the house rules in some way). It is important that other agencies working with a young person who may be considered to be intentionally homeless pass on any information that can help to inform the decision.

After the 28 days (or more), HAC will work with other agencies to try to make sure that there is somewhere for the young person to go to. If the young person is a 'child in need', then Social Services are likely to have a responsibility to accommodate them.

Local connection

The City Council has a legal obligation to house only those homeless people who have a local connection with the city. This is defined in the law and guidance as being one of the following:

- Residence in the city for 6 months of the previous 12 months or 3 of the previous 5 years
- Close family living in the city (who the applicant wants to live near to) including parents, children, brothers or sisters, or another relative if the applicant has been brought up by them or is very close to them
- Employment in the city

A local connection can sometimes be created through other connections, particularly if the person has no real connection with any other area.

Young offenders who have no local connection with Newcastle may move into supported accommodation in the city. Supported housing providers are asked to discuss with the YOT whether such a move might be detrimental, since it might mean that they are stuck in temporary accommodation if they cannot access long term accommodation in Newcastle.

If there are disputes about intentionality or local connection, agencies are advised to set up a meeting with the Homelessness Prevention Officer to discuss the matter, and to raise the issue at the Young Persons' Housing Strategy Review Group.

Electronic monitoring

Some young offenders (those on the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programmes (ISSP) are required to have a tag (a Personal Identity Device) which monitors their location and therefore whether they are complying with a curfew order or not.

The accommodation provider must agree to the equipment being placed in the property, and the following supported housing providers have agreed to this or will consider accommodating a young person who is tagged:

Byker Bridge, Cumberland House (Norcare), Outpost, Salvation Army Cedar House, Stepping Stones, Tyneside Foyer, Wavelength (Norcare)

A protocol for the management of electronic monitoring devices can be found on the YJB website.

Stage 3: Before custody

When a young person is on remand and it is known that a period in custody is quite likely, the process for identifying what housing is likely to be available on release should start as soon as possible.

Aim: to identify the housing options prior to custody starting		
Task	Agency with key responsibility	Who else to involve
1. Establish with the young person and their parents/carers as early as possible whether the option of going back home is possible	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remand staff • Parents/carers
2. If this is not possible, identify the most suitable options for accommodation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Other family or close friends – Temporary accommodation – Other supported accommodation – Permanent accommodation, with support if needed 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remand staff • HAC / Homelessness Duty Team • NHLP
3. If the young person has their own tenancy, the following actions are essential: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Alert the landlord to the fact that the young person is going into custody – Check how the rent will be paid whilst the young person is in custody: will someone else be staying there and able to claim HB and pay the rent, will someone else pay the rent, or (if time spent in custody is to be less than 13 weeks), will HB continue to be paid? – If the tenancy needs to be terminated, check that this is completed in writing and keys are handed in and arrangements made about the gas and electricity supplies (see sample termination notice) * <i>see note below</i> – Try to ensure that belongings can be stored and that young person knows where they are being stored – Ensure landlord informed about decision about tenancy (unless 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remand staff • Family/carer • Any partner • Landlord

someone at YOI terminated the tenancy) – Identify whether landlord will offer replacement tenancy on release – Ensure YOI informed about all these actions		
4. If the young person was staying in supported housing: - Alert provider to the stay in custody - Discuss whether the bed could be kept open for a short stay and how this would be funded, or whether a another bed could be found (using the Nominations meeting) - Try to ensure that belongings can be stored safely - Identify whether the provider will offer a bed on release - Ensure YOI informed about all these actions	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remand staff • Family/carer • Supported housing provider

* Housing Benefit can now be paid to cover the 4 week notice period after a tenancy is terminated, whilst an offender is in custody. See Section 3 in the Information Pack for an example of a letter to be sent to a landlord telling them that the young person has gone into custody and wishes to give up their tenancy.

NB A new HB claim needs to be put in if the tenancy is not being terminated.

Stage 4: During custody

During the first 10 days in custody, a training plan is developed, to include a housing plan. This involves the YOT worker, parents/carers, and YOI staff.

The first step in the housing plan is to check that all actions needed in Stage 3 have been completed.

Aim: to secure housing and support prior to release, and to prepare the young person for release and for sustaining a home		
Task	Agency with key responsibility	Who else to involve
<p>1. For long sentences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that any tenancy or supported housing has been terminated properly and information passed to both the housing provider and YOI. - Make application to YCH at start of period in custody, following the Pathway process for under 18s (see below) - Make applications to supported housing providers at least 2 months before release, using the common referral form now in use in Newcastle.³ - Assess the young person's life skills using the Pathways Support Plan (see below) and identify how any shortfall in life skills can be filled. 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YOI / Secure Training Centre/ Secure Children's Homes – at initial planning meeting • Newcastle College (pre-release education programme) • Probation keyworker at YOI • YHN Inline team/YCH, plus Leaving Care Team if relevant
<p>2. For shorter sentences, the following is essential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain contact with a previous supported housing provider to keep them informed about a possible release date - Where the young person had no accommodation at the start of custody, make applications to supported housing at least 2 months before release (i.e. where the sentence is 4 months or less, 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HAC • Supported housing provider • YHN Inline team/YCH

³ See Section 5 of Information Pack on how supported housing providers can book visits at HMP / YOI Castington.

<p>this needs to be done at the start of period in custody)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Make application to YCH at start of period in custody, following the Pathway process for under 18s (see attached). – Assess the young person’s life skills using the Pathways Support Plan and identify how any shortfall in life skills can be filled. 		
<p>3. Where young person has accommodation to go back to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Check there is furniture still in the property – Inform HB of release date – Inform landlord of release date 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Benefit • YHN Inline team
<p>4. Where the young person has been allocated a new tenancy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If this is an advanced offer (i.e. allocated before it is ready to move into), inform fuel suppliers of move-in date – Organise furniture or furniture loan/grant – Arrange for the keys to be picked up (Inline will do this) – Supply small amount of food and toiletries as a starter pack 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YHN Inline team/YHN or other landlord
<p>5. Where there is no accommodation in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 4 weeks before the due release date, contact HAC to discuss the options with them and ask them to raise the need at the regular Nominations Meeting – 3 weeks before release, contact HAC to make a homeless application by phone or e-mail – 1 week before release, identify where a vacancy might be found for the young person 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YHN Inline team/ HAC

A document called “Support Plan to Identify Strengths and Aspirations for People in Supported Accommodation in Newcastle” is being piloted as part of the Pathway to Independence for Under 18s. YOT staff are asked to work with the specialist agencies working with young homeless people and with Pathways Advice and Support Workers, who will mainly be responsible for completing this with young offenders. *Contact Supporting People for more information.*

Stage 5: On release

Aim: to secure housing and support on release		
Task	Agency with key responsibility	Who else to involve
<p>1. Where the young person has a new tenancy to go to, or returning to own tenancy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure they have transport to get there – Ensure the fuel supplies are turned on – Inform housing office that they are returning and arrange for sign-up process to be carried out – Pick up keys – Identify tenancy support package if needed – Make contact with housing staff so that any problems with the tenancy can be discussed with you 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YHN or other landlord • YHN Advice and Support Workers • YHN Inline team or other support provider
<p>2. Where the young person has supported housing to go to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – At the appointment with YOT officer on day of release, check that there is transport to get there – Tell the provider what time the young person will be arriving – Allow around an hour for the process of moving in – Arrange to help the young person with shopping for food and other essentials 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported housing provider
<p>3. Where the young person has no accommodation to go to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Contact HAC or Emergency Homeless Officers – Arrange transport to get to temporary accommodation or to HAC 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HAC

Stage 6: Living in the community

Aim: to help the young person to sustain their settled housing, or to move into settled housing		
Task	Agency with key responsibility	Who else to involve
<p>1. If the young person has their own tenancy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure that the housing office have your contact details and are alerted to the need to discuss with you and a support worker if there are any problems with the tenancy (<i>see note below on preventing homelessness</i>) – Keep in contact with the young person as agreed between you and the young person – Agree a review date for discussing with other agencies and the young person how things are going with their tenancy (if there were any concerns about their ability to sustain the tenancy) – Where there are any difficulties identified, meet with the young person, the housing officer, and any other agencies involved to agree a plan of action for maintaining the tenancy, and for helping the young person to build any skills they are lacking for managing the tenancy (<i>using the Checklist of Life Skills</i>) 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YHN or other landlord • YHN Inline team • YHN Advice and Support Workers
<p>2. If the young person has supported housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discuss with them, and their keyworker at the supported housing how their application for settled housing is going, and when they will be ready for moving on to that stage (<i>see Pathway to Independence for under 18s – see below</i>) – Identify any barriers to moving on and work on those along with the supported housing provider – Check if there are any areas the young person cannot go to, either because of an ASBO, or because of any risk to their safety or that of 	YOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported housing provider • Youth homelessness support workers

others		
– Help to prepare them for moving into independent accommodation		

Preventing Repeat Homelessness and Evictions Protocol - 2006

A Protocol for preventing repeat homelessness and evictions has been agreed between Your Homes Newcastle and Newcastle City Council (Strategic Housing and Social Services). This sets out the procedure for YHN staff and others to follow to help prevent homelessness amongst vulnerable people, including offenders and young people. The essence of the Protocol is that it should be identified from the start of every tenancy where the tenant is likely to be vulnerable and have some difficulty sustaining a tenancy, and agencies involved with the tenant should work together to try to prevent the loss of that tenancy. YHN staff are asked to find out which other agencies are working with a vulnerable tenant, and make contact with them before the situation gets anywhere near an eviction, so that interventions aimed at preventing eviction (or the person giving up the tenancy) can be avoided.

Guidance on the Protocol can be found on the Newcastle Homelessness Forum website and on the Newcastle Supporting People website:

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf>

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/supportingpeople>

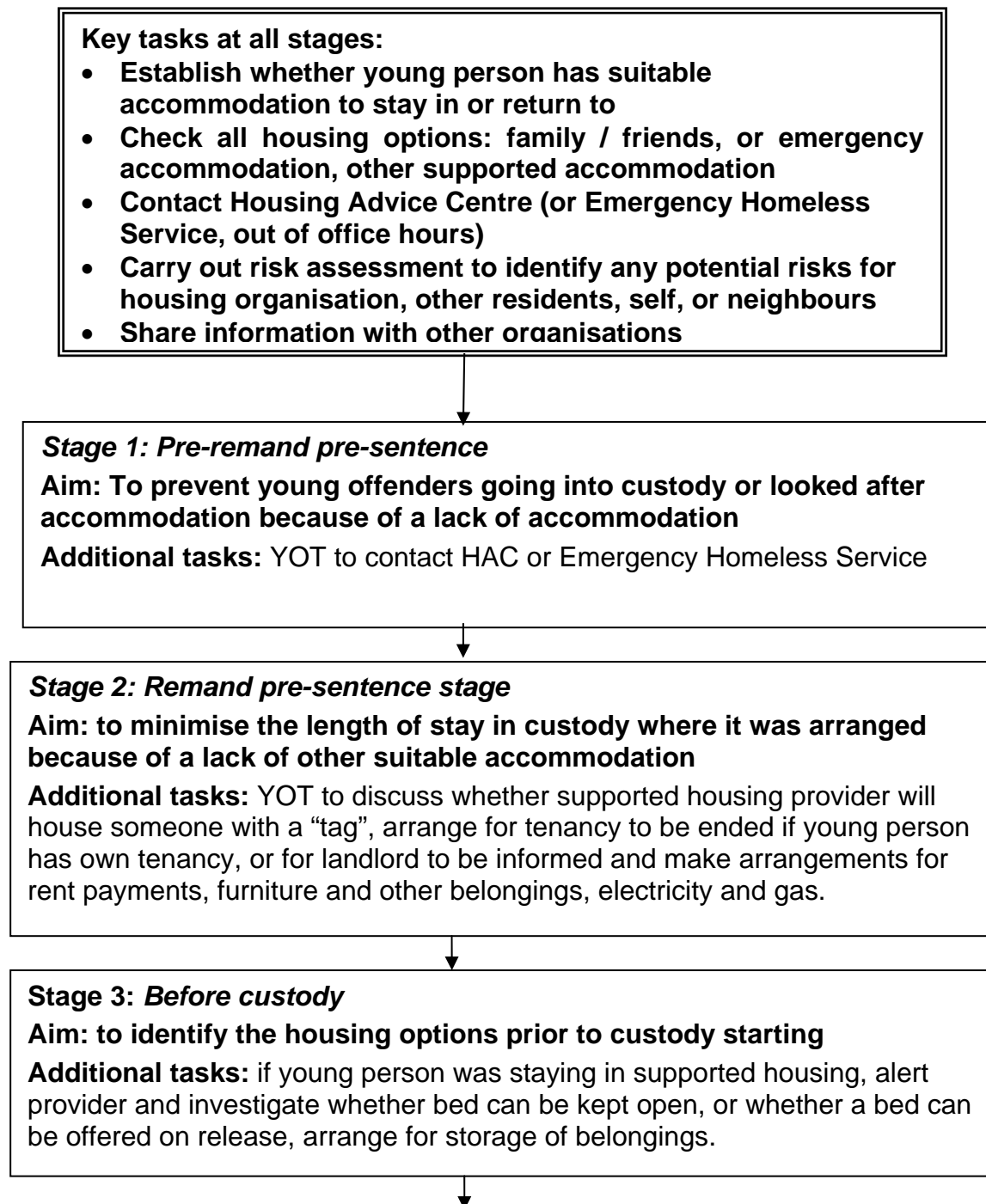
Pathways to Independence for Under 18s in Newcastle - 2006

Alongside the Protocol, there is also a new process for helping young people in housing need to gain access to council and Housing Association housing in Newcastle, also developed by Your Homes Newcastle and Newcastle Council's Strategic Housing Service. Staff from the YHN Inline team are based at the Housing Advice Centre to provide a combination of assessment, advice, and help to prevent homelessness for any under 18 year old who says they are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. Home visits are carried out to try to resolve the problem without a need to go into temporary accommodation, if the young person is being asked to leave by their parents.

Where the young person is not in such urgent need, the worker will identify the best next step for them, which could be to move into supported accommodation, or to move into a tenancy with support. Agencies working with the young person, including the YOT, will be able to give a recommendation to the Inline support worker about whether the young person has the minimum skills necessary to hold down a tenancy, and then a welfare priority (similar to a homeless priority but without having to apply as homeless) can be given, and the person can be offered a housing management let through Your Homes Newcastle or can be nominated to a Housing Association. YOT workers will work with support workers and the young person to assess the skills they have at the moment, or the preparation work needed to help them gain the skills needed for managing a tenancy. A checklist to help assess the skills needed by each young person is used by all organisations involved – contact Supporting People for further information.

You can find more detail on the Pathway in Section 2 in the Information Pack.

The six stages of preventing homelessness for young offenders



Stage 4: During custody

Aim: to secure housing and support prior to release, and to prepare the young person for release and for sustaining a home

Additional tasks: make applications for housing through Your Choice Homes and HAC as early as possible, assess any skills needed and help to prepare for living independently, or plan for return to previous housing. Keep in touch with HAC to make sure some accommodation is identified for release.



Stage 5: On release

Aim: to secure housing and support on release

Additional tasks: help young person to get to new or previous home, arrange for interview with HAC if no accommodation found before release.



Stage 6: Living in the community

Aim: to help the young person to sustain their settled housing, or to move into settled housing

Additional tasks: for tenants, make sure housing provider knows who is working with the young offender, keep in touch with young person, and meet with housing provider if any problems. For supported housing residents, work with them and their keyworker to help them obtain suitable settled housing to move on to, and help them to gain the skills for managing a home independently.

Summary of roles for each agency

◆ Youth Offending Teams

YOT workers in the courts, and in the local office, will both play a role in helping the young person to find and maintain appropriate accommodation.

YOT workers will:

- Make sure there is a full assessment of the young person's housing and support needs, and other needs
- Help the young person, and their parents/carers, to be involved in decisions about accommodation and support
- Help to ensure that accommodation is available for a homeless young person appearing in court
- Make contact with housing organisations who can offer accommodation, advice or support
- Ensure that information about a stay in prison is communicated to a housing or supported housing provider for any accommodation held beforehand, and help to ensure that the rent is continued to be paid, or that the tenancy and contracts for electricity and gas are terminated properly
- Work with the young person and their parents/carers to plan for accommodation on release, in good time
- Keep other YOT and YOI officers informed and maintain contact with housing agencies
- Help the young person to make a homeless application if needed, at least 4 weeks before release
- Work with YOI staff to assess support needs prior to release, and communicate these needs, and any skills gained during a stay in prison, to supported housing providers
- Help the young person to move back into their tenancy, go back to parents, or to get to supported housing, following release
- Work with the Homelessness Prevention Officers and the Leaving Care Team to agree who will take which course of action to resolve a need for housing in each case where a young offender has been looked after, and who will pay for any emergency accommodation needed
- Report any cases of young offenders being placed in unsuitable accommodation to the YOT Board

◆ Youth Offending Institution / Secure Training Centre/ Secure Children's Homes

Staff in YOIs, STCs, and SCHs will:

- Work with the young person, their parents/carers, and the YOT, to plan for accommodation on release, in good time
- Keep other YOI and YOT officers informed and maintain contact with housing agencies

- Assess support needs prior to release, and communicate these needs, and any skills gained during a stay in prison, to supported housing providers

◆ **Supported housing providers**

Supported housing providers will:

- Prioritise people who have been accepted as in a priority group after a homelessness assessment within Newcastle
- Discuss with YOT staff all applications for supported housing from young offenders from outside Newcastle (having already discussed the allocation of the vacancy in the nominations process)
- Assess applications for placements in their schemes as quickly as possible
- Carry out visits or arrange for a video conference or phone interview if a visit cannot be arranged easily or quickly
- Let all applicants know the outcome of their application
- Share information about support plans with other supported housing providers where relevant
- Help to provide support where a young person is staying in B&B for a short period

◆ **Social housing organisations**

Housing officers will:

- Assess applications for housing as quickly as possible
- Carry out visits or arrange for a video conference or phone interview if a visit cannot be arranged easily or quickly
- Let all applicants know the outcome of their application
- Acknowledge correspondence about termination of any tenancy held by a young offender going into custody

◆ **Homelessness Prevention Officers**

Homelessness Prevention Officers will:

- Work with YOT workers, youth homelessness agencies, and Advice & Support Workers and others, to prevent a young offender losing their home
- Help to identify suitable accommodation and support for any homeless young offender, including accommodation which will avoid a stay in custody, and accommodation which can be available on release
- Provide information about housing options to the young person, their parents/carers, and YOT workers

◆ Leaving Care Team

Social workers and others in the LCT will:

- Work with the YOT and Homelessness Prevention Officers to agree who will take which course of action to resolve a need for housing in each case where a young offender has been looked after, and who will pay for any emergency accommodation needed
- Keep in regular contact (at least monthly) with a young offender who has been looked after
- Share information with other agencies to ensure that the most appropriate housing solution is found
- Assess support needs and help to prepare young people for independent living, with support if needed

◆ Connexions

Connexions workers will:

- Support YOT workers to identify appropriate accommodation and to support to move to housing after release

3. Making the Protocol work

Communication

The key to the effectiveness of the YoHARP Protocol lies in clear communication, jointly-understood risk assessment, and building trust between the agencies involved.

Information Sharing Protocol

Why it is important to share information with other agencies

Good information sharing is essential if agencies are to be able to work together to resolve the housing and support needs of a young offender. It is in the interests of the young person and the organisation to share information in a clear and timely way: to ensure that the best possible solution is found for the young person; to maintain the credibility of the organisation and the individual worker; and to ensure that the organisation can continue to work well with other agencies for other young people in the future.

Some principles about information sharing

- Agencies will ensure that the young person has signed a consent form, so that information can be shared with any other agency which is working to help them resolve their housing and support needs
- Agencies will share information about all aspects of the person's needs, including risk assessments, so that any possible risk to the young person, to other people they may live with, to staff, to organisations, and to neighbours and the community around them, can be identified, managed, and minimised (see later for more details about risk assessment under YoHARP)
- Agencies will not hide information in order to enable the young offender to access accommodation which is not appropriate to meet their needs, or which would put them or others at risk

Named contact points

All parties to this Protocol will provide and update lists of staff in three areas:

- i. List of contact staff within the agency with their function, e.g. contact point for referrals, for resolving problems, or for training.
- ii. Named staff who are dealing with individual cases.
- iii. Named managers who can be contacted in emergencies, at times of concern or uncertainty, and out of office hours

Updating the contact list

Each agency will check the contact list twice a year (in January and July), and send any amendments to the Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Project on hpp@newcastle.gov.uk

Effective joint working

Key principles:

- Building good relationships – developing good relationships with other agencies, and with individuals within those agencies, will help to ensure that each organisation has a good understanding of how others work and what their processes and constraints are.
- Promoting a good understanding of each other's roles – agencies should take all opportunities to do joint training and visits or job swaps
- Maintaining roles and contact as agreed – probably the most important aspect of working effectively with others is agreeing who will do what, and ensuring that these agreements are kept to
- Keeping each other informed about changes of staff or arrangements
- Keeping in touch, particularly when things go wrong – for example, when the young person's behaviour or actions mean that the situation has changed, or when an organisation has not been able to do what it agreed to do
- Signposting – advising the young person who they can contact for different aspects of help or advice

Dealing with differences or conflict between agencies

There may be differences of opinion about how to resolve the housing and support needs of a young offender. These often are linked to different views on the risk associated with housing the person in particular accommodation or in a particular area, or different understandings of the legal obligations of the statutory agencies. In many cases, the matter can be best resolved by meeting together to share information held about previous behaviour, and to look together at risk assessment and a plan for managing and minimising risk, and agreeing a forward plan for meeting housing needs.

Where a meeting does not arrive at a satisfactory resolution of the problem, it may be appropriate to contact Neil Munslow (Strategic Housing), Martyn Burn (Your Homes Newcastle), or Rod Stapley (YOT), and subsequently to raise the matter at the Young People's Housing Strategy Review Group and, if appropriate, at the YOT Board.

Monitoring, reviewing, and resolving any problems

This outcomes of this Protocol will be monitored by the Young People's Housing Strategy Review Group. Regular reports on progress, and particularly on any difficulties encountered, will be taken by the YOT to the Supporting People Core Strategy Group and the YOT Board, and regular reports will also be taken to the Newcastle Housing Partnership.

The Protocol will be initially reviewed by the Young Persons' Housing Strategy Review Group in **October 2007**, with a fuller review to take place in **April 2008 and annually thereafter**.

Agencies are asked to report any problems with implementation to:

**Neil Munslow, Housing Services Manager,
Strategic Housing Service:**

Tel. 0191 211 5856 / 07855 828048
E-mail: neil.munslow@newcastle.gov.uk

**Martyn Burn, Area Housing Director,
Outer West & North, Your Homes Newcastle:**

Tel: 0191 277 1146 / 07970 515907
E-mail: martyn.burn@yhn.org.uk

or to Rod Stapley, YOT manager:

Tel: 0191 277 7377
E-mail: rod.stapley@newcastle.gov.uk