

BRIEFING: Access to Housing for young women leaving care who are at risk from violence, abuse or exploitation

Contents

1. Context.....	1
1.1. Homelessness.....	1
1.2. Abuse, violence and exploitation.....	3
2. Legislation impacting care leavers.....	3
2.1. Social Services Duties.....	3
2.2. Care Leavers and Access to Housing.....	4
3. Making the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal more accessible.....	5
4. Mapping of specialist support services in London.....	7
4.1. 4.1. Support for Young People in Care.....	7
4.2. Young People and Homelessness.....	7
4.2. Violence Against Women and Girls Services for young people in London.....	8
5. References.....	9
Appendix A: North London Care Leaver Reciprocal Case Study.....	11
Appendix B: Reciprocal Named Leads Workshop Report.....	12

1. Context

Young women leaving care are a group particularly vulnerable to homelessness and being at risk of violence, abuse or exploitation. The statistics show that one third of care leavers become homeless in the first two years immediately after they leave care and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.¹ There is a lack of research into the link between those leaving care and experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation for young women, however this is something we see through all our Services at Safer London including referrals to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal.

1.1. Homelessness

Discussion around causes of homelessness generally focuses on either ‘structural’ causes such as poverty or the housing crisis, or explanations centred around the ‘individual’ which focus on vulnerabilities and behaviours. Research has highlighted the impact of, and association between, these approaches. For example a study examining three large data sets capturing homelessness

¹ Crisis.org.uk. (2019). [online] Available at: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf

across the UK showed *'the centrality of poverty to the generation of homelessness.'*² While the researchers found that poverty and particularly childhood poverty is a predictor of homelessness and potential direction of causation, the research also showed that some systematically disadvantaged groups are far more likely to experience homelessness than others.³

International research has highlighted the links between experiences of the care system and social exclusion, which includes higher levels of unemployment, offending behaviour, mental-health problems, as well as experiences of homelessness.⁴ Research has also linked Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to homelessness, particularly experiences of abuse related to lack of care or neglect and physical or sexual abuse⁵. In April 2017-March 2018 63 percent of children in the UK entered in to care due to neglect or abuse, fifteen percent were placed due to family dysfunction, and 6 percent due to parental absence.⁶

While legislation exists in the UK to support young people leaving care in to housing, evidence shows a strong link between young people leaving care and homelessness. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness highlighted this year one third of care leavers become homeless in the first two years immediately after they leave care and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.⁷ This was highlighted recently by The National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers' First Year Report (2018)⁸, which sets out a national ambition for 2019-20 that: *'No care leaver is made homeless and that any accommodation offered by the local authority is of a high standard that would be good enough for your own child.'*

In the UK young people in the care system begin to prepare for and often enter independence at ages 16-17. In comparison with their peers that have not had contact with the care system they are expected to transition into adulthood and its associated responsibilities at a much younger age. There is little time for adjustment; as highlighted by Stein a critical transition stage is 'preparation' which young people leaving care often miss out on, denying young people *"an opportunity to 'space out', providing a time for freedom, exploration, reflection, risk taking and identity search"*. Young people leaving care will of course still need to partake in all of these behaviours however the consequences of them getting it wrong are far higher than for their peers.

Young people who enter care when older, for example 16-17, often have poorer long term outcomes and less post-care stability.⁹ This may be associated with a number of reasons, for example the young person will often have been exposed to disruption and trauma for a longer period of time. Research has also highlighted that a key protective factor against homelessness

² Bramley, G. & Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?, *Housing Studies*, 33:1, 96-116, DOI: 10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957>

³ Ibid. pp.112-113

⁴ Stein, M. (2006) Research review: young people leaving care, *Child and Family Social Work* 2006, 11, 3, 273-279 <http://www.swetswise.com/eAccess/viewFulltext.do?articleID=27583513>

⁵ Herman, D., Susser, E., Struening, E. and Link, B. (1997). Adverse childhood experiences: are they risk factors for adult homelessness?. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87(2), pp.249-255.

⁶ Department for Education (2018). *Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2018*. National Statistics.

⁷ Crisis.org.uk. (2019). [online] Available at:

https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf

⁸ National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers' First Year Report (2018)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/764710/National_Implementation_Adviser_for_Care_Leavers_Annual_Report.pdf p.21

⁹ Allen, M. (2003). Into the mainstream Care leavers entering work, education and training. [online] York. Available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/1842630865.pdf> [Accessed 28 Jan. 2019].

is the availability of having a secure social network¹⁰ "having a partner and/or living in a multi-adult household, including being able to live as an adult child in the family home," can act "as a 'buffer' to homelessness"¹¹

1.2. Abuse, violence and exploitation

Young people experience the highest rates of domestic abuse than any age group.¹² As a recent briefing by SafeLives raised young people experience a complex transition from childhood to adulthood which impacts on their behaviour and decision making.¹³ The means that where young people are experiencing abuse they are often doing so at a particularly vulnerable time in their lives. For those leaving care this is likely to be an even more complex time in their lives.

It is likely that young people who have had contact with care will have had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Public Health Wales found a correlation between experiences of ACE's and being a victim of violence with those with 4 or more ACEs being 14 times more likely to have experienced violence in the past twelve months than those with none.¹⁴

The intersections between, care, homelessness and abuse/exploitation is something we see across our programmes at Safer London, for instance our LGE (London Gang Exit) programme data shows that 55% of the young women who received support through the programme so far were known to social care, 26% were Looked After Children, and 92% had a housing need (compared to 22%, 11% and 64% for young men receiving support through LGE).

In 2018 we received 4 referrals for female care leavers to our Pan-London Housing Reciprocal who were fleeing abuse or exploitation. The referrals also demonstrate intersections between care, homelessness and abuse/exploitation, alongside mental health needs and other vulnerabilities. Many of the applicants have been in contact with services multiple times over the course of their lives.

2. Legislation impacting care leavers

2.1. Social Services Duties

Local authorities are legally required to make plans for transition to adulthood for young people under their care, these are usually referred to as 'Pathway Plans'. The creation of these plans should be initiated when a looked after child turns 16. They should be live documents that are reviewed and amended according to the young person's needs as assessed by a Needs Assessment. They should be prepared for all Eligible Children¹⁵ and continued for all Relevant Children¹⁶ and Former Relevant Children¹⁷.

¹⁰ Bramley, G. & Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?, *Housing Studies*, 33:1, 96-116, DOI: 10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957> p.113

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.113

¹² Safe Lives (2018) <http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf> p.7

¹³ *Ibid.* p.7

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.27

¹⁵ Children in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14.

¹⁶ Children aged 16 and 17 who meet the criteria for eligible children but who leave care.

¹⁷ Children who before reaching the age of 18 were either eligible or relevant children.

Pathway plans should address:

- Accommodation needs of the young person, what accommodation they will occupy when they cease to be looked after, and how this will be suitable.
- Plans for education, training or employment and/or how the local authority will assist the young person in obtaining this.
- how the responsible authority will develop the practical and other skills that the young person will require
- Support to develop and sustain family and social relationships, and the capacity of the network to encourage the young person to make a positive transition to adulthood.
- The young person's financial capabilities and money management capacity.
- The young person's health care needs, and how such needs will be met when the young person ceases to be looked after.
- The contingency arrangements that the authority will have in place.

The social worker or personal advisor from the Looked After Children and Young People Service will hold the responsibility of co-ordinating the Pathway Plan.¹⁸

Social Services have a duty to help and support care leavers until 21 or for longer if they continue with education or training. This should include support to move from care to independent living.

2.2. Care Leavers and Access to Housing

The Children (Leaving Care) Act

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 states that care leavers must be provided with 'suitable accommodation'¹⁹, which is defined as suiting a young person's needs and lifestyle (being near work or college, for example), have received checks from the local authority, and follow health and safety regulations for rented accommodation.

Housing Act 1996

In addition to the support owed under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, young people who have left care and are aged 18-20 year are a priority need group under Part 7 of the Housing Act (1996). Young people aged above 21 may be assessed as being priority need due to vulnerability as a result of having been in care.

Allocations Policies

Local authorities are legally required to have an allocations scheme for their housing stock under Part 6 of the Housing Act (1996) and subsequent changes made by the Localism Act (2000). An allocations policy should outline a local authority's priorities when allocating their housing stock, which includes 'Reasonable Preference' categories. Reasonable preference must be given to:

- people who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act (including those who are intentionally homeless and those not in priority need)
- People who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under s.192(3)
- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions

¹⁸ http://www.proceduresonline.com/southtyneside/childcare/pdfs/pathway_plan.pdf pp 2-3

¹⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35>

- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to

Local authorities are not legally required to prioritise care leavers for the social housing stock they hold remit over, however Government Guidance recommends that reasonable preference under Welfare grounds should “encompass a wide range of needs, including, but not limited to, the need to - provide a secure base from which a care leaver... can build a stable life.”²⁰

Allocations Policies in London

29 of 33 local authorities mention Care Leavers in their allocations policy. Of these 24 mention arrangements with Social Services and the Leaving Care team which generally involve either a quota system or Panel based system. Quota systems usually work by providing Social services with a limited amount of referrals for Care Leavers into Social Housing. Panel based systems work through Care Leavers either being presented at or attending a Housing panel after being nominated by social services where a decision is made on whether they should be placed on the social housing register. These panels take in to account information presented to them by Social Services, for example readiness to live independently, risk information and whether other types of accommodation would be suitable. Sometimes quota systems and panels overlap, for example social services will have a limited amount of young people they can refer and a housing assessment through a panel is also required.

The result of these panels or quota systems either result in the Care Leaver either being placed in a specific band within their allocations systems (20 out of 33 local authorities), and/or in the Care Leaver being made a direct offer of accommodation (13 local authorities). Five local authorities place Care Leavers in the highest priority band, 11 place Care Leavers in the second highest priority band and four place them in the third priority band.

3. Making the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal more accessible

Some young people in care will be at risk in the borough in which the local authority holds care responsibilities. This may be due to the reasons why they were placed in care or may be related to experiences of violence and abuse that occurred after they were placed in care. For example, we know that young people under local authority care are particularly vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation and other forms of abuse.

We know from our LGE and Empower programmes at Safer London` that young people in the care system are often targeted and exploited by gangs or groups. This may be while they are in the care system or during their transition in to independence at aged 18. Young people can be exploited and abused in many ways for example being forced to hold or sell drugs or weapons, being forced to run county lines (modern slavery/trafficking), their flat being taken over by gangs or ‘cuckooed’, and sexually exploited.

Experiences of violence and exploitation for example sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and/or gang related exploitation can increase the likelihood of young women building up arrears or even sadly being evicted for ASB when experiences of abuse are misinterpreted. As our mapping has

²⁰ <https://centrepoin.org.uk/media/2035/from-care-to-where-centrepoint-report.pdf>
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5918/2171391.pdf p.19

indicated there is variation across London by local authorities and their response to and prioritisation of Care Leavers.

The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal is an opportunity for local authorities to house young people to whom they owe a duty and are at risk in the borough, in suitable accommodation. Following discussions with our housing Named leads (appendix 2) and the Heads of Leaving Care Teams across London, we have been working to adapt our pathway for this group. We have agreed to open the pathway for both care leavers who already have a social tenancy and those who would be offered one in their borough if they were safe to live there. This would mean they could still access social housing (when assessed as the most suitable accommodation/housing pathway for them by social services/housing), and move to a borough that would be safe for them. The referring borough would then owe a property to the centralised scheme.

After consulting with Housing Leads and Heads of Leaving Care, respondents from both groups were supportive of the scheme being used more for young people leaving care, as long as relocations are supported and safeguarded appropriately.

Based on feedback from these sessions the coordination team at Safer London will be collecting additional information/confirmations of support for any referrals for young people leaving care moving forward (please see table below). This will be alongside the standard referral form which outlines risk, need and housing requirements. This information will be shared between social service and housing professionals to facilitate safe moves and continued support where appropriate.

Additional information that will be collected and shared with housing/support partners for young people leaving care		
Young person's consent to share below information	<input type="checkbox"/>	Date:
Agreement from Corporate parent that they will have a continued duty to the young person not withstanding support arrangements outlined below	<input type="checkbox"/>	Date:
Name and contact details of Personal Adviser		
Name and contact details of professional leading on or coordinating Housing Support		
Current package of support around the young person (including the care placement where relevant and the borough they are currently residing in if different to the borough the referral is being made by)		
Assessment of young person's housing and support needs completed as part of their Pathway plan and date this was last reviewed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Date:
Interim housing plan while waiting for a property to be offered through the Pan London Housing Reciprocal		
If young person is an unaccompanied minor or has been placed in the care system due to insecure immigration status, please outline details and current legal status		
Financial support available to young person- how they will afford the move including whether they have already used their leaving care grant.		
Tenancy Sustainment assessment provided/in place		

Planned resettlement and floating support in place, provided by whom and how this will be maintained when the young person moves.	
Role and contact of the applicant has with family and other support networks	
Are there any reasons they need to visit their old borough/area due to services, ETE, products, people? (<i>and how will this risk be managed</i>).	
Other agencies involved in supporting this applicant (Please include details and if the support can follow to the new borough)	

We have also been working with the North London Homelessness Coordinator who has facilitated reciprocal moves at a local level for young people leaving care (see appendix A), and will be using this as an example when we meet with all Heads of Leaving Care services in London later this year.

4. Mapping of specialist support services in London

4.1. 4.1. Support for Young People in Care

Catch 22- Care Leavers Partnership

Catch22 and Southwark Council have gained funding from the Department of Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Fund to design and test a new model of support for Southwark's care leavers, effective in achieving positive outcomes for young people.

<https://www.catch-22.org.uk/services/southwark-care-leavers-partnership/>

Children' Society's (Fresh Step)

The Fresh Step service works with girls and young women aged 15-25, who have experienced or are at risk of CSE and are leaving care or custody. They must be placed in one of the following boroughs Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets. They provide one-to-one support and group work using a gendered and trauma informed approach.

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/helping-children/fresh-step-young-women-leaving-care-and-custody>

Coram

Coram offers direct, practical help and emotional support to vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

<https://www.coram.org.uk/>

4.2. Young People and Homelessness

New Horizons Youth Centre

New Horizons acts as a support network for 16-21 year olds who have no one else to turn to. They provide hot food, showers and laundry and support in finding them accommodation, training and employment. They offer street and prison outreach and offer specific support around domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

<https://nhyouthcentre.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work>

Look Ahead

Look Ahead provides services for young people that have previously been in care. Some services operate on a pan-London basis, accepting referrals from Leaving Care and Social Work Teams from across different local authorities. Their staff teams work closely with Personal Advisors, take part in joint reviews and support each young person to move towards independent living in line with their individual Pathway Plan.

Most young people Look Ahead work with will receive support from their supported housing services which includes hostels, step-down support and floating support services.

<https://www.lookahead.org.uk/our-services/services-we-provide/young-people-and-care-leavers/>

4.2. Violence Against Women and Girls Services for young people in London

Abianda

Abianda is a social enterprise that works with young women affected by gangs. Their Star project provides 12- one-to-one session for gang-affected young women aged 16-24 in Islington. They work alongside young women to explore:

- healthy relationships
- sexual violence and exploitation and other VAWG issues in the context of gangs
- risk for gang-affected young women
- anger, power and harm

<http://abianda.com/services/>

Children's Society

Children's Society provide services nationally to young people experiencing Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). The range of support varies according to the area the service has been commissioned, and includes counselling and therapeutic work, targeted youth work and work with families.

Safer London

Safer London provides support to young women and men who have experienced or are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation using a gendered and trauma informed approach. The service includes:

- 1 to 1 support and advocacy
- Group work
- Support to families and carers

<https://saferlondon.org.uk/>

Solace Women's Aid

Solace Women's Aid offers free advice and support to women and children in London to build safe and strong lives free from abuse and violence.

Solace works alongside Redthread, a London-based youth violence charity, to provide Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) based in London's four major trauma centres. Their IDVAs provide specialist support for young people aged 11 – 25 who are admitted into hospital due to Violence Against Women and Girls

They also provide support to young women who are:

- aged 11 – 19 (or up to 25 if they have a disability),
- live, work or study in Haringey or Islington, and
- have experienced, are currently experiencing or are at risk of experiencing any form of violence against women and girls (VAWG). These include domestic abuse, sexual violence, forced marriage, "honour" based violence, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.

Our IDVAs provide specialist support for young people aged 11 – 25 who are admitted into hospital due to Violence Against Women and Girls

<https://www.solacewomensaid.org/>

Hear2Change

The Hear2Change project works with young people in schools and community settings across Haringey and Islington with the aim of changing attitudes to Violence Against Women and Girls. The project is led by a steering group of young women who meet regularly to decide on project priorities. The project also provides support to young people through workshops, assemblies and one-to-one advocacy work for those who have experienced, or are at risk of, violence and abuse

<https://www.solacewomensaid.org/young-people/be-champion-your-community>

Women and Girls Network

Women and Girls Network provide a Young Women's Service that works to create safe and confidential spaces free from violence and abuse. They provide support to young women under 18 who are currently or at risk of experience any form of violence against women and girls who live work of study in West London.

They provide:

- 1-2-1 support - for individual mentoring in our advocacy service that works to empower young women to speak their mind free from judgement.
- Group-work support - for young women to explore issues of relationships (family and friends), safety, identity and self-reflection outside of your usual group of friends.
- Therapeutic support- for young women who wish to access counselling services.

<http://www.wgn.org.uk/young-women-at-wgn>

5. References

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Briefing written by the Domestic Abuse, Housing and Policy Team at Safer London as part of the project 'Preventing homelessness for women and girls in social housing facing VAWG and multiple disadvantage'

Updated September 2019

Appendix A: North London Care Leaver Reciprocal Case Study

Established in 2017 The North London Sub-region via the North London Housing Partnership (NLHP) have a pilot protocol which seeks to support authorities to work in partnership to address the long-term accommodation needs of care leavers²¹ who wish to, and have been assessed by their responsible borough as being appropriate for, a social housing tenancy within the host²² local authority into which they have been placed and have since formed support networks.

In Summary:

- The responsible borough must be able to evidence that the care leaver in question is ready to live independently and able to sustain a tenancy.
- A reciprocal request to a host borough for a social tenancy should be planned as far in advance as possible, ideally within 6 months before the young person plans to move (in some cases this will be 6 months in advance of the young person's 18th birthday), to provide ample time for a smooth transition.
- The guideline for a minimum period of time that the young person has resided within a host borough to be considered for the reciprocal is 12 months, however this can be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- Nominations for this reciprocal arrangement are requested by Children's Services via a young person's caseworker, and then primarily led by the nominated lead contacts in Housing within each NLHP borough.
- Each young person will remain on an active caseload with the 'responsible authority' as long as they are receiving services from either or both authorities.

For full details see accompanying agreement

Since its establishment there have been only a small numbers of referrals, but last year there were a couple of successful placements.

A Housing Manager in one of the participating boroughs outlined two cases in which they successfully placed their young people for long term-accommodation in another borough. In both these cases, rather than the reason for referral being to stay with support networks established in a host borough, the long term placement was requested because of with gang links/association and risk of harm in the original 'responsible' borough. In both referrals the young person was older than 18 when the reciprocal was requested.

The manager suggested that these placements were successful because good communication was established between the social services and housing teams in both boroughs. Risk assessments were completed involving the police Gangs team to evidence risk. The social work team in the responsible borough was able to demonstrate that the young person could live independently, would be set up financially and linked in with other appropriate support services as needed.

The responsible borough's leaving care team still provides support, but the problem of making appointments in a safe area was suggested not to be a significant factor, as their level of independence meant that input from the leaving care team was at that point 'minimal'. They

²¹ The protocol relates to young people between the ages of 17 to 21 years old (25yrs if still in education), who qualify for a service as defined by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (as it amends the Children Act 1989).

²² The "host authority" refers to the local authority within whose boundaries the care leaver is living where that is different from the 'responsible authority'.

suggested that if promoted with Leaving Care teams, the flexibility to also access properties Pan-London via the [PLHR](#) for those fleeing abuse/violence would likely be welcomed.

Appendix B: Reciprocal Named Leads Workshop Report

Improving Access to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal: Feedback from the Reciprocal Named Leads workshop, October 24th 2018

In October 2018 Safer London ran two workshops for the Reciprocal Named Lead contacts, attended by approximately 40 people in total. Part of the sessions aimed to discuss the development of the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme, with a specific focus to improve access to the scheme for groups of people who are more likely to experience violence or abuse and also experience specific barriers to accessing safe housing. The two groups discussed at this workshop were care leavers and women in prison. To be referred to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, applicants from these groups would still need to fit the usual criteria which is to be at risk of harm where they live, and have a social tenancy with one of the Reciprocal partners. It was noted that care leavers might not have a social tenancy yet but would be allocated one if they were safe in their borough.

This document summaries the discussions had and includes direct quotes from Named Leads who attended.

"I welcome these groups being included in the Pan London Scheme"

Care Leavers

Care leavers are particularly vulnerable to homelessness: one third of care leavers become homeless in the first two years immediately after they leave care and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.²³ Care leavers are also more likely than other young people to be at risk of violence or abuse, such as Child Sexual Exploitation and/ or exploitation through gangs. This may be due to the reasons why they were placed in care, or may be related to experiences of violence and abuse that occurred after they were placed in care. If this risk takes place in the borough that holds care duty over them, this can prevent the local authority to being able to offer them social housing within their housing stock. The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal is an opportunity for local authorities to house young people to whom they owe a duty and who are at risk of harm in their borough.

Workshop Feedback

The workshop focussed on current practice across different local authorities, potential barriers and challenges to housing care leavers at risk of violence or abuse, and how the current Pan-

²³ https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf

London Housing Reciprocal processes could be adapted to make the pathway accessible for this group.

Current Practice

Some local authorities identified that they have previously moved care leavers across borough boundaries through reciprocal agreements, however these were through informal agreements and were not monitored.

“Care leavers [reciprocal] would be beneficial. As a local authority we often receive referrals from other boroughs but this is captured manually”

“We accept reciprocals but these are often direct swaps within our existing quota. It would be good to have this process managed through Safer London with maybe a percentage of the quota put towards the scheme, keeping it transparent.”

Many local authority housing departments implement a quota system for social housing allocated to care leavers. This would usually be a set number or percentage of properties to be allocated each year to young people leaving care. Social services (usually Leaving Care Teams) nominate those who are ready for independent living. Often Housing teams hold a panel to review the supporting evidence brought forward by social services for the young people they nominated. Safer London reviewed local authority allocation policies and found that 24 out of 33 make reference to quota arrangements with Social Services and the Leaving Care team.

Barriers

➤ Lack of readiness for independent living and/or support

Named Leads reported that often young people were nominated for social housing when they were not ready, or did not have the support required, to start holding a tenancy independently. Alongside not being prepared for the financial responsibility and management of a tenancy, named leads highlighted the lack of continuity of support after foster placements or other supported living arrangements. Young people often face isolation and a lack of emotional support once they reach 18 and leave supported placements. A number of attendees reported stories of how this absence of support and preparation led to ASB reports, high rent arrears and eventual eviction and risk of homelessness.

➤ Lack of identification/information sharing

Registered providers raised that they are often unaware whether their tenants nominated by the local authority had been in contact with the care system previously. Consequently they often do not identify potential risks or support needs until other issues arise. Local authorities reported facing similar problems when someone accesses housing support through the homelessness route. Often whether a young person has been in care is not identified, particularly if their primary priority need is recorded due to a different vulnerability (e.g. if the young person is pregnant or has a child).

Adapting the Reciprocal Pathway

Despite the concerns above, Named Leads had many examples of good practice to mitigate against these risks and effectively support young people leaving care to access and sustain social housing tenancies.

Partnership working

Named leads highlighted the value of working in partnership with social services and voluntary sector agencies to provide both resettlement and on-going support to young people moving in to independent living.

Case study

One local authority provides tenancy sustainment group training sessions for young people leaving care who are allocated social housing within their borough.

They also stressed the need for tenancy maintenance training for both young people and the professionals supporting them. Some local authorities described having agreements in place for young people leaving care such as a specific furniture allowance, or a fast-tracked system for Discretionary Housing Payments.

Support

Support needs to be put in place around young people moving into independent living. Landlords are in a position to offer some of this support when someone has signed a tenancy. For example tenancy sustainment teams or equivalent can support around budgeting, explaining the tenancy contract (for example providing an explanation on what may be counted as anti-social behaviour e.g. having parties) and signposting tenants to internal contacts who can provide help should they have an issues.

The need for emotional support or equivalent for those moving through the scheme was also emphasised. Named leads asked for resettlement and ongoing support to be captured on any referral, including who would be providing this support and how. Care Leavers Pathway Plans could provide this information and would need to be updated if a care leaver moves through the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme.

Case Study

A young person who had left care and was at risk from gang-related violence has successfully moved through the scheme. Social services paid arrears as DHP request was unsuccessful. The new landlord worked with the young person to set up direct rent payments as well as provided him information on who to contact should he be worried about finances.

Women in Prison

An enormous body of research has evidenced the extent the female prison population have experiences of violence and abuse in their lives. More than half of women in prison in England (53%) report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child and 57% report having been victims of domestic violence as adults. Experiences of domestic abuse are likely to be underreported, Women in Prison report that 79% of their clients have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse²⁴. Women are often experiencing abuse when they enter prison. 34% of the

²⁴ http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Domestic_abuse_report_final_lo.pdf

population at HMP Bronzefield, the UK's largest female prison, reported experiencing abuse at the time they were sent to prison. The abuse and coercion women experience is often linked to their offending behaviour; for example 48% of women report having committed offences to support someone else's drug use.²⁵ The risk of homelessness when leaving prison then increases reoffending.

Intervening when a woman with a social housing tenancy enters remand or custody and utilising the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal could lead to more women leaving prison with stable housing in an area where they are safe, offering a chance to start rebuilding their lives.

Workshop Feedback

As with the discussion around young people leaving care, conversation focussed on current practice, barriers to support and how the current PLHR pathway could be changed to improve access to this group of women.

Current Practice

Currently women can access Housing Benefit or equivalent for up to 52 weeks while they are on remand, and up to 13 weeks if they have been sentenced. Named Leads reported that if they are made aware that their tenant is going to prison, they could work with them to relinquish the tenancy in order to avoid arrears, and offer an alternative property upon release. They could also work with different support agencies to ensure that the tenancy is sustained.

Case Study

One registered provider has a policy in place ensuring tenants that if they enter prison and relinquish their tenancy, they will be offered another property once released.

Some local authorities reported that previous tenants who went to prison have often come back to their attention through a homelessness application after their release. With the Housing Reduction Act, prisons and probation services now have a duty to refer anyone at risk of homelessness. There is therefore likely to be an increase of referrals for this group. Housing Options services can include the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal in the Personal Housing Plans where relevant, as part of their prevention duty.

"We hope this will be improved via HRA! Groups that require pathways [such as women involved in the criminal justice system] should be identified and supported through the duty to refer."

Barriers

➤ Lack of identification/information sharing

The key barrier identified was the lack of information sharing between agencies, resulting in housing providers not knowing if their tenants were in prison. Named Leads reported that they are often unaware someone has been sentenced until substantial arrears build up, prompting the tenancy sustainment teams to get involved. Eviction processes might already be instigated before providers are aware that their tenant is in prison.

²⁵ http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Domestic_abuse_report_final_lo.pdf p.8

Adapting the Reciprocal Pathway

➤ Early Identification

To address the barrier of information sharing and identification, work needs to be done with non-housing agencies. This work needs to include awareness raising around the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, housing options and pathways available to women. If someone has a tenancy when entering prison, there needs to be support in place as early as possible to sustain this tenancy, well before the release date. This could be done through prison tenancy rescue services (for example Crisis, Shelter) to identify those who have a social housing tenancy and are at risk.

Support

Named leads suggested that further information would be needed for referrals to the Pan-London Housing for women leaving prison. This included information on medical needs, risk assessments, support networks, and family members moving with the household. They advised that case information may also be required around their conviction and restrictions in order to find an appropriate property. Finally referrals should also include information on any support in place upon the applicant's release, agencies involved in providing this support, applicant's financial situation and expectations.

Partnership working and pathways

Safer London have been in conversations with the St Mungo's resettlement service and HMP Bronzefield and HMP Downview. Staff discussed women being granted Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to view properties offered through the scheme while there were in prison.

Recommendations

While recommendations and actions around both groups were not identical, key themes arose around both. Recommendations included:

- 1) Current support and risk captured for all referrals to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal
This should include risk factors, links/support networks in boroughs of choice, resettlement and ongoing support. While these are in general already captured on the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal form, this information should be explicitly captured for care-leavers in the same way that risk information is captured for gang-related referrals.
- 2) Resettlement support and on-going support
It is important that support packages are in place for young people leaving care and support provided to women leaving prison. Information relating to this should be included in all referrals including information on who will be leading on what support – for instance who is accountable for the young person's Pathway Plan or who will signpost a woman leaving prison to access local services, such as the new Women's Support Centres.
- 3) Production of resources to help those referring to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal
Resources should include the key information that needs to be provided to refer someone who has been in care or is leaving prison. Safer London to support mapping of services available in London who provide support to these cohorts, e.g. Women's Support Centres.
- 4) Awareness Raising and Training
With the introduction of the Housing Reduction Act and duty to refer this is a key time to improve partnership working across different agencies. Feedback included suggestions to work with social services leaving care teams and prison resettlement teams. Training and awareness raising about the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal would be delivered by Safer London.
- 5) Innovative practice sharing
Local authorities and registered providers to share practice and policies that they have found to be effective with Safer London who can disseminate with wider Housing Partner

leads. Housing pathways and support to be shared with agencies who may be supporting people leaving care or prison to enable them to make effective referrals.