

Barnet Home seekers

CHILDRENS PANEL

PROTOCOL and PROCEDURES

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1. Introduction – Panel Purpose

1.1 The Panel's overall objective will be to ensure that the council's housing resources are directed appropriately for the benefit of children and young persons who are in need within the meaning of S17 of the Children Act 1989 because:

- i) s/he is unlikely to achieve or maintain or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by the council.
- ii) his/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired without the provision of such services.
- iii) S/he has a disability.

1.2 The Panel's function is therefore to advise the Housing Service on housing applications which are the subject of case reports received from professional agencies concerned with children's safety, health and welfare. Where appropriate, the Panel will recommend the provision of additional housing services required on applications which include children or young persons in need.

1.3 The Panel may make recommendations concerning any type of housing service which may be relevant, but will in particular recommend:

- i) Whether additional priority under the council's housing points system should be awarded to increase the priority for re-housing for the family concerned.
- ii) Whether there are essential requirements concerning the type or location of housing which should be taken into account in selecting allocations of temporary or permanent housing for the family.
- iii) Cases other than above where a child has been assessed as in need in accordance with the Children Act 1989. (i.e. an exceptional referral to Private Sector team)

2. Criteria for Referral

2.1 Housing officers / Social Workers should normally seek the recommendation of the Panel in all cases where:

- i) It is known that a housing application includes a child who is on the Child Protection Register.
 - ii) Where social services have specifically advised that a child who is included on a housing application may need to be looked after or is the subject of significant child protection concerns.
- 2.2 Housing officers should also make referrals to the Panel if a report is received about a case which indicates that there are special concerns for the child's safety or welfare. Such reports may be received from:
- Social Services, NSPCC
 - Education welfare, head teachers
 - Consultant, GP, health visitor
 - Police, solicitor, court reports and orders
 - Other relevant professional bodies
- 2.3 Housing officers should establish in all cases the extent of other agencies' involvement in cases where children's welfare is of concern. Minutes and decisions of Case Conferences, Care Planning meetings etc, should be obtained where relevant to housing services.
- 2.4.1 If relevant information and/or recommendations are received from professional agencies over the phone, housing officers should request a written report.
- 2.4.2 Referrals for the Children's Panel can be made by any relevant professional or supporting agency and should be made directly to the Housing Panel Co-ordinator at Barnet House, 1255 High Road, London N20 0EJ.

3. Assessment Factors

- 3.1 Referrals to the Panel will normally be appropriate where reports and/or recommendations are received in connection with one or more of a wide range of factors and concerns for children's safety and welfare including:
- Actual or likelihood of any form of abuse
 - Other concerns for children's safety, for example, because of the condition of their home.
 - Disability issues and/or learning difficulties.
 - Poor attendance at school, truanting, exclusion.
 - Offending behaviour, solvent abuse.
 - Hyperactivity, behavioural difficulties, attention deficit disorder.

3.2 Referral should normally be made first to the Medical Adviser or Mental Health and Housing Officer as appropriate if:

- i) A medical report is received from the GP, paediatrician, clinic or hospital concerning the child.
- ii) If the case also requires medical assessment because a medical report has been received about the parent or someone else in the family.

3.3 The Medical Adviser and/or Mental Health and Housing Officer must ensure identification of all cases where referral to the Panel is appropriate. After medical assessment and recommendation, the file should normally be referred directly to the Housing Panel Co-ordinator for the next meeting of the Children's Panel unless there is a need for a further report or other information to be obtained first by the housing officer.

4 Panel constitution:

Resources Manager
Assistant Divisional Manager (Supporting Families Division, Children's Service).
Advocacy Officer (Complex Needs Division, Children's Service))
Housing Panel Co-ordinator

5. Panel Responsibilities

5.1 The Panel is responsible for considering in each case presented for recommendation:

- i) the child's housing circumstances, including the security of tenure of the child's home, the condition of the property, facilities, etc.
- ii) the nature and significance of any special need for more suitable settled housing to be provided by the council for the family.

5.2 Before making recommendations, the Panel will assess all relevant reports and other information received concerning the child and family. The Housing Panel Co-ordinator attending the Panel is responsible for identifying these and for advising the Panel on the applicant's housing circumstances and the prospects for re-housing.

5.3 Recommendations by non-housing agencies concerning the award of priority for re-housing should be given due weight by the Panel.

However, the Panel should ensure that information provided by agencies supports their recommendations.

- 5.4 In considering the needs of the child in each case, the Panel must also consider the carer's needs and circumstances and the functionality of the household as a whole.
- 5.5 Panel recommendations should be made as applicable concerning:
- i) The award of housing points to increase the priority for re-housing as compared with other families on the Housing Register and Transfer Register.
 - ii) The type of re-housing which needs to be provided.
- 5.6 The Panel's recommendations may also be requested by the referring officer about issues or questions in connection with applications for housing assistance made by families or single young people under the homelessness legislation, Part VII of the Housing Act 1996:
- i) Whether or not the applicant should be considered to be statutorily homeless because the child's home is so unsuitable that it would not be reasonable for the family to remain, taking into account the general housing situation in Barnet.
 - ii) Whether or not a child may reasonably be expected to live with and be cared for by the applicant, if the child has been or still living elsewhere or dependent on others.

6. Housing points awards

- 6.1 300 points may be awarded where there is an immediate and significant risk of harm to a child within the dwelling. Cases awarded 300 points should be reviewed on a monthly basis. The award of 300 points will also normally be appropriate in the case of households which contain children who are on the Child Protection register and who are actually or potentially homeless, or in situations where looked after children could be returned home from care if suitable housing were provided.
- 6.2 150 points may be awarded where it is essential that suitable settled housing be provided for the child and his/her carer as soon as possible. The provision of temporary accommodation should also be

recommended by the Panel if appropriate, taking into account the likely delay in providing re-housing.

- 6.3 75 points should be awarded in less exceptional cases where re-housing is nevertheless required urgently.
- 6.4 10 points should be awarded where there is recognition that there is an effect upon the child caused by their housing circumstances but this is of a minor nature.
- 6.5 All points can be awarded to each individual child within a household if deemed appropriate.
- 6.6 The Housing Panel Co-ordinator attending the Panel must ensure that recommendations by the Panel are recorded and referred to appropriate managers or staff for action where necessary. In addition written confirmation of panel outcomes to be sent by the Housing Panel Co-ordinator to all applicants and copied to any supporting professionals.
- 6.7 The Panel may require additional information before making a recommendation on a case, for example:
 - i) A care plan
 - ii) A child in need assessment
 - iii) A further report on any aspect of the child's welfare or needs
- 6.8 Such further information as is required should be obtained as quickly as practicable by the Housing service and the case should be referred back to the Panel.
- 6.9 The Panel may also recommend that action be taken by another agency where they would appear appropriate to meet the needs of the child and/or the family. The Panel must ensure that, responsibility for notification of the Panel's recommendation is assigned to the Housing Panel Co-ordinator or another appropriate Panel member.

7. Panel Administration

- 7.1 The Special Needs Assessment Form should normally be used in all cases being referred to the Panel.
- 7.2 Cases should be referred to the Panel if any of the criteria at 3 above are applicable.
- 7.3 The referring officer should ensure that all relevant reports about the case are on file. A memorandum should be prepared and attached if

there are matters which the referring officer considers relevant which are not included in reports.

- 7.4 The Housing Panel Co-ordinator attending the Panel is responsible for ensuring that all Panel decisions are recorded on the Assessment Form, including recommendations for further action by the Team responsible for the case.
- 7.5 After each Panel meeting, the Housing Panel Co-ordinator should pass the file for SAFFRON input:
- i) To the Customer Services/ Housing Registration team in the case of housing register and/or accepted homelessness applications.
 - ii) To Barnet Homes Area Housing Team if it is a council tenancy case.
- 7.6 The housing officer responsible for the application or tenancy concerned is responsible for ensuring that the applicant and relevant agencies are informed of the Panel's recommendations on each case as appropriate.

Last updated 14.8.07

Resources Manager