



CHILD
FRIENDLY
CITIES &
COMMUNITIES

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE NEW NORMAL

5. HOUSING

THE CHANGE

Being restricted to their homes during lockdown was tough for children in even the most comfortable of living situations. But for those children across the UK living in cramped, damp and cold homes, with no desk to study at or garden to play in, 'stay at home' orders made life incredibly challenging.

As in so many other areas of life, the pandemic exposed huge inequalities in housing, with many children from the most marginalised communities living in unsuitable homes, very often with no access to outside space. It was also children from marginalised groups that made up the majority of children living in temporary accommodation throughout lockdown, which can range from hostels to repurposed shipping containers.

Home, either permanent or temporary, provided limited refuge for these children during the pandemic.

**NEW
NORMAL**

**A UK COMMITTEE
FOR UNICEF
(UNICEF UK) SERIES
FOR COUNCILS AND
THEIR PARTNERS**

THE CHALLENGE

Article 27 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) clearly states that every child has **the right to an adequate standard of living** and that public bodies have a duty to provide this, particularly housing, if parents cannot.

While much of the national housing crisis is outside of local authorities' control, the pandemic has exposed aspects of the crisis they *can* influence, including identifying those groups of children most vulnerable to living in inadequate housing, as well as the importance of children's immediate surroundings, namely access to safe and green spaces to play.

Taking a [child rights-based approach](#) to housing at the local level – one that puts children's rights front and centre of decisions around housing and the wider built environment – is a powerful step towards ensuring children don't just have a roof over their heads, they have a foundation on which to thrive.



5. HOUSING



THE STARTING POINT: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



All children under 18 should enjoy all the rights set out in the UNCRC **without discrimination**, and so there should be no inequalities in basic living standards.



The **best interests of the child** should be the top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children, including around housing.



Public bodies should use the maximum available resources to ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living.



Every child should enjoy the **same opportunities to develop to their full potential**.



Every child has **the right to be heard and for their views to be taken seriously**, including on discussions around where they live.



Children have **the right to benefit from social security**, including financial support, taking into account the resources and circumstances of their families.



Every child has **the right to a standard of living that supports their needs and development**, including housing.



Every child has **the right to rest, leisure and play**.

THE UNCRC

The full list of children's rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) can be found [here](#).





RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Build a strong understanding of where and how children and young people live, and how they feel about their home and immediate surroundings. Ensure that any opportunity to participate is promoted in an accessible and child-friendly way, proactively includes young people who may face barriers to participating, and that any decisions are communicated back to young people.
- 2** Review local housing policy using a [child rights impact assessment](#) and ensure local housing teams, services and associations know how to use a [child rights-based approach](#) when planning and making local housing decisions.
- 3** Align internal housing standards to children's rights standards i.e. a safe and well-maintained home that supports children's physical, mental, spiritual and social development.
- 4** Prioritise children's right to play and their access to recreational spaces in the immediate vicinity of their homes. Reflect on how new developments may impact on children's right to play, or discriminate against certain groups of children. And consider whether children have the space they need to play when placing families in temporary accommodation.
- 5** Ensure any existing or planned housing developments in high-traffic or industrial areas take into consideration the children and young people who live there, and that action is taken to mitigate the impact of increased noise and air pollution.
- 6** Afford particular consideration to young people living in unregulated accommodation, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, homeless 16- and 17-year-olds outside of the care system, as well as young people transitioning out of care. Involve all children and young people in decisions about where they live during and after care.
- 7** Integrate children's rights into local campaigning around the national housing crisis – calling for an end to youth homelessness and a warm, safe home with room to play and study for every child.



5. HOUSING



CASE STUDY

WOKINGHAM: SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS



Care leavers in Scotland and Wales are currently exempt from paying council tax. Yet the same is not true of England, where care leavers face a postcode lottery as to whether they will have to shoulder the financial burden of paying council tax once they begin to live independently.

It is, however, within the gift of *all* local authorities in England to fully exempt care leavers from paying council tax, and the costs to them are negligible.

In 2021, Wokingham Borough Council extended its council tax exemption for its care leavers up until their 25th birthday (up

from their 21st). The decision was felt to be in the best interests of young people, to support their right to an adequate standard of living, and a simple way to help ensure young people that didn't have parents to support them financially still had the same opportunities to develop and thrive.

Wokingham Borough Council is one of nine cities and communities across the UK taking part in the UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities programme.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- *General comment 17 on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts:* Adopted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013
- *General comment 21 on children in street situations:* Adopted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2017
- *Child rights impact assessment:* Child Friendly Cities & Communities template and guidance for local authorities

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This document is one in a series of recommendations for councils and their partners published monthly by the UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities team.

Continue the series: unicef.org.uk/child-friendly-cities/new-normal

