Why is accommodation for care leavers an important issue?
A care leaver (guide) is someone aged 16 to 21 (up to the age of 24 if still in full time education), who has spent time in the care of the local authority as a child or young person but has now left that care. The local authority has a responsibility to support care leavers, which includes ensuring they live in suitable accommodation. We know from national research that being a care leaver can be a risk factor for homelessness among young people (guide).
Leeds City Council and partner agencies aim to secure accommodation for care leavers that, wherever possible, mirrors the societal norms and options available for young people who have not been in care, which include living with family and friends, in student accommodation, in assured short-hold tenancies and in local authority tenancies.

What are the accommodation options for care leavers in Leeds?
There is a range of accommodation offered to care leavers in Leeds, with the majority of care leavers living in suitable accommodation; no Leeds care leavers have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for several years.
The following are some of the options available in Leeds:

Staying Put - The Staying Put scheme allows young people in foster care placements to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18, if both parties agree. Evidence suggests that this can improve outcomes for young people, providing them with additional stability at a time of transition and more closely replicating the on-going support their non-looked after peers may receive from parents and other family members. The 2015 Leeds Ofsted report noted that 36% of recent care leavers have remained with their carers in Staying Put arrangements.

Supported lodgings - this is an in-house service which offers supported accommodation in a family setting for young people aged 16-21 years. It is designed to support young people moving on from residential care, those who have experienced a placement breakdown, and those who have struggled with living independently. The service is in the early stages of development.

Semi-independent living is provided in a number of ways to care leavers in Leeds:
The GIPSIL Leaving Care Team work with around 120 young people at any one time to provide city-wide pre-tenancy and continued floating support for young people making the transition from care to independence. In support of this, GIPSIL also provide trainer flats in a variety of areas across Leeds, which provide safe and secure homes where young people have the space and time to develop life skills.

FLAGSHIP are commissioned by Leeds City Council to provide a young people’s housing pathway, which includes the provision of 150 trainer flats across Leeds for young single people, couples and families including care leavers, usually for around six months. Trainer flats help prepare young people to secure their own tenancy, either through the local authority or in the private rental sector, or to purchase their own home in the future. FLAGSHIP also offers pre-tenancy support, and support continues when they leave the trainer flat.

Leeds City Council has a framework of providers that offer supported tenancies, floating support, supported lodgings and group living for care leavers and other vulnerable young people. These providers work to support young people to develop skills and resilience for independence. Some of these providers work with young people who have the highest levels of needs, providing intense and short term packages of support (e.g. Vision, Bedspace, Independent Living Project).
How is accommodation for care leavers managed in Leeds?
There are strong partnerships in Leeds City Council between the Children’s Social Work Service (CSWS) and Leeds Housing Options, the local authority housing department, which has enabled the housing needs of care leavers to be appropriately prioritised, particularly when bidding for local authority properties. CSWS, Housing Options and housing associations which provide support and accommodation to care leavers meet on a weekly basis to respond to requests for accommodation and support which appropriately meets the needs of care leavers.

There is also effective partnership working at a strategic level, with a group established to consider any emerging needs within the care leaver population and set commissioning priorities to respond to those needs.

What additional housing support is available to care leavers?
In addition to the support offered through individual housing providers, Leeds has a number of schemes and resources in place to support young people. These include the Youth Mediation Service offered by Leeds Housing Options which works to support relationships which may have broken down, the Sanctuary Scheme which supports care leavers at risk of violence or harassment, and using the Homeless Prevention Fund to maintain current housing arrangements or facilitate planned moves.

Key contacts
If you are working with a care leaver and have concerns or questions about their accommodation, you can speak to the Placements Service on 0113 3783662.

Care leavers can speak to their personal advisor for help with their accommodation, or they can go to the drop-in service at Leeds Housing Options, based at 2 Great George Street in the city centre, for assessment and support. Leeds Housing Options can be contacted by phone on 0113 222 4412, or by Twitter @LeedsHsgOptions.

Emergency accommodation for care leavers
The local authority has options for care leavers who need emergency accommodation:

**Leeds Housing Concern** operates the Seacole Hostel, which is emergency accommodation in a group living environment for a maximum of seven days. The hostel is staffed, so that young people can receive the support and supervision they need, and staff have an overview of the needs of each young person and can recommend the most appropriate options for them, in terms of accommodation and on-going support needs.

**RD Willis** is a provider of social housing, offering basic and safe emergency accommodation for young people for up to 28 days. Young people are provided with welcome packs, but this accommodation is not staffed, in contrast to the Seacole Hostel.

The availability of these emergency options in Leeds means that we do not have to place young people in unsuitable accommodation such as multi-occupancy housing or bed and breakfast accommodation, which are still sometimes used in other local authorities.