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# Homeless child will have his day in court

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The High Court has granted a judicial review into Surrey County Council's decision not to house a "child in need". In 2019, a 17-year-old who was known to Surrey's social services team was on the verge of being made homeless.

Surrey County Council caseworkers, who the judge praised, said the teen required the highest level of intervention together with a co-ordinated multi-agency approach. These are reserved for cases where children are in serious need. However, when he applied for emergency accommodation, the council's housing team said they were forced into a "snap judgement" – something the judge dismissed.

Mr Justice Calver rejected the county council's claim that their decision was made against the clock and found they had a "duty to provide him with accommodation". The judge said he was "well known to Surrey County Council with his history of children's services involvement", and that the council had already made considerable enquiries about his needs and welfare.

He added it was "clearly the case that… suitable emergency accommodation…was required, whilst his full needs, including his need for continuing accommodation and support, were further assessed."
Following the county council's decision the teenager, now 22, began to "sofa surf" between friends and family until he eventually ended up homeless and living on the streets.

Justice Calver's judgement read: "Despite this, Surrey County Council inexplicably failed to provide (him) with any accommodation and indeed failed to take any steps to assess his case at all until September 18, 2019, being five days later, which is highly regrettable." He wrote: "It is plain in my judgement that as at September, 18, 2019 it was or ought to have been clear to Surrey County Council on the facts as known to them that he could not return home, and did not otherwise have stable, suitable accommodation. Instead it merely recommended a referral to its targeted youth support."

Justice Calver also said that, given the background of the young man's situation, and how well known he was to Surrey County Council it was "extraordinary that on October 28, 2019, Surrey County Council nonetheless closed his case."

The judge said that while there was "no doubt" he had a "caring and diligent social support worker" it was "clear that Surrey County Council as an organisation seriously failed" him. He said: "I do not accept the submission of Surrey County Council that no purpose would be served now in granting the relief sought by this claim," adding "the support he receives from his supported accommodation key worker is being stepped down over time, and is accommodation-based.

"He still requires but cannot access support to return to college, access vocational training, plan his future and manage his social anxiety, all practical challenges which he struggles with owing to the lasting effects of his childhood."

The judgement, handed-down on Friday December 15th granted the man permission to bring his claim forward for review.

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said it does not comment on active court proceedings.

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