

5 December 2013		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Housing for Looked After Children and Care Leavers		
Report of: Paul Coke, Service Manager, Through Care Services		
Wards and communities affected: None	Key Decision: Non-key	
Accountable Head of Service: Barbara Foster, Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		
Purpose of Report: To provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with information in respect to Housing provided for our looked after children and care leavers.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information in respect to housing provision for our looked after children and care leavers.

This report and its contents are written from an officer's perspective.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and agree how they will monitor housing for looked after children and care leavers in the future.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee has requested a report in respect to the provision of accommodation, supported or permanent for our looked after children and care leavers.

2.2 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, places a duty on the local authority to provide services to young people who are eligible for leaving care services, by way of a Pathway Plan, which will include accommodation.

2.3 The Children and Young Person's Act 2008 makes it a '*General duty of the local authority to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children*'

- 2.4 Planning Transition to Adulthood for Looked After Children, details more specifically the local authority's duties in respect to care leavers and accommodation.
- 2.5 Within the regulations bed and breakfast is considered not to be suitable accommodation and any use of this will lead to serious criticism in inspections.
- 2.6 Southwark Judgement – This is a piece of case law that requires children's services to thoroughly assess the circumstances of 16 & 17 year olds and then to provide accommodation and support to those who are homeless.
- 2.7 There is a current Protocol between Housing and Social Care which enables Social Care to make referrals to Housing for care leavers for permanent accommodation. This referral will be accompanied with evidence of the young person's ability to live independently.
- 2.8 Each young person, if successful, will be placed on silver banding and able to bid for properties as per the current process.
- 2.9 Each young person is provided with a Setting Up Home Allowance of £2,000.00 as from April 2013 in accordance with the government's recent recommendations.
- 2.10 Social Care are part of the Joint Resource Panel (JRP) with Housing, where all referrals for supported accommodation is discussed and allocated on a monthly basis.
- 2.11 Social Care has access to the use of Family Mosaic who provide both supported accommodation and individual packages of support where appropriate to our young people.
- 2.12 Within the After Care Team, a worker deals primarily with housing issues for our care leavers and works in partnership with Housing colleagues both in house and in the private sector.
- 2.13 The Department's working relationship with Housing is very good and constant dialogue with staff enables this relationship to remain positive.
- 2.14 The Department has to provide performance data to the Department for Education on care leavers living in suitable accommodation at the age of 19.
- 2.15 The Department as from April 2013 will need to provide performance data to the DFE for not only 19 year olds but also for those aged 20 and 21.
- 2.16 The Department via its Resource Panel will agree for young people to remain with their foster carers post 18 if they are in education and are completing a course or there are specific circumstances that warrant this to happen. The best practice requirement is for the Council to declare a "Staying Put" Policy for young people who wish to remain with foster carers after the age of 18.

2.17 A new Pathway Plan has been developed and gone through the consultation process with the CiCC and currently with staff before it goes to senior management team for approval.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

3.1 As of this year (April 2013) the Local Authority has to report on suitable accommodation for 20 and 21 year olds to the DFE. As the reporting process was delivered to the Local Authority late the Department has had to play some catch up in terms of collecting and recording the data.

3.2 The After Care Team currently have 104 young people open to the team, with 5 case workers, a Team Manager and a specialist worker who deals with accommodation.

3.3 Our current data for each age group in terms of accommodation is as follows:

19 year olds

13 – suitable accommodation

9 – not recorded – this is due to the fact that they are not yet 19

1 – unsuitable accommodation (custody)

20 year olds

18 – suitable accommodation

1 – unsuitable accommodation (custody)

21 year olds

18 – suitable accommodation

1 – unsuitable accommodation (custody)

9 – not recorded – Department will need to do some further investigations into this cohort.

3.4 The Aftercare Team are currently working with 100 care leavers. They are placed in the following types of accommodation:

- 14 placed in properties run by the After Care Team
- 23 in Social Housing
- 6 in Supported Lodgings
- 11 in Private rented accommodation
- 11 living with family
- 13 non-engagers / unknown
- 7 living with friends
- 2 in mental health institutes
- 2 in custody
- 1 in residential unit for disabled adults

- 2 in hostels
- 1 missing
- 7 University accommodation
- 4 Hospital

3.5 The Aftercare Team manage 12 properties which provide shared accommodation for young people.

3.6 For those young people that fall into the category of the Southwark Judgement the Department has the allocation of 6 beds at Charles Street Hostel

For the current year of 2013, there were 20 young people who presented as eligible under the Southwark Judgement Ruling:

- 5 young people became looked after
- 15 were either placed in Charles Street, Brooke House or found alternative accommodation.

3.7 The Department is currently in discussions with other local authorities within the Eastern Region about accommodation for young people 16+ and the type of accommodation required. A series of meetings have taken place, led by the Commissioning Team. A further meeting is due place imminently to progress this.

3.8 There is a draft 'Staying Put' Document that requires completion that will address the issue of young people wishing to remain with their carers once they have reached 18. Currently requests are made via the Department's Placement Panel where decisions in respect to this are made by senior managers.

3.9 The implementation of the Welfare Reform legislation in respect to Housing Benefit and Council Tax has gone relatively smoothly for our care leavers. The individual case workers have supported the young people with this transition and where necessary made representation to either housing benefit or council tax to resolve issues.

3.10 Further work will need to take place in ensuring the communication between the After Care Team and Council & Housing benefit is strengthened during this period of change.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

In light of the Government strategy published in October 2013, the local authority will need to ensure there is adequate provision for housing for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

6.1 The impact of the changes to welfare benefit and the implementation of universal credit means that it will be the responsibility of the tenant to pay the housing costs to the housing provider. This could mean that payments are not made, which could possibly lead to an increase in evictions.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652466**
kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk

Most of the accommodation costs for the young people will be met through Housing Benefit but, there are certain circumstances where the Local Authority will need to support young people with financial support for their accommodation costs, such as unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those young people that are in higher education.

With the year on year increase in the number of Children being looked after, this will mean a continuing budget pressure.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652054**
Lindsey.Marks@BDTLegal.org.uk

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 the housing of some 16 to 17 year olds will be the responsibility of Children Services. The Act gives Children Services a clear responsibility for: eligible children – 16 to 17 year olds still in care, looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, for relevant children – 16 to 17 year olds who have left care, but were looked after for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 and for sometime while 16/17 and former relevant children – 18 to 21 year olds formerly eligible/relevant children.

Children Services has a duty to undertake the following in respect of eligible and relevant children:

- develop a 'pathway plan' by the young person's sixteenth birthday
- assess and meet needs
- provide financial support

- provide the services of a personal adviser
- ensure the young person has access to suitable accommodation – this includes
 - the provision and maintenance of accommodation, unless social services are
 - satisfied that the welfare of the young person does not require it. The
 - accommodation provided must be reasonably practical for the young person’s
 - needs. Bed-and-breakfast accommodation is considered not acceptable
 - stay in touch. If a young person has to move to another area, the placing area
 - will retain responsibility for the young person, but may transfer the funding
 - arrangements to another authority.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
 Telephone and email: **01375652472**
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As this is a vulnerable group, which the council has a duty towards and as Corporate Parents, the local authority needs to ensure the array of accommodation is of good quality, appropriate for the young people’s needs and takes into account their cultural and diverse needs.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

Not applicable.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Not applicable.

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

None

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