

7 January 2020		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Head Start Housing: Progress To Date		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: All	
Report of: Tiffany Bright, Skills Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director for Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director for Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Local Authorities have a duty, as a corporate parent, to ensure continued involvement in supporting young people as they leave care and move into independence until they are 21 years of age (or up to 25 years if specific, targeted support is required). Thurrock is committed to ensuring that care leavers (CLs) and children in need receive targeted support in high quality accommodation.

Young people in care and leaving care can be highly vulnerable and at risk of experiencing multiple accommodation moves, and/or in the case of young people leaving care, are at risk of becoming homeless.

Head Start Housing (HSH) was formally launched in December 2018. This is a joint initiative between Children Service and Housing. The team comprises 4.5 officers, as part of the Inspire offer. There are 2.5 FTE Housing Officers, 1 FTE business administration apprentice, 0.5 FTE Commissioning Officer and 0.5 FTE Mediation Officer.

HSH sources and manages a portfolio of accommodation for young people either in care or in the process of leaving care.

The HSH Strategy aims to return all care leavers (CL) to Thurrock by December 2023. This is so they can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, can easily access the plethora of local services, diverse education and employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.

Preparing CL for adulthood remains a key priority for Thurrock Council. HSH has been created to provide a solution for CL accommodation.

The aim of this report is to provide Corporate Parenting with an overview of progress to date and to make some recommendations for further enhancing the service.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Continue work on cross directorate specifications for services covering estate agency, repairs, storage and floating support;**
- 1.2 Continue work with Housing to purchase up to 12 beds for exclusive use by CLs;**
- 1.3 Create and promote innovative ways to engage CLs to evaluate the HSH service, as well as develop basic maintenance and cleaning skills;**
- 1.4 Continue reducing costs, improving quality, maximising cost avoidance, regularly reviewing/modifying processes and developing effective working relationships with partners to further extend the portfolio of properties;**
- 1.5 Continue work to develop joint protocols, enable consistent use of terminology and templates for services from 16 years+ and positively contribute to other directorates' strategies.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Early pilot findings

- 2.1.1 In March 2016, Children's Services and Housing designed a pilot to test HMO's for vulnerable young people, either in employment or working towards or at risk of losing their job on account of unstable accommodation.
- 2.1.2 The first property, 4 bedroom in Chadwell St Mary, accommodated two males and 2 females. Three were in employment and one was working towards employment. Out of hours support was provided on a one to one basis and in group sessions and the early success lead to the modification of a second property.
- 2.1.3 The second property, 3 bedroom, also in Chadwell St Mary, accommodated three males. Two were in employment and one had an offer of employment. Out of hours support was provided and this was successful for nearly a year.
- 2.1.4 Changes to tenants lead to anti-social behaviour and the first property withdrawn for use. One tenant returning home, from the second property, lead to anti-social behaviour and crime by the remaining tenants who were both detained in prison. The second property was returned to housing stock.
- 2.1.5 Considerable learning has been applied from the pilot to inform the Head Start Housing strategy, 2018 - 2023.
- 2.1.6 The aim is to return all CLs to Thurrock by December 2023. This is so they can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, can easily access the plethora of local services, diverse education and

employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.

- 2.1.7 HSH sources and manages a portfolio of accommodation for young people either in care or in the process of leaving care.
- 2.1.8 Housing made a commitment to provide 6 beds each year, by 2023 for exclusive use by CLs. So far, the LA has provided 8 beds, with below market rental costs applied. 12 further beds are expected to be purchased by end April 2020. This makes use of Right to Buy receipts, increases LA owned housing stock and makes a positive contribution to the Housing Reduction Act 2017.

2.2 **Progress to date**

- 2.2.1 Once a dedicated team was appointed, a review of properties took place. This led to properties being handed back, the procurement of properties, repairs and maintenance for others, whilst developing effective working relationships with the tenants.
- 2.2.2 Over the past 10 months, 16 properties (14 out of borough) have been handed back. 17 beds, in borough, have been procured and, latterly the weekly rental charge includes essential furnishings, water rates, wifi and cleaning tools. This is designed to reduce the CL's outlay from their Setting Up Home Grant, enable online access to courses/employment, working with the communal cleaning contractor to learn how to keep the property clean, reduces the amount of property in storage and, an added benefit of reducing the number of financial transactions for the Finance team.
- 2.2.3 Robust negotiations have significantly reduced the average weekly rent paid in 18/19. An update will be provided after close of this financial year.
- 2.2.4 HSH Mediation has worked with more than 100 young people and their families to delay/avoid homelessness. This intervention is very successful with more than 87% positive outcomes. The calculation for cost avoidance will be provided after close of this financial year.
- 2.2.5 Robust negotiations on repairs, furniture, infestation treatments, gardening etc amount to further cost avoidance. Figure will be provided after close of this financial year.
- 2.2.6 A close working relationship, with a key contact in Housing, has led to the donation of furniture (left behind in garages by residents that had lived in LA accommodation) for exclusive use by CLs. This ranges from settees, numerous chests of drawers and coffee tables, outdoor furniture, dining tables and chairs. If HSH had paid for these items, a conservative saving of £1,000 has been made. Since then, more colleagues have learnt about the programme and we are receiving donations on a regular basis. The items are used to make the accommodation more comfortable for the CLs.

- 2.2.7 HSH works closely with After Care who have been working hard to prepare CLs for social housing in Thurrock. Housing have been working hard to provide accommodation for priority band residents.
- 2.2.8 The voice of the young person is integral to the way HSH operates. HSH attends Placement and Transition Panels to understand and plan for pipeline demand. A referral form is completed by the social worker or personal advisor (After Care) and HSH consider the young person's needs, available properties, risks of co-habitation and much more, before offering viewings.
- 2.2.9 A straightforward, easy to understand, licence agreement is explained to the young person, as well as house rules and a 'What's where guide' is in development, to help the young person settle into the area. The CL, if not in employment, is supported to sign up for universal credit, with the housing element paid direct to HSH. This reduces the amount of time, the CL is receiving £57.90pw, from After Care and offsets rental costs to HSH.
- 2.2.10 HSH provides a suitable, temporary housing solution for CLs allowing them a safe space to develop skills/transition into adulthood. It provides move on and 'move back' opportunities if the accommodation is too much for the young person to manage.
- 2.2.11 As of 6 December, HSH provides accommodation for 60 CLs. HSH is working with After Care to move on 7 CLs in the next two months. HSH is preparing for 9 new arrivals, either from foster care, residential care or prison. HSH works closely with a range of external partners to extend the portfolio of beds.

Property size	No. of properties types in portfolio	Additional skills development support from external partner	CLs accommodated
1 bedroom/self-contained unit	33	31	11
2 bed	8	4	16
3 bed	2	-	5
4 bed	3	-	12
5+ bed	3	-	16
	49	35	60

- 2.2.12 Close working, with colleagues in Procurement, Commissioning and Housing has led to the creation and implementation of quality assurance templates (using national good practice), a contract issued for cleaning the communal areas of HSH properties, an invitation to tender young parents accommodation and support, hostel accommodation and support.

2.3 What's Next

- 2.3.1 Single specifications are being prepared for estate agency services, repairs and maintenance, climate controlled storage for CLs' belongings between tenancies and floating support.
- 2.3.2 Continue working alongside Housing to review the suitability of properties for sale so £1.3mn is maximised to provide up to 12 beds, for exclusive use by CLs. A robust process for identifying and shortlisting properties before a cross directorate review including a surveyor, before viewings and offers made, is in place. Once the properties are ready for occupation, we should be in a position to realise rental income from these beds.
- 2.3.3 Making use of the engagement portal and other methods, HSH will develop innovative and perhaps, incentives for CLs to provide feedback, learn new skills (light maintenance and cleaning). HSH is in negotiation with Mears Group and the dedicated Careers Advisors, CL into EET to provide a programme of learning during monthly open sessions at Inspire Youth Hub. An automatic invitation, to the trade skills programme run by Mears Group, will be extended to CLs.
- 2.3.4 An automated compliance notification system would be useful. Design discussions with an ICT Business Analyst stalled after he left the organisation, but would be exceptionally useful to enable efficient 100% compliance.
- 2.3.5 HSH will continue working with partners to extend the property portfolio to meet demand and provide 'move back' opportunities.
- 2.3.6 HSH will continue reviewing systems and processes, making modifications as required to ensure a high quality service is delivered to CLs.
- 2.3.7 Continued work, cross directorate, to develop joint protocols, standardise templates and consistent terminology for services provided 16+ years, should provide a coherent transfer across services and improve young people's understanding of their entitlements and how to access them.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 ICT hardware and software utilised is prohibitive eg. HSH takes photographs as inventories; before and after repairs as a record of condition for future reference. The android phone functionality is very limited and taking too long to resolve. Limited and any such issues can take too long to resolve.
- 3.2 Despite an active recruitment process, the After Care team is still under resourced. In practical terms, this means that a request for accommodation is made, HSH identify options and there is a delay with the information we need to provide it.

3.3 Research and working in partnership with CLs and other local authorities, with Ofsted ratings of outstanding, will continue so we continue improving the service.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 It is requested that the Committee agree the recommendations and use the reporting mechanisms to support and challenge the work of HSH's services, on behalf of CL.

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

5.1 There is no additional information for the committee as part of this report.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 This report relates to the council priorities: People, where all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay; and Prosperity, a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

This report asks that the Committee notes the work involved in providing suitable accommodation to CLs. The responsibilities of HSH do not cross over to the work of After Care. The growing demand for accommodation, including financial support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker (UAS) children, often with no recourse to public funds is impacting on the budget. The growing demand for a diverse range of services has been absorbed by Inspire Youth Services ability to secure funding for tailored provision.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Strategic Lead Legal Services & Deputy
Monitoring Officer

Any joint working arrangements between a children's services authority and a housing authority for CLs' transition to independent living should include ensuring the delivery of effective preparation for independence with planned, sustainable moves into supported or independent accommodation. Local processes and/or practices do not involve CLs routinely being treated as homeless when care placements come to an end in order to place the

housing authority under an obligation to secure accommodation under Part 7 of the 1996 Act.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which came into force in October 2001 and gave Local Authorities the statutory duty to provide significantly **enhanced** leaving care service, with the intention to raise the quality of our support to that of good parents.

"Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. The local authority responsible for their care should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood." Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers.

The main purpose of the Leaving Care Act 2000 is to:

- Delay young people's discharge from care until they are prepared and ready;
- To improve the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care;
- To provide better personal support for young people after leaving care;
- To improve the financial arrangements for care leavers.

Relevant legislation:

1. Local authorities have a duty to offer **Personal Adviser** support to all care CLs towards whom the local authority had duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989, up to age 25 - irrespective of whether they are engaged in education or training. This includes CLs who return to the local authority at any point after the age of 21 up to age 25 and request such support. This includes suitable accommodation;
2. There is a duty on local authorities to explain housing options as part of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017; and
3. The Leaving Care Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities to delay discharge from care until ready through personal support.

The ultimate aim of HSH is to provide CLs with suitable accommodation (safe, secure and affordable) so they can commit to study/employment, develop positive networks in the community, have good health and contribute to society; whilst improving quality, turnaround times and reducing costs to the local authority.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Community Development and Equalities Team
Manager

Supporting CLs with suitable accommodation is a significant function for Thurrock's most vulnerable young people. Data is collated to understand the profile of young people supported. Decisions are based on each young person's needs, including equality and diversity, SEND and emotional health needs.

The Authority recognises the importance of ensuring that young people who are leaving the care system can and should have access to the offers available locally. They are positively discriminated for priority housing and, by being in borough can access a full range of offers and services to lead to sustainable employment. We are working cross directorate, in an holistic way, to provide CL's with the best life chances and ensure that they have a voice that is heard and shapes the provision.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children.

There are no other implications as a result of this report.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

8.1 There are no background papers to this report.

9. Appendices to the report

9.1 There are no appendices to this report.

Report Author

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