

8 September 2021		ITEM: 15 Decision: 110584
Cabinet		
Supported Accommodation for 18-24 Year Olds		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Barry Johnson – Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Social Care		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas - Assistant Director Education and Skills		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is: Public – with the exception of the Stage 1 ‘Approval to Proceed to Tender’ procurement report (Appendix 1) which should be exempt since it contains commercially sensitive information regarding the tender.		
Date of notice given of exempt or confidential report: 10 August 2021 (for relevant part)		

Executive Summary

This report sets out proposals to commission further supported accommodation to support our vulnerable young people aged 18-24. This will include accommodation for our care leavers as we provide a range of opportunities to support the transition into adulthood. To support this work we have established a working group within the Local Authority which covers, children’s services, housing and adults services recognising that we have a number of vulnerable young people and adults across the three directorates who require additional support. Our analysis has identified that we have seen an increase the number of care leavers in part due to historical numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and an increase in the numbers of children who are looked after in the 10-15 year age bracket.

This report will provide further analysis around care leavers but recognises that we do have a number of adults who also required supported accommodation and when looking to procure new providers this will be factored into the process and the ongoing work.

Our current accommodation offer for care leavers is met through our Headstart Housing team working closely with the Children Services Aftercare Team. This work is carried out on an individual basis and identifies suitable accommodation for our care leavers. Some of our young people require additional support and this is

provided by a supported accommodation offer. Due to some of the complexities of need particularly related to mental health challenges there is currently a shortage of supported accommodation to meet certain needs and this can result in young people having accommodation outside of the local area although it should be noted that in a small number of cases, this is sometimes in the best interests of the young person.

It is proposed that, subject to Cabinet approval, the procurement of external placements is undertaken to encourage a wider range of provider's locally with the potential to consider whether the provider could also provide supported accommodation for 16-18 year olds. It is proposed that the Council reserves the right to open the contract for new applications, if required, to support the development of this market. Commissioners also recommend on some occasions we block purchase accommodation on a limited basis where this would meet a young person's need and improve the stability and value for money of the offer being made.

The Thurrock Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy has identified the need to focus on development of the offer for care leavers, which includes the following priority:

'The provision of a range of offers for those aged 18 and over to ensure that they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be looked after'. In particular the action 'develop the work through Headstart Housing to improve our accommodation offer to care leavers with different levels of support needs'

These proposals, as a part of an overall partnership approach would improve the offer to young people and support the delivery of the local authority's statutory duties.

1. Recommendation(s):

- 1.1 That Cabinet agree to commence the procurement of contract(s) for supported accommodation for 18-24 year olds.**
- 1.2 That Cabinet agree the option to block purchase places through the contract(s) where this represents best value for the Council to meet demand.**
- 1.3 That Cabinet agree to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Childrens Services, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder to award contracts following completion of the procurement process.**
- 1.4 That, in line with Rule 13 of the Contract Procedure Rules, Cabinet agree that the Corporate Director can seek to invoke the waiver provisions of the Contract Procedure Rules due to the nature of the services being purchased.**
- 1.5 That Cabinet agree to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children's Services and the Portfolio Holder where:**

- **The placement cannot be made on the contract to be awarded under this procurement exercise;**
- **The purchase is required in order that the Council may meet its statutory obligations and;**

1.6 That, as recommended by Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet investigate opportunities to invest in housing to help meet the provision that Children’s Services need to meet the supported accommodation requirements for care leavers.

1.7 That Cabinet note the joint work that is already in place and the statutory duties on the local authority including to develop a jointly commissioned support offer for those aged 18+ who need additional support to be able develop independence as an adult and where possible this is extended to provide support for the 16-18 year olds.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Thurrock Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy has identified the need to focus on development of the offer for care leavers and includes the following priority.

‘The provision of a range of offers for those aged 18 and over to ensure that they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be looked after’. In particular the action ‘develop the work through Headstart Housing to improve our accommodation offer to care leavers with different levels of support needs’.

2.2 This report sets out proposals to improve the provision of arrangements for those aged 18-24 years by further developing the offer for those in need of supported accommodation for the transition to independent living. With a view to utilising these new commissioning arrangements to support over vulnerable young people in Thurrock.

2.3 Whilst the focus of this piece of work is care leavers aged 18-24 years it also contributes to the following priorities in the wider Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

- *To redefine and simplify pathways for vulnerable households to access health and wellbeing services across the borough, especially in relation to mental health*
- *To consider ways in which the council could develop support and accommodation options for people with complex needs’.*

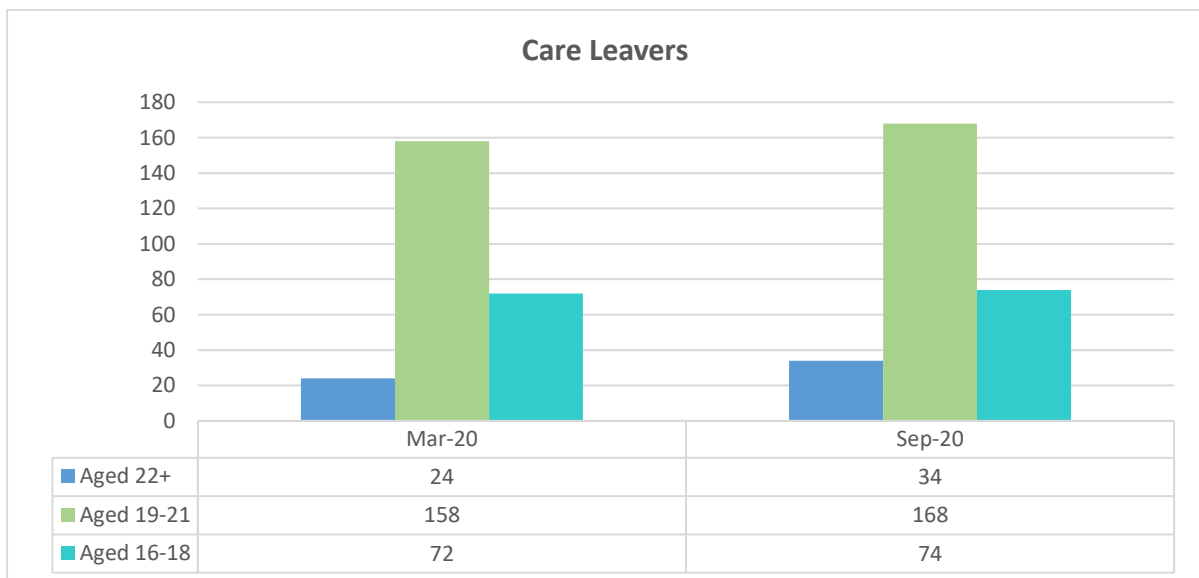
2.4 The Children Act 1989 guidance on planning transition to adulthood for care leavers indicates that there should be links between children’s and adult services commissioning arrangements and those for housing related support

services to support the provision of a range of support options based on assessed needs. Through this project we are seeking to extend the existing joint working to jointly commission support for the most vulnerable young adults.

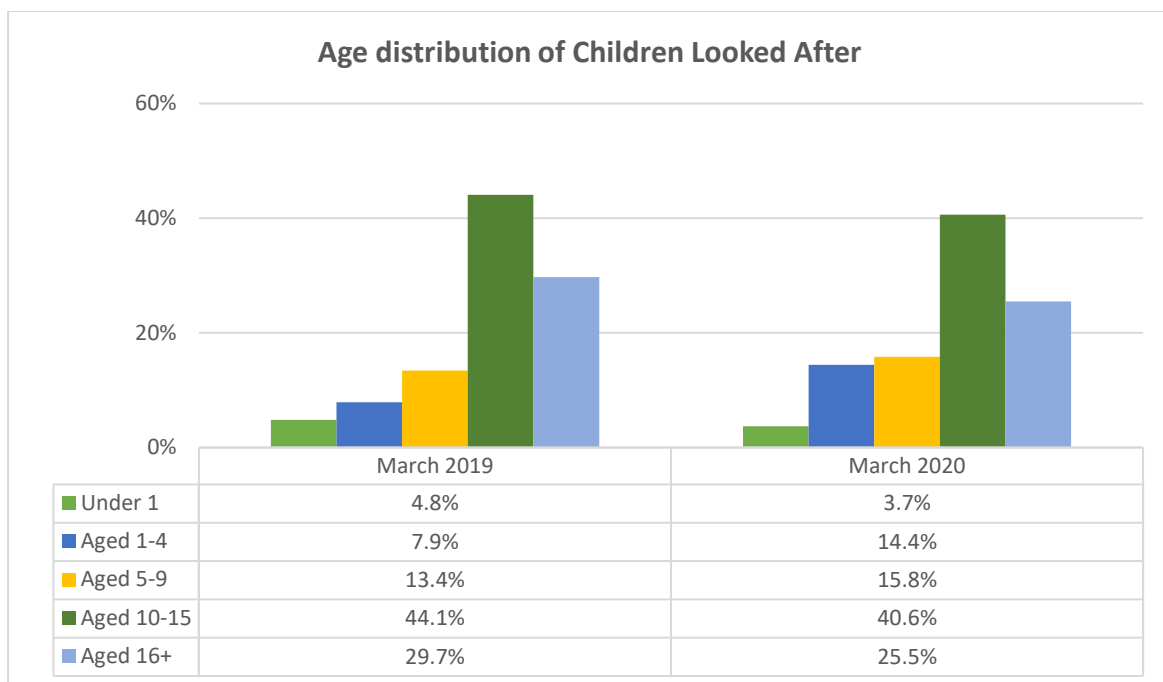
3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Ensuring we have the right support for Care Leavers is a priority for Thurrock as this supports transition into adulthood.

3.2 A number of interlinked projects have already commenced that bring together partners such as Housing, Adult Services and Children’s Services to identify and meet support needs and find housing solutions locally. As a part of our sufficiency planning an analysis of need has been undertaken, at the end of March 2020, 276 Care Leavers, were receiving an Aftercare Service, this is a slight increase from March 2019.



3.3 To support forward planning for care leavers the sufficiency assessment also provides a breakdown of the ages of children looked after. The highest percentage of children in care in Thurrock are those aged 10-15 years, this has remained broadly stable over recent years with this age group representing 40.6% of the children in care population as at 31 March 2020.



3.4 The high levels of Care Leavers combined with the cohort of 10-15 year olds who will become Care Leavers in the coming years has identified that we need to commission further post 18 accommodation in the local area. Our strategy is wherever possible to house young people locally this enables them to access the wider support of Inspire and ensuring young people can access education and employment opportunities. We recognise that for some of our care leavers we need to source accommodation outside of the borough. Joint working has already commenced across Children's, Adults, Housing and Public Health to integrate commissioning and identify opportunities to better use existing funding.

3.5 At the end of September 2020, 276 Care Leavers aged 18+ were receiving an Aftercare service. Working closely with the Aftercare team, Head Start Housing provides a range of transitional accommodation whilst young people develop the independence skills required to manage social housing, this is in addition to the supported accommodation that is a focus of this report. Now managing a portfolio of 114 beds, including 42 supported by key workers, the service provides a tailored approach to support young people to develop.

3.6 There remains a shortage of:

- Post 18 low need 24/7 Supported Accommodation
- Post 18 medium / high need CQC Registered accommodation
- Floating support for Care Leavers aged 18-25 years old
- Linked local supported accommodation provision for young people aged 16-18 years to move into when they reach 18 years old who need it including for young people who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children

- 3.7 To address the identified need we currently undertake a spot purchase against a local specification. This commissioning work seeks to move this to the procurement of external providers both local and where necessary out of borough to meet the needs of care leavers. By providing an opportunity to the market and highlighting the need for local provision we aim to stimulate the local market and support the development of high quality supported accommodation in borough.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Thurrock Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy has identified the need to focus on development of the offer for care leavers and includes the following priority.

‘The provision of a range of offers for those aged 18 and over to ensure that they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be looked after’. In particular the action ‘develop the work through Headstart Housing to improve our accommodation offer to care leavers with different levels of support needs’.

- 4.2 The recommendations set out make proposals to improve the provision of arrangements for those aged 18-24 years old by further developing the offer for those in need of supported accommodation for the transition to independent living. It is proposed that this is done by the implementation of a procurement approach contract subject to Cabinet approval.

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

- 5.1 Feedback from children and young people was used as a part of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy to help shape the priorities.
- 5.2 Direct discussions with Care Leavers have been held and these will be used to shape the commissioning exercise and included in the specifications developed.

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

- 6.1 This work contributes to the following corporate priorities:

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay

Prosperity – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

7. Implications

- 7.1 **Financial**

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

By developing the procurement approach to move away from spot purchasing there is the opportunity to engage the market and move towards improved value for money. In addition the consideration of block purchasing will reduce the risk of high cost emergency placements. The new procurement will also provide opportunities to support council wide supported accommodation solutions.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Courage Emovon**
Principal Lawyer / Manager – Contracts & Procurement Team

The procurement proposals set out in this report falls within scope of the Council's duties and statutory obligations and any tender process must comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. It is noted that Volume 3 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations as amended by the Leaving Care Act 2000 'planning transition to adulthood for care leavers' provides guidance, primarily addressed to local authorities and their staff in England, about their functions under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989. It is issued as guidance under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which requires local authorities in exercising their social services functions, to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. This guidance should be complied with by local authorities when exercising these functions, unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation. The proposals contained within this report will support the local authority in meeting these requirements and ultimately its statutory obligations.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

The Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency considered a range of information alongside protected characteristics of individuals as defined by the Equalities Act 2010. This information was used to ensure that the needs of children and young people were met in the priorities that underpin these proposals. The ongoing engagement with young people, as this project develops, will ensure that specific needs are considered. Community Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out if and when required.

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

None

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):

- Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Statement
<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/strategy-childrenlookedafter-careleavers-202012-v01.pdf>

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Stage 1 Form – Approval to Proceed to Tender (EXEMPT)

Report Author:

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Strategic Lead Integrated Commissioning