

19 July 2022		Item: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Inspire - Head Start Housing: Supporting Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Tiffany Bright – Inspire - Skills Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director 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) 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, risk of becoming homeless.

Head Start Housing (HSH) was formally launched in December 2018. This is a joint initiative between Children Service and Housing.

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, providing this is the right decision for them. Returning to Thurrock can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, can easily access the range of local services, diverse education and employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.

Preparing young people leaving care for adulthood remains a key priority for Thurrock Council. HSH has been created to provide a solution for their accommodation.

1. Recommendations:

1.1 That the Report be noted.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In March 2016, Children's Services and Housing designed a pilot to test HMOs for vulnerable young people, either in employment/working towards or at risk of losing their job on account of unstable accommodation.
- 2.2 Considerable learning has been applied from the pilot to inform the Head Start Housing strategy, 2018 - 2023. Working collaboratively with Housing, the Head Start strategy has been refreshed one year early (to coincide with the refresh of Housing's strategy). The Head Start strategy, 2022 – 2027 makes provision for switching all private rental beds for LA housing stock by the end of December 2027.
- 2.3 When Head Start Housing launched it did so with a commitment from Housing to provide 6 beds each year until 2023. The combined use of Transformation Funding and Right to Buy receipts supported Housing's strategy to increase LA owned housing stock whilst making a positive contribution to the Housing Reduction Act 2017.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Over the course of the past two years, three properties have been purchased and modified for exclusive use by care leavers. At £1.14mn for 12 beds including legal fees and modifications, the underspend was returned to core funding.
- 3.2 12 CL are settling into the 'new' properties that are well positioned in Grays, South Ockendon and Aveley.
- 3.3 Over the past 12 months, 8 properties (7 out of borough) have been handed back. Predominantly the properties relinquished were used to accommodate CLs with a high level of support needs; housing provision for this cohort is now being supported by the Commissioning team.
- 3.4 There is a process for CLs to access the housing element of universal credit. Aftercare supports the CL to make a contribution towards their rental costs by setting up a direct payment to HSH. To date, £10k has been received from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to contribute towards CLs' accommodation. The income from DWP helps to offset the costs of Head Start Housing.
- 3.5 As of 17 June 2022, HSH provides accommodation for 67 CLs. The team manages a portfolio of 25 properties, ranging in size:

Property size	No. of properties types in portfolio	Additional skills development support from external partner (no. of beds)
1 bedroom/self-contained unit	13 (9 of these are Clarence Road hostel)	11
2 bed	9	-
3 bed	3	-
4 bed	4	-
5+ bed	4	-
Average occupancy 21/22 - 95%		

- 3.6 Each property provides essential furnishings, utility bills, water rates, wifi, cleaning tools, blinds, and light shades. 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.
- 3.7 HSH works closely with other teams and external partners to provide targeted interventions so that HSH accommodation is transitional, and no one stays for longer than is necessary. A target reduction in average length of stay from 9 months to 4-6 months should have a positive effect on the number of CLs that can be accommodated by HSH in the future.
- 3.8 Excluding the hostel provision, HSH weekly rental cost per person, per week is £148.57 (after £35k housing benefit applied).
- 3.9 CLs are actively encouraged to access mental health support, vaccinations and Education, Employment or Training to enable transition into adulthood and engage in the community in which they live.
- 3.10 HSH Mediation continues to work with young people and their families to delay/avoid homelessness. This intervention remains very successful with more than 90% positive outcomes, with positive relationships maintained.
- 3.11 HSH is working with After Care to move on 15 CLs in the next few months to make way for 8 new arrivals, by end August. Maintaining occupancy rates of more than 90%, meeting demand and supporting timely move-on is a challenge though achievable.
- 3.12 A single framework specification for supported accommodation will be published within the next 4 months. It is intended to create specialist provision for CLs and CLA (16–17-year-olds) to reduce the number of moves at key transition points whilst meeting Ofsted requirements.

- 3.13 An Invitation to Tender will be published for repairs and maintenance of private rental properties within the portfolio. LA stock is repaired and maintained by a provider as commissioned by Housing.
- 3.14 Cross directorate conversations have started to explore the feasibility of self builds by CLs as a way of building community, pride, and skills. Anticipated timeframe: two years.
- 3.15 HSH will continue reviewing systems and processes, making modifications as required to ensure a high-quality service is delivered to CLs.
- 3.16 Continued work, cross directorate, to develop fair joint protocols, standardise templates and consistent terminology for services provided to young people aged 16+ years, should provide a coherent transfer across services and improve young people's understanding of their entitlements and how to access them.
- 3.17 Children's Services and Housing have formed a small task and finish group to explore the benefits of HSH being managed by Housing. It is envisaged that efficiencies may be possible with compliance being absorbed by existing contracts and the support provided by HSH officers to continue. Update to follow.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 For the Committee to note delivery and outcomes delivered by HSH in supporting Council's priority of supporting CLs into independent living.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 n/a

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

- 6.1 n/a

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

The accommodation and associated costs are to be contained within the annual Headstart budget allocation, supported by the housing element of universal credit received from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal Social
Care & Education**

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 duties introduced by the 2000 Act are supported by this statutory guidance. This guidance also sets out in chapter 7 and in Annex C the requirements on the Local Authority in planning accommodation provision for CL. It sets out the need for joint working between Housing and Children's Services and the creation of joint protocols.

There is further government non-statutory good practice advice on 'joint housing protocols for care leavers' :-
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-housing-protocols-for-care-leavers/joint-housing-protocols-for-care-leavers-good-practice-advice>
which sets out the Corporate Parenting Principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 section 1 which the Council must have regard to when exercising its functions in respect of CL and its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The exercise of the corporate parenting principles is subject to statutory guidance which the Council must follow unless there are clear reasons to depart from this. The statutory guidance can be found here: [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

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 Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder and 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):

None

9. Appendices to the report

None

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Inspire Childrens' Services