

21 March 2023		ITEM: 10
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Housing Options for Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Luke Froment, Service Manager, After Care		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report sets out how the Local Authority will meet its statutory duties and responsibilities to young people leaving care to support them into independent living as adults.

The report sets out the diverse types of living arrangements that are available to Thurrock Care Leavers and how care experienced young people's needs are met after they leave care.

Progress is being made in assisting young people to achieve Thurrock Council tenancies where appropriate to do so and a range of other services are in place where other arrangements are required.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 For the Committee to note the range of accommodations option provided to care Experienced Young people on leaving care and how Thurrock Council is discharging it's corporate parenting duty.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Aftercare service works with young people in Thurrock who are aged 16 plus who are eligible for a Care Leaving Service and young adults aged 18-25.

When a young person becomes 18 years old, they are transferred to the aftercare service. The young people are formerly Children Looked After and at age 18 they fall within one of the following categories:

- former relevant child, entitled to: Personal Advisor, Pathway Plan (regularly reviewed), assistance with employment, education or training, assistance with accommodation, help with living costs.
- qualifying care leavers are entitled to help with living expenses, advice and assistance.

Between the ages of 16 – 18 years, children's cases are held in the Children Looked After service and they have a Personal Advisor allocated as a secondary worker. This group fall into one of two categories:

- Eligible child, entitled to: A Qualified Social Worker, Personal Advisor, Care Plan, Pathway Plan, regular review, regular visits, Support relating to Education, accommodation and living costs
- Relevant child, entitled to: Personal Advisor, Needs Assessment, Pathway Plan, support with accommodation and subsistence

2.2 All local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989, and subsequent legislation, to prepare children for leaving care and must publish Information relating to what support it offers to care leavers (the Local Offer). It also has duties and powers to assist care leavers.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The current Joint Housing Protocol has been in place since 2019. It has assisted in making responsibilities and rights clear. Joint meetings between housing and after-care team, at an operational and strategic level, are held so that there is regular oversight of the young people's progress in being allocated a Council property.

3.2 The Aftercare Team and the Housing Service work together to help prepare young people for a tenancy. They are supported with training and preparation for having their own property. Personal Advisors and Housing Officers work together to support young people through the application process and in most cases bid for a property in line with the Thurrock Housing Allocation Policy.

3.3 Care experienced young people who have just turned eighteen are supported in other arrangements until they are able to find permanent housing, such as:

- Remaining with their Foster Carer under a 'Staying Put' Arrangement
- Living in semi-supported accommodation
- Living in 'Head-Start Housing'
- Choosing to live within their own family
- Attending university
- Supported by Adult Services in a CQC registered home or Shared Lives arrangements (for young adults with significant additional needs)

Young people leaving care can stay in these arrangements for varying periods. The goal is to move on to a permanent housing arrangement as soon as the young person is ready for this.

- 3.4 The After Care team work hard with young people in identifying the right accommodation for the young person in a timely way so that they can go on to independence with confidence.
- 3.5 The After Care Team works with colleagues from within and outside of the Local Authority to ensure that each young person is supported in accessing and maintaining their property.
- 3.6 Much of the work between the After Care team and the housing department is set out in the joint housing protocol. There are regular meetings to track progress of care leavers obtaining social housing and to address strategic issues and planning.
- 3.7 There are also weekly meetings alongside Head Start housing colleagues to look at the “transitions pipeline.” We seek to ensure that we are clear which young people are approaching eighteen, and that they have a clear plan for post eighteen. We ensure that there is a clear plan in place so that young people can bid for their own social housing at the earliest opportunity and that they have the skills, support, and training to achieve and maintain a tenancy.
- 3.8 The impact of this work can be seen in the collaborative working between after care and housing to address issues that might arise; and in the numbers of young people achieving their own social housing. On average we have had one Care Leaver every two weeks who has moved into a social housing tenancy since August 2022.
- 3.9 There are a range of diverse types of accommodation provided to Thurrock’s Care Leavers depending on their assessed need. The Pathway plan for each young person provides regular analysis and review of the plan towards independence. Part of this planning ensures that the young person is matched to the right kind of accommodation. The goal is to support the Care Leaver to become an independent and valuable member of the local community.

3.10 Types of Accommodation provided to Care Experienced Young People

3.11 Social Housing provided by Thurrock Council

The largest cohort of care leavers are those who are currently living in their own social housing. These are young people who have the skills to live independently in the local community. This cohort is supplemented by those young people living in privately rented accommodation and a further group who reside with family members, friends (in some cases former “staying put” carers) in less formal arrangements.

- 3.12 These young people receive ongoing support from their allocated Personal Advisor in the After Care team as well as a range of support provided by housing colleagues as and when required.
- 3.13 The offer of support from the After Care and Housing services is formalised as part of Thurrock's "Local Offer" to care leavers.
- 3.14 This is the formal offer made by the local authority for all care leavers – it is shared with young people from the age of 16 by their Personal Advisor and used to explain what might be expected in terms of support from the point the young person turns 18. This is available on the Thurrock website at www.thurrock.gov.uk/bigwideworld. Personal Advisors and social workers use the 'Big Wide World' as a direct work tool and a reference guide for young people.
- 3.15 A young person can expect regular visits from their PA and advice and guidance in respect of managing their budget and maintaining their tenancy. This is alongside the work by housing colleagues who will work to support the young person. There is an ongoing training session that takes place quarterly for care leavers, facilitated by housing colleagues for those young people who are actively bidding for their social housing to prepare them for successfully obtaining social housing and the responsibilities that this entails.

3.16 Head Start Housing

- 3.17 For many young people who have recently turned eighteen their first accommodation will be provided by Head Start housing. This service is provided via Housing and is shared living in a home environment. The aim of this accommodation is to act as a steppingstone on the journey towards achieving social housing. There are several properties in the local area identified for Care Leavers and these properties are supported by Head Start Housing staff supplementary to ongoing Personal Advisor support.
- 3.18 These properties are furnished and are provided with white goods and Wi-Fi access. The Head Start housing staff are focused on building relationships with the young people, supporting them to bid for their social housing, to understand the expectations around paying rent and regular bills, providing guidance around practical tasks relating to living independently.
- 3.19 This accommodation is a transition arrangement moving towards independent living.
- 3.20 The Aftercare team are currently supporting twenty-one young people who do not currently have a final decision from the home office in relation to their immigration status and therefore are unable to access social housing. Most of the young people in this cohort are accommodated within Head Start Housing provision. These young people receive the same level of support as any other Care leaver. They are supported to make appropriate applications to the Home Office in order to resolve their immigration status, once status is

granted, they are supported to make an application for social housing. In the interim accommodation is provided, usually by Head Start Housing

3.21 Staying put

3.22 Staying Put is a framework that allows young people to remain in their foster home beyond their 18th birthday; this reflects the experience of most young adults. Staying put allows young people to remain in a family environment until they are ready to move on to independence. These arrangements can be in place to support a young person to finish their formal education or can be maintained up to the age of twenty-one. In some cases, a young person and their carer may agree for the arrangement to be maintained post twenty-one on a private arrangement basis

3.23 These arrangements are agreed by mutual consent of the young person and the foster carer, planning for these arrangements starts as early as possible (driven by the allocated social worker in the children looked after service, supported by the Personal Advisor from After Care who acts as a secondary worker between the ages of 16-18) and the aim is that by the young person's 17th Birthday they are clear about any plans to stay put with their foster carer.

3.24 While a young person is in a staying put arrangement their former foster carer will provide them with continuing support alongside their PA who will ensure that they are clear about the next steps – including bidding for social housing which needs to be managed to coincide with the proposed end date for any staying put arrangement.

3.25 The After Care service meets weekly to track a range of issues relating to accommodation and staying put cases are considered in this forum to ensure that planning is in place and progressing.

3.26 Adult services provision

3.27 Young people who have additional needs or vulnerabilities may be provided with specialised accommodation via adult services. These are young people where a referral is made to the transitions team in adult services prior to the young person turning eighteen and an assessment carried out by adult services to ascertain if the remit is met for additional support post 18 years.

3.28 Where it is felt appropriate that young person may have a social worker appointed from adult social care or additional support from mental health or drug and alcohol services. A part of this package may include provision of specialised accommodation that can be effective in supporting with additional needs.

3.29 The allocated Personal Advisor remains involved with these young people to ensure that the Local authority provides support in line with the duties of being a good corporate parent.

3.30 Sanctuary Supported Accommodation

- 3.31 Sanctuary provides placements for Care Leavers who may be considered to have a higher level of need at the point they turn eighteen. Sanctuary hostel is a staffed facility with additional expertise available to support young people around issues such as budgeting and tenancy management, bidding for social housing as well as understanding how antisocial behaviour might impact on the young person's ability to maintain a tenancy.
- 3.32 Sanctuary staff work closely alongside the PA and the After Care team manager meets regularly with the manager at Sanctuary to ensure that there is close joint working and that issues are identified early and addressed.
- 3.33 Sanctuary also provides several placements for young people who approach the Local Authority prior to eighteen and are homeless. In these cases, the young person may be offered the choice to be considered a Child Looked After or be provided with support from Children's services as a Child in Need.

3.34 Continuation of Pre-18 Semi-Independent placements

- 3.35 There are a small number of young people who are supported by children's services to remain in their pre eighteen placement for an additional period. This may be in acknowledgement of a particular risk or vulnerability; or this may be due to a lack of available resource within Head Start housing for the young person to move into at the point they turn eighteen.
- 3.36 These placements are reviewed weekly, and a plan is devised so young people can move on to either their own tenancy or another provision that caters to young adults.

3.37 Temporary Accommodation

- 3.38 For a small number of young people, it may be that at times it is not possible to identify accommodation from the vast range of options available. In these cases, temporary accommodation may need to be provided pending further planning or support towards social housing.
- 3.39 Most of the young people provided with temporarily housing by Thurrock housing department pending assessment of their housing needs and a formal decision about how these needs will be met in the longer term. Any such arrangement has a strict timeframe of 56 days during which the housing needs assessment would need to be completed and a formal outcome provided.
- 3.40 For a very small number of young people who have been provided with accommodation via temporary housing due to issues of risk or vulnerability that prevents other providers from meeting their needs at this time. These cases are considered as part of monthly planning meetings that take place between the After Care service and Head Start housing colleagues.

3.41 Shared Lives

3.42 'Shared Lives' is an arrangement that provides individuals that invite a young person into their home to live within their family. This is like a foster carer arrangement for adults. The young people placed in such arrangements have additional needs and part of the funding for this type of placement usually comes from the young person's Personal Independence Payment.

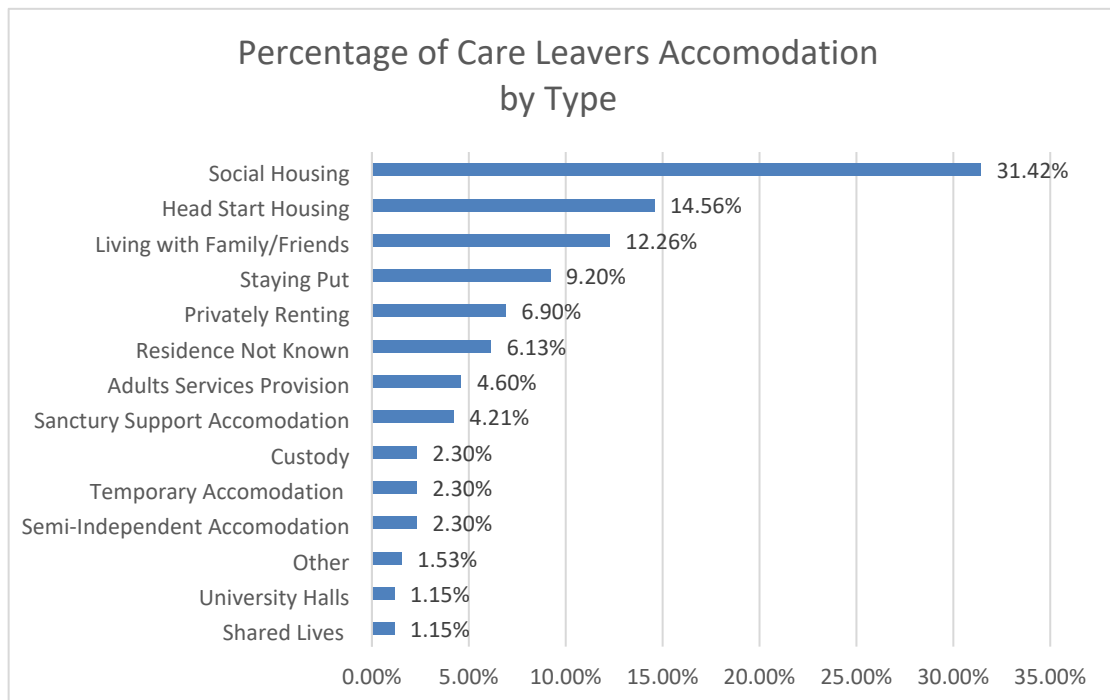
3.43 The personal advisor continues to be involved with the young person to ensure that statutory duties towards them as a Care Leaver are addressed.

3.44 Property Rented by Children's services

3.45 To support care experienced young people whose immigration status is under-review but who are also ready to live independently, there is an initial pilot to make use of a council owned property that is leased to Children's Services and licensed to the young people. This provides them with the autonomy needed but also avoids the use of more expensive provision whilst their immigration status is settled. Work is ongoing with commissioning colleagues to look at identifying more such properties that might be used in a comparable way.

3.46 Comparative Use of Accommodation Types

3.47 The following graph sets out how the differing types of accommodation used by care leavers:



- 3.48 Despite best efforts made by the Aftercare Team there are a small percentage of young people who do not keep in touch and their living arrangements are unknown. We continue to monitor these young people and support them with accommodation options as they come to our attention.
- 3.49 The graph demonstrates the wide range of options available and how they are used. There is good progress for care experienced young people in achieving a Council Tenancy from Thurrock Council. This is bolstered by the Head-Start, Sanctuary and Temporary Accommodation also provided through Thurrock's Housing Service.
- 3.50 Foster carers, family and friends continue to provide homes after the age of 18 to support young people. Young People are supported to attend university with a combination of halls and staying put. For some young people who have the support of Thurrock Council's Adult Services, there is good evidence of the use of Shared Lives, and Adults placements.
- 3.51 Overall this demonstrates the wider corporate parenting that supports our care experienced young people in their first steps after the age of 18

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The report informs members of the types of accommodation available to young people leaving care and how this is used.

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

- None

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

- 6.1 Young People who have been in care of the Local Authority are a corporate responsibility and will have an impact on wider corporate policies and performance.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

All accommodation costs are managed from within the Children Social Care Placements budget. There are no financial implications to this report

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

The Local Authority is required under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to publish a local offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers.

The local offer should include information on how care leavers are supported to access suitable accommodation, including the support available from housing services. Joint housing protocols should be aligned with the local offer and can help to ensure that the commitments to support Care Leavers to access and sustain accommodation are met. Local Authorities should consider providing a link to the joint protocol within the local offer so that Care Leavers, advocates and other professionals can have access to the document.

The Local Authority is required to have regard to the Homelessness Code of Practice and this Code advises Children's Services and housing to have joint protocols for Care Leavers.

The provision of social housing to Care Leavers is undertaken in line with the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme.

The Local Authority must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles Section 1 of the Children and Social work Act 2017 in the exercise of functions in relation to Looked after, relevant and former relevant children.

For Care Leavers who access accommodation through adult social care the Council must have regard to its duties under the Care Act 2014.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that a range of communities and groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and Housing services. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access housing.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, 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):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

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