

3 December 2015		ITEM: 8
Report to Corporate Parenting Committee		
Housing for Looked After Children and Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Paul Coke – Service Manager, Through Care Services		
Accountable Head of Service: Andrew Carter, Children’s Social Care (CATO)		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children’s Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report updates members of the Committee in respect to housing provision for our looked after children and care leavers.

The Local Authority, its key partners and the Corporate Parenting Committee are very clear in their ambition for care leavers, in that they want the best outcomes for them which means good quality housing provision that everyone would be proud of and are happy to live in permanently.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to support the Local Authority in its duty to provide appropriate accommodation for its care leavers.**
- 1.2 Corporate Parenting Committee to support the partnership working between Social Care and Housing Department.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 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. 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’.
- 2.2 The Children and Families Act 2014 places ‘staying put arrangements’ within a legislative framework. There is statutory guidance; ‘Staying Put

Arrangements' for Care Leavers aged 18 and above to stay with their former foster carers completed by the DFE, DWP and HMRC dated May 2013.

- 2.3 Planning Transition to Adulthood for care leavers, details more specifically the local authority's duties in respect to care leavers and accommodation. This is statutory guidance from the Department for Education, 27 October 2010.
- 2.4 Within the regulations "bed and breakfast" is considered not suitable accommodation.
- 2.5 Southwark Judgement – This is a piece of case law that requires children's services to provide accommodation and support to homeless 16-17 year olds.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 Each young person, if successful, will be placed on "silver banding" and able to bid for properties as per the current process. Each young person is provided with a Setting Up Home Allowance of £1,200.00.
- 2.8 Social Care are part of the Joint Resource Panel (JRP) with Housing, where all referrals for supported accommodation are discussed and allocated on a monthly basis
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 Within the After Care Team we have a worker that deals primarily with housing issues for our care leavers and works in partnership with Housing colleagues both in house and in the private sector
- 2.11 The After Care Team continues to have a very good working relationship with the Housing Department and some private sector providers of accommodation.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Issues

3.1.1 Performance

- 3.1.2 The Local Authority has to report to the DFE through its annual return (903) the numbers of care leavers in suitable accommodation from the ages of 19 – 21.

3.1.3 The current statistics as of November 2015 are as follows:

Accommodation			
Age	Suitable	Unsuitable	Unknown/ Not in Touch
19	18	0	1
20	16	0	0
21	18	2	4
19-21	52	2	5

3.1.4 Suitable = 88.1% Unsuitable = 3.4% Unknown/not in touch = 8.5%

3.1.5 The figure for suitable accommodation in 2014 nationally was 77.8% and the total for Thurrock was 75% for the year 2013/14.

As you can see from the figures above, in 2013/14 we were below the national average. Of the 25%, there were 3 young people who were in custody, there would have been a proportion that would have been unaccompanied asylum seeking children who would not have got their legal status and would have 'disappeared', and there would have also been some young people whose whereabouts were unknown or not in touch with us. Whilst this is not acceptable the Local Authority has endeavoured in its efforts to maintain contact with its care leavers through allocations prior to their eighteenth birthday so that they can build up relationships from a much earlier age.

As you can see from the figures above (3.1.4) in terms of accommodation we are currently moving in the right direction and we will continue to monitor this on a monthly basis and provide alternative services such as group work, consultation evenings and other workers such as specialist employment workers (P.A's) to also keep in contact.

3.1.6 The After Care Team (ACT) currently works with 141 young people between the ages of 18 - 25. The accommodation as of 13 November 2015 is as follows:

- Suitable accommodation – 127 (90%)
- Unsuitable accommodation – 14 (10%)

Of those in unsuitable accommodation, their circumstances are described as the following:

- 7 – Custody
- 2 – Friends
- 1 – Case Closed as 21, but has also left the country

- 4 – Unknown: 2 young people have expressed that they do not want a service from the Department. 2 the Department is not in contact with.
- 3.1.7 An issue that is encountered by the young people and staff is the sanctions that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) bring in for non-compliance of their rules, such as not signing on, not showing evidence of looking for work or attending training courses offered to them. This will affect their housing benefit and Council Tax claim. The ACT work with the DWP in minimising these issues on an individual basis.
 - 3.1.8 The ACT also have a very good working relationship with our Housing Benefit colleagues, which enables early identification of issues that can be resolved before they get out of hand.
 - 3.1.9 The ACT currently manages five 1 bed properties and three 2 bed properties within the private sector. These properties currently provide twelve young people with accommodation.
 - 3.1.10 The ACT also manages, along with Family Mosaic who provide the support, 4 units situated in Clarence Road. The Department has agreed to manage a further four units, which is currently in a proposal going to Cabinet via Housing.
 - 3.1.11 The cost of renting Clarence Road, having the support, and being able to use the units as transition, where we can also re-claim the housing benefit from those young people who are entitled to it, is more cost effective than keeping young people in residential and some supported accommodation.
- 3.2 Housing Department
 - 3.2.1 The Housing Department has acknowledged there is a shortage of 1-bed accommodation
 - 3.2.2 The Housing Department, since the creation of the new system (i.e. on-line applications) care leavers in May 2013, have housed 31 young people.
 - 3.2.3 Due to the shortage of 1 bed accommodation it has taken Housing longer than they would have wished for allocation of permanent accommodation. It has therefore to be acknowledged that Housing is reliant upon the availability of 1 bed accommodation, plus the choice of areas the young people wish to reside in.
 - 3.2.4 The Housing Department have introduced Introductory Tenancies, which enables Housing Officers to address issues such as rent arrears, anti social behaviour etc, with 3 warnings within the first year. Should tenants not get three positive reports then the tenancy will be withdrawn, hence evicting them.
 - 3.2.5 We have also agreed that young people can make their on-line application six months prior to their eighteenth birthday. This needs to be furthered explored

in that we would not just want young people to put their application in, we would also want them to be able to begin bidding earlier with a view to getting their accommodation at 18 years of age.

3.2.6 The Housing Department have a new Housing Strategy for Thurrock, March 2015, which incorporates care leavers as a priority group, within its section of 'Looking Ahead'.

3.2.7 The strategy also mentions the proposal of building a Foyer, where again care leavers will be a priority group in the allocation process.

3.3 Staying Put Arrangements

3.3.1 The Local Authority has been given a grant from the Government of £72, 974 for the financial year of 2015/16

3.3.2 The Local Authority has a Staying Put Policy, which details the financial arrangements for young people who wish to remain living with their carers once they turn 18.

3.3.3 A carer will receive £246.44p per week as a Staying Put carer. The young person will receive financial assistance depending upon their circumstances.

3.3.4 The policy is due to be reviewed in April 2016.

3.3.5 We currently have 8 young people in this arrangement and are actively encouraging more young people to take up this opportunity. We have put in place 'Staying Put Champions' whose main task will be to raise awareness of our policy and the benefits of staying with carers after they have turned 18.

3.4 Looked After Children

3.4.1 It is acknowledged that we have an increasing number of looked after children, which includes unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

3.4.2 To date the number is 331. Of this total there are 31 young people turning eighteen this financial year.

3.5 Transition Panel

3.5.1 The Panel addresses young people aged 16 and 17 who are in the process of moving into the area of leaving care and planning for their future accommodation needs. Service Managers chair this multi-agency Panel which currently meets twice a year, although this is under review as it may need to meet quarterly in future.

3.5.2 The Panel has members from Adults, the After Care Team, Health, Virtual School and Commissioning.

3.5.3 The Panel also addresses financial care packages and ensure they are of best value and from the right section of the Department.

3.6 Outcomes

3.6.1 It is important when care planning for young people in the transition phase from 15 – 17 clear plans are made in respect to housing options and that all is done to ensure they are equipped with the tools to move into independence. The attendance of the ACT at all Looked after children Reviews from 15+ onwards, will provide a focus for all in terms of preparation and the transition to adulthood.

3.6.2 Encouraging young people to remain with current foster carers under the staying put arrangements is a positive way of ensuring young people do not enter into independent living too early. We wish to increase the numbers of young people living in staying put arrangements.

3.6.3 Ensuring we have a range of accommodation to suit the needs of all young people will continue to be a challenge especially as the private rented market is becoming more competitive. From this report it details the Department's endeavours to work with our housing colleagues in terms of Clarence Road, that Care leavers are now recognised and acknowledged within the Housing Strategy, that we continue to make links with our private rented providers and that the proposal of a Foyer Project where care leavers are a priority are all indicators of the importance we place on accommodation for our young people.

3.6.4 Ensuring the Department gets best value from the accommodation, its providers and is attuned to the Department's current financial position. This can be achieved through working with our commissioning partners, being robust in our negotiations with providers and ensuring we have enough through put to enable our young people to make the transition as smoothly and as positive as we can. Working with our Housing Benefit colleagues ensure we can also maximise our finance by ensuring we get collect the housing benefit where it is appropriate to.

3.6.5 Using our commissioning partners to obtain the best provision

3.6.6 Ensuring that our unaccompanied asylum seekers receive the same service when they are legally entitled to it. This means they also are entitled to their own accommodation that we encourage them to continue with their education and support them where necessary and we assist/support them to find alternative accommodation should they not wish to return to Thurrock.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The Local Authority has a duty to provide accommodation for those young people who have been looked after and are entitled to services under the current legislation

- 4.2 It has to be acknowledged that the housing market, both council and private have limited resources and that care leavers are a vulnerable group whom all Departments have a duty to provide services to.
- 4.3 There also has to be an acknowledgement of the current financial climate for local authorities and the continued effort to make high quality, good value provision available for our young people.

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

N/A

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

- 6.1 This report should to be read in conjunction with the Housing Strategy and services that are provided to vulnerable young people/adults
- 6.2 With the increasing numbers of looked after children, there is likely to be an increase in the numbers entitled to leaving care services, which will mean an increased need for accommodation.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Consultant, Corporate Finance

The numbers of looked after children in this report have increased. This will have an impact on the After Care Team Budget and the need for more accommodation either from the private or Council sector. Continued scrutiny of care plans, working in partnership and with our commissioners is crucial in alleviating some of this pressure.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor Children's Safeguarding

The Local Authority has a duty to provide services to our care leavers which also includes housing.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

When providing housing for care leavers the local authority must take into account the individual's culture, religious and disability needs when looking for appropriate accommodation.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

N/A

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):

- Thurrock Housing Strategy, March 2015
- Thurrock Staying Put Arrangements Policy

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Not applicable

Report Author:

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Children's Services, Care and Targeted Outcomes