

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 17 January 2018

Wards: All wards

Subject: Care Leaver Accommodation Follow-up Report

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead member: Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children Services
Cllr Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Contact officer: Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Policy, Planning and Performance

Recommendations:

- A. Members of the panel discuss and comment on the actions proposed in response to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel review of Care Leavers Accommodation and recommendations made.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report provides members of the panel with an update on work underway and actions proposed in relation to the accommodation of care leavers, following on from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel report and recommendations made to Cabinet on 16 October 2017.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel made recommendations to Cabinet on aspects to explore in order to further improve the Council's support for care leavers in gaining suitable independent accommodation upon leaving care.
- 2.2 The report made nine recommendations, responsibility for which is shared between Children, Schools and Families and Community and Housing departments. Officers have worked together to develop an action plan to further explore, or address the recommendations made. This report provides context and an update on work already underway across the Council in relation to the Scrutiny Panel recommendations, then presents the proposed action plan, attached as Appendix 1, key aspects of which are summarised within this report.
- 2.3 **Social Work Act 2017** – This act introduces a few changes that relate to looked after children and the support they receive when they become care leavers. The main implications of this as far as the scrutiny recommendations are concerned are that:

- There is a requirement to Keep In Touch and provide advice to care leavers until the age of 25. This will require a review of how services are provided. London Councils and a number of Local Authorities are lobbying for extra funding to support this increased provision, however, it is unlikely that sufficient funding will be provided to meet anticipated increases in service provision. A more detailed cost analysis will be required once the extent of any government funding is known.
 - Benefit cap changes are being introduced, but the detail and implications of this are as yet still unknown and a further update can be provided once details of this have been confirmed. There is currently no timeframe for when this information will be available.
- 2.4 **Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASCs)** – The number of UASCs is relatively low, with only around 20 to 25 in the Council’s care at any one time. In addition to this there are around 60 UASCs as care leavers. Whilst a few of these remain in contact with the Council and receive some support, advice or services, the majority loose contact and revert to their own networks. There is very limited funding provided by the government to support these young people.
- 2.5 **Staying Put** –This was flagged as a recommendation within the recent Ofsted inspection and actions have been implemented to address this, although with the small numbers impacted there is always going to be fluctuation in the numbers at any given point in time. At the end of November 2017, these services were being provided to 5 young people (this is an increase from 2 at the time of the Ofsted inspection). It is recognised that increasing the number of young people staying put places extra demand on existing foster care provision and therefore increases the importance of continuing to recruit new foster carers.
- 2.6 **HMO Provision** – The Council has recently established provision of an HMO for five care leavers as a pilot, with a view to extending this type of provision in the future as a more cost effective method of providing affordable accommodation and support to care leavers as they work towards fully independent accommodation in the future.
- 2.7 **Related Strategies** – Work is underway to refresh the Sufficiency Statement, Looked After Children Strategy and the Care Leavers Strategy each of which expires during 2018. The Sufficiency Statement is being considered by Corporate Parenting Board this month and the other strategies will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in July 2018 for approval. These strategies will take forward many of the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel, along with other priorities for ensuring the continued high quality provision of services to this group of young people.
- 2.8 **Scrutiny Panel Recommendations**
- 2.9 The report of October 2017 identified two groups of recommendations as summarised below.
- 2.10 **Growing demand for independent / semi-independent accommodation** – work is underway on several aspects of this, with further work planned in relation to:
- **Peer mentors and lead tenants** – further work is proposed to understand more about how Kensington & Chelsea and other councils have supported such models. This will include gaining an understanding of the provision of officer time, how the work of mentors and lead tenants is recognised and other resourcing commitments required in order to successfully implement similar models.
 - **Accommodation provision** – working together with Community and Housing, Children, School and Families department is exploring the current demand for and supply of housing options to ensure that suitable properties are available to meet predicted demand. There is currently provision of around 20 Y-Cube units per year,

which is believed to be broadly sufficient to meet the existing need pending full analysis of the data.

2.11 **Developing skills and knowledge for independent living** – this remains a major focus of activity and the scrutiny panel's recommendations are welcomed to further support and focus this activity. This will principally focus on:

- **Achieving better engagement** – whilst engagement with young people in care is good, there is always room for improvement and a review is proposed to determine what else can be done to maintain or build upon the relationship with these young people in order to further support them as they leave care and move into accommodation.
- **SMART Choices scheme** – since its establishment, this scheme has helped to support 12 to 20 young people in care each year in their knowledge and use of English prior to them leaving care. The scheme providers, whilst maintaining their focus on ESOL, will be asked to incorporate aspects in the programme to help these young people with financial planning and the responsibilities of taking on a tenancy.
- **Saving schemes** – young people in care are already encouraged to save through a number of activities. The Children in Care Council will be engaged in reviewing this work and considering new opportunities such as independent living workshops will be investigated to help care leavers in developing the skills required to fund their accommodation needs and live independently once they leave care.

2.12 **Barriers to success**

2.13 The action plan sets out a number of proposals that are possible within the resources currently available. There needs to be lobbying by London Councils and local authorities to ensure that funding is made available to support the activities identified.

2.14 As previously stated, proposed changes to the benefit cap may have a detrimental effect on delivery of the action plan. The impact of these changes will be monitored and used to inform a future report on delivery of the action plan and development of the Care Leavers Strategy.

3. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The financial implications from the actions contained within this report have yet to be fully costed and further information is required on what funding will be provided by the government in order to offset the costs of the new responsibilities in relation to providing support to care leavers until the age of 25.

4. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 No specific implications from this report.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

5.1 No specific implications from this report

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No specific implications from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 No specific implications from this report.

8. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

8.1 Appendix 1 – Care Leavers Action Plan

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 Cabinet Papers 16 October 2017 Agenda Item 9 – Reference from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – consideration of care leaver accommodation

Care Leavers Accommodation Action Plan

Number	Issue	Outcome	Service / Area	Action	Responsible AD / Head of Service	By when	Reviewed by
2.3.3 i	Housing, Future Merton and Children, Schools and Families departments to continue working with private landlords and partners like Evolve to offer more HMO opportunities to care leavers. A pilot project for Evolve is explored.	Young care leavers are enabled to enter suitable shared accommodation with other people to support their transition to independent living	ART	Pilot project of 5 units with provision of support available Review to determine success and future needs	Head of Access to Resources & CWD	Oct-17 Jul-18	SC Scrutiny
2.3.3 ii	The "lead tenant" model has been found to be successful and should be considered	Care leavers are supported by more experienced / responsible tenants to make a successful transition into independent accommodation		Lead tenant model to be considered within Care Leavers Strategy development	Head of Permanency, LAC & Care Leavers	Jul-18	SC Scrutiny
2.3.3 iii	Explore the potential for extending suitable Shared Lives accommodation to young people with more complex needs leaving care	Young care leavers with more complex needs are supported into semi-independent accommodation		Offer with Shared Lives to be extended to care leavers Suitable young people to be identified	Head of Access to Resources & CWD		SC Scrutiny
2.3.3 iv	Explore other longer term opportunities: Housing First, co-operative building schemes and Merton developing extra accommodation for itself (e.g. Y-Cube model)	Care leavers are supported to make a successful transition into independent accommodation		Explore practicalities and opportunities for Y-Cube for care leavers Establish quota of units to meet anticipated need	Head of Access to Resources & CWD		SC Scrutiny
2.3.4 i	Consider implications of "staying put" policy	Young people are afforded the opportunity to stay put where appropriate and the impact of this on overall provision of foster provision is minimised	ART	Review and refresh policies New arrangements to be identified and tested	Head of Access to Resources & CWD	Dec-17 Mar-18	SC Scrutiny
2.3.4 ii	Focus on working with young people whilst in foster care with the aim of achieving better engagement when they enter semi-independent provision	Improved engagement of young people after they leave care to support them into adulthood and independent living	14+ ART Transitions	Consider within Care Leavers Strategy development Work with foster carers to support them in promoting transitions to independence Review "My Guide to Independence" and Pathway Plans	Head of Permanency, LAC & Care Leavers	Jul 18 ...	CYP Scrutiny
2.3.4 iii	Maintaining good work and integration of pre-tenancy help into ESOL provision to provide support for care leavers that speak English as an additional language	Integration of pre-tenancy help into ESOL provision to provide support for care leavers that speak English as an additional language	14+ ART Transitions	Content of commissioned ESOL training reviewed to include other financial and tenancy skills Explore opportunities for an English language coffee shop or social facility for asylum seekers or others for whom English is not their first language	Head of Permanency, LAC & Care Leavers	Jan-18 18	CYP Scrutiny
2.3.4 iv	Encourage care leavers who have successfully transitioned into independent accommodation to become peer mentors to offer support to those that are yet to successfully achieve this transition	Care leavers are supported to make a successful transition into independent accommodation	14+ ART Transitions	Explore the approach in K&C Consider if / how to resource similar approach Report back on recommendations Work proactively with Young People to support transition Look at making care leavers pledge into regulations	Head of Permanency, LAC & Care Leavers	Jan-18	CYP Scrutiny
2.3.4 v	Explore how to encourage and support young people prior to leaving care to understand the benefit of saving to build up a rent deposit / property maintenance fund	Young people understand the need to save for rent or property maintenance and are therefore in a better financial position to sustain independent accommodation	14+ ART Transitions	Discuss regular savings proposals with Children in Care Council Consider independent living workshops and how these are provided in the future	Head of Permanency, LAC & Care Leavers		CYP Scrutiny

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