

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 9th October 2018

Wards: All wards

Subject: Care Leaver Accommodation Follow-up Report

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead member: Cllr Kelly Braund, 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 progress against the actions established in response to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel review of Care Leavers Accommodation.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report provides members of the panel with an update on delivery of the actions proposed in relation to the accommodation of care leavers, following on from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel report of October 2017 and actions presented to this Panel in January 2018.

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 worked together to develop an action plan to further explore, or address the recommendations made. This report provides an update on delivery of the actions, attached as Appendix 1, with progress summarised within this report.
- 2.3 **HMO Provision** – The current project of 5 units is working well, although there have been some issues raised about anti-social behaviour. There is currently provider interest in offering additional units, although these are not local to Merton. Discussions are also in hand to explore further providers and understand if opportunities can be created for more local provision.
- 2.4 **Lead Tenants** – Whilst shared housing takes place within HMO provision, the current cohort of care leavers are not suitable to make one vulnerable young person, as a lead

tenant, responsible for the actions of other tenants. Where suitable candidates and access to two bedroom properties is available, this will be considered as an option. Merton does not have a housing stock and one of the main barriers is that private landlords want guarantors: this barrier is currently being explored.

- 2.5 **Shared Lives** – This is now offered as part of the menu of placement options for young people with additional needs. Whilst referrals have been made, at present no referrals have been accepted, but we are working with some young people with mental health difficulties who turn 18 shortly and may benefit from this approach.
- 2.6 **Building Schemes and Quotas** – Work continues along with the housing needs service to enable these young care leavers to be offered permanent tenancies through housing. This has currently been achieved for 28 young people. Further work continues to explore options within the private rental market, where some success has been achieved for individual young people.
- 2.7 **Staying Put** – The number of young people staying put is continuing to increase and currently stands at 14 as of September 2018. This is comprised of 9 with in house foster carers and the others staying put with independent fostering agency provision. This continues to grow from 5 young people as at the end of November 2017, and 2 in June 2017 at the time of the Ofsted inspection.
- 2.8 **Young People in Foster Care** – These aspects and further opportunities are being picked up within the refresh of the Care Leavers Strategy, which is currently in development, and will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board for approval later in the year. The strategy will also take forward several of the other recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel, along with other priorities identified by our young people.
- 2.9 **Pre-Tenancy Support and ESOL Training** – The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) has grown since the last update and stands at 34, as of end September 2018. Coffee meet ups take place on a monthly basis for these UASCs. A Young Migrants Early Intervention pilot project has also been proposed to apply for additional ESOL support.
- 2.10 **Peer Mentors** – Further work to develop peer mentors has not currently progressed, but instead care leavers are used to informally support other care leavers. With the Children in Care Council (CiCC) having recently been reinvigorated, they will consider some of these issues and determine their priorities for progressing and providing suitable support.
- 2.11 **Encouraging Saving for Rent and Deposit** – Young people in care are already encouraged to save through a number of activities. Over the coming year, 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.

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 |
| 2.3.3 v | 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 i | 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 |