

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 21 July 2014
Subject: Access to Suitable Accommodation for Care Leavers
Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Summary: This report seeks to update the Corporate Parenting Panel in respect of the legislative duties required to meet sufficient accommodation for care leavers. This report updates on a presentation to the Panel at its meeting of 03 February 2014.

Advising Officer: None
Contact Officer: Gerard Jones – Assistant Director, Operations
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Report supports the following Council priorities:

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
- Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.
- Improve educational attainment.

Financial:

1. Financial costs relating to accommodation for Looked After Children up to the age of 18 is funded entirely from the social care budget. For care leavers from the age of 18 the housing costs i.e. rent/council tax are entirely met through housing benefit.

Legal:

2. The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children it looks after regardless of where they live. When a Looked After Child reaches 18 years old they become care leavers and are no longer in the care of the local authority. In accordance with the duties outlined in the Leaving Care Act 2000, care leavers are entitled to access local authority housing support.
3. Care leavers are entitled to housing accommodation under band B the Quota Housing Scheme operated by Central Bedfordshire Council.
4. Central Bedfordshire Council is expected to accommodate any homeless young person [aged 16-18 year olds] under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 where it is assessed that they are a child in need whenever it is determined that the young person has nowhere else to reside and there is no appropriate adult to care for them.

Risk Management:

5. Central Bedfordshire Council ensures that all young people looked after [16 years -18 years] are accommodated in safe & suitable accommodation

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

6. Not Applicable

Equalities/Human Rights:

7. All looked after children and care leavers will be offered safe & suitable accommodation appropriate to their needs. Assessments to determine accommodation needs take into account the young person's independence skills, their ethnicity and disability.

Public Health

8. Good housing has a positive impact on the physical health and emotional well being of young people.

Community Safety:

9. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

10. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

11. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:**The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:**

1. **Note the contents of this report and the steps identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.**

- 2. Support the establishment of a Care Leavers Accommodation Working Group, with representatives from housing, adult social care, health, children's social care and the independent and voluntary sector. The Head of Corporate Parenting will chair the Working Group.**
- 3. Support the establishment of the Terms of Reference of the Care Leavers Accommodation Working Group in relation to the following:**
 - To ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of Children Looked After and Care Leavers.**
 - To review evidence and monitor current process and ways of working from a results/outcomes perspective, to develop an Improvement Plan**
 - To develop an Improvement Plan**
 - To maximise the benefits of collaboration and joint working**
 - To strengthen local partnerships**
 - To address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers**
 - To input directly into the new Annual Lettings Plan being developed, so as to establish a Quota of properties that shall be available to Children Leaving Care, as well as Foster Parents and adopters.**

Introduction/Background

Looked after children and care leavers

12. The term 'looked after' refers to any child or young person for whom the Council has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom the Council provides care and accommodation on behalf of their parent. The term "child" can refer to any child or young person aged 0 to 18 years. The Council also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave their long-term care from the age of 16 years until they reach the age of 21, or 25 if they are in higher education.
13. A data pack has been developed by the Department of Education relating to care leavers, similar to the comparative data sets already produced for Adoption and the Education of Looked After Children. This will assist the Council to review its policies and benchmark its performance.
14. The data pack underlines the clear links between good outcomes for care leavers, the number of placement moves and the age when young people leave care. There are currently two outcome indicators for care leavers. These measure the percentage of young people in suitable accommodation and those in Education, Employment or Training. Both are reported on at age 19.
15. The performance indicator measures the number of care leavers at the age of 19 in suitable accommodation. Our local target for 2013-14 was 90% we achieved 89% (this was because 3 of the young people in the cohort where asylum seeking young adults who due to their negative asylum decision have absconded).

Current Situation and Presenting Accommodation Issues

Transitional Placements

16. Where young people living in their primary placements (Residential Children's Homes or Foster Care) are assessed as requiring a semi-independent placement as a 'stepping stone' from care to independent placements, a range of semi-independent options are available. These options are:
 - i. Registered Providers of Social Housing including the Council as a landlord
 - ii. Supported Lodgings
 - iii. 'Staying Put'
 - iv. Private Semi-Independent Accommodation Providers
17. Accommodation and support provided by Registered Social Landlords and Private Semi Independent Accommodation Providers is not regulated by Ofsted. However, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and related Guidance sets out requirements for local authorities to develop a new inspection and monitoring framework in order to ensure appropriate standards are in place.
18. There is a gap in our current sufficiency provision in that we do not have enough providers who are "regulated" [by the local authority] in order to meet the needs of our care leavers and as a result some of our young people are remaining in residential children's home for longer than they should due to the lack of supported accommodation provisions.
19. There is an urgent need to commission a sufficient range of semi-independent and independent living accommodation choices for this cohort of young people

Independent Accommodation

20. Care leavers are referred for permanent housing only when they are ready to manage and maintain their own tenancy. In order to ensure that all care leavers are ready to live independently and manage a tenancy when they turn 18, Social Workers & Personal Advisors need to evidence that the nominated young people have the appropriate life skills. These include a broad range of practical skills, emotional resilience, an assessment of their support requirements to enable them to engage with education, employment. These elements are essential in managing a successful transition to adulthood, including managing and maintaining their tenancies.
21. Where young people are assessed to have the life skills required to sustain independent accommodation by the age of 18, a system is in place whereby young people move directly to permanent local authority housing or housing association accommodation. The Housing Directorate in Central Bedfordshire use the choice based lettings system of allocating tenancies.

Actions undertaken

22. This report provides an update regarding actions that are currently being undertaken to advance accommodation options for care leavers as a result of the recommendations made at the Corporate Parenting Panel held in February 2014

23. The Support for Success Panel Meeting in partnership with Youth Support Service currently tracks all 15-21 (or 25) year old young people making sure they access further education, training and employment. The Panel will expand to monitor the placement and move on arrangements for all young people in this cohort. Particular attention has been paid to placement planning where young people are living outside their 'originating housing authority' and where young people will need a supported accommodation setting when they reach the age of 18. The aim of the meeting is to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to address the placement and accommodation needs of all children looked after and care leavers aged 16 plus. In addition, the Panel monitors and tracks the detailed move-on plans for all care leavers aged over 17 and 6 months, all young people in high cost placements and those with complex placement needs.
24. We are paying all our care leavers a £2,000 setting up home allowance when they are ready to live independently.
25. To ensure that young people have the necessary life skills to sustain independent accommodation, we are undertaking in partnership with fostering services, including IFA's, and supported independent providers to ensure they provide evidence of the independence skills young people have developed.
26. A Preparation for Independence Life Skill Programme is being developed with the Youth Support Service. The Programme will be developed in partnership with foster carers, supported lodgings carers and staff working across the complete range of children looked after and care leaving services. In addition, the Programme will be piloted with young people, placement and accommodation providers and a broad range of community organisations. Training will be provided on the use of the Programme and mechanisms in place to review and update the progress of each young person. The primary aim of the programme is to assist with the development of life skills, promote resilience and develop skills to sustain tenancies.
27. In order to meet our sufficiency duty and provide a sufficient range of supported accommodation for care leavers we undertook a tendering exercise in March 2014 that will provide:
 - i. Contracts in place by June 2014 with a select group of 16+ providers who will offer placements based on a common service specification and have been able to evidence suitable qualitative information.
 - ii. A robust, scored, quality assurance process including written submissions. Interviews with young people were done jointly with the Children in Care Council [CiCC]. Young people were involved in drawing up the specification and a workshop was held to obtain feedback from the members; this was included in the tender document. The CiCC members were also involved in giving a presentation to providers as well as shortlisting them against framework criteria.
 - iii. Additional scrutiny on quality that will raise standards of providers and improve outcomes for young people. Unlike fostering and children's homes provision that is regulated and inspected by Ofsted, there is no similar statutory regulatory framework for 16+ supported accommodations.
 - iv. Improved value for money and clarity in terms of what services are included in standard costs.
 - v. Improved placement data, market intelligence and consequent ability of local authorities to manage the market.

28. Care leavers are entitled to housing accommodation under Band B of the Quota Housing Scheme operated by Central Bedfordshire Council. A new allocation policy was approved by Executive in May 2014, which has highlighted care leavers as a vulnerable group.
29. A Housing Group will be set up whose focus will be to scrutinise current processes, maximise the benefits of local partnerships & address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers. An integral aspect of this work will be to:
 - i. Ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of Children Looked After & Care Leavers.
 - ii. Review evidence and monitor current process and ways of working from a results/outcomes perspective, to development an Improvement Plan
 - iii. Maximise the benefits of collaboration and joint working
 - iv. Strengthen local partnerships
 - v. Address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers
 - vi. Input directly into the new Annual Lettings Plan being developed, so as to establish a Quota of properties that shall be available to Children Leaving Care, as well as Foster Parents and adopters.
 - vii. Support the Housing allocation policy for LAC/Care Leavers
 - viii. Supported accommodation provision for looked after children at 16 – become less dependant on private providers
 - ix. Joint housing protocol between Looked After Children Services and Housing.
 - x. Outreach support for young people living in their own tenancy for the first 3-6 months.
 - xi. New build provision and making sure we evidence that requirement to deliver as a result of s106 agreements for affordable housing (i.e. specialist provision)
 - xii. Promote shared houses – as a model – for people who are low risk, or close to establishing full independence
30. The Annual Lettings Plan will be used to determine how the predictable resource of lettings (approximately 1000 per annum) will be used. The purpose of the ALP is to “make the best use of stock”. It is envisaged that approximately 2/3rds of lets will continue to be let through CBL, whilst about 1/3 of lets will be used on the basis of direct lets, transfers and quota.
31. The Council will make a percentage of annual lets available to certain groups of applicants, via quota schemes. These quotas will be set out in an Annual Lettings Plan. Groups likely to be subject to a quota include:
 - i. Foster carers and adopters, as well as looked after children
 - ii. Clients with mental health issues, but ready to move on from supported housing schemes
 - iii. Clients with learning disabilities, but ready to move on from supported housing schemes
 - iv. Others to be identified as part of consultation with partner agencies

Conclusion

32. This report has identified a need for a longer-term strategic approach to address the affordable housing issues facing young people in Central Bedfordshire. It has

suggested some first order priorities to widen the housing offer for young people through innovation in flexible tenure and new sharing options, streamlining commissioning and delivery of housing related services and increasing the capacity of young people, in particular vulnerable young people.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None