

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 18 January 2016

Meeting the Housing and Support Needs of Vulnerable Young People Update

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Purpose of this report

1. This report provides an update to the report of 13 October 2014 titled 'Meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable young people'. The original report affirmed the commitment of the housing service to the Corporate Parenting responsibility and set this in the context of a strategic housing agenda that is fully aligned to that responsibility. This report updates on progress since October 2014, and identifies next steps going forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note progress made since October 2014 towards an improved day to day experience of housing and support services by Care Leavers, and towards improved access to supported accommodation for those Care Leavers that are not ready for independent accommodation at the age of 18
2. Consider the proposed next steps at paragraphs 22 to 27.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The item is not planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny.

Issues

2. The Corporate Parenting Operations Group (CPOG) was established in September 2014 in order to enable a more co-ordinated approach to the council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent, across services. Participation in this group has been a high priority for the Head of Housing Solutions, who has attended every meeting to date

3. A report entitled 'Meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable Young People' was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) on 13 October 2014. The purpose of this report was to draw attention to particular challenges in relation to housing and support for Care Leavers and other vulnerable Young People; and to identify opportunities for closer collaboration, through the CPOG, in order to improve the council's response to those challenges.
4. The purpose of this report is to update on progress made since September 2014, from a housing perspective and to propose next steps

Improving access to Council and Housing Association tenancies

5. In October 2014, a new Housing Allocations Policy was launched. This policy restricts access to the Housing Register only to those with a social housing need. The new policy explicitly recognises Care Leavers as having a need for social housing.
6. Housing and Corporate Parenting colleagues co-operate to plan a transition into a social housing tenancy for Care Leavers at the point they are ready to leave their care placement and move into their own home. Care Leavers are given help to develop their independent life-skills whilst they are waiting for their own home, and only assisted to bid for properties once they are felt to be able to cope with this step.
7. Most Care Leavers apply to the Housing Register at age 17, and wait in date order in Band 2, with other general needs applicants. However, a Quota Scheme was introduced in November 2014 as an additional route into social housing. The Annual Lettings Plan for 2015-16 gives Corporate Parenting access to 10 one-bed and 4 two/three bed lettings per year for Care Leavers (plus a further 8 lettings that are specifically for Teenage Parents leaving care).
8. This allows Corporate Parenting colleagues to select priority cases for rehousing on their own terms (rather than having to make a case to housing that the Care Leaver in question should have a high priority). The selected applicants are able to bid from Band One with higher priority than most other applicants. This facilitates case working by enabling access to a letting within a predictable time-frame.
9. Corporate Parenting colleagues have used all the quota nominations made available to them since the beginning of the scheme. In order to assist Corporate Parenting colleagues to make best use of the scheme going forward, so that quota nominations are used to best effect to assist with case management, the Housing Solutions Locality Manager has offered to attend Children's Services team meetings in order to feed into operational planning.

10. Where a Care Leaver is barred from the Housing Register due to their conduct, the Housing Service will hold a panel meeting to consider the person's application, with representation from Corporate Parenting. Where access to the register is prohibited, there will be an agreed timetable for reconsideration, and an interim plan to address behavioural barriers to rehousing.
11. Floating support services are available to Care Leavers starting council and Housing Association tenancies, in order to supplement the support provided by the Personal Advisor. Around 10 referrals have been made to the former Bromford Support Service from Children's Services in the first two quarters of 2015-16. This service was taken in house on 9th December 2015, now known as Gateway Housing Support.

Improving access to specialist supported accommodation for vulnerable Young People

12. The previous report highlighted that some Care Leavers have significant personal challenges that hinder their ability to cope in mainstream housing. For instance, psychological impact of negative life-experiences, vulnerability to peer pressure (particularly if those peers are their main form of support); offending behaviour, and there may be Learning Disabilities and Mental Health needs. These Young People ideally need specialist supported accommodation in order to develop their life skills to the point that independent mainstream accommodation is a good option.
13. Social Care, Health and Housing invests £490 K per annum in supported accommodation services for vulnerable Young People in Central Bedfordshire. In addition, a proportion of support provided by former Bromford Support also assists care leavers. However, it is clear that this accommodation does not cater for all vulnerable homeless Young People in Central Bedfordshire. Services are over-subscribed and some young people needing a highly supported environment (including young people both above and below Adult Social Care eligibility criteria thresholds) are not catered for by any of the local supported accommodation services.
14. Since October 2014, the Head of Housing Solutions has led on work to achieve more provision of supported accommodation for this client group. This includes exploring the development of a foyer in Dunstable, making use of an existing site owned by Aldwyck Housing Association. There have been partnership meetings with all stakeholders, including the Homes and Communities Agency, to discuss requirements, feasibility and funding options. The Head of Housing Solutions is continuing work with Aldwyck to sustain momentum on the project, some of Aldwyck's key stakeholders having left their positions in August 2015.

15. There have been initial discussions with Signposts, in September 2015, to look at expanding their services for Care Leavers at risk of homelessness, potentially with the provision of increased capacity to accommodate and support Young People in shared housing in the Dunstable / Houghton Regis area.
16. Housing Services has facilitated the development of a 'shared house' supported model with Amicus Trust. The model is currently being tested through a pilot project with homeless veterans, with a view to sourcing properties for a similar approach with Care Leavers.
17. The gathering of intelligence around accommodation and support needs for vulnerable Young People is a key driver towards achieving more provision. The Head of Housing Solutions has worked alongside Ben Pearson (Head of Commissioning – Children's Services) to develop use of the Managing Demand toolkit in order to inform our understanding of needs. Information about the needs of vulnerable Young People – in respect of supported accommodation, and mainstream accommodation with support – has been provided to Housing Strategy and Planning colleagues, with the aim of informing decisions about new-build requirements.

Improving operational collaboration

18. The previous report identified a need to work more collaboratively, to address pathway issues and to promote up-stream intervention rather than crisis intervention, particularly in respect of challenging cases that require creativity, insight and co-ordination across the whole system, in order to find the right solutions.
19. The quota scheme aids improved collaboration and has been instrumental in resolving some challenging cases, by providing a stream-lined path for getting the right person into the right property.
20. Individual challenging cases require close collaboration between front-line managers. The CPOG acts to establish and maintain a culture of joint working and as a mechanism to ensure that the right people participate in those individual case discussions and are empowered to seek creative solutions.
21. Feedback from frontline officers suggests that there has been a tangible cultural shift since early 2014 in the way that Housing Solutions have responded to their role as a Corporate Parent. Front line officers from Corporate Parenting and Housing Solutions have strengthened working relationships; there is a better understanding of each other's role and responsibilities and staff act with a common focus on a good outcome for the Young Person. All Housing Solutions staff have completed E-learning Child Protection training since October 2014, and there has been good progress on working to protocols in respect of Care Leavers.

Next Steps

22. The most important next step is to continue driving continuous improvement in the way that Housing and Children's Services collaborate and respond to Care Leavers needs, through sustained commitment to the CPOG. We will continue to seek improved day to day experiences of housing and support services for Young People, to understand blockages within the system and look for solutions.
23. We will explore, via discussions at CPOG, whether or not an Improvement Plan is required to drive change in respect of housing and support, and we commit to developing and implementing such a plan if required. This includes a commitment to explore how well the Corporate Parenting role is understood and responded to across all housing and support services.
24. We will continue to gather intelligence about the need for general needs rented accommodation in respect of Young People, and to promote the use of this intelligence to inform plans for future new developments of affordable housing in Central Bedfordshire. An example is the recent research undertaken by Citizens Advice in respect of the pressures in the local private rental market.
25. Social Care Commissioning colleagues held workshops in the summer to inform the commissioning of housing support services in 2016, which involved Children's Services colleagues to help identify priorities for future funding of housing support services. There will be further engagement with colleagues in January 2016 as the detailed specifications are developed.
26. Also of vital importance is to maintain momentum in the achievement of additional supported accommodation in Central Bedfordshire, and the Head of Housing Solutions will continue to support Corporate Parenting managers in "making the case" for additional accommodation through strategic policies, such as the developing Housing Strategy and Development Strategy (Technical Guidance), and through individual initiatives with key partners and stakeholders. It is important that needs are evidenced and presented to ensure new housing growth and Housing Support commissioning can help meet those needs.
27. Housing Services are also collaborating closely with Director of Children's Services to find suitable housing solutions for Syrian refugee families arriving in Central Bedfordshire as part of the Government's allocation plan.

Council Priorities

28. Improving Education and Skills
Protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing

Legal Implications

29. 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. In accordance with the duties outlined in the Leaving Care Act 2000, care leavers are entitled to access local authority housing support.
30. Care Leavers are entitled to apply for a council or Housing Association home via the Housing Register. Care Leavers are explicitly identified in the Central Bedfordshire Allocations Policy as having a need for housing assistance.
31. The 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.
32. The Children and Family Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 introduce new duties around assessing and planning for care and support needs.

Financial and Risk Implications

33. Financial costs relating to accommodation for Looked After Children (LAC) up to the age of 18 is funded entirely from the Children's social care budget. For care leavers from the age of 18 the housing costs i.e. rent/council tax, are typically met through housing benefit or personal income (where a person is employed). Housing support services, that are non-statutory, are funded from the General Fund and for council tenants by the Housing Revenue Account.
34. The Council ensures that all young people looked after [16 years -18 years] are accommodated in safe & suitable accommodation.

Public Health

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

Community Safety

36. Good housing with appropriate support helps to prevent vulnerable Young People from becoming either victims or perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Equalities Implications

37. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. There is no equality impact assessment required for this update report but the Council's Housing Allocations Policy was subject to a thorough equalities impact assessment before approval by Executive in May 2014 and specifically considered the needs of vulnerable young people.
38. 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, disability and any other relevant factors.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None. The report presented to Corporate Parenting Panel on 13 October 2014 can be found on the Council's website.