

Central Bedfordshire Council

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 5 March 2018

Subject: Meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable young people – an update

Report of: Julie Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
Sue Harrison, Director Children's Services

Summary: This report provides an update to the reports of 13th October 2014 and 18th January 2016, 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. This report uses case study examples of Care Leavers to review the progress made since January 2016.

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Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Report supports the following Council priorities to:

- Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.
- Improve educational attainment.

Financial:

1. Financial costs relating to accommodation for Looked After Children (LAC) up to the age of 18, are funded 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.

Legal:

2. The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children it looks after regardless of where they live. Relevant legislation and legal implications are outlined in Appendix 2 to this report.
3. In relation to care leavers, Children's services has responsibilities to 4 key groups of young people:
 - Looked after children/young people aged 16-17yrs old;
 - Young people aged 16 and 17 who have ceased to be looked after between their 16th and 18th birthday
 - Young people aged 18-21yrs who have been looked after, care leavers
 - Care leavers who have remained in higher education to the age of 25yrsThese are the subject of a significant update in new legislation to be implemented on 01 04 2018

Children and Social Work Act 2017

The first 3 sections of this are particularly relevant to this this report.

Section 1 outlines 7 Corporate Parenting Principles local authorities must have regard to in their work with these children and young people:

- i. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- ii. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- iii. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- iv. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- v. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- vi. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- vii. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

Section 2 requires local authorities to publish information about the services it offers to care leavers which may assist them in preparing for adulthood and independent living. These services may include health and well-being, education and training, employment, accommodation, and participation in society. This is the local offer or Leaving Care Offer

The Leaving Care Offer

This is a comprehensive statement of the services that Children's Services, the rest of the council including but not confined to Housing and Education, and the council's partners such as the NHS, and Department of Work and Pensions will offer to looked after children/young people and care leavers in their transition to adulthood. The production and content of CBC's leaving care offer will be the subject of future reports to panel

Section 3 requires local authorities to appoint a personal adviser for care leavers who request one up until the age of 25, regardless of whether the young person intends to pursue education or training. The local authority also has a duty to carry out an assessment of the young person's needs and to provide the necessary advice and support.

Risk Management:

1. The Council ensures that all young people looked after [16 years -18 years] are accommodated in safe & suitable accommodation. It also has a duty to support the transition to adulthood of its looked after children/young people.
2. The increased vulnerability of looked after children/young people and care leavers to negative outcomes and the difficulties they experience in achieving positive outcomes at the same level as the general population is well-documented. It is true for the avoidance of homelessness and the achievement of stable living arrangements. The establishment of these living arrangements in appropriate locations with proper support is a key element in mitigating the well-publicised risks of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
3. 89% of CBC's 18-21yrs old care leavers live in accommodation that meets the criteria of suitable. (The remainder are in custody or are young people who went missing soon after they became looked after as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) No care leavers live in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation There is need to maintain this performance and enhance it by continuous effort to raise further the quality and value for money of the accommodation in which looked after children/young people and care leavers live.
4. It is also important that the Council meets the requirements of the Children and Social Work Act maintaining the level of its leaving care service which attracted an OFSTED rating of GOOD in July 2017.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not applicable

6. Equalities/Human Rights:

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

Services to these children young people must take into account the abuse, neglect or other trauma that led to them becoming looked after and the difficulties they will experience in taking advantage of housing offers as a result. This includes 2nd chances for accommodation and full multi-agency support.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people should receive a service that is both of the same quality as offered to all looked after children and care leavers and acknowledges their different residence status and pre-care experiences.

Public Health

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

Community Safety:

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

Sustainability:

- 9. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

- 10. There are no procurement requirements to or as a consequence of activity and recommendations made in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1	Note progress made since January 2016 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	Note the experiences and challenges of Care Leavers towards achieving suitable housing solutions

3	Note and consider the proposed next steps and works in progress.
4	Note the related developments in this area
5	Note the new responsibilities of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and how this will influence the development of the Leaving Care Offer

Introduction and Background

11. The Corporate Parenting Operations Group (CPOG) was established in September 2014 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.
12. 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 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.
13. An update report was presented to Corporate Parenting Panel on 18th January 2016. This report outlined progress, particularly in collaboration between services but also outlined further work to do.
14. The purpose of this report is to update on progress made since January 2016 but also to look at some real-life experiences of Care Leavers in their efforts to find suitable and sustainable housing solutions. This was required by the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel in January 2016.
15. The Leaving Care Service in Children's Services supports 78 looked after children/young people aged 16-17 yrs old and 127 former looked after children, care leavers aged 18yrs+. The majority of the latter young people have achieved independence and independent living with an appropriate tenancy.
16. This report reviews the accommodation needs of children and young people in 2 broad areas:
 - **Looked After children aged 16-17yrs comprising:**
 - i. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children/young people (UASC)
 - ii. Looked after children aged 16-17yrs who are not UASC (either born in the UK, UK citizens or UK residents)
 - **Former looked after children aged 18+yrs comprising:**
 - i. Former UASC who are awaiting a decision on their application to reside in the UK
 - ii. Former UASC who have exhausted all appeal rights and are awaiting deportation
 - iii. Former looked after children from Group a) ii above. With the right support all young people in this group should be able to find and fund

housing and subsistence through universal benefits. Accommodation is sought for this group in exceptional experiences in response to short term crisis.

Improving access to Council and Housing Association tenancies

17. The Council's Housing Allocations Policy explicitly recognises Care Leavers as having a need for social housing and improved the offer to Care Leavers.
18. Most Care Leavers apply to the Housing Register and wait in date order in Band 2, with other general needs applicants. The Housing Allocations Policy, however, includes a Quota Scheme as an additional, planned route into social housing. The current Annual Lettings Plan gives access to 12 one-bed units (an increase from 10 in 2016/17) and 6 two/three bed lettings for Teenage Parents leaving care. This enables arrangements to be planned for, well in advance, which in turn means the arrangements are likely to be successful.
19. The quota system allows Corporate Parenting colleagues to determine priority for rehousing on their own terms. The selected applicants can bid as Band One, with higher priority than most other applicants. This facilitates a smoother transition by enabling access to a letting within a more predictable time-frame.
20. Corporate Parenting colleagues successfully use all the quota nominations for one bed units made available. To assist Corporate Parenting colleagues, make best use of the scheme going forward, so that quota nominations are used to best effect, the Housing Solutions Locality Manager has offered advice to Corporate Parenting colleagues about using the normal bidding process as an alternative to using quotas for every young person, to maximise effectiveness of the quota scheme.
21. Where a Care Leaver is barred from the Housing Register due to their conduct, the Housing Service holds 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 a plan to address behavioural barriers to rehousing.
22. Children's Services Managers contribute to joint discussions and this is very much in line with the lead given by the Ministerial Adviser on implementation of leaving care elements of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. 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. Housing Services (and other social landlords) require a care plan, which outlines the level/type of support in place to help the Care Leaver sustain their new tenancy.
23. Floating (non accommodation based) support services are available to Care Leavers starting Council and Housing Association tenancies, to supplement (but not duplicate) the support provided by the Personal Advisor. Not every new

tenancy is successful, with rent arrears occurring in some instances. Further collaborative work between colleagues to develop a protocol and clearer customer pathways would be beneficial to help reduce the incidences of tenancy failures amongst Care Leavers. Costs associated with failed tenancies are significant (rent arrears, eviction and court costs, homelessness) so support provision to help enable a successful tenancy is cost effective.

24. As noted elsewhere in this report, this floating support has been commended by the Social Workers and Personal advisers working with Care Leavers in this accommodation.

Improving access to specialist supported accommodation for vulnerable Young People

25. 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 to develop their life skills to the point that independent mainstream accommodation is a good option.
26. Social Care, Health and Housing commissions Accommodation Based Housing Support for vulnerable people, including young homeless people, in Central Bedfordshire. Three schemes are commissioned in addition to the support provided by the Independent Living team within Housing Services. It is clear, however, that this accommodation/support 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.
27. There has been work to explore additional provision of supported accommodation for this client group. This includes the development of a foyer in Dunstable, making use of an existing site owned by Aldwyck Housing Association. There were several partnership meetings with stakeholders, including the Homes and Communities Agency, to discuss requirements, feasibility and funding options but conditions attached to the original funding of the scheme prevented progress.
28. There are continuing discussions with Signposts (part-funded by CBC) and their plans to expand their services for young people at risk of homelessness. The issue is, as always, that of securing appropriate housing at the right rent/leasing costs to make an expansion financially feasible for Signposts.

A new model, New Accommodation for our Care Leavers

29. Following the joint work between Housing and Children's Services over the last 6 months, 9 young people are now living in 3 shared houses in the CBC area. They are being getting practical support provided by Housing Officers which adds to the work undertaken by their Social Worker or Personal Adviser. This is high quality provision and support.
30. The work that led to this outcome began when Housing Services proposed and developed with Children's Services a 'shared house' supported model, piloted in Houghton Regis for 16 to 17-year old Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC). A three-bedroom house has been converted and a business plan/Service Level Agreement (SLA) has been developed and agreed between the services. This model includes an all-inclusive cost per person, which includes rent, utility costs, and 5 hours of support tailored to the needs of the individual young person.
31. A second business plan/SLA has been developed for 18 to 25-year-old UASC, which has been used to agree the use of a former long term empty property in Linslade. The property has been converted into a shared house, now occupied by three UASC, and a tailored package of support is provided by the Independent Living Team. A third shared house is occupied by 2 18+yr old former unaccompanied asylum seeking children awaiting Home Office decisions, (the 3rd resident has recently moved on leaving a vacancy the next resident has moved in). To date, 9 units of accommodation are secured.
32. Housing Services have purchased a large property in Houghton Regis (Puddlehill) and have planning permission to develop a 13-unit supported "move on" housing scheme aimed at vulnerable young people. There have been initial discussions between the services. The schemes should be completed by March 19. This additional provision, alongside other units of Transitional Accommodation, is an important element of a plan to provide resilience across the main towns of Central Bedfordshire, to meet the Council's new obligations (particularly to single person households), under the Homelessness Reduction Act.
33. Regular meetings are now taking place and a practice manager has taken on the role of ensuring coordination and that young people are matched to appropriate accommodation.
34. Social Workers and Leaving Care Personal Advisers have reported positively on the quality of support offered to young people as part of the SLA detailed above. It is compared favourably to that provided by other providers from charitable and private sector.
35. The gathering of intelligence around accommodation and support needs for vulnerable Young People is a key driver towards achieving more provision. Understanding demand and needs is a key part of CPOG. Going forward, however, there needs to be a renewed effort to provide evidence of demand to Housing Strategy and Planning colleagues, with the aim of informing decisions about new-build requirements and further improving the Housing Offer to Care leavers.

36. In relation to looked after children/young people and care leavers, the information gathering is a fluid and progressive process. Having established three shared houses, Children's Services are realising that properties in Houghton Regis and Dunstable are the preferred choice of many of our young people rather than, for example, Leighton Buzzard. Their expressed wishes have some validity. Although Leighton Buzzard is on train link to Milton Keynes, including MK College and London, Houghton Regis/Dunstable offers proximity to Barnfield College which many attend and links with their community and support network. The proximity of Watling House is also an advantage.

Improving operational collaboration: a single-team approach

37. The previous reports 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, to find the right solutions.
38. The quota scheme aids 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.
39. 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 case discussions and are empowered to seek creative solutions. Undoubtedly as key Officers change, the maintenance of a collaborative culture between services can be challenging but it is essential to creating solutions.
40. Feedback from officers suggests that there has been a tangible cultural shift in the way that Housing has responded to their role as a Corporate Parent. There is further work to progress, particularly in respect of Care Leavers becoming tenants of the Council. It is recognised that there can be conflict between the business needs of Housing Operations (to ensure tenancy conditions and rental obligations are met) and the need to support new tenants who get into difficulties with their tenancy. Understanding each other's roles and responsibilities, and a common focus on a good outcome for the Young Person has to be reinforced.
41. The housing priority of early prevention is fully shared by Children's Services. There is a need to ensure that the experiences of being looked after children prepares them for independence from the youngest age. This is in line with the 7th principle of corporate parenting. Building on this, a strong Leaving Care Offer, produced collaboratively with young people, across the Council and its partners will detail the support that can be offered to looked after children/young people and care leavers between 16 and 25yrs old.
42. For a small number of young people, a bridge supporting those with acute need from 25yrs to 30yrs old may be appropriate and is being discussed. It is likely that further proposals will follow.

Next steps

43. The most important next step in driving continuous improvement is collaboration in responding to Care Leavers needs. This includes continued commitment to CPOG. We will continue to seek improved day to day experiences for young people from housing and support services, to understand blockages within the system and look for solutions. The case studies below indicate how complex and challenging some cases are to resolve. Key steps include:
 - Monthly Meetings between the Leaving Care Team Managers (Children's Services) and Managers in Independent Living Team (Housing),
 - There are currently 9 places in Shared Houses provided by CBC Housing this will increase to 15 by April 2018. By 29th March 2019 CBC Housing will be the majority provider of supported shared housing for care leavers.
44. We will continue to gather and review intelligence about the housing need of Young People through CPOG. The new duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places even greater emphasis on the Council preventing homelessness, which will cause a rethink our approach towards young people and Care Leavers.
45. Also, of vital importance is to continue to explore opportunities for supported accommodation in Central Bedfordshire, and "making the case" for additional accommodation through strategic policies, such as the Housing Strategy and Local Plan, and through individual initiatives with key partners. It is important that needs are evidenced and presented to ensure new housing growth can help meet those needs. The aim is for a jointly developed evidence paper to be presented for discussion with Strategic Housing (Planning) colleagues to help understanding of accommodation needs by August 2018.
46. A review of performance and outcomes achieved by Signposts scheme, which focuses on younger homeless people, will be conducted through quarterly performance reviews and six monthly contract review meetings between the Council (Housing) and Signposts.
47. Children's Services are enthusiastic partners to all the recommendations above.
48. Practically, this means that meetings between managers and practitioners will continue to take place to ensure:
 - The continued flow of good accommodation offers for individual young people from some of our key groups,
 - Best matching of young people to accommodation
 - The development of accommodation offering a level of additional support to young people with higher levels of need. By end of 2018, a Shared House with support provision will be established for higher need young people, if appropriate, based on the 13-unit supported "move on" housing scheme in Houghton Regis detailed above.
 - Joint development of policy and procedure that will underpin these developments,

49. In consultation with young people, across Central Bedfordshire Council and its partners, a Leaving Care Offer will be developed, published and promoted to all those qualifying for support. The aim is an ambitious Offer that includes innovative measures to facilitate successful outcomes for young people leaving care, including housing outcomes.
- An initial draft offer will be available by May 2018
 - Final offer be completed by Sept 2018.
 - All members of the Corporate Parenting panel and their agencies will contribute to the development of the offer.

Appendix 1: Case Studies

Appendix 2: Legislation related and legal implications

Related papers

Meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable young people, report to the Corporate Parenting Panel dated 13 October 2014

<http://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s52168/08%20Care%20Leavers%20report%202%2010%2014%20d%20version.pdf>

Meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable young people update, report to the Corporate Parenting Panel dated 18 January 2016

<http://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s62330/Housing%20and%20Support%20Needs%20for%20Vulnerable%20People%20v2%2021Dec2015.pdf>

Annual Lettings Plan 2017/18 (available on request)

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/9.36_Get_in_on_the_Act_-_Children_02%20web.pdf

LGA guide to Children and Social Work Act

Appendix 1 Legal implications and background

The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children it looks after regardless of where they live. Of particular significance in relation to their housing needs is the fact that 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, they are then entitled to access local authority housing support.

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 Housing Allocations Policy as having a need for assistance

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. Young people who become homeless and who express an explicit and fully informed view that they do not want to become Looked After can be supported, including financially, without becoming subject to Section 20 Accommodation and are therefore not Looked After

The Children and Family Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 introduce new duties around assessing and planning for care and support needs

For the Corporate Parenting Service of Children's Services, detailed duties are laid down in legislation on how Looked After Children/Young People should be supported in their transition to Adulthood. The Children Act 1989 laid the foundations to these responsibilities, which were significantly updated in Leaving the Leaving Care Act 2000, and subsequent detailed DfE guidance in this decade. In relation to care leavers, Children's services has responsibilities to 4 key groups of young people:

- Looked after children/young people aged 16-17yrs old;
- Young people aged 16 and 17 who have ceased to be looked after between their 16th and 18th birthday
- Young people aged 18-21yrs who have been looked after, care leavers
- Care leavers who have remained in higher education to the age of 25yrs

Children and Social Work Act 2017

1. This is a significant new piece of legislation which comes into force in April 2018, there are 3 significant sections

Section 1 outlines 7 Corporate Parenting Principles local authorities must have regard to in their work with these children and young people:

- i. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- ii. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- iii. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- iv. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;

- v. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- vi. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- vii. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

Section 2 requires local authorities to publish information about the services it offers to care leavers which may assist them in preparing for adulthood and independent living. These services may include health and well-being, education and training, employment, accommodation, and participation in society. It is distinct from the special educational needs and disability (SEND) local offer stipulated by the Children and Families Act 2014

This is the Local Offer or **Leaving Care Offer**. This is a comprehensive statement of the services that Children's Services, the rest of the council including but not confined to Housing and Education, and the council's partners such as the NHS, and Department of Work and Pensions will offer to looked after children/young people and care leavers in their transition to adulthood. The production and content of CBC's leaving care offer will be the subject of future reports to panel

Section 3 requires local authorities to appoint a personal adviser for care leavers who request one up until the age of 25, regardless of whether the young person intends to pursue education or training. The local authority also has a duty to carry out an assessment of the young person's needs and to provide the necessary advice and support