

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 16 October 2017

Wards: Borough wide implications

**Subject:**

Lead officer: **Reference from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – consideration of care leaver accommodation**

Lead member: Councillor Abigail Jones, Chair of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Contact officer: Annette Wiles, Scrutiny Officer, 0208 545 4035

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**Recommendations:**

That Cabinet takes account of comments made by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (set out in paragraph 2.3 below).

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**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. To inform Cabinet of the recommendations and comments resulting from the scrutiny of issues relating to accommodation for care leavers that took place at the Panel meeting held on 5 September 2017.

**2 DETAILS**

- 2.1. Members received a background briefing report on care leaver and young people accommodation that was jointly authored by officers from the Community & Housing and Children, Schools and Families Departments.
- 2.2. Acknowledging that accommodation for care leavers is also an issue relevant to the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, its members were in attendance at the meeting. To support members in their examination of the issues the Panel invited a number of external guests with relevant experience. These were 1) Paul Chadwick, a previous Director of Children Services at the London Borough of Croydon; this has a far greater number of care leavers than Merton, requiring creative approaches to meet accommodation needs and 2) Representatives from Evolve Housing and Support and Grenfell Housing and Training; organisations that work with care leavers in semi-independent accommodation and young people at risk of homelessness.
- 2.3. As a result of their discussions, members made the following comments and recommendations:
- 2.3.1 As reflected in the recent Ofsted combined inspection judgement and report, Merton has a good track record in making appropriate accommodation available for care leavers for which we congratulate officers.
- 2.3.2 Proactive accommodation planning is critical as part of the young person's pathway plan for independence. We want to endorse the approach of Children's Services of engaging young people in care to understand their

aspirations, to continue to meet their needs and prepare them for independence.

2.3.3 Through our exploration of the issues, we learnt that whilst there is sufficient semi-independent accommodation for care leavers, there is not enough nor a sufficient range of independent accommodation options as the next step on from semi-independent arrangements. Additionally, the recent change in requirements means the Council is now retaining its corporate parenting responsibilities for longer potentially through to the age of 25. This means provision of sufficient accommodation of all types is likely to be stretched and there is a need to increase the volume and supply of semi-independent and independent accommodation for care leavers. We are keen that a range of options be explored to meet this growing demand including:

(i) Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) at their best can offer care leavers the opportunity of accommodation supported by their peers, the Council and its partners. We ask the Council's Housing, *futureMerton* and Children, Schools and Families departments to continue working with private landlords and partners like Evolve to offer more HMO opportunities to care leavers. We have identified that there is potential to work in partnership with Evolve and its portfolio of HMO landlords. We recommend that a pilot project with Evolve is explored;

(ii) The 'lead tenant model' has been found to be successful and should also be considered. This is where a more experienced tenant (potentially themselves a former care leaver) takes the responsibility for managing key aspects of the tenancy and to model this for other less experienced tenants (care leavers new to independent living). Typically this is offered in exchange for a discounted rental cost;

(iii) Children's Services, working with Adult Social Care, explores the potential for extending suitable Shared Lives accommodation to young people with more complex needs leaving care; and

(iv) Other options that we identified and that we recommend are explored as longer term opportunities are Housing First (provision of accommodation first supported by long-term, open-ended support), co-operative building schemes (allowing care leavers the opportunity to take responsibility for the refurbishment of their own property) and Merton developing additional accommodation itself for example on a Y-Cube model.

2.3.4 The recent combined Ofsted inspection additionally identified that care leavers in Merton receive good support in developing the skills and knowledge that they need to live independently and to manage their own affairs. We congratulate officers on this achievement but want to encourage exploration of what else might be done. We recommend the following are specifically considered:

(i) The implications of developing more 'staying put' arrangements as a transition to full independence, (this is a new policy allowing those in care to remain with their foster carers for longer);

(ii) Maintaining our good work and focus on working with young people whilst still in foster care with the aim of achieving better engagement when they enter semi-independent provision;

(iii) Maintaining our good work and integration of pre-tenancy help into ESOL provision to provide support for care leavers that speak English as an additional language;

(iv) Continue to encourage care leavers who have successfully transitioned into independent accommodation to become peer mentors to offer support for those that are yet to successfully achieve this transition. We suggest looking at the good practice established by Kensington and Chelsea; and

(v) The Council 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. Care leavers have themselves identified this need.

2.3.5 The recent Ofsted inspection report states that the Council's 'staying put' offer is "underdeveloped". We recognise that Children's Services is working to improve the opportunities for young people to stay with their foster careers. However, we also note that arrangements for staying put have the potential to reduce the pool of available foster families. Therefore we ask Cabinet to prioritise that all teams and all departments across the Council work together to support and increase the recruitment of new/additional foster careers.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1. Cabinet is required under the terms of the constitution to receive, consider and respond to recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny.

### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

4.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **5 TIMETABLE**

5.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

8.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

9.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

11.1. None

**12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1. None