

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 13th March 2019

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: Sharon Buckby, 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.

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 working well, previously there was concerns raised about anti-social behaviour and these concerns have been addressed. This is our most successful type of accommodation for care leavers, although the cost is still higher than the LHA rates. All young people entering HMO are risk assessed and views sought from their allocated worker as part of their suitability and matching. Evolve have increased the number of units made

available to Care Leavers and in February 2019, we referred 5 young people, all young people are subject to interviews and risk assessments. The council has been independently approached by local landlords to offer housing, however the cost of the properties is higher than the young person can claim through Housing Benefits, or if they were employed, this would place care leavers at a financial disadvantage.

- 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.
- 2.5 **Shared Lives** – This is now offered as part of the menu of placement options for young people with additional needs. As yet, we have not accessed this provision, mainly related to the needs of the current cohort of Care Leavers, matched to this provision.
- 2.6 **Building Schemes and Quotas** – Work continues along with the housing needs service to enable care leavers to be offered permanent tenancies through the housing quota which is set at 15 per year. This financial year there are 17 young people on the current bidding list, 8 young people have been offered a property to date and 6 young people have moved into their tenancy.
- 2.7 **Staying Put** – There are currently 9 Staying Put placements (with 5 awaiting decision). Staying Put is firmly embedded into social work practice and discussed as part of the planning for independence at a young person's Looked After Review, well before their 18th birthday, however it is fluid and changes throughout the year. The Local Authority has an active recruitment drive and we have successfully secured funding from the Controlling Migration Fund in 2019 and 2020 to assist in recruiting and training foster carers to care for and support UASC and maintain their placements post 18. Merton also operate the staying close practice, which supports young people to remain in the area and community where they were raised in their foster placement.
- 2.8 **Young People in Foster Care** – Young people in foster care now revert to staying put arrangements if they remain.
- 2.9 **Pre-Tenancy Support and ESOL Training** – The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) has continued to rise, we reached our quota of 35 young people in December 2018, when young people turn 18 we revert back to the rota. We were successful in 2019 and again for 2020 in securing funds from the Controlling Migration Fund, enabling the Local Authority to support unaccompanied young people with transitioning to independence and adjusting to being part of the Merton Community. We have also been chosen as a Pilot, by the Early Intervention Project, South London Refugee Association, to work with up to 20 Merton UASC, to achieve their status more efficiently. This will enable our unaccompanied care leavers to move on from semi-independent accommodation more efficiently, gain employment or claim benefits. Each unaccompanied asylum young person, where appropriate has access to ESOL training which is identified and supported via the Virtual School.

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. At the end of last year we undertook a care leavers consultations through Coram Baaf Bright spots, care leavers supported other care leavers with completing the survey, part of the survey included seeking Care Leavers views on their current housing.

2.11 **Encouraging Saving for Rent and Deposit** – This has been explored and the current long term practice supports care leavers with rent and deposit, if required. A procedure is required to be written into the Care Leavers financial policy to change the current practice. The CICC would review the procedure to ensure that the practice was fairly applied to all care leavers. The council has recently agreed to exempt all Merton Care Leavers living in Merton from paying Council Tax up until their 25th Birthday, this is a significant achievement for Merton and sets an example to other Local Authorities of the support offered to Merton Care Leavers.

3. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The scoping of the financial costing of the above has not taken place. A housing strategy which incorporate Care Leavers would assist in identifying how to support care leavers from moving on to independent living to private and shared HMO. Currently London wide, there is insufficient affordable accommodation and the Local Authority does not currently act as a guarantor to Care Leavers so options of leaving local authority care remain limited.

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 ii | 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 iii | 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 iv | 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 |