

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

14 JULY 2016

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

**Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Mrs A McCoy
Environment and Housing – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor M Smith**

ACCOMMODATION FOR CARE LEAVERS AND HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Summary

There is a legal requirement for the Council to provide suitable accommodation to care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 and 17. At this present time the Council currently commissions a range of housing related support for a variety of different client groups. It is acknowledged that this could be expanded and more effectively targeted in order to better meet the needs of care leavers and homeless young people in the borough. This report updates Members on both progress made to date and outlines the further actions proposed in order to address this critical issue.

The report also considers the likely impact of proposed Government welfare and social housing policy reforms on all young people in the borough.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet are asked to:

1. Endorse the proposals detailed within this report (paragraphs 6 – 9) which are aimed at maximising the availability of suitable accommodation for care leavers and homeless young people in the borough as summarised below:

The on-going review of Housing Related Support (HRS) provides an opportunity to address the current shortage of supported accommodation for care leavers and homeless young people:

- *Stage 1:* a review of all existing service contracts has been undertaken. Specifically in relation to care leavers and homeless young people contract variations for appropriate services have specified that providers will (i) be required to allow access to those aged 16years+ and (ii) all future vacancies must be considered by the Youth Accommodation Panel or Housing Gateway Service. This is now in operation.
- *Stage 2:* will include a formal procurement exercise with newly commissioned services/contracts in place for 2017/18. Relevant new contracts will include the revisions detailed above and therefore facilitate on-going access to accommodation services.

- The immediate impact of these actions has been to expand the range of accommodation services available to care leavers and homeless young people, this in turn will support the move-on of young people from temporary supported accommodation to independent living.

2. Receive future reports detailing how the accommodation needs of care leavers and homeless young people continue to be addressed (specifically in relation to the Housing Related Support review) and updates on the broader implications of Government welfare and social housing policy on all young people in our Borough.

3. Reasons for the Recommendation(s)/Decision(s)

The council has a legal duty to provide suitable accommodation for care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 and 17 in the borough.

As a responsible corporate parent, the council is also committed to ensuring that looked after young people and care leavers in the borough are provided with suitable accommodation and appropriate support as they prepare for the transition to independent living.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code).

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code).

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to:

1. Endorse the proposals detailed within this report (paragraphs 6 – 9) which are aimed at maximising the availability of suitable accommodation for care leavers and homeless young people in the borough as summarised below:

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in in turn will support the move-on of young people from temporary supported accommodation to independent living.

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DETAIL

Background

1. All local authorities have a legal duty to assess the needs of care leavers aged 16 and 17 year olds and to provide suitable accommodation. Following the Southwark judgement (Law Lords May 2009 relating to a homeless 16 and 17 year old young person), there is also an obligation on children's services to provide accommodation and support to homeless young people aged 16 and 17 as a looked after child and subsequently as a care leaver.
2. Throughout the legislation and guidance there is an emphasis on joint working between children's services, housing authorities and other statutory, voluntary and private sector partners to tackle youth homelessness.
3. In Stockton, we have a well-established joint protocol that supports both the prevention and tackling of homelessness of young people in the borough. This is supported by the Youth Accommodation Panel a nationally recognised panel which brings together; the Councils Children's Services and Economic Growth and Development Services (EGDS) Housing Team with both commissioned services and private sector housing providers. This multi-agency Panel ensures that the allocation of both accommodation provision and support services to care leavers and homeless young people in the borough is appropriately prioritised.
4. The EGDS Housing Options team (who delivery the Councils homelessness and homeless prevention services) have recently undergone a diagnostic peer review as part of the DCLG Gold Standard Challenge (a national programme set up to help local authorities improve their housing options and homelessness services). Members may recall that National Practitioner Support Service (who undertook this review) identified specific 'good practice' that they would like to share with all of the local authorities in the country in respect of the work undertaken by the Councils Children's Service specifically in relation to their engagement and standard of work with 16 and 17 year olds. This standard of work was highlighted as one of the best in the country incorporating; a well-established approach, senior management commitment evident as well as from front-line officers, a good and clear Joint Protocol in place and one point of access into the services for young people.

Current service needs and demands

5. There are currently pressures in relation to accommodation provision for care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 and 17. Following consideration by the Councils Corporate Management Team in May 2015, a number of initiatives were agreed in order to specifically respond to this issue. These are set out below together with an update on progress in relation to each initiative:
 - ***Additional part time social work post to develop and increase the number of supported lodgings placements***
An appointment has now been made to this post and a marketing strategy has been formulated to seek further providers. To date this has generated three ongoing

assessments of new families.

- **Expansion of regulated accommodation for young people looked after up to 18 years**
Piper House Children's Home has recently been extended to include a semi-independent unit for a young person leaving care (following a similar arrangement at Ayton Place) and the joint venture with Spark of Genius has facilitated access to additional placements.

- **Strengthening relationships with Registered Housing Providers as a means of securing access to accommodation**

The Thirteen Housing Group have worked positively with the council to support this objective, this has included the development of a 'shared accommodation property' within close proximity to children's home to enable/support independent living opportunities for young people. Other properties will be identified for the expansion of this arrangement as/when required.

- **Ensuring commissioned supported living accommodation (Fairways and Parkfield Hall) deliver fit for purpose services**

Discussions have taken place with both providers who are supportive of the Council's agenda, service revisions have subsequently been made which ensure accommodation and support services reflect care leavers/homeless young people's needs.

6. Whilst the actions outlined in paragraph 5 have had a positive impact, the need for additional temporary accommodation services (which support move-on to independent living) for **more complex and hard to reach young people** have also been explored. Initially it was considered that this may be best achieved through an additional, bespoke accommodation service. However following extensive discussions within the Council and with key partners and stakeholders it has been determined that this is no longer the preferred delivery option. As an alternative, the proposed strategy is to seek to maximise access to a broader range of existing supported accommodation units. In order to progress this, detailed conversations have taken place between Children's Services, EGDS (Housing Team) and Adults and Health and this option will be further progressed through the ongoing Housing Related Support (HRS) review.
7. HRS services are commissioned services which deliver a combination of floating and accommodation based housing-related support to vulnerable people in the borough. The review is being led by the Adults and Health Directorate and a staged review programme has been agreed; stage 1 includes a review of current service contracts (including issuing contract variations if required) to ensure they deliver Council priorities during 2016/17, followed by stage 2 a formal procurement exercise with newly commissioned services/ contracts in place for 2017/18.
8. Specifically in relation to care leavers/homeless young people, contract variations for (appropriate) commissioned services for 2016/17 will ensure that:
 - As vacancies arise all future referrals will be considered by the Youth Accommodation Panel or Housing Gateway Service, this will ensure that appropriate priority is given to placements for Stockton 'only' residents for commissioned services.
 - The range of accommodation services for young people aged 16 and 17 is expanded.
 - The Council can better facilitate the move-on of young people through hostel / supported accommodation to independent living when this is appropriate.
 - The Council will have a greater knowledge of the mix of young people in placement at any given time which will enable greater consideration to be given to the appropriateness of any new placements from a safeguarding perspective.

9. Conversations with existing service providers to the above interim proposals have been positive and have now been implemented. Whilst the re-procurement exercise will ensure that these changes will be included as standard within all (appropriate) newly commissioned services.
10. Following recent discussions at the Councils Senior Management Team in April 2016, it has been agreed that colleagues across EGDS, Adults and Health (due to the ongoing HRS review) and Children's Services continue to work closely together to ensure that the Council is able to respond appropriately to the changing accommodation needs of care leavers and homeless young people and that further reports be considered both by SMT and Cabinet to ensure effective progress is being made.

The broader impact of welfare and social reform on young people

11. Whilst the primary focus of this report is on care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 and 17, it should be noted that looking ahead there are a number of significant challenges which are likely to have a negative impact on **all** young people seeking accommodation. These challenges include:

- (a) Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

Private sector rented accommodation: the amount of LHA most single people under 35 years can claim in the private rented sector is capped at a 'shared accommodation rate' (which is currently £57.34 per week). The shared accommodation rate has been in operation for some time and acts to limit the type of accommodation that single people (under 35) are able to rent in the private rented sector. As a result a number of private rented landlords have indicated they have seen a reduction in demand for self-contained accommodation and an increase in demand for shared accommodation via houses of multiple occupation.

Registered Housing Provider accommodation: In the last Autumn Statement, Government announced that from 2018 housing benefit (and universal credit) for all new social rented tenancies that began from April 2016 onwards will be capped at LHA rates. This change will have a radical impact on those under 35 years, as the level of housing benefit (universal credit) they can claim when renting from a registered provider (RP) property will also be capped at LHA shared room rate. This will have a significant impact on both our RP partners and the ability of all young people to access affordable rented accommodation.

As detailed above the LHA level for those under 35 is £57.34 per week, this is considerably less than a self-contained registered provider 1 bed flat. The potential impact of this change will be two-fold; it will limit the range of properties that under 35 year olds will be able to afford to rent from our RP partners and in addition it is unlikely that RPs will be able to fund (due to restricted rent levels) new build single person accommodation.

Whilst those under 35 years will be able to make an application for Discretionary Housing Payments to cover the rental shortfalls, this is a discretionary (and not a statutory) payment, it is intended to be short-term and will be subject to the availability of funding.

- (b) Removal of Housing Benefit for 18-21 year olds

As part of the Summer Budget 2015, the Chancellor announced the removal of entitlement to the housing element of universal credit (currently Housing Benefit) for young people aged 18 – 21, with some exceptions from April 2017. The stated rationale is to "ensure young people in the benefits system face the same choices as young people who work and who may not be able to afford to leave home." Certain categories of young people will be exempt from the removal of Housing Benefit, current published exceptions include vulnerable young people; those who may not be able to return home to live with their

parents; parents; and those who have been in work for 6 months prior to making a claim. Organisations such as Shelter, Crisis and Centrepoin t whilst welcoming that the limitation has not been extended to those under 25years as originally mooted, have expressed concerns against the removal of what they describe as an “essential safety net” which can offer a lifeline to young people faced with homelessness.

(c) *The proposed ‘local housing allowance cap’ for all supported housing*

As referenced in bullet (a) the Government has announced that from 2018 LHA rates will be applied to housing benefit (and universal credit) for all new social tenancies which began from April 2016 onwards. Currently rents in supported accommodation (which covers a broad range of client groups including people with learning disabilities, older people with support needs, single homeless people, homeless families, young people including teenage parents and those leaving care etc.) are considerably highly than the local housing allowance rates. RPs (at both a local and national level) have indicated that should this cap be introduced supported accommodation schemes will become financially unviable and will potentially be at risk of closure. Following pressure from RPs and other stakeholders (including the National Housing Federation and Local Government Association), the introduction of this cap has been postponed by 12 months pending a broader review of its potential impact. An announcement is expected towards the end of 2016 and once known it is proposed that a further report be presented back to Cabinet to update members of the outcome of this review and its potential impact on the broad range of supported accommodation currently available within the Borough

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

12. The proposals detailed within paragraphs 6-9 of this report are aimed as directly addressing the accommodation needs of care leavers and homeless young people in our Borough, they were informed by a detailed needs assessment which has examined both current and project service demands and explored how these accommodation needs can be best addressed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13. In relation to accommodation costs, homeless young people are eligible for housing benefit although care leavers are not. The council will continue to meet the costs of accommodation and additional support for care leavers through existing service budgets.
14. The proposed variations to existing HRS contracts as detailed within paragraphs 8/9 and re-procured services will be delivered within the existing HRS budget without resulting in any additional financial pressures to Council budgets.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15. The proposals contained within this report will ensure that the Council continues to discharge its statutory duty towards care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 and 17 and remains compliant with the Southwark judgement.

RISK ASSESSMENT

16. The provision of accommodation to care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 and 17 is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk. Members are also asked to note that a further risk assessment will be undertaken once the outcomes of the on-going

Governmental review regarding the proposed 'LHA cap' on supported housing accommodation are known.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

17. The provision of accommodation to care leavers and young people aged 16 and 17 contribute to a number of key policy principles contained within the Council Plan. The proposals detailed within the body of this report target a key vulnerable group within the borough, thereby contributing to equality of opportunity for this group.
19. Access to suitable and stable accommodation for all young people will increase their chances of being able to take part in appropriate education, employment and training activities, in turn contributing to the economic prosperity of the borough.
20. The reduction in homeless young people contributes to the development of strong and healthy communities.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

21. The provision of suitable accommodation to care leavers and homeless young people aged 16 and 17 make a positive and direct contribution to the Councils corporate parenting responsibilities.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

22. There has been no formal consultation to date with ward members in relation to this issue.

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Education related? No.

Background Papers Not applicable.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:
All

Property
There are no direct implications for Council property.