

CROYDON COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 9 July 2014
AGENDA ITEM NO:	9
SUBJECT:	Report on Suitable Accommodation for Care Leavers
LEAD OFFICER:	Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director, Children, Families & Learning
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Learning
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT: Children and Families Partnership Priority	
FINANCIAL IMPACT:	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: n/a	
1. RECOMMENDATION	
1.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note this report.	

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report has been requested for the Corporate Parenting Panel for information about the accommodation of our care leavers. Members of this Panel positively received the previous report on the Education, Employment and Training of Care Leavers and were impressed with the very high number judged to be in suitable accommodation. Members asked for further details about the range of accommodation in use and the standards of suitability that apply.

3. REPORT ON CARE LEAVERS ACCOMMODATION

- 3.1 The LAC Leaving Care Service supports 814 care leavers aged between 16-25 yrs. The monitoring of suitable accommodation for those aged 18-21 years shows that between 90-95% are at any one time judged to be in suitable accommodation according to the criteria set out in the legislation. The accommodation of the remaining percentage of these care leavers is either judged to be not suitable, in the assessment of the personal advisors (for

example, because of poor repair), or because it is accommodation that does not meet the 'suitability' criteria of the regulations (for example, remand or prison, psychiatric hospital) or because the care leaver will not keep in touch with the Leaving Care Service and so their accommodation is unknown. Below 18 years the care leaver would be returning to a Family and Friends environment and the social worker will be a regular visitor, after the age of 21 years the statutory duties for care leavers largely cease unless they are in higher education or wishing to access education when a duty of assistance applies. A care leaver aged over 21 years will have been maintaining their own tenancy for 3 years and this is no longer tracked by the Leaving Care Service as they are of age and experience to choose and maintain their own accommodation and tenancy arrangements.

This report demonstrates the considerable achievement of the Leaving Care Service and its partners across the council and the private housing sector in ensuring suitable accommodation for 90% and more of care leavers aged 18-21 years. Croydon is impacted by a shortage of social housing and a shortage of private sector rented accommodation and young people in this age group are in general. The achievement of the Leaving Care Service and its partners is all the more significant considering that approximately 160 of these care leavers are without recourse to public funds because of their asylum status.

There are two main forms of accommodation provided to care leavers and these are, *supported*, and *independent*. Supported accommodation provides some level of support service to the care leaver because of their assessed needs for additional support, for a period of time, in making the transition fully to adult independence. Independent accommodation is without any additional support in the accommodation, but the support from the personal advisor continues to age 21 or 24 if in education. The large majority of our care leavers are in independent accommodation; 652 out of 814 (80%).

3.2 Types of supported accommodation

The range of supported accommodation provided to Care Leavers includes the following types:

Shared housing: these offer temporary or permanent accommodation and care leavers have their own room but share bathroom, kitchen and communal areas with other young adults. It is similar to a hall of residence at university. Support is delivered by support workers who may have an office in the property or visit on a regular basis.

Self-contained flats: care leavers have their own flat or a studio flat. The provider may manage a block of flats, or may provide single unit flats in buildings across the locality. Support is provided by support workers who may have an office in the block or offer a visiting service.

Hostel: accommodation is temporary and intended to provide a high level of support; care leavers have their own bedrooms and share communal areas with other young adults. Unlike shared housing meals are provided and cleaning services. Support from workers is provided on a 24-hour basis,

seven days a week, every week of the year. This is a transitional arrangement leading to greater independence.

Foyers for young people: Foyers offer temporary accommodation for young people (usually 17—25 years of age) with support and access to employment, training and education. The accommodation may be shared or self-contained. Support is provided by support workers who are usually based on site and may be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Training flats: care leavers who are planning to go for Higher Education are offered accommodation in self-contained flats for a short period of time to give them a chance to see what it would be like to live on their own. Workers then assess any needs for future support / skills development.

Supported Lodgings: are families provided by CAYSH after referral through SNAP and they provide the care leaver with a family environment, but one in which the care leaver is expected to exercise a degree of adult independence and responsibility. The care leaver can stay with this family under this arrangement until he / she is ready for independent living.

Mother and baby units: provide temporary shared accommodation for care leavers who are young parents or about to become parents, who need some extra support with their new born until they are settled and independent. There is 24 hours key work support available in these units to teach them child care and life skills.

Shared Lives arrangement for care leavers with a disability: are arrangements for care leavers with disabilities to stay with an adult carer and these arrangements are made through the Adults Disabilities Team

3.3 Types of independent accommodation

Local Authority Housing: the long waiting list for social housing makes it extremely difficult for care leavers to obtain a council accommodation, unless they are vulnerable and have complex social and housing needs.

Housing Associations: again demand for this accommodation is high and young adults are not a priority but there are a few care leavers who have been provided a Housing Association accommodation.

Private rented sector accommodation (PRS): this can be studio flats or a 2-3 bedroom house that is shared by care leavers (and only by care leavers), the properties are checked and registered with the council to obtain the legally required House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) license.

Landlord Bond Scheme (previously known as Sponsored Tenancy Scheme): are studio, and one or two bedroom flats provided by private landlords in partnership with the council's housing department and offering accommodation for care leavers who are indigenous or have relevant

immigration status. The council acts as sponsor and guarantor to the landlord.

Staying Put Arrangement: the White Paper guidance issued in 2013 became legislation with the Children and Families Act 2014 and provides the framework for care leavers remaining with their former foster carers as a Staying Put arrangement. The council's Staying Put Policy is an item at this meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel and should be read in conjunction with this report

Family and Friends: some care leavers choose to stay with their family members or relatives or friends. The arrangement is monitored by the Leaving Care Service.

Emergency accommodation: the last resort when the care leaver's current accommodation has broken down and eviction served for varied reasons. This accommodation might be a hostel provided by the council's housing department or an emergency Homeless Shelter provided by CAYSH. It could be a B&B for one night but this very rarely the case and at time of writing this report that are no care leavers in overnight B&B.

No Recourse Accommodation: the Leaving Care Service has developed good partnerships with a number of private rental sector accommodation providers which are used for care leavers with No Recourse to Public Funds. The rent is fixed and claimed back from the Home Office. These are shared accommodations which can range from 3 to 6 bedrooms, and the properties are checked and registered by the council's housing department for the required HMO license. The leaving care workers keep in touch with the landlords/ estate agents for the NRPF properties on a daily basis, due to the frequent changes that take place in terms of a young person's asylum situation. There is also a need to receive regular updates on the vacancies in these accommodations so that immediate moves can be arranged from and to these accommodations. The landlords/ agents are very aware of the changing scenario and quite flexible with accommodation arrangements.

3.4 Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMO)

The majority of Private Rented Sector properties for the care leaver age group are likely to be in shared arrangements with other young people. Approximately half of care leavers living in independent accommodation (397 = 48.8%) will be sharing a house with other young people. These arrangements are called Homes of Multiple Occupancy. The council has a statutory duty to monitor and register these arrangements. The landlord is required to obtain a license from the Council if the property is occupied by three or more persons. The license is required so that Council can control and monitor standards. The Council makes monitors the standards of:

- ◆ safety
- ◆ good repair
- ◆ smoke detectors
- ◆ fire exits

- ◆ sinks, cookers, baths and toilets for the tenants.

The Council will only provide a license if they are satisfied that:

- ◆ The property is suitable for occupation by the number of people expected
- ◆ The license holder is a 'fit and proper person'
- ◆ The property manager, if there is one, is a 'fit and proper person'
- ◆ The property management arrangements are satisfactory
- ◆ The financial stability of the provider is evident.

The license is normally given for 5 years, and The HMO officer conducts regular visits to the property to ensure the property is of the required standard. (Information obtained from Croydon Council housing website)

3.5 The judgment of suitability of accommodation

There are two elements to the judgement of suitability of accommodation. The first element is based on the assessed needs of the young person by the social worker including the wishes and views of the young person. The social workers in the Permanence 1 and 2 Services of the Looked after Children Service discuss each case at the Housing Panel which occurs every fortnight. The Housing Panel agrees a housing plan for the care leaver depending on his / her needs. The housing plan is taken forward by the allocated social worker and the accommodation is put in place before the care leavers 18th birthday. Once the case is transferred to the Leaving Care Team, the personal advisor or the social worker follows up on this plan based on the needs of the care leavers. Accommodation is identified according to the following criteria:

1. Distance from education establishment
2. Local connections
3. Care Leaver's personal preference
4. Availability of accommodation.

The second element to the judgement of suitability is the statutory standards. This is set out in Regulation 6, 7, & 9 and Schedule 2 of the Planning Transition to Adulthood Guidance, which includes the Care Leavers regulations (England) 2010.

General state of the accommodation:

- 1) Is the accommodation furnished or unfurnished? If furnished - is the furniture in a good state? If not furnished, we provide the necessary furniture for each care leaver. Is the flooring in good condition? If not, what can be done to improve the state of the accommodation?
- 2) Is there access to food preparation and storage facilities 24 hours a day?
- 3) Is there access to utilities and services, including heating, hot water, electricity, water?

Safety:

- 1) Does the landlord possess a current gas safety/Safety certificate?
- 2) Are there policies and procedures to maintain safety such as fire?
- 3) Is the relevant fire safety equipment available, fitted and in working order?
- 4) Is there a system to establish who is at the door without compromising security (e.g. peep whole; chain; CCTV)

Location:

- 1) Location public transport?
- 2) Community safety - is the area safe at night (including information about local crime characteristics)?

Support:

- 1) How will housing related support respond to the young person's assessed needs.
- 2) Where accommodation is to be provided in a domestic setting (not with former foster carers) how have hosts been selected, assessed and trained.
- 3) Was assessment subjected to independent scrutiny? Who by?
- 4) How are supported lodgings providers supervised? What arrangements are in place for keeping their suitability under review?

Tenancy agreement & Affordability:

- 1) Are all the charges are detailed in the agreement (e.g. deposit; rent, service charge)?
- 2) Are utilities available are competitively priced?
- 3) Does the landlord have insurance in place for the buildings and their contents and are there arrangements to insure the young person possessions?

Young person's views:

- 1) Does the young person think the accommodation is suitable?
- 2) Does the accommodation meet the young person's assessed needs and aspirations, as set out in Pathway plan?
- 3) Does the young person understand how the accommodation and related support is intended to respond to their assessed needs as set out in their pathway plan?

For quality assurance of the accommodation and the Leaving Care Service meets with all our providers to enforce the above criteria. The service ensures that there is a HMO license and safety certificates for any HMO and the service only uses known landlords of good reputation. The allocated worker visits the accommodation prior to the care leaver moving in and then immediately afterwards. They also conduct regular two to six monthly visits to check the well-being of the care leavers and the on-going suitability of accommodation. The care leavers contact their workers if there are issues in

the property, such as repairs needed, and the workers liaise directly with the landlord.

3.6 Some sample case examples of the work undertaken by the Leaving Care Service to ensure suitability of accommodation

JD, aged 20

JD has been evicted from his supported accommodation where he thrashed the property and has been charged with criminal damage. He became intentionally homeless due to the above reason, and hence housing department would not consider his application for a landlord bond scheme or homelessness route. Once he became homeless, JD started engaging with different services like the alcohol and drugs team, Adult Mental health team, and started to make positive decisions and stopped taking alcohol and drugs. He went back to live with his father, and few months later he was supported to move into a studio flat by the Leaving Care Team. JD had made complaints about his homelessness situation but did agree to take responsibility for any future tenancy that might be secured. Later on there were issues at the property where the roof was leaking and dampness, the allocated personal advisor worker liaised with the estate agent and work was carried out on the property. However JD decided to end the tenancy and re-join his father again. JD remains in his father's home but is now requesting a tenancy of his own.

MO, aged 20

MO is a university student and struggling with her finances and has failed to pay her rent. The landlord asked her to leave. MO has told her personal advisor that she might stop the course due to the financial pressures although she is in receipt of the student loan and a bursary provided by the university for care leavers. Her personal advisor is working with her to develop a budget plan taking her income and expenditure into account and exploring any other resources to help. Her personal advisor is also looking at cheaper accommodation options with the University Students Welfare Officer. The personal advisor is having ongoing discussions with the current landlord, ensuring that MO pays the rent each month as a priority. MO has paid off her rent arrears.

BS, aged 18

BS is a college student, who has just turned 18. He wanted to continue to live with the foster carer, and arrangements were made for BS to stay in the accommodation as a private tenant under the room rental framework. His accommodation costs are met by his housing benefits.

MN aged 19

MN is a care leaver with behavioural issues and mental health issues. He was living in a shared accommodation from the age of 18, but he was served with

an eviction notice because he did not keep his room or the communal areas clean. He refused to move into a supported accommodation and demanded a studio flat so he could be on his own. Because of his needs, providers were unwilling to give him accommodation of his own. The Leaving Care Service managed to achieve a compromise by obtaining a supported accommodation but which provided MN with his own flat. MN grew with the trust placed in him and with the additional support he has maintained his tenancy. He is keeping his flat clean and he does all his own washing, cooking and budgeting. MN can remain in this accommodation long term until he feels ready for a fully independent tenancy.

YS aged 19

YS is a care leaver who initially had limited leave to remain in the UK, but this was refused at a later tribunal hearing and his asylum claim was refused. He was living in a private rented property paid from housing benefit, but when his asylum claim was rejected he lost all right to benefits. His allocated worker met together with his current landlord to explain the situation but the landlord was unwilling to accept the lower fixed-rate payment made for the accommodation of care leavers who are NRPF and YS had to leave his flat. He is now accommodated in a house with three other care leavers who are NRPF by a landlord who is working in partnership with the Leaving Care Service. The house is registered and licensed by the council as a HMO.

3.7 Conclusion

The problems faced in the general population by young people aged 18 years and over of finding their own independent accommodation are acute because of the shortage of housing options and their lack of attractiveness to private landlords who are looking for employed adults able to compete at a higher rental rate. Care leavers face additional challenges to their peers because of their life experiences and because they may often lack a family to offer some financial security or to act as guarantor with landlords. The achievement of the Leaving Care Service is to be able to achieve year on year the suitable accommodation of 90% or more of the many hundreds of care leavers – London's largest population of care leavers. Partnerships between the council's housing staff, the third sector and with local landlords are strong and effective. However the risks to this achievement are those risks associated with a volatile housing market, a shortage of housing stock, cuts to public expenditure, and the low priority of care leavers for providers in general. Work is on-going to strengthen partnerships and engage proactively with landlords and providers to increase capacity and the recognition by the Corporate Parenting Panel for the priority that this work should be accorded across all departments and with those providers with whom the council does business will assist in raising the profile and awareness of the housing needs of care leavers.

4. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Considerations are contained within the report.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: London Borough of Croydon Leaving Care Policy
2014; Children and Families Act 2014