

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 22 nd September 2022
SUBJECT:	Housing & Support for Care Experienced Young People in Croydon <i>Is this good enough for our young people?</i>
LEAD OFFICER:	Shaun Hanks: Head of Service, Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr. Maria Gatland
WARDS:	All
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	None

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report provides an overview of the housing options and pathway for young people leaving care in Croydon. It provides a comparison of the use of different accommodation types and an explanation of each. The report then outlines some of the recent achievements and current challenges.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES 2020-2024

The recommendations and future actions outlined at the end of the report focus on all three of the council priorities: alleviating the impact of poverty for our most vulnerable children and young people as they become independent; ensuring an affordable and quality service; providing value for money.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- i) Continued work with housing colleagues to improve the offer to young care experienced young people namely:
 - Enabling access to housing register at 17
 - Increasing the priority allocation of social housing for care leavers from 2% to 10%.
- ii) Improving the support that Care experienced young people receive in preparing to live independently via two new specialist PA posts and the use of 'young inspectors' in checking properties.
- iii) In liaison with our Housing colleagues, we are ambitious to deliver the best for our children and young people as corporate parents, developing a framework towards independence that prepares and provides for our young people's specific housing needs.

Housing & Support for Care experienced young people in Croydon

Introduction:

We currently have responsibility for 714 care experienced young people aged between 18-25. As young people transition to adulthood one of the most significant aspects, that impacts on wellbeing and achievement, is having a settled and appropriate home environment.

Suitable accommodation

Each year the local authority reports on the types and suitability of the accommodation that Care experienced young people are living in at the ages of 18-21. (Children Looked After return SSSDA903)

Suitability is not defined rigidly, however the criteria of Safe, Secure and Affordable are outlined in the guidance. Any emergency accommodation used in a crisis would be graded unsuitable, but short-term accommodation used to help gain a long-term home would be seen as suitable.

The types of accommodation reported on are:

- **With parents/relatives**
- **Staying put-** Where young people remain living with their foster carers at from 18-21. As young people are no longer looked after a legal agreement is set up where an allowance is paid, made up from part of a young person's universal credit and a contribution from the council.
- **Community home/residential care-** For young people who require ongoing residential care due to their significant care needs.
- **Semi-Independent** (Supported hostel/trainer flats)- These arrangements enable a young person to live independently with adults in the household, either full time or part time, who provide 'support' rather than 'care'.
- **Self-contained** with floating support
- **Supported lodgings-** This is an arrangement where an individual provides accommodation within their household and 'supports' a young person.
- **Foyers-** These provide hostel type accommodation, with an expectation of engagement in Education, Employment and Training for young people who are homeless.
- **Independent tenancy**
- **Emergency / homeless accommodation**
- **Bed and Breakfast**
- **Custody**

As at the end of August 91% of our young people were placed in suitable accommodation. This compares well against the 2021 national average of 81%

Table 1

Current 17–21-year-old 903 return data. (566 young people)

<u>Type of accommodation</u>	<u>%</u>
With parents/relatives	4%
Staying put	20%
Community home	1%
Semi-independent	3%
Supported lodgings	2%
Independent (Housing association)	2%
Independent (Landlord Bond Scheme)	27%
Independent (Private Rented)	23%
Independent	8%
Unknown/ Emergency/Homeless/ B&B	3%
Foyers	1%
Custody	3%
other	3%

Support for YP to live independently

Whilst many young people are keen to live independently, the realities of this can be daunting. There are many elements that young adults find themselves struggling with for the first time. In addition to the independent living skills such as budgeting, cooking & cleaning, young people also require support with managing emotionally and making the most of employment and education opportunities.

Every care experienced young person over 18 will have someone who is a Personal Adviser, and they will provide practical and emotional support to help young people transition to adulthood. The support provided to individuals varies according to their need and is outlined and reviewed via their Pathway Plan.

As corporate parents our support needs to be guided by the principle of *'is this good enough for my child?'* as they transition in to adulthood. Many of our young people have additional needs and vulnerabilities that most of the population do not have, it is therefore important that support goes above and beyond what the majority of young people require.

The Care Leavers Offer outlines the basic support that can be provided, some of the important aspects are:

- i) Help with obtaining relevant identity documents (e.g., Birth Certificates, Passports, driving licences) in order that young people can set up bank accounts/ claim benefits.
- ii) Deposit and 1 month's rent in advance – within Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates
- iii) Providing the equivalent of Universal Credit for the first 5 weeks while UC is processed.
- iv) Setting up home allowance- this enables young people to purchase essential items, such as washing machines, beds, cutlery etc. up to a limit of £2000.
- v) Council Tax Relief is provided at 100% for Croydon care Leavers.
- vi) Support with Educational, Employment and Training costs.

Whilst all the PA's are able to help with welfare benefit advice and housing issues, there is a need for greater knowledge and co-ordination at a local level. Two PA's have been recruited who will focus on helping individuals and other PA's with housing issues, as well as developing an up to date knowledge of welfare benefit changes and advice.

Transition to adulthood:

'Leaving home and becoming an adult is daunting for anyone, but for many care leavers this means moving to a completely unfamiliar place or to live alone, and managing cooking, cleaning, and budgeting for the first time, often with little support. Care leavers need a gradual transition and to be taught the skills they need to live independently. They need to be kept informed about the next steps, for example knowing the plan early enough to get used to it before they leave care.'

Many young people reported feeling alone or isolated after they left care, but professionals did not always consider emotional well-being as part of leaving care plans. Professionals should recognise that not all children will need the same level of assistance, and some will need ongoing support after leaving care.'

'Ready or Not', Care Leaver view on Leaving Care. January 2022

As young people develop, they require different support. Croydon has effective support provided through E.M.P.I.R.E for all its Looked After Children which has started a 'Sunday Service' group ,where young people can come for food and discussion about issues affecting them as young adults. This is in addition to the emotional and practical support that Social Workers and Personal Advisers provide.

The community also supports care experienced young people and the 'Esther Outreach' group provides a space where Independent Living Skills are learnt and a sense of group identity and support is enabled in partnership with Council staff.

Esther Outreach has recently reached the finals of the Children & Young People Now Awards for 2022.

Pathways

Our current Housing Pathway consists of many of the reported options outlined above, please see appendix i) for a visual outline of the pathway.

Staying Put

Young people are supported wherever possible to remain with their foster carers as young adults, and can remain as Staying Put until they are 21 years old (or until they finish their course of study)

We have made exceptional progress in this area for our young people and the numbers of our young people staying put has significantly increased over the last 2 years.

At the current time 115 young people are Staying Put.

Semi-independent supported accommodation

This provision is funded post 18 via the service for the very small percentage of young people (3%) who are not able to transition into any of the other supported options. We currently have a low use of this type of provision. These types of provision are not regulated and there is a national drive to improve the standards. Significant positive progress has been made within this area in the last 18 months, resulting in many more young people transitioning on to alternative options successfully at 18.

University

In the last year 30 of our young people were attending university.

Our young people can and do transition to university and their accommodation needs are met via general student pathways, be those halls of residence or shared accommodation. We provide vacation accommodation for these young people for up to 26 weeks or support them to remain around their university or with friends for the holidays. We also have strong links with the universities to ensure our young people are able to access the 52-week halls provision, if they wish, and other care leaver support provided by some universities.

Supported Housing Pathways

We have 2 foyer type supported housing options within the borough that our young people are able to access for accommodation:

- Ingram Court YMCA for young people 18 to 21 and
- Fitz Millennium Centre which provides supported accommodation for young people from 18 to 30; We use this provision for our older young people.

We also have access to a supported housing pathway for our young people with more significant emotional needs, learning difficulties, or those who require significantly more support to enable them to transition on to independent living. This comprises of 3 and 4 bed homes that are supported by staff to support young people to transition on to the next stage of independence. This provision is generally utilised for an assessment period of between 3 to 6 months during which time the next step for moving on to independence is identified and supported. There is limited capacity within this provision.

Guaranteed Rent Scheme accommodation, Private Lease Accommodation.

At the current time we have 411 young people (aged 18-25) within this provision.

Young people who do not wish to be provided accommodation within the supported pathway, are able to access independent accommodation via the Guaranteed Rent Scheme pathway (GRS).

GRS is the provision of privately rented accommodation for our young people which is managed by our housing colleagues. The accommodation comprises of a room in a shared house, a studio flat or a stand-alone dwelling. There are capacity issues within this offer and stand-alone self-contained accommodation is increasingly difficult to source. Young people are provided with a tenancy which is with the Local Authority. These properties are generally managed and inspected by the Local Authority and is available to young people up to the age of 21.

NRPF Accommodation. (No Recourse to Public Funds)

At the current time we have 45 young people within this provision, this has reduced by approximately 50% in the last 18 months, supported by the work with our Home Office Colleagues and more robust and effective oversight of the use of void management in our block purchase arrangements.

This accommodation is provided by our housing colleagues and comprises of shared houses for our young people who do not yet have an immigration status. This provision was formerly funded by a block purchase agreement, however significant work has progressed in this area, and a new contract is in place which ensures we are only funding provision that is in use.

Young people transition from this accommodation as they achieve immigration status. Young people also leave this provision if they deemed All Rights Exhausted by the Home Office, who then provide for their needs and accommodation under immigration legislation and arrangements. This provision provides support up to the age of 25 or the outcome of immigration matters, which-ever is soonest.

Support to access Private Rental Accommodation

Young people who identify that their needs are not able to be met within any of the above provision are supported to access the private rental market with the support of their PA and the provision of one months' rent and one months' deposit. Care Experienced People are supported by the government to be able to access a higher rate of housing benefit to assist with affordability. This type of provision is very

difficult for our young people to access due to costs and guarantor requirements. There is a concern that with increasing rents, evictions, and an increase in the cost of living this solution will not be sustainable for many young people starting out in work.

Provision of Social tenancies

At the current time our housing colleagues provide 15 priority housing nominations for our cohort of young people. Enabling them to fast track within the housing bidding system to secure a tenancy with the council. We are currently in discussion with our Housing colleagues with the aim to increase this offer to be closer in line with our statistical neighbours. The current offer represents 2% of our total Care Leaver population, we are hoping to be supported to achieve a 10% offer of priority nominations annually for our young people.

Our young people are supported to ensure they are placed on the housing register, and our housing colleagues are currently reviewing their practice to enable care experienced young people to access the housing register at age 17. The level of priority is at level 3 (moderate) for Care Leavers- we would want this to increase to give Care Experienced young people a higher priority. Our housing colleagues are also reviewing their systems with an intention of implementing an 'auto bid' process for our young people.

Achievements

We have successfully been awarded with DFE funding to support the provision of two specialist Personal Adviser posts, who will focus on Housing and reducing risk of homelessness. We have successfully recruited to these posts, and they will be in service by Mid October 2022. This will increase both capacity and expertise in the service to assist our young people around housing issues and challenges.

We have established a clear link with our colleagues in both the Housing benefit and the council tax departments and have an outline plan to enable us to more effectively support our young people in these areas and reduce debt and arrears for both rent and council tax.

We are working closely with our colleagues in housing, to look at improvements to how our young people are placed and monitored on the housing register. Consideration of them being able to be on the register from age 17 is one area and increasing priority housing nominations from 2% to 10% per annum is another. These changes would have a significant positive impact for our young people and their outcomes going forward.

We have achieved 15 priority housing nominations for our young people in the last year, enabling them to secure a council tenancy, which will support their journey on to successful independence and lift them out to the financial poverty trap of private rental arrangements.

We have implemented a new contract across our NRPF providers that supports higher standards and expectations for the property and safeguarding of our young people and also ensures that we are effectively managing voids and minimising any overspend.

We have reduced the number of young people who were All Rights Exhausted (ARE) and living in our NRPF housing provision significantly, allowing for eligible young people to be accommodated within this provision and also ensuring best value and appropriate usage in this area of accommodation.

Challenges

There are several challenges that Croydon faces in supporting care experienced young people to achieve permanent and suitable accommodation.

Capacity:

41% of complaints through the advocacy service are in relation to housing issues for our young people.

The availability of suitable housing stock and options for young people is a significant issue within London. Many of our Care experienced young people have remained on the Housing Register for several years, with no suitable vacancies being identified or made available. As outlined in the pathway appendix i), this can lead to the prolonged use of privately rented accommodation that is becoming increasingly unaffordable and may result in young people presenting as homeless at a point of crisis (e.g., eviction). As outlined above the provision of 15 priority tenancies each year in total is not an appropriate level for our Care Leaver population. We are discussing with housing colleagues increased capacity in managing voids across housing stock and prioritising care leavers.

Quality & Safety:

Although many of the tenancies are viewed as 'suitable' there is room to improve the inspection standards being used. We would like to introduce 'young inspectors' who are care experienced and can provide additional insight in to the safety, security and affordability of housing offers.

Future Plans

As outlined above there are several initiatives that we are undertaking to improve the experience for our young people in seeking and obtaining a permanent home.

- i) The priority that Care experienced young people are given on the housing register does not enable a quick transfer to social housing. There are options being explored such as, accessing the register at 17; improving the way that voids are managed and the recruitment of two specialist PA's who will work closely with the housing department to champion Care experienced young people housing needs.
- ii) Aiming to increase the priority allocation of social housing for care experienced young people from 2% to 10%.

- iii) Improving the support that Care experienced young people receive in preparing to live independently via two new specialist PA posts and the use of 'young inspectors' in checking properties.

In liaison with our Housing Colleagues, we are ambitious to deliver the best for our children and young people as corporate parents, developing a framework towards independence that prepares and provides for our young people's specific housing needs.

1. CONSULTATION

- 1.1. This report is an overview of the current service provision and sets out improvements that are already in consultation with Housing.

2. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1. **Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations**
-The proposals set out do not adversely impact on revenue.
- 2.2. **The effect of the decision – N/A**
- 2.3. **Risks - N/A**
- 2.4. **Options – N/A**
- 2.5. **Future savings/efficiencies**
 - A reduction in complaints in relation to Housing issues for Care Experienced young people represents an efficiency saving in reducing officer time investigating and responding.

3. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

N/A

4. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

N/A

5. EQUALITIES IMPACT

N/A

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

N/A

7. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

N/A

8. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?

NO

8 Approved by: Róisín Madden Director Children's Social Care

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

Appendix 1 - Housing pathways and options post 18