

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 14 December 2017

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

SUBJECT: Supported Accommodation for Children in Care and Care Leavers

WARD: Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To seek approval to a revised approach to supporting care leavers in their own accommodation via:

- Phase 1 – directly commissioning the majority of accommodation related support; and
- Phase 2 – leasing a small group living setting, possibly with the provision of an emergency bed.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That the proposed approach is endorsed.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The planning for all children in care needs to consider their most appropriate accommodation options as they approach 18 years of age and leave care.

3.2 For many, there is a transition period between residential or foster care and taking up their own tenancy. This is usually referred to as semi-independent or supported living. Under this arrangement, the Council secures a property for the young person from a RSL or a private landlord. The support that the person needs to develop sufficient independence skills and become tenancy ready is then spot purchased from one of the recognised providers on the North West Leaving Care Framework.

3.3 The level of support can range from 24 hours a day at the beginning of such an arrangement, to 5-10 hours per week as a young person approaches 18 years of age.

3.4 The spot purchase nature of the current arrangements present a number of challenges –

- (i) it is difficult to coordinate the range of packages across the borough.
- (ii) the number of providers results in some inconsistent approaches/practice and varying quality of outcomes. During 2016, 10 different organisations have been utilised to provide support.
- (iii) the individual cost is high and more difficult to influence
- (iv) where housing can't be sourced via a RSL or private landlord, the organisations who provide the support charge a premium for also providing the accommodation.
- (v) there is no flexibility in a spot purchase arrangement to allow for support to be 'diverted' to where it was required.

3.5 The number of care leavers in Halton has historically been around 60 at any one time. However, due to recent increases in the number of children in care, particularly the number of older young people entering the care system, the number of care leavers is also rising. Currently there are 68 and this figure is predicted to be increased or at least maintained for the next few years.

3.6 In addition to the increased number, the complexity of those leaving care is also greater, with a significant number of them presenting anti-social behaviour linked to substance misuse, offending, mental health and the impact of their home experiences. This means that they require significant support to make progress towards independent living.

3.7 There are currently 45 young people in care between the age of 16 and 17 (18th birthday) that Halton is responsible for providing with accommodation. Of those, 17 are in accommodation and receiving related support through semi-independent living arrangements.

3.8 The types of semi-independent living for 16-18 year olds include:

- 2 bedroom properties where they can be intensively supported during the day and also, at least initially, during the night as well with the presence of staff sleeping in
- 1 bedroom properties where young people live alone, with no 'sleep in' support but the assessed amount of support during the day/evening
- Group accommodation where several young people share a property.

3.9 A number of internal and external factors have put pressure on service to change the way they operate. Ongoing reductions to government funding mean that there is still a need to make

significant savings. Changes to the benefits and housing systems are also impacting on affordability and sustainability.

- 3.10 The Care Leaver service is striving to change the way they deliver services to meet the challenge of efficiency, while ensuring customer focus, achieving value for money, demonstrating best practice and achieving positive outcomes.
- 3.11 Ensuring appropriate, stable and safe accommodation for children in care and care leavers is the subject of much national discussion. Ensuring that provision is sufficient, high quality and in line with young people's wishes, feelings and needs is essential. Often this means more provision of different types is needed within the borough. Many of these issues were highlighted as part of the second Education Select Committee report on 16 plus care options (Into Independence, Not Out of Care) and in the Government's strategy to improve opportunities for care leavers (Keep on Caring). This strategy has two main themes –
- (i) developing and driving new ways to deliver better and more effective support for care leavers, both in terms of what is provided and how it is delivered, and
 - (ii) embedding a culture of corporate parenting across the whole of society making the past, present and future of care leavers everybody's business.
- 3.12 In order to develop the offer for Halton care leavers, Phase 1 of the proposal would be to commission support for young people where this is required. This will include the delivery of the following outcomes:
- reducing the number of individuals not in education, employment or training (NEET)
 - ensuring young people receive appropriate financial support
 - promoting personal safety
 - enabling young people to become valuable members of their local community
 - increasing individual self-esteem and resilience
 - developing tenancy ready young adults
- 3.13 It is envisaged that the Leaving Care outcomes and outputs will be delivered through the Leaving Care Specification which will focus on
- A requirement, as part of pathway planning, for increased independence for the young person
 - To ensure health needs are met
 - To motivate to attend education, employment and training, thereby achieving potential

- Each young person working towards an independent living plan, subject to regular review
- To promote family contact where appropriate
- For each property to be well maintained
- For properties to be sustainable post-18

3.14 The type of support required and how many hours of it would need to be clearly defined within the contract specification.

3.15 Cheshire West and Chester entered into a similar contract over 12 months ago and report a better and more consistent quality of service, improved outcomes for care leavers and efficiencies in cost. If the proposal is agreed, there may be some options in the future for joint contracting and the achievement of further efficiencies.

3.16 Phase 2 of the proposal would be to work with local housing providers to develop a small group setting for care leavers. This ideally would be a block of 3-4 flats where young people could live with staff on site 24 hours a day to provide tailored support. This could also be an additional base for Personal Advisors to work from and offer support, and if large enough, could offer an emergency bed for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. Identifying such a property will be challenging and careful consideration needs to be given to the impact of possible voids within such a setting. However, if the approach is agreed, these issues can be considered with any provider.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 This approach is consistent with meeting the needs of care leavers, is a more efficient model and is in line with the government's drive to see new delivery models and creative approaches.

4.2 The majority of care leavers are currently supported until they are 21 years of age. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 which became law in May, will require local authorities to support all their care leavers until 25 years of age. If care leavers get good housing and support when they need it, fewer should require intensive support from Personal Advisors between the ages of 18 and 25.

5.0 **FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 In the current financial year, the Council is committed to fund accommodation and support for 16-17 year olds totalling more than £1.2m. This consists of the costs of 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation plus a variety of support packages for young people, all of which is currently on a spot purchase basis.

5.2 The Care Leaver Service has an agreement with HHT to lease 1 or 2 bedroom properties as required and as they become available. It

is hoped that other local housing providers, including RSL's and private landlords can be encouraged to consider a similar arrangement. Under this proposal, support would then be commissioned using a block purchasing approach.

- 5.3 Efficiencies would be achieved if the housing costs for each young person could be reduced. Identifying suitable housing for 16-17 yr olds remains a challenge, not least because of the reluctance of some RSL's and private landlords to provide housing for young people under 18 and because of the limited availability and completion for 1 bedroomed properties. If housing cannot be identified in this way, and it has to be sourced from one of the private support providers, the cost is approx. £325 per week as opposed to the cost of a RSL property at approx. £100 per week. A saving of £225 per week on accommodation costs would be equivalent to £11,700 per year per young person, £398,000 per year in total. It is also an option that young people could fund post 18 and is therefore more sustainable and a better outcome.
- 5.4 In addition to improving quality and co-ordination, a contract for the delivery of dispersed housing support would also allow the Council to set some volume requirements that are anticipated to see a reduction in the hourly support cost from £25 per hour to approx. £17-£19 per hour. Given that support packages range from 24 – 10 hours support per week, there is the potential for some significant savings.
- 5.5 The proposed contact value is for £450k. Further, and more substantial savings would be achieved in Phase 2 of the project if 4-6 units of 'shared' accommodation could be made available to care leavers, and more RSL's could be encouraged to provide care leavers with tenancies. The shared accommodation would result in economies of scale for the delivery of support with the additional option that some of the support could potentially be offered by Personal Advisors being based within the property.
- 5.6 HHT are presenting a report to their Board in June 2017 to present options for their housing stock. The report does not specifically outline the plan for a Shared Accommodation resource as yet, but there is a commitment to ask a group within HHT to consider the viability of securing a specific block for CiC/care leavers over the coming months. The action has become part of the revised CiC and Care Leavers Strategy with a deadline of the end of the financial year.
- 5.7 It is also hoped that as part of both Phase 1 and 2, care leavers themselves will have a voice and a role to play. A social enterprise called the Stoke-on-Trent House Project provides an example of a new approach to supporting care leavers to take control of their transitions to independent living and to have greater involvement

and choice in creating their own long term home after care. The Project is funded and evaluated by the Innovation Fund but may offer some ideas for Halton to create a service that is care leaver led.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, additional duties are being placed on the local authority to support and prepare care leavers for independence.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Appropriate accommodation and support are key to supporting care leavers with access to and sustaining employment, education and training.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

None

6.4 A Safer Halton

None

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Without a different approach, the costs of supporting care leavers in their own accommodation are likely to continue to rise and will not necessarily deliver the quality of service desired.

7.2 One provider could bring increased risk as there may not be the flexibility or capacity required, hence spot-purchasing of support may continue and costs may not reduce.

7.3 Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, additional duties are to be placed on local authorities from April 2018 as corporate parents and in how services are delivered for care leavers. The age to access support is increasing from 21 to 25 and as yet there has been no comment as to whether these additional duties will have additional funding. When this is known, it may be that the funding and approach proposed may need to alter and as such the contract will be on a short-term basis which may deter potential providers.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Support for care leavers to develop the skills and confidence to become good tenants is essential to them living successfully in their communities

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.