

From: Peter Oakford: Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care
Andrew Ireland: Corporate Director for Social Care, Health and Wellbeing

To: Children’s Social Care & Health Cabinet Committee.

Subject: **CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS ACCOMMODATION**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides information about the Statutory Requirements on the Council to ensure that older children in Care and Care leavers have suitable accommodation. The report highlights the current challenges faced in sourcing such accommodation

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council and its Members in regards to ensuring Care Leavers have suitable accommodation

The Cabinet Committee is asked to lend its support to the Lead Member for Children’s Services in influencing District, Borough and City Council Members in regards to the provision of social housing for children in care and care leavers.

Introduction

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced new requirements on local authorities to plan for looked after children so that they have the support they need as they make their transition to the responsibilities of adulthood.

Since 2001 the trend to discharge young people from care prematurely when they are as young as 16 has been reversed and many more care leavers now live in suitable accommodation when they are no longer looked after; the numbers of care leavers in education, training and employment has also increased. However, the Government contends that there is still more to do, and believes that there remain too many young people expected to cope with independent living too early and without proper support.

In response to these concerns, Statutory Guidance was published which largely concerns information about the support provided to young people who have ceased to be looked after. Guidance in relation to young people entitled to support to prepare them to leave care but who remain looked after (i.e. “eligible children”) is included in Volume 2 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance – *Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations and statutory guidance* (‘the Care Planning Regulations’). This describes a comprehensive framework of assessment, care planning, intervention and case review that must be followed by local

authorities to plan the support they will give to prepare 16 and 17 year olds for the time when they will not be looked after.

Context

The main aim of the Care Leavers Regulations and of the guidance is to make sure that care leavers are provided with comprehensive personal support so that they achieve their potential as they make their transition to adulthood

The Statutory Guidance is clear that Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. The local authority responsible for their care should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than housing.

Where there is any proposal for the young person to move to different accommodation, as part of the process to prepare for their transition to adulthood, then their pathway plan must include an explicit assessment of the support they need to develop the skills that they will require to be ready for this significant change. The plan must also include a thorough assessment as to the suitability of the potential accommodation for the individual young person.

Although the Local Authority's Duties to provide accommodation for Care Leavers end when they reach the age of 18, the local authority must ensure that our Care Leavers new homes are suitable for their needs, offer sufficient support and are linked to their wider plans and aspirations. For example located near their education or work, safe and in a secure setting with the right levels of support if and when necessary. This duty inevitably leads to the Council to funding or providing financial support for a wide range of accommodation to ensure that the accommodation needs of our Care Leavers are met.

In addition to our Statutory Duties, Specialist Children's Services aspires to be providing a Good to Outstanding service for Care Leavers in accordance with Ofsted judgements. Our recent work in this regard has highlighted the need for us to focus more intensively on the whole range of accommodation for care leavers. In order for Kent's Care Leavers to have the best possible chance of accessing the most suitable accommodation we require the support and active involvement of our partner Councils at Borough, District and City level.

Accommodation Options

- Staying Put. This is the offer to all Care Leavers who meet the eligibility criteria to remain in their existing foster placement post their 18th birthday. An assessment of need is undertaken and the foster carers are assessed as Supported Lodgings providers in order for the Care Leaver to remain in the placement. An average supported lodgings placement costs £160 per week and requires that the care leaver claims Housing benefit if eligible and contributes to their rent and food and utilities
- Supported Lodgings. These can be provide both in a family home setting and in a larger managed unit, and provides the young person with a safe place to live as well as 14 hours of support a week. This support can be increased if necessary but is aimed at ensuring that young people and care leavers are supported through the transition into adulthood. The cost of this type of provision varies between £160 and £550 per week and there is an expectation that care leavers contribute to the rent and utilities.

- Vacation Accommodation. This is provided to care leavers in Higher Education when they are not at University, either in the form of an actual room in a semi independent living placement or as a £100 per week contribution to rent in an existing property.
- Semi-independent accommodation. Some care leavers remain living in semi-independent accommodation beyond their 18th birthday. At the current time these are exclusively UASC, and during this time the costs of this accommodation is met wholly by the Local Authority. It is more challenging to find accommodation in the private sector for this cohort which can sometimes result in the individuals concerned having to present themselves as homeless at their local District Council in order to be housed.
- Privately rented accommodation. The majority of Care Leavers living independently are in the Private Rented Sector. In order to ensure that they are able to access suitable and safe accommodation, the Service often finds itself having to “top up” the rent or Housing benefit on behalf of the young person.
- Social Housing Less than 10% of all eligible Care Leavers are currently living in Social Housing, even though they are classed as a vulnerable group and should be given additional points when bidding for properties. This is a very low figure and reflects Kent’s overall Housing challenges. Single Tier Authorities achieved a much higher access rate of social housing for their care leavers than upper tier authorities.
- Bed and Breakfast. Care leavers are never placed directly from leaving care into Bed and Breakfast accommodation. However there are some rare instances when young people have exhausted all other types of accommodation usually through their own choosing.

Financial Implications.

The total cost of supporting Care Leavers to the Council in 2014/15 is forecasted as follows:

UASC Care Leavers	£4.97 m
British Citizen Care Leavers	£4.72 m
Total	£ 9.7 m

These costs are made up of indirect costs of £2.6m for staffing and infrastructure costs, and £7.09m of direct costs for individuals concerned, including substantial accommodation costs.

Future Planning.

The 0-25 Transformation programme includes activity around the provision of suitable accommodation for 16-25 year olds including care leavers.

Review of Supporting People funding is taking place to explore opportunities for Care Leavers to be included in this funding stream.

Current Supported Lodgings provider contract includes “growing the market” incentives.

Semi-independent accommodation option to be opened up to include all Care Leavers.

Housing Managers task and finish group in collaboration with Early Help to explore joint commissioning of Supported Housing options with Borough and District Councils.

Recommendation(s)

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The Children's Social Care & Health Cabinet Committee is asked to

Note the contents of the report and when and where appropriate raise the provision of suitable accommodation for Care Leavers with members and officers of the District, Borough and City Councils.

Contact details

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