

**REPORT FOR: CORPORATE
PARENTING PANEL**

Date of Meeting:	10 January 2012
Subject:	Housing for Children Looked After who are Leaving Local Authority Care
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Catherine Doran Corporate Director of Children's Services
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Mitzi Green
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

- This report seeks to inform the Corporate Parenting Panel about issues relating to housing support for children looked after who are leaving local authority care.
- Panel members are invited to consider recommendations contained in section 3.19 and give guidance on subsequent Cabinet or Portfolio Holder decision making arrangements.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

Children looked after (CLA) and young people who are leaving care (care leavers) that have entitlement to housing support are invited to bid for accommodation under the Locata Housing Scheme in order that they can be housed at the point that they leave local authority care.

2.1 When CLA are 18 years old they become a care leaver and are no longer in the care of the local authority. In accordance with duties outlined in the Leaving Care Act 2000, care leavers are entitled to receive local authority housing support.

2.2 Care leavers are entitled to housing accommodation under Band B of the Locata Housing Scheme operated by Harrow Council Housing Department. The Housing Department have 22 allocated properties for care leavers in 2011. However, there has been a significant increase in demand for eligible properties for care leavers over recent years.

2.3 In 2012 it is expected that 38 care leavers will be eligible for housing under the Locata Housing Scheme. This means that 16 care leavers will be unable to be offered the opportunity of securing permanent housing as per the Children Act 1989 as amended, as demand is currently in excess of the allocation limit.

2.4 In order to prioritise the housing needs of CLA and Care Leavers and Housing Group has been established as a sub group to the CLA Life Chances Forum. This has relied and the positive relationship between Children's Services and the Housing Department. The CLA Life Chances Forum is a multi agency group of practitioners and senior professionals chaired by the CLA Service Manager, who is also an officer member of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2.5 The terms of reference for the CLA Life Chances Forum focus on improving the life chances and outcomes for CLA. The focus of the Care Leavers and Housing Sub Group is to scrutinise current processes, maximise the benefit of local partnerships and address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers. An integral aspect of this work will be to ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of CLA and care leavers.

2.6 Representatives of the Care Leavers and Housing Sub Group include the following;

- CLA Service Manager
- Children's Placement Service Manager
- Leaving Care Team Manager
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Team Manager
- Youth Offending Team Manager
- Children with Disabilities Team Manager
- Harrow Foster Carer's Association
- Adult Care Services

- Housing Department
- “Beyond Limits” Child in Care Council
- Independent Visitor Scheme

Options considered

3.0 Issues

3.1 Consultation with Care Leavers

The Leaving Care Team have issued questionnaires to all care leavers aged 18 years + who are living in their own tenancy. The questionnaire seeks to ascertain care leaver’s views regarding the allocation and suitability of accommodation under the Locata Housing Scheme..

3.3 Increased demand

There has been a significant increase of teenage CLA aged 15 to 18 years old in Harrow’s looked after population. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this increase and the Teenage Placement Strategy (TPS) is a targeted attempt at addressing the range of issues that having an impact on Children’s Services ability to manage services in an efficient and effective manner. The Locata Housing Scheme is an important aspect of the TPS.

3.4 Homelessness

Legislation regarding homeless 16 - 18 year olds has had an impact on local services. Following the Southwark Judgement in 2009, which was issued to Local Authorities in 2010, Authorities have been reminded about the need to ensure that 16 – 18 year olds have a full assessment of need and support for education, employment, health and finance, including accommodation.

3.5 Harrow is expected to accommodate any homeless young person (aged 16 – 18 years old) under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 where it is assessed that they are a child in need whenever it is determined that the young person has nowhere else to reside and no appropriate adult to care for them. There is a joint Housing and Children’s Services Protocol outlining detailed procedures for responding to the needs of vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds.

3.6 Life Skills Programme and the Readiness Assessment

Previously the local practice was to defer referring care leavers for permanent housing until they were ready to manage and maintain their own tenancy. In practice this often delayed timely transitions and ultimately increased CLA placement costs. A great deal of work has been undertaken to review the way that CLA are supported to acquire the necessary life skills in order to be able to make a successful transition to young adulthood.

3.7 In order to ensure that all care leavers are ready to live independently a tenancy once they turn 18 years old, a new Life Skills Programme has been developed with teenage CLA, care leavers and a range of partners during 2011. The new Life Skills Programme, which will be launched in January 2012, provides an individual programme tailored to meet the unique needs and circumstances of all care leavers.

3.8 The Life Skills Programme will focus on the timely acquisition of appropriate life skills for all care leavers. This includes a readiness assessment for a broad range of issues, including appropriate practical skills, emotional resilience and well-being needs, support requirements and the type of education, employment and training conditions that will support a successful transition to young adulthood, including managing and maintaining a tenancy.

3.9 Locata Housing Scheme Nominations

Prior to making a Locata nomination, Social Workers will need to evidence that CLA have successfully completed a Life Skills Programme and that an assessment of their readiness has indicated that a Locata nomination is appropriate. This assessment of readiness will include a detailed review of an up to date Pathway Plan.

3.10 The Social Worker, with the assistance of other relevant adults where appropriate (eg; Foster Carer, Residential Worker or Independent Visitor), will support care leavers with their Locata application and once nominated the care leaver will be accompanied to view any suitable properties that they are intending to bid for.

3.11 Housing Options

Existing care leavers who are entitled to housing under the Locata Housing Scheme should be supported immediately however, as there has been a significant increase in the demand for single occupancy one bed social housing accommodation, there is a shortage of these types of properties. If the Housing Department increase the quota for care leavers this will have a real and immediate impact on the availability of available properties for other vulnerable groups including homeless people.

3.12 Alternative housing options may now need to be considered in order to address the current position. Consideration may need to be given to moving into the privately rented sector in order to develop partnerships with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). There are however, concerns that such a move pose the risk of developing less secure tenancies and more expensive rents than would ordinarily be enjoyed in the social housing sector.

3.13 Although care leavers are provided with advice and support regarding appropriate benefits and entitlements, benefits legislation is frequently changing and can be difficult system to navigate and entitlements will be affected.

3.14 Setting up Grant

Concern has been expressed about the quality and decorative state of some properties that have been allocated under the Locata Housing Scheme. The Housing Department provides a standard one off decoration payment of £206 to meet the costs of decoration expenses in a one bed flat. Care leavers are not currently included in the group of new tenants who have their flat decorated by the Council's contractors at the higher cost of £585. This service currently applies to elderly and disabled tenants.

3.15 At present care leavers usually purchase essential items from the Independent Living Grant (ILG). In reality the ILG does not cover the costs of

all essential items and this creates significant difficulties for care leavers attempting to set up home.

3.16 Children's Services has developed a list of essential items that will be provided to care leavers as part of a scheme to alleviate some of the additional pressures associated with setting up home. These essential items include a cooker, fridge/freezer, and washing machine.

3.17 Ongoing support for Care Leavers

Children's Services has a dedicated Leaving Care Team to provide support to care leavers aged 18 years and over. In addition to Leaving Care Team staff care leavers enjoy continued support from foster carers, residential care staff and independent visitors who maintain enduring relationships and support after CLA turn 18 years old.

3.18 Under the Children Act 1989, as amended the Local Authority continues to have responsibility for providing certain types of support for care leavers up to the age of 25 years if they continue to be in full time higher education. This support is equivalent to the type of support that any young person may reasonably expect from a caring parent.

3.19 Proposed Recommendations

The Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to consider the following recommendations in order to address the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities for care leavers as it relates to housing support;

- a) To increase the Locata Housing Scheme allocation for care leavers from 22 to 38 in 2012 and to review future demand on an annual basis in line with the regular corporate planning cycle
- b) To provide a view about the financial assistance that should be provided by the Council to enable care leavers to set up home
- c) To provide a steer about the pro's and con's of exploring opportunities in the privately rented sector in order to develop partnerships with Registered Social Landlords as a way of addressing current housing resource pressures for care leavers
- d) To support the collective endeavours of the Care Leavers and Housing Sub Group of the CLA Life Chances Forum and task them with the responsibility for developing clear operational systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing how the housing needs and circumstances of care leavers will be addressed by the Council
- e) To note the questionnaire feed back from care leavers regarding the suitability and provision of housing provided under the Locata Housing Scheme in order to establish a minimum quality standard in the future

Environmental Impact

There is no specific environmental impact from the issues outlined in this report.

Financial Implications

Care leavers are entitled to claim housing benefit from 18 years old in order to cover the costs of their rent. Where care leavers remain in placements beyond their 18th birthday, rather than accessing their own tenancy and housing benefits, it presents a significant financial cost to the Council. The recent reductions made to leaving care placement costs have relied upon an adequate supply of suitable accommodation for those leaving care. Over the next few years there is a bulge of young people leaving care. The risk is that if suitable housing can not be identified young people will remain longer in high cost placements, such as semi independent placements. If the lack of accommodation results in a 6 months delay in leaving care, based on the current cohort of CLA, it is estimated to result in a budget pressure in excess of £0.5m.

3.22 Care leavers with additional support needs, for example a learning disability, mental illness or substance misuse, will require input from adult care services. In these cases the existence of an effective Transition Protocol between Children's and Adult Care Services is essential in order that appropriate targeted and specialist care can be provided. In many instances the nature and level of the care leaver's additional needs will have an impact on their ability to manage and maintain their own tenancy and it will be critical to ensure that appropriate arrangements, including funding, are in place.

Risk Management Implications

All related risks are recorded in the Children's Services risk register. There is a significant reputational risk from a poor inspection of social care, in particular any serious or untoward significant incident concerning a care leaver. Preparations are in place to mitigate this risk.

Equalities implications

CLA and care leavers are additionally vulnerable child in need. The 2009 statutory guidance "The Roles & Responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services" highlights the need for Local Authorities to work corporately to improve the well-being of looked after children and young people leaving care, to make their needs a priority and seek the same outcomes that any reasonable caring parent would want for their own children. CLA consistently fare worse than their peers across a range of indicators including health, education, training, employment, homelessness and offending.

Corporate Priorities

CLA and care leavers are additionally vulnerable by virtue of the experiences that led them into Local Authority care and in respect of the poor outcomes that many CLA and care leavers experience when compared to their peers,

The Council's corporate priorities include providing care and protection to those who are most in need and this includes CLA and care leavers.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Emma Stabler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 9 December 2011		
Name: Helen Ottino	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 9 December 2011		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Peter Tolley, Service Manager, Family Placement Service & Nick Crick, Service Manager, Children in Need & Looked After Service

Background Papers: None