

Corporate Parenting Board - June 2013

Title of paper:	Accommodation for Care Leavers	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Candida Brudenell – Interim Corporate Director for Children and Families Helen Blackman – Acting Director of Children’s Safeguarding	Wards affected: All
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Relevant Council Plan Strategic Priority:		
World Class Nottingham		
Work in Nottingham		
Safer Nottingham		
Neighbourhood Nottingham		x
Family Nottingham		x
Healthy Nottingham		
Leading Nottingham		
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
<p>This report details the up to date issues in respect of the legislative duties required by Nottingham City Council in respect of sufficient accommodation for Care Leavers.</p> <p>It focuses on the service provided to Care Leavers by the 15 Plus Team. It describes the importance of ensuring young people have appropriate and sufficient accommodation to support young people into their transition into adulthood.</p> <p>This report is framed by the requirements of the Children Act (2011), Volume 3: Planning Transitions into Adulthood for Care Leavers.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	The Board continues to offer commitment to ensuring, as Corporate Parents, that Care Leavers receive sufficient and appropriate housing in Nottingham City.	
2	The Board continues to commit to the protocol between Nottingham City Homes and the Children and Families Service implemented as a partnership to improve outcomes for Care Leavers.	

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Nottingham City Council has to adhere to a legislative framework provided by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

They are:

- The Sufficiency, Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2011)
- Children Act (1989), Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers.
- Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds (young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation) April 2010

1.2 The Sufficiency Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2011) seeks to improve outcomes for young people leaving Care or requiring accommodation. It states that Local Authorities take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practical, sufficient accommodation within the authority to meet the needs of the young people the Local Authority are responsible for.

1.3 The statutory guidance provided by the DFE in respect of 16/17 year olds who require accommodation, states that Children Services are the lead agency with regard to the assessment of 16/17 year olds who seek help in respect of homelessness. However, it also states that 'integrated services can assist in the delivering of a seamless child centred response to the needs of young people requiring assistance'.

1.4 Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers provides the legislative guidance for providing accommodation in Chapter 7.

1.5 Regulation 9 (2) of the Care Leavers Regulation defines what is meant by suitable accommodation;

- That which is as far as reasonably practicable is suitable for a young persons needs.
- That the Local Authority has satisfied itself to the character and suitability of providers.
- That properties comply with Health and Safety requirements.
- That the Local Authority, so far as is reasonably practicable, has taken into account young peoples wishes and feelings.
- That there has been consideration given to young people in respect of their education, training or employment needs.

2 Providing Accommodation to Care Leavers in Nottingham City.

2.1 Since November 2011 Nottingham City Council has provided Accommodation to young people in semi-independent provision through a tendered framework. This framework includes a range of options to ensure the diverse needs of Care Leavers are met. This has not been without its challenges and a re-evaluation of some of the options available from some providers to ensure the Accommodation meets individual requirements of Care Leavers.

2.2 Nottingham City believes that most young people will benefit from sometime placed in semi-independent provision prior to acquiring their own tenancy so that they can 'transition' with the safety net of planned support. Some young people may benefit from 'Staying Put' with their foster carers and this is promoted if agreed within a young person's Pathway Plan. NCC are currently reviewing the policy and procedures for a refreshed strategy for Staying Put.

2.3 Social Workers will discuss with young people within Pathway Planning the range of options available to them in respect of semi-independence accommodation prior to making a referral to the Placement Service.

2.3 The referral (E01) includes the package of support that addresses the emotional, social, educational, health and practical needs of young people. The Placement Service ensures

accommodation provided is Quality Assured by visits to properties and with regular meetings with providers.

2.4 As young people reach 18 years of age there is an expectation for the majority of them that they become a tenant in their own right. The majority of Care Leavers accommodation is provided by Nottingham City Homes. There can be a risk of tenancy breakdowns so Nottingham City has implemented systems to ensure young people are well prepared and can demonstrate the necessary skills to live independently. A Care Leavers protocol with Nottingham City Homes is now well embedded to mitigate against the risks of young people becoming homeless.

2.5 The protocol enables both partners to understand their roles and engage in joint working, leading to increased transparency and better outcomes for young people. It complies with the 'sufficiency duty' required. It incorporates:

- Planned moves towards independence, using clear and flexible accommodation and support Pathways.
- Ongoing support to enable young people to maintain their accommodation and early intervention if require.
- Access to safe, secure emergency accommodation, if exceptionally accommodation rearrangements do breakdown.

2.6 Ensuring that young people are in suitable accommodation is a priority for the 15 Plus Service, Placement Service and the Independent Reviewing Officers Service. Young people in suitable accommodation are more likely to have better outcomes as opposed to those who are of No Fixed Abode. There will always be a cohort of young people that every Local Authority area will be unable to locate. Some young people choose to disengage, live with unknown adults or leave the Local Authority Area. The 15 Plus Social Work Team makes every effort to ensure contact occurs wherever practicable. For some young people who are Care Leavers they make up a proportion of the prison population, but Nottingham City Council does not consider this to be suitable accommodation.

2.7 Young people are assessed on an individual basis in respect of their 'Setting up Home' allowance. The 15 Plus Service strive to ensure that young people are set up materially in their own homes at a good standard. A catalogue is available to all Care Leavers to select goods required. Young people can also access a Hardship Fund and/or food parcels should this be required. The 15 Plus Service also works in partnership with the Anti-Social Behaviour Order Team and has access to electrical goods confiscated by the Team which includes televisions, radios etc. The Arches is also used to access furniture.

3. Performance

3.1 Year to date figures at Quarter 4 s currently at 92.3%. Suitable accommodation is not recorded for those young people who are serving custodial sentences.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

N/A

5. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

None

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY)

6.1 The framework for semi-independence accommodation has demonstrated considerable saving efficiencies within the Placement Budget. April 2012- April 2013 acquired £250,000 in savings. The Quality and Commissioning Service are undertaking value for money reviews on the outcomes this far for the 16+ Accommodation Framework.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES (INCLUDING LEGAL IMPLICATIONS, CRIME AND DISORDER ACT IMPLICATIONS AND EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS)

7.1 Current case laws (Southwark ruling) dictate that the Children's Act (1989) has primacy over the Housing Act in providing for children who need housing. The duties of Children's Services to accommodate young people can not be circumvented by referring a young person to the Housing Authority. Duties under Part 7 (Housing Act, 1996) provide a safety net for those homeless young people who do not meet the criteria for accommodation.

7.2 The implementation of the Legal Aid and Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) in December 2012 has meant there is an increase in the number of Care Leavers acquiring accommodation, as remanded young people beyond 13 weeks acquires relevant status.

7.3 The Welfare Reform is also impacting on Care Leavers. There is a benefit cap introduced on bedrooms, known as 'bedroom tax', whereby less housing benefit will be paid to those with additional bedroom space not occupied. Nottingham City Homes/Children's Services/Benefit Team are working with those young people that are affected. From 01st April 2013 the Local Authority has responsibility for Crisis Loans/Community Care Grants and information has been circulated to staff and Care Leavers as to how to access loans. Universal Credit will replace all 'benefits' giving young people a monthly lump sum rather than the weekly benefits they have been receiving. Work is to be undertaken to support young people when this is implemented. A young person's guide to the reforms is available,

7.4 There is a locally agreed strategy that no care leavers in Nottingham will be adversely affected by the 'bedroom tax.'

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (EIAs)

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

- No 'This report does not include proposals for new or changing policies, services or functions'

9. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION

None

10. PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

Children Act (2011), Volume 3: Planning Transitions into Adulthood for Care Leavers.

Part 7 (Housing Act, 1996)