



<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Corporate Parent Advisory Committee</b>	<b>Item Number:</b>	
	<b>22 September 2014</b>		

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Semi-independent Accommodation Provision for Looked After Children</b>
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<b>Report Authorised by:</b>	<b>Lisa Redfern Director, Children's Services</b>
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<b>Lead Officer:</b>	<b>Chris Chalmers Service Manager, Children in Care</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected: All</b>	<b>Report for information</b>
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## **1. Describe the issue under consideration**

- 1.1 This report provides information on the arrangements in place in Haringey to meet the housing needs of those young people living in semi-independent accommodation. There are 55 young people in care aged 16 and 17 who are living in separate accommodation (i.e. not in a family or residential setting). At the time of the recent accommodation review (March to June 2014) 37% of young people placed were female and 63% males. This report describes the use of this semi-independent accommodation and Haringey's support of young people in this cohort.
- 1.2 A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care was launched by the DfE in October 2013. This has been led by Edward Timpson, Children's Minister, who stipulates that local services to those in care and care leavers must build on best practice to ensure that care leavers receive high quality services which meet their needs and support them to make the transition into adulthood. Within this is a section on housing responsibilities for local authorities. There is an emphasis on the need for "staying put" arrangements and local authorities working with voluntary sector partners to develop positive youth accommodation options. In addition to this there is an onus on local authorities to provide cost effective and efficient homelessness prevention services, such as the avoidance of placing 16 and 17 year olds in bed and breakfast accommodation.



## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Looked After Young People aged 16/17 placed in semi-independent accommodation**

Semi-independent accommodation is provided to young people aged 16 /17 and looked after by the Council when an assessment indicates that this is the best way of meeting their needs. The wishes and feelings of the young people are taken into account and central to the decision is a judgement about whether the young person will be able to cope and be safe with this level of support.

It should be noted that this provision for young people who are looked after is not regulated by Ofsted in the way that fostering and residential care is regulated. However there are national standards for semi-independent accommodation and Haringey makes every effort to ensure that young people are only placed in good quality accommodation that will meet their needs and which will enable them to participate in education / training and develop independent living skills.

All these young people have an allocated social worker who meets regularly with them. They have Looked After Child reviews chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer at least every six months to review their care plan. In addition, Children and Young People's Service Placement Officers make regular monitoring visits to all placements to ensure that quality standards are being met.

Semi-independent accommodation for this group includes a wide variety of provision, ranging from small units with staff present on the premises 24/7, to individual studio flats with outreach support being provided from a support worker.

### **2.2 Procurement of semi-independent placements for this cohort of young people**

Haringey worked collaboratively with Barnet, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge in tendering for supply of this provision in 2010, as a result of which Framework Contracts were put in place with 39 independent providers. Unfortunately since that work was completed the partner boroughs have drifted away from the contract thereby reducing its effectiveness.

When a semi-independent placement is required for a young person, details are sent out by the CYPS Placements Team to all the approved framework providers. The responses from providers are assessed and Haringey then selects the provider that best meets the requirements of the specific placement against the following criteria:

- geographical location;
- compatibility of profile/skill of the proposed key worker with the young person's assessed needs;



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- overall suitability of the proposal for meeting the young person's needs; and
- weekly placement cost (value for money judgement).

Once satisfactory arrangements have been fully agreed, an individual placement agreement is completed with the provider for that placement. Final authorisation for the placement to proceed is then given by the appropriate senior manager.

### 2.3 Review of Semi independent accommodation

In the period March to June 2014 a comprehensive review of the quality of accommodation and support provided by 19 different providers was undertaken. At this time 32% of the provision was outside Haringey and 68% was within the borough. Most out-borough provision is within neighbouring authorities and, not infrequently, young people request to be placed outside the borough boundary for a variety of reasons.

With a focus on 16 and 17 year olds' accommodation, three flats/shared houses were selected from each provider for inspection. These also included some care leaver provision as the providers supply both cohorts. Findings regarding the physical quality of the accommodation were: 7 adequate, 10 of good quality, and 2 outstanding. Regarding support of young people by providers: 8 were deemed to be adequate, 10 of good quality, and one outstanding. None were considered to be inadequate in either support or physical standard.

### 2.4 Action Plan

As an outcome of this piece of work the following action plan was developed by the Placements and Commissioning Team to support the providers in improving the standard of their accommodation plus their support and service delivery to young people.

- ✚ Haringey's Children's Placement and Commissioning Team to develop an effective tool which should be ratified by Senior Management for Placement Officers/and Looked After Children Advisors to use when carrying out their monitoring duties/and responsibilities;
- ✚ Haringey to ensure that monitoring visits are undertaken four monthly due to this being an unregulated area, so as to ensure young people are being given a quality service, adequately safeguarded and appropriately supported by the semi-independent providers. This process must be embedded as this will demonstrate to our semi-independent providers that as the Local Authority we are taking our monitoring responsibilities seriously and to drive up standard of accommodation and support;
- ✚ Establish a regular Semi-Independent Providers' forum where the providers can talk about their services, identify gaps in service delivery, presentation of providers services, setting up good practices, raise concerns, share ideas, and seek resolutions and solutions to their concerns and issues;



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- ✚ Offer the Semi Independent Providers access to some Local Authority training such as safeguarding young people, young people involved in gangs, managing difficult and challenging behaviour and sexual exploitation;
- ✚ Principal Social Worker, Team Managers and Senior Practitioners possibly could be asked to deliver in-house training such as sexual exploitation, missing person's training via Semi-Independent Providers' forum;
- ✚ Social Workers, Placement Officers, and Independent Review Officers to ensure that the providers are given key documentation such as placement request forms, pathway plan, Personal Education Plans and Looked After Child Review minutes - ideally the placement request forms plus pathway plan at the commencement of the young person's placement;
- ✚ Social Workers and Placement Officers to ensure that placement planning meetings are convened within seven days of placing a young person, so that all parties - the young people, the Local Authority and the providers - are clear about their expectations and responsibilities; and
- ✚ Placement Officers must undertake regular monitoring visits.

### **Action plan for the providers from Haringey**

- Safer recruitment must be evidenced in all of the providers' support staff files and the documents that must be seen are CRBs, proof of address, proof of identification, previous work references or personal references, application form, CV, and qualifications if applicant specifies that they have a qualification;
- Providers must ensure that they provide regular supervision to their support staff;
- Providers must ensure that they hold regular team meetings to ensure effective communication and sharing of information is taking place between themselves and their support staff;
- Providers to ensure that all of their support workers have undertaken the mandatory training that has been specified by Haringey and evidence these trainings on the staff's files;
- All providers must develop systems where they are able to obtain young people's views about the standard of accommodation and support that they receive;
- Providers need to invest in their staff's training needs especially staff who have had no previous experience of working with young people;
- Some providers must work towards bringing up their standards to ensure that they are able to provide both good and outstanding accommodation and support to young people;
- Providers must be able to show evidence that they have chased the local authority for missing documents such as placement service request forms, pathway/care plans, Personal Education Plans and Looked After Child Review minutes;
- Providers must set up systems whereby they are able to record external complaints and internal complaints which should include any disputes, conflicts, and disagreements. They must also evidence what actions have been taken and give an indication of the resolution if any;
- Providers must record all incidents and what actions have been taken;
- Providers must show evidence of missing person's procedure and that they are following their processes and procedures; and



- Providers must report young people missing to the police and the Local Authority must be informed when a young person is deemed missing.

## **2.5 Transition planning for those currently in semi-independent accommodation**

Semi-independent accommodation is used only for older Looked After Children and care leavers. It is not permanent and is used prior to transition at 18 and in the early stages of transition whilst young people await their permanent social housing.

Haringey utilises a range of options for those in care and care leavers at transition which is summarised below:

- We have an established agreement between Housing Services and Children's Services that a quota of social housing lets will be set aside each year for care leavers. The quota level is based on a projection of the number of young people who are due to leave care that year and a consideration of the range of needs. For the last two years the quota has been 60 one bedroom properties per year. Each quarter we provide a tenancy workshop for 15 young people aged 17 upwards and, upon completion of the workshop they are able to apply to start bidding for a tenancy. The workshop includes staff from the Young Adults Service (YAS), Housing Vulnerable Adults Team (VAT) and an Income Recovery Team worker to give practical advice on bidding, moving in to a tenancy and sustaining it. The quota system means that care leavers use of temporary accommodation is greatly reduced;
- Joint work is underway with Aspire and Housing Management Team to consider whether to add a small number of 2 bedroom properties into the quota to help meet the needs of care leavers who are parents. Aspire are assisting in terms of setting appropriate criteria for this offer as there will not be a sufficient number of flats for all young parents. The average time for our care leavers moving on to their permanent accommodation is within six months of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday;
- We have a well-established supported living scheme, which provides shared housing for young women (at one address) and now we have just acquired newly refurbished accommodation for our parallel young men's project. These houses provide for young people who are due to leave care but are assessed as needing to develop some additional skills or experience before they are likely to be able to manage a tenancy. This project gives those who have medium level independence skills to live as part of a group of three young people with a volunteer lead tenant to offer them additional support. The outcome of staying in the halfway house is a young person's opportunity to move seamlessly onto their own permanent accommodation in around 6-10 months of moving in. This option is especially suitable for those young people who return to London after a period living away in foster care or residential care and benefit from support as they adjust to being back in London; and
- Since the introduction of the social housing quota, most care leavers move on to their settled accommodation within approximately six months of becoming 18 without the need for temporary accommodation. This however was not the case historically and so the Housing Service are currently reviewing all care leavers who



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are living in temporary accommodation with the aim of moving them on to one of three options:

- a) permanent social housing;
- b) private sector accommodation; or
- c) supported housing, if they have struggled in temporary accommodation and would benefit from a period of support.

### **2.6 Care leavers who are No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**

Those care leavers post-18 who are All Rights Exhausted cases are supported by the service with their Housing needs as well as with a subsistence allowance. They are not entitled to claim any benefits as they have no defined leave to remain in the UK. We will continue with our support until they are at least 21 when they will be referred to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) or, if they are parents, to our NRPF team.

### **3. Comments of the Chief Finance Officer and financial implications**

#### **4. Comments of the Assistant Director Corporate Governance and legal implications**

- 4.1** The Assistant Director Corporate Governance has been consulted about this report.
- 4.2** Under Section 22C of the Children Act 1989 (CA 1989), the local authority must make arrangement for a looked after child to live with parent, someone with parental responsibility, or a person in whose favour a residence order was made, unless such an arrangement would be inconsistent with the child's welfare. If so, the authority must place the child in the placement which is, in their opinion, the most appropriate placement available. Such a placement may be with a friend or relative who is a local authority foster parent, a different foster parent, a children's home, or any other placement, provided the arrangement comply with any relevant regulations. This may involve independent accommodation, semi-independent accommodation or a placement with a private provider. There is statutory guidance on the provision of accommodation for young people who are looked after and care leavers. Local authorities are required to adhere to the requirements of the guidance unless there are exceptional reasons to depart from it. In exercising its corporate parenting and advisory role, the Committee should take into account the requirements of the guidance.
- 4.3** The statutory guidance "Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation" (April 2010) provides guidance on children's services' and housing services' initial responses to 16 and 17 year olds seeking help because of homelessness; the provision of suitable accommodation based on an assessment of needs and in accordance with the local





authority duty to provide accommodation under Section 20 CA 1989; and joint working protocol between children's and housing services at strategic and operational level to prevent youth homelessness and ensure sufficient accommodation to meet the range of needs of homeless young people. The guidance provides that bed and breakfast accommodation is not suitable accommodation for young people.

**4.4** For care leavers, the statutory guidance "Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care leavers" 2011 requires local authorities to commission a range of semi-independent and independent accommodation. Children's Services are required to work with housing strategy, housing options, housing related support functions and other partners to secure a range of suitable housing and support options for young people leaving care. The guidance provides that there should be joint protocols which should establish arrangements for:

- "A shared commitment from Children's Services and Housing Services to adopt a 'corporate parenting' approach for looked after children and care leavers making the transition to adulthood.
- Clear roles and responsibilities for supporting the transition from care, including the role of the PA (Personal Adviser).
- Access for care leavers to the full range of potentially suitable supported accommodation options in the area.
- Pathway planning systems that anticipate accommodation needs. They should engage each young person, their PA and housing services staff regarding suitable housing options and any additional support needed, so that the necessary arrangements are in place at the point where the young person is ready to move on from their care placement. Subsequent moves should also be carefully planned.
- Arrangements to offer care leavers in need of social housing reasonable preference on welfare grounds through local housing authority allocations schemes.
- Contingency planning arrangements for when placements are at risk or break down, led by PAs working with accommodation providers, housing options teams and other support services.
- Planned access to accommodation and support for care leavers who will need accommodation on release from custodial institutions.



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- Ensuring supported transitions to adult services where needed, such as adult social care, adult mental health services, substance misuse services and the Probation Service.”

**4.5** The guidance advise that the range of semi-independent and independent accommodation options for care leaver may include “enabling young people to remain in the accommodation in which they lived whilst being looked after, e.g. by converting a foster placement to a post-18 arrangement or supported lodgings”; specialist accommodation and independent accommodation in the social or private rented sectors.

**4.6** As to independent accommodation, the guidance advise that “children’s services and housing services should develop access routes for care leavers into both social and private rented accommodation, taking into account local housing market conditions, to maximise care leavers’ housing options. Local authorities should avoid blanket approaches of promoting or discouraging either tenure, instead ensuring that the advantages and drawbacks of each are discussed with each young person as they plan to move to independent living”.

**4.7** For care leavers aged 18 and over who were formerly unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC’s) and have exhausted their rights of appeal and have no recourse to public funds, they are unlawfully in the country and by virtue of Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 are excluded from entitlement to leaving care support services. The local authority is only under a duty to provide subsistence and accommodation if it is necessary to prevent a breach of their human rights.

## **5. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments**

## **6. Head of Procurement Comments**

## **7. Policy Implication**

## **8. Use of Appendices**

## **9. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**