

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 29 November 2016	Meeting Name: Education and Children's Scrutiny Sub Committee
Report title:		Southwark Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Strategy	
Ward(s) or groups affected		All	
From:		James Postgate, Commissioning Manager, Children's and Adults' Services Paulette Robin, Senior Commissioning Officer, Children's and Adults' Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the committee notes work currently underway to refresh the Southwark care leavers and 16/17 year old homeless accommodation and support strategy.

SOUTHWARK CARE LEAVERS ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT STRATEGY – BACKGROUND TO THE 16+ PROJECT

2. The transition to adulthood can be a challenging journey for any young person but, for those young people who are at risk of homelessness or who have been in local authority care, it can be particularly difficult. The impact on the cost of housing in areas such as Southwark is a significant challenge for young people, as is the reduction in the availability of local social and council housing. In acknowledgment of this, the Council is currently undertaking detailed work to refresh the approach in the borough to support young people for whom the Council has a duty of care, by supporting them to achieve better individual outcomes, to access good quality, affordable housing, and to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to live independent lives and to access employment opportunities.
3. The 16+ accommodation and support project was set up to refresh the Council's current approach to the offer provided to vulnerable young people aged 16 years and above. The primary aims of this work is to ensure that the Council has a range of appropriate good quality accommodation for care leavers, young people who are at risk of homelessness or on the edge of care, and that services support young people to gain independence skills, employment and emotional resilience. The project is jointly led by Children's and Adults' Services and Housing and Modernisation. A summary of the project team's work, including information about the current delivery offer for care leavers and 16/17 year old homeless is set out in Appendix 1.
4. It was determined that, in order to provide a holistic offer to all young people in Southwark, the scope for the 16+ accommodation and support project should be wider than care leavers alone. Whilst the project's remit, in consequence, will be establishing a care leavers accommodation and support strategy – the breadth of the work is actually broader.
5. The current offer for Southwark care leavers and 16/17 year old homelessness is

divided in two along legislative boundary lines¹, that is, that there is one offer for care leavers and another offer for young people who have presented as at risk of homelessness due to their being 16 or 17 years old:

- **The offer for care leavers** is primarily based out of borough, with a focus on short-term, practitioner-directed interventions and with the majority of young people accessing semi-independent supported living arrangements, with help provided to develop the knowledge and skills to, for those able to, expected to be after a maximum of two years, then move into a tenancy of their own. In addition, a small number of young people choose to remain with their foster care family, and some young people require specialist or high-level interventions which may require a short-term residential placement.
 - **The 16/17 year old homeless** offer is very similar to that provided to care leavers in terms of its approach and stated outcomes although, primarily due to historic decisions, the accommodation and support is all based within Southwark and is underpinned by delivery by a contracted support provider. Young people are expected to spend a maximum of eighteen months in services prior to moving onto a tenancy of their own.
6. On 1st July 2016², there were 337 young people in the Southwark care leavers and 16/17 homelessness accommodation and support system. Of these:
- 240 were care leavers
 - 95 were young people who had originally approached the Council as at risk of homelessness due to being 16/17 year olds
7. One of the key challenges highlighted by the work of the 16+ accommodation and support project was that many of the young people staying in services were doing so beyond the anticipated target period, with some young people in services for up to 6 years. Work is still underway to understand the key drivers of this, although it is recognised that there are a number of challenges around the lack of affordable housing options for this group, which itself will be further impacted by:
- the Housing and Planning Act 2016 which will require local authorities to sell-off “higher value³” council homes as they become vacant in order to fund housing association tenants to “right to buy” their own homes. Southwark will be particularly impacted by this change as an area of both relatively high numbers of council housing and also relatively high house prices. The Government have set out that any homes sold under the scheme will be replaced on a one-to-one basis although this may be a very challenging target to meet.
 - the decision to cap the local Supported Housing Allowance (SHA) to people aged

¹ That is, to meet the parallel duties of (a) the Children’s Act 1989 (s20/22G) to provide looked after children with accommodation that, in so far as is practically reasonable, is (i) within the authority’s area and (ii) meets the needs of those children and (b) the Housing Act 1996 (s189 – 1c) to provide housing to people who are statutory homeless, including those who are in priority need due to (i) being aged 16 or 17 years old or (ii) aged under or over 21 years who are vulnerable as a result of being in local authority care and (c) the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 (s23B) to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare and, unless they are satisfied that child’s welfare does not require it, support them by (i) maintaining them (ii) providing them with or maintaining them in suitable accommodation and (iii) providing support of such other descriptions as may be prescribed.

² Total service landscape snapshot data from the 1st July 2016 was taken to inform the 16+ accommodation and support project in order to gain a complete picture across different divisional boundaries and data systems.

³ The Government have not set out a value for “higher value” homes at this time. The majority of local authorities are planning for this change on the basis that “higher value” is defined as homes with a value of £300,000 or above.

under 35 under Housing Benefit/Universal Credit from 2019/20, which in Southwark will be at the level of £95.18 per week (that is, for rent, water, electricity, gas and other housing charges). This level of allowance will restrict the availability of housing options in Southwark for the majority of care leavers and 16/17 year old homelessness who at this time do not have another source of income. The Government intends to provide a “ring-fenced” top-up budget to councils from 2019/20 to provide additional funding to the system to help meet any shortfall from this cap. This however will need to meet the needs also of adult mental health, learning disabilities and homeless clients. It is also unclear the amount that would be provided to Councils as part of this grant.

8. In order to assess both the accommodation needs and the level of support young people require to fully support them to go on to live independent lives, the 16+ accommodation and support project has considered pathways into accommodation from the point of referral, how young people are supported practically and emotionally during their residence and the processes for move-on to sustain more permanent accommodation.
9. The 16+ accommodation and support project has covered:
 - engagement with service users and service providers
 - an analysis of current financial information (2015/16)
 - engagement with internal partners including the local NHS and voluntary sector
 - benchmarking with other local authorities
 - residential placements scoping exercise
10. The scope of this work has not included those young people who have very high support needs and who have been assessed as unable to live a completely independent life. These young people are instead being considered in line with the 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and learning disabilities pathway. For young people living independently in their own accommodation feedback will be used to develop a move-on protocol where additional support may be required with tenancy sustainment.
11. A paper on a refreshed care leavers and 16/17 year old homeless accommodation and support model is planned to be presented to Cabinet in February/March 2017.

BACKGROUND TO 16+ ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT PROJECT – OPERATIONAL AND POLICY LANDSCAPE

12. A number of local and national drivers underpin the work of the 16+ accommodation and support project including the Southwark Sufficiency Strategy. The Sufficiency Duty in the Children Act 1989, places a duty on the Council to take steps to ensure that there is sufficiently high quality accommodation and support within the local authority area to meet the needs of LAC and those on the edge of care. The Council Plan 2014-2018 commits the Council to give children and young people the best start in life by ensuring that every child, young person and family in Southwark thrives and is empowered to lead a safe and healthy life.
13. The Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy further outlines the need to improve the resilience of children and young people and to prepare them for a successful adult life where they can live independently. The document sets out the Council's approach in addressing a number of challenges for this cohort including the need for young people to 'feel safe, secure in their placements, live closer to home in

accommodation that meets their needs' and to ensure that young people are cared for and prepared for adulthood.

14. The 2012 Ofsted inspection raised concerns about the quality of pathway planning for young people and requested that the Council take a closer look at how it helps young people feel safe in their homes or safeguarded in accessing council services. Ofsted also noted that, of equal importance, was the need to ensure improved outcomes for young people. Independent research through the Speakerbox Young Inspectors Accommodation Programme and the Care Leavers review undertaken by Catch 22 further highlighted that children in care wanted to feel safe, receive support to be near their family/siblings, have regular contact with their social workers and gain the necessary skills needed to be able to live independently.
15. The Care leavers Charter developed with the Children's Rights Team, sets out 7 key principles/promises which were agreed with service users and the Corporate Parent Panel. These principles, listed below are applied to all young people who the Council supports:
 - to respect and honour your identity
 - to believe in you
 - to listen to you
 - to inform you
 - to support you
 - to find a home
 - to be a lifelong champion
16. The Council has set out to address these issues and to work to deliver its vision as outlined in the Fairer Future promises (2014-18) and local strategic priorities, that is:
 - to reduce the numbers of children and young people coming into care
 - to ensure young people in care achieve positive outcomes and are in stable placements
 - the transition from care to independent living is a smooth one

BACKGROUND TO 16+ ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT PROJECT – LOCAL CONTEXT

17. Children in local authority care are enabled to put aside ongoing support on their 18th birthday. Local authorities however must continue to offer support until a young person reaches the ages of 21 or 25 years if that person is still in education or training. The preparation and planning to leave care is at the forefront of this change process at the age of 16 when, if appropriate, young people are able to access semi-supported accommodation. For some young people looked after in foster care placements, agreement may be reached with foster carers to allow the young person to stay beyond their 18th birthday where they will continue to receive support with accommodation, access to education and employment. For many young people this may be the best outcome for them, that is, to continue to receive help and support in the family-setting where they have always lived.
18. The Department of Education (DfE) reported that at the end of March 2016 that there were 70,440 children being looked after nationally. Whilst the overall statistics indicate a decrease in the number of children coming into care, this is sadly outweighed by the fact that fewer children are leaving care. This together with an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

supported by London authorities (1,470 during 2015/16) has impacted on the overall number of children looked after in the country. The new Immigration Act 2016 will further impact on local authorities who will be required to support higher numbers of UASC due to the dispersal arrangements provided for in the Act, as well as the arrival of UASC from the Calais border.

19. At the end of March 2016, there were 475 Looked After Children (LAC) in Southwark with 51% over the age of 16. The number of children being looked after by the Council is still above the national average and since 2012, Southwark has consistently been within the top three London local authorities supporting the highest number of LAC annually. The number of *younger* children coming into care in the borough has continued to decrease year on year in line with the national picture.
20. During this same period (2015/16) the Council also supported 95 young people who were at risk of homelessness by providing them with accommodation and support. Following the Southwark Judgement made by the Supreme Court in May 2009, the Council now has a duty to, at the point of a homeless assessment, give the young person information about their right to be assessed as a child in need. For the most part young people do not choose to become looked after children, but for those that do, this places an additional responsibility on the Council to make certain provisions for that young person up to and until their 21st or 25th birthday (in those cases education where they remain in education until age 25). 22 young people became 'looked after' via this route during the last 18 months ie: April 2015 – October 2016.
21. Although the Council has different responsibilities/duties to young people being looked after/leaving care and those at risk of homelessness, both cohorts are in need of support to prepare them for adulthood.

KEY FINDINGS FROM 16+ ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT PROJECT - MODEL

22. There are a number of emerging issues from the 16+ accommodation and support project. These are being explored by lead officers in order to inform the development of a new model, which itself will be brought to Cabinet in early 2017.
23. The emerging issues are set out below:
 - a number of young people over 18 years are residing in services for longer than the anticipated periods of support required. There are a number of young people known to be "stuck" in services as they are unable to access appropriate permanent accommodation to enable them to move-on. There are also a number of young people with particular support needs (for example mental health) which are undermining their ability to make the shift to independent living.
 - the Southwark support pathway is largely predicated on service users obtaining a Council tenancy as their end permanent housing solution (to enable this all care leavers have historically been granted a "band 2" status as part of the Council's housing allocation policy). Changes to council housing and Housing Benefit/Universal Credit will disproportionately impact on the under 35s. If a Council tenancy is no longer a viable option for the majority of these young people, what is? Are we supporting young people to have realistic expectations?
 - with the ongoing costs of housing in Southwark, as well as the anticipated further reductions in council housing and the cap in housing benefit/universal credit paid, the current model for care leavers and 16/17 year olds at risk of homelessness

will not be financially viable in the near future. Council and other social rents are often in the area of £80 a week, whereas those in the private sector can be two or three times higher. What is the right approach to support young people to obtain the right support and housing for them?

- There is a complex commissioning and operational environment in Southwark with many teams working across homelessness, the reablement and resettlement service (RARS), children's social care, providers, and two different contracting frameworks for different services. The 16+ accommodation and support project is exploring the best way to organise our support and housing model for young people, including the option to have "one front door/one pathway" into and through services.

KEY FINDINGS FROM 16+ ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT PROJECT - FINANCIALS

24. Currently LAC in Southwark are accommodated in residential care, adoption and fostering services or semi-independent /supported accommodation; with the latter commissioned specifically for young people aged 16-18 years. Placement is dependent on age, level of need and availability. There is also an option to return young people to family home with/without support if appropriate.
25. In 2015/16, Children's Social Care spent £7.9 million on accommodation and support for young people aged 16 and over. £2.2 million was spent on semi-independent and supported housing provision alone with a further 288k on the delivery of a Floating Support service to assist young people aged over 18 years with resettlement and tenancy sustainment. The biggest spend area was specialist placements in residential care which accounted for £3.5m. A full outline of spend can be found in Appendix 1.

NEXT STEPS

26. The 16+ accommodation and support service is aiming to bring a proposal on a new model to the Council's Cabinet in February/March 2017. This proposal will be available for consideration and comment by Education and Children's Scrutiny Sub Committee as directed by scrutiny.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2016-19	Commissioning Team Children's and Adults' Services	James Postgate Ext: 57627
Semi-Independent Living Service	Commissioning Team Children's and Adults' Services	James Postgate Ext: 57627
Prevention and Inclusion Services – Accommodation Based Support	Commissioning Team Children's and Adults' Services	James Postgate Ext: 57627

AUDIT TRAIL

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Director of Law and Democracy		No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance		No	No
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