

Item No. 7.	Classification: Open	Date: 25 April 2017	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Gaining Independence: Transforming Support and Housing for Southwark Looked After Children/Care Leavers and Young People at Risk of Homelessness aged over 16 Years	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the Corporate Parenting Committee

1. To note and consider the report.

Recommendations for the Cabinet 9 May 2017

That cabinet:

1. Accepts the findings of the young people aged 16+ support and housing project as set out in full in Appendix 1 of this report.
2. Approves the following recommendations:
 - i) to establish a joint leadership across the Council for delivering the 16+ support and housing pathway, with a common purpose across care, health, housing and support.
 - ii) to support young people wherever it is safe and in their best interests, to stay living at home with their family or foster carers.
 - iii) to establish a single "front door" into 16+ support and housing pathway for all looked after children/care leavers and young people at risk of homelessness, underpinned by a unified approach across children's social care and housing.
 - iv) to establish new Southwark Young People's 16+ Support and Resettlement Services with a small number of providers which will deliver support directly to young people that robustly prepares them for independent living. Some of these services will be located in Southwark with other services located within a reasonable travel distance of the borough.
 - v) to establish a whole system approach to support young people to move on from services. This approach will be underpinned by a principle of helping young people to make their own choices around their housing needs.
 - vi) to ensure young people can live independently in the community following preparatory support and training, so that young people do not experience a "cliff-edge" when leaving different support and housing schemes.
3. Instructs the strategic director of children's and adults' services and the strategic director of

housing and modernisation to undertake work to deliver these changes.

4. Notes that these changes will avoid costs that would have been borne by the council of £2.5m over the coming two years.

Recommendations for the Leader of the Council 9 May 2017

That the Leader of the Council:

5. Delegates joint authority to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and the cabinet member for children and schools to approve procurement decisions for the new Southwark Young People's 16+ Support and Resettlement Services, including any award of contracts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. The move to independent living is a formative time in many young people's lives. It is a time when many young people finish their education, take up employment and begin to pay rent and other bills in what may be their first home away from their families and foster carers. For many this is an exciting time, a time when they are able to flourish as adults, but also a time when they will be taking up the greater responsibilities that come with more independence. Still it is recognised that not every young person who turns 16 or 18 will be ready and prepared for this change. For some young people this can be a very challenging time, a time when they may be at risk of being exploited at the same time as they are struggling to cope with the task of living independently in their own home.
7. Southwark Council takes its different but overlapping duties to children leaving the care system and to those young people who are at risk of becoming homeless extremely seriously. Through the day-to-day professionalism of keyworkers, personal advisers, social and housing workers and volunteers, young people are helped to achieve better outcomes, to leave care equipped with the skills necessary to live independent lives, and to access good quality, affordable housing in places where each individual has the opportunity to build and deliver on their potential.
8. For many people, finding a home is a challenging experience and for care leavers and young people at risk of homelessness, this task can be particularly daunting. The options faced can appear unclear and at the same time require numerous decisions, including where to live and whether to live with friends or to move in on ones own. All of these options are important and each may play a role in setting the direction of a person's life. Still, when these decisions are put into the context of a housing crisis that is evident across London – and perhaps at its most acute in inner-London areas like Southwark - it is recognised that these issues can sometimes feel slight – and that questions of where to live can be vastly outweighed by the question of affordability.
9. Numerous national commitments to build new homes and to tackle the housing crisis in London have so far failed to stem a situation in which many people, and often young people in particular, cannot afford to rent or own a home. In order to meet this housing need, the council has led work to both foster the availability and affordability of housing in Southwark, including through community-led regeneration projects and with its trailblazing commitment to build 11,000 new council homes. And yet, despite these important local programmes, for young people leaving care or who are at risk of becoming homeless, the context of a lack of available homes to rent and move into, or of homes which are affordable, can often mean that the transition to independence can appear a near-impossible task.

10. It is in recognition of these challenges that the council has put in place a diverse range of services which ensure that for children leaving care and for other young people aged over 16 years old, there is provision which allows access to both support and housing. The Southwark 16+ support and housing services comprise a diverse set of schemes, support workers and accommodation which, taken together, supported 485 care leavers and other young people in 2016/17. Whether it is a flat with an attached key worker who is helping the young person sustain their education or find employment, a secure or therapeutic service, or a specialist home for young mothers and babies, the 16+ support and housing services aim to help prepare young people for independent living and, when ready, to move to a new home outside of services.
11. Given the importance of 16+ services to the life chances of care leavers and other young people, it is of particular concern that these schemes are coming under increasing pressure. In part due to the context of the housing crisis but also with the unprecedented reduction in local authority funding, services have begun to report that it is becoming more difficult to help young people both prepare for and then move onto their own home, with an impact that valuable places in 16+ schemes are “silting up” and, in consequence, more young people are having to be placed in emergency and residential settings. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of young people with complex and challenging behaviour entering services. For individual 16+ support and housing schemes, the need to adapt to these unprecedented circumstances can sometimes lie beyond their means to meet alone.
12. It was in this context that the council established the Southwark 16+ support and housing project with a primary objective to review current service pathways and to bring forward a refreshed, sustainable approach to helping care leavers and other young people to prepare for and move onto independent living. The outcome of this work and recommendations for change are set out in full in Appendix 1 of this report.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

13. The Southwark 16+ support and housing project undertook a range of different activities in its work, taking account of the views of young people who use services, as well as service providers, social workers and housing workers, and other key partners. The result is a system-wide review of the pressures facing 16+ care, support and housing services in Southwark, together with potential solutions. The key findings of this work were that:
 - Work on delivering the council’s housing strategy will ensure that there is a good provision of available and affordable housing in Southwark, including council housing. This is a very challenging issue as national housing policy has in recent years operated counterproductively to the housing needs of the local population. For young people in 16+ support and housing services, it is becoming more difficult to find their own home. Some are staying in services for far longer than originally intended as a consequence. There is some evidence that services are beginning to ‘silt up’. Due to this, the current delivery model for Southwark 16+ support and housing services is not sustainable in its current form.
 - The council provides a diverse range of different services, providing help for care leavers and young people who are at risk of homelessness. The pathway for young people to prepare for independence is complex and often requires young people to move services in order to get to the next stage in their journey to independence. The dual pathways for care leavers and young people at risk of homelessness adds further complexity and currently works against a whole-system approach. For young people using services, this journey to independence can often seem arbitrarily and confusing.

14. For young people in foster care at 18 years old, the best approach in terms of preparing for independent living, may be to stay with their current foster carer for a time through the established “Staying Put” arrangements. For other young people, where it is safe, suitable and healthy to do so, they may wish to return to their parental home after a stay in services, perhaps following a reconciliation. Other young people may wish to move outside London, others to stay in Southwark, or to return to Southwark. The approach for each young person should be tailored to meet their needs. All young people need access to reliable information and good advice to enable them to make choices about their options. However, the complexity of current service arrangements, together with an implied expectation that council housing will be available, risks setting up unrealistic expectations which are hard to meet.
15. The key challenge facing the council is to provide and sustain locally-based high-quality support and accommodation services, accessed through a single front door, that work to prepare young people leaving care and those at risk of homelessness (and therefore on the edge of care) for independent living in their own home. At the same time, the council must mitigate as far as it can the impact and adverse implications of housing benefit and welfare reform.
16. The outcome of meeting this challenge should be that more young people are able to lead the design and delivery of a pathway that meets their needs, that more young people feel safe during their use of this support and accommodation to prepare for independence and that more young people report that their learning provided them with the skills and resilience needed to obtain a good experience of independent living. Particular factors that must be incorporated into meeting this challenge include the higher number of young people coming into care during adolescence and the disproportionate numbers of young people with a Black Caribbean and Black African heritage entering 16+ services.
17. If the council and its partners are successful in bring about improvement in the support to care leavers and those at risk of homelessness in obtaining the skills to live independently through transformed 16+ housing and support, then this will have a number of positive outcomes including the increased confidence of young people wanting to move on, including from foster care and semi-independent living, less recourse to services because of placement or tenancy breakdown, more step-down arrangements from residential care, less recourse to residential care in circumstances where semi-independent placements are not available, and that an improved route on from semi-independent to independent living is established.
18. Southwark has been successful, with its partner, Catch 22, in winning an Innovation Bid to work in new ways to support young people leaving care. Catch 22 is a national charity with expertise in working with care leavers and innovation, as well as challenging social issues around young people. The timing of this work is well suited to working together on the transformation of support and housing for looked after children leaving care. It is also consistent with Southwark’s Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy.
19. Following the conclusion of its work, the 16+ support and housing project set out the following case for change:
 - In order for the Southwark 16+ support and housing services to meet the challenges identified and support young people on their journey to independence, it is recommended that there is a whole-system change of the current model of delivery.
 - This change would be underpinned by a common approach across care, health,

housing and support, to ensure that the young people who use services are at the centre of the design and delivery of the support arrangements.

- This new model would require a transformation, not only of commissioned services, including semi-independent and supported housing provision, but of the current support pathway – including how care and housing together support young people to overcome challenges, to develop skills and foster resilience and to live and flourish independently outside of services. This change will require the establishment of new services which it is proposed are called Southwark Young People’s 16+ Support and Resettlement Services.

20. The project has set forward six recommendations (2.i- vi in this report) to deliver this change.

21. A delivery plan has been developed which sets out an approach to implement these recommendations and this is set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

Policy implications

22. The policy implications of this work are set out in section 2 of the 16+ support and housing report at Appendix 1.

Community impact statement

23. Details of the population affected by any changes to these services are set out in section 5 of the 16+ support and housing report at Appendix 1.

24. The 16+ support and housing report sets out how the Council will work with young people and communities to ensure that any changes to services are equitable and led by service users. Any service change will be considered with regard to its impact on age; disability; faith/religion; gender; race; ethnicity; sexual orientation; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity.

Resource implications

25. The changes proposed will avoid costs that would have been borne by the council of £2.5m over the coming two years. Details of this are set out in Appendix 9 of the 16+ support and housing report at Appendix 1.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Democracy

To follow.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

To follow.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None.		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Report of the Southwark young people aged over 16 years old support and housing project - May 2017
Appendix 2	Delivery plan - transforming support and housing for Southwark looked after children/care leavers and young people at risk of homelessness

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Stephanie Cryan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing Councillor Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	
Lead Officer	Dick Frak, Director of Commissioning, Children's and Adults' Services Alasdair Smith, Director Children's and Families, Children's and Adults' Services Paul Langford, Director of Resident Services, Housing and Modernisation	
Report Author	James Postgate, Commissioning Manager, Children's and Adults' Services Paulette Robin, Senior Commissioning Officer, Children's and Adults' Services	
Version	Final	
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Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	Drafting	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Drafting	No
Cabinet Members	Yes	TBC
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		TBC