

Outreach visit to Accommodation providers on Monday 20 March 2017

The Education and Children's Services Committee is conducting a review into the experience of children and young people leaving the care system, in order to make recommendations for improvement. Two visits were made to council funded accommodation providers, by the committee chair Cllr Jasmine Ali, the scrutiny project manager, Julie Timbrell and the commissioning officer, James Postgate. Both the projects house care leavers and other young people in need.

Springfield Lodge – support and housing service for young people aged 16+

1 Grove Hill Road
Camberwell
London
SE5 8DF

The service is run by the Salvation Army. Ivan Congreve, service manager, and Helen Wilson, coordinator, discussed the service and gave a tour of the accommodation.

The project houses 33 young people. Around 50 % are care leavers. The other young people are 16 to 18 year olds who the council have deemed priority homeless. Often these young people will also have some kind of social care involvement. Young people can choose to be 'Looked After' at 16, 17 & 18 years old, and there was a court judgement to this effect. This means they can access more support. Homelessness is often a result of relationship breakdown between the young person and parents, the wider family & stepfamily.

The young people are frequently experiencing social problems: there is a significant problem with gang involvement. This can mean the young people are involved in the drugs business, robberies, knife crime and other forms of inter-gang violence, as well as child sexual exploitation / prostitution. Young people are vulnerable to gang involvement because they often yearn for a sense of belonging, and gangs offer this. Grooming for gang involvement can take place at school.

The project works with young people by building relationships, developing trust, and seeing the young people for who they really are. They challenge bad behaviour, and reward positive behaviour.

Support meetings take place initially once a week, then every couple of weeks. In the initial meeting a Risk Assessment is done and the young people is given 8 areas to work on, including physical, emotional and spiritual development. Young people are originally given a 28 days to licence to occupy, and this can be extended to 1 month, 2 months and 3 months. Young people can progress from a small room with shared kitchens in clusters (similar to university student accommodation), then to a studio flat, and then finally there are a few flats located in the grounds of the project, which are used to prepare for independent living. There are also extra facilities on site: a study/computer room, music studio and garden.

Before being allocated a permanent council tenancy young people live in Northcote House training flat, however that can involve mixing with adults with mental health problems and involve difficulties with storage of furniture and household goods acquired. It also means another move, and for young people who may have experienced a lot of instability and several moves this needs to be justified.

Young people are expected to progress. If there are problems the project uses the same disciplinary process that young people may experience at work, partly in preparation. The reasons for young people having their supported accommodation terminated include perpetrating a crime, not paying

rent, or not engaging. Normally moves are planned, and options include going to Bournemouth Road, a bedsit, or specialist residential accommodation, which can be frequently based out of London.

The workers were asked if moves out of London work; they said although there can be reasons for moving young people away it often does not work as young people travel back.

The workers said that for those who progress successfully through the programme the housing move options include being resettled back home, moving into private rented accommodation or if Band 2 status is given because of Care Leaver status or through the Move On Allocation Allowance (MOAA) scheme they can access a council flat or social housing. (The Move On Allocation Allowance (MOAA) assists adults and young people in supported housing to move into their own homes. Young people have to demonstrate they have taken steps to progress, for example: engaging with education, employment and training over time. The scheme is recognised as valuable in how it offers support and help, on the basis of clear milestones achieved, and responsibilities fulfilled.)

The workers were asked about permanent rehousing out of Southwark given the limited social housing availability. The workers said most young people want to stay in Southwark, though the rest of London is okay, but further afield is problematic as the young people would have little support. Young people will have local relationships and much of the projects preparation work is focused on building community links.

The project was asked if it would be helpful for Southwark to offer a scheme of shared living with one person acting as a peer landlord. They thought this could be useful as a development stage as young people who receive their own tenancy too soon can fail to sustain it.

The project links in with Southwark Works for employment support. Apprenticeships can be difficult for young people to maintain because the pay is low.

The project has links with care leavers who have moved on and they come back from time to time to offer their experience, and sometimes informal peer support happens, which they considered valuable as this happens organically.

The scheme runs a Life skills programme, with about 23 modules; however they are working to develop a smaller range of core categories.

The project was asked for recommendations and they gave the following:

- Recent re-tendering has left the project with the same money, which is not sufficient. The Salvation Army tops up with fundraising, how if the money continues to flat line this will become increasingly difficult
- More consistency - longer term contracts and also a consistency with expected outcomes. They would like commissioners to recognise the journey and little milestones e.g. a young person not grunting and instead offering a greeting is an important step.

Southwark Accommodation Based Service/Floating Support Service for Young People - support and housing service for young people aged 18+ including mothers and babies

4 Chancel Street
London
SE1 0UX

Jess Haigh and Jacqueline (LookAhead Care and Support) met and talked about the service.

Southwark Accommodation Based Service (SABS) delivers accommodation based support in properties owned by private landlords. The people using the service are semi-independent, as they are coping with floating support. They have their own tenancies and receive 3 hours support (not all face to face) for about 2 years. Support workers will link people into the community and offer tenancy support.

People usually move on using the Move On Allocation Allowance (MOAA) scheme. The project said this is a valuable route as it built independence. Workers said it would be helpful to have more consistency for clients in the MOAA expectations, and also the expectation for young mothers to work can be problematic. This is particularly so for care leavers, who may have increased separation anxiety around leaving young babies or toddlers because of their early experiences. They also struggle to find an appropriate person to child-mind, with no income and little or no family support. Once the children are older and the 15 hours early years offer becomes available it is easier for young mothers to fulfil the work requirement for MOAA.

Moving on options without MOAA are very difficult. Private housing is prohibitively expensive; in supported housing £204 per week is available via housing benefit, but this drops to £95 when people leave. Moving out of the borough to access cheaper housing is difficult without local support networks. They considered young mothers staying in borough a particular priority.

Floating Support around 100 young people receive floating support. There are a range of issues leading to people being in a precarious housing situation and in need of support ; often related to family breakdown. The floating support service is offered to people in a variety of situations, but hardly anyone or no-one is in private accommodation. Some people are sofa surfing, or staying with family, or in social housing.

Although support is offered it can be difficult to get young people to engage – the support is voluntary. Care leavers can sometimes not engage authentically because of a lack of trust. Other issues with care leavers are related to ‘attachment’. Boundaries can be an issue, with confusion between friendships and professional relationships – this is not helped by inconsistent messages from providers.

The project thought better working relationships with social workers, for example joint team meetings, would be helpful to provide better support to care leavers. They thought more courses on practical life skills, relationships and managing emotions would be helpful for care leavers e.g Managing Money and Healthy Relationships . These need to be made appealing; accredited courses are more popular. The project encourages people to develop relationships and engagement in community, and they promote positive risk taking. They work with REED to get employment support.

They thought peer mentoring for care leavers would be good, particularly from older people with experience of the care system, as care leavers can often distrust professionals.