

Item No. 9.	Classification: Open	Date: 9 May 2017	Meeting Name: Cabinet
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	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR VICTORIA MILLS, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

We are committed to giving Southwark's young people the best start in life. Supporting young people to prepare for adulthood and, when ready, to move into a home of their own, is a critical responsibility for those with a parenting role. For children who are in the care of the local authority and young people who are at risk of becoming homeless this transition period can be an especially testing time. We are ambitious on behalf of our young people and this report underlines our commitment to supporting them at this formative time in their lives.

As our young people take their first steps towards independence, we want to see them be able to continue their education, move into employment, but also to find their first home away from their families and foster carers. We recognise that this can be a challenging time for all young people as they take on greater responsibilities, but it can be particularly difficult for those young people leaving care and those at risk of becoming homeless. We are committed to supporting all our young people to make this move at the right time, in a safe way, and when they are prepared for these responsibilities.

A new Southwark Young People's 16+ Support and Resettlement Service will provide one single 'front door' and pathway for all young people and ensure unified leadership and support across care, health and housing. It will also better ensure that young people have genuine choices around their housing needs and are properly supported to live independently when leaving housing and support services.

We take our duties to support both children leaving the care system, and those young people who are at risk of becoming homeless extremely seriously. Through the day-to-day dedication, professionalism and work provided by keyworkers, personal advisers, social and housing workers and volunteers, we are committed to ensuring our young people are equipped with the skills necessary to live independent lives, and to access good quality, affordable housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the Cabinet

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 may avoid costs that would be borne by the council of up to £2.5m over the coming two years.

Recommendations for the Leader of the Council

That the Leader of the Council:

5. Delegates authority to the cabinet member for children and schools to, in consultation with the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing, 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

26. This report seeks cabinet approval for a new approach to housing and support provision for young people aged 16 and over who are looked after or are otherwise eligible for housing support. The report recommends the establishment of a new joint leadership approach across care, housing and health, and makes a number of recommendations for the commissioning of support to meet the needs of young people. The report recommends establishing 'one front door' for young people accessing services, establishing a new approach for commissioning support and resettlement services, and a whole system approach to support young people to move on from services and to be prepared for independent living when they do so. The approach will support young people, where it is safe and in their best interests to live at home with their family or foster carers.
27. The decision to agree the approach is one that can be taken by cabinet collectively under the council's contract standing orders.
28. The report sets out at paragraphs 13 to 19, the main issues for consideration. Further detail is set out in Appendix 1.
29. The report includes the findings from consultation which has taken place during the last twelve months. The details of the consultation are summarised within paragraphs 13 to 19 and Appendix 1 of this report.
30. Appendix 1 notes in section 2.12 that the new approach is consistent with the council's Fairer Future promises, as set out in the Council Plan, and also consistent with the Children and Young People's Plan, the joint Strategic Framework for Children and Young People, the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy, and the Council's Sufficiency Duty.

Legislative framework

31. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 sets out the responsibilities of local authorities to provide services to children in need and their families. It is the general duty of every local authority to (a) safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and (b) so far as is consistent with that duty to promote the upbringing of children by

their families.

32. Section 20 of the Children Act requires that local authorities must provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of (a) there being no person who has parental responsibility for him, (b) his being lost or abandoned or the person who has been caring for him being prevented from providing suitable accommodation or care. A further duty to provide accommodation may arise where a child in need has reached the age of 16 and whose welfare will be seriously prejudiced if accommodation is not provided.
33. If children's services decide they do not have a duty to provide accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act or the young person has refused provision of accommodation children's services must consider what other support and services should be provided to meet their needs in conjunction with housing services.
34. Under Housing Act 1996 Part 7 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation (England) Order 2002 applicants aged 16 or 17 may have a priority need for accommodation if they are not owed a duty under section 20 of the 1989 or have refused section 20 accommodation.
35. Guidance has been issued entitled 'Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation'. This is statutory guidance issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 and section 82 of the Housing Act 1996. Social services authorities and housing authorities are expected to comply with this guidance.
36. The guidance endorses cooperation between children's services and housing services to meet the needs of children and young people. It provides for strategic joint working to secure a range of suitable housing and support options for young people – including options' for the provision of accommodation with support for 16 and 17 year olds who seek help because they are homeless and for care leavers and endorses collaboration between children's services commissioners and housing services to meet the housing needs of young people.
37. Any commissioning processes related to the implementation of the recommended approach and the action plan set out in Appendix 2 to the report should take account of the council's duties as a Best Value authority under the Local Government Act 1999. Officers should seek advice from the director of law and democracy, both in relation to the form and content of any contracts to be awarded to commercial and voluntary sector organisations and the appropriate procurement process to be followed in each case.
38. The report recommendations have been subject to a equalities impact assessment. This is important because in exercising its functions the council must have due regard to its equalities duties as set out in the Equalities Act 2010 and specifically the need to:
 - a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct
 - b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
 - c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those that do not. The relevant "protected characteristics" are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

39. Cabinet is referred to the community impact statement in this report and, in particular to the equalities impact assessment and the consultation which has been undertaken in order to inform the development and detail of the recommended approach.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (Ref: CAS17/015)

40. The budgets for the services identified within this report are within a range of areas across directorates and service areas. The report identifies that there are demand and supply issues, with a consequent significant budget pressures most notably within children’s services. The direction of travel within the report suggests that there is the potential to avoid costs of up to £2.5m over the next two years following implementation of the suggested initiatives and therefore the potential to reduce costs pressures, though not necessarily to make budget savings given ongoing demands.
41. This cost avoidance target set out will need to continue to be reviewed for realism with the service, commissioning and finance as the work develops. Whilst information on how this figure has been calculated has now been provided, until this has been reviewed in detail with the affected services, the figure and any assumptions on investment costs needs to be treated with caution. In addition there will also be a need to ensure that there is no double counting of any consequent savings and cost avoidance flowing from other related initiatives. In addition, as part of the work it will be important to balance statutory duties, quality and outcome factors against affordability considerations in the context of constrained budgets overall.

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 Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	
Lead Officer	Genette Laws, Director of Commissioning, Children's and Adults' Services, Alasdair Smith, Director Children's and Families, Children's and Adults' Services and Paul Langford, Director of Resident Services, Housing and Modernisation	
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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments sought	Comments included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
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