

<b>7 February 2018</b>		<b>ITEM: 16</b> Decision 0110465
<b>Cabinet</b>		
<b>Pilot Development of Head Start Housing for Care Leavers &amp; Vulnerable Young People</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Councillor James Halden, Portfolio Holder for Education and Health		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Strategic Lead, Learning and Skills		
<b>Accountable Directors:</b> Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services and Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## **Executive Summary**

This report sets out how Thurrock Council is looking to support young people who are leaving care and other vulnerable young people with one of the key barriers they have identified, finding suitable affordable accommodation.

To address this Inspire have worked in partnership with Thurrock's Housing Department and have undertaken a pilot around the development of Head Start Housing for Care Leavers and other vulnerable young by developing two (HMO's) house of multiple occupancy. This pilot scheme has been developed to support our role as the Corporate Parent a number of housing issues that young people have identified as they moved into adulthood have been addressed have been resolved by the development of this scheme.

Since the inception of this scheme the council has saved more than £66,000 this is made up of a combination of out of borough placements, supported accommodation and social housing. By year end March 2018 savings across the financial year are forecast at £84,000.

The following are quotes from young people who have benefitted to date from the scheme.

*"This scheme is so needed in Thurrock and [the pilot] should be extended so that more young people stand a chance of developing independence and success at work. " HT*

*"Before the HMO, I was sharing a caravan in Ockendon with my two brothers.*

*It was very cramped; I would hit my head on the door frames. People often judged me for living where I did, expecting a type of behaviour before getting to know me. Of course this affected my view of the world/them and not in a good way. Now my work life balance is good. My work is going well – I am in a permanent post, in a job that I enjoy and get on well with my colleagues. I get on well with the other tenants, I like sharing the space with the others. We help each other out – car rides, lending and borrowing our things, making repairs, sometimes cooking for each other I enjoy spending time with my family now! We have improved the property and made it our own. We have good relationships with the neighbours; they have donated garden chairs and tools. At some point, I will invite them round for a BBQ. I no longer feel judged. I can relax and be me, in my home.”*

*JW*

## **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1 To approve and support the ongoing development of the programme to enable more properties to be available for the scheme**
- 1.2 To approve and support the development of a transitional housing scheme and would provide personalised support for young people as they enter the aftercare service.**
- 1.3 To approve the joint working approach between Social Care and Housing to improve the offer to care leavers.**
- 1.4 To approve the proposal to exempt Care Leavers from Council Tax between 18-21 and in exceptional circumstances for young people up to 25.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Children’s Services have recognised the need to provide more support to our young people in relation to housing opportunities, and in March 2016 they developed a strategic partnership with housing. The purpose was to address some of the key barriers young people face in finding suitable accommodation at an affordable rate.

As a result of the partnership in June 2016, Housing launched its first house of multiple occupation (HMO). As part of a joint partnership between Housing and the Inspire Youth Hub, the HMO offers accommodation for up to two years to those who are receiving support from Inspire. The main focus of the project is to support the tenants in developing the skills necessary so they are ready to work and live in local communities independently. This is supported by strong pathway plans to independent living which look at moving on and budget management.

## **2.2 Safeguarding**

Ensuring young people are safe is an essential part of the process of selection for the Head Start Housing opportunity. The selection process for the HMO is undertaken jointly between Inspire and Housing. We also provide a range of ongoing support opportunities for young people to ensure that we have the safety of young people at the forefront of the project. We undertake regular meetings with tenants and provide both emotional and practical support around the transition into independent living.

These meetings provide an opportunity for the Inspire team to review progress and identify any potential safeguarding concerns so as to ensure they are dealt with swiftly. Staff work closely with tenants to ensure that we mitigate for any risk associated with young people living together. If issues do arise they are discussed with the youth work team who look to identify resolutions – ensuring that young people have a voice around for example conflict resolution.

Through regular visits, housing colleagues will ensure that the tenancy remains in good condition, while at the same time the Inspire team will address any pastoral concerns which may arise during the course of the visit. This will ensure that any problems can be identified and addressed at the earliest possible moment and that any potential risks to the tenancy can be identified and addressed.

## **2.3 Eligibility Criteria**

We have engaged with a range of young people and other professional colleagues to develop the criteria and as part of our ongoing development we review these on a regular basis

To be eligible for accommodation, the occupants will:

- be aged between 18-25 years,
- priority is given to young people who are in care of the local authority
- engaging in some form of education employment or training opportunity
- provide two references (training or education, one character (not a relative))
- have no criminal record for violence including sexual offences, arson, fraud or any offences related to drug dealing
- Agree to enter into a formal agreement with conditions for accessing training, personalised support and involvement in community activities.

The minimum term is 6 months; the maximum term is 24 months, unless there is a serious breach of the agreement. On successful completion of the agreement, the young person is provided with advice and support from the housing team within the council to identify suitable accommodation.

Utilising the specialist support offered by Inspire/other agencies, tenants are helped to establish stability in their lives and develop their career and various skills such as money management, developing and maintaining effective relationships and the practicalities of independent living. Support is provided to successfully integrate new tenants to existing 'house mates'. This support is part of the overall service that has been developed between Inspire and our Housing Department.

The Tenancy Management team supports the tenants through quarterly reviews, facilitating repairs and access to wider services. To make independent living as easy as possible, the tenants pay a service charge which covers their utility bills; this ensures continuous lighting, warmth, water etc which helps the tenants to focus on developing new skills.

All tenants undertook a selection and interview process by the partnership, with the tenancy agreement being for a minimum of 6 months and a maximum of 2 years. When the tenants give notice, they are supported to secure new accommodation; this will free up rooms in the HMO for new tenants.

As a result of early successes, in May 2017, Housing opened a second HMO to further test systems and processes for the pilot.

## **2.4 Moving On**

The scheme looks to move young people on from the scheme within 24 months. Reviews are undertaken throughout the tenancy at 6, 12 and 18 months, to ensure that young people are prepared for moving on. These reviews will be undertaken jointly with both Inspire and the Housing Team with the aim of ensuring that young people move on and maintain a secure tenancy when they leave the scheme. The moving on process also includes personal debt plans and how to manage money – this is based on feedback from the young people and the recognition that managing finances is one of the key challenges to a successful transition into the young person managing their own tenancies. Each young person will also have a personal education, employment and training plan to ensure they have every chance of meeting their full potential.

## **2.5 Outcomes to date:-**

- 2 houses, unused for over 2 years, have been converted into an HMO (1 x 4 bedroom, 1 x 3 bedroom), to the required standard.
- To date, 9 individuals, all employed/ full time education had unstable living arrangements have benefitted from the accommodation.
- All of the tenants have maintained their employment/education with the exception of one who has had a baby and benefitted from the 'move on' support (into social housing). She recently passed her first quarterly review.
- One tenant successfully completed their apprenticeship and has started a teaching degree at London Metropolitan University. In the

intervening period, she secured a part-time role as a LSA in a local primary school (maternity cover).

- One tenant moved out of the accommodation because he could not maintain the rent account to his satisfaction. He continues to receive support in this matter and, excepting the arrears, Housing described him as a model tenant.
- All of the individuals are supported by Inspire Youth Service and Housing to promote and encourage independent living, whilst developing a diverse range of skills.
- Safeguarding tenants is extensive with regular contact by Inspire Youth Services (Employability and Skills, Youth Workers, After Care Workers, Next Steps team) as well as teams from Housing, namely Rents and Welfare, Registration, Estate Services, Repairs and Tenancy Services. Weekly meetings take place to review developments and external agencies, such as Vitality (smoking cessation), Step Change (debt management), Open Door (advocacy) are introduced, as required.
- Neighbours are happy with the tenant's behaviour and have written compliments to Thurrock Council.
- The net revenue of the properties has more than doubled by converting to an HMO. Conversion costs are recouped within one year.
- The tenants are paying 24% less than market rent for their accommodation.

## **2.6 Early evaluation of how the scheme works:-**

- All tenants view the property before making a commitment to the tenancy agreement.
- Support provided by Inspire Youth Service, Housing has been useful for developing skills and confidence to successfully manage a home.
- Face to face support does not have to be so frequent (once a week for 6 weeks, then every two weeks for 6 weeks, then once a month it can take various forms such as telephone calls, text messages and visits from other teams/support workers.
- The group sessions, used to resolve conflict, were unhelpful, however we have subsequently changed the focus and this has improved.
- The original four tenants believed they achieved/exceeded their expectations for independent living.
- The tenants feel their home is in a safe location and that they are part of the local community.
- The tenants are teaching each other useful, practical skills.

## **2.7 The Challenges**

- To ensure that support for tenants is consistent between Tenancy Management and Inspire Youth Service.
- Building sufficient trust between the council and tenants so targeted support is effective.

- Effective communication between different directorates at the council, each with some competing priorities around outcomes.
- Introducing new tenants with minimal disruption.
- Promoting success without compromising the sensitivities of the pilot or the safety of the tenants.

## **2.8 Future Developments**

As part of the ongoing commitment to identify ways in which we can reduce costs associated with placements we are exploring the potential to utilise more HMO's and we would like to look at a focus on providing transitional support to our young people in the care system who are 17 and will be moving into the aftercare team. This would provide an opportunity to reduce costs associated with semi-independent living, and enable more focussed work to be undertaken around the transition into adulthood.

The potential to provide more affordable housing for young people under the Head Start Housing scheme is being explored – this would look to address some of the significant delays in finding suitable affordable housing for Thurrock's young people.

## **2.9 Council Tax Exemption**

It is recognised that many care leavers struggle to manage their finances until they have adapted to living independently and are able to budget effectively. In order to support this transition, it is proposed that all care leavers living in Thurrock should be exempt from Council Tax aged 18-21, and in exceptional circumstances to 25. This will go hand in hand with support work being undertaken with the Inspire team offering financial planning and careers advice.

The Portfolio Holder met with the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee During Committee on Tuesday 12 December where he gave an undertaking to offer additional information regarding the "head start housing" policy for care leavers. Specifically he said he would outline the options and possible recommendations that he and officers considered for the tax exemption element. The 4 options considered are listed below -

1. No change. Clearly this would be the option that did not create any burden on the budget, but this was instantly discounted as it was felt that those 18 year olds who were straight out of the system most benefitted from some "breathing space".
2. A totally discretionary system. This would best allow us to target support at the most needy, however this was removed as a fully means tested system would be a large logistical burden.
3. A exemption at the age of 18. This was the most straightforward and would offer universal support for some of the most vulnerable. However, reflecting both on the full Council debate and the fact that our pastoral support and HMO offer would be for longer than 1 year, it was felt an exemption at 18-19 was too limited.

4. An exemption from 18-21, with discretionary exemptions to 25. This option hit all the targets. 36 months felt very robust (initially it was 2 years in line with the HMO tenancy but a year was added to help any young people who were transitioning from HMO onwards). The additional 4 year discretion was felt to be very manageable and would best help target support at the most needy. This is the option included in the paper.

In terms of what “discretionary” means, we have left this as loose as possible. It was felt that social workers should be able to use their judgement without us imposing a rigid tick box exercise. The Director will be keeping a close eye on this.

In regards to the full council motion calling for the exemption to 25 and the Portfolio Holder’s amendment asking for this issue to be considered by committee alongside the wider housing/education support, it was felt that this was satisfied this with a policy that robustly links housing support with a pastoral offer from the skills team while putting in place our first ever tax exemptions for all care leavers up to 21 and extending to 25 on a case by case basis.

At the time of writing this report there had been no further comment from Overview and Scrutiny Members.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 This report sets out a range of opportunities to address the issues around housing for young people in the care of the local authority – we have undertaken a pilot programme to look at the potential ways in which we can develop this further – one of the key issues we are looking to address is the transitional housing requirements of young people and will continue to review the pilot HMO’s to identify ways in which this can be further imbedded in the Council’s housing strategy.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1 To develop this pilot programme into the Council’s housing strategy and promote a more cohesive offer to care leavers around transitional housing opportunities. One of the key reasons for the recommendations is to create a range of housing solutions and thus address some of the significant budget pressures associated with providing housing for care leavers.

## **5. Impact On Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance And Community Impact**

5.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:

- create a great place for learning and opportunity

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**  
**Management Accountant**

This report has no financial implications – however it has evidenced a reduction in costs incurred by our Leaving & Aftercare Team.

### **6.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Principal Solicitor for Children’s**  
**Safeguarding**

The Committee is asked to note the report content under the remit of the Committee’s terms of reference and powers.

### **6.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

Supporting our young people is a key strategic priority for Thurrock Council, we ensure that we can utilise our powers to positively discriminate to create opportunities. We continue to seek the views of young people to shape the programmes on offer and continue to utilise integrative partnerships to secure Brighter Futures.

### **6.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

- None

**7. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

- None

**8. Appendices To This Report:**

- None

**Report Author:**

Michele Lucas

Strategic Lead, Learning and Skills

Education