

2 July 2019		ITEM: 8
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Semi Independent Supported Accommodation Sufficiency		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Sue Green, Strategic Lead of Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

The local authority has a statutory duty under S.22G of the Children Act 1989 to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children. Semi-independent accommodation for 16-18 year olds is currently unregulated and this report outlines the work that had been undertaken to ensure that the placements provided are of good quality, this was identified as a priority in the last sufficiency audit.

The recent commissioning exercise has, for the first time, established a select list of providers that provides a consistent quality standard as well as setting a framework of fees and charges. Clearer monitoring requirements have been set as a part of this commissioning exercise particularly for the semi-independent supported accommodation providers. A set of commissioning intentions seeks to continue to develop this work and will be delivered over the coming year.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 That members note the progress made to date to increase the provision of good quality semi-independent accommodation.**
 - 1.2 That members agree the commissioning priorities outlined in paragraph 3.10.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 The local authority has a statutory duty under S.22G of the Children Act 1989 to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children. The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

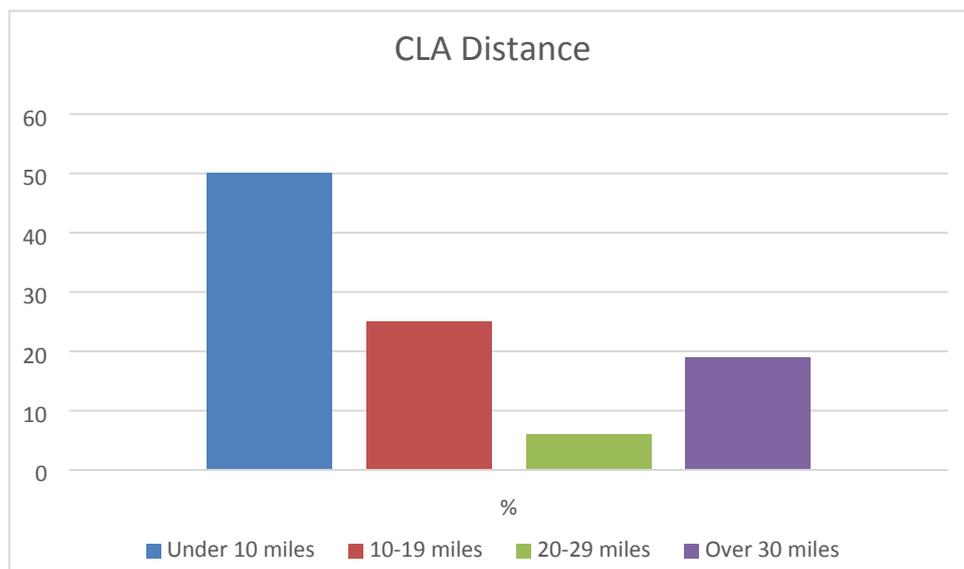
- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the local authority is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy is part of the market management
- That the Duty applies not just to meeting the needs of looked after children and young people but also children at risk of care or custody
- Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families.

2.2 This report has a particular focus on how the local authority meets its duty for 16-18 year olds requiring semi-independent accommodation as this is unregulated and was identified as a priority in the previous sufficiency analysis.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The number of children in care is reducing from its peak in 2017 of 334 to 285 at the end of March 2019. This is due to a number of contributory factors including the reduction of unaccompanied asylum seeking children due to the national protocols introduced and the introduction of the Early Help strategies that aim to provide support at an earlier stage.

3.2 75% of placements are within a 20 mile radius, this is broadly similar to 2017. Those placed over 30 miles has increased slightly from 16% to 19% but the recent procurement activity will not yet have had an impact on securing placements closer to Thurrock. The size of Thurrock means that those children not placed in the Borough are generally in neighbouring or nearby authorities such as Essex, Southend, London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge



- 3.3 During 2018 a full procurement exercise was held for all residential provision, independent fostering placements, mother and baby placements and semi-independent accommodation. This allowed us to set up a framework of providers to meet individual needs and reduces, although does not remove spot purchasing
- 3.4 Nationally concerns have been raised about the market for semi-independent accommodation particularly as this is unregulated and it was a priority that the procurement exercise addressed this locally.
- 3.5 Organisations applying to be a provider for Thurrock are expected to meet high quality standards and The aim of the service is to provide “Supported Accommodation” and “Support” for Young People aged 16-18+ (up to a maximum age of 25 by exception) in five distinct groups:
- Young People aged 16-17 who are deemed suitable to reside in Supported Accommodation to prepare them for independent living and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
 - Young People who are looked after children as unaccompanied asylum seekers aged 16-17 to prepare them for independent living and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
 - Young People who are homeless aged 16-17 and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
 - Young People aged 16-17 who are leaving secure accommodation / youth offending institutes or (police custody pending a court hearing) and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
 - Young People aged 18 with no recourse to public funds for short periods
- 3.6 In 2018 we commissioned supported accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17, and in some cases aged up to 25 with agreement from the Council. The aim of the provision in most cases was as a transition between either Foster Care or Residential Care to work towards independent living at age 18.
- 3.7 The expected quality levels set for semi-independent accommodation were high and of the 53 providers that tendered for this work, 40 were failed, this is a reflection of the importance of this. The select list is opened annually so we are hoping that the number of locally based providers continues to increase.
- 3.8 Our monitoring processes include a minimum of an annual visit that is unannounced where the quality standards are monitored, this frequency is increased based on risk. Where concerns are raised an unannounced visit is made on the same or next day and on the day of the visit a decision is made on suspension or termination depending on the concerns. If young people need to be moved this is arranged immediately.

3.9 Young people are also looked after through residential and fostering placements, particularly where there is a need for care as well as support. We have identified that there is a need to develop models that strengthen the links between different types of care to support children as they move towards adulthood such as the transition between fostering and semi-independent provision there may still be care needs as defined by Ofsted but there is also a need to prepare for independence. Semi-independent accommodation is not regulated to provide this but we are working with some providers to become registered and meet with transition.

3.10 As a part of the ongoing work to increase the sufficiency of provision we have identified the following commissioning intentions:

- To further develop 16+ provision generally plus where there are care needs rather than just support.
- To further develop the existing area risk assessment work focussed on CSE, Gang and knife crime
- To increase the number of residential providers particularly where there are high needs
- To develop provision to support the step down from secure and high needs provision addressing the gap between care and support
- Develop the work through Headstart Housing to improve our accommodation offer to care leavers
- To continue to improve our market development strategies as a part of further procurement work
- To increase the take up of current in house foster care placements and to increase the number of placements available
- To continue to reduce spot purchasing through the annual procurement exercise recognising this may always be needed to meet specific needs
- To consider block purchasing where need has been identified to improve the offer and reduce costs

3.11 The impact of the work to improve sufficiency will be mainly be measured through the outcomes for the children and young people in placements including through feedback from children and young people as a part of their individual reviews. However, the following indicators will also provide some information on how well our duty to provide sufficient places to meet needs is being met:

- Placement stability
- Distance to placement
- Number of placements through framework against number of placements spot purchased
- Average cost per placement per type

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The local authority has a statutory duty under S.22G of the Children Act 1989 to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children.

4.2 As semi-independent accommodation for young people aged 16-18 years is unregulated the need to have a robust quality framework supported through the commissioning of placements is paramount. A commissioning exercise was carried out in 2018 for all types of placements and a framework is now in place. The next phase of commissioning builds on this exercise and also on the range of services available to young people to support the transition to adulthood.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 During the Council's commissioning exercise engagement and consultation with young people who have experienced being "looked after" they used the following key words to describe the features of a good service:

Trust	Listening	Structured
Communication	Helping	Transparency
Supporting	Understanding	Knowledge

This feedback was reflected in the specification that sets out the requirements for providers.

5.2 As a part of ongoing consultation, the views of young people will be gathered through the newly appointed Participation and Engagement Officer. A JSNA product on the needs of children who are looked after is also being developed and this will inform any future service provision.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 This report impacts on the following council priorities:

- People: a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.
- Prosperity: a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Management Accountant

The need to achieve value for money whilst providing high quality placements that meet individual needs is crucial. The recent work to commission a framework of providers will reduce spot purchasing and regularise the fee levels paid particularly for semi-independent support accommodation and the annual opening of the contract for new providers will strengthen this.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Legal

The work outlined in this report contributes to the local authority statutory duty on sufficiency. The Sufficiency Duty (the “Duty”) is outlined in S.22G of the Children Act 1989, as follows:

“General duty of local authority to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children

(1) It is the general duty of a local authority to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, the outcome in subsection (2).

(2) The outcome is that the local authority are able to provide the children mentioned in subsection (3) with accommodation that—

(a) is within the authority's area; and

(b) meets the needs of those children.

(3) The children referred to in subsection (2) are those—

(a) that the local authority are looking after,

(b) in respect of whom the authority are unable to make arrangements under section 22C(2), and

(c) whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the authority's area.”

The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010) which states that:

“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for looked after children.”

The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the Local Authority is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy and practice is part of the “market management”
- That the Duty applies not just to meeting the needs of “looked after” children and young people but also children at risk of care or custody

Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Officer

By strengthening the requirements on providers to provide a diverse range of support and care the individual needs of children and young people can be better met. Clear standards are set out through the specifications on the requirements of providers and they are expected to evidence they are meeting these.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **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

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author:

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Children's Services