

<b>16 March 2021</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Inspire - Head Start Housing : Supporting Care Leavers</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Report of:</b> Tiffany Bright – Inspire - Skills Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services & Roger Harris, Corporate Director Adults, Housing & Health		
<b>This report is public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

Local Authorities have a duty, as a corporate parent, to ensure continued involvement in supporting young people as they leave care and move into independence until they are 21 years of age (or up to 25 years if specific, targeted support is required). Thurrock is committed to ensuring that care leavers (CLs) and children in need receive targeted support in high quality accommodation.

Young people in care and leaving care can be highly vulnerable and at risk of experiencing multiple accommodation moves, and/or in the case of young people leaving care, are at risk of becoming homeless.

Head Start Housing (HSH) was formally launched in December 2018. This is a joint initiative between Children Service and Housing. The team comprises 4 officers, as part of the Inspire offer. There are 2.5 FTE Housing Officers, 1 FTE business administration apprentice and 0.5 FTE Mediation Officer.

HSH sources and manages a portfolio of accommodation for young people either in care or in the process of leaving care.

The HSH Strategy aims to return all care leavers (CL) to Thurrock by December 2023. This is so they can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, can easily access the range of local services, diverse education and employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.

Preparing CL for adulthood remains a key priority for Thurrock Council. HSH has been created to provide a solution for CL accommodation.

The aim of this report is to provide Housing O&S with an overview of progress to date and to make some recommendations for further enhancing the service.

## **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1 To scrutinise the cross directorate working to improve the quality of services to care leavers regarding housing options.**
- 1.2 To support and promote innovative ways to engage CLs to prepare for independent living including entry into employment.**
- 1.3 Housing Overview and Scrutiny is asked to note and comment upon the work undertaken by HSH.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

### **2.1 Early pilot findings**

- 2.1.1 In March 2016, Children's Services and Housing designed a pilot to test HMO's for vulnerable young people, either in employment or working towards or at risk of losing their job on account of unstable accommodation.
- 2.1.2 The first property, 4 bedroom in Chadwell St Mary, accommodated two males and 2 females. Three were in employment and one was working towards employment. Out of hours support was provided on a one to one basis and in group sessions and the early success lead to the modification of a second property.
- 2.1.3 The second property, 3 bedroom, also in Chadwell St Mary, accommodated three males. Two were in employment and one had an offer of employment. Out of hours support was provided and this was successful for nearly a year. With a change of tenants we did experience some unacceptable behaviours this was addressed in partnership with Housing and Children's services.
- 2.1.4 Considerable learning has been applied from the pilot to inform the Head Start Housing strategy, 2018 - 2023.
- 2.1.5 The aim is to return all CLs wherever possible to Thurrock by December 2023. This is so they can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, can easily access the range of local services, diverse education and employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.
- 2.1.6 HSH sources and manages a portfolio of accommodation for young people either in care or in the process of leaving care.
- 2.1.7 Housing made a commitment to provide 6 beds each year, by 2023 for exclusive use by CLs by making use of Right to Buy receipts, increasing LA

owned housing stock and making a positive contribution to the Housing Reduction Act 2017.

## 2.2 Progress to date

- 2.2.1 Support from the LA with a £1m capital bid has enabled further work to be undertaken between Housing and HSH and as a result HSH has purchased 3 properties that will provide 12 beds (the aspirational target). Taking into account Legal fees and modification costs, approximately £140,000 will be returned to the capital fund. 5 young males have moved into the first property.
- 2.2.2 Since December 2018, Housing has enabled CLs to make use of 13 beds, with below market rental costs applied. A further 7 beds are anticipated to be available by end August 2021. This leaves a further 10 beds to be allocated by Housing by December 2023, for the allocation of 6 beds pa, to be met.
- 2.2.3 Over the past 12 months, 9 properties (6 out of borough) have been handed back. 19 beds, in borough, have been procured. Each property provides essential furnishings, utility bills, water rates, wifi, cleaning tools, blinds and light shades. This is designed to reduce the CL's outlay from their Setting Up Home Grant, enable online access to courses/employment, working with the communal cleaning contractor to learn how to keep the property clean, reduces the amount of property in storage and an added benefit of reducing the number of financial transactions for the Finance team.
- 2.2.4 HSH Mediation has worked with fewer than 10 young people and their families to delay/avoid homelessness, despite promotion of the service and regular meetings with Families First. This intervention remains very successful with more than 90% positive outcomes, with positive relationships maintained.
- 2.2.5 The process for CLs accessing Housing Benefit as a direct payment to HSH, has generated more than £150k so far, this financial year. This helps to offset the additional expenditure for high level needs supported accommodation. Typically Head Start accommodates 8 CLs in this category with support ranging from 5 hours per week to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. During the first lockdown, demand for high level needs support increased to 21 young people (currently 14 and rising).
- 2.2.6 HSH works closely with other teams and external partners to provide targeted interventions so the arrangement is transitional and no one stays for longer than is absolutely necessary.
- 2.2.7 With support from senior leadership team, HSH has identified more than £522k additional Covid related costs and will receive £456k from the central fund to relieve the burden on the budget. In addition to this, with rent, council tax refunds (on hand backs), hand back of expensive properties, Housing Benefit (in 2.2.5) and reimbursement from Adult Social Care for emergency mental health care, the budget code is relieved by income of £287,232.

2.2.8 As of 15 February, HSH provides accommodation for 83 CLs. The team manages a portfolio of 27 properties, ranging in size:

Property size	No. of properties types in portfolio	Additional skills development support from external partner (no. of beds)
1 bedroom/self contained unit	16	13
2 bed	4	-
3 bed	5	3
4 bed	3	6
5+ bed	2	0
Average occupancy 84%		

2.2.9 Close working, with colleagues in Procurement, Commissioning and Housing has led to the creation and implementation of a single framework for temporary accommodation.

### 2.3 What next

2.3.1 HSH is working with After Care to move on 11 CLs in the next two months. HSH is preparing for 47 new arrivals, either from foster care, residential care or prison over the next 8 months. HSH works closely with a range of external partners to extend the portfolio of beds.

2.3.2 High level needs support is expensive, so HSH is part of a working group, led by Commissioning, to write a specification for a single framework. It is anticipated the contract will begin in September 2021.

2.3.3 Children's and Housing CL working group has enabled the delivery of a half day training session on 'all aspects of Housing' to social workers and support staff. Solutions to the delivery of practical skills to CL and formal sign off, of a standard met, is being explored. 21 CLs live out of borough (reduced by 25%, as of Apr 19) most because they are studying in East London. It is hoped that by raising awareness of HSH strategy to relocate as many CL to Thurrock by end December 2023, that preparatory work will begin earlier than their 18th birthday. There will always remain a small contingent <10, that due to lifestyle choices, are unable to return to Thurrock.

2.3.4 A local partner has invited HSH to collaborate on a pilot to provide CLs with accommodation and an apprenticeship in health and social care. For those that successfully complete the apprenticeship and secure sustained employment, the tenant(s) will be invited to switch to a private rental agreement with the partner, taking control of their accommodation/future.

- 2.3.5 Cross directorate conversations have started to explore the feasibility of self builds by CLs as a way of building community, pride and skills. Potential locations are being scoped now. Anticipated timeframe: 3 years.
- 2.3.6 HSH will continue reviewing systems and processes, making modifications as required to ensure a high quality service is delivered to CLs.
- 2.3.7 Continued work, cross directorate, to develop fair joint protocols, standardise templates and consistent terminology for services provided 16+ years, should provide a coherent transfer across services and improve young people's understanding of their entitlements and how to access them.
- 2.3.8 HSH and Aftercare are working in partnership to develop effective processes to enable accurate forecasting and the timely move on of CL from supported accommodation, into a HSH property then social housing/private rental. This will support HSH meeting the statutory requirements to provide suitable accommodation and ensures a balanced budget at year end.

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

- 3.1 Covid has presented challenges but has enabled a number of new ways of working – we are working closely with ICT to enable us to access systems that enable quick turnaround re repairs.
- 3.2 Covid has meant we have had to work in a different way, the cross directorate working has proved incredibly helpful, an example of this is the school catering service has provided food parcels for young people who have had to self-isolate due to a positive Covid test.

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

- 4.1 It is requested that the Committee agree the recommendations and use the reporting mechanisms to support and challenge the work of HSH's services, on behalf of CL.

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

- 5.1 There is no additional information for the committee as part of this report.

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

- 6.1 This report relates to the council priorities: People, where all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay; and Prosperity, a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

## 7. Implications

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead, Finance**

This report asks that the Committee notes the work involved in providing suitable accommodation to CLs. We recognise the growing demand for accommodation and have identified expenditure directly related to Covid 19. The LA has provided capital monies of £1m to further growth and enhance the HSH offer to our care leavers.

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)**

7.2.1 Given the nature of this report there are no legal implications directly arising from it? By way of background information, the following summarises the relevant statutory/non-statutory guidance:-

7.2.2 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which came into force in October 2001 and gave Local Authorities the statutory duty to provide significantly **enhanced** leaving care service, with the intention to raise the quality of our support to that of good parents.

*"Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. The local authority responsible for their care should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood."* Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers.

The duties introduced by the 2000 Act are supported by this statutory guidance. This guidance also sets out in chapter 7 and in Annex C the requirements on the Local Authority in planning accommodation provision for CL. It sets out the need for joint working between Housing and Children's Services and the creation of joint protocols.

There is further government non-statutory good practice advice on 'joint housing protocols for care leavers'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-housing-protocols-for-care-leavers/joint-housing-protocols-for-care-leavers-good-practice-advice>

which sets out the Corporate Parenting Principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 section 1 which the Council must have regard to when exercising its functions in respect of CL and its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

Supporting CLs with suitable accommodation is a significant function for Thurrock's most vulnerable young people. Data is collated to understand the profile of young people supported. Decisions are based on each young person's needs, including equality and diversity, SEND and emotional health needs.

The Authority recognises the importance of ensuring that young people who are leaving the care system can and should have access to the offers available locally. They are positively discriminated for priority housing and, by being in borough, can access a full range of offers and services to lead to sustainable employment. We are working cross directorate, in a holistic way, to provide CL's with the best life chances and ensure that they have a voice that is heard and shapes the provision.

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

There are no other implications as a result of this report.

### 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):

There are no background papers to this report.

### 9. **Appendices to the report**

There are no appendices to this report.

### **Report Author:**

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