

8 February 2022		ITEM: 11
Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
Inspire - Head Start Housing: Supporting Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Tiffany Bright – Inspire - Skills Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director, Education and Skills		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is public		

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 young people leaving care 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 at risk of becoming homeless without careful planning for their independence.

Head Start Housing (HSH) was formally launched in December 2018. This is a joint initiative between Children's Services and Housing. The team comprises 2.5 officers, as part of the Inspire Integrated youth hub. There are 2 FTE Housing Officers, and 0.5 FTE Administration 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 is being refreshed, in partnership with Housing, to ensure the Council:

- maximises Thurrock Council's corporate parent approach, cross directorate
- are ambitious in our housing aspirations for this vulnerable cohort, balanced with what is achievable and affordable and
- compliment the Housing Strategy (also being refreshed in 2022).

Preparing care leavers for adulthood remains a key priority for Thurrock Council. HSH has been created to provide a solution for transitional accommodation for young people leaving care.

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

1. Recommendations:

- 1.1 To review 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 children in care and care leavers to prepare for independent living including entry into employment.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In March 2016, Children's Services and Housing designed a pilot to test Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) for care leavers, either in employment or at risk of losing their job on account of unstable accommodation.
- 2.2 The first property, 4 bedroom house in Chadwell St Mary, accommodated two males and two 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 led to the modification of a second property.
- 2.3 The second, a three bedroom property 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.
- 2.4 Considerable learning has been applied from the pilot to inform the Head Start Housing Strategy 2018 - 2023. The refreshed version will apply from 2022-2027.
- 2.5 The aim of the refreshed strategy is to enable the voice of young people receiving a service to be heard and, as were required, to reside in HSH transitional accommodation that supports their education, employment or training and networks until they are ready to move on, either into private rental or social housing.
- 2.6 Where care leavers reside in HSH transitional accommodation within Thurrock they can be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor and more easily access the range of local services, diverse education and employment opportunities.

- 2.7 HSH sources and manages a portfolio of accommodation for young people who are either in care or in the process of leaving care.
- 2.8 Housing made a commitment to provide six beds on a yearly basis for exclusive use by care leavers by making use of Right to Buy receipts, increasing LA owned housing stock and making a positive contribution to the Housing Reduction Act 2017.
- 2.9 To date, Housing has committed 24 (of 30) beds for exclusive use by care leavers. 12 of these beds were purchased using Transformation funding and Right to Buy receipts.

2.10 **Progress to date**

- 2.10.1 Five care leavers live in the first property located in Grays. A three bedroom property in Aveley should be ready for occupation early 2022 and a four bedroom property in South Ockendon should be ready for occupation July/August.
- 2.10.2 Over the past 12 months, six properties (three out of borough) have been returned to the landlord. Seven beds, in borough, have been procured. Each property provides essential furnishings, the rent covers 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, and enable online access to courses/employment.
- 2.10.3 Since April 2021, HSH has provided accommodation for 83 young people leaving care at an average weekly cost is £185 pp p/w. Average occupancy is 95.56%.
- 2.10.4 From April 2021 till January 2022 (9 months), HSH has provided accommodation and support to 22 care leavers with high level needs. A high level needs specification is being written by Commissioning to provide additional support to young people leaving care with high support needs.
- 2.10.5 At present HSH provides accommodation for 81 Care leavers, including 15 young people with high level needs. The team manages a portfolio of 27 properties (including a hostel with nine beds at Clarence Road), ranging in size:

Property size	No. of properties	Additional skills development support from external partner (no. of beds)
1 bedroom/self contained unit	10	14
2 bed	4	2
3 bed	5	6
4 bed	5	16
5 bed	3	0
Average occupancy 2021-22: 89.56%		

2.11 What next

2.11.1 HSH is working with After Care to support the move on and transition to independent accommodation for eight care leavers in the next three months. HSH is also preparing to source appropriate accommodation for 16 young people transitioning from foster care, residential care or other alternative accommodation over the next three months. HSH is working creatively with housing to be able to extend the portfolio of beds.

2.11.2 Aftercare and Headstart Housing is looking to ensure that we can claim the housing benefit linked to universal credit.

2.11.3 Aftercare are working closely with the Home Office to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers with no recourse to public funds whose immigration status has not been approved.

2.11.4 Targeted work to reduce the voids.

2.11.5 Agree and publish final version of the Head Start Strategy 2022 – 2027. Continue exploration of the feasibility of self builds by care leavers as a way of building community, pride and skills. Potential locations are being scoped now. Anticipated timeframe: 2 years.

2.11.6 HSH will continue reviewing systems and processes, making modifications as required to ensure a high quality service is delivered to care leavers.

2.11.7 Continued work, cross directorate, to develop fair joint protocols, standardise templates and consistent terminology for services provided to young people 16+ years, should provide a coherent transfer across services and improve young people's understanding of their entitlements and how to access them.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The increased cost of construction materials, delays as a result of Covid-19 and inflation, has negatively impacted on HSH expenditure this year (now

£185 pp p/w). 2022/23 is forecast to cost £410k for 51 beds (average £154.50 pp p/w) when the purchased properties become available for occupation.

3.2 Targeted interventions, should see:

- improved transition points so that as young people transition from care to become care leavers they are able to live in accommodation that is stable and meets their needs.
- an increase in the number of care leavers who are entitled to the housing element of Universal Credit, contributing to their housing costs
- as outlined above the work being undertaken with the Home Office will hopefully see a reduction in the number of asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds.
- increased move on's, to reduce average length of stay to maximum six months.
- a strategy, devised and implemented, to increase the number of foster carers and placements in borough, so UASC are never placed out of borough.
- Young people who require a service post 18 which cannot be met by children's social care, transfer to Adult Social Care where appropriate so their needs are better met.

3.3 HSH continues to provide suitable high quality accommodation for Thurrock care leavers. There are very few anti-social behaviour complaints by neighbours of HSH tenants. Inspire staff use intelligence to inform decisions in the allocation of provision.

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 care leavers.

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 forecast overspend directly attributed to the provision of high level needs costs. We recognise the growing demand for accommodation and have proposals being considered by Housing.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal

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: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development

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 CLs with the best life chances and ensure that they have a voice that is heard and shapes the provision.

A community equality impact assessment will be completed through the process of preparing the Head Start Housing Strategy for 2022/27.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

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.

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