

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 JUNE 2018

UPDATE ON SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

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Summary

The purpose of the report is to update the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the future provision of supported accommodation for Children in Care and Care Leavers as requested by the Committee on 11 January 2018. This report includes information on the work being done around securing Supported Accommodation for older children in care and Care Leavers following the additional obligation on the Council as part of the Children and Social Care Act 2017.

This report also provides the Committee with details on how Medway Council, through working with all its partner agencies, is addressing the placement needs of current and future Children in Care and Care Leavers, and improving their outcomes in light of our understanding of their needs and current provision.

It can be considered in conjunction with the annual update of the statutory Sufficiency Statement which the Committee reviewed on 5 December 2017 (minute number 554 refers).

The report is presented to the Committee for consideration and comment.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Council has statutory duties and responsibilities to ensure sufficiency of provision of accommodation and care of children and young people and must ensure that they are placed in an environment likely to promote and safeguard their welfare and development.
- 1.2 The Local Authority (LA) has a statutory duty as a Corporate Parent. The role of the Corporate Parent is to act as the best possible parent for each child

they look after and to advocate on his/her behalf to secure the best possible outcomes.

- 1.3 Supported Accommodation places are required to ensure suitable accommodation for:
 - young people in the care of the LA over the age of 16,
 - young people over 16 exiting care and
 - 16-18 year olds (including potential Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children UASC) coming in through the Housing route assessed as a 'child in need'.
- 1.4 The Medway Council Plan 2016/17 to 2020/21 includes the objective that children and young people have the best start in life in Medway, including the commitment to work with partners to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are safe.
- 1.5 The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Medway 2012-2017 sets out five strategic themes, including working together to give every child a good start (theme 1) improving physical and mental health and wellbeing (theme 4) and reducing health inequalities (theme 5).
- 1.6 Priorities in relation to the health and wellbeing of children and young people are set out in the Medway Improvement Plan, Early Help Strategy, the Looked After Children (LAC) Strategy (2015/18) and the Looked After Children's Commissioning Strategy and 16+ Homeless and Care Leavers Commissioning Action Plan (2014 – 2017). Many of these are currently in the process of being reviewed or refreshed.
- 1.7 The current spend on Supported Accommodation placements is in the region of £1.4 million per annum. There is currently no internal provision and therefore this spend is on externally commissioned services. It is drawn from the general revenue fund through Children's Services budgets.

2. Background

Supported Accommodation

- 2.1 Medway currently has in place a Framework for securing placements with Supported Accommodation providers. It is due to expire in November 2018. It has not however been able to provide the scope of placements required to match the needs of Medway's young people and this has caused an over-reliance on costly spot purchased placements. There is therefore a requirement to deliver an improved Framework that can be relied upon to support the needs of a wide spectrum of young people.
- 2.2 Although there does exist a range of accommodation and support for young people within Medway, there continues to be a significant shortage of good quality Supported Accommodation provision. The gap in provision is especially evident for young people requiring more enhanced, intensive levels of support. Work is currently underway with the procurement of the new Framework to work with providers to address this.

Offer to Care Leavers

- 2.3 Under the Children and Social Care Act 2017, an additional obligation was placed on Local Authorities to provide care leavers with support, if needed, until the age of 25 regardless of whether or not they are in education. As a minimum, it places upon the Local Authority the duty to publish its “Offer” to care leavers to be produced in consultation with young people. Cabinet reviewed a draft Offer on 6 March 2018 and work is currently underway to consult with young people to ensure their contribution towards finalising the Offer for publication in September this year.
- 2.4 On 6 March 2018 the Cabinet:
- noted the changes in national policy and legislation and the implications this may have on the Council, as set out in the report.
 - approved Option 2 (publish a multi-agency, enhanced Offer co-produced with our Care Leavers), as set out in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of that report, subject to suitable resources being identified (decision no. 39/2018 refers).
 - agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Children and Adults Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services (Lead Member), to finalise Option 2 if it can be provided within budget. However, if additional resources beyond New Burdens funding are required, a further report will be presented to Cabinet (decision no, 40/2018 refers).

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 Securing a sufficient range of good quality Supported Accommodation that is tailored to meet the individual needs of young people remains a key priority for Medway Council. Unlike other areas of provision of accommodation for looked after young people, it is currently unregulated and therefore the levels of scrutiny required by Council staff are greater.
- 3.2 Partnership commissioning, Housing and Children’s Services colleagues continue to work to ensure that there is greater integration between care planning, placement decision making, matching and placement finding and quality assurance. High priority is also being given to embedding an integrated pathway to support the smooth transition for young people moving into independence especially for key vulnerable groups such as young offenders.
- 3.3 The vision we are seeking to embed for accommodation for young people in and leaving care is one that is seamless, integrating services provided by housing and health colleagues with care services for young people in general. We intend to have some providers able to deliver placements for young people with higher risks around their safety and wellbeing and more complex needs. For example, young people at risk for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), criminalisation, exiting offending institutions, or frequently going missing.
- 3.4 Equally we will also need placements for young people whose situation has stabilised and who are able to live semi-independently but still need an element of support in learning to live independently.

- 3.5 For both types of placement, when young people first move in to a new home their need for support will be greater but as they become more secure and develop towards independence, that support can be reduced as they settle.
- 3.6 As always, this model will perform best with good partnership working between Personal Assistants, social workers and providers to agree active care and support plan management which will identify progress towards desired outcomes as laid out in an established outcomes framework. This outcomes framework will be developed as part of the procurement process.

Keep on Caring Strategy 2016

- 3.7 The spirit of the new statutory requirements outlined in the new Strategy around developing the Offer to Care Leavers is that it be done in conjunction with young people. The new Strategy indicates a commitment to support and test approaches that empower care leavers to have a greater say in the design and delivery of services. Accordingly, officers have attempted to strengthen consultation with young people and reached out to those who would normally not respond to routine engagement methods. The engagement feedback from young people will serve to inform both the Supported Accommodation procurement and the development of the Offer to Care Leavers.

Other options

- 3.8 In addition to the commissioned services, Medway is currently engaged in Identifying local and cost effective accommodation solutions, such as the reprovisioning of services using existing stock. For example Children's Services are exploring the potential for the Aut Even site to be adapted to Supported Accommodation.
- 3.9 The Council is also working with local partners and across teams internally to identify other creative solutions for example looking at local housing stock to see where under utilised properties can be brought into our pool of options. These will be brought together in a coherent framework and pathway around young people's housing options over the upcoming months.

Related areas of work being taken forward

- 3.10 The most recent Sufficiency Report identified a need for greater understanding of the needs of our children with disabilities. This requirement has been built in to the tender of the new model for the 0-19 Community Health Service which will come into place during 2018. As these needs become clearer we will work to ensure they are met.
- 3.11 As this report does not reflect a change in policy or practice, no Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed.

4. Risk management

Risk	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
There may be a risk that the procurement process does not deliver the service model we are aiming for.	Market engagement events will be held to ensure provider interest, understanding and feedback in the service.	E3
There may be a risk that the new service fails to offer appropriate access, quality of service delivery and outcomes.	Undertake robust quality evaluation of tenders and ensure robust quality assurance and contract management procedures are in place	C2

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The Supported Accommodation procurement has been considered by Children's Services Management Team, and Children and Adults Directorate Management Team. It has also been shared with colleagues from Housing who have been and continue to be proactively involved during the development stages.
- 5.2 Young people have been consulted by survey, at engagement events, and through Children in Care Council representatives groups.
- 5.3 Market providers have been consulted in one market engagement event and a second "meet the commissioner" event is planned for later in May.

6. Implications for Looked After Children

- 6.1 There are significant implications for Looked After Children (LAC) as set out in this report. The Supported Accommodation Framework that will be procured will work to ensure that older children in care and Care Leavers not only have good quality placements to go to but that all measures are taken to ensure that these are robust placements that reflect the values that those children and young people have indicated are important to them. It will also serve to improve placement stability and improve young people's progression towards independent living.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Upstream strategies are being put into place to reduce the amount of young people requiring Supported Accommodation as well as to enhance their experience of care and ensure they are prepared and enabled to move into independence as thoroughly as possible. However, it is expected that procuring this new Framework will both improve the quality of the placements the Council are able to offer young people, and obtain value for money. The aim is to reduce reliance on costly spot purchased placements and instead, procure robust, high quality placements that will serve to improve placement

stability. This in turn will reduce the rate of placement breakdowns which can result in a spiral of ever more costly placements and negative outcomes for the young person. Finally, as officers will be seeking to enhance procurement of floating support this should also enable the Council to increase placement stability and keep costs down.

- 7.2 Funding for these placements continues to be funded from the general fund revenue budget. If additional resources are required beyond the New Burdens funding, a further report will be presented to Cabinet for approval as per Cabinet decision no. 40/2018.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 As the current Framework for procuring Supported Accommodation placements is due to end in November 2018, procuring a new and improved Framework will ensure that Medway remains compliant with procurement legislation as well as fulfilling our Sufficiency Duty.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 The Committee is asked to note the update on supported accommodation for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 5 December 2017
(Item 554 Sufficiency Statement 2017 refers)

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=378&MId=3720>

Cabinet - 6 March 2018

(Item 5 Care Leavers Offer and Supported Accommodation refers)

<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=21293&Opt=3>