



Agenda Item 13

Provision of Housing & Support for Care Leavers

Falkirk Council

Title: Provision of Housing & Support for Care Leavers
Meeting: Executive
Date: 21 March 2017
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services & Director of Corporate & Housing Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on work being progressed in relation to the provision of housing and support for children leaving care.

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Executive is asked to:-

- (1) request a further progress report following consideration of the Housing Options Protocol by the Champions Board**

3. Background

- 3.1 On the 17 November 2016 the Scrutiny Committee considered the conclusions and recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel established to review outcomes for looked after children. The recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel were subsequently agreed by Executive on 29 November 2016. This report specifically deals with the following recommendation:

“Children's Services and Corporate and Housing Services report back to Members before the end of March 2017 on the provision of housing and support for children leaving care. This report will include how to overcome the challenges of providing accommodation, the potential for a protocol for housing options, the need to continue support and how this is provided, the role and remit of the leaving care service and how we provide support to older young people in line with our new obligations.”

- 3.2 Research shows that the journey for care experienced young people is challenging, their outcomes are much poorer than their peers and they need support over a longer period. Recent policy and legislative developments acknowledge the need for care experienced young people to be supported until adulthood. Their rights have been extended to allow them to remain in

their care placement to the age of 21, to receive aftercare support to the age of 26 and for joint social work and housing protocols to be established to help achieve the best outcomes for care leavers.

- 3.3 It is the responsibility of Local Authorities, as corporate parents, to ensure that all their young people living in care fulfil their potential on their journey to adulthood.

4. Housing Care Leavers

- 4.1. Young people leaving care need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition into adulthood. Secure housing is critical to young people progressing in other areas of life such as education, training and employment. They are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and more likely to experience housing instability. Even when ongoing support and guidance are in place, unresolved childhood trauma affects care leavers' ability to access and make best use of the support available.
- 4.2. Under Housing and Homelessness legislation, any person over the age of 16 years has the right to apply for housing. Falkirk Council's allocation policy reflects the exceptional needs of care leavers and awards them the highest level of priority within the Allocation Policy.
- 4.3. Most young people also tend not to have the independent living skills required to sustain a tenancy and as such housing support services are provided to this vulnerable group. This generally tends to be in the form of supported accommodation specifically for young people.
- 4.4. Care Leavers often have a housing crisis when they approach the housing service for help. This is usually as a result of their current placement breaking down at short notice. To help prevent unexpected homelessness and crisis situation, it is recognised that improved transitional planning at an earlier stage is required (at least 6 months prior to individuals leaving care).
- 4.5. The development and implementation of improved transitional planning arrangements is a priority work stream. A wider range of housing options is being developed to enable a crisis presentation to be diverted and a data base will be developed and resourced to effectively plan for all young people in care. This work is being progressed by an Operational Group comprising Housing and Children's Services officers.

5. Housing Options Protocol for Care Leavers

- 5.1 It is recognised that young people in different situations will need various types of housing and support, ranging from 24/7 supported housing through to their own flat with floating support. The provision of flexible support, focussed

on the needs of the individual with an overarching aim to help them to succeed is critical.

5.2 Young people also value their involvement in decision making and having choice and control over what options and support they have.

5.3 A Housing Options Protocol for Care Leavers is currently being developed which aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Young people leaving care will participate in assessment, planning and decision making about their future housing and housing support needs and they will have a personal housing plan.
- Young people leaving care will have access to the housing support they are assessed as needing during their transition to independence in the community, for as long as they need it.
- Young people leaving care will reside in a safe community environment within good quality housing accommodation.
- Young people leaving care will be helped to understand and accept their responsibilities within the community and consider the potential consequences of their actions.

5.4 In order to achieve the above outcomes, a range of Housing Options will be developed as illustrated below:

- **Continuing Care** - Continuing Care was introduced by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and positively delays the age at which young people move toward more independence. It extends the right of young people (within criteria) to remain in their care placement to the age of 21. This extension of time allows young people to not only learn skills for independence but allows them to learn and practice skills whilst making mistakes and receiving encouragement not to give up and to try again.

This has the potential to incur significant costs however Continuing Care is an option, not a requirement and it is likely that many young people will still be eager to leave their care placements too early and make their own way into the world. Young people in Falkirk will be actively encouraged to remain with their foster carers, kinship carers or within their children's house to fully benefit from opportunities to learn key skills and move on to suitable accommodation in a carefully planned way.

- **Supported Carer Scheme** - A small working group is currently reviewing the Supported Carer Scheme, which allows young people to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18. Parameters are being developed for a stand-alone scheme where we will recruit specifically for carers to provide accommodation and support to an older young person in their home. The group are now moving on to identify the resources required to

set up the scheme and how it will be best managed.

- **Supported Accommodation** – There is a dedicated young persons supported accommodation resource which can provide specialist support to those in a crisis homeless situation between the ages of 16-25. Many of our care leavers who find themselves homeless can be placed there. Support provided looks at helping young people to develop the skills necessary to sustain their own tenancy and support will only end when the service is satisfied that this has been achieved.
- **Tenancy with Floating Support** – Work is progressing on a joint initiative between Housing Services and the Leaving Care Team, where accommodation will be identified in an area agreeable to the young person and wrap around support will be commissioned and tailored to suit the specific circumstances of the individual.

5.5 It is envisaged that the Housing Options Protocol will be presented to the Champions Board and then the Executive for final approval. Progress on the development of housing options and monitoring of outcomes will be regularly reported to the Champions Board.

6. Role and Remit of the Leaving Care Team

- 6.1 The Children and Young People Act (Scotland) Act 2014 contains new provisions to improve Corporate Parenting and Continuing Care and Aftercare duties for care leavers. Corporate Parenting is now a statutory function with clear outlines, duties and responsibilities.
- 6.2 Part 10 of the 2014 Act extends the duty on local authorities to provide advice, guidance and assistance to care leavers from the current upper age limit of 21 to their 26th birthday. Where a care experienced young person aged 19-26 asks for assistance the local authority has a duty to assess that person's needs. If they are assessed to have "eligible" needs, the Council must provide them with the advice, guidance and assistance considered necessary.
- 6.3 This new duty requires changes to be made to the Leaving Care Team's remit as it extends its provision to adults as well as young people. The extension of eligibility to care leavers until their 26th birthday will represent **an increase** in the numbers eligible for and accessing Aftercare services. Scottish Government funding has been made available to Local Authorities to support the changed eligibility and implementation of the Aftercare extension.
- 6.4 The Leaving Care Team have been holding development days to consider the changes necessary to meet additional demand and provide services to an older service user group. Members will be provided with a further update when the review of the Leaving Care Team concludes.
- 6.5 The extension of Aftercare also impacts on Adult Services, but with proposed changes to eligibility criteria, Aftercare duties alone are unlikely to meet the

critical and substantial criteria. Work is well underway between Children's and Adult services to develop good practice principles which will smooth the transition process for those who do meet eligibility criteria.

7. Consultation

- 7.1. A consultation plan will be put in place to ensure that the views and feedback of young people are considered in the development of the various housing options initiatives.

8. Implications

Financial

- 8.1 Following the review of the Leaving Care Team there may be financial implications in terms of staffing to provide additional resources to meet the new duties of the Children's Act 2014. Specific Scottish Government funding has been provided to meet initial additional demand, but it is difficult to project whether this will be adequate as the number of young people who request this ongoing support is unknown and unpredictable.

Resources

- 8.2 No additional resources are required at this stage. The Leaving Care Review and Housing Options Protocol will be carried out within existing resources. Should additional resources be required at a future date to implement joint initiatives or support changes in service delivery a report will come back to the Executive.

Legal

- 8.3 The Council must ensure it meets all its legal obligations in terms of the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Risk

- 8.4 The risks to the Council are four-fold. The first is in relation to Scottish Government funding and whether it meets assessed need/requirement over the next few years, allied to the ongoing requirement for efficiency savings to be identified in future years. This then potentially leads to a risk that the Council may be unable to meet their statutory duties which in turn leads to potential risk to vulnerable individuals and reputational risk to the Council.

Equalities

- 8.5 An EPIA has not been carried out at this stage but it will be carried out as necessary as the review work progresses.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

8.6 There are no sustainability or environmental impacts identified

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 This report outlines the joint work currently being undertaken between Children's Services and Housing Services to provide housing and support for young people leaving care. Work is on-going to develop a Housing Options Protocol and a number of housing options initiatives have been identified as part of this process which are being taken forward by relevant groups of officers. The progress will be monitored by the Champions Board.
- 9.2 In order to meet the new duties placed upon the Council under Part 10 of the Children's Act (Scotland) 2014, a service review of the Leaving Care Team is being undertaken.

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Date: 24 February 2017

Appendices:

None.

List of Background Papers:

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- Report to Scrutiny Committee 17/11/16 – Scrutiny Panel Conclusions and Recommendations – Outcomes for Looked After Children
- Report to Executive 29/11/16 – Referral from Scrutiny Committee 17/11/16