

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>5 OCTOBER 2023</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>HOUSING PATHWAYS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING AND CHIEF OFFICER FINANC, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Pete Tyson – Group Manager, Commissioning</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p><b>This report outlines the accommodation pathways available to care experienced young people and care leavers from the age of 16+. The information shows that there are a number of accommodation options available to young people between the ages of 16 to 21 but the main challenge is moving young people on from these and into settled/permanent accommodation in a timely way and reducing the risk of them becoming homeless.</b></p> <p><b>Welsh Government have asked all Councils to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to the future accommodation needs of care leavers. The Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales provides a model that local authorities can adapt to inform housing strategies.</b></p>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Update Corporate Parenting committee on progress of work from a paper taken by Housing Services in March 2022.
- Provide information on care leavers pathway, including how many children are currently waiting for permanent accommodation.

## **2. Background**

2.1 Councils have been tasked by Welsh Government to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to care experienced children and young people and their future accommodation needs.

- 2.2 To enable Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to consider its future response, work was undertaken across Housing Services and Children's Social Care to look at current joint working and commissioning practises. A report outlining the key findings of this work was taken to Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee on 2nd March 2022.
- 2.3 Whilst the findings showed that joint working does take place across these services, more detailed work was required. It was proposed that the work be classified under the following headings and a working group be established consisting of officers across social care and the housing service, to progress the proposed actions:
- Corporate outcomes
  - Commissioning
  - Joint working
  - Projecting need
  - The experience for young people
- 2.4 To support this work a Children and Young Peoples Planning Group has been established to enable regular dialogue and liaison between representatives of the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate and our key internal partners within BCBC, to help inform the strategic planning and future commissioning of services.
- 2.5 The remit will cover specific areas of children and young people which includes children leaving care. A workstream with officers across children's social care and housing are due to meet at the beginning of October 2023 to undertake more detailed work noted within this report.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

#### The Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales

- 3.1 A new Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales launched by Welsh Government (WG) and developed by Shelter Cymru in May 2023, superseding the former 2016 framework. It aims to guide local authorities in helping young people to transition from care to settled housing by helping local authority commissioners, team managers of leaving care/housing and providers that support young people to plan for transition.
- 3.2 The framework identifies 5 key stages listed below:
- Preparing for the reality of housing options
  - Planning young people's accommodation and support options with them
  - Reducing housing emergency
  - Accessing housing and support as needed
  - Accessing and successfully managing longer-term move-on and support options
- 3.3 It is in place to help local authorities think, plan and work through the range of areas in which young people will need support and accommodation as they leave care.
- 3.4 The framework is not prescriptive but gives consideration on how young people can be supported as they leave care. It is designed to ensure that care leavers have the

flexible support they need so that no care experienced person falls out of the framework. The framework recognises that care leavers are among the groups likely to be more at risk of homelessness than others and they need support from their corporate parents throughout and beyond this transition.

### Accommodation options/pathways for Care Experienced Children and Care Leavers

- 3.5 Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide suitable accommodation for care experienced children and care leavers up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, where the accommodation pathway and options is robust for these young people within BCBC.
- 3.6 Inclusive of care leavers over the age of 18, young people are entitled to support in the form of structured pathway planning, and this includes support to find suitable accommodation and access to education or training which we rely on our partners to support. The pathway and options in this area within BCBC are not as effective or robust as for those young people under the age of 18, for a number of reasons outlined in section 3.8 onwards.
- 3.7 On leaving care, some young people exercise their rights as an adult and choose to return home to live with family or move in with friends or partners. Some progress on to higher education and stay in university halls or student accommodation. Others want to live independently and therefore will either look for a private rental, which is increasingly challenging to obtain or too expensive or make an application to the Common Housing Register (CHR).
- 3.8 Young people can access a range of supported accommodation options, for example Foster Care/When I'm Ready, residential care, returning home or living with other connected persons. Children's Social Care commission supported accommodation and semi-independent options and also host a supported lodgings scheme. A specialist supported service (Ty Mor) was developed by the Social Services and Wellbeing directorate to support care leavers aged 18-21 who have complex needs.

### Challenges

- 3.9 BCBC's care experienced children population remains high, with children aged 10 to 15 making up the largest proportion of this (39%). Despite the range of accommodation options available to care leavers, demand still outweighs capacity and there is no safety net post 18, which can result in homelessness.
- 3.10 All local authorities are part of the mandated National Transfer Scheme, and to date, the majority of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children referred have been aged 16+ and their needs have been primarily met in supported accommodation. Due to their immigration status and no recourse to public funds, accommodation options and move on from these placements are extremely limited, which results in lengthy stays in supported environments, impacting on availability.
- 3.11 Many care leavers choose to return home to family, or move in with friends/partners on leaving care, but quite often these relationships subsequently break down. A desktop audit of care leavers who experienced homeless during 2021-22 identified that 40% of these were as a result of relationship breakdowns after care leavers had

returned home to family or moved in with partners. This correlates with information in the Housing Support Strategy which is out for consultation it suggests that care leavers are not presenting as homeless directly after leaving care, but on average within the first 2 years of doing so (at an average age of 19 years and 7 months).

- 3.12 For many care leavers, applying for social housing through the CHR is their only option for future move-on. However, with current numbers on the CHR exceeding 2,600 and the Rapid Rehousing Programme absorbing a large proportion of allocations, waiting times on the CHR are lengthy. Time spent in supported accommodation services within Children's Services are therefore much longer than their identified need, due to the lack of move-on. This is not optimal as it means that care leavers are delayed in living independently and from a financial perspective it is not good use of scarce resource as more support is being provided than is required. These challenges are shared by other temporary and supported accommodation services the Council delivers to other residents, including young people who are homeless, but have not been in care and other categories of homeless persons.
- 3.13 Data collection and information on children leaving care is challenging, particularly between the ages of 18-25, and there is no integration of information systems between housing and social care systems to identify where a young person is residing, or if they have applied for housing or are homeless.
- 3.14 As a snap-shot, there are:
- a total number of 6 young people across our commissioned and internal services waiting for permanent accommodation;
  - three referrals for young people requiring 24 hour supported provision, but no vacancies available due to lack of options within general housing; and
  - one young person has been served notice from a When I'm Ready placement who has since presented as homeless.

### Homelessness

- 3.15 Welsh Government's statutory homelessness Code of Guidance states that care leavers are among the groups likely to be more at risk of homelessness than others. In Bridgend 15% of our care leavers (between the ages of 18 and 25) experienced homelessness between April 2021 and March 2023.
- 3.16 Many of our care leavers have experienced extreme adverse childhood experiences and quite often need intensive support and sometimes therapy whilst in our care to help them make sense of their worlds and overcome these difficulties in the short, medium and long term. Presenting as homeless and being placed in temporary accommodation is at the detriment of a young person's wellbeing.

### Work to Progress

- 3.17 To progress this work further and find some solution to the challenges outlined from section 3.8 onwards of this report a workstream has been set up and will meet monthly, chaired by the Group Manager of Case Management and Transition and will report into the area planning groups chaired by the Head of Children's Service bi-monthly.

3.18 Areas required for action are detailed below, where an action plan and timescales will be discussed and agreed in October 2023:-

- Commissioning
- Joint working
- Projecting need
- The experience for young people

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report.

**Long Term.** The improved service will ensure the Council is better placed to meet the needs of the current and future care experienced children population

**Prevention.** Improved planning between departments and agencies will prevent care experienced young people from experiencing homelessness

**Integration.** Improved planning for care experienced young people is integrated across the authority

**Collaboration.** Collaboration will be critical to achieving the best outcomes for care experienced young people

**Involvement.** The knowledge of care experienced young people will be key to informing the work that needs to be undertaken

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no specific climate change implications arising directly from this report.

#### **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 Young people leaving care are more at risk than their peers. They need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition into adulthood.

Good housing plays a critical role in supporting these vulnerable young people to achieve better outcomes, by underpinning success in other areas of life.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee:

- Note the information contained in the report and the further work required.
- Give consideration to the priority given to care experienced children in line with the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities when reviewing the Social Housing Allocation Policy.

## **Background documents**

None