

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

1 JULY 2019

HOUSING OFFER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Report of the Senior Housing Manager, Neighbourhood Directorate and the Strategic Service Manager, Together for Children

1. Strategic Context

The Housing Strategy for Sunderland 2017 – 2022 has as one of its main priorities “to support vulnerable people to access and maintain housing” and within this priority there is a key action to develop a joint protocol between Together for Children and Housing Services to ensure that 16 and 17 year old homeless young people and those leaving care are supported to find suitable accommodation.

The Council has also recently drafted its Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Prevention Strategy following consultation with partners, including Together for Children. This draft Strategy also has as a key priority to prevent homelessness among young people and to ensure that there is suitable advice and accommodation for them. This could be accommodation within the family home, in commissioned or supported accommodation or in their own tenancies with appropriate levels of support.

2. Introduction

A paper was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in July 2018 in the context of the recently implemented Homelessness Reduction Act and the imminent visit of the Government’s Homeless Advice Service Team (HAST) to look at how housing services for young people were being offered. The introduction of new prevention duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act is now a year old and an action plan, which resulted from the HAST visit (Appendix One) is being delivered through a working group comprised of staff and officers from Housing, Together for Children, Adult Social Care and Commissioning.

3. Current Picture

Since the previous presentation to Board in July 2018 and the next steps outlined in that report, much progress has been made and there are also areas where joint work is required to be continued.

1. Robust data is gathered – the Homelessness Reduction Act, and the accompanying CDP soft system, has allowed for detailed and robust data to be gathered on homeless young people aged 18 – 25 years old and this has shaped and informed our commissioning needs in this respect. This

data has been complemented through data from Together for Children's on homeless young people and looked after children. However, there is still some work to be done in collecting data through Liquid Logic on all young people where homelessness may not be the primary presenting need.

2. Recommendations made by HAST

The recommendations made by HAST are captured in the action plan attached at Appendix one but a summary is outlined below:

- Communications and advice for young people and their families/carers – the web pages have been reviewed and specific and appropriate advice for homeless young people is available both on Together for Children and Housing web sites. An information leaflet has also been produced. This is based on best practice from around the UK.
- Training on best practice and joint working was undertaken by HAST in October 2018 for frontline service staff from Housing, Together for Children, providers, YOS and ASC.
- A Housing officer now sits on the Together for Children Accommodation Panel so joint advice can be given.
- Housing Officers now undertake home visits to prevent homelessness by mediating between parents/carers and young people.
- Joint commissioning, based on the data gathered, is being undertaken to provide accommodation for 16 – 25 year olds rather than having a different service for those aged 18 years plus. This will also provide supported accommodation for young people with complex needs.
- An operational group of front line staff from across the Council and Together for Children was established and met for a year to oversee the implementation of the action plan. It will meet annually to review the Joint Protocol for homeless 16 – 17 year olds.

3. Actions completed because of the recommendation made by OFSTED in relation to the offer of Section 20

- An information leaflet has been produced to ensure that children who present as homeless fully understand their rights to become looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, and the benefits this brings.
- Young people are formally informed of their right to become Section 20 at the point of being accommodated, and at the 5 day and 10 day checkpoints within their Child In Need Assessment. They are informed again at the conclusion of assessment at 45 days. This is recorded within the assessment.
- Where young people decline the offer of Section 20, a management decision is recorded within their case notes.
- Further development of Liquid Logic post introduction of the Signs of Safety model of practice will further improve consistency of recording in relation to the offer of Section 20.

4. Together for Children and Housing Services draw up a joint protocol which sets clear and practical arrangements to prevent youth homelessness and to ensure 16 and 17 year olds have the accommodation to meet their needs – this protocol is complete and is attached at Appendix 2. It includes best practice from around the UK and input from HAST and Youth Homelessness North East.
5. A Homelessness Strategy is developed which addresses the needs of homeless young people and care leavers.
<https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/12172/Homeless-services>. This has been developed with input from partners including providers and Youth Homelessness North East as well as from officers within the Council and Together for Children. This Strategy will be finalised by September 2019 and partners have drawn up action plans in order to deliver the Strategy in relation to young people.
6. The Council's Housing Allocation Scheme has been revised and is published. <https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/12169/Find-a-home> This scheme now gives priority to Care Leavers and Gentoo has also agreed to give priority to young people who are at risk of homelessness such as care leavers. This means that young people no longer need to go through a process where they have to become homeless to get priority housing and instead can access social housing through the revised Allocation Scheme. However, there is still an issue around affordability of social housing with young people not always being able to afford to maintain their own tenancies.

4. Next Steps

1. Finalise and publish the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and develop delivery plans linked to the priorities in relation to homeless young people and care leavers. September 2019
2. Finalise and publish the Joint Protocol between Housing and Together for Children by July 2019
3. Work with housing providers to overcome the affordability issues around young people having their own tenancies. On-going
4. Jointly commission supported housing for young homeless people and looked after children – working party is established
5. Together for Children to use Liquid Logic going forward to collect data for all young homeless people including those whose priority reason for presenting may not be homelessness – this had been added to the work plan

5. Recommendations

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

- i) Accept this report as an update on the joint work undertaken by Housing and Together for Children on the housing offer for young people; and
- ii) Agree to receive a further report in July 2020 on the Homelessness Strategy and Joint Protocol in relation to young people as well as the recommendations in this report required to improve the housing offer for young people further.