

<p><u>MEETING</u></p> <p>HOUSING AND GROWTH COMMITTEE</p>
<p><u>DATE AND TIME</u></p> <p>MONDAY 25TH JANUARY, 2021</p> <p>AT 7.00 PM</p>
<p><u>VENUE</u></p> <p>VIRTUAL</p>

Dear Councillors,

Please find enclosed additional papers relating to the following items for the above mentioned meeting which were not available at the time of collation of the agenda.

Item No	Title of Report	Pages
1.	REFERRAL FROM CHILDREN, EDUCATION & SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE - HOUSING NEEDS OF CARE LEAVERS - TO FOLLOW	3 - 24

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Housing & Growth Committee

25 January 2020

Title	Housing Needs of Care leavers
Report of	Chairman of Housing and Growth Committee
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	Yes
Enclosures	Appendix 1: Report to Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee on the Housing Needs of Care Leavers.
Officer Contact Details	<p>Cath Shaw, Deputy Chief Executive, cath.shaw@barnet.gov.uk</p> <p>Susan Curran, Head of Housing and Regeneration, susan.curran@barnet.gov.uk</p> <p>Derek Rust, Group Director, Growth & Development, The Barnet Group, derek.rust@barnethomes.org</p> <p>Elliot Sweetman, Group Director, Operations & Property, The Barnet Group, Elliott.sweetman@barnethomes.org</p>

Summary

Following review and referral by Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee, this paper sets out a number of challenges to care leavers' entitlement to suitable housing and seeks approval by Housing and Growth Committee for further activities to be undertaken to inform a decision on how the council could respond to the current and future level of housing

needs and ensure that the needs of care leavers can be met. The aim is to enable young people to move into independent living accommodation. The activities range from reviewing the housing protocol and exploring options for changing banding, to housing stock options.

Officers Recommendations

- 1) That Housing and Growth Committee recognise the importance of effectively meeting care leavers' housing needs, as set out in the report at Appendix 1.**
- 2) That Housing and Growth Committee agree to the following work being undertaken:**
 - a. A review of the Care Leaver Housing Protocol, including reviewing the target of providing long-term housing for 4 new care leavers per month.**
 - b. A review of existing and known pipeline local affordable housing stock, and to explore other options such as shared accommodation in larger properties to ensure more long-term tenancies can be secured by care leavers, reflecting growth in this cohort.**
 - c. The Barnet Group be invited to collaborate with council officers, including Family Services, to identify the most effective route to purchase approximately 30 units for use by care leavers, if possible, within existing programmes.**
 - d. To ensure that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan to be considered by [Policy and Resources] Committee in due course reflects the need to deliver further properties to meet future forecast need.**
 - e. A review of the banding options for care leavers.**
 - f. To ensure when sourcing additional temporary accommodation, that accommodation that is suitable for care leavers is included, and explore the acquisition of new provision that specifically meets the needs of increased numbers of care leavers.**
 - g. A review of the booking policy for transitional / TA accommodation for care leavers, with a view to moving away from the nightly booking arrangement to enable stability within ring-fenced units.**
- 3) That Housing and Growth Committee note that on completion of the activities outlined in recommendation 2), recommendations that cannot be implemented within existing officer delegations will be reported to a future Committee for decision.**

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

Background context

- 1.1 A paper, prepared by Family Services in conjunction with Barnet Homes in response to the housing needs of care leavers, was submitted to Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee on 11 February 2020 as an appendix to the Family Services Quarterly Update report. It focuses on the challenges of meeting care leavers' entitlement to suitable and appropriate housing; the banding of care leavers; and how direct offers are made. Recommendations are included for how the council could respond to the current and future level of housing needs and ensure that the needs of care leavers can be met. The recommendations are focused on enabling young people to move into independent living accommodation; and range from reviewing the housing protocol and exploring options for changing banding, to housing stock options. Any decision on the council's housing allocations policy is reserved to the Housing and Growth Committee and therefore Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee referred the recommendations in the paper to Housing and Growth Committee. Housing and Growth Committee are asked to agree to further work being undertaken which will inform a decision on how the council could respond to the current and future level of housing needs and ensure that the needs of care leavers can be met. The aim is to enable young people to move into independent living accommodation. The activities range from reviewing the housing protocol and exploring options for changing banding, to housing stock options.
 - 1.2 Prior to Covid19, Barnet Homes were meeting their target for housing care leavers in long-term accommodation. However, the number of care leavers has risen from 259 in October 2018, to 343 in October 2020 meaning that more ambitious targets, along with additional long-term and transitional (temporary) accommodation, is required to support the increasing number of care leavers, both now and into the future.
 - 1.3 The COVID-19 pandemic has created an additional constraint on the availability of housing, with additional duties on Local Authorities to house rough sleepers, and guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE) resulting in the council being unable to move care leavers onto their long-term housing option between April and October 2020.
 - 1.4 During the initial lockdown period, the 'Everybody In' policy and dedicated support by housing teams to accommodate our most vulnerable residents meant increased pressure on Barnet's accommodation stock. Many of these residents needed single-occupancy properties, the same need as our care leavers. Barnet Homes also experienced delays in being able to complete repair work on vacated or newly acquired properties due to access restrictions and builder merchants being closed and construction/handyman companies being unavailable. The stay on evictions also had a significant impact on the availability of accommodation for those awaiting offers. Although much of the lost ground has been recovered, the rising number of care leavers creates a pressing need for action.
- Proposed changes to housing allocation and nominations**
- 1.5 The large number of care leavers, as well as the impact of Covid-19 regulations, means that there is a cohort of care leavers that are awaiting housing nomination. This contributes to additional waiting times for young people that have been banded. It is important to note that Band 1 is reserved for those with exceptional need, for example specific urgent medical or other needs, and almost all young people leaving care will be banded Band 2. The Allocation Scheme was reviewed in 2014 and the Housing Committee agreed at that time to waive the community contribution and agree for all care leavers to be placed in Band 2 for allocation. More detail in relation to the banding, and the number of young people in each band, is set out in Appendix 1.

- 1.6 Subject to agreement by Housing and Growth Committee, Barnet Homes will explore the implications of all care leavers automatically being placed into Band 1. This would show clear commitment to our young people and may reduce waiting times for allocation. Other issues to be considered include the impact on affordable supply; the availability of housing for other vulnerable groups and any potential cost implications such as the indirect costs associated with people potentially being in temporary accommodation longer.

Joint-Housing Protocol: Target of 4 housing offers per month and banding

- 1.7 The Housing Needs team have a current target agreed with Family Services of moving 4 care leavers into long-term accommodation each month, which equates to 48 per year. It is proposed that this target should be increased to reflect the rising number of care leavers. As there is already a significant cohort that is banded and awaiting housing, the number of young people that are banded is likely to grow over time, as young people turn 18 and/or receive permanent leave to remain. It is therefore proposed that the council should consider options to feasibly increase the target for the number of care leavers moved into long-term accommodation each month.

Increasing the supply of suitable homes for care leavers

- 1.8 To meet the needs of the rising number of young people awaiting housing, The Barnet Group will explore options for the provision of additional temporary and long-term housing.
- 1.9 Barnet Group officers will review the existing supply and known pipeline of local affordable housing (including council and Housing Association stock) to explore other options such as shared accommodation in larger properties to ensure more long-term secure tenancies can be secured by care leavers, reflecting growth in this cohort.
- 1.10 There is, however, a significant general lack of affordable housing in London, including in Barnet, which has an impact on all residents who have been allocated to a Band and are awaiting an offer of housing.
- 1.11 The Barnet Group will work with council teams including Family Services to identify the most effective route to acquire approximately 30 units for use by care leavers, if possible within existing programmes. In addition, the Infrastructure Delivery Plan currently being developed will include the requirement to ensure that forecast need is met.

Transitional (Temporary) Accommodation

- 1.12 52% of banded young people already live independently in transitional (temporary) accommodation; often studio flats which offer privacy and independence. It is reasonable to utilise transitional arrangements for young people waiting to move on to long-term accommodation. Transitional housing can also be an effective preparatory route for young people before they take on the responsibility of a secure tenancy. However, to meet our obligations to care leavers it is important that they have a clear path to long-term accommodation.
- 1.13 Issues regarding sustaining employment with a secure income and education and training have been heightened by COVID-19; resulting in anxiety and financial pressures for young people who are seeking the security of a home. By providing more stability in the housing provided, young people are better placed to gain confidence over other aspects of their

lives. This means that where possible, it is advantageous to increase the supply of long-term housing locally and use transitional housing to support this.

- 1.14 The ability to have a ringfenced or block booked allocation of transitional housing stock for care leavers will also be explored, along with a change to the booking system, moving away from the nightly booking arrangement. Consideration, however, needs to be made to the rates (which could be above London Housing Allowance rates) and for the payment of void periods in the event of the accommodation not being let.
- 1.15 Increasing the supply and variety of long-term housing options will create opportunities for young people to seamlessly move into long-term housing without experiencing significant delays and the anxiety that often goes with the knowledge that their housing is only temporary.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The COVID-19 pandemic, together with the increase in the number of care leavers has increased the pressure on the supply of suitable accommodation, resulting in delays to moving care leavers.
- 2.2 The proposed joint strategic approach has been developed by Barnet Homes and Family Services to address the current number of care leaves requiring housing, and to review the banding, allocation and targets for care leaver housing.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 The committee could decline to act on the referral from CES Committee. However, Corporate Parenting Principles apply to all parts of the council, not only Family Services; and the case for acting to improve housing outcomes for care leavers is compelling.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 Following Committee, officers will undertake the work set out in the recommendations which will inform a subsequent decision by Committee prior to any changes being implemented.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 The delivery of good services to children and families is a key mechanism through which Barnet Council and its partners will deliver the Family Friendly Barnet vision to be the most family friendly borough in London by 2022.
- 5.1.2 Family Friendly also forms part of our corporate Covid-19 recovery priority. The approaches taken supports the corporate and committee aims to:
 - Maintaining good or better services
 - Improve services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do.

5.1.3 Barnet's Health and Well Being strategy has the vision "To help everyone to keep well and to promote independence", and the council recognises the role that good housing can help to support this vision, such as helping older people and those with health and social care needs to live independently. As set out in the Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024:

"The council will promote the delivery of homes and places that meet the needs of older people and those with disabilities, as well as measures to support young people leaving care to make a successful transition to living independently."

5.1.4 Furthermore, the Housing Strategy recognises the need to deliver high quality services for young adults through closer working with partners to provide better housing options and to prevent youth homelessness.

5.2 **Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

5.2.1 Funding will need to be secured for any required increase to the supply of additional units beyond what is already in the capital programme. This will be further explored if required.

5.2.2 Where units earmarked for temporary accommodation within the existing capital programme are to be re-purposed for care leavers, existing MTFS saving plans are likely to be impacted and this shall be reported as appropriate.

5.3 **Social Value**

5.3.1 The council must take into account the requirements of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 to try to maximise the social and local economic value it derives from its procurement spend. Before commencing a procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

5.4 **Legal and Constitutional References**

5.4.1 The council's Constitution, Article 7.5 Committees, Forums, Working Groups and Partnerships, sets out the functions of the Housing and Growth Committee:

- Responsibility for housing matters including strategy, homelessness, social housing and housing grants, commissioning of environmental health functions for private sector housing, regeneration strategy and oversee major regeneration schemes, asset management, employment strategy, business support and engagement.
- To receive reports on relevant performance information and risk on the services, under the remit of the Committee.

5.4.2 Local authorities have specific duties in respect of children under various legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. They have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and, if this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare, to promote the upbringing of such children by their

families by providing services appropriate to the child's needs.

5.4.3 Local authorities have specific duties to care leavers under the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The corporate parenting duties and powers under the 1989 Act include:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and,
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

5.4.4 In addition, the council has a duty to appoint a personal advisor to provide support to care leavers until they reach their 25th birthday. This support can include support from the council as housing authority or from other housing organisations. Chapter 22 of the Homeless Code of Guidance gives guidance on housing options for care leavers and confirms that local processes and practices should not routinely involve care leavers being treated as homeless when care placements come to an end, in order to place the housing authority under an obligation to secure accommodation under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. The guidance recommends that local authorities have in place a joint protocol to cover arrangements for achieving planned, supportive transitions to independent living; identifying homelessness risk early and acting to prevent it, and providing a quick, safe, joined up response for care leavers who do become homeless. Housing options for care leavers should be based on the circumstances of the individual and the guidance confirms that there should be no blanket presumption that at 18 a young person who has left care will be ready for their own tenancy and that options could include supported lodgings, supported accommodation or independent accommodation with visiting support. Specific circumstances may require that a young person is supported to access accommodation close to a strong family support network or near to other significant adults, such as ex-foster carers or there may be a need to avoid certain locations due to childhood experiences or associations.

5.5 Risk Management

5.5.1 Specific risk management is being carried out for Children and Young People's Plan. Any Family Services risks are recorded on the Family Services Risk Register and monitored each quarter.

5.5.2 There is the risk that some of the proposed changes will impact on the availability of housing for other vulnerable groups. This will be further explored, and the impact and mitigations will be reported in the subsequent paper to Committee.

5.5.3 There is a risk that efforts to increase the supply of bespoke care leaver housing could

lead to over-supply of such accommodation. However, rising numbers mean that this is unlikely; and should the situation arise such accommodation could easily be repurposed to other vulnerable young people.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 The Equality Act, 2010 outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act, 2010;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people of different groups; and
- Foster good relations between people from different groups.

5.6.2 Equalities and diversity considerations are of central important in supporting care leavers, including in relation to their housing needs. It is imperative that services for care leavers are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, race and ethnicity, faith or belief, sex, gender reassignment, language, maternity / parental status and sexual orientation. The council will continue to place these considerations at the centre of its work with care leavers.

5.7 Corporate Parenting

5.7.1 In line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles in all decision-making. The Housing Needs of Care Leavers report (appendix 1) addresses how the council will meet its statutory duty to support care leavers up to the age of 25; this includes services assisting care leavers in preparing for adulthood and in independent living through housing and accommodation services.

5.8 Consultation and Engagement

5.8.1 A range of stakeholder consultation and engagement has occurred as part of the public engagement programme developed for the London Borough of Barnet's Housing Strategy.

5.8.2 Consultation and engagement with young people is central to social work practice and service improvement across Family Services. Barnet Family Services are expanding on engagement activities and as a part of the plans we are recruiting for a post that will focus on service user engagement.

Insight

5.8.3 Insight relevant to the report is set out in Appendix 1.

5.8.4 Insight data will continue to be regularly collected and used in monitoring the progress and impact of the Children and Young People's Plan and to shape ongoing improvement activity. Please see references to our Insight data as part of the self-assessment.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee, 11 January 2021, Agenda item 12, Family Services Quarterly Update, <https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=697&MId=10096&Ver=4>

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<u>MEETING</u> CHILDREN, EDUCATION & SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE
<u>DATE AND TIME</u> MONDAY 11TH JANUARY, 2021 AT 6.00 PM
<u>VENUE</u> VIRTUAL MEETING

Dear Councillors,

Please find enclosed additional papers relating to the following items for the above mentioned meeting which were not available at the time of collation of the agenda.

Item No	Title of Report	Pages
1.	FAMILY SERVICES QUARTERLY UPDATE	3 - 12

Naomi Kwasa 020 8359 6146 naomi.kwasa@Barnet.gov.uk

Please note that this will be held as a virtual meeting. An audio and video live stream of the meeting can be accessed using the link below:

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Housing Needs of Care Leavers

October 2020

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This paper has been prepared by Family Services in conjunction with Barnet Homes, in response to the housing needs of care leavers. It focuses on the challenges of care leavers entitlement to suitable and appropriate housing; the banding of care leavers and how direct offers are made. Recommendations are included for how we should jointly respond to the current and future level of housing needs and ensure that care leavers housing duty can be met.
- 1.2. Operationally there is a clear commitment and investment in the housing and support needs of care leavers. Family Services and Barnet housing teams work together to identify positive solutions for our individual young people. Care Leavers have entitlement to housing via Barnet Homes irrespective of where they live. Family Services' longer-term sufficiency model encompasses a range of accommodation and support options (supported lodgings, Staying Put, Moving Forward, floating support, supported accommodation, amongst others) to reflect the needs of our diverse care leavers. To address the need of those living outside of the borough Family Services has collaborated with Barnet Homes on the 'Let 2 Barnet' project which enables young people to access housing via the private sector in or out of borough. This is supported by early and robust transition planning.
- 1.3. Within the current housing strategy and joint protocol Barnet Homes has a current target of moving 4 care leavers per month into permanent housing. This equates to 48 care leavers per year. Our high number of care leavers, up from 259 in October 2018, to 343 October 2020, means that we need more housing availability to support the number of care leavers now and into the future. This includes both permanent housing offers and transitional (temporary) accommodation.
- 1.4. This issue has been amplified through the Covid-19 pandemic. Barnet's resources and housing stock faced an unprecedented challenge, with Government's plans to prevent the spread of the virus placing additional duties on Local Authorities to house people under the pandemic. During the COVID-19 lockdown period Barnet Homes housed 195 rough sleepers and continue to house 126 rough sleepers in temporary accommodation with a requirement to provide move on plans for them all. Department for Education (DfE) also issued guidance that no care leaver should have to leave care or change placement during the pandemic, which have meant that we have not been able to move care leavers onto their permanent housing option. This guidance was in place for 6 months, during which 24 care leavers would in normal circumstances have been made an offer.
- 1.5. The DfE guidance on children in care and care leavers was lifted in October, and any move now should be right for that young person and take into account their wishes and feelings. Family Services and Barnet Homes are working effectively on moving care leavers onto their permanent offers. Barnet Homes is reporting that the existing target of 48 young people will be met this year, however this will not be sufficient to address the numbers needing housing.
- 1.6. A joint strategic approach is needed to firstly address the current number of care leavers requiring housing and secondly to review the banding, allocation and targets for care leaver housing by Barnet Council. It is timely to consider a formal review of the Housing strategy and Allocations Scheme. Capital investment to acquire additional housing within and beyond the borough will need to be explored. To address the current surge in need up to 30 additional properties would produce some

relief to the increasing demand and will allow care leavers the opportunity to move directly from their supported environment to permanent housing, bypassing the need to use TA.

- 1.7. The large number of care leavers, as well as the impact of Covid-19 regulations, means that there is a cohort of care leavers that are awaiting housing nomination. This contributes to additional waiting times for young people that have been banded. It is important to note that Band 1 is reserved for those with exceptional need, for example specific urgent medical or other needs, and almost all young people leaving care will be banded Band 2. The Allocation Scheme was reviewed in 2014 and the Housing Committee agreed at that time to waive the community contribution and agree for all care leavers to be placed in Band 2 for allocation. Family Services and Barnet Homes would like to explore the possibility of all care leavers automatically receiving a Band 1, which would show clear commitment to our young people and may reduce waiting times for allocation. This variation to the Allocation Scheme would need to be presented to the Housing and Growth Committee if it was considered feasible.
- 1.8. At the point of analysing the data during October, 87 care leavers were banded band 2 and awaiting allocation of permanent housing, 2 were due to be banded, as well as 3 young people who have been banded band 4. Analysis shows that more than half of the cohort (56%) are ready to live independently in their own long-term accommodation, but are awaiting a housing offer. The numbers waiting in current placements or transitional arrangements change constantly but as the care leaver cohort grows their numbers needing housing will grow over time, as more young people turn 18 and/or receive permanent leave to remain.
- 1.9. 28% (26) of the banded care leavers are not currently ready to move into permanent housing, this can be due to a variety of reasons, including not turned 18 yet (5), not ready to live independently (15); at university (3); or in custody (3). However, only 8 of these are officially on 'hold', indicating that an offer could potentially be considered for part of the cohort, for example together with floating support, or as soon as they turn 18.
- 1.10. 63% (54) of the cohort currently live independently, the majority (52%; 45) of these are currently living in transitional accommodation (what Barnet Homes call Temporary Housing). On average, this cohort of young people has lived in transitional housing for 1.33 years. The Covid-19 restrictions contributed to longer waiting times in transitional accommodation, but there are also other contributing factors, such as young people wishing to live in specific parts of the borough, rent arrears that prevent them from allocation in Band 2 and personal circumstances that may prevent them from being able to confidently transition to permanent housing. Given that many of our care leavers will need to remain in transitional arrangements prior to securing a tenancy, we need to find solutions and allocate available housing effectively. Reviewing the booking arrangements for transitional accommodation which are currently allocated on an on-the-day availability basis and moving to a system whereby properties are acquired and are prioritised for care leavers will increase the capacity and provide stability for care leavers.
- 1.11. Having identified suitable accommodation for care leavers will support our broader sufficiency planning and would assist in the efficient delivery of our planned floating support model. The aim of floating support is to enable young people to settle in, connect with their local community, further develop independent living skills and to thrive as effective adults. By 'ring-fencing' properties for care leavers, there is the potential to increase pressure within the housing system for other high needs groups, however the welfare of our care leavers needs to be prioritised.

Recommendations:

- Review the Care Leaver Housing Protocol, including the target of housing 4 new care leavers per month
- Housing to review current local housing stock that is either social housing or housing via Housing Association/private developments at LHA rent levels to explore other options such as shared accommodation in larger properties to ensure more permanent tenancies can be secured by care leavers, reflecting growth in this cohort.
- Work with The Barnet Group to identify the most effective route to purchase approximately 30 units for use by care leavers, if possible within existing programmes; and provide further properties through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan to meet forecast future
- Show our commitment and support to care leavers, by exploring the option of changing banding options for care leavers
- When sourcing additional temporary accommodation, ensure suitability for care leavers and acquire new provision that specifically meets the needs of increased numbers of care leavers.
- Review the booking policy for transitional / TA accommodation for care leavers moving away from the nightly booking arrangement to enable stability within ring-fenced units.

What young people are telling us*

A received his housing nomination and was offered a flat but realised that he was not ready to live on his own. He really appreciated the support of his foster carer and he wanted the opportunity to continue to develop his independent living skills. His PA liaised with housing and they agreed to put his offer on hold until he felt he was in the right place to transition to independence. This has allowed him to develop at his own pace and take charge of his own transition.

B waited more than a year to be nominated for housing. She feels that not knowing where she would be living stopped her looking for employment opportunities. She has now signed a tenancy and has an interview for a job role next week.

C spent time in custody. His housing offer was put on hold until he is due to be released which will help minimise any time spent in transitional accommodation. Secure long-term accommodation will help minimise the risk of re-offending.

Due to a breakdown at her placement, D requested to move into independent accommodation. Within weeks it was clear that D was unable to manage independent living due to her vulnerabilities and was therefore moved to supported accommodation. Since the move, D's ability to manage independence was assessed, and as a result, on her behalf we negotiated a request for her long term offer to be placed on hold whilst an intervention plan was developed to progress her independent living skills. Without the ability to place a hold on her nomination for longer-term housing, D would have moved into her long-term accommodation with a likely outcome that she could have lost this tenancy and face future homelessness.

*details have been changed.

2. Housing Duty

2.1. Good housing underpins success in other areas of life. Secure, safe and stable accommodation is an essential building block for success and achievement in education, training and employment, and has a direct impact on emotional health and wellbeing. It is therefore essential that a multi-agency approach is adopted when securing accommodation for care leavers. Agencies must work together to meet their statutory duties and corporate parenting responsibilities, in order to provide a safe and supportive pathway to independent living (Barnet Joint housing protocol)

2.2. Barnet Council is responsible for the care and support of care leavers and will make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need; the same as any parent. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to support care leavers up to the age of 25 and this includes services assisting care leavers in preparing for adulthood and in independent living through housing and accommodation

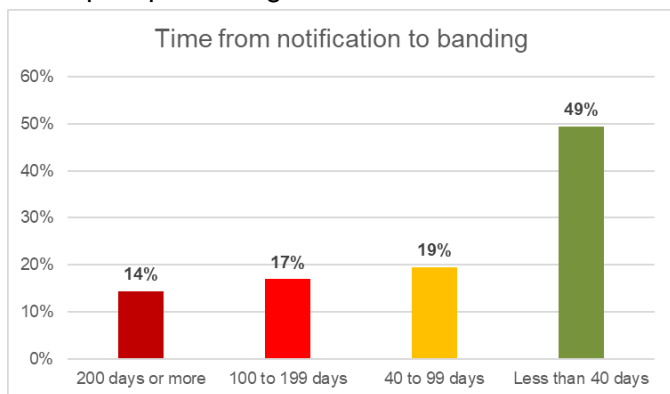
services. This is clearly outlined in the Local Offer: a guide for young people leaving care¹. As Council Officers, we also have the role of Corporate Parent to these young people to support them in their transition to independence. As of 5th October 2020, Barnet has 343 care leavers. This compares to 259 in October 2018, and 309 in October 2019. Our aspiration is for care leavers to be living independently in their own accommodation or living at university. Currently, 59% are living independently. Housing are supporting this goal by successfully providing Transitional Accommodation to our care leavers, and by working flexibly with the timing and type of offers of permanent accommodation.

2.3. We have high aspirations for all of our young people and our staff and partners work hard to support them to develop the skills to live independently, to study and/ or secure a job which enables them to be financially independent. The journey out of care is a particularly important, but sometimes challenging transition. Securing suitable accommodation for care leavers is about much more than just finding them somewhere to stay, it is about supporting them to become independent young adults that can meet the challenges and thrive.

3. Nomination process

3.1. Our Joint Housing Protocol and process, has ensured that 64% of young people are now successfully banded when they are 17.5-18.5 years old². Best practice states that pathway planning for care leavers should have permanence planning start early enough whilst they are still in our care, to enable a smooth transition into their permanent home and minimise waiting times. In Barnet we start developing the pathway plan with the young person when they are 16.5 years old. Following agreement with Housing in 2018, Family Services are now able to notify housing from the age of 17.5. In 80% of cases, the notification to housing was made when the young person was aged 17.5-18 years old. Were a notification is done at a later stage, this can be due the young person coming into care when they are older; personal circumstances such as staying put arrangements or where the young person is a former unaccompanied asylum seeker (UASC). Notification can only be made when the young person has permanent leave to remain. In the banded cohort, 25 young people are former UASC.

3.2. Care leavers receive a priority for housing nominations. For young people with entitlement to housing as a care leaver in Barnet, a referral is made by Social Care to the Housing Options team. This process ensures that young people do not have to make the applications themselves or attend a housing appointment, as this application is made by their social worker on their behalf. It reflects excellent partnership working between Barnet Homes and Family Services, placing the young person's needs first. When Family Services notify Housing, a housing officer will be allocated within 5 days of receiving the nomination. The housing assessment is expected to be completed within 33 days, however, this is dependent on all the supporting documents being provided by the young person to support their assessment. In 86% of cases, care leavers are notified of their banding within 200 days. As standard practice, care leavers are usually placed into priority band-2, the second highest priority category possible. Priority Band-1 is reserved for those with exceptional need, for example specific urgent medical.



Base: 77. Excludes those not banded, and data recording issues.

¹ https://www.barnet.gov.uk/sites/default/files/020948_barnet_care_leavers_a4_digital.pdf

² Analysis of 90 banded care leavers

3.3. The Housing Needs team also have potential, and are willing to make, direct offers to care leavers that are banded and where there is a need for secure housing offer, rather than transitional accommodation, for example, for a young person that is pregnant. This may be following a decision made at the Social Care High-Risk Case Forum, which Housing attend on a monthly basis, or through direct conversation with Housing when an urgent move is needed.

4. Overview of our current banded cohort

4.1. At the point of writing there were 87 care leavers³ that are banded priority band 2, and a further 2 that are due to be banded. 3 young people are in priority band 4. This compares to just 33 pending offers this time last year and just 9 in the same week in 2018. Out of these young people that are banded, only 53 are currently ready to move into their own permanent accommodation, and are currently delayed by availability of housing stock that is either social housing or affordable rented accommodation. For other young people, the following applies:

- 4% of young people are likely to shortly move into their own accommodation, as they have recently been made an offer.
- 4% have requested to live somewhere else, or may not be able to live in Barnet due to safety reasons. The pan-London housing protocol enables us to request housing out of Borough for someone who cannot live in Barnet. Young people can also be supported to access housing in the private sector via Let 2 Barnet, this includes a landlord incentive scheme and is not limited to area.
- Furthermore, not all are currently ready to move into their permanent housing at this stage (28%).

Current key factor?	No.	%	Comment
Housing stock	47	51%	Some of these young people may not have been ready for housing previously
Housing stock - but restricted area	5	5%	These are known cases - other young people may restrict their areas without informing us
Offer has recently been made	4	4%	E.g. young person in process of viewing property/ moving.
Wants/needs to live out of borough	4	4%	Due to young person's wishes, or safety concerns - e.g. delay not due to Barnet Homes
Not ready for housing - any reason	26	28%	E.g. not turned 18 yet (5), not ready to live independently (15); at university (3); or in custody (3)
Other	6	7%	For example, re-assessing banding due to changes in circumstances
Total	92	100%	

5. Key reasons for delays in permanent offers

5.1. More than half of the cohort (56%) are over 18, and are ready to live independently in their own long-term accommodation, but are unable to move due to lack of available, affordable housing options. Thus far, they have waited an average of 286 days from being banded. The temporary hold due to Covid-19 would have impacted this cohort. However, some young people have also restricted their search area (5%), and others may have been on hold at an earlier date due to other reasons. Waiting times can delay permanence for young people as seen by the 29% (15) of this cohort who are 20 years or older. Out of the young people that are currently waiting due to housing stock as the prime reason, 28% have waited more than a year for an offer, from their banding date (or 18th Birthday, were nomination was done prior to it).

³ 6 of these young have open care plans as they are 17/very recently turned 18, and are therefore not classified as care leavers, and a further 4 young people have had their pathway plan closed – e.g. they do not need any further assistance from Onwards and Upwards.

Young people not ready to live independently, or on 'hold'

- 5.2. 28% are currently not ready to live independently. E.g. not turned 18 yet (5), not ready to live independently (15); at university (3); or in custody (3). Only 8 of these young people are officially on 'hold', indicating that an offer could be considered for part of the cohort on review of their circumstances.
- 5.3. Some of those young people who have been banded and are on the housing waiting list at any given time are subject to a negotiated pause in their nominations (currently 8 young people; some young people would have been in on hold previously).
- 5.4. Placing a hold on nominations to allow for appropriate referrals and interventions are key to preventing future homelessness and achieved through Onwards & Upwards and Housing working in partnership. These 'holds' are primarily as a result of young people being in-custody, a significant deterioration in their physical and/or mental health, concerns about substance misuse issues, anti-social behaviour, significant budgeting concerns or any other matters that would negatively impact on a young person's ability to maintain a tenancy. Holds can be for a short period of time, for example to allow someone to benefit from a period of employment, or longer, for example if someone is in custody or accessing therapeutic support. Young people who had their nomination placed on-hold do not lose their place in the 'queue', and they remain at the same priority. Delaying permanent housing offers through 'holds' is a successful partnership initiative, that has contributed to ensuring that it is now extremely rare for leavers to become homeless.

Lack of affordable housing

- 5.5. Barnet Homes is successfully exploring options for additional temporary and permanent housing. However, there is a general lack of affordable housing in London, which has an impact on all our residents that are banded.

Joint-Housing Protocol: Target of 4 housing offers per month and banding

- 5.6. The Housing Needs team have a current target of 4 housing offers per month. This requires review as it equates to 48 offers in a year. Our high numbers of care leavers, up from 259 in October 2018, to 343 in October 2020, means that we need more housing availability to support the number of care leavers we have now and in the future. This includes both permanent housing offers and temporary (transitional) accommodation.
- 5.7. As there is already a significant cohort that is banded and awaiting housing, the number of young people that are banded is likely to grow over time, as young people turn 18 and/or receive permanent leave to remain. With 52 young people waiting for accommodation and more young people turning 18 coming through the system the need to look at a revised target and explore different permanent housing options is required.
- 5.8. As previously described, care leavers are currently banded category 2. Banding care leavers as category 1 would show our commitment, as well as decrease the waiting times.

Covid-19 Impact

- 5.9. During the initial lockdown period, the 'Everybody In' policy and dedicated support by housing teams to accommodate our most vulnerable residents meant increased pressure on Barnet's accommodation stock. Many of these residents needed single-occupancy properties, the same need as our care leavers. Barnet Homes also experienced delays in being able to complete repair work on vacated or newly acquired properties due to access restrictions and builder merchants being closed and construction/handyman companies being unavailable. The stay on evictions also had a significant impact on the availability of accommodation for those awaiting offers.
- 5.10. The pandemic has created a need for stability in accommodation and support. Young people who have left care, or are just about to, are especially vulnerable right now. As per DfE guidance, all

decisions about their future are carefully considered in the light of the pandemic and with an overriding objective of supporting them during this period and minimising any additional stress for them. In particular, we take the impact of the pandemic into account when making decisions about the transition for those leaving care, and their housing options. The initial guidance was that *all* young people should stay at their current placement or accommodation. The guidance was changed in October 2020, to reflect that “while young people will still be able to move out of care into suitable accommodation, where this happens the move should be right for that young person and take account of their wishes and feelings. Care leavers can also be moved between different accommodation settings, provided that the move is in accordance with the wishes of the young person and that the local authority is assured that the setting they are moving into is safe in relation to risk factors arising from coronavirus (COVID-19).”⁴

5.11. Services have had to adapt, with virtual viewings and new ways to offer support to enable young people to move into new properties. Working closely in partnership, Barnet Homes and Family Services have started to move young people into their own accommodation as a result of early permanence planning and good working relationships between the agencies. Family Services have full support from Barnet Group colleagues regarding the identification of practical solutions and prioritisation based on exceptional circumstances and needs.

5.12. Nonetheless, this has created a backlog of care leavers that are awaiting permanent offers. In normal circumstances, 24 offers would have been made in the time period between April and September.

6. Transitional options

6.1. 63% of the banded young people already live independently; in transitional accommodation (52%, known as temporary accommodation by Barnet Homes), at university (5%), with their partner/ relative (6%) or in private rental property (1%). Young people that are banded pay for their own independent accommodation through housing benefit, their salary or other income such as student grants.

6.2. Family Services are working closely together with Housing, ensuring that all young people that are ready to live independently, are given the option. Housing offers transitional accommodation (TA) of a suitable standard in Barnet; they are studio flats which afford privacy and independence. It is reasonable to utilise transitional arrangements for young people waiting to move on to permanent accommodation. TA housing can also be an effective preparatory route for young people before they take on the responsibility of a permanent tenancy. Some young people will have had multiple periods in TA. E.g. move from semi-independent to TA, move in with partner, move back to TA, go into custody/hospital. All the while they remain banded for permanent housing. For a significant proportion of the cohort, it is not a linear process from TA to permanent housing.

6.3. Some young people moving into their first independent tenancy require additional support. To mitigate this challenge, Family Services has a clear offer of support for care leavers to ensure that the right support is available at the right time. Their Personal Advisor remains in contact with them, supporting them as required and signposting them to appropriate services as needed.

6.4. In addition, Family Services are developing a clear floating support offer and are working with an organisation which has match funding from November 2020 for the next three years. Providing an independent living skills programme will have a positive impact on the young people, enabling them to maintain their first tenancy successfully and reducing the risk of future tenancy management issues.

6.5. Time spent living independently prior to having the responsibility of a permanent tenancy can be extremely valuable for some young people as it is a testing period during which they can learn to navigate through all the necessary processes, requirements, and possible hurdles of living independently. Our young people would benefit from some TA that is ‘ring-fenced’ for care leavers.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care#care-leavers>

Ring-fencing specific buildings would ensure that coordinated support through the floating support offer can be allocated for these young people; and it allows for additional consideration, in terms of other criteria such as safety of the area and impact of other residents. There are alternative providers, that Housing could explore together with Family Services, that fall within the agreed London wide rates.

6.6. Care leavers who are at risk of losing their tenancy for any number of reasons will receive additional support from their PA, and the High-Risk Case Forum (HRCF) will review their situation and will consider financially supporting the young person to clear arrears using the funding available through the Homelessness prevention grant has been earmarked to support young care leavers.

6.7. We are also in the early stages of exploring options with Centre Point, about developing a local Independent living offer. This will be an alternative option to transitional accommodation, with the goal of providing support to young people that are starting out, and transitioning some of our young people into alternative housing pathways that will be affordable to those in employment or training.

7. Young people remaining in supportive accommodation

7.1. A smaller number of care leavers require some support to help them transition. Out of the banded cohort, 31 currently live in this type of accommodation.

- 18% of young people live in foyers or semi-independent (supported) accommodation. We have developed our own in-house offer through a partnership arrangement between Housing and Family Services. Moving Forward transitional accommodation was introduced in July 2020, this enables young people to develop their independent living skills further with regular floating support. Out of this current banding cohort, one young person is in Moving Forward.
- In some cases, the best option for the young person is within in a Staying Put arrangement with their former foster family (11%), or in supported lodging arrangement (1 person).

Current accommodation	No.	%
Transitional accommodation	45	52%
Semi-independent/ foyer	16	18%
Staying put	10	11%
With relatives/partner	5	6%
Student accommodation	4	5%
Custody	3	3%
Other	4	5%
Total	87	100%

Excludes 5 young people that are only 17 years old

7.2. Young people that are banded pay for their own accommodation at no cost to the Local Authority. They are eligible for housing benefit, and the large majority are in Education, Employment or Training (EET). However, there are exceptions to this where Family Services contribute towards costs:

- 17-year-olds that have been banded ahead of their 18th Birthday are looked after children and as such are accommodated by the Local Authority (5)
- Young people that are banded, but currently not ready to live independently (7)
- Young people that want to live out of borough (2)
- Young people where we are contributing towards their costs through top-up as rent is high, when comparing to income (2)
- Accommodation during university holidays (1)
- Mother and baby assessment on-going (1)

7.3. There are points within the housing nomination process, were we need to carefully consider the need of the young people. In the banded cohort there are some young people, were the benefit of the young person staying at their current accommodation (primarily staying put arrangements), compared to moving onto their own accommodation, needs to be carefully considered. While the

main reason for the delay is more closely related to care planning/pathways and safeguarding issues, than it being a result of there not being sufficient permanent housing, the young people are primarily in their current accommodation as they are awaiting nomination. It poses a challenge for two reasons - firstly, it is at a cost to Family Services, some of which could potentially be mitigated on an individual by individual basis by ensuring that, where suitable and applicable, young people contribute towards their accommodation costs. Secondly, this affects sufficiency of high quality local supported accommodation for other young people who need a placement with specific support. From the point of the young people being ready to live independently, to today, costs to Family Services for this cohort are at a total of £132k:

- 5 young people that are mostly be ready to live independently, but benefit from the stability of staying put, and the extra support it can offer, and therefore remain in in their current arrangement until a permanent offer is made. The cost to Family Services on 5 young people remaining with carers beyond what is needed is £58k in total for these young people.
- Young people that due to health reasons are vulnerable due to Covid-19 and were transitional accommodation is not suitable (2 young people – this far costing Family Services £42k)
- Young people that are vulnerable in transitional accommodation, due to safety concerns, and need to move straight into their permanent accommodation (2 cases – this far costing Family Services £32k)

8. Why we need to act now

8.1. The impact of delays to moves are as follows:

- The list of care leavers that are awaiting permanent accommodation will grow over time.
- In a few instances, young people are not able to move on from their more expensive supported accommodation or placement - resulting in pressure on the budgets and on MTFs targets.
- Secondary impact on sufficiency of transitional accommodation, supported accommodation and placements for those that need it where care leavers have not moved on
- Potential for young people to become anxious, at a stressful time of transition, without the security of a longer-term tenancy. Housing stability is essential to young people meeting their potential of being economically active, healthy, confident adults who participate and contribute to the community of Barnet.

8.2. We now know that the restrictions under Covid-19 will be in place for a longer period (at least the next 6 months to March 2021), and that there is a risk of further local restrictions, therefore, solutions are required now to avoid further drift and delay.

8.3. If we can move more young people to permanent housing we can maximise access to the match funded floating support programme available from November 2020.

8.4. Issues regarding sustaining employment with a secure income and education and training have been heightened by Covid; resulting in anxiety and financial pressures for young people who are seeking the security of a home. The more housing stability we can provide, the better for enabling young people to focus on gaining control and confidence over other aspects of their lives and maintain levels of motivation and engagement.

8.5. To assist care leavers to achieve this we propose the need for housing to identify more permanent housing locally. Transitional accommodation should be considered as one option amongst a range of housing and support models and not as an inevitable part of the pathway to independence. In instances where transitional housing is the chosen option, complemented by wider support services to meet needs, stability and choice of provision would be further supported through ringfenced allocation of transitional housing stock for care leavers and a change to the booking system.

8.6. Ensuring that a variety of permanent housing options are developed will create opportunities for young people to seamlessly move into permanent housing without experiencing any delays and the anxiety that often goes with the knowledge that their housing is only temporary.

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