



## Housing & Growth Committee

25 January 2020

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