

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Wednesday, 18 October 2017

Electoral Division affected: All

Homelessness Protocol and Supported Accommodation

(Appendices 'A' to 'D' refer)

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

The homelessness protocol for children aged 16-17 years is aimed to support and enable children considered to be homeless to secure appropriate assessment and accommodation. The protocol was established to ensure a streamlined process to assess and meet the needs between housing and social care.

Supported accommodation is a separate area of need which is currently included with the homelessness protocol for children aged 16-17 years in an attempt to support the transition of children into adulthood and independence. Support thereafter is however only provided to children who have been looked after or are relevant by means of leaving care legislation.

Recommendations

The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- i. Note and comment on the Homelessness Protocol January 2017, as set out in Appendix A
- ii. Consider the Homelessness flowcharts, as set out in Appendices B to C
- iii. Note and comment on the supported accommodation offer for looked after children, as set out in Appendix D

Background and Advice

The protocol was established to improve the offer to homeless children aged 16-17 years of age, which is usually a time of crisis requiring a clear and joined up response from housing and social care (as at Appendices A to D).

The protocol has improved the service for children who are vulnerable and at the point of homelessness and has begun to improve the working relationships between housing and social care. This includes:

- District councils and housing departments will work together to meet the needs of vulnerable 16-17 years old's who find themselves homeless.
- All assessments will consider reunification where appropriate with family members, but remain child centred.
- This commitment enables positive transitional arrangements to be established to meet their needs as they move onto adulthood.
- The protocol prevents children being passed between housing and social care during periods of crisis whilst assessments of need are completed, which can increase the stress placed upon a child who finds themselves homeless.
- Children assessed as being in need will have their placements funded by social care and will if consenting to do so become looked after children.
- Children assessed as being in need of accommodation only will maintain their placement funded by the district councils/housing.
- Supported accommodation placements are utilised for children aged 16-17 years in an attempt to enable to develop the required skills to move onto adulthood.

Consultations

There has been a continued working group to ensure that the protocol is fit for purpose and during the roll out has monitored the working arrangements to ensure all parties were content with the process. There has been consultation with legal in relation to local authority responsibility.

Financial Implications

The annual recurring budget for externally commissioned support for looked after care leavers and 16-17 year olds who present themselves as homeless and subsequently become looked after children under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, is in £4.950m in 2017/18. A further £0.500m of non-recurring reserves funding is available in 2017/18. The budget funds supported accommodation/semi-independent living provision currently spot purchased individually, or sourced via the North West Leaving Care Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) by Children's Social Care and also supported accommodation provided through the existing block contracting arrangements. The existing block contract arrangements include semi-independent and independent supported accommodation schemes, foyers, supported lodgings and emergency accommodation.

It is estimated that an annualised equivalent of 120 16-17 year olds present themselves as homeless to district councils or directly to providers per year. However it is not known what proportion of these young people will subsequently choose to become looked after children under Section 20 of the Children's Act. Where this is the case the average cost of the rent and support funded by the County Council under block contracted arrangements is £385 per week, whilst the average cost of provision spot purchased is circa £800 per week.

A 16-17 year old young person who presents as homeless and chooses not to become looked after by the Authority will be supported under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Where possible support will be provided through the above

existing block contract arrangements, however, the young person would be eligible to claim housing benefit and so the cost of rent would not be met by the County Council.

Risk Management

Financial

The main financial risk is that young people to whom the County Council owes a statutory duty (under Sections 17 and 20) cannot access the block contracted arrangements which currently exist and that there is additional spend on spot purchasing over and above the budget, and additional costs resulting from increases in the numbers of children looked after (CLA). Any increase in numbers of CLA could also impact on social work caseloads and responsibility for statutory intervention, possibly up to the age of 25. This will be subject to regular review and any financial impact addressed through monthly revenue monitoring and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
NA		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
NA		