

## Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 24 November 2020

### Report of the Head of Service, Policy, Information and Commissioning (Start Well)

Electoral Division affected: (All Divisions);
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### Supported Accommodation and Joint Housing Protocol Report

Contact for further information:

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#### Executive Summary

This report will provide a brief update to the Corporate Parenting Board on the following care leaver accommodation priorities:

#### a) Supported Accommodation Services – Commissioning Arrangements

Currently, services for care leavers and for homeless young people are commissioned through a mix of block contracts, and individual spot purchase arrangements via the North West regional purchasing system. In 2018 the decision was taken that our primary route to the market for all services – block and spot - will be through a purchasing system that will be administered by the Council. Covid-19 implications have delayed the next stage of the procurement process and consequently we have issued direct awards to our block-contract providers so that services will continue until September 2021, by which time we anticipate new contracts being in place. We will continue to commission some services via the regional system during that timeframe.

In partnership with the 12 district housing authorities, our providers and the voluntary sector, there is strong commitment to ensuring that our young people have a wide range of housing and support options available to them. Gaps in service have been identified and through a partnership approach the focus will be on how service accessibility and delivery across the county can be improved.

To strengthen the accommodation pathways for care leavers, including those with complex needs and 16/17 homeless young people, the Joint Housing Protocol is being refreshed and a new Care Leaver Housing Protocol is being introduced.

## **b) Joint Housing Protocol including the refreshed 16/17 Homeless Protocol and the new Care Leaver Housing Protocol**

The Joint Housing Protocol 2017- 2020 is due to be refreshed by the end of the year. This Protocol also includes the 16/17 Homeless Protocol, which is largely working well across the county but needs to be revised to ensure there is a consistent and fair approach, regardless of where a young person presents as homeless.

The new Care Leaver Housing/ Homelessness Protocol is being developed in partnership with the twelve district housing authorities, local voluntary sector organisations and providers with support being received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

It is intended that the overarching Joint Housing Protocol will be revised to include more specific information on the prevention of homelessness across the county and how we can work in partnership with the third sector to ensure that young people receive a wider understanding of homelessness.

The Protocol will also include new guidance on how best to support Intentionally Homeless Families to ensure there is targeted support in preventing these occurrences.

### **Recommendation**

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note the update provided on the supported accommodation commissioning arrangements, the revised Joint Housing Protocol and the new the Care Leaver Housing/Homelessness Protocol.

## **Background and Advice**

### **Supported Accommodation Services – Commissioning Arrangements**

As a corporate parent the Authority has a statutory duty to provide a range of suitable accommodation and support to young people who are in and who are leaving our care. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets an objective of ensuring that accommodation and support services for young people meet their individual needs, both immediate and long term. We are committed to improving our accommodation support offer and strive to ensure that young people can be supported in a location that best meets their needs.

In Lancashire we have experienced an increase in the number of young people starting to be looked after who are aged 16-17, and have seen a significant increase (60%) in the demand for supported accommodation/independent living (SAIL) placements over the past three years. This is attributed to a range of factors including homeless legislative changes and policy application, greater identification of unmet need and pressures on capacity in other sectors. We anticipate the demand for supported accommodation/independent living (SAIL) accommodation to continue increase over the next year given the recent trend of 16/17 year old children

looked after and the high prevalence of young homelessness reported in the North West.

Currently, services for care leavers and for homeless young people are commissioned through a mix of block contracts, and individual spot purchase arrangements via the North West regional purchasing system. The services we commission are wide ranging, for example our block-contracts provide 368 placements across the following service types:

- Core 24/7 building-based accommodation (197)
- Visiting support – a mix of building-based and shared dispersed (134)
- Supported Lodgings (22)
- Teenage Parent services (15)

Smaller group living accommodation, dispersed individual floating support with accommodation (visiting support) services and more bespoke packages of support are also commissioned under spot arrangements. There is however some inconsistency in terms of the types of services that are available in different parts of the county, and in responding to the increase in demand and changes in need we continue at times to experience challenges in sourcing the right placement to meet need at the right time. It is a key priority that we ensure that our new commissioning arrangements provide that consistency, with local variation where appropriate.

Ahead of the block contracts expiring midway through 2019 we took the decision that our primary route to the market for all services – block and spot - will be through a purchasing system that will be administered by the Council, with the regional system being secondary. Our objectives in doing this are to ensure that all of our service providers are working to consistent agreed quality standards, to simplify the commissioning process for all parties concerned, and to we ensure that the Authority is achieving value for money.

The Invitation to Tender for services was published in May 2019. A significant number of providers across the private and Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) have been successful at selection criteria stage 1, which will allow them to bid towards mini-competitions for service contracts. COVID-19 implications have delayed the next stage of the procurement process and consequently we have issued direct awards to our block-contract providers so that service contracts continue until September 2021, by which time we anticipate new contracts being in place. We will continue to commission other services via the regional system during that timeframe.

The new purchasing system can remain open for up to 10 years and throughout its lifetime we will continually review its service delivery model to respond to such factors as changes in need/demand and/or to regulatory requirements, and to establish services that reflect evidenced-based models of best practice, learning from other Local Authorities nationally. Longer-term strategies may include exploring the option to deliver some services in-house.

**For further information, please contact Rachel Blundell, email [rachel.blundell@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.blundell@lancashire.gov.uk) - Financial Intelligence Manager - Policy, Information and Commissioning Team, Start Well Joint Housing Protocol**

The Joint Housing Protocol forms the overarching policy of how we work in partnership across Lancashire to best accommodate and support young people as they move towards independent living. At present, there is a significant focus on how we support 16/17 homeless young people across the county with wide ranging information and guidance aimed at young people, children's social care and district housing teams.

It is intended that the refreshed Protocol will be further strengthened by working with partners to identify an effective and equitable prevention service that can respond to varying needs across the county. Prevention work is vital and will build on the success of the Breathing Space Trailblazer project delivered in East Lancashire and will also look to increase access to mediation services for young people and their families.

A new element of the Joint Housing Protocol will be to introduce guidance on how we best work with families who have become 'intentionally homeless'. This guidance will outline how services can best work together with families to prevent this occurring but also to provide ongoing support to ensure that families are settled and secure, therefore improving the life chances of children and young people.

The new Care Leaver Housing Protocol will focus on the following priorities;

- long term planning
- priority banding
- local connections

The Care Leaver Homelessness Protocol will focus on;

- crisis response
- intentionality
- withdrawing duties

The development of the Care Leaver Housing/ Homelessness Protocols will be supported by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and informed by new Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance published in November. This guidance promotes and endorses joint working arrangements and is timely for Lancashire's updated information. The Protocol will be led by the Leaving Care Service who work in close partnership with district housing officers. The Protocols will set out practical approaches on how teams can work together through the improved use of the Local Housing Register for young people in care approaching their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Local Housing Panels will also be established to further enhance accommodation pathways.

The above protocols will be consistently monitored through the multi-agency Housing Reference Group that will be chaired by a senior manager within Children's Social Care and ensure that district variances are challenged and resolved. This will be

further enhanced by the new working arrangements currently being developed within Children's Services.

**For further information, please contact Roxanne McAllister, email [Roxanne.mcallister@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:Roxanne.mcallister@lancashire.gov.uk) - Leaving Care Team Manager, Central (Care Leaver Housing/ Homeless Protocols) or Sarah Jones email [sarah.jones2@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.jones2@lancashire.gov.uk) - Policy Development Officer (Joint Housing Protocol)**

## **Finance**

The current contract value for Supported Accommodation for 16/17 year olds and care leavers is £2.765m as at October 2020. Financial entitlements for care leavers will continue and are not affected.

## **Legal**

There are no legal implications relating to the information stated in this report.

Please note, as stated in the Supported Accommodation section, due to the COVID-19 pandemic we have issued direct awards to our block-contract providers so that service contracts continue until September 2021. After this time, we anticipate new contracts being in place. These contracts will be reviewed and agreed by Procurement and Commercial Legal Services.

Legal advice will be sought in reference to the Joint Housing Protocol prior to publication.