

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

15th FEBRUARY 2007

**HOUSING ISSUES FOR LOOKED AFTER YOUNG PEOPLE
AND CARE LEAVERS**

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To advise Members of ways in which young people leaving care can access housing and support to maintain a tenancy.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. Housing arrangements are an integral part of the Pathway Plan for young people leaving care and help to ensure a smooth transition from care to independence. A previous report was brought to the Corporate Parenting Board, in January 2006, highlighting the need to consider the options available for this client group to access suitable housing with support and encourage independent living skills.
3. Housing Services have worked with the Pathway team and Erimus Housing, in relation to the preparation of the contents of this report.

HOUSING OPTIONS AND SUPPORTED LIVING

4. The Pathways team have a Young Persons Accommodation Worker to assess the housing needs of young people coming through the service and ensure that all opportunities for access to independent living are maximised. Each young person's Pathway Plan includes identification of housing options that can be explored with their Personal Adviser. The Pathway team would expect to have approximately twenty young people looking for independent housing options, in any one year. Each young person is advised to complete application forms for a number of housing providers, with properties in Middlesbrough, in order to maximise their options of finding a suitable tenancy. Each housing provider will consider the application in accordance with their own allocation policy and the availability of suitable properties in the particular areas of choice identified by the young people.
5. Middlesbrough has a number of housing and support providers, who offer housing options with various levels of support and accept referrals from the Pathway team and the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service (which is delivered on behalf of the Council by Erimus Housing). The Pathway team also has a Supported Lodging Scheme, which provides supported accommodation for looked after young people and care leavers. This scheme has recently secured funding from Supporting People and currently provides six placements located across the Tees Valley area. Young people accommodated within the supported lodgings scheme are expected to remain in the scheme until they acquire the necessary skills to sustain a tenancy with a housing provider. The availability of appropriate single person's accommodation can also have an impact upon the time young people stay in such schemes and the amount of new clients, that can therefore take up places.

Availability of properties

6. Key stakeholders feel there is a lack of available properties suitable for single young people. In addition the following factors can contribute to the difficulties experienced in meeting supply and demand:
 - a) Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) implementing age restrictions to properties which are physically suitable for single people but due to management problems experienced and the need to try to better balance the stock, are only available to older single people;
 - b) affordability issues for single young people in terms of securing private rented accommodation due to rent restrictions in place for people under the age of 25 years; and,
 - c) a perceived reluctance that some housing providers, due to previous management problems, decline to re-house this client group.
7. In recognising the factors outlined in section seven, the following measures are being progressed to improve the opportunities for young people to access and sustain settled and affordable housing:

- a) The Pathway team are working in partnership with Erimus Housing to adopt a protocol which will outline the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved with clients, and provide a structured response to problems arising which could potentially result in tenancy failure;
- b) Housing Services, through its regular formal liaison with RSLs is raising the profile of the issue of the lack of move-on accommodation for this particular client group;
- c) The allocation policy of the Council and Erimus Housing is currently being reviewed and the Pathway team are actively involved within the current consultation process;
- d) Housing Services undertake regular monitoring in respect to the performance of RSLs in providing a percentage of their available properties for allocation through the Council's allocation policy; and,
- e) Housing Services work closely with Erimus Housing in respect to monitoring the level of available properties which are allocated to priority groups.

Choice Based Lettings

- 8. In November 2004 Middlesbrough Council transferred its housing stock to Erimus Housing, included within the conditions of the transfer agreement was a commitment that Erimus Housing would introduce a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) allocation scheme. This type of scheme is the Government's preferred system for housing allocations, with all local authorities required to introduce such schemes by 2010. The key principles of a CBL system are as follows:
 - a) applicants take a proactive role in seeking housing through bidding for advertised properties through a variety of methods;
 - b) the policy operates a number of different bandings which reflect a variety of different priority groups and housing needs;
 - c) when fully developed the system will offer a one stop approach to housing, through which properties are available from a variety of housing providers offering a full range of tenure types; and,
 - d) a fair and transparent policy for allocating properties, with regular information published to demonstrate which category of client has been successful in securing accommodation.

- 9. Within the current Council approved CBL policy¹ the following bandings are in operation to prioritise allocation:
 - a) band 1 - households losing their home due to regeneration and demolition schemes;
 - b) band 2 - a number of priorities including statutory homeless households, hospital leavers and young persons leaving care;
 - c) band 3 - general needs; and,
 - d) band 4 – out of area applicants and eligible owner occupiers.

¹ A full review of the policy is currently being undertaken.

In addition to the banding which an applicant is placed into, factors such as the date of registration on the scheme can be taken into account in respect to who qualifies for a particular property from within that band.

10. In addition to accessing accommodation through the bidding process of CBL the policy includes a process known as a management let. This is whereby certain client groups are offered a property outside of the bidding cycle in order to allow for a more controlled and managed process to rehousing. The policy relevant to management lets includes a number of different client groups who can be offered accommodation in this way. Looked After young people and care leavers who are moving on from supported accommodation schemes are included in the list of eligible applicants. Effective working between the young person's case worker and Erimus Housing staff is crucial in respect to the timing of an offer and information sharing in terms of ongoing support.

Homelessness

11. There are occasions when a young person will complete a homeless application to secure accommodation. The circumstances, under which this route is chosen, are varied but could include:
 - a) a young person who has previously been rehoused through a care leaver priority status and has subsequently failed to sustain a tenancy; and,
 - b) a relationship breakdown which leaves a young person without any accommodation and with no family to provide support or assistance.
12. Young people who are homeless and not supported by the Pathway team are considered within the homelessness legislation. All 16 and 17 year old applicants are considered vulnerable within the homelessness legislation and therefore entitled to temporary accommodation if appropriate. In terms of support, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service at Erimus will make referrals to Middlesbrough Independent Network (MIN) who provide advice and outreach support to young people.
13. Where possible referrals for 16 and 17 year old service users are made by the Homelessness and Housing Advice service to supported accommodation projects. Opportunities can be limited as the primary funding regime for supported accommodation, Supporting People, is designed for adults 18 years and over and can only fund 16 and 17 year old clients in exceptional cases. In terms of bed and breakfast accommodation, the Government has recently introduced targets aimed at minimising the use of bed and breakfast for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. Within Middlesbrough the numbers at any one time are low (2 households at the end of September 2006), more robust statistics are currently being collated and are now required to be reported quarterly as part of the statutory homelessness monitoring process.

Floating Support

14. Floating support is a system that allows an individual to live in his/her own tenancy and gain independent living skills with the help of a floating support worker. The worker visits, or can be contacted, to provide advice and support for an agreed number of hours each week. Community Campus has recently appointed a Resettlement Worker to provide support for a short period of time following a move-on from the organisation's supported living scheme. In addition Tees Valley Housing Group (TVHG) provide floating support within Middlesbrough, through Supporting People funding as part of a scheme designed to offer support for people in TVHG's own tenancies, Erimus Housing tenancies or private sector tenancies.
15. The floating support service provides support on all aspects of tenancy management, including payment of rent and utilities, housing benefit and money management. There is also sign posting to a doctor, or dentist, and advice regarding training and employment. As the floating support scheme is not property based the service can be gradually withdrawn without the need to find move-on accommodation. Referrals for the floating support scheme are taken from a number of different agencies and organisations.

OPTION APPRAISAL

16. The Local Authority has a corporate statutory responsibility to provide children looked after and care leavers with appropriate accommodation and support. This aspect of work is also likely to form an element of the forthcoming Joint Area Review due on March 2008. It is therefore important that actions noted at paragraph eight are undertaken to ensure an appropriate corporate response to the issues highlighted in this report.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

17. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. As services support for children looked after is a corporate responsibility, this report will be of interest to all elected members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to housing issues for care leavers.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Corporate Parenting Board report: Housing Issues for Care Leavers, January 2006

Erimus Housing Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy

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