

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**6<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008**

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

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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To advise the Corporate Parenting Board of the actions taken to improve access to appropriate housing and support in maintaining a tenancy for young people leaving care.

**BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION**

2. Housing arrangements are an integral part of the Pathways Plan for young people leaving care and help to ensure a smooth transition from care to independence. A report to the Corporate Parenting Board, in February 2007, summarised the issues relating to access to suitable housing and support for this client group. These included housing options, availability of properties, choice-based lettings, homelessness and sources of support.
3. This report provides an update on the progress made with a number of measures proposed within that report and highlights some current actions and issues. Housing Services have worked with the Pathways team and Erimus Housing, in relation to the preparation of this report.

## HOUSING OPTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE

4. As previously reported to the Board (15/2/07), the Pathways team supports approximately twenty young people per year to access independent housing options. The accommodation applied for includes supported accommodation projects and general needs housing.

### Supported Housing

5. Referrals can be made to a number of housing and support providers by the Pathways team, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service (which is delivered on behalf of Middlesbrough Council by Erimus Housing) and by other agencies. The time spent by a young person within supported housing projects is usually limited to two years, but is further influenced by the availability of appropriate move on accommodation. Where blockages occur in the through flow of supported housing schemes, this in turn impacts upon the availability of supported housing options for new clients requiring accommodation.
6. The Pathways team's Supported Lodging Scheme currently provides eight placements across the Tees Valley area. A young person accommodated within the scheme would be expected to remain until they acquire the necessary skills to sustain a tenancy with a housing provider.
7. Other supported accommodation options that are available for care leavers and young people aged 16 to 25 years in Middlesbrough include:
  - a) Community Campus '87;
  - b) 7 Park Road North Hostel;
  - c) Single Key;
  - d) Wellington Street Hostel; and,
  - e) hostel accommodation in other local authorities.
8. These tenancy-based support schemes are funded through Supporting People grants, which require that tenants are provided with an element of support to help develop their independent living skills. Prospective tenants must, therefore, be willing to engage with the support provider and to be involved in formulating their support plan and achieving the goals set out within it. The support plan usually covers areas such as management of finances, housekeeping, health, education, employment, developing appropriate social and support networks, and where relevant, managing offending behaviour and substance misuse issues. It should be noted that, subject to confirmation of capital funding streams, Wellington Street hostel will be redeveloped and this could result in reduced availability of this facility for a limited period of time.

## **Floating Support**

9. Floating support, whereby a young person receives a package of support to assist them to develop their independent living skills, continues to be provided by Community Campus and Tees Valley Housing Group for 16-25 year olds, including care leavers, living in cross tenure, general needs accommodation within Middlesbrough. As the floating support scheme is not property based, the service can be gradually withdrawn, based on the young person's ability to manage independently, without the need to find move-on accommodation. Referrals for floating support are made from a number of different agencies and organisations.

## **Permanent Accommodation Options**

10. There has been increased pressure on accommodation in the last few years due to a number of circumstances, such as the introduction of the Choice Based Lettings scheme, and Middlesbrough Council and Erimus regeneration activities. In addition, the following factors could further compound the difficulties experienced in meeting demand from care leavers:
  - a) two years ago, age restrictions were imposed by some RSLs on properties which are physically suitable for single people but are only available to older single people. This measure was implemented in response to previous problems experienced in accommodation for single people as a way of providing better management of the stock and achieving community cohesion; and,
  - b) affordability issues for single young people accessing private rented accommodation and owner occupation, due to house price rises over the past three to four years.

## **ACCESS TO HOUSING**

### **Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Allocation Scheme**

11. Since the Council transferred its housing stock, Erimus has introduced a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme, for the allocation of its own and other RSL stock, in accordance with the Government's requirement that all local authorities introduce this system by 2010. The key feature of a CBL system is that it operates on a bidding cycle whereby people have to apply for properties and are subsequently placed into a banding system and as such take an active part in selecting where they wish to live.
12. Following the recent review by Erimus of the current Council approved CBL policy, a number of minor adjustments were made to the priority groups placed within certain bands. This was necessary to ensure that legislative requirements regarding additional housing needs<sup>1</sup> were featured within the

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<sup>1</sup> The CLG Code of Guidance *Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings* advises that allocation policies should be constructed to account for cumulative needs, i.e. where an applicant can demonstrate more than one priority reason for requiring rehousing.

policy. For the purposes of this report, the bands listed below are now applied to all applicants on the CBL scheme:

- a) Band 1 - applicants who require housing due to approved demolition and regeneration schemes;
  - b) Band 2a - applicants who can demonstrate more than one priority need requirement for rehousing (this band may include young people leaving care who have additional, multiple needs);
  - c) Band 2b - applicants who can demonstrate a single priority need requirement (this band may include a young person leaving care without any other additional, multiple needs);
  - d) Band 3 - applicants who demonstrate a general need for rehousing; and,
  - e) Band 4 - applicants who are owner-occupiers and who have no prevailing or general need for rehousing.
13. An assessment is conducted to determine which part of Band 2 would apply to a care leaver seeking accommodation through CBL. Applicants placed in either banding may place up to 4 bids per bidding cycle.
14. Middlesbrough Council is currently leading on the development of a sub regional CBL scheme with other partners<sup>2</sup> in the Tees Valley area. The project is funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and aims to work in partnership with other Tees Valley housing authorities to develop and implement a single CBL scheme, a common housing register and a common allocations policy by the target date of 2010. It is anticipated that by working sub regionally, the options available to homeseekers will be increased and that mobility across existing local authority boundaries will be easier to achieve. The partners have drafted a common allocations policy and are presently consulting with key stakeholders. The following bands have been proposed for inclusion in the policy framework:
- a) Band 1+ - applicants who require rehousing due to demolition and regeneration;
  - b) Band 1 - applicants who have priority need for accommodation, including those who are statutory homeless or leaving the care of the local authority under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000;
  - c) Band 2 - applicants who require rehousing as a result of high housing needs, for example those who are overcrowded or who have a prevailing medical need for suitable accommodation;
  - d) Band 3 - applicants who have a low need for rehousing, i.e. due to relationship breakdown; and,
  - e) Band 4 - applicants who have no prevailing need for rehousing, i.e. their current accommodation meets their needs.
15. In Band 1, additional, or cumulative, housing need is taken into account (i.e. where an applicant can demonstrate more than one priority need, for example a homeless applicant with a disability). Greater priority for

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<sup>2</sup> Stockton Council, Redcar & Cleveland Council, Hartlepool Council, Darlington Council and partner landlords, Erimus Housing, Tristar Homes, Coast & Country Housing and Housing Hartlepool.

accommodation is awarded to applicants who qualify under more than one category and, accordingly, they are prioritised in the short-list ahead of those applicants with only one housing need.

### **Management Lets**

16. In addition to actively participating in the CBL scheme, care leavers within Middlesbrough are able to access accommodation through the direct lettings process. The current CBL allocation policy, and the new Sub Regional Common Allocations policy, provide for Looked After young people and care leavers, amongst other groups, to be offered a property outside of the bidding cycle in order to allow for a more controlled and managed process of rehousing.

### **Homelessness**

17. There are occasions when it may be necessary for care leavers to make a homeless application to secure accommodation. This might arise as a result of a failure to sustain a tenancy or difficulties such as relationship breakdown. The Homelessness and Housing Advice Service completes an assessment and, where needed, referrals are then made to supported accommodation projects. Opportunities for accessing such projects can be limited due to other young vulnerable groups, who require accommodation. These groups may include 16/17 year olds. The Government recently introduced a target for local authorities not to use Bed & Breakfast accommodation for this particular age group, except in cases of emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

### **Homelessness Strategy Review**

18. The current Middlesbrough Homelessness Strategy is presently being reviewed in preparation for the production of a revised Homelessness Strategy, which must be adopted and published no later than 31<sup>st</sup> July 2008. Housing Quality Network, the consultants undertaking the review, have produced an interim report. This is a composition of analyses of present strategic approaches to housing issues and consultation that has been carried out with key stakeholders. It has identified a number of headline issues that pertain to accommodation for young people in general, and care leavers in particular. These issues are:
  - a) there is a need for additional supported accommodation, particularly that which provides intensive support to those with complex needs and who may have previously failed to sustain a tenancy;
  - b) there is need for the co-ordination of services, including housing, support, health, education and employment, to young people;
  - c) that consideration should be given to convening a multi agency panel that would operate as a single access route into services and accommodation for all homeless young people, including care leavers;
  - d) that housing market renewal programmes may temporarily impact upon the accommodation options available to care leavers;

- e) that RSLs could do more to support care leavers; and,
  - f) that consideration should be given to further exploration by the Council to build a relationship with Department for Work and Pensions with the aim of a more consistent approach being adopted towards young people and care leavers.
19. Housing Services has formally invited representatives from other service areas, including the Pathways team, the Children's Board, Supporting People and the Drugs Action Team to become involved in the Steering Group for the review and revision of the Homelessness Strategy.

## **PROGRESS UPDATE**

20. A number of measures were previously identified at the Corporate Parenting Board meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2007 to improve the opportunities for young people to access and sustain settled and affordable housing. Since then, the following progress has been made:
- a) the Pathways team has worked with Erimus Housing to develop a protocol that outlines the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved with single young people, and which provides a structured response to problems arising which could potentially result in tenancy breach or failure;
  - b) Erimus Housing and a number of other RSLs, have adopted good practices such as ensuring appropriate support is in place prior to any offer of accommodation, as a result of this issue being raised at regular liaison meetings with Housing Services;
  - c) the Council and Erimus Housing recently reviewed and adopted a new allocations policy after consultation with key stakeholders, including the Pathways team. The new policy offers a priority banding to assist care leavers;
  - d) the Council and Erimus Housing, as part of the Tees Valley Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Partnership, have drafted a Common Allocations Policy which will apply to homeseekers across the region. They are presently consulting on this with key stakeholders; and,
  - e) Housing Services continue to monitor the performance of RSLs in providing a percentage of their available properties for allocation through the Council's allocation policy and to work closely with Erimus Housing to monitor the level of available properties that are allocated to priority groups.

## **ACTION PLAN**

21. In addition to the above, and as a result of the initial findings from the Homelessness Strategy Review, a number of other approaches are being developed to improve the opportunity for care leavers to access suitable housing options, including:
- a) other RSLs will be invited to adopt the protocol developed by Erimus Housing and the Pathways team;

- b) Housing Services will aim to formulate a deliverable action plan within its revised Homelessness Strategy that will include meeting the needs of care leavers;
- c) Housing Services will seek to prioritise the accommodation needs of care leavers in other strategic plans;
- d) through partnership working with Supporting People, Housing Services will endeavour to convene a multi agency panel to meet the support and accommodation needs of young people, including care leavers; and,
- e) Housing Services is currently exploring the option of appointing a youth housing and support co-ordinator.

## **OPTION APPRAISAL/ RISK ASSESSMENT**

22. The Local Authority has a corporate statutory responsibility to provide children looked after and care leavers with appropriate accommodation and support. This issue continues to be the focus for corporate action to ensure that the local authority can fulfil its legal duties effectively.

## **FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

24. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the progress update and the actions planned for improving access to suitable housing and support for care leavers.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

25. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
- a) Corporate Parenting Board report: Housing Issues for Care Leavers, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2007;
  - b) Housing Quality Network Homelessness Strategy Review; Interim Report;
  - c) Erimus Housing Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy; and,
  - d) Tees Valley CBL Partnership Common Allocation Policy.

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