

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

19 January 2022

Rapid Scrutiny Exercise: Provision of Accommodation for Young People at Transition Time – Gap Analysis

Purpose of the report

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the rapid scrutiny (RS) exercise, for endorsement by the Children's Select Committee (CSC).

Background

2. The issue of how effective the council was at getting care leavers into the right housing, including the availability of choice and location, was first raised by the previous Cabinet member for Children's Services, Cllr Pauline Church, in 2019.
3. It was placed upon the Select Committee's forward work plan on 12 November 2019. Subsequently, it was agreed at a work planning meeting between the Select Committee Chairman and the Executive in July 2021 to start the analysis in the autumn of 2021. The scope of the exercise was widened to consider how effective the council is at meeting housing needs for young people at transition time e.g., care leavers or people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) 'ageing out' of existing provision.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the setting up of the Rapid Scrutiny exercise, but the process was started in September 2021 with the recruitment of group members.

Membership

5. The opportunity to take part in the rapid scrutiny was offered to all non-executive members of the council. The following members were appointed:
 - Cllr Carole King (Lead Member)
 - Cllr Mike Sankey
 - Cllr Jo Trigg

Evidence

6. The rapid scrutiny considered the following evidence:
 - a) The current number of 17–18-year-olds, 18–25-year-olds and families housed by the council or on the housing register.
 - b) General information provided to care leavers and SEND by the council, Coram Voice, Alabaré and Shelter

- c) *Analytical report: consultation on unregulated provision for children in care and care leavers* (Department for Education 2021)

Aim of the meeting

7. The rapid scrutiny exercise undertook a gap analysis of the accommodation available to young people at the time of transition.
8. The exercise will inform a decision by Children's Select Committee regarding a longer-term task group to consider how effective the council is at meeting housing needs for young people at transition time (e.g., vulnerable families, care leavers or SEND "aging out" of existing provision).

Witnesses

9. The Rapid Scrutiny group would like to thank the Cabinet members and the following officers for attending the meeting on 27 October 2021, providing information, and answering questions:
 - Cllr Laura Mayes (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills).
 - Cllr Jane Davies (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND and Transition and Inclusion)
 - Cllr Suzanne Wickham (Portfolio holder SEND).

 - Michele Llewellyn (Service Manager Children in Care & Placement).
 - Iona Payne (Head of Children in Care and Young People in Care)
 - Jen Salter (Head of Service Support & Safeguarding).
 - Nicole Smith (Head of Housing Operations).

Summary of deliberations

10. The Cabinet member gave some context to the development of the Rapid Scrutiny exercise. Clarifying that the original issue - *how effective the council was at getting care leavers in the right housing (including availability of choice and location)* – had been raised by Cllr Church when she was Executive member with that responsibility. However, having spoken with officers Cllr Mayes is reassured that there is currently no significant issue with these transitions.
11. There is little specific data about unmet housing needs for young people at transitions time. The housing needs for young people in general were presented. There are currently (October 2021) no 16–17-year-olds in bed and breakfast or hotel type accommodation though three 16–17-year-olds are in supported housing. Currently six young people are being worked with to prevent homelessness. There are a total of 24 people, 18 years or under, registered on Homes4wiltshire, two of whom are working with the homeless team, but both are 18 years of age. During 2020/21, 57 16–17-year-olds were identified as homeless or threatened with homelessness, but none were formally accepted as homeless, and all were prevented from becoming homeless or had their

accommodation secured. As some care leavers join the housing register before they are ready to transition, this skews the data, but there are currently 32 care leavers on the housing register.

12. A Placement Panel meets monthly to consider care leaver transitions, looking at upward of twenty cases each time. Care leavers have the highest priority for social housing. However, the council is also focusing upon ensuring young people have the skills needed to live independently and effectively manage a tenancy, so a new training package has been developed to support care leavers in being able to manage a tenancy.
13. There are no figures available as to which types of accommodation care leavers access. As choice and location are considered on an individual basis there are no figures for accommodation available in total to young people in transition. There is however a more general housing crisis, nationally as well as in Wiltshire, which does have an impact as supply does not meet current housing demands.
14. Care leavers will in the main be offered social housing or private rented housing. Supported accommodation is available for those who might benefit from or need additional support. Supported accommodation is not suitable for everyone and is time limited so vacancies do become available as clients successfully move on into independent living. Some care leavers may choose to settle outside of the county or to go into private accommodation but will still be supported to make the transition and maintain their independence.
15. All care leavers (16-21 years old) have a personal advisor, who has built up a relationship with the care leaver. They work with the young person from an early stage to get them ready for transition. Once the care leaver has transitioned the personal advisor will continue to visit them in their accommodation every eight weeks. Any concerns about the suitability of accommodation can be raised with the advisor. Though caseloads for officers are high, the focus is to ensure that the transition to more independent living succeeds. If an alternative move is needed, then support is put in place to make it happen.
16. There is a range of accommodation and support available through commissioned services e.g., for those with complex and high support needs (Key2 Futures) and Shared Lives. The number of young people staying with their foster carers is also increasing. This will be by the mutual agreement of the young person and the foster carer. The council never blocks these arrangements, but every foster carer entering such arrangements needs to be replaced.
17. In terms of SEND there is always a need for more types of accommodation to support transition, in particular half-way houses. This is an issue often raised by Wiltshire Parent Carer Council.
18. A panel looks at SEND transition for individuals, matching the accommodation and support needs.

19. To look at the provision of suitable housing for young people with SEND needs and carers the council is developing an accommodation strategy. This will look at the needs of people with physical and learning disabilities as well as autism. The council's ambition is to offer more choice and address the requirements of individuals with SEND needs. Finding suitable accommodation depends upon the individual's needs. There are gaps but this is improving, and actions, like the accommodation strategy, are being taken to address the issues.
20. Families on the housing list are vulnerable and this has been monitored closely during the pandemic. Some 89 families are currently (October 2021) in temporary accommodation, none of which are in hotels or bed and breakfast.
21. The wider national housing crisis was touched upon in the discussions, principally in respect of the housing register where there are approximately 4,500 people in need of accommodation. There are also around 900 empty homes in Wiltshire. Though outside of the scope of this exercise the group highlighted the issue of empty homes with the Head of Housing Operations and felt that actively bringing empty homes back into use warranted consideration given the demand.

Conclusion

22. There is a general housing crisis both in Wiltshire and nationally due to a lack of affordable accommodation, suitable or otherwise, in the county.
23. The panel welcomes the council's ambition to provide young people with choice, the right support, and the most suitable accommodation. An individualised approach to accommodation does mean that analysing this issue is challenging – statistics identifying gaps or needs are not available.
24. However, the council does have structures in place to address care leavers needs as they transition into more independent living. Though caseloads are high, care leavers are supported during and after transition and there is an emerging focus upon helping young people to become ready for independence and supporting them during and after transition.
25. There is a recognition however of a need for a greater number and more varied accommodation for young people with SEND needs. An accommodation strategy is in development to assess and address young people's accommodation needs.
26. The group does not consider that any further action should be taken at this time. It does recommend that the Children's Select Committee continue to monitor developments in this area.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence it received, the rapid scrutiny exercise recommends that:

- i. **Children’s Select Committee consider the draft of the accommodation strategy covering the needs of children and young people with learning disability, mental health, and autism (potentially published mid-2022)**
- ii. **The Select Committee thereafter receives an annual update on relevant parts of the strategy’s delivery**
- iii. **The Select Committee continues to monitor the data on care leaver accommodation provided in the Corporate Parenting annual report.**

Cllr Carole King, lead member for the rapid scrutiny exercise

Report author: Simon Bennett, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 718 709,
simon.bennett@wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices None

Background documents None