

Room 118, 2nd Floor
Hackney Town Hall
Mare Street
London, E8 1EA

21st October 2022

martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk

Cllr Anntionette Bramble,
Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education,
Young People and Children's Social Care
&
Cllr Sade Etti,
Mayoral Adviser for Housing Needs and Homelessness

Dear Cllr Bramble and Cllr Etti,

Housing Support for Care Leavers (Recommendations)

The Children and Young People and Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commissions have completed their joint scrutiny of housing support for care leavers which they commenced earlier this year. Both Commissions would like to extend their thanks to you both for attending the dedicated scrutiny session, and for the ongoing collaborative support of your officers from across Corporate Parenting, Benefits & Housing Needs and Housing Strategy throughout the summer.

This was an extended piece of work in which members of both Commissions conducted focus groups with care leavers, undertook site visits to supported housing schemes and received evidence from Leaving Care and Housing Needs Teams from a number of other London boroughs. Wide ranging [documentary evidence](#) was also submitted and considered by Commission members, which together with the meet [recording](#) and [minutes](#) provide a public record of scrutiny activity.

Hackney Leaving Care Service has a statutory duty to support children leaving care until the age of 25, including the responsibility of finding suitable accommodation between the ages of 18 and 21 years and currently supports around 400 young people who have left care. Many of these care leavers will have experienced significant personal challenges and family upheaval in their lives which makes their journey to adulthood and living independently more difficult, especially as they may not have access to the same support network of families and friends that many other young people do. Further to discussions with care leavers, members of the

Overview & Scrutiny

Commission know how important accessible, sustainable and affordable housing is in their journey to independence, but officers face real difficulties in meeting these needs given the lack of local housing options available resulting from the ongoing housing crisis.

On the evidence provided and through extensive consultation with officers, members of the Commission have made 10 recommendations to help extend and improve the range of housing options available for care leavers in Hackney. In particular the Commission have made recommendations in the following priority areas:

- To enable more care leavers to develop access to the social housing register;
- To ensure that there is parity of support for care leavers required to seek accommodation in the private rented sector;
- To improve future housing supply for care leavers.

The recommendations of the Commissions are timely. Both the Hackney Care Leaver Offer and the Hackney Housing Strategy are due to be updated and refreshed in 2022, so the Commissions' hope that its recommendations will guide and inform new iterations of these key policy documents and help to improve Hackney's offer to care leavers. Hackney's offer to care leavers is important, as it will come under further scrutiny and challenge from Ofsted which has recently amended its inspection framework to include the specific assessments of '*The experiences and progress of care leavers*' and which will contribute to its overall determination on the quality of children's social care.

The Commission would particularly like to thank those care leavers that shared their experiences of their journey into independent living with members as part of this review. The number of care leavers who were eager to engage with this scrutiny process, and their willingness to engage and talk openly with members is perhaps a testament to how important quality, safe and affordable housing is in their (and other young people's) journey into independence.

The Commission would also like to thank the working group of officers from across Corporate Parenting, Benefits & Housing Needs and Housing Strategy which was convened to support this scrutiny process, and hopes that this work will continue as they oversee and implement those recommendations which are approved by the Executive.

It is hoped that the recommendations given below will contribute further to the positive work that is already taking place across the Council for our looked after children. We look forward to receiving an update on the agreed recommendations at a future scrutiny meeting.

Yours sincerely

Overview & Scrutiny

Cllr Soraya Adejare

Chair, Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Sophie Conway

Chair, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Clare Joseph

Vice Chair, Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Margaret Gordon

Vice Chair, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

Cc:

- Jacquie Burke, Group Director Children and Education
- Diane Benjamin, Director of Children's Social Care
- Laura Bleaney, Head of Corporate Parenting
- Stephen Haynes, Strategic Director Inclusive Economy, Corporate Policy and New Homes Strategic Director Customer and Workplace
- Jennifer Wynter, Head of Benefits and Housing Need
- James Goddard, Interim Director, Regeneration
- Naeem Ahmed, Head of Corporate Finance
- Ben Bradley, Cabinet Office

Overview & Scrutiny

Recommendations of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission and Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission [The Commission].

Improving quality, consistency and timeliness of Housing Advice & Support for Care Leavers across the Council

1. Whilst the Commission recognises the complexity of the housing support landscape for care leavers, it was apparent from the testimonies of young care leavers themselves, that improved quality and greater consistency was needed in the provision of housing advice that was provided to care leavers.

The Commission therefore recommends:

- a) That additional specialist housing advice and support is commissioned to meet the housing needs of care leavers across both Corporate Parenting and Housing Needs services (in particular for care leavers seeking accommodation in the private rented sector - see recommendation 3);
- b) That Social Workers and Personal Advisers in the Corporate Parenting team and housing workers in the Housing Needs team are provided with regular updates and dedicated training to maintain and improve the quality and consistency of housing advice for care leavers;
- c) That at least two housing support officers within the Greenhouse (which supports local homeless young people) are dedicated to support/ or identified as nominated leads for care leavers (to help improve consistency
- d) That in collaboration, the Corporate Parenting and Housing Needs team regularly audit the quality and timeliness of advice and assess and validate with care leavers / prospective care leavers.

Improving strategic oversight and coordination of housing support for care leavers across the Council

2. The Commission has noted the positive working relationships developed across Corporate Parenting, Benefits & Housing Needs and Housing Strategy and Supply resulting from this scrutiny exercise. The Commission recommends that this should be formalised and structured through the establishment of a joint corporate parenting and housing protocol. The development of such a protocol (as recommended by government departments) will ensure that there is a strategic and coordinated approach to supporting the housing needs of care leavers across the Council and bring greater transparency and accountability for the provision and delivery of housing support and accommodation for care leavers.

Overview & Scrutiny

In developing the joint housing protocol for care leavers, the Commission recommends that Corporate Parenting, Benefits & Housing Needs and Housing Strategy:

- Note the [Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework](#) developed by St Mungo's & Barnado's
- Note the [information and advice](#) provided by government departments (DCLG/DfE/DLUHC) to support the development of local protocols;
- Engage and involve local care leavers, other looked after children, foster carers and other stakeholders;
- Develop and agree on oversight and monitoring arrangements with the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that there is ongoing review of delivery across children's and housing services;
- The protocol should be agreed and implemented by the end of financial year 2022/23 at the latest.

Improved support for care leavers seeking to live independently within the private rented sector (PRS).

3. Given the limited availability of social housing lets, the reality for most care leavers in Hackney who are seeking to live independently is to source accommodation within the private rented sector (PRS). From the evidence presented the Commission noted a number of key issues:

- Many care leavers held a number of genuine and well founded anxieties about accessing accommodation in the private rented sector including; transitioning from more more supportive housing arrangements, high rental costs, insecurity of tenure and the location of affordable options.
- Although the Council has equal responsibility for all looked after children in its corporate parent role, the Commission felt that there was little parity in the nature of support offered to care leavers seeking independent tenancies in the PRS compared to the social housing sector.
- Care experienced young people face three significant barriers to renting privately; access to a deposit, the need to provide rent in advance *and* access to a guarantor.
- Other London boroughs have responded to similar concerns and developed a PRS support strategy for care Leavers (e.g [Wandsworth](#)). (Whilst the Council operates a deposit and rent in advance scheme - is this only available through the homeless route - to clarify?)

The Commission recommends that additional specialist support should be commissioned to provide more help to those care leavers transitioning from supported housing into the private rented sector. To support this the Commission recommends:

Overview & Scrutiny

- a) That further investigative work should be undertaken to assess the **experiences of care leavers in the private rented sector** to further understand issues around the acceptability and accessibility of tenancies and what support might be needed to help them sustain their tenancies (e.g. how well are care leavers sustaining PRS tenancies at the moment);
- b) The Council considers commissioning the [The National House Project](#) (or similar) which provides a peer support framework to assist care leavers to develop the skills, confidence and social networks to progress to independent tenancies within the PRS. This will help young people to leave supported housing earlier and live independently, if they wish to do so.
- c) Corporate Parenting and Housing Needs should consider how **additional floating support** can be commissioned to help young people transitioning from supported housing to housing within the private rented sector;
- d) That the Council considers developing an **accredited landlord scheme**, which identifies those local landlords who would be willing to work with care leavers, their personal advisers and housing officers to help support them into and maintain tenancies in PRS accommodation (e.g. flexible tenancies, commitment to work with the LA to avoid eviction, reduced deposit);
- e) That the Council considers **providing a deposit / rent in advance** scheme (outside homeless route) and considers developing a pilot scheme in which the **Council acts as a guarantor** for care leavers seeking accommodation in PRS for the first 6/12 months of tenancy.

Improving how the local quota system for social housing works for care leavers.

4. For looked after children who have experienced significant personal upheaval, placement instability and possible breakdown of care arrangements, independent social housing tenancies can offer an affordable, secure and supportive accommodation option for when they leave care. The Council currently operates a social housing quota with 18 social housing tenancies available per annum available for care leavers (16 x 1 bedroom 2 x 2 bedroom). The total number of social lets that the Council is able to provide has reduced significantly in recent years, with latest figures indicating that this totalled just over 400 lets annually.

Given that the number of care leavers (376 in year to March 2021) far exceeds the number of social lets available (18), the Commission noted a number of challenges with the current social housing quota in Hackney:

- The eligibility criteria and prioritisation process for care leavers to be considered for social housing tenancy has not been sufficiently defined and / or communicated to social workers, personal advisers or care leavers themselves.

Overview & Scrutiny

- The lack of clarity around eligibility has resulted in possibly inaccurate information given to young people by personal advisers/social workers which has led to inflated expectations among care leavers, with many believing that this is a realistic and possible accommodation option for them, when in reality just a small fraction will be eligible and put forward for consideration for social housing via the quota.
- Whilst acknowledging the totality and scale of local housing needs in Hackney, and the individuality of housing demand and supply across other London Boroughs, it would appear that comparatively, fewer care leavers are placed in social housing in Hackney than many other boroughs. Evidence presented by Lambeth indicated that they found permanent social housing for 103 care leavers in the 12 month period to November 2021.
- A number of other London Boroughs operate social housing quotas for care leavers. In [Sutton](#) this is set at 28 and in [Haringey](#) it is 66. In the former, 15% of all 1 bedroom lets in the borough were made to care leavers in 2019/20 and was running at 22% mid-way in 2020/21.
- At present most care leavers put forward for social housing tend to be aged 20 years (so that they can get a tenancy before reaching the age of 21). The Commission noted that this approach created a number of challenges:
 - The age 'restriction' is unrelated to the actual support needs of individual care leavers;
 - It may encourage more young people to remain in supported housing for longer in the hope of obtaining a social rented tenancy (inflated expectations);
 - Creates an unnecessary 'cliff-edge' in service provision, which may leave limited time for care leavers to plan and prepare for independent tenancy.

The Commission also discussed with officers the possibility of moving away from a social housing quota altogether and instead placing all care leavers on the local housing register at the age of 18. Under this process all care leavers would be encouraged and supported to bid for a social rented tenancy for the three year period until they reach the age 21 (with those not successful during this time, providing they were actively bidding, being given a direct offer). Whilst this would give all care leavers an equal opportunity to bid and achieve consistency and parity of housing service offer, a number of uncertainties would remain:

- Whether this would actually result in a high number of care leavers being placed in social housing tenancies;
- How care leavers who attended university outside the borough be included (possible deferral);
- How care leavers with families would be impacted (bidding for 2 bedroom properties).

Overview & Scrutiny

This is clearly a complex issue which needs further investigation and modelling by the Housing Needs and Corporate Parenting services. Irrespective of the outcome of any further investigation the Commission is of the view that the number of social housing tenancies let to care leavers should increase from current levels. The Commission therefore recommends that:

- a) That Council considers ways in which the social housing (Council) quota for care leavers can be increased from 18 units **to a minimum of (30)** units per annum;
- b) A defined set criteria should be developed to determine care leavers eligibility for permanent social housing tenancy through the council quota. The eligibility criteria should be:
 - i) Developed in consultation / co-produced with looked after children /care leavers;
 - ii) Underpinned by an open and transparent scoring system;
 - iii) Clearly communicated to professionals supporting care leavers (Social Workers, Personal Advisers, Housing Support Officers and Foster Carers) and care leavers themselves (in particular details to be set out within the local offer).
- c) Housing Needs and Corporate Parenting undertake further research and modelling to assess the impact of placing all care leavers on the housing register at the age of 18, in particular:
 - i) Whether this would lead to more care leavers placed within permanent social housing;
 - ii) How the rights of care leavers with children or those attending university could be preserved in such a system.

Improving housing supply for care leavers

5. The Commission was in broad agreement that many of the issues and concerns that care leavers face in relation to housing was a result of the lack of quality and affordable accommodation options available to them in Hackney. This remains a significant and ongoing challenge for the Council (and many other inner London boroughs).

The Commission received evidence from a range of other boroughs on their efforts to increase housing capacity and extend accommodation options for care leavers which included:

- [Commissioning modular developments](#) - Lambeth is creating 40-50 such units in partnership with Centrepint;
- [Working more closely with housing associations](#) - Wandsworth collaboration with local housing associations ensures that there are 300 housing units for care leavers;
- The addition of new housing units through an [audit of local housing/ building assets](#).

Overview & Scrutiny

The Commission noted that a new 5 year Hackney Housing Strategy was currently in development, which would set out the housing needs and priorities of the borough and how the Council would deliver on these. Given that the current strategy (2017-2022) makes no reference to the housing needs of care leavers, the Commission anticipates that the outcomes and recommendations of this work would help to set out the housing priorities for this cohort within the future reiteration of the strategy which may then begin to address these needs in the medium to longer term.

To improve the supply of housing available for care leavers the Commission recommends:

- a) In line with the actions of [other boroughs](#) regarding this issue, a full asset review is undertaken across the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to identify potential properties which might be reconditioned / repurposed as accommodation for care leavers. (It is noted that a number of community flats on estates, currently being used for tenant engagement, have already been identified as possible units which might be considered for repurposing.)
- b) That the newly developed Housing Strategy:
 - i) Recognises and prioritises the housing needs of care leavers;
 - ii) Set out the approaches the Council will take in responding to the housing needs of care leavers particularly in creating additional housing capacity and broader range of accommodation options:
 - 1) Investment needed to *prevent* housing needs (e.g Staying Put, Supported Lodgings, Staying Close etc)
 - 2) How the role of modular builds can increase and extending housing options for care leavers (e.g. both studios and shared accommodation);
 - 3) Expansion of Peer Landlord Scheme;
 - 4) Utilisation of 'Live and Work Schemes' for care leavers
 - iii) Sets out how local Housing Associations will be directly engaged and involved to create additional social housing capacity to meet the needs of local care leavers;
 - iv) That care leavers are prioritised for opportunities within the *Living Rent* scheme;
 - v) Set out how the role of the Hackney Housing Company can be used to create additional housing capacity and further housing options for care leavers through:
 - 1) Purchase and repurposing of properties (internal and external to the borough);
 - 2) Modular build schemes.

Improving supply, quality and flexibility of supported accommodation available to care leavers

6. Many care leavers are accommodated in supported housing arrangements, generally houses of multiple occupation with different levels of on-site or floating support commissioned by Corporate Parenting. The Commission notes that these housing

Overview & Scrutiny

units were generally supplied by independent / private housing providers, many of whom were relatively new to this 'developing market'.

The Commission learnt that commissioning arrangements for supported housing had recently been reassessed and reconfigured to:

- (i) Improve the quality of housing commissioned
- (ii) reduce the size of individual units commissioned (to house max of 7 young people)
- (iii) ensure that there was greater flexibility in support arrangements for care leavers
- (iv) focus provision within Hackney
- (iv) ensure that housing support is delivered in the most cost effective way through a new longer term 7 year contract with providers.

Care leavers consulted by the Commission were generally positive about the range of supported housing provided, though had a number of concerns in relation to:

- Affordability of this accommodation option, particularly when considering options to progress and move on (77% of young people felt 'trapped' by their accommodation);
- The limited agency which they had in their choice of supported accommodation;
- Accessibility and quality of housing support arrangements.

The Commission noted that there are many new and emerging providers in this field of housing support for young people and [reported concerns](#) that national guidance and regulations had failed to keep up with such a new and emerging market of new service provision / providers. In this context, the Commission was keen to ensure that quality services were commissioned, and that there were effective controls in place to assess and monitor the quality of provision and that providers were able to deliver complex packages of care/support to meet the multiple needs of local care leavers.

Whilst the Commission noted that new Commissioning arrangements would aim to ensure that provision was focussed within Hackney, this could not always be the case and that for many reasons (personal safety, specialist support) some care leavers would continue to be placed outside of the borough. In this context, the Commission noted the importance of the need for additional safeguarding controls in light of [safeguarding practice review](#) of the City and Hackney Safeguarding Partnership and the children placed outside of the borough.

The Commission recommended that Corporate Parenting ensure:

- That care leavers are actively engaged in processes to assess, monitor and review the quality of supported housing provided;
- That commissioned accommodation remains affordable to allow care leavers to move on, or that there are adequate step-down arrangements to allow care leavers to transition to more independent living;
- That equally effective processes are in place to monitor and review supported housing which is commissioned in locations outside of the borough;

Overview & Scrutiny

- That wherever possible, care leavers are given a choice of available supported housing options suitable to their needs.

Improving the scope and consistency of the Corporate Parenting Offer in Hackney

7. In conducting this review, the Commission noted the wide variations in the corporate parenting offer across London Boroughs to care leavers, not only in relation to housing but also for a wider package of financial support and other benefits that were made available. For example, there were wide variations in relation to Council Tax exemption / reduction support and the age to which care leavers were able to claim this benefit (ranged from 21 or 25). [Analysis undertaken by the Commission](#) highlighted the wide range of different levels of provision for housing support, council tax reduction and support in setting up a home (e.g. provision of contents insurance, Wifi, TV Licence, mobile phone contract and cooking equipment).

The Commission also noted that even when care leavers were in the care of the same borough, there were marked inconsistencies in the range of support and benefits depending on whether they were placed *within* or *external* to that borough boundary. The Commission considered it unfair that care leavers placed outside of the borough which was responsible for them often did not get the same level of support to care leavers placed within its boundaries, especially when care leavers may exercise little choice as to where they may be placed. Thus, for example, care leavers placed outside of Hackney are not automatically exempt from Council tax as those placed in Hackney are.

In this context, the Commission noted the work of the Children's Society to develop a [London-wide offer for care leavers](#) to help develop common standards and to identify good practice across London Boroughs in their respective offers to care leavers. The Commission also noted that Greater Manchester had already agreed a [city-wide offer](#) to care leavers among all its 10 constituent local authorities.

The Commission was strongly of the view that the role of the Corporate Parent does not rest solely with the Corporate Parenting team and wider Children and Families service, but a responsibility that sits across the Council as a whole. In this context, the Commission believes that further work should be undertaken to benchmark local provision and to explore ways in which Hackney's local offer to care leavers (and wider looked after children cohort) can be further developed and extended *through the wider family of council departments* e.g. council tax, sustainable travel, education and training, therapeutic services, youth provision and leisure facilities.

Overview & Scrutiny

To improve the consistency, coherence and coordination of the care leaver offer, the Commission recommends that:

- a) The Council makes arrangements (either through reimbursement or reciprocal arrangements) to ensure that all care leavers are exempt from Council Tax until the age of 25, irrespective of which London borough they are placed/accommodated within;
- b) (In the absence of a pan London agreement) The Council works with key local neighbouring boroughs¹ with whom the majority of care leavers placed externally to the borough are located to develop reciprocal housing support arrangements for care leavers;
- c) That the [Corporate Parenting Board](#) is convened periodically (annually) to review the nature and level of the Hackney offer to care leavers (financial and all other support available).
- d) That the Mayor / Council write to London Councils and the GLA to urge them to use their influence and to lead / coordinate or facilitate work with London Boroughs for further the development of a London-wide offer for care leavers.

Making care leavers aware of the local offer website - greater openness and transparency - maintaining contact with care leavers up to age of 25

8. From the consultation with local care leavers, it was evident to the Commission that details of the local offer were not presented in a clear and consistent way to young people and that further work was needed to ensure that this cohort of young people were aware of full extent of their rights, entitlements and how they could access support and services.

Whilst it is a statutory duty for local authorities to publish their local offer to care leavers, it was apparent that these often lack the detail about the full range of services available. The Commission felt that this was illustrated in the [Hackney Care Leaver Offer](#) (both on-line and printed) where there was little detail of the social housing offer, in particular the number of units available through the quota system and the eligibility criteria used to determine access. It should be noted however, that this lack of detail was a common feature of many Local Authority care leaver offers assessed by the Children's Society in their work to develop a London wide offer detailed in their evidence to the Commission.

¹ Current LA location of care leavers: Enfield (40), Waltham Forest (30) Haringey (22), Redbridge (19), Croydon (13), Newham (13), Islington (12) and Tower Hamlets (9)

Overview & Scrutiny

The Commission also noted that the local Care Leaver offer is primarily focused on those benefits, entitlements and support which are available through the Council and that there was a wider range of support which could be included, particularly from the independent, community and voluntary sectors. In this context, the Commission noted the approach of Lambeth to set up a **Care Leaver Hub**, in which care leavers can access a wide range of support services from one integrated site. The Commission also heard evidence from Islington about their [Grandmentors Scheme](#) which matches care leavers with older volunteers (aged 50) to provide ongoing advice and support into adulthood.

Care leavers who are settled in independent tenancies may at times also need to be given additional support and be reminded of the care leaver's offer of support up to the age of 25. Evidence provided by Housing Needs service to this work also suggested that some care leavers continue to need additional housing (and other) support after the age of 25 (when legal duties of corporate parenting services cease). Other boroughs which gave evidence to the Commission also identified this as an area of concern, as care leavers often emerged in other areas of the welfare support system. This would suggest that there may be some benefit for local Corporate Parenting services to maintain lines of communication / keeping track / contact with care leavers past the statutory limit (25) to help with signposting of early help and support (with accessing adult social care, CAMHS etc).

To increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of the local offer for care leavers the Commission recommends that the Corporate Parenting (in collaboration with other services):

- a) Establish a local offer website dedicated to the services, entitlements and support available to care leavers;
 - i) That it incorporates not only services available through CPT, but the wider council and non-statutory services;
 - ii) Ensure that this is designed / co-produced with care leavers and foster carers.
- b) Consider how a care leaver hub, with an integrated on-site offer with opportunities for peer support and networking might be provided in Hackney;
- c) Consider ways in which the needs of care leavers beyond the statutory age limit (25) are identified / monitored - and identify ways in which support might be provided in a sustainable way e.g. [Lifelong Links](#) or similar scheme set up in Islington [Grandmentors](#)

Overview & Scrutiny

Ensuring that local services remain focused on prevention and, where appropriate, helping more looked after children (potential care leavers) to remain in supportive family / foster homes for as long as possible (e.g. preventing placement breakdowns and enabling looked after children to remain with their foster carers after the age of 18).

9. From the Children and Families Act (2014) looked after children may remain with their foster carer after the age of 18 under *Staying Put* arrangements. *Staying Put* arrangements help bring continuity of support for looked after children as they transition to adulthood. This approach helps looked after children move to more independent living when they are ready and have the emotional and practical skills to do so (rather than just turning 18). Such arrangements can help looked after children to maximise opportunities for education, employment and training, reduce the likelihood of homelessness and social exclusion.

As of January 2022, there were 48 children who were looked after by Hackney within a *Staying Put* arrangement. As part of a [£99.8m national package of support](#) Hackney currently receives [£322k annually](#) to support local *Staying Put* arrangements.

To help more children and young people to remain in family / foster carer homes under *Staying Put* arrangements the Commission recommends that the Corporate Parenting Team (Children and Families Service):

- a) Increase awareness, information and advice for looked after children on *Staying Put* arrangements as part of a wider package of housing options;
- b) Increase awareness, information and advice for local foster carers of *Staying Put* arrangements, particularly aiming to resolve any financial and / or administrative barriers local arrangements;
- c) Work with local foster carers and other stakeholders (e.g. IFAs) to encourage, develop and support a sector wide understanding that young people can (where appropriate) be able to continue to live at their fostering home / family after the age of 18.
- d) The above is accompanied by a renewed focus on the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers to help replace those who are providing ongoing accommodation and support to looked after children under *Staying Put* arrangements.

Supported lodgings offer young people (aged 16-21) an alternative to fostering when they are unable to remain with their birth families, leaving care or at risk of homelessness. Whilst not suitable to all children leaving care, this provides a further housing and accommodation option. The Commission noted that 12 supported lodgings had been recruited since 2020 and that as of the end of January 2022, six

Overview & Scrutiny

care leavers were supported in such accommodation. In this context, the Commission recommends:

- e) Children and Families undertake a dedicated awareness and recruitment campaign to help increase the uptake of Supported Lodging as an accommodation option for care leavers.

Finding financial opportunities and synergies through further Housing support for care leavers and impact on children and families and wider corporate finance.

10. The Commission noted the forecasted spend within the Children and Families Service for care leavers accommodation for 2021/2 was £4.9 million, £3.8m of which was for the provision of supported housing. This has remained an area of budgetary concern in particular in relation to the provision of semi-independent housing where a cost pressure of approximately £1.6m was recorded in [January 2022](#) for this services alone. Ongoing cost pressures within this and wider corporate parenting budget therefore continues to impact on children's services and in the wider council services beyond.

The Commission received a wide range of evidence on finances and budgets connected to children leaving care. It is clear that this is a complex area of budgeting, which not only interrelates with other aspects of children's social care (e.g. foster care) but also beyond this directorate to other department (i.e. Benefits and Housing Needs). Whilst it has not been possible during the course of this piece of work to undertake a detailed assessment of all such interrelated budgets, the Commission is confident that a more strategic and detailed analysis of both policies and budget can realise positive budgetary developments. The Commission would recommend a time-limited group be established led by corporate finance to identify:

- Opportunities for joint commissioning with Adult Social Care (floating support) and SEND (housing support);
- How helping young people move into independent living from supported accommodation when they were ready to do so rather than at age 21 would help to remove service 'cliff edges' (e.g. opening up the social housing register, further support to PRS);
- Opportunities for an invest to safe approach given that annual average cost of care leaver supported housing is £26,000.