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| Title of Report | Cabinet Response to the joint Children & Young People and Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission Investigation into Housing Support for Care Leavers |
| Key Decision No | Non Key Decision |
| For Consideration By | Cabinet |
| Meeting Date | 26 June 2023 |
| Cabinet Member | <p>CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Anntoinette Bramble Deputy Mayor Cabinet member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care</p> <p>MAYORAL ADVISER: Cllr Sade Etti, Mayoral Adviser for Housing Needs and Homelessness</p> |
| Classification | Open |
| Ward(s) Affected | All |
| Key Decision & Reason | Not required |
| Implementation Date if Not Called In | |
| Group Director | <p>Jacque Burke Group Director, Children & Education</p> <p>Ian Williams Group Director, Finance & Resources</p> |

1. MEMBERS' INTRODUCTION: DEPUTY MAYOR BRAMBLE AND CLLR ETTI

- 1.1. In May 2022 a manifesto pledge was made to '*develop a Care Charter for all the children in our care, which will set out our promises to them as corporate parents*'. Last year, the [Hackney Promise](#) to all our care experienced children and young people was reviewed and refreshed, with input from

those with lived experiences of being in our care. This set of commitments includes a promise that *'we will try to find the best home that we can for you'*. Ongoing consultation with care leaver representatives in Hackney's Children in Care Council, Hackney of Tomorrow, highlights the concerns about housing that often preoccupies our care leavers' thoughts. For this reason, we very much welcomed the collaboration of the Living in Hackney and Children and Young People's Scrutiny Commissions to focus on care leavers' housing last year. We appreciate the careful consideration the members involved gave to drawing together their comprehensive set of recommendations. Similarly, in our roles as lead member for children and young people and mayoral advisor for housing needs and homelessness, we are energised by the shared commitment of the executive to improving our housing offer for Hackney care leavers, and to be ambitious about what we can achieve, despite the challenging local and national housing context.

- 1.2. Since the Scrutiny Commission took place last year, we are aware that much hard work has already been undertaken to make improvements in our housing offer to care leavers. Whilst we have continued to protect a quota of 18 social tenancies, which are set aside each year specifically for Hackney care leavers, we have also now ensured that care leavers are named as a priority group in the Housing Strategy due to be finalised by the end of 2023; introduced two dedicated benefits and housing needs officers to work specifically with care leavers; commissioned a new contract with voluntary sector organisation Settle, to offer care leavers post tenancy support; launched a joint protocol between Housing and Children and Families Services focusing on care leavers and housing; updated our local offer to care leavers to confirm a universal offer for rent deposit support for care leavers prior to turning 21; begun a new 7 year commissioning contract which aims to improve the supply and quality of local supported accommodation for care leavers; and overhauled our web-based local offer, to improve our communication to care leavers about their rights and entitlements, including in relation to housing.
- 1.3. Nevertheless, going forward, we are committed to doing more. We intend to amend the Housing Register to allow care leavers to register at 18, rather than 21. This would require an Equalities Impact Assessment, legal consultation and a recommendation to be reviewed and approved by Cabinet. Our ambition would be to progress this agenda prior to the beginning of the next financial year.
- 1.4. We intend to scope opportunities to help address supply issues through the Hackney Housing Company. The Hackney Housing Company (HHC) exists, in its current mission and business plan, to support the Hackney housing regeneration and estate renewal programmes. It provides homes let at a market rent as well as Hackney Living Rent - where rent is set at approximately 30% of local market rents. Officers have commissioned a review of the HHC, which includes whether and how the company can help to increase housing supply and affordability outside of the regeneration programmes. The review will look at the issue of care leaver housing (as well as supported housing, different forms of tenure, street purchasing, out of

borough operations etc) and how the HHC could help produce a supply of additional housing options suitable to and affordable for care leavers. Specialist consultants have already been commissioned to assess financial models around street purchase programmes by the HHC and whether this can work for care leavers. These work streams will report to officers initially by summer with more in depth analysis and potential options for the HHC as part of the new Hackney Housing Strategy later this year.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. The Council's housing offer to Hackney care leavers was the subject of a joint Children and Young People's and Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission in February 2022. The outcome of the Commission were ten wide-ranging recommendations in relation to how we might improve our housing offer to care leavers, both before and after they turn 21. The recommendations were finalised by the Commission in October 2022. This report provides an initial response to the recommendations. We are committed to providing regular updates on progress to the Scrutiny Commissions on a no less than 6 monthly basis, given the very important nature of this work.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1. **That Cabinet is asked to approve the Executive response, found in Appendix 1, to the Children and Young People and Living in Hackney joint Scrutiny Commission Review on Housing Support for Care Leavers.**

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 4.1. Hackney Council is required to produce a response to the Children and Young People and Living in Hackney joint Scrutiny Commission Review on Housing Support for Care Leavers. The response draws on work underway and is in line with principles, values and priorities held by Hackney Council.

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 5.1. Not applicable

6. BACKGROUND

- 6.1. Policy Context

Prior to the Scrutiny Commission in February 2022 a briefing was prepared jointly by Benefits and Housing Needs, Housing Strategy and Children and Families Services on meeting the housing needs of care leavers. This briefing provided an overview of the housing options for care leavers both before and after they turn 21 and the challenges currently in the system.

The Scrutiny Commission on 24/02/22 then heard submissions from officers, care leavers and other Local Authorities - full recording available at this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xn3n8yExOyM> - following which, they developed their recommendations.

6.2. Equality Impact Assessment

When making policy decisions, the Council must take account of the public sector equality duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) and in particular any potential impact on protected groups.

The recommendation and noted responses will only have a positive effect on care leavers as they improve the level of corporate parenting Council support. Seventy seven per cent of Hackney care leavers are from Black and Global Majority communities and one third of Hackney's looked after children (our care leavers of tomorrow) have Education and Health Care Plans, as a response to their additional needs.

Further work on the Council's Lettings Policy will require a full EQIA and will be brought into the appropriate workstream for delivery within existing manifesto commitments.

6.3. Sustainability and climate change

There are no issues within the report that impact on the physical and social environment.

6.4. Consultations

Hackney Care Leavers were consulted during the Scrutiny Commission in February 2022. They have since been involved in further discussions around improving the local offer to care leavers with Cabinet and senior officers. They have consistently emphasised that access for care leavers to safe, affordable, sustainable, high quality homes is their top priority.

6.5. Risk Assessment

The Scrutiny Recommendations are designed to try and improve the housing offer to Hackney's care leavers, in recognition that care experienced children and young people are amongst our most vulnerable residents. There is a significant body of research that links care experience to poor outcomes e.g. nationally 39% of care leavers between the ages of 19 and 21 are not in education, employment or training; approximately 33% who leave the system become homeless within two years; and 27% of those currently within our custody system have been in care. The Social Work Bill 2017 introduced corporate parenting principles which were intended to change the culture in local authorities so that all staff and departments consider the impact of their work on children and young people for whom the Local Authority is the corporate parent. The Corporate Parenting Principles state that English local

authorities must 'have regard to the need' to take certain actions in their work for children in care and care leavers, including in the following areas, which are directly applicable to these recommendations:

- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Risks related to not taking action to progress the Scrutiny recommendations potentially include:

- Poorer outcomes for Hackney's care leavers, who understandably find it difficult to focus on other life goals, such as education, training and employment, when their current housing offer is problematic or their future housing options uncertain;
- Reputational risk: In 2022 Ofsted announced plans to reintroduce a separate judgement for the experiences of care leavers in their Children's Services inspection framework;
- Costs: Corporate Parenting currently spends a significant amount of resource on supported accommodation for care leavers and the Scrutiny Commission highlighted that there may be opportunities to utilise some of this resource differently.

7. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

- 7.1. The recommendation of this report is that Cabinet agrees to the executive response (Appendix 1) to the Children and Young People and Living in Hackney Joint Scrutiny commissioning review on housing support for care leavers. There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. However there are a number of recommendations and responses from lead officers outlined in Appendix 1 of the report. Any proposed changes to service delivery as a result of the responses to the recommendation will need to be implemented via the governance process within each respective directorate with detailed business cases developed including any financial implications.

8. VAT Implications on Land & Property Transactions

- 8.1. There are no VAT implications in this report.

9. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES

- 9.1 Before the Leaving Care Act (2000), there was no statutory framework in place for care leavers, with each local authority determining what level of support it provided. With no nationally-set expectation about what was an adequate level of support, many care leavers received only minimal assistance. The 2000 Act introduced, for the first time, requirements on local authorities to: assess the needs of the young person once they left care; appoint a Personal Adviser for them; and develop a pathway plan. This support was available to care leavers up to age 18, or to age 21 if the young person was in education.
- 9.2 In 2008, the Children and Young Persons Act introduced provisions that required local authorities to provide assistance to care leavers in education (including a £2,000 bursary for those in higher education); and extended support from a Personal Adviser to age 21 for all care leavers; and to 25 if they remained in education.
- 9.3 The 2014 Children & Families Act introduced the 'Staying Put' duty. This requires local authorities to support young people to remain with their former foster carers to age 21 where both the young person and carer want the arrangement to continue – allowing those young people to enjoy continuity in their care arrangements and a more gradual transition to adulthood.
- 9.4 Local housing authorities are required to produce a strategy setting out how they will prevent and tackle homelessness in their area. As part of this process, they should work with Children's Services to consider the needs of care leavers who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 9.5 The Cabinet Report complies with the requirement for the Council to carry out Equality Impact Assessments of its proposals and policy decisions.
- 9.6 The recommendation of this Report is that Cabinet agrees to the executive response (Appendix 1) to the Children and Young People and Living in Hackney Joint Scrutiny commissioning review on housing support for care leavers. There are no direct legal implications arising from the Report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Executive response to the Children and Young People and Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission's Housing Support for Care Leavers recommendations

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Appendix 1 - Executive response to the Children & Young People and Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission's Housing Support for Care Leavers recommendations

Recommendation one

The Commission 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.

Response

The Benefits and Housing Needs Service and Corporate Parenting Teams have worked closely together to fulfil these recommendations. We continue to meet monthly to chart progress against the agreed shared work streams for care leavers.

- A. A new contract was jointly commissioned by CFS and the Benefits and Housing Needs Service from January 2023 with [Settle](#), a voluntary sector organisation who specialise in homelessness work with young people, Settle have been specifically commissioned to provide post tenancy support for care leavers moving into the private rented sector, supporting them with issues such as budgeting and managing bills.
- B. A quarterly care leavers housing forum for social care practitioners and housing colleagues has been established from January 2023. This forum enables all staff to have up to date information on the current housing context, in order to improve the consistency of housing advice given to our care leavers.
- C. Two named Benefits and Housing Needs Officers dedicated to providing housing advice and homelessness prevention work for young people, including care leavers, have been in post since October 2022. These officers are co-located for part of the week within CFS. Care leavers were

offered the opportunity to be involved with the selection process for these roles.

- D. The creation of an audit programme for care leavers aged over 20 is in progress, which will report on a 6 monthly basis and will identify care leavers earlier who are approaching 21 without a housing plan. An electronic dashboard will draw together information from different software systems to inform this work. This will help us to prevent cliff-edge crisis situations.

Recommendation two

In developing the joint housing protocol for care leavers, the Commission recommends that Corporate Parenting, Benefits and 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.

Response

Responding to housing needs for care leavers will be addressed by the forthcoming housing strategy, however, we have started work in advance to address the specific items in the scrutiny challenge:

- A draft joint protocol was shared with the Corporate Parenting Board in 2022, as well as the Senior Youth Homelessness Advisor from DLUHC during her visit in May 2022. The protocol was finalised in January 2023, incorporating feedback from key stakeholders and developments in progress since the Scrutiny Committee in February 2022. The protocol reflects best practice highlighted in the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework developed by St Basil's and Barnardos.
- There is ongoing engagement with looked after children and care leavers through Hackney of Tomorrow around the development of our local offer to care leavers, with housing a key issue because it is repeatedly highlighted by care leavers as their number one priority.
- The development of our housing offer to care leavers, both before and after they turn 21, is named as a key strategic priority in our Corporate Parenting Strategy, 2023-5. The Corporate Parenting Board, Chaired by Deputy Mayor Bramble, is responsible for monitoring progress of this Strategy.

Recommendation three

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:

- 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 Benefits 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.

Response three

- A. Hackney of Tomorrow are currently undertaking a peer review on the experiences of care leavers who have moved into their own tenancy. Initially this was planned for those in social tenancies, although has been expanded to include those in private sector tenancies, in light of the Scrutiny Recommendations.
- B. Initial research has been conducted to understand the potential of commissioning the National House Project. Several conversations have taken place with Islington, who successfully operate this model. The operating model is dependent on available social tenancies for care leavers who complete the programme, which is a challenge for us. Nevertheless, we continue to explore the possibility of this or a similar preparation for independence programme.
- C. As cited above, a jointly commissioned contract with Settle has been agreed. Initially, Settle will offer intensive post tenancy support (for those in PRS as well as social tenancies) for up to 30 care leavers per year.

- D. Hackney Council is affiliated to and financially supports the London Accredited Landlord Scheme. The scheme is run by Camden Council and provides a comprehensive framework to encourage landlords to be good, responsible landlords who provide property of the highest standards to all residents, details can be found here: <https://www.londonlandlords.org.uk/how-it-works/>. All landlords have a legal responsibility to work with the Local Authority to prevent homelessness. It should be noted that the private rented sector in Hackney is constricting with 30% less properties available for rental on Rightmove than prior to the pandemic. The current economic landscape with increased borrowing rates is making it extremely challenging to retain current privately rented properties in use, let alone source new supply, despite increased rates and incentive payments.
- E. Following the Scrutiny Committee, the Local Offer to Care Leavers was updated, to clarify that rent deposit support would be offered by CFS to care leavers who wished to move into their own tenancies before the age of 21, if we agreed that this was an appropriate option for them. We are aware that Wandsworth offers a guarantor scheme for care leavers and have been in contact with them to find out more about how this operates.

Recommendation four

The Commission 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.

Response four

Ensuring our care leavers have stable, secure housing tenancies is of critical importance to us as corporate parents. However the shortage of both social and

affordable rents in Hackney present a significant challenge to us achieving this end. As a council we are not able to consider the needs of care leavers in isolation from the needs of other residents, notwithstanding our commitment to being good corporate parents.

1. A & C - With c 80 care leavers each year turning 21, even doubling the allocation of social tenancies to 30 units will not provide social lets for the majority of our care leavers, thus anxiety about long-term housing insecurity will still be a factor for our young people. We believe a more sustainable long-term option would be to give care leavers access to the housing register at 18, rather than 21. Benefits would include the universality of this offer to all Hackney care leavers, plus the increased self determination of access to a housing register (a process through which when and what to bid for is in the hands of care leavers, as opposed to the current system of a direct offer system via the quota). This change would require a recommendation endorsed by Cabinet, prior to potentially going live in April 2024. It must be recognised that, given the current shortage of social housing, access to the housing register will not guarantee access to a secure tenancy in a timely way. If this change is agreed, a programme of information and awareness raising around this would be rolled out for care leavers and the practitioners that support them.
2. In order to properly understand local housing needs across the piece and provide a platform for innovative solutions, a Housing Needs Survey has been commissioned from an independent agency (Campbell and Tickell). This will begin reporting in late Spring 2023 and care leavers' housing need has been presented as a priority group for this assessment.
3. This Housing Needs Survey will inform the updated Housing Strategy (due end 2023) and the review of the new Lettings Policy (a manifesto commitment). Part of the work will be to ensure that a Lettings Plan is published annually to outline the forecast number of social housing homes for allocation and how these will be allocated and to whom. This will ensure that the Council takes a strategic approach as part of our wider comprehensive programme of action to tackle the deep and systemic housing crisis that we face, and ensure that we are acting consistently with our equalities duties and mitigate the risk of unintended consequences.
4. B - A defined criteria was established, with a clearer and more transparent process, for making the decisions about which care leavers would be nominated for a social housing tenancy each year through the quota process in autumn 2022. As in the previous year, the system was designed to focus on those in most need, in line with the wider lettings policy. This was discussed with Hackney of Tomorrow (Hackney's Children in Care Council) and staff before being rolled out. This process is outlined in the new local offer google site and housing for care leavers (<https://hackney.gov.uk/leaving-care-local-offer>).
5. There is great commitment to improving the housing offer for care leavers. The Housing Needs Survey will provide Cabinet with the information required to agree future strategy around meeting their housing needs and social tenancy allocation.

6. We are currently exploring other possible approaches to improving care leavers housing such as:
- Treating care experience as an additional equality strand alongside the Protected Characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010;
 - Including care leavers in the Hackney Living Rent Criteria;
 - Scoping opportunities to source homes for care leavers through Council-run housing companies, for example, learning lessons from Barking and Dagenham's 'Reside' project.

Recommendation five

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 and MMC build schemes.

Response

- A. On the HRA assets, a 20% stock condition survey is currently being commissioned, which will be used to determine the long term viability and investment needs of existing properties. A review of community halls is to

be refreshed in line with the manifesto commitments, the first part of which is the proposals linked to bringing back into residential use properties which have previously been redesignated to community use. Proposals for this were presented at Cabinet in December 2022. The General Fund does not typically hold assets of this type. A lack of unencumbered and available land in Hackney, means that sourcing purpose built products in the Borough is the principal alternative to self delivery, as LBH has done in expanding the TA provision. Adult Social Care and Strategic Property Services can review models for delivery, part-informed by learning from a successful programme in the provision of TA, and assessing how they might meet the Hackney need. If suitable corporately owned assets do become available, these will also be considered alongside other corporate priorities.

- B. Care leavers have been named as a priority group in the forthcoming Housing Strategy, which will continue to consider these recommendations during the course of its development.

Recommendation six

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

Response

- Care experienced young people were involved in the commissioning of the new Young People's Accommodation Pathway, with the contract being launched in April 2022.
- The Young People's Pathway contract is overseen by formal contract management arrangements, which include quarterly meetings and at least annual site inspections. Plans are in development to involve care leavers in these contract management processes. Our longer-term ambition is to involve care experienced young people in the commissioning arrangements for all supported accommodation commissioned by Children and Families Services.
- Hackney is a member of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG), through which Local Authorities across the country share monitoring and quality assurance activities for children's homes. CCRAG have also developed a framework for the QA of supported accommodation, which we are using.

- Outside of the Young People's Pathway, we continue to spot purchase additional supported accommodation for care leavers where required. We plan to develop a commissioning framework for these arrangements, which will give us greater control over quality and costs.
- Wherever possible, we aim to give care leavers an element of choice about their supported accommodation options, even if at times this may only be the choice of bedrooms in a home. Our ambition over time is to supplement and grow the Young People's Pathway over time, including through exploring innovative funding opportunities, as by doing this we have greater scope to offer young people more choice.

Recommendation seven

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 boroughs 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.

Response

- A. Jacquie Burke represents Hackney in the ongoing discussions at a senior level on the development of a pan London offer to care leavers. A priority area in this group is Council Tax exemption. The initial ask is for all London Boroughs to offer full exemption for their own care leavers living in their borough up to the age of 25, which Hackney already does. The longer-term ambition is for all London Boroughs to offer full exemption to care leavers up to the age of 25, regardless of their 'home' borough. Scoping on this continues.
- B. At this time, we believe energies are best spent progressing the work on the pan London offer, which has considerable momentum.
- C. The Corporate Parenting Board meets bi-monthly. As noted above, improving the housing offer to care leavers is a key priority in the next 3 year Corporate Parenting Strategy as is improving the whole system local offer to care leavers more widely. Progress against ambitions will be

reviewed regularly at the Board and through the Corporate Parenting Officers Groups, that sit below the Board.

- D. As A, work in relation to a pan London offer for care leavers in relation to housing is ongoing.

Recommendation eight

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

Response

- A. Initial scoping is underway in relation to improving the overall Children and Education's web presence, to make it easier for Hackney children and families to understand the potential support available to them and access key information. In the interim, work has been undertaken on a google site specific to the [local offer for care leavers](#).
- B. Conversations are ongoing with colleagues from Facilities around the scope for developing a care leavers hub, with an ambition to go live in 2023.
- C. The updated local offer, as reflected in the new google site, highlights the opportunity for care leavers over the age of 25 to get in contact with the Leaving Care Service to access additional advice and guidance, where required. We will track the demand over time, to inform further developments in our 25+ offer to care leavers.

Recommendation nine

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 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.

Response

- A. We continue to promote Staying Put as our preferred option for all looked after children living in foster care when they turn 18. Scope for this is reviewed through their Looked After Children Reviews and the CFS monthly Preparation for Independence Panel. The number of care leavers in Staying Put arrangements has increased over time, however, there remains considerable scope for further increase. Information on Staying Put forms part of work ongoing - in collaboration with Hackney of Tomorrow - to improve the information available to looked after children and young people about their housing options.
- B. The Staying Put Guidance and accompanying materials for foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis.
- C. Scope for further work across stakeholders around promoting Staying Put will be explored e.g. through the North London Consortium.
- D. Work to improve our recruitment and retention offer to foster carers is ongoing and was the subject of a CYP Scrutiny Commission in October 2022, with recommendations awaited.
- E. The option of Supported Lodgings is promoted and explored through all our Fostering Recruitment activities, e.g. in our promotion material and following an initial expression of interest by prospective foster carers. Further work is planned within CFS to promote this option as an alternative to supported accommodation, to ensure our Supporting Lodgings carers are always fully utilised.

Recommendation ten

The Commission recommends a time-limited group be established led by corporate finance to identify:

- A. Opportunities for joint commissioning with Adult Social Care (floating support) and SEND (housing support);
- B. 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);
- C. Opportunities for an invest to save approach given that annual average cost of care leaver supported housing is £26,000.

Response

- A. Across the Children and Education directorate (including Health), the service is working to bring together the commissioning functions for the directorate. This is planned to be implemented in 2023/24, and as part of this exercise, the service will explore wider commissioning opportunities including ASC to ensure the pathways to transition for children and young people are in place.
- B. As outlined above, initiatives such as a standard offer of rent deposit and post tenancy support (through Settle) are being implemented, alongside an enhanced offer of advice and support from housing colleagues pre-21, to support care leavers who are ready and able to move into independent accommodation before they turn 21 to do so.
- C. Opportunities to develop business cases and invest to save initiatives will be considered at the Children and Education Budget Board, which is co-chaired by the Group Director (Children and Education) and the Group Director (Finance and Corporate Resources). This will ensure that there is joint oversight and any opportunities which require investment can be effectively explored.