



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
People Overview Committee	
DATE – 18 th July 2018	<u>Public</u>

Responsible Officer: Laura Fisher

e-mail: laura.fisher@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 258981

1. Summary

The aim of this report is to give an overview of current housing options for young people in Shropshire, specifically those who are Looked After or Care Leavers.

The report seeks to explore the significant changes in housing provision across Shropshire and the impact this has had on suitable and sustainable options for this client group.

It also strives to develop the required actions, recommendations and improvements to improve options available and joint working needed to improve a young person's ability to live independently as well as increase suitable provision.

2. Recommendations

- Employment of a Children's and Young Person Co-ordinator (budget agreed and in progress);
- Employment of a Private Rented Sector Officer (budget agreed and in progress);
- Implementation of independent living skills for all those leaving care (in progress);
- Better planned move on for all those leaving care (in progress);
- Agreement for Children's Services to act as guarantor for all Looked After Children aged 17 who are allocated a property in social housing stock up until their 18th birthday (agreed at corporate parenting panel on 21st June 2018);
- Secure supported housing projects within the County (ongoing);
- Improve access to semi-independent housing options for those leaving care (ongoing);
- Improve and increase the use of Discretionary Housing Payment, Enhanced Housing Management and Housing Benefit funding (ongoing);
- Identify corporate funding to provide better housing options for those leaving care (ongoing);
- Monitor all Looked After Children's move on options at age 18 (ongoing).

REPORT

3. Legislation and statutory responsibility

Children's Act 1989

Every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of:

- there being no person who has parental responsibility for him;
- his being lost or having been abandoned; or
- the person who has been caring for him being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.

Every local authority shall provide accommodation to any child in need within their area who has reached the age of sixteen and whose welfare is the authority consider is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide accommodation.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

Corporate Parenting Principles

The Children and Social Work Act 2017, sets out the Corporate Parenting principles that local authorities in England must carry out in relation to the children and young people, having regard to the need:

- To act in best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views and wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- To help those young people gain access to and make the best use of services by the local authority and 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 young people and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Homelessness Legislation

The Local Authority Housing Department has responsibility to provide housing for some priority need groups. Of these groups the following applies to young people (who are not part of a family unit):

16 or 17 year olds – Most homeless 16 or 17 year olds are entitled to accommodation and support from social services rather than the housing department of the Council. However, Housing Services have a responsibility to accommodate 16 or 17 year olds who are not deemed to be a child in need by Children's Services.

Care Leavers aged 18-20 – Housing have a responsibility to all young people aged 18-20 who have spent at least 24 hours in care arranged by social services when they are aged 16 or 17. This includes time in foster care, a children's home or any other accommodation arranged by Children's Services.

4. Housing Provision

In 2010 there was supported housing provision across the county with projects in Market Drayton, Whitchurch, Oswestry, Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Ludlow. At this point there were approximately 100 bedspaces for young people. The aim of the projects was to provide supported accommodation for young people age 16-25. The support included day to day independent living skills, ensuring young people were able to move on into independent living at the point they were ready. The majority of young people placed in the projects were aged 16-21 and would have included a significant number of care leavers.

Since 2010 we have lost a number of the supported housing projects due to providers moving out of the Shropshire area as they have felt their business models are better suited to more urban areas where staffing and resources are easier to access. The impact of this has meant that despite the Local Authority having the funding available we have lost a significant amount of our bedspaces.

Supported Housing Projects closed in Shropshire:

Year	Project	Number of bedspaces lost
2010	Market Drayton YP project	15 (independent flats)
2010	Ludlow YP project	13 (shared)
2015	Shrewsbury YP project	9 (shared)
2015	Whitchurch YP project	14 (2 bed shared)
2015	Shrewsbury ex offender project (18+)	7 (shared)
2016	Oswestry YP project	12 (shared)
2018	Bridgnorth homeless project (18+)	15 (shared and independent)
		TOTAL = 85 bedspaces

In 2017 Shropshire Council purchased the Oswestry New Century Court project and have commissioned Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing to manage it. This has added 12 bedspaces to the provision for young people, including a training flat specifically for the use of Children's Services. Having been made aware of the loss of the Parish Rooms in Bridgnorth later this year we are also in correspondence with Centra, the owner, regarding ongoing use of the project enabling a further 15 bedspaces to remain accessible.

Current provision for young people in Shropshire is below:

Ludlow	15 bedspaces Note – currently only 13 bedspaces are in use due to building work on a new development which will see an extra 22 bedspaces in 2019.	Ages 16-25 Maximum of 3 x crash pads at any one time
Bridgnorth	15 bedspaces (including self-contained flats)	Ages 18-65
Shrewsbury	4 bedspaces	Ages 16-25 1 x crash pad
Oswestry	12 bedspaces	Ages 16-25 1 x crash pad 1 x training flat
SHIP	12 bedspaces commissioned (currently 8 in use)	Ages 18-25 Care Leaver move on accommodation – mixture of 1 and 2 bed properties

5. Housing Demand

In 2017/18 Housing Services had 883 presentations of young people aged 16-24 as homeless or at risk of homelessness. Although not all these would be Looked After Children or those Leaving Care it is a good indication of the demand for housing for this age group within Shropshire. With the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act in April 2018 Housing Services now have a duty to prevent and relieve the homelessness of all those who present to our service (approximately 3000 households per annum). Therefore it is important to recognise the wider need for supported accommodation for all young people who have not yet held a tenancy, have never lived out of a family home and are finding their way for the first time.

During the same period of time (April 2017-March 2018) Shropshire Council had 37 Looked After Children turn 18 and become Care Leavers. Of these, 24 had housing needs and required the support of Housing Services. However, in addition to this there may be a

number of 16-18 year olds who have sign themselves out of care but re-present as a care leaver at a later point and request accommodation. These are the young people who often go to Supported Board & Lodgings providers or SAAIL semi-independent units but who are still likely to present to Housing at age 18 or older.

With an increase in homelessness presentations across the board, not just young people but also older single people and families, the housing service is under more demand now than ever. This has caused an increase in the need for temporary and emergency accommodation.

The table below shows the increase in those placed in temporary accommodation since 2010.

Snapshot - 31st March	Total Households	Total People
2010	73	148
2011	75	166
2012	78	191
2013	61	120
2014	62	116
2015	79	173
2016	84	155
2017	90	163
2018	131	241

6. Plans for the Future

Alongside joint training days to improve a young person's 'customer journey', a fortnightly multi agency working group has been developed including members of both Housing and Children's Services. The aim of these meetings is to go through the 30+ identified young people known to both services and jointly working through their options to ensure they are able to move on or secure accommodation that meets their needs in a timely manner.

Staffing:

Further to this, Housing have recently advertised a full time two-year position for a Children and Young Person's worker. This role is designed to work across all Children's teams (Early Help, Looked After and 18+) as well as working within the Housing Service. The officer will hold a caseload of approx. 30-35 individuals aged 16-25 who are known to both services and have a housing need. The hope is that this role will be the bridge between the teams and to ensure that a young person's needs and requirements are met by all departments.

Independent Living Skills:

Children's Services have recognised the need for earlier implementation of independent living skills for all those leaving care. Plans are in place for a programme of support starting when a young person is 12 and continuing until they are 18 and ready for independence. Case studies have shown that even if a young person is provided with suitable housing, if they do not have the skills and maturity to manage they will struggle and may fail.

As a Local Authority and Corporate parent we have a responsibility to ensure that young people are able to manage and sustain accommodation they are placed into and that it meets their needs until such time as they choose to move on. Recent events at New Street hostel in Shrewsbury where 2 care leavers damaged the property to the extent that it has been closed for 6 weeks and will cost thousands to be repaired, show both services that we need to work together to ensure that young people approaching 18 have had the sufficient and necessary skills to enable them to succeed in independence.

With the recent opening of New Century Court in Oswestry and the identification of the independent flat attached to the project being used as training flat for those approaching 18, it is hoped that a robust and detailed 'transition to independence programme' will improve the outcomes of those moving on from care. Working alongside the housing providers in the County it is also hoped that a joint support assessment will shortly be implemented for all those living in accommodation for young people and ensure that we are all working consistently to manage their move on when ready.

However, as stated we also need to increase the options available to young people and ensure that the options made available are suitable and sustainable.

Social Housing:

The Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme states that where a young person who has been looked after, fostered or accommodated by the Local Authority and is engaging fully with support and is likely to have a duty to be rehoused accepted by Shropshire Council and deemed to be within 6 months of being ready for independent living, they can be awarded Gold Banding to enable a planned move on to independent accommodation. This enables Housing to award all care leavers deemed to have a housing need, gold banding on Shropshire HomePoint at age 17.5. However, it is important to note that despite this banding, without a guarantor a young person is unlikely to be successful in being allocated a social housing property at age 17. If a young person is unable to take on a property at age 17 it is likely they will have to present as homeless and then be accommodated in unsuitable emergency accommodation until such time as they are successful via HomePoint. It is recognised that no young person that is in the care of the local authority should have present themselves as homeless and as corporate parents we should not allowing this practice to take place. It should be noted that many of the emergency accommodation providers are not felt to be appropriate for vulnerable care leavers and it is felt that on occasions young people are being left in vulnerable situations whilst in such accommodation.

Being able to move in a planned way during the young person's 17th year of age by utilising a guarantor agreement by Children's Services, enables a young person to have a planned move on as they leave care. It means that the young person can plan proactively for their transition, to be in a position to make an informed choice about their accommodation and to move on a planned basis.

Joint working:

As part of the fortnightly multi agency meetings Housing Services and Children's Services are working closely to identify young people 6 months before they require housing to ensure they are registered, banded and are bidding accordingly. We hope that as this develops this will enable better planned move on for Looked After Children approaching 18. Having a guarantor agreement for this will assist in the pathway being a success.

Housing Services were pivotal in the purchase of New Century Court in Oswestry having recognised the impact of losing projects over recent years. Housing were also keen to ensure a training flat for Looked After Children formed part of the scheme as well as a crash pad for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. Housing and Children's Services have and continue to work together to develop this. However the implementation of one scheme is not enough and we need to safeguard the loss of future projects such as Parish Rooms in Bridgnorth. Currently, Housing are working with the landlord of this scheme to ensure that if sold, Shropshire Council has the opportunity to purchase the building, but also to develop a scheme with local housing providers that meets the needs of our young people.

Housing also recognise the need for more independent accommodation for care leavers, and are aware that supported housing is not suitable for everyone. Currently Housing fund an accommodation project called SHIP which is specifically for care leavers who have a housing need. The project consists of 1 and 2 bed shared properties that are leased from private landlords. The aim of the project is to provide semi-independent accommodation where care leavers can move on after time in Supported Board & Lodgings or SAILL placements before moving on into independent options via either social or private rent.

However, a lack of private rent options throughout the county has meant we have never managed to provide more than 8 bedspaces at any one time. The contract in place with Shropshire Housing Alliance is for 12 young people but the supply of units has not allowed this to be achieved. Plans are in place to work with social housing providers, allowing Shropshire Housing Alliance to lease social stock from the providers and utilise as SHIP accommodation. The hope is that with a mixture of social and private options the number of bedspaces available will increase.

Housing Services have recognised the need for more access to private rent across the homelessness sector and are in the process of advertising the post of 'Private Rented Sector' Officer. This role will work with private landlords developing a Shropshire Council offer which we hope will give them the confidence to lease directly to us. We hope that although this role will bring on line more options for families it will also help with the lack of 1 bed accommodation in the social sector and enable us to better meet the needs of single young adults, including care leavers. With the development of a Local Housing Company,

the option to be a private landlord is also open to the Local Authority, enabling us to provide Assured Shorthold Tenancies to those in housing need, not just social or temporary housing.

Finally, we are also working with the Welfare Reform and Housing Benefit Teams within Shropshire Council to develop an offer for young people approaching 18, or those moving out of supported projects, who will require housing but for whom the cost is too high. We hope to better use the Discretionary Housing Payment fund, especially given the significant underspend on this resource. Further to this, we are exploring the option of Enhanced Housing Management costs as part of the extra responsibilities providers have in relation to the management of properties with young people. We have also recently started to look at the option of using Housing Benefit funding to continue placements within SAILL for those young people who have not yet secured a social or private rent move on option. The aim of this is to minimise the moves for a young person and therefore avoid temporary accommodation where possible.

7. Conclusion

Both Housing Services and Children's Services recognise the need to provide suitable and sustainable housing options for all young people presenting as homeless, specifically in relation to this report looking at care leavers.

We recognise that along with more housing provision that is suitable and sustainable there is a need for improved transition work for those in care as well as more housing options. The key is to work together to improve the options available for care leavers in Shropshire, meaning they have choice about where they live and the skills to maintain the property long term.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Lee Chapman (Housing, Health and Adult Social Care)

Nick Bardsley (Children's Services)

Local Member

n/a – relevant to all of Shropshire

Appendices:

None