

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Delegated Officer Decision – [Click here to enter a date.](#)

**Report Title**

Increasing the Dispersed Supported Accommodation

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

Yes

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

**Report Author(s)**

Sandra Tolley– Head of Housing Options

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough wide

**Report Summary**

The purpose of this report is to give approval to increase the current dispersed portfolio from 10 to 20 properties used by the Leaving Care team.

**Recommendation**

Agreement to increase the dispersed portfolio by 10 units for the Leaving Care Service utilising general needs housing stock.

**List of Appendices Included**

None

**Background Papers**

None

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

No

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Leaving Care dispersed accommodation is supported by officers located at Hollowgate House. The team offer a range of services and support, including case holding, ensuring properties are kept to the standard of the council and developing and delivery of group and individual work around their progression towards independence.
- 1.2 Leaving care dispersed accommodation is a critical service provided to young people transitioning out of foster care or residential care settings. These individuals often lack family support and require stable housing to facilitate their successful integration into independent adulthood. Currently, RMBC operates up to 10 dispersed accommodation properties, accommodating Rotherham young people. There is a need to increase this provision by 10 units.
- 1.3 A Cabinet report, dated 17 February 2020, outlined Rotherham Children and Young People's Services strategic intention to reduce external residential placements and ensure more Rotherham looked after children and young people are placed within the borough close to their family and community networks. This has resulted in more children being placed in Rotherham, developing relationships with service, education and supportive family members, increasing the need to provide move on service for these young people.
- 1.4 Young People can join the housing register at 16, and their housing application is held in suspension then activated when the young person is ready to live independently. They have 3-6 months, waiting time for tenancy once their application is activated and bidding starts. This results in dispersed accommodation linked to the Supported Accommodation Service having over 18's within the service.
- 1.5 The introduction of the HMO will reduce some of this impact on the service.

## **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 The "House Project" provided supported accommodation for up to 10 young people. The scheme offered suitable, safe and long-term housing, alongside a holistic and bespoke package of training and support that focused on increasing young people's independent living and personal skills and their participation in education, employment and training (EET).
- 2.2 The "House Project" was ended in June 2023, as it was felt that RMBC can offer similar support in house without the on-going subscription cost of £363,857 per annum based on 10 children by offering the same number of properties. However, this has reduced the possible dispersed properties from 20 to 10 for care leavers, as wasn't agreed via Cabinet. This has left a significant gap in what RMBC can offer to our young people.
- 2.3 There is also a growing number of young people who require support and housing. With only 10 properties available, many individuals are left without suitable accommodation, leading to potential placements in external providers or to remain in high-cost residential placements where they are settled, however not progressing.

- 2.4 Ofsted introduced the Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023. Providers that had not registered by 28th October 2023, will be committing an offence to carry on or manage a supported accommodation service on or after that date and may lead to several young people requiring regulated placements. There is a risk that numbers of external registered placements may reduce.
- 2.5 In January 2022, Ofsted reported that a third of care leavers felt they left care too early. In Rotherham we are aware that development of independent skills and knowledge is required to take place much earlier in the right placements. The Leaving Care team are ambitious for our young people to provide the right care, support and then move towards independence. Without the right number of supported accommodation and dispersed properties often young people remain in care homes resulting in young people moving directly into their own tenancy at 18yrs when they reach adulthood and face a greater risk of tenancy breakdown.
- 2.6 Access to stable housing is essential for the successful transition of young people from care to future independent living. By doubling the number of properties, we can provide a greater number of individuals with the support they need to thrive, leading to improved long-term outcomes in education, employment, and mental health.
- 2.7 CYPS is projecting an overspend which is in part is due to the 18+ budget being overspent because of the delay in our care leavers not moving on to suitable accommodation in a timely manner. The additional cost of bringing onboard an additional 10 properties can create a cost saving in comparison to external providers and ensure a more robust quality assurance. Furthermore, the cost of ensuring the properties is prepared ready via Furnished Homes can be reduced and ensuring our care leavers are provided a higher and consistent quality of suitable accommodation.
- 2.8 The current cohort of care leavers in the age brackets: 16/17 as of 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 is 139. The in-house Support Accommodation can only provide accommodation for up to 19 young people. There is a need for properties to support this cohort which has increased year on year (table 1).

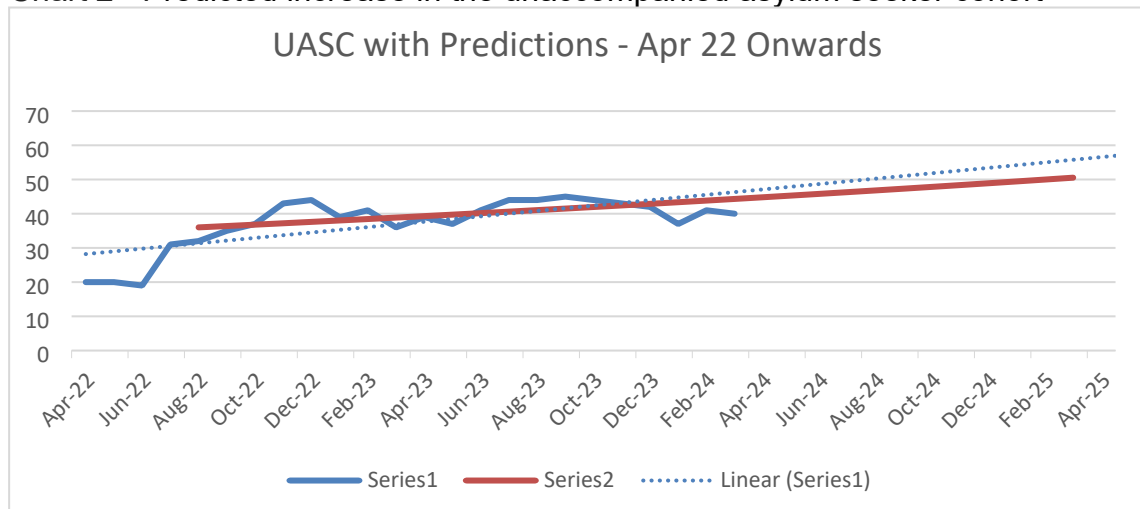
Table 1- Care Leavers in the age brackets: 16/17 as of 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Age/ No of young people	2022	2023	2024
16/17	118	129	139
18/19	106	124	149
20+	78	76	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>353</b>

- 2.9 Furthermore, there is a predicted increase in the unaccompanied asylum seeker cohort (UASC) to up to 51 young people in April 2025. It is unclear without going through all records of young people that are required a placement that are currently in residential homes, foster or other accommodation that require a move on at this current time to support

a transition into their own tenancy as the support after they reach the legal age of 18 years old is significantly reduced as they are a former relevant child.

Chart 2 - Predicted increase in the unaccompanied asylum seeker cohort



- 2.10 The Care Leaver's Personal Assistant will act as the focal point to ensure that care leavers are provided with the right kind of personal support. With the changes to regulations that at the age of 18 years old responsibility for support for any former young people in the regulated supported accommodation service would be realigned to the PAs. At the age of 18 years old we would look at signing over the property and obtaining a replacement one from housing.
- 2.11 Current figures, at the time of the report have a total of 9, 16/17-year-olds living in children's homes and 57, 16/17-year-olds living independent living (flat/lodgings/friends/B&B). This total of 66 young people that possibly subject to assessment, being suitable for our in-house provisions. However, it is evident that there is a gap in what availability we have in comparison to the needs of the 16/17 cohort and therefore a requirement to increase our internal capacity
- 2.12 By providing stable housing and support to young care leavers, we can reduce the likelihood of these individuals experiencing homelessness, which carries significant impact on the children and reputational risk to RMBC. Additionally, successful outcomes for care leavers, such as higher education attainment and sustainable employment, contribute positively to the economy and society.
- 2.13 The implications for housing, is that having ten fewer properties for general needs lettings will reduce available properties for the 7,300 households on the housing register. However, given the fact that the 10 young care leavers will already be on the housing register, this should have a nil affect. There is also potential that the tenancy should be more sustainable as the young person will be supported by Children's Leaving are team before the young person becomes a tenant.

### **3. Options Considered and Recommendation**

- 3.1      • **Option 1 - Do nothing** - This is not the recommended option due to factors outlined in section 2.
- 3.2      • **Option 2 - Agreement to increase the Dispersed accommodation portfolio from 10 to 20 units (Recommendation)** This will help to ensure the young people have access to suitable accommodation.
- 3.3      It should be noted that fitting out the properties with carpets and furnishing to meet the needs of care leavers will require an initial investment £1500 - £2000. It is proposed to look at utilising Furnished House to reduce this cost. However, this can further be mitigated by potential placement savings compared to private providers and can be further mitigated by using the services of Housing who have a well-established process for their portfolio of 130 temporary accommodation properties.
- 3.4      Operational costs will increase, doubling the number of dispersed properties will naturally incur increased operational costs. This would include paying rent to the HRA and the cost of maintenance, utilities, and staffing. The current staffing levels will continually be reviewed to ensure needs are met.
- 3.5      Expanding leaving care dispersed accommodation from 10 to 20 properties represents a proactive and cost-effective approach to addressing the housing and support needs of young people transitioning from care to independent living. By investing in stable housing and tailored support services, we can empower care leavers to achieve their full potential while generating long-term savings.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1      The decision has been consulted on at the Homeless Improvement Board meetings chaired by the Assistant Director of Housing, and in the Temporary Accommodation and Homeless task groups.

### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1      Acquiring 10 additional properties will take time, so if it is approved than preferred locations will be provided to housing colleagues, and they will source the 10 HRA properties required in these locations.
- 5.2      Ongoing forecasting of young people turning 18 cohort will need to be in place to ensure that properties can be signed over or remain in the service. For the majority of our Care Leavers that choose to take over tenancy this will require a quick availability of another property to remain at 20 properties. Currently there are positive links between Housing and Hollowgate to identify new properties and had these over.
- 5.3      The Assistant Director of Housing is accountable for implementing this decision.
- 5.4      Following the decision, the dispersed portfolio of temporary accommodation will be increased by an additional 10 units.

**6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)**

- 6.1 The current average unit cost of external 16+ provision is £1,040 per week (£54k per annum per place) with 92 young people placed. The cost avoidance from use of 10 disbursed properties would equate to £10,400 per week (£542k per annum for a full year). The actual savings to the LAC placement budget would be profiled to the effective date of the placement of the identified young people in the dispersed properties.
- 6.2 Associated costs of the 10 dispersed properties relate to rent payments at an average of £92 per week (£47.6k per annum for 10 properties). At 18 it is proposed that the tenancy would transfer to the young person, where eligible housing benefit would be claimed. Council tax is payable by CYPS for any children under 18 or void properties, the current Band A charge is £1,434 per annum. The Council has a CT exemption scheme for Care Leavers aged 18-21.
- 6.3 A charge to utilities would be payable from the young person's weekly living allowance. For 16+ external providers this is capped at £15 per week.
- 6.4 As the Care Leaver will transfer the tenancy at 18 it is expected that the young person's £3000 setting Up home grant is utilised for fixtures and fittings for the property.
- 6.5 Under the tenancy agreement maintenance costs will be picked up by HRA. Any damage caused by the young person would be picked up by CYPS as is the case for all children in placement.
- 6.6 The total cost of the tenancy charged to CYPS for a 16–18-year-old Care Leaver would be circa £6.2k per annum for rent and CT at 18 with the transfer of the tenancy the care leaver would be liable for the full cost.
- 6.7 The in-house 16+ accommodation service has 9 support workers, 4 Band F (£31.6k per post) and 5 Band E (£29.9k per post) covering 9 properties at Hollowgate and the current 10 dispersed properties. Any request for more staff would be an additional cost which would require a funding solution from the wider CSC placement budget.

**7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)**

- 7.1 Increasing the Dispersed Accommodation portfolio from 10 to 20 units will help to ensure that more young people have access to suitable accommodation when they are ready to move on from Foster care and/or Residential care, whilst also enabling care leavers to remain close to family and community networks.
- 7.2 Given the growing number of young people who require support and housing, failing to increase the Dispersed Accommodation portfolio will result in increased pressure on the Council's Housing Options Service to provide 'suitable' accommodation, often at short notice, to applicable care leavers requiring homelessness assistance.

- 7.3 From 28 April 2023, supported accommodation providers in England were required to be registered with Ofsted to provide any one or all of 4 prescribed categories of supported accommodation.
- 7.4 Local authorities registered to provide supported accommodation must maintain quality standards as provided for by The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023. Failure to comply with the Regulations shall be an offence. Those found guilty of an offence under the Regulations shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine and untold reputational damage.
- 7.5 In adopting recommendation 2 and ensuring Regulation compliance with the duties set out therein, the Council will minimise any risk of legal challenge. Option 1 will leave the Council open to significant risk of legal challenge as the Council would be failing in its duties to provide suitable accommodation to young people in the Borough.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 All Housing Support worker posts are recruited to. This should be sufficient to support the increase in properties going forward. If additional resource is required to support individual young people as part of their care plans this will be considered on case-by-case basis.

## **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 9.1 The change will benefit children with safe, self-contained supported accommodation within Rotherham, and reduce the likelihood of children being placed in external residential placements.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

- 10.1 The additional properties will bring a positive impact for Care Leavers as they will be provided with fully furnished, self-contained supported accommodation.

## **11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 This proposal has no additional impact on emissions.

## **12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 There are no implications for partners.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

- 13.1 The proposed additional properties mitigate the risk that the existing provision of dispersed accommodation is insufficient to meet demand.

## **14. Accountable Officers**

- 14.1 Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health  
James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing

*Report Author:* Sandra Tolley, Head of Housing Options