

## **.Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council**

### **Response to Barnardo's Beyond care – A guide with key questions for councillors on care leavers' accommodation**

- 1. Does your council have an elected member with specific responsibility for championing the needs of looked after children and care leavers?**

Yes

Councillor Christine Beaumont, Lead member for Children's Services.

Councillor Beaumont chairs the RMBC corporate parenting panel.

Councillor Beaumont has received an introduction to the Leaving Care and Looked after Children's Team with Service Manager Maryann Barton.

- 2. Does your Corporate Parenting Board routinely consider the needs of care leavers, including their housing needs and outcomes?**

Yes

There is a quarterly report sent to Rotherham's Corporate Parenting Panel. The report identifies the accommodation and its suitability for all care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 and for the whole care leaver cohort. This is represented as a percentage in a written report which is also discussed with the members and background information is given about anyone who is not in suitable accommodation.

Further data would help the Corporate Parenting Board scrutinise the services provided and whether they meet the desired outcomes for young people. Service Manager Maryann Barton is currently working with performance and commissioning on a new data set to strengthen this.

- 3. What support is your local authority offering to young people who are waiting for the outcome of asylum decisions?**

Financial support is offered towards suitable accommodation and living allowance until all rights of appeal are exhausted and a return home is directed.

This is offered to anyone aged 16 to 21, however, the amount is based on an assessment of need. They are classed as 'former relevant' and offered an allocated Personal Advisor to support them throughout their asylum process. The Personal Advisor would also support the young person in remaining in contact with their solicitor and the Home Office until they are granted asylum or 'All Rights have been Exhausted' (ARE).

- 4. What support does your council give to care leavers who are leaving prison to access suitable housing?**

Care leavers who are leaving prison are given the same access to a leaving care service as any other young person. There would be a pathway planning meeting prior to release to identify suitable accommodation post release along with any other resources or support that may be needed.

They would be supported to meet with the Shelter Worker in the Prison, who will often be able to suggest or signpost other suitable accommodation for ex-offenders.

RMBC also have a specialist worker within the Rotherham Integrated Youth Support Service who takes the lead on accommodation for young offenders.

**5. How are Housing and Children's Services working together to meet the accommodation needs of young people including care leavers?**

The Move on Panel is led by the Homeless Manager from RMBC Housing. Its aim is to ensure that all young people, including care leavers, who move from Supported Accommodation, are ready for their own tenancy and therefore reduces the likelihood of failed first time tenancies.

Young people moving from Supported Accommodation are entitled to priority housing options in Rotherham and by ensuring they are ready for their tenancy it allows the young person to make the most of this opportunity. Care leavers have a specialist pathway, which ensures that priority status is accrued from turning 16 years and activated through the moving on process.

The Move on Panel consists of the Homeless Manager, Housing Finance Officer, Council Officer, Ward Member, Youth Offending Service Accommodation Officer and representatives from accommodation providers. All panel members are of a management level.

Young people are given the opportunity to discuss what type of accommodation they would like and how they will furnish and maintain it. What would be expected of them as an RMBC tenant is always discussed to ensure they understand the responsibilities of being a tenant. There is also an opportunity for young people to ask any questions they may have and the process of bidding for a property, should their priority be activated, is also discussed.

Care leavers are encouraged to place their name on the Council's Housing waiting list from their 16<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Their Personal Advisor is responsible for ensuring this takes place. The application is then listed with a priority category but with a status of 'suspended – not ready for independent living'. This allows the young person to gain time on the waiting list whilst they are not ready to live independently. Once their priority is activated they will have accrued a significant amount of 'waiting time' meaning that once they start bidding on properties they should be nearer the top of the list.

Although not unique to Rotherham the success of the Move on Panel is evidenced by the number of care leavers who have sustained a tenancy in their community for a period of at least 6 months. Between April 2013 and March 2104, 14 Care Leavers attended the Move on Panel. Of the fourteen young people twelve now live successfully in independence, one has returned to live with family and one has remained in supported accommodation.

The Leaving Care Accommodation Team also have close links with local Housing Champions to ensure those living in the community are supported effectively.

RMBC also has a joint protocol and practice guidance for young homeless aged 16 and 17 which offers guidance about young people leaving care.

**6. Does the Lead Member for Housing or a senior official attend your Corporate Parenting Board?**

No. There is no representative from Housing or the lead member for Housing on the Corporate Parenting Panel or in attendance.

Corporate Parenting Panel may wish to invite attendance from a senior housing officer when matters relating to care leavers are discussed.

The lead member for Housing is Councillor Maggie Godfrey.

Councillor Godfrey sat on the November 2014 Panel, however, in future Councillor Neil Hamilton will sit on the Moving on Panel which oversees the progression for all young people including care leavers into independent tenancies with RMBC.

**7. What information does your Lead Member for Housing and/or Children's Services receive from your authority about the number of young people who leave care each quarter and the accommodation they move to?**

The Corporate Parenting Panel receive information each quarter about the type and suitability of the accommodation that all care leavers live in and overall information about the leaving care cohort.

There is currently work underway to further develop the information around care leavers. This will include the type of accommodation, whether young people are in Rotherham or out of authority and where young people leave care to their own accommodation if this tenancy is maintained beyond 6 months. This will allow the Lead Members to better scrutinise and challenge the services being provided to ensure they meet the needs of our young people.

**8. How many of the care leavers in your area are housed in "suitable accommodation"?**

Currently 96% are in suitable accommodation. The 4% who are not in suitable accommodation represents 3 young people who are in custody and 1 staying with friends on their sofa – this young person has been offered referrals and support to access supported accommodation but has declined and chooses to remain with friends, they are over 18.

Updated information is provided each quarter to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

**9. How stringent are the checks that your authority makes on care leavers' accommodation?**

The leaving care service has long standing links with a number of accommodation providers in Rotherham.

Accommodation providers for young people within Rotherham are all monitored by Supporting people and are therefore subject to their contract monitoring and quality assessment framework.

As good practice leaving care personal advisors take photos and complete an inventory alongside the young person when they move into and out of any accommodation. This includes student accommodation for care leavers.

The Personal Adviser and Social Worker visit all young people's placements and report back any concerns to their team manager.

Concerns would be discussed between the young person, leaving care team and the provider and if the concern is not addressed then the young person would be found a more suitable placement and young people would not be placed there again.

The placement provider will not receive any payment until the Personal Advisor is happy that the accommodation is suitable.

Where a young person is over the age of 18 and is responsible for funding their own accommodation the leaving care team would still advocate and support the young person to raise any concerns with accommodation with the provider but the choice to move remains with the young person as they are the tenant/ Licensee

Personal Advisors have excellent links with the local Housing Champions to ensure that young people in the community have access to support to address any concerns.

The White Rose group now consists of all the West and South Yorkshire Authorities as well as York, Hull and North East Lincs. We have previously awarded tenders for independent residential and fostering providers. Post 16 accommodation is the next accommodation type in that process. The tender went out for four categories of support,

- 1 – Group Living
- 2 – Supported Tenancy (Floating support and accommodation)
- 3 – Supported Lodgings Accommodation
- 4 – Floating Support Only

Tenders have been received and scored with the whole process being co-ordinated by Leeds. We are awaiting information from Leeds on which were the successful providers in each category as they are just about at the point of sending letters out to providers to notify them. Whilst we are signed up to the framework and have participated in the process to date including the tender scoring we are under no obligation to use the framework. It will depend on how local the successful providers are to Rotherham, their prices and capacity but it may well at the very least be another set of opportunities in terms of options for young people.

**10. Does your social housing allocation policy prioritise care leavers, including those who have been placed in care out of your area?**

As per the information in question 5 care leavers are given priority status within Rotherham. Unfortunately if a young person wishes to access social housing out of our area (for example following a placement out of area) we have no jurisdiction over this.

Our Social Workers and Personal Advisors would always advocate on behalf of the young person and if there is a local connection (e.g. through a family member) this along with their care leaver status would always be highlighted to the relevant housing officer. Housing Officers are also reminded of their duty towards care leavers in that they are classed as vulnerable young adults.

**11. How many care leavers in your area have spent time in a B&B all-age hostel during the year?**

Two care leavers (siblings), one over 18 the other under 18, were placed in B&B accommodation for 1 night by The City of Lincoln Council Housing Department following a breakdown in the family home. They returned home the next day. Three care leavers have accessed an all-age hostel in the last year. All 3 of these young people were over 18 and there was a detailed support plan including daily contact with them for the period of their stay in the hostel.

**12. How many B&B placements have been for an emergency (only a few days)? Were any for longer than 28 days?**

Both care leavers placed in a B&B were for a short period and certainly no longer than 28 days.

**13. Which departments in your council are placing care leavers in B&Bs and other unsuitable emergency housing?**

RMBC have not placed any care leavers in B&Bs and the decision to place a young person in unsuitable accommodation would be a joint decision between Housing and Social Care when all other options have been exhausted.

RMBC provides 4 emergency beds for young homeless.

**14. Are there approval procedures in place to assess the safeguarding or other risks of emergency accommodation?**

We have good links with some emergency providers in the area and maintain regular communication even if not in use. Personal Advisors would visit the accommodation to ensure it is safe for a care leaver.

The Service Manager would need to approve any emergency placement and the Director safeguarding and families would need to authorise any B and B placement.

Any safeguarding issues or other risks identified to the care leaver would be shared with the placement provider as a priority. Where possible the young person is taken to the accommodation and it is checked as being appropriate. This placement is then reviewed daily, with daily contact to the young person to ensure they are safe and well.

In Rotherham we have an agreement with a local hostel that no under 18's will share a room and where possible over 18's will not be asked to share. All care leavers are highlighted as vulnerable to all hostel staff.

**15. What support does your council offer to young people as they leave care to live independently?**

The Personal Adviser would ensure that Pathway Planning continues once they have left care and whilst they are still under the service and living independently. They would also support the building up of independent living skills and ensure they have access to their Leaving Care Grant to purchase any items needed for their tenancy.

As per question 5 care leavers are given a priority status and can accrue waiting time from their 16<sup>th</sup> Birthday to ensure that once their priority is activated they can locate somewhere much quicker.

We have an ongoing partnership with RMBC Housing and are currently looking to expand our number of dispersed properties. These properties are owned by RMBC Housing but as a service the Leaving Care Team manages who the tenants are. This allows us to prioritise care leavers and ensure their first tenancy in the community is in a suitable and supportive location.

It also gives young people who may like to live together for financial and emotional support the opportunity to see whether this is a suitable option without losing their priority status or feeling restricted to a tenancy agreement they are not happy with.

Young people are normally offered a dispersed property for 6 months with the potential to extend for 6 months whilst they are bidding on their own property. Young people who sign up for a dispersed property must also accept floating support for the duration of their tenancy.

Staff from our two Semi-Independent units for care leavers offer a specific floating supporting service to young people leaving care who have recently made the transition to independence. This service supports with the setting up of the tenancy, moving in, arranging utilities, developing independent living skills and ensuring access is available to any other services as needed. The young people on floating support are also encouraged to make sure their accommodation is safe and secure. This service can also be offered up to 25 even if they have been closed to the rest of the Leaving Care service.

The Leaving Care Accommodation Team along with young people in the service have developed an independent living skills toolkit entitled the Moving on Toolkit. The toolkit is a set of modules that allows young people to build up a written portfolio of the independent living skills they have developed whilst being supported by the Leaving Care Accommodation Service. This portfolio has been developed by staff and young people from within the Leaving Care Service.

It covers the following areas:

**Safe and Well**

- Healthy Lifestyles
- Keeping Safe
- Cleaning your Home

**Personal Issues**

- Personal Hygiene
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Contraception
- Pregnancy and Unplanned Pregnancy

**Education, Employment and Training**

**Benefits**

**Housing**

- What type of accommodation is best for you?
- Your Neighbourhood
- Dealing with Conflict
- Your Rights
- Tenancy Agreement
- Eviction
- Homelessness
- Cost of moving out - what will you need?
- Bills
- Budgeting

The toolkit is developed so that it can be done in small sections over a longer period of time to meet the needs of everyone in the service.

The completed toolkit is presented as evidence of their independent living skills to the Rotherham Move on Panel as outlined in question 5.

**16. What continued support does your council have in place to help care leavers manage their private or social tenancies and move towards independence?**

The Leaving Care Floating Support Service is offered for up to two years from signing up to the service. Once our Floating Support Service is withdrawn they are always linked in with their local Housing Champion for any future problems. If there are still outstanding concerns then the young person can be referred to alternative floating support services funded through Supporting People. The young person can also be referred back to the Move on Panel for support and guidance.

**17. Are there exemptions to council tax for care leavers?**

Care Leavers are not exempt from council tax, however for those in independent accommodation who are in full time education, employment or training a discretionary payment can be made to ensure they can remain in placement and not be financially out of pocket for accessing the right services to better themselves. This will not cover the full cost of the council tax but will be in addition to a contribution made by the young person based on their overall income. This is only available to Care Leavers in council accommodation.

**17. Are care leavers given priority for discretionary housing payment in your area?**

No - All care leavers who are eligible are supported to apply for discretionary housing payments (DHP). Each application is then accessed based on their level of need. Their tenancy Support Worker or Personal Adviser will always advocate on their behalf as a care leaver.

Priority for care leavers to access DHP was sought when the additional bedroom charge was bought in but we were unable to secure this. Local letting policy has since been changed to ensure that single young people cannot access a property that is larger than their need.

**18. How many care leavers make a homeless application in your area and how many are accepted? What support is available for those who are not accepted?**

Between April 2013 and March 2014 two 16 or 17 years olds were accepted as homeless. Also in this period three young people formally in care were accepted as homeless. Between April 2014 and June 2014 1 young person aged 16 or 17 was accepted as homeless.

For care leavers who are not accepted or are found to be intentionally homeless the leaving care service still has a duty to find accommodation for them. Discretionary payments can be made by the leaving care team to assist with accommodation.

**19. How many care leavers in your area were found to be intentionally homeless last year?**

In the last twelve months three young people applied for homelessness support and were found to be intentionally homeless.

Reasons found to be intentionally homeless

- Charged with assaulting his partner who was a fellow resident in semi-independent accommodation
- Violent threats towards fellow residents and staff in semi-independent accommodation
- Significant property damage and threatening behaviour towards staff and other young people

All 3 young people were supported by the leaving care team to consider accommodation options.

**20. What procedures are in place to help keep care leavers away from having to make a formal homelessness application?**

All care leavers have an accommodation section within their Pathway Plan which includes alternative accommodation to wherever they are placed. There is good practice amongst the Personal Advisers to ensure that all young people have contingency referrals in place regarding accommodation and that the suitability and placement on

waiting lists is reviewed in line with the Pathway Plan. All care leavers are encouraged to have a referral into our own semi-independent accommodation and floating support. To avoid homelessness a young person can also be supported to activate their priority for social housing via the Move on Panel. The Move on Panel can also be an arena for professionals to discuss problematic cases.

**21. Do care leavers have easy access to the services and support available for young homeless people in your authority?**

All homeless care leavers would be supported to access any services appropriate to young people in Rotherham but with additional support from their Personal Adviser or Social Worker.

One of our Semi-independent units also has a 16-18 year old Homeless bed which is a joint initiative between Social Care and Rotherham Housing. This can be stayed in for a maximum of 33 working days to allow the allocated social worker time to assess the young person's needs and find them suitable long term accommodation.

As an alternative if this bed space is full, there are 3 emergency beds that the homeless team can request access to via another provider at Rush House.

**Maryann Barton, Service Manager, Looked after Children and Care Leavers Team**

**Claire Papka, Team Manager, Care Leavers Accommodation Service**