	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 24 July 2019
	<b>Report from the Strategic Director,  Children and Young People</b>
<b>Update on Semi-independent Provision for looked after children and care leavers (requested by CPC at a previous meeting)</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	ALL
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	n/a
<b>Background Papers:</b>	
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## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee with an overview of semi-independent provision commissioned by the council to accommodate looked after children (LAC) aged 16-18 and care leavers. It provides information on the quality assurance of commissioned services, including findings from a recent multi-agency quality assurance audit.

## 2.0 Recommendations

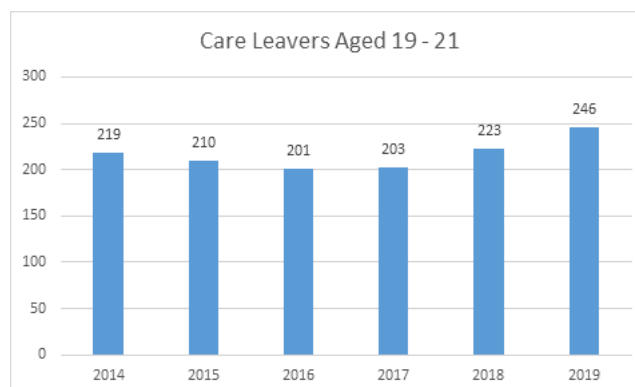
- 2.1 Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report.

### 3.0 Detail

#### Background

- 3.1 In accordance with the Children Act 1989 and 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017, local authorities have a duty to assess and meet the needs of young people aged 16+ who are looked after and who are care leavers. Wherever the young person lives, local authorities have a duty to maintain contact with care leavers until they are at least 21 (although care leavers can request support up to age 25). It is the local authority's responsibility to ensure all LAC and care leavers are properly prepared for transition to adulthood in a planned and effective way to achieve the best possible outcomes for the individual young person.
- 3.2 To support this duty, the council commissions a range of semi-independent living accommodations for looked after children aged 16–18 and care leavers aged 18–21, as an alternative to staying put arrangements in foster placements or as a step-down from residential provision. This kind of accommodation is not regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000 and, as a result, it is not inspected by Ofsted.
- 3.3 The profile of Brent's LAC population points to increasing demand for semi-independent provision. The number of young people in Brent placed in semi-independent provision has risen from 90 in April 2016 to 147 in April 2019, of whom 60 were LAC and 87 were aged 18+ (care leavers or young people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)). Currently there are 62 LAC and 81 care leavers or young people with NRPF placed in semi-independent provision. It is anticipated that demand will continue to grow, given an increase in the number of young people entering care in their teenage years, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The graph below shows the number of 19-21-year-old care leavers at April for the past 5 years, and this year's provisional number.

Graph 1: Care Leavers aged 19-21



## **Commissioning of Semi-Independent Placements**

- 3.4 The range of semi-independent placements that the council commissions includes supported placements that have 24-hour onsite support, shared placements with different levels of day time support and independent accommodation with floating/visiting support. Brent commissions many semi-independent placements through a contract framework established by the West London Alliance, a commissioning partnership of local authorities comprising Brent, Barnet, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea councils. Brent also spot-purchases placements outside of this framework. At any point in time the local authority commissions placements from around 30 providers.
- 3.5 The type of semi-independent placement commissioned is based on assessment of the needs of the individual young person. Brent expects all semi-independent providers to work with young people to provide a settled and safe environment, supporting access to education, employment or training and to help young people build a range of life skills within a supportive environment that will enable them to make a successful transition to independence. Brent's care leavers placed in semi-independent provision are supported to move into their own tenancies only when they are considered to be ready. This approach has enabled Brent young people to successfully maintain their tenancies. Over the past two years, there have been no tenancy breakdowns among the care leaver population living in Brent.
- 3.6 Semi-independent accommodations play a key part in helping Brent to manage the risks of serious youth violence and are key partners in Brent's contextual safeguarding approach. The challenges of safeguarding incidents, related to county lines, knife crime and the risks of vulnerable young people missing from care, require agencies, including semi-independent providers to collaborate and work together in identifying and implementing models of intervention to address these concerns which are often related to drugs or postcode rivalry. Training was provided to semi-independent providers in January 2019 in collaboration with the Metropolitan Police to enable them to have a greater understanding of Contextual Safeguarding and peer-on-peer abuse.
- 3.7 Brent awarded a block contract to Centrepont in July 2018 for the provision of up to 60 placements, subject to identification of suitable properties. Having a strong supplier relationship with Centrepont enables greater influence over the quality of the provision Brent's young people can access. Centrepont currently provides 20 placements, 5 of which are high support placements. Expanding placements at Centrepont will mean that this provision will deliver the Council's core semi-independent accommodation offer to achieve the following outcomes:
- Increasing placement stability for young people;
  - Increasing young people's life skills to enable successful move on to their own council tenancy or other long-term housing solution;
  - Reducing the proportion of 16-18 year olds, who are not in education, employment or training (NEET);

- Increasing the percentage of young people participating in learning, activity and sport;
  - Improving emotional health and wellbeing of care leavers
- 3.8 In a survey carried out in 2018 Brent care leavers ranked Centrepont as the number one provider for quality of accommodation and services. The Centrepont service provides added value to the young people placed in the provision including:
- A Health and Wellbeing Team that provide young people with access to a health needs assessment, drug and alcohol interventions, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Drama Therapy and Art Therapy
  - Mentoring through an accredited Mentoring programme
  - A range of support and skills development services, for example functional skills courses, English language courses for UASC, careers information advice and guidance and financial skills courses.

### **Quality Assurance of Semi Independent provision**

- 3.9 There are no regulatory or national minimum standards for what constitutes “good” quality semi-independent provision. As this kind of accommodation is unregulated, local authorities determine their own quality assurance processes. Unregulated provision is allowed in law and is for children usually over the age of 16 who need support to live independently rather than needing full-time care.
- 3.10 Brent’s current quality assurance framework involves a range of technical and compliance quality assurance checks that aim to ensure that young people are living in a safe, clean environment and have appropriate support to meet their needs. When considering placing a young person in a semi-independent provision, the Children and Young People Commissioning Team discusses safeguarding information, including information about other young people placed in the provision, with the placement to ensure appropriate matching. Where placements are being considered in semi-independent settings that have not been used before, references are sought from two other local authorities who have placed children there alongside the Brent quality assurance checks.
- 3.11 The local authority undertakes a rolling programme of quality assurance visits to semi-independent providers, which includes seeking feedback from young people. The key focus for site visits is to assess the standard/condition of the accommodation, review staff records and supervision records, and review how the young person is being supported to achieve positive outcomes, for example if they have been registered with a GP, dentist and optician. Qualitative measures, such as how well the provider knows the young person and their goals and achievements, are also assessed. An action plan is agreed with the provider to address any identified concerns. In the last quality assurance round, 3 of 11 providers visited were asked to undertake actions to improve the quality of provision. Examples of improvement actions include ensuring that training and supervision records are up-to-date and ensuring that key worker

sessions happen in a timely way. The local authority has also implemented a provider self-evaluation process from July 2019 which will be used regularly to assess providers against Brent's standards.

- 3.12 Providers are also expected to provide regular placement progress reports to the young person's social worker that detail the support and care provided. Social workers and personal advisers play a key role in the quality assurance of provision through their regular visits to young people every 4 or 6 weeks, feeding back both positive observations and any concerns to the CYP Commissioning Team.
- 3.13 A multi-agency audit (local authority and Brent CCG) was undertaken of 3 semi-independent providers, including Centrepont, between September 2018 to February 2019. The audit found that young people interviewed confirmed that they were being prepared for independent living. All young people were registered with a GP, dentist and optician. 80% were in some form of education, employment or training. One provider used a personal outcomes framework for each young person that set out how they would be supported to transition to adulthood. In terms of facilities, all properties complied with Health and Safety requirements.
- 3.14 The audit also identified a number of areas for improvement. The audit found inconsistency in the quality of accommodation across the sample of units, for example not all provided access to desks and computer facilities to support personal study. The accommodation of one provider was considered to be of poor quality and actions were taken by the provider to improve this quality, including to install a new shared bathroom and kitchen.
- 3.15 Whilst all three providers supplied evidence that young people were supported in preparing for adulthood, not all providers had a *structured* programme that prepares young people for adulthood and independence and a framework that sets out how young people will be supported to be healthy and to participate in activities and opportunities aimed at improving young people's self-esteem, confidence and economic well-being. Providers are being supported to develop structured frameworks by signposting to good examples when these are not in place.
- 3.16 There was variability in how young people's health needs are supported. Contract requirements that all staff are fully aware of the health plans and medical needs of each young person have been clarified, as has the requirement that social workers and personal advisors are kept fully abreast of young people's health needs so that they can ensure that relevant multi-agency professionals are working together to provide holistic support. Through the audit process, health colleagues have recommended that staff and all young people have access to the 'NHS go' App that provides health information and information about local clinics, A/E, NHS walk-in health centres, alcohol, drug and substance misuse services, services related to mental health and emotional well-being and one stop information services. Information regarding this App has been circulated to providers.

## **4.0 Future developments**

- 4.1 To ensure providers understand the needs of Brent's young people and the local authority's expectations of providers, Brent engages with semi-independent providers in six-monthly provider forums. This is a multi-agency forum and a range of topics are discussed. For example, in previous sessions the police have delivered a presentation on safeguarding with respect to CSE and the LAC and Permanency Service delivered a session on planning the transition to adulthood. The next forum is scheduled for September 2019, which will have a focus on quality assurance, pathway plans and keywork support.
- 4.2 The local authority is working with Barnardo's on a project that will support consistent commissioning of high quality semi-independent provision for looked after children and care leavers to improve their life chances. The project has a number of objectives:
- To develop a quality assurance approach that is informed throughout by care experienced young people operating as 'experts by experience'.
  - To develop an understanding of the providers that can meet Brent's requirements to inform future commissioning and thereby narrow the number of providers the local authority commissions, which will give the local authority greater influence over quality.
- 4.3 This project will involve close working with young people currently or previously placed in semi-independent accommodation to understand their views of placements in terms of the quality of the accommodation and support available (eg. staff/the role of the key worker). At every stage of the project, the roles that care experienced young people can play will be considered – for example helping to draft standards, undertaking quality assurance evaluations of providers, operating as an advisory board to inform commissioning and ensuring real time feedback on current places.
- 4.4 Brent Commissioning Team is working with the WLA to further develop high quality semi-independent provision through a Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV).
- 4.5 At a national level, Ministers have asked local authorities to ensure that they are meeting their statutory responsibilities to ensure that the accommodation used is suitable and to ensure that young people are getting the support they need, including safeguards when they are placed out of area. There have also been calls for the DfE to consider regulating semi-independent provision to ensure that there is consistently high-quality provision across the system. However, there are concerns that this could reduce choice and capacity or increase costs. Brent is contributing to some research that Sir Alan Wood, Chair of the Residential Care Leadership Board, is leading on the use of semi-independent provision to increase understanding of the drivers behind an increase in its use and of the challenges that local authorities are facing.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

The financial cost (excluding staffing costs) associated with Brent's looked after children and care leavers consists primarily of the cost of placements, and of the statutory and discretionary spend incurred supporting those young people, as outlined in the Looked After Children Offer and Care Leavers Offer. The budgeted expenditure in 2018-19 for placements of looked after children (LAC) and care leavers was £13.1m compared to the actual expenditure of £15.0m. The 2019-20 expenditure budget for placements is £13.9m.

**Report sign off:**

**GAIL TOLLEY**

Strategic Director, Children and  
Young People