

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Specialist accommodation</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 March 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

- 1.1. Increasing in-borough local and affordable housing options for children leaving care and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds to support their transition in adulthood and independence.
- 1.2. This programme of work will enable WBC to meet its statutory obligations by accommodating Wokingham's care leavers in suitable local provision enabling them to retain local links and family relationships and reduce use of temporary and Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 1.3. This programme of work aligns with the strategic direction of Children's Services and Housing Services by creating local provision for children leaving care and care leavers ensuring the Council fulfils its duties as a Corporate Parent.
- 1.4. Localised provision will create a more graduated pathway towards independence for young people by creating stability and affording them the opportunity to maintain local employment, remain in local schools/colleges and maintain relationships with primary and secondary health services.
- 1.5. The Council will be able to closely monitor, and quality assure the service through direct contract management, regular contract monitoring and quality assurance reviews ensuring value for money.
- 1.6. Increasing localised provision will reduce WBCs expenditure on semi-independent (SIL) placements that are currently commissioned from external private providers.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1. It is recommended that Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report and supports the programme of work outlined below.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

- 3.1. The purpose of this paper is to inform Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the programme of work in relation to improving housing options and provision for children leaving care and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds within the borough of Wokingham.
- 3.2. Local Authorities have a duty to accommodate all homeless 16- and 17-year-olds and care leavers (16 and older) under statutory legislation (The Children Act 1989,

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000, Children and Social Work Act 2017, Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homeless (Priority Need) Order 2002).

3.3. At present, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) does not have enough localised housing options for care leavers and young people. A programme of work has been established in order to address this need by providing housing and support for young people, more specifically care leavers and homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

3.4. Increasing provision for these two cohorts is being undertaken in a phased approach (outlined below).

3.5. Current in borough housing provision for Young People:

3.6. WBC has one property situated in central Wokingham which provides accommodation and support for Young People aged 16 – 25.

3.7. The accommodation provides:

- Two self-contained one-person bedsit flats that have their own access, kitchen, cooking areas and recreational and en-suite facilities.
- seven individual bedrooms that have en-suite facilities but share kitchen and recreational facilities within the main building.

3.8. This property provides excellent accommodation and support for young people in Wokingham however more of this housing is required in order to meet demand and to ensure that our young people can remain in Wokingham Borough.

3.9. More specifically there is a need to provide housing for two groups of young people: care leavers aged 16 – 25 and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.

Phase 1: Housing and Support for Care Leavers aged 16 – 21 (complete)

3.10. Officers across the council have been working together to increase local in-borough and affordable semi-independent accommodation specifically for Care Leavers aged 16 – 21.

3.11. Housing and support will be provided in borough to ensure that children leaving care are able to remain local and maintain local networks and services

3.12. It will also ensure that the council are able to provide an effective transition to adulthood and independence for children leaving care.

3.13. A property located in central Wokingham underwent significant renovation in 2021 and has been remodelled and extended to provide accommodation for 7 young people.

3.14. A support Provider, Two Saints, have been commissioned by WBC to provide 24/7 onsite support

3.15. The property and support service officially opened in February 2022 and occupation of the property is underway.

Phase 2: Housing and Support for Care Leavers 18+ and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds

3.16. A site in central Wokingham was purchased by WBC in 2021 to provide further housing and support for young people.

3.17. A feasibility study of the site has recently been commissioned

3.18. A business case is currently in development which will incorporate a needs assessment to determine the exact specification of the building.

3.19. Capital money has been identified to undertake the renovations required in order to make this property fit for purpose

A timeline is currently being drafted but it is anticipated that the property will be ready for occupation in the summer of 2023

## Background

### Phase 1: Housing and Support for Care Leavers aged 16 – 21 (complete)

- 4.1. In 2019 the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in discussions with Children's Services identified a property which could provide supported housing for young people (care leavers aged 16 – 21).
- 4.2. Renovation of the property commenced in early 2021 and work was completed in the Autumn of 2021. This property is located in central Wokingham.
- 4.3. In 2021 'Two Saints' (support provider) were awarded a contract to provide a 24/7 support service based at the property.
- 4.4. Two Saints have been commissioned to:
  - Provide accommodation-based support and an effective transition to adulthood and independence for children in care and care leavers aged 16 – 21.
  - Ensure that young people have a safe place to live and access to appropriate support.
  - Improve the physical, emotional, and mental health of young people and ensure that they can access relevant universal and specialist services as and when necessary.
  - Ensure that young people are prepared for future independent living
  - Ensure that young people have a good understanding of finances and can manage their own and budget effectively
  - Enable young people in Wokingham to achieve their optimal potential
  - Ensure that young people are fully supported to engage in appropriate education, training, or employment
- 4.5. The support contract was awarded to Two Saints via a robust and competitive procurement process for up to 3 years at the cost of approximately £216,000 per year.
- 4.6. The support contract will be monitored closely at set quarterly intervals. The performance of the service will be subject to a robust performance and outcome framework ensuring quality service provision, high performance and value for money.
- 4.7. The property is able to provide accommodation-based support for up to 7 young people.
- 4.8. The accommodation consists of:
  - 4 bedrooms with ensuite facilities, and 3 self-contained bedsits. There is a shared kitchen and lounge.
  - A staff office as well as provision for staff to sleep at the service. There is the option to offer the staffing sleep in area as emergency accommodation (crash pad). This will be in addition to the other 7 placements.
  - A purpose-built training and meeting room which is separate to the main building. This is located at the rear of the property as a separate outbuilding. It is proposed that this will be a multi-functioning space,

operating as a meeting room, a base to deliver relevant training and potentially as a hub for care leavers.

4.9. The 'service' officially opened in February 2022. Care leavers are in the process of moving into the property.

### **Phase 2: Housing and Support for Care Leavers 18+ and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds**

4.10. In recognition that Phase 1 provided accommodation to a specific cohort of young people (care leavers aged 16 – 21), a further site was purchased by WBC in 2021 in order to increase housing options for older care leavers (18+) and homeless 16-and17-year olds.

4.11. Capital money (approximately £840,000) to undertake significant renovations to the building was also identified in order to make the building fit for purpose and extend the current property.

4.12. A feasibility study has recently been commissioned in order to review the property and provide an understanding of what potential the site could deliver.

4.13. A business case is currently in development to ensure appropriate governance and oversight of:

- a WBC asset
- the building and renovation programme of work
- a robust needs assessment which evidences the need for this provision (in the context of changing, dynamic and growing need)
- value for money
- delivery of good outcomes for young people

4.14. A number of teams across the council are involved in this programme of work: Children's Services, Commissioning, Housing and Place as well as Operational Property. This ensures a co-ordinated and strategic approach.

4.15. The timeline for this project is currently being scoped but it is anticipated that the property will be ready for occupation in the Summer of 2023.

4.16. Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report and progress being made

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£27,000 (part year of Support Contract, Phase 1)		Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£216,000 (Support Contract, Phase 1)		Revenue
	£840,000 (Property)		Capital

	renovation, Phase 2)		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£216,000 (Support Contract, Phase 1)  Support costs information for Phase 2 have not yet been determined		Revenue

<p><b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b></p> <p>Phase 1 To provide 24/7 support at the property costs approximately £216,000 per annum.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the programme of work will support Children’s Services to manage costs in relation to the decreasing availability of semi – independent private accommodation for young people as demand on services across the country continues to increase.</p> <p>By developing council owned provision, it enables Children’s Services to reduce exposure to inflated prices of external provision born out of a lack of supply. It also ensures better placement options for children and young people.</p> <p>The purchase and renovation of the property was funded via the Housing revenue Account.</p> <p>Phase 2 An allocation of £10,000 has been assigned to the feasibility study of the site.</p>
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<p><b>Cross-Council Implications</b> (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)</p> <p>Children’s Services, Housing and Place are working closely together to ensure that the delivery of work identified above is approached strategically and is effectively co-ordinated to ensure that the council is making the best use of its assets and resources in the interests and benefits of the young people in the borough. This workstream is aligned to the Children’s Services Strategy, Housing Strategy, and the Corporate Plan.</p>
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<p><b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b></p> <p>Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.</p>
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<p><b>Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i></b></p> <p>As part of our plans to become Carbon Net Zero by 2030, WBC continue to build and refurbish buildings so they are as energy efficient as possible. This latest supported accommodation (phase 1) is no different and, in fact, is the first council building to be rated A on its Energy Performance Certificate. The building has been redesigned so it reduces CO2 emissions by 38%. Tesla Powerall batteries have been installed, which store electricity from the roof’s solar panels, meaning the building is self-sufficient for</p>
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electricity. There is no gas-powered equipment in the property so the gas supply has been removed, greatly improving the carbon footprint. There is also a 20,000-litre tank in garden to store rainwater for re-use when flushing the toilet and there are air source heat pumps for underfloor heating and hot water.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>

<b>List of Background Papers</b>

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