

Report Title: Care experienced housing

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update in regards to the needs of care experienced young people

Summary

Access to a stable and permanent accommodation is an urgent need for Torbay's care experienced young people; this is one of their base needs, and often is the foundation of stability that they need to be able to achieve their potential and achieve a sense of safety.

At the end of the year 23/24 the performance evidences that 81% Torbay's care experienced young people were assessed as living in suitable accommodation. This compares to the 2021-22 national figure of 88% and statistical neighbour comparator for that year of 90%. Children's Services continue to offer a range of accommodation and placements to cared for and care experienced young people aged 16-25. As of the 13th May 2024, this includes:

- 38 fostering placements (both in-house and independent fostering placements);
- 3 residential placements;
- 15 spot purchased semi-independent placements;
- 52 units of supported semi-independent accommodation through a commissioned block contract, with 2 of these vacant at the point of writing the report.

This totals 117 individual units; in addition, we have 24 care experienced young people in Staying Put arrangements.

We are working with the TDA on an opportunity for six care experienced young people to access further transitional accommodation with support as part of their permanence accommodation journey.

There are two current vacancies within the block contract, with all vacancies linked to identified cared for or care experienced young people.

Only four care experienced are currently in temporary accommodation, demonstrating a significant reduction from earlier this financial year, when we had a high of seven in temporary accommodation; This is tracked on a weekly basis, and all of these young people have oversight of the DCS and senior leadership team through Independent Placement Overview Panel (IPOP). We are also seeing a continued reduction of care experienced young people being tracked through Youth Homelessness Panel, compared with previous years.

On the 3rd May 2024, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DFE) published updates on several key areas in regards to the housing and

accommodation of care experienced young people as part of their three step approach:

1. **Preventing care experienced homelessness:** DLUHC has updated the Homelessness Code of Guidance to strengthen their expectation that all local authorities should develop a joint housing protocol. DLUHC have also updated the good practice guidance, which can support local authorities with the development of joint housing protocols. Whilst this is in place in Torbay, and reviewed annually, there is a need to update it further considering the proposed changes to governance as outlined below.
2. **Intentional homelessness decisions for care experienced young people are exceptional:** both departments have outlined a clear expectation that local authorities should avoid the impact of intentionally homeless decisions wherever possible. The Homelessness Code of Guidance has been updated to clarify that, when a housing authority is considering whether a care experienced young person has become homeless intentionally, the local authority should be satisfied that the support and accommodation provided has met the care experienced young person's need needs. Whilst recognising that in rare situations, a decision of intentionality may be necessary where all other avenues have been exhausted, local authorities must have regard to vulnerability of care experienced young people and the lack of parental support and stability that would ordinarily be provided to young people, when considering accountability. Intentional homeless decisions in respect of care experienced young people should therefore be exceptional. This is not yet the case in Torbay.
3. **Increasing governance in respect of intentional homelessness decisions for care experienced young people:** there is now an expectation for local authorities to increase governance around intentional homelessness decisions for experienced young people by updating their joint protocol to include arrangements for senior leader level sign off, for example Director or Assistant Director, from **both** housing and children's services for any intentional homelessness decisions for care experienced young people. This will increase governance around negative decisions and ensure that all appropriate checks are in place and interventions have been considered. As part of this sign off, senior leaders should review the circumstances that have led to the decision. Whilst this sign off exists in Torbay, it is from Children's only, with oversight of all care experienced young people in temporary accommodation (for any reason) reported on weekly and discussed in the Independent Placement Overview Panel chaired by the DCS on a fortnightly basis. There is a need therefore to ensure that there is replicable accountability and responsibility from Housing as part of this decision-making process.

2. Recommendations

*Endorsement of a joint update to the Youth Homelessness joint protocol by Children's and Housing, to incorporate the proposals to amend governance processes outlined in this report. This will include an agreed process for senior leader sign off of intentional homeless decisions from both Housing and Children's.

*All further updates in regards to care experienced and housing/accommodation should be jointly authored by Children's and Housing, to further enhance joint working and responsibility.