

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: CARE LEAVERS SERVICE

Date considered: 7 APRIL 2022

Introduction

1. On Monday, 4 April 2022, the Committee met with care leavers to discuss their needs and the support they receive. Feedback was mixed, with most care leavers highlighting quality, timely support as well as times where they could have been better supported.
2. On Thursday, 7 April 2022, the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Member for Children and Families and senior officers regarding the Care Leavers service, in response to an Ofsted monitoring visit in September 2021. Questioning focused on the needs of, and support available to, care leavers and the pressures on the Service, in particular:
 - unaccompanied asylum-seeking looked after children and care leavers, including numbers, specific needs and support and funding;
 - supported and independent accommodation, including the suitability of accommodation, procurement, capital investment, collaboration with partners and the transitions from care and between accommodation types;
 - the cost of living, including the impact of rising energy prices;
 - support for young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, include those who are not care leavers;
 - personal advisors, including their caseloads and capacity to support care leavers promptly and effectively, workforce stability and duty arrangements;
 - pathway planning; and
 - the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of, and support for, care leavers.
3. A Member asked whether, in the context of the drive for net zero carbon emissions, the publication of the Government's Energy Security Strategy and rising energy and living costs, the council maintained a register of the energy efficiency of care leavers' accommodation and whether, where care leavers were placed in less-energy-efficient accommodation, they could be supported with meeting costs. The Committee heard that there were not any minimum requirements in respect of individual properties but in support of social value commitments, some accommodation providers had begun to issue 'smart meters' to young people, although it was acknowledged by witnesses that this did not address the issue entirely; and also that if a service user did experience financial hardship, they could raise it with their personal advisor and may receive additional support.

4. In response, the Member asked how much it cost to heat care leavers' homes and if that was not known, that the council collect the available data; however, the Committee was told that the relevant teams were not adequately resourced or suitably structured to prioritise that work, although it was accepted that the energy efficiency of accommodation would need to be given consideration in the future by the Greener Futures teams.

Recommendation

The Select Committee makes the following recommendation:

That the Corporate Parenting Service work with the Council's Greener Futures Team to understand the energy efficiency of current care leavers accommodation and opportunities for its improvement, and seek to place care leavers in energy efficient accommodation wherever possible going forward.

Liz Bowes

Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee

Cabinet response

The Corporate Parenting and Commissioning services welcome the Select Committee's recommendation, which supports the Council's overall priority to enable a greener future for Surrey. They remain committed to reducing the environmental impact of the accommodation and support we commission for care leavers, within the resources available. As explored in the Select Committee, this ambition needs to be balanced with our statutory responsibilities to ensure care leavers can access appropriate accommodation that meets their needs – but it is positive to note the alignment between reducing our environmental impact and work to enable more care leavers to live in or close to Surrey, as set out our [Looked after Children and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy](#).

Initial links have already been made with the Greener Futures team, which has led to the promotion of the [Low Carbon Across the South and East \(LOCASE\)](#) to supported accommodation providers that partner with SCC, as well as improvements to strengthen consideration of environmental impact as part of the recent supported accommodation block contract tender, through bidders' social value submissions.

In response to the Select Committee's recommendation, officers from Corporate Parenting and Commissioning are strengthening existing links with the Greener Futures Team and will be reviewing the current arrangements in place for care leaver accommodation to identify any additional steps we can take to further support our ambition for a greener future. They aim to provide an update on this during the summer.

Clare Curran

Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Background papers: [Item 5, Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee, 7 April 2022.](#)