

Executive summary

The Care Leaver Team at Cambridgeshire County Council propose that surplus County Council properties be used as short term accommodation for care leavers.

We'd like to discuss how this could be managed and / or where it could sit with existing housing provision.

1. Context

When children in care reach the age of 18 they often experience challenges finding appropriate housing. Certain care leavers are better suited to accommodation that incorporates housing related support or on site support. However the demand is greater than supply of this form of housing within the county.

Therefore eligible individuals that ideally require this kind of housing due to their need can accept other forms of housing only to experience negative outcomes. Importantly, the provision of inappropriate housing for this cohort can significantly increase their risk of homelessness.

2. Proposed solution

On an ad hoc basis, residential properties owned by the county council become designated as surplus and eligible for disposal.

We propose that suitable properties are used as short term accommodation for care leavers. Councils in Bedford and Northamptonshire are successfully running similar schemes with care leavers.

3. Benefits and outcomes

1. There is not currently any accommodation of this kind available in the county, so this scheme would provide a safety net for at-risk individuals.
2. This provision will mean that care leavers have stability in provision and stay connected to their communities (rather than being allocated housing out of county)
3. Access to move on accommodation would prevent homelessness and rough sleeping

4. Scale

The majority of the individuals are able to access suitable housing. However certain individuals fall through the gaps. In September this year:

- **56** care leavers were at risk of homelessness
- **52** care leavers were classed as homeless

District Councils have a duty to accommodate them from the first day of homelessness up to 56 days. Following this they either access accommodation with on-site support or standard housing on the market.

However standard housing is not suitable for a segment of this cohort and if they move into permanent housing they become ineligible for schemes that are most appropriate for their needs.

On average there are **20 care leavers** that would benefit from move-on accommodation to enable them to access this provision.

5. Conditions for viability

For the scheme to be viable, the following conditions would need to be met by the selected partner(s):

1. Accomodation is **reserved solely for care leavers**
2. There is **flexibility on the term of the tenancies** (potentially using a licence model)
3. **Acceptance of tenancy applications for particular properties is managed in partnership with the service** to avoid clashes and unsuitable pairings of tenants with similar needs e.g. substance misuse
4. Individual tenants would stay in housing for a maximum of 12 months (with scope for exceptions)

Housing is required in each Cambridgeshire district.

The properties will need to be:

- Central
- Linked to transport networks
- Habitable
- Not require change of use/ major conversion

Size

- The properties would need to have 3 or more bedrooms
- If 3+ tenants are in a property, they would be able to afford market rate rent.

6. Proposed structure

The properties would be designated as supported and 'exempt'.

1. Type of tenancy

Care leavers could be accommodated on licences for a duration that suited their needs.

1. Rent costs

If the AST tenancies were used, care leavers would be claiming Universal Credit if 18+ (which would include any payment towards housing costs). Similarly, if licences were used, the costs would be covered by housing benefit.

1. Property maintenance costs

As the properties would be 'exempt', a charge for 'enhanced housing management' could be levied that incorporate a proportion of renewal costs to take account of the additional 'wear and tear' anticipated for short term supported accommodation.

7. Options for management

	Mixture of options	CCC to let and manage properties <i>Properties owned by CCC</i>	This Land manages properties <i>Properties owned by This Land</i>	This Land to designate a proportion of new properties as CL short term accommodation	Housing Associations to let and manage properties <i>Properties owned by CCC</i>	Selling to the market with condition that property is ring-fenced for letting to care leavers only
Is this legal?		No	Yes – must be no bias	N/A	Yes	Not sure
How much will it cost the LA?		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Property renovation costs 2. Maintenance costs 3. Letting management costs 	<p>If we grant the properties to This Land free of charge and / or subsidise This Land's costs this would exacerbate the current low return on investment into This Land- politically undesirable?</p> <p>This Land would cover the property renovation cost (indirect cost to CCC?)</p>	Indirect costs to CCC	<p>£15k to cover void costs</p> <p><i>Unless CHS Group (or other housing association) is willing to take on properties for free</i></p>	N/A
Affordable housing?		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not guaranteed
What are the risks?	Corporate Parenting service may be taking on a disproportionately large workload/ management requirement of multiple contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs and resource required due to responsibility for management and evictions may be prohibitive • Revenue loss when there are voids within properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Land is arms-length so the property must be advertised on open market - no guarantee they would be awarded the contract • Financial risk of indirect cost to CCC from any losses incurred 	This may not go ahead under current evaluation of ROI into This Land	May not find a HA that will not charge us for void costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cannot sell with a condition to let only to care leavers - Privately-controlled letting costs are unaffordable for care leavers

7. Covering associated costs

1. Maintenance and letting management costs:

Whichever agent is appointed to let and manage the property, the maintenance and management costs are built into the rent costs that Care leavers' pay from their housing allowance.

To cover these costs and market rate rent there must be at least 3 individuals in a property at any one time.

2. Void costs (where less than 3 individuals are in a property)

The options for covering these costs are as follows:

1. CCC puts out a tender for service including sale of the property and the successful bidder builds costs into their payment for the property. Loss of revenue to CCC
2. CCC lease property to tenants through a housing association and pay £15k to housing association to cover void costs. The service would need to bid for the budget from the capital programme board.
3. CCC lease property to tenants through a housing association and potential void costs are built into the pricing

3. Renovation costs

The options for covering these costs are as follows:

1. Obtaining C&I funding for 2022-23
2. Inviting an investor to donate funding for renovations (due to social value). No/ low returns anticipated
3. No renovation – only using CCC properties that require no renovation for this scheme. It is unknown if this is the case for any properties..

Feedback

- Could this need be effectively met by District councils?
- Are there alternative options that are not captured here?
- Anything else?