

# Semi Independent Living - Policy and Overview Committee Information Report

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| <b>Committee name</b>     | Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee                      |
| <b>Officer reporting</b>  | Julie Kelly, Director of Service Delivery, Children and Young Peoples Services (CYPS) |
| <b>Papers with report</b> | None  |
| <b>Wards</b>              | All   |

## HEADLINES

This report provides an overview and update of Semi Independent Living arrangements for young people aged 16-25 years, commissioned by The London Borough of Hillingdon, Children and Young People's Social Care.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

**That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee note the report on Semi Independent Living.**

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1. Introduction

Semi Independent Living [SIL] are services that provide accommodation and support to young people aged 16-18 or up to the age of 21, or 25 for care leavers who remain in education or training.

Accommodation usually comprises single rooms of a bedsit type with other shared communal space. Properties can range in size from large domestic properties to large scale providers of schemes such as the YMCA or St. Mungos, where there can be bed numbers of 70 plus.

The support offered should be targeted to promote preparation for adulthood, including attendance and engagement with education and employment, teaching of life skills such as budgeting, tenancy management, keeping safe, managing health and relationships and often support with English as a second language.

The size and quality of the provision is varied and SIL services are not regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000, and subsequently not inspected by Ofsted. The issue of unregulated accommodation for young people, particularly those aged 18 and under has been subject to debate across central government for the last couple of years. New legislation, which will become law in September 2021 will effectively ban the use of unregulated accommodation for under 16s. In 2019 Hillingdon undertook a review of how SIL services in the Borough operate and the quality of accommodation, support and outcomes for young people.

The review identified that the quality of support and accommodation varied and that the supply available to CYPS for placement relied on availability as opposed to purposeful choice. Risk matching, providers with a specialist focus on individuals' needs and good quality accommodation was not as robust as we would expect.

Providers sometimes lacked impetus to move young people on as part of their journey as they were concerned about vacancies affecting their business, but there were significant voids across the suppliers in the Borough. The Council was and continues to be signed up to the West London Alliance [WLA] in relation to the sourcing of young people's placements, however, as an automated system of searching, it is not responsive to the immediate needs for a placement that often occur, especially when searching for a placement for an unaccompanied young person.

The review identified that the accommodation at Olympic House was not of a standard we would expect, with long term outstanding repairs not carried out by the Landlord and the size of the building was not conducive to developing a shared house/family type of support to the young men living there. Following agreement from the Leader of the Council, the contract for this service was formally ended with the notice period concluded on 31st March 2020.

Alongside the decision on Olympic House, a review of all of the 'block' provided services by YMCA and P3 took place and with the exception of the Supported accommodation at Ventura House [60] rooms, all other accommodation was confirmed as suitable for ongoing use. YMCA has chosen to offer a different business model and increase the number of rooms available at Ventura House for young people to 100. This will be for young people over the age of 18 who will require housing related support only.

As there are a range of providers who the Council contracts with for places on an individual basis [spot purchasing] within the Borough and nationally, we did not anticipate a lack of choice or capacity as a result of changed commissioning arrangements with Olympic House or Ventura.

## **2. Current position**

Following the above review and change in commissioning arrangement. We successfully transitioned 33 young people from Olympic House into more appropriate shared and self-contained supported accommodation. The transition from Olympic House to smaller, better quality provision was completed just prior to the first lockdown and as such was unaffected. To achieve the best outcomes the move on of housing clients from some of our YMCA beds was impacted by the pandemic and as such many of these moves didn't take place. To mitigate we sought alternative provision for young people via WLA arrangements or spot purchasing as described above.

Whilst the move to smaller self-contained accommodation was intended to improve the quality of life for our children and young people an unintended consequence of the pandemic was that young people were more isolated by default. To support our young people the Leaving Care Service, ensured that they offered an enhanced level of contact, in person and virtually. Our Children's participation service provided a fortnightly newsletter to keep our young people connected and additional practical support in the form of increased financial support, food and care parcels have been provided throughout.

Feedback from young people affected by the move from Olympic House has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of quality and satisfaction with their new accommodation and support provided.

Alongside utilising semi-independent provision accessible via WLA arrangements, Children's social care are seeking to increase access to alternative supported accommodation, by increasing the number of 'Staying Put' arrangements, where young people and their foster carers are supported to extend this arrangement post 18. We currently have 20 young people in Staying Put arrangements

The pandemic has created some delay in young people transitioning to semi-independent accommodation from regulated accommodation, and from semi-independent accommodation to independent housing options. Children's social care and Housing are working together to review housing and commissioning options for young people 18+ who are ready to move to independent accommodation.

### **3. Provider development**

Services for 16+ young people remain unregulated, though in Hillingdon we are committed to providing the best possible services to our young people. To do this we are fully signed up to the West London Alliance commissioning and accreditation arrangements. There are a significant number of services waiting to go through the accreditation process, which has been impacted by COVID related delays. Where we need to secure a placement that hasn't already been accredited, we adopt the same criteria and ensure that we carry out a quality assurance visit to any new provider and the associated accommodation.

In February 2021 we have integrated children's placements and Adults Brokerage into one brokerage service with a dedicated Quality Monitoring Officer for children to ensure that young people are living in a safe, clean environment and have appropriate support to meet their needs. This includes safe and appropriate matching of young people with the right provider and the right mix of other young people. The new service model will strengthen our market management through the centralised oversight of providers, will allow a better understanding of gaps in the marketplace and in turn inform commissioning activity.

The introduction of 'Young Inspectors' involvement in the QA process has been delayed as a result of pandemic but will be reintroduced as we ease out of lockdown.

### **Implications on related Council policies**

A central role of the Policy Overview Committees is to monitor Council services and make recommendations on changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

### **How this report benefits Hillingdon residents**

None at this stage, pending any findings approved by Cabinet.

**Financial Implications**

None at this stage.

**Legal Implications**

None at this stage.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL.