

Service Review of the Young People's Supported Housing Pathway: Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

This review was instigated to increase our understanding of the effectiveness of the commissioned services within our Young People's Supported Housing Pathway (YPSHP) to inform service recommissioning as contracts end in 2020. Data has also been analysed and reported on for our in-house provision to help us to better understand how the whole of the YPSHP is working for our homeless young people aged 16-24 years.

This review was undertaken with the involvement of District and County Council staff, colleagues from partner agencies and young people who have used supported housing services.

The following methods were used:

- Online and hard copy surveys
- Site visits
- Workshops and focus groups
- Semi structured telephone and face to face interviews
- Desktop analysis of quantitative data
- Desktop review of national best practice learning

The findings of this review will be used to strengthen both commissioned and in-house YPSHP services, for young people in Oxfordshire. Detailed findings and recommendations are available in the full report.

1.2 Key Messages

Commissioned Services

1. More work needs to happen to prevent young people, especially those aged 16 and 17 years, from entering the YPSHP. Once a person enters the YPSHP, they rarely sustain living independently from professional support in the long term.
2. Young people aged 16 and 17 years do not thrive in the current YPSHP and are put at risk through living with young people/ adults with their own additional and complex needs. There should be alternative provision within the pathway for young people in this age group.
3. There needs to be more reunification work prior to young people entering the YPSHP and this should continue with family members (where it is safe to do so) when the young person is in pathway accommodation.
4. Young people, their families and professionals do not always consider the implications of homelessness. There are also unrealistic expectations of the accommodation and support that a young person will access through the YPSHP, with limited options upon leaving.
5. More resources are needed in the Placement Team to manage the volume of referrals and work generated around the placements. Additional resources are also needed in the Quality and Contracts Team for more intensive quality monitoring activities and data analysis across the projects, to identify trends and inform the forecasting of demand and throughput.
6. There is not enough capacity in the pathway to meet demand, with placements resource lead rather than needs lead, with admission into the pathway taking too long. Housing providers can feel pressurised into accepting referrals when they know they will struggle to manage the risks of young people entering, alongside the risks of existing young people in the provision.

7. Over a quarter of the units in the YPSHP are occupied by people aged over 18 years who are not care leavers. Whilst they meet current eligibility criteria of the YPSHP, OCC do not have a statutory duty to accommodate them. If there are issues around demand management in the pathway, then pathway eligibility criteria will need review to ensure resources are targeted to meet OCC's statutory duties.
8. Over a third of units in the pathway are occupied by young people under the age of 18. There are 41 (19%) with Looked After Child/Leaving Care status, with 26 (12%) of young people accommodated under Section 17¹ due to safeguarding issues. If eligibility changes to meet statutory duties only, then due consideration will need to be given to young people under the age of 18 who do not have LAC/LC status, as when they reach 18, they would not be eligible for onward support through the YPSHP, despite their level of vulnerability.
9. There is good geographical coverage of provision across the county but too much variability in the standard of accommodation, with provision falling below standard in several projects. Where provision is in more rural locations, young people can struggle to access positive activities and employment, education and training (EET).
10. There needs to be additional provision for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) outside of Oxford City, which offers UASC the opportunity to develop networks in their local community. UASCs can struggle to move on from Support Package 4 (SP4)² provision into the larger projects within the YPSHP, and there can be conflict which can arise between groups of UASC and citizenship young people within the projects.
11. Young people are more likely to thrive in shared accommodation which houses a maximum of 4 young people, with many struggling to make progress in the larger-style accommodation when they are accommodated with other vulnerable young people.

¹ Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 states that it is the general duty of every local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and so far, as it is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.

² Dedicated specialist package of support for UASC

12. Housing Support Workers (HSWs) develop positive relationships with young people and professionals from other agencies but can often feel deskilled and undervalued which is reflected in poor retention, poor pay and high staff turnover.
13. The professional 'team around the young person' appears to fall away as young people enter the YPSHP, with a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities between professionals.
14. Projects do not always have the staffing resources to increase staffing to manage risk and help young people to feel safe and there can be variability around the quality of staffing support across the projects.
15. Additional staffing resources need to be made accessible to the projects around particular issues such as mental health and substance misuse, with particular challenges to accessing health services for the young people/adults aged 18 years and over. There is too much reliance on accessing services external of the YPSHP, where there are limited services with high thresholds or long waiting lists.
16. Three quarters of young people feel that they have someone to talk to and HSW provide emotional support to young people in the projects. However, HSWs are often left holding high levels of risk and working in a reactive way to daily incidents impacting one or more residents, with limited opportunities for planned interventions.
17. There needs to be more flexibility and intensity of support a young person can access in the YPSHP to better meet their needs and support them to achieve long term change. The trauma a young person has experienced is not always identified and addressed.

18. The concerns around 'county lines'³ is increasing with substance misuse and knife crime becoming increasingly problematic for residents and whilst the movement around the pathway for some residents provides safety, for others it further exacerbates these problems.
19. Whilst young people are provided with the opportunity to manage money and handle bills whilst in the pathway, this appears to put many at increasing risk⁴ of entering debt or risk-taking behaviour. Charges seem inconsistent and unreflective of services received across the YPSHP and escalating arrears have a long-term impact upon onward housing options but limited effect for onwards behaviours around money management.
20. The charging systems and benefits payments do not always act as an incentive to work or maintain full-time employment for residents. Housing benefit is tapered as a young person gains employment so that they are only marginally better off in work and face financial issues if they are also having to pay accrued rent arrears. The system in place can act as a dis-incentive to work, placing further reliance on the benefit system in the longer term. Young people and staff working in the projects remain confused and lack confidence in understanding benefit entitlements, with more specialist input needed.
21. The impact of the YPSHP does not appear to make much of a difference to a person's ability to secure or sustain living independently of supported housing services. Young people can become dependent on the professional support that they accessed in the pathway and then struggle to identify who they need to ask for support when it is needed and actively progress this, once they have left the YPSHP.

³ Criminal exploitation is also known as 'county lines' and is when gangs and organised crime networks exploit children to sell drugs. Often these children are made to travel across counties, and they use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs.

⁴ Especially those aged 16 and 17 years old.

22. There are challenges around accuracy, collection and sharing of data within the pathway services. The current data collected as part of the contract monitoring of services provides limited understanding of outcomes made for young people through the projects' services.
23. There are challenges with forecasting young people who are likely to need access to the YPSHP, as well as challenges in the system to instigate suitable accommodation for move on, to be able to effectively manage demand and throughput in these services.
24. Projects have limited budget (if any) for positive play and leisure opportunities or onsite activities and no certification scheme in place to motivate and reward young people's achievements.

In-House Services

House Project

1. As the House Project (HP) supports a small number of young people, their individual needs can be met by professionals, with project team staff getting to know the young people well, which helps to identify and work through any difficulties as they arise.
2. The long lead in time means the project cannot accommodate people quickly when they are in housing crisis.
3. Young People in the HP have been working well together and demonstrated that they have developed some independent living skills, but professional feedback echoes that at 16 years, they would struggle if left to be fully independent.

Move On Homes

4. The Move On Homes (MOHs) provide a very high standard of accommodation and a nurturing environment and staff benefit from having a clinical team that work alongside them.

5. The MOH staff teams have a breadth of skills and flexibility around the support package they can offer to meet individual need, with a budget for activities and resources to support their work with a young person.
6. Staff have begun to provide reunification work between young people and family members and the MOH environment offers a conducive environment for this.
7. The jump between the Children's Home environment and support, to the MOH model is great and the needs of the young people entering the MOH are complex, with them often struggling to be able to sustain long term change after just 6 months of input from the MOH, suggesting the need for increased flexibility around length of stay.
8. The MOH model appears to work best for aspirational young people who have multiple needs but whose needs are not too complex, to act as too much of a barrier to progress during their 6 month stay. Whilst this may be the case, the MOHs have facilitated a transition process for very high needs young people in high-cost out of county Children's Homes where they were not making adequate progress.
9. The MOH license agreement does not always match with what the young people accessing the provision are capable of and there can be an unrealistic expectation of what young people can achieve in their 6 months at the MOH, given the complexity of their needs when they arrive.
10. There is a vast difference in the standard of accommodation and staff support between the MOH and the YPSHP commissioned services which is reflected in the budget variance, with the young person's expectations being raised whilst in MOH accommodation. The young person can find entry into the YPSHP commissioned services challenging as their staffing support drops and the quality of the accommodation changes, with increased contact with other vulnerable young people.

Supported Lodgings Scheme

11. More Hosts are needed, especially in urban areas and many want the scheme expanded to accommodate more young people, whilst also recruiting Hosts who can accommodate young people with more challenging behaviours, which could include young people in the Youth Offending Service where a Supported Lodging (SL) placement could prevent a young person receiving a custodial sentence. However, there is the recognition that SLs isn't often suitable for young people with extremely challenging behaviour.
12. The support and accommodation offered through this scheme is highly valued and provides a good stepping stone for young people towards reaching independence. Hosts provide a bespoke support package to meet the individual needs of a young person and can encourage them to participate in family or individual activities with the Host.
13. This type of provision can be particularly suitable for 16 and 17 year olds who have had wrap around staff support in residential care homes or foster care and newly arriving UASCs, but less successful for young people with very challenging behaviour who would likely find the support too intensive or exposing for those with offending behaviour or issues with substance misuse.
14. There are challenges with progressing Hosts' assessments quickly due to capacity limitations within the City Fostering Team. Additional resources are required to be able to recruit, train, supervise and support an increased number of Hosts.
15. Moving back to shared accommodation in the pathway is reported as detrimental when a placement with a Host breaks down. There need to be increased opportunities to remain with a Host, move into SLs with an alternative Host or support to access accommodation outside of the YPSHP.

1.3 Recommendations

Commissioned Services

1. Identify families at risk of breakdown earlier and deliver intensive family work. Forecast cases where entry into the pathway is likely, so that better consideration can be given to demand management and throughput. Undertake a Family group conference (FGC)/mediation prior to pathway entry to ensure that all options have been exhausted within the family and extended family. Reinstate the role of Specialist Housing Assessment Social Workers to ensure that families receive a robust message about their responsibilities not to abandon their child and the implications of homelessness or entering the YPSHP.
2. Commission the delivery of housing options education work for staff and pupils in schools, colleges and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) which covers the reality of housing options/choices and increase access to training about housing for professionals across the county working with children, young people and families.
3. Review the number of beds for each type of package when services are recommissioned based upon forecasted need and demand in District areas. Do not recommission beds specifically for step down accommodation and revise Emergency bed (E-bed) model and review the referral process. Include some flexibility for providers to meet fluctuating demand for the different support packages (where appropriate) where voids are held.
4. Ensure young people aged 16 and 17 years have access to different accommodation and services to those of young people/adults aged 18+ and that Social Workers consider the impact upon onward access to services when young people are accommodated under Section 17, rather than Section 20⁵ or Section 31⁶ status.

⁵ Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 sets out how a Local Authority can provide accommodation for a child within their area if that child is in need of it, due to the child being lost/abandoned or there is no person with parental responsibility for that child.

⁶ The court can create a care order under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, placing a child in the care of a designated local authority, with parental responsibility being shared between the parents and the local authority.

5. Commission provision both within and outside of Oxford City for UASC, with a model which provides short term accommodation for the statutory assessments to be undertaken (i.e. a Welcome Assessment House) with longer term provision provided in a small project, dedicated to supporting UASC. Prioritise keeping UASC in the locality in which they have built support networks upon arrival.
6. Review existing capacity, roles and responsibilities of staff within the Placement Team and make changes as required to match the volume of work being generated. Review existing processes and forms (including risk identification and young person's compatibility with other young people in the project) used for admission into the pathway. Identify ways in which to better involve the young person in considering which project in the YPSHP will best meet their needs, their compatibility with others in the project and the support they will need from professionals with the move.
7. Review the eligibility for entry into the YPSHP to ensure that OCC's available resources meet the needs of young people there is a statutory duty to accommodate. Consider the implications around accommodating young people aged 16 and 17 years under section 17, if young people aged 18+ who are not care leavers are not eligible for the YPSHP (if resources outside of OCC cannot be identified). Review and amend referral processes to improve transparency around decision making around legal status and between the Adults Homeless Pathway (AHP) and YPSHP to ensure that people access the support that will best meet their needs and do not fall between services.
8. Increase the accommodation budget when services are recommissioned to secure improved countywide accommodation. Ensure that young people continue to be prioritised within their existing locality (unless safeguarding issues are identified for re-location). Improve processes to better ensure that vacancies/voids in projects are turned around quickly and rooms are adequately ready for young people arriving.

9. Ensure when services are recommissioned that the support packages are able to meet the needs of higher risk young people and young people with low level learning disabilities, through flexibility in staffing to meet need and appropriately mitigate risk.
10. Instruct providers to source properties no larger than four beds when retendering services, to exclude the use of large hostel style accommodation, to achieve better outcomes for young people.
11. Develop a 'Working Together' agreement which housing providers and partners use consistently from case outset which clarifies roles and responsibilities of each professional involved in a case, with expectations that are realistic. This should be reviewed, amended to be case specific and signed by all professionals as a young person enters the YPSHP to help ensure that the 'Team Around the Young Person' approach continues as young people enter services.
12. Increase understanding about the CAMHS Mental Health Worker role⁷ across all workers in the projects to ensure it is used effectively. Identify if increased capacity is required as the post holder is used more consistently.
13. Increase the use of Substance Misuse Worker role⁸ across the projects to support individual young people and professionals working with the young person. Identify if increased capacity is required as the post holder is used more consistently.
14. Provide HSWs with access to reflective practice sessions and case formulation from a Clinical Psychologist (such as those within the REoC Clinical team). Increase HSW access to multi-agency and multi-project training. Ensure that providers offer career progression and continuing professional development opportunities to their staff.
15. Explore the resources required to extend the remit of the Phoenix team to provide health support to care leavers up to 25 years.

⁷ Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are commissioned to provide this role.

⁸ Aquarius are commissioned to provide this role.

16. Increase the delivery of evidenced based interventions within the HSW job description and person specification, with salary scales reflecting this. Ensure that reunification work with family members (where it is safe to do so) is incorporated into a Young Person's Support Plan, with the HSW having an active role in taking this piece of work forward. Omit general cleaning and gardening duties within the HSWs job description, with dedicated staff employed specifically for these duties.
17. Commission the delivery of EET interventions by professionals external to the YPSHP, if there is no dedicated resource to meet this need through existing OCC EET workers in the Family Solutions Service (FSS). Explore better access to alternative educational provision, where access to college isn't possible mid-year, for 18+ year olds.
18. Encourage projects to become accredited assessors for certification such as with the Assessment Qualification Alliance (AQAs) or have access to an assessor⁹, with certification provided to young people to mark achievements and increase motivation. Projects should have access to funding for positive play and leisure activities or for onsite activity resources for their young people for individual or group activities.
19. Increase consistency and flexibility in Housing Support Plans, so that young people can access the intensity of support identified through their assessment of need, prior to entry into the YPSHP. Improve the identification of trauma and impact of trauma, using a Clinical Psychologist where required, for young people accessing the YPSHP. Ensure that the behaviour management and eviction policy is consistent across providers and that the outreach model is flexible, varying in intensity and duration to meet individual need upon leaving the pathway.
20. Seek the advice of the Child Exploitation sub-group on how to prevent escalation of 'county lines' through movement around the YPSHP. Encourage police Officers to have increased contact with young people in the pathway to develop positive relationships and prevent/de-escalate criminal activity including knife crime, whilst managing any issues around data sharing/confidentiality.

⁹ An example of this is Riverside acting as the assessor for AQAs completed by young people in the MOHs.

21. Prevent giving young people, aged 16 and 17 years, large amounts of money to manage and offer support through a dedicated professional to facilitate them towards making appropriate choices around spend. Increase independence using a phased approach once money management skills have been demonstrated, which may include completion of an intensive money management course.
22. Ensure that service charging falls within a consistent range across all providers. Recruit additional benefit specialists, external to the projects, who have dedicated time within each of the projects to offer drop in surgeries for young people and staff, training for staff and can also be contacted outside of this surgery as required for specific queries.
23. Commission extensive work to be undertaken with Private Landlords, which complements the work already underway through District Councils, to offer incentives where they provide tenancies for young people that have come from YPSHP services. Commission extensive work to be undertaken with Employers to identify where opportunities can be increased for young people to access apprenticeships, volunteering opportunities and paid employment.
24. District Council Housing colleagues to undertake work with HSW, to improve relationships and increase understanding of processes in each of the District areas.
25. Develop and provide a hard copy and online 'Support Service Guide' to young people upon leaving the project, so that they have details all in one place for onward professional support required.
26. Review data processes and sharing requirements to make improvements for when services are recommissioned and reduce barriers to the sharing of information.
27. Revise the use of planned/unplanned move categories and identify better mechanisms to identify positive destinations and the achievement of long-term sustainability.

28. Explore the use of 'payment by results' when recommissioning services to enhance provider performance and reward positive outcomes achieved by young people. Increase the resources available to offer more intensive contract monitoring, to better monitor and support providers to deliver high-quality services.

In-House Services

The House Project

1. Use early learning evidenced through implementation of the House Project (HP) to inform future recommissioning.
2. Ensure that staff and young people are made aware of future plans for the HP at the earliest opportunity to alleviate future uncertainty.
3. Conduct an 'options appraisal' to identify the recommended option for delivery, if this project is to continue in the long-term after the pilot funding ends.

Move On Homes

4. Continue to ensure that workers build reunification work with family members (where appropriate) into a young person's support plan and that they take an active role in harnessing positive relationships.
5. Review the eligibility of the Move On Homes (MOH) to ensure that it is still meeting demand and that there is a seamless fit with the wider eligibility of the YPSHP and SL scheme, with further consideration given to the transition between services.
6. Rename the provision so that there is greater clarity of purpose to manage expectations of professionals and young people and their families.

7. Review the license agreement and build flexibility within its terms, to ensure that young people who are being referred into the provision can realistically uphold the requirements of the agreement. Ensure that there is greater consistency around the sending of licensing breach letters to demonstrate fairness and transparency across the young people residing at the home.
8. Review the length of time young people can remain at the MOH and consider greater flexibility in the offer to better meet individual need. Uphold the lead in time for referrals into the MOH to ensure that adequate outreach support can be undertaken by the team to prepare the young person for the provision and develop solid relationships from the outset.
9. Review the charging structure to ensure that it aligns with the charges made in provision within the commissioned services, SL scheme or local accommodation charges outside of the pathway.
10. Identify which outcome tool(s) is consistently used across the MOH to measure progress made and outcomes through the MOH provision. Align this tool(s) with the outcome tool(s) used by providers in the commissioned services and SL scheme.
11. Review the eviction policy and consider how it can align to the eviction policy in place in the commissioned services and SL scheme.

Supported Lodgings Scheme

12. Increase the capacity of the Supported Lodgings (SL) Team so that there can be additional marketing, recruitment, training and support to an increased pool of Hosts.
13. Increase the pool of Hosts with a focus on identifying Hosts in urban areas and increase the number of Hosts who are trained to support young people with more complex needs (whilst recognising that young people with very challenging behaviour aren't often suited to this type of provision), including those who have a history of offending behaviour.

14. Increase flexibility in the length of time a young person can remain in SL provision to meet the needs of the young person and Host.
15. Ensure that referral to the scheme is consistent with referral into the wider YPSHP, rather than referrals being processed via alternative routes.
16. Review charges made to the young person and increase consistency with charging made in provision within the commissioned services, MOH or provision outside of the pathway.
17. Develop Host peer support groups to offer the opportunity for reflective practice, peer support and access to group training (such as that which is offered to Foster Carers).
18. Retain the in-house delivery model of the SL Scheme with increased budget and capacity.

1.4 Next Steps

The findings and recommendations from this service review will be taken to the County Council's Senior Managers for consideration and actions will be progressed in line with their decision-making and budget confirmation.

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