

<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Cabinet</b> 10 July 2019
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<b>Report title</b>	The House Project	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services	
<b>Originating service</b>	Children and Young People in Care	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Alison Hinds	Head of Children and Young People in Care
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Children and Young People Leadership Team	13 June 2019
	Strategic Executive Board	25 June 2019

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### Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve that the City of Wolverhampton Council, in partnership with the National House Project and Reconomy, delivers a local House Project for young people in care and care leavers.
2. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the Director of Finance, to approve contributions from Reconomy towards the costs of the National House project.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 This report informs Cabinet of the benefits of running a local House Project for children in care and care leavers and describes the impact it can make on outcomes for young people. It details how the project will be funded and operated in the City of Wolverhampton, to enable Cabinet to approve the proposal.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 Every year around 10,000 young people aged between 16 and 18 in England leave local authority (LA) care. Moving to independence from 16 and living alone from 18 as a care leaver is daunting. Doing this without the support of close family and at a much earlier age than the general population (average age of leaving home is 24) does not work for many young people. Care leavers often describe the loneliness and fear they feel.
- 2.2 Against all the key indicators in education, employment, health, offending and accommodation, outcomes for care leavers are unacceptable. The National Audit Office report 'Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood' (2015) notes that a third of care leavers experience homelessness between six and 24 months after leaving care. Other research highlights that over 25% of the adult prison population have been in care, and that care leavers are four times more likely than the general population to have mental health problems.
- 2.3 It was against this backdrop that the House Project framework was developed. The project takes a ground-breaking approach through its commitment to young people's ownership to enable young people leaving care to achieve successful independence. The House Project was co-designed with young people from the start and works on cooperative principles through which adults and young people in and leaving care, work together to refurbish properties that become their homes, developing a long-term community of support. The process focuses on maximising young people's ownership of all aspects of the project, so they feel proud of what they have developed and have confidence in themselves and their futures.
- 2.4 The House Project framework has been established and supported by the Department for Education (DfE) Social Care Innovation Fund. The first House Project was established in Stoke in Phase One. A second phase of DfE Innovation funding in 2017 enabled the development of new House Projects in five other local authorities. It also enabled the establishment of 'The National House Project' as a National Charity, which is developing the framework, and provides the expertise and support to enable any group of young people and the adults working with them to apply to set up their own House Project in the future. With a licence arrangement which sets out the support and provides a suite of resources, the fidelity of the model is assured.
- 2.5 The House Project works on a theory of change known as the Orchids Practice Framework. This offers a supportive safe base to young people to explore their world and build a positive future to enable them to: take ownership of their decisions, take

responsibility for keeping themselves safe, build a community of support, have their own homes, gain independence skills, gain a sense of developmental direction, and have a positive sense of wellbeing.

- 2.6 The National House Project provides support and guidance to local authorities through a paid membership arrangement to establish a local House Project.
- 2.7 A House Project works with approximately ten young people aged 16 and above who have successfully applied to be part of the project.
- 2.8 Links are built with local housing providers which enables the House Project to have access to properties. Links are also developed with companies and training providers engaged locally in building and associated trades. Through these connections, young people learn to project manage and participate in any works necessary to make their allocated property a home.
- 2.9 When the young people have refurbished their property, they move into their home, initially on an introductory tenancy, with a view to them having a long-term tenancy within 6 to 12 months. As excellent tenants, when they 'graduate' from the House Project, they retain the property that they have made into a home. They continue to be a member of the House Project community for as long as they wish.
- 2.10 This not for profit entrepreneurial approach saves money, allows a safer step down from residential care and stretches budgets to provide longer term support and better outcomes for young people. Landlords get good tenants and LA's have a long-term, sustainable housing solution to meet the needs of young people leaving the care system.

### **3.0 Progress**

- 3.1 Although significant progress is being made in ensuring only the right children enter and remain in the care of the City of Wolverhampton Council there are a high proportion of the children in care who are aged 14 to 18, the majority who are likely to remain in care until they reach adulthood. Most of this group of young people have either been in care for a long time or, alternatively, they have entered care late as a teenager. They are unlikely to return home to parents or family, or unlikely to achieve permanence via an Adoption Order or a Special Guardianship Order due to their age. Of the 610 total number of children and young people in care, 215 of them fall within the 14 to 18 age range. This equates to 35% of all children in care.
- 3.2 It is necessary for the local authority to plan and consider a variety of options of care for this group given the large numbers, to ensure appropriate support to independence is provided.
- 3.3 This is also relevant from a financial perspective given this group of young people are those most likely to be placed in external residential or supported accommodation provision.

- 3.4 There are currently 39 young people in care living in residential placements. Of those 39, 22 are aged 15 to 17. The weekly costs for residential care homes for the 22 young people ranges from £2,795 to £5,700 per week, with an average weekly cost of £3,700 per young person. The average annual cost for one residential placement for one young person is in the region of £192,000.
- 3.5 At the age of 16 every young person in care has a social work assessment completed to establish what is required for young people to successfully transition into independent young adults. This process is managed by a Pathway Plan.
- 3.6 At this point young people are supported to establish the most suitable accommodation option for them. This can include Staying Put in their foster placement post 18. Alternatively, if young people are not placed in foster care, between the ages of 16 and 18 they will be supported to move into semi-independent accommodation, of which there are several options.
- 3.7 Housing options available to young people within this age group include, living in a Host Placement (supported lodgings) provided by the YMCA, or living in semi supported accommodation either provided by the YMCA, or purchased from an independent provider.
- 3.8 There are currently 8 young people who are in care or care leavers aged 16 to 18 placed in purchased supported accommodation, with an average weekly cost in the region of £1,400.
- 3.9 An additional alternative, which for many young people is the most appropriate option, is the supported housing offer operating in the City of Wolverhampton Children in Care and Young People's Service, in partnership with Wolverhampton Homes. This housing support programme supports young people in care and care leavers aged 16-18 to live independently. This programme enables up to 30 young people at any one time to live in their own flat, provided by Wolverhampton Homes. Each young person receives between eight and 30 hours of support each week from the housing support team in the Children and Young People in Care Service. The team offer flexibility of support when young people require it most, by working between 8.00 a.m. and 8.00 p.m. during the week, and 10.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m. at the weekend. This is a successful programme of support with 92% of young people sustaining their tenancies for 6 months or more post 18. This service will continue and there are no proposed changes to this.
- 3.10 The implementation of a local House Project would be an additional offer to young people in care and care leavers. It would be more suited to some young people who would benefit from a more planned move into their own flat which they have spent time renovating and decorating to make their own. In addition, for some young people the additionality of the peer support of the other young people in the House Project would optimise their potential for success. This would form part of the range of options available to young people post 16 to support their transition to living independently.

- 3.11 The City of Wolverhampton Council have been approached by the National House Project with a view to delivering a local House Project in Wolverhampton supported by a local company. The local company is a Telford based company, Reconomy, whose Managing Director is a local person, born and raised in the City of Wolverhampton. The company want to provide support and opportunities to help improve outcomes for care leavers in the City.
- 3.12 Positive initial discussions and meetings have taken place between the City of Wolverhampton Council, Wolverhampton Homes, the National House Project and Reconomy with a view to progressing a House Project in Wolverhampton.
- 3.13 Subsequent discussions have also taken place with Reconomy who are keen to be able to extend their support to care leavers by assisting them with opportunities to enter employment. They can offer opportunities of work experience and work taster sessions, and already have two internships specifically ring fenced for local care leavers, one of which would be available for a young person in care or a care leaver from Wolverhampton. One of the key criteria for consideration of suitability for young people for the House Project is that young people are actively engaged in education, training or employment. These offers could support this position for some young people.
- 3.14 Total Respect training for Reconomy staff has been arranged and will be delivered by care experienced young people in July 2019.
- 3.15 Two care leavers from Wolverhampton have visited the original House Project in Stoke and spoken to young people who have been part of the project there. They gave positive feedback about their experience of the Stoke House Project, and our young people are very keen to support a local House Project in Wolverhampton.
- 3.16 Subject to Cabinet approval the local House Project will start in July 2019 with a view to the first young person moving into their own flat around April 2020.
- 3.17 Subject to Cabinet approval, the project would be reviewed on an annual basis.

#### **4.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 4.1 Option one would be to continue with the housing support options already in place in Wolverhampton and not consider developing a local House Project. These services can work well and the service run by the Children and Young People's service, in particular, has positive outcomes for young people .However, given the projected number of young people who are going to be in need of supported accommodation in the next four years an expansion of options would be beneficial, to avoid young people remaining in residential care too long, and entering adulthood unprepared for living independently..
- 4.2 Option two would be to develop a local House Project as detailed in the report. This would expand the range of offers available to our young people in care and care leavers, support our sufficiency of accommodation options reducing reliance on providers, and be a more cost-effective offer of care and support.

## **5.0 Reasons for decision**

- 5.1 The proposal is to implement option two. This gives greater placement choice for young people to be supported into independence. It gives the additionality of peer support contributing to reducing feeling of loneliness and isolation and offers opportunities via the potential funder for training and employment options for Wolverhampton young people in care and care leavers. Although our current housing support programme works well and has positive outcomes for young people, to not develop alternative complimentary services would reduce options available to young people.
- 5.2 This option is also financially cost effective given the potential savings outlined in 6.5.

## **6.0 Financial implications**

- 6.1 As detailed above the Housing Project involves taking ten current young people in care and housing them in properties which are part of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) housing stock.
- 6.2 As detailed in the table in 6.6, the project will incur additional costs including increases in staffing and an expenditure budget for the renovation and decoration of each per property. The Council will be required to pay the National House Project £90,000 over the first 3 years and £15,000 per annum thereafter. In addition, the rent for each property would be paid from Children's Services budgets to the HRA.
- 6.3 The financial model assumes that the young people are currently receiving a package of care paid for from Children's services budgets and will move into a House Project property around their 17th birthday. When the young person reaches 18 the Council would no longer pay for their accommodation and any services they receive would be as they are currently for care leavers. The model assumes they are then replaced in the project by another young person.
- 6.4 The financial model assumes that the initial cohort of ten current children in care entering the House Project will consist of four from residential placements (average cost per Young person between 17 and 18 is £120,000 and the current assumption is that they move into supported accommodation half way through the year), four from supported accommodation (average cost per Young person between 17 and 18 is £43,000) and two from Independent Fostering Agencies (average cost per young person between 17 and 18 is £41,000). Once established the House Project costs in the region of £16,000 per Young person between the ages of 17 and 18.
- 6.5 The modelling indicates that although the House Project would cost in the region of £108,000 in Year 1 2019-2020, the overall effect on budgets in Year 2 2020-2021 would be a saving in the region of £317,000. Once established, the Project would result in an annual saving in year 3 and onwards in the region of £509,000.

<b>Costs of Local House Project</b>	<b>Year 1 2019-2020 (£)</b>	<b>Year 2 2020-2021 (£)</b>	<b>Year 3 2021-2022 onwards (£)</b>
Payment to National House Project	50,000	25,000	15,000
Salaries and Training	56,000	88,000	88,000
Property renovation	2,000	13,000	15,000
Rent	-	33,000	43,000
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>108,000</b>	<b>159,000</b>	<b>161,000</b>
Saving to Placement budgets	-	(476,000)	(670,000)
<b>Overall impact on budget</b>	<b>108,000</b>	<b>(317,000)</b>	<b>(509,000)</b>

- 6.6 When the Council was initially approached by the National House Project, there was an offer from Reconomy, a private sector organisation working with the National House Project, to loan the Council the funds to finance the project until savings began to be realised. This is not permissible under the Prudential Code by which the Council is bound to adhere, so the financial model used for these implications assumes no external contribution, although discussions are ongoing, and some form of contribution may still be offered. This report requests delegation to the Cabinet member for resources and the Director of Finance to agree to receive any further contributions.
- 6.7 The additional costs of the project in year 1 will be met from the Troubled Families grant, however a corresponding amount will be allocated to work consistent with the use of Troubled Families grant from the savings to placement budgets in Children's services in year 2. The ongoing savings to placement budgets will support existing savings targets built into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

[JB/01072019/S]

## **7.0 Legal implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct legal implications. The Housing Project will enable young people leaving care to achieve successful independence and gives greater placement choice for young people to be supported into independence whilst providing training, peer support and better outcomes overall for young people.
- 7.2 There will be contractual provisions arising in connection with the relationship with Reconomy.

[TC/25062019/I]

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

8.1 An equalities analysis has been completed. This raised no concerns. The local House Project supports the ambition to improve opportunities and reduce the disadvantage that care leavers face in society. It will offer ten care leavers the opportunity to live in their own accommodation supported by the project and their peers within the project. This will enhance their potential for stability through sustainment of their tenancy post 18. For care leavers involved in this project there will also be increased opportunities to participate in training, education and employment, thus improving their confidence and self-esteem and positive transition to adulthood.

## **9.0 Environmental implications**

9.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## **10.0 Human resources implications**

10.1 The project will have three staff, a project lead and two facilitators. The National House Project will provide job descriptions and person specifications for these roles and will support with the selection and recruitment of staff if required.

## **11.0 Corporate landlord implications**

11.1 The project will need a base which serves both as an office for staff, but more importantly a safe space for young people to meet on a regular basis with the option to drop in for support as and when required. It would be helpful if the base had cooking facilities.

## **12.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

12.1 The theory of change that underpins the project is based upon improving young people's outcomes and wellbeing, supporting positive changes to enable care leavers to live successful healthy adult lives.