

6.0 CURRENT LOCAL OFFER

For the past two years the Council's Children's Services and the Strategic Housing Team have worked together to increase availability and choice of accommodation in the Borough for Care Leavers and have implemented the following new initiative. A Group Home for Care Leavers in Brook Street, Chester, which offers 5 single bed flats, was established to cater for the more vulnerable Care Leavers. The Group Home is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and has proved very successful. However, its flats are in high demand.

A **Dispersed Tenancy Scheme** was created by the Council for its Care Leavers. This is when the Council takes on the tenancy agreement for Care Leavers until their 18th Birthday. Care Leavers are also offered a **Floating Support Service** to help them to adjust to living independently.

The Dispersed Tenancy Scheme was implemented in April 2015 and was commissioned to provide Care Leavers with a tailored support package. Between April 2015 and December 2015 nine care leavers moved into flats across the Borough and in its first year it created savings of £100,000.

Once a Care Leaver is assessed, as ready to move into a semi- independent setting, the Leaving Care Team approach a Housing Provider to request a one bed flat. The tenancy for the Care Leaver is then held by the Council until they are 18 years of age. The Care Leaver, once they have moved into their new home, receives a high level of support from P3 staff initially (a previous service commissioned by the Council). Support is reduced gradually as the Care Leaver adjusts to their new home and increases their independence skills.

Once the Care Leaver is 18 and has demonstrated that they can be a responsible tenant, they take over the tenancy from the Council.

The creation of the Group Home in Brook Street and the Dispersed Tenancy Scheme has had a real positive impact for Care Leavers, as they have started to have access and choice to appropriate housing. Upon leaving care, Care Leavers who access the scheme, are given secure housing and a good level of support. The scheme provides them with stability in their lives and consequently enables them to focus and invest fully in their education, training, or employment. This service development also facilitated a two tier approach for our most needy and vulnerable Care Leavers, as they can have a phased introduction to independent living – firstly they move into a flat in the Group Home with around the clock support on hand and, once they are ready, they progress to the Dispersed Tenancy Scheme.

The real benefit to this approach is that Care Leavers know that when they move into a dispersed flat, they have the potential of making it their permanent home. The young person can then invest in the flat, make it their home and become a good tenant. The stability that this creates gives Care Leavers every opportunity to achieve good outcomes in terms of their education, training and employment prospects, similar to that of their peers.

A two bed flat, also in Brook Street, Chester, was acquired to provide emergency accommodation to homeless 16 and 17 year olds with the aim of preventing them becoming homeless and stopping them from entering the care system.

A National Housing Advisor visited Cheshire West and Chester Council in 2016 to brief Officers regarding future housing trends and needs. She was briefed about the Dispersed Tenancy Initiative and was impressed by the innovation, the likes of which she had not seen anywhere else in the Country.

To date, 12 care leavers have been placed with a variety of Registered Social Landlords within the Borough.