

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 03/20

Date: November 2020

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To provide a briefing about use of out of authority housing placements for families who are homeless.

The role of social care in supporting families who are homeless

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What role does social care have in supporting families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness at the time of their assessment?

If the family are threatened with homelessness within the next 10 days, or are already homeless, an assessment under S17 of the Children Act will be undertaken. If the period of notice exceeds 10 days, families are referred to Early Help for intervention and support to avoid becoming homeless.

When families are referred for an assessment under S17 of the Children Act due to homelessness, Children's Social Care will support them with temporary accommodation during the period of the assessment. This accommodation is usually in cost effective local B&Bs and the quality of the accommodation is very limited.

If the assessment deems that there are no safeguarding concerns, children's social care involvement will end, and the family will be referred on to housing and/or Early Help support. For families who have no recourse to public funds, social care will continue to pay until the family can access benefits and resolve their immigration issues.

Social care is able to pay for removal fees for families that choose to relocate to other areas in the country and have also paid part of deposits for families to allow them to secure properties.

Children's social care sign-post families to various charities, Citizens Advice Bureau and other resources to support families with their housing and financial concerns, but the responsibility for re-housing sits with the housing department.

How does the directorate react to the statements in the programme that families are told to accept offers of accommodation out of area or they will have their children taken into care?

This is not a policy adopted by Medway Children's Social Care.

What view would the directorate take if families reject offers of accommodation, particularly offers which are refused because they are made out of area?

Children's Social Care encourage families to work with housing and secure accommodation in areas where they can afford the rent. All families are encouraged to live within their means, and we work with some families who have incurred significant housing debt. We will support them to access financial support from charities and if there are concerns about the safety and well-being of the children, we will offer support through S17 or S47 of the Children Act.

Part of the assessment will determine their family networks and support, and connections they have and wish to maintain, but affordability of housing will also be an important factor. If families refuse an offer of accommodation, work will be done with them to consider all their options, and support will be offered to help them make informed choices within their means, but unless there is a clear safeguarding concern, children's social care cannot intervene

How many of the families placed out of area are known to children's social care?

If families decide to move to accommodation out of area, their involvement with Medway social care will cease unless there are clear safeguarding concerns, e.g. their child is subject to a child protection plan. In this situation, the family would be transferred to their new local authority once they are settled into their accommodation. Medway children's social care do not hold data on the number of families who continue to be involved with social care in their new area.

How many of the families placed out of area have special needs or are disabled?

Children's Social Care do not hold data on the number of families with special needs or a disability who have secured accommodation out of Medway.

Once families who are supported by Medway children's social care are placed out of area, what arrangements are put in place for their continued support?

If families have an ongoing need for support, a referral is made to the relevant Local Authority Children Services who, with the family's consent, will be asked to assess whether the children meet threshold for intervention. If there are safeguarding concerns and the children are subject to CP plans, the referral to the receiving Local Authority will seek to transfer these plans.