

Strategic Review of Housing for Older and Vulnerable People

Report No 3: Vulnerable Young People (Learning Disability; Physical Disability; Looked After Children Approaching Independence)

Section 1 - Executive Summary

Kingston currently lacks a housing strategy for older and vulnerable people (O&VP). Affordable housing within the borough is in short supply, with only 4,800 council homes and 6,000 households currently on the waiting list. It was agreed last year that a strategic review would be undertaken to address the needs of specific O&VP groups for whom the Council in many cases has a statutory duty.

The Older and Vulnerable Peoples' Housing Strategy Review formed part the of 'One Kingston' suite of projects (OK5, Project 2) and ran from May 2013 to January 2014, led by Housing Services. It took a cross departmental look at housing supply and demand issues for older people, plus certain groups of vulnerable adults and young people. The Project Board, chaired by Simon Pearce, Director Adult Social Care included representatives from Housing, Adults and Children's Services, Clinical Commissioning Group and third sector partners. The process included desktop research, discussions with key officers and external partners, also interviews and focus groups held with the relevant client groups. To ensure the review was meaningful and manageable the review looked at likely housing requirements through to 2020.

This report is the third in a series of three, focusing on three groups of vulnerable young people: those with a learning disability, those with a physical disability and looked after children approaching independence. The first report focuses on older people and sheltered housing and the second focuses on vulnerable adults. It is recommended that all three reports are read together to gain a full understanding of the review.

Key Findings

This project addresses housing issues that vulnerable groups face and the contribution that housing can make to their safety, health and wellbeing between now and 2020.

The known population of disabled children in Kingston is very small. The population of disabled children and young people is close to the England average, which is less than one child in 200. Just 153 individual children and young people aged 0 to 17 were recorded as disabled in RBK's 'Children in Need Census' in 2012. This also indicated that 22.2% of disabled children had a mobility problem (i.e. were physically disabled) equating to 34 individuals. It is likely that many parents still see disability in children as a stigma and avoid contact with statutory services if they can.

Families that include children who are 'permanently and substantially disabled', may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to provide major adaptations to their homes i.e. stair lift, level access showers or ramps. There seems to be agreement across departments that the efficiency and speed of current processes could be improved, delivering savings to the council, if return from hospital or residential care can be speeded up.

The small number of families with disabled children currently receive priority access to social housing and to disabled adaptations. Both these resources are finite and closely rationed. Considering RBK's limited housing resources, reasonable efforts are being made to ensure fair outcomes for disabled children.

Looked after children (LAC) in RBK are also few in number. Children's Services reported 121 LAC in December 2013. That is just 0.35% of Kingston's child population aged 0 to 17. The number included 36 care leavers aged 16-17. There were a further 58 care leavers aged 18 – 26 making a total of 94. Although most of the younger children under 16 who are LAC are in foster care, the majority of the older young people who are care leavers (16 – 26) are placed out of borough in expensive placements due to the lack of in-borough provision. In particular, very low level need unaccompanied asylum seeker young people are being unnecessarily placed outside of borough in expensive medium need placements who could easily manage a low cost, semi independent setting.

RBK's Tenancy Strategy identifies foster carers as one group of people who may need social housing and who, if offered a Council property, would be offered a fixed term tenancy while they are fostering. Children's Services can also use their 'social services nomination' quota in urgent cases.

Children's Services has 40 to 50 low needs LAC, currently placed in medium care residential schemes outside Kingston. When these children move to adulthood it is likely that shared housing will meet their needs. For looked after young people, The Housing Service seeks to

contribute both to RBK's leaving care pathways and to its fostering arrangements, but it is limited by availability of resources. For example, Housing has allocated a pool of up to six one bedroom flats on two year fixed term tenancies for young people leaving care, following which they are eligible to apply for permanent council housing.

While housing offers to LAC leaving care in 2013 have exceeded the original quota, there has been no take up on the fixed term tenancy quota. This reinforces the suggestion that Housing and Children's Services should liaise more frequently and effectively.

Local authorities' duties are however changing. The new Special Educational Needs & Disability Children & Families Bill (SEND Bill/SEND Act for short) that will come into force from September 2014, will require a combined local offer of services to meet the individual's disability needs, from within the appropriate local community health, social care, education services & voluntary agencies, for disabled children and young people up to age 25 years.

The housing environment meanwhile has become more challenging financially for young people seeking a home of their own. Housing Benefit levels, with some exceptions for specialist accommodation, are capped at Local Housing Allowance levels, with all people under 35 now entitled to just the 'single room rate' allowance rather than an allowance to cover the full capped rent. This is because government expects all young people on benefit to share a flat rather than rent on their own. Welfare reform legislation has capped the total amount of benefit a household is entitled to, and forthcoming Universal Credit changes will mean that landlords are no longer guaranteed to receive their rent direct from housing benefit as occurs now. Payment monthly direct to the tenant, as is proposed, will mean that some landlords will be more reluctant to take on benefit dependent tenants, and that all tenants may need help to acquire budgeting skills.

The SEND Act changes require more joined up working as already undertaken by the best performing authorities. Housing Services are seeking to progress a Service Level Protocol with Children's Services but to date progress has been limited. Current communication arrangements in RBK between Children's Services and Housing need further improvement in order to meet SEND Act requirements. It should be noted that Housing Services provide RBK's gateway to additional non-council housing services including Private Sector Leasing, access to social housing from registered providers (housing associations) through the Common Housing Register, also new grant funded affordable housing developments using GLA and RBK capital funding. It is therefore even more important that good and effective liaison is put in place to enable Housing Services to support the needs of Children's Services in future.

Recommendations arising from these findings are set out below. Some will need further in-depth exploration, which is beyond the scope of this project, before they can be taken forward as practical measures.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation VC1: *As tenancy records are updated, RBK should aim to capture more comprehensive information on dependants with a disability including children. The purpose of holding such information includes Equalities Act monitoring and promotion of relevant services (see page19).*

Recommendation VC2: *Children's Services to liaise more regularly with Housing Allocations, say quarterly, to review the performance of all relevant waiting lists and allocations quotas and to input into annual allocations plan reviews (see pages 19-22).*

Recommendation VC3: *Children's Services should take the opportunity offered by Housing Services to work together on future development plans that include the needs of disabled children and children leaving care (see page 22).*

Recommendation VC4: *One shared supported living scheme for a group of disabled young people approaching adulthood should be worked up jointly for inclusion in the Housing Development Strategy, subject to financial viability assessment (see pages 22-23).*

Recommendation VC5: *Housing Services should explore with YMCA and Children's Services whether there is the potential for a Y:Cube type interim housing solution within RBK for a range of single young people including young people approaching adulthood (see page24).*

Recommendation VC6: *Housing and Children's Services should seek to firm up short term proposals for the use of redundant sheltered scheme places by low needs LACs currently placed in medium care residential schemes outside Kingston (see page 25).*

Recommendation VC7: *Occupational Therapists and Housing Services should review management arrangements for disabled adaptations including:*

- *A monthly 'adaptations panel', or similar, held between Housing Services and Occupational Therapists*

- *A 'fast track' adaptations procedure whenever a child or young person is 'bed blocking' in a hospital or care home*
- *Measures to overcome the reluctance of private landlords to agree to disabled adaptations being carried out*
- *Measures to reduce wastage when previously adapted properties are vacated and relet (see pages 25-27).*

Recommendation VC8: *Children's Services should help young people approaching independence to acquire the skills to manage a tenancy, and should be able to call on the help of Housing Services, in helping to deliver key 'life skills' training (see page 28).*

Recommendation VC9: *Children's Services and Housing to both appoint a single senior point of liaison. The responsibility of each person will be to meet regularly with their opposite number, initially monthly and thereafter quarterly, to help establish better joint working methods, progress joint issues, and to act as problem solver within their respective services. Children's Services should be liaising ad hoc, but at least twice a year, with Housing Development to review long term projects and ensure that Children's Services do not miss out on opportunities to secure a share of RBK's housing development programme (see page 29).*

Background to this Report

Origins

As indicated in the Executive Summary, this project is part of the OK5 Strategic Housing Programme, which is one element of the One Kingston Programme. The review was undertaken from May to December 2013. It was originally conceived as a project to help the Council to understand the housing needs of older people and to make more informed decisions about future housing supply. At the Annual Housing conference 2012 there was a strong call to develop similar strategies for a range of other vulnerable groups in Kingston. As a result the project scope was broadened to include a range of other client groups.

Objectives

Objectives are as formally set out in the Project Initiation Document, May 2013:

“Project 2, Older & Vulnerable People’s Housing (O&VP) will enable the Council to make informed decisions about supply and the projected needs of O&VP through to 2020. An effective strategy will help address the balance between future O&VP housing needs and the supply of suitable long term housing.

This strategy will consider the need for new housing supply for O&VP, both public and private, and how to make the best use of existing accommodation.

Consequences of ineffective housing strategies will fall on other RBK and public services: public health, education, adult social care (ASC), children’s services (CS), crime and justice, etc. Hence the strategy aims to align with Adult Social Care, Children’s’ Services, NHS and Public Health strategies. The project will provide an opportunity to generate collaborative solutions across departments and to involve customers and the third sector.

The first objective of the project will be to identify the likely housing needs of O&VP through to 2020 to enable better medium-term planning. The project will include a review of current housing provision, particularly of the Council's sheltered housing, which makes up around 20% of RBK's total housing stock.

The strategy that emerges will include options for redevelopment of existing HRA land and sites, private and registered provider developments and procurement of homes through private landlords. It will, therefore, also closely link to OK5 Project 3, Affordable Housing Supply."

Project Manager and Board

A project manager, Paul Kingsley, was recruited externally. He was appointed on the basis of his longstanding experience as a provider and consultant in the field of supported and sheltered housing. A Project Board was then recruited as a 'task and finish' supervisory group, aiming to meet six-weekly until the project closed in February 2014. Project board members were tasked with:

- Shaping the project Securing better outcomes and greater buy in from key stakeholders
- Helping the project to keep on track and managing and reducing risks
- Ensuring that the Council's equalities responsibilities were being met
- Providing an effective channel for input and exchange of information between the project team and internal and external stakeholders
- Ensuring the accuracy and relevance of data and analysis.

The O&VP Project Board had formal responsibility to approve progress reports to the Housing Project Board and to communicate concerns that could not be resolved within the project. It was also responsible for agreeing the final report and recommendations.

Project Board members represented a good cross section of internal and external stakeholders. Those regularly attending meetings included:

- Simon Pearce, Executive Head of Adult Social Care and Board Chair
- Loraine Shaile, Older People's Housing Team Manager
- Justine Rego, Performance and Data Team Strategic Business
- Angela Parry, Supporting People and Commissioning Manager Adult Social Care

- Peter Hodges, Chair Kingston MENCAP
- Tom Bell, Age Concern Kingston
- Andy Redfearn, Development Manager Surrey YMCA
- Dawn Secker, Practice Lead Adult Social Care
- Mac Heath, Head of Integrated Youth Support Children's Services
- Theo Harris, CEO Kingston Centre for Independent Living
- Sylvie Ford, Kingston Clinical Commissioning Group
- Jo Williams, Interim Group Manager, Housing Strategy and Project Sponsor
- Paul Kingsley, Project Manager and Secretary to the Board.

Information Gathering

Across the three strands of the project, the methodology involved several processes. The project manager first sought to gather background data through interviews and meetings, with over 50 council officers and external stakeholders. They helpfully pointed him to a wealth of additional data on file or in the public domain. RBK's Strategic Business Unit put together all the tables and graphs drawing on local and national datasets to an agreed plan, under the direction of Justine Rego.

The second broad phase of work comprised interviews and focus groups, held over approximately two months in September and October 2013. An external experienced social worker, Diana Kuznetsova, was recruited to undertake the bulk of the interviews. Assisting her was Andrew Bushell, a third year social work student on secondment to RBK's Resettlement Team. Debbie Hunter, from Strategic Business, provided the team's 'back office' and data analysis support. In all, the team succeeded in interviewing 176 individuals and holding nine focus groups, involving a total of 76 individuals, though most were adults and older people. Grace Over, Participation Officer from Children's Services was particularly instrumental in facilitating interviews and focus groups with disabled young people and their parents. One focus group was successfully held with 10 physically and learning disabled young people, where even non verbal young people were able to contribute. Another was held with parents of disabled children. One focus group, facilitated by Francis Taylor, Youth Participation Worker, was held with representatives from Children in Care Council (young people who are a group of care leavers). In addition, one to one interviews were held with 10 young people.

Analysis and Challenge

Following the data gathering and analysis stages, draft conclusions and recommendations were developed and exposed to constructive challenge from board members and peers within Housing. Concurrently, progress reports were presented to a range of council committees: Housing Partnership Board, People's Services Committee, Health and Wellbeing Board. The work on older and sheltered people's housing was also the subject of a workshop at RBK's Annual Strategic Housing Partnership Conference on 21st November.

Formal Consultation

Draft conclusions and recommendations were circulated to colleagues and external stakeholders prior to the report being finalised for publication in February 2014.

Acknowledgements

It would be impractical to name each individual who contributed to this review by the provision of advice, challenge and practical support. It would also be unfair to pick out just a few. The Project Manager expresses gratitude to them all, without whose help this project would not have been possible. Thanks also for the good humour with which everyone responded to requests for help, quite often at unreasonably short notice!

The Demography of Vulnerable Young People in Kingston

Young People with a Disability

The Equalities Act 2010 defines a disabled person as a person with a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day to day activities. The condition must have lasted, or be likely to last, at least 12 months in order to be classed as a disability.

National and local data concerning the prevalence of disability amongst children comes from the annual 'Children in Need Census' that local authorities are required to submit annually to the Department for Education (DfE). This indicates that RBK's population of disabled children and young people known to children's social care is close to the England average, 0.44% and 0.45% respectively of the child population; which is to say less than one child in 200. Just 153 individual children and young people aged 0 to 17 and known to children's social care were recorded as disabled in the borough. The census also indicated that 22.2% of disabled children had a mobility problem (i.e. were physically disabled) which equates to just 34 individuals. RBK provided no data in the census on learning disability.

| | Local Authority | Number of children in need at 31 March 2012 | Number of whom have a disability recorded | Percentage having a disability recorded | Autism/Asperger | Behaviour | Communication | Consciousness | Hand Function | Hearing | Incontinence | Learning | Mobility | Personal Care | Vision | Other Disability |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------|--------------|----------|----------|---------------|--------|------------------|
| England | 369,400 | 51,800 | 14.0 | 27.7 | 22.0 | 22.1 | 6.5 | 5.9 | 5.3 | 9.1 | 45.9 | 22.4 | 15.1 | 8.6 | 20.1 | |
| Kingston | 847 | 153 | 18.1 | 36.6 | 2.0 | 7.2 | x | 0.0 | x | 0.0 | x | 22.2 | x | x | 5.9 | |

Source: CIN Census 2012/13 (DfE)

Another source of information that helps towards an understanding of numbers of young people with a disability is the Kingston 'I Count' Register for Children and Young People with Disabilities or Special Needs. This was a voluntary data gathering exercise by Public Health that was last fully completed as at March 2010, but this is still recent enough to be relevant. Of the 492 children aged 0 to 18 identified in the Register, there were:

- 72 children with a moderate physical disability
- 35 children with a severe physical disability
- 108 children with a moderate learning disability
- 71 children with a severe learning disability.

The project heard that for many disabled young people, the expected future would be to stay at home with 'mum and dad'. Owner occupiers were well represented amongst parents. Others were looking forward, in due course, to being able to rent or buy their own home, or to share with friends.

Living with mum and dad is not a lifetime housing solution for a disabled person moving into adulthood. Population estimates, as shown in the table below¹, for learning disability data illustrate how, from age 45, some households start to encounter problems as parents grow older and become unable to support their adult children. By age 55 it has become a cliff edge: hardly any are still living with parents beyond 54. This has implications for housing, care and support planning for disabled adults.

¹ Source : *Set of prevalence rates for adults with a learning disability living with a parent, established as a proportion of those known via learning disability registers (the administrative rate as established by Eric Emerson and Chris Hatton of the Institute for Health Research, Lancaster University, entitled Estimating Future Need/Demand for Supports for Adults with Learning Disabilities in England, June 2004).*

| People aged 18-64 predicted to have a moderate or severe learning disability and be living with a parent, by age, projected to 2020 in Kingston | 2012 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 | 2020 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| 18-24 | 78 | 85 | 87 | 87 | 86 |
| 25-34 | 68 | 75 | 81 | 86 | 91 |
| 35-44 | 63 | 65 | 68 | 71 | 74 |
| 45-54 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 30 | 30 |
| 55-64 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 9 |
| Total people aged 18-64 predicted to have a moderate or severe learning disability and be living with a parent, by age, projected to 2020 | 242 | 259 | 272 | 282 | 290 |

As disabled young people become adults, responsibility transfers from Children’s Services to Adult Social Care. It is important, that in the transition, help in planning a long term housing future is provided proactively rather than in response to the first crisis. The Housing Service has a role to play as a resource for Children’s Services and Adult Social Care, both in the provision of advice and in procuring suitable developments through specialist housing organisations. ‘Making it happen’ will depend on all three departments working together with a will to succeed.

Looked After Children

‘Looked After Children (LAC)’ is the term used to describe children in local authority care. There are several ways in which children become looked after. Children may be placed away from home after being taken into police protection; as the result of a court-directed Emergency Protection Order (EPO), Interim Care Order (ICO) or Care Order (CO) they may be remanded into local authority care. They may also be

accommodated, at the request of parents, or with their agreement. Local authorities can have responsibility for young people up to age 25 who have left care.

Data has been provided by Children’s Services, which illustrates there were 127 looked after children in 2012/13. In the three years, 2010 /11 to 2012/13, there has been no apparent trend that helps with planning for future needs. However, Children’s Services believes that LAC numbers will start to come down as fewer older children come into care. RBK now seeks to take decisions earlier to support vulnerable children and prevent them coming into care. Earlier interventions, around age 0 to 4, will often avoid the need to take a child into care later on.

Based on 2012/13 numbers of Looked after Children, the number who will turn 18 between 2014/15 and 2019/20, is shown below. On average there are just over six per year, equal to the allocations quota of six one bedroom flats provided on two year fixed term tenancies. But actual numbers leaving care at 18 are not entirely predictable from numbers coming through the LAC system. For various reasons, children migrate in and out of care, especially in mid teens.

| Year of turning 18 | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 11 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 5 |

LAC numbers can be further analysed by age, ethnicity, gender and locality (ward). It should be noted that 76 out of 127 LAC are placed out of borough.

| Age | Number of Looked After Children | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|------|------|
| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| 0 | 7 | 5 | 13 |
| 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| 2 | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

| | | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | 2 | 6 | 4 |
| 6 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| 7 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 8 | 6 | 8 | 7 |
| 9 | 3 | 6 | 7 |
| 10 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| 11 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 12 | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| 13 | 7 | 5 | 3 |
| 14 | 3 | 9 | 6 |
| 15 | 18 | 8 | 9 |
| 16 | 20 | 22 | 11 |
| 17 | 25 | 14 | 28 |
| 18 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 127 | 113 | 127 |

| Ethnicity | Number |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| A1 -White British | 63 |
| A2 -White Irish | * |
| A3 -Any Other White | 12 |
| B1 -White and Black Caribbean | 5 |
| B2 -White and Black African | * |
| B3 -White and Asian | * |

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| B4 -Any Other Mixed Background | 14 |
| C1 -Indian | * |
| C2 -Pakistani | * |
| C4 -Any Other Asian Background | 8 |
| D2 -Black African | 8 |
| D3 -Any Other Black background | * |
| E2 -Any Other Ethnic Group | 6 |

| Gender | Number |
|--------|--------|
| Female | 55 |
| Male | 72 |

** numbers below 5 are not disclosed as they become identifiable*

Consultation with Young People and Carers

One-to-one Interviews

The consultation team carried out 14 one-to-one interviews with a range of disabled and looked after young people, plus some carers. This was rather fewer than had been hoped for due to difficulties locating and getting responses from suitable interviewees. Names and introductions were provided through Children's Services, Kingston Centre for Independent Living and Surbiton YMCA. Over 40 questions were asked using a standard template and a mix of closed and open ended questions. Interviewees comprised: four currently looked after children in an RBK residential home; four formerly looked after children now living independently; three parents of physically disabled children; two parents of learning disabled children; one young adult with physical disabilities. The sample was ethnically mixed: three black African; three Asian; seven white British. Tenure included: six RBK tenants; two housing association tenants; one private tenant; three in owner occupied housing. Key findings included:

- Six people were in temporary accommodation and would therefore require a move in due course; a further six were seeking to move, so only two considered themselves to be satisfactorily housed at present.
- In five out of six (non-temporary) cases where people wanted to move, problems with inadequate space and mobility issues were cited.
- Four of those seeking to move stated they required social housing; two intended to purchase.
- Households with a physically disabled young person all wanted additional adaptations; between them they provided a long list which included level access showers, door entry/intercoms, door widening for wheelchairs, handrails and guards, mobile hoist.

The full datasets have been retained and can be further interrogated through RBK Strategic Business following the conclusion of this project.

Focus Groups

The Special Educational Needs Team in Children's Services facilitated two focus groups with disabled young people and their parents. One focus group was successfully held with physically and learning disabled young people, where even non verbal young people were able to

contribute. Another was held with parents of disabled children. A further focus group, facilitated by the Looked After Children Team was held with representatives from Children in Care Council (young people who are a group of care leavers).

The focus group for physically and learning disabled young people attracted 10 young people aged between 15 and 25. Of the 10 young people present eight were presently attending school or college; two were working. All the young people were still living with parents although one was away at college and back with mum at weekends. Almost all felt happy and safe where they lived. Several had parents who had undertaken adaptations while others had received help through RBK's occupational therapists team.

The young people discussed their expectations between now and 2020. For most the main wish was to finish school, college or university and then to get a good job. The young people generally recognised that it would be difficult getting independent accommodation. With regard to housing, most were expected to be sharing with friends. Thinking about their future home, feeling safe indoors was important, as was having a suitable adaptations for their disability. The young people recognised they would continue to need support, such as continuing to live near parents. Making the move to independent accommodation would be challenging, and the young people said they would need help with such things as finding a suitable property, help with moving in at and with all the form filling. Those who expected to be living in shared supported living mentioned that they would need ongoing support and help with living skills. The young people spoke well of the support they received from various sections within Children's Services and Adults Social Care.

Only two parents turned up for the focus group that they themselves had requested, although it was an interesting discussion. Both parents had housing issues. One was the parent of a young wheelchair dependent daughter, living in a privately rented flat. RBK had helped by fitting a shower, but would be unable to assist with fitting a hoist as the landlord was unlikely to allow it. This parent foresaw that it would become impossible to cope in due course without a hoist, and had applied for bigger home but, assessed only as Band 'C', stood little chance of an offer. As to his daughter's future, he didn't think that sharing accommodation should be forced on disabled adults if they didn't want to share. With an adapted home his daughter might be able to make it on her own.

The other parent, a longstanding tenant of RBK lived in a two bedroom maisonette with two older sons, one with a disability and attending special school in RBK. The older son was now back from university which meant mum having to sleep in the living room. RBK didn't recognise such households as overcrowded, so this parent too had no realistic expectation of an offer. This parent hoped that both sons would get work eventually, but lack of housing options meant they would probably remain at home in a 'forever family'.

The final focus group was held with four representatives from 'Children in Care Council' (a group of young people representing care leavers). The young people talked about their housing thoughts and aspirations to date. All confirmed they planned to finish their education before going on to get a job and a home of their own. One, currently studying and sharing a flat during term had been put off the experience of sharing and now wanted his own flat. Another with no experience of independent living, agreed. But two expected to be living in shared housing when they got to university. There was general agreement that these young people hadn't had an opportunity to discuss how to get and sustain a home, and the skills and knowledge needed. They contributed a list of skills and knowledge that they felt they lacked: budgeting, welfare benefits, cooking, domestic tasks like cleaning, dealing with neighbours over such things as holding a party, managing bills, housing law, keeping healthy. An interesting discussion followed about whose responsibility it would be to inform and train the young people. Despite a unanimous first response that it should be the social workers, thoughts opened up to placing more expectation onto foster carers and to the young people themselves sharing responsibility for researching particular issues, or maybe a buddy system, pairing up a young person in care with someone who had been through the system and could pass on their experience. The idea of 'training flat' also came up, where small groups of young people could spend a week or two practising some of the skills required for independent living.

Housing Issues and Recommendations

Tenancy Records

In compiling this report, it became evident that the quality of some tenancy records needs to be improved. In some respects the breadth of information is commendable, for example age and ethnicity, whilst other information is incomplete or out of date. The Housing Service is working on improving this, alongside the development of new reporting tools. Housing has a minor role in ensuring that families with disabled children are known to RBK and that information held is accurate.

Recommendation VC1: *As tenancy records are updated, RBK should aim to capture more comprehensive information on dependants with a disability including children. The purpose of holding such information includes Equalities Act monitoring and promotion of relevant services.*

Social Services Allocations

Housing Services support the needs of disabled and looked after children including those leaving care in several ways, mostly through what is known as the Social Services Quota which is set annually by the housing allocations team. This and other housing quotas are part of their effort to balance competing needs for the very scarce housing resource of 365 council lettings a year. The Housing Service seeks to involve client services including Children's Services and Adult Social Care in discussions each year leading to agreement of the following year's quotas.

Families with disabled children currently receive priority access to social housing, as do young people leaving care and homeless 16 and 17 year olds, under Children Act 1989 duties. The current 2013/14 annual 'social services allocation quota' is shown below. It gives overriding priority to approved cases and therefore, an almost certain housing offer, if the applicant bids for housing, with reasonable expectations, within the choice based lettings system. Eleven out of 25 'social services quota' lettings are earmarked for children or young people leaving care. This suggests that within RBK's limited housing resources, reasonable efforts are being made to ensure fair outcomes for vulnerable children.

| Quota Group | Annual Quota |
|-------------|--------------|
|-------------|--------------|

| | | |
|------|----------------------------|-----------|
| MH | Mental Health | 12 |
| | | |
| YPLC | Young Person Leaving Care | 8 |
| CHA | Children Act 1989 | 2 |
| DIS | Physical Disability | 1 |
| CDIS | Children with Disabilities | 1 |
| LDIS | Learning Disability | 1 |
| | | 25 |

‘Young Persons Leaving Care’ Quota

The ‘young person leaving care’ list is oversubscribed, and by September 2013, the allocations team had already exceeded the annual year quota by letting to 12 young people, following an informal agreement. The case could be made that this quota should have been formally increased for 2013/14 and 2014/15 to accommodate the ‘bulge’ of 18 year olds leaving care in these years. However, it is for Children’s Services to request this if it becomes apparent that a number of care leavers will not succeed in finding accommodation after their care ends. RBK has a responsibility for the welfare of care leavers up to age 25.

For the time being Allocations is managing to make offers in excess of quota to meet the demand. It is recommended that Housing Service and Children’s Services review the ‘young person leaving care’ quota for 2014/15 and decide whether a temporary uplift is necessary for another year and if so to put it on a formal basis. In addition to the annual quota of eight permanent lettings, Housing has allocated a pool of up to six one bedroom flats for young people leaving care, on two year fixed term tenancies, following which they are eligible to apply for permanent council housing. The Housing Service is trying to contribute to RBK’s leaving care pathways within resource limitations, but so far there has been no take up of this offer. Reasons for the failure of this seemingly attractive scheme need to be further investigated.

‘Children Act 1989’ Quota

The 'Children Act 1989' list is for the prevention of homelessness amongst young people aged 16 and 17. It is also oversubscribed, with three lettings made by September 2013 and five more on the list. Nevertheless, this group of households seems to be quite volatile, with some failing to pursue bids and others going off to make their own arrangements. It is recommended that Housing Service and Children's Services review the workings of the 'Children Act 1989' quota, especially whether this group of young people requires more proactive engagement around their housing options, ensuring that either they make bids or find other solutions.

'Children with Disabilities' Quota

Children's Services has no outstanding nominations under the 'children with disabilities' quota. But during the interviews and focus groups, the project team met two parents of disabled children, both of whom described housing problems, with one potentially becoming serious as their disabled five year old child continues to grow. Hopefully, the lack of nominations to the 'children with disabilities' quota to date, reflects a wish to hold back in case there is a case with overriding priority during the year, rather than a systems failure. It is recommended that Housing Service and Children's Services review the 'children with disabilities' quota and whether enough help is available to families facing serious problems due to unsuitable housing.

Tenancies for Foster Carers

Most LAC are in fostering. RBK's allocations strategy identifies foster carers as one group of people who may need social housing with an appropriate number of bedrooms and who, if offered a Council property, would be offered a fixed term tenancy while they are fostering. Children's Services can also use their 'social services nomination' quota in urgent cases. It is not clear in the published Allocations Policy how prospective foster parents obtain additional priority. RBK needs to be sure that this information is reaching the right people at the right times.

It is recommended that Housing Service and the Fostering Team review whether the current system is working adequately to address RBK's needs for fostering families, both in terms of access routes to larger housing and in terms of information to prospective fostering families.

Recommendation VC2: Children's Services to liaise more regularly with Housing Allocations, say quarterly, to review the performance of all relevant waiting lists and allocations quotas and to input into annual allocations plan reviews.

New Housing Development

Supported Housing for Looked After Children

Section 22G of The Children Act 1989, requires a council to take steps, as far as reasonably practicable, to secure accommodation for LAC within the authority's area, which meets their needs. Children's Services currently has 48 young people with low needs, in unnecessarily expensive medium level supported residential accommodation for lack of a better alternative. Most of these young people simply need shared housing with a low level of support. Fifty young people are living out of borough. Thus, to date, RBK does not fully meet the locality or the needs requirements of The Children Act 1989

Due to the lack of available supported housing within the borough, RBK is paying more than is necessary through costly out-borough placements for LAC, where levels of care and support provision are in excess of actual need. The average cost of an independent medium level supported residential placement is over £3,500 per week. So far no alternative solution within Kingston had been found. Children's Services has apparently been seeking around 4 to 6 family houses through Housing Services, although Housing Allocations is seemingly unaware of this request.

Whilst new housing development is an option in theory, RBK is very constrained in the supply of additional social, or 'affordable', housing. Land and finance are limited and OK5 Project 3 is seeking to deliver as much as possible, within those limitations. Timescales from identifying a vacant site to handing over keys to new tenants could be anything up to three years, and perhaps five for a building that is part tenanted.

Recommendation VC3: *Children's Services should take the opportunity offered by Housing Services to work together on future development plans that include the needs of disabled children and children leaving care.*

Supported Living for Disabled Young People

There are several housing providers operating in the London Region that specialise in accommodation for young people with disabilities. Specialist development is likely to require the expertise of registered providers with small scale and specialist expertise. Examples of such specialists are:

- Advance Housing and Support (Provides support and accommodation to people with learning disabilities. Also has a shared ownership scheme for people with learning disabilities.)
- New Era Housing Association (Registered housing association specialising in housing for people with learning disabilities.)
- Golden Lane Housing (Established by Mencap to develop property based initiatives to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities.)
- Habinteg (Registered housing association specialising in housing for people with physical disabilities.)

As disabled young people reach adulthood, one of their housing options may be for a group of three to five to share a house, with facilities for care, if applicable. There are some good examples of imaginative schemes being put together by registered providers and local authorities (see box below).

Five young adults are celebrating independence in their new home thanks to an innovative partnership between Bath & North East Somerset Council Learning Difficulties Team, specialist housing organization, Curo and Adult Community Services. Willow House is a bespoke new-build scheme for young adults with autism and Asperger syndrome. The development consists of five individual one-bedroom flats, a communal lounge, and support accommodation. The concept behind the scheme is to allow individuals with similar needs to live independently, benefiting from a flexible support package from the council that prevents the need for one-to-one 24 hour assistance. The building is especially safe and includes anti-tampering equipment: 'boxed in' boilers, adjustable water flow rates, specialist Tunstall equipment and underfloor heating so that radiators don't need to be used. A communal lounge area has been incorporated into the design to encourage a social environment.

For such long term schemes to stand a chance in the competition for resources, Children's Services, together with their service users, should begin working up a brief at least two or three years ahead of implementation, with support from Housing Services.

Recommendation VC4: *One shared supported living scheme for a group of disabled young people approaching adulthood should be worked up jointly for inclusion in the Housing Development Strategy, subject to financial viability assessment.*

Innovation need not stop at permanent new build social housing. Other innovative ideas have been put forward for temporary housing units that can be constructed and later demounted on vacant sites awaiting permanent redevelopment, which RBK may have in its possession or acquire. These temporary units might perhaps prove to be another move-on housing resource for young people leaving care and faced with the alternative option of sharing a flat in the private rented sector. (See box below).

Y:Cube Housing is a new housing concept developed by SW London YMCA providing self-contained units that requires no capital grant and offers affordable accommodation, primarily targeted as move-on accommodation for tenants who have previously been accommodated in hostels/foyers and other short stay housing schemes. The Y:Cube Housing unit is a modular system that is portable. The units have been designed to provide a self-contained, one bed flat of 26sq meters with a high quality toilet/shower and galley kitchen. Each unit has its own front door, as well as its own metered heating (electric) and water system. The design is led by Roger Stirk Harbour and Partners; project management and construction is by Insulshell. The units are designed to exceed 2002 Part L Building Regulations, meeting Code Level 4 for Sustainable Homes. The units are located in clusters (of between 20 to 40 units) on either leased brownfield sites or sites in ownership of housing providers. The accommodation can be owned and managed by housing charities and Registered Housing Providers. At the end of the lease period the accommodation may be removed and relocated onto another site. Rent will be set at, or below, the local housing allowance for one bedroom units making the accommodation accessible for people on benefits.

Recommendation VC5: *Housing Services should explore with YMCA and Children's Services whether there is the potential for a Y:Cube type interim housing solution within RBK for a range of single young people including young people approaching adulthood.*

Short Term Housing

There is another potential housing resource that could deliver short term housing solutions for LAC relatively quickly. Sheltered housing, that is in process of being decommissioned, or might in the near future be decommissioned, due to low demand could be re-utilised for the purpose of a medium stay hostel, with individual bedsits for low needs looked after young people. Initial discussions with Children's Services have been enthusiastic and promising, but need to be followed up with a solid business case to show that a hostel type solution would work in practice and would save more than would be gained by closure of a redundant sheltered scheme and reuse of the capital receipt for another purpose. If agreed, RBK would commission low level support externally, from providers such as YMCA. However Children's Services would put in support up to 24/7, where required.

Recommendation VC6: *Housing and Children's Services should seek to firm up short term proposals for the use of redundant sheltered scheme places by low needs LACs currently placed in medium care residential schemes outside Kingston.*

Management Arrangements for Disabled Adaptations

RBK should look again at the way disabled adaptations are managed. The outcome should be the speedy identification of a household's needs, leading to a quick decision, followed by quick and cost effective implementation.

Households, where there is a 'permanently and substantially' disabled child or young person, living in privately owned or rented accommodation may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to provide major adaptations to their homes, e.g. stair lift, level access shower or ramps. Council tenants in the same position and in need of adaptations are also able to request help from RBK. An occupational therapist's (OT's) assessment is required for this, though control of adaptations lies within Housing Services.

Liaison arrangements are in place to ensure where possible that OT recommendations to Housing Services for major adaptations (or if necessary a housing transfer) are made before the point of need, with the aim of ensuring that the work can be completed in time to avoid a breakdown in the home care management situation, due to lack of suitable accommodation or care facilities.

This is a complex operational area involving a range of stakeholders. These may include residents, private landlords, Housing Services, Occupational Therapists, third sector organisations who provide advice and practical assistance, hospitals, Adult Social Care. Each has a different perspective and set of financial constraints. For example in the case of privately rented housing it is usually difficult to secure major adaptations that affect the structure or appearance of a property, but would enable a disabled resident continue living safely and comfortably. Private landlords mostly do not welcome adaptations that might reduce the appeal of the property to a future incoming tenant, even if paid for by someone else. It is also hard for RBK to justify an expensive adaptation when there is no guarantee that it will be retained for future use if the existing tenant eventually moves on. HRA and DFG funds are currently rationed and may need to reduce in the coming years, so it is essential that investments are not squandered as a result of being removed after a short period.

There is also recognised wastage where the council has invested in adaptations for a particular tenant, who subsequently moves out. Under pressure of time to get the property relet, it is not usually possible to find a disabled applicant with matching needs. This means expensive equipment, such as a stairlift, is removed rather than re-utilised for someone else.

A further inherent difficulty with the management of disabled adaptations is that budgets are fixed while demand is hugely unpredictable. Most adaptations are relatively inexpensive and can be budgeted for annually. Occasionally however the demand will come along for, say, a tracked hoist or through-floor lift that is hugely expensive.

There seems to be agreement across departments that the efficiency and speed of current processes could be improved, along with better liaison arrangements. Hopefully more effective joint working between Adult Social Care (OT department) and Housing Services on this would deliver savings to the council.

One suggestion is to introduce a 'fast track' procedure whenever a child or young person is 'bed blocking' in a hospital or care home but could, with suitable adaptations, return to a home in the community. The cost of a residential care bed in the private and voluntary sector is over £500 per week. Considering the weekly cost of delay, there is insufficient urgency in the current process. Part of the adaptations budget could be placed under direct Adult Social Care control for urgent cases, subject to appropriate controls. If homecare costs are racking up at more than £500 per week, there is no point spending two additional weeks deciding whether £1,000 investment in an adaptation that would get someone back home is justified – it is self evidently an investment with a two week payback and should be progressed.

Protecting the council's DFG investment in privately rented accommodation might be resolved through a special agreement with the landlord to ensure the retention of the property for letting to a disabled person for a certain number of years. This could include, for example, offering a form of income guarantee or compensation where a landlord agrees to an alteration which makes the property hard to let, should the current disabled tenant vacate within a certain period. This would help allay landlords' understandable concern at the prospect of being unable to relet a highly adapted property. The cost of such a measure should be weighed against the cost of having to move the tenant into the social sector and undertaking adaptation works there instead.

Occupational Therapists and Housing Services should also consider possible measures to reduce wastage when adapted properties become void, through earlier and more accurate matching of waiting list data with information held on property adaptations. Joint work on a more accessible database of property features (responsibility of Housing Services) including adaptations in place, and suitability for various forms of further adaptation, together with a more accessible database of disability requirements of applicants (responsibility of Occupational Therapists), could make it possible to match disabled applicants more often and more accurately with pre-adapted homes.

Occupational Therapists, Housing Services and other agencies need to work more closely together to achieve these aims. For example a monthly adaptations panel, which has worked well in other local authorities, could contribute towards a solution. This would ensure effective communication and challenge between the key players and that informed decisions are made relatively quickly.

Recommendation VC7: *Occupational Therapists and Housing Services should review management arrangements for disabled adaptations including:*

- *A monthly 'adaptations panel', or similar, held between Housing Services and Occupational Therapists*
- *A 'fast track' adaptations procedure whenever a child or young person is 'bed blocking' in a hospital or care home*
- *Measures to overcome the reluctance of private landlords to agree to disabled adaptations being carried out*
- *Measures to reduce wastage when previously adapted properties are vacated and relet.*

Advice for Young People approaching Adulthood

The disabled young people, encountered by the project team, were forward looking and had clearly been helped to think about their housing futures after achieving adulthood. This seemed slightly less the case with looked after children, although in focus groups, the looked after young people were clear about the kind of skills they would like help with: budgeting, welfare benefits, cooking, domestic tasks like cleaning, dealing with neighbours over such things as holding a party, managing bills, housing law, keeping healthy. As part of preparing for adulthood, it would seem to be essential that young people about to leave care acquire some of the skills required to manage a tenancy, especially as there has historically been a high tenancy failure rate amongst this group. This remains the lead responsibility of Children's Services. However Housing Services has in-house resources it can offer to help deliver training and support as part of its homelessness prevention service. There are also third sector organisations with relevant skills, who should not be forgotten.

Recommendation VC8: Children's Services should help young people approaching independence to acquire the skills to manage a tenancy, and should be able to call on the help of Housing Services, in helping to deliver key 'life skills' training.

Joined Up Working

Current liaison between Housing and Children's Services will be inadequate, in the eyes of the Housing Department, to implement the spirit of the new Special Educational Needs & Disability Children & Families Bill that will come into force from September 2014. For example Housing has been seeking to agree a new Joint Working Protocol as part of OK5 Project 1 but this is failing to make progress. Unless more proactive working arrangements are in place it is likely that looked after, SEN and disabled young people will miss out on future opportunities to secure a share of RBK's housing development programme. Moreover these young people may also fail to obtain their fair share of council and housing association lettings if their voice is not effectively heard when the 'social services allocations quota' is reviewed annually. In addition Housing Services is the gateway to other services and resources, such as leasing in the private sector.

Recommendation VC9: Children's Services and Housing to both appoint a single senior point of liaison. The responsibility of each person will be to meet regularly with their opposite number, initially monthly and thereafter quarterly, to help establish better joint working methods, progress joint issues, and to act as problem solver within their respective services. Children's Services should be liaising ad hoc, but at least twice a year, with Housing Development to review long term projects and ensure that Children's Services do not miss out on opportunities to secure a share of RBK's housing development programme.