

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

16 November, 2016

Name of Cabinet Member:
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People- Cllr Ed Ruane

Director Approving Submission of the report:
Executive Director of People

Ward(s) affected:
City-wide

Title: Improving and Redesigning City Council Children's Residential Care Provision

Is this a key decision?

No – this is a decision to proceed to consultation.

Executive Summary:

The Ofsted Inspection of Coventry's Children's Services published in March 2014 judged the three areas of 'Looked After Children', 'Leaving Care' and 'Adoption Performance' as requiring improvement. The Improvement Notice issued to Coventry City Council on 30th June 2014 included the requirement to address the areas of improvement identified by the inspection of services for children undertaken by Ofsted, including services for children looked after.

In response to the need to improve Children's Services in Coventry, The Children's Services Strategy 2016 – 2018 was developed to set out a Vision for Children's Services and a detailed transformation programme that supports the improvement of Children's Services and places children at the heart of everything we do.

The improvement of these services sits within the context of a significant savings pressure for Children's Services with a requirement to achieve in excess of £7 million in 2017/18, rising to in excess of £11 million from 2018/19.

The Children's Services Transformation Programme converts the vision for the service into action that will ensure sustainable service improvement in Coventry. The programme comprises of eight discrete projects, largely falling under the 2 broad themes of workforce redesign and looked after children placements.

Children's Internal Residential Care Redesign is one of the eight projects and sets out to improve the quality of children's homes provided by the Council, whilst realising revenue benefits. It is planned that the redesign of the service will reduce spend on external residential provision by creating additional internal capacity by utilising the existing resource tied up in the current provision. The proposal is to provide homes with additional capacity, higher levels of occupancy and improved quality of care that represent better value for money.

This report recommends a period of stakeholder consultation to explore options for the reconfiguration of the service by providing 4 smaller homes for children to replace the existing provision at Gravel Hill and The Grange children's homes. The proposal is based on an identified

need to create a more coherent, modern and suitable model of provision for the future care of Coventry's children and young people who require a residential home while they are being looked after by the local authority.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is recommended to support a period of consultation on the proposal to change the way that Council operated Children's Residential Care Homes are provided.

List of Appendices included:

There are no appendices included in this report

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny? No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

Yes, Corporate Parenting Board

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Improving and Redesigning City Council Children's Residential Care Provision

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1** Coventry currently operates two children's homes for children and young people assessed as requiring residential care. These homes are Gravel Hill and The Grange, together registered for a maximum of 12 children of either gender aged between 10 and 18 years. Gravel Hill is used as a short-term assessment centre and offers a 12 week programme and The Grange offers medium to long term placements for those assessed as needing residential care as opposed to a family based placement. This report sets out the proposal for an alternative and forward thinking option for the future service delivery of residential care provision for children in Coventry. The resolution being sought is for a period of consultation with the Young People, staff and key stakeholders and partners to be undertaken on these proposals.
- 1.2** This proposal would see the disposal of two existing children's homes (The Grange and Gravel Hill) in their current form and the identification of four properties (5 or 6 bedroomed) for the redesigned service. This will include acquisition of suitable properties and the intention would be to use capital receipts from the sale of home(s) to purchase the new provision.
- 1.3** The existing children's homes incur average weekly placement costs which are significantly higher than the national average. Coventry homes average £5,405 per week (full cost based on average capacity in the year to January 2016) and Other LA homes average £2,964 per week (DfE 2014).
- 1.4** The existing homes do not closely mirror the domestic setting of a family residence but provide a more institutionalised living environment with industrial sized kitchens, large office space for staff and domestic staff employed to undertake the cleaning of the properties and cooking of meals. In comparison, the proposal to provide four smaller residential homes would provide homes that offer good quality care in a group setting which replicates as much as possible day to day life in a thriving, happy and healthy family.

2. Rationale for Change

- 2.1** The current provision offers a maximum occupancy of 10 beds (4 registered at Gravel Hill and 6 the effective operating maximum at The Grange).
- 2.2** The proposed new model comprising of 4 X 6 or 5 bedroom homes would offer up to 16 placements if suitable properties are available in the area (either through the purchase of 4 properties, or purchase of 3 and a remodelling of Gravel Hill).
- 2.3** There are revenue benefits as a result of this proposal as detailed in Financial Implications section. In addition to savings benefits the proposed new model would achieve the following;
 - enable more flexibility to meet the needs of our children living in residential care
 - enable the retention of an in-house provision which gives a greater degree of control

- increased capacity and the potential to avoid up to 6 external and distant residential placements
- increased local provision to ensure continuity of education and health care and
- the purchase of properties that are fit for purpose and meet service requirements.

3. Options Considered

- 3.1 Option 1 - Recommended Proposal** - Undertake a period of consultation on the preferred option to close the two existing children's homes (The Grange and Gravel Hill) in their current form and the identification/acquisition of four properties (5 or 6 bedroomed) for the redesigned service. Utilise any capital receipts from the sale of current property(s) to purchase the new provision. Establish four small homes with a maximum of four residents operating in a way that more closely resembles family life, where shared activity is paramount, where the creation of close nurturing relationships is emphasised and where the risk of institutional life is eliminated, or at least significantly minimised. These will be homes where adults and children interact continuously, where menus are planned and food is cooked together, where individual and group activities are negotiated and undertaken, where pride and ownership of the property is a jointly shared and where there is shared responsibility for upkeep, maintenance and neighbourliness. These will be less children's homes and more homes for children.
- 3.2 Option 2** – retain the current two homes with their existing Statements of Purpose and operating procedures representing a “no change option”. This option is not recommended. In brief the homes use an outmoded and dated model of residential care practice, considered to be overly institutional by modern standards and in addition do not currently offer good value for money in comparison to residential care provided either by other local authorities or voluntary or private sector providers. Occupancy levels have been relatively low, as a result of which staff resource levels are relatively high and these factors have led to a weekly placement cost which is not sustainable.
- 3.3 Option 3** – dispense with internal residential provision altogether and simply commission placements according to identified need via a combination of block contracts, framework agreement provision and spot purchase from the market. Whilst this is a position which has been adopted by a number of local authorities it is not considered to represent the best way forward in Coventry for the following reasons:
- A greater degree of control of placement supply is retained by having internal provision
 - Retaining in-house provision allows for greater flexibility in overall service delivery and the use of controllable resources
 - The proposed model increases overall capacity and occupancy which reduces the need for more expensive external placements
 - Retention of capital assets which may well appreciate in value over time
 - Increases local provision and better ensures continuity of education and healthcare
- 3.4** A consultation is proposed in order to seek the views of the main stakeholders involved;
- Children, young people and their carers
 - Health professionals
 - Education professionals
 - Police
 - External Agencies

- Social Care staff

Consultation will be undertaken through face to face meetings and events and also via an on line survey.

It is proposed that during the consultation period further exploration of the option to utilise Gravel Hill as one of the proposed four homes providing future placements is undertaken. Gravel Hill is already owned by the council and is the right size of property for the proposal but would require remodelling to ensure it could fit the new model of service provision. More detailed work is required in order to decide whether or not this approach would offer value for money and achieve both the service improvement and savings required.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1** This report is seeking permission to consult on the outline proposals being described and further explore delivery options. If agreed the consultation programme outlined above will be conducted throughout November and December 2016. Results from this consultation will be collated and analysed with a view to a report being presented to Cabinet early in 2017. The implementation phase for any decision made following the consultation will be undertaken in 2017.

5. Comments from Executive Director of Resources

5.1 Financial implications

- 5.1.1 Cost benefits would be realised due to placing more children in internal provision without incurring additional costs, so therefore needing less external provision. This is estimated to be a reduction in cost of between £500K and £1M and the internal residential project has an annual revenue target of £750K. The financial savings hinge on the ability to achieve a high level of occupancy on an ongoing basis (in excess of 85%). This is considered to be achievable based on the provision being less institutionalised and the aim for this provision to be a long-term provision for children with residential care needs.

- 5.1.2 In addition to revenue there will also be capital implications. The implementation of the project depends on the disposal and sale of The Grange, and possibly Gravel Hill (depending on the outcome of further exploration). Any proceeds from the sale of the asset(s) would then be used to purchase/remodel the new provision however there is potentially a timing issue and bridging finance may be required to ensure continuity of provision. The expectation is that the cost of purchasing and remodelling new/existing properties will not exceed proceeds from sale of the current asset(s).

5.2 Legal implications

- 5.2.1 The Children Act 1989 (Section 22(4)) requires the Council to consult with young people and seek their views on decisions affecting them. The proposal will also require formal consultation with staff and their trade unions.
- 5.2.2 The Children Act 1989 (Section 22G) requires local authorities to provide sufficient accommodation within the authority area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after.

- 5.2.3 Public authority decision makers are under a non-delegable ongoing duty to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. (Public Sector Equality duty).
- 5.2.4 The proposed consultation and resulting equality assessment is intended to enable the decision makers to consider the impact and public response to the proposal and any alternative proposals raised. The product of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account when the ultimate decision is made.
- 5.2.5 Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 and the statutory guidance issued under it imposes duty on a local authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way on which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 5.2.6 Regulation 49 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 requires the responsible individual and or the registered person to give notice in writing to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Ofsted as soon as it is practicable to do so if a registered provider proposes to cease to carry on or manage the home.
- 5.2.7 There will be other legal implications depending on the final proposal following consultation.

6. Other Implications

6.1 Property Implications

- 6.1.1 The property implications of this proposal are as follows. The existing children's homes at Gravel Hill and Grange Avenue will be declared surplus and disposed of at an estimated disposal value of £1.6m to fund the acquisition of four, five or six Bedroomed detached houses in the Coventry Area. It is assumed that the properties to be acquired will be in good order with little requirement to spend on them, other than to ensure fire, Health and safety and Children's Homes Regulations compliance.
- 6.1.2 A desk top survey of available properties in Coventry has indicated that there are some buildings on the market in the City, but availability for purchase will obviously be market dependent at the point when the decision to acquire is made.
- 6.1.3 The four replacement properties are assumed to incur the same property running costs of the current two properties (£82,000 per annum). There will be some overlap of running costs as it will be necessary to acquire the replacement properties before the disposal of the existing ones. If there are additional property running costs these will impact on the savings achieved.
- 6.1.4 Further work needs to be done with planning colleagues to ensure what if any planning permissions are required for the premises to be acquired and disposed.
- 6.1.5 The Council invested £330,000 in 2010/11 converting Gravel Hill into its current configuration.

6.2 How will this contribute to the Council's priorities?

- 6.2.1 This proposed service development would make proactive contributions in a number of areas for Council priority. At a direct level, the newly configured arrangements will have immediate and sustainable impact to outcomes for children in care. The new model will provide improved quality of accommodation than currently exists, which will be located in established residential areas with good access to transport and easy availability of community resources and activities. This will enable our children to be in a better position to make positive contributions to both their own lives and the wider neighbourhood in which they live.
- 6.2.2 We aspire to look after our children in care within or close to Coventry. This allows for the maintenance of family contact and continuity of both education and healthcare. It also allows for a seamless transition towards independence for those children aged over 16 who will most likely be looking to assume adulthood and settle within the city. They will be close to any work experience, training and/or employment opportunities that may become available and will have ready access to their Social Worker or Personal Adviser situated within localities.

6.3 How is risk being managed?

- 6.3.1 A Transformation Programme Delivery Board meets on a monthly basis with representation from all Children's Services Teams. An Internal Residential Care Redesign Project Team meets regularly to progress actions and manage identified risks. A project risk register has been established for the project. The Project Team Manager reports to the Transformation Board at each monthly meeting sharing a Highlight Report which give updates on progress, identified risks and mitigation. Risks will continue to be identified, mitigations sought and impact managed through this process.

6.4 What is the impact on the organisation?

6.4.1 Staffing Impacts

The proposals outlined will impact on staff. There may be some staffing reductions and changes to working practice and hours. The proposed model would remove the Waking Nights arrangements (unless exceptional circumstances require this to be in place) and introduce Sleep-in positions. There would no longer be a requirement for the Team Leader, Cook and Domestic posts. Staff and Trade Unions will be fully consulted on the specific content of the proposals. Any changes will be managed in accordance with the City Council's agreement on management of change which aims to manage staffing reductions through management of vacancies, reviews of temporary contracts and avoidance of compulsory redundancies through redeployment or Early Retirement Voluntary Redundancy opportunities where possible.

6.5 Equalities / EIA

- 6.5.1 Officers will undertake an Equality Consultation Assessment as part of the consultation period for consideration when the final recommendations are made.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

6.6.1 Any impact on partner agencies as a result of these proposals will be minimal and is expected to be positive. The increase in capacity arising from the proposals will ensure more young people in care placed locally and therefore have improved access to wraparound support services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Youth Service and related support provision. Community Safety will be enhanced through a careful property search and locality assessments.

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