



A separate Briefing Note is submitted in the private part of the agenda in respect of this item, as it contains details required to be kept private in accordance with Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The grounds for privacy are that it contains information relating to an individual, financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). The public interest in maintaining the exemption under Schedule 12A outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

23 November 2023

Subject: Homes for Looked After Children and cost of placements

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To provide a briefing outlining the challenges in finding appropriate residential care for children, including those who have a high level of diverse & complex needs, and consequent impact of the cost of these children's placements.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:

- 1) Note the continued support for the Residential Children's homes review & Strategy 2023-2026 (Appendix1) and the work being undertaken in relation to sufficiency, including value for money, addressing high-cost placements and improving outcomes for our looked after children.

- 3) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 Wherever possible children and their families will be supported to remain living together when it is safe to do so. Our Strengths based; outcomes focused Family valued approach seeks to enable families to find the solutions to challenges they face.
- 3.2 Families are supported through Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences (FGC) to identify family led solutions. If a child cannot remain in the care of their parent/s, we will explore the wider family network, supporting connected adults to become Kinship (Connected) foster carers, or a Special Guardian,
- 3.3 If this is not viable, a foster placement will be sought, enabling children to receive care and support in a family environment, through either the Coventry Fostering service or via an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA).

- 3.4 For some children, due to their complexity of need, placing them in a children's home will be deemed the most appropriate care plan and only if our internal children's homes or block providers cannot care for them, would we seek to explore the wider residential market of commissioned placements.
- 3.5 There are currently 67 children living in a residential children's home, placed by Coventry Children's Services, a reduction from quarter one of 9 children. Trend analysis of data shows there is often an increase in June each year as foster carers are unable/ unwilling to care for new children due to planned holidays and carers offering respite support to each other.
- 3.6 A bi-monthly review is undertaken of all children living in residential care, to consider their plans to move on, in line with their care plan. In September 2023, a deep dive review was undertaken of the 74 children who were living in residential care by Children's Services Leadership Team (CSLT) and a review of the highest cost placements with the Chief Executive and Chief Partnership Officer.
- 3.7 The review identified that there were clear plans for each child living in a children's home and highlighted the complexity and challenges of finding homes for some of our looked after children.
- 3.8 Although the numbers of children living in a children's home have reduced, costs have increased for newly commissioned residential placements significantly over the last 12 months.

This is a national challenge as was evidenced in the Competition and Market's Authority report of March 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social care of May 2022, and the Government's consultation response to this review – Stable Homes: Built on Love (February 2023) there is recognition that the children's placement market is broken. These problems break down into two main areas. A lack of placements of the right kind, thereby increasing risk of unregulated placements and secondly that larger providers are making materially higher profits, and charging materially higher prices, than we would expect if this market were functioning effectively. There is also a concern around high level of debt some providers have and impact if they could no longer operate and therefore the impact on individual children and LA's ability to meet these children's needs.

- 3.9 Recent reports from Warwickshire & Cambridgeshire highlight the challenges they are facing in relation to the residential market. Warwickshire identified that they are paying 57k per week for one child and Cambridgeshire 85 K.
- 3.10 An outcome from the Care Review is to increase, strengthen & upskill those who work in residential children's homes. The Strategic lead for Looked after Children (Corporate Parenting) is working with the Department for Education and Ofsted on this, representing the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). Alongside the Operational Lead for Residential a meeting & visits to some of our children's homes from 4 DfE representatives, including the Policy Lead - Children's Homes Workforce took place on the 7th of November.

4 **Sufficiency.**

- 4.1 Several actions are already being progressed to address the placement sufficiency challenges through the Sufficiency Steering group.

- 4.2 **Residential strategy (2023-2026)**, set out to open a further 5 further children's homes, bringing the total to 10, run by Coventry City Council. The short stay/ same day home has been purchased in Doe Bank Lane. Unfortunately, the purchase was delayed by the sellers and as a result the home will not open until early 2024. A Registered Manager has been appointed and the application to Ofsted is being submitted, alongside a planning application for change in use of the property.
- 4.3 The 1st purpose built home for looked after children with a disability, based at Pearl Hyde in on track to open in the summer of 2024.
- 4.4 There has been a robust, targeted recruitment campaign for carers to work in our homes, including an 'open evening', which has resulted in 92 applications being submitted.
- 4.5 **Hard 2 Place** contract with 2 commissioned providers to meet the need of children who require high levels of staffing in solo or 2 bedded homes, due to the risks they present to themselves or others through their presenting behaviours, as result of childhood trauma. It is anticipated that these homes will open early in the new financial year 24/25, subject to planning and Ofsted registration. There are discussions with a further 2 providers who may join this contract.
- 4.6 **House Project & Staying Close**, increase in the number of cohorts. 2 children currently living in an internal children's homes have just been offered their own home through the House Project and will receive ongoing support through "Staying Close".
- 4.7 **Next Step foster carers** to support children to move from or prevent moving to a children's home who have complex needs. There has been a significant growth of 7 additional Next Step placements in this financial year.
- 4.8 In addition, the West Midlands region has submitted a bid to the DfE to become a Regional Care Corporative (RCC), which if successful will bring additional funding into the region to address placement challenges, including funding for jointly commissioned placements between the ICB and Coventry & Warwickshire.
- 4.9 The regional residential commissioning contract is due to end in Dec 2024. The current contract is not fit for purpose in today's market, with providers increasingly opting to leave it and rely on council's spot purchasing from them. Coventry is leading the recommissioning on behalf of the region and is aiming to have the new contract in place by Oct 2024.

5 Health Inequalities Impact

- 5.1 There is significant work being undertaken with the ICB in relation to meeting the needs of children with complex mental health, Autism and/ or a learning disability that require bespoke residential care. 5 out of our 6 most costly placements in September, meet the needs of children who have one or several of these diagnoses.
- 5.2 For some children being discharged from a tier 4 hospital, where there is a need for a registered provision there are few or no providers who are willing/or able to care for them.
- 5.3 Joint work is being undertaken to enhance preventative services and reduce the number of children who access hospital due to their mental health needs. There are early discussions in relation to jointly creating a wraparound service of 'day provision', out of hours support and a jointly funded residential provision for children with mental health needs.

Appendix 1: Residential Children's Homes Strategy 2023-2026

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