

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE THE RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOME AT VICTORIA ROAD, WISBECH

To: Children and Young People Committee
Meeting Date: 9 October 2018
From: Executive Director People and Communities.
Electoral division(s): Wisbech West

Forward Plan ref: **Key decision:** **No**

Purpose: This report provides the Committee with information to enable Members to consider whether to accept the recommendation for closure of the Children's Home at Victoria Road, Wisbech.

Recommendation: Committee are asked to:

- a) Note the content of the report and;
- b) Accept the recommendation to close the residential children's home at Victoria Road, Wisbech;
- c) Note that funds released through this decision will be used to contribute to the cost of placements for children in care;
- d) Note that officers are seeking to ensure that as many members of staff affected by this decision are offered alternative employment opportunities as possible.

Officer contact:		Member contacts:	
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Victoria Road is a children's home located in Wisbech. It had been identified as the location of the residential element of the no wrong door model, based on that developed in North Yorkshire.
- 1.2. Under the proposals recommended in this report, the residential element of this approach will close, but the outreach and 'edge of care' aspect of the model will be retained and will support the work of the new adolescent teams that are being implemented as part of the Change for Children programme, currently in the process of being implemented following extensive consultation.
- 1.3. The proposals to close the residential children's home at Victoria Road were included within this broader consultation. No comments about this element of the consultation were received.
- 1.4. No young people have been resident at the home since June 2018. This followed a series of events that resulted in it being impossible to safely staff the rota. The two young people resident at the time both moved positively to new placements.
- 1.5. Remaining members of staff from the residential home have been redeployed since this time, supporting other areas of work within the broader service, pending a final decision about the closure of the home.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1. Victoria Road was envisaged as forming the residential element of the 'No Wrong Door Model', originally developed in North Yorkshire with the aid of innovation funding. The local name adopted for this approach was 'The Hub'.
- 2.2. Under this approach, a mixed model of an outreach team, a residential home and linked foster carers all work together to try and prevent young people from coming into the care system. In the event that a young person becomes looked after, the outreach team would continue to work with them and their family while the young person was in care, potentially being placed in the residential part of the model – at Victoria Road. Where young people were clearly not able to return home, the model assumes that foster carers linked to the residential home would build relationships with young people resident, making it more likely that young people needing to remain in care would benefit from a foster placement rather than a residential one.
- 2.3. It is fair to say that this residential element has not developed as intended. The primary reason behind this has been a continuing challenge in recruiting suitable experienced members of staff.
- 2.4. Working in residential settings with young people with complex needs is a challenging task. A sufficient number of experienced and qualified staff within any staff team is vital if any children's home is going to be able to meet the diverse needs of young people living there.
- 2.5. Despite a number of attempts to recruit experienced members of staff, it has not

proved possible to put in a place a sufficiently experienced team and the home has struggled to meet the needs of young people placed there, despite the best efforts of the staff team that has been in place.

- 2.6. For most of the last 12-18 months, the home has only managed to accommodate two young people, significantly below the capacity of five. This has an obvious impact on unit costs. A capacity of up to five young people is now seen as a large children's home. Most residential children's homes mostly have a capacity of no more than three or four because providing care for a larger group of young people often presents significant challenge because of the mix of young people with varied but complex needs.
- 2.7. It should, therefore be stressed that the decision to close the home is not a reflection of the quality or commitment of those staff in post; it is an acknowledgement that the size of the home and the on-going recruitment challenges have resulted in the home no longer being viable.
- 2.8. As noted above, the proposal to close the residential element of the home was included within the broader Change for Children consultation process, which closed in August. As a result of these proposals, there are a number of posts that are currently at risk of redundancy, as set out below:

Post	FTE
Housekeeper	0.95
Hub Worker Residential	5.00
Relief Residential Night Worker	0.00
Relief Residential Night Worker	0.00
Residential Night Worker	0.54
Residential Night Worker	0.43

- 2.9. There are a number of roles available within the new overall structure that may offer suitable alternative employment for the members of staff above. This will become clearer as we move into the implementation period in respect of the broader changes.
- 2.10. There are a number of other members of staff holding relief posts and who work flexibly. There are other roles available for these members of staff that will provide alternative suitable employment.
- 2.11. The annual budget associated with the residential element of The Hub at Victoria Road is £603K. Actual savings that result from the closure of the home are, however, less than this, as these need to be offset by the cost of providing alternative placements for the two young people in residence up to the point that the home became empty earlier this year. Full year costs associated with providing alternative accommodation for the young people concerned is in the region of £250-£300K per annum, meaning that net full year savings are in the region of £300-£350K per annum.
- 2.12. It is proposed that the balance of the savings identified as a result of this decision will be used to help offset continuing pressures within the placement budgets for children

and young people in care.

- 2.13. There are options available for future use of the building itself, which will need to be taken together with corporate property services. The property has limited capital value. Options for alternative use either by the Council or by another organisation that may be able to operate services of benefit to the Council will be explored before any final decisions are made.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

The following bullet points set out the details of implications identified by officers:

- There are no implications of significance resulting from this report

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- There are no implications of significance arising from this report.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- For some young people, residential care is always likely to be needed for short or longer term care;
- In most cases, individual needs are complex and highly variable, meaning that the young person concerned must be carefully matched with available provision;
- The pressure to use 'in-house' capacity can result in this need to match provision with need being compromised given that unused capacity is seen as having no additional cost to the Council;
- The consequence of this approach can include an increased likelihood of poorer outcomes for the young person concerned should the need for further placement moves arise.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The savings that will result from any decision to close the residential element of the home are as set out above;
- Again as outlined above, net savings must take account of the cost of meeting the lost capacity, which in the case of Victoria Road has been two placements for young people;
- The decision does also reduce financial risk, however. Staffing difficulties in the past have resulted in the need to use much higher cost agency staff. While the associated increased costs have for the most part been contained in the past,

there is no guarantee that this would always be the case in the future, were the home to remain open.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

- No implications

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- There are no significant legal implications arising from this decision, so long as the Local Authority is still able to meet its duties towards Looked After Children (LAC).
- Human Resources (HR) is to still to advise in respect of any Employment law issues that may arise from the closing of this particular aspect of the home and the staff that will be made redundant.
- On the basis that the Change for Children Programme consultation closed in August 2018 and there were no objections raised, the Local Authority has followed due process before any final decision has been made.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The home is located within the constituency of Cllr Steve Tierney. Councillor Tierney has been consulted about these proposals and is content.

4.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

Implications	Officer Clearance
Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?	Name of Finance Officer: Roger Brett
Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by Finance?	N/A
Has the impact on statutory, legal and	

risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?	Name of Legal Officer: Prity Patel
Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Lou Williams
Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?	Christine Birchall
Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Lou Williams
Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health	

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Source Documents	Location
None	