

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 3rd June 2014

From: Executive Director: Children, Families and Adult Services

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: 2014/003 **Key decision:** Yes

Purpose: To present the recommendations arising from a review of the Council's three residential children's homes for Looked After Children (LAC). The homes under review were the two children's homes for adolescents, namely The Hawthorns in Cambridge and Victoria Road in Wisbech, and London Road, Harston, a home for disabled young people.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

- a) Consider the recommendations of the review to improve the two children's homes for adolescents, under a new service specification and internal commissioning arrangement. This is not a key decision but details are provided for information.
- b) Consider the recommendations for improved provision for disabled children at London Road through the commissioning of an external provider.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council is responsible for three children's homes providing care for children who are unable to live at home with their family. The Hawthorns and Victoria Road cater for six children in each home and London Road caters for four children. The current budget for the homes in 2014-15 is:

London Road	- £484,677
Hawthorns	- £509,997
Victoria Road	- £558,589

- 1.2 Both the Hawthorns and Victoria Road provide care for adolescents who have experienced some challenges in their lives and who have been unable to be cared for within an alternative family setting such as foster care. Many have experienced problems both within their family homes and within their schools. They often require high quality of care and support in order to either return home or to move into independent living.
- 1.3 London Road is a very different setting for disabled children who have high levels of complex need. A number of children live on a shared care basis where they spend some time at home with their family and some time within the children's home. Most of the children living within the children's home will require support throughout their lives.
- 1.4 All three homes are regularly inspected by Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and recent Ofsted inspections have shown that there is a good level of care provided to the young people residing in the homes. In addition each home is visited by what is referred to as a Regulation 33 visitor (the regulations contained within the Children Act to ensure children in care receive the best possible care). These independent visitors are independent of the care management of the home and the reports are provided to Lead Councillors, the Executive Director: Children, Families and Adult Services and the Service Director: Children's Social Care. These reports also contain detail of conversations with both children and staff on duty to ensure that their views are listened to with regard to any concerns or issues that they might have.
- 1.5 The children also have access to independent advocates from the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) as well as being part of Cambridgeshire's Children in Care Council, known as Voices Matter. Some of the children attend the groups established to support children in care called "Just Us" groups.
- 1.6 Each of the children within the children's homes has a social worker whose job it is to ensure that there is a clear plan in place which sets out the aspirations and the actions required in order to ensure a robust plan is in place. These plans are reviewed on a regular basis by an Independent Review Officer (IRO) whose job it is to ensure that the children are receiving the quality of care that they deserve and that other aspects of their lives, such as their health and their education, are also being considered.
- 1.7 The Council has a responsibility to ensure that it meets the Department of Education's (DfE) sufficiency duty – this sufficiency duty requires Councils to provide sufficient accommodation for children in care within their local area. Cambridgeshire's sufficiency statement has recently been refreshed and this

sets out how we are planning to ensure that we have the right service in the right place for children who need to come into care. This work is overseen as part of the Placement Strategy for Looked After Children 2011-15, which sets out a number of actions officers needed to take in order to ensure we have the right provision in the right place for looked after children. The Placement Strategy also has a strong focus in ensuring that efficiency and value for money are also considered in identifying the right place for children who need to come into care. Part of this work was to review the Council's children's homes and to ensure that they were fit for purpose and best placed to deliver on the outcomes that we wanted for children in Cambridgeshire.

- 1.8 The review was conducted over a five-month period, concluding in March 2014, and has included membership from across several Directorates to ensure that all aspects of the commissioning process have been fully considered. The review has been led by the Head of Looked After Children, Tracy Collins, and supported by the Head of Disabled Children's Services and other staff with key roles within both Children's Social Care and Commissioning Enhanced Services. The managers of the children's homes have also been included in the review and staff have been kept fully informed of the process as the review has been underway. Children and young people have not been consulted specifically on the review but their wishes and feelings have been regularly canvassed with regard to what they value and need when living in a children's home.
- 1.9 The review report was taken to the Children, Families and Adults (CFA) management team setting out the options for taking the service forward. CFA management team considered all the options and supported the proposal to bring to Committee the recommendation that both the Hawthorns and Victoria Road continue to be maintained and managed by the Council. A different option is being recommended for London Road and the recommendation here is to consider whether an external provider should be commissioned to provide the specialist care for children.

2. MAIN ISSUES

Hawthorns and Victoria Road

- 2.1 Since the autumn of 2013 there has been extensive work focussing on improving the occupancy and throughput of children within both the Hawthorns and Victoria Road. There was also the closure of a children's home in Fitzwilliam Road in 2013 as a result of under-occupancy, its location and building structure. In addition, there have been changes on the profile of young people coming into care and in particular more young people aged between 16 and 17 who required supported lodgings rather than being placed in a children's home. To address this, a range of providers has been commissioned to cater for this particular age group and for those young people who do not need the level of support provided within children's homes.
- 2.2 However, there is a continuing need for a small number of places within children's homes, which should be within the boundaries of Cambridgeshire. One of the performance measures that Ofsted monitor is in relation to children being placed within 20 miles of their family and community. Currently too many children go out of county and although some may be very close to our border, such as in Peterborough, Bedford or Newmarket, it is still considered important that we retain a level of provision within Cambridgeshire.

- 2.3 The review also looked at other councils, particularly where they had either closed or outsourced their in-house provision. It concluded that there was too great a risk that providers may not come forward to manage the service and that the Council needed to retain a degree of control to ensure that the right children were placed in the right children's homes.
- 2.4 The option supported by both the review team and CFA management team was to retain both the Hawthorns and Victoria Road as in-house provision and place more of an emphasis on the homes providing emergency and short-term placements which last from a few months to a maximum of a year.

London Road

- 2.5 The position of London Road is different and there are other factors which need to be considered.
- 2.6 The children supported by London Road all have severe learning disabilities and in some cases additional significant physical disability. Their support is multi-disciplinary and multi-agency from specialist disability services. Since the Council only has one children's disability home, there are structural difficulties in ensuring consistent, quality services. The Looked After Children's Service is limited in its ability to support the home at critical times of staffing difficulty such as sickness absence or when recruitment has been unsuccessful, times leading to a disproportionate use of agency and sessional staff. Additionally, with only one children's disability home within the Looked After Children Service, whilst staff benefit from access to good quality generic training, appropriate specialist staff training and development opportunities are limited. The home works co-operatively with other specialist services but this is insufficient to outweigh the inherent isolation of the service.
- 2.7 This position compares with the Council's experience of externalising residential short break homes in two locations in Cambridgeshire for disabled children in 2011. Action for Children hold the contract for the provision for short break services at Haviland Way in Cambridge and Woodland Lodge in Huntingdon and this has been very successful in providing high quality care for disabled children with very complex needs. The contract includes joint health funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to enable specialist health support to be available within a social care setting and is meeting some of the most complex needs of disabled children in the service. Families who use this service have talked very positively about the quality of care and the evidence of monthly contract monitoring of the service is that there are benefits, both to the Council and most particularly to the children who use these services.
- 2.8 Action For Children is the biggest provider of services to disabled children in the UK. Consequently, the short break service previously managed by the Council now benefits from specialist managers at all levels of the organisation, with staff having access to development and training opportunities from across the organisation. There are also national quality assurance schemes applied by the organisation. This has impacted positively on the support received by disabled children.

- 2.9 From July 2014, the contract with Action for Children is being amended and extended up to the end of September 2015 to include shared/ long-term care as well as the residential short break service. The service will be re-tendered for a new contract in October 2015 and this provides an opportunity to include London Road as part of the procurement process. If London Road is added to this portfolio, it will represent an attractive commissioning opportunity to the independent sector and a good value contract for the Council. The resulting service will have a level of organisational stability with economies of scale and specialist provision under one provider, therefore providing the most cost effective option.
- 2.10 The specialist services commissioned together will bring together a continuum of services that complement community based support to families of disabled children, from residential short breaks where disabled children are predominantly with their families and occasionally supported elsewhere though to the two homes that can offer shared and long-term care, all within Cambridgeshire. The design of this contract will support close working with the Children's Disability Social Care Service as well as education and health services and will be supportive to full implementation of the Special Educational Needs (SEND) requirement within the Children and Families Act 2014 that will be enacted in September of this year.
- 2.11 The recommended option would have a positive impact on disabled children and young people as it promotes a strategy whereby they would remain in county and as close to the home as possible.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 CFA management team supported the proposal to maintain the Hawthorns and Victoria Road as in-house provision for children who require residential care. They also supported the proposal to tender for an independent provider for London Road and to bring these recommendations to Children and Young People Committee for endorsement.
- 3.2 It is believed that both these options safeguard the Council's ability to deliver on the sufficiency duty by having the right level of residential provision within county and at the same time provide a focus for the children's homes to provide the best quality of care and support to children in their care. The Council has invested significantly in the training and development of its staff within the mainstream children's homes and this is evident by the independent reports received on the high quality and standard of staff care witnessed by both Ofsted and independent visitors. The option to retain these two children's homes means that this investment is safeguarded and that we are able to continue to closely monitor and safeguard the interest of some of our most vulnerable children in Cambridgeshire.
- 3.3 It is believed that by tendering for a provider for London Road that this will also enable the service to be part of a network for disabled children, as opposed to an isolated, stand alone service. The option with regard to London Road means paving the way for a provider with very specialist skills and knowledge in the area of disabled children and ensures the continuity of care for children whose needs change over a period of time.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

4.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

There have been significant benefits to working in partnership with the voluntary sector on the provision of the residential short break homes and it is hoped that this recommendation would further develop this relationship.

4.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

An overriding principle of the work undertaken within all of the children's homes is to ensure that they have the best possible support as they move into independent living or into Adult Services.

4.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

This is also a core purpose of all the children's homes and all recommendations have this as an underpinning principle within the option appraisals.

5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

London Road market testing has identified interest from potential providers. There will be overhead savings to the Council by externalising London Road if this is agreed. There will be a contract of fixed cost with the provider carrying any financial risk beyond this figure.

5.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The Project Review Report, 19 March 2014, stated that all implications would be addressed in the implementation process. The project team understands the risks and in particular the need to ensure that staff are supported through any unsettled period until such time as the transfer is put into place. There is a risk that the Council could lose experienced staff and a reduction in the quality of care provided could be seen in the intervening period, although experience of recent closure of a children's home did not see this risk realised as staff were largely redeployed within the service and children were safely moved on to their new homes. An independent provider would need to be able to run the service and still cover all the costs, therefore it is considered unlikely that an independent provider would be able to run the service at a significantly lower cost than the Council and retain all the staff and carers. The Council has a statutory obligation to ensure there are sufficient placements in county for our looked after children and young people.

5.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

It is imperative that these are considered, particularly during the period of transition and the need to communicate effectively with children and families alike as we go through the changes. Again the learning from re-commissioning of the short break services demonstrated that regular meetings with parents and carers was of significant importance to the parents and carers and the same approach will be adopted this time. Consideration

will need to be given to communicating with children who do not have language as their form of communication.

5.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

Subject to Committee approval, there will be a formal consultation process for the staff involved and for the children, parents and carers also involved.

5.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.6 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

Source Documents	Location
Options Appraisal 19 th March 2014	Sarah.Gawne@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Sufficiency Statement January 2014	Rachel.Leslie@cambridgeshire.gov.uk