

Corporate Parenting Panel

15 February 2019

Plans to Increase Residential Provision for Children and Young People in County Durham



Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report sets out plans for the future development of in house residential provision in Children's Services which includes the re-development of the children's home in Newton Aycliffe as well as the development of solo provision for complex young people and transitional supported living arrangements for Looked After Young People and Care Leavers.

Executive Summary

- 2 This report outlines proposals to relocate a current 4 bed children's home in Newton Aycliffe, to a new location and increase capacity to 5 beds. The report details the specification for this development.
- 3 In addition, the proposal includes the option to consider the development of either 2 transitional supported living arrangements for young people or a solo provision within the grounds of the larger property.

Recommendations

- 4 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to:
 - (a) note the proposed developments to increase the current capacity of Durham County Council's in house residential provision.

Background

- 5 The numbers of Looked After Children in County Durham has increased. At 31 March 2016, they were 675 looked after children in County Durham. In 2018/19, this has increased by 22%, to an average of 825, which led to increased pressure across all in house and external resources including residential services. This has also impacted on choice of placements for some young people.

- 6 This has led to a decision to increase the size of the current residential estate in order to enable Durham County Council to continue to provide care for more of our children and to enable them to remain living locally near their own communities and families. In addition, a small cohort of young people require provision which can be tailored to meet their specific needs which can include enabling them to live on their own, at least for a period of time.
- 7 The children's home in Newton Aycliffe is currently rated as 'Good' with 'Outstanding' elements by Ofsted and is part of the current in-house residential establishment which provides 32 beds across 8 Children's Homes. The home is home to 4 young people who live there on a medium to long-term basis.
- 8 At present the home is located on the Aycliffe site at Newton Aycliffe and is the only inhabited building remaining on this site apart from Aycliffe Secure Unit and NEAS. There is demolition work ongoing to remove the remaining structures. This has caused disturbance to the home's amenities on a number of occasions.
- 9 Further work will commence in April 2019 to continue to develop the area. This effectively means that the children's home will remain situated in the middle of a building site with all the associated issues for residents. These include the amount of heavy traffic and the number of construction workers on site. There is a recognised need to relocate the home elsewhere.

Current Demand

- 10 Demand for residential care has been consistently high over the last three years, as a result of increased LAC numbers and the closure of two homes in 2015, which meant a loss of 8 residential placements. At that time LAC numbers were around 630 which is significantly less than the current LAC numbers which stand at 830.
- 11 At present demand exceeds the supply of suitable in-house residential beds and therefore children and young people also live in externally procured residential placements. We currently have 22 young people in external residential provision which is 2.7% of the total number of our looked after children. With a high demand for these placements at both regional and national levels, it is often difficult to secure residential placements. Some young people have specific needs that require specialist support, but it is also the case that there are some young people who could be cared for in our in house provision if we had the capacity. External provision can also come at premium cost.

Proposed Specification

Increase Capacity

Children's Home – 4 to 5 beds

- 12 The aim is to replace the children's home (currently 4 beds) with a 5 bedded children's home for young people aged 12 to 18yrs. The necessary budget is in place for this proposed development. This would increase capacity by one bed. The rationale for not increasing bed numbers to more than 5 is in line with keeping children's homes to have a domestic and family feel rather than a larger group which is difficult to match and can lead to institutionalised routines and expectations. Young people with complex and challenging behaviours can present risks to the safety of other young people and staff and therefore a Children's Home for five young people is felt to be the maximum number that can be safely managed.

Develop x 2 Transitional Supported Living Arrangements

- 13 The identified location should ideally have the potential to provide up to two transitional supported living arrangements for young people aged 16/17+ years. This would have the remit of working with young people to equip them with life skills to help them move into independence. This would also potentially free up capacity in our children's homes. As well as increasing placement stability having this kind of provision would help the authority meet some of the requirements of the Government's legislation around 'Staying Close' in the future.
- 14 Martin Narey, (Residential Care in England, July 2016) identified that Looked After children will 'sometimes shun advice and support and soon find themselves isolated and essentially abandoned' once they leave care. This type of project would help them to develop the skills necessary to live alone without either remaining in an expensive provision during this period, or finding themselves without accommodation altogether. Key adults from Residential Services would remain involved with the young person throughout.
- 15 The development of transitional supported living provision will require clearly defined eligibility criteria and a matching process, ensuring that the risks attached to any young person in this accommodation do not impact upon the children's residential home. This would need to comply with legislation in the Children's Homes Regulations 2015 around the Locality Risk Assessment (Regulation 12. (2)(c).

Provision of a Solo Children's Home

- 16 Extensive searches have been undertaken to identify a suitable property to establish a solo provision for young people. This is very challenging due to issues around location; community relations; issues relating to 'change of use' and the associated planning permission

- 17 Should any potential larger property have external buildings in the grounds of the main home, consideration will be given to developing solo provision on the main site given the difficulties experienced to date in locating a suitable property. Approval has been given for the associated budget for this project.

Location

- 18 The children's home must be located within County Durham and consideration must also be given to the young people currently resident in the current home and their access to education and local amenities in the surrounding area.
- 19 With this in mind, the preferred relocation would be to the south west region of County Durham, not be too remote and be near to bus routes for both young people and staff – potential areas such as:
- Bishop Auckland
 - Newton Aycliffe
 - Spennymoor
- 20 Emphasis must also be placed on the likelihood that once a potential property has been identified and planning application made it is possible that there will be opposition from neighbours and residents so the proximity of the home to neighbouring houses will also be a consideration.

Property Requirements

Five Bedded Children's Residential Home

- (a) Detached/ ensuring privacy for/from neighbours
- (b) Minimum of 7 beds (5 x young people/2 x staff – 1 with en-suite to have a separate bathroom from young people)
- (c) 2 x Reception Rooms/Lounges
- (d) Kitchen
- (e) Dining Room (accommodate 8 people) or kitchen/diner
- (f) Minimum of 2 bathrooms as well as an en-suite for staff
- (g) Utility room or area for laundry and storage
- (h) Private garden
- (i) Access to internet/wi-fi
- (j) Parking for 4/6 vehicles at any one time
- (k) Adequate boiler capacity to provide hot water for residents and staff

Transitional Supported Living Placements / Solo Provision

- 21 Whilst priority will be given to the replacement of the current home, increasing capacity to 5 beds, this specification will also consider the development of 2 x transitional supported living arrangements in close

proximity to the children's home and for solo provision for children and young people.

- 22 There would need to be an identified referral process and pathway for the use of the supported living accommodation. The building(s) would need to be:
- (a) In close proximity but separate from the main building
 - (b) The capacity for two 'flats' would be more cost effective
 - (c) Completely self-contained with separate entrance
 - (d) Preferably with separate outdoor space

Voice of the Child

- 23 Young people who are currently resident at the existing home have been made fully aware of the plans to relocate the home and will be included in all appropriate decisions about the property. Young People will continue to be part of the development of the new provision.

Ofsted Approval

- 24 The current Ofsted Inspector is supportive of the plan to relocate and increase the capacity of the home. This will be subject to all Regulations being met at the time of Registration in order to meet the Children's Homes Regulations 2015.
- 25 Ofsted have been informed of the proposal to include supported living accommodation adjacent to the Children's Home and have agreed with this subject to all Regulations being met at the time of Registration of the Children's Home. If appropriate accommodation is identified that meets the requirements to include solo provision then further discussion will take place with Ofsted.

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APPENDIX 1: Implications

Finance – The replacement of the home in Newton Aycliffe is dependent upon the allocated budget, development of the Aycliffe site and service delivery preferences. The replacement of this children’s home has the potential to provide an additional in-house residential bed as opposed to seeking an external residential placement and potential for x 2 supported living arrangements.

Staffing – Staff will relocate to the new children’s home.

Risk – N/A

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – N/A

Accommodation – Children and young people who are looked after by the Authority require accommodation within suitable and regulated placement provision. This report sets out the proposed development of solo provision in line with the Authorities sufficiency duty.

Crime and Disorder – N/A

Human Rights – The young person has the right to a family life where he is cared for in a safe and secure environment which meets the young person’s needs.

Consultation – N/A

Procurement – N/A

Disability Issues – N/A

Legal Implications – Section 22C Children Act 1989 places a duty on a local authority who are looking after a child to place that child with his parents, unless that is not consistent with the child’s welfare; or would not be reasonably practicable. If the local authority are unable to make such arrangements, they must place the child in the placement which is, in their opinion, the most appropriate placement available. “Placement” means:

- (a) placement with an individual who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent;
- (b) placement with a local authority foster parent who does not fall within paragraph (a);
- (c) placement in a children's home; or
- (d) placement in accordance with other arrangements which comply with any regulations made for the purposes of this section.

This arrangement complies with the duty in s22C as the young person will be placed in a children's home.

In addition Section 22G requires Local Authority`s to take steps to secure so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within their area which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare to be provided with accommodation that is in their local area.
("sufficiency duty")