



Report of Ann Haigh Acting Centre Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to update members on the progress, development and priorities of Aycliffe Secure Centre since the last annual review on 28 February 2020. The reason for the longer reporting time is due to the restrictions and impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

Executive summary

2. The centre has continued to develop its service and resources, despite facing the impact of the Covid19 pandemic. Including fully implementing the SECURE STAIRS framework across the whole centre, rolling out the electronic case file system ClearCare and the building and development of Maple House – transitions home.
3. Recruitment and retention of staff has been exceptionally challenging over this period and remains a high priority for the senior management team.
4. Maintaining the physical environment and infra-structure has been undertaken over this period and an action plan is in place to continually improve it.

Recommendations

5. The Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note the content of this report and the progress made at the centre over the last two years.

Background

6. Aycliffe Secure Centre is currently registered to care and educate up to 38 vulnerable and complex young people. Aycliffe is the largest secure children's home nationally. The centre cares for up to 8 young people referred by the Youth Custody Service (YCS) Placements Team following being remanded or sentenced. The other young people are accommodated for their own or others' safety under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989 (known as welfare placements) and are commissioned by local authorities. We can also care for young people placed under the Concordat, which prevents the detention of children in police stations following charge.
7. Local authorities across the country refer young people via the national Secure Welfare Hub and typically there have been fewer requests from our local area. However, over the last two years we have had a significant increase of young people being placed with us from both Durham County Council as well as neighbouring authorities.
8. Aycliffe Centre has five houses (Durham, Lumley, Auckland, Walworth, and Barnard), which are made to feel as homely as possible within the parameters of a secure setting. Young people are able to personalise their bedrooms and have a say in the decoration and furnishing within the home. Individual young people are matched to move into one of these houses using the information we have about them in order to ensure the "best fit". We always have an all-female and an all-male house and then other three are dependent on need.
9. There is a well-equipped school offering a broad curriculum which is both academic and vocational. The facilities in school are set over two floors in which more practical lessons are undertaken on the ground floor, including Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), Motor Vehicle studies, Health and Beauty, Art and Design, Catering and Music. On the upper floor there is ICT, Health and Social Care, PHSE, Maths, English as well as a Library and exam room. The young people are educated in their house group but engage in differentiated learning. Some young people have bespoke 1:1 education plans in school and on the houses until they are able to work within a group setting.
10. There are extensive indoor and outdoor leisure areas in the centre for the young people. This includes play courts, gardens, Astro court, horticulture, and park areas, running track as well as indoor sports hall, exercise gym and training swimming pool.
11. The rest of the facilities includes visitors' areas and meetings rooms within the secure perimeter so that young people can see their families and professionals as well as attend their meetings. There are staff offices, facilities, and maintenances areas as well a central kitchen and laundry,

Context

12. During this period the centre continued to face significant challenges due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has undoubtedly impacted

operationally and meant the centre has had to identify new ways of working in response to both the pandemic and changes within local/national legislation. Whilst still maintaining a safe environment in which young people are supported to grow and achieve. In Autumn 2021 there were extreme pressure on the centre due to high levels of absenteeism under “Track and Trace” as well as high staffing vacancies and other absenteeism. The impact of entering the third lockdown over the Christmas (2022) period presented additional challenge. In the early part of 2022, the centre experienced a significant rise in Covid-19 absence due to both positive tests and periods of isolation. However, this figure has trended downwards of late, with Covid-19 related absence at a minimum.

Inspection Framework

13. Secure Childress Homes are inspected twice annually by Ofsted and the CQC. There is a Key (full) inspection in which all aspects of the centre are inspected, and a judgement grading is given. The Interim inspection reviews any requirement and recommendations from the previous key inspection as well as looking into key lines of enquiry. These are unannounced in nature and so continuous monitoring, matching against the Children’s Homes Regulations including the quality standards 2015 is required, to ensure that the centre is always inspection ready.
14. In April 2021 Aycliffe Centre had its Key Inspection and was judged as Overall **OUTSTANDING**. The individual grading measured against the inspection framework were.
 - a. Overall experiences and progress of children and young people – **OUTSTANDING**
 - b. Children’s education and learning – **GOOD**
 - c. Children’s health - **OUTSTANDING**
 - d. How well children and young people are helped and protected – **OUTSTANDING**
 - e. The effectiveness of leaders and managers – **OUTSTANDING**

With the overarching statement,

“The secure children’s home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children’s home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experience for children and young people who need help, protection, and care.”

15. In November 2021 the centre had an assurance visit (as interim inspection were replaced with these due to the restrictions of Covid 19) and received the judgement of **SUSTAINED EFFECTIVENESS**.
16. At the time of preparing this report the latest inspection had commenced and updates will be provided to the Panel.
17. In November 2021 Ofsted undertook their Triannual Inspection of the Buildings and Premises. This is in order to establish that Aycliffe Centre has

maintained its registration as being fit for purpose - as a secure children's home. It highlighted a number of requirements including aspects of building repairs and maintenance and also aspects of upgrade of the centre infrastructure. This included external weathering of the building which could not be undertaken during the Covid 19 period due to contracting issue and restrictions. There is an action plan in place which is reviewed on a bi-monthly basis. We have also applied to the Department for Education (DfE) for grant funding for CCTV upgrade and Locks replacements and servicing – which has recently been agreed. We have also applied for Capital Funding from DCC for some other key areas of repair and refurbishment.

18. Alongside the Ofsted Inspection Framework we have regular monitoring meetings with the Youth Custody Service (YCS) which includes both contractual scrutiny and also thematic or responsive reviews.

Philosophy

19. The model of care and culture within the centre is that of “Exceptional Parenting”. This is underpinned by Trauma Informed Care. Aycliffe centre has fully embraced the “Framework of Integrated Care for Children and Young People living in secure environment, SECURE STAIRS”. This offers the highest level of training and support, building resilience and psychologically informed staff so that they are supported in caring for our vulnerable and complex young people.
20. Aycliffe Centre was heavily involved in the National Anna Freud Research Team who have evaluated the SECURE STAIRS implementation and its outcomes, across the secure estate.

Service Priorities and Progress over this reporting period.

21. Aycliffe centre continued to provide a Covid-19 safe environment for everyone living, working, and visiting the centre.
22. We moved to Hybrid working arrangements for those this was relevant for with team agreements put in place. Including the upgraded technology within meeting rooms. This is being used successfully for internal and external meetings e.g., partnership and Multi Agency Team Around the Child meetings.
23. Due to managing the impact of Covid 19 over this period we had to consolidate our people resources and also reduce the “foot fall” into the centre so Auckland House was temporarily “moth balled”. The re-opening of Auckland House was delayed due to a third national lockdown and high staffing vacancies and absenteeism. However, we used this home as base whilst kitchens and bathrooms were refurbished which has provided an opportunity for improvements to be completed ahead of schedule. As a result, there has been minimal impact to young people while this work has been undertaken. Auckland House was re-opened on the 20th of June 2022.

24. Ongoing development of the Recruitment & Retention Strategy has been a key priority for the senior management team and remains a high priority due to recruitment requirements and challenges.
25. The continuation of being part of the SECURE STAIRS national evaluation project with the final evaluation being published in Spring 2022. The SECURE STAIRS framework continued to be rolled out across all service areas. – The national pilot was completed by end of March 2022. Work was then underway with national leads to determine “cluster” homes to continue from shared learning of practices and developments. Fundamentally however, SECURE STAIRS is fully embedded within the centre and our second annual review is to take place in October 2022.
26. In order to achieve the above, the roll out of National SECURE STAIRS 5-day trauma informed care training programme (Level 3 NCFE accreditation). The commencement of the 5-day training programme started in October 2020 and to date approximately 140 people have attended. Alongside core staff undertaking the 5-day programme, a large proportion of support staff have attended module 1 of the training. In the spirit of SECURE STAIRS being a holistic framework of integrated care, this increases awareness across the entire centre. Thus, being able to follow the philosophy of every interaction counts.
27. The continuation of the ongoing work around least restrictive practices. Initial findings have been shared and as a next step this has been broadened out to include wider representation from across the centre.
28. Progression of the sleep/Fitbit project has been undertaken. The initial pilot has been completed and a second home is being piloted. Information gathered has already been used to inform change in both physical and psychological practice and this will remain an ongoing area of work.
29. Continuation with ongoing developments to further embed the Health Care Standards in the centre has been prioritised in order to meet the CQC inspection framework. The multi-agency team continues to further develop these standards and are currently working on a Health Promotion Strategy for the centre.
30. There has been further review and development of Durham House. In discussion with the Secure Welfare Hub and the centre’s multi-agency team, Durham House has been identified as a Home that will care for children who have complexities including neurodiversity, trauma experiences and high levels of emotional dysregulation. The centre is exploring further training for the staff in Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) programmes.
31. The centres system of communication and alarm (via a Bosch handset) had become outdated and needed replacement. A new radio system was procured and the decision to hard wire in beacons rather than the original proposal of battery ensured minimum maintenance. The system was tested in April 2022 with the ‘Go live’ in June 2022.
32. A vast amount of work to update and improve the physical environment and living and learning experiences of the young people has taken place over this

period of time. This includes completion of horticultural and park area. Replacement of Barnard and Walworth Kitchens. Replacement and redecoration of all the bathrooms including flooring have been replaced. Refurbishment of Catering and Music Classrooms. The Music room has undergone a full redesign and refit of all furniture in the room. This was undertaken to allow for a better layout and more functionality.

33. The centre registered for the Better Health at Work Award and achieved the BRONZE level in February 2022. We are now at the early stages of working towards the next level of Silver.
34. Seeking opportunities to create ways to celebrate achievements and promote the voice of both the adults and young people in the centre are essential to both build a culture of value and belonging as well as acknowledging individual successes.
35. Continued development of the young people's participation workstream has given young people greater voice in their care plans and developments in the centre. It echoes the culture of "No decision about me without me."
36. Development of the centre's Strategic Plan April 2022 – March 2025 has been undertaken in a collaborative and inclusive manner with the whole centre.
37. The centre has registered to undertake the Enabling Environments award; this will be over a three-year period. The development of an action plan for EE has started with data being gathered from service areas within the centre to seek the views of the workforce. Prior to the development of a formal action plan, further consultation with the EE consultant will take place along with support for corporate HR.

New Developments

38. Maple House transition home - It is acknowledged nationally that there is a shortfall of community placements that can meet the needs of some of our young people who leave secure accommodation. The centre reviewed the outcomes for some young people who succeeded in the secure environment but then struggled once living in the community placements. The concept of the transitions home became a possible solution for some of these young people - seen as a steppingstone into the wider community. The project was developed and supported by some DfE funding and the premisses has been converted and extended from the "old" step down unit. It is due to open in November 2022.
39. The centre procured a new I.T. System in December 2020 - ClearCare case management system. A working group was developed in place to oversee progress of the project. Roll-out of Phase 1 of ClearCare system –took place in Mid-November 2021 to early December 2021 and saw the implementation of ClearCare in all homes and education. The culmination of a long-term project has seen care management recording move from paper-based systems to electronic. All centre staff have received training, and ongoing support and training is available upon request. The project is ongoing with plans to further expand what is undertaken on ClearCare once the current processes are embedded.

Conclusion

40. Aycliffe Secure Centre has had a very challenging two years but has both continued to offer a high level of care and education for our young people and has also further developed resources, service, practice and environment within it.

Background papers

Author

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None

Finance

The centre continues to bid for DfE funding to improve the physical environment

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

The centre is currently recruiting Residential Workers and Senior Residential Workers

Accommodation

None

Risk

None

Procurement

None