



Report to the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Title:	Children's Residential Care Homes Update
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Cabinet Member sign-off:	Councillor Warren Whyte

1.0 Purpose of Agenda Item

This report provides an update on the Children's Residential Care Homes Project which is part of the Change for Children Programme. This project aims to increase placement sufficiency for children who are looked after by creating additional in-house residential care provision in Buckinghamshire.

The Committee is asked to note the current position.

2.0 Background

The Children's Residential Care Homes Project was established to address concerns about the shortage of in-house residential placement provision within Buckinghamshire. It aims to increase the number of local in-house residential care placements and to reduce reliance on independent out-of-county provision. The ambition is to increase local options for our young people who may require residential placements by opening up to four new local authority homes providing 20 new in-house residential care beds. There is currently one Council owned children's residential care home located in Aylesbury.

On 24th April 2017, Cabinet agreed to:

1. Approve the business case for the provision of additional residential places for children in Buckinghamshire.
2. Prudentially borrow up to a value of £2m to fund the additional property purchases.
3. Delegate to the Cabinet Member for Resources, in agreement with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the authority to purchase properties and carry out improvement works as required funded by prudential borrowing up to an overall value of £2m.

On 11th May 2017 the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Resources approved the purchase of properties in Buckingham and the re-development of two Aylesbury sites to be funded through prudential borrowing.

This matter was last brought to the Select Committee as part of the Change for Children Programme update in March 2017 and a brief update was also provided as part of the budget scrutiny session in January 2018.

3.0 Summary

Since the Cabinet decision was taken in April 2017, work has been undertaken with Property Services to identify potential sites / properties and establish the feasibility of developing these into new Children's Residential Care Homes. Four options were initially identified (two in Aylesbury, one in High Wycombe and one in Buckingham). The first home in Aylesbury has now been fully refurbished. The new incoming Children's Senior Leadership Team have taken the opportunity to review the analysis of needs for children who may require a residential placement. As a result we have recognised a need to deliver short term as well as long term placements.

4.0 Key updates

Residential Care Home 1: Aylesbury

This residential care home is the first to be developed. It will provide five long term beds for children who are looked after. A full refurbishment of the building has now been completed and a successful recruitment campaign has resulted in the appointment of a skilled and experienced residential manager and residential staff group. All staff have completed an in-depth induction and training. An Ofsted registration is required to open the home which has been submitted and is expected to be approved by early June 2018 although every effort is being made to bring this date forward if at all possible.

We are developing care planning arrangements for a number of children who are placed in out of county residential care homes to start using our own provision as soon as the Ofsted registration is complete. This will enable the children to return to Buckinghamshire. As the children identified commute from their current placement to attend schools within Aylesbury we will be able to significantly reduce the daily time they spend travelling. These placement moves will only happen if they are in the best interests of the children and young people.

Further to progressing our first home we have completed an updated needs analysis which highlighted a number of key trends, including:

- The increase in the total number of children looked after has risen substantially. In February 2018 we had 479 children in care.
- An increasing number of referrals resulting in unplanned emergency placements and including children previously not known to Children's Social Care Services.
- Continuing reliance on expensive out of county children's residential care placements commissioned from private and voluntary sector providers (15 additional residential placements representing a 36% increase since April 2017).

The above trends reinforce the need to continue to develop new in-house Residential Care Homes, as per the original Cabinet decision in April 2017. It highlights the need to strengthen Buckinghamshire's placement sufficiency strategy and address high cost emergency placements. We are now moving ahead with 3 further homes to address these needs:

Residential Care Home 2: Aylesbury

The site for the proposed second residential care home is also in Aylesbury. The site is already owned by Buckinghamshire County Council and does not require extensive development. This means that the home can be brought on line relatively quickly and we aim to have it completed by the end of 2018.

It is recommended that to address emergency referrals, we should use this second home to provide short term placements for children who are looked after. The home will provide a total of four beds; three beds will be for short term assessments, likely to be completed over a 12 week period, and one bed that will be used as an emergency 'crash pad' accommodation for up to a few days. The assessment provision will be used to determine young people's placement needs in order to take a more considered view about care and placement planning including the possibility of rehabilitating the child back home to family and friends. This approach has been shown to increase placement stability in the longer term and can help to achieve better outcomes for children looked after. The 'crash pad' bed will be used as a local emergency resource to prevent the need for more costly out of county emergency residential provision being required.

The proposed approach includes a number of benefits:

- The appointment of an experienced Residential Group Manager to oversee the development and longer term management of the existing and new Children's Residential Care Homes.
- An opportunity to build a local 'Staying Close' Scheme that will support young people into adulthood.
- An opportunity to limit the escalation of care needs through the short term provision to improve outcomes through a better planned next placement.
- Keeping young people closer to their birth family and local services, where appropriate, which brings less travelling, improved oversight and relationship building with allocated social workers

Children's Residential Care Homes 3 and 4:

Work with colleagues in Property Services continues. Two other potential sites, both owned by Buckinghamshire, have been identified in Buckingham and High Wycombe. Although the Buckingham site offers potential benefits in terms of the short length of time that a refurbishment would take before being able to bring additional bed capacity on line, the recommendation is not to pursue this site. The high level of concerns raised by local

residents has been reviewed as part of the options appraisal process, as have reservations about the suitability of the cul-de-sac location. It is recommended therefore that this site is returned to the corporate estate with agreement of the corporate landlord without any impact on the non-committed capital which will remain available for alternative options.

The Wycombe site is owned by Buckinghamshire County Council and is used as a car park by local residents. A feasibility exercise has been undertaken to consider all possible options which raised a number of concerns about its suitability. This included concerns about the costs to develop the site which were higher than first anticipated, obtaining planning permission was likely to be difficult and the timescale for development was likely to take a minimum of eighteen months. The recommendation is that this site is not pursued any further.

We are working with Property Services to identify two further sites to ensure that the provision we deliver will be sustainable and meet the needs of young people. Consideration is being given to leasehold properties too in order to ensure that all options can be reviewed before the final sites are confirmed. It is expected that both of the remaining sites will be in High Wycombe to establish group provision in the South of the county. This is because it has been identified that there are significant benefits to grouping homes to increase resilience. It is anticipated that these two homes (3 & 4) will come on line in 2019.

5.0 Resource implications

Capital:

The initial Cabinet member decision for this project approved £2m capital spend to build four new children's residential care homes. To date one home has been completed at the cost of approximately £230k of which £180k was funded from capital. A further amount of approximately £40k has been committed for the other 3 properties. This means that £1,776,940 of uncommitted capital remains to be spent on the remaining sites.

Revenue:

The savings profile for this project has been adjusted in line with the revised project plan. The savings are anticipated to be achieved over the 4 year period.