

**Report of the Head of Service Children Looked After**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)**

**Date: 15 October 2015**

**Subject: Leeds Residential Children's Homes review and update**

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| Are specific electoral Wards affected?<br>If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-In?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?<br>If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:<br>Appendix number: | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

**Summary of main issues**

To provide Scrutiny committee with an overview and update of the review of the children's home provision in Leeds.

**Recommendations**

The Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) is recommended to support:

- The development of the children's homes as an integral part of the Children's Services offer to vulnerable children and families in Leeds;
- The restructure and reconfiguration of the children's homes staffing matrixes and the subsequent investment in training and skills development to meet the challenge of modern day children's homes;
- The development of a flexible and responsive resource that reflects the profile of demand and supports Leeds City Council's legal duty to provide sufficient and appropriate accommodation for those children who are in need of care and accommodation;
- The alignment of children's homes service delivery to similar services within Leeds City Council and our partners;
- The plan to provide small homes for up to four children which reflect the accommodation of a family home rather than an institution;
- The refurbishment of the children's homes to reflect modern family living.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 To update the Scrutiny committee on the findings and recommendations of the Residential Review and progress towards modernising the provision for Leeds' children.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 Over the last two and a half years Leeds Children's Services have embarked on a whole service review (see attached report) and a significant improvement programme for children's homes. A clear strategy was developed and agreed at Executive Board in October 2013; this report provides an update on progress made. Leeds now operates six mainstream children's homes all but one being for four children with one home still offering care to five children. One further, refurbished home at Lanshaw Crescent is to open in early October which will bring the total of mainstream homes to seven. Leeds also operates two complex needs homes and one secure children's home at Adel Beck which was newly built in 2014. This paper reflects the changes to the mainstream homes only.

## **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 Historically children's homes in Leeds have not been developed and improved alongside the improvements that have been made in the wider Children's Services. Therefore in 2013 an improvement journey began and to date some significant progress has been made. Examples of progress include:
- 3.2 The development of two homes to deliver specific interventions with the Multi Systemic Therapy (MST) team. Leeds have been chosen by the Department of Education to "road test" a new intensive support and treatment programme to children, young people and their families where the care plan is family reunification using the MST Family Integrated Therapy model. This is operational in one home with a second home awaiting registration with Ofsted.
- 3.3 Previously children's homes have not reflected the demographic of children in need of care in Leeds, leading to children being placed in privately run children's homes and in some cases outside the local authority area. A detailed analysis of the referrals for care and accommodation to Leeds' Placement Team over a six month period has informed the focus and specialism of each home. However there continues to be an increase in the demand for placements for teenagers and those at risk of child sexual exploitation.
- 3.4 We are developing our ambition for all children's homes to be judged as Outstanding by Ofsted.
- 3.5 We have developed a clear strategy that was agreed at Executive Board in October 2013 to close our larger children's homes and replace them with smaller homes that blend into local communities and that better replicate family life. The last large home operated by Leeds City Council was at Bodmin Road, for twelve children and this was closed in early 2015. A significant restructure and development plan has been developed for all staff working in children's homes to enable them to meet the demands of a modern children's home sector.

- 3.6 A new, fit for purpose, staffing structure has been developed reflecting the role and responsibility of the Registered Managers and their teams in the Children's Homes Regulations and associated Quality Standards. Work is underway to appoint Registered Managers, Deputy Managers and Senior Practitioners to each home. There is also now a clear progression for entry grade children's homes workers to achieve nationally mandated training and develop the necessary skills for this work. This restructure better fits with our ambition for children's homes in Leeds and will lead to significant improvements in the care planning for children who reside in children's homes.
- 3.7 Furthermore, as part of the National Innovation Scheme delivered by the National Implementation Service, Leeds was accepted onto the pilot scheme to deliver RESuLT training, initially to two children's homes. This is a 10 week licensed and accredited programme to develop skills in direct work with challenging teenagers through an operational knowledge of Social Learning Theory and Brain Science.
- 3.8 We are moving on with our ambition that the majority of children in care should not stay in children's homes for long periods and that the role of the home is to help prepare children and young people for family life / independence.
- 3.9 All of our children's homes are working on developing a clear specialism and will link more directly with other parts of Children's Social Work. In addition to the two MST/FIT homes described above, Leeds now has one home for children aged eight to twelve focussing on preparing children to return to family life within their own family or foster family. One home specialises in preparing children for leaving care, repairing family and friendship networks, building support and self-care skills and where appropriate seeking to match young people with Supported Lodgings providers, therefore delaying the point at which a young person must enter independence and maximising the young person's likelihood of succeeding in entering adult life in training, education or work. A further home offers medium length care to children who have experienced multiple moves and experienced repeated disruption; again using restorative practices and improving family members involvement in their children's lives whilst in care, maximising the opportunity for successful reunification and/or improved family relationships.
- 3.10 The seventh home is to operate a short placement and emergency provision for children and young people who experience immediate disruption in their care placements or whose entry to care is problematic and immediate identification of a suitable care placement is not possible; for example those children who present with extremely risky or offending behaviour where they are released into the care of Leeds City Council by West Yorkshire Police. This approach allows emergency admissions to other homes to be kept to a minimum and thus reducing the consequential disruption of such admissions.
- 3.11 We are developing a new approach to the refurbishment and/or replacement of all our children's homes over a three-ten year period. A proposal and plan has been presented to Asset Management Board in which the capital receipts from the sale of the closed children's homes at Inglewood, Wood Lane and Bodmin are to be used to refurbish and improve the children's homes estate which is currently in a poor and out-dated condition. A detailed plan and drafts are currently being drawn up in consultation with the care teams in the homes and the children who are cared for within them.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 There has been extensive consultation throughout the review and implementation of the review with children, young people, care leavers, children's home staff members, partner agencies, children's services staff and local communities.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

#### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

4.3.1 The Children and Young People's Plan for the city cites a primary obsession as safely and appropriately reducing the number of children looked after. The recommendations of the review to increase the focus on safely returning children to family living, improving family functioning through delivery of direct work from a skilled children's homes workforce; delivering this critical work at the point of contact with a children's home, rather than referring on to partners or other professionals, significantly improves the likelihood of family engagement in the care plans for family reunification. This necessitates significant investment in the workforce both in structure, purpose and expectation of the staff teams in our homes but also in the level and depth of training and partner engagement going forward; reflected in both the Children and Young People's Plan and the Best City Plan.

4.3.2 The children's home review and recommended actions for the authority are consistent with the Council's objective in the City Plan to continue to become a child friendly city, providing good quality, safe care for Leeds' most vulnerable children.

4.3.3 Furthermore in line with the Social Contract within the Best Council Plan the focus on restorative practices, Family Group Conferencing and increased family involvement in our children's homes sees families taking control of the decisions about their children's care and maximising the potential for reunification.

#### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

4.4.1 Since 2013 significant progress has been made. Our three largest homes have been successfully closed (Wood Lane, Inglewood and Bodmin Road). This has resulted in a decrease of 28 beds. These have been replaced by two smaller homes: Ganners Green and Cherry Tree, which has increased our capacity by eight beds, with a net loss overall of 20 beds within the internal children's homes sector over the last two years. At the same time we have reduced our use of external children's homes placements purchased from the private sector from 110 to 51, this has created a net reduction of circa 70 children's homes beds. This reduction has realised significant savings for the council and reduced our reliance on children's homes in favour of family based care options. These savings have been achieved by:

- Increasing the number of foster placements available
- Improving care planning to ensure children and young people move to a family quicker rather than spending many years in children's homes.
- Developing a clear specialism for each home.

## **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 The Children's Homes Regulations and associated Quality Standards were reviewed in 2014 leading to new legislation coming into place in April 2015. These regulations set out how children's homes should be operated and the legal responsibility to provide accommodation and care of a decent standard and quality to maintain the statutory registration with the children's homes inspectorate, Ofsted.
- 4.5.2 Ofsted have also reviewed their inspection framework and have implemented a new framework and guidance upon which all homes are now judged. The rating of Satisfactory has been replaced by Requires Improvement, emphasising the continuous improvement agenda within the inspectorate and implicit within the new legislation.

## **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 We are currently assessed by Ofsted as being a Good authority with Outstanding for leadership and management; however there is a reputational risk to the Local Authority if the homes of children that we have corporate parenting responsibility for are not assessed as Good or Outstanding. Without investment in the residential children's homes sector we will not be able to meet the ambition that we have for all homes to be Outstanding, to be a Child Friendly City, the best city in the UK and the best city for children to grow up in without implementing the recommendations of the review.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 Children's homes service provision has been subject of a comprehensive review covering the quality and extent of all the services currently offered within our homes and taking into consideration the demand profile and demographic of children in care in Leeds. The resulting improvement programme is well underway and is already delivering better outcomes for children who need to spend time in children's homes, however the focus on improvement needs to continue so that we can achieve our ambitions for children in care.
- 5.2 The review has also considered the changes to the regulations which set out how children's homes should be operated and the guidance on the quality of the services operated by Leeds City Council and changes have been made accordingly.
- 5.3 We have listened to the voice and experience of children, family members, children's home staff and those responsible for the care plans of our children looked after. It was evident from the review that the residential provision needed to change and by involving all of the key stakeholders changes made have been ambitious and needs led.
- 5.4 Further change is needed to ensure Leeds is well positioned to meet the regulatory requirements of the Children's Homes Regulation 2015, the Quality Standards and the improvements highlighted above. We have secured funding to allow some urgently needed improvements to the housing stock which makes up the current residential estate.

- 5.5 Further work is still needed to improve the offer to children leaving our children's homes to either return home to their families, return to foster care or to live independently.
- 5.6 We need to be ambitious in terms of the expectation of the skill level of all children's homes employees to offer the best care possible to children looked after and build a supportive network of professional challenge and development in and around the homes.
- 5.7 The staff in children's homes need be highly skilled and more flexible to reflect the direction of travel of Children's Services and to create an environment in which residential services has parity with peers and partners and is seen as a critical partner to assessing and supporting children in need.

## **6 Recommendations**

The Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) is recommended to support:

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- The refurbishment of the children's homes to reflect modern family living.

## **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.