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**Report of Chief Social Services Officer,  
Director of Children's Services**

**Executive Board**

**Date: 13<sup>th</sup> December 2006**

**Subject: Review of Residential Children's Homes**

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**Electoral Wards Affected:**

All

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report describes the key focus, process, findings, recommendations and suggested actions for improvement arising from a review of children's residential homes in Leeds that took place over 2005 –06. The review is an integral part of the Council's drive, overseen by the Director of Children's Services, to improve the lives, aspirations and achievements of Looked After Children.
2. Children's homes are a part of the range of care provision used for Looked After children, for whom all Elected Members share the role of Corporate Carer. The review has highlighted a number of priority areas for improvement, referred to in the report as "Improvement Priorities".
3. The report also draws Elected Members' attention to a specific part of the review that was to assess the children's home buildings against "fitness for purpose" criteria. This directly relates to the recommendation that Holmfield children's home is closed.
4. All appendices and the full report are available to Elected Members as background papers. An executive summary of the report is attached as an appendix to this report to Executive Board.

## **1.0 Purpose Of This Report**

1.1 This report aims to:

- summarise the national and local context of children's services within which the review took place;
- explain the links between the review, priorities for improvement in Children's Services across Leeds, and the Social Services' Transformation Programme for children's services;
- describe the consultation process which has been an integral part of the review at all stages;
- summarise the views of children, young people and staff expressed through consultation;
- report the findings of the review within the thematic areas on which it was structured, including referring to some comparative data;
- list the areas for improvement which have been identified as a result of the review process,  
  
and, in relation to Holmfield children's home
- explain the reasons for suggesting its closure, and outline proposed future arrangements for children who live at Holmfield, and the staff.

## **2.0 Background Information**

### **Every Child Matters – Improving services for children in Leeds**

- 2.1 The Every Child Matters influence on the development of children's services expects that provision be constructed around a child, putting the needs of the child and his/her family at the forefront of service development. Every Child Matters is supported by a framework of outcomes and performance indicators which link to a 5 fold framework:
- Be Healthy
  - Staying Safe
  - Enjoying and Achieving
  - Making a positive contribution, and
  - Achieving Economic Wellbeing
- 2.2 The priorities for the improvement of services to children across Leeds are linked to this framework, and articulated in Leeds strategic plan for children and young people, also known as "Every Child Matters" (2006). The strategic partnership which develops and monitors this strategic plan is called "Children Leeds". The Director of Children's Services plays a critical role in driving forward this agenda.
- 2.3 The Director of Children's Services and the Chief Officer for Social Services engages in regular structured conversations with DfES advisers on priorities for Leeds, guided by areas of specific focus articulated within the 5 outcomes framework. Many of the areas of focus relate to securing improvements in provision for looked after children. Within the "Staying Safe" category, a specific priority relates to improving residential care provision to meet National Minimum Standards.

A related focus within “Enjoying and Achieving” is the need to improve attendance and attainment of looked after children, and improve alignment and connections between services. Importantly, under “Making a Positive Contribution”, improving the participation of looked after children and young people in their reviews is highlighted.

- 2.4 The review of residential children’s homes has considered and made direct service related recommendations in all of these areas. The review has been thorough, searching and well timed to challenge and explore practice and provision in this important area of care provision for looked after children and young people.
- 2.5 The Director of Children’s Services has considered the outcomes of the review of residential children’s homes, and is entirely confident that the agenda for improvement that arises from the review, is consistent with identified priorities for the future of children’s services in Leeds. The priorities for improvement and the associated activity programmes (see section 6 of the full residential review report available as a background paper) provide practical approaches to progress key actions to improve services for looked after children.

### **Social Services – Placement Management**

- 2.6 Ensuring an appropriate balance of the right type of high quality care placement presents an ongoing challenge for all Local Authorities, including the Social Services Department of Leeds City Council.
- 2.7 In order to drive forward improvement in services for looked after children, the Social Services department has developed a “Transformation Programme” which sets out proposals for much needed service changes and development. A key strand in the Transformation Programme is that of improving placement management. This means:
- improving placement choice,
  - adjusting the balance between foster care and residential children’s home provision, by increasing the number of foster care places, and
  - improving the quality of all residential care provision through a structured series of reviews.
- 2.8 The aim is to secure a better match of care provision to the needs of children and young people. Plans are well developed to introduce, in 2007, a structure within which the provision of foster care will become “professionalised” ensuring better arrangements for the pay, training and support for foster carers. This structure will enable social workers and their managers, through monitoring and accountability structures, to better assure continuing quality of foster care provision.
- 2.9 It is within the context of the placement management strand of the Transformation Programme, that the review of residential children’s homes has taken place.

### **National Policy**

- 2.10 The government’s green paper “*Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care*” (DFES 2006) sets an aspirational agenda for a “relentless” drive to transforming services for looked after children.
- 2.11 The green paper expresses concerns about the number of changes of care placement that some children and young people experience. It suggests a range of proposals to “radically” reform the placement system, with a focus on extending

numbers and improving quality of foster care provision, and ensuring that children “are only placed in children’s homes which meet high standards of care”. CSCI inspect children’s homes against a set of criteria known as the “National Minimum Standards for Children’s Homes.” Appendix 2 to the full report of the Residential Review (available to Elected Members as a background paper) shows an analysis of inspection grades of Leeds children’s homes against inspection criteria applied in 2005 / 2006.

- 2.12 The green paper also refers to placement choice. It suggests regional commissioning as an approach to extend this. A CSCI report “*Making Every Child Matter: Messages from inspections of children’s social services*” (2005) said that “*real placement choice for looked after children is constrained everywhere.... And many (local authorities) undertake specific initiatives to increase choice, mainly involving foster care recruitment...*”.
- 2.13 The findings of the residential review are consistent with the key messages of Care Matters.

### **Leeds Social Services - Policy Context**

- 2.14 In 2003 Social Services published its “Residential Childcare Strategy 2003-2005”. The strategy provided a direction within which service managers have aimed for improvement. The residential review has reinforced a number of priorities set out in this strategy (also available as a background paper).
- 2.15 The Leeds Social Service’s Children’s Plan (2002-2005) set some success criteria for the development of residential children’s home provision, including:
- the construction of plans to improve residential services,
  - an inclusive programme of participation and consultation with young people and staff,
  - improved attendance and examination results, and
  - independent management of the regulation 33 inspection process.
- 2.16 In its contribution to the 2006 Annual Performance Assessment, CSCI reported that only 57% of children’s homes meet minimum standards in key areas. An analysis of CSCI inspection results shows a very high level of dissatisfaction from inspectors about staffing levels.
- 2.17 Information on how Leeds compares with other authorities is referred to in more detail in the full report of the review.

### **The Consultation Process**

- 2.18 Consultation has been an integral part of the review process. There has been discussion and consultation with staff, both informally, in small groups and in structured team and practitioner meetings. Leeds Children’s Rights service, commissioned by the Social Services Department to provide advocacy services to looked after children and young people, were additionally commissioned to seek young people’s views. This was done through a Children’s Expert Panel and one to one and small group interviews. Children’s comments are summarised throughout the full review report, and are reported in full in an appendix to the review report (available as a background paper).

### **3.0 Main Issues**

#### **The Views of Children and Young People**

3.1 The children's and young people's views reflect their own experiences and perceptions. There are some key themes:

- Homes vary in character and style
- There are differing standards in the different homes.
- 'Bullying' can be an issue, especially where children of widely differing ages are mixed.
- Children would like to be involved in the recruitment of staff
- There are not enough staff and agency staff are not always welcomed.
- A number of young people expressed a desire to have more space / quiet areas
- A common theme was that of pocket money – generally a wish for more
- A number of the children see their homes as an institution rather than a home
- Lack of placement choice means that it looks as if their views on where they would like to live aren't important

These views are drawn from a meeting with young people in July, the results of interviews, consultation and a further meeting in August where the outline recommendations, including ensuring homes are "fit for purpose" was discussed. No recommendations were rejected by the young people.

#### **The Views of Staff**

3.2 The commitment of staff to providing high quality care is very high. Residential staff expressed recurrent concerns about staffing levels, and explained the impact of this (beyond low inspection grades) meant that it was not always possible to undertake the type of normal day to day activity that a child or young person could reasonably expect, such as sports or activities in the evening, or support for making a snack in the kitchen.

3.3 Fieldwork staff expressed concern about the lack of placement choice.

#### **Review Findings**

3.4 The process of the review, and the organisation of review findings is set within the following structure:

- General service
- Staffing
- Accommodation
- Leaving care
- Disability Provision

#### **General Service**

3.5 Restricted placement choice can lead to inappropriate placements, and consequently poor placement stability. This leads to some fieldwork staff having low levels of confidence in placement management. Some placement staff report

frustrations with lack of flexibility and capacity in the overall range of provision within which to place children. The number of referrals for placement exceeds the available resource. Being able to manage the provision resource is complicated because database and systems development work to improve data management has not yet taken place.

- 3.6 CSCI have expressed recurrent and serious concerns about staffing levels in residential homes, as well as recommending that improved approaches to share good practice will help to reduce bad practice.
- 3.7 Sometimes the “statement of purpose” for a children’s home can create lack of flexibility in the provision of residential care, but more importantly, can mean that a young person who is well settled in a home, needs to move because of age restrictions.
- 3.8 Placement stability is a performance indicator for the Council against which its performance is measured and compared with other authorities. A recent analysis (October 06) of children in care for 2.5 years and who have lived in the same place for 2 years, or who were placed for adoption and aged under 16, shows that placement stability is almost twice as good (compared to children in residential homes) for children placed with extended families, and 50% better (than for children in residential homes) for children placed in foster care.
- 3.9 ICT facilities for children and young people are improved and are provided through Education Leeds and the Leeds Learning Network. Most young people would still like access to more than one computer, although some do have their own lap tops. For staff there is more to do. All residential homes have access to e mail and the internet, although the reliability of the links and the effective use of the systems varies across homes. Access to Council systems is needed in due course.
- 3.10 In July 2006 an analysis of education arrangements for children living in children’s homes showed that 23 out of 71 children had not received their full entitlement to 25 hours education. Much of this was around two to three specialist educational provisions / schools, and since this time some progress has been made through closer working with Education Leeds.

### **Staffing**

- 3.11 Many of those consulted during the review commented on the high levels of commitment, dedication and expertise of residential care home staff. Young people also made positive comments.
- 3.12 Salary for Unit Manager 1 graded posts is low in comparison with neighbouring authorities. This creates both recruitment and sustainability issues. CSCI have made frequent comment, both through inspection reports and in conversations with officers, that the staffing establishments in residential homes are inadequate or unacceptable. Staffing levels are having a negative impact on inspection grades. Of ten homes inspected against inspection standard 30 (relates to staffing levels), only 3 met the standard required. Leeds Children’s Rights has commented that current staffing capacity does not enable staff to carry out effective key working activities. Young people enjoy their “one to ones” and said that they were not able to have this contact very often. Unit managers have explained that a number of staff are not up to date with some specialist training because staffing levels do not allow for their release to be trained.

- 3.13 Staff sickness levels are high, and if they continue at current rates will exceed Council targets by 40% in 2006/07. Unit managers explain sickness levels as relating to stress arising from an unacceptably pressured working environment due to inadequate staffing levels.
- 3.14 Low staffing, high sickness levels and high and complex needs of some young people have led to a high use of overtime and agency staff. CSCI support the Department's view that an over-reliance on agency staff is not good practice. Spending on agency and overtime is likely to lead to a £1.3m overspend in 2006/07, although since the review, improved sickness management and increased accountabilities when appointing agency staff may reduce this.
- 3.15 Staff morale is low, although managers say that morale has not affected the hard work and commitment of staff. Managers spend unnecessary time on administrative tasks because there is no administrative post within the staffing structure. Management training and development is not taking place in a coherent and structured way. This is also the case for specialist skills related training, for example in substance misuse, first aid and therapeutic crisis intervention. The Principal Unit Managers (PUM) and unit managers agree that the PUM posts should be increasingly distanced from day to day matters, and should increasingly focus on strategic management, monitoring and accountability to ensure ongoing improvement.
- 3.16 Young people would like to become more involved in the recruitment of the staff who will look after them.

### **Accommodation**

- 3.17 A joint exercise with an asset management officers assessed all children's homes against "fitness for purpose" criteria. These criteria are:
- the home is structurally sound
  - the building meets basic health and safety standards
  - the location of the home is suitable for young people, and enables safe access to community facilities
  - there is suitable space for play
  - bedroom size is suitable
  - communal space is of a sufficient size
- 3.18 CSCI also work within a framework of minimum standards of which the relevant standards are:

Standard No	Standard Description
Standard 23:	The home's location, design and size are in keeping with its purpose and function. It serves the needs of the children it accommodates, and provides an environment that is supportive to each child's development
Standard 24	The home provides adequate good quality domestic style facilities for those living on the premises consistent with the purpose and function of the home, and is maintained in good order throughout.

Standard 25	Baths, showers and toilets are of a number and standard to meet the needs of the children. Outcome: Children's privacy is respected when washing
Standard 26	Positive steps are taken to keep children, staff and visitors safe from risk from fire and other hazards.

- 3.19 Young people's comments primarily focused on the extent to which their home was like a "family home". The newer purpose built homes received commendation from both staff and young people.

### **Leaving Care**

- 3.20 Most young people interviewed said that "leaving care" homes were a good idea, although not all wanted to live in one. The design tends to be similar to that of other homes, and as such does not provide the flexibility that is needed to develop independence, such as independent use of kitchen facilities.
- 3.21 Some managers referred to a model of provision where a building has a communal area, but attached annexes designed to promote independence, but enabling access to and support from staff. There are no "leaving care" homes built on this design idea in Leeds.
- 3.22 The Pathway Planning team supports the leaving care process. The view of fieldwork staff is that the Pathway Planning team is "massively under resourced", having an impact on the level of support that can be provided, particularly the frequency of contact between staff and the young people, some of whom may be living on their own in flats.
- 3.23 Residential care home staff want to do more to support the pathway planning process, through the provision of outreach support, and more time to prepare young people for their next steps. However, staffing levels in homes do not allow for this.
- 3.24 Young people's comments ranged from one young person saying he felt lonely because he did not see enough of his key worker, to another saying that there was nothing about the arrangements for him that he would change.
- 3.25 Some young people leaving care will need adult care or support. This is especially the case for disabled young people. There is frustration amongst some children's workers because they feel that adult services do not always recognise the extent of some young people's disabilities and their need for continuing provision and support of the type and level that they believe is right.
- 3.26 The Social Services Transformation Board has recognised these concerns and has commissioned a "Transitions Project" which is currently in the process of being scoped.

### **Disability Provision**

- 3.27 The review considered the needs of all children, including disabled children, at every stage of the review. However, there are some considerations, for example transitions (see paragraph 3.25 above), that are more relevant to disabled children. In order to support the concerns about transition, a PFI bid is being progressed that proposes the development of a linked residential provision for children and adults with learning difficulties, challenging behaviour and usually an autistic spectrum disorder.



## Areas for Improvement

- 3.28 In total the full review report (available as a background paper), lists 33 separate findings. These are summarised into the text above. The findings have been structured into a framework of six Improvement Priorities. The full review report (section 6) provides sub-text to support the Improvement Priorities. This sub-text indicates broad areas of action called “activity programmes”. They will provide the key building blocks for improvement planning.
- 3.29 The six Improvement Priorities are:
1. Improve the **strategic management** of residential services, including foster care.
  2. Improve **operational / service management** processes to ensure consistency and improve quality in residential services, including foster care.
  3. **Involve children and young people** in implementing the outcomes of the review of residential services, to include contributing to monitoring and evaluation processes.
  4. Achieve an infrastructure of residential homes where **buildings** are fit for purpose and located in appropriate locations.
  5. Develop a **highly skilled and flexible workforce**, able to respond appropriately to the changing and unpredictable needs of children and young people
  6. Ensure that the needs of **disabled children** and their families are fully included within overall service planning and service delivery.

## Holmfield Children’s Home

- 3.30 As a result of the consideration of each children’s home against the criteria set out in paragraphs 3.17 and 3.18 above, Holmfield Children’s home would require significant resources to ensure it is fit for purpose, and even then its building structure does not resemble a family home.
- 3.31 The national and local context to this report, (paragraphs 2.6 – 2.9) indicate a need to move towards a new balance between foster care provision and residential children’s homes. This is articulated in the Social Services Department’s Transformation Plan.
- 3.32 The balance between foster care and residential care home provision is monitored by the Social Services Department. The aim, in changing the balance of placements between foster care and residential children’s homes, is to increase the number of children successfully placed for adoption, and of the remaining children who need specialist care, to increase family living arrangements through foster care, and reduce the corresponding proportion in residential homes. Supporting this is an ongoing aim to reduce reliance on out of authority care provision.

The table below shows recent performance towards attaining a change in the balance of placements:

	<b>April 06</b>	<b>September 06</b>	<b>06/07 target</b>
<b>% of LAC living in residential homes</b>	11.03%	10.1%	10.4%
<b>% of LAC in foster care or placed for adoption</b>	82.77%	83.7%	83%
<b>The number of children adopted as a % of all LAC</b>	(05/06 = 4.9%)	6.2%	5.9%

LAC = Looked After Children

- 3.33 In order to support this, increased capacity has been added to the fostering officer team to deal with a backlog of foster carer assessments, and to continue to provide the support needed to carers who are approved. The new Payment for Skills approach to supporting foster care includes a clear structure of training, support, pay and two way accountability between the Council and the carer to ensure appropriate and skilled foster care. The scheme includes higher fees for carers who look after children and young people with more challenging needs, especially where this relates to difficult behaviour. Complementary recruitment drives to include numbers of foster carers and adopters support this approach.
- 3.34 It is within this context that the assessment of suitability of children's home accommodation (see paragraphs 3.17 and 3.18) has taken place.
- 3.35 In the event that Elected Members approve the recommendation to close Holmfield, and to prepare for an efficient and speedy process, avoiding the difficulties that protracted programmes can bring, early work has been undertaken with staff and young people from Holmfield to explore alternative care arrangements for young people, and employment opportunities for staff. Arrangements are in hand to ensure that all young people have a child care review before Christmas, and to ensure that all young people are supported to participate in the review process and to express their views. The families of the young people have also been informed and have an opportunity to make their views known. The staff have all had interviews with Human Resources staff, and there are suitable vacancies to which the staff can be redeployed.
- 3.36 There are 8 young people at Holmfield. Careful management of admissions to, and leavers from residential care homes, means that there is a place for each young person in either another residential home, or through a supported placement with their family, or with skilled foster care.
- 3.37 Children, young people, staff and social workers have been invited to express their views in this early planning and consultation process. This planning is taking place in the full understanding that any final decision will be taken by the Executive Board. However, in order to manage change for young people and staff with as little disruption and anxiety, early planning and discussion has taken place.
- 3.38 There was a mixed reaction from young people when they were told that there was a possibility that Holmfield might close, with the majority indicating their approval to this. The young people who live at Holmfield all have a range of complex needs. Six

of the eight young people (at October 2006) have committed criminal offences. All young people have a school place, with five of them attending specialist educational provision: special school, Pupil Referral Units or alternative programmes, and three of them at mainstream school. Seven have up to date health assessments and 8 have up to date dental checks. Only 3 of the young people at Holmfield have lived there longer than 2 years. Statutory child care reviews will have taken place for all young people before the end of December, with all young people being supported by staff and by Leeds Children's Rights advocacy service.

3.39 Leeds Children's Rights has written to the Chief Officer (Children's Services). This letter is available as a background paper to this report. The main points made in the letter are:

- A loss of 6 - 8 beds will create further demand on existing placements
- Flexibility on residential homes supports unpredictable demands for foster care breakdown.
- If foster care is going to be a viable alternative, there needs to be a suitable number of foster places with suitably skilled carers.
- It is essential that young people are involved in decision making processes about any future care placement.

These issues are considered within this report: paragraph 3.32 covers the balance between foster care and residential provision; paragraph 3.33 describes the approach to ensure appropriate skills levels amongst foster carers, and refers to recruitment; paragraph 3.38 explains that advocacy support is being provided to support young people participate in their child care reviews.

3.40 If Elected Members support the recommendation to close Holmfield residential home, alternative care placements for young people will be in place by the end of February, and staff will be able to be relocated by the end of this period of time.

#### **4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

4.1 There is no statutory guidance or statutory requirements from government concerning the closure of a children's home. Neither is there any statutory provision for determining the balance between different types of care provision for looked after children and young people. Councils are however measured on certain related performance indicators. Placement stability is particularly relevant in this respect. Paragraph 3.8 shows that placement stability is better for young people in foster care or who are placed with their parents.

4.2 The Social Services Transformation Programme signals the need to adjust the balance between residential care and foster provision, stating that the closure of a residential home will support this. Detail on current performance is set out in paragraph 3.32.

4.3 The outcomes of the review, and the aims behind the proposed closure of Holmfield, are consistent with the direction and focus of the Council's Children and Young Person's Strategic Plan (06/07).

4.4 The statutory requirement to have child care reviews to recommend next steps for the young people at Holmfield is satisfied by the current early planning on the proposed closure of Holmfield.

4.5 The Council's duty to act as Corporate Parent is fulfilled by its detailed consideration of the issues and areas for improvement identified through the review of residential children's homes for looked after children, and the related considerations for Holmfield.

4.6 The Headingley ward Members have been kept informed that a report will be taken to this Executive Board recommending the closure of Holmfield. They have indicated that they have no objection to the recommendation.

## **5.0 Legal And Resource Implications**

5.1 The legal implications are set out within the body of this report.

5.2 There are likely to be financial implications arising from the review and the consequent need to increase foster care capacity. Whilst resources would be released from a decision to close Holmfield Children's Home, it is planned to use these to raise staffing levels in other children's homes.

5.3 Financial plans to both increase foster care capacity, and increase residential home staffing to reach national minimum standards, are being developed and refined with finance officers, and need to be considered within the budget submissions from Social Services as part of the process followed by the Council in constructing its budget for 2007/08.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

6.1 The residential review has been a thorough, year long review of a range of aspects relating to residential children's homes for looked after children. The Improvement Priorities that will drive progress over the next 2-3 years are drawn from a sound evidence base of analysis, and engagement through consultative processes with field workers, service managers, residential home staff and children and young people who live in the homes.

6.2 The Improvement Priorities categorise the key areas within which a range of action is needed to secure improvement. They are consistent with priorities agreed by Children Leeds for the ongoing development and improvement of children's services

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 That the Executive Board notes the key issues arising from the residential review as set out in this report, and approves the intention to develop an Improvement Plan based on the Improvement Priorities set out in paragraph 3.29.

7.2 That the Executive Board approves the recommendation that Holmfield Children's Home should close at the end of February 2007, subject to alternative suitable care arrangements having been identified and secured for the young people who live there.

## **Appendices**

1. Executive Summary of the Review of Residential Children's Homes (October 2006)

## **Background Papers available for Inspection**

1. Residential Review Report (October 2006)
2. Appendices to the Residential Review report
  - Appendix 1a\*      Asset Management Matrix and Report
  - Appendix 1b\*      Placement cost per children's home
  - Appendix 1c\*      Map of children's homes locations
  
  - Appendix 2 \*      Performance of Leeds Residential Children's Homes against CSCI standards between September 2005 and July 2006
  
  - Appendix 3      Report by Leeds Children's Rights: Consultation with Young People
  
  - Appendix 4      Documents from targeted consultation with disabled young people
3. Residential Childcare Strategy (2002-2005) Leeds Social Services
4. Letter from Leeds Children's Rights to the Chief Officer (Children's Services)

\* available to staff and Elected Members only as the reports identify names and locations of children's homes