

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 9th September 2010

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children and Young People

SUBJECT: The re-design of Children’s Residential Services as part of the Council’s overall Placement Strategy Review

Ward: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information on the outcome of the review of Halton’s residential provision for children in care.
- 1.2 To propose changes to the provision in order to ensure that Halton makes efficient and effective use of all it’s resources and is able to meet it’s statutory responsibility in meeting the needs of its children in care and care leavers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board

- (1) endorses the proposal to close Littlebourne Children’s Home.**
- (2) In order to meet statutory requirements and responsibilities, endorses the proposal to use some of the efficiencies from this re-design to provide essential services to care leavers, foster carers and children in care.**
- (3) endorses financial efficiencies of £150,000 (one off capital) and £105,000 (revenue) to contribute to the Council’s efficiency programme.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 A Placement Strategy Review in respect of children in care was presented and approved by the Executive Board of the Council on 5th November 2009.
- 3.2 The review presented the trend data on the borough’s children in care population and the arrangements for placing those children.
- 3.3 The review focused initially on the borough’s situation in relation to foster care. It identified that barriers to the recruitment of carers needed to be overcome in order to address a severe shortage of carers and the resulting high cost of placing a significant number of children in Out of Borough provision.

- 3.4 As a result of that first stage of the review the Executive Board agreed to support an Invest To Save Bid to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers through an increase in allowances.
- 3.5 The increased allowances will be introduced on 7th September 2010. Having publicised the new rates of allowances and introduced a revised marketing campaign, enquiries about fostering have increased. There are already 4 new carers approved and a further 10 are in the assessment process.
- 3.6 The second stage of the process was identified as a review of the borough's residential provision, which is the subject of this report.
- 3.7 Both stages of the review of arrangements for placing children have been set within the context of Halton's children in care population and the data on their placements.
- 3.8 In 2004, the borough had 169 children in care. At the time of presenting the first stage of the Placement Strategy Review in November 2009, there were 158 children in Care. As of July 2010 there were 149 children in care.
- 3.9 These figures are very positive for the Borough and its children and are contrary to both regional and national trends which have seen numbers of children in care increasing over the past 2 years. This has been achieved through a rigorous approach to children in need, child protection and children in care services.
- 3.10 In order to meet the variety of assessed needs of these young people, Halton needs to provide a range of provision for children in care which includes foster care, residential and preparation for independence.
- 3.11 Within its own residential provision, Halton has had 6 beds in its Children's homes for the past 6 years – four at Edinburgh Road, Widnes and two at Littlebourne, Runcorn.
- 3.12 In the course of the review of this provision a number of issues have been noted:
- 3.12.1 Demand for placements in residential provision has declined and at the moment there is a vacancy in each home for which no young people have been identified.
- 3.12.2 Sustaining any vacancies within the homes increases the unit cost of a placement.
- 3.12.3 Within Littlebourne in particular, there have been regular and often lengthy vacancies due to the difficulties of carefully matching the needs of just 2 young people and taking into account its location.

- 3.12.4 The nature and location of Littlebourne – a relatively small modern property at the bottom corner of a cul de sac, on a private estate, in close proximity with elderly neighbours and families – continues to be a challenge for the provision of a Children’s Residential Care home.
- 3.12.5 There is a sustained shortage of provision for young people who reach 16 years of age, that have ‘out grown’ residential care but are not ready to live independently.
- 3.12.6 The majority of young people currently in our residential provision have reached school leaving age (3 out of 4).
- 3.12.7 Children leaving care have very limited preparation for independent living which significantly impacts on their education, employment, training and future housing prospects.
- 3.13 Alongside the review of Halton’s in-house residential provision, analysis of the demand for use of residential provision for children with external providers also shows a decline. In November 2009 there were 22 Children places in external residential care. As of July 2010 there are 7 young people, all of whom are receiving such provision because they are unable to be managed in any other setting. This is clearly a volatile and somewhat unpredictable area, but it is well managed and actively reviewed; and bucks national trends.
- 3.14 In the Placement Strategy Review (November 2009) it was identified that Halton’s children’s home’s would need to change their purpose. Analysis shows that, taking into account recent and predicted trends, 4 in house residential beds will be sufficient to meet the needs of children in care.
- 3.15 In order to prevent residential provision becoming ‘blocked’ analysis also shows that there is a need for older young people to have more suitable provision to move on to.
- 3.16 When young people finish their statutory education at 16 years of age they often find that the move to college or work and the desire to become more independent is incompatible with life in a children’s home. At the moment, there are limited options for young people to leave a children’s home and move into a supported environment, but options are being developed.
- 3.17 The provision of such semi-independent living would become part of a range of options for young people leaving care which would include:
 - 3.17.1 Semi-independent project – 3 beds within a home in the community where project staff are available at key times and young people work towards an accredited independence skills programme.
 - 3.17.2 Supported lodgings – currently being recruited to, this will provide a rented

room within a home in the borough, with limited support from the householder but further support from project and social care staff.

- 3.17.3 Supported shared housing – a tenancy in the community which two young people share and support staff are deployed as necessary.
- 3.17.4 Starter flats – provided by a local RSL and used to accommodate young people who need limited support and who are able to take on the tenancy when they reach 18 years of age.
- 3.17.5 Supported living – provided by an agency and based in the community, these are used for those young people who need a high level of ongoing support.
- 3.18 All young people who are leaving care will be encouraged and supported to complete the LIFE programme (Living Independently and Fulfilling Expectations). This is an accredited, competency based programme which helps young people to develop the knowledge, skills and capacity to be 'tenancy ready' and live independently in the community.
- 3.19 Such a range of provision would provide reassurance that the Council is committed to providing a suitable setting for care leavers up to adulthood. It would also address one of the key issues that care leavers have themselves raised about the lack of choice they have previously faced and the resulting impact this can have on their lives.
- 3.20 The **proposal** is therefore that:
 - 3.20.1 Littlebourne children's home should be closed.
 - 3.20.2 In order to meet its continuing statutory responsibilities following the closure; the Council would commission semi-independent provision for care leavers, provide support for the Children In Care Council; fund two care leaver apprenticeships; provide an Independent Visitor Scheme; services for foster carers; personal Education Allowances for children in care; and refurbishment funding for the children's home at Edinburgh Road.
 - 3.20.3 The efficiencies made by this reorganisation would contribute to the Council's efficiency programme. The items in 3.20.2 above ensure that front line services are not affected by such efficiency savings.
- 3.21 The proposal would take effect with the closure of Littlebourne on 31st March 2011 and the award of a contract for semi-independent provision to commence in April 2011.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposal is consistent with current Council policies and priorities, the Halton multi agency Children in Care Strategy and Corporate Parenting

responsibilities.

- 4.2 The proposal would be part of a clear pathway for Children in Care and Care Leavers and would ensure that high cost placement resources are used efficiently and effectively.
- 4.3 Additional support across a range of placement services will impact positively on performance on such issues as employment education and training, placement stability, recruitment and retention of carers, quality of care and homelessness.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Whilst meeting the needs of children in care and care leavers, the proposal also identifies efficiencies for the Council.
- 5.2 The value of the Littlebourne property is estimated at £150,000. The sale of the property would contribute to the Council's efficiency programme.
- 5.3 The current establishment budget for Littlebourne is £325,540. The cost of the provision identified to continue to meet statutory requirements to children in care and care leavers (3.20.2) following the closure of Littlebourne is £220,000. A total of £105k revenue would therefore contribute to the Council's efficiency programme.
- 5.4 The need to identify funding to meet these essential statutory requirements and responsibilities has largely arisen out of the significant reduction in the Area Based Grant for 2010/11 and 2011/12.
- 5.5 There is currently a staffing establishment at Littlebourne which is as follows:
- 1 x Registered Manager
 - 1 x Assistant Registered Manager (vacant)
 - 5 x Residential Child Care Workers (0.5 vacant)

Consultation on the proposal has commenced with the staff and Unison and the Council's At Risk Policy will be implemented. It is anticipated that alternative employment can be identified for those who are affected.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton**
The proposal seeks to ensure that there are suitable placement options for both Children in Care and Care Leavers within their own community.
- 6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**
If young people who are getting ready to leave care are able to remain in Halton in a supported environment, they will experience less disruption and uncertainty and will benefit from the partnerships that have developed to promote employment and learning opportunities. Completion of the

accredited LIFE programme also entitles young people to claim EMA and be registered as involved in EET activities.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The proposal is consistent with ensuring that children in care and care leavers are able to access local resources, which will help to support this physical and emotional well-being.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Young people often wish to remain within their own community and the ability to do so improves their likelihood of achieving well in all areas of their life.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

If children in care and care leavers feel settled and comfortable within their home and community they are likely to engage better in the opportunities the borough is able to offer them.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The failure to redesign services in line with the proposal will result in limited progress on meeting the needs of care leavers, inefficient use of resources and limited impact on improving the medium – longer term outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

7.2 There is one young person placed at Littlebourne at the moment. He will be 17 years old in December and even if Littlebourne remained open, he would have had a plan to move on to independence provision in 2011. Plans will be made for him to move on appropriately.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment of the proposal identifies no negative impact on children in care and care leavers as a result of the proposal, this as a result of paragraph 3.20.2.

8.2 The proposal improves choices for children in care and care leavers and will facilitate positive action to improve the life chances of this vulnerable group.

9.0 REASON FOR DECISION

9.1 The decision is required in order to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources and to improve outcomes for children who grow up in care.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED.

10.1 Consideration was given to utilising the existing property at Littlebourne for the semi-independent provision. However neither the location nor the size makes it suitable for this service.

10.2 Consideration was given to developing the semi-independent provision as a Halton Borough Council resource. This was not a cost effective model and would not have allowed the department to benefit from a partnership with an experienced provider of such services.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

11.1 It is proposed that the closure of Littlebourne takes place by 31st March 2011 and a contract for semi-independent accommodation is awarded and commences in April 2011.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact
Care Matters	DFE Website	CT
Children and Young Persons Act 2008	DFE Website	CT
Children in Care Strategy	Grosvenor House	CT
Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	DFE Website	CT
Placement Strategy Review Executive Board Report 05.11.01	Grosvenor House	CT