

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 17th March 2020

Report Title: Children's Homes Mobilisation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

Senior Officer: Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report will update the Committee on the mobilisation of our new children's homes, which constitutes phase one of the Bespoke Care Hub Project. Bringing our children and young people back to live in Cheshire East is one of the most important priorities for the whole service, and will enable those with some of the most complex needs to reform and foster relationships and links with their families and communities.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. We have established a strategic approach and 'direction of travel' for our Bespoke Project, which have generally been met with approval from stakeholders including most importantly, our Cared For Children. The Committee is asked to endorse the steps that have been taken thus far in making it a reality on the ground and to contribute any further aspirations and ideas as we move into the next phases of the work.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The Care Hub approach will ultimately provide us with a wide range of services that will have an impact on children beyond those who will actually live in the homes. For example, it will contribute to work in the Fostering Service to improve placement stability and support for carers, and enhance the good work that Ofsted recently recognised in our 'edge of care' services. However, none of these developments will be possible unless the homes themselves are mobilised properly, with time allowed for registered managers, staff teams and young people to settle into their new working

relationships and establish a baseline level of stability. In each case therefore, we have agreed with our partners that the first and second admissions to the homes will follow each other relatively quickly, and that there will then be a period of a few weeks' consolidation before a third young person is considered for each of the groups.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. The major factor in opening new homes over which both the providers (Safe Places and Horizon) and the Council have essentially no control is the timescale for registration imposed by Ofsted. Generally, they will look to register homes in 12 to 16 weeks but as has been noted elsewhere, the north-west region has a disproportionate number of new children's homes and the process can sometimes take in excess of 20 weeks here. We have therefore had little option but to open the homes in phases as outlined below.

5. Background

- 5.1. The Bespoke Project finally became a reality on 13th January when Horizon's Malbank House opened its doors. On this day, one of our furthest placed young people moved in successfully from a children's home in Oxfordshire as planned. He was followed a week later by a 15 year old boy who is a new entrant to care and for whom our long search for a foster placement had unfortunately proved fruitless. However, with this one exception, all of our planning for the Bespoke Homes has involved young people who are already in residential care in out-of-borough homes, generally at high cost.
- 5.2. At the time of writing, further developments are planned as follows:
 - Flude House at Broad Street in Crewe, which is run by Safe Places will become operational on 27th January and it is hoped that one of our most complex young people, who is currently in a residential special school will be admitted first. Thereafter it is planned that two other boys who attend the same school will move into the home to establish a group of 12-13 year old children who already know each other and who can live together locally for the foreseeable future.
 - Committee members will be aware that there is a national shortage of foster carers which has directly affected both our in-house service and the market of independent fostering agencies (IFAs). This has led to the placement of a number of younger children in residential care because we have been unable to find stable families for them. 'Step-down' to foster care will be one of the cornerstones of the Bespoke Project and we therefore intend to use Victoria Lodge in Macclesfield as the initial base for this work. This home had stood empty since early

2017 and therefore required more renovation than either the provider or the Council had originally anticipated; as a result it is likely that registration will be delayed until sometime in May. However, three of our younger children have already been provisionally identified to move into the home with a view to preparing them for life in a foster family.

- Horizon's other home is in Macclesfield and when it has been registered by Ofsted, it is intended that two of our young people who are both keen to return to Cheshire East and are currently amongst our highest cost agency placements will be the first to be admitted.
- The Council's contract with Keys Group to run Claremont in Crewe ends on 31st March and will not be extended. Only one 16 year old young person is living there and we are currently considering a number of options with him and his family.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

6.1.1. There are no identified legal implications at this point.

6.2. Finance Implications

6.2.1. Reducing our dependence on the agency residential market will have a significant impact on the placement budget for Cared For Children; for example the combined cost of the two homes referred to in the final bullet point above exceeds £10k per week.

6.3. Policy Implications

6.3.1. No policy implications have been identified.

6.4. Equality Implications

6.4.1. Sadly, it is well known that Cared For Children are disadvantaged in many ways and that they can generally expect poorer outcomes than their counterparts in the general population. Across all our services, we are working hard to close this gap and we believe that Bespoke will play a key role in delivering this aim.

6.5. Human Resources Implications

6.5.1. There are no HR implications at this stage. Claremont staff are not employed by the Council and these considerations will be addressed by Keys Group.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

6.6.1. The opening of new residential services is not without risk in terms of further poor outcomes for young people and the potential for disruption in local communities. We believe that strong leadership, engagement with stakeholders and neighbours, and the phased approach outlined above will mitigate these concerns.

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

6.8.1. There has been much press and political interest in recent months about the placement of cared for children far from home and Cheshire East's performance in this regard is currently around the national average. Our new homes will make a genuine difference in this respect and will we believe, lead to significantly better outcomes for some of our most complex young people. At the same time, even planned moves have the potential to be disruptive and in particular, we are working closely with colleagues in the Virtual School to ensure that every young person who returns to Cheshire East also has an appropriate level of full-time education.

6.9. Public Health Implications

6.9.1. Improved outcomes for cared for children can only have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

6.10. Climate Change Implications

6.10.1. Our first admission of a young person to the Bespoke Project means that a social worker, an IRO and a family will no longer have to drive to Oxfordshire to undertake visits and reviews; every move of this kind will contribute to reducing the Council's carbon footprint.

7. Ward Members Affected

7.1. The members for wards in which our children's homes are located have been informed of developments as the project has unfolded.

8. Consultation & Engagement

8.1. Three of the four homes are in residential areas and both providers have consulted with neighbours about their plans.

9. Access to Information

9.1. There are no supporting documents.

10. Contact Information

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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