

Review of Residential Provision in Cheshire East

1. Chairman's forward
2. This review of the residential provision in Cheshire East looked at the inheritance from the former Cheshire County Council (CCC). After Ofsted inspections had found that the two CCC residential homes in the east of the county did not meet their standard.
3. CCC had started a process of change, but this was at an early stage and the Task/Finish Group was set up to look at the changes being made and recommend any future changes to the residential provision for looked after children and young people
4. The Task/Finish Group was drawn from Cheshire East Council's Children and Families Scrutiny Committee.
5. I would like to thank Councillors D Flude, M Simon, D Beckford, J Goddard for their hard work and diligence in carrying out the work. We had one aim to always look for what is best for the children.
6. I would also thank the members of "The children in care council" for their candid and very helpful contribution, the team from the Together Trust at Wilkinson House who gave us an opportunity to look at other ways of provision.
7. To help us carry out the work we relied on the Cheshire East children and families team lead by Paul Mossman whose interim work had been very thorough.
8. Thanks are also due to Denise French for her excellent administrative support.
9. We commend our work to the Cheshire East Cabinet and request they give it full and fair consideration.

Councillor David Neilson

Vice Chairman, Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

10. Introduction

11. When Cheshire East came into existence on 1 April 2009 it inherited a pattern of residential provision that was to some degree already in the process of changing and improving. An independent consultant, Jill Thorburn, had also already been commissioned to review residential provision.

12. The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee on 6 July 2009 decided that a Task/Finish Group should review current residential provision and make recommendations about future provision. A Group was therefore established with the following Terms of Reference:

13. "To review and examine current residential provision for young people for 11 – 17 and make recommendations as to future residential provision for Cheshire East children".

14. The Membership of the Group is:

Councillor David Neilson (Chairman)
Councillor Darryl Beckford
Councillor Dorothy Flude
Councillor John Goddard
Councillor Margaret Simon

15. The Group commenced work in November 2009 with the aim of reporting to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee in summer 2010.

16. The Group met on 5 occasions and received written and oral evidence from a number of officers, the Group also carried out a number of visits to existing facilities and met with the Children in Care Council (a full list of meetings and visits is attached at Appendix 1).

17. Executive Summary and Recommendations

18. In 2005 Cheshire County Council undertook a Scrutiny Review of Residential Provision with a focus, in Cheshire East, on Redsands near Crewe and Priors Hill, Macclesfield. The conclusion was that neither were fit for purpose and the model of care was no longer appropriate. The County Council purchased 2 properties in the Crewe area to replace Redsands and these properties were in the process of being furnished and staffed as this Scrutiny review began.

19. The Group has had the opportunity to visit all existing provision as well as the two new homes in the Crewe area and this has been a very useful exercise. These visits plus information from officers and Jill Thorburn's report provided the basis for the Group's work. The Group also received valuable first hand information from members of the Children in Care Council.
20. The current and future focus for residential provision appears to be towards smaller units in established residential areas and the Group supports this direction of travel. Members have heard how the new units will achieve a homely and ordinary feel and about measures put in place to ensure high quality staffing arrangements. A lot of the concerns raised through Ofsted inspections of Redsands and Priors Hill have already been addressed, which the Group welcomes.
21. To continue and build on the changes already introduced the Group recommends that a further two properties is purchased in the mid or north of the Borough. This will enable a more even distribution of provision across the Borough; this is important to enable children to remain near their home location and help to maintain existing relationships and schooling arrangements.
22. The previous arrangement of having an emergency bed, currently not in operation, must not be reintroduced as this simply feeds the care system and does not produce the best outcomes for children. The removal of the emergency bed, along with the introduction of an assessment bed, has enabled a more planned approach to be adopted for children and young people coming into the care system. This is commended.
23. There are clear advantages to in-house residential care placements but early closures of Priors Hill units and Redsands have depleted the authority's ability to make such placements. The way forward is to expand the capacity of the new bed units but this needs to be done cautiously. There is clearly a shortage of in-house beds currently, particularly in the north of the borough, but the full extent of the shortage will not be clear until every single outplacement has been reviewed (a time consuming exercise) and the present uncertainty regarding the number of children being taken into care has been resolved. It is also clear from the experience within the Crewe units that commissioning such units requires time and capacity if the right staff are to be put in place and the right atmosphere is to be established. Providing two additional 4 bed units immediately making a total of 4 altogether , would seem to be justified as a first step, given that this will still leave the authority with less in-house beds than it inherited in April 2009. A review in say 12 months time could then be made to establish if the provision of additional units is needed.

24. Overall the Group feels that there have been a number of positive changes introduced in the residential service which must now be given time to establish and therefore a period of stability is important. Past issues have largely been addressed and the Group feels the Council is now in a position to run its own in-house provision together with some partnership working with existing partners (the Together Trust).

25. The full list of recommendations is below:

1. **That in view of the changes and improvements already made in the residential service and so as to introduce a period of stability and certainty the provision of residential care in Cheshire East, should remain an in-borough service either through directly managed establishments or by commissioned establishments. Out of borough placements should be minimised.**
2. **That the model of care at Priors Hill (a large institutional type building) is not suitable as a residential home for children and young people and that the model be not replicated in the future.**
3. **That the Priors Hill building and site be sold and the resultant capital receipt is ring-fenced to provide funding for replacement residential provision located in the mid and/or north of the Borough.**
4. **For similar reasons as Priors Hill that the Wilkinson House premises be sold and the resultant capital receipt is ring-fenced to provide funding towards new residential facilities.**
5. **That all future residential provision be based on the small residential units (around 4 bedrooms) model. In addition the specification should ensure that each new house has one bedroom and common facilities flexible enough to be used by either an abled child or by a child who uses a wheelchair.**
6. **That two properties are purchased (and modified), one in the mid part of the Borough and one in the north, to be used as residential accommodation for Cared for Children along the same lines as the two existing properties in the Crewe area. The properties should be situated in an established community near to local facilities.**
7. **That the Council gives favourable consideration to continued working with the Together Trust. The recommendation to close Wilkinson House is entirely a reflection on the premises rather than on the performance of the Trust.**

8. That the concept of an assessment bed be supported and that the one of the beds in one of the two new homes be reserved for this purpose.
9. That just before the new homes are due to open a local community engagement strategy be developed to inform the local community and reduce the likelihood of any negative publicity or speculation.
10. Cared for Children in residential homes should have access to possessions and facilities that are available to most children within their own family such as their own door key and the ability to have friends round for tea.
11. That the questions of consistency of access to possessions and facilities in foster care should be reported to the Council's Corporate Parenting Board for them to consider the need for any modification to current guidance.
12. Cared for Children in residential homes should have access to a computer to enable them to participate in modern methods of communication (with a safe format) and to help with studying. The Council's Corporate Parenting Board should be asked to consider the need for a change to current guidance to foster carers on this subject.
13. All cared for children in residential homes over the age of 10 should have their own mobile phone for safety reasons. A regular and reasonable top up should be provided. The Council's Corporate Parenting Board should be asked to consider the need for a change to current guidance to Foster Carers on this subject.
14. That all Cared for Children should be placed within a family setting wherever possible and that sufficient resources are targeted at the fostering service to ensure sufficient capacity is available.
15. That Cheshire East Council should seek to ensure as stable a workforce as possible within its children's homes so as to enable continuity with the children and the opportunity for relationship building.
16. That recruitment to residential care services should always be through a robust process and Warner style safer recruitment methods should be used. Any organisation commissioned to organise residential services on the Council's behalf should also be required to comply with the recommendation.
17. That an on-going training programme and an appraisal system be implemented for all staff working in residential care to ensure staff development and knowledge is kept up to date and monitored.

- 18. That short break provision for disabled children should cease to be provided in the Langley Unit at Priors Hill. Although the service is viewed as good the physical environment is not suitable and not the model of care the Council should be aspiring to provide. Full consideration of short break provision should be covered under the Aiming Higher review.**
- 19. That emergency beds should no longer be made available. Emergency provision should be provided through outreach workers or emergency foster carers.**
- 20. That regular summaries of reports and recommendations made under the regulation 33 visit programme should be submitted to the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee. This is considered to be the best way for the committee to have its finger on the pulse of the residential services.**

26. The Position at 1 April 2009

27. Cheshire East Council came into being on 1 April 2009 and inherited the following children's residential homes:

- Redsands near Crewe – a purpose built 12 bed unit for children aged 12 to 18 in two units of 6;
- Priors Hill, Macclesfield, a purpose built facility comprising the following Units:
 - Langley Unit - providing 6 short break beds for disabled children aged 8 to 19;
 - Alderley Unit - providing 6 beds for children aged 12 to 18;
 - Mottram Unit - providing 2 emergency beds for children aged 12 to 18;
 - Kerridge Unit - providing 2 short break beds for fostered and adopted children requiring respite for children aged 8 to 19.

28. Cheshire East also manages a contract (which runs until March 2011) with the Together Trust. The Together Trust manages Wilkinson House, Sandbach, which is a 6 bed unit providing 3 beds each for Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester for children aged 8 to 12.

29. A Scrutiny Review carried out by Cheshire County Council conducted in 2005 concluded that the model of care provided at Redsands was no longer fit for purpose and care could more appropriately be provided in small 4 bedded homes. In Cheshire East two such properties were purchased (by the County Council) in the Crewe area. Redsands was closed in April 2009.

30. Priors Hill – the Scrutiny Review of 2005 also considered that this facility should be replaced in principle but no action was taken due to Local Government Reorganisation. The Langley Unit is run as a separate unit but the other three Units are run as one due to staff working across the Units as required. The Mottram Unit closed in April 2009, the Alderley Unit closed in December 2009 and currently only the Langley Unit remains open.

31. Ofsted inspections of Redsands and Priors Hill in 2009 judged both as "inadequate". This was in part due to the physical state of both properties but in relation to Priors Hill the Inspector remarked that "The building is not fit for purpose and Cheshire needs to move away from large group homes" and "the external of the building is tired". The Inspector also commented that staffing levels were poor and there was a general feeling of apathy.

32. The Group reviewed the Ofsted Inspectors' reports of both Redsands and Priors Hill along with both the Ofsted Report and Statement of Purpose for Wilkinson House as a starting point for its work. The Ofsted Reports and Statement of Purpose are attached as Appendices.

33. Throughout the period of the Scrutiny Review, the in-house residential provision was changing and developing and the Group was kept updated as these changes happened. However, this did make the Group's work challenging as Members were dealing with a frequently changing situation.

34. Independent Review of Residential Provision

35. A consultant, Jill Thorburn, was commissioned to undertake a review of residential placements for Cheshire East Council. The "Residential Childcare Review" was a comprehensive look at provision over a two year period 1 June 2007 – 30 June 2009. The review looked at various aspects of the residential service including demographic information, placements, current provision (Priors Hill, Wilkinson House and the 2 new homes in the Crewe area), outcomes of children in residential care, feedback from the Children in Care Council, good practice recommendations and future provision.

36. Jill Thorburn attended two Group meetings and presented her findings to Members. She felt that residential provision in Cheshire East was out of date and practices were institutionalised. She made a number of recommendations including the closure of Priors Hill and a review of the contract with the Together Trust and the provision of an assessment function at Wilkinson House. She had also proposed that, because the in-house provision at Redsands and Priors Hill had been deemed inadequate, Cheshire East's residential provision should be outsourced. However, she recognised that since her report was researched and written there had been a number of significant changes and improvements introduced in the residential care service in Cheshire East. She advised the Group that she now felt that Cheshire East Council could run residential provision for children and young people as an in-house service.

37. Conclusions

38. The Group found Jill Thorburn's report a useful basis for discussion and a number of issues highlighted in her report are addressed below. The Group did note that some issues had already been addressed and that the report was based on a situation that had changed and improved in a number of areas. The Group believes

that Cheshire East now provides a good in-house residential service. The Group also feels that it is important for a period of stability to take place in the residential service in the light of all the recent changes, developments and improvements that have occurred. Once the changes have had time to establish, it may then be appropriate to look at the service again.

39. Recommended:

That, in view of the changes and improvements already made in the residential service, and so as to introduce a period of stability and certainty, the provision of residential care in Cheshire East should remain an in-house service.

40. The current provision of Children's homes

41. Priors Hill

42. This is a large detached two storey building on the outskirts of Macclesfield in fairly large grounds. The building has been separated into units providing different types of care (as listed above). At the time of the Scrutiny Review, only the Langley Unit was operational. The Group has received Ofsted reports from 2009 both of which rated the home as inadequate. Jill Thorburn noted that the material standards at the home were not acceptable with old and tatty furnishings and dirty and stained carpets with few home comforts. She felt the building was unsuitable for a children's home and the prevailing culture was of an institution. She agreed with the earlier Scrutiny Review that Priors Hill is not fit for purpose and supported its closure.

43. Members of the Group visited the home in 2009. They noted that the building was large and looked like an institution rather than a home. There were a number of corridors and doors which were often locked. The Langley Unit was in a better decorative state than the other units. There was a large garden. However, the overall effect was not welcoming and homely and Members agreed that large impersonal buildings are no longer suitable for children's residential care.

44. Conclusions

45. Priors Hill is unsuitable for residential care due to its large, impersonal and institutionalised nature. The building should be declared surplus to requirements and sold to enable replacement provision in new home(s) along the lines of the two homes in the Crewe area.

46. Recommended:

1. That Priors Hill is sold and the resultant capital receipt is ring – fenced to provide replacement residential provision (two homes) located in the middle and/or north of the Borough;
2. The model of care at Priors Hill (a large institutional type building) is not suitable as a residential home for children and young people and is not replicated in future.

47. Wilkinson House

48. This is a large house on the outskirts of Sandbach that is owned by Cheshire East Council and run by the Together Trust (a voluntary sector not for profit organisation). The house is a large detached property set in its own grounds. The House has 6 units and the Council has a contract with Cheshire West and Chester Council to share provision equally. The provision is registered to provide for children aged 8 – 12 years old on admission.
49. Its purpose is to prepare children to live within a family environment. The philosophy includes a belief in keeping sibling groups together wherever possible both during their time at Wilkinson House and afterwards. The provision also includes an accessible unit.
50. The Group received the Ofsted report which judged the overall quality rating as good (June 2009). Some Members of the Group went to visit Wilkinson House and noted the spacious facilities including a large kitchen-diner, play room, lounge and individual bedrooms with adequate bath and shower rooms.
51. Members were advised that Wilkinson House now accepts children aged 10 – 14 years on admission. It focuses on direct work with children, many of whom have experienced multiple foster placement breakdowns and need one to one support. There is fairly high therapeutic provision. The Ofsted inspection of June 2009 judged the provision in relation to making sure the children are healthy as “outstanding”.
52. Jill Thorburn noted in her report that there was a strong education ethos at the home. Members who visited were advised that all children who live at the home go to school and there are good relationships between staff and schools. Members also noted the good range of activities available to the children.
53. Over the time period of the review, Wilkinson House has had a number of vacant beds, however, at the time of the Members’ visit, it was full.

54. Officers advised the Group that one of the Cheshire East beds was currently being used as an Assessment Bed where a child could stay for a period of around 3 -6 months to enable a thorough assessment by all relevant agencies to assess their needs and then match this to the most suitable provision. Members of the Group support this provision as it helps to ensure the most appropriate placement and care planning for each child based on their individual needs.

55. Conclusions

56. The Group feels that provision at Wilkinson House is good and supports the provision of an accessible unit at the home. The change in use of one of the units to an assessment bed is seen as appropriate and is endorsed. The change in age on admission from 8 – 12 to 10 – 14 is also seen as more appropriate as the Group feels that a child below the age of 10 should be placed in a foster care setting rather than a residential care home.

57. Members noted the significant changes occurring in residential provision in the Borough and felt that it was important to try to maintain some stability and continuity where possible and to continue to work with partners where provision and outcomes are seen to be good.

58. However, the size and location of Wilkinson House is seen as less suitable when compared with the new provision in the Crewe area of small units in established communities near to facilities. The Group has noted that at the time of the review all the children resident in Wilkinson House were not from the immediate local area which reflects the concentration of residential provision in the southern part of the Borough and the lack of residential provision in other parts.

59. It was also uncertain whether the provision will remain viable if Cheshire West and Chester were to withdraw from the contract in 2011.

60. Recommended:

1. That Wilkinson House is sold and the resultant capital receipt ring fenced to provide an alternative home in the middle or north of the Borough;
2. That officers liaise with the Together Trust to seek their views on continuing to work with the Council to provide some residential provision in another building in the middle or north of the Borough and such provision should be for children aged 10 years or above;
3. The provision of an assessment bed is supported and should continue to be provided in any new unit.

61. Cared for Children population

62. The Cared for Children's population is increasing nationally as well as locally. At March 2010 there were 440 Cared for Children in Cheshire East, an increase of 85 in one year. There has been a significant increase in children in the younger age groups although the older age group (11 years onwards) was more likely to be looked after in residential homes:

63. Ages	64. March 2009	65. April 2010
66. 0 – 4	67. 95	68. 133
69. 5 – 10	70. 70	71. 108
72. 11 – 15	73. 124	74. 131
75. 16 – 18	76. 66	77. 68
78. Totals	79. 355	80. 440

81. Research based evidence and Lord Laming, who has reviewed services for children, suggest that the best outcomes for Cared for Children are achieved through foster care rather than residential placements. However, for some children, foster care is not appropriate and so a certain level of residential provision will always be needed. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient suitable accommodation within their area.

82. Conclusion

83. The Cared for Children's population is a changing picture and a mix of foster care and residential care is needed. Although foster care would be the first choice for a cared for child, this will not be suitable for all children and a certain amount of high quality residential provision is needed.

84. Demographic and statistical Information

85. The Group used Jill Thorburn's report to look at placements over a two year period from 2007 – 2009. During this period 58% of placements made were to in-house residential provision. 33% of children were placed in out of borough residential placements and 9% were in mother and baby care placements (there are no mother and baby foster placements available in Cheshire East and only private external provision is available – the Group has not included consideration of the provision of mother and baby placements within its remit).

86.Placement Type	87.March 2009	88.March 2010
89.Homes and Hostels	90.25	91.19
92.NHS/Health Trust	93.1	94.1
95.Residential School	96.4	97.9
98.Residential Accommodation	99.0	100.8 (sanctuary seeking young person)
101. Residential Care Home	102.1	103.1

104. Over this timescale, the majority of children in in-house care provision came from the Macclesfield area (50%), with 15% from Congleton and 35% from Crewe. This may in part be explained by the emergency bed (see below) being located in Macclesfield and children entering the in-house care service through that route. Of those children placed in external care home provision, 35% came from Macclesfield, 35% from Congleton and 29% from Crewe.

105. The mother and baby placements showed the majority of children coming from the Crewe area (60%), with 10% from Congleton and 30% from Macclesfield.

106. Taking all these figures together the report suggests that between 30 - 40 % of children looked after in residential care in Cheshire East are from the Macclesfield area. Figures from December 2009 suggest a high number of children from the Congleton and Crewe areas and a lower rate from Macclesfield. However as there is provision of 8 beds in the Crewe area this suggests a need for some residential provision in the north of the Borough.

107. Jill Thorburn also looked at the numbers of Cared for Children at any one time and noted that at April 2009, out of a care population of approximately 400 children, 26 were residing in residential care homes. This represents a percentage of 6.5% of children being cared for in residential homes compared with the national average of 13% of looked after children being in residential care.

108. Of these 26 children, 20 were placed in residential units in the local authority and 6 were in care outside of Cheshire East – either residential schools or residential homes with on-site schooling, privately run care homes or in Cheshire West and Chester residential care homes.

109. During the two year period of Jill's review there were 60 placements of children within residential homes in Cheshire East. Priors Hill had 43 children over the two year period, Redsands had 11 and Wilkinson House had 6. During this two year period there were 104 residential placements in total – 60 to in-house placements, 34 external residential placements and 10 mother and baby placements. The Group has received information about independent Children's Homes in Cheshire East, all of which have had good inspection outcomes (as judged by Ofsted) although it is noted that not all the children in these homes are Cheshire East children.
110. In March 2010 there were 38 children and young people in residential placements compared with 31 in March 2009.
111. In view of the numbers of children requiring residential placements in Cheshire East, it would appear that the current provision of two 4 bedded homes in the Crewe Area and 2 beds available at Wilkinson House, is inadequate.
112. It is also important to note that there are a number of children placed outside of the Borough which may be due to lack of availability as well as lack of suitable provision. The Group has been made aware of costs of placements both to in-house and external provision. The Group has been advised that all external placements are to be reviewed as to their appropriateness. Once this review has been completed, a further assessment may need to be made as to how much residential provision is needed within the Borough and what type of provision this should be. It may be that some specialised provision would not be appropriate or financially viable as an in-house service but the review will ascertain this picture more clearly.
113. It is also relevant to note that Cheshire East is below the national average in terms of numbers of Cared for Children in residential care and this is a positive position to be in. However, if numbers of Cared for Children in residential care in Cheshire East were to increase to nearer the national average, then there would be a greater shortfall in provision. Taking into account that the figures in the report are based on all the available current information, the Group concurs with Jill Thorburn's assessment of the need for more residential provision in the Borough.
114. Conclusions
115. Given the increase in numbers of Cared for Children, there is under provision of residential care in the Borough. The Group believes that more provision is needed and that this should be located in the middle and/or north of the Borough in 4 bedded units in an established residential area along the lines of the homes in the

Crewe area. This will enable a more even geographical spread of provision which will enable Cared for Children to be located in a placement as near to their home as possible, provided that this is appropriate for the child. Any out of area placements should be for specialised provision only.

116. **Recommended:**

That two properties are purchased in the middle and/or northern part of the Borough to be used as residential provision for Cared for Children along the lines of the two existing properties in the Crewe area – in an established community near to local facilities. One house should be run as an in-house service and the second may be appropriate for the Together Trust to run as a replacement provision for Wilkinson House.

117. Two new homes in the Crewe area

118. Two properties had been purchased by Cheshire County Council in the Crewe area of Cheshire East to replace existing residential provision at Redsands. The properties each provide 4 single bedrooms for young people together with appropriate living accommodation, bathroom facilities and an office and staff sleeping in facilities. One of the properties has been adapted to provide a bedroom and access to all of the ground floor for a young person in a wheelchair. The aim of the houses is to have a homely feel and not feel institutionalised. Jill Thorburn noted that two members of the Children in Care Council who visited the new homes commented positively – “They both feel like a home. Not a big ‘I’m in care’ building! They looked fresh and nice and ‘normal’” and “They are so much better than what we have now.”

119. The Group has welcomed the move towards children’s residential care being provided in small houses in residential areas rather than being in large residential units with an institutionalised look and feel. The Group has visited both of the new homes - one house is a large detached house in an established community surrounded by other family type houses. It has a large garden area with open play areas nearby and is within walking distance of a town centre. The other house is a modern home in a cul de sac, again with plenty of garden area and within walking distance of the town centre. Both houses are well served by local schools.

120. The Group commends both the homes for their ordinariness and homely feel and the opportunities for the young people living there to experience domestic style living. One of the comments contained within the Ofsted report dated 1 July 2009, following inspection of Priors Hill residential home, was that arrangements at Priors Hill did “not promote domestic style living” and do not “encourage children

and young people to feel “at home””. The Group feels that these two homes are a positive start to better residential provision in Cheshire East and should be replicated.

121. Bedrooms in the two new homes are designed as “blank canvasses” to enable them to be personalised and were viewed by Members as welcoming. Any office equipment would be kept to a small area away from domestic living areas to emphasise the homely nature of the building. Members were advised that residential staff would sleep during the night and would not have “waking nights”; this was seen as an important way of contributing to the normality of the home. Mealtimes will be shared experiences and young people will be encouraged to participate in cooking and domestic chores as other children would be expected to do as being part of a household. This will also be a way of learning independent living skills, again as other children and young people will learn who live with their natural parents.
122. The Group has been advised of the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of one of the new homes, which was judged as “good” (April 2010). The inspection noted that the young people living in the home “can easily access community facilities such as public transport, schools, colleges and shops”. The home was judged as being “effectively managed” with staff who are “experienced and qualified”. The majority of staff hold a relevant professional qualification and all staff were committed to continuing professional development and attended on going training events. The home was viewed as giving a “good standard of care” to the young people and “positive relationships” had been formed between staff and young people.
123. The environment of the home was judged as “comfortable and homely” with young people “encouraged to personalise their rooms”. The young people were given a mobile phone to make and receive calls and were also able to use the house phone. Education was seen as important and an incentive scheme used to encourage young people to benefit from education or training opportunities. Young people had access to a computer as well as a wide selection of books.
124. The Group noted that there had been some adverse publicity when the new homes in the Crewe area had opened. There had also been expectations among some young people currently resident in other homes in Cheshire East that they would be moving into the new homes. It was important that in future any new homes that opened must be subject to a carefully planned engagement and publicity strategy so that the transition was handled proactively. Young people affected by home closures and the development of new homes must be kept fully aware of exactly how the changes would affect them. The Ofsted inspection of one of the new homes had noted that the

home strived “to make good relationships with neighbours and the wider community”.

125. Conclusions

126. The two homes in the Crewe area are commended for their location, facilities and physical environment. This is a model that should be replicated in any future residential provision. The provision of an accessible unit is commended. The Group welcomes the positive Ofsted inspection report which shows how a number of the issues highlighted in this report appear to have been recognised and addressed. It is now important that this good provision is used by and for the young people of Cheshire East at the earliest opportunity.

127. However, the Group does believe that having two homes based in the Crewe area may not be appropriate or viable in the future as there may be too much of a concentration in the south of the Borough. If the Group was recommending provision from the beginning, Members may have recommended just one home in the Crewe area.

128. **Recommended:**

1. That all the beds in the two new homes in the Crewe area are utilised as quickly as possible.
2. That all future residential provision is in small residential units (around 4 beds) and not large institutions and consideration should be given to ensuring that one unit in each new home is accessible for children who use a wheelchair or whose mobility is compromised.
3. When a new home is due to open a local community engagement strategy must be developed to inform the local community and reduce the likelihood of any negative publicity or speculation.

129. Children in Care Council

130. The Group met some young people representing the Children in Care Council. The Children in Care Council is comprised of young people who have experience of care services.

131. The young people who met with the Group were either currently in the care of Cheshire East Council or had recently left care. They had experienced a range of types of provision including foster care, respite care and residential care. They were positive about the existence of the Children in Care Council as it is a valuable forum to share experiences and discuss issues and ideas with people who were in similar situations.

132. Their individual experiences of the care system varied greatly with positive experiences including opportunities to undertake activities and experiences that would not have been possible with their natural parents and increased personal confidence due to feeling supported by carers. However, there were also examples of frequent moves between placements which caused upset and distress and lack of communication as to why moves were required. It was suggested that a speedy move could be welcomed if the child or young person was upset with their current placement.
133. The relationship between a child or young person in care and their social worker was seen as an important one that needed time to build up in terms of knowledge and trust. There appeared to be inconsistency around how often social workers visited and a feeling sometimes that their focus was on paperwork rather than the child or young person. Some children or young people could view a visit by a social worker/professional as a source of anxiety because they expected them to be bringing bad news.
134. The Group asked the young people what they thought is important for a young person in residential or foster care to have in terms of facilities and possessions eg TV and DVD in their own room, access to a computer etc and what they thought a young person in residential care should expect – eg to have friends for tea, sleepovers, front door key etc.
135. The young people felt strongly that a child who was in a foster family should have access to all the same things that the child(ren) in the foster family have, for example a television in their own bedroom, laptop and internet access, (taking into account safeguarding needs), the ability to have friends round and their own door key. A child in residential care should also be able to access these things, as any child living in their own home would do.
136. The young people thought that it was vital that each Cared For Child/young person has a mobile phone, not just for communication, but for safety reasons and that the phone is kept regularly topped up (as a parent would do). They accepted that sanctions should apply if a phone or personal television was destroyed as this would help with learning about consequences. If a Cared for Child is able to have their own personal items, such as a television, they are more likely to look after it as they feel more attachment and have more respect for it because it is their own. The Panel heard of an example whereby young people living at Priors Hill had been able to go shopping to choose their own television. They welcomed the possibility of choosing an item for themselves because it felt more personal; one young person explained how she still had her television even though she had left care a number of years ago.

137. It is also important that foster carers and residential staff recognise the importance for young people of modern communication methods such as text messaging and social networking and that Cared for Children are able to access these in the same way that other children and young people do, ie if age appropriate and within a safe format. This has benefits in enabling Cared for Children to feel the same as other children and young people and was particularly important to help them to maintain relationships even if moving placements and locations.

138. Members valued the opportunity to hear from young people who had direct experience of the care system and were grateful to the young people for allowing them to attend one of their meetings. The Group felt that it would be useful for Members to hear from the Children in Care Council on a more regular basis as this would assist them in their corporate parenting role.

139. Conclusions

140. Cared for Children must be able to experience normal family life as much as possible whether in a foster home or residential home. This should be achieved by Cared for Children being able to have all the possessions and facilities that children living in their own homes enjoy and expect. They should also have regular access to the internet for educational reasons and to help with maintaining relationships and a mobile phone of their own with regular top-ups provided for them.

141. **Recommended:**

1. There should be consistency of access to possessions and facilities in foster care so that foster children are treated the same as other children within the foster family;
2. Cared for Children in residential homes should have access to possessions and facilities that most children expect within their own family to include their own door key and the ability to have friends for tea;
3. All Cared for Children should have access to a Computer to enable them to participate in modern methods of communication (within a safe format) and to help with studying;
4. All Cared for Children should have their own mobile phone for safety reasons with a regular and reasonable top-up provided.

142. Fostering

143. Although the fostering service was not within the remit of the Group, Members were aware that residential provision could not be looked at in isolation and it was important to look at the whole picture in terms of provision so as to ensure the best care is available to Cared for Children. The Group has received information on numbers of children placed with foster carers – at 28 February this was 230 placed with foster carers and 66 placed with foster carers (relative or friend). This was out of a total figure of 430 Cared for Children.

144. In line with the redesign of Children's services, the Group supports the use of foster carers rather than residential care as this is more likely to achieve better outcomes for the Cared for Child. Members would also aspire to all children having a home in a family setting. However, the Group recognises that for some children this will not be possible or suitable, in which case residential provision will always be necessary.

145. The Group has been advised about training and support to foster carers and the importance of following up swiftly any initial expressions of interest from potential foster carers.

146. **Recommended:**

That all Cared for Children should be placed within a family setting wherever possible and that sufficient resources are targeted at the fostering service to ensure that there is a good supply of foster care to access when needed.

147. Staff at residential homes

148. The Council inherited a large number of staff in its residential service. This included a number of casual and agency staff. This made continuity of care difficult and made it more difficult for Cared for Children to build and maintain relationships with their carers.

149. Both Ofsted and Jill Thorburn noted issues around staff in terms of staff behaviour, training and recruitment processes. The Ofsted report of Priors Hill noted "not all staff employed at the home are appropriately vetted and assessed as suitable individuals to work with young people. Recruitment procedures are not robust enough and staff files are not maintained in line with schedule 2 of the Children's Homes Regulations 1991". J Thorburn noted that staff at Priors Hill "appeared to be largely unaware of their professional caring role" and "overall the staff appear to be poorly trained". In two lengthy visits she noted only "one positive interaction between a staff member and a child".

150. The Group has been advised that immediate staffing issues have been addressed in some measure and the numbers of staff

have now reduced from 103 in 2009 to 47 in April 2010 partly through the cessation of temporary and agency contracts.

151. The Group has been made aware of the recruitment process for both new residential homes and that this has been by a rigorous and lengthy process including “Warner” interviews (safe recruitment practices). One of the Group Members has investigated this process and met with members of the recruitment team to learn about the interview process in some detail. The Group has been advised that the recruitment process used to staff the new homes is being viewed as good practice and other Local Authorities and care provider organisations are seeking information and training on the process used in Cheshire East. The Group has been advised that the Together Trust who run Wilkinson House are also looking to put their staff through this “Warner” style recruitment process. This is encouraging and commended.

152. Conclusions

153. Good staff in residential homes are vital and this can be achieved through robust recruitment procedures and on-going training. Once staff are recruited there needs to be time and energy spent in developing a caring and supportive culture within the residential service and good leadership must be introduced and maintained. There needs to be a core group of permanent staff to ensure continuity and if staff are well trained this should enable more children to remain in the area rather than having to access costly out of area placements.

154. **Recommended:**

1. That staffing at residential children’s homes must be mainly provided through a core group of permanent staff to enable continuity and the opportunity to build relationships;
2. That recruitment to residential care services should always be through a robust process and Warner style safer recruitment methods should be used; in addition, the Council should only use care providers whose recruitment is through a “Warner” style process;
3. That on going training and appraisals must be implemented for staff working in residential care to ensure staff development is kept up to date and monitored.

155. Short break service

156. There is currently short break provision in Cheshire East at the Langley Unit, Priors Hill. This Unit is predominately used for short breaks for children with disabilities and additional needs. J Thorburn noted that the environment was materially better than the other Units at Priors Hill, bedrooms were nicely decorated and there were higher standards of cleanliness. Staff seemed to engage well with the children. Members of the Group visited the Unit as part of their visit to Priors Hill. They felt the service provided at the Langley Unit was good although the physical environment was poor due to its large and impersonal nature that appeared more of an institution than a home.
157. The Council also uses foster carers just outside the Borough to provide a short break service for children with disabilities and additional needs. Members of the Group visited this provision and met the foster carers who showed them round their home and explained the type of care and activities they provided for the foster children. Members of the Group were very grateful to the foster carers for welcoming them into their home and appreciated the time taken for the visit which they found very useful. They commended the service as a model of good practice.
158. The Group was advised that provision of short breaks was currently going through a major review in line with the process around Aiming High for Disabled Children.
159. Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) is a central government programme to help disabled children, young people and their families to get the support and chances they need to live ordinary lives. The government needs to ensure that the funding for AHDC is allocated to a family's specific wants and needs; families have described short break opportunities as their key priority.
160. Short breaks come in a variety of formats and each one can last from just a few hours to a few days and occasionally longer. They include day, evening, overnight and weekend activities and can take place in a community setting, the child's own home, the home of an approved carer or a residential setting. They provide disabled children and young people with enjoyable experiences away from their primary carers, thereby contributing to their personal and social development and reducing social isolation. They can also provide parents and families with a necessary and valuable break from caring responsibilities.
161. The Council has sought expressions of interest from organisations around how alternative respite provision might be delivered. It is expected that expressions of interest will be for non-residential services in which case a replacement unit for residential short break provision will be needed. The Group noted the importance of short break provision to enable children with disabilities and additional needs to remain with their families.

162. Conclusions

163. Members believe that short break provision is necessary for families and foster carers but note that this will be fully addressed as part of the Aiming High review. The Group feels that the Langley Unit is no longer fit for purpose due to its large and institutionalised feel and should therefore be replaced as soon as possible.

164. **Recommended:**

That short break provision should cease to be provided at the Langley House Unit as, although the service is viewed as good, the physical environment is not suitable and not the model of care the Council should be aspiring to provide. Full consideration of short break provision can be achieved through the Aiming High review.

165. Emergency beds

166. Emergency bed provision had been provided at the Mottram House Unit, Priors Hill. This comprised 2 emergency beds and, until mid 2009, was available to both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils to place children in an emergency. The emergency bed was intended to be for a one night stay only and was not available until 5.00pm with any child or young person placed there needing to be removed by 9.00 am.

167. However, the bed had not been used as intended. J Thorburn in her review noted that since March 2007 there were 64 occasions when children were placed in the emergency bed. On some occasions children were placed more than once. Of these children, 30 were female and 34 were male. The children ranged in age from 9 – 17 with the majority being children in their mid teens:

168. Age at point of admission	169. Number of children
170. 13	171. 14
172. 14	173. 15
174. 15	175. 18

176. Many of the children stayed for very short periods of time and this meant that information about where they went following their stay at Mottram House was not always available. From information that was available, 28% returned home and 22% went to foster care. There was no information on 10 young people which Jill Thorburn

suggested meant that they returned home because if they had remained in care there would be information available about them.

177. If this was the case then 44% of young people who used the emergency bed were able to be placed back home without the risk of them being subject to significant harm. This suggests they did not need to be admitted into the care system in the first place and skilled intervention would have been more appropriate. Since 2009 the emergency bed had ceased to be available. No child or young person had been put at any risk through the withdrawal of the emergency bed. The withdrawal of the emergency bed has resulted in a reduction in demand for such a facility. Current emergency provision is provided by foster carers or other night stock.

178. The previous existence of emergency beds could be seen as an easy short term solution which risked such beds becoming a “dumping ground” with no proper plan in place once a child was placed there. They offered an immediate solution without any apparent follow up through a planned care approach. The emergency bed could also be seen as “feeding” the care system by bringing into care young people who did not need to be in the system in the first place through a lack of alternative provision. As a high proportion of children who had accessed the emergency bed in the past were young people, a more appropriate system could involve outreach workers based in a building where a short break service could be offered. This would also make it more likely that a young person would return to their home rather than remain in the care system.

179. Conclusions

180. Emergency beds should no longer be provided as they simply feed the care system and do not result in proper care planning. For some young people early intervention work can take place without the need for them to enter the care system. The withdrawal of the emergency bed, along with the provision of an assessment bed, enables a child or young person who does need to enter the care system to have a full assessment of their needs which will result in an appropriate care plan being agreed.

181. **Recommended:**

That emergency beds should no longer be available but any emergency provision that is required should be provided through outreach workers or emergency foster carers.

182. Conclusions

183. The provision of residential care has already changed and improved over the life of Cheshire East Council. The change from large impersonal institutions to small ordinary houses in established communities is welcomed. The Council should aspire to all children being cared for in a family environment and as such must ensure that adequate good quality foster provision is available. For some children, though, this is not appropriate and for those children and young people excellent residential provision must be available in homely environments with professionally trained and caring staff. This should be provided in-house and through partnership with existing partners.

184. In view of all the changes in the residential care service, the Group feels it is now important that as much stability as possible is maintained so as to give the changes a chance to bed in. The Group is confident that Cheshire East Council can provide a good standard of residential provision and looks forward to seeing this provision develop in the future.

185. 05/08/10