

Residential Childcare Review Cheshire East

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1 Introduction

1.1 Legal Definition

The legal definition of a Children's Home is defined under Section 1 of the Care Standards Act 2000 is:

An establishment which provides care and accommodation wholly, or mainly for children. The definition applies to private, voluntary and local council children's homes, and both mainstream and special boarding schools accommodating or arranging accommodation for any child over 259 days a year. Hospitals of any description are excluded.

All Children's Homes now have to be registered by Ofsted. Ofsted combines the work of Social Services Inspectorate, the Audit Commission Joint Review Team and National Care Standards Commission.

All Children's Homes are Regulated and inspected by Ofsted against 36 National Minimum Standards (NMS). These NMS are based on Children's Homes Regulations 2001.

Ofsted has a wide range of registration and inspection functions within all sectors, local authority, private and voluntary children's homes and deals with complaints about registered services such as children's homes.

All Homes have announced inspections once a year and several which are unannounced. A report is issued by Ofsted following each inspection which has to be responded within 14 days with a comprehensive Action Plan by those responsible for the Home. The Commission has the power to de-register a Home or a Provider and the power to enforce NMS via criminal prosecution.

The Children Act 1989 provides a comprehensive framework for the care and protection of all children and young people in need, including those living away from home. Local authorities have a specific duty under section 22 of that Act to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of each child they look after.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 amends the Children Act 1989; strengthening the legislative framework underpinning the care system and putting in place the structures to enable children and young people to receive high quality care and support. Amongst other provisions the Act requires local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient suitable accommodation within their area and improves care planning by strengthening the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

1.2 The Purpose of Residential Children's Homes

To provide safe and stable accommodation for children and young people who have experienced emotional trauma.

To provide continuity of care for the young person as they move towards independence with a focus on both their emotional and practical needs.

To assist in personal development of young people focusing on self-esteem, building trusting relationships and learning social skills to semi-independent skills.

To actively promote the value of education and secure full-time education for young people who need it.

The residential home should provide a therapeutic environment, in its widest sense, where young people are encouraged to explore and express their feelings in a way that will enable them to resolve conflict both internally and externally in a positive way.

The main objective is that young people will be given the necessary support to enable them to either return to their own or substitute families or to remain until they reach adulthood.

Children's homes should be able to:

-  Demonstrate an improvement in the child's physical and emotional wellbeing.
-  Identify the risks to the child and put in place measures to reduce those risks.
-  Demonstrate how the child's cultural and religious needs are met.
-  Demonstrate how the child lives safely in the home.
-  Identify and show how the child's educational needs are met and how the home promotes a learning environment.
-  Demonstrate how the child's views are actively sought and heard.

2.0 Care Population Information

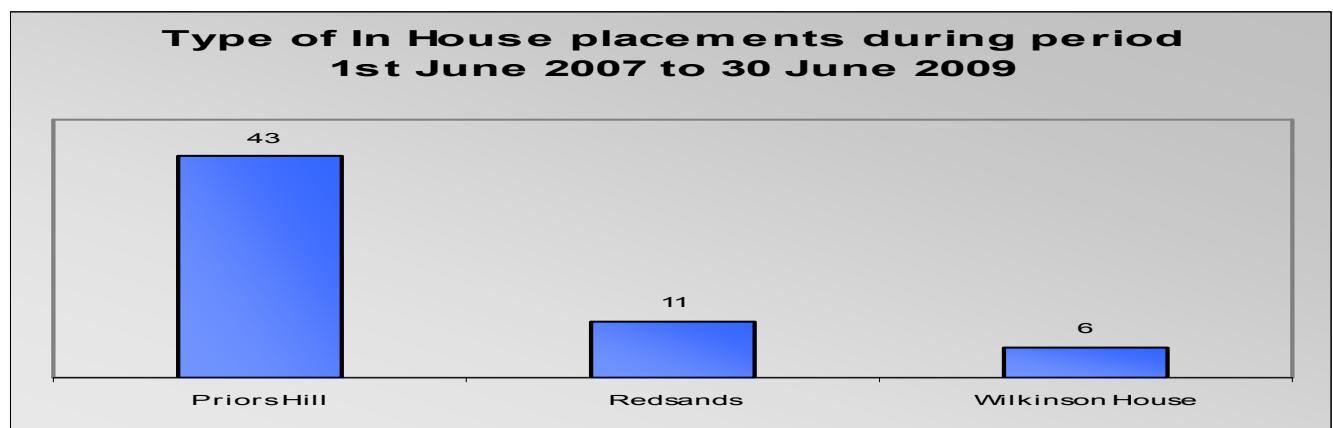
As of April 2009 Cheshire East had a care population of approximately 400 children who were looked after. Of these 26 were residing in residential care homes. This percentage of 6.5% of children placed in residential provision is considerably lower than the national average of 13% of looked after children.

2.1 Demographic Information

Of those children 20 were placed in residential units which were in the local authority and 6 were in care homes outside of the local authority. 60% of those children were placed in residential schools or in residential homes with on-site schooling. 25% were placed in privately run residential care homes. 15% were living in Cheshire West and Chester residential care homes.

In March 2009 there were three residential care homes in Cheshire East. These were Redsands, Priors Hill and Wilkinson House, which is a commissioned service provided by Together Trust. Redsands ceased to be a care home when it was closed in April 2009.

In the two year period leading up to this review there were 60 placements of children within these residential homes. The following chart details the numbers of children placed in each for the period of June 07 – June 09.

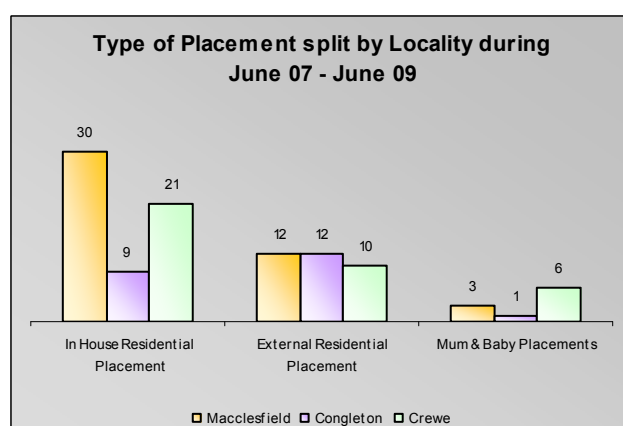
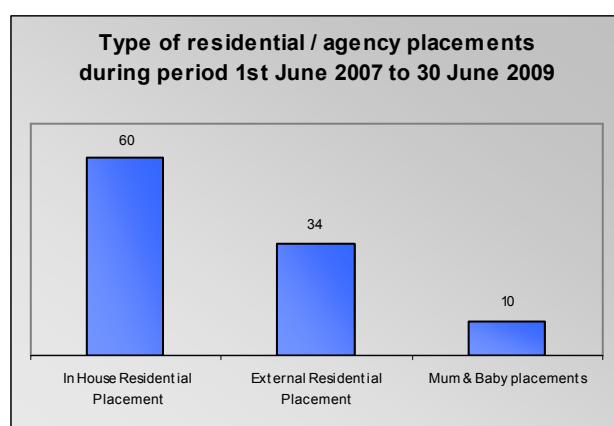


For information available for the two year period leading up to this residential review data has been gathered which is helpful in determining levels of need for residential placements over a longer period of time. During the period June 07 – June 09 there have been 104 residential placements made in Cheshire East, the following

diagrams show the type of residential placement and the type of placement split by locality during this period

2.2 Placements

The following tables demonstrate the nature of the placements made in the two year period leading up to this residential review as well as the locality of the home area of the children placed.



Over 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 placed in mother and baby care placements. There are currently no mother and baby foster placements available and therefore only private external provision was available.

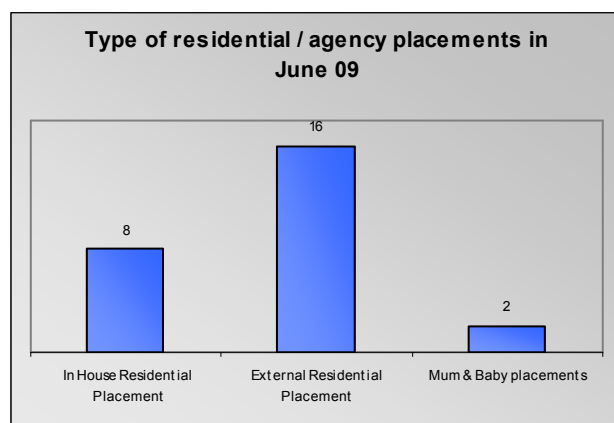
When exploring the local areas the children come from it appears that the majority are from the Macclesfield area. For those placed in in-house residential care 50% are from Macclesfield, 15% from Congleton and 35% from Crewe. It is quite possible that the numbers of children is much higher than would be expected in the Macclesfield area because the emergency bed was in that locality and therefore more children entered in-house care through that route.

Again in external care home provision 35% are Macclesfield children, 35% are from Congleton and 29% from Crewe. This shows that there is consistently a high level of referrals for residential care from the Macclesfield area.

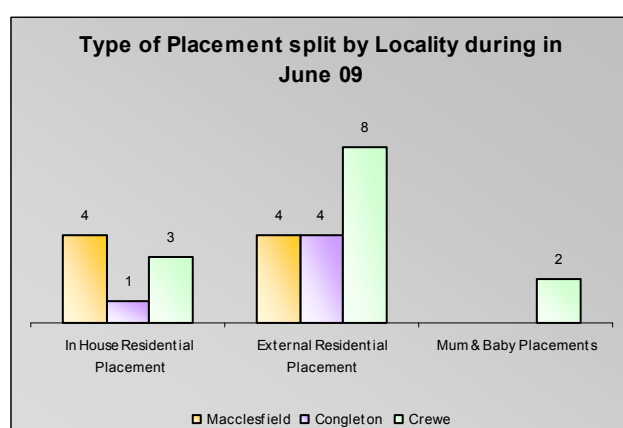
The figures are a little different for Mother and Baby placements whereby the majority of these children 60% are from the Crewe area, 10% from Congleton and 30% from the Macclesfield area.

Given that the figures for in-house residential care may slightly skew the figures approximately between 30-40% of all children looked after in residential care in Cheshire East are from the Macclesfield area.

As of the end of June 2009 there were only 26 residential placements and the following diagrams show the type of residential placement that the current 26 young people are placed in.



There were 3 children at that time placed in Cheshire West and Chester Council's homes following the changes brought in by the local government review.



When looking at a snap shot of the placements in June 2009 again 50% of those children placed in-house were from the Macclesfield area. 13% were from Congleton and 38% from Crewe.

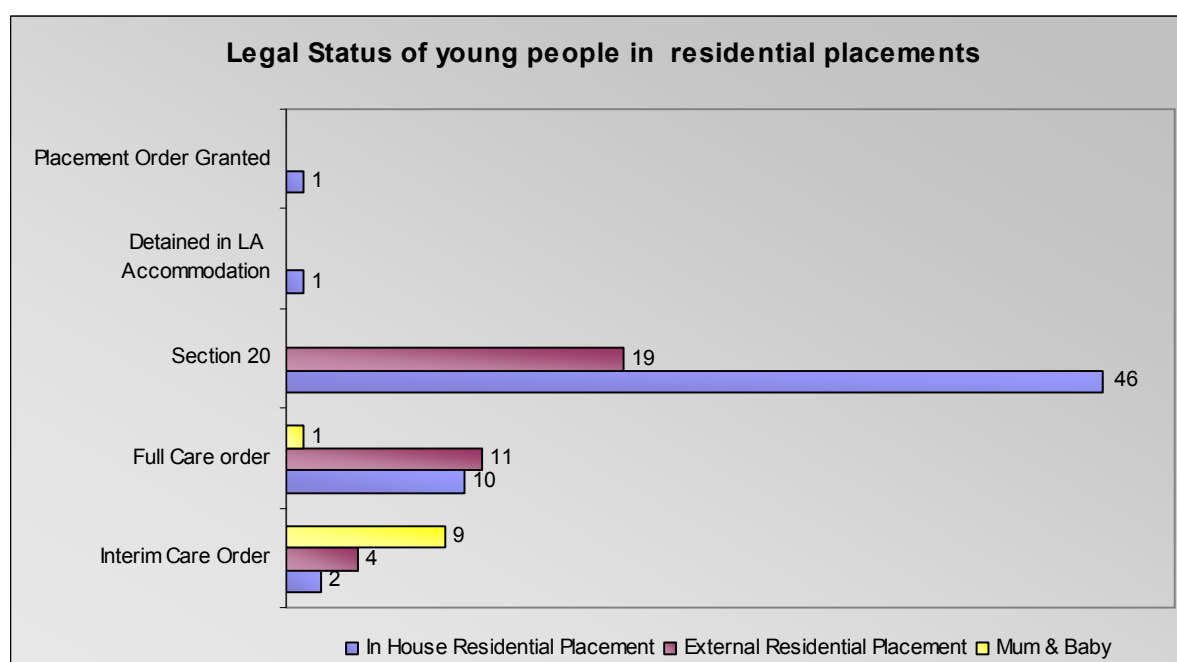
50% of children placed in external residential placements were from Crewe with 25% from both Macclesfield and Congleton.

In June 2009 there were two children placed in mother and baby homes and they were both from Crewe.

When considering the total numbers of children placed in residential homes in June 2009 36% were from Macclesfield, 14% from Congleton and 50% from the Crewe area. This is likely to be the correct proportion of looked after children requiring residential care in Cheshire East which is very important in considering future need and location of resources.

2.3 Legal status of the residential care population

When looking at the general care population figures, excluding those in mother and baby placements and those compulsorily accommodated, it appears that there is a disproportionate number of looked after children placed in homes who are section 20 accommodated. This figure accounts for 71% of all children placed and is probably linked to the fact they have been taken into care in their teenage years. 23% are subject to full care orders and 7% subject to interim care orders.



3.0 Budgetary Information

The figures were taken from PSS EX1 (March 2008) so will not have included inflationary increase for this year.

Gross cost for children in care homes in Cheshire East was £4,318,000 with the average weekly cost for a looked after child in an in-house care home placement being £3,412 / week. The average cost of a looked after child placed in a children's home which is outside of the local authority provision is £3,562 / week. For comparison purposes the average cost of a child placed in foster care is £438 / week.

Cost of Residential Care Provision 2009-2010

The table below shows a breakdown of each of the residential care homes giving their current budget and projected expenditure figure at the time of the review.

Residential Home	Current Budget	Projected Expenditure
Alderley House	£305,965	£643,800
Mottram House	£109,421	£330,589
Langley House	£270,768	£637,868
Home A	£500,000	
Home B	£500,000	
Wilkinson House	£201,928	£301,054

4.0 Current Provision

In June 2009 there were four types of children's homes placements available for children in Cheshire East. The places were in Priors Hill and Wilkinson House.

Priors Hill has a number of different units performing different functions. Alderley House is the main residential care provision designed to provide long term placements for children. Langley House which is a short term short breaks unit for children with disabilities and Mottram House a separate unit containing two emergency beds. Priors Hill is a large centre on the outskirts of Macclesfield. The premises is a detached two storey building situated in a housing estate. The building has been separated into five separate sections providing different types of care. At the time of the review only three of these were being used and the others were empty.

4.1 Alderley House

Alderley house is a home which caters for up to six young people and provides long term care placements. Since June 2007 there have been 13 young people placed in Alderley House.



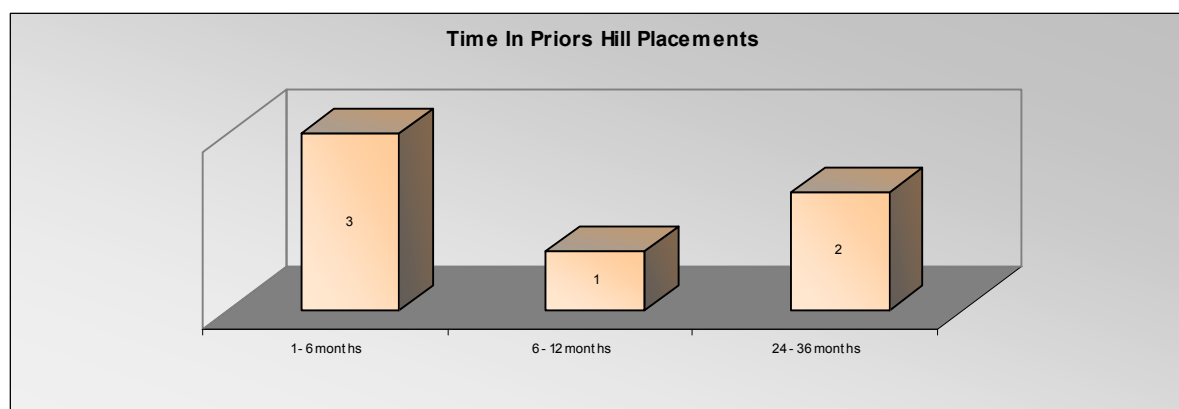
Of those 7 were young women and 6 young men. Their age at the point of their admission was as follows:

Age on admission	Number of young people
12	1
13	4
14	2
15	6

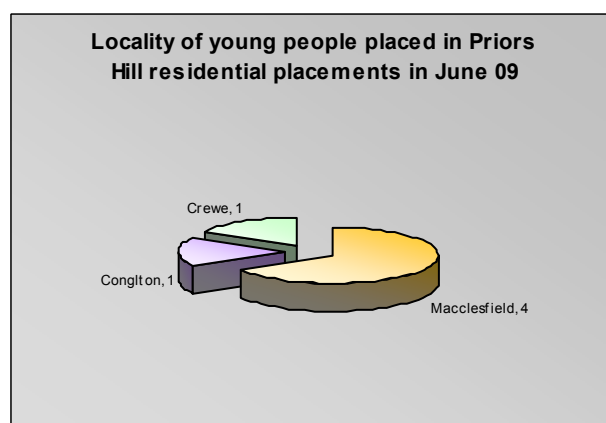
As a number of young people have remained for some time in Alderley House the average age of the residents is now 16 years old, with 33% of residents being aged 15, 33% aged 16 and 33% aged 17.



Of the young people who lived in Alderley during this time the length of time they stayed in the home varied considerably from one young person staying only for one month to another who was there for over two years. The vast majority of children remained there for between one and two years so the home is meeting its statement of purpose and function as a long term provision.



The vast majority of children placed in Alderley House originated from the Macclesfield area. At the time of this review 67% were from the Macclesfield area. This proportion remained largely the same for the two year period preceding this review.



In exploring where the young people went to once they left Alderley House there was a variety of designations but the majority left residential care.

Placement / destination	Number of young people
Living independently	3
Homeless	1
Supported Lodgings	1
Returned home	2
SWITCH (treatment foster care)	1
Keys (therapeutic placement)	1

Private care home	1
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Quality of Care & Physical Environment

Priors Hill was inspected by Ofsted on two occasions recently. These inspections took place in March and July 2009. The outcome of both these inspections is that the home was rated inadequate on both occasions. A notice to improve was issued in March and July. Redands children's home also received very poor inspection reports which also stated the level of care being provided was inadequate.

Although the last inspection report recognised that there was some good and satisfactory practices that promote children's welfare these were not consistently applied. Ofsted were of the view 'that shortfalls in practice mean that the health, welfare and safety of children are compromised'.

The quality of care being offered to the children in in-house residential services is very poor. The material standards are not acceptable. One young person's bedroom was very shabby, with curtains hanging off, a bed which was very old and tatty, dirty and stained carpet as well as a broken set of drawers. The level of acceptance of these poor conditions was worrying in both the staff team as well as by the young person himself. His room at best was sparse and impersonal and at worse could be described as extremely poor. Worryingly this young person had lived in the home for 3 years and expressed views that made me believe he thought he was worth no more than what he was experiencing.

The rest of the houses in the residential home were dirty, tired and messy looking. There was graffiti which had been left present and there were no home comforts which would be expected in a children's home. There had been an attempt to make the living room in Alderley look a little like a 'normal' living room but there was also holes in the walls which had been left unfilled. There were again no home comforts like lamps and pictures.

The building is simply unsuitable for a children's home. It is a series of corridors and many rooms which are unused. It must be difficult to staff effectively to ensure appropriate vigilance. The building is an old 60s type building in its own grounds in a fairly run down part of Macclesfield, which appears to have its own social problems. Ofsted agreed in their inspection report from April 2009 that the 'location and standard of the premises is not meeting the young people's needs'.

The grounds are not appropriately maintained. The grass was overgrown and the flower beds need attention. There was also litter all around the door which is routinely used by the young people. On my first visit there was a condom lying by that door and on both occasions cigarette butts thrown on the ground.

The care planning for the children seemed disorganised and I was informed by the manager there was a lot of drift in children's care plans. He felt this was because

social workers, once the children were placed, appeared to back off. When asked about the residential staff's role in ensuring plans were progressed I got a response which was a bit passive and defeatist. At the time when I visited three of the eight young people had plans which involved them leaving residential care but the plans had not been progressed.

Overall I felt that leadership in the residential home was extremely poor. The senior manager with overall responsibility had only visited the home once between two inadequate Ofsted inspections. The home had been without a registered manager since September 2008 and it has taken twelve months for a temporary registered manager to be put in place.

Ofsted also picked up on the fact that there 'had been shortfalls in the monitoring of the operation of the home on behalf of the local authority'.

The home manager had not received adequate supervision or support for the previous 8 months and was 'floundering'. The manager was in an acting up position into his first management post. The manager had also not received an appraisal of his performance and professional development planning.

This is a large organisation to control and the management of such a big site would require some experience or good quality leadership and management. The regulation 33 report indicates that staff have regular supervision but that appraisals have not been completed. I viewed the quality of the manager's supervision and it was inadequate. There was no focus on feedback or professional development and the content was simply a list of tasks which needed to be done. Ofsted agreed that 'whilst he is child focussed and competent in many areas, he is not sufficiently trained or supported as a new manager'.

The prevailing culture in the home is that of an institution. There was no flavour of 'normal' family life and both staff and the children were very institutionalised. The staff appeared to be largely unaware of their professional caring role. There has been a much higher than expected level of restraint of children; complaints from children; allegations against staff members from children and staff subject to disciplinary procedures. Overall the staff appear to be poorly trained and I detected undercurrents of resistance and suspicion of change. Particularly the senior residential workers demonstrated this during my visits.

I picked up a feeling of defeat, apathy and cynicism from the staff I spoke to. I only witnessed one positive interaction between a staff member and a child during two lengthy visits to Priors Hill. Appropriate boundaries were not enforced such as children swearing and making threats of violence towards staff members which went unchallenged by the staff who heard them.

The quality of care was very poor. This very poor quality provision is costing the local authority a projected **£968,457 per annum** and represents extremely poor value for money.

It was reported in a recent regulation 33 report it that all the policies are out of date and that the statement of purpose and function appears to have replaced the use of the policies and procedures folder. Of particular concern was the absence of the child protection procedures and the equality and diversity policy. The control and restraint policy was also reported to be out of date and the care planning document contained no information regarding education or health planning.

The lack of policies and procedures was impacting on the staff team's ability to provide a safe environment for the children. Staff had reported to the manager conducting the regulation 33 visit that they were concerned over the changes brought in whereby they were not to report minor criminal activity within the home to the police as they felt they had no alternative strategies available to them. Ofsted picked up on the point that the employment of behaviour management strategies is 'sometimes good but not consistently applied'.

In analysing the practices within Priors Hill it is apparent that some staff do not have the skills to work effectively in that environment. Although there is a strong message from Ofsted which is that there are some parts of the practice which are of a good standard, the prevailing message is that there is a distinct lack of consistency which is leaving children a risk.

4.2 Emergency Beds

Priors Hill also has a section called Mottram House which has provided an emergency bed function and consists of 2 emergency beds. Mottram house is physically joined onto Alderley House but staffed separately. This facility was available to both Cheshire West and Cheshire East to place children in an emergency up until July 2009 when admissions ceased following two adverse Ofsted inspection reports for Priors Hill.

Since March 2007 there were 64 times when children were placed in the emergency bed in Mottram. On some occasions some children were placed more than once. Of these children 30 were young women and 34 young men. The age range was between aged 9 and 17 years but with the vast majority of admissions being children in their mid teens as shown below.

Age at point of admission	Number of children
9	1
10	1
11	1
12	3
13	14
14	15
15	18
16	4
17	1
DOB not available	6

Many of the children stayed for very short periods of time and because of that some information was not available when exploring where they went to following their stay in Mottram House. However, the following table shows where the children went once they left the provision.

Next destination / Placement	Number of children	% of all residents of Mottram
Home	18	28%
Alderley House	8	13%
Custody	3	5%
Foster care	14	22%
Redsands	5	8%
Armthorpe Drive	2	3%
Together Trust	1	2%
Meadows	1	2%
Wilkinson House	1	2%
Independence	1	1%
Details unavailable*	10	16%

*Note: the 10 young people for whom the details of their next placement was unavailable it would be reasonable to assume that they did not remain in care as this information would exist if they had and therefore likely to have also returned home to parents or the information would be available. If this is the case then 44% of all young people (28) who used the emergency beds were able to be placed back home without the risk of them being subject to significant harm. Therefore it could be argued that they did not require admission into care in the first place but rather some skilled intervention to enable difficulties at home to be resolved.

Good Practice Recommendations for Priors Hill

- Staff should be interacting with young people to provide them with stimulating activities which take into account their race, culture, language, religion, interests, abilities and disabilities. All young people should be encouraged, with support and guidance, to undertake individual activities and become members of local community groups. All activities should have a written risk assessment completed before being undertaken.
- Young people should be given individual support and guidance and encouraged to enter into the decision making process around unit routines and procedures through weekly “Young People’s Meetings” and should be

regularly consulted on changes that affect them especially the closure of the home. Older young people should be undergoing Independent Living Skills work which will include budgeting, Health and Safety, D.I.Y. and a variety of domestic skills, to enable them to move on successfully to independent living.

- An incident and intervention and monitoring process should be implemented to ensure that any patterns or trigger points can be easily identified between young people and residential staff and measures should be put in place to counteract repetition, and evidence any reductions or increase in incidents.
- Young people and staff should be taking part in all aspects of group living together and staff should ensure that young people are cared for in a way that respects their individual dignity and maintains a safe and welcoming environment.
- The manager should be providing staffing levels to meet individual need based on risk assessments.
- There should be a far greater focus on improving educational outcomes of the children living in Priors Hill. All children need to have a personal education plan in place which is reviewed through key worker sessions.
- Staff need to enable the young people have more opportunities to enjoy themselves, more involvement in decision-making, and a "cosier", more "home-like" environment
- Staff should be more proactive in ensuring that they help to make the setting a place where the young people can see that they were helped to turn their lives around and where they were able to have good experiences and new opportunities.
- Residential care staff need to work in partnership with their corporate colleagues and various other organisations in order to provide young people with support guidance and build on self esteem and confidence in order to ensure all young people's needs are met and that they receive an excellent service to enable their development and ensure that each young person reaches their potential.

4.3 Langley

The material standards and cleanliness were better on Langley house. This resource is predominately a short breaks unit for children with disabilities and additional needs. This is the information contained within the homes statement of purpose and function, however, there is a young man who has been living there as his home for a number of years. He describes his care as being very good and attributes his development and positive life choices to the quality of his key workers. There are problems with him living in this way in what is an institution.

He is required by staff to go to his room at 10pm even though he is seventeen years old. He was required to stop using the computer at that time as the night staff required the room it is kept in. This is not meeting his needs. Even though he has lived there for a number of years his room is labelled 'Red Room' rather than it having been made into his room. He needed additional help to tidy up his room and was advised that there was nowhere in the building where he belongings could be stored and therefore all of his possessions were in boxes around his room. This again did not give a homely feel to this young man's home.

Many of the doors were locked and the young man had to ask for staff to come and open them as he showed me around his home. A recent regulation 33 report states that the manager conducting the inspection was concerned that this young man was effectively 'locked onto' Langley unit as parts of the site are locked. This inspection visit took place in April and this situation remained unchanged two months later.

The set up in the kitchen did not allow the young man to be able to assist in food preparation as the only part he was able to reach was a very small area of work surface which had been lowered so as he could use it as he is a wheelchair user. As this young man is rapidly approaching adulthood he should have been receiving support to develop independence skills for the time he comes to leave care. He also seemed to be completely cut off from the young people his own age who live in Alderley House.

The material standards in Langley appear slightly better than the other houses however it is very old fashioned looking. The front room, I was advised, was rarely used by the children and the couches were made from a plastic covered material which if you sat on them shot onto the floor as they were very slippery. I was advised that they used to have material covers but these got taken off as they got soiled.

The bedrooms for the children who came as part of a respite provision were appropriate and nicely decorated. The staff team largely seemed well engaged with the children. It has been reported though that there is an over reliance on putting children in front of the television rather than engaging them in meaningful activity.

The care provided in Langley is of an acceptable standard, however, this could be improved by it being provided in a more suitable building with appropriate resources such as enough shower rooms. There also needs to be a review of the activities provided to the children and arguably the TV should be removed to improve the opportunity for meaningful play and activities.

The cost of providing staff for Langley unit is projected to be £606,420 this financial year. With all other associated costs this unit has a projected expenditure of £606,420 although the budget set was £270,768.

The unit has six beds providing short breaks to disabled children although only five have been used for this purpose for a number of years.

4.4 Wilkinson House

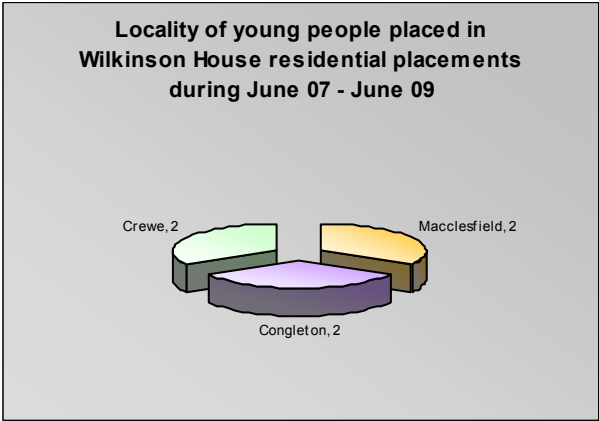
The contract price for Wilkinson House is £593,905 per annum and as this contract was in place before the local government review it is split between Cheshire West and East on a 50:50 basis, meaning that three beds are available to Cheshire East. In addition to the cost of this home there has been additional resources put in to support educational activity. This is a six bedded home currently registered to provide for children aged 8-12 with a remit to work in a therapeutic way through the use of a play therapist to assist the child in reaching a stage where they are able to be fostered.

If fully occupied the unit costs for Wilkinson House are £1904 / week / child. At the time of this review Wilkinson House had three young people in residence with no referrals pending meaning that the current unit cost per child is £3808 / week.

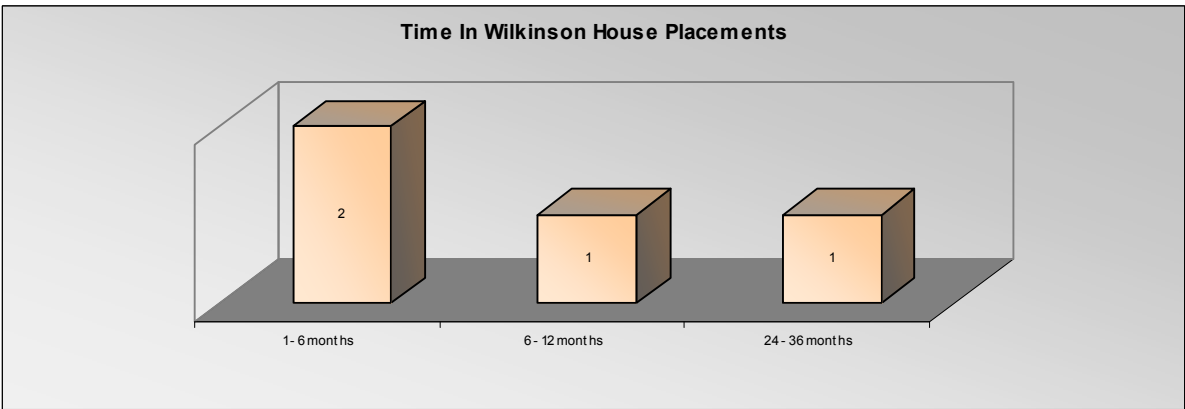
The age of the children placed in Wilkinson House over the last two years have ranged from 10 to 14 years old, with the majority being aged 11 years.



The referrals to Wilkinson House have been received evenly from each of the Cheshire East localities. However, during the time of the review there were only two children placed both of whom were from the Crewe area.



The children placed in June 09 were both boys one of whom age 10 and the other 11. Both boys had experienced a number of foster care breakdowns prior to their admission into Wilkinson House. One of the young people placed had been there for over two years the other for more than 12 months. The statement of purpose and function is clear this is a resource which is meant to be a ‘short term’ intervention to enable children to return to family based care.



Approximately half of the children leaving Wilkinson House have been placed with foster carers after their stay.

Quality of Care

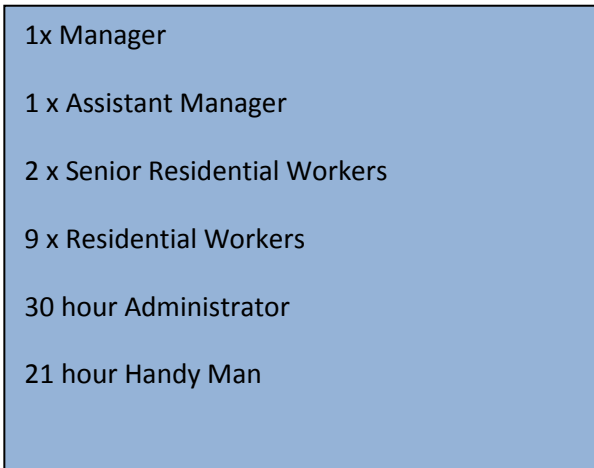
The quality of care is of a good standard. The children appear to be happy and settled. The care planning and key work arrangements are very good and good account is taken of the children's needs.

An Ofsted inspection took place on the 18 June 2009 and the overall standard of care was deemed to be of a 'good' standard. Ofsted deemed that in areas of enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and being healthy Wilkinson House is exceeding minimum standards. In terms of making sure the children are healthy this was deemed by Ofsted to be 'outstanding'. There are excellent health care plans in place for each child. There were only two recommendations made by Ofsted in their inspection which were around water safety and keeping records of staff training.

The house is a large detached property set in its own grounds in Sandbach. Each of the children has their own bedroom and there are plenty bathrooms and living rooms. Although it is on a busy road there is a large garden and play area to the rear of the property. The building is owned by Cheshire East but maintained by the Together Trust. The property is warm and welcoming, well equipped, spacious and in a good state of repair.

The home provides specialist care for children aged between the age of eight and twelve on their admission. The home provides care to children who have emotional and behaviour difficulties.

The staffing complement is:



- 1x Manager
- 1 x Assistant Manager
- 2 x Senior Residential Workers
- 9 x Residential Workers
- 30 hour Administrator
- 21 hour Handy Man

There is no use of agency staff as the Together Trust operate a 'pool' of peripatetic staff.

There is a strong education ethos in the home and all children in placement were reported to be doing well in their education. One of the requirements of being placed in Wilkinson House is that the child must have a school placement.

One of the strengths of the home was the fact it ensures there is a high level of activities available for the children. There is evidence of a programme of summer activities to ensure the children make the most of their summer holiday. The type of activities included a summer holiday caravanning, camping trips and a two night break for each of the children with their key worker. During the term times children are encouraged to take part in activities such as horse riding, canoeing, football and cadets.

The leadership in the home was of a very good standard. The registered manager had very good knowledge of her area of work and was an experienced and capable people manager. There was also a good infrastructure and support available to her through her through Together Trust.

The quality of care being provided to Cheshire East's children in Wilkinson House is of a good standard.

Issues

Given the level of occupancy it is questionable whether there is a need for such a large resource in Cheshire East for this age group. For the current unit cost good quality treatment foster care beds could be commissioned which would allow children to remain in a family setting while addressing their needs for therapeutic intervention.

Children were unable to remain in their home area as both children in placement were from the Crewe area.

The age of the children being admitted to Wilkinson house is of a concern. It can be argued that children who are aged 8-12 should be placed within a family setting wherever possible. It is concerning that only 50% of the children who have been in Wilkinson House were able to move on to a foster care placement as this should have been higher. For children who stay in residential placement for a considerable period such as those in Wilkinson House it is very difficult for them not to become institutionalised and be unable to make the transition into family based living.

Although the work being carried out with the children is of a very good standard I would advise that the children need to be of an older age range at the point of admission.

Cheshire West commissions 50% of the home and currently their occupancy levels are only 33% and there are no children on a waiting list. This does not present good value for money as their unit costs are currently standing at £3883/ child per week I am concerned that should Cheshire West choose to decommission this service it would have great financial implications on Cheshire East as the service would become unviable. The current contract is in place until March 2011. Cheshire West and Chester are of the view that they do not require residential beds for children as young as the age group for Wilkinson house and believe that the age on admission needs to be raised to meet their requirements.

The current contract is in place to the 31 March 2011. However, there has recently been a contract meeting to look at the viability of extending the age group of children at the time of their admission. The level of occupancy is increasingly threatening the contract. If children between the age of 12 and fourteen were admitted to Wilkinson House this would change this situation.

4.5 Outcomes for Children in Cheshire East's Residential Care

In considering the suitability of placements for children in Cheshire East's care it is essential to look at the outcomes once the children come to leave.

This review has taken account of information relating to performance measures detailing the numbers of those who have left residential care and have entered into education, employment and training, whether or not they are living in suitable accommodation and also the proportion of children who have come into contact with the youth justice system.

Although it is recognised that these are relatively crude in terms of measuring outcomes they link closely to the five Every Child Matters outcomes – be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well being.

Of the children and young people who have recently left residential placements 30% are living independently, 10% are reported to be homeless, 10% are in a supported lodgings placement, 20% have returned to live with their parents, 20% have gone to live in a different residential placement s and 10% have gone to live in foster care.

It is interesting to note that 40% of all of those who left care have gone to live within a family based setting. It is concerning that 10% of those young people are described as being homeless as this will impact adversely on their ability to be safe and healthy.

Of the same cohort of young people who have left residential care only 40% are reported to be in employment, education and training. The remaining 60% are

classed as NEET at the time of this review. This obviously has implications in terms of the young people's ability to enjoy and achieve as well as achieving economic well being.

Of the last 22 children to leave residential care only two were not known to the Youth Offending Service(YOS). 68% were known to YOS prior to them being placed in residential care.

It is interesting to note that 23% were convicted of a crime only after their admission into residential care. Of that group 80% of the recorded criminal activity was violence against a person or property. The remaining 20% were convicted of theft. It is quite possible that all of these offences were as a direct link to them living in residential care.

This is an incredibly high proportion of children looked after in residential care in Cheshire East. This would lead me to believe that there is a culture of criminalisation of children in residential care in Cheshire East. In terms of making a positive contribution and enjoying and achieving this will have a massive impact into adulthood as so many will be leaving with a criminal conviction.

5.0 New Provision

In Crewe there are 2 new 4 bedded children's homes are fully furnished and registered. They are currently at the point of being able to be opened as soon as the staff are selected to work in them.

Home 'A' is a 4 bedded home in an established community to the north of Crewe Town Centre. It is a large detached house located on a main through road. It is within a nice area of other family type houses. It is an extended home with gardens to front, rear and each side of the property. There are open play areas nearby and it is within walking distance of the town centre and is well served with local schools.

The bedrooms have been designed as 'blank canvasses' each with a different colour scheme. It is anticipated that Home A will be adapted to become more accessible to all children, young people and their families. Work is currently underway to assess how best to do this. The home has been renovated and furnished to a high standard and provides a warm and appropriate setting for children to be placed.

Home B is a modern home, situated within a cul-de-sac, with gardens to front, rear and each side of the property. Home B is within walking distance of the town centre and is well served with local schools on the South Cheshire campus.

Close by there is a new college being built. This is a large 'family' home in its own grounds. The houses in the surrounding area are also detached family homes. Work is currently underway to replace the kitchen and make the home fully accessible for children or their family members who are wheelchair users.

The next stage in the development of the new homes is for the staff to be recruited. The job descriptions have been through the job evaluation process and advertising has taken place internally. The jobs advertised are for registered managers, who will hold a social work professional qualification and deputy residential managers. There are also two levels of residential care officers.

A consultant has been brought in to help the Cheshire East to conduct Warner compliant interviews to identify staff suitable to work in the new units. These interviews will take place during November 2009. It is the intention that one of the homes will be up and running and able to have children placed by December 2009.

5.1 Feedback from Care Council Visit

Two members of Cheshire East's Children in Care Council made a visit to both new homes to give feedback about the views of young people about the new homes.

When asked about material standards the following feedback was given.

Both homes were very good...very homely and I think had obviously had input from young people as to what they would want them to look like.

They both feel like a home. Not a big 'I'm in care' building! They looked fresh and nice and 'normal'.

They both blended in perfectly with the surrounding houses in the neighbourhood.

I loved the look of the bedrooms. They are blank canvasses waiting for young people to come and live in them and put their own stamp on them.

When asked about whether there was anything which should be developed differently the following feedback was received.

The only thing I can suggest is around accessibility for wheel chair users. The bathroom in Home A could be made accessible. They also need a fixed ramp. Home B could have a downstairs bedroom.

In Home A you could make the current office into an accessible bedroom but widening the door frame.

Other general views offered were:

I think these houses would definitely suit the needs of teenagers in care.

They are so much better than what we have now.

If I was a bit younger I would move in tomorrow!

I would definitely recommend the new homes to other young people.

Interestingly one of the concerns held by a member of the care council was that she was worried that young people coming from an 'institution' such as Priors Hill would not be able to adapt to living in a homely setting like the new homes.

The view represented in this visit will be communicated to the whole of the children in care council at the next meeting.

5.2 Good Practice Guidance for New Homes

As noted by the young person from the care council any children transferring from Priors Hill will need a great deal of support to adjust from the way they have been used to living to being able to enjoy living in a new small home setting. It shouldn't be taken for granted that just because the young people would be moving into much nicer living conditions that this would be an easy transition to make.

There needs to be a great deal of work conducted with the staff who have been successfully appointed to the posts within the new homes too as many of the staff also display symptoms of being institutionalised. This is evident in the over reliance of restraint and use of the police. In high quality children's homes there are many other ways in which behaviour is managed.

Staffing recommendations

Although at times of crisis agency staff are crucial to ensure that staffing levels are sustained, this is often a costly option which does not provide consistency or effective continuity for children.

Consideration should be given to employing sessional workers from the local work force (teachers, teaching assistants and social work support staff) under dual engagement. This would provide a cost effective solution, and build in planned flexibility to the rota, whilst allowing young people to build relationships with these workers.

Rotas should be planned over a minimum of a 12 week period, this allows the manager to plan for annual leave and other times when staffing shortages arise. Any deficits should be covered immediately with the use of sessional workers, the use of agency workers should only be sanctioned by a senior manager once evidence of this need has been investigated and verified. When there is a plan for a child to enter the placement staffing ratios should be reviewed to meet with the young person's plan and risk assessment.

Every Child Matters Outcome	Practice Recommendations for the New Homes
Be Healthy	The key priority, for the home should be to make mealtimes a central focus. Emphasis on meal times should be given a high priority, and all young people and staff on shift should eat together at all times, (whilst on shift should no staff member should consume a meal in the home that is not part of the agreed mealtimes without a child present at the dinner table). Mealtimes need to be normalised for the young people, and staff should utilise this opportunity to discuss the young person's day at school or college in a relaxed environment. Residential staff should also see their role at mealtimes although not explicitly to support children in eating, the introduction of new foods and if applicable table manners. Furthermore no child should be excluded from meal times.
	A cook should be employed at each home with the skills and expertise to create nutritional healthy meals using healthy ingredients. The cook should be able to subtly incorporate ingredients into meals to ensure that they have a healthy balanced diet. For example if a child is reluctant to eat vegetables, a soup or sauce should be prepared using vegetables in manner that is not obvious to the young person and added to the meal, and guarantees that the young person will be consuming their healthy "five a day" quota.
	Taster sessions should be included in the home's weekly programme to educate children on healthy eating and introduce them to foods and food groups they may not have tried. To further enhance this process the young people should be consulted on a weekly basis in relation to the planning of meals, and foods from different cultures should be incorporated into the meal plans on a weekly basis.
	To monitor and improve emotional wellbeing of all young people placed in the home, policies and procedures must be adhered to ensure that every child and young person has someone to talk to they can trust. On placement the role of advocacy services must be explained fully to the young person, including, the positive outcomes that these professionals may bring to the young person. The key worker will enable to young person to engage with these services and be present for all introductory meetings or sessions.
	Healthy lifestyle choices will be fully promoted with the residential setting and participation in sport and physical activity should be encouraged at all times, this includes staff and key workers transporting young people to any agreed activities. Furthermore activities should be organised within the home to ensure that all young people participate in a least one 'healthy session' per week either individually or as part of a group. Sessions should be organised and arranged in an age appropriate manner to explain the consequences of taking drugs alcohol and tobacco. Sexual health should be openly discussed and promoted. Consideration should be given to utilising the looked after children's nurse or other suitably qualified professional to deliver these sessions

Stay Safe	All young people who are placed in residential homes should have accurate risk assessments in place; This should be undertaken between the social worker, the key worker and in consultation with the young person. Their 'timeout' factors and exhibited behaviours must be discussed and plans put in place to allow staff to quickly recognise trigger behaviours and implement strategies to de-escalate the situation quickly and effectively. Therefore speaking and consulting with the young person will allow the young person time to reflect on their triggers and provide staff with the best solution to deal with that situation. All risk assessments should have clear plans and contingencies, and should be transparent in approach and should prove an effective support mechanism for all staff working with the young person to understand the risks and associated 'trigger points'.
	For children with additional needs there should be clear policies and procedures to ensure that there is an adequate package of facilities and activities to improve and support the transition to adult services, for example, 'improve transition arrangements from children's social care to adult social care services', this should always be undertaken with the Leaving Care Worker and should form the basis of the Transition or Pathway Plan.
	A baseline monitoring, evaluation process should be put in place to monitor and record incidents and of bullying, harassment and behaviour management incidents and the Registered Manager should monitor closely the levels of these. If there is evidence to suggest that individual staff are routinely being involved in any incidents of this nature it must be addressed as part of the supervision process. Furthermore the registered manager will seek solutions to actively decrease the number of incidence of bullying, harassment and sanctions.
	Ensure that registered managers and their deputies are able to implement and are fully conversant with safe recruitment practices. The registered manager must ensure that all staff employed in the residential home are skilled to care for children who have been abused and neglected, and have sufficient experience and knowledge to recognise the signs of abuse (including its recognition in non-verbal children) dealing with disclosures or suspicions of abuse, safe care skills, skills to support positive behaviour and ways of boosting and maintaining the child's self-esteem.
	Ensure that systems are in place to enable young people to report to appropriate staff concerns about potential risk to themselves, with appropriate response and without reprisals. Young people should be made aware of these procedures when first placed in the home.

Enjoy and Achieve	The key worker should, as part of their role, establish a direct link with designated looked after children's teacher. They must ensure that they are informed of any new developments or concerns and attend any school meetings as a good parent would.
	Key-workers must attend all looked after children's reviews and actively be involved in the planning process for the young person. The key worker must be equipped with skills to appropriately challenge decision making that may disadvantage the young person and seek to identify alternative solutions to such issues.
	Consideration should be given to providing "outreach" support for children who have moved from residential care into foster care. Positive relationships should be encouraged between key workers and young people, and this continued support should be offered to them while they are in a new placement and should be part of the young person's plan. This allows for extended support for new carers and provides the young person with a level of continuity and stability in their new placement.
	Although not always feasible placements for children should always be planned where possible. This allows time to undertake a 'matching' process, and allows the young person time to adjust both physically and emotionally to the move. The young person should be allowed time to say their goodbyes and this is particularly important if the child may have to move schools as this will be another major adjustment in the young person's life. The social worker should liaise with the placement to ensure that as key worker is identified at an early stage in this process, it is vital that the child should meet their planned key worker and that they are provided with an age appropriate understanding of the environment they will be moving to. It is crucial that the young person's room is prepared in readiness for them to move in. This should involve simple steps like allowing the young person to select colour schemes and soft furnishings for their room to help to instil a feeling of belonging.
	The achievements of children and young people with disabilities and their schools is celebrated through a range of activities including head teacher meetings, sharing of good practice. Key workers should be trained to deliver to deliver sports activities for children with disabilities and swimming clubs should established to target young people to learn to swim.

Make a Positive Contribution	A welcome pack should be created by young people which will act as a guide for all young people entering residential care in Cheshire East. It should be appropriate to the young people's age and understanding. The cost for such a project should be relatively small as the children themselves will be the main source of information, and all ideas presented by the young people should be given through consideration any young people should be provided with a full explanation for any ideas or suggestions that cannot be approved.
	Policies and procedures should be implemented to develop or extend volunteering opportunities or activities for young people, they should be undertaken in partnership with the youth service to ensure that young people are engaged in positive behaviours, for example Princes Trust or Millennium Volunteer scheme .
	All professionals employed within Cheshire East will ensure that the young person acquires and understands how an informed and responsible citizen should behave. Cheshire East should implement policies and procedures to ensure that as a corporate parent it does not act to criminalise it's looked after young people.
	Processes need to be implemented to aid early identification of possible or evident offending or negative behaviour. This should always be discussed with the young person, their social worker and if applicable their YOT worker and a planning meeting held to ensure that all professionals formulate a plan on working with the young person to reduce this behaviour whilst educating the young person of the consequences and positive aspects on not being embroiled in this behaviour.
	Young people who have offended or are at risk of offending should be provided with a range of activities and support to assist them in leading law-abiding and constructive lives and to raise their self-esteem. The local authority must ensure that arrangements are in place to address specific educational and training needs of young offenders and to co-ordinate the education of young people who are taken into custody

Achieve Economic Wellbeing	The role of the key worker is vital if a young person is to achieve economic wellbeing they must view their role as crucial and identify and minimise any factors that will prevent the young person from achieving their full potential. The key worker must understand that educational achievement remains the most effective route out of poverty, and that young people need to leave school and be able to earn a living and make the most of their lives. From an employment perspective this means learning how businesses work and developing the skills and qualities that employers need, such as literacy, numeracy, creativity, leadership, problem solving, teamwork, the ability to work independently and an enterprising spirit. The key worker must work with the allocated social worker and Connexions worker to ensure that all these key skills are met and appropriate action plans implemented in instances of unmet needs.
	All young people will have an up to date PEP and the key worker will liaise regularly school and allocated worker on any issues in relation to school, behaviour attendance or achievement, if any are identified to allow for early intervention. Realistic goals and targets must be set and monitored for the young person in accordance with their ability. Goals achieved should be rewarded as any good parent would do and the residential home should have monies set aside to “<i>treat</i>” the young person if they have done well in a particular aspect. Furthermore all young people at the age of 14 will have a Learner Entitlement and Action Plan which sets out what they can expect from their education provision in Cheshire East.
	The key worker as corporate parent will ensure all professionals involved with young people directly, must emphasise the importance of positive futures after leaving school. The young person must be encouraged to embrace life long learning, employment opportunities and enjoying a positive standard of living. The key worker as part of their role will identify and make the young person aware of their Connexions worker and their joint role in ensuring that the young person is engaged in further education, employment or training when leaving school, as they would aspire for their own children.
	A baseline measurement should be undertaken to measure the achievement of children with a disability and policies and procedures should be implemented to measure this achievement with realistic and aspirational goals set. New initiatives should be introduced as a joint venture with Connexions to prioritise EET for children with a disability.
	All staff employed in the residential home will actively encourage and plan with the young people for the time they come to leave care and provide independence training. Sessions for the young people should be planned from a personal and individual perspective, and should explore themes such as learning how to manage their own money, the roles of banks and financial services. Practical training should be conducted within the home to allow young people to learn how to cook wholesome meals on a budget and young people should be encouraged to attend the supermarket with their key worker to understand budgeting and getting the most from their money.

	Key workers will jointly work with the allocated social worker to ensure that a young person has a personal bank account as part of “general citizenship standard”. Furthermore procedures should be in place to ensure that the young person has their national insurance number in their possession as near to their 16th birthday as possible. As part of this process the key worker should ensure that HMRC are aware of the young person’s current address to prevent delay in the process of issuing the national insurance card. Timely responses could prevent a delay in the young person entering education, training or employment.
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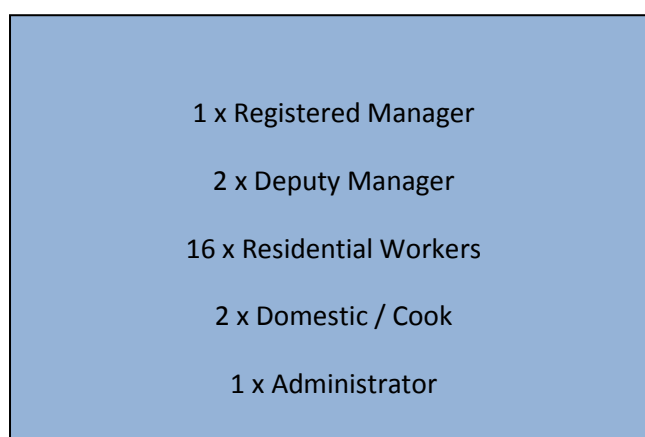
6.0 Future Provision

6.1 Short Breaks Placements for Children with Disabilities

Provision of short breaks for disabled children is currently going through a major review in line with the process around Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC). Cheshire East has asked for expressions of interest from organisations for views on how alternative respite provision might be delivered. It is likely that many of the expressions received will be for non-residential services. As AHDC provides financial support to develop additional services it would not be able to fund the short break residential service as this would not represent additionality.

Therefore a new short breaks residential home is going to be required. This should have five places and should be based in a community which is accessible as possible to the whole of Cheshire East. Many local authorities and voluntary sector providers operate such a resource from accessible bungalows. There needs to be five beds available on a rota basis for children who need over night short break care.

From researching other local authorities and voluntary organisations a suggested staffing structure would be:



The staff teams should work in teams of fours making up four teams to cover 24 / 7 rotas. On a rotational basis one of the teams would cover nights.

Children would be divided into groups of five according to their age, needs, friendships or those attending schools together. There can be thirteen of these groups of children who attend on a rolling rota basis. This allows 65 children to receive short breaks from this home. Currently 24 children use this service each year.

The rolling rota should run from Monday through to Friday and then Friday through to Monday on a cycle and then start again. This ensures that children and young

people get an equal share of the weekends. A standard package for each child would be 28 nights respite each year. However, there would need to be a level of flexibility which would enable some children sharing a 'standard package' and so getting 14 nights each. If the needs assessment required it a child may need a 'double space' and receive 56 nights respite per year.

6.2 Future requirements for Residential Care in Cheshire East

Residential care placements will be required in Cheshire East. In accordance with current thinking and practice every young person who can be placed within a 'family setting' should be placed within one. This allows children to see what 'regular' family functioning should look like and give them the best chance of overcoming earlier difficult experiences. It is well documented that children who fair best according to Every Child Matters outcomes are those placed with stable, long term foster placements. Cheshire East's Children in Care Council have very firm views around the need for stability and for most children the best way to achieve stability is within a foster care setting.

Having said which, there are young people whose needs can best be met within a residential setting. Excellent quality residential care can also assist young people to achieve good outcomes. The current residential care provision is not able to provide this type of care.

Based on the current figures available there needs to be fifteen residential care beds available for children in Cheshire East. There are approximately 175 young people aged 11+ who are looked after in Cheshire East. Fifteen beds would mean that 8.5% of those looked after over the age of 11 would be placed in residential care homes. It may be that if there is a rise in the care population this may need to be reviewed. This would allow for some additional 'specialist' beds to be purchased from out of area placements if required to meet the specific needs of the children. There will be the eight beds in the two new Crewe homes and 3 beds in Wilkinson House.

As between 30% and 50% of children looked after by Cheshire East are from the Macclesfield area there needs to be a children's home in that locality in order to allow children to remain in their home area and maintain their school placements.

Due to the evidence that the quality of care would be higher and the unit cost lower it is more beneficial to tender this provision out to the private and voluntary sector.

The council needs to decide whether it would rather own the property or include that as part of the commissioning process. I would suggest that by owning the building this would be more cost effective in the long term. The property should be made fully accessible and DDA compliant.

If the service was to be commissioned out issues of TUPE would need to be resolved and would influence the costs of the tender as all the remaining staff would TUPE with their existing terms and conditions.

I would advise that if a suitable property could be found that a four bedded home could be developed within the next twelve months.

Having looked into a number of council run and voluntary sector care homes the average staffing for a four bedded children's homes will be as follows:

1 x Registered Manager
1 x Deputy manager
10 x Residential Workers
18.5 hour Administrator
20 Hour Domestic

6.3 Emergency placements

Given that 44% of all children who have recently been placed in the emergency provision returned to the care of their parents it could be argued that they should never have come into care at all and rather if an emergency response team of social care staff could be deployed during the crisis this would potentially stop almost 30 children being admitted into residential care.

The staffing of Mottram House is projected to cost approximately £313,555 this year. The staffing complement for that part of Priors Hill is 12 hours of manager's time a week plus; 1FTE Group Leader, 2FTE senior residential workers and 3 FTE residential care workers. This equates to 197 hours of residential staff time each week, which is 10,244 staff hours per annum.

22% of all children placed on the emergency house went to live in foster care. To replace Mottram House emergency foster care beds should be developed.

A service which is currently missing in the residential service in Cheshire East is an assessment function. It is worth considering where Wilkinson House would be able to carry out this function. It would assist in the identification of a child's needs and also to determine the type of placement where those needs would be best met.

7.0 Recommendations

- Residential care in Cheshire East needs to be urgently brought up to date. Its institutionalised practices and provision are about 20 years behind where they should be. It is achieving very poor outcomes for the children who reside in this type of 'care'.
- Given the recent history of in-house provision with both Redsands and Priors Hill units being deemed 'inadequate' I would advise that residential provision should be outsourced in Cheshire East. Initially this should be the two homes in Crewe and also the home which will be in Macclesfield. It should be remembered that Ofsted are inspecting against minimum standards and it has been demonstrated that in-house is unable to achieve these. The unit costs would be similar or less than the current cost of in-house provision and the quality would be much greater representing better value for money and better quality of care for the children. One organisation providing all of the residential care provision would bring economies of scale in relation to management costs. Any outsourcing arrangement should be contractually linked to levels of occupancy to ensure good value for money. The tender specification should be strongly linked to outcomes and any organisation making a bid would need to be able to demonstrate that it already provides 'excellence' in children's residential care.
- Priors Hill is not fit for purpose. The emergency bed facility should be closed by the end of November and Alderley should be closed by the end of December. Children currently in this provision need to have their care plans progressed appropriately and if they are to remain in residential care should be moved to the new Crewe homes as an interim measure. The closure of Priors Hill and its replacement was endorsed in principle by the Scrutiny review Panel in 2005. If this timescale was adhered to then a £240k saving could be made before April 2010 although this would be dependent upon staff costs of redeployment or redundancy.
- A new house should be purchased in a residential area of Macclesfield. This should be a four bedded home in order to accommodate the level of need

within the Macclesfield area. I would advise that it would be financially prudent for the house to be purchased by Cheshire East Council and for the provision to be put out to tender for the delivery of the service. This should be an 'ordinary house' in an ordinary area as requested by the children. The cost per annum of such an outsourced provision would be in the region of £560k if the building was owned by Cheshire East. This home needs to be fully accessible.

- As an interim measure in the period between Priors Hill closing and a new home being available children from the Macclesfield area would need to be placed in Crewe and transport to school or college provided. Another solution might be to spot purchase beds from Cheshire West and Chester in Wilkinson House if they remain unused.
- Placements into the new Crewe homes should commence by the end of November.
- One of the new homes in Crewe needs to be made fully accessible and suitable for children who use a wheel chair or whose mobility is compromised.
- A review of the contract with Together Trust needs to take place to adjust the age group for Wilkinson House to children 12-14 years at the point of admission. Children under the age of 12 years need to be placed in a family environment. This may necessitate the development or commissioning of treatment foster care provision or additional resources added in to skill up existing foster carers. Further needs analysis should take place once the contract with Together Trust reaches its conclusion. If such a resource is required in the Sandbach area then this service could also go out to competitive tender.
- Wilkinson House should also be asked to take on an assessment function so as children's needs can be determined to effectively match them in suitable care provision.
- Emergency foster care provision should be developed. There needs to be an option of two beds available. This could be simply a foster carer who is paid a retainer to be available to take emergency admissions should they arise.
- The 'front door' needs to be more effectively managed to avoid large numbers of teenagers entering residential care and then returning to the care of their parents. A small team is needed to work out of hours providing emergency crisis intervention based on a solution focussed intervention model. This should be developed to help address the issue of teenagers entering the care system in emergency situations. Current EDT arrangements are not appropriate to meet the need and stop children needlessly entering the care

system. It may be that some space in the Wilkenson House campus could be made available to house such a team.

- Mother and baby foster placements are needed. There needs to be places for two young people and their babies. Ideally there should be a foster placement in each of the localities to enable the family to remain in their local area.
- A pool of peripatetic residential staff could be developed and trained to improve quality standards and reduce the unnecessary use of agency staff within the residential homes.
- Work needs to take place with the staff teams to reduce the levels of criminalisation of children in the care homes. Perhaps a greater level of understanding of basic principles surrounding attachment issues may help staff find new ways of managing difficulties. A policy change is also required to support this change.
- Langely House needs to be moved out of Priors Hill. This will take some time as a new bungalow would need to be purchased to house the new short breaks home. It would be necessary to continue to operate out of the current building until a new one was fully operational. As the other parts of Priors Hill will close there will be a need to employ security staff in the short term to ensure the safety of the children and staff in Langley House.
- There needs to be an investment in improving the leadership skills in the residential service. There has not been suitable leadership or quality management and in the short term there will need to have a level of improvement in that area.
- Following the appointment to posts for the new homes all staff should be audited against the new residential induction standards. Any shortfall in their training needs should be addressed.
- There needs also to be an investment of time and energy in turning around what appears to be an adverse culture within the residential service.
- Managers within the residential sector need to receive training on budget management and controls and regular reviews put in place to ensure services operate within budget.