

## CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

### Item under consideration: TRANSFORMATION OF SURREY CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL PROVISION

Date considered: 18 OCTOBER 2021

#### Introduction

1. On 18 October 2021, the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Member for Children and Families and senior officers regarding the transformation of the council's residential provision for looked after children (LAC) which is being recommended to Cabinet for approval at its meeting of 30 November 2021. On the basis of the evidence it received, the Select Committee recommends that Cabinet agree the proposed transformation.
2. The Select Committee heard that, if agreed, the transformation will:
  - make residential care a specific intervention to address the needs of the LAC with the most-complex needs by specialising the purposes of the council's residential homes for children
  - support the No Wrong Door service
  - provide two additional residential places – for children with autism experiencing crisis
  - update the children's residential staffing structure to align with the changes to provision, increase management capacity and provide a framework for staff development.
3. The Select Committee heard that key benefits of this will include:
  - LAC being supported in more-stable placements which are closer to home and provide an assuredly high standard of care
  - increasing staff skills, with more completing training and qualifications
  - improved staff recruitment and retention
  - containment of cost pressures.
4. The Select Committee received assurances in respect of the robustness of the costings for the budget-neutral proposals and manageability of associated risks.

## Summary of the rationale provided to the Select Committee

5. The Committee heard that the preferred placement for any LAC is within the community, but there are a small number of children, those with the most-complex needs, for whom residential care is the best option and the proposed specialisation of children's homes will make residential care a specific intervention to address the needs of such children before they are stepped-down to family- or community-based care when their needs lessen.
6. The Select Committee heard that the Corporate Parenting Service is aiming to reduce the number of LAC in residential care, despite forecast increases in LAC, and under the Sufficiency Strategy, is seeking to increase fostering capacity and stability. When residential care is needed, the Service aims to place children within the county. The Service is increasing in-house residential capacity through capital investment and is to engage with providers in respect of increasing external residential provision in Surrey, as the proposed transformation will not meet the demand for residential placements entirely.
7. It was submitted that the specialisation of residential provision will increase the proportion of LAC accommodated in county by using existing homes to support the children with the highest needs, who are often placed out of area due to a shortage of appropriate residential provision locally. The Corporate Parenting Service will place children with less-complex needs in family- or community-based care. This will also contribute to the containment of cost-pressures as in-house residential provision is generally cheaper than external, as is non-residential care.
8. The Select Committee heard that, in order to provide stable, specialised residential care for children with highly complex needs, the residential workforce model needs to be updated to provide adequate capacity in the right roles under a structure which develops staff. The transformation aims to increase management capacity and provide opportunities for career progression for staff who complete training and qualifications, which will improve care quality and workforce sustainability and contain cost pressures by reducing the reliance on bank and agency staff in a competitive labour market with workforce-development issues.
9. The transformation will provide two new crisis beds for children with autism, linked with the Children's Crisis Intensive Support Service, to prevent children with autism in crisis being detained in clinical settings or placed out of county. The Select Committee received assurance that this increase is sufficient, the demand for it having been identified with health partners.
10. The Select Committee heard that the alternatives to transformation considered by the Corporate Parenting service were to continue with the existing residential model and placing LAC in external provision. These options were less desirable as they would not deliver the benefits of supporting children with higher needs in-house and the greater assurance of care quality provided by the council employees who staff

its children's homes, and further, as external provision is usually located outside of the county.

11. The Select Committee heard that the key risks of not implementing the transformation are not being able to support children with the most complex needs in-house and within the county and maintaining homes' Good and Outstanding Ofsted ratings.
12. The key risks of implementing the transformation were said to be recruiting to the new staffing structure, due to a competitive labour market, and the difficulty of co-locating children with highly complex needs, which could lead to homes' capacity being underutilised.
13. The Select Committee also enquired as to the impact of replacing some longer-term placement capacity with short-stay beds to accommodate children supported by No Wrong Door and sought assurance that this will not result in more LAC being placed out of county while further residential capacity under the capital programme is awaited. The Select Committee was told that the transformation will build upon the expertise of residential staff and reflected the needs of LAC supported by the Service. Further, the Committee heard it was important to maintain respite provision and develop short-term No Wrong Door provision to prevent children from entering care or remaining in care for long periods.
14. The Select Committee considered the financial detail of the proposed transformation in private. The Committee tested the assumptions on which the costings are based and received assurances that the costings are robust, although the changes being revenue-neutral to the council is dependent on contributions from health partners which cannot be formally agreed until after the provision has been developed.

## **Recommendation**

The Select Committee made the following recommendation:

- Cabinet agree the proposed transformation of Surrey's Children's Residential Services provided there are no material changes to the recommended decision or supporting information as reported to the Select Committee.

## **LIZ BOWES**

**Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee**

## **Background papers**

[Items 7 and 7a, Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee \(18 October 2021\)](#)

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