

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER 2009

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

RESIDENTIAL REVIEW OPTIONS PAPER

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 To present, for discussion, the outcome of the first phase of a review of in-house residential care for looked after children with a view to reshaping the service to meet the needs of local children within Bridgend. The report sets out some options for consideration and recommends that officers undertake further analysis and feasibility work in relation to the proposed options.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 This report links with the theme "Young Voices", one of the new corporate priorities for 2009/10.

3. Background.

- 3.1 The "Creative Exchanges" report, presented to members in 2007, outlined how the then Children's Services should realign its budget, reducing the number of children in care and re-investing in early intervention to prevent family breakdown.
- 3.2 Bridgend has 14 places in in-house residential care and also has 16 children placed in residential establishments outside the authority. This is a high total number compared to other like authorities, almost twice as many children. Some of these children have complex disabilities that only specialist services can provide but some have emotional and behavioural difficulties that have excluded them from mainstream education and prevented them from being cared for within their families. Some of these children cannot be catered for locally at present because we are unable to offer appropriate packages of care, therapeutic support and education. Other factors, evidenced through information gathered for the review, indicate that children do not want to be sent long distances to a placement, thus reducing contact with family and friends.
- * 3.3 The residential review (see Appendix 1) considers a number of possible options for redesigning current provision so that it better meets the needs of our looked after children in the context of added value both in the quality of provision and more efficient use of resources, bringing financial savings as well as creating better outcomes for our children and young people.

4. Current situation / proposal.

- 4.1 The options are set out below, in the context of the findings of the Review.
- 4.2 **Option 1 – Preferred Option**

- Retain existing units but change their statements of purpose to reflect:
 - One acting as a short term emergency and Assessment Unit
 - One focusing on challenging behaviour with a dedicated education and therapeutic resource
 - One dealing with 16+ transition support etc

The group felt that there was strong evidence emanating from the review to suggest that a number of children currently in costly out of county placements could return to a re-configured in-house provision with a dedicated education and therapeutic resource. The short-term assessment unit would need to work closely with the family support service to avoid unnecessary family breakdowns.

This option offers the potential to make a savings in the out of county placement costs through the potential to return 1 placement to in-house as well as divert a child from entering such a placement. In addition there is likely to be some scope to prevent admission to Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. At an average Social Services cost of 2 out of county and 2 IFA placements, there could be the potential to 'save' £285,000 per annum. If contributions from Education and Health were to be included these savings could be greater. In achieving such a service it would be necessary to meet the educational needs of such children. Currently where such support is needed at an out of county residential placement Education (for some placements) contribute to the overall cost. By returning such a placement there are potential Education budget savings to be achieved. These savings would be offset by the need to provide additional support in the form of educational and therapeutic resources in-house which would need to be quantified both in terms of number of staff and associated costs.

4.3 **Option 2**

- Close 1 unit and commission an emergency/assessment service from an external agency.
- Remaining 2 units – one to focus on adolescent/challenging behaviour and other on transition.

4.4 **Option 3**

- Close 1 unit and put children young people in IFAs.
- Remaining 2 units – one to focus on adolescent/challenging behaviour and other on transition.

4.5 The group felt that options 2 and 3 were not supported by the evidence that has emerged from the review. In addition, many local authorities are in the process of increasing their in-house residential provision to meet identified needs. We also need to be mindful of the recommendations contained within Lord Laming's report that residential care has an important role to play in the lives of some children who need to be looked after.

4.6 The closure of 1 unit would require resourcing alternative placements, either through our in-house provision or from Independent Fostering Agencies. The average cost of a community home in 2008/09 was £342,000 whilst the cost of alternative provision within the independent sector is on average £40,000 per placement. The need to secure an additional 4 placements would cost £160,000 or

for 5 placements £200,000. This would suggest that there are potential savings to be achieved through this option, however disrupting a placement by forcing a child's move to another carer can cause future disruption potentially requiring an out of county residential placement at much higher cost. This option could be achieved through allowing the number of children at a home to run down naturally as children progress from the establishment, but this could mean in the short-term the unit cost of in-house residential placement significantly increasing, particularly if only 1 child remains resident for a period of time. It would be anticipated that the level of staffing could also be reduced with reduced numbers of children, although there would still be a need for a minimum staffing level to provide 24/7 cover. These costs also do not take account of any potential redundancy costs that would need to be met. These may well be short-term costs but could take a number of years to repay.

4.7 **Option 4**

- Retain the existing units with no changes to their existing statements of purpose.

The group felt that this was not the best use of resources and the consultation process confirmed the need to re-shape the existing provision. There would be no financial impact on this option as no additional resources would be required neither would any savings be achievable.

- 4.8 The initial findings of the review are consistent with recent similar reviews undertaken by other authorities. However, there is now a need to undertake more detailed analysis and feasibility work on the preferred options and to consider the management arrangements for such provision. This could include in-house provision, commissioning or joint working.

5. **Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.**

- 5.1 None.

6. **Legal Implications.**

- 6.1 None.

7. **Financial Implications.**

- 7.1 The report identifies a number of options for the future provision of residential services in Bridgend. The review has focused, appropriately, on the needs of the service. The review currently provides indicative potential savings and costs associated with each of the proposals, and the report should be read in this context, as the financial viability of any option will require further financial appraisal as part of a detailed feasibility study.

8. **Recommendation.**

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee:
- receives the Residential Review Report at Appendix 1;

- explores, through discussion, the various options put forward, and
- agrees to receive further reports on the detailed feasibility work.

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Background documents

There are no background papers to this report.