

Sufficiency Initiatives for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

Report of the Head of Children's Health and Wellbeing (Deputy Chief Officer)

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) To consider and comment on the sufficiency initiatives outlined in this report.**
- b) To review the next steps for each project.**

1. Summary

- 1.1 The council has recently secured funding following the submission of two successful bids to the Department of Education for the following initiatives:

The DFE Children's Home Capital Programme

- 1.2 Tenders to carry out capital works to increase capacity at Welland Children's Home and Barnes Children's Home were published in 2022 in line with the Devon County Council 2022-23 capital programme. Following receipt of tenders in 2022, the capital available was not sufficient to carry out these projects and they were put on hold.
- 1.3 To increase the supply of children's homes accommodation the Department for Education launched the Wave 1 Children's Homes Capital Programme 2021-2023 in July 2021. Devon County Council were unsuccessful in bidding for this round of funding.
- 1.4 A 'Wave 2' round of DFE Children's Home Capital Programme funding was announced in June 2022 with a bid deadline of September 9, 2022.
- 1.5 Following submission of a revised Wave 2 bid, the council was awarded capital funding of £733,354 from the DFE Children's Home Capital Programme to develop Welland Children's Home and a new children's home at The Link Centre to create five new 52-week placements for complex needs children in care.
- 1.6 The DFE funding has enabled the council to use existing and new resources to match fund the capital projects for Welland and The Link Centre. Additional council capital from the Basic Need Grant has also been identified to fund the children's home extension of Barnes Children's Home to create 2-3 additional 52-week placements at that home.

- 1.7 The tenders for Welland and Barnes have been published for a second time. Subject to Council approval of an updated FIN letter, published on 19th May 2023, these tenders will be awarded soon.
- 1.8 The capital project for the new children's home at The Link Centre in Holsworthy is not ready to go to tender. Further work on tender development and consultation is ongoing before this project is finalised and the capital funding allocation is approved.
- 1.9 The council has also identified £733,354 of Basic Needs Capital Grant funding to provide the required 50% match funding for the DFE grant.
- 1.10 Officers in children's services will continue to consider opportunities for the development of other small children's homes to ensure that, where possible, we are able to provide local homes for Devon children.

The DFE Staying Close Programme

- 1.11 Devon County Council secured a grant of £1,147,106 in May 2023 from the Department for Education following a bid for funding under the Staying Close programme. The revenue funding is to be used over the next 2 years to pilot supported accommodation for care experienced young people.
- 1.12 This is a priority programme for the government to ensure effective transition to independence for care experienced young people aged 18+ in England. The proposed delivery model and objectives of the project and the next steps for delivery are set out below.
- 1.13 The successful bid submitted by DCC sets out how the council proposes to use up to 6 buildings to accommodate a minimum of 24 care experienced young people aged 18+ in high and medium needs provision. The young people will benefit from the support of a personal advisor and key workers for between 12 and 18 months, depending on their needs.
- 1.14 These services will enable the Council to provide semi-independent supported accommodation for care experienced young people who are currently living in high cost supported accommodation for 16-18 year-olds and residential children's homes. The Staying Close offer will provide more tailored support which is better suited to the transition to independent living.

2. Background - DCC Children's Home Capital Programme

- 2.1 The recent Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Children's Social Care Study found that there is:

'a lack of placements of the right kind, in the right places.'

This is reflected in the acute challenge faced by local authorities when placing young people with complex needs in the South-West of England.

Profile of Children in Residential Care in Devon

- 2.2 The Devon Sufficiency 2022-24 showed that the number of children in care increased significantly in 2020-21. A high proportion of these children have significant learning needs and disabilities, with 39% having an EHCP and a further 24% in receipt of SEN support in school.
- 2.3 At the same time, the number of children looked after placed by the council in children's homes increased from 70 in April 2020 to 102 young people in May 2023. In September 2022, 51 out of 90 children in residential care were placed within Devon. The remaining children and young people were placed outside Devon, often at a very significant distance from home. An out of county placement disrupts links with family and friends, as well as engagement with education and health services.
- 2.4 The council currently provides 4 children's homes, 3 respite and one long term, all of which are for children with a disability. All of these homes are currently rated as 'Good' by OFSTED and they have stable staffing teams delivering for our young people.
- 2.5 The mainstream children's home market in Devon is wholly delivered by private and voluntary sector providers. These providers are often reluctant or unable to accommodate our most complex young people, due to the challenges of meeting their needs and matching with other children and young people. Consequently, options for placing complex needs young people are extremely limited.

Cost of Residential Care in Devon

- 2.6 The average cost of a placement in a private or children's home in England and Wales was £4,153 per week in 2020-21, from figures published by the Personal Social Services Review Unit, which is the latest figure available. The current average cost, in September 2022, for DCC young people in residential care was £5,608 per week. The higher average cost reflects the shortage of supply in the local market and the high needs of some of the looked after children.
- 2.7 In September 2022, the 20 highest cost residential placements of children in care in Devon cost an average of £12,617 per week. These young people are mostly accommodated in registered children's homes, with a small number in unregistered placements. The council is committed to securing high quality registered placements for all young people in care.
- 2.8 The new children's homes will provide a multi-agency therapeutic model of care and education in Devon. This will ensure that young people have a stable and supportive environment in good accommodation. Visits from family, friends, and professionals will be more regular and it will be possible to create a network of support service around the homes.
- 2.9 The homes will have facilities and support services tailored to the high needs of the young people in our care. The aim is to secure positive outcomes that enable the young people to move on to less intensive provision over time as their needs reduce. This will greatly reduce placement moves for this cohort of young people and the number of unregulated placements accessed by the council

2.10 The attached slide deck provides more detail on the rational and objectives for the three new children’s homes which are due to be completed in this financial year.

3. Background - DCC Staying Close Initiative

3.1. The numbers of young people in 16+ supported accommodation has increased significantly since April 2021, when there were 60 young people in 16+ supported accommodation. By September 2022 there were 89 young people in 16+ supported accommodation. Of these, 60 are children in care and 29 are care leavers.

3.2. The increase in the number of young people in 16+ supported accommodation is projected to continue over the next period. This is due to the increase in UASC aged 16+ and in the number of children in residential and foster care moving to supported accommodation.

3.3. Each year, around 40 care leavers age 18 are supported by specialist housing workers for young people based in District Councils. This includes care leavers seeking early advice and support in relation to housing options and others whose placement or accommodation has broken down, putting them at risk of homelessness.

3.4. In October 2022, the average weekly cost for supported accommodation was at the following levels:

- The average weekly placement cost for those young people living in On Framework provisions is £2,047.
- The average weekly placement cost for those young people living in Off Framework provisions is £3,535.

3.5 The costs are lower for 18-year-olds as illustrated in the table below, however these are likely to rise in future years.

Type of Placement	Number	Average Cost/Week
Support Living Provider	31	£1551
Residential Children’s Home	5	£5,434
Cost per person for Staying Close model	12 in year 1 24 in year 2	£615

3.6 As of January 2023, Devon County Council (DCC) had 31 care experienced young people aged 18 or above in supported accommodation placements through our Supported Living Options framework, and five 18-year-olds in residential children’s homes. They remained in these settings because they were not ready to move into independent living, social housing, or other move on options.

- 3.7 Feedback from providers and front-line workers is that move on from residential children’s homes and supported accommodation is a challenge for the following reasons:
- Finding suitable options for young people with high support needs, including young people in need of mental health support.
 - High levels of demand for housing, particularly in Exeter where there are more employment and education opportunities.
 - Young people who come into care at a late age, 17 or older, and require at least 6 months in a stable environment before they are ready to consider move-on options.
- 3.8 The anticipated continued pressure on sufficiency of supported accommodation and children’s homes illustrates the need for good move on options for those who are not ready for independent living at the age of 18. The introduction of OFSTED registration for supported accommodation providers for 16-17 year-olds from October 2023 may also reduce sufficiency for this age group. Moving 18 year-olds into more appropriate accommodation will create more sufficiency for all age groups.
- 3.9 Securing move on accommodation with appropriate levels of support for care experienced young people will have a number of benefits:
- Reduced use of homeless accommodation for care leavers, including B and Bs.
 - Better supportive pathways for children as they leave care and become independent reducing cost in the long-term.
 - Good quality accommodation for young people to support the transition to independence.
 - Increase availability of 16-17 supported accommodation for children in care as 18+ young people will be able to move to more independent options.
 - Reduced use of high cost supported accommodation for 18+ care experienced young people.
- 3.10 The council is working closely with housing providers to identify properties that will be suitable for the Staying Close programme. These are progressing well and as soon as a suitable property is identified local elected members will be consulted.
- 3.11 The aim is to open between 2-3 buildings between October and December 2023, with a further 2-3 buildings opening between January 2024 and December 2024.
- 3.12 The DFE revenue allocation is for 2 years, as follows:

2023/24	2024/25	Total
£382,369.00	£764,737.00	£1,147,106.00

- 3.13 As the Staying Close model reduces use of high cost supported accommodation and residential care for care experienced young people aged 18+ it is expected that the project will deliver significant long-term savings for the council. This aspect of the project will be closely evaluated over the next 2 years.

4 Next Steps

- 4.6 The council will publish a Finance letter in May 2023 for approval of the revised capital spend for the Welland and Barnes Children's Homes projects. Tender award will follow subject to this decision and these capital projects are due to be completed by December 2023.
- 4.7 The tender documentation for The Link Centre will be finalised alongside further consultation on this project.
- 4.8 A Cabinet Report on the Staying Close initiative will be considered at the July Cabinet meeting. This report will seek approval for the project and the recruitment of staff to deliver the project.

Background Information

Scrutiny Committee Homes for Children's Presentation

Scrutiny Committee Staying Close Presentation