

Excerpt from the Outline Business Case detailing the reasons for remodelling our children's home provision:

Bristol City Council ('BCC') has a statutory duty under s22 of The Children Act 1989 to take steps to ensure, as far as practicable, that we can provide looked after children with locally based placements that can meet their needs ('the sufficiency duty').¹

We want children and young people wherever possible to live in a family setting and we only place in a children's home or residential special school when this is the best option to meet their needs.

For those children and young people who do require local authority care, a stable, well-matched placement where they can live until prepared and ready to leave, is the single most influential factor in improving children's outcomes and creating the conditions from which they can go on to live successful adult lives.^{2 3} When we look to make a placement match we are required to carry out an impact assessment which looks at whether the needs of the young person are compatible with the needs of the other young people in the setting and also the skills of the staff group, other considerations such as community and location are also taken into account.

Current provision

BCC Children's Homes

We currently have 4 x 5-bed homes and 1 4-bed home. However, 1 5-bed is currently closed reducing the number of available beds for children and young people to 19. The site was handed over to Housing Delivery for demolition to provide access to an HRA development site.

The homes provide short and long term care for children aged 12-17. The current provision is geographically imbalanced with 3 of the 5 homes in the south of the city. The homes were built around 1950, they are institutional looking, some have structural issues and maintenance costs are rising.

We have 58 independent children's homes on the sub-regional framework and we currently have 36 placements with 19 providers.⁴

Residential schools

¹ Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation and access to services for looked-after children published 30th March 2010

² Bristol City Council Sufficiency Plan Placements for children in care and homes for care leavers 2016-2019

³ Residential Care in England Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care

July 2016

⁴ data correct as at 28/3/18

Children in care with special educational needs and disability (SEND) may be placed in residential special schools when a Bristol maintained special school cannot meet their needs. Independent residential schools provide integrated social care, education and therapeutic placements which may be tripartite funded by social care, education and health. BCC currently has one maintained residential school, Notton House SEMH School in Wiltshire where 8 children are placed.

In addition there are 44 independent residential schools nationwide 7 of which are in the southwest region and we have 12 looked after children placed in 4 schools. All places are jointly funded by SEND and social care with some placements also receiving a funding contribution from health.⁵

We currently invest £5.8m a year commissioning external residential placements for children in care including independent residential schools.

Issues with the current provision

Up until 3 years ago we had a very stable group of young people placed in our in-house children's homes who were either unable to remain with their families for varying reasons or were unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC) and in either case did not have particularly complex needs. The majority of these young people were of a similar age and consequently moved on from full time residential care at a similar time creating capacity to place a whole new cohort of children in our children's homes. At the same time the decision was taken to commission alternative placements for UASC children and not place them in our children's homes as their needs could be best met in a foster care placement.

It became apparent that the new cohort of children and young people we were seeking to place had a greater range of complex needs and different backgrounds to those placed previously. Increasingly placements are required for children and young people whose primary presenting need is SEMH (Social Emotional or Mental Health), gang involvement, child sexual exploitation, sexually harmful behaviour or learning disabilities, or a combination of these.

In addition, we were seeking to match a mix of children and young people who were new into care, escalated from foster care or who we wanted to bring back from an out of authority placement. The primary reason for placing in an out of authority placement has been an inability to match children requiring a local authority residential placement in our children's homes. In the period April 2015 to March 2018, 27 children had a care plan to place them in an out of authority placement due to their presenting need and/or the risks associated with a local placement, whilst 46 children had a plan to place locally. Of those 46 children; 18 were placed in out of authority placements in Bristol or in a neighbouring local authority, the majority of which were specialist placements for disabled children. The remaining 28 children were placed out of authority and some distance away because a Bristol children's home placement was not available.

⁵ There is another project within the Strengthening Families programme looking at increasing the contribution from health. This is a joint-piece of work with North Somerset and South Gloucestershire local authorities.

This is a demand led service where we need to be able to react to and cater for emerging requirements. For children with complex social, emotional or mental health needs it is apparent that our existing children's homes are too large, the staffing ratio too low and they are not sufficiently specialised. Consequently, we have had to place children out of the city in the private sector as far away as Cambridge and even Glasgow, even though their social workers have wanted them to remain in Bristol. This costs more, as well as making it more difficult for Bristol social workers to support those children and supervise their care.

An alternative to this has been to run one of our own homes mainly empty, which impacts on occupancy rates and on costs and is looked upon negatively by Ofsted.

There is therefore a case to move to a new model comprising a larger number of smaller homes to better meet the more complex needs of the children and young people we are seeking to place. This will create more flexibility, maximising placement and matching opportunities and improve occupancy rates. Given the starting point for this project, that BCC already has five children's homes with a current budget of £3,002,530 per annum, it must be recognised that any savings from this proposal will not be significant compared to a starting position of having no in-house provision because we are remodelling an existing service with a large annual budget. In addition, the running costs of children's homes do not reduce proportionally based on the number of placement beds available, particularly as experience suggests the current staffing levels in our existing homes are not sufficient to manage the complex needs of the children we are seeking to place. However, the proposals should yield some savings through a reduction in expensive out of authority placement costs and the costs associated with supporting a young person in an out of authority placement such as increased social work time and Independent Reviewing Officers as well as creating a better value for money through increased levels of occupancy.

Further benefits include better placement stability and a significantly enhanced residential experience for the children and young people we place by keeping them nearer their family home and friends and not disrupting their education. By managing their needs within smaller homes that are more like ordinary houses and fit for purpose we will be able to achieve the assessed outcomes set for them.

Future model of delivery

Our aspiration is to have an in-house residential provision which more closely replicates family life and meets the placement requirements of children and young people with complex needs which cannot be met through foster care or other family placements. We will do this by redesigning our children's homes and having a larger number of smaller homes, some with a specific focus on a particular primary presenting need, so that there is wider range of matching and placement options available. This model will not only support high cost out of authority placements to come back into Bristol, where previously accommodation of these children and young people with very complex needs was difficult in the larger bed homes, but also create better stability of placements and enable us to deliver 'wrap around' services, such as specialist health, mental health or education services or mentoring, in a better way.

There is good evidence to suggest that stability maybe a factor in achieving good outcomes for children in care⁶

As part of the development of this outline business case we undertook a good practice visit to Nottingham City Council and met with the Service Manager for Residential and Targeted Support about how they successfully moved from a model of larger to smaller homes, the challenges they faced and the lessons learnt and we were told:

- They have a spread of homes across the city and select homes in the nicer areas. Some properties the council own and some are rented from a social housing provider who they have developed a good relationship with.
- The provision comprises a short breaks unit, a 4 bed home for complex disability and one emergency short term home with the remaining provision comprises long term children's homes with a minimum of 2 beds. A further two bed home is due to open shortly, which will be the last with any future homes having a minimum of 3 beds due to financial pressures.
- The children's homes are nearly always at full occupancy, spend on out of authority placements has reduced due to an ability to place some very complex damaged children and outcomes for young people who have been placed in the homes have improved.
- They have high levels of staff retention which they believe is because the children's homes are stable and supportive places to work, although they struggle with recruitment.
- Currently all their homes the last Ofsted financial year have been judged 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. Key Ofsted messages are around excellent planning, very good joint working and stable care.
- They work closely with the local CAMHS team around the young people's behaviour and causes. CAMHS visit the homes 6 weekly either working directly with the young people or with the residential staff. They also have regular contact with their virtual head and service when required.

Implementation approach

The intention is to implement the new model via a phased delivery approach, the reasons for this are:

- 1) We need to test the new model in terms of ability to match and place children to improve occupancy rates;
- 2) We need to transition in a staged and proportionate way due to the dependencies with other workstreams in the programme which are designed to impact on demand; and
- 3) In order to provide the best support to children and young people currently in residential care, both in our homes and in out of authority placements, we would not

⁶ Paras 4&5 Page 10 Residential Care in England Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care

plan to move them unless there is reason such as placement breakdown or a transitional point has been reached.

The proposal is to open one 2 bed home in the 18/19 financial year, followed by a further two 2 bed homes in the following financial year 19/20. **It should be noted that when referring to the number of beds throughout this business case this is for the residential placement of a child or young person and an additional 2 bedrooms are required in each property for live in residential staff.** During the same time period we would begin closing our existing homes, the first of which would be in summer 2018, with a further home to be closed in the financial year 19/20 and subsequent financial years until the new model is fully established. Based on the current ages of the young people placed in our homes we believe this is a realistic timeframe as they would be reaching a transition into independence. As the new model becomes established we anticipate seeing a reduction in the number of out of authority placements and consequently a reduction in the overall cost.

We will know we have succeeded when...

- Fewer children and young people in care are placed in out of authority residential settings and are instead placed in the new model of local small children's homes providing accommodation for two children or young people, equating to a 10% reduction on spend on out of authority placements over 5 years
- The occupancy rates of BCC children's homes increases to 85%
- The overall cost of providing residential care for children and young people has reduced.
- The majority of our children in care who require residential care live in small homes in Bristol rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted
- We are able to offer a wider placement choice and therefore are better able to match resident young people and meet their emotional wellbeing needs.
- Our children's homes are better geographically balanced throughout the city.