

Report to: **Cabinet**

Date: **17 November 2004**

By: **Director of Social Services**

Title of report: **Children's Residential Strategy**

Purpose of report: **To approve the next steps to implement the strategy.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1. approve the next steps to modernise the children's residential service in line with the strategy approved by the Cabinet in April 2004;**
 - 2. approve the reconfiguration of staffing arrangements in line with the discussions with trade unions over the past five months; and**
 - 3. approve the restructure of the current children's residential placements from the Lansdowne Children's Centre to two 4/5 bed domestic style homes;**
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1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The revenue costs of the reconfigured service will be contained within the base budget for Social Services. The new staffing structure for the two smaller homes and the pattern of attendance have been thoroughly explored and agreed with trade union and staff representatives over the past five months. A cost benefit analysis has been completed (attached as appendix A), including the use of capital, and shows that the proposed strategy offers value for money.

1.2 The two properties identified earlier in the year (7 Terminus Avenue, Bexhill and Homefield Road, Seaford) have been thoroughly explored, including preliminary consultation with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), and are deemed suitable for re-providing the 8/9 residential placements currently provided at Lansdowne House in Hailsham. The costs of refurbishing both properties to national standards for children's residential homes are contained within the capital programme for 2004/05. The proposals for the properties in terms of changes to the buildings and use are subject to planning permission and then registration by CSCI.

2. Background Information

2.1 In April 2004 the Cabinet approved the children's residential strategy to improve outcomes for children in residential care by restructuring the current residential placements into smaller, domestic style homes. The Cabinet also agreed to receive more detailed proposals, including revenue costs, after the formal consultation process. The strategy is based on local experience, the comments of successive inspections, the Best Value Review, and national research which shows that children in smaller residential homes achieved better outcomes. The strategy is closely linked to the proposed redevelopment of the secure unit on the Lansdowne site in Hailsham.

3. Personnel Issues

3.1 Cabinet approval to restructure the placements currently provided at Lansdowne House, and eventually at Old Roar, is based on the premise that the revenue costs will be contained within the base budget for Social Services. Although the strategy requires the reconfiguration of staffing arrangements, it has received strong support from both staff and trade unions. The proposed staffing structure and pattern of attendance have been thoroughly explored in formal consultation with staff and trade unions over the past five months. There is full agreement that the proposals are in the best interests of looked after children and agreement has been reached to move forward. The agreed arrangements will need to be approved by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) as part of the process of applying for registration and will be closely monitored and formally reviewed.

4. Environmental Issues

4.1 Some neighbours of the proposed children's home at 7 Terminus Avenue, Bexhill are opposed to the plan. Two meetings have been held with them in order to address their concerns. The main issues raised relate to location, impact upon property values, impact upon quality of life, the cost, supervision and safety. A petition regarding the future use of 7 Terminus Road has been submitted to the County Council. The petition has been referred to the Cabinet by the Chairman under Standing Order 40 for consideration as part of this report. One of the signatories to the petition has been invited to address the Cabinet in support of the petition for up to five minutes.

4.2 Some neighbours feel that the property is not big enough and is situated in a quiet residential area. Officers and inspectors are of the view that the property is suitable for four children. Officers have explained that, as Corporate Parents, the County Council has a duty to the children in its care to do everything it can to raise them in as positive a residential environment as possible. Terminus Road provides a suitable environment.

4.3 Immediate neighbours have expressed the view that a children's home will have a negative impact on their quality of life and the value of their properties. They would prefer that the house is sold to a private family. The house has been used as a day centre for young people with learning disabilities for a number of years. Officers and planners do not believe that a small residential home for just four children will significantly impact upon the quality of life or on house values. The children, looking forward to moving to a real home in a real community, are fully aware that their attitude and behaviour will be critical to the success of the move. Officers are confident that, with good levels of supervision and the support of the local community, the children will respond positively to the opportunity this move offers.

4.4 Some neighbours believe that the cost of the move does not represent good value for money. The cost benefit analysis shows that the proposed move represents best value in its widest sense, in terms of the unit cost of the placements and the quality of service delivery to children in the care of the County Council. The proposed moves are also linked to wider, long-term cost benefits to the County Council in terms of both capital and revenue budgets.

4.5 Some neighbours had unfounded concerns about the nature of the children in care and the levels of supervision, believing, initially, that the children would be left unsupervised overnight. Officers have challenged a number of views about children in care and sought to give reassurances that the children will have 24 hour supervision in the home. Staff would want to work co-operatively with their neighbours to promote positive behaviour and to resolve any problems that might arise. Staff are committed to being good neighbours.

4.6 It is possible that similar issues will be raised by neighbours at Homefield Road, Seaford; a meeting is planned to address any concern. A meeting with Councillor Freeman, local member for the Homefield Road area took place on 4 November 2004. A meeting with neighbours of the Homefield Road property is also planned to take place.

5. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

5.1 The majority of the work required to proceed to the next stage of the residential strategy has been completed, including a cost benefit analysis, consultation with staff and trade unions, consultation with children, consultation with the CSCI, and consultation with neighbours for the property at Terminus Avenue. Consultation with neighbours at Homefield Road will take place shortly. Commitment has been given to hold ongoing meetings with neighbours throughout the programme of change. The Cabinet is asked to endorse the reconfigured staffing arrangements to provide residential care in smaller domestic-style homes on the basis of the consultations and agreements reached with staff and trade unions. The Cabinet is also asked to give approval to continue with applications for planning permission and registration of the properties as children's homes with the CSCI. Once approvals have been gained, building work will be tendered and commissioned in the usual way. The proposals support the overall objective of providing children's residential care in smaller domestic style units.

5.2 It is proposed that Old Roar will be restructured in line with the strategy during 2005/06, once Lansdowne House has been closed as a children's home.

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Previous Papers: Cabinet Report 6 April 2004