

Report to: **Cabinet**

Date: **6 April 2004**

By: **Director of Social Services**

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

Purpose of report: **To endorse the proposal to modernise the children's residential service.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1. approve the overall strategy to modernise the children's residential service;**
 - 2. agree to the commencement of a formal consultation process about arrangements for the future provision of services currently provided at Lansdowne;**
 - 3. agree the strategy, to restructure the children's residential service from Lansdowne into two 4/5 bed domestic style homes; and**
 - 4. agree to receive more detailed proposals, including revenue costs, after the formal consultation process.**
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1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The revenue costs of a reconfigured service will be contained within the base budget for Social Services.

1.2 Two properties have provisionally been identified as suitable for providing alternative accommodation for the 8 beds at Lansdowne, Hailsham, subject to consultation with local people and planning permission. The cost of refurbishing and acquiring these properties, in line with national standards for children's homes, has been estimated at £560,000, subject to negotiation with the National Care Standards Commission as part of the process of registration. Funding has been identified in the capital programme for 2004/05.

2. Background Information

2.1 The overriding aim of the children's residential strategy is to improve outcomes for children in residential care and community safety. Local experience, the comments of successive inspections, the Best Value Review, and national research suggest that children in residential care do better in smaller, domestic style homes. In line with evidence from practice, the new national standards and regulations for children's homes are geared towards smaller homes of no more than 5/6 beds. Smaller homes with a clearer role and function enable more careful matching of a child's needs and risks to the placement. These proposals are endorsed, in principle, by the Corporate Parenting Panel, whose members regularly visit the current homes, and supported by the Regulation 33 Inspector and the National Care Standards Commission.

2.2 The current secure unit on the Lansdowne site in Hailsham is coming to the end of its useful life and it is unlikely that it will continue to function beyond 2006. The Cabinet has already endorsed a bid to the Department for Education and Skills for capital funds to redevelop a modern secure unit, subject to consultation with local people and planning permission. Further reports, detailing an options appraisal and recommendations, will be submitted to Cabinet once the Minister has made an initial decision and, again, when the outcome of consultations and the planning application are known. If the plans to redevelop a secure unit on the Lansdowne site proceed, the adjacent 8 bed home will need to be restructured in any case, regardless of the principles underpinning the strategy outlined in this report. If the plans for a new secure unit on the site do not proceed, the Cabinet will be asked to consider disposal of the property (1.8 acres).

2.3 This strategy and the principles underpinning it have been presented and discussed within the Children & Families Division, with the relevant trade union representative, with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and with the locality manager of the East Sussex Area National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). There is universal support for the direction of travel proposed in this strategy, subject of course to consultation and negotiation about the operational details. Should the Cabinet approve these proposals, consultations with the children in residential care and their families, and with local people most affected by the plans will begin in earnest. A project team will be established, involving young people, and further stakeholder meetings will be held.

3. Personnel Issues

3.1 These proposals are based on the premise that revenue costs will be contained within the base budget for Social Services. This will mean some changes in the way homes are staffed and will require detailed consultation with the NCSC and negotiations with relevant trade unions about staffing establishments and attendance patterns. Should these negotiations fail to provide an effective model, a further report will be submitted to the Cabinet, detailing an options appraisal and recommendations about how to implement the strategy within the principles of best value.

4 Strategy

4.1 For the reasons outlined in section 2 above, it is proposed that the overall strategic direction for children's residential care is to rearrange the service provided at both 8 bed children's homes (Lansdowne and Old Roar) into 4 smaller 4/5 bed domestic style units, as well as redevelopment of the secure unit. The first step is to restructure the children's residential service from Lansdowne into the 2 units provisionally identified as suitable. This is necessary both to enable the redevelopment of a new secure unit on the Lansdowne site and to improve outcomes for the residents.

4.2 The strategy is subject to the outcome of a number of consultations and formal negotiations with:

- i) children in residence and their families
- ii) local people and neighbours
- iii) planning permission
- iv) staffing issues with trade union representatives
- v) registration by National Care Standards Commission

5. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

5.1 The proposals support the overall objective of providing children's residential care in smaller domestic style units.

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