

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

20 APRIL 2006

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION/KEY DECISION

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Cunningham

REVIEW OF RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES

1. Summary

There has been a decline in Looked After Children from 218 in 2002 to 195 in March 2006, and wherever possible we aim to place children and young people within a family setting. There has been a review of residential care provision and it is proposed that the number of residential beds in Stockton is reduced.

2. Recommendations

- i) Vulcan Way Children's Home is closed.
- ii) Princess Avenue Children's Home continues as a task centred unit providing intake facilities, assessment, remands to care and respite.
- iii) 6 medium to long term beds are retained at the small children's homes at Routledge Road and Rochester Lane.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- i) There has been a decline in the number of Looked After Children. Wherever possible we would aim to place these children in a family setting, so we do not require the current number of residential beds.
- ii) The current percentage of Looked After Children in residential homes is 12%, if the bed base is reduced this would bring our percentage of Looked After Children in residential care to 9.2%. This would bring the Council into line with CSCI expectations of local authority residential provision.

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting is being held, whilst the matter is being considered; not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc.; whether or not they are a member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting, and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room during consideration of the relevant item.

5. General Exception

This matter has not been included in a forward plan, but it is impracticable to defer the proposed decision until it has been included in the next forward plan (due to be published on 13 April 2006) and until the start of the first month to which the next forward plan relates (i.e. 1 May 2006). This is because the children and young people affected, appropriate families and relevant employees have been informed of the proposals and they have indicated that they would wish the decision whether or not to proceed with the proposals to be dealt with without delay. In order to progress as quickly as possible and to minimise the uncertainty and the concerns for all involved, it is therefore necessary to report the proposals to Cabinet on 20 April.

The Proper Officer has informed the Chair of Executive Scrutiny of the matter in respect of which the decision is to be made by notice in writing, and has made a copy of the notice available to the public at the offices of the Council. Five clear working days have elapsed since the Chair of the Executive Scrutiny Committee was informed and a copy of the notice was published.

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SUMMARY

There has been a decline in Looked After Children from 218 in 2002 to 195 in March 2006, and wherever possible we aim to place children and young people within a family setting. There has been a review of residential care provision and it is proposed that the number of residential beds in Stockton is reduced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) Vulcan Way Children's Home is closed.
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DETAIL

1. The Council is considering the long term future of residential children's homes in Stockton on Tees with a view to reducing the residential bed base for Looked After Children.
2. We have seen a slow but steady decline in the overall number of looked after children from 218 at its highest in 2002 to 195 as at March 2006, this number has been maintained on average over the last year.

Current Provision

3. Stockton currently has four Children's Homes for Looked After Children. Details are as follows: -

Princess Avenue

4. Princess Avenue is a two storey building situated within the Victoria Estate, Stockton. This home is owned by the Council. The home provides short term emergency or task centred accommodation for a mixed group of 6 young people aged 11 to 16 years upon admission.

5.	The budget for this unit is:	Staffing	£406,404
		Running costs	<u>65,159</u>
		Total	<u>£471,563</u>

6. Weekly unit costs for this are £1426.60.

Vulcan Way

7. Vulcan Way is a two storey building owned by the Council situated in Thornaby. The home provides medium to long-term placements for a mixed group of 7 young people aged 11 to 16 years on admission. Current occupancy is six leaving a vacancy. Young people are placed from across the Borough.

8.	The budget for this unit is:	Staffing	£388,299
		Running costs	<u>77,785</u>
		Total	<u>£466,084</u>

9. Weekly unit costs for this home are £1214.99.

Rochester Road

10. Rochester Road is a two storey 4 bedroomed Council property in Roseworth, currently leased from Tristar. The home provides accommodation for up to 3 young people of either gender aged between 11 and 18 years, who are unable to live with their families or within a foster home and who require a placement for the duration of their childhood. They offer medium to long-term care. The home currently has three occupants.

11.	The budget for this unit is:	Staffing	£227,506
		Running costs	<u>34,076</u>
		Total	<u>£261,582</u>

12. Weekly unit costs for this home are £1528.73.

Routledge Road

13. Routledge Road is a two storey 4 bedroomed Council property in Tilery, currently leased from Tristar. The home provides medium to long-term placements for a mixed group of 3 young people aged 11 to 16 years on admission. The home currently has three occupants.

14.	The budget for this unit is:	Staffing	£219,238
		Running costs	<u>37,124</u>
		Total	<u>£256,362</u>

15. Unit costs are £1539.92.

Fostering Provision

16. Despite the national trend, Stockton has continued to recruit foster carers and retain existing carers. Between September 2004 and September 2005 we approved a further 17 foster carers including kinship carers for specific young people. The current foster care base is 88 including 8 kinship carers. We have had a small number of carers return from Independent Agencies to rejoin the Local Authority scheme, this is as a consequence of our recent increase in allowances and the plan to roll out the multi agency support services that are being developed for looked after children. This may prove even more attractive to the more experienced carers who currently foster for the independent sector.

17. We have recently launched a paid scheme known as TASC (Training Assessment Support Carers) with a view to providing placements for the more challenging children or young person who would historically or currently be placed in a residential home. The support package and payment structure may ensure that the child or young person could be placed in foster placements as a positive alternative to residential care. There will be no other child or young person in placement.
18. The response to borough wide and sub regional publicity has been mixed. There have been 24 enquiries 14 of which were for mainstream fostering, of the 24 it would appear that 3 are suitable in terms of undergoing the assessment process.

Current Residential Occupancy

19. There are currently 16 young people in placement in total in the four residential homes, leaving 3 vacancies. A further vacancy is anticipated over the next month.
20. Analysis of current residents would suggest that there are 10 young people who will require long term care, and with the exception of two, all have indicated a preference to stay within a residential setting. It is likely that two could be fostered. Five young people are likely to move on within the next year and one may return home within the same timescale.
21. Residential placements will continue to be required for some young people, particularly those who present risks to foster carers or their families and it is clear that an intake/assessment unit at Princess Avenue will continue to be required.

Proposals

22. It is proposed that Vulcan Way Children's home is closed and 6 medium to long-term beds in the two small homes at Rochester Road and Routledge Road are retained. This would reduce our in house residential bed base by 7 and provide a total of 12 beds.
23. It is proposed that Princess Avenue continues as a task centred unit, providing intake facilities, assessment, remands to care and respite. An analysis of usage would suggest that a more flexible approach to offering respite care is developed converting some beds into respite with planned interventions which could assist in maintaining children and young people at home or in family settings. Princess Avenue is the only home that could offer remand facilities and whilst there is a very low take up they have the flexibility to respond should we need to.
24. The current percentage of children and young people who are looked after in residential placements is 12%. This has already significantly reduced from last year. If the bed base is reduced by 7 there would be a total of 18 children in residential placements both within and outside of the Borough. This would mean a further reduction in residential placements to 9.2%.
25. Wherever possible children and young people need to be placed in family settings. We are working to develop a range of foster care placements for those children who cannot remain with their family. These proposals recognise the reduction in overall numbers of children who are looked after by Stockton Borough Council, and will release resources to invest in community based services.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

26. If approval is given to the closure of Vulcan Way Children's Home then the vacated buildings could be used either within CESC or generate a capital receipt for the Council depending on the outcome of the current accommodation review.
27. In accordance with employment legislation and the Council's own HR policies and procedures, appropriate consultation is being conducted with the workforce of the unit, which includes consideration of available employment options (e.g. redeployment, early retirement/voluntary redundancy) on an individual basis.
28. The budget for Vulcan Way CH is £454k per annum. The estimated cost of displacing children from Vulcan Way to foster care would be approximately £321k per annum. Therefore annual savings would be around £133k for reinvestment within children's services. These would of course be offset in the first years by any early retirement/voluntary redundancy costs.
29. There may be short term costs re maintenance and security of the building.

Legal

30. Children Act 1989
Children Act 2004
The Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003

Risk Assessment

31. This report is categorised as medium risk in relation to the closure of a Children's Home, an effective project plan will ensure that it is achieved within timescales.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

32. Links to Community Strategy across all the thematic partnerships.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

33. A consultation process has been agreed. Children and their advocates have been consulted, the staff and Trades Unions have been consulted, individual consultations are being provided for each member of staff. The children's schools have been notified and will be consulted as part of the planning process and individual care plans will be agreed for each child.
34. Ward Councillors have been consulted.

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Background Papers Report to CTMT – 17 February 2006

Education Related Item Yes

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: All

Property:

The closure of Vulcan Way will release a Council owned building.