

## Cabinet – 18 June 2008

### Proposed closure – Castlevue children's home

**Portfolio:** Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's Services

**Service:** Children's Services

**Wards:** Darlaston South

**Key decision:** Yes

**Forward plan:** Yes

#### 1. Summary of report

In line with plans to improve children's homes in Walsall and to ensure residential care settings continue to meet the exacting standards set by Ofsted the closure of Castlevue children's home is proposed.

The home was established in 2001 in response to a need at that time for a small five bedded residential unit for children under 10 with complex emotional and behavioural needs. The children currently placed will be moving to family placements in the summer of 2008, in line with their care plans.

In response to identified best practice, Ofsted guidance and in the light of improvements in recruitment of foster carers for children with more complex needs it is not now necessary to place young children in residential settings. Family placements are recognised as the appropriate care for young children, and such care is shown to provide more nurturing environments for children which support improved outcomes. This report sets out the background and timetable for the closure of Castlevue children's home. The expected date of closure is estimated as 29 August 2008.

On the 16 April 2008 cabinet approved the Moxley Strategic Framework Study (SFS) as the basis for long term regeneration of the Moxley area. Following consultation, Castlevue children's home was identified within the SFS as one of the council owned sites to be re-developed.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the timetable for closure of Castlevue children's home as indicated in **appendix A**.
- 2.2 That Cabinet endorses the proposed strategies to minimise the risk of compulsory redundancy by offering redeployment and voluntary redundancy (Section 4.3).

### **3. Background information**

- 3.1 Castlevue children's home is located in the Moxley area of Walsall and is adjoined to Castlevue older peoples home. Castlevue has provided medium term (6 to 24 months) care and support for up to five children aged between 4 and 9yrs on admission, who have emotional and behavioural difficulties and who cannot live with their families. The overall purpose of Castlevue has been to work with children towards re-integration into a family environment or, where a child's needs are more complex, to identify the type of future placement which would appropriately meet a child's long term care needs.
- 3.2 Since opening in 2001 Castlevue has provided care and support for 23 children, 14 of whom have been reintegrated into families via fostering or adoption and 5 of whom moved onto specialist residential placements. There are currently four children living at the home.
- 3.3 Walsall has successfully reduced the numbers of children who have to be placed in residential care outside of the council boundaries by developing responsive placements and improving the range of services available locally through education and health partners. The recent JAR inspection identified much good practice and improvements in the care provided for looked after children. Walsall has successfully reduced the numbers of children requiring residential care; the vast majority of all children in care are looked after in family settings. The track record in placing children in adoptive placements is one of the best in the country with a year on year increase in children being adopted from care. Since 2004/5, outcomes for children have continuously improved and plans are in place to upgrade the remaining 4 residential homes. Since 2004/05 £2.6m savings have been achieved by enabling children to be looked after locally rather than in expensive independent settings outside of Walsall.
- 3.4 In the summer 2007 DTZ were appointed by the Council and Walsall Housing Group to develop a detailed framework strategy (SFS) for Moxley. On the 16 April 2008 cabinet approved the Moxley SFS as the basis for long term regeneration of the Moxley area. This included the re-development of the currently owned council site on which Castlevue children's home is located.
- 3.5 The current 4 residents at Castlevue are due to move to new placements in line with their care plans. Two of the children have been matched with foster carers in Walsall and will be moving after the end of the school term. The remaining two have ongoing therapeutic needs which will be met in specialist family placements. In the best interests of the children and to ensure compliance with regulation it is proposed that the home should be closed once the current group of children has moved to their identified alternative placements.
- 3.6 Appendix A illustrates the closure timetable for Castlevue. The estimated closure date of 29 August 2008 will ensure that the children currently living at the home will be settled in their new placements in time to begin the new school year, in keeping with their statutory care plans.
- 3.7 A review of future placement options for all looked after children is currently underway in Walsall. This includes the development of a modern intensive

fostering scheme and new services for teenagers who are currently proving difficult to place. Younger children will be placed in family placements with additional support where necessary in line with best practice nationally.

- 3.8 The review will respond to the need for ensuring the continual development of high quality local placements for looked after children of all ages who have more complex emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- 3.9 Approval to close Castlevue in accordance with the proposed timetable would be timely in respect to meeting the future needs of the current group of children, a pro-active response to JAR feedback, Ofsted judgements and the regeneration of the area.

#### **4. Resource considerations**

##### **4.1 Financial:**

The annual revenue costs of running the home total £0.522m. The estimated expenditure in 2008/09 until the closure date is £0.218m. The balance of the 2008/09 revenue budget will be used to fund alternative placement provision and any one-off costs associated with the closure of the home. The intention is to re-deploy staff employed at Castlevue children's home into alternative posts; however some voluntary redundancy payments may be required.

##### **4.2 Legal:**

Castlevue is registered, inspected and regulated by Ofsted in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes. Whilst the home remains in operation continued compliance to the range of required standards and regulations will be necessary.

##### **4.3 Staffing:**

There are currently 19 staff employed at Castlevue children's home who occupy a range of positions. All staff are registered with the re-deployment team and work is actively being undertaken to secure re-deployment into alternative posts. Voluntary redundancy has also been offered to avoid the risk of compulsory redundancy.

#### **5. Citizen impact**

- 5.1 The closure of Castlevue children's home is possible because of improvements in the recruitment and retention of foster carer and enables children with complex needs to be placed in family settings. In addition, the regeneration of the area will create a significantly enhanced area, greater local pride and citizen involvement.

## 6. Community safety

There are no issues for community safety arising from this proposal

## 7. Environmental impact

The National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes 2002 and Children Home Regulations 2001 placed new duties on all service providers in respect of environmental standards. A service review of all Walsall Children's Homes was carried out to assess the condition of accommodation against national standards and regulations (Cabinet report, April 2007).

In respect of Castleview this review highlighted a range of environmental deficits. The poor location of the property, the external appearance, the lack of light and space in the premises and the fact that it adjoins Castleview older person's home, make it unsuitable for meeting the needs of young children. It is also not in keeping with the environmental standards provided and being provided for children looked after within other Walsall children's homes. Ofsted have made no formal recommendations with regards to the suitability of the property; however they have indicated would do so in the future if the building continued to be utilised as a children's home premises.

The redevelopment of the site will transform the local area through the provision of high quality new buildings and improving open spaces.

## 8. Performance and risk management issues

### 8.1 Risk:

The principle risks to the proposal are:

**Risk 1:** Securing alternative appropriate placements for the children currently living at Castleview within time table (Risk level **Low**)

As the closure is not scheduled to take place until August 2008, and the potential for closure has been known for some time, adequate time is available to secure appropriate future care and each child's care plan is being actively progressed to secure a future placement.

**Risk 2:** Redundancy risks (Risk level **Low**)

The staff team at Castleview is relatively small. All staff have been registered with the re-deployment team and work is currently underway to secure all staff alternative employment opportunities. Children's residential services have offered up a number of vacancies within the service and it is hoped that Castleview staff will be re-deployed either into these vacancies or other suitable vacancies within the council.

**Risk 3:** Vacant premises (Risk level **Low**)

Castleview is adjoined to Castleview older people's home which is due to close in the autumn/winter of 2008. Risk assessment has indicated that the vacation of the much larger older people's home prior to the children's home could present safety issues to both staff and children at Castleview children's home with the potential for the vacant larger site to be subjected to vandalism and related anti-social behaviour. Security measures will be taken on the site as appropriate; however, approval of the proposed timetable would assist in mitigating this risk.

As the children's home is a much smaller site, similar risks to the older people's home are reduced and appropriate security measures will be implemented to mitigate any identified risks.

## **8.2 Performance management:**

The delivery of the SRF project is a priority within the 2008/2009 Regeneration Service plan as such the timely closure of Castleview close will contribute to achievement of this plan and the associated BVPI (Cabinet report , April 08)

## **9. Equality implications**

Looked after Children are a vulnerable group at risk of social exclusion and poor life chances. Continued development of a relevant range of appropriate internal placement options for looked after children supports the focus on outcomes (strategy and performance) that form a critical part of the regulatory assessments of children's services by Ofsted and the objectives within the Children and Young People Plan.

The current placements review will inform the future development and expansion of the range of placement options available for children and young people within Walsall and ensure that local placements are available and appropriate to current need. Developing and maintaining positive living environments for children and young people in family placement and residential care will have a direct impact on children's placement stability, emotional health and their educational achievement and attainment in accordance with the requirements of the Children Act 2004.

## **10. Consultation**

Ofsted, Staff groups, Finance, Regeneration, Health and Safety, Unions and Human Resources, have been or will be consulted as an aspect of this proposal. The children have been consulted about their future placements and made their views known to their statutory review.

This time table for closure of Castleview children's home supports Walsall vision to be an excellent authority. In particular, a quality, flexible and continuously developing corporate parenting service will contribute to the priorities in making Walsall a healthy and caring place and ensuring people are safe and secure, including vulnerable children looked after by the local authority.

## Background papers

Cabinet – April 2007 - Phase 2 Modernisation of Walsall Children's Homes.

Cabinet – April 2008 - Moxley Regeneration Framework Study and Possible Use of Compulsory Purchase Powers for land in Harrowby Road Estate.

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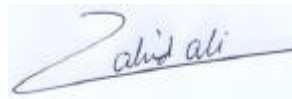
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David Brown  
Executive Director  
6 June 2008



Councillor Zahid Ali  
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6 June 2008

## Appendix A

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