

**Corporate Parenting Board  
10 January 2023**

**Children's Residential Service**

**Executive Summary:**

Walsall's Children's Residential Service aims to provide sustainable quality care to children from across the Borough who are unable to reside with their families and for whom foster care is not considered a suitable option at that time.

This report provides an overview of changes to the current service model through expansion and aims to improve quality and outcomes for our children.

The June 2021 Cabinet endorsed the plan by Children's Services to open and run two new children's homes to be run by Walsall Children's Services. These homes would specifically focus on the more complex, hard to place and therefore more costly children, and those who were in the process of being able to return home or step down to foster care

**Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:**

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on

- the activities and progress being made in the three current children's homes .
- The progress in establishing 2 new homes

**Recommendations:**

That the Board notes the progress made by the service.

**Background papers:**

Cabinet Report submitted 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021. Redesign of Children's Home

**Corporate Parenting Pledges**

The Promise: Younger Children 5-11 years

The Promise: Older Children 12-15 years

The Promise: Older Children & Care Leavers 16 years plus.

**Resource and legal considerations:**

**Legal considerations:**

- The Children Act 1989 (Section 22(4)) requires the Council to consult with young people and seek their views on decisions affecting them. The proposal will also require formal consultation with staff and their trade unions.
- The Children Act 1989 (Section 22G) requires local authorities to provide sufficient accommodation within the authority area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after.

- Public authority decision makers are under a non-delegable ongoing duty to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. (Public Sector Equality duty).
- Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 and the statutory guidance issued under it imposes duty on a local authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way on which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Regulation 49 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 requires the Responsible Individual and or the Registered Person to give notice in writing to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Ofsted as soon as it is practicable to do so if a registered provider proposes to cease to carry on or manage the home.
- The Government has introduced new legislation in 2021, prohibiting local authorities from the use of unregulated accommodation for children under the aged of 16 years. Children in care under 16 will no longer be allowed to be accommodated in unregulated independent or semi-independent placements.

### **Resource considerations:**

The three current children's homes are owned as part of council's assets. The council has allocated funding for asset and running costs.

In June 2021 a capital budget of up to £1,071,000 was agreed to fund the costs of purchasing 2 Children's Homes based on average cost of a four/five bedroomed house in Walsall being between £350 to £450K at the time of application. The two new homes have been purchased and work is underway to securing planning, Ofsted registration, refurbishment and furnishing costs of both properties.

### **Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

The Walsall Right for Children Transformation Programme contributes to several of our Council Corporate Plan priorities:

#### **a) People**

We do and will continue to work with children, young people and their families to ensure they have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities.

#### **b) Internal Focus**

The programme is focused on a change of working, to ensure that within Children's Services we are as efficient and effective as we can be.

#### **c) Children**

The primary objective is to ensure that the right support is in place so that children in care can have the best start and are safe from harm, are happy, healthy and learning well.

**Citizen impact:**

The current service and planned growth provide Walsall's Looked After Children with improved opportunities to live, grow up and go to school in Walsall. We anticipate have a duty for children to live closer to home

The addition of 2 new homes creates opportunities for children to remain and participate in the life of their community; it also allows them to continue attending the same school. It develops a sense of place and belonging. It improves access to social support, health and community services, such as arts, culture, sport and leisure. It aids inclusion.

We aspire to look after our children in care within or close to Walsall. This allows for the maintenance of family contact and continuity of both education and healthcare. It also allows for a seamless transition towards independence for those children aged over 16 who will most likely be looking to assume adulthood and settle within the Borough. They will be close to any work experience, training and/or employment opportunities that may become available and will have ready access to their Social Worker or Personal Adviser situated within localities.

**Environmental impact:**

There is no identified environmental impact from the project

**Performance management:**

The Regulated Management Board has oversight of the effectiveness of the existing children's homes ensuring that we are meeting children's homes standards and wider service development.

The Children's Residential Steering Group responsible for the implementation of the redesign of Children's Homes is chaired by the Director of Children's Social Work and meets on a monthly basis and includes colleagues from Finance, Corporate Landlord and Asset Management to progress actions and manage identified risks.

A project risk register has been established for the project and provides updates on progress, identified risks and mitigation. Risks will continue to be identified, mitigations sought and impact managed through this process.

The progress of the project will report to the Children's Services Directorate Management Group and Capital and Asset Board and will not proceed without their approvals.

There is a Regulatory Board and Residential Steering Group chaired by the Director of Children's Social Work who meet regularly to monitor progress of the development in our children's homes.

**Reducing inequalities:**

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is currently being completed but is not expected to identify any concerns around the creation of the new projects  
Analysis will be completed and updated as we progress

## **Consultation:**

All employees who work with the Children's Home Service are given the opportunity to contribute to the Children's Home Scoping Exercise undertaken in 2020/21.

Care experienced children contributed to the initial scoping exercise, as did professionals from other teams and/ or agencies. Through engagement with the Children in Care Council, Walsall's care experienced children will be consulted on the ongoing plans to redesign the Children's Home Service.

Community Consultation around plans for the new homes has now commenced and will continue throughout the planning application period.

The consultation will inform the EQIA and will report to the Children's Home Redesign Steering Group, which is chaired by the Director of Social Work

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## Report: Children’s Residential Care

### 1.0 Children in Care

1.1 The Council’s looked after children population has increased and continued to grow since 2019, with a net increase of 5 children in 2019/20 with 671 children in care compared to 2018/19 when there were 614 children in care. During 2020/21 children in care increased to a peak of 693 in August 2020 reducing to 671 by March 2021 and 661 at March 2022.

There has been a gradual reduction in children in our care over the last 8 months and at 30<sup>th</sup> November there were 646 children in care. Of these 75 children were in living external residential placements in equating to 11.6% of children in care. The number of children accommodated in residential provision has more than doubled since 2019 from 37 to 75 in the last three years.

1.2 The increase in children in residential care and the demand for placements is at critical level, with a shortage nationally and locally of suitable foster carers for older children and residential provision. The market is saturated with high numbers of local authorities in competition for every bed across the country. The availability of children’s homes has meant that some children have needed to be placed in unregistered provision. There is an increase in children living more than 20 miles away from their homes. This is largely due to ongoing pressures in relation to placement sufficiency and the lack of available placements for older children and those with more complex needs.

1.3 Pressures on the cost of residential provision is high and the average cost of residential care has increased over the last 5 years. The total cost of external residential placements in 2021/22 was £11.9 million. Placement sufficiency is impacted locally, regionally and nationally as residential provision for children with complex needs is not readily available. The Council is finding it increasingly difficult to place children, particularly those with more complex needs which has meant some children are placed at distances as far as Scotland and London and experience many moves. Independent providers are currently in a strong position clearly evidencing the need to create more in-house services alongside plans to reduce the number of children coming into residential care.

### 1.4 Walsall Average Weekly Unit Cost for External Residential Placement

External Residential	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	Trend
Weekly Cost (£)	£3,445	£3,820	£3,960	£4,675	£5,772	
% Change		11%	4%	18%	23%	
Outturn (£ m)	5.7	6.1	7.2	9.6	11.9	
% Change		7%	18%	33%	24%	

Source: DfE and the Finance Team

- The average weekly unit cost for external residential placement had been increasing by **68%** from **£3,445** in 2017/18 to **£5,772** in 2021/2022.
- The annual outturn costs for external residential placement had been increasing by **109%** from **£5.7m** in 2017/2018 to **£11.9m** in 2021/22.

**1.5** The private providers market, whilst offering placements to children and young people, are also subject to the same external scrutiny from Ofsted as Local Authorities. The advice from central government is that Local Authorities should only place children in Good or Outstanding children's homes. The impact this has had for private providers is that they are reluctant to accept placements for more challenging children who may create disruption in the home, cause damage, pose a threat to other young people and staff and who are involved in criminal activity. The impact this has for local authorities is that they are often faced with paying extremely high costs to secure a solo placement and to secure additional staffing.

**1.6** A large percentage of Walsall's Looked After Children live in a Children's Home which is 20 miles or more outside of their local communities. Where children have moved to live outside of Walsall then this can have an impact in respect of social work and IRO time and expenses, which potentially incurs additional costs. Having to move outside of Walsall can lead to a breakdown or strain on longstanding relationships with family, previous carers and friends. It could also lead to excessive travel time to school or possibly a change of school. All these factors will affect the child's emotional wellbeing and their sense of identity.

**1.7** The complexity of need of some of our children means that we have, on several occasions, needed to place children far from their family homes and also, at times, in unregistered provisions. Increasing our footprint within Walsall will enable us to accommodate more children within Walsall and reduce the need to consider unregistered provisions.

**1.8** Increasing sufficiency internally will enable us to secure appropriate accommodation for children experiencing disruption who are under the age of 16 years who may be left with no available placement

**1.9 Unregistered Provision:** The demand for children's homes has also impacted by new legislation introduced by the Government in September 2021 prohibiting the placement of children under the age of 16 in unregistered children's homes. Placing children in unregistered provision is an absolute last resort. With the increasing rejection from registered providers to agree to accommodate some of our more challenging young people, there has at times been the need to access these services. Ofsted heavily scrutinise us around placing children outside of regulated services and it is vital that, where this has occurred, we maintain close scrutiny of the progress of our children and the performance of the provider. Some of our children are living in accommodation which is registered by CQC. In December 2022 there were 5 children under the age of 6 living in unregulated provision.

## **2.2 Operational services**

**2.1** The current portfolio of three Children's Homes operated by the Local Authority offers eight registered beds across two homes (Hilton Road and Redruth Road) for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In addition, a six-bedroomed Short-Breaks service (Bluebells) for Children with Disabilities.

**Redruth Road** provides care for up to four young people and is currently rated as **Outstanding** with Ofsted. The last Inspection was carried out in October 2021.

**Hilton Road** also provides care for up to four young people and is currently rated as **Requires Improvement to be Good** following inspection in May 2022. The home was judged to be **Inadequate** earlier in the year, but sufficient improvement was made to improve the judgement. Actions identified from the inspection have all been met.

**Bluebells** Offers a Short-Breaks service for Children with Disabilities and currently operates for four nights per week. The home was rated **Good** at the last Ofsted Inspection in February 2022. The Ofsted Action Plan was completed following the visit and all actions identified have been met.

## 2.2 Occupancy Levels

Occupancy levels at Hilton Road have been impacted due to a number of factors. The Inadequate Ofsted judgement from earlier in the year and the subsequent decision of the Registered Manager to resign left the home with no identified Manager and several staffing vacancies. Recruitment of a replacement Manager has been challenging, reflecting the national picture. A new Manager was appointed in mid-October and is currently awaiting his Fit-Person interview with Ofsted. Staff have now predominantly been recruited to vacant posts and the home is now opened up to referrals again.

Redruth occupancy was 100% for over a year, but one child has recently moved on and, following a period of stabilisation, the home will look to offer the fourth bed for another admission. The home is close to full staffing.

Bluebells currently has thirteen children accessing short breaks. There have been a number of difficulties in recruiting staff to the predominantly weekend contracts, but work is underway to make posts more attractive to potential candidates. The Registered Manager is currently working alongside the Group Manager and CWD team to try and best match children into the home

## 2.3 New Children's Homes

In 2020, a review of Walsall Children's Homes was undertaken in respect of the three children's homes. Bluebells was excluded from this review as this provision was reviewed in 2019 and offers short term breaks to children with disabilities. As part of the New Ways of Thinking Framework, the review focused on the benefits, costs and opportunities to increasing the number of internal children's homes for Walsall's Looked After Children. The outcome of the Review recommended a redesign and diversification of the internal Children's Homes for an alternative and forward-thinking option for the future service delivery of residential care provision for children in Walsall. This proposal saw the disposal of one of the existing children's homes (Lichfield Road), and the establishment of 2 children's homes providing care for a total of five children. This included the acquisition of two suitable properties for the redesigned service.

## 2.4 Purpose of the New Homes

**Home 1** – located in Walsall and this home will offer up to 1:1 support to children on a short-term basis for up to 3 children. Children will be admitted to the home from families or foster Care breakdowns for a period of assessment involving Social Care, Health & Education which will support the plan for the child to return as many children back to their families as is possible. Where this cannot be achieved, then the home will work closely

with the fostering service Fostering Team to try and match children to appropriate carers. This service is deemed critical in reducing cost and improving placement sufficiency across Walsall. The home is currently undergoing refurbishment and is expected to be operational by May 2023.

**Home 2** – Located in Walsall, the home will provide up to higher levels of staffing of up to 3:2 support for children who are currently proving hard to identify suitable regulated accommodation who have been accommodated in unregistered provisions. Again, this service is critical to improving the Council's placement sufficiency and the home will provide a platform to support the stabilisation of behaviours and identify appropriate longer-term registered services for children.

## **2.5 Recruitment**

Recruitment of staff for the homes commenced in April 2022 and there is a rolling advert for staffing. A Home Manager and 2 Assistant Managers have been appointed. Recruitment for the additional Home Manager and residential care staff is ongoing. There are regional and national challenges in recruiting suitably qualified staff to these posts. Recruitment was identified as a priority at the last project board meeting to avoid the homes opening without sufficient staff and therefore incurring extra expenditure

## **2.6 Quality Assurance and Audit Framework**

Children's residential care settings – often known as 'children's homes' – are subject to regulation through individual registration of the homes themselves and the homes' 'registered manager' and through a cycle of regulatory inspection carried out by Ofsted under the Social Care Common Inspection Framework [Social care common inspection framework (SCCIF): children's homes for April 2022 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))]. This SCCIF framework is separate from and unconnected to the inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework for the inspection of local authorities' children's services.

Ofsted publishes children's homes inspection reports on their reports website in an anonymised form to protect children. Published inspection reports do not contain any of the following:

- The name of the home
- The address of the home
- Any information that identifies the location of the home
- Any information that identifies an individual child or staff member (other than the Responsible Individual and the Registered Manager at the home)

2022 has seen the introduction within Walsall's Children's Homes of a more stringent Quality Assurance and Audit framework.

- A Managers "Golden Hour" Template has been introduced alongside a more detailed Managers Audit.
- SCCIF Audits have also commenced to support Managers to improve the overall quality of Service.
- A new Regulation 44 Visitor was identified to improve external monitoring and regular review meetings are now taking place with NYAS to review the effectiveness of the Independent Visitor reports.

## **2.7 Consultation with Children in Care**

All three homes consult regularly with children around their views, wishes and feelings through House Meetings, Individual Key work sessions and engagement with the Children in Care Council. Suggestions made by children are listened to and form an integral part of the running of the homes. Feedback requests are distributed to parents, Social Workers and other involved stakeholders to establish what others think we are doing well and where we could improve.

## **2.8 FLASH (CAMHS) Consultation**

There have been some challenges to this crucial part of the service. Previously, Walsall FLASH team had been visiting both Redruth and Hilton Road fortnightly and supporting staff with therapeutic approaches to working with children in the service. Some staffing difficulties within the FLASH service has meant that this service ceased altogether for a few months across the summer and autumn. From November 2022, Sandwell have agreed to deliver 4-weekly Consultations to the two homes as an interim arrangement. Moving forward, we need to consider how we can ensure uninterrupted and consistent Clinical support for the residential homes staff in providing the best possible therapeutic parenting to our children.

## **2.9 Therapeutic Model of care in our Homes**

The PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) Model been identified as the most suitable therapeutic model for the service moving forward. Some staff have already received DDP (Dyadic Development Psychotherapy) training which incorporates PACE, whilst whole teams will attend a 4-day PACE course (including one day around Attachment and Trauma) in the first quarter of 2023. Having an identified therapeutic model to work within is considered critical to improving practice and achieving best possible outcomes for children.

## **2.10 Elected Members**

Cabinet members are now allocated to each of the existing homes.

**Cllr Jukes – Hilton Road**  
**Cllr Worrall – Redruth Road**  
**Cllr Hicken – Bluebells**

All Councillors will be sent invitations to visit the respective homes in due course