

BRIEFING NOTE

**TO: Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

DATE: 21 June, 2016

RE: Member Visits to Walsall's Children's Homes

Purpose

To provide an overview of Walsall's Children's Homes and appoint members to undertake a programme of visits.

Recommendations:

1. That five Panel members nominate themselves to undertake a programme of visits during the 2016/17 Municipal Year.
2. That the appointment of Members to undertake a programme of visits be considered at the first meeting of the Committee, each Municipal Year.

Background

Walsall operates five Children's Homes located in Alumwell, New Invention, the Butts, Park Hall and Willenhall. Each home is registered, inspected and regulated by Ofsted in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children's Home (Amendment) Regulations 2011 & 2014 and the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes.

Children's Homes provide support and care for some of our most vulnerable children and young people. Many children placed in residential care have highly complex and challenging needs. In order to meet the needs of these children and young people, the environment in which they are cared for should be:-

- safe,
- stimulating and ambitious,
- able to establish strong and positive relationships;
- attentive to their emotional, mental and physical needs.

Each of the homes operated by the Council has a specific purpose and function. Further detail on each care home is attached as appendix 1 to this briefing note.

Opportunities and benefits of visits

It is not a statutory requirement that Members should visit Children's Homes, however, Members of the Committee expressed a wish to formalise arrangements for visits to take place in 2014/15. Each Home has since been visited by Members on several occasions and their findings were reported to meetings of the Scrutiny Panel on 14th April, 2015 and 19th April, 2016.

Visiting Children's Homes not only assists Members in their role as scrutiny Members but also as corporate parents. Visits are welcomed as a positive step which could give a number of benefits and opportunities in supporting Members in their role as corporate parents including:

1. Supporting the duty to ensure that the welfare of children in care is safeguarded and promoted by providing an insight into the quality of care and the welfare of children and young people looked after in our children's homes.
2. Understanding how well children living in our children's homes are supported by both the Local Authority and its partners. What's good and what needs to be done to improve that support.
3. The promotion of aspiration, ambition and expectation for our children and young people. Do the children get the same opportunities as any good parent would expect for their own children?
4. Providing an opportunity to listen to children and young people and help them to feel valued.
5. Ensuring clear and strong governance arrangements that help ensure good quality services and interventions are in place that meet the needs of looked after children.
6. Being able to answer the question *"is this good enough for my child?"*

Children and Young People's views on visits

Discussions were held in 2014/15 with children and young people in each of the Children's Homes to seek their views and thoughts about the possibility of Member's visiting. They welcomed the idea and were interested in how the visits might help them understand the role of Members and how such visits could benefit their home. A general view from the children and young people was that visits should be planned in advance and undertaken regularly i.e. twice a year.

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Bluebells

Bluebells provides residential short term breaks for up to six children and young people with a disability. The home aims to work in partnership with Children and Young People, their families and a multi-disciplinary team of professionals in the development of an individual care plan. The objective of this is to identify, co-ordinate and ensure the delivery of services to meet the care, communication, emotional, physical, social, educational and spiritual needs of the individual child or young person.

Hilton Road

Hilton Road children's home operates within a therapeutic framework, offering long term care for up to four young people with complex needs.

The overarching purpose of the home is to ensure that the young people within their care are provided with needs led and planned services which will secure the best possible outcomes now and into adult life and that care is provided in an environment which is homely, safe, empowering and nurturing.

Lichfield Road

Lichfield Road children's home provides care and support for up to 4 children and young people with a range of needs, who are unable to live at home. The aim of Lichfield Road is to work in partnership with relevant agencies and families to provide consistent and good quality needs led packages of care. The focus is to rehabilitate the child or young person back to their families or to allow residential assessments to be made to underpin the identification of long term placements.

Redruth Road

Redruth Road provides long-term care, support and accommodation for up to four children who have physical and or learning disabilities.

The home aims to work in partnership with children, their families and a multi-disciplinary team of professionals in creating an individual care plan to identify, co-ordinate and ensure the delivery of services to meet the care, communication, emotional, physical, social, educational and spiritual needs of the individual child.

Spindle Tree Rise

Spindle Tree Rise sets out to help and support up to six young people between the ages of 13 – 18yrs to achieve the best they can in relation to their health, wellbeing and education. At Spindle Tree Rise one of the primary aims is to support young people to work towards gaining and embedding practical and emotional skills, which will help them to live successfully in adulthood. Spindle Tree Rise work to ensure that the young people have opportunities and experiences, which enable them to develop emotionally, mentally and physically so that they can grow into fulfilled independent adults who are able to contribute to their community in a positive way.