

## **Cabinet – 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

### **Phase 2 Modernisation of Walsall Children's Homes**

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

**Service:** Children's Services

**Wards:** All

**Key decisions:** Yes

**Forward plan:** Yes

#### **Summary of report**

The National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes 2002 and Children Home regulations 2002 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. The review highlighted a number of key findings:

**Short Heath Children's Home** – at risk of imminent failure in respect of both conditions and suitability.

**New Invention Children's Home** – work required in respect of building condition and essential work required in respect of suitability.

**Moxley Children's Home** – work required in respect of building condition and suitability.

**The Butts Children's Home** – long term work required in respect of building condition and work required in respect of suitability.

**Central Walsall Respite Home** – work required in respect of conditions and long term work required in respect of suitability.

A first phase transformation plan has been carried out that involved three main elements:

1. The re-provision of the Short Heath children's home that involved land sale, demolition, and replacement by the construction of a new home as a modern fit for purpose home.
2. The refurbishment of Parkhall children's home (previously private Foster home with a contract to Walsall Council); which was developed

into a new long term children's Home facility specifically geared to meet the needs of children and young people with a disability.

3. Extension and health and safety improvements to the respite Children's Home in central Walsall.

The cycle map diagram at **Appendix 1** and report at **Appendix 2** provides full details of Walsall Council Residential Children's Service proposals to further modernise Walsall's Children's homes through a second phase of the transformation agenda. The report at **Appendix 2** illustrates the benefits to children's services and the areas of risk if no changes are made.

## **Recommendations**

That Cabinet is asked to approve the proposal to continue with the modernisation of children's residential services within Walsall and approve the use of £125,000 of unsupported borrowing to fund the capital works.

## **Resources**

The programme will be financed through the use of un-supported borrowing and the balance of the Short Heath receipt as detailed.

- During the first phase of transformation a capital receipt of £1,175,000 was gained through the sale of the Short Heath land asset.
- The receipt provided capital expenditure to build a new home on the Short Heath site at a Value for Money cost of approximately £780,000
- The receipt balance of £395,000 is conditionally reserved to Children's Services to facilitate improvements across the remaining Residential Children's Homes.
- £46,000 has already financed small improvement programmes at Davenport Road (Temporary Children Home – link to Short Heath rebuild) Parkhall Children's Home and the Short Heath children's home re-build.
- A budget fund of approximately £474,000 would be used for the purchase and decoration of a new property to replace the home at New Invention and refurbish The Butts children's home.
- Unsupported borrowing of £125,000 is needed to support the proposal. The repayment costs would be funded from within existing revenue budgets.
- £19,000 has been retained as a legal and contingency fund.
- Proposals for Moxley Children's home will be brought back to Cabinet once the re-provision of this site has been considered in conjunction with adult services and the future of the adjoining site has been determined.

The second phase cycle map is shown within **Appendix 1**, which illustrates the financial and time planning considerations for the phase 2 improvement too two of the three remaining homes not covered in the phase 1 transformation.

## **Citizen impact**

Implementation of this modernisation proposal will help ensure good and common environmental standards across all of our children's homes. It will also improve our local ability to successfully manage the care of children and young people from Walsall within Walsall. The proposal will maintain continuity in aspects of children and young people's lives such as contact with families, education and leisure through maximising local statutory partnerships and extended services.

## **Community safety**

There are no implications for community safety arising out of this report.

## **Environmental impact**

Walsall Council has expanded its children's residential provision in recent years and now has six Children's Homes. Each home is registered, inspected and regulated by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 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.

Implementation of this proposal is urgently required in order to ensure that we meet the legislative requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 and to ensure that we are positively responding to the Change for children, Corporate Parenting and Every Child Matters agenda in ensuring positive outcomes for all children and young.

In addition, as from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 Ofsted will assume responsibility for the inspection of Children's Homes. Initial discussions with the inspector have indicated that there will be changes in respect of the inspection regime with Ofsted adopting a more stringent approach to providers who fail to meet the required standards.

## **Performance and risk management issues**

CSCI have indicated that improvement or re-provision of the children's home at New Invention is an urgent requirement and failure to comply could result in enforcement action against the Council. Furthermore, in the most recent children and young person's directorate asset management plan it is identified that condition of the building is satisfactory however the building is not suitable for its purpose.

The children and young person's directorate asset management plan identified that condition of the building at The Butts is good with work being required in the longer term. However, the internal fabric of the property is not suited to the task that it performs as a residential resource providing care for children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of

the walls in the property are boarded over and are subject to repeated damage and require frequent repair. CSCI have identified that additional communal space, work to property frontage, plastering work and magnetic door closure system is needed to make the building compliant with standards.

The children and young person's directorate asset management plan assessed the overall condition and use of the facility at Moxley. This site adjoins provision for elderly services and therefore we will consider the use of this site in conjunction with adult services once the future of the adjoining site has been determined.

The overall proposal includes consideration to ensuring that local children placements within Walsall are maintained in a manner that avoids inflating unit costs. The property at New Invention will remain occupied until a property has been purchased and The Butts Children's home has been refurbished.

### **Equality implications**

Looked After Children are a vulnerable group at risk of social exclusion and poor life chances. Continued transformation of residential children's services would support the focus on LAC outcomes (strategy and performance) that will form a critical part of the regulatory assessments of children's services by CSCI and the objectives within the Children and Young People Plan. A positive living environment for Children in residential care would mean that children and young people would be more likely to achieve and attain in line with the Children Act 2004 requirements as the means for promoting their wellbeing and development.

### **Consultation**

CSCI, staff groups, finance, adult services, property services, planning and health and safety, have been or will be consulted as an aspect of this second stage transformation.

The objectives of the transformation plan support the Walsall vision to be an excellent authority by 2008. In particular, a high quality and continuously improving children's residential 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. Local placements also make it easier for local children to access local services.

### **Vision 2008**

The objectives of the proposal support the Walsall Vision. In particular, a high quality and continuously improving residential service contributes to the priorities in relation to making Walsall a healthy and caring place and ensuring people are safe and secure, including vulnerable children looked after by the local authority. Local placements also make it easier for local children to access local services.

## Background papers

CSCI inspection of Walsall Children Homes to be found at [www.csci.gov.uk](http://www.csci.gov.uk). Cabinet report re-provision of Stroud Avenue September 05, Cabinet Report, Purchase of Redruth Road Children's Home cabinet report July 2004, Capital Programme 2004 to 2009, Residential Modernisation Plan **Appendix 1** –cycle diagram and report **Appendix 2** and the Management Asset Plan 2006/2007

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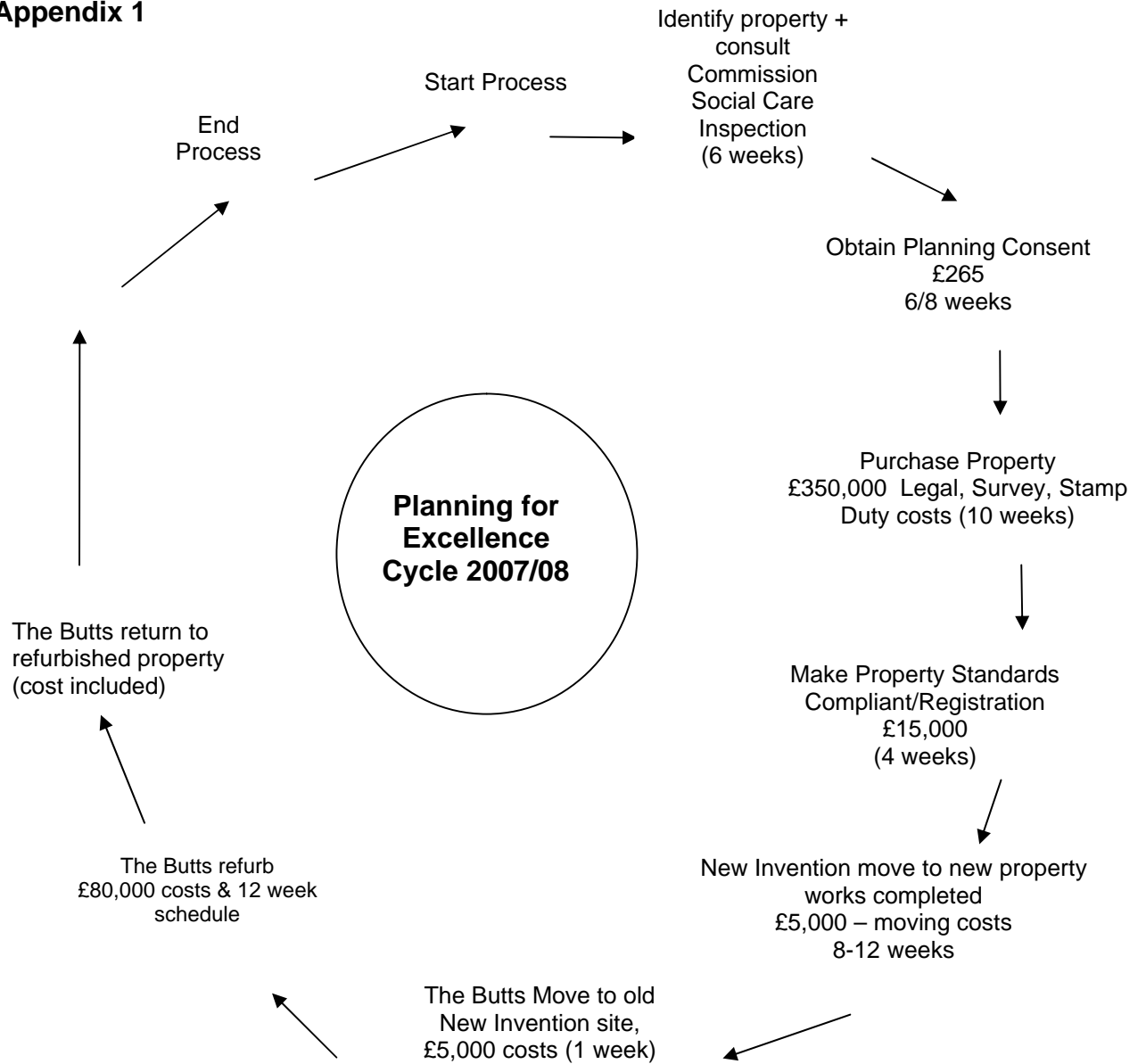
**Deputy Leader:**  
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3 April 2007



**Portfolio holder: Councillor Zahid Ali**  
3 April 2007

## Phase 2 Transformation

### Appendix 1



**Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council  
Children's Services**

**Report to the Executive Leadership Team on a phase 2 Proposal to  
Modernise Walsall's Children's Homes.**

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper will outline a proposal for the further modernisation of Walsall's Children's Homes, through the second phase of the transformation agenda.

1.2 This report will illustrate the benefits to children's services and the areas of risk if no changes are made.

2. Proposal summary

2.2 This paper sets out a proposal to purchase a new children's home as a direct replacement to an existing home which is not fit for purpose and the modernise/refurbishment of another children's home. This proposal forms the second part of a programme of planned environmental transformation and outlines the focus for a future phase three transformation. Key areas are as follows:

- To refurbish The Butts children's home to ensure that it meets the required standards and remains fit for purpose
- To relocate the New Invention children's home to an alternative property which meets the required standards and which is fit for purpose
- To develop in conjunction with adults services the remit for a third phase of modernisation to improve standards of accommodation for the children at Moxley children's home.
- To devise a financial scheme to support the modernisation agenda through the use of unsupported borrowing and the balance of the capital receipt from the sale of land at Short Heath (see last page of this report).

3. Background to this proposal

3.1 Walsall has expended its children's residential stock in recent years. Walsall has six Children's homes each of which are registered, inspected and Regulated by the Commission for Social Care Inspection 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.

3.2 The Children's Homes National Minimum Standards are published in accordance with section 23 (1) of the Care Standards Act 2001

and identify 8 specific areas of regulation. In keeping with the principles of the Every Child Matters agenda the National Minimum Standards focus on ensuring and supporting positive and achievable outcomes for children and young people.

The standards are grouped under a range of themes including Quality of Care and Environmental matters.

3.3 Given the introduction of the National minimum standards in 2002 and specific new duties on service providers in respect of environmental standards, a review of children's home accommodation took place across the service. This local review took account of both the condition of the buildings and the views of the Registered Managers and Commission for Social Care Inspection as to the suitability of the buildings to task. At the time the following was highlighted:

- Short Heath children's home – at risk of imminent failure in respect of both conditions and suitability
- New Invention children's home – work required in respect of building condition, essential work required in respect of suitability
- Moxley children's home – work required in respect of building condition and suitability
- The Butts children's home – long term work required in respect of building condition, work required in respect of suitability
- Central Walsall respite children's home – work required in respect of conditions, long term work required in respect of suitability.

3.4 In 2003, the first phase of the children's home modernisation agenda began with Short Heath children's home being demolished and a new home being constructed on the same site in its place.

3.5 In 2004, we continued with this first phase of the modernisation agenda and purchased and refurbished a modern property in the Park hall area of Walsall, which has been developed into a new facility specifically geared to meet the needs of children and young people with a disability.

#### 4. Current conditions of children's homes premises:

##### 4.1 New Invention home:

In the most recent children and young person's directorate draft asset management plan it is identified that condition of the building is satisfactory however the building is not suitable for its purpose.

In 2002/3 it was identified by the National Care Standards Commission that although the team at New Invention provided a



good standard of care for the children and young people the home itself did not meet environmental standards as required by the National minimum standards for children's homes 2001. When CSCI assumed inspection responsibilities they more specifically identified the following:

- The pantry requires internal relocation
- The house is in general need of refurbishment and modernisation
- All bedrooms must be on the first floor
- Additional communal space for the children was necessary

In addition, within the last year the capacity of New Invention has been reduced from five to four children due to a ground floor bedroom becoming unfit for purpose as a result of new building regulations.

The commission for social care inspection have indicated that they require urgent action to address the environmental issues at this site and they will issue a notice of concern if action is not taken speedily.

A value for money appraisal of options and risk management was completed with the assistance of Estates Management. This determined the best route forward to be the purchase of a new fit for purpose property.

Further details regarding the options appraisal are attached are detailed later on in this report.

#### 4.2 The Butts home:

In the most recent children and young person's directorate draft asset management plan it is identified that condition of the building is good with work being required in the longer term. However, the internal fabric of the property is not suited to the task that it performs as a residential resource providing care for children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of the walls in the property are boarded over and are subject to repeated damage and require frequent repair.

The commission for Social Care Inspection identified the following in respect of compliance with standards:

- Additional communal space is required as current space is limited
- Works are required to the frontage of the property
- The property would benefit from plastered walls
- A magnetic door closure system is required to all communal internal doors

#### 4.3 Moxley home:

This home forms part of the site of an older people's home and cares for five children, all of who are under eleven.

In the most recent children and young person's directorate draft asset management plan has overlooked the assessment of the condition of the property however due to the location of the property, the external appearance, the lack of light and space in the premises and the fact that it adjoins the older person's home it is not ideally suited to providing services for children.

Although the Commission for Social Care Inspection have made no formal recommendations with regards to the suitability of the property as yet, it has been indicated that this will be the case in the future. Additionally, the re-provision of elderly services and the potential closure and reuse of the adjoining residential site is a potential cause for concern.

Given this, the proposal is that the re-provision of this site is considered in conjunction with adults services once the future of the adjoining site has been determined.

#### 5. The Modernisation Proposal:

5.1 The proposal is to purchase a new property within the Walsall area which can accommodate five children and young people, is fit for purpose and meets the standards as required by the National Minimum Standards.

5.2 Once a suitable property has been identified, planning permission gained and the purchase completed, it is proposed that the team and young people from the New Invention site will occupy the property.

5.3 As New Invention will then be a vacant property it is proposed that staff and young people from The Butts home temporarily move to New Invention whilst the internal re-furbishment of their property is completed. Once the refurbishment is completed they would then move back to The Butts.

5.4 As previously indicated it is proposed that plans for the Moxley home are considered in further detail once the future of the adjoining site as a residential resource for the elderly is confirmed.

#### 6. Financial Implications:

6. 1 During the first phase of the children's homes modernisation agenda a part of the land at the Short Heath site was disposed of to

create the finance to facilitate improvements across the service. This secured a capital receipt of £1,175,000 which was ring fenced to Children's Residential Services.

The first phase of the improvement agenda has now been completed and the remaining monies total £349,000. It is proposed that further funding of £125,000 is secured through the use of unsupported borrowing.

This gives an overall budget of approximately £474,000. It is planned that £474,000 (including legal and contingency) will be used for the purchase and decoration of a new property to replace the home at New Invention and the refurbishment of the home at The Butts. However, to ensure local placements for children and young people within Walsall and to avoid inflated unit costs through the use of external placements, the property at New Invention will need to remain occupied until such a time that a property has been purchased and The Butts has been refurbished.

The repayment costs of the £125,000 of unsupported borrowing will be met from within existing revenue budgets.

Supporting evidence and the financial details in support of this proposal can be found on the last page of this report.

#### 7. Benefits arising from proposal implementation:

- Clear children's services evidence of striving towards the councils 2008 vision for excellence
- Clear evidence of striving towards the aims of the children plan and the change for children agenda's.
- Improving services to children and young people who are looked after within Walsall
- Buildings which are in good condition but also fit for purpose for the long term
- More favourable working conditions for employees of the authority
- Compliance with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes, which encompass ensuring better outcomes for children and young people
- Having assets within buildings which increase over time
- Evidence of commitment to Corporate parenting and providing the best services for Looked After Children within Walsall
- Cost effective local residential services for the Children and Young people of Walsall
- An additional residential placement within Walsall
- A reduction in unit costs due to an increase in internal placements

## 8. Consequences of not modernising:

- Potential Closure of the New Invention home with the loss of four/five internal placements
- Increased number of children and young people being looked after outside of Walsall and at increased weekly costs
- Potential enforcement notices being issued by CSCI with adverse publicity for the Council.
- Adverse inspection scores in respect of environmental conditions, which may have an impact in respect of the forthcoming JAR
- Risks to the achievement of positive outcomes for children looked after in residential care in Walsall
- A deterioration in the relationship between Walsall and CSCI which at present is largely positive

## 9. Conclusion:

9.1 Implementation of this proposal is urgently required in order to ensure that we meet the legislative requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 and to ensure that we are positively responding to the Change for children, Corporate Parenting and Every Child Matters agendas in ensuring positive outcomes for all children and young people living within residential care.

9.2 Implementation of this modernisation proposal will ensure good and common environmental standards across all of our children's homes. It will also improve our local ability to successfully manage the care of children and young people from Walsall within Walsall, whilst also maintaining continuity in aspects of children and young people's lives such as contact with families, education and leisure through maximising local partnership arrangements.

## 10. Recommendation

10.1 EMT is asked in principle to approve this proposal to continue with the modernisation of children's residential services within Walsall and approve the use of unsupported borrowing of £125, 000.

10.2 EMT to support the tabling of this proposal to Cabinet is also a recommendation.

## **Options appraisal and risk assessment, New Invention children's home :**

In the spirit of providing value for money and good quality local placements for Looked After children and young people an unexpected increase in the estimated costs of the refurbishment has given the opportunity to complete an appraisal of our options to improve the physical standards at New Invention. These options are as follows:

1. **No further action should be taken.**

**Risk assessment:** This would inevitably result in the revocation of the registration of New Invention children's home and a reduction of local places for Looked after children and young people. As New Invention is a specialist resource, whose work is underpinned by the therapeutic approach of, Transactional analysis, similar placements would be difficult to find locally and would be at a much inflated cost local or otherwise.

**Recommendation:**

That this option is not pursued

2. **Minor repairs should be undertaken, refurbishment to some of the house:**

**Risk assessment:** This may result in the revocation of the registration of New Invention children's home as the Commission for Social Care Inspection believe that the home requires overall modernisation. Available placements would remain at four placements resulting in the continued loss of one placement locally. It is likely that minor repairs would only be sufficient in the short term and that major works would need to be undertaken in the foreseeable future.

**Recommendation:**

That this option is not pursued

3. **Complete refurbishment and decoration of the house:**

**Risk assessment:** This would ensure that our registration remains and available placements could increase to five. However this option is costly, does not represent value for money given that it will not achieve the ideal environmental standards. It may be likely that we can provide better facilities for our children and young people by pooling resources and purchasing a new home. This option would create minimal risks in relation to the ensuring the maintenance of good relations within the community.

Recommendation:

That this option is only pursued after a comprehensive viability study and risk assessment has been completed and disregarded in respect of the other options available.

4. Use of Unsupported Borrowing to fund a re-located Children's Home:

Risk Assessment: The use of unsupported borrowing would provide funding which could be used together with the refurbishment monies to buy a more modern property fit for purpose. It would also give the opportunity for the re-location of the home to a more suitable location. A re-location would need careful planning bearing in mind the need for effective work with prospective local councillors, the local community and the planning department if it is to be successful and cause minimum disruption to all involved.

Recommendation:

That this option is pursued.