

21 September 2015**Agenda Item: 04****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****BLOCK PURCHASE OF RESIDENTIAL CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH
SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides an update for Members following the agreed recommendation at the previous meeting of the Committee in July for a review of the implementation of the block purchase arrangement for residential care for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Information and Advice**Background and Rationale**

2. Members will recall that in September 2014, following a period of market testing, it was unanimously agreed to undertake a procurement process to secure partners to provide additional residential accommodation in Nottinghamshire for up to 24 children. It was further agreed by Members that due to a shortage of good quality local provision the procurement exercise would specifically require providers to commit to opening new provision within the County. By increasing provision within the County, the procurement sought to ensure that every vulnerable child and young person in residential care could access vital local children's services. The block contract was also intended to reduce the cost of external placements. The average weekly cost of SEBD (social, emotional and behavioural difficulties) residential provision is in excess of £3,000 per week. The block contract price is over 20% less and aims to achieve an annual saving of over £800,000. The procurement process followed was that required by legislation and in accordance with the Council's financial regulations. Members are aware that the successful bidders were G4S Children's Services and Castlecare (The Priory Group).

Implementation

3. It will be helpful to Members to have a full picture of the roles and responsibilities of various agencies in respect of the block purchase contract. The contracted providers are responsible for identifying and procuring appropriate property for the provision of residential care. The relevant District/Borough Councils are responsible for agreeing the necessary planning permission in accordance with the statutory process for planning. Ofsted are responsible for registering the provision in accordance with their statutory obligations. The County Council is responsible for ensuring that placements meet the needs of the individual young person and ultimately that providers are performing against

the contract. The County Council is not responsible for identifying properties or agreeing planning permission. These are a matter for the contract provider and the relevant District Council.

4. G4S notified the relevant planning authorities of its proposed properties to fulfil its contractual obligations on 23 February 2015, ahead of a meeting with Council officers on 25 February. It confirmed formally its planning submissions on 3 March 2015. A number of Members raised concerns about a lack of consultation by the provider over the location of the proposed new homes, and whilst there was no contractual obligation for them to do so, the provider agreed to pause each planning application to allow time for consultation with key stakeholders and the local community surrounding the proposed location of the new homes. G4S subsequently arranged a series of events to ensure that local communities could comment on the plans that it had for the establishment of new residential units.
5. These events had a number of key objectives:
 - to encourage as much input as possible from nearby residents
 - to provide the community with an opportunity to provide feedback on the plans
 - to allow people to become actively involved in the process
 - to identify and seek to address any issues raised by the local community and stakeholders.
6. G4S arranged for a consultation pack to be hand-delivered to 664 homes around the three proposed sites (300 in Worksop, 92 in Kirkby-in-Ashfield, 272 in Nuthall). The pack consisted of:
 - an update letter – this included background information on the consultation process, the public exhibition details, and how residents could provide feedback;
 - a consultation brochure – this included details of Nottinghamshire County Council's child care provision and other G4S children's homes, as well as specific information regarding the proposed home;
 - a tear-off freepost feedback form – for residents to complete and return with their comments.
7. Four public exhibitions were held, two in Worksop, one in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and one in Nuthall. Representatives from the G4S Children's Services Team, supported by Council Officers, attended the events to talk directly with residents. They were able to respond to questions and give details about the proposals. G4S ensured local media coverage to advertise the public exhibition to make sure as many residents as possible were aware of the events. The opportunity to discuss common misconceptions of children in care, and the nature of the residential provision required for them, with local residents was particularly useful.
8. In Worksop, approximately 27 people attended in total and 15 people submitted written feedback (5 positive, 2 neutral, 8 negative). 31 people attended the event in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and 6 submitted written feedback (5 negative, 1 positive). 148 people attended the event in Nuthall and 141 feedback forms were received (2 positive, 139 negative).

9. Following the consultation events and feedback from residents, G4S opted to submit the planning applications for all three sites, having written to local residents both to confirm its intentions and to respond to the concerns raised. If the planning applications are successful, Ofsted will undertake its statutory work to assess the suitability of the proposed homes for formal registration as children's homes.
10. The implementation of the block purchase contract has highlighted the fact that whilst it is clearly important that the Council ensures its contracted providers consult local communities sufficiently, it is for providers themselves to ensure this happens and it is for local planning authorities to ensure that adequate publicity is given to planning proposals as required by legislation. The engagement events highlighted common negative misconceptions of children's homes and the young people who live in them. It is therefore incumbent upon the Council, as the corporate parent for looked after children, to continue to work with communities to ensure a greater understanding of the needs of these vulnerable young people and to seek to reassure communities in the event they have concerns.
11. The delay in increasing capacity for residential care is having a significant impact on the successful implementation of the contract. In July 2015 11 new residential placements were made but only one of these was within the County. Children have been placed as far as Stafford, Halifax and Liverpool as there has been no suitable local accommodation closer to their home county.
12. A 'Matching Panel' designed to ensure that young people are placed in appropriate residential provision was developed as part of the tendering process, and has been working well in promoting information sharing across services and allowing opportunity to consider longer terms plans for individuals. However, the Council's stated ambition of having the most vulnerable children and young people within County boundaries to ensure the best possible outcomes for them will not be realised until new homes are opened.

Conclusions

13. In order to ensure the most vulnerable children within the County receive the best possible support and care, it is essential that they can be provided with residential placements within Nottinghamshire. Such placements cannot be provided without the establishment of new homes. It is accepted that many members of the public have concerns about the establishment of children's homes within their communities. However, it is very important that the Council continues to seek to inform communities accurately about the actual nature of children's residential provision, and the vulnerable children that they support. The Council will continue to encourage the providers under this contract to engage local communities in their planning; however, it is a matter for the provider to decide where they place homes subject to the necessary planning permissions and OFSTED registrations.
14. The delay in opening new local provision is continuing to require placements to be spot purchased from other providers outside of the County which is damaging to the welfare of children as well as undermining both the efficiencies and quality improvements intended by block contracting.

Other Options Considered

15. The report is for noting.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

16. The report is for noting.

Statutory and Policy Implications

17. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

18. The identified saving from the implementation of this contract is £811,000 per year. The part year saving for 2015/16 is £439,000 and this has been removed from the placements budget; any delay in implementation will result in additional budget pressure.
19. The contract allows for a steady 'ramp up' of placements with each provider. The Council is contractually obliged to pay for one additional bed each month until all 12 beds are commissioned. The Council is required to pay for the bed whether it is used or not. At present the Council has agreed with providers to pause this incremental increase in payments until the provision is available; however this is a voluntary arrangement with the providers and further delays in developing local provision may result in the Council needing to meet its contractual obligation and therefore pay for void beds.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

20. Research evidence and recent Serious Case Reviews into Child Sexual Exploitation suggest that children and young people are better safeguarded when placed nearer to home.

Implications for Service Users

21. The Block Purchase agreement will lead to a closer commissioning arrangement with external providers and will lead to better outcomes for Looked After Children. The 'No Labels' Children in Care Council was actively involved in the tendering process and will remain involved in the Quality Monitoring arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the update on the implementation of the Block Purchase of Residential Care for Children with Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

22. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (SS 27/08/15)

23. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Block Purchase of Residential Care for Children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) - report to Children & Young People's Committee on 29 September 2014

Block Purchase of Residential Care for Looked After Children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties – report to Children & Young People's Committee on 13 July 2015

G4S Consultation pack

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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