

13th December 2021**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES****CHILDREN'S HOME PROVISION****Purpose of the Report**

1. To make recommendations regarding the future of Minster View as a Local Authority run children's home.

Information

2. Minster View forms part of a cluster of buildings developing on from the original Southwell Workhouse. For many years it has been used as a Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Home that looks after children and young people with severe learning disabilities and complex behaviours, many of whom are on the Autistic Spectrum. The home was closed temporarily in November 2020 following staffing issues caused by the pandemic and concerns about professional practice and standards of care in the home. At the time of temporary closure there were five young people placed in the residential unit, four of whom were relocated to other homes in the external placements market, the fifth was placed in another Local Authority run residential home.
3. The temporary closure of the home has allowed time for reflection on the suitability of the building for use as a modern children's home. With a capacity of 12 bedrooms the current building is far larger than is considered optimal for a children's home today where normally the number of children present would be no more than four and for those with more complex needs should in most cases be no more than three. The building also limits the effective oversight of quality of care by the registered manager of the home and their deputies. Given the history of the building, built in the 1930s as an annex to the workhouse, the premises have an institutional feel at odds with the homely atmosphere that is required for children's full-time residence and home. Minster View is not a statutory listed building but is 'curtilage listed' by virtue of its close and historical relationship with the adjacent Workhouse. This limits the development at the site that would be required to make the significant adaptations even if it were deemed possible to adapt it to a more suitable setting. It is of note that the development over the years of more effective community support has also reduced the need for that volume of care places and Minster View has been operating well below full capacity for some years.

4. A review has also been undertaken of the needs profile of children who are in the care of the Local Authority and who may need, for a short or extended period, to live in a residential children's home. Due to improvements in the support to families in the community there is a reduced need for places for children with the presentation that Minster View previously specialised in and there is good sufficiency of placements for most of these young people in the independent market and at a competitive cost and of a high quality. There are however some young people whose needs are more difficult and costly to place and where it is considered that the Local Authority should continue to make its own provision.
5. Given the above observations it is recommended that the use of Minster View as a children's home is ceased and that it does not re-open but that new premises are identified for a smaller home or homes for up to four looked after children with severe learning disabilities and very complex behaviours. The future of the Minster View building and the purchase of alternative premises for the proposed new home, should the Council not be able to identify premises it already owns or where approvals are not already in place, would be subject to approval by Economic Development and Asset Management Committee.

Other Options Considered

6. The option to retain Minster View as a children's home has been considered but is not recommended for the reasons set out above.

Reasons for Recommendations

7. Minster View as a venue for a residential children's home is too large, has an institutionalised feel and limits the ability to provide oversight of the quality of care. The needs of children needing residential placements and the availability of placements in the external market that provide high quality and value for money is good. There remains a small group of children whose needs are such that it is difficult to secure places and where it is the best option for the Local Authority to make its own provision. This can be done more successfully in a smaller setting.

Statutory and Policy Implications

8. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment 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

9. The costs anticipated in the annual provision of a three bedded children's home are approximately £890,000 per annum set against a current annual budget for Minster View of £1,685,000. There is a continued need to develop additional placement provision for young people with other specialist needs, in relation to emotional and mental health, either through direct delivery, partnering with an independent agency or by commissioning in the market. The Local Authority is working with key NHS partners and neighbouring local authorities to

develop a model for this provision, and it is proposed that the residual £795,000 is transferred into the department's placement commissioning budget to secure further development over the coming 12 months and to support any interim support to young people becoming looked after.

HR Implications

10. The majority of staff previously working at Minster View who remain with the Local Authority have taken up roles, either temporarily or permanently, in other teams within the department and most within the children's residential homes. Any staff not already in permanent positions would be deployed using enabling processes. Given vacancy levels it is strongly anticipated that no redundancies would be required. A further report will be brought to Committee to agree the details of the revised staffing structure across residential services.

Implications for Service Users

11. No children are currently residing at Minster View and the best interests of children who are looked after is the central consideration in these proposals. No child will have their care plan negatively impacted by the proposals in this report and they should help ensure high quality care into the future for those needing very high levels of support.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

12. The 'curtilage listing' of Minster View presents potential barriers to creating an environment that will meet the Council's sustainability ambitions going forward. A new setting would be free of such restrictions and as such can be designed to meet higher environmental standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:

- 1) agrees to cease the use of Minster View as a children's home with resulting proposals regarding staffing structures across the children's residential estate being received at the next meeting of the Committee
- 2) agrees to receive a detailed proposal on the development of the children's residential estate at the next Committee meeting which would then be subject to approval by the appropriate committee.

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Constitutional Comments (LPW 30/11/21)

13. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (CDS 26/11/21)

14. The formal closure of Minster View as a children's home would ultimately free up annual revenue budget of £1,685,000, which may be used to fund alternative specialist placements. As stated in **paragraph 9**, this may consist of £890,000 for direct provision of a 3 bedded home and the remaining £795,000 for externally commissioned provision.
15. With an estimated effective date of April 2022, this indicative split would be incorporated into draft budget workings for 2022-23, ahead of detailed proposals (which would be subject to further approval).

HR Comments (BC 02/12/21)

16. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. As indicated above, it is not anticipated that any staff will be at risk of redundancy due to the proposed closure of Minster View.

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.

None.

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.

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