



EDUCATION, SPORT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE 6 FEBRUARY 2024

LOCAL RESIDENTIAL FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE

Report by Children's Services Manager (Resources)

PURPOSE

- 1.1. The Purpose of the Report seeks to update Committee members about progress in:
- An ongoing review of the care estate
 - Potential need for a bespoke residential care house with a focus on the complex care needs of some young people
- 1.2 These above actions are components within review of the **overall care estate and resources** within the Comhairle with the task of improving resiliency, efficiency, and efficacy of our care support systems.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report explores the contexts of:
- Ongoing review of the overall care estate
 - Necessity for an on-island residential resource for complex care

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle note the progress of the Review of the Care Estate.**

Contact Officer: Maxwell Smart, Children's Services Manager (Resources)
Appendix: None
Background Papers: None

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications- Yes
Financial	Yes – Capital expenditure (if residential house options proceed)
Legal	Yes – Compliance with National Standards
Staffing	Yes – Staff recruitment (if proposals proceed)
Assets and Property	Yes – New Building(s) and equipment (if proposals proceed)
Strategic Implications	Implications/Yes – Provision of new services
Risk	None presently
Equalities	Yes – resource to meet different need area gaps (if proposals proceed)
Corporate Strategy	Yes – meeting service gap areas (if proposals proceed)
Environmental Impact	Yes – but limited to footprint of buildings (if proposals proceed)
Consultation	Yes- consultation with stakeholders will be necessary (if proposals proceed)

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 This Report updates the Comhairle on progress regarding a review of the Department's care estate and support for vulnerable young people. The care estate review has been necessary to develop the resiliency and capacity of service provisions for vulnerable children and young people.
- 5.2 Scope to Review:
- The effectiveness of and resource gaps in, our work with Looked After and Accommodated young people (LAAC, residential).
 - Support for and with young people who have complex care / comorbidities in their care needs, that require off island resourcing.
 - The substitute family care resources and recruitment (need for specialist foster carers who are trauma centric, and needs led).
 - Preventative intervention supports and consider resource gaps.
 - Consider a common focus that integrates our care provisions (Philosophy of Care).
- 5.3 Participants:
- Stakeholders, including children and young people, Parents, Teachers, Third Sector Partners, Social Workers.
- 5.4 Process:
- Data collection, discussion, and discourse with a range of stakeholders. Analyses of resource gaps.
 - Recommendations of support and resources required to address need.

DETAIL

- 6.1 It is a necessary component of innovation to analyse what resources are at the disposal of any given agency or business, and to consider the effectiveness and gaps that need to be addressed.
- 6.2 This review seeks to do exactly that. The review is timely as it coincides with significant policy changes nationally in childcare law and practice. It occurs at a time of hardship for so many and necessitates care services changing the way they work to transform services and experiences for children and families.
- 6.3 Within the Care Estate Review, we are assessing our provision and effectiveness in the following areas:
1. Substitute family care
 2. Residential childcare (LAAC)
 3. Residential care (complex care needs) and
 4. Preventative service provision
- 6.4 Within each of these service areas we have observed dedicated foster carers, creative, supportive, and skilled staff in social caring and creative flexible preventative intervention supports. However, it has become evident that we also have specific resource gaps in some crucial areas:
- Fostering provision which has a trauma focus.
 - Gaps in residential support for children and young people with complex care needs that have necessitated the use of off island long-term care provision.
 - Some structural gaps in our preventative care and support systems requiring reactive support to families.
 - Gaps in residential provisions for LAAC young people
- 6.5 To address the gap areas noted above we must consider **how we work**, and **how we think** and **interact** with children, young people, and their families. Whatever changes become necessary in this review we must recognise that changes in resource provisions might not be just financial, changes must include changes in ourselves, our present practices, and philosophies of care, as well as our organisational provision.
- 6.6 The review is seeking to address:
- **Substitute Family Care** - Recruitment and expansion of the role of specialist foster carers (salaried) to work with young people who have experienced significant trauma. (We have established links with, and intend to visit, some neighbouring authorities to look at their thinking and doing around this). Specialist foster carers should reduce the need for LAAC residential beds at Hillcrest or on the mainland.
 - In context we are taking the view that Foster Carers are ideally suited to be among the most influential of healers and helpers for children and young people in difficulty, and if we get our Fostering Services focused to meet contemporary care need this will impact and influence positively all areas of the care estate.
 - Foster Carers, therefore, are an integral part of our thinking strategically about the wider review of the care estate as we seek to create a 'team parenting approach' to the overall review.

- What is important about this approach is that this emphasises not so much what each service arm does, but that we do it together with a common focus on how service supports integrate around the care goals for each child and young person referred.

6.7 **Complex care support** - The Comhairle presently works with a small but significant population of young people who have a combination of highly complex specialist care needs.

- Services for young people with complex care needs are often limited on Island Authorities and the Comhairle is in this position. Traditionally young people who have comorbid needs (*coexisting conditions that develop independently of each other, that may increase or complicate, risks in other areas of life and care*) have required off island resourcing in mainland placements to meet care, education, and direct support needs.
- Provisions of care and support of this nature come at significant cost and are expensive by the very nature of the complexity of the needs of these children /young people: physically, intellectually, and emotionally problematic life circumstances profoundly impacting both the children/young people and their families.
- Given the level and complexity of needs, provisions for such children and young people require specialist care resourcing and often this resourcing has to be committed over a number of years to meet the developmental, daily personal care needs and educational requirements for these children. Costs for off-island placements can and do prove fiscally challenging for funders particularly at a time of budgetary restraint nationally, and practicality by local authorities becomes even more problematic at times fiscal restriction.
- Education and Children's Services meet some of the service needs of young people and their families via a combination of Social Work and Social Care resources but mainly through respite support, outreach and short stay services provided by Action for Children, at their Hillcrest residential resource.

6.8 **Residential Care & Support** – At present local residential provision for young people in the Comhairle is outsourced to third sector provision with Action for Children Western Isles. This service has for some time provided care and support for young people with traditional care and support needs as well as short-stay and respite care in house for young people with complex care needs. Having a facility that combines the care needs of children with disabilities and also children who require a placement due to for example risk to self and others is rare, however the Review has had to consider how the needs of both client groups are or can be met, and the wider risk that comes from a combined service that may be over stretched and unable to meet the unique needs of either group.

- The Care Estate Review is in the process of evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of care provision in this way, and whether it is meeting the needs of either care grouping.
- In recent years the task of residential caring has been seen as multi-layered and complex, with staff groups having to respond to deep seated emotional pain, problematic behaviour and trauma defined needs.
- Over the course of 2023, the vulnerability of several LAAC young people in local residential population became acute, and consequently with high tariff risk to self or others, necessitated the use of secure care and residential care and education provision off island.
- These external provisions are still required for these specific young people, and it has not as yet been possible to return these young people in-house resources. Consequently, significant financial provision has been necessary to facilitate care and education on mainland resources.

6.9 **Preventative Intervention** – Preventative Interventions resources have been a component of work in children’s services for a while.

- Our provisions range from work in schools to support educational attainment, work with families to sustain care at home and work in the community to support belonging in positive ways. Our workforce and wider voluntary and third sector support has sought to respond proactively rather than having to react to problematic situations.
- The Review has seen the value of such services and applauded the efforts of many engaging in this work recognising that it is better to ‘put a fence at the top of a cliff rather than an ambulance at the bottom’, if we are making a difference to the lives of vulnerable young people and their families.

CONCLUSION

7.1 As indicated, this review is ongoing and is considering various potential actions when it is completed. A quick synopsis of these is detailed below.

7.2 **Complex Care** - The current expenditure level for the provision of external complex care resourcing off island (52-week) is circa £750.000 per annum, (provision also includes education as part of negotiated placement costs). It is recognised nationally that external placement costs are usually higher than resources provisions for services locally.

7.3 The outlay costs to the authority may also rise in the near future, as presently there are a number of children and young people with significant, complex care needs on island, whose families are under acute stress and present respite arrangements are insufficient to meet care, support, and education demand. Indeed, the Department have a current placement request for off island complex care provision, that is being assessed over the course of January 2024.

7.4 As we consider what actions might be necessary to address the needs areas in this report it is important that emphasis is placed not so much on what each service arm does, but what actions are taken to coherently integrate the care estate as a whole.

Actions given consideration in the review are:

- **The need for a bespoke residential provision for complex care, provided by the Comhairle.** This option has had preliminary discussions with HHP to consider potential sites.
- Other options - Individual wrap-around care provisions in individual care houses in combination with housing partnership (HHP) and supported by individual staff teams around each child/young person, current estimated weekly costs in the region of £6000, may mean this type of option is prohibitive.
- Potential Service level agreements with third sector partners to focus solely on the provision of a complex care service without the dual care of LAAC population.
- Foster Carers are an integral part of our thinking strategically about the wider review. We consider that there needs to be **expansion of the fostering resources in the islands. The role of specialist foster carer (salaried), is needed to work with young people who have experienced significant trauma.** (We have established links with, and intend to visit, some neighbouring authorities to look at their thinking and doing around this).

- We are taking the view that Foster Carers are ideally suited to be among the most influential of healers and helpers for children and young people in difficulty, and if we get our Fostering Services focused to meet contemporary care need this will impact and influence positively all areas of the care estate.
- It is envisaged that expansion of the fostering service will impact and reduce demand for residential care and shift our focus of services towards family-based community support.
- There is a **potential need for the creation of a small residential house for LAAC young people, run by the Comhairle**. The future facility would accommodate up to three young people with high tariff care needs. This service has potential to be part of an overall 'prevent and return' strategy, linking in with supported provision for aftercare support with ELR and the Keith Street resources. Social Work staff would work with a trauma centric understanding of the needs of this care grouping, with intervention skills focused upon decoding developmental need, understanding of supports that create belonging, develops competence, supports self-control and the needs for kindness and generosity.
- The prevent and return strategy would be a constituent component of our preventative intervention strategy. It would seek to 'prevent the need for young people being accommodated via investment in our preventative intervention support, and the seeking the return of young people in off island resources to return to island provision.
- Any future residential provision would seek to have an **intensive outreach service** that works with young people (and their families) on the cusp of care with a view to creating sustainable change and mitigating against the need to be accommodated.

7.5 It is anticipated that the Review of the Care Estate will conclude by Summer 2024 and recommendations will be presented to the Committee with accompanied costs for each option considered in the Report. We anticipate that the overall review will facilitate a clearer focus on service delivery in an integrated way.