

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 18 JANUARY 2016

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF GREENGATE CHILDREN'S HOME –
REPORT ON THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2015

Purpose of report

1. To seek the Committee's views on the closure of Greengate Children's Home following the completion of a public consultation which closed on the 20th December 2015. The Committee's comments will be reported to the Cabinet when it considers the proposal for closure at its meeting in February 2016.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children Act 1989 (Section 22G) places a statutory duty on the Local Authority to ensure sufficient suitable provision of care for looked after children with the area. This includes taking reasonable steps to meet the child's needs and requires the Council to have regard to:-
 - a) The benefit of having a number of accommodation providers in the area; and;
 - b) The need to have a range of different types of accommodation capable of meeting the different needs of children in the Council's area.
3. The Cabinet has previously considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services setting out proposals to improve the placement arrangements for young people in care to secure 'permanence', where possible, moving away from residential placements towards a family-based care approach. The 'Choices for Children and Young People 2013 – Placement and Sufficiency Strategy' was agreed by the Cabinet in December 2013.
4. On the 7th October 2015 the Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services about the proposed closure of Greengate

Children's Home. The Director of Children and Family Services was authorised to commence a period of consultation during November and December on the proposal to close Greengate Children's Home with effect from 1st April 2016.

Background

5. Local authorities are required to ensure that there are sufficient placements available to meet the needs of the children and young people that it is looking after. The departmental budget for placement commissioning has been under pressure for some years. The forecasted overspend for 2015/16 is £5.9m and it is necessary to find ways to contain spending within the budget available.
6. The demands on the placements commissioning budget are unpredictable and difficult to forecast as they are significantly affected by national issues such as the increased visibility of child sexual exploitation and the additional numbers of asylum seeking children.
7. In December 2013, the Council agreed a policy entitled 'Choices for Children and Young People 2013; A placement and Sufficiency Strategy" to ensure that the children in the care of the County Council are placed with families as opposed to in institutions. The Children's Commissioner for England produced an annual report about the views of children and young people with regard to their social care. In 2014 this Children's Care Monitor Report, indicated that children in residential homes feel significantly less happy and more vulnerable than those in foster homes. Those who did not feel they were living in the right place felt they were not part of a family.
8. The County Council currently operates two children's homes and in order to further implement the ambition to achieve family based care, it is recommended that Greengate Children's Home should now close and the one young person currently placed there, and who is now over 16, moves into other accommodation in line with their pathway plan.
9. The proposed closure would be consistent with the County Council's intention to ensure that more of the children in care are looked after in family settings such as foster care. This approach is better for the child or young person and is also more cost effective. Greengate Children's Home is amongst the most expensive of placements currently provided by the Council and closure could reduce the current overspend by approximately £400,000.
10. The needs of the children and young people in the care of the County Council does vary considerably and their needs will be met through commissioning a

wide range of placements, the vast majority of which will be family based provision, but will also include a small amount of residential care.

Proposals/Options

11. The proposal is to seek the Cabinet's approval to initiate procedures for the closure of Greengate Children Home.

Consultations

12. A formal 6 week public consultation started on the 9th November 2015 and ended on the 20th December 2015.
13. The purpose of this was to gain a balanced view from all interested parties regarding the future of Greengate and to seek opinion of any future planning in relation to family based placements.
14. The total number of respondents for the consultation is 91 on line responses and 73 young people took part in face to face meetings. The total number of responses is 164 .
15. 56% agreed and strongly agreed with the closure of the home because of the type of building or its running costs.
16. 29% tended to disagree with closure because they were either concerned about what the future provision would be or because a family based environment, such as a foster placement, would not be suitable for all young people.
17. 15% expressed no opinion either way.
18. The full consultation report is attached as Appendix A.

Resource Implications

19. The process to close Greengate Children Home will be led by the integrated Fostering, Adoption and Placement Service, Service Manager supported by the Transformation Project (T3).

Conclusions

20. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposed closure of Greengate Children's Home.

Background Papers

21. The following background paper is available: Cabinet Report, 13th December 2013, 'Choices for Children and Young People 2013' <http://ow.ly/WK1md>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

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List of Appendices –

Appendix A - Public Consultation Interim Report 21st December 2015

Equality and Human Rights Implications

22. Undertaking consultation is in keeping with the Council's corporate standards to ensure that all stakeholders are made aware of the difficulties in meeting these children's needs and have an opportunity to contribute to the plan.
23. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) was completed on the 10th April 2015 to inform the decision to progress with a proposal to the Cabinet to initiate a public consultation on the closure of Greengate Children Home.
24. The outcome of the EHRIA was that the closure of the home was likely to have a positive impact for the children and young people in Leicestershire.
25. The EHRIA was considered by the Children and Family Services Departmental Equalities Group on the 28 April 2015 which confirmed the impact assessment.