

APPENDIX A

Proposal to Close Greengate House Children's Home: Public Consultation
Response: Interim Report: 21st December 2015

Public Consultation: From 9th November 2015 to 20th December 2015

Introduction

Greengate House Children's Home is one of the two children's residential homes operated by Leicestershire County Council. Since 2013, supporting the most vulnerable children remains a priority for Leicestershire County Council. Our policy for 'Choices for Children and Young People' promotes the ambition for children in care to have family based care.

Greengate House was built in 1974 and now requires considerable immediate work to modernise and to repair the building. The number of children in Greengate House has been decreasing over the past few years and there is currently only one resident. Many of the staff members at Greengate House are supporting children in care in other ways on a temporary basis by ensuring placement stability remains and there is a focus on brief intervention work.

The council is proposing to close Greengate House with a view to making a saving of £400,000. The intention is to increase 'family based' placements by recruiting specialist foster carers who can provide the specialist support for our most vulnerable children and young people in care.

Leicestershire County Council's Cabinet decided on the 7th of October 2015 to initiate the consultation for the proposed closure of Greengate House Children's Home. A formal 6 week public consultation started on the 9th of November 2015 and ends on the 20th December 2015. 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.

The total number of respondents for the consultation is 91 participants of which the majority of the feedback is the views of children and young people.

Overall, 56 %. This was made up from 24% strongly agreed with 32% tending to agree with the plans for closing Greengate House. The general comments that support this statement are in relation to the building and its running costs. 29% tended to disagree with the proposal on the basis that there was concern if we lost a provision where the children would be placed, and for some young people a family based environment would not be suitable. 15% expressed no opinion either way.

The Survey

An online survey was operated from the 9th November 2015 to 20th December 2015. The approach was inclusive through proactive engagement directly with key stakeholders that would be affected by the closure, including the staff at Greengate House and the resident. In addition to this partner agencies that have an interest and those that work directly with the children's home were also contacted to have their views and opinions expressed. The link to the survey can be found at: www.leics.gov.uk/greengate

The three main groups of stakeholders that have contributed to the feedback are:

- Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers
- Internal Staff
- External stakeholders

The following questions were asked in the survey and through the direct engagement activity with the key staff groups, children and young people and stakeholders:

1. We are required to ensure that there is sufficient and suitable care for looked after children in Leicestershire. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed closure of Greengate House Children's Home as part of our overall approach to this?
2. Why do you say this?
3. Do you have any other suggestions for how we could provide sufficient and suitable care for looked after children in Leicestershire and provide care in a family setting, wherever possible?
4. Do you have any other comments?

A summary of the online responses:

“Having specialist foster carers in their own homes, is probably more cost effective and supportive to the children”

“I think the unit could be much better utilised if it had a different function”

“For some young people in care it is difficult for them to be placed with foster carers in family home placements and they may need/feel that they would be better cared for within a children’s home environment with other young people in similar situations”

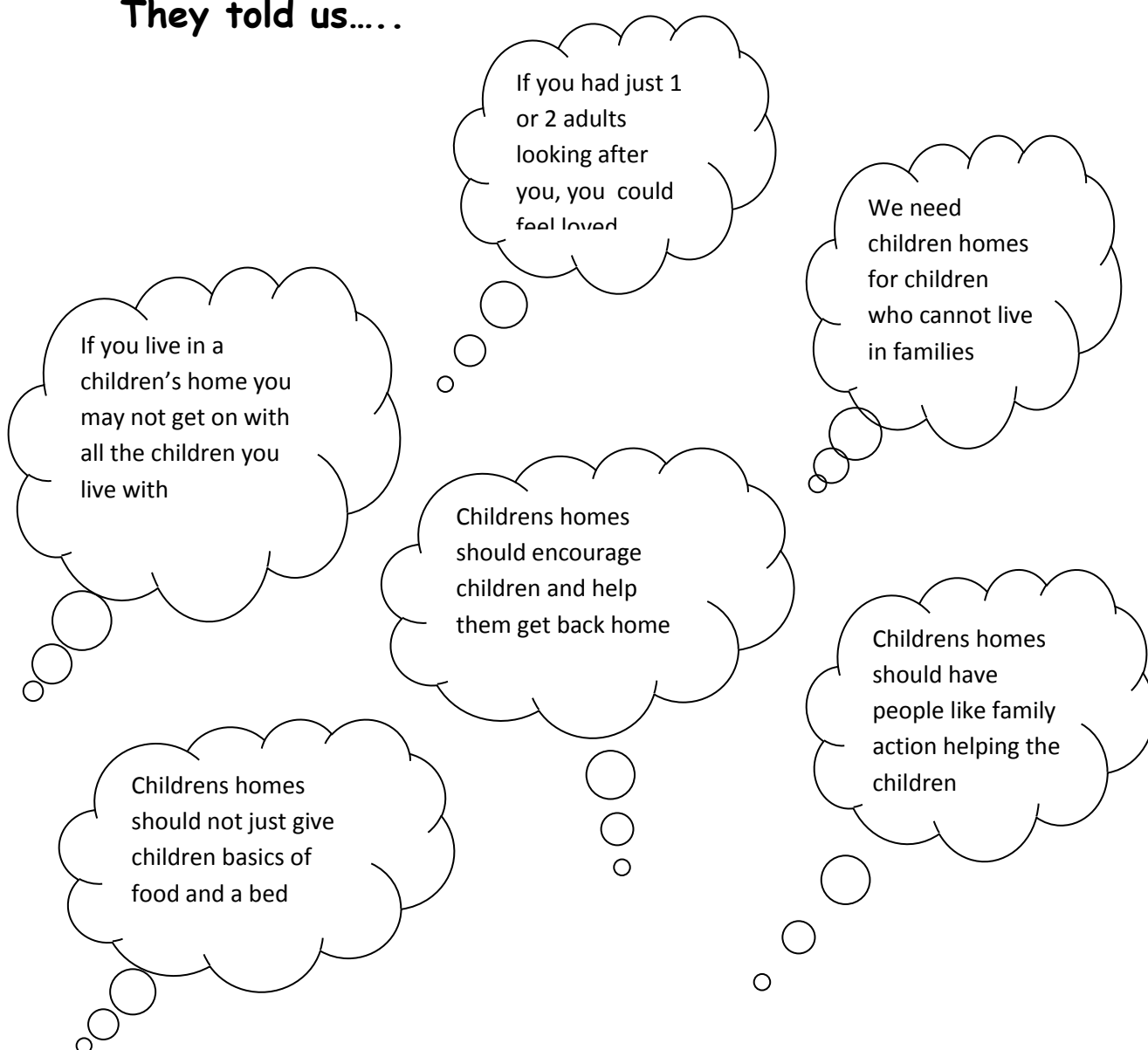
“I understand that there might be cutbacks but you cannot put a price on a young person’s welfare..... [however] residential care gave me rules and boundaries, encouraged me into education and helped me live independently” (ex-resident of a children’s home)

Consultation with Children in Care Choir

At the event there were 16 young people in attendance. All are currently children in care. 15 live in foster placements, 1 lives in a children's home.

The young people were asked whether they thought we needed to keep the children's home open? Whether we should look into having more foster carers? And where was the best place for children to live?

They told us.....



They told us.....

If the home was far away how would they get to school?

We need carers and staff who actually understand

Children should be placed with people similar to them

If foster homes didn't want children then you need a home for them to live in

Even in foster care you have to travel a long way for school

We need more foster carers

We should be able to choose where we live

Homes can be like a big family

I live in a home and sometimes there isn't enough staff

In a children's home you don't get

We should be with carers that care about us

More choices for more children where they live

Key messages from children and young people were that:

We should recruit more foster carers

We should give children choices about where they live

Children need to feel those caring for them actually do care

We should keep using children's homes because some children do not want to live in a family

Homes can be like a big family

Homes should be staffed adequately

Children and young people should be in placements that retain their education placement.

Carers should be skilled to help the children they are caring for

Children need to feel cared and loved for where they live

[Voices captured: 30.11.15]

Feedback from Older Children in Care / Care Leavers Christmas Meeting December 17th 2015.

Young people in attendance: 58

Young people who had lived in a children's home; 21

Do you think we need to keep children's homes open?

Yes because some kids don't want to live in foster care, they don't want a family

Yes because if you get chucked out of your foster home, you will have somewhere

Not sure, but if it's like Tracy Beaker then yes

Yes because some foster carers are horrible, they don't treat you kind

Yes because some kids can't cope in foster

Yes because if you are naughty and get chucked out of foster care you can live in a home

It doesn't really matter where you live as long as people are kind and don't hurt you

No because I don't want to live in one, I want to stay with my foster

Yes because you should be able to have a choice of where you can live

Where do you think is the best place for young people to live?

With my family not care

With a family so foster care is better

Depends on the child because it might be you don't want another family so then a kid's home

If not with mum and dad then foster care as no-one needs to know you're in care

Anywhere as long as you're happy and are being treated nice by the

Foster care as it is more normal than a big children's home

Depends on how old you are because you can get kicked out of foster care but not kids' homes

Foster care but only with nice foster carers, not horrible ones

At home but I can't so I want to stay with my foster carer, I don't want to move

Should we have more foster carers?

Yes because we should be able to pick them like they pick us, not to be just put somewhere

Yes because lots are old and not nice

Yes because it's better to be with a proper family

Yes because some are very far away and we need ones who live on their own, no men

Yes because kids' homes are scary and I don't want to live in one

Yes because there might be some nearer to where I used to live instead of miles away

Yes or maybe small children's homes like people's houses

Yes but we need lots of different types of foster carers like young, old, black and white

Key Messages from the young people:

You should be able to have a choice regarding where you live

Some young people cannot cope living in an alternative family if they cannot live in their own family

You should be able to pick your foster carers the way they pick you

We need lots of different types of foster carers

Smaller children's homes are better than larger ones

Equip foster carers to manage challenging behaviour

Wherever you live you need to be treated with respect

Have a smaller more family type children's home.

Want to live in own locality

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| Themes emerging |
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Children and young people's feedback:

- Value for Money – There is a worry that Greengate is only caring for one young person and is very expensive.
- Improved Outcomes – That better outcomes could be achieved for the young people in a family setting
- Strategy & care plans for the future – Whilst some agreed with the plan, there is a worry that for some young people it would minimize the choices of placement available to them.
- Geography – Where children live is important to them, they want to live near their schools, their friends and families.
- Foster carers – The young people want to see a fostering provision fit for the future with a range of carers offering specialisms and having the skills to cope with the challenges of caring for a teenager.

Internal (staff & corporate parents) feedback:

- Over-arching Strategic Vision for CIC – ‘family values/based provision’ should be aligned to the Council’s Pledge as Corporate Parents
- Value for Money - The costs of looking after one young person at Greengate was very costly, but we would need to ensure that we had commissioned placements to call upon as required.
- Improved Outcomes - That young people could be better supported in foster placements, The Team Around the Child was an excellent idea. Concern that some children do not want families and costs would be incurred. Some children not safe to live in families.
- Commissioning Strategy - Generally supported the strategy but concern raised over the use of the home for the future. Waste of money to be left empty when we need a focus on family based provision in that locality. Concern was raised that by losing a provision and skilled staff a loss to service and young people who may need it

External (partner agencies) feedback:

- Over-arching Strategic Vision for CIC – ‘family values/based provision’ - This view has generally been supported by all respondents. Very supportive of the vision of recruiting L6 carers and being supported by an experienced and specialist staff team. Concern was expressed that if we close Greengate without an alternative this can increase the risk of failure.
- Value for Money – A general acknowledgement that running a home with one resident is not cost effective. There was a worry that not having an in house provision would mean placing children in homes that are running for profit and costs may escalate.
- Improved Outcomes The feedback recognised the importance of matching children to prevent negative behaviours. Family based settings promoted real life experiences and opportunities.
- Commissioning Strategy - Consideration that we use the resources with due diligence applied in the way decisions are made about provision or spot purchase for children who cannot live in foster families. Strongly support the view of supporting children with skills based L6 carers.

The Key Messages from the consultation are:

1. The key message from children and young people in care is that the service needs to be flexible in providing supportive care that makes them feel:
 - Safe
 - Valued
 - Worthy
 - Ambitious and Aspiring
 - That they have a voice and choice
 - Cared for by people that want to care
 - That people invest in them and want them to achieve.
2. The key message from staff and professional stakeholders is that:
 - The commitment and resilience of the staff team. They tend to be enablers that prioritise the immediate needs of being in a caring environment and supporting independence skills.
3. The key message from the general public is that:
 - “The LCC seem, to be doing a lot of good things advertising foster care evenings and making the public aware. As long as there is good support for foster carers it seems a more sensible approach to provide care in a family setting”

Overall, the feedback suggests that Greengate House should close and is not fit for purpose in the current climate. Future considerations should factor in the following areas in developing the Commissioning Strategy to meet the Sufficiency Duty and the ‘Pledge/Promise’ made to children in care and young people leaving care, here’s the link www.leics.gov.uk/pledge. The analysis suggests:

- Increasing placement choices and stability
- Having bespoke packages of care that can evidence the outcomes
- Managing resources and services that reduce the demand on statutory provision
- Having foster carers that are skilled in dealing with teenagers and supporting them through their adolescents
- Transitioning care to alternative support services including the offer from Early Help Support Services

It is reassuring that many of these messages also appear to be aligned to the messages outlined in the State of the Nation Report 1: Children in Care and Care Leavers Survey 2015, published by the Children's Commissioner for England.

www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Care%20monitor%20v12_1.pdf