

**Meeting of the Decision Session – Cabinet  
Member for Education, Children and Young  
People**

**25 October 2012**

Report of the Director of Adults, Children and Education

**Development of a Looked After Support Service for York**

**Summary**

1. This report describes the development of a specialist service for the support of looked after children. In particular this service will facilitate, at a single venue, supervised and assessed contact arrangements between looked after children and their parents. These new arrangements will reduce the transport costs and create a centre of expertise in relation to children's contact needs.

**Background**

2. Every local authority has a statutory duty to facilitate contact between looked after children and their parents. Currently, in York, these arrangements are delivered by a variety of social care professionals in various settings across the city. For many of these workers this task is only one of a diverse range of duties they perform within their role. A review of these arrangements and the changing expectations of the courts who order much of the contact that is facilitated have highlighted the need for a more specialist and dedicated team to facilitate this contact.
3. This paper describes the development of a new dedicated Looked After Children's Support Service which would operate from a single venue. A new team comprising a designated manager with nine looked after children's support workers would be responsible for delivering high quality supervised contact time. This new arrangement will provide economies of scale in relation to staff time, the utilisation of buildings and savings in the cost of transport both for staff and parents attending the proposed new centre.

4. Through staff redeployment a new team has been established to commence this service in December 2012.
5. An existing council property on Nursery Drive has been identified as a potential site to locate this new service and a survey to assess the refurbishment and equipment costs of this venue has been commissioned.

### **Consultation**

6. There has been extensive consultation with all stakeholders including a reference group of staff undertaking this role. Feedback from these consultations has been incorporated into the planning for the service commencement in December 2012.

### **Options**

#### Option 1

7. The vacant building described at paragraph 5 could provide an excellent base for this newly established service. It will be easily accessible by parents from public transport and it will give a single base for the designated team. The cost savings will relate to optimum staff deployment in a single venue with greater space availability and staff travel expenditure.

#### Option 2

8. The service could continue to be provided from the many different children centres and other settings in which contact meetings are currently arranged. This ongoing arrangement would however involve the staff group undertaking a significant level of travel, which will waste staff time in unnecessary journeys. It will also inhibit the scope for a designated team to develop a team identity, from which greater economies of scale will flow.

### **Analysis**

9. The savings for option 1 are significant and will contribute to meeting the 2012-14 budget strategy of the council.

## **Council Plan**

10. The proposals relate to the following priorities in the Council Plan:
  - Protecting vulnerable people
  - Protecting the environment

## **Implications**

### **Financial**

11. Option 1 proposes the refurbishment of 6 Nursery Drive. The estimated cost to carry out the adaptations and refurbishment required is £248k. A capital grant of £58k has been identified which can be spent on this project. The remaining £190k would then be funded by prudential borrowing over a period of ten years.
12. This will require a revenue budget of approximately £29k. This will need to be earmarked within the ACE revenue budget, and funded by a further saving which is not currently in the budget process.
13. Option 1 would also contribute to the full achievement of a budget saving of £204k which has been identified from the re-organisation of the Looked After Children Contact Service over the years 2012/13 and 2013/14, and is already part of the authority's revenue budget for these two years.
14. Option 2 would not deliver the full saving required as there would be little or no saving in transport costs if the restructured service continued to be delivered from a number of separate locations across the city. In addition to the impact on the quality of the service the shortfall in savings is likely to be in excess of £40k.

### **Property**

15. The proposed building, 6 Nursery Drive, is currently a surplus property and, in accordance with the Council's Disposal Strategy, has been identified as having potential for re-use to provide a council service. If the building is suitable then this will take precedence over obtaining a capital receipt by selling on the open market.
16. The proposal also meets one of the key strands of the wider asset review being carried out by Asset and Property Management – reducing revenue costs by rationalising the use of assets.

17. If the building does not prove to be suitable for this use then it will be retained in the short term to see if it can deliver any other council or related service need resulting from the Asset Review. If there is no requirement then it will be disposed of to generate a capital receipt.
18. A feasibility study has, however, been undertaken to ascertain the suitability of the existing property and confirmed that it could be readily adapted to accommodate the required facilities, with ten family rooms proposed, together with reception, offices, two kitchens and baby change/toilet provision. Externally there is space for increased vehicle parking and separate outdoor family areas to the rear.

### **Other**

19. There are no HR, equalities, legal, crime and disorder or information technology implications to this report.

### **Risk Management**

20. The risk in the development of this service relates most to the location of the building. If it is not possible to identify and refurbish a council building from which to undertake this service, the economies of scale in the staffing of the service and travel costs will not be achievable.

### **Recommendations**

21. The Cabinet Member is asked to consider the establishment of the Looked After Children Support Service, with the improvement in service for children and their parents and consequent service efficiencies.
22. Option 1 is recommended subject to the approval of the Cabinet for the requested prudential borrowing, on the understanding that the revenue costs of this prudential borrowing be funded from the ACE revenue budget. The required budget will be found by making a further on-going revenue saving of £29k in ACE.

*Reason: The full effect of the service improvement will be achieved by agreeing to option 1 and a single designated site delivering both service improvement and efficiency.*

## Contact Details

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**Report  
Approved**



**Date** 15.10.12

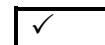
### Specialist Implications Officer(s)

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**Wards Affected:** List wards or tick box to indicate all

**All**



**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### Background Papers

None

### Annexes

None