

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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REVIEW OF THE OLD VICARAGE CHILDREN'S HOME PROVISION

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Summary

This report provides information relating to the Old Vicarage Children's Home for young people experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties, and its sustainability in the current economic climate.

The report provides the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with feedback from the public consultation relating to the proposed closure of the provision.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This report supports the Council Plan priority "Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential". It promotes the following way of working: "Giving value for money".
- 1.2 The information in this report provides Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members with an overview of the service and the proposal to close the provision and conduct an in-depth analysis of the future type of service that could be provided.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Old Vicarage is an established residential unit for children and young people located in the village of Upnor within Medway. The home is a large detached property in a rural area. It provides a medium to long-term residential service for up to eight young people aged 12-18. The service is for Medway children only with emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- 2.2. Ofsted has assessed the service as outstanding and in line with children's homes regulations, it is subject to a monthly independent visit, the aim of which is to inspect and monitor the service.
- 2.3. Although there is provision for up to eight children, there are rarely more than four or five young people resident at any one time. While there is a demand for residential placements, the needs of the children and young people requiring residential care are not in line with the Old Vicarage's Statement of Purpose.
- 2.4. Medway's ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) in July 2019 concluded that too many vulnerable children and young people in need of statutory help and protection wait too long for intervention. This not only delays entry to care, but contributes to the complexity of identifying suitable placements for young people with high levels of need, leading to young people being placed outside of Medway, often at considerable distance and expense.
- 2.5. The Old Vicarage is unable to meet the needs of this evolving demand in its current format. It is practical to review the current purpose of the Old Vicarage and explore the various types of provision that could be provided.
- 2.6. The staff establishment of the Old Vicarage comprises of a registered manager, deputy manager, three team leaders, nine residential care workers (and three employed on a casual basis), a cook/housekeeper and a support services assistant.
- 2.7. There are implications for staff working at the provision if the proposal is carried forward.
- 2.8. The monthly cost of the provision is just under £60,000 per month (approximately £702,000 per year). The cost of the service in relation to the number of service users is not financially viable, when there are other cohorts of children and young people whose needs are not being met.
- 2.9. Should the provision be closed in February, it would result in savings this financial year of £104,000 minus maintenance and security costs estimated at £4,585.
- 2.10. Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 22 October 2019 for consultation to be undertaken on the proposal. This decision was called in and was considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 November 2019, where it was agreed to accept the Cabinet decision and take

no further action and therefore the Council commenced consultation which took place between 19 November and 18 December 2019.

3. Options

3.1. There were two options proposed in the public consultation:

- 1) Continue to provide the current service, recognising the cost for each client is disproportionate to those receiving similar services.
- 2) Close the service and investigate what service type would better serve the needs of Medway's children and young people - ensuring that current residents have a clear plan for the future. This is the recommended option.

4. Results of the Consultation

4.1. As part of the process, there was a staff and a public consultation where the views of interested parties could be expressed, and all views taken into consideration prior to Cabinet determination. The period of public consultation ran for 30 days from 19 November 2019 to 18 December 2019.

4.2. An online survey was published on the Council website. The following stakeholders were also contacted and directed towards the website. A printable version of the survey was also sent, to enable respondents to print out and post their responses if they wished.

- Staff at the provision
- Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Kent Police
- Medway Children and Young People Council (MCYPC)
- Parent -Carer Forum
- Young Lives Foundation (YLF)
- Secondary and specialist school head teachers
- Medway Council services, including Youth Service, Fostering and Adoption, First Response, Corporate Parenting, 0-25, integrated disability, Virtual School, QA, ART, Commissioning and the Children's Hubs

4.3. The Communications team tweeted about the survey and loaded the link onto the Council Facebook pages. A poster was displayed at the council offices where children's social work teams are based, informing them of the consultation and including a link to the questionnaire.

4.4. In addition to the online survey, there were individual meetings and a group meeting with the young people residing at the home. A meeting was also held with two of the head teachers of the schools attended by the young people.

4.5. There were 89 responses to the consultation. The numbers of each type of respondent are shown in the table below. Responses to each of the questions, and the comments received are shown in the rest of this section.

Question 1 - Are you responding to the consultation mainly as...

Type of respondent	Count	%
A parent of a young person staying at the home	2	2.25
A young person staying at the home	4	4.49
A young person living in Medway	2	2.25
An employee/volunteer in the Old Vicarage children's home	5	5.62
A Social Worker working in Medway	5	5.62
A professional partner (e.g. GP, health visitor, teacher etc)	28	31.46
A Medway resident	21	23.60
Something else	17	19.10
No reply	5	5.62
Total	89	100.00

Question 2 - Do you agree with the proposal to close the Old Vicarage children's home in order to make better use of resources and provide an improved service for more of Medway's children and young people?

4.6. Overall, 72% of respondents did not agree with the suggestion to close the Old Vicarage children's home. However, sixteen respondents (18%) did agree with the proposal. Eight respondents said that they did not know whether they agreed or not.

Response	Total number	Percentage
Agree	16	18%
Disagree	65	72%
Don't know	8	10%
Total	89	100%

4.7. The table below shows whether a respondent either agreed, disagreed with the proposal by type of respondent.

Type of respondent	Count			
	No reply	Yes	No	Don't know
A parent of a young person staying at the home		1	1	0
A young person staying at the home		1	3	0
A young person living in Medway		0	1	1
An employee/volunteer in the Old Vicarage children's home		1	4	0
A Social Worker working in Medway		1	3	1
A professional partner (e.g. GP, health visitor, teacher etc)		4	22	2
A Medway resident		4	18	0
Something else		3	9	4
No reply	1	0	4	0
Total (shown as a count)	1	15	65	8

Question 3 - Please explain here why you agree or disagree with the proposal to close the Old Vicarage children's home.

- 4.8. Overall, the majority of respondents were not in favour of the proposal, and the largest group represented was the professional partners. The general view was that the provision fulfils a need for Medway children. There was recognition of the good work carried out with the young people who are, and have been, resident at the Old Vicarage.
- 4.9. Of those who were in favour of the proposal, a number expressed concern about the operation of the provision and the amount of money devoted to keeping the provision open, compared with fostering, for example. There was a view that the closure would be acceptable so long as any savings were reinvested.
- 4.10. A number of respondents, including those who were not in favour of the proposal, acknowledged that the funding currently dedicated to resourcing the Old Vicarage could potentially be used for other purposes, which might reach a broader range of children and young people. Some questioned what the future provision may look like.

Question 4 - Are you aware of the following opportunities that Medway Council offers?

- 4.11. Overall, the majority of respondents were aware of the alternative options available to children and young people. The table below shows results as count and percentages.

Respondents	(shown as a count & percentage)			
	No reply	Yes	No	Don't know
Fostering - a way of providing a family life for children who cannot live with their own parents.	0	87	2	0
	0	97.8%	2.2%	0.0%
Adoption - a way of providing a child who cannot be raised by their own parents with a new family. Adoption is a legal procedure which transfers the parental responsibility for the child to the adoptive parents.	0	87	2	0
	0	97.8%	2.2%	0
Shared Lives - a form of support where vulnerable adults and young people over 16 live at home with a specially recruited and trained carer and their family. The service runs in a similar way to a Foster placement.	3	72	8	6
	3.4%	80.9%	9.0%	6.7%

Question 5 - Please use this space for any other comments you wish to make about the possible closure of the Old Vicarage children's home

- 4.12. Respondents were also given an opportunity via the questionnaire to make additional comments about the proposed changes. There were mixed views reinforcing previous comments. There was acceptance that the use of the

funding needed to be reviewed in order to provide a service that ensures better outcomes for Medway's children and young people.

Comments

- 4.13. A number of respondents expressed concern about the current residents and their onward care pathway, should the provision close. All the young people in residence are approaching the age of 18 and have an ongoing transition plan to support them into Adult Social Care and alternative accommodation arrangements.
- 4.14. Some respondents expressed surprise that the Old Vicarage could not be repurposed whilst still remaining open. The Old Vicarage is an Ofsted registered facility. Changing the function, or type of service provided by such a facility requires a formal application to Ofsted.
- 4.15. Some suggestions were made regarding the type of provision that could be provided, and asked why this had not already been explored. As part of this consultation process, the proposal is also to look at what kind of service Medway Council needs to offer its children and young people. Some of these options are explored below (Section 7).

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1. As this proposal to close a service provision directly affects service users and staff the consultation was vital.
- 5.2. Having considered the feedback from the consultation, it is clear that the proposal to close the provision is not favoured.
- 5.3. However, it is vital that the needs of vulnerable children and young people in Medway are considered and since the current service model of the Old Vicarage no longer meets the more complex needs of service users, it needs to be re-engineered for the children and young people currently presenting to the Council in need of statutory help. We need to explore the feasibility of various alternative provisions. We cannot apply to change the Statement of Purpose of the provision until we know the type of provision that is required. Some potential options are explored below (Section 7).
- 5.4. Furthermore, continuing to provide the current service in its current format, is not financially viable. The current residents are already 18 or approaching 18 and the provision will continue to be under-used as children/young people with similar needs are now placed in a family environment, i.e. Foster Care. The unit cost of accommodation per young person will be much greater than the cost of suitable alternative provisions.
- 5.5. It is, therefore, recommended to proceed with the option to close the service and analyse alternative provisions that could be established (option 2 above).
- 5.6. It is recommended that the closure take effect from 7 February 2020 to enable robust analysis to take place to determine the most appropriate provision is implemented to support vulnerable children and young people in Medway.

Closing the provision will enable Medway Council to examine and commission the types of provision that will serve a greater number of our children on a sustainable basis.

- 5.7. The young people currently at the Old Vicarage are being kept informed of the situation as part of their pathway plan as they approach the age of 18. Their respective transitions into Adult Social Care are already under way.
- 5.8. Diversity Impact Assessments have been completed for both the staff and public consultations. These are attached at Appendices 1 and 2 to the report.

6. Risk management

6.1 The following risks have been identified.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Public opinion: the Council could be criticised for closing a provision rated Outstanding/Good when Children's Services are deemed Inadequate.	Whilst it is recognised that the Council needs to periodically review its provisions to achieve the best outcomes for its children and young people, the proposed closure of this provision is not likely to be well received by Medway residents and the local press.	<p>The completion of the consultation does not avoid this risk, but ensures that Medway residents, stakeholders and partner organisations have the opportunity to challenge the proposal.</p> <p>A meaningful consultation has been carried out and enables the Local Authority to respond appropriately to any queries or complaints.</p> <p>The Council recognises Ofsted's criticisms that children and young people are waiting too long for intervention. Reviewing our provision addresses this issue.</p>	B2
The closure of this service may not be received well.	The closure of the provision may cause anxiety for service users, their parents/carers and families.	The consultation included meetings with those affected, where alternative and appropriate services could be discussed.	B2
The closure will deem employees' roles at risk.	The closure will deem that the staff in the provision will no longer have roles at this service.	The consultation included meetings with staff, HR and Union Representatives. Alternative employment opportunities within the Council are being reviewed.	B2

7. Options for the Future Use of the Provision

7.1. Previously, Children's Services had identified various types of provision which could be explored. This has been researched in more detail and considered together with the Sufficiency Statement to ensure that we can project our thinking and plans into a strategic five-year vision. The findings under each section are:

7.1.1. Provide a number of in-house crisis beds, which are blocked-out and staffed by highly skilled staff/foster carers. These would cater for high-end breakdowns and would be designed to break the 'vicious circle' by creating time and space for the right long-term placement to be found. If we used this type of provision for our more challenging young people who are currently placed in provisions at a cost of £6,000 to £10,000 a week (averaging £8,000 per week or £416,000 a year) and managed them earlier (before crisis), the placement savings could be significant.

We have identified local providers that are looking to develop this provision locally in Medway. These providers are already under our existing framework. We would be keen to develop this with providers and understand through sufficiency planning where the gaps in future provision are.

7.1.2. Pilot a 12 week assessment placement (targeting Looked After Children [LAC] who are likely to have multiple placement breakdowns) to provide support and improve the quality of their future permanent placement.

Looking at national examples, many authorities are moving to a smaller provision to support this work with a provision for edge of care (Hampshire model is working well). Medway Children's Services would like this to be an option and use the resources from supporting the Old Vicarage into this programme of work.

We are not at a stage where we can detail this and would be a risk to do so based on current data. Medway Children's Services and Commissioning will align a future provision against the sufficiency plan (recently completed).

7.1.3. Develop an approach in line with the No Wrong Door Model adopted by North Yorkshire County Council. This would require developing an integrated multidisciplinary model of care for complex and hard to engage adolescents.

An evaluation of No Wrong Door Model by the Department for Education (2017), suggests this model significantly contributed to young people remaining out of the care system. Considerable changes were noted with minimal out of area placements, reduced placement moves and improved emotional health and wellbeing of young people.

Medway Children's Services is developing a new structure to support the adolescent model. Savings from the Old Vicarage could be used to support this model, working with children on the edge of being brought into care. This approach could identify value for money in a relatively short time. Such action is vital to reduce Medway's placement costs.

Medway Children's Services also working with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), Medway Task Force (MTF) and Serious Youth Violence (SYV) to look at this as a partnership endeavour focusing on those at greatest risk and vulnerability.

8. Implications for Looked After Children

- 8.1 This proposal applies to children and young people who are looked after by Medway Council. The report and associated work aim to improve outcomes for Medway's Looked After Children.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The closure of this provision will result in a reduction in spend of c£104,000 (c£60,000 per month) between February and the end of the financial year.
- 9.2 Potential redundancy costs have been estimated at a cost of £27,230, however there is the potential for this cost to be met by a central reserve.
- 9.3 There will also be ongoing maintenance and security costs to keep the building secure estimated at £1,666 per month.
- 9.4 Extending the closure further from April to the end of September (six months) to allow time to explore potential options for the provision would result in a further reduction in expenditure of £358,000 minus maintenance and security costs (estimated at £10,000 for this period).
- 9.5 A comprehensive analysis of the provision will enable the Council to provide more responsive care to a given cohort of children at risk, potentially reducing the risk at an earlier stage, which may avoid more costly intervention at a later stage. This was also recently highlighted within an independent review, identifying what Medway Council needs to do in order to improve outcomes for children at the same time as achieving savings.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1. The decision on this matter should be made by Cabinet on the basis that it is a key decision in terms of finance and outcome for the children of Medway, as it will make significant savings. (Chapter 2, Article 12.3 (b) of the constitution).
- 10.2. The service users living in the provision and staff members were consulted. A wider public consultation was not required, but the fact that a consultation was being held was published on the Council website so that anyone who felt they wished to comment could do so.
- 10.3. There was no statutory duty to consult regarding the purpose of the provision. There was no implied duty to consult as no promise of consultation had been made, there was no past practice of consultation of this nature and the nature and impact of the decision did not require it given the small number of service users affected by the decision.

- 10.4. There was a general duty to consult under the Equality Act 2010: s149 provides a duty in respect of people suffering any of the “protected characteristics” including age, which applied in this context.
- 10.5. The Consultation Principles 2018 issued by the Government recommend that consultation should last a proportionate amount of time, on the basis of legal advice and taking into account the nature and impact of the proposal. In this instance, the number of people affected was small and they were directly consulted. It was therefore judged that a four week consultation was reasonable.

11. Recommendations

- 11.1 That the Committee recommend the proposed closure of the current provision at the Old Vicarage Children’s Home, with continuation of care pathways for current residents at the home, finding suitable provision that meets their eligible needs, with the aim of minimising disruption to their care pathways.
- 11.2 That the Committee recommend that a provision is developed that ensures a greater number of children and young people receive the right intervention at the right time, a need highlighted during the ILACS inspection.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – DIA for service users and public
Appendix 2 – DIA for staff

Background papers

None.