

Mr Marshall, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People	Ref No:
May 2019	Key Decision: Yes
Beechfield Secure Children's Home - building and service plans	Part I
Report by Director of Children and Family Services	Electoral Divisions: All
<p>Summary</p> <p>Beechfield is a secure children's home owned and run by the County Council that is located in Copthorne, near Crawley. Historically, the secure unit provided placements for vulnerable young people with highly complex needs.</p> <p>Beechfield has been closed since October 2016 following an Ofsted inspection rating of "inadequate". Since that time work has been undertaken to review the need for this type of provision within West Sussex. An assessment of the steps required to enable the unit to reopen and understand the approach other local authorities are taking in relation to secure accommodation has also been carried out.</p> <p>This review has identified that the unit is no longer financially viable as the demand and need analysis for this type of care is not significant enough to justify the running of the unit as part of the County Council's residential estate.</p>	
<p>West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context</p> <p>Best Start in Life - The proposal in relation to service planning for young people with highly complex needs seeks to better match the Council's ambitions for young people with such needs and to move away from a reliance on secure accommodation.</p> <p>A Council that works for the community - The proposal seeks to make more effective use of Council resources and the support of critical service partners.</p>	
<p>Financial Impact</p> <p>The closure of Beechfield will result in budget pressure of £460k in 2020/21 by removing the anticipated profit from the Children's budget. The future decision on the Council's plans for the site and the use of any proceeds if sold will need to take account of obligations related to previous grants from the Department for Education (DfE).</p>	
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People agrees to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The permanent cessation of the operation of the Beechfield Secure Unit and (2) Declare the Beechfield secure unit site surplus to service requirements. 	

Proposal

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 Beechfield is a 7 bedded secure children's home owned and run by West Sussex County Council, located in Copthorne, near Crawley. Between 2003 and 2016 the unit was used for the provision of secure placements for young people with highly complex needs aged between 10 and 17.
- 1.2 Beechfield provided a resource to accommodate young people looked after by the Council and who needed to be accommodated securely for short periods of significant need. On average the Council would place no more than 2 young people in secure accommodation during the year. As a national resource Beechfield was also available for placements by other councils. This provided a source of income whilst also addressing the national demand for specialist resources of this kind.
- 1.3 Beechfield also provided education and training as a service for those young people placed there. Most recently this provision was secured from the Alternative Provision College (APC). The education services commissioned from APC withdrew from the Service Level Agreement on 31/12/18.
- 1.4 In October 2016, Beechfield was closed following an Ofsted inspection rating of 'inadequate', highlighting a number of significant concerns regarding its management, operational practice and physical environment.
- 1.5 During the period of closure the opportunity has been taken to review the value and usefulness of Beechfield as a resource. The conclusion is that it is not likely to provide an adequate service resource in the long term, due to building deterioration and stricter physical requirements for the provision of secure accommodation services that have come into effect since 2016. Improvements to the building have been made as an interim measure to address the issues identified at closure; however, in order for provision to be restored for the longer term, a significant refurbishment and re-modelling would be required to meet Ofsted requirements.
- 1.6 Beechfield's current license to operate was granted by Ofsted and expired in March 2019. The DfE have also ceased their involvement in the service, relating to their licence to operate as a secure unit.
- 1.7 There are 14 Ofsted registered secure units across the country operating 234 beds in total. Sizes of the units vary with the smallest two units both operating 7 bed models in East and West Sussex (when operational), and the largest unit of 38 beds located in Durham.
- 1.8 The units are mostly local authority run with only one operated by a voluntary sector organisation.
- 1.9 Following the closure of Beechfield the following actions have been taken:
 - In depth review of the model offered
 - Staff redeployed into roles across the Council
 - 24 Hour CCTV surveillance was installed at Beechfield to ensure

the site was kept secure

- Larger assets (such as furniture) were re-distributed across the residential estate

- 1.10 The interim refurbishment of Beechfield referred to in para 1.5 was achieved through DfE Grant Funding

Service Review

- 1.11 The service need for secure accommodation has been assessed and the conclusions are set out in paragraph 7.2 below.
- 1.12 During the period of closure the Council has required secure accommodation places for 4 children for varying lengths of time. This is typically between 3-7 months. The cost of this provision was £454k.
- 1.13 The site is currently vacant with no staff working from it; facilities management currently visit the site to ensure that it is secure, with 24 hours CCTV surveillance on the site.

2. Proposal Details

- 2.1 It is proposed to permanently cease operations at Beechfield with the intent to, where possible, redeploy staff into existing vacancies to minimise potential redundancies. This will enable the building to be declared surplus by the service.
- 2.2 A detailed inventory is being undertaken on the site to ensure that best value for money is achieved in the redistribution of the remaining assets from the site.
- 2.3 To fully vacate the site should take no longer than 2 months which will allow all resources to be removed.
- 2.4 The service requirements for secure accommodation in the future would be met through the nationally managed resource allocation which matches specialist provision and availability with the needs of the young person and the urgency of those needs. It is not expected that this will be required to a greater extent than has been over the last two and a half years.

3. Consultation

Members

- 3.1. The Cabinet Member and his Senior Advisor have been appraised of the issues affecting Beechfield and the problems associated with plans to re-open the unit. They both undertook a site visit to a secure unit run by a neighbouring authority to obtain an understanding the requirements for an operational unit and ascertain if there was the potential for Beechfield to re-open.
- 3.2 A site visit to the secure unit operated by Leeds City Council was undertaken by the Senior Advisor. This identified that there was a need for significant investment at Beechfield, particularly in terms of the

architectural requirements to meet the secure specification, in order to replicate the secure offer provided by other authorities.

External

- 3.3 Officers made contact with 22 local authorities to assess whether there was any interest in establishing a partnership arrangement; no interest was expressed in Beechfield by another local authority.

Staff

- 3.4 Staff and Unions have been informed of the plans for Beechfield and will be part of a formal staff consultation when the formal decision has been taken.

4. Financial (revenue and capital) and Resource Implications

- 4.1 Beechfield is budgeted to achieve a surplus of £460k income over expenditure within the Children & Young People's budget. This surplus related to anticipated revenue presuming the unit was open and generating a positive income (which it never has). This has been removed temporarily for 2019/20 through a 1 year budget allocation and reflected in the budget report for 2019/20. The decision to cease permanently will need to be addressed as part of the 2020/21 budget process.

4.2 Revenue consequences of proposal

The proposal would have the following impact on the Children's In House Residential & Foster Care budget -

	Current Year 2019/20 £m	Year 2 2020/21 £m	Year 3 2021/22 £m	Year 4 2022/23 £m
Revenue budget		6.815		
Change from Proposal		0.460		
Remaining budget		7.275		

4.3 Capital consequences

- 4.3.1 The capital consequences of the proposed recommendation will not be known until a decision is made regarding the future of the Beechfield site. That will need to follow consideration of options and the benefits and consequences of those options.
- 4.3.2 In April 2015 the service secured grant funding from the DfE to make improvements to the building at Beechfield with a view to re-opening the unit if appropriate. The future decision on the Council's plans for the site and the use of any proceeds if sold will need to take account of obligations related to grants from the DfE.

4.4 *The effect of the proposal*

Beechfield has not achieved a revenue surplus in its history and has not been open as a service for over two years. The decision to close and dispose of the site will reduce the ongoing depreciation and maintenance costs currently being incurred to maintain the safety and security of the building.

4.5 *Future transformation, savings/efficiencies being delivered*

Although Beechfield was budgeted to achieve a surplus, costs have been incurred in other parts of the Councils' budget such as property and education, which means that Beechfield operated at a net cost to the Council. Even when operational, the full cost to the Council has always exceeded the income generated.

4.6 *Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact*

There are 14 employees who worked at Beechfield when it was operational who have since been redeployed. All 14 staff are currently temporarily reassigned to teams and services within Children & Family Services, pending a decision on the unit's future. A decision to permanently close Beechfield will give rise to a risk of redundancy however, that will be mitigated by a redeployment exercise to identify alternative long term solutions for these staff after the formal decision to permanently close Beechfield has been made.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 Statute

There is no obligation for a local authority to provide a secure unit of accommodation within its area. The duty arises to provide suitable options for the children it holds responsibility for. This duty can be discharged throughout the residential estate and market partnerships with external providers.

6. Risk Assessment Implications and Mitigations

6.1 The key risks and actions to mitigate these are set out in the appendix.

7. Other Options Considered (and reasons for not proposing)

7.1 Significant work has been undertaken by Officers and the Cabinet Member over the last 6 months to consider the other options for the service.

7.2 Main Alternative Option

The significant alternative option would be to re-open the service as a secure unit. This was appraised and discounted on the following grounds;

- The County Council does not have a specific need for secure accommodation for its own children; just 4 placements have been made since 2016/17,

- The County Council is moving towards a model of prevention and multi-agency intervention to avoid the need for secure accommodation,
- Based on further in depth feedback from Leeds City Council including a 2 day site visit, the building is unsuitable for secure accommodation in its current condition,
- The unit is located in Surrey, which would cause issues with Police Forces and CCG (Health) catchment areas, as these are changing and have changed within the last few years. They have different operating procedures and different levels of funding.
- In summer 2018, efforts were made to recruit a registered manager through a nationwide recruitment process to enable the unit to re-open. The County Council were unable to recruit a manager with the specialist skills required due to the complex requirements of the role.
- The County Council is currently reviewing the in-house residential offer with a view to implementing a residential strategy and improvement plan. In addition the County Council is working with providers to develop the market, with a view to providing a more preventative offer that avoids the need for secure services and develops a high standard of operation for complex children and young people in the residential estate. Re-opening a secure unit, including the resource and complexity, may distract from this and affect a wider cohort.

8. Equality and Human Rights Assessment

- 8.1 The implications of removing the service provision within the County will mean that any placement of a young person will be further afield and the Council will have less control over the provision identified. The arrangements for meeting the complex and often urgent needs of young people in these circumstances will need to be made carefully by reference to the public sector equality duty and be informed by a thorough understanding of the impact on an individual's protected characteristics.
- 8.2 In addition any proposal to make provision for secure accommodation for a young person triggers the Council's obligations under Article 5 of the Human Rights Convention (the right to liberty and security of person) and Article 8 (respect for private family life and home). These are responsibilities the Council discharges when assessing the need for secure accommodation and the arrangements require a judicial process which ensures that full independent oversight of the use of such accommodation is in place.

9. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment

Not applicable

10. Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment

Not applicable

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Appendices

Appendix Risks and Actions to Mitigate

Background Papers - None

DRAFT

Key Risks and Actions to Mitigate

Risk Description	Risk Impact	RAG	Risk Control/Action
Pace is required to ensure that all sensitive information is removed from the site.	Reputational risk for the county council if confidential information is not stored appropriately.		Priority work to itemise and archive documents in accordance with normal WSCC procedure
Risk of redundancy for staff whose substantive post is at Beechfield.	Loss of skilled and experienced staff who could be redeployed to vacancies elsewhere in the county council, particularly in other parts of Children's Services.		Continuous engagement with staff throughout the process to ensure the potential impact of the decision on the closure of Beechfield to be minimised.
Historic DfE investment funding will need to be re-invested into Children's Services	If the funding re-investment is not sufficiently evidenced then there is a risk that DfE will request the investment returned.		Robust itinerary of all equipment and resources from Beechfield. Agreed evidencing of any potential release of capital from the potential sale of the Beechfield site.