

Report to: Cllr Jacquie Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

October 2022

Repurposing of Former West Green Youth Centre

Report by: Lucy Butler, Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Electoral divisions: Northgate & West Green, Broadfield, Langley Green and Ifield East

Summary

The County Council has a statutory duty to provide meaningful contact between children we care for (CWCF) and those in care proceedings with family and other people important to them. The Council's Family Time Contact Service (FTCS) meets this requirement through family time sessions from a number of locations across the county, including one in Crawley. The property used in Crawley has been identified as the best option to provide temporary accommodation for children living in two of the Council's children's homes – Teasel and High Trees – whilst refurbishment of these homes is underway. An alternative location for FTCS in the Crawley area has been identified at the former West Green Youth Centre.

In October 2021 the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People approved the launch of a procurement process to refurbish Teasel and High Trees Children's Homes (decision [CYP02 \(21/22\)](#) refers). However, it is now proposed to procure the work to these 2 homes together with the work to West Green and the work on the temporary accommodation at the current FTCS hub in Crawley under a single contract. This should mitigate the risks of multiple contractors involved in 4 interdependent projects. An allocation of £1m for the relocation of FTCS in Crawley was made in the capital programme budget approved by Full Council in February 2022. £121k has already been approved to deliver the design stage. The total project cost for West Green is estimated at £888k, and the remaining funds are now requested.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is asked to:-

- (1) Approve the allocation of £767k from the capital programme allocation towards the work required to repurpose West Green Youth Centre.
- (2) Approve the commencement of a procurement process for a contractor to deliver the work to repurpose West Green Youth Centre, as well as work to prepare the temporary residential accommodation using the current Family Time Contact Service site and the refurbishment of Teasel and High Trees Children's Homes.

- (3) Delegate authority to the Director of Children, Young People and Learning, in consultation with the Assistant Director (Property and Assets), to award the contract for the works required to these 4 properties.
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Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 West Sussex County Council has a statutory obligation to provide meaningful contact between children we care for (CWCF) and those in care proceedings, and their birth families and other significant people. The Family Time Contact Service (FTCS) meets this requirement through delivering family time sessions from a number of locations across the county, including 3 dedicated sites in Worthing, Bognor Regis and Crawley.
- 1.2 The property in Crawley where family time sessions are delivered has been identified as the best option to be repurposed for the provision of temporary accommodation for children resident at two of the Council's children's homes (Teasel and High Trees, both also in Crawley) whilst the refurbishment of these homes is underway, as part of separate but interdependent projects as detailed in paragraph 1.5.
- 1.3 FTCS is also profiled to experience an increase in demand for contacts in the coming years, driven by the increasing CWCF population. There is therefore a requirement to identify a permanent location for a Family Time Hub in Crawley that is fit for purpose, meets the needs of children, families and carers and frees up the current property to enable the refurbishment of High Trees and Teasel to take place.
- 1.4 In 2021 a feasibility study took place on Maidenbower Day Centre, Crawley, to become the permanent location for the Family Time Hub; however, the study identified issues with the site, leading to it being discounted as an option. In late 2021 a viability study commenced on West Green Youth Centre (a County Council owned property identified as surplus to requirement during the [redesign of the Early Help Service](#) in 2021). This study demonstrated that this site was a viable option. This was further developed into a feasibility study which completed in April 2022, indicating an estimated total project cost of £888k.
- 1.5 In October 2021 the Cabinet Member approved the allocation of funding for and the commencement of a procurement process to refurbish High Trees and Teasel children's Homes in Crawley (decision [CYP02\(21/22\)](#) refers). These works are required to resolve critical issues with the sites, modernise the homes and improve the facilities for those children resident there. Due to the extensive nature of these refurbishment projects, approval was also given to prepare an alternative Council-owned property to provide temporary accommodation for the children of each home to reside in during these separate refurbishment projects. It is now proposed that the current FTCS property in Crawley is used for this purpose.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 West Green Youth Centre (to be renamed West Green Family Time Hub) is proposed as the new FTCS hub in Crawley. The 2 existing open halls will be sub-divided to create 5 separate contact rooms, a sensory room and storage spaces. The existing office/meeting spaces, kitchen and WCs will be retained,

with minor modifications to layout to account for the building's new purpose. Two enclosed and private outdoor contact spaces will also be created to the front of the building. The building overall will benefit from refurbishment, with improvements that will increase efficiency and reduce running costs and carbon emissions.

- 2.2 Once work at West Green is complete and FTCS have moved, the current FTCS hub in Crawley will be utilised as temporary accommodation for children from High Trees and Teasel children's homes. A plan for its longer-term use will be made within the aims of the Council's Asset Strategy and in line with the planned period of temporary use. This will require some work to the current FTCS Crawley hub to make it fit for purpose. It was determined that the best course of action was to procure the work to all 4 properties (West Green Youth Centre, the current FTCS Crawley Hub and High Trees and Teasel children's homes) together in order to reduce the commercial risk associated with multiple contractors working on interdependent projects. On this basis, the procurement for the works to High Trees and Teasel has not yet commenced and will not until the other projects are ready.
- 2.3 As part of this decision the Cabinet Member is asked to approve delegation of authority to award the contract to the Director of Children, Young People and Learning, in consultation with the Assistant Director (Property and Assets); the process to award will be subject to an officer key decision.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 **Do nothing.** FTCS would remain in a building that is not ideally suited for family time contact and is itself in need of work and modernisation in order to make it suitable as a long-term location. An alternative location for the Residential Service to use as temporary accommodation for children from Teasel and High Trees would have to be found. Requests for available properties have been sent to external providers of residential care in West Sussex but no opportunities have been identified. Identifying a suitable alternative to either lease or purchase in West Sussex that would meet with Ofsted registration requirements without also requiring significant investment is highly unlikely. This option was therefore discounted due to the impact it would have on the children and families supported by FTCS and the Residential Service, as well as the additional costs involved.
- 3.2 **Identify another location for FTCS in Crawley.** Maidenbower Day Centre, another vacant property, was identified as a potential option but proved to be unviable after a study in 2021. No other available WSCC assets have been identified as suitable in the Crawley area. Identifying another property would therefore entail either leasing or purchasing a suitable space at further cost, which would also require resource from the Property and Assets team to conduct a search and put in place arrangements for a lease or purchase, adding further time to this project and the interdependent residential projects. Given FTCS requirements for their buildings, this would also likely entail additional investment to make the space suitable. This option was therefore not deemed cost effective and was discounted.
- 3.3 **Identify an alternative use for West Green Youth Centre.** This site was originally identified as surplus to Early Help requirements as part of the Early Help redesign in 2021. It is estimated that leasing the site to a 3rd party could offer the potential for income plus savings in running costs. Disposal of the site

could also offer the potential for capital receipt. However, both of these options would have the same negative impacts as set out in paragraphs 3.1 and/or 3.2, requiring either FTCS to remain where it is, identify an alternative location, and/or for the Residential Service to identify an alternative property for the temporary accommodation. This would result in a level of disruption to children and families, delays in interdependent projects and additional cost that would outweigh any possible benefit from leasing or disposing of the site. This option has therefore been discounted on the basis that the West Green property is the best and only option to meet the needs of FTCS and Residential Service users.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The Member for Northgate & West Green has been updated on the plans for West Green Youth Centre. The local Members for High Trees and Teasel children’s homes have been briefed throughout the development of the proposals for the refurbishment of these properties.
- 4.2 The intention to retain West Green Youth Centre was included within an update on the [Early Help Asset Plan](#) given to Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee on 17th June 2022.
- 4.3 The Capital and Assets Board (the Council’s internal governance process for capital projects) has considered and supports the proposal and comments from the Board have been incorporated into the final proposal and recommendations. No material changes have been made to the proposal or the recommendations since consideration by the Board.

5 Finance

5.1 Revenue consequences

Some additional revenue costs arise from the borrowing required for capital budgets below. These have been calculated at 3.8% borrowing over 35 years. Any delay in the refurbishment will delay the revenue savings that have been included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The table below shows the cost of borrowing set against the savings from Phase 2 of the Council’s children’s residential home refurbishments currently shown in the MTFS, which West Green will support the delivery of.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Net annual saving CYP portfolio	0.000	0.000	-0.042	-0.127	-0.169
Borrowing costs paid centrally	0.143	0.141	0.139	0.137	0.560
Net saving (-) saving (+) cost	+0.143	+0.141	+0.097	+0.010	+0.391

The net annual saving for the County Council as a whole, after taking into account borrowing costs above, starts to exceed the cumulative cost of borrowing in 2026/27. The net costs are £0.122m as at the end of 2025/26.

There will also be the lost benefit from the original plan to declare West Green surplus to service need (see section 3.3). This property was previously declared surplus to Early Help requirements, and it was anticipated savings on running costs would have been achieved following vacation in December 2021. This property will now continue to be treated as a Corporate Asset and all current revenue budgets will continue to pay for the outgoings at this property on an annual basis, estimated at £15,700 p/a.

5.2 Capital consequences

The table below deals with the amount requested for West Green of £0.767m. £0.121m has already been approved and is in flight in the capital programme as design fees. This leaves £0.112m of the original £1m in the pipeline for this project. When the current capital programme was set, this was labelled as Maidenbower, but it was subsequently decided, on the basis of viability studies, to repurpose West Green instead (see section 3.2).

	Current Year 2022/23	Year 2 2023/24	Year 3 2024/25	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2026/27	0.2	0.8	-	1
Approved design fees West Green	-0.121	-	-	-0.121
Change from Proposal – repurposing of West Green	-	-0.767	-	-0.767
Remaining budget Pipeline	0.079	0.033	-	0.112

This request asks for a procurement process for a contractor to deliver the work to repurpose West Green Youth Centre, as well as the work to prepare the temporary residential accommodation at the current FTCS site and the refurbishment of Teasel and High Trees children’s homes. The current capital budgets available to fund this procurement process are shown below.

Capital Budget	£m
West Green approved	0.121
West Green requested	0.767
High Trees approved	1.799
Teasel Close approved	1.081
Total	3.768

5.3 The effect of the proposal:

(a) **How the cost represents good value**

This proposal utilises only vacant WSCC assets for both FTCS and the Residential service and the use of the current FTCS building will be temporary, leading to a review of its future use within the asset strategy. It also minimises additional costs for both the residential service and the FTCS service by keeping the services close to those who need to attend them as service users.

(b) **Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

The savings and efficiencies relate to the avoidance of the more costly options if a future FTCS provision were needed to be secured from other assets outside the Council's control. There will be a longer-term benefit from the availability of the current FTCS building once the temporary use has ended. This will in part offset the originally planned savings from the release of the West Green building as part of the Early Help re-design.

(c) Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact

The repurposing of West Green Youth Centre will require the relocation of 8 members of WSCC staff from the existing FTCS site. As the distance between sites is c. 2 miles, the impact is assessed as minimal. Additional desk space for up to 4 members of staff from the Youth Justice team has also been included within the design, taking advantage of the existing space to better accommodate another WSCC team in need of space. All necessary ICT considerations have been included within the proposed design for West Green. This proposal will also result in the refurbishment of a WSCC asset, increasing the lifespan of the site.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
1. Impact on children, families and carers – this proposal will entail a change in location for service users of FTCS and the Residential Service, which may be more or less convenient for some.	Service users will be communicated with as the projects develop – notification of timings for the change in location of services will be given well in advance to children, families and carers supported by FTCS and the Residential Service.
2. Impact on staff – staff will be required to change their base locations within the Crawley area (the driving distance between the current and proposed sites is c. 2 miles).	Staff have been made aware of the move and likely timescales, and managers will also continue to be involved in workshops as the design progresses.
3. Delay – should slippage in timescales occur, there will be an impact on the delivery of work as a part of phase 2 of the residential programme. There may also be some knock-on financial risk if the contractor is delayed in starting a project as a result.	All 4 sites are proposed to be procured under one contractor, minimising any potential delay and any commercial risk. Any impact on services should be minimal, as no move/decant would take place until the relevant property in the 'chain' was ready, even if slippage should occur.
4. Escalating costs – current market material and labour scarcity is resulting in fluctuations in cost and delays in some projects.	Contingencies and allowances for inflation have been built into the budget to account for the risk of changes in cost. Instruction will be placed as soon as possible with contractors/suppliers to ensure sufficient lead-in time to source materials and labour.

7 Policy alignment and compliance

7.1 Our Council Plan – This proposal will have the following impact on key performance indicators (KPIs) from the West Sussex Our Council Plan;

Outcome	KPI
Support to people when they need it	Stability of CWCF placements – providing a dedicated and repurposed family time contact space in Crawley will support the service in providing high-quality contact between families and CWCF, contributing to their wellbeing and therefore increasing the likelihood that their placement will remain stable.
CO2 emissions	The proposed work will result in an estimated reduction in annual carbon emissions from West Green Youth Centre of 7.351 tonnes, as a result of improvements to the building.

- 7.2 Legal implications – This proposal meets with the Council’s obligations under The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (“PCR”) and its own standing orders. Faithful & Gould, the Council’s Multi-Disciplinary Consultant (MDC), will be instructed to produce final designs prior to commencement of works. The MDC was compliantly procured following a competitive procurement process in 2018. The combined value of the 4 projects to be procured together for construction is estimated at £3.43m and is below the current procurement thresholds for works contracts. This proposal will also support the Council to better meet its statutory obligation to promote contact under the Children Act.
- 7.3 Equality duty and human rights assessment – The design for West Green includes elements to better accommodate children with disabilities and those with additional needs, including a dedicated sensory room for contacts.
- 7.4 Climate change – The following elements have been included in the design for West Green, leading to the estimated reduction in annual carbon emissions of 7.351 tonnes;
- Controls modification
 - Installation of sub-metering
 - Improvements to wall insulation
 - Installation of photo voltaic panels
- A water neutrality study on the proposed design for West Green has also indicated that the building’s water consumption will be reduced by an estimated 146m³ per annum as a result of the proposed changes.
- 7.5 Crime and disorder – N/A
- 7.6 Public health – N/A
- 7.7 Social value – Social value considerations will be built into the procurement process to secure a contractor to deliver these works. For example, through assessing the degree to which a contractor will be able to employ individuals and use suppliers within West Sussex, thereby boosting employment and stimulating the local economy.

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Background papers – None