

Date: 02 January 2024

Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Thursday 4th January 2024

Dear Sir / Madam,

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

I am now able to enclose a copy of the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was circulated.

4. **Homes for Children in Our Care** (Pages 3 - 50)

Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

John Tradewell
Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services



Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Thursday 4 January 2024

Homes for Children in Our Care

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Supports the recommendation for Staffordshire County Council (SCC) to open three (6) in-house Local Authority run children's homes.
- b. Supports the recommendation to request a Contribution of £0.3m in 24/25 from the Council's transformation fund to meet upfront costs incurred during the transition process (invest to save).
- c. Supports the recommendation for SCC to join the West Midlands Framework for the Provision of Residential Placements – from October 2024
- d. Supports the recommendation for SCC to join the West Midlands Foster Care Framework from April 2024.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Councillor Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People

Summary

1. Seeking approval to:

- a. Open six (6) in-house Local Authority run children's homes. This is to help compliment the current homes and provide smaller homes for our children & young people (C&YP) who have more complex needs. The aim is to help maintain some control over the market by enabling SCC to take C&YP that the private sector is reluctant to take without a significant increase in their fees.
- b. For a contribution of £0.3m in 24/25 from the Council's transformation fund to meet upfront costs incurred during the transition process (invest to save).

- c. Join the West Midlands Framework for the Provision of Residential Placements 2024. The current flexible framework contract expires in December 2024. The plan is to implement a new framework earlier, by October 2024. The aim is to encourage more providers to join which aims to widen choice, specialisms and achieve better value for money. This contract is led by Coventry on behalf of the West Midlands region.
- d. Join the West Midlands Foster Care Framework 2024. This framework is to replace the existing framework which has been in place since April 2020 and expires in March 2024. The current framework has been successful in maintaining costs and has helped access a wide market. The current contract may be extended by 3 months given timescales are tight. The current contract is led by Sandwell on behalf of the West Midlands region.

Report

- 2. Please refer to Appendix 1: Cabinet Report.

Strategic Plan

- 3. The Placement Sufficiency Strategy, aligned to the Council's Strategic plan, aims to increase sufficiency to meet the needs of children & young people in our care with the most complex needs. The recommendations within this paper / Appendix 1 are aligned to this overarching aim.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

- 4. N/A

Community Impact

- 5. Please see attached –

Appendix 3 - CIA (LA run children's homes)

Appendix 4 - CIA (residential framework)

Appendix 5 - CIA (West Midlands Fostering Framework)

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Cabinet Paper (17/1/2024) - Homes for Children in Our Care

Appendix 2 - Time Line

Appendix 3 - CIA (LA run children's homes)

Appendix 4 - CIA (residential framework)

Appendix 5 - CIA (West Midlands Fostering Framework)

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Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 21 February 2024

Homes for Children in Our Care



Councillor Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People said,

"Providing a safe and nurturing environment for some of our most vulnerable children is a priority for us. It is clear that most local authorities are facing challenges in this area, which is why it is important we plan effectively to help meet their needs.

"By proposing to open six in-house children's homes, we can ensure our vulnerable children will be taken care of in a home within the county, have better flexibility for those with multiple needs, and we can create more stability for children in our care to help them thrive.

"As well as this, by joining regional frameworks for the provision of residential homes and foster care, we can be sure to have vulnerable children and young people in the right home that meets their needs and increase the number of children and young people who return to the family home wherever possible."

Report Summary:

Staffordshire County Council (SCC) has a duty to provide sufficient homes to meet the needs of children in its care.

Nationally all local authorities are facing challenges in meeting these duties, this is recognised in 'Stable Homes Built on Love' and the government's commitment to develop alternative approaches to seek to tackle the national challenges faced through Regional Care Collaboratives will take time to develop and we are therefore seeking to develop local approaches to help us mitigate the impact.

Following the endorsement of the Homes for Our Children, Sufficiency Strategy work has been underway to deliver our plan including exploring a range of possible options which will support us to meet our statutory duty resulting in three recommendations to Cabinet.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Endorse the proposal to open six (6) in-house Local Authority run children's homes.
- b. Contribution of £0.3m in 24/25 from the Council's transformation fund to meet upfront costs incurred during the transition process (invest to save).
- c. Endorse Staffordshire County Council joining the new West Midlands Framework for the Provision of Residential Homes from October 2024.
- d. Endorse SCC joining the new West Midlands Foster Care Framework from April 2024.

Cabinet – Wednesday 17 January 2024**Homes for Children in Our Care****Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Endorse the proposal to open six (6) in-house Local Authority run children's homes.
- b. Contribution of £0.3m in 24/25 from the Council's transformation fund to meet upfront costs incurred during the transition process (invest to save).
- c. Endorse Staffordshire County Council joining the West Midlands Framework for the Provision of Residential Homes from October 2024.
- d. Endorse SCC joining the West Midlands Foster Care Framework from April 2024.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Director for Children and Families**Reasons for Recommendations:**

1. We recommend that Staffordshire County Council endorses three proposed parallel approaches to help us secure the right type of homes for our children at the best price.
2. This will help us achieve our objectives set out in the Homes for Children Sufficiency Strategy, 2023,

- a. Homes that are closer to home,
- b. Reduce the number of times a child must move,
- c. Create better flexibility for children with multiple needs,
- d. Eliminate unregulated provision and
- e. More cost-effective options in an expensive market.

Homes for Children in our Care

The current picture - National and Regional

3. Nationally the government have recognised that the children's care market is a risk which needs a new approach. Within 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' they acknowledged that there was more that could be done, steps taken nationally to address this have been slow.
4. In 2023 the DfE launched several pathfinders to test new ways of working. The mechanism chosen to affect change for this market was the development of the Regional Care Collaboratives (RCC.) These RCC's would see Local Authorities working through a regional arrangement to enable greater buying power.
5. West Midlands has a developed regional commissioning hub however it is small (circa 4 staff) and has limited capacity to fulfil the suggested model of delivery offered by the DfE.
6. An application was submitted by the WM to develop the RCC and areas will be selected in January 2024. This could see circa £5 million invested in two regions nationally.
7. The urgency for Staffordshire means that we cannot wait for National changes, the pressure on budgets requires a proactive approach in the short term to help us address the financial overspends.
8. A recent report prepared by the LGA compared our level of spend to other local authorities and Staffordshire is a 'middle payer' compared with other local authorities. Some costs nationally have been reported to run to £63,000 per week.

Current Picture - Locally

9. As at 9th December 2023, the number of Children in Care (CiC) was 1,360. These children live in a range of types of homes;
 - a. 353 children with independent foster carers

- b. 330 children with in-house foster carers.
 - c. 217 children with a Relative/friend foster carer.
 - d. 124 residential homes of which includes 21 children with disabilities.
10. Having developed the Homes for our children sufficiency strategy we sought to develop options which would support the aspirations, exploring options to tackle the rising costs and lack of the right type of care for our children.

Residential Homes

11. Currently the percentage of children in residential homes is 8.6% which is down from around 10% in previous years and compares favourably to the West Midlands average, 12.4%.
12. SCC spends approximately £31.5m per year on residential homes with 124 independent places at any one time. The 20 high-cost place costs SCC £150k per week, which equates to £7.8m per year.
13. We do have unregulated/unregistered arrangements which can cost circa £13k/15k per week per child. We do not want children utilising these places but the existing residential market does not currently match some children leaving us without an alternative. This equates to approximately 2 or 3 children of the top 20.
14. The single most important step we can take in reducing the cost is securing a stable home. When we do not secure the stable home it often results in multiple moves. The 20 most complex children were moved 71 times in total.
15. Of the 124 children; 68 children (57%) are placed outside of Staffordshire (7% of which are in Stoke-on-Trent), ideally they would be placed within the county.
16. Based on the future modelling as part of the transformation we estimate circa 90 children will need to have a residential placement, of those we anticipate circa 15 will have multiple complex needs which would currently be unlikely to be met by the independent sector.
17. Staffordshire is no different to other local authorities in needing both internal and external provision to meet the needs of children. Internally we have capacity for 19 children at any one time (3 medium to long-term). Meaning circa 121 children are currently placed using the external market. Often it is cheaper to use the

external market but as the complexity increases the cost externally is not sustainable.

18. Most local authorities are investing in internal provision to disrupt the market and provide care for children who would otherwise be difficult to place. SCC currently has the following internal provision:

- a. 4 bed edge-of-care provision (Stafford Short Breaks).
- b. 4 bed home (The Alders).
- c. 3 bed home (The Firs).
- d. 2 x 4 bed in-house short break disability homes (Cannock Resource Centre and Hawthorne's Resource Centre).

19. Stafford Short Breaks, Cannock Resource Centre and Hawthorne's Resource Centre are all Public Finance Initiative (PFI) buildings that are due to come back to SCC in the next 3 years. The plans for them are to continue to be used in the current form. These buildings have been ruled out for consideration as properties for children's homes on the basis that they are not conducive for offering a small, homely environment.

20. The other in-house home i.e. the Alders is a large 7 bed property which is registered for 4 children. This type of provision is also not appropriate for supporting C&YP with more complex needs such as emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) which we have seen an increase of post pandemic. Hence the new in-house LA home, The Firs, is a smaller setting (3 registered beds).

21. In addition to external provision, Staffordshire County council currently accesses the West Midlands Flexible Framework Contract, which is a contract for providers who provide residential care. This has been developed and implemented on a regional basis to ensure we maximise the leverage with our collective buying power.

22. The framework is due to expire in December 2024. We know that we get better value using regional frameworks and a greater range of providers. The West Midlands region is seeking to widen access to more providers to increase competition to help control the market.

23. The new framework is intended to increase the number of providers, SCC currently purchase 56% of our homes for children from the framework and 44% off-contract for our children. The framework tends to be 41% cheaper than spot purchase.

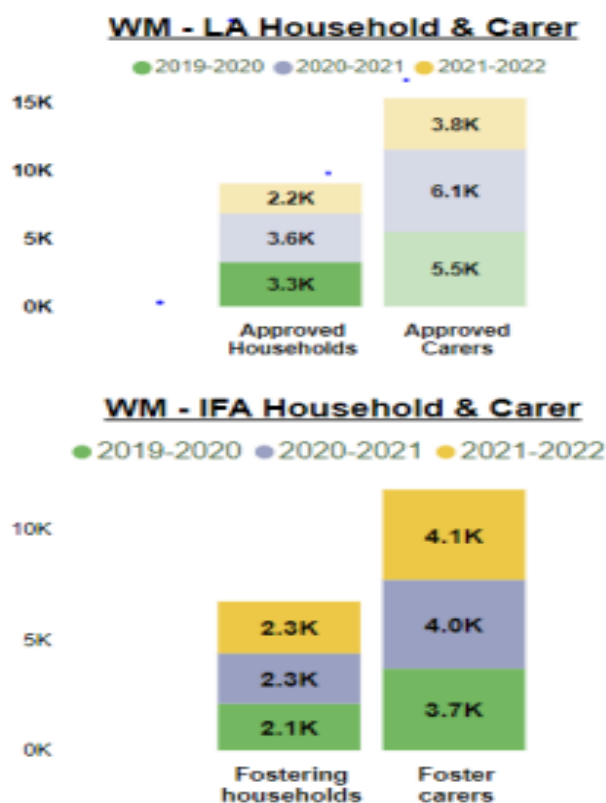
24. The average cost on the framework is £4.4k per week and for off-contract is approximately £7.4k per week. SCC have always tended

to use more framework providers than non-framework providers and are keen to ensure access is increased further. Hence, why a collaborative approach with all West Midlands authorities/trusts, including the West Midlands Regional Commissioning Hub is key to ensure we achieve best value.

Fostering

25. We know that foster carers are in short supply nationally and regionally, with the number of internal foster carers dropping in the West Midlands from 6,070 to 3,780 from 2021 to 2022 (with IFAs maintaining their number of carers at around 4,000, detailed in the table below).

26. Recruitment and retention of foster carers has been difficult with a noticeable decline in the number of foster carers made in the last year which has been identified in SCC Sufficiency Strategy of an area of action.



27. SCC always pursues in-house carers as the priority, however with a reduction overall in the number of foster carers available often SCC relies on the private sector to meet demand.

28. When SCC procures independent foster care via an agency we use the West Midlands Foster Care Framework. This expires on the 31st March 2024. SCC places approximately 160 children with external foster carers in per year via the independent sector. Staffordshire secures better value using these frameworks and therefore renewing the regional approach will ensure maximum value is secured. Average cost of framework placements is £840 per week compared to approximately £1,100 per week compared to off framework placements.

29. Although, in-house carers are much more cost effective than the private sector, SCC still currently needs the private sector to meet the demand to avoid higher residential costs.

30. The benefits of a regional framework are as follows:

- a. As the contract is used when needed, no need to pay for voids such a block contract.
- b. No pressure on the providers to accept inappropriate matches.
- c. Helps widen the market supply by accessing as many providers as possible.
- d. Standard service specification agreed by all local authorities will help encourage specialisms and deliver consistency.
- e. Provides regional buying power to influence and help control/cap costs.
- f. Helps monitor and maintain providers quality.

31. The new framework contract is to commence from April 2024. Tendering anticipated spring 2024. There are a number of proposed changes to attract more providers and to keep providers on the contract. They are as follows:

- a. Increased lots – to cater for more specialists foster carers. i.e. standard, enhanced and disability
- b. To re-set prices to help support the market to expand and encourage more providers.
- c. Capped fees to help control costs.
- d. Uplift process inbuilt into the contract to allow for inflationary increases at an agreed formula to manage the impact to encourage more providers to join.

What are the current challenges?

Residential Homes:

32. We know that Staffordshire has sufficient provision within Staffordshire to meet the current residential demand with circa 500 residential beds in the area. **57% of our C&YP are in homes which are out-of-county**, despite there being sufficient independent residential beds within Staffordshire.
33. The market is used on a national footprint and demand nationally is outstripping the supply meaning that providers can choose which children they match to – often this can be those with less complex needs.
34. A residential manager will carry the risk when matching children who live in their residential home. We have seen an increasing reluctance to match some children who have multiple needs due to the increased risk for the children and the negative impact this could have when they are inspected or on them personally.
35. This often leaves those who have faced significant trauma with the most challenging emotional and behavioural needs without a local residential option. The better option for these children is a smaller home where matching is less of a risk.
36. The challenges the homes face is around how to manage C&YP who display with one or more of the following behaviours / risks:
- a. aggressive / violent behaviour.
 - b. go missing.
 - c. are involved in criminal behaviour.
 - d. have mental health issues.
 - e. Some diagnosed or undiagnosed SEND needs.
 - f. are involved with gangs / drug misuse.
 - g. self-harm
 - h. are exploited or cause significant damage.
37. With these complexities come the unintended consequences of arrangements breaking down. In 2022/2023 there were 32 children in residential homes which ended prematurely.
38. This often increases costs as providers increase their fees to cover extra resources particularly additional staffing and bed blocking to help manage the C&YP. The top 20 high cost placements average around £7,500 per week.

39. The Local Government Association (LGA) analysis of residential costs has seen a sharp increase in costs over the last 5 years, which has been highlighted in this report. Please see link, [Placement Costs \(LGA\)](#).
40. It can also make it extremely difficult to find a regulated option for some children leading to a small number of children living for a short time in unregistered provision.
41. The Competitions & Market Authority (CMA) report in March 2022, stated that the largest providers are making materially higher profits and therefore LAs need to address the balance by ensuring they are not forced to use these providers for our C&YP with the most complex needs.
42. Local Government Association acknowledged that whilst there are a small proportion who are making excessive profit, there are also a high number who are carrying significant financial challenge.

Foster Carers:

43. Another sector where demand has outstripped supply is the availability of suitable foster carers. LA applications for foster carers have decreased by 22% since 2018 and for the private sector applications have decreased by 21% over the same period.
44. The unintended consequences of a lack of foster carers are some C&YP being placed in residential care when this is not the most suitable place and it comes at an increased cost.
45. SCC are currently reliant on the private sector to meet the demand for foster carers via the framework however as prices have not kept pace with increased costs several private sector providers have chosen to leave the framework.
46. The DfE recently commissioned research into market barriers around fostering recruitment in LA's and several barriers were identified:
 - a. Insufficient benefits / money to foster carers to cover cost of caring.
 - b. Cost of living impact.
 - c. The impact of Covid due to the increase of working from home.
 - d. LA's have less monies i.e., for marketing.
 - e. The process the LA takes can be longer.

What do we propose to do & why?

47. The Homes for our children, Sufficiency Strategy, endorsed by Cabinet on 12th April 2023, aims to meet our sufficiency duty by creating an active and vibrant market delivered both internally and externally with the focus by the end of 2026. The expansion of the in-house homes aims not just to save money but will also contribute to ensuring SCC:

- a. have the right C/YP, in the right place at the right time.
- b. have our C&YP living locally in the right 'home' to meet their needs.
- c. eliminate the use of unregulated arrangements.
- d. increase the number of C&YP who return home.

48. We recommend that cabinet take steps to increase the options available in the market through supporting three key developments,

- a. Endorsing the WM Residential Framework: This will see us sign up to the WM regional framework. This framework will ensure SCC continues to be procurement compliant and enable SCC to access a wider market to increase the number of foster carers.
- b. Endorsing the WM Fostering Framework. This framework will ensure SCC continues to be procurement compliant and enable SCC to access a wider market to increase the number of fostering carers and eradicate the use of unregulated residential homes being used.
- c. Invest in six internal homes to disrupt the market and provide a home for our most complex children.

Disruptive Methods Considered

49. To address these challenges and to bring about improvements the following options have been considered (see Options Appraisal Appendix 1):

- a. **RECOMMENDED OPTION - Expand the in-house children's home provision:** SCC currently lack smaller residential homes internally that meet the needs of our children in care whilst also promoting a nurturing, personable approach. Expanding our in-house provision with this in mind would enable us to gain more control over how our children are cared for and would allow for fluency depending on their need that we don't necessarily get with the external market e.g., to support a return to family, or a move into foster care.
- b. **Creation of a LA Trading Company to operate the in-house children's home:** This option was proposed as the operating costs such as superannuation would be significantly lower, it would reduce

the apparent risk to the Local Authority and provide greater influence in a market which is challenging. The key benefit is that it would be commercially oriented but not for profit. It is noted that the scale needed to be markedly cheaper may not be available within the children's market. Due to the small market this option did not present any better value for money compared to the internal delivery model.

- c. **Block contracting homes with the private sector:** Creation of a solo home block contract had been endorsed last year and tendered. With the home being solo it would remove the need of matching children and young people which we often see as a barrier when finding homes. However, our experience has demonstrated that this did not appeal to the market and has presented challenges in its use.
- d. **Collaborative partnership with Registered Social Landlords:** Due to affordable housing costing around £5-6K per annum this option was considered to reduce capital investment from SCC or a third-party provider with properties being readily available. Whilst this option could result in affordable accommodation it may be more suited to older children in supported accommodation or those leaving care.
- e. **Collaborative partnership with a private provider/voluntary sector to work with SCC to open up homes:** This could be in the form of a strategic partnership, seeing SCC and a provider sharing the risk. This has been used by some local areas such as Somerset. Having undertaken some soft market testing there was limited interest.
- f. **Acquisition of existing children's home organisation:** The acquisition of an existing children home was considered, as this was seen as the quickest way to address the demand and need for residential homes. This was tested with the market and enquiries were made around purchasing a going concern. The major barrier was the cost of purchasing a going concern which was more expensive than internal provision.

50. The detailed Options Appraisal is available in Appendix 1 showing the pros and cons of each option. This options paper led us to recommend the development of local authority run internal provision.

Legal Implications

- 51. Commissioners have liaised with Legal colleagues regarding elements of this report such as the regional framework agreements and the 'in-house' homes.
- 52. Depending upon Cabinet's decision/s commissioners will continue to liaise with Legal colleagues to ensure legal obligations are adhered to and furthermore specific guidance is obtained at the appropriate time.

53. The recommendations within this report will help us to secure our statutory obligations to secure homes for children in our care.

Risks

54. The table provides the risks associated with the proposed recommendations and the associated mitigation.

Recommendations	Risk	Mitigation
In-House LA Homes	Recruiting sufficient staff in a timely manner.	Robust recruitment campaign and promotion of investment by SCC.
	Having appropriate skilled staff	Comprehensive recruitment process and training delivered to all staff.
	Home(s) not admitting the most complex children.	Close monitoring and appropriate matching by commissioners in conjunction with the Placement Team.
West Midlands Regional Residential and Foster Care Framework Contracts	Not joining will leave SCC vulnerable to market forces. Resulting in increase in spot purchased placements, hence overall costs.	Regional framework to provide leverage across a wider footprint to help control costs.
	Will not be procurement compliant when the current ends in March 2024 and December 2024 respectively.	Robust tendering process to ensure quality and value of money is considered.

Legal Implications

55. The Children Act 1989 places a general duty on Local Authorities (LAs) to secure sufficient accommodation for children in our care so far as reasonably practicable, accommodation that is within the authority's area and meets the needs of those children.
56. Commissioners have liaised with Legal colleagues regarding elements of this report such as the regional framework agreements and the 'in-house' homes.
57. Depending upon Cabinet's decision/s commissioners will continue to liaise with Legal colleagues to ensure legal obligations are adhered to and furthermore specific guidance is obtained at the appropriate time.
58. The recommendations within this report will help us to secure our statutory obligations to secure homes for children in our care.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

59. The financial benefits of entering into the regional framework contracts (recommendation c & d) are detailed within this report. This is to ensure SCC obtains value for money, by entering into a tendering process that is based on a collaborative approach with the West Midlands region in order to help manage the market.
60. The cost of the in-house delivery option vs LATCO is shown within the options paper and demonstrates that the financial impact of using a LATCO is negligible. This is largely due to the LATCO requiring a larger portfolio of provisions to make it more cost effective to run. The proposal therefore is to further expand the local authority run internal residential provision through the acquisition of 6 additional (2 bed) homes to support and manage existing markets and pressures arising due to limited capacity and increasing costs.
61. The timescales will be approximately 8 months up to 12 months to ensure flexibility is built into the lead in times. See Appendix 2 (Timeline).
62. Operation of the six LA homes on this basis could save approximately £0.5m per annum. This is compared to the cost of placing 12 children

with external independent providers at an average cost per child of £7,500 per week. This is shown below and includes significantly:

- a. Capital funding for acquisition and refurbishment of 6 homes (each accommodating 2 children) will require an estimated outlay of £2.580m. This will be funded by borrowing and repaid by the service over 40 years.
- b. The estimated annual running costs for all six homes is £3.5 m per annum. This assumes an average occupancy level across the homes of 85% and two registered managers overseeing the operation of the homes. This annual cost also includes repayment of the capital expenditure mentioned above.

Capital

Acquisition of premises (6*2 place property)
Adaptations/Fittings
Furniture
Fees - legal/stamp duty/other contingency

Funded

Borrowing

Run In House by SCC		
		Total
6	£350,000	£2,100,000
6	£40,000	£240,000
6	£25,000	£150,000
6	£15,000	£90,000
		£2,580,000
		£2,580,000

* Annual revenue borrowing costs (40 years @ 4.5%)

140,200

Revenue

Running cost of 2 place home

- Employees
- Premises
- Transport
- Supplies & Services
- Transfer Payments
- Fees

Sub Total £m

x No of Properties

Sub Total £m

- 2 * Registered Managers (shared across 6 properties)
- Capital Charge*

Total Cost £m

Occupancy	
85%	100%
0.473	0.473
0.008	0.008
0.018	0.018
0.028	0.031
0.002	0.002
0.006	0.006
0.535	0.538
6	6
3.207	3.226
0.156	0.156
0.140	0.140
3.504	3.523

Estimated external residential cost

No. of placements (2 children * 6 properties)

Estimated weekly placement cost

No of weeks

Occupancy

Total £m

12	12
7500	7500
52	52
4.693	4.693
85%	100%
3.989	4.693

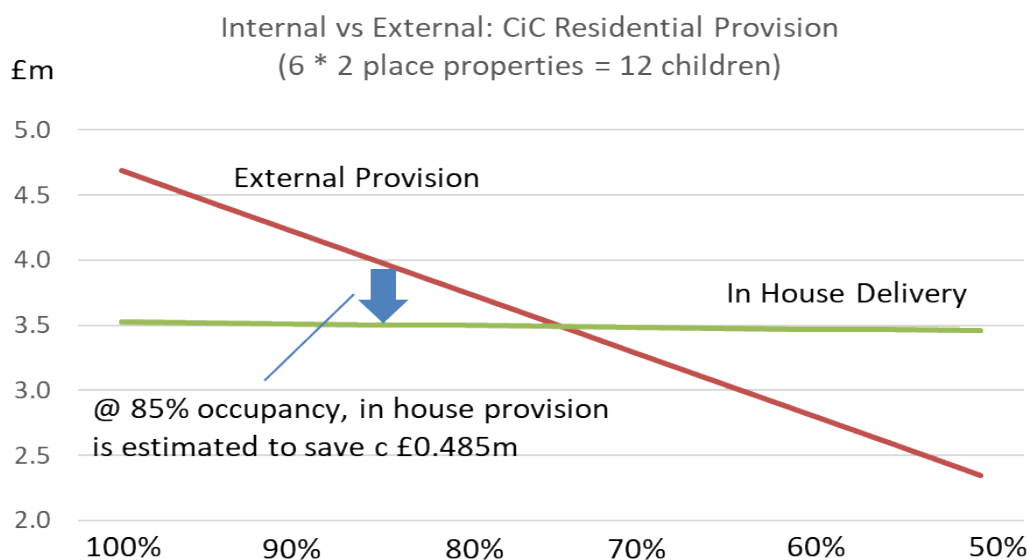
Estimated Saving

0.485

1.170

63. The 2 bed homes cost savings will range from £485k to £1.17m based on occupancy rate between 85% to 100%. There will be flexibility to operate on a solo basis, if appropriate, with the aim of preventing unregulated placements or alternative high-cost placements. Savings will still be achieved as solo placements/ unregulated placements can cost up to £14k/£15k per week.

64. SCC estimate that an average occupancy of 85% is deliverable and will provide a cost saving of circa £0.5m. If occupancy levels are higher then this could achieve additional cost savings; a minimum occupancy level of 75% must be achieved for the internal provision to be viable.



65. Whilst annual revenues circa £0.5m will be anticipated once the delivery model is fully operational, there will be some initial upfront costs for a period of time, prior to the children being placed, as there will be staff wages and running costs during the recruitment process and therefore the savings shown above will not be realised immediately. In 24/25 it is likely that the additional cost of £0.3m will be incurred in that initial transition year and the recommendation that this is funded from the Councils corporate transition monies.

£m	Yr1 24/25	Yr 2 25/26	Yr 3 26/27
Capital			
Acquisition and Refurbishment of 6 properties	2.4	0.1	
Funded			
Borrowing (PWLb)	2.4	0.1	
Revenue			
- Employees	0.7	2.7	3.0
- Other	0.1	0.4	0.5
	0.8	3.2	3.5
... versus			
Cost of external provision	0.5	3.2	4.0
Net additional annual revenue cost / (saving)	0.3	0.0	-0.5

Net Present Value (NPV) – Table (to be added)

66. For any placements where there is an identified health need, SCC will be seeking funding from the Integrated Care Board (ICB). Continuing Health Care Funding would be sought where appropriate, which could provide an additional contribution to cover part of the placement costs. These would also include children who maybe stepping down from Tier 4 provisions or preventing them from admission.

Climate Change Implications

67. Providing more residential homes in Staffordshire will align with the key principles of the Strategic Plan by reducing carbon emissions and business travel, as local authority practitioners (e.g. Social Workers/IROs) will spend less time travelling.
68. Carbon emissions will also be reduced when children have family time / school transport as they are closer to their home.
69. This proposal will add another property onto the Corporate property list, which will contribute to SCC's carbon footprint. Whilst refurbishing the property(s) it would be prudent to also consider the future energy efficiency and carbon footprint of the building and how these can be lowered/mitigated, so as not to impact negatively on our carbon emissions.

Conclusion

70. Finding homes for children in our care is a priority. Whilst we recognise that work being undertaken nationally may assist the council in the medium to long term. Staffordshire County Council needs to act now to avoid further overspends by disrupting the market.
71. This report concludes that investing in internal provision will provide the quickest access to increased residential provision saving circa £0.5 million per year. As such we recommend work progresses establishing 6, 2 bed properties locally. In addition to committing to the WM regional frameworks which will supplement the capacity needed.

72. The development of the 6 internal homes together with work undertaken using the regional foster and residential frameworks will ensure a mixed market approach which is better able to:

- a. have the right C/YP, in the right place at the right time.
- b. have our C&YP living locally in the right 'home' to meet their needs.
- c. eliminate the use of unregulated arrangements.
- d. increase the number of C&YP who are able to return home.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1- Options Appraisal

Appendix 2- Time Line

Contact Details

Assistant Director: Natasha Moody, Assistant Director for Wellbeing & Partnerships

Report Author: Shahid Munir

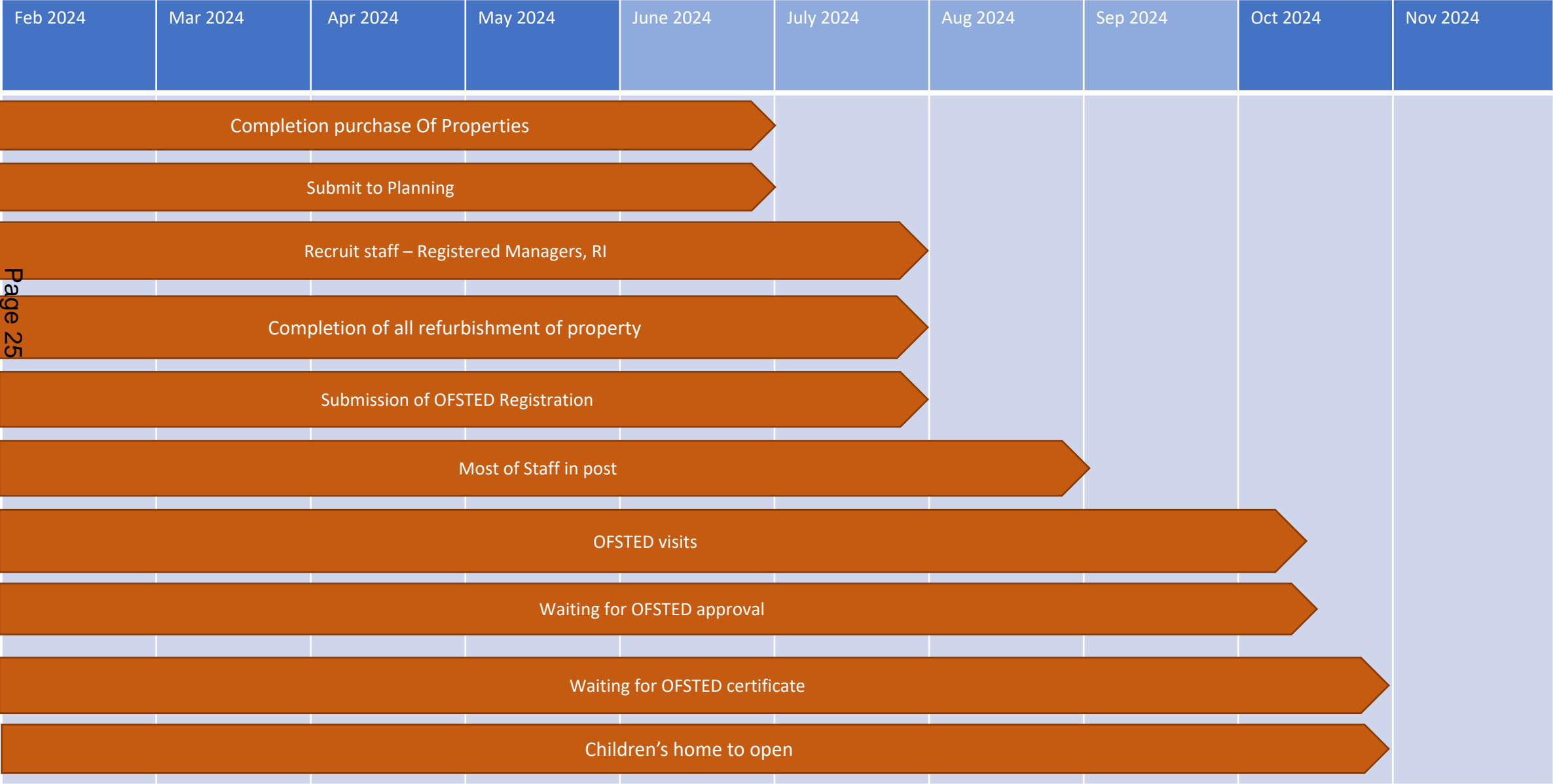
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Cabinet Paper (21/2/2024) – Homes for Children in Our Care

Appendix 2: Timeline – In-house Children’s Home/s



Community Impact Assessment

Proposal Title : Local Authority Children's Homes

Author: Shahid Munir

Date: 10th October 2023

➤ Equality Assessment

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Age – Children and younger people 6-17 year olds	Having a wide remit will ensure it meets the demand for all children but it will also provide flexibility around matching.	There is a risk that the home may take easier to manage children.	The aim is to have a wide breadth of ages, and this will be managed by robust referral and monitoring to ensure we use the service for the most complex.
Disability - people who are living with different conditions and disabilities, such as: mental illnesses, long term conditions, Autism and other neurodiverse conditions, learning disabilities, sensory impairment and physical disabilities.	Although the home is aimed at children with emotional and behaviour difficulties and mental health it can also includes children with mild learning difficulties	The awareness or the correct diagnosis may not occur or in a timely manner.	The home will ensure comprehensive information is collated and processed to ensure all children are considered fairly
Gender reassignment - those people in the process of transitioning from one sex to another	The home will ensure needs are supported for the transitioning and the appropriate support is available when required.	Staff not having the knowledge or understanding of the emotional support needed.	The home to ensure appropriate training and knowledge to support and meet the needs and requirements of all children in our care.
Marriage & Civil Partnership - people who are married or in a civil partnership should not be treated differently at work	n/a	n/a	n/a

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Pregnancy & Maternity - women who are pregnant or who have recently had a baby, including breast feeding mothers	The home will be able to provide a service during pregnancy.	There are possible risks being pregnant in a children's home with other complex children.	Appropriate risk assessments would be put in place. An alternative provision would be sourced once the young person gives birth.
Race - people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins	The home will have the ability to meet the requirements of all regardless of race, by meeting needs appropriately	Organisations may not be equipped to work with a diverse group of children and young people	The home ensures close monitoring to ensure all needs and requirements are met.
Religion or Belief - people with any religious or philosophical belief, including a lack of belief. A belief should affect a person's life choices or the way they live for it to be considered	The home will ensure all needs are met	Staff in the homes may not have the awareness of different religious beliefs.	Training would be expected to be provided by the LA (s) and this would be monitored via statutory reviews and regulatory visits.
Sex - men and women	From our data analysis there is more demand for residential placements for males than females. The home is aimed to fulfil this demand and any changes in demand.	With the higher demand for male placements and the high percentage of the workforce female in the sector, there is a lack of positive male roles models.	Good recruitment and ensuring positive role models is promoted.

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Sexual orientation - whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes	The home will ensure that the needs are met regardless of sexual orientation	Some staff in the homes may not have the awareness or knowledge	All staff are provided appropriate training

➤ Workforce Assessment

Who will be affected – consider the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
N/A			

➤ Health, Well-being and Social Care Assessment

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Emotional Well-being	The aim is to ensure children and young people feel safe and	Some children needs may not be met due to their complexities	The home to ensure they have the best trained and skilled staff so

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Health Care	<p>are able to thrive in their environment.</p> <p>Home will ensure children & young people have access to a GP and attends dentist appointments.</p>	<p>and their experiences.</p> <p>CYP may not engage with attending.</p>	<p>children and young person can thrive and be the best they can.</p> <p>The home sets out the requirements of the home to ensure appropriate access to health services at all times.</p>
Mental health	<p>The home is also to meet the needs of children and young people with mental health needs by having different lots.</p>	<p>Some CYP maybe too complex therefore requiring more specialised care.</p>	<p>To ensure were appropriate that for CYP with acute mental health needs are referred to the appropriate resources.</p>
Independence	<p>The home covers children up until 17, therefore this allows children where appropriate to have the support so they are ready for independent living</p>	<p>Some homes don't always prepare children in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Robust monitoring and feedback via social work teams and our quality assurance process to ensure timely preparation is made.</p>

➤ **Communities Assessment**

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Impact on the local community	More homes would provide Staffordshire with more choice.	There is a risk of impact on community cohesion due to local communities not accepting homes and complaints as it is a local authority home so risk of reputational damage.	Strong engagement with neighbour's other agencies such as Police, health and engagement with councillors in the community to address issues if and when they occur.

➤ **Economic Assessment**

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Local authority homes may dis-courage more homes opening up in Staffordshire	Increase capacity for Staffordshire to solely use. Provides increased employment opportunities for the	Risk that employment could be from outside of Staffordshire.	Engagement with the workforce to work with Staffordshire to employ local population

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
	residents of Staffordshire.		

➤ **Climate Change Assessment**

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
N/A			

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➤ **Environment Assessment**

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Local Authority homes may discourage more homes private run homes to open in Staffordshire.	Fewer private homes could mean less impact on local services such as social care, Police, health and mental care facilities.	Limited choice could result in placing outside of Staffordshire.	To continue to engage with the market to ensure we have sufficient supply to meet any unmet need.

Community Impact Assessment

Proposal Title : West Midlands Provision Of Residential For Children
Framework

Author: Shahid Munir

Date: 25th September 2023

➤ Equality Assessment

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Age – Children and younger people 6-17 year olds	Having a wide remit will ensure it meets the demand for all children but it will also provide flexibility around matching.	There is a risk that within the framework providers take easier to manage children.	The aim is to have a wide breadth of ages, and this will be managed by robust referral and contract monitoring to ensure we use the service for the most complex.
Disability - people who are living with different conditions and disabilities, such as: mental illnesses, long term conditions, Autism and other neurodiverse conditions, learning disabilities, sensory impairment and physical disabilities.	Although this contract is aimed at children with emotional and behaviour difficulties and mental health it can also includes children with mild learning difficulties	The awareness or the correct diagnosis may not occur or in a timely manner.	The contract will ensure comprehensive information is collated and processed to ensure all children are considered fairly
Gender reassignment - those people in the process of transitioning from one sex to another	The contract will ensure needs are supported for the transitioning and the appropriate support is available when required.	Staff not having the knowledge or understanding of the emotional support needed.	The contract to ensure appropriate training and knowledge to support and meet the needs and requirements of all children in our care.
Marriage & Civil Partnership - people who are married or in a civil partnership should not be treated differently at work	n/a	n/a	n/a

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Pregnancy & Maternity - women who are pregnant or who have recently had a baby, including breast feeding mothers	The Contract will be able to provide a service during pregnancy.	There are possible risks being pregnant in a children's home with other complex children.	Appropriate risk assessments would be put in place. An alternative provision would be sourced once the young person gives birth.
Race - people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins	This contract will have the ability to meet the requirements of all regardless of race, by meeting needs appropriately	Organisations may not be equipped to work with a diverse group of children and young people	The contract ensures close monitoring to ensure all needs and requirements are met.
Religion or Belief - people with any religious or philosophical belief, including a lack of belief. A belief should affect a person's life choices or the way they live for it to be considered	The contract will ensure all needs are met	Staff in the homes may not have the awareness of different religious beliefs.	Training would be expected by the contracted organisation and the LA (s) would monitor this as part of their statutory reviews, regulatory visits and the quality assurance processes.
Sex - men and women	From our data analysis there is more demand for residential placements for males than females. The contract is aimed to fulfil this demand and any changes in demand.	With the higher demand for male placements and the high percentage of the workforce female in the sector, there is a lack of positive male roles models.	Good recruitment and ensuring positive role models is promoted.

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Sexual orientation - whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes	The contract will ensure that the needs are met regardless of sexual orientation	Some staff in the homes may not have the awareness or knowledge	All staff are provided appropriate training

➤ Workforce Assessment

Who will be affected – consider the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
N/A			

➤ Health, Well-being and Social Care Assessment

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Emotional Well-being	The aim is to ensure children and young people feel safe and	Some children needs may not be met due to their complexities	To ensure we have robust specification and we access the most appropriate providers in which a child and young person

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Health Care	<p>are able to thrive in their environment.</p> <p>Contract will ensure CYP have access to a GP and attends dentist appointments.</p>	<p>and their experiences.</p> <p>CYP may not engage with attending.</p>	<p>can thrive and be the best they can.</p> <p>Service specification sets out the requirements of the provider to ensure appropriate access to health services.</p>
Mental health	<p>The contract is also to meet the needs of children and young people with mental health needs by having different lots</p>	<p>Some CYP maybe too complex therefore requiring more specialised care.</p>	<p>To ensure were appropriate that for CYP with acute mental health needs these are referred to the appropriate resources.</p>
Independence	<p>The contract covers children up until 17, therefore this allows</p>	<p>Some homes don't always prepare</p>	<p>Robust contract monitoring and feedback via social work teams and our quality assurance</p>

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
	children where appropriate to have the support so they are ready for independent living	children in a timely manner.	process to ensure timely preparation is made.

➤ Communities Assessment

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Impact on the local community	More homes would provide Staffordshire with more choice.	There is a risk of impact on community cohesion due to local communities not accepting homes.	Strong engagement with Providers, West Midlands Local Authorities, and engagement with councillors the community to address issues if and when they occur.

➤ Economic Assessment

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Contract may encourage more homes opening up in Staffordshire	Increase capacity for Staffordshire to use. Provides increased employment opportunities for the	Risk that employment could from outside of Staffordshire.	Market engagement events to work with Staffordshire to employ local population

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
	residents of Staffordshire.		

➤ **Climate Change Assessment**

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
N/A			

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Environment Assessment

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Framework may encourage the expansion of Providers within Staffordshire	The contract may encourage more providers to come into Staffordshire.	There maybe a small impact on the local services such as Social Care, Police, health and mental care facilities	To ensure needs are met robustly within the provision. Staffordshire to try to place more children locally.

Community Impact Assessment

West Midlands Fostering Framework April 2024

Author: Eddie Birch

Date: 27/9/24

➤ **Equality Assessment**

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Age - older and younger people	Children and young people (0-18) in care will be able to live in safe, secure and Ofsted-regulated foster homes with the added protection of being a framework provider.	N/A	The framework will offer protection to CYP as it will be easier for the council to monitor their outcomes.
Disability - people who are living with different conditions and disabilities, such as: mental illnesses, long term conditions, Autism and other neurodiverse conditions, learning disabilities, sensory impairment and physical disabilities.	The framework will have a specific 'lot' for CYP with disabilities, additional needs and complex behaviours with stringent contract monitoring in place to ensure their needs are met continually.	CYP with disabilities are not placed with the right carers (or their knowledge of the disability(s) isn't enhanced) meaning they are not receiving appropriate care.	The local authority social worker will conduct risk assessments and regular reviews with the foster carer and provider to ensure they are upskilled and able to meet the needs of their CYP.
Gender reassignment - those people in the process of transitioning from one sex to another	Although gender reassignment is unlawful until aged 18, CYP may be expresses wishes/feelings around this topic during their childhood. The framework will	Foster carers may not feel comfortable in caring for CYP with aspirations to undergo gender reassignment. Similarly, CYP may not be comfortable living with carers	The views, wishes and feelings of CYP are always taken into account when a placement search is being sought, and any (potential) offer of a placement will always go to their social worker for approval who will ensure the needs of the CYP

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
	allow for a 'matching process' so foster carers will only put themselves forward to care for CYP if they feel they can promote their best interests and be free from discrimination.	depending on their views about the subject – however the	would be met to the best of their knowledge.
Marriage & Civil Partnership - people who are married or in a civil partnership should not be treated differently at work	N/A		
Pregnancy & Maternity - women who are pregnant or who have recently had a baby, including breast feeding mothers	The framework will cater for Parent and Carer foster placements. If a CYP was to become pregnant whilst in placement appropriate risk assessments and planning meetings would be held to decide on the best outcome for the CYP/baby in a planned way.	Foster carer/provider may wish to end the placement or feel they can't care for the CYP during pregnancy.	Appropriate risk assessments would be put in place to mitigate the risk for CYP and baby with any move being planned in the best interests of the parent and baby.

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Race - people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins	All CYP will be treated equally, including their race and taking all other protected characteristics into account when searching for a foster placement.	The nature of the market (foster carers) will ultimately determine to what extent this is met however the same could be said without the framework.	Ensure relevant information is captured during the placement search and share with providers on the framework to ensure race/cultural needs etc are reflected to match appropriately.
Religion or Belief - people with any religious or philosophical belief, including a lack of belief. A belief should affect a person's life choices or the way they live for it to be considered	All CYP will be treated equally, including their religious beliefs and taking all other protected characteristics into account when searching for a foster placement.	The nature of the market (foster carers) will ultimately determine to what extent this is met however the same could be said without the framework.	Ensure relevant information is captured during the placement search and share with providers on the framework to ensure religion/cultural needs etc are reflected to match appropriately.
Sex - men or women	N/A		
Sexual orientation - whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes	The framework will allow for a 'matching process' so foster carers will only put themselves forward to care for CYP if they feel they can promote their best interests and be free from discrimination.	Foster carers may not feel comfortable in caring for CYP with specific sexual preferences. Similarly, CYP may not be comfortable living with carers depending on the	The views of CYP are always taken into account when a placement search is being sought, and any (potential) offer of a placement will always go to their social worker for approval who will ensure the needs of the CYP would be met to the best of their knowledge.

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
		sexual orientation e.g. same sex carers.	

➤ Workforce Assessment

Who will be affected – consider the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
N/A			

➤ Health, Well-being and Social Care Assessment

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
The framework needs to be fit for purpose to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CYPs physical health and emotional wellbeing is prioritised at all times 	The framework will provide robust contractual Terms & Conditions with contract monitoring arrangements in place	As with any provider who is caring for a CYP, there will be risks associated with any placement given the vulnerability of	A robust framework contract will be in place to ensure the needs of all care-experienced CYP are met, with the council inserting clauses

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A CYPs independence is promoted and encouraged – which will be bespoke to each CYP • The CYPs future (i.e. move into adulthood) is thought about at all times 	to ensure carers and providers are acting appropriately to meet the needs of our CYP in care, whom the Care Act 2014 applies to.	<p>care-experienced CYP.</p> <p>For example, a provider could attempt to terminate a placement early, and although contractual stipulations will be in place to protect the local authority, this would still have a negative impact on the CYP.</p>	to ensure any issues/concerns can be acted on to maintain and promote the wellbeing of CYP in care.

➤ Communities Assessment

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
The framework would impact on the care-experienced community. It's also envisaged that Staffordshire providers would join the	Local and regional providers would be on the framework, ensuring children continue to live locally	Children are placed out of county (OOC) if a local placement can't be sourced, however this would	More competition on the framework would increase the chances of CYP living locally.

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
framework which would allow for CYP to stay within Staffordshire and their local communities (where it's safe to do so).	when it's safe to do so. The framework allows for placement searches to be made and secured as quickly as possible. Staffordshire children continue to live locally ensuring they make a positive contribution to their own community.	apply to 'spot' providers who aren't on the framework also.	However, improving our internal sufficiency would be of greater benefit in this aspect in terms of community capacity holistically.

➤ Economic Assessment

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Staffordshire foster care providers have grown by approximately 50% over the last 3-4 years.	Most providers will be on the framework ensuring money from the public purse will remain in Staffordshire if our	As a foster care placement is based on a positive 'match' rather than a specific provider, national providers will also be on the framework, however it's	Invest in our internal foster care recruitment and retainment to ensure we have greater internal sufficiency and therefore less money leaves the local authority.

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
	children are placed with these providers	imperative they are due to a sufficiency shortage nationally and locally.	

➤ Climate Change Assessment

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
All contracts, monitoring and searches are done online to reduce our carbon footprint.	Ensure the carbon footprint is minimal to help tackle climate change.	N/A	The framework to remain paperless.

➤ Environment Assessment

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
N/A			