

Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 25th September 2012
Lead Member / Officer: Cllr Bobby Feeley
Report Author: Leighton Rees
Title: Bryn y Wal Children's Home Contract

1. What is the report about?

The report focusses on a contractual arrangement we have with Action for Children in respect of a four/five bedded Residential Children's Home in Rhuddlan. It explains our plan when the contract comes to an end for both the contract itself and the release of resources.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To seek members agreement to the proposals in respect of this contract when it expires on 31st March 2013 and the alternative use of resources proposed.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- I. That Members agree the proposed contractual arrangements post April 2013.
- II. That Members agree the development of a seven day waking hours family support service as detailed
- III. That Members agree the development of support foster care as detailed

4. Report details.

Bryn Y Wal is a four/five bedded Residential Home for Children owned and run by Action for Children. Until 31st March 2013 we have exclusive rights for placements and in effect have a block contract for this resource in the sum of £559,393.

Part of our efficiency savings in 2013/14 was to make a saving of £109,000. Initially this was intended to be by the sale of one placement to neighbouring authorities. Bryn Y Wal is seen as having a positive reputation as a family group home.

However when we have reviewed our usage of Bryn Y Wal we have come to the conclusion that our demand for such a resource is limited.

However we do see a purpose in keeping the resource open. We have therefore had discussions with Action for Children, Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Council and Conwy County Council to see if it is possible for there to be a shared use of the resources and the costs shared equally between partners. Currently Flintshire and Wrexham are considering their position. Conwy is also carefully considering their overall position and will let us know in September 2012. Action for Children have indicated that they would not maintain the resource open without a commitment from local authorities to purchase all the bed spaces available. If agreed the contracting will be between individual Local Authorities and Action for Children without any residual liability to Denbighshire County Council.

The agreement being considered is that the overall cost of the resource is shared three / four ways, cost of unoccupied beds will be shared equally between parties, beds used will be funded by the Authority using them. If there is agreement to proceed in this way across the Authorities appropriate governance and agreements will be put in place with Action for Children in respect of each Authorities commitment to Bryn Y Wal.

In conclusion there are two options; our currently preferred one is the shared utilisation of the resource with two or three other local authorities. If that is not possible we would allow the contract to lapse at the end of March 2013.

Either of these options would achieve the budget saving identified. They would in addition enable a reinvestment in priority areas, in particular the following:-

1. To reduce the number of children needed to be accommodated by the development and resourcing of a Family Support Service which was available waking hours seven days a week
2. The development of Support Foster Carers to reduce the number of children who need to access residential care
3. The development of Emergency Foster Carers to manage short term urgent admissions

It is proposed therefore that a portion of the existing Bryn Y Wal budget, £215,000, is retained to purchase a share in the revised residential resource if that is agreed, or alternative placement arrangements if not; it would also fund the additional costs involved in providing emergency foster care arrangements.

The balance would then be utilised to facilitate two developments both of which will be targeted at reducing the numbers of children / young people who need to be accommodated or reducing our need to use residential care as the

accommodation response to their needs. It would in effect be an invest to improve and potentially an invest to save approach.

The first of these development is 'Supported Foster Care' which provides respite care for agreed periods for children at risk of local authority accommodation. Foster carers, in addition to providing respite, work with the child's family as part of a change intervention to enable the child to remain safely in their family. In order to take this forward we would seek to appoint one full time social worker to develop the scheme. The post would be located and managed by our existing Fostering Service.

The second aspect is to extend the range and availability of Family Support Services. We would seek to build off the existing Family Support Services so they can effectively respond to, seven days a week, waking hours. To achieve this and to appropriately supervise the activity the following staff are proposed:-

- 2 Senior Family Support Workers
- 2 Family Support Workers
- 2 Family Aides
- Activity Support Budget

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The responsibilities as a Corporate Parent is an important part of Safeguarding Children. The proposed service developments detailed would also make a substantial contribution to the objectives in the BIG plan in respect of safeguarding vulnerable children.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The requirements for additional resources will be accommodated within the current cost of Bryn Y Wal and will generate the required efficiency saving,

The Placement Cost budget would be supplemented by £215,000 to either provide foster or residential care as detailed above.

The Supported Foster Care Service development; one additional Social Worker post £44,374 (Social Worker £39,374, Activity Support Budget £5,000).

The Family Support Service development; £191,636 (staffing £184,062, Activity Support Budget £6,900).

In that it relates to vulnerable children it will seek to enhance their life chances and opportunities.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and recognises that the proposed steps seek to improve the circumstances of disadvantaged children and enable them to be given better opportunities to succeed.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The above options have been considered during the Service Challenge process and a savings target of £109K is included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2013/14. Failure to progress either of the options outlined in the paper are likely to impact negatively on the MTFP and will require alternative compensating savings to be delivered.

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- No commitment from the partner authorities to block contracting and loss of Bryn y Wal as a resource – Option not to renew contract has already been identified as the second option with development of other services to support children and young people
- Failure to recruit emergency foster carers – Foster Carers already identified as potential emergency foster carers from current cohort
- Re negotiation of contracting arrangements in respect of Family Support Services – Involve HR/Union with existing staff when the final model is agreed.
- Delay in development of support foster care – proposal being developed and time scales attached to identify best way forward
- Unable to complete the tasks identified within available resources – proposals will be limited to available resources released
- Unable to find placement for existing young people in Bryn y Wal – Foster carers already identified for one young person, second young person due to leave shortly, need to identify the best options for third young person to enable move on.

10. Power to make the Decision

Duties and responsibilities in respect of this area are contained within the Children Act 1989 in particular Sections 17 and 23.