

Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 6 October 2021

Subject:

Residential Children's Homes & Related Issues

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Summary statement:

This report provides an update regarding the current situation regarding the Children's Residential homes in Bradford and related issues.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:
Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

This report provides an update regarding the current situation regarding the Children's Residential homes in Bradford and related issues.

2. BACKGROUND

In recent weeks several of our children's homes have been inspected and the outcome is that a number have dropped one or more grade.

Since June 2021, 7 homes have been inspected. Three have retained their "Good" judgement. The outcome for the other 4 homes are as follows:

- **Valley View (including BEST)** – Inadequate (previously RI). Included a suspension of registration and a compliance notice.
- **Owlthorpe** – Inadequate (previously Good). Included a suspension of registration & a compliance notice
- **The Willows** – Inadequate (previously Good). Included a compliance notice
- **Wedgewood** – Requires Improvement (previously Good)

The following actions have been undertaken to improve outcomes:

- A decision notice is being prepared for the future of Valley View. An Action Plan is being drawn up to address the areas outlined in the compliance notice.
- Ofsted have recently revisited Valley View and have lifted the suspension notice and have re-instigated the registration for Valley View. An extension has been given to provide additional time to address the revised compliance notice, following the recent visit.
- Options are being explored to separate BEST and Valley View from the same URN to provide more options for the use of BEST.
- Ofsted have revisited Owlthorpe and lifted the suspension and the compliance notice. An Action Plan is being progressed to begin reintroducing children back into Owlthorpe and to move it rapidly out of an Inadequate category.
- Ofsted have revisited the Willows and have determined that all aspects have met within the compliance notice. All restrictions have therefore now been lifted at the Willows.
- Work is underway to put in place action plans to rapidly improve the outcomes at Valley View, Owlthorpe and The Willows to support all three homes to move out of the inadequate Ofsted rating.
- An Action Plan specific to the issues identified at Wedgewood is in place to enable it to improve quickly to achieve a Good or better rating at its next inspection.
- A re-introduction plan is being carefully drawn up to safely and gradually enable The Willows and Owlthorpe to begin to have children placed in the homes.

STAFFING

There have been a number of challenges at all levels regarding staffing, which have occurred in the past few weeks.

- Two senior managers, including one who was also the Responsible Individual for Children's Homes, have both resigned and now have left their posts.
- Several middle managers with responsibility for some of the homes are on long-term sickness absence.
- A significant number of residential staff operating out of Valley View (including BEST) and The Willows are on long-term sickness absence
- There is a very high reliance on agency staff across a number of the Children's Homes

A number of changes have taken place to begin to address these issues:

- On the 2nd August, the Deputy Director for Education & Learning, has stepped across to provide senior leadership support and to also, for the interim, take over as the Responsible Individual for all 11 Children's Homes.
- An experienced interim Head of Service took up post on the 12th August. The Head of Service will also take over the Responsible Individual role as soon as the registration transfer is completed.
- An experienced interim Assistant Director took up post on the 16th August 2021.
- The Deputy Director will continue to retain oversight for the short-medium term to ensure that there is continuity in the work that has already been started and a continued line of sight for residential managers into senior leaders.
- Approval has been given to recruit interim middle Managers to ensure adequate management oversight across all the children's homes.
- Staff who are on long-term sick leave have been contacted to ensure that appropriate referrals have been made to Occupational Health and to discuss how we can support them to safely and confidently return to work.
- A system has been developed to ensure that appropriate checks are in place to ensure that where agency staff are required, that they have the appropriate checks and qualifications provided to Residential Managers so that this can be recorded correctly.
- Work is underway to provide opportunities for casual and bank residential staff to consider moving onto permanent contracts.

REGULATION 44 REPORTS

- Following the outcome of recent judgements, it is clear that we need to have assurances that our current children's homes are offering a high quality of care for our children/young people. Where issues are known, it is important that we have robust action plans in place that are scrutinised and secure rapid improvement.
- Concerns have been identified regarding the Regulation 44 reports which do not always reflect the concerns identified by Ofsted in their inspection

outcomes. A quick review (led by the School Improvement Service) of all the regulation 44 reports submitted in June would concur with this position.

- In addition, it has been noted that the Action Plan section at the back of the regulation 44 reports are not completed or reviewed in such a way as to be able to track and record the progress against identified areas.
- A quick review of the Action Plans for individual homes has shown an inconsistency in the quality of the plans and there is no set format or template for action planning in our Children's Homes.

The following action has been taken:

- An experienced external organisation has been identified to undertake a review of the quality of provision across each of the children's homes to identify areas for improvement, as well as to provide clarity on the quality of the care provided to children/young people. It is anticipated this will begin week beginning 13th September and will be for a contracted period of 23 days. A report will be produced which will inform further and future planning for children's homes.
- The interim Head of Service is putting in place a standardised template which will be used across all Children's Homes so that there is a consistent approach in action planning with clarity on expected outcomes that will need to be evidenced.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The physical condition of the homes has been an area that has been recently identified as needed a very different and more responsive approach. Positive discussions have taken place between the Deputy Director and colleagues in Facilities Management to put in place arrangements to ensure that we have a quick response when repairs are needed in our children's homes.

Plans are being put in place to enable children to decorate their own bedrooms and also be involved in choosing furniture and other aspects in shared areas in the homes.

In addition, work is underway to set out a clear plan to ensure that all homes are part of a regular condition survey with planned upgrades for longer-term and larger aspects, such as fire alarms, boiler upgrades, etc.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

Capital funding is being identified to support the maintenance of children's homes.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

All children and young people are entitled to have their basic needs met and the provision in our Children's Homes must ensure that children in our care have access to good quality care and support to enable them to thrive.

7.5 TRADE UNION

Trade Unions have been engaged with and further meetings are planned.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

Children's Homes are a critical part of the care provision in the District for our Children Looked After. The Corporate Parenting Panel receive reports on the Children's Homes in the District and work is underway to further strengthen and develop the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

In order to protect the rights of individuals, including staff and children/young people, the contents of this report have been written in such a way as to provide information to enable the Committee to consider the information contained in this report. However, specific details on individual issues in the homes may not be able to be disclosed for the purposes of protecting the identities of individuals.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

9. OPTIONS

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That the report is noted.

11. APPENDICES

None.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS