

	Foreword
	As a corporate parent I want to ensure a safe, happy and secure childhood for the children in our care. This review has provided me and Councillor Bailey with the opportunity to explore the strengths and weaknesses of our current provision and to make a series of recommendations which we believe will improve the service for staff and most importantly for our Looked After Children.
	In the interviews we conducted, staff from across the service spoke eloquently and passionately about their service and the things that would make the biggest differences to the care they can provide. Their evidence made pulling recommendations together a straight forward task as the themes and issues identified were consistent and well argued. We would like to thank those who attended for the formal interview process for their time and considered contributions.
	During our visits to Children's Homes we were made to feel very welcome and would like to thank the staff and young people for their hospitality. I particularly would like to thank staff and young person at Queensferry Gardens where a lunch made by a resident was very much enjoyed and the children spoke with confidence about their experiences in the care system and their lives.
	We witnessed first hand the dedication and commitment the staff in many of the homes provide for the children in their care and want to make it clear that we hope the recommendations in the review will support staff in improving the opportunities they have to support vulnerable children.
	The recommendations are not intended to undermine the excellent work that is taking place in our homes by a dedicated staff team. It is hoped that this report will provide additional strength to their voices about the frustrations they expressed in fulfilling their roles. In the longer term we hope the recommendations will free them from their frustrations so that they can concentrate on the most important job of looking after the children in our care.
	We were extremely impressed by the maturity and debate at the Children in Care Council who not only contributed to the recommendations we have suggested but put well thought out and challenging questions to us.
	Finally, I would like to thank my fellow review team member Councillor Bailey who listened to, questioned and reviewed the evidence gathered over several intensive days in December and January.
	Councillor J. Whitby, Chair of Children and Young People Board 2012-2013

	Introduction
1.1	As Corporate Parents, Councillors want the homes that are run by Derby City Council for the children in our care, to be of an extremely high standard. They want homes to provide high-quality care, in a safe environment, that looks after the specific care needs of this group.
1.2	In addition, in a time where the local authority is dealing with increasing numbers of Children and Young People coming into care and pressures on budgets are increasing, the care provision has to be good value for money.
1.3	Board Members were aware that the Children and Young People's Department had instigated a review of the Children's Homes run by Derby City Council.
1.4	Following discussions with the Strategic Director and Director of Specialist Services, it was felt that it would be timely for Councillors to reflect on the current provision and to determine whether the services provided to children in care homes across the City were of a sufficiently high standard.
1.5	The Children and Young People Department felt that a scrutiny review into the current provision of care homes would provide useful and complimentary evidence to its own internal review and the review was welcomed by the Strategic Director and Cabinet Member.
1.5	The Board resolved at its meeting on 11 September 2012 to conduct a Topic Review to establish 'Are our children's homes fit for purpose now and in the future?'
1.6	Working with the Service Director for Specialist Services to ensure that all of the relevant information would be available for Members, the Overview and Scrutiny Officer produced a scoping report for the review which detailed the aims and objectives of the work, the methodology and the likely timescales.

	Methodology
2.1	Following the agreement of the Children and Young People's Board on 11 September 2012, Board Members were asked to volunteer to take part in the review and form a review team.
2.2	Initially 5 Councillors volunteered to be part of the review however due to illness and other unforeseen circumstances only two Councillors were able to hear all of the initial evidence gathering, Councillors Bailey and Whitby. It was agreed that there were advantages of having a smaller group as then both Members would be able to hear all of the evidence and visit all of the children's homes.
2.3	<p>The review team received background evidence packs in November which set out information on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoping Report • Summary of Laws about Children in Care • Children's Homes National Minimum Standards • Community Care Article about a third of councils that have no children's homes • CfPS Guide: 10 questions to ask if you are scrutinising services for Looked After Children • Stoke-on-Trent Scrutiny Report: Are our residential care homes good enough for our children? <p>All of these documents are available on the following link [CMIS TBC]</p>
2.4	Those who were invited to interview were selected by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer in conjunction with the department to ensure that a wide range of voices were heard and from different levels across the service.
2.6	<p>Invitations to interview were delivered to and accepted by the following Professionals, Council Officers and people involved in supporting Children in Care. All of the witnesses had different insights into the care provided in Derby City Council's children's homes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Barratt – Director Specialist Services • Helen Smith – Queensferry Gardens Children's Home Manager • Jo Blackshaw – Residential Child Care Worker at Coronation Avenue Children's Home • Debbie Cartledge – Social Worker for Children and Young People in Derby City Council Care Homes • Chris Hill – Cricklewood Children's Home Manager • Helen Wilson – Residential Child Care Worker at Moorfield's Children's Home • Mike Evans – Service Manager, Looked After Children Service, Leicester
2.7	The review team visited all care homes and this gave them the

	opportunity to meet with managers/senior staff/staff on duty and children and hear, in a less formal setting, views on the care provided by Derby City Council.
2.8	The review team met on 10 and 22 January to draft its recommendations based on evidence they had heard.
2.9	The recommendations and the reasons for the recommendations can be found in the final section of this report.
	Interviews
3.1	Interviews were conducted over 2 days on 4 and 5 December 2012.
3.2	Each interviewee was invited to talk freely about their role within the service, the aspects of the service they felt worked well, areas they felt could be improved and any other issues that they felt would contribute to understanding whether children's homes in Derby were fit for service.
3.3	The interviewee was assured that their views would remain anonymous to encourage them to speak honestly and frankly about the services they helped to provide.
3.4	Each interview lasted approximately an hour and detailed notes of the discussions were taken for the review team to reflect upon, compare and contrast when forming their recommendations.
3.5	The review team discussed trends or themes that had emerged in the initial interviews with those who followed to cross check their evidence.
3.6	Evidence from another Local Authority witness was arranged by the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and this proved extremely useful for the review team as similarities and contrasts in services could be explored.
3.7	The review team decided not to pursue attempts to interview a child in residential care individually due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the review. A more general discussion with the Children in Care Council was used to explore service users views and opportunities to talk to children in their homes were used during the children's home visits.
3.8	All interviewees responded extremely positively to the process and the evidence they gave formed the main evidence for the conclusions and recommendations at the end of the review.
	Visits to Children's Homes

4.1	The review team had visited the majority of the 5 children's homes run by Derby City Council in fulfilling their role as corporate parents. However, the review team decided that in order to be able to effectively compare and contrast provision visits to all 5 children's homes were required.
4.2	Whilst recognising the importance of the specialist provision provided at The Lighthouse, the review team decided that for this review the focus should be on the more 'mainstream' children's homes.
4.3	A corporate parent visit to The Lighthouse has since been arranged as part of the Council's rolling programme of visits made by Councillors.
4.4	Visits to Cricklewood, Moorfields, Queensferry Gardens, Coronation Avenue and Bute Walk took place on 3 January 2013.
4.5	The review team and Overview and Scrutiny Officer spent approximately 45 minutes in each home. They met with the Manager (or a senior member of staff) and received a full tour of the home. If the manager had not been interviewed as part of the formal interview process, themes and issues that had been discussed during the interviews were put to them and discussed to further cross check the evidence received.
4.6	Whenever possible the team took the opportunity to talk to children in the homes and several were willing to show the team their bedrooms and discuss the care they received.
4.7	The greatest opportunity for discussion with young people arose at Queensferry Gardens where most of the Children in the home joined the review team for lunch. The lunch had been prepared by a young person and was enjoyed and extremely welcomed by the review team.
4.8	The review team witnessed the hard work and dedication of many of the staff in the homes during their visits.
Children in Care Council	
5.1	On 5 February 2013 the review team attended the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to talk to them about a Councillors role in their lives and the work undertaken in the Topic Review.
5.2	Several of the CiCC Members were in residential care and they largely voiced support for the draft recommendations that were put to them.
5.3	They had particularly strong opinions about the use of agency staff. They felt the services provided by permanent staff were superior to agency staff and preferred the consistency and quality of care the

	permanent staff team supplied.
5.4	The CiCC had considered their views prior to the review team's visit and this was evident in the maturity of the discussion and suggestions put forward.
	Recommendations
6.1	The review team felt that they had the opportunity to understand in detail the services that are offered to children living in our residential homes.
6.2	After careful consideration of all the evidence heard and seen, the Board has made the recommendations set out below. For clarity, the reasons and context underpinning each recommendation is also detailed.
6.3	Context and Reasons 1
	<p>From each of the interviewees and homes visited examples of good practice were evident. The review concluded that if the best practice in each of the homes was shared the review team felt standards would be driven up across the service, to provide a high quality, receptive and consistent service across the city.</p> <p>By addressing this issue staff will be able to move easily between the homes, it will help to ensure that standards are high across the homes and it ensures that all children living in the homes are treated in the same way and can expect the same high levels of service.</p>
6.4	Recommendation 1
	The Department should create one service that shares the same values, high standards and paperwork.
6.5	Context and Reasons 2
	<p>It is widely recognised the best interests of a child would be found in a family home – be it with their own family, kinship placement, foster care or through adoption. The evidence received suggested that as carers concentrate on the day to day care of a child the focus on the longer term plan for the child can sometimes slip.</p> <p>It was felt that the priority and emphasis on moving children ought to be strengthened to ensure the right plan was made for the individual needs of the looked after child.</p>
6.6	Recommendation 2
	At every opportunity consideration should be given to whether it

	is in the child's best interest to remain in a children's home or whether alternative care would be more appropriate.
6.7	Context and Reasons 3
	<p>Children in long term residential care need to experience an environment that is as stable and as familiar as possible. The evidence received in the interview process and from the Children in Care Council suggested that agency staff created instability within the home.</p> <p>It was noted that agency staff are very expensive and the review team felt that the cost cannot be justified in the current economic climate.</p> <p>The review team received evidence to suggest that there is a negative impact on the Children and Young People in the homes when agency staff are employed as the children do not know the staff coming in and do not have an opportunity to develop positive relationships with these staff.</p> <p>The evidence suggested that agency staff can also be less effective as they do not know how the home runs on a day to day basis and are not familiar with the policies and procedures. Additionally they have no relationships to fall back on with the Children and Young people if the circumstances necessitate.</p>
6.8	Recommendation 3
	The reliance on agency staff in Children's Homes needs to end.
6.9	Context and Reasons 4
	<p>Evidence received in the review from the Children in Care Council suggested that an over reliance upon the use of agency staff had a detrimental effect on the service they received.</p> <p>The Children at the Children in Care Council felt that they had a higher quality of care when a permanent member of staff was working with agency staff as the permanent staff member would help to maintain the homes normal standards.</p> <p>The Children in Care Council felt that when there was a number of agency staff employed, the young people behaved in a way that would see them push boundaries and behave in ways they would not normally behave. They were uncomfortable that this was allowed to happen despite there being benefits to themselves e.g. when staff were from an agency; the young people were able to stay up far later than they normally would be able to.</p>
6.10	Recommendation 4
	If on occasion agency staff absolutely must be used, a permanent

	member of staff should also be on duty. At no time should cover be provided solely by agency staff.
6.11	Contextand Reasons5
	<p>There will on occasion be a need for relief staff for the permanent staff in each of the homes.</p> <p>As discussed in previous recommendations it was evidenced that agency staff did not provide the best value for money or always provide standards of care that are as high as the permanent staff we employ.</p> <p>If permanent staff work within the same values/standards and utilise the same paperwork their talents and skills could be utilised across the service.</p> <p>By employing staff's skills across the service, staff will develop an understanding of different homes and have a greater opportunity to develop positive relationships with Children and Young People in all homes. This will contribute to consistency of care across the service as the staff will expect the same standards to apply in each home.</p> <p>Staff will be encouraged to share best practice and learning through the homes if they work in different homes more regularly.</p>
6.12	Recommendation 5
	A pool of relief staff – drawn from current staff – needs to be developed and utilised.
6.13	Contextand Reasons6
	<p>Evidence heard during the witness interviews suggested that in some cases, staff had worked in the same home for a considerable period of time and that this could have two potential affects on the service they provided. Firstly, staff may develop a particular skill within the home and develop good practice. The review team felt that if staff moved around between homes in a structured way (in order to best meet the needs of the children within homes) services would improve as the skills developed and best practice would be shared.</p> <p>Secondly, some interviewees felt that if staff remained in the same home environment they perhaps 'did not see' or became immune to things in the home that needed addressing. At times it was suggested that staff did things 'because that was the way it had always been done'. Moving staff around between homes would enable them to see the home they were moving to with fresh eyes.</p> <p>The review team felt that moving staff between homes on a structured</p>

	<p>basis would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable the service managers to ensure the right skills sets are available in each home. • encourage learning and professional development of staff through the sharing of best practice. • prevent homes from becoming stale and will re-energise staff. <p>The review team believed staff should work for Derby City Council rather than particular children's home and that their talents should be used where they are most needed.</p>
6.14	Recommendation 6
	There should be a structured rotation of staff between the homes.
6.15	Context and Reasons 7
	<p>Concerns were raised by several interviewees about the proposal to remove the cooks from children's homes as detailed in the Cabinet's budget proposals.</p> <p>Evidence suggested the removal of cooks at the busiest time of the day will have a negative impact upon the care that can be provided for the children.</p> <p>It was noted that staff are not qualified to produce nutritionally balanced meals. It was also recognised that the homes needed to provide a balanced and normalised experience of life.</p> <p>Suggestions were put forward that the domestic staffs work could be conducted by staff at quieter periods of the day and it was stated that 'in a crises dusting could wait but feeding the children was essential.'</p>
6.16	Recommendation 7
	That a review of the role of cooks / domestic staff within children's homes be undertaken subject to this being cost neutral.
6.17	Context and Reasons 8
	<p>Some concerns were raised by interviewees about the need to improve the quality of staff recruited to work in the homes.</p> <p>Evidence was heard from a neighbouring authority about their recruitment process which was challenging and detailed, and it was felt that Derby City Council might be more aspirational in the recruitment of staff.</p> <p>The review team felt that getting the right staff was the key factor in</p>

	<p>ensuring a home was successful and therefore time and energy should be invested to secure strong candidates.</p> <p>The review team also recognised that giving children a greater involvement in decisions that affect them was important and that their input to the recruitment process should not be underestimated.</p>
6.18	Recommendation 8
	The recruitment process, across the service needs to be far more vigorous and robust. Children from the homes need to be involved in the recruitment process.
6.19	Context and Reasons 9
	<p>Many partner agencies contribute to the running of a home.</p> <p>Evidence was heard about the need for staff to have a firm grounding in the work partners do. It was felt that this will enable staff to get the most out of the services provided by partner agencies for the children in their care.</p>
6.20	Recommendation 9
	The induction for staff should be far more detailed and should include opportunities to work with partner agencies that support the homes.
6.21	Context and Reasons 10
	<p>Evidence from a neighbouring authority suggested that a longer probationary period for staff assisted in ensuring that the best possible people were approved in posts in children's homes.</p> <p>Other interviewees suggested that on occasion people who performed excellently at interview did not always go on to demonstrate their abilities in the workplace.</p> <p>Extending the probationary period would enable a review to take place following the induction to ensure people could apply what they had learnt and that they were the right people for the job.</p>
6.22	Recommendation 10
	The probationary period for staff should be extended to 6 months and a formal review should take place at the end of this period before the member of staff is confirmed in post.
6.23	Context and Reasons 11
	The review team felt that there were many skilled professionals working in the service but that work needed to be done to map out what the

	<p>skills employees had. It was also important to ensure that the service had a clear idea about any skills gaps and training needs.</p> <p>Staff need to have their training needs met appropriately in order to ensure they are equipped to provide the highest level of care for children in their care.</p>
6.24	Recommendation 11
	A 'skills analysis' exercise needs to be conducted across the service and a training plan developed to address any areas of weakness or developmental needs.
6.25	Context and Reasons 12
	<p>There appears to be a top heavy management structure across the service with a number of assistant managers and deputy managers working in each home. Several interviewees felt that this structure was unnecessary and that a more streamlined management structure with a greater number of residential child care workers would maintain care standards in the home on a more cost effective basis.</p> <p>It was noted that Moorfield's management structure seemed particularly top heavy.</p>
6.26	Recommendation 12
	A review of the management structures in the homes needs to be conducted and where possible the structure needs to be flattened and streamlined (whilst recognising the need to be Ofsted compliant).
6.27	Context and Reasons 13
	<p>Using outside agencies to complete maintenance jobs has large cost implications for Derby City Council.</p> <p>Children's home repairs were not being completed in a timely fashion, this complaint was raised several times by different home managers and interviewees.</p> <p>It was felt that as corporate parents, Councillors should insist that the environment where the children live should be safe and pleasant.</p>
6.28	Recommendation 13
	The following recommendations were made with regard to the

	<p>maintenance of the homes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Derby City Council's maintenance teams should be used wherever possible within the homes. b) Consideration should be given to employing a dedicated children's home maintenance person. c) As corporate parents we must insist that maintenance of children's homes is given priority by maintenance teams. d) If maintenance issues are not rectified within appropriate and reasonable timescales, a clear escalation policy needs to be in place and this needs to be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board. e) Local Performance indicators should be developed for the maintenance of children's homes and these should be regularly monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board.
6.29	Context and Reasons 14
	<p>The review team visited an independent living flat at Coronation Avenue.</p> <p>The flat was used to help young people who were due to move to semi/independent accommodation – this programme was to enable young people begin to experience the reality of living independently becoming accustomed with living alone, managing their finances, cooking and cleaning for themselves whilst having the security of staff being available 24 hours a day next door.</p> <p>The flat at Coronation Avenue is highly valued by the children and staff who use it. It enables the Young Person to have a taste of independent living whilst in a safe and supported environment.</p>
6.30	Recommendation 14
	<p>In any future rebuilding of children's homes, consideration should be given to incorporating a flat for older children to live semi-independently in prior to them leaving care.</p>
6.31	Context and Reasons 15
	<p>Not all of the children's homes had a flat that could be used to train young people for independent living.</p> <p>The review team felt that whenever possible children from homes across the city should have the opportunity to use the facility at Coronation Avenue to help prepare them for leaving care.</p>
6.32	Recommendation 15
	<p>If any of the current independent flats are not being utilised by</p>

	homes that have them, the facility should be shared with other homes.
6.33	Context and Reasons 16
	<p>At Coronation Avenue the review team were shown an area that was used by several agencies for supervised contact between parents/relatives and children. The room was entirely self sufficient with its own front door, kitchen and toilet.</p> <p>The review team felt that this facility could be used far more extensively and across the City.</p>
6.34	Recommendation 16
	The contact area at Coronation Avenue should be promoted internally and externally and hired out at a cost.
6.35	Context and Reasons 17
	<p>The review team heard evidence that a more mixed economy within the types of homes owned by Derby City Council would be beneficial for children in our care.</p> <p>A move towards smaller, less institutionalised homes was regarded as best practice and the team felt that if the opportunity arose the building of smaller homes should be explored.</p> <p>It was felt that the majority of children who live in residential children's homes would benefit from living in a smaller; non institutionalised environment.</p>
6.36	Recommendation 17
	Consideration should be given to developing some smaller 2-3 bed children homes.
6.37	Context and Reasons 18
	<p>Compared with Derby's comparator Authorities there are a high number of children home beds.</p> <p>The review considered that as the number of children in Derby's care changed; there will be a need for the service to re-focus the provision of accommodation across the Council. The review team felt it was important for the department to explore safely and appropriately review the residential provision over the next few years.</p>
6.38	Recommendation 18
	We have an overprovision of beds in the children's homes in

	Derby City Council. This needs to be safely reduced.
6.39	Context and Reasons 19
	<p>Staff in the children's homes across the city had a wealth of experience which foster carers would benefit greatly from if it was shared with them. The team felt that encouraging links between foster carers and the care homes may have several potential benefits. Firstly, experience could be shared and skills passed on to foster carers.</p> <p>Secondly, by offering foster carers additional support from children's homes foster carers may feel that Derby City Council was providing an enhanced level of support otherwise provided by private providers of care such as the Independent Foster Agencies.</p> <p>Thirdly, foster carers who previously may have discounted fostering older children may find that they are more willing to foster an older child if they know that they have the back up of staff who have previously worked with a child.</p> <p>Finally, by encouraging links between foster carers and children's homes the service for all children looked after may work together better as one service.</p>
6.40	Recommendation 19
	Work should be done to encourage and develop much stronger links between children's homes and foster carers.
6.41	Context and Reasons 20
	Evidence was heard from witnesses that they had not regularly received a debriefing following an OfSTED inspection in the home they worked in and that information was not systematically shared across the homes.
6.42	Recommendation 20
	<p>After an Ofsted inspection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) All the staff within the home and all the other home managers need a detailed debriefing on findings as soon as possible. b) Any areas for improvement raised by OfSTED need to be shared with all homes and if the recommendation can be implemented in other homes this should be done immediately. c) An action plan for meeting the recommendations should be shared with the Corporate Parenting Board.
	In summary the overarching aim for the Children and Young People Service should be to develop one service with shared aims, values and objectives.

