

MINUTE EXTRACT

Time Commenced: - 6.00 pm
Time Finished: - 8.00 pm

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMISSION 11 DECEMBER 2007

Present: Councillor Rawson (Chair)
Councillors Higginbottom and Poulter

29/07 Maintenance Issues for Children's Homes

The Sub-Commission received a Report of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People regarding maintenance in Children's Homes. The report was presented jointly by Rod Jones, Head of Service – Residential and Leaving Care Service and Tim Findlay, Maintenance Manager.

Rod reported that the five Children's Homes operated by Derby City Council were in varying states of repair. The design specifications were not always completely suitable. The maintenance of the homes sometimes failed to meet minimum Ofsted standards, as the Children's Homes regulations required a higher standard than that required for other council properties.

Rod advised that the maintenance backlog across the Council was £108 million and increasing. A condition survey was planned by the end of the 2007-08 financial year but was subject to funding constraints. There were regular meetings to ensure that the system worked and that homes were as well maintained as possible. However, there was a struggle to maintain and decorate homes, with residential workers often carrying out minor repairs and decorating work themselves.

Another issue was that the standard of repairs deemed acceptable under current Council contracts was not always sufficient to meet the requirements of the homes. The current feedback system on work carried out was not always reliable. The report recommended the commissioning of a full condition survey of the five homes, and the development of a robust and realistic service level agreement for the delivery of reactive maintenance repairs.

Councillor Higginbottom asked why there was still a problem with the service level agreement, as the same issue had previously been discussed. Tim Findlay replied that no agreement exists, and that the City

Council maintenance strategy did not meet Ofsted requirements. Tim added that regulations determine the standard required for maintenance in Children's Homes and therefore this was a special case that would need a separate service level agreement. There were cost implications, with the current situation of increasing backlogs and decreasing budgets. Keith Woodthorpe advised that Corporate Services agreed that maintenance of Children's Homes should be a priority, and he would lobby for them to be seen as a special case.

Councillor Poulter observed that the standard of the three homes he had visited were higher than he expected, but that minor defects spoiled the whole. He added that residential staff were frustrated by this and should not have to perform routine maintenance tasks. He gave two suggestions for solutions, the first being devolving some of the maintenance budget to home managers for minor work and the second being a dedicated handyperson for all five sites.

Tim Findlay advised that the possibility of a handyman was on the agenda. He suggested that it might work but that the range of competencies required could rule it out. With regard to devolved budgets, Tim Findlay and Keith Woodthorpe both warned that a disaster in one home could wreck the budgets for all homes if too much of the budget was devolved.

Councillor Rawson expressed his disappointment in the upkeep of one of the homes, as damage noted in an Ofsted report in May had still not been fixed when he visited in October. He suggested that the service level agreement should include the time taken to make a repair. Tim Findlay advised that sometimes follow-ups to temporary repairs were sometimes missed. He acknowledged there were difficulties, and advised that new call management software was being looked at.

Councillor Rawson asked if contractors performing sub-standard work could be identified, and Councillor Higginbottom asked if contractors left feedback forms for residential staff to complete. Rod Jones advised that feedback forms should be routinely left by contractors under their contract and that home managers were encouraged to complete these. However, not all contractors left these forms. Keith Woodthorpe added that there were no real consequences for contractors if the form was not left.

Councillor Poulter asked if PFI was an option if one building needed to be replaced entirely. Keith Woodthorpe replied that this would be an option so long as there was a commitment to revenue flow. He advised that previous experience showed PFI to be a commercially viable option for large projects. Rod Jones advised that none of the homes were at risk of condemnation at present.

Tim Findlay advised that the condition surveys should be completed in time for the next Sub-Commission meeting. The Sub-Commission agreed to receive a brief update at the next meeting.

Resolved to recommend the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Corporate and Adult Services jointly to:

- 1) Commission a full condition survey of the five children's homes operated by Derby City Council, consider suitability and sufficiency issues, carry out an option appraisal and recommend proposals to bring them to a suitable standard, or replace them.**
- 2) Develop a robust and realistic service level agreement for the delivery of reactive maintenance repairs within the constraints of the Council's limited maintenance revenue budget and increasing maintenance backlog.**
- 3) Investigate the options of devolving some of the budget for the maintenance of children's homes to home managers and of employing a dedicated handyperson for the five children's homes.**
- 4) Develop a system of checks to ensure that feedback forms are left.**