

Maintenance of Children's Homes

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Corporate Parenting Sub-Commission recommends the Cabinet Members for Children and Young People and Corporate and Adult Services jointly to:
- 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.
 - 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.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 Derby City Council operates five children's homes providing a maximum of 41 residential places for children in care aged 7-18. The homes are registered and inspected by Ofsted and are required to comply with the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes.
- 2.2 All five homes were built during the 1970s. They have been extensively refurbished at various times in the last two to seven years. The homes are subject to more than usual wear and tear because of the emotional and behavioural difficulties of their residents. They were designed and built for a different purpose and to a specification which is not suited to their current use. The homes require frequent and repeated maintenance as a result and fail to meet the minimum maintenance requirements required by the Care Standards.
- 2.3 Maintenance of the homes is the responsibility of the Property Maintenance section of Corporate and Adult Services. Routine defects are reported to a Maintenance Helpdesk and allocated according to set timescales. Bigger jobs are covered by a property surveyor who commissions work according to budget availability. Capital projects are also commissioned by this section according to funding allocated by Asset Management Group. The priority of all maintenance requirements are considered in accordance with the Council's maintenance strategy, which prioritises keeping buildings safe and operational.

2.4 The Council's maintenance backlog for its building stock is around £108 million and increasing. Possible budgetary reductions to both the revenue and capital budget for 2008/2009 will have a further negative effect on the maintenance of the Council's property including Children's Homes.

2.5 The National Minimum Standard which applies is as follows:

Standard 24, Paragraph 24.2

"The home is decorated and furnished to a standard which creates a pleasant domestic environment, appropriate to the number, gender mix, disability, age, culture and ethnic background of the children being accommodated."

Paragraph 24.3

"The interior and exterior of the home are maintained in a good state of structural and decorative repair. There is a satisfactory maintenance and repair programme for the building, furniture and equipment, and any damage is repaired properly. Gardens and/or hard play areas are well maintained and safe. The home is kept clean."

2.6 In 2005 the Corporate Parenting Sub-Commission reviewed services for Looked After Children and recommended that:

"The Council Cabinet members for Children and Young People and for the Environment are requested jointly to consider the specifications for fixtures and fittings and repair standards in the five Children's Homes and report back to the Commission the outcome".

A condition survey of the buildings is planned by the end of the financial year in order to comply with this recommendation, subject to the allocation of funding.

2.7 The report of a random inspection of Bute Walk Children's Home on 21 May 2007 said:

"The ceiling in the lounge is damaged due to a leak in the upstairs bathroom which had developed the previous week. The leak was causing a potential health and safety hazard as it was near to an electric socket. Although the defect had been reported at the time it was noticed, water was still leaking through the ceiling. This highlighted the need for a more effective and efficient maintenance and repairs system....staff were advised to contact the maintenance department and ask them to come out as a matter of urgency."

2.8 The report of a key inspection of Moorfield Children's Centre on 21 June 2007 said:

"In one unit three windows have been broken and boarded up. There are wires exposed on a door closer and another closer has broken. Although these issues are reported immediately, along with others for the other two units, to the maintenance department of the local authority, it can be some time before they are addressed. This is not acceptable as young people are exposed to hazards."

- 2.9 The report of a key inspection by Ofsted of Bute Walk Children's Home on 3 October 2007 said:

"Despite the best efforts of staff and young people to make the building more homely, the décor in the home is poor. The system for dealing with repairs and maintenance, which is provided by another of the local authority's departments, is slow and ineffective and impacts on the quality of life of the young people living at the home.

"Staff and young people have worked hard to improve the environment. However, areas of the home affected by the installation of a new central heating system earlier this year, have not been re-decorated leaving some areas looking poor....the ceiling has not been redecorated since the damage from a water leak in May 2007.

"The arrangements for maintenance and repairs in the home are unsatisfactory. The home's management team constantly 'chase-up' the local authority's maintenance department to deal with repairs and maintenance. However, these take an unacceptable length of time to complete. This results in a poor living environment and young people's privacy is compromised in some instances."

- 2.10 The report of a key inspection of Cricklewood Road Children's Home on 14 June 2007 said:

"Carpets and décor throughout is poor including in the bedrooms.... The home is poorly maintained.... there is severe damage to the wall around a door frame in one of the bedrooms and the door doesn't shut properly when left to close by itself.... The shower room and the bathroom are very warm as staff are unable to turn off the radiator. Staff said this has been reported but not attended to. Doors throughout the building are very heavy and close quickly.... There are also holes in the wall of two bedrooms. The door of the meeting room is missing a door closer. This is a fire door and young people do use this room on occasions."

Servicing of plant and equipment is carried out to set standards and timescales but, although the Property Maintenance team in the main responds to these reports and carries out required work, existing mechanisms and budgets appear incapable of consistently maintaining these buildings to the required standard. There are timescales specified for repair work ordered by Property Services but these are in some cases too long or not met by the contractor, leaving children to live in a deteriorating or damaged environment, thus inviting further damage.

- 2.11 Maintenance budgets do not permit a rolling programme of decoration, with the result that buildings inevitably deteriorate over a period of time. Residential workers often carry out decorating and minor repairs themselves to effect some short-term improvement.
- 2.12 Longer-scale maintenance projects may be delayed for several months when required funds cannot be identified in maintenance budgets. Alternatively projects may have to be charged to cost centres within the CYP department, resulting in overspend. e.g. carpet replacements
- 2.13 The standard of repair work carried out does not always meet that required in this

environment which differ from other properties in that more robust solutions are sometimes needed. Property Services do not have the capacity to routinely check all work commissioned, given the number of orders they issue and rely on children's homes' staff to provide feedback. Response times and quality issues standards need to be formally established and discussed with the Council's maintenance contractors – for building work – Environmental Services Department. An audit of the quality of repairs in one home will be jointly carried out to review quality standards.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 1.1 An average of £113,000 has been spent on the maintenance on children's homes in each of the last four years.

Legal

- 2.1 Children's Homes are regulated by Ofsted which has the power to close down homes which fail to meet minimum standards.

Personnel

- 3.1 None

Equalities impact

- 4.1 Children's homes provide a service to some of the most vulnerable children in Derby. Achieving the best quality environment we can helps to ensure their diverse needs are met.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 5.1 The physical condition of homes is deemed to contribute to Achieving Economic Well-being, one of the five outcomes for children.

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Background papers:
List of appendices: Appendix 1 - Implications