

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **29th November 2023**

Report Subject: **Progress Report: Children's Residential Homes**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Haydn Trollope, Cabinet Member People and Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Interim Corporate Director Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
17.10.23	19.10.23	08.11.23			13.11.23	29.11.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update on the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes. The development of Blaenau Gwent's own children's homes has been agreed by all necessary decision makers within the Council and evidenced within the Business Case Report which has been previously submitted for Council's approval.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 As reported within the business case, the plan for Blaenau Gwent establishing its own children's residential home is supportive of the Welsh Government's policy initiative to *'eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after by the end of the Senedd term'*.

2.2 Agreement was sought as part of the business case to purchase 2 properties to meet the requirement of being redeveloped into children's residential homes in the Tredegar area. On 9th March 2023, following necessary planning applications being submitted, the Planning Committee agreed to the change of use application to enable the Local Authority to move forward with redeveloping the properties to ensure they are fit for use and Care Inspectorate Wales compliant.

2.3 The first property (Mons Calpe) will provide residential care for a maximum of 4 children. The second property (Madison House) will provide emergency accommodation on a short-term basis for up to 2 children at any time. The second property will also provide move on accommodation for 2 young people aged 16+, acting as a steppingstone from residential care into independence.

2.4 Following the costs associated with property purchases, the Local Authority has remaining Regional Integration Capital Grant Funding for refurbishment of the properties equating to £865,500.

2.5 The business case presented previously offered an anticipated opening date of 1st January 2024. This is no longer an achievable target for this project.

2.6 **Progress Update**

2.7 Regional support has been accessed via the Regional Eliminate Team who has assigned a specific project officer to Blaenau Gwent to advise and support with the development of the residential homes. This support has proven invaluable to date as the regional team have access to a wealth of knowledge and experience from neighbouring authorities who are experienced in developing and managing their own residential homes as a council.

2.8 Since acquiring the properties, work has been ongoing in partnership with the Council's Community Services Division to develop the vision for the properties and reach the point where we are ready to commence the procurement process to undertake the work on both properties to ensure they meet the regulatory requirements of the Care Inspectorate Wales

2.9 The estimated completion date for the tender drawings is currently 20th October 2023 which will include the architectural designs, electrical designs and specifications as well as the mechanical designs.

2.10 Upon completion, the tender drawings will be reviewed by the Local Authority's Quantity Surveyor to evaluate and provide an estimated total project cost as well as drawing up the project contracts in preparation for the procurement process. It is estimated that this will be completed by 6th November 2023.

2.11 It is anticipated that the procurement process will take up to 8 weeks which provides an estimated end date of 1st January 2024.

2.12 Providing the contract is awarded to a suitable contractor within the week following the 1st January 2024, it is anticipated that the current estimated 12 – 15 week construction time will be completed by 22nd April 2024.

2.13 The Care Inspectorate Wales registration process can take up to 14 weeks thereafter before the residential provision can become operational and for children to move in. Should the full 14-week timescale be required for registration then the anticipated opening date for the provision is estimated to be **w/c 29th July 2024**. It is considered that this is an appropriate time to consider moves for children from other provisions given the natural ending of their academic school year and having time to settle into a new home prior to the new academic year, which for some children may be in a completely new school.

2.14 In tandem with the refurbishment work, there has also been significant activity being undertaken in relation to the operational needs of this project.

- 2.15 This workstream includes the following:
- Liaising with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) around the reconfiguration plans (**complete**)
 - Liaising with Pan-Gwent Authorities regarding their journey of developing new residential provisions (**ongoing**)
 - Developing Job Descriptions and Person Specifications for the Residential Children's Home staffing team (**ongoing**)
 - Agreeing preferred working patterns and rotas (**ongoing**)
 - Commencing Job Evaluations for the new staff roles (**ongoing**)
 - Developing Blaenau Gwent Policies and Procedures for Residential Children's Home Operation (**ongoing**)
 - Establishing a Residential Children's Home workforce training framework (**ongoing**)
 - Identifying a Responsible Individual (**This role will be assumed by Beth Thomas, Service Manager – Children's Services**)
 - Commencing Responsible Individual registration (**to be completed**)
 - Developing Statement of Purposes for both properties (**complete**)
 - Commencing CIW registration process for both properties (**ongoing**)
 - Housing Capital Fund Reporting monthly (**ongoing**)

2.16 The task for prioritising in coming weeks is for the Job Evaluation processes to be completed for the Home Manager, Assistant Manager, Children's Residential Workers and Night Officers. Followed by developing a recruitment plan for staff which is in-keeping with the estimated operational date for the residential homes.

2.17 Engagement with colleagues in Organisational Development is required around the desired shift patterns for the provision which would be reflective of neighbouring authorities.

2.18 Fortnightly project review meetings are being held and will continue for the foreseeable future to closely monitor progress and to identify any unanticipated delays in project completion at the earliest opportunity.

2.19 There is currently an Eliminate Task and Finish group being led by a Children's Service Manager to proactively identify the cohort of children who can transfer to our property once operational in 2024, thus reducing our reliance on for-profit private providers and meeting the WG initiative of eliminating use of these providers.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report will be considered by the People Scrutiny Committee on 13th November 2023, and any feedback will be provided verbally to Cabinet.

3.2 **Option 1**

That Members support this report as an accurate representation of the progress to date in respect of the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes.

Option 2:

That Members consider the progress to date in respect of the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes and make specific recommendations.

4. Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

4.1 As evidenced within the previous reports regarding the residential children's homes development, the development of such a project within these reports support the achievement of the priorities contained within the Corporate Plan 2022-2027, including:

- Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent,
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place,
- Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent, and resilient.

4.2 It will also support the priorities set out for the social services directorate which are:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater,
- To work with our communities and partners including Aneurin Bevan Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support,
- To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm,
- To ensure effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience,
- Ensure long-term sustainability is at the forefront of our thinking and decision-making, enabling us to work better with people, communities, and each other, looking to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

4.3 It is also supportive of Objective 3 of the Strategy to Safely Reduce the numbers of Children Looked After - to provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality placements.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long-term impact)*

5.1.1 The remaining Capital funding for refurbishment is healthy and is anticipated to fully meet the costs associated with the plans to refurbish the properties to an excellent standard and which is CIW regulation compliant.

5.1.2 As noted in paragraph 2.18, the anticipated operational date of the children's homes is later than originally planned which will likely have an impact on projected forecasting for the 23/24 Q4 budget and the 24/25 budget.

5.1.3 The Business Case identified a cost pressure of £94,330 for 2023/2024 due to the need to employ staff prior to opening and a financial efficiency of around £63,000 in 2024/2025. The delayed implementation will mitigate the cost pressure for 2023/2024.

5.1.4 Using the financial costings for the original business case and assuming staff are employed from April and the home is operational from 29 July 2024, there would be a potential cost pressure of £123,000 in 2024/2025 based on an occupancy of 3 Children Looked After. However, should there be full occupancy from opening, this cost pressure will be mitigated.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.2.1 As noted in paragraph 2.18, the anticipated operational date of the children's homes is later than originally desired which will likely have an impact on projected forecasting for the 2023/24 Q4 budget and the 2024/25 budget.

5.2.2 Whilst there is an anticipated opening date based on current project planning, there may be unforeseen issues which could arise that could further extend the operational date of the residential provisions. This may be associated with:

5.2.3

- Delay with refurbishment work – fortnightly project management meetings will continue to be held to closely review the refurbishment work with colleagues from Community Services Division to identify any issues as early as possible and consider any mitigating actions which may support keeping the estimated completion date realistic.

5.2.4

- Recruitment Challenges - The difficulties in recruiting to social care staff has been widely reported so there could be difficulties recruiting to the posts required to manage the children's home. To mitigate against this we are hoping to be consistent with neighbouring authorities with salaries for the posts to ensure we remain competitive within the social care recruitment market. We will ensure there is a robust recruitment process in place considering a range of recruitment options such as traditional applications and recruitment open days in the local area. Thorough inductions and training are planned for the staffing team when identified to promote the likelihood of staff retention. We are aware of a number of private residential home providers in Blaenau Gwent who have staff who may be interested in working for the Local Authority particularly given the drive to eliminate for-profit care settings in Wales.

5.2.5

- Registration issues – Whilst the refurbishment may complete within estimated timeframes there may be unforeseen challenges with the registration of the provisions which may delay opening date. To mitigate against this, we will maintain dialogue with our appointed CIW inspector throughout the refurbishment and action any advice or guidance offered.

5.3 **Legal**

5.3.1 There will be a legal requirement to register the home with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and ensure compliance with all associated registration regulations including Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016.

5.4 **Human Resources**

5.4.1 Organisational Development (OD) colleagues have suitably advised on the Job Evaluation process which must be followed for all posts in the proposed children's residential staffing structure.

5.4.2 Engagement with OD colleagues will be required regarding the proposal to adopt a 15-hour shift operating model akin to neighbouring authorities to enable the Local Authority to be competitive within the recruitment market to secure and retain staff. A report relating to this proposal will be completed upon further advice being sought from OD colleagues in coming weeks.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

5.5.1 All refurbishment work will adhere to Health and Safety standards and will be quality assured by colleagues in Technical Services who will oversee the project management of the works.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 The business case found at Appendix 1 has already outlined the performance information and data relevant to the development of Blaenau Gwent's own children's home/s.

6.1.2 Further progress reporting will be provided to offer updated information on anticipated operational date.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

6.2.1 The impact of having Blaenau Gwent residential provision will improve outcomes for children looked after, and in turn provide the public with reassurances that the children in the care of the local authority are having their needs met.

6.2.2 The establishment of the residential home in Blaenau Gwent, will provide employment opportunities to local residents and businesses and provide opportunity to improve their socio-economic circumstances.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

During this process consultations have taken place with various directorates within the Council.

As part of the acquisition process and through the change of use policy the Council planning department have undertaken a statutory consultation process

In addition, a meeting was held with local residents the Interim Head of Children's Services and Council members.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Blaenau Gwent has never had its own children's residential provision. However, at a time when the needs of children are becoming more complex and Blaenau Gwent children are increasingly being looked after in independent for-profit organisations, with the quality of care being afforded to our children not being what is expected, it is imperative that Blaenau Gwent moves forward with these plans and in the long term the LA will make savings alongside children's needs being met in their local community.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.5.1 Preventing children from being placed outside of Blaenau Gwent who need care is a positive outcome in itself and will prevent the breakdown of important relationships.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 The establishment of the pan-Gwent Regional Eliminate Team has been an invaluable source of support to the Local authority in driving forward the development of its own residential provision. The allocated project officer for Blaenau Gwent and the Team Manager are key members of the fortnightly progress meetings to offer advice and guidance to the Local Authority.

6.6.2 Following the submission of the Business Case earlier this year, a Residents Committee has been established to provide residents with key updates on the development of the project. The next meeting is due the end of October 2023.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

As part of the development of the residential children's home in Blaenau Gwent it will be vital that we build on existing relationships with our statutory and voluntary partners whose involvement and support to our children will be integral to the success of the home.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

6.8.1 Refurbishment works will take into consideration opportunities for decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions. An example to date relates to the installation of electric charging points for vehicles to be utilised at the provision.

6.8.2 Early engagement with partners in Ecology have commenced to consider to the opportunities available to us to promote the landscapes being biodiversity friendly.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for non-decisioning making reports. However, an IIA was undertaken for the report presented to People Scrutiny Committee on 28th February 2023.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Progress of the project development will continue to be reviewed by the Social Services Senior Leadership Team and formal reporting on progress is next suggested to be presented at year end (March 2024), when building work is well underway to offer a meaningful estimation on the homes becoming operational, identification of children to access the provision and the anticipated cost saving this will achieve.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

N/A