

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY MEETING  
3 NOVEMBER 2008**

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**CHILDREN'S HOMES OVERVIEW**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide information about the provision of children's residential services in Darlington Borough Council Children's Homes.

**Summary**

2. This report outlines the extent and remit of the Children's Homes in Darlington that provide a service for Looked After children as well as information on the Short Break Centre for Disabled Children.

**Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that:-
  - (a) Members note the contents of the report; and
  - (b) A Task and Finish group be established, should members wish to discuss this area in more detail.

**Murray Rose  
Director of Children's Services**

**Background Papers**

Children Act 1989

Children Act 2004 ("Every Child Matters")

Mary Sweeney : Extension 2924

S17 Crime and Disorder	Provision of residential accommodation for young people not cared for by family
Health and Well Being	Provision of home environment
Sustainability	-
Diversity	Provision for Looked After children from any ethnic or cultural background
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	Young people aged 12 – 17 years
Budget and Policy Framework	No implications
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Services for vulnerable children

# MAIN REPORT

## Information and Analysis

### 4. Background

All of the Council's residential services for young people are provided and managed by Darlington Borough Council Children's Services Department and are part of the Children and Families Division.

The aim is to provide a range of high quality residential services to meet the needs of young people referred through the child care assessment process.

Provision includes response to emergencies and crises as well as short term and long term planned care for young people who may have emotional, behavioural and/or learning difficulties.

The age remit of children's residential provision covers young people aged twelve to seventeen years for whom alternative provision is not available. The actual age range of young people currently placed in the Children's Homes is fourteen to eighteen years. Where it is part of a clear plan to meet a young person's identified needs, residential care can be a very positive experience for them.

### 5. Description of Children's Homes

Darlington Borough Council has four Children's Homes that provide mainstream care for Looked After children and one Short Break Centre for Disabled Children. The mainstream Homes consist of one larger purpose-built detached house and three smaller Homes within existing council housing stock.

The larger Home offers care for no more than five young people of either sex. Male and female staff are employed, including a Registered Manager and sufficient staff to meet the minimum requirements of a ratio of two members of staff per five young people. However, if the Home has young people with very complex needs or who display challenging behaviour, the staffing ratios would increase.

The remit of the larger Home is primarily for unplanned, short term accommodation, often in response to out-of-hours emergencies, if no other option is available with family, friends or foster care.

The Home offers a base from which young people, their families, social workers and other key people can take stock and plan how to move forward in the most positive way.

The three smaller Children's Homes offer planned, long term care for no more than three young people of either sex aged twelve to seventeen years who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties and for whom no alternative placements are available/or appropriate with either family, friends or in foster care.

Male and female staff are employed in the smaller Homes, including a Registered Manager and sufficient staff to meet the minimum requirement of one staff member per three young people. As with the larger Home, staffing levels would be increased in the event of a young person being placed with particularly complex needs and/or challenging behaviour.

The smaller Homes generally offer long-term provision for young people who are unlikely to return to their own families in the near future. Some young people stay until they are able to live independently, whilst others may move to other permanent accommodation, foster care or an eventual return to their families.

## **6. Partnership Working**

- (a) Young people remain with their current General Practitioner on admission to a Children's Home. Where a young person is not registered with a GP, staff arrange for them to be accepted by a local practice as soon as possible.

Young people are encouraged to learn about and discuss health issues (including substance misuse, HIV, Aids and teenage pregnancy) and to take an active interest in their own health.

Each young person is provided with a comprehensive Health Care Plan which is updated regularly during their stay.

The Children's Homes do not use any specific therapeutic techniques. However, the staff teams regularly consult with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The consultation provides staff with guidance and support to enable them to agree the best responses to meet young people's needs.

- (b) Following admission to any of the Children's Homes, all young people continue to attend their own schools, where possible. Continuity of education is recognised as a crucial factor in enabling Looked After children to enjoy and achieve. Each young person has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that addresses their educational needs, aspirations and achievements.
- (c) The Children's Homes operate in accordance with the Safeguarding Children Board procedures. There is close liaison between residential staff and the Safeguarding Children team. Any concerns are dealt with in accordance with relevant legislation.
- (d) Friends and family are encouraged to keep in contact with Looked After children. Telephone calls and visits are facilitated, including help with travel or other arrangements. Contact arrangements are agreed at the time of placement so that staff are aware of contact that should be supervised or is not permissible, to ensure the young person's safety.

## **7. Short Break Centre for Disabled Children**

The Short Break Centre was purpose built to provide short break care for children and young people who are learning and/or physically disabled. The age range is six years to eighteen years. The services provided include overnight breaks, day care and tea visits.

The Short Break Centre differs from the mainstream Children's Homes in relation to the legal status of the children and young people. Whilst the mainstream Homes provide care for Looked After children, for whom the Local Authority is the Corporate Parent, the parents of young people accessing the short Break Centre retain full parental responsibility.

Young people are encouraged to visit several times prior to overnight stays at the Short Break Centre. Where appropriate, young people are encouraged to participate actively in all meetings to plan for their future and are supported at all times to communicate their views about any decisions affecting them.

## 8. Conclusion

- (a) The aim of all Children's Homes in Darlington is to work within all relevant legislative requirements to provide an environment which is safe, child centred and where young people's individual circumstances, rights and opinions are respected. Partnership working ensures that young people have access to the opportunities, resources and support they need to achieve a positive future.
  - (b) Performance is monitored through an operational multi-agency group that reports to a Strategic Leads Group for Looked After children, chaired by the Assistant Director, Children and Families. Consequently, regular reports regarding Children's Homes are taken to Corporate Parenting Panel.
  - (c) Due to the confidentiality issues that may arise, Members may consider that future discussions may be more appropriately dealt with through the medium of a Task and Finish group.
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