



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

7 March 2023

REPORT TITLE:	CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The Children, Young People and Education Committee held on the 10th March 2022 requested an update on progress in relation to the Partnership Accommodation Programme as part of the work plan. The report below offers this update.

The report impacts all wards but is not a key decision.

The report supports the Wirral Plan priority 'Brighter Futures' and the 'Positive Lived Experiences' priority of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. note the report; and,
2. request that the Director of Children, Families and Education bring an update report to the Committee on the progress of the Programme in 12 months.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Children, Young People and Education Committee held on the 10th March 2022 requested an update on progress in relation to the Children's Partnership Accommodation Programme as part of the forward plan.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 A range of options were considered in relation to the Children's Partnership Accommodation Programme in the report considered by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on the 10th of March 2022. There is no reason to consider other options within this report as it is an update on progress in relation to the options agreed in October 2021.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In August 2020, a Partnership Accommodation programme was established with the vision to: *"improve the local offer and availability of options of high-quality provision that meets the need of children looked after"*.
- 3.2 Currently, four projects sit within the programme, with the Director of Children, Families and Education as Senior Responsible Officer. These projects aim to encourage resilience in the supply of placements locally. Officers across the Council from social care, commissioning, legal, procurement, finance, housing, assets, regeneration have made significant progress over the past 12 –18 months leading to a mixed model of enhancing provision locally.
- 3.3 The case for change leading to the establishment of the programme remains compelling and clear: -
1. The Council needs to ensure there are sufficient local, high-quality placements for local children. Currently 74 residential placements for children looked after are commissioned and only 40% of those placements are in-borough.
 2. The increase in costs for children's residential care nationally shows no sign of slowing and the projects below aim to help address some of the financial pressures on the Council
 3. We need to support the provision of high-quality provision for the borough's most vulnerable children
 4. We need to increase sufficiency of local placements in line with our statutory sufficiency duty
 5. By investing in different models of delivery we reduce the risk and begin to bring balance to a market dominated by private providers who use growth acquisition models to increase market share, funded by private equity, resulting in increasing risk and volatility in the care system. Children who have all experienced trauma and neglect need and deserve stability.

3.4 PROJECT UPDATES

3.5 In-House Provision including Willowtree provision for children with disabilities:

Willowtree was previously a short-break provision for children with disabilities and following an extensive programme of building extension and renovation it is now also an in-house registered children's home for 6 children. Following the refurbishment at Willowtree the service has fully opened during the year. There were some delays with filling residential beds due to several emergency admissions to the home of young people who did not fully meet the criteria for the service; however, the 6 residential beds are now occupied following matching for suitability taking place. The extended short break provision is also fully occupied.

3.6 A new Registered Manager is now in post and Ofsted have visited to undertake the variation, so the home is compliant with the Children's Home Regulations. Recruitment to other posts has been ongoing throughout the year. Nationally there are problems with recruiting suitable candidates to the sector and the home has struggled to cover several posts as a result. It is anticipated that following a recent recruitment advertisement all posts will be filled by April 2023.

3.7 Transforming Care Project

Following a successful capital grant process with NHS England the Council was awarded £866,000 (reported to Children, Young People and Education Committee on the 11th March 2021 and Policy and Resource Committee on the 17th March 2021). Wirral is purchasing and opening a 3-bedded community provision to prevent admissions to Tier 4 mental health hospital beds and to prevent out of borough placements for children and young people with learning disabilities and autism.

3.8 A property was identified, and all relevant structural reports and specialist reports having been successfully obtained and completed. The planning application for change of use has been granted.

3.9 However, the project has been delayed as the vendor of the property unexpectedly passed away in July 2022, two weeks before the sale of the property was due to complete. We were assured at the time that probate was straightforward and have since been awaiting its completion to progress the sale. Probate is still in process and such the Council's legal team have been liaising with the executor's legal team to expedite the process. All paperwork and proforma's have now been submitted and whilst the standard timeline is a further 16 weeks it is expected to be resolved in six weeks. NHS England have been fully briefed and updated and are confident that the bid will progress with a sale completion in Quarter 1 of 2023/24.

3.10 As part of contingency planning, an ongoing open market property search has been reinstated and health and housing partners have been approached to establish the possibility of alternative viable properties.

3.11 An Officer Decision Notice was taken and agreed (20th July 2022) to accept an increase in capital grant monies up to £900,000 and to appoint a named service provider who will facilitate to the operation of the home. The additional funds were to reflect the increase in the property market and construction industry post pandemic.

3.12 Regular internal reporting on this project is via the capital programme. Lead Members, spokespersons and ward Members will be regularly updated and when purchase is finalised service provider engagement with neighbours will be undertaken.

3.13 Care Leaver Accommodation

The award of a three-year contract, following a full tendering process was completed with a start date of January 1st, 2022, to a local registered provider to provide eleven units of high-quality accommodation for Care Experienced Young People 16-18. The level of support is tailored to meet the needs of the young people. The service comprises of two homes offering group living accommodation to four young people in each setting and a separate building with three self-contained flats.

3.14 Occupancy across the scheme is at 90% at the end of the last quarter. The scheme prioritises young people, who are currently placed in residential care, and as part of their care plan, are ready to make the transition from residential care into supported accommodation. The Commissioning team have an identified cohort of young people who meet the criteria for the scheme and consultation takes place with the social worker, personal advisor and independent reviewing officer with final matching decisions endorsed by Childrens Services 16-18 Panel. Further discussions are planned around young people who turn 18 whilst living in this accommodation and have nowhere to move to. There are 2 young people who are currently 18 in this situation.

3.15 Despite the challenges around occupancy, the expected financial savings associated with this project are expected to be realised. Robust financial oversight and monitoring has ensured forecasting is accurate.

3.16 Residential Transformation project

Following approval by elected Members (Policy and Resources Committee and Children, Young People and Education Committee) in October 2021, a loan agreement was finalised with Capacity on 31st January 2022.

3.17 The 'We Are Juno' Community Interest Company was established for the purposes of setting up the children's homes. Since the loan investment, We Are Juno has also been successful in obtaining a substantial amount of funding from other sources, including £800,00 loan from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (confirmed 14th October 2022). Regenda social landlord has committed £630,00 to open market purchases and refurbish homes which will then be leased to We Are Juno.

3.18 Home 1 was purchased in January 2022 and an extensive period of building works to refurbish and renovate the property was successfully completed in November 2022. There has been successful recruitment of a full management team for the home and the majority of the care team have also been recruited and are undergoing training in preparation for opening. Ofsted registration paperwork has been completed and submitted and so the home is now pending successful sign off and registration from Ofsted and then can fully open. Subject to registration being granted it is anticipated that the first placements will be in April 2023.

3.19 Home 2 has been identified and will be purchased in conjunction with Regenda. Conveyancing is in process and all required reports and inspections are underway. There were some neighbour objections to the planning application for the change of

use of the property. The application was heard at Planning Committee on 12th January 2023 and was approved. The property sale process will now continue and following completion the property will be subject to a refurbishment programme and Ofsted registration. Subject to conveyancing, refurbishment and registration, the current projection is for the home to open in October 2023.

3.20 There is continuous engagement by We Are Juno with social investors and housing associations to scope sites for future homes. As sites are identified for further homes, lead members, spokespersons and ward members will be briefed at each stage with the company undertaking immediate neighbourhood engagement as each home is progressed. The Juno Board has been strengthened with the appointment of a new chair and director. The Juno Young Leaders Group is continually developing and is being facilitated by Open Door Charity. The University of Central Lancashire have also commenced their independent evaluation work.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 As the above projects link to the Council's medium to long term financial savings plan, a finance sub-committee of the Partnership Programme Board outlined above has been established to provide scrutiny and challenge to the projects. Clear savings targets totalling £964,000 have been attached to the programme, as part of the 2022/23 budget and are attributed to each scheme and are being monitored closely to ensure they are achieved. The social value aspects of each project add value to the Council's local offer for children looked after and quality outcomes will be reported on against each scheme.

5.2 Savings target allocation and forecast:

Project Name	Savings Target 22/23	Forecasted Saving 22/23
Willowtree	£289,000	£365,000
Transforming Care	£125,000	£0
Care Leavers Accommodation	£500,000	£605,000
Residential Transformation	£50,000	£0
Total Programme	£964,000	£970,000

5.3 Delays in the Transforming Care and Residential Transformation projects unfortunately means that in year savings targets cannot be achieved on the individual projects. However, the forecasted savings across the programme mean that the savings targets could still be fully realised.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The following Legislation is relevant to the provision of care homes for children: -

- The Care Act 2014 and supporting guidance.
- The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015; and
- The Care Standards Act 2000

6.2 Local Authorities await the publication of Government national standards for supported accommodation providers who will be required to be registered with OFSTED by April 2023. The full registration schedule is expected to be announced soon with inspections beginning in 2024. We have already started to engage the

local market in the preparatory process for this change. We would expect all good quality local providers to already meet the standards however a check against national standards and a culture of continuous improvement will enhance the local offer.

- 6.3 Commissioning of any placements in any residential care facility will need to comply with the requirements of all relevant procurement obligations including the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and Part 4 Section 6 of the Council's Constitution – Contract Procedure Rules.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 7.1 There are no significant Information Technology issues arising out of the report.
- 7.2 There are no significant staffing issues arising out of the report. However, officers from across several departments across the Council have been involved in the collaboration with and work with We are Juno and will continue to be involved through overseeing the loan arrangement of the project from a Council perspective or through representation within the formal governance arrangements of the social enterprise backbone organisation.
- 7.3 Work will need to continue with the Council's Asset teams to explore the feasibility of acquiring property or land to support the development.

8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 8.1 In relation to the development of four CIC (Community Interest Company) Children's Homes the risks to the Council include:
- a) Failure to provide financial savings to the Council: This risk must be weighed up against the improved offer of homes for vulnerable children and young people and the potential quality of support to improve outcomes for young people. The escalating placement costs which are continuing to rise means that alternative options need to be explored even if they do not achieve the full financial return expected. The expected savings from this programme, once fully operational, are estimated to be £166,400 per year.
 - b) Failing to deliver the programme outlined and the children's homes on Wirral: The loan agreement includes conditions for repayment of the loan if the project is not completed. The impact of this risk is mitigated by the market equivalent rate of interest to be charged on any loan made and the provision for non-repayment of debt.
 - c) Reputational damage should the homes fail to obtain registration or do not deliver on the quality of provision promised: This risk will be mitigated by the Council having oversight of the progress of the project throughout its establishment and will be able to guide and support the backbone social enterprise organisation. The Council will have influence over the strategic direction of the backbone organisation and be regularly sighted on performance monitoring and quality assurance activity/analysis.
- 8.2 The risk with the in-house Willowtree Residential Children's Home is the home not maintaining 100% occupancy. This risk is mitigated by matching discussions and future planning with all key stakeholders, parents, carers, social care teams, independent reviewing officers to ensure occupancy levels are high and children

suitably matched. There is a highly experienced Responsible Individual overseeing this process. A further risk with this project is the delay of identifying move on placements for residents once they become 18 and require an adult placement. This delay then impacts on any new young person being able to move into the home as the bed is occupied by a post 18 resident. This creates an impact on savings and the possibility of an alternative out of borough placement being sought for a young person due to the non-availability of the in-house provision. This is mitigated by early communication and transparency with the Adults Service to ensure that sufficient time and care is taken to obtain a suitable placement for the adult following their 18th birthday.

- 8.3 The risk to the Transforming Care project is the delay in the completion of the sale due to the property being in probate. This delay needs to be carefully managed to ensure timescales and multi-faceted project milestones hit their target completion dates to meet the NHSE capital grant requirements. The project team is mitigating this risk by updating the NHSE Regional Lead weekly and keeping a tight rein on all strands of delivery targets.
- 8.4 Sustaining high occupancy levels remains the main risk for the Care Leavers project. The impact of COVID meant the full scheme was slow to start with each tier of the provision opening in a staggered fashion. Matching considerations are key to the overall outcomes for the young people, and this has at times impacted on the occupancy levels. During the pandemic we have matched young people coming out of disrupted foster placements, where the financial risk begins to impact. The business modelling for this project is based on young people stepping across from residential care. This risk is mitigated by rigorous oversight of referrals to the project by the Care Leavers Team, Commissioning, the 16-18 Panel and the Provider, ensuring there are no delays in our own systems and processes which might prevent young people entering the provisions. The outcomes we are seeing for the young people who have accessed the project over the past year are outstanding, high levels of engagement with employment, education and/or training and high levels of engagement with relevant support services such as mental health services.
- 8.5 The total recurrent savings for 2022/23 totalling £1m must be fully achieved in year. If any of the risks above materialise, this may put the full achievement of these savings at risk. As part of the 2022/23 budget monitoring, a new Council wide Star Chamber type process will be proposed to ensure savings are on target to be achieved. This is vital to the medium- and long-term financial sustainability of the Council. If at any time, risks materialise that may mean the savings may not be achieved, immediate mitigation will be implemented to offset this.

9.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Fundamental to the development of new residential models has been understanding what young people want and need. Their views and aspirations have been integral to shaping and designing the models outlined. They have said:

“Good quality homes and accommodation for us are what we want you to make your priority”

“We want to be supported by people who care”

“We want to be near our family, school, and friends”

- 9.2 Care experienced children continue to have the loudest voice throughout the implementation and delivery of the above projects.

- 9.3 The Chair and Spokespersons of the Children, Young People and Education Committee have been briefed on the projects and regular progress updates have been presented to Corporate Parenting Board. Further regular detailed briefings will be provided to the Chair and Spokespersons and relevant ward Members going forward.
- 9.4 Children and young people have played an integral part in designing and influencing the development of the projects. Their voice will be maintained throughout.

10.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The projects reported on above will bring more choice locally for children, young people looked after, with a vastly increased likelihood of being able to offer them provisions to meet their needs on the Wirral.
- 10.2 Consistency of education, peers and contact with family and the team of local professionals around Children Looked After is likely to lead to much greater emotional and placement stability.
- 10.3 Looking to provide excellent accommodation standards in good areas, near good schools raises aspirations for Children Looked After.
- 10.4 Environmental considerations will consider the sensory needs and triggers for children with adverse childhood experiences and who have suffered trauma and neglect including noise, physical structure, colours and patterns, labelling, lighting, window coverings, smells and temperature.
- 10.5 An Equality Impact Assessment will be required for each project with a view to assessing and mitigating any equality impacts.

11.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There is the opportunity during any purchase, lease, or refurbishment of property to ensure that a low carbon footprint design is undertaken.
- 11.2 The recommendations contained in this report are expected to have a neutral effect on emissions and greenhouse gases.

12.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The projects outlined within this report have the potential to bring significant additional investment to the borough of Wirral. In summary, this includes:
- We are Juno have confirmed £250,000 from the National Lottery Community Fund for a 2-year development grant to support youth participation, social pedagogy learning and evaluation.
 - Segelman Trust: investment of £150,000 of development grant to support core costs for We Are Juno
 - We Are Juno have secured £600,000 from Green Pastures for the purchase and refurbishment of one of the homes.
 - LCR (Liverpool City Region) Combined Authority loan investment of £800,000.

12.2 As the investment catalyst, Wirral Council's investment has enabled We Are Juno CIC to secure this additional funding which will create employment opportunities in multiple sectors including construction, care and training and development bringing new opportunities and funding to the borough. As a social enterprise, the organisation is committing to providing opportunities within the borough that will help generate growth across many areas.

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APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[literaturereview.pdf \(scie.org.uk\)](#)

[Social pedagogy - Lighthouse Children's Homes \(lighthousechildrenshomes.org.uk\)](#)

[Wirral Borough Council's Accommodation Programme](#)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in accordance with paragraphs A and E of its Terms of Reference:

- (a) exercising management, oversight and delivery of services to children and young people in relation to their care, wellbeing, education or health, with the exception of any powers reserved to full Council;
- (e) any other functions comprised in partnership arrangements with other bodies connected with the delivery of services for children, young people and families;

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children, Young People & Education Committee	15th June 2021 4th October 2021 10th March 2022
Policy and Resources Committee	17th March 2021 7th October 2021