

Divisions Affected – N/A

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & YOUNG
PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

16 January 2024

**Children's Services Residential Capital Programme for
Sutton, Witney (Solo2 Home)**

Report by Executive Director: People

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED** to release funds to:
 - (a) Purchase a property in Sutton, Witney for **the amount listed in Annex A**
 - (b) Cover fees of **amount listed in Annex A** (Stamp Duty Land Tax, valuation, legal etc)
 - (c) Cover the adaptation and refurbishment for the **amount listed in Annex A**

Executive Summary

2. Approval of the Children's Services Residential Capital Programme was received on 5 December 2022. This was for the acquisition and associated works of four residential properties to be converted to Children's Homes. The property meets the requirements for the Small Solo Children's Home set out in the Business Case to house up to two children.
3. The subject property at Sutton, Witney has been identified by the service as meeting their needs as a Small Solo children's home. Terms have been agreed to acquire the property for the amount listed in Annex A subject to approval by Cabinet. The offer is below the asking price listed in Annex A as a market valuation supported by the desk-top valuation.

Alignment to relevant strategy:

4. Children We Care for [Sufficiency Strategy](#) 2020-2025
5. To support the departments Sufficiency Strategy for placements for Children We Care For, Children's Services plan to deliver four additional Children's

Homes which will be operated and staffed by the Council’s experienced Residential and Edge of Care (REoC) service. To support children with the greatest needs CEF plan to purchase four properties from the open market and convert to a specific specification working with the Council’s Property department.

6. To increase the number of residential beds within county, to prevent having to place Children We Care For out of county.

Ref no.	Benefit	Measurement
B.01	To provide Children We Care For with complex needs a homely and nurturing environment with specialist trained staff including access to the Council’s Clinical Psychologists to enable them to thrive close to their family and friends.	<i>Reduction in CWCF placed outside of Oxfordshire</i>
B.02	These schemes will support the department to meet their duties under the Sufficiency Strategy to increase the provision of in-county residential placements.	<i>Increase in internal residential provision</i>
B.03	The internal residential expansion programme is an invest to save initiative whereby CEF aim to save between £0.5m and £5.6m per annum which is a cost comparison on current un-registered arrangements and out of county placement spend for children who would be accommodated in these homes based on a 75% occupancy rate.	<i>Reduction in number of children placed in unregistered provision</i>
B.04	Increase in the quality of care afforded to our children	<i>Clear Corporate Parenting oversight of the provisions our children are living within</i>

Exempt Information

7. The information in the Annex is exempt because it contains information that could reveal the identity of an individual (the vendor of the private property) and relates to the business affairs of the vendor (the commercial sensitivity of the purchase of a private property).

Case for Change

8. Before this property was selected as one of 4 properties for conversion across Oxfordshire, a detailed search exercise was undertaken which looked at all vacant properties owned by Oxfordshire County Council. Unfortunately, none of these were suitable as a prospective children’s home. Therefore, an extensive search has been carried out across the county to identify properties

on the open market for purchase and conversion. The Service consider each property in light of the particular needs of the children the home will be catering, and Sutton was found to be suitable for a small Solo children's home.

9. The house was chosen as it gives children the opportunity to live and thrive within a settled and safe community within easy reach of universal amenities that are afforded to any other child living within Oxfordshire. Ordinarily there will be no more than 2 children living at the property with 2 - 3 adults caring for them.
10. Oxfordshire currently has 3 children's homes each of which provide a home for up to 6 children at any one time. These homes are well established within their communities and are all registered with Ofsted and rated GOOD at their most recent inspections.
11. The property will be offering a short-term home to a maximum of 2 children at any one time as we move away from institutionalised living and offer these children the valued experience of living within a nurturing family setting that supports the recovery from trauma suffered from being unable to live with their birth families.

Constraints and dependencies

Constraints

12. The pool of properties available on the open market within 10 miles of Eynsham suitable for minimal conversion are limited. The property offers the accommodation required with minimal conversion work and is within the budget set. If works to this property are not approved, there will be considerable time delay to find another suitable property.
13. Locating a home within 10 miles of Eynsham is a geographical and regulation challenge sufficient parking, mains drainage, suitable amenities and not located near a railway, waterway or main road is a geographical challenge. For reference, Ofsted view railways, main roads and waterways as significant risks to our children and therefore not suitable

Dependencies

14. In the local housing plan for the property it looks favourably on properties seeking change of use from C3 to C2, however we recognise this is for the purposes of elderly care due to the increasing elderly population.
15. Planning permission for change of use from C3 to C2 will be instigated once the property has been purchased. The Service have instructed robust pre-app due diligence to ensure the dependency of planning permission is mitigated as much as possible preplanning.
16. Ability to recruit to the volume of residential staff required in the timeframes will be a challenge due to the current national shortage of candidates entering the care sector. This will require a focused recruitment campaign with support from Human Resources, Marketing and Communications Teams.

Economic case

17. The proposal is to purchase the property at Sutton, Witney.
18. The house is a two storey 5-bedroom detached dwelling with garden to the rear and parking and garage to the front. The layout is such that minor internal reconfiguration is required and the building would require a re-fit to suit robustness for use and meet OCC's ligature risk policy.
 - Internal refurbishment to create the required robust, safe environment including fire detection, security etc
 - Replacement doors and windows, upgrade the external fabric/services to ensure improvement in energy efficiency in line with OCC's decarbonisation requirements including ASHP and solar PVs
 - Landscaping at front boundary may need to be scaled back to accommodate required visual splays
19. This is an initial proposition to inform project costs and facilitate acquisition of the property and will be properly designed at feasibility stage.
20. The preferred option is to purchase the property, obtain planning consent for change of use and carry out the refurbishment as required.
21. This is the agreed template as approved by SCB (April 23) and the programme on the property will follow the same approach as the first children's home.
22. The high-level programme is based on carrying out pre-planning application discussions with the planners, local community and residents during the purchase process. The necessary surveys will also be carried out during this period to inform the design work. Once the property is purchased, the planning application will be progressed and submitted to obtain planning consent for change of use before construction works start.
23. A review of potential risks has been carried out by the project team, including the possibility of starting works prior to planning approval. The risk consequence includes potential reputational risk and impact on the relationship with neighbouring residents longer term. Also, if obtained as hoped, planning consent may have conditions precedent that need to be complied with prior to starting works on site. The council would automatically be in breach of the planning consent if work had started prior to consent.
24. Therefore, it was agreed that once consent is received a contractor will start on site.

Financial Implications

Financial case

Identification of funding source

25. Strategic Capital Board (SCB) approved the Business Case strategy to develop the Children's service Care Home capacity through the purchase and adaptation of 4 children's homes costing a total of £10.450m with 50% match funding by the DfE. The authority capital commitment totals £5.225m. Cabinet subsequently approved the proposal at its meeting December 2022.
26. Purchasing and adapting 3 / 4 of the units in this financial year will enable the service to optimise its claim against the DfE conditions, spend profile and share of funding across 2023/24 and 2024/25. The approach will ensure that the spend is at or above the minimum spend thresholds preventing any risk of clawback of underspend on any individual or combination of units against the DfE 50% share. The approach is reinforced by the DfE policy of paying its share of the costs in full up front leaving the authority to cover the balance and have maximum discretion and flexibility in utilising any underspends
27. The CEF Service confirmed approval for staffing and non-staffing supplementary revenue budget through the January 2023 (P10) Budget Monitoring Report approved at Cabinet in May 2023. Funding for the costs is based on an Invest to Save strategy, further details are listed in Annex A. The rationale and basis for the savings strategy is set out in the original Business Case approved by SCB and Cabinet in December 2022
28. The financial strategy and approach to the purchase and adaptation of the units has been planned and structured to ensure best quality of care for children obtaining best value, maximising the use of the DfE's share and optimum use and return on the investment funds.

Future costs, income, and planned expenditure:

Revenue costs

29. The original business case for the four new homes, including two large homes (of which this is one), set out estimated savings totalling between £0.5m and £1.8m per annum. Recently revised, the potential revenue saving per annum on all four children's homes once operational will be in the order of £1m - £5m per annum. This is based on 10-12 children and a cost saving listed in Annex A. The return on investment is 10%-50% per annum and the capital investment would be fully recovered between 2 and 10 years.
30. Net revenue savings for each home were estimated at between £0.2m to £0.5m per annum. The running costs of a single home have been reduced overall following a reduction in proposed staffing levels, offset by small increases in other costs and an increase of £4,000 for utility costs from £20,000 to £24,000 per annum due to inflation, giving a total of £44,000 for property-related costs.

- 31. Costs will be incurred prior to the home becoming operational, particularly in relation to the early appointment of staff. These costs are estimated at no more than £80,000 and these can be offset by the savings from more expensive external placement costs. There are also other revenue costs that have been, or will be, incurred that relate to the property acquisition process that cannot be charged to capital. This includes professional costs incurred in preparing a bid for a property that was subsequently rejected. There may be other costs, such as design fees, but these are minimal and can be met from revenue budgets.
- 32. The estimated full year running costs for the home are £850,000, including £24,000 for property-related costs. These costs will be met from savings in other placement costs as set out in the original business case and incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Plan

Comments checked by: Danny Doherty, FBP, CEF
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Legal Implications

- 33. The legal due diligence will be undertaken in-house by Legal Services.
- 34. Any additional building and technical surveys required prior to the exchange of contracts will be instructed via existing framework agreements or through a purchase order.

Comments checked by Richard Hodby, Solicitor, Richard.Hodby@oxfordshire.gov.uk
 (Law and Governance)

Staff Implications

Technical Advice and Refurbishment Works

- 35. The minor works team will provide detailed surveys and specifications in line with the requirements of the service.
- 36. Project management of the subsequent works will be carried out by the minor works team, and the already appointed specialist project manager will complete both the design and completion of the works to the agreed scope and specification.

Risk Management

<i>Ref no.</i>	<i>Risk</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Likelihood</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Mitigating Action</i>

CMDCEYPS7

R.01	Planning	Approval for change of use not achieved resulting in the need to sell the property	Medium	High	Pre-application engagement will seek to determine response from OCC planners on acceptability of change of use before exchange; in addition, a consultation exercise will be undertaken with neighbours, parish council and local Councillors
R.02	Property Acquisition (1)	Acquisition falls through due to vendor change of circumstances	Low	High	Engagement with vendor through vendor's agent at pre-bid stage to understand circumstances and drivers for sale
R.03	Property Acquisition (2)	Acquisition doesn't proceed due to failure at due-diligence stage	Low	High	Already undertaken pre-bid property, planning and high level technical due diligence
R.04	Staff Recruitment	Unable to successfully recruit the volume of staff needed for the home to be operational in the desired timeframe	Medium	High	High impact recruitment campaign including marketing & comms and the use of social media

NAME

Stephen Chandler, Executive Director: People

Annex: Annex A (Exempt)

Background papers: Nil

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