

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET 17 June 2025

– Update on Children’s Homes Report of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
 - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
 - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. At its meeting on 28 March 2025, the Committee considered a report providing an update on Council-maintained children’s homes in Oxfordshire.
4. The Committee was grateful to the then Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People’s Services, then Cllr John Howson, and to Lisa Lyons, Director of Children’s Services, Jean Kelly, Deputy Director for Children’s Social Care, and Charlotte Davey, Assistant Director – County

Services, for attending to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions..

SUMMARY

5. The Cabinet Member introduced the topic of children's homes, explaining the collaboration with the Department for Education (DfE) to increase the number of small, family-like children's homes in Oxfordshire. He highlighted the benefits of these homes in providing a more personal and supportive environment for children.
6. The Assistant Director providing an update on the development of new children's homes, detailing the progress of each of the four, and the Assistant Director summarised the financial aspects, noting that the homes were coming in on budget with any under-budget savings being partially returned to the DfE.
7. Members raised questions about timeframes for getting homes registered; the number of children in unregistered placements (noting that the Council used only registered placements); intensive support available; private provision and planning; potential expansion of the children's homes initiative. Recruitment was also discussed as were out of county placements and the cost differences between county-run homes and private sector care.
8. The Committee makes only one recommendation and that relates to the length of the registration period of new homes with Ofsted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. One of the difficulties in opening new children's homes is the time it takes for that home to be registered with Ofsted. Until that registration is complete, the Council cannot place children in the home. The Committee recognises that Ofsted registration is necessarily detailed and thorough but it does not follow that it should be overly complex or take a long time. The Committee was told that one of the main factors in the delay of opening the Council's new homes even once built has been the onerousness of the Ofsted registration process. The Committee agrees with the then Cabinet member that it would be helpful to the Council as Corporate Parent and as the organisation running children's homes were Ofsted to work to reduce the length of time that process takes.
10. The Committee was advised that the process had seen some improvements. Whilst, in 2023, the timeframe was around 19 weeks from the point of having all necessary paperwork ready, this had reduced to approximately 12 weeks in 2025. Nonetheless, it could still take longer in some cases, owing to the complexity of the process, and also the requirement to have a registered manager and staff in place before one can apply for registration.

11. The Committee welcomes the fact that the average waiting time for the completion of registration has reduced but considers that it could and should be even shorter. Ultimately, a shorter but still thorough registration process is for the good of the children we care for. The Committee therefore calls on the Council to impress upon Ofsted the need to reduce the time it takes to complete the process of registration. The Committee would consider it appropriate for this to be done by Leader of the Council or by the relevant Cabinet member writing to Ofsted on behalf of the Council to set this out.

Recommendation: That the Council should encourage Ofsted to ensure the registration period for children's homes is as short as possible and thereby expedite the process of placing children in registered settings.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

12. It will be for the 2025/2026 Committee members to decide whether or not to receive a further update on children's homes but it is anticipated that it will consider other matters relating to children's social care.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
14. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

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Annex:	Pro-forma Response Template
Background papers:	None
Other Documents:	None
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