

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 15 OCTOBER 2020

PROVISION OF OVERNIGHT UNIT-BASED SHORT BREAKS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Director for Education and Early Help have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to the overnight unit-based short breaks transition planning for children with disabilities during COVID-19.

Background

2. Members will be aware of the consultation on proposals for the re-design of overnight unit-based short breaks for children with disabilities undertaken in January and February 2018, the Scrutiny Task Group Report on the same subject, and the subsequent report to Cabinet on 26 September 2019 where a number of recommendations from the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families were agreed.

3. The following is a reminder of key dates in the process so far:

- 14 December 2017 – Cabinet agrees consultation with parents, carers, professionals and wider stakeholders on a number of proposals to re-design the provision of overnight unit-based short breaks
- 8 January – 19 February 2018 –consultation including on-line survey, meetings with families, unit drop-ins, letters to parent carers and publication of FAQs on website
- 8 March 2018 – Cabinet Member with Responsibility meeting with families
- 26 April 2018 – presentation of Scrutiny Task Group Report to Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board
- 12 July 2018 – report to Cabinet by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families
- 8 August 2018 – discussion at Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel in the light of decisions taken at 12 July Cabinet
- 27 and 29 September 2018– Cabinet Member with Responsibility and Scrutiny Task Group Members attend co-design events with parent carers, professionals and providers.
- 6 June 2019 – discussion at Cabinet on the results of co-design activity and authorisation agreed for the Director of CFC to carry out a consultation on the proposed changes.

- 25 September 2019 – update presented at Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel ahead of the discussion at Cabinet on 26 September 2019.
- 26 September 2019 – discussion and approval at Cabinet for the future model of delivery by the Health and Care Trust, including varying the contractual arrangements with the Trust as necessary to implement the changes.

Transition Planning during COVID-19

4. Following the notice to cease delivery at Ludlow Road, the Interim Group Manager with responsibility for Children with Disabilities visited both Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit and Osborne Court sites to examine the detailed transition planning for all the children identified and worked with both units to make direct contact with families to arrange visits and introductory sessions. Shortly after this instruction, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown occurred.

5. During the COVID-19 pandemic many parents chose to keep their children at home rather than access overnight respite. Many of the children and their family members have underlying health concerns and were in a shielded group. In most cases this meant that active transition planning, through visits and introductory sessions, were put on hold until further government guidance was issued, or families felt more confident.

6. Worcestershire Health and Care Trust closed Ludlow Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit earlier at the end of March due to the COVID-19 response. In line with national guidance, Worcestershire Health and Care Trust decided to change service delivery models so the risks to patients could be minimised, and ensure they had capacity to support those services likely to be at the front line of the response.

7. The staff team at Ludlow Road remained in regular contact at least weekly with all families via keep in touch calls which were all electronically recorded. This was to assess the home situation and how families were managing and if they needed any urgent additional support as a result of not accessing overnight short breaks. This information was shared with the allocated social workers who were also making keep in touch calls to all families so had greater clarity on the family's situation at the time.

Transitions to Bromsgrove Short Breaks Unit – Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit

8. All families due to transition to Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit were contacted via phone to ask for an update on their situation regarding overnight short breaks. During the pandemic all confirmed that they were staying at home but would like to look at getting the arrangements for the transition completed. Some families wanted access to a short break of a few hours when they felt safe to do so. Families were assured that while face to face transition planning was on hold, the process would not be delayed unnecessarily.

9. A letter (see Appendix 1) was sent to families ensuring they had Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit contact numbers and their social worker's contact details.

10. During the Spring and summer of 2020 Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit senior management team made weekly and at the frequency agreed by families, keep in touch calls to all families so that they could continue to build the relationship in preparation for active transition when families felt in a position to safely do this. Families welcomed this approach. Managers at the unit also kept in touch with the relevant social workers to feedback and address any concerns.

11. Three face to face placement meetings were completed before the COVID national lockdown. From July to September seven young people have had introductory visits to Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit and six have now started to access overnights. No families are currently shielding. Progress of transition is being determined at the pace and choice of the families. Staff have been completing individualised training provided by Worcestershire Health and Care Trust alongside introductions for young people.

12. Prior to COVID-19 national lockdown staff from Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit went into Ludlow Road to meet young people and to see the work alongside Ludlow Road staff. Staff also went into the school environment to meet young people and start to build positive relationships.

13. Relevant paperwork and visual images of people and places were provided to all families to aid the move towards transition.

14. Staff recruitment has been successful at Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit to meet the additional capacity needs. Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit have adhered to the Government policies and guidelines around COVID-19 whilst continuing to deliver services.

15. Ofsted registration of the additional two beds within the Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit has now been finalised and six beds are now operational and incorporated within the service.

Transitions to Osborne Court

16. All families due to transition to Osborne Court were contacted prior to and after Ludlow Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit closed. Initially, only three of the families due to transition decided to access an overnight short break at Osborne Court due to COVID-19. The remaining families chose to keep their children at home pending further government advice. The Registered Manager and the Deputy Manager made regular keep in touch calls with all the families and the families were aware of how to contact Osborne Court should they need to.

17. Over the last two months a further two children have commenced overnight short breaks, bringing the total number of children that have transitioned from Ludlow Road to Osborne Court to five.

18. Almost all young people have now made the transition from Ludlow Road to Osborne Court and are accessing overnight support. Where this has not happened, this is due to current needs which are kept under continual review and in partnership with families.

19. There was initially a delay on the completion of the building work at the Osborne Court site. In response to COVID-19, work was paused however, the contractors have since returned and completed the work.

20. The service has been in contact with Ofsted regarding registration of the new bungalow. A pre-registration visit is planned for the 2 October and it is anticipated that the setting will be registered shortly after.

21. Ten new staff members have been recruited, two of these staff transferred from Ludlow Road.

Transitions to Acorns Hospice Children's Hospice

22. Acorns Hospice took the decision to suspend all short breaks support until further notice in response to COVID-19 due to the vulnerability of the children who access this site. Between March and September 2020 Acorns Hospice have offered emergency support to families. Acorns Hospice are now in Phase 3 of their return to service whereby all families are now able to re-book short break stays.

23. Where there has been transition planning for children to Acorns Hospice overnight short breaks this has been managed and supported via keep in touch calls, outreach and the provision of support as required and in partnership with the social worker.

Support available to Children with Disabilities during COVID-19

24. The community short breaks groups and activities were suspended in March 2020 in response to COVID-19 and all families were informed in writing as to the reasons why (see Appendix 2). Worcestershire Children First reviewed the risk assessments for these services and following government guidance, reopened services during the summer. 146 young people obtained a place at an activity group throughout the summer.

25. Support work and domiciliary care services have continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to support families who still wanted to access this support. For those families who were shielding and opted not to access support during this time, providers continued to contact families by phone to check on their well-being. Social workers also continued with regular keep in touch calls to these families. Government guidance on delivering this service safely has been followed by providers.

26. Support via direct payments has been maintained. A letter (see Appendix 3) was sent to families to outline the use of their direct payment during this time.

27. In addition, the Children with Disabilities Team, in partnership with commissioners, developed a crisis outreach support service for those families whose children were on the edge of becoming accommodated or where there were increasing concerns for the child's safety (see Appendix 4). As at 31 August, there were 24 referrals for crisis support.

28. The Children with Disabilities team have a parent advice line that operates every day should families want to call the team for support/advice.

29. Social workers are visiting children where required following government advice.

30. We continue to work in close partnership with health and education colleagues to create a coordinated supported response to families.

31. Contact has been maintained with families and as soon as families wished to move forward with overnight short breaks this has been facilitated in line with the Government's guidance.

Summary of key points

32. The COVID-19 situation has delayed active transitions for some children as many families chose to stay at home and shield to keep their families safe.

33. There are two families who have not yet transitioned to the new service. This is the choice of both families; social workers and unit managers are in contact with these families to ensure they continue to be supported.

34. Strict preventative measures and guidance is being followed as per Government advice for those families that continue to access or begin a service.

35. Kidderminster and Bromsgrove Short Breaks units and the bungalows at the Osborne Court site remained open for those families who wished to access short breaks support.

36. A variety of support options have been made available to families during COVID-19, including a crisis outreach support service.

37. All families had and continue to have regular Keep in Touch calls at least weekly from the managers at the short break units and their social workers in an effort to support families who may be feeling isolated at the present time. Having made the decision not to access overnight short breaks to keep their family safe, many parent carers acknowledged the benefit from such a break when it was safe for their child to access.

Purpose of the Meeting

38. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- Consider the information relating to transition planning during COVID-19 for overnight unit based short breaks provision;
- Determine whether it would wish to carry out any further scrutiny; and
- Agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families.

Supporting Information

[Appendix 1](#) - Letter to parent carers of children transitioning to Providence Road Overnight Short Breaks Unit site

[Appendix 2](#) - Letter to parent carers regarding community short breaks

[Appendix 3](#) - Letter to parent carers regarding Direct Payment support
[Appendix 4](#) - Outline of Crisis Support Offer

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director for Education and Early Help) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and Minutes of the Cabinet held in July 2015, 16 May 2016, 14 December 2017, 14 June 2018, 12 July 2018, 6 June 2019 and 26 September 2019

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)