

Future provision of overnight short break care

Update to Scrutiny Committee

7 September 2023

Background

- The Council has a statutory duty to provide short break care for disabled children, including overnight stays according to assessed needs.
- SCAS have been commissioned to provide residential short break care on behalf of TfC since Dec 2018.
- TfC plan to provide residential short break care in-house going forward, as agreed by the Council

Current provision

- 39 children attend Grace House for short breaks.
- Children are allocated between 12-60 nights per year, across a mix of weekdays and weekends.
- 3 children with complex health needs / life-limiting conditions access specialist short breaks at St Oswald's, Newcastle.
- 1 child accesses North East Autism Society's short breaks at a home in Durham.
- 18 children also on the waiting list to attend Grace House – longest wait is 659 days.

Current and projected need

- 219 children open to the Children with Disabilities team, with the following identified need:
 - 51 of these children have co-morbid conditions
 - 69% have autism and learning disabilities
 - 12% are physically disabled
 - 19% are siblings of disabled children and have no disability
 - 38 are Cared for Children:
 - 13 are cared for under the auspices of s.20 Reg 48 (meaning they remain in their parents' care with a high level of support).
 - 25 children and young people live with foster carers or in specialist residential homes for disabled children.

Current and projected need

- Greatest demand is for services to meet the needs of children with autism, learning disabilities and complex behavioural / mental health needs.
- The prevalence of autism in Sunderland is much higher than national figures; 22% of children in Sunderland have a primary learning need of autism, compared to 12.4% nationally.
- Prevalence rates for Moderate Learning Disabilities (MLD) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH) are also higher than national figures.
- There is a small but significant cohort of children with the most complex behavioural needs who require intensive support to prevent families from reaching crisis point, and potentially requiring further statutory intervention.

Planning for the future

- Expanded the Family Care & Support Team (CQC registered) from 9 to 15 members of staff. The team delivers personal care and outreach support known as 'Leisure Link'.
- Targeted recruitment has been aimed at SCAS staff who have transferrable skills and existing relationships with children and families.
- Transition of 16 and 17 year olds to SCAS short breaks homes.
- Referrals for children with complex health needs to St Oswald's.

Bespoke support

- Personalised support – 83% increase in direct payments and personal budgets in last 2 years – 117 children currently in receipt of a direct payment, including 17 personal budgets.
- Breathing Space programme offering additional support out of school and during holidays to children with autism or SEMH needs.
- Exploring other alternatives with parents including supported holidays and additional commissioned community short breaks provision.
- Recruitment of additional short breaks foster carers

External short break care homes



- 14 other short break care homes in the North East (not including specialist provision for complex health needs) with a total maximum capacity of 81 beds.
- 10 are LA provisions, 2 private and 2 voluntary sector.
- 13 homes have Ofsted judgements of good or outstanding, 1 requires improvement.
- Impact of pandemic - most homes have waiting lists and are not accepting external referrals, with two LAs considering the development of additional homes to meet internal demand.
- Recruitment and retention of suitably skilled staff remains a challenge to further market development.

Alternative short break care home

- Comprehensive search underway across private, public and commercial sales markets.
- Over 15 properties considered in detail to date.
- Requirements include:
 - a large detached property with enclosed outside play space and parking for staff vehicles / minibus.
 - at least 5 bedrooms and space for a lift to be installed if not single storey.
 - spacious communal areas - all rooms large enough to accommodate specialist equipment, wheelchairs etc.
 - Additional space for office, laundry room and sensory room.

TfC as provider



- TfC currently operates 6 residential children's homes, with 1 further home awaiting registration which will bring total bed capacity up to 33.
- 2 additional properties have been purchased, with plans to register one for a child with a complex disability.
- All TfC homes judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- First registered supported accommodation provider in England (July 2023)
- Recruitment and retention of residential staff remains a challenge but competitive salaries, benefits, training and support make TfC an attractive employer.

Next steps

- Further Q&A session for families to share progress and engage in future planning.
- Work with individual families to identify specific supports to meet their children's needs.
- Planning group for new short break care home, including parents and carers and children and young people.
- STARS and Young Commissioners groups to guide our co-production with children.