

CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 15th June, 2021

Title: Safe Accommodation for Children with Complex Needs

Purpose of the report: Approval of a regional scheme to develop safe accommodation for children with complex needs.

For: Decision

**Cabinet Portfolio and
Cabinet Member:** Councillor Alun Williams, Porth Cynnal

Introduction

The development of safe accommodation for children with complex needs has been a priority action within the Regional Partnership Board's work programme since 2019 in light of the shortage of such provision within the region and across Wales and the unmet demand in the West Wales region.

The Children's Commissioner's report 'No Wrong Door' set out a clear expectation that Regional Partnership Boards should ensure that Local Authorities and Health Boards work together to develop a range of integrated support services for children with complex behavioural and emotional needs. This includes increasing the availability of safe residential facilities for a specific cohort of children where care at home with their families or with foster carers has broken down or is not appropriate.

More recently, Welsh Government has made the development of safe residential accommodation for children a criteria for bids within ICF capital and revenue funding.

Over the last 5 years, at any one time, Ceredigion County Council has in the region of 3 - 5 children looked after in residential placements and these placements are all out of county and are also very often outside of the West Wales region. It should also be noted that placements in the private sector are also extremely costly with the aim of ensuring company profit margins; charges for the placement alone can range between £5,000 and £10,000 or even higher for more complex children on a weekly basis. Additional costs are often charged for educational provision or therapeutic provision and there are also travel and time costs for the local authority staff involved with the child. At times, concerns can also arise about the quality and ongoing suitability of placements and of the long term outcomes for children.

The shortage of available residential placements has led, at times, to some very difficult and challenging circumstances in safeguarding and meeting the needs of Ceredigion children to be looked after and cared for appropriately pending the identification of suitable placements.

The development of this regional scheme provides greater potential for children to receive better quality support closer to home with public bodies' close collaboration and that a return home or to alternative provision within Ceredigion can be successfully carried out sooner with links maintained with the child's family and local network.

West Wales Regional Partnership Proposal

The West Wales Regional Partnership recently drafted proposals to Welsh Government which included bids for both capital and revenue ICF funding in order to develop a regional hub and spoke residential provision with the aim of providing specialist care, support and accommodation for children with the most complex needs at a small regional hub (suitable for 4 or 5 children) and that more local in county provision (suitable for 1 or 2 children) be developed in line with local need as a step - down provision.

The Local Authorities' social care delivery model along with Hywel Dda Health Board is based on the provision of specialist and community support to assess and stabilise the child's emotional, behavioural, physical and mental health needs in a safe and trauma - informed environment and to work with community support and families and carers towards safe reunification and reintroduction to step - down provision or home wherever possible.

The Regional Partnership Board's Business Unit was informed last week that the safe accommodation expression of interest was successful and an award of £1.7 million capital funding and an award of £708,220 revenue funding to pump prime the project during 2021/22 has been approved by the Minister. The capital award includes provision for the purchase of the central hub property along with the potential for capital to be drawn down (up to £450,000) by the individual local authorities for the purchase of more local step down provisions in each of the three counties.

In light of the award, specific regional project group and task groups are being held by the RPB Business Unit to manage the future development of the scheme and Ceredigion County Council is represented by the Statutory Director of Social Services and Porth Cynnal Corporate Lead Officer and other relevant officers. Carmarthenshire CC is the designated Lead Authority. Future roles and responsibilities will be defined and confirmed in a Service Level Agreement. The RPB's Regional Children's Outcomes Group will oversee project progress reports and will report into the Regional Partnership's Board meetings which the Porth Cynnal Cabinet Member attends.

Locally, work is progressing on the business case with regard to the spoke element of the scheme with the recent appointment of the ICF project officer with close collaboration across the Through Age and Well-being model and with Schools Service along with other relevant departments.

Next Steps

- In order to ensure that the scheme progresses within the necessary timescale, a suitable property for the regional hub that meets the regulatory specification will need to be urgently identified and purchased from the open market.

- A Service Level Agreement is currently being drafted by Carmarthenshire County Council for consideration by the three Local Authorities and their Legal services in relation to the purchase, ownership, governance management and funding agreement of the facility.
- The future funding formula for the central hub will need to be agreed in the Service Level Agreement which will take account of the need and usage of the provision and be based on an invest to save model for the Local Authorities.
- The business case for the Ceredigion residential step-down spoke accommodation is being drafted and will be discussed at the Ceredigion Corporate Project Management Panel. It will progress in a separate future paper to Leadership Group and be presented back to Cabinet as required.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:	<p>Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why</p> <p><i>Summary:</i></p> <p>Long term: 5 year plan</p> <p>Collaboration: Regional Partnership Board</p> <p>Involvement:</p> <p>Prevention: Preventing children from being placed out of the Region/out of the County</p> <p>Integration: Social Care and Health</p>	<p>This is a regional plan the the EIA will be considered on that basis.</p>
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Recommendation(s): Cabinet approval is sought for the development of the regional safe accommodation scheme specifically in the use of ICF funding for the purchase and establishment of a regional central safe accommodation hub for children with complex needs.

Reasons for decision: To provide the Statutory Director of Social Services with the political mandate to agree with the development of the regional hub.

Overview and Scrutiny:

Policy Framework: Looked After Children Policy and Legislative Framework

Corporate Priorities: Corporate Priority 3

Finance and Procurement implications: The SLA for the Central hub is to be received and the funding formula for the central unit service costs and placements is to be agreed, Carmarthenshire CC will execute the purchase of the central hub as the Lead Authority.

Legal Implications: The SLA for the central hub will need to be agreed via Legal Services and will address issues of ownership and governance and management.

Staffing implications: The central hub and spoke will require staffing as per regulatory requirements. The central hub staff will be hosted by Carmarthenshire CC and Hywel Dda Health Board respectively.

Property / asset implications: It is envisaged that Carmarthenshire CC will purchase the central hub with the ICF funding. The issue of ownership and governance will be addressed in the Service Level Agreement.

The development of the local spoke provision will be considered separately.

Risk(s): If the scheme is not progressed the risk will be that we will not be able to meet our statutory duties in the provision of suitable placements for children who require care.

The risks in relation to the management and running of the central hub will be identified and managed within the policies and procedures of the facility.

The associated risks of this project will need to be identified and addressed in the regional Service Level Agreement

Statutory Powers: SSWBA 2014

Background Papers:

Appendices:

Corporate Lead Officer: Sian Howys

Reporting Officer: Sian Howys

Date: 7th June, 2021