

REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE – 29 AUGUST 2019

ABERDEENSHIRE'S CHILDREN'S HOMES COMBINED ANNUAL REPORT

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 **Note and acknowledge the update contained within the Annual Report.**
- 1.2 **Continue to support best practice to ensure Care Experienced Young People receive the right support at the right time.**

2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 The practice of Aberdeenshire Council's Residential Children's Homes, located within Children's Services, is underpinned by the core components, values and principles of GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child). These are enshrined within the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

Aberdeenshire has three Children's Homes, which can accommodate sixteen Looked After young people: Two 6-bedded Homes in Inverurie and Fraserburgh, and one 4-bedded Home in Peterhead.

The Children's Homes are committed to providing high quality care to Aberdeenshire's children and young people who require to be looked after in a residential children's home.

The young people looked after are between 12 and 18 years old and have often experienced traumas in their childhood which can, in turn, lead to them exhibiting social, educational, emotional and behavioural difficulties. They are unable to remain in their family home and require support and care to help them through their adolescence. Some young people return to their families after a period, and others are supported onto independence when the time is right and they are ready to move on.

The Homes are committed to creating a supportive, safe and nurturing environment where relationships are key whilst the young person is resident, and beyond. They are also committed to working closely with family members and communities to support and develop positive relationships with the young people as they grow and develop to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

The Service aims to ensure they are **Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible** and **Included**. The Service believes that living in a Children's Home is the preferred/best option for some of our adolescents and promote it as a placement of choice.

The Children's Homes are regulated by the Care Inspectorate and required to provide an annual report against a set of key criteria. Given the small numbers of children and young people being cared for in the Children's Homes, the annual reports have been combined into one report to ensure confidentiality. The report is available at Appendix 1.

- 2.6 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section E.1.1 (a) of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance, as the matter relates to Children's Services.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the report is an annual report and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.2 There are no staffing and financial implications.
- 4.3 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level

ACORP006 – Reputation management
[Corporate Risk Register.](#)

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- ECSSR003 – Embedding GIRFEC; and
- ECSSR004 – Support inclusive, vibrant and healthy communities.
[Directorate Risk Registers.](#)

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Date 01 08 2019

ANNUAL REPORTS FOR ABERDEENSHIRE'S CHILDREN'S HOMES

April 2018 to March 2019

INTRODUCTION

Aberdeenshire has three Children's Homes which can accommodate sixteen Looked After young people: Two 6-bedded Homes in Inverurie and Fraserburgh, and one 4-bedded Home in Peterhead. The young people looked after are between 12 and 18 years old and have often experienced traumas in their childhood which can in turn lead to them exhibiting social, educational, emotional and behavioural difficulties. They are unable to remain in their family home and require support and care to help them through their adolescence. Some young people return to their families after a period in a Home, and others are supported onto independence when the time is right and they are ready to move on.

The Homes seek to provide a supportive, safe and nurturing environment where relationships are key whilst the young person is resident and beyond. They are also committed to working closely with family members and communities to support and develop positive relationships with the young people as they grow and develop to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

To do this, we aim to ensure they are **Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible** and **Included**. We believe that living in a Children's Home is the preferred/best option for some of our adolescents and promote it as a placement of choice.

STAFFING STRUCTURE

Each of the Homes has a full time Manager and a number of full-time permanent residential Social Workers who work shifts to provide 24-hour care of the young people. The bulk of our residential staff hold a Social Work qualification, with only four of our staff being Social Care Officers. There remains an expectation that there will be a national policy for all residential childcare staff requiring to be Social Work qualified in the near future, and we will be well positioned at this time to manage the transition. All the teams also have a number of relief staff who cover staff sickness and holidays – we try to ensure all relief staff are used on a fairly regular basis to ensure they remain familiar to the young people and understand their needs and plans.

Two members of staff are on shift at all times, including two staff sleeping over in each Home every night. This level of staffing therefore needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about new young people who may be moving to our Homes – the staffing levels and need for young people to manage mainstream education mean that alternative resources need to be considered for young people with more complicated needs.

ADMISSIONS/DISCHARGES

During the period of this report ten young people moved into the Homes. All admissions were planned apart from one young person who required to be cared for on an emergency basis. In the same period, nine young people moved on from the Children's Homes of which four happened at short notice and would be deemed as 'unplanned' moves.

As far as possible we will aspire to planned admissions and discharges, as young people benefit from being positively engaged with their plans and taking responsibility for their next move. We will aim for young people and their families to have visited the Homes prior to moving in and to have established a link with the staff and have seen their room so they can think about what they want to bring with them. Young people who are planned into our vacancies tend to settle better and experience less trauma from the move. Our unplanned discharges tend to be as a result of a young person exposing other young people to risk of harm, and where we have to make a quick decision to ensure young people are not exposed to abusive behaviour from others.

MISSING PERSONS

Staff in the Children's Home use our Missing Person's Protocol to assess and act when any young person is deemed to be missing from their placement. During the year, we had 29 occasions when the Homes reported young people as missing from their care. Whilst this may sound like a very high incidence, this does not equate to 29 children going missing. It relates to the number of occasions young people have been reported missing across the three Homes. It is very rare for us to have young people go missing for a significant period – nearly every one of these incidents were around young people not returning home at their specified time, but actually returning by the end of the day.

When a young person has been reported missing both the Police (Return Home Welfare Officer) and the staff in the Home will take time to speak to the young person on their return. This will be to ensure we understand where they were, who they were with, why they failed to return, and to assess if they were at risk whilst missing. Staff also would regularly remind young people of the importance of us knowing where they are when they are out of the building.

The majority of our missing young people are with friends and want to stay out longer than the return time staff have given them as opposed to running away from the Children's Home.

TRAINING

All staff who work in the Homes require to be on the Residential part of the Social Services Council Register. To remain on the Register, staff must ensure they complete the equivalent of five days training per year as a minimum to demonstrate Continuing Professional Development. The bulk of staff training is accessed via Aberdeenshire Council's training calendar and a lot of it will be skills-based around working with young people. However, staff in Children's Homes also need to undertake/remain up to date

with some mandatory training including Food Hygiene, Fire Safety and Accident and Incidence Reporting.

All residential staff are also trained to use CALM (Crisis and Aggression Limitation and Management) which is a model to manage difficult situations/behaviours. The emphasis is on de-escalation and safe management of potentially aggressive and violent situations. Staff are also trained in the use of physical restraint as part of this, but this would only ever be used as a last resort when a young person is physically placing themselves or others at risk. During the reporting period, there were **no** incidents of restraint being used in any of the Homes, but our Registration requires us to ensure staff are trained in all elements of CALM and that they regularly update their training as well as practice CALM holds.

FEEDBACK

The Homes will seek feedback about their service in a number of formal ways: Annual questionnaires are sent out to parents/carers, Social Workers and ex-residents. All the young people in the Homes are encouraged to complete a Well being survey at regular intervals to help them think about how they think they are getting on and to identify what areas they need to work with their Keyworker on.

Whilst not all questionnaires are returned, the majority of feedback received is positive. The questionnaires ask the respondent how they think the staff in the Homes meet the young people's needs in terms of being safe, health, achieving, nurtured, active, respected/responsible and included rating them from very poor to very good.

This year, the number of returned questionnaires from parents was good across all three Homes, stating the service was either **good or very good**, and with some parents thanking staff for helping their children return to the family home.

From parents:

'We know that staff work hard to support B'

'No concerns I have found staff to be very helpful'

'Very helpful and understanding, their experiences are vast and their knowledge invaluable'

Feedback from social workers was also positive with a high percentage of forms returned. Again many of them scored the service highly on the care provided to the young people.

From social workers:

"Staff did all they could to support H however at times H was resistant to this support. The writer feels that staff did all they could to cover all the above areas and achieved this when H chose to work with them"

"The Home has been a great place for C and he now views this as his home whilst maintaining a close connection with all of his family members. C recognises how different he is now than when he first came into care and how much being at the Home with the help of staff that he has positively changed his life"

'Given K's learning disabilities he does require additional support for a child of his age however the staff encourage K, where possible to do things for himself (such as lay out his clothes and shower)'

Responses from ex-residents tend to be very limited, but many of our young people have further contact later on with the Home they lived in and are often able to provide feedback more informally than in discussion with staff, and reflections on what helped and what could have been done better. One particular ex-resident regularly helps with staff recruitment and provides a vital voice with lived experience in terms of the selection process.

Wellbeing Survey

These surveys were set up electronically in 2016 in an attempt to develop something more user-friendly and which young people would be willing and able to engage in. As above, the questions are all based on the Shanarri well-being indicators and ask the young people to think how safe, healthy, active etc they would rate themselves, as well as giving them the chance to provide comments. They provide 'scores' for the young people against the different areas so staff can identify if there are areas where young people are developing in, as well as areas where the young person may need to have some targeted work done with them.

From young people:

'i get on well with the other kids and staff, which helps to build up relationship skills and opening up to staff about if there is something that i feel uneasy about.'

'i feel like i get treated very well and people treat me as my age and i respect that and therefore i am the same back.'

"they are really nice and cook amazing food."

It is noticeable in all three of our Homes this year that our young people have reported feeling safe and cared for. This is also an area that the Care Inspectors look at and they independently confirm this feedback from young people.

CARE INSPECTORATE REPORTS

All our Homes are independently inspected by the Care Inspectorate annually with the results published on their website. They are usually inspected under two areas of the Care Standards (establishments will be more widely assessed when there have previously been significant areas of concern, but for a number of years now our Homes have all routinely been assessed in two areas).

This year all three were inspected on Quality of Care and Support and all three were rated at 5 (Very Good) in this area. Two of the Homes were inspected on Quality of Environment and again both were rated at 5. The other Home was inspected on Quality of Management and Leadership and was also rated at 5 in this area.

Whilst Care Inspectorate Reports tend to be short, all three establishments receive considerable verbal feedback from the Inspector and use this to then identify areas for improvement with their Teams.

SERVICE ACHIEVEMENTS

- A number of the young people who became Looked After in our Homes this year had either very poor or non-existent school attendance, but all resumed attending education during the course of their residence with us. We still have some young people who struggle in their school and require additional or flexible support, but we have a well-established culture in each of our Homes that young people are expected to engage in education. Three of our young people will also be starting college courses after the summer.
- In the past year the Homes have worked with the Aberdeenshire Tobacco Alliance Group. This included the staff teams participating in a training event which was very well received. Over the years we have changed how we manage smoking within the homes to ensure that our young people are afforded a healthy and smoke free environment. The Homes are now smoke free, and no one is allowed to smoke on the grounds. The staff team also have appropriate skills and training to support young people to make positive choices around smoking and to support them to quit smoking if this is their goal.
- For the young people, the most significant event for them would be the installation of Wi-Fi! Whilst this took some time to establish, our young people now experience what most young people have living at home. The Wi-Fi has safeguards in place to ensure our young people cannot access inappropriate material. The management of social media is an ongoing area of concern. We work with our young people and partners to ensure that we are all as educated as possible on the developing trends of social media.

INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Within each of the Homes' individual annual reports, they identify areas of achievement for their young people. A sample of these hopefully gives a flavour of what we aspire to for our young people:

- We successfully managed to give guidance and support to all our young people in relation to maintaining full time Education.
- One young person who previously had significant behavioural problems in school has continued to succeed in school and make real progress. He continues to volunteer at the local charity shop every week and recently received a Saltire Volunteer Award for all his efforts and commitment to volunteering.
- A number of the young people have been supported over the year to take part in community groups eg MMA, boxing, army cadets, with one young person recently joining the local archery club.
- Many of our young people engage in an Independent Living Programme covering such things as cooking one day a week for themselves, budgeting skills, learning how to use public transport, etc.

- One new resident in the last few months had school refused for over a year and had also been refusing to leave the family home. Since coming to the Home, she was supported to re-establish a good school routine and did so quickly. She was very withdrawn to begin with, but she is now able to spend time with our other young people and enjoys having fun. She has caught up on the schooling missed and attends after school activities.
- The teams also work hard with families to help them address relationship difficulties. Often, we need to support parents to set clear and consistent rules and boundaries for their young people, and in turn, the teams work with the young people to help them accept these. Working together around such issues means some of our young people can return to the family home, complete their education and re-establish positive supportive relationships with their parents, which in turn gives them a stronger start into the world of adulthood.

CONCLUSION

This has been a largely positive year for all three of the Homes. The majority of our young people have been supported along with their families to make and sustain significant changes in their lives. Our staff are committed to continue to build strong relationships with our young people to enable them to be the best they possible can and to have the same opportunities as their peers. Our teams will always aspire to establish good relationships with parents and to engage them in their child's plans, even if it's accepted the young person will not be returning home.

All three children's homes continue to ensure that the voice of children, young people and their families inform their improvement journey to ensure that we are 'getting it right for every child.'