

**Private & Confidential**

Sent by email

Date: 16 May 2024

Dear Parents and Carers

Firstly, I would like to thank all of you who took part in this piece of work; it was very important to us that your voice was reflected throughout the review, and we believe this has been achieved. The Council is pleased that the report produced by Freedom Training and Consultancy is very thorough and covers a range of areas, many of which we are intending to take forward as we further develop the wider Short Breaks service and our strategy.

As we are not meeting until the 23 May, we wanted to write and let you know that we have listened carefully to your views and want to let you know what actions we are going to be taking regarding the themes, issues and ideas raised within the report, and how we will be responding to the recommendations.

Proposal

The proposal was to explore whether we could use Tudor House as a full-time residential home so we could bring children and young people who are currently residing outside of the city back home, to be nearer to their families. To do this, we needed to expand the use of Drove Road to accommodate all those children and young people currently accessing Tudor House, so that no families would lose their short breaks. We had also intended to expand the use of Drove Road further once the full-time residents transitioned to longer term placements so that we could provide more short breaks for those families who currently don't have access to this support.

The £504k saving would have been generated by bringing children back from their out of area placements, because it costs less for us to provide them with the support they need in-house. It would also have provided us with some additional funding to invest in staffing and the properties in order to expand the current offer.

The outcome of the report has confirmed that Tudor House is suitable for 2/3 non-ambulatory children or young people in 52 week placements downstairs and for 1 or 2 children with moderate to severe learning disabilities or children who are ambulant and suitably matched upstairs. It is not suitable in its current presentation for children or young people back with emotional, social or complex dysregulated behaviour or severe intellectual disability differences, including complex neurodiverse disorders without very careful selective matching and compatibility assessments.

In the reviewer's opinion Drove Road will require adaptation for accessibility and extensive building work would be needed to meet the legal requirements to make the building suitable for children and young people who are wheelchair users. Currently, all children and young people accessing Drove Road are ambulant. This does mean we could not use the premises for those children and young people who are in wheelchairs and who may be displaced by Tudor House becoming residential.

Therefore, we have taken the initial decision, to consider other sites for the full-time residential provision as per the recommendations in the report. We have already looked at two options, one of which is likely to be a possibility.

#### Response to parent/carer feedback:

We were really pleased to read that all parents/carers were positive about the staff in both Drove Road and Tudor House; we are very proud of our staff teams across our two homes and it is lovely to see how much they are appreciated.

We heard clearly that two nights respite are not enough: we want to reassure you that the allocation of respite is reviewed every two weeks by the Responsible Individual and the Home Managers for both homes. Priorities are decided by individual family need. We generally do not allocate more than 4 nights of respite per month; in exceptional circumstances, a family may be allocated more, should this be required. However, children and young people should not be residing there for more than 75 nights maximum per year as the child would then be deemed 'looked after' by the Local Authority.

We understand that parents/carers would like more access to overnight short breaks. We know that neither home is working at full capacity, and we will be looking at the current staffing levels and structures to ensure that we are maximising the potential of each home so that we can increase the number of placements available.

You would like more community events and for us to also provide activities for siblings. We are in the process of working with home managers and their teams to see how this can be achieved as part of the wider short breaks offer.

Parents/carers would like more early help and we will be looking at the range of roles we have in our care services to see how we might be able to deliver support to families differently at an earlier stage.

You have asked for a day centre that can provide day care for autistic children and young people and those with learning disabilities. We think this is a good idea to explore further, and we are committed to looking at this becoming a feature of our wider short breaks offer.

We are already aware of the need for more trained PAs. Our Head of Commissioning is currently working on this with PaCC to appoint to a post that will develop a PA register, work on recruitment and retention and support families.

Families have asked for more help to support independent skills. We think there are ways we can do this by being more creative with our current resources and would like to progress this area of development.

We know from the recent short breaks meeting that you would all like more help in the school holidays. We are currently working on this with providers Drove Road and Tudor House and hope to have an improved offer for the summer holidays. Families also want more access to after school clubs; we know Hill Park is currently operational and is looking to increase their numbers and Downs View are hoping to open after the May half term.

You want your children to come back to the city; we want you to know this is a priority for us as well and we are considering all options so that we can make this happen.

One parent mentioned regional Care Co-Operatives; we think this is a really good idea and our Head of Commissioning is currently researching this idea to see how we can develop a model for the city.

### Recommendations:

**To develop a robust workforce plan:** A Workforce Development Plan will be developed and implemented over the next 6 months by the Head of Service for 0-25 Specialist Community Disability Service. This will include both homes with a focus on recruitment and retention. We are keen to develop the apprenticeship scheme for care staff as well as considering how we can use other staff such as school TAs and PAs to enhance the current work force. The suggestion that we work more closely with colleges, and universities to provide placement opportunities for those studying social care, occupational therapy and related subjects will also be progressed. Building a base of volunteers to support families is also a really good idea and one we are very keen to pursue; we think it would fit well with the work we are doing to develop a PA register and the establishment of a care co-operative in the city.

As part of this work, we will also be reviewing the current job descriptions, staffing structures (this will include the consideration of a permanent Behaviour Support Officer post and a cook), rotas and the training offer to ensure that we have a resilient workforce, and we are able to maximise the resources in both homes. The role of the Responsible Individual will also be included in the review. The recommendations also include the proposal to have a nurse on site; we will pursue this with NHS Sussex as this post would be funded and clinically supervised by Health.

In addition to the above, we would also like to attract full-time foster carers to the city who have a particular interest in providing a home for children and young people with complex needs. We would really like to take this forward and work with our current fostering team to see how this can be achieved.

**Recommendations for change of use at Drove Road:** In considering the review's findings and the voice of staff and parents/carers, it is likely that we will not be changing the use of Drove Road to accommodate non-ambulant children and young people. However, there will be further work done on expanding the offer by transitioning the full-time residents onto longer term permanent placements so these rooms can be used for short breaks. This will include using flat 55c as an emergency placement respite bed. When doing this, we will ensure children are carefully matched in terms of their needs.

There are also recommendations in terms of using the premises for day care. The Council fully support this recommendation and is currently working with home managers to deliver

an offer for the summer holiday with the intention that this continues through school holiday periods going forward. We are also keen to explore support at weekends during the day for those children who are too young to benefit from the overnight offer. In addition, we would like to move forward on the suggestion for using the building to develop a PA placement experience and supporting groups and parent/carers during the day.

**Recommendations for Tudor House in its current presentation and the change of use:** As we have referred to earlier, we are currently exploring whether we can use other buildings to accommodate full-time residential care placements, we are in the process of looking at the possible options. Many of the recommendations that have been applied to Drove Road regarding the use of the premises in the day will also apply to Tudor House.

In addition to the above, there was a recommendation that we consider 5 night holiday packages in the school holidays with weekend day care and also 2, 3 and 4 night packages depending on need. There was also a suggestion that this service could host an early intervention service which we are keen to explore alongside our other Council services that provide Early Help.

The above recommendations will be included in our new Short Breaks strategy going forward which will be led by the Head of Service 0-25 Specialist Community Disability Service and Head of FCLS Commissioning. The draft strategy will be shared with the community in July 2024.

**Wider recommendations:** We have gathered the data on the 0-5 age group who will require short breaks, as well as the current data we have on those children and young people who require short breaks. We will be using this to inform the Short Breaks Strategy as this data combined with the recommendations will set the parameters for what we will need to do to meet the needs of the community.

The workforce recommendations will be picked up through the Workforce Development Plan and we are in the process of looking at other buildings in terms of accommodating the long-term residential placements.

We have already worked with our two outstanding special schools to provide the after-school clubs. Hill Park currently run an after-school club and we have been informed that Downs View will be starting theirs after May half term. However, we recognise that these are venues that could be successfully used within the holidays, and we are committed to exploring this further with the schools to see what can be achieved.

We are currently working with PaCC on developing the support and recruitment of PAs. We have also brought in additional capacity to focus on the Direct Payments and Personal Budget offer. The officer doing this work will be liaising with PaCC to ensure that parents/carers are involved in the development of these areas and the wider short breaks offer.

## Summary

We hope that from reading our response you are reassured we have taken on board the findings and recommendations from the review. Now that we have more detailed information on how both of the homes can be utilised, we are in a good position to move

forward at pace and shape the provision and services to meet the needs of the community.

We will have our draft wider Short Breaks Strategy to share with the community in July, this will also include the Workforce Development Plan and the Short Breaks holiday offer which will be shared in June. The strategy will include an action plan setting out all the actions we will be taking and the timescales for delivery.

There will be also an opportunity at the meetings on the 23 May for you to ask any questions you may have about the report and the actions we will be taking.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Georgina Clarke-Green', is written over a light grey dotted grid background.

Georgina Clarke-Green  
Assistant Director for Health, SEN and Disability  
Families, Children & Learning Services