



**Consultation on the Future of Children's Home
Services Provided at Birchen Lane, Blossom Corner
and Rifford Road**

January 2014

1. Introduction

Devon County Council's Strategic Plan 2011-2015 acknowledges the council's role in commissioning and delivering services. Although the council delivers services directly, this role has decreased as the commissioning process has increasingly found alternative providers and reassessed the contribution of directly provided services to the market.

It is accepted that there will be a continuing need for care within residential settings for some children and young people. However, there are national and local drivers that have resulted in a shift in the balance of residential and family-based provision. These can be summarised as:

- Social work (and inspectorate) thinking and research in respect of best practice relating to alternative placements for children unable to live with their families. In the UK there is a strong preference for family-based placements via fostering or family and friends care.
- A preference, based on evidence of good outcome-based practice for smaller residential homes with two or three residents and access to therapeutic input, thus making larger units no longer the preferred option.

(Source: Living in Children's Residential Homes, Research Report DFE-RR201, ISBN: 978-1-78105-090-3 © University of Bristol, March 2012 and Therapeutic approaches to social work in residential child care settings: Literature review, Social Care Institute for Excellence, May 2012)

- Concerns raised by Ofsted with Devon County Council about the size of its three children's homes and the institutional environment of Rifford Road in particular
- The Devon County Council and South West Peninsula's approach that good quality family-based care will, in the majority of cases, promote the best outcomes for children
- The national trend for decreasing local authority ownership of Residential children's homes

The Department for Education published statutory guidance in 2013 called Working Together to Safeguard Children. This guidance, alongside developing practice for older children indicates that best outcomes are achieved through the provision of Early Help, use of Family Group Conferencing and making arrangements for all children to be kept within their family of origin or wider community, with support, wherever possible.

Devon County Council is implementing this approach. Additionally, the council's Cabinet approved significant investment into its In House Fostering Service in 2013. This investment is planned to increase access to a range of fostering placements that include therapeutic support to meet the need for family-based care.

Accompanying investment has been made into Devon's Children's Brokerage Service to source well matched, high quality and value for money placements in the independent sector and through in-house provision.

2. Context

This proposal focuses on residential children's home provision in Devon and its future, particularly in the context that nationally there has been heightened degree of attention on children's homes and safeguarding, alongside a national trend for decreasing Local Authority ownership of Residential children's homes with a decrease from 61% in 2000 to 22% in 2013
(Source: DFE: Children's homes data pack: September 2013)

Devon is one of five Councils that collaborate in the Peninsula Commissioning and Procurement Partnership¹ which works together to ensure sufficient supply of placements for children in care and all children and young people in the Peninsula area needing placements.

The Partnership recognises that, 'It is not always easy for us to predict placement demand trends ahead of time however, whilst there will be variations within each local authority, we think that it is likely that that demand will continue to grow for foster care, stabilise or possibly fall slowly for children's homes (as a percentage of overall placements needed), and rise for 16-25 year old accommodation and support.'²

There is an increasing focus and interest in placements and services that assist the authorities to divert children from entry into care and reduce the length of time spent in care. Additionally there is interest in developing better options for 'step up / step down' provision that better supports children at the interface of family-based and residential placements.

At the same time all local authority budgets across the Peninsula are under pressure. The authorities will address this by continuing an approach that:

- Prioritises matching placements to children's needs to get the best outcomes for children and young people.
- Reduces the numbers of children coming into care by intervening earlier to prevent this.
- Increases the numbers of children placed permanently in families, e.g. either with foster carers or placed for adoption.
- Supports children and young people and their families or carers to prevent unnecessary placements in children's homes, residential special schools or residential family centres, whilst accepting that sometimes a residential placement is the best option.

¹ The Peninsula Commissioning and Procurement Partnership is longstanding collaboration set up in 2006 between Cornwall Council, Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Somerset County Council and Torbay Council.

² Accommodation and support for 16-25 year olds, with a specific focus on 16 -18 year old care leavers and those who meet Local Authority thresholds.

- Encourages providers developing service delivery models that can deliver value for money.
- Increases the number and range of placements available to Peninsula Authorities within the boundary of each Authority'

Source: Final Draft Peninsula Placements for Children and Young People Market Position Statement. November 2013)

Devon County Council's Children and Young People's Placement Strategy 2012 states that, 'A happy stable home life is fundamental to the successful development of all children'. For children in care, a successful placement is the most important factor in enabling them to flourish. Frequent placement moves can have a dramatic impact on the ability of children to succeed both in education and other areas of their life. In Devon we want to be able to offer choice of placement, locally based that will provide stability and have a positive impact on children and young people's lives.'

The Strategy sets out the key outcomes for childrens placements:

- To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children and young people to be looked after by ensuring a focus on early help.
- To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care to make sure the right children and young people come into care at the right time
- To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements so that all children and young people have a positive experiences in care, whatever their needs
- To ensure all children and young people in care get a good education, whether this is in mainstream schools or in alternative arrangements
- To give children and young people clearly planned journeys through care which enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively

From March 2008 to March 2013 the number of children in the care of Devon County Council rose by 27.9% from 556 to 711 children. Traditionally, Devon's rate of children in care has been below the statistical neighbour average, but at 31 March 2012 Devon's rate exceeded its statistical neighbours. Figures have declined slightly since then and in December 2013 Devon numbers had decreased to 699.

3. Financial Considerations

The impact of reducing bed numbers to 3 per home in line with recognised changes described above is significant. 2014/15 draft budgets assume a reduced level of staffing to care for fewer children whilst delivering best practice and regulatory requirements. They include a distribution of indirect overhead costs (management, building maintenance and central overheads). The resulting unit costs per bed per week, based on 100% occupancy are:

- Birchen Lane £4,859 per bed per week
- Blossom Corner £4,327 per bed per week
- Rifford Road £5,167 per bed per week

These costs compare with the Devon average spot contract unit cost of £3,600 per bed per week in the independent sector, based on 2013/14 costs. This average cost includes the provision of therapeutic and education support for a number of higher cost placements where social care share costs with health and education. If this is taken into account the projected average weekly social care cost of an independent sector place is £2,800 per bed per week.

In February 2013 Barnardo's was commissioned to undertake an independent review of services³ in response to the impact of the changes described above. Barnardo's reviewed the practice and quality of services provided from Devon County Council's three children's homes. The review findings are significant and include a number of important recommendations that have been considered in formulating these proposals for change and are described below.

The overall drive is to place children and young people within family settings. However, Devon County Council policy does not negate the use of residential provision, as for some children this is the best possible match for their needs. Commissioners need to assure themselves that Devon's residential provision is of a high quality and safe for the most vulnerable children who are likely to be placed there. Where residential provision is needed, Devon will continue to work closely with providers to commission care to at high standard and ensure children and young people are achieving the best possible outcomes for their future.

4. Purpose of the Document

This document sets out our proposal for the future of Devon County Council's three 'In House' children's homes.

We would like your views about this proposal. Your response will help us make decisions about the future shape of services for children and young people.

There are 50 staff employed across the 3 homes. A formal consultation process is in progress with these staff members.

³ Barnardo's 'Final Summary in Respect of Independent Review' is available at <http://www.devon.gov.uk/childrenshomes/>

5. The Children's Homes

5.1 Birchen Lane

Birchen Lane is registered for 6 young people for short to mid-term placements between the ages of 10 to 17 years. The home has a 'Good' Ofsted grade. The service is currently temporarily suspended following significant safeguarding concerns raised by staff and key stakeholders about risks of child sexual exploitation posed within the wider community.

The suspension of services has continued pending the outcome of the Barnardo's review described above. Staff are currently temporarily redeployed into vacant or supernumerary posts across children's services.

The Barnardo's review of Birchen Lane reports that, whilst the child focused culture and good standard of care was acknowledged, "There are fundamental concerns relating to Birchen Lane's location and serious risks presented to young people, particularly girls, from sexual exploitation within the local community. It is difficult to see how these risks (of child sexual exploitation) can be adequately managed despite the very best efforts from staff."

The Barnardo's review makes the following recommendation:

"That careful consideration is given to the location of the service currently offered at the premises at Birchen Lane in the light of concerns relating to child sexual exploitation and the particular risks which present within this local community. The review team recognise this is an exceptional recommendation but would note these have been exceptional circumstances and the critical question needs to be addressed about whether risk in the community can be sufficiently reduced or managed. Suggestions have been made about younger children being placed age 10-13 but the review team do not believe the risks of child sexual exploitation to this age group would be any less than that to older young people."

5.2 Rifford Road

Rifford Road is registered for seven young people for emergency and short term placements for young people between the ages of 13 to 17 years.

The home was judged 'Inadequate' across all areas at the Ofsted Inspection in July 2013 and the service was temporarily suspended. The home was inspected again in September 2013 and found to be adequate, albeit there were no children resident. The service remains temporarily suspended.

Rifford Road is a large home that was refurbished during 2011/12. This followed remodelling proposals approved prior to the changes of national best practice in relation to the requirement for smaller units.

The independent review of Rifford Road undertaken by Barnardo's reports that:

“Very careful consideration needs to be given to whether there is value in sustaining Rifford Road Community Home. There are concerns overall that the level of change needed at Rifford Road to affect the improvements needed will not be achievable. Significant improvements are necessary to the leadership, strategy, operational management and day to day practice in order to change the embedded culture. Strong child focused leadership is essential to achieve such a change. There is undoubtedly a need for some emergency and short stay placements in Devon, but this would be better provided through a smaller unit. The premise at Rifford Road is also not best suited to provide care for vulnerable young people with conflicting needs.”

5.3 Blossom Corner

Blossom Corner is registered for 6 young people for short to medium term placements between the ages of 10 to 17 years. The home has a 'Good' Ofsted grade. Bed numbers were recently reduced from 6 to 3 in response to the requirement for smaller bedded units that can meet the diverse and complex needs of young people requiring care.

The Barnardo's review found that Blossom Corner is a well run provision with a highly committed staff group who have a strong focus on achieving the best outcomes for young people. However, the review goes on to say that,

“Decisions need to be made about the home's purpose and function, and where this fits with any other changes affected in Devon”.

5.4 General

The three children's home buildings have been designed to accommodate larger numbers of children than best practice now dictates. The buildings are not conducive to providing the homely and welcoming environment for the maximum three children that will need to be accommodated within each home.

Significant progress has been made through improved partnership working to reshape the independent residential market in Devon. Whilst there are challenges to the sufficiency of supply in the independent sector to meet demand, commissioners are working closely with the market to enable them to respond more flexibly to the need for short and medium term placements linked to family based care. Alongside this, work has commenced to actively review high cost placements in order to ensure needs are being met

appropriately and cost effectively. This work should release capacity as more children are moved into family based placements.

The investment into Devon County Council's fostering service has been planned to meet the need for high quality foster placements that can meet the needs of young people 'stepping down' from residential care.

6. The Proposals

Devon County Council believes it is unsafe to resume a children's home or any other service for children and young people at Birchen Lane. The council therefore proposes to formally cease this service. If the service does cease the future use of the site will be considered by the council. Feedback from this consultation process will be used to inform the decision to implement the proposal and, if applicable, the considerations regarding the future use of the site.

Devon County Council proposes to formally cease the services at Rifford Road and Blossom Corner Children's Homes. If the service does cease the future use of the sites will be considered by the council, including the potential to develop them into supported living accommodation. This will be actively pursued by Devon County social care commissioners and appropriate partners. Feedback from this consultation process will be used to inform the decision to implement the proposal and, if applicable, the considerations regarding the future use of the site.

Devon County Council proposes to continue its work to secure and support increased capacity within its Fostering Services, support Foster Carers and work closely with independent and voluntary sector providers to develop specialist capacity.

7. Your Involvement

Devon County Council is seeking the views of local stakeholders on the proposal outlined above. Local stakeholders we are informing of this proposal include:

- DCC Elected Members
- Children in Care Council
- NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Virgin Care
- CAMHS services
- Provider Engagement Network (PEN)
- Independent and voluntary sector providers
- Local Members of Parliament
- Chair of the local City, District, Town and Parish Council as appropriate
- Ofsted
- Barnardo's

In addition Devon County Council Independent Review Officer (IRO) service will be consulted. This service has responsibilities and duties for ensuring the Local Authority fulfils its function as a 'corporate parent' and a role in supporting the Local Authority to assess the quality and effectiveness of local authority planning and support for children

You are invited to comment in writing by email or by post

Send an email	childrenshomesreviewfeedback-mailbox@devon.gov.uk
Write to:	Assistant Director, Social Care Provision Room A107, County Hall Topsham Road Exeter Devon EX2 4QD

Please contact childrenshomesreviewfeedback-mailbox@devon.gov.uk if you require any further support to help you respond:

8. The Final Decision

The consultation will close on **Friday 7 February 2014**

The final decision will be based on the requirements of the County Council's commissioning strategies and the completed Impact Assessments⁴ (which may be amended in light of this consultation process), as well as the outcome of this consultation process.

We will notify you of the decision and this will also be made available via the Devon County Council website at: www.devon.gov.uk

⁴ Impact Assessments available at <http://www.devon.gov.uk/childrenshomes/>

Impact Assessment completed by:		Responsible officer:	
Name/Job Title(s)		Name/Job Title	
Andrea Morris Professional and Governance Lead (Social Work)		Malcolm Vede Head of Service (Social Care Provision)	
Date of sign off:			

To publish the report, send it to impact-mailbox@devon.gov.uk. You may delete these guidance notes from your final document.

1. Background

1.1 Title:

Proposal to cease services at Rifford Road Community Home, Exeter

1.2 Description:

This impact assessment considers the proposal to cease services within a Devon County Council residential unit for children; namely Rifford Road Community Home, Exeter. Consultation will be undertaken with interested parties.

Rifford Road Community Home (hereafter referred to as Rifford Road) is a 7 bedded unit, providing emergency and short term care, to young people aged 13 plus, with a staff team of eighteen people, including a manager and deputy manager, 12.5 whole time equivalent residential staff and a part time domestic worker.

This residential home is operated by Devon County Council from premises owned and recently refurbished by the council. The unit is required to be registered by Ofsted, and is currently graded as 'Adequate'. This grading follows a management action plan and re-inspection after a previous inspection in July 2013 which found the unit to be 'inadequate'.

At the time of writing there are no children living in the unit after a decision was made to suspend placements to allow an investigation to take place in relation to practice and management of the home.

Partners who contribute to providing these residential services to children include Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who offer therapeutic input to the residents and guidance to staff, Children in Care Nurses who provide health assessments, advice and information and where necessary support from the Virtual School for Children in Care. Strong links are also established with the local community police teams.

In addition to these providers, stakeholders are described as follows:

- Children and young people who may need future placements (who may come from diverse backgrounds)
- Parents / Carers of children and young people
- Staff who work in and manage the unit
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Ofsted (as the approving registration body for the units)
- Elected members and DCC officers as corporate parents
- Brokerage Team (who arrange placements)
- Independent Providers
- Virgin Care (as the locally contracted provider of services to children with special needs)

1.3 **Service users:**

Rifford Road offers placements to children from across Devon who require a residential placement. As this is a temporary and emergency resource, young people often move on from the home quite swiftly. Young people who need placements may have experienced family breakdown, have been abused or neglected or faced multiple placement moves. Their needs are frequently complex; occasionally the young people will also have diagnosed medical conditions such as diabetes.

Please note that children with complex physical needs or who require nursing care are not within the scope of this unit.

1.4 **Describe any reasons for change and intended aims and benefits:**

Ceasing services within the unit would result in a reduction of 7 residential places. The proposed closure is part of an overall shift in policy and practice. The aims are to strengthen Devon's Fostering Service (and provide more foster placements), at the same time as improving 'early help' to families and increasing the use of Family Group Conferencing to contribute to the strategy to encourage family-based options for children and reduce general admissions to care.

There are several drivers in respect of the proposal, which can be summarised as:

- National social work (and inspectorate) thinking and research in respect of best practice relating to alternative placements for children unable to live with their families. In the UK there is a strong preference for family-based placements via fostering or family and friends care. There is also national thinking in regard to the preferred style of residential home and optimum number of residents (smaller units with perhaps two or three residents, with therapeutic input),^{1 2} thus making larger units of 6-7 beds no longer the preferred option.
- The County Council approach is that good quality family-based care will, in the

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf
Living in Children's Residential Homes, Research Report DFE-RR201, ISBN: 978-1-78105-090-3

© University of Bristol, March 2012

² <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report58/files/literaturereview.pdf>

Therapeutic approaches to social work in residential child care settings: Literature review, Social Care Institute for Excellence, May 2012

majority of cases, promote better outcomes for children than institutional care.

- Investment has been made in Devon's Fostering Service to pursue this approach where family-based care is the preferred option for the majority of children requiring care placements. The risk in this strategy is that sufficient fostering placements of the right calibre and experience will not be available swiftly enough to cater for the complex needs of young people who require placements in the near future and/or who cannot manage the intensity of a family placement.
- The mitigating action to the above risk is that accompanying investment in the Brokerage Service has been made as a mechanism to source well matched and value for money placements in the independent sector and through in-house provision.
- The need to use the most appropriate, effective and efficient service

1.5 **Overlap with other policies, services etc:**

Placements offered to children at Rifford Road form part of the overall placement options for children in care to Devon County Council. Placements are sought for children by placing social workers through the Brokerage Service who work with a range of providers including:

- In-house fostering – Devon Fostering
- In-house supported lodgings – Devon Young People's Accommodation Service
- In-house residential services – Rifford Road, Birchin Lane and Blossom Corner
- External fostering – through a number of agreed providers
- External residential - again through a number of agreed providers

The Devon County Council Placement Strategy has a target of recruiting 100 more fostering places, which will help mitigate the impact of not having in-house beds.

For children and young people with complex special needs and chronic health needs, short break services are provided through Virgin Care. Where children require secure accommodation, this can be accessed through the Atkinson Unit.

Children in care have many and diverse needs, and come into care as the result of neglect, abuse, family dysfunction or other loss or trauma. The range of provision reflects the diversity of situations and needs presented by the children and matching takes place to provide the placement best suited to meet those needs.

Ideally, children should be offered a choice of placement, but in reality this is rarely an option; a pattern reflected nationally for some time³. Devon has a strong matching policy and ethos, for both fostering and residential placements⁴.

³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmchilsch/111/11108.htm>

Ensuring a sufficient supply of good quality placements, Looked-after Children - Children, Schools and Families Committee, April 2009

⁴ http://devonchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_place_resi_care.html#ident_approval

1.6 The following stakeholders have been involved in this assessment:

The local authority is taking into consideration the potential needs of children and young people who **may** need placements in the future from the perspective that for the majority of children and young people, their needs will be better met in a family setting than in a residential setting. It does however recognise that comparison between the two types of provision is difficult because of considerable variation in type and form of residential care and foster care and that for some young people a family setting will not be appropriate and therefore a range of placement options is still required.^{5, 6}

As the decision was made to suspend placements at Rifford Road (which were required to be made in the immediate due to potential safeguarding issues), consultation regarding impact on those young people in placement at the time was not possible. Plans were put in place to move the young people to suitable alternative placements (some of which were already in planning prior to the decision to cease new admissions) and the children moved on in a measured way.

Consequently, the views collated are gathered from relevant documentation and children's feedback and will be used to inform the consultation process

Children and young people who may need future placements – as the unit is not accepting new admissions at present, and therefore there are no children or young people matched as potential residents, the information offered here is gathered from previous residents via the 'My Review Survey' and 'The Pledge Review' – both conducted during Spring / Summer 2013. In the feedback received from a small number of residents of the unit, the young people indicated that they were well cared for where they lived. However, the recent independent review of the home carried out by Barnardo's found that 'young people for the most part were negative about their experience at Rifford Road'.

Parents / Carers of children and young people – As above – no parents are currently linked to the unit through their child being placed. The Regulation 33 Visit for Rifford Road in June 2013 notes that a parent has written to thank the unit. Representation will be sought by engaging the Children in Care Council to take part of the consultation process

Staff who work in and manage the unit – There will be a formal staff consultation process, involving Trade Unions, following Devon County Council Policy.

Independent Reviewing Officers – This service has responsibilities and duties for ensuring the Local Authority fulfils its function as a 'corporate parent' and a role in supporting the Local Authority to assess the quality and effectiveness of local authority planning and support for children. Views will be sought as part of the consultation process.

Ofsted (as the approving registration body for the units) Ofsted is aware of the proposals being consulted upon.

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jun/21/residential-care-home-children-fostering>
Young Person's perspective, Dawn Howley, The Guardian, 21 June 2011

⁶ <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr05.pdf>, Fostering Success, An exploration of the Research Literature in foster care, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Wilson et al, 2004, p31

Elected members and DCC officers as corporate parents – Elected members carry out the Regulation 33 Visitor role for the residential homes, and so have had direct knowledge of the unit. Regulation 33 requires a visit on a monthly basis from a person independent of the home, to monitor the running of the unit. This impact assessment forms part of the documentation which will be shared with elected members as part of the consultation relating to the proposed unit closure.

Brokerage Team (who arrange placements) – The Brokerage Team draw information from a range of providers, so other than a potential increase in placement search time (and the costs associated with same) there are no significant impacts anticipated on this team through the proposed home closure.

Independent Providers (who may wish to provide an alternative service, or indeed take on the existing homes) It is likely that the proposed ceasing of services at Rifford Road will create additional business in the placement market for external providers, they will be consulted with.

Virgin Care (as the locally contracted provider of services to children with special needs – the latter being occasionally placed in the units) The vast majority of children who are supported by Virgin Care, have needs which would be too complex to be dealt with at Rifford Road, so no impact is expected.

1.7 **The following research or guidance has been referred to, or advice sought, in order to inform the assessment:**

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf *Living in Children's Residential Homes*, Research Report DFE-RR201, ISBN: 978-1-78105-090-3 © University of Bristol, March 2012
2. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmchilsch/111/11108.htm> *Ensuring a sufficient supply of good quality placements*, Looked-after Children - Children, Schools and Families Committee, April 2009
3. http://devonchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_place_resi_care.html#ident_approval Devon County Council Policies and Procedures
4. OFSTED inspection report for Rifford Road Community Home, 12th September 2013, page 3.
5. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report58/files/literaturereview.pdf> *Therapeutic approaches to social work in residential child care settings: Literature review*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, May 2012
6. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jun/21/residential-care-home-children-fostering> Young Person's perspective, Dawn Howley, The Guardian, 21 June 2011
7. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr05.pdf> , *Fostering Success, An exploration of the Research Literature in foster care*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Wilson et al, 2004, p31

1.8 **Options Appraisal**

Option	Pros	Cons	Cost/Achievability
N/A			

Recommended/preferred option(s):

Not applicable.

2. Analysis

2.1 Social impacts

	In what way is this characteristic relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Age:	This characteristic is relevant as the potential future residents of Rifford Road are aged between 13 and 17 years.
Disability:	This characteristic applies as the children and young people may have a range of special needs including autism spectrum disorders and chronic health issues such as diabetes.
Gender/Sex (men and women):	This applies as the unit can accommodate children and young people of both genders.
Marriage and civil partnership:	This could potentially apply to young people aged 16-18 years who can enter into a marriage or civil partnership from age 16 (with parental permission – unless in Scotland where no permission is required).
Pregnancy and maternity:	This could also apply, although an alternative more appropriate placement would be likely to be sought once the pregnancy was known.
Race/ethnicity:	This characteristic applies as the young people who are potential residents could come from any background.
Religion/belief:	This applies as the young people could hold a range of faiths or beliefs.
Sexual orientation:	This characteristic applies as the unit is open to young people from any sexual orientation.
Trans-gender/gender identity:	Gender identity could be a relevant characteristic, but trans-gender less likely given the age of the

	young people.
Other (e.g. socio-economic, general health and wellbeing, human rights, safeguarding):	All children and young people who are resident in the units will need to be safeguarded, and their health, well-being and human rights protected and promoted.
Overall degree of relevance to equality:	High
Geographic areas affected:	Rifford Road accepts young people from across the county of Devon. Occasionally, there might also be a young person from another local authority placed on an emergency basis until arrangements can be made to return them to their home authority.

2.1.1 Positive impacts:

<p>The proposal to cease services at Rifford Road seeks to promote positive impacts and is predicated on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the belief that high quality alternative placements will be available for potential future residents, through the strengthening of the Devon Fostering Service and an improved market relationship with external providers • increased and more effective use of Family Group Conferencing at the point of a child potentially needing care, will reduce pressure on placement choice, and raise the use of family and friends care, and • that for the majority of children, a family setting will minimise disadvantage and promote strong outcomes across the protected characteristics. To support this, training and development in understanding the potential prejudices to which children in care and care leavers can be subjected is offered to all Devon Foster Carers through their induction and preparation, supervision, support groups and specialist courses.
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2.1.2 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

<p>The potential negative impacts of ceasing services at Rifford Road could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced choice of placement (at least in the short term, for example until Devon Fostering Service recruit new carers, and if the independent sector cannot offer sufficient options) – the mitigation actions taken to minimise this include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investment in the fostering service to increase recruitment activity, and to further enhance support being offered to carers to promote placement stability 2. Ongoing investment in the brokerage service to further improve matching and placement maximisation in the independent sector • Loss of collective expertise of experienced and dedicated staff teams at the units – this is being mitigated against in the short term through temporary redeployment of some of the Rifford Road staff to other areas of business (and would be further mitigated if all staff were similarly redeployed on a permanent basis) so that their
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knowledge and expertise is still used to improve outcomes for children who have vulnerabilities across the protected characteristics.

(Note, as there are no children in placement, there are no direct impacts on known children.)

2.3.4 Neutral impacts:

None noted.

2.2 Economic impacts

	In what way is this factor relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Impact on knowledge and skills:	<p>Redeployment of Rifford Road staff to other areas of Devon County Council business would retain the knowledge and skills of the staff group to work with vulnerable children affected by the protected characteristics.</p> <p>The children themselves would continue to receive support to promote their education and training through their alternative placements.</p>
Impact on employment levels:	Negligible if redeployment possible internally or externally. Similarly the children will receive support to promote their education elsewhere.
Impact on local business:	Although Rifford Road uses local businesses in many forms, the impact of closure is likely to be fairly small as the workers will continue to live in and contribute to the Devon economy in most cases.

2.2.1 Positive impacts:

It is anticipated that by increasing the pool of foster carers, there will be an overall saving of costs to the local authority through an effective 'invest to save' policy.

2.2.2 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

There could be a negative impact on staff if full redeployment of staff is not possible (not yet known).

2.3 Environmental impacts

2.3.1 The policy or practice does not require the identification of environmental impacts using this Impact Assessment process because it is subject to (please select and proceed to Section 2.3, otherwise complete table below):

	Devon County Council's Environmental Review Process for permitted development highway schemes.
	Planning Permission under the Town and Country Planning Act (1990).
	Strategic Environmental Assessment under European Directive 2001/42/EC "on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment".

	In what way is this factor relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Reduce waste, and send less waste to landfill:	Very limited effect as any waste produced by the unit is likely to be dispersed amongst any other placement in which the young people are living.
Conserve and enhance biodiversity (the variety of living species):	Limited effect – as above.
Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape:	Not applicable.
Conserve and enhance the quality and character of our built environment and public spaces:	Not applicable.
Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage:	Not applicable.
Minimise greenhouse gas emissions:	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise):	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Contribute to reducing water consumption:	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level):	Not applicable.
Other (please state below):	None known.

2.3.2 Positive impacts:

Limited as stated above.

2.3.3 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

None known.

2.4 Combined Impacts

2.4.1 Linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts:

No conflicts known.

2.4.2 'Social Value' of planned commissioned/procured services:

- Consideration will be given to using the building for another DCC purpose if the decision is made to close the unit
- As Rifford Road is a council-owned residence, there is the potential to sell the property (perhaps to an established external provider), thus recouping capital monies and possibly replacing (via an external provider) the access to residential placements on an individual basis if needed
- Temporary alternative employment has been found for some of the unit staff affected by the suspension of placements – permanent alternative posts would have to be explored if the unit is to close, or redundancies considered.

2.4.3 Potential impacts on partner agencies:

- Potential development opportunity for an alternative provider
- Potential resource saving for police if the units are permanently as currently the police invest time in safeguarding the young people placed

3. Actions and risk management

3.1 Actions:

- The potential to sell the site and raise capital monies.
- The potential to re invest in alternative models of services.
- Redevelopment of the Fostering Service and increased resources for recruitment of new carers is in place and work underway to recruit, assess and prepare new fostering families.
- Revision of the placement request form has been undertaken, with greater emphasis on matching considerations to promote improved matching and safeguarding.

3.2 **How will you monitor the actual impacts of recommendations/decisions (consider what service user monitoring and consultation is necessary)?:**

Placement requests are monitored on an on-going basis by the Brokerage Team – this will indicate the nature of placements required for children and will also monitor how those placement requests are met and by which provision.

3.3 **Risk assessment**

Inherent risk (mark an X in one box).

If the service is ceased, and no alternative placements identified, then the potential impact on any future children requiring a similar provision would be significant, as the children and young people have many vulnerabilities under the protected characteristics.

Severity	Catastrophic	5					
	Major	4				x	
	Moderate	3					
	Minor	2					
	Negligible	1					
				1	2	3	4
			Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain

Likelihood (in a 5 year timeframe)

Current risk (mark an X in one box).

If the strategy to create additional placements through redevelopment of the fostering service is successful, the local authority would be replacing the lost residential placements with family based care, leading it is hoped, to better outcomes for children and young people.

Severity	Catastrophic	5					
	Major	4		x			
	Moderate	3					
	Minor	2					
	Negligible	1					
				1	2	3	4
			Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain

Likelihood (in a 5 year timeframe)

Impact Assessment completed by:		Responsible officer:	
Name/Job Title(s)		Name/Job Title	
Andrea Morris Professional and Governance Lead (Social Work)		Malcolm Vede Head of Service (Social Care Provision)	
Date of sign off:			

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1. Background

1.1 Title:

Proposal to cease services at Birchen Lane Community Home, Exeter

1.2 Description:

This impact assessment considers the proposal to cease services at a Devon County Council residential unit for children; namely Birchen Lane Children's Home, Tiverton.

Consultation will be undertaken with interested parties.

Birchen Lane Children's Home (hereafter referred to as 'Birchen Lane') is a 6 bedded unit providing care for children aged 10-17 years on a short to mid-term basis, plus one emergency bed of 72 hours, with a staffing compliment of 17 people, including a Manager and Assistant Manager, eleven residential social workers and a cook and domestic worker.

This residential home is operated by Devon County Council from premises owned by the council. The unit is required to be registered by Ofsted, and is currently graded as 'Good'.

At the time of writing there are no children living in the unit after a decision was made to suspend placements due to the risks that had been identified in relation to child sexual exploitation within the community. Full multi-agency strategy meetings were instigated, and have now concluded. Further safeguarding actions are not required in this respect. An independent external review by Barnardo's concludes that it 'is difficult to see how these risks can be managed' and 'consideration needs to be given to the need and scope to relocate or identify alternative suitable placements for young people who need to be looked after'.

Partners who contribute to providing these residential services to children include Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who offer therapeutic input to the residents and guidance to staff, Children in Care Nurses who provide health assessments, advice and information and where necessary support from the Virtual

School for Children in Care. Strong links are also established with the local community police teams.

In addition to these providers, stakeholders are described as follows:

- Children and young people who may need future placements (who may come from diverse backgrounds)
- Parents / Carers of children and young people
- Staff who work in and manage the unit
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Ofsted (as the approving registration body for the units)
- Elected members and DCC officers as corporate parents
- Brokerage Team (who arrange placements)
- Independent Providers
- Virgin Care (as the locally contracted provider of services to children with special needs)

1.3 **Service users:**

Birchen Lane offers placements to children from across Devon who require a residential placement (of this nature).

Young people who need placements may have experienced family breakdown, have been abused or neglected or faced multiple placement moves. Their needs are frequently complex; occasionally the young people will also have diagnosed medical conditions such as diabetes. Please note that children with complex physical needs or who require nursing care are not within the scope of this home.

1.4 **Describe any reasons for change and intended aims and benefits:**

Ceasing services within the home would result in a reduction of 6 residential places, plus one emergency bed. The proposed closure is part of an overall shift in policy and practice. The aims are to strengthen Devon's Fostering Service (and provide more foster placements), at the same time as improving 'early help' to families and increasing the use of Family Group Conferencing to contribute to the strategy to encourage family-based options for children and reduce general admissions to care.

There are several drivers in respect of the proposal, which can be summarised as:

- National social work (and inspectorate) thinking and research in respect of best practice relating to alternative placements for children unable to live with their families. In the UK there is a strong preference for family based placements via fostering or family and friends care. There is also national thinking in regard to the preferred style of residential home and optimum number of residents (smaller units with perhaps two or three residents, with therapeutic input),¹ ² thus making larger units of 6-7 beds no longer the preferred option.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf
Living in Children's Residential Homes, Research Report DFE-RR201, ISBN: 978-1-78105-090-3

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² <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report58/files/literaturereview.pdf>

- The County Council approach is that good quality family based care will, in the majority of cases, promote better outcomes for children than institutional care.
- Investment has been made in Devon's Fostering Service to pursue this approach where family-based care is the preferred option for the majority of children requiring care placements. The risk in this strategy is that sufficient fostering placements of the right calibre and experience will not be available swiftly enough to cater for the complex needs of young people who require placements in the near future and/or who cannot manage the intensity of a family placement. There is also a risk that children and young people will be placed at greater distance if there are fewer or no in-house residential places available.
- The mitigating action to the above risk is that accompanying investment in the Brokerage Service has been made as a mechanism to source well-matched and value for money placements both in the independent sector and through in-house provision.
- The need to use the most appropriate, effective and efficient service

1.5 **Overlap with other policies, services etc:**

Placements offered to children at Birchen Lane form part of the overall placement options for children in care to Devon County Council. Placements are sought for children by placing social workers through the Brokerage Service who work with a range of providers including:

- In house fostering – Devon Fostering
- In house supported lodgings – Devon Young People's Accommodation Service
- In house residential services- Rifford Road and Blossom Corner
- External fostering – through a number of approved providers
- External residential - again through a number of approved providers

The Devon County Council Placement Strategy has a target of recruiting 100 more fostering places, which will help mitigate the impact of not having in-house beds.

For children and young people with complex special needs and chronic health needs, short break services are provided through Virgin Care. Where children require secure accommodation, this can be accessed through the Atkinson Unit.

Children in care have many and diverse needs, and come into care as the result of neglect, abuse, family dysfunction or other loss or trauma. The range of provision reflects the diversity of situations and needs presented by the children and matching takes place to provide the placement best suited to meet those needs.

Ideally, children should be offered a choice of placement, but in reality this is rarely an option; a pattern reflected nationally for some time³. Devon has a strong matching policy and ethos, for both fostering and residential placements⁴.

³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmchilsch/111/11108.htm>

1.6 The following stakeholders have been involved in this assessment:

The local authority is taking into consideration the potential needs of children and young people who **may** need placements in the future from the perspective that, for the majority of children and young people, their needs will be better met in a family setting than in a residential setting. It does however recognise that comparison between the two types of provision is difficult because of considerable variation in type and form of residential care and foster care and that for some young people a family setting will not be appropriate and therefore a range of placement options is still required.^{5, 6}

As stated, the decision has already been made to suspend placements at Birchen Lane (which was required to be made in the immediate due to potential safeguarding issues), so consultation regarding impact on those young people in placement at the time was not possible. Plans were put in place to move the young people to suitable alternative placements (some of which were already in planning prior to the decision to cease new admissions) and the children moved on in a measured way. Strategy Meetings have been held as described.

Consequently, the views collated here are gathered from relevant documentation and children's feedback and will be used to inform the consultation.

Children and young people who may need future placements – as the unit is not accepting new admissions at present, and therefore there are no children or young people matched as potential residents, the information offered here is gathered from previous residents via the 'My Review Survey' and 'The Pledge Review' – both conducted during Spring / Summer 2013. In the feedback received from a small number of residents of the unit, the young people indicated that they were well cared for where they lived.

Parents / Carers of children and young people – As above – no parents are currently linked to the unit through their child being placed. Representation will be sought by engaging the Children in Care Council to take part of the consultation process.

Staff who work in and manage the unit – There will be a formal staff consultation process, involving Trade Unions, following Devon County Council Policy.

Independent Reviewing Officers This service has responsibilities and duties for ensuring the Local Authority fulfils its function as a 'corporate parent' and a role in supporting the Local Authority to assess the quality and effectiveness of local authority planning and support for children. Views will be sought as part of the consultation process.

Ofsted (as the approving registration body for the units) Ofsted was fully involved in

Ensuring a sufficient supply of good quality placements, Looked-after Children - Children, Schools and Families Committee, April 2009

⁴ http://devonchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_place_resi_care.html#ident_approval

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jun/21/residential-care-home-children-fostering> Young Person's perspective, Dawn Howley, The Guardian, 21 June 2011

⁶ <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr05.pdf> , Fostering Success, An exploration of the Research Literature in foster care, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Wilson et al, 2004, p31

the multi-agency risk assessment process for Birchen Lane and is aware of the proposals being consulted upon.

Elected members and DCC officers as corporate parents – Elected members carry out the ‘Regulation 33 Visitor’ role for the residential homes, and so have had direct knowledge of the unit. Regulation 33 requires a visit on a monthly basis from a person independent of the home, to monitor the running of the unit. Elected members are part of the consultation relating to the proposed unit closure.

Brokerage Team (who arrange placements) – The Brokerage Team draw information from a range of providers, so other than a potential increase in placement search time (and the costs associated with same) there are no significant impacts anticipated on this team through the proposed home closure.

Independent Providers (who may wish to provide an alternative service, or indeed take on the existing homes) – It is likely that the proposed closure of Birchen Lane will create additional business in the placement market for external providers, they will be consulted with.

Virgin Care (as the locally contracted provider of services to children with special needs – the latter being occasionally placed in the units) The vast majority of children who are supported by Virgin Care have needs which would be too complex to be dealt with at Birchen Lane so no impact is expected for those young people. In the past, where emergency placements have been made for children with special needs, these have been short term in nature whilst a more appropriate placement is sourced; additional staffing has been drafted in as necessary whilst alternative plans are made.

1.7 The following research or guidance has been referred to, or advice sought, in order to inform the assessment:

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf *Living in Children’s Residential Homes*, Research Report DFE-RR201, ISBN: 978-1-78105-090-3 © University of Bristol, March 2012
2. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmchilsch/111/11108.htm> *Ensuring a sufficient supply of good quality placements*, Looked-after Children - Children, Schools and Families Committee, April 2009
3. http://devonchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_place_resi_care.html#ident_appro_val *Devon County Council Policies and Procedures*
4. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report58/files/literaturereview.pdf> *Therapeutic approaches to social work in residential child care settings: Literature review*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, May 2012
5. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jun/21/residential-care-home-children-fostering> *Young Person’s perspective*, Dawn Howley, The Guardian, 21 June 2011
6. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr05.pdf> , *Fostering Success, An exploration of the Research Literature in foster care*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Wilson et al, 2004, p31

1.8 Options Appraisal

Option	Pros	Cons	Cost/Achievability
N/A			

Recommended/preferred option(s):

Not applicable.

2. Analysis

2.1 Social impacts

	In what way is this characteristic relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Age:	This characteristic is relevant as the potential future residents of Birchen Lane are aged between 10 and 17 years.
Disability:	This characteristic applies as the children and young people may have a range of special needs including autism spectrum disorders and chronic health issues such as diabetes.
Gender/Sex (men and women):	This applies as the unit can accommodate children and young people of both genders.
Marriage and civil partnership:	This could potentially apply to young people aged 16-18 years who can enter into a marriage or civil partnership from age 16 (with parental permission – unless in Scotland where no permission is required).
Pregnancy and maternity:	This could also apply, although an alternative more appropriate placement would be likely to be sought once the pregnancy was known.
Race/ethnicity:	This characteristic applies as the young people who are potential residents could come from any background.
Religion/belief:	This applies as the young people could hold a range of faiths or beliefs.

Sexual orientation:	This characteristic applies as the unit is open to young people from any sexual orientation.
Trans-gender/gender identity:	Gender identity could be a relevant characteristic, but trans-gender less likely given the age of the young people.
Other (e.g. socio-economic, general health and wellbeing, human rights, safeguarding):	All children and young people who are resident in the units will need to be safeguarded, and their health, well-being and human rights protected and promoted.
Overall degree of relevance to equality:	High
Geographic areas affected:	Birchen Lane accepts young people from across the county of Devon. Occasionally, there might also be a young person from another local authority placed on an emergency basis until arrangements can be made to return them to their home authority.

2.1.1 Positive impacts:

<p>The proposal to cease services at Birchen Lane seeks to promote positive impacts and is predicated on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the belief that high quality alternative placements will be available for potential future residents, through the strengthening of the Devon Fostering Service and an improved market relationship with external providers • increased and more effective use of Family Group Conferencing at the point of a child potentially needing care, will reduce pressure on placement choice, and raise the use of family and friends care, and • that, for the majority of children, a family setting will minimise disadvantage and promote strong outcomes across the protected characteristics. To support this, training and development in understanding the potential prejudices to which children in care and care leavers can be subjected is offered to all Devon Foster Carers through their induction and preparation, supervision, support groups and specialist courses.

2.1.2 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

<p>The potential negative impacts of ceasing services at Birchen Lane could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced choice of placement (at least in the short term, for example until Devon Fostering Service recruits new carers, and if the independent sector cannot offer sufficient options) – the mitigation actions taken to minimise this include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investment in the fostering service to increase recruitment activity, and to further enhance support being offered to carers to promote placement stability

2. Ongoing investment in the brokerage service to further improve matching and placement maximisation in the independent sector

- Loss of collective expertise of experienced and dedicated staff teams at the units – this is being mitigated against in the short-term through temporary redeployment of some of the Birchen Lane staff to other areas of business (and would be further mitigated if all staff were similarly redeployed on a permanent basis) so that their knowledge and expertise is still used to improve outcomes for children who have vulnerabilities across the protected characteristics. The geographical location of Birchen Lane at Tiverton decreases the likelihood of local redeployment as there are fewer services operating in the Tiverton area, thus increasing the likelihood of travel to work time and cost for redeployed staff.

(Please note that as there are no children currently placed in the home, there are no direct impacts on known children.)

2.3.4 Neutral impacts:

None noted.

2.2 Economic impacts

	In what way is this factor relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Impact on knowledge and skills:	Redeployment of Birchen Lane staff to other areas of Devon County Council business would retain the knowledge and skills of the staff group to work with vulnerable children affected by the protected characteristics. The children themselves would continue to receive support to promote their education and training through their alternative placements.
Impact on employment levels:	Negligible if redeployment possible internally or externally. Similarly the children will receive support to promote their education elsewhere.
Impact on local business:	Although Birchen Lane uses local businesses in many forms, the impact of closure is likely to be fairly small as the workers will continue to live in and contribute to the Devon economy in most cases.

2.2.1 Positive impacts:

It is anticipated that by increasing the pool of foster carers, there will be an overall saving of costs to the local authority through an effective 'invest to save' policy.

2.2.2 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

There could be a negative impact on staff if full redeployment of staff is not possible (not yet known).

2.3 Environmental impacts

2.3.1 The policy or practice does not require the identification of environmental impacts using this Impact Assessment process because it is subject to (please select and proceed to Section 2.3, otherwise complete table below):

	Devon County Council's Environmental Review Process for permitted development highway schemes.
	Planning Permission under the Town and Country Planning Act (1990).
	Strategic Environmental Assessment under European Directive 2001/42/EC "on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment".

	In what way is this factor relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Reduce waste, and send less waste to landfill:	Very limited effect as any waste produced by the unit is likely to be dispersed amongst any other placement in which the young people are living.
Conserve and enhance biodiversity (the variety of living species):	Limited effect – as above.
Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape:	Not applicable.
Conserve and enhance the quality and character of our built environment and public spaces:	Not applicable.
Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage:	Not applicable.
Minimise greenhouse gas emissions:	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise):	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Contribute to reducing water consumption:	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.

Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level):	Not applicable.
Other (please state below):	None known.

2.3.2 Positive impacts:

Limited as stated above.

2.3.3 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

None known.

2.4 Combined Impacts

2.4.1 Linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts:

No conflicts known.

2.4.2 'Social Value' of planned commissioned/procured services:

- As Birchen Lane is a council-owned residence, there is the potential to sell off the property
- Consideration could also be given to using the building for an alternative DCC purpose
- Temporary alternative employment has been found for some of the unit staff affected by the suspension of placements – permanent alternative posts would have to be explored if the unit is to close, or redundancies considered.

2.4.3 Potential impacts on partner agencies:

- Potential development opportunity for an alternative provider.
- Potential resource saving for police if the units are permanently closed as currently the police invest time in safeguarding the young people placed.

3. Actions and risk management

3.1 Actions:

- Redevelopment of the Fostering Service and increased resources for recruitment

of new carers is in place and work underway to recruit, assess and prepare new fostering families.

- Revision of the placement request form has been undertaken, with greater emphasis on matching considerations to promote improved matching and safeguarding.
- If the unit closes the county council will need to remain vigilant in addressing child sexual exploitation risks in the area.

3.2 How will you monitor the actual impacts of recommendations/decisions (consider what service user monitoring and consultation is necessary)?:

Placement requests are monitored on an on-going basis by the Brokerage Team – this will indicate the nature of placements required for children and will also monitor how those placement requests are met and by which provision.

3.3 Risk assessment

Inherent risk (mark an X in one box).

If the service is ceased, and no alternative placements identified, then the potential impact on any future children requiring a similar provision would be significant, as the children and young people have many vulnerabilities under the protected characteristics. However, alternative placements have been found during the period of temporary suspension.

Severity	Catastrophic	5					
	Major	4				x	
	Moderate	3					
	Minor	2					
	Negligible	1					
			1	2	3	4	5
			Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain

Likelihood (in a 5 year timeframe)

Current risk (mark an X in one box).

If the strategy to create additional placements through redevelopment of the fostering service is successful, the local authority would be replacing the lost residential placements with family based care, which we believe will lead to better outcomes for children and young people.

Severity	Catastrophic	5					
	Major	4		x			
	Moderate	3					
	Minor	2					
	Negligible	1					
			1	2	3	4	5
			Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain

Likelihood (in a 5 year timeframe)

Impact Assessment completed by:		Responsible officer:	
Name/Job Title(s)		Name/Job Title	
Andrea Morris Professional and Governance Lead (Social Work)		Malcolm Vede Head of Service (Social Care Provision)	
Date of sign off:			

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1. Background

1.1 Title:

Proposal to cease service at Blossom Corner Community Home, a children's home in Exeter.

1.2 Description:

This impact assessment considers the proposal to cease services at a Devon County Council residential unit for children; namely Blossom Corner Community Home, Exeter. Consultation is to be undertaken.

Blossom Corner Community Home (hereafter referred to as 'Blossom Corner') is a 6 bedded unit providing care for children aged 10-17 years on a short to mid-term basis, with a staffing compliment of 15 people, including a Manager and Deputy Manager, 10.5 whole time equivalent residential social workers and a domestic worker. The home is currently operating as a three-bedded unit, in line with developing national thinking that children can be better-served in smaller scale residential units. Ofsted research in 2011¹ into twelve children's homes who consistently maintained an 'Outstanding' grading demonstrated that there is no 'typical' children's home in terms of optimum size, but growing awareness of potentially increased risk of child sexual exploitation linked to residential care establishments being targeted, and the increasingly complex needs of residents points towards greater protection afforded in units with fewer children.

Blossom Corner is operated by Devon County Council from premises owned by the council. The unit is required to be registered by Ofsted, and is currently graded as 'Good with Outstanding Features', having previously attained an 'Outstanding' grading under the previous inspection framework.

At the time of writing there is one child living at Blossom Corner, in a short-term

¹ OFSTED, 'Outstanding children's homes', March 2011, Reference 100228

placement.

Partners who contribute to providing these residential services to children include Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who offer therapeutic input to the residents and guidance to staff, Children in Care Nurses who provide health assessments, advice and information and where necessary support from the Virtual School for Children in Care. Strong links are also established with the local community police teams.

In addition to these providers, stakeholders are described as follows:

- Children and young people who may need future placements
- Parents / Carers of children and young people/ Children in Care Council
- Staff who work in and manage the unit
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Ofsted (as the approving registration body for the units)
- Elected members and DCC officers as corporate parents
- DCC's Brokerage Team (who arrange placements)
- Independent Providers
- Virgin Care (as the locally contracted provider of services to children with special needs)

1.3 **Service users:**

Blossom Corner currently offers placements for up to 3 children of either gender from across Devon who require a residential placement (of this nature).

Young people who need placements may have experienced family breakdown, have been abused or neglected or faced multiple placement moves. Their needs are frequently complex; occasionally the young people will also have diagnosed medical conditions such as diabetes. Please note that children with complex physical needs or who require nursing care are not within the scope of this unit.

1.4 **Describe any reasons for change and intended aims and benefits:**

As stated, ceasing the service would result in a reduction of 3 residential places. The proposal is part of an overall shift in policy and practice. The aims are to strengthen Devon's Fostering Service (and provide more foster placements), at the same time as improving 'early help' to families and increasing the use of Family Group Conferencing to contribute to the strategy to encourage family-based options for children and reduce general admissions to care.

There are several drivers in respect of the proposal, which can be summarised as:

- National social work (and inspectorate) thinking and research in respect of best practice relating to alternative placements for children unable to live with their families. In the UK there is a strong preference for family based placements via fostering or family and friends care. There is also national thinking in regard to the preferred style of residential home and optimum number of residents (smaller units with perhaps two or three residents, with therapeutic input),² ³ thus making larger

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf
Living in Children's Residential Homes, Research Report DFE-RR201, ISBN: 978-1-78105-090-3

units of 6-7 beds (as Blossom Corner previously operated) no longer the preferred option.

- The County Council approach is that good quality family based care will, in the majority of cases, promote better outcomes for children than institutional care.
- Investment has been made in Devon's Fostering Service to pursue this approach where family-based care is the preferred option for the majority of children requiring care placements. The risk in this strategy is that sufficient fostering placements of the right calibre and experience will not be available swiftly enough to cater for the complex needs of young people who require placements in the near future and/or who cannot manage the intensity of a family placement. In addition, as there are a restricted number of external residential placements available, closure of the unit could result in children and young people being placed further away from their home of origin, potentially outside of the county.
- The mitigating action to the above risk is that accompanying investment in the Brokerage Service has been made as a mechanism to source well-matched and value for money placements both in the independent sector and through in-house provision.
- The need to use the most appropriate, effective and efficient service

1.5 **Overlap with other policies, services etc:**

Placements offered to children at Blossom Corner form part of the overall placement options for children in care to Devon County Council. Placements are sought for children by placing social workers through the Brokerage Service who work with a range of providers including:

- In house fostering – Devon Fostering
- In house supported lodgings – Devon Young People's Accommodation Service
- In house residential services- Rifford Road, Birchin Lane and Blossom Corner
- External fostering – through a number of agreed providers
- External residential - again through a number of agreed providers

The Devon County Council Placement Strategy has a target of recruiting 100 more fostering places, which will help mitigate the impact of not having in-house beds.

For children and young people with complex special needs and chronic health needs, short break services are provided through Virgin Care. Where children require secure accommodation, this can be accessed through the Atkinson Unit.

Children in care have many and diverse needs, and come into care as the result of neglect, abuse, family dysfunction or other loss or trauma. The range of provision reflects the diversity of situations and needs presented by the children and matching takes place to provide the placement best suited to meet those needs.

³ <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report58/files/literaturereview.pdf>

Therapeutic approaches to social work in residential child care settings: Literature review, Social Care Institute for Excellence, May 2012

Ideally, children should be offered a choice of placement, but in reality this is rarely an option; a pattern reflected nationally for some time⁴. Devon has a strong matching policy and ethos, for both fostering and residential placements⁵.

1.6 The following stakeholders have been involved in this assessment:

The local authority is taking into consideration the needs of the child currently living in Blossom Corner and the potential needs of children and young people who **may** need placements in the future from the perspective that, for the majority of children and young people, their needs will be better met in a family setting than in a residential setting. It does however recognise that comparison between the two types of provision is difficult because of considerable variation in type and form of residential care and foster care and that for some young people a family setting will not be appropriate and therefore a range of placement options is still required.^{6, 7}

Children and young people currently placed – in the event of a decision to cease services within the unit, the move-on planning for the young person in residence would be robust and based on a careful consideration of their needs. Whilst alternative placements are often difficult to secure, every effort is made to match the young person with the most appropriate available resource to meet their needs. The securing of such placements would also influence the timetable for unit closure, as meeting the child's needs would impact on decisions regarding the timing of when the unit could be closed.

Children and young people who may need future placements – as we are not able to identify future children who may need placements feedback from the children who have been living at Blossom Corner will be considered within this consultation.

Parents / Carers of children and young people – because the current placement is a short-term one and any closure will only take place after that placement ends, there is no need for consultation which would, indeed, be potentially disturbing for that child. Representation will be sought by engaging the Children in Care Council to take part of the consultation process

Staff who work in and manage the unit – There will be a formal staff consultation process, involving Trade Unions, following DCC Policy.

Independent Reviewing Officers – This service has responsibilities and duties for ensuring the Local Authority fulfils its function as a 'corporate parent' and a role in supporting the Local Authority to assess the quality and effectiveness of local authority planning and support for children. Views will be sought as part of the consultation process.

⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmchilch/111/11108.htm>

Ensuring a sufficient supply of good quality placements, Looked-after Children - Children, Schools and Families Committee, April 2009

⁵ http://devonchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_place_resi_care.html#ident_approval

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jun/21/residential-care-home-children-fostering> Young Person's perspective, Dawn Howley, The Guardian, 21 June 2011

⁷ <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr05.pdf>, Fostering Success, An exploration of the Research Literature in foster care, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Wilson et al, 2004, p31

Ofsted (as the approving registration body for the units) - is aware of the proposals being consulted upon.

Elected members and DCC officers as corporate parents – Elected members carry out the 'Regulation 33 Visitor' role for the residential homes, and so have had direct knowledge of the unit. Regulation 33 requires a visit on a monthly basis from a person independent of the home, to monitor the running of the unit. This impact assessment forms part of the documentation which will be shared with elected members as part of the consultation relating to the proposed unit closure.

Brokerage Team (who arrange placements) – The Brokerage Team draw information from a range of providers, so other than a potential increase in placement search time (and the costs associated with same) there are no significant impacts anticipated on this team through the proposed home closure.

Independent Providers (who may wish to provide an alternative service, or indeed take on the existing homes) – it is likely that the proposal to cease services at Blossom Corner could create an additional niche in the placement market for external providers, they will be consulted with as part of this process.

Virgin Care (as the locally contracted provider of services to children with special needs – the latter being occasionally placed in the units) The vast majority of children who are supported by Virgin Care have needs which would be too complex to be dealt with at Blossom Corner so no impact is expected for those young people. In the past, where emergency placements have been made for children with special needs, these have been short term in nature whilst a more appropriate placement is sourced; additional staffing has been drafted in as necessary whilst alternative plans are made.

1.7 The following research or guidance has been referred to, or advice sought, in order to inform the assessment:

1. Ofsted, '*Outstanding children's homes*', March 2011, Reference 100228
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf *Living in Children's Residential Homes*, Research Report DFE-RR201, ISBN: 978-1-78105-090-3 © University of Bristol, March 2012
3. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmchilsch/111/11108.htm> *Ensuring a sufficient supply of good quality placements*, Looked-after Children - Children, Schools and Families Committee, April 2009
4. http://devonchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_place_resi_care.html#ident_approval *Devon County Council Policies and Procedures*
5. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report58/files/literaturereview.pdf> *Therapeutic approaches to social work in residential child care settings: Literature review*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, May 2012
6. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jun/21/residential-care-home-children-fostering> *Young Person's perspective*, Dawn Howley, The Guardian, 21 June 2011
7. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr05.pdf> , *Fostering Success, An exploration of the Research Literature in foster care*, Social Care

1.8 Options Appraisal

Option	Pros	Cons	Cost/Achievability
N/A			

Recommended/preferred option(s):

Not applicable.

2. Analysis

2.1 Social impacts

	In what way is this characteristic relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Age:	This characteristic is relevant as the potential future residents of Blossom Corner are aged between 10 and 17 years.
Disability:	This characteristic applies as the children and young people may have a range of special needs including autism spectrum disorders and chronic health issues such as diabetes.
Gender/Sex (men and women):	This applies as the unit can accommodate children and young people of both genders.
Marriage and civil partnership:	This could potentially apply to young people aged 16-18 years who can enter into a marriage or civil partnership from age 16 (with parental permission – unless in Scotland where no permission is required).
Pregnancy and maternity:	This could also apply, although an alternative more appropriate placement would be likely to be sought once the pregnancy was known.
Race/ethnicity:	This characteristic applies as the young people who are potential residents could come from any background.
Religion/belief:	This applies as the young people could hold a range

	of faiths or beliefs.
Sexual orientation:	This characteristic applies as the unit is open to young people from any sexual orientation.
Trans-gender/gender identity:	Gender identity could be a relevant characteristic, but trans-gender less likely given the age of the young people.
Other (e.g. socio-economic, general health and wellbeing, human rights, safeguarding):	All children and young people who are resident in the unit will need to be safeguarded, and their health, well-being and human rights protected and promoted.
Overall degree of relevance to equality:	High
Geographic areas affected:	Blossom Corner accepts young people from across the county of Devon. Occasionally, there might also be a young person from another local authority placed on an emergency basis until arrangements can be made to return them to their home authority.

2.1.1 Positive impacts:

<p>The proposal to close Blossom Corner seeks to promote positive impacts and is predicated on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the belief that high quality alternative placements will be available for potential future residents, through the strengthening of the Devon Fostering Service and an improved market relationship with external providers • increased and more effective use of Family Group Conferencing at the point of a child potentially needing care, will reduce pressure on placement choice, and raise the use of family and friends care, and • that for the majority of children, a family setting will minimise disadvantage and promote strong outcomes across the protected characteristics. To support this, training and development in understanding the potential prejudices to which children in care and care leavers can be subjected is offered to all Devon Foster Carers through their induction and preparation, supervision, support groups and specialist courses.
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2.1.2 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

<p>The potential negative impacts of closing Blossom Corner could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced choice of placement (at least in the short term, for example until Devon Fostering Service recruits new carers, and if the independent sector cannot offer sufficient options) – which could result in children and young people being placed further away if local placements are not available. Some children are not able to be placed in a fostering setting, so access to residential placements will need to be factored in even if Devon chooses to commission these externally rather than
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provide them internally.

The mitigation actions taken to minimise the reduced placement choice include:

1. Investment in the fostering service to increase recruitment activity, and to further enhance support being offered to carers to promote placement stability
 2. Ongoing investment in the brokerage service to further improve matching and placement maximisation in the independent sector
- Loss of collective expertise of experienced and dedicated staff teams at the unit – this could be mitigated against through redeployment of Blossom Corner staff to other areas of Devon County Council Children’s Services business.

2.3.4 Neutral impacts:

None noted.

2.2 Economic impacts

	In what way is this factor relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Impact on knowledge and skills:	Redeployment of Blossom Corner staff to other areas of Devon County Council business would retain the knowledge and skills of the staff group to work with vulnerable children affected by the protected characteristics. The children themselves would continue to receive support to promote their education and training through their alternative placements.
Impact on employment levels:	Negligible if redeployment possible internally or externally. Similarly the children will receive support to promote their education elsewhere.
Impact on local business:	Although Blossom Corner uses local businesses in many forms, the impact of closure is likely to be fairly small as the workers will continue to live in and contribute to the Devon economy in most cases.

2.2.1 Positive impacts:

It is anticipated that by increasing the pool of foster carers, there will be an overall saving of costs to the local authority through an effective ‘invest to save’ policy.

2.2.2 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

There could be a negative impact on staff if full redeployment of staff is not possible (not yet known).

2.3 Environmental impacts

2.3.1 The policy or practice does not require the identification of environmental impacts using this Impact Assessment process because it is subject to (please select and proceed to Section 2.3, otherwise complete table below):

	Devon County Council's Environmental Review Process for permitted development highway schemes.
	Planning Permission under the Town and Country Planning Act (1990).
	Strategic Environmental Assessment under European Directive 2001/42/EC "on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment".

	In what way is this factor relevant, or not relevant, to the service, policy or practice?
Reduce waste, and send less waste to landfill:	Very limited effect as any waste produced by the unit is likely to be dispersed amongst any other placement in which the young people are living.
Conserve and enhance biodiversity (the variety of living species):	Limited effect – as above.
Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape:	Not applicable.
Conserve and enhance the quality and character of our built environment and public spaces:	Not applicable.
Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage:	Not applicable.
Minimise greenhouse gas emissions:	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise):	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Contribute to reducing water consumption:	Limited effect, as waste reduction above.
Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level):	Not applicable.

Other (please state below):	None known.
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2.3.2 Positive impacts:

Limited as stated above.

2.3.3 Negative impacts and mitigations or justification:

None known.

2.4 Combined Impacts

2.4.1 Linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts:

No conflicts known.

2.4.2 'Social Value' of planned commissioned/procured services:

- The closure of Blossom Corner as a children's home may enable the building's use as another form of resource.
- As Blossom Corner is a council-owned residence, there is the potential to sell the site and recoup capital monies.
- Redeployment of staff to permanent alternative posts would have to be explored if the unit is to close, this would retain the skill base within children's services. Alternatively redundancies may be considered.

2.4.3 Potential impacts on partner agencies:

- Potential development opportunity for an alternative provider.
- Potential resource saving for police if the units are permanently closed (and not redeveloped by an alternative provider) as currently the police invest time in safeguarding the young people placed.

3. Actions and risk management

3.1 Actions:

- The future use of the building and site to be considered in the broader County Council Accommodation Strategy during 2014.
- Redevelopment of the Fostering Service and increased resources for recruitment of new carers is in place and work underway to recruit, assess and prepare new fostering families.
- Revision of the placement request form has been undertaken, with greater emphasis on matching considerations to promote improved matching and

safeguarding.

3.2 How will you monitor the actual impacts of recommendations/decisions (consider what service user monitoring and consultation is necessary)?:

Placement requests are monitored on an on-going basis by the Brokerage Team – this will indicate the nature of placements required for children and will also monitor how those placement requests are met and by which provision.

3.3 Risk assessment

Inherent risk (mark an X in one box).

If the home is closed, and no alternative placements identified, then the potential impact on any future children requiring a similar provision would be significant, as the children and young people have many vulnerabilities under the protected characteristics.

Severity	Catastrophic	5					
	Major	4				x	
	Moderate	3					
	Minor	2					
	Negligible	1					
			1	2	3	4	5
			Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain

Likelihood (in a 5 year timeframe)

Current risk (mark an X in one box).

If the strategy to create additional placements through redevelopment of the fostering service is successful, the local authority would be replacing the lost residential placements with family based care, which we believe will lead to better outcomes for children and young people.

Severity	Catastrophic	5					
	Major	4		x			
	Moderate	3					
	Minor	2					
	Negligible	1					
			1	2	3	4	5
			Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain

Likelihood (in a 5 year timeframe)