
To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 20 August 2020

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Changes in residential children's houses

1. Summary

- 1.1. Residential childcare refers to the service provided within our children's houses and is a form of care provided to children who require to be cared for out with a family setting. Residential childcare is provided by Renfrewshire Council when the specific needs of children and young people means that they cannot remain living with their parents or in an alternative family setting such as kinship or foster care.
 - 1.2. Renfrewshire Council has radically reviewed and upgraded its residential childcare estate over the last 15 years by reducing the number of registered placements provided from 58 to 28, investing in three purpose designed and built houses and launching the Philosophy of Care which is a relationship and trauma informed approach to supporting the young people in the children's houses.
 - 1.3. Through the development of alternative supports the demand for residential childcare beds within the council has reduced each year since 2014. Renfrewshire currently has 5 residential children's house registered with the Care Inspectorate. Across these 5 houses we have a capacity to accommodate 28 children. At the present time there are 18 children and young people accommodated across four of these establishments. The fifth establishment Longcroft has been temporarily closed since December 2019 when the young people who lived there moved to live with their extended family on a kinship care arrangement.
 - 1.4. This report seeks approval to close Longcroft on a permanent basis, cancel its registration with the Care Inspectorate and declare the property surplus. The report also highlights that Roneil Children's House has been closed and its registration with the care inspectorate cancelled, in line with a decision made at a previous decision of this Board. Members are asked to declare the Roneil property surplus.
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2. Recommendations

2.1. Members of the Board are asked to

- a) note the improvements made within residential childcare in Renfrewshire;
 - b) note the progress made to reduce numbers of accommodated children within our children's houses;
 - c) approve the closure of Longcroft Children's House and the cancellation of its registration with the Care Inspectorate; and
 - d) declare the Longcroft and Roneil properties as surplus.
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3. Background

- 3.1. Local authorities have a duty to secure the welfare and protection of children and young people in their care and as corporate parents should look after the young people as any other parent would look after their own child. A number of children in Renfrewshire require to be accommodated in local authority care. In most situations we try to place these children with foster carers however this is not always possible due to carer availability or appropriate due to the needs of the young person. In these circumstances we place children in children's residential houses. Residential care is a positive option for some children.
- 3.2. Renfrewshire Council has made significant improvements to this area of service delivery in recent years. We have built three new purpose designed and built children's houses and reduced our overall capacity from 59 to 28 whilst at the same time improved our staff to child ratio and moved to a position of having wakened night shift in all of our houses instead of staff sleeping over to supplement wakened night shift. All of our houses now have single bedrooms with our three new houses having ensuite facilities also.
- 3.3. Renfrewshire currently has 5 residential children's houses: Longcroft, Beech, Arkleston, Barochan and Brediland. Arkleston, Barochan and Brediland are the three new purpose-built facilities. Beech Avenue provides good sized accommodation which is well integrated into the local community.
- 3.4. Longcroft Children's House is registered to provide accommodation for 6 young people in a single storey house which was converted from two smaller local houses. These were formerly park attendant's accommodation which is positioned within Robertson Park in Renfrew. The accommodation has a layout which makes it difficult to replicate the elements of good practice regarding living space we have in our other residential houses.
- 3.5. In late 2018, the service accommodated a family of five within one of our other children's houses. This family required to share accommodation with other unrelated children and after a period of assessment it was assessed that the family would be better placed on their own. Fortuitously, due to other planned moves across the residential resources, we were able to move this family to Longcroft to enable them to be the sole residents in February 2019.
- 3.6. When these children were discharged from care in December 2019, a decision was made to temporarily suspend Longcroft's registration as a care home and treated the beds there as "mothballed" meaning they are not in use

but can be stood up at any point necessary. This approach was adopted to allow the testing of the view that we no longer required a capacity of 28 residential care beds.

- 3.7. Over the course of the past 5 years there has been decreased demand for beds and we have consequently reduced our capacity in line with demand. Since the temporary suspension of Longcroft's registration we have had a consistent occupation level of between 18 and 21 beds, with no pressure to access the mothballed beds at Longcroft.
- 3.8. The reasons for the reduction in demand is not related to a single cause, however increased community based initiatives such as Functional Family Therapy and Intensive Family Support are likely to have played and will continue to play a significant role in reducing this demand and are also part of our strategy to reduce the overall number of accommodated children. Added to this has been children's services success in recruiting foster carers and placing children with kinship carers.
- 3.9. The number of children in our internal residential children's houses had been reducing and at the point the country entered lockdown it was decided to move young people from Roneil to live in the other houses where there was space for them. The number of children requiring internal residential children's placements has not been higher or lower during the current COVID crisis.
- 3.10. We have now maintained our position of operating within capacity of less than 22 for more than 6 months and have confidence that we can meet the demand for residential care with 22 beds across 4 Children's Houses. Longcroft is therefore no longer required as a children's house and children's services no longer requires this property. Members are therefore asked to agree to the closure of Longcroft, cancel its registration with the Care Inspectorate and declare the property surplus to requirements.
- 3.11. This Board previously agreed that Roneil children's house would close when the new children's house in Linwood was completed. The new Linwood house has been operational for over 12 months and no young people are currently living in Roneil. The registration for Roneil has been cancelled in line with the previous decision of the Board. Members are asked to agree to declaring Roneil as surplus to requirements.
- 3.12. The reducing demand for residential children's houses means that the service has been operating with higher numbers of residential childcare staff than required. As part of the Right for Renfrewshire Programme staff in this area of service were offered the opportunity to express an interest in VER/VR. As the right for Renfrewshire Programme has been suspended there will be a need for staff redeployment which will be managed in consultation with individual staff members and the trade unions. During the COVID-19 crisis the staff have been fully deployed to ensure staffing ratios were maintained covering staff shielding and reducing the need for overtime and agency workers.

Implications of this report

1. Financial

Some minor savings will be made in the day to day running costs however most of the costs associated with the houses are related to employee costs. Longcroft and Roneil have the potential to provide a capital receipt for the Council if sold.

2. HR and Organisational Development

As a result of the closure of Longcroft and Roneil the service has been operating with a higher number of residential childcare staff than required. Prior to lockdown residential staff were offered the opportunity to express an interest in voluntary early retirement or voluntary redundancy through the right for Renfrewshire Programme. As this programme is now suspended and pending a decision on restarting this, staff redeployment will be managed in consultation with the individual staff members and their trade union.

3. Community/Council Planning

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| Our Renfrewshire is thriving | - Providing good quality care is central to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in Renfrewshire are provided with an opportunity to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. |
| Building strong, safe and resilient communities | - Providing children and young people with safe, supportive and nurturing placements, increases the likelihood of them becoming effective citizens who contribute productively to the communities in which they live |

4. Legal

None.

5. Property/Assets

Longcroft and Roneil are now surplus to the requirements of Children's Services. The Council should consider if they can be used by other services or be disposed of through marketing.

6. Information Technology

None.

7. Equality and Human Rights

- (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is

for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website. (Report author to arrange this).

- 8. Health and Safety**
None.
- 9. Procurement**
None.
- 10. Risk**
None.
- 11. Privacy Impact**
None.
- 12. Cosla Policy Position**
None.
- 13. Climate Risk**
None.

List of Background Papers

- (a) None

Children's Services

MMcC/JT

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Author: Michelle McCargo, Children's Services Manager