

By: Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
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To: Children's Social Care & Health Cabinet Committee – 9 July 2014

Decision No: 14/00081

Subject: **Future of Millbank Reception and Assessment Centre**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To seek agreement to close the current reception accommodation for male UASC 16+ in Kent and to commission alternative accommodation

Recommendation: Members of the Children's Social Care & Health Committee are asked to:

ENDORSE the proposed decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Specialist Services will be asked to:

APPROVE the proposal to close the Reception Centre for UASC male 16+ and to commission alternative accommodation.

Introduction

1. (1) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who arrive in Kent are accommodated by KCC as part of the Local Authority's statutory duty towards children in care. They are placed in temporary accommodation for 6 – 8 weeks during which time they undergo a series of assessments including age, social care needs, education and health. In addition, they receive a basic orientation and independence skills training programme. Girls and boys under 16 are placed in foster care for this period. Boys who are assessed on arrival as over 16 are placed at a reception centre on Millbank Road in Ashford.

(2) The Millbank Reception Centre is owned and run by an externally contracted organisation Nayland Rock Ltd with temporary support staff employed by KCC on site. This centre has been used for this purpose since September 2008. This paper sets out the proposal to close this centre for the following reasons, it is larger than required and recent changes in Home Office funding to KCC make it unaffordable. Alternative accommodation will be commissioned which meets KCC's statutory duties, meets the needs of this small group of UASC arrivals and is within the funding limits.

Policy Context

2. (1) This proposal fits within the Bold Steps For Kent priority of improving how we procure and commission services. The commissioning of the new accommodation will be needs led and based on best value principles.
- (2) The proposal will achieve financial savings which will contribute to the Specialist Children's Service savings targets for 2014-15 identified within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Key Issues

3. (1) The current reception accommodation was established in September 2008 in emergency circumstances when KCC were responding to a large and sudden increase in the numbers of UASC arrivals to Kent. The facility consists of accommodation for up to 50 service users, a staffed reception desk, office space, interview and meeting rooms and full board catering facilities. Under the terms of the existing agreement KCC pay for exclusive use of the facility which means the centre is inefficient at times of low occupancy. Furthermore Kent is the only authority continuing to provide a reception centre of this kind for UASC arrivals.
- (2) Establishing the required capacity for this service is challenging as it is difficult to predict the numbers of UASC who may arrive at the port of Dover on any given day. However, based on analysis of occupancy at Millbank over the last 14 months the average occupancy at the centre was 16. The maximum occupancy was 35 and this occurred on one occasion only. Occupancy went over 20 on three occasions only, all during summer months. Analysing data over the last three years shows there is a clear trend of higher numbers of arrivals during the summer period. These figures demonstrate clearly that whilst there are some peaks in demand which can be planned for, the average bed space requirement for this group of UASC new arrivals is closer to 20 bed spaces and the current facility is too large.
- (3) Prior to September 2013, KCC received a Gateway Grant from the Home Office which covered the full cost of reception accommodation for UASC. This grant has been removed and replaced with a daily rate paid for each UASC aged 16/17. The impact of this change means that KCC can no longer afford to pay for a large reception centre and a new provision with a smaller flexible capacity based on demand needs to be commissioned.

Proposal

4. (1) It is proposed that smaller units of shared housing for use as Reception Accommodation will be sourced under the existing Accommodation Services contract which was tendered in 2012. The new reception accommodation will be similar to the housing provided for UASC when they move out of foster care and Millbank into the community after their first six weeks. It will, however be staffed by the provider for 12 hours per day in the same way as the Millbank Reception Centre is managed. The client group will be accommodated in individual furnished bed spaces of the same quality and standard as those at Millbank with shared facilities, kitchen and lounge areas. Reception Accommodation in smaller units of this kind will enable KCC to increase or decrease capacity according to the number of

arrivals and will facilitate an easier and quicker transition into longer term accommodation.

(2) The UASC Service has had discussions with the existing providers of Accommodation Services about the provision of this form of supported accommodation. There has been strong interest from providers and Service is confident that there is sufficient suitable accommodation available and at an affordable price to meet the council's needs. Negotiations for this provision will be concluded if the decision is taken to close Millbank and actual closure will not take place until suitable alternatives are in place.

Financial Implications

5. (1) This proposed change in accommodation will achieve significant savings on current expenditure as the new provision will be commissioned within the limits of the funding received for this purpose from the Home Office. The annual cost of the current Reception facility is £430,323. This figure is based on 2013-14 expenditure. This is largest part of the total cost of the Reception and Assessment service provided by KCC for this group. The other KCC costs are staffing (agency support staff), interpreting, transport and service user costs. . This proposal relates to the Reception facility costs only which is externally commissioned.

(2) The proposed new accommodation model will be smaller, based as closely as possible to actual numbers of arrivals and will not include the additional meeting room and catering facilities provided at Millbank. The budget will be set as a unit cost based on the Home Office funding rate leaving sufficient funding to cover additional support. Interpreting and living costs detailed above. Based on provisional costings, this approach is expected to achieve savings of at least 35%.

Legal Implications

6. (1) Children who arrive in Kent unaccompanied and claim asylum are accommodated, as part of KCC's statutory duty under Childcare Legislation towards children in care. Under this proposal KCC will continue to deliver its statutory duty towards this group of children and will therefore have no legal implications for KCC.

Personnel and Training Implications

7. (1) The support staff based at the Millbank Centre are agency staff members employed by KCC. This proposal will require a change of location and some change to working arrangements.

Property Implications

8. (1) The Millbank Reception Centre is privately owned by Nayland Rock Ltd and there are no property implications for KCC

Equality Impact Assessment

9. (1) An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which concluded the change to be of low impact.

Alternatives and Options

10. (1) This paper proposes an alternative accommodation arrangement for a portion of UASC new arrivals to Kent, those who are male 16+. It relates only to the 6-8 weeks following their arrival in the UK. The risks associated with this change have been considered and summarised in the table below

Risk	Actions proposed
Availability of emergency bed spaces if number of arrivals increase substantially	A minimum of 5 empty bed spaces will be available and ready at all times. Planning of capacity requirements with Providers will be ongoing to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation sourced and available
Meeting / Training / Interview rooms currently available at Millbank will not be available within the new accommodation. There is a risk of a lack of facilities for assessments, observations which contribute to the age assessment process and group training facilities	Careful planning will be undertaken in consultation with staff and other agencies using the facilities to plan alternative KCC venues and ensure that new accommodation has sufficient communal areas for this purpose
The centre at Millbank is in a central but discreet location and is managed well. There have been no community problems in the neighbourhood. The new accommodation will be in properties in the community with a potential increased risk of community problems	The new accommodation will be staffed by the provider in the same way as Millbank for 12 hours per day to identify any anti-social behaviour and prevent any problems. In addition, social workers and support staff will be visiting regularly.
Health & Safety risks. This client group are unknown when they arrive in the UK prior to assessment. They will in the new accommodation have easier access to kitchen facilities than they do at Millbank. This may present a higher Health & Safety risk	The presence of staff in the accommodation for 12 hours per day will mitigate against this risk. Emphasis will be placed on training service users in life skills and use of facilities in preparation for moving into very similar accommodation after 6 weeks

(2) SCSDIV MT was consulted on this proposal on the 24.6.14 and was supportive of the proposal.

(3) Informal consultation will take place with former service users, staff and stakeholders to inform the planning of the new accommodation.

Implementation Proposals

11. (1) The implementation timetable is set out below

Consultation with SCSDivMT	24.6.14
DMT agreement on proposal	By 31.6.14
Cabinet Committee	9.7.14
Lead Member decision	By 15.7.14
Notice to Millbank provider	16.7.14
Staff briefing	July 14
Planning and Consultation on alternative accommodation options	July / August 2014
Report back to SCS Div MT on progress of proposal	September 2014
Preparation of new accommodation	September 2014
Transition to new accommodation	From 1 st of October 2014

Recommendations

12. Members of the Children's Social Care & Health Committee are asked to:

ENDORSE the proposed decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Specialist Services will be asked to:

APPROVE the proposal to close the Reception Centre for UASC male 16+ and to commission alternative accommodation.

Appendix

13. Proposed Record of Decision

Background Documents - None

Contact Details

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