

Select Committee Briefing

SP23 Breaks for carers of disabled children
October 2022

Introduction

In this presentation we are going to cover:

- Firvale – background and context
- The alternative offer
- Consultation outcomes
- Staffing implications
- Summary
- Recommendation

Background to Proposal

- Firvale is a 9-bed overnight residential respite unit, in Basingstoke used by children and young people with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Firvale has been closed since March 2020 due to Covid pandemic.
- The breaks for carers of disabled children budget is £16.8m in total.
- Savings from this budget were proposed in the 2021 Balancing the Budget consultation.
- HCC subsequently undertook a formal public consultation, in 2022, which specifically sought views on the potential permanent closure of Firvale.
- Firvale has an annual budget for financial year 2022/23 of £900,000.
- Closure will deliver savings of £500k*, and also avoid an additional £400k+ of improvement costs.

*This has increased from the £450k figure used in the consultation due to the uplift in the budget from the new financial year of 2022/23 since the consultation was undertaken in financial year 2021/22

Background - Issues

- Since Firvale opened the immediate surrounding area has been extensively developed (Rooksdown).
- The bedrooms, grounds and gardens of Firvale are now overlooked by neighbouring properties, resulting in a loss of privacy for service users.
- At the point of closure, Firvale was accessed by only 12 children.
- Prior to closure, occupancy was poor – just a third of respite capacity was used.
- Firvale has a higher bed night cost than externally purchased respite provision.
- HCC has a duty to distribute our finite resources fairly and effectively.

Background – Partners

- Firvale is owned by Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (HHFT) and is jointly managed by HCC.
- HCC operated 5 of these beds to meet social care respite provision.
- The 5 social care respite beds have not been in use since March 2020.
- The remaining 4 beds are utilised by HHFT to meet health care needs.
- HHFT have continued to deliver health services from the Firvale site throughout the pandemic and continue to explore how they may use the building if the decision is made for HCC to withdraw.
- HCC officers have continued to support HHFT in their exploration of alternative usage.

Background - Overnight Respite

- Residential Overnight Respite (RONR) is one of the most expensive forms of community support provided to children with disabilities and their families.
- HCC has been keen to support children and their families using a more diverse range of services which directly address their needs.
- Other services available from HCC can reduce the need for ONR.
- RONR was provided in-house by HCC at Firvale, and continues to be commissioned from a range of external providers.
- Some families receive respite via Home from Home support, which is overnight respite with a foster carer.
- Other families receive Personal Budgets to organise their own support arrangements.

Cost of RONR at Firvale

- The cost per night of delivering respite at Firvale, based on a target occupancy figure of 80% (for a 1:2 staff to child ratio) was £731 per bed night.
- The equivalent (average) rate from HCC's contracted external providers is £361 per bed night.
- In the period to March 2020 Firvale was operating at approximately one third total occupancy.
- Due to under occupancy the actual cost of delivering overnight respite at Firvale was an average of £1,486.87 per night.

Background - Respite Usage

Currently:

- 56 children in Hampshire access HCC funded RONR
- Average provision is 25 nights per annum
- Total allocated provision 1,395 nights
- Of those children who previously attended Firvale, HCC are still finalising alternate respite provision for one child (the full assessment process with an existing provider is underway).

Alternative Respite Offer

- HCC continues to commission overnight respite services from third party providers at a competitive cost.
- HCC continues to work with this market to provide cost effective services, including overnight respite.
- More targeted use of Personal Budgets and other forms of support including:
 - Home from Home
 - Care support hours
 - Technology Enabled Care
 - Other interventions that address the root causes of the need for respite, such as sleep systems and other technology enabled care.
- The Hampshire Approach, which encourages families to use their own sustainable support networks.

Consultation

- Consultations opened on 17 January 2022. During the 10-weeks consultation period 6 public drop in sessions were scheduled, 2 of which were hosted online.
- A total of 58 responses to the public consultation were received.
- Key concerns raised about the proposal included:
 - that it would potentially reduce opportunities for respite
 - the impact (of the closure of Firvale) on those children and their families who were accessing it
 - the lack of suitable alternative respite provision
- Respondents were asked to describe the potential impact of the proposed closure:
 - 41 responses mentioned the impact on the families of service users
 - 30 responses mentioned an inability for service users to access respite
 - 14 responses mentioned the impact of increased travel
- Individual comments from the consultation and HCC's responses to them are detailed in the report

Staffing Implications

- Firvale requires 20.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) HCC staff.
- There are currently 13.6 FTE vacancies at Firvale.
- Since the closure of social care provision at Firvale staff have been relocated into roles across HCC's Childrens Services Department.
- Recruitment and retention poses a significant challenge across the children's social care sector
- Should the social care provision at Firvale be permanently closed, appropriate redeployment opportunities will be explored to seek to avoid compulsory redundancies, however, closure may lead to a small number of redundancies.
- Redundancy costs are estimated to be a maximum of £71,614 (including potential enhanced voluntary redundancy), the actual figure is expected to be lower due to the anticipated redeployment of staff.

Summary

- HCC can meet assessed respite need through the use of more cost effective services and provision.
- The range of alternatives offered make greater use of non-residential respite services.
- There continue to be challenges around the delivery of effective social care respite services from Firvale, including it's location, maintenance costs and staffing.
- Consultations have been undertaken to ensure that both public and staff have contributed their views which will be taken into account by the Lead Member on the Decision Day.

Recommendation

That the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the recommendation to permanently close social care provision at Firvale Residential Respite Unit by 31 March 2023.