

ANGUS COUNCIL

FAMILY, EDUCATION AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE – 14 JANUARY 2025

ANGUS CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

REPORT BY KIRSTY LEE, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JUSTICE

1. ABSTRACT

- 1.1 This report updates members of the Family, Education & Justice Committee on the progress of the development of a new residential children's house, as approved by Policy & Resources Committee on 6 December 2022.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

- 2.1 This report contributes to outcomes across a range of strategic plans:

The Angus Community Plan 2022-30:

- Provide the best start in life for children
- Improve physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals

The Council Plan 2023-2028:

- When children cannot safely live at home, keep our children local in Angus, providing for their education and family needs.

The Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2021-23

- Our children have the best start in life in a nurturing environment
- Our children growing up healthy, confident, and resilient with improving physical and mental health and strengthened emotional wellbeing

Angus Promise Plan (Corporate Parenting Strategy):

- Keeping children and young people within their local communities where that meets their needs.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1.1 It is recommended that the Family, Education and Justice Committee:
- (i) Notes the progress to date regarding the development of the new residential children's house;
 - (ii) Agrees that the Children, Families & Justice Service will pause the development of a further residential children's house until the completion of a review of the wider strategic priorities for the service; and
 - (iii) Instruct the Director of Children, Families and Justice to submit a report on progress to this Committee by the end of March 2026.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Council lacks capacity in children's residential services to provide care for all Angus children who require residential care placements. In November 2022 demand for placements was 200% more than Angus in-house capacity. Any imbalance means children are placed in out of authority residential houses to get the care they need. This is often distant from connections with their friends, family, school, and local communities. This can result in poorer

health, wellbeing and attainment outcomes. Therefore, a business case was developed that sought investment in the Angus Council owned and managed children's residential estate, to ensure more children and young people are cared for in Angus and reduce Council reliance on out of area care placements.

- 4.2 The business case highlighted that this would also help deliver improved outcomes for Angus children and young people. Extending the Council provision would offer more choices for matching children and young people, which would contribute to a reduction in placement breakdown and associated poorer outcomes. Developing additional capacity could offer greater flexibility, including reach into other localities across Angus, to offer the potential for further connectivity with children's local communities.
- 4.3 A Joint Report No [409/22](#) was submitted to the Policy & Resources committee by the Director of Children, Families and Justice and the Director of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth setting out proposals for investment in Angus Council children's residential estate. The Committee agreed:
- (i) to note and approve the Business Case for investment in the Angus Council children's residential estate and agreed the strategic direction;
 - (ii) to approve the proposed expansion of the Angus Council children's residential estate by 8 beds across two properties as outlined in Section 5 of the Report;
 - (iii) to require the Director of Children, Families and Justice to submit detailed budget bid proposals as part of the budget setting process for 2023/24; and
 - (iv) to require that the Director of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth commence arrangements to secure and deliver the necessary properties, on the presumption that the required resources were agreed through the 2023/24 HRA and General Fund Revenue budgets.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 A project team was established in January 2023 to take forward the acquisition of the first new house. A property specification was completed, and the initial consideration of the project team was to scope current Angus Council stock, to establish whether any property was available that met with requirements. When it was clear there were no properties that did so, the project team then looked towards the open market.
- 5.2 Whilst several properties came into scope, the project team matched the project needs to a domestic property in Brechin, which was secured in April 2024. The new children's house will accommodate up to 4 children aged 12 years and over, providing high quality relationship-based care, which is trauma responsive and focuses on children's strengths and talents. The placements will take account of children's developmental needs and offer a safe, secure and loving home. Children and young people will develop their full social, emotional, and educational potential, whilst we will promote and support continued inclusion within local schools. The establishment of this home will help us to deliver 'The Promise', with the best outcomes for children and young people, in the most cost-effective way.
- 5.3 **Progression of Internal Works**
Planning permission was not required, as the use of the premises as a house where not more than 5 residents living together, including a household where care is provided for residents, did not constitute a material change of use that would require planning permission.
- 5.4 Building warrants are now in place and a tender process was completed for the internal works during October into November 2024, with this awarded to a local Angus contractor. The pre-start meeting with the project team and the contractor took place on 28 November 2024, with works expected to start in December 2024. The timeline for completion of the works is 28 March 2025.
- 5.5 **Staffing**
Recruitment for the Team Leader took place during the summer, with the successful candidate starting in post on 4 September 2024. Following induction, the Team Leader has been leading the development of service policies, aims and objectives and has progressed the submission of registration with the Care Inspectorate.

5.6 At the time of writing, two Senior Social Care Officer have been appointed, one following an internal process, with the other preferred candidate progressing from a strong field of external candidates, following interviews held on 22 November 2004.

5.7 Recruitment is also underway for the team of 10 x Social Care Officers and two waking night staff posts. To date, we have received a high number of applicants, including some local to Brechin.

5.8 **Next Steps**

The Team Leader has started the process of reviewing the files of children placed in external residential placements, giving due consideration as to who may be a potential match(es) for the new house. This work is on-going, whilst referrals will be sought from the locality Social Work teams from January 2025, prioritising those children placed out of area we would be looking to bring back. Once further appointments are made and staff step into post, a key task will be to build relationships with any child identified for the new house and work with providers and locality staff to develop clear plans to support their transition.

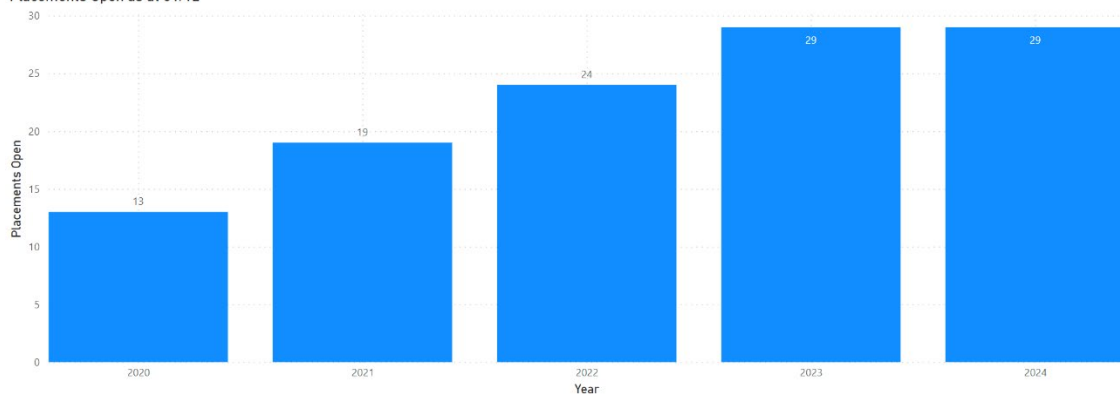
5.9 Monthly monitoring of children’s plans has enabled identification of future vacancies across the other children’s house, which is linked to financial sustainability and bringing children back from external placements. As of 25 November 2024, there are 29 children placed in external residential children’s houses and residential schools.

5.10 **External Residential Placements**

The graph below illustrates the total number of external children’s residential and residential school placements each calendar year from 2020:

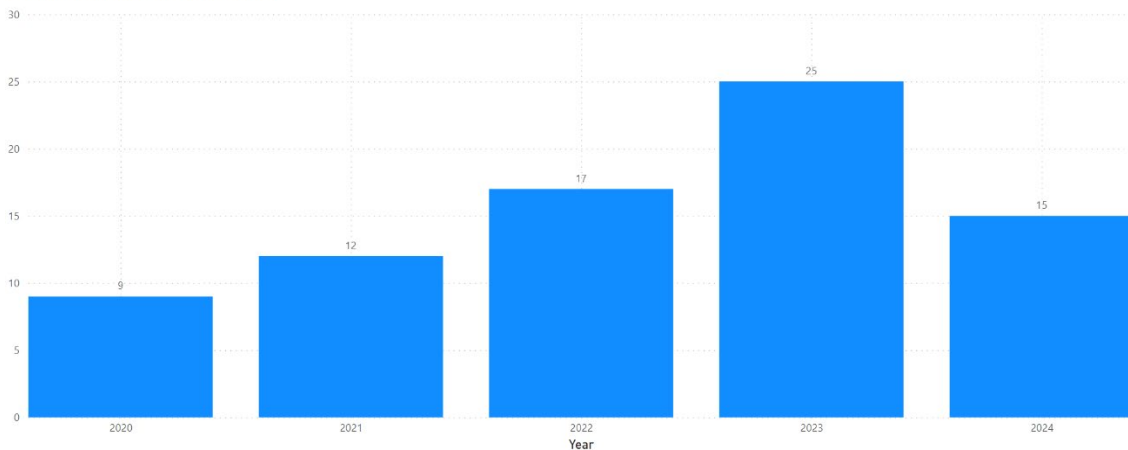
Figure 1

Placements Open as at 31/12



The following graph shows the number of new placements made with external providers during the same period:

External Residential Placements started



- 5.11 Figure 2 highlights a significant and positive reduction in the number of placements started to date in 2024 compared to last year, whilst also showing a slight reduction to those made in 2022. It is notable within Figure 1 that the number of external placements in their totality have remained static over the past 23 months. This speaks to an improvement in placement stability and may be seen as reflective of the significant work that has been undertaken by the Children, Families and Justice service to place more children on a planned basis, and improve the profiling of children, to support information sharing and matching with providers. In addition to this, positive partnerships have been developed with a range of external residential providers, and in some instances our Care and Risk Management process has enabled dynamic planning to be put in place to work alongside providers and other partners to sustain placements. This work is complex, and due to the specific needs of some children and young people it will always be appropriate to have some level of commissioning external providers, who offer a range of specialist interventions and additional support services.
- 5.12 The development of these partnerships has extended to collaborative work with smaller scale providers who share a similar ethos of care and has included mentoring and support in setting a strategic vision for the service. Alongside this, we have worked pro-actively with these providers in placing four children within their Angus based children's houses, and agreeing Angus Council receives priority status for any vacancies arising in these resources.
- 5.13 Of the 29 children and young people placed externally, it is anticipated two young people will transition back to Angus into their own accommodation during the first half of 2025. Plans are also being progressed for another young person to return into kinship care, whilst matching is underway for a current vacancy in one of the houses in Brambles.
- 5.14 Another five children have been identified as having achieved permanence within their current external placements. Two others are expected to progress towards this at their next Care Planning Meetings.
- 5.15 This highlights an improving picture in terms of reducing the number of new placements, whilst securing stability for our children placed in external residential placements, while our aim is to reduce the number in favour of support for children in family-based care or within our internal residential children's houses.
- 5.16 Future Plans**
Whilst we work towards the completion of works and entry to the new house by the start of April 2025, the service has not looked to initiate the next phase of the project, as agreed by Policy & Resources Committee, of progressing the acquisition of a second new house. There are a number of reasons for this:
- the priority need is to establish the current house being developed, train and upskill staff, and populate the placements on a phased basis
 - whilst recruitment has been positive thus far, the service recognises the national and local recruitment difficulties and the potential challenges in staffing a further house
 - as discussed, good progress has been made in reducing the number of new external residential placements over the past 12 months and reducing the associated cost pressures
 - we are also seeing stability within external placements, with good and improving outcomes for a number of our young people
- 5.17 In addition to the above, a service review has been completed in relation to our Enhance Service, which will be implemented in early 2025. Over the course of 2025 we shall also be reviewing our third-party contracts, with the aim of building upon the range of family support services to provide both early help and scaffolding to enable children to remain within their family and/or family-based care in Angus.
- 5.18 During 2025 we shall also review our wider residential estate and strategy, with a focus on the need to future proof our residential short breaks service, as part of our Children, Families & Justice Improvement Plan.
- 5.20 Therefore, it is recommended that Committee endorse the proposal that the Children, Families & Justice service pauses the progression of securing a further residential children's house while the service reviews its wider strategic priorities, and instruct the Director of Children, Families and Justice to bring a report on progress before the end of March 2026.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no additional financial implications at this time in relation to the allocated budget for the development of the new house.
- 6.2 The trend in respect of revenue cost pressures, since the case for the new house was made in December 2022, is worth noting however and is outlined below:

Figure 3

EXTERNAL RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENTS						
	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Projection	
					24/25	
Res School	2,120,466	1,749,995	3,364,190	4,597,180	4,280,000	
Res Unit	1,490,619	1,881,723	2,602,627	3,532,665	2,875,000	
	3,611,085	3,631,718	5,966,817	8,129,845	7,155,000	

- 6.3 As discussed earlier in the report, the number of external placements has remained static at 29 over 2023 and 2024. Nonetheless, the reduction in projected costs for 2024/2025 is also reflective of the on-going work within the service to monitor placements and work closely with providers to reduce these costs.
- 6.4 Members are however asked to note that changes in individual circumstances can mean additional placements being required at short notice. This can affect the financial position and members will be kept updated through the usual reporting mechanisms where this is the case.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The demands for external placements as reported above are recorded in the CFJ operational risk register and subject to regular analysis or trends, risks and mitigation.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

- 9.1 A screening assessment has been undertaken and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

10. CHILDRENS RIGHTS AND WELLBEING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 A Childrens Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment has been undertaken and a full assessment is not required as the "General Principles" do not apply to this proposal.

11. CONSULTATION

- 11.1 The relevant members of the Council's Leadership Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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