

Appendix A: Support to step children in care from residential to family placements briefing note



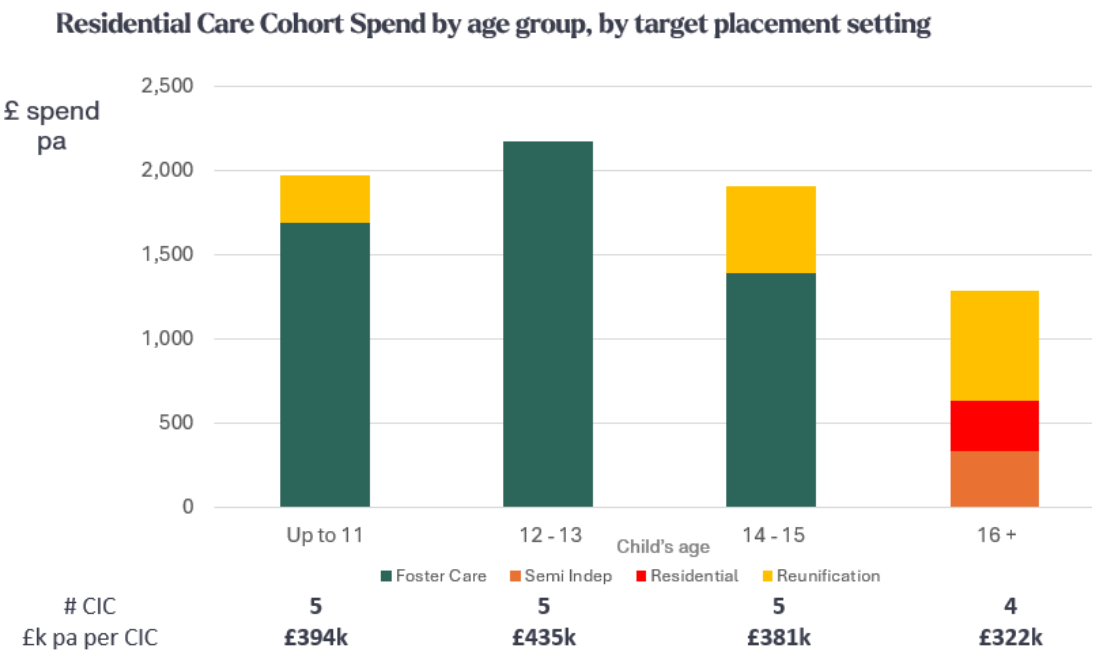
Purpose of the Programme

Plymouth have experienced a growth in numbers of children in care and like many local authorities around the country, as a result of a severe national shortage of foster carers Plymouth currently has a high number of children in high-cost residential care creating a significant pressure for the Council. A significant cohort of these children in care are identified to be ready to step onto family settings, either foster care or with their own family. Focused work has been in place over the last year to achieve this for these children with limited success given the shortage of foster carers available nationally to meet the more complex needs of these children.

The purpose of this programme is to develop and implement an approach to transition children and young people from residential care to a family-based setting, where their assessed need determines this as being appropriate and within their best interests. The planning and intervention aims to improve the well-being and stability of children who have experienced trauma and to allow successful care within a supportive family setting. The purpose is to also identify and support prospective carers for children and young people including foster carers, connected carers and parents to provide trauma informed care within an enhanced support network. This programme is needed now more than ever due to the rising cost of residential care, which is incompatible with the ever-increasing deficits and pressures on financial resources available to local authorities.

Proposal context and summary

The context for the proposal is that Plymouth City Council, in line with all English Local Authorities, is challenged by increases in high-cost Children’s Residential placements. In summary terms for Plymouth City Council, spend for the 19 children proposed for the programme is £7.4m pa.



The split in the bars in the chart above shows the potential changes in setting for children that Plymouth / Reconnect believe might be possible.

In its efforts to help turn possibility into realities, Plymouth would like to commission Reconnect to work with us. Reconnect have developed a programme to work with Local Authorities to address these issues, over an initial 14 month period (8 weeks “Phase 2” assessment, and 12 months “Phase 3” intervention). Reconnect will commit 4 – 6 FTE experienced practitioners over this period, working alongside Plymouth City Council Children’s Service social workers to achieve family-based care arrangements for children through foster care, reunification with parents and kinship care. The predominant change of setting is to Foster Care, given the low average age (13 years) of the cohort.

Payment for these services will be based on cost savings achieved as children transition from residential care, with a **total potential annualised saving of £5.8m per annum**.

Programme overview

There are two strands to the programme:

- **Assessment, Planning and Intervention** – the programme will focus on an initial cohort of 19 children, all of which have already been identified and profiled, amounting to £7.4m pa of residential care cost. Intensive therapeutically informed engagement will be undertaken with these children to identify suitable family-based settings, and to prepare them for these new arrangements. A detailed Project Initiation Document (PID) will be provided to set out these activities. All decisions regarding change of setting remain with Plymouth City Council.
- **Foster Carer recruitment** – Reconnect will work with Plymouth City Council to accelerate recruitment of appropriate foster carers, using its profession-specific recruitment database to carry out targeted recruitment campaigns – likely with per carer fees at enhanced rates and support arrangements, due to the profile of the cohort children both parties wish to transition. As well as targeted recruitment, we will also provide assistance to implement the new carer profile / support and fee levels; in addition we suggest that we work with Plymouth to identify candidates within the existing cohort of foster carers through a light-touch review of carer profiles.

Why Reconnect?

Reconnect have a proven model of practice to achieve the outcomes set out above, with 2024 clients including North-East Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. The programme will be overseen by experienced senior social work leaders, and led by experienced senior managers, all of whom are social work qualified and have experience of working in different local authorities.

The Leadership team will be supplemented by a therapeutic team, overseen by a qualified therapist, as well as quality assurance and admin support resources to manage the programme (“Programme consulting” below). In addition, five family support practitioners and a manager will be recruited to work (fixed-term contracts) to support day-to-day intervention activities (“Intervention resources” below).

Commercial Model

Reconnect operate on a payment-by-results basis. Plymouth City Council will not be invoiced for any costs until savings through a change in care arrangements are achieved, and at no point will pay more than the current run-rate residential care costs.

Reconnect’s charges for Programme consulting are £35.4k for Phase 2 (6 – 8 weeks) with the remaining programme cost of £564.4k split over the remaining 12-month duration of the

programme, in line with savings accumulated – total £599.8k. This is based on senior Consulting resources from Reconnect leading and managing the programme, in line with the engagement with Plymouth to date, and “Intervention Resources” of 3 family support practitioners and a team manager, during Phase 3.

The costs above are inclusive of travel and accommodation costs for the Consulting team – mileage / travel costs for family support workers to visit children resident out of area will be invoiced separately.

It will be challenging to achieve the planned placement setting for each and every child, but as set out above, the risk inherent in the programme is borne by Reconnect due to the payment-by-results approach. As well as the fixed fee of £599.8k set out above, if savings exceed £3.0m pa at the end of the 12-month Phase 3 period, a success fee of 10% of savings above the £3.0m pa threshold will be charged.

Reconnect will also be recruiting foster carers for children, utilising an extensive database of professionals working locally. This is conducted on behalf of Plymouth City Council, and if carers assessed by Reconnect are successfully approved at Panel and a child in residential is placed with them, a recruitment fee of £10,000 will be paid by Plymouth.

If Reconnect identify other individuals who are interested in Fostering for Plymouth as part of the mainstream scheme their details will be passed to Plymouth for an assessment to be completed with no fee attached.