HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services		
Date:	15 January 2018		
Title:	Proposals to close two overnight residential respite homes for children with disabilities as the County Council moves towards a wider range of overnight respite services.		
Report From:	Director of Children's Services		
Contact name:	Amber James		
Tel:	01962 845973	**Email:**	amber.james@hants.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 Taking into account relevant information and the outcomes of the public and staff consultation, and the petition received, it is recommended that Merrydale and Sunbeams residential respite homes for disabled children close in Spring 2018.

2 Executive summary

2.1 Hampshire County Council's strategic approach to meeting the needs of disabled children and their families who meet the criteria for overnight respite is to develop a wider range of options rather than continuing to purely provide support with overnight residential respite provision. This strategy has been developed through engagement with parents, carers and providers with a view to providing a sustainable offer to disabled children and their families.

2.2 On 17 July 2017, the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services gave permission to commence a public and staff consultation on the proposal to close Sunbeams and Merrydale – two County Council maintained residential respite homes.

2.3 The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services of the outcomes of public and staff consultation.

2.4 Feedback received during the consultation has indicated that the majority of respondents disagree with the proposals to close the homes and a clear view that residential overnight respite provision was necessary.

3 Contextual Information

3.1 The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 place a duty on local authorities to provide a range of services for disabled children and their families which includes, “overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere.”

3.2 Local authorities have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 section 149 to have due regard to the need to: eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.3 Disabled children have their needs assessed by qualified children’s social workers against Hampshire County Council’s eligibility criteria. The County Allocation Panel (CAP) consisting of disabled children’s team managers, a district manager, and an in-house respite home manager approves individual children for overnight respite, where the need has been clearly identified via assessment and planning.

3.4 Following assessment and approval, regular programmed overnight stays may be provided by one of the three County Council residential respite homes, a specialist respite carer or with an external provider. As at November 2017, 126 children and young people are currently receiving overnight respite across the range of respite provision.

4 Current overnight respite provision in Hampshire

4.1 Overnight respite is currently provided either in one of the three County Council residential respite homes – Merrydale in Kings Worthy, Winchester; Sunbeams in Aldershot; and Firvale in Basingstoke – or purchased via the County Council’s contract with external providers. Overnight respite is also delivered via the Specialist Respite Care scheme (formerly ‘Family Link’).

4.2 As at 1 November 2017, there were 126 children receiving overnight respite care. Merrydale and Sunbeams were supporting 35 children who were receiving 1,188 overnights per annum, which represents 28% of the total cohort of children receiving overnight respite as at 1 November 2017. 91 (72%) children were receiving overnights through Firvale, external provision or Specialist Respite Care (this is a form of specialist respite foster care – see below). Children can require a high level of staff support whilst staying at a residential home and staffing levels vary depending on the child’s needs and individual care plans. Typically the staffing ratio is two children to one member of staff. However, some children receive one-to-one or two-to-one support, depending on their level of need.

4.3 Children and young people accessing Merrydale and Sunbeams receive an allocated number of overnight stays determined upon their assessed need. The

current allocation of nights per child ranges from 16 nights per year to 61 nights per year. This includes a mix of week day and weekend stays. Which nights are allocated to a child are agreed with the family on an individual basis taking into account the home's ability to meet demand for stays during weekends and school holidays.

4.4 As at 1 November 2017, there were 16 children accessing 442 nights in the 5 social care beds in Firvale. 2 children are in the process of being introduced to the home via tea visits who will be receiving 48 nights.

4.5 There are currently 50 children receiving their overnight respite from external providers. This equates to 1,338 nights per annum. The providers are Keys Care, Kids, Rose Road and Beechside. In addition 2 children are receiving a total of 58 overnights at the school they attend.

4.6 23 children are receiving overnight respite through the Specialist Respite Care service, a total of 782 nights per annum. This service is described later in this report.

4.7 The three in-house County Council units are described below.

4.8 Firvale (not proposed to close)

Firvale is a purpose built nine-bed home in Basingstoke within which the County Council and Hampshire Hospitals Foundation Trust (HHFT) jointly deliver services to a cohort of children who have very complex needs.

4.9 Merrydale, Kings Worthy, Winchester

Merrydale is a 13-bed residential respite home. As at 1 November 2017, there were 19 children using Merrydale. Whilst not a purpose built home, over the years a number of adaptations have been made to ensure the needs and safety of the children using the home and the regulatory requirements have continued to be met.

The potential property liabilities associated with Merrydale over the next five to ten years have been assessed by the County Council's Property Services Department. It is expected that over this period, a minimum of £420,000 would have to be invested in the Merrydale building to ensure its safe and continued use. Works already identified include upgrading the bathrooms/wet rooms, laundry, kitchenettes, internal and external decoration and specialist garden equipment/furniture.

4.10 Sunbeams, Aldershot

Sunbeams is a four-bed respite home and as at 1 November 2017, there were 16 children accessing its services. Sunbeams is co-located within premises that also deliver other services for children and young people. The children who access Sunbeams have severe learning disabilities. Whilst not a purpose built home, over the years a number of adaptations have been made to the premises

to ensure the needs and safety of the children using the home and the regulatory requirements are met.

The potential property liabilities of Sunbeams over the next five to ten years have been assessed by the County Council's Property Services Department. It is expected that over this period, as a minimum £330,000 would have to be invested to ensure its safe and continued use. Works already identified include the replacement of two boilers and lighting systems.

Contrary to public belief raised during the public consultation, there is no covenant in place on the Sunbeams' titles.

4.11 Average bed night rates

The table below shows a comparison of average bed night rates, based on staffing ratios, between the in-house and external residential respite units for the 2015/16 financial year, and assuming 80% occupancy.

The 2015/16 actuals show the actual average unit rates per night, per service user during the financial year April 2015 to March 2016. The 1:2 and 1:1 rates compare the average contracted rates per night, per service user for those ratios of care compared to the equivalent in-house rate, assuming 80% occupancy. The table below sets out the bed night costs for Merrydale and Sunbeams.

	Sunbeams	Merrydale	External
2015/16 Actuals	£588.63	£635.59	£319.92
1:2 rate (per night) based on 80% occupancy**	£470.78	£383.60	*£278.40
1:1 rate (per night)**	£686.40	£626.58	*£561.34

* Average contracted rates

** Based on all in-house service users being one ratio at 80% occupancy

5 The Pilot Projects

5.1 Over the last three years, the County Council has worked with parents of children with disabilities to explore new ways to provide overnight respite within a context of working to improve choice and increased flexibility. Service user engagement, pilot projects and national research show a clear preference towards options which provide greater personalisation of overnight respite for disabled children and young people, and their parents and carers.

5.2 Hampshire's Children's Services Department has a long history of engagement with children who have disabilities and their parents, and has carried out a number of formal public consultations on proposals for change. Throughout 2015 and 2016, substantial engagement has taken place with children with disabilities and their parents, and with providers of overnight respite services, to understand

what service users want to receive from overnight respite, and what the external service providers have to offer.

5.3 The County Council has developed a valued partnership with the Hampshire Parent Carer Network (HPCN) and Parent Voice, both contributing to consider how overnight respite is provided. Feedback from focus groups, workshops and surveys involving HPCN, Parent Voice and families who currently receive overnight respite, has contributed to option development and appraisal.

5.4 Engagement with families told the County Council that:

- There is a desire for a wider choice of overnight respite, beyond a stay in a traditional respite home;
- There is a desire to offer children and young people the opportunity to take part in exciting and stimulating activities as a core part of the respite offer;
- There is a need to support older children to develop life skills and independent living skills as part of an overnight break
- There is a need for parents and carers to have access to help to find solutions for underlying issues – such as sleep deprivation – which would enable families to become more resilient;
- Parents and carers have requested more variety of duration of overnight respite, particularly when travel time to and from a respite setting is taken into account;
- Some families would like to be able to combine an overnight respite for the whole family with shared and individual activities available in a supported environment; and
- There is a need to offer age-appropriate overnight respite.

5.5 Research and engagement with providers of services to disabled children showed that:

- There was a significant reliance on the local authority in commissioning services, which meant that the market responded to the demands and needs identified to them by local authorities, rather than the wishes of families; and
- Small scale projects and initiatives in particular locations, offered alternatives to traditional overnight respite.

5.6 Following further discussion with families, it was agreed to pilot new approaches on a small scale, allowing the County Council, providers and families to work together to co-produce new services and test how they worked.

5.7 During 2016 five pilots were carried out to test the feasibility and viability of the alternative breaks. The pilots were reviewed at the mid-point and showed that families were reporting an increase in satisfaction in the standard of care and the suitability of the break when compared to a residential respite break.

5.8 During the pilots, workshops were carried out with the pilot providers to gather feedback, develop specifications and discuss scalability. An end of pilot survey was sent to all the families that took part and they were also invited to take part in a focus group. A short questionnaire was sent to all families who were in

receipt of current residential respite care to gather their views on the pilot concepts.

5.9 The five pilots and their outcomes were;

1) **TEC (Technology Enabled Care) formerly Telecare**
TEC is a way of providing support to families via assistive technology. The pilot ran with 30 children and families who were supported in their home through a range of equipment such as sensors, alarms, CCTV, monitors etc. The equipment meant that parents, who were often up multiple times in the night checking on their child, or perhaps even sleeping next to their child to check on them regularly, were able to have improved sleep patterns leading to improved peace of mind and a reduction in stress.

The pilot was not only successful in terms of improved outcomes for families but also in terms of cost avoidance.

2) Family Breaks
The purpose of this pilot was to provide an opportunity for all the family to enjoy time together in a safe environment which meets their needs. Five families received a total of 21 nights provided by Sebastian's Action Trust at The Bluebells.

There was mixed feedback from the pilot families, supported by only 40% of respondents to the wider survey expressing an interest in this type of break.

3) Activity Breaks
This break aimed to enable children and young people to enjoy a diverse range of physical activities that they may not normally have access to at a residential unit. Six families attended Hampshire County Council's Runways End activity centre, with Disability Challengers providing the care support and HC3S the catering for a total of 18 nights.

The pilots were well received; however families told us that they would like a range of activities on offer not limited to activity centres. A survey of current residential respite providers found that a wide range of activities were currently already on offer, including, trips to the zoo, country parks and theme parks. Activity Breaks are limited by the Ofsted 56 night restriction[1] which would make this option less attractive to providers.

---

[1] The Residential Holiday Schemes for Disabled Children (England) Regulations 2013: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/1394/made Ofsted guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-residential-holiday-schemes-for-disabled-children: "*A provider may operate at any time throughout the year. There is no minimum number of days they can operate. However, a provider cannot operate for more than 56 days in any 12-month period. No individual child can be accommodated for more than 28 consecutive days in any 12-month period.*"

4) 16+ Independence

This was a targeted break to deliver individual outcomes for young people to achieve more independence moving into adulthood. Four families took part receiving 10 nights each.

The outcomes of the pilot greatly surpassed the expectations of the parents and young people and demonstrated that, over a period of time, significant outcomes could be achieved that would reduce reliance on long term support.

5) Intensive Support Programme

The aim of this pilot was to support families in addressing sleep issues, to reduce any potential reliance on residential respite or an increase in residential respite care. Ten families took part in the pilot which has been extended for a 6 month period to allow for the longer term interventions required to effect sustained changes.

Initial feedback from the pilot provider was that it was taking longer than expected to demonstrate any benefits and that the issues presented were more complex than anticipated. This type of intervention is likely to deliver more benefits as a preventative measure to prevent increases in respite and may be less beneficial to extremely complex or high need children.

5.10 The new service offer

5.11 The pilot outcomes have been used to develop the new offer planned. The table below sets out the full scope of the new offer planned to become available to families eligible for overnight respite. Options within this new offer are not mutually exclusive, and families would be able to create overnight respite packages which meet the needs of their children. Families' choice of overnight respite can vary over time as the needs of the family change.

New service offer	Description of service	External provider or in-house?	New or existing service?
Firvale – residential overnight respite provision	Firvale is a purpose built nine-bed home in Basingstoke. Four beds are for children and young people with complex health and disability needs, funded by HHFT. Another five beds provide overnight respite for children and young people with severe learning disabilities, funded by Hampshire County Council. The children who access Firvale have severe learning disabilities, complex health needs and severe physical disabilities.	In-house	Existing
Revised Overnight Respite	A new framework agreement is now in place which provides families' access to three contracted providers with additional	External	Existing but refreshed

New service offer	Description of service	External provider or in-house?	New or existing service?
Framework Agreement	providers currently going through the application process.		
Specialist Respite Care	Formerly known as 'Family Link,' Specialist Respite Care is a form of respite for families. Specialist respite carers are registered foster carers who are linked to a family to provide overnight respite for children. Specialist respite carers, with the support of their supervising social worker from the Children's Services Fostering Team and the child's social worker, provide breaks which can be for a few hours at a time or can be overnight, depending on the needs of the family.	In-house	Existing but refreshed
Whole Family Overnight Breaks	Family Breaks provide an opportunity for the whole family to go away together, spending time at a location that is fully equipped to support those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The County Council is due to develop this service and an approved list of providers will be in place later in the year. Families would also be able to request consideration of new providers to be added to the list to widen the choice of where they spend the break.	External	New
Care Support	A family may wish to have a break in their own home, either for shorter periods during the day or having a carer stay overnight, so the child does not need to stay somewhere else e.g. in a residential setting. This could be with or without the parents in the home.	External	Existing but refreshed
Enhanced activities	In consultation with children and families, in-house and external providers offer a range of on and off-site activities. Where an additional need is identified, for example, an increase in activity centre-based trips, an enhanced offer can be supported via the existing short breaks activities programme. Activity Breaks can also be accessed via family Breaks.	External	New

6 Proposal to close Merrydale and Sunbeams

6.1 In 2007, '*Aiming High for Disabled Children'* accelerated a change in approach from providing overnight respite for disabled children in primarily institution-based care, to offering a range of services which enables disabled children and young people to remain in their communities and alongside their disabled and non-disabled peers.[2]

6.2 The County Council has been reviewing how it provides overnight respite to disabled children and their families over the past 3 years to expand the range of services available to give greater choice to current and future users of in-house residential respite.

6.3 As outlined in 5.4, engagement with families took place to consider what alternative options may be appropriate for children and families leading to an initial pilot period and then the development of the alternative options outlined in 5.11.

6.4 Two of the in-house homes (Merrydale and Sunbeams) require significant capital investment to improve them. The County Council remains committed to providing high quality services to disabled children and their families within a reducing budget. The County Council would put capital investment into the refurbishment of these homes if it thought that this was the appropriate way to support disabled children and their families for the future as it has with the residential children's homes. However, this paper sets out that this is not the best approach to delivering a range of services to disabled children.

6.5 Engagement with providers and analysis of the cost and quality of external provision evidences that the County Council can commission an equivalent level of service without the infrastructure costs creating a revenue saving of £452,000 per year.

6.6 On 17 July 2017, the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services gave permission to commence a public and staff consultation on the proposal to close Sunbeams and Merrydale.

6.7 Financial context

6.8 The prolonged period of austerity has led to significant reductions in government grant for the County Council. In response, the County Council has worked diligently to stretch every penny and deliver more with less money – achieving

---

[2] *Aiming High for Disabled Children: better support for families.* HM Treasury and Department for Education and Skills, May 2007. http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/PU213.pdf

over £340 million in recurring savings, whilst protecting the quality of services as far as possible and keeping Council Tax low.

6.9 The table below shows the **net** budgets and outturns for the County Council's three residential respite homes. This includes capital purchases:

Residential respite home	2016/17 Budget	2016/17 Outturn	Variance	2017/18 Budget
Sunbeams:	459,000	453,808	(5,192)	466,000
Merrydale:	628,000	794,631	166,631	645,000

6.10 If the decision is taken to close the two homes, it is estimated that £452,000 would be saved. These estimated savings have been calculated taking into account the saving that would be made if Merrydale and Sunbeams were to close as well as the additional costs associated with increasing capacity both at Firvale and purchased respite with external providers.

6.11 The proposal to close Sunbeams and Merrydale is being made on the basis of:

- The future availability of a new offer of overnight respite which is more aligned with feedback from service users and their families, and offers a wider range of options than the service historically available;
- Analysis that greater value for money per bed per night can be achieved by working more closely with independent providers. The County Council wants to ensure that any money spent is on the children receiving the service, not on infrastructure costs; and
- The ongoing capital and revenue costs associated with maintaining Sunbeams and Merrydale, both of which require significant on-going investment to ensure they are able to meet the continuing and forecast needs of their client group.

7 The Consultation Methodology

7.1 Staff/trade union consultation methodology

7.2 The proposals in the consultation would directly impact on staff. The proposal would mean a reduction in staffing equivalent to 27.07 FTE (38 individual staff members) of which 23.06 FTE are permanent employees and 4.01 FTE are temporary employees (based on staffing data 31 December 2017).

- There are currently 22 individual members of staff working at Merrydale (16.01FTE)
- There are currently 16 individual members of staff working at Sunbeams (11.03 FTE)

7.3 All possible steps would be taken to minimise compulsory redundancies arising from the proposed home closures. With this in mind, the opportunity to apply for Enhanced Voluntary Redundancy (EVR2) has been offered to staff across all three homes. The application window has been extended to allow for the proposed closing date for EVR2 applications to be after the Executive Lead Member's decision on the proposals, allowing staff to consider their application with full knowledge of the decision outcome.

7.4 Firvale staff have been allowed to apply for EVR2, on the basis that applications from Firvale staff would only be accepted where it guarantees a redeployment opportunity for a displaced staff member from either Sunbeams or Merrydale, and would prevent a compulsory redundancy.

7.5 The current enhanced redundancy package is known as 'EVR2' and offers payment equivalent to 20 weeks' pay or compulsory redundancy entitlement (maximum of 30 weeks) whichever is the higher. Eligibility criteria based upon length of service and contract type apply to EVR2 entitlement.

7.6 Staff who are Members of the Local Government Pension Scheme who have over 2 years pensionable service and are aged 55 or over are entitled to receive their full redundancy payment and unreduced pension access, regardless of whether they leave on EVR2 or compulsory redundancy grounds.

7.7 The potential cost of EVR2 for Sunbeams and Merrydale staff is approximately £273,900. The maximum pension strain would be £160,900* (*based on available data for 31 March 2018).

7.8 Staff that do not apply for EVR2 would be at risk of compulsory redundancy and would be given redeployment status and support for a three month period to help them secure alternative employment within the County Council. Compulsory redundancy would be a last resort.

7.9 Should staff be successful in securing redeployment into another role within the County Council, reasonable training would be provided, as required.

7.10 Outplacement support would be provided to staff at risk of compulsory redundancy in the form of a workshop to provide skills and guidance in areas such as writing CVs, completing job application forms and interview skills.

7.11 All affected staff and their union representatives have been consulted on the staffing implications of the proposed closures.

7.12 Staff briefings took place with staff in Merrydale, Sunbeams and Firvale on 14 June 2017, prior to the consultation period, to inform staff of the decision to ask the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services for permission to consult on the proposed closure of Merrydale and Sunbeams. Union representatives were invited to support staff at this meeting.

7.13 All affected staff within the specialist respite service and their union representatives have been consulted on potential closure of Merrydale and Sunbeams and the impact on staffing. A separate staff and union consultation

took place alongside the public consultation between 7 August and 2 October 2017.

7.14 Recognised trade union and employee representatives were fully informed of the proposals through a briefing at the union group meeting on 19 July 2017 and an s.188 notice which was issued on 4 August 2017. There have been further meetings during the consultation period on 17 August and 13 September 2017 with union representatives where they have had the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

7.15 Three staff briefings took place at the start of consultation followed by nine HR drop in sessions across the three homes where 42 employees, employed at the time, attended individual sessions. Three staffing briefings were held post consultation to update staff on the outcome of the staff and union consultation and update them on new timescales.

7.16 Staff have been encouraged to provide comments and feedback through:

a) Staff briefings – held in August, October 2017.
b) HR Drop in sessions held throughout August and September 2017
c) Team meetings
d) Emails to their relevant human resources teams.
e) Trade union representatives or elected staff representatives

7.17 Managers, together with dedicated HR support, ensured staff members were given every opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback throughout the staff consultation process. Questions have been captured and a frequently asked set of questions and answers has been circulated to staff via email and have been placed on the restructure web page for Hampshire County Council staff.

7.18 The Public Consultation Methodology

7.19 The County Council carried out an eight-week open consultation from 7 August 2017 to 2 October 2017 to seek residents' and stakeholders' views on the proposals to close overnight respite homes at Merrydale in Winchester and Sunbeams in Aldershot.

7.20 During the consultation period, communication took place in a range of ways to raise awareness of the consultation and provide opportunities for key stakeholders to raise questions.

7.21 'Unstructured' responses could also be sent via email or written letter and those received by the consultation close date were incorporated into the consultation findings report.

7.22 Communications/publicity

7.23 Ahead of, and during the consultation period, communications took place in a range of ways to raise awareness of the consultation and provide opportunities for key stakeholders to raise questions.

- Pre-engagement workshops were held with representative parents and Hampshire Parent Carer Network (HPCN). Feedback from these events helped to shape the development of the consultation.

- A dedicated webpage was set up on Hantsweb (Hampshire County Council's website), providing full details of the consultation timeframe, the drop-in events and links to the consultation document and online questionnaire. The web address for the consultation web page or hyperlinks to the page were included in all communications publicising the consultation.

- A news item was placed on the home page of the County Council's external facing website (Hantsweb) and also on its intranet for staff (Hantsnet) with encouragement to both respond to, and spread the word about, the consultation. Information was also displayed on the plasma screens in the County Council's headquarters' reception/foyer and café areas where there is a lot of traffic in terms of both County Council staff and visitors who are not County Council personnel.

- An email in-box was set up during the consultation specifically to deal with non-media enquiries relating to the consultation. Enquiries were responded to within 10 working days of receipt.

- The consultation was publicised through editorial in Hampshire newspapers, broadcast items on regional television and radio news bulletins, together with TV and radio interviews with the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services.

- Posts were placed at the start of the consultation on the County Council's Twitter feed (@hantsconnect) that has 44,000 followers, Hampshire County Council's Facebook account (over 3,000 followers) and on the County Council's LinkedIn account (11,000 followers). Additional reminders were posted at intervals during the consultation period. The postings were aimed at alerting people to the consultation and encouraging responses.

- Letters were sent to the families who would be directly affected by the proposals if they are agreed. The letters alerted them to the consultation, providing links to read the document and questionnaire. The letters also advised families about the opportunity to attend one of the drop-in events. Additionally, social workers met with the families in their own homes.

- Information about the consultation was sent to Support4SEND, Hantslocaloffer, Hampshire Parent Carer Network, Parent Voice and Community Service Volunteers, for adding to their own websites and sharing with/dissemination to parents and carers of children with learning difficulties and disabilities within their networks.

- Through the County Council's schools communication channel, information was disseminated to all of Hampshire's 526 schools' head teachers and governors, and schools with nursery units (11) and the County Council's three maintained

nursery schools to notify them of the consultation and asking for details and links to be included in their own parent mail communications.

- A briefing paper, copy of the consultation document and the consultation questionnaire were sent, via email, to all Hampshire County Councillors and Hampshire MPs.

- Letters were sent to, and an information and engagement event was held for professional agency stakeholders – including health commissioners and providers.

- Letters were sent to, and an information and engagement event was held for external providers of residential respite services.

- Consultation meetings were held with staff working in the County Council's residential respite homes.

- Easy Read versions of the consultation document and response form were made available to all parents/carers through children's social workers, and on request. Paper copies of the Easy Read documents were posted on Hantsweb for ease of access. The online response form also linked to an online Easy Read questionnaire, in an effort to make the consultation as inclusive as possible.

7.24 Communication with families directly affected by the proposals

7.25 To aid children and young people with disabilities, and their parents, who would be directly impacted by the proposals, one-to-one meetings were arranged for them with children's social workers and paper copies of the Information Pack and Response Form were sent to families by post. Meetings with children's social workers were designed to enable those directly affected by the proposals to make an informed response to the consultation. The children's social workers were able to discuss the proposals with children and parents, and with them, consider appropriate and available alternative services which would meet their respite needs, should the decision be made to close one or both residential respite homes.

7.26 In addition, a series of six drop-in consultation events were organised, enabling contact between parents and interested people to talk directly with County Council officers from the Children's Services department. The events were advertised on the County Council's consultation webpage, at Sunbeams and Merrydale, through the Hampshire Parent Carer Network and Parent Voice, in local press and through the County Council's social media channels.

8 Response to the Public Consultation

(Full analysis of the public consultation can be found at Appendix C)

8.1 A total of 366 responses to the consultation questionnaire were submitted. 339 responses were received via the online response form, of which 3 were from an organisation or group, 336 from individual responses. Of those individual responses, 33 were the easy-read online version of the consultation questionnaire.

8.2 There were 27 responses received via the paper response form; one from an organisation or group and 26 from individual responses. In addition, 12 'unstructured' responses were also received by the consultation deadline; nine were from members of the public, two responses from two political representatives and one from a stakeholder organisation. A list of organisations or groups (where names were provided) can be found in appendix two of the consultation findings report.

8.3 141 responses were received from parents, carers and family members of children with disabilities or special educational needs. Of these, 98 responses were from families of a disabled child accessing overnight respite, 85 responses (25%) were received from respondents that indicated they were current users and/or family or carers of a child who currently uses Merrydale or Sunbeams:

- **55** were from those who indicated they were current users and/or family or carers of a child who currently uses Merrydale.

- **30** were from those who indicated they were current users and/or family or carers of a child who currently uses Sunbeams.

8.4 Of these responses, two were received from young people who currently use the homes. 49% of respondents with a disabled child stated their child was aged 8-15 whilst 33% stated their child was 16-18 years.

8.5 22 responses were received from staff working at Sunbeams or Merrydale.

8.6 A petition entitled, "Prevent the closure of Merrydale and Sunbeams respite centres" was received by Hampshire County Council on 22 December 2017. This contained 4313 verified signatories.

8.7 Contextual responses about the proposed closures

8.8 The consultation responses indicate that there is strong concern about the proposals to close Merrydale and Sunbeams and that whilst the buildings may need improvement, ensuring the provision of overnight respite remains necessary.

8.9 Respondents questioned the County Council's use of the term "institutionalised". The use of this language in the Consultation Information Pack was to recognise that traditional overnight respite tends to lend itself to disabled children being cared for in isolation from their broader community, rather than supporting them to be a part of it. Such an environment is restrictive as the requirements of the organisation may stop truly individualised plans being created for children and it

is the County Council's vision to provide a range of options that support individualisation and more opportunities for skills and independence development.

8.10 Parents have told us that they would like an increased offer and choice of provision. The County Council has responded to this by growing alternative provision of respite but acknowledges that for some children a traditional overnight respite provision is the right service within that wider offer to meet their needs. However, families should be choosing this for their child out of preference to meet their particular circumstances, rather than it being the only offer available.

8.11 The first set of questions in the consultation response form asked respondents to rate the extent to which they agreed with the proposal to close Merrydale and Sunbeams and what the most important aspects of overnight respite are for children and their families.

8.12 **To what extent do you agree with the proposal to close Merrydale?**

87% of respondents had a strong concern about the proposal to close Merrydale, either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

There was a negative response regarding the closure of Merrydale from all response groups, however some groups were more concerned than others.

Respondents who indicated they were a family member of a child with disabilities were more likely to disagree with the proposals than any other group (94%).

Respondents that indicated they had a health or disability issue were more likely to disagree (88%) with the proposals than those without health or disability issues (86%).

Parents or carers with older children (ages 16-25) who currently use respite homes, were less likely to agree with the proposals (88%) in comparison to parents or carers with younger children (ages 0-15) who use respite homes (83%).

8.13 **To what extent do you agree with the proposal to close Sunbeams?**

As with the response about the proposal to close Merrydale, 87% of respondents had a strong concern about the proposal to close Sunbeams, either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

There was a negative response regarding the closure of Sunbeams from all response groups, however some groups were more concerned than others.

Respondents who indicated they were a family member of a child with disabilities were more likely to disagree with the proposals than any other group (97%).

Respondents that indicated they had a health or disability issue were more likely to disagree (88%) with the proposals than those without health or disability issues (86%).

Parents or carers with older children (ages 16-25) who currently use respite homes, are less likely to agree with the proposals (92%) in comparison to parents or carers with younger children (ages 0-15) who use respite homes (84%).

8.14 **The most important aspects of respite for children with disabilities**

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of several aspects of overnight respite.

Almost all respondents felt that it was very important that children using overnight respite felt, 'happy' (96%), 'secure' (96%) and 'safe' (95%).

Although still viewed as important by the majority, a smaller proportion of respondents felt that 'making their own decisions' (62%) and 'having access to facilities and equipment not available at home' (64%) were very important aspects of respite for children.

The level of importance given to each aspect of respite care did vary slightly across the core respondent groups. Respondents who worked in respite care were more likely to see all aspects of respite provision as similarly important, whereas parents and carers placed much greater emphasis on the safety and care of their child, than their need for equipment or developing independence.

A further factor that impacted on the perceived importance of different aspects of respite was the age of the child with disabilities. Respondents who identified that they were a parent or carer were asked how old the child is/children are who have a disability. Responses showed that respite care being with friends, having access to facilities/equipment that is not available at home and making their own decisions was relatively more important to those in the older age group.

8.15 **Important aspects of respite care for parents/carers**

All respondents were asked to choose what they thought the most important aspects of overnight respite are for parents or carers with children with disabilities. 'A break from caring' (91%) and 'time spent with other children in the family' (88%) were considered to be the most important aspects of overnight respite by the majority of respondents.

Those with very young children at home (ages 0-4) identify this as the most important aspect (100%) above any other group.

Parents or carers with children at home thought that spending time with family is an important aspect of respite care. Those with children in the 0-4 age bracket identified this as the most important aspect above any other group.

8.16 The Impact of proposed closures on respondents

Respondents were encouraged to consider and set out the potential impact of the proposed closures, specifically: *To describe what impact, if any, the proposed closures would have on them, their family, people they know or work with, or their group or organisation*.

A group of medical professionals from the Child Health Department, Royal Hampshire County Hospital (Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust) in their collective response to the consultation highlighted three potential impacts of the proposed closures: increased attendance for mental health related issues in siblings; an increased length of stays in hospitals, as often if a child is recovering from an illness, the discharge from hospital to a respite setting can be facilitated earlier than discharge to home; and the potential increase in demand from parents asking to support Education Health and Care Plan requests for out of county placements.

- **To describe what impact, if any, the proposed closures would have on them, their family, people they know or work with, or their group or organisation.**

  285 responses were received.

  The most common themes were:

- loss of rest for parents and carers (33%)
- increased stress for parents and carers (30%)
- impact on siblings and family (28%)
- the loss of a safe, supportive facility (28%)
- wider service and financial pressures (22%)
- the emotional impact on children of moving from provision they are familiar with and staff they trust (21%)
- the loss of experienced staff (10%)
- anger that the outcome is pre-determined (11%)

8.17 Loss of rest for parents and carers

Families who currently receive overnight respite will continue to receive support whilst they are still eligible so there should be no loss of rest for parents and carers if the proposals are agreed and implemented.

The County Council is clear that there will not be any reductions in children's current overnight respite care packages if they choose to access an alternative residential overnight respite provision. Reassessments will not be required if the decision is taken to close Merrydale and/ or Sunbeams. Ongoing reviews will continue to ensure that services remain appropriate to children and their families.

Families who are newly assessed as requiring respite support will also continue to be able to access this type of provision.

Children's Services eligibility criteria remains unchanged. It is the location of the delivery of the support, and the range of support on offer that is changing.

8.18 Increased stress for parents and carers

There is no reduction in care proposed should the decision be made to close Merrydale and Sunbeams. The Council will work with all affected families to identify alternative arrangements that are suitable to meet their child/children's needs. The approach that has been and would be taken is outlined in the sections below with the aim that there is no increased stress for parents and carers.

8.19 Impact on siblings and family

Concerns were raised through the consultation that the proposals would affect siblings who are able to spend time with parents accessing activities that their disabled sibling may not be able to engage in or may not want to, when they are having overnight stays at Merrydale and Sunbeams. If it is agreed that the homes should close, a suitable, alternative option would be offered so that sibling time with parents could be maintained.

The consultation responses also raised wider questions about the support offered to young carers and siblings of children with disabilities. Children's Services currently funds Hampshire Young Carers Alliance (HYCA) to provide a young carers' service.

Via the Short Break Activities grants, Hampshire County Council currently funds provision which allows siblings to attend activities. These presently include YMCA, Avon Tyrell and some Disability Challengers schemes. These inclusive services enable children with a disability to enjoy Short Breaks activities with their siblings, and enables families to access one service for their children.

Where families give consent for their details to be shared, families of children with disabilities can be linked up; perhaps where there are children and siblings in similar circumstances, giving the families the opportunity to share experiences, and benefit from new friendships and support networks.

8.20 The loss of a safe, supportive facility

The County Council recognises that it is important that children feel safe and secure where they receive care away from their families. Parents and carers need to build trusting relationships with staff and change can be difficult for children and their parents. There are obvious emotional ties between children and their families with Merrydale and Sunbeams where trusting relationships have been built.

If the decision is made to close these provisions, opportunities will be put in place to enable these endings and goodbyes to be managed and the children's time at these provisions celebrated, recognising that the way that this is achieved may well be individual for each child.

Families would be supported to build trusting relationships with new providers and their staff. Social workers will support children to have a managed transition, agreed with their family, which works with the child and family's timescales.

8.21 The emotional impact on children of moving from provision they are familiar with and staff they trust

Care packages would not be reduced for any child receiving overnight respite currently at Merrydale and Sunbeams. A suitable alternative would be offered through discussion between children's social workers and families and they would be supported through a transition that helps them get to know the new respite environment and staff group and that all questions and concerns are addressed.

The transition from one setting to another may cause stress and anxiety to the directly affected children and families. Given the needs of children attending Merrydale and Sunbeams, the impact of such change for them could be particularly challenging. To enable these transitions to be successful, social workers would undertake individualised planning for each child. There would be opportunities for the child to be visited by staff from their new provision at home, to make visits to the provision and for staff from Merrydale and Sunbeams as well as parents to share information about the children they care for with the new provider.

All the children and families directly affected by the proposals were offered one-to-one meetings with a social worker during the consultation to explore what their individual options would be. Each child has a potential option identified in the event of closure. Families have been supported to visit alternative settings if they wished to and for some children, these new respite arrangements have been progressed in advance of any decision, at the parent's request.

Parents and carers of children accessing Firvale have also been made aware of the potential changes to the in-house offer. This group may also be impacted in the event of any closure due to potential new children accessing Firvale as an alternative.

Where families have chosen not to identify an alternative, social workers have used their own professional judgement based on the knowledge of the family to identify a potential suitable alternative. These are not fixed and should the decision be taken to close one or both of the homes, families would have the opportunity to have further discussions with their social workers about the alternative options available. Individualised transition plans would be put in place for each child. Children would have the opportunity to visit any new provision prior to commencing overnights and their care plan would be reviewed regularly to ensure it meets the needs of the child.

Children's Services monitors and reviews children's care plans jointly with their family to ensure that they are effective; this includes any respite arrangements. The County Council would ensure that full transition plans are agreed with families before any proposed closures take effect. All providers of overnight respite put in place individual care plans for each child, informed by information from the child or young person, their parents or carers and anyone else identified. This ensures that the provider is able to meet the individual needs of a child and tailor its support accordingly.

If the decision is made to close Merrydale and Sunbeams the County Council would work with providers to support the transition plans for groups of children. External providers would use this information to look at matching children, for example to maintain school friendships and existing relationships. Children and young people who currently access Merrydale and Sunbeams would continue to have opportunities to mix with an appropriate peer group which would enable them to maintain existing and establish new, relationships.

The alternative overnight respite providers are established and experienced in caring for children with complex needs and disabilities. Many Hampshire families already access these services. They are experienced in welcoming and settling new children into their environment, making bonds and developing trusting relationships with children and their families. The staff work with parents to understand the needs of their children and how best to meet these.

The County Council has considered whether, if the decision was made to close the homes, they be kept open longer to allow those who are 16 or 17 years old the opportunity to move to adult provision (preventing a move to an alternative overnight respite provision and then a potential further move to an adult provision). This would not be possible but the County Council acknowledges that two moves in such a short period would not be the best outcome for these young people. Therefore for the children approaching adulthood, alternative plans would be focused on accessing their adult provisions earlier, negating the need for a further change wherever possible.

8.22 The loss of experienced staff

The options for existing staff are discussed in section 7.

Staff who may leave under EVR/CR will have valuable skills and experience relevant to being a foster carer providing short-term respite care in their homes for children with disabilities. Staff would be eligible to apply to become a foster carer for the Specialist Respite Care Service (SRC). Information about Specialist Respite Care is provided in section 8.36.

8.23 Wider service and financial pressures

Concerns were raised during the consultation that the impact on families could potentially lead to family breakdowns or families needing further support, perhaps even full time care.

Children and families would not receive a reduction in overnight respite as a result of these proposals. Therefore, it is not anticipated that the closure of one or two in-house units in Children's Services would result in a displacement of spend to Adults Services. Any older young people taking the opportunity to potentially transition to Adults Services earlier, as a result of any closure, would continue to be funded by Children's Services until they are 18 years old.

Where respite families are experiencing extreme difficulties providers can be approached to offer emergency overnights, including same day referrals. All contracted providers are expected to consider emergency respite placements when the need arises. For children known to them this is much easier, but where possible they will also consider children they have not previously cared for. One provider will have a bed specifically for emergencies, which will be kept free for such instances.

8.24 Anger that the outcome is pre-determined

It is recognised that some people hold the view that the outcome of the consultation has been pre-determined. However, no decision about the proposed closure of Merrydale and Sunbeams has yet been made.

8.25 Views on alternative options

8.26 Respondents were then asked to consider the alternative options presented:

- **For their comments on the proposals, and the alternative options which have been considered or rejected.**

8.27 Alternative Overnight Residential Respite

11% of respondents commented about the alternative respite provision proposed.

The most common themes in relation to alternative overnight residential respite were:

- Limited range of options; alternative homes do not cater for the same range of disabilities
- Concerns that other local provision did not offer the same standards of care and had lower Ofsted ratings than Merrydale and Sunbeams
- Lack of clarity as to whether there are comparable facilities in the alternative options
- Distance and travel concerns
- Concerns that private homes had higher staff turnover
- Concerns that the County Council would be less able to influence the quality of provision with external providers

8.28 Limited range of options; alternative homes do not cater for the same range of disabilities

The current known overnight respite market local to Hampshire consists of;

Firvale	Basingstoke
Cherry Trees	Guildford
Tree Tops	Chertsey
Castle Gate	Newbury
Rose Road	Southampton
Galena	Southampton
Kids	Fareham (although please note that this provision will be moving to purpose built premises in Waterlooville in the New Year)
Beechside	Portsmouth

The homes above provide for the same range of needs and disabilities as Merrydale and Sunbeams currently.

For children meeting specific eligibility criteria for life limiting conditions there are also specialist settings such as;

Naomi House	Winchester
Shooting Stars Chase	Guildford
Chestnut Tree House	West Sussex

If other overnight respite provision is identified this will be explored with the possibility of utilising such services to offer children and their families further choice.

8.29 Concerns that the market will not be able to cope with the demand

Based on the face-to-face discussions with families and their social workers, there is currently sufficient capacity in the market to accommodate potential children transferring from Sunbeams and Merrydale, should the closures take place.

Some providers in the local market are registered charities; Rose Road, Kids, Cherry Trees (and previously Stephens Ark Mencap). There are also two local authority providers (in addition to Hampshire County Council's Firvale); Beechside is a Portsmouth City Council operated service and Castle Gate is a West Berkshire Council operated service. Galena is run by Keys Group which is a private company.

The mixed economy affords the market a level of stability. The County Council works closely with the providers and has built positive relationships over the

years to be able to support settings facing challenges. For example, should a critical provider of care be in financial difficulty the County Council would work with them to move to a more stable position whilst simultaneously monitoring the risk.

Providers have advised the County Council that they are able to meet the potential volume of nights. At this stage they are unable to comment on meeting the current particular days being received, without further detail regarding specific patterns of overnights for individual families. These details have not yet been provided at this initial scoping phase.

The potential demand increase for Firvale has been scoped and this indicates that the potential volume of nights can be met.

External providers are currently aware of potential numbers of children and numbers of nights. Should the decision be made to close one or more of the homes, more detailed discussions would be had regarding individual child needs and circumstances, to ensure that these could be met by a particular provider.

Current and potential capacity of the existing market consists of:

a) Existing capacity, i.e. the provider is not running at full capacity within its current opening times and is able to accommodate more children within current offer;
b) The provider is able to increase opening times thus increasing capacity, should this be required. (If this is the case it is acknowledged that staff recruitment activity may be required and would need to be built in to any transition timeline.)

If demand were to increase, effective contract management and on-going dialogue with our providers would ensure that there is sufficient capacity going forward.

There is a potential new provision in the North West of the county that will be able to apply to deliver services, adding even more market capacity to the current availability detailed above. This provision is dependent on Ofsted registration in April 2018.

Furthermore, when Kids moves to its new premises in Waterlooville in 2018, this will further increase the number of beds in the market and add to the available capacity for current and future demand.

With the increased respite offer, the development of an increased number and range of arrangements with external service providers, and the development of the Specialist Respite Care service, there is a foundation for growth in respite support that would be able to meet an increase in demand. This includes consideration of forecasted population growth figures which takes into account planned new homes being built in the county over the next 6 years. Preventative interventions such as the Sleep Support service for families (where non-medical sleep issues are the main reason for respite being required) will present opportunities to tackle the core underlying issues (e.g. sleep).

Where any gaps in provision are identified later in the process for any reason, the County Council would work with current providers, and carers to fill these where possible. Where this is not feasible work with carers and the market would be undertaken to identify other solutions.

A further option for managing any gaps in provision is via a direct payment. These would enable families to commission their services directly.

The County Council's approach to contracting with external service providers ensures that any new overnight providers or new settings that meet the required standards are able to apply to deliver overnight services to Hampshire without having to wait until a new tender is issued.

If an alternative provider does not feel it is able to meet the needs of the child for any reason, there is a range of other options that would be explored to secure suitable alternative provision for the family.

8.30 Concerns that other local provision did not offer the same standards of care and had lower Ofsted ratings than Merrydale and Sunbeams

Hampshire County Council's three residential respite services Firvale, Merrydale and Sunbeams have all been graded by Ofsted as being 'Good' following their most recent inspections. All three services are managed and supported by the same management team. As such there is a consistency across all three homes in the services and care provided. All provide suitable accommodation and facilities that meet the needs of the children they look after during their respite.

All overnight respite units are inspected by Ofsted. The County Council promotes access to settings with an Ofsted rating of 'Good' or above.

Where a contracted provider has a less than 'Good' rating support is provided to develop and improve practice to move back to 'Good' at the next inspection.

During this period new families would not be referred to the service and risk assessments for existing children accessing the provision would be undertaken by the children's social worker.

Where parental choice or specific needs dictate, new children may access 'requires improvement' settings following a comprehensive risk assessment process being undertaken.

Regarding suitability of care; should the closures go ahead, more detailed discussions with providers would start to take place. Where a provider has been identified as a potential alternative for a child, information would then be shared regarding the individual needs. Providers would undertake their assessment and meet with the child to ascertain if the setting can meet their specific requirements.

8.31 Lack of clarity as to whether there are comparable facilities in the alternative options

The alternative overnight respite providers outlined in the consultation are established providers who have experience of providing overnight respite for many children and young people. The children for whom they currently provide respite have similar needs to those currently at Merrydale and Sunbeams. The settings are structured to provide environments to meet the needs of these children and young people. They will also provide appropriate peer groups for them.

The County Council's external providers of overnight respite are contracted to deliver services according to the following principles;

- Children accessing overnight respite are loved, happy, healthy, safe from harm and able to develop, thrive and fulfil their potential.
- Overnight respite staff value and nurture each child as an individual with talents, strengths and capabilities that can develop over time.
- Overnight respite providers foster positive relationships, encouraging strong bonds between children and staff in the home on the basis of jointly undertaken activities, shared daily life, domestic and non-domestic routines and established boundaries of acceptable behaviour.
- Providers are ambitious, nurturing children's school learning and out-of-school learning and their ambitions for their future.
- Providers are attentive to children's need, supporting emotional, mental and physical health needs, including repairing earlier damage to self-esteem and encouraging friendships.
- Overnight respite providers are outward facing, working with the wider system of professionals for each child, and with children's families and communities of origin to sustain links and understand past problems.
- Overnight respite providers have high expectations of staff as committed members of a team, as decision makers and as activity leaders. In support of this, children's homes should ensure all staff and managers are engaged in on-going learning about their role and the children and families they work with.
- Overnight respite is provided in a safe and stimulating environment in high-quality buildings, with spaces that support, nurture and allow privacy as well as common spaces and spaces to be active.
- Providers offer a range of on and off site activities which meet the needs of individual children and respond to their preferences.
- Overnight respite staff are sensitive when listening to the wishes and feelings of each child, especially those with communication challenges. They ensure that all children are able to participate and be involved in planning activities, and providing feedback on the service.

Each child will have a personalised respite plan identifying what the desired outcomes are for that individual during their time at respite.

8.32 Lack of clarity about the 16+ independence breaks

The 16+ independence breaks are a targeted break that focuses on supporting young people to work towards developing skills. The aim of this provision is for young people to achieve more independence as they move into adulthood.

Working on skills will also be a fundamental part of all provisions ensuring that there is ongoing agreement between children, parents, providers and other professionals involved with the child, such as schools, as to what the priority for the child is and the best approach to achieving this for all.

In addition to the principles outlined at 8.31, overnight respite providers work to a set of principles agreed with Hampshire County Council for older young people. Where appropriate, this will be focussed on developing independence skills as identified below (this list is not exhaustive);

- I can care for myself more independently
- I have an improved awareness of personal safety and have a better understanding of how to use the internet safely
- I am more independent in keeping my room in good order
- I recognise the importance of eating well and have a better understanding of how to keep myself healthy
- I am more independent in preparing a meal
- I have an improved ability to make decisions about how to spend my day
- I have an improved ability to manage my money
- I have greater independence in finding information about community facilities and services
- I have greater independence in travelling by foot, or public transport
- I have improved awareness of road safety
- I demonstrate improvements in understanding appropriate behaviours in different situations
- I have an improved ability to make myself understood
- I have a better understanding of relationships and what I need to do to stay healthy.

8.33 Distance and travel concerns

The County Council recognises that travelling to and from respite venues is an additional concern for families. When planning for alternative provision, transport to or from overnight respite would be considered with families on a case by case basis. The Council is committed to ensuring that families remain able to access provision that would meet their child's needs.

8.34 Concerns that private homes had higher staff turnover

In 2016/17 Hampshire County Council depended on the external market to provide over 2,000 overnights.

Hampshire's external residential respite market generally has a low turnover of staff.

Staffing in these externally commissioned homes is consistent; individuals tend to remain in post at the same setting for several years, this includes both management and practitioner roles.

8.35 Concerns that the County Council would be less able to influence the quality of provision with external providers

Children's Services work closely with the external market and are a significant purchaser of respite services. As a result of this and the relationships developed with external service providers, the County Council has some influence on external service providers who are responsive to input from the County Council in developing and shaping provision to meet evolving needs.

Following any transition providers will be monitored to ensure that they are providing the required levels and standard of care and that feedback from children and families is positive. Any areas for development would be identified and worked through via contract management. As part of the care plan reviewing process social workers would continue to meet with families to ensure that the provision in place, is meeting their needs and that the new package is working. If a family feels that the support is not meeting their needs for any reason, this would be explored by the social worker and where appropriate alternatives could be sought.

The County Council's approach to contracting with external service providers ensures that the service offer is not static and is flexible enough to take account of feedback from families to ensure that any viable future options can be explored.

8.36 Specialist Respite Care

7% of respondents commented on the specialist respite care option. Much of the concern about specialist respite was based on pre-conceived knowledge of the service – and in particular on perceived past failures to meet required need.

The key themes were:

- Limited availability
- Matching
- Suitability for needs
- Not professional carers
- Reliability concerns
- Onerous assessment

- No social progress
- It hasn't worked before

Limited availability

There are currently 40 approved Specialist Respite Carers able to provide respite to one or more children. The Council is launching a new targeted recruitment strategy in January 2018 to increase the number of Specialist Respite Carers.

Matching

Children are matched to carers according to their individual needs. If specific training is required to enable a carer to meet the needs of a child, this is provided through Hampshire County Council or by commissioning specific training from relevant organisations. Introductory sessions give the opportunity for the carer/child/family to meet and confirm suitability of the match prior to the commencement of the placement.

Suitability for needs

The County Council has undertaken a detailed analysis of the needs of children who use overnight respite. This information is being used to target the recruitment of specialist respite carers in Hampshire to meet those needs.

Not professional carers

Carers are skilled in supporting and promoting a range of outcomes for children. Many carers are skilled professionals such as nurses, teachers and learning support assistants who can utilise such skills to children's benefit within a family environment.

Reliability concerns

Specialist Respite Care provides children with the opportunity to spend time with another family on a regular basis, potentially over many years and can result in very close relationships being formed that are supportive of the child and their family. As carers generally only care for one or two children this can enable flexibility around the arrangements that can be made.

Onerous assessment

Specialist Respite Carers are approved foster carers under The Fostering Regulations 2011. Providing Specialist Respite Care requires a high level of skill and commitment. The assessment process provides the opportunity to explore in detail a carer's resilience and commitment and ensure the necessary safeguards to protect children are in place.

No social progress

Specialist Respite Care can provide consistency of care with the same family for a child on a regular basis. The child's individual care plan identifies the outcomes to be met and how these will be achieved. The review of a child's plan includes monitoring how outcomes are being met and provides the mechanism to revise these where needed.

It hasn't worked before

Specialist Respite Care is one of many options to meet the needs of children. Overnight respite away from home can be a difficult step for children and their families and not all options will suit everyone. The County Council is committed to expanding the number of carers available to support better matching for children and families so that care within a family environment is available where it is the appropriate option.

8.37 Overnight Care Support

5% of respondents made comments related to the care support alternative. The key themes were:

- difficulties in recruiting and retaining carers
- additional burden of hospitality that this option would place on the host family
- lack of space to accommodate a carer in their home
- would not offer a break for the family.
- would be socially isolating for the child and not enable them to make friends or develop their independence.

Difficulties in recruiting and retaining carers

This type of support can be accessed via a County Council contracted care support provider who would employ a care worker, or via a personal budget and a family would make their own arrangements, or via a direct payment worker.

Additional burden of hospitality that this option would place on the host family

Some parents/carers choose to use the time to visit friends and family therefore opting to not stay in the home during the overnight.

Lack of space to accommodate a carer in their home

This option is about giving families choice; for those it suits it can be explored, and for those who have concerns around this type of support and how it would work for their particular circumstances, there are other types of respite that can be accessed.

Would not offer a break for the family

Overnight care support in the home is one option for respite. It is recognised that this type of provision may not meet the needs of all families. However, during the consultation period a small number of families have identified this option as their preference.

Would be socially isolating for the child and not enable them to make friends or develop their independence.

For some families they would prefer for their child to stay at home and not to go to another setting for respite, as it is less disruptive and they know they are happy in their own room and familiar environment.

8.38 Family Breaks

2% of respondent comments related to family breaks. The key themes were:

- would not offer a break for the family
- would be difficult for families whose children struggled to adjust to change
- would offer longer breaks, but less frequently, but need little breaks more often.
- opportunities for independent development and social progression would be limited.

Would not offer a break for the family

Family breaks were a pilot project which mixed results. Some families really enjoyed getting away together as a family, especially those with younger children, and for them the opportunity to stay in accessible premises that met their needs worked and was beneficial. For some families it was the first time they had been able to all go swimming together for example, as the setting had hoists in the pool room.

For other families this type of break did not meet their needs as a carer was not provided.

Would be difficult for families whose children struggled to adjust to change

Family breaks are intended to offer families a choice in how they access respite services. It is acknowledged that they would not suit all families for example where children struggle to adjust to change or where families are looking for independent development opportunities.

Would offer longer breaks, but less frequently, but need little breaks more often

In terms of length of overnight respite, some families fed back during the service user engagement that if they were able to have a longer break, they would not need so many shorter breaks during the year. Parents/carers fed back that a

longer break would enable them to re-charge more fully than one or two overnights which were spread out across the year.

Should a family opt for a family break as their alternative package, they could mix and match it with another type of break such as respite in a residential setting. For example they could have half their allocated nights away together as a family and half with the child accessing a respite home.

Opportunities for independent development and social progression would be limited

Families eligible for overnight stays could potentially coordinate dates and share a break to enable their children to spend time together if opportunities to socialise and social progression is a concern for the family with this type of break

8.39 Respondents' own ideas for alternative service provision

Given their concerns about alternative provision, some respondents made other suggestions about how respite services could be adapted to meet the needs of both service users and the County Council.

8.40 Redevelopment/ refurbishment

14% of respondents felt that if the homes were to close and the land sold, that the proceeds and developer contributions could be used to provide a new purpose built facility.

A further 8% of respondents thought that the County Council should re-imagine the use of their overnight respite homes to make the facilities more sustainable by investigating options for mixed use or extending the range of services provided. Respondents saw the potential for the homes to be used as a 'hub' from which other forms of respite could be provided. This, they felt, could help towards the cost of refurbishment of an existing home, or the ongoing running of a new purpose-built facility.

Merrydale and Sunbeams have been adapted over many years to ensure they meet the ever changing requirements of their users and the regulatory infrastructure that surrounds respite care.

Given the age and condition of both buildings, significant capital investment would be required if their use was to be meaningfully altered. Further to this, the location and environment of both homes brings limitations that could severely restrict any form of different use. Therefore, this approach to either location is not recommended.

The County Council could invest in the refurbishment and development of the two homes but this would not achieve the saving of £452,000 per annum required.

8.41 Delayed decision

6% of respondents felt that any decision to close should be postponed to enable a smooth transition for existing users. This was considered to be particularly pertinent for older users, who would soon be transferring to adult care. Respondents also wanted reassurance that nothing would close until alternative care plans were in place.

All children would be supported to identify alternative provision if the decision is to close Merrydale and Sunbeams. The County Council has considered that, if the decision is to close the homes, whether they could be kept open longer to allow those 16 and 17 years olds the opportunity to move to adult provision. This would not be possible but alternative plans will be focused on accessing adult provision earlier, negating the need for further change.

8.42 Review eligibility criteria

There is a perception that there are a number of families who would benefit from overnight respite, but who do not quite meet the existing criteria. 6% of respondents suggested that the County Council could re-assess the eligibility criteria to increase service user numbers which would make the homes more viable and enable them to continue operating.

Children's Services has a published eligibility criterion to receive a service from the disabled children's teams. Social workers in these teams are trained to complete a holistic assessment of a child and their family's needs and the assessment is used to understand the family's need for support or specialist services. Social workers will work with the family to plan how the family can be supported to meet their needs; part of this involves consideration as to whether specialist services are recommended.

Overnight respite is one of the most costly services provided to families, so the County Council needs to ensure that this service is available to the people who need it most, when they need it. This is not just based upon the needs that a particular condition presents but also the wider needs of parents and carers, and their families as a whole.

Overnight respite is considered for families where:

- The child regularly does not sleep through the night and needs supervision to stay safe
- The child has complex health needs that regularly need attention during the night
- The child's support needs are so intensive that the parents/carers need a longer break

The County Council holds a County Allocation Panel every two weeks, where referrals for overnight respite are presented and a panel decision is made as to whether to approve those referrals. Prior to this meeting the child's social worker

would ensure that all other avenues of support had been explored, including support available within the wider family or community.

8.43 Key findings from staff and union consultations

8.44 There were a number of key findings from the staff and union consultations. These are outlined below:

8.45 Maintaining a professional service during the review and minimising the impact on service users

Staff were concerned about ensuring that the quality of the service would not be affected by the proposals and consultation process. Staff have remained professional in their day to day duties to ensure minimal impact. Where staff have had concerns or questions about the proposals they have been able to feed these back to their unit manager and have been taken into consideration as part of the consultation. This is outlined below.

8.46 Loss of experienced staff

Concern was raised that the children using the service often have very complex needs and consequently the staff working at the homes are highly trained and experienced, many with long service. It is recognised that the staff within the homes are highly trained and experienced. If the proposal to close the homes is approved, staff who leave employment, either through EVR2 or compulsory redundancy, would be eligible to become a foster carer for the Specialist Respite Care Service (SRC) and this would not affect their entitlement to retain their redundancy pay or gain access to their pension. In addition redeployment opportunities into other roles with Hampshire County Council would be sought for those at risk of compulsory redundancy.

8.47 HR Processes

During the consultation process there have been discussions with staff regarding the HR timeline; the redeployment opportunities available at Firvale, the department and wider authority that staff would be eligible to apply for; and the redeployment process.

8.48 Voluntary/ compulsory redundancy process

Also during consultation queries have been answered in relation to who would be eligible to apply for enhanced voluntary redundancy (EVR); how to apply; how to calculate the value of their EVR package; the criteria for selection; potential leaving dates and implications for employees who have been accepted for EVR.

8.49 Pay and conditions

Staff raised concerns about the lack of new children and families being approved for overnight respite care and the implication this had for them in terms of

reduced regular overtime and the potential impact this could have on their redundancy payments With some voluntary turnover in staff during the consultation it is not clear that there would be any reduction in overtime. However, it has been confirmed that redundancy pay would be calculated in line with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) guidelines and Employment with Hampshire County Council (EHCC) policy.

8.50 Transition plans

Staff have raised a number of issues relating to the transition of children between settings. Where possible staff would assist in the transition process and support the children and families with the move.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

http://www3.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/about-cs/cs-equality-diversity.htm

9.1 A comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) on the impact of these proposals on the children who access Merrydale and Sunbeams and the staff who work in them was carried out in July and has been further considered and revised for decision day taking into account the staff and public consultation findings.

9.2 The EIA describes how the County Council has considered the impact of the proposed changes on those with protected characteristics and the action that would be taken by the County Council to minimise this impact. It covers the impact for both children and staff.

9.3 The protected characteristics that have been identified as medium or high impact for children are age, disability, poverty and rurality. The County Council has addressed these impacts within this report and in detail in the EIA which has resulted in a lower impact rating after mitigation.

9.4 The protected characteristics that have been identified as medium for staff are age, gender and poverty. Again, these impacts have been addressed in this report and the full detail is within the EIA.

10 Proposals and implementation

10.1 Hampshire County Council has considered the views expressed through both the public and staff consultations. The County Council recognises there is strong feeling against the proposed closure of the two homes which are valued by families using them. The proposed overnight respite provision is predicated on offering families a more flexible choice of services, within the current financial constraints.

10.2 The decision has to be a carefully balanced consideration of all the factors including the responses to the consultation, the needs and welfare of the current

cohort of children accessing Merrydale and Sunbeams, the future needs of disabled children in Hampshire and the availability, quality and capacity in the market, now and in the future.

10.3 Having carefully considered the responses from the consultation, the needs of the current 35 children accessing the homes, as well as the future needs of disabled children, the options for the sites against the investment required, this report seeks approval to close Merrydale in Winchester and Sunbeams in Aldershot. Closure is proposed to take place in Spring 2018 to enable detailed discussion with children, their parents/carers and providers to support a smooth transition to alternative provision.

10.4 The recommendation for the closure is made on the basis that the buildings do not meet the standards of accommodation that Hampshire County Council would wish to provide, will not meet the future needs of disabled children and that the limitations of the buildings are such that it is not possible to bring them up to this standard whilst maintaining economic viability. The recommendation has taken into account the availability of provision within the external provider market.

11 Legal implications

11.1 The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 place a duty on local authorities to provide a range of services for disabled children and their families which includes “overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere.” These overnight breaks can be provided to children under Section 17 or Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

11.2 Local authorities have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 section 149 to have due regard to the need to: eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	No
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	**Yes**
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	No
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	No

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
Title	Reference	Date
Executive Member for Children's Services		
Short Breaks for Disabled Children Grant Awards for 2014-15	5195	22 January 2014
Short Breaks Statement: Service Statement review 2014-15	5580	26 March 2014
Children with Disabilities Public Consultation	5933	25 July 2014
Revenue Budget report for Children's Services for 2015/16	6286	21 January 2015
Short Breaks Grants Allocation for 2015/16	6447	23 March 2015
Transformation to 2017 - Revenue Savings Proposals	6889	16 September 2015
Revenue budget report for Children's Services for 2016/17	7131	20 January 2016
Short Breaks for Disabled Children Grants for 2016-17	7216	18 March 2016
Revenue budget report for Children's Services for 2017/18	8019	18 January 2017
Permission to consult on proposals to close two overnight respite residential homes for children with disabilities as the Council moves towards a wider range of overnight respite services		17 July 2017
Cabinet		
Cabinet: Revenue Budget and Precept 2015/16	6373	6 February 2015

Transformation to 2017: Consultation Outcomes	6942	21 September 2015
Medium Term Financial Strategy Update and Transformation to 2017 Savings Proposals	6920	5 October 2015
Children and Young People's Select Committee (ref: Respite Task and Finish Group)		
Short Breaks Task & Finish Group report	6003	23 July 2014
Consideration of Request to Exercise Call-in Powers	6083	12 September 2014

Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
Title	Date
Children Act	1989
Local Government Act	1999
Equality Act	2010
Short Breaks: Statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using Short Breaks	2010
The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations	2011
Children and Families Act	2014
Best Value Statutory Guidance (revised and updated)	2015

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document	Location
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

1.2. The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;

1.3. Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;

1.4. Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionally low.

1.5. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. A summary statement is available at section 9 of this report. The full assessment is available at: www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/about-cs/cs-equality-diversity.htm.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. There are not considered to be impacts on crime and disorder.

3. Climate Change:

3.1. There are not considered to be impacts on climate change.