Shared Services Programme
Vision for Residential Services

1. Overview
This document sets out a vision for residential children services across Bury, Oldham and Rochdale councils. The vision covers all residential services including children’s homes, emergency temporary accommodation, supported accommodation and residential short breaks for disabled children.

The objective is to ensure that the work undertaken by the residential project (a project that sits within the wider shared services programme), has an articulated long term vision for how services can be most effectively aligned between the authorities.

The document also sets out a clear vision to inform how Oldham and Rochdale can collaborate more effectively when developing the next generation of in-house and external residential services.

2. Context
The last 30 years has seen a significant decrease of children living permanently in residential homes, and a corresponding increase in the numbers of children in foster care. The rate of the use of children’s residential care has decreased from 32% of the care population in 1978, to 21 % in 1986, to 9% cent in 2010/11. ¹ The latest figures from the DoE indicate that this rate of decline has stabilised with just less than 1 in 10 children living in residential homes.

The children who currently live in residential homes tend to be those for whom it is impossible or impractical to care for with a family or in foster care arrangement. The main cohort of these are young people who have moved from foster care placement to foster care placement until residential care becomes the only option.

In addition to this there is a second smaller group of children who cannot be cared for at home because of complex physical and/or learning impairments, or a significant mental health illness. Again older children are more likely to be accommodated in this kind of residential care.

Residential accommodation has consequently become a destination for children who in their teenage years have become difficult to place in foster care or children who have complex impairments who cannot be easily cared for at home. One of the clearest indicators of this is that the average age of children living in residential care is 14.6 years.

¹ DoE Research Report DFE-RR201
The cost of residential care of accommodation is significantly higher than foster care and the outcomes for the children are poorer. The average cost per week of care per child in residential accommodation in the UK in 2013/2014 is £2900. This is significantly more than in-house foster care and IFA provision. The DoE have also found that the cost of residential accommodation is broadly equivalent for in-house and external providers.

In addition to those who live permanently in residential care children are also accommodated on a short term basis to:

- Prevent family / foster care breakdown.
- Provide residential short breaks for the families of disabled children with significant and complex needs.

This preventative type of short term residential care is generally seen as positive in maintaining family life.

Children’s services also have a duty to provide a range of accommodation options for vulnerable care leavers.

Although all the above types of residential care are different, and have very different objectives, they all provide an opportunity for local authorities to invest in positive outcomes for children and young people rather than just maintaining them in residential accommodation. This is of course sometimes already undertaken, but this vision sets out to prioritise this active approach to achieving positive outcomes through all types of residential accommodation.

3. Role of Residential Accommodation

It is accepted that permanent residential care will be the right option for some children presenting with significant social care needs or vulnerability. Children’s services will also have a role in providing residential breaks to prevent foster care / family breakdown by accommodating children over short periods of time. These core functions of children’s services will be maintained in whatever arrangements are designed between Oldham and Rochdale.

The vision recognises that residential care has a role in supporting the long term stability of children in family settings by providing an investment earlier in a child’s life. For example a child between the ages of 9-11 who has already experienced a number of foster care breakdowns may benefit from a period of outcome focused residential care rather than continuing the cycle of breakdowns in foster care.

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2 The data is inclusive due the complexity of need however the number of residential homes being judged good or outstanding has decreased in the last few years.
Investing in this ‘stickability’ of placement is both financially efficient in the long term and will bring significant benefits for the child.

The exact nature of the outcomes required by Oldham and Rochdale councils will be determined through the residential project however outcome focused activity that could be managed within a residential setting could include:

- Promoting attachment
- Supporting recovery from sexual or physical abuse
- Increasing educational attainment
- Improving physical health
- Improving mental health
- Mitigating substance misuse
- Improving behavioural outcomes

4. Vision
The overall vision for residential care is to support the long term sustainability of children’s services by developing residential services that are directed to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people.

A key element of this will be the sharing of knowledge, expertise and skills across the authorities. We will also ensure that services are sustainable by sharing operating and management costs; and by using our collective economies of scale to commission more efficiently.

Bringing services together will also enable a greater degree of service flexibility, innovation and quality. This is because an increase in scale will enable a greater degree of collective investment in some of the challenges faced by the individual authorities. Working collaboratively will also have the benefit of sharing specialist knowledge of good practice across a larger cohort of children.

Whist recognising the great work that residential services currently do the vision places on the residential project a requirement to think about how residential care can be used over the long-term as a positive intervention. It is our vision that collective resources are focused where possible on proactive rather than responsive models of care. This approach will help us meet the needs of the most challenging looked after children using planned evidence based intervention rather than simply providing responsive care at the point of breakdown.

In the case of permanent residential accommodation this may include developing joint services that can provide outcome based interventions directed at enabling children and young people to have a greater chance of living with foster carers.
The vision seeks to reinforce current thinking around positive outcomes when services are developed for children and young people who are accommodated on a short term basis. It will also consider transition arrangements including the development of effective post 16 supported accommodation.