

5 January 2021		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Sue Green, Strategic Lead Commissioning; Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead Looked After Children; Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence and Data Analytics Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report is to provide members with an overview of the Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy to ensure and the duties the Council has with regard to this are met. A copy is provided in the appendices to this report.

The local authority has a duty, so far as is reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.

The quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people 'doing well' and having stability in care. It is therefore the aim of this strategy to ensure that, across all areas of our services supporting children who are looked after and our care leavers, we aspire to achieve the best possible placements and housing provision for our young people.

There are six key priorities set as a part of this strategy:

- The voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning
- Achieving placement stability and permanence
- Recruitment and support of foster carers
- Commissioning and partnership working
- Developing the offer for care leavers
- Developing the offer for our most vulnerable children

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That members support the delivery of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy January 2021 – January 2024.

1.2 That members note the information contained in the report and accompanying strategy.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.

2.2 This report and accompanying strategy builds on the long term vision for the development of our sufficiency duty that has been set out in previous years. This version provides a three year plan from January 2021 to January 2024 to support planning and commissioning as needed.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for Children Looked After 2010) which states that:

“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of Children Looked After is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for Children Looked After.”

3.2 Working with the Participation and Engagement Team we have been able to ensure that the views of children and young people have been included in the development of this strategy. To further develop this one of the key priorities of the strategy is 'To ensure the voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning', this will be ongoing as the strategy is delivered.

3.3 Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a child looked after that, so far as is reasonably practical:

- is near the child's home;
- does not disrupt his/her education or training;
- enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably

practicable.

- 3.4 As at the end of March 2020 there were 298 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a reduction from 72.0 per 10,000 in 2018 to 68.1 per 10,000 in 2020, this is lower than our statistical neighbour average of 76.0 per 10,000 but higher than the England average of 65.0 per 10,000 based on the most recent data available (2018-19).
- 3.5 The highest percentage of children in care in Thurrock are those aged 10-15 years, this has remained broadly stable over recent years with this age group representing 40.6% of the children in care population as at 31st March 2020.
- 3.6 The majority of Children Looked After (78.9%) have a placement in a foster care setting, this is a slight increase from 2019 (75.1%). These placements are provided through in-house foster placements and placements through commissioned Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and breakdown of fostering placements is also provided in the strategy.
- 3.7 We want to ensure the right children are in our care, that they are in the right placements and that they transition into adulthood feeling support with the skills to progress to independent living. We want our Children Looked After and care experienced young people to feel settled, secure and stable and aim to do this through robust permanency planning and placement stability.
- 3.8 The performance on placement stability and educational attainment at KS2 & 4, including school attendance, is above that of our statistical neighbours and national performance for Children Looked After.
- 3.9 There is a recognition that there is a slight decrease in the numbers of Children Looked After who are placed both within the borough and within 20 miles of their home. As at end March 2020, 71.5% of children and young people are placed within a 20 mile radius of their home compared to 74.5% in 2019 and 79.3% in 2018. The geographical size of Thurrock means that those children not placed in the borough are generally in neighbouring or nearby authorities such as Essex, Southend, London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.
- 3.10 Placements over 30 miles tend to be of a specialist nature where there are few providers available to meet specific needs. The children who are placed in residential care have specialist needs and are unable to settle within a foster family environment. They generally have extensive trauma histories and foster families can be challenged with the presenting needs of these children. Residential care offers safe care to some older adolescence who can be subject to grooming from gangs and experience exploitation.
- 3.11 In 2020-21 and 2021-2022 if the numbers of Children Looked After remain at 298 (as at March 2020), an increased fostering recruitment campaign would seek to increase fostering capacity by approximately 20 households and reduce the number of children placed over 20 miles from Thurrock and in

other types of placement by at least 20 Children Looked After. The Thurrock placement need is also focussed on the recruitment of fostering households that will be able to provide for and manage sibling groups locally as this is currently where we often have difficulty securing a local placement.

- 3.12 Getting the right support for care leavers is a priority for Thurrock as this supports transition into adulthood. A number of interlinked projects have already commenced that bring together partners such as Housing, Adult Services, Headstart and Children's Services to identify and meet support needs and find housing solutions locally.
- 3.13 As at the end of March 2020, 276 care leavers, including those 16-18 being supported, were receiving an aftercare service. This is a slight increase from March 2019 but this is largely dependent on the age of children in care. The majority of Children Looked After are supported by the leaving and aftercare team on turning 18. Working closely with the Aftercare team, Headstart Housing provides transitional accommodation whilst young people develop the independence skills required to manage social housing.
- 3.14 The Headstart Programme has increased the availability of local accommodation. This in turn provides improved access to support, training and employment and access to services. Now managing a portfolio of 114 beds, including 42 supported by key workers, the service provides a tailored approach to support young people to develop.
- 3.15 The strategy provides an overview of costs, however as a part of the ongoing market development work through the commissioning team this will be further analysed in partnership with other local authorities. Changes to the team will support this further scrutiny and market negotiation within the quality standards that we have set.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy is a Statutory Duty of the Council and provides a framework for the development of high quality placements to meet the identified need.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The views of children and young people were obtained through the existing mechanisms in place through the Participation and Engagement Team and will be used as services are developed.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 This report relates to the following corporate priorities in particular:

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

This means:

- High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
- Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
- Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

7. Implications

7.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

The provision of high quality, cost effective placements is a priority in meeting our duties for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Whilst this strategy does not have savings targets attached, any savings that are achieved will contribute to the costs of earlier intervention and increased demand.

7.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.

The Local Authority is required to have regard to the statutory guidance in exercising this duty and the guidance gives the context for this as follows:

“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for looked after children.” (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010).

The Local Authority also needs to have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

7.3. **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager Community Development and Equalities

Access to placements that meet the needs identified are key to improving outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. This strategy outlines key factors such as ethnicity, gender, age and provides an analysis of these to aid planning.

Placement planning addresses the individual diversity needs of children placed and the supervising social workers assist foster carers to ensuring appropriate oversight and supervision is in place. In some situations where a cultural match has not been possible, foster carers' support network (Independent Reviewing Officers, Social Workers, and Independent Visitors) can provide and contribute to the information and care that foster families need to provide appropriate support.

7.4. **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Statement

Report Author:

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