

25th January 2024		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Placement Sufficiency Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Ceri Armstrong, Head of Transformation and Commissioning, and Dan Jones, Head of Service, Children Looked After		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Executive Director Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

Under Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) the Local Authority has a duty, as 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 local.

Thurrock Council's Sufficiency Strategy has been reviewed and revised in light of the significant change in available provision in the local and national area. There are increasingly fewer placements available for children with a high level of need, children of secondary school age, sibling groups and, parent & child placements. This has been recognised as a national issue and the Government has published a forward plan, Stable Homes Built on Love'¹

The Sufficiency strategy sets out Thurrock Council's response including:

- Children and Young People's priorities and experiences
- How local placements of all types will be developed
- How our Think Family' approach and targeted intervention will work to reduce the number of children requiring a placement
- How the Sufficiency Strategy links to regional and national initiatives

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1185931/Children s Social Care Stable Homes Built on Love consultation response.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1185931/Children_s_Social_Care_Stable_Homes_Built_on_Love_consultation_response.pdf)

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That members are advised of the revised Sufficiency Strategy and have had the had the opportunity to review and comment upon this in relation to Thurrock Council's statutory duty**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Section 22 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. In September 2021, the law changed to require that children aged 0-16 years are placed in either foster care, residential care or other registered care setting.
- 2.2 As noted in our previous update to this Committee², there has been a significant change in the local and national availability of foster placements, registered children's homes and specialist residential schools for children with SEND and complex needs.
- 2.3 Since our last Sufficiency Strategy, there have been two key changes in the legal framework around children's placements:
- It is now illegal for Local Authorities to place Children in unregistered provision when they are aged 0-15 years
 - From the end of October 2023, all supported accommodation providers to looked after children must be registered with Ofsted or have made an application to do so.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Every child in care requires a suitable placement that meets their needs and is as local as possible to the child's home. As at 30 September, 288 children were looked after by Thurrock Council which is near our twelve month average of 292 children. Thurrock Council has an allocated quota of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in its care of 44 children and the 12 month average is 42 children.
- 3.2 The table below gives a breakdown of the placements that our children and young people are currently living in.

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<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s35310/Children%20Looked%20After%20and%20Care%20Leaver%20Sufficiency%20Strategy%20Update.pdf>

Placement Type	Number of Children Placed.
Placed for Adoption	3
Placed with Connected Persons Foster Carers	19
Placed with Thurrock Foster Carers	96
Placed with IFA Foster Carers	86
Placed with Parents/those with PR	8
Placed in Supported Accommodation	45
Placed in Registered Children's Homes/Schools	24
Placed in Registered Parent and Child Home	2
Placed in other settings	5

- 3.3 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 supported with the skills to progress to independent living feeling settled, secure, and stable. We aim to do this through robust permanency planning and placement stability.
- 3.4 Over 2022/23 key placement pressures have been:
- Low availability of local Parent and Child Placements
 - Low availability of 52 week SEND School Placements
 - Fewer placements for children with complex trauma
 - Fewer placements for Secondary aged children
- 3.5 Children and young people placed outside the Local Authority area remains a challenge due to the under development of the care market and too few providers having local provision available. These are local challenges but also exist at a national level with sufficiency issues and increasing costs within the residential care market, Thurrock has looked at new solutions for children. To address the gaps locally, particularly around placements for young people with complex needs, often on Deprivation of Liberty Orders we have developed two residential homes within Thurrock utilising local council housing stock. These are initially being used as solo placements with the view to possibly increasing capacity to two placements in at least one of the homes. These two properties are being retained by the Local Authority and have been commissioned to a local provider to register with Ofsted. Both homes have received an initial inspection grading of 'good' by Ofsted. The development of the homes has reduced our reliance on emergency accommodation, significantly reduced costs and provided placement stability for two young people with a history of placement breakdowns.

- 3.6 Development of the care market has been a key priority under the difficult circumstances described. However, we have implemented a Placements Framework for supported accommodation, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and residential placements. For supported accommodation 90% of placements have been made through the framework, having come from a position of zero prior to the implementation of the framework. The framework has supported around 50-60% of placements made with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Attracting residential care providers has been challenging given the national sufficiency issues with only around 5% of placements made from the framework for this placement type. There will need to be a focus on this area when the framework is retendered in 2024. The framework is periodically re-opened to attract new providers to be based in Thurrock.
- 3.7 The placement framework operates a quality monitoring approach to ensure that providers deliver to the standards set out in the specification. This has brought more stability and resulted in less providers being decommissioned.
- 3.8 A Placement Framework is also being developed for residential placements for children with Special Education Needs (SEND). Options are being considered to merge this with the retender of the placements for looked after children framework in 2024. This will be designed to bring the same consistency and quality framework to our SEND provision as we have developed in our overarching placement framework.
- 3.9 Getting the right support for care leavers is a priority for Thurrock as this supports transition into adulthood. Several interlinked projects are already in place bringing together partners such as Housing, Adult Services, Headstart and Children's Services to identify and meet support needs and find housing solutions locally.

The Revised Sufficiency Strategy

- 3.10 The revised Strategy is set out in Appendix 1.

The document sets out how Thurrock Council will discharge its duties and work to ensure that children have suitable placements. The document sets out the key priorities from young people and how Thurrock Council will address key challenges.

- 3.11 The Sufficiency Strategy will be overseen by the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help. Members will have oversight via the Corporate Parenting Committee who will receive an update annually. Members of the committee can call in more frequent updates at their discretion.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Appendix 1 contains the Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy which members can comment on and review. This strategy is completed in respect of Statutory requirements and in response to local needs.
- 4.2 The revision of the strategy implements a previous recommendation from the Corporate Parenting Committee³

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

- 5.1 The views of Children and Young People were sought in the preparation of the Strategy

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

- 6.1 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: **Michelle Hall**
Senior Management Accountant

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.

There are no financial implications in this report.

³ Para 4.2

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s35310/Children%20Looked%20After%20and%20Care%20Leaver%20Sufficiency%20Strategy%20Update.pdf>

7.2 Legal

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

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The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010) which states that: "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."

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca 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.

The service are currently completing a CEIA.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

Impact on Looked After Children – discussed in the report

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 Sufficiency Strategy

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