

Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy

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Introduction

Children in Care are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. It is our priority to ensure that all children in our care and their families receive the best possible support. This strategy outlines a review of the needs of our children and young people who are looked after and Care Leavers by Thurrock Council and our approach to addressing these.

Meeting the needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents and a priority across the council and its partners. It is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents, to support each of our care leavers as individuals in order to enable them to achieve their maximum potential.

Our vision is to provide sufficient high quality placements for children and young people which understand their aspirations and ambitions and can support them to fulfil their potential. We aspire for our Care Leavers to have all the necessary skills and support to make a successful transition to adulthood and independence at a time that is right for them individually.

We want to make sure that we have appropriate placement and accommodation options, both now and in the future, that support our looked after children to achieve the best possible outcomes, whilst ensuring best use of available resources.

By working together across the service and with our partners responsible for children looked after we are focused on delivering the services children and young people need and deserve to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, reading 'S. Murphy'.

Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children's Social Care

Our Vision for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

When a child becomes Looked After, the local authority becomes their “Corporate Parent” responsible for them during their period as a child who is looked after and when they leave Care. Every parent wants the best for their child. In Thurrock, we believe that where possible and in children’s best interest, children should live with their families or their communities. It is not always possible for children to remain with their families due to risk of harm or because they have been harmed.

We want to ensure the right children are in our care, that they are in the right placements and that they leave our care at the right time. We want our children looked after to feel settled, secure and stable and aim to do this through robust permanency planning and placement stability.

Members and senior leaders in the Council are committed to running the best possible services and ensuring that children within Thurrock remain safe. Members from all parties support children’s social care and provide support and challenge through the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The current Portfolio Holder is a passionate supporter of children’s social care, attends the Social Care Development Board and is a member of the Fostering and Adoption Panel.

Sufficiency Duty

Legal context

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.

Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a child looked after that:

- 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.

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.”

The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the Local Authority is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy and practice is part of the “market management”
- That the Duty applies not just to meeting the needs of “looked after” children and young people but also children at risk of care or custody
- Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families

Thurrock the Place

There are 27,784 children on the school roll (School Census 2017 - the School Census is a statutory data collection report developed for all maintained nursery, primary, secondary, middle-deemed primary, middle-deemed secondary, local authority maintained, special and non-maintained special schools, academies including free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges and city technology colleges in England). There are 45,265 children and young people under the age of 18 years in Thurrock accounting for 26.3% of the population (2018). The population of children and young people is expected to increase by 11.2% in the next ten years.

Alongside existing increases in the child population in Thurrock there is expected to be a rapid economic and housing growth over the next decade. It is expected that the population of children and young people aged 0 – 25 years will rapidly increase as a result. It is highly likely, therefore, that the numbers of children looked after in Thurrock will also grow. In order to account for this expected population growth, the local Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) population projections take into account the high levels of job and housing growth expected to take place in Thurrock in the coming years to provide a more realistic forecast of population growth than the standard Office for National Statistics (ONS) forecasts.

The child (0-17 years) population has been increasing in Thurrock at a much faster rate compared to the national average. This higher rate of growth is expected to continue in the future in part due to the high level of economic and housing development currently taking place. It is likely that there will therefore, be a proportionate increase in the numbers of children looked after in Thurrock, even if the rate per 10,000 remains constant. The implementation of Early Help

through the Brighter Futures Strategy aims to provide support earlier and reduce the number of children entering the care system, alongside the introduction of the Families Together Team in April 2019.

It is estimated that from the baseline year of 2014 the child population (0 – 17 years) will grow by 19 % by 2024 and 35.4% by 2037. By comparison, the child population of England is projected to grow by just 13.3% by 2024 and 19.2% by 2037. This is around half of the rate of growth expected in Thurrock over the next 20 years.

Our Priorities

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
- Building 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

Place – a heritage rich borough which is ambitious for its future

This means:

- Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
- Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
- Fewer public buildings with better services

Prosperity – a borough, which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

This means:

- Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
- Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
- Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

What are our children telling us?

During June 2019 we held a feedback week that included feedback from children/young people and parents to gain some insight into how young people felt we were meeting their needs. Some of their comments are listed below.

- 70% of children and young people scored their overall experience as 6 or above on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being totally satisfied) with 37% of these young people scoring 10.
- 87% understood the need for children's services involvement.
- 87% of children and young people agreed that their social worker does what they say.

- 56% of children and young people said that they were involved in making their plan and 30% said they were “sort of” involved.

Comments on what we are doing well

- Consistent
- Knowledgeable
- Listening, explaining and communicating
- Problem Solving and taking action
- Making things better
- Supporting, encouraging advising and information
- Connecting with children and hearing their voices
- Putting services in to help
- Making sure children are happy and safe
- Fighting family’s corner
- Keeping our word
- Efficient and caring
- Finding workable solutions

Comments on what we could do better

- Include children in planning
- Help children explain their feelings/listen to the child’s voice
- Help to acknowledge issues and make changes
- Make things move faster
- More resources for parents
- Help with anger, mental health to ensure child’s safety
- Changes of SW’s/placements
- Making sure the history is accurate
- Sensitivity of the power imbalance between social worker and family
- Less time on paperwork, more time with children.
- Visits don’t always suit the child i.e. after school/in school
- Too many people involved, cannot always remember who they are.

We want all children in our care and care leavers to be healthy, safe and happy, do well at school, training or employment and enjoy good relationships with their peers. We want our young people to be able to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults into higher education, good careers and jobs, and achieve financial security.

The quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people ‘doing well’ 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.

Children can be in care for varying lengths of time. Some children are unable to return to live with their parents because to do so would mean that they would likely

suffer further harm, abuse and/or neglect. When children become looked after in Thurrock, we will work hard to make sure that they are not further disadvantaged and that the care we provide is better than the care they have previously received. We will provide high quality care in a foster placements with a family or where necessary a high quality residential setting.

We want to enable our children and young people to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, along with their parents and carers. We will work with our children looked after and our young people who have left care to shape how we manage and organise the resources and services that support them.

Current Demand and Performance

Our Children Looked After (CLA)

On 31st March 2019 there were 293 children looked after in Thurrock which has seen a reduction over the last 2 years to 68.4 per 10,000, lower than our statistical neighbours average in 2017/18 of 69 per 10,000 and higher than the England average of 64 per 10,000 in 2017/18.

With the support of the Eastern Region protocol, the overall number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) has reduced representing 10.2% of our Children Looked After population.

More children achieved permanency through adoption in 2018/19 in Thurrock and an increased number are identified for 2019/20 with adoption as a potential permanence plan.

Our Children Looked After are making good educational progresses with lower absences and exclusions as a result of good Personal Education Planning (PEP) and this has supported good engagement of older children in education, employment or training [EET] figures.

For the whole Thurrock CLA cohort in 2018, those achieving the expected standard were as follows:

- Reading 65%,
- GPS 59%,
- Maths 71%
- Writing 65%.

Age of Children in Care:

The highest percentage of children in care are those aged 10-15 years, this has remained broadly stable with this age group representing 44% of the children in care population as at 31st March 2019. At the end of March 2019 UASC accounted for 10.2% of the Children Looked After population. As the numbers of UASC have decreased the percentage of 16+ Looked After population has stabilised over the last two years at 29%.

Children in Care with Disabilities:

3 % of our children looked after as at the end of March 2019 had a disability as defined by the Children Act 1989 (Section 17 Part 11).

Although this group make up a comparatively small proportion of the wider cohort of looked after children, they usually have complex needs and so it is essential that we can provide placements, which are able to meet their needs and provide them with the support they need to thrive. The specialist nature of the care needs of this group, the national shortage of provision and the need for an effective transition to Adult Services where appropriate make this a key group to consider with regards to planning of provision.

Location of placement:

83.9% of children and young people are placed within a 20 mile radius of their home. The 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. Placements over 30 miles tend to be of a specialist nature where there are few providers available to meet specific needs.

Data: End of March 2019

Gender	Number	%
Male	174	59.4%
Female	119	40.6%

Ages:	Number	%
Under 1	14	4.8%
Aged 1 - 4	25	8.5%
Aged 5 - 9	40	13.7%
Aged 10 - 15	128	43.7%
Aged 16+	86	29.4%

Legal Status of Children in Care	Number	%
Interim Care Order	30	10.2%
Care Order	170	58%
Single Period of Accommodation	70	23.9.%

(S20)		
Placement Order	20	6.8%
Other	3	1%

Ethnicity:	Number	%
White British	180	61.4%
White Irish	0	0.0%
Any other White background	21	7.1%
White and Black Caribbean	7	2.3%
White and Black African	4	1.4%
White and Asian	1	0.34%
Any other mixed background	13	4.4%
Any other Asian background	6	2.0%
Black Caribbean	3	1.5%
Black African	39	13.3%
Any other Black background	4	1.4%
Indian	1	0.3%
Chinese	0	0.0%
Any other ethnic group	12	4.0%
Not obtained	1	0.4%

Children with a disability

Yes	9	3.1%
No	277	96.9%

Status:	Number	%
Unaccompanied and seeking asylum	30	10.4%

Where do our young people live?	Number	%
Foster Families	218	74.4%
Residential settings	25	8.5%
Live at home - placed with own parents	8	2.7%
Other Placement in the community	31	10.6%
Secure units	0	0.0%
Placed for adoption	11	3.8 %

Distance	%	Number
Under 20 miles and inside LA boundary	40.6%	119
Under 20 miles and outside LA boundary	42.3%	124
Over 20 miles and inside LA boundary	0.3%	1
Over 20 miles and outside LA boundary	16.4%	48
Distance not known or not recorded	0.3%	1

CLA SEND

Years 1-6	Total in Year	SEN Support	SEN Support%	EHCP	EHCP%
Years 7-11	139	19	14%	24	14%
Year 12-13	76	5	6%	14	18%
Totals	66	15	23%	13	20%

2018 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis:	
Number of Children Looked After of School Age:	254

2018 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis: 12+ months in care	CLA	ALL	National ALL	National Non Disadvantaged
Key Stage 2 Attainment Cohort				
Reading, Writing & Maths combined EXS+	50%	66%	64%	70%
Key Stage 2 Progress Cohort				
Average KS1-2 Progress Reading	-0.49	-0.32	0.0	0.3
Average KS1-2 Progress Writing	+0.18	+0.56	0.0	0.2
Average KS1-2 Progress Maths	+2.16	+0.44	0.0	0.3

From 2018, primary progress is reported as a number, and continues to measure the attainment from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2. A positive progress number means progress made is better than expected and a negative progress number means progress is less than expected

Secondary /Progression continues to measure the attainment from the end of Key Stage 4. A positive progress number means progress made is better than expected and a negative progress number means progress is less than expected.

2018 Key Stage 4 Exam Analysis: 12+ months – 23 pupils	Thurrock CLA	National	National Disadvantaged	National Non-Disadvantaged
Attainment 8 Score	19.7	46.6	38.2	50.6
5+ in English and Maths GCSEs	17.4%	43%	Not available	Not available
Progress 8	-1.42	0.0	-0.44	0.13

Attendance & Absence 2018-19

Average attendance:	94.1%
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Attending University	Number: 17
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Adoptions:	Number	% of exiting care
Adopted in 2018/19	13	6.3%
Special Guardianship Order	11	5.3%

Health:	Number	%
Annual Health Assessments 2017/18	195	90.6%
Annual Health Assessments 2018/19	194	95.1%
Annual Dental Checks 2017/18	94	43.7%
Annual Dental Checks 2018/19	175	85.4%
Up to Date immunisations 2017/18	141	65.5%
Up to Date immunisations 2018/19	171	84.9%

Under 5 years and had a development assessment 2017-18	6	42.8%
Under 5 years and had a development assessment 2018-19	12	75.0%

NB: Only includes Children Looked After in Care for more than 12 Months

Care Leavers

Care Leavers Receiving an Aftercare Service	226
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The definition of care leavers includes young people who have left care post 18 but also children who have not left care but have become eligible for support post the age of 18.

Eligible children within the meaning given by paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989. Eligible children are young people aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still being looked after.

Relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A(2) of the children Act are children who are not being looked after by a local authority, but was, before last ceasing to be looked after, an eligible child, and is aged 16 or 17

Former relevant persons within the meaning given by Section 23C (1) of the Children Act 1989 are young people aged between 18 – 25 who have been either eligible or relevant children or both

The majority of Children Looked After are supported by the leaving and aftercare team on turning 18. At the end of June 2019, 226 Care Leavers were receiving an aftercare service. Where needed, accommodation for this group is provided through a mix of council stock, private landlords and agents and housing association providers. To support young people as they move into our leaving and aftercare team we have the following services in place:

Inspire – Education Employment and Training: We have dedicated personal advisors who support young people into education employment and training. This is operated out of Inspire youth hub which brings together a range of support services to young people. A personal advisor will meet with the young

person linking closely with our virtual school to ensure that we have a range of opportunities available this includes progress into higher education, apprenticeship opportunities or college courses. Inspire also offers a range of programmes that meet the needs of young people who are not ready for formal routes, this includes our outstanding Prince's Trust team programme which supports young people who lack confidence to progress into other learning pathways.

Inspire – Headstart Housing: Recognising the need to ensure that young people entering into the aftercare service require suitable accommodation we have developed our own housing support team to provide a range of housing opportunities. Young people coming into the leaving care service have priority around social housing however, for some young people they are not ready to take on a tenancy and as such we provide a range of alternative accommodation until they are able to access their own social housing. This looks in a holistic way at the need of the young person and tries to ensure that we match them with accommodation that will meet their needs. Headstart has developed a range of support packages to meet the needs of young people, an example of this is the close working relationship with Job Centre Plus who have dedicated advisors to support with universal credit claims. We have also introduced a money management programme to support young people develop skills around money management. As accommodation is provided through a range of different types of providers we are working to extend the processes we have implemented for semi-independent accommodation for 16-18 year olds to standardise what we offer for care leavers.

Progress Since Last Sufficiency Statement

As a part of the previous sufficiency analysis, the following priorities were identified:

- To ensure there is sufficient post 16 residential provision including to meet identified specialist needs.
- To provide and commission high quality placements that meet identified needs and improve stability

In response to these priorities, a full procurement exercise has been carried out to increase the quantity and quality of provision available. This provided the opportunity to set very clear quality expectations to all types of providers and also to apply a consistent approach to specifications and documentation. We now have a select list of providers who meet the local authority quality and cost expectations. We recognise that there may still be a need to make individual / spot purchases in order to meet the needs of the child or young person but this should reduce over the annual programme of tendering when we will continually add providers to the select list.

The procurement exercise did not address the shortage of placements for children and young people with high needs and we acknowledge there is further work to be completed to fully address this sufficiency issue. Placements of this type are therefore more likely to be secured through spot purchasing however the same quality criteria is applied to all placements.

The procurement exercise undertaken during the last 12 months had a focus on quality, distance and cost. As a result of this, from 1 April 2019 the Authority has operated a select list of preferred providers that will open annually. It is recognised that due to the needs of children and young people, spot purchasing will still be required although it is anticipated that this will reduce as the select list increases.

The procurement exercise has moved the local authority away from a model of a regional contract instead working towards a model that seeks to increase the number of placements within a 20 mile radius over the coming years, it also aims to reduce spot purchasing that did not support good value. This new exercise has also set a clear definition and rates for standard and complex care and has provided a wider range of 16+ accommodation with clear quality standards and monitoring processes.

Placements Sufficiency Comparison Following 2019 Award of Contracts for the Placements Tender (2017) – Key Changes:

Contract type: The contract types have been rationalised to one (from four) Thurrock specific contract bringing consistency in terms and conditions and decreasing the risk of contractual issues with the use of contracts that were not designed by Thurrock. We have moved from three Individual Purchase agreements and one Select List to one standard Thurrock Select List. Individual purchases will only be utilised if a placement cannot be found from the Select List, and in these cases will still be subject to a standardised set of contract terms and conditions.

Supported Accommodation: There are now twelve providers, five more providers than were in place pre-tender. All twelve providers are on standardised contracts and within the Select List whereas previously they had been on Individual Purchase. Distances to placement are broadly similar at an average of sixteen miles from Civic Offices, Grays. There are a greater number of locations available than pre-tender. Costs have remained broadly similar but now with discounts that were not previously routinely offered.

Independent Foster Care Agencies (IFA's): The number of providers on the Thurrock Select List has remained broadly similar to that achieved by the Eastern Regional Select List which ended in 2018. Whether those providers who passed the Thurrock tender can meet demand will need to be monitored going forward. The Council now has the added benefit of a Thurrock specific contract. Costs and discounts have remained broadly similar.

Residential care: The nature of the residential care market has resulted in a lower number of providers who tendered than Thurrock would have liked. However, 7 of the 9 placements are within 40 miles from Civic Offices, Grays. Thurrock also has the added benefit of a Thurrock specific contract. Costs remained broadly similar, however it should be noted that the previous placement costs could have varied considerably placement by placement as no contract terms were previously in place governing price. Discounts are now part

of the contract whereas these were not routinely offered under previous contractual arrangements.

Feedback from Young People on Placement Commissioning

During the Council's commissioning exercise engagement and consultation with young people who have experienced being "looked after" they used the following key words to describe the features of a good service:

Trust	Listening	Structured
Communication	Helping	Transparency
Supporting	Understanding	Knowledge

This feedback was reflected in the specification that sets out the requirements for providers. As a part of ongoing consultation, the views of young people will be gathered through the newly appointed Participation and Engagement Officer. A Joint Strategic Needs Analysis product on the needs of children who are looked after is also being developed and this will inform any future service provision.

Joint Commissioning and Partnership Working

We work closely with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) particularly for cases where there are significant care needs. Residential places are currently purchased according to need and where appropriate, agreed through a joint decision making panel. It is acknowledged that where there are complex needs the market drives the cost and availability of provision, this is an issue facing local authorities across England and continues to be a priority for us to address. Placements for children with significant health needs are jointly funded with the Continuing Care team in the CCG.

A partnership pilot to accelerate the introduction of the Transforming Care Programme is being developed with implementation due in 2019. This identifies young people at risk of entering care where the provision of a whole family support programme is likely to prevent this.

Transition to Adult Services

Only the most complex children and young people are assessed as eligible to receive Adult Social Care services, these tend to be young people who have been supported through the Children with Disabilities Team. The majority of those who do transition to Adult Services require learning disability support (65% in last 7 years), this is followed by mental health support (7% in the last 7 years).

What we are doing and the impact of this



Placement type and the age of our children in care population have recently been relatively constant. The numbers of children in care have decreased in line with our statistical neighbours. If we are to achieve the best outcomes for all these children we need to ensure that all our placement services are fit for purpose and continue to grow and develop.

There are six main strands to our plans for the next 12 months:

1. Focus on the child.
2. Achieving permanence
3. Developing Fostering
4. Commissioning provision
5. Developing our offer for care leavers
6. Developing the support offer for our most vulnerable children

Measuring the Impact

The impact of the work to improve sufficiency will be mainly measured through the outcomes for the children and young people in placements through

feedback from children and young people as a part of their individual reviews and through different methods of participation and engagement. The following indicators will also provide some information on how well our duty to provide sufficient places to meet needs is being met:

- Placement stability
- Distance to placement
- Number of placements through framework against number of placements spot purchased
- Average cost per placement per type

Overall improvements

Across all of the services we deliver, we seek to make sure that all decisions are centred on the views and needs of the child. We also aim to making sure that our time is focussed on achieving the right outcomes for our children who are looked after to achieve these aims.

Priority 1: Focus on the child

Ensure that all internal processes are focused on the child and maximise the impact of money spent to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved.

Actions:

1. Make sure that the voice of the child is at the centre of everything that we do.
2. Ensure that all processes are efficient and minimise any potential wasting of resources.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased value for money achieved across all placements.
- Clear decision making processes and clarity around roles and responsibilities throughout the placement process.
- Better communication between teams and improved information sharing.
- All systems are fit for purpose and support effective management of information throughout process.

Priority 2 – Achieving permanence

2.1 Ensure there is sufficient support available for children to achieve their long term care plans to prevent looked after children remaining in placements which may not best meet their needs.

Where possible we want all our children to be in placements which provide them with long term placement stability, and where appropriate to leave care. We describe this as achieving permanence for that child. Although it is sometimes necessary to move a child to provide them with a better placement our aim is to minimise the number of times each child changes placement as this can be very disruptive. To achieve permanence it is

essential that all our teams work effectively together to support each placement. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways, including adoption, special guardianship order, child arrangement order or matched for long term fostering. Each of these options gives the chance for the child to achieve stability and achieve their potential.

Actions:

1. Complete an in-depth review of all placements to understand where there is opportunity to support permanence or where a child might be better served by moving to a different placement.
2. Improve the placement review process to ensure all placements are regularly brought before the placement panel for review and all options for that child are considered at this time so each child is able to move towards permanence where appropriate.
3. Ensure all children who are at the edge of care and those becoming looked after are part of a Family Group Conference/Meeting.
4. Put in place necessary support for our carers and children in care to enable long term placements. This covers placement support such as therapeutic intervention to ensure the carer's home can meet the needs of the children placed with them.
5. Raise awareness of and assist carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders wherever suitable to ensure that this option is available to achieve permanence for children who are looked after.
6. Improve our offer of life story work for children.
7. Review all approved connected carers to see whether an SGO would be more appropriate to meet the child's long term needs.

Expected outcomes:

- Increase placement stability and so minimise the damaging effects of additional placement moves for already vulnerable children.
- Granting more SGO arrangements will:
 - Enable young people to escape the intrusion and stigma that is sometimes attached to being looked after.
 - Young people have the security of knowing that they are legally part of their carer's family.

2.2 Further develop our adoption support services to achieve and secure improvements in service delivery.

Actions:

1. Increase our early intervention and therapeutic offer to provide the additional support for adopters funded through the Adoption Support Fund (government funding to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families).

Expected outcomes:

- Reduced adoption placement breakdowns through ensuring placements are adequately supported, helping us avoid further disruption for vulnerable children.

2.3 To recruit sufficient adopters and maintain existing placements as the number of available adopters continues to fall across the UK.

Actions:

1. Implementation of the Adoption Recruitment Strategy.
2. Raise awareness of support for those who have adopted through more effective use of social media.
3. Increase targeted support groups for families to allow early intervention where a placement might be at risk of breaking down.
4. Maintain quality and quantity of matches through a review of processes to ensure they are robust and achieve what is right for the child

Expected outcomes:

- Prevent placement escalation and support permanence.
- Reduce risks for a child resulting from being looked after: already separated from the birth family and foster carer, breakdown of a placement with their permanent carers can be extremely disruptive for a child.

Priority 3 – Developing Fostering

Fostering recruitment and retention

There are three main types of foster care available to our children who are Looked After. Where possible we keep children with people they already have some form of relationship with, this type of placement is Family and Friends Foster Care. When a child is first referred to us we will speak to any proposed carers to assess whether they will be able to provide the support that child needs. If we cannot find a suitable related carer, we will try to place them with one of our Thurrock 'in-house' carers. Only where we cannot identify an in-house placement to meet their needs will we then look to place them with an independent fostering agency (IFA). These placements are more likely to be further away and are usually more costly

We are looking over the next three years to significantly increase the number of children placed with Thurrock Council foster carers and so reduce our dependence on external fostering agencies. We have set a target to increase in house placements by 20 households year on year and reduce the proportion of children placed with costly independent fostering agencies rather than with in-house carers.

Actions:

1. Improve our offer to potential carers to encourage them to foster with Thurrock Council rather than an independent agency.
2. Increase support and training for our carers to help give them resilience.
3. Increasing local engagement and raising awareness of fostering with Thurrock.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased proportion of in-house carers, to meet our ambition to place more children with Thurrock Council carers by 2021.
- Improved value for money to allow us to invest more of our budget in supporting our children who are Looked After.

Priority 4: Commissioning Sufficient Provision

The levels of demand for placements as a result of the numbers of children in care and our limited control over the market is resulting in pressures within our external placements budgets and difficulty in identifying suitable placements for all children within the required timescales.

The recent placement commissioning exercise has enabled us to develop a select list of providers with clear quality frameworks to bring a consistent approach to all types of provision. Whilst this has been successful, there are only a limited number of residential providers who are a part of this and the majority of this type of provision is still spot purchased. Where children have needs which cannot be met through other types of placement we will seek to identify a residential home in which they can live. This more intense environment can ensure that children are given the help they need 24 hours a day. Where this type of placement is made we will review it regularly to ensure that it is still the best way to meet their needs and to support them to move to a fostering or a more permanent placement when appropriate.

Actions:

1. Responding to the increasing complexity of need presented by those needing residential placements.
2. Use business intelligence to direct commissioning practice and ensure a joined up approach to managing placements, including the continued development of the Thurrock Select list on an annual basis to reduce spot purchasing.
3. To further develop 16+ provision generally and where there are care needs rather than just support.
4. To further develop the existing area risk assessment work focussed on CSE, gang and knife crime.
5. To increase the number of residential providers, particularly where there are high needs.
6. To develop provision to support the step down from secure and high needs provision addressing the gap between care and support.
7. To continue to improve our market development strategies as a part of

- further procurement work.
8. To continue to reduce spot purchasing through the annual procurement exercise recognising that this may always be needed to meet specific needs.
 9. To consider block purchasing where need has been identified to improve the offer and reduce costs
 10. Review and improve our short breaks offer to provide a variety of options for care.
 11. Improve placement planning and deliver a joined up approach to identification of specialist residential provision to reduce reliance on emergency placements.
 12. Review availability of therapeutic support to allow us to provide more support to those children placed in-house. Work closely together in partnership between services supporting looked after children with special educational needs.

Expected outcomes:

- Value for money within services which are commissioned.
- A joined up approach to commissioning all services which we cannot provide in house.
- Closer working with partners to ensure effective coordination of our needs and their offer.
- Better value for money.
- Higher proportion of children within residential placements located nearer to their home.
- Earlier recognition of any issues within placements to improve outcomes for our children who are Looked After.

Commissioning others to deliver services on our behalf

There are some services that we are unable to provide ourselves. This may be because we do not have the required specialist skills or may reflect the fact that we do not have sufficient capacity to deliver these services. Where this is the case, we will commission services from others; however, it is essential that we manage this effectively to make sure that these placements support our vulnerable children to achieve their full potential.

Priority 5: Developing the offer for care leavers

Provision of a range of offers for those aged 18 and over to ensure they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be Looked After.

Actions:

1. Develop the work through Headstart Housing to improve our accommodation offer to care leavers with different levels of support needs.
2. Put in place a supported lodgings offer through recruitment of foster

carers who can provide a bed to those who are aged 18 and over within a family environment

3. Support to and early identification of young people leaving care who are planning to move to live with birth relatives.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased availability of accommodation for Thurrock young people.
- Increased placement stability and outcomes through better quality testing of local provisions to ensure they can meet young people's needs.
- Better local offer available to young people in terms of choice of locations and styles of accommodation and support.

Priority 6: To develop the support offer available to our most vulnerable children

To develop early support to address the demand driven nature of preventative work which results in us not being able to provide support early enough to some of our most vulnerable children.

Actions:

1. Implementation of the Brighter Futures Strategy to identify opportunities for integration with partners so that we can target services more effectively to the most vulnerable.
2. Providing the right support at the right time to children and their families.

Expected outcomes:

- Earlier support for families, to prevent escalation of issues and where possible keep children at home.
- Avoid confusion and duplication for families who need information advice and help
- Give families the tools to help them solve their own problems and also be more resilient in the future while making sure they know where they can go for help when they need it.

Outcomes of this strategy

There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting families in the community or for improving outcomes for Children Looked After. Different cohorts of children require different approaches. This strategy has identified some of the key challenges we face in meeting our sufficiency duty and actions proposed to make sure we are best placed to meet these challenges and deliver financially sustainable services.

Our Pledge to Children Looked After

Our pledge

Our pledge makes 5 promises to children and young people in our care. These cover:

- health
- education
- reaching potential
- positive relationships
- leaving care

The pledge was written by young people and has been adopted throughout the council.

It applies to all children and young people, from birth to their 18th birthday, who are in our care. Some apply to those leaving care from the age of 18 up to 21 years, or 25 years in certain cases.

The pledge applies regardless of sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, ability or background. It applies wherever young people are placed, whether this is inside or outside Thurrock.

Our 5 promises

We promise to work to help you to develop healthily by:

- helping you to keep fit and healthy and giving you the resources and information on how best to equip yourself to continue to develop
- making sure you are given support to have regular health and dental checks
- having social workers support you in all aspects of your development and giving you every opportunity to flourish

We promise to do everything we can to keep you safe and feel important to us while in care by:

- making staff available to speak to you when you need to contact them to discuss your problems, anxieties and achievements
- involving you in decisions and plans that are made that will affect your current and future life
- not changing your social worker unless absolutely necessary
- giving you advice and support to stay safe both within your home and community
- calling you back within 24 hours

We promise to help you reach your dreams while in care by:

- celebrating your achievements and recognising your goals and helping to push you further while in care
- supporting you to attend and achieve in education
- providing you with good educational opportunities that best meet your abilities
- providing you with a translating dictionary in your language when you first come into care if your first language is not English
- giving you the same opportunities available to young people who are not looked after

We promise to support your positive relationships and social activities by:

- giving priority when you ask to stay with friends and relatives away from your normal placement
- aiding you in having easy access to libraries, youth clubs and positive activities
- giving you access to an independent visitor/ mentors
- supporting you in being heard throughout the local authority across all departments

We promise to prepare you for adult life and leaving care by:

- supporting you financially up until the time you start work or are entitled to claim benefits
- providing you with a grant to help you settle into your own accommodation when you leave care
- supporting you in higher education at university
- helping you with support to seek employment and training
- helping you with transport for attending education and looked after children appointments
- supporting you to apply for all documentation and providing you with necessary

Appendix 3

Charter for care leavers

We have a responsibility to children and young people in our care, and to our care leavers.

Our charter for care leavers was written jointly with a group of young people. It is a set of principles and promises to care leavers.

We will respect and honour your identity

We will:

- support you to develop your own identity, respect your background and accept your culture and beliefs
- treat you as an individual, taking into consideration your own values and personal needs

We will believe in you

We will:

- support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can
- believe in you, celebrate you and help you overcome limiting barriers

We will listen to you

We will:

- respect and strive to understand your point of view
- be honest with you and place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you

We will support you

We will:

- do our best to support you in achieving your goals, dreams and aspirations
- provide you with the support that you require with education, training and employment to succeed in life

We will help you find a home

We will:

- keep you safe and well by working alongside you to help you find the most appropriate place to live and prepare you for independent living

- do everything we can to prepare you for a smooth transition to adulthood and help you to be where you want to be

We will inform you

We will:

- point you in the right direction and journey alongside you at your own pace
- help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger