

<b>19 July 2022</b>		<b>Item: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy Update</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones – Strategic Lead, Children Looked After Catherine Wilson – Strategic Lead, Commissioning		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon – Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy – Corporate Director Children’s Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

This report will give an update to Members regarding the progress of delivering the outcomes and next steps identified within the Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy 2021 – 2024. Offering reassurance that the statutory duties the Council has regarding this are met. A copy of the Strategy is provided for ease at appendix 1.

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.

The quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people ‘doing well’ and having stability in care. It is therefore, as Members are aware, our aspiration to provide the best possible placements, accommodation and support provision for our children and young people in the care of the local authority.

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

It is important to acknowledge that the delivery in first 2 years of the strategy has been restricted by the pandemic and the previous and resulting challenges in the care market.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

### **1.1 That Members review the update within this report of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy January 2021 – 2024.**

## **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 The Strategy builds on our long-term vision for the development of our sufficiency duty within a three-year plan from January 2021 to January 2024 supporting planning and commissioning.
- 2.3 The delivery of the strategy has, as mentioned, been significantly restricted due to the pandemic however alongside this, Members will be aware of the national, regional, and local challenges within the social care provider market. The provider market for children and young people's care and support is not delivering as it should. In April 2022 Ofsted called for a national audit of needs of children in care to properly understand and deal with issues around the sufficiency of social care placements. This was based on Ofsted's latest report indicating that there is a lack of collective knowledge of needs and resources to meet those needs.
- 2.4 The final report published by the Competitions Authority in March 2022 found that private Children's home providers were making profits much higher than expected. This report also raised the prospect of wider commissioning reforms. This influences our own local delivery and supports our understanding of the challenges faced day to day by operational and commissioning colleagues in finding high quality value for money placements for our children and young people.

### 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 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.”*

3.2 One of the key priorities of the strategy is ‘*To ensure the voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning*’. The Children in Care Council has continued to meet regularly and be consulted on a wide range of issues. The voice of the young person is at the heart of the assessment process ensuring that their wishes and feelings are included. Advocacy is available to support children and young people in this process. Whenever possible children and young people can give their views when placements are being found for them. As contracts and placements are monitored for effectiveness and quality children are asked wherever possible to give their views on where they are placed and the experience of living there.

3.3 The 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 not reasonably practical

3.4 At the 31 March 2022 there were 294 children looked after by Thurrock Council. Over the last financial year, the average number of children in Thurrock’s care at any one time was 302. Whilst the overall number varies a continued downward trend will likely be impacted by the growing population in Thurrock. There will always be a number of children requiring local authority care to thrive. We anticipate this number to be between 280-290 children each year.

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.

3.6 The majority of Children Looked After have a placement in a foster care setting. These placements are provided through In-house foster placements and placements through commissioned Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA’s).

The table below gives a breakdown of the placements that our children and young people are currently accommodated in.

Placement Type	Number of Children Placed
Placed for adoption	6
Placed with Thurrock Connected Persons Foster Carers (Family and Friends)	23
Placed With Mainstream Thurrock Foster Carers	92
Placed with Other Local Authority Foster Carers	1
Placed with IFA Foster carers	107
Placed with Parents/those with PR	10
Placed in Registered Children's Homes	25
Placed in Supported Accommodation for children aged 16+	26
Placed in other settings (e.g., Yol, Individual Arrangements)	4

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 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.

3.8 Over 2021/22 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

3.9 Market pressure and increased costs mean private providers have been increasing the weekly rate charged particularly for residential care:

£/week	Jan 2020	Nov 2020	May 2022
<b>Average Price paid nationally</b>	£3963	£4130	£4599

3.10 Given the increasing costs and limited residential placements Thurrock is developing new solutions for children. To address the gaps locally we are in the early stages of a project to establish small residential placements through local council housing stock. If successful it will offer bespoke residential care to a small number of children with specific needs and increase our emergency placement capacity.

3.11 Children and young people placed outside the Local Authority area has slightly increased this reflects the challenges of the care market and very little local provision being available. Often out of area placements are put in place to support children and young people with complex needs. The performance

on placement stability and educational attainment at Key Stage 2 and 4, including school attendance, is above that of our statistical neighbours and national performance for Children Looked After.

- 3.12 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 95% of placements have been made through the framework we are working hard to encourage providers to be based in Thurrock and to date we have 5 supported living providers with 7 placement addresses within the boundaries of the Local Authority.
- 3.13 The placement framework has supported around 65% of placements made with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Attracting residential care providers has been difficult. The framework has set pricing which allows providers to amend their pricing each time the list is opened for new providers to apply. Providers understand they are ranked on both quality and price, this approach has resulted in fewer requests for uplifts throughout the year. 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.
- 3.14 A Placement Framework is also being introduced for Special Education Needs (SEND), and currently we are undertaking the tender process developing the specification, engaging with the provider market, and preparing to go out to tender later this year. This will bring the same stability and quality to our SEND provision as we have developing in our overarching placement framework.
- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 Currently Aftercare has 275 care leavers to support. So far, since April 2022, Headstart Housing has provided accommodation for 68 care leavers. 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. Last year, Head Start Housing accommodated 64 care leavers excluding Clarence Rd and young parent provision.
- 3.17 The current sufficiency strategy was developed prior to the impact of COVID-19. The current national picture is one of reducing availability and increasing

costs of placements in the private sector: The Sufficiency Strategy requires a review because of these changes.

#### **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.

4.2 Given the national changes Thurrock should review and update its strategy

#### **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 as described in the report 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 & 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:

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### **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.

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

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 Strategy 2021 to 2024

### **Report Author:**

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Strategic Lead Commissioning