



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Sally Williams
Director Children and Families

Report of: *Meredith Dixon-Teasdale, Strategic Director
 Children's Services*

Report to: *Education, Children and Families Policy
 Committee*

Date of Decision: *2nd November 2023*

Subject: *Children and Families Sufficiency Strategy*

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? (2375)				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-				
<p><i>"The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."</i></p>				

Purpose of Report:

The Children and Families Sufficiency Strategy sets out how Sheffield City Council will fulfil its role as a Corporate Parent and meet its statutory sufficiency duty by providing good quality homes that support children and young people and care leavers.

It describes the principles that are applied when seeking to commission the provision of secure, safe and appropriate accommodation and support, to children in care and care leavers over the next three years.

The strategy provides the underpinning principles that will inform how we address changing demand to ensure that there is the right mix of provision available that meets the needs and enhances the outcomes of children and young people, and balances value for money for the local authority.

Recommendations:

The Education Children and Families Policy Committee is recommended to approve the “Children and Families Sufficiency Strategy”, as appended to this report at Appendix 1.

Background Papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2023-26

Lead Officer to complete:-	
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.
	Finance: <i>Kayleigh Inman</i>
	Legal: <i>Patrick Chisholm</i>
	Equalities & Consultation: <i>Bashir Khan</i>
	Climate: <i>Kathryn Warrington</i>
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>
2	SLB member who approved submission: <i>Meredith Dixon-Teasdale</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted: <i>Cllr Dawn Dale</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.
	Lead Officer Name: <i>Sally Williams</i>
	Job Title: <i>Director Children and Families</i>
	Date: 24 October 2023

1. PROPOSAL

1.1 The Children and Families Sufficiency Strategy has been developed in line with the local authorities 'sufficiency duty' to provide and/or procure sufficient placements for Children Looked After (CLA).

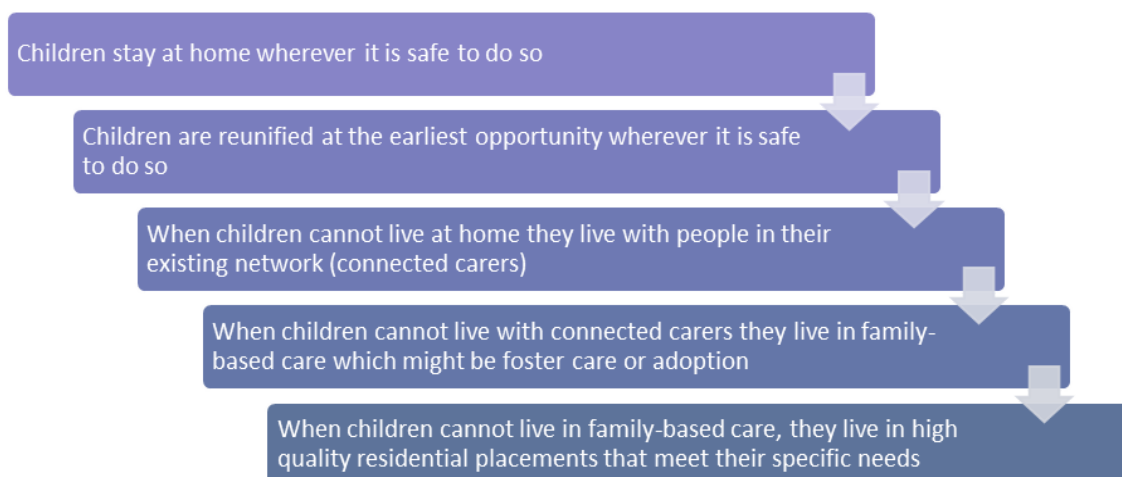
1.2 This Strategy aims to improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers through the provision of a sufficient number and range of high-quality placements and accommodation options. It sets out how the Council will meet its Statutory Duty '*...to secure, so far as reasonably practical, sufficient accommodation for looked after children [in their local authority area] in order to enable a child to stay at the same school and near to family where contact can easily take place*' (Section 22G, The Children Act 1989).

1.3 Meeting our Sufficiency Duty and providing a sufficient number and range of local placements is good for CLA and care leavers in Sheffield and at the same time achieves financial cost efficiencies for the Council.

1.4 This strategy recognises and accounts for the changing demand for care placements, the changing population of CLA in Sheffield and the challenging and complex independent placement market.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE ?

2.1 The strategy sets out Children and Families key principles in managing demand and sufficiency in Sheffield as outlined in the diagram below.



Committee endorsement of the strategy will allow Children and Families in partnership with Commissioning to progress the response to the sufficiency challenge in particular:

- Changing demographics of children in care
- Increasing complexity of children and young people
- Rising placement costs

- Increasing numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
- The regional and national shortage of placements
- The challenge in the independent market

2.2 Endorsement will allow Children and Families to deliver the key aims of the strategy to:

- Provide the right number and type of homes for children and young people who are looked after in Sheffield
- Improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers through the provision of a sufficient number and range of high-quality placements and accommodation options
- Provide local homes in Sheffield to enable young people to maintain links to those that are important to them
- Ensure that we achieve best value for money

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

3.1 Sheffield City Council does not have a statutory duty to consult on the Children and Families Sufficiency Strategy. However, as is good practice, engagement workshops have taken place with key stakeholders in the development of the strategy and will continue to be held as subsequent delivery plans are developed.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

4.1.1 Decisions need to consider the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

4.1.2 This is the duty to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

4.1.3 The Equality Act 2010 identifies the following groups as a protected characteristic: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.

4.1.4 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and highlights that there are around 660 children and young people in care at any one time in Sheffield. To provide the right number and type of homes for children and young people

the CLA population are monitored to ensure we can meet their varying needs as best as possible, eg identifying and recruiting family based carers from a variety of different backgrounds as well as commissioning placements that are suitable for young people with varying needs. The Children and Families Sufficiency Strategy sets out how the Council will fulfil its role as a Corporate Parent and meet its statutory sufficiency duty by providing good quality homes that support children and young people and care leavers of all characteristics.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 The gross placement budget for 23/24 is £40.7m, with a further £14.7m gross budget for in-house residential provision (including Aldine House). The Sufficiency Strategy will guide how spending against these budgets is incurred.
- 4.2.2 Where there is a need for the Council to commission services from third party organisations to deliver the Strategy, this must be done in compliance with the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations. Early consideration needs to be given in the development of any commissioned services to ensure the chosen delivery vehicle includes the flexibility to meet the requirements of the Strategy.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1 Local Authorities are required to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for Children in Care within their local area. In 2010 the Statutory Guidance for the sufficiency duty was issued. This guidance is explicit in placing a duty on Local Authorities to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring they include in relevant commissioning strategies their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.
- 4.3.2 The sufficiency duty is a measure, which is part of a broad suite of guidance, and legislative provisions introduced to improve outcomes for children in care. Local Authorities should consider the sufficiency duty in tandem with their duties towards children within their area under S17(1), 20, 21, 22C and 23 of the Children Act 1989.
- 4.3.3 Section 22G Children Act 1989 also imposes a duty on local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, that the local authority is able to provide looked after children with accommodation within the authority's area that meets the needs of those children, where circumstances are such that it would be consistent with the children's welfare for them to be provided with accommodation.
- 4.3.4 In taking steps to secure the provision of accommodation, the local authority must have regard to the benefit of having a sufficient number of accommodation providers in their area and a sufficient range of accommodation in their area capable of meeting different needs.
- 4.3.5 A failure to meet the general sufficiency duty could result in a legal challenge which could have significant costs implications.

4.4 Climate Implications

4.4.1 No direct climate implications arise from this report. The Sustainability and Climate Change Team has been consulted and are in agreement no further action is required on CIA.

4.4.2 The strategy to manage demand and sufficiency will support the reduction in the number of looked after children being placed outside the city and therefore reduce the need for travel helping to reduce the council's fleet mileage.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Alternative option not to approve the new Strategy, is rejected. This would mean the Council does not have an accurate and up to date strategy that sets out its commitment in line with the sufficiency duty. Governance of the delivery of the strategy will not be articulated and understood and may result in failure to escalate issues as they arise.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Children and Families Sufficiency Strategy will ensure the Council has set out its commitment in line with its duty to ensure that there is a range of sufficient placements which meet the needs of children and young people in care.

6.2 Approval of Corporate Parenting Board to undertake the monitoring and oversight of progress against the delivery plan, and annual review of the aspirations, will ensure consistent oversight of the delivery of the strategy and escalation as appropriate if issues arise.