

Corporate Parenting Panel

18 December 2020

Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers



Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

Sarah Burns, Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning for County Durham CCG and Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an Executive Summary in relation to the updated Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2020-2023 (Appendix 3).

Executive summary

- 2 The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy sets out Durham's strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our children looked after.
- 3 It looks closely at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 8 months, how this has affected our sufficiency and the steps we are taking to ensure that our sufficiency offer is robust and continues to meet our changing needs.
- 4 Between March 2014 and March 2020, we have experienced a 51% increase in the number of children and young people that we care for (605 in March 2014 and 914 in March 2020). The increasing demand for children and young people who require care continues to place significant pressure on services.
- 5 Durham has seen a 4% increase in the number of children coming into care between March 2020 and September 2020, in comparison with neighbouring authorities such as Darlington and Middlesbrough, with a 12% increase.

- 6 The strategy outlines the ongoing work being carried out to improve and broaden our current placement sufficiency offer and the short to medium term priorities.

Recommendations

- 7 The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:
 - a) Consider the Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers set out in Appendix 3 and provide comments.
 - b) Consider the strategic priorities contained within Appendix 2 and provide comments.

Key Priorities within the Strategy

- 8 There are four overarching objectives within the Strategy, with a number of priorities that sit below. The key objectives include:
- (a) Grow our number of in-house foster carers and reduce our reliance on independent foster care provision;
 - (b) Increase the number of adopters;
 - (c) Continue to develop and broaden our residential homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so; and
 - (d) Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers.
- 9 Our key priorities within the Commissioning Strategy are detailed in Appendix 2 of this report.

Background

- 10 The council has a duty, as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children looked after within their local authority area. The 2010 guidance on the 'sufficiency duty' states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty.
- 11 The sufficiency duty must take account of the requirement, under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989, that the overriding consideration for placing a child is that the placement must be the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs. Next, preference must be given to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a placement must be found, as far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:
- (a) Is near the child's home;
 - (b) Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable;
 - (c) Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
 - (d) Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
 - (e) Does not disrupt his/her education or training.
- 12 The objectives and indicators within the Strategy will be monitored on a 3 monthly basis and used to understand and determine our ongoing changing needs in relation to placement sufficiency.

Conclusion

- 13 As Corporate Parents we must ensure that we have a range of good quality placement provision that is able to meet the varying needs of our children looked after and our care leavers.
- 14 The strategy sets out our current position in being able to meet these needs and the challenges presented to us, particularly in light of the ongoing covid-19 pandemic; and outlines the key priorities that we will deliver over the coming two years to address gaps in provision and to broaden our sufficiency offer for children and young people.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Local Authority has a legal duty to provide sufficient accommodation options for children and young people who are looked after and those that are care leavers.

The strategy outlines a number of key priorities which will enable us to continue meeting are changing needs and to minimise any reputational and political damage with regulators such as Ofsted.

Finance

A number of the proposals set out in this strategy will require either capital or revenue investment in order to take forward. These will be subject to individual business cases, setting out the rationale and justification for services and the funding requirements.

Consultation

The Local Authority will be required to consult with elected members and local communities when developing many of the services as outlines in the strategy. This will be completed as part of the formal planning process.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Authority is required to ensure that all children looked after have equality of opportunity, to ensure best outcomes.

Human Rights

Young People who are in the care of Durham County Council have the right to be provided with suitable and appropriate local care which can meet their needs to enable them to successfully move into adulthood.

Crime and Disorder

Non applicable.

Staffing

The strategy sets out the development of a range of new services which will broaden and enhance our current sufficiency offer. These services will require new staff to support their operational delivery. All revenue funding required to recruit new staff will be subject to individual business cases.

Accommodation

The report provides information about the range of accommodation options available for our children and young people and also proposes a suite of new service developments to broaden and improve our sufficiency offer.

All proposed service development involving new accommodation will be subject to individual business cases.

Risk

There is a significant risk to the Local Authority if we are unable to provide suitable accommodation and care options for our children and young people.

Whilst there is a risk of prosecution from Ofsted which would be reputationally damaging to the Local Authority.

Procurement

When commissioning new services, the Contract Procedures Rules will be adhered to and Corporate Procurement Colleagues involved.

Appendix 2: Strategy Priorities

No	Overarching Objective	Priorities	Completed by
1	Grow our number of in-house foster carers and reduce our reliance on independent foster care provision	Recruit 30 new foster carer households during 2021/2022 and 2022/23	March 2022 and March 2023
		Review the training and support offer to support the retention of our foster carers	March 2022
		Evidence the good work we do in ensuring the voice of the child and their carers informs service delivery	March 2022
		Carry out targeted foster carer recruitment so we are able to care for more teenagers and sibling groups	March 2022
		As part of the annual review process for foster carers, we will continue to ensure that we have carers with as wide an approval range as possible to provide flexibility and opportunities for placement finding	March 2022
		We will develop respite foster carer provision which will support the stability of our placements	March 2022
		We will continue to work regionally with other Local Authorities to ensure that the regional Independent Fostering Agency commissioning framework continues to be fit for purpose.	Ongoing
		Through the framework solution we will continue to develop the independent fostering agency market to be able to take more complex young people. This	March 2023

No	Overarching Objective	Priorities	Completed by
		will take time to develop, however we would like to see a shift in the type of placements that IFAs are able to provide over the next 3-5 years	
		We will seek to reduce the dependency on IFA provision by developing and implementing strategies to recruit in-house, local foster carers and maximise in-house provision	March 2023
2	Increase the number of adopters	To work in partnership with Together for Children, Cumbria Council and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to develop and roll out the 'Coast to Coast' regional adoption agency which will be hosted by Cumbria County Council.	April 2021
		Improve practice to increase in-house adoption provision in preparation for a partnership RAA model	April 2021
3	Continue to develop and broaden our residential homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so	Develop and open a new Edge of Care Children's Home	September 2021
		Develop a 'Relief Pool' to provide additional staffing capacity, across residential homes and our edge of care service	Ongoing
		Develop a Staying Close Pilot	June 2021
		Expand our smaller homes offer (1-2 bedded homes) with potentially up to 4 additional homes, depending on the ongoing service needs	March 2023

No	Overarching Objective	Priorities	Completed by
		Develop up to three new therapeutic children's homes for children aged 7-13 and 12-17	March 2023
		Review the upper bedding capacity of our existing children's homes to meet our changing needs	March 2022
		We will continue to work in partnership with a community of interest company to develop a bespoke package of care for a child/children with ASD. The service will become an extension of our in-house residential offer for Durham children and young people.	January 2021
		We will continue to play an active role in the NE12 regional consortia, working closely with residential providers	Ongoing
		We will continue to work closely with providers that wish to develop new services in County Durham, to shape services and to positively challenge service development when this does not meet our needs	Ongoing
		As our capacity increases within in-house residential home provision, we will review our out of county placements to understand which children and young people have a plan to move back into Durham	April 2021 onwards
4	Develop access to a diverse range of	To review the marketing and recruitment strategy for Supported Lodging provision	April 2021

No	Overarching Objective	Priorities	Completed by
	appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers	We will review the current supported living offer on an ongoing basis and ensure that new services are secured when gaps in provision are identified	Ongoing
		We will seek agreement to extend the current offer provided by Hedley House, based on the findings at the 6-month review stage, developing two dispersed supported living properties with outreach support, in line with our increasing care leaver numbers	April 2021
		We will recommission our Supported Living Provider Panel for young people with needs that challenge services, in 2021, enabling new providers to join, broadening our current offer	December 2021

**Appendix 3: Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for
Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2020-2023**

Attached as a separate document