

OPEN

Children & Families Committee –

12th February 2024

Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027 - Cared for Children and Care Leavers

Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director, Children & Families

Report Reference No: CF/29/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report intends to provide the Children and Families committee with the opportunity to consider and note the Sufficiency strategy for children's social care. The strategy outlines our vision to intervene early, prioritising the safety of children by keeping them at home whenever possible. It clearly identifies our planned initiatives in children's social care and commissioning to address existing gaps in provision, emerging demands, and to stabilise family environments. At its core, the strategy encourages collaborative efforts in children's services to overcome traditional boundaries and achieve excellent outcomes for the children in our care.

The strategy provides background on some of the approaches being taken to implement demand management strategy and deliver against the medium-term financial strategy. Executive Summary

- 2 Our sufficiency strategy is based on the government's 2023 '[Stable Homes Built on Love](#)' strategy. We believe by implementing the six pillars of reform that this will lead to greater sufficiency within Cheshire East, and have therefore chosen to use these pillars as the structure for this strategy.
- 3 Cheshire East had a total of 533 Children in Care on 31st December 2023. This is the lowest number since August 2022, when we had a total of 529 children in care, and has fallen from a peak of 586 in May 2023.

- 4 The Strategy intentionally addresses our strengths and our areas for development with governance being established through a quarterly Sufficiency Board to continuously update and review this document.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Childrens and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Consider and note the 2024-2027 Sufficiency Strategy in the context of the medium term financial strategy and the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2023.

Background

- 5 The Sufficiency Statement is a statutory document that all Local Authorities have a duty to update and publish on a yearly basis, in accordance with Section 22G of the Children Act 1989.
- 6 The Sufficiency Duty places a responsibility on Local authorities to have enough suitable homes for cared for children and care leavers. Local Authorities can find it difficult to meet their sufficiency duty for many reasons, and never more so than at present.
- 7 The sufficiency duty requires local authorities to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that it can offer enough suitable accommodation in its area to meet the needs of children who are looked after.
- 8 Local authorities must take into account the relevant statutory guidance. Two of the requirements are that local authorities:
- I. Include the plans for meeting the sufficiency duty in their commissioning strategies.
 - II. Work with partners so that they can offer, where reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children looked after in their local authority area.

Sufficiency Statement – Priority Actions

- 9 The key actions are included in relevant sections of the strategy and outline 'what we will do' to improve sufficiency in that area.

Consultation and Engagement

- 10 Extensive consultation with relevant teams has been continuous while developing the sufficiency strategy. This has included a wide range of

stakeholder groups including Providers, Placements North-West and relevant teams within Cheshire East Children's Social Care.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 11 To meet the legal Duty under the Children Act 1989 to maintain an up to date Cared for Children's Sufficiency Statement.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 12 The Children Act 1989 places a general duty on Local Authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and so far as is consistent with that duty to promote the upbringing of such children by their families. Where inconsistent with that duty, a child must be placed within their area if at all possible.
- 13 The sufficiency duty contained in Section 22G Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to act strategically in respect of cared for children who are provided with accommodation in their area and to ensure there is sufficient accommodation that meets their needs and is within their Local Authority area. Publishing a sufficiency strategy evidences compliance with the sufficiency duty.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

Medium Term Financial Strategy savings this Strategy and associated activity will be required to deliver:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Saving</i>	<i>Budget</i>
Review of commissioned services across the Children and Families Directorate.	£0.1m	£1m for commissioning contracts
Increase our in-house foster placements to reduce the need for high cost independent placements, through a targeted approach to recruitment and retention. This will be supported by the involvement in a regional programme for foster care recruitment and an internal focus on family networks.	£0.25m	£27.4m (internal and external placements)
Increase Commissioning approach to establish greater opportunities to provide accommodation for 16+ young people through block contract commissioning.	£0.4m	£3m

Review of high-cost low outcome external residential placements to support effective and safe stepdown.	£1m	£27.4m (internal and external placements)
Total savings	£1.75m	

Policy

- 14 The recommended option directly supports the priorities within the Cheshire East Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025.

Priority

Aims and objectives

A council which empowers and cares about people

- Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient
- Increase the life opportunities for young adults and adults with additional needs
- Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care

An open and enabling organisation

- Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents
- Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 15 Equality Impact Assessment accompanies the Strategy as an additional Appendix to this report – completed between November 2023 & January 2024.

Human Resources

- 16 There are no HR implications to this report

Risk Management

- 17 There is an explicit expectation under the Children Act 1989 and Ofsted inspection regimes to meet the sufficiency duty and to set out how Cheshire East intend to meet needs for children and families. If we do not have an up to date sufficiency statement this can form part of the basis for a limiting judgement.

Public Health

- 18 No significant impact on Public Health.

Climate Change

- 19 Nil impact.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Appendix 1 –Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027 Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment to accompany (and part-inform) Sufficiency Strategy 2024-27
Background Papers:	N/A