

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Corporate Parenting Panel – 13th December, 2022

Report Title

Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023 – 2028

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Suzanne Joyner, Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

Helen Sweaton. Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Quality
Helen.sweaton@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

Rotherham's Looked After Children's Sufficiency Strategy 2019-2022 was agreed by Cabinet in June 2019. As such, the period of this strategy ends this year, and the new one needs to commence in January 2023.

This was considered by Cabinet on 17th October, 2022, and the Strategy agreed (Minute No. 57 refers).

The Duty of 'sufficiency' requires Local Authorities (LA) to ensure that there is a range of sufficient and appropriate placements that meet the needs of children and young people that are looked after by the LA. There is also a responsibility to take steps to develop and shape service provision to meet the needs of all children and young people in care at a local level, as far as is reasonably possible. The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2028 has been developed in line with the duty to provide or procure placements for Looked After Children (LAC) by the Local Authority.

The Strategy identifies the principles that are applied when commissioning the provision of secure, safe and appropriate accommodation and support to children in care and care leavers over the next three years. It provides the needs analysis that will inform market management work, seeking to ensure that there is the right mix of provision available to meet the needs of children and young people and that this provision mix provides positive outcomes and value for money. Whilst this Strategy is not primarily a financial one, it is expected that the commissioning and strategic intentions set out will provide significant cost avoidance and savings opportunities and which are essential to the sustainability of improved outcomes and the LA budget.

The revised Sufficiency Strategy focuses on what Rotherham Council knows about its children and young people and the information about local homes for children. It includes the voice of looked after children. The strategy provides all the latest data trends, what the priorities are and the delivery plan to achieve these.

This report provides an update on the delivery of the previous strategy and requests approval of the new Strategy.

Recommendations

1. To approve the new Strategy.
2. To approve the monitoring and oversight of progress against the delivery plan, and annual review of the aspirations, be undertaken by Corporate Parenting Board.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023 – 2028
Appendix 2 Initial Equality Screening Assessment
Appendix 3 Carbon Impact Analysis

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Background Papers

1. Looked After Children's (LAC) Sufficiency Strategy 2020-22
<https://modern.gov.rotherham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=895&MId=15429&Ver=4>

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Yes

Considered by Improving Lives Select Commission on 6 September 2022.

Council Approval Required

No

Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy (including Sufficiency) 2023 – 2028

1. Background

- 1.1 The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023 – 2028 has been developed in line with the duty to provide and/or procure placements for Children Looked After by the Local Authority. The legislation and guidance include Children Act 1989, Sufficiency Statutory Guidance 2010, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2011. The duty of ‘sufficiency’ requires Local Authorities and Children’s Trust partners to ensure that there is a range of sufficient and appropriate placements which meet the needs of children and young people in care. There is also a responsibility to take steps to develop and shape service provision to meet the needs of all children and young people in care at a local level, as far as is reasonably possible.
- 1.2 The Strategy sets out how Rotherham Children and Young People’s Services will fulfil its role as a Corporate Parent and meet its statutory sufficiency duty by providing good quality care, effective parenting and support to children and young people in care and leaving care. 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 five years.
- 1.3 The Strategy provides the underpinning needs analysis that will inform market management, seeking to ensure that there is the right mix of provision available to meet the needs of children and young people and that this provision mix provides positive outcomes and value for money. Whilst this Strategy is not primarily a financial one, it is expected that the commissioning intentions are essential to the sustainability of improved outcomes and the Local Authority budget.
- 1.4 The previous Sufficiency Strategy was approved by Cabinet in June 2019. The key priorities of the Market Management Project were:
 - To reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies by recruiting more in-house foster carers
 - To develop local residential provision and secure block-bookings for Rotherham children where this will achieve best value
 - Explore opportunities for regional collaborative working arrangements
 - Review the Rotherham Fostering Framework to ensure that it continues to deliver high quality placements and value for money
 - Implement a Dynamic Purchasing Framework to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for Rotherham care leavers; and
 - Work in partnership with Adult Care and Housing to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Progress against all priorities in the previous sufficiency strategy has been reviewed to support the development of the new strategy.

1. To reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies by recruiting more in-house foster carers

A significant programme of work has progressed to increase the number of in-house foster carers through recruitment, including significant investment in a digital marketing contract.

During the period of the strategy there have been some successes in recruitment and development of available fostering places, however in 2021 recruitment did not attract the targeted number of foster carers. A review of the digital marketing contract and mobilisation of a new specification has resulted in improved performance.

During the period of the strategy a number of Rotherham foster carers have resigned/ de-registered. This means that despite the recruitment, the number of in-house foster carers has not increased. Nationally, Ofsted standards for official statistics for 2020/21 indicates the total number of IFA fostering families (and places) increased and the number of LA fostering families (and places) reduced.

The programme of work now focuses on retention in addition to recruitment.

2. To develop local residential provision and secure block-bookings for Rotherham children where this will achieve best value

The February 2020 Cabinet report agreed a proposal to develop a range of in-house residential provisions, including emergency accommodation for Rotherham looked after children. 16 residential beds and 2 emergency beds across 7 registered settings.

- 4 new children's home purchased or acquired and fitted out to meet the specification informed by young people's service and Ofsted
- Recruitment of 4 managers and 44 staff
- 60 days of induction training covering Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, evidence based therapeutic approaches, Signs of Safety and Rotherham Family Approach
- 3 children's homes opened with Ofsted registrations
- Ofsted rating of Good for all children's homes on first inspection
- 6 young people living in the homes since opening.
- Successful 'step down' from residential care into foster care settings as a direct result of the work offered by the service.

Block bookings were secured, however due to matching (identifying children who can safely live together and with the provider of a home) best value was not always achieved.

3. Explore opportunities for regional collaborative working arrangements

Children and Young People's Services continue to work with other authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber as part of the White Rose Framework. Despite a number of providers choosing to operate 'off framework' reducing the collective buying power, this remains a collaborative opportunity to explore regional working arrangements.

4. Review the Rotherham Fostering Framework to ensure that it continues to deliver high quality placements and value for money

Children and Young People's Services joined the White Rose Framework for fostering in April 2020. Despite a number of providers choosing to operate 'off framework' reducing the collective buying power, this remains a collaborative opportunity to explore regional working arrangements.

5. Implement a Dynamic Purchasing Framework to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for Rotherham care leavers

Children and Young People's Services developed a 16+ Support and Accommodation flexible purchasing systems (FPS) which went live in January 2021. The purpose of the FPS was for the Commissioning team and Social Care to continue working closely to secure good quality provision for Rotherham's young people. The FPS also allows Rotherham to develop and shape the market; build relationships with existing and new providers; monitor quality and provide a compliant route to market.

Ofsted will develop a registration and inspection framework for 16+ accommodation and begin registering providers from April 2023. In preparation for this the Commissioning Team will review the Quality Assurance Document they use to quality assure commissioned provision, to include the four national standards, to focus providers on the requirements for registration.

6. Work in partnership with Adult Care & Housing to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for vulnerable 16- and 17-year-olds

Collaborative working ensured sharing of good practice to inform the commissioning of accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds who are homeless. Work is underway to further develop the FPS to expand it to include this cohort.

Accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17 because they are homeless not looked after children will still be relevant for Ofsted registration. CYPS are working with Adult Commissioners to understand the new developments and mirror the regulation requirements for their young people's projects.

2.2 To support the development of a new strategy, regular monthly core group meetings with key people involved in the services have taken place along with benchmarking against the 'What Works for Children's Social Care' independent review. These have helped to inform the structure, analysis, and content of the new Strategy.

2.3 The Strategy has been developed in line with the principles of the Rotherham Charter (Four Cornerstones):

1. Welcome and care

2. Value and include
3. Communicate
4. Work in partnership

- 2.4 This is reflective of the work undertaken by the Genuine Partnerships team which involves an equal partnership between Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC), facilitated by the Education Psychology Service (EPS), and Rotherham Parent Carer's Forum.
- 2.5 Corporate Parenting is the term used in law to describe the collective responsibility to care for, love and champion children in care and care leavers and ensure they have every opportunity to reach their full potential as they grow up in the Rotherham family.
- 2.6 This Strategy has been developed in line with the Looked After Children and Care Leaver promises. The promises were created by Rotherham's Looked After Children and Care Leavers and agreed in Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 2.7 Internal Audit were commissioned to undertake an audit to provide assurance that the originally agreed intentions of the LAC Sufficiency Strategy have been achieved. Based upon the results of the audit, internal audit was able to provide Substantial Assurance that the controls are operating effectively.
- 2.8 Based on the analysis of local need; the following aspirations are identified for the period of the Strategy.

The aspirations over the next five years are to:

- More Young People aged 10+ are able to be cared for safely in their families and communities
- Children and young people have access to a range of homes (internal and external options) that meet their needs and improve their outcomes
- All services take the Rotherham Family Approach to ensure all Rotherham children and young people are "resilient, successful and safe", evidenced by Quality Assurance activity
- Children and young people are able to access the support they need when they need it because Health, Education and Care Services share a joint understanding of the needs of children and young people in Rotherham and use this to inform commissioning and service delivery
- Children and Young People and their families and carers are able to access CAMHs assessment and intervention when needed
- Children, young people, families, and carers benefit from additional social value in Rotherham e.g., more employment opportunities
- More children, young people and families benefit from additional support to improve outcomes and access employment.

- 2.9 Cabinet have maintained oversight of the key priorities identified in the LAC Sufficiency Strategy 2019-22 through reports to Cabinet on fostering recruitment and development of residential provision, this has focused on in-house services.
- 2.10 It is proposed the delivery plan for the Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Sufficiency Strategy 2023 - 2028 will be developed with key milestones for each of the objectives, and outcome measures documented. Progress against the delivery plan will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board. The aspirations will be reviewed annually by the Corporate Parenting Board based on updated annual sufficiency data and local / national drivers.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Option 1:

1. To approve the new Strategy.
2. To approve the monitoring and oversight of progress against the delivery plan, and annual review of the aspirations, be undertaken by Corporate Parenting Board.

Approval of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2028 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.

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.

3.2 Option 2:

Do not approve the new Strategy.

This will mean the Council does not have an accurate and up to date strategy to set out its commitment in line with its 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.

3.3 Option 1 is the recommended option.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The development of the revised Strategy has involved collaborative working across Rotherham, including Looked After Children and Care Leavers, First Response, Locality Social Work, Commissioning, Performance, Early Help, Legal Services and Finance.

- 4.2 Internal Audit were commissioned to undertake an audit to provide assurance that the originally agreed intentions of the LAC sufficiency strategy have been achieved.
- 4.3 Two recommendations for the development of the future strategy were made.
- The LAC Sufficiency Strategy 2023-28 does not clearly show in tabular form the aims and objectives of the previous strategy, the actions taken, and any outstanding actions included in this strategy. **Recommendation 1**
 - Also, the Aspirations Section of the LAC Sufficiency Strategy 2023-28 does not include details of how these actions are to be monitored. This Aspirations Section can be interpreted as a formal Action Plan. **Recommendation 2**

These have been incorporated into the development of the strategy and associated governance arrangements.

- 4.4 Further engagement has also influenced the document including Public Health, the Integrated Care Board Rotherham Place, TRFT, RDaSH, Residential and Independent Fostering providers, In-house fostering, Rotherham Therapeutic Team, Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership and LAC Council.
- 4.5 The draft strategy was considered at Improving Lives Select Commission on 6th September. The recommendations made have been incorporated into the development of the strategy and associated governance arrangements.
- 4.6 The Looked After Children Council considered the strategy at their meeting on 14th September. They provided specific guidance on the presentation and design of the strategy, the relevance of the graphs (including whether any contain identifiable information that may make them feel uncomfortable), feedback on what they feel the strategy should be for, what is important about it and their voice to supplement the LAC promises. The Looked After Children Council also requested Care Leavers were more robustly considered in the strategy, suggesting some amends in section 5 and an additional data set in section 6. This is reflected in the final draft Strategy.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The Strategy focuses on what Rotherham Council knows about its children and young people, including their voices, and the information about local homes for children. The Strategy also provides all the latest data trends, what the aspirations are and the delivery plan to achieve these over the next five years 2023 – 2028.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 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 2015 (as amended). 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.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 The legislation which sets out the Councils sufficiency duty is contained in the body of the Report. There are no further legal implications arising from the review of the Strategy.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 No direct HR implications within this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 Implications to vulnerable children and young people and vulnerable adults who are care leavers are covered within the Report and Appendices.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 An equality impact assessment checklist is attached. Equality implications for looked after children, care leavers and foster carers are reflected in the draft strategy.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 N/A

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Implications for partners are reflected in the draft strategy.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 These are referred to in the draft strategy and associated delivery plan.

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	03/10/2022
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	29/09/2022
Assistant Director, Legal Services	Phil Horsfield	29/09/2022

(Monitoring Officer)		
----------------------	--	--

Report Authors:

Helen Sweaton, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Quality
helen.sweaton@rotherham.gov.uk

Monica Green, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
monica.green@rotherham.gov.uk

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).