

Report title	Children's Services Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Services	
Originating service	Children's Commissioning	
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Report has been considered by	Children's Social Care Leadership Team	19 November 2020
Report to be considered by	Corporate Parenting Board	25 March 2021

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the publication of the refreshed Children and Young People's Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024.

Recommendations for noting:

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note:

1. The refreshed approach to Commissioning, with a more strategic offer across the directorate.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The Sufficiency Strategy is a statutory requirement set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989 which requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of those children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation within their local authority area. In those circumstances, section 22G requires local authorities, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for those children that meets their needs and is within their local authority area.
- 1.2 The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy ensures that the Council:
- Supports and maintains a range of services that meet the needs of children in care and those who, without support, might be accommodated.
 - Works with partners to ensure that only the children and young people who need to come into care are accommodated.
 - Supports the market to deliver appropriate placements within the Local Authority area.
 - Has the appropriate mechanisms in place for the commissioning of appropriate placements and additional support outside of the local area, where the child's needs require this.
 - A key element of this strategy is the Council's desire to develop new models and improve placement stability.
- 1.3 This Children and Young People's Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2025 is the first strategy that also includes how we will commission services. The strategy covers a reformed commissioning service that encompasses all aspects of a commissioning cycle including strategic reviews of services and contracts.
- 1.4 This approach implies that, in order to be effective, commissioning activity must be based on comprehensive commissioning principles which clearly specify what services are required, and which in turn drive purchasing and contracting arrangements and the re-configuration of in-house services. We have systems to ensure that the strategy is implemented and makes effective use of monitoring to assess and evaluate progress. Crucially, we recognise that the development of commissioning strategies may lead to change as much within local authority 'own' internal services as those which are purchased from other agencies, and that the market for services encompasses both types of provision.
- 1.5 Organisational factors that can also have a positive impact on the ability of commissioners to implement the changes identified within sufficiency strategies include:
- A political and corporate commitment by the local authority to social services and to investment in long term solutions rather than 'quick fixes'.
 - Local authorities and partner commissioning organisations perceiving themselves as commissioners and 'enablers' of provision, rather than solely as providers.
 - The development and maintenance of effective relationships with partner agencies, particularly Health and Education.

- The development of effective local arrangements to support and drive commissioning activity, including attention to governance or accountability for decision making.

1.6 A review for this strategy identified the following indicators of better commissioning arrangements:

- Based around an individual or commissioning team with the character, influence and skill sets to manage both contracts and relationships, closely influence provider choice for placements and regular communication with external providers.
- A structural arrangement that creates a more commercial relationship between separate commissioner and in-house provider functions.
- Based on constructive working arrangements with external providers, e.g. developing preferred provider arrangements.

2.0 Background

2.1 Previous Sufficiency Strategies focused solely on the analysis of demand and forecasting. New leadership to the commissioning team within City of Wolverhampton Council has revised the culture of commissioning within children's services and this strategy details those changes and, for the first time, how we will commission to meet the sufficiency demands of the service.

3.0 Key Highlights of the Children and Young People's Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024

3.1 Every year of the three years of this strategy, consultation will take place to ensure the relevance and development of a Commissioning plan that supports it. A Commissioning Plan that details the specific service reviews, contracts and procurement activity to take place will be produced on an annual basis in September of each year. The first plan will be produced in September 2021.

3.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council has a strong history of including the views of children, young people and their families in the shaping of services, this Strategy builds on and strengthens this. The Strategy sets out how we embed co-production into our commissioning approach. The development of the Coproduction Hub will provide a central focus point for commissioners to plan for the voice of children, young people and their families to be involved in all future commissioning plans and intentions. Likewise, procurement colleagues will work with commissioners to plan that the coproduction work with children, young people and their families is scheduled into procurement timescales as well as into the governance reporting timelines within the City of Wolverhampton Council.

3.3 A preventative commissioning approach is the basis on which we will meet the sufficiency of provision our children and young people need within a finite financial envelope. Early Intervention, Specialist support services, and Restorative practice are our approaches to supporting people at the right time at the right level and to help us strengthen families where children are at risk. Our strategic approach and decision making for commissioned services will be based on evidence and data. We will work with partners and the community to ensure we build on strengths and networks that already exist, and our focus will be on prevention and targeted services that have the most impact. To be clear, the strategy is

not about savings targets but instead about finding new ways of providing services, either to improve performance or to make savings which can be redirected for investment in other services.

- 3.4 There are seven themes of Strategic Commissioning within the strategy, and these meet the objectives as set out in paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2 of this report. The seven themes are;

Strategic Commissioning for Children and Young People



- 3.5 In order to make better Strategic Commissioning decisions, we have committed to having a full service review approach. These workshops will be scheduled in line with our risk-based approach elsewhere. Workshops will move away from isolated contract and procurement decision making, where the impact on other contracts and providers is not fully understood. We will instead establish what we need and when before procurement or contract activities commence.
- 3.6 Workshops will;
- Present the Children and Young People's experience
 - Provider(s) feedback
 - All contract(s) and internal service performance
 - Total budgets at service level (amalgamated from internal and contract funding)
 - Market Information
 - Service Teams and Frontline staff information
 - Head of Service overviews and strategic plans
 - Commissioning Analysis

They will establish a clear and jointly owned vision for a service over a two to five-year period.

- 3.7 We will deliver contract management on both a risk-based approach, and a shared responsibility for success culture. Where the Council chooses to deliver services 'in-house' it will use contract management mechanisms with internal services to ensure their performance is aligned to the expectations and standards of the external market and regulatory bodies.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 Any costs associated with this strategy will be met from the approved budget for the Children and Young People in Care Service or other services within the Council as appropriate. If there are instances where this is not possible, further reports would be received by the appropriate authority.
[JB/17032021/G]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The publishing of a Children's Sufficiency Strategy is a statutory requirement set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989 which requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of those children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation which will meet their needs within their local authority area.
[SB/17032021/W]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 Research has shown that children who are maltreated by their parents are at risk of poor peer relationships and low self-esteem. Children's emotional well-being can be affected and this may have a negative impact on their personal and social lives at home, at school, and in the wider community. As a group, children in care have on average some of the lowest levels of educational attainment in comparison to other young people of the same age. The implications extend beyond education since the educational outcomes of children and young people in care are strongly linked to subsequent employment, housing, mental and physical health and offending. It is vital that our children in care receive the most stable and consistent support to negate these impacts. They must have the most appropriate service at the right time.
- 6.2 This Strategy aims to ensure that the council supports and maintains a range of services that meet the needs of children in care and those who, without support, might be accommodated. Works with partners to ensure that only the children and young people who need to come into care are accommodated. Supports the market to deliver appropriate placements within the Local Authority area. Has the appropriate mechanisms in place for the commissioning of appropriate placements and additional support outside of the local area, where the child's needs require this.
- 6.3 There is a clear vision that is shared across the Children and Young People in Care service and which is embedded in this strategy, which is focused on achieving permanence and stability for children. This Strategy aims to put greater emphasis on tackling problems within the family unit and offering support at an earlier stage, preventing the need for children and young people to become looked after.

7.0 All other implications

- 7.1 There are no other implications as a result of this report.

8.0 Schedule of background papers

- 8.1 There are no background papers

9.0 Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1: Children and Young People's Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024