



Cabinet Meeting

19 July 2017

Report title	Wolverhampton Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2017 - 2020	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Cllr. Val Gibson Children & Young People	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Linda Sanders	
Originating service	People Commissioning	
Accountable employee(s)	Nick Price Tel Email	Commissioning Officer - People 01902 551961 nick.price@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	People Leadership Team Senior Executive Board	15 May 2017 23 May 2017

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

That the Cabinet:

Approve the Wolverhampton Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2017-20.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 A Sufficiency Duty was placed on local authorities in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 and this has been reinforced by the Draft Statutory Guidance Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2009). Section 22G requires local authorities to take all reasonably practicable steps to secure sufficient accommodation for looked-after children under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in a child's best interest to be accommodated by the local authority. There is a requirement to ensure access to a sufficient range of placements so that, whenever it is in the interests of a looked-after child, they can be placed locally with access to the full range of services and support necessary.
- 1.2 The duty applies to each Local Authority providing children's services and the Sufficiency Strategy sets out what steps have, and will be, taken to secure sufficient services and accommodation to meet the needs of children that it is looking after and children whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation.
- 1.3 The sufficiency duty, therefore, applies in respect of all children who are Looked After. However, it also applies to Children in Need who are at risk of care or custody (sometimes referred to as children 'on the edge of care'). This acknowledges the importance of taking earlier, preventive action to support children and families so that fewer children become looked after.
- 1.4 Wolverhampton's current three year Sufficiency Strategy comes to an end on 31 March 2017. The attached Sufficiency Strategy document sets out how this duty will be met over the next three years (2017-20).
- 1.5 One of the key ambitions for the Children and Young Peoples Service is for as many children and young people as possible to live and grow up safely at home with their families. However, there is recognition that for some children and young people this will not be possible and where this is the case, the ambition for those who are admitted to the care of the local authority is that they have the best possible life chances, improve their outcomes and reach their full potential.
- 1.6 The Sufficiency Strategy is one of a number of strategies/programmes which support these ambitions and as such it has been developed with reference to those other strategies/programmes (e.g. Corporate Parenting Strategy) so that they are consistent and reinforce and support one another.
- 1.7 The Sufficiency Strategy sets out, and provides information about, Wolverhampton's ambitions for vulnerable children, young people and their families, what the priorities will be over the three year period 2017-20 and what action has and will be taken to address these priorities and achieve the ambitions.

1.8 The Strategy focuses on:

- those children and young people on the edge of care and the need, wherever possible, to prevent them being taken into care.
- those children and young people that do become looked after and ensuring they have the right placement at the right time. Underpinning this is the belief that for most looked after children the best possible chance of their thriving and developing is if they are cared for in a family setting but we recognise that there is a broad spectrum of needs and that for some young people their assessed needs dictate that they are best placed in other settings such as residential homes;
- the need to find permanence for as many looked after children as possible and as early as possible.
- older looked after children and the need to assist the development of their skills, confidence and general resilience which will prepare them for adult life. This places greater emphasis on independent/semi-independent living options.

1.9 The high level strategic priority outcomes set out in the strategy document will be supported by an annual implementation plan which will contain detailed operational performance indicators and targets. Performance monitoring will continue to take place on a quarterly basis with detailed reports and updates presented to Children and Young People Management Team. The implementation plan will identify, and set out actions, relating to specific specialist needs and particular cohorts such as unaccompanied asylum seeker children and disabled children and young people

2.0 Progress

2.1 The new Strategy has been developed with reference to both linked strategic documents/processes (e.g. Corporate Parenting Strategy, People Commissioning Strategy) and lessons learnt from the development and implementation of the current Strategy. It provides a synthesis of existing national and local targets, business plans and broader transformation programmes as well as identifying new areas for development.

2.2 During the previous strategy period (2014-17) there were significant changes in the looked after children population which reached a high point in autumn 2014 (807) and then subsequently experienced a significant reduction (633 at 21 March 2017). The expectation is that the population will be reduced further and this will have implications for the delivery of the Strategy Implementation Plan, for example, there is likely to be a proportionally aging looked after children population and this will place added emphasis on the provision of accommodation and services for older looked after children. Other challenges over the next three years are likely to come from changes in legislation, for example extension of local authorities responsibilities for looked after children beyond their 18 birthday (such as the Staying Put Policy and changes to welfare benefits. have implications for service development and delivery. Any such changes will make it necessary for the Sufficiency Strategy and its Implementation Plan to be regularly

reviewed to ensure its priorities reflect the prevailing needs and ensure it is fit for purpose to meet new challenges.

- 2.3 The recent Ofsted Inspection noted that the new Strategy had appropriately identified the sufficiency priorities for the next three years.

3.0 Financial implications

- 3.1 The breadth of the response to meeting the sufficiency duty impacts across the whole of Children and Young People's Services which has an approved budget of £47.3 million for 2017-18.
- 3.2 Any costs relating to the implementation of the Strategy will be met from within the existing overall budget. [NM/03072017/S]

4.0 Legal implications

- 4.1 The production of the Strategy fulfils the Sufficiency Duty placed on local authorities in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 which has subsequently been reinforced by the Draft Statutory Guidance Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2009). [TS/10072017/P]

5.0 Equalities implications

- 5.1 There are no equalities issues to this report as the needs of all looked after children and those on the edge of care are specifically addressed through the existing processes that are in place.

6.0 Environmental implications

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications as a result of this report or the implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy over the next three years.

7.0 Human resources implications

- 7.1 There are no specific human resources implications as a result of this report.

8.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 8.1 There are no specific corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

9.0 Schedule of background papers

- 9.1 Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children – DCSF 2010
Wolverhampton Sufficiency Strategy 2014-17