

REPORT TITLE: Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People 2022-26

Cabinet Date	25 th January 2023
Cabinet Member	Cllr Stephen Davies, Cabinet Member for Children’s Safeguarding and Early Years
Key Decision	Yes
Purpose of Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval for the Sufficiency Strategy Home@theHeart 2022-2026 attached at Appendix 1.
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Approves the Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People Homes@theHeart 2022- 2026 Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Children’s Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children’s Safeguarding and Early Years to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) make any final changes prior to publication and implementation; and, (b) develop an implementation plan, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children’s Safeguarding and Early Years
Reasons for Recommendations	<p>To ensure compliance with the duty outlined in the Children Act 1989 and Sufficiency Strategy Guidance (2010).</p> <p>To build on the progress made under the previous Sufficiency Strategy: Right Placement Right Time and setting out our intent to commission sufficient good quality provision that meet the needs of our children in care locally, alongside contributing to the management of demand and reductions in avoidable high-cost placements, whenever practicable.</p>

Resource Implications	<p>The Vulnerable Children’s budget for 2022/23, set out in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, is £116 million and is a significant element within the Council’s support for children and families. The Sufficiency Strategy covers the services developed and delivered through this budget. Through the implementation of this strategy, services will be reconfigured to achieve efficiencies through better planning, commissioning, and purchasing of placements alongside contributing to market sustainability and development.</p> <p>Decisions on specific service developments and contract awards arising out of the Sufficiency Strategy will be made in accordance with the Council’s constitution and Scheme of Delegation.</p>
Background Documents	<p>Children, Young People and Family’s Needs Assessment 2018</p> <p>Sufficiency Strategy Guidance 2010</p> <p>Sufficiency Summary Report: Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2025 (IPC) (Appendix 2)</p>
Statutory Authority	Children Act 1989
Divisional Councillor(s)	All
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Timeline	Following approval, a series of specific proposals will developed over the period 2023-2026.

Background

1. The Sufficiency Strategy: Home@theHeart covers the full breadth of provision from universal services that seek to support all children, young people, and families, through to specialist services supporting children and young people with complex and dynamic needs.
2. As corporate parents, Gloucestershire County Council is committed to ensuring children and young people in its care achieve the best possible outcomes and are well supported to step confidently into adulthood. When they cannot remain within their family, Gloucestershire County Council is committed to providing children and young people with permanence and stability in care in settings which meet their changing needs over time.
3. The 'sufficiency' duty to provide or procure placements for Children in Care (referred to as children looked after in legislation) is explicit within the Children Act 1989. The duty has since been strengthened by the introduction of Sufficiency Statutory Guidance (2010) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
4. The sufficiency duty requires Local Authorities and partners to ensure, through direct provision or commissioned services, that a range of placements sufficient to meet the needs of all children are available locally, or that there is a plan in place to move towards that position. The resulting sufficiency strategy describes how a Local Authority intends to provide sufficient care placements for its children in care.
5. The guidance also requires that the commissioning standards on securing sufficient accommodation for children in care, also apply to children in need who are at risk of care or custody (referred to as children on the edge of care). This is important since it is preferable, where it is in the best interest of the child, to provide support to avoid the need for them to become children in care.
6. Covid 19 has had a profound and enduring impact on a provider market that had been showing significant signs of fragility prior to its onset. The emerging cost of living crisis has been a further compounding factor. Taken together with the sustained growth in the children in care population at local and national levels, the prevailing provider market conditions require a proactive and innovative approach within our revised Sufficiency Strategy.
7. The Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University was commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council to support the review and refresh of the Council's previous Sufficiency Strategy: Right Placement Right Time. A copy of the summary report is attached at **Appendix 2**. In formulating its advice, the IPC drew upon a wide range of evidence including data, documentation, a provider survey and, most crucially, the voices of care experienced children and young people.
8. The IPC noted both the increase in child in care numbers and ongoing concerns nationally about the quality of care and poor outcomes for children, including

those set out within the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England (May 2022) and the Competition and Markets Authority: Children's Social Care Market Study (March 2022). The IPC further noted the over representation of mixed heritage children within the care population, an increased proportion aged under 5 years, high levels of instability for some children and poor outcomes for children leaving care. These are challenges at national and local levels and as such have been key influencing factors in the development of Home@theHeart.

9. Home@theHeart proposes a twin track strategy that aims to reduce the number of children in care while also increasing care capacity in both fostering and residential places. It will operate alongside the Continuous Improvement Plan, put in place following the recent Ofsted inspection, which will drive the wider improvements in social care practice, in support of the actions set out in Home@theHeart. The strategy is constructed around three key themes, each supported by a series of priority actions:

- **Theme 1: My Home**

- Flexibility to meet searching needs or maintain children at home
- A single pathway for home searching
- One page profile
- Increased Stability
- Staying Close and Staying Put
- In-house Fostering

- **Theme 2: Home Life**

- Reducing unregistered provision with imaginative solutions
- Commissioning services, quality and home searching

- **Theme 3: Home Design**

- Future developments – building on the model
- Individual homes by design

Options

10. There is an explicit sufficiency duty placed on local authorities by The Children Act 1989, further strengthened by the Sufficiency Strategy Guidance (2010) and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010) to provide, or commission placements for children in care. The Sufficiency Strategy sets out how Gloucestershire County Council will meet that duty over the coming years and as such there is no alternative option.

Risks

11. There are several risks identified in the revised Sufficiency Strategy, including:

Risk: The Sufficiency Strategy is not effective in ensuring provision is commissioned in line with children and young people's needs, risks, and circumstances.

Mitigation: The strategy has been informed by a strong evidence base and the views of children and young people, partners, and carers to ensure its proposals are in line with assessed needs and informed projections

Risk: Ongoing provider market conditions continue to limit choice and quality.

Mitigation: The strategy contains a series of proposals to develop provision in partnership with good quality providers to deliver greater certainty and choice.

Risk: Aggregate and unit costs continue to grow to unsustainable levels.

Mitigation: The strategy aims to reduce overall numbers in care and the associated costs alongside developing provision in partnership that gives greater control over cost, quality, and choice.

Financial implications

12. The Vulnerable Children's budget for 2022/23, set out in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, is £116 million (26 January 2022 Cabinet) and is a significant element within the Council's support for children and families. The Sufficiency Strategy covers the services developed and delivered via this budget. Through the implementation of this strategy, services will be reconfigured to achieve efficiencies through better planning, commissioning and purchasing of placements alongside contributing to market sustainability and development.
13. It is important to note that the Sufficiency Strategy provides the framework for the development of provision and is not intended to replace the need for key decisions around specific proposals to be taken in accordance with the Council's established decision-making arrangements. Decisions on specific service developments and contract awards arising out of the Sufficiency Strategy will be made in accordance with the Council's constitution and Scheme of Delegation.

Climate change implications

14. A key aim of the Sufficiency Strategy: Home@theHeart will be to develop provision close to need, thereby reducing travel distances for young people families and practitioners. As well as helping to maintain personal and familial connections that are important to young people, this will also contribute to carbon reduction and ensure that the Gloucestershire pound is invested in Gloucestershire. Providers' environmental and sustainability policies will also form part of the procurement and commissioning process.

Equality implications

15. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) Statement has been completed which considers the Sufficiency Strategy: Home@theHeart in relation to the Public Sector Equality Duty. This assessment highlights the potential for commissioning intentions and priorities identified within the Sufficiency Strategy for Children's Services to achieve positive impacts for Gloucestershire's children in care, care

leavers and disabled children, and economic impacts for Gloucestershire as a whole.

16. Cabinet Members should read and consider the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) to satisfy themselves as decision makers that due regard has been given.

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) implications

17. As part of the cabinet process a DPIA decision checklist has been completed and shows that there are no direct data protection implications arising from this decision. The Information Management Team have been consulted and will continue to support across the projects covered in the strategy ensuring that DPIA's are completed where they are legally required and personal data risks are considered and mitigated within contract terms and agreements with service providers.

Social value implications

18. Ensuring children in our care have good quality accommodation which meets their needs, risks and circumstances is key to their safeguarding and wellbeing over the longer term. This is the essence of the Sufficiency Strategy Home@theHeart and the programme of development it sets out.
19. The strategy will deliver considerable social value through better outcomes for children in our care and, in turn, the wider community of Gloucestershire.

Consultation feedback

20. Engagement with young people, foster carers, Ambassadors and parents was at the heart of the development of Home@theHeart. Engagement over the course of 2021, building on the approach that had informed the development of Right Placement Right Time.
21. Key themes from the consultation included language – using 'home' or 'house' rather than 'placement'; criticism of the quality of some supported accommodation; the need for social workers to review and learn from past issues; and a focus on the 'here and now', acknowledging that young people live for today requiring accommodation that is fit for purpose.
22. Carers and partners' feedback emphasised the need for partnership working, preventative work to avoid the escalation of children into care and consistency of social worker for young people. Alongside the engagement feedback, the IPC drew upon evidence around best practice both nationally and from those who have a detailed knowledge of our local services within their summary report.

Officer recommendations

23. The Sufficiency Strategy: Home@theHeart responds to a specific duty outlined in the Children Act 1989 and Sufficiency Statutory Guidance (2010), therefore it is recommended that it's publication and implementation is endorsed.

24. The Sufficiency Strategy: Home@theHeart outlines how Gloucestershire County Council will ensure that children and young people who need to be in care, can grow up in high quality provision that is well matched to and effectively meets their immediate and long-term needs, providing them with stability and permanence at the earliest opportunity.
25. Home@theHeart is based on views from young people, data and benchmarking within a robust needs assessment, and intelligence from the placements team in relation to sourcing placements and costs. Whilst one area of focus is on services for children in care and on the edge of care, the strategy focusses on prevention and early intervention, therefore it covers the whole continuum of need for children and young people.

Performance management/follow-up

26. A key element within the wider response to the Ofsted inspection of GCC Childrens Services (February 2022) was to refocus the previous Improvement Board towards becoming a Continuous Improvement Board, to support the journey from services from requiring improvement to a judgement of good at the next inspection. The CIB will play a key role in overseeing Home@theHeart alongside Corporate Parenting Board and Children's Services Senior Leadership Team.