

Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee 3 December 2024

Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Education (DCS)

Sufficiency Strategy – Children’s Services

Summary

1. This report outlines our responsibilities in accordance with Section 22G of Children Act 1989. This is referred to as our **Sufficiency Duties** to ensure we have enough homes for children in the care of the local authority.
2. The accompanying **Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027** sets out our vision and approach to meeting our responsibilities to provide secure, safe and appropriate accommodation to children in need, children in care and care leavers over the next three years.
3. It is informed by current and anticipated sufficiency requirements, market changes, gaps and opportunities, drawing on a wide range of available national, regional and local data, and identifies the key challenges that we face in achieving sufficiency and our approach to overcoming them.
4. Members are asked to consider and support this strategy, as we deliver on the ambitious targets we have set and achieve positive outcomes for children and young people in our care.

Background

5. The sufficiency duty describes a local authorities’ responsibility to have enough suitable homes for children looked after. Local authorities can find it difficult to meet their sufficiency duty for many reasons. These can include:
 - the rising numbers of children in care and an older profile of children.

- issues with recruitment and retention of foster carers, residential care workers and other social care and wider children's professionals.
 - not having the right quantity and mix of provision for the children in their area.
 - difficulties in working with the private market, where there is an imbalance of power and local authorities have little choice.
6. These challenges are not new, though some have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. 'The independent review of children's social care' (the Care Review) and our research report 'Children's social care 2022: recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic' highlighted these issues..
7. **Section 22G of the Children's 1989 Act** requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of those children they look after and where it is appropriate for their welfare, to be provided with accommodation. 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.
8. Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is essential if we are to deliver improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right home, in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving stability, which is a critical in relation to better outcomes for children in our care.
9. The sufficiency duty applies to all children who are defined as 'looked after' under the 1989 Act. However, we also recognise that in improving outcomes for children and having sufficient accommodation to meet their needs – is also taking earlier, preventive action to support children and families so that fewer children become looked after. This is in line with our '**Building Brighter Futures**' practice model.

10. Therefore, the sufficiency duty must be seen as a core part of how we meet our broader duties to ensure that looked after children's needs are fully assessed, that effective matching takes place so that these are met within an appropriate care arrangement, and that regular reviews are held to evaluate whether the child's needs are being met and to address any emerging issues.
11. Within the relevant statutory guidance, there is a requirement to have the plans in place for meeting our sufficiency duties. The accompanying document with this report is the **City of York's Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027**.

Consultation

12. This is not required/needed for the purpose of this report.

Options

13. Members are invited to consider the report and accompanying **Sufficiency Strategy**. There are no key decisions or options to consider.

Analysis

14. The City of York Council is **required**, under Section 22G Children's Act 1989, to ensure that it has plans in place to meet its sufficiency needs. The attached **Sufficiency Strategy** document satisfies these requirements.

Council Plan

15. The Council Plan 2023-2027, **One City, For All**, sets a strong ambition to increase opportunities for everyone living in York to live healthy and fulfilling lives.
16. This strategy document will develop and strengthen our resources to ensure children and young people, continue to live in homes close to their families, friends, and wider connected networks.
 - **Equalities and Human Rights** – Equality of opportunity
 - **Affordability** - Tackling the cost-of-living crisis

- **Climate** - Environment and the climate emergency
- **Health** - Improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities, taking a Health in All Policies approach.

Implications

17. This report and accompanying strategy are to provide Members with assurance on the work being done to meet our Sufficiency Duty. There are no known implications.

Risk Management

18. The City of York Council is required, Section 22G Children Act 1989, to have a **Sufficiency Strategy** in place, which outlines our plans to ensure that there are sufficient resources to meet the needs of children in our care.
19. Not having a strategy in place would mean that we were operating outside of the requirements as defined in the legislation and would compromise our position for future regulatory inspections.

Recommendations

20. That members consider and note this report and accompanying strategy document.

Reason: So that members are updated on the council's responsibilities in accordance with Section 22G of Children Act 1989.

Contact Details

Author:
Michael Cavan
Head of Resources

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:
Martin Kelly
Corporate Director of Children and Education
Tel no. Ext. +5612

**Report
Approved**



Date 22 November 2024

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

N/A

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A: Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027