

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



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| Report subject             | <b>Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Sufficiency Report</b>  |
| Meeting date               | 28 January 2025   |
| Status                     | Public Report   |
| Executive summary          | <p>The Children in Care (CiC) and Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – 2028 sets out how Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP Council) will meet its sufficiency duty as laid out in section 22G of the Children Act 1989.</p> <p>The Strategy sets out how BCP will provide sufficient, safe, secure, and sustainable homes for Children in Care (CiC) and Care Experienced Young People between 2024 - 2028. The required standard as a corporate parent is to ensure that the accommodation provision is at the level that professionals would want for their own children or family. Demand pressure and the reality that resources are finite means that sufficiency is a policy imperative.</p> <p>This briefing and attached appendices purpose is to inform the Committee of the agreed sufficiency strategy priorities between 2024 – 2028 and the progress achieved to date, alongside the immediate areas of focus during 2025 in order to mitigate any sufficiency risks.</p> <p>Progress against the six priority areas will be reported into the Children's Service's Quality, Performance and Improvement Board as per the Governance process.</p> |
| Recommendations            | <p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Committee acknowledges and understands the Children's Services statutory responsibility to produce a Sufficiency Strategy in relation of the accommodation needs of Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People.</li> </ul>   |
| Reason for recommendations | For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be aware of The Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole (BCP) Council Sufficiency   |

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|  | Strategy for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2024 – 2028 and associated action plan taking note of the progress against the agreed priorities. |
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| Portfolio Holder(s): | Councillor Richard Burton - Cabinet Member for Children, Young People |
| Corporate Director   | Cathi Hadley - Corporate Director, Children's Services                |
| Report Authors       | Sarah Langdale – Head of Children's Commissioning                     |
| Wards                | Council-wide  |
| Classification       | For Information   |

## 1. Background

The Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – 2028, fulfils BCP Council's Sufficiency Duty in respect of Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. The Act places a duty on Local Authorities to take steps that secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in Care within their local area. Each Local authority has a duty, under section 10 of the Children Act ('the 2004 Act') to make arrangements to promote co-operation with its relevant partners with a view to improving the wellbeing of children in the authority's area. This Duty was further outlined in statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education in 2010 which made explicit the requirement for local authorities to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring that plans to meet this duty were included in relevant commissioning strategies.

There are a range of legal duties associated with an overall 'Sufficiency Duty' on local authorities as part of the Children Act, 1989, to secure accommodation for children in their care within the local authority area.

The strategy seeks to address the sufficiency, quality and sustainability of appropriate accommodation provision, which will support the best possible outcomes for our children and young people by ensuring there is a range of accommodation provision that supports cultural diversity and meets the individual needs of each child or young person, as well as seeking value for money within the available resources.

The views, desires, and aspirations of our children in Care and Care Experienced young people will be sought through Unite and Insight, to ensure they have been listened to, heard, understood and that the sufficiency of accommodation meets their needs.

## **2. Consideration of National and Local Strategies**

- 2.1 Stable Homes Built on Love - following an Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the government published a new strategy 'Stable Homes Built on Love' (February 2023) which outlined six pillars to transform Children's Social Care.
- 2.2 Corporate Parenting Strategy Brighter Future for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2024 -2026.
- 2.3 Early Help Partnership Approach and Strategy 2024 – 2026
- 2.4 Children's Services Self-Assessment April 2024 / Childrens Social Care and Early Help Improvement Plan and SEND Improvement plan.
- 2.5 Children and Young People plan 2021 – 2024, a new five-year Children and Young People's Partnership Plan will be launched in 2025 and is an important statement of BCP's commitment to children and young people. It will provide clarity in respect of new priorities and how they will be delivered and achieved.

### 3. Key Sufficiency Pressures

- 3.1 Through the robust analysis of Children's Services data (summarised within the Sufficiency Strategy (Appendix 1) the following key sufficiency pressures have been identified.

| Children In Care  | Care Experienced Young People   | Children's Services  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increasing number of children in Care, rate higher than national average</li><li>• Higher proportion of children placed in residential settings</li><li>• Too many children placed out of area because of insufficient suitable placements within the BCP area</li><li>• Limited choice of local or national placements for children with complex needs</li><li>• Understanding the quality of provision through robust monitoring and contract management practice</li><li>• Too many other local authorities placing young people in supported accommodation which impacts future housing sufficiency</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Joint planning between Children's Services and Housing preparing young people for independence</li><li>• Lack of affordable move on accommodation due to economic position of BCP Council; for example, rental market is competitive with student accommodation and lack of social housing</li><li>• Suitable accommodation for young people being released from custody</li><li>• Young people's ability to live independently and maintain tenancies e.g. financial pressures</li><li>• No high support accommodation post 18 years</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial pressure due to the rising costs of placements</li><li>• Insufficient Short Break provision to meet need</li><li>• Lack of consistent engagement with providers which impacts on market sufficiency within the BCP area</li><li>• Placement of UASC by the Home Office</li></ul> |

### 4. Agreed Priorities 2024 - 2028

- 4.1 As a result, the following 6 key priorities have been agreed to ensure BCP council has sufficiency of local accommodation provision.

Priority 1 - Ensure there is sufficient local family-based care available in the BCP area, so more children can live within a family home.

Priority 2 - When children need to live in a residential home, ensure there is sufficient locally based residential provision within the BCP area to meet the needs of those children and young people who cannot, or chose not to, live in a family setting.

- Priority 3 - Increase supported accommodation provision and further develop a sufficiency model which offers a range of provision models (high to low support) so children and young people have a choice to move through a pathway of services, offering a range of homes across the BCP area which shall prepare them for independence.
- Priority 4 - Re-establish positive partnership and collaboration between Housing, Children's Social Care and Commissioning, focusing on the Joint Housing priorities for Care Experienced young people.
- Priority 5 - Improve relationships with providers through open and transparent engagement in order to further develop services to meet the needs of BCP council's children and young people.
- Priority 6 - Embed governance and quality assurance frameworks to ensure compliance and support strategic decision making in the future.

## 5. Measuring Success

- 5.1 Whilst there are high level success measures detailed in the Sufficiency Strategy; more detailed measures will be monitored via a Commissioning scorecard and robust governance arrangements.
- 5.2 The Commissioning Service have an action plan developed which is updated monthly to evidence progress against the agreed Priorities. The action plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it responds to emerging needs, trends, and legislation.
- 5.3 Progress to date

| Priority 1 - Local family-based care available  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-House Fostering Service 'Recruitment and Retention Strategy drafted.</li> <li>• Collaboration with regional arrangement – South West Foster Carer Recruitment Hub</li> <li>• Ofsted registration of in-house supported lodgings scheme underway</li> <li>• Dedicated Senior Commissioning Officer attending all Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Framework partnership quarterly meetings – annual data informing sufficiency planning</li> </ul> |

### **Priority 2 - Sufficient locally based residential provision**

- Care Episode Gateway data dashboard developed which provides a better understanding of sufficiency challenges
- All residential providers located within BCP have been mapped, number of beds, voids and BCP usage is collated on a quarterly basis to inform sufficiency planning
- 1 existing provider has opened a new home within BCP specifically for Children in Care who have a learning disability, increase of 2 beds.
- Ofsted ratings of all commissioned provision is known and monitored.
- Short Breaks Position Statement produced and signed off by Children's Services Senior Leadership Team – July 2024, all commissioned services are known and mapped.

### **Priority 3 - Increase supported accommodation provision**

- All providers located within BCP have been mapped, number of beds, voids and BCP usage is now collated on a quarterly basis to inform sufficiency planning.
- 1 new provider and 2 existing providers have opened new homes within BCP within the last 18mths, increasing sufficiency by 17 beds.
- Collaboration with an existing external provider has resulted in a new 6 bed unit within BCP being commissioned for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people.

### **Priority 4 - Re-establish positive internal partnership and collaboration**

- Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) accommodation tender supported by Children's Commissioning (19 units in total, 12 shall be supported). 2024/2025 - Q3 Care Experienced Young People accommodated 13 units (81%)
- Diagnostic review of all commissioned accommodation provision for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people has been completed.
- Named link worker for Care Experienced Young People in Housing.
- Care Experienced Young People identified as target cohort for Homewards Project in BCP.
- All housing commissioned supported accommodation provision has been mapped, number of beds, voids and Care Experienced Young People placed is now captured at the end of each quarter
- Joint 16/17 Homelessness / Housing Assessment training delivered across Children's Services and Housing.
- Reduction in use of B&B, assisted by robust joint working with housing and fostering.

| Priority 5 - Improve relationships with providers   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In person visits to commissioned Provider homes has commenced, 5 providers across 12 homes have been visited to date.</li> <li>• 3 x providers are planning to open registered children's homes within BCP during Spring 2025, supported by Children's Commissioning, based on sufficiency need.</li> <li>• Provider Forums planned to commence January 2025.</li> <li>• Attendance at Independent Fostering Agency and Residential Framework provider event (October 2024).</li> <li>• Initial scoping for a Supported Accommodation framework has commenced, contractual documentation has been reviewed, links with other Local Authorities has been established and documentation has been shared.</li> <li>• Visits to local providers for Quality Assurance compliance assurance have commenced.</li> <li>• Monitoring of Ofsted Improvement Plans for requires improvement and inadequate rated providers is now embedded, supported by commissioning.</li> </ul> |

| Priority 6 - Embed Governance / Quality Assurance Frameworks  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Assurance Framework produced, final draft to be signed off by agreed governance January 2025.</li> <li>• The ofsted ratings of all BCP providers are known and logged. Those with a rating of 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' have been contacted and improvement plans obtained.</li> <li>• Contracts pipeline data collation has commenced, enabling central procurement services to upload onto the corporate register.</li> <li>• Established links in place via monthly meetings with Corporate Procurement colleagues continues.</li> <li>• Review of existing contractual arrangements with spot purchase care and education providers has commenced with a view to embedded corporate terms and conditions.</li> <li>• Consideration of new procurement regulations, due to be implemented in early 2025. Initial training has been provided to the team by the corporate team.</li> <li>• New internal Service Level Agreement template has been produced and is now embedded practice.</li> </ul> |

## 6. Assessment of Risk Areas 2025/2026

- 6.1 The **overarching Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole (BCP) Council Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2024 – 2028** Action Plan details the priorities and the workstreams allocated. The areas documented below require immediate focus to minimise sufficiency risk.

### **Priority 1 - Local family-based care available**

- Utilisation of the 63 Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) beds located within BCP currently being commissioned by other Local Authorities, re-building partnerships, notification of new carer registration or existing carer vacancies to aid matching.
- Embed the In-House Fostering Recruitment Strategy priorities.
- In-House Fostering recruitment strategy to include Ofsted registered supported lodgings carers specifically for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- In-House Supported Lodgings Recruitment strategy aims to increase the number of carers within BCP

### **Priority 2 - Sufficient locally based residential provision**

- Continued partnership working with external registered providers (White Trees Group, Wild Orchard, Libre Living) to ensure the proposed development of registered children's homes within BCP continues, proposed to open Spring 2025 and beds are secured for BCP children.
- Ongoing planning with the provider Developing Lives Services in respect of building of registered provision for children with complex needs, based on the Trevone House model, planning has been submitted – Summer 2027.
- Accurate reporting and utilisation of voids and planning to effectively use the provision located within BCP.

### **Priority 3 - Increase supported accommodation provision**

- Accurate reporting and utilisation of voids and planning to effectively use the provision located within BCP.
- Additional provision for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children required within BCP to ensure cohort requirements under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) are achieved.
- Partnership working with local registered providers (International Care Network (ICN) / Valiant Homes) to open two new supported accommodation homes by the Spring of 2025.

### **Priority 4 - Re-establish positive internal partnership and collaboration**

- Embed the recommendations of the accommodation review completed by Commissioning, Housing and CSC in respect of current commissioned services, alongside ongoing accommodation needs analysis
  - Work with internal Housing partners to consider the impact post 18 accommodation sufficiency with other Local Authority children eligible under local connection.
  - Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People accommodation needs to be effectively mapped into an accommodation pathway.
  - Complete review the CEYP who are continuing to live in CSC funded provision post 18yrs, understand the cohort needs.
  - Better understand why a low % of CEYP are accessing housing supported accommodation



- Support the delivery of the Council's Housing strategy – with a focus on CEYP accommodation needs.

#### **Priority 5 - Improve relationships with providers**

- Raising the profile of BCP within the South-Central IFA Framework partnership arrangements.
- Work with the South-Central Residential Framework to increase access to local and national sufficiency of provision.
- Provider Forum's to be established with local providers during Q4 of 2024/2025, sharing of sufficiency data to inform market development.
- Developing the local market to meet the needs of sibling groups and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) identified as cohorts being placed out of area.

#### **Priority 6 - Embed governance and quality assurance frameworks**

- Ensure approval of the draft quality assurance framework through governance arrangements.
- Continue to update the existing contracts pipeline for children's services, thus informing the strategic commissioning plan and assurance in respect of procurement compliance
- Work in partnership with providers to regularly monitor all provision rated 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate,' ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children to allow them to remain in their home.

### **7. Consultation / Participation**

- 7.1 All members of the Children Services Extended Leadership Team have had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the strategy, and to comment on it prior to it being formally signed off.
- 7.2 Comments and suggestions received during the consultation period were considered and either reflected in the final version of the strategy or embedded within the 'action plan.'
- 7.3 Each strategic lead – for the Strategy - will have their own mechanisms to enable participation and to gather views and feedback, finding out what children and young people views are in respect of the accommodation, care and support available. These views will inform the monitoring and commissioning of providers and the provision they offer and develop.

### **8. Summary of financial implications**

- 8.1 The reduction in Local Authority funding means that even greater focus needs to be given to delivering value for money in the commissioning of accommodation provision for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People. The challenge for BCP Council, as with all other Local Authorities, is to continue to improve and sustain high quality accommodation provision and services whilst also delivering efficiencies.

- 8.2 The Competitions and Markets Authority completed a market study into children's social care in England, Scotland, and Wales in March 2021, this was in response to 2 major concerns that had been raised about how the commissioned care and support accommodation provision market is operating.
- That Local Authorities were too often unable to access appropriate placements to meet the needs of children in their care.
  - That the prices paid by Local Authorities were high and this, combined with growing numbers of Children in Care, was placing significant strain on Local Authority budgets, limiting their scope to fund other important activities in children's services and beyond.
- 8.3 A number of recommendations were made which included:
- Setting out what minimum level of activity must be carried out collectively. This should include an appropriate degree of activity in each of the key areas of forecasting, market shaping and procurement.
  - Ensuring that there is a set of bodies to carry out this collective market shaping and procurement activities, with each Local Authority required to participate in one of them. We expect sub-national bodies to be appropriate for England.
  - Providing an oversight structure to ensure that each body is carrying out its functions to the appropriate level. This should involve an assessment of the extent to which sufficiency of placements is being achieved within each area.
- 8.4 Janet Daby, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Children and Families) states the Children's Wellbeing Bill will 'return the sector to providing high-quality outcomes at sustainable cost to the taxpayer', as Ofsted seeks new powers to regulate children's care providers. A number of measures are set to be announce, designed to reduce the financial burden on Local Authorities. Companies providing children's care placements will be required to share their finances with the Local Authorities. The proposals would put a limit on the profit providers can make "if providers do not voluntarily put an end to profiteering."
- 8.5 Children's Commissioning have a duty to consider the recommendations made by the Competitions and Markets Authority and strive to achieve best value. Through regional collaboration market intelligence is being collated which shall inform sufficiency planning and market shaping based on an analysis of the assessed needs of children entering Local Authority care. Furthermore, the monitoring of Provider fees, the implementation of improved provider financial accountability and transparency is a key focus and an expansion of corporate parenting responsibilities.

## **9. Summary of legal implications**

- 9.1 Although the sufficiency duty lies with each Local Authority, the duty can be implemented most effectively through a partnership between the authority and its partner agencies. Each local authority has a duty, under section 10 of the Children Act ('the 2004 Act') to make arrangements to promote co-operation with its relevant partners with a view to improving the wellbeing of children in the authority's area.
- 9.2 The guidance is therefore issued under two provisions:

- section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities, in the exercise of their social services functions, to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State; and
- Section 10 (8) of the 2004 Act, which requires all local authorities in England and each of their relevant partners to have regard to guidance from the Secretary of State when exercising their functions in relation to their duty to co-operate to improve the wellbeing of children in the local area.

## **10. Summary of human resources implications**

Not applicable

## **11. Summary of equality implications**

- 11.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) report, action plan and screening tool has been produced and has been considered by the Equality Impact Assessment panel, discussions continue. Now that a final draft of the Sufficiency Strategy has been produced it shall be shared with the EIA Panel for further discussion with a view of obtaining sign off by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- 11.2 Most children in care and care experienced young people have experienced inequalities during their upbringing, coupled with adverse childhood experiences (ACE's). Many will be experiencing continuing inequalities, either as a result of disability, exploitation or extra health and educational needs, for example. The Strategy will need to make progress on reducing all inequalities as far as can be done within this specific remit. For example, BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) children should be offered placements that are culturally competent and sensitive. Girls who have suffered abuse or been exploited should be offered accommodation provision with appropriately trained staff who can meet specific identified needs.
- 11.3 The Sufficiency Strategy Strategic Leads will ensure that data is analysed and continues to inform all areas of accommodation provision and support services which are commissioned, and which may affect children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing, mental health, stability, and choice.

## **12. Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Children in Care (CiC) and Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – 2028

Appendix 2 - Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – 2028 Action Plan