

**Corporate Parenting Board
1 September 2025**

Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028

Executive Summary:

This report seeks approval of Our Childrens Sufficiency Strategy for the next 3 years which seeks to embed and developed practice, sustaining and progressing the partnership approach to deliver innovate models of accommodation. This will enable the directorate to maximise the right accommodation for the right children at the right time.

The Strategy will have governance through, the Childrens Placement Sufficiency Board and the Corporate Parenting Board.

We will ensure our children are cared for by skilled and talented people who are passionate about our children, have the right home, in the right place at the right time enabling them to be safe, happy, successful and healthy

We know that there are unprecedented demands on children's social care, the reports from the Competition and Markets Authority and the Care Review all share similar concerns regarding the privatisation and profiteering from children's care placements by providers.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

- To agree the Board's shared partnership ambition for children in our care and care experienced young people.
- To support Walsall Council in meeting its legal responsibilities in regard children in our care and care experienced young people.

Recommendations:

The Board members are asked to

1. Consider and comment on the approach and implementation of the 2025-2028 Sufficiency Strategy
2. Agree the priority areas and action plan for the delivery of the strategy.

Background papers:

None

Resource and legal considerations:

There is resource implications associated with the delivery of the strategy. The proposals within the strategy will manage the cost of accommodation for Children's Services. The placements budget for 2024-2025, set out in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Commissioning strategies should include where relevant plans for meeting the sufficiency duty. Appropriate procurement legislation and process will need to be followed.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall.

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 and the programme of development it sets out. A key aim of the Sufficiency Strategy 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. The strategy will deliver considerable social value through better outcomes for children in our care.

Environmental impact:

There are no environmental implications associated with the development of the strategy

Performance management:

The delivery of the strategy will be monitored through the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities:

Successful delivery of a strategy to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers will have a significantly positive impact on the outcomes of one of the most vulnerable groups. The Strategy will ensure that the directorate delivers inclusive services that meet the needs of our diverse communities, through the commissioning of a diverse range of accommodation, co-producing and developing models with our children and families.

Consultation:

Consultation has not been undertaken on this strategy, although individual commissioned services within it (such as tenders for supported accommodation, the development of new homes for example) are subject to consultation with services users to ensure that the commissioned services are fit for purpose.

The children in care council is one of the key forums through which services for children in our care and care experienced young people seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

Contact Officer:

Full Name:

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Natasha Moody, Head of Commissioning

Report: Sufficiency Strategy 2024 -2027	
1.0	Introduction
1.1	Walsall Council’s Children’s Placement Sufficiency Strategy covers the breadth of 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. We believe in supporting all our children and young people to have a safe place to live and thrive. We recognise that most children and young people are best brought up within their own families, however where this is not possible, we look to find a family or a home that best meets their needs and offers access to the support and opportunities needed for success and happiness in later life. To meet this vision, we need to have the right home, in the right place, at the right time. This strategy sets our aims and priorities to deliver this.
1.2	As corporate parents, Walsall 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, we are committed to providing children and young people with permanence and stability in care in settings which meet their changing needs over time.
1.3	The duty to cooperate underpins our role as Corporate Parents and applies to all partners. That services are based on the ‘if this were my child’ principle and by making sure young people have a safe and stable place to live, that they are economically sound; with the opportunity and support to be successful.
	Legal Framework
1.4	The ‘sufficiency’ duty to provide or procure placements for Children in our Care (referred to as children looked after in legislation) is explicit within the Children Act 1989 (section 22g). The duty has since been strengthened by the introduction of Sufficiency Statutory Guidance (2010) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
1.5	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 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.
1.6	The resulting sufficiency strategy describes how we intend to provide sufficient homes and accommodation children in our care. To achieve this Walsall works in partnership with young people, their families, providers, and partner agencies to

	ensure that there is a robust and quality choice of accommodation. Securing sufficient accommodation and support that meets the needs of children in our care and those leaving care is important in delivering improved outcomes. Our ambitions for our children in care and care leavers have informed our 'Strategic Priorities' for this Sufficiency Strategy
1.7	<p>Our strategic priorities are We want to,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broaden the range of provision: Ensure we have the right types of homes to meet the diverse and changing needs of children in our care. • Raise the quality of care: Work with providers to deliver consistently high standards across all settings. • Promote stability and permanence: Reduce placement moves and support long-term, loving relationships for every child. • Keep children close to home: Increase the number of children living in or near Walsall, connected to their communities. • Strengthen our workforce and partnerships: Build a skilled, supported workforce and a collaborative system that puts children's needs first.
1.8	There are increasing challenges in securing the right homes for some of our children nationally and regionally. We know that there are unprecedented demands on children's social care, the reports from the Competition and Markets Authority and the Care Review all share similar concerns regarding the privatisation and profiteering from children's care placements by providers. The emerging cost of living crisis has been a further compounding factor. Taken together with the complexity of the needs of our children in care, the prevailing provider market conditions require a proactive and innovative approach within our Sufficiency Strategy.
2.0	Summary of Needs Assessment and Trends
2.1	Our analysis has examined the changing trends in the characteristics of children in care and the nature of the homes they are experiencing. The key findings have been used to revise this Sufficiency Strategy and identify the priority actions required to achieve its aims.
2.2	<p>Our overall number of children in care is reducing over the last three years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March 2025 there were 578 children in our care which lower than previous years (665 at March 2024 and 650 at March 2023) • The rate of children in our care was 82.4 per 10,000 children in the population aged 0-17. This is lower than statistical neighbours and west midlands region but remains higher than national comparators. • Fewer children have entered our care, 34% less than 2023/24. For 2024/25 the rate of children entering care has reduced to 17.3 per 10,000, equating to 121 children. • 68% our children in care live with foster families

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6% of our children live with their parents • 20% of our children live in children’s homes or supported accommodation • 16.7% of children live more than 20 miles away, reduced from 18% in 2023/24 • 7.2 % of our children have experienced 3 or more moves • 67% have experience stability of living in their home for over 2 years which is a slight improvement since 2023/2024 • 64 children secured permanence through adoption, special guardianship or CAO • The number and proportion of children in residential children’s homes, secure or supported accommodation has been increasing with 20.4% in such provision at March 2025 compared with 16% in 2022/23 • The proportion of children from ethnic backgrounds other than white is increasing, largely within the Asian and Other groups. This is driven by the increasing number of separated children seeking asylum, but also the increasing proportions of older children entering care generally.
<p>3.0</p>	<p>The strategy is underpinned by 5 priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the range of provision • Improve the quality of provision • Promote Stability and Performance • Keep children close to their homes and communities • Strengthen the workforce and partnerships
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Our Fostering Intentions are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve sufficiency to ensure as many children as possible can live in a family environment • Ensure we have a consistent approach to recruiting and supporting foster carers across Walsall Council incorporating learning from best practice. • Digital and community-based recruitment and marketing activity to increase the overall numbers of foster carers and specifically for adolescents and sibling groups. • Increase New Horizons fostering households for children who have lived in a residential home but where a foster home has been identified to meet their needs. • Establish our Emergency Fostering Scheme • DDP training and the Nurturing and Attachment training to increase foster carer capabilities and confidence to manage trauma behaviours. • Expanding bedroom capacity through the availability of capital funding to increase foster carer capacity through adaptations • Strategically explore carer capacity and encourage expanding approval when appropriate • Ensure that the Support and Stability Team offer targeted interventions, therapeutic support and guidance where there are risks to the stability of home

	<p>life and reduce the risk of children’s care needs escalating and the placement breaking down.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and maintain strong relationships with our independent fostering agencies (IFAs). Deliver quarterly provider engagement events with IFAs to build relationships • Support more of our foster carers, and independent sector foster carers who are fostering Walsall children, to provide them with on-going Staying Put accommodation once they become 18. • Through our Families First for Children pathfinder we are keen to ensure that we increase the number of children that can be cared for within their extended family and develop Kinship Local Offer. • Lead on establishing a Regional Fostering Hub which incorporates recruitment and assessment in conjunction within the Black Country LAs/Trust
<p>3.2</p>	<p>Our Residential Care intentions: Improve sufficiency to increase and improve the availability of children’s home provision and reduce use of unregistered placements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop further provision to meet the needs of children with complex needs where DOLs restrictions are required to reduce the use of unregistered provision. • Maintain an internal multi-disciplinary model of residential assessment provision for children in crisis in Pineview to children in crisis and support them to live in a foster family or return to their families • Deliver robust quality assurance and monitoring of internal residential children’s homes to support them to achieve good or outstanding and ensure that internal children’s homes are at full occupancy. • Our children live in residential provision that is judged ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted. • Capitalising on collaborations address specific gaps in provision by working with our local market and through the West Midlands Framework Providers. • Undertake market engagement with external providers to encourage the setting up of new provision locally • Robustly apply protocols to secure appropriate support and joint funding from Education and Health partners (ICB, TCP and BCHFT). • Work together with the CAHMS collaborative to support children with complex needs access a pathway to more specialist mental health support. in crisis. The service will focus on meeting the needs of children in crisis and support them to live in a foster family or return to their families.
<p>3.3</p>	<p>Our Supported Accommodation intentions for young people is to improve sufficiency of Supported Accommodation to meet the needs of young people who are moving into adulthood or who have specific needs we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure young people are living in supported accommodation in line with their needs, closer to their communities and are supported to transition to adulthood.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the regional commissioning arrangements for Supported Accommodation Framework to ensure that there are a range of providers to meet the needs of our young people. • Supporting providers to prepare for registration and inspection by Ofsted, ahead of the implementation of statutory regulations across the sector in 2024. • Maintain robust quality assurance and contract management processes for spot bed purchases and for West Midlands SA Framework Providers.
3.4	<p>Achieving Permanence</p> <p>We have made significant improvements in helping our children and young people in care to achieve permanence in a timely manner and find a stable, long-term home. An increasing number of our children are leaving care through reunification to the care of their parents, special guardianship orders (SGO's) or adoption.</p> <p>Our Permanence Strategy focuses on the key priorities to ensure children are securing permanence through reunification, permanence in fostering, special guardianship and adoption. The Permanence Steering Group drives the action plan</p>
3.5	<p>Our Permanence intentions are to support more children and young people to achieve permanence within loving and stable homes we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure children who enter care have an effective permanence plan as soon as possible. • Increase the number of prospective adopters available regionally through targeted recruitment, focusing on recruiting adopters who are able to adopt older children and children in sibling groups. • Increase the planned adoption of children where effective permanence planning shows that is the best option for the child. • Implement the Family Safeguarding model to support the task of renunciation of children and subsequent revocation of care orders is proactively progressed where this is appropriate. • Provide training and support for special guardians to equip them to meet the needs of the child or young person and maintain stability. • Ensure that therapeutic support is available to special guardians through the Adoption Support Fund
4.0	<p>Governance and next steps</p>

The work will be overseen by an internal placement sufficiency board which feeds into the Corporate Parenting Panel annually to report on progress. The sufficiency board will be underpinned by thematic working groups focussed on fostering, kinship care, residential care. The focus of this work will be the internal workings of the council.

We will continue to work regionally on two key areas supported accommodation and the safe centre.

Proposed Working Groups



We recognise the critical role partners play in this strategy. We want to work with them to develop a partnership approach to children in our care. We will work with the Children in Care Alliance to further develop the delivery plan and improve the way we work to encourage a joined up partnership response.

4.1

Sufficiency or lack of sufficiency impacts on all services that support children and young people. It is important that partners, providers, carers, children and young people are all invested in the aims of the strategy and committed to implementing the actions needed to achieve its stated outcomes.

Partnership and collaboration will be key to achieving our sufficiency aims and market engagement events will be used to ensure the strategy is kept relevant and part of ongoing service development. Sufficiency covers a wide range of areas within children services, and it is important that partners, carers, children, young people, and providers are all invested into the actions contained so partnership and collaboration will remain key to delivering the strategy.

4.2

The Placement Sufficiency Board which includes all key officers from children's services and is chaired by the Director of Social Work, will drive and monitor the intentions, actions, and priorities. This group will develop innovative new concepts to meet our sufficiency duties in response to emerging needs, trends, and legislation as aforementioned.

Regular reports on the impact of the strategy will be taken into Corporate Parenting Board.

A detailed action plan setting out work to address these themes is in place and progress against this will be reported to the Board annually.

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