

# Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 9 March 2022

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**Subject:** X

**Sufficiency Strategy to include In-House Fostering and Adoption**

## **Summary statement:**

The Bradford Sufficiency Strategy details how Bradford City Council intends to meet the 'Sufficiency Duty' 1 set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989.

It sets out the Council's vision and approach to meeting its responsibilities to provide secure, safe and appropriate accommodation to children in need, children in care and care leavers over the next three years

## **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:**

There are no direct implications for equality and diversity arising from this report. The Council has a duty to ensure that its services comply with the public sector equality duty

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### **Portfolio:**

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## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report introduces the proposed new Sufficiency Strategy for consideration and approval.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Sufficiency Strategy focuses on issues related to sufficiency of placements for children in care and aims to ensure a sufficient range of high quality accommodation for Children in Care and Care Leavers in Bradford.
- 2.2 Publication of a Sufficiency Strategy is a legal requirement This is a 3 year strategy. The previous version was a one year strategy based on the context of a rapidly changing environment within Bradford's Children's Services. The plan was for work to be continued in 2022 on scoping the next iteration which would reflect the levels of progress.
- 2.3 The strategy inevitably links closely to other strategies. For example, a key contributor to the aim to reduce the number of children who need to enter care is the work being done in relation to the early help offer, which has its own strategy, partnership and action plan.

## **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The purpose of Bradford's placement and sufficiency strategy is to provide looked after children with the best possible placements.
- 3.2 The Council wants to do what is right for all looked after children, which includes being able to provide somewhere safe, caring and suitable for their needs if they are not able to remain at home. This might only be for a few days or it might be for the duration of their childhood, depending on circumstances.
- 3.3 The sufficiency strategy is part of our improvement programme for the whole of Children's Services. There are many changes taking place and planned, which means that the strategy is ambitious but also has to be flexible. For example, we do not know the full impact of COVID-19 on public services. But the strategy sets out the planning and procedures that we think necessary to guide placement developments over the next three years.

The strategy will allow us to achieve four broad aims:

- increasing our understanding of children's needs
- developing alternatives to children becoming or remaining looked after, through earlier intervention and at 'the edge of care'
- improving placement and care planning, to minimise the number of disrupted placements and unplanned moves
- developing the local authority residential care and fostering agency offers, to provide more placements within the district

- 3.4 The strategy outlines how these aims will be achieved.
- 3.5 The strategy links with many others designed to promote children's health, safety and welfare. Its success will depend on the energy and vision on colleagues working across the Council and in partner agencies. We will work hard to achieve placements for children that are more than sufficient. Identify any other directly or indirectly related matters.

#### **4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

- 4.1 Bradford Council is currently consulting on an increased investment of £7.5m to help mitigate budget pressures arising from additional Children in Care Placements as part of the annual budget setting process
- 4.2 The quarterly budget monitoring reports to the Executive have detailed the financial cost of placements, and the increasing number of placements.
- 4.3 The regular Vital Signs reports to Improvement Board detail the metrics used to assess the need for investment

#### **5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

- 5.1 The data presented within the Sufficiency Strategy evidences a continued increase in the numbers of children entering care in line with national trends. This presents us with significant challenges in future years if numbers continue to rise at the same rate. We aim to promote earlier and timely services to children and families in Bradford to support and enable them to live safely together and to reduce the number of children needing to become looked after.
- 5.2 As corporate parents we want to ensure that our children and young people receive good quality care and resources to promote positive outcomes for them. We want Bradford children and young people to be able to live in the district by ensuring that local placements and support services are available to meet their needs. Where it is necessary for a child or young person to live outside of the district we will ensure that they have access to good quality placements and support services in the areas where they live.
- 5.3 The governance framework for our strategy includes a range of people from children in care and care leavers through to Executive

#### **6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

- 6.1 The Children Act 1989, section 22G requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for 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 within the local authority's area – for example, in order to stay at the same school or near to other family where contact can easily take place. This is commonly referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'. The statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for children looked after

fully sets out the local authority's responsibilities.

6.2 Further statutory guidance was also issued in April 2018 around the 'Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation'.

6.3 Local Authorities have a legal duty to publish a Sufficiency Strategy. This strategy sets out how Bradford meets the duty in ensuring there are sufficient resources for children in care and those on the edge of care, including accommodation of all types.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

### **7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

N/A

### **7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

### **7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

N/A

### **7.5 TRADE UNION**

N/A

### **7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

### **7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)**

N/A

### **7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Corporate Parenting is an integral element of the Sufficiency Strategy on which the Corporate Parenting Panel will maintain an oversight

### **7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

N/A.

**8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None

**9. OPTIONS**

N/A

**10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the contents of the Sufficiency Strategy or alternatively to offer feedback that can further strengthen the strategy.

**11. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 - Sufficiency Strategy

**12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Copy of the proposed Sufficiency Strategy attached