

Cambridgeshire Sufficiency Strategy

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 29th June 2021

From: Director of Children's Services

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: N/a

Outcome: To consider a renewed sufficiency strategy relating to children and young people in care to Cambridgeshire County Council and family support services.

The sufficiency strategy will help us to work with internal and external providers of placements for children in care to ensure that as many children coming into care as possible are able to continue to live in Cambridgeshire and close to their home communities.

Recommendation: a) To agree to the adoption of the sufficiency strategy included as Appendix 1 to this report.

Officer contact:

Name: Lou Williams
Post: Director of Children's Services
Email: lou.williams@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 703286

Member contacts:

Names: Councillors Bryony Goodliffe and Maria King
Post: Chair/Vice-Chair
Email: bryony.goodliffe@cambridgeshire.gov.uk and maria.king@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398 (office)

1. Background

- 1.1. All local authorities who have responsibility for children in care are required to publish a sufficiency strategy.
- 1.2. A sufficiency strategy should set out what steps the local authority will take in order to ensure that as many children and young people in our care are able to live in placements [usually foster homes] that are within the County, enabling them to retain links with communities and families, except where to do so would not be in their best interests.
- 1.3. Local authorities are not under any obligation to provide all placements for children in their care. Placements may be provided by Independent Fostering Agencies and independent sector providers of residential children's homes.
- 1.4. The Sufficiency Duty is described in the 2008 Children and Young Person's Act as: 'A whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after. For those who are looked after, Local Authorities and their Children's partners should seek to secure a number of providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of looked after children and young people within their local area'.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1. The Cambridgeshire Sufficiency Strategy 2021-24 is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. It provides a detailed analysis of the population of children looked after by Cambridgeshire County Council. This is not a static group – many children and young people who come into care leave care again quite quickly. This might be because the issues that caused the child to come into care have been addressed and they are able to return home. It may also be because they have left care to be adopted, or to live permanently with a [usually] relative under a Special Guardianship Order. Some children and young people – often those who have complex disabilities – are in care as a result of having a number of overnight short breaks from their families, but continue to live for the majority of the time at home. A significant proportion, however, and particularly those who come into care aged 5 and above, will remain in care until they reach 18 years of age.
- 2.2. The characteristic of children in care change over time, reflecting changes in the broader community as well as changes in practice. The Cambridgeshire population of children and young people is becoming more culturally diverse. The implementation of Family Safeguarding in Cambridgeshire means that we are better at supporting families with younger children to make the changes they need to make in order to provide loving and stable homes. This means that fewer young children are coming into care now than was the case previously. Changes like these mean that there is an on-going need to review the availability of local placements for children in care.
- 2.3. The majority of children and young people live in foster families, with over 70% of Cambridgeshire children and young people living with foster carers. The majority of the remainder live in residential children's homes or, for some of those aged 16 and 17, in semi-independent provision. The sufficiency strategy is concerned with ensuring that we are taking

steps to ensure that children and young people living in foster placements, residential care and semi-independent living are, as far as possible and in line with their specific circumstances, able to be looked after locally.

- 2.4. Our ambition remains to build the number of our own fostering households, and support our foster carers to enable them to feel more confident about offering homes to older children and young people. We have been successful in recruiting our own carers following investment in this area, but we have more to do to enable more of our carers to feel confident offering care to older children and young people.
- 2.5. Independent Fostering Agency foster carers provide an important service, with no local authority able to place all their children with their own carers. We work closely with fostering agencies to develop positive relationships so that we can place more of our children and young people with their carers, but not Independent Fostering Agency carers with vacancies will live within the County.
- 2.6. There is a national shortage of foster carers, and a growing number of children in care nationally [even if numbers in care in Cambridgeshire have been declining recently]. Foster carers tend to be older, meaning that approved carers may not foster for many years before retiring. Foster placements with foster carers also become unavailable to children newly coming into care, because the foster carer has decided to offer a permanent home for the children they are looking after. This is obviously great for the children in their care, but means that placement choice is reduced. For reasons like these, recruitment must be a continuous activity, if numbers of fostering households overall are to be maintained, let alone increased.
- 2.7. The other two main forms of accommodation where children in care live are residential children's homes and semi-independent living, for some young people aged 16 and 17.
- 2.8. The sufficiency strategy discusses both types of accommodation, indicating not only the gaps in current availability, but also geographical areas within Cambridgeshire where there is a need for more of certain types of provision.
- 2.9. Children and young people needing residential care generally have highly specialist needs and do best in small homes that are very well matched to those needs. Placement matching with other young people in placement is also very often an important consideration. Nationally, around 66% of this type of provision is managed by the independent sector, and many local authorities, including Cambridgeshire, do not operate their own children's homes except those that offer short breaks for children and young people with disabilities.
- 2.10. The sufficiency strategy includes a proposal to undertake an options proposal to look at other options for delivering residential care for Cambridgeshire children and young people in care. As is the case with fostering placements, there is a national shortage of residential placements for children and young people. There are indications from Government that they are considering how to streamline the process of opening children's homes, and may consider some capital funding for local authorities to develop their own provision.
- 2.11. For some children and young people, and particularly those with very complex needs, the ability of a placement to be able to promote the best possible outcomes will continue to take priority over location.

- 2.12. Semi-independent provision is largely operated by the independent sector, and there are a number of small local providers of this accommodation in Cambridgeshire. This sector is not currently regulated by Ofsted, and our commissioning service has a very robust quality assurance framework in place to ensure that all providers that we use are providing good quality support.
- 2.13. The Cambridgeshire sufficiency strategy has been co-produced with children and young people who have experience of being in care in Cambridgeshire. The strategy describes our ambitions for continuing to develop preventative services that enable families to provide the love and care that their children need, while ensuring that as far as possible, children and young people coming into care have suitable local placements available for them.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Children in care do best when they live in stable family homes, attend a consistent school and build sustainable community relationships.

3.2 A good quality of life for everyone

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Effective family support services enable families to address issues that would otherwise have an adverse impact on their children. Where children need to come into care in order for their wellbeing to be safeguarded and promoted, enabling them to remain living in the right placement is most likely to enable them to achieve the best outcomes.

3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Children do best in learning and development if they are able to live in stable and loving homes, with their own families if at all possible, or with well-matched foster placements or other care settings if remaining at home is not in their best long-term interests.

3.4 Cambridgeshire: a well-connected, safe, clean, green environment

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.5 Protecting and caring for those who need us

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Vulnerable children are entitled to be supported to remain at home with their parents wherever possible. Our family support services work with families where parents are struggling to meet the needs of their children so that they are supported to make the changes they need to make.
- Where children would be at risk of significant harm were they to remain in the care of their parents, or where they have very complex needs that require specialist care, we provide well-matched placements to enable children and young people to grow up safely and achieve the best possible outcomes.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- This report is not primarily about finance, but actions that we take to increase the supply of suitable, in-house foster placements and placements that are within the local authority do have apposite financial benefit. In-house fostering placements are around half the cost of an Independent Fostering Agency foster placement. Local placements reduce travelling time for social workers and the expense of promoting contact between children and their families.
- Supporting children to remain with their families where this is in their best long term interests is also a better outcome for the child concerned as well as financially.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- The Sufficiency Strategy details the commissioning and procurement mechanisms in place for sourcing placements for children and young people in care from external providers. .

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- As set out in paragraph 1.4 of this report, upper tier local authorities are required by statutory duty to have a Sufficiency Strategy. Family support services and the law relating to children and young people in care are also covered by legislation including the Children Act 1989.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4.7 Public Health Implications

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Supporting good outcomes for children, young people and their families contributes to an overall improvement in public health outcomes.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? Yes

Name of Officer: Henry Swan

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?

Yes

Name of Officer: Lou Williams

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes or No

Name of Officer:

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Lou Williams

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Raj Lakshman

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

None