



Cabinet

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| Title | Placement Sufficiency Strategy |
| Date of meeting | 12 December 2023 |
| Report of | Councillor Pauline Coakley-Webb, Cabinet Member for Family Friendly Barnet |
| Wards | All |
| Status | Public |
| Key | Yes |
| Urgent | No |
| Appendices | Appendix A – Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2023-27 |
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Summary

In Barnet, we believe that for most children, the best place to live is with their families of origin. However, there are circumstances where some children need to live in alternative care arrangements. Barnet Council is the Corporate Parent for those in our care and we have high aspirations for our children. Our duty goes beyond the provision of safe placements for these children and requires us to

do all that we can to ensure that they have the support and resources to achieve the best possible outcomes.

We have both a moral and legal duty to ensure, as far as it is practical, that there is sufficient accommodation for children in care within the local area and that we address any identified gaps in provision through robust plans and commissioning strategies. This duty is set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act and was further outlined in statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education (2010)¹.

This Sufficiency Strategy sets out how we will meet this duty and the steps we will take to secure sufficient accommodation for our children; providing them with the right placement at the right time which is of high quality and provides them with the love and support they need to achieve their full potential.

Recommendations

That Cabinet notes the report and approves the publication and implementation of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2023-2027)

1. Reasons for the Recommendations

1.1 As corporate parents for children in care and care leavers, we want the same things for our children as any good parent would want for their child. We want our children to have a healthy and happy childhood, to feel valued and loved, and to have the chance to grow, develop and learn so that they can find their own way in the world as successful and fulfilled adults.

1.2 Our Corporate Parenting Pledge sets out what our children and young people can expect from us. Adherence to this pledge informs how we work as a local authority and therefore underpins this Sufficiency Strategy.

Our Corporate Parenting Pledge

We will support you to fulfil your dreams.

We will be there for you, when you need us.

We will support your mental and physical health.

We will listen, communicate and make decisions together with you.

We will support you to become independent and prepare for adulthood.

We will celebrate children & young people, their achievements, identity and culture.

1.3 Our six priorities for Placement Sufficiency are:

Priority 1: More Children Living Locally

Placing our children locally enables Barnet children to access the comprehensive support we have in place for them, including specialist mental health services and bespoke support for our UASCs. It also offers a wealth of other benefits such as maintaining local connections,

¹ Securing sufficient accommodation for looked-after children, Department for Education (2010) [sufficiency - statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214242/sufficiency_-_statutory_guidance_on_securing_sufficient_accommodation_for_looked_after_children.pdf) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

employment opportunities, housing, health and education, friendship, faith, and cultural support. This creates resilience in our young people.

Priority 2: More Children Living in Families

For the majority of our children in care, the best place for them to live is in a loving family environment. Over the last twelve months we have made progress with the percentage of children living within families increasing to 71%.

Priority 3: Sufficiency of High-Quality Supported Accommodation

We will work to maintain sufficient supported accommodation provision within Barnet. All provision supporting our children is to be regulated, with the accommodation quality assured. We want to improve our understanding of the local supported accommodation market and develop close working relationships with local supported accommodation providers, supporting them with continuous improvement.

We want to ensure greater placement choice for young people, including family based supported lodgings placements.

Priority 4: Partnership

To create sufficiency we will further develop the positive working relationships between our placements team, Commissioning and placement providers with the objective of improving their capacity for providing placements for our young people with significant vulnerabilities and complex needs.

We will prioritise working together to commission high cost; low incidence provision, namely: therapeutic placements, trauma-informed support, child centred positive behaviour support, solo and small provisions that include multidisciplinary wrap around support.

Priority 5: Data and Insight

For a Sufficiency Strategy and subsequent commissioning activity to be effective, it needs to be informed by a robust evidence based. Data is essential to ensure we understand:

- 1) Current need and future trends in demand
- 2) Supply and the extent to which it meets the need of current/future demand
- 3) The impact of our intervention and progress we are making against our strategy
- 4) What additional activity is required by us to inform our commissioning activity

Building on well-established analytical tools that have been developed collectively by London local authorities, we will continue to champion the importance of data and commit to developing commissioning strategies which are targeted and evidence-based to deliver the best possible outcomes for children.

Priority 6: The Voice of Children

To develop provisions that meet the needs of children we need the views and lived experience of our children and young people. We want our children and young people in care to feel like their views matter and that we listen to them and that our practitioners and providers know what matters most to our young people and how we get things right.

- 1.4 The pan-London Placements Commissioning Programme continues to develop and grow in maturity, and Barnet plans to work closely with other London authorities to commission services for young people with the most highly complex needs. Indeed, the move to regional commissioning is also the direction of travel from the Department for Education with their

planned development of Regional Care Co-operatives, as outlined in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (MacAlister 2022)².

Where it is prudent to do so, Barnet will look to work with regional partners to share costs, invest resources and deliver projects together. A full list of the pan-London projects and research papers is included in Annex 1 of the strategy.

- 1.5 This Placement Sufficiency Strategy will ensure that for the children in our care we have the right placement options which are in the right place, made at the right time and are of high quality. We recognise that stable, resilient and supportive relationships are a key factor in improving outcomes for children and we achieve this through our practice and in securing safe and caring homes for our children.
- 1.6 Through the effective implementation of our Sufficiency Strategy and a child focused approach to placement and care planning we will work to deliver the following for children in care:
- The individual needs of children will drive the placement planning process.
 - We will always look for our children to live locally and maintain connections with local communities.
 - We want all our children to be loved, feel safe and be encouraged to be the best that they can be.
 - We will take a holistic approach to placement planning, working with education and health partners to ensure children can access the support they need.
 - We will strive for placement stability and encourage children to maintain safe and secure relationships with friends, family, and other trusted adults.
 - We take a resilience-based approach and our independent living programme forms an integrated part of all living arrangement for children who are 16 years and over, to support a successful transition to adulthood.
- 1.7 Publication and implementation of the strategy will enable the council to deliver its placement responsibilities for children in care, including increasing opportunities for children to live in local foster families, developing local residential care provision and supported accommodation, and by commissioning specialist placements where this is required.

2. Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended

None

3. Post Decision Implementation

- 3.1 Upon approval, the Placement Sufficiency Strategy will be published and implemented.
- 3.2 Our progress towards meeting this strategy's priorities will be routinely assessed via the success measures detailed within the strategy.

4. Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations

Corporate Plan

² MacAlister, J (2022). *The Independent Review of Children's Social Care*. Department for Education. [ONLINE] [Independent review of children's social care - final report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/107147/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-final-report.pdf)

- 4.1 The Placement Sufficiency Strategy supports the council's corporate aim of tackling inequalities, by working towards redressing the historically poorer outcomes experienced by children in care relative to their peers.
- 4.2 This involves our edge of care early help offer, diversionary activities for children in care at risk of custodial outcomes in Youth Justice contexts and improving provision and outcomes for children with ASD and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- 4.3 The Placement sufficiency strategy also directly relates to the Family Friendly priority of providing services for vulnerable children and young people.
- 4.4 Children in care are a particularly vulnerable group on the basis that they are more likely to have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma, and we ensure that the support available to children in care is trauma-informed and recognises the impact of past experiences.
- 4.5 This strategy outlines how the services made available for this group are able to support in the building of resilience and in encouraging the most positive outcomes for them into adulthood.
- 4.6 The corporate plan's Family Friendly priority also makes reference to our areas of focus, including 'Safe & Secure'. This about ensuring the most vulnerable are protected, safe and supported to make the best choices and to build trusted relationships.
- 4.7 The Placement Sufficiency strategy details why placement stability is key to supporting young people to build trusted relationships, as well as the importance of retaining proximity to Barnet, and the ways we will work towards improving these factors.
- 4.8 The corporate plan also references education and skills as an area of focus within the Family Friendly Priority, and the Placement Sufficiency Strategy details the education, skills and training opportunities available to young people in care as part of the positive activities available within the Youth Justice Service offer.

Corporate Performance / Outcome Measures

- 4.9 The success measures for the priorities and cohort-specific sections of the strategy are detailed within the delivery plan.

Corporate Parenting

- 4.10 In line with Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles in decision-making across the Council. The outcomes and priorities in the refreshed Corporate Plan, Barnet 2024, reflect the Council's commitment to the Corporate Parenting duty to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and the needs of children are considered in everything that the Council does.
- 4.11 The Placement Sufficiency Strategy enables Barnet as a local authority to meet its statutory duty as corporate parents. The strategy outlines our sufficiency needs and the ways in which we will address them.

Risk Management

- 4.12 The Children Act 1989 (section 22g) requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for children and young people under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in their best interests 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'.

4.13 The risk should this strategy not be approved and implemented before the end of 2023 is that Barnet are in breach of our statutory duty to have an in-date placement sufficiency strategy for children social care placements.

Insight

4.14 Use of insight data has informed the direction of this strategy. Examples of this within the strategy include:

4.15 The use of the Monte-Carlo simulation has enabled us to ensure that our plans are informed by cost-projections and projections of the total number of children in care.

4.16 Engagement with front-line staff and their heads of service has enabled the strategy's delivery plan to be informed by operational insights, with the areas of focus and success measures being heavily informed by operational expertise.

4.17 Insight into the impending regulatory changes for supported accommodation has been used to determine our plans for activity around market development, and specifically in supporting providers to be and remain compliant.

4.18 Use of wider national research and local data have pointed to an increased vulnerability of children and young people with adverse childhood experiences including exposure to parental substance misuse, housing instability, offending, violence and neglect at home. This insight drove the inclusion of a cohort-specific section on our plans for supporting Vulnerable Adolescents and children and young people with complex needs, as they had been identified as a high-needs group.

4.19 Both local and national data around custodial outcomes for young people suggest a disproportionate number of boys from Black and Global Majority Ethnic groups receive custodial outcomes, as well as care-experienced young people being overrepresented within the criminal justice system.

4.20 This informed our areas of focus and measures of success for vulnerable children and young people with complex needs.

Social Value

4.21 Supporting children and young people in corporate care to achieve their best outcomes into adulthood, is of immense social value, by supporting young adults to be happy, healthy and productive members of our community.

4.22 The provision of positive and diversionary activities for children and young people in care through our youth justice service is with the aim of preventing young people from engaging in criminal behaviours that would otherwise contribute to the societal cost of offending and re-offending. As care-experienced people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, these diversionary activities are of particular social value.

5. Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)

- 5.1 Our activities working towards our priority for the development of the Children’s Social Care market aim to increase value for money and to make use of alternatives for high-cost, low-incidence placements.
- 5.2 No reference has been made to specific resource implications, outside of the need to expand our internal provision- the ways in which this expansion will take place will be flexibly informed by need, and any decisions around placements that have accompanying resource implications will be brought to the relevant governance bodies for approval.
- 5.3 There is planning for a second small children’s home and further additional support accommodation provisions.

6. Legal Implications and Constitution References

- 6.1 Under the Children Act 1989, the local authority has a number of responsibilities and powers in respect of provision of accommodation to children (Sections 20, 21, 22A and 22C). These set out the local authorities duty to accommodate children, under what conditions and criteria the children should be accommodate and how the children should be accommodated by the local authority.
- 6.2 The Children Act 1989 (section 22g) forms the statutory basis for this strategy. It requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for children and young people under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in their best interests 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’.
- 6.3 Part 2D of the Constitution, Terms of Reference and Delegation of Duties provides that Cabinet will have responsibility for: -
 - the exercise all of the local authority functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the local authority, whether by law or under this Constitution;
 - approving plans which are not the responsibility of Council and any other non-statutory plans that, from time to time, may be considered their responsibility
 - All key decisions – namely; a decision which is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or a decision which is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area of two or more wards of the Borough.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 This strategy outlines our statutory duty and our strategic direction to meet this duty. Ongoing consultation and review of the priorities will be conducted through the Children in Care Council (BOP), the Corporate Parenting Officers Group and the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel.

8. Equalities and Diversity

- 8.1 Decision makers should have due regard to the public sector equality duty in making their decisions. The equalities duties are continuing duties they are not duties to secure a particular

outcome. The equalities impact will be revisited on each of the proposals as they are developed. Consideration of the duties should precede the decision. It is important that Cabinet has regard to the statutory grounds in the light of all available material such as consultation responses. The statutory grounds of the public sector equality duty are found at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and are as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- a) Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- a) Tackle prejudice, and
- b) Promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under this Act. The relevant protected characteristics are:

- a) Age
- b) Disability
- c) Gender reassignment
- d) Pregnancy and maternity
- e) Race
- f) Religion or belief
- g) Sex
- h) Sexual orientation
- i) Marriage and civil partnership

8.2 It is not expected that these groups will be adversely affected by implementing the recommendations set out in this report, however the impact will be monitored to ensure that these groups are not adversely affected.

9. Background Papers

9.1 [Corporate Parenting Strategy 21-23.pdf \(barnet.gov.uk\)](#) presented to Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel on 18 May 2021