

# **Cabinet**

## **19 January 2021**

### **Children's Provision**

#### **For Decision**

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

**Local Councillor(s):**

**Executive Director:** T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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**Report Status:** Public

#### **Recommendation:**

1. That Cabinet approve the Placement Sufficiency Strategy – Appendix 1
2. That Cabinet give approval for the procurements and awards of contracts set out in Appendix 2. In giving this approval, Members are approving known / likely procurement set for implementation during 2021/22 on terms to be agreed by the Executive Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Education, Skills and Early Help for each arrangement. Procurements exceeding the key decision threshold which are not yet identified will be subject to a separate report presented at a later date.

#### **Reason for Recommendation:**

The council is required through a 'sufficiency duty' to secure sufficient accommodation for children and young people under their care who cannot live at home. The procurement of supported accommodation is required as the existing contract comes to an end this financial year. The procurement will deliver a modernised service that is better value for money. The procurement of residential children's homes will replace existing spot purchasing spend and offer better value for money.

## **1. Executive Summary**

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, so that they can see their family and stay at the same school. This is commonly known as the 'sufficiency duty'.

The strategy outlines the targets for reducing the number of children in care in Dorset and increasing the number of homes available for children in care in Dorset.

The Council defines key decisions as those with a financial consequence of £500k or more. This report provides notice of the planned / known procurement activities that Cabinet will need to make key decisions on during 2021/22. The procurement timetable details forthcoming procurements related to meeting the council's sufficiency duty which require Cabinet approval due to their value. These cover a range of services which are described briefly in the timetable.

## **2. Financial Implications**

The aim of the placement sufficiency strategy is to contribute to a reduction in spend on children's social care, and to ensure that spending in this area delivers value for money and makes a positive impact on outcomes for children in care. Service budgets have identified the funding required for the procurements set out in this report which are from existing placement spend.

## **3. Well-being and Health Implications**

The aim of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy is to contribute to improvement of health and well-being outcomes for children in care.

## **4. Climate implications**

The strategy sets out a number of measures which will ensure that more children in care live in Dorset. This will reduce the need for these children, their families, and any professionals involved in their lives to travel outside of Dorset.

## **5. Other Implications**

The strategy forms part of the corporate parenting duties of the council.

## **6. Risk Assessment**

To be carried out by the appropriate project team as part of the business case and rationale for each procurement and as part of ongoing contract management.

## **7. Equalities Impact Assessment**

To be carried out by the appropriate project team as part of the business case and rationale for each procurement and as part of ongoing contract management.

## **8. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Placement Sufficiency Strategy

Appendix 2 – Procurement Timetable

Appendix 3 – Corporate Parenting Data Set November 2020

Appendix 4 - DORSET CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES PLAN 2020-23 PRIORITY DELIVERY PLAN PRIORITY: Good Care Provision

## **9. Background Papers**

### **Children, Young People and Families Plan 2020 to 2023**

Available at : <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/childrens-plan/childrens-plan.aspx>

### **Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020 – 2023**

Available at : [Corporate Parenting Strategy.pdf \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](#)

**Looked After Children Reduction Case for Change (2019):** Available at: <https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s13558/Cabinet%20LAC%20reduction.pdf>

### **Children's Residential Care 2019:**

<http://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s14812/Childrens%20residential%20Provision.pdf>

## **10. Introduction and Background**

10.1 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, so that they can see their family and stay at the same school. This is commonly known as the 'sufficiency duty'. From April 2010, local authorities had to include in relevant commissioning strategies their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty. From April 2011, working

with their Children's partners, local authorities must be in a position to carry out the sufficiency duty.

10.2 The procurement timetable details forthcoming procurements which require Cabinet approval due to their value. These cover a range of services, described briefly in the timetable, which are relevant to the meeting of our statutory sufficiency duty.

## **11. The Sufficiency Strategy**

11.1 Dorset Council's Placement Sufficiency Strategy for children and young people is based on the rights-based approach to reducing the number of children in care which was adopted by the Council in 2019. The strategy outlines the targets for reducing the number of children in care in Dorset and increasing the number of homes available for children in care in Dorset.

11.2 The strategy seeks to deliver two key targets:

- i. Reducing the number of children in care per 10,000 to a level comparable with our statistical neighbours – 60 per 10,000
- ii. Reducing the percentage of children in care placed out of area to a level comparable with our statistical neighbours – 30%

11.3 To ensure there are sufficient local placements, reducing the need for sending children outside of Dorset, away from family, friends and school we have forecasted the need for an additional 51 places for children and young people in Dorset. The strategy seeks to achieve this through increasing the number of residential places in Dorset alongside increasing the number of foster carers.

11.5 We recognise that children and young people in Dorset have a wide range of needs. When it comes to finding a home, we want to support children and young people to have a safe place to live and thrive. To do this we need a range of different homes and settings, including respite and effective short breaks for children and young people with disabilities.

11.6 **The Harbour:** We will implement a different way of supporting and providing care to our teenagers through a new model of delivery at The Harbour in Weymouth and Portland. Building on the evidence based No Wrong Door model, this replaces traditional young people's homes with hubs which combine residential care with fostering, outreach support, and supported lodgings. A range of premises were identified by the council as potential children's homes following the report to cabinet in 2019. The council is in the process of seeking registration with Ofsted for these.

11.8 **Foster care:** Sufficiency will be increased through continuing to focus on targeted recruitment for a diverse range of children and young people, increasing the number and proportion of active carers, modernising work of the fostering

panel, and the implementation of an evidence based model of support for foster carers. Known as the Mockingbird model, this has proved successful nationally and has been shown to increase the number of young people who are able to stay with foster carers after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, in what are known as Staying Put arrangements. We will deepen relationships with independent fostering agencies with carers in Dorset to ensure that we are able to place more Dorset children with these carers through prioritising matching and improved brokerage arrangements. In addition, we will seek to commission a short break fostering service and specialist schemes such as parent/carer and baby placements.

**11.8 Residential Care:** Sufficiency will be increased through a new build children's home in Weymouth. We will all pursue the registration of a number of premises identified by the Council as children's homes. These will be operated by Dorset Council or by partner organisations and eliminate the use of unregistered provision. We will continue to work with partners to encourage the development of new residential provision in the county by independent sector providers through the use of block contracts. We will review the statement of purpose for our home for children who are disabled and consider how the service can be delivered differently - linking with foster carers and short breaks provision - and join up this strategy with the SEND capital strategy to identify opportunities for children to stay in Dorset.

**11.9 Supported accommodation and independent living:** We will increase sufficiency and value for money through reducing the use of spot purchasing; retendering the contract for young people's supported accommodation with a new model to better meet needs; deliver additional accommodation for care leavers in Weymouth; work with colleagues in Adult and Housing to embed the joint protocol for young people at risk of homelessness; seek opportunities to develop affordable housing options for care leavers, and increase the number of shared lives carers.

11.10 We will seek to improve outcomes for children in care through support from the virtual school; review our arrangements for 'Family Time' so children in care are able to keep in touch with people that are important to them; focus on supporting the health and wellbeing of our children in care by working differently with health partners, and will review our regional adoption agency arrangements. Our new brokerage service has increased our capacity for contract monitoring and quality assurance arrangements with providers. This will provide more assurance about quality standards; ensure value for money and improve placement stability.

## **12 Procurement Pipeline**

12.1 The implementation of this strategy and meeting our statutory sufficiency duties requires a number of procurement exercises to be implemented throughout 2021/22, details of which are provided in Appendix 2. These

procurement exercises are to replace existing spend and seek to deliver better value for money. This includes:

- i. Block contracts for Supported Housing: these block contracts would replace the existing contracts for young people's supported accommodation due to come to end in this financial year. This will enable us to address the issues arising as part of the government review of unregulated provision and to modernise the support model. They will be sourced through competitive tender for a maximum of 7 years.
- iii. Block Contracts for various residential placements in county: these block contracting arrangements would seek to replace existing spot purchasing arrangements and encourage new providers to set up residential homes in Dorset - either using premises identified by the council or premises identified by providers. Current regional frameworks arrangements have not yielded development in county and are contributing to the number of children placed out of county. They will be sourced through competitive tender for a maximum term of six years. The outcome of this procurement seeks to reprofile existing spend and offer better value for money.

### **13 Recommendations**

13.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- i. approve the Placement Sufficiency Strategy – Appendix 1
- ii. give approval for the procurements and awards of contracts set out in Appendix 2 on terms to be agreed by the Executive Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Education, Skills and Early Help for each arrangement. Procurements exceeding the key decision threshold which are not yet identified will be subject to a separate report presented at a later date.

**Footnote:**

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.