

People and Health Overview Committee

6 February 2024

Childrens Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

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

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: The Attached Report is our Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027, which outlines how we will continue to implement and deliver arrangements that wrap around our children and families, to ensure that they receive the right support at the right time.

This strategy will support us to deliver the best possible outcomes for our children when they are in care and as they enter adulthood. Our aim is to keep children close to home and be the best corporate parents that we can be, and this strategy will help us do just that.

The report offers a snapshot of “Our Care Family” highlighting the details of the number of children and families that we support.

Recommendation:

To recommend that Cabinet approves this sufficiency strategy and related action planning that is required for its effective delivery.

Reason for Recommendation:

There are a range of legal duties associated with an overall “sufficiency duty” on all local authorities, as part of the Children Act 1989, to secure accommodation for children in their care, within the local authority area. This report highlights some of the detail.

With regards to the strategic contexts, we are working within, the report highlights some of the national strategies, which underpin our plans and approach. **Stable Homes Built on Love** (which Dorset is one of three Local Authorities chosen to implement the recommendations of this review) and **Families First** together with **Regional Care Coordination** are some examples nationally. Locally we refer to Dorset Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023 -2033, where we have highlighted that **“We want Dorset to be the best place to be a child, where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be.”** This plan is reinforced by the Dorset Strategic Alliance for children and young people, which offers the best from a multi- agency partnership, which is actively shaping the transformation of our services and approach.

1. Report

- 1.1 Within the report we have provided an analysis of our current provision and achievements from our last strategy;
- 1.2 We have reduced the rate of children in our care from Dorset to 60 per 10,000, however changes to the National Transfer scheme and the high court ruling relating to placement of unaccompanied children in hotels by the DfE resulted in a rapid increase in the number of unaccompanied children being care for by Dorset so our overall rate of children in care is 71 per 10,000.
- 1.3 There has been a reduction in children in care placed out of area from 47% in 2020 to 42% in 2023. Again, this has been impacted by the number of unaccompanied children who are more likely to be placed out of area – if these are excluded the proportion placed out of area is 36%
- 1.4 We have increased the number of children’s homes places in Dorset from 16 to 30.
- 1.5 Although the number of in-house fostering households has remained the same, we have increased the number of children our in-house foster carers are caring for through better utilisation rates. We have also

implemented an increase in foster carer payments to in-house foster carers (above inflation) to recognise the invaluable role they play in caring for our children.

- 1.6 We have implemented a new evidenced based model of sustainable foster care – Mockingbird, offering structured support and relationships that mirrors an extended family. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community.
- 1.7 We have implemented a new framework contract for supported accommodation which is supporting providers to meet the requirements of the new regulations. There are five local providers on there offering 87 places.
- 1.8 We have implemented a new model of support and care for teenagers who are on the edge of care, at risk of placement breakdown or in insecure accommodation – through the ‘Harbour’ approach. The Harbour approach is a multi-agency partnership that pools resources to achieve improved outcomes for children, families, and communities. This has a linked 3 bedded residential children’s home, College House (rated good by Ofsted).
- 1.9 We have converted a range of Dorset Council properties to develop a range of in-house provision and used this to develop the external residential children.
- 1.10 Our overall Strategic commissioning intentions for 2024 – 2027 are:

1. **We will support more children to stay with their birth parents or within their wider family networks**

- This work will be underpinned by our Pathfinder work which includes, supporting communities to respond and develop resources to support families, increased use of Family Group Conferencing, rolling out Safeguarding Families Together to the West of the county. Develop a Harbour East out reach service and develop the ‘Lighthouse Model’ for outreach for families who care for children with a disability. Continue to grow the Pause Project.

2. **We will increase the provision of local high quality foster care so that most children who cannot live with birth family are provided with alternative family-based care**

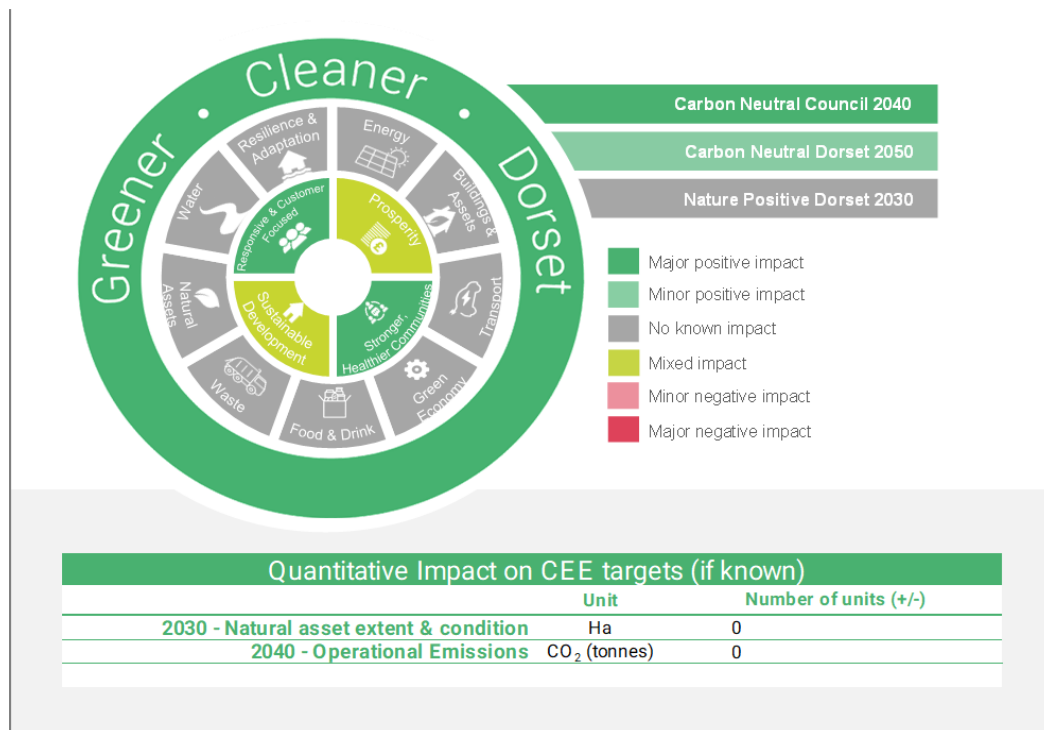
- The Southwest consortium of Local Authorities of which Dorset is one, were successful in a DfE bid to undertake a regional recruitment drive to grow the number of foster carers, the funding will also support Dorset to develop more Mockingbird fostering communities. We will bid for Capital Funds to support carers to make adaptations to their homes to create more fostering availability or to adapt homes to care for children with special needs,
3. **We will only place children and young people in residential care where their needs cannot be met within a family, and we will increase local provision so that when we do so, we do not place them at distance**
 - We will develop both internal provision as well as engaging with external providers to create more provision within the county with opportunities for external providers to lease council owned buildings to create more capacity.
 4. **We will increase and improve specialist provision for children and young people with significant mental health and /or complex needs**
 - We will continue to develop and implement our Birth to Settled Adulthood service, creating specialist services for children with a disability and the support they and their families receive, we will continue to support the Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services re design ensuring a range of ways and places where children can receive support (I.e. mental health practitioners within schools, family hubs and within localities)
 5. **We will secure permanence outside of care through adoption and special guardianship for all children for whom this is in their best interests**
 - We will ensure that permanence is secured at the earliest opportunity for children and the right support is in place for children to maintain permanence.
 6. **We will increase the quantity and range of high-quality care leaver accommodation and support to promote stability, safety, and emotional wellbeing**
 - Working with our Housing and Assets team we will identify and re purpose Dorset properties for our care leavers, learning and building on the success of the 12 self-contained units in operation currently. We will also review our Staying Put Policy to encourage more of our foster carers to offer Staying Put accommodation to children in their care when they turn 18.

7. **We will manage placement resources effectively**
 - We will review the mechanisms in which we oversee and manage all resources for children and their families which includes both quality of provision, value for money and developing and managing the local external social care market.

2. **Financial Implications**

n/a

3. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**



4. **Well-being and Health Implications**

The children, young people and their families will benefit greatly in terms of their health and well-being by the commissioning of the right care, in the right place and closer to home.

5. **Other Implications**

n/a

6. **Risk Assessment**

- 6.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: high if we fail to approve the sufficiency strategy and do not deliver its plans and actions.

Residual Risk: The risk is significant reduced by the delivery of this strategy,

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**
n/a

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Accessible Table and Table of Recommendations

Appendix 2 – Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2024-27

9. **Background Papers**

n/a