



CABINET

7 May 2025

Subject Heading:

Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy

Cabinet Member:

Councillor Oscar Ford

SLT Lead:

Tara Geere Director of Starting Well

Report Author and contact details:

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Policy context:

Havering Corporate Parenting Strategy

Financial summary:

There is no financial commitment

Is this a Key Decision?

This is a Key Decision because:

- (a) Expenditure or saving (including anticipated income) of £500,000 or more
- (b) Significant effect on two or more Wards

When should this matter be reviewed?

The Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy should be reviewed annually

Reviewing OSC:

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

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|---|---|
| People - Supporting our residents to stay safe and well | X |
| Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy | X |
| Resources - Enabling a resident-focused and resilient Council | X |

SUMMARY

The Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy describes how the London Borough of Havering will continue to meet its Sufficiency Duty which is a statutory requirement set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989.

The Council is required to provide the children in care with accommodation that

- (a) Is within the authority's area; and
- (b) Meets the needs of those children.

The Strategy describes the population of children in care, their needs and the type of care that they require. It sets out the direction of travel to increase the number of children in care living within the borough, nearer their families, friends and critical agencies, such as schools, GPs and specialist health providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to approve the Childcare Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028 as set out at Appendix 1.

REPORT DETAIL

Havering's Priorities

The Corporate Parenting Strategy has identified the following 5 priorities for Havering's children in care for 2025/26;

- Listening to and hearing children and young people
- Keeping our children and young people safe
- Ensuring we providing caring homes for all
- Having high aspirations for our children and young people's education and providing them with a range of opportunities
- Ensuring our children and young people have excellent health outcomes

Key Actions

The information in the Corporate Parenting Strategy identifies the key commissioning activity that should be undertaken to deliver the priorities set out above.

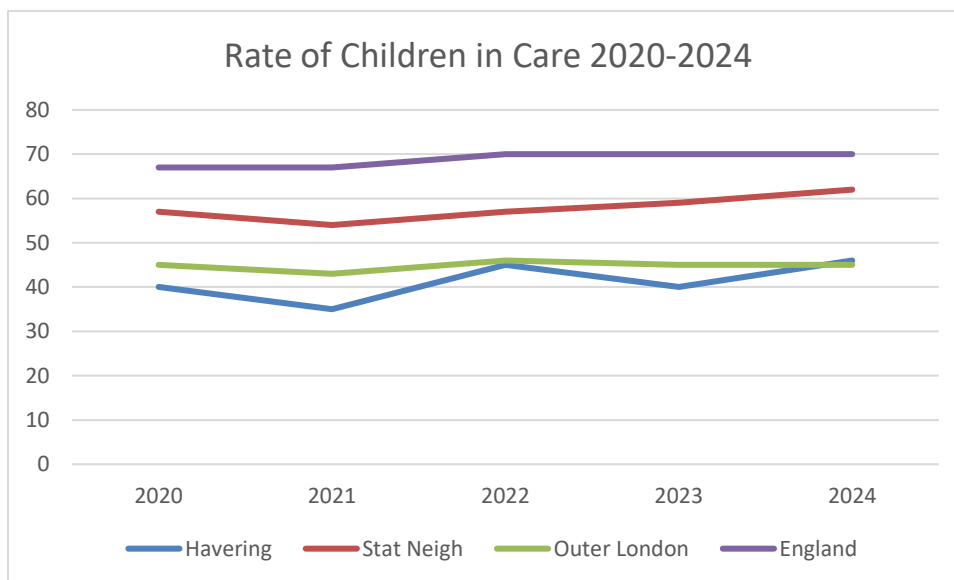
Acting in our roles as corporate parents we will;

- Ensure children achieve permanency within a family at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure more children in care live within the borough by;
 - Increasing the number of approved foster carers;
 - Developing commercial relationships with fostering, children's home providers and supported accommodation providers;

- Creating new children's homes;
- Increasing after care accommodation pathways including Staying Put within foster carers, Staying Close near children's homes and their own housing options through supported tenancies.
- Ensure children have access to well-trained foster parents by;
 - Developing a robust recruitment and training offer for staff and foster carers;
 - Expanding and embedding a specialist emotional wellbeing support service, based upon trauma informed practice into fostering;
 - Ensuring foster carers are receiving continuous professional development through enhanced supervision;
 - Contracting with care providers who share Havering's aspirations.
- Ensure children who have additional special and complex needs have the right services to meet their needs by;
 - Providing sufficient short breaks;
 - Ensuring children's additional needs are fully understood by their carer's, who are able to support the child's development whilst in their care.
- Ensure children in care receive the support to reach their educational potential by
 - Enabling the Virtual School to engage with care providers to describe the additional support required to promote the importance of school attendance.

Demand

Since March 2020, Havering's population of children in care has risen from 232 to 284 in March 2024. During the same period the population of all children in Havering has risen by 6%. The graph below shows a comparison between Havering, Statistical Neighbours, Outer London Boroughs and England.



It is estimated that between January 2025 and March 2028, the population of children in care will rise to 298. This is based upon an annual linear growth in the population of children of 1.4% and a fixed rate of 46 children per 10,000 being in care.

Ability to Meet Demand in Havering

As we are required under the Sufficiency Duty to provide accommodation within the borough it is important to know the capacity of the care market.

The market is comprised of the council, private and voluntary providers.

The council only provides a fostering service, so all children's home care and supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds is provided by the private and voluntary sector.

The table below shows the maximum capacity of care within Havering against the council use on 31st March 2024.

| Care Type | Capacity | Use |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Havering Foster Carer | 125 | 80 |
| Independent Foster Carer | 49 | 16 |
| Children's Homes | 55 | 4 |
| Total | 229 | 100 |

It must be noted that although Havering's fostering capacity is officially homes for 125 children, the nature of fostering approvals is dependent upon a number of factors such as age, gender or sibling groups, so in reality it is lower than 125. When benchmarking Havering against all Outer London councils Havering's utilisation of internal fostering capacity is the third highest, at 64%. The median for all Outer London councils is 57%.

The rise in children in care during 2023/24 has impacted upon where they live. The current proportion of Havering children living within the Borough is lower than the council would prefer.

| | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--|------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Children living with Havering based Carers | 116 | 102 | 131 | 123 | 122 |
| Total In Care | 232 | 206 | 264 | 239 | 280 |
| Proportion living with Havering based carers | 50% | 49.5% | 49.6% | 51.5% | 44% |

Havering's fostering service has recently implemented the Mocking Bird support system and has created its first constellation of families. This will be monitored to ensure it is effective in supporting fostering families.

In 2024 Havering's fostering service only had 103 families enquire about fostering. This is a low number and needs to increase. Havering has now joined the regional fostering recruitment hub. This hub will be responsible for the advertising and raising fostering awareness across the region. We will measure the effectiveness of this service to increase the number of families enquiring to foster.

Children with disabilities do not have access to local residential short breaks, which mean families have to choose to use provision in Essex or Kent. Some families choose this but others receive support in their home.

The council has already agreed for the building of a new children's home to provide residential short breaks. This will provide a maximum of 1,460 bed nights of short breaks. This could potentially allow the council to provide a programme of planned short breaks for between 19 and 30 children per year. This service will reduce the pressure families face and prevent the need for children to enter care permanently. Children with complex social and emotional needs may need to live in a children's home for a period of time which prepares them to return to a family or to move into independence. The council has jointly commissioned a provider to deliver a local children's home service, which currently gives 20 children a home. These homes are all in the NE London region and Havering uses 25% of the capacity.

The service is unable to meet the needs of children with the most complex needs, such as those being discharged from psychiatric hospital, who require a multi-agency/multi-professional approach. The council has agreed to bid for capital funding from the DFE which will enable the council to create two local children's homes.

The Strategy recommends the following actions to deliver the Sufficiency Requirement.

1. Social Workers, IROs and Foster Carers have trauma informed training, and we can reflect this in children's plans, in order to ensure carers are more aware of children's needs
2. A greater number of foster carers are recruited from backgrounds which are similar to children requiring care
3. To develop strategic partnerships with local fostering agencies, children's homes and supported accommodation providers through a framework contract, so Havering children are prioritised by local care providers, which enables the Havering £ to remain in Havering.
6. To review and amend the Permanency Planning Process for children in care, so that more children find long term parents outside of the care system, without the need for formal children's social care.
7. To performance manage the Fostering Hub's recruitment effectiveness
8. To review the effectiveness of the first Mocking Bird constellation
9. To apply to the DFE to create and deliver a Havering based children's home service. This will be for both children with disabilities and those with behavioural and emotional needs.
10. Develop regional care options through the NEL Commissioning Partnership.
11. With colleagues in Live Well to develop supported accommodation for care leavers aged over 18.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Every Tier 1 council has a statutory duty to create a Children's Sufficiency Strategy which sets out the council's commissioning priorities for children in care.

Reasons for the decision:

The Sufficiency Strategy was co-produced with officers from Start Well and colleagues in the Integrated Commissioning Board. It considered the needs of children in care, the projected demand and methods for the council to meet the future needs. The majority of the actions do not incur the council additional costs, and is focused upon better utilisation of current services, and improving the commercial relationship with local providers, which will provide the council with better value.

There are recommendations for developing options to create a Havering children's home service. If the options appraisal recommends this approach a further Executive Decision will be required to agree Capital and Revenue funding.

Other options considered:

The options which were considered and rejected included doing nothing, which would ultimately lead to the council purchasing greater amounts of care without a proper procurement approach, which would leave the council at risk.

The option to join the Commissioning Alliance placement framework was rejected for three reasons.

- Firstly the providers on the framework are national, and not only in the NE London region
- Secondly there would be no guarantee of homes being available
- Thirdly, the annual subscription cost would outweigh any financial benefits of joining.

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| IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS |
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Financial implications and risks

Expenditure on homes and placements for Children in Care accounts for around 27% of the Starting Well general fund budget and the increase in costs of care has been a significant driver of the financial pressure in this service. Spend on Children in Care Placements has risen from £6.9m in 2020/21 to £18.7m in 2023/24 – an 170% increase over four years. Within this total increasing costs of residential placements went from a relatively small segment of spend (£1.3m) to the major element - £11m. Although increasing numbers of children is part of this growth it is mainly attributable to increasing complexity of need and steeply rising costs of provision. The average weekly cost of a residential placement is now between over £6,500 per week and there are a small but growing number that cost more than £10,000.

Finding ways to manage this financial pressure whilst still ensuring good outcome for children is an essential part of supporting the Council's financial sustainability.

The sufficiency strategy looks to improve decision making within children's social care, to be proactive and increase the utilisation of Havering's fostering services.

These actions will reduce the need for children to enter care, or for the council to purchase care from the private sector. The greater support to foster carers will also act as a catalyst to improve foster carer recruitment.

This in turn should result in financial benefits (cost avoidance and potentially savings) as an in-house foster carer costs on average £450 less per child per week. There is a planned saving in the Council's MTFS of £0.120m in both 2025/26 and 2026/27 from delivering this.

The creation of strategic partnerships with Havering based care providers will enable the council to negotiate better pricing and get early warning to future vacancies, which will prevent the need to place children outside of the borough in often more expensive provision. There is a further saving of £1.98m in the MTFS to be made from improved commissioning and the development of new provisions that this strategy will support.

Cabinet in July approved an Improvement Plan in response to the Ofsted inspection which included a staffing restructure of the Children's Social Work teams including Corporate Parenting and the Fostering team. Most of the actions set in this strategy will be delivered within this restructured service and other existing resources within Commissioning.

Where the strategy identifies future options appraisals to create specific provision a further Executive Decision will be required to agree the commissioning strategy and identify any funding required.

Legal implications and risks:

The Council is required to comply with its duties under s 22G of the Children Act 1989 which came into force in 2011 This provides that it is the general duty of a local authority to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, that looked after children are provided with accommodation that—

- (a) is within the authority's area; and
- (b) meets the needs of those children. ("the sufficiency duty")

The statutory guidance from 2012 stated that local authorities should include in relevant commissioning strategies their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.

There is therefore no absolute duty to have a sufficiency strategy, however, it would be considered good practice particularly if there isn't a separate commissioning strategy which includes sufficiency issues within it.

The content of the Strategy seeks to address the Council's approach to meeting its statutory sufficiency duty and therefore there are no legal risks in approving this.

Human Resources implications and risks:

The recommendations in this report do not appear give rise to any negative impact for the Council or its workforce. All relevant staff will receive additional training that

will enable them to support the successful delivery of the strategy. All necessary audits will be undertaken within existing staff resources.

Equalities implications and risks:

The Sufficiency Strategy identifies needs linked to children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, genders, ages and disabilities. It identifies methods to maintain children living in families and to support those families to prevent relationship breakdowns.

None of the recommendations have a negative impact on any resident's protected characteristic.

Health and Wellbeing implications and Risks

As corporate parents, the council have a responsibility to ensure that children and young people in care have the best start in life, are healthy and happy and supported to reach their full potential.

Delivering the proposed sufficiency strategy actions to maximise the number of Havering children in care that can remain within the borough and to reduce the time to placement permanency will help to mitigate the physical, emotional and social effects of the disruption to children's lives which can result from moves out of borough and placement changes or breakdown.

The proposal to expand and embed a specialist emotional wellbeing support service for fostering provision offers the opportunity to improve earlier identification of developing needs amongst children and young people, enabling early intervention and hopefully avoiding escalation of needs.

Ensuring that the strategy reflects the broad range of social, cultural and health factors (and the intersectionality of these factors) that may influence the individual experiences of children and young people in care, and the ways in which these are considered as part of placement and support planning to will support approaches to strengthen placement stability and permanence.

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| ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS |
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| BACKGROUND PAPERS |
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