



22 July 2024

Title	BFfC Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2026
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Kelly Hallett, Acting Head of Central Services
Lead Councillor	Cllr Wendy Griffith, Lead Councillor for Children
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That this report is noted and the steps being taken by Brighter Futures for Children Ltd to improve the sufficiency of placements for children and young people.2. That the strategy be published as per the sufficiency duty.3. That the strategy be reviewed in 12 months.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) Sufficiency Strategy for 2024-2026 details how the Company intends to meet sufficiency duty on behalf of Reading Borough Council. This strategy is a statutory requirement set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989. This duty requires "local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the Sufficiency Duty')".

2. Policy Context

2.1 The Council's new Corporate Plan outlines its vision and priorities for Reading for the next three years (2022/25). The Council's vision is to help Reading realise its potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success. To make this vision happen, the work of the Council is focused around three Corporate Plan themes:

- Healthy Environment
- Thriving Communities
- Inclusive Economy

2.2 These themes are underpinned by the TEAM Reading principles which explain the way we work at the Council:

- Team
- Efficiency
- Ambitious
- Making a difference

- 2.3 Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website [Corporate Plan-2022-25](#).
- 2.4 This report relates to the ability of the Council, and Brighter Futures for Children Ltd (BFfC) to improve the welfare of looked after children, Thriving Communities.
- 2.5 The Council through BFfC also have numerous duties notably under the Children Act 1989 and other legislation and regulations to promote the wellbeing of children and young people in their area and to safeguard them from harm.
- 2.6 In addition to its own four year Business Plan, BFfC publishes a Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy; these are published on their [website](#). This strategy is replaces the current published strategy for 2020-2023.

3 The Proposal

- 3.1 The purpose of our strategy is to set out our vision and approach to providing sufficient, safe, secure and appropriate homes to meet the diverse needs of the children in our care and care leavers over the next two years. We want our children and young people to have access to homes which are of the highest quality; child and family centred; personalised and responsive to support our children to achieve the best possible outcomes. Our emphasis is on providing local homes in Reading or as close to Reading as possible so children and young people can remain in contact with family, friends and local services.
- 3.2 The delivery of our strategy is dependent on our ability to offer the right help at the right time, as early as possible, to enable children to remain with families, preventing needs from escalating and entering care. We are committed to working with partners to ensure that only the children and young people who need to come into care, do so.
- 3.3 On 2 February 2023, the government published a new vision to transform children's social care called 'Stable Homes, Built on Love': This strategy for reform set out proposals in response to recommendations from Josh MacAlister's Independent Review (Care Review) of Children's Social Care (2022), the Child Safeguarding Practice Panel's National Review into Child Protection in England (2022) and the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) Children's Social Care Market Study (2022). One of the key aims of this vision is 'Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care'. This is a vision shared by the Company and is at the heart of this sufficiency strategy.
- 3.4 It is important that councillors are appraised of this strategy and of the ongoing efforts by BFfC to address the issues of providing suitable and sufficient homes for young people in difficult circumstances.
- 3.5 Councillors are invited to note the report, prior to its publication.

4 Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 Outcomes for children in care in Reading is a paramount concern to both the Council and BFfC. As per priority 3 in the BFfC business plan 2023-26, *to 'deliver a sustainable Children's Social Care service through practice rooted in relationship-based and timely statutory engagement with families'*, this strategy aligns with the business plan aim to *'Urgently increase the number of local placements for our children in care to ensure as many of our children as possible remain living near their local friends and family networks'*.
- 4.2 The context of sufficiency is important as it is considered by OFSTED in their

next inspection of Children's Services. Although we await the final outcome of our recent 2024 inspection, the previous inspection visit in 2019 concluded that Children's Services requires improvement to be good. Sufficiency is one of those areas where further improvement is needed. The 2019 report noted:

Sufficiency of placements close to home remain a challenge, despite a targeted recruitment campaign. Provision for care leavers and supported accommodation have recently been strengthened through work with housing and a new provider framework. However, provision for some 16 and 17 year old homeless young people has been inappropriate and insufficient. The management oversight and quality assurance of a small number of young people placed in B&B accommodation or in unregistered provision have not provided enough assurance about the suitability and quality of placements.

5 Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

6 Community Engagement

- 6.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".
- 6.2 There has been no consultation with local stakeholders on this matter beyond those providers who we have worked with to commission the local provision cited in the strategy in order to increase local sufficiency.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 An equality impact assessment is not relevant to this report.

8 Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 There are any number of other issues which can be relevant for a report and these might include (the list is not exhaustive):
- Procedural requirements – be particularly careful to note departures from established procedures
 - Legitimate expectations of service users and the public to be consulted about changes to policy
 - Public Health implications
 - Risk management implications
 - Health and Safety risk assessments
 - Transparency of information and freedom of information implications
 - Effects on the Armed Forces Community (Armed Forces Act 2021)
 - Privacy Impact Assessment

- Impact on Human Rights Act duties
- Corporate Parenting
- Regulatory duties (though these may be covered also in legal implications)
- Changes brought about by European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act
- Community safety implications
- Any other relevant issues

8.2 This covering report and the attached main report covers all relevant considerations.

9 **Legal Implications**

9.1 These are fully covered in the attached report

10 **Financial Implications**

10.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report

11 **Timetable for Implementation**

11.1 Not applicable.

12 **Background Papers**

12.1 There are none.