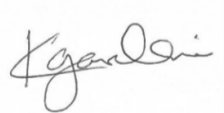


London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title	Sufficiency Strategy – Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2024 - 2027
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Meeting / Date	Cabinet, 14 th January 2025
Cabinet Portfolio	Councillor Kizzy Gardiner, Portfolio Lead Member for Children and Young People



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Wards affected	All
Public access	Open
Appendices	Appendix 1 – Waltham Forest Children’s Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027 Appendix 2 – Equalities Screening

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 This report introduces the Waltham Forest Children’s Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027 for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers. Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the strategy prior to publication.
- 1.2 The strategy supports Waltham Forest delivery of its Sufficiency Duty as outlined under Section 22G of the Children’s Act 1989. This requires Local Authorities, as far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure there is sufficient accommodation within their Local Authority area to meet the needs of those children for whom they have Corporate Parenting responsibility.

2. **Recommendation**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the Waltham Forest Children’s Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027.

3. **Background**

- 3.1 Waltham Forest’s 2024-2027 Children’s Sufficiency Strategy sets out the vision, principles, and priorities for supporting children in care and

care leavers with accommodation needs. LBWF's ambition is to provide safe, loving homes for children and young people in high-quality and affordable environments.

- 3.2 This strategy sets out the actions that will improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people and sits alongside the council's People at the Heart of Our Place Strategy; the SEND Preparing for Adulthood Strategy; the SEND Strategy; the Babies, Children and Young People Strategy; and the All-Age Autism Strategy. These plans collectively ensure residents with unique needs are supported.
- 3.3 Mission Waltham Forest represents the Council's commitment to ensure that every family and every child can access the services and support they need to thrive, reducing the requirement for children and young people to leave their family environments and placing them in alternative care. The Sufficiency Strategy aligns with these aims.
- 3.4 The strategy responds to what young people consider to be most important to make them feel supported so that they can realise their full potential as they grow into independent and confident young adults, seeking to deliver transformational change for Children in Care and Care experienced young people.
- 3.5 Council practice and focus in this area will centre on family preservation and early intervention, so that families can be supported before they reach crisis points.
- 3.6 The associated three-year action plan to this strategy will enhance the availability and quality of alternative homes for children and young people who may require them although the primary focus will always be on family preservation. Approaches to meeting this need will include prioritising collaborative arrangements with other local authorities and providers of children's accommodation to develop additional, sustainable accommodation capacity, locally.
- 3.7 The strategy is for:
 - Children and young people (0-25) who are in care or care leavers.
 - Parents, carers, and families.
 - Professionals working in education, health, and social care.
 - Local partners, such as third sector organisations (charities and voluntary organisations).
 - Accommodation providers for children and young people as well as families who could provide loving, family environments in the Borough.

3.8 **LBWF's Sufficiency Priorities**

The Sufficiency Strategy identifies three priority areas:

- Priority 1: - Ensuring children and young people are thriving in their homes or in alternative care settings.
- Priority 2: - Ensuring all children and young people have access to safe, stable and supportive accommodation.
- Priority 3: - Supporting young people by building their independence.

3.9 Priority 1: - Ensuring children and young people are thriving in their homes or in alternative care settings.

3.9.1 Waltham Forest is committed to creating a nurturing environment at home and in alternative care homes within the Borough, so that children and young people can thrive.

3.9.2 The Council's priority is to support families to stay together, minimising the need for children to enter care, and where appropriate and safe, to reunite children with their families, ensuring they grow up in environments that promote stability and growth.

3.9.3 This ambition aligns with Corporate Mission Statement 1 (Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity) ensuring that every child and family is supported with the right services to create stable, nurturing environments, enabling all children to thrive, whether at home or in alternative homes.

3.9.4 The above ambition will be delivered by:

- Increasing the pool of local foster carers, providing a safe, stable and loving home.
- Improving the adoption and permanence service.
- Promoting Early Permanence by working with adoption specialists Coram.

3.9.5 By increasing the number of high-quality, independent foster care homes close to the borough, children and young people will have the opportunity to stay connected to their local community, friends, and school, which will contribute to their sense of stability. This also ensures children remain in nurturing environments tailored to their needs, giving them the chance to build trusting relationships with foster carers.

3.9.6 By strengthening of the adoption and permanence service, including kinship care and Special Guardianship Orders, children will experience more stable, long-term stability by living with family members or close caregivers.

3.9.7 Providing training on trauma-informed practices to kinship carers ensures that those caring for children better understand the effects of trauma and can provide the appropriate support. This will create more nurturing environments, helping children heal and thrive both emotionally and physically.

3.10 Priority 2: - Ensuring all children and young people have access to safe, stable, and supportive accommodation.

3.10.1 Waltham Forest is committed to providing every child and young person with a safe, stable, and nurturing environment.

3.10.2 The Council's vision is that all children and young people, whether at home or in alternative homes, will have the support and security they need to grow, develop, and achieve their full potential.

3.10.3 The ambition aligns with the Council's Corporate Mission Statement 4 (Tackle the housing crisis head on) and contributes to the broader goal of addressing the housing crisis by providing homes, security and support for CLA and care leavers.

3.10.4 The above ambition will be delivered by:

- Establishing a front-door Recruitment and Retention Hub that will enable high quality foster care.
- Increasing payments made to Foster Carers providing homes to children with complex needs.
- Extending and expanding the current 16+ Semi Independent Accommodation Framework to 2026 to ensure the continued availability of sufficient, local as well as regional accommodation for LBWF's Care Leavers and young people.
- Introducing the Supported Lodging Scheme (for care leavers requiring additional support before moving towards semi-independent living and finally into independent living).
- Extending operating hours of Lester House, the in-house Children's Residential, Respite and Contact Centre Services.
- Reviewing effectiveness and value for money of existing children's residential provider contracts and consider collaboration with neighbouring boroughs or providers to develop shared specialist home provisions, at good value.
- Working with national Children's service providers to consider proposals to re-develop existing Council property into semi-independent accommodation for young care leavers who are ready to live independently.
- Development of an emergency accommodation suite as an alternative for young people under a Police Protection Order (PPO), who inappropriately may require may spend time at a police station whilst they ongoing café arrangements are determined.

3.10.5 By delivering on this priority, every child and young person in Waltham Forest will have safe, stable, and supportive accommodation that will enable them to thrive and achieve positive outcomes as they transition into adulthood.

- 3.11 Priority 3: - Supporting young people by building their independence.
- 3.11.1 Waltham Forest will develop services to improve young people's sense of independence to ensure that they thrive in adulthood. Young people should leave care and move towards independence at a time and pace that is right for them.
- 3.11.2 Positive and loving relationships and social networks that are established whilst young people are in care will be nurtured and helped so that these endure into adulthood.
- 3.11.3 This ambition aligns with the Council's Corporate Mission Statement 3 (Make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well), by empowering young people leaving care and ensuring that they have the support needed to live healthier, more independent lives, which contributes to making Waltham Forest a great place to live at any stage of life.
- 3.11.4 This ambition will be delivered by:
- Developing a Leaving Care Hub to prepare young people for independent living by equipping them with the necessary skills to become confident young adults.
 - Improving the education support offer by collaborating with Virtual Schools and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) service to support young people with disabilities into education.
 - Improving outcomes in employment for young people by working in partnership with local businesses and Voluntary Sector organisations.
- 3.11.5 Planning for leaving care will start early to meet young people's needs and build on existing care and personal education plans. The wishes and feelings of care leavers will be at the core of this. The planning process will also consider any needs related to the young person's specific circumstances – including whether they are an unaccompanied asylum seeker (UAS), a young parent or have had contact with the criminal justice system.
- 3.11.6 Through these changes, young people will be able to make the most of their strengths and will be equipped with the necessary skills to prepare them for a successful adulthood, living healthier, safer and independent lives. The focus on using education, employment and training as a vehicle to support young people in being independent will develop resilience to the challenges of becoming an adult.
- 3.11.7 There are multiple challenges in becoming an adult. The Corporate Parenting Service is committed to always being accessible to Waltham Forest's care leavers for information, advice and support.

3.12 Governance

3.12.1 Waltham Forest's Corporate Parenting Board's role is to ensure the Council and its partners commit to excellent standards of corporate parenting and deliver the right services to children looked after and care experienced people, so that they are kept safe and have every opportunity to flourish.

3.12.2 The Board, which includes and is co-chaired by local young people with care experience, will hold to account the delivery of the Waltham Forest Sufficiency Action Plan with progress monitored quarterly. Additionally, this will ensure the strategy document:

- Reflects any changes made to practice or policy.
- Provides key updates about improvements made to the care support system, or new developments arising due to this plan.
- Develops additional opportunities to hear feedback from LBWF's children in care, care experienced young people and practitioners from across the system to refine the plan further.
- Ensure significant progress will also feature in the Corporate Parenting Board's annual report.

3.12.3 Feedback from children, families, and stakeholders will inform ongoing improvements and adjustments to ensure that the strategy remains responsive to evolving needs.

4. Options & Alternatives

4.1 In assessing the future strategic options for the adoption of Waltham Forest Children's Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027 for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers the following were considered: -

4.2 Adopting the Waltham Forest Children's Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027 supports the council in fulfilling its statutory duties as a Corporate Parent. Having an updated strategy in place supports implementation of the strategic direction and detailed action plan that these documents provide. This will ensure the London Borough of Waltham Forest is compliant in meeting its statutory duties in having a robust Sufficiency Strategy in place detailing its vision, principles, and priorities for supporting the accommodation needs of children in care and care leavers. The document presents the ambition of the council in improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people in the borough.

This is the recommended option.

4.3 Cabinet could choose not to adopt the Strategy but for the reasons set out in 4.2 above this is not recommended.

5. **Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)**

5.1 Waltham Forest's Children's Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2027 for Children Looked After and Care Leavers supports the council's ambition for a more equal borough. It directly supports the following council Mission Statements:

- Mission 1 - Ensuring every family and every child can access the services and support they need so all children can thrive.
- Mission 3 - Making Waltham Forest a place to live and age well where residents can make the most of their strengths and live a healthier longer and more independent life.
- Mission 4 - Ensuring the delivery of a new generation of homes that are affordable to buy and affordable to live in.
- Mission 6 - Ensuring every resident feels safe in their home and neighbourhood and feels included and welcome.

6. **Consultation**

6.1 From October – December 2023, LBWF's Voice and Participation Team conducted a consultation for Children Looked After and Care Leavers, to inform the new Children's Sufficiency Strategy for Waltham Forest. The consultation gathered feedback through online surveys, interviews, and meetings with children, young people, professionals, and service providers.

6.2 Consultation feedback offered valuable insight into how children services could be improved, offering fresh ideas and ways to work together. The consultation focused on key concerns, including housing choices, support services, safety, and independent living skills training available for children and young people. The primary aim was to hear directly from children and young people with lived experience to improve services and shape the Action Plan within the Sufficiency Strategy.

7. **Implications**

7.1 **Finance, Value for Money and Risk**

7.1.1 The services covered by the sufficiency strategy are funded from the Children's Social Care budgets, currently set at £38,842,000 for 2024/25 of which £16,671,000 relates to the Alternative Homes provision. The expectation is for the service to deliver all aspects of the strategy within the existing and future budget envelope, including factoring any requirements for efficiencies.

7.1.2 In addition to the three strategy priorities supporting the council in meeting three of its Corporate Mission Statements, the strategy will also support the authority meet the fourth mission statement of operating on “A firm financial footing.” This should be achieved by providing a service with increased focus on preventative initiatives aimed at both limiting the need for long term support from children and young people whilst also providing them with the skills to be more independent should they require support. These approaches are likely to result in improved value for money, giving the opportunity to deliver efficiencies whilst improving the outcomes for young people and their families in the borough.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 Waltham Forest is a Local Authority as defined by section 270 of the Local Government Act 1972 and has a general duty under section 1 of the Care Act 2014 to promote the well-being of individuals. “Wellbeing” in relation to an individual is defined within the 2014 Act as including suitability of living accommodation.

7.2.2 The Local Authority also has a general duty under s.22 of the Children Act (CA) 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of Care Experienced Young Adults for whom they have a corporate parenting responsibility. Where a child is in the care of a Local Authority s.22A of CA 1989 provides it is the Local Authority’s duty to provide the child with accommodation, and to place the child in an alternative home which is the most appropriate provision or option available. S.22C sets out the ways in which Children Looked After are to be accommodated and maintained. It refers to a hierarchy of alternative homes and provides that the Local Authority must give preference to an alternative home with relatives / friends who are connected to the child and who are local authority foster parents over other alternative provisions, such as a provision in a children’s home.

7.2.3 S.22 of the CA 1989 also provides that the Local Authority must ensure the alternative home is such that it allows the child to live near to their home; it does not disrupt their education and training. If the child has a sibling for whom the local authority is also providing accommodation, it enables the child and the sibling to live together and if the child is disabled, the accommodation is suitable for their needs and the provision is within the Local Authority’s area.

7.2.4 The Council has the power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything (subject to certain exception) that an individual may generally do. It also has the power under section 111 Local Government Act 1972 to do anything incidental to, or which facilitates or is conducive to the exercise of any other Council function. Proposed framework as detailed in this report can be procured under these powers and is compliant with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

7.2.5 Section 1 of the Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 provides that every statutory provision conferring or imposing a function on a local authority confers power on the local authority to enter into a contract with another person for the provision or making available of assets or services, or both, (whether or not together with goods) for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the local authority.

7.3 **Equalities and Diversity**

7.3.1 This strategy will support CLA and Care Leavers by contributing to a reduction in the disruption of alternative home provisions.

7.3.2 The wellbeing of children and ensuring that potentially vulnerable children and young people are safely housed and supported based on their needs, is a fundamental responsibility for the Council, staff and Members as corporate parents.

7.3.3 Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2019, the Council must consider its wider public sector equality duty (PSED) when making its decision. The duty requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; advance equality of opportunity between those who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not share that protected characteristic; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (this involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) tackle prejudice and (b) promote understanding).

7.3.4 The Equality Screener exercise was undertaken and has determined that the analysis does not identify any negative impacts arising from this strategy. The strategy will seek to reduce inequality for CLA and Care Leavers. The screener is attached at Appendix 2.

7.4 **Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder).**

7.4.1 Energy Efficiency Standards - All providers offering accommodation and support to children and young people will be required to meet Minimum Efficiency Standards. These standards will be set at Level "C," with providers encouraged to strive for improvement and aim for Level "B."

7.4.2 The Council, with its partners, are committed to ensuring the best outcomes for CLA and Care Leavers, enabling them to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. The implementation of the Sufficiency Action Plan will support CLA and Care Leavers by:

- Ensuring their needs are met through targeted interventions, resources, and services.

- Focusing on improving both physical and mental health, ensuring that every child in care has access to appropriate health and emotional wellbeing services.
- Addressing broader aspects of wellbeing, such as emotional support, stable housing, educational opportunities, and life skills to prepare young people for independence as they transition out of care.
- Collaborating with partners to ensure an integrated approach to meeting the needs of Waltham Forest's CLA and Children in Care.

7.4.3 The Health & Wellbeing Impact Assessment does not identify any negative impacts arising from this strategy. The strategy will seek to enhance the health and well-being of children looked after and care leavers by addressing their basic needs, fostering stability, and reducing health inequalities.

7.5 **Council Infrastructure (e.g. human resources, accommodation or IT issues)**

7.5.1 The proposals contained in this report are put forward to enable needs to be met and will require the engagement of all Council services to secure the outcomes set out.

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None