

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Christine Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

DECISION NUMBER:

25/00093

For publication

Key decision: YES

Key decision criteria. The decision will:

Savings or expenditure of more than £1m

Affects two or more Electoral Divisions

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Kent County Council's Sufficiency Strategy – 2025 to 2028

Decision:

The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services is asked to agree to:

- a) Adopt the Sufficiency Strategy from 2025 to 2028, and
- b) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education or other Officer as required by the Corporate Director to review the Sufficiency Strategy on an annual basis and make revisions to the strategy where changes do not require additional governance.

Reason(s) for decision:

The publication of the Sufficiency Strategy meets the Council's statutory duties under the Children Act 1989. Adoption of this Sufficiency Strategy allows KCC to be clear on its sufficiency duty and provide information on the service development needed for children's social care.

The Sufficiency Strategy reflects our ambition to accommodate Kent's children in care, on the edge of care and care leavers within the county in affordable accommodation.

If adopted, it will replace the Sufficiency Strategy 2022/27.

The Strategy is the result of extensive engagement with professionals across Integrated Children's Services and is informed by engagement from children who use the services.

How the proposed decision supports the strategic direction of the Council

The draft Strategic Statement "Reforming Kent 2025 to 2028" includes priorities recognising the need to work with the Home Office on the effectiveness of the National Transfer Scheme, the development of in-house Children's Homes and make representations at national level for a revised, needs-based funding formula for children's social care that recognises the burden from other Local Authorities placing so many of their Looked After Children into Kent which aligns with the Sufficiency Strategy.

Financial Implications:

Finding ways to manage the Council's financial pressure, whilst still maintaining good outcomes for children and young people, is an essential part of supporting the Council's financial sustainability. The Sufficiency Strategy looks at ways that we can improve sufficiency which will support the Council with managing this financial pressure and achieving the best outcomes for our children and young people.

The total net budget for children looked after in 2024/25 was £105m in 2024/25 and was overspent by £3m. Responding to the trend in increasing costs of placements, the Council has responded and invested further funding, increasing the budget to £117m in 2025/26, although the initial forecast is still indicating a possible overspend of £6.5m. This rise in cost is being driven by a reduction in our most cost effective placement offer (in-house foster carers) resulting in a greater reliance on more costly externally purchased alternatives, such as residential care. In addition, the cost of externally commissioned placements is also rising, exacerbating this financial impact, and escalating costs.

The cost of UAS Children placements and associated support is expected to be fully funded from Central Government via the Home Office specific grants for Kent based UAS Children, former UAS Children Care Leavers and newly arrived children being temporarily supported until a permanent Local Authority is confirmed through the National Transfer Scheme. Whilst there is no direct cost to KCC, KCC still has a responsibility to secure value for money on supporting UAS Children and the placements secured. In addition, the grant for UAS Children (and former UAS Children Care Leavers) supported long-term by Kent has remained static for a number of years, therefore ensuring ongoing efficiencies to secure affordability within the grant provided is important.

The Strategy sets out a number of activities and services either being or will be undertaken to support future sufficiency. It is part of the foundations required to frame the activity needed to deliver overall savings and improve quality therefore, the Strategy itself does not constitute either a direct financial cost or saving. However, the activities undertaken to support the outcomes of the Strategy are intended to improve overall quality and cost effectiveness. The Medium Term Financial Plan agreed by County Council in February 2025, including savings totalling £3.6m over the next three years including the impact of the new Kinship service and development of in-house residential provision.

Any activity arising from the Sufficiency Strategy that constitutes a Key Decision will be subject to the Council's established governance processes.

Legal Implications:

The Council has a statutory duty to provide suitable and safe accommodation with the right level of support for Children in Care (including UAS Children) in accordance with the Children's Act 1989.

The Sufficiency Duty (Section 22G of the Children Act 1989) requires Local Authorities, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of those children they have a Corporate Parenting responsibility for within their Local Authority area.

The Council must provide Care Leavers (including former UAS Children) with support and financial support to assist in prompting their welfare, especially in relation to maintain suitable accommodation and helping them access education, training, and employment.

The Council must comply with s.149 of the Equality Act 2010. It is an "have regard to" duty for Councils when exercising their functions, to "... eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation... advance equality of opportunity... and foster good relations..."

Equalities Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and did not identify any negative impact on protected characteristics.

Data Protection Implications:

There are no implications as a result of this Strategy as there is no personal data being processed.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Do nothing

There is an explicit expectation under the Children Act 1989 and Ofsted inspection regimes to meet the sufficiency duty and to set out how Kent County Council intend to meet needs for children and families. If we do not have an up to date sufficiency statement this can form part of the basis for a limiting judgement.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

.....
signed

.....
date