

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 18 July 2017  
**Subject:** Placement Sufficiency Strategy  
**Report of:** Strategic Director of Children’s Services

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**Summary**

This report introduces a review of the Council’s Looked after Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016 – 2019. The strategy was drafted in 2016. Progress on the strategy was reviewed in May 2017.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee Members

- Consider the content of this report and explore the progress the Council is making in meeting its ‘sufficiency’ duty to provide *a sufficient number and range of high quality placements and accommodation options* for ‘our looked after’ children and young people.
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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

The Looked after Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy.

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The Placement Sufficiency Strategy aims to improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers through the provision of a sufficient number and range of high quality placements and accommodation options. It sets out how Manchester City Council will work with partners to meet the statutory 'Sufficiency Duty' set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 which requires local authorities to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area.

1.2 As well as meeting our 'Sufficiency Duty' and improving outcomes for children and young people, we know that success in delivering the strategy will realise significant cost savings for the Council.

1.3 The strategy sets out a 'vision' for how we will meet the accommodation needs for looked after children and care leavers and what steps we will take to deliver that vision.

## **2.0 Background**

2.1 It is a legal requirement for all local authorities to provide a Placement Sufficiency Strategy, as set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. As indicated above, the strategy should set out how the local authority will secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area.

## **3.0 Our Vision for Sufficiency**

3.1 Our vision for placement provision as set out in the strategy is that:

- Children will be supported to stay with their families where it is safe to do so
- We will achieve permanency through adoption, special guardianship and permanent fostering in a timely manner
- Most children will live in a local, family placement
- Children with disabilities will have the same access and opportunity for placements as their non-disabled peers
- Care leavers will be able to access 'Staying Put' foster care, supported lodgings and supported accommodation
- We will improve the timeliness of care planning and utilise strategic commissioning

## **4.0 Progress**

4.1 Specific areas of progress in 2016/17 include:

- A reduction in the overall Looked after Children (LAC) population of 67 (reduced from 1406 in July 2014 to 1170 at the end of March 2017).
- 80 children have been discharged from care into adoption
- Timeliness of adoption continued to improve with average time from coming into care to placement with adopter reduced from 500 days in 2015/16 to 460 days in 2016/17
- The number of children discharged from care into special guardianship increased from 49 to 60
- The percentage of children placed in foster care increased from 73.4% to 75.5% over 2016/17. The proportion in independent fostering agency placements reduced from 43% to 41.8% and those placed with in-house recruited carers has increased from 16% to 19.6%.
- The percentage of our looked after children in residential care at the end of 2016/17 reduced to 5.7% of the LAC population - 66 children compared to 101 at the end of 2014/15.
- The redesign of the in-house residential provision has been completed. Alonzi House is now operational and is supporting young people (and their families) on the edge of care to stay together. Willow Vue Children's Home remains as our only directly run in-house children's home, providing 6 medium/long term beds for some of our most complex young people aged 12 to 17.
- Intense work in partnership with our commissioned provider has led to significant performance improvement with regard to services to care leavers. Importantly, the percentage of care leavers accommodated in houses of multiple occupancy has gone down from 17% in April 2016 to 7.2% in February 2017. The level of those who are NEET has come down steadily from 41.5% to 36.1% over the year. The percentage in unsuitable accommodation had remained very much the same over the year.
- The use of 'Staying Put' placements means that young people can continue to stay with foster carers, and Manchester's work in this areas means that 72 young people currently remain with their carer after the age of 18. #

## 5.0 Moving Forward

5.1 Progress continues to be made with regard to providing a range and choice of placement options for children and young people. However in order to meet our ambitions there is more to do. Subsequently the priority actions for 2017/18 and beyond include:

- To work with the external fostering market to encourage the development of a wider pool of 'specialist' foster care placements to meet high end complex needs within family settings.

- To explore the option for the joint commissioning with health of a residential home with 'in-reach' bespoke therapeutic services to meet the needs of children and young people with high level complex emotional wellbeing needs
- To look at options of recommissioning one of our partnership residential homes to provide a service which meets the needs of a smaller group of children with more complex needs. 4 beds rather than the current 6 beds
- To assess and secure sufficient emergency fostering accommodation inclusive of suitable PACE placement options.
- To systematically promote a new enhanced Special Guardianship Support Offer to foster carers of children in long term arrangements to secure permanence outside of local authority care.
- To ensure that 'Alonzi House' successfully links with all other edge of care services and succeeds in reducing admissions of adolescents.
- To accelerate internal foster carer recruitment
- To develop initiatives and joint working arrangements to address the number of care leavers who reside in unsuitable accommodation.