

**Written statement of a non-key decision**  
**Cabinet member children and families**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Looked After Children &amp; Complex Needs Accommodation Commissioning &amp; Sufficiency Strategy 2019 – 2024</b>
Decision maker	<p>Cabinet member children and families</p> <p>Information about cabinet, including the names and contact details of the cabinet members, can be found here:</p> <p><a href="http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=251">http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=251</a></p>
Date of decision	6 March 2019
Report exemption class	Open
Purpose	<p>To adopt the placement sufficiency strategy to meet the expected levels of demand for 2019-2024.</p> <p>The proposed strategy builds on the previous strategic priorities for 2014-2019, which were to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements</li> <li>ii. prevent use of residential placements by improving intensive wrap-around support to children with challenging needs and their carers, including reducing the reliance on residential placements by 50%</li> <li>iii. enable more children with complex needs to remain with their families or, if necessary, be accommodated closer to home</li> <li>iv. improve the quality and availability of local supported living arrangements for Looked After Children aged 16+</li> </ol> <p>There has been some positive progress since 2014, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the in-house fostering service has recruited new carers to manage carer turn-over</li> <li>ii. the recommissioning of HIPSS (Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service) which has helped young people step away from the need for residential care</li> <li>iii. improved multiagency arrangements, including education, health and care planning, along with a recommissioned short breaks offer is supporting children with complex needs</li> </ol>

	<p>and their families.</p> <p>iv. commissioning of 15 supported accommodation beds for looked after children and care leavers</p> <p>Since 2014, however, the number of looked after children increased by over 30%. While the in-house fostering service has been relatively successful in recruiting new carers, it has not been sufficient to keep pace with demand. This has meant an ongoing and increased reliance on the more expensive independent fostering sector, which itself appears to be reaching capacity. Councils elsewhere are also reporting difficulties in finding placements with the independent sector. For Herefordshire, this can lead to placing children into foster care at greater distances than is desirable, or in some cases escalating to distant residential care when no fostering placement can be identified.</p> <p>While continuing the previous work, the proposed strategy strengthens the focus on growing the pool of in-house foster carers and supported lodgings hosts, and will also consider the opportunities for dedicated residential beds with local providers under contract and/or the development of new in-house residential children's homes.</p>
<p><b>Decision</b></p>	<p><b>That:</b></p> <p><b>(a) The Looked After Children &amp; Complex Needs Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2019 – 2024 (Appendix 1) is approved.</b></p> <p><b>(b) the director for children and families be authorised to take all operational decisions necessary to implement the placement commissioning plan (section 6, Appendix 1) within approved budgets including, following consultation with the s151 officer and relevant cabinet member, award of contracts in excess of £500k.</b></p>
<p>Reason for the decision</p>	<p>As set out in the report. Documents relating to this decision are available at</p> <p><a href="http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=50028560">http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=50028560</a></p>
<p>Options considered</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue with the 2015-2019 placement sufficiency strategy. This option is not recommended as the proposed 2019-2024 strategy has been informed by an updated needs analysis (Appendix 2), with priorities that are relevant to current and projected demand.</li> <li>2. Dispense with a placement sufficiency strategy. This option is not recommended as it would place the council at risk of not meeting its statutory duties, criticism by Ofsted, and could create additional cost pressures as a result of increasing reliance on independent sector providers.</li> </ol>
<p>Declarations of interest (see below)</p>	

Call-in expiry date (decisions are not subject to call-in where special urgency provisions apply)	12 March 2019
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Councillor: ..... Cabinet member children and families (Councillor EJ Swinglehurst)	Date 6 March 2019
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- a record of any conflict of interest declared by any executive member who is consulted by the member which relates to the decision;
- and
- in respect of any declared conflict of interest, a note of dispensation granted by the relevant local authority's head of paid service.