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| Decision maker: | Cabinet member children and families |
| Decision date: | Wednesday, 6 March 2019 |
| Title of report: | Looked After Children & Complex Needs Accommodation Commissioning & Sufficiency Strategy 2019 – 2024 |
| Report by: | Childrens joint commissioning manager |

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To adopt the placement sufficiency strategy to meet the expected levels of demand for 2019-2024.

The proposed strategy builds on the previous strategic priorities for 2014-2019, which were to:

- i. reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements
- 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%
- iii. enable more children with complex needs to remain with their families or, if necessary, be accommodated closer to home
- iv. improve the quality and availability of local supported living arrangements for Looked After Children aged 16+

There has been some positive progress since 2014, including:

- i. the in-house fostering service has recruited new carers to manage carer turn-over
- ii. the recommissioning of HIPSS (Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service) which has helped young people step away from the need for residential care

- iii. improved multiagency arrangements, including education, health and care planning, along with a recommissioned short breaks offer is supporting children with complex needs and their families.
- iv. commissioning of 15 supported accommodation beds for looked after children and care leavers

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.

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.

Recommendation(s)

That:

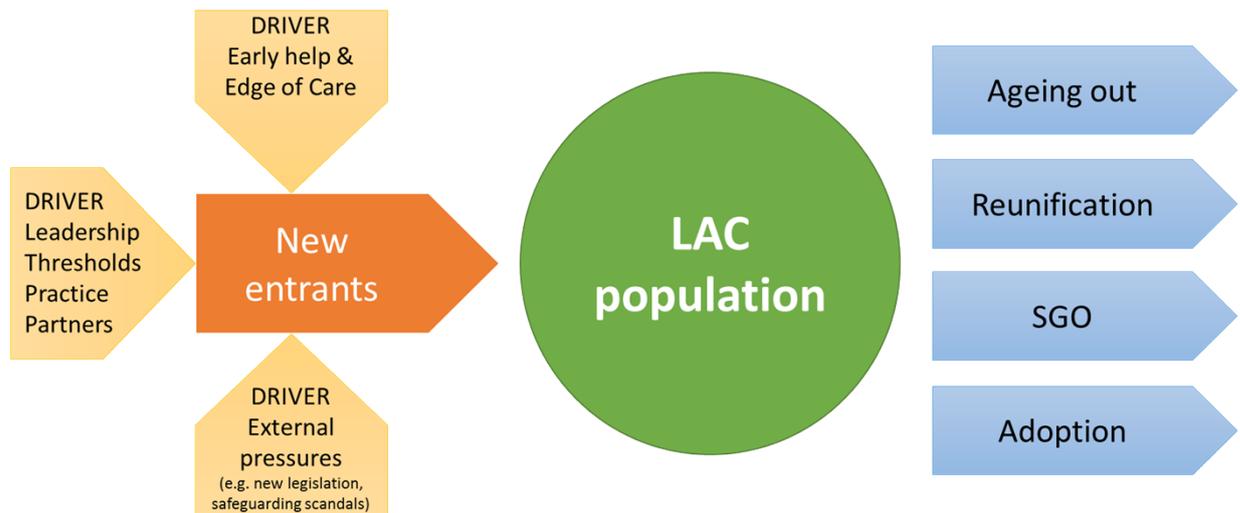
- (a) **The Looked After Children & Complex Needs Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2019 – 2024 (Appendix 1) is approved.**
- (b) **the director for children and families be authorised to take all operational decisions necessary to implement the placement commissioning plan (section 6, Appendix 1) within approved budgets including, following consultation with the s151 officer and relevant cabinet member, award of contracts in excess of £500k.**

Alternative options

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.
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.

Key considerations

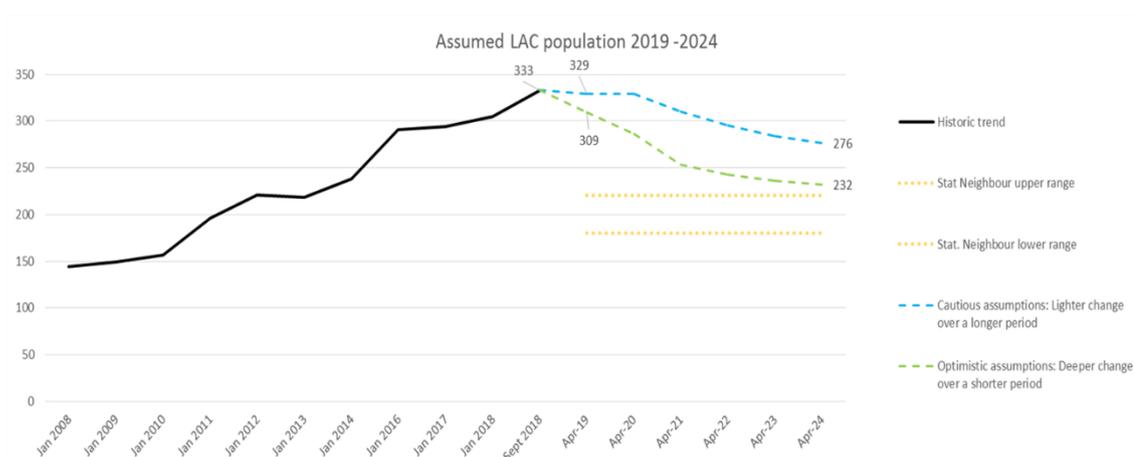
3. When a child comes into care, the council becomes their Corporate Parent. As corporate parent, the council has the same goals for the children it looks after as those of every good parent; to see them flourish, enjoy good health, be safe and happy, to do well at school and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as happy, healthy, successful and financially secure adults.
4. The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient suitable accommodation within the area which meets the needs of the children that the council looks after, where it is consistent with their welfare.
5. On 28 October, 2014, a placements commissioning strategy covering the period 2014-2019 was approved. While there has been some good progress, a significant increase in the number of children looked after by the council has led to additional demand for fostering, residential and supported accommodation. In particular, the 2018 Ofsted inspection noted that *'the local authority is struggling to provide a sufficient number of foster families, and in particular those that meet the needs of sibling groups and teenagers'*. The inspectors also reported that *'sufficiency planning lacks effective strategic direction and future needs are not articulated clearly. This is compounded by the current commissioning strategy not being underpinned by a comprehensive assessment of future needs'*.
6. Appendix 1 sets out the draft Placement Sufficiency Strategy for the next five years to 2024, which has been informed by an updated strategic needs analysis (Appendix 2). The types of placements that the strategy considers include:
 - i. Fostering: kinship arrangements, general or specialist in-house foster carers and independent fostering agencies (IFAs)
 - ii. Independent residential children's homes or schools for looked after children and those with complex needs or disabilities
 - iii. In-house supported lodgings for 16+ looked after children and care leavers
 - iv. Independent supported accommodation for 16+ looked after children and care leavers
7. The council's spend on children's placements has continued to increase in recent years and is forecasted to exceed £12.5m in the current year. Spend may range from £29,000 per year for an in-house fostering placement, to over £300,000 per year for a specialist residential placement for a child with complex needs or disability.
8. Increasing demand, as a result of additional LAC, has been the main influence in rising spend each year. The cost of externally provided placements has been generally well managed by the use of regional purchasing arrangements. However, limited capacity and choice within the in-house and independent sector has also been a key cost driver in the last two years, particularly with more children having to be placed with either independent fostering or residential providers.
9. There are multiple factors that can influence the size and shape of Herefordshire's LAC population (below). In recent years, Herefordshire has had a higher number of looked after children than would be expected for its size, compared to statistical neighbour authorities.



10. At the end of November 2018, there were 326 Herefordshire children and young people looked after by the council. The council is continuing to develop its approaches to Early Help and Edge of Care, which are intended to prevent a child's needs escalating so they don't need to become looked after and reduce the level of need for those that do enter care. While these approaches are focussed on ensuring that children and young people receive the right support at the right time, they are also expected to have an impact on the size of Herefordshire's LAC population in the short and medium term.
11. Herefordshire's current Early Help model was implemented in 2016, with the number of families being supported growing since then. By November 2018, the number of children being actively supported by Early Help Assessments had risen to over 900, with most of those being held by partner agencies. The council is leading work with partners to further embed the approach, it expected that there will be:
 - improved identification of families who require Early Help and will receive support at an earlier stage
 - improved signposting of Early Help resources for professionals and families
 - a more user friendly system for professionals and families so that they can help themselves
 - an increase in families who take up the offer of Early Help following no further action by social care
 - more partners supported to complete Early Help assessments
 - upskilling of partner agencies in the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) and improved communication and knowledge about the Early Help approach and services
 - information immediately available for social care if cases step up
12. The council has previously recognised delayed or missed opportunities to develop care plans during the PLO (Public Law Outline) process, which sets out the duties councils have when thinking about taking a case to court to ask for a Care Order to take a child into care or for a Supervision Order to be made. It has also acknowledged that foster to adopt placements have not always been considered early enough and in all relevant situations when planning permanency for children. To help address these issues, the council has implemented a new Alternatives to Care panel decision-making process in September 2018, which builds on earlier targeted work to begin reducing the size of the LAC population. It is expected that the new panel process will deliver:
 - clear expectations that result in sustainable change to enable children to safely remain in the care of their parents

- improved timescales for achieving permanency for children
- reduced demand for foster placements
- increased number of foster to adopt placements

13. The Placements Needs Analysis, October 2018 (Appendix 2), uses local intelligence and professional assumptions of the impact of Early Help and Alternatives to Care work, combined with comparisons against Herefordshire's statistical neighbours to project the LAC population and placement demand over the 2019-2024 period. It is anticipated that Herefordshire could have c.232-276 looked after children by 2024 (below), however this is not a certainty and is based on projections, so needs to be treated at risk. If the demand does not reduce by as much as planned, or at all the demand for placements will be much greater than set out. The projections will be regularly refreshed to ensure that they continue to reflect local context and published intelligence.



14. The Children and Families Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) have been involved in testing the assumptions on which future LAC population projections have been based. It is acknowledged that they can be subject to a variety of influences that may be within or outside the council's control and will be regularly reviewed. Other key considerations included:

- maximising the opportunities for kinship care as part of the overall approach to in-house provision
- matching an appropriate number of children with each carer that enables them to provide effective care and reduces the chances of the placement breaking down because carers no longer feeling able to support the child/ren they are caring for

15. The Needs Analysis has identified the following placement sufficiency pressures:

- growing use and higher cost of independent fostering agency placements
- increasing use of residential accommodation due to insufficient capacity in both general and specialist in-house and independent fostering provision
- too many children and young people placed away from home/Herefordshire when their needs do not require distant accommodation
- local provision of supported living arrangements for young people with higher needs

- v. robust commissioning of non-accommodation support services for children in need (CIN), children subject to child protection (CP), looked after children (LAC) and those with complex needs (CNF)
16. To help address these pressures, the proposed 2019-2024 Placement Sufficiency Strategy includes the following objectives:
- i. Achieve a rate of 90% of general and specialist fostered LAC being placed within 20 miles of home and reduce reliance on independent fostering agencies
 - ii. Ensure that more children needing residential care can be placed ideally in-county, but no more than ten miles from the Herefordshire border, when it is appropriate to their care plan
 - iii. Improve the availability of local supported living arrangements for Looked After Children aged 16+
 - iv. Implement robust procurement arrangements for non-accommodation support services
17. Appendix 1 sets out the proposed strategy to achieve sufficient placement capacity and choice over the 2019-2024 period (chapter 2 provides a brief overview). Key aspects include:
- i. Increasing the numbers of in-house foster carers. The service is already developing a new carer recruitment and retention plan to change the balance between in-house and IFA (independent fostering agency) provision. The approach includes maximising opportunities for kinship care, as well as increasing the pool of general and specialist carers that could support children for whom kinship care is not feasible. It is expected that the number of in-house general and specialist beds will need to rise from between 134 and 154 in 2019-2020 to between 143 and 170 in 2023-2024. The expectation is that in-house general and specialist carers will be able to provide between 45,000 and 53,500 nights of care by 2024. In addition, the number of kinship placements is expected to increase, however quantities are difficult to project as opportunities will depend upon the family circumstances of individual children. The overall expectation, as a result of a reducing LAC population and increasing in-house carer provision, is that the purchase of higher cost IFA placements will reduce from c.20,000 in 2019-2020, to c.6,000 by 2024, and therefore more fostering placements will be made within 20 miles of the child's home.
 - ii. Accessing, when necessary, more local residential children's homes beds, rather than placing children at greater distances. As well as mainstream and complex residential placements, this could include providing short-term 'turn-around' residential placements where the plan would be for a child to return to their family or existing foster placement. A mainstream residential bed costs c.£200k per year, while a complex needs bed usually costs c.50% more. Compared to regional neighbours, Herefordshire has a relatively small number of residential placements with normally 20-30 children placed in residential settings at any one time. Herefordshire is participating in a regional flexible contracting arrangement (FCA) for residential placements with independent providers. Among the homes covered by the FCA, is a local market of 73 homes with 259 beds that are either in Herefordshire or neighbouring counties (with 19 homes and over 90 beds are in Herefordshire). However, it can be challenging to access these beds for Herefordshire children when they are occupied by children placed from other areas. Therefore, the first intention

will be to block contract with existing local provision to provide access to a limited number of beds, initially 2-4, that would be reserved for use by Herefordshire. A further option to be explored will be the establishment of new council-run registered children's homes.

- iii. Growing the in-house 16+ supported lodging service to expand the number of supported lodgings beds that are available for looked after young people and care leavers, as well as reviewing existing arrangements for externally provided supported accommodation and floating support.
 - iv. Strengthening internal procurement arrangements for non-accommodation service to ensure good value and consider joining a sub-regional DPS (direct purchasing system) for such services
18. Appendix 1 also sets out a range of performance indicators that will be used to monitor the progress of the proposed strategy. Key performance indicators will be reported via the directorate's performance scorecard. As a result of the actions arising from the strategy, the council expects to be able to achieve the following:

General & specialist foster care

- i. 90% of general and specialist fostered LAC being placed within 20 miles of home by 2024
- ii. Progress towards a 90%/10% split of in-house/IFA fostering bed nights by 2024
- iii. Total of c61-71,000 bed nights provided in 2019/20, falling to c50-60,000 by 2024 as LAC numbers reduce
- iv. In-house capacity provides up to 170 beds / 53,000 nights per year by 2024
- v. IFA nights to reduce to c.6,000 per year by 2024
- vi. No children will be placed in residential care because there was no suitable fostering placement available

Residential care

- i. Less than 20 children and young people placed in residential care by 2024
- ii. A higher proportion will be placed within 20 miles of their home
- iii. Need for c.3,600 LAC and 3,700 Complex Needs bed nights per year by 2024
- iv. In-house fostering service will maintain a pool of 8-10 specialist carers to support HIPSS approach

Supported living

- i. Clearer projections of demand to inform evolving commissioning plan
- ii. Increase in-house supported lodgings places (excluding dual registrations) available for LAC and care leavers
- iii. High proportion of external agency placements are provided within 20 miles of the young person's home, education, or employment

Community impact

19. The proposed Placement Sufficiency Strategy supports the principles outlined in the council's corporate plan and Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Plan, including:
- i. Enabling residents to be independent and lead fulfilling lives by improving outcomes for children and young people
 - ii. Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life

20. The strategy will have a direct effect on the lives of looked after children and care leavers and will support the council in its role as corporate parent. It seeks to ensure that more children and young people are able to be placed local to home, when it is in their interests to do so, and that they are able to maintain contact with their families, education and communities.

Equality duty

21. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
22. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.
23. Before a child or young person is placed, a professional assessment of their needs is undertaken so that any specific equality issues can be identified. The individual's assessment and specific equality requirements informs their care planning to ensure that an appropriate placement is provided for them.

Resource implications

24. The key driver of placement requirements is the size of the LAC population, which it is assumed will decrease over the five years to 2024. However, it should be noted that there are a range of factors that could have an adverse impact on the planning assumptions, such as slower than expected improvements in children's services, or a national event that causes a spike in child protection concerns.
25. The direct resource implications of implementing the strategy will be as follows, for which internal invest to improve/save business cases are being developed:
- i. £80k per full year for additional resource and officer capacity within the in-house fostering service to increase the chances of attracting prospective carers and progressing new applications through to carer approval. This is initially expected to involve 1xHC5 recruitment business support officer and 1xHC8 assessing social worker. Subject to the success of the project in attracting more carers, additional assessing and supervising social worker capacity may be required in future. Assuming that the service is successful in providing the required number of carers, placement spend could be expected to reduce by £400k-£500k per year by 2024 as a result less reliance on more expensive IFA placements.

- ii. £45k per year for 1xHC9 commissioning officer capacity for 2 years to develop the local residential care market. This will include managing new contracting arrangements with local external providers. It will also involve considering the potential to establish new in-house residential services, which would be subject to further investment and governance. For example, should it be decided to establish a 3-bed in-house children's home, initial estimates would be for £400k capital investment and £600k annual running costs, depending upon the types and level of needs of the children to be supported. Assuming that this approach were pursued, there would be initial investment costs at this level, before costs were subsequently met from the existing residential budget as distant placements ended and future children were placed into the new local provision.
26. A key focus of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy is to increase the number and variety of beds provided by the in-house fostering and supported lodgings service. As the number of in-house beds increases, it is expected that the use of more expensive IFA or residential provision will decline and overall general and specialist fostering spend will reduce. The in-house service is developing its carer recruitment and retention plan to meet the projected demand for beds. However, recruiting and supporting the number of additional carers required in a timely manner will present a significant challenge to the fostering service.
27. Depending upon the rate at which the LAC population may reduce and the rate at which kinship care might increase, it is expected that the net pool of general and specialist in-house foster carers will need to rise from 107 currently, to between 111 and 128 in 2019-2020 and between 119 and 141 in 2023-2024. The gross number of carers recruited will need to account for the number of carers that leave the council each year. Over the last three years the in-house service has recruited 15-23 general and specialist carers per year, while 12-20 have left the service each year. While the service has performed relatively well in recruiting carers, the net increase that there has been over this period is unlikely to be enough to meet demand going forwards.
28. The in-house service is currently supported by 1.5 (HC6) marketing and recruitment officers. One of the key recruitment approaches is creating a conversation in the community that, as well as involving marketing campaigns, relies on making personal contact with community groups and individuals who may be interested in becoming carers or that can help spread the message to others that might be interested. Therefore, an invest-to-save proposal will be prepared to increase the level of recruitment resource within the service so that community engagement activities can be further expanded to increase the number of prospective carer applications. Assuming that recruitment efforts are successful, there will be a need to increase the capacity of assessing social workers, which the invest-to-save proposal will also consider. The intention would be to ensure that prospective carer applications do not enter a procedural bottleneck at the assessment stage that could cause potential carers to withdraw their application.
29. It is also expected that spend on residential placements will decline as the LAC population decreases. Options to be further explored through the strategy include block contracting for local residential beds and/or considering establishing in-house residential children's homes, which are common in other areas. The main intention will be to enable a higher proportion of residential placements to be made closer to the child's home, rather than achieving significant cost reductions per placement. With the introduction of either block contracting or in-house provision, there would likely be a period of time where a bed maybe unoccupied, but for which resource will still be required. As far as possible, such a situation will be avoided through good placement planning.

Legal implications

30. The Council is subject to a range of duties towards children within our area which are related to the sufficiency duty. In particular:
31. Section 17(1) of the 1989 Act provides that it is the general duty of a local authority to provide a range and level of services to children in need (as defined in section 17(10) of the 1989 Act) and their families in the local area which are appropriate to their needs.
32. Section 20 of that Act requires local authorities to provide accommodation for children in need within their area who appear to them to require accommodation in accordance with the provisions of that section.
33. Section 21 requires a local authority to accommodate certain children who are either removed or kept away from home under Part V of the 1989 Act or who are subject to a criminal court order.
34. Section 22C (5) requires local authorities to place children in the most appropriate placement available. In determining the most appropriate placement for a child, section 22C (7) requires local authorities to take into account a number of factors (such as the duties to safeguard and promote welfare; promote educational achievement; ascertain the wishes of the child and family; and give due consideration to religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural background).
35. In determining the most appropriate placement for a child, section 22C(7)(a) also requires the local authority to give preference to a placement with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent.
36. Section 22C sets out the additional factors (in no order of priority) which the local authority must take into consideration when deciding the most appropriate placement:
 - a. allowing the child to live near his/her home;
 - b. not disrupting the child's education or training;
 - c. enabling the child and a looked after sibling to live together;
 - d. meeting the particular needs of disabled children; and
 - e. providing accommodation within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.
37. Section 23(1) (a) requires a local authority to provide accommodation for a child who is in their care (by virtue of a care order).
38. The strategy meets the council's statutory obligations in fulfilling these duties.

Risk management

| Risk / opportunity | Mitigation |
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| 39. If the LAC population does not decrease and/or the take-up of kinship care does not | The Children and Families Directorate, along with its partners, is implementing improved approaches to Early Help and Edge of Care. The directorate has also |

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| increase, the council will continue to rely on more expensive independent sector placements and not fully achieve the objectives of placing more children within 20 miles of their home | <p>implemented a plan to improve children's social care practice, management and leadership. Together, these approaches should have a positive impact on the LAC population.</p> <p>The in-house fostering service recruitment plan and changes to social care procedures will ensure that the opportunity for kinship care will be considered earlier for relevant children.</p> |
| 40. The in-house fostering service is unable to attract and/or process sufficient prospective carers and supported lodgings hosts | <p>The service is preparing a new recruitment strategy, which is informed by the strategic analysis of projected capacity requirements.</p> <p>An invest-to-save proposal is being developed to provide additional recruitment and assessment capacity.</p> <p>Recruitment performance and carer capacity will be reported on the service scorecard</p> |
| 41. If the council is unable to access sufficient local residential beds, some children will continue to be placed beyond 20 miles from home when it is not necessary to their needs | <p>The council will seek to block-contract with local children's homes and consider establishing one or more in-house residential children's homes.</p> |
| 42. Challenges in matching some new children with those already placed local residential provision could mean that those children have to be placed elsewhere and beds funded by Herefordshire remain unoccupied. | <p>Placement planning arrangements are kept under constant review by children's social care, which should avoid any long periods of unoccupied beds.</p> <p>The risk of unoccupied beds is outweighed by the ability to place locally, ensuring that the child is able to maintain contact with the family, education and community, as well as reducing pressure on frontline professionals to spend time travelling to visit children in distant placements.</p> |
| 43. Where children and young people may be placed at a distance, there can be a risk that it is difficult for them access the support they may need if they return to Herefordshire as young adults | <p>Existing care planning arrangements help to ensure that the right support is in place when a child transitions to adulthood. One intended outcome of the proposed sufficiency strategy is that fewer placements are made beyond 20 miles from home, which will further reduce the risk.</p> |

44. These risks will be managed at a service and directorate level.

Consultees

45. Consultation has been undertaken with the political groups. The feedback received included a request for clarification from the It's Our County group about how vulnerable the council might be to market failure, and what contingencies can be put in place?

46. In this context, the market generally involves the provision of fostering or residential care, as well as competition from other authorities wishing to place their own children. There have been year-on-year increases in the national LAC population. At 31 March 2018, there were 75,420 LAC in England, up 4% on 31 March 2017.
47. It is difficult to measure the risk of overall market failure. What is known is that, despite some successful recruitment of carers in recent years, the growth of the in-house fostering service has not kept pace with the increases in Herefordshire's looked after child population. This has meant that the council has continued to rely on the independent sector, where places can be made on an emergency or urgent basis, in competition with other placing authorities. Over the three years to March 2018, the council made 28 placements into residential care because no suitable in-house or IFA foster placement could be identified, at a cost of almost £2.4m. The majority of these residential placements were made outside Herefordshire on an urgent or emergency basis.
48. Nationally, the largest group of children in care are in foster placements, provided by council in-house fostering agencies and IFAs. In 2012 there were 295 IFAs; by 2018 there were 308 (an increase of 13 agencies, 4% of the total). However, there is no national-level data available to show how the growth in the number of agencies has impacted on the number of places available for children.
49. With regard to residential provision, children's social care data in England 2017 to 2018 (Updated 4 February 2019) shows that:
 - i. There were 2,209 children's homes, of all types, at 31 March 2018. This was an increase of 64 children's homes (3%, similar to the previous year's increase) from the figure at the same time last year (2,145).
 - ii. While the number of all children's homes continues to rise overall, there is a variation within the sectors. Overall, more children's homes are being owned by organisations that are run for profit. The number of privately owned homes has increased year on year and the number of homes run by voluntary organisations remains stable. However, the number of children's homes run by councils fell for the third consecutive year in 2018, by 3%. From 2016 to 2017, it fell by 4%, and 5% in the year before. As at 31 March 2018 there were 44 local authorities (29%) in England that did not run any children's home in their area. Despite the falling national numbers, during 2017 to 2018 6 LAs had increased the number of homes they ran.
 - iii. Although the overall number of children's homes increased, the number of places changed by less than 1% (from 11,664 to 11,746). This smaller increase is because of the drop in the number of places in residential special schools registered as children's homes.
50. The proposals within this report seek to significantly grow the pool of in-house foster carers and secure access to local residential beds through block contracting with existing children's homes and/or the commissioning of new residential provision. It is likely that the council will continue to need to place some children with the independent sector in order to meet their individual needs. However, it is anticipated that the recommendations of this report will improve Herefordshire's placement sufficiency and reduce its exposure to a limited market or possible market failure.
51. Children and young people are routinely involved in planning their care and placement arrangements. When asked what they wanted from their support packages, responses from looked after children and care leavers have included:

- Stability
- We want to be trusted to be there – “I was made to leave when they left in the morning”
- Options of places to go if we can’t stay in placement
- We want to be able to be ourselves
- We can’t be expected to meet your expectations all the time
- Why can’t we have a second chance at foster care if it didn’t work the first time
- It was three strikes and I was out (supported accommodation) – it felt like they always wanted me to fail “you have known me most of my life, but when I need you the most you forget the challenges I face – and then I am intentionally homeless.”
- Practical support – “yes I know I am 21 but I still need someone to come to the hospital with me.” “I just want to know you are there.”
- Emotional support – availability
- More placement options
- More city properties
- Why do I get less than X who is in foster care – we are the same age (or they are in an IFA)
- There needs to be a range of old and young foster carers
- Be nice
- For my space to be respected
- Be fun and reliable
- For rules to be clear and flexible based on who I am and what is going on in my life
- Don’t judge me based on what is written about me
- Safety
- Have a private space – just for me
- To know how long I am going to be there
- Moving on preparation - we need more preparation to leave from our carers and this to be given early enough
- Close to buses/ trains
- Don’t want to be where there aren’t any street lights
- Close to shops
- Close to people who support me

52. Occasionally, young people give much more detailed feedback about their placement experiences, the following is an anonymised example:

‘Sarah is very understanding and non-judgmental. When I first went to her she made sure she knew what things I liked and I didn’t like. She made me feel comfortable, she ensured that I was happy even when I was going through a tough stage. Sarah let me free in the sense that she doesn’t put many boundaries only curfews as to when I have to go in, but we have a safe word and Sarah always knows where I’m going and who I’m with. I like this because it makes me feel safe. I can confide in Sarah in things that I’ve never confided other people with. I can talk to Sarah about problems, work, relationships, family, mental health, general health, sex and lots more that I usually wouldn’t speak to anyone about. I would keep these things to myself.

Sarah has always made me feel wanted, never once made me feel upset or hurt. She knows me that well that she can tell when I’m upset, moody or depressed, she asks me if I want to talk about it and if I don’t then she respects that. If I tell her something upsetting and I start crying she’ll do what’s best to her ability to ensure that I’m happy, makes me see things from different perspectives. She never invades my personal space and respects if I need to be on my own or with my boyfriend/friends.

Sarah is a very fun person to be around, the amount of laughs and fun memories I have with her are amazing. Sometimes it’s the little things that makes me happy, whether that’s just sitting in a quiet room with her or talking to her about life. Sarah always makes me see the positive in life, if I have a problem and I was in the wrong she never tells me off for it. She just tells me what I should’ve done instead. I feel so lucky in living with Sarah, I’ve never met such an amazing, caring, loving woman like her. She’s a star. Sarah is like the mother I never had, she looks after me like a princess.

I've put Sarah through a lot of stress with quitting college, work, being in and out of hospital. However, Sarah has never once made me feel rubbish about it. Instead, she picked up the pieces and put me on the right track. If that was anyone else then they would've just left me to it and probably let me fail. Sarah rewards me when I do something good. E.g. when I got my new job we went out for food. She says when she's proud of me and that makes me feel great.

Sarah has not once shouted at me, that makes me feel safe. At my own home shouting was an everyday occurrence. Sarah has gone the extra mile when I needed help, took me to the doctors, hospital and recently when I was tight on money she would buy me food. I'm honestly such a lucky girl to live in a house with Sarah.

I hope every child in care is either in a house like a foster parent like Sarah or I hope they soon will be. If it wasn't for Sarah I probably wouldn't be here today, she's an amazing person and I don't want to leave her anytime soon. Regardless of what happens in the future, I will always remember my time at Sarah's and I will forever remember how lucky I am/was to live with her.'

53. Through the delivery of the proposed sufficiency strategy, the council is seeking to improve the availability of local placement choices that can provide stability and positive outcomes for children and young people, which will include attracting more excellent carers like Sarah.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Looked After Children & Complex Needs Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2019–2024

Appendix 2: Looked After Children & Complex Needs Placement Needs Analysis, October 2018

Background papers

None.