

# Sufficiency Strategy

Home@TheHeart  
2025-28



**Home@theHeart**

 Gloucestershire  
COUNTY COUNCIL

## Foreword



**As the Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding, and the Director of Children's Commissioning and Safeguarding, we are delighted to introduce Gloucestershire's Sufficiency Strategy for 2025 – 2028.**

**Our vision is for Gloucestershire to be a great place where children and young people thrive and live lives of choice and opportunity.**

This strategy, informed by the voices of children and young people and shaped in collaboration with our partners, sets out an ambitious three-year programme to ensure those in and leaving care receive the love and support that every child deserves.

Building on **Home@theHeart 2022–2026**, which marked a significant shift in how Gloucestershire County Council delivers sufficiency, we continue to repurpose council-owned properties to create and manage high-quality children's homes. This marks a return to direct residential care provision after more than 15 years.

Our focus is to think about 'homes' rather than 'placements' or 'accommodation' —safe, nurturing environments supported by our Children's Wellbeing Coalition and Safeguarding partners. This approach not only improves outcomes for children requiring residential care but also reduces reliance on a fragile, risk averse and costly external provider market. The first home will open in the first year of this strategy, with integrated education, health and care support in place to help children thrive.

Achieving *sufficiency* goes beyond residential capacity. It requires a whole-system approach, starting with early support to help families stay together through Family Hubs and Family Help, alongside kinship care where it is not possible for children to remain at home. We are also expanding and strengthening our foster care capacity and supports, particularly with teenagers, many of whom have experienced prior adversity and trauma.

Universal, targeted, and specialist services all vitally support children at risk of entering care, those in care, and care leavers. This strategy brings these efforts together through a wider spectrum of activity underpinned by trauma-informed, relational practice.

Progress will be regularly reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Group and the Children and Young People's Wellbeing Coalition. The strategy will be publicly available to ensure transparency and shared accountability.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment.

**Cllr Paul McLain**

Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding

**Rob England**

Director of Children's Commissioning and Partnerships

## 2.0 Introduction: What is 'Sufficiency'?

2.1 The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to secure accommodation for children in their care, within local authority boundaries whenever possible and appropriate. This is known as the 'sufficiency duty', with the Act requiring the local authority to 'take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority's area boundaries which meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.' Greater detail on meeting the sufficiency duty is provided by the DfE document *Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children* ([DfE:2010](#)).

2.2 This Strategy outlines how Gloucestershire County Council, collaborating with its Coalition and Safeguarding partners, will fulfil these duties and meet the needs of children in our care and those leaving our care. It encompasses, and links, with the vision set out in the One Plan for Children in the county, developed by Gloucestershire's Children and Young People's Wellbeing Coalition, and Gloucestershire County Council's Children and Families Department Plan.

2.3 While the primary focus is on the quality and accessibility of homes for children in care and those leaving care, meeting the requirements of the sufficiency duty will encompass a much broader range of multi-agency activity. This starts with the work to support children to remain with their parents and within their birth family, the support for kinship and connected care when this is not possible, the quality, capacity and availability of foster care alongside the support of universal, targeted and specialist services for those children in care, and securing the continuity of provision for those leaving care beyond 18 years of age. As such, this strategy and action plan take a whole system approach, acknowledging that our ability to develop/commission the accommodation that meets our children's need is impacted by a wider range of prior activity.

2.4 In determining the most appropriate home and care for a child, section 22 of the 1989 Act requires the local authority to give preference to a loving home with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent. In no particular order of priority, the local authority must also take into account the following factors when deciding the most appropriate placement:

allowing the child to live near their home

not disrupting the child's education or training

enabling the child and their looked after sibling(s) to live together

meeting the needs of disabled children

and providing accommodation within the local authority's area, unless this is not reasonably practicable.

## 2.5 Good practice in securing sufficiency will be evidenced by the following:

- ✓ All children are placed in appropriate homes with access to the support services they require in their local authority area; except where this is not consistent with their welfare.
- ✓ The full range of universal, targeted and specialist services work together to meet children's needs in an integrated way in the local area, including children who are already looked after, as well as those at risk of care or custody.
- ✓ Where it is not reasonably practicable for a child to be placed within his/her local authority area, there are mechanisms in place to widen the range of provision in neighbouring areas, or wider region which is still within an accessible distance (i.e. based on transport links and community boundaries), while still being able to provide the full range of services required to meet identified needs.
- ✓ All children with adoption recommendations are placed within an adoptive family within 12 months of that recommendation.
- ✓ Children's Trust (Coalition) partners, including district councils as the housing authorities, work together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become looked after at the age of 16 and 17, and support the continuity of accommodation beyond the age of 18.
- ✓ Services are available in adequate quantity to respond to children, including predicted demand for a range of needs, and emergencies.
- ✓ In addition to meeting relevant national minimum standards, services are of high enough quality to secure specific outcomes identified in the care plans of looked after children.

- ✓ Services are situated across the local authority area to reflect geographical distribution of need.
- ✓ All foster and children's home or other care providers (inc. private, voluntary, and public sector providers) are linked into the wider network of services and work with these services to offer appropriate support to deliver identified outcomes for looked after children.
- ✓ Universal services know when a child is looked after and have good links with the range of targeted and specialist services which support him/her, including fostering and care providers.
- ✓ There are mechanisms in place to ensure that professionals involved in placement decisions have sufficient knowledge and information about the supply and quality of homes and the availability of all specialist, targeted and universal support services within the local authority area.
- ✓ The local authority and its Children Trust (Coalition) partners collaborate with neighbouring Children's Trusts to plan the market for services for looked after children and commission in regional or subregional arrangements.

2.6 Progress against this will be evidenced by reference to the following:

- progress with the **Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan** attached at **Appendix 1**
- the number and proportion of children for whom a local foster carer or children's home is not consistent with needs and welfare;
- the extent to which local universal services are able to meet needs;
- the state of the local market for supported and independent accommodation, including the level of demand in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists;
- the degree to which the market is responsive, actively managed and contributing to the delivery of good outcomes for children and young people;
- the resources available to, and capabilities of, accommodation providers (where 'resources' means not just the available funding but also the staff and premises, and 'capabilities' includes experience and expertise); and
- the priorities and measures of progress within the One Plan as overseen by the Children's Wellbeing Coalition

2.7 The complex and multi-faceted nature of the sufficiency duty will require the contributions of the full range of Gloucestershire Coalition and Safeguarding partners to ensure the needs of looked after children and those leaving care are fully met and their outcomes improved. The **Children and Young People's Wellbeing Coalition** and **Corporate Parenting Group** will have a leading role in overseeing progress and addressing any lack of progress. The county's Education Reference Group, Virtual School Governing body and District Councils' Housing Group will also have a key role in respect of the education offer and housing options.

2.8 This Strategy and Action Plan will be approved by Gloucestershire County Council's Cabinet, as the accountable body and subject to review on at least an annual basis. A copy will also be available on the council's website to ensure it is accessible to children and young people, their families, providers, partners, and key stakeholders.

### **3.0 National and Local Context**

3.1 Over the last 10 years or so, local authorities, including Gloucestershire County Council, have had to balance an increasing demand for children's services with ongoing budgetary constraints. Alongside this, successive studies have highlighted the increasing fragility and risk aversion of the independent care market, and a corresponding impact on the costs and availability of suitable homes particularly for children that present with the highest levels of complexity and vulnerability. Taken together these factors have made achieving the sufficiency duty particularly challenging requiring a dynamic and agile approach from local partners.

3.2 In response to concerns raised by local authorities about accessing appropriate placements for children in their care, along with the high unit price of placements the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) commenced a market study in March 2021, which reported in March 2022<sup>1</sup>. The study pointed to significant problems in how the placements market is functioning finding a lack of placements of the right kind in the right places, the largest providers making materially higher profits and charging higher prices, along with some large providers carrying high levels of debt that could lead to disorderly failure and disruption for children.

3.3 Further insight into market conditions was provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) who commissioned Revolution Consulting to review the publicly available evidence of the financial performance of the largest independent sector children's social care provider originations in England.<sup>2</sup> The report highlighted that over the previous 6 years spending by local authorities in England on independent sector children's homes and fostering had grown by 50% in real terms. It further reported that the greatest growth had occurred in spend on children's homes, which had more than doubled since 2015/16 while spend on independent fostering agencies had increased at a much lower rate. In common with the earlier CMA report, the study also raised concerns about debt levels and the need for greater strategic stewardship of the market.

3.4 In July 2024, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) published the results of a further study into how English local authorities were responding to the rising demand for Adults and Children's social care<sup>3</sup>. This study focussed on the markers of good practice in demand management, which have informed this strategy, including:

- Strong corporate and leadership buy in.
- Utilising resources and funding from diverse sources.
- A focus on improving outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's social care market study final report. England summary. (10 March 2022)

<sup>2</sup> Profit making and Risk in Independent Children's Social Care Placement Providers. (September 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Managing rising demand in adult and children's social care: Lessons from English local authorities. (CIPFA July 2024)

- Monitoring, forecasting, and benchmarking.
- Directing resources/funding upstream

The report highlighted the need for local authorities to take the initiative rather than becoming resigned in the face of a range of macro-contextual factors, many of which will require action by national government to fully resolve. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (The Care Review) 2022 also recommended the development of Regional Care Co-operatives and Fostering Recruitment and Retention Hubs as further mechanisms to improve capacity. This strategy proposes a pragmatic and realistic approach focussed on actions at county, sub regional and regional levels that will be most impactful for children and families.

3.5 In November 2024, the newly elected government published 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive', setting out its plans for reform to Children's Social Care. The document highlights four key priorities:

support to keep children at home with their family

a greater focus on the flexible use of kinship care when children cannot live with their parents

urgent reform of the 'broken' care market

investment in key enablers, including permanent workforce, use of data and information sharing, evidence-based approaches and the national children's social care framework.

This strategy recognises the direction of travel outlined above and is committed to adapting to changing policy and legislative frameworks as more detail is published in coming months. We are confident that our approach aligns with the emerging principles outlined by central government.



3.6 Gloucestershire's Children's Services continues its journey of improvement, bolstered by positive outcomes from the Children's Services Ofsted (ILACS) Inspection in 2022, and Joint Targeted Area Inspection in 2023. These inspections highlighted improvements in key areas of practice, and steady progress towards improved services and outcomes for children,

young people, and families in the county. Additionally, the SEND inspection in 2024 has highlighted both areas for strength and development.

3.7 A revised **Ambitions Plan (2023/24)**, overseen by a multi-agency Ambitions board, provides the framework for our improvement work, which is based upon 3 core obsessions and 9 workstreams. The Children and Families Commissioning Hub will play a key role particularly in securing placement sufficiency. The recommissioning of key services such as youth support and children and family

centres allows us to ensure these align with our locality delivery model as this comes onstream in 2024.

3.8 Currently, we have circa 800 children in our care, and 572 leaving our care (September 2024). Our children in care population equates to a rate of 63 per 10,000 0–17-year-olds against a peer group average of 64.1 at the end of March 2024. Around a quarter of children placed out of county live more than 20 miles from their home (24%) which is slightly higher than the peer group average of 22.4% (2024). The numbers of Gloucestershire children in care placed in children's homes or residential non-maintained special school continues to reduce from 113 in 2023 to 75 in September 2024.

Whilst this represents an improving picture, there remains more to do to enable more of our children to live nearer to their family and community. The average weekly unit cost for our children in care continues to reduce through increasingly effective joint operational and commissioning practice and is supporting more stable financial management. This provides the platform from which we can be ambitious for our children, aiming support more children to live in-county with loving foster families or through the proactive and proportionate use of local children's homes.

# 3.9 - Overview of current population of children in care and care leavers<sup>4</sup>



- 796 children in care (of whom 66 are UASC) – rate of 62 per 10,000
- 808 care leavers (aged 18-25 eligible or in receipt of a service) who have reached the threshold for leaving care services.

- 68 % of our children in care are in Foster care and of these 69% are placed with in house provision.
- 25% of children in care are placed out of borough.
- 68 (9%) children in care have a disability

## 24%

- 24% of Gloucestershire's children in care are Black, Asian or Minority ethnic.

- 15, 16 and 17 are the most common ages for CiC.
- 108 of 954 children in care had a missing episode in the last 12 months.

- 65% of Care Leavers aged 17-18 yrs. old are in education, employment, or training (EET)
- 55% of Care Leavers aged 19-21 yrs. old are in education, employment, or training (EET)



- 69% of children who have been in our care for 2.5 years or more have lived with the same carers for two or more of those years.
- 12% of children have had three or more homes in the previous twelve months



- 95% of care leavers 19 – 21 yrs live in suitable accommodation
- 88% of care leavers aged 17 and 18 live in suitable accommodation.

3.

3.10 It is notoriously difficult to predict the number of a relatively small cohort of children such as those requiring our care. The single biggest indicator for a child entering care is deprivation, with free school meals being a good proxy indicator. Our children in care population has been steadily reducing over the past 12 months bringing us broadly in line with statistical neighbours (rate per 10k) and we expect to remain at or around this rate over the course of this strategy. Within that broad trajectory, we have identified a range of enduring pressures this strategy aims to address:

- Through the course of the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery there has been **a notable rise in the prevalence of emotional and mental health and wellbeing (EMHWB) concerns for children and young people**. While the partnership in Gloucestershire has made considerable strides in relation to earlier intervention and support with respect to EMHWB, more still need to be done to ensure children and young people can access mental health services in a timely way. We also continue to have difficulties in meeting the needs of children whose complex needs and behaviours present the greatest risk to themselves or others such that they require assessment and intervention from specialist paediatric, psychological, education and care provision. This has rightly been highlighted at a national level by the Children's Commissioner in her challenging report on children with complex needs who are deprived of liberty.<sup>4 5</sup>
- **Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people**, comprising primarily boys aged 15-17 years, is an anticipated pressure that we need to be able to respond to by developing sufficient foster, children's home, supported lodgings and supported accommodation.
- **Complex emotional and mental health needs appear to be increasing** in terms of children who then require our care. In responding, we will develop options with the ICB to better support children in their birth family and school (SEND Improvement Plan) and ensure our own carers and children's homes are well supported by health and social care.
- Another area of development is our work to **support family resilience** and reduce the number teenagers needing our care. We are making progress in this area with a gradual reduction in the number of later teenagers requiring our care over the past year, alongside work to increase the capacity and capability of foster carers able to meet the needs of teenagers, we will continue to develop our edge of care/earlier interventions, family support and extra familial harm services.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2024/11/cc-deprivation-of-liberty.pdf>.

- **Fostering** will remain our most used form of care with 68% of children in care currently placed with that sector. Of the population of children living in foster care, 70% are with in-house carers and 30% with independent fostering agency carers. Our long-term objective is to increase the percentage of children in care who have a loving foster family and of those fostered, to increase the percentage fostered with local authority carers to 80%. Currently, our utilisation of our own foster carers is good at 86%.
- The proportion of Gloucestershire **children in care living out of county is now below statistical comparators and the England average**. Our aim is to further improve this as we further develop our fostering base and open our own children's homes. For very good reason, some children will always grow up out of the county, so our aim is not to reach 0% but to ensure that any child living out of county does so for a positive reason.
- A further aim is to **maximise our use of third-party accommodation in the county** – currently 32% of our children in care in residential settings are in county - thereby reducing the strain on partners supporting children placed out of county. The latter will require ongoing structured engagement with providers.
- To support more of our young people to live locally and develop the skills for greater independence, we will **expand our in county supported accommodation** provision with a second site in Stroud over the course of this strategy. We will also continue to develop our Supported Lodgings, Staying Close and Staying Put arrangements.
- **Ensuring stability of home and minimising disruption to education will continue to be key priorities** over the course of this strategy. Research tells us that these are two of the most important indicators of children in care achieving good outcomes. We have a range of actions that aim to increase the capability of carers to meet the needs of children, particularly teenagers, alongside ensuring that our review and planning processes are robust. The wraparound support of universal, targeted and specialist services is a further area of development, building on the learning from our CAMHS linked Foster Care project.

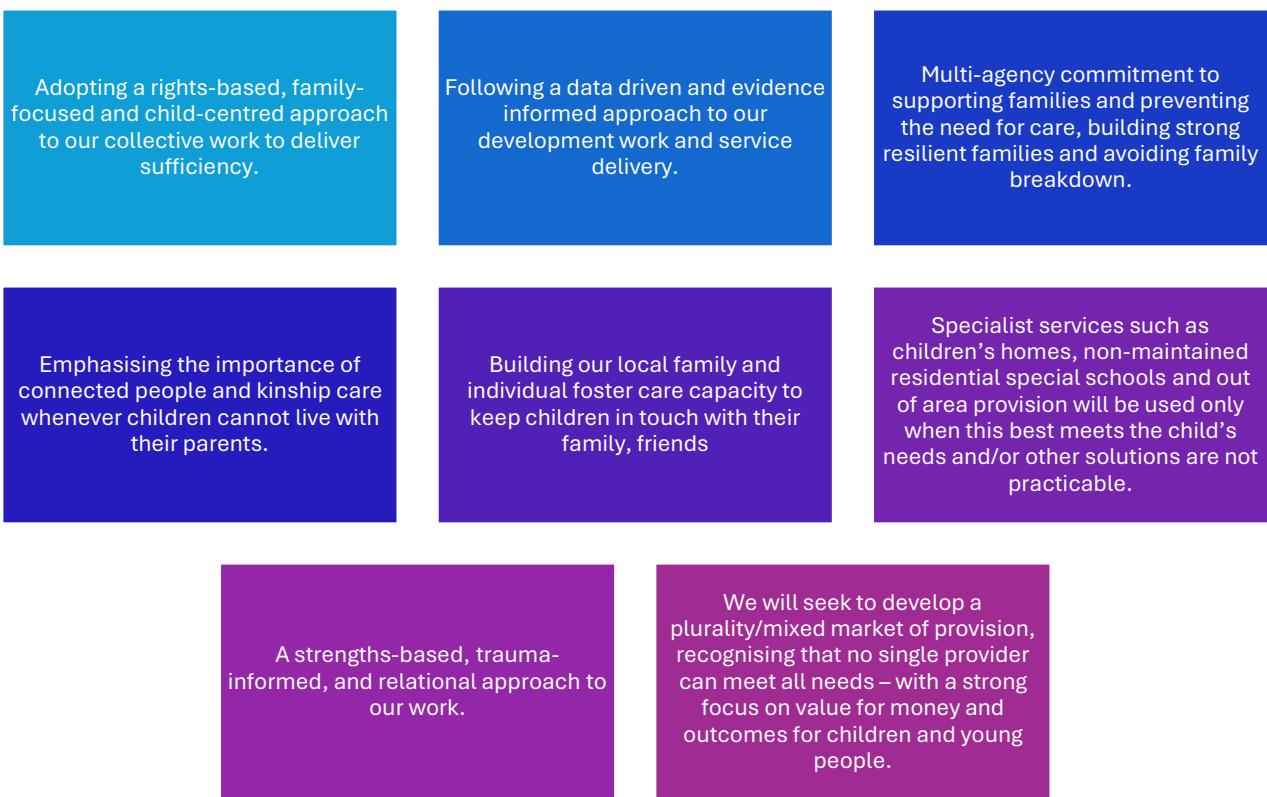
## 4.0 Key Principles

4.1 Our approach to the sufficiency duty reflects the core values underpinning the development of our **One Plan for Children in Gloucestershire** and wider multi-agency safeguarding partnership. **We will be rights based and child centred in this strategy, in our practice, and in our language.** The priority we place on the child/young person's voice does not mean that we are entirely 'child led', rather that we balance this with our corporate parenting responsibilities to act in the best interests of our children and to always ask, "would this be good enough for my child?"; taking action when it is not.

4.2 Ensuring we have sufficient, accessible, and suitable 'homes' for the children and young people in (and leaving) our care, continues to be a priority for the council and its safeguarding partners. Our approach is to think about everything it takes to **provide a good home rather than thinking 'placements' or 'accommodation'.** We will have an unrelenting focus on the quality of care as it translates to the child or young person's lived experience, over and above considering capacity on an overly simplistic 'bricks and mortar' basis. This shift in our approach is taking place against a challenging background due to the updated 2023-24 legislation regulating the delivery of supported accommodation for 16-17 year olds, along with considerable market fragility and volatility (cost, quality, and availability) for regulated services.



4.3 In adhering to this approach we apply the following operating principles:



4.4 Gloucestershire children's social care maintains a panel framework to secure effective oversight and decision-making for our children in care and those leaving our care.

## 5.0 Enabling children to safely remain at home

5.1 A key shift within this refreshed strategy is to place a greater focus on a **family first approach towards sufficiency**, alongside the development of in-county provision and our work with the provider market at sub regional and regional levels. We currently have a wide spectrum of family support activity to support children to remain at home. This encompasses and/or explores the capacity for care within the wider family or connected persons' network. This includes our multi agency early help work<sup>6</sup> through to our edge of care team who focus on children at risk of entering care, those experiencing placement or family breakdown, or requiring support to return to their family. While our assessment is that we have a good deal of resource in this area, we also recognise the opportunity to achieve greater efficiency and impact for children and families.

5.2 Learning from leading partners in the sector the following have informed our sufficiency actions as follows:

<sup>6</sup> Early Help Strategy Gloucestershire 2024 - 2027

- Enhance the current partnership threshold document to articulate the level 4 offer more clearly, around issues such as exploitation.
- Consider the overlap between a number of key roles – Community Social Workers, Partnership Managers and Early Help Co-ordinators, Early Help Triage – to direct resources to best effect.
- Review and streamline the number of case discussion forums that consider the needs of highly complex vulnerable children.
- Clarify locality delivery arrangements including the role of the locality inclusion partnerships and the locality arrangements for the Family Hubs.
- Work with the VCS to enhance their capability to support step down from Level 3 family support.

These detailed recommendations will inform the refresh of our **Early Help Strategy**, will augment plans to deliver the requirements of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024, and have informed the Family First priority set out in the **Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan**, attached at Appendix 1.

5.3 Our **Edge of Care Team** makes an important contribution to our Family First approach and the delivery of our Sufficiency duty. Operating on a seven-day per week basis, it comprises 1 Team Manager, 2 Deputy Team Managers and 24.2 FTE Family Support Workers. All staff are trained to NVQ level 3 or equivalent, with several staff accredited for Triple P and the Solihull Approach parenting programmes.

The team focusses on a combination of preventative work to avoid family breakdown, assessment and support for family reunification and supporting step down from residential care to fostering. The team is critical to the delivery of our **STEPs Programme** which aims to support children to step down from residential to home, foster care, or supported living when ready to do so.

Our assessment is that the team is making a positive impact, but more work is needed to integrate its activity within our wider family support offer.

5.4 In April 2024, our revised **Children and Family Centres** contract commenced, including a commissioned family support offer for younger children, a key element of our family hub model. Governance will be provided by multi-agency locality partnerships to ensure the offer develops in line with local needs and that the funding devolved to localities builds the right capacity and addresses any identified gaps.

Work will continue through this strategy to ensure that our developing Family Hub offer aligns and integrates with our multi agency locality arrangements to further support the sufficiency duty. Our recommissioned **Youth Support Service**, commenced in October 2024 combining locality and county wide elements, it provides further opportunity to align our offer towards the most vulnerable young people from the earliest point.

5.5 We will continue to develop our **Family Meeting Service** (family group conferencing and family-led decision making) to ensure it is available on all occasions a child is identified as being at risk of entering care, and pre-birth in similar circumstances.

## 6.0 The role of in-house and independent foster care

6.1 A key priority of this strategy is to increase our foster care capacity, both in-house and independent fostering agency providers, to ensure that children requiring a home are well-matched to the right family as needed. A **Fostering Service Improvement Plan**, focussed on a range of actions to improve the capacity and quality of our inhouse offer, is in place to deliver this. Our in-house foster care capacity has grown slightly over the past 18 months, bucking the national trend but also reflecting some of the challenges with recruitment both locally and nationally. Utilisation of in-house capacity is generally good and is currently at 86%. Of those children in care placed with foster carers, 69 % are placed with in-house and 31% with independent providers. Our longer-term aim is to bring this more towards an 80/20% balance and to increase the overall percentage of children in care that benefit from a loving, stable foster family. We will target an annual net growth of 10 foster care places, alongside an enhanced capability to meet the needs of teenagers in a familial setting.

6.2 We are working locally and regionally (Southwest Recruitment Hub - [Fostering South West \(fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk\)](https://fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk)) to increase our foster carer base and to ensure we can recruit, train, retain the safe and skilled carers our children need, for as long as they need. The South West Hub is a regional pilot, funded by DfE as part of the pilot arrangements testing proposals set out in Stable Homes Built on Love. The pilot will run to March 2026 and, following the recent government announcements, will be mainstreamed thereafter. It is already showing a positive impact in terms of the number of enquiries received.

6.3 Our focus on capacity is also underpinned by a range of actions to improve our support for foster carers and ensure they are fully equipped to meet the needs of children in their care. Set out in the Fostering Service Improvement Plan, these include:

- Training for all carers, social workers, and panel members on our therapeutic model (Emotional world of the child).
- Improving our initial contact and welcome pack processes.
- Revising our training manual for carers.
- Developing a more structured approach to feedback/audit and learning to inform service development.
- Developing an electronic form for discretionary payments.



6.4 To further strengthen our foster care offer, we are committed to the roll out of the **Mockingbird Model**<sup>7</sup> as a means of providing peer support and guidance, alongside social activities that aim to strengthen relationships and permanence. We have two constellations/clusters in place, and we aim to expand to have six constellations/clusters, one in each district, over the course of this strategy.



6.5 To further strengthen our foster care offer, we have developed a business case for a capital improvement scheme which would allow foster carers to make renovations to their home and/or purchase a vehicle to enable care for one or two more children.

6.6 In response to the demand pressures on in-house and commissioned fostering provision, particularly for children with more complex physical, psychological and behavioural needs we will be working with partners to develop an intensive programme to support foster families to care for these children.

## 7.0 **The importance of kinship and connected persons' care**

7.1 Gloucestershire is committed to working with parents and children to identify family or connected people who can look after children when they are unable to remain safely with their parents. For any child who cannot remain with their parents, we carefully and thoroughly consider any connected care options prior to using mainstream foster care. Our specialist kinship team works in partnership with children's teams to provide the advice and support needed to ensure arrangements are sustainable in the short and long term.

7.2 Kinship foster carers are a valuable and important resource and are treated fairly and in line with our mainstream carers, in respect of general support, training, and our financial offer. Our specialist kinship team recognise the additional challenges that sometimes come with being a kinship carer and can provide additional help and support when it is required.

7.3 For kinship carers who wish to seek a court order to provide an alternative form of permanence and long-term care such as special guardianship or a child arrangements order, support is maintained. We operate an open door offer for families who may need support and advice, including access to the adoption support fund for therapeutic interventions.

<sup>7</sup> Delivered with the Fostering Network, Mockingbird is an evidence-based fostering model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community.

7.4 We recognise the importance of kinship care in delivering a truly family first approach to sufficiency and we are developing a Gloucestershire Kinship Care Strategy based on [Championing kinship care: the national kinship care strategy \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/Championing%20kinship%20care%3A%20the%20national%20kinship%20care%20strategy) and [Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/kinship-care-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities) that will be launched early in 2025.

7.5 Our focus is to improve the provision of support for children in kinship care and kinship carers, enabling more children to stay living with those with whom they have a connection, where safe to do so.

The kinship local offer being developed includes:

- Financial support
- Practical support
- Training and development for carers, including support groups
- Employment support for carers
- Housing support
- Support with education
- Family time
- Legal support
- Therapeutic interventions.

## **8.0 Homes for children: Residential Care**

8.1 For the past 15 years or so, Gloucestershire County Council has relied entirely on the market for the provision of homes for children requiring residential care. The only exceptions being an in-house respite provision, and a supported accommodation site operated in partnership with third party provider. As a proactive response to the increasing challenges posed by a dysfunctional provider market, the previous Sufficiency Strategy Home@theHeart set out an ambitious programme to repurpose a number of Council's premises as children's homes or supported accommodation.

8.2 Several potential sites were identified over the course of 2021/22, with funding from the DfE to match the council's capital funding, providing the potential for 4 in county children's homes. Alongside this initial tranche, a second supported accommodation site and parent and child assessment unit are planned. As the project has progressed and, after further reflection on market conditions, it was decided to manage and deliver the sites in house, rather than partner with an existing third-party provider. This reflected the desire of local partners to maximise their ability to deliver trauma informed practice and wrap around support from safeguarding and Coalition partners for the children placed.

8.3 The table below sets out the programme status at the time of writing.



**Home@theHeart**

**Table 1 Progress in mobilising in-county provision**

Property	Provision	Capacity	Status
Hartwood House	Short breaks for children with SEN and disabilities		Operational – Direct Provision
Trevone House	Supported Accommodation for Care Leavers	19 beds	Operational – third party provider mgt. and staffing
Trevone House	CQC-registered wellbeing suites	2 beds	Operational – third party provider mgt. and staffing
LR	Children's Home	8 Beds	Mobilising – direct GCC care provision
BW	Children's Home	2 Beds	Mobilising – direct GCC care provision
RR	Children's Home	4 beds	Mobilising – direct GCC care provision
SF	Supported Accommodation for Care Leavers	19	Initial design and scoping complete, building refurbishment underway
4 <sup>th</sup> CH	Children's Home	4/5 beds	TBC

8.4 Mobilising all 4 children's homes by 2025 will provide around 18-20% of our residential requirements based on anticipated needs. It has also involved recruiting and embedding a new workforce of registered general managers, deputy managers and residential support workers, which is now well advanced. The homes will fall under the leadership of the Assistant Director (Specialist Services) who also has responsibility for permanence services. Edge of care and early help provision will ensure a co-ordinated family first approach to activity. Management and staff will also receive support from health colleagues and the Social Work Academy to deliver a trauma informed relational model of care.

8.5 Ensuring the right children benefit from the in-house accommodation and enabling step down to foster care, kinship care and reunification for those children whose permanence plan is not residential care, will be critical success factors. In achieving this, we will build on the arrangements we have developed for matching and move on from our supported accommodation - **Trevone House**. This involves monthly panels reviewing young people with their LCS social workers, personal advisors, and the Trevone Team. Clear time scales are agreed for move on plans, care, and pathway planning, supported by regular panel reviews to keep actions on



track, with a dedicated worker managing the panel process. Because of the collaborative work across commissioning, brokerage, and our partner provider there are rarely vacancies in Trevone House, which was recently reviewed and commended by Ofsted and rated as Good by the Care Quality Commission.

8.6 The effectiveness of the in-house provision in improving outcomes for children and delivering value for money will be key determinants in deciding whether the programme extends into a second phase. Our second in-house Supported Accommodation site will begin to mobilise over the course of 2025/26.

## **9.0 Commissioning**

9.1 Gloucestershire County Council has established a joint commissioning approach with the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) bringing together social care and health commissioners from across both organisations. Strategic direction and oversight are provided by a Joint Commissioning Partnership Executive comprising of the ICB Chief Executive Officer, Gloucestershire County Council's Director Adult Social Services and Director Children Services.

Our Children's Services Commissioning Team has recently been restructured under a new post of Director of Children's Commissioning and Partnerships with the twin aims of ensuring that commissioning activity has a direct link to senior leadership and that the interface between social care practice and commissioning is effective and well understood.

9.2 Our previous Sufficiency Strategy Home@theHeart highlighted the scarcity of placement provision as a continuing concern for children's services, both in containing costs and meeting the needs of children. In doing so it placed particular emphasis on capacity and the bricks and mortar of our emerging in-house provision.

This will continue to provide the backcloth to this revised strategy as whilst gains have been made by our commissioning service, parts of the market remain 'provider led' and characterised by limited supply, high demand, and the sharp inflationary pressures. The largest proportion of residential children's homes are provided by the for-profit sector (80%), with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) providing 19% of placements in England and Wales.

9.3 Costs charged to local authorities for private sector children's homes increased by 40% in 2019 (National Centre for Excellence in Residential Childcare) and have continued to rise year on year running alongside the increase in living costs. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) review of private social care provision (2022), and Oxford University's (OU) research into the quality of provision in this sector offer key findings in this respect. The Children's Homes Association (CHA) State of the Sector Spring 2023 Survey adds to the evidence base albeit from a provider perspective.

9.4 In summary, the CMA and OU reports indicate that the expected quality and cost benefits that should follow from an effectively operating competitive market are not evident. In contrast, there are greater risks of inflated and inflating costs and

poor quality. The CHA report reaches a similar conclusion 'that this is not a market that could be described as well functioning' although they attribute this to different causes, including 'outdated local authority procurement arrangements.'

Taken together, the findings have significant implications for local authority budgets and the quality of care for children. Moreover, while the introduction of regulation for the supported accommodation sector is welcome and offers quality improvements, it is also likely to impact on availability and cost.

9.5 Working closely with 15 other southwest (SW) local authorities we contributed to the development of a **Southwest Market Position Statement**<sup>8</sup> which provides a comprehensive picture of demand and supply in the region as the basis for future commissioning at local authority, sub regional and regional levels. The market position very much aligns with the findings of the CMA, OU and CHA and outlines a collective commitment towards three key objectives:

- All children placed within 20 miles of their home postcode – unless safeguarding or individual needs prevent this.
- All children have a say in the home they are moving to.
- All children to be placed in the most appropriate provision.

9.6 In order to achieve these objectives, southwest local authorities have committed to the following:

- Greater co-production with providers along with regular engagement events.
- New models of commissioning
- Developing a larger pool of foster carers
- A stronger shared evidence base to inform future commissioning.

9.7 We will continue to engage with regional and sub-regional commissioning arrangements where these align with our strategy and improve outcomes for children. We participate in the SW **Residential Children Homes Framework**, which has recently been extended until March 2026 and **Independent Foster Care Framework** also concludes in March 2026, albeit with option for a further 2 yr. extension. After careful consideration have withdrawn from the **SW Dynamic Purchasing System for Supported Accommodation (16 yrs. plus)** and develop a multi-supplier **Open Supported Accommodation Framework Agreement** on a Gloucestershire basis, commencing April 2025.

9.8 Our **Compliance and Quality Assurance Team (CQAT)** based within Joint Commissioning continues to develop its role to ensure commissioned providers deliver good quality care in accordance with the council's requirements. Work is ongoing to develop CQAT activity alongside **Advocacy** and **Independent Visiting** to ensure senior leadership have an authentic appreciation of children's lived experience within in-house and commissioned homes.

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<sup>8</sup> South West Market Position Statement for Fostering, children's residential care and independent special schools.

**10.0 Universal, targeted and specialist services to meet children's health, educational, psycho-social, and cultural needs.**

10.1 The support of universal, targeted and specialist services are key to ensuring we improve the situation and long-term outcomes for children in care and those leaving care. This includes children progressing to live independently, reunification and step down to foster care.

10.2 As the council has progressed the development of its in-house provision we have worked closely with health and education partners to ensure that the children who will live in these homes have the wrap around support they need to thrive. Building on the learning from our CAMHS support for foster carers we have developed an **enhanced health offer for staff, children and families accessing our in-house accommodation**. The offer comprises 3 key elements:

- Therapeutic support for residential care staff to enable them to deliver trauma informed care for children.
- Direct health support for children placed in our in-house children's homes.
- CAMHS – Functional Family Therapy.

As we seek to increase the proportion of children placed in county we aim to expand this health support accordingly.

10.3 Our **Virtual School (VS)** provides effective leadership of the education offer for children in care and, in accordance with the extended duties, supports all children with an allocated social worker. Recent developments in the Virtual School include the embedding of the EPEP, greatly enhancing the quality and consistency of joint working between partners, participation in a DfE pilot for Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus and ongoing involvement with the Rees Centre, Oxford University research on the impact of PEP quality for post 16 learners.

10.4 Our most recent academic year (2023/24) data shows that 95% of early years children had an up-to-date Personal Education Plan (EPEP), 96% up to Yr11 and 94% for post 16yrs. 67% of EPEPs for new to care children were completed within 20 days. Internal auditing and quality checking shows that between 96-97% of EPEPs met required standards. Attendance for primary children was 95% and 85% for secondary over the 2023/24 academic year. We continue apply the child in care protocol for permanent exclusions and have had zero permanent exclusions for Children in Care since 2007/08 academic year. 16.4 % of children had a suspension over the 2023/24, a 1.5% increase compared to the previous academic year. 83 children in care experienced a change in school placement, a marginal increase (0.4%) over the previous academic year.

10.5 Our current **VS Development Plan** is focussed on several core issues highlighted through our data and self-evaluation. These include educational progress, the quality and consistency of EPEPs, improving attendance and inclusion (reducing suspensions) and the delivery of high-quality training for education providers. Alongside the enhanced health offer set out above, we have dedicated an officer from the Virtual School to support our in-house provision.

## 11.0 Securing continuity of accommodation/support beyond 18 yrs. of age

11.1 The final elements of our Leaving Care Service (LCS) – **Housing Advice and Youth Support** – returned to the council in October 2024 having previously been contracted to Prospects (Shaw Trust). This ensures that action is taken to reduce eviction and support tenancies, with evidence this prevents notices to quit for young people. Our newly formed leaving care service allocates personal advisers to work with children and young people from the age of 16. Working alongside the child's social worker, our children in care social workers and leaving care personal advisers know their children and young people well and hold positive relationships. We are in contact with the vast majority of our care leavers, including regular face-to-face meetings to ensure we have a good appreciation of their situation, needs, and preferences.

11.2 The majority of our care experienced young people (90.5%) have an up-to-date pathway plan, although we know more work is needed to improve this. We are in touch with 96% of all care experienced young people. If care leavers have not been in touch with us we are active in attempting to engage these young people to establish their welfare., including via third party professionals. The majority of care leavers (93.1%) were in suitable accommodation at the end of September, and high-risk planning meetings are in place for any care leavers at risk of homelessness.,

11.3 Gloucestershire is a two-tier county with the six district councils acting as the housing authority for their respective localities. To ensure we have consistency of provision and avoid a post code lottery for care leavers we have developed a **Joint protocol for the provision of accommodation for care leavers in Gloucestershire**, which is in the final stages of approval by each authority. The protocol outlines how Gloucestershire County Council and its six partner District Housing Authorities will work together to support care leavers as they transition from placements funded by Gloucestershire County Council to independent living.

11.4 The Joint Protocol acknowledges that the journey from care can often be challenging for young people, and the degree of success can have an impact on their outcomes well beyond early adulthood. Consequently, it sets out the following aims and objectives:

- To ensure all care leavers achieve a successful transition into independent living through support, preparation, and the provision of suitable accommodation
- To jointly assess and meet the diverse housing and support needs of young people leaving care, through the application of a clear and consistent process
- To ensure young people are not subjected to numerous assessment processes, and that they do not have to negotiate their way through the range of agencies.
- To jointly ensure that all staff are aware of the housing needs of young people leaving care and the obligations of each partner agency to address these needs. This will include on-going joint training, a robust induction process and opportunities for shadowing.

- To minimise the use of the homeless route by awarding priority status to care leavers on local housing allocations policies, at the time a young person is ready (as outlined in the Pathway Plan).
- To provide clear guidelines on the management of difficult tenancies which will include contingency arrangements.
- To provide clear guidelines on the management of difficult tenancies which will include contingency arrangements.
- To ensure that the accommodation needs of young people leaving custody are appropriately planned
- To identify gaps in service provision for young people and to work together with other partner agencies to address these gaps feeding information into the relevant strategies.

11.5 We will ensure that accommodation provided for care leavers is safe and suitable<sup>9</sup> for their needs. All accommodation arrangements will be based on a thorough assessment of the young person's need which includes ascertaining their wishes, feelings, and aspirations, including:

**Staying Put:** Gloucestershire County Council has a staying put offer for care leavers in foster placements, up until the age of 21 years, with the discretion to extend this where the needs of the young person require it. The allocated social worker will ensure staying put is discussed during their review to ensure young people and foster carers understand the process and any possible financial implications of a staying put arrangement. We currently have **36** young people in a staying put arrangement, and **6** others now aged 21yrs+ who we no longer financially support.

**Staying Close, Staying Connected:** Gloucestershire County Council is committed to offering a staying close arrangement for young people living in residential care where this is possible and whilst moving through supported accommodation and into a tenancy. All requests will be made via the 16+ Panel. We currently have **45** young people being supported to Stay Close.

**Supported Lodgings:** Gloucestershire County Council are currently developing a Supported Lodgings scheme; requests for supported lodgings will be made via the 16+ Panel. We have our first Supported Lodgings host in preparation, and are waiting for Ofsted registration, and we are currently assessing a number of other potential hosts.

**Semi-independent accommodation:** There are a variety of supported accommodation types in Gloucestershire. Ranging from self-contained spaces within a supported setting or with visiting support, through to accommodation with shared facilities; levels of support also vary and can be tailored to the needs of the young person. The Youth Housing Advice Service works closely with the Leaving Care Service and provides information on the range, location and availability of accommodation options for young people over the age of 18. To access this

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<sup>9</sup> Children Act 1989 Care Planning guidance, volume 2 (pages 74-80) and volume 3 (7.12-7.18)

provision the allocated social worker or personal adviser must complete a START Application Form with the young person.

**Living with family, friends, or relatives:** For some young people it might be the right option to return to living with family members or friends. Where young people choose to live with family, consideration should be given to the support that might be needed, this could include for example, convening a Family Meeting or Family Group Conference to ensure plans are developed that family members and the young person own. Joint working will still be necessary and provided where longer-term housing need remains.

**Social Housing:** All young people who are assessed as ready for independent living will be eligible to apply for social housing. The waiting time will vary in each area and so the young person's pathway plan will need to reflect this, along with what will happen if the young person needs to move on from their current home before a property is secured.

## 12.0 The Views of our Children in Care and Care Leavers

- 12.1 The views of our children and young people are an essential element within our improvement journey, including the refresh of this sufficiency strategy. We employ a number of care-experienced young people as Ambassadors who work with Children's Social Care across all aspects of our provision, but with a particular emphasis on our support for children in care and care leavers. Currently we have around 15 Ambassadors who work with Senior Leadership to develop an annual programme of activity. An annual report on Ambassador activity is provided to SLT and the Corporate Parenting Group.
- 12.2 We are incredibly proud of all our children and young people and our Ambassadors in particular who are at the heart of all improvement activity, from recruitment to mentoring Senior Leaders, including the DCS, case file auditing, and playing a leading role in specific improvement programmes, such as promoting 'Language that Cares' and purposeful visiting, informed by their own experiences and those of the wider population of children in care and care leavers.



Both projects aim to enhance our child-centred practice, with their contribution to case file audits testing impact on practice and considering how well the voice of the child is captured and Language that Cares used.

- 12.3 Ambassadors have made a significant contribution to the design and 'fit out' of our partner delivered supported accommodation - Trevone House, and the initial tranche of in-house children's homes. They also shared in April with the Corporate Parenting Group their experiences of being in care and moving on, moving back home and moving apart from siblings. Recent consultation has involved a positive

discussion about the preferred use of 'placements' or 'homes' within our practice and documents.

For some children this doesn't matter, for some it matters a great deal and for some, 'home' is only where their birth family lives; for others, the impermanence experienced through instability means they feel unable to trust that their current setting will be their 'home.' For others, the term 'home' is very dear to them, and they value the place and people that make it so and rail against the institutional language of 'placements' and 'accommodation'. What is important is that we work sensitively, checking with children about the terms they prefer and that we work to deliver the loving, stable homes that all our children deserve, with adults they can trust.

12.4 In developing this latest version of the Sufficiency Strategy, a dedicated consultation event was convened with Ambassadors resulting in a range of helpful suggestions/observations which will inform our approach to sufficiency going forward:

- Of all the protective factors discussed, consistently the most prominent for the young people was **friendship**. This was expressed through multiple lenses with many different facets of the importance of friendship being reinforced.
- The second most prominent point of feedback relates to **consistency and stability** of home, education, worker, adults.
- **Well-trained, high-quality staff** who recognise the uncertainty in which many children in care are living (and perhaps have come from) and the importance of consistency, reliability and being available and for our children. Emotional and mental wellbeing needs are regular.
- **Clear and consistent boundary setting** and maintenance with care, warmth, and kindness. Carers that understand that all the moves and instability experienced by the child will come out somewhere and very often in their behaviour. This requires carers who equipped to understand this generally and specifically for each child.
- Practical assistance during **periods of transition** - helping with moves out, moves across, and moves in. Providing opportunities for children to familiarise themselves with where everything is, how it works and what the rules and conventions are. **Changes of education setting** were also highlighted and the potential for a child to retain their previous school place.
- Supporting children/young people to engage in **Education, Training and Employment** needs adults (including teachers) who will connect, inspire, motivate, and are persistent (but not forceful).

12.5 While recognising the commitment of the partnership to children in care and care leavers, young people felt that more work is needed to formalise the sampling of children's views and measure the impact of our offer. They suggested the **adoption of a target of 80% plus 'satisfied or better'** based on regular child level feedback and reported as part of quality and performance framework.

### **13.0 The views of Care Providers**

13. When children cannot reasonably live with their family (nuclear or extended) then we utilise foster carers, residential children's homes and supported accommodation as needed.
- 13.2 Through dedicated consultation about this Sufficiency Strategy with these providers of care they have highlighted the following:
  - **Increasing capacity for foster care for adolescents** due to the perceived challenges in supporting this group. Suggested solutions included: promoting positive aspects of caring for teenagers; equipping carers with realistic expectations and boundaries; and developing a strong support network for carers of teens, including flexible and reliable support channels (including an experienced 'buddy' system).
  - **Support for Stability** that addresses disruptions like school exclusion and family time arrangements and offers swift and responsive stability meetings and support structures preventing burnout and breakdowns in placements.
  - **Commissioned services** noted improved communication, quicker decision-making, and the benefit of a designated contact in brokerage. A shift toward increasingly relational commissioning is seen positively, leading to a decrease in placement breakdowns and a stronger Staying Put program. Further improvement could be made in the quality of risk information provided and faster responses for funding adjustments (uplift requests).
  - In-house and commissioned providers noted a **reduced interest in fostering** post-COVID, coupled with challenges such as increased demands from carers, financial expectations, and personal constraints, have together led to a shortage of foster carers willing to take on a variety of placements. The council could map existing placements to identify low-uptake areas for targeted recruitment. IFAs and in-house fostering services are further encouraged to collaborate rather than compete to ensure a sustainable carer pool.
  - **Educational stability** is deemed as crucial, especially when a child is placed out of the area without a secured school placement. A lack of interim support for children awaiting a confirmed school place can place considerable strain on carers.

### **14.0 Progress against previous Strategy and Key Priorities for 2025 – 2028.**

- 14.1 As set out earlier, our previous sufficiency strategy Home@theHeart was necessarily weighted towards capacity building, and particularly the mobilisation of a number of surplus council properties as children's homes alongside additional supported accommodation, the latter building on our experience with **Trevone House**. As we move forward to mobilise, this strategy places a strong emphasis on safeguarding practice, care and permanence planning, and partner co-operation, alongside a continuing focus on capacity building.
- 14.2 Mobilising the additional in-house capacity set out in our previous Sufficiency Strategy has been challenging for a combination of reasons. A significant number of local authorities are moving in this direction, as a response to the market conditions highlighted earlier in this strategy. Consequently, recruitment has taken place against a background of high demand and limited supply. Considerable

progress has now been made with our first tranche of management and staff recruited and more to follow, alongside the registration of the first two children's homes with Ofsted.

14.3 The table below provides a brief overview of progress with the previous strategy **Homes@theHeart 2022/26**.

**Table 2: Progress against previous Strategy Homes@theHeart**

Key Theme	Actions	Progress
<b>My Home</b>	Single Pathway for Searches	There is now a single pathway in place for all placement searches, integrated within the Liquid Logic database for children.
	One Page Profile	A working group has developed a one-page profile which will be launched imminently.
	Improve stability	Placement stability although improved remains a key priority.
	Increasing Staying Close/Staying Put	Our use of Staying Put and Staying Close is increasing. Our first Supported Lodgings is currently undergoing registration with more to follow.
	Increase in-house fostering capacity	In house foster care capacity has remained broadly static.
<b>Home Life</b>	Bring new homes into operation	The first two in-house are in the final stages of mobilisation. The third is in the final design and refurbishment phase – final site to be determined.
	Trauma informed model of care	Residential workforce recruitment underway. Support for staff to deliver trauma informed care from health and SWA.
	Compliance and Quality Assurance Team (CQAT)	The role of CQAT continues to develop.
<b>Home Design</b>	Design and fit out of in-house children's homes.	First two homes largely complete.
		Consultation is ongoing with Children on the design and fit out of our homes.

14.4 Taking account of the breadth of the sufficiency duty, the fragility and risk aversion of the provider market, along with the views our children and young people, partners, and stakeholders, we have taken a pragmatic and realistic approach to what we can achieve over the life of this strategy. Consequently, we have focussed on a small number of priorities and related actions that we believe will have a positive impact on outcomes for children in care and those leaving care:

- **Adopting a family first approach** – placing an emphasis on children remaining with the partners, actively exploring kinship care (inclusive of the use of FGC), then foster care, with residential only for the most complex/vulnerable of children.
- **Improving placement stability.**
- **Increasing the capacity and quality of our in-house foster care.**
- **Enabling our in-house residential provision to deliver outstanding care.**
- **Developing provision to meet the needs of children with SEN, disabilities and at risk of exploitation.**
- **Enhancing and embedding our Care Leavers Protocol.**

14.4 The **Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan** attached to this strategy provides greater detail on the actions necessary to deliver on each priority and will be kept under regular review to ensure we are making progress, acting as necessary to address any barriers or under performance.

## **15.0 Delivery and Oversight**

15.1 The **Children and Young Peoples Coalition** and **Corporate Parenting Group** will provide for regular strategic oversight of progress against this strategy acting as might be necessary to address any underperformance. Beneath that our locality partners will ensure that links with our family hubs are robust with our various case discussion forums used to ensure we provide the right service to the right child, at the right time.

15.2 This Strategy will be subject to formal review on an annual basis, including seeking the views and input of children, families, partners, and providers on its impact.

15.3 At an operational level our **Independent Reviewing Service** has a vital role play in relation to individual children impacted by sufficiency issues. We have recently revised the escalation policy and are asking the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to use their influence to escalate concerns when it is not possible to resolve them quickly on a professional-to-professional basis, thus applying some pressure to the commissioning function and alerting senior leaders to gaps and themes in provision. The IRO annual report provides a further opportunity for the service to look more closely at emerging trends and themes and seek assurance from senior leaders and commissioners about what is required to meet the needs of the care

population. Over the course of this strategy, we will move towards a bi-annual audit of new entrants in to care which will further enhance our appreciation of sufficiency needs and gaps.

15.4 Our use of **disruption meetings** is a further area of development, with a project currently in place to look at both the support we provide to placements under pressure, and the ways in which we can learn from placements which sadly end. This work is overseen by the **Corporate Parenting Group** and involves close collaboration between operational and fostering teams, as well as thinking about how we engage more effectively with independent providers of residential care and fostering services.

## 16.0 Conclusions

16.1 Gloucestershire County Council has embarked on an **ambitious programme** of developing its own children's homes, supported accommodation and specialist provision. In making this a success for children, we have recognised the need to co-ordinate a wider range of universal, targeted and specialist services to both support the emerging offer and deliver our sufficiency duty on a family first basis. It also acknowledges that additional capacity, in the absence of a 'whole system' approach, will be insufficient to meet the needs of our children in an affordable sustainable and child centred manner.

16.2 The challenging market conditions highlighted by successive studies are unlikely to be resolved in the short to medium term. As such it is essential for local authorities and their safeguarding partners to take an initiative-taking approach, working collaboratively at local, sub regional and regional levels. This revised strategy and action plan set out Gloucestershire's determined response to the challenges we face in the interests of our children at risk of care, in care and leaving care.



## 17.0 Appendices

### Appendix 1 Sufficiency Action Plan

Priority	Actions	Target date / timescale	Owner(s)
<b>Priority 1</b>  <b>A Family First Approach to Sufficiency.</b>	1.1: Review partnership threshold document, with emphasis on level 4 response to exploitation.	July 2025	Emma Trigwell and Claire Connelly.
	1.2: Review and streamline the range of family support activities and review locality partnerships.	Nov 2025	Dan Jones / Julie M
	1.3 Develop a range of support to prevent CYP to come into care; i.e. maximise the use of the Family Meeting Service, edge of care, reunification etc..	Nov 2025	Emma Trigwell
	1.4 Develop and implement a Gloucestershire Kinship Carer Strategy.	June 2025	Tammy Wheatley
<b>Priority 2</b>  <b>Placement Stability.</b>	2.1 Develop a structured approach to learning from disruptions and breakdowns to inform future practice.	Aug 2025	Dan J
	2.2 Develop a programme of regular provider engagement and feedback	June 2025	Rob England Caroline Spamer, & Holly Beaman

	2.3 Reduce suspensions, exclusions from education .	Aug 2025	Kirsten Harrison Phil Haslett
	2.4 Reduce cross-country moves. Sufficiency of education provision	Jan 2026	Jane F / Mark B
	2.5 Increase our use of third party in-county provision.	Nov 2026	Rob England Caroline Spamer
	2.6 Revise our IRO escalation policy with an emphasis on children impacted by Sufficiency issues.	July 2025	Sarah Leonard
	2.7 Proportionate use of residential care	June 2025	Sam Haines / Rob E / Dan J
	2.8 Improve panel framework to ensure better recording and consistent clarity of process	June 2025	Rob E / Paul S / Caroline S/Dan J
<b>Priority 3</b> <b>Increasing the quality and capacity of our foster care offer.</b>	3.1 Complete the roll out of training for SW, Carers and Panel Members on therapeutic model of care.	July 2025	Tammy Wheatley / Vivien / Practice Educator in SWA
	3.2 Expand our network of Mockingbird Clusters/Constellations to ensure we have one in each district over the life of this strategy.	Aug 2025	Tammy Wheatley
	3.3 Increase our in-house foster care capacity by a net 10 places and increase utilisation of foster carers	July 2025	Tammy Wheatley

	3.4 Develop specialist fostering places	Aug 2025	Dan J / Rob E
	3.5 Develop a Fostering capital improvement scheme	July 2025	Tammy Wheatley
<b>Priority 4</b> <b>Enabling our in-house residential provision to deliver outstanding care.</b>	4.1 Mobilise 4 in-house children's homes.	December 2025	Dan Jones /Rob England
	4.2 Roll out training for Mgrs. and residential support staff on a trauma informed and therapeutic model of care.	April 2025	RI / Dan J
	4.3 Implement wrap around health and virtual school support for in house provision.	April 2025	Dan J / Jane Featherstone / Health lead
<b>Priority 5</b> <b>Developing provision to meet the needs of children in care with SEN, Disability, and those at risk of exploitation.</b>	5.1 Continue to develop our Respite Provision.	Aug 2025	Naomie / Julie
	5.2 Revision of Short Breaks Contract	March 2026	Hannah Chester / Rob E
	5.3 Improved response to Harm outside of home	July 2025	Dan J
	5.4 Improved support to CYP with Mental Health, self harm and challenging behaviours	April 2026	Rob E / Dan J

<b>Priority 6</b>  <b>Enhancing and Embedding our Care Leavers Protocol.</b>	6.1 Agree and implement the Joint Protocol with the 6 District Councils	July 2025	Mark Bone
	6.2. Develop our Supported Lodgings Scheme.	Aug 2025	Tammy Wheatley
	6.3. Continue to grow and develop our Staying Put and Staying Close arrangements.	March 2026	Tammy Wheatley Mark Bone
	6.4 Mobilise a second, in-county Supported accommodation unit.	December 2025	Rob England Ann James Dan J
	6.5 Increase accommodation to post 18 , incl care leavers and those without leave to remain, including CABs beds	Aug 2025	Caroline S



**Home@theHeart**

 Gloucestershire  
COUNTY COUNCIL