

Knowsley Children's Social Care Operational Procedures Manual

Sufficiency Needs Assessment for Children



1. What is the Sufficiency Duty?

Each Local Authority providing children's services must ensure that they take strategic action in respect to providing Children Looked After accommodation in their local area. Knowsley take this requirement from Section 22G of the 1989 children act seriously, so far as reasonably practicable, to provide sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children that it is looking after and children whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation in the local authority area. This is referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'.

The sufficiency duty, therefore, applies in respect of all children who are **Looked After**. However, it also applies to **Children in Need** who are at risk of care or custody (sometimes referred to as children 'on the edge of care'). This acknowledges the importance - both for improving outcomes for children and in having sufficient accommodation to meet their needs - of taking earlier, preventive action to support children and families so that fewer children become Looked After.

From April 2010, local authorities had to include in relevant commissioning strategies their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.

From April 2011, working with their Children's Trust partners, local authorities must be in a position to carry out the sufficiency duty.

In securing sufficient accommodation Knowsley consider a wide range of needs and work together with partner services, such as education and health.

2. The Most Appropriate Placement

We believe in Knowsley that children should not be moved from out of authority placements for the sole purpose of meeting the sufficiency duty if their needs are being met by the existing range of services. We have a dedicated ART (Access to Resources Team) who work closely with our fostering, provider and commissioning services.

The Access to Resources (ART) Team has the role in ensuring that we secure sufficient accommodation that will meet the needs of Knowsley children and families. This is in order to improve that children live closely (where practicably possible) to their families and that they then

reach better outcomes as Children Looked After. The ART service meets with providers in the area to ensure they understand our remit and the needs of children to forecast and provide suitable placements on demand.

The overriding factor is that the placement must be the most appropriate placement available. Next, preference must be given to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a placement must be found, so far as reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:

- Is near the child's home
- Does not disrupt his/her education or training
- Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling
- Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child
- Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

There is no order of priority within the categories listed in the bullet points above. The matching of placements is taken seriously and apart of ensuring children's needs are paired with the abilities and suitability of placement.

All of the factors need to be taken into account. For example, if placing a child within his/her area conflicted with placing him or her near home or with a sibling, or which disrupted their education, the local authority could justifiably placing the child out of area if this met his/her needs more effectively than a placement within the area.

For the majority of Children Looked After, the 'most appropriate placement' will be within the local authority area. For those children who require highly specialist services, or children for whom there is a safeguarding issue, it may be more appropriate for them to be placed in a neighbouring local authority area.

When making decisions about the most appropriate placements for children requiring more specialised provision, the issue of proximity to the home area must be considered, alongside the other factors set above. Wherever possible, children requiring such provision should be placed as close to their existing family networks and support systems as is possible and appropriate.

If challenged by a child, family, social worker, Children's Guardian, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) or other advocate, a local authority should be in a position to demonstrate how, working with its Children Trust partners, it has done all that is reasonably practicable to secure sufficiency. Plans should be documented and published, within the commissioning strategy or the Children and Young People's Plan, to allow scrutiny and challenge.

3. How can 'Reasonably Practicable' be Assessed?

The sufficiency duty is a general duty that applies to strategic arrangements rather than to the provision of accommodation for a particular, individual child. Local authorities must be able to show that - at strategic level - they are taking steps to meet the sufficiency duty, so far as is 'reasonably practicable'.

It should not be assumed that it is 'not reasonably practicable' to secure appropriate accommodation simply because it is difficult to do so or because the authority does not have the resources to do so. Any constraining factors should not be taken as permanent constraints on the local authority's requirements to comply with the sufficiency duty.

In assessing whether they are doing all that is 'reasonably practicable' to secure sufficiency, there are a number of factors which local authorities, working with their Children's Trust partners, may wish to take into account, for example:

- Current progress within an effective, phased programme to meet the sufficiency duty
- The number of children for whom a local placement is not consistent with their needs and welfare
- The extent to which local universal services meet needs
- The state of the local market for accommodation, including the level of demand in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists
- The degree to which they are actively managing this market
- The resources available to, and capabilities of, accommodation providers (where 'resources' means not just the available funding but also staff and premises, and 'capabilities' includes experience and expertise)
- The Children's Trust's resources, capabilities and overall budget priorities.

4. Knowsley Sufficiency Strategy

Knowsley's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy sets out our overall approach to Children Looked After in the authority. It establishes the principles and values that govern our approach to these children and young people, including our corporate parenting role and gives details of how we intend to develop the service. There are 5 priorities for 2018-20:

- i. Leaving care accommodation
- ii. Edge of care services
- iii. Increase in house fostering provision
- iv. Residential services
- v. Children Looked After demand management.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy, and also the Children Looked After Charter, published by the Make a Difference Everywhere group (MADE).

Overall the local children looked after population had seen an increase from 2015. However numbers have been steady in 2017 from as low as 259 up to around 290 children looked after by Knowsley Borough Council. Over the next two years it is expected that the children in care population will remain steady. There has been investment into Edge of Care provisions that should

provide more support and intervention to reduce the number of adolescents entering the care system.

Knowsley continues to take sufficiency serious and endeavours to place children in the local area where possible. We aim to ensure that all children who require accommodation are provided with a permanent placement within the quickest timescales to maximise stability and success.

Our priorities continue to be the development of preventative services for those children on the edge of care; this is being completed from a holistic approach of services such as family support, edge of care respite home and MST services.

Knowsley had appointed a Recruitment and Marketing coordinator for the fostering service, this has allowed for more specialist and targeted approaches to gaining new foster carers. We continue to wish to increase our in house fostering provision particularly for all children sibling groups and those with complex needs and for teenagers. Within this there is also a proposed restructure to divide the fostering services of mainstream and Family and friends / Special Guardians in order to provide a more bespoke service.

Priority will also be given to developing residential provision and plans will be considered alongside demand management plans for residential services.

The final priority is in relation to sufficiency for 2018-2020 is to improve the services provided to our care leavers and in particular the leaving care accommodation, working with the local housing providers in order to secure suitable housing and support.

Sufficiency is monitored in Knowsley via the Sufficiency working group, corporate parenting board and other strategic and or members meetings.

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