



# Children Looked After Placement and Fostering

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Sufficiency and Commissioning  
Strategy for 2022 to 2024



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# Executive Summary

The Bromley Children Looked After Placement Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy presents how the Council intends to meet its 'Sufficiency Duty' set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, 'to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area'.

While the duty, literally, refers to sufficient placements within a local authority area, in practice London boroughs and many county authorities are unable to provide for all needs within local authority boundaries. The overriding consideration, therefore, is to place children looked after, wherever possible and appropriate, as near to their home areas as possible to enable them to retain important familial and social links and education provision. As at the end of March 2022 15% of our children were placed out of Bromley more than 20 miles from home. This is better than the national average and our statistical neighbors (21%). We have worked hard to bring our children closer to home, when it is in their best interest.

The 2010 guidance on the 'sufficiency duty' states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty. The sufficiency duty must take account of the requirement, under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989, that the overriding consideration for placing a child is that the placement must be the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs.

In this document we have:

- Set out **Bromley's Placement Sufficiency and Commissioning vision and approach** to providing secure, safe and appropriate placements which meet the needs of our children
- Informed our sufficiency intentions and medium-term financial strategy with **demand management analysis** and long-term forecast of placement requirements
- We have reflected on **feedback from our children, cost pressures, market challenges, gaps and opportunities** to achieve our placement sufficiency needs

Understanding demand, we know our children and understand their needs. We are continuing to invest in detailed 'demand management' analysis to inform our understanding of our pressures. We use these to ensure that our budgets have these pressures built in. We also understand that our pressures are two-fold, the numbers and types of placements and the cost of placements.

## During 2021-22

- we took **453 children** into care,
- we accommodated them in **637 placements**,
- we procured **15,535 weeks** of placement provision.

An analysis of all placement types and duration, by age (2021-22) has informed our specific commissioning intentions for the next two years (2022-24). We have purposefully chosen to assume forward our placement commissioning needs from one year of data only (2021-22), the key reasons for this are as follows; we know that 2020-21, the first Covid year, brought with it an unusual level of placement stability (7% with 3 moves or more during 2020-21). We had fewer disruptions and breakdowns during this period, therefore the numbers of placements required would be an underrepresentation of likely need moving forward, this is validated by our 2021-22 performance (3 moves or more 10.7%). We also know through our audits and management oversight that the

complexity of case work we are seeing now (during 2021-22) is greater than we have seen before, it is therefore most likely that the presentation of placement needs, and disruptions seen in 2021-22 will carry forward into the next two years.

Our analysis allows **us to strategically commission the right mix or “menu” of high-quality placements and wrap around support** to meet identified needs of children looked after and care leavers as cost effectively as possible.

We have the highest ambitions for our children as corporate parents, we judge our success by a range of criteria including providing or commissioning services or settings which are independently judged good or outstanding, demonstrating that the views and ambitions of children and young people have informed and improved our services and strengthening our work with children and families to prevent an escalation of need and risk.

Accommodating children and young people in the type and range of placements that are best suited to their current and on-going needs is vital to improving outcomes and shaping their adult lives.

This document sets out our approach to securing a sufficiency of placements. It provides a framework for the **proactive activity required to deliver our vision** to obtain high quality placements and placement stability for our children and young people.

# Vision and approach

Bromley Council and partners have refreshed the boroughs corporate strategy “Making Bromley Even Better 2021 – 31”. Our vision is for Bromley to be:

**‘a fantastic place to live and work, where everyone can lead healthy, safe and independent lives’.**

Together we will deliver five ambitions, the first of which is about children and young people.

**‘For children and young people to grow up, thrive and have the best life chances in families who flourish and are happy to call Bromley home.’**

In Bromley we believe in and deliver through partnerships, our ambitious **Children and Young Peoples Plan 2021-2024** is focused on the following priorities:

- ✓ Targeted early intervention and good universal services
- ✓ Safeguarding children and adolescents
- ✓ **Being the best corporate parents**
- ✓ Challenging disproportionality
- ✓ Engaging with children, young people and families

As a Corporate Parent it is our responsibility to ensure that children and young people in our care are safe, have positive experiences and achieve the best possible outcomes in their future lives.

Our ambition to be the “best corporate parents”, is being delivered through our **Corporate Parenting Strategy** monitored by our Corporate Parenting Board.

Our strategies and partnership governance demonstrate a Golden Thread approach.

# Looked After Placement Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy Vision

Through this strategy we are committing to (see further details in action plan):

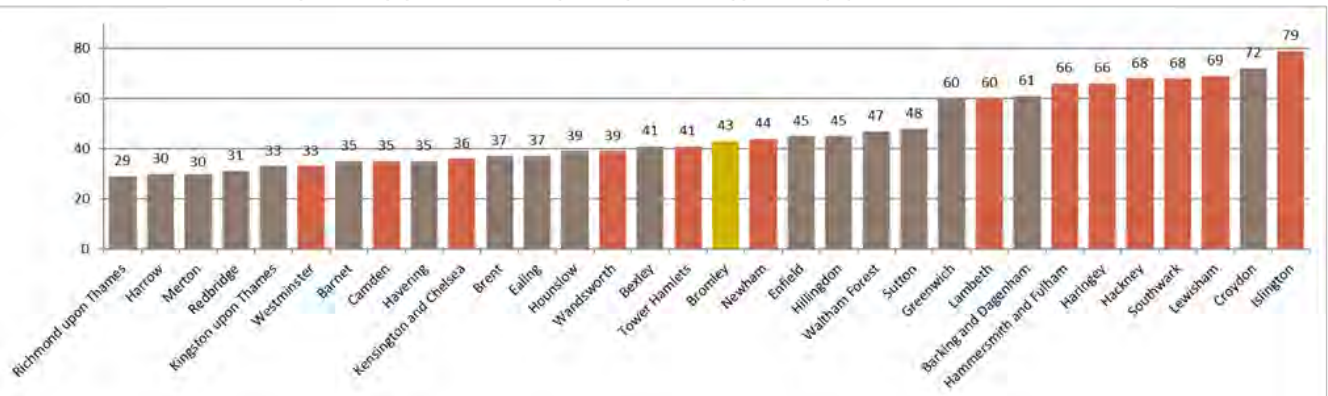
- Ensuring that **children only come into care where this is in their best interests**. If they do come into care, children should without delay achieve **timely and appropriate reunification** with their families, **or alternative permanency**.
- When children need to remain in care, **providing and commissioning the right mix or “menu” of high-quality placements and effective wrap around support** to meet identified needs of children looked after and care leavers as cost effectively as possible.
- Placements will always be sought through our **‘In-house fostering network, as a first preference**, prior to considering services from external providers and includes residential homes, agency foster placements and supported accommodation.
- We will further **grow our In-House Fostering capacity**. By delivering effective recruitment and retention strategies and increasing the capability of internal fostering to **deliver more complex support**.
- Our focus will remain **on quality, ensuring interventions lead to a de-escalation of needs and placement stability** resulting in improved outcomes for children and young people through strengthened: matching processes; placement planning; quality assurance processes; improving support available for carers and professional development opportunities for foster carers.
- We will ensure our **commissioning is needs-led**, with robust procurement and contracting. We will continue to commission through a range of mechanisms to ensure availability, quality and best value of services. We will continue to participate and develop more London (and sub regional) block contracts and provider frameworks where economies of scale can be evidenced and quality sustained. We are also committed to developing our placement service to better utilise and negotiate our ‘menu of placement options’.
- We will work directly with the Children in Care Council (LinCC) and our network for Care Leavers when undertaking commissioning or development activity to **ensure that the views of our children are central to decision making**. We will seek views from Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers to understand the individual needs, wishes and feelings of children and young people when sourcing individual placements.
- We will ensure that our current and **forecasted position of placement needs influences the Councils budget setting processes**, including forecasts of inflation, rates of looked after children and their respective placement needs.
- We will support **young people in care to make a successful transition into adulthood** through the provision of high-quality leaving care services which support care leavers to find and maintain suitable accommodation arrangements that meet their needs and provide them with independent living skills.

# Demand Management Analysis – Children Looked After and Placement forecasts

We are delivering on our vision, **Children only come into care where this is in their best interests.**

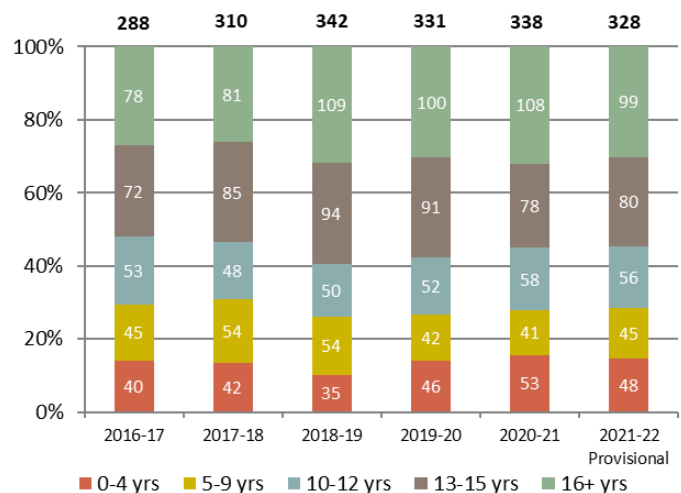
Bromley’s rate per 10,000 (43, 2021-22) of looked after children remains below the England (67) and London (47) averages 2020-21. We place in the middle quartile of all London Boroughs and are in line with the Outer London averages (43).

Chart 3 Rate of Children looked after per 10,000 population in London (2020-21), 2022 Bromley provisional (43).



In absolute terms, our numbers of looked after children have increased as we have improved our practice since 2017 (Ofsted).

Our ‘**new normal**’ number of children looked after **on any given day is between c.330 and c.340** (This includes indigenous and USAC children). These actuals correspond well to a good rate per 10,000 as benchmarked above. Our audits over the last four years have reassured us that our thresholds are correct. On the 31st of March 2022, Bromley was corporate parent to 328 children.



Our robust early years early help offer continues to keep younger children out of the care system, we can evidence a **41% reduction in children aged 5 entering care over the last 5-years.**

**Adolescents.** Over the last four years we have seen an increase in the numbers of adolescents coming into care. This growth pressure is in line with London and National trends. We can attribute some of the increase to experiences of the pandemic, we also know that within our indigenous population we are seeking higher numbers of children in need living within more complex families and growing levels of risk to exploitation and extra-familial harm.

In the last two years we **can evidence some reduction of 13- to 15-year-olds coming to care**, we are attributing this to our Adolescents Strategy and prevention work including the Staying Together Service (targeted interventions for edge of care) and targeted Adolescent Parenting Courses. Our

commissioning intentions are informed by our understanding of the particular pressures facing adolescents.

In the future, we are anticipating that the current cost of living crisis may put additional pressures on families, which could lead to an increase in the number of children who need to come into care. Increased Mental Health issues across both adults and children combined with longer wait times to access services could also see an increase in the number of children who need to come into our care. A major contributor to the increase in mental health issues is the pandemic and health colleagues are putting in additional resources in response to these pressures.

We also know that Asylum Seeking applications were dampened during COVID due to international travel restrictions and may returning to pre-covid levels. It's worth noting that although we are anticipating that unaccompanied children from Ukraine will impact our Private Fostering figures, we are hoping that those children will not experience family breakdowns and come into care. Our substantial 'Bromley Ukraine programme' is working hard to support those children and families along with the Private Fostering Service.

## Indigenous children long-term forecasting

Our annual demand management programme forecasts the likely numbers of **'Indigenous children' into the care system over a five-year period** and informs budget considerations. We know that with effective prevention and edge of care work we are able to influence the numbers of indigenous children coming into care. We also know that with effective social work we can de-escalate and return children home.

The graph below demonstrates that forecasts prepared in March 2019 informed by data from 2015 up to and including March 2019 (see yellow line on graph), indigenous children looked after forecast based on averages of month end. The forecast applied variation in children by age group, population growth and growth factors in children looked after over a five-year period.

The forecast has been updated with actuals from April 2019 to March 2022, see blue line on graph. Despite the significant increased demand pressures during the pandemic (April 2020 to March 2021), the graph shows that indigenous LAC figures have returned to previously forecast figures.

In March 2019 we accurately forecast numbers if indigenous looked after children as of March 2022, within an accuracy margin of two children. This is despite considerable atypical activity during Covid. This is why our sufficiency strategy is able to influence our Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) planning and budgeting.



Indigenous Children looked after (numbers at end of month) and five year forecast based on population growth and age bands

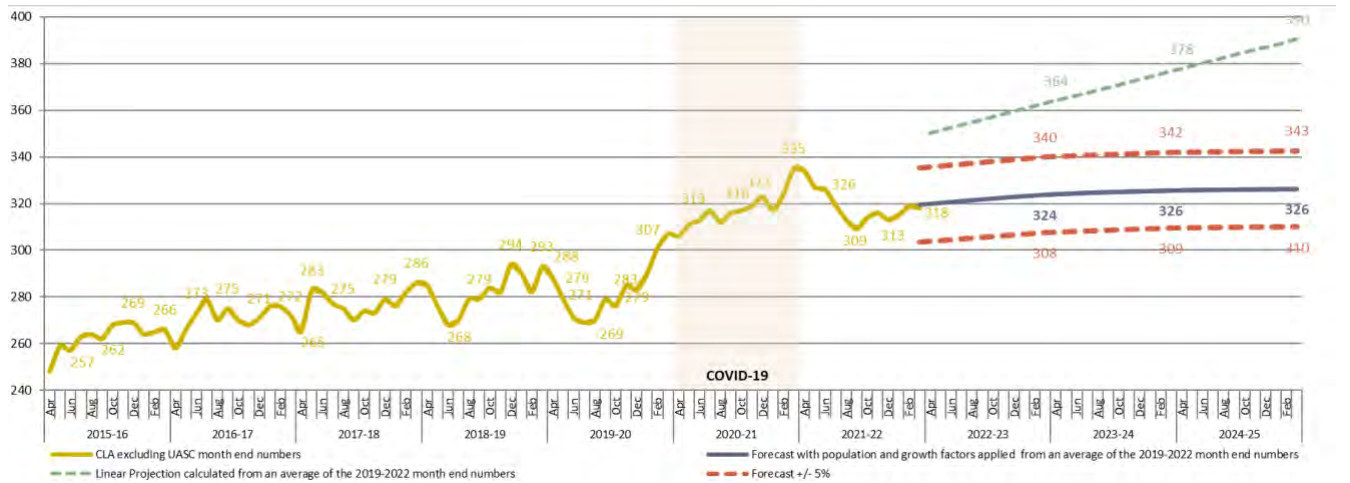


In addition to our indigenous cohort, we know that we should anticipate the placement needs for 10-15 UASC in any given year.

Given the volatility of the last 2 years a revised forecast has been developed and is the preferred model to inform the MTFs 2023/24. Forecasts apply variation in children by age group, population growth and growth factors in children looked after over a three-year period. Linear projection calculated averages of 2019 to 2022, this means the forecast takes into account Covid demand pressures.

This preferred demand model, anticipates 324 indigenous children in care as at March 2023 with a higher forecast of 340 indigenous children in care.

Indigenous Children looked after (numbers at end of month) and three year forecast based on population growth and age bands



In terms of **Ethnicity** 54% of our children are White, 9% Black African, 8% Black Caribbean and 3% are Black other, 20% are from mixed heritage, 3% Asian and 2% other. This means in pure terms we

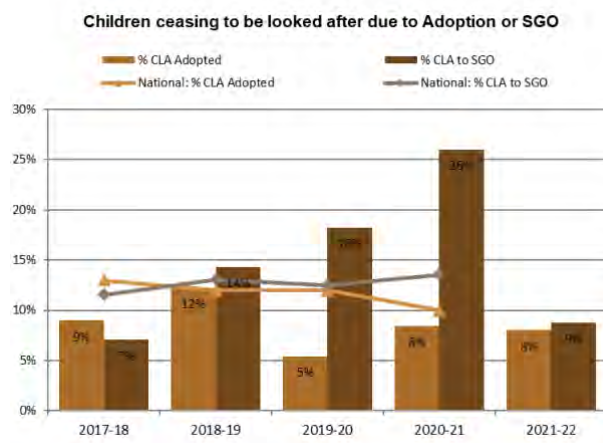
have an under representation of white children, and an over representation of BAME children in the care system. This is being examined across services and within the safeguarding partnership.

Our first preference is to match based on cultural and religious preference where possible. We are working with the BAME community increase our in-house foster carers.

When we do take children in to care, our first preference is to ensure a **timely and appropriate reunification** with their families, during 2020-21 37% returned home to live with a parent or relative or family friend/connected person.

**Our next preference is permanency**, Bromley was the first London borough to be awarded the 'Working towards Quality Mark' in Early Permanence. Delays in the court during the pandemic and in regulations on placing children in SGOs have somewhat slowed our otherwise excellence performance.

We believe that we are **securing placement stability** through strengthened: matching processes; placement planning; quality assurance processes; improving support available for carers and professional development opportunities for foster carers.



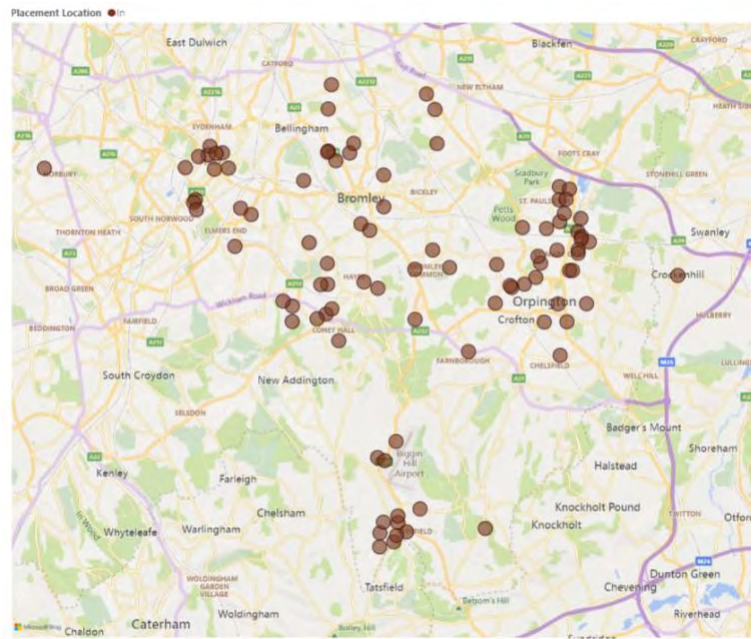
Our children continue to experience placement stability with on average few moves (2021-22, 10.7% with 3 moves or more compared to 9% national) and good long-term placement stability 71% (70% national).

While the sufficiency duty, literally, refers to sufficient placements within a local authority area, in practice London boroughs and many county authorities are unable to provide for all needs within local authority boundaries. As at the end of March 2022 **15% were placed out of Borough more than 20 miles from home**. This is better than the national average and our statistical neighbors (21%). We have worked hard to bring our children closer to home, when it is in their best interest. The overriding consideration is to place children wherever possible and appropriate, as near to their home areas as possible to enable them to retain important familial and social links and education provision.

The Virtual School are involved in placement planning for children and young people. The Virtual School strives to keep children in their current school wherever possible, particularly those at Key Stage 4, and work with foster carers to try to ensure that children are able to travel to their current school even when they have to move to a new placement.

For those that will need a new education provision the Virtual School will work with local Virtual Schools, use the local knowledge of foster carers as well as looking at OFSTED reports to identify suitable schools. The young person would then be encouraged to look at websites and visit suitable schools to have an input into choice, where there is a choice. A transition plan will then be developed with the Virtual School, current school, new school, social worker, young person and foster carer to ensure a successful and smooth transition. All children will have their PEP reviewed each term and we ensure at least one of those is face to face, irrespective of distance placed. More face-to-face visits from the Virtual School may take place if there are concerns around a young person's education.

Our placements be they in or out of borough are considered and understood as appropriate.



We are supporting our **young people in care** to make **successful transitions into adulthood**. 89% of those we are in touch with were living in suitable accommodation. Care leavers have access to a range of suitable accommodation, with timely consideration of options. We value young people moving at a time that is right for them. Tenancy breakdowns are rare because we build their confidence and skills in supported housing arrangements first. The 18+ panel monitors care leavers' progression.

# Achieving placement sufficiency

## Use of placement types and duration, by age 2021-22

We have reflected on cost pressures, market challenges, gaps and opportunities to achieve our placement sufficiency needs. Our current and forecasted position of placement needs has influenced budget setting, including forecasts of inflation, rates of looked after children and their respective placement needs.

### During 2021-22

- we took **453 children** into care,
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An analysis of all placement types and duration, by age (2021-22) has informed our commissioning intentions for the next two years (2022-24).

We have purposefully chosen to assume forward our placement commissioning needs from one year of data only (2021-22), the key reasons for this are as follow:

- We know that 2020-21, the first Covid year, brought with it an unusual level of placement stability (7% with 3 moves or more during 2020-21). We had fewer disruptions and breakdowns during this period, therefore the numbers of placements required would be an underrepresentation of likely need moving forward, this is validated by our 2021-22 performance (3 moves or more 10.7%).
- We also we know through our audits and management oversight that the complexity of case work we are seeking now (during 2021-22) is greater than we have seen before, it is therefore most likely that the presentation of placement needs, and disruptions seen in 2021-22 will carry forward into the next two years.

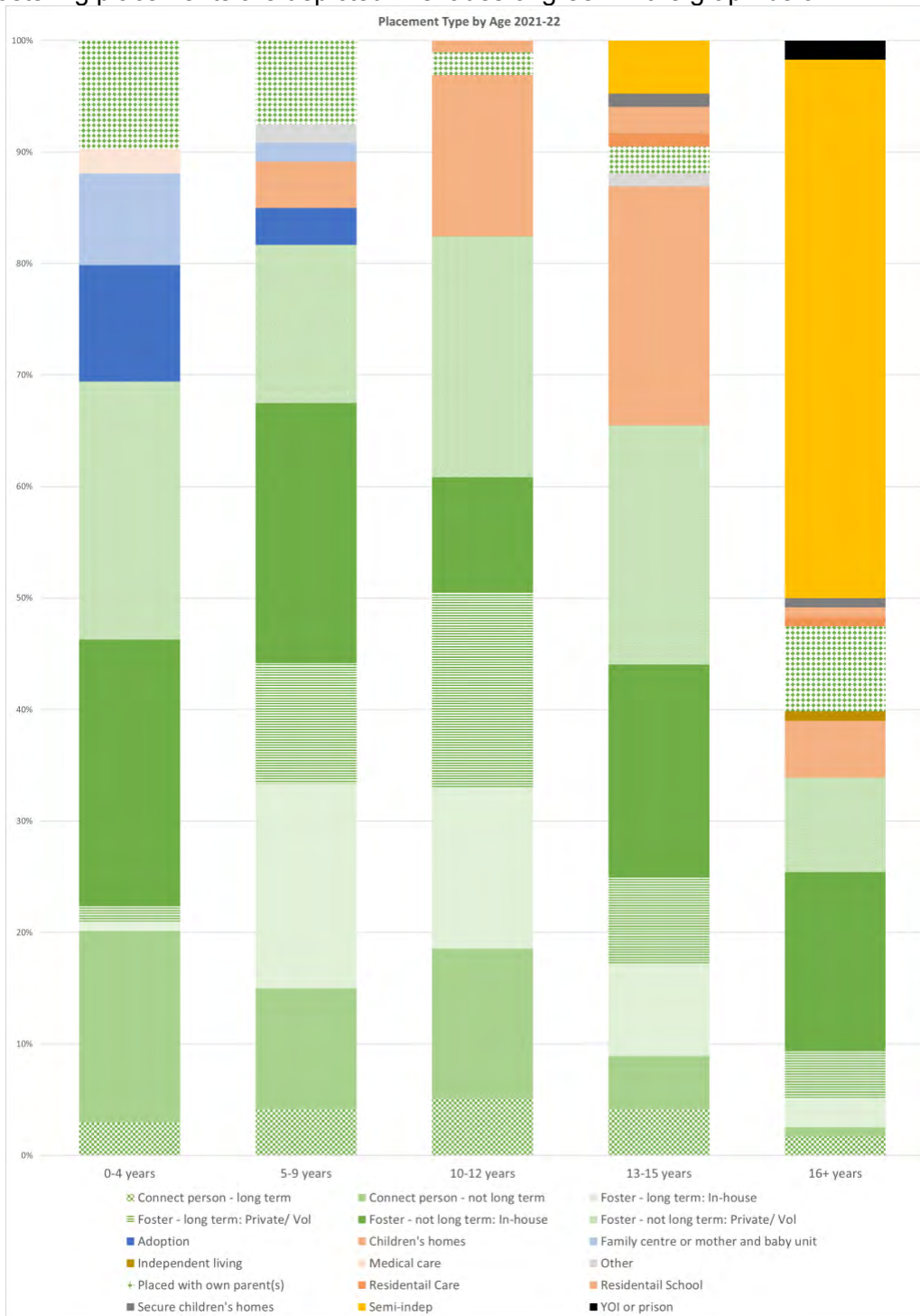
Our analysis allows **us to commission the right mix or “menu” of high-quality placements and wrap around support** to meet identified needs of children looked after and care leavers as cost effectively as possible. All placements are procured to give due regard to safety, health, education, emotional, network and contact needs.

**Engagement and influence.** We recognise that providers and our children and young people have an integral role in sufficiency planning. As such they are given opportunities to influence our commissioning intentions. Our commission intentions reflect our understanding of the experiences of our children and care leavers and their input has contributed to and informed service developments and delivery.

## Placement Types by Age

The vast majority of placements for 0- to 15-year-olds are 'fostering arrangements'. When it is in the best interest of our children, we prefer to place our children in family-based care close to the borough where they can retain education links and contact.

Types of fostering placements are depicted in shades of green in the graph below:



## Total numbers of Placement during by Type by Age (2021-22)

Children Looked After placements (all episodes throughout the year) 2021-22, by age band						
	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-12 years	13-15 years	16+ years	Totals
<b>Fostering</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>421</b>
Connect person - long term	4	5	5	7	2	23
Connect person - not long term	23	13	13	8	1	58
<b>Foster - long term: In-house</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>54</b>
Foster - long term: Private/ Vol	2	13	17	13	5	50
<b>Foster - not long term: In-house</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>121</b>
Foster - not long term: Private/ Vol	31	17	21	36	10	115
<b>Other</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>216</b>
Adoption	14	4	0	0	0	18
Children's homes	0	5	14	36	6	61
Family centre or mother and baby unit	11	2	0	0	0	13
Independent living	0	0	0	0	1	1
Medical care	3	0	0	0	0	3
Other	0	2	0	2	0	4
Placed with own parent(s)	13	9	2	4	9	37
Resid care	0	0	0	2	1	3
Resid schools	0	0	1	4	1	6
Secure children's homes	0	0	0	2	1	3
Semi-indep	0	0	0	8	57	65
YOI or prison	0	0	0	0	2	2

## Total weeks of Placement procured Types, by Age (2021-22)

Total weeks 2021-22 of Children Looked After placements (all episodes throughout the year), by age band						
	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-12 years	13-15 years	16+ years	All Ages
<b>Fostering</b>	<b>1859</b>	<b>2811</b>	<b>2740</b>	<b>2642</b>	<b>863</b>	<b>10916</b>
Connect person - long term	163	215	220	142	47	787
Connect person - not long term	313	136	239	153	45	886
Foster - long term: In-house	10	971	641	602	116	2340
Foster - long term: Private/ Vol	64	663	819	571	101	2217
Foster - not long term: In-house	581	483	224	534	356	2178
Foster - not long term: Private/ Vol	728	342	597	641	198	2507
<b>Other</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>1336</b>	<b>1705</b>	<b>4619</b>
Adoption	268	145	0	0	0	414
Children's homes	0	211	322	867	235	1636
Family centre or mother and baby unit	141	48	0	0	0	189
Independent living	0	0	0	0	18	18
Medical care	19	0	0	0	0	19
Other	0	0	0	18	0	19
Placed with own parent(s)	217	122	32	104	191	666
Resid care	0	0	0	57	40	96
Resid schools	0	0	52	153	30	235
Secure children's homes	0	0	0	12	23	35
Semi-indep	0	0	0	125	1123	1248
YOI or prison	0	0	0	0	45	45
<b>Total placements weeks</b>						<b>15535</b>

## Fostering

The majority of our children aged 0 – 15 are accommodated in fostering placements.

	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-12 years	13-15 years	16+ years
<b>Fostering</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>66%</b>

Our **THRIVE** (Trust, Hope, Respect, Inspiration, Vision, Empathy) **therapeutic team** is co-located in our permanency service to provide psychological support to foster carers, special guardians and adopters. THRIVE also upskills social work practitioners, foster carers, special guardians and adoptive parents to understand and supporting some of our complex young people more effectively. Our foster carers receive weekly communication from our children's services and all participate in a "buddy system" for additional peer support.

### In-House Foster Carers 'network'

Our In-house Foster Care networks includes Family and Friends Foster Carers 'Connected Persons', Bromley Foster Carers (live in borough), Bromley Out of Borough Foster Carers (live out of borough), Bromley Respite Carers (very short-term placements in and out of borough).

Just over half of all our long and short-term fostering arrangements are met with 'in-house' fostering capacity. We need to further **grow In-House Fostering capacity**. When it is in the best interest of our children, we prefer to place our children in family-based care arrangements close to the borough where they can retain education links and family contact. We need to deliver an effective recruitment and retention plan to increase the capability of internal fostering to **deliver more complex support**.

We are very good at placing 0 to 9 and 13 to 15-year-olds with our 'in-house' long term foster carers, we need to recruit more 'long term' in house carers for our 10- to 12-year-old. We also need more inhouse capacity for sibling groups and carers from specific ethnic groups, we are working with different religious groups such as the local mosque and a number of churches to promote the need for more BAME carers.

As at 31st March 2022, we had 101 approved in-house foster carers assessed and able to receive children. Our in-house capacity delivered 175 placements during 2021-22. We believe in-house fostering to be the best form of care for our children if they stay with us.

On average our fostering **assessment take no more than 6 months**. During 2021-22 we invested in our in-house fostering service to increase our capacity and recruitment/marketing activity. 11 in-house foster carers were recruited in 2021/22, 9 were de-registered, allowing for a net gain of 2. We are mindful of our 'aging' fostering householders and are therefore pursuing a continuous cycle of recruitment. Annually we set ourselves an ambitious target of recruiting 20 new foster carers. We know we aim high! Why wouldn't we?

We have developed our in-house capacity to manage more complex cases. During 2021 we recruited four new in-house specialist carers to our **New Horizons** project who offered a package of therapeutic support for young people with **complex needs stepping down from residential care**. We have stepped down 4 children through our New Horizons project. This project adds to our broader drive to assist all young people to step down from residential care when safe to do so.

Our **Emergency Foster Placement Scheme** was set up in November 2019 to respond to the needs of children in an emergency or crisis. To date we have placed more than 40 children through this scheme.

## **Independent Fostering Agencies**

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) are only used if needs cannot be met by In House Foster Carers.

To alleviate all agency fostering demands, we would need to recruit a net additional 30 in-house foster carers to provide 'short term care' (c.1500 weeks of care) and 40 'long term' in-house foster careers (c.2000 weeks of care). Give that this is entirely unrealistic to achieve, we have developed access to the following agency capacity.

## **Pan London Commissioning Arrangement**

Following a strategic review in 2019 Bromley joined the Commissioning Alliance purchasing consortium (February 2020). Theoretically this improved market access to quality and timely children's placements. (We joined the Dynamic Purchasing Vehicles for Residential, Semi-Independent and Independent Fostering Agencies placements).

In the last year we procured 102 new placements, 66% of these we via the commissioning alliance. We found it easier to identify IFAs via the alliance (93% of all IFA placements) but much harder to identify residential placements (only 19%, 5 of 26 residential placements):

- 102 total new placements (of which 43 IFA, 26 residential, 33 16+)
- 68 via the Alliance (40 IFA, 5 residential, 23 16+)
- 34 were placed outside of the Alliance (3 IFA, 21 residential, 10 16+)

A full review is underway in 2022 to critically consider our use of consortium placements, gaps and opportunities.

We are committed to participating in and developing more London (and sub regional provision) block contracts and provider frameworks where economies of scale can be achieved and quality sustained. We are also committed to developing our placement service to better utilise our menu of placement options.

## **Spot Purchasing**

Spot purchasing allows us a mechanism to access and secure sufficient choices of placements for our young people who have complex needs including those at risk of offending, those experiencing or at risk of exploitation including CSE. Given the challenges of extra familial harm and contextualised safeguarding we need to ensure that spot purchasing allows us the freedom to be creative with placement selection and location.

## **External Residential Children's Homes**

We place our children in Residential Homes only when all other types of provision options have been exhausted. During 2021-22 we required 61 children's home placements, 9% of all placements.



We are mindful that reforms to unregulated provisions and the ever-growing complexity of placements needed may lead to further demand for residential placements. Like a lot of other boroughs, the most challenging cohort to place are aged 12+ with complex needs.

A provider led residential market and a continued increased demand for residential placements with significant numbers of voids may lead to further increases in the cost of residential placements. According to a study commissioned by London ADCS there has already been a 64% increase in the unit cost of residential settings since 2015. The current inflation rate of 7%, with forecasts of increase to 9% in the last quarter of 2022 is likely to impact the cost of providers, we are ensuring that inflation rates have been built into future budgets.

We have joined the Pan London Alliance Complex Adolescents Project to consider the feasibility of large-scale block contracts and building new provision. The project has evidenced that as a region London and the South-east has a lack of residential provision, but that the provision we have is also not utilised by London Local Authorities.

### **Semi Independent**

Forty eight percent of our 16+ cohort were placed in semi-independent provision last year, (34% remained in fostering arrangements). We have wrap around arrangements in place to assist our young people to prepare for independence whilst in semi-independent provision.

We benefit from the Commissioning Alliance accreditation scheme for the unregulated semi-independent provision for 16+ year old. In addition, our own placement service has a Quality Assurance Framework for monitoring semi-independent placements.

### **Specialist placements**

#### **Mother and Baby Foster Placements**

Independent Fostering Agencies are only be used if the mother and baby's needs cannot be met by In House Foster Carers network. These specialist placements are spot purchased only, during 2021-22 we required 13 such placements (family centre or mother and baby unit).

#### **Residential Parenting Assessment Centres**

Placements to these units are made when it is necessary to carry out an assessment on parenting capacity. These facilities are spot purchased only.

#### **Secure Placements**

These placements will only be used if the child or young person is able to meet very specific eligibility criteria and in exceptional circumstances. Placements are intended to be short term; reviewed through the secure accommodation review process and step down suitable alternative sourced. Three secure placements were utilised during 2021-22.

The national shortage of capacity in the secure estate and waiting times mean that we have had to find alternative means to manage higher levels of risk in the community. As is the case for all authorities we are continuing to find it a challenge to identify provision in a market which has limited provision for managing DOLS in the community and the risk of exploitation through use of external restrictions.

**Remand Placements**, the council is responsible for deciding the most appropriate level of accommodation (if not specified by the court). Where possible we use Remand foster care placements with a small number of foster carers being identified to provide support to young people involved in offending and a robust service offer is made available.

## Care Leavers

Our first preference is that our Care Leavers are able to “Stay Put” within a fostering setting, once they turn 18. In the last two years we have on average retained 5 young people in staying put arrangements – we recognise the need to improve this take up.

We have a dedicated placement officer in the Leaving Care team to quality assure semi/independent placements for over 18s. We run a Young Inspectors Scheme to enable our young people to undertake site visits and influence our post 18 provision.

As at the end of March 2022, 97% of Care Leavers were in ‘suitable accommodation’ (national 96%).

# Actions

There are a number of key strands of activity required to deliver our placement sufficiency strategy.

We are committed to:

- ✓ Ensuring that **children only come into care where this is in their best interests**. If they do come into care, children should without delay achieve **timely and appropriate reunification** with their families, **or alternative permanency**.
  - Continue to invest in prevention work including the Staying Together Service (targeted interventions for edge of care)
- ✓ When children need to remain in care, placements will always be sought through our '**In-house fostering network, as a first preference**', prior to considering services from external providers and includes residential homes, foster placements and supported accommodation.
  - Recruit 20 new foster careers per year
  - Target recruitment towards more 'long term' in house carers for our 10- to 12-year-olds.
  - We also need more inhouse capacity for sibling groups and carers from specific ethnic groups and children with disabilities.
  - Improve Care Leavers take up of "Stay Put" within a fostering setting
- ✓ We will further **grow our In-House Fostering capacity**. By delivering effective recruitment and retention strategies and increasing the capability of internal fostering to **deliver more complex support**.
  - Build on the four new in-house specialist carers to our **New Horizons** project who offered a package of therapeutic support for young people with **complex needs stepping down from residential care**.
  - Build on the **Emergency Foster Placement Scheme** set up in November 2019 to respond to the needs of children in an emergency or crisis
- ✓ Our focus will remain **on quality and ensuring intervention leads to a de-escalation of needs and placement stability**. We will continually review the effectiveness and impact of our **wrap around support**.
  - Continue to commission wrap around arrangements to assist our young people to **prepare for independence whilst in semi-independent provision**
  - Continue to commission the **THRIVE therapeutic team** co-located in our permanency service to provide psychological support to foster carers, special guardians and adopters.
  - Continue through THRIVE to **upskill** social work practitioners, foster carers, special guardians and adoptive parents to understand and supporting some of our complex young people more effectively.
- ✓ We will ensure our **commissioning is needs-led**, with robust procurement and contracting.
  - We will continue to work with colleagues in other local authorities to explore ways in which **joint approaches** can expand the range of available placement options, particularly for more specialist needs
  - We will continue to participate and develop more London (and sub regional) **block contracts and provider frameworks** where economies of scale can be evidenced and quality sustained.
  - Test the feasibility of the **Pan London Alliance Complex Adolescents Project** to consider the large-scale block contracts and building new provision.

- We are also committed to **developing our placement service** to better utilise our ‘menu of placement options’.
  - We are committed to **upskilling our placement officers ‘negotiation skills’** and are putting in place appropriate training.
  - We will further develop commissioning skills in the organisation to enable strong and robust relationships with providers, improved procurement of individual placements and a more **strategic approach** to placement sufficiency.
- ✓ We will work directly with the Children in Care Council (LinCC) and our network for Care Leavers when undertaking commissioning or development activity to **ensure their views are central to decision making**. We will seek views from Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers and to understand the individual needs, wishes and feelings of children and young people when sourcing individual placements.
- Crucial to our sufficiency strategy, high quality social work practice will ensure **alternatives to care** will always be considered and actively pursued if appropriate; the **assessment of needs** for children requiring placements will be accurate and will actively inform placement finding; and that social work support for placements will promote **resilience and stability**.
- ✓ We will ensure that our current and **forecasted position of placement needs influence the Councils budget setting**, including forecasts of inflation, rates of looked after children and their respective placement needs.
- Continue to deliver an **annual demand management program** which informs budget setting and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy
  - We will retain our focus on **value for money** in our contracting relationships with providers and use our understanding of costs to inform commissioning activity.