

Hertfordshire Sufficiency Statement Summary:

**The Accommodation of
Children & Young People
Living Away from Home**

Annual Update:

2022



**Children's Services
CLA and Safeguarding
Commissioning**



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Executive Summary

The Children Act (1989) requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as 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 ('the sufficiency duty').

When assessing 'sufficiency', Hertfordshire County Council considers:

- the condition of the local market, including the level of demand for specific types of providers in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists
- the development capacity of local providers
- the current resource and overall budget priorities of the council.

This Hertfordshire Sufficiency Statement reports current levels of demand, our capacity to respond to that demand and key priorities for 2022/23. Data updates within this document relate to the period 1 April 2021 - March 2022. Any slight variations are the result of the volatility of the data and the fact that snapshots are being taken at slightly different times.

Key Achievements in 2021/22

Residential Strategy Continuing: New In-House provision Bright Skies and Meadow View both rated as 'Good' by Ofsted

Regional collaboration with Essex County Council to re-commission the Inside Out Project. The new contract has been awarded after a successful joint procurement exercise and is due to start in July 2022. Positive outcomes have been identified from the DfE funded project to June 2022

As the host of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG), Hertfordshire successfully completed the re-commissioning of the Group's database and launched a national 'Vacancy Alert' system to improve local sufficiency

16+ Semi-Independent Accommodation and Support Framework Contract (9 providers) – 1 further multi-occupancy provision offering an additional 4 beds opened in Hertfordshire in February 2022

Continue to provide quality accommodation for families that have 'No Recourse to Public Funds' and 18+ young people (including Care Leavers and former UASC) ensuring value for money is achieved.

Housing Related Support Service providing Supported Accommodation via 5 providers for young people aged 16 to 25 years

The Floating Support Service (for Young People aged 18+) accepted 178 referrals in 2021/22 of which 140 were Care Leavers (83%). In addition the Intensive Support Service for Care Leavers at risk of homelessness/rough sleeping received continued funding from DfE & DLUHC.

Solo residential provision continues to be fully utilised and is rated as 'Good' with Ofsted

Retention of foster carers was higher for 2021-22 was higher than previous years

Woodland View home for four young people with autism and/or learning disabilities with challenging behaviour which has been open since the end of May 2019 is rated as 'Good' with Ofsted and continues to operate at full capacity

Cross regional contract for shared block contract of residential provision has been operating successfully; positive negotiation to commence work to increase provision in Hertfordshire by adding an additional four bed home to support the residential strategy.

Strategic Position 2021/22

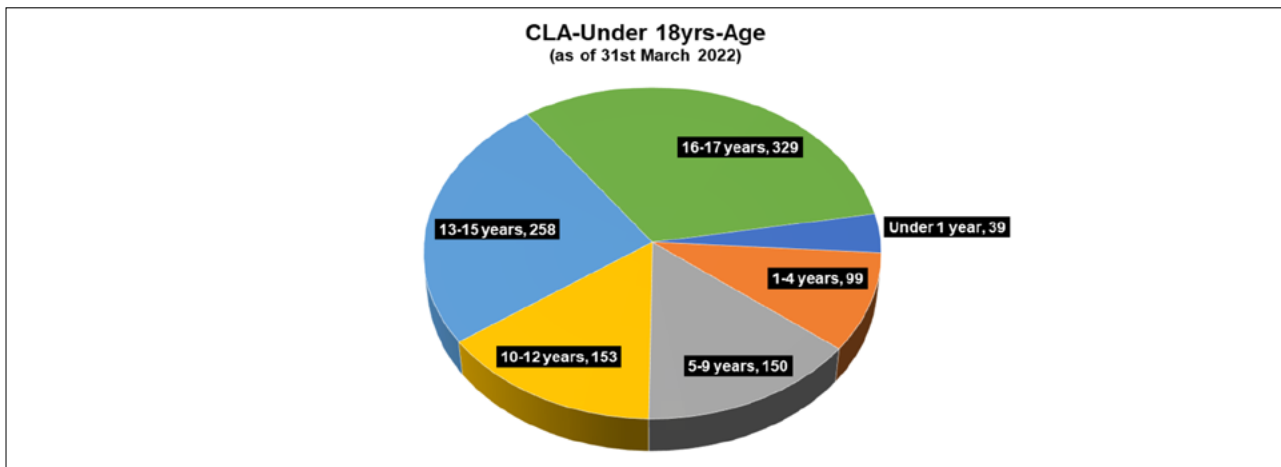
Approximately 272,558 children and young people under the age of 18 live in Hertfordshire. This is 23% of the total population in the area. The Office of National Statistics predicts an overall increase in Hertfordshire's 0-19 population of 0.8% between 2021 and 2024; after this point, it is projected that the population will decrease. However, growth is still projected in the 10-14 (2.1%) and 15-19 (10%) age groups. Current projections do not yet factor in possible increased inward migration to Hertfordshire from London as a result of the pandemic and changing work patterns.

As at end of March 2022, the number of CLA was 1030, with the number of UASC being 111. The CLA rate per 10,000 (under 18 population) was 38. This is an increase of 3.4% (34 children and young people) compared to the same period last year. The largest increases have been for those aged under 1, from 33 to 40 children. This is a 21.2% increase from 2020/21 and puts this group at 4.3% of population. Another large increase was seen in the age 13-15 category (5 children 2.1%) and aged 16+ (1 young person 0.14%). Other age groups have remained static or decreased.

Despite the increase of Children Looked After in 2021/22, there have been more children leaving care than in the previous 2 years (23.5% increase in care leavers). Despite this increase in CLA numbers however, Hertfordshire still compares favorably against the East of England (49), Statistical Neighbours (49.9) and Nationally (67) as at 2020/21.

Where possible, we aim to keep children within their communities if it is safe to do so. However, we are facing increasing challenges in placement location, availability and choice. This is a national challenge that all Local Authorities are facing mainly due to age, urgency of placement needed, presenting needs and risks, the national shortfall in people wanting to foster and the residential market feeling under pressure and unable to manage the more complex children referred to them.

Children Looked After (CLA) Data



Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

OAs at the end of March 2022, there were 111 UASC, an increase of 26 (23.5%) from 2020/21. Of the 111, the majority were from Iran, Sudan and Iraq. The children have mainly been placed via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) which is a voluntary scheme whereby UASC are transferred between local authorities ensuring that a small number of authorities are not disproportionately affected due to being points of entry.

Most of the others are spontaneous arrivals (children that present in Hertfordshire)

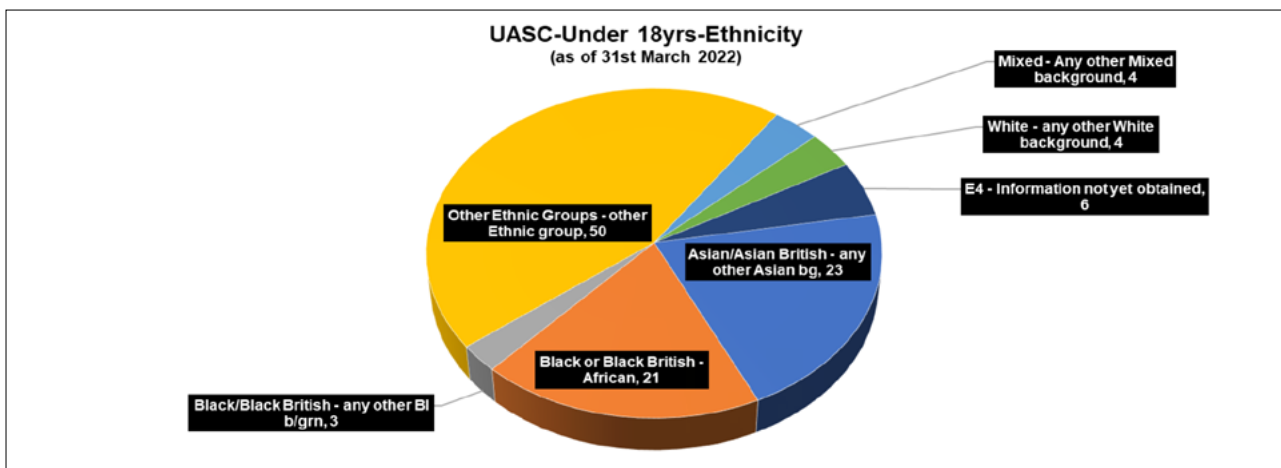


Figure 1: UASC Nationalities

Breakdown of gender, ages and UASC at the end of Q4 (31/3/22)

	Number	% of CLA population
Looked after Children		
Female	424	41.4%
Male	604	58.6%
UASC	111	10.7%
Under 1	39	3.8%
1 – 4 years	99	9.6%
5 - 9	150	14.5%
10 - 12	153	14.8%
13 - 15	258	25%
16 - 17	329	31.9%
Total	1030	

Ethnicity data

Ethnicity Category	CLA
1. Asian/Asian British	40
2. Black/Black British	70
3. Mixed	151
4. Other Ethnic Groups	59
5. White	704
6. Not Yet Obtained	4
Grand Total	1030

Location of Placements

Ensuring that children and young people are placed within Hertfordshire continues to be a challenge for commissioners.

Children placed outside of Hertfordshire borders

As of 31st March 2022, there were 383 children and young people placed outside of Hertfordshire's borders; 259 placed in Band 1 areas and 124 placed "At a Distance", of these, 37 were placed 100 miles or more from their home address (30% of all children placed at a distance). This is down by 4 (3.2%) from last year.

Band 1 comprises Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Kent, London and Peterborough.

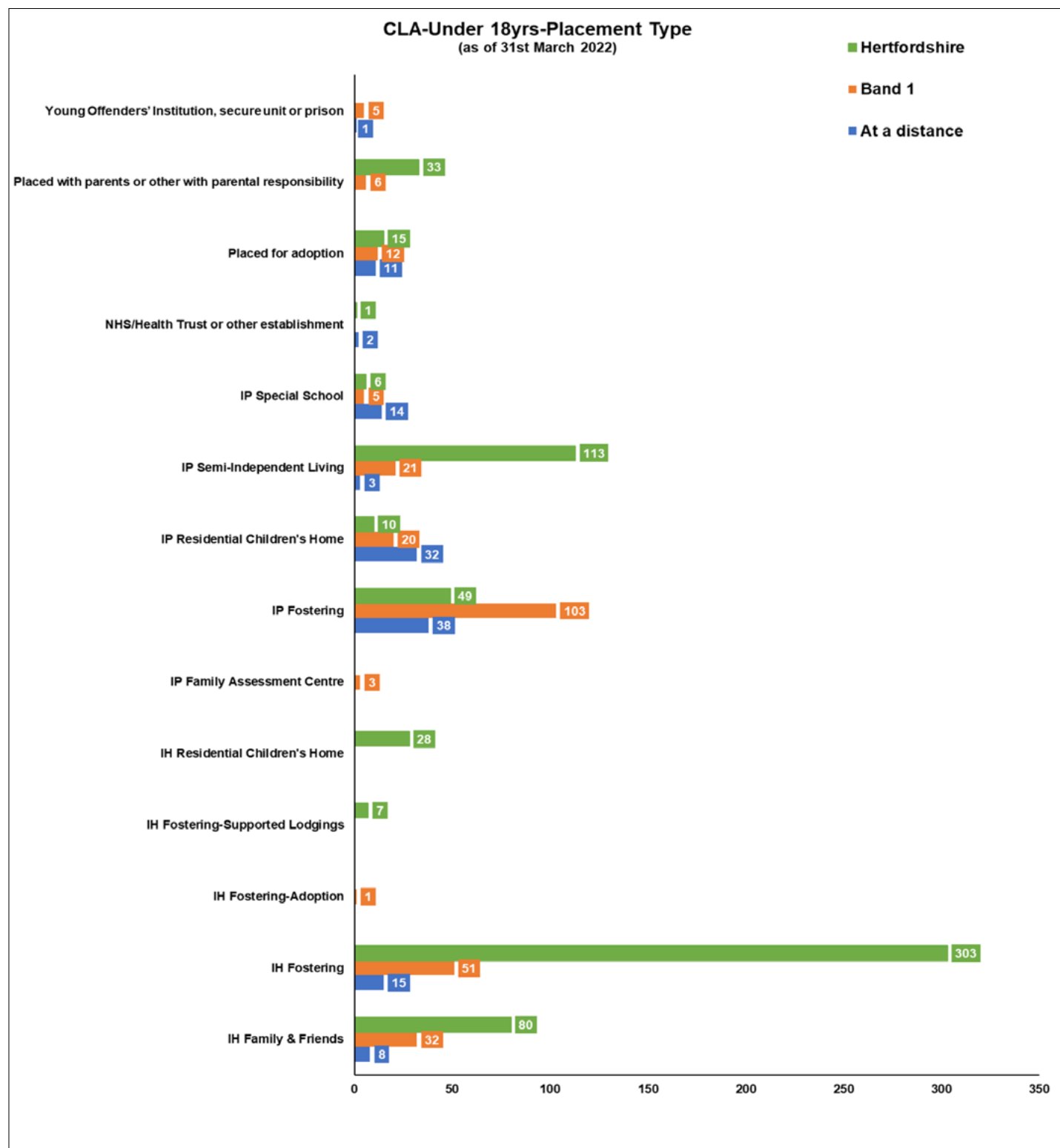
Placement Type	At a distance	Band 1	Hertfordshire	TOTAL
IH Family & Friends	8	32	80	120
IH Fostering	15	51	303	369
IH Fostering-Adoption	0	1	0	1
IH Fostering-Supported Lodgings	0	0	7	7
IH Residential Children's Home	0	0	28	28
IP Family Assessment Centre	0	3	0	3
IP Fostering	38	103	49	190
IP Residential Children's Home	32	20	10	62
IP Semi-Independent Living	3	21	113	137
IP Special School	14	5	6	25
NHS/Health Trust or other establishment	2	0	1	3
Placed for adoption	11	12	15	38
Placed with parents or other with parental responsibility	0	6	33	39
Young Offenders' Institution, secure unit or prison	1	5	0	6
TOTAL	124	259	645	1028

CLA placed at a distance by age is showing that the highest number of children placed at a distance (40) fall within the 13 to 15 age range.

There were 37 children placed 100+ miles from home, which equates to 30% of all children placed at a distance. This is a decrease compared with 40 in March 2021, which equated to 44% of all children placed at a distance.

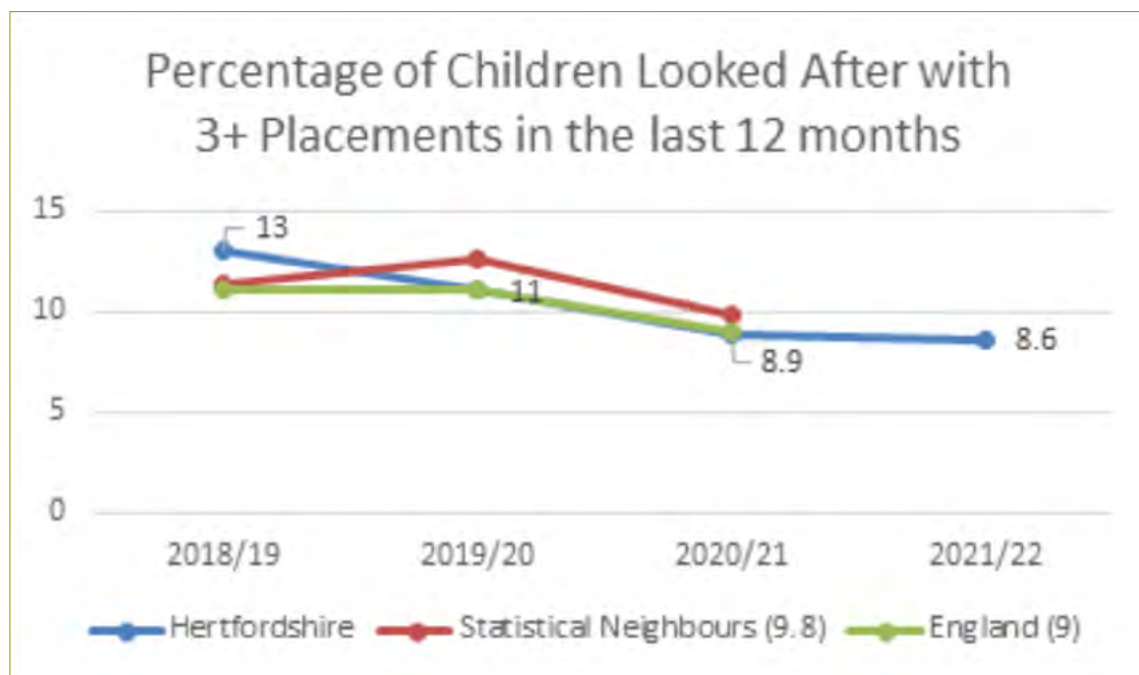
Summary of all Placements

As at March 2022, placement types were as follows:

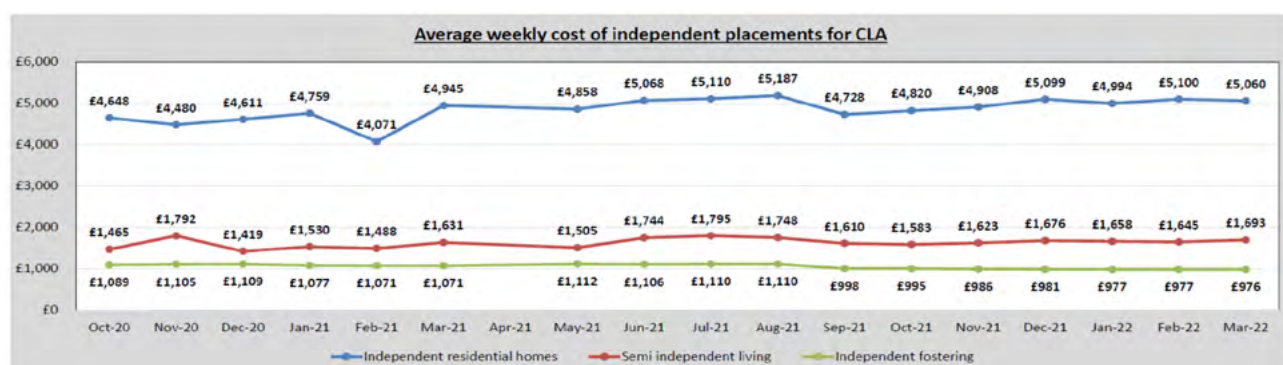


Placement Stability

Hertfordshire has now seen three successive years of improving placement stability and as of March 2022, 8.6% of children looked after had 3 or more placements in the last 12 months which is the best performance to date. Hertfordshire now compares favourably with the Eastern Region (9%), statistical neighbours (9.8%) and nationally (9%).



Independent Placement Average Weekly Costs



Average Weekly costs

	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22
Independent Residential	£4,665	£4,017	£4,945	£5,060
Independent Foster	£982	£1,049	£1,071	£976
Semi-independent living	£1,267	£1,386	£1,631	£1,693

Average weekly costs for independent residential placements dipped slightly at the end of financial year 2019/20, but costs have continued to rise since. Due to the high cost and relatively low volume of such placements, average costs fluctuate. Although there has been an increase year on year since 2020, the increase since 2021 is only 2%.

The costs relating to Independent Fostering have decreased by just over 9% in the last year, with the 2022 average still being 1% lower than 2019.

Although the absolute costs are considerably lower for semi-independent than residential, the percentage increases year on year and since 2019 are marked.

Overall placements costs have risen in the last year, with more providers requesting additional support to manage placements.

High-Cost Placements

Placements without additional support

- 28 placements cost over £6000
- 18 placements over £8000
- 9 placements over £10,000 (includes one unregulated)

Placements with additional support

- 47 placements cost over £6000
- 30 placements over £8000
- 14 placements over £10,000

There is a need to increase the number of foster and residential placements within Hertfordshire.

Placement Sufficiency

As at the end of March 2022, of the 1030 CLA, 645 were in Hertfordshire with 383 out of area. This represents an increase in children placed in Hertfordshire (by 2%) from 2020/21 despite an increase in the CLA population. Although most of the children placed outside of Hertfordshire were in Local Authority areas bordering the county, 37 are placed at a distance of 100 miles or more from their homes. There are a range of reasons why children are living out of area including:

- In-house foster carers living out of area
- Children placed out of area in appropriate settings to meet need such as adoptive placements, Tier 4 hospital, criminal secure provision and placement with parents (on Care Order).
- Children placed in residential special schools out of area, mainly in Band 1. Many of these are specialist provisions and therefore cannot be replicated by one authority as the numbers of young people requiring such a provision do not warrant it.
- A small cohort (potentially 20) are placed at a distance for their own safety (criminal and sexual exploitation in Hertfordshire).

We still have too many children in residential and foster placements placed out of area. For this reason, we have developed both a Residential Strategy and a Fostering Strategy.

Semi-independent (16 years plus) placements do not pose such a challenge and the majority are local. There is a clear plan in place for the commissioning of semi-independent provision and there is a framework in place to cover the range of needs of young people 16 years plus moving towards independence.

Plans are outlined below for all three placement types:

- Residential care
- Foster care
- Semi-independent

Residential Care

Over the past 12 months, the number of children placed in residential care has remained steady. The numbers are partly due to limited availability nationally of specialist foster care placements for teenagers, and the increasing complex histories of children entering care for the first time. We have also noted increased unit costs, with a growing number of providers requesting 1-1 or 2-1 cover to provide care for the child. The residential strategy is designed to address both financial and location issues.

Independent Residential

As at end March 2022, there were 62 children in independent residential children's homes. The number placed in 52 week Residential Schools is 25.

Needs Analysis

69% of children in residential accommodation are aged 13-15	Five children aged under 10 within residential provision	High number of emergency moves and placements required within 2 days
High need for solo provision	A third of the cohort are diagnosed with Autism/ASD	Girls are much more likely to present with mental health issues and/or self-harming

In-House Residential

Our in-house residential services have three 5 bed homes and a 6 bed home for children with disabilities. At the end of 2020, our first new home as part of the residential strategy opened, adding an additional 4 bed mainstream home to the overall In-House service. We also opened an innovatively designed new home, based on the need to offer solo and short-term provision. This consists of 3 self-contained solo flats, under one Registered Manager. All our In-House homes have achieved a “Good” rating from Ofsted.

The average budgeted unit cost varies from £2,860 to £3,058. However, given the level of need currently, additional support has been sourced in the homes bringing the range of costs from £3,314 to £4,498.

ARC Short Stays

ARC Services offer short stays as part of a family intervention programme where there is risk of family breakdown, and children are on the edge of care. The short stay service is open 6 days per week. Over 90% of the young people have remained at home as a result of the ARC support.

Outcomes in residential care

We have noted reductions in missing episodes, aggressive behaviours, harmful sexual behaviours and placement moves for a group of children who had previous multiple moves. In a number of cases, behaviour has stabilised preventing increase in risk. We also, however, have a small number of children placed where outcomes are not as we hope, despite high cost highly supervised placements.

Voice of the child

The voice of children and young people is integral to commissioning decisions. We have involved children and young people in the progress of our residential strategy. They have named the first 3 homes to date and been involved in discussions and decisions about furnishings, décor and care practice. Using alternative methods chosen by the young people, we have ensured that they have been involved in recruitment of the new staff teams, replacing the previous young people panels, that were unable to take place due to lockdown. They have worked really hard, in difficult circumstances, making decisions virtually to ensure the new homes have been thought about from a child focused perspective.

When restrictions were lifted, we were able to take groups of children to the potential new homes, which provided a much more direct experience for them. They provided us with wonderful insight and thoughtful decision making on use of rooms, lay out and furniture

During the COVID pandemic, children in residential care gave their feedback as below:

- Some children reported that they felt safer, because contact with families and friends is restricted
- Reduced fear of exploitation
- Learning new coping strategies
- Some children welcomed less contact from professionals

Current Developments in residential care

Independent Provision

Out of the 62 children placed in independent provision, we currently block commission 6 beds as part of a the Cross Regional project, increasing to 10 by Autumn 2022. We have also opened a 4 bed medium to long term residential home in St Albans for children with learning disabilities, autism and behaviour that challenges. This provision should have a positive impact on the numbers placed in residential special schools. We have also commissioned a solo short term emergency provision in Herts. .

Residential Strategy

We are in the process of creating an additional 31 residential beds within Hertfordshire's borders over the next 18-24 months. There are 10 beds already in operation, a mix of both in-house and independently managed services. The strategy aims to bring more of our young people closer to home which will facilitate family contact and encourage the possibility of re-unification. All homes opened as part of the Strategy have achieved a "Good" Ofsted rating at inspection.

The homes will be a blend of short term/emergency and medium to longer term placements. In response to current needs, we are developing larger 4 bed homes as well as smaller 2/3 bed and solo provision. We hope by creating a variety of provision, all our children, no matter what their needs, will have good options and the right type of care available. In addition to the new homes, we recognise that, to meet the needs of children effectively, we need an holistic approach to care to include their education and health as well as their social care needs.

A special focus of the strategy has been on children's mental health and wellbeing. A needs analysis undertaken in May 2020 showed that 13% of children living in residential accommodation in Hertfordshire had been admitted to Tier 4 accommodation, 35% had an emerging or mental health diagnosis and 54% demonstrated self-harming behaviours. With this prevalent group of children in need of specialist care, the residential strategy has worked in collaboration with health colleagues to try and bridge the gap in provision. A business case was successful in achieving joint funding with Health to create a specialist children's home with a multidisciplinary team. Registered with Ofsted as a children's home, it will offer a team of both clinical and social care staff with psychiatry oversight. It aims not only to prevent Tier 4 hospital admission but, in addition, to support timely discharge. This service will care for children experiencing mental health crisis and support stabilization and successful transition to a longer-term placement. The home plans to open at the start of 2023.

Project Ambitions of the Residential Strategy:



Development phases of the residential strategy:



Intended Outcomes of the residential strategy:

- Improve outcomes for Children Looked After and their families
- Ensure the right children are in appropriate care, at the right time
- Increase the number of children placed within Hertfordshire and neighbouring counties and reduce number placed at distance
- Create stability and value for money within Hertfordshire residential placements
- Improve access to local health and education provision
- Improve chances of step down to foster care or return to family
- Create more local residential accommodation over the next 5-10 years so that at least 78% of residential placements are within Hertfordshire's borders or in neighbouring local authorities

Intended Outcomes of the residential strategy:

- Developed a provider network which offers both support and training on an equal footing to in-house and independent providers as a “family” of provisions within the county
- Received a “Good” Ofsted rating at inspection for all new strategy homes, both in house and independently managed
- Revised and enhanced the learning and development offer for residential staff
- Created a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary induction program for all staff and Managers
- Worked in partnership with Health and in the process of developing a mental health support offer to residential homes
- Worked in collaboration with Health to secure joint funding for a Specialist Children’s home, with a multidisciplinary staff team, including psychiatry input
- Worked in partnership with Education and the Virtual School in planning for the provision of education for children living in the homes. The Virtual school ensuring the right professionals are involved in the assessment and creation of bespoke packages of education
- Involved children and young people in the development and design of the new homes
- Held discussions with potential providers and organising a full procurement of Phase II homes to be managed by independent providers
- Working with Young Commissioners to support the tender and award process.
- Identified children who may be able to move from out of area placements into provision within Hertfordshire

Inside Out

The Inside Out project piloted in Hertfordshire in May 2019, is a programme that tested an innovative approach to improving outcomes and stability for Children Looked After, primarily focusing on children in residential care, however also supporting young people in other placements in exceptional circumstances.

The programme was funded through the Department for Education's Innovation Fund and commissioned in partnership with Essex and Norfolk County councils and was delivered by The Children's Society (TCS).

Following the success of the pilot programme, Hertfordshire County Council in partnership with Essex County Council, has recommissioned the Inside Out Project as a 3-year contract with potential for a further 2 year extension. After a competitive tendering process, the contract has been awarded to The Children's Society (TCS).

The project offers intensive, relationship-based support through a coach employed by The Children's Society (TCS), who aims to work closely with participants, social workers, and placement providers to effect positive change. The coach provides support to children and young people in care, who may not be getting all the support they need from the current system of social care and support.

The programme aims to provide the critical scaffolding to support a positive transition into adulthood. An Inside Out coach works 1:1 with a young person to establish a sense of stability by way of a positive relationship, encouragement to make positive decisions and resilience to face setbacks should they occur. Contact is often face-to-face but also involves keeping in touch via phone or text messages for a duration of up to 18 months, although there is some flexibility for support to finish sooner or to extend this period in response to particular needs.

With use of intensive coaching, the goal is to stabilise and to enable children to return home, or successfully 'step down' to less intensive care wherever appropriate and possible. Other positive outcomes include improved wellbeing, a reduction in placement staffing ratios, engagement with education or training or a reduction in missing episodes.

Since the project mobilised in May 2019, it has had a great impact on the young people that have been supported. This was also evidenced in the report published by The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR). The Institute presented their findings of their in-depth evaluation of Inside Out during 2018-2021. Overall, the evaluation of Inside Out has shown that the programme has resulted in a mixture of positive soft and hard outcomes for young people – although COVID-19 appears to have reduced the impact. More specifically, the quantitative results show an overall significant impact on placement stability, with the average reduction from 3.41 placement moves over the last 12 months to 2.51 moves for those participating in Inside Out. Most young people really appreciated the support they received and felt that it positively impacted on them in the short or longer term. This included improved wellbeing, stability, confidence, personal development, participation in education or training, and transition to independent living. The cost benefit analysis also revealed a positive benefit-cost ratio for the programme overall.

Hertfordshire has had a total of 47 young people referred in and accepted on to in the project since the project mobilised, with over 60 more young people discussed as potential candidates for the project.

Summary of figures:

Total referred and accepted - 47

Stepped down to lesser care during project - 15

Returned home whilst on project - 12

Ongoing work to step down - 7

Closed for various reasons - 13

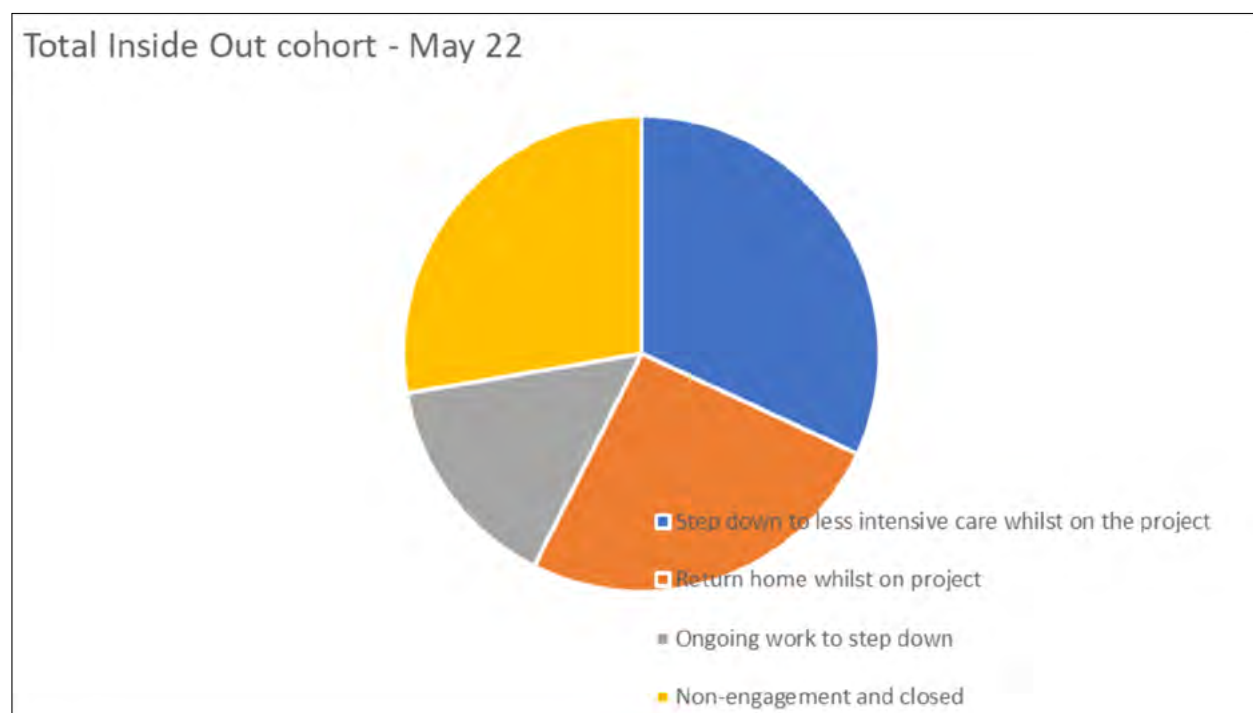


Figure 2: Inside Out Cohort

Residential Parenting Assessment Units

There were 10 placements made in Family Assessment Units in 2021/22, representing 9 families. There is an average cost of £5312.33 p/w. Placement duration is from 4 to 12 weeks.

Outcomes are:

- Step down to fostering – placement order granted
- Return home to parents
- Assessments ongoing

Foster Care

As of 31st March 2022, there were 687 children and young people under 18 (including UASC and family and friends placements) in foster placements, excluding those in “staying put” arrangements. Of the under 18s in foster care, 497 (72%) were placed with in-house carers including family and friends carers (excludes “staying put” over 18 arrangements).

In-House foster care

There were 497 children placed in in-house foster placements including family and friends as of March 2022, of whom:

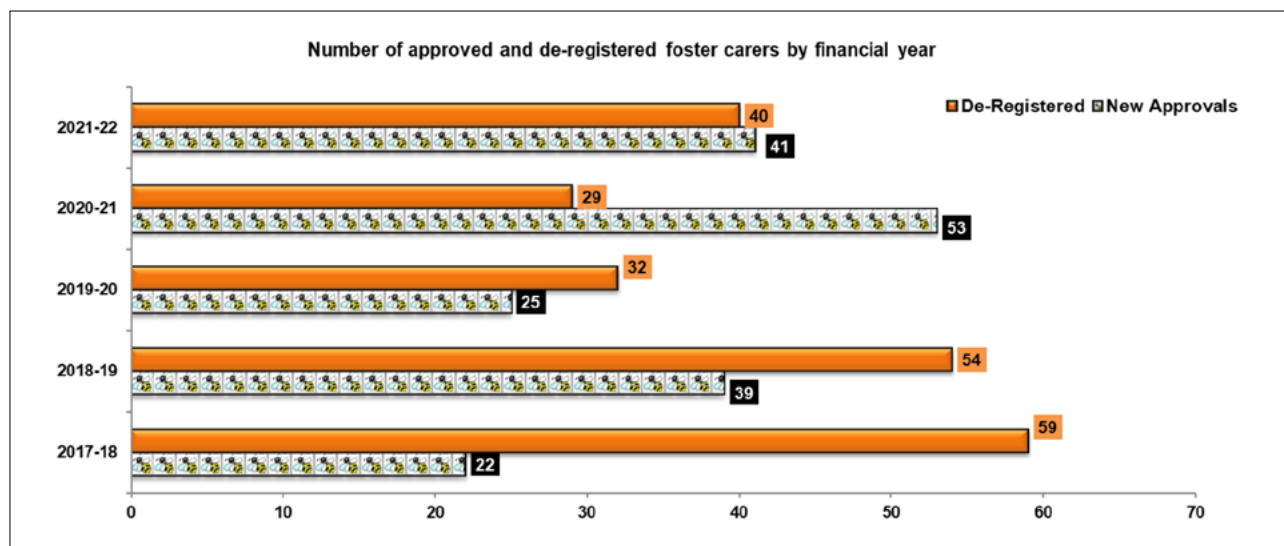
Provision type	Placements
In-house friends and family	120
In-house Fostering	369
In-house Fostering-Adoption	1
In-house Supported Lodgings	7

The Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment and support of the in-house fostering resources for children in Hertfordshire. Fostering provides care and support for some of the most vulnerable children in Hertfordshire. The focus of the recruitment strategy is to ensure sufficient recruitment of mainstream foster carers. The service recruits foster carers from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to reflect the diverse needs of children in care. The service welcomes applications from the LGBT community.

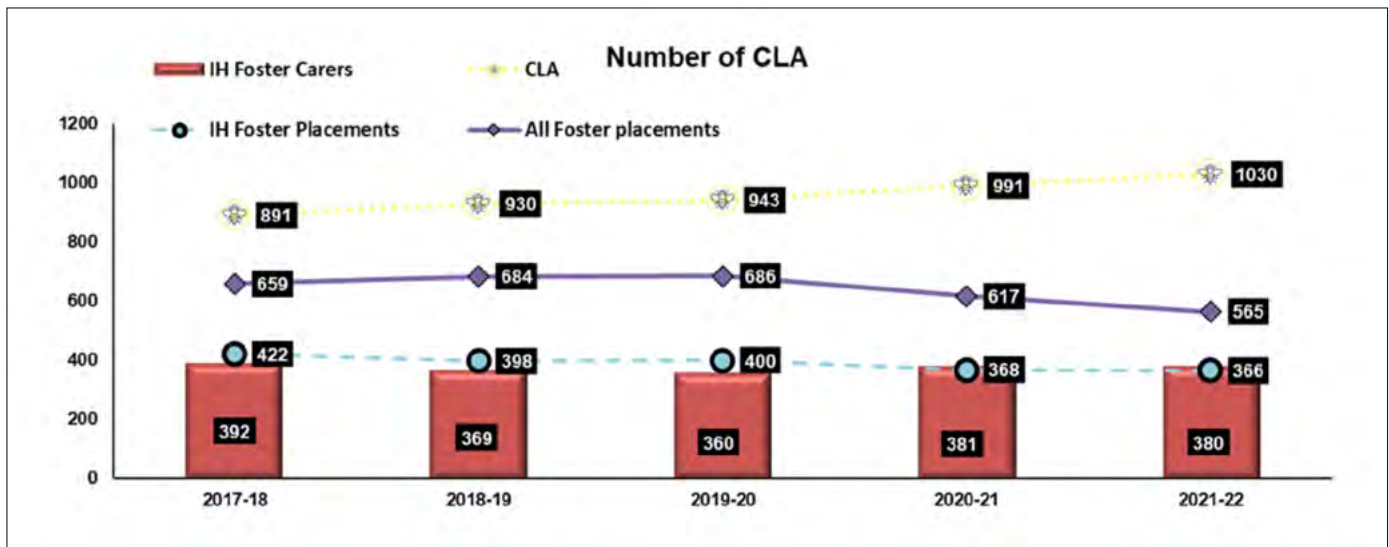
New approvals in Hertfordshire over the last 5 years have fluctuated significantly and reflect the national challenge of sustained recruitment and retention of foster carers to undertake the complex but rewarding task of caring for looked after children in partnership with the local authority. Whilst Hertfordshire has achieved a higher number of approvals during this period, the de-registrations from the service of foster carers retiring and/or leaving due to changes in personal circumstances has had an impact.

This can be seen with the fluctuating figures below:

- Net gain of 1 foster carer for 2021/22
- Net gain of 24 foster carers for 2020/21
- Net loss of 7 Foster carers for 2019/20



Over the last 5 financial years, there have been 180 new approvals and 214 de-registered carers (households).



Over the last 2 years, service development has been focused on improving the support offer through ARC Fostering and the Mockingbird Family Model, to address the changing demands on foster carers to manage and care for older children with a complex profile and ensure that fostering remains a rewarding activity for all those already fostering and those wishing to foster in the future.

Hertfordshire continues to work hard at recruitment and retention to ensure that we increase the current levels of in-house placement capacity and utilisation. Through the launch of the Fostering Strategy 'One Team Built Around the Child', focused recruitment drives, more accurate performance data alongside weekly target meetings, increased recruitment and retention continues to be seen from 2020 onwards. Recruitment, retention and utilisation of carers remain the key focus.

Fostering Strategy

The One Team Fostering Strategy aims to grow and improve fostering in Hertfordshire and by doing this:

- have more skilled in-house foster carers who are able to meet the needs of the children and young people in our care
- there will be more choice of placement for children who are looked after in Hertfordshire and they will be able to achieve good outcomes in a local family environment, in line with Hertfordshire's Outcome Bees framework

Progress update on the Fostering Strategy

- Foster carers and staff had the opportunity to feedback their thoughts on fostering in Hertfordshire through a series of surveys and focus groups, and this fed into the production and launch of the One Team Strategy in November 2020.
- A new structure of in-house foster carer skills payments was implemented from October 2020, which ensures payments more accurately reflect the complexity of needs of the children who are placed with the carers
- A review of the support provided to in-house foster carers was conducted and a new offer launched and communicated more clearly to foster carers, including a new peer support service, support hubs, and a trial of the Reflective Fostering model. Significant engagement took place with other teams in Children's Services to seek to embed the One Team principles and ensure carers are valued by all professionals. Retention of carers was higher in 2020/21 compared to previous years, and remained a focus for the service going forwards.
- A review of fostering service processes was conducted, and new systems set up, for example a weekly target meeting to monitor pipeline data and assessment timescales on a regular basis, and improved data collection and reporting.
- A more targeted approach to recruitment was implemented, with a focus on the voice of our existing carers. A series of successful social media campaigns continues. In total 41 new in-house foster carers were approved in 2021/22, with a net gain of 1 (compared to net gain of 24 carers the previous year).
- Recommendations from the Behaviour Change Unit were implemented by the Recruitment Team to enhance the processes used from enquiry to assessment to improve the conversion rate.

Independent Foster Placements

There has been a decrease in placements in independent fostering since 2020/21 bringing the total to 190 placements. The main gap in provision remains the lack of capacity in-house and within the independent sector to take children 11 years plus with challenging and complex behaviours and sibling groups. Placement choice is extremely limited, and matching is difficult due to limited options increasing risk of placement move. Although nationally we have come through the third period of lockdown and there are no current restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there remains a risk of still being reliant on independent placements due to in-house carers being unwell/unable to maintain placements due to self-isolation and/or infection. Longer term health implications are still not fully known.

Semi-Independent Provision

The vast majority of children who access 16 plus provision are placed in Hertfordshire and sufficiency is not generally an issue for us with this cohort. Out of the 137 children placed, 113 (83%) are in Hertfordshire and 21 (15%) in local authorities bordering Hertfordshire. The majority of the 24 (17%) children placed out of Hertfordshire are unable to live within Hertfordshire borders due to risks posed in the local area in relation to gangs/criminal exploitation and/or have chosen to live in another area where they had previously settled.

We tendered for the provision of a Framework Agreement for 16 plus semi-independent accommodation based on a needs analysis. The profile of children in semi-independent provision includes self-harm/mental health issues, risk of exploitation (CSE and CCE), substance misuse, criminal and challenging behaviour.

The Framework Agreement sits within the strategic fit of the Accommodation and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Aged 16 and 17 and Care Leavers Aged 18 to 21. It provides Semi-Independent accommodation and support for 16 and 17-year-old Young People Looked After, including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People (UASC).

The aim of this service is to make a successful transition progressing young people towards independent living by providing high quality accommodation and support whilst facilitating their personal well-being, ensuring safety and equipping them with the skills required to sustain an independent tenancy long term, thus preventing repeated homelessness.

The service aims to provide a settled period in a safe environment where the young people will receive a housing management and support service, enabling them to gain the necessary skills to live independently.

The Framework Agreement has secured more competitively priced services with continued quality assurance.

The new Framework Agreement is part of a continued service development that places emphasis on quality, with robust systems in place to maintain and sustain good quality accommodation and support. Commissioners have identified the need for a step-down service from Semi-Independent provision prior to young people commencing their own tenancies as Care Leavers, these 'Practice Flats' were part of the Lots within the tender. The provisions are based across Hertfordshire and meet the majority of the need. To support this cohort, there is a range of supported accommodation including group living and solo with varying levels of support, dependent on the young person's needs.

Financial Data relating to semi-independent provision

With an increase in the expected numbers of young people accessing this service in the next few years, the budget for 2021/22 has been increased to £4,831,643 per year (an increase of 14% since 2020/21). Budget increase is due both to demography changes and estimated inflation. The budget will be managed and regularly monitored to ensure that the resource is used effectively.

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
£3,827,142	£3,986,658	£4,247,443	£4,831,643

The current average cost of Semi-Independent beds in Hertfordshire, excluding additional support, is **£1,297** per week and the Block purchase of the same type of beds is **£750** per week. Therefore, there is a potential **avoided spend of £547 per placement per week**.

Proposed Actions 22/23 (COVID prevented tenders in 21/22)

1. Recommission the Prevention of Homelessness service (16 to 24yrs):
 - To provide services for Assessment, Advice, Information & mediation for young people, families and carers who are at risk of homelessness
2. Recommission Floating Support (18+) and Outreach Housing Support services:
 - Provide Floating Support for young people aged 18+ moving into their own tenancy/ accommodation, including Intensive Support Service if required
3. Recommissioning of Housing Related Support Service:
 - Review and plan options for services (await outcome of new Ofsted National Minimum Standards being published in late 2021) and procure services as appropriate
4. Recommission Semi-Independent Accommodation & Support Framework for 16/17yrs:
 - Plan tender of new Semi-Independent Accommodation & Support Framework (various Lot's e.g. Solo provisions and UASC specific provisions)
5. Develop 18+ Accommodation/Support will focus on family groups:
 - Joint Development/Commissioning with internal partners of proposed services
 - Exploration of pooled budgets to maximise reach of service
 - Accommodation and support for young people who are Care Leavers, including for those with higher needs e.g. mental health and behavioural difficulties

Adoption and SGOs

Performance varies significantly between years and overall shows year on year improvement.

The Adoption Service has consistently strong performance in the recruitment of prospective adopters and in seeking to place for adoption older children, those in sibling groups and children with complex needs. Recruitment activity in Hertfordshire continues to match predicted levels of requirement activity for 2021/2022, which is an improvement on the national trend (47 Adopters approved as of the end of March 2022). This is a 20% increase from 2020/21.

Hertfordshire Adoption Service is part of the Adopt East Regional Adoption Alliance and as of July 2022, there is no longer an interagency fee for placing children with approved adopters across the Adopt East region.

Extensive use is made of the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic intervention and since 2015, more than £1.2 million of therapeutic provision has been awarded to ensure that adoption is successful and enduring. During the year ending March 2022, 286 applications were made to the Adoption Support Fund, with a total of £767,119.37 being received for a range of specialist therapeutic provision and assessment, including Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), Sensory Integration Therapy and Play Therapy.

This included group applications for therapeutic support made to the ASF to support multiple families within therapeutic group interventions.

This is a significant increase on £626,579.95 drawn from the fund over 2020-2021 and on the 234 applicants made in 2019-2020.

SEND Commissioning

The SEND Commissioning Team develops contracts and projects to ensure there is a community offer for children and young people (CYP) with Special Education Needs and/or Disability (SEND).

Short Breaks Services, including Overnight Short Breaks and Short Breaks Local Offer services, provide a break for parents and carers, whilst their children stay, for a short amount of time, in a safe and suitable setting. Having access to this support has important benefits for both carers and their children, helping the carer continue to care for their child and providing the child with a change from daily routine and an opportunity to develop new skills and mix with their peers.

Homecare Services have been commissioned to provide support to CYP and their families with SEND within their home and local community to find solutions through integrated personalised commissioning.

1. Overnight Short Breaks

Overnight Short Breaks (OSB) are residential services for children and young people with SEND and complex health needs that live in Hertfordshire. These services operate during evenings, weekends and throughout the day during the school holidays.

The number of CYP accessing OSB services at year end 2021/22 was 100, with the largest number of these CYP having ASD and/or challenging behaviour, and second largest number having complex health needs. The number of CYP accessing OSB remains relatively static from the previous financial year, although we are seeing an increase in the complexity of care packages and CYP requiring increased staffing ratios.

The number of commissioned hours for 2022/23 has reduced by 1,500 hours due to the re-modelling and re-commissioning of the service. The service is now modelled on a staffing ratio of 1-1 (previously 3-1) and emergency placements hours will be counted separately outside of the block OSB contracts, allowing for a more accurate reflection of OSB activity. In addition, the contract has introduced a minimum occupancy level for the service. A full data needs and trends analysis has been carried out to inform the new service model and performance data will be collected and analysed monthly.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, and with the social distancing measures that were in place, all the three OSB services worked hard to keep their support available and to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable children were met. For the OSB providers, this meant having to look at their “business as usual” with fresh eyes, responding to new risks, being quick at identifying and sourcing new equipment, providing training and additional staff to make sure the service remained open and safe. In addition, OSB providers have gone above and beyond their usual day to day activities by supporting emergencies across children’s services. OSB services are now returning to business as usual (BAU), although they are facing carer recruitment issues and a rise in the CYP complexity and hours of service required.

An addition to the new OSB service specification; each service will provide an emergency bed for CYP who meet the criteria to access the service and have an immediate need for accommodation because they cannot return home and for whom no other accommodation option is available. The expectation is that the Emergency Bed is used only for short admissions and that there is an expectation that the CYP will be temporarily resident for no longer than 6 weeks. In addition, discharge planning will begin on admission, and will be co-produced with the family and CYP, with the aim of working towards returning the individual to the family home or a suitable long-term placement within the 6-week timescale. The emergency bed will be funded by the placing service outside of the OSB Block Contract.

2. Transforming Care:

The Transforming Care Team aims to improve outcomes for CYP with complex LD and/or ASD with challenging behaviour and is working closely with both CCGs to understand which community commissioned services are required for CYP with complex Learning Disabilities and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (LD/ASD), to reduce reliance on psychiatric hospital admissions for these CYP.

The key objectives will be to develop community services for the Transforming Care cohort of children and young people with complex LD/ASD by:

- reducing the number of inappropriate psychiatric hospital admissions for CYP, but when admissions are required ensuring these are timely and a CYP does not remain in hospital for longer than necessary
- avoiding family breakdown crises by providing the right support at the right time for the Transforming Care cohort
- ensuring CYP have access to appropriate care and community services including Short Break Local Offer / Overnight Short Break provision at the right time
- stimulating and increasing community offer/provision in order to reduce hospital admissions, spend and out of county placements
- increasing the number of CYP with complex LD/ASD and care needs placed within Hertfordshire borders
- developing the 'blueprint' for Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) outcomes such as developing independent and health pathways for young people 16+ with complex health/care needs through integrated working across education, social care and health

Proposed Actions 22/23:

- continue to strengthen the Community Education and Treatment reviews
- continue to develop the Dynamic Risk Register and the offer to prevent psychiatric hospital admission
- continue to develop the keyworker pilot ensuring that every child or young person at risk of hospital admission is allocated a Keyworker.
- To work with commissioners and support the development of specialist supported living, residential options and community support as alternatives to admissions for the transforming care cohort.

Summary

As outlined above, there is a need to increase the amount of provision available locally. There is a national shortage of appropriate residential and fostering provision especially in relation to teenage placements and placements for children with complex histories and high needs. Placement costs have risen placing pressure on current placement budgets. A range of activity is planned over the coming years to address these challenges. The key activity for 22/23 is outlined on the next page.

Key Priorities in 2022/23

Prioritise placement stability initiatives across commissioning activity including the provision of additional support into placements
Timely Quality Assurance of placements to ensure high quality care
Undertake procurement exercises to commission independent providers to run five homes utilising existing HCC properties by March 2023
Work in partnership with health to create a specialist mental health provision jointly managed by health and social care
Increase provision in the cross regional contract by 4 beds
Continue to embed the fostering strategy to increase the number and range of in-house foster carers
Make preparations for the introduction of regulations for 16+ “semi independent” provisions and ensure that only regulated providers are used from the point of implementation
Tender for 18+ Accommodation (Care Leavers (including those with additional needs), Former Relevant UASC (AREs), No Recourse to Public Funds Families and Intentionally Homeless families)
Re-commission the Hertfordshire Children’s Contact Service to be operational by April 2023
Prepare tender documentation and commence collaboration with SPG, Finance, Legal and Brokerage Accommodation Team for 16+ Semi-Independent Accommodation and Support Framework for tender Feb/Mar 2023
Sourcing additional funding for Crashpad bed spaces for the Prevention of Homelessness/Housing Related Support Service for 16/17 year olds at immediate risk of street homelessness (currently 9 bed spaces)
Work with CCRAAG partners to develop the recommissioned placement database and digitalise the monitoring module
Re-tendered and awarded contract for the Prevention of Homelessness Service and Outreach Housing Support Service (contract commencing 1st August 2022)
Awarded STAs (1 year contracts commenced 1st April 2022) to five existing Supported Accommodation Providers due to new Ofsted regulations (standards yet to be announced)
Re-commission the support services offer
Commission and mobilise the new Inside Out service by July 2022