

# Hertfordshire Sufficiency Statement Summary:

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

**Annual Update:**

**2021**



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

  
**Hertfordshire**

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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 are 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 2021/22. Data updates within this document relate to the period 1 April 2020 - March 2021.

## Key Achievements in 2020/21

Residential Strategy underway:  
Bright Skies (3x1 bed provision) and Meadow View (4 bed provision) opened

Regional collaboration with two other Local Authorities on the DfE Innovation Fund project, Inside Out. Positive outcomes for 20/21; project funding extended to end June 2022. Upscaling workshops have taken place.

The Prevention of Homeless Service (provided by Herts Young Homeless) will continue until the end March 2022 in line with all Housing Related Support contracts. The service supported 427 young people in 2020/21, out of this group 91% of young people were prevented from a S20 request being required, with the intervention preventing a potential 90% making homeless applications (91% had a planned resolution from either Crashpad or Temporary Accommodation).

16+ Semi-Independent Accommodation and Support Framework Contract (12 providers) – 2 further multi-occupancy provisions opened in Hertfordshire and the launch of a third Practice Flat in January 2021.

Continue to provide quality accommodation for families that have no recourse to public funds and 18+ young people seeking asylum ensuring value for money is achieved.

Housing Related Support Contracts with 5 Supported Accommodation providers for young people aged 16/17 years, increased Crashpad bed spaces by 1 bed in June 2020 (6 Crashpad beds in total).

The Floating Support Service accepted 174 referrals in 2020/21 of which 120 were Care Leavers (69%). All the young people receiving the service achieved a score of over 96% in their outcome star results. In addition, a new Intensive Support Service for Care Leavers at risk of homelessness/rough sleeping was introduced, funded by the MHCLG.

Solo residential provision has has been fully utilised.

Fostering Strategy launched to recruit and retain more foster carers, with a net gain of 26 in-house carers achieved in the first year of implementation

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 full, with significant use of the emergency bed.

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.

### Coronavirus period

As at end of May 2021, the number of CLA was 977, with the number of UASC being 79. The CLA rate per 10,000 (under 18 population) was 36.1. The number of children looked after increased in the period from June to December 2020 as a result of slightly more children entering care and a reduction in the number of children leaving care. This reduction was a result of court delays around adoptions, SGOs and revoking care orders, as well as a reduction in the number of children leaving care.

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 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

As of March 2021, the number of CLA was 996, a rate of 36.8 per 10,000. This is an increase of 4.7% (45 children and young people) compared to the same period last year. The largest increases have been for those aged 1 to 9 (up 12.6%) and 16+ (up 13.6%). Analysis of the data indicates that as a result of the pandemic, fewer children were leaving care. Despite this increase however, Hertfordshire still compares favourably against the East of England (50), Statistical Neighbours (48.7) and Nationally (67) as at 2019/20.

	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Polarity
CLA Rate per 10,000	35.1	34.7	34.8	35.4	35.7	36.0	36.1	36.3	36.8	37.0	36.5	36.9	36.8	Smaller is better
% CLA with 3+ placements	11.1	10.9	10.0	9.7	9.0	8.7	8.3	8.5	8.3	8.4	9.0	8.6	8.9	Smaller is better
% Long-term stability of CLA	68.6	70.5	70.1	70.8	71.7	70.5	71.3	71	70.8	72.1	72.3	72	72.6	Bigger is better
% CLA leaving care via adoption	9.7	9.4	8.5	8.7	6.2	6.7	6.1	6.9	8.5	8.7	7.8	7.9	7.8	Bigger is better

As at end March 21, the number of CLA excluding UASC aged 16+ has increased by 37 (13.6%), since March 2020. This is the second biggest percentage increase in any group. The biggest percentage increase was seen in CLA aged 1-4, which has risen from 82 in March 2020 to 99 in March 2021, a 20.7% increase.

- The impact of the rise for the 16+ age category began in June and continued every month, peaking in December, with January being the first decrease since then which has continued to date.
- The impact of the rise of the 1-4 age category also began in June and has continued steadily since.
- CLA in the 13-15 age group saw a decrease, down 19 from 251 in March to 247 in March 2021 (7.1%). CLA under 1 age group reduced by 3 (8.3%) with 5-9 and 10-12 age groups both seeing increases of 7.8% and 1.3% respectively.

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Of the 85 UASC as at end March 2021, the majority were from Sudan, Afghanistan and Eritrea. Hertfordshire remains on the regional rota and potentially could take up to 184 young people, the agreed quota. Numbers have remained steady over the past few months due to numbers of UASC turning 18 years and leaving care. The number dropped further to 82 at the end May 21. Since May, due to a number of new arrivals into the UK, Kent requested that LAs consider taking additional children. Hertfordshire are taking a further 5 children in July in addition to the children who will be placed from the national rota.

## Breakdown of gender, ages and UASC at the end of Q4 (31/3/21)

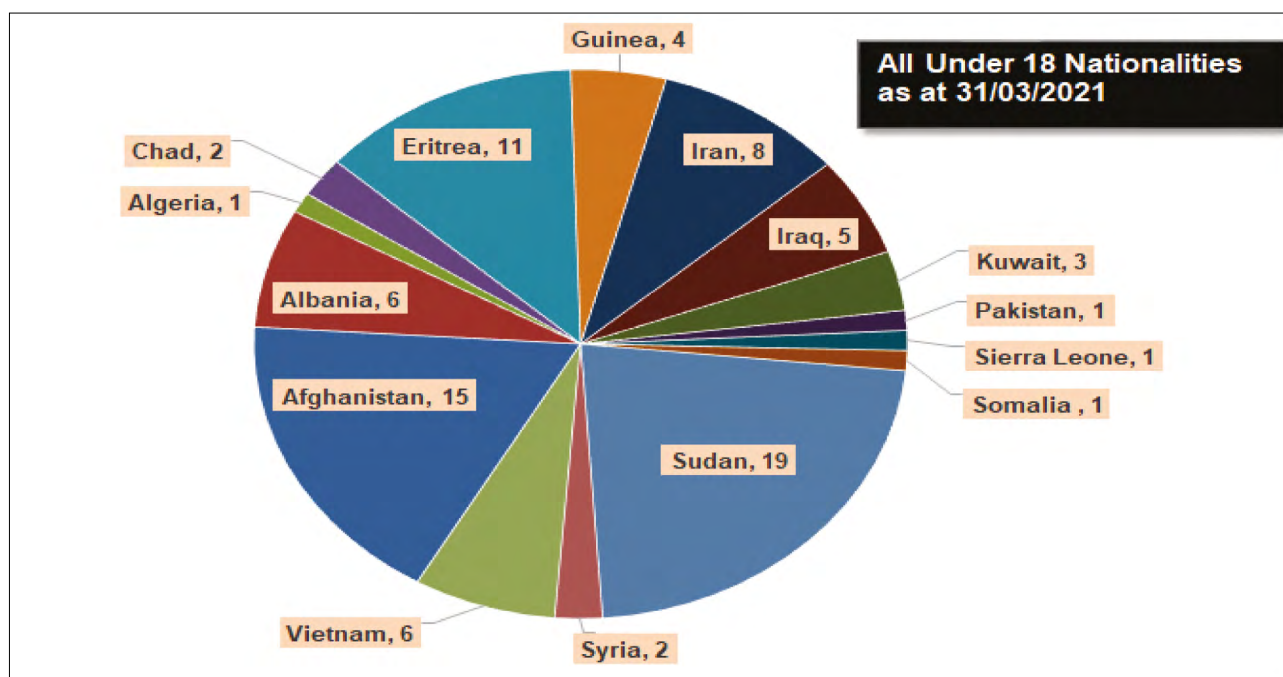


Figure 1: UASC Nationalities

	Number	&
<b>Looked after Children</b>		
Female	416	42.0%
Male	575	58.0%
UASC	85	8.6%
Under 1	33	3.3%
1 – 4 years	101	10.2%
5 - 9	150	15.1%
10 - 12	156	15.7%
13 - 15	246	24.8%
16 - 17	305	30.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>991</b>	
<b>Care Leavers</b>		
17-18	172	20.3%
19-21	500	58.9%
22+	177	20.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>849</b>	



**Ethnicity data**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>CLA</b>
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	5
Asian or Asian British - Indian	2
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	7
Asian/Asian British - any other Asian background	12
Black or Black British - African	46
Black or Black British - Caribbean	19
Black/Black British - any other Black background	14
E4 - Information not yet obtained	1
Mixed - any other Mixed background	45
Mixed - White and Asian	13
Mixed - White and Black African	23
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	54
Other Ethnic Groups - other Ethnic group	48
White - any other White background	44
White - British	648
White - Gypsy/Roma	2
White - Irish	2
White - Traveller of Irish Heritage	6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>991</b>
<b>Ethnicity Banding</b>	<b>CLA</b>
1. Asian	26
2. Black	79
3. Mixed	135
4. Other	48
5. White	702
6. Unknown / Unborn	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>991</b>

**Disability data**

<b>Has a Disability</b>	<b>CLA</b>
No	860
Yes	131
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>991</b>

## 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 at 31st March 2021, there were 384 children and young people placed outside of Hertfordshire's borders; 291 placed in Band 1 areas and 93 placed "At a Distance", of whom, 41 were placed 100 miles or more from their home address.

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

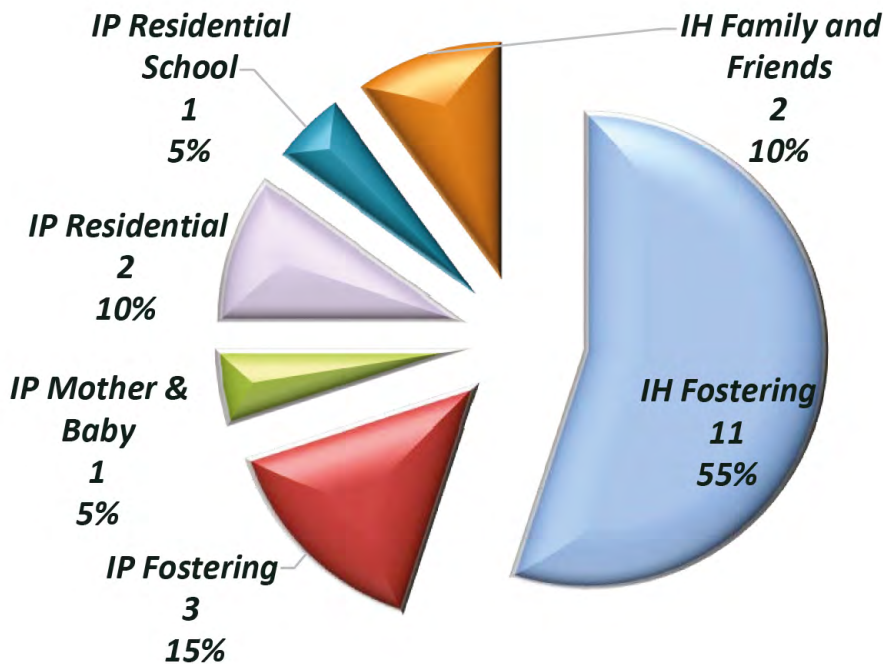
Provision type	Band 1 areas	At a distance
In-house Family & Friends	42	8
In-house Fostering	57	16
In-house Fostering-Adoption	2	0
IFA Fostering	120	18
Independent Residential	26	31
NHS/Health Trust or other establishment	0	1
Placed with parents or other with parental responsibility	2	0
Residential Special School	9	14
Semi-Independent Living	27	2
Secure	6	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>93</b>

A further snapshot at end of May 2021 showed that whilst the numbers at a considerable distance were small, there were 3 children placed in Scotland, 4 in Cumbria and Devon and 1 young person placed in Wales:

<i>Based as at 31/05/21 (0-17yrs) placed outside of Hertfordshire</i>	approximate miles from Hertfordshire	0-5yrs	6-10yrs	11-15yrs	16-17yrs	TOTAL
Bedfordshire	33	6	14	36	21	77
Berkshire	67	0	1	3	3	7
Buckinghamshire	36	1	4	7	7	19
Cambridgeshire	39	3	0	4	10	17
Cumbria	262	0	1	2	1	4
Devonshire	215	0	2	2	0	4
Essex	47	6	13	23	9	51
Gloucestershire	111	2	0	2	0	4
Greater Manchester	190	1	2	0	1	4
Hampshire	84	0	0	2	1	3
Isle of Wight	113	0	2	0	0	2
Kent	67	0	4	11	4	19
Lancashire	201	0	0	1	3	4
Leicestershire	94	0	0	1	0	1
Lincolnshire	91	0	2	9	3	14
London	26	16	11	31	30	88
Merseyside	191	0	0	2	0	2
Norfolk	87	0	2	4	2	8
Northamptonshire	53	0	0	1	0	1
Northumberland	282	0	1	0	0	1
Nottinghamshire	113	0	0	0	1	1
Oxfordshire	65	0	0	1	0	1
Peterborough	61	1	0	1	1	3
Rutland	79	0	0	1	2	3
Scotland	429	0	0	2	1	3
Shropshire	140	0	0	2	0	2
Staffordshire	131	0	2	0	0	2
Suffolk	76	3	1	4	0	8
Surrey	47	0	0	1	0	1
Sussex	87	0	0	2	2	4
Wales	225	0	0	1	0	1
West Midlands	97	0	0	0	1	1
Wiltshire	106	0	1	1	0	2
Yorkshire	178	0	0	8	1	9
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>39</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>371</b>

## Summary of all Placements

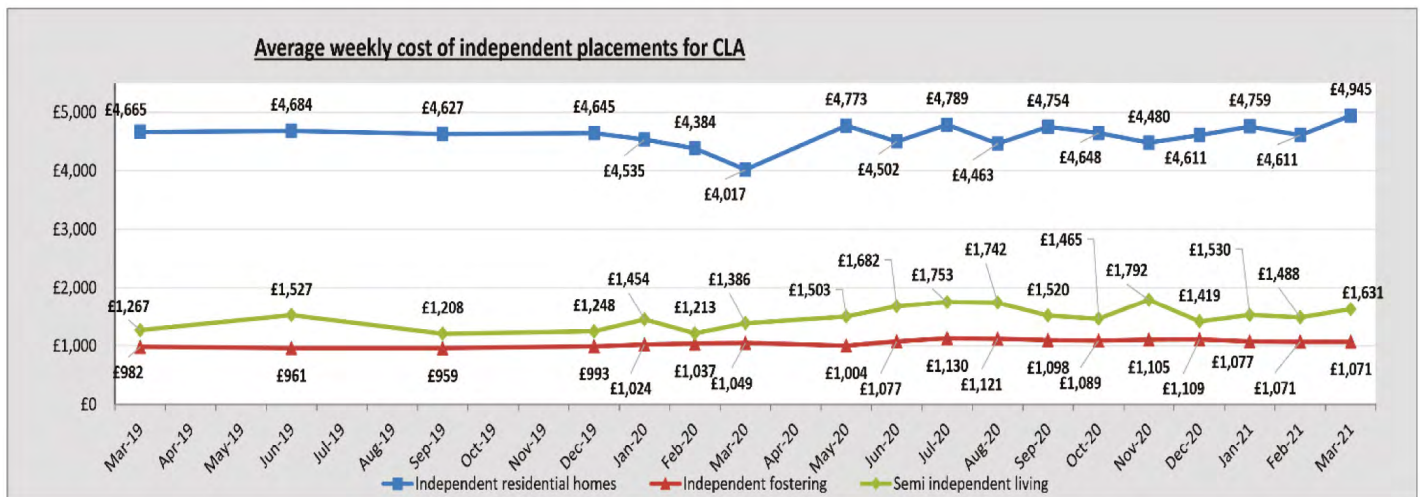
As at March 2021, placement types were as follows:



## Placement Stability

A success for Hertfordshire recently is that the percentage of CLA with three or more placements has fallen to 8.9% in March 2021 from 11.1% in March 2020, a year on year improvement since 2018/19. This reduction places Hertfordshire within the top quartile nationally (9% or below). Hertfordshire now compares favourably with the Eastern Region (10%), statistical neighbours (11.9%) and nationally (11%).

## Independent Placement Average Weekly Costs



**Average Weekly costs**

	Mar-19	Mar-20	Annual % change	Mar-21	Annual % change	2 year trend 2019 - 2021 %
<b>Independent Residential</b>	£4,665	£4,017	-13.9%	£4,945	23.1%	6.0%
<b>Independent Foster</b>	£982	£1,049	6.8%	£1,071	2.1%	9.1%
<b>Semi-independent living</b>	£1,267	£1,386	9.4%	£1,631	17.7%	28.7%

Average weekly costs for independent residential placements dipped slightly at the end of financial year 2019/20, but costs have since risen again. Due to the high cost and relatively low volume of such placements, average costs fluctuate, however, the two year trend data shows an increase of around 6% in average weekly costs since March 2019.

The costs relating to Independent Fostering are also increasing, at just over 2% in the last year, but the larger increase between March 2020 and March 2019 results in a two year increase of just over 9%.

Although the absolute costs are considerably lower for semi-independent than residential, the percentage increases are marked. There has been a 17.7% increase in the last 12 months.

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

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

## Placement Sufficiency

We have too many children in residential and foster placements placed out of area. Semi-independent (16 years plus) placements do not pose such a challenge and the majority are local. As at the end of March 2021, of the 991 CLA, 607 were in Hertfordshire with 384 out of area. Although most of these were in Local Authority areas bordering Hertfordshire, 41 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).

For this reason, we have developed both a Residential Strategy and a Fostering Strategy.

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

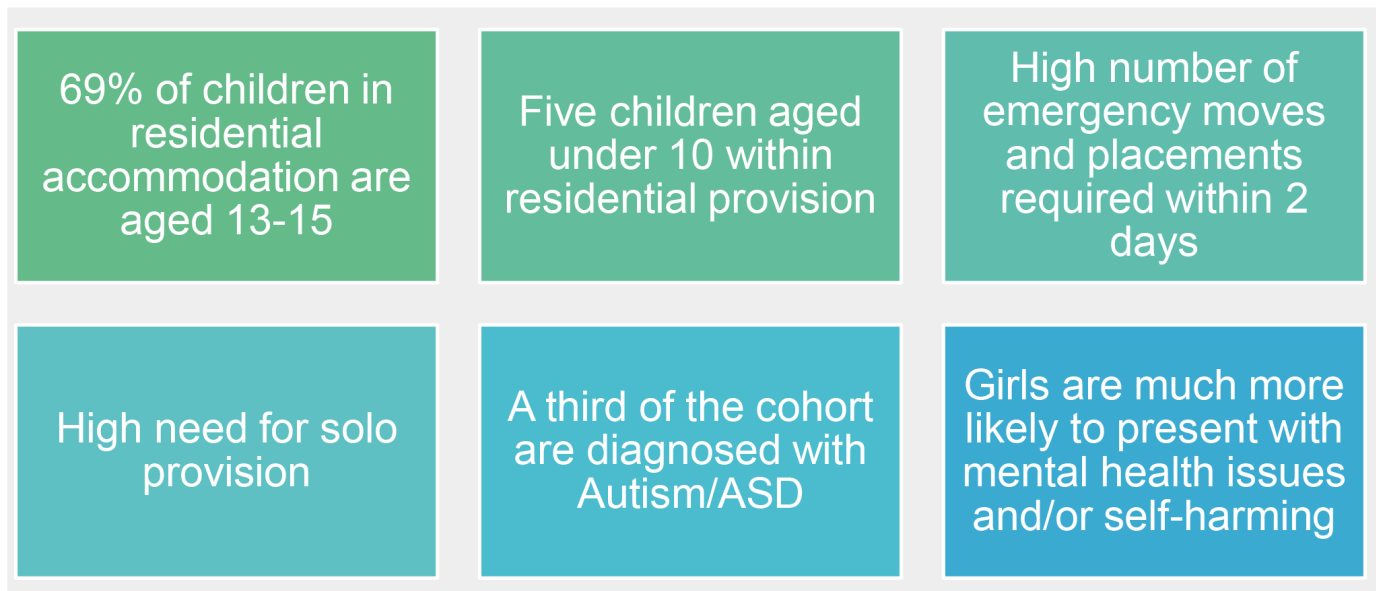
## Residential Care

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 Mar 2021, there were 71 children in independent residential children's homes, including 6 in IP disability funded. The number placed in Residential Schools is 44 including 26 from the 0-25 service. There were joint funding agreements in place for 30 placements with either Health and/or Education, with contributions based on the individual needs of the children and young people (CYP). Contributions from Health range from 9% though to 50%.

### Needs Analysis



### High Cost Placements

- 14 placements cost over £6000
- 5 placements over £8000
- 3 placements over £10,000 (includes one unregulated)

## **In-House Residential**

There are currently three 5 bed homes, one 4 bed home, one solo provision and a 2 bed provision consisting of one emergency and one short term bed. In addition, there is a three bed home consisting of 3 self-contained solo flats. There is also one 6 bed home for children with disabilities.

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.

As part of the residential strategy, in-house provision will be expanding by a further 3 homes, to include emergency provision.

### **ARC Short Stays**

ARC Services offer short stays as part of a family intervention programme where there is risk of family breakdown. 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.

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

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



## Current Developments in residential care

### Independent Provision

Out of the 71 children placed in independent provision, we currently block commission 6 beds as part of a the Cross Regional project (increasing to 10 by Autumn 2021). We have also opened a 4 bed medium to long term residential home in St Albans for children with 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 aim to create an additional 31 residential beds within Hertfordshire's borders over the next 18-24 months (8 beds are already open). The strategy aims to bring more of our young people closer to home which will facilitate family contact and the possibility of re-unification.

The homes will be a mix of short term/emergency and medium to longer term placements. In response to current needs, we are developing a mix of 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 a holistic approach to care to include their education and health as well as their social care needs.

Project Ambitions of the Residential Strategy:



Development phases of the residential strategy:



**Phase I (by September 2021)**

**17 bedrooms** created through refurbishment of Hertfordshire properties and the creation of new in-house and independent provider run provision



**Phase II (by March 2022)**

**11 bedrooms** created through refurbishment of Hertfordshire properties and the creation of new in-house and independent provider run provision



**Phase III (From April 2022)**

**3+ bedrooms** created through either refurbished property, new build or market purchase to be run by independent providers or in-house

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 neighboring 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 neighboring local authorities

In delivering the residential strategy, we have:

- 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
- Revised and enhanced the learning and development offer for residential staff
- Created a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary induction programme
- Worked in partnership with Health to develop a mental health support offer to residential homes and a joint Specialist Therapeutic Mental Health provision
- 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 planning a full procurement of Phase II homes to be managed by independent providers
- Identified children who may be able to move from out of area placements into provision within Hertfordshire

## Inside Out

Inside Out is a programme that is testing an innovative new approach to improving outcomes and stability for CLA in residential care. The programme is funded through the Department for Education's Innovation Fund and commissioned in partnership with Essex and Norfolk county councils and has been delivered by The Children's Society (TCS) on a pilot basis. The Inside Out coaching service offers intensive 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.

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 engagement with education or training or a reduction in missing episodes. The project has been successful to date and the DfE has agreed further funding and are considering a roll out of the programme nationally.

Since the Inside Out project mobilised in May 2019, it has had a great impact on the young people that have been involved. Hertfordshire has had a total of 34 young people involved in the project so far (June 2021), with another 4 young people due to start in July 2021. Of these, 17 have successfully stepped down to less intensive care, with 13 working towards a step down in line with their care plan:

- 10 stepped down to less intensive care whilst on the project
- 7 returned home whilst on the project
- 13 ongoing work with the young person, however planning towards step down
- 4 non-engagement from outset

Of the above figures, 8 of these did not fully complete the 18-month duration of the project and closed for a variety of reasons.

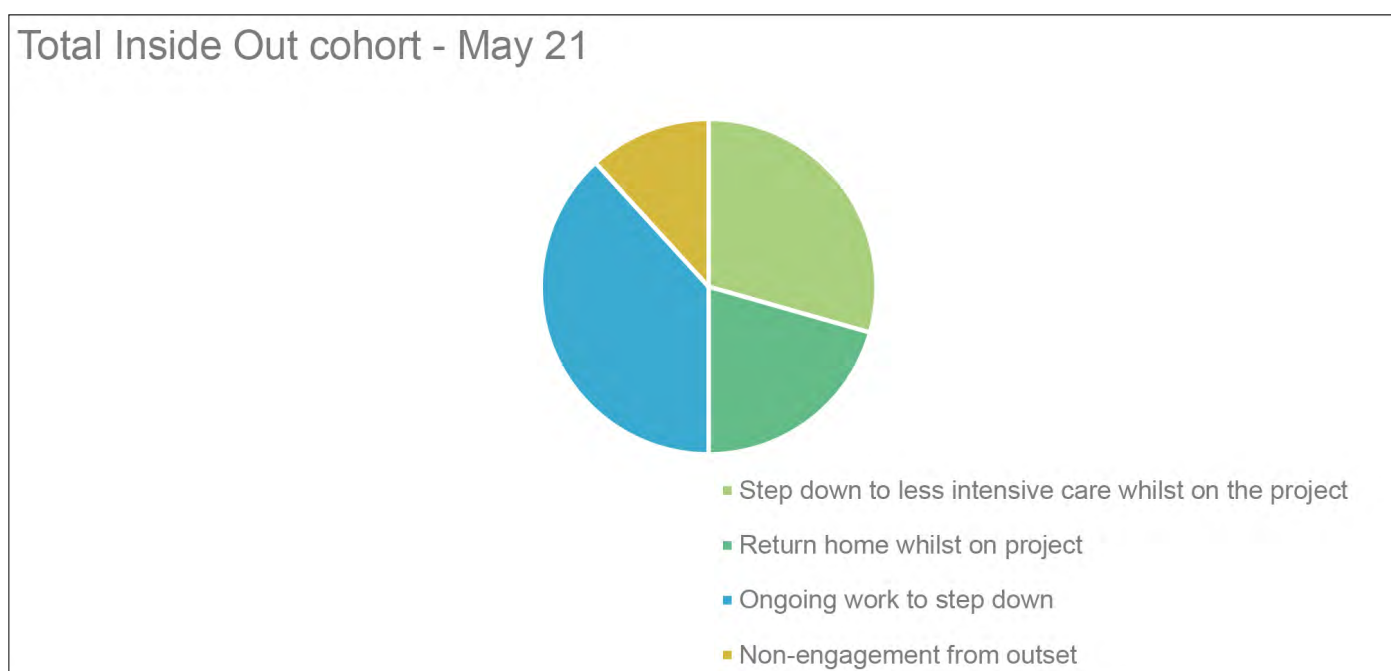


Figure 2: Inside Out Cohort

## Residential Parenting Assessment Units

There were 5 placements made in Family Assessment Units in 20/21.

There is an average cost of £3,643.74 p/w. Placement duration is from 4 to 12 weeks.

Outcomes are:

- Step down to parent and child fostering
- Step down to fostering – placement order granted
- Step down to live with grandparents – SGO granted

## Foster Care

As of March 25th 2021, there were 704 children and young people under 18 (including UASC, family and friends' placements) in foster placements excluding staying put. Of the under 18s in foster care, 496 were placed with in house carers including family and friends' carers (excludes staying put over 18 arrangements).

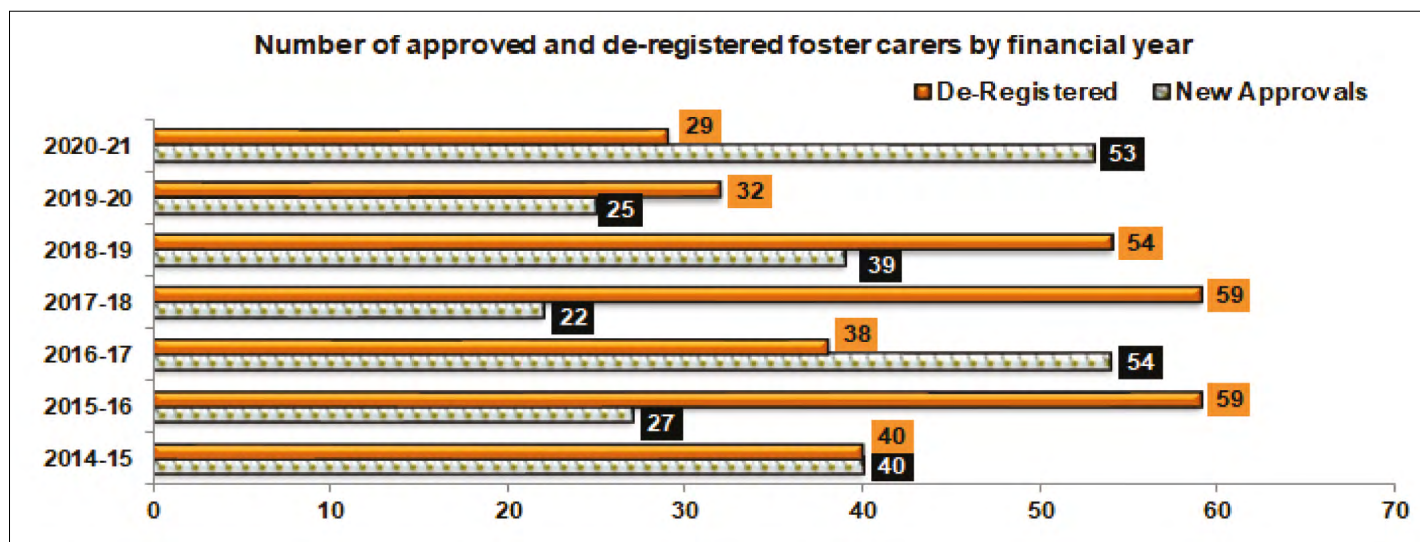
### In-House foster care

There were 488 children placed in in house foster placements including family and friends as at Jun 21, of whom:

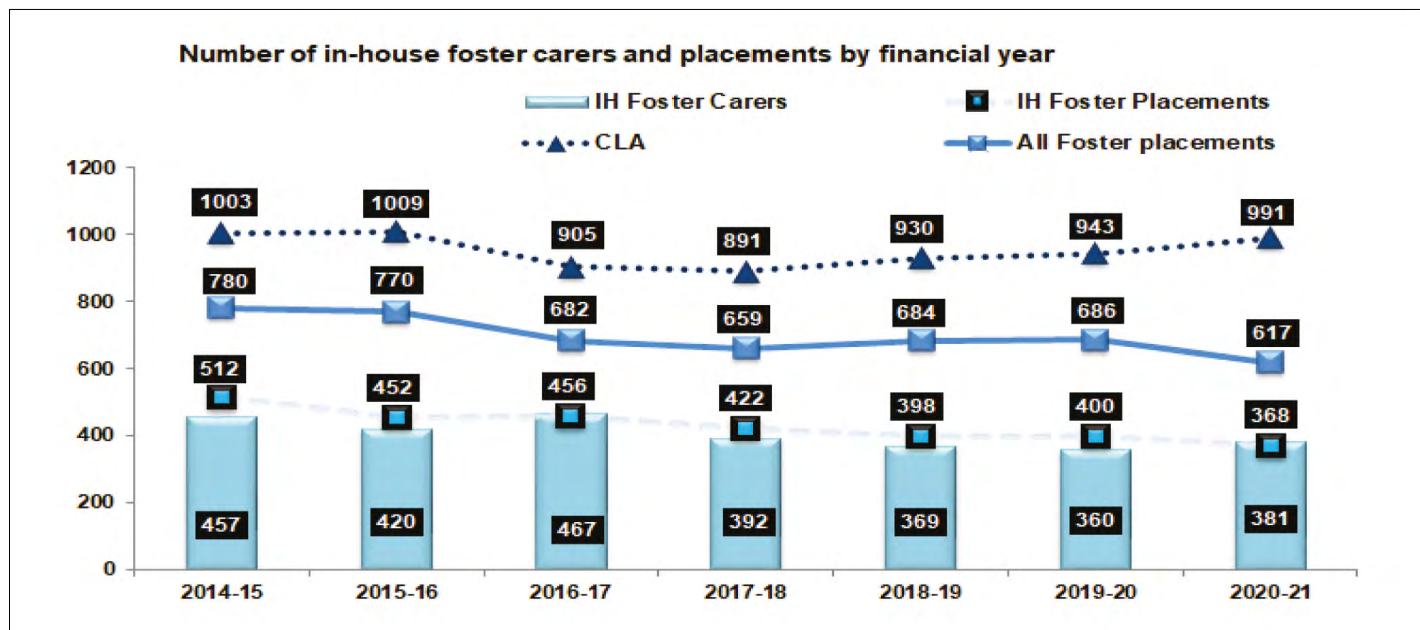
Provision type	Placements
In-house friends and family	101
IFA fostering	210
Long Term placements	146

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, although in the financial year 2020-21, there was a net increase in capacity of 24.



Over the last 7 financial years, there have been 260 new approvals and 311 de-registered carers (households).



Since 2014-15, there has been a loss of 76 carers (households). This figure includes those who have moved to Friends & Family, Shared Care and Supported Lodgings.

The ratio of In House (IH) foster placements has decreased from 66% in 2014-15 to 60% in 2020-21.

The ratio of all placements to children looked after (CLA) has decreased from 78% in 2014-15 to 62% in 2020-21.

Over the last 2 years, service development has been focused on improving the support offer through ARC Fostering and 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 has been seen throughout 2020-2021. Double the number of foster carers have been recruited compared to the previous year resulting in a net gain of 24 foster carers. 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.
- 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 lead to a significant increase in enquiries and approvals during the year. In total 54 new in-house foster carers were approved in 2020/21, with a net gain of 24 (compared to net loss of -9 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.
- Despite the increase in in-house carer numbers, in-house placement numbers decreased during the year due to the impact of Covid-19 on foster carer availability and children looked after numbers. Action plans have been developed to address this, and this will be a key priority in 2021.

## **Independent Foster Placements**

There has been an increase in placements in independent fostering since the last quarter bringing the total to 208 placements. There are 84 children in staying put foster care arrangements which consequently reduces capacity for the under 18s. 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. As we come through this third national lockdown and ongoing 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.

## **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 117 children placed, 93 are in Hertfordshire and 22 in local authorities bordering Hertfordshire. The majority of the 22 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.

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, a potential **avoided spend of £547 per placement per week**.

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



## Care Leavers / Accommodation

Care Leavers aged 18+ from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021:	Totals
18 years old	168
19 to 21 years old	467
22 to 26 years old	188
All Care Leavers 18+	823

### Proposed Actions 21/22 (COVID prevented tenders in 20/21)

- Hertfordshire County Council is preparing to issue a tender for the provision of single person accommodation for:
  - Care Leavers aged 18 and above who require interim accommodation prior to moving to local authority social housing or Supported Accommodation (short term)
  - Care Leavers aged 18 and above with additional needs, but who do not meet the Care Act 2014 eligibility criteria (longer term)

Work has been undertaken to conduct a needs analysis in order to assess the number of accommodation units, the type of accommodation and support required and the location.

- A further strand of the tender will focus on accommodation for Care Leavers who are also failed asylum seekers (generally NRPF & ARE) who require accommodation whilst awaiting the outcome of the asylum and/or appeals process.
- Two further strands of the tender will focus on family groups:
  - No Recourse to Public Funds families (NRPF) who require accommodation as a result of Section 17 duties towards the children (a protocol is in place to transfer responsibility to the housing authority, if and when the family get a decision that enables them to access public funds and services);
  - Families who have been deemed 'Intentionally Homeless' by a housing authority and due to Section 17 duties and where the family are unable to identify a suitable solution, Children's Services provides interim accommodation whilst a longer-term solution is developed that transfers responsibility back to the family.

It is proposed that the tender will be executed via commissioning arrangements with approved Letting Agents and Estate Agents who will be commissioned to source specific accommodation dependent on availability of the property type and area required. It is envisaged that this will be achieved using a range of procurement methods that are appropriate to the levels of spend in these areas, such as through a quotation method or a Framework Agreement contract. Children's Services is also exploring the possible use of a range of vacant Hertfordshire County Council properties that may enable a more 'local' approach to be used via the renovation of properties that become vacant and/or may be unused. This has been achieved through a business case for a capital bid agreed at Board.

As part of the commissioning arrangements, work will be required to establish the tenancy and license arrangements, the rent and housing benefit/housing element of Universal Credit contribution and subsidy arrangements and the arrangements for vacating the properties when Children's Services has been deemed to have discharged its duties.

## **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 continues to match predicted levels of requirement activity for 2020/2021, which is an improvement on the national trend (38 Adopters approved – end of March 2021).

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 period April 2020 - March 2021, 234 applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund, with a total of £626,579.95 being received for a range of specialist provision, including; DDP dyadic developmental psychotherapy (attachment therapy), sensory integration therapy and therapeutic play therapy and life story work.

## **SEND Commissioning**

The SEND Commissioning Team includes 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 2020/21 was 100, with the largest number of these CYP having ASD and/or challenging behaviour, and second largest number having complex health needs. This indicates a decrease from 131 for 2018/19. The number of commissioned hours for 2020/21 remained at a similar level, to accommodate the increasing complexity of care packages and CYP requiring increased staffing ratios.

A full data needs and trends analysis has been carried out to inform the proposed future service model.

A public consultation has been carried out, which will feed into the new service model going forward.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, and with the social distancing measures 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 would remain open and would be kept safe. Additionally, OSB providers have gone above and beyond their usual day to day activities by supporting emergencies across children’s services.

### Proposed Actions 21/22:

The recommissioning of OSB has been delayed due to COVID-19, however we are proposing to recommence this activity during the summer of 2021.

- The new OSB service will continue to recognise that the current service supports CYP from the Transforming Care cohort.
- Developments of short-term emergency placement capacity, building on our work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are proposing to go out to tender in summer 2021, with the aim of the new service to be in place April 2022.

## 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 20/21:

- continue to strengthen the Community Education and Treatment reviews
- continue to develop the Dynamic Risk Register and the offer to prevent psychiatric hospital admission
- implement the keyworker project ensuring that every child or young person in the Transforming Care cohort who is at risk of admission, is heard
- 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 21/22 is outlined below.

### Key Priorities in 2021/22

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

Open a further 3 children's homes; utilising existing HCC properties run by independent providers by March 2022

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

Tender for 18+ Accommodation (Care Leavers (including those with additional needs), Former Relevant UASC (ARE's), No Recourse to Public Funds Families and Intentionally Homeless families)

Re-commission the Inside Out service and transition to business as usual in Hertfordshire in conjunction with regional partners

Create further additional Crashpad bed spaces for the Prevention of Homelessness/Housing Related Support Service for 16/17 year olds at immediate risk of street homelessness (currently 6 bed spaces).

Work with CCRAAG partners to implement and develop the recommissioned placement database

Tender for the Prevention of Homelessness Service and Floating Support Services (both contracts to commence April 2022)

Award STAs (1 year contracts) to existing Supported Accommodation Providers due to new Ofsted regulations/consultation of unregulated providers/provisions