



Placement Sufficiency Update

*Report for Select Committee on the sufficiency of placements
for Buckinghamshire's Children Looked After*

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Introduction

1. The council has a 'sufficiency duty', which states that it must take steps to secure, as far as possible, sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children that it is looking after.
2. It is evident that the quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people 'doing well' in care – the higher the quality, the better children and young people do' (Sinclair et al, 2007).
3. Following the approval of our 3-year Placement Sufficiency Strategy in April 2021, there have been unprecedented changes to the availability and cost of placements for children in care both nationally and locally.
4. In response to the national pressures, the Department for Education (DfE) has accepted the Independent Review of Children's Social Care's recommendation to regionalise placement commissioning, through the establishment of regional care co-operatives (RCCs).
5. This presentation provides an overview of the CLA profile based on the latest available benchmarking data, the current position and associated challenges and our future priorities to increase the availability of provision within the county for our CLA.



CLA Profile Data 2022



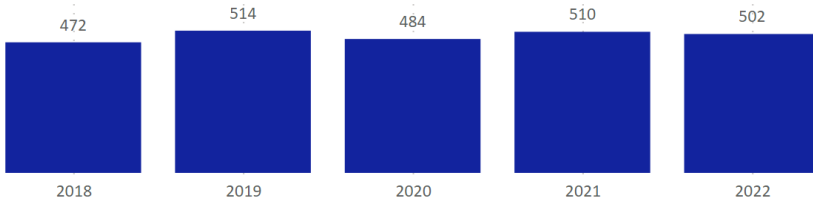


CLA in Buckinghamshire as at 31st March 2018 - 2022

CLA numbers and rates

Total Number of CLA in Buckinghamshire

2018	2022	Percentage Change
472	502	6.4%

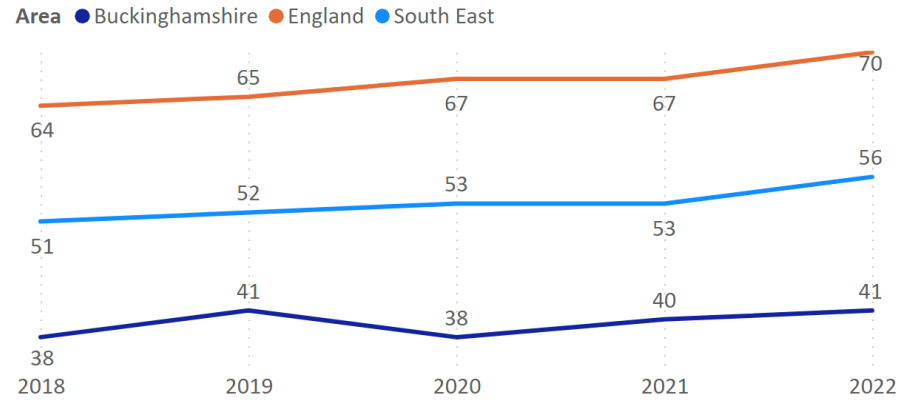


Percentage Change - South East
8.5%

Percentage Change - England
9.0%

Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Buckinghamshire	472	514	484	510	502
South East	9990	10270	10430	10480	10840
England	75360	78140	80000	80780	82170

Rate of CLA per 10,000 population



Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Buckinghamshire	38	41	38	40	41
South East	51	52	53	53	56
England	64	65	67	67	70



CLA in Buckinghamshire as at 31st March 2018 - 2022

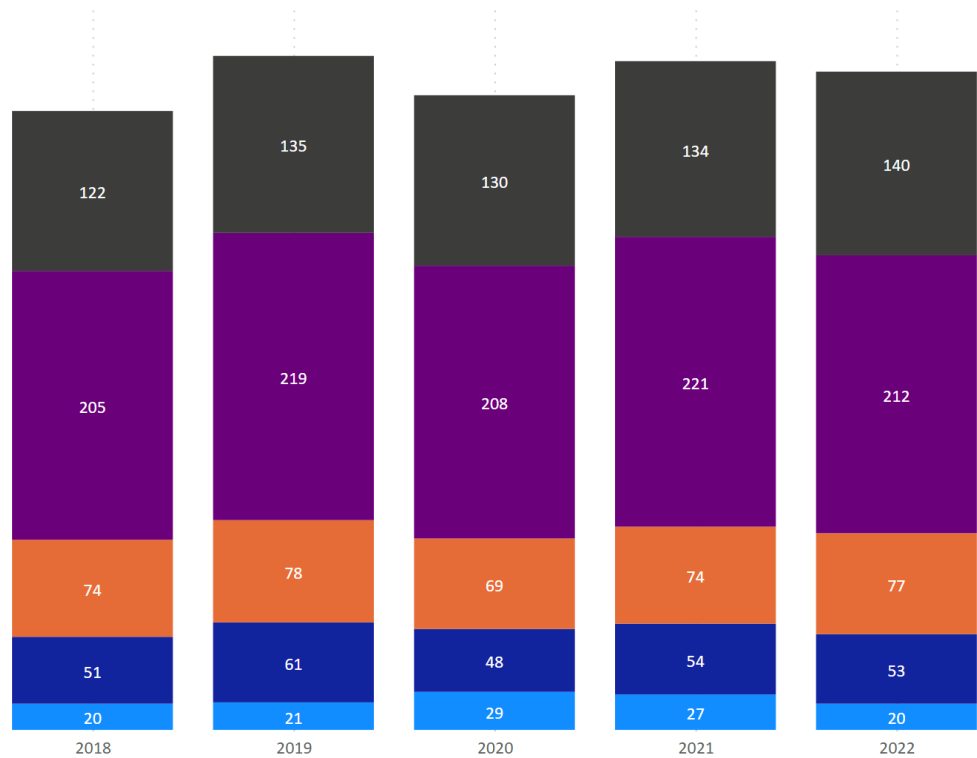
CLA by age

% of CLA by age group

Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Buckinghamshire					
Under 1 year	4	4	6	5	4
1 to 4 years	11	12	10	11	11
5 to 9 years	16	15	14	15	15
10 to 15 years	43	43	43	43	42
16 years and over	26	26	27	26	28
South East					
Under 1 year	5	5	5	4	5
1 to 4 years	11	11	10	11	11
5 to 9 years	18	18	17	17	17
10 to 15 years	41	41	40	40	40
16 years and over	26	26	28	27	28
England					
Under 1 year	6	5	5	5	5
1 to 4 years	13	13	14	14	14
5 to 9 years	19	18	18	19	18
10 to 15 years	39	39	39	39	39
16 years and over	23	24	24	23	25

Number of Buckinghamshire CLA by age group

● Under 1 year ● 1 to 4 years ● 5 to 9 years ● 10 to 15 years ● 16 years and over

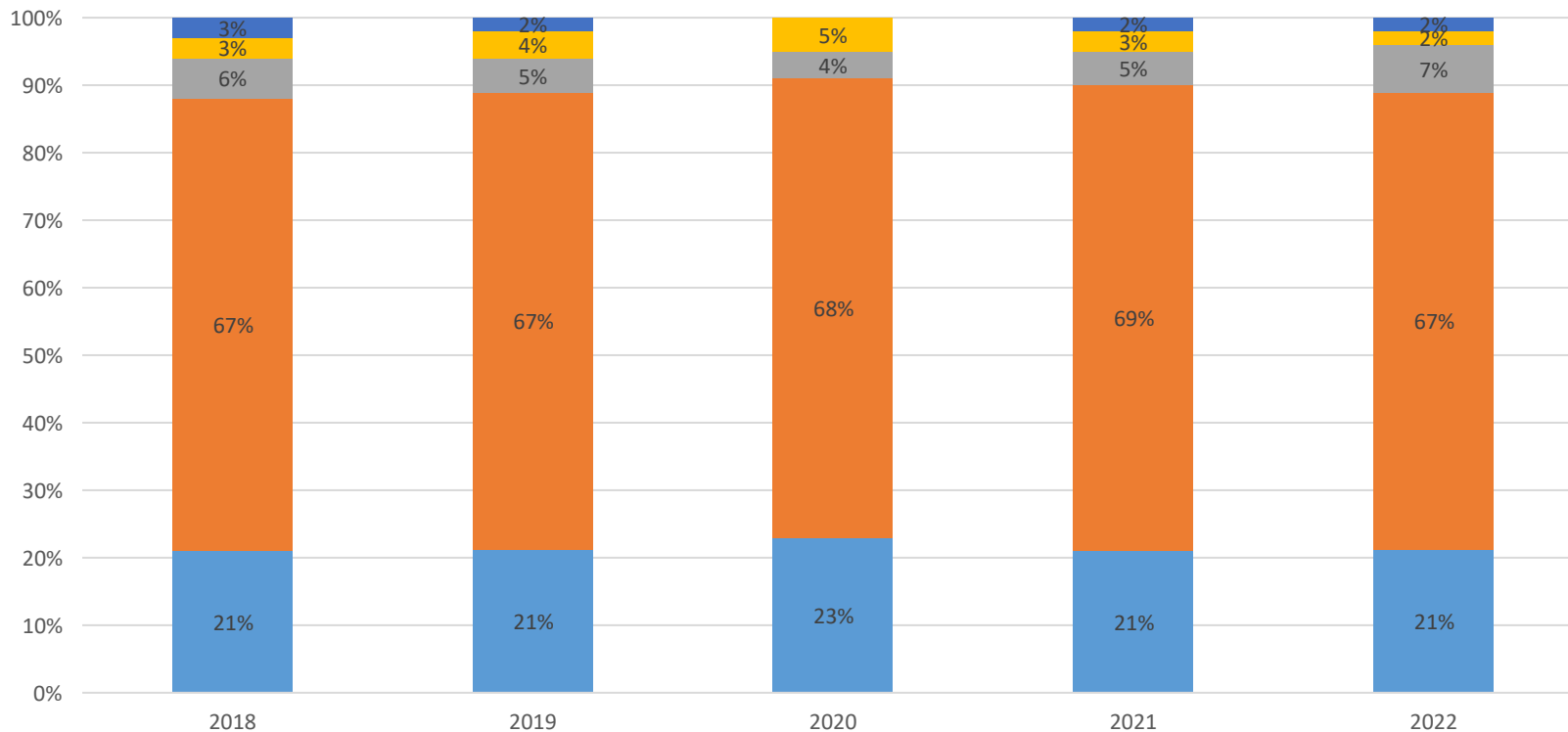




CLA in Buckinghamshire as at 31st March 2018 - 2022

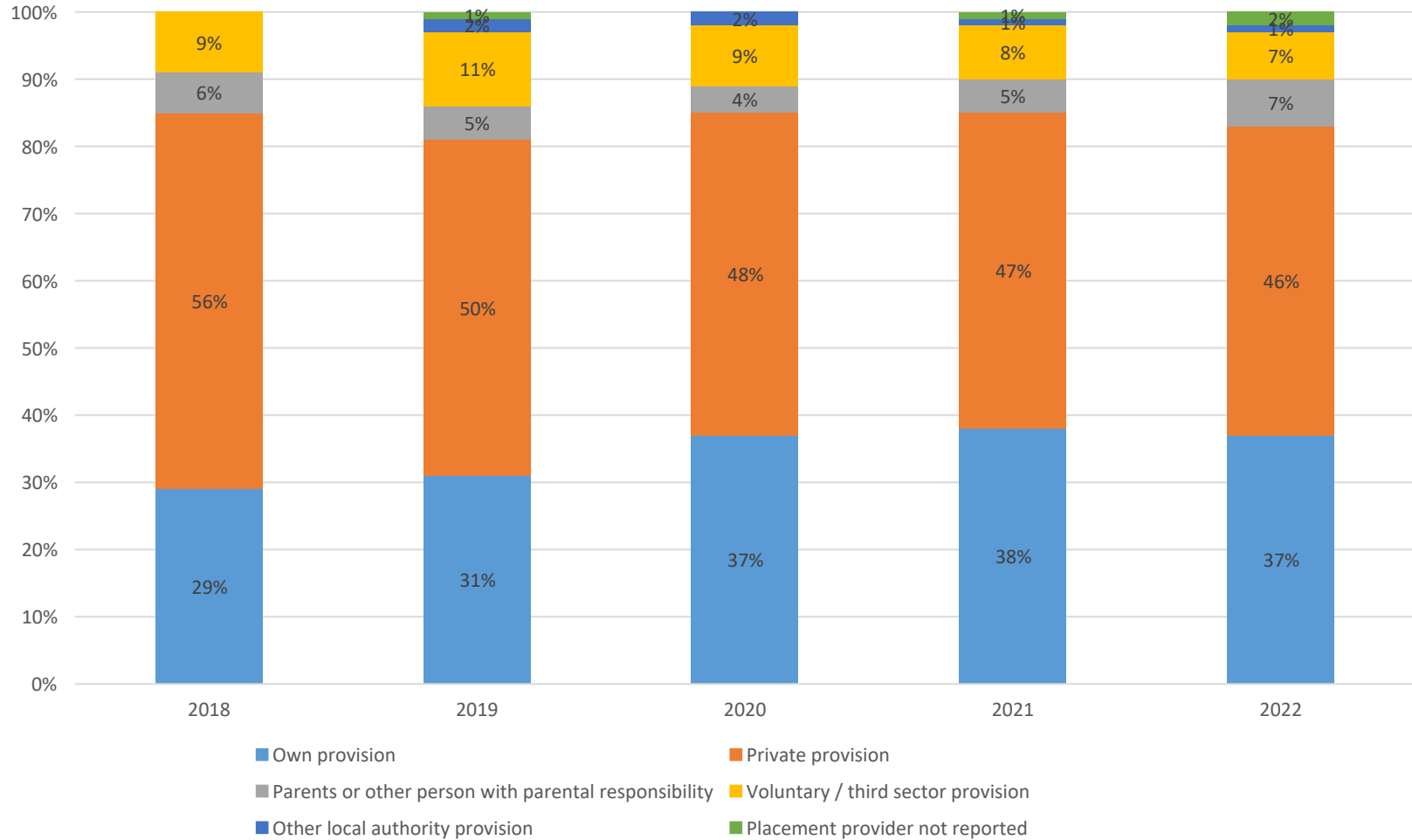
CLA by placement

% of Buckinghamshire CLA by Placement Type



- Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation
- Foster placements
- Parents or other person with parental responsibility
- Placed for adoption
- Other type of placement

% of Buckinghamshire CLA by Provider Type



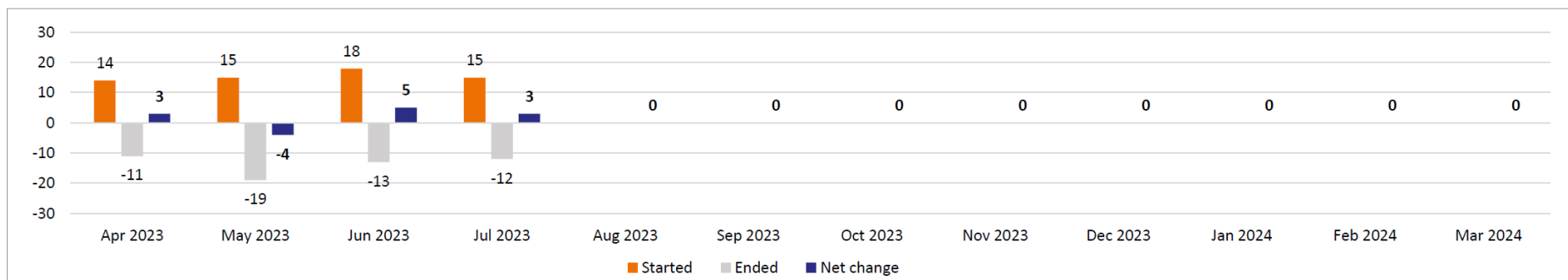
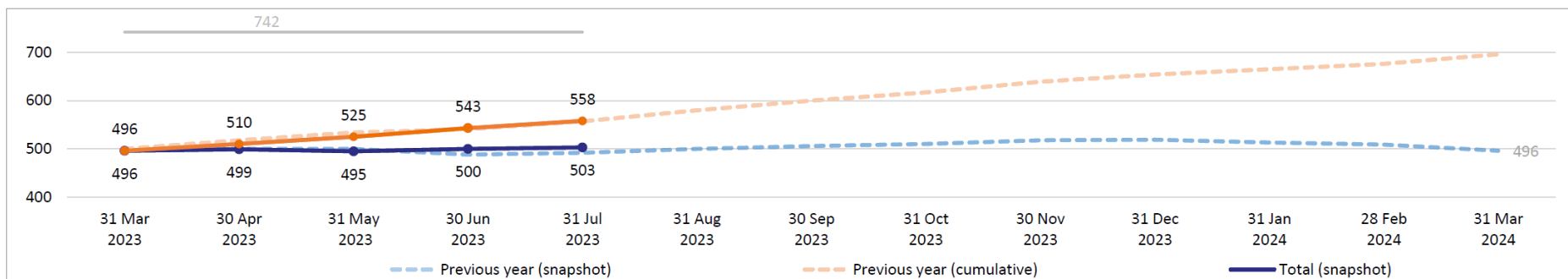


Current Position and Challenges



Number of CLA

1. As at the end of July, our number of CLA was 503.
2. The rate of CLA per 10,000 children aged 0-17 in Buckinghamshire at the end of July is 41 compared to 60 in the South East (Q3 2022/23). If our rate was as high as the South East level of 60 per 10,000 children, this would equate to 742 looked after children (which would equate to an additional 239 children).
3. Although our number of CLA has remained circa 500 for a number of years, it is important to note that our cohort of CLA is extremely volatile as children are continually entering or leaving care. For example, since April 2023, 62 children have become looked after and 55 have ceased to be.

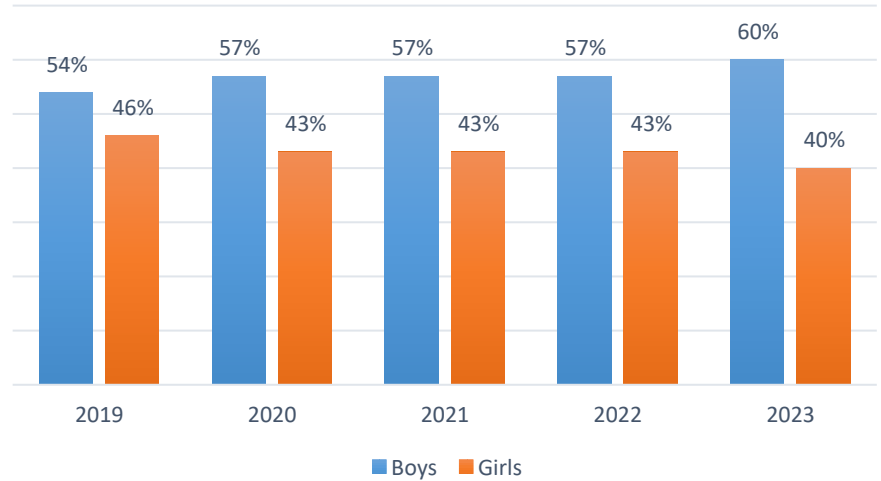


All information in this report is from the Children's Social Care System LCS. Data extracted from LCS on the 01 August 2023 and excludes all children over the age of 18.

Profile of CLA

1. Within our CLA population the gender demographic has changed significantly from an 8% to 20% difference in gender between boys and girls, with males now making up 60% of CLA.
2. In addition, an increase in the average age of the care population, particularly boys, is one of the most significant recent changes in the cohort. The significant increase in 16- and 17-year-old males is attributable to the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
3. Adolescents are now the largest and fastest growing age cohort in the care population and so a system which was designed to meet the needs of younger children is now needing to adapt to a different set of risks and needs.

Gender profile of CLA



Age profile of Buckinghamshire boys looked after

Age	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	3%	6%	4%	4%	2%
1 – 4	11%	10%	11%	11%	6%
5 – 9	15%	14%	15%	15%	11%
10 – 15	45%	41%	43%	44%	37%
16 – 17	26%	29%	27%	26%	43%

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

1. Buckinghamshire Council has now, along with all other local authorities, been mandated to take UASC when they are referred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).
2. The Council is also now required to continue to receive referrals until it reaches 0.1% of the child (0-18) population (124 individuals for Buckinghamshire) compared to the previous ask of 0.07%, 89 individuals for Buckinghamshire.
3. At the time of writing, the Service supports 73 UASC, an increase from 30 in April 2022. In addition, the service is also supports a further 89 unaccompanied individuals over the age of 18.
4. In response to the significant increase, we have created a specialist UASC team with the skills required to support this unique and increasing cohort of young people seeking asylum.
5. These decisions by central government are having a significant impact directly and indirectly on the Council's budgets. The direct impacts are on placement costs and on subsistence payments. Indirectly, the impact on placement availability for all children has and continues to decrease supply.

Placements for CLA

1. Since October 2021, it has become increasingly difficult to find placements, particularly but not limited to children aged 12 plus with complex need. As a result, this has affected the overall % of our CLA placed in foster care and the number of children placed with a Buckinghamshire Council foster carer.
2. During the last 2 years we have also seen a decline in the number of people willing to be foster carers.

	% of CLA placed in foster care	Number of CLA placed with an inhouse foster carer
May 2021	69%	171
May 2022	67%	164
May 2023	58%	138

3. Conversely, we now have three of our own children's homes (14 beds) within the county providing a safe home for our CLA. Building on the success of our current homes, we plan to open additional homes in the future as detailed later in the presentation. In addition, we have also recently opened our first parent and child assessment centre (4 bed) to ensure that parents who require residential assessments can remain within the county.

Current Pressures (1)

Workforce

A lack of registered managers for Ofsted semi-independent placements has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of residential placements available. It is now taking 4 to 6 weeks to find a placement, and there is usually only one option which can lead to children being placed a significant distance from home. We are anticipating that the shortage of registered managers will impact on the number of semi-independent providers who are able to meet the more stringent Ofsted registration requirements which come into effect by October 2023, this will lead to closures, less placement options for 16+ and increased placement costs. In addition, availability of domiciliary carers and residential care home workers has led to

- significant delays in domiciliary care packages being delivered with subsequent impact on the waiting lists for children requiring respite at our residential respite units.
- local and national providers closing or reducing the number of children they can offer placements to which, in turn, increases competition.
- emergency residential placements being impossible to find for any child 12+ and it is now taking on average 4 to 6 weeks to identify a suitable placement.

Demand outstripping supply

As a result of the diminishing supply of placements, there is increased demand and competition in respect of finding suitable accommodation and care for our Looked After Children. Placement costs across the board have increased significantly, a specific example of this is unregistered provisions now cost between £15,000 and £60,000 per week, dependent on the level of risk and staffing required.

Current Pressures (2)

Unregistered provisions

Prior to last year, this Council had never placed a young person in unregistered provision, and it is always our intention not to do this. However, as the availability of placements for the most complex children and young people became virtually non-existent, this has led the Council and all other local authorities in the country to be faced with using provision that is not Ofsted registered for some under 16-year-olds.

Some of our children have been in unregistered provision for longer than we would like, and they are our most complex high-risk children. All of whom have carefully planned arrangements that are monitored and agreed by the Service Director. Placement searches have continued with over 140 Independent Fostering Agencies and 550 residential placements contacted but no formal offers received. The impact being:

- Children are held in a transient position whilst placement searches continue.
- Children can experience disruption to their education due to the duration of the provision being unclear.
- Engaging with external services (i.e., CAMHS) can be challenging due to the transient nature of the provision.
- There is an additional burden on social care budgets to fund food, clothing and activities which would ordinarily have been covered by placement costs.

Secure accommodation

Children who are a significant risk to themselves or others meet the criteria for secure accommodation. The secure estate has faced significant challenges for the last 3 years, the waiting list for beds has been at 70+ each week with 1 or 2 vacancies. We have been advised by the secure estate that some of our children are too high risk to meet the criteria for a secure bed. For the children who we have successfully placed in a secure bed it has taken on average 6 weeks to identify a bed.

Current Pressures (3)

Placement Stability

This in the main, impacted upon by a change in the child's needs/risks which the care providers do not feel able to meet or they are concerned about the impact of the child's behaviours/risks on their Ofsted judgement. Residential providers and foster carers are aware that there are more children than placements available so they can choose which children they wish to care for.

Therefore, more children are experiencing placement moves and there are limited options available for complex children with carers/providers being aware that they can choose less challenging/complex children.

Reduction in the number of inpatient mental health beds

There are a limited number of specialist provisions across the country who, if they have capacity, will offer placements for those under 16. No providers are offering residential placements for children aged 16+ so we are using semi-independent placements to solve this challenge, this however does not always reduce the level of risk and we are not able to provide care in these placements. This means Looked After Children are not placed in provisions where their complex mental health needs are met, which can lead to multiple short term hospital admissions and/or children being placed in placements who do not have the skills/knowledge/experience to meet their needs.

Access to social housing

Housing colleagues are reporting a 65% increase in referrals for social housing over the last 12 months. This will impact on the availability of local placements as they become full of care leavers who are ready and able to live independently.



Future Priorities



Our future priorities (1)

Buckinghamshire Children's Services is currently assessing the logistical and financial viability of:

- 1. Increasing our local residential capacity** through in-house development and increasing our cross regional project beds, whilst exploring other alternative residential options including a secure unit.
- 2. Developing a residential academy** to address the challenges in the recruitment and retention of residential staff.
- 3. Increasing the post 18 offer of accommodation for UASCs** to offer a variety of accommodation and support options whilst they await the outcome of their asylum claims that negate the need for them to remain in expensive external placements.
- 4. Improving the stability and support to foster carers, special guardians, and adopters** by developing a dedicated placement support and life story team to a consistent offer of life story work to all children with a permanency plan of adoption, special guardianship, or long-term fostering alongside improved training and support from the fostering support team.

Our future priorities (2)

- 5. Building on the work with the fostering support service** to ensure the offer we provide to the carers matches or improves the offers they receive from independent fostering agencies. This includes high levels of support from their allocated social workers, CAMHS consultations, life story work team, joint cross-service training, enhanced training offer, increased financial package, access to PAM assist.
- 6. Reviewing our current recruitment and communications plan** to ensure we are maximising the recruitment options for both fostering and adoption.
- 7. Enhancing the package of support provided to children placed in unregistered provision** and ensure there is senior management oversight of risks.
- 8. Reviewing the threshold for service provision** in the Children with Disabilities service to ensure that services are consistently provided based on the needs of the child.

Questions?