



Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2018-2021

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	1. Action Plan (reviewed every 6 months)	

Issue Date	Date of Next Strategy Review	Lead Service(s)
May 2018	May 2021	Strategic Manager – Placement Efficiency & Children’s Commissioning Service
Issue Date	Date of Action Plan Reviews (every 6mths)	Lead Service(s)
June 2018	December 2018 June 2019 December 2019 June 2020 December 2020 May 2021	Strategic Manager – Placement Efficiency & Children’s Commissioning Service (Lindsey Herring – CPPO)

1. INTRODUCTION – POLICY CONTEXT

The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy sets out Durham’s strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our looked after children.

The council has a duty, as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area. The 2010 guidance on the ‘sufficiency duty’ states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty.

The sufficiency duty must take account of the requirement, under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989, that the overriding consideration for placing a child is that the placement must be the most appropriate available to meet the child’s needs. Next, preference must be given to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a placement must be found, as far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:

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

FINANCIAL CONTEXT

There are significant financial implications and pressures in relation to the services provided for Looked after Children and Leaving Care. In 2017/18 the Budget associated with LAC placements was £13.528m and was overspent by £4.735m. Following additional growth monies the 2018/19 LAC placement budget was increased to £18.042m. At the close of Quarter 1 the budgets are forecast to overspend by £0.528m. This is primarily due to the increasing numbers of LAC and usage of externally commissioned residential provision

2. BEING A CORPORATE PARENT

Looking after and protecting children and young people from harm is one of the most important jobs that a Local Authority can do. Where a child cannot remain safely at home for whatever reason and comes into the care of the Local Authority and becomes ‘Looked After’ the council becomes the ‘corporate parent’ for that child. They are also the corporate parent for any young person who is under 25 and has been looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday.

The term ‘corporate parent’ means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding support for the children and young people who are looked after by the council. A child in the care of the council looks to the whole council to be the best parent it can be to that child. Every member

and employee has the statutory responsibility to act for that child in the same way that a good parent would act for their child.

Our commitment is to all children and young people living in foster care and residential care, placed for adoption, those living in supported lodgings or at home under Placement with Parent Regulations, as well as those living in secure establishments or in custody.

3. POSITION STATEMENT

As an Authority we:

- Will work collaboratively with families and our partners to offer family support and enable children and young people to be cared for within their own families wherever possible.
- Offer a range of Early Help Services to support children subject to a Child Protection Plans and their families, and prevent entry into care. This includes Family Group Conferencing, Supporting Solutions Service (our Edge of Care service) and direct social work interventions from our One Point Service and Families First Teams.
- Will undertake robust assessment, planning and case review to ensure that we only look after children and young people for whom being in care is the only way of ensuring their safety, protection and development.
- Will continue to work with those with parental responsibility to help a child or young person in care return home safely, wherever this is possible.

When it is not possible for a child or young person to remain with their family, we will seek to provide high quality care which meets their individual needs and as near as possible to the child or young person's home to maintain links with birth parents, relatives and their communities (where appropriate).

As an Authority we:

- Will aim to secure legal and emotional permanence, preferably through adoption, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Orders or where this is not possible, through long-term foster care.
- Will maximise the use of internal foster care resources before using local external fostering agencies.
- Will avoid using residential care except when it is in the best interests of the child / young person and meeting their complex needs.
- Are committed to being the best parent we can be for our Looked After Children and Care Leavers and strive to ensure that we deliver support and care that is as good as every good parent.
- Are committed to ensuring that Looked After Children and Care Leavers have the best opportunities available to them to achieve their potential and that these are at least as good as the opportunities available for all other children. We recognise that many children and young people face significantly greater levels of challenging circumstances before reaching

- adulthood than their peers and that this may mean that they have the need for additional support.
- Are committed to ensuring that services are designed with and for Looked After Children and Care Leavers to meet their needs.
- Want all of our Looked After Children to live in loving, stable and safe homes in a place that they can 'call home'.
- Want the people who are caring for them to be fun, loving, skilled, enthusiastic, ambitious and fighting their corner every step of the way.
- Want our children and young people to form good, trusting, nurturing relationships with their carers and have positive experiences.
- Want our children and young people to live in stable placements and only having to move when it is in their best interests or when they have chosen to do so.
- Are ambitious for our children and young people and want to encourage them to dream big and fulfil their potential.
- Are committed to ensuring that they receive the best education in the best schools and get additional support if they need it; that they are well prepared for independence and work through apprenticeships, high quality training, supported into higher education and into university for those who aspire to do so.
- Want our children to be well, healthy and have good emotional and mental health.
- Want to celebrate their achievements, whether big or small so that they can be proud of themselves and know that we are proud of them.
- Want them to have fun and be able to develop their own interests and hobbies so that they can develop in confidence; develop friendships and memories that they can fondly look back on in later years.
- Are committed to listening to our children and young people, hearing what they have to say and acting on it wherever possible. We will develop our services based on this feedback and regularly check with them that we have got it right. We will be open to change and challenge.
- Want our care leavers to be well prepared for adulthood and ensure that they feel that they are part of a wider extended family who will be there for them if they are needed.
- Want our care leavers to feel safe and to receive the appropriate level of support and advice to enable them to transition to adulthood. This includes young people living in staying put arrangements with their carer(s) and having access to suitable high quality supported living or independent living provision. We recognise how big a challenge this is and that many of our young people do this at a much younger age than many other young people.

- Want our young people to be able to make mistakes and know that they will be supported to learn and that someone will be there to help them pick up the pieces.

4. LISTENING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

As an authority we are committed to listening to children and young people and have embedded this practice across Children's Services. We work in partnership with a social enterprise called 'Investing in Children'. They deliver a range of children's participation services on our behalf and implement a number of schemes through a contract arrangement:

- Facilitation of young people's participation / reference groups;
- Facilitation of the eXtreme group to ensure that the voice of children and young people with disabilities are listened to and acted upon.
- Coordination of the Children in Care Council;
- Management of Drive Project – enabling young people to learn to drive.
- Management of the Freedom Card – enabling Looked After Children and their carers to access a range of leisure activities at a discounted price.
- Management and facilitation of the Investing in Children Membership Programme – services are reviewed annually to ensure that they meet investing in children criteria.

All teams across Children's Services have either achieved Investing in Children Membership or are working towards this. The 'Investing in Children membership', is a kite mark which demonstrates that Looked After Children and young people feel valued and are listened to by adults.

These are some of the things Looked After Young People have said about the services we provide :

“You have too many changes of social workers when you are in care”

“It is important to have the same social worker as you need to be able to trust them and changing social workers doesn't help with this!”

Those young people that have a stable social worker state:

“How they are really good, how they help with any problems they have and listen to what they say”

“They listened to me about contact and helped with this”

“They helped me at school”

Other comments include:

“I like where I live now. My carers are great!”

“My life is much better now that I am in care”

“Young people need to be involved in deciding who works with them. Like foster carers, social workers and young people's advisors”

“We now get to train potential foster carers and say if we think they will be good or not!”

“I have been involved in interviewing social workers. Young people need to be involved in this as it is us who will be working with them”

5. STRATEGIC NEEDS ANALYSIS

[Durham Insight](#) is being developed as the shared intelligence, research and knowledge base for County Durham, informing strategic planning across Durham County Council and its partners. The aim is to provide users an easy way to access and share information, intelligence, research and knowledge for deeper insights about their local area or communities. Children and Young People is one of the eight key themes contained within Durham Insight. Factsheets which contain analysis and intelligence to inform plans and strategies around the needs of children and young people are available here <https://www.durhaminsight.info/related-factsheets-children-young-people/>, including one with a focus on Looked After Children. Further data and mapping is available through the '[Children & Young People](#)' theme.

Key messages relating to the population of children and young people in County Durham and the needs of our Looked After Children and young people are presented below.

Durham's Population

The overall population of County Durham is projected to grow by 3.0% (+15,600 people) between 2016 and 2026 to 537,300 people and by 5.6% (rising to 550,800) by 2041. The number of children aged 0 to 15 is also predicted to rise by 1.6% (to 90,500 children) by 2026 but over the entire projection period, by 2016 to 2041 this age group is predicted to fall by 0.2% to just under 90,000.

Historically, the county has had a low ethnic population which increased slowly from 1.0% (5,100 people) in 2001 to 1.8% (9,500 people) in 2011. Work around using administrative data to support the 2021 Census suggests that the ethnic population in the county has fallen slightly and may in part be due to economic change and uncertainty around Brexit. However, the main contributing factor to changes in the ethnic population of the county is due to the expansion of Durham University as the majority of people from ethnic minority populations are students.

Since 2011 the number of births in the county has steadily fallen from 5,832 to 5,156 in 2017. This trend may continue as recent ONS population estimates have indicated a fall in the number of children aged under 18 between 2001 and 2017 (a fall of 5.6% / 6,000 fewer children) which will feed into a lower number of women of child bearing age. For further information on population including detailed factsheets and mapping at small area level please see <https://www.durhaminsight.info/population/>.

Durham's Looked After Population

Durham County Council has seen a 29.82% increase in the number of looked after children since April 2015. This has presented many challenges for services across the Authority, particularly in relation to ensuring a sufficient number and range of placement types to meet the individual needs of children and young people.

Table 1 below identifies the increasing trend of children and young people being cared for by the Authority. Whilst the looked after population has stabilised in terms of the overall number throughout 2017-18 and into quarter 1 (2018/19), the total number continues to remain high.

Table 1 – Looked After Numbers and Rates between 2016-2018

	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018
LAC rate per 10,000 population	66.6	80.8	79.3
Number of LAC	668	810	795

Durham's rate of looked after children continues to remain below the regional and statistical neighbour rates but is higher than the national average and this is outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 population under 18

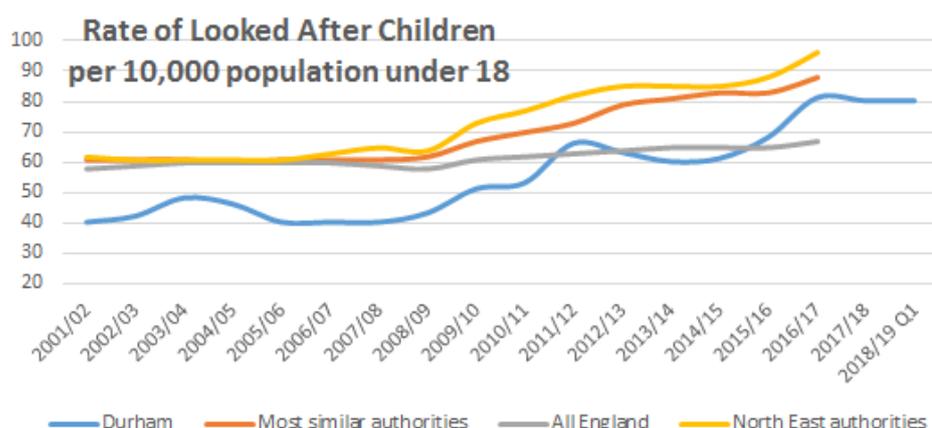


Table 2a provides benchmarking data for March 2017 and Durham's provisional rate for March 2018, which is also demonstrated in the above table.

Table 2a – Looked After Numbers - Benchmarking Data

Durham [Provisional]	Statistical Neighbour	North East	England
79.6 (31 March 2018)	87.5 (31 March 2017)	92 (31 March 2017)	62 (31 March 2017)

Table 3 – LAC Age Profile (31 March 2018)

Table 3a – Looked After Children aged under 1 year

Age Group	Length of Time Looked After					Total
	Under 6 months	6-12 months	1-2yrs	2-5yrs	5+ yrs	
under 1yr	46	26	0	0	0	72
1-4yrs	30	38	68	16	0	152
5-9yrs	20	19	42	51	30	162
10-12yrs	11	16	25	43	59	154
13-15yrs	11	7	12	33	78	141
16-17yrs	10	6	11	34	53	114
Grand Total	128	112	158	177	220	795

CLA at 31 March: % Age: Under 1

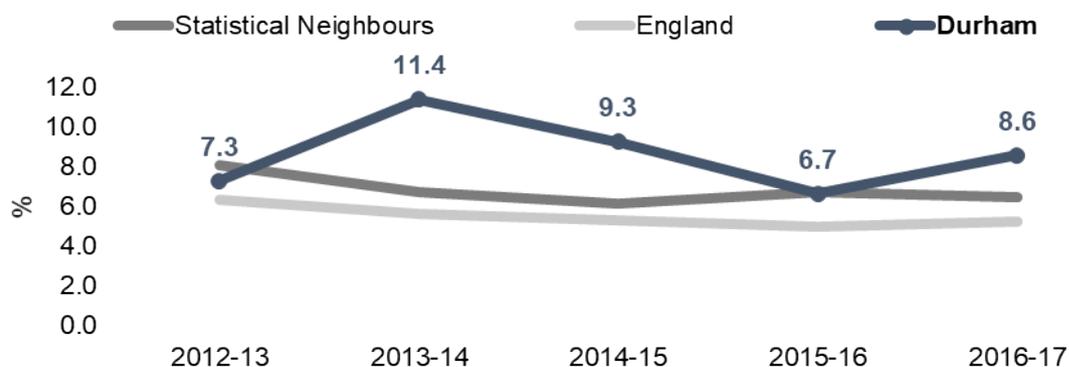


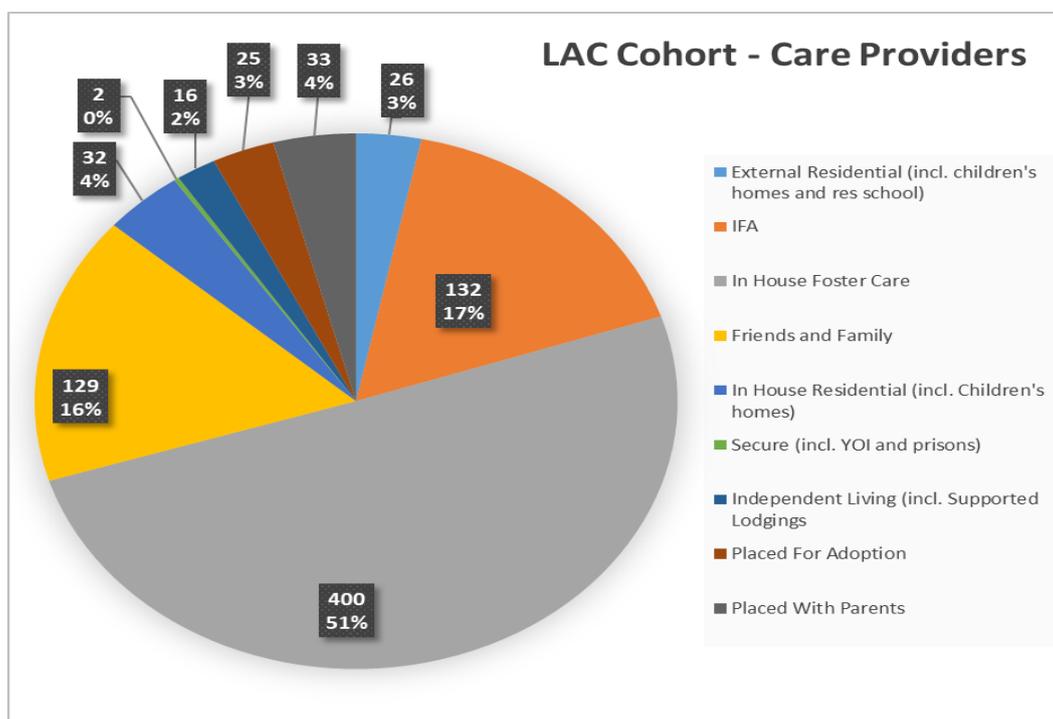
Table 3b – Additional LAC profile Information (31 March 2018)

Gender	Transgender and unknown	Female	Male
	Supressed due to low numbers	353 (44%)	431 (54%)
Duration of time spent in care	Less than 12 months	13mths - 3 years	Over 3 years
	383	221	191
Age Cohort	10 Years and under	11 - 15 years	16 -17 years
	430 (54%)	251 (32%)	114 (14%)

Analysis

- The largest group of looked after children are aged between 10-15 years (37.1%), with 46.4% of 10-15 year olds being looked after for 5+ years.
- Further analysis of the 10-15 year old age group highlights that there is a larger number of 10-12 year olds who are remaining within looked after services.
- The number of looked after children aged under 1 year has decreased since 2013/14, however, this age group still represents 9% of the overall LAC cohort. This is higher than regional, statistical neighbour and England averages.

Graph 4 – Placement Mix (31 March 2018)



Analysis

The graph above identifies the range of placement types that Durham's looked after children and young people are placed in:

- The majority of our looked after children and young people are in foster care (68%), a total of 51% with in-house foster carers and 17% with independent fostering agencies.
- The second largest group of children and young people (16%) live with family and friends.
- 7% of our children and young people are in residential care (3% external provision and 4% in-house provision)

Table 5 – Placement Stability

Performance Indicator	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Target 2017/18
Percentage of children looked after with 3 or more placements [number of children shown in brackets]	12.9% [78 of 606]	6.5% [40 of 619]	4.4% [30 of 678]	6.1% [50 of 814]	8.3% [66 of 800]	5%
Percentage of CLA continuously for 2.5 years or more aged under 16 who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years	54.2% [103 of 190]	57.0% [122 of 214]	69% Final	72.6%	69.3% [187 of 270]	72%

Analysis

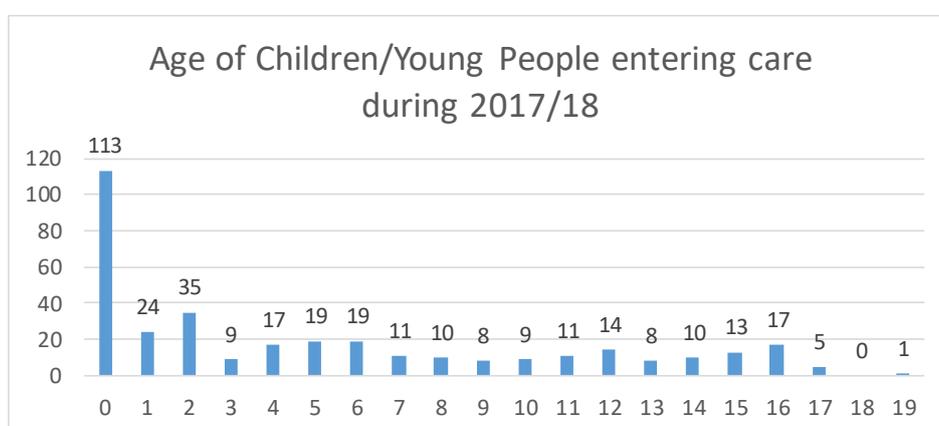
- As of 31 March 2018, 8.3% of looked after children and young people experienced 3 or more placement moves, which exceeds the 5% target set.
- Over the previous 4 years, children and young people with 3 or more placement moves reduced considerably, to 4.4% in 2015/16. It has risen gradually during 2016/17 (6.1%) and 2017/18 (6.9%) and we recognise that placement sufficiency and placement choice are key factors in supporting and improving placement stability.
- As of 31 March 2018, 69.3% of looked after children who have been in care for more than 2.5 years have remained in the same placement for at least 2 years.

Table 6 – Placement Stability – Benchmarking Information (2016/17)

Benchmark Rate England Average	Benchmark Rate North East Average	Benchmark Rate Statistic Neighbour	Durham's Rate
10%	8%	9.6%	6.1%

Placement instability causes disruption to the young person, results in poor outcomes and the tendency to require expensive placements to be sourced at short notice. The most up to date comparative data (2016/17) set out in Table 6 above suggests that Durham is performing better than other regional local authorities, statistical neighbours and the England average.

Table 7 - Age of Children/Young people entering care 2017/18

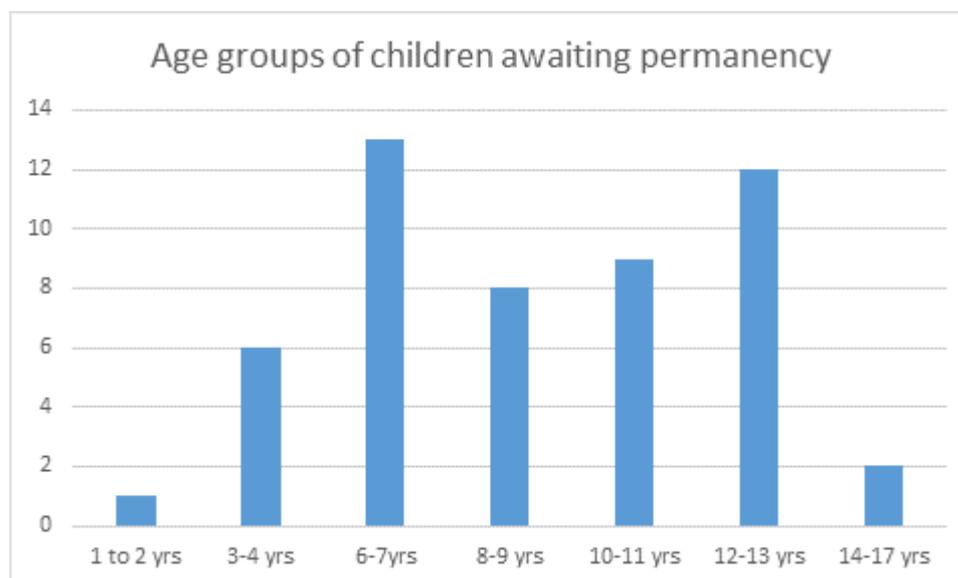


Further data is provided in Tables 14 and 15 in respect of the number of placements with Independent Fostering Agencies

Analysis

- During 2017/18, 353 children and young people became looked after by the Authority.
- The largest group of children entering the care of the Authority were the under 1's, equating to 32% of all children entering care.
- 24% of children entering care are aged 1-4 years
- 21% of children entering care are aged 5-10 years
- At the age of 12 years there is a slight increase in the number of children entering the care of the Authority, which then stabilises and peaks again at the age of 16 years.

Table 7a - Profile of Children/Young People Awaiting Permanent Placements



Analysis

- 6.5% (51) of looked after children/young people are awaiting permanent placements as of 31st March 2018
- 14 % of children are aged under 4 years
- 41 % of children are aged 5-10 years
- 41 % of children are aged 11-13 years
- 4 % of children are aged 14+ years

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

- 15% (117) of looked after children/young people have an EHCP, of which 87 are in Durham Schools
- 15% (119) of looked after children/young people have SEN support, of which 99 are in Durham Schools
- Primary Needs are:
 - Social/Emotional/Mental Health (SEMH)
 - Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD)
 - Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)

Table 8 – Reasons for children and young people coming into care during 2017/18

Category	% accommodated
Absent Parenting	3.7%
Abuse or Neglect	82.5%
Childs Disability	0.8%
Family Dysfunction	4.5%
Family in Acute Stress	3.1%
Parental illness or disability	2%
Socially unacceptable behaviour	3.4%

- The overarching reason why children and young people were taken into the care of the Authority during 2017/18 was due to abuse or neglect (in 82.5% of cases).

6. IN-HOUSE FOSTERING

(i) Types of Foster Placements

Durham offers a range of in-house fostering provision. Table 8 below identifies the number of fostering household type over a 5 year period.

Table 8 – Type of Foster Placement Households

Type of Care	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017-18
Short Term Care	108	101	98	125	123
Both Short Term and Permanent Care	69	70	85	30	50
Permanent Care	42	55	51	82	71
TOTAL MAINSTREAM	219	226	234	237	244
Family & Friends Care	36	39	44	70	68
Family & Friends Temp Approved	45	32	28	56	40
TOTAL FAMILY&FRIENDS	81	71	72	126	108
TOTAL MAINSTREAM AND FAMILY & FRIENDS	304	297	306	363	352

Analysis

- Over the last year, the number of mainstream fostering households has increased by 7.
- The number of family and friend households have reduced by 18. This includes fully improved as well as temporarily approved foster carers.
- Short term fostering provision has remained stable over the last 5 years and reached a peak in 2017/18. Permanent fostering provision has also increased in line with the rising number of looked after children and young people.

(ii) Foster Carer Profile Analysis (as at 31 March 2018)

Age

- 20% of the foster carers are aged over 60 year olds which creates a potential pressure on the service as carers retire over the next few years.
- 73% of foster carers are aged between 40-59 year olds.

Religion

- Durham foster carers practice a range of diverse faiths including Sikh, Muslim, Roman Catholic and Protestant.

Gender

- Durham has a total of 456 foster carers, within 244 households and the gender split is shown below:
 - 214 male foster carers
 - 242 female foster carers
- The gender split between male and female foster carers is therefore balanced.

Ethnicity

- The ethnicity of Durham foster carers is predominantly White British but is shown below:
 - 3 - Any other ethnicity
 - 2 - Mixed Race African
 - 4 - Mixed Race Asian
 - 2 - Mixed race Caribbean
 - 527 - White British
 - 2 - White English
 - 1 - White Scottish
 - 8 - Other White background

Disability

- There are currently 7 Foster Carers with a disability.

Fostering Households

- Of the 244 foster carer households – 212 are couples, which includes 4 same sex couples and 32 are single carers.
- All single foster carers are female, although many main carers within fostering households which are couples, are male.

Age preference (short-term carers)

Foster carers state their preferences for the age of the children they feel able to care for based on the needs of their own families and the ages of their own children.

- 40% of short term carers have a preference to care for 0-4 year olds
- 41% of short terms carers have a preference to care for 5-10 year olds
- 19% of short term carers have a preference to care for 11+ year olds, which is significantly lower than the other age preferences.

Geographical location of foster carers

- The majority of foster carers live in the central area of County Durham particularly around Durham and Chester le Street areas, providing access to services and families across the county.
- The carers who live outside of County Durham mainly live within 10 miles of it. There is a number of carers in the Houghton-Le-Spring area which is still close to both the north and east areas.
- A number of foster carers (32) live outside the county boundaries and of these, 60% (19) offer permanent placements

Table 9 – Location of Foster Carers

Location	Numbers
North*	80
South	36
East*	59
West	37
Out of County	32

*these locations include Durham City

(iii) De-registration of mainstream foster carers

- The number of mainstream carers who have been de-registered has increased each year, however, we are still below the national average (10%) as stated in ‘Foster Care in England Feb 2018’ (Martin Narey/Mark Owers).
- The average foster carer’s length of service is 10 years in Durham. According to Fostering Network (2018) the national average is less than 8 years.

Table 10 – De-registration of Foster Carers

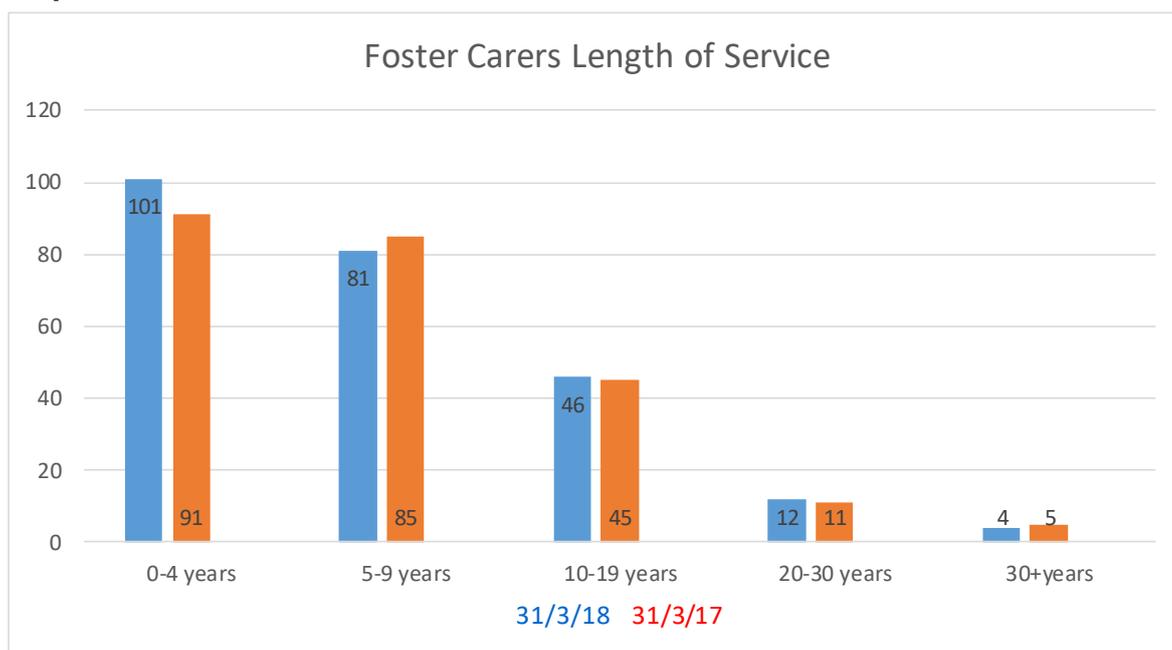
Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Short term carers only	06	08	12	12	16
Permanent carers	08	07	05	08	09
Totals	14	15	17	20	23
% of Total Number of Foster Carers	6.3	6.6	7.2	8.4	9.4

Twenty-three foster carer households were de-registered during 2017/18 and the reasons included retirement following a long career, allegations and concerns about their practice.

(iv) Retention of Foster Carers

- 41% of foster carers (101) have been approved in the last 5 years illustrating the importance of the continued recruitment of foster carers.
- 10% increase in foster carers approved within the last 5 years.
- 26% of carers (62) have been approved for more than 10 years

Graph 11 - Retention of Foster Carers



Foster Carer Recruitment

- Whilst there have been slightly fewer initial enquiries in 2017/18 (329) in comparison to 2016/17 (341), there has been an increase in the number of foster carers approved (28) in 2017/18, which has gradually increased year on year from 2015/16 onwards.

Table 12 – Recruitment of Foster Carers during 2017/18

Stages	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total 17/18	Total 16/17
Initial Enquiry	23	40	33	32	32	22	28	33	16	28	16	26	329	341
Attend Information Session	4	15	15	15	17	5	9	7	6	21	6	11	131	130
Expression of Interest Forms	14	15	17	12	13	8	11	18	7	9	5	15	144	147
Initial Visits completed	5	7	15	6	7	7	6	2	8	1	5	7	76	59
Attend Preparation Training	-	-	11	-	-	11	-	8	0	12	-	8	50	45
Application Forms Accepted	11	1	1	6	4	4	5	4	1	9	2	3	51	32
Total Number Approved 17/18	1	1	2	1	5	3	1	2	4	1	3	4	28	25
Total Number Approved 16/17	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	1	2	1	4	2	25	
Total Number Approved 15/16	1	2	1	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	-	7	22	

- In terms of the fostering data set 2016/17 (published 27/03/18) there has been a 1% decrease in enquiries amongst local authorities nationally.
- There are a number of triggers that result in enquiries being made to the Authority about becoming a foster carer; 41% of enquiries are as a result of the Local Authority Website; 17% are generated through word of mouth and 16% are through carers self-motivation – something foster carers often state that they have thought about for years but never took that first step to make an enquiry. Only 2% of enquiries are, as a result of promotional information on buses and 3% through radio advertising.
- The Fostering Stocktake Report by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers, published in February 2018, clearly states the need for Local Authorities to review their recruitment and marketing strategies. Social media and on-line marketing is often cheaper and more effective than conventional marketing activities and enables Authorities to target recruitment on those most likely to respond.

(v) In-House Fostering – Key Findings

- 51% of our looked after children and young people are accommodated within in-house foster placements.
- The use of in-house foster placements has increased during 2017/18 reaching a maximum of 400 placements with mainstream carers.
- Family and Friends placements totalled 129 (March 2018), which includes fully approved carers approved under Regulation 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations.
- The majority of our foster carers live within County Durham (87%) with the remaining 13% living in neighbouring authorities. This means that there is less disruption to services for children and young people living in foster care provision i.e. fewer changes required to their education or health provision, children and young people are able to maintain contact with their families (where possible). All these factors support placement stability.
- 73% of our foster carers are aged between 40-59 years old, with 20% aged 60+.
- There has been a slight increase in the number of foster carer de-registrations during 2017/18 – the main reasons due to retirement or changes to family circumstances.
- A total of 28 new foster carer households have been recruited during 2017/18, however when this is off-set against the number of de-registrations (23), this provides a net number of 5 new foster carer households during 2017/18.
- A total of 126 foster carers have been recruited over the last 5 years. A total of 101 foster carers still remain and retention of carers is positive. Support, including financial support available to foster carers is critical to their recruitment and retention. This is evident in the feedback received for both new and long-time serving foster carers.

- 19% of short term carers have a preference to care for children aged 11+.
- There is a shortfall in available permanent placements to meet the current demand. The fostering service is promoting permanence arrangements for all new foster carers and ensures dual approval for both short term and permanent arrangements.
- 40% of foster carers have a preference for caring for children aged 0-4 years old and this represents the largest group of children entering care.
- During 2017/18, 19% of children entering care were aged over 11 years (67 in total), however, the total number of foster carers with this age preference was 26 (19% of the foster carer cohort). This identifies a shortfall of in-house carers with a preference of caring for children aged 11+ which also results in older children and young people requiring independent fostering agency provision (currently 133 placements made with IFAs).
- 15% of looked after children have an EHCP and a further 15% with SEN provision.
- Staying Put arrangements are set out in the Care Leavers section of this Strategy and it should be recognised that foster carers play an integral role in supporting Staying Put arrangements. Whilst this does have a direct impact on the numbers of foster carers, it is important that foster carers continue to support these arrangements which often result in positive outcomes for young people.
- Given the age profile of our children entering care, at present our Fostering Service has limited respite carer provision to support our edge of care service (Supporting Solutions) and to support placement stability.

(vi) Actions we will take

- We will develop a robust Fostering Marketing & Recruitment Strategy, working closely with the Marketing Team, to identify both new and proven methods of recruitment and use information/data captured within this Strategy to determine future target audiences and marketing needs. A focus will be placed on recruitment of foster carers for primarily teenagers, dealing with complex needs and challenging behaviour and providing permanency.
- As 20% of our foster carers are aged 60+ and we have a growing number of young people remaining with their carer's in staying put arrangements, we will continue to increase our pool of existing foster carers by recruiting 25-30 new foster carer households in 2018/19 (net target). This will also reduce the dependency on IFA provision which shows a total of 54 short-term placements currently placed with IFAs.

- We will continue to strengthen the support offered to our foster carers, which is critical to our recruitment and retention of foster carers going forward, by developing foster carer focus groups and listening to the needs of foster carers and provide exit interviews, to fully understand the reasons why foster carers leave the authority.
- We will analyse and evaluate current offer of professional development and training with the potential to provide further support to foster carers to manage young people with challenging behaviour and complex needs, which will support placement stability and result in fewer placement breakdowns. (At present 30% of looked after children have either an EHCP or SEN provision.)
- We will evaluate the Mockingbird Model used successfully in a number of local authorities which is critical to stabilising fostering placements and offering support to foster carers and children. Following a benchmarking exercise a visit to Leeds local authority has been arranged who have already successfully implemented a robust support network for foster carers.
- We will increase our pool of foster carers who have a preference to care for children and young people age 10/11+ and sibling groups through targeted recruitment and marketing.
- We will continue to promote and support permanency to both new and existing foster carers at both panel and review stages.
- We will continue to maximise the use of our in-house foster placements for our children and young people by collaborative working across the fostering service and the development of a new placement team.
- As part of the annual review process for foster carers, we will continue to ensure that we have carers with as wide an approval range as possible to provide flexibility and opportunities for placement finding.
- We will develop respite carer provision which will support our edge of care service (Supporting Solutions) and support the stability of our placements.

7. INDEPENDENT FOSTERING PROVISION (IFAs)

(i) Usage

Table 13 - Usage - Independent Fostering Agencies

	Number of IFA Placements	% of LAC Cohort
March 2015	78	12.6%
March 2016	96	14.2%
March 2017	118	14.5%
March 2018	133	16.6%

Analysis

- Following the increase in the number of LAC, further demand has been placed on external provision and as a result there has been a 66.25% increase as of the 31 March 2018 since April 2015, in commissioning fostering placements from independent fostering agencies. The table above demonstrates the increase.
- Current demand for IFA placements is high across the region, with local authorities describing the market as 'saturated'.
- Durham continues to struggle to identify placements for older young people and those with more challenging and complex needs.
- Lack of availability has led to more than one local authority chasing a placement.
- High demand for placements allows providers to be more selective.

(ii) Commissioning Arrangements

- Durham play an active role in the current NE7 IFA Consortia Framework, which enables independent foster placements to be purchased from providers. This is an established framework in its second phase which has received positive feedback in national reports.
- The current framework is due to end in March 2019. A new commissioning solution is being developed involving 12 regional Local Authorities. This regional wide approach will result in greater control of the market and bargaining power, standardised pricing for placements (whereby not distorting market competition), better understanding and input into the recruitment strategies of IFAs and a consistent approach to the commissioning of IFA placements across the region. The new solution will also offer a greater level of flexibility, enabling new IFAs to join (following relevant checks) throughout the term of the contract.

The benefits of a regional commissioned framework are outlined in a statement below from the 'Fostering Stocktake Report – February 2018' (Sir Martin Narey/Mark Owers)

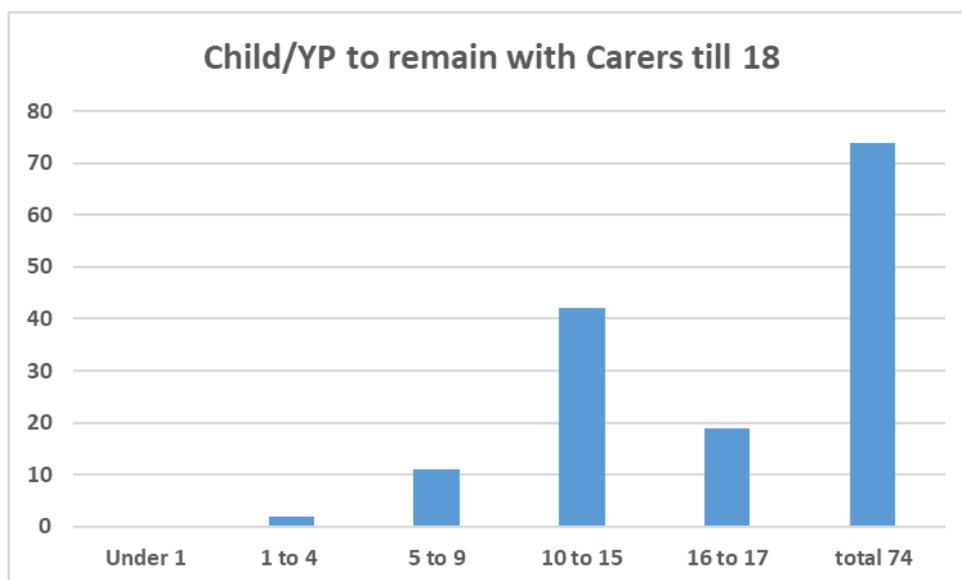
"Quite a lot could be achieved immediately were local authorities to share their framework contracts with one another. The secrecy and the variation in prices negotiated by different local authority's benefits providers, but not councils. They need to come together to create about ten large

commissioning consortia with critical mass, better able to understand commissioning requirements, concentrate expertise, discourage local authority versus local authority competition and negotiate new agreements with IFAs to provide placements at significantly reduced cost, almost certainly through guaranteeing particular IFAs a certain level of business”.

- When a placement cannot be made with an IFA provider on the framework, off-framework providers are approached. Currently there are 4 off-framework providers that the authority works with which represents 6% of all IFA placements.

(iii) Permanence

Table 14 - Permanent IFA Placements (March 2018)

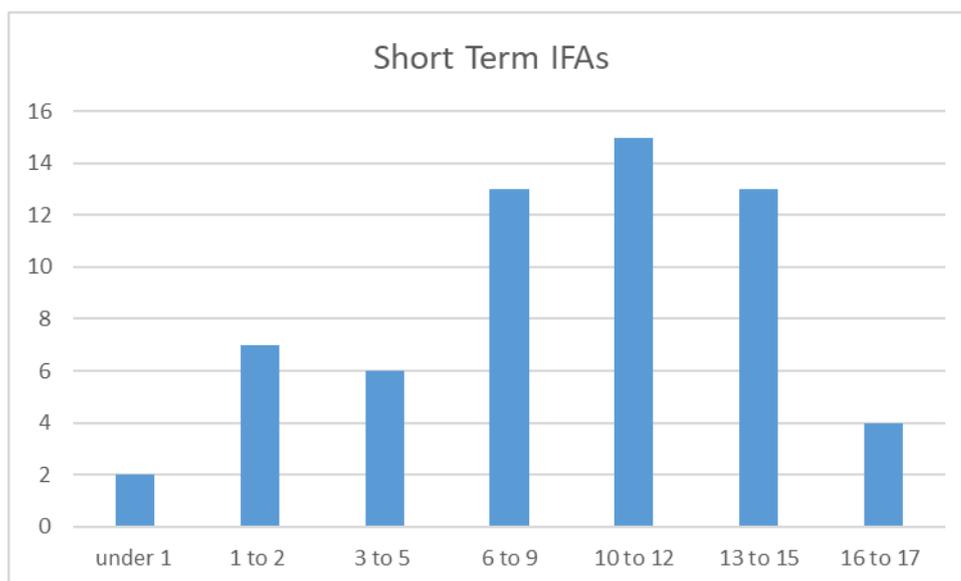


Analysis

- Of the 133 children and young people placed in IFAs on the 31st March 2018, 74 are matched permanently to their carer(s).
- The largest number of placements with IFAs are for children and young people aged 10-15 (57% of all permanent placements) and the second largest group is for 16-17 year olds (26% of all permanent placements).

(iv) **Short-term IFA Placements (March 2018)**

Table 15 - Short Term IFA Placements (in months)



Analysis

- Of the 133 children and young people in IFAs on the 31st March 2018, 59 were in short-term placements.
- 47% of all short-term placements are for children and young people aged 10-15.
- 22% are for 6-9 year olds
- 25% of children placed with IFAs are aged 0-5 years.

Main Reasons for Children/Young People Placed in IFAs

- Sibling Groups – diverse age range within a sibling group
- Matching
- Lack of Availability – primarily for young people aged 6+ years
- Complex needs/challenging behaviour of children/young people

(v) **Consortia Placement Information**

Table 16 - Number of Placements made by NE7 IFA Consortia – 2015 to 2018

Year	Number of new placements
2015-16	234
2016-17	287 (22.6% increase)
2017-18	233 (Q1-Q3 stats only – awaiting data for Q4)
Total	754

Analysis

IFA placements are based on 1-3 banding levels with a set cost for each different band level which is dependent upon the level of needs and the complexity of the child/young person being placed. Of the 754 placements made over the last 3 years across the 7 North East Local Authorities:

- The majority (561, 74.4%) of placements are Band 1. These are mainstream placements for children and young people with low level needs.
- Most placements in 2015-16 were for 14, 15 and 16 year olds.
- In 2016-17 the majority of placements were for 13, 14 and 15 year olds.
- During 2017-18 (up to and including Q3 data) the majority of placements have been for 11 year olds followed by 15 and 10 year olds.
- During 2017-18 there have been slightly more IFA placements for males than females. This is consistent with previous years.
- Only 71 (9.4%) placements were made out of hours or as an emergency placement. This does not however capture the overall number of occasions that IFAs have been approached on an emergency basis, where they have been unable to meet need.
- A total of 439 placements (58.2%) are made on a “short term (longer than 28 days)” basis. Only 32 (4.2%) are designated “long term”.
- The placements are made for a wide variety of reasons, but “Neglect” is by far the most common.
- A total of 277 children/young people were placed with their sibling(s) and a further 60 were placed apart, many of which were unplanned placements. Sibling groups are most commonly made up of 2 individuals.

(vi) Independent Fostering Placement – Key Findings

- There has been a 66% increase in the number of IFA placements since April 2015, as a direct result of the increase in LAC numbers; 16.6% of the LAC cohort are placed with IFAs.
- Durham are part of the NE7 IFA Consortia, a group of 7 Local Authorities which enables us to purchase fostering placements from independent providers. A new regional commissioning solution will be in place from April 2019, exploring the potential of a framework for all 12 regional Local Authorities.
- During 2017/18 demand for IFA placements was high across the region with the majority of placements required for young people aged 10+ years, in comparison to the majority of placements being required for 13-15 year olds in 2016/17. It is therefore evident that there is a growing need for placing younger children in IFA provision, particularly when there is limited availability within in-house fostering provision.
- The majority of Durham’s placements sought with IFAs are Level 1 (mainstream placements). We struggle to find appropriate placement provision for children and young people with more complex needs and challenging behavior. This is reflective in the much smaller number of Level 2 (mainstream with additional needs) and Level 3 placements (complex needs) that we have.

- No children under 1 year have been placed in permanent IFA arrangements with a very small number (2) aged 1-4 years, which is primarily as a result of sibling links.
- The main age group for both permanent and short-term IFA placements is for young people aged 10-15 years. This also underpins the significant shortfall of in-house foster carers with the age preference of 11+ years.

(vii) Actions we will take

- We will work regionally with other Local Authorities to develop a new commissioning solution for purchasing independent fostering placements. This will be operational from April 2019.
- We will work closely with Independent Fostering Agencies and share relevant information to inform targeted recruitment strategies to ensure our placement needs are met both now and in the future.
- Through the new solution we will develop the IFA market to be able to take more complex young people. This will take time to develop, however we would like to see a shift in the type of placements that IFAs are able to provide over the next 3-5 years.
- We will review the type of information that is provided to IFAs and adopt a process which quality assures the contents of referrals prior to sending to IFAs. Whilst the most up to date risk information needs to be shared, this also needs to be balanced, capturing the positive aspects of a young person. This may often have a direct impact upon identifying a suitable placement.
- We will explore opportunities to include other placement types within the new regional solution i.e. step-down from residential placements, respite provision and remand provision.
- We will seek to reduce the dependency on IFA provision by developing and implementing robust marketing strategies to recruit in-house, local foster carers and maximise current in-house provision.

8. ADOPTION

(i) Performance and trend information

- Adoption gives vulnerable children, including many with complex needs and a history of ill-treatment, the greatest possible stability, in a permanent home with a permanent family.

- The Adoption Service continues to focus on achieving the best outcomes for children and to prevent delay in achieving permanence for the child with a plan of adoption ensuring children remain the focus and the centre of the service in all areas.
- The adoption team continues to ensure that only adopters who have the necessary skills to meet the needs of children with a plan of adoption, are presented to panel for approval.
- In line with national trends, the Adoption service has seen a reduction in the number of available adopters, and this has significantly impacted on the work of the team and made family finding more difficult.
- Whilst we continue to ensure that placements are sought at the earliest opportunity for the child, this has involved seeking approved adopters from all over the country in order to meet the individual needs of the children. Although this is in line with the government agenda to reduce delay, it does mean that children are being more often placed outside the north east region.

Table 17a - Initial Enquiries 2017 - 2018

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Initial Contact	11	7	10	17	13	17	16	12	12	15	16	11	157
Information Events	3	2	3	6	4	6	2	4	5	2	7	5	48
Number of Enquiry Forms	7	3	6	6	8	7	8	5	8	10	5	5	78
Number of Adoptions	4	8	1	3	8	0	3	5	3	3	2	3	43

Table 17b – Number of children in adoption process and sibling groups

2016-17		2017-18	
Number of children in adoption process	Of which: Number that are part of a sibling group	Number of children in adoption process	Of which: Number that are part of a sibling group
137	57	136	64

Analysis

- 1 in 3 children and young people entering care in County Durham are aged under 1. Adoption can provide the best possible outcomes for children if the option of a placement within their own family network has been exhausted and is not possible.
- In line with national trends, the number of adoption enquiries has declined over recent years. In 2017/18, Durham received 157 initial enquiries, in comparison to 165 received in 2016/17.
- There has been a reduction in the number of Placement Orders being granted to Durham. In 2017/18 there were 54 and in 2016/17 there were 65. Whilst we have seen a reduction, Durham continue to have a higher

rate of placement orders granted in comparison to statistical neighbours which had 40 order placements granted in 2016/17.

- In 2017/18 Durham placed 43 children for adoption. This number matches our children placed for adoption in 2016/17. We continue to have a higher number of children placed in comparison to our statistical neighbours, who placed 21 children in 2016/17. This is also in line with national trends and reflects the changing attitudes of court and practices.
- Children placed for adoption in inter-agency and out of county adoptive placements have increased with the likelihood of having complex needs, being part of a sibling group and being older children.

(ii) Regionalisation

As a response to the published white paper 'Adoption – a vision for change', Durham has committed to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency which will be called 'Coast to Coast'. The approved bid will involve Together for Children (formerly Sunderland City Council), Cumbria, Durham and a number of voluntary adoption agencies. All functions in relation to the provision of adoption services will be delivered by the new organisation from October 2019.

(iii) Fostering for Adoption

Fostering for Adoption aims to increase early planning, increase placement stability, reduce the number of moves for children and ultimately achieve permanence as early as possible. This has formed a significant part of Durham's new Early Permanence Strategy and a detailed implementation plan for 2018/19 has been produced, which includes training and development for staff across the service, including Adoption, the Looked After Teams and the Council's new Pre-Birth Service.

(iv) Adoption – Key Findings

- In line with national trends we have seen a reduction in the number of available adopters with a 17% reduction in the total number of children placed for adoption in 2017/18.
- There were 137 children in the adoption process during 2016/17 of which 57 were part of a sibling group; during 2017, 136 children were in the adoption process of which 64 were part of a sibling group.
- Inter-agency Placements total 25% of adoption placements during 2017/18 and this may mean that children are placed outside of the north east region. These arrangements are also costly to the Authority.
- Fostering for Adoption is now part of Durham's Permanency Strategy which seeks to reduce the number of moves for children and achieve permanency as early as possible.

(v) Action we will take

- Fostering for Adoption is a strategic priority for Durham and we will continue to promote Fostering to Adopt and discuss with all prospective adopters during training and assessment and actively promote during information sessions and events. We will also provide training and development to staff across the service including the Adoption Team, Looked After Teams and the new Pre-Birth Service.
- Due to the reduction in numbers, we will develop a marketing strategy to recruit prospective adopters, which targets adopters for children with complex needs, sibling groups and older children. At present this cohort of children tend to be accommodated in inter-agency provision often outside of the north east region and are costly.
- We will continue to be part of the regional adoption agency development, 'Coast to Coast', involving two other local authorities alongside voluntary adoption agency involvement.

9. RESIDENTIAL CARE

Durham recognises that group living in residential homes is a positive choice for some young people and is the best way to meet their assessed needs. A recent statement from Eleanor Schooling (Social Care Commentary 9 January 2018) outlined that *'1 in 12 Looked After Children currently live in children's homes, which is a positive option, however, often residential homes do not receive the recognition they deserve for the significant role they play in children's lives.'*

Durham is committed to looking after as many of its own children as possible as we believe this enables children to be close to home and their family. This offers the best opportunity of achieving good outcomes and placement stability for children and young people. This approach also ensures that resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

9a. In-house Residential Provision

(i) Feedback

- Durham have received positive feedback from Ofsted about the quality of provision within in-house residential homes. There are currently three homes rated as 'outstanding' and the remaining considered to be 'good' with outstanding features.
- Durham recognises the exceptional work of residential staff across the 9 Children's homes who have achieved very good outcomes for our children/young people. The staff teams are very experienced and stable and have a level of resilience, which means they do not give up on young people and as a result, the authority's use of secure accommodation and placement moves is low.

(ii) **In-House Residential Home Provision**

Table 18 – In-house residential home provision

Children's Home	Type of Provision	Number of Beds	Age Group
West Rainton	Medium - Long-Term Therapeutic	3	7-12 years*
New Lea House,	Long Term	4	12-17 years
High Etherley	Long Term	3	12-17 years
Cedar Drive	Long Term	4	12-17 years
Framwellgate Moor	Long Term	5	12-17 years
Moorside	Long Term	5	12-17 years
Coxhoe	Long Term	3	12-17 years
Tow Law	Long Term	5	12-17 years
Park House	Short Break/Respite for disabled children/ young people	6 + 1 emergency bed	7-17 years
Edge of Care Provision	Emergency Overnight	2 x emergency beds	11 – 17 years

Analysis

- The majority of in-house residential placement provision (29 placements) are long term and meet the needs of older children/young people aged 12yrs+.
- West Rainton provides a small number of placements (3) for younger children aged 8-11, providing intensive therapeutic intervention with the intention of facilitating a transition into fostering or returning home.
- At present there are no other short term placements for any age group other than West Rainton.
- Park House provides respite provision for disabled children/young people who meet the required eligibility criteria.

(iii) **Profile of children and young people (March 2018)**

Table 19 - Profile of Children/Young People – In-house residential provision

Gender	Female		Male
		10 (32%)	
Duration of time spent in In-house Provision	Less than 12 months	13mths - 3 years	Over 3 years
	12 (38%)	16 (52%)	3 (10%)

Age Cohort	10 Years and under	11 - 15 years	16 -17 years	18+
		2 (6%)	15 (49%)	13 (42%)
Entered In-house Provision From	Fostering (in-house/external)	External Residential	Home	
	24 (77%)	1 (3%)	6 (20%)	
Placement Demographics	No. of Children Young People	No. of Placements	% of Placements	
EHC Plan	20	32	62.5%	
Social, Emotional, Mental Health Needs	24	32	75%	
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	2	32	6.25%	
Moderate Learning Difficulty	4	32	12.5%	
Specific Learning Difficulty	5	32	15.6%	
Speech, Language & Communication Needs	7	32	21.9%	
Visual Impairment	0	32	0%	

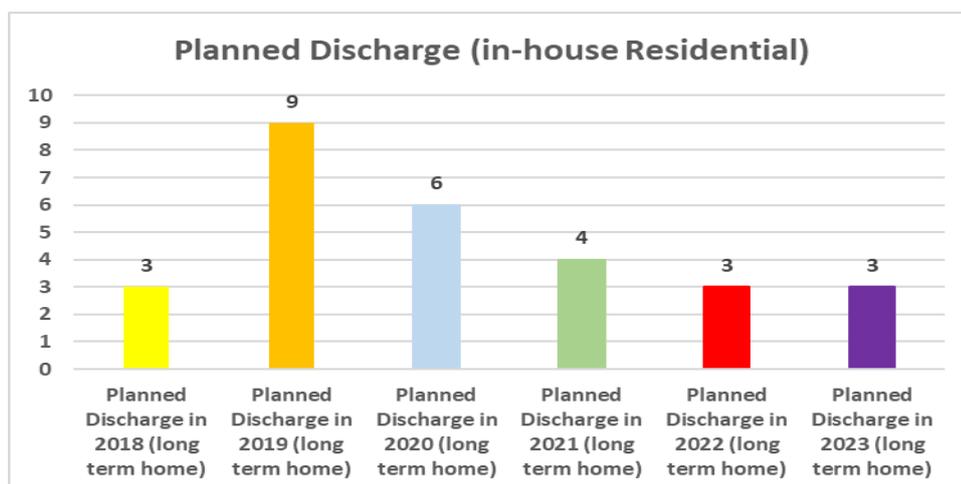
Analysis

- The majority of young people currently within in-house residential placements are male (68%).
- 49% of children and young people living in in-house residential provision are aged 11-15 years.
- 52% of children and young people currently accommodated within in-house residential provision have been residing there for between 13 month and 3 years.)
- The majority of young people come into residential care after a foster placement has broken down and likelihood is that they will remain until moving on to independence.

- Given the long-term nature of placements, there is limited in-house provision. The appropriate matching with current young people already living in the homes is an overriding factor in determining the suitability of in-house provision when vacancies do become available.
- When taking into account the long-term homes and the therapeutic home (32 placements), 20 young people have an education, health and care plan (62.5%).
- 75% of young people have social, emotional, mental health needs (SEMH), which is the over-riding presenting need across the whole cohort.
- 5 young people (15.6%) have a specific learning difficulty and 4 young people (12.5%) have a moderate learning difficulty.
- 7 young people have speech, language and communication needs (21.9%).
- A very small number of young people (2) have a diagnosis of autism.

(iv) **Future capacity within in-house residential provision**

Table 20 - Planned Discharge for current young people within in-house residential provision



The table above provides an assumption that each young person will remain within in-house residential until they reach 18 years, however, work is ongoing to ensure a plan is in place to support each young person into independence prior to reaching 18 years.

Analysis

- The majority of older young people within in-house residential provision (excluding West Rainton, Park House and the Edge of Care provision) have a plan to support them into independence prior to reaching 18 years. There are a small number of young people whose plan has not yet been ratified.
- A growing number of young people (42%) are aged 16 and 17. A total of 3 young people will turn 18 during 2018 and will exit their provision, moving into alternative living arrangements. This will create vacancies for other young people who require residential care. Given the long-term nature of the placements and the fact that they are at 100% capacity, this makes accommodating further young people within in-house provision extremely

difficult and offers very little flexibility to move children to another home if a situation arises.

- A total of 9 young people have plans to leave the service during 2019, which provides a greater deal of flexibility, but this is dependent upon future looked after numbers, the complexities of those children and moving children in external provision, back into in-house provision when it is in their interests to do so, in a planned way.

9b. External Residential Provision

(i) Usage and Commissioning Arrangements

During 2017/18 a total of 28 externally commissioned residential placements (including residential schools) were made where the needs of these young people could not be met by in-house residential provision which may be due to their age, level of needs, required education provision, matching requirements, level of risk or lack of in-house capacity. Of the 28 placements, 22 have been made within a mixed setting i.e. more than one child within the establishment.

Durham's agreed route to seek external residential provision is through the new regional flexible solution called the NE12 Consortia Framework which commenced on the 1st February 2018. This enables the Authority to purchase non-maintained special school placements, children's residential home placements and short break overnight provision for children and young people from independent providers.

Given demand for children's residential home provision across the region, availability within the external market continues to be unpredictable. When a placement cannot be secured through the Framework, off-framework residential providers are approached.

(ii) Profile of young people

Table 21 - Profile of young people currently in external residential provision.

Gender	Female		Male	
	6 (21%)		22 (79%)	
Duration of time spent in External Provision	Less than 12 months	13mths - 3 years	Over 3 years	
	14 (50%)	10 (35%)	4 (15%)	
Age Cohort	10 Years and under	11 - 15 years	16 - 17 years	18+
	4 (14%)	17 (60%)	6 (21%)	1 (5%)
Presenting Needs of Young People	Challenging Behaviour	LD	Autism	
	20 (71%)	5 (17%)	3 (12%)	
Type of provision	52 week residential and education	Residential only		
	20 (71%)	8 (29%)		

Analysis

- There were more males (79%) that accessed external provision indicating that we have a greater need for this provision in-house.
- External placements were sought for a total of 4 young people aged 10 years and under; (two placements are therapeutic based placements).
- The largest proportion of children / young people in external provision were aged between 11-15 years old (60%).
- 50% of children / young people have spent less than 12 months in external provision; with 35% remaining in external provision between 13 months – 3 years; only 15% had lived in external provision for 3 years or more.
- The majority of children / young people (71%) presented challenging behaviour; 17% had learning disabilities and 12% had a diagnosis of autism.
- Of the 28 children and young people, 20 have accessed independent residential care alongside a special school provision (of which 1 accessed another special school off site, 2 accessed in-house special school provision and 17 accessed a joint package of residential and special school provision).
- There is limited in-house special school capacity within Durham to accommodate children and young people who have additional needs. This results in an increasing number of placements being made with independent 52 week special school providers.
- The inclusion, education and accommodation of children and young people with a learning disability and/or autism who have a mental health condition or display behaviour that challenges remains a key area of focus for Durham County Council and the broader Transforming Care Partnership.
- An increasing number of young people have sexual offences / behaviour / allegations made against them. Due to the risk these young people present they can on occasion require solo provision to minimise risk to themselves and other young people. This is often difficult to secure as there are a limited number of providers that offer this type of provision across the region. It is evident that there is a significant gap in the market for solo residential provision. During 2017-18 a total of 6 bespoke solo placements were made (4 placements for under 16's and 2 placements for over 16's).

(iii) Location of Residential Placements

At present the majority of young people are accommodated within County Durham (53%) and the remaining within surrounding areas such as Newcastle and Sunderland which represents 28%. Four placements are in Northumberland and Cumbria (14%) with one placement in Lancashire (which

has recently ended). Analysis shows that 81% of all placements are within 20 miles of a young person's home.

(iv) Residential Provision – Findings

- Residential accommodation meets the needs of some of our children and young people with more complex needs and challenging behaviour who cannot live within fostering provision.
- Current in-house residential provision operates at a maximum occupancy of 32 beds with a constant waiting list of referrals, primarily for boys aged 11-15 years and a significant demand for placements for the younger cohort, whereby in-house provision for the younger cohort is currently limited to 3 placements, providing intensive therapeutic support. Park House continues to provide short break/respite provision to disabled children/young people aged 7-17 years.
- 75% of young people within in-house residential provision have social, emotional, mental health needs (SEMH) and when operating at 100% capacity this offers very little flexibility to move children to another home should a situation arise.
- Demand for placements in the external market remains volatile with regional authorities all seeking similar placements. The Authority made 28 external residential placements in 2017/18, of which 71% were joint packages for care and education.
- The likelihood is if in-house residential provision had been available at least 4/5 of the young people currently placed in external provision would have been placed within in-house provision.
- Limited in-house special school provision across Durham has led to an increase in the number of independent 52 weeks placements with external special school providers. (A review of local arrangements was undertaken by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) which highlighted the need to develop capacity across the education estate).
- During 2017/18 there have been a total of 6 solo placements needed. Identifying appropriate placements for these young people has been difficult, as there is no in-house residential provision and there is a significant gap within the external market, which also requires further development.
- There is insufficient residential provision both in-house and externally that meets the current and future needs of our looked after children and young people. As the demand for residential provision remains high, there is an urgent need to develop capacity to provide a broader and more flexible and accessible range of good quality provision, which ensures that the needs of some of our most challenging and complex children/young people are met.

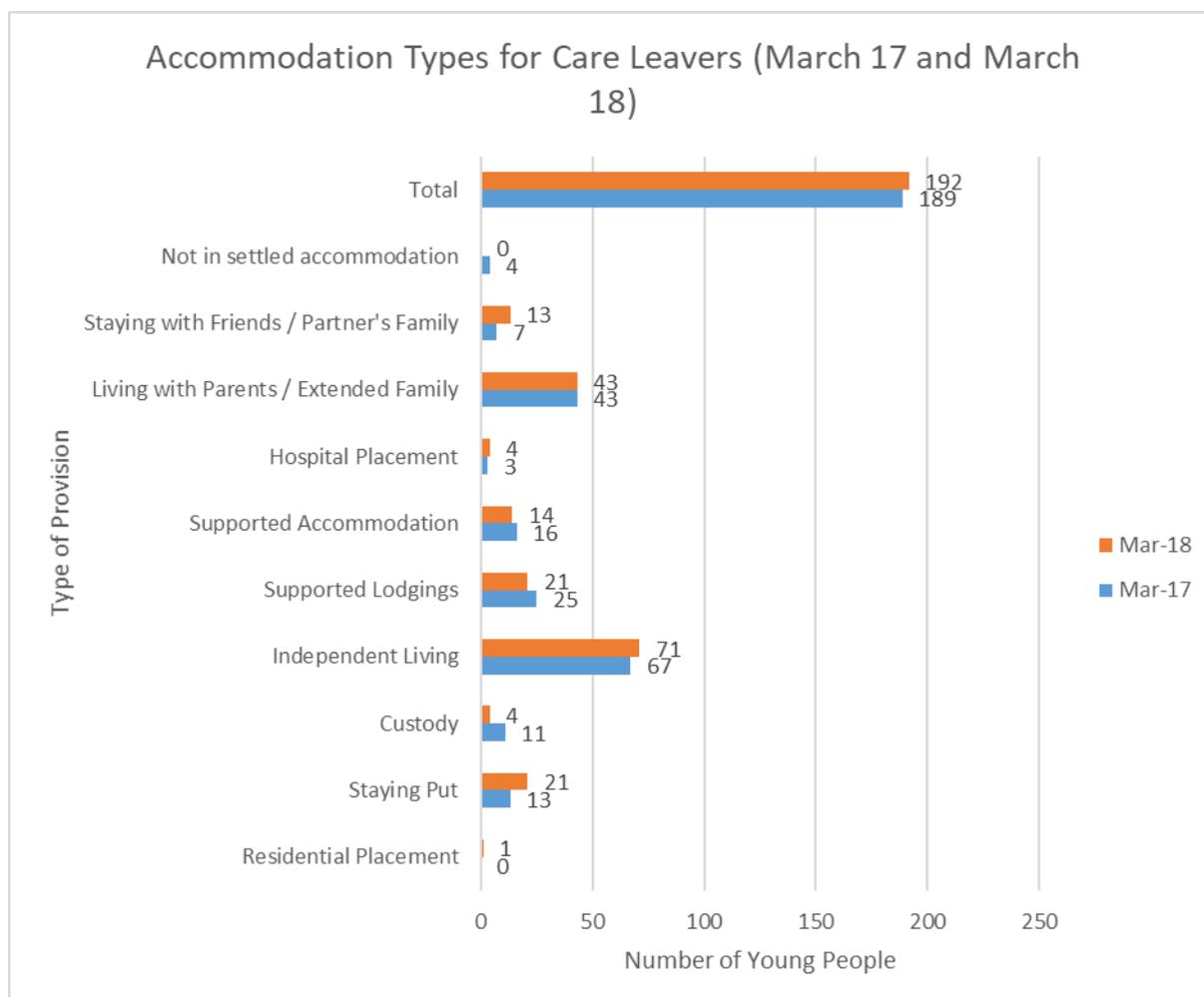
(v) Action we will take

- We will develop a Residential Strategy which considers both in-house and external residential provision and identifies options for increasing in-house residential capacity to provide flexibility and meet the needs of our children and young people now and in the future.
- We will work with providers to develop more options for solo residential provision, which are both affordable and will meet our future needs.
- We will continue to work with residential providers through the NE12 Consortium.
- We will develop more enhanced mainstream educational provision with an emphasis on early identification and the delivery of high quality integrated interventions and support to both children, young people and families.
- In line with NICE guidance parents will be offered practical and emotional support and training targeted to their specific needs.
- Promote access to short breaks (when there is a need) and option to access direct payments to support children and young people and their families and to support family stability.
- Through market engagement we will develop the market and build capacity with providers to ensure that the needs of children with learning disabilities, autism and mental health issues are met.

10. CARE LEAVERS

(i) Accommodation Options

Table 22 – Accommodation Options for care leavers



Analysis

- As of the 31st March 2018, Durham had 192 care leavers aged 16-25 with active cases, in comparison to 189 active cases in March 2017, which demonstrates that this cohort has been stable over the last 2 years.
- Care Leavers are able to access a variety of accommodation and support options dependent on their individual needs, with the majority of care leavers living in their own tenancy (37%).
- The second largest group of care leavers have returned home to live with their parents or extended family (22%).
- There are a growing number of young people moving into Staying Put arrangements when they reach 18 years old (11%) and fewer young people requiring accommodation following a period in custody in 2017/8 (2%), in comparison to 2016/17 (6%).
- There are 21 former relevant young people living in Supported Lodging provision. The number of young people living in this type of provision has steadily increased during 2017/18 and there is an ongoing recruitment campaign to attract new Supported Lodging providers.

(ii) Care Leaver Profiles

Analysis

- Of the 192 young people receiving active support in March 2018, the largest cohort are aged between 18 and 20 (66.6%). Only 2% are aged between 23 and 25 years old, suggesting that only a small number of care leavers feel the need to continue accessing support from the Authority after the age of 22 years at present. It is however, anticipated that this will change and increase, as awareness of the new legislation and authority's statutory responsibility to continue to offer support and services to care leavers post 21 up until 25 years old. This could result in a greater demand for accommodation support from Care Leavers and a direct financial impact on the Authority i.e. Care Leavers aged 22-25 years old who wish to access University.
- 49.4% of care leavers receiving support from the Authority are female and 50.6% are male.
- 43 care leavers accessing support live outside of County Durham (22%), with 78% of care leavers living in Durham. Care Leavers are able to access a range of accommodation and support options in County Durham. Those that live outside of the County is usually a choice that they have made, so they live closer to family or friends.

(iii) Suitability of Accommodation for Care Leavers

Table 23 – Percentage of Care Leavers aged 17-21 in suitable accommodation

Durham – 2016/17 (Q4)	Durham – 2017/18 (Q4)	England Average (2015/16)	North East Average (2015/16)
90.4%	89%	84%	86%

Analysis

- The Authority continues to work hard to ensure young people are accessing appropriate accommodation that is safe and suitable to their needs. The accommodation needs of care leavers are routinely monitored and recorded. Durham continues to have a high percentage of Care Leavers (89%) in suitable accommodation, in comparison to both the England average and the North East average.
- During 2017/18 48 emergency placements were accessed by Care Leavers (29 – unplanned supported lodgings; 16 – bed and breakfast; 3 – supported living).
- As an Authority we continue to adopt a zero tolerance approach to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for young people, however it has been necessary to access bed and breakfast provision on an emergency basis on 16 occasions during 2017/18. In the majority of cases, young people are placed into bed and breakfast provision due to their eviction from a previous placement or asked to leave by family at short notice. Bed and breakfast provision is only used as a stop-gap until alternative accommodation is secured.

- Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Protocol (CLASP) provide a multi-agency partnership to support a planned transition to independence. This protocol is designed to ensure the Young People's Service, the Housing Solutions Service and housing providers within County Durham work together to ensure that the accommodation and support needs of care leavers are met.

The benefits of the protocol lead to:

- early identification of accommodation and support needs
- clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities for workers, wider agencies and clients
- better working relationships between agencies
- best use of limited resources and time
- smoother transitions to independence
- young people accessing the most appropriate accommodation
- increased tenancy sustainability
- reduced homelessness presentations
- reduced repeat homelessness
- reduced risk of young people falling through the net.

It also outlines each agency's respective role and responsibilities to achieve successful transition to independence among this group of young people and aims to:

- ensure the effective discharge of corporate and statutory responsibilities between the Service, Strategic Housing Authorities and housing providers by jointly addressing the diverse accommodation and support needs of young people leaving care
- Support care leavers to achieve independent living

(iv) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

The Authority currently accommodates 11 UASC. The majority of young people are male and aged between 16-18 years. Many have experienced good parenting and a secure upbringing but require an intensive level of support initially. One-to-one tutoring is provided if their English is not at a level to allow them to access education. The majority of our UASC are accommodated and supported within in-house Supported Lodging provision and in IFA placements in neighbouring local authorities, where facilities and services are more able to meet their cultural and religious needs.

(v) Commissioning

The Authority has developed a menu of options to meet the accommodation needs of care leavers and has developed numerous contracts with providers which can be accessed on a spot purchase basis, and are dependent on the individual needs of young people.

(vi) Care Leavers – Findings

- As of 31 March 2018, the Authority had 192 care leavers aged 16-25, actively receiving support.
- 89% of Care Leavers are living in suitable accommodation.
- 37% of our Care Leavers are living independently.
- 66.6% of our Care Leavers are aged between 18 and 20.
- 78% of Care Leavers that are actively receiving support live in County Durham.
- We have a range of accommodation and support options for Care Leavers, dependent on their individual needs.
- We have seen a growth in Staying Put and Supported Lodging arrangements for young people, which enables young people to continue living in a family environment with ongoing support.
- Whilst only 4 young people have been in custody during 2017/18 (a decrease on the previous year), when young people (usually males) are released they often require a high level of support. This often results in the development of costly, bespoke Supported Living arrangements, which support the young person within a community setting.
- We only place young people in bed and breakfast accommodation when we have no other alternative. This provision is only offered on a short-term basis until suitable alternative provision can be secured.
- New legislation in April 2018 meaning that all Local Authorities have a responsibility to continue offering support and accommodation to Care Leavers post 21 to 25 years, could result in greater demand for accommodation and support and this is factored in to recruitment activity and commissioning plans.

(vii) Action we will take

- We will continue to develop alternative provision for all care leavers to increase their accommodation and support options.
- We will develop a robust marketing strategy to recruit Supported Lodging providers, setting a target of an additional 10 providers during 2018/19; In addition, working alongside the North East Migration Partnership, a targeted recruitment campaign is being developed to recruit carers to provide placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).
- We will further explore the market to fully understand the range of providers that are able to support young people with more complex and challenging needs and at the same time ensure that provision is flexible, responsive and provides value for money.

- We will continue to make contact with ‘all’ known care leavers to identify if they require additional support.
- We will only use bed and breakfast provision as a last resort.

11. CONCLUSION

The aim of this Strategy is to ensure that children and young people in care live in stable, high quality settings, where their needs can be met and their outcomes improved, enabling them to return home where this is in their best interests.

Analysis of local data, alongside statistical neighbour, regional and national benchmarking where available, has identified key findings for all five key areas of this Strategy:

- In-house Fostering
- Independent Fostering Provision (IFAs)
- Adoption
- Residential Care
- Care Leavers

The actions identified throughout the Strategy have been developed to address these findings and meet the needs of our Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

As corporate parent, the whole Council has a role to play to improve the outcomes for Durham’s looked after children and care leavers. This Strategy and the delivery of its outcomes form just one part of our overall approach to supporting looked after children and care leavers and those on the edge of care and should be read in conjunction with other local strategies for children and families in need of support and protection.

12. OBJECTIVES

Based on the analysis of the needs of looked after children and care leavers, an understanding of the market locally and a range of research, six main objectives have been identified within this Strategy to contribute to achieving the authority’s sufficiency duty and meeting the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

The six objectives set out in detail below, shape the activities, we as an authority believe will best deliver this outcome. As we make progress with these objectives, we will achieve the quality, sufficiency and value for money we need in order to achieve the best for children and young people in County Durham.

Key Objectives - Actions

(All actions are detailed in a supporting Action Plan)

No	Objective	Actions
1	Support and strengthen Edge of Care provision/support	<p>To support young people to remain at home wherever possible and provide support to young people aged 11- 17 years at risk of entering care and work with their families.</p> <p>To provide robust internal systems to record all factors affecting children on the edge of care to provide a better understanding of the needs of children in this cohort, which will help to inform and remodel future support.</p> <p>To conduct financial modelling and in-depth analysis to understand the potential cost benefits and impact on LAC numbers as a result of edge of care interventions.</p>
2	Grow Number of In-house Foster Carers and provide appropriate support/training to Foster Carers	<p>To place local children with local in-house foster carers.</p> <p><i>Due to the shortage of in-house provision there is a dependency on IFA provision which is likely to increase, given the current age profile of our foster carers.</i></p> <p>To develop a robust Marketing & Recruitment Strategy, setting a net target to recruit 25/30 foster carer households to reduce the dependency on IFA provision and provide greater choice of in-house foster care provision.</p> <p>To improve the foster carer's journey throughout the recruitment process and initial stages of being a foster carer.</p> <p>To focus on targeted recruit campaigns to recruit foster carers with a preference for the older age group 11-17 years, managing children/young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour and offering permanent placements.</p>

		<p>To continue to develop training/support available to foster carer and identify new methods/approaches to ensure foster carers are both listened to and supported. To understand the reasons for placement breakdowns and the support needed to deal with children/young people with complex needs/challenging behaviour.</p> <p><i>Following the recruitment and de-registration during 2017/18 the net total of additional foster carers was 5.</i></p>
3	Increase Number of Adopters	<p>To develop a robust marketing and recruitment plan with a key focus on seeking adopters for older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities to increase the number of adopters and reduce the need for inter-agency adopters.</p> <p>To raise awareness and promote 'Fostering to Adopt'.</p>
4	Develop In-House/External Residential Capacity	<p>To increase in-house residential provision and develop external residential provision in the market.</p> <p>To develop a Residential Strategy which considers both in-house and external Residential provision and identifies options for increasing in-house residential capacity and working with providers to develop more bespoke residential provision in the external market, to meet the needs of our children and young people now and in the future.</p>

<p>5</p>	<p>Improve how we commission placements from the market</p>	<p>To work in partnership with external providers to develop and shape the market to ensure the most appropriate and value for money placements are accessible.</p> <p>To continue to play an integral role in both the continued development of the IFA and Residential Frameworks with a focus on the development of Level 2/3 IFA placements to reduce direct progression into residential provision.</p> <p>To revise performance monitoring and outcomes framework for providers within the children's market in addition to existing contractual monitoring arrangements.</p> <p>To monitor the efficiency of placements and to ensure that providers meet agreed outcomes for children and young people, operate in a child-centred way and deliver quality improvements.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers</p>	<p>To work closely with providers to assist in building capacity and sharing expertise to address the long-term accommodation requirements for care leavers.</p> <p>To provide care leavers with the skills to thrive and live independently upon reaching adulthood.</p>

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