



Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2021-2024

**Priority 5
Meeting Need &
Measuring
Progress**



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Foreword

Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the responsibility of a Council (and for us a Children's Trust) to provide the best possible care and protection to children and young people we care for. The core of this responsibility is the moral duty to provide the kind of support and environment that any good parents would provide for their children. This includes making sure the children we care for have the best possible quality of life and are safe and able to achieve the best possible outcomes.

We know that If we get the care and accommodation right for the children and young people we care for and those who have left our care, we are giving them a stable platform upon where they can develop into healthy adults. In Sandwell we have high aspirations for our children, we want them to be able to access education, employment and training and develop strong social and personal relationships and will be happy, healthy, fulfilled and contributing members of our communities and wider society.

This sufficiency strategy aims to demonstrate a detailed understanding of the children's needs and the placement landscape in Sandwell, in the context of the regional and national markets. We will be in a position to examine supply and demand whilst identifying gaps in provision and expertise. The strategy will be the platform for us to offer realistic, cost effective and outstanding solutions to ensure sufficiency for looked after children in Sandwell between 2021 and 2024.



Furthermore, this strategy supports the ambition of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Sandwell Children's Trust to ensure that all children that we care for live and grow up in homes with carers who meet all of their physical and emotional needs. It will define and make statement of what we intend to do in the future to improve our provision for children and young people we care for.

Emma Taylor

Chief Executive, Sandwell Children's Trust

Introduction

Sandwell Children's Trust's purpose is to improve the lives of children and young people in Sandwell, and the children we care for are no exception. Our ethos outlines:

- We have high aspirations for our children, we make a difference and change children's lives for the better
- We place children at the heart of everything we do
- We keep families' safe, keeping them together where possible
- We work alongside our families, guided by their needs
- We empower and work with the whole, extended family
- We only use language that our children and young people can understand
- We celebrate our children and enable them to smile, laugh, play and succeed



***Click the image above
to see our ethos***

For the children we care for, we want everything the best parents want for their children. The Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy focuses on placement data and market factors which will inform the market management activity we need to undertake.

We know that the market for placements regionally is competitive, in part due to the densely populated nature of the West Midlands Conurbation – being the second largest urban area in the country behind Greater London. Thus, the demand for children's placements is high, upon the backdrop of a national shortage.

Sandwell borders the west and central of Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Dudley and is very close in geography to the north of Worcestershire. Being centrally placed within the West Midlands Conurbation means that geography is a natural constraint regarding the reach for placements.

Sandwell Context

Sandwell is an urban area lying in the centre of the West Midlands conurbation, made up of six small urban towns. It is a deprived area, ranking as the 13th most deprived authority in the country and this deprivation is spread across the borough.



Sandwell has a growing population because births and migration into the borough have exceeded deaths. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 49% of all children living in the area, compared with 26.2% in England (0-17 years). The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Indian origin (8,246 people) and Pakistani origin (5,917).

82,995 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Sandwell. This is 25.1% of the total population in the area. There have been big increases in the number of children and young people living in Sandwell. This has required 5,288 new primary school places and 3,405 secondary school places since 2011.

Many of Sandwell's children and young people experience poor outcomes. Approximately 25% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families. Around 7 in 1,000 children die before their first birthday, levels of teenage pregnancy are higher than the national level and 28.2% of 11-year-olds are classified as obese.

The proportion of children entitled to free school meals in primary schools is 26.3% (the national average is 21.6%); in secondary schools is 27.6% (the national average is 18.9%). The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in primary schools is 32.4% (the national average is 20.9%); in secondary schools is 29.2% (the national average is 17.2%)

As of 1 November 2021 we have 848 children in our care, which equates to a rate of 102 per 10,000 – higher than most of our statistical neighbours, however this is reducing given the strategies we have put in place to reduce the numbers of children we care for.

Legal Duty

In 2010, the Government published statutory guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 'General Duty of Local Authority to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children'. Since May 2014 there is a duty in the Children and Families Act (2014) for local authorities to have staying put arrangements in place to enable young adults to remain in their foster placements until they are 21 years old. The Council must support and monitor these placements.

This strategy considers what is required by the local authority (in our case a Children's Trust) in terms of sufficient provision. The accompanying data booklet collates the relevant data to help us understand some of the dynamics affecting sufficiency. The market for sufficiency is diverse and complex; as such it is difficult to predict changes in need or availability in a rapidly changing environment.



Principles

This strategy has its foundations in the belief that every child has the right to a family life. Wherever possible and safe we will support children to live with their parents or family. When this is not possible we take responsibility to ensure that they live with supportive and nurturing families.

In the event that living in a family home is not an option we will make every effort to ensure they live in a children's home which replicates family life as closely as possible. Once in care every effort will be made to either plan for the safe return of children to their families or have a permanent alternative family as soon as possible.

In Sandwell Children's Trust we believe:

- Children should be supported to live with their parents in their own communities wherever it is safe to do so.
- Intensive support should be offered to children and families on the edge of the care system. This includes exit from as well as entry to care.
- Where a child cannot remain in the family home meaningful contact with parents, siblings and other important people in their lives will be carefully considered. The needs and welfare of the child will be at the centre of all contact arrangements.
- If it is consistent with the child's wishes and welfare a placement with family or friends will be the preferred option for children who become looked after.
- When a family member or friend is being considered for placement they will be afforded the same training and support, including financial support as other arrangements to secure the child's future (this may be via a fostering arrangement, special guardianship order or private arrangement).
- The next preferred option will be in-house fostering or Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placement so that their right to a family life is upheld.
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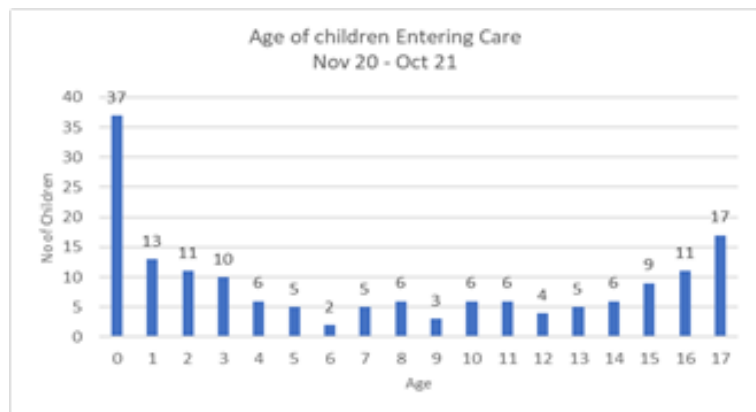
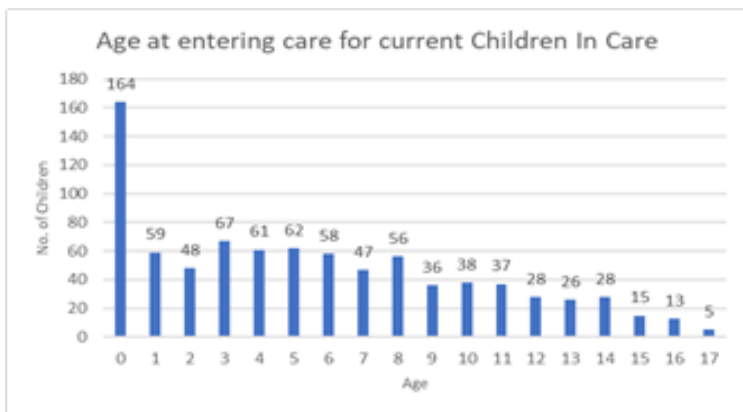
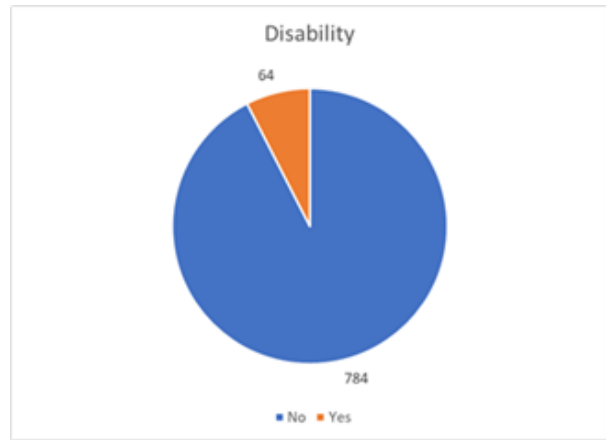
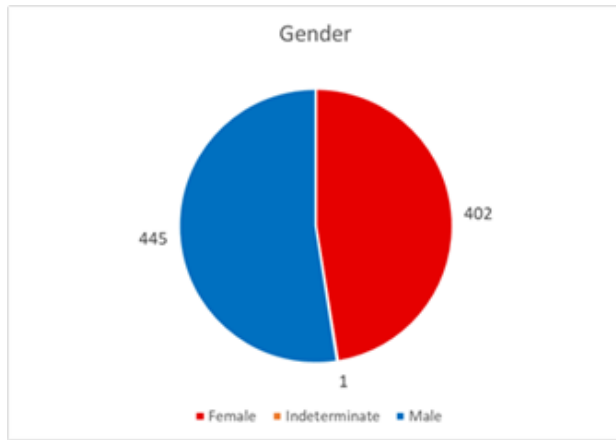
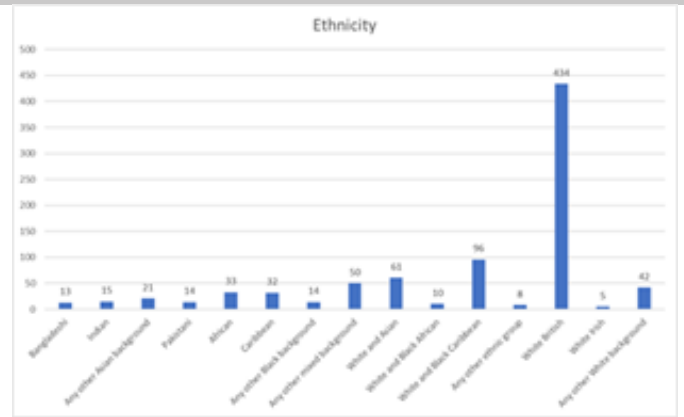
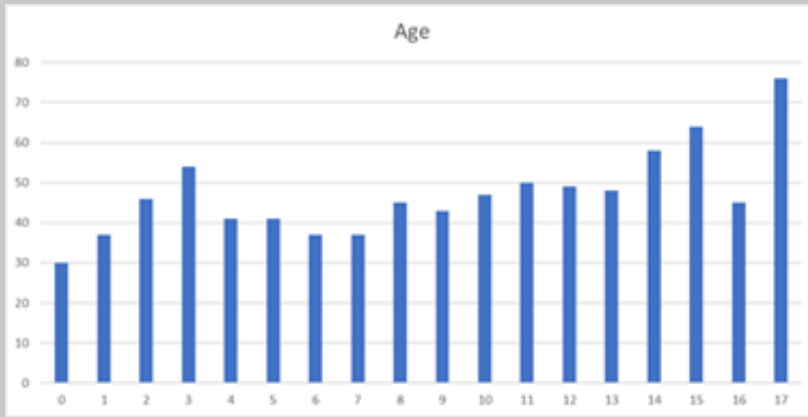
- Some children cannot live in a family environment, usually due to a combination of complex factors including the child's experiences and management of presenting risk. In these cases placement in a caring and nurturing children's home will be sought with due attention to the matching process. Wherever this is the case, plans for coming out of the children's home and into a family environment such as fostering should be explored at every opportunity. It should never be the case that residential care is seen as a lifelong option and step down should be considered at every review from the point of entry into the children's home.
- Where it is necessary to use a children's home they will be small and replicate a stable and happy family home as far as possible.
- Where children are not expected to return to their parents' care planning for a permanent placement will happen as quickly as possible. The preferred options will be adoption, child arrangement orders, special guardianship orders or long term fostering.
- Where the longer-term solution is out of necessity residential provision we will seek to ensure security of placement and timely, supported transition into adult services, where possible and appropriate developing joint transition or long term arrangements.
- Placement matching will consider closely all the needs of the child/children in placement.
- Wherever possible siblings will be placed together unless assessment determines that it is not in their best interests.
- Placement in a residential setting will only be taken as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted.
- All plans and reviews will be made, wherever possible, with the participation of the child. The child will be consulted on every decision and their views taken into consideration. There may be times when, as a good parent, decisions are made with which the child does not agree, such decisions will be clearly explained, and the views of the child will be noted.



We should only place our children in facilities judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted. Should judgement result in a lower rating post placement then work will be undertaken to ensure the safety and care of the children accessing it is not compromised. Once this is ascertained and where through discussion with the child, social worker and other relevant individuals the child may be relocated, or remedial work undertaken with the service.

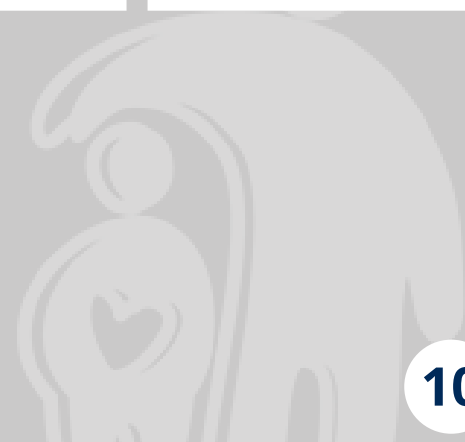
Profile of Children in Care

There were 848 Children in Care in Sandwell as at 1 November 2021. The majority of our Children in Care fall into the 5-15-year-old age bracket with the majority being White British (51.2%). There are more males being looked after than females. We have seen an increase of children coming into our care at 16 and 17 – due to an increase of UASC and homeless young people.



The breakdown below shows the length of time Children and Young People have been Looked After.

Duration in care	Number
Under 6 months	59
6 months to under 1 year	76
1 year to under 2 years	123
2 years to under 3 years	105
3 years to under 4 years	192
4 years to under 5 years	89
5 years to under 7 years	89
7 years to under 9 years	45
9 years to under 11 years	40
11 years to under 13 years	22
13 years plus	8
Grand total	848



The table below shows the rate of Children in Care per 10,000 under 18 population. Sandwell rate of Children in Care is higher than regional, statistical neighbours and England averages, and has remained so for the last 5 years+ (Source: DfE)

	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21
Sandwell	74	69	68	76	92	109	105	108
Statistical Neighbours	89	89	86	87	90	93	94	
England	60	60	60	62	64	65	67	

The below table shows the trend of Sandwell number of Looked After Children since November 2020.

	Nov 20	Dec 20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21	Jun 21	Jul 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21
Children in Care	859	866	876	867	876	876	865	853	856	841	842	839	848
Admissions	19	22	7	17	22	10	10	13	7	12	8	15	
Ceased	12	12	16	8	22	21	22	10	22	11	11	6	
Net +/-	7	10	-9	9	0	-11	-12	3	-15	1	-3	9	

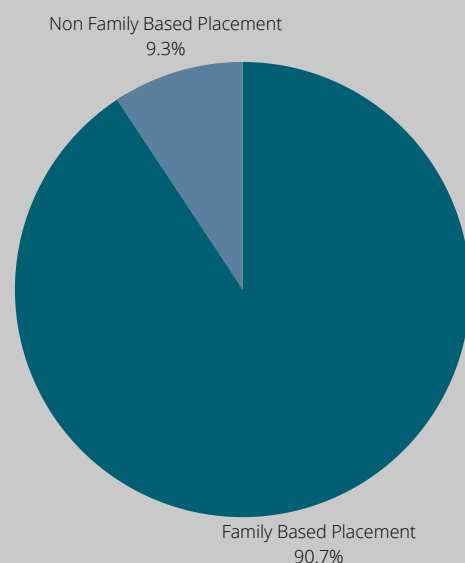
Sandwell had seen a large increase in the number of Children in Care, over the last four years, with a peak of 937 - with a steady decline in 2021 to 848. Within the West Midlands, Sandwell has seen the third highest increase in Children in Care population over the last 4 years with a 18% increase between 2017-18 to 2020-21.

Placements

Of the 848 Children in Care in Sandwell as at 1 November 2021, 90.7% were in a family-based placement of which 11% were placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility.

Placed out of Authority

As at 1 November 2021 there were 503 Looked after Children who were placed out of the authority. This represents 59.3% of the Children in Care cohort.

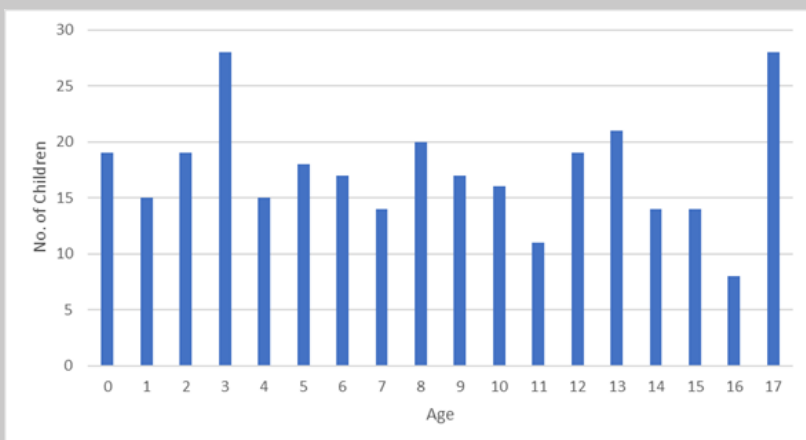


LAC Placements - Outside LA	No. of Children	% of children
A4 - Placed for adoption with consent (under section 19 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	6	1.2%
A5 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	3	0.6%
A6 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	15	3.0%
H5 - Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to children's homes regulations	2	0.4%
K2 - Children's Homes subject to Children's Homes Regulations	46	9.1%
P1 - Placed with own parents	19	3.8%
P2 - Independent living for example in a flat, lodgings, bedsit, bed and breakfast (B&B) or with friends, with or without formal	14	2.8%
R3 - Family centre or mother and baby unit	1	0.2%
S1 - All Residential schools, except where dual-registered as a school and children's home	2	0.4%
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering	21	4.2%
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA	44	8.7%
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering	32	6.4%
U5 - Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter- FFA	10	2.0%
U6 - Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA	288	57.3%
Grand Total	503	100.0%

When the placements of the entire Children in Care cohort are considered as a whole, a significant number of Sandwell children are currently placed outside the borough. Although 47.9% (406) are placed within our neighbouring authorities (within 20+ Miles) with 11.4% (97) placed further than 20+ Miles

In-House Fostering

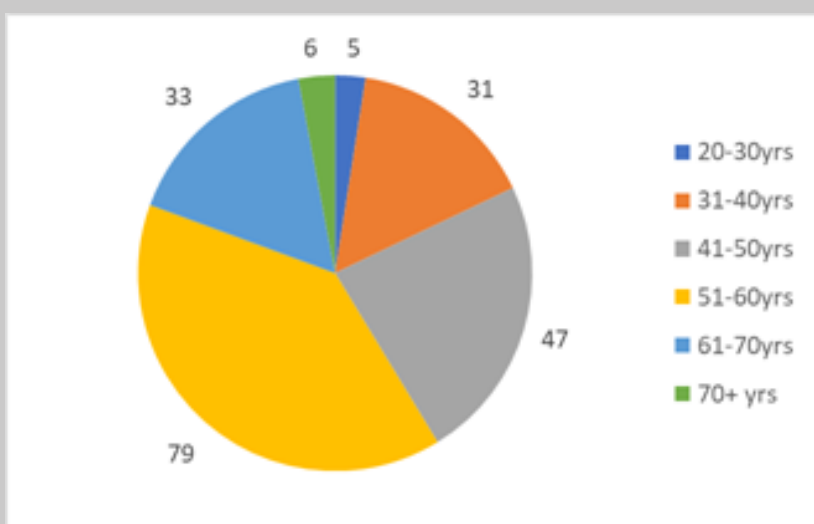
As of October 2021, the number of children in care was 848. As a proportion of all children in care the number of children in internal foster placements has decreased. At 31st October 2021, 47% of children in our care had a Sandwell foster carer versus 53% in an externally sourced fostering placement. Namely, 305 of the 650 children in foster placements were living with a Trust Fostering Family.



Age of Carers

Of the 201 mainstream and connected carer carers 19% are of the 60+ age category, which is considered approaching the age of retirement. This has been factored in to the overall recruitment strategy for mainstream fostering, to ensure the 'next generation' of foster carers are able to maintain and increase placement availability for children and young people.

Age of Carers	Number
20-30 years	5
31-40 years	31
41-50 years	47
51-60 years	79
61-70 years	33
70+ years	6
Grand Total	201



NB: This includes Mainstream and Connected

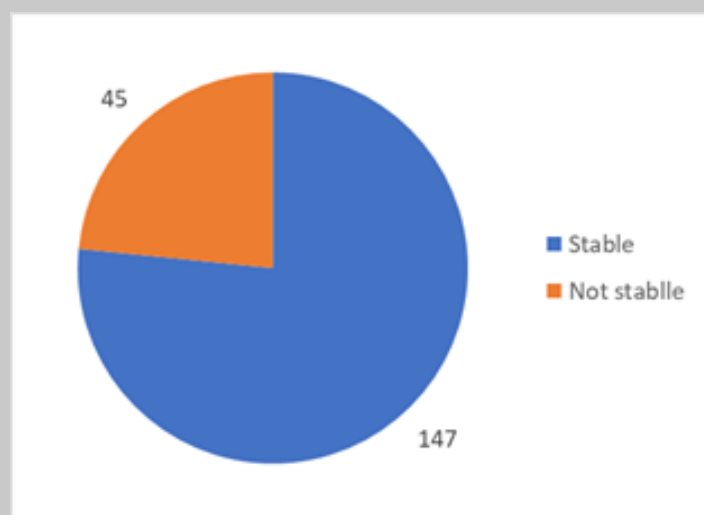
Placement Stability

Of the 192 children in internal foster placements 76.56% had been looked after continuously for 2.5 years or more. To maintain this stability the Foster Carers, have the support from their Supervising Social Worker as well as the Child's Social Worker in managing any challenging behaviours that emerge. Family Solutions Team are also available for consultations and direct work to prevent any breakdown. Signs of Stability Meetings are also held to ensure the Foster Carers are getting all the support that is needed in order to meet the children or young person's needs.

Mainstream and Connected Persons Teams work closely with any Foster Carers that are struggling with a child placed and a Signs of Safety Meeting will be convened as soon as there are signs of placement breakdown to create a support package around the Foster carers to meet the needs of the children and young people and manage the challenges.

Permanency is also established through Long Term matching and with Long Term Panels now taking place every Monday. This creates further stability for the children and young people and the feeling of belonging. Evidence has shown that the confirmation of a Long-term Match has been made this has further settled a child or young person in placement.

Of the 45 children not deemed stable currently, this relates to new foster placements when it takes a period of time to settle a child or young person and for them to get to know their carers or has not yet passed the 2.5 year benchmark. Children and young people can become unstable when changes are made for example to contact arrangements, care plans or changes of school. This can be predicted and therefore managed through this unstable period with extra support to allow the child or young person to accept the changes and become stable again.



Sandwell Children's Trust have supported children to establish permanency through special guardianship order. The table below shows how many foster carers were granted an SGO for each financial year.

Whilst this supports our values and ethos of achieving long term stability for children to achieve better outcomes, it also means that our internal carer cohort has been reduced as a result.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 as at 31/10/21
SGOs granted	10	10	20	25	7
SGOs granted to Former Foster Carers	8	3	18	20	5

Recruitment, Retention & Approvals

At the end of March 2021 there were 150 Foster Carer Households. Between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, there were 7 newly recruited Foster Carers and 12 de-registrations, meaning a net sufficiency loss of -5.

As of October 2021, we have approved 9 mainstream carers and have had 7 mainstream de-registrations. There are a further 10 applicants under assessment with a forecasted approval date before March 2022. This financial year we are prediction a net sufficiency gain of +10. In terms of placement sufficiency. With each fostering household offering an average of 1.5 placements, this will yield a net increase of 15 available foster placements.

24 fostering enquiries are currently being processed within the recruitment team.

Mainstream recruitment continues to be strong within the Trust. The recruitment strategy looks to focus on a blend of digital and offline marketing to attract the next generation of foster carers to the Trust. We are aware that several our current cohort of foster carers are approaching retirement age and need to ensure we are proactively recruiting to maintain sufficiency levels.

A new re-brand of the service has been completed in consultation with our foster carers. We are now working on new resources and materials that can be used for offline events as well as with new applications.

Our recent Ofsted Inspection, which was graded as 'Good' in all areas has attracted more enquiries, approved external carers wanting to transfer or return to the Trust.

A new 'refer a friend' initiative has been introduced and has yielded 3 new carers to date. There is also a proposal to adopt a 'fostering friendly employer' policy to support existing Trust employees in their roles as foster carers and attract new staff to the Trust who may already be approved foster carers.

The focus within the Trust has been to recruit new foster carers and to support existing foster carers to access a career pathway in fostering. We have introduced a foster carer progression initiative, where carers can work towards higher skill levels and is connected to more specialised training and financial rewards.



Skill levels 1-4 are considered mainstream fostering roles. Level 5 supports carers to look after children and young people with complex needs, including those who are on the edge of residential care.

A new level 6 – Specialist scheme has been introduced, where carers are specifically supporting young people who are ‘stepping down’ from residential care provisions. Caring for parent and child placements, with a specific support and assessment remit. Short Breaks carers, who care for children with complex learning and physical disabilities and Emergency carers, who will be supporting the out of hours social work team, this will include remand and PACE resources.

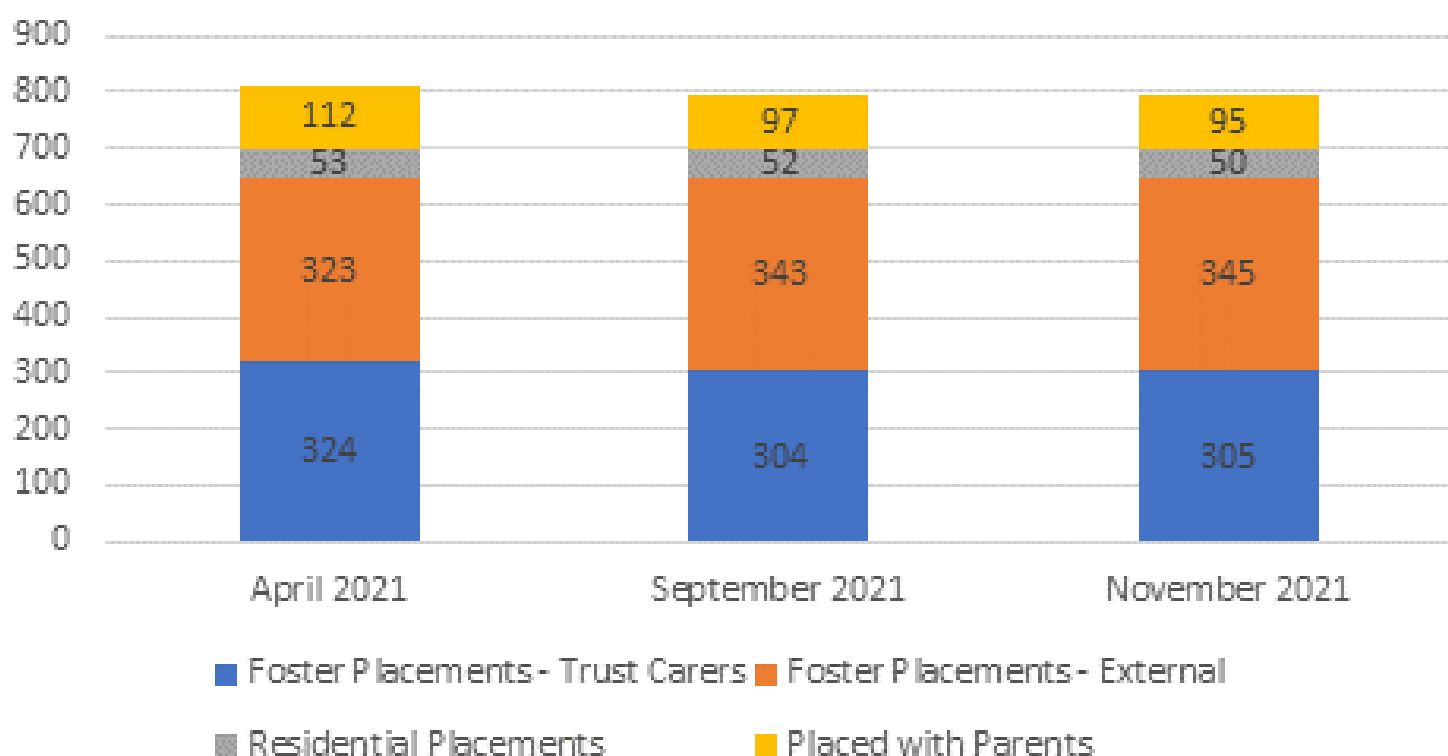
Sandwell Children’s Trust continues to be an integral part of the Black Country Fostering forum, currently exploring ways to work in collaboration with other Local Authorities and Trust to maximise recruitment and retention opportunities.



Independent Fostering Agencies

Sandwell currently leads and manages the West Midlands Fostering Framework with fostering agencies. The framework is working well across the region and for Sandwell approximately 98% of IFA placements are with framework providers.

Children who we Care for by Placement Type



Sandwell along with partner authorities in the Black Country (Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton) are working together to develop relationships with key IFAs in the region to work to reduce the need to commission off-framework placements.

The work with IFAs will be set in the context of renewed focus on recruiting more in-house foster carers.

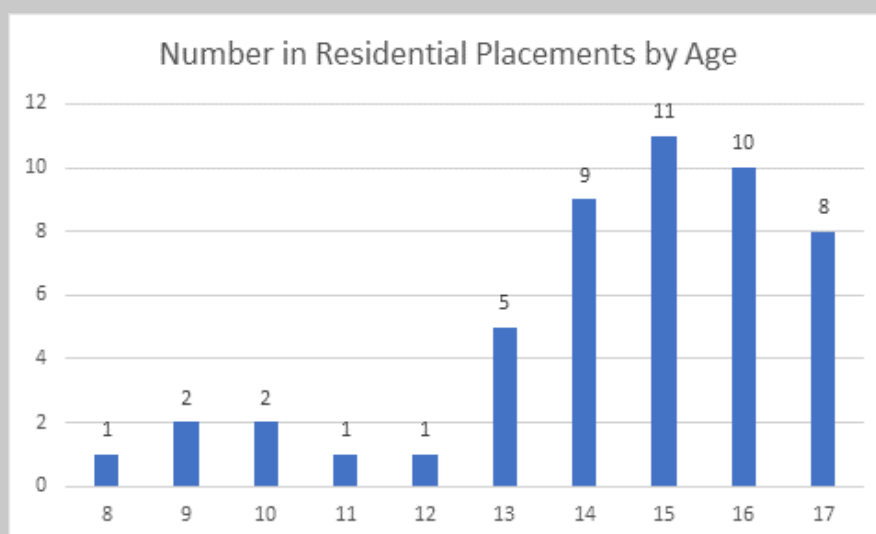
Sandwell is now a member of the Big Fostering Project, a sub-regional arrangement commissioning step down fostering placements. The project focuses on those young people in residential care whom could step down into a fostering placement. The plan is to step down a minimum of 4 young people a year into the project.

Residential Placements

Sandwell does not have any in-house residential provision. This means that all of its residential placements are made in the main with independent providers via the West Midlands Residential FCA (Flexible Contracting Arrangement). The Residential FCA is managed by Birmingham on behalf of the 14 West Midlands authorities & trusts. There is a level of assurance in relation to both price and quality when procuring placements with contracted providers. The majority of placements are with providers on the framework.

Children requiring residential placements are often older children with complex needs or challenging behaviour who need an intensive package of support from a range of agencies.

There are 50 Children and Young People in Residential Placements

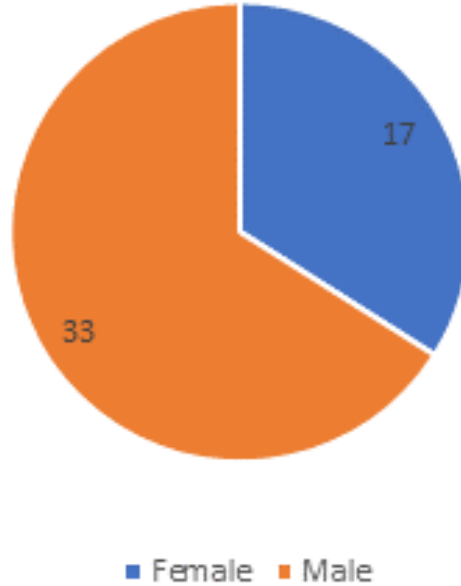


Sandwell is working to build better relationships with private providers who are based in the borough, there are currently 14 residential homes in the borough, whom we are currently engaging with to understand occupancy and usage. To then be in a position to place according to the principles of this strategy, within or close to the local area, and to achieve best value for money.

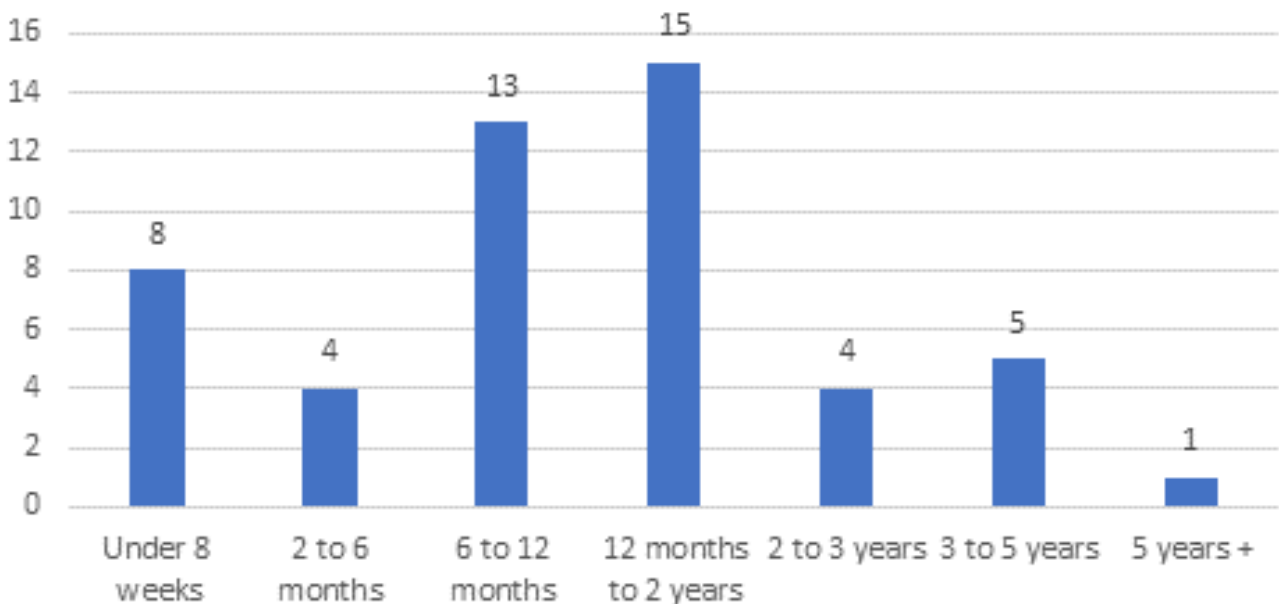
The market management work will prioritise developing relationships with providers to encourage them to open new provision within the Sandwell borough and working with them to secure cost & volume arrangements or exclusivity of use, this will ensure value for money sufficiency of local, good quality placement options for young people.

Work has begun on commissioning a block contract arrangement for an independent provider to provide 2 homes in the borough. One home for intake & assessment (including emergency & PACE), the other for medium to long term placements

Gender in Residential Placements



Number of Children/YP in Residential Placements by Length of Time



Specialist Placements

Out of the 848 Children in Care in Sandwell as at 1 November 2022, three children were accommodated in a Specialist Placement. The use of specialist placements are managed through the Resource and Complex Needs Panel.

Placement Type	No. of Children
Secure Unit	1
Residential Care Home	0
NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical/nursing care	0
Family Centre or Mother and Baby Unit	0
Young Offender Institute or Prison	2
Total	3

Short Breaks

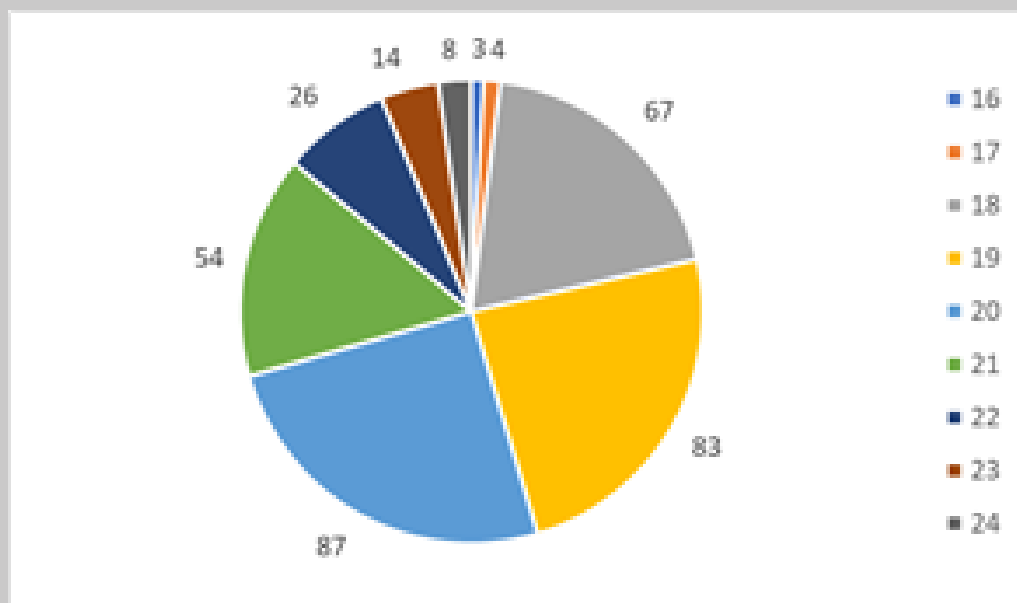
The Trust commission all of their support for SEND children and young people either via tendered contracts or spot purchase arrangements.

For children whose support has been identified through a single assessment completed by the Children with Disabilities Social Care Team. The Trust commission overnight support, both fostering and residential, through the West Midlands Regional Framework; Personal Care and Community Support are currently commissioned through spot purchase arrangements but The Trust are working towards developing a framework contract to commission these services.

The Trust currently has a SEND Short Breaks Programme in place. The commissioned programme consists of a variety of activities; holiday schemes covering all school holidays; weekend clubs; family activities and PA Support. All activities are open access for children and young people with a diagnosed disability and/or an ECHP. This programme is due out for retender for new contract start in April 2022.

Care Leavers

As at the 31 December 2018 there were 346 Care Leavers in Sandwell (aged 18-24). The pie chart below shows the age breakdown of the Care Leavers Cohort.



Care Leavers Key Performance Indicators

	No.	%
Care Leavers:	346	-
Eligible Care Leavers with Pathway Plan	335	96.8%
Eligible Care Leavers with up to date Pathway Plan	235	67.9%
Care Leavers in suitable accommodation	304/346	87.9%
Care Leavers in employment, education or training	169/346	48.8%
Eligible Care Leavers (289) in Touch	287/346	82.9%
Care Leavers with PA allocated	346/346	100.0%

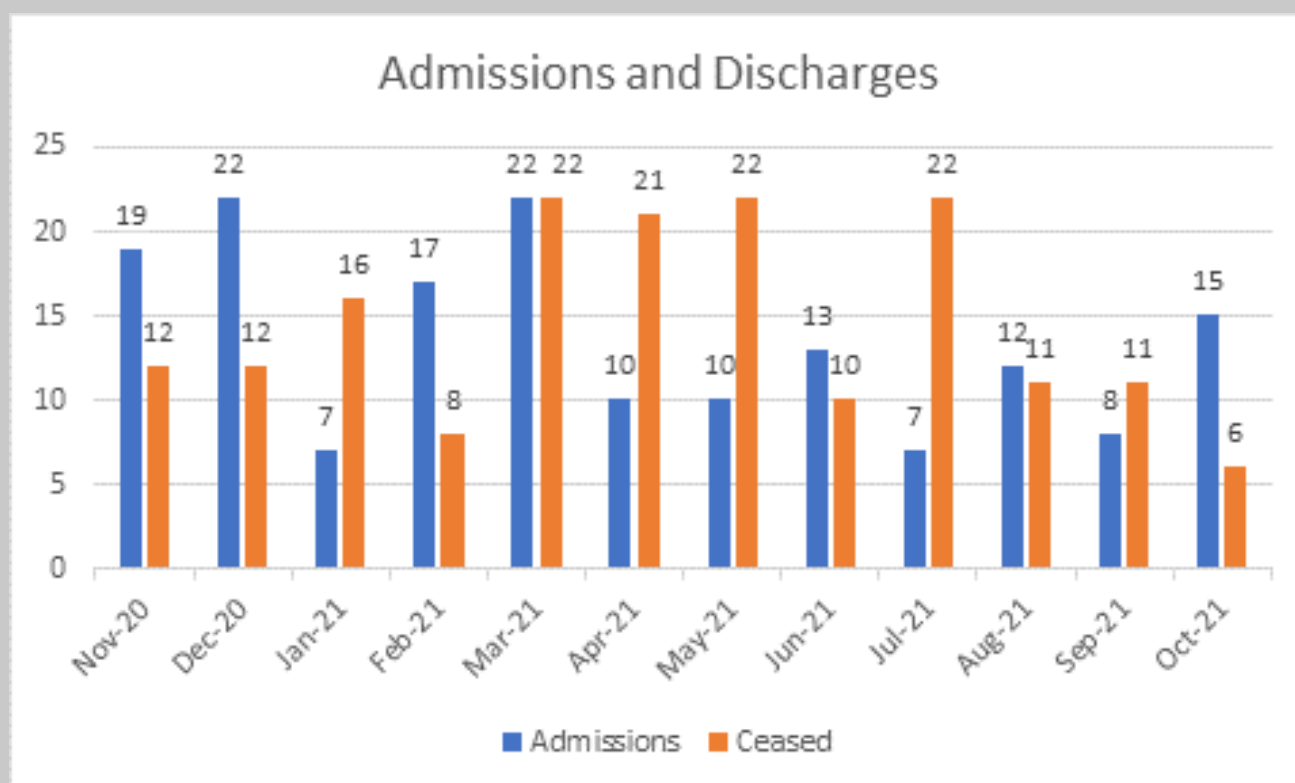
Accommodation Type	No of Children
A - With Foster Carers	6
B - With parents or relatives	43
C - Community home or other form of residential care	10
D - Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	79
E - Supported lodgings	32
G - Gone abroad	1
K - Ordinary lodgings	13
R - Residence not known	1
S - No fixed abode / homeless	9
T - Foyers	2
U - Independent living	107
V - Emergency accommodation	2
X - In custody	22
Y - Other accommodation	7
Z - With former foster carers	6
Not recorded	6
Grand Total	346



Demand Management Approach

When Sandwell Children's Trust began delivering children's Services in April 2018, we had too many children in care, too many children on the edge of care and too many children in receipt of services through child protection and child in need plans. We have worked to ensure that children receive the right support at the right time and have seen a significant reduction in the children receiving services, particularly children subject to CIN and CP planning. These activities are wide ranging and have embedded processes and expectations that have led there to be a sustained, safe reduction of children we work with. This means more children live with their families without intrusive social work intervention in their lives. Our transformation programme, which was introduced in May 2021 has 'Meeting Need and Measuring Progress' as one of its priorities, highlighting the need to maintain a focus on this area. In addition, we have had a renewed focus on the importance of early help support for families and the strengthening of already robust edge of care services.

The graph below shows that we now have, on average, fewer entries into care than we used to, and we continue to promote alternative ways for permanence such as special guardianship, and reunification.



Edge of Care

Multi Systemic Therapy (MST)

We have two MST teams, providing 24/7 support to children and families, with typical duration of involvement being three to five months. Operating in conjunction with MST UK, these interventions in line with the fidelity of the model to ensure greatest impact. In terms of delivery, the intensive approach helps families where young people have two or more of the following:

- Criminal behaviour (conviction, final warning, reprimand within the last year),
- Frequently missing/absconding,
- Substance misuse,
- School exclusion/attendance concerns,
- Association with negative peers or unknown/criminal adults,
- Aggressive behaviour outside of the home

in 2021 an 'MST-E team' funded through the Youth Endowment Fund, was set up as a pilot specifically designed to explore the MST model with a more specific focus on exploitation, and at a younger age (10-15).

The requirements of the model mean that there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact on families and data shows clear evidence of close collaborative working of skilled practitioners who work intensively with families. They understand in detail family dynamics, the root causes of behaviour and consistently apply their knowledge and skills during their interventions. Whilst this is a high-cost approach, the impact is noticeable. Out of 55 children who have been known to the teams since 1st April 2021, all have avoided care at the point of closure. We recognise that a more longitudinal view of these children's circumstances will provide us with greater insight into the success of these services and are working on robust ways to capture this information.

In the last six months, we have worked on ensuring that as many children benefit as possible and because of internal promotion 25 families received a service from the MST team alone in the last quarter.

Family Solutions Team (FST)

The Family Solutions Team focuses on:

- Crisis response –children on the edge of care
- Placement stability - including home, foster care, adoption, and SGO support.
- Reunification
- MST exclusion - where a child does not meet the strict MST criteria
- Advice and guidance to our early help teams (Community Operating Groups)
- Consultation, support, and training to develop relationship-based practice skills across the Trust

The primary aim of the team is to safely prevent family breakdown, and the team is effective in this aim. Within the previous six months FST has worked with 80 children who live with their family and at the point of closure all 80 were not in care. As with MST, we recognise the importance of following these children through longer period of time to further demonstrate success. FST is also effective in preventing foster placement breakdown and enabling children to return home. The team worked with 25 children in the last six months whose placement was at risk of breaking down, 23 of these placements were preserved. Furthermore, the team have overseen 1 reunification which has so far been successful.

Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

This team follows accreditation from the Family Right's Group in 2018. Attention has been focused on preventing families escalating to either CP or PLO and analysis shows that they are having a positive impact on families. Input from the team within the legal planning process means that every family is offered a service before care proceedings are considered. In the first 6 months of 2021/22, 223 children (127 families) have been referred for a Family Group Conference, and effective family centred solutions have been put into place for 58 families, which has helped to ensure that children could remain safely within their own families. Although we are developing more long-term performance data in this area, we know that at the point of FGC involvement ending for 24 children closed within the last six months, 4 have become children in care.

Market Management Approach

The Market Management project will implement plans to make sure the right placements are available to meet the needs of Sandwell's children in care.

Increase In-House Fostering Capacity

- Continuation of the 2021/2022 Marketing strategy
- Launch and support of new specialist fostering schemes to ensure our most vulnerable children and young people have carers skilled and experienced to meet their needs.
- Targeted recruitment of experienced carer and those from other professional backgrounds
- Targeted recruitment for 11+ age group, complex health and physical needs, Step down young people and sibling groups
- Engaging with community partners of 'hard to reach' faith and community groups.

Explore In-Borough Residential Provision

Sandwell does not have any in-house residential provision. This means that all residential placements are made in the main with independent providers via the West Midlands Residential FCA (Flexible Contracting Arrangement). The Residential FCA is managed by Birmingham on behalf of the 14 West Midlands authorities & trusts. There is a level of assurance in relation to both price and quality when procuring placements with contracted providers. The majority of placements are with providers on the framework.

Sandwell is working to build relationships with private providers who are based in the borough, there are currently 14 residential homes in the borough, who we are currently engaging with to understand occupancy and usage.

We want to explore what options could be available to Sandwell's children that not only meet our children's needs but achieve best value for money. This could be via:

- A 'block contract' arrangement with local providers that prioritises Sandwell children
- An exclusive commissioning arrangement between one or more named providers and the Trust
- An arrangement with the council whereby we meet specific children's needs based on our data analysis, for example
 - Short breaks for children on the edge of care
 - A home for children based on a certain age criteria and/ or specific needs
 - A wider range of accommodation for our care leavers that takes account of their range of needs and abilities

Financial Analysis

The CYPS Children in Care placement costs for 2020/21 were £33.787m, with the majority of spend on the following placements:

	Costs	Numbers
External Residential (Out of Area) Placements	£12.381m	57
Independent Fostering Agencies	£12.886m	332
In-house FosterCarers	£6.520m	330
Supported Accommodation	£1.545m	27

Conclusion

Our Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy will underpin the activity that will be delivered through our approach to market Management. In conjunction with our Foster Care Recruitment Strategy, the key priorities of the Market Management Project are:

- **Internal sufficiency** - Reduce reliance on IFAs by recruiting more in-house foster carers and ensure internal capacity covers the spectrum of needs of children, including age on entering care
- **External Sufficiency** - Improve access to local, quality residential provision, ensuring capacity meets our children's needs
- **Suitable accommodation**- Ensure a range of local housing options for our care leavers based on their varied needs. This includes working in partnership with Adult Social Care & Housing to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for vulnerable 16 and 17yr olds
- **Prevention** - Ensure that this remains a practice priority to so children only enter care where there is no other option, including the exploration of overnight short breaks under S17 (Children Act 1989)
- **Internal scrutiny and decision making** - Review and improve this to make sure that children are placed in external provision when only necessary and that they are reviewed regularly to make sure they are impacting positively on children (can break down panel activity)

In addition to this work we will take a regional approach to market management via:

- **Exploring opportunities for regional collaborative working arrangements.** Sufficiency is a priority across the region and Sandwell will engage with innovative practice that will support the principles and challenges set out in this strategy
- **Reviewing the Regional Fostering Framework** to ensure that it continues to deliver high quality placements and value for money
- **Implementing a Dynamic Purchasing Framework** to ensure sufficiency is for care leavers