

Looked After Children

Wokingham Borough Council

Sufficiency Statement

A Borough where all children and young people feel and are safe and cared for, enjoy, and achieve, are healthy and resilient, grow up ready for adulthood, and feel happy, hopeful and loved.

-Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy, 2021-23

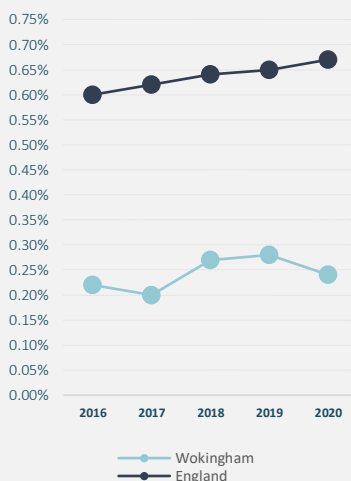
November 2021

Summary

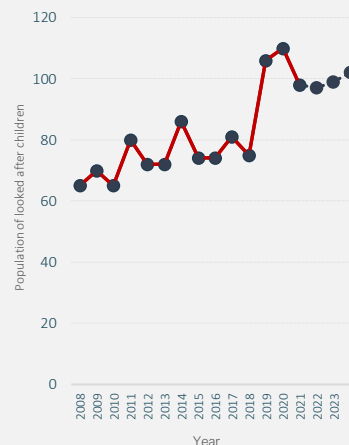
Key information

- The population of children looked after by Wokingham Borough Council peaked in 2019 at 110 children and decreased in 2020 to 98, in contrast to the steady rise shown nationally.
- Of the 98 children looked after on March 31, 2020, more were male (61%) than female (39%).
- The majority of looked after children (70%) were living with foster households while 17% were living in residential settings (including 10% in children’s residential homes and 7% in semi-independent living).
- The majority of children in our care (72%) were in placements within 20 miles from home, but a lack of children’s home and semi-independent living accommodation in borough means more children (58%) are placed out of borough than in borough (42%).

Looked after children at March 31 as a share of total population of children



Population of looked after children – forecasts over 2021-2023



Key Challenges

Offering suitable placements in foster households through existing providers will be difficult over the next three years particularly for older children, children with complex needs, children with disabilities and sibling groups.

The number of children in care is increasing (October 2021 – 116) while nationally demand for residential children’s home placements outstrips supply in the external market.

Low number of Independent Fostering Agency and children’s homes placements available in Wokingham

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1. Overview

Introduction

This Sufficiency Statement builds on the progress made in previous placement strategies and should be read in conjunction with the *Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-23* and the *Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-23*. The Sufficiency Statement contains a summary of the council's key activities to provide suitable placements for looked after children as well as information on demand for and supply of placements.

The responsibility for this strategy leading to improved outcomes for children is shared across Wokingham Local Authority in recognition of the statutory function to provide sufficient placements and as the Corporate Parent to children looked after.

Our Vision

The Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-23 is the overarching strategy for children in Wokingham and sets out our vision for children in care and care leavers: *"A Borough in which all children and young people are safe and cared for, enjoy and achieve, are healthy and resilient, grow up ready for adulthood, and feel happy, hopeful and loved."*

Our Mission for Children in Care and Care Leavers is *"to be highly effective corporate parents, providing high-quality, tailored support for our children in care and care leavers which would be good enough for our own children."*

*This Sufficiency Statement addresses Strategic Priority 7, as set out in Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-23: to **Ensure that children in care and care leavers have a safe place to live, in the right location, which meets their individual needs.*** Local authorities are required to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in care within their local area.

Key information on demand for placements

Information needed to understand the children in our care and demand for placements as of the 31st of March 2020 including the ages, gender, needs and number of children in our care is set out in Section 2. Most of the 98 children in our care on 31 March 2020¹ were male (61%) and most of the children in our care were White British (67%). 34% of the children in our care were aged over 16 and of these, 18% were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Most children and young people came into care due to abuse and neglect (60%) and had a special educational need (SEN) (58%).

¹ Data based on the children in our care at the 31st of March 2020 except where indicated. Due to the small number of children in our care at the 31st of March 2020 (98), some percentages will seem high when the actual number of children is relatively low.

Placement provision, location, cost, and key challenges

Section 3 explores the supply of placements including the provision, location and cost of placements and then highlights some key challenges and WBC's future plans. We believe every child is able to live in a familial setting and fostering is our preferred and most utilised placement type with 70% of the children in our care living in foster care, but it is difficult to find foster carers for children with complex needs, older children, children with disabilities and sibling groups. Most children in foster care on 31 March 2020 were living with WBC's in-house foster carers (42) vs foster care commissioned from independent foster agencies (IFAs) (12). Most children and young people in our care had less than three placement moves, but the number of children with more than three placement moves has increased. The majority of children in our care (72%) were in placements within 20 miles from home, but a lack of children's home and semi-independent living accommodation in borough means more children (58%) are placed out of borough than in borough (42%).

Key challenges to providing placement sufficiency are explored in section 3.4 including the increasing number of children in our care who will need a placement, yet both locally and nationally demand for placements is outstripping supply. While the majority of children in our care will be placed within a family setting in foster care, it is difficult to find placements for older children, children with complex needs, children with disabilities and sibling groups.

Addressing the above key challenges will be achieved through ensuring that the profile of our placements meets the profile of the children in our care and our care leavers. The three areas of focus that we think will have maximum positive impact are effective management of demand for placements, increasing the number of foster care placements with carers that have the skills to match the needs of our children and improving the availability of placements for our care leavers (including semi-independent living, supported lodgings, and tenancies).

Strengths and best practice

To prevent a child or young person coming into care or to stabilise an existing placement and support reunification with a child or young person's family or connected network, in April 2020 WBC created the Compass team, made up of 3 child and family workers and one psychologist.

WBC has successfully reduced the use of solo placements since 2019/2020 when a number of Semi-independent living and residential placements were solo placements for young people with complex needs. Through changes implemented as a result of the last sufficiency strategy, and targeted work completed by the Operational Commissioning Team the use of solo placements has significantly decreased.

The total expenditure in 2020 on residential placements was £2,386,000, down considerably from 2019 (£3,502,000). The average weekly costs for a placement didn't reduce until 2021 which shows that the average weekly residential costs dropped from £3,800 in 2020 to £2,219 in 2021. We need to be aware that

given the small numbers of children looked after and placed overall, this variance can influence the costs throughout the year significantly.

WBC also introduced increased governance in placements through regular meetings of children's services, operational commissioning, and finance to consider each child in a placement to understand future plans for the child and the ongoing cost of the placement.

WBC is a key part of the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP), which completed a report in May 2020; 'South East Region Complex LAC Project: Strategic Needs Analysis and Recommendations for Future Commissioning Arrangements'. The report provided a detailed analysis of need and provision for complex Looked After Children (defined at the beginning of the project as those children and young people aged 10+ with needs across a number of conditions and/or risk factors who were in high-cost residential placements) for the 19 children's social care authorities/trusts within the South East region, with research conducted during 2018 and 2019. Findings are reflected in this statement where appropriate as the aim of the project was to support Local Authorities and provider partners as they collaboratively seek to improve the outcomes for looked after children in their care with complex needs.

What children in our care tell us about placements:

Feedback from children in care is gathered periodically; whilst the completion numbers are small:

- 93% said they felt carers knew enough about them to support them and felt cared for in their new home
- 87% felt settled and happy in their home
- However, children want to be more involved in the planning for their placement:
 - 47% did not feel they had the information they needed before their placement nor had met their carers in advance
 - 42% did not feel any placement moves had been explained to them.

Feedback from children in the South East was gathered as part of the SESLIP Complex LAC project:

- 'What I think makes a good placement would be the security of the place, and also having that secure-ness that you feel like you're safe. You feel like you're with people that you can trust and people that can care for you and keep you protected throughout that entire time'
- "Having information about me, where probably I've come from, the situation. Maybe some comforts. So, you know, if I'm in distress when I go to a placement, when coming into a new environment, I want to feel welcome. And obviously safe of course. And then they kind of start a conversation if they know a little about you, so then they can build up more of a relationship at the start, which is best"
- "The best qualities in foster care or children's home workers is that they understand how the young people feel. They listen. They're taking information in on what the young person has said to them. I think also the best quality is that they're just there to kind of guide them in the best way possible"

2. Demand for placements

2.1 Population of looked after children

On the 31st of March 2020 there were 98 children in our care (including 7 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children). Monthly figures for the numbers of children in care in Wokingham have been shown to fluctuate over the last 20 years. There have been periods of time where numbers of children in care have increased rapidly over a few months and dropped suddenly in the same way. The current figure is 116 children in our care (October 2021).

Wokingham has a lower proportion of children and young people subject to a Child Protection Plan, or who are in the Care of the Local Authority than in England, which may reflect great resilience within local systems. While there has been an increase in demand in recent years, which has seen Child Protection Plans more than treble and begin to approach comparator figures, the number of Children in Care remains lower, see Figure 1 below. In 2020 numbers of children coming into care (44) were lower than both the number of children coming into care in previous years and lower than the number of children leaving care in 2020 (55), which reverses a trend over the previous two years where more children came into care than left care.

Figure 2 shows the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in Wokingham and in England as at the 31st of March. It is possible that UASCs may present or be transferred to the area at any time, which cannot be predicted. While the number of UASCs was decreasing in 2020 partly due to the pandemic, there is currently a rise in numbers of UASCs. Growth in demand could mean a subsequent increase in demand for care leavers accommodation which would need to be appropriate and affordable potentially for those with low needs and no recourse to public funds.

Figure 1. Looked after children at 31 March as a share of the total population of children

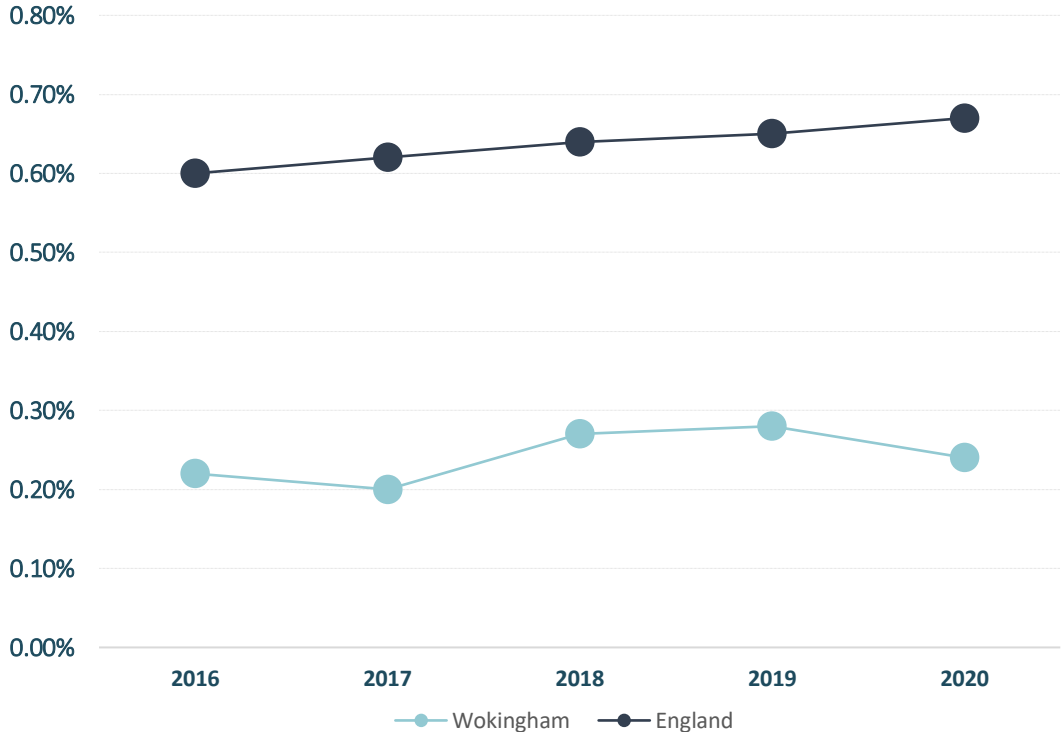
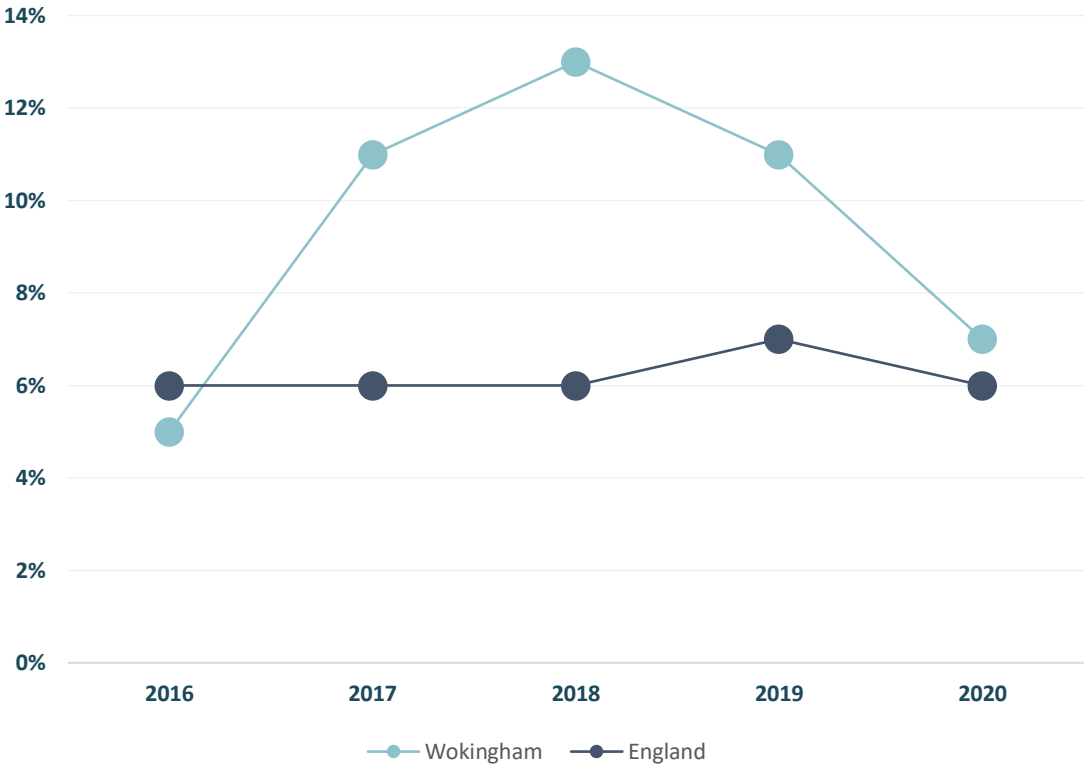


Figure 2. *Optional: Looked after children who were Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers as a share of the total CLA population*



Note: The figure includes the number of looked after children at March 31, 2020, who were unaccompanied asylum seekers.

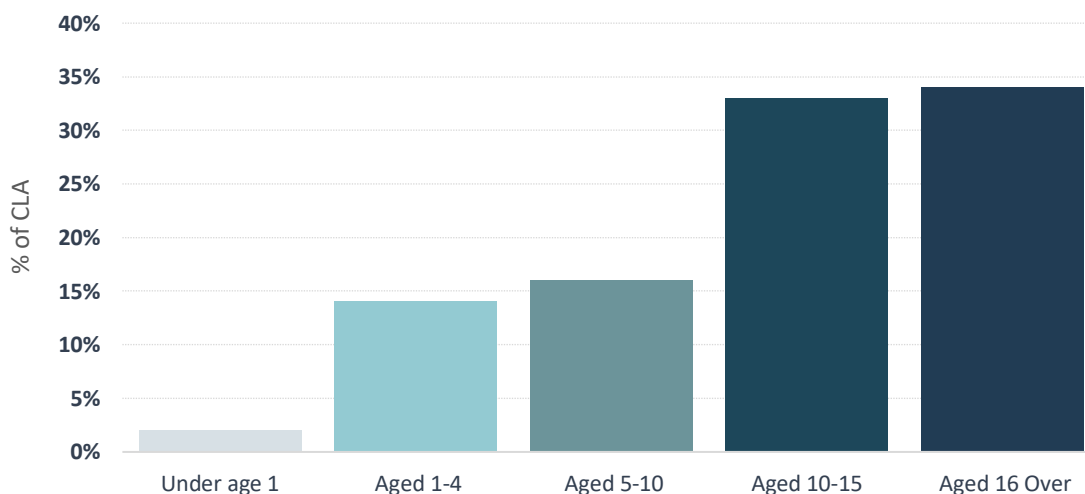
Of the 98 children in our care on 31 March 2020, the majority were male (61%) and 39% were female, which is similar to previous years. In terms of age, 33 children (34%) were aged over 16 including 6 UASCs children and 33% were aged 10-15, see Figure 3 below.

The overall child population in the Wokingham Borough is predicted to increase by 2-3 percentage points over the next 9 years, however, the younger ages are predicted to decrease, and the older ages are predicted to rise more significantly.

Under 25-year-olds make up almost a third of the population of Wokingham (30.2%), and under 18s just under a quarter (23.5%). Both figures are higher than for England as a whole (29.9% and 21.4% respectively). Between 2017 and 2021 the population of 10–14-year-olds grew faster than any other age group in the Borough. This is likely to change the age profile of our Children in Care and could lead to an increased number of adolescents requiring placements.

The percentage of looked after children from an ethnic minority background was 32% (Indian 4.7%, Pakistan/Bangladesh 2.1%, Mixed 1.8% and other 1.6%) and 68% were White British, see Figure 4. In comparison, in the wider Wokingham population 13% are from an Ethnic Minority background and 87% are White British².

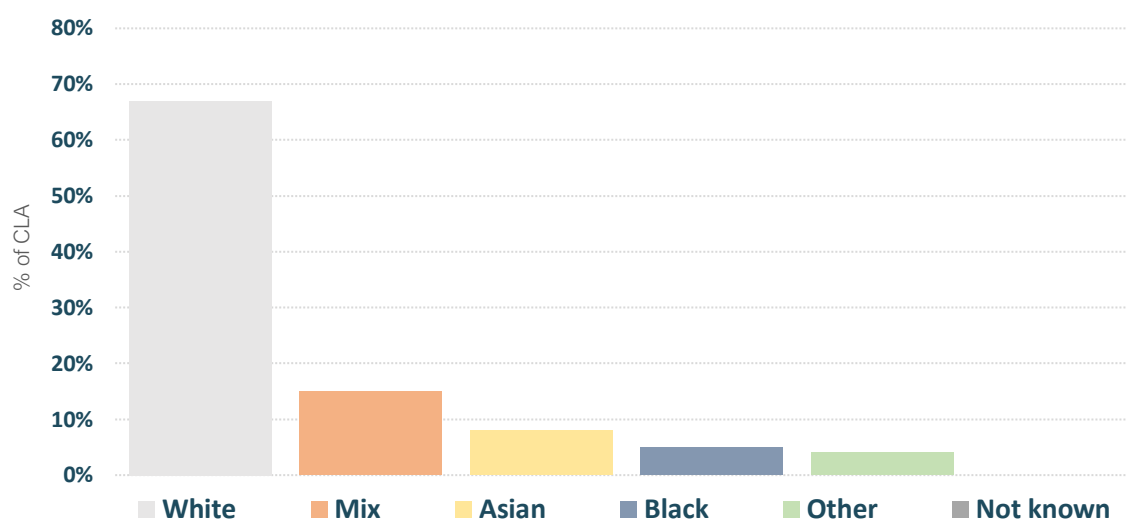
Figure 3. Looked after children by age group (as a share of total LAC population), 2020



Note: The figure includes the number of looked after children at March 31, 2020.

² Wokingham Borough Ethnicity Profile 2021, page 7

Figure 4. Looked after children by ethnic background (as a share of total CLA population), 2020



Note: The figure includes the number of looked after children at March 31, 2020.

2.2 Needs of looked after children

The most common reason for children to be placed in care in Wokingham is abuse or neglect (60%), followed by family dysfunction (11%) and acute stress (9%), see Figure 5 below. The percentage of children coming into care due to abuse or neglect in Wokingham is higher than Reading (52%), West Berkshire (42%) and the South East (48%), but in line with National figures (61%).

Children who are placed in the care of the Council may have a range of underlying needs including special educational needs and mental health issues. The mental health of looked-after children is significantly poorer than that of their peers, nationally almost half of children and young people in care meet the criteria for a psychiatric disorder³. In comparison one in ten non-looked-after children and young people suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder⁴.

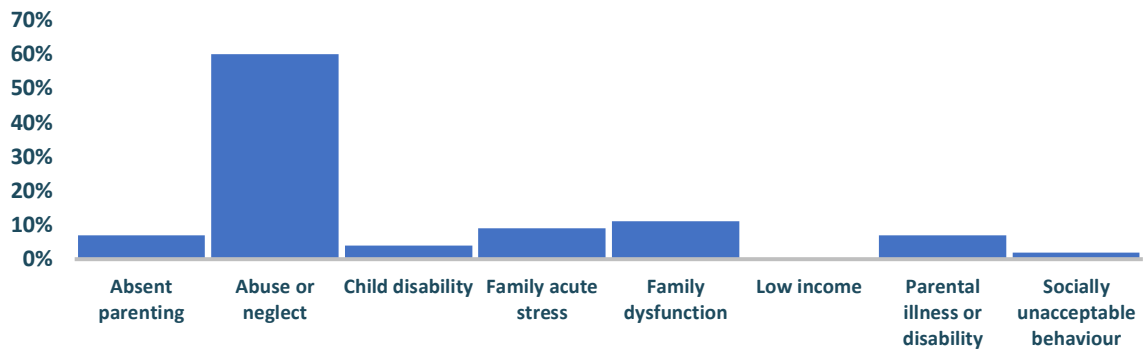
The number of children in care with Special Education Needs (SEN) was 58% and 42% qualified for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. In 2020, 9% of all children and young people in Wokingham were receiving SEN Support and 2.5% of children had an EHC plan.

To help local authorities understand the emotional and behavioural difficulties of children in care, a clinically proven assessment is used called the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Figure 7 above shows the share of looked after children who completed the SDQ by the results they obtained. Most scores showed a Cause for Concern or Borderline score (57%), with 43% having a normal score. Performance on completion of looked after children's immunisations, teeth check, and health assessments was very good and above the national average.

³ Luke et al, what works in preventing and treating poor mental health in looked-after children? (August 2014),

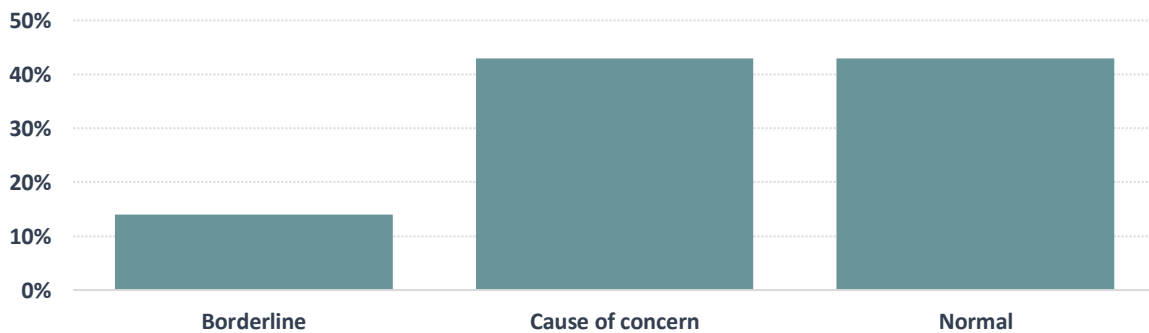
⁴ Office of National Statistics, Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain, 2004 (August 2005), p xxi

Figure 5. Children who started to be looked after during 2020 by primary need category



Note: The figure above shows the proportion of children who started to be looked after during the year ending March 31 by need category

Figure 6. Proportion of looked after children by SDQ score (as a share of total CLA population), 2019



Note: The figure includes the proportion of looked after children whose SDQ score was normal, borderline, and cause of concern

2.3 Care leavers

Most care leavers (93%) were in suitable accommodation, see figure 8 below and most (63%) were in education, training, or employment, see Figure 9 below.

Accommodation types for the 71 care leavers aged 18 – 25 in March 2020:

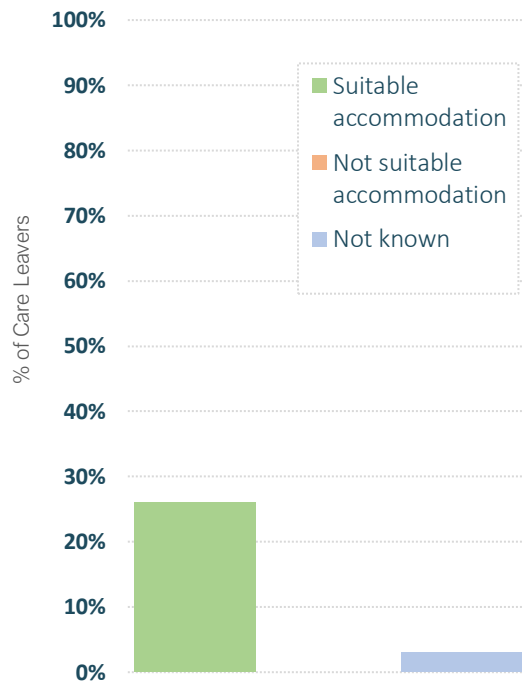
- 32% were living independently
- 18% were living with parents or relatives
- 17% were ‘staying put’ with former foster carers⁵

⁵ The Children Act 1989, under section 23C defines Staying Put as an arrangement whereby a young person, who is a ‘former relevant child’ at the age of 18, continues to live in an arrangement with the foster carers with whom they lived prior to the age of 18. The ‘placement’ is converted to an ‘arrangement’ as the child is no longer a child in care and the foster carer becomes a ‘Staying Put Provider’.

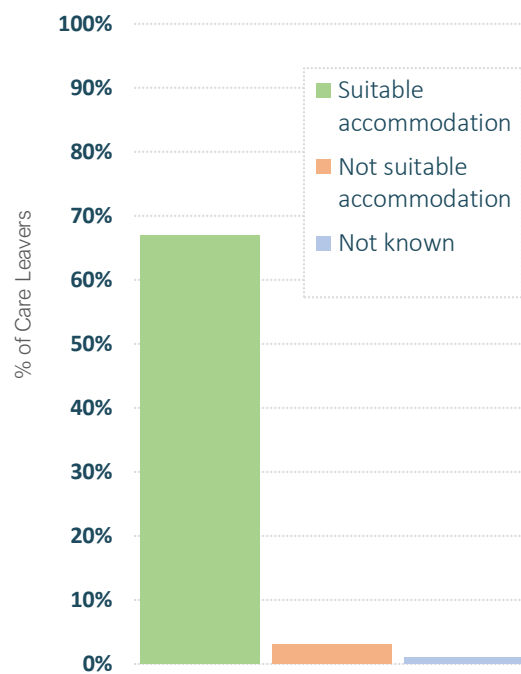
- 15.5% were in semi-independent supported accommodation
- 10% were in a community home/residential care setting, which may include an NHS establishment.

Figure 7. Care leavers by suitability of accommodation (as a share of total population of care leavers), 2020

age group: 17 to 18



age group: 19 to 21



Note: The figure includes care leavers in the year ending March 31, 2020, aged 17 and 18 and 19 to 21 who were looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday

Figure 8. Care leavers by type of activity (as a share of the total population of care leavers), 2020



Note: The figure includes care leavers in the year ending March 31, 2020, aged 17 and 18 and 19 to 21 who were looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday. The figure does not include care leavers for whom the activity is not known.

3. Supply of placements

3.1 Provision of placements

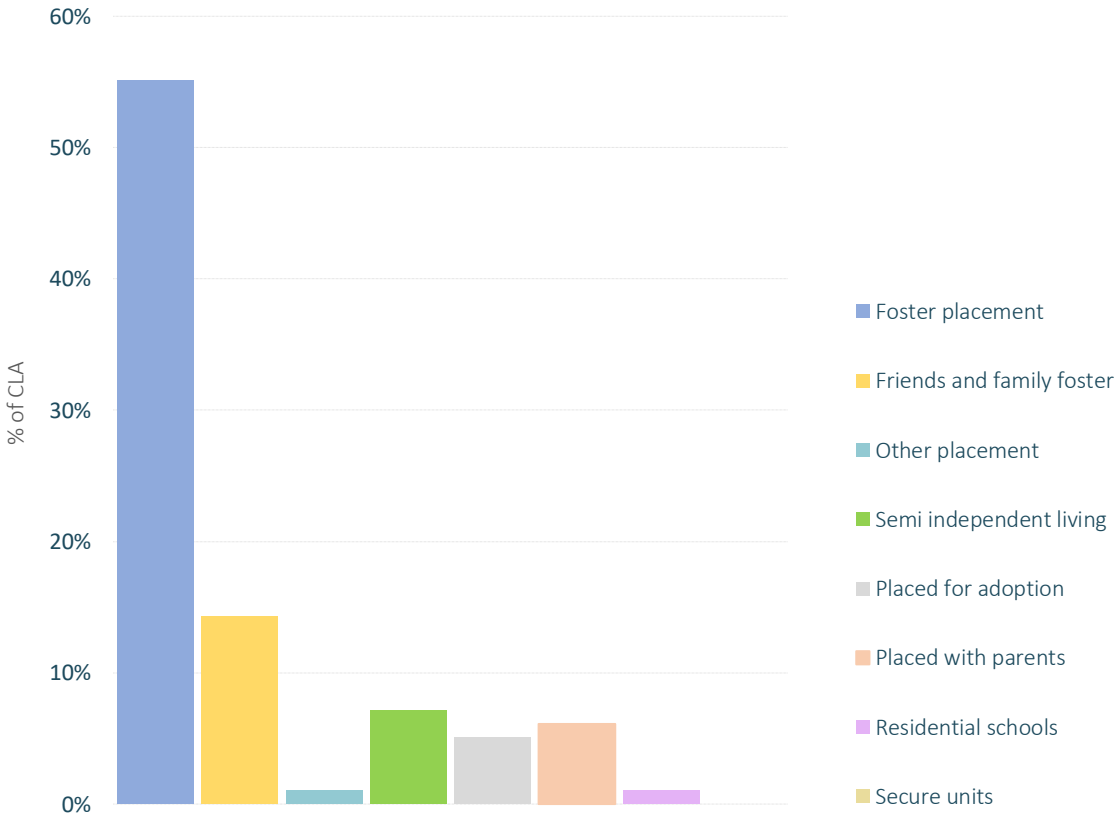
Critical factors in a child’s emotional and physical wellbeing, as well as their ability to recover from the circumstances which led to their being in care, are where and with whom the child lives.

Fostering is our preferred and most utilised placement type. Most children in our care (70%) live in foster care including with in-house foster carers, Family and Friends foster care and foster care commissioned from Independent Foster Care Agencies (IFAs). More children in foster care were living with WBC’s in-house foster carers (42) than with foster care commissioned from independent foster agencies (IFAs) (12), see figure 11 below.

Another 10% of children in our care were living in residential children’s homes. Other placement types included semi-independent living (7%), placed with parents (6%) and adoption (5%), see figure 10 below.

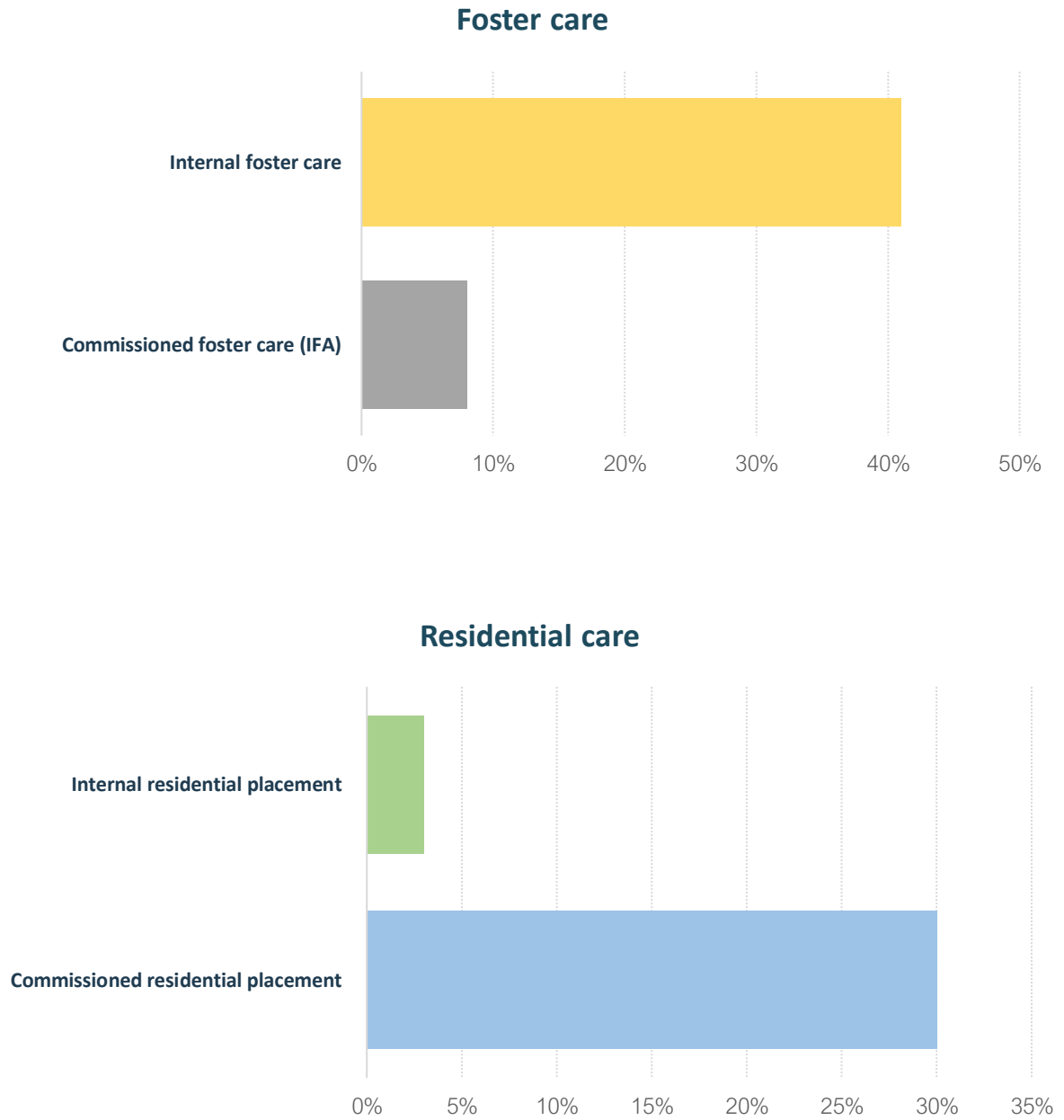
Currently the WBC Operational Commissioning team is seeing an increase in referrals of children and young people overall including an increase in the requirement for mother and baby placements due to courts asking for all options to be presented before considering taking a baby into care.

Figure 9. Looked after children by type of placement (as a share of the total CLA population), 2020



Note: The figure above includes the proportion of looked after children at March 31, 2020

Figure 10. Looked after children by placement provider (as a share of the total CLA population), 2020



Note: the figures include the proportion of looked after children at March 31, 2020, by type of placement.

The stability of placements for children is very important for their emotional wellbeing. Moving can be particularly challenging for children in care as their lives may have been unstable before going into care. Most children (82%) had less than three placement moves, but the number of children with more than 3 placement moves (18%) increased in 2020. Ensuring a child is matched appropriately and that there is a range of provision to meet the needs of children increases stability of placements for children. Placement Stability meetings are held every four weeks to ensure that placement stability is central to supporting outcomes for children in care. Well-planned placements reduce the need for placement changes and emergency placements.

Table 2. Stability of placements for children looked after	2020
% children looked after for at least 12 months	65
% of children looked after with three or more placements during the year	18
% of children looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years aged under 16 who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years	78

Note: This table shows numbers of looked after children at March 31, 2020.

WBC has a policy of only placing children with IFAs and in children’s homes with an overall Ofsted rating of good or outstanding. If an Ofsted rating decreases while a child is placed, any decision to move a child is based on individual need. Based on Ofsted inspection results, the majority of our looked after children were placed with IFAs and children’s homes with an overall rating of outstanding or good, see Table 3 below. The proportion of good and outstanding IFAs nationally in 2020 was 93% and across all private and voluntary owned children’s homes nationally, 80% were judged good or outstanding⁶.

Table 3. Quality of placements based on Ofsted inspections, 2020	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement to be good	Inadequate
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people				
Independent Fostering Agencies	0	0	0	0
Children’s homes	3	1	0	0
How well children & young people are helped and protected				
Independent Fostering Agencies	0	0	0	0
Children’s homes	3	1	0	0
Effectiveness of leaders & managers				
Independent Fostering Agencies	0	0	0	0
Children’s home	2	1	1	0

Note: The table includes outcomes from Ofsted inspections of IFAs and children’s homes (both internal and external). Numbers of IFAs and children’s homes are presented by inspection outcomes. Information on Ofsted inspection outcomes for residential schools and secure home is not shown here, as they represent a small proportion of available residential settings.

⁶ Inspection profiles of the largest private and voluntary providers of children's homes and independent fostering agencies March 2020 (updated September 2021) Ofsted

3.2 Location of placements

Local placements are defined as 20 miles or less from home address and distant placements defined as over 20 miles from home address. This is irrespective of local authority boundaries. As of March 2020, the majority (72%) of looked after children from Wokingham were in placements within 20 miles from home, see Figure 12 below while more children (58%) are placed out of borough than in borough (42%), see Figure 1.

There are three residential children’s homes in Wokingham managed by private organisations with a total of 10 placements:

Name of the home	Provider	Max users	Main category of need:
The Dingles	Calcot Services for Children Ltd	3	Behavioural and emotional difficulties
Pond View	Calcot Services for Children Ltd	3	Behavioural and emotional difficulties
Chiltern Crescent	SWAAY Child and Adolescent Services Ltd	4	Behavioural and emotional difficulties

Figure 11. Looked after children by the distance between the placement and home (as a share of total population of CLA), 2020

Note: The figure includes numbers of looked after children at March 31, 2020.

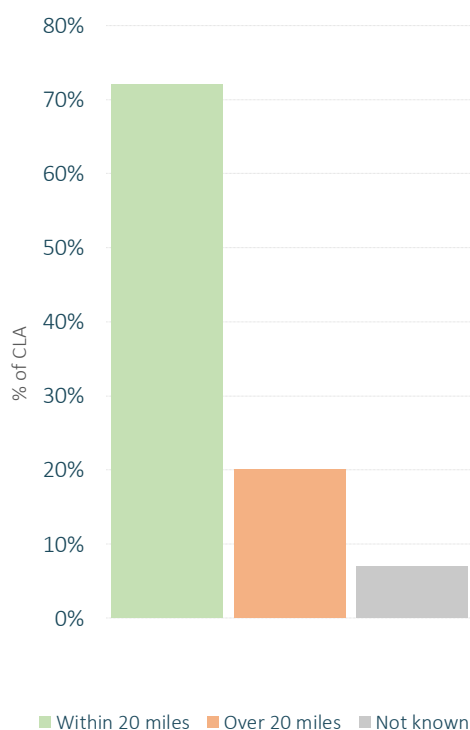
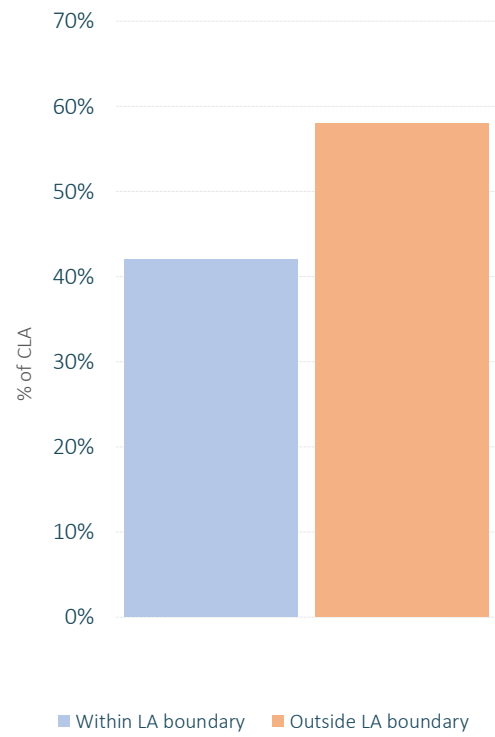


Figure 12. Looked after children placed within and outside the LA boundary, (as a share of total population of CLA), 2020

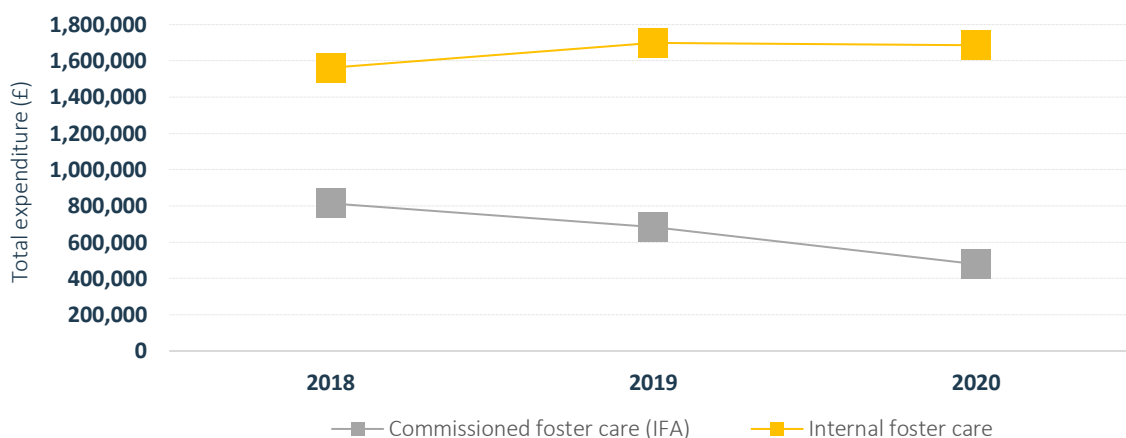
Note: the figure includes numbers of looked after children at March 31, 2020.



3.3 Cost of placements

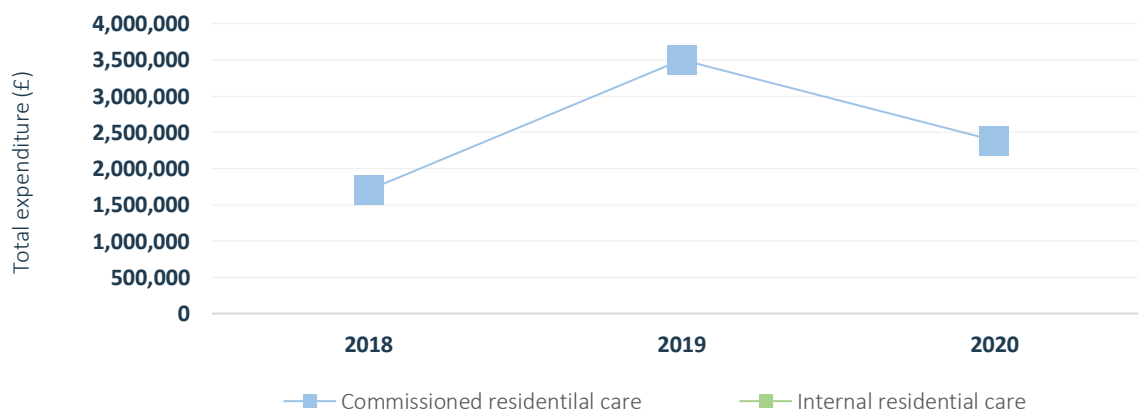
Figure 14 below shows total expenditure on internal and commissioned (IFA) foster care in the financial year ending 31 March 2020. The expenditure on internal foster care has been largely consistent while the expenditure on commissioned foster care placements has reduced year on year, which is mainly due to a lack of IFA placements rather than a lack of demand.

Figure 14. Total expenditure in foster care during the year ending March 31



Note. Council figures do not include management & other internal costs while expenditure on commissioned services includes overhead costs.

Figure 15. Total expenditure in residential placements during the year ending March 31



Note. The figure only includes expenditure in residential placements (management & other internal costs are not taken under consideration).

WBC total expenditure on residential placements, see Figure 15, shows a higher expenditure for 2019 which is attributed to a higher use of solo residential placements, which has now reduced.

WBC average weekly expenditure per child in foster care (both internal and commissioned) over the past three years has been similar to the average weekly expenditure on each type of

placement nationally, which suggests that WBC is not paying more for these types of placements than other local authorities, see figure 16.

WBC average weekly expenditure per child in residential care was lower than nationally in 2018 and 2019, but higher in 2020. WBC average weekly expenditure on children's residential care has fallen in 2021 to £2,993.

Figure 16. Average weekly expenditure (per child) in foster care during the year ending March 31



Notes. Council figures do not include management & other internal costs while expenditure on commissioned services includes overhead costs. The national average is calculated based on the responses provided by the 34 councils that responded to the survey.

Figure 17. Average weekly expenditure (per child) in residential care during the year ending March 31



Notes. The figure only includes expenditure in residential placements (management & other internal costs are not taken under consideration). The national average is calculated based on the responses provided by the 34 councils that responded to the survey.

3.4 Challenges in providing placements and related services

WBC faces a number of challenges in demand for and the supply of children's placements, many of which reflect the national position. This section addresses some of those challenges in meeting the placement sufficiency duty, and key areas of focus to make sure the Council is better placed to meet these challenges going forward.

Key challenges:

1. Age, number and ethnicity of children in care: The number of children coming into care is increasing including the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. The proportion of children in care over the age of 16 is 34%, which may impact on the type of placements required and the likely needs of the young people. The number of children in our looked after population from an ethnic minority background is higher (32%) than the wider Wokingham population (13%). Reasons for this and any implications of this need to be considered.
2. Unpredictable demand for placement types: while WBC has low numbers of children and young people requiring any one type of placement, for instance mother and baby placements, the need may vary widely across the year, with some weeks there being up to five mother and baby placements to find while at other times there will be no such placements required.
3. Supply of fostering and residential placements from the external market: Both regionally and nationally demand for foster carers and registered children's homes outstrips supply. As highlighted in *The Case for Change interim report*⁷, 'while local authorities have a duty to ensure there is sufficient provision in their area to meet the needs of the children in their care, it is increasingly the case that they are operating in a national market where providers are able to set the terms of engagement'. The recently released Competition and Markets Authority interim report (CMA, 22 October 2021) includes their initial findings including that 'concerns about a shortage of places and high prices appear to be supported by the evidence we have seen so far'⁸.

Wokingham aims to find placements for children close to home where possible, but this is challenging, however as the borough is small, has no Council managed residential children's homes and has limited IFA or externally provided placement provision in area. There is also a

⁷ Interim Report: Case for Change, independent review of children's social care, 2021 pages 58-59

⁸ Interim Report, Competition and Markets Authority, October 2021

shortage of semi-independent accommodation and short-term emergency accommodation to support a high level of need among care leavers.

As well as overall capacity, it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure placements able to meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs.⁹ In addition, as WBC has low numbers of children in our care, there is less incentive for providers to engage with the Council in relation to ensuring sufficiency of placements for children and young people.

4. Internal fostering provision: while most children can access foster care, it is a challenge to place 16/17-year-old children, children with disabilities, sibling groups¹⁰ and children with complex needs. The needs of older children will vary, however adolescents who have experienced trauma may be more vulnerable to extra familial harm through exploitation, substance misuse and criminal behaviour. This in turn can increase the potential risks and challenges for placement providers, particularly for foster carers who may have more than one child in the family home or who may be working and therefore not feel able to manage such complex needs. Therefore, the requirement to review the current provision is essential to ensure that there is both additional capacity and a range of fostering provision that can meet the needs of adolescents and young people leaving care.

In addition, there are national issues in fostering to consider such as the aging population of foster carers, regional issues such as the need for foster carers who can assist in the step down of children and young people from residential care, as well as local issues such as the impact of the cost of housing on recruitment of local foster carers.

5. Closure of local Tier 4 provision – Willow House was a 9-bed inpatient mental health facility for children aged 12 to 18 years of age, which closed in Spring 2021. A new service provided by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust from the Willow House site, provides treatment through a hospital at home service. Support can be provided for up to 16 children and young people who will either receive support from a multi-disciplinary team at day care or at home or a combination of the two. If in-patient care is required, children in Wokingham would need to access units outside of the borough. A challenge arising from this change is the need for the LA to place, potentially at short notice, children, and young people for whom their home is not the right place to receive the hospital at home service.

Key areas of focus to address the key challenges:

Addressing the above key challenges will be achieved through ensuring that the profile of our placements meets the profile of the children in our care and our care leavers. The three strategic aims that we think will have maximum positive impact include preventing children coming into care where

⁹ ADCS, Response to The Case for Change interim report, p 10

¹⁰ Ofsted figures show that for fostering in England in 2019 to 2020, 1400 siblings were not placed according to their plan. This represented 13% of all siblings in care.' CMA Interim Report, 22 October 2021

safe to do so, increasing the number of foster care placements that can provide emergency or long-term care, with the skills to match the needs of our children and improving the availability of placements for our care leavers (including semi-independent living, supported lodgings, shared housing and tenancies).

1. Preventing children coming into care where safe to do so

- Early Help: in Wokingham the Integrated Early Help service provide whole family and group-based support to children, young people and their parents/carers who have been assessed as needing more support than universal services provide. The service is based in Children's Centres, Wokingham Youth Centre and the Family Resource Centre and skilled staff work in community-based centres, schools and family homes to ensure support is accessible. A solution focused, strength-based approach is used to help families and sometimes other professionals to identify what is working well for the children and family and agree on the areas that need to change.
- The Compass team was formed to provide additional support to social workers to prevent a child or young person coming into care or to stabilise an existing placement and support reunification with a child or young person's family or connected network. The Compass Team use their training in both Trauma Informed Practice and Systemic Practice to underpin their interventions with young people and their families.

The Compass Team became operational in June 2020 and continues to:

- Provide intensive support to families and children where there is a risk of the young person coming into care.
 - Provide support to placements outside of the birth family in order to prevent placement breakdown or placement instability.
 - Contribute to reunification plans where there is a realistic prospect of a safe return to family.
 - Provide case consultation to the social work teams, particularly for families that are hard to reach or engage, or where limited change has been achieved. The team has successfully offered this knowledge-base out to the wider social work teams in the form of case formulation consultations to give Social Workers space to consider other hypotheses for the difficulties facing families.
 - Reduce the need for high-cost placements by working with young people who present with complex behaviours and who are at risk of accommodation.
 - Reduce the number of high-cost placements by working with young people in those placements and their networks.

Families who have finished working with members of the Compass Team have noted improvements in their own parenting and an improvement in the behaviour and confidence of the child/young person. It has also been noted that families who are working with the Compass Team have been able to develop more positive working relationships with the Social Work team; there have been several cases where this has been a marked improvement and has led to greater understanding. WBC will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Compass team and review

its development at regular intervals to ensure it is achieving the impact with the right children at the right time and to increase knowledge about interventions that may work for a range of needs.

- An exploration of the demand for and availability of respite provision and shared care for families in Wokingham is being carried out as part of the SEND sufficiency project. Short breaks and respite provision for children with SEND can provide fun, leisure and social activities and may prevent children from coming into care. Parents and the SEND Voices Parent/Carer forum have told us that there is not enough respite provision for children with SEN, in particular children with SEMH needs.

2. Increase the number of foster care placements that can provide emergency or long-term care for our children in care, with the skills to match the needs of our children.

- Recruitment: WBC is targeting recruitment at those in related employment such as teachers, nurses, and youth workers and advertising the financial offer for foster carers in WBC including council tax exemption so that it becomes worthwhile for those in related professions to foster.
- Fostering Transformation Project: A Fostering Transformation Project has been established to review current arrangements and develop a future model of delivery which is evidence based and needs led.

The project will be developed in three distinct phases:

Phase 1: Stabilisation

Phase 2: Needs Assessment and Model Development

Phase 3: Implementation and mobilisation.

There are several expected benefits arising from the outputs of this project. These include:

- Improved placement stability
- Reduction in residential placements/increase in option to stepdown
- Improved Foster Carer retention
- Improved Foster Care Support
- Better understanding of impact and intelligence
- Better outcomes for CYP
- Reduced spend in the placement budget
- A detailed understanding of Unit costs
- To support the savings agenda through the MTFP

The new model of delivery will be implemented between July – September 2022.

- Mockingbird model: WBC has been given £35k via DfE funding as part of the Children's Social Care Prime Pump Innovation Programme to pilot the Mockingbird model within the fostering

team. Work is ongoing over the next 12 months to implement this; the project will be delivered through a subgroup of the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (seslip.co.uk) made up of fostering leads from the 8 participating and 4 trailblazing LAs in the region. In particular, the Mockingbird model should include improving foster carer retention, increasing access to respite/breaks, reducing placement disruptions (multiple & expensive placements) and improve support to permanency. Wokingham Borough Council are the host authority for this programme of work.

- Inside Out: Wokingham was also successful in securing additional DfE funding through the Children's Social Care Prime Pump Innovation Programme to pilot a new project based on the Essex 'Inside Out' model and extending this further to incorporate Therapeutic Interventions. The pilot seeks to measure the impact of weekly therapeutic interventions on placement stability, outcomes for the Children and Young People as well as support for Foster Carers. This project has secured funding to implement this pilot project across 11 local authorities and measure the impact of the interventions. Wokingham Borough Council are the host authority for this programme of work.

3. Improve the availability and stability of placements

Care leavers (including semi-independent living, supported lodgings, shared housing and tenancies):

- Work has been undertaken to understand the housing needs of our care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seekers, and homeless 16/17-year-olds. The work undertaken covers different types of housing needs and includes temporary, respite, supported, permanent and assessment. This was used to develop a pathway of support for Care Leavers and Young People as they transition to adulthood. Part of this work will aim to ensure that we effectively utilise money from the Capital Programme to develop local affordable provision which can meet needs and ensure our young people and care leavers have access to several housing options to support their transition to independence and reduce homelessness.
- Two joint housing protocols have been developed to improve planning and decision making between Housing Services and Children's Services for two cohorts of children: Care Leavers and 16/17-year-old young people presenting as homeless:

-Care Leavers Protocol:

This joint protocol sets out how Children's Services and Housing, as well as other parts of the Council, will work together as a corporate parent to ensure that young people who leave care have the housing and the support they need to live successfully as young adults.

-16/17-year-old Protocol:

The purpose of this joint protocol is to ensure that young people are not passed around, being sent between Children's Services and Housing, but that they and their parents (or those with parental responsibility) get a timely and helpful response from WBC, which focusses on the well-being and safety of the young person and supports them to remain with their family wherever it is safe to do so.

- Supported lodgings is a rarely used resource and the exploration of how we could increase and utilise this placement option will be explored as part of the fostering transformation programme. Currently the supported lodging provision is managed within the WBC Fostering service, but discussions are ongoing regarding increasing the involvement of the Housing service in overseeing this provision.
- A vast amount of work has been undertaken during 2020 and 2021 in order to increase semi-independent accommodation for Care Leavers. A new 7 bed resource (London Road) will open in January 2022 which will provide 24/7 supported accommodation for Care Leavers aged 16 – 21. This resource also provides 1 emergency bed placement. This provision is local and based within Central Wokingham.
- There is also a programme of work which is seeking to further increase semi-independent provision for Care Leavers aged 18+ and Young People aged 16/17 who present as Homeless. This provision will provide a further 8 placements and is located in Central Wokingham. It is expected to open in 2023.
- Currently demand for independent move on accommodation for our care leavers outstrips supply and the council is working to identify how they can increase this provision locally with colleagues across the council, particularly with our Strategic Housing colleagues.
- We will work with the Transition team, colleagues in adults social care and commissioning to understand the emerging need for housing for young adults with Care Act needs.

Other initiatives to improve access to placements or placement stability:

- It is recognised that looked after children and their carers and families can have specific support needs and may need access to specialist support. A dedicated looked after children CAMHS Service is being established across Berkshire West to ensure that Children who are in care receive quicker access to mental health support through sharing information and knowledge, directly assessing the needs of CYP in care and providing interventions that meet needs where that is best for the child or young person. It is expected that the service will be fully staffed and operational from 1st April 2022.

The service aims to improve life chances of Children in Care, by working towards increasing these resilience factors:

- Creating stability of the Child or Young person’s home placement
- CYP able to maintain a relationship with family members and work to be re-united where that is possible.
- Fostering as strong an attachment as possible with the CYP foster carers or adults responsible for their care (if in a residential setting)
- Reaching as high as possible education achievements and
- Creating local social networks, forming positive and meaningful relationships with peers and other adults.

The objectives of this specific service will be to:

- Provide evidence based mental health assessments
 - Use these high-quality assessments to inform multi-disciplinary care planning and inform interventions (clinical and non-clinical)
 - Share knowledge, expertise, advice, and guidance to professionals (including foster carers) so more informed decisions (both small and significant in scale) are made with CYP about their lives.
 - Provide training to professionals (including foster carers) about CYP presentation of need to enable adults to identify needs earlier, respond in a knowledgeable and empathic way and be confident that as adults they are doing the right things for that CYP.
 - Provide evidenced based interventions directly with CYP and foster carers that support improved outcomes.
-
- Wokingham works in partnership with other authorities in the south region to collectively have a wider impact on the availability, quality, and affordability of all placement types. The authorities collectively commission (via framework agreements) provision from the IFA, residential and semi-independent accommodation Providers. This is cost-effective, however, has so far not increased the quantity of placements available within the borough. More local market engagement by the WBC Operational Commissioning team is planned to understand the potential for use of local placements as they become vacant.
 - Multifaceted placement hub: a registered multi-use site with flexible provision could address several gaps and challenges including increased respite, mother and baby provision, tier 4 discharges, children in care who are not able to access supported living and children with additional needs. This project is in the early stage of scoping including a cost/benefit analysis, consideration of any unintended consequences of the model and exploration of new guidance which came into effect in 2021 from Ofsted relating to multi-building registration. There is an allocation of money within the Council's Capital Programme in order to support this piece of work.
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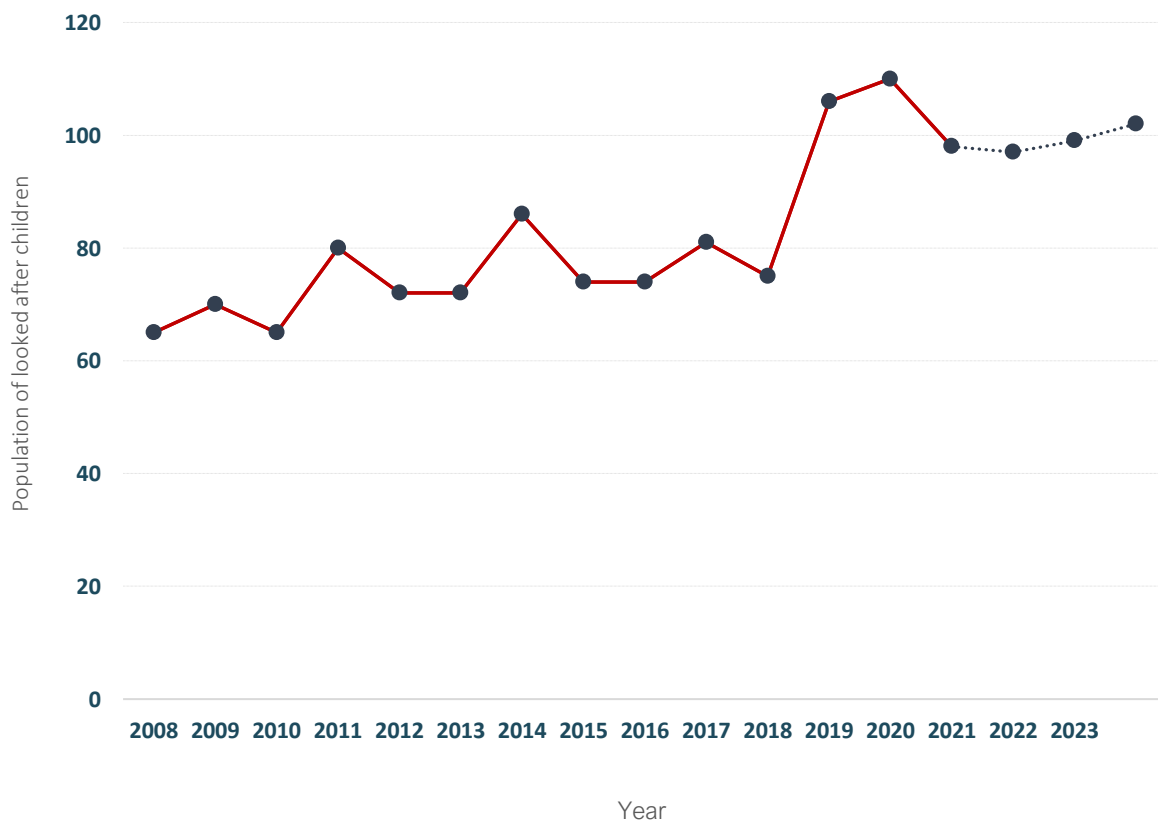
4. Projections on demand for placements

Figure 18 shows historical trends for the population of children in our care as at 31 March each year as well as the forecast produced centrally using the Alma Economics forecasting model, which predicts numbers of children in our care will remain relatively steady. This is similar to internal modelling which predicts that overall numbers of children in care at 31 March each year will average around 105 (0.27% of the Wokingham Borough 0-17 population). Previous analysis has shown, however, that numbers in-year show greater variances and the current monthly in-year figure is 116 (October 2021).

While overall numbers at 31 March should remain relatively steady, there is an anticipated growth in the population of older children over the next 3 years including a potential increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Therefore, there is a need for continued provision and the likelihood of an increased number of older children with complex needs, see pages 23 and 24 above for plans to address this challenge.

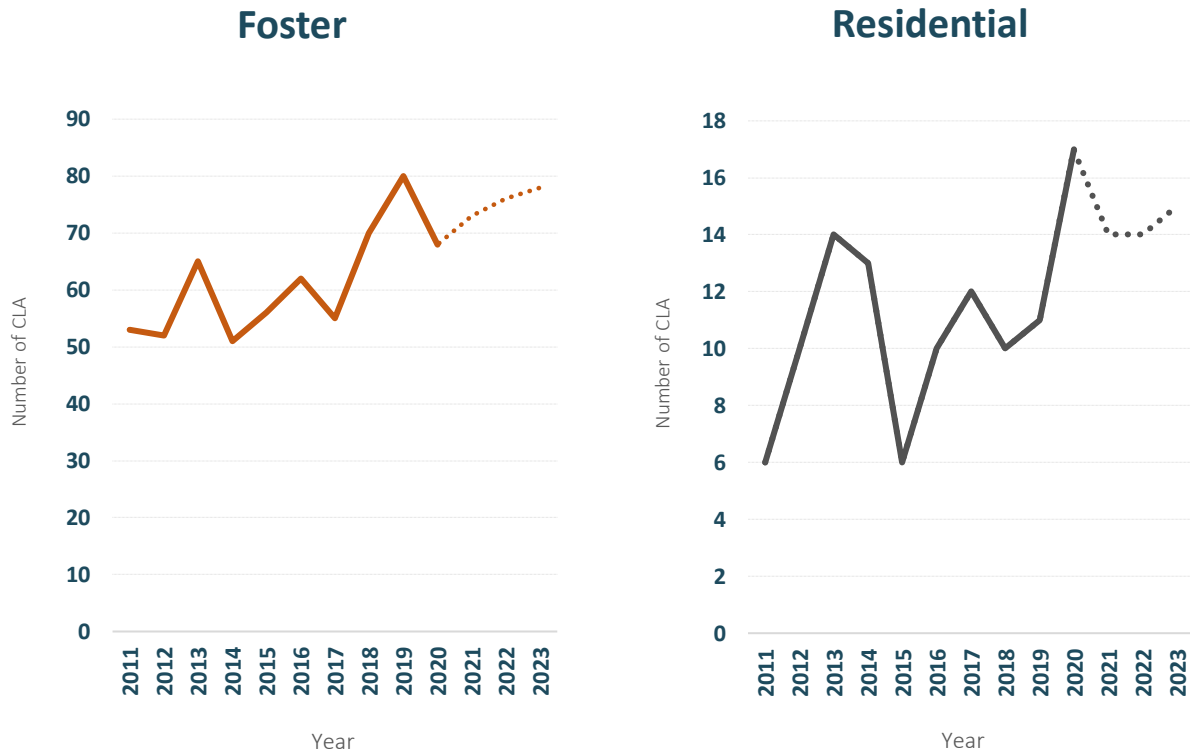
Figure 19 on the next page indicates a relatively consistent need for residential placements and an increasing need for foster care placements, which will be addressed within the Fostering Transformation project, see page 22 above.

Figure 18. Population of looked after children – forecasts over 2020-2023



Note: Forecasts are produced using historical data on numbers of looked after children at March 31 of each year.

Figure 19. Looked after children in foster and residential placements



Note: Forecasts are produced using historical data on numbers of looked after children at March 31 of each year. Residential placements include secure units, children's homes, semi-independent living accommodation, residential schools, and other residential settings.

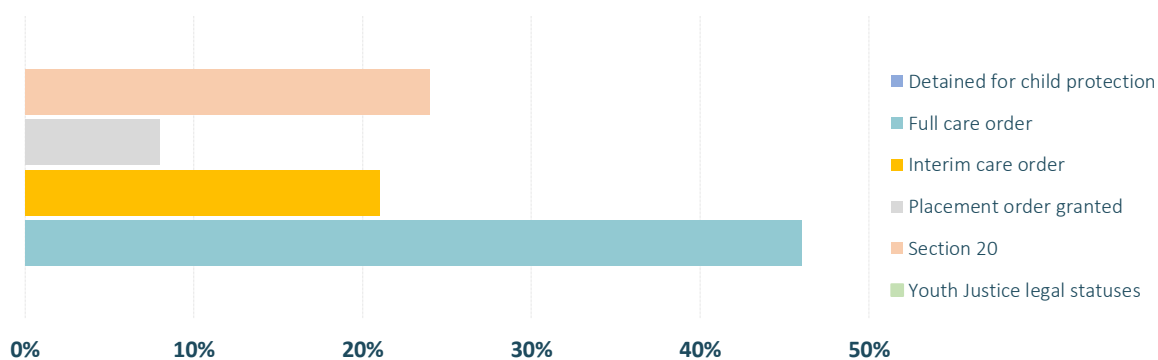
5. Appendix

A1. Population of looked after children

Table A1. Population of looked after children during the year ending March 31

	2018	2019	2020
Children looked after	106	110	98
Children who started to be looked after	66	62	44
Children who ceased to be looked after	36	58	55

Figure A1. Legal status of looked after children, 2020



Note. The figure includes information on the legal status of children looked after at March 31 in the year of interest.

A2. Supply of placements

Table A2. Number of fostering households, 2020

	2018	2019	2020
Number of fostering households (internal)	31	49	39
Number of fostering households (IFAs)	18	16	10

Note. The table includes the number of fostering households (internal) and the number of fostering households (IFA) at March 31 of each year.

Table A3. Number of residential places and number of beds, 2020

	Council	Private / Third sector	N. beds
Children's home	1	3	15
Secure homes	0	0	0
Residential schools	0	0	0

Note. The table includes the number of children's home, secure homes, and residential schools owned by the council (including both those owned by the Local Authority and the Health Authority) and privately owned (including those owned by the third sector).

Table A4a. Looked after children placed in other councils, 2020

	Foster care
Ealing	1
Redbridge	1
Buckinghamshire	1
Milton Keynes	1
East Sussex	1
Hampshire	2
Swindon	1
Bracknell Forest	5

Windsor and Maidenhead	3
West Berks	2
Reading	7
Kent	2
Isle of Wight	1
Surrey	4
West Sussex	1

Table A4b. Looked after children placed in other councils, 2020

	Residential care
Central Bedfordshire	1
Hampshire	1
Bracknell Forest	1
West Berks	1
Nottinghamshire	1
Cheshire West and Chester	1
Gloucestershire	1
Surrey	1
West Sussex	1
Wales	1

Table A4b. Looked after children placed in other councils, 2020

	Residential care
Central Bedfordshire	1
Hampshire	1
Bracknell Forest	1
West Berks	1
Nottinghamshire	1
Cheshire West and Chester	1
Gloucestershire	1
Surrey	1
West Sussex	1
Wales	1
