



# **Bristol City Council**

## **Sufficiency Strategy Placements for Children in Care and Care Leavers**

v1

### **2020-2023**

## PLAN ON A PAGE: Sufficiency Strategy - Placements for Children in Care and Care Leavers

- Ensure that there are sufficient placements, both in terms of numbers and quality, available locally to meet the needs of children and young people who need our care
- In recent years, the number of placements available have not increased at the same rate as the number of children coming into care, and the cost of placements has been rising; we will work to develop the market and ensure value for money
- The action points below are drawn from range of strategy documents, action plans, Market Position Statements and other sources, for more information please refer to these documents which are linked throughout this strategy

### Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) / Adoption

- Revise our SGO policy
- Increase the number exiting care to alternative forms of permanency

### Youth Offending & Secure

- Develop placements for children and Young People in care with serious criminal offences
- Review placements available for children in care leaving secure placements, incl. education & health
- Ensure development of preventative approaches is a priority, working with safer options and the Contextual Safeguarding Scale Up Project

### Fostering

#### In-house

- New recruitment and retention approach to attract and retain skilled carers
- Recruit more specialist carers
- Targeted recruitment of BME and Muslim Foster Carers
- Maintain retiring carers as advisors and mentors

#### Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)

- Ongoing monitoring of regional IFA framework
- Develop a new Fostering Market Position Statement for 2021
- Explore child specific carer recruitment with IFAs, for children with additional needs and disabilities

### Residential

#### In-house

- Re-profile in-house children's homes
- Proposal to develop a three-bed disabled children's home
- Review links with education and health providers
- Review stepping down arrangements
- Further develop Staying Close arrangements
- More intensive behavioural support for children with complex needs

#### Out of Authority

- Develop step down plans with providers
- Work with providers to develop approaches that meet new and emerging needs

### 16+ and Leaving Care

- Increase number and range of providers on high-support framework
- Review youth housing pathway and align commissioning priorities across housing and social care
- Review outcomes of new PA support to care leavers up to 25
- Review impact of Staying Put on foster care capacity
- Analyse results of care leavers Employment Education and Training Social Impact Bond

### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

- Review the range of suitable accommodation and make proposals to further develop a variety of care and supported accommodation options

### Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

#### In-house

- Review support available for children with complex communication difficulties
- Assess placements on development of independence and social skills
- Assess and prepare for the impact of the introduction of Liberty Protection Safeguards in 2022
- Ensure strengths based, evidence informed approaches are understood and utilised to deliver best outcomes

#### Independent Non Maintained Special Schools

- Further develop framework to increase local provision for children with complex needs
- Support providers to improve transition into adult living

## INTRODUCTION

The Council is committed to giving all children and young people the best start in life, whatever their background and wherever they live ([Strategy for Children and Young People 2016-2020](#)).

Our vision for children and families in Bristol is that they get the right response, the right assessment and the right help at the right time. In the first instance, we are committed to working with families and children in need to support them to stay together wherever this is safe and in the child's best interest to do so. We will ensure that the children and young people in our care are only those who really need to be.

As Corporate Parents, we hold high aspirations for the children and young people in our care; we want to ensure that they receive the help and support needed to equip them for a successful life. Children in care in Bristol will have equal opportunities to learn, play and grow and be able to access cultural, faith based, leisure and social activities that make being in care an enriching experience ([Bristol Corporate Parenting Strategy](#)).

In 2019 we carried out a system wide transformation of children's services, via the Strengthening Families Programme. The programme focused on the root causes of demand, sought to improve our partnership response to children and families in need of support, and enable us to deliver our vision. In order to achieve this, we invested in early intervention and services on the edge of care, as well as services to achieve permanency including supporting reunification with parents when this is the right outcome for children

We want children and young people, wherever possible, to live in a family setting and we aim for children to live in residential children's homes only when it is in their best interest. Our Strengthening Families programme means our services will be more effective in keeping children in their own families when this is the best option for them. The number of Bristol children in care has fallen by around 11% in the past five years, from 699<sup>1</sup> in 2011/14 to 621 end March 2020<sup>2</sup> and we want to see this trend continue where it is safe to do so.

The Sufficiency Duty, under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, requires the council to take steps to ensure, as far as practicable, we can provide children in care with homes that meet their needs, within our area. This involves making sure there is a sufficient range and number of providers capable of meeting the differing needs of our children in care and care leavers.

This Strategy sets out a high level summary of need of our children in care and care leavers. The document presents our current delivery arrangements and our approaches to meeting the statutory responsibility to provide secure, safe and appropriate accommodation over the next three years.

## Methodology

This Sufficiency Strategy has been developed in consultation with professionals from across Social Care, Education and Health. Providers have been consulted on our needs through our regular Provider Forum. We have used a range of information sources in putting together this document including:

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<sup>1</sup> Children looked after in England including adoption: 2018 to 2019:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019>

<sup>2</sup> Bristol City Council QlikSense data

- Statistical analysis of placement data and spend
- A Deep Dive analysis of twelve of the highest costs placements
- Review of the whole system approach
- Identification of areas of concern and pressure points
- Market position statement for children's residential care

In taking forward the Council's aspirations, we will with consult children and young people on how best we should deliver services to achieve our priorities. It is our ambition to develop a group of young commissioners to work with us, in order to co-construct services directly with the children and young people who will be accessing them.

In addition to consulting on any market position statements and policies that are developed as a result of this strategy, we will build requirements into our contracts that service development must be undertaken with children and young people; and that services will be monitored against this requirement. As we develop and shape our Quality Assurance Framework we will triangulate information from contract management with the child's view and those of their social worker and the IRO to ensure we are evidence informed and intelligence led.

## Headlines

- Bristol City Council has the second lowest rate of children in care of the English core cities, just behind Sheffield. However, whilst Sheffield's rates of children in care have been increasing, our rate has reduced over the past five years.
- Although the number of children in care has been steadily decreasing over the past five years, the total cost of placements has been increasing.
- The number of children in residential children's homes fluctuates but has reduced from 56 in April 2017 to 45 in April 2020.
- All of our most complex, high cost placements for children in care have been made in independent children's homes or residential special schools, with the majority of these having been made outside of Bristol. This has meant that some children have lost consistent access to services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Be Safe (working with children with Sexualised Harmful Behaviour) and BASE (service to support sexually exploited children). Furthermore, seeing and/or keeping in contact with their family is made more difficult; whilst placement distance makes it more challenging for our social workers to effectively support the child and those looking after him or her and the extra travel time further adds to the overall cost of the placement.
- The majority of our children and young people in care with the most complex needs are male and experienced particular difficulty in early adolescence, even in previously long-term stable placements.
- Out of Area independent residential home placements are often made because there is no specialist provision available locally. We are working to improve this, for example, through our re-profiling children's home project, bringing children and young people placed out of area back into Bristol.
- Shortages of local placements are particularly acute for joint education and residential placements. This leads to delays in placing children and young people and contributes to placement instability.

- There is insufficient step down provision from crisis placements to stable children's home placements, into foster care, or return home.
- We perform well in relation to placement stability. In 2017/18 49% of our children in care had no placement changes within the past four years, which is the highest percentage of all the Core English Cities and compares to 42% nationally. However there are a small but consistent number of children in care who do not live in a stable environment, so a 12 month therapeutic support pilot has been established to address this.
- The Strengthening Families programme has positively increased the number of children leaving care to adoption and special guardianship.

### Bristol City Council Sufficiency Requirements

- Increased foster homes within Bristol or within reasonable travelling distance of schools
- Highly trained foster carers and quality homes for those children and young people with the most complex needs including those with additional needs and disabilities.
- Foster placements that can:
  - Meet the needs of our most complex children
  - Care for siblings so that they can stay together
  - Care for children in an emergency
- Foster carers who are representative of the children they care for, particularly in relation to ethnicity and religion.
- Residential Children's Homes in Bristol that can support young people to move into a foster placement or to return home to live within their extended family.
- Residential Children's Homes within Bristol that are able to care for our most complex children and young people with very challenging behaviour.
- Residential Children's Homes for disabled children, with suitable adaptations that replicates a home environment.
- Homes for children and young people, particularly teenagers, at risk of exploitation (Criminal and Sexual).
- Increased number of 16+ High Support Housing providers on the Bristol framework to increase market capacity in the local area and deliver a range of support options including shared accommodation and lower support.
- Foster placements and 16+ supported accommodation for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- Local residential provision that can provide secure regulated short term placements.
- Providers who are skilled in preparing young people for adulthood. We will work with providers to ensure they support young people to develop the skills and resilience they need to make successful transition to adulthood and independence.

### Related strategies and documents

- [Corporate Parenting strategy](#)

The corporate parenting strategy sets out the Council's approach to delivering on the Corporate Parenting Principles to improve the lives of children in and leaving care, our vision and priorities for children in care and care leavers

- [Pledge to children in care and care leavers](#)

Our Pledge is a promise made by the Council and the Children and Families Partnership to all children in care and care leavers. We have a responsibility to make sure that children in and leaving

our care are safe, healthy and achieving their goals. We promise to do our best to help children in care achieve their full potential. We are committed to involving these children and young people in any decisions that affect their life, asking what they think, listening and taking their views into account. This is part of our commitment to making sure that all children are valued in every aspect of their lives.

- [Local Offer for Care Leavers](#)
- Fostering recruitment strategy
- Special Guardianship Policy 2020 - we are currently finalising our plan and this will be made available once completed.
- [Bristol City Council Young People’s Housing and Independence Pathway Plan](#)

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

We have a duty under section 22 of the Children Act 1989 to take steps to ensure, as far as practicable, that we can provide children in care with locally based placements that can meet their needs. We need to ensure there is a sufficient range and number of care providers capable of meeting the needs of children in our care.

Nationally, the number of children in care has grown from 69,470 in 2014/5 to an all-time high of 78,150 in 2018/9. This is a 12.4% increase over five years. Comparatively, Bristol’s Children in Care population has decreased by 11.7% over five years.

The table below details the yearly breakdown<sup>3</sup>:

Year end	Children In Care population (nationally)	Children In Care population (Bristol)	Percentage change on previous year (nationally)	Percentage change on previous year (Bristol)
2014/15	69,470	699	+0.9	+0.7
2015/16	70,410	674	+1.3	-3.5
2016/17	72,610	684	+3.1	+1.4
2017/18	75,370	639	+3.8	-6.5
2018/19	78,150	617	+3.6	-3.4

Of the current 78,150 Children in Care nationally, the majority (72%) lived with foster families as at 31 March 2019). Of the other children, 12% lived in children’s homes, secure units or semi-independent living accommodation, 7% were placed with parents, 4% in other placements in the community, 3% were placed for adoption and 1% lived in “other placement” or “other” residential settings.

As the number of children in care nationally continues to rise, the market takes time to respond so whilst the number of placements has increased, demand is still outstripping supply. This has created

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<sup>3</sup> Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014/15 to 2018/19 (SSDA903)

competition between local authorities for local placements, forcing authorities to make placements considerable distances outside their boundaries.

For example, although there has been an increase in the number of Children's Homes in England, the rise in the number of places has not kept pace with the rise of children in care nationally. Between March 2015 and March 2019, the number of places increased by 3% compared to a 12.5% rise in the number of children in care.<sup>4</sup>

Private companies own almost three quarters of the children's homes in England and as the number of local authority-run homes continues to fall, private companies are gaining a greater share of the market. At the end of August 2017, 43 private companies ran 41% of all children's homes in England, with the five largest companies accounting for about 17% of all homes.

Staying Put legislation introduced in 2014 allows young people to remain in their foster homes post 18; whilst this provides placement stability and enables young people to leave home when they are prepared and ready to do so, it also impacts the availability of foster placements for younger children.

### Key legislation changes since 2015

#### **Permanence, long-term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child Statutory Guidance 2015:**

The Care Planning and Fostering Regulations 2015 amend the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 with respect to:

- Foster carers and residential child care workers must be appropriately consulted and involved in decision making for children;
- Where the plan for permanence is long-term foster care there must be an appropriate planning process which considers the needs of the child and the capacity of the carer to meet these needs;
- Where a long-term foster placement is agreed this must be recorded in a child's placement plan; and appropriate and flexible visiting and case review arrangements should be made.
- Where a local authority is considering ceasing to look after a child, it must assess the proposed arrangements for the child and set out the support that will be provided when the child ceases to be looked-after. The authority must consult with the child, their parents and others to ensure that the proposed arrangements are in the child's best interests and will safeguard and promote their welfare. Also, the authority must have robust arrangements in place to scrutinise decisions to cease to look after a child<sup>5</sup>.

#### **The Children Act 1989 and Amendments:**

Separated children, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children, should be supported by local authorities in accordance with their duties to children under the Children Act 1989. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to '(a) safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and (b) so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs'. [2] Section 20 provides a specific duty to provide accommodation to a child who requires it.

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<sup>4</sup> Ofsted Children's social care data in England 2018 to 2019: main findings

<sup>5</sup> Introduced by [2015 regulations](#)

### **Children and Social Work Act 2017**

Section 3 of the Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities, which requires them to offer Personal Adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 who request this, whether or not they are in education or training.

It also set out a new duty on local authorities to consult on and publish their local offer for care leavers, which sets out both care leavers' legal entitlements and the additional discretionary support that the local authority provides.

Care leavers have also been given additional support under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and are now considered to have a local connection for housing purposes to the local authority whose care they were under. The Act also introduced general duties on local authorities to help people (including young people aged 16 and 17) threatened with homelessness.

### **Ofsted Inspection Framework**

New Inspection Frameworks have been introduced for independent fostering agencies and for children's homes in April 2018. Local authority fostering services are now inspected under the new framework for local authority children's services (the latest framework was introduced in September 2018). For all services, inspectors now make judgments on a four-point scale: outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good and inadequate. The frameworks operate on the basis that only good is good enough for children. We only wish to place with providers who have been judged to be good or outstanding.

### **The Education and Adoption Act 2016:**

This legislation required that all council adoption services are merged into regional bodies so children can be matched with parents more quickly. Bristol has joined together with five other local authorities through Adoption West, which went live on 1 March 2019.

The Government also introduced measures through the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to increase the number of children placed with their adoptive family sooner and reduce the time children spend in care waiting to move into their new home, by requiring courts to consider a child's relationship with prospective adopters they are placed with, when deciding on an adoption order.

In addition, it also amended the special guardianship regulations so that councils have to carry out more thorough assessments to make sure children placed with family members are in the right home and relatives they are placed with can look after the child right up until they are 18.

### **Changes in mental capacity legislation**

The Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill has replaced the Deprivation of Liberty Standards (DOLS) with Liberty Protection Standards (LPS) that are intended to provide a more straightforward process to consider the restrictions of people's liberty as part of their overall care package. The LPS will also cover 16 and 17 year olds, having originally only applied to those 18 and over.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

Bristol is the 8th largest city and the 10th largest local authority in England with a population of approximately 463,400 people. Bristol has a relatively young age profile with almost one in every five people living in Bristol aged under 16. Between 2007 and 2017 the number of children living in Bristol increased by 12,900 (17.8%), much higher than the England and Wales increase of just 8%. The increase has been largely amongst the under 10s (an increase of 24%).

The child population in Bristol is increasingly diverse; 28% of children (under 16) belong to a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) group. In Inner City and East Bristol, where child population increases have been highest, 52% of under 16s are BME compared to 21% in the North and 13% in the South.

According to the 2011 census 3,250 children in Bristol have a “limiting long-term illness or disability”, proportionately more than the national average. 12.8% of children and young people aged 5-19 years have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem at any one time; self-harm hospital admission rates for those aged 10-24 years exceed the England average at 618 per 100,000 compared to 421.2 per 100,000 for England<sup>6</sup>. The rate of hospital admissions due to substance misuse is 25% above the National Average (112.9 per 100,000 in Bristol compared to 89.7 per 100,000 in England)

Whilst the total child population in Bristol has been increasing, the overall number of children in care has fallen by 11% in the past five years from approximately 73% of Bristol’s children in care are subject to a full or interim Care Order and 18% are voluntarily accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (both figures are similar to national averages).

The overall ratio of girls to boys among Bristol’s children in care is 44% female and 56% male (similar to national averages). However for children placed in out of authority children’s homes the ratio is 27% female and 73% male, whilst this number fluctuates, the percentage of males in this type of placement is consistently greater than females. 64% of Bristol’s children in care are of white ethnic background, with 16% mixed race, 7% black or black British background and 4% of Asian or British Asian background.

The financial climate is increasingly challenging within the public sector and we continue to have to make difficult decisions to make sure we provide the best services, within the funding that is available. This makes it crucial that we contain the council’s spend on placements for children in care by ensuring we support children to live with parents (building strong and resilient families). Where this is not possible we will seek alternatives within birth family or with someone who knows them best. When children do need our care, we must make sure that we find the most suitable, cost effective and stable homes.

For more information on our local context please see the Bristol JSNA Chapter [Looked After Children and Care Leavers](#).

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<sup>6</sup> Public Health England Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Profiles, September 2019;

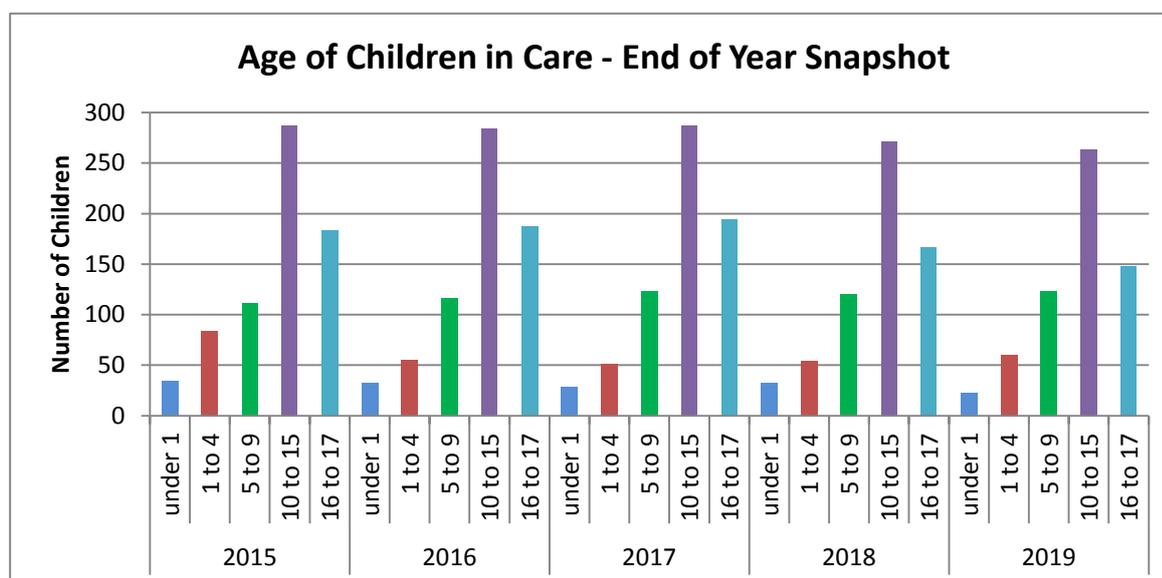
## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

### Children in Care population in Bristol

The number of children in care (CiC) in Bristol has reduced over the past five years:

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Trend
All CiC at 31 March	699	674	684	639	617	
Rate of CiC at 31 March per 10,000 children	76	73	73	68	66	

### Age



The number of young people in care aged 16-17 had been steadily increasing, before falling in 2018 and 2019, this fall is attributed to the Strengthening Families Programme that invested in edge of care services, thereby enabling more teenagers to remain in their family. This period has also seen fluctuations in the number of children in care in other age groups but the proportions of those children have not changed significantly. Children aged 10-15 remain the largest age group of children in care in Bristol, as is the case nationally.

### Special Educational Needs and Disability

The 2019 national statistical return data showed that 28.7% of Bristol children in care have a statement of SEN or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), compared to 27.2% of children in care nationally<sup>7</sup>. These figures compare to 2.5% of the total Bristol pupil population and 3.1% of the

<sup>7</sup>National Statistics Statements of SEN and EHC plans: England, 2019

total pupil population in England<sup>8</sup>. Between March 2015 and February 2018, 52% of children placed in out of authority children’s homes had a Statement or EHCP at the point that the placement was made.

## Placements

### Placements by Provision Type:<sup>9</sup>

		Foster	Residential*	Adoption	Parent	Other Accommodation
2014/15	England	74%	10%	5%	5%	4%
	South West	78%	11%	4%	3%	3%
	Bristol	80%	12%	5%	0%	0%
2015/16	England	73%	11%	4%	6%	5%
	South West	78%	12%	4%	3%	3%
	Bristol	82%	15%	1%	1%	0%
2016/17	England	73%	11%	4%	6%	5%
	South West	77%	12%	4%	3%	3%
	Bristol	81%	15%	2%	2%	0%
2017/18	England	73%	12%	3%	6%	4%
	South West	76%	13%	3%	3%	4%
	Bristol	81%	12%	3%	2%	0%
2018/19	England	72%	12%	3%	7%	6%
	South West	75%	11%	3%	4%	7%
	Bristol	82%	12%	2%	3%	0%

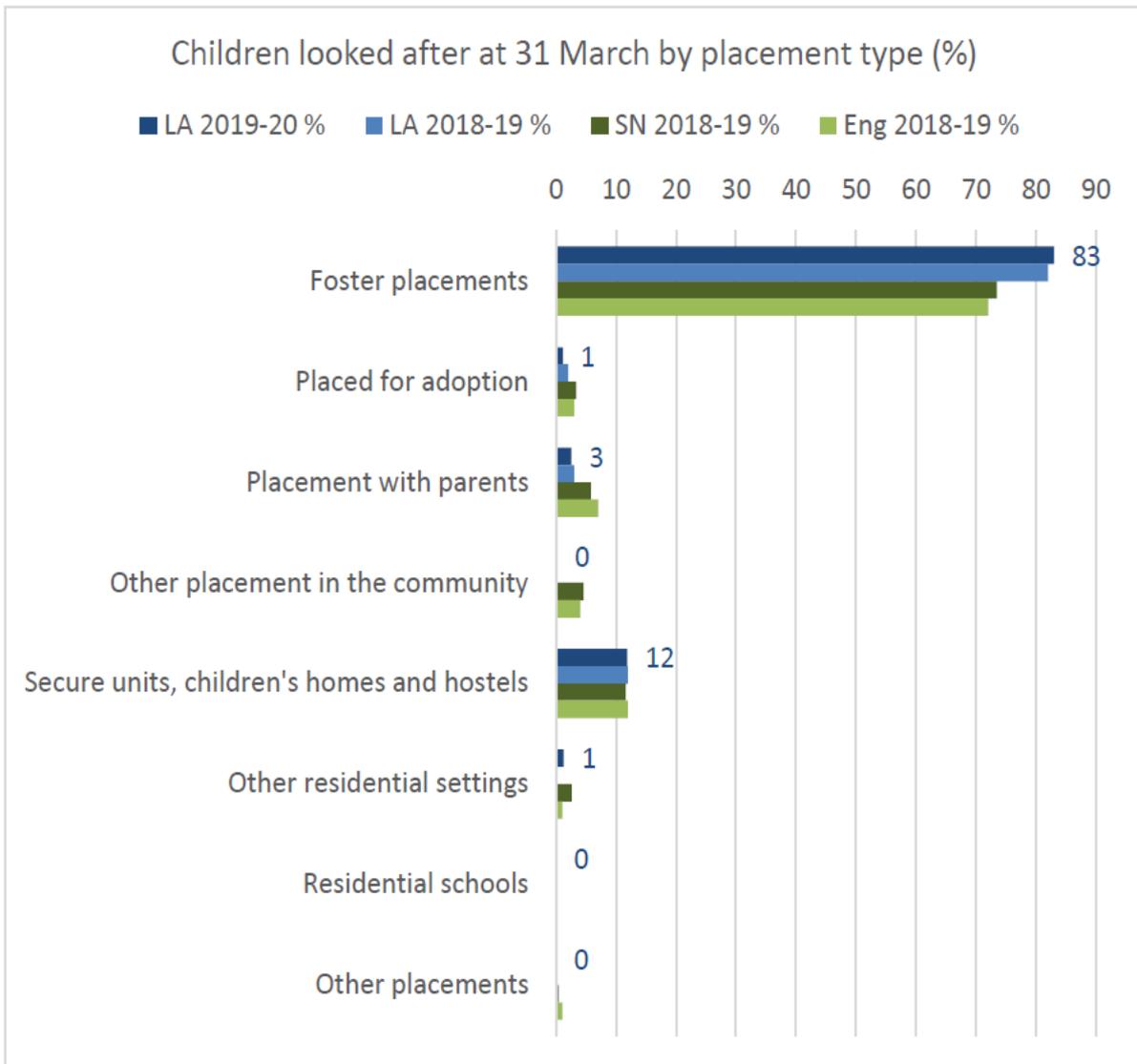
\* In this care Residential refers to secure units, children’s homes and semi-independent accommodation

The above table gives the breakdown of the type of provision we have placed young people in over the last five years, compared with the regional and national picture. A significant majority of placements are with foster carers, and Bristol has greater percentage of children in foster care compared to the regional and national average. The percentage of young people in residential placements is fairly low, in line with the national average; however the children and young people who are in these placements often have the most complex needs, meaning the placements can be very high cost.

The graph below shows an updated picture of our placement breakdown. The graph compares the types of placements our children in care were living in at 31 March 2018/19 and 2019/20, compared to both our statistical neighbours (SN) and the England average. This shows that we have continued housing a high proportion of our young people in foster homes, and that our residential use is in line with both the national average and our statistical neighbours.

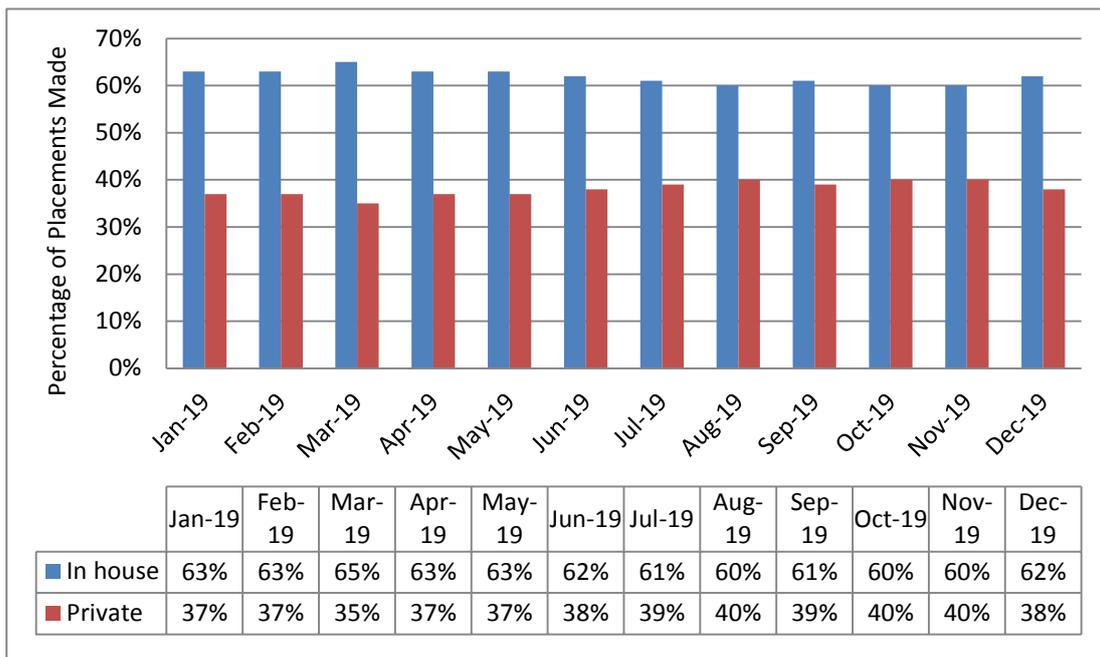
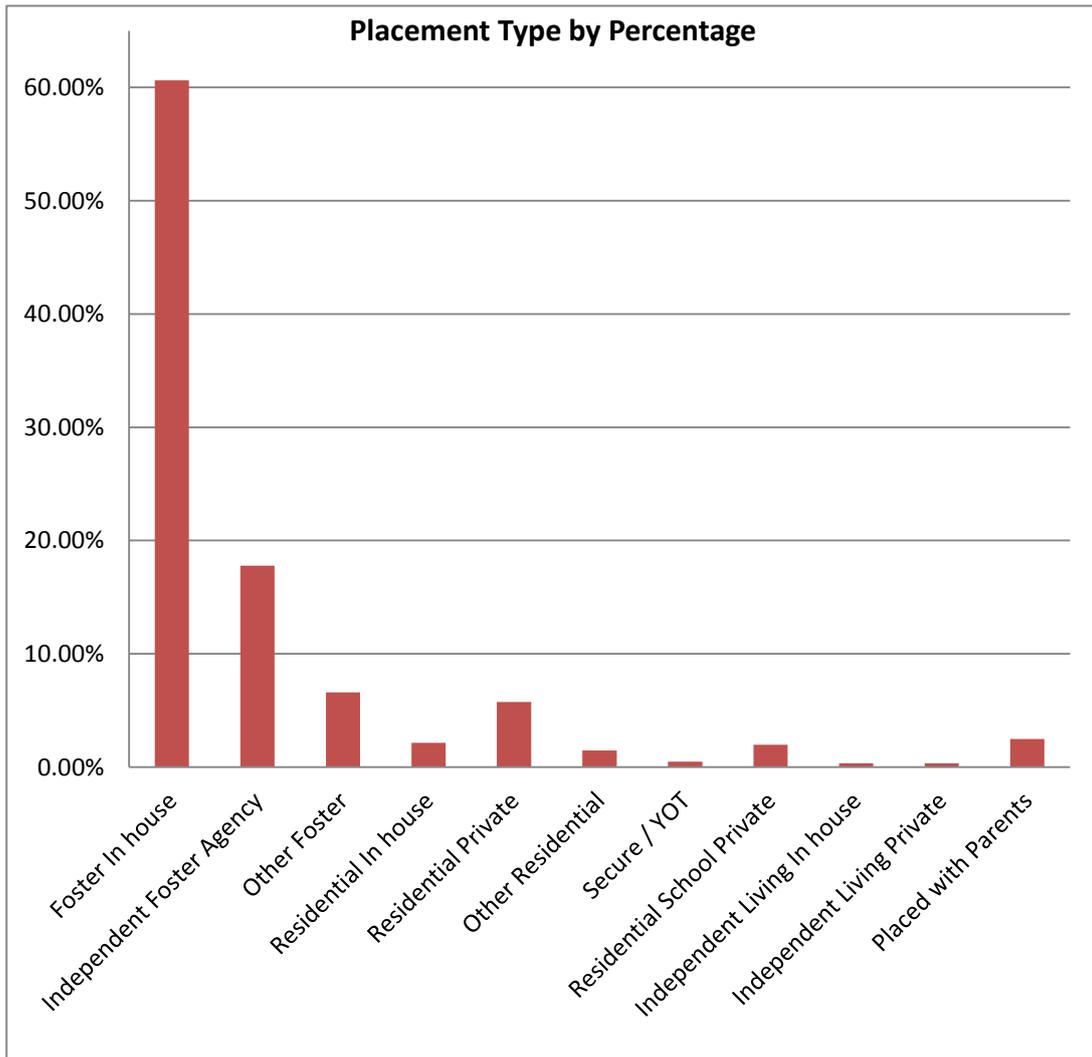
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-31-march-2019>

<sup>9</sup> DfE Children looked after in England including adoption: 2018 to 2019 National Tables

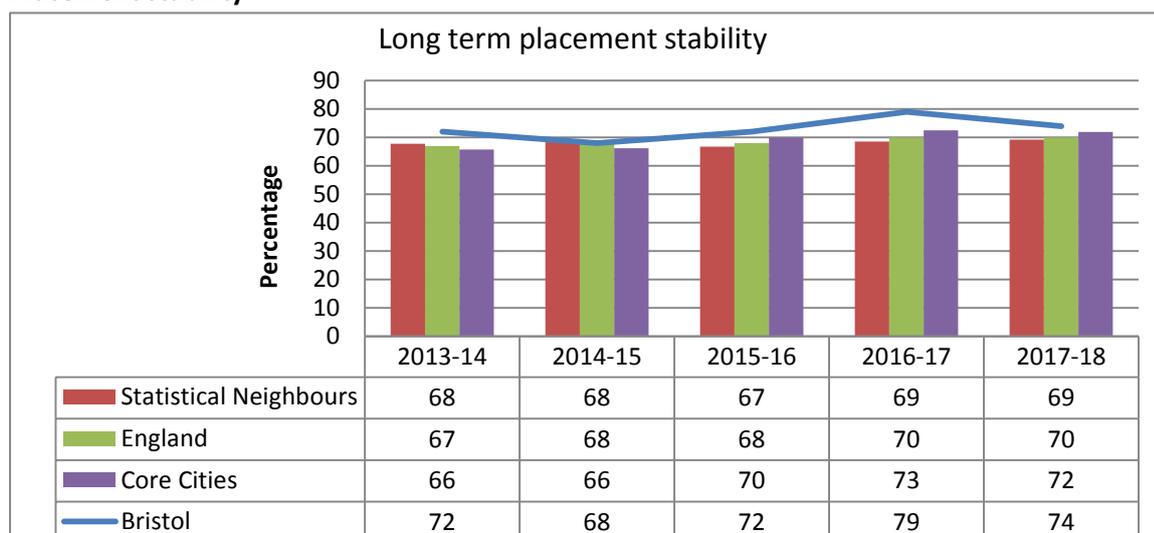


The two charts below offer a more detailed breakdown of the type of provision children and young people were placed in during 2019, showing that the majority of our placements made are in-house and a significant majority of those are foster care. Six percent of placements were made in OOR (out of region) residential homes. Whilst residential care may be the most suitable placement for a small number of young people, we are committed to reducing the number of children in residential care where appropriate. In order to do this we need to recruit and retain highly trained foster carers who are suitably skilled and supported to care for our most complex young people. A new recruitment strategy has been developed to attract more foster carers and increase the number of in-house foster homes available.

We are looking for providers in the local area who can work with foster carers, to support young people to move on from children's homes and provide support to both the child and the carers to make the move a success.



## Placement stability:



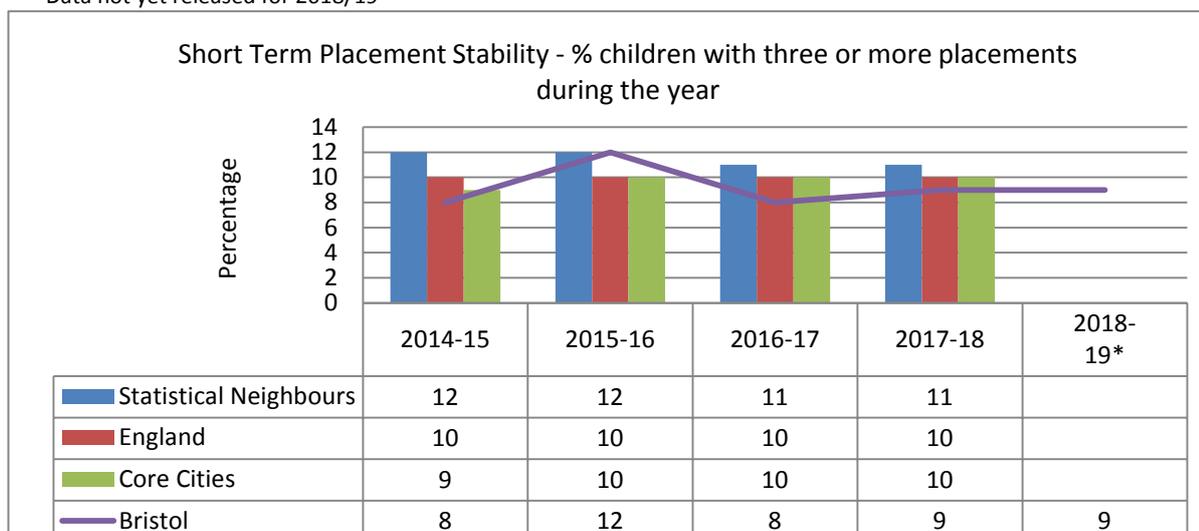
Data not yet released for 2018/19 by Children's Commissioner<sup>10</sup>

The graph above shows long term placement stability. This is measured by the number of children under 16, who at 31 March had been in care for at least two and a half years, and have remained in the same placement for at least two years. This includes children who have been adopted where, within the past two years, they had had just one placement prior to living with their adoptive family. Bristol's percentage in 2017-18 was 74%; the target is 'above 70%', which has been met every year since 2015-16. This compares favourably to rates for England (70%) and statistical neighbours (69%).

The stability of our long term foster placements in particular has remained constant over the last five years. We perform slightly better than national, statistical neighbours and core cities average. In 2017/18, 49% of our children in care had no placement changes within the past four years, this is the best of all the Core English Cities and compares to 42% nationally and 43% locally.<sup>11</sup>

Short term placement stability is measured by how many children in care have three or more placements in the space of a year. In 2018/19, our rate was 9% and the target is 'below 10%'. This is slightly lower than statistical neighbours and national averages and again shows that we are meeting the set target.

\*Data not yet released for 2018/19



<sup>10</sup> Children's Commissioner – Stability Index 2019 – Underlying Data

<sup>11</sup> Children's Commissioner Stability Index 2019 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/stability-index-2019/>

Both of the charts above show that our children experience better placement stability than other local authorities' children; both nationally and across the core cities and our statistical neighbours. This shows that increasing budget pressures have not manifested themselves in a deterioration of placement stability, and that the approach we have taken has worked for the vast majority of our young people.

#### **Distance from home:**

During the 2018/19 financial year, approximately 58% of children in care were placed in the Bristol area. Of the placements made outside of the local authority area, the majority were within 20 miles of Bristol in neighbouring authorities such as North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset. 133 children entered our care between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019; of these, 19 (14%) were placed more than 20 miles from home.

Whilst in the last year the South West has seen an increase in the percentage of children's homes judged good or outstanding, it still has the lowest percentage of good or outstanding homes in the country (65%). We are committed to placing children in private homes rated good or above with Ofsted which can limit the availability of local placements, for those requiring residential care. Of our six in-house children's homes, two are rated good, our two new re-profiled homes are awaiting their first inspection and two are currently rated requires improvement. We are continually striving to improve our services and development work is underway to align in-house provision with our ambition to have all of our children placed in homes rated good or outstanding. The new mix of homes, the new trauma informed approach to our children's care and better geographical spread achieved through the re-profiling project will deliver an improved model of home from home provision.

## **Outcomes**

Studies of children in care and care leavers have continually identified poorer health outcomes and increased risky behaviours compared to the rest of the population. These outcomes are linked to a range of factors that are distinctive to these children and young people. Neglect and abuse in childhood are clearly identified as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and as such are risk factors for poor outcomes in both physical and mental health during the whole life course.

The CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study enhanced our understanding of the link between childhood trauma and poor mental, emotional and physical health outcomes. The study identified ten ACEs:<sup>12</sup>

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

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<sup>12</sup> Centre for Disease Control – Child Abuse and Neglect  
[www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/about.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/about.html)

- Exposure to domestic violence
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member

Children who experience four or more ACE's, as the majority of our children in care do, are at the highest risk of having poor outcomes. For example, they have 3x increased risk of heart disease, respiratory disease and type 2 diabetes and are 14x more likely to have been victim of violence in the last 12 months. Without the right level of care and support, ACE's have the potential to affect our children throughout their lives.<sup>13</sup>

Dregan, A. & Gulliford, M. C. (2012) found that being in residential care was a stronger predictor of criminal convictions, smoking and depression/low self-efficacy at age 30 than foster care (statistically significant results).

A joint study undertaken by the University of Bristol and University of Oxford<sup>14</sup> found that children whose final placement was in foster or kinship care did better at GCSEs than those in residential care. To some extent this reflected the duration of the young person's final placement – i.e. the more stable the placement, the better the outcomes – but even the longest term residential (3+ years) scored on average fewer KS4 points than the shortest foster placements.

A recent longitudinal study by Neil, E., Gitsels, L. & Thoburn, J. (2019)<sup>15</sup> of Local Authority children in care data, demonstrated that age at entry to care was a very strong predictor of where children ended up (return to a parent, special guardianship or residence order, adoption or staying long term in care). The study found that more than half (51%) of children entering care age 7–11 stayed long term in care.

These studies support the Council's Strengthening Families Programme's move away from residential care and keeping children and young people at home, or in a family environment, where it is in their best interest and safe to do so. It is however recognised that for some children the best and most appropriate placement option will be residential care.

### **Placement stability:**

Placement instability reduces a child's opportunities to develop secure attachments. It may also exacerbate any existing behavioural and emotional difficulties, making it more difficult for children to establish relationships with carers and thereby contributing to further placement breakdown and

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<sup>13</sup> Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults, [www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8/abstract](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(98)00017-8/abstract)

For further reading on ACE's go to

[www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html)

<sup>14</sup> The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data, November 2015, University of Bristol and Rees Centre, University of Oxford

<sup>15</sup> Neil, E., Gitsels, L. & Thoburn, J. (2019), Children in care: Where do children entering care at different ages end up? An analysis of local authority administrative data [Children and Youth Services Review](#), Volume 106, November 2019, 104472

rejection. As set out on pages 14-15 of this strategy, we perform well in terms of placement stability, with better rates of placement stability than both the South West and National average.

However, there are a consistent number of our children in care, roughly 10%, who do not live in a stable environment. A Deep Dive analysis of our of twelve highest costs placements has demonstrated that these young people have the most complex needs and would greatly benefit from consistency at home. We are committed to exploring innovative and creative ways to support this cohort of young people to live in long term stable placements, so a 12 month therapeutic support pilot has been established to address this.

The pilot's 'team around the child' model provides a three pronged intensive support approach to stabilise both residential home and foster care placements through therapeutic and behavioural support for the young person, support for their carers and support for education providers.

#### **Permanence:**

In 2017/18, 21 children exited care to adoption and 22 left to live with connected people with a Special Guardianship Order (6.7% of the CiC population). In 2018/19 these figures increased to 27 children adopted and 46 children who left care under a special guardianship order (11.8%), these increases are attributed to the work that has been undertaken through the Strengthening Families programme.

#### **Education:**

The rate of children in care who are persistently absent from school in Bristol is 10.5%, this is lower than both the children in care national average of 10.9% and the South West CiC average of 12.6%<sup>16</sup>. Bristol has consistently seen a decrease in persistent absence for children in care year on year since 2016. Children in Care attendance at primary school is significantly better than at secondary school, however persistent absence has decreased overall due to a decrease in secondary pupils' absence. In 2018/19 our results showed steady progress in the educational attainment of children in care. In Key Stage Two, Bristol's children in care outperformed both the national and regional performance average with regards to meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. 43% of our children in care reached the expected standard compared with 36% of children in care nationally and 31% children in care in the South West.

In maths, 60% of Bristol's Key Stage Two children in care achieved the expected standard; this is higher than the national figure of 51% and shows an improvement on 2017/18. At Key Stage Four, Bristol children in care have improved their performance over the past three years, outperforming the regional figures and performing in line with national figures. We have also seen the number of days lost through Fixed Term Exclusions reduce from 305 to 191.

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<sup>16</sup> [National Statistics: DfE Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2019: additional tables](#)

## Costs and Funding

### In house services:

Placement Type	Expenditure 2019/20	Average weekly cost per placement
In-house foster service	£5.97m	£260
In-house children's homes	£2.67m	£4,422
Post 16 supported accommodation	£230,000	£135

### Externally commissioned services:

Placement Type	Expenditure 2019/20	Average Weekly Spend per Placement
Independent fostering agencies (IFA)	£5.627m	£605
Residential	£5.4m	£3,770
Post 16 supported accommodation	£1.326m	£1,912
Parent & child (Residential and IFA)	£403,000	£1,454

## KEY ISSUES FACING OUR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

### Serious Youth Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation:

Street conflict, involvement in serious youth violence and children being criminally exploited can affect any young person; however some young people are disproportionately affected by these issues. Young people who experience adverse childhood experiences are more vulnerable to contextual and complex forms of exploitation and abuse. We are seeing increasing numbers of teenagers in our care who are being targeted by criminal gangs.

Analysis of crime data shows that serious youth violence offences in Bristol have increased by 24% between 2016/17 and 2018/19, whilst serious knife crime offences have increased by 45%<sup>17</sup>. We recognise that there is an escalating picture of young people in Bristol who are falling victim to serious youth violence.

<sup>17</sup> Bristol Serious Youth Violence: Problem Profile 2020

Gangs are increasingly exploiting vulnerable young people in Bristol to sustain their criminal activity; this is called Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). County Lines is one example of CCE and is the growth of organised criminal gangs based in the big cities taking over the supply of drugs in rural and smaller urban areas. It involves CCE as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move and supply drugs and money. We also see vulnerable people being targeted and their homes being used as a base for drug dealing and supply (known as cuckooing), often accompanied by sexual exploitation. This is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, organised criminal gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons.

Young people in care who are placed in unfamiliar areas can be particularly vulnerable to exploitation and this presents a range of challenges for carers, providers and the local authority in keeping these children safe.

Insight Bristol has developed a risk model to identify children at risk of criminal exploitation in Bristol so that appropriate action can be taken to safeguard these young people. The most at risk young people within this cohort are known as Tier 1. As of January 2020, there were 65 individuals within Tier 1; of these 40% were either Children in Care, registered as a Child in Need or under a Protection Plan and 43% have been reported missing<sup>18</sup>.

Going missing from care increases children and young people's risk of all types of exploitation. In 2019/20 on our Children's Social Care system there were 16 missing episodes involving 8 children in care where child criminal exploitation was a factor. In 2018/19 8% of children in care had a missing episode during the year, this compares to 11% both in England and the South West.

In response to Serious Youth Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation we are further developing our understanding of these issues and we have established the Multiagency Safer Options Team; this is a collaborative approach between Bristol City Council and Avon and Somerset Police which adopts a public health approach to serious youth violence. We also have a grant agreement in Place with the charity Barnardo's to run a prevention service aimed at young people in Bristol involved in or at risk of serious youth violence.

We are partnered with the University of Bedfordshire in delivering the Contextual Safeguarding Scale Up Project 2019-2022 (<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>). Contextual Safeguarding has been developed by Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire over the past six years to inform policy and practice approaches to safeguarding adolescents. Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. The Scale Up Project considers how Bristol's developing practice will adopt and implement the approach.

A multi-agency safeguarding arrangement has also been developed in Bristol called the [Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership](#) (KBSP). The partnership is an amalgamation of the previous Children's and Adult local safeguarding boards and Safer Bristol Partnership. This provides an opportunity to reduce silo working and ensuring a life-course approach to safeguarding of children, adults and communities. The partnership has responsibility to deliver statutory duties to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children as required by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. The

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<sup>18</sup> Insight Bristol, Think Family Database

three statutory partners are: Bristol City Council, Avon and Somerset Police and Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire CCG (BNSSG). The Partnership is working at a regional level to tackle issues that cross local authority boundaries such as County Lines.

For more information on Serious Youth Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation see the [Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy 2017 – 2020](#) and the [Safer Options Response to Serious Violence](#)

### **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE):**

Young people who are or were in care, and who have therefore experienced greater levels of adversity than their peers, have increased vulnerability around CSE. Going missing from care increases children and young people's risk of both sexual and other exploitation by adults and peers. Bristol is committed to ensuring that young people who have experienced exploitation are well supported and able to access specialist recovery services in the city. In 2019/20 63 of Bristol's Children in Care had episodes of missing from care; of these young people 12 were known to be at risk of CSE. In addition at the end of March 2020 there were 83 children who were known to have CSE risks; 25% of these children were children in care.

Bristol contributes to a regional contract with Barnardo's (BASE) that provides specialist support for children and young people at risk of or vulnerable to CSE; a high numbers of their service users are children in care. It targets young people to reduce risks and works in partnership with Unity, which provides sexual health services in Bristol. Operation Topaz, a police led multiagency team ensures that the focus is on disrupting the perpetrators of exploitation not disadvantaging children who are victimised.

### **Mental health:**

Data measuring the emotional health and wellbeing of children aged 4-16 who have been in care for at least 12 months is collected via the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a behavioural screening questionnaire which can be completed by children and young people themselves, by their carers and by their designated teacher. An overall stress score is then calculated which can be used as:

- An indicator to track the levels of difficulties children and young people are experiencing and any improvements that are made
- A guide for putting in place the appropriate support services, either from the Council (such as the Placement Support Team) or from partnership agencies (e.g. CAMHS)

Each child is then given a score ranging from 0-40. A score of less than 14 is categorised as being within the 'normal' range; 14-16 indicates a slightly raised score, 17-19 a high score and 20-40 a very high score. Any score over 14 suggests there is a cause for concern about the young person's wellbeing.

The average SDQ score for CiC in Bristol for 2018/19 was 14.3 (borderline cause for concern), this compares to 14.2 nationally and 15.5 in the South West. This figure has remained relatively stable in recent years with the average score between 2010 and 2018 at 14.8. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, 36% of

CiC had a score of 17 or over, indicating a cause for concern, this was lower than both that of the National and Regional figure (39% and 45% respectively). Currently, a score of 14 will result in a young person being referred to Thinking Allowed (specialist Children in Care mental health service). A Thinking Allowed professional will undertake a consultation with a young person's social worker to ascertain the most appropriate course of action.

We have recently reviewed how we use SDQ scores to enable us to better identify when a young person is in need of support, and what form that support should take. This will take the form of a triangulated approach utilising all three SDQs to provide a fuller and more rounded picture of the young person so their support needs can be more clearly identified. The aim being that the earlier identification of need will result in children accessing lower-intensity services prior to their needs escalating, and therefore reducing the need for, and demand on, acute services.

In addition to this we have also added the CRIES/8 form onto our social care IT system for practitioners to use. This is a short child-friendly measure designed to screen children at risk for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which will also inform a referral to CAMHS.

Trusted relationships are key to helping children and young people recover from the trauma they have experienced. Sometimes that trauma makes it very difficult to sustain placements and enable children to have the time and opportunity to build relationships that heal. Bristol has a treatment fostering and placement support service, as well as dedicated CAMHS team in Thinking Allowed which is focused on supporting carers and children to work through trauma and build safe, stable, nurturing relationships. We are working to deliver this for children living in our children's homes and private children's homes through the therapeutic adolescent placement support pilot, the extension of our Staying Close innovation programme with DfE and the delivery of our re-profiled, smaller children's homes where the staff team are trained in the Bristol Model of therapeutic care. We know that we will not be able to meet every child's needs and we are therefore looking to work with the market to develop therapeutic placements and trauma informed practice.

## COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

We commission placements for Children in Care and Care leavers from a mixed market of internal and external providers.

In order to secure independent placements we are part of several large consortia with other local authorities, using Dynamic Purchasing Systems and Frameworks to purchase:

- Independent Non-Maintained Special School placements; including Residential (Wiltshire Council Procurement lead and, Bristol City Council contract management lead)
- Parent and Child Residential Assessment Centre placements (we are the lead authority)
- Residential Children's Home placements (Southampton and Bournemouth Council's lead – we joined this consortium in October 2019, prior to this we were in the South West Consortium)
- Independent Fostering Agency placements (Bath and North East Somerset Lead)

We also have a Bristol only Dynamic Purchasing System for high support accommodation for young people aged 16-25 in addition to several block contracts with supported accommodation providers.

Being part of these consortia provides us with significant purchasing power and therefore the ability to collectively negotiate in a provider led market. It also enables us to meaningfully engage with and manage the market to achieve efficiencies in the purchasing and development of services.

In addition to the commissioned services, we also run a range of provision for children in care and those preparing to leave care in-house. As of March 2019, we have 227 in-house mainstream foster carers and 64 kinship carers, offering a total of 477 places. We have six children's homes and will be opening two three bed homes in the 2020/21 financial year through the re-profiling project. We run a range of supported flats for young people and a successful supported lodgings scheme, both schemes enable young people to move towards independence while living in a supported environment.

## **SERVICE AREAS**

### **System Approach**

A key aim of the Council is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond, and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. A range of options for permanence exist, all of which can deliver high-quality outcomes for individual children.

The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need to support them to stay together. Wherever safe and possible, children and young people should live with their parents, when this is not possible, within their birth family or with someone who knows them best. We will ensure that the children in our care are only those who really need our care. Working with families to help build strong resilient birth families is a central element of our support for children and families.

Where it is not possible for the child to stay with their parents, we will explore options for living with wider family and friends networks wherever possible to achieve permanency. This could be achieved through Special Guardianship, Kinship Care or a Child Arrangement Order. Special Guardianship is a formal court order which places a child or young person with someone permanently and gives this person parental responsibility for the child. This could be a grandparent, close relative or a family friend. Kinship Care is when the child is placed with a family member or friend by the Council. The carer is assessed and approved as a foster carer to look after the child. A Child Arrangement Order is a court order arrangement between an adult and child. The named carer shares parental responsibility and decision making with the child's parents; the child lives with this care usually until they are 18 years old and continue to have contact with their parents. Where this is not appropriate further options for permanence include Adoption and long term care.

We will always seek to place children in the most appropriate permanent arrangement for them. The majority of children will grow up within a family; however, there are occasions when our assessment will indicate the need for a different sort of placement such as a therapeutic residential home or residential special school. When this is the case, we will always work toward the outcome of a child returning to a family setting where this is in their best interests.

Our Strengthening Families programme invested in edge of care and reunification services so that we are more effective at supporting children in their own families when this is the best outcome for them. When this is not possible, we are investing in new, smaller, children's homes that will enable us to care for children closer to home and maintain links with family and home community.

Escalating needs result in escalating costs; however this is also often accompanied by poorer outcomes. As children are placed further along the care continuum, meaning further away from a family based placement towards residential care, fewer agreed outcomes are met and the poorer the outcomes tend to be<sup>19 20 21</sup>. We are committed to working in a more person centred way, focusing on the needs of the child and we are working together with a number of partners around this. We will be exploring how we can develop better 'step down' approaches for example, from residential care to fostering to improve outcomes, placement experience and value for money.

## Special Guardianships

Special Guardianship is a legal status introduced by the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

A Special Guardianship Order fits broadly between a Child Arrangements Order and an Adoption Order in terms of the carer taking responsibility for the child. Special Guardianship offers permanency for the child.

A Special Guardianship offers greater security than long-term fostering as it lasts until the child reaches 18, but it does not require the legal severance from the birth family that is the result of an adoption order.

The local authority provides a range of support services to special guardians and this is provided by a specialist team, this includes access to the adoption support fund

We are currently developing a new policy document that outlines the support that will be given to special guardians, this will be made available once finalised.

## Fostering

Foster care makes up the vast majority of placements for Bristol's children in care. In April 2019 Bristol had 227 mainstream foster carers and 64 kinship carers offering a total of 477 places. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 there were 514 children in foster homes, of which 361 were placed with our in house foster carers. In Bristol, approximately 82% of our children in care live in a foster placement, compared with 75% nationally.

Since 2013, our foster carers and young people have embraced the "Staying Put" arrangements available to them. Staying Put supports a young person to remain living with their foster family beyond age of 18. This gives our young people time to prepare for adulthood, experience a similar

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<sup>19</sup> The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data, November 2015, University of Bristol and Rees Centre, University of Oxford

<sup>20</sup> Dregan, A., Gulliford, M. C. (2012). Foster care, residential care and public care placement patterns are associated with adult life trajectories: Population-based cohort study. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 47, 1517–1526.

<sup>21</sup> Ford, T., Vostanis, P. & Meltzer, H., 2007. Psychiatric disorder among British children looked after by local authorities: comparison with children living in private households. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 190(4), pp. 319-325.

transition to their peers and avoids social exclusion. We have delivered Staying Put placements since before the legislation was introduced; this positive practice enabled us to secure pilot status prior to the legislation and to build from there. Whilst this can limit the availability of foster homes for our younger children, we have taken steps to avoid this where possible. Carers who have the space (and we will support this through loft conversion, pods etc) can provide staying put and continue to foster. Furthermore, often staying put foster carers are not looking to foster again.

Our in house fostering service is responsible for recruiting, training and supporting foster carers. In house foster carers offer us better value for money and there is a drive to build our in house sufficiency. As part of our three year fostering strategy the Behavioural Insight Team are working with the authority to help us develop ways of supporting foster carers through light touch tools, changing existing services and mobilising peer to peer support. They will also help to increase carer engagement through clearer communications. The number of foster carers and the number of placements we provide has stayed broadly stable over the past 3 years. As part of the Strengthening Families Programme, we aim to recruit more foster carers locally to provide a wider foster care offer across the city.

We want to recruit foster carers from a wide range of ethnicities and faiths, so we can place children with a family that best matches their background. As with all children who are fostered, it's important that Muslim and BME children have carers who best suit their needs. Having carers who of the same ethnicity or religion can help BME children to get a better sense of belonging in their foster care household, appreciate their cultural heritage and build and maintain a connection to their community and religion. As such we are seeking to recruit more Muslim and BME foster carers in Bristol.

There are a number of older foster carers, who are approaching retirement. It is important that their skill set is not lost and so the intention is to keep them on as advisories providing a support network to those newer foster carers who are still developing their skills and experience.

The current South West Independent Fostering Agency Framework is in place until 2021. A market position statement to inform our purchasing intentions will be developed when a new framework is being developed, and will be made available to set out our commissioning strategy before this framework ends.

## **Residential Children's Homes**

We are currently undergoing a re-profiling project to create a greater number of smaller homes and close our larger homes. In 2019/20 we opened two, two bed children's homes and will be opening two three bed homes in the 2020/21 financial year. This takes our total number of homes to six. We do not intend to change the total number of beds we provide but we intend to create a more flexible service that can meet the needs of our children needing residential care.

In addition we have two more children's homes providing short breaks to disabled children, which are not in the scope of this sufficiency plan. Our homes provide short and long term care to children aged 12-17 and are located throughout the city.

The number of children living in residential children's homes fluctuates, but has reduced over the past few years from 56 in April 2017 to 45 in April 2020. At the same time, the number of in house residential home placements has increased. This is positive as it means for those children who need

to live in a residential children's home, we have been able to keep more in Bristol where they have existing support networks.

The current South Central regional framework for residential care is in place until 2022 and there are 86 providers on the framework. In April 2020 we had 26 children living in private residential children's homes (not including residential schools), 100% of which were outside of the Bristol area. It is our aim to reduce the number of children in children's homes where this has been identified as the best outcome in their care plan.

Bristol has been awarded funding from the Department for Education to pilot Staying Close arrangements in locations close to our children's homes, with on-going support from their home to broker regional arrangements.

Through this pilot we have created a self-contained flat in the grounds of one of our children's homes. We have improved the housing pathway for young people with direct housing offers being made to young people leaving our children's homes and rent will be paid directly to landlords, avoiding some of the challenges caused by universal credit. Within our homes we now use the ASDAN model to plan and prepare young people for independence.

Please see the Residential Market Position Statement for further information.

### **Secure Children's Homes/ Welfare Beds**

The Police and Crime Act 2017 amended Section 136 of the Mental Health Act to state that children can no longer be held in police cells. As such, when children are experiencing a mental health crisis, are a significant risk to themselves or others, and no other type of placement can keep them safe they may need to be placed in a secure/welfare bed.

Secure accommodation welfare placements are available for young people that meet the criteria set out in Section 25 of the 1989 Children's Act. The Act stipulates that a child being looked after by the local authority may not be placed in secure accommodation unless it appears:

- That he/she has a history of absconding and is likely to abscond from anything other than secure accommodation; and
- If he/she absconds he/she is likely to suffer significant harm
- If he/she is kept in anything other than secure accommodation he/she is likely to injure him/herself or other persons

Although there has been an increase in children presenting with complex mental health needs in Bristol, we have not needed to place any children in this type of provision since 2018. However it is important that there are providers who are able to supply welfare beds that can meet the needs of children with complex mental health needs should this need arise in future.

We also need homes for children coming out of secure accommodation. Although this is a small number of children these young people will be amongst our most complex and we need to have placements that can provide education and care to support young people out of a secure setting.

## High Support Accommodation (formerly External Supported Accommodation (ESA))

We have been successful in providing a wide range of supported accommodation in Bristol through a mixed market of in house provision and through block and spot purchasing; we have also been supported by a range of voluntary organisations that help particularly with young people facing homelessness. We are always keen to talk with providers to see how we can jointly develop innovative ideas to meet the needs of children in care.

In house, we run a range of supported flats for young people and a successful supported lodgings scheme, both of which enable young people to move towards independence while living in a supported environment.

We have a block contract for 6 units of self-contained high support flats with a local provider. We have also recently recommissioned the Foyer and St Georges House and this will provide a wider range of housing options for young people who need low, medium and high support housing.

There is a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for High Support Accommodation for young people aged 16+. We currently use this DPS to purchase self-contained supported accommodation only. There are currently 8 providers on this framework; 7 provide ad hoc placements and we have one block contract for 6 high support self-contained flats in the city of Bristol. The cost of provision on this DPS is high and we need to ensure that value for money is achieved going forward.

Our 'off contract' purchasing is still high as the current service specification does not meet the requirements of our young people. We have undertaken an analysis of this provision and have identified that we need to amend the framework to include shared, as well as self-contained accommodation and outreach to enable more flexible support options. We also need to consider specialist provision for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

A survey of our Care Leavers highlighted the fact that some of them don't feel safe in supported accommodation and felt they did not have any choice about where they lived. In diversifying and increasing this offer we will be able to give young people more choice and control over their move on options and locality.

See [Young Peoples Housing and Independence Pathway Plan](#) for more details

## Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are asylum seekers under the age of 18, who arrive in the EU / UK unaccompanied by a responsible adult, or who are left unaccompanied after their arrival. Legally, UASC are treated in the same way as children in care who were born in the UK.

Bristol was officially recognised as a City of Sanctuary in 2010, a City of Sanctuary is a place where a broad range of local people, organisations, community groups, schools and faith communities, as well as local government, are publicly committed to welcoming and including people seeking sanctuary. We play a part in this by providing safe care and accommodation for young people seeking asylum and have been able to deliver best practice through the reunification of siblings, working with Home Office, Red Cross and Asylum charities.

We have a duty to assess and accommodate anyone entering the City as a UASC and we have provided safe homes for a number of young people under the National Transfer Scheme. As of August 2020, the number of children in care who were UASC was 45 (6% of the total CiC population) and 85 care leavers were UASC. Under the National Transfer Scheme, Local Authorities are asked to look after UASC (not including care leavers) up to 0.07% of its total child population; we are currently at approximately 0.06% and therefore expect to care for and house more UASC in the future.

Currently all of our UASC are cared for either within the Bristol area or placed as closely to Bristol as possible. 76% of our unaccompanied children and young people live in foster care whilst the remaining 24% are placed in supported accommodation.

UASC are entitled to accommodation up to the age of 18 (and thereafter if status is granted). Some of these young people will need a foster placement whilst some (aged 16 and over) will live in supported accommodation. Some UASC care leavers receive high support accommodation in hostels and their needs could be better met in another supported accommodation setting.

This group is likely to have multiple ACE risk factors and the increase in the number of UASC indicates a probable rise in the prevalence of mental health needs among CiC and Care Leavers. It is important that we have education, employment and training options for UASC; the education of UASC is overseen by The HOPE; Bristol's Virtual School for Children in Care. The HOPE supports Social Workers to apply for appropriate educational provision for all UASC and working closely with local colleges and sixth forms we have funded additional pastoral care for these young people and much improved the education, employment and training rate of 16-17 year old UASC.

## Young People Involved in the Criminal Justice System

All local authorities have a legal duty under Section 21 of the Children Act 1989 to provide accommodation for children and young people remanded to local authority accommodation pending a trial or sentencing hearing. These young people automatically have children in care status.

Children and young people can be remanded to secure children's homes, secure training centres or to a Young Offenders' Institution. The local authority is responsible for meeting the costs of these placements. In England and Wales the number of places in secure children's homes has decreased by 18% between 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 whilst the use of remand to youth custody has increased by 12%<sup>22</sup>. There were 13 secure children's homes as at 31 March 2020, offering 231 places. These homes are not split evenly across England with the majority of secure homes in the North.

In addition to the use of remand to youth custody increasing, the severity of the alleged offence that has resulted in remand is increasing too. This means that children are often in our care for longer whilst on remand either awaiting the conclusion of a complex investigation or a trial date. These

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<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Justice: Youth Justice Statistics Bulletin 2018 to 2019 for England and Wales published January 2020:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/862078/youth-justice-statistics-bulletin-march-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/862078/youth-justice-statistics-bulletin-march-2019.pdf)

young people accrue leaving care status and continue to be entitled to care and accommodation, subject to assessment on their release, often when this is not what they want.

Bristol has had a year on year reduction in the number of Children cautioned or sentenced; from 446 in 2013/14 to 261 in 2018/19<sup>23</sup>. 33% per cent of the sentenced young people have gang affiliations or have been groomed by gang members into offending. It is increasingly difficult to find placement providers who will offer placements to young people who have committed serious offences. Lack of suitable accommodation which facilitates rehabilitation in safe environment can lead to an increased likelihood of a custodial sentence.

In 2018/19 4% of Bristol's 19-21 year old care leavers were in custody<sup>24</sup>. Approximately seven placements per year are required for young people who are coming out of custody. Their time within the justice system is highly structured and these young people often struggle on release due to lack of structure and routine. Whilst often advanced warning is given of a release date this is subject to change and the team are unable to hold bed spaces for release as providers are reluctant to run with voids. The high support housing providers do not provide enough support to safely accommodate this cohort of young people.

It is our ambition to build relationships and strengthen families to enable young people who are involved in the criminal justice system to return home where this is possible and safe, and Our Safer Options teams are working with Youth Offending Team to achieve this. Where accommodation is required, we will research models of best practice in order to commission appropriate placements that can provide enough support to meet these young people's needs.

### Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

It is our aim to give all young people equal life chances as they move into adulthood, by promoting their independence, and having high aspirations for them. The core focus for our disabled children and young people will be on developing independence, met through their personalised outcome focused SMART plan and EHCP.

Within the SEND reforms code of practice, Children and Families Act 2014, we need to focus on the four core areas of 'preparing for adulthood' namely:

- Independent living
- Employment and education
- Having friends and relationships, and be part of the community
- Being as healthy as possible – health needs will include emotional health and sexual health

Through this approach we want to ensure we have the right children in the right place at the right time; and within the methodology of the Signs of Safety's strength based approach ensuring the child's needs are the focus of all intervention. We want to ensure services can provide a creative flexible service that provides a stepping stone to independence and meets the ever changing wishes and needs of the young people

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<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Justice: Youth justice annual statistics for 2018 to 2019 for England and Wales.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019>

Children and their families/carers must be at the centre of every stage of the pathway to adulthood, and their views reflected in the plans. Commissioning needs to be joint between children and adult's services, with the Liberty Protection Safeguards and the Care Act assessments being addressed and reviewed appropriately.

Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities and health services to work together to deliver support and services to the children and young people with SEND in their local area. As a part of this joint commissioning arrangements have been established this includes the Joint Commissioning Panel (JCP). This is a joint panel, comprising representatives from Education, Social Care and the Clinical Commissioning Group (health), who meet monthly to review the needs of children and young people with complex needs who require a jointly funded package of support, to agree/challenge requests for care placements.

We require homes for children who have complex communication difficulties and who can also present challenging behaviour. We need local providers who will support these children to maintain their links with their community and enable them to move into adult living.

We are finding it ever more difficult to find high quality homes for our children and young people with SEND; this is in part due to the fact that there is a national shortage of foster placements for children and young people with SEND, particularly for children who use wheel chairs. In order to meet this demand we are exploring child specific recruitment of foster carers for a handful of disabled children who we find increasingly difficult to place.

We also have a smaller number of disabled children who have complex health needs who can no longer be cared for in a family setting and they require residential children's home placements that can meet their complex health and emotional needs, while supporting them to maintain their links with their families and community.

In July 2019 St Christopher's School Residential Unit was closed by Ofsted, this was the only residential home for children and young people with SEND in Bristol. This led to alternative placements being required for the five Bristol young people who were living at St Christopher's and has caused a gap in the market locally. We implemented interim measures to meet this increased need, however this is an area we are working to develop in the long term through incorporating into the wider recommissioning and re-profiling of Bristol's children's homes.

A proposal has been put forward to develop existing Bristol City Council housing stock into a three bed disabled children's home, with suitable adaptations that replicates the home environment for the children. This home will allow the council to house 3 children with severe disabilities whom would otherwise have to be placed out of county, which would be disruptive to family life, their medical connections, and at an ongoing significant cost to the local authority in visiting and placement costs.

### **Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS):**

Where a child or young person has an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) and their needs cannot be met within a mainstream or maintained special school, a placement in independent or

non-maintained provision may be required, this can include residential schools of either 38 or 52 weeks per year.

We are part of a consortium of local authorities, led by Wiltshire Council, which has established a flexible open framework of providers for INMSS placements for children and young people aged up to 25. Bristol currently has 74 children and young people placed in this type of provision, some of whom are also children in care.

In setting up the new framework we hope to achieve:

- Education placements for those with complex needs including social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, autism and associated challenging behaviours (risk of child sexual exploitation, gang exploitation, anxiety levels which prevent attendance, high levels of physical violence and self-harm)
- Additional local education provision to meet the needs of increasingly complex children and young people in care of the local authority and in Bristol children's homes
- Residential education packages, including confirmed offers of 25 hours per week for children who are statutory school age, particularly those in or near to Bristol
- School places for children and young people with Youth Offending Team (YOT) involvement, and those who need to be placed following release from custody

Please see the INMSS Market Position Statement for further information.