

Southwark Council:  
Children in Care and Care Leavers  
Placement Sufficiency Strategy  
2023-2026

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## Executive Summary

This Strategy has been developed as part of our statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of placements for children and young people in our care. It pulls together available data and recent analyses in one place to help uncover themes and trends. This allows us to identify gaps in our provision and informs our priorities for the upcoming period. We continue to develop our fostering service and we especially need more capacity for older children, especially:

- unaccompanied asylum seeking young people
- children on the autistic spectrum
- children who are vulnerable to exploitation or who present risk to themselves or others
- emergencies
- sibling groups of more than 2 children
- Parent and child placements that can include fathers

Our children requiring residential care need local provision – a prospect that is already underway.

The information presented in this report consistently identifies gaps in provision for those people with additional or elevated needs.

Our young people aged 16 and over need more high quality, local accommodation and we need to expand on our offer of quality local block funded provision while providing accommodation suited to specific groups including<sup>1</sup>

- gender-specific accommodation
- young parents
- young people with health needs requiring support e.g. with medicine management and administration
- young people on the autistic spectrum
- young people exiting custody or other secure estate
- intensively supported units delivering greater than 1:1 supervision
- young people over the age of 21 who do not meet thresholds for adults services but still have mental health issues and/or learning disabilities

Our key priorities over the life of this strategy therefore are

- a) To work to prevent the need for care through a strong preventative offer
- b) To build a resilient and expert foster care community able to support and care for the older cohort of young people
- c) To improve the experience of care including ensuring a strong voice of our young people is threaded through all services
- d) To continue to improve the numbers of adoptive families available to our children, particularly those that are able to meet the needs of older children and Black children

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex C

- e) To ensure that we improve our ability to continuously assess both placement sufficiency and inequity in the system

## Introduction

This strategy focuses on understanding the drivers and identifying the requirements and intentions to ensure sufficient placements for children in care and care leavers. It is intended to describe our route map for ensuring sufficiency of accommodation and support for Southwark's children in and leaving care.

In May this year the Independent Review of Children's Social Care published its Final Report<sup>2</sup> and made recommendations advocating a "dramatic system reset". The Review placed a clear and strong focus on families receiving more responsive, respectful, and effective support at the earliest stages and in community based settings. This builds on the existing Sufficiency Duty as the statutory guidance states that:

"an important mechanism – both in improving outcomes for children and in having sufficient accommodation to meet their needs – is to take earlier, preventive action to support children and families so that fewer children become looked after. This means that the commissioning standard outlined in this guidance ...also applies to children in need who are at risk of care or custody (sometimes referred to as children 'on the edge of care')."

Thus, a significant arm of meeting the sufficiency duty in the London Borough of Southwark lies with the work being undertaken to safely and appropriately reduce the need for children to enter care.

## Sufficiency Duty: Legal and Policy Context

The council has a duty under the Children Act 1989 (Section 22) to provide sufficient placements in the locality, as far as reasonably practical, to meet the accommodation needs of our children looked after and of our care leavers. The Children Act 1989 requires that the priority consideration for placing a child, is that the placement is the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs, including any physical disability, enabling of siblings to live together if appropriate, and least disruptive to the child's education.

In addition to the legislation already in place (Annex A) in 2022-23, the government will implement a programme of mandatory national standards for unregulated provision that accommodates 16-and 17-year-old looked-after children and care leavers. This will introduce a requirement for providers to register and be inspected by Ofsted. This may present challenges for some of our providers and impact on the supported accommodation local landscape. The council will need to remain alert to developments and work to support providers who can deliver for our young people.

Strategies that are in place or due for a refresh during the life of this strategy include:

- Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24

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<sup>2</sup> [The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](https://www.childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk)

- Southwark Five Year Forward View (FYFV) for health and social care 2016-21 - which focuses on population and placed based commissioning, whole-system value and how care is delivered.
- Partnership Southwark Recovery Plan which includes a section called Start Well.
- The Southwark Borough Plan to successfully develop more local homes for children in care and care leavers at the heart of all Council Departments and the overarching strategic plan.

### Fairer Future

The Borough Plan 2020-2022 sets out its commitment to achieve a fairer future for all across eight themes. The Sufficiency Strategy cuts across almost all of them.

- Theme 1 - COVID-19 response
- Theme 2 - Southwark Together
- Theme 3 - A green and inclusive economy
- Theme 4 - Climate Emergency
- Theme 5 - Tackling health inequalities
- Theme 6 - Homes for all
- Theme 7 - A great start in life
- Theme 8 - Thriving neighbourhoods

### Southwark's Vision

Our vision for all our children is a simple one;

*“We want all our children and young people to be safe, happy and healthy and to enjoy life. We will give them the care and support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence. We will provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure they get the opportunities they deserve.”.*

We will achieve this through our mission of;

- Putting Children First - this means prioritising and actively supporting all children and young people's right to grow up safe, healthy and happy, in their own families and communities, when it is safe to do so.
- Keeping Families Strong - this means working together with parents and carers, and the networks and services around them, to enable their families to be safe, healthy and happy.

### Southwark's Values and Principles

The following values underpin the planning, commissioning and delivery of services to support children and young people.

- Be the champions our young people deserve
- Deliver high quality care, support and accommodation services
- Do our best to enable families to stay together
- Keep children and young people safe at all times

### Southwark's Pledge to Children Looked After

1. We will support you to be healthy
2. Southwark will ensure you can stay safe
3. Southwark will support you to enjoy and achieve
4. We will empower you to make a positive contribution
5. We will equip you to achieve economic wellbeing

- Keep children and young people's needs and wishes central to our work
- Keep all children and young people in care and care leavers well informed about their rights and where to go for help
- Empower children and young people to take control of their own lives and realise their full potential
- Deliver proactive support that secures the best long term outcomes for all children and young people
- Ensure the views of children, young people and their families inform service improvement

### Improvement priorities

The Improvement Plan for Children's Services includes the following points relevant to the Sufficiency Strategy:

- Earlier help for children and young people and those that care for them - Ensuring all our children & families get the right help at the right time, and at the earliest possible opportunity.
- An improved cross system approach to the challenges of helping vulnerable adolescents - Ensuring our young people are safely able to grow towards independence and are protected from all threats and risks to them both inside and outside the home.
- A better experience and improved outcomes for the children we parent and the young people we have cared for - A whole Council and whole Borough approach to providing to the children in our care all that they deserve and expect of an excellent parent
- A more able and stable workforce - Making sure our workforce has the right resource, skills, knowledge and tools to be able to deliver our vision for all children and families in Southwark.
- A fairer organisational culture, working with people and listening to all voices - Making sure that our organisation embodies our principles at every level. That we are representative of our communities and everyone inside and outside the organisation has the opportunity to contribute, succeed and achieve.
- A modernised & intelligent system, accountable for impact - Reforming our commissioning, systems, data and performance arrangements to ensure we and our decision making are properly focused on outcomes and the impact of our services, not process and procedure.

### Care Leaver Charter

The Council has a Care Leavers Charter. The principles are:

- To respect and honour your identity
- To believe in you
- To listen to you
- To inform you
- To support you
- To find you a home
- To be your lifelong champion

### Addressing inequalities

In 2020 the council initiated and adopted the Southwark Stands Together programme: a long-term programme of positive action, education and initiatives for the council to work in solidarity with Southwark's communities and the council's staff to tackle racism, injustice and inequality.

The programme has adopted five pledges that should carry through all the work that we do and are especially relevant to children in care.

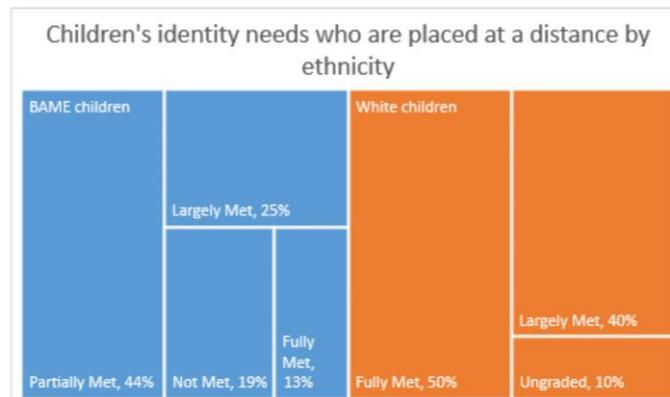
- I/We pledge to promote an open and transparent culture where employees who experience/see racism or discrimination are able to raise it and expect the issue to be dealt with swiftly and fairly.
- I/We pledge to listen to and amplify our diverse voices within our organisations on how we create an inclusive, fair and representative workplace at all levels
- I/We pledge to work to address and prevent structural racial inequalities and structural racism within our organisation, the organisations we partner with and within the service we deliver.
- I/We pledge to champion organisations that address racial injustices and organisations that promote equality and diversity
- I/We pledge to ensuring that people of all backgrounds can rise to the top of the organisation.

The most significant recommendations in the Southwark Stands Together Programme to affect the care population were to:

- Develop a strong partnership approach across the whole health sector to address the wider health inequalities that disproportionately impact Black and Minority Ethnic communities and their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- Recognise that discrimination can occur in many different ways from front line to backroom functions and adopt and embed organisation wide approaches to improve the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic patients in health and care

Continuing to build these recommendations into business as usual will be a key focus of the work conducted across all teams for the life of this strategy.

In 2021, a needs analysis was undertaken on the children requiring residential care to understand some of the patterns in provision. Of note was the poor experiences of some of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children placed at a distance. The report found that there are significant differences between children placed at a distance from Southwark in the extent to which their needs are met. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children particularly face disadvantage in terms of their identity and in terms of their education when they are placed at a distance when compared with white children as shown in Figure 1 below.



Following this work the council adopted its children’s residential care provision strategy to develop a number of in borough children’s homes which is in the process of being rolled out and will be the primary focus of delivering sufficiency over the next four years.

There is still work to do. The needs analysis found that “over the past four years, in any one month the council [children’s social care] has been paying for between 19 and 50 residential placements (monthly average 30 placements) and [All age Disability team] AAD has been paying for between 6 and 12 placements (monthly average 8 placements).” This means that children with disabilities make up a quarter of the residential population and are being placed out of borough – further away from their families and targeted support services. The production of a SEN specific sufficiency strategy will be a priority action within the next four years and will enhance the information we hold on the needs of children with SEND. This should dovetail with the publication of the national SEND delivery plan set for later this year.

The Adopt London South (ALS) has found that it needs to work to address inequalities in children with autism finding adopters. ALS also made recommendations in its annual report to continue to address the racial disparity with more Black children waiting longer to find adoptive families and being more likely to have a reversal of their adoption care plan.

The above are inequalities which are known to us. There remain hidden inequalities which will need to be properly identified in order to prevent or address. If a child is known to be LBQTQ+ the carer would be informed before placement. This is particularly important for children with multiple placement moves, reducing the need for them to come out repeatedly to carers or at least confront that decision at each move.

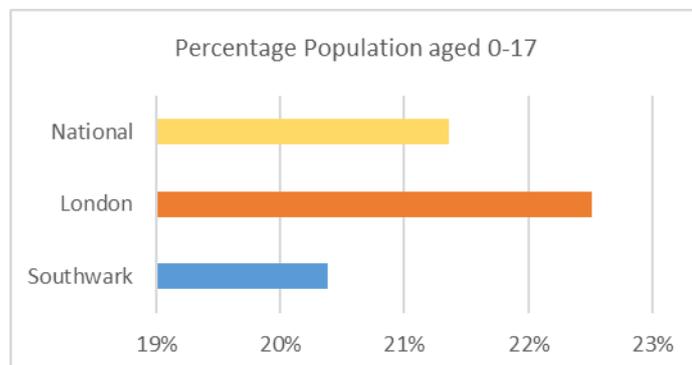
Some measures now in place should serve to move us forwards. In 2022 an Adolescent and Young Adults Pathway Advisory Panel was revived and strives to ensure that young residents and their families receive the services that can best meet their needs, particularly on the transition to adult services. It should also help to inform commissioning intentions where it is identified that there is insufficient care provision.

### Southwark: the place

The Southwark JSNA gives the following information<sup>3</sup>.

“Southwark is a densely populated and diverse inner London borough situated on the south bank of the River Thames, with Lambeth to the west and Lewisham to the east. The borough is made up of a patchwork of communities: from leafy Dulwich in the south, to bustling Peckham and Camberwell, and the rapidly changing Rotherhithe peninsula. Towards the north, Borough and Bankside are thriving with high levels of private investment and development. Yet there remain areas affected by high levels of deprivation, where health outcomes fall short of what any resident should expect.

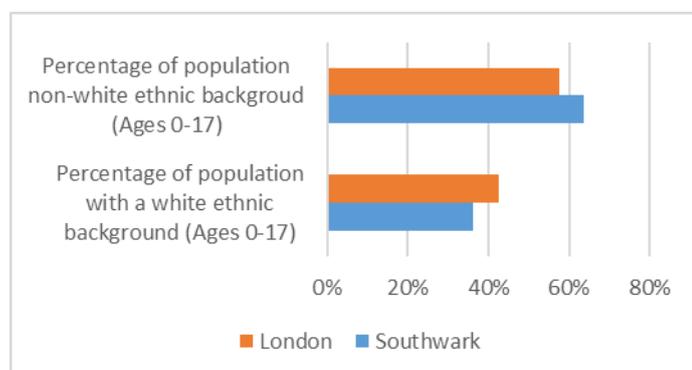
Home to some 320,000 people, Southwark has a comparatively young population but the low average age in the borough stems not from a large number of children, but from a large number of young working age residents: 39% of the Southwark population is aged 20 to 39, compared to just 32% in London and 26% in England. As can be seen in the chart in comparison to London as a whole and the national picture, Southwark has a smaller cohort of 0-17 year olds.



Population growth in the 0-17 age group is expected to remain stable with a very small decrease projected (-0.03%)<sup>4</sup> remaining around the current 66,474 young people. This is in line with the national reduction in birth rates.

Southwark is a diverse borough with 49% of all residents coming from a wide range of ethnicities and backgrounds and 51% from white background.

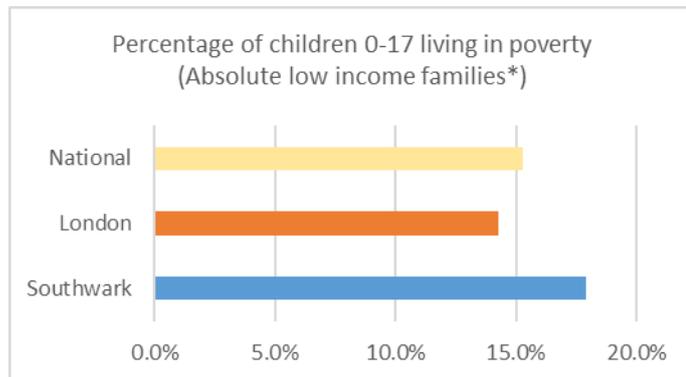
This increases in its young population with over 60% of 0-17 year olds from non-white ethnic backgrounds.



<sup>3</sup> For greater detail please see [JSNA Annual Report 2022.pdf](#)

<sup>4</sup> Source: GLA Ethnic group projections (2016-based central trend)

Approximately 21% of Southwark's population live in communities ranked within the most deprived nationally. This percentage rises for young people. Local authorities with greater increases in child poverty also tend to see greater increases in the rate of children entering care<sup>5</sup>.



The chart shows the greater percentage of absolute low income families in Southwark in comparison to both London as a whole and the national picture.<sup>6</sup>

### What the children tell us they want

In Jan-April 2020 all children in care aged 4-18 in Southwark were asked to take part in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives. The survey was conducted by the Rees Centre and Coram Voice had a 32% response rate.

The children indicated that what was working well was: their relationships with their foster carers, feeling safe, having a trusted adult, relationships with social carers, and liking school. Areas they identified for improvement were: high turnover of social workers, a percentage with high numbers of placements, issues around contact with family, and some children were not clear why they were in care.

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<sup>5</sup> [Child poverty and children entering care in England, 2015-2020: a longitudinal ecological study at the local area level | Elsevier Enhanced Reader](#)

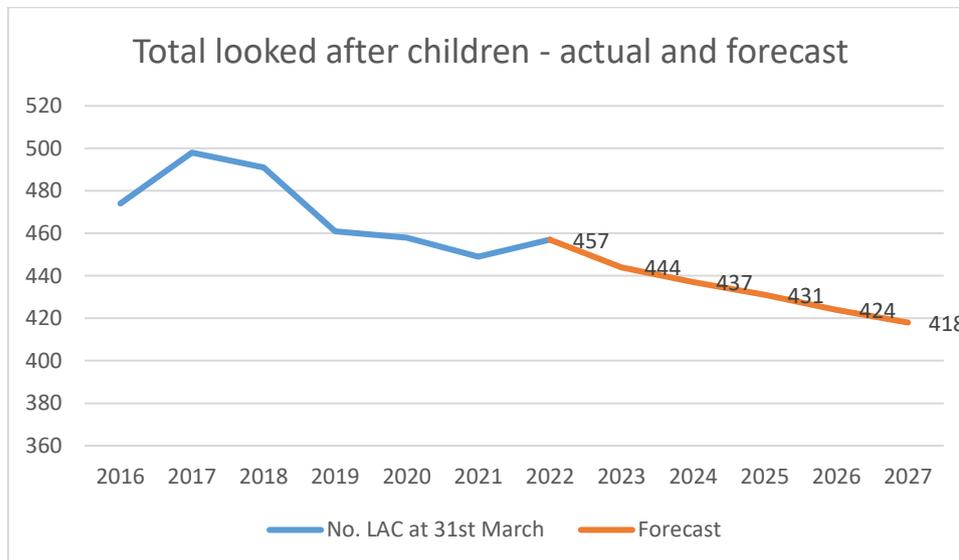
<sup>6</sup> Source: Children in low income families: local area statistics, financial year ending 2021. Absolute low income is defined as a family in low income Before Housing Costs (BHC) in the reference year in comparison with incomes in financial year ending 2011. A family must have claimed Child Benefit and at least one other household benefit (Universal Credit, tax credits, or Housing Benefit) at any point in the year to be classed as low income in these statistics.

## [Placement needs analysis](#)

### Profile of our children in care

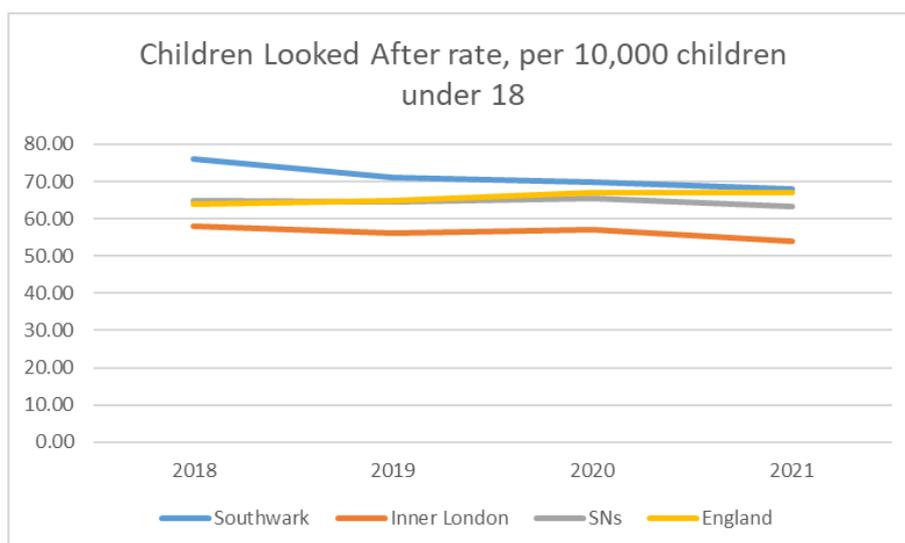
The council's total number of looked after children has reduced over the last five years. Current projections show that this is expected to continue as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1



In contrast to the national rate which has risen over the last four years, the rate of children coming into care for both the council and inner London has fallen as shown in Chart 2. The council especially sees the greatest drop from 76 to 68 per 10,000 children under 18 so although still higher than comparators, we are narrowing the gap although it should be recognised that we have fewer school age children in the Borough. This also possibly reflects success in delivering a strengthened Family Early Help Team and family support and safeguarding service. This is a positive move that enables more children to live safely with their families and thus reduces pressure on the requirement for placements.

Chart 2

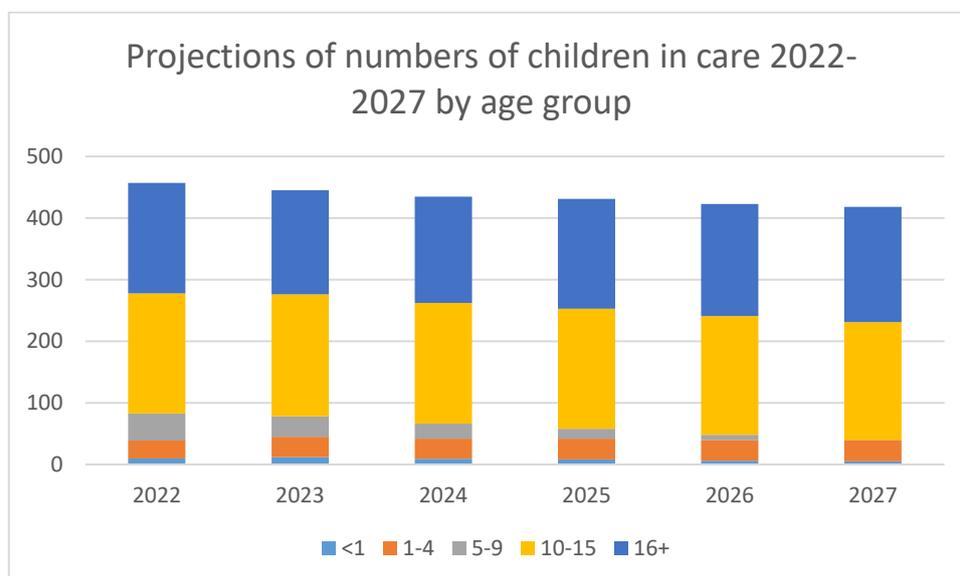


## Age, Gender, Ethnicity and projections

Assuming no change to local or national policy or practice, projections show us that for the largest group of Children in Care (CIC) the 10 to 15 age group, an initial increase is expected with a following reduction in total numbers from the current 195 to a projected 191. Effectively no significant change in size but remaining the largest cohort of children across the life of the strategy.

Available data and initial modelling tells us that the 5 to 9 age group is also likely to see a decline in numbers over the next five years. For the age groups 1 to 4 and 16+ however, we may see a gradual increase in numbers with the 16+ cohort remaining the second most significant cohort in size. While the Under 1's are projected to see a decline in numbers, this is a difficult group to project and most subject to policy or practice change. (Detailed charts in appendix). To build upon this analysis, more detailed modelling will be taken forward with regional colleagues over the next four years.

Chart 3



Currently 82% of children looked after are aged over 10 years old. Looking at the projections for the cohort as a whole as shown in Chart 3, it demonstrates the overwhelming focus of the cohort for the life of this strategy as sufficiency for children aged between 10 and 18 years old. This has implications on how we both deliver and procure care at all levels.

In common with many London boroughs and the national profile, there are currently more males (58%) than females in our care.

About 60% of the borough's population are from black and minority ethnic groups, and just over 50% of children looked after identify as Black or Black British.

The table below shows the distribution of the children looked after across different social working teams.

Table 1: Social worker teams as at 31st March 2022:

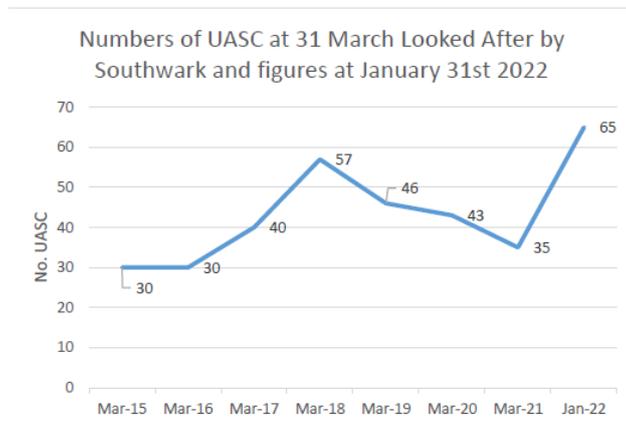
	March 2021	March 2022
All Age Disability Team	22	19
Assessment and Intervention	1	7
Care team 0-15	226	198
Care Team 16+	107	156
Safeguarding and Family Support	93	84

## Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Following arrival in the UK, unaccompanied asylum seeking children are almost always looked after in local authority care under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (CA 1989) until they are 18 years of age. Most are 16 or 17 years old but where children are younger it may be necessary to seek a Care Order (s31 CA 1989) in order to gain parental responsibility. On reaching adulthood at age 18, former unaccompanied asylum seeking children who were looked after for more than 13 weeks become *former relevant children* under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and are eligible for the complete range of care leaver services, whilst others will be “*qualifying children*” with more limited entitlements to post 18 services.

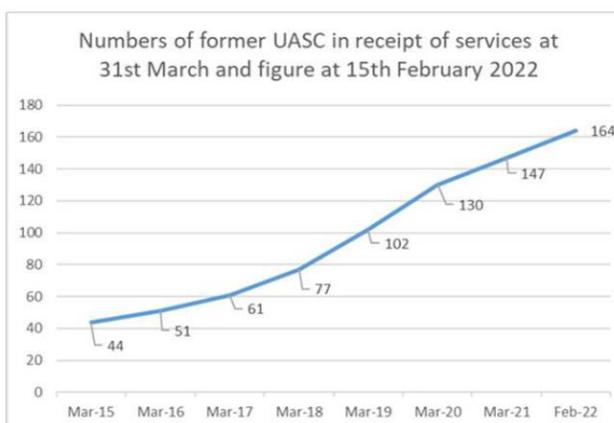
As at February 2022 there were 64 unaccompanied asylum seeking children who were in the care of the council. This equates to 14% of the total of children in care.

- 95% are male.
- 59% are 17 years old, 28% are 16 years old and 13% are under age 16 years.
- 73% were undergoing age assessments at the time
- 67% were living in semi-independent accommodation, 33% were in foster care.



On the same date, February 2022, there were 164 care leavers receiving services who were formerly unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This was 29% of the total of number care leavers receiving services, almost double the proportion of children in care.

- 87% were male.
- 62% were 18 to 20 years old, 38% 21 years or above.
- 49% were in semi-independent accommodation, 30% in independent living, 7% are staying put with former foster carers, with very small numbers in various other forms of accommodation including supported lodgings, custody or living with a relative.



Young people who are unaccompanied and asylum seeking have specific accommodation and support needs especially when not placed in foster care. They need to be placed in a culturally matched environment that can support them over long periods of time as the legal processes in which they are involved can be lengthy. Once in placement, their friend group frequently takes on some of the role of a family and it can be very difficult to move them on. This places an importance on having this type of accommodation locally to ensure that local services can be brought in to support them. It also means that the nature of the support provision must be flexible as their needs change without needing to prompt a move.

#### Legal status of children looked after

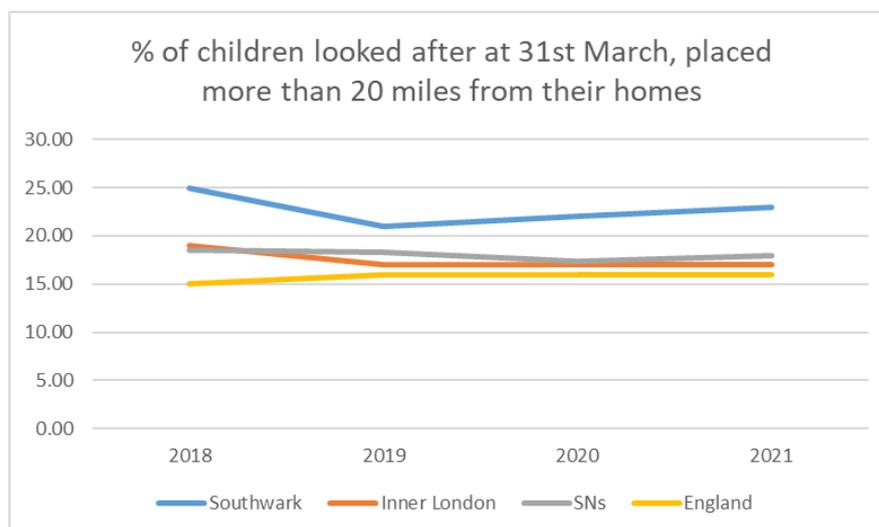
The majority of our children looked after are subject to a legal order, with only 30% accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 with parental consent or the consent of the child if 16 years and over.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022 (%)
(C1) Interim care order	45	53	45	61	49	11%
(C2) Full care order	298	282	282	278	260	56%
(E1) Placement order granted	21	13	15	17	12	3%
(J1) On remand, or committed for trial or sentence, and accommodated by LA	3	3	6	2	2	0%
(L1) Under police protection and in local authority accommodation	0	0	0	0	2	0%
(L2) Emergency protection order	0	3	0	0	1	0%
(V2) Single period of accommodation under section 20	120	102	111	91	138	30%
<b>Total CLA</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>464</b>	

## Placement distance

Nationally around 21% of children in care are placed further than 20 miles from their home. [7] Although the council has a slightly higher rate of children placed at distance than comparators at 23% (Chart 4). Work to develop local residential provision is underway but further work is needed to recruit more local foster carers.

Chart 4



The key driver behind this is that Southwark currently has no residential provision within its boundaries so all children must leave the borough to access this. In February 2021 just over 60% (43) of children in residential children's homes were placed more than 20 miles from Southwark

The plans to open residential care homes in the borough over the life of this strategy should significantly increase those placed within 20 miles of Southwark.

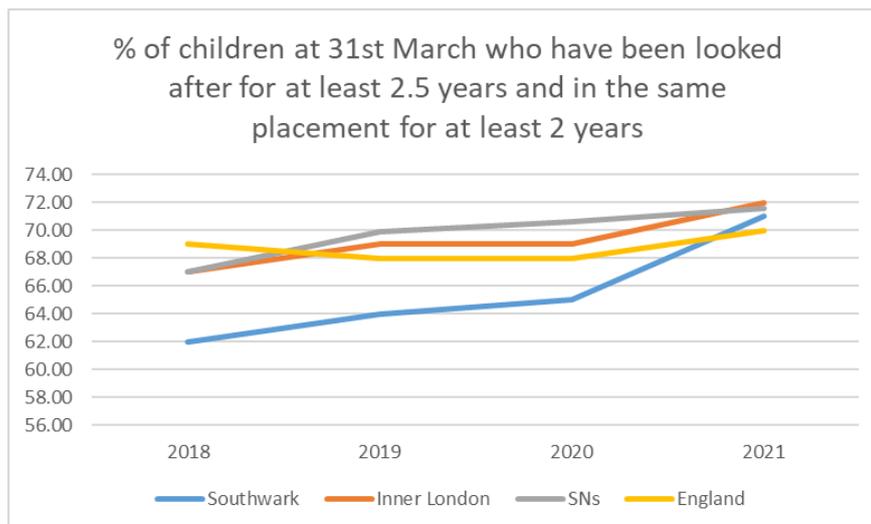
## Placement stability

Long-term: The council has shown a strong and consistent trend in improving the percentage of children in long-term stable placements over the last four years: from 62% to 71% (Chart 5). Compared to other Inner London boroughs who have also shown an improved trend, the council improvement is quite marked and has narrowed the gap.

In 2019 the Access to Resources Team (ART) implemented a process of requiring stability meetings be held before agreeing to a placement ending. Where a placement move for the child is not part of their care plan, a stability meeting must be held and the report must be signed off and a placement move approved by the Head of Service for Permanence and Resources. This has had a positive effect on placement stability, however there is still a high rate of emergency referrals made to ART. A desktop review of 48 referrals made to ART between April 2022 and August 2022 showed that over 50%, (25 v 23) were for placements required within one working week and therefore defined as an emergency. It is not clear whether this is yet having an effect on the resilience of the placements being made.

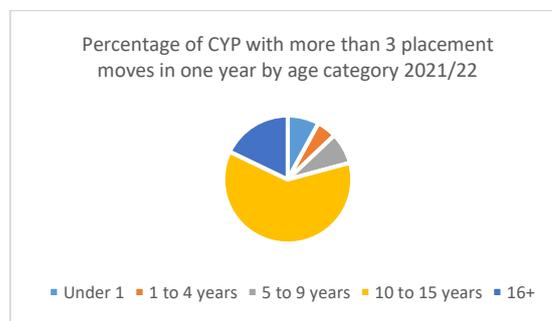
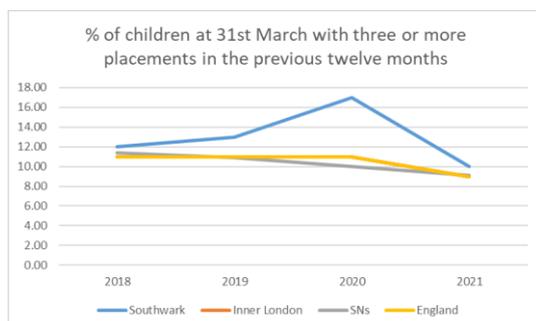
<sup>7</sup> [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2021 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

Chart 5



Short-term: As the national figure in Chart 6 shows, there is a small percentage of children who have more than 3 placements in one year. Each time a child moves home at best it is unsettling, at worst creates additional trauma so all LAs seek to minimise this figure. We see that the Council has had, and continues to have, a slightly higher rate than comparator areas but does have an overall downward trend. As the local residential provision becomes available, more children will be supported locally and this number should reduce further.

Chart 6



### Educational attainment<sup>8</sup>

As of July 2022, 430 students were recorded on the roll of Southwark Virtual School compared to 422 last year: 293 children are of statutory school age and 137 in Key Stage 5. Recorded as 166 females 264 males.

5% (16) of the councils looked after children are educated in schools graded less than Good by Ofsted. 4 placed prior to coming into care, 4 already at the school prior to the inspection, 5 unaccompanied asylum seeking children placed in specialist ESOL provision, 2 placed due to travel distance and 1 placed in a provision consulted as being able to meet needs.

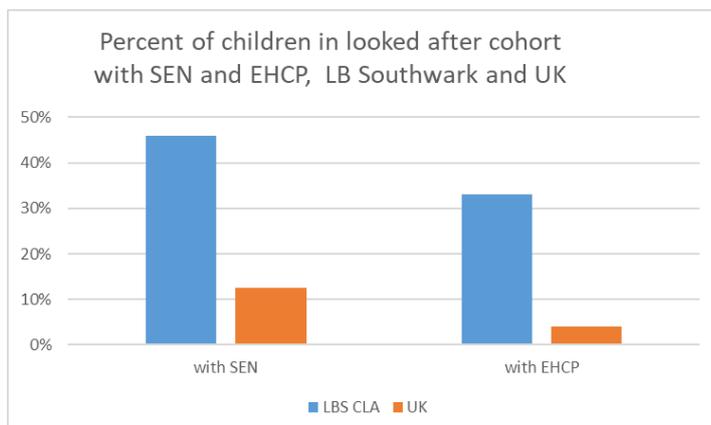
Children only attend 'requires improvement' schools in exceptional circumstances, such as when a previously good school has a poor inspection outcome but it is

<sup>8</sup> Information from Virtual School HT report to Corporate Parenting Board July 2022

considered in best interests of the child for them to remain there.

In Southwark, the proportion of statutory school age looked after children with special educational needs is 46% (134) compared to 12.6% nationally with an EHCP is 33% (95) compared to 4% nationally.

The residential needs analysis identified that of the CLA children placed within a residential children's home, 73% have an EHCP, indicating significant overlaps between SEND and social care involvement.

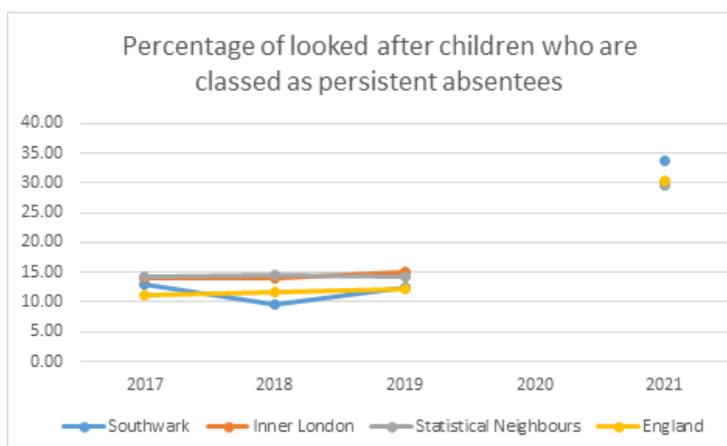


Persistent absenteeism data shows 28% (81) of looked after children with below 90% attendance. Of these:

- 29 are in Yr11,
- 20 are in Yr10,
- 20 are in KS3 (Yrs 7-9),
- 12 are in Primary.

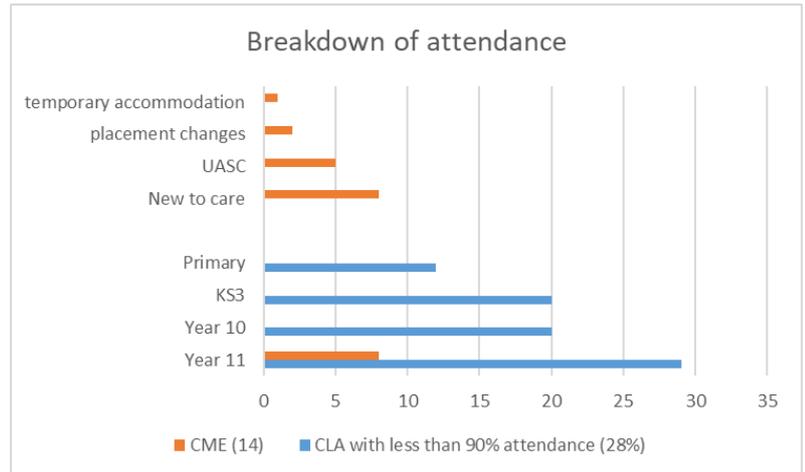
Of this group,

- 24 are new to care in this academic year so attendance was not collected prior to care episode.
- 7 are unaccompanied asylum seeking children – of which 5 arrived in the UK this year.
- 23 had one or more placement changes,
- 20 received fixed term exclusions and
- 1 child was permanently excluded.



By way of comparison the national rate recently more than doubled from 1 in 9 (2018/19) to 1 in 4 (Autumn 2021).<sup>6</sup> 81 children from 430 is 1 in 5.3.

Reasons for absences were attributed to post pandemic school refusal especially in KS4 where children lost confidence in sitting the examinations, new to care, care placement change and medical absences. Fixed term exclusions have also contributed to this increase.



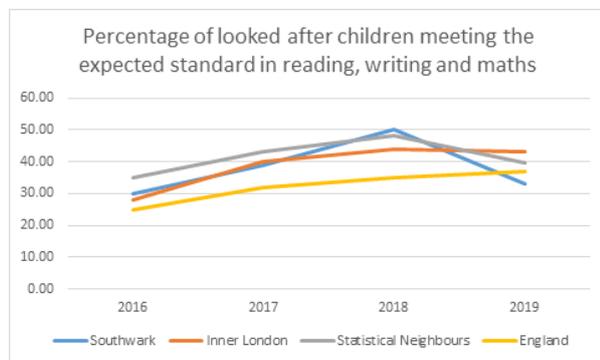
Children Missing Education (CME): 14 children looked after remain out of education compared to 8 this time last year. All have access to education provision through tuition, of these:-

- 8 came into care this academic year of which 5 are unaccompanied asylum seeking children .
- 8 are in Year 11 with pathway plans for the year ahead
- 2 had a recent placement change
- 1 is in temporary accommodation

This is a significant achievement when considering post pandemic engagement and the rate of mobility of looked after children in this cohort.

**KS4 GCSE outcomes:**

42% of the council’s 2021 children looked after GCSE cohort achieved a Grade 1-9 in English and Maths. Attainment 8<sup>9</sup> is lower than the previous year but in line with national data. London attainment 8 is marginally ahead



KS5 Outcomes: 80% of learners who are children looked after achieved at the expected level for their course against 83% last year. The 2021 year 13 cohort has achieved a 100% progression/pass/ success rate at A’ level/ L3.

Destinations of children looked after aged 16+: Destinations are recorded against access to education, employment and training, this continues to be a strength 37% in education, employment and training including 34% of children choosing to continue in

<sup>9</sup> The UK measure of how well pupils in key stage 4 are doing: it includes English, maths and 6 other subjects

education. There is an improving trend with 21% recoded as not being in education, employment and training compared to 26% at this stage last year.

Educational sufficiency and placement sufficiency are so closely interlinked that in addition to the strategic work being undertaken by the Virtual School to narrow the attainment gap and address persistent absenteeism, the following areas of work have been identified by the Virtual School:

- Working to ensure that children looked after are enrolled and engaged in school without delay as they come into care by introducing a Virtual School presence on the New to Care panel.
- Improving the joint working between social workers and Virtual School by commissioning and embedding an electronic PEP system
- Raising awareness with social working teams that PEP and attendance are always a priority for children in care and spreading the focus across the year rather than at key times.
- Reducing the length of time that children spend out of education by improving the understanding of and adherence to, of all departments across the Council to the Virtual School mandate.

#### Children looked after with additional needs<sup>10</sup>

There is an element of overlap between the cohorts of children in care and those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND). For those children supported by Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) the most common need identified is Autistic Spectrum Condition. The Children Looked After Health Team are jointly working with CAMHS to expedite autism assessments for CLA and CLA consultants are doing joint assessments for autism with CAMHS which means earlier assessment and intervention for special educational needs arising from autism, earlier assessment for ECHP and earlier identification of the right placement and school.

The Virtual School has been supporting the speech language and communication needs (SLCN) of children in care. The impact report from the current provider for the period September 2021 to February 2022 notes that the primary diagnosis of the cohort of students consisted of:

- General anxiety
- PTSD
- ASD
- ADHD

The carer-scored SDQ (Strengths and difficulties questionnaire) is a mandatory measure collected annually for all children and young people in care. The 21/22 Annual report indicated that 79.1% of children aged 4 to 16 years old who were looked after for a period of 12 months or more had an SDQ score. Of those, 34.2% were lower than the national average and therefore "Cause for Concern". Although there are acknowledged caveats to using SDQ scores, this suggests that slightly over a third of the cohort of children in care have significant additional emotional health and wellbeing needs.

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<sup>10</sup> Taken from the 2021/22 Annual Health report

A key ambition for 2022-23 was noted as “SDQ reporting to be supplemented by use of the Child & Adolescent Strengths & Needs (CANS) measure, which will improve our population level understanding of our children’s mental health needs and allow us to better plan strategically to meet them”. This work will also serve to improve placement management.

Areas noted as gap areas for children with disabilities, neuro-diverse children and children with mental health needs include:

- more regional commissioning of low-incidence high-need provision
- the role of the Integrated Care System (ICS) and need for transparent, efficient panels
- partners to work together to improve the effectiveness of therapeutic placement support for both children and young people and those that care for them
- the use of MDT approaches and/or clinical services for reducing placement breakdowns

### Health priorities for the cohort

The 2021-22 Annual Report on the Health of Children Looked After indicated that:

“There is a robust system in place across the partnership for constructive challenge, scrutiny and learning around issues pertaining to looked after children and care leavers”

and highlighted that there remains:

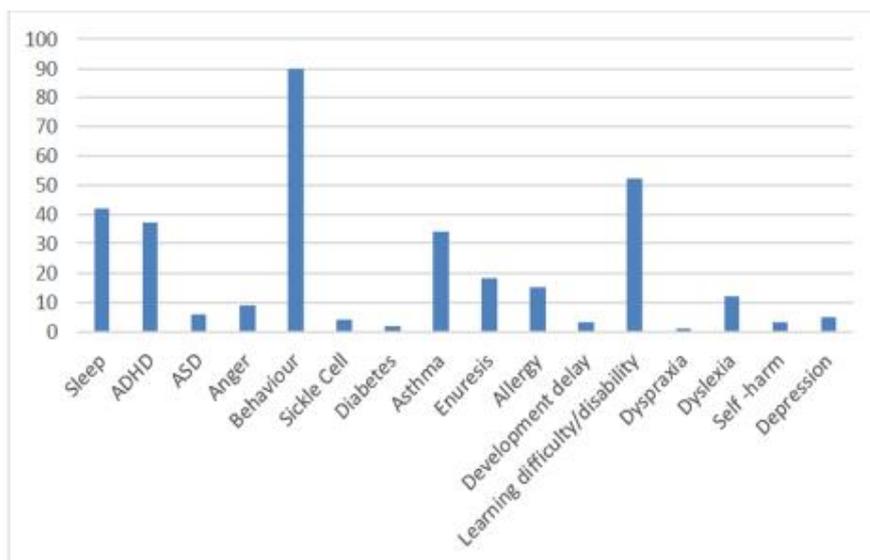
“...equitable consideration of looked after children placed further away as those placed within LB Southwark boundaries.”

Challenges which make it more difficult to ensure that the right placement is sourced for the child at the right time and with the right support package around them that were noted included:

- There continued to be challenges in completion of initial health assessments (IHAs) within the statutory timeframe. Resolving this is a priority for 2022-2023.
- There is a changing statutory landscape across the country resulting in difficulties in access to resources such as school placements and mental health support depending on where children are placed
- There is an increasing complexity of individual children and the cohort as a whole – particularly around safeguarding issues such as exploitation and violence including exposure to knife crime, impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); and mental health need.

Chart 7 below indicates the most common health needs of the cohort.

Chart  
7



*Most common health needs of Southwark looked after children at March 2022 – identified from statutory health assessments*

In addition to addressing the above-mentioned challenges, priorities for the year ahead include:

- Transition to adult services remains an area of further work. Ensuring a smooth transition across health and social care systems remains a challenge for a significant proportion of young people.
- Ensuring parity of access to mental health services and support for Southwark looked after children and for care leavers wherever they are placed - including those in high-cost residential placements as well as those in secure accommodation
- Ensuring looked after children have access to immunisations and dental care
- Embedding trauma-informed care in root practice across the system
- Working with the Southwark Clinical Service project to create a system of recording mental health provision that our children and young people are receiving in order to allow us to monitor issues around access and outcomes.

### [CYP at risk of custody](#)

When a child or young person under 18 is remanded or sentenced to custody, the Youth Custody Service (YCS) decides where they should be placed. This will be either at a secure training centre, secure children's home or under-18 young offender institution (for young males only). These services are commissioned by the Department for Education.

Table 2 shows the number of secure placements and the number of young people remanded into custody started in-year for the last five years. The numbers of young people in this situation are small and quite variable but it can be clearly seen the increase in spend as the weekly rate has increased.

Table 2	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Secure					
started in year	5	1	4	2	3
Remanded in custody					
started in year	15	12	22	8	11
FY spend	£28,773.00	£156,406.00	£137,769.00	£244,159.00	£317,079.00
average of weekly rate	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	£ 3,295.24	£ 3,980.79	£ 6,153.45	£ 8,112.73	£ 5,641.20

Children are sometimes held in a secure setting either on the grounds of “justice” through the criminal justice route, or through the “welfare” route where they are admitted for their own safety. Of the 13 secure children’s homes operating in England at March 2019, providing a total of 206 beds, 6 take only welfare children; 2 only justice children and the other 5 are mixed. There is a shortage of suitable, available placements..

There is currently no local London provision of secure setting. Following the Independent Review into Children’s Social Care, which recommended the establishment of Regional Care Cooperatives, the Association of London Directors of Children’s Services (ALDCS) have taken the first steps with a “Pan London Vehicle (PLV)”. This PLV is in the process of being piloted and its core focus would be on Secure Welfare placements initially, followed by Low Incidence High Cost placements for young people with very complex needs and then the residential market as a whole.

Initial data from the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) shows that over the last three years London LA’s have referred 295 children to Secure but received only 159 places. There is on average 33 London children in secure settings at a time. The proposed PLV pilot would develop provision of 24 Welfare beds and Step-down facilities and a site search is underway. Resources have been secured for development but the PLV legal vehicle is required to take the project forwards. This is due to be developed through Autumn 2022.

This PLV-commissioned secure accommodation has the potential to also deliver against the legal requirement for all Local Authorities to provide PACE<sup>11</sup> accommodation. Data is not currently collected on the extent of the requirement for PACE non-secure beds but it is a small volume. The current accommodation offered for PACE can be fostering or residential care. Information from the service indicates that in Southwark potentially one bed would be required for one to two nights at a time up to 20 times a year. A PLV-commissioned secure setting would both supply the expertise to care for young people in this setting and provide a cost & volume arrangement for all London LA’s.

The children who require secure settings are extremely vulnerable and have high levels of needs. A May 2021 study found that their needs include “speech and language problems; physical and learning disability; severe trauma; mental health

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<sup>11</sup> Police and Criminal Evidence Act

issues such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder; and behavioural disorders.....”<sup>12</sup>

Having appropriate accommodation in place to support young people upon their release from secure placements (justice or welfare) is a known gap. Currently young people are housed through the 16+ accommodation service however long term post-release accommodation that is more specific to their needs would improve their outcomes and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Additionally, the YOS has identified a need for services that can deliver respite accommodation and support for young people on temporary release.

It should be noted that the development of the Southwark-based children’s residential care provision offers the potential for risk-managed suitable placements in-house possibly to accommodate the above-mentioned requirements and in particular for those young people who cannot live alongside others due to risk at a point in time.

### Transition to adulthood

As has been previously indicated, it is not unusual for children coming into care to be older adolescents aged 16 years and over (26% in 2021), this is an increasing trend locally and nationally. This has several implications.

1. The young person has possibly had much longer for negative experiences and trauma to develop and embed and therefore needs are more complex and require correspondingly complex care and support.
2. There is less time for the care system to be able to support the young person and meet their needs.
3. There are higher numbers of care leavers often requiring more complex support
4. There are increased numbers of young people needing to transition into adults services.

Work has begun through the Adolescents and Young Adults Pathway Advisory Panel previously mentioned (page 5) which sits under the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Group. This group seeks to bring the system together so that services should ‘stretch up’ or ‘reach down’, to ensure that young residents and their families receive the services that can best meet their needs. It also intends to inform the development of future commissioning intentions.

### Care Leavers

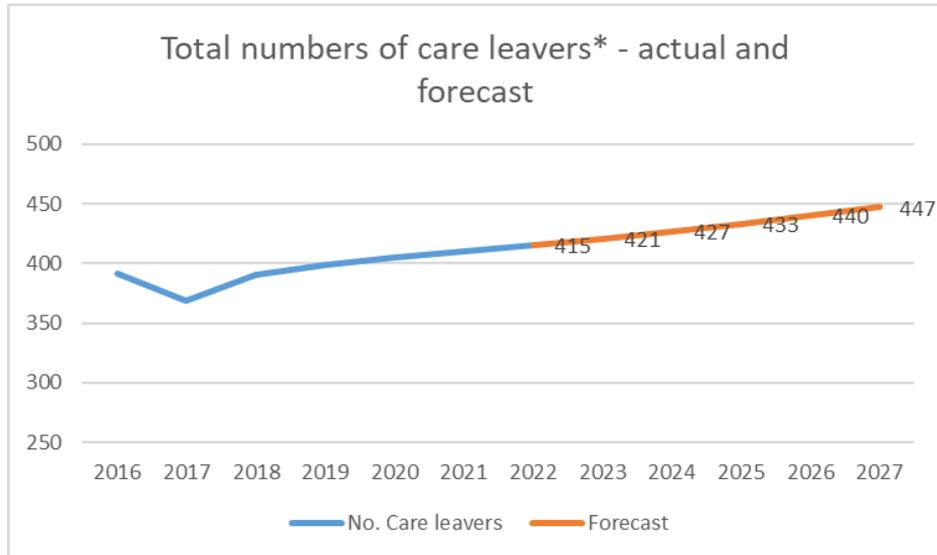
In September 2022 Southwark had 567 care leavers (all categories). The trend shown in Chart 8 shows a clear and steady increase that is projected to increase.

Number of Care Leavers (total receiving a service) at 31st March	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Southwark	395	464	528	545	567

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<sup>12</sup> [Secure children’s homes: placing welfare and justice children together \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Chart 8



\*including relevant and former relevant care leavers only

While there has also been a steep rise in unaccompanied asylum seeking children which creates an additional input into numbers of care leavers, it is not possible to predict those numbers with any accuracy. It is possible that due to measures put in across the country to reduce the number of children and young people seeking asylum the trend will slow and may have already started to do so.

The majority of accommodation for older young people in care (16-17 years), care leavers and other vulnerable young people is provided through staying put with former foster carers, commissioned supported accommodation services and spot purchased semi-independent and supported accommodation as seen in Chart 9 and 10.

Chart 9

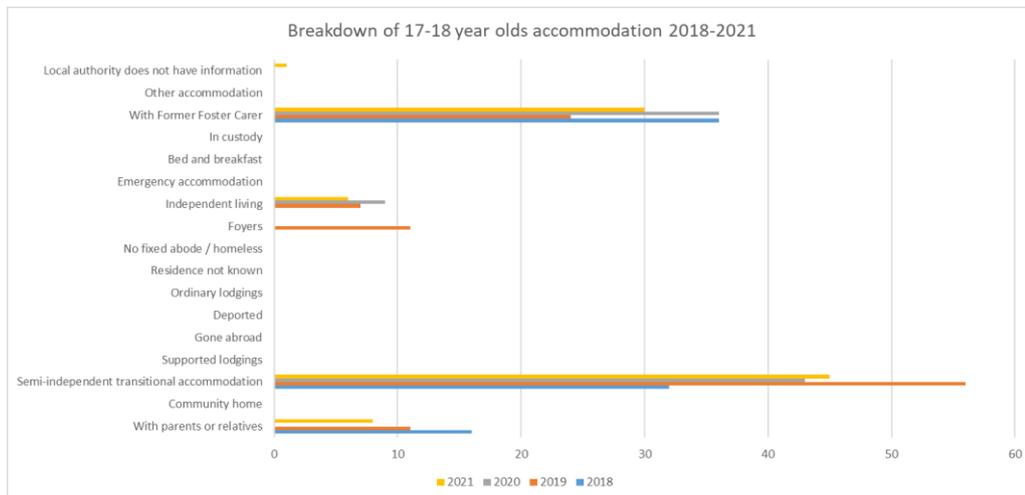
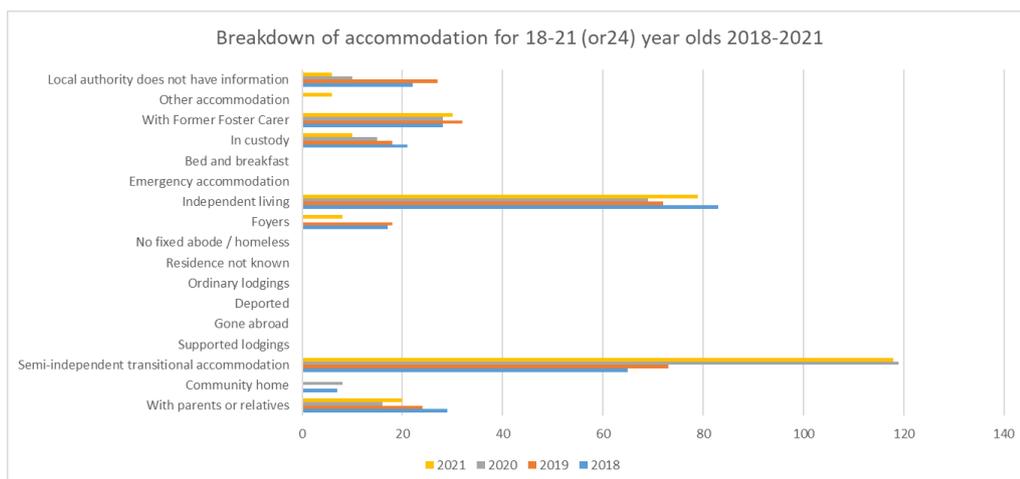


Chart  
10



The council has a small number of children [aged 16 or 17] where they have care needs and are in supported semi-independent accommodation. In December 2021 this was 4 children (16 and 17 years olds) and an audit of their cases by the Audit and Learning Team showed all 4 were making good progress and their needs were being met. While the legislation would indicate they should move to foster care or a children’s home, searches had not found such a provision able to meet their needs. In some cases the young people had experienced multiple moves in foster care and residential children’s homes and were doing better in supported accommodation. In some cases a move to a regulated placement would go directly against the young person’s expressed wishes. There is regular senior management oversight for this cohort of young people including multi- agency oversight at the Complex Needs Panel.<sup>13</sup>

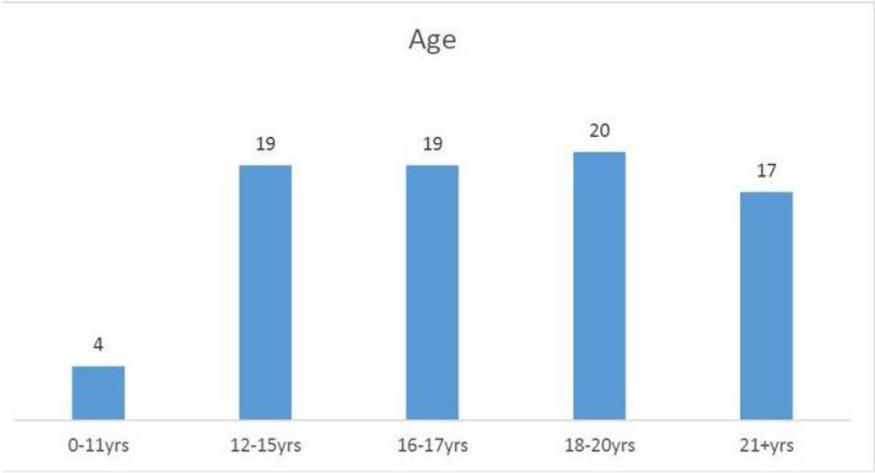
### How Care Leavers Feel About Where They Live

Housing remains a key issue for care leavers as well as children in care. The Q1 report for FY 2022-23 from the Advocacy Service indicated that housing was the top issue for young people at the point of referral.

*“...in the reporting period, similarly to previous quarters, a high number of young people accessed advocacy support to resolve issues around housing. Advocates support young people to understand Southwark’s housing local offer for care leavers and explain the differences in rights & entitlements based on care and immigration status, age and additional vulnerabilities. In addition, when requested by young people, advocates also support them in accessing specialist legal housing advice where young people themselves instruct solicitors based on their advice”*

<sup>13</sup> AS report to CP on semi-independent accommodation for children in care and care leavers April 2022

The age profile of the young people accessing the Advocacy service that quarter is shown here.



## Provision

### Adoption

The council hosts the Adopt London South (ALS) Regional Adoption Agency. 2021/22 marked the third full year of the partnership. The members are the London Boroughs of Croydon, Richmond and Kingston (Achieving for Children), Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Southwark, Sutton, Wandsworth, and on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 the London Borough of Greenwich joined. Key points regarding sufficiency across these authorities taken from the ALS Annual Report 21/22 are:

- 58 adopters were approved in 2021/22, slightly higher than the previous year. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 there were 38 approved adoptive families waiting for children. Of these families, 7 were Black or of Black mixed heritage and 20 were suitable for transracial placements. However, there is still a shortage of the right families to adopt south London children, in particular for Black children and all children with additional needs.
- 50% of the south London children waiting are children of Black and Black mixed Caribbean and African heritage and we are working towards 50% of our adopters being right for Black children. All ALS adopters are offered transracial adoption training. There is now a surplus of families offering transracial placements. Of equal significance for delay is reluctance of adopters to consider children with additional needs such as autistic spectrum conditions because they fear that there is not enough support available. Clearer messages about children's needs are now given at the point of adopter enquiry and through the process.
- One of the benefits of adoption regionalisation is the availability of ALS adoptive families and the local support which can be offered. 60% of South London children were placed with ALS adopters in 2021/22, compared to 68% the previous year, a target for improvement. 12 external children were placed in ALS Families of whom 3 were from Adopt London. 81% of ALS children joined new families in London or the South East.

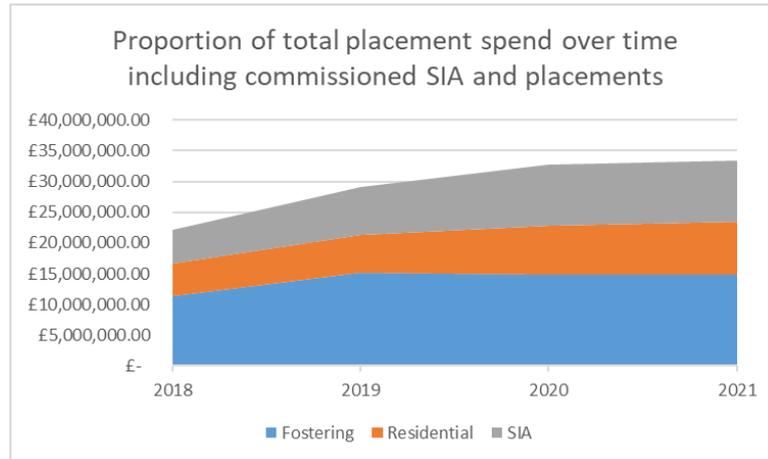
### Placements

The proportion of total placement spend in the last four years spent on residential services has increased as has that on semi or supported accommodation (Chart 11).. Overall this is a 50.9% increase in costs across all commissioned placements between 2018 to 2021. This reflects the picture across the country<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> [Councils boost social care budgets by £700m but say they are 'plugging gaps in an underfunded system' - Community Care](#)

Chart 11



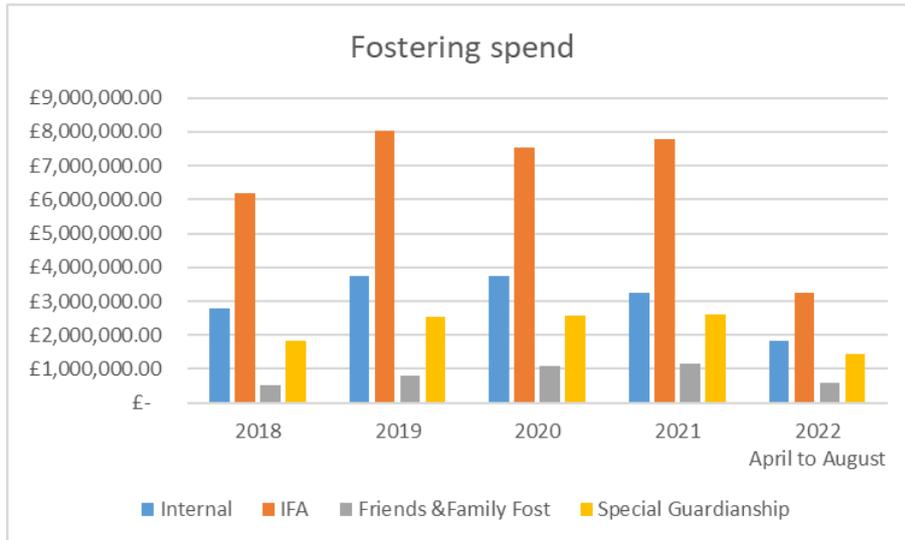
### Fostering

Chart 12 shows how the internal fostering service was negatively impacted by the pandemic, losing a significant number of foster carers. As part of the work to rebuild the service in the wake of the pandemic, the council's Fostering Service has begun to reinforce their training programme for Friends and Family Foster Carers as well as maintain an assertive recruitment and assessment programme. The work will occur in partnership with the SGO team around support areas such as life story development and supporting transition of carers into the role. There are also plans to strengthen the awareness and understanding of the different options of Special Guardianship Orders and Friends and Family Foster Carers to ensure optimum and appropriate take up of each service. The service will work alongside the national movement to obtain increased recognition for these carers.

As of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022, 52 out of 134 internal foster placements were in-borough and only 7 were over 20 miles away.

Since 2018, the proportion of spend on internal fostering has been at a consistent 22-26% and on external providers at 51-54% with Friends & Family Foster Care and Special Guardianship Orders between 21-29%. Determining like for like cost comparisons with in-house and external provision is challenging however, due to difficulties in separating out central on-costs for in-house services. The number of friends and family carers varies given the temporary nature of many arrangements but has broadly doubled over the last 3 years. The chart below gives an indication of costs

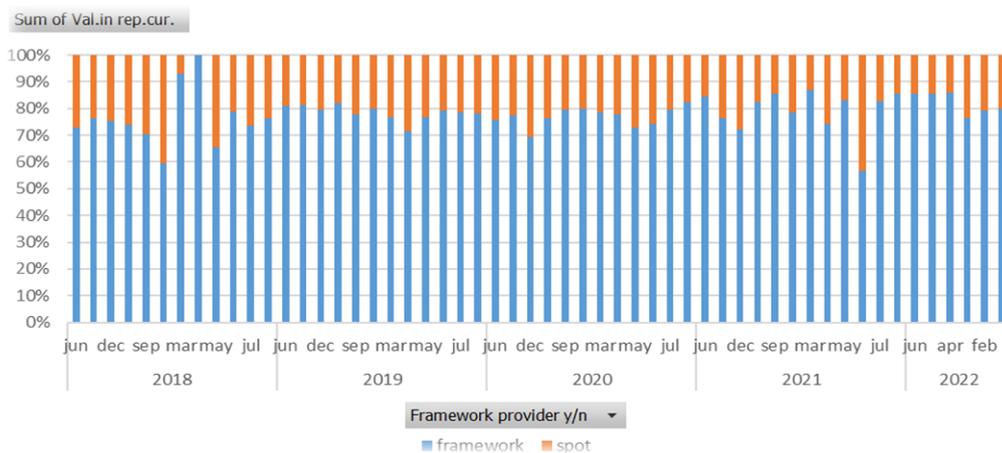
Chart 12



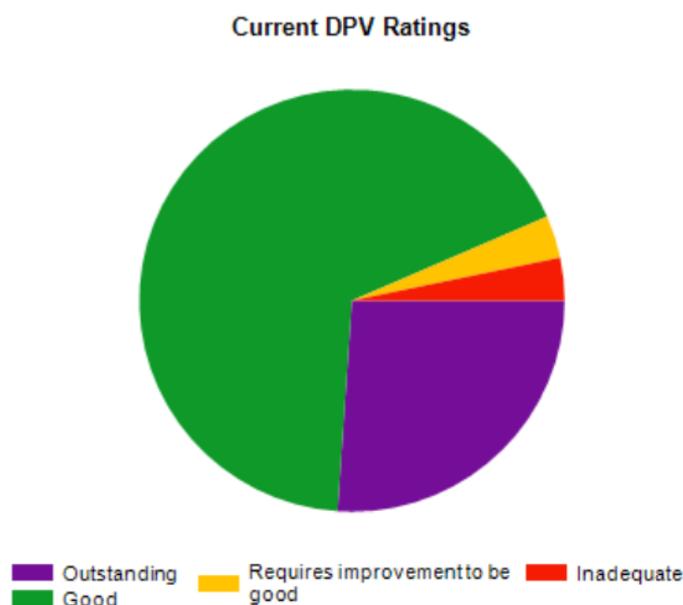
The Council is a member of the Commissioning Alliance Fostering Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) where costs are stabilised across the lifetime of the contract. As shown in Chart 13, DPV placements consistently make up approximately 80% of the externally sourced placements. This shows good use of the commissioned arrangements although there is known to be a number of bespoke support arrangements in place.

The contract runs out in May 2023 and the work to appraise options has begun.

Chart 13



The quality of the external provision is largely good or outstanding as seen in the pie chart.



### Parent and child

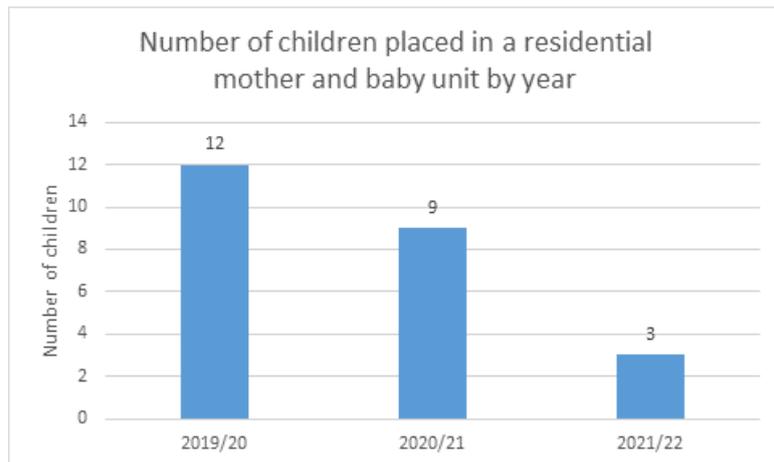
The Council uses a mixture of fostering and residential parent and child placements based on the assessed risk to the child and support needed for the parent. The combined picture is given in Table 3.

Table 3	FY 18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Number of families under assessment	16	18	22	11
Total spend	£539,515	£394,451	£472,774	£454,699
Number of providers used	8	7	14	10

The number of residential parenting assessment placements has dropped significantly over the last three years as shown in Chart 14. If safe to do so then fostering placements are preferred as they are closer to the community setting that the parent will return to following the assessment period. While residential placements are the preferred environment when safety is a concern, they can mask the care -and therefore the risk- brought by the parent.

Chart 14

The average time placed in this setting is 87 days (range: 6 to 272)



Availability of placements has not been an issue although the following are areas that have been identified as gaps:

- local Southwark-based placements
- placements that take fathers and children
- placements that allow fathers access during the day to support with care
- placements that take couples
- Improvements in the quality and timeliness of reports submitted
- Clarity for carers around how to support the parent without doing the job for them

Currently if a placement has to be sought out of hours, the social worker must undertake the placement search. This opens up a risk of variation in placement cost and quality. To avoid going outside of commissioned arrangements and to ensure a consistent standard in placement quality, rigorous arrangements, training and induction need to be in place. A piece of work to consider how best to manage out of hours placement searching could serve to ensure the best arrangements are in place.

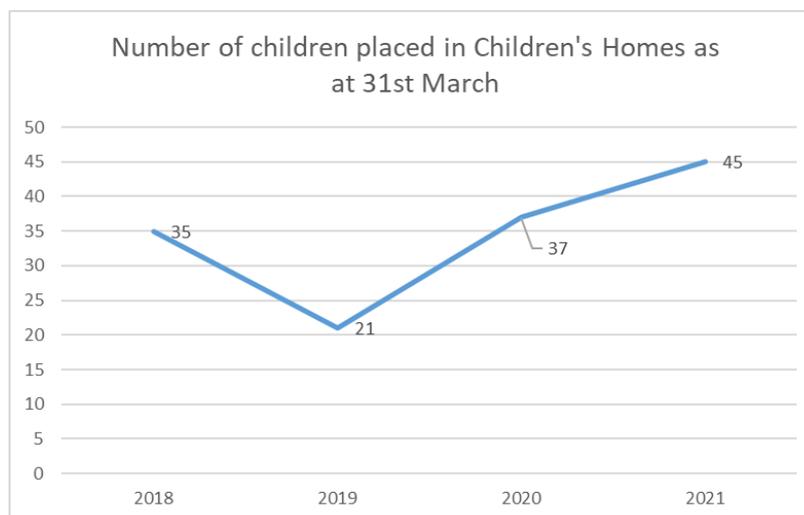
## Residential

Following an initial drop in placements made, the number have risen since 2019 (Chart 15). This is likely to be a combination of:

- Nationally, more children are coming into care, and more children are staying in care longer, meaning that the overall cohort size is increasing while the national number of foster carers is decreasing. This means that despite lower numbers of children in care locally, competition for externally-sourced foster placements is high.
- The consequence on children with more complex needs is that it is much harder to source a foster placement and some residential providers are now being asked to care for children who should or could be in a fostering setting in addition to children whose needs require residential care which increases matching difficulties.

- It is now generally acknowledged that overall levels of complexity in the needs of the children and young people are rising – children who are at higher risk of mental ill-health, criminal and gang exposure, or CSE, present real challenges in how to care for them within current provision both fostering and residential.

Chart 15



A needs analysis for children in residential settings done in 2021 showed that

- Of the 43 children in residential care, 10 (33%) were White British and 33 (77%) were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- The case files of Southwark children show that approximately a quarter needed to be placed at a distance from Southwark, and this need was likely to continue.
- Attendance with education was a problem for around half the children in residential care. A large proportion had Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and access to provision was often exacerbated when children change placements in emergencies because it takes time to get children registered with a new school. This has been offset more recently by the wider availability of remote tuition, albeit the service reports that some children were reluctant to engage with this.
- A study of the case files of the 43 children in residential placements (as at 1 February 2021) was undertaken. Twelve of the 43 children were worked with by the All Age Disability (AAD) Service to meet their needs.

Current best practice suggests that children requiring residential care are best served by homes which are family sized and look like the homes of their peers. In 2021, the council endorsed and adopted a residential development programme to deliver three new homes local to the borough. A £1.85m bid to the DfE was successful and progress is underway to secure funding for homes two and three. The residential strategy proposes, dependent on identified needs, to deliver three homes as follows:

One home of 5 beds for children of mixed gender who are between the ages of 10 and 16 years.	Property is identified and refurbishment programme underway. Home expected on line towards the end of 2023
A 5 bed home with high quality therapeutic support for children aged 13-17 years old with more challenging behaviour and	Property identified and refurbishment programme being developed. Home expected on line in 2024.

potentially an emergency bed/solo accommodation attached.	
A short term assessment home with up to 5 beds and flexibility to build bespoke packages of care around children who may need very high levels of care in an emergency	No property yet identified.

The council is a member of the Commissioning Alliance Residential DPV to source external placements. The contract is due to expire in May 2023. Options appraisal work has already begun.

The council's Local Offer has one internally operated home for children with disabilities that provides short breaks and overnight respite for children and young people. Short breaks are also commissioned from external providers.

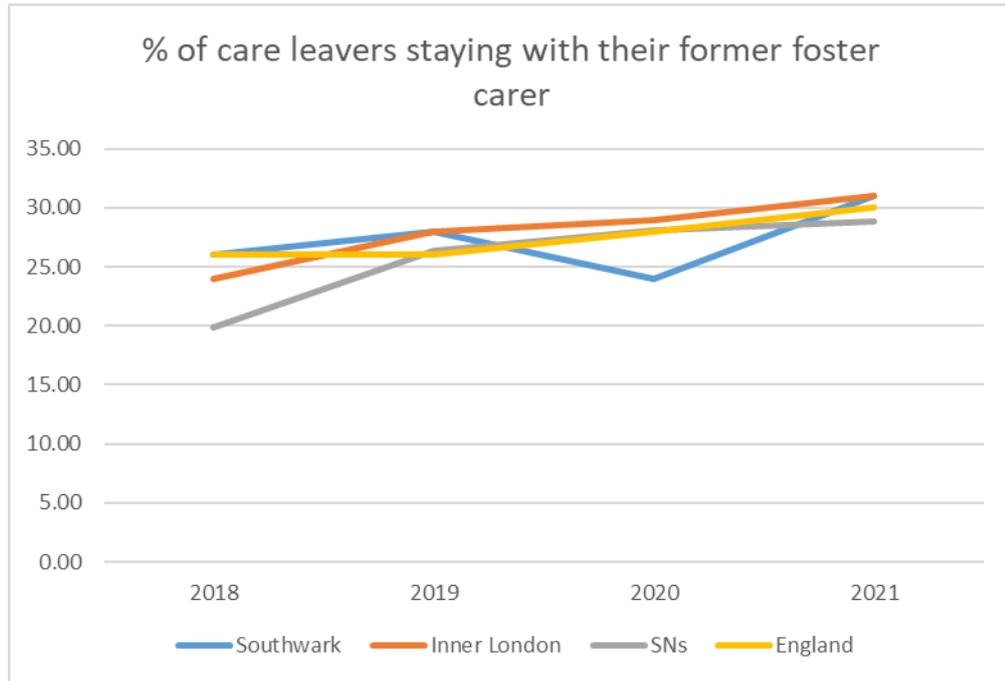
#### Accommodation and support for young people over the age of 16

As already seen, the numbers of children in care aged 16-17 and the number of care leavers are rising steadily. Accommodation for these young people is provided mainly through

- Staying Put fostering placements
- Commissioned 16+ housing and support services
- Spot Purchased Supported Accommodation and semi-independent placements
- A pilot Supported Lodgings service
- Staying Put

The council is showing a steady trend towards increasing numbers of staying put placements and has closed the gap with statistical neighbours and national figures as shown in Chart 16. For 17-18 year-olds, staying put with former foster carers made up 33% of all placements in 2021.

Chart 16



- Block Commissioned 16+ Service

The 16 Plus Support and Accommodation Project is block commissioned accommodation with both staffed and dispersed accommodation with floating support. It has a north and south focus across the borough and is open to children in care aged 16 and over, care leavers and young people aged 16 to 18 in vulnerable housing.

The service has established an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Hub to build upon local support services and reduce reliance on expensive spot purchased semi-independent accommodation.

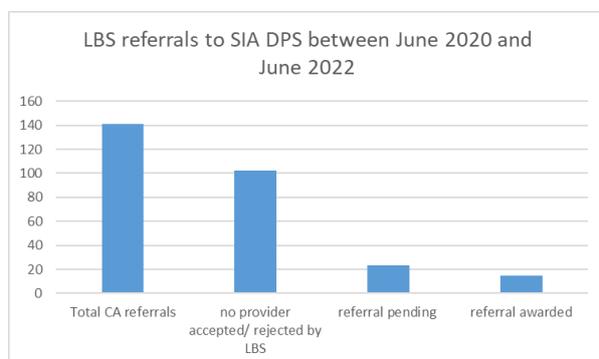
A 2021 review into the performance of the commissioned service established that it has proved difficult to move young people on to independent accommodation and there are still a number of challenges to be overcome. The review made a number of revised recommendations which will continue to be embedded over the life of the contract.

As a part of the procurement of this provision an options appraisal work will take place 2022-23. This provision needs to be able to free up low level capacity in order to be able to move young people on from provision for higher needs.

- Spot purchased Supported Accommodation and Semi-Independent placements

In 2021/22, the council spent over 4 times (£6.7M) on spot purchased placements as opposed to £1.4M on the block contracts. The number of young people in block contracted services and spot purchased services are similar, between 250 and 300, and therefore the imperative to increase provision within the block contracted services should be a priority. This is not only due to the cost-effectiveness of such action but more importantly the fact that the two appointed providers are strategic partners in providing Southwark homes for Southwark children.

In 2020, the council joined the Semi-independent Accommodation and Support Framework that operates as a Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) run by the CA on behalf of a large partnership of 19 other mainly London Local Authorities. The CA also manage an accreditation service for providers on the DPV.



Data suggests a success rate of 10% for referrals put through the DPV however there are known problems with the data that may confound this. More rigorous understanding of the placement data is required to evaluate the contract.

The contract will end in June 2023 and options appraisal work has begun.

- Supported Lodgings

In addition to the continued work to increase the numbers of young people in Staying Put placements, a pilot scheme to develop an internal Supported Lodgings service is underway. The pilot for 6 households was begun in April 2022 with the first hosts expected to be ready by November 2022.

A key benefit of delivering the service in-house is the close working relationship and open conversation between the recruitment, 16+ and Care Leaver teams in order to get an early match between hosts and young people. Hosts need to be completely ready to start once approved.

Another benefit is the ability to dovetail with fostering recruitment. The service has already been able to transfer 3 carers from fostering to the supported lodging assessment process.

- Next steps

Both the commissioned block of accommodation and support and the DPV contract require renewal during the life of this strategy. This creates an opportunity to deliver a robust offer to young people in vulnerable housing situations, the excellent progress made by joint working and having an experienced housing practitioner sitting in the 16+ team have already made significant improvements. However there are still challenges as well as a number of gaps in accommodation for specialist groups. Annex C shows the feedback from a 16+ working group session on sufficiency.

With the incoming process of mandatory registration with Ofsted for providers supporting young people aged 16+, there is an opportunity to work with quality providers and support them in delivering locally to our specific requirements.

## Gap analysis

### Fostering

We know that our fostering service generally has sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the under 10s locally but we need more capacity for older children, especially

- unaccompanied asylum seeking young people
- children on the autistic spectrum
- children who are vulnerable to exploitation or who present risk to themselves or others
- emergencies
- sibling groups of more than 2 children
- Parent and child placements that can take fathers, allow fathers access, take couples

There is a need to develop carers who are able to work with our local residential offer to take young people stepping out of residential provision, this will include undertaking an options appraisal of the DPV for Independent Fostering Agencies.

There is a need to promote enhanced support for foster carers such as the Mockingbird Model to support them in caring for our most complex young people including those aged 16 or 17 who still require care rather than support.

### Residential

We have a programme to develop local residential provision along with access to externally commissioned provision. However we are still in a position where children may have to live outside of Southwark and are concerned around the negative impact that this may be having on too many young people so we will continue to develop our residential offer at pace. In considering the profile of the remaining two homes there is a need to examine the need for children at risk of multiple placement breakdowns, those with SEN and the outcome of the proposed 16+ needs analysis including a review of current provision and the current DPV purchasing arrangements

#### 16+ accommodation

More information on the needs of the 16+ cohort is required to inform and ensure that a robust framework of options to support our care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children locally is in place.

We recognise that we need to ensure our planning and support for adolescents is robust so that only those who really need to be looked after do so and only for as long as necessary. We need to work with providers, including those on the DPV and our placement team to ensure robust placement management processes support this.

For care leavers, there is a need to continue to develop supported lodgings and staying put arrangements and there is a need to continue to work with our partners including those through the DPV to provide options and support our young people who are NEET.

### Children at risk of custody

There is a need to ensure accommodation and support is in place that meets the need of young people exiting custody including those on temporary release as well as long term post-release.

There is a need to identify the requirement for and ensure availability of PACE accommodation.

### All placements

We want to minimise the number of placement moves looked after children may experience, especially those which are unplanned and emergency placements. We will work with our Access to Resources Team to build on the current successes and ensure our potential to be more effective in this area is reached.

There is a need to work to improve the support around engaging with new education settings for those young people who have to change placement. All contracts for external provision should be retendered to ensure continuity of access to good quality placements at best value.

### Enablers

Engagement and involvement: we will further develop consultation and engagement with young people in respect of placement commissioning, monitoring, quality assurance and service development. As part of an overall consultation and engagement strategy, we will develop a programme of Young Inspectors by the end of 2023. We are committed to developing this area of our work over the life of this strategy.

Partnerships: we will work with health and VCS partners within Southwark and across the South East London ICS to develop a clear and consistent pathway and support under the Transforming Care agenda and in relation to placements that require a multi-agency response in terms of expertise, services and funding to meet physical, mental and emotional needs. We will also need to refresh the SLA that covers the CLA nursing team to cover leaving care requirements and ensure that it is in line with other services up to the age of 25 years.

Sharing data: we will continue to pay attention to our data quality, so that data available is responsive and contributes positively to inform provider performance and service development as well as enables us to identify areas of inequality. Where we commission therapeutic placements, we need to ensure our health colleagues are fully part of reviewing the quality and outcomes of any therapeutic or clinical element of the placement.

### Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The production of a SEN specific sufficiency strategy will be a priority action within the next four years and will enhance the information we hold on the needs of children with

SEND. This should dovetail with the publication of the national SEND delivery plan set for later this year.

### Equalities

In terms of outcomes, experience and access there is a need to ensure that the information we gather permits us to identify where there is inequity across all services as well as understand what support or action is needed to remove it. We will need to hold all providers as well as our internal services to a high standard and call out services with pronounced inequity.

### Key priorities

- 1) We will continue to work to safely and appropriately reduce the need for children to be in care through a strong preventative offer
  - a) We will continue to ensure robust support packages for families where children are cared for under Special Guardianship Orders.
  - b) We will work to make sure that children only stay looked after for as short a time as necessary.
  - c) We will ensure strong join up with SEND commissioners to ensure that the risk of children requiring specialist SEND provision becoming looked after is reduced if their needs can be best met by family support and appropriate educational provision.
  
- 2) We will build a resilient and expert foster care community able to support and care for the older cohort of young people.
  - a) The in-house fostering service will continue with its recruitment plans and, alongside this, ensure attention is given to retention and incentives/barriers for carers to care for older or more complex children.
  - b) We will grow our own fostering service in each year of this strategy to create the range and types of fostering placements required for complex needs, older children, respite, crisis intervention, siblings, and parent and child as well as ensuring a supply of follow on placements for our residential provision.
  - c) We will work to reduce the number of children placed in residential care by increasing the number of foster care placements available locally.
  - d) The number of care leavers is rising and, together with the significant increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children, this has future implications for leaving care services. We will keep careful monitoring on 16+ provision to increase capacity within the block contracted arrangements.
  - e) We will continue to build a strong family and friends fostering offer in order to maximise our opportunities for these placements for children and young people.

- 3) We will continue to improve the experience of children in our care including ensuring a strong voice of our young people is threaded through all services
  - a) We will ensure that the voice of young people is central to any commissioned or provided service
  - b) We will open local children's homes
  - c) We will improve placement stability through a better supply of local high quality placements alongside improvements to practice in relation to assessment, care planning and placement.
  - d) We will work to reduce the persistent absenteeism levels of children and young people who are looked after.
  - e) We wish to embed a culture whereby risk is managed by keeping young people close, with trauma informed and restorative approaches. Partners need to be encouraged to support this approach at all times.
  - f) We know we have some excellent multi-agency resources for children with specialist and complex needs. We will build in opportunities to ensure partners are fully involved at the earliest opportunity in planning support and managing risk with children and their families/carers to prevent admission to care or placement breakdown.
- 4) We will continue to increase the numbers of adoptive families available to our children, particularly those that are able to meet the needs of older children and Black children
  - a) We will support the Adopt London South in their work to find adopters for Black children and autistic children.
  - b) We will maintain and develop the sufficiency of adoption placements through Adopt London South working in collaboration with all Adopt London Regional Adoption Agencies.
- 5) We will improve our ability to continuously assess placement sufficiency and inequity in the system on an ongoing basis to ensure a responsive system
  - a) We will work to improve the quality of our data allowing us to track outcomes, inequality, and impact.
  - b) We will work with partners both locally and regionally to ensure the best possible outcomes for our children.

### Measuring success

A successful Sufficiency Strategy means that in four years' time we can look back and see that

- we improved the choice of placement options we were able to offer children in care;
- more of our children were able to be in homes in or near the borough;

- there is increased placement stability and children experience less placement moves;
- we reduced the numbers of children, especially older ones, coming into care as they and their families were better supported in the community; and

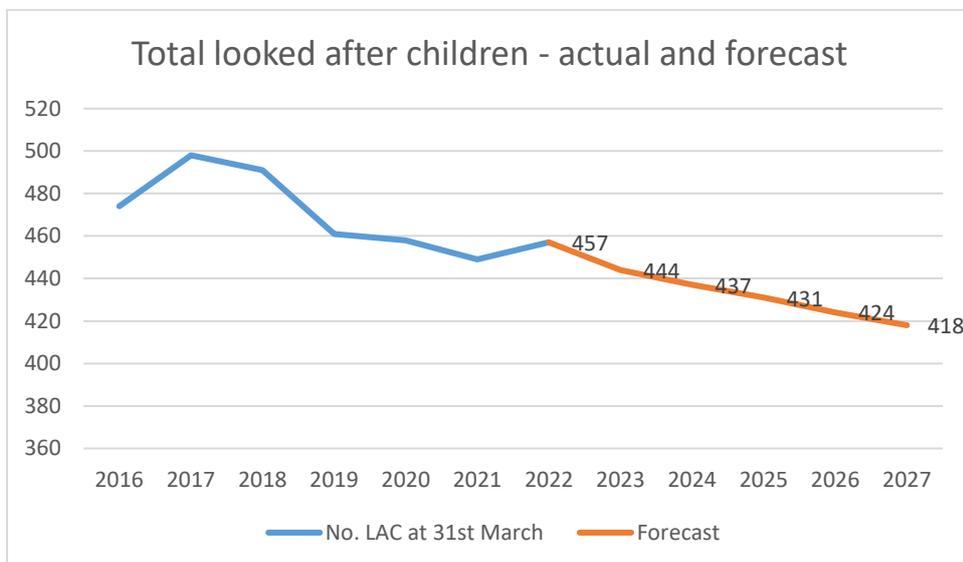
An action plan will be developed by March 2023 and monitoring will be on six monthly basis with regular reporting to the Sufficiency Steering Group who will also review forecasts annually to support any changes to the actions needed.

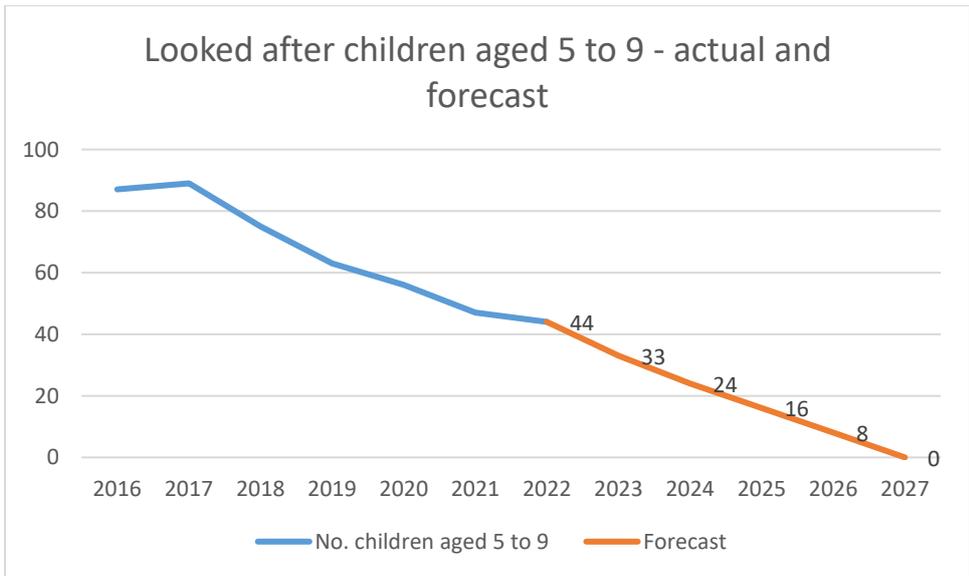
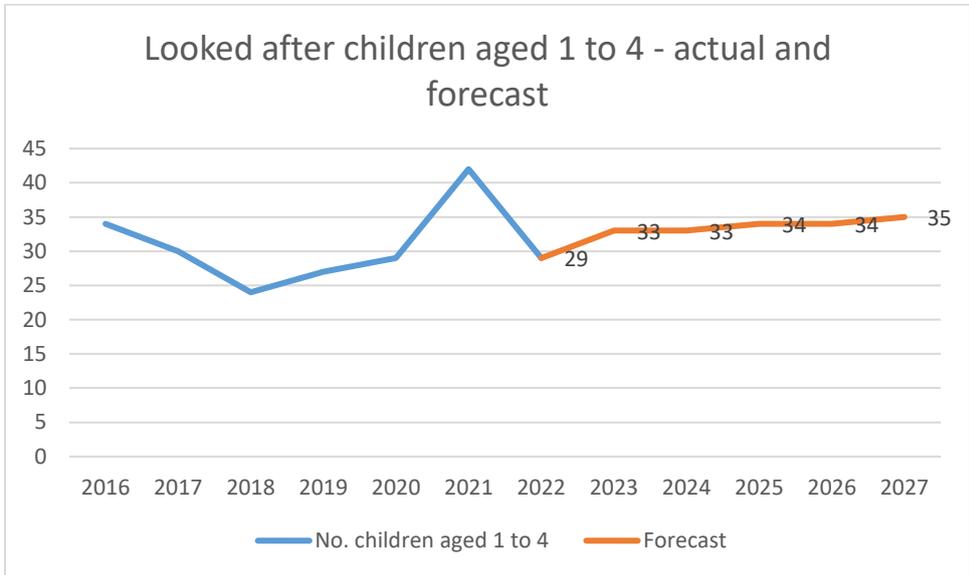
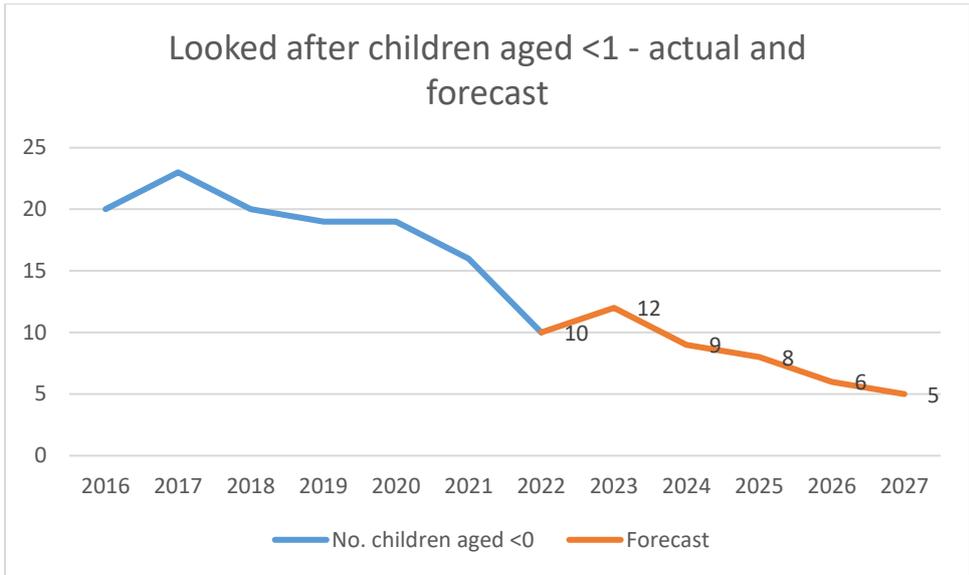
## Annex A Legislation

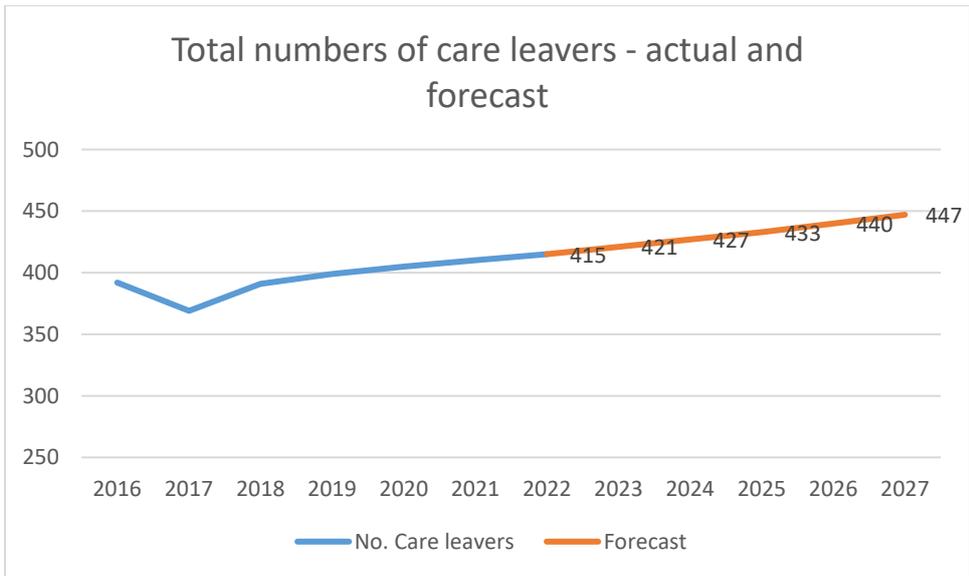
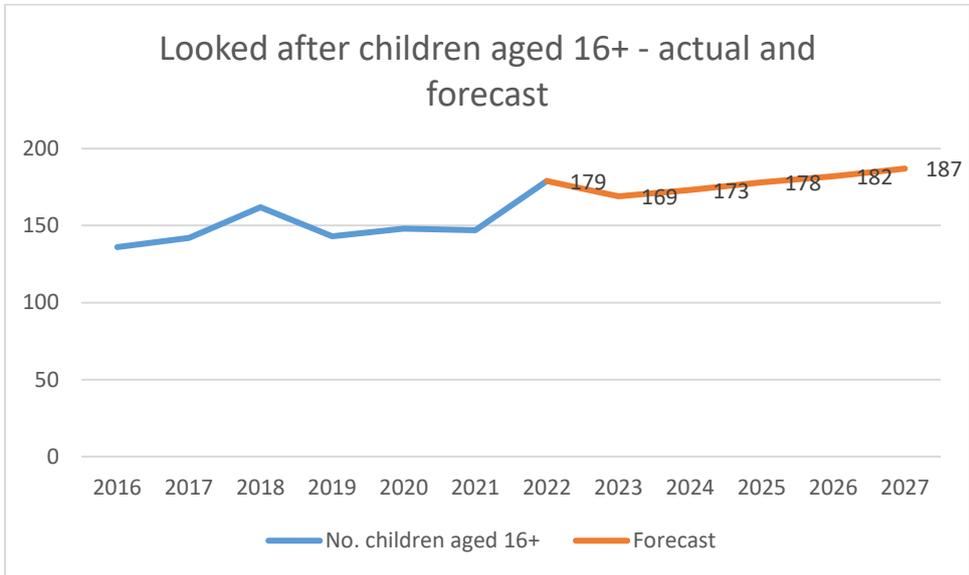
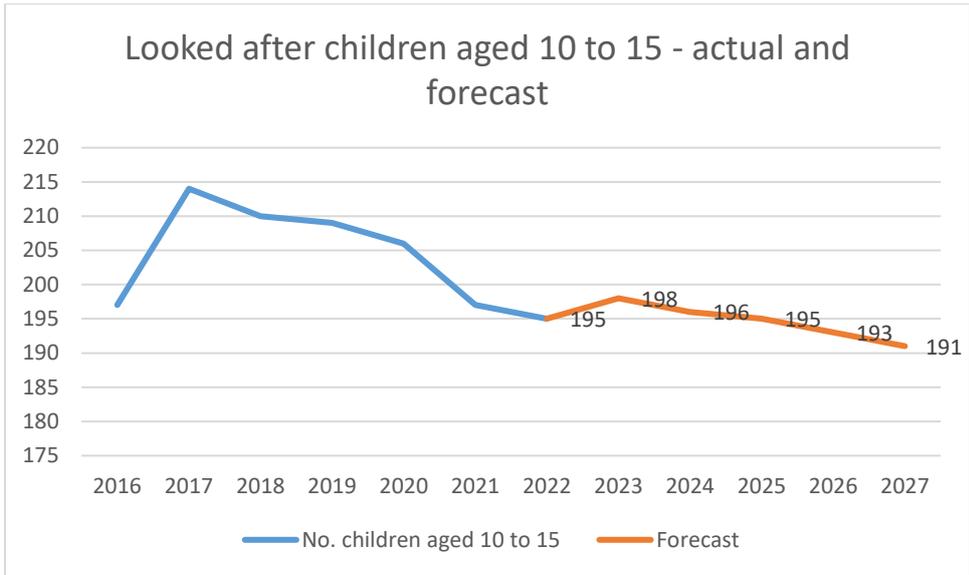
The Sufficiency Strategy is set within the context of national policy and guidance with the following primary legislation applying:

- Children Act 2004
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Children and Family Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children 2010
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010, 2015  
*Putting Children First* (2016)

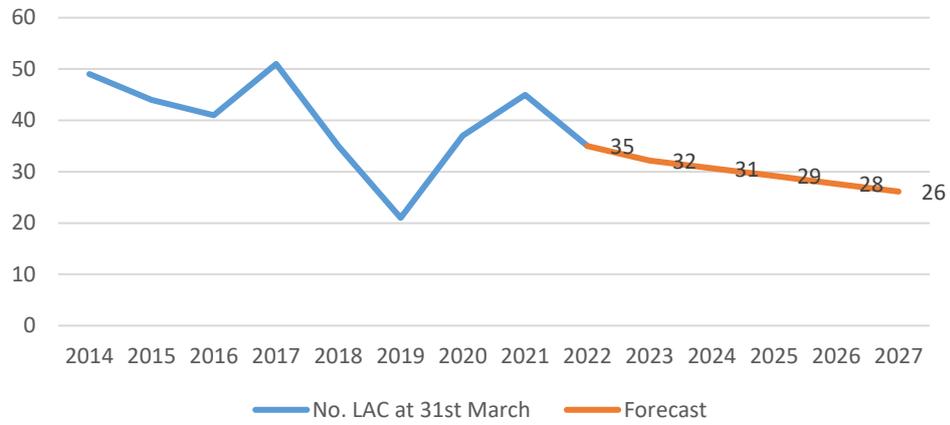
## Annex B – cohort projections by age group







Total number of looked after children placed in a residential children's home - actual and forecast



## Annex C – 16+ session feedback

Areas that were highlighted as gaps in a specialised focus group session were:

- The need for training flats in assured short hold tenancies
- Floating support
- Affordability checks
- The Telford Care Leaver hub is forced to close a 5pm due to insurance criteria which is not in line with Care Leaver requirements.
- Work needs to be done with providers on the quality of their keyworker reports.
- Outreach support staff being confident to conduct assertive outreach
- Contracts need to be managed more effectively and providers held to account when necessary
- Out of hours provision requires social workers and PA's to run placement searches themselves
- No emergency bed provision is available
- No PACE provision is available

Below is the focus group's evaluation of the landscape in Southwark against the acknowledged best practice [St Basils and Barnardos Accommodation and Support Framework](#).

Short stay / Emergency	High support	Medium support	Low support
Nightstop  No provision	Small units 24/7  OASIS	Floating Support  DePaul	Shared houses with floating support  OASIS and SA
Short breaks respite  Orient Street	Small group homes  Not currently but residential strategy could deliver	Supported accommodation – commissioned  OASIS and SA	Peer landlords  No provision
Short term Supported Lodgings  Pilot project	Specialist supported lodgings  Not currently		On-call concierge  Not known
Emergency assessment bed  No	Housing First  Not known		

Greater clarity of data around the needs of young people is needed to inform the work that needs to be taken forward in 2023.

- An in-depth analysis of the 16+ cohort would serve to inform both a joint strategy for young people's independent housing and commissioning activity. This could include an agreed Joint Housing Assessment protocol, tenancy training, pre-tenancy schemes as well as increasing aspirational tenancies.
- Analysing the DOLS activity could potentially highlight an invest to save opportunity for accommodating young people with the most complex needs
- Existing contracts deliver accommodation and support that is fairly generic. More granularity of information is needed to understand the needs of different groups and how providers can flexibly respond to these needs, especially
  - gender-specific accommodation
  - young parents
  - young people with health needs requiring support e.g. with medicine management and administration
  - young people on the autistic spectrum
  - young people exiting custody or other secure estate
  - intensively supported units delivering greater than 1:1 supervision
  - young people over the age of 21 who do not meet thresholds for adults services but still have mental health issues and/or learning disabilities.