

This is my home

Lewisham's Children in Care Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2022–25



Lewisham



Lewisham Children's Social Care



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1. This is my home, an introduction to this strategy.

For most children and young people, the right place for them is to be with their family and the overall aim in Lewisham Children’s Social Care (CSC) is to collaborate with families to help them stay together. However, we understand in some instances where there isn’t enough safety in the child’s family, it may be necessary for them to come into care for a short period, or on a long-term basis. When a child becomes ‘Looked After’, the Local Authority becomes the “Corporate Parent”. Like any good parent, we want our children to grow up in an environment where they are happy, healthy, secure, well cared for and loved, enjoying good relationships, doing well at school, having opportunities to develop their interests and talents, so they grow up confident about themselves and their future. The quality, stability and location of placements strongly relates to children and young people doing well in and beyond care.



We take our Corporate Parenting role very seriously and in 2021 we developed a Corporate Parenting Strategy, setting out how we aspire to be the best parents we can be. The six ambitions of the Corporate Parenting Strategy can be seen in the appendices. **One of the six key ambitions of our Corporate Parenting Strategy (2021 – 2024) is “This is my home”.**

THIS IS MY HOME

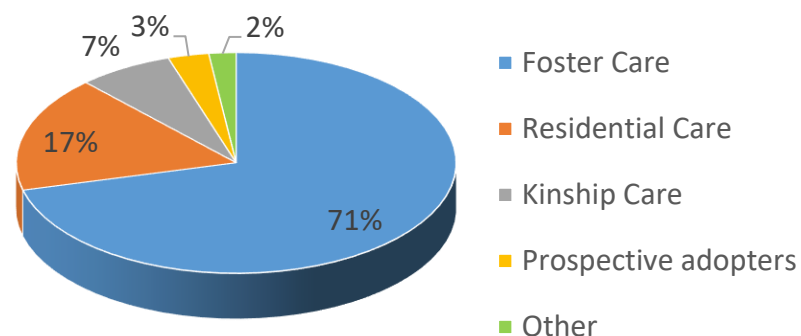
In this ambition we pledge that children in our care will know where they will grow up, they will receive good quality care, they will be supported to stay in the same place and we will do everything we can to help them feel safe and secure in their home. **This placement sufficiency strategy sets out what we will do to realise this ambition** and it has been developed in consultation with service leads, external providers, and importantly our care experienced children and young people.

Whilst the work we have done since 2019 under the umbrella of the CSC improvement programme is reducing the numbers of children needing to come into care, Lewisham has a historic legacy of a high net rate of children in care and therefore also high numbers of care leavers. This local context set against an exceptionally challenging national picture of care placement availability, means the need for an ambitious placement sufficiency strategy has never been more critical. As well as meeting our statutory duty and improving outcomes for children in our care, this strategy also aims to deliver cost savings.

The legal framework

The Sufficiency Duty, Section 22G The Children Act (1989) requires Local Authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority’s area boundaries which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the Local Authority’s area (‘the sufficiency duty’). The statutory guidance of securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children states: *Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children.*

2. The National Context



The number of children in care in England is currently at an all-time high at 80,850 (as of March 2021), up 1% on the previous year and an increase of 25% since 2010. Numbers and rates vary widely across the country. Most children in care are placed in foster placements, followed by residential settings, kinship care, then placed for adoption. Of the 71% in foster care, 56% are with mainstream carers, the remaining 15% are with connected carers.

Nationally, after a peak in 2017, the number of children entering care is decreasing, with a notable drop of 8% in 2020, to 28,440. This marked fall in 2020/21 was affected by the covid pandemic national lockdowns.

The main category of need recorded as the reason a child is in care is 'abuse or neglect' (66%). This increased by 3% between 2018 to 2021. Other prevalent categories include 'family dysfunction' (14%) and 'family in acute stress' (8%), which have all remained stable in the last 4 years.

Slightly fewer placements are inside the home council boundary: 57%, down from 59% in 2018. However, the majority (74%) of children in care were still placed within 20 miles of their family home. As might be expected, location of placement varies by type, children placed for adoption are the most likely to be placed further from home and children in a foster placement are more often nearer. The requirements of the Children's Act 1989 and evidence based best practice guidance, points to the importance of children in care remaining close to their family of origin, their community networks, and their support services, such as schools, leisure groups and health care.

Between 2010 – 2020 within the 24% national increase of children in care, there was also a marked change in age profile of care population. A 25% increase in children aged 10-15 years old and a 39% increase in those aged 16-18 years old. A proportion of those children entered care at a younger age, but there is a growing trend of older children becoming looked after, where exploitation in the community and social, emotional, and mental health vulnerabilities are key factors. It is generally more challenging to find alternative friends and family (kinship) based arrangements and to place older children in foster placements, as they may present with challenging behaviours and risks of violence to themselves or others. This leads to more demand for specialist foster carers and residential care placements. But nationally, supply does not meet demand, between 2010–20, across the country, children's homes only grew by 8%.

78% of residential homes and 41% of fostering places are provided by private agencies and market forces are driving up the cost inflation of these care placements, placing increased pressure on Lewisham's Care and Placement budget. In addition to this national shortfall, the pandemic created additional pressure on the sufficiency of care placements, two notable factors were delays in court proceedings, which meant permanence plans for some children e.g., Progressing to a return home, granting Adoption or Special Guardianship, were subject to

significant delay, children have subsequently remained in care for longer. The second factor related to care providers experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.

More details about the national context can be found in two significant recent national reports, both with a remit of exploring the experience of children in care, care leavers and placement sufficiency. The Competition and Markets Authority, Children's Social Care market study report (2022), into the placements market and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022), a system wide review of the children's help, protection, and care services.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report/final-report>

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230308122820mp_/https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/

Recent and pending practice developments and legislative changes are also anticipated to have an impact on future sufficiency needs, internal developments and commissioning priorities. These include:

- Changes to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for unaccompanied children seeking asylum (UASC)
- The regulation of semi-independent, now named Supported Accommodation for 16-17-years old's, from Autumn 2023
- The pending government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

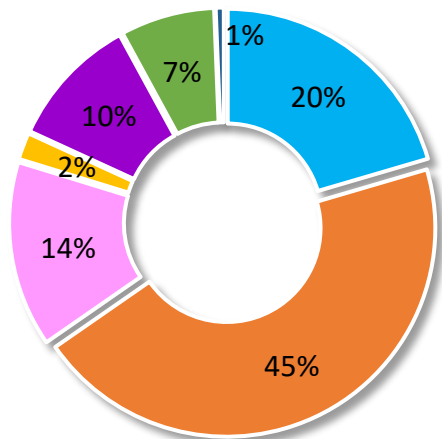
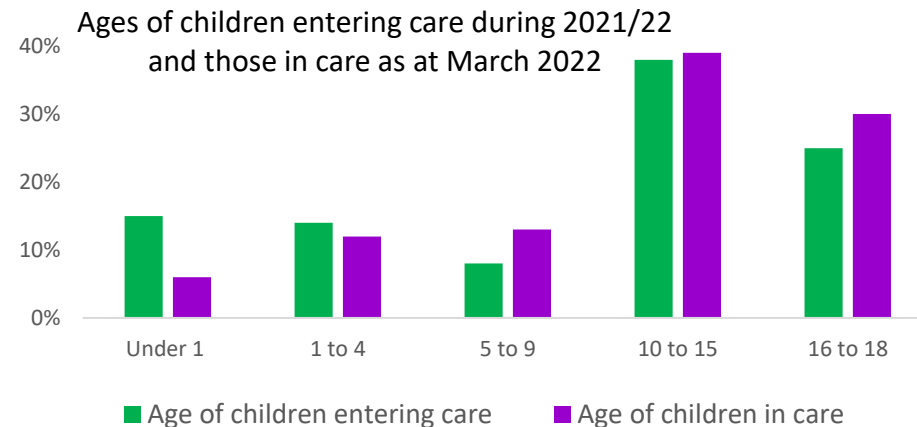
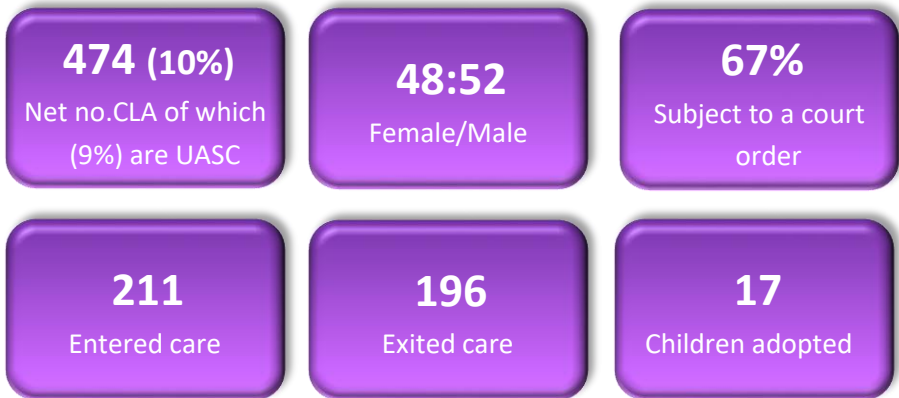
3. The local context and a snapshot of our children in care

Lewisham has a population of 275,885, 53% white and 47% BME. (Census 2011). This is projected to rise to 371,836 by 2050. Lewisham is the 14th largest borough in London by population size and the 6th largest in Inner London.

Approximately 71,132* children under the age of 18 live in Lewisham, this is 23% of the total population in the borough. There are over 170 languages spoken by pupils in Lewisham's schools. The Office of National Statistics predicts an overall decrease in Lewisham's 0-19 population of 0.7% between 2021 and 2025; after this point, it is projected that the population will continue to decrease. However, current projections do not yet factor in, possible increased migration to and from the borough because of the pandemic and changing work patterns.

Lewisham has high levels of poverty, deprivation, and inequality, with many children living below the poverty line in the lead up to the pandemic. The latest research from End Child Poverty shows that 39% of children in Lewisham were living in poverty, after housing costs were considered, between April 2019 and March 2020. This is slightly above the London average (37%).



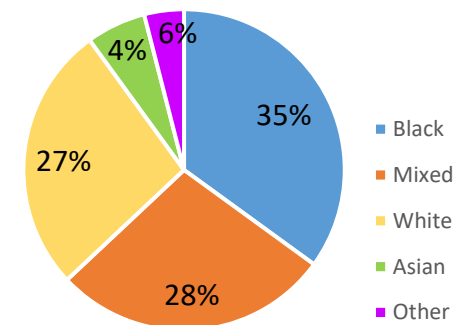


Where our children live

- In house fostering
- Independent fostering
- Kinship care
- Placed with parents
- Residential care
- Semi-independent
- Secure/Prison

Of the children placed in Lewisham:

- 24% are aged under 1
- 27% are aged 1-4
- 32% are aged 5-9
- 28% are aged 10-15
- 36% are aged 16-18



Ethnicity (Dfe Categories)



The vast majority of children under the age of 10 are placed in fostering arrangements, only 4 are in residential settings (placed with parents in assessment centres). 39 children aged between 11 – 18 are in a residential care setting. 33 children aged 16+ are in semi-independent supported housing.

4. Key trends, the national picture compared to Lewisham (2018-2021)

National	Lewisham																		
<p>The overall number of children in care Between March 2018 and March 2021, the number of children in care increased from 75,370 to 80,850. This is a rate of 67 per 10,000 children with the largest annual growth of 2,770 in 2019 with overall increase of 7%. The percentage has decreased each year with only a 1% increase in 2021, although this needs to be considered in the context of the pandemic</p>	<p>Between March 2018 and March 2021, the number of children in care remained stable from 481 to 480. Since 2018 Lewisham has not followed the national trend, but Lewisham has a high net rate of children in care.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr style="background-color: #d9d9d9;"> <th>Date</th> <th>Net no. children in care</th> <th>Rate per 10,000 children.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>End of March 2018</td> <td>481</td> <td>70</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2019</td> <td>487</td> <td>71</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2020</td> <td>472</td> <td>69</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2021</td> <td>482</td> <td>69</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2022</td> <td>480</td> <td>70</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Date	Net no. children in care	Rate per 10,000 children.	End of March 2018	481	70	End of March 2019	487	71	End of March 2020	472	69	End of March 2021	482	69	End of March 2022	480	70
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<p>The number of children entering care During the year (2021) has fallen by 8% compared to last year, to 28,440. This decrease continues the recent trend of the falling numbers of children entering care, from a peak in 2017. Monthly figures comparing 2021 to the 3-year average from 2018 to 2020, show the number of children entering care were consistently lower than we might usually expect, and were particularly low during periods when national lockdowns or restrictions were in place.</p>	<p>Lewisham has followed the national trend that fewer children are entering care. On average 12 children enter care each month.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr style="background-color: #d9d9d9;"> <th>Date</th> <th>Children entering care</th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>End of March 2018</td> <td>251</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2019</td> <td>230*</td> <td><i>*No. Requires validation</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2020</td> <td>218</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2021</td> <td>179</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>End of March 2022</td> <td>218</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Date	Children entering care		End of March 2018	251		End of March 2019	230*	<i>*No. Requires validation</i>	End of March 2020	218		End of March 2021	179		End of March 2022	218	
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Reasons for being in care

Two thirds of children in care have a primary recorded category of need as ‘abuse or neglect’ (31 March 2018 to 2021, England) ‘Family dysfunction’ was the next most common reason then ‘Family in acute stress’. The proportion of children with a primary need of ‘Absent parenting’ has fallen from last year but this is likely due to the decrease in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) who are predominantly looked after due to absent parenting.

In Lewisham in March 2018, 188 (75%) of children had abuse and neglect as the primary reason, by March 2022, this had decreased to 117 children (55%), more children were identified with the primary need of family dysfunction. Absent parenting also increased from 23 children in March 2018 to 50 in March 2022.

The general characteristics of children in care

2018-2021 are similar to previous years:

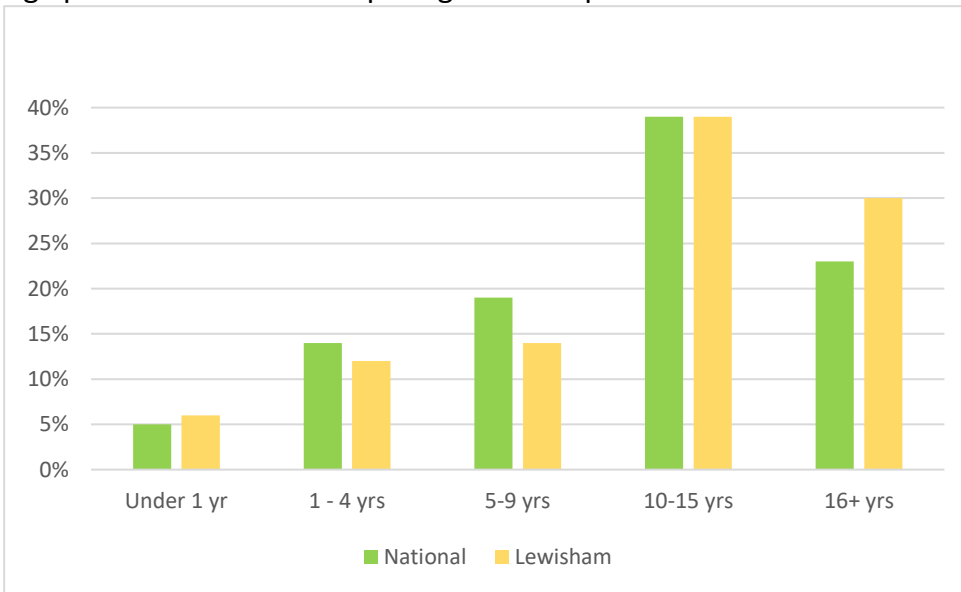
Males 56% Females 44%

Children of white ethnicity account for 75% of children, 10% were Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, 7% Black, African, Caribbean or Black British, 4% were Asian or Asian British, 3% other ethnicities and ethnicities was not known or not yet recorded for 1%.

March 2022: Males 53% Females 47%
There has been a 2 % increase in females since 2018

Children of white ethnicity account for 27% of the care population in March 2022 a small decrease from 30% in 2018. Children of mixed ethnicity has seen the largest increase from 36 to 47%, an increase of 174 to 227 children in March 2022. It is difficult to compare Lewisham to the national picture because of the diversity of the London Region. Lewisham’s ethnic care profile is comparable to other London Boroughs.

Age profile as of 2022 comparing National picture to Lewisham



Comparing 2018 to 2022, the only significant shift in the care population has been children aged between 1-4, an increase of 3% to 12% of the total care population. We believe this reflects a shift in practice to intervene decisively at a younger age when there are significant concerns about safety.

The age profile of the net care population is not the same as the age profile of those entering care. There is a higher proportion of pre-school children that enter care (29% compared to 16% of the overall net care population), largely because with younger children, in most circumstances we are actively assessing parenting and in family courts. The outcome of this may be the child returns home when sufficient safety is established. Then if the child cannot return home, it is easier to identify other permanent options, for younger children to exit care earlier.

<p>Where children in care live (placement type)</p> <p>71% of children in care are placed with an approved foster carer. 15% of this total group are in kinship foster placement, with a relative or friend have increased very slightly up to on the previous years. The overall number of children living with foster carers who are not family or friends, has reduced from 60% in 2018 to 56% in 2021.</p> <p>14% of children in care are living in residential care; secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living accommodation (for example hostels, lodgings or flats where staff are employed to provide support and advice) was 14% in 2021 the same as the previous year.</p> <p>7% are living with parents or other person with parental responsibility. 3% are living with a prospective adopter.</p>	<p>80% of Lewisham children are placed in foster care. In March 2022, 382 children (80%) lived with approved foster carers. This represents a small but steady increase since March 2018 from 367 children (76%).</p> <p>17% of children are living with approved family and friend carer, which has more than doubled from 8% (No.30) since March 2018.</p> <p>17% of children are living in various categories of residential care; with 10%, (No.50) living in children's homes and 7% (No.35) in semi-independent/supported accommodation.</p> <p>3% are living at home with parents, compared to 1% in 2018. 6 (1%) of children were living placed for adoption in 2018 compared to 1 child in March 2022.</p>
<p>Where children in care live (geographical location)</p> <p>57% of children are placed within the same County/Borough as their family home, down from 59% in 2018.</p> <p>74% of children are placed within 20 miles of their family home. As might be expected, location of placement varies by type of placement - children placed for adoption are the most likely to be placed over 20 miles from home and children placed with parents or in a foster placement are most likely to be placed 20 miles or less from home.</p>	<p>More children were living within the borough in March 2022 compared to March 2018.</p> <p>36% of Lewisham placements are inside the council boundary, an increase of 4% from 2018. This could in part be attributed to the increase of children living with family and friends approved carers who are more likely to live locally. London Boroughs has higher % of children placed outside their Borough; our rate is comparable. 82% are placed within 20 miles of their family home, a 2% increase since 2018.</p>
<p>Placement stability</p> <p>Nationally 7 in 10 children had one placement in the year - this is slightly higher than the previous year, but it is likely that the restrictions during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic reduced the number of placement moves. 1 in 11 children had 3 or more placements, a slight decrease on previous years.</p>	<p>Of children under 16 children in care for 2.5 years or more, who have been in the same placement for at least 2 years, in the last 3 years, Lewisham has seen an improvement in long term stability with an increase from 68% in 20/21 to 75% in 21/22. Conversely, there has been a decline in the stability of short-term placements. Children who have had 3 or more placement moves was 8% in 20/21, increasing to 10% in 21/22, with a peak at 13.5 % in April 2022. This reflects the growing complexity of need and with children 10 years and older entering care, where it is</p>

	<p>becoming harder to find the right placement, at the right time to meet their assessed needs.</p>
<p>Reasons for ceasing to be in care</p> <p>The number of children exiting care during the year was down by 6% on last year and is at the lowest point since 2012. Numbers dropped during the first national lockdown in April-July 2020, but then recovered from September onwards to the levels we would expect.</p> <p>The most common reason for children to leave care is to return home to their parents. Other common reasons for leaving care include moving into independent living with supportive accommodation, leaving as the subject of a special guardianship order or through adoption.</p> <p>The average duration of the period of care has been increasing slightly over recent years and has increased by a further 79 days in 2021 compared to 2020. This could have been influenced by court delays during the pandemic meaning some children were in placements longer than they might have been previously. In 2018, 35% of children left care within 6 months, in 2021 this decreased had to 25%.</p>	<p>In March 2018, 226 children (33%) left care and this % has remained similar since. The most common reason for children to leave care is to return home to their parents followed by leaving care to live independently.</p> <p>The average duration of the period of care has reduced. The average number of days in care was 106 days in 2018 which then reduced by 27% in 2019 to 77 days and has continued to decrease to 80 days in 2021 and this trajectory continues with a further 9% reduction in 2022. The exception was an increase during 2020, where Lewisham saw an increase in duration to 117 days which could be attributed to the pandemic complicating delays of securing out of care orders and reunification plans</p>

5. Listening to the voices of our key stakeholders

WHAT OUR PLACEMENT PROVIDERS SHARED

To inform our strategy we set up a forum to start a dialogue with placement providers. The first engagement session was held in July 2022, where we asked for feedback about how to develop the best working relationships. They said the benefits of meeting together...

- *develops relationships to help achieve a common goal of supporting children and young people in care e.g., working together for early planning & placement stability*
- *enables keeping abreast and up to date information about Lewisham, our profile of children and their needs.*
- *better understanding of Lewisham's practice model and our respective challenges. E.g., staffing in residential care.*
- *stimulates creative collaborative thinking to develop options to support and develop the local market.*
- *gains a better understanding of local provision, the wider market and supports strategic planning for the local & national offer for Lewisham's children.*

Providers also reinforced the importance of...

- *Easy access to social care staff and options when current workers not available,*
- *Having the placements team as pivotal point of contact, which they reported as a positive experience in Lewisham.*
- *The use of multiple communication methods, not only using email, referral forms and portals. Strong consensus from providers about the value of regular telephone calls and meetings about children currently being cared for and planning for future needs*

WHAT OUR FOSTER CARERS FEED BACK

Overall foster carers feedback they feel supported, appreciated and they have great pride in working for Lewisham.

They have felt well communicated with throughout the pandemic and have embraced the use of whatsapp groups and video conferencing.

Carer appreciate their relationships with their supervising social workers and the skills of their supervising social workers are improving.

They are very positive about the training offer and the quality of the trainers.

There are mixed views about the group support sessions, with most feeling these work better when they are smaller and have skilled facilitation.

Knowledge of the procedures is good, but carers do feel vulnerable to allegations.

There is a strong consensus, although the financial policy is clear, but there are often delays in getting payments and difficulties in getting these resolved.

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

IROs have supported the drive to improve permanency planning for children in care by monitoring and escalating issues of delay. This is also supported through IRO attendance at the recently established permanency tracking panel.

Over 90% of Looked After Review meetings were held within timescale, with children and young people participating. 177 escalations and alerts were raised through 2021-2022, including late reports, delays in planning and permanence, concerns about a child's vulnerability, payments to carers, transfers between services and allocation of personal advisers.

Advocacy services are commissioned with NYAS who received approximately 79 issues-based requests for advocacy. The main issues referred for advocacy services are support in meetings; placement moves; placement issues; access to services and relationships with social workers and Pathway Planning.

WHAT OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US



The voices of care experienced children need to be strongly heard and Lewisham aims to improve the mechanisms to regularly involve them in the decision making and delivery of its responsibilities as a Corporate Parent. This is a summary of key points following consultation with the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum; Elevation, which have contributed the development of this strategy.

- *More to prepare you for life and moving on, this is all part of sufficiency in its broadest sense, quality also comes from helping make the most of your home life and planning for the future.*
- *You want someone to comment when you walk in the door, see you, take notice and take an interest, if you've had a good or bad day.*
- *More support with cultural needs to support my religion and food choices, carers and staff learn about these things.*
- *Social workers need more time and say 'I need to ask my manager' less.*
- *The problem with placements / homes is that they are all temporary, you know you will leave even if it is long term. You don't choose when to leave, you are told when you will leave, pressure to move on bid for properties etc. The difference, for most, not all, children and young adults who live with parent/s is they can go back when they want.*
- *Foster carers – It's important that they sort out their own issues first, how can they help us with our trauma and loss when they still have their own going on? They need to want to look after children, not just the money they get from us. Foster care felt like to was never my home, can't just come in, kick off your shoes and flop on the sofa, can't just go to the fridge and help yourself.*
- *In children's homes – The importance of shifts being published in advance so you know who is working and when, who you may want to do things with some people, like go shopping and most importantly, who you will wake up to. They will take all young people always, because they get paid so much money, they aren't going to say no, then when they have had enough, and they move you out.*
- *Children to be more involved in services, e.g., leaving care ambassadors, young people seek the views of children for reviews etc. Care leavers need to be invited to seek the feedback from children in homes, children will talk to them more freely. A young inspectors program. Children need to co-produce and run the preparation/independence work starting young and building up over time*
- *Delete the words... 'placement' and 'respite', to something warmer, more heartfelt. Call it 'my home'; Foster home, Children's/Young person's home. Home means...somewhere where you feel comfortable and safe. Creating good memories, feeling loved, not made to feel different, treated same as their (carers) own kids e.g., Same money on clothes, presents etc going on holiday together. Being part of the whole family, that means the extended family as well. No respite unless its natural with family / friends you like and know.*

6. The cost of care

The mode costs of care placements; the most commonly occurring cost of placement type, and the average costs, which is the total cost divided by the number of children for comparison are considered.

Cost of placements 2020-2021

Placement type	No of children	Mode cost - per week	Average cost – per week
Fostering (In house)	167	£438	£440
Semi Independence (18+)	86	£355	£956
Semi Independence	62	£1,120	£1,517
IFA	212	£726	£963
Residential	57	£3,200	£4,279
Supported Lodgings	8	£250	£240
Placed with Family & Friends	19	£144	£978

When calculating considering costs, there are always a small number of children, due to complexity of need, where weekly costs will be significantly higher than the most commonly occurring. For example, during 2022 one of the the most expensive bespoke designed care placements was £17,993 per week. One expensive care placement will affect the average cost and does not always provide a helpful understanding of the usual expenditure spent across each sector.

Foster care costs, comparing in house with commissioned carers

Fostering in house, direct costs only	£629 per week	Fostering in house, including wider non-direct costs (estimate)	£800 per week	Independent Fostering Agency charge	£825 per week
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In calculating the costs to deliver in house foster care placements, this has been completed with direct and indirectly associated costs, and we conclude that the level of expenditure is roughly equal for a Lewisham foster care placement and an IFA, considering all the wider costs associated with running a Local Authority fostering service. Factors which affect an average calculation are ‘parent and child together’ foster care placements. These are frequently used for parents with babies, who are subject to court proceedings, to manage high levels of risk whilst keeping the parent/s and child together to be assessed. These are currently not available within Lewisham fostering resources and additionally there are more children and young people with higher levels of complexity living with IFA carers.

7. This is my Home, *our placement sufficiency strategy ambitions.*

Taking all the information, data, and feedback into account, we have eight ambitions to meet our placement and housing sufficiency duty for the children and care experienced young adults in Lewisham. The following pages summarise the actions we will taking to deliver on these ambitions.

Prevention

Keep more children and young people safely at home with their families and avoid the need to come into or stay in care unnecessarily.

Permanence Planning

Early and timely permanence planning, so that children and young people only remain in care for as long as they need to and have the security of knowing where they will live and who will be looking after them.

Family & Friends Care

When children and young people cannot remain safely living at home. Support more of them to be able to live within their own extended network of family and friends.

Foster Carers & Supported Lodgings

Increase the pool and diversity of in-house local foster carers, so more children and young people in care can live in stable family-based alternatives, that help keep them connected to their important contacts and communities.

Placement planning & stability

Improve placement matching, to provide CYP in care the best placement options to meet their needs, keep them safe, and provide them with stability and opportunities to reach their potential.

Commissioned Placements

Commission a broad range of regulated placements, which are of good quality and offer value for money to Lewisham.

Home Care Leaver & UASC Accommodation

Develop a continuum of suitable local supported and independent housing options for care leavers to meet a broad range of needs. Ensuring timely transitions and securing tenancies that offer long term stability.

Systems & Data

Develop efficient systems & processes to: (a) support best practice, (b) minimise bureaucracy, (c) provide reliable performance data and (d) support strong financial management.

Prevention

Where we are now: A key element of the Children’s Social Care (CSC) improvement programme has been to strengthen support for the most vulnerable children, on the edge of entering care. In 2019 we introduced the Signs of Safety practice framework, emphasising the significance of relationships in facilitating change, taking a strength-based approach to managing risk and promoting the development of safety and belonging through the child’s natural network of family and friends. Then through 2021, we started realigning existing services, to be more targeted towards those subject to Child Protection Plans and in court proceedings with the aim of supporting more children to stay safely with their families and avoiding the need to be, or stay, in care. Through 2021/22 we transitioned from buying in family support services, to delivering ‘in house’ support by expanding and diversifying our existing Meliot Family Centre. The cumulative effect of all this activity is beginning to be seen, with half the number of court proceedings being issued and less children entering care than in previous years. We are ambitious to deliver a broad range of intensive, therapeutic, agile, and tailored interventions and will continue building these ‘edge of care’ prevention services under the umbrella of this strategy.

Key challenges: Risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and engagement in community-based violence are a common feature for a number of adolescents entering care. Lewisham’s approach to extra-familial risk was reviewed during 2021/22, the Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership has introduced new MACE procedures, CSC now has a small dedicated missing team, the Exploitation Strategy is being refreshed and plans are in place to develop a multi-agency adolescent service, to strengthen our approach to keep more older children safely at home.

Our ambition

Keep more children and young people safely at home with their families and avoid the need to come into or stay in care unnecessarily.

- 1.1 Implement Joint Protocol between Children’s Social Care & Housing Departments and strengthen the housing pathways to better support homeless 16/17 yr olds.
- 1.2 Explore the best ways to better utilise creative short break and respite care arrangements, to support families in crisis and avoid the need for full time care.
- 1.3 Work with partners to refresh and implement the Local Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Exploitation Strategy, to strengthen safety of young people from harm in the community.

Measures of success:

*Maintainence of low court proceedings no/rates.
Reduced CYP entering care to be comparable with London.
Reduced rate of CLA (Per 10,000 Lewisham child popn.)
Reduced % of CYP in care for less than 6 months.*

- 1.4 Introduce Public Law Outline working group recommendations, to support diverting children from needing to come into care.
- 1.5 Work with Police and Youth Offending Service to reduce any unnecessary demand on Welfare Secure placements & DOL’s orders.
- 1.6 Develop the CSC Safe Space team into a multi-professional Adolescent Service, bringing together a range of services to support young people exposed to criminal and sexual exploitation.

Permanence Planning

Where we are now: Through 2021, we strengthened scrutiny of early permanence, this included introducing senior management oversight panels, to routinely review placement and permanence plans. We have reduced the time some children spend in care, by formalising permanent arrangements more promptly. In 2021/22, more children (No.28) left care to go into special guardianship arrangements, 37% of those who left care returned to live with family, 7% more than the previous year and more children were formally matched with a long-term foster carer. Lewisham are members of the Adopt London South (ALS), the Regional Adoption Agency formed in 2019, who recruit and identify families for children whose permanence care plan is adoption, and we have a dedicated permanence lead officer who is our key link with ALS.

Key challenges: With better early planning and access to a broader spectrum of foster care, more children could be provided with the emotional security of permanent care more quickly. We know that there are challenges in timely identification of adopters, especially for those children who are harder to place e.g., children with complex disabilities.

Our ambition

Early, timely permanence planning, so that children and young people only remain in care for as long as they need to and have the security of knowing where they will live and who will be looking after them.

Measures of success:

Reduced length of court proceedings as near to 26 weeks.

Reduced % CYP in long-term fostering placements.

100% CYP to have permanence plan agreed by 2nd CLA Review. CYP returning home, to be matched with permanent carers within 12 months of that permanence plan being confirmed.

2.1 Proactively work with local judiciary and CAFCASS to reduce delays in court, through the established relationships in the South London Care Proceedings Partnership Project.

2.2 Embed Permanence Tracking and Family & Friends Panels to quality assure permanence and care plans.

2.3 Proactively engage with the Regional Adoption Agency (ALS), to ensure there is timely adoption planning and matching.

2.4 IRO's have a stronger focus on permanence planning and utilise the alerts process to promptly highlight any drift and/or delay.

2.5 Extend the Edge of Care/Family Support Service at Meliot to provide rehabilitation home offer.

2.6 In accordance with the child's needs, routinely explore family reunification permanence plan options.

Family & Friends Care

Where we are now: After introducing the Signs of Safety Practice framework in 2020, we have been developing our practice to identify and engage extended family in safety and care planning at an earlier stage, with the aim of enabling more children to be in kinship care arrangements if they cannot remain safe at home. Through 2021, we also reviewed the way we monitor our temporary Regulation 24 & 25¹ connected care arrangements. We expanded our Special Guardianship Team with a view to increasing support for kinship carers and special guardians (SG). SGs are now assisted by a financial policy and an SG support plan delivered through a dedicated team, (in accordance with SG Regulations 2015). In 2021/22, more children are living with an approved connected carer, up from 38 in 2020/21 to 69 in 2021/22.

Key challenges: By providing the right amount and type of help families need, more children could remain in, or be cared for in their own kinship friends and family networks, on a long term basis.

3. Ambition

When children and young people cannot remain safely living at home. Support more of them to be able to live within their own extended network of family and friends.

3.1 Engage families at the earliest point, increasing Family Network Meetings &/or FGCs to improve kinship care planning for more children to have the opportunity to live with approved and supported kinship carers from their own network

3.2 Promote Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Order support package offer to carers, to incentivise more families to take up permanent care arrangements.

Measures of success:

Increased no. of CYP placed with family/friends in SGO or CAO arrangements.

Reduced length of time CYP remain in unregulated Reg 24/25 placements.

3.3 Refresh policies, procedures, and monitoring panel to streamline local process for supporting, regulating, and formalising Reg 24/25 family/friends care arrangements.

3.4 Review resources in SG Service to ensure sufficient capacity to assess and support a wider range of family/friends care arrangements.

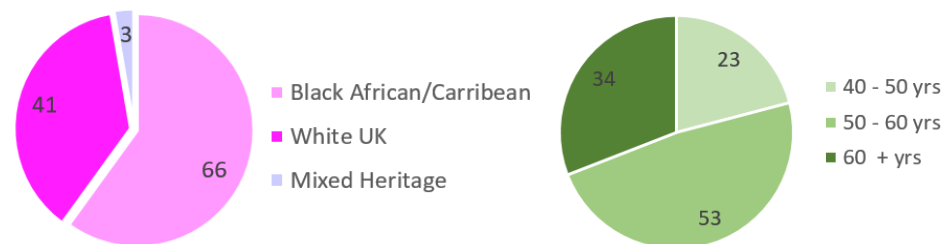
¹ Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

Foster Carers & Supported Lodgings

Where we are now:

Lewisham has more than the national average of children looked after in foster care placements. At the end of 2021/22 Lewisham had a total of 76 fostering households, offering a total of 143 placements with minimal voids. There were 6 new approvals and an attrition rate of 12 per year. 3 new supported lodgings households, offering 3 new placements were approved. Demographic profile of carer group is represented in the charts.

There are 53 households within the Lewisham boundary and 29 outside of the local authority area.



Key challenges: As January 2022, only 30% of children in foster care were living with Lewisham ‘in house’ carers, compared to statistical neighbours at 42%, and lower than the UK average of 48%. Of that 30%, 23% were placed with mainstream Council registered foster carers, 7% are kinship care arrangements and therefore only approved to care for a particular child/ren. Furthermore, there is no longer a regular out of hours Emergency Carer system. Lewisham is too heavily reliant on the independent fostering agency (IFA) sector, IFA placements are marginally more expensive, placing some increased pressures on Council budgets, more significantly there is a higher likelihood of children being placed at a distance, IFA placements can tend to be less connected to the Local Authority care planning and offer less flexibility than carers who are managed internally. The Lewisham foster carer age demographic is typical of the national picture, with a considerable number of households in the older age category. The need to introduce new households to replace families when they choose to retire from fostering is needed as the fostering community ages. Ensuring all suitable fostering enquiries convert to households who can care for children. The current average UK conversion rate for Local Authority carers averages at 7% and Lewisham report similar averages. Our internal systems and fostering service seek to improve recruitment, approvals, and retention of quality carers, maximize existing carers availability and capacity to care for children and young people with more complex needs and oversee strong void management.

Our ambition

Increase the pool and diversity of in-house local foster carers, so more children and young people in care can live in stable family-based alternatives, that help keep them connected to their important contacts and communities.

Measures of success:

Maintain >75% of CYP in care live in a foster home.
 50% of CYP placed with Lewisham foster carers.
 Increase net no. of in-house Lewisham carers.
 Reduced time between referral to approval and lower attrition rate.
 90% Carer Annual Reviews held on time & with outcome achieved.
 No unapproved voids on in-house fostering/Supported Lodgings.

4.1 Refresh fostering recruitment and retention strategy, informed by market research, intelligent local needs analysis and accurate placement unit costs. Develop distinctive and targeted identity to support campaigns, including re-launching referral scheme reward and better utilising existing carer testimony, social networks, and connections to promote Lewisham as an employer of choice.

4.2 Employ Lewisham foster carers to support the recruitment and retention of new and existing carers

4.3 Offer Care Leaver apprenticeship opportunities to support the recruitment and retention of new and existing carers

4.4 Develop a dedicated pool of emergency foster carers available for finding children a home out of office hours, to reduce any delays and avoid children needing to wait in offices e.g. police stations for long periods.

4.5 Explore maximisation of in-house fostering & supported lodgings providers (SLP) through expanding existing carer capacity, to care for more children. Including encouraging SLP's to be foster carer and to consider the financial benefits of home modifications.

4.6 Strengthen training and support offer to carers, to enable more complex children to be placed in foster care, reduce placement breakdown, and improve retention. Evaluate models such as Mockingbird and family intervention, introduction of therapeutic fostering schemes and maximize use the Bromley Road facility as a foster carer support base.

4.7 Review staffing and streamline ways of working to ensure sufficient capacity and capability to quickly turnaround referrals to assessment, support, and review of carers.

4.8 Explore the feasibility of establishing a pool of 'Fostering for Permanence' carers, for more options for long term foster care permanence plans.

4.9 Explore and evaluate models for part time and shared care arrangements with step up/down options, e.g., whole family fostering, integrated models of residential and fostering.

4.10 Ensure that feedback from our children in care and care experienced young adults helps to inform the development of foster care placements

Placement Planning & Stability

Where we are now: The children's placements team find care placements for Lewisham's Looked After children and young people, prioritising families as the preferred placement option. All referrals will be considered for an in house foster care placement, before referring children to the independent sector. Delays are avoided, and for many children, parallel searches are undertaken. Too many placement searches are requested with short time scales, which can limit the opportunities to find the best matched placement. Despite these challenges, most children are found a placement at the point of need. We have seen an improvement in long term placement stability, but there has been a decline in the stability of short-term placements and practice to minimise breakdown needs to be strengthened.

Key challenges: Due to the limited availability of placements Nationally, children are not always in best matched placement and are frequently placed where there is availability. This is especially the experience for older children with complex needs and large sibling groups. The growing complexity of need for children 10 years and older entering care, means it is becoming harder to find the right placement, at the right time to meet their assessed needs. In exceptional circumstances, arrangements to procure a bespoke unregulated placement is necessary. This is exacerbated when children enter or move placements in an unplanned way, often following a crisis at home or a placement breakdown. These situations are not always predictable, but we can do more to minimise placement breakdown, by planning collaboratively with carers/providers at the early stage of placement, improving communication and identifying placement fragility sooner and mobilising a multi-agency intervention of the team around the child. There is also more that we can do to better match children to placements which would be assisted by better development of foster carers and children's homes profiles.

Our ambition

Improve placement matching, to provide children and young people in care the best placement options to meet their needs, keep them safe, and provide them with stability and opportunities to reach their potential.

5.1 Introduce policy and best practice guidance to strengthen outcome focused placement planning and placement stability management. Children's needs are fully understood, and placements matched accordingly, with more options and children involved in choosing where to live.

Measures of success:

Good placement stability indicators maintained.

Increased % of planned placement moves.

Improved quality Placement Profiles to support better matching.

90% of placement planning meetings held on time and increase no. of stability meetings where required.

Reduced IRO alerts associated with placement plans.

5.5 Work with Health to explore placement and support options for children who require mental health and behavioural support on discharge from, or alternatives to hospital.

5.2 Refresh the placement matching tool to address how any gaps in meeting a child's identified needs will be met

5.3 Provide children and carers/care providers with more explicit preventative support at initial stages , to minimize placement breakdown and unplanned placement moves

5.6 Develop framework and systematic, collaborative ways of working for placement requests, searching, and matching.

5.6 Work with YOS and Probation, to review placement planning and funding arrangements for children in care and care leavers released from custody with complex packages of support.

5.7 Strengthen practice and notifications for children placed out of borough, to ensure they are not disadvantaged by distance from home and have access to all necessary services.

5.8 Improve early collaborative planning for children who have SEN and/or an EHCP, especially where education provision needs to be part of the placement package.

Commissioned Placements

Where we are now: Lewisham has historically procured IFA and residential care placements from the London Care Service Register, where costs have been held with minimal increases. But there has been a reduction in the number of providers on the register and a decline in the number of Local Authority subscribers. Lewisham is also a member of the South London Commissioning Partnership (SLCP), hosted by the London Borough of Croydon, this aims to achieve better commissioning outcomes through joint procurement and contracting practices.

While we aspire to support our children to live in family-based care, for some older children, semi supported accommodation is a good option as they approach independence. In January 2019, Lewisham carried out a competitive procurement process jointly with the Royal Borough of Greenwich to commission a framework contract. Lewisham is the lead borough in this partnership and contracts were entered into with a range of providers for semi-independent accommodation and support. Since the introduction of the framework, between 2019 – 2020, 121 placements have been made. 50 for care leavers, 66 for children looked after and 5 for homeless 16/17-year-olds supported as ‘children in need’. As of August 2020, Lewisham had 45 children looked after and 72 care leavers living in semi-independent accommodation procured through this framework.

Key challenges: Ensuring that children and young people consistently receive care which meets their changing needs and improves their outcomes, is a responsibility Lewisham takes very seriously. Care placements are quality assured by social workers, personal advisers, managers, and independent reviewing officers, but our internal quality assurance processes need to be strengthened and managed centrally by a placements service with a broader remit. Sufficient staffing levels and stronger management oversight in the placements team is needed to consistently provide a proactive service with robust quality assurance of external care placements and routine monitoring of impact and value.

Our experience of the SLCP framework in terms of quality assurance and cost is variable and we are too frequently spot purchasing placements. Croydon will cease to host the partnership in March 2023 and the future of this arrangement is uncertain. The framework with Royal Borough of Greenwich was extended to allow time to transition to an alternative, this comes to an end in April 2023. In addition, National Standards are being introduced from Autumn 2022, requiring all provision of semi-independent accommodation for 16/17-year-olds to be OFSTED regulated.

Lewisham has no in house residential provision and is entirely reliant on the private sector for these placements. There is increasing competition for limited places and market forces are driving up the costs. With Lewisham’s high rate of children in care, we are particularly vulnerable to the impact of the national position, in terms of both good placement choices and increased budget pressures. We are finding it increasingly challenging to find providers willing to accept some of our most traumatised children, leading to increasing numbers of children being temporarily placed in unregulated provision. Budget pressures are further compounded by an absence of a mechanism to agree joint funding of complex placements across Children’s Social Care, Education and Health services.

Alternative regional commissioning arrangements are being explored as a key part of this strategy, to better position us to influence and manage the market and to provide Lewisham with a broader range of placement options, to best meet the needs of our children.

Our ambition

Commission a broad range of regulated placements, which are of good quality and offer value for money to Lewisham.

- 6.1** Review our existing commissioning arrangements and become a member of the Commissioning Alliance, (regional body of Local Authorities, procuring placements through the Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle). To deliver better value for money, stronger quality assurance, reduce reliance on spot purchasing and re-position Lewisham to influence the provider market.
- 6.2** Scope in house parent and child residential provision so families can benefit from a seamless residential and community-based assessment delivered by Lewisham and opportunities to make these resources available to other authorities presenting an opportunity to generate income.
- 6.3** Establish joint funding protocol and panel for shared cost of complex placements. Agree funding approach with CCG, Education and Adults Social Care
- 6.4** Embed provider forums, to improve partnership working with placement providers, and ensure feedback from our children in care and care experienced young adults contributes to placement provision, benchmarking costs and exercising more influence on the local market.
- 6.5** Explore partnerships with trusted external providers to establish pro-active procurement e.g., preferred providers, block contracts at reduced costs.

Measures of success:

Reduced average costs of IFA placements
Reduced average costs of Residential Placements
Increased placement options (type) for CYP.
Increase in-house placement capacity.
100% correct payments to providers without delay

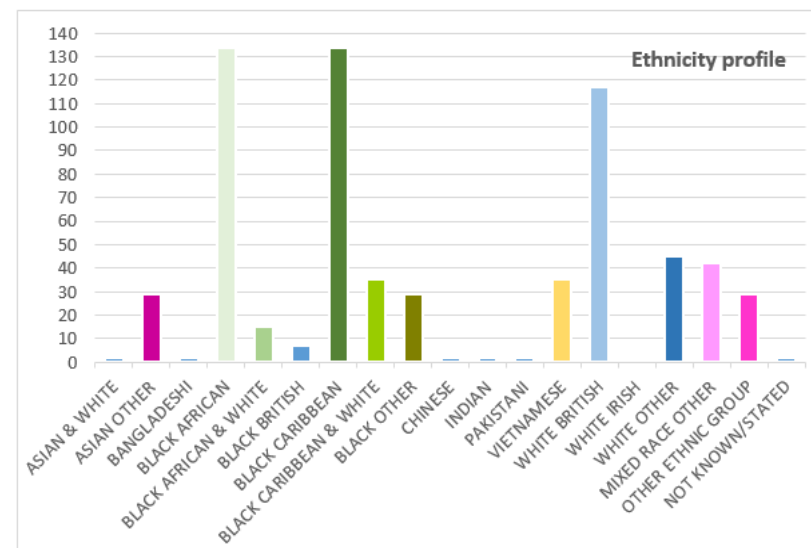
- 6.6** Improve joined up working across Children's Services for commissioned placements, with strong focus on quality assurance to ensure providers keep children safe, stable, and supported showing improved outcomes linked to care and pathway plans. Ensure brokerage and monitoring is aligned to commissioning priorities to achieve effective market stewardship.
- 6.7** Strengthen processes and practice for ensuring safety and quality of care of children in unregulated placements, especially those subject to Deprivation of Liberty Orders.
- 6.8** Re-align Placements Team staffing structure to provide improved service, with clearly identified responsibilities.
- 6.9** Enter commissioning partnerships with external provider to re-purpose Northover and Amersham buildings for additional semi-independent accommodation for 16- and 17-years old children looked after and care leaver accommodation.
- 6.10** Explore options for developing Lewisham 'in house' bespoke regulated residential provision for hard to place children. E.g., children discharged from Tier 4 psychiatric hospital settings and increase opportunities for solo provision and an emergency residential bed.
- 6.11** Strengthen the decision making, tracking, and reviewing mechanisms for 'additional' services on top of core placement costs, as part of stronger contract management.

Housing for care leavers and unaccompanied children seeking asylum (UASC)

Where we are now: To support care leavers to be best prepared for independence through 2020-21, Lewisham made significant improvements to the range of accommodation available. Through stronger contract management and the development of an internal pathway, we are now able to offer a spectrum of flexible, tailored supported housing to match individual need, which includes Staying Put and Supported Lodgings. These options act as a stepping stone before young adults are ready to secure their own tenancy. Arrangements are also in place to move onto independent social housing without delay.

Lewisham is a Borough of Sanctuary and has a proud history of being an open and welcoming borough, supporting refugees and migrants. We remain on the pan London distribution rota, to care for UASC at 0.01 % of the total child population. In August 2022, changes to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) increased the requirement for all Local Authorities to care for 0.1% of their total child population. For Lewisham this is an increase from 47 UASC children to 64 (u18). UASC and former UASC are provided with homes and care in range of provision with specialist accommodation tailored to meet their needs. We monitor demographic changes to ensure effective resource planning is in place. We anticipate the need for care leaver accommodation to increase for children who arrive as UASC because the 'Prevent' aims of this strategy has minor impact on this group and there are fewer opportunities for reunification with family. For care leavers who arrived as UASC and who have unresolved immigration status and no recourse to public funds, Lewisham funds accommodation and subsistence until this is resolved and/or they reach their 25th birthday.

Key challenges: We have analysed our last 3 years care trends to forecast future need for care leaver housing. In the period 2017-19 there was a small rise in children entering care aged 14-17 year and 18-year-olds leaving care. However, since then with our focus on prevention, numbers have stabilised. Care leaver numbers are anticipated to continue increasing until 2025 before the impact of more recent practice is seen. Therefore, we will have increased need for placements for UASC children in care and care leavers through the period of this strategy.



Our ambition

Develop a continuum of suitable local supported and independent housing options for care leavers to meet a broad range of needs. Ensuring timely transitions and securing tenancies that offer long term stability.

7.1 Improve commissioning arrangements for semi-independent Care Leaver accommodation

7.2 Working with Housing to introduce refreshed process for social housing nomination and strengthen tenancy support, for independent living.

7.3 Ensure the 35 existing ring-fenced housing pathway places are fully utilised and add 30 further pathway places by re-purposing Northover Rd (x8 units) and Breakspears Rd properties (9x units) as in-house provision and through Supported Lodgings, for care leavers requiring higher level support.

7.4 Introduce transitions panel providing a multi-disciplinary forum, which includes Adults Social Care, to review the transition plans for children in care approaching 18 and supports smooth transition across services, signposts and ensures accommodation plan is clear.

7.5 Working with housing to negotiate social housing opportunities for care leavers living out of Lewisham borough

Measures of success

95% or more Care Leavers are in suitable accommodation.

Reduced average cost of accommodation.

Prompt assignment of social housing & move on.

Improved transition planning to adults' services.

Increased tenancy stability.

Fewer accommodation related complaints received

Increase in number of Care Leavers Staying Put.

7.6 Improve use of training flats and develop effective independence support programmes.

7.7 Embed dedicated Housing Co-ordinator in Care Leaver Service to better match Care Leavers to suitable accommodation, manage prompt move on and minimise voids.

7.8 Improve placement planning and tracking of Staying Put arrangements, including commissioned IFA placements with funding agreement set at onset.

7.9 Expand partnerships with external providers (e.g., QVT) to develop local provision for UASC (e.g., Sydenham Rd, Dunfield Rd, Manor Rd, Northover).

7.10 Pilot the Bench Housing First Model which adopting the principles outlined in Housing First England.

Systems, Processes & Data

Where we are now and key challenges: A key part of the Children's Social Care improvement programme since 2019, has been to improve the infrastructure, streamlining systems and processes to be more efficient, provide the necessary tools for management, inform service planning and better support practice. A series of projects to review and re-design case recording (LCS), performance data, financial and administrative systems have been underway, under the umbrella of this strategy we are addressing these issues with a specific focus on care and placements.

Our ambition

Develop efficient systems & processes to support best practice, minimise bureaucracy, provide reliable performance data and support strong financial management.

- 8.1** Improve placement and accommodation recording and monitoring/tracking systems.
- 8.2** Redesign LCS - Fostering, Adoption and Connected Carers modules. Placement (PIR & PUARF) formats and Care Leaver accommodation types, to capture practice & key data.
- 8.3** Develop performance frameworks and accessible, reliable performance reporting.
- 8.4** Ensure the key ICT systems: LCS, ContrOCC and Oracle are aligned with placement codes and costs.
- 8.5** Explore implementation of Care Alliance Provider Portal, Care Place to create efficiencies in processing commissioned placement payments.
- 8.6** Set out accurate and detailed unit costs for all key placement and care leaver accommodation types, to enable accurate financial planning and forecasting.

Measures of success:

Accurate finance & performance reports are in place to providing reliable data for service development.
Reduced drift and delay in placement transitions.
Fewer complaints received re: late provider payments.
Accurate Year End spend forecasts.

- 8.7** Ensure robust mechanisms are in place for strategic recharging of split placement costs.
- 8.8** Review payments systems (ContrOCC/ LCS/ ORACLE) to ensure systems are aligned and there are no payment delays to carers and providers.
- 8.9** Ensure robust mechanisms are in place for claiming UASC Home Office funding.
- 8.10** Establish robust mechanisms to ensure Housing Benefit is claimed wherever Care Leavers are eligible.
- 8.11** Workforce development offer to include training and guidance aimed at improving practice in the planning of placement, permanence, and care.
- 8.12** Update all associated policies, procedures, and practice standards/guidance to support new ways of working.

Appendix.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Lewisham pledge, our ambitions for improving the care experience of our children and young people.

Our pledge sets out in six key ambitions, how we intend to make sure our care experienced children and young people have a positive care experience, and we make a bigger difference in their lives, both now and in the future.

WE ARE PROUD PARENTS

1. Committed to Corporate Parenting
2. Promoting Inclusivity and diversity
3. Living in a safe and caring community
4. Improving our care and pathway planning

THIS IS MY HOME

5. Knowing where I will grow up
6. Receiving good quality care
7. Staying in the same place
8. Feeling safe and secure in my home

HEALTHY & WELL

9. Being fit and well
10. Feeling happy and hopeful
11. Having hobbies and interests
12. Keeping connected to people that matter

HAVING A VOICE

13. Making a difference
14. Listening to my experience
15. My care & pathway plan
16. Helping to grow good social work

ASPIRATIONS & AMBITIONS

17. Reaching my potential
18. Being the best version of myself
19. Getting involved and having fun
20. Skills for work

BEING INDEPENDENT

21. Managing my money
22. Ready to look after myself
23. Knowing where to get advice and help
24. Having access to the right services