



**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE  
LEAVERS**

**PLACEMENT COMMISSIONING  
STRATEGY**

**2014 - 2017**

## **CONTENTS**

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>.....3</b>
<b>2. The Legal Context</b>	<b>.....3</b>
<b>3. Local Context for Children’s Services</b>	<b>.....5</b>
<b>4. Local Context for Looked After Children</b>	<b>.....6</b>
<b>5. Placement Analysis of Looked After Children</b>	<b>.....9</b>
<b>6. Current Accommodation Provision</b>	<b>.....10</b>
<b>7. Ongoing Actions/Commissioning Priorities</b>	<b>.....14</b>

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Commissioning Strategy provides an update to the original strategy document dated 2012 – 2015. It includes key information regarding the profile of looked after children in Southampton and the range of accommodation currently provided. The strategy included actions which are underway in order to demonstrate how the City aims to increase the range and choice of accommodation to meet the presenting needs of the children looked after population now and over the forthcoming 3 years. Whilst the information in the 2012 - 2015 strategy was accurate and reflected the position at the time it was written, in the 18 months since, the looked after children population in Southampton has continued to rise beyond forecasts.
- 1.2 As part of a systematic review of the current structure for provision of services and in response to a wider range of challenges, an overarching Children's Services Transformation Programme (CSTP) is in place within Southampton Children's Services in order to focus on the development of early intervention and prevention, and for those children who need to be looked after away from home, to drive forward timely permanence.
- 1.3 The CSTP will transform and redesign services across the City in order to deliver the partnership's agreed vision as follows:

*'An Early Intervention City with a multi agency, integrated service provision that works to ensure children's needs are met at the earliest stage. Where possible, and children's welfare is assured, these needs will be met within their family and community resources.'*

## **2. THE LEGAL CONTEXT**

- 2.1 Since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 local authorities have been required to take steps that secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area (Section 22G Children Act 1989). This section of the 1989 Act was also inserted into Section 9 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. This is now referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'.
- 2.2 The Statutory Guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children provides examples of best practice in securing sufficiency that include the following:
- That all children are placed in appropriate placements with access to the support services they require in their local authority area, except where this is not consistent with their welfare;

- That the full range of universal, targeted and specialist services work together to meet children's needs in an integrated way in the local area, including children who are already looked after, as well as those at risk of care or custody;
- Where it is not reasonable or practical for a child to be placed within her/his local authority area, there are mechanisms in place to widen the range of provision in neighbouring areas, or region which is still within an accessible distance, while still being able to provide the full range of services to meet identified needs;
- That partners, including housing, work together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become looked after at the age of 16 and 17 years, and support the continuity of accommodation beyond the age of 18 years;
- And in addition to meeting relevant national minimum standards, services are of high quality to secure the specific outcomes identified in the care plans of children looked after;

2.3 The Statutory Guidance states that 'Local authorities must be able to show that at a strategic level they are taking steps to meet the sufficiency duty, so far as is 'reasonably practical'.' It further explains what is meant by 'reasonably practical', and it includes the following:

- that it is a general duty that applies to strategic arrangements, rather than to the provision of accommodation to a particular, individual child;
- it does not require local authorities to provide accommodation within their area for every child they look after;
- there may be a significant minority of children for whom it is not 'reasonably practical' to provide a certain type of accommodation within the area;
- in accordance with section 22C (5) of the 1989 Act, the overriding factor is that the placement must be the most appropriate placement available;
- the local authority must give preference to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster parent [section 22C (7) (a)];

2.4 The term 'looked after children' as defined in the 1989 Act refers to all children and young people being 'looked after' by the local authority. These may be subject to Care Orders or Interim Care Orders; placed or authorised to be placed, with prospective adopters; voluntarily accommodated including unaccompanied asylum seeking children and

finally those subject to court orders with residence requirements i.e. a secure order or remanded to local authority accommodation.

2.5 The term 'care leavers' as defined in The Children (Care Leavers) Act 2000 refers to eligible, relevant and former relevant children:

- Eligible children are those young people aged 16 and 17 who are still in care and have been 'looked after' for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 and including their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday;
- Relevant children are those young people aged 16 and 17 who have already left care, and who were 'looked after' for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14, and have been 'looked after' at some time while they were 16 or 17;
- Former relevant children are those young people aged 18, 19 or 20 who have been eligible and/or relevant.

### **3 LOCAL CONTEXT FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

3.1 Southampton's population is approximately 240,000 with an estimated 50,000 children. The City is ranked 81st out of all 326 local authorities in England in the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 (where one is the most deprived). It ranks 114<sup>th</sup> out of 152 Local Authorities in England for the percentage of children living in poverty. 18.2% of people are from an ethnic group other than White British. The largest proportion of this non-white population comes from the Asian or Asian British ethnic group (6.4%).

3.2 There is the strongest imperative for change; outcomes for children in the City require improvement, and in some areas substantial improvement. The City's performance needs to improve across a range of indicators. Analysis of that performance, both quantitative and qualitative, has clearly identified that in order to close the wide gap between all children and vulnerable children, across a range of outcomes, the services in the City require transformational change.

3.3 In July 2013 an analysis of the demand for services and the subsequent journey of the child and family across a range of access points was undertaken. This analysis identified a range of improvements necessary. These improvements aim to ensure that when children cannot safely and effectively be brought up within their own families, interventions will be timely and service provision will be of a sufficiently good and sufficient standard to ensure the looked after children population in Southampton subscribes to 'right child, right time, right placement, only for as long as necessary'.

#### 4. LOCAL CONTEXT FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

- 4.1 The number of Looked After Children in Southampton has grown significantly in recent years almost doubling from its low of 268 in March 2007 to 482 in March 2013 and increasing to 507 as of the end of December 2013. This high number of looked after children is unsustainable for the service and an action plan is in place to address this. The City now has one of the highest Looked After Children rates per 10,000 in the country (See Table 1).
- 4.2 The projected figures within the original Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2012 - 2015 can be seen in Table 2 below and when compared to actual figures, it can be seen that the number has significantly exceeded those forecast. Revised forecasts based on actual numbers project that the population of looked after children will peak. As the transformation is implemented, early intervention strategies and swift planning for permanence when children are removed from their families, will begin to favourably impact the care population over the next 3 years (see Table 2)

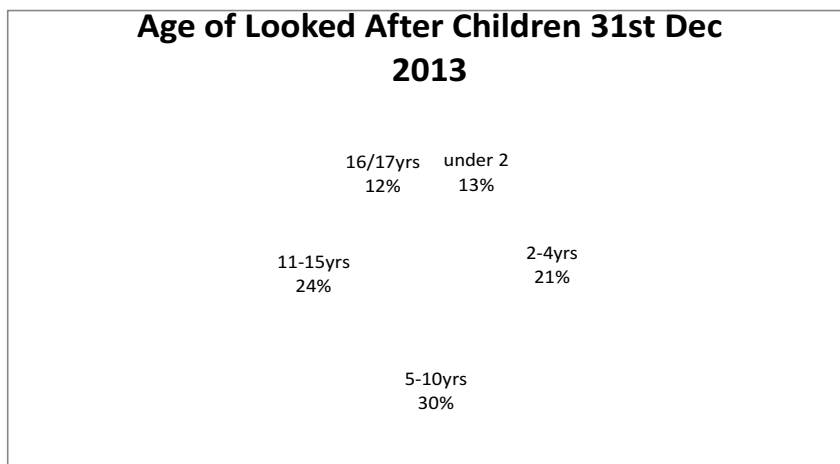
**Table 1 – Looked After Children Numbers**

<b>Number of Looked After Children at 31 Mar.</b>		<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
All looked after children at 31 March	<b>LA</b>	296	268	289	374	386	429	482
Looked after children at 31 March per 10,000 population 0 to 17 yrs	<b>LA</b>	70	63	67	86	89	93	102
	<b>SN</b>	81	81	79	82	86	82	83
	<b>England</b>	55	54	55	59	59	59	60

**Table 2 – Looked After Children Numbers and Forecasts**

<b>Projected Numbers of Looked After Children (2012 - 2015 Placement Strategy)</b>	<b>Actual Mar-12</b>	<b>Forecast Mar-13</b>		<b>Forecast Mar-14</b>	<b>Forecast Mar-15</b>	
	429	417- 438	-	413- 451	405- 455	-
<b>Projected Numbers of Looked After Children (Refresh January 2014)</b>	<b>Actual Mar-12</b>	<b>Actual Mar-13</b>	<b>Actual Oct-13</b>		<b>Forecast Mar-15</b>	<b>Forecast Mar-16</b>
	<b>429</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>506</b>	-	<b>499</b>	<b>449</b>

- 4.3 A crucial factor and indicator for the future is the number of children (47 as at the end December 2013) who are already placed in adoptive placements awaiting a final order. At 10% this is above the national average and underlines a lack of sufficient rigour and pace historically in securing final orders – there is now a concerted programme underway to ensure that these cases are progressed in a timely way for these children and their adoptive families. Once these children and the 82 others who also have a plan for adoption but are yet to be placed, are secured a permanent family this year it is anticipated that the number of looked after children will begin to fall.
- 4.4 There were more boys than girls looked after at the end of 2012/13 with 276 (57%) compared to 206 (43%), this differential continues in the end of year figures and is wider than national or neighbour figures. Intriguingly this is reversed in only one area - the under 2 age range where of the 67 under two years old in the year end figures 60% of these children were female. Analyses by age demonstrates that the growth in looked after children numbers is essentially in the 0 – 9 age group, whilst numbers for those over 10 have remained relatively stable over recent years.
- 4.5 At 31 March 2013, the largest proportion of looked after children in Southampton was aged 1 to 4 (34%) and 10 to 15 (28%). Significantly less young people aged 16 and over were looked after in 2012/13 (11%) compared to 2011/12 (16%) and national (20%) and local (21%) trends. Statistics as at the end of December 2013 can be seen below.



- 4.6 White children continue to represent the largest cohort of looked after children at 81%. Children from an Asian background rose from 2% (2011/12) to 5% (2012/13) slightly higher than national figures which remained static at 4%.
- 4.7 **Placement stability:** Research highlights the importance of stability, security and lasting relationships as fundamental for the healthy

development of children. 10% of looked after children in Southampton had 3 or more placements during 2012/13, the same as in 2011/12, slightly lower (better) than local and national figures (11%). In terms of longer term stability in 2012/13, 73% of children who had been looked after for at least 2.5 years have been living in the same placement for 2 years or more or placed for adoption. Whilst this is lower than 2011/12 (77%) it remains higher than local (69%) and national (68%) figures.

- 4.8 As at the end of 2012/13 84% of looked after children were placed within 20 miles from their home compared to 76% (England) and 71% (SN) supporting them to maintain networks and stability.

**Table 3 – Distance between Home and Placement**

Looked after children on 31 March – distance between home and placement		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Placement 20 miles or less - all episodes at 31 March	<b>LA</b>	78%	82%	82%	83%	84%
	<b>SN</b>	77%	76%	79%	79%	71%
	<b>England</b>	72%	74%	76%	76%	76%
Placement 20 miles or less - inside LA boundary	<b>LA</b>	51%	52%	49%	48%	52%
	<b>SN</b>	54%	53%	54%	53%	
	<b>England</b>	54%	54%	55%	55%	
Placement 20 miles or less - outside LA boundary	<b>LA</b>	27%	29%	34%	34%	36%
	<b>SN</b>	23%	24%	25%	26%	
	<b>England</b>	18%	20%	21%	22%	
Placement over 20 miles - all episodes at 31 March	<b>LA</b>	9%	8%	10%	10%	10%
	<b>SN</b>	15%	16%	14%	14%	
	<b>England</b>	17%	16%	16%	16%	12%
Placement over 20 miles - inside LA boundary	<b>LA</b>	2%	1%	1%	1%	0.2%
	<b>England</b>	4%	4%	4%	4%	
Placement over 20 miles - outside LA boundary	<b>LA</b>	7%	6%	9%	10%	10%
	<b>SN</b>	15%	16%	14%	14%	
	<b>England</b>	13%	13%	12%	12%	
Not known or not recorded (includes children placed for adoption and children with no home address such as UASCs)	<b>LA</b>	11%	11%	9%	7%	2%
	<b>England</b>	11%	10%	8%	8%	

## 5. PLACEMENT ANALYSIS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN



5.1 Placement details up to the end of December 2013 are detailed below.

**Table 4 – Breakdown of Placement Type**

Looked After Children, placements number in Southampton	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	End Dec 2013
Foster placement with relative or friend: inside LA	13	32	46	49	53	68
Foster placement with relative or friend: outside LA	13	14	20	29	27	
Placement with other foster carer: inside LA	117	129	116	141	159	344
Placement with other foster carer: outside LA	74	106	131	142	171	
Secure unit	4	5	1	2	0	4
Homes and hostels	12	21	9	11	11	12
Hostels and other supportive residential placements	2	3	4	7	1	0
Residential schools	5	8	6	2	1	2
Other residential settings	2	3	1	2	7	4 (M & baby)
Placed for adoption (inc placed with former foster carer)	15	15	16	19	23	47
Placed with own parents	21	27	30	17	23	20
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently	7	9	4	6	1	5
Absent from agreed placement	4	2	2	2	2	1
Total	289	374	386	429	479	507

5.2 As at the end of December 2013, of the 507 looked after children in Southampton, 81% were in foster care (excluding those placed for adoption with current foster carers) which comprises 239 with in-house mainstream carers, 68 children placed with family and friends carers and 105 placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). Just over 2% of children were placed in residential care (excluding 2 children in residential schools). The population of looked after children has increased by 28 since the end of March 2013 and since that time, IFA placements have increased by 14.

5.3 **Care Leavers:** At the end of March 2013 63% of the City's care leavers who were in contact with the City, were in suitable accommodation compared to 84% (SN) and 88% (England), which places Southampton at the bottom of the table (see Table 5 below). This is a slight improvement from 2011/12 when it was 61%, but up until end March 2013 there was a general downward trend over the last seven years. Addressing this is a priority area for focus and further development, and as at the end of December, 88% of care leavers were in contact

and in suitable accommodation. This is a much improved position and one which continues to be a priority for development.

**Table 5 – Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation**

<b>Care Leavers</b>		<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
The percentage of former care leavers aged 19 looked after on 1 April in their 17th year, who were in contact and in suitable accommodation (former NI 147)	<b>LA</b>	69%	93%	63%	73%	61%	63%
	<b>SN</b>	87%	92%	93%	90%	90%	
	<b>England</b>	88%	90%	90%	90%	88%	88%

5.4 In October 2013 of the 107<sup>1</sup> care leavers were living in a range of accommodations as follows:

- 24 young people in supported housing (flats, shared living)
- 28 with family and friends
- 26 in council/private rented accommodation
- 3 in custody or secure home
- 6 other e.g. Army or adult placement (e.g. shared lives)
- 6 not known (not in touch with the service)
- 13 young people who are living with their foster carers in 'Staying Put' arrangements
- 1 young person is living in a residential placement following a breakdown in a supported lodgings placement

5.5 As at the end December 2013 there were 106 care leavers open to the service in Southampton with a further 38 young people becoming 18 over the next 12 months.

## **6. CURRENT ACCOMMODATION PROVISION**

### **6.1 In-House Foster Care (Mainstream)**

6.1.1 There are currently (as at February 2014) 271 fostering households. Of these, 176 households are within the City boundaries, 79 are within 20 miles of Southampton and 16 are over 20 miles away. In terms of maximum capacity, there are 540 placements although in real terms there are always likely to be less available, e.g. a carer may be approved for 1 child, 2 if siblings, and they may only have one in placement, leaving the second placement unavailable. It may also be the case that a carer is approved for 2 children, but may have a child in placement who would benefit from being the only child in placement,

<sup>1</sup> Of the 107 care leavers aged 18+ 6 young people aged 16/17 are included in this figure as they discharged themselves from care, having been looked after under Section 20 of the CA1989.

due to their needs. This results in the second placement being unavailable.

- 6.1.2 The fostering service operates a continuous recruitment campaign throughout the year. This includes radio campaigns, poster and billboard advertising, features in The Southern Evening Echo, postcard drops, local events, working with the faith communities, Face book and web pages.

**Table 6 - Recruitment and assessment statistics<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Table 6</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> July – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2013</b>	<b>25<sup>th</sup> September- 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013</b>
<b>Enquiries</b>	129	95	89
<b>Initial home visit</b>	72	45	40
<b>Conversion rate</b>	55%	47%	45%
<b>Assessments</b>	19	15	14
<b>Overall Conversion rate</b>	14.7%	15.7%	15.7%

- 6.1.3 The conversion rate for the first 3 months (14.7%) of enquiry to assessment is above the national average of 10%. This does not reflect any prospective carers that may withdraw through the assessment process. The same can be said for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter showing a 15.7% conversion rate. The service continued to have a 15.7% conversion rate from enquiry to assessment in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter.

- 6.1.4 **Family and Friends Carers:** The fostering service progress all assessments in respect of family and friends carers. The team screen out and progress all Viability Assessments in order to determine those whereby it is recommended to progress to a full fostering assessment or temporary approval.

## 6.2 Commissioned Fostering Placements

- 6.2.1 It is absolutely acceptable and the norm that local authorities, as part of their sufficiency strategy, commission placements externally from the independent sector, i.e. Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). Southampton is one of 11 authorities in the south east region who have commissioned IFA placements via a Framework Contract. The IFA framework sets out clear guidance on the type, volume, and locality of IFA placements required, helping to shape the market. Providers were also required to submit detailed costs, which enabled participating authorities to have a clear understanding of what they are purchasing.

<sup>2</sup> These figures do not include family and friends approvals.

The process encouraged new providers to enter the local market, increasing choice and driving down cost. Following the procurement process, Providers selected to join one or more of three lots within the framework contract:

- Framework 1 General Fostering Placements - 27 providers
- Framework 2 Parent and Child Placements - 25 providers
- Framework 3 Disabled Children Placements - 13 providers.

This collaborative procurement process has:

- Assisted in improving outcomes for children and young people.
- Increased the availability of diversity in placement choice.
- Increased the number of local placements.
- Reduced placement costs

The contract was implemented in April 2012 and spans a period of 3 years with the potential to extend for a further 2 years.

**6.2.2 Prevention of Offending Contract:** Southampton, alongside Hampshire, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight currently commission Action for Children, via a Block Contract, to provide prevention of re-offending beds for young people. These placements are provided by specialist foster carers who offer young people a high level of supervision and support in line with the needs identified in their care plan, the aim being to enable young people to access appropriate support services. The four authorities commission 2095 beds per year broken down as follows: Hampshire 1700, Southampton 225, Portsmouth 150 and the Isle of Wight 20.

The service is to provide fostering placements as follows:-

**Group A** - Young people remanded to Local Authority accommodation who are normally resident within the Local Authorities of Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

**Group B** - Young people who are at risk of offending/re-offending, and who have been assessed as vulnerable, which is likely to lead to their involvement with the Youth Justice system. Priority will be given to those young people most at risk of court ordered secure remand.

**Group C** - Convicted young offenders serving the community phase of a custodial sentence.

**Group D** - Emergency overnight placements for young people as required under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (P.A.C.E) coming to the attention of the Local Authorities Out of Hours Services.

**Group E** - Emergency placements out of hours (not including 2.1.4 above) for young people who present as vulnerable and/or are at risk of offending.

**Group F** - Youth Rehabilitation Order with a Local Authority Residence Requirement

### **6.3 Adoption Placements**

6.3.1 At 30 September 2013 there were 23 assessments of new adopters underway. 13 new adoptive households completed their assessment and were approved by the Adoption panel in the six months between April and September 2013. This took the overall number of approved adoptive households to 39, of whom 31 had children in placement, and one had been matched with a child.

6.3.2 Throughout 2013-14 an average of 21 adoptive households have been assessed at any one time, including foster carers wishing to adopt children already in their care. During the same period the adoption team have been family finding for an average of 50 children at any one time. It is expected that the number of children with a plan for adoption will remain constant for at least the next twelve months and therefore family finding will remain at this level. There is therefore a shortfall in the number of adopters being recruited to meet the needs and numbers of the children with a plan for adoption.

### **6.4 Residential Provision**

6.4.1 Southampton has no residential beds as part of its range of in-house accommodation provision. The City is an extremely low user of children's residential care and it is therefore not a viable option to provide residential beds in-house. Placements are currently spot-purchased when required, with support from a Placement Officer, whose role is to assist with the identification of a resource, in line with presenting needs, and who works in partnership with the child's social worker to identify outcomes required from the placement, and draft an Individual Placement Agreement accordingly. Assistance is also provided regarding the negotiation of costs.

### **6.5 Care Leaver's Accommodation**

6.5.1 There is no question about the favourable impact '**staying put**' with foster carers will have for care leavers, and it must be seen as an absolute priority for most young people. In Southampton those 18+ have the choice to remain with their carers where it is their wish to do so and the carer is able to offer this resource. This applies to those placed with in-house foster carers and those placed with IFAs. At present there is no provision within the IFA Framework Contract to address young people staying put beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This

currently results in a lack of consistency in rates charged. At the end of December 2013 there were 9 young people who have remained with their carers beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and this trend is predicted to increase with the removal of the condition that these children need to be in employment, education or training for them to remain in placement.

6.5.2 The most common route to independence in Southampton (after those who return to live with their families) is to enter a shared living arrangement via **Chapter One** or **YMCA**. Chapter One is a large house with single bedrooms which are secured by locks. The kitchen, lounge, toilets and a shower rooms are shared between the residents. The YMCA is made up of self contained flats with a shared larger kitchen. Shared living can bring challenges and risks for young people who can lack maturity, independence skills and self regulation. It is an expectation that all residents are engaged in education, employment or training.

6.5.3 **Supported Lodgings:** Southampton's fostering service recruit supported lodgings carers in order to ensure a range of accommodation is available for those care leavers who wish to have an element of independence but with the back-up of a higher level of support. The City currently has 15 supported lodgings households which provide 17 beds. Of these, 3 households are currently unavailable and 1 has a vacancy. 11 young people (as at February 2014) are in supported lodgings.

6.5.4 A number of young care leavers move to private rented accommodation, once they have completed tenancy training and/or independent skills training (provided by a company Next Steps). They are supported with deposits and rent in advance and increasingly the City are funding private rents through Next Steps Care Management (NSCM). NSCM take on tenancies with landlords on behalf of care leavers and are very flexible about the level of floating support they provide and the duration of the tenancy. They generally take a 6 month tenancy and if the young person wants to move out before then for whatever reason, it is possible to place another young person in for the balance of the tenancy. If the young person successfully completes the 6 month tenancy then they are able to take the tenancy on themselves and for this reason they always try to source flats that can be paid for by Housing Benefit if necessary.

## 7. Ongoing Actions/Commissioning Priorities

7.1 In allocating resources for 2014-5, funding has been identified to meet the increasing numbers of children who have been placed under the care of the local authority. Funding has been built into the budget to provide additional resources for further pressures in safeguarding that are already in the system, such as social work staffing. It is anticipated that the numbers of children in care will increase in the short term, but

will subsequently reduce from 2014-15 onwards (see Table 7) as a result of measures taken to transform Children's Services. This will reduce the cost of children in care accordingly and budget forecasts are now based on this projection.

**Table 7 – Projections of numbers of Looked After Children**

<b>Placements for Looked After Children</b>	<b>Actual Mar-12</b>	<b>Actual Mar-13</b>	<b>Actual Oct-13</b>	<b>Projected Mar-15</b>	<b>Projected Mar-16</b>
Fostering up to 18	282	320	306	315	282
Independent Fostering Agencies	62	86	105	87	70
Supported Placements or Rent	7	4	1	1	1
Inter agency fostering placements	0	3	3	3	3
Residential - Independent Sector and Our House	14	11	11	12	12
Secure	0	0	0	1	1
Other placements	64	58	80	80	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>449</b>

7.2 The City's Integrated Commissioning Unit is in its early stages of development. As part of these developments a Buyers Team is currently being configured, the aim being to work in collaboration with Children's and Adults services to procure placements. In respect of Children's Services a Placement Officer will be recruited imminently to support the commissioning of placements in respect of children's residential care and IFAs. This arrangement ensures that placement management will no longer be dependent on a single officer and will benefit from team support.

7.2.1 The core functions of Placement Officer role remains to provide a centralised process for making external placements, offering a strategic overview of resources, securing better value for money and achieving better outcomes for children and young people. Specifically the Placement Officer supports Children's Social Care to:

- Undertake financial monitoring and fee negotiation with providers.
- Monitor performance and outcomes for children and young people, in conjunction with Quality Teams.
- Monitor and check the quality of placements.
- Realise benefits under the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Procurement Project.
- Complete Individual Placement Agreements (IPAs) for all new placements.
- Negotiate over any additional services not specified in the IFA Framework.
- Issue amended IPAs for all placements where the cost changes.
- Check invoices to see if they are correct and liaising with finance

- Maintain an overview of all placements and all payments.
  - Improve management information on outcomes and costs for individual placements.
- 7.3 Looked after children who require specialist residential placements are not currently subject to a Framework Agreement or pre-placement agreement. However, work has commenced on addressing this in collaboration with other local authorities in the South East. A framework approach is being designed to unify purchasing processes across local authorities to ensure quality standards and outcomes for children as well as enabling the achievement of best value.
- 7.4 A similar approach is being developed within the region in respect of post 16 collaborative tender approaches. Recent provider events have enabled Southampton along with other Local Authority areas to share their service requirements and to encourage providers to shape service provision to meet needs. It also is a mechanism for informing potential new providers of requirements in an attempt to broaden market choice.
- 7.5 Southampton is currently undertaking a Strategic Review of the Housing Support Services for Young People and Young Parents aged 16 to 25 at risk of homelessness in Southampton. The current housing support service contracts end in summer/autumn of 2014 and new housing support services will be commissioned in 2014. Although the funding for the Supporting People programme is no longer ring-fenced, there is a commitment within the City to continue to improve outcomes for young people and young parents in the City who are at risk of homelessness. Housing support is an important part of achieving this aim and representatives from Children's Social Care, including the Looked After children and Care Leavers Team, are involved in the review in order to ensure needs assessments are taking into account our care leavers.
- 7.6 In November 2013 the Government proposed to extend accommodation provision under 'Staying Put' and released some funding which will enable all young people to stay with their foster carers until the age of 24 years, regardless of whether they are in employment, education or training. This will have ongoing financial and practical implications for the City if all those young people who are entitled to now "Stay Put" do so. The need for a continuation of payment to the carer in order to provide an incentive for them to continue to support the care leaver in their household (as opposed to fostering another child) will impact financially and in addition, for each care leaver in question, a fostering placement will be 'taken up' for each care leaver who 'Stays Put'. The predicted increase for 2014/15 for those Staying Put is 24 young people.
- 7.6.1 Ongoing developments regarding the City's Staying Put policy are underway. Confirmation of the City's allocation is awaited and strategies to address the impact, both financially and practically are



part of this. This includes the need to work collaboratively with the 11 authorities who, as part of a Framework Contract, have commissioned Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to provide fostering placements. A working group has been set up to take this work forward.

7.6.2 The City's partnership arrangements with Next Steps Care Management is positive and the plan is to grow connections with them and assess the feasibility of entering into contracting arrangements in order to look at more efficient rates and defined outcomes.

7.7 Ongoing recruitment of foster carers within the City is a priority and an ongoing marketing strategy is in place. There are 33 mainstream assessments underway (as at February 2014). A target is set for an additional 40 carers in 2014/15 in order to increase capacity and choice and replace those carers who cease fostering as they are granted Special Guardianship Orders in respect of children they care for. Specific areas for recruitment are being targeted in response to the presenting needs of the looked after population in Southampton. The target areas are as follows:

- Mother and baby placements (including assessment placements);
- Placements for sibling groups;
- Placements for young people aged 12+, including for those staying put 18+

7.7.1 Training and development of the City's in-house foster carers remains a priority in order to maximise the skills mix available in meeting the needs of more complex children, and minimising the need to commission placements out of city and/or use IFA placements.

7.7.2 The fostering service is currently assessing three supported lodgings households. One assessment is due to be presented to fostering panel in March 2014.

7.8 A target has been set to recruit and approve 40 adoptive households in 2014-15. This is nearly double the number approved in each of the last two years but reflects the current and ongoing number of families needed for children who have a plan for adoption. This is a challenging target which will be supported by a revised recruitment and marketing campaign including improvement of the council website pages for adoption, revised marketing materials and use of social media and press campaigns. A more detailed recruitment strategy has been written which details all the planned activity to increase recruitment of adopters.

7.8.1 In order to progress adoption for children with adoption as the plan in a timely way we have matched 19 children with 14 adoptive households from other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies, using the

Adoption Reform Grant to provide funding for some of these placements. 6 adoptive households approved by Southampton City Council have been matched with other local authority children which provides an income to the Council, but clearly these are fewer in number than placements commissioned. In 2014-15 we will continue to recruit adopters who can be matched with children nationally as well as locally. There has been some local consideration about the feasibility of expanding local consortium arrangements in a range of adoption practice areas, including recruitment and family finding. A decision will be made in the spring of 2014 about how this will be taken forward.

- 7.9 Increasing choice of placement for care leavers within the City remains a high priority. In addition to the Strategic Review of the Housing Support Services for Young People and Young Parents aged 16 to 25 in Southampton, capacity for provision of supported lodgings is a focus for activity and led by the fostering service, with a specific emphasis on recruiting and training prospective carers to meet the needs of the more challenging young people. Ongoing collaboration with housing colleagues and private providers, as part of the transformation of Children's Services within the City is a focus and plans to put in place a dedicated care leaver's service in order to improve outcomes, including addressing suitability of accommodation, are underway.
- 7.10 Changes to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 are due to be published early in 2014 to address safeguarding issues regarding the placements of children at some distance from their local authority area. Statutory guidance will be issued imminently which will clarify the role of Director of Children's Services in ensuring robust processes are in place for challenge and scrutiny and that decisions to place a child in a specific placement is consistent with the assessed needs of the child concerned. Arrangements within Southampton to ensure robust oversight and scrutiny of these arrangements at the point of placement and on an ongoing basis are in place but need to be strengthened in order to respond in full to the revised statutory guidance and Regulations when they are published.

