

July 2021



Children and Families Scrutiny Panel
Sufficiency of accommodation for children in care
Martin Smith - Service Manager, Permanence

What is the Sufficiency Duty?

There is a legal duty of 'sufficiency' that requires local authorities to ensure that, through direct provision or commissioned services, a range of placements sufficient to meet the needs of all children in care are available locally or that there is a plan in place to move towards that position. The range of accommodation within the scope of the sufficiency duty includes adoption, foster care, children's homes and supportive accommodation.

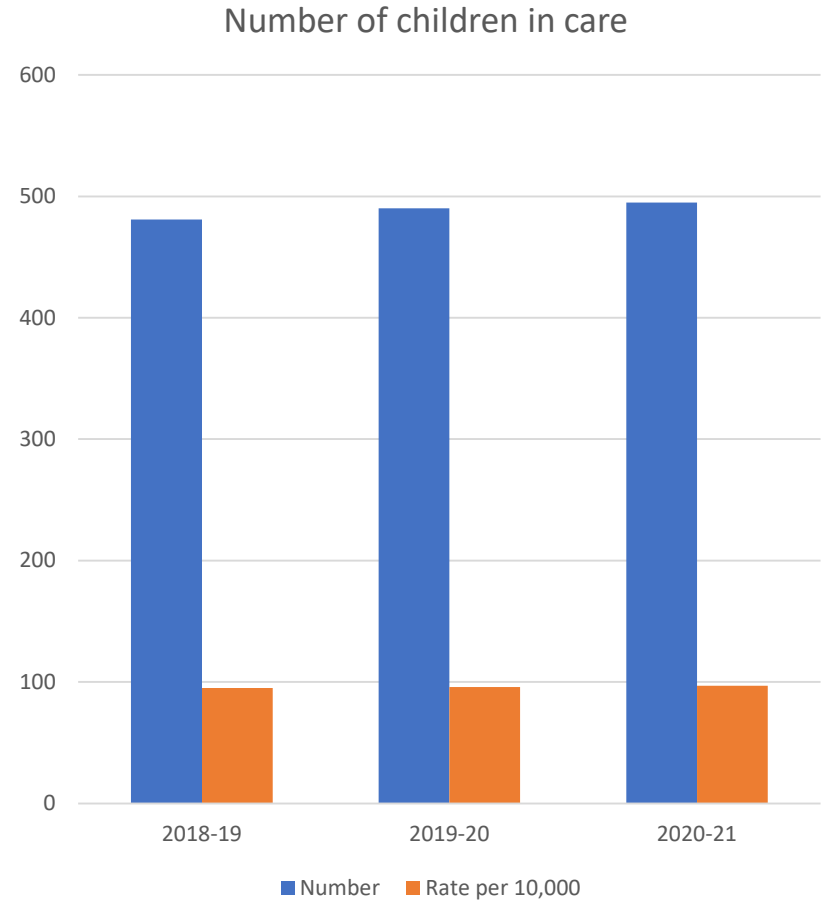
Statutory guidance requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').

DfE (2010); Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children

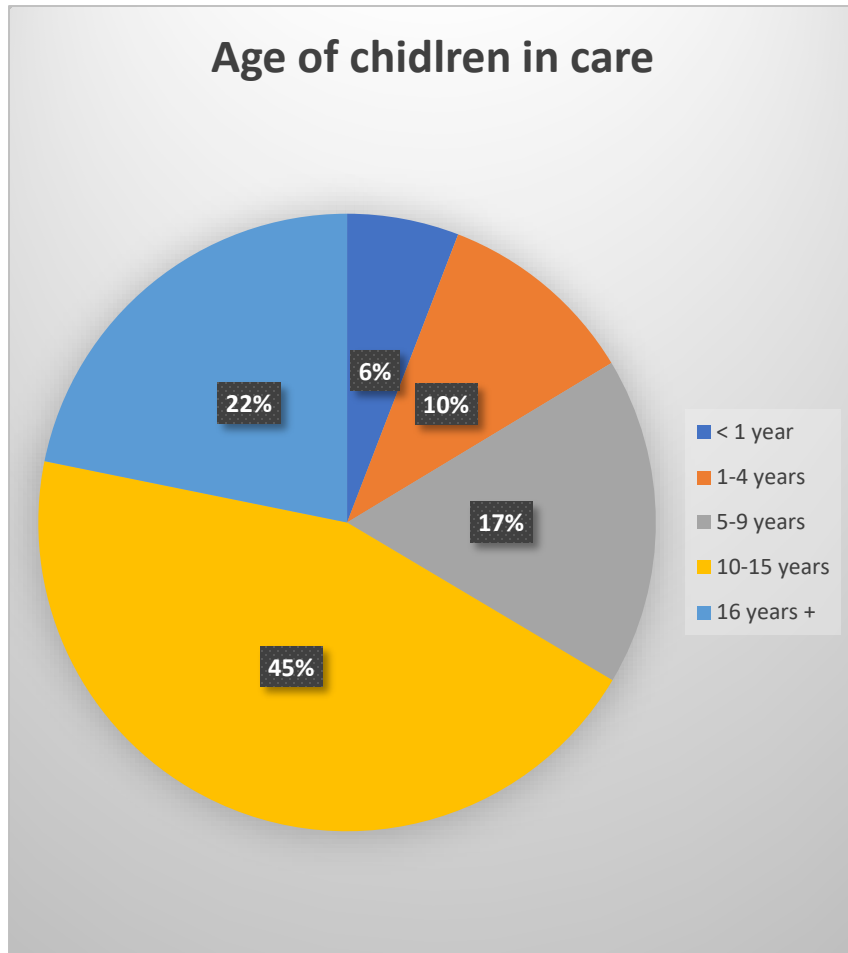
The profile of our children in care

As of 30 June 2021, there were 498 children and young people in our care.

The cohort of our children in care and the rate per 10,000 has seen a slight increase year on year from 2018.



The profile of our children in care



The proportion of children by each age group and gender has remained relatively unchanged over the years.

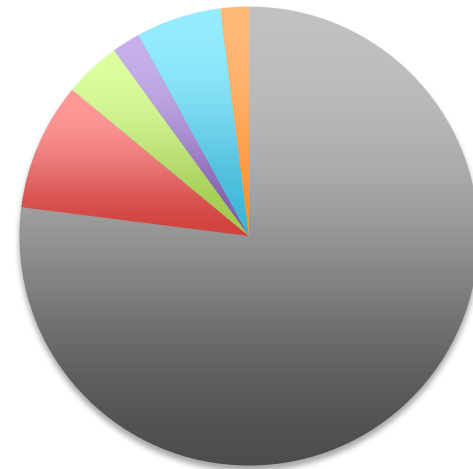
The 10-16 age group accounts for two thirds of the children in our care and males accounting for 60% of the children in our care.

The profile of our children in care

Most of the children in our care, 77%, are placed with foster carers.

This is consistent with the national data for 2019-2002 with 72% of children in care placed with foster carers

Placement Type



- Foster care
- Children's home
- Supportive accommodation
- Placed for Adoption
- Placed with parents
- Other

The profile of our children in care

The children we care for are likely to present with complex needs and behaviours given their experience of adversity and trauma that would have precipitated their becoming looked after.

In recent years, awareness of contextual safeguarding has highlighted the care and safeguarding needs of older children and young people at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation in our communities.

Their continues to be a demand for placements providing safe secure accommodation and skilled care supported by multi-disciplinary interventions.

The national picture

- Most fostering places are approved by local authority fostering services. Local authorities reported 59% of all approved places, with 41% in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs).
- Over the last 6 years, the general trend is a slow increase in numbers of fostering places. There are an estimated 89,200 fostering places in England as at 31 March 2020, a small increase in approved places from 88,370 as at 31 March 2019.
- However, during 2019-2020 the net capacity increased in IFAs, but decreased in local authorities.
- The number of children's homes in England rose during 2019 to 2020. There was a 7% increase in the number of homes and a 1% increase in the number of places.

National Statistics (2020) Main Findings: children's social care in England

National Statistics (2020) Fostering in England 2019 to 2020: main findings

The national picture

Most children in care are placed within 20 miles of home; 73%.

Placements inside council boundaries accounted for 58% of all placements.

GOV.UK (2020) Children looked after in England including adoptions

The independent review of children's social care has highlighted that there are not enough homes in the right places with the right support.

The independent Review of Children's Social Care (2021); Case for Change.

Our Sufficiency Strategy

Southampton City Council currently commissions/provides a wide range of options as part of ensuring that it can access the full range of provision needed to meet the varying needs of the local children and young people in its care.

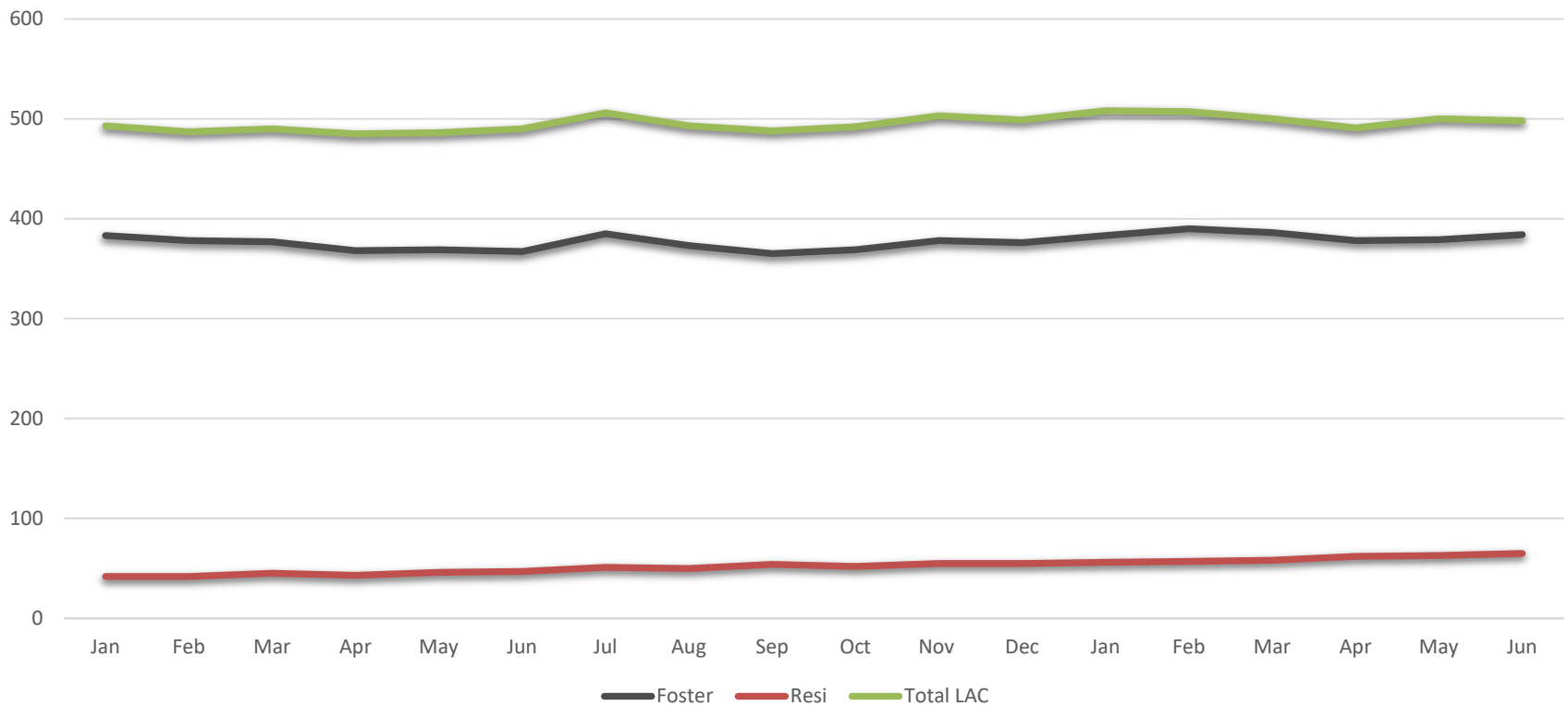
The Placement Commissioning Sufficiency Statement and Strategy 2020- 2025 was presented to Cabinet in March 2020.

Our Sufficiency Strategy

Placement Type	Commissioning arrangement	Key strategy
Foster care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In house provision by SCC. • South Central Commissioning Framework • Spot purchases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2020-2023 • Specialist foster care scheme to step children across from residential to foster care • Re-procurement of the contract for IFAs
Children's homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Central Commissioning Framework • Spot purchases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of up to 3 in house children's homes
Supported accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Central Commissioning Framework • Spot purchases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-procurement of the contract for IFAs
Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership arrangement via the regional adoption agency; Adopt South. 	

How are we doing?

Our use of fostering and residential care



How are we doing?

- The use of foster care has fluctuated, mirroring fluctuations in the looked after cohort.
- There was a noted peak in July 2020 in the number of children in our care. Our in-house provision had the responsiveness and capacity to meet this demand.
- At this point 62% of our foster placements were with in house carers. Research undertaken by The South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) identified that the average use of IFA across the SE region was 50-60%.
- From September 2020 onwards, there is an upward trend in our looked after population this is matched by an upward trend in our use of external provision; IFAs and children's homes. This is indicative of our in house provision having reached capacity. Anecdotally, independent fostering agencies are reporting similar capacity issues.

How are we doing?

- The use of children's homes and semi-independent accommodation has seen a steady increase since the start of the pandemic.
- Exceptionally, at the end of May 2021 three children were placed in unregistered children's homes.
- In terms of location, as of 30/6/21 35% of placements were within the city boundaries. This is below the national average of 55% (as of 31/3/20).
- The geography of the city does impact on the availability of local placements, being a small waterfront city.
- However, 73% were within 20 miles of the city boundaries which is consistent with the national average.

Progress on key strategies

Fostering

- This year 189 fostering enquiries were received, a slight decrease from the previous year.
- The pandemic had a significant impact on our recruitment activities.
- 14 mainstream foster carers were recruited this year, an increase from 10 the previous year.
- However, recruitment is not keeping pace with retention.
- The net loss for this year was – 6 mainstream households. A slight improvement from last year.
- Specialist fostering scheme is actively recruiting staff and carers.

Progress of key strategies

Local Children's Home Project

- The property acquisition phase of the project commenced in March 2021.
- The current strategy is being review following a period of testing the open property market.

What did Ofsted say?

Most children who come into care are placed in suitable settings. A lack of sufficient local placements means that some matching, particularly for vulnerable adolescents, is resource-led rather than child-led, resulting in some children living in settings a long distance from Southampton.

The sufficiency of placements to meet the diverse needs of children in care remains a significant challenge

Inspection; Nov 2019



Work to increase the range and choice of placements for children in care is continuing but has not yet provided a sufficient variety of local options. This results in some children not being well matched to foster carers or residential placements that meet their needs on a sustained footing. A significant number of children are placed outside the local authority. Many children, however, do live in stable, caring foster families, and their carers reported that they had been well supported by their fostering social workers during the pandemic.

Focused visit: May 2021

Summary

The sufficiency of local placements for our children in care remains a challenge in the context of a stable cohort of looked after children and a national and local shortage of suitable placements to meet the varied and complex needs of the children we care for.

Next steps



- Deliver on our fostering recruitment strategy 2020-2023; return to face-to-face recruitment events, maintain our social media presence, foster carer ambassador scheme.
- ‘Fostering Friendly’ project – become an accredited employer and work with others to achieve this.
- Enhance our fostering provision; step-across scheme, parent and child offer and emergency provision.
- Deliver on the provision of two in house children’s homes by the end March 2022.
- Manage and develop local independent placement provision through re-tendering of the commissioning framework and active engagement with providers based in the city.

