

Sufficiency Strategy

for Children in Care
and Care Leavers in
Ealing

2023-26



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Foreword: Ealing's vision and values

The Ealing Sufficiency strategy is rooted in the Council's strategic vision and values for children and young people:

[Ealing Council Plan 2022-26](#) has a **fairer start** as one of its nine priority outcomes – ensuring all our children and young people of all backgrounds get the best start in life, from their earliest years through to a great education. This includes a commitment to supporting families to reduce the number of children who need to be taken into care through earlier and improved quality interventions. It also prioritises better academic progress and increasing the number of young people in education, employment and training (EET).

[Our Strategy for Additional Educational Needs, Disabilities \(AEND\) and Inclusion](#) for 2022-26 has been co-produced and consulted on, and will be published in 2023. The strategy sets out our shared vision, principles and priorities as we work together over the next three years to support our children and young people with additional needs and SEND (up to the age of 25) and their families.

In the [Joint Housing Protocol](#) for Ealing Care Leavers (Aug 2022) Ealing Council services and their partner agencies have committed to their role as Corporate Parents to Ealing's young people who are care experienced. Ealing services are committed to preparing young people well to live independently in a step-by-step approach that works at the pace of the young person, supported by their pathway plan

Supporting young people to access accommodation opportunities is only one aspect of successful independent living. Ealing is committed to having shared aspirations and responsibilities for the preparation of young people for independence and the ongoing support to maintain their home.

Ealing Leaving Care and Children Looked After Teams engage with young people in a variety of ways; by listening to what they told us they want from us, we have co-produced a vision:

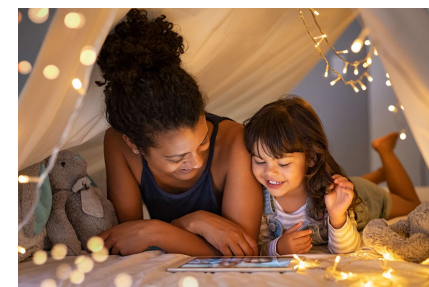
- To build strong empowering relationships with young people who are care experienced
- To use those relationships to develop young people's skills and abilities to live fulfilled and enriched lives
- To embrace our corporate parenting role towards each of our young people
- To act as a safety net for young people when things do not go to plan
- To stand alongside young people in all that they do
- To advocate for young people in our dealings with internal and external partners
- To listen well to what our young people say to us and to act upon this.

Our values are summarised in the strapline – [Stand Alongside You \(SAY\)](#).

Ealing takes its role as corporate parent as a key priority and is very focussed on improving outcomes for children and young people and listening to their views. At the same time, it is also strongly committed to the prevention of care wherever possible and to permanency planning when this is needed.

I hope that you find this updated strategy helpful and informative and feedback and suggestions are very welcome.

Carolyn Fair
Strategic Director, Children's Services



Introduction and statutory context

This Sufficiency Strategy 2023-26 sets out how Ealing Council, as a Corporate Parent, will meet the current and future placement needs of children looked after (CLA) and care leavers and meet its statutory sufficiency duty as outlined in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Young Person's Act 2008.

The strategy builds on existing duties in law to promote and safeguard the welfare and well-being of children and young people, high-quality care planning, and draws on statutory guidance and other recommendations including:

- Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (DfE 2010)
- the Children Act 2004
- the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017
- best practice such as [Oxford Rees review of Sufficiency Strategies](#) in London
- Feedback from [Ofsted \(2019\)](#) and the DfE (2021)

The strategy provides an update on progress in delivering Ealing's Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2018-22 and details current and planned actions to meet placement sufficiency over the next 3 years in line with the demographic profile of Ealing's population.

The priorities of this strategy are to:

- Ensure that we have access to sufficient local accommodation including foster care, kinship care, residential care, semi-independent provision and housing, in order to meet the needs of the diverse range of children in our care
- Work in partnership across service areas and with other organisations, to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- Utilise data and local intelligence to look ahead and plan for future changes and pursue continuous improvement
- Deliver evidence-based services to drive innovation and creativity
- Put children and young people and their families at the heart of service design and delivery and adopt a child/family journey approach to service delivery
- Embed the views of children and young people and their families to drive quality improvements
- Equip and support frontline staff to enable them to spend quality time with children and young people, and their families, so that they can make a real difference to their lives
- Support and empower children and young people and their families to only need to tell their story once and be able to rely on long-term relationships with CYP professionals
- Provide CLA and care leavers with access to support and services of high quality that are appropriate to their needs as identified in their care plan or pathway plan
- Provide CLA and care leavers with access to a range of placement options that meet their specific and diverse needs as identified in their care plan
- Enable CLA to be placed in a family setting where possible, whether with their own extended family members or foster carers, and provide Staying Put options for care leavers
- Ensure placements are subject to robust quality assurance by commissioners and social work teams to support placement stability, with further support and challenge provided by Independent Reviewing Officers

Our ambition for children looked after and care leavers

We want all children and young people to live in stable homes, with strong attachments to adults who can meet their needs on a long-term basis



- We recognise that the best outcome for children and young people is to remain within their families, where it is safe for them to do so. We have put additional resource in place to prevent family breakdowns and reduce the number of children entering care.
- If children do need to come into care, our intention is to move them home quickly where this is the right outcome, with the right support in place to do so safely and successfully.
- For children and young people who cannot return home, we will plan for their long-term stability early on.
- We aim to keep children and young people within their kinship networks if it is possible, in family and friend placements. This keeps them with carers known to them and often allows them to remain within their local area, wider support network and education provision.
- If all options for kinship care have been explored and are unviable, we will seek the right foster care placement.



- Our preference is to place children with our in-house foster carers where possible. Ealing has high standards for our carers and offers a strong level of support; we are also able to better match carers with young people; these factors support long term placement stability. For both in-house and independent fostering agency placements, good matching of carer and child/young person is crucial, including consideration of the child's cultural, religious and ethnic background.
- For some children, the best route to permanency and stability will be either adoption or a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), meaning they are no longer looked after.

Our ambition for children looked after and care leavers

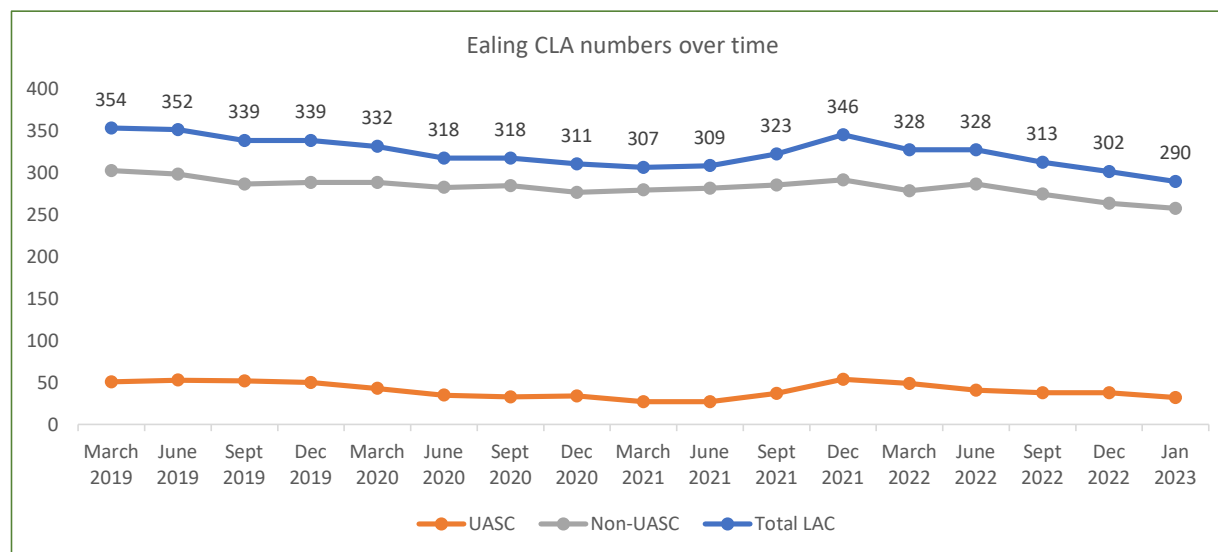
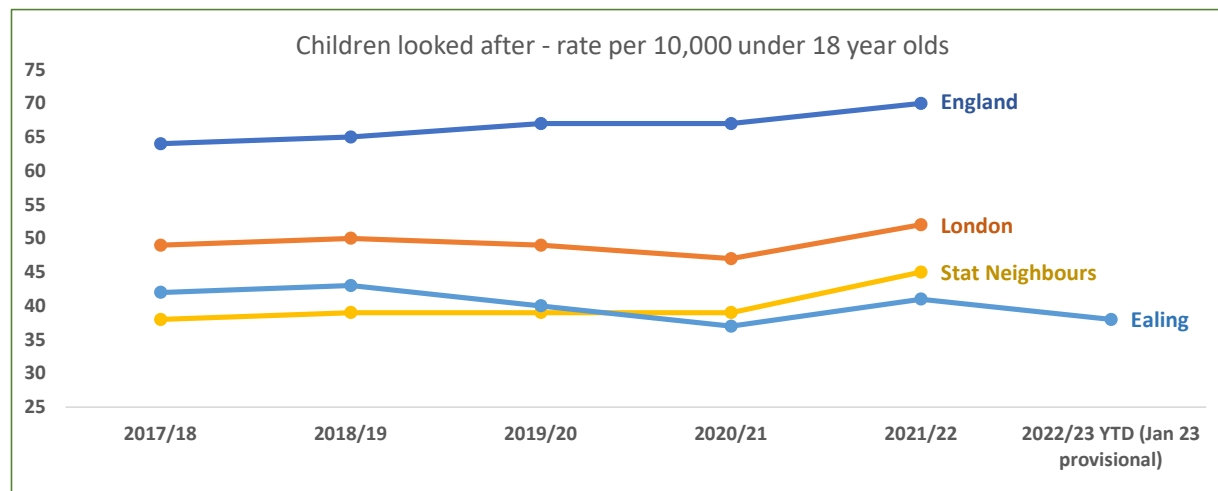
- Residential care should only be used when the specific needs of the child or young person mean that they are not able to live in a family setting. Residential care should focus on supporting the young person to be ready to move to a family setting, whether this is returning home, moving to a kinship carer or to a foster placement.
- Alternatively, residential care should prepare the young person for transition to semi-independent provision when they are aged over 16 and ready to do so.
- We will have robust arrangements in place to make sure that all externally-commissioned placements are high quality, safe, value for money, and meet the individual needs of the child/young person.
- As young people approach adulthood, planning will take place to determine whether the right place for them to live is remaining with their existing carers or moving to semi-independent provision. Young people may remain with foster carers after turning 18 in Staying Put arrangements. Wherever they live, they will be supported to prepare for independent living post-18.
- Those care leavers who are particularly vulnerable will be supported to apply for social housing, securing them a stable home long-term. Other care leavers will be supported to secure alternative accommodation when they are ready to do so. The provision of ongoing support will help care leavers with this transition.



Ealing's children looked after and care leavers

At the end of January 2023 there were 290 children looked after (CLA) aged 0-17 years

- This is a rate of 36 per 10,000 under 18s – below the national average and statistical neighbours, a fall of 12% from March 2022, and Ealing's lowest number for 7 years.
- Ealing saw a reduction in CLA rates in 2020/21 but numbers increased in the 2021/22, in part due to the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).
- The number of children starting to be looked after was lower in 2022/23 (to end Jan) than 2021/22 (123 vs. 165), while the number of children ceasing to be CLA was higher (161 vs. 149 in 2021/22). A significant factor was the increase in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. In addition, London data indicates that the rate of children entering care in 2020/21 was impacted by lockdown restrictions relating to Covid-19.
- The comparatively low rate in Ealing in recent years reflects a variety of contributing factors but the Brighter Futures model of working in the last 5 years has enabled a multi-disciplinary approach 'team around the family' approach which includes supervising social workers, child's social worker and psychologists, who are based in the same team.
- There are 154 boys (53%) and 136 girls (47%) – most of the discrepancy is due to almost all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) being male.



Ealing's children looked after and care leavers

In January 2023 there were 32 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

- This represents 11% of the total children looked after population.
- Numbers fell throughout 22/23 (from 43 in March 2020 to 27 in March 2021), then rose to a high of 54 in December 2021, before falling again in 2022/23. To date in 2022/23 there have been 22 new UASC entering the CLA population (some who have since turned 18 or been age assessed as over 18), compared to 56 in 2021/22 and only 18 in 2020/21.
- All but 1 UASC are male. 4 are aged 15 and the rest are aged 16-17, with 17 of the 32 being aged 17 in January 2023. This has implications for the Care Leaver population, as new UASC spend a short time as CLA before becoming Care Leavers at 18. This is compounded by the current ongoing delays faced by former UASC in obtaining immigration status, meaning they require support and accommodation for longer as they have no recourse to public funds.

Table 1: UASC by Ethnicity

Asian or Asian British	20	63%	<i>Of which: 8 Afghanistani; 4 Iranian; 3 Any other Asian background; 2 Assyrian; 2 Iraqi; 1 Kurdish</i>
Other Ethnic Group	7	22%	<i>All Arab</i>
Black or Black British	3	9%	<i>All Black African</i>
White	2	6%	<i>Both Albanian</i>

Table 2: All CLA by Ethnicity

Asian or Asian British	65	22%	<i>Ealing population*: 30%</i>
Black or Black British	62	21%	<i>Ealing population: 11%</i>
Mixed	64	22%	<i>Ealing population: 5%</i>
White	84	29%	<i>Ealing population: 43%</i>
Other Ethnic Group	12	4%	<i>Ealing population: 11%</i>
Not Known/Not Stated	3	1%	

*ONS 2021 census

70% of all children looked after are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups

- This compares to 57% of the wider Ealing population
- Children of Mixed ethnicity and Black ethnicity are particularly over-represented in the CLA population. Asian and White children are under-represented (although it is White Other, not White British, children who are under-represented)



Ealing's children looked after and care leavers

64% of children looked after are aged between 13-17 years old (Jan 2023)

- In part driven by UASC – most common ages are 15, 16 and 17 years old – and the high numbers of adolescents entering care in their teenage years.
- However, the over 13 cohort has decreased 20% since March 2022, with a reduction in UASC and intensive work with families to prevent adolescents from becoming looked after.
- The under 5 years old cohort has increased by 50%, though is still only 15% of the total population – with the biggest increase in the under 1 cohort.
- The skew towards the older age group presents particular challenges in commissioning suitable placements. Adolescents are harder to place in foster homes and are more likely to require placements in residential homes.

Table 3: All CLA by Age

Age Group	Number	Percentage	March 2022
Under 1	17	6%	March 2022: 3%
1 – 4	27	9%	March 2022: 6%
5 – 9	27	9%	March 2022: 9%
10 – 12	34	12%	March 2022: 12%
13 – 15	78	27%	March 2022: 29%
16 – 17	107	37%	March 2022: 41%

There are 341 former relevant and relevant care leavers aged 17-25

- A high number of Ealing's care leaver population are former UASC, some of whom have not yet obtained their Immigration Status
- This impacts the high number of care leavers who are male (69%) and from BAME backgrounds (84%)

- Ealing are in touch with 98% of our 17-18 year old care leavers and 93% of 19-21 year olds
- 82% of 17-18 year olds and 58% of 19-21 year olds are in Education, Employment or Training (EET)
- 97% of 17-18 year olds and 95% of 19-21 year olds are in suitable accommodation. Care leavers tell us that housing is their number one concern.



Looked after children: placements

69% of children looked after (199 CLA) are in fostering placements

- Of these, almost half (97 children) are placed in independent provision, and a third (62 children) with in-house carers. 39 are with kinship carers and 1 child is with another local authority carer.
- 17% (48 young people) live in semi-independent provision – The majority are aged 16-17, 13 of whom are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)
- 8% (24 young people) are in registered children's homes, including one in a secure residential.
- Of the remaining 7%, 11 young people (4%) are placed with their parent(s); 3 are in residential Parent & Baby settings; 2 are in other residential settings and 3 are placed for adoption.

38% of children and young people are placed within Ealing and 82% are within 20 miles from their home (Dec 2022)

- This is lower than in March 2022 but higher than March 2021.
- 18% - 55 children and young people – are placed more than 20 miles from their home address.
- In some cases, children are placed far from Ealing due to being matched with a specific carer (2 children were placed for adoption and 2 were with kinship carers). Young people may also be placed out of Ealing for safeguarding reasons, such as the risk of exploitation by gangs or child sexual exploitation, leading to needing a safe placements away from Ealing.
- However, a significant number of young people are far from home because it is difficult to source suitable provision locally – either they were placed in IFA placements because no closer, suitable foster carers could be found; or specialist residential care was needed (11 of the 55 young people) and there is a shortage of availability in West London.



In 2021/22 13.7% of children and young people experienced 3 or more placements in the year.

- The figures for 2022/23 are on track to be slightly lower, although above the 2021/22 comparator average of 9%.



Care leavers: placements and independent accommodation

There are a range of accommodation options for care leavers aged 18+

- At the point of turning 18 most young people will be in some form of placement, either foster care or semi-independent provision.
- As they get older the Leaving Care Team will support them to identify the best independent housing option; for most young people this is a private rented tenancy. Housing and the Leaving Care service are now working together to support moving young people into private rented properties, with additional resource in place to both support young people in preparing for and sustaining a tenancy and to identify and acquire suitable properties.
 - **Staying Put with ongoing foster carer(s):** 37 young people in November 2022
 - **Supported Semi-Independent provision** – 162 young people in April 2022
 - **Supported Lodgings:** where a new host family is sourced via the local YMCA
 - **Living away at university** – either in halls of residence or in a shared house – 56 young people in 2022/23
 - **Living with immediate or extended family members**
 - **Private rental** – either alone or with other young people
 - **Social Housing** – there is now a clear criteria for care leavers applying for priority social housing, aimed at those young people who would have difficulty maintaining a private rental tenancy, for example due to mental health needs or learning disability



Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026



Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Children and young people at risk of becoming looked after

- We recognise that the best outcome for children and young people is to remain within their families, where it is safe for them to do so. We have put additional resource in place to prevent family breakdowns and reduce the number of children entering care.
- Ealing's focus is on reducing the number of older young people entering care under Section 20

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Teams (MAST)

- At the end of January 2023, 296 children and young people were subjects of child protection plans, having been assessed by the local authority and multi-agency partners as being at risk of significant harm. This is an increase since March 2022 when it was 240.
- Social work undertaken with their families is crucial in reducing the number of children entering care, where it is safe for them to remain with their birth parent(s). This is particularly true in the two MAST Adolescent Teams where a significant amount of risk is held; teenagers are more likely to become looked after than younger children.

- Workers practice in line with Ealing's Brighter Futures model and work to form trusting relationships with young people that are essential in this area.
- Key factors for children that increased the risk of coming into care, particularly when experienced in combination, include: being in adolescence, gang involvement, domestic abuse, emotional health, substance misuse, sexual and criminal exploitation.

REACH Team (Rapid Engagement of Adolescents and Children)

- In Autumn 2022 a new team was set up to support young people at risk of becoming looked after, as well as those young people in care who are placed in, or at risk of moving to, residential care.
- The team will be non-statutory and will aim to:
 - support young people to remain in their families safely;
 - support young people in care to be reunified with their families;
 - support young people in residential care to move safely to a foster placement; and
 - reduce placement breakdowns.
- The focus of the work will be practical, therapeutic relationship-based interventions that complement the work of the statutory teams and pull on the strengths of the young people and their families and carers.

- The number of young people accommodated under Section 20 has fallen significantly between March 2022 and January 2023.

Family Group Conferences

- Ealing are in the process of expanding their Family Group Conference offer, enabling more families to benefit from the approach
- This will improve outcomes for children and young people, enabling them to remain with their parent(s) or within their wider family network.

We will develop the MAST Adolescent and REACH Teams to further reflect the needs of adolescents at risk of entering care, including building up the youth work offer and enhancing support to parents through a Parent Champion network

We will expand the Family Group Conference offer and integrate it into the support offer to families

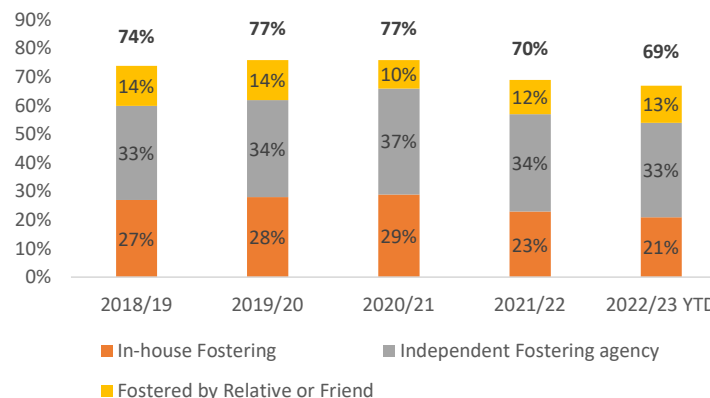
We will continue to focus on early intervention work that ensures only children who need care become looked after

Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Foster placements

- When children or young people do enter care, most of them will live in a foster placement. As at January 2023, 69% of Ealing’s children looked after were living with foster carers.
- Over the 5 years to 2021/22 there has been a slight decline nationally in the proportion of children looked after placed in a fostering household, from 73% to 70%. Initially during this period Ealing’s fostering placements saw a steady increase during the same period from 69% to 77%. However, Ealing’s trend reversed in 2021/22 as shown in Chart 1 – a reduction to 69% by January 2023.
- Ealing’s proportion of children looked after in fostering households remains higher than that of statistical neighbours (65%) and in line with London (69%) and England (70%).
- It is recognised that despite this, there is a growing sufficiency issue with foster placements for older children, which in some cases can lead to the use of residential care where it may not be in the young person’s best interests. Nationally, the number of foster placements has not kept up with the number of children looked after requiring placements.

Foster placements as a proportion of all placements



Kinship foster care (relative or friend)

- The percentage of children and young people in kinship care fell in 2020/21 but has since risen, with a high of 15% in 2022/23 (currently 13%). Placements in kinship care are expected to increase nationally, with recognition of the benefits highlighted in the recent independent review of children’s social care.
- There is a growing recognition of the benefits of kinship care – which is associated with better long-term health and employment outcomes for young people than other types of care. Combined with a local and national shortage of foster placements, there is a growing need to explore family and friend placements early on and consider more robust and creative support to facilitate and sustain them.

We will continue to develop our support offer to kinship foster carers, to ensure that young people can remain in their family networks safely wherever possible

We will ensure that the wider family is brought together for a Family Group Conference when a child may be a risk of coming into care, so that potential kinship carers are aware of the support and demands of becoming a carer

We will continue to provide support to our kinship carers from the external organisation Kinship (as part of our ongoing work with Adopt London West and Post-order support)

We will ensure that respite is available for our kinship carers

We will review the financial needs of carers when young people turn 18 and remain in Staying Put arrangements



Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Foster placements

In-house placements

- The percentage of children living with in-house foster carers has fallen since March 2021, from 29% to 21%. There are a number of contributing factors, including retirements among an ageing carer population and a particular recruitment challenge in London due to the housing market. The impact of Covid-19 also caused some reduction in recruitment activity during 2020/21.
- Ealing has high standards for our carers and offers a strong level of support; we are also able to better match carers with young people. In-house carers tend to be closer to Ealing which allows children and young people to maintain links with their networks and may allow them to remain at their schools.
- In-house placements are therefore seen as better for children and young people; they also offer better value for money.



We will recruit a new full-time Fostering Marketing Coordinator

We will develop and deliver a new re digital marketing and recruitment strategy to target, recruit and retain more in-house foster families

We will build on our 'word of mouth' recruitment campaign offering incentives to our existing carers who put forward friends or relatives

We will consider the evidence from the Fostering Network in expediting fostering assessments safely, with consideration of concurrent support for prospective carers to build their skill whilst also being assessed

We will consider options to increase the utilisation of our current foster carers, to care for more children, where it is safe to do so, including incentives such as support for house extensions/ additional bedroom capacity. This will enable our experienced carers to provide placements for sibling groups and older young people.

We will encourage our current foster carers to provide 'emergency support' to young people who come into LA care out of hours.

We will continue with our 'respite' foster carer recruitment campaign, targeting teachers in local schools.

Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Foster placements

Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements

- The proportion of children and young people in IFA placements has remained broadly stable over the last 4 years.
- Commissioning data shows that there is a sufficiency challenge when seeking Specialist foster placements for more complex children and young people. This has led to some young people being placed far from home and at times, requiring residential placements when no foster carer match is found.

Reducing placement breakdowns

- Children and young people achieve better outcomes when they are in stable placements. In 2021/22 13.7% of children and young people experienced 3 or more placements in the year. The figures for 2022/23 are on track to be slightly lower, although above the 2021/22 comparator average of 9%.
- Ealing recognises that targeted action is required to reduce the number of children experiencing multiple placements, for example by holding placement stability meetings when issues start to emerge and considering additional support to reduce the risk of breakdown

IFA placements: We will work closely with external fostering providers to maintain and increase the number of placements and to support the step across from residential to fostering.

Foster to Adopt: We will ensure that our Early Permanence scheme enables more children to be placed with their potential adoptive carer(s)

Staying Put: We are committed to enabling young people to stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday as part of Staying Put arrangements.

Reducing placement breakdowns: We will develop an enhanced system for recognising cases where bespoke, intensive support is required to stabilise placements



Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Residential children's homes

- 8% of our children have an assessed need that is currently being met by a residential children's home (January 2023) – 24 young people, including 1 placed in secure residential. The majority of those are placed outside of London, with some over 100 miles away.
- Numbers of young people requiring residential has fluctuated in the last 4 years, with a low of 15 in August/September 2019 (4% of CLA population) and a high of 31 in May 2021 (10% of CLA population). Drivers for the increase include fostering sufficiency; an increase in the proportion of CLA who are adolescents; and higher rates of factors that put young people at risk of residential care, such as self-harm, criminal involvement, and multiple placement breakdowns. Some children require specialist residential provision due to complex disabilities.
- For most young people, residential care is required because they are unable to live safely and successfully in a family setting. Because of the lack of suitable provision in and around Ealing, a placement in residential often involves moving well over 20 miles away from home, leaving behind support networks and school. While we aim to reduce our use of these placements where possible, there is a project to develop local provision to ensure that young people who do need these placements can remain close to home where this is safe.

- Ealing does not directly deliver residential provision; placements are purchased from external providers. These cost significantly more than other placement types and costs have increased each quarter for the last 2 years.

Table 4: Percentage of CLA placed in residential children's homes or secure residential

March 2020	March 2021	March 2022	Jan 2023
7%	9%	7%	8%

We will continue our work with the Commissioning Alliance to increase local sufficiency, so that where residential care is the best option for young people, local provision can be considered

We will join a Pan-London Vehicle (PLV) for Commissioning which will develop secure welfare provision in London and will also provide a mechanism for future joint commissioning within the Pan-London region

We will progress plans to develop a commissioned care home utilising an Ealing asset, part funded by the DfE

We will undertake a Needs Assessment of young people with complex disabilities who require residential care and review our options to meet their needs



We will reduce our use of residential children's homes where it is safe and appropriate to do so, by:

- Working to keep adolescents at risk of residential placements from becoming looked after
- Increasing sufficiency of kinship and foster placements
- Working in partnership with young people and their caregivers to enable successful transition to return home or step down to fostering, kinship care or semi-independent provision
- Identifying placements at risk of breakdown and putting in place support to stabilise

Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Semi-independent provision

- The use of semi-independent placements more than doubled between March 2021 and March 2022, from 29 to 62. This increase was driven by the sharp increase in 16–17-year-old UASC in year.
- This provision is generally used for young people who do not wish to remain with their foster carers; who enter care at age 16-17; or who have transitioned out of residential care.
- In April 2020, the Commissioning Alliance launched a Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) for semi-independent living alongside an Accreditation Scheme that was designed to raise standards in lieu of registration.
- In late 2023 it will become mandatory for all semi-independent provision for 16- and 17-year olds to be regulated and inspected. This will have a significant impact on the sector and is a risk for Ealing particularly considering the challenges in securing foster placements for older teenagers. The Commissioning Alliance are currently undertaking analysis of the local market to understand the likely impact in more detail.

Table 5: Young people placed in semi-independent provision

	March 2020	March 2021	March 2022	January 2023
Number	29	29	62	48
Percentage	8%	9%	19%	17%

Semi-independent provision: We will ensure that all 16-year-olds have semi-independent living as part of their plan when it is the best option for them

We will work closely with providers to understand the impact of the changes in regulation of this provision in 2023

We will continue to work in partnership with the Commissioning Alliance and providers to ensure that young people have choice and support to successfully transition into adult life

We will consider the use of council assets as semi-independent provision for 16- and 17-year olds, to mitigate the risk of registration changes

Placements with parents: We will review the support in place for parent(s) whose children move back home, including housing assistance, support during transitions and robust safeguarding plans

We will increase the number of families who are offered a Family Group Conference to explore their support needs

Placements with Parent(s)

- Where young people remain looked after but they can be safely placed at home with their parent(s), this is preferable for their long-term outcomes. Demand for other placement types is reduced when this is successful.
- These placements have increased from 3 in March 2021 to 11 in January 2022. Increasingly these placements are being considered where there is a breakdown of another placement or where they can provide a route out of residential care.
- The level of risk involved in these placements is always carefully assessed.



Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Parent & Baby Residential Placements

- At any one time there are normally between 1 and 4 children in residential Parent & Baby placements.
- These are time-limited placements where the parent is assessed to determine whether they can safely care for their baby. They are low incidence but high cost, the average cost per week per placement is over £3,000 per week.
- Ealing also utilise parent and baby foster placements
- Where successful, the outcomes are positive for the child who can be raised with their birth parent(s) instead of remaining in care.

Special Guardianship Orders & Adoption

- The number of children subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) has fallen since 2020/21. SGOs provide long-term security to children without removing Parental Responsibility from their parent(s).
- Adoption services are provided via the regional adoption agency Adopt London West. Most of our children waiting adoption are matched this way, but where there is not an appropriate match, the services of other adoption agencies are used

Parent & Baby residential: We will work with the Commissioning Alliance as they explore options to move from spot purchasing to a framework agreement, improving the offer, quality and price

SGOs & adoptions: We will continue to consider SGOs as a permanency option for all children where this is appropriate

We will ensure the support we offer to Special Guardians remains appropriate

We will put in place a system for flagging where there is a risk of SGO breakdown, as we know that older children in these arrangements can sometimes require re-entry into care



Children with disabilities: We will work with the Commissioning Alliance to maintain and increase the number of placements for this cohort of children

We are reviewing commissioned short breaks and other services that support families to remain together for longer

We are co-producing our short breaks offer with young people and families to ensure that it continues to meet local need. This will include a review and procurement of a short-breaks Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV).

We will undertake a Needs Assessment of young people with complex disabilities who require residential care and review our options to meet their needs

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children: We are working to deliver a range of UASC specific supported accommodation that meets the needs of these children and support young people into education, employment and training and have links with community groups and voluntary sector organisations for support and work experience.

Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Progression and prevention support

- Support to manage transitions safely is crucial when children and young people move, particularly during:
 - Reunification with parents after periods in care;
 - Moves into any new kinship placement;
 - Transitions from residential care to any other types of care; and
 - Moving from being looked after to leaving care via Special Guardianship Order (SGO)/adoption.
- This support is also vital when there is a risk of young people entering care or escalating to a higher placement need (e.g. from foster care to residential) and the service is working to prevent this.
- There are existing, robust support offers in place for children, carers and families already, but also recognition that these could go further in some cases, to ensure successful transitions and placement stability.

We will further develop a range of co-designed support which includes:

- **Mental health support for children, young people, and parents**
- **Family Group Conferences**
- **Family practitioners to support parents and carers**
- **Youth workers support to young people**
- **Peer support from Parent Champion Network**
- **Financial support to reduce pressure on parents or kinship carers**
- **Support to re-engage young people in education**
- **Housing support, for example sourcing larger properties to reduce pressure on families**

In some cases, the offer to families will be coordinated with and/or delivered by the new REACH team, working alongside the statutory social worker.



Delivering on our ambition: our journey to 2026

Independent accommodation for care leavers aged over 18

- Care-experienced young people tell us that moving to independent housing is a high stressor: they want early preparation for independence and do not want to move before they are ready. They may need support in navigating the private rented housing market and they would prefer social housing in Ealing as their independent housing option.

“The worry about housing has the biggest impact on my mental health”

“Now I can focus on my studies without worrying”

“I feel secure at last”

- From direct feedback we know that young people have been delighted with the quality of private rental accommodation offered to them, and that they are able to live in or close to Ealing. However, we also know that benefit caps and cuts are causing financial hardship for some of those who have moved to private rental housing and who are not in employment. A range of financial support offers for care leavers have been put in place to ensure that care-experienced young people are not at risk of becoming homeless.

- There are also challenges in the availability of affordable private rental properties to meet demand.
- Ealing have responded by setting up a private rental housing project with dedicated resources for acquisitions and housing related support; pre tenancy training and affordability checks are offered to young people identified as being ready for independent housing. For those affected by the benefit cap, a financial safety net was quickly set up and an employment, education and training project. Care leavers are exempt from Council Tax payments until age 25.
- Work is underway across the council to consider creative solutions to the lack of affordable independent housing options.
- In relation to social housing, joint Housing and Leaving Care panels consider nominations; and a project group is considering needs in relation to the available supply. We have developed a Joint Housing Protocol which sets out priority categories for social housing and options for securing tenancies which are safe and affordable. Feedback from individual young people, our advocacy services and regular Accommodation Surveys will inform whether we have adequately addressed the issues previously raised by young people.

We will continue to work closely with Housing Providers and Partners to ensure that all care leavers have access to sustainable and affordable accommodation to meet their needs.

We will develop models to reduce isolation and increase education, employment and training. We will positively address any risk of homelessness.

We will lobby on the issue of the benefit cap for care leavers, which appears to be contrary to other policy measures which recognise the additional challenges faced by young people with care experience



The voices of children and young people

How we gather young people's views

- Listening to children and young people is fundamental in understanding what they want for their lives and whether our work is making a difference to achieving this. Young people's voices must inform both their individual care and how our services are delivered more widely.
- This strategy has been informed by the experiences and views of children, young people and their families.
- Young people's voices are heard in multiple ways including via their Social Workers, PAs and IROs; during visits and reviews; through complaints; through surveys and consultation groups; through the Children in Care Councils; and via our advocacy provider Coram Voice. We have reviewed our Corporate Parenting Strategy and this has increased the voice of young people via the Children in Care Councils.
- Placement issues raised individually are responded to as appropriate, for example through quality assurance visits, raising issues with providers or moving children where this is needed.

Areas identified by young people include:

- Placements to match the needs of sibling groups
- A large proportion of older CLA are placed in semi-independent units, some of which are excellent but some of which are below standard
- Anxiety about moving to independence from foster care, leading to development of an independence checklist and independence skills workbook
- Some young people do not feel safe in their placements
- The financial challenge of independent living, exacerbated by the current economic situation



Commissioning arrangements

Commissioning approach and quality assurance

- The following commissioning principles underpin this strategy:
 - understanding the needs of children looked after and care leavers through individual assessment and care planning
 - a strategic assessment of need to ensure the right numbers and types of placement are anticipated and planned for
 - developing the market to meet required needs so that appropriate placements can be commissioned
 - focusing on outcomes for children and young people through rigorous quality assurance and contract management and monitoring.
- Ealing continues to work in partnership with the West London Alliance (WLA), a collaboration of 7 local authorities.
- Direct Purchasing Vehicles (DPVs) for Independent Fostering Agencies and residential provision are used for most commissioning activity. In April 2021 a new DPV for semi-independent providers was launched with a key focus on raising the quality of provision via a new accreditation scheme. The aims of the WLA-negotiated DPVs is to secure local provision and to deliver cost and volume savings to local authorities.

The Access to Resources Team (ART) works very closely with social work teams, the Children with Disability Team (CWD) and the Youth Justice Service (YJS). It provides a brokerage service for individual placements as well as a strategic commissioning function. The ART also carry out additional quality assurance checks prior to any placement of children and young people with external providers not previously used by the local authority. This includes completion of a safeguarding questionnaire, review of published Ofsted reports and statements of purpose.

Where placements are being considered in a residential or semi-independent setting that may not have been used before, references are sought from other local authorities who have placed children there.

Ealing monitors the submission of residential provider Regulation 33 and Regulation 44 reports. The local authority regularly asks providers to complete a quality self-review, that sets out clearly the local authority's quality standards. Feedback from social work teams about any placement concerns or best practice is encouraged to ensure that we can address any issues with providers. Social workers review monthly child or young person placement progress reports that cover the support and care provided and raise any quality assurance issues at relevant placement panels. The CA also carries out a schedule of quality assurance visits to residential and semi-independent providers.



Commissioning arrangements

This approach supports existing services and market to ensure we are efficient and effective and that our children are safe. Our Strategy is based on developing a market in partnership with all that has relationship practice at the core:

- We will prioritise ethical providers who are as passionate about Our Children as we are
- Recognise and value the voices of children and young people in the development and monitoring of services
- Ensure we use learning from existing good practice, timely data, intelligence and consultation to inform innovative service design
- Co-produce Market development plans with service users and providers
- Collaboratively develop future-proof services across the Council, partner agencies and communities to ensure maximisation of existing resources
- Ensure Social value is embedded within all commissioning to make sure we reinvest in our communities and services
- Own our decisions to ensure we are investing in services which positively impact children's lives.
- Finance processes are automated to ensure providers are paid on time
- Information sharing as early as possible to enable effective planning

Ealing commissions a range of placement types to meet the needs of Looked After Children, including foster care placements, semi-independent placements, residential placements (including secure arrangements), placements for children with special needs including residential schools and adoption. Care Leavers who are not considered ready for independence are offered a range of semi-independent options, including 'staying put' arrangements with foster carers.

Most children and young people live with foster families. Efficient screening and assessment processes ensure that only the most appropriate carers are recruited. Enhanced payment incentives are provided for carers who support children with more complex and challenging needs. This includes support for staying put arrangements.

Fewer than 30% of children and young people live in residential care (including semi-independent provision). All live in homes rated good or better by Ofsted. Placement planning ensures that, wherever possible, children's homes are able to meet the unique needs of each child or young person.

Short breaks provision for children who have a disability has developed and judged by Ofsted to be good. Our new overnight short provision Haydock Avenue is a 6-bed respite service with excellent facilities and has received positive feedback from families.

We know that the referral process is crucial to sharing up-to-date, relevant information with potential providers. We will work with our children and providers to develop and improve our referral processes, considering key information and language used. The aim is that the information is of sufficient quality to inform placement decision. Our providers will know our placements team and will be able to have conversations in a timely way to ensure that there is no delay or drift.



Financial context and governance

Financial context

- The Children's Services financial position in Ealing and nationally has been extremely challenging, with 8 out of 10 LAs being overspent in this area in 2020/21. Given the climate of austerity, Ealing's rising population and a significant reduction in council budgets, key to this strategy is the need to influence and safely manage demand whilst at the same time ensuring that all interventions commissioned internally and externally are effective, safe, and evidence based.
- The net budget for Children's & Schools in 2022/23 was £65.2m. The bulk of the spend is on staffing and placements (including CLA, Care Leaver, Children with Disabilities and SEN placements).
- Residential costs in particular have increased significantly over the last 2 years, this is due predominantly to an increase in provider costs but also an increase in complexity of support needs.
- There is an ambitious programme of cost avoidance initiatives across the service with the intention of managing demand and reducing the number of high-cost placements. Linked to this is increasing local, high quality and value-for-money supply.



Governance

- This sufficiency strategy will be underpinned by an action plan that details how each commitment will be delivered and monitored
- Monitoring will take place collaboratively between children's social care and commissioning teams, overseen by Assistant Director level

Related strategies and documents:

[Ealing Council Plan](#)

[SEND Strategy](#)

[Ealing Safeguarding Children's Partnership](#)

[Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers](#)

[Children and Young People Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#)

[Ealing Children and Young People Statistics](#)