

Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2025

“Getting it Right First Time”

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Action plan and priorities

1. Foreword

In Milton Keynes City we have a real commitment to promoting the wellbeing of children and young people. We have the vision of MK as a place where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous through growth that creates opportunities for all, with a particular commitment to those children and young people for whom we are corporate parents. We know the difference it can make for our Looked After and care experienced young people when there is a clear understanding of, and stability in, their living arrangements and this strategy details how we intend to meet this through our placement sufficiency duty. As a Council our relationship with our looked after children, and with those leaving the Council's care, is unlike any other we have with our residents. We are 'Corporate Parents' to these young people and, as such, we have legal and moral responsibilities towards them, as we have towards our own children. In simple terms, we need to be the best possible parents we can. We must help all our children to thrive and flourish; reach and exceed their potential; and expand their life chances. We must provide help and support when and where this is needed whilst creating opportunities to develop resilience and independence as they move towards adulthood.

For the Council to be the best corporate parent it can be, we need to have the highest ambitions for children and young people that are looked after and have a 'whole council' approach to their care and upbringing, involving staff, carers and Elected Members alike. We are passionate about doing the best for our looked after children and young people and we want everyone connected to the council, and our partners, to share this passion. In order to do this is our desire to continue to develop new models of provision particularly for our most complex children, including those who access residential provision, to ensure the needs for all our children are met. Further, for all children impacted by this strategy, we wish to improve their sense of stability and identity, so they are able to have a strong sense of self and be clear as to their circumstances and future.

Listening to the voice of children and young people is at the heart of what we do as we drive forward the implementation of this strategy. Children and young people say that they want to feel a sense of belonging and for where they live to be their "home", where they are able to have friends to visit them and to take part in activities; in the same way their peers can. Children and young people want to be able to remain with their carers until they feel ready for independence and the work on securing permanency for young people always includes discussions with carers about Staying Put options post 18, as well as developing other ways for young people to choose how they might best be supported into adulthood. In MK we are clear that corporate parenting is about how we will be the best parents we can be for the children and young people in our care, when they have left care and as they become independent adults.

This strategy is part of a whole-system approach that includes early intervention and preventative services to support children within their families, as well as the range of support services for children who become looked after. This strategy is informed by what our children and young people tell us individually and collectively, our promises as corporate parents, our statutory duties and what we know from our data including the

analysis of our children looked after population in MK which provides opportunities to learn for the future. We are proud of the children and young people we support in Milton Keynes but continue to strive to improve our support to them and help them further succeed throughout their lives.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Mac Heath'.

Dr Mac Heath, Director of Children's Services



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zoe Nolan'.

Cllr Zoe Nolan, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

2. Introduction

Milton Keynes has recently acquired City status and we are proud to be part of a growing city that is Thriving, Progressive and Sustainable. We aim for all our children and young people to be provided with good quality care, have access to open spaces, be integrated into communities and have access to good and outstanding education.

Milton Keynes Children's Services is committed to providing good quality local accommodation to all our looked after children and young people with care experience. When children can no longer live at home or with family, our aim to provide the best quality care in Milton Keynes or as close to Milton Keynes as possible, staying connected to their families, communities, school, and friends.

We recognise the current challenges in sourcing the right homes for our children and young people, but it is important to us that children can grow up in a home that offers love, stability, good quality care, where they have a sense of belonging and our ambition is to get it right for them first time.



3. Our Duty and Legal Responsibility

The Children's Act 1989 requires local authorities to ensure we secure and provide a range of sufficient accommodation that meets the varying needs of our children in care.

Section (22c) Children Act 1989 sets out additional factors that local authorities must take into consideration when deciding the most appropriate placement.

- allowing the child to live near his/her home;
- not disrupting the child's education or training;
- enabling the child and a looked after sibling to live together;
- meeting the needs of disabled children; and
- providing accommodation within the local authority's area unless that is not reasonably practicable.

This strategy sets out how Milton Keynes City Council will fulfil these duties and meet the needs of our children in care and young people with care experience.

It will include an overview of our current children in care and young people with care experience. It sets out our vision, drawing upon our model and ethos when working with families in Milton Keynes, whilst considering how our commissioning services will support and ensure we have a range of available placements that meet the needs of our children and young people.



4. Our Children in Numbers: Demographic Summary



361 children are cared for by Milton Keynes City Council as of 31 March 2022. The number of children cared for by Milton Keynes Council has decreased by **8%** in the past 12 months and **7%** the past 5 years.



The number of children cared for by Milton Keynes City Council continues to be below comparable regional and national averages.



Age profile for children cared for at 31 March 2022



MKCC cared for a total of **549** children throughout the 2021/22 year



58% of children cared for by Milton Keynes at 31 March 2022 are **Male**



55% of children cared for by Milton Keynes at 31 March 2022 are **White British ethnicity**



11% of children cared for by Milton Keynes at 31 March 2022 have a recorded disability



Legal status for children cared for at 31 March 2022



A Place to Live, Your Home

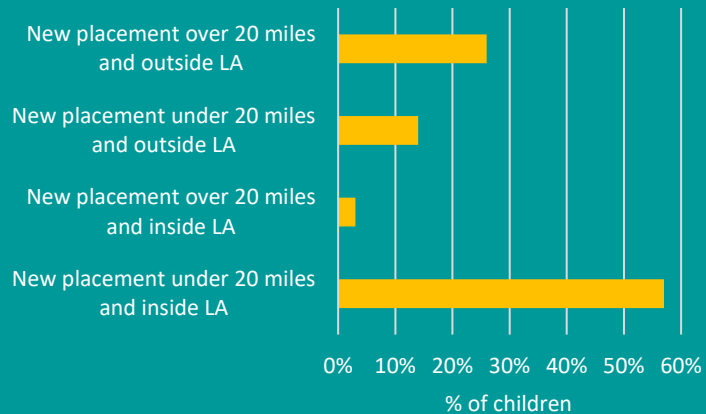
MKCC are ambitious for all our children coming into care and we will strive to 'Get it Right' first time when identifying the right placement options for children.



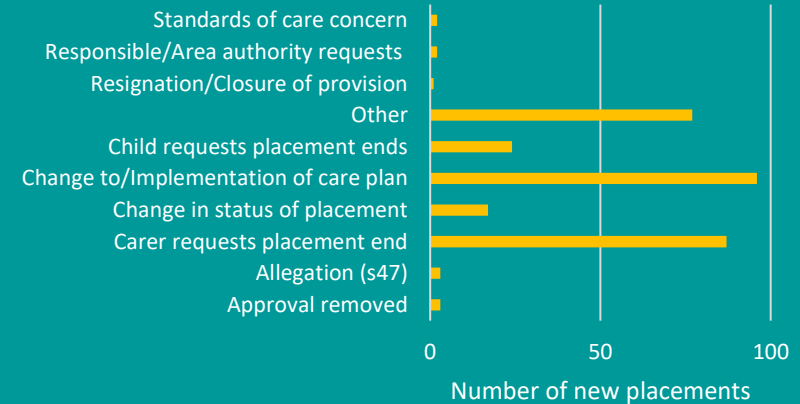
467 New placements were made during the 2021/22 financial year



71% of new placements made during 2021/22 were in Milton Keynes or within 20 miles of Milton Keynes



Reasons for change of placement



Other category may include time limited placement/emergency placement, better option closer/within MK or change of school

It is important to us to have children placed locally, so they can remain at the same education provision, stay connected with their families and grow up in their communities, where it is safe for them to do so.

70%

Percentage of children looked after at 31 March 2022 placed in Milton Keynes or **within 20 miles of their home**

Our ambition is to increase the number of our in house foster carers to enable us to place more children locally with our own carers.

16%

Children looked after at 31 March 2022 had three or more placements during the year

57%

CLA in care at least 2.5 years at 31 March 2022 living in their current placement for at least 2 years

30%

CLA at 31 March placed outside Milton Keynes boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live

We are committed to recruiting and supporting a range of foster families that can meet the needs of our children and young people.

73%

Percentage of children cared for by Milton Keynes City Council at 31 March 2022 placed with Foster Carers

11%

Percentage of children cared for by Milton Keynes City Council at 31 March 2022 in Foster placements with relative(s) or friend(s)

34%

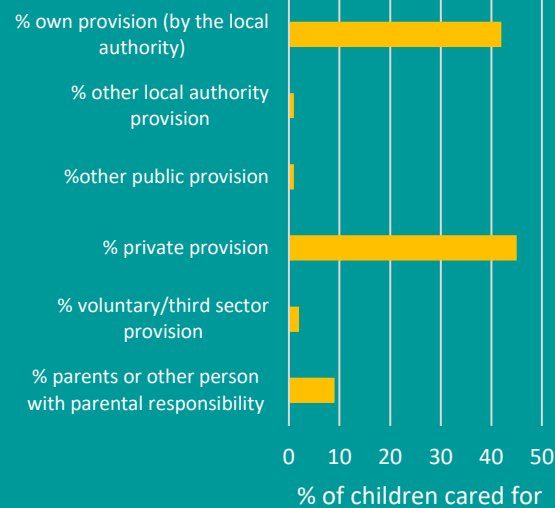
Percentage of children cared for by Milton Keynes City Council at 31 March 2022 in Foster placements confirmed as permanent (long term)

42%

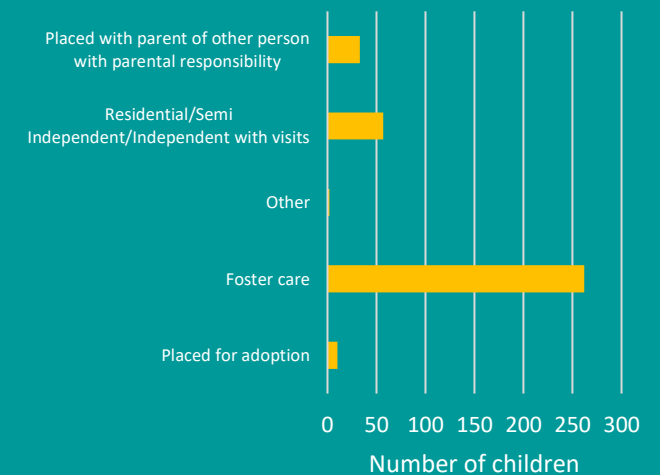
Percentage of children cared for by Milton Keynes Council at 31 March 2022 placed in MK lower than national (49%)



Placement Provider for children cared for at 31 March 2022

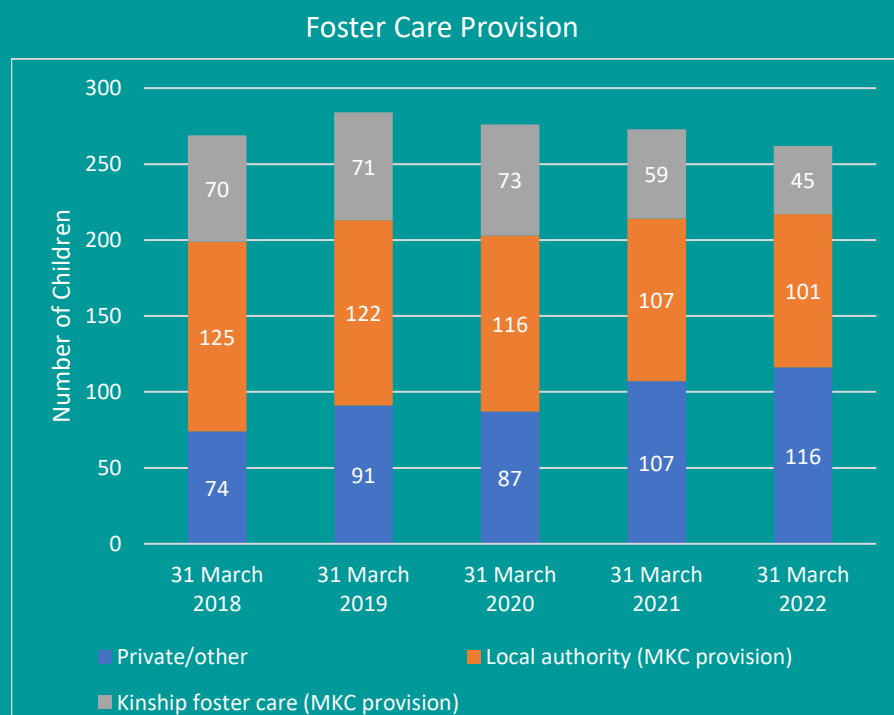


Placement type for children cared for at 31 March 2022



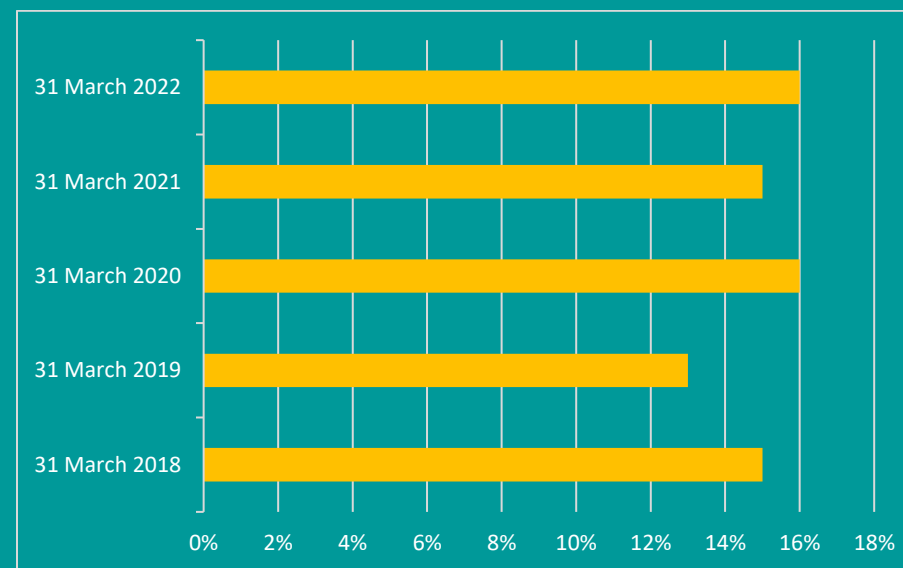
A Place to Live, Your Home

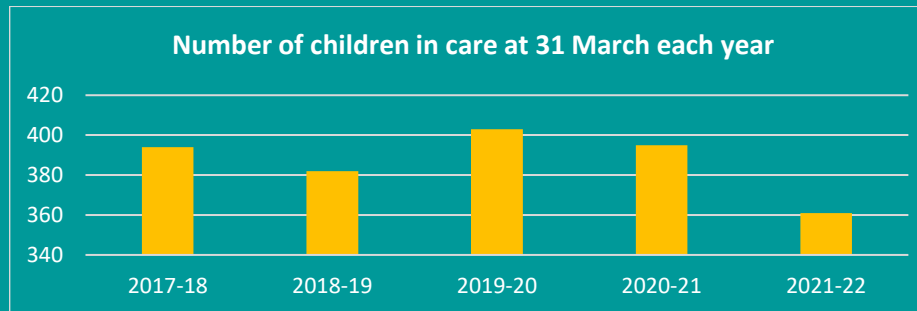
Most looked after children are accommodated in foster placements with 73% children looked after at 31 March 2022 placed with a foster carer, a similar proportion to previous years



At 31 March 2022 16% of children looked after were placed in secure units, children homes, independent living (including visiting), family centres or semi-independent living.

Secure units, children's home, independent living (including visiting), family centres and semi-independent living accommodation





2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
394	382	403	395	361

Financial data

Despite the fact our numbers of LAC are declining, we are still facing significant budget pressures as a result of the below factors:

- The unit cost of external placements is rising. This is both as a result of inflationary pressures as well as the lack of capacity nationally especially for specialist placements. In the 12 months between April 2021 and April 2022, the average cost of an IFA placement increased by **6%** and the average cost of external residential and secure placements increased by **31%**
- Each child placed in an in-house foster placement versus an external IFA placement saves the Council on average £0.030m over a year (this does not include the cost of our in-house staffing team). The proportion of in house and external placements significantly impacts financial pressures
- The number of Adoption and SGO placements are increasing which also has a financial cost to the Council. In 2022-23, the forecast spend on Adoption and SGO allowances is £3.1m, this is **34%** of the total forecast spend on in-house placements and **15%** on placements overall.

Children Starting to Become Looked After



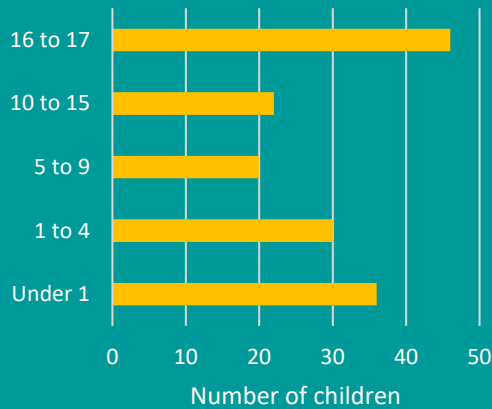
154 children started to be looked after by Milton Keynes City Council during the 2021-22 financial year. The number of children becoming cared for by Milton Keynes in the 2021-22 year is lower than recent, previous years.



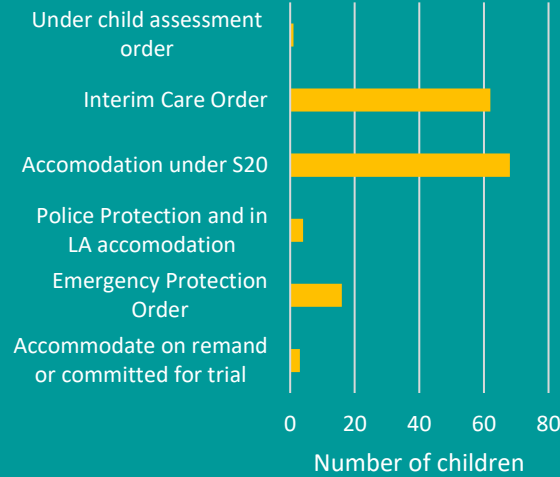
The number of children becoming cared for by Milton Keynes City Council in 2021-22 is below comparable regional and national averages



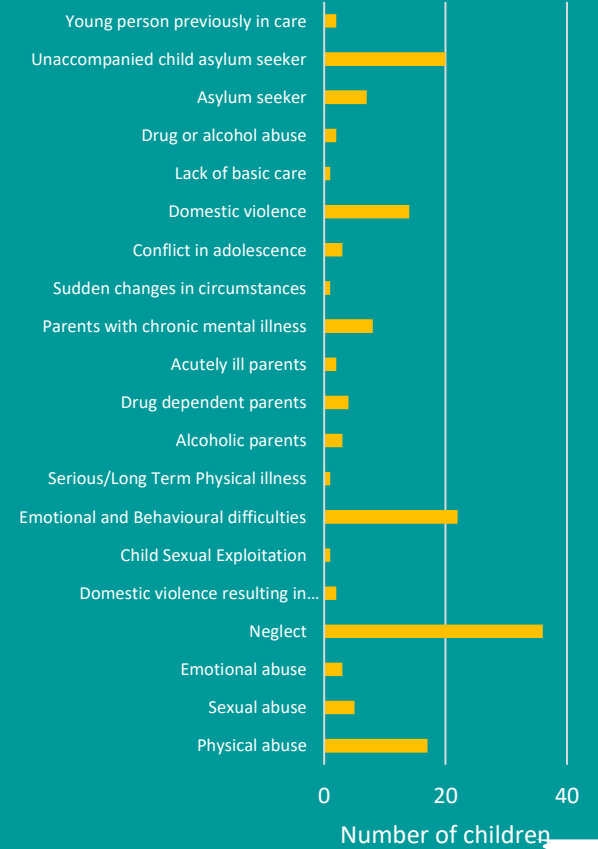
Age profile for children becoming cared for in 20/21 financial year



First legal status for children becoming cared for in 20/21 financial year



Children starting a LAC episode by category of need



Children Ceasing to be Looked After



189 children ceased to be cared for by Milton Keynes in 2020-21. A 17% increase compared to last year.

15%

The percentage of children that ceased to be cared for during 20-21 were adopted, an increase compared to the previous year

19%

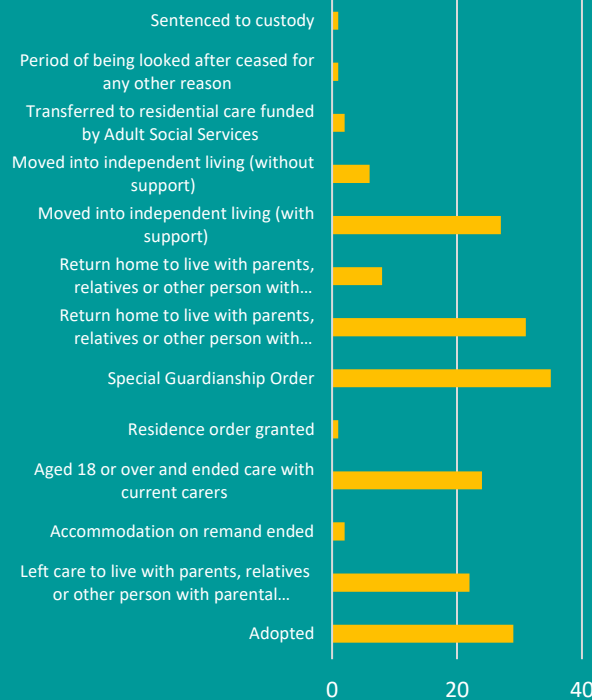
The percentage of children that ceased to be cared for during 20-21 were discharged with a Special Guardianship Order, the same as the previous year

32%

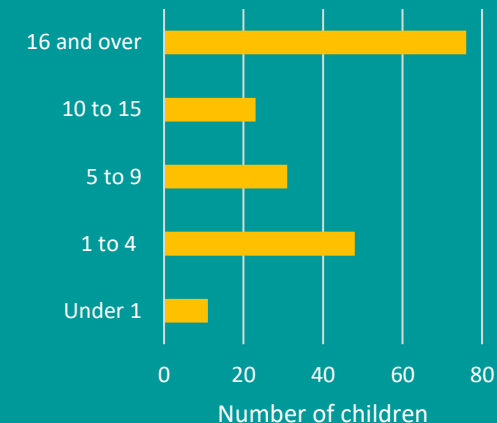
The percentage of children ceasing to be looked after that returned home to live with parents



Reason for leaving care (2021-22 financial year)



Age profile for children who ceased to be cared for in 20-21



34%

The percentage of children ceasing to be looked after that left care on their 18th birthday

Rate for the child population and comparator data

Number and rate of children looked after

		31 March			
		2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Milton Keynes	Number	382	403	395	361
	Rate per 10,000	56	59	57	52
England	Number	78,150	80,000	80,850	TBC in October
	Rate per 10,000	65	67	67	TBC in October

Net changes in the last 4 years

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Children becoming Looked After	169	171	163	154
Children ceasing to be Looked After	181	151	171	189
Net CLA population increase/decrease	-12	+20	-8	-35

Adoption – We currently have adopters who are waiting for children, but require adopters from Black, Minority and Ethnic Groups and those that can take siblings.

In-house Fostering – Council Plan is to increase foster carers by 15 each year who can offer a range of different types of care

External Fostering – Plan is to reduce the use of external fostering provision

Supported Lodgings – We are actively recruiting more in house supported lodgings carers

Residential – We are exploring options to have a residential provision within Milton Keynes run by council, which will lead to a reduction of external residential provision.

5. Our Ethos and Family Support Approach

Our Vision

“For our Children and Young People to lead happy and successful lives, achieving their potential, feeling secure in loving homes, engaged in safe communities and attending good local schools, leading them into a fulfilling career”

Our Values

We value the concept of family in our approach, be this a traditional family, a family of schools, a community, or individuals coming together with a common aim or purpose.

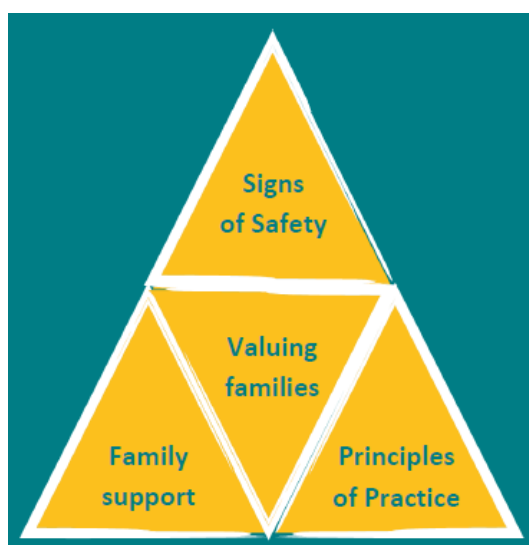
We operate on the values of Milton Keynes City Council:

We are:

1. Dedicated
2. Respectful
3. Collaborative

There is a clear expectation that all services that form part of Children’s Services are clear on a ‘One Children’s Service’ approach and focussed on children and young people’s outcomes. There is an expected principle of us being outward looking as a service, with value being judged on impact and outcome, for a child, young person, their family, or the community in which they live.

This approach is at the core of our Golden Triangle Model



Early identification of risk and resilience factors

We use Signs of Safety to engage our families in understanding what needs to change and to agree a plan to help move families forward, whilst building on their strengths.

Delivering a comprehensive Family Support Service

To meet the complex range of families' needs, we offer wrap-around services tailored to meet the individual needs of parents, children, and young people.

Working to the highest 'Quality First' principles of practice

We constantly challenge our own and each other's practice to ensure our support really makes a difference to our families.

Our Principles of Practice are:

- Let's Communicate Better
- Get it right first time, you're empowered to do what it takes.
- Innovation and creativity are allowed.
- Your time is valuable. Do more of the things that have the greatest impact.

Our Aims

Getting it right first time – Good quality, highly trained and committed carers from our fostering community to help raise our children, striving to give them the best possible opportunities to help them grow into adulthood.

Knowing our children well – through robust assessments, relationship based social work, listening to the voice of the child, children writing their own pen pictures.

Placing Close – Keeping a child within the community that is familiar to them is important both to us and to them.

We believe that where it is safe and possible to do so, children should remain living within the family home with their birth parents or the next best option, will be explore wider family networks as a Kinship option to enable the child to remain within their family unit. This option is frequently the one that will have the least amount of disruption to the child's daily life.

Where the child cannot remain with their birth parents, or live with extended family, then we will first consider a foster placement. We will always explore our in-house carers first, to see if we have a carer who can offer a home to a child locally, to keep the child connected to birth family, maintain school, social networks, etc.

4. Prevention and What We Currently Do

Milton Keynes City Council supports a Family Support Approach. We believe in most circumstances children are best raised with their families and will strive to ensure children can remain with their families when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

We support families to stay together, working alongside them to reduce risk, promoting, and supporting the strengths families can have. We have successfully embedded Signs of Safety into our practice, and our 'Edge of Care' strategy continues to be successful ensuring lower numbers of teenage children entering care.

We have Child and Family Practices that support families early before reaching threshold for statutory intervention, this supports families to address issues before needing alternative intervention.

Where families do require support, we'll continue to support via Child in Need plans using Signs of Safety with families and partners, with the plan of reducing any risks. We have more recently introduced Edge of Care panel, reviewed by Head of Safeguarding to direct additional resources to families to mitigate the need for children to enter care.

We continue to keep our children in care numbers low, through effective family support approach, an edge of care approach and focusing on throughput of our children and young people into permanency.

7. Children Coming into Care

All children coming into care are referred to the Fostering Service to search for a fostering placement unless the child can be placed with their extended family.

If no fostering in house placement is found, our Community Resource Team will look for an external placement, either independent fostering, or provide a semi-independent or residential placement.

Children who need specialist placements

Some of our children need specialist residential placements to meet their needs. This includes, residential children's homes, specialist education provisions, hospital placements or secure accommodation. For the few children who live in these provisions we want to ensure that the package of support around them understands their presenting needs, will work with them to help overcome any difficulties and assist them in moving on when the time is right.

8. Commissioning Arrangements

Where an in-house placement is not available, our Community Resource Team will search for an Independent Fostering Agency placement, residential children's home, semi-independent provision or specialist placement.

How we are navigating Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) market

The Council subscribes via an SLA (service Level Agreement) to the LCS (London Care Services) Placement Framework for IFAs and Residential Care Homes. This provides:

- **Brokerage:** Operate a central register of approved foster and residential care providers offering various placement types to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.
- **Price negotiations:** Annual pre-placement bulk negotiation of contract prices to ensure boroughs have access to good quality, affordable provision for their looked-after children and young people; contribute to a reduction in spot-purchasing; strong collective bargaining position to deliver best value for money prices.
- **Centralised contract:** Management of the London Model Contract, undertaking due diligence and quality checks and updates to reduce administration costs to boroughs; standard terms and conditions to create a shared understanding between contractors and councils to improve the contracting process.
- **Web portal:** 24/7 platform to support local authorities to access placements and services, contract documentation, training and support material, share information on providers/placements, make placement searches and send referrals.
- **Development:** identification of opportunities for continuous improvement in the service and opportunities to support placement teams and sub-regional arrangements

The Community Resource Team (CRT) will also secure services on a Spot Purchase basis, where necessary.

Commissioning to secure placements for our children at the right cost

All Supported Accommodation services are commissioned in line with the Council's procurement rules which typically requires a competitive tendering process to identify the Most Economically Advantageous Tender.

The only exception to this is where supported accommodation services are, necessarily, sourced on a Spot Purchase basis. Nonetheless provision is still required to comply with the same service specification and meet the same quality criteria as that which is commissioned via a competitive tender process.

The cost of the Block Contract is determined by fixed price agreed on the award of contract

The cost of provision sourced via the Provider Framework is determined by the price quoted on award of the Framework Agreement. Our Community Resource Team will always contact providers in the order that they are listed on the Framework, which is determined by a combination of quality and price. The selected provider is always subject to approval by Children's Services.

The cost of provision sourced via a Spot Purchase is subject to negotiation between the Community Resources Team and the provider. The agreed price is always subject to approval by Children's Services.

A robust quality assurance and contract compliance regime, which includes monitoring visits and annual inspections, ensures that the provision is suitable for meeting the needs of the young people placed with each provider. A planned 'Young Inspectors' project will, on completion, enable young people to contribute to, and enhance the assessments currently undertaken by the Council's Quality & Compliance Team.

IFA (Independent Fostering Agency) services and Residential Care Home services are usually sourced by the CRT via the LCS (London Care Services) Framework. The cost of the services is reviewed and agreed with participating providers by LCS on an annual basis. Where the Independent Fostering Agency and residential provision cannot be sourced via the LCS Framework, services may be obtained via a Spot Purchase. The cost is subject to negotiation and approval by Children's Services.

Relationships with External providers

The Council maintains its relationships with commissioned providers mainly through:

- direct communications
- market engagement events
- performance reviews and meetings as required
- Quality & Compliance inspections and visits
- the Council's CRT (Community Resources/Brokerage Team)
- membership of CCRAAG (the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group), which facilitates various commissioner/provider events and workshops throughout the year; (MKC is a steering group member) and
- the BLMK (Bedfordshire, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes) Provider Forum
- Attendance at national and regional conferences

9. Moving on or Moving Up

Young People with Care experience

We want the best opportunities for young people with care experience, so we start planning in a timely way with our young people to look at all the options available to them to ensure each young person has a smooth transition at a time that is right for them. We use their Pathway Plan to illustrate the options and accommodation available.

Currently, we are reviewing alongside Adult Social Care and the Housing Development all pathways for young people with care experience. The current options available to these young people with are as follows –

- 'Staying Put' with foster carer
- Return home to parent/family
- Semi-independent accommodation
- Specialist provision provided by Adult Social Care
- Staying close – leaving residential care and remaining close to residential community
- Own tenancy through housing
- Privately rental market
- Shared accommodation with friends.

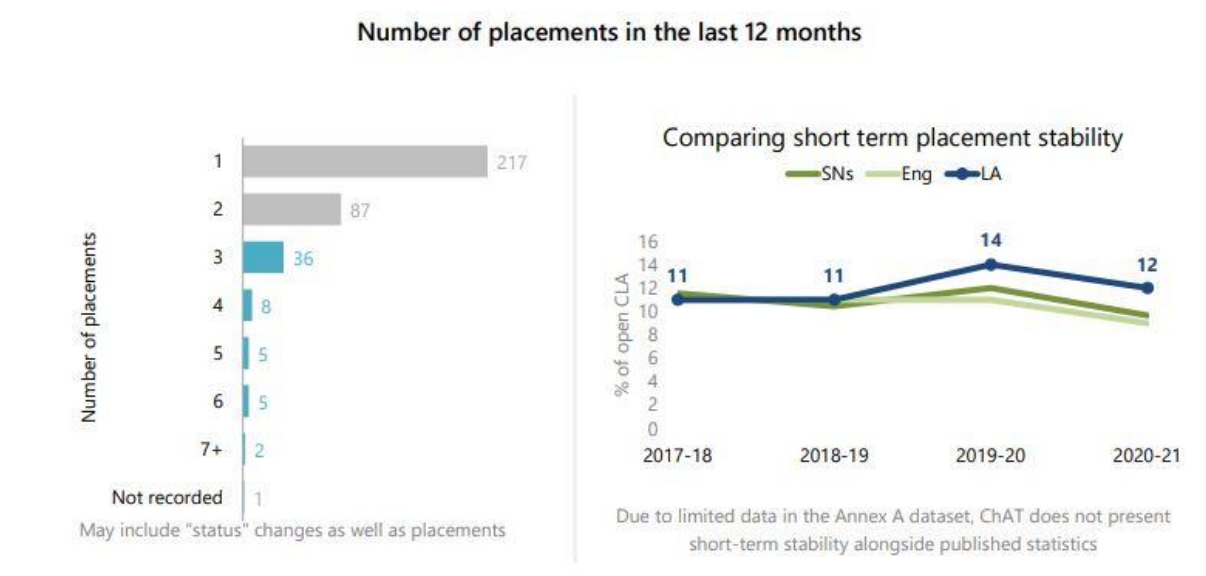
We have recently collaborated on the reviewed Housing Allocation Policy – see below for link.

[Housing Allocation Policy](#)



10. Placement Stability

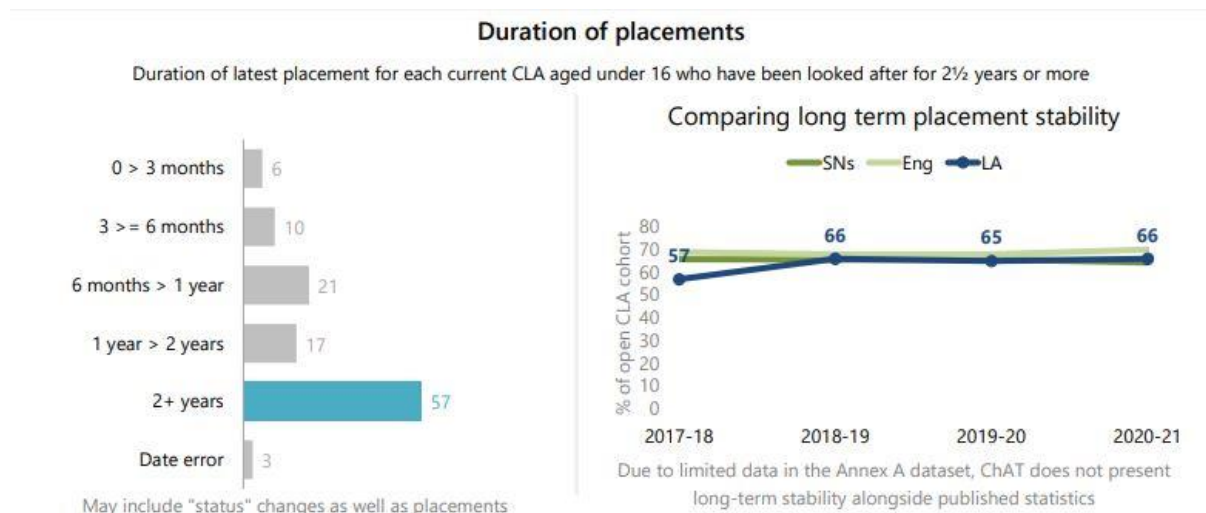
Short term stability



Placement Stability is a challenge for us in Milton Keynes. This is due to us having insufficient appropriate placement options when a child comes into care that meets the child’s presenting needs. Additionally, we have a higher proportion of babies coming into care and court’s request parent/child placement to assess parents’ ability.

If an assessment is negative, the placement ends, and the baby moves to an alternative placement. We are working with Adoption Connects to increase early permanence planning and although we are improving in our adoption and permanence arrangements this continues to be a focus for us.

Long term stability



11. In-house Fostering Service

Our in-house fostering service assesses, supports, and identifies new placements for all children coming into care or existing children who require a new home. The Fostering Service are an experienced and committed social work team, who complete a range of assessments including Form F's, Viability Assessments, Regulation 24, and Special Guardianship Order Assessments.

Currently, we have a range of carers who offer a variety of different types of placements, including short term, emergency, respite, long term and specialist. We recognise as a service we need more availability and want to particularly recruit foster carers who can offer parent and child placements, placements for complex children, long-term or emergency care. We have a number of active marketing campaigns to recruit, assess and train new foster carers.

Recruitment and Retention Strategy:

- To recruit a wide range of foster carers that can meet the needs of our children in care population using a variety of marketing initiatives.
- To provide a high-quality support service, supervision, and training to our current foster carers to ensure they feel valued and part of our fostering community.
- To develop the Team and Service to meet the need of our children in care, to ensure we have a workforce who have a variety of expertise and committed to building the service and going the extra mile for our foster carers and children.
- Monthly support groups for foster carers
- 24/7 telephone support
- Events and activities to ensure foster carers feel valued and part of a successful team
- Careful matching of children with foster carers to ensure right children are placed with right foster carers
- Valuing foster carers as professionals who play a significant part in the child's life, ensuring they are part of the planning and communication about the child
- Review of fostering payments scheme
- Buddy and mentor scheme to support new and existing carers
- Weekly meeting with the Head of Service for foster carers to input in service development

Throughput of Children in Care:

Milton Keynes is ambitious for all our children in care. It is important to ensure we have the right children in care, when a child is in care their Care Plan is progressed in a timely manner to ensure effective throughput of children in care.

Milton Keynes Children's Services has been consistently committed to a strong family support ethos and early intervention into the lives of children and their families. In 2016, Milton Keynes council identified a growing trend of older teenagers coming into care and this trend still exists today, in response to this 'Edge of Care Strategy' was drafted and implemented, this is to ensure that where possible children can remain with their families. Edge of care panel is a multi-disciplinary panel and looks at all resources across the city that can meet the needs of children and their families, thus preventing the child entering care. This strategy has been instrumental in keeping are looked after children figures low and below the national rate.

12. Adoption

Milton Keynes remains part of Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Adoption Connects, in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council, St Francis and Adoption Plus. Adoption Connects is made up of two experienced Teams, Recruitment and Family Finding Team and Post Adoption Support Team. Over the last year, 25 children have been adopted and 18 were matched with prospective adopters. Most of our children are placed with in house or voluntary adoption agencies.

The RAA has successfully recruited adopters and currently we have more adopters approved for adoption than children. However, we have a shortage of adopters who are willing to look after sibling groups or children from BME communities. We are involved in the national work to recruit a wider pool to meet the needs of our children.

13. Semi-Independent Accommodation

As of 17 May 2022, there were 67 young people placed in Supported Accommodation provision.

Of these, 45 young people were placed with the Block Contract provider. 24 were recorded as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC), of which 12 were 18 years of age or older with no confirmed status

A further 22 young people were placed with a Framework or Spot Purchase provider. 13 were recorded as UASC, of which 4 were 18 years of age or older with no status

Based on Government Participation Data for 16/17 year olds, from March 2018 to March 2021, it can be anticipated that the numbers in Milton Keynes will continue to increase by approximately 3% per year.

It is anticipated that demand will be also influenced by:

- Potential increase in the number of UASC allocated to Milton Keynes via The National Transfer Scheme
- Growth of city population
- Increasing number of UASC who on reaching 18 who continue to have no status
- Young people who on reaching 18 years of age are, owing to local accommodation factors, are unable to find suitable accommodation.

New Block Contract for semi-independent provision

In order to comply with its statutory responsibilities, as set out in 'Section 22 of The Children Act 1989' and 'Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (2010 rev 2015)', the Council externally commissions Supported Accommodation services for the following groups of vulnerable young people:

- 16+ 'Looked After' young people
- 'Care Leavers' and 'Relevant' young people
- Young people assessed as a 'Child in Need'
- 16/17year olds at risk of homelessness
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

The services are delivered primarily through a 'Block Contract' (with a single provider), offering placements for up to 52 young people at any one time, supplemented by a 'Provider Framework'. Where necessary services are also secured on a 'Spot Purchase' basis.

An approved Spot Provider list is currently being developed to ensure greater quality assurance.

As the 'Block Contract' is due to end on 12 October 2023 a Project Group, chaired by the Group Head – Children & Families, has been established to review existing services, analyse needs and consider options for recommissioning services from October 2023.

The following summarises the context in which these considerations are made.

Based on Government Participation data for 16/17 year olds from March 2018 to March 2021, it can be anticipated that the numbers in Milton Keynes will continue to increase by approximately 3% per year.

A further 25 Care Leavers who are 18+ may also need to be accommodated each year
The National Transfer Scheme for UASC will increase demand for placements.

Our Children's Social Care demands and our young people have a preference for smaller family home type accommodation rather than larger hostel type accommodation, which are used in part to deliver the current Block Contract.

Whilst new national standards, which will include the requirement for provider registration with Ofsted and compliance with specific inspection criteria, will enhance the Councils existing Quality Assurance controls, it is anticipated that this will also have further cost implications.

There has been an increase in complexity of young people in this age bracket since the block contract and framework went live and the need for solo placements has grown considerably.

A needs-based model that distinguishes between high, medium and low levels of support needs, together with provision specifically designated for the assessment and acclimatisation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, will enable the Council to secure services that best meet the specific needs of each young person at the most affordable price.

The Commissioning Options considered include

- Recommission the Block Contract on a 'Like for Like' basis, using existing properties or equivalent
- Recommission Block Contract arrangement, using smaller family home type properties
- Commission DPS (Dynamic Purchasing System)
- Commission DPS & Block Contract(s)
- Join the existing Commissioning Alliance DPV (Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle)

All of these options require consideration as we recognise the increase in demand and importance of us meeting the placement sufficiency challenges of this cohort.

14. Health Placements

Each year we have a few children who require a Tier 4 hospital placement. NHS England is responsible for sourcing this type of provision for a child who has presenting mental health needs. There is a national shortage of beds and consequently our children may have to be placed at a distance taking them away from their families, communities, school, and friends. We have a new Tier 4 provision being built in the Luton area, this provision will offer children the opportunity to remain close to Milton Keynes, whilst receiving treatment, but the importance of appropriate and sufficient local placements are very important for some of our most vulnerable young people.

15. Custody – Youth Offending

On 31st March 2022 there was one young person on remand and awaiting sentence. The Youth Offending Service are involved in working with 80 – 100 young people at any one time.

These young people receive a mixture of statutory interventions (Court orders and formal Out of Court Disposals) and voluntary engagement - Early Support Project (ESP) and Promoting Reintegration, Reducing Exclusion (PRRE). The multi-agency work with Children's Social Care reflects an overlap between the cohort of children with complex needs who are involved in working with the Youth Offending Team.

Analysis identifies that 21% of our YOT's caseload are working with young people who have been looked after at some point, 19% having been subject to a Child Protection Plan and 80% either currently, or previously, on a Child in Need plan.

The most recent available data identifies 9% of the YOT cohort are currently Children in Care (rising to 15% when considering those who have previously been in care) 11% are on Child Protection Plans (rising to 27% when considering both current and previous CP Plans) and 27% are Children in Need (rising to 76% when also considering previous Child in Need episodes).

Prevention and Diversion

Milton Keynes Youth Offending Team (MKYOT) have a well-established Youth Diversion and Prevention Service that is known locally at the Early Support Project (ESP). ESP offers support to children and young people who require early prevention and targeted prevention and diversion from the formal youth justice system. Within the Prevention service offer, we have a Speech and Language Therapy project that works with primary and secondary schools, known locally as PRRE (Promoting Reintegration and Reducing Exclusions). The project enables school and further education settings (where appropriate) to refer children and young people to the project where it has been identified that they are at the greatest risk of school exclusions and / or a move to an alternative provision. The Prevention element of ESP works with children and young people who are displaying behaviours associated with offending behaviour and / or child exploitation in order to safeguard and

reduce vulnerabilities that could be associated with them being at risk of entering the formal youth justice system.

There are currently 8 primary referral pathways for agencies to refer children and young people to the Prevention element of the service (including PRRE).

These are:

- Children's Social Care including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Children and Families Practices (Early Help)
- Missing and Exploitation Panel (MEP)
- Strategic Exploitation Panel (SEP)
- Milton Keynes Youth Risk Meeting
- Primary and Secondary schools and Further Education settings
- Alternative Education Panel (a multi-agency panel where children and young people at risk of being moved to alternative education are discussed)
- PREVENT Channel Panel (a multi-agency panel where children at risk of radicalisation and / or extremism are discussed)

Within the Diversion aspect of the service, we have a local service level agreement with Thames Valley Police whereby we received all YOT notifications for young people who have received Community Resolutions in the Milton Keynes area. We then complete an initial screening assessment for the ESP and if the young person is considered suitable and eligible for the project, we make a service offer and complete an Asset Plus assessment and plan to address young people's risks and needs and build on identified positive factors and strengths.

How do we know we are successful?

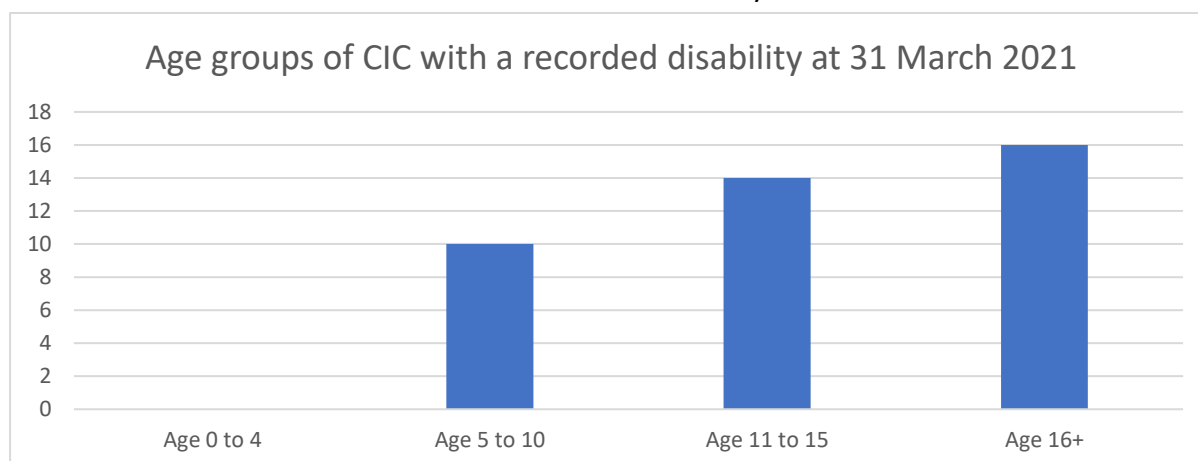
Our ESP Reoffending /Offending rate of 3.39% measured over 2 years compared to the National Reoffending rate of 33%

16. Provisions for Children with Disabilities

We have one residential children's home (Westminster House) for children with disabilities. Currently, the home offers care to 5 young people, but we are looking to extend the building to increase capacity to offer care to a maximum of 8 children or young people.

Children with Disabilities Data of looked after children: –

We had **40** children looked after with a recorded disability at 31 March 2022



Type of placements for CIC with a recorded disability at 31 March 2022:

Row Labels	Parents or other person with parental responsibility	Own provision by LA	Private Provision	Voluntary/Third Sector Provision
H5 - Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to Children's Homes Regulations			1	
K2 - Children's Homes subject to CHR		2	3	
P1 - Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	3			
R1 - Residential Care Home			3	
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- matched fostering		1		
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA		1	1	
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- matched fostering		6	10	1
U6 - Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA		3	5	
Grand Total	3	13	23	1

We have a respite residential children's home (Furze House) for children with disabilities, which offers respite care to a number of children throughout most of the year. This provision enables families to have a break and maintains the child at home with their family.

17. Learning from our Children in Care and Care Leavers

What our young people say about being in care and would like from care?

The Head of Corporate Parenting commissioned Bright Spots to independently seek the views of our children and young people. The outcome of this survey is due September 2022, and the outcome and findings will be added to our Sufficiency Strategy and subsequent plans.

Raise Your Voice is the name of our Children in Care Council and recognises the importance of ensuring that Children in Care and Care Leavers are given the right placements and support.

This helps them to achieve success and ensure they retain their heritage, friendships and interests. We strongly believe, from talking to children and young people that things like cleanliness, being able to spend time with friends, and support with learning how to live on your own are all very important and something that all placements should ensure.

We know that communication needs to be good so that we know what is happening to us and, where possible, we know children and young people need to be involved in the decisions that affect them.

We know that having stable placements is an important part of us achieving well in education or employment and keeping healthy and having a good sense of wellbeing. We should give young people the choice of where they live, and what that looks like could be location, living with other children/ care leavers or living alone.

Without sufficient placements Milton Keynes City Council will not be able to provide placements that meet these needs. Whether living with carers, parents or having key/support workers, we should give children and young people the support they require for their needs and challenges, and that includes, how to live in today's society.

Raise Your Voice is pleased to see that this strategy recognises these things and is committed to offering Children in Care and Care Leavers the right support, care and placements.

18. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

In Milton Keynes, we are part of the National Transfer scheme and regularly take unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children from other local authorities. Additionally, we have Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children who arrive in Milton Keynes through other routes.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children living in the care of Milton Keynes will be offered a safe home. Their needs will be assessed by a social worker to establish the right type of home where their needs will be met and they can thrive. We work closely with interpreter services to ensure that any communication barriers are minimised and ensure cultural needs are met.

Children's Services ensure that all Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children have financial support and are encouraged to develop their independence in a safe environment. We support young people with appointing a solicitor and attending appointments with them and the Home Office.

All young people in our care have regular health reviews. We support the young people to register with universal health services and ensure they are all offered Blood Born Virus (BBV) screening. Working closely with colleagues such as the Looked After Nurse Team we promote healthy living and escalate any health concerns in a timely way.

Education is offered to all Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children through both schools and college. We also access additional tutoring services to support with learning English for those that need it.

We offer all Looked After Children and care leavers a mentor through Grandmentors. Mentors meet up with the young people, offering advice, guidance, and friendship in the community. Advocates are also offered to all young people through the service 'Reconstruct'.

Each week there are a number of social events for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people. These include the 'New2UK group', football training, celebration events, and Raise Your Voice.

We are building on our relationship with the Refugee council, who currently offer family tracing, advice, and counselling. We are keen to support our young people with their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Support is offered through services such as

CAMHS, YIS (Youth Information Service) counselling service, the Crisis Café, alongside our primary Mental Health Worker.

19. Cost and Budget

How MK is responding to rising demand

Analysis shows through population growth, demand on the service will continue to grow with a rising in care population expected to rise gradually from around 350 currently to 410 by 2025-26.

The Fostering recruitment targets plan to increase the number of in-house carers and the use of in-house placements. This will mean a reduction in spend out IFA placements, but we know how challenging this may be. Projections are shown in the table below.

Year	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26
Starting number of carers				
	77	97	117	137
Target in-house provision growth				
Target growth households (20 households)	20	20	20	20
In house placements required to meet target (70%)				
Total CIC (based on projection in Demand growth business case)	355	370	388	410
70% in-house CYP	249	259	272	287
Number of households required (based on x2 children per household - avg. FC register 2021/22)	124	130	136	144
Difference				
Start of year	-47	-33	-19	-7
End of year	-27	-13	1	13

Further analysis is being completed to identify annual reduction in carers (e.g. through retirement or securing formal Orders in respect of the child) to further refine the picture of recruitment need. Additionally, we are working closely with Commissioning to look at providing other alternative care options, such as, spot purchase an emergency bed, small residential units run by MKCC within MK.

20. Analysis of Looked After Children

What's working well

- We have kept looked after number of children low through continuous and timely throughput of children to adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, returning home or aging out of care.
- We have over 70% of children in foster care.
- 70% of our children are placed within 20 mile radius
- We have maintained numbers of children in residential care.
- We have effective partnerships with external partners, such as, Transitions UK, Grandmentors, Health, Police, education.
- We have worked collaboratively with the Council Authority Housing Department ensure young people with care experience are given high priority with allocations of tenancies, all young people are referred at 16 years old to the Housing Department, to ensure their application is processed at a time that is right for them post their 18th birthday.
- No young person with care experience is presented as homeless at 18.
- We have sufficient number of adoptive parents compared to number of children with a plan for adoption
- Westminster House our Residential Children's Home is rated Good by Ofsted.
- We have consulted with our children in care and young people to understand their views about where they live through Bright Spots survey.
- We have a successful Youth Offending Service with very low reoffending rates with our Looked After Children and rated as good within the last Ofsted inspection.
- Excellent education provision for Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who have no delay in accessing education regardless of when they arrive
- Majority of our children have appropriate provision for them
- Majority of our children are in good or outstanding schools

What we want to achieve

- To continue to keep children in care numbers low through timely throughput and effective early help of families in need to address issues.
- To increase the children placed with in-house foster carers and reduce the number of children placed with external providers
- To recruit a diverse range of foster carers that can offer a range of placements
- To increase the number of children who are permanently matched.
- To increase the number of children placed within 20 mile radius of Milton Keynes
- To ensure we continue to consult with our children and young people in care to ensure they help shape our service
- To ensure every child is offered an advocate.
- To review the options to set up smaller residential units within Milton Keynes
- To introduce training flats for young people with care experience.
- Commission a new block contract that offers a range of types of placements for young people with high, medium and low needs.
- To commission an emergency bed provision to prevent children who need a residential placement going into an unregulated provision
- To recruit carers who can offer family link respite for children with disabilities
- To work with health in the development of the local Tier 4 hospital in Luton
- To have greater understanding of the emotional and psychological needs of our children working collaboratively with health to ensure the right services are in place early to help children begin to heal.
- To extend Westminster House to offer more in-house beds for children with disabilities

21. Action Plan and Priorities

No	Action:	Lead	Timescale
1	<p>Recruit a range of mainstream foster carers that can provide, respite, short and long term, emergency, parent and child and specialist placements</p> <p>Targeted Marketing Campaign –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment officer to focus on social media campaign Update website <p>Target to recruit 15 mainstream carers over a 12 month period.</p>	Fostering Managers	March 2023
2	<p>To continue with throughput of children in care to ensure timely permanence in line with each child’s care plan.</p> <p>Permanency tracking meetings held monthly to keep this on track</p>	Head of Corporate Parenting Service	Ongoing
3	<p>To review matching process for all children. To ensure evidence of robust matching for all children in short and long- term placements to ensure placement is the best provision for the child.</p> <p>Through matching meetings Matching forms Fostering Panel</p>	Fostering Managers and Children in Care Team Manager	July 2022
4.	<p>To provide high quality support and supervision to our existing foster carers, this will include, regular supervision, clinical supervision, a range of training, support groups, foster carer forum, access to mentoring and buddy support, community links, respite, events and celebration evening, effective communication.</p>	Fostering Managers	Ongoing
5.	<p>Children in external placements are regularly reviewed to ensure best value and placement meets child’s needs and plan is on track</p> <p>External Placement Meetings</p>	Group Head	Ongoing
6.	<p>Review Fostering Service to consider creating a specialist Family and Friends Team and consider increase in Team to meet future demands of new foster carers being approved.</p>	Head of Corporate Service	September 2022
7.	<p>To procure a new block contract for young people with medium, high and low needs</p>	Commissioning Service	October 2022
8.	<p>To explore cost effective options for 2 to 4 small residential children’s homes provisions within Milton Keynes</p>	Commissioning Service	2023/2024
9.	<p>To procure an emergency bed provision to prevent children being placed in unregulated placements</p>	Commissioning Service	October 2022

10.	To recruit Family Link Carers	Head of SEND	April 2023
11.	To ensure a greater offer of accommodation for young people with care experience, include training flats	16 to 25 Team Manager Housing and Commissioning Service	Dec 2022
12.	To continue to complete annual assessments to ensure we have the right children in care	Whole Service	March 2023
13.	To ensure all children know why they are in care and understand their care journey, through life story work, books where appropriate and through statutory visits, Pathway Planning, Care Planning and Child Care Reviews	Children in Care Team Manager	March 2023
14.	To explore extension of Westminster House using Capital Funds	Head of Corporate Parenting Service	October 2022
15.	To review and understand the emotional/psychological needs of our children to ensure the right support is in place to meet their needs. This will ensure placement stability	Head of Corporate Parenting Service and Associate Director of CAMHS	March 2023

There are additional actions and priorities that have been highlighted within Ofsted Action Plan 2022 in relation to children in care that will be considered and progressed separately to this strategy.