



PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

2023-2026

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Contents

Purpose of the Strategy	3
1 Foreward and Introduction	4
2 Guiding Legislation	5
Vision, aims and drivers	6
3 Our Vision	6
4 Our placement sufficiency aims:	6
5 Summary of needs assessment and trends	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Finding the Right Home	8
6 Foster Care	8
6.1. Foster Carer Numbers.....	8
6.2. Mockingbird	9
6.3. Residential children’s homes to fostering	9
7 Children’s Homes.....	10
7.1. Current provision and challenges.....	10
7.2. Unregistered Children’s Homes	10
8 Supported Accommodation.....	11
Services and Support	11
9 Achieving Permanence	11
9.1. Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)	11
9.2. Adoption	12
9.3. Planned Improvement Actions – Permanence:	Error! Bookmark not defined.
10 Support Services.....	12
10.1. Parental Intervention Team.	12
10.2. Family Safeguarding Model	12
10.3. Turning Point	13
10.4. Adolescents with complex needs (in development).....	13
Making a Difference our Approach	
Governance and Next Steps	0
11 Review	Error! Bookmark not defined.
11.1. Planned Improvement Actions – Review:	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix A	1
Summary of key actions set out in the Action Plan:	1
Appendix B – Children in Care Placement Analysis 2022-23	6
1 Introduction	6
2 Overall numbers.....	7
3 Children entering care.....	8

Legal Status: 8

Gender: 8

Age: 9

Ethnic background: 9

Need: 9

4 Children Seeking Asylum 10

5 Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) 10

6 Placement Types 11

Placements in children’s homes 12

Unregistered Placements **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Placement Stability and Distance 13

Commissioned Placements 14

7 Conclusion and next steps 16

Foreword

In Walsall we believe that all children and young people should have a safe place to live and thrive. We recognise that most children and young people do best when brought up within their own families, however for children and young people where this is not possible, it is our responsibility as corporate parents to find local homes where they are safe, happy, nurtured and which meets their needs and offers access to the support and opportunities needed for them to achieve success and to thrive in life.

We have high aspirations for children and young people who are in our care and are committed to achieving permanency and stability for them at the earliest opportunity, through tailored support provided through our services and those of our partners.

As our care experienced children and young people grow into adulthood, we will ensure that they are equipped to lead independent lives and provide them with the highest possible level of support to recognise and meet their needs.

*In Walsall, our work with children, young people and their families is underpinned by our Walsall Right 4 Children vision (WR4C) which aims to ensure that the right children, are in the right place, at the right time and for the right amount of time. We want to ensure that all of our children and young people have the best start in life and have the opportunity to thrive, achieve and remain safe. We aim to find permanent homes at the earliest opportunity for our children which meet their needs and provide them with the opportunity to live a full and filled life, where they meet their full potential. Our WR4C vision for our care experienced children and young people is to **find the right home, in the right place, at the right time.***

To enable us to achieve our vision, we need to work with our partners to ensure we have sufficient local, high-quality homes available to meet the needs of our children. This strategy enables us to understand the needs of our children and young people and what range of homes we need available to meet these needs. I am confident that this strategy will take us forward and support us in making our vision a reality. The strategy describes what we will do differently and how we will do it, resulting in a better service for our children and young people, where children and young people's needs are met at the earliest opportunity, enabling them to find a place they call home.



Colleen Male

Interim Executive Director Children's and Customer



Introduction and Purpose of the Strategy

1 Introduction

The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to secure accommodation for children in their care, within 20 miles of home and within local authority boundaries wherever possible and appropriate. This is known as the ‘sufficiency duty’ and is stated in the Act as: “the Local Authority must take steps to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority’s area boundaries which meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority’s area.”

This Strategy sets out how Walsall Council will fulfil these duties and meet the needs of our Children in Care and Care Experienced young people. It includes the Council’s commissioning intentions and supports our vision for children and young people. In Walsall, our work with children, young people and their families is underpinned by our Walsall Right 4 Children vision (WR4C) which aims to ensure that the right children are in the right place, at the right time and for the right amount of time.

Our WR4C vision is driven by the principles of:

- **Getting the basics right for children and reducing demand.**
- **Strong leadership informed by ‘what works’ to set our strategic direction and developing strong partnerships.**
- **Understanding the lives and challenges of real families and implementing evidence-based changes that work for Walsall children and families.**
- **Prioritising the stability of children in all aspects of their life.**
- **Creating a skilled and stable workforce and developing a culture of being proud of what we achieve with relentless drive to improve quality, impact and outcomes.**

We believe that all children and young people should have a safe place to live and thrive. We recognise that most children and young people do best when brought up within their own families, however for children and young people where this is not possible, it is our responsibility as corporate parents to find homes where they are safe, nurtured and which meets their needs and offers access to the support and opportunities needed for them to achieve success and happiness.

We have high aspirations for children and young people who are in our care and are committed to achieving permanency and stability for them through tailored support provided through our services and those of our partners.

As our care experienced children and young people grow into adulthood, we will ensure that they are equipped to lead independent lives and provide them with the highest possible level of support to recognise and meet their needs.

This Sufficiency Strategy sets out how we intend to deliver the WR4C vision for the children and young people who are in our care. When assessing “sufficiency,” Walsall Council considers the condition of the local market (which will include the level of demand for the specific types of provision locally) and the amount and type of supply that currently exists. We also consider the capacity, quality and suitability of all providers and unique challenges to Walsall. We are now focusing on how we respond to the longer-term impact of the pandemic, including young people’s mental health and emotional well-being, isolation, loneliness, employability, and cautious markets. This is within the context of the current resource and overall budget priorities of the Council.

This will be a living document, which guides our service delivery and development. It is overseen by our Corporate Parenting Board and the children and young people for whom it has been delivered via our Children in Care and Care Leavers Council’s. It will be regularly reviewed and updated in line with

changing demand and challenge to ensure that it supports continuous improvement of services and placement sufficiency for children and young people in our care.

2 Guiding Legislation

The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for children and young people under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in their best interests to be accommodated within the local authority's area. This is commonly referred to as 'The sufficiency duty'. In particular

- Section 17(1) of the 1989 Act provides that it is the general duty of a local authority to provide a range and level of services to children in need (as defined in section 17(10) of the 1989 Act) and their families in the local area which are appropriate to their needs.
- Section 20 of that Act requires local authorities to provide accommodation for children in need within their area who appear to them to require accommodation in accordance with the provisions of that section.
- Section 21 requires a local authority to accommodate certain children who are either removed or kept away from home under Part V of the 1989 Act or who are subject to a criminal court order. Introduction and purpose
- In determining the most appropriate placement for a child, section 22C(7)(a) also requires the local authority to give preference to a placement with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent.
- Section 22C sets out the additional factors (in no order of priority) which the local authority 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.

Whilst the sufficiency duty applies to children in our care, it also recognises the importance of earlier, preventative action to support children and families so that children can remain in the care of their families

The Children and Social Work Act 2017, extends the duties on all Local Authorities to have regard to a [seven corporate parenting principles](#) when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and care experienced young people up to the age of 25 which ensure that children and young people have safe, stable and caring places to live and call home. Our vision and this strategy is built on those principles.

The Seven Corporate Parenting principles are:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;

6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

Vision, aims and drivers

3 Our Vision

We want to ensure that all of our children and young people have the best start in life and have the opportunity to thrive, achieve and remain safe. We aim to find permanent homes at the earliest opportunity for our children which meet their needs and provide them with the opportunity to live a full and filled life, where they meet their full potential.

Our WR4C vision for our care experienced children and young people is:

Find the right home	securing a permanent home and support that meet the needs of our children and young people whether that is supporting them to return to their birth parents, long term foster care in a family home or children's home or adoption.
In the right place	most of our children and young people will remain living close their home or within the local area but where it is in the best interest of the child or young person the right place may be outside the local area.
At the right time	where children need to enter care or where their placement needs to change, moves will be well planned, reducing the need for unplanned change and emergency placements

4 Our placement sufficiency aims:

- To provide a suitable range of homes for our children and young people that meet their needs and are safe places for them to live and thrive.
- To increase the recruitment and retention of Walsall Council foster carers and through training and support increase their capacity to meet the needs of the children they care for.
- To ensure that our children and young people live as far as possible in local provision with appropriate services in place to support their needs.
- To provide stability for our children and young people, by providing timely options to achieve permanence and providing homes and support at the right time.
- To ensure we work with our partners across health and education to identify appropriate support and joint funding arrangements which benefit of our children.
- To implement effective early intervention and prevention services through Early Help and Turning Point to ensure that young people receive support as early as possible and avoid or reduce the need on-going services.
- To guide and help our young people to develop the life skills needed to live successfully as independent adults.
- To commission smarter and deliver the best value for money while assuring quality and delivering support which meets the needs of our children and young people through building better relationships with our market providers and establishing stronger commissioning practices.

5 Summary of Needs Assessment and Trends

There are increasing challenges in securing the right homes for some of our children. This is not just a local Walsall issue, but is something that is occurring both regionally and nationally and has been recognised as a significant issue within the Government's recent review of care: **Stable Homes Built on Love**

A local data analysis has examined the changing trends in the characteristics of our children in care and the nature of the placements they are experiencing. The key findings have been used to inform the development of this Sufficiency Strategy and identify the priority actions required to achieve its aims.

- As at 31/03/2023 there were 650 children in care compared with 669 on 31/03/2020, a decrease of just 2.8%.
- Overall the number of children who are entering care is falling and has been in line with or lower than comparators. In 2022-23 just 163 children entered care (23.5 per 10,000) compared with 180 children entered care in 2021-22 (26.0 per 10,000 population) This is a reduction of 9.4% on 2021-22 and 31.2% on the number that entered care in 2019-20.
- Ethnicity - the proportion of children from ethnic backgrounds other than white is increasing, largely within the Asian and Other groups. This is more generally driven by the increasing number of children seeking asylum.
- The number of boys entering care has increased by 16.9%, whereas the number of girls entering care has reduced by 31.9%. The increase in children in remand and seeking asylum contributes to this. Boys are more likely to move into residential care either as a first placement or as a placement move.
- 70% of our children live in foster home and this is a reduction compared with 76.8% in 2021-22 with fewer children in internal foster care and with family and friend's carers. This decrease in children in foster carers has only been seen largely within the last 12 months. There is an increase in the use of independent fostering providers. We have insufficient Walsall based foster carers, who are able to care for teenagers, have increased our reliance on residential care.
- The number and proportion of children in residential children's homes, secure or supported accommodation has been increasing gradually over time with 22.9% of children in supported accommodation and 11.3% of our children were living in Children's Homes.
- We are seeing a fluctuating picture of children who enter a residential children's home as a first placement. The proportion of children who entered a residential children's home as a first placement was relatively low, prior to 2021-22, with the number of children ranging from between seven and nine. In 2021-22 this increased to 14 (7.8%) but in 2022-23 the number fell back to six (3.6%).
- More children, coming into our care, have complex support needs, with high levels of need associated with exploitation, mental health difficulties, and have required Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
- More children living in unregistered care arrangements, either because there is less flexibility with matching considerations or national shortage of secure children's home beds or homes that can meet the needs for children with complex needs.
- 83% of children live in Walsall but there has been an increase in children living away from Walsall from 11% in 2020/21 to 17% in 2022/23.
- 24.9% of children in care have an EHCP
- The percentage of children with 3 or more placements in 12 months has increased to 8.8%. This remains lower than 2021-22 regional and national comparators.
- The proportion of children who have been in care for at least 2.5 years, are aged under 16 and who have been in the same placement for 2 or more years has declined, in 2020-21 69% of these children had been in the same placement for 2 years or more, this reduced to 66% in 2022-23 and is below the current published national average for 2020-21 of 70%.

- An increase in children seeking asylum where 22 children have been accommodated either as part of the National Transfer Scheme or spontaneous arrivals as a result of the Home Office use of a local hotel.
- An increase in children remanded to custody in 2022-23 with 14 children entering care compared to 3 in 2021-23. Whilst this increase can be attributed to a significant incident the Youth Justice Partnership are undertaking needs assessment of all children involved in serious violence to influence wider partnership strategy.
- 10% of residential providers have left the West Midlands Residential Framework leading to an increase of 18% spot purchasing of residential care compared to 2022.

Finding the Right Home

We recognise that our children and young people who are in our care have different needs when it comes to finding a home, and we want to support all our young people to live in a safe place where they can thrive.

Whilst we believe our homes and families are the best place for our children and young people, we also recognise that to meet the needs of some of our children and young people, we need to commission homes from other providers. However, increasing our range of homes locally is our biggest priority.

Walsall is responding primarily in two ways; improving internal sufficiency in fostering and children's residential care and developing a strong practice-led improvement approach in the identification of placements for children and young people.

6 Foster Care

6.1 Foster Carer Numbers

Our vision is for all children in foster care to have stable placements, establish trusted relationships, to feel cared for and to benefit from high quality foster care for as long as they need it. We will meet the individual needs of the children and young people living with fostering families, including their racial and cultural needs, in line with their age, stage of development, abilities and learning style.

Walsall currently supports around 200 fostering households offering short-term, permanent, short break and foster-to-adopt fostering households. ort-break care. A significant number of our carers are family and friends of the children they care for (also known as kinship or connected foster carers). For young people transitioning into adulthood, our staying put scheme offers the opportunity for them to remain with their foster carer after they have reached their 18th birthday and left care.

Our Fostering for Adoption scheme with Adoption@Heart ensures that more children can be placed with their potential permanent carers on a fostering basis while the local authority seeks a legal order from the courts.

We are committed to improving the quality of foster care and its availability, to ensure our children in care are able to remain in Walsall and experience the support and stability they need. To support our recruitment needs, we have implemented an improved marketing strategy and improved our support offer to increase the recruitment of foster carers. These improvements include:

- **An improved marketing strategy:** We have a dynamic and evolving marketing strategy to support the recruitment of foster carers.
- **Becoming 'Foster Friendly':** Walsall Council is accredited as **Fostering Friendly Employer** and we are working with local employers to encourage them to seek accreditation so that Walsall becomes a **Fostering Friendly Borough**.
- **Providing enhanced financial support:** Fees and allowances for foster carers have been significantly enhanced to bring them in line with Department for Education (DfE) rates including council tax relief for all foster carers living in Walsall.

- **Offering a capital grant scheme:** Where accommodation is a barrier to foster carers meeting the needs of children in their care we have implemented a capital grant scheme to fund adaptations to foster carers homes so that they can care or continue to care for children.
- **Ensuring more children can live in a family environment:** We are developing specialist fostering schemes to enable children to move from residential to foster care.
- **Reducing placement breakdowns:** A Support and Stability Team improves stability by providing bespoke interventions to support foster carers and offering a 24 hour help line that foster carers can call when they need support.
- **Specialist training for staff and foster carers:** Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) is offered to our foster carers and all our staff in the fostering teams are trained at DDP level 1 and some have achieved DDP level 2. We have established attachment training for foster carers and are embedding a therapeutic approach using DDP. We have already trained over 80 foster carers and will train more over time.
- **New Horizon Fostering Scheme** to help children who are currently living in a Children's Home, to return to live in a nurturing family environment.

6.2. Mockingbird

The Mockingbird model of foster care has been developed in the UK by the Fostering Network and was launched in Walsall in 2017. Our Mockingbird Hubs have a track record in successfully promoting stability for children.

The model works as a constellation where one foster home acts as a hub, offering planned or emergency sleepovers, short breaks, advice, training, and support to between six and 10 satellite households.

Relationships are central to the programme and the hub home builds strong relationships with all those in the constellation, empowering families to support each other, overcoming problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown, and increasing the protective factors that surround children.

The constellation also builds links with other people that are important to the children's care plans and to resources in the wider community that can provide them with enhanced opportunities to learn, develop and succeed.

The Mockingbird model, has been shown to have positive effect on outcomes for children, including stronger placement stability, improved wellbeing, better planning for permanence, improved birth family and sibling contact and foster carer wellbeing, support and retention.

There are five fully operational Mockingbird constellations in Walsall with a sixth constellation planned to be in place by the end of Summer 2023.

6.3. Residential children's homes to fostering.

For some children and young people, depending on their individual needs and circumstances, a residential children's home will be the best placement for them. However, we believe that all children and young people have the right to grow up in a family environment, and that this is best for them and their life chances.

The sufficiency of suitable foster carers should never be a reason why any young person is not benefitting from a supportive family environment although we recognise that the availability of foster carers generally as well as the availability of foster carers trained to meet the increasingly complex needs of children and young people has been a contributing factor in the increasing numbers of children who are being placed in children's homes.

As we increase the number of available foster carers and the training and support that they are offered, we will support more young people to move from residential to fostering homes safely and sustainably. We aim to see the number of young people living in a residential children's home start decrease by April 2024.

7 Children's Homes

Residential children's homes will be a safe place to live for children and young people for whom it is identified as the most appropriate placement. They will feel cared for and benefit from the support offered by staff and services to help them to succeed and thrive.

The number of children in residential children's home has been increasing over the past two years. We have seen an increase in younger children placed in children's homes, with more children also being placed out of borough.

7.1. Current provision and challenges

Walsall maintains three internal children's homes, including specialist respite support for disabled young people. Where out of area or more specialised provision is required, we commission bespoke packages for each young person.

Our current internal provision does not meet the more complex and challenging needs of children and young people and smaller homes (2 or 3 beds) with specialist support such as increased supervision or where therapeutic support is needed.

A capital development programme has an investment of £1.071 million to develop 2 new internal children's homes. This will increase the flexibility and capability of in-house provision to meet the increasingly complex needs of children requiring care for whom foster care is not appropriate or suitable foster care is not available at that time.

There are significant challenges in securing placements for children in a crisis situation with Ofsted registered providers, the ability of providers to meet needs of children when needs escalate is limited, often due to staffing capacity or matching needs with our children leading to providers serving notice. Our experience is that the registered children's homes are decreasing as homes close, with less placements available. This is leading to more children placed at a distance and increasing placement and associated costs.

The West Midlands Residential care framework remains in place and within the context of a fluctuating and complex residential landscape the West Midlands Commission Hub is struggling to maintain a previously strong robust framework. Increasingly the framework does not fully meet our needs and there is an increase in spot purchasing provision. Some providers are withdrawing from the framework in order to command higher costs. New providers in the market are untested and we need work with them to strengthen sufficiency. There are also sector wide challenges in recruiting registered managers /staff.

We are also working with external providers and health partners within Walsall and regionally to ensure that when children are placed in external provision, we are able to identify and utilise the best provision available for our children through the West Midlands Residential Framework.

Where external spot providers are used, we negotiate our costs, however, we are seeking to develop block contract arrangements to deliver greater consistency to our young people while meeting their bespoke needs and providing stability.

Children in care, and more specifically those who reside in residential care homes often have complex needs. We will ensure that our children are receiving the support and services they require by engaging and working with our education and health partners, including the Virtual School, Walsall Integrated Care Board (ICB), the Transforming Care Partnership (TCP) and the Black Country Mental Health Trust (BCMHT) to support stability and meet children's needs.

7.2. Unregistered Children's Homes

The number of children for whom we have needed to use unregistered accommodation on a temporary basis, while seeking appropriate longer-term care has increased since April 2022, though the numbers of children in such provision at any one time has remained steady at around 15 children per year.

Some of the provision we use is CQC registered and providing care for children with complex physical health needs or mental health needs, however many children live in Ofsted unregistered

accommodation, due to a lack of availability of registered children's homes who are able to provide high levels of staff supervision or solo provision to meet complex needs, particularly for those children where Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards need to be applied or when placements provide immediate notice limiting the time available to secure a registered home.

Where children and young people are placed in an unregistered setting, a full risk assessment is completed and children in these settings are visited regularly to ensure that their needs are being met appropriately. Ofsted are notified of all placements of children under the age of 16 and appropriate legal orders are applied for where required.

8 Supported Accommodation

We want our older care experienced young people to succeed in their future accommodation plans. Many of our young people transition from care to supported accommodation or supported living arrangements before moving into their own tenancy. An increasing number of young people are remaining with their foster carers, under Staying Put Arrangements. We recognise the need to find homes that meet their emerging needs, create stability while providing the support they need to develop their independence as they move into adulthood.

On average there are around 40 children in supported accommodation at any one time. The needs of our young people vary with the majority requiring low or mid-level support. However, around 1/3 of young people require high-level specialist support where both general support and support to meet specific care needs are provided.

Supported Accommodation is secured through West Midlands Supported Accommodation Framework. However, there has been a shift toward spot contracting to identify suitable supported accommodation for those children who have more complex needs and where registered accommodation is not available.

The majority of our separated children seeking asylum live in supported accommodation. There is an increase in separated children seeking asylum presenting in Walsall and through the National Transfer Scheme and many remain in this provision post 18 whilst their immigration applications are progressing.

The new requirement for supported accommodation providers to register with Ofsted means that we expect to see sufficiency within this area start to fluctuate and we are currently supporting local providers to secure Ofsted Registration under the new framework for Supported Accommodation Providers

Services and Support

9 Achieving Permanence

We have made significant improvements in helping our children and young people in care to achieve permanence in a timely manner and find a stable, long-term home. An increasing number of our children are leaving care through reunification to the care of their parents, special guardianship orders (SGO's) or adoption.

9.1 Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)

We want children and young people to maintain and strengthen their support networks and relationships with family and friends where possible as these connections are likely to remain with them for much of their lives and help them grow into independent young adults.

For many children and young people in care, SGOs are a positive way to provide a loving and caring home and enable children to leave care, supporting closer links to their birth families, siblings and wider family and friend networks and, where this is right for the child or young person, we will provide the support needed to enable an SGO to be put in place.

9.2 Adoption

Adoption services are provided via the Adoption@Heart regional adoption agency. The impact of the cost living is having an impact on the number of available adopters, particularly for sibling groups, older children and children additional needs.

We anticipate an increase in inter agency adoptive placements in 2023-24 due to sufficiency of adopters. Adoption@Heart have analysed the number of adopters needed by local authorities in the RAA for their children, are undertaking recruitment activity and have a robust marketing strategy in place.

10 Support Services

10.1 Parental Intervention Team.

The Parental Intervention Team was established in February 2021. It's aim is to prevent the need for parent and infant separation and care proceedings through intensive intervention to support vulnerable mothers and fathers as they transition to parenthood. The programme has an emphasis on both attachment and mentalisation and places particular emphasis on improving:

- Parent-infant attachment relationships
- Parental reflective functioning
- Social support
- Treating solvable problems

The model has at its heart intensive attachment and mentalisation based interventions which focus on building healthy attachments between mother and baby from conception onwards. It acknowledges that to enable many parents within the family justice system to build their parenting capacity, they have to first better understand their own protective strategies or lack of them, often developed through experiences of trauma and maltreatment in their own childhood.

The team consists of a small group of Care Coordinators who work with expectant parents, starting direct work at the earliest possible stage, and delivering support through a Dynamic Maturation Model and Mentalisation alongside the AMBIT approach.

10.2 Family Safeguarding Model

The Family Safeguarding model is delivered across each of the geographic localities in Walsall and provides early help and statutory safeguarding services. The model was originally developed by Hertfordshire to provide multi-disciplinary support to address the issues faced by adults in the family that impact on children.

Through the model adult mental health workers, domestic abuse survivor and perpetrator workers, substance misuse workers and child psychologists work in teams alongside social workers to offer holistic support to families with children aged 12 and under who have mental health, domestic abuse or substance misuse needs.

The model is underpinned by a strength-based approach and uses of motivational interviewing and restorative approaches to work with the whole family.

Family Safeguarding in Walsall has reduced the number of children who enter care following a period on a child protection plan. Where children have needed to enter care for a period of time, increasing proportions of children are being supported to return home within nine months, rather than remaining in care and needing long term provision.

This is having an effect on the demographic make-up of our children in and entering care. Our demographics in both areas are moving towards older children with more complex needs.

10.3 Turning Point

Turning Point was developed as part of our programme of support for adolescents, to support young people aged 10-18 years old who are at risk of coming into care, and their families, to help them remain together safely and sustainably. It is an integrated, multi-disciplinary service for adolescents with complex needs, bringing together a group of practitioners with different skills and specialisms working within an agreed practice stance. Turning Point has a service model based on a 20-week programme of intervention which is driven by comprehensive assessment of the young person's needs.

The service is focussed on working with young people and their families to secure improved outcomes and prepare them for adulthood by identifying and supporting family strengths and relationships and challenging and disrupting harm to young people in and outside of the family home.

The main aim of Turning Point is to prevent young people from entering the care system by delivering flexible services and using innovative and evidenced-based approaches, including Adaptive Mentalization-Based Integrative Treatment (AMBIT) to help the family to make and sustain change themselves.

10.4 Adolescents with complex needs (in development)

A workstream has been developed as part of a multi-agency Emotional Health and Wellbeing group which includes representatives from the Local Authority, Integrated Care Board and Black Country Mental Health Trust which aims to develop an effective, coordinated, community-based approach to meeting the needs of children and young people within the community.

A multi-agency audit of young people in high-cost placements is being undertaken to understand both their pre-care and in care journey and to understand what earlier intervention could have been provided to prevent the young person's deterioration and escalation into a high-cost placement. Evidence-based community models both regionally and nationally are being considered, alongside co-productive meetings with key partners, young people and parents in order to better understand what support would need to look like.

10.5 Support and Stability Team

The Support and Stability Team is based within Walsall's Fostering Service which was established in December 2021. The team is managed by the Recruitment Team Manager and includes a Senior Practitioner, youth worker and 2 child and family support workers. The work of the Support & Stability Team is underpinned by DDP, which is a therapy, parenting approach and model for practice that uses what we know about attachment and developmental trauma to help children and their caregivers with their relationships. 4 members of the team are fully trained up to DDP level 2 and to facilitate Foundations for Attachment training to foster carers

The Support & Stability Team will work and support in two areas:

- The Support & Stability Team will work with children and young people in children's homes with a plan to transition into foster care, and with children and young people living with IFA foster carers. A worker from the team will work with the child/young people to initially build a relationship prior to preparing the child/young person for the transition. It is anticipated that the support and stability team will be part of the matching process, transition planning and introductions, and the allocated worker will continue to provide support to the young person for a period of time following the move to their new home.
- Children living with Walsall foster carers where there is instability or a risk of disruption and breakdown. This work will consist of approximately 12 weeks of support, working directly with the child/young person and/or their foster carers if required. The aim of this work is to bring some stability to the home and prevent a breakdown.
- In addition to undertaking referrals for direct work with children/young people and their carers, the Support & Stability Team also leads on delivery of DDP informed Nurturing Attachments & Foundations for Attachment Training for Foster Carers.

10.6 Black Country Family, Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)

The FDAC model is an adaptation of the family treatment courts developed in the United States. Cases which come into FDAC are commonly those where parental substance misuse is impacting on parental capacity, but in the majority of cases there are also concerns about domestic abuse and parental mental health problems. The problem solving, trauma informed approach of the FDAC multi-disciplinary team offers holistic support to manage and assess the complexity of these needs in the timeframes of the child/ren.

FDAC was launched in 2020 involving Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley and was launched in conjunction with the Designated Lead Judge for Wolverhampton and the Child And Family Court Assessment and Support service (CAFCASS,).

FDAC is a multi-disciplinary specialist team who work closely with the court to deliver an expert assessment, taking into account the family's needs, concerns and strengths, in order to return the child safely to the care of their parents or to ensure permanent care for the child within appropriate timescales. Specially trained judges deal with the individual families throughout and there are regular judge-led reviews of the parents' progress known as Non Lawyer Reviews (NLR's), which are attended by parents, the FDAC team, the social worker and often the child's guardian. Parents have an identified FDAC key worker who does direct work with the parent and co-ordinates the other relevant services involved. The local authority retain responsibility for the child. The service will offer community support to families where reunification has been successful for up to 18 months.

The FDAC service will work up to 80 families over the three-year period with Walsall referring up to 15 families each year. The service is subject to a robust evaluation and a steering group maintains overview of the delivery.

Making a difference Our Approach

- To continue efforts on targeted evidence-based intervention programmes, to ensure that only children that need care enter care. Or where they need a period in our care, they return home at the earliest opportunity.
- For all children and young people in care to experience first placements that are well matched, able to meet their needs and are stable.
- To gain a better understanding of why placements do not always endure and intervene appropriately to prevent placement breakdown.
- To continue with family-based placements but recognising that this is not right for all young people and there will be occasions where other placement options are more suitable to meet the needs of the child or young person.
- To provide residential care, and commission and/or create more good quality, local provision for children who need this care.
- To recruit and retain more in-house foster carers
- To help children move from residential care to family settings where this is their assessed need.

To work effectively with providers as partners to ensure that children are placed as close to home as possible.

Making a difference Our Approach

Our Fostering Intentions:

Improve Sufficiency to ensure as many children as possible can live in a family environment we will:

- Ensure we have a consistent approach to recruiting and supporting foster carers across Walsall Council incorporating learning from best practice.
- Targeted recruitment and marketing activity to increase the overall numbers of foster carers and specifically for older children, teenagers and sibling groups.
- Launch the New Horizons fostering scheme for children who have lived in a residential home but where a foster home has been identified as a better placement to meet their needs.
- Continued roll out of DDP training and the Nurturing and Attachment training to increase foster carer confidence to manage trauma behaviours.
- Annual Reviews to strategically explore carer capacity and encourage increasing approval / expanding approval when appropriate.
- Expanding bedroom capacity of known and valued foster carers through the availability of capital funding to increase foster carer capacity through adaptations.
- Ensure that the Support and Stability Team offer targeted interventions, therapeutic support and guidance where there are risks to the stability of home life and reduce the risk of children's care needs escalating and the placement breaking down.
- Develop and maintain strong relationships with our independent fostering agencies (IFAs). We will identify and develop creative solutions to meet children's needs and ensure that all options are considered with them in order to navigate emerging local challenges.

- Ensure the wherever possible children are supported to live with their families who can be assessed as their connected carers.

Our Supported Accommodation intentions for young people:

To improve sufficiency of registered Supported Accommodation to meet the needs of young people who are moving into adulthood or who have specific needs we will:

- Ensure young people are living in supported accommodation in line with their needs, closer to their communities and are supported to transition to adulthood.
- Work with the regional commissioning arrangements for Supported Accommodation Framework to ensure that there are a range of providers to meet the needs of our young people.
- Supporting providers to prepare for registration and inspection by Ofsted, ahead of the implementation of statutory regulations across the sector in 2024.
- Maintain robust quality assurance and contract management processes for spot bed purchases and for West Midlands SA Framework Providers.

Making a difference Our Approach

Our Residential Care intentions – Children’s Homes:

Improve sufficiency to increase and improve the availability of children’s home provision and reduce use of unregistered placements, we will:

- Develop two children’s homes to meet the needs of children in crisis and the needs of these children with complex needs, reduce the use of unregistered provision.
- Develop an internal multi-disciplinary model of residential assessment provision for children in crisis. The service will focus on meeting the needs of children in crisis and support them to live in a foster family or return to their families
- Deliver robust quality assurance and monitoring of internal residential children’s homes to support them to achieve good or outstanding Ofsted ratings and ensure that exiting internal children’s homes are at full occupancy.
- Capitalising on collaborations address specific gaps in provision by working with our local market and through the West Midlands Framework Providers.
- To develop residential block bed contracts and negotiate with external spot providers on pricing where framework providers are not available.
- Maintain robust quality assurance and contract management processes for spot bed purchases and WM Midlands Framework Providers.
- Work with health services to develop a Ofsted registered “crash pad” to support children coming out of hospital settings and increase our ability to secure registered provision based on a holistic assessment of the child’s needs.

- Robustly apply protocols to secure joint funding and appropriate support from Health partners (ICB, TCP and BCMHT) and Education.
- Supporting providers to prepare for Ofsted registration and inspection.
- Strengthening and brokering closer relationships with local and regional providers to increase access to local placements.

Our Permanence intentions:

To support more children and young people to achieve permanence within loving and stable homes we will:

- Ensure children who enter care have an effective permanence plan as soon as possible.
- Increase the number of prospective adopters available regionally through targeted recruitment, focusing on recruiting adopters who are able to adopt older children and children in sibling groups.
- Increase the planned adoption of children where effective permanence planning shows that is the best option for the child.
- Implement the Family Safeguarding model to support the task of renunciation of children and subsequent revocation of care orders is proactively progressed where this is appropriate
- Provide training and support for special guardians to equip them to meet the needs of the child or young person and maintain stability.
- Ensure that therapeutic support is available to special guardians through the Adoption Support Fund
- We will review our SGO Policy, including the allowances offered and increase staffing capacity to support the stability special guardianships.

Governance and Next Steps

Sufficiency or lack of sufficiency impacts on all services that support children and young people. It is important that partners, providers, carers, children and young people are all invested in the aims of the strategy and committed to implementing the actions needed to achieve its stated outcomes.

Partnership and collaboration will be key to achieving our sufficiency aims and market engagement events will be used to ensure the strategy is kept relevant and part of ongoing service development.

The Regulatory Board which includes all key officers from children's services and is chaired by the Director of Social Work, will drive and monitor the intentions, actions, and priorities. This group will develop innovative new concepts to meet our sufficiency duties in response to emerging needs, trends, and legislation as aforementioned.

Regular reports on the impact of the strategy will be taken into Corporate Parenting Board.

The sufficiency placement analysis and action plan will be reviewed annually. Sufficiency covers a wide range of areas within children services, and it is important that partners, carers, children, young people, and providers are all invested into the actions contained so partnership and collaboration will remain key to delivering the strategy.

Priorities

- 1. Providing good, stable homes and ensuring children and young people feel cared for (aligned with Corporate Parenting Strategy).**
 - 2. Develop additional opportunities to hear feedback from our children in care and care experienced young people.**
 - 3. Ongoing development of inhouse fostering, including continued targeted recruitment of foster carers to reflect the diversity of children, older children and sibling placements.**
 - 4. Ensuring providers are supported to navigate the new regulatory framework for supported accommodation for young people.**
 - 5. Ensuring access to the residential sector through relational commissioning and supporting the quality of these services.**
 - 6. Using innovative commissioning and procurement models understanding and recognising the current national challenges, specifically surrounded the cost of living and workforce difficulties.**
 - 7. Working effectively with our Corporate Parenting Partners and advocating on behalf of Children in Care.**
 - 8. Update our data analysis and forecasting models to take into account the impacts made by our changes in information.**
 - 9. Review this strategy annually and ensure that progress is reflected in the Corporate Parenting Board annual report.**
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Appendix A

Summary of key actions set out in the Action Plan:

Our Intention	Corporate Parenting Strategy: priorities supported	Action	Who / When	Update and Evidence of Impact
<p>Develop more high-quality, in-house and external fostering capacity that meets the needs of children and young people</p>	<p>Consider foster care as a first option of choice for all children and young people</p>	<p>Ensure we have a consistent approach to recruiting and supporting foster carers across Walsall Council.</p>	<p>Mark Burrows Quarterly reports</p>	<p>Increase in internal foster placements in line with the recruitment strategy targets</p>
	<p>Always seek to enable children looked after to live with connected carers when possible.</p>	<p>Target recruitment and marketing activity to increase the overall numbers of foster carers. We will increase our dedicated capacity for specific cohorts including children with complex needs, sibling groups and children who have lived in a residential home but where a foster home has been identified as a better placement to meet their needs.</p>	<p>Mark Burrows Quarterly reports</p>	<p>Increase in proportion of children who report feeling happy, safe and supported in foster care.</p>
	<p>Maintain our strong focus on recruiting more Walsall managed foster carers and residential workers.</p>	<p>Ensure that the Support and Stability Team offer targeted interventions, therapeutic support and guidance to families where there are risks to the stability of home life and reduce the risk of children's care needs escalating and the placement breaking down.</p>	<p>Mark Burrows Annual Report</p>	<p>Increase in proportion of children placed with local foster carers.</p>
	<p>Maintain a constant focus on increasing the numbers of looked after children who are able to live close to their communities.</p>	<p>Develop and maintain strong relationships with our independent fostering agencies (IFAs).</p>	<p>Jivan Sembi / Commissioning Manager</p>	<p>Reduce numbers of children in a residential home</p>
		<p>Launch the New Horizons fostering scheme for children who have lived in a residential home but where a foster home has been identified as a better placement to meet their needs</p>	<p>Mark Burrows June 2023</p>	<p>Improved placement stability and fewer placement moves especially in emergencies</p>
		<p>Continued roll out of DDP training and the Nurturing and Attachment training to increase foster carer confidence to manage trauma behaviours</p>	<p>Mark Burrows 2023-24</p>	<p>Increase in the number of children staying put.</p>
		<p>Annual Reviews to strategically explore carer capacity and encourage stretching approval / expanding approval when appropriate</p>	<p>Mark Burrows Quarterly report</p>	
		<p>Expanding bedroom capacity of known and valued foster carers through the availability of capital funding to increase foster carer capacity through adaptations.</p>	<p>Mark Burrows 6 monthly reports</p>	

Our Intention	Corporate Parenting Strategy: priorities supported	Action	Who / When	Update and Evidence of Impact
		Develop 6th Mockingbird Hub and maintain the existing 5 Mockingbird constellations.	Mark Burrows	

Our Intention	Corporate Parenting Strategy: priorities supported	Action	Who / When	Update and Evidence of Impact
Develop more high quality, internal and external local residential capacity that meets the needs of children and young people	<p>Recognise that residential care may be a positive choice for some young people.</p> <p>Implement the capital investment to set up 2 Homes to focusing on children whose needs are so complex that they are being placed in unregistered accommodation or where short term /crisis accommodation is required to support reunification home or stepping into a model of smaller 'ordinary homes</p> <p>Maintain a constant focus on increasing the numbers of Walsall children in care who are close to their communities.</p> <p>Commission all placements for children, whether with internal providers or with other providers, so that our expectations are absolutely clear – each child will have a placement plan which we</p>	Develop two children's homes to meet the needs of children in crisis and reduce the use of unregistered provision.	Alan Davies July 2023 October 2023	<p>Fewer children placed at distance in externally commissioned homes unless this is explicitly the way their needs will be met.</p> <p>Increase in amount of Ofsted registered residential provision available in Walsall and range of needs that can be met so that children with specialist needs are supported by Walsall services wherever possible.</p> <p>Improved placement stability and fewer placement moves especially in emergencies.</p> <p>Targeted support for older young people to remain or return home with intensive wrap-around support due to contextual safeguarding concerns.</p> <p>Fewer children in Unregistered Children's Homes</p> <p>There is increased placement sufficiency through block</p>
		Ensure that exiting internal children's homes are at full occupancy.	Alan Davies	
		Secure additional children's home capacity by working with our local market and through the West Midlands Framework Providers to develop residential block contract beds and negotiate with external spot providers on pricing where framework providers are not available.	Jivan Sembi Commissioning Manager	
		Deliver robust quality assurance and monitoring of internal residential children's homes to support them to achieve good or outstanding Ofsted ratings.	Alan Davies	
		Maintain robust quality assurance and contract management processes for spot bed purchases and for West Midlands Framework Providers.	Commission Manager	
		Develop an internal multi-disciplinary model of residential assessment provision for children in crisis. The service will focus on meeting the needs of children in crisis and support them to move to an appropriate foster care placement or return to their families.	Alan Davies	
		Work with health services to develop a "crash pad" to support children coming out of hospital settings and increase our ability to secure registered provision based on a holistic assessment of the child's needs.	Commissioning Manager	

	will review as part of the statutory review process	Robustly apply protocols to secure joint funding from Health and Education in line with the needs of children. (ICB, TCP and BCMHT)	Heads of Service	contracts that secure provision for Walsall Children
		Work with unregistered providers to encourage them to register with Ofsted and provide support in their Ofsted application process	Alan Davies and Commissioning Manager	There are more registered providers within the region keeping children closer to their communities.
		Track all external residential placements to ensure that ; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate joint funding is secured with ICB, TCP and BC • High cost placements are reviewed and monitored via EPP. • High-cost or where additional packages are agreed these are reviewed to ensure that children's needs are stabilised with appropriate interventions and costs are reduced accordingly. • Identify and track children under 13 years to ensure that interventions are supporting children to step into family settings (home or fostering) in a timely manner 	Jivan Sembi and Head of Service	Better understanding of the types of risks affecting children as they move through the care system, giving more insight into which provisions and interventions would be most effective Effective partnerships with Health Education and Adult Social Care to manage demand, targeted interventions, and where appropriate the reduction in need for more costly and intense interventions

Our Intention	Corporate Parenting Strategy: priorities supported	Action	Who / When	Update and Evidence of Impact
Supported Accommodation	Maintain a constant focus on increasing the numbers of Walsall looked after children who are able to live close to their communities. Work with partners and providers of registered social housing and third	Ensure young people are living in supported accommodation in line with their needs, closer to their communities and are supported to transition to adulthood	Children's Commissioning Manager	Increase in local Ofsted registered supported accommodation provision which meets the range of needs for young people.
		Work with the regional commissioning arrangements for Supported Accommodation Framework to ensure that there are a range of providers to meet the needs of our young people	Children's Commissioning Manager	More young people live in accommodation that is either registered with Ofsted or CQC

	sector organisations to commission and provide a range of supported, semi-independent accommodation and permanent housing options for Walsall care leavers. unities	Supporting providers to prepare for registration and inspection by Ofsted, ahead of the implementation of statutory regulations across the sector in 2024	Alan Davies	as in line with their assessed needs and transition to adulthood. Fewer young people leaving care are living outside of Walsall unless this is to meet their specific needs.
		Maintain robust quality assurance and contract management processes for spot bed purchases and for West Midlands SA Framework Providers.	Placement's team and Commissioning	More young people leaving care report feeling confident in developing their independence

Our Intention	Corporate Parenting Strategy: priorities supported	Action	Who / When	Update and Evidence of Impact
Permanency		Ensure children who enter care have an effective permanence plan as soon as possible.	Team Managers and IROs	Increase in number of children who have a clear permanence plan which includes the child's family or an exit from care via adoption, special guardianship or other option as appropriate. Improved sufficiency in Adopters including Foster for Adoption Improved placement stability for children living with special guardians by supporting them with appropriate training, support, financial and therapeutic support.
		Increase the number of prospective adopters available regionally through targeted recruitment campaigns, focusing on recruiting adopters who are able to adopt older children and children in sibling groups.	Adoption at Heart	
		Increase the planned adoption of children where effective permanence planning and social work practice shows that is the best option for the child's long-term needs and interests.	Social Workers, Team Managers and Group Managers	
		Provide training and support for special guardians to equip them to meet the needs of the child or young person and maintain stability at home.	Mark Burrows	
		Implement the Family Safeguarding model to support the task of renunciation of children and subsequent revocation of care orders is proactively progressed where this is appropriate	Jenny Cockcroft / Zoe Morgan	
		Ensure that therapeutic support is available to special guardians through the Adoption Support Fund	Mark Burrows	

		Review our SGO Policy, including the allowances we offer Special Guardians.	Mark Burrows	
		Increase the staffing capacity in the service to support the stability of SGOs	Mark Burrows	

Our Intention	Corporate Parenting Strategy: priorities supported	Action	Who / When	Update and Evidence of Impact
To keep the Sufficiency Strategy up to date and alive	Closely and routinely monitor key data and information about our placements at both operational and strategic levels	Update our forecasting models to take into account the impacts made by our changes.	Annually	<p>We can demonstrably show that the voice of children & young people has informed the commissioning process.</p> <p>Maintain a continuous oversight of our sufficiency requirements through systematically gathering key data on social care needs & trends to enable us plan for future service demand and identify where there is a need for new or changed services.</p> <p>Ensure that our sufficiency strategy is attuned to changes in national and regional policy</p> <p>Robust Quality Assurance Processes in place to ensure that providers are delivery high quality accommodation.</p>
		Update the strategy to reflect any changes made to national or local policy.	Head of Service Annually	
		Provide regular, six-monthly updates against the sufficiency action plan, outlining changes made to the system or new developments and their impact.	Head of Service	
		Develop additional opportunities to hear feedback from our children in care and care experienced young people.	Head of Service	
		Review this strategy every 12 months at the Corporate Parenting Board and ensure that progress is reflected in the Corporate Parenting Board annual report.	Head of Service	

Appendix B – Children in Care Placement Analysis 2022-23

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1 Introduction

This analysis looks at children who are in care and who have entered care over the past five years, their demographics and the types of placements that are used.

The analysis has been used to develop the Sufficiency Strategy and monitoring of the key indicators will continue to provide evidence of impact for the action plan.

This analysis will be updated annually in line with the review of the sufficiency strategy.

2 Overall numbers

As at 31/03/2023 there were 650 children in care compared with 669 on 31/03/2020, a decrease of 2.8%. There have been some significant demographic changes, particularly in relation to the ages of the children and the legal status of children entering and in care.

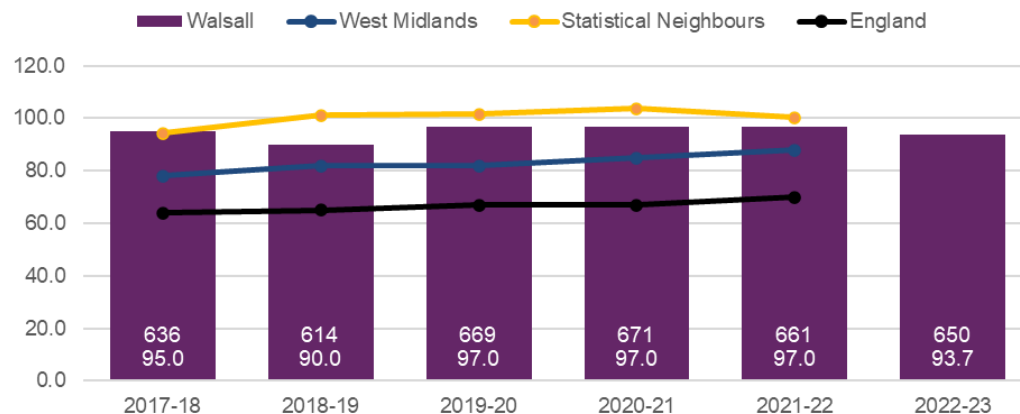
The rate of children in care was 93.7 per 10,000 children in the population aged 0-17. This is lower than statistical neighbours but remains higher than regional and national comparators. This is a reducing percentage compared to the 3 previous years.

However, the number of children in care remains higher than regional and national comparators, despite falling numbers of children entering care. This is largely due to historical factors of children who entered care and are now likely to remain in care until they are 18. However, because of Walsall's lower rate of children entering care and because the rate of children leaving care in is in line with comparators, the rate of children in care in Walsall is falling, while nationally and regionally it is in increasing.

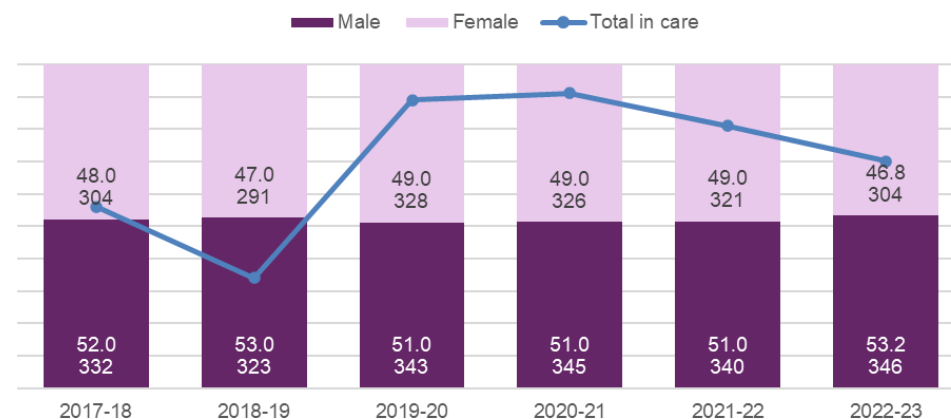
The profile of children in care is also changing with the proportion of children who are male and the proportion of older children increasing. This is driven by increasing number of young people entering care on remand or as Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and fewer younger children entering or remaining in care due to the success of the Family Safeguarding Model.

The proportion of younger children in care has reduced from 46.0% to 43.7% whereas the proportion of children aged 10 plus has increased from 54.0% to 56.3%.

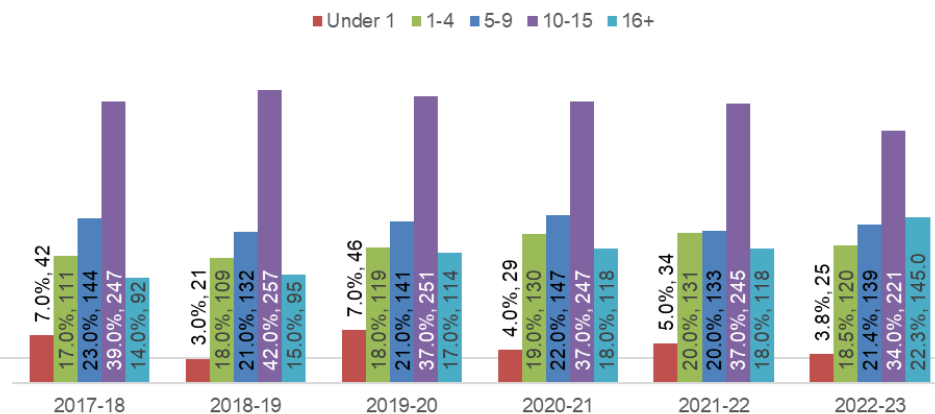
Rate of children in care per 10,000 population aged 0-17 as at 31st March



Gender of children in care as at 31st March



Age of children in care as at 31st March



3 Children entering care

The number of children who are entering care is falling. Since 2020-21 the rate of children entering care has been falling and has been in line with or lower than comparators. In 2021-22 180 children entered care, a rate of 26.0 per 10,000 population aged 0-17, in 2022-23 just 163 children entered care (23.5 per 10,000). This is a reduction of 9.4% on 2021-22 and 31.2% on the number that entered care in 2019-20.

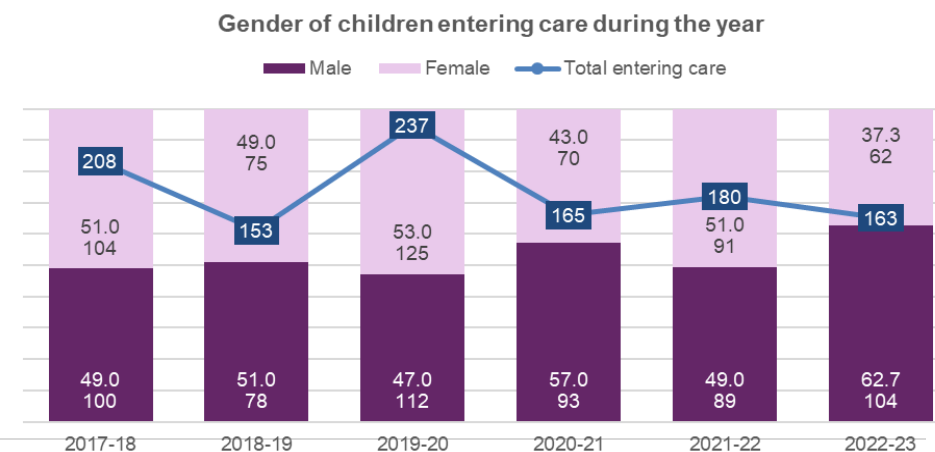
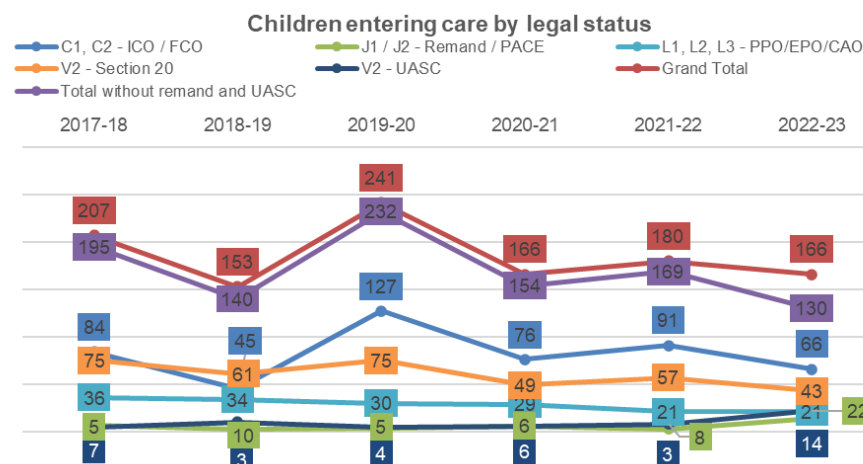
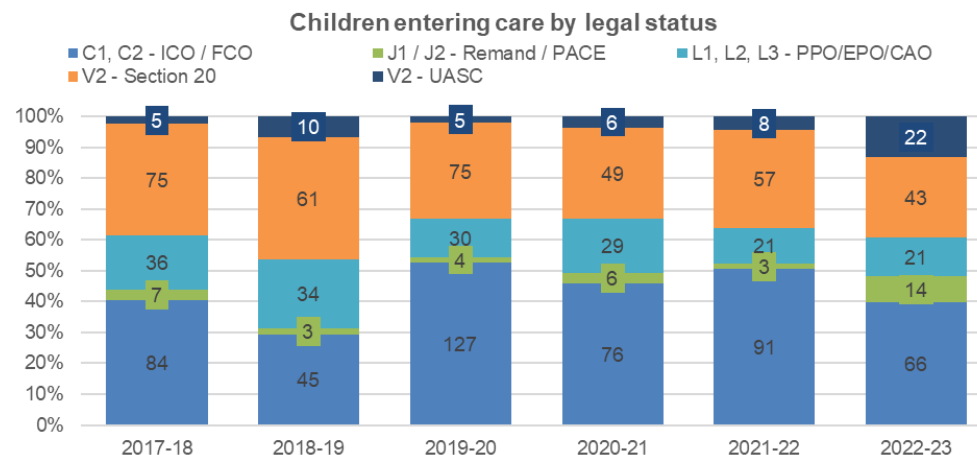
Legal Status: However, while the overall number of children entering care is falling, the profile of those children and the reasons they enter care is changing significantly. The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers entering care has more than doubled in 2022-23, as has the number of young people entering care on remand with these cohorts accounting for one in five entrances to care compared with between one and two in 20 in previous years.

As a percentage, historically, UASC and young people on remand have accounted for around 6.5% of children entering care, in 2022/23 this cohort accounted for 21.7% of children who had entered care. If we had not seen this increase, and the number of young people entering care as UASC or on remand had stayed the same as the average of previous years (12), there would have only been 142 children and young people entering care, a rate of just 20.5 per 10,000 children aged 0-17.

Based on the 2021-22 comparator data, this rate would have ranked Walsall in the lowest quartile nationally for children entering care (35 out of 152). The actual rate of 23.5 per 10,000 places Walsall in the second quartile (60 out of 152), whereas in 2021-22 Walsall was just inside the third quartile (78 out of 152).

This change in profile of the reasons that children are entering care is also having an impact on the demographic make-up of the children who are entering care.

Gender: There is a significant difference between the numbers of boys and girls entering care. On a year by year basis, the proportion of boys vs girls entering care changes, however, while the number of boys entering care is relatively consistent, there is significant inconsistency in the number girls with large swings up and down.



While the overall number of children entering care has reduced by 9.4% on the previous year, the number of boys entering care has increased by 16.9%, whereas the number of girls entering care has reduced by 31.9%. The increase in remands and UASC will be driving much of this given that these cohorts usually tend to be male.

Age: Children who are entering care are getting older. This is driven by two main factors – the first is the increase in UASC and remand, as young people in this cohort tend to be older. The second factor is the impact of the Family Safeguarding Model which is successfully reducing the number of children who enter care following a period of time on a child protection plan, with the main focus on children aged 12 and under.

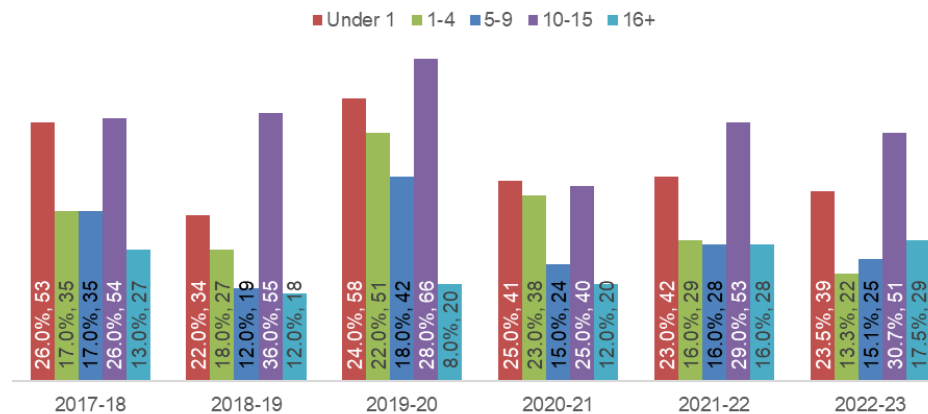
Overall, the number of children aged 9 and under has reduced by 13.1% on the previous year, whereas the number of children aged 10 plus who have entered care has reduced by just 1.9%. Overall, the proportions of children entering care has changed from over 60% being aged 9 and under to closer to a 50/50 split (51.8% aged 9 and under and 48.2% aged 10 plus).

Within the 9 and under cohort, the biggest reduction has been in the 1-4 cohort which has reduced by 24.1% (under 1 cohort has reduced by 7.1% and the 5-9 cohort has reduced by 10.7%). In the 10 and over cohort, entrances to care for children aged 10-15 has reduced by 3.8% whereas for young people aged 16+ there has been a 3.6% increase.

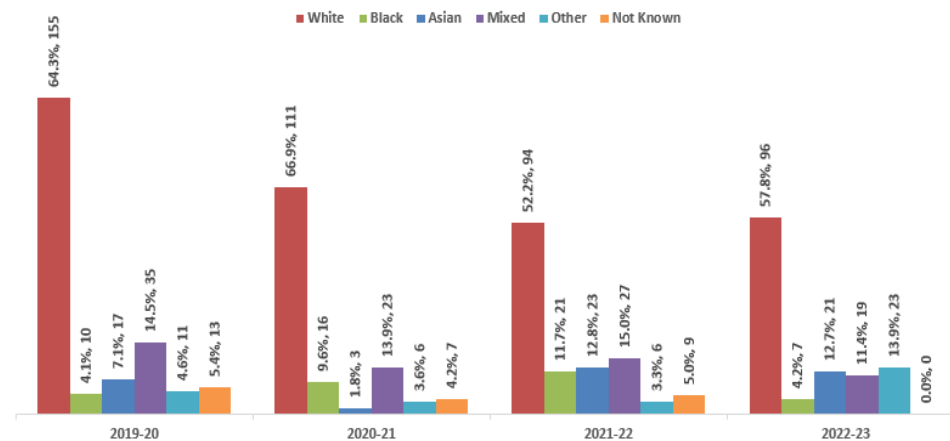
Ethnic background: The proportion of children from ethnic backgrounds other than white is also increasing, largely within the Asian and Other groups. This is driven by the increasing number of UASC, but also the increasing proportions of older children entering care generally as children who enter care from these backgrounds, tend to be older.

Need: The majority of children (66%) entered care in 2021-22 for abuse or neglect, followed by family dysfunction at 13%. In 2022-23, the proportion entering care for abuse and neglect remained around the same, while the proportion with family dysfunction had fallen to just six percent. Conversely, the proportion of children entering care with a need of absent parenting has increased from 9% to just under 16%.

Age of children entering care during the year



Ethnicity of children entering care during the year



4 Separated Children Seeking Asylum

At the end of March 2023 there were 25 young people in care who were classed as UASC, accommodated as either spontaneous arrival in Walsall or the National Transfer Scheme. Since April 2022, 18 young people seeking asylum have been accommodated by Walsall. All of the young people accommodated have been males from a range of countries.

9 of the 22 children have been accommodated through the mandatory National Transfer Scheme. A further 13 spontaneous arrivals were accommodated in January and February 2023 following the Home Office dispersal of adult males in a local hotel in December 2022. Age assessments in respect of the 13 spontaneous arrivals have led to 1 young person was assessed as being 18 or over.

The majority of our asylum-seeking children are aged 16/17 years and as a consequence their ongoing support continues as care experienced young people. There are 42 care experienced young people aged 18 to 24 being supported by our Transition and Leaving Care Service. Many of them are still awaiting a decision from the Home Office in relation to their asylum claims and those who have been awarded limited leave to remain this is usually for a period of up to 5 years.

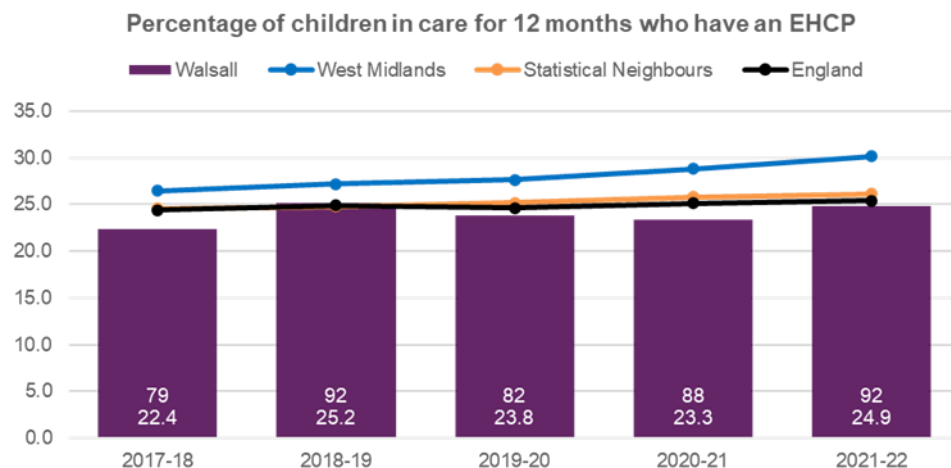
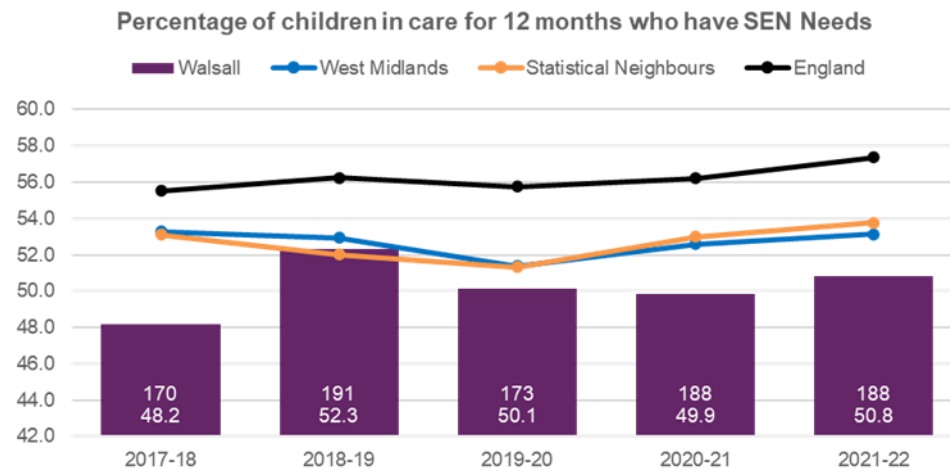
5 Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Generally, fewer children in care in Walsall have identified SEN needs. Just 50.8% (188) children who had been in care for at least 12 months at the end of March 2022, had an identified SEN, this is lower than comparators (England – 57.4%, West Midlands – 53.1% and Statistical Neighbours – 53.8%).

The percentage of children in care for at least 12 months with an EHCP was 24.9% indicating that around half of children in care with SEND have complex needs that cannot be met through SEN Support alone. The 50.8% of children with SEN and 24.9% of children with an EHCP in care compares with 16.9% of children with identified SEN needs and 4.1% of children with an EHCP overall.

Of the children in care as at 31st March in Walsall, 166 out of 650 children had an EHCP (this is not comparable to the published figures as not all of them have been in care for 12 months or more). Of these 166, just 47 had received their EHCPs before entering care. 119 (71.7%) received their EHCPs after entering care.

SEND needs, particularly more complex needs, which have not been previously recognised and supported can result in behaviours and needs which make it difficult to find places for children that are able to meet



those needs.

6 Placement Types

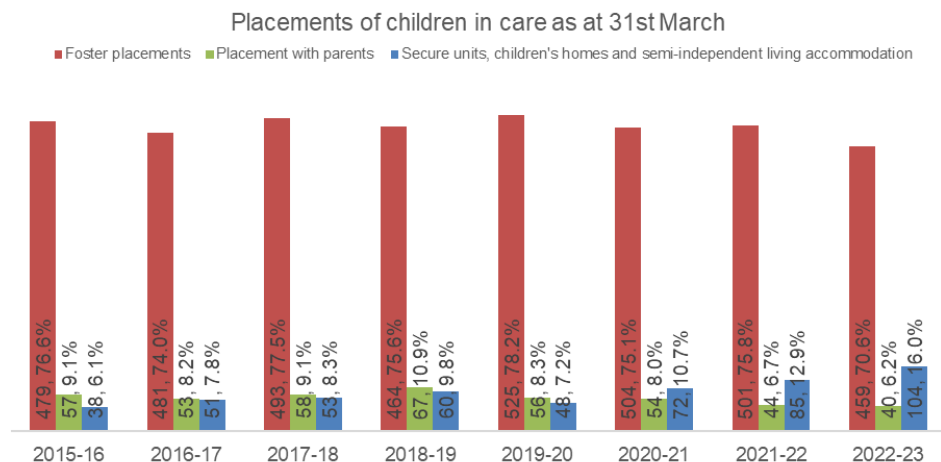
Over 90% of children in care are placed in either foster care, with parents or in residential children’s homes, secure or semi-supported accommodation. This is also the case amongst comparators. However, we are seeing a shift within these categories, with fewer children placed in foster care and increasing numbers in residential children’s home.

While the number and proportion of children in residential children’s homes, secure or semi-supported accommodation has been increasing gradually over time, the decrease in the proportion of foster carers has only been seen largely within the last 12 months.

As the 2022-23 comparator data is not available, it is not possible to say whether this is something that has been seen elsewhere or whether it is a Walsall specific issue, however, comparators have seen similar increases in the proportion of children in residential children’s homes, secure or semi-supported accommodation and anecdotally other LAs are reporting similar issues with foster placement sufficiency, so it is expected that comparator data will reflect what has happened in Walsall.

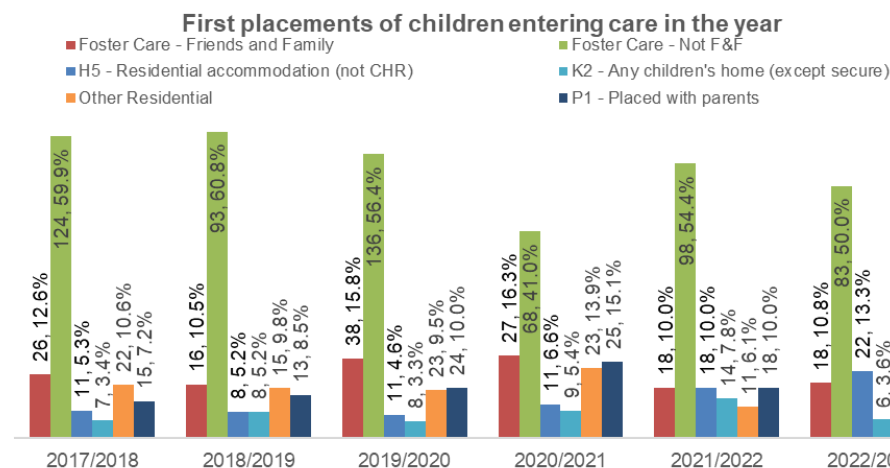
A similar shift can be seen in first placements of children entering care. Up until 2019-20, around 72% of placement starts were into foster care and less than 10% were in care homes or semi-supported accommodation. In 2020-21, there was a significant drop in the proportion of children entering foster care that was not Kinship Carers or Connected Carers and an increase in the proportion of children placed with parents – this is likely due to Covid-19 restrictions.

In both 2021-22 and 2022-23, the proportion of first placements has shifted again –children in Kinship or Connected Carers care has moved back up to 50%, although this still remains lower than pre-pandemic proportions. However, the proportion of first placements that are with Kinship or Connected Carers has decreased from around 15% to around 10%. The decrease in Kinship Care and Connected Carers is largely in the 10-15 age category where the proportion of children for whom this was their first placement has fallen from an average of 16% between 2019 and 2021 to an average of less than 5% between 2021 and 2023.



Accommodation Type	Year				% change since 2019-20
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
Childrens homes (K2)	43	50	53	59	37.2%
Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Homes Regulations (H5)	19	24	35	43	
Childrens homes (K2)		16.3%	6.0%	11.3%	126.3%
Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Homes Regulations (H5)		26.3%	45.8%	22.9%	

Children’s placement type is changing in light of changing age ranges of



children in care.

Placements in children’s homes

The proportion of children who enter a residential children’s home as a first placement is relatively small – prior to 2021-22 the number of children ranged between seven and nine. In 2021-22 this increased to 14 (7.8%) but in 2022-23 the number fell back to six (3.6%).

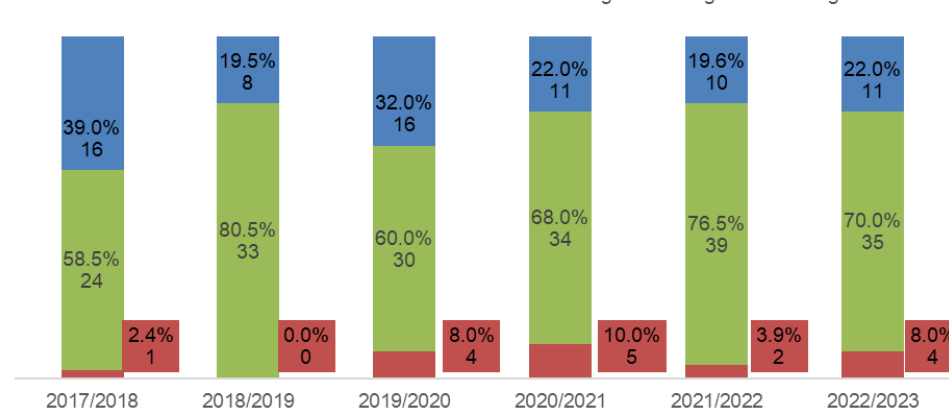
However, despite this the number and proportion of children in residential children’s homes continues to increase driven by two factors. When a child enters a residential care home placement, they are less likely to move to a different type of placement (e.g. step down to foster care) and they are also likely to be children who will remain in care on a more long term basis. In addition to first placements in residential children’s homes, there have also been an increase in placement breakdowns resulting in more children being placed in residential homes as part of a planned or unplanned move.

Boys are more likely to move into a children’s homes either as a first placement or as a placement move. Of the 37 children whose first placement was a children’s home between 2019 and 2023, 25 (67.6%) were male. Of the 59 who were in a children’s home as at 31st March 2023, 39 (66.1%) were male.

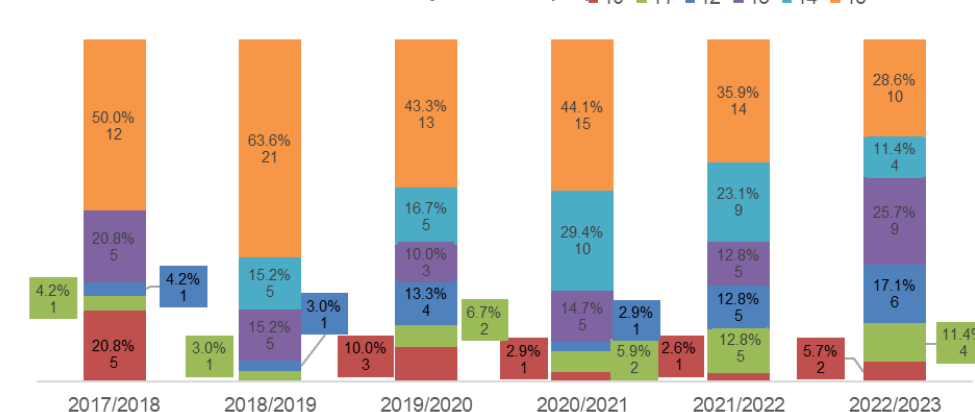
When we look specifically at the ages of children who have started a placement within a children’s home over the years, we can see that there has been some increase in the numbers of children aged 10-15, however, overall the proportions are fairly consistent (please note that some of these ‘starts’ may be moves from one children’s home to another).

However, when we look at the detail within the 10-15 age category, we can see that there has been a distinct shift towards younger children starting placements within children’s homes with over 60% of starts in 2022-23 being for children aged 13 or under (compared with 41.0% in 2021-22 and 26.5% in 2020-21).

Proportion by age of children starting a children's home placement (K2)



Proportion by age of children age 10-15 starting a children's home placement (K2)



Unregistered Placements

Due to difficulties in finding placements for children with increasingly complex needs we have also seen an increase in children aged under 16 who are placed in unregistered placements for a time, while a registered placement is sought. This is not clear in the data above as it is recorded as an H5 semi-supported accommodation placement.

In 2021-22 11 children and in 2022-23 there were 15 children under 16 were placed in unregistered accommodation. As at the 31st March 2023 there were five children under 16 in an unregistered placement.

Placement Stability and Distance

The lack of sufficiency within placements also means that it is not always possible to find the right placement for a child quickly. This can mean that children are placed where there is availability until the right placement can be found. This leads to an increase in placement moves which impacts on short term placement stability.

We are also seeing increasing numbers of placement breakdowns, even within long term placements which is impacting on longer term placement stability.

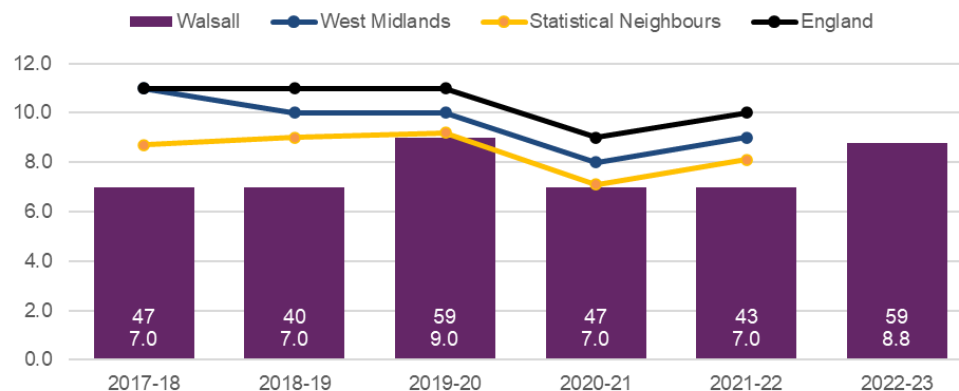
Historically Walsall's short term stability has been generally better than comparators in 2022-23 the percentage has increased to 8.8%. This remains lower than 2021-22 regional and national comparators. Conversely, long term stability has always been lower than comparators in Walsall. Stability has decreased further in 2022-23.

The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles from home and outside of the LA boundary has generally been lower than comparators, although in 2021-22, the gap between Walsall and comparators reduced. The percentage of children placed at distance has increased further in 2022-23.

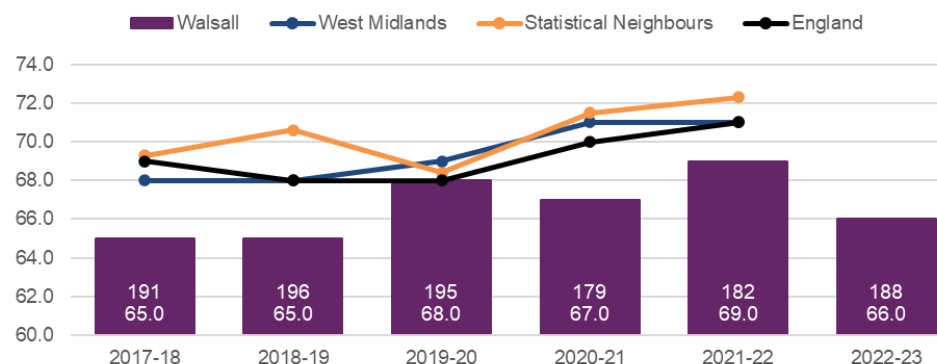
Of the 650 children who were in care as at 31st March 2023, 307 (46%) had received at least one placement move within the year. However, 138 of these children are new entrants to care who will often have at least one placement move in the early days of entering care.

When the same cohort is limited to children who have been in care for at least 12 months, 169 have had at least one placement move. The proportion of children in the 5-9 and 10-15 age cohorts with placement moves is in line with the proportion of children in those age cohorts in total, however, the proportion of children in the 1-4 age cohort with a move is 22.5% compared with just 18.5% in the cohort overall and the proportion of young people aged 16+ in the cohort with a move is 21.3% compared with 22.3% in the cohort overall.

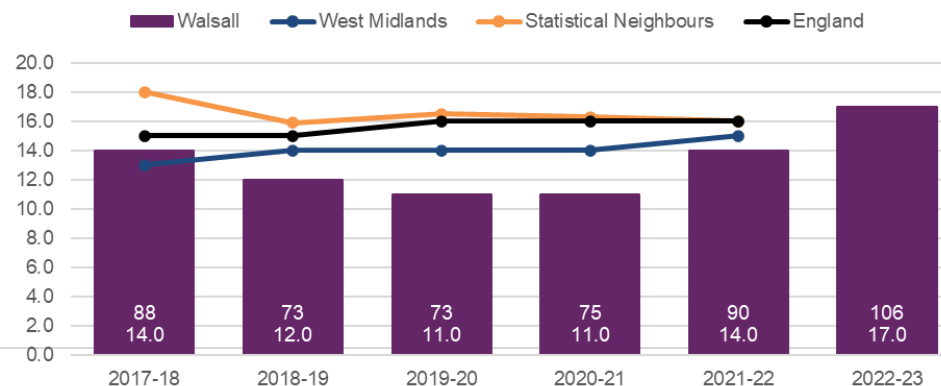
Short term placement stability - Percentage of looked after children with three or more placements during the year



Long placement stability - Of the looked after children continuously for at least 2.5 years and aged under 16 at 31 March, the percentage of looked after children in the same placement for at least 2 years



Percentage of children placed more than 20 miles from home and outside of the LAs boundary



31.7% of children aged 1-4 who had been in care experienced at least one placement move, compared with 26.6% of children aged 5-9, 26.2% of children aged 10-15 and 24.8% of children aged 16 plus. However, when the type of moves are looked at:

- For the 33 children aged 1-4, two thirds of the moves were to more permanent or long term placements, either adoption, return to parents or moves to long term fostering from a short term placement. Just 11 moved from one short term placement to another.
- For the 37 children aged 5-9, it is a similar picture with 23 (62.2%) moving to more permanent or long term placements and 14 (37.8%) moving from one short term place to another. None of these children in either age group moved into a children's home.
- For the 58 children aged 10-15, it is a different picture. Just 17 (29.3%) moved into more permanent or long term placements, with three of these being from existing long term placements that had broken down.

Commissioned Placements

Range of Commissioned Placements

Table 10a: Internal and External Placements as at 31 March 2022

Type of Placement	Internal	External Framework	External Spot Purchase
Fostering	34% (130)	62% (237)	4% (13)
Residential	13% (7)	59% (31)	28% (15)
Supported Accommodation		13% (6)	81% (39)

Placing in foster care increased from 368 to 380 by March 2022 of which 66% (250 of 380) were with an IFA while only 34% in internal foster care.

Table 10b: Internal and External Placements as at 31st March 2023

Type of Placement	Internal	External Framework	External Spot Purchase
Fostering	34% (117)	62% (211)	4% (15)
Residential	10% (7)	45% (29)	45% (29)
Supported Accommodation		32% (23)	64% (47)

Table 10c. Quality of fostering and residential provision by Ofsted Ratings

Note: The table includes outcomes from Ofsted inspections of IFAs and children's homes.

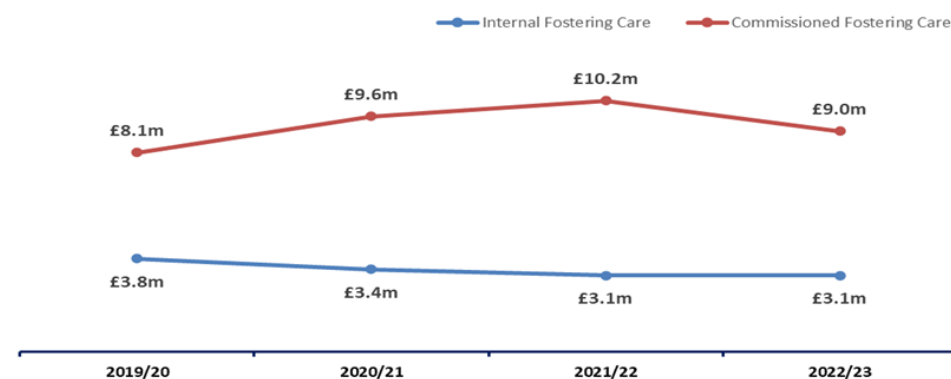
Quality of placements based on Ofsted inspections at September 2022	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement to be good	Inadequate
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people				
Independent Fostering Agencies	0	5	1	0
Children's homes	4	30	16	2
How well children & young people are helped and protected				
Independent Fostering Agencies	0	5	1	0
Children's homes	6	22	19	5
Effectiveness of leaders & managers				
Independent Fostering Agencies	0	4	2	0
Children's home	4	30	16	2

Numbers of IFAs and children's homes are presented by inspection outcomes. Information on Ofsted inspection outcomes for residential schools and secure home is not shown here, as they represent a small proportion of available residential settings.

Cost of Placements

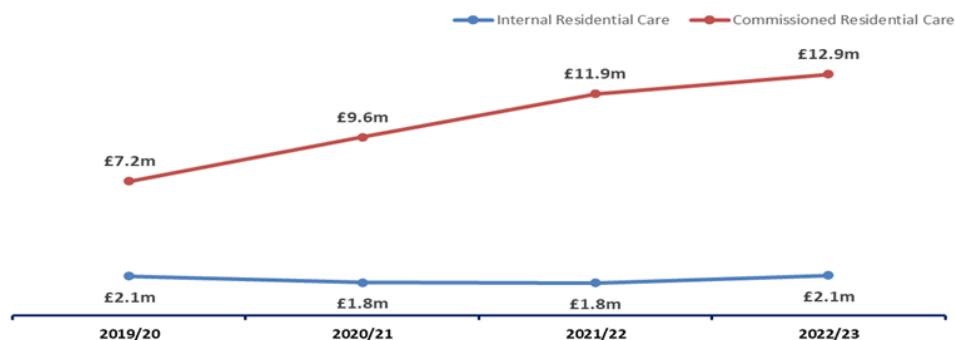
Figures 11 and 12 show total expenditure on commissioned foster and residential care had increased from £8.1m to £9.0m by 11% and £7.2m to £12.9m by 79% respectively during last four years,

Figure 11: Total Expenditure on Fostering Placements during the year ending March 31



Note. Council figures do not include management & other internal costs while expenditure on commissioned services includes overhead costs.

Figure 12: Total Expenditure on Residential Placements during the year ending March 31



Note. The figure only includes expenditure in residential placements (management & other internal costs are not taken under consideration).

Weekly expenditure for different types of placements.

The table below shows average weekly expenditure (per child) in foster and residential care (both internal and commissioned) over the past three years. Walsall have lower weekly costs than the average expenditure on each type of placement at the national level, except for commissioned residential care.

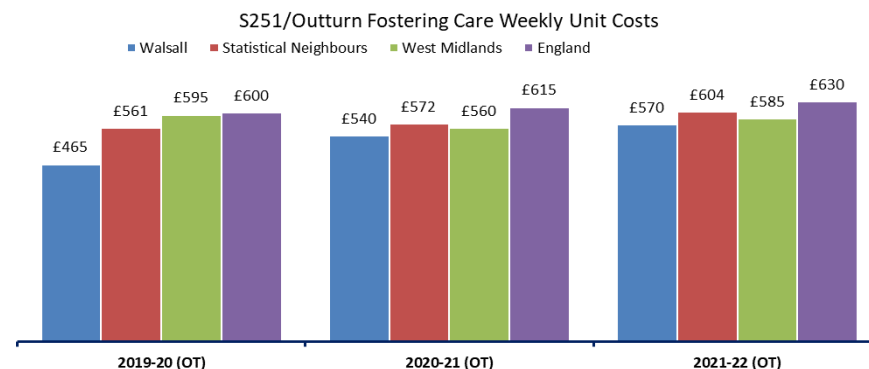
Placement Weekly Cost/per child	Walsall 2019/20	Walsall 2020/21	Walsall 2021/22	Walsall Trend	CIPFA LA Average 2019/20	CIPFA LA Average 2020/21
Internal Residential Care	£3,507	£4,206	£2,640	↘	£3,373	£3,571
Commissioned Residential Care	£3,531	£4,372	£5,772	↗	£4,201	£4,086
Internal Fostering Care	£400	£406	£381	↘	£476	£485
Commissioned Fostering Care	£757	£782	£817	↗	£937	£996
Average Weekly Cost	£704	£808	£1,152	↗	£1,022	£1,012

Average Weekly Cost for different Placements for Children in Care

Figure 13 shows that the average weekly unit cost per child for foster care has increased from £465 to £570 in 2022/23, was less than the WM, SN and the national level over last three years.

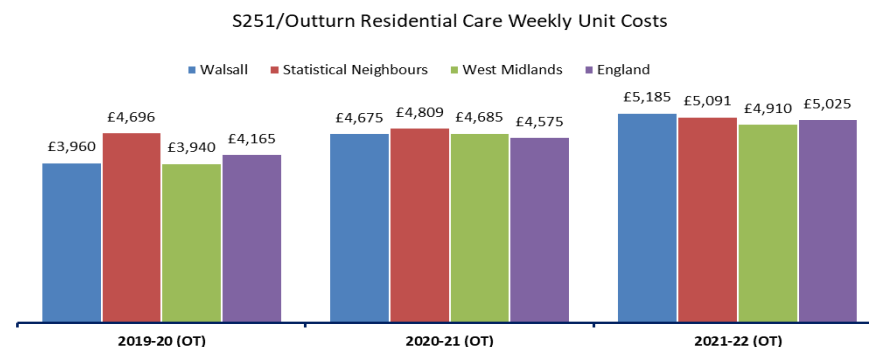
Figure 14 indicates the average weekly unit cost for residential care had significantly increased from £3,960 to £5,185 over last three years, higher than the WM, SN and the national level. The average weekly unit cost for children in care has increased from £905 to £1,180 in 2021/22, was less than the WM, SN and the national level over last three years as Figure 15 shown.

Source: CIPFA children looked after benchmarking data
Figure 13: Average Weekly Expenditure (per child) in Foster Care during the year ending March 31



Note. Unit costs include all in-house provision, fostering services purchased externally, fees and allowances paid to foster parents and the costs of social worker and other support staff who support foster carers, DfE (2022)

Figure 14: Average Weekly Expenditure (per child) in Residential Care during the year ending March 31



Note. Unit costs include expenditure on residential care in Voluntary Children's and Registered Children's Homes as defined in Children Act 1989, DfE, (2022)

Figure 15: Average Weekly Expenditure (per child) for Children in Care during the year ending March 31 - Source: DfE, 2022

7 Conclusion and next steps

The data analysis shows that while the number of children who are entering and remaining in care is reducing overall, there are some significant changes in both demographics and needs which have an impact on placement sufficiency.

The increase in the proportion of older boys with more complex needs who are more likely to enter residential care is something that needs careful consideration when planning the commissioning of placements to ensure that suitable homes can be found. The work being done in relation to support services will also benefit this demographic.

The SEND needs of children in care is also something to be considered, particularly in relation to the earlier identification of SEND for children in Walsall overall, particularly those who may be vulnerable and who are being supported at the early help, child in need and child protection stages, as this may also help to reduce further the number of children entering care by reducing the pressure that SEND needs can cause for families.

The Sufficiency Strategy and supporting action plan sets out how we will ensure that there are sufficient placements in Walsall to address these changing needs and how support services will help to prevent children from entering care or support them and their families to facilitate a return home.