



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Three-Year Sufficiency Strategy
for Children in Care and Care
Leavers
2018-2021**

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1. Introduction

One of the greatest responsibilities held by the Council is the duty of taking into public care those children and young people who can no longer live with their parents. When we do this we want to ensure that we are meeting the accommodation needs of all of our Wokingham children and young people in care whether they are on the edge of care, in care or leaving care. Our strategy for 2018 to 2021 sets out how we plan to achieve this.

Historically Wokingham has been below the national trend of numbers of children coming into care, however, since 2014 there has been a steady increase in the numbers of children coming into care, with 70 children in 2014 and 99 at January 2018. A range of demand factors including demographic growth, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and the complexity of the children coming into care requires that we develop new approaches to both reducing demand and meeting an increased number of children becoming looked after. Our plans aims to develop the sufficiency to accommodate up to 120 children if need be.

We want to be clear about the areas where we are excelling as well as be aware of where we could do better so that we can build this into our new strategy and focus on these areas. We are proud of the work we have undertaken over the last couple of years, particularly around keeping our children in care local and the progress we have made around the early help and prevention offer. We want to improve the way we commission services to ensure we have **the right placement, at the right time, in the right place, for the right price.**

During 2018 to 2021 we will work to ensure that all our children in care have a safe place to live, that they are happy, and they reach their full potential. We want them to be able to compete on a level playing field with their peers, so that no child or young person is disadvantaged by virtue of their care history.

Supplementing this three-year strategy document will be an annual analysis of demand and an action plan demonstrating how we are developing our strategy and meeting objectives in response to changes in the children in care population.

2. Our Key Priorities

The Council has a duty under the Children Act 1989 to ensure that so far as is reasonably practicable; there is sufficient accommodation for children in care, that it meets their needs, and that it is within their local authority area. The sufficiency duty applies in respect of all children who are defined as 'looked after' under the Children Act 1989. Our key priorities to meet our duty and to deliver the best possible outcomes for our young people are summarised below-

OUR KEY PRIORITIES FOR ACCOMMODATING CHILDREN IN CARE

- ❖ Reduce the number of children entering into care and in care, through effective early intervention and support for families
- ❖ Increase the number of residential placements in Wokingham and the number of placements within 20 miles of the child's home
- ❖ Improve permanency of placements, to give children a sense of continuity and belonging
- ❖ Enhance the skills and stability of the social work workforce in order to offer a consistent and long-term relationship for our children in care which is key to achieving our aims
- ❖ Improve recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers to increase capacity and choice of in-house placements, reduce out of area placements, and improve availability of foster care for all children in care
- ❖ Improve the way that we commission our placements to ensure that we get **the right placement, at the right time, in the right place, and for the right price**
- ❖ Develop our Market Position Statement to inform local providers of future need

To achieve these priorities a range of initiatives are currently being developed-



OUR KEY ACTIONS

- ❖ Adoption of a refreshed permanency planning process and procedure to improve stability of placements based on a systems learning model IE the framework of Signs of safety/permanence
- ❖ Identifying connected persons at the earliest possible point in the child's journey through social care involvement, so that the potential for inter family placements via private law orders is achieved
- ❖ Establishing an integrated strategic commissioning team across adults' and children's services
- ❖ Adopting a young people's housing plan to address the housing and support needs of vulnerable young people
- ❖ Recruit more specialist foster carers for children with additional needs.
- ❖ Recruit more in-borough foster carers resulting in the positive outcome of a reduced proportion of children being placed more than 20 miles from 'home'
- ❖ Improving options for young people leaving care including better local accommodation provision
- ❖ Working closely with foster carers to enable our young people to benefit by the "staying put" initiative

Key factors in the success of increasing our capacity- We hope this combined approach of developing our In House services and working in partnership with other Local Authorities and providers will enable us to meet the up and coming demands on local sufficiency.

OUR FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

- ❖ Understanding the need with a refresh each year to update the sufficiency action plan
- ❖ Continuous development of In House recruitment against up and coming need
- ❖ Participation in the residential and 16+ frameworks with neighbouring authorities to increase provider uptake in the local area
- ❖ Completion of the 'local homes' project, to keep children closer to their local community
- ❖ Continued partnership with the IFA contract and its development – sighted as good practice by Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP) December 2017
- ❖ Exploring the use of the new LOT on the IFA contract – Alternatives to Residential Care
- ❖ Analysis of our spend on Therapy services to inform a business case to bring a therapy service In House

3. Statutory Duties and Guidance

The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of those children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation within their local authority area. Securing sufficient accommodation requires a whole-system approach which includes early intervention and preventive services to support children in their families, as well as better services for children if they do become looked after.

4. Our Drivers

Provision for our Children in Care is a key role and responsibility for the Council driven by a number of local strategies, policies, and drivers-



The key local strategies driving this Sufficiency Plan are:

- [Corporate Parenting Board](#)

Our wider aims and ambitions for Children in Care are set out in our Corporate Parenting Strategy. The

- ❖ Health opportunities and promotion
- ❖ Promotion of emotional health and wellbeing development and a link to 'Futures in Mind'
- ❖ Good quality care and accommodation
- ❖ Children in care receive the best educational support
- ❖ Care Leavers will have further education, training or employment at 18 and live in safe/stable accommodation
- ❖ Training for Members and the board

Corporate Parenting Board identified the following priority themes for 2017/18-

- [Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board \(WSCB\)](#)

The WSCB 2017/18 priorities agreed at the January 2017 Board are-

- ❖ **Child Sexual Exploitation**
 - An expansion on the definition to explore the definition of CSE in the wider sense and to include bullying.
- ❖ **Neglect (Including Domestic Abuse)**
 - Neglect is applied as an umbrella term for various themes and our focus will be on assessing the impact neglect has on a child who lives in an environment where they are exposed or experience Domestic Abuse and how the continuous cycle of neglect results in the child not meeting innate potential.
- ❖ **Innovation and development of front-line practice**
 - Understanding and being clear about risk and how we evidence best practice through innovation and development.

This will be updated annually as each following year's priorities have been agreed.

- [Young People's Housing Strategy](#)

The Young People's Housing Strategy reflects our corporate parenting responsibilities, with a view to preventing and responding to the needs of the most vulnerable young people in the Borough. This includes those at risk of homelessness, including care leavers and young people on the edge of care. It also aims to improve access to affordable housing for all young people.

In 2014 we created the Young Peoples' Housing Need tracker; a data set that serves three important purposes:

Specialist Housing - an evidence base to allow us to analyse current and future need for specialist and supported accommodation to determine our current and future demand

Individual Housing Need - regular meetings between senior staff at Here4U and Housing Needs ensure that cohort data is updated. These meetings are also an important opportunity to discuss individual circumstances and the housing element of each Care Leaver's Pathway Plan. Where a young person's circumstance has changed or become urgent, the meetings provide a forum to discuss options and solutions.

General Needs Housing - detail of the housing need of young people who are outside of Social Care but who may have emerging or urgent housing need. Together with the universal data provided by the Housing Register numbers, we have reached a position of stable knowledge of the needs of young people in our Borough. This data is essential when we make decisions about the size and location of new affordable housing in the Borough.

- [0-25 SEND Strategy 2018 to 2019](#)

At c.40% the proportion of children with statements of Special Educational Needs among Wokingham Children in Need population, including Children in Care is higher than is seen nationally. Our 0-25 SEND strategy complements this Sufficiency Strategy looking to increase SEND service provision within the borough and or closer to the borough boundaries. A range of initiatives to increase in-borough specialist provision and increase the capacity and capability of mainstream schools to support children with SEND will improve our capacity to place Children in Care within and or closer to Wokingham.

- [Recruitment, Retention and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2019](#)

Our strategy sets out a how Children's Services will retain, recruit and develop talented, skilled and experienced staff able to deliver excellent services to meet the existing and future needs of children and their families. The strategy will give a clear view of focus for the recruitment and retention effort for Wokingham. The scope of the strategy covers Social Workers, Early Help and Youth Service practitioners. The document is a sub-strategy of the Workforce Development Strategy 2017-2019 and details of objectives and actions that will contribute to its delivery.

- [Actions in response to regulatory inspection](#)

The Council was inspected by Ofsted in 2015.

Inspectors highlighted examples of good practice with regard to sufficiency-

- The early help hub established in August 2014 provides a robust multi-agency consideration of the most appropriate early help support for children and their families
- The authority's 'Elevate' initiative has successfully established a much enhanced, easily accessible 'one-stop-shop' that supports young people into work, education or training
- A notable strength of the local authority is listening to and acting on the views of children and young people

Inspectors also identified areas for improvement with regard to sufficiency, including-

- Provide foster carers with good quality written review decisions quickly
- Increase the number of in-house foster carers and reduce the number of foster placements made over 20 miles from the child's home
- Increase the support offered for independent living skills
- Ensure that children in care and care leavers receive regular visits that incorporate strong pathway plans and agreed outcomes
- Improve the SEND offer to bring children back to area

These areas for improvement have been responded to and will continue to be developed.

- Early Help and Prevention

Local early help and preventative services contribute to reducing the chances of vulnerable children entering the statutory care system. We are now taking this model of working and seeking to embed it across our partnerships. It builds upon

- The restorative practice working with families, our Family First programme has been the highest performing Troubled Families programme in the country with the highest percentage of families achieving positive outcome changes.
- The Signs of Safety practice framework has been successfully rolled out across our social care staff and is embedded in our early help services, triage team and Child protection Conference Chairs.
- Children's Partnership - We have invested in developing our Children's Partnership through an academic partnership with the Institute of Public Care to achieve strategic multi-agency commitment to delivering our system changes.

The Edge of Care Team has a specific role in reducing children coming into care and leaving care through:

- Supporting edge of care tier 3 children in need cases to remain at home where possible and appropriate
- Undertaking assessments in conjunction with the Housing Service for those 16 and 17 year old young people who are homeless with the sole purpose of ensuring that all young people in the cohort are supported with housing and additional help either through Housing section 17 or Children Services section 20
- Identifying the children who would be suitable for step down from their current placements and care arrangements

5. Understanding the Need

- Demographics

Wokingham has a growing young population. The data shows that the numbers of both older teenagers (15 to 19) and 10 to 14 year olds are expected to grow over the next 5 years. The number of 10 to 14 year olds (likely to continue to be an age group of particular focus for sufficiency purposes) is expected to grow sharply at around 3% per annum.

One factor in Wokingham that may lead to accelerated growth is the very high level of housebuilding planned. Over 10,000 new homes (predominantly family housing) are in the process of being delivered in four "Strategic Development Locations" in Wokingham Town, Arborfield and Shinfield. These are part of an overall commitment of over 13,000 new homes over the life of the current Core Strategy (to 2026). By 2016 the DCLG

has counted 64,730 dwellings in the Wokingham area, pointing to an increase of over 15% in the housing stock (and therefore a commensurate increase in the total population).

Wokingham is an area that young families move to, often with young (preschool and key stage 1 (under 8) children). The Office of National Statistics projects a sharp increase in the number of 10 to 14 year olds, rising at 3% year on average to 2021. The number of 15 to 19 year olds rises by 1% per y “Wokingham Borough Council has an ongoing new school and school expansion programme. A new secondary school (Bohunt Wokingham) has opened in Arborfield, primary schools are being expanded in Woodley and Earley and a new primary school is on target to open in September 2018 in Shinfield. This programme is intended to ensure that all children, including children in care have a school place available. Further new schools will open in line with the build out of the four major development areas in the Borough.

School admissions arrangements, in accordance with statutory requirements, give very high priority to current and former children in care, so they will continue to be able to secure admission (through the admission rounds for Reception and Year 7 places) to the schools that can best meet their needs. At other times they will continue to have priority for available school places. Children in care placed out of the Borough will also have high priority for any places available in the communities where they have been placed.

6. Our children and Young People

Wokingham have signed up to a pledge for Children in Care and Care Leavers that represents the promises that we are making to our children and young people to make sure we are good corporate parents. Our pledge was written by The Children in Care Council (CiCC) in consultation with other children in care and care leavers.

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is made up of young people who live in care and care leavers in the Wokingham Borough. Our Children in Care Council has been active since 2010. The CiCC play an important role in Childrens services, they are the voice of Wokingham’s Children in Care and Care Leavers and bring forward issues to senior management and councillors. The CiCC gives young people in care a place to have their say about issues that are important to them. WBC are committed to making the experience of being a child in care and a care leaver a good one.

- [What our Carers Leavers told us on being a child in care in Wokingham](#)

There is not enough social workers and the first year can be really stressful and overwhelming. They also don’t like how they’ve had to repeat their story due to having new social workers.

They are grateful for the CiCC and for the children’s advocacy officer. They also said it’s obvious that Wokingham genuinely care about children and that are grateful for the Staying Put policy.

The council is committed to engaging children and young people in the preparation of the 2018-2021 Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Their feedback from the 2014-17 strategy was sort which has helped form the latest strategy and is behind the idea of the easy-read summary page. Credit for the art work also goes to the CiCC.

The children in care and care leaver’s annual survey is undertaken between January and March each year and reported to the Corporate Parenting Board. We are currently working on the survey for 2017-18, which will inform future actions.

- [Opportunities for our young people – Our Commitment to apprenticeships](#)

Wokingham is committed to working with the apprenticeship initiate as a way for young people and adults to earn while they learn in a real job. It gives apprentices real qualification and a real future. The scheme provides

high quality training that benefits both apprentices and employers and an appropriate wage. This gives the young person a real job of at least 30 hours per week for at least 12 months with a specified job description, a qualification leading to a national qualification that can be up to degree level and a real future - after finishing 85 percent of apprentices stay in employment with 64% staying with the same employer.

7. Developing the Children in Care Work Force

- Our Vision

Wokingham continues to develop its approach to social work with children, young people and families based on a clear Practice Framework, strong relationships with partner agencies and professionals, and a policy of securing a well-supported, effective permanent workforce. A local workforce which is of a high standard, flexible, dynamic and responsive. Our aim is to develop a compelling 'workforce offer' that attracts and retains quality social workers and managers differentiating Wokingham in a competitive social care market.

- Current Position

It is a continuous priority for the Council to ensure a stabilised workforce given the potential impact of staff absence or vacancies in a small authority.

Like many Local Authorities, Wokingham finds itself in a challenging situation for social work recruitment, set against a national shortage of qualified social work staff and located within the area between the London Boroughs and amongst the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities all in close proximity. The Local Authorities are competing to attract the available candidates and this leads to a constant increased revision of pay scales and retention schemes by each unitary to attract the pool of Social Workers living within Berkshire and commutable distances. The implementation of the market comparable pay scales for Social Workers, up to Team Manager Grade has helped the recruitment and retention of experienced social work staff. However, pay is not the only factor.

As a long term sustainable strategy, to recruit the best Social Workers, Practitioners and Managers, we need to give people the right reasons to not only join us but stay. We will take action to influence the supply of practitioners, but there will be a necessary focus of effort on the retention and wellbeing of staff, actively managing the positive factors which encourage staff to stay. To that end, we are developing a compelling workforce offer.

8. Key Activities at January 2018

Across the department we have made progress against ongoing activities which are in place to support the development of our sufficiency within the local area.

- Building capacity - In-house Foster Care Provision

Targeted fostering recruitment continues to be successful using a range of sources including social media, information events/drop-ins, community recruitment (local events and noticeboards), and advertising on the Council's website and through Council publications and through the Fostering Network.

A considerable amount of energy has been invested in developing the training programme for foster carers. We now have a dedicated page on our online learning and training platform, MyLearning. We have a wide-ranging programme of both classroom training and e-learning designed to meet the varied needs of foster carers. We have also streamlined the application process so that it is simple to use and accessible to all foster

carers. We are in the process of working with the Learning and development consultant on plans for next year's foster carer training.

The Out-of-Hours support line continues to operate efficiently and was relaunched earlier this year with a new dedicated phone line and a clear policy and procedure of operation.

- Keeping our children in care locally

We have brought back 3 children to Wokingham from the independent sector and one parent and child placement returned to a Wokingham foster carer from a high cost residential placement. This is an achievement we remain ambitious in repeating.

Although we have met with foster carers to consult with them on returning 5 named children from the residential sector by working with colleagues in other teams and agencies such as Health and Education in order to set up intensive packages of care for the return of these children, none of the children have yet been ready to return to the Wokingham area. With increased fostering resources together with the right level of support we should be able to bring children back when they are ready.

Plans to return children can include fostering or living with family, supported by foster carers.

In the future we wish to avoid placing children away from Wokingham unless there is a good reason to do so. We will develop more foster carers for asylum seeking minors and our foster carer recruitment strategy includes specific targeting of potential applicants for this purpose.

We have avoided placing parent and child placements in the independent sector this year and have trained a group of 9 foster carer households who are wishing to take this on in the future.

Other actions to increase our In House Foster Care provision include-

- Ensuring initial visits happen within 24 hours
- Processing application within 10 days
- Ensure that initial foster carer training is responsive to need and run consistently by the same members of the recruitment team with foster carers
- Completing assessments and present to panel within 4 months

- Staying Put

The lack of choices for older children (16+) has been recognised and we are aiming to increase the number of supported lodgings carers and extend "staying put" arrangements where appropriate. Our new 'staying put' policy with increased funding will encourage foster carers to offer Staying Put to our young people. Our foster carers are aware of the benefits of children staying put beyond 18 and were consulted on the new policy. Specifically, it gives young people who are in stable and supportive placements the opportunity to pursue education, training and employment without the disruption of having to move into 'independence' during this critical period of their lives.

We want to enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way, just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support. We currently support 9 young people under our Staying Put Policy (January 2-18).

- Legal Permanence Plans

We are keen to secure legal permanence for children where their care plan is permanent fostering. Both Wokingham foster carers and those in the independent sector are being approached to consider making private law applications in respect of Special Guardianship or Adoption orders for those children who have

been in placement with them for two years or more, and formally matched. Wokingham will support this initiative by providing financial support and leaving care support for those children as if they continued to be long term fostered. This applies only to children where it is appropriate in terms of their care plan and their birth family situation.

This will require putting in the necessary support to enable this to happen. Family and friends who have taken on the responsibility of a Special Guardianship Order are also entitled to access the central government Adoption Support fund. We provide education, therapeutic and health support to those who were Adopted or made subject to a Special Guardianship order on the same criteria as our children in care. The Adoption Fund enables the guardians to access a range of specialist providers that can provide training on therapeutic parenting, therapy for both the child and the parent/s and a range of other specialised services.

- **Young People Transitioning to Adult Services**

Support to young people transitioning can be found in our Annual Analysis and action plan. The key themes of our ongoing work to support the successful transition of vulnerable young people to adulthood include:

- ❖ **Review of policy, procedure and practice**
 - Reviewing criteria and thresholds for transitions
 - Developing and providing good and accessible information for young people and their families/carers
 - Ensuring that transition starts from age 14
- ❖ **Improving joint working to achieve better outcomes**
 - Improve joint working across the Council and with our key partners to improve outcomes
 - Explore integrated IT systems
 - Joint resources and virtual transitions team
 - 0 – 25 service
- ❖ **Smarter commissioning**
 - Explore joint commissioning opportunities
 - Evidence based commissioning
 - Commission specialist services for autism, ADHD and challenging behaviour
 - Increase local provision in partnership with the voluntary sector
 - Improved and timely housing provision
- ❖ **Skills and behaviours**
 - Provide training for our staff so that they have the right skills to manage complex and varied needs
 - Explore the need for therapy-based input at the start of assessments

We currently manage commissioning for young people transferring from children's to adults' services within a dedicated transitions team.

The team works closely with children's services to identify and track young people from the age of 14 who may need ongoing social care services on becoming 18. This includes children in care with learning and physical disabilities as well as vulnerable care leavers. Each term any children in care with Special Educational Needs who will become 14 that term will be assessed to establish whether they are likely to have needs as adults to enable longer term planning of services. Those who are likely to need services are allocated to a worker in the transitions team who will begin working with the young person to plan services. The Children and Families Act 2014 places requirements on Social Care, Health and Education services to work together to jointly plan and

commission services for young people with Special Educational Needs and work is currently being done across social care, health and education to enable us to fulfil this duty.

Where independent housing is identified as the preferred option the transitions team works closely with the Council's Young People Specialist Housing Needs worker to identify suitable Council properties for supported living. Places are also identified with specialist housing providers with the Borough. Generally finding appropriate accommodation is not a major issue for this group.

- **Emotional and Mental Health**

We know that a high proportion of our children in care have behavioural, emotional and social issues and we recognise that accessing support from mental health services at the earliest opportunity produces better outcomes for our children and Young People. We work closely with the Tier 2 CAMHs services and are aware of a number of improvements that is going on within the service. The waiting times have significantly reduced and as of November 2017 no young people were waiting over 9 weeks for an assessment from the point of referral, this is compared to a 19 week wait in November 2016. Overall for tier 2 the waiting times have reduced with the majority of children and young people receiving an assessment within 6 weeks of referral.

The tier 3 CAMHs is a Berkshire West Service and we are also seeing a reduction in waiting times for the specialist service (excluding the ASD pathway). The waiting times for autism related appointments are also reducing but not at the same rates as the rest of the service.

Despite these successes there is a commitment to transform our Emotional and Mental Health Services and Support across West Berkshire. This is being led by the LTP (Local Transformation Plan). Examples of these initiatives include-

- School Link Project
- Increased support in schools to identify mental health and emotional needs earlier and support the development of resilience
- Redesign of the TEIR 2 and Universal Emotional and Mental Health support
- CAMHS urgent response pilot
- PPEP Care training (psychological perspectives in education and primary care)

- **Young People & Housing**

In response to what our Care Leavers told us we have developed a "more than one chance" policy meaning that if a Care Leaver does not sustain their first chance at a social housing tenancy, we look to help more than once and ensure that any extra support and help is in place. The introductory tenancy process and 'more than one chance' ethos for social housing takes the view that our young people are in training or progressing to sustainment.

For 16/17 year olds, Housing and Children's Services have an agreed protocol for joint working, this was recently updated in January 2017 and the launch of the new protocol will be an opportunity for further joint training.

Here4U and our Housing Needs team work together to deliver the housing element of pathway plans. We have a simplified Housing Register application process for our children in care and we encourage our PAs at Here4U to consider this process at as early a stage as is possible.

One of the strategic aims of the Young People's Housing Strategy is to ensure that the accommodation and support needs of Care Leavers, young people on the edge of care and young people at risk of homelessness are met. To support this aim, we have dedicated Young People Specialist Housing Advisor within our Housing Needs Team, contributing greatly to our ability to assist at an early stage. Young people self-refer straight to the Housing Needs Team or are referred from other teams within Children's Services and other partner agencies. Working with our Housing colleagues.

- Care Leavers

All 15 ½ - 18 year olds have pathway plans and all 18 – 21 years old Care Leavers have a pathway plan. Our Care Leavers have priority on the Housing Register and their housing needs and aspirations are discussed as part of their pathway plans. The Young Person’s Housing Adviser and a senior member of the Housing Needs Team meet regularly with the Here4U Team to discuss the cohort data, and individual young people whose need for housing has become particularly urgent. We then work together to consider what may be the most appropriate response.

- Sufficiency for Children and Adoption

A new organisation called Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency was launched on 1st December 2017. It works across seven local authority areas in the Thames Valley (Bracknell Forest, Oxfordshire, Reading, Swindon, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, West Berkshire, Wokingham including Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service).

Adopt Thames Valley actively contributes to ensuring that each of the contributing authorities perform well in terms of placing children for adoption within national timescales, by both recruiting adopters seeking to adopt an unrelated child(ren), and by assessing friends and family and existing foster carers who have applied to be considered as potential adopters for a specific named child(ren). The Agency also provides a full range of adoption and special guardianship support services and services aimed at enabling the contributing local authorities to meet the statutory requirements placed on all local authorities relating to the processing of notified adoptions and the provision of inter-country adoption services.

Adopt Thames Valley seeks to achieve the placement of each child referred for family finding within four months of the placing authority deciding that the child should be placed for adoption or the granting of the Placement Order (which-ever is the latter) or within three months if the child is under six months of age and the birth parent(s) is/are requesting that the child be placed, provided that working within these timescales is not likely to be detrimental to the child.

The Agency will review its recruitment strategy on a six monthly basis and more frequently if the profile of children requiring placement changes markedly.

The key objective is to raise the public’s awareness of Adopt Thames Valley (ATV) across the geographical area covered by the seven contributing local authorities, in order to enable the Agency to recruit a higher number of adoptive parents who reflect the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of the children referred to the Agency for placement and improve placement choice.

Wokingham is committed to reviewing Foster to Adopt.

9. Key Objectives and areas for development for improving sufficiency and quality of placements

Our key objectives to increase a sufficiency of quality placements are:

- ❖ Reduce the number of children coming into care, through early intervention and support for families;
- ❖ Reduce the number of residential placements and in particular reduce the number of placements more than 20 miles from the child’s home.
- ❖ Improve permanency of placements and the stability of the social work workforce in order to offer a consistent and longer term relationship for our children in care;
- ❖ Improve recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers to increase capacity and choice of in-house placements, reduce out of area placements and improve availability of foster care for all children in care
- ❖ Improve the way that we commission our placements to ensure that we get the right placement, **at the right time, in the right location for the right price**
- ❖ Develop our contract and quality monitoring processes



Our key objectives

- Commissioning Objectives and Actions

Our Access to Resources Panel is working well to improve operational commissioning which ensures placement decisions are better informed and that the child's needs are being met. This provides opportunities for teams to be accountable for decision making and also to arrange discussions with partners funding arrangements for different elements of the proposed placements.

Areas for development within commissioning to increase our sufficiency include-

- Increasing the number of providers and is incorporated within our commissioning strategy
- Using our permanency plan and procedures to influence our market development strategy by contributing to more stable placements
- Improving the SEND offer via the delivery of our Children with Disabilities Strategy 2016-18
- Increasing the number of supported lodgings carers and extend "Staying Put" arrangements where appropriate
- Developing our Market Position Statement outlining the needs, service requirements and commissioning intentions to better inform current and prospective providers about the development and future direction of services
- Work alongside our colleagues who are continuing to build our in-house foster care provision to ensure continuity of provision and to identify gaps to take to market development
- Effectively manage the (Independent Foster Agencies) IFA market and ensure good outcomes for children via the South Central IFA Framework, a regional consortium made up of 14 Local Authorities.
- Support Social Work colleagues where appropriate to access the new and unique provision called 'alternative to residential care' under the recently re tendered IFA framework. This is an innovative solution which will offer targeted interventions for children with complex needs, utilising highly skilled and resourced foster carers for a limited time-period (up to two years) either to support children to move out of residential care or as an alternative to going into residential care.
- Building effective provider relationships which will enable continued market development, influence and management

- Developing a business case to appraise the option of commissioning an In House residential children's home within the Wokingham boundary
- Developing an options appraisal to explore how we could better meet the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children within the Berkshire area

Invest in becoming part of other Local Authority Consortiums for the commissioning of children's homes and 16+ accommodation and support, this will include-

- Looked after children, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children (16 to 17 years old)
- Care leavers (18 years and older)
- Young people with highly complex needs (16 years and older)
- Parent(s) and child - Accommodation and support for mothers in late stages of pregnancy and parent(s) following birth of child.

- **Improving Foster Care Recruitment and Retention**

There is an ongoing annual recruitment plan for foster carers. This will support us to be able to place all new children coming in to care with Wokingham carers. Each year we review the need and set the target for recruitment accordingly to meet that need.

We also want to build on the work we are undertaking with our existing experienced foster carers to support and encourage them to take children with more complex needs who we are attempting to return to Wokingham from the independent sector.

Currently the social workers in the team support internal foster carers, many of whom are caring for children with very significant needs and often supporting our carers will take priority over recruitment activity. In order to address this we are currently exploring the option of restructuring our Family Placement team so that additional capacity and focus is directed specifically to the recruitment and assessment of new foster carers.

- **Increasing our local residential SEND offer**

An aim of the Wokingham sufficiency strategy is to create or use provision closer to Wokingham wherever possible. Wokingham has two state funded special schools – the maintained Addington School in Woodley and the Northern House Academy in Wokingham Town. The latter school is designated for children with Social Emotional and Mental Health issues (SEMH). This school, the Northern House Academy is of particular interest for sufficiency purposes because the school has residential provision. It is an intention of the new sufficiency strategy to work with the academy trust to seek to maximise use of this provision for children in care.

10. Market Management

We are developing a new commissioning framework to ensure that we are effectively using our needs data alongside individual profiles of our children to predict future demand and commission appropriate provision.

We are looking to develop our local market in order to increase the volume of placements and placement choice for children in care within and or closer to Wokingham. Our main market areas for market development are:

- Increasing Access Accommodation Through Regional Commissioning partnerships

To ensure local sufficiency Wokingham is now working as part of three regional partnerships –

- South Central Independent Fosters agencies framework
- Children's care homes, including placements for Planned Residential, Same day Residential, Parent and Child/Children, Therapeutic Placements, Crisis Placements, Children with Disabilities (Excluding SEND) and DFE regulated Education
- 16+ accommodation and support framework

The benefits of the joining the frameworks include –

- The ability to block contract within our local area
- Access to quality checked providers with pre agreement on service and fees
- Contract monitoring and shared market intelligence across Local Authorities
- Incentive to providers to develop provision within each Local Authority area
- Joint working
- Collective buying power

- [Increasing Fostering Placements](#)

The Fostering Innovation Project was a key vehicle for developing and shaping the local market through increasing the number and range of local in-house foster care provision, in 2016/17 we increased our foster carers by 8.

Collaboration with our partners, commissioners, the market and children and young people will ensure that we have a vibrant and diverse market that meets the needs of our children and young people.

- [Increasing access to local Housing](#)

For young people generally, access to affordable accommodation in Wokingham is very difficult due to high rent levels within the private rented sector and lack of smaller properties, they are priced out of the market which sees many youngsters move out of the area. The waiting time for social housing via the Housing Register is likely to be long, unless a person has particular needs that result in priority through the medical or social routes.

To meet this challenge, WBC are delivering record numbers of new affordable housing with 465 new affordable homes forecast to complete in 2017/18. These include a mix of sizes, types and tenures of homes to meet a range of needs. This number includes 9 supported housing units at 52 Reading Road specifically for vulnerable young people.

- [Improving Accommodation and Support for young people](#)

A new local provision for young people to access supported housing at Reading Road is to open from March 2018 replace our old provision at Seaford Court. The aim is to provide temporary accommodation and support for a period of around 12 months (dependent on individual requirements). The service will support young people to acquire the skills necessary to live independently and access full time training, education or employment while they are temporarily accommodated.

- [Increasing access to local Residential Care Homes](#)

There are 19 residential care homes within a 21 mile distance of the main offices. After reviewing the Statement of Purpose and Ofsted reports Wokingham have selected 5 homes we would like to work with more closely to ensure local provision is available when it is required and to enable children to move back to the area at a suitable time for them.

Alongside this we are developing a business case to appraise the option of commissioning an In House residential children's home within the Wokingham boundary.