

# Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children Placements 2020-2025

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## Section 1: Introduction & Purpose

### Contextual Note

This document has been completed during the stay at home measures resulting from the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. Children's social care services, like many others are quite rightly focusing their efforts on supporting children and families who need extra help through this period of uncertainty, risk and hardship.

It is right and proper that senior management attention is focused on current challenges, and for this reason it has not been possible during this period for commissioners to have the more wide ranging discussions with service leads and partner agencies regarding Oxfordshire County Council's strategic response to the issues raised and needs forecast by the recently completed Needs Analysis for Looked After Children Placements. But it is important to share with services, partner agencies and providers some of the knowledge gained from the recent Needs Analysis exercise and to indicate those commissioning priorities and intentions currently identified. For this reason, the Strategy records current strategic priorities, targets and position on responses to identified needs but will need to be refreshed later in 2020 with updated strategic priorities and commissioning intentions.

It is also important to note that the forecast and actual figures quoted (both financial and numbers of children / placements available) are based on a pre-Covid 19 environment, and could be subject to change over the coming months.

Demand for placements is ongoing and the associated financial challenges mean that it is important to complete this project and continue to make progress in improving the commissioning of services to the children for whom OCC is their corporate parent.

### Introduction

For the majority of children, the right place for them to be is at home with their family. Some families may need support, and OCC has an Early Help Strategy in place, as well as introducing the Family Safeguarding Plus model in 2020 to provide specific and targeted support to families facing particular challenges.

For those children who need to be in care, OCC recognises and takes seriously its responsibility as their Corporate Parent. Ensuring that children are placed in the most appropriate setting is a key part of this responsibility, as it has so much impact on their outcomes and ability to thrive. The effectiveness of any commissioning approach to looked after children placements is significantly impacted by the quality of care planning, individual needs analyses and the quality of the wider universal and targeted services supporting children and families across the whole system.

For most children in care a fostering placement in a family environment is most appropriate, but we recognise that for a small proportion of children a residential setting will be most appropriate for their specific needs - and can be especially effective in providing a stable and secure environment in which children can progress and thrive.

This strategy focuses on sufficiency for mainstream LAC placements, against a backdrop of increasing numbers of LAC between 2012 and 2019, significant overspends in recent years and a lack of needs and market intelligence to date, all impacting OCC's ability to forecast

demand and develop the market appropriately. It is important to understand, plan for and meet future demand and the individual needs of children. The Needs Analysis and this Strategy are key tools in enabling this process.

Key partnership and OCC strategies and plans which interface with this document include:

- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018 - 2022
- Oxfordshire SEND Strategy (draft) 2019-2022
- Oxfordshire’s Vulnerable Learners Strategy 2018-2021
- Oxfordshire CCG’s Operational Plan 2018 - 2022
- Oxfordshire’s Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Transformation Plan 2016-2021
- Oxfordshire’s Early Help Strategy 2018-2022
- Oxfordshire’s Transforming Care Plan 2018 - 2021
- Oxfordshire’s Early Years Strategy 2020 – 2023

### Purpose

The purpose of this Commissioning Strategy is to drive a more consistent and focused approach to sufficiency, cost-effectiveness, market development and (most importantly) good outcomes for children.

This is achieved by sharing with partners and providers via this document:

- key information from the Needs Analysis
- details of OCC key priorities and targets
- forecasts relating to demand, supply and gaps in provision
- commissioning intentions regarding how OCC will address gaps, meet the identified needs, engage with the market and ensure sufficiency

### Vision and Strategic Objectives

The Oxfordshire Children and Young People’s Plan (2018-2021) outlines a vision ‘to make Oxfordshire a great place for children and young people to grow up in and to have the opportunity to become everything they want to be’. To achieve this, our strategic objectives are:

<p><b>Be Successful</b> To ensure children have the best start in life; ensure they have access to high quality education, employment and motivational training; go to school feeling inspired to stay and learn; and have good self-esteem and faith in themselves.</p>	<p><b>Be Happy and Healthy</b> Services are available to promote good health, and prevent ill health; learn the importance of healthy, secure relationships and having a support network; have access to services to improve overall wellbeing, and easy ways to get active.</p>
<p><b>Be Safe</b> Ensure children are protected from all types of abuse and neglect; have a place to feel safe and a sense of belonging; access education and support about how to stay safe; and have access to appropriate housing.</p>	<p><b>Be Supported</b> Children are empowered to know who to speak to when they need support, and know that they’ll be listened to and believed; can access information in a way that suits them; have inspiring role models; and can talk to staff who are experienced and caring.</p>

## Section 2: National & Local Context

### Legal Framework

#### **The Sufficiency Duty**

Section 22G of the Children Act 1989<sup>1</sup> requires local authorities, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for those children that meets their needs and is within their local authority area.

The document 'Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children' states:

*1.7 Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children.*

In relation to strategic commissioning for looked after children, research with providers and commissioners suggests the key gaps are:

- quality of individual needs assessments and care plans;
- strategic needs assessment and demand analysis;
- market management;
- regional and sub-regional collaboration;
- procurement including purchasing and contract management;
- adopting a whole system approach to designing universal, targeted and specialist services to improve outcomes for looked after children and children in need at risk of care or custody;
- involvement of children in placement decisions.

Although looked after children make up a minority of the total number of children in need, they account for more than half of all local authority spending on children's services. The increase in demand, combined with reductions in funding from central government and increases in care costs has increasingly put local authorities' finances and services under pressure. To meet the increased demand for care, local authorities have been spending on average 10% more than the previous year on looked after children.<sup>2</sup>

The Government has recently announced two planned reviews: one relating to children's social care and the other relating to the use of unregistered placements. The outcomes from these reviews are likely to have significant impact on future commissioning priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> [Children Act 1989, Section 22](#) and [The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations](#)

<sup>2</sup> NAO, Pressures on children's social care, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, January 2019. Available at <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Pressures-on-Childrens-Social-Care.pdf>

## Key trends over recent years

The table below summarises the trends in Oxfordshire as compared to England over the last five years:

National trends	Oxfordshire trends
Between March 2013 and March 2019, the number of children in care increased by 15%, around triple the rate of overall population growth.	In the same period, Oxfordshire experienced a steeper increase in the numbers of children in care, by 88% (from 415 to 779). However, from March 2019 to February 2020 numbers had only increased by 4 (to 783)
In March 2013 56% of children who started to be looked after during the year did so because of abuse or neglect; by March 2019, this had risen to 59%.	In Oxfordshire the increase was more striking - from 46% in March 2013 to 62% in March 2019.
The percentage of looked after children in foster care reduced from 74 % to 72 % between March 2015 and March 2019	In Oxfordshire the proportion of children in foster care increased from 67% to 69% in the same period
12% of children in care were in residential placements in 2019, an increase from 10% in 2015 <sup>3</sup>	In Oxfordshire, the number of children in residential care decreased (to 15% from 17%), although this figure has consistently been higher than England averages
Children placed for adoption decreased from 5% to 3% between March 2015 and March 2019.	A similar decrease was seen in Oxfordshire during the same period: 6% to 4%
Average length of stay in care data is not published nationally.	Internal OCC data produced for the Needs Analysis shows an increase in average length of stay in care overall from 366 days to 428 days between 2016-17 and 2018-19. <sup>4</sup>

The increase in LAC numbers in England has been attributed to a combination of factors<sup>5</sup> including:

- greater awareness and referrals following high profile cases such as those involving sexual exploitation in Rotherham,
- increasing numbers of children who are vulnerable or at risk from female genital mutilation, County Lines, gang violence, child sexual exploitation, and radicalisation,

<sup>3</sup> Includes secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation

<sup>4</sup> OCC Performance & Data Team February 2020

<sup>5</sup> See for example, All Party Parliamentary Group for Children (APPGC), *No Good Options: Report of the Inquiry into Children's Social Care in England*, 17 March 2017; House of Commons Briefing Paper (08543), *Children's social care services in England*, 28 June 2019.

- better identification and understanding of children at risk, including domestic abuse, parental mental ill-health and parental substance misuse,
- an increased number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children,
- poverty and deprivation<sup>6</sup>
- the decrease in the number of children leaving care, especially from 2016-17 onwards (from 31,400 in 2017 to 29,460 in 2019).

The Needs Analysis for Looked After Children in Oxfordshire found that all of these factors contributed (by varying degrees) to the sharp increase in LAC numbers in Oxfordshire up to 2019.

Older children and those who have complex needs are harder to place into foster care and are therefore more likely to require additional services or go into residential care. Across England, demand for residential placements has exceeded the capacity in the market: according to the NAO, only 41% of local authorities reported access to enough places for 16- and 17-year olds, with less than a third saying the same for 14- and 15-year olds. As observed in the Foster Care in England review, the shortage of foster carers is often related to *'the availability of carers who can look after more challenging children'*<sup>7</sup>, which adds to the increased demand for residential placements.

*The mismatch of supply and demand has seen providers on average being able to increase prices, partly to compensate for the impact of cost pressures driven by statutory increases in the underlying National Living Wage and pension entitlement and increasing costs in recruiting and retaining staff. Over half of all placements happen outside of frameworks commissioned by local authorities indicating that procurement approaches with price controls are proving to be ill-fitted to the sector conditions.*<sup>8</sup>

In Oxfordshire, the average annual cost per child increased from £36k in 2015-16 to £51k in February 2020, representing a 41% increase. Although overall expenditure has increased significantly, the proportion of expenditure on each placement type has remained fairly consistent over 5 years. The largest changes are on internal children's homes (reduced from 7% to 2% of spend<sup>9</sup>), internal fostering (increased from 13% to 15% of spend) and IFA (increased from 18% to 21% of spend).

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<sup>6</sup> According to Child Welfare Inequalities Project, *Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries*. Briefing Paper 1: England, Bywaters, P. et al, February 2017, children in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods in England were over ten times more likely to be looked after or on a child protection plan than children in the least deprived 10%.

<sup>7</sup> Foster Care in England. A Review for the Department for Education by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers, February 2018, p12. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/679320/Foster\\_Care\\_in\\_England\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679320/Foster_Care_in_England_Review.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> The Independent Care Homes Association (ICHA), "State of the Market" survey, 6 January 2020 <https://www.icha.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ICHA-Jan-2020-survey-12-Feb-2020-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> There are two main drivers for the reduction in spend on internal homes: (1) expenditure on this service is largely stable over the years, against an increase in overall placements spend, and (2) Internal service currently has one home less than previous years, until the new home is completed

## Key Pressures

Nationally, the key pressures identified for many local authorities include:

- Increase in numbers of children in care
- Increase in the complexity of needs of looked after children
- Children are staying longer in care
- Older children entering care with more complex needs and less family based provision to support them
- Increasing numbers of children placed far from home where it is not in their best interests
- Local Authority and external providers report challenges in recruiting and retaining residential staff and foster carers
- Cost of entry to / expansion within the residential market – particularly for smaller providers

All of these pressures are also reflected within Oxfordshire.

## Strategic Aims and Principles

The following aims and principles incorporate a range of priorities and strategic aims reflected in the current Corporate Plan, CYPP, CEF Service Plan and other transformation plan initiatives:

### **Service Planning Principles**

- All provision decisions (internal or external) should be based on best value and evidence of outcomes
- Conscious shift towards keeping families together through use of the FSP model, and reuniting children more quickly where appropriate
- Placements should provide a safe, stable & nurturing environment as local as possible that will meet the needs of the child
- The care pathway should focus on enabling children to exit the care system sooner with appropriate support, where that is the right thing for them

### **Children's Needs & Placements**

- OCC will work positively and collaboratively with existing and potential providers to develop a range of appropriate provision to meet the needs of Oxfordshire's children within County (ensuring access to services, continuity of schooling, maintenance of support networks)
- OCC will share what we are learning about our children's needs and features through the Valuing Care needs assessment tool, to identify what is needed from the local market to support those needs

### **Market Development & Support**

- OCC supports a mixed economy of provision, further developing both in-house and external provision
- OCC works in partnership with other agencies, external providers and other local authorities in order to ensure sufficiency and maximise value for money



- OCC wish to develop dedicated specialist provision for (often) older children with more complex needs, who are trauma-experienced and unable to thrive in mainstream settings
- OCC is committed to continue working with external providers (both IFA and residential) to further develop services within Oxfordshire

#### **Feedback from Children**

- The voice of the child should be heard more strongly, wherever they are placed
- OCC wishes to strengthen its mechanisms to consult with children, involve them in decision-making and deliver its responsibilities as a Corporate Parent

## Section 3: Overview of Looked After Children and Services in Oxfordshire

*In 2019-20 OCC spent an anticipated total outturn of £45m on looked after children (including staffing, SGO fees and Adoption support). This figure is forecast to rise to approximately £61m in 2023-24 (all forecast budget figures were calculated prior to completion of the 2020 Needs Analysis which forecasts a higher annual number of overall LAC than previously anticipated).*

As of February 2020, there were 783 children in care in Oxfordshire. Of them

- 58.5% of them were boys;
- 40% were aged 10-15;
- 75% them were white, 10% of mixed background;
- 64 of them were UASC (70% of whom are boys, and nearly half are 17 years old);
- 25% of all LAC in Oxfordshire were young people 16+;
- 8.6% had a disability.

As mentioned above, between March 2013 and March 2019, the number of LAC increased by 88% (from 415 to 779) in Oxfordshire, against a 15% increase in England (see *Appendix 1*). The needs analysis recorded a levelling off this increase since (at 783), which suggests that the particular drivers for that increase may now have materialised. However, the next section illustrates a revised (increased) LAC forecast, based on more recent OCC population projections.

The profile of Oxfordshire's children is also changing slightly. There have been consistently more boys than girls in care in Oxfordshire, but the proportion of boys has increased slightly. In terms of the age profile of LAC in Oxfordshire, 10-15 year olds have consistently been the largest group since 2012-13 and that group has seen a significant increase since 2012-13, alongside 16+ (see *Appendix 2*). Older children coming into care had profound implications for placements, which added to the pressures to meet demand and contain costs.

Another factor that contributed to the increase in LAC numbers was the increase in the rate of children entering care and a decline in those leaving care. In 2013, 245 children started

to be looked after and 290 children left care. Since then every year the number of children entering care has exceeded the number of children leaving care in Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire has various mechanisms to ensure the voices of children in care are heard and their concerns are addressed appropriately. Findings from recent surveys regarding their placements showed:

- The majority of children (87%) always felt safe where they lived;
- Nearly all of them said that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education;
- Most of them liked school;
- Most reported that they trusted the adults they lived with, and their social worker.
- Younger children (4-7 yrs) were less likely to know who their social worker was compared to the older groups.

For younger children concerns were related mostly to their life story and not knowing why they were in care. For children 11+ years old, concerns related mostly to being included in decisions made about them. Low well-being seems to be an issue across all children in care, but especially among girls. For younger children, low well-being was related with contact with their birth family and siblings, and for 11-18 year olds, low well-being seemed to be related with not feeling safe or settled where they lived; difficulty in getting in touch with their social worker, and limited opportunities for hobbies or to explore the outdoors.

## Assessing Individual Needs

### ***Extract from Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance:***

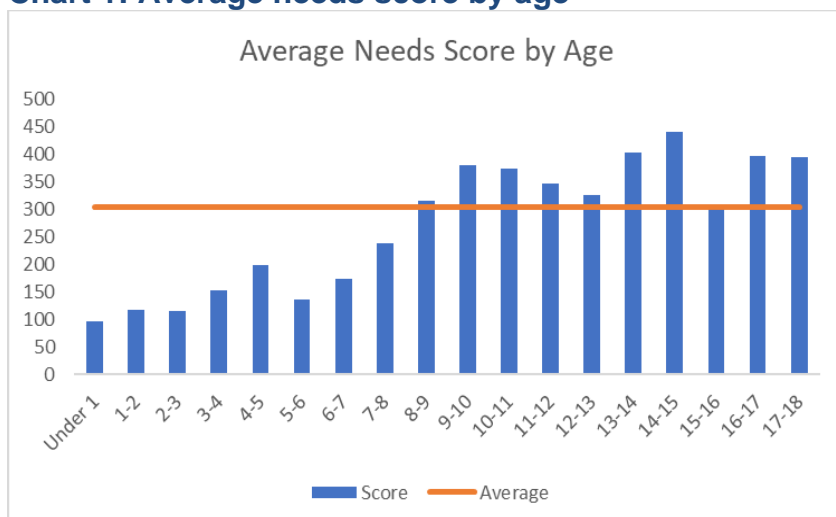
*A robust needs assessment is the starting point for all commissioning decisions for a child's services.... An incorrect decision at this point will lead to vastly inefficient or ineffective service provision.*

In 2019, Oxfordshire rolled out mainstream use of the Valuing Care Assessment Tool, which is now used for all children entering care and allows social workers to assess a child's individual needs across 13 domains, using a common scoring mechanism.

Initial analysis by age shows that 14-15 year olds had the highest needs score, and on average teenagers had higher needs than younger looked after children.

The average needs score for boys was higher than that for girls for all age groups (except under 5s), and boys 16 and older had the highest needs among all looked after children (see *Appendix 3*).

**Chart 1: Average needs score by age**



The average needs score of a child in residential care is nearly double that of other looked after children:

Placement Type	Needs Score
Residential	619
Independent Fostering Agency	320
OCC foster carers	243
Kinship carers or with parents	221

Children and young people placed with external providers (of all types) have a higher needs score than those with in-house services and kinship carers (see *Appendix 4*).

The table below demonstrates that the two most commonly occurring needs across all setting types are emotional mental health and managing emotions and boundaries.

**Table 1: Needs scores by placement type**

	Residential	Foster Care	All LAC
Emotional Mental Health	1	1	1
Manage emotions & boundaries	2	2	2
Understands identity / life story	7	4	3
Safe relationships	5	3	4
Healthy attachments and Friendships	3	5	5
Educational Progress	4	6	6
Positive Social activities	6	9	7
Expresses wishes and opinions	10	7	8
Age Appropriate Goals	8	8	9
Age appropriate self-care	11	10	10
Safe decisions	9	13	11
Learning Disability	12	11	12
Physical health	13	12	13

The analysis of SDQs showed that 39% of LAC have high or very high scores. Together with the above analysis, it is evident that emotional, psychological and mental health support needs should be considered more holistically as part of service planning and strategic commissioning activity.

## Current provision

In Oxfordshire at February 2020, 64% of looked after children were in foster care, and 16%<sup>10</sup> were in residential placements. The number of external residential and IFA placements increased, against a decrease in OCC foster carers since 2012-13 (see Appendix 5).

The key challenge regarding placements is the lack of in county provision in Oxfordshire. Our needs analysis showed that the proportion of out of county placements has increased over the years, from around 25% to 40%.

Of all current looked after children at February 2020, 374 of 783 (48%) are placed in internal OCC provision (or with parents).

For those children in fostering and residential placements only (total 628), 51% overall are placed externally and 49% internally (see charts below). Internal figures include kinship carers.

## Fostering

Oxfordshire has a mixed market in fostering where we both commission and directly provide foster care through our foster and kinship parents. OCC market research during 2019 records one registered IFA office based within the County and a couple of other providers who have carers based within Oxfordshire, in addition to OCC's own internal service.

The *percentage of overall LAC* who live with OCC foster parents decreased from 49% in 2014/15 to 39% in February 2020. In the same period, children with IFA carers increased from 18% to 25%.

Placement Type		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Feb-20
Foster placements	No.	344	407	463	474	540	504
	%	67%	68%	70%	69%	69%	64%
OCC mainstream+kinship	No.	251	290	315	289	350	307
	%	49%	49%	47%	42%	45%	39%
IFA	No.	93	117	148	185	190	197
	%	18%	20%	22%	27%	24%	25%

**Note:** % of overall LAC at February 2020

One reason for this is the decline in the number of approved foster carers, from 520 in 2014/15 to 316 in February 2020. Service records show that enquiries, applications and approvals have also fallen significantly.

<sup>10</sup> Including Childrens Homes and Residential Schools: OCC dataset on Current LAC 06.02.2020

OCC has recently initiated a project to address the decline in in-house foster carers, which includes increased fees, the introduction of a co-produced Foster Carer Charter and the implementation of a Tiered structure to categorise carers and provide targeted training and support at different levels. OCC is also expanding its Mockingbird hubs to provide further support to in-house carers.

The decline in OCC’s mainstream foster carers has been partly offset by the increase in kinship carers locally; the number of kinship carers increased from 91 to 142 in the same period.

OCC’s main route for sourcing external foster placements is the South Central Independent Fostering Agreement framework, which is commissioned jointly with 14 Local Authorities. Providers offer agreed prices in the four categories of placement – mainstream, disabilities, parent and child and, ‘alternative to residential’ which identifies providers who are willing to find foster placements for children with complex needs who would otherwise be placed in residential care. However, this is the category of children that OCC is finding most difficult to place, suggesting a lack of sufficiency via the framework.

Although the number of providers overall appears to have increased each year, at March 2019 there were 108 places available within Oxfordshire with a significant lack of provision across the North and West of the County.

## Residential

OCC also has a mixed market for residential placements, though only a small proportion of provision is internal.

OCC currently has 5 internal settings, with one new setting in the planning stages. Of the five existing homes, one is a children’s home, two are assessment homes, and two are 16+ provisions that offer move on accommodation for children who are preparing to transition to independent living. The total number of beds in the 5 homes is 26, with 6 beds in the current children’s home. The new home is expected to have 6 beds + 1 semi independent bed and will be registered for SEMH provision, which is more specialist than the existing home. All OCC homes are mixed-gender and can accommodate young people age 8 and older. Having internal homes provides OCC with a flexibility and space to assess young people’s needs before moving on to more long term placements, or returning home. As the table below shows, the current internal capacity represents only 2% of LAC.

		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Feb-20
Residential	No.	85	95	101	100	106	124
	%	17%	16%	15%	15%	14%	16%
<i>OCC children's homes</i>	No.	13	10	9	8	9	14
	%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
<i>External residential</i>	No.	72	85	92	92	97	110
	%	14%	14%	14%	13%	12%	14%

**Note:** % of overall LAC at February 2020

The majority of children in residential care are in external residential homes (around 14% of total LAC). OCC market research during 2019 records a total of 10 children’s homes with 59

beds, plus 3 residential schools within the County. This highlights the overall lack of sufficiency in the area.

The majority of residential placements are purchased through the South Central Residential Agreement Framework, which is a partnership between 20 local authorities in the South to arrange residential placements for LAC. Total beds available in Oxfordshire at April 2019 was 36 (across 6 homes), with 9 vacancies (25%). The only in-County framework provision is in the North, though there are a number of other children's homes (some with associated schools) within County.

Block contracts may be called off by individual consortium members, and OCC has just completed the tender process for a total of 15 exclusive use mainstream residential beds (7 from October 2020 and a further 8 from April 2021) within County (or within 10 miles of the border). This contract is specifically intended to increase 'close to home' provision, with some flexibility on location in recognition of the challenges relating to property prices and employment levels within the County.

OCC also has access to up to 10 beds (15 from August 2020) as part of the Cross Regional Contract (CRC), for which it is the lead commissioner. The contract offers a therapeutic model of care for children with more complex needs and includes education provision at an inclusive price. Currently there are 6 homes located in Bucks, Herts and Milton Keynes. One of the two new homes will be in Oxfordshire, though OCC will not have exclusive rights to these beds.

OCC is also a part of arrangements such as CCRAAG and London Care, though these arrangements are not heavily used. OCC still relies significantly on spot purchasing for residential placements (66% of residential placements at February 2020), which suggests that current frameworks are not able to provide in-County sufficiency.

There are currently different approaches to placement oversight for internal / external provision and also for placements made via spot / block / framework arrangements.

***Extract from Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance:***

*All services, including those provided by the local authority, will be performance managed through a contract, grant, service level agreement or other similar approach – based on the needs and specific outcomes described in the child's individual assessment. Performance management should be evidence-based.*

**Young People's Supported Housing (16+)**

OCC currently has a mixed delivery model of services within its Young People's Supported Housing Pathway (YPSHP), through externally commissioned services, as well as delivering some services in-house. The Pathway's aim is to deliver Supported Housing services for young people at risk of homelessness, aged 16 to 24 years of age, by providing them with a place to live, guidance from professionals around housing related matters, and other support as needed to help them to reach independence.

The in-house services include two Move-on homes, a Supported Lodgings Scheme and the House Project.

The current commissioned service includes 228 beds which are contracted to 5 providers to deliver, with these contracts coming to an end in September 2020. There were 214 episodes open in May 2019, of which 67 were for young people under the age of 18 (41 LAC and 26 Section 17), and 147 were young adults. Spot purchases are made for residential provision delivered by external providers, for young people who cannot be accommodated within this provision.

As existing contracts with commissioned providers were drawing to an end, a service review was conducted to understand how services could be strengthened as they were recommissioned. The service review identified that under 20% of young people accessing the current commissioned services are able to leave services with the skills and employment, education or training secured, to move on from the pathway into positive independent living opportunities.

The review also identified that opportunities needed to be taken to improve outcomes for young people through strengthening preventative services, increasing capacity and access to high quality accommodation and intensive support services. The findings demonstrated the business case for delivering provision in-house for 16 and 17 year olds and UASCs, and commissioning external provision for the 18+, parents and out of county provision.

The remodelled service is called the Young People's Supported Accommodation (YPSA) Service and will offer, from 1 October 2020, 80 in-house beds (delivered by the Residential and Edge of Care service), 208 commissioned beds (of which 10 beds are out of county), alongside the capacity offered through existing in-house supported accommodation services which include the Supported Lodgings Scheme, Move On Homes and the House Project. This YPSA service is being co-commissioned in partnership with City and District Councils, with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as the Lead Commissioner.

## Feedback from Providers

The following list is a summary of key points made by providers via a range of recent events and other contacts, relating to what they seek from the Council:

- A clear understanding of its looked after children profile and their needs
- What services are available / intended in-house, and what OCC needs from its market
- OCC's commissioning priorities and intentions over the next 5 years
- Open and honest dialogue relating to market / service development, as well as when things go wrong
- Clarity on what is meant by 'therapeutic' placements

The recent Strategic Needs Analysis work has informed some of the detail in this document relating to needs and current provision. This Strategy will develop over the coming year (2020-2021) to give a clearer indication of commissioning priorities and specific intentions, as well as those provisions that OCC seeks to source from the external market.

## Gaps and Challenges in Oxfordshire

The LAC Placements Needs Analysis identifies the following gaps in provision:

- Mainstream fostering placements, particularly for older children
- Emergency / short term fostering placements
- Alternative to residential and step-down fostering placements
- Residential placements offering a clinically validated therapeutic environment
- Smaller residential settings of 1-2 bed homes
- Psychological support services for children who don't meet CAMHS criteria
- Direct feedback from individual children
- Over-reliance on frameworks that don't offer sufficiency
- Inconsistent approach to quality assurance and oversight of children's placements (internal v external and spot v contract placements)

## Demand forecasts

Based on the current proportions of placements, and no policy change at national and local level, Oxfordshire's Strategic Needs Analysis estimated the following number of residential and fostering placements from 2020 to 2025. Although these figures represent current proportions as opposed to desired, they give an indication of the likely level of provision required over the next 5 years.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
LAC Forecast based on OCC population projections and 5% decrease year on year from April 2021 due to FSP	796	813	790	805	818	828
Children's Homes (all) 15.8% of LAC	126	128	125	127	129	131
External children's homes based on 15% of LAC	119	122	119	121	123	124
16+ (all) 10% of LAC	80	81	79	81	82	83
External 16+ residential based on 9.3% of LAC	74	76	73	75	76	77
All Fostering placements based on 64% of LAC	509	520	506	515	524	530
IFA placements based on 25% of LAC	199	203	198	201	205	207

Additional analysis on a range of specific placements made into fostering and residential settings either via emergency teams or to alternative provision types has led to the following estimates relating to more specialised requirements:

- Estimated 28 additional specialist fostering placements p.a. for children ready to step down from residential care or needing a higher level of fostering support which is currently not available (hence entering residential placements instead)
- If sufficient provision above were available, this should release up to 28 mainstream residential places p.a.



- c) Estimated 12 placements p.a. in solo or smaller (2-3 bed) residential settings operating a clinically validated therapeutic model for trauma-experienced children and young people
- d) Estimated additional 8 emergency fostering placements p.a., accommodating urgent need or children needing a specialist short term setting, to allow time to find the right longer term placement

OCC does not currently have the capacity to provide these services in-house (other than a proportion of the fostering placements under (a) above), and is likely to be seeking to commission external provision.

## Section 4: Strategic Priorities and Commissioning Intentions

The following commissioning priorities and intentions have arisen from existing service planning and transformation work, as well as the recent needs analysis project:

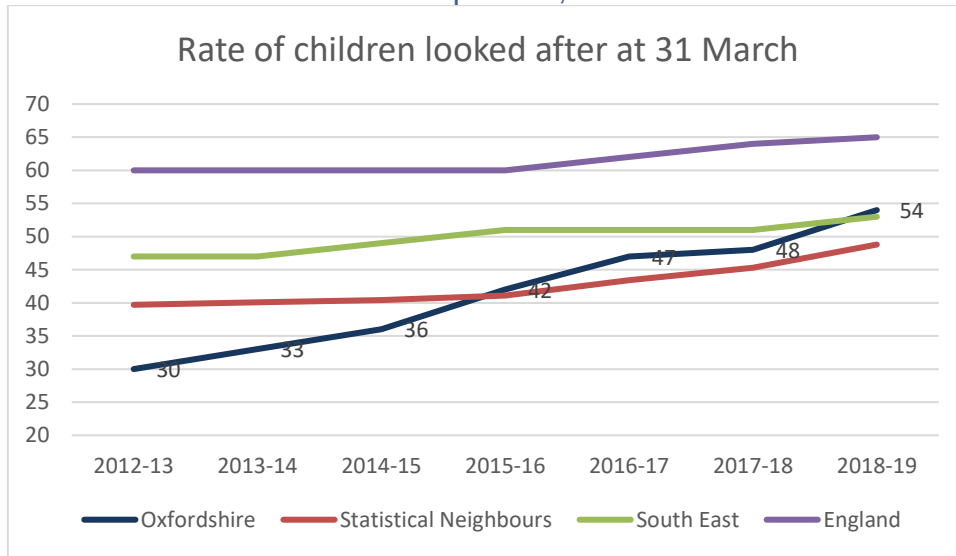
Key Commissioning Priorities	Commissioning Intentions
<p><b>Service Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service planning will be based on the 2020 Needs Analysis and sufficiency planning will focus on the needs of all LAC, across internal and external provision</li> <li>- Reduce the number of children needing to become looked after via targeted early help, in particular through the introduction of FSP</li> <li>- Aiming to reflect Statistical Neighbour (SN) and / or national figures for placement types</li> <li>- Ensure that settings keep children safe, enable them to thrive and offer best value, whether provided in-house or by the external market</li> <li>- Focus on providing the right placement first time, except where a short term placement is in the best interests of the child.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overall focus on FSP model to support more children to remain with (or return more quickly to) their birth families, resulting in a 5% reduction p.a.</li> <li>- Overall LAC rate to remain in line with SN (March 2019 OCC at 54 per 10k, against a target of 49)</li> <li>- Increase total fostering placements from 69% of overall LAC to 72%</li> <li>- Reduce total residential placements from 14% of overall LAC to 12%</li> <li>- Provide family-based care wherever possible</li> <li>- All placements to receive appropriate oversight of quality, outcomes and safeguarding through a single common process</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children’s Needs and Placements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OCC to reduce current rate of Out of County and over 20 miles from home placements to align with SN averages (March 2019 figure was 31% or 241 children) against SN rate of 24%</li> <li>- Look at groups of children and providers to understand trends in needs and progress achieved</li> <li>- Ensure that all LAC receive the relevant psychological and clinical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At February 2020 783 children in placement. 24% represents 188 children – a reduction of 53 children placed Out of County</li> <li>- All LAC entering care to have a needs assessment completed</li> <li>- Review progress of individual children, and provider’s ability to meet those needs</li> <li>- Attach service provides psychological support to LAC placements to</li> </ul>

<p>support to address their mental health and emotional wellbeing needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure a clearer understanding and definition of 'therapeutic' placements for trauma experienced children</li> </ul>	<p>support placement stability. Access via the child's social worker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clinical Team and CAMHS also support some LAC directly – access via SPA</li> <li>- Work with providers and internal clinical teams to develop clear specification for placements which provide a therapeutic environment, based on an evidenced clinical model</li> </ul>
<p><b>Market Development and Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OCC wishes to better understand our internal cost base to ensure that value for money commissioning decisions are based on appropriate comparisons</li> <li>- Targets reflect Statistical Neighbour and / or England figures for proportion of provider types</li> <li>- Source smaller 1 or 2-3 bed homes and fostering households providing a therapeutic environment for trauma-experienced children</li> <li>- Undertake detailed market analysis and structured engagement regarding more specific proposals to develop further in-County provision. Looking at different ways to secure sufficiency, more broadly than traditional procurement approaches</li> <li>- Engage in structured discussions with IFA market regarding definition of specialist placements as identified in the Needs Analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undertake a robust costing exercise to ensure that internal services are fully costed before the 'make or buy' decision is approached</li> <li>- Secure further exclusive use of existing in-County fostering placements and residential beds</li> <li>- Reduce the proportion of IFA mainstream placements to 33% by 2025 (currently at 51%), recognising that overall FC placement requirement is likely to increase above previous estimates</li> <li>- Develop a specific target for Kinship carers and increase conversion of kinship placements to SGOs</li> <li>- Work with providers to develop specialist fostering placements (e.g. emergency, Tier 4, alternative to residential) externally, based on a clear specification for description of 'specialist'</li> <li>- Work with providers to develop solo and smaller (2/3 bed) settings providing a therapeutic environment, based on a clinically evidenced model</li> <li>- Provide better support to the market to understand individual children's needs and offer improved support in placement</li> <li>- Liaise with providers re suitable locations for homes</li> <li>- Explore wider range of procurement vehicles, including new frameworks, further block, DPS etc</li> <li>- Better understanding of all provision within County, in particular number of IFA placements available and</li> </ul>

	<p>residential beds by type and location (not just frameworks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better understanding of wider market and providers who may be encouraged to develop services within the County</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children’s Feedback and Participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review our current mechanisms for engaging children’s views and participation</li> <li>- Involve children more directly in decision making about their care</li> <li>- Strengthen the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel in championing the child’s voice</li> <li>- Provide clarity on how we expect providers to children’s feedback in placement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bright Spots survey to be run again in 2020</li> <li>- Improved methodology to use apps like MOMO and feedback from Reviews to enable more direct feedback from individual children</li> <li>- Deliver 2 new apprenticeships to support development of the participation and engagement service</li> <li>- OCC expects providers to be using an approved feedback tool to engage children and young people in their care plans</li> </ul>

# Appendices

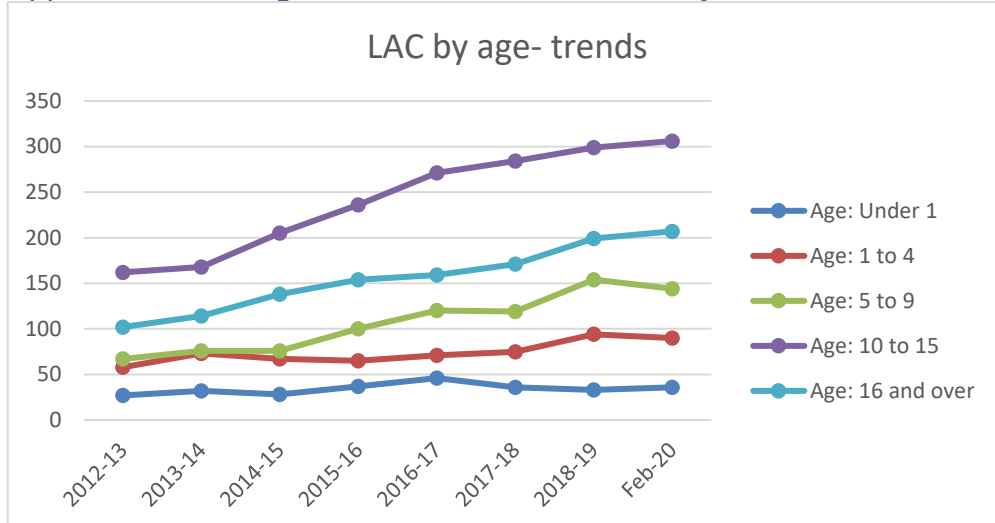
## Appendix 1: LAC rate in Oxfordshire in comparison, 2012-19



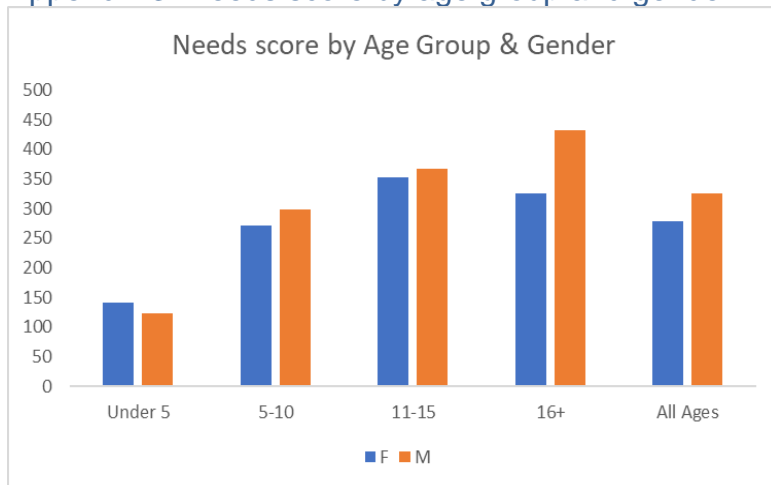
Source: Department for Education (DfE), Looked After Children Statistics, 2012-2019

One of the most striking changes in the profile of LAC in Oxfordshire is the age profile. As can be seen in chart below, the increase in the number of 10-15 year olds has been faster than any other age group since 2012-13.

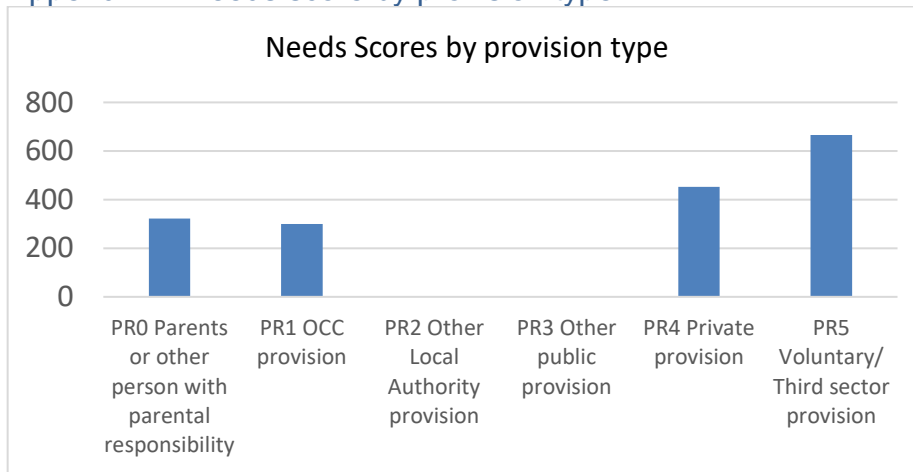
## Appendix 2: LAC age trends, 2012-13 to February 2020



### Appendix 3: Needs score by age group and gender



### Appendix 4: Needs score by provision type



Source: Slide 29 in 'Valuing Care Needs Analysis Insights Session'

### Appendix 5: Trends in placement type, 2013-2020

