

Looked After Children's Service Sufficiency



Corporate Parenting
Panel, January 2023



National Sufficiency Context

- Increased numbers of LAC nationally (60, 900 in 2008, 82, 170 in 2022, 35% increase).
- Higher numbers of LAC in all placement options other than adoption.
- LAC presentations show an increase in levels of complexity – trauma, risk, behaviour, learning, disabilities(including neurodiversity).
- Demand for placements is outstripping supply.
- Market unable to develop and keep pace with levels of need/demand.
- All provision for LAC is supplied either directly by LA's or from the independent sectors.
- South central LA consortia reported that across 17 LA's **379** live searches for fostering and residential placements on any given day. **247** vacancies reported but 'true' vacancies less than half that number.

Fostering Placements

- Nationally **45,370** fostering households available – 2% increase in households but 11% increase in LAC placed in fostering households.
- ESCC increased numbers of children placed in foster care **426** to **451**.
- Recruitment for foster carers nationally and locally not keeping pace with demand.
- Despite high profile recruitment strategies fewer families choosing to foster.
- Complexity of LAC needs impacts on matching and placement stability.
- Children who previously could have been fostered now often placed in residential homes.



Residential Placements



- Highly regulated by Ofsted's inspection framework.
- Registration of new homes lengthy – takes minimum of 12 months to progress from planning to registration.
- Recruitment of staff extremely challenging and many homes dependant on temporary agency staff.
- Impact of Ofsted activity often results in independent children's homes making offers for LAC with less challenging behaviours.
- Therefore often no placement options for children with more challenging presentations.





Unregulated provision

- Use of this provision is only permitted for children/young people over the age of 16 years requiring support **not care**.
- National growth of children placed in this type of provision due to lack of capacity in fostering and residential provision. At times resulting in LAC being placed illegally if they have a care need or are under 16 years.
- Across **11** LA's in SE region **96** LAC were found to be in illegal placements, and **58** were under the age of 16. Most authorities reported that this was the first time that they had ever needed to do this.
- Demand for emergency placements and lack of supply can at times mean that Social Workers are having to care directly for LAC or move into family homes to fulfil their safeguarding duties.

Impact on care planning and budgets

- Often no placements at the time of issuing care proceedings



- Increased levels of placement breakdowns



- Average weekly costs range from £350 pw for in-house fostering to £18,000 pw for independent residential care



- Increased use of unregulated provision with high cost agency staff

