

West Berkshire Council

Sufficiency Strategy 2017 - 2020



WestBerkshire
COUNCIL



Background to the Sufficiency Duty

Every Local Authority has the duty of 'sufficiency' that requires it to ensure, through direct provision or commissioned services, a range of placements to meet the needs of the children in their care. Fundamentally this means providing to our children the right placement, in the right place, at the right time.

This approach is based on accepted commissioning principles. This means understanding and assessing need; anticipating the right number and type of placements; developing the market to meet requirements; ensuring robust procurement methods; effectively managing contracts with providers and monitoring outcomes.

This needs to be achieved within the context of the ongoing financial constraints imposed on local authorities. The Council Strategy highlights the key priorities for the coming four years (2015-19): improving educational attainment; delivering more affordable housing; enhanced infrastructure; helping communities to do more for themselves; being good at safeguarding and becoming a more efficient and effective Council

Children and Family Services are committed to delivering improved services alongside this Council commitment. This strategy reflects the recommendations of OFSTED's Single Inspection of Children's Services, March 2015 and the LGA Peer Review, July 2016 which recognizes the good progress that is being made in this area and ensures we are prioritising the needs of our Looked After population and are planning for those who may require our services going forward.

1. Current Need and Services

West Berkshire District Council serves a population of 155,500 people. Of these almost 40,000 are children aged between 0 and 19 years. There is an even gender split. The national Census indicates that the majority of the population living in West Berkshire is White British (91.2%). The next largest Ethnic group is Other White, such as White European. There are a lower proportion of people from all Ethnic minority groups living in West Berkshire than nationally and in the South East Region. Five percent of West Berkshire residents define themselves as coming from a black or minority ethnic (BME) background, compared to 14% of people in England.

West Berkshire is a district of contrasts: being one of the most affluent areas in the country yet with some communities experiencing high levels of deprivation.

2. Looked After Children

The number of children in care has decreased in the last year to 155 children as of September 2016. Four of these are under 'short break' arrangements and twelve are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

The gender split does not quite reflect the local population but does reflect the national Looked After population where 55% are boys.

Table 1

Gender	Number	%
Male	86	55%
Female	69	45%
Total	155	100%

Table 2

Age Group	Number	%
Under 1	8	5%
1 to 4	12	8%
5 to 9	25	16%
10 to 15	62	40%
16 plus	48	31%
Total	155	100%

Over 50% of the children are aged 13 to 18 with almost 30% coming into care after their 13th birthday. This is in line with the national picture. Key learning from our recent 'Looked After Children Analysis' showed that that, outside of our UASC, the most frequently occurring risk factors for this age group include : missing children and children at risk of sexual exploitation ; self harm; neglect; emotional abuse , including domestic abuse. Early attachment difficulties and developmental trauma, combined with early exposure to neglect and the toxic trio (domestic violence, parental substance-misuse, and parental mental health) are the most consistent features within the cohort. The Analysis also noted that the national evidence base indicates a link between maltreatment in early years and risk taking/risk of care in adolescence. The links have been established between the undeveloped cortex and impulsive behavior, risk taking and difficulty with tasks that require higher thinking and feeling. Adolescents are less likely to settle in their placements and so experience greater placement breakdown, instability and a greater likelihood of being placed in residential care.

3. Legal status

In the last 12 to 18 months there has been a focus on ensuring the children do not drift in care and decisions about their care is made in a timely way. All children accommodated under section 20 CA1989 have had their cases reviewed and for many the Local Authority made the decision to issue care proceedings to secure the children's futures. Any concerns relating to drift and delay is mitigated through the Legal Tracking and Permanency Tracking processes to secure permanent care arrangements wherever possible.

For September 2016 the 151 children in care and not on short breaks, had the following the legal status:

Table 3

Legal Status	Number
Care Order (CA1989 S31)	88
Interim care Order (CA1989 S31)	27
Accommodated under Sec 20 CA1989	28
Placement Order and Care Order Section	8
Total	151

The plan for 61 of our looked after children under 16 is to remain in foster care and these children are now served by a dedicated Children in Care team to ensure their needs are prioritised

Table 4

Legal Status 16 to 17	Number
Care Order	27
Interim Care Order	1
Accommodated under sec 20	19
Total	47

There are also 47 young people aged between 16 and 17 years in our care and not on short breaks.

4. Placement Type

We are committed to offering a number of placement options alongside our children's needs. This includes a range of different arrangements:

In September 2016 we had a total of 123 fostering placements. This comprised of short term, long term, short breaks, Parent and Child and family or friend's placements. 98 of these placements were filled. 18 were vacant, 4 of which were for relief care only, 2 were ending their time with us and 6 were on hold for health or other issues. Where households were not up to their placement capacity this was due the match not being right between carers availability and the needs of children already placed. Overall 21 foster carers are approved for multiple placements.

Table 5

Placement Type	Number
Foster Care In House overall, (including; Connected Persons Foster to Adopt)	98
	15
	2
Independent Fostering Agency	26
Theoretic Residential Unit	13
Bramlings Semi Supported Arrangements	4
Supported Lodgings (Step By Step)	6
Short Breaks	4
Total	155

The demand for foster placements continues to be met by in house foster carers and independent providers. West Berkshire continues to purchase their placements in the independent sector under the governance and contractual arrangements of the South Central Partnership Consortium. This is made up of 14 Local Authorities and helps to ensure best value and standards are maintained

The 10-15 year old cohort currently accounts for 41% of current spend on external placements.

For below shows our comparative level of children were support through different placement arrangements.

Table 6



5. Ethnicity

Local demand for culturally matched placements for black and minority ethnic children is significant and the scarcity of provision is a frequent trigger for an out of area search.

As previously stated the ethnicity of our children tends to be more diverse than our population as a whole.

Table 7

Ethnicity	Number
White British	131
Any other Asian background	5
Any other ethnic group	4
Any other mixed background	4
Black African	3
Any other white background	2
White & Black Caribbean	2
White & Black African	2
White Irish	1
White and Asian	1
Total	155

6. Sibling Groups

There are a number of sibling groups with our looked after population and at present the local authority is recruiting to address the challenge of placing additional siblings with children who are already securely placed. This is however not always appropriate due to the differing needs some children can have from their siblings, but we strive to keep families networked together wherever it is safe to do so.

7. Children with Disabilities

West Berkshire is served by one integrated service for children with disabilities, which meets the needs of looked after disabled children and young people by providing appropriate local respite care and support for children and their families.

The service uses specialist agencies in both adoption and fostering work within the independent sector to help meet the particular needs of disabled children; there is currently insufficient in-house provision available to meet both the placement and permanency needs for this group which will continue to be a recruiting priority for us.

8. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

West Berkshire currently care for 11 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). These children and young people need placements that meet their cultural needs and also address the trauma and isolation they are likely to experience.

They have arrived 'spontaneously' and not through the National Transfer Scheme.

These children are cared for in local Foster Care Placements or in Supported Accommodation. 5 are outside of the Local Authority, predominantly in London, to provide them with the appropriate support network and 6 are placed within our district.

West Berkshire receives daily funding from central government that contributes to the cost of caring for these children and young people until they turn 18. The rates only cover the costs of 'In House' Foster Care placement arrangements, meaning we need to ensure we have the right level of skills and knowledge available to ensure all cultural and language needs are met. From July 2016 if they qualify for leaving care support there is also a grant available.

The Home Office has requested all Local Authorities to accommodate UACS at a ratio of 0.07% of their Child Population. For West Berkshire this would mean 25 children in all, so an increase of 13 children.

At present there are 3 Schemes in operation which oversee the dispersal of children.

1. The National Transfer Scheme – dispersal from Kent and now Calais (funded from the grant).
2. The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement to complement SVPR, Middle East & North African families (funding as SVPR – all cost covered).
3. UASC in Europe (unknown funding).

The impact of the asylum process, including undertaking age assessments, requires both resources and skilled professionals so it is important we access the different funding arrangements, depended upon the way these children have been received.

9. Placement Area

In order to find suitable placements for our children we sometimes have to look outside of the district boundary. This is rarely our first option, but if there are particular local risks we will consider this alongside our matching considerations. For all of our placement requests we consider a matching matrix taking into account all of the child's needs, identified circumstances and what each placement is able to offer. Geographically our current arrangements are:

Table 8

Inside/Outside Boundary	
Inside	99
Outside	55
N/A	1

33 of the 55 Looked After Children placed 20 miles outside of West Berkshire or over 20 miles from their home but within the LA boundary. Some of these children are placed with connected persons or are in their adoptive placements; equally some are West Berkshire carers but live just outside of our district boundary.

10. Leaving Care

There are 4 categories of support under Section 24, CA1989, which guides the Local Authority when considering its duty to those Leaving Care.

Eligible Young People

They are aged 16 or 17, have been Looked After for a period or periods totalling at least 13 weeks starting after their 14th birthday and are still in care. (This total does not include a series of pre-planned short-term placements of up to four weeks where the child has returned to the parent). There is a duty to support these young people up to the age of 18, wherever they are living.

The statutory definition and requirements to undertake a needs assessment, prepare a Pathway Plan, keep the Pathway Plan under review and appoint a Personal Adviser are now covered by Regulations 42, 43 and 44 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

Relevant Young People

They are aged 16 or 17 and are no longer Looked After, having previously been in the category of Eligible Young Person when in care. However, if after leaving care, a young person returns home for a period of 6 months or more to be cared for by a parent and the return home has been formally agreed as successful, he or she will no longer be a "Relevant Young Person".

A young person is also “Relevant” if, having been in care for three months or more, he or she is then detained after their 16th birthday either in a hospital, remand centre, young offenders’ institution or secure training centre. There is a duty to support Relevant Young People up to the age of 18, wherever they are living.

The statutory definition and requirements to stay in touch with the young person, undertake a needs assessment (unless this was done when the young person was ‘Eligible’), prepare and keep the Pathway Plan under review, appoint a Personal Adviser (unless this was done when the young person was ‘Eligible’) and provide accommodation and assistance to meet his or her needs in relation to education, training or employment are now covered by Regulations 4 to 9 of the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.

Former Relevant Young People

They are aged 18 to 21 (or up to 24 if in full-time further or higher education), and have left care having been previously either “Eligible”, “Relevant” or both. There is a duty to consider the need to support these young people wherever they are living.

The statutory definition and requirements to stay in touch with the young person, keep the Pathway Plan under review, continue the appointment of a Personal Adviser and provide financial assistance near where the young person is employed or seeking employment/ to enable the young person to pursue education or training remain unchanged they are now covered by Regulations 4 to 9 of the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010. These duties continue until the young person becomes 21 or, where the Pathway Plan sets out a programme of education or training beyond 21, they continue so long as the young person pursues the programme. The duty to pay a higher education bursary also continues, as before for those who started a course of higher education after 2008.

Qualifying Young People

- They are over the age of 16 and under the age of 21, (or up to 24 if in full-time further or higher education), and have been Looked After or, if disabled, have been Privately Fostered after reaching 16, but do not qualify as Eligible, Relevant or Former Relevant. They may receive support, advice and assistance wherever they are living. If in full-time further or higher education, this may include assistance in relation to securing vacation accommodation. They may also qualify if they are the subject of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and were Looked After immediately before the SGO was made.

The Children and Social Work Bill 2016 proposes placing a duty on local authorities to provide a Personal Advisor, an assessment and a pathway plan to all care leavers up to 25. The only situation where this wouldn’t apply is where the care leaver themselves chose not to take up this offer.

The Bill doesn't provide for young people in care homes to remain until 21 – but in acknowledging the parity of need for advice and support, perhaps opens the door to negotiations for this. A local authority has a duty to inform care leavers of the support now available to them. The Department for Education is unsure how many existing care leavers will return to claim this but are confident new care leavers will have enough information to claim it.

Table 9

Age (LCT)	
18	30
19	15
20	14
21	1
Total	60

There are 60 young adults currently open to our Leaving Care Team.

11. Placement Options for Young People in Care

There are a range of placement options for our older children in care

Table 10

Placement type (LCT post 18)	
Residential	1
Staying Put (post 18)	8
Supported Lodgings	
(Step by Step, Alma and Cornerstones)	11
Supported Living 16+	
(Bramlings)	7
Independent	19
Other	10
University	4

Staying Put

A Staying Put arrangement is where a Former Relevant child, after ceasing to be Looked After, remains in the former fostering arrangement where they were placed immediately before they ceased to be Looked After, beyond the age of 18.

The intention of Staying Put arrangements is to ensure that young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown.

It is the duty of the local authority to monitor the Staying Put arrangement and to provide advice, assistance and support to the Former Relevant child and the former foster parent with a view to maintaining the Staying Put arrangement (this must include financial support), until the child reaches the age of 21 (unless the local authority consider that the Staying Put arrangement is not consistent with the child's welfare).

Under the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, Planning Transition into Adulthood for Care Leavers Guidance and Government Guidance Staying Put - Arrangements for Care Leavers Aged 18 and Above to Stay on With Their Former Foster Carers (2013), the Local Authority must provide information about extending foster placements post-18.

In West Berkshire the Staying Put arrangement applies to all young people who were previously eligible children living in foster care, and who were Looked After immediately prior to their eighteenth birthday. This is regardless of whether the young person is undertaking full or part time education, training or employment or none of these activities. The young person can 'Stay Put' until their 21st birthday, or if they are on an agreed programme of education or training on their 21st birthday, when the course is completed.

Supported Lodgings

Our supported lodgings scheme is provided by Step by Step, Alma and Cornerstones. They recruit, train and support Hosts to bridge the gap between home or being in care, and living independently in the community. The young people who are placed with Hosts benefit from being able to develop their independent living skills whilst living with a responsible adult.

Supported Living (16+)

This service is currently provided by NACRO at Bramlings in Newbury. Bramlings is a bespoke building providing an emergency crash pad with 3 beds, cluster flats with shared areas and separate flats. The service provides supported housing for vulnerable people between the ages of 16 and 24 years. The service assists young people in gaining the necessary skills to achieve independent living through a supportive, empowering and non-judgmental service, where young people are given the opportunity to make informed choices and achieve independent living appropriate to their aspirations, choices, abilities and needs.

The service works with young people to identify and remove barriers which make it difficult for them to access services employing a flexible approach that enhances social inclusion and reduces stigma. The team provides practical assistance to enable young people to live independently and actively participate in the local community in a planned way working with other relevant agencies to enable move on when need arises. The aim is also to reduce the frequency of and cost associated with accommodation breakdown and repossession, encouraging vulnerable young people to maintain appropriate relationships to reduce the risk of homelessness.

12. Adoption

For our younger children in care Adoption is often the best outcome.

For the period April 2015 to March 2016 West Berkshire Council placed 10 children, between the ages of 0 – 8 years, in adoptive placements. This is an increase from the previous year when 6 children were placed for adoption.

During this period West Berkshire secured 7 Adoption Orders and a further 7 Orders have been granted since April 2016. The average time between placement for adoption and the adoption order being granted was 7½ months.

During this time, West Berkshire also commenced three 'Foster to Adopt' placements. In 2013, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 were amended to allow approved prospective adopters to be given temporary approval as foster carers for a named child. In July 2014, the Children and Families Act 2014 imposed a duty upon local authorities to consider placement with dually approved carers whenever it is considering adoption or where the decision has been made that the child ought to be placed for adoption, but where the agency does not yet have authority to place the child for adoption through either a placement order or parental consent. This means for the child the chance to form at the earliest opportunity a secure attachment with the person who may go on to be their parent. The first baby has now been adopted and the second baby is in the process of being adopted.

West Berkshire Council is part of a dedicated adoption service, Adopt Berkshire. The other contributing local authorities are the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham Borough Council, and Bracknell Forest Council

Adopt Berkshire actively contributes to ensuring that West Berkshire 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.

Adopt Berkshire works on behalf of West Berkshire at an early stage to identify those Looked After Children who would benefit from adoption and to achieve the placement of these children with the right prospective adoptive families, within timescales, appropriate to the needs of each individual child.

Adopt Berkshire works in line with DfE standards and within national timescales except where this is not considered to be in the identified interests of the individual child concerned. The service seeks to keep to a minimum any delay in achieving placement for each child and, given this, the option of Fostering for Adoption is considered for every child referred.

When recruiting and preparing prospective adoptive applicants who are seeking to adopt unrelated children, Adopt Berkshire is mindful of the placement needs of the children who are waiting for families both locally and nationally. All applicants are expected to be

able to accept the placement of a child with complex backgrounds and a child for whom there is incomplete background and/or health information. Priority is given to potential applicants who are able to consider the placement of a child/ren with a higher level of additional needs and those able to accept the potential uncertainties inherent in Fostering for Adoption placements.

Adopt Berkshire priorities achieving applications from potential adopters who are able to offer placements for:

- Single children aged four years and over;
- Sibling groups of two or more children;
- Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care;
- Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may always require a higher level of support than other children of similar age (including in some cases a level of special education provision);
- Children who have an identified physical or learning disability;
- Children who have additional emotional and/or behavioural support needs;
- Children whose background histories include having a parent(s) diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties and/or a personality disorder or a parent who is diagnosed to be on the autistic spectrum.
- Children diagnosed to have or be at risk of having Foetal Alcohol Syndrome or to be or be at risk of being on the Autistic Spectrum.

While a significant percentage of the children placed for adoption through the Agency are aged under four years; nearly all of these children have difficult or complex background histories and in most cases the children's future intellectual / academic potential and/or emotional and behavioural issues cannot be clearly predicted.

In recent years the vast majority of children placed for adoption by the four contributing authorities have been of White British heritage.

Adopt Berkshire seek 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 from the granting of a 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. This is with the provision that working within these timescales is not likely to be against the best interests of the child.

Adopt Berkshire is part of the Berkshire Local Authority Adoption Agencies' Consortium and the four contributing authorities are moving forward with plans to become part of a larger Regional Adoption Agency (currently known as Adopt Thames Valley) which will include Reading, Oxfordshire and Swindon alongside current partners.

In seeking to identify prospective adopters for children requiring placement, the Agency will firstly seek to identify appropriate prospective adopters from within its own pool of approved and waiting adopters unless a child's specific circumstances and placement

needs suggest this to be inappropriate. When this is not possible consideration will be given to other potential adopters recruited by the other Consortium agencies prior to consideration of potential adopters recruited by other agencies.

West Berkshire are mindful of the period of time that older children and those with significant additional needs can wait for placements and seek to be pro-active in achieving appropriate placements for all children referred to it for placement, within the shortest possible timescales. To this end, when a child's placement needs are such that it is unlikely that a suitable 'match' will be identified for him/her within Adopt Berkshire or within one of the other RAA associated local authorities partners, wider family finding initiatives will be pursued from the earliest opportunity, accepting any restrictions imposed by any ongoing Court proceedings.

Adopt Berkshire has an inclusive approach to the recruitment of adopters and applications will be considered from applicants who appear to meet the Agency's minimum criteria.

Adopt Berkshire will consider general applications from individuals/couples seeking to be approved as prospective adopters who live outside of the geographical areas covered by the four contributing authorities if:

they appear to have the potential to meet the placement needs of the profile of children who the four contributing authorities regularly need to place, but for whom it may be difficult to identify appropriate prospective adopters;

- and they live within two hours travelling distance of the Adopt Berkshire office in Woodley, Reading;
- and they otherwise meet the Agency's normal criteria for prospective adopters.

The Agency has a target for the number of applications that it will process each year, although this is regularly reviewed and revised as the demand for placements changes. The target is based on the number of children originating from the four contributing authorities who have an adoption plan and the agency seeks to maintain a pool of approved adopters who are able to provide a range of placements including applicants able to provide single and sibling placements and placements for children across the usual age range of children requiring placements. The specific placement needs of the four contributing authorities will directly impact on the decisions made.

During the year running April 2016 – March 2017 Adopt Berkshire have put in place a 12 month tailored recruitment campaign to enable the Agency to recruit 30 adoptive families at least 10 of whom are able to provide placement for sibling pairs. Adopt Berkshire will involve the adoption community (Adoption Advocates) in delivering a range of recruitment initiatives. If the numbers of children on referral should increase during the year the agency will review its recruitment target.

13. Post Adoption Support Service

Post Adoption Support Services are provided from within the Family Placement Team. The Service supports:

- Children and their adoptive families;
- Children and their Special Guardianship Families;
- Adopted adults who request access to their adoptive records.

In addition if necessary the service supports children who have a care plan for adoption to ensure a smooth adoption transition.

The Post Adoption Support Service is responsible for all West Berkshire children for the first 3 years post their adoption order. This means that we are responsible to offer support to placements across the UK. The Service is also responsible to support all adopters living in West Berkshire from 3 years post their adoption order. 125 adoptive families' current living in West Berkshire.

For the period between April 2015 to March 2016 there were referrals/ enquiries from 22 adoptive families with issues ranging from contact arrangements to behavioural problems.

Following these referrals the Post Adoption Service undertook 20 assessments of needs.

The assessment of needs identified 11 families who were referred to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) for therapeutic support. The prototype ASF was created in December 2013 with 10 Local Authorities. This followed the Department for Education's (DfE) report 'Further Action on Adoption: Finding more loving homes' in January 2013, setting out their proposals to attract adopters and improve the support available to adoptive families. The ASF was expanded in May 2015 to all Local Authorities and was initially just for Post Adoption therapeutic support. The criteria was expanded in 2015 to include support to adoptive placements before the adoption order has been granted. The criteria was expanded in April 2016 to include therapeutic support to Special Guardianship placements where the children was previously looked after.

West Berkshire Post Adoption Service successfully applied for £40,060 (for 11 families) for the period August 2015 to March 2016. Since April 2016 a further £28,329 (for 5 families) has already been applied for from Adoption Support Fund.

The therapeutic services commissioned include:

- Play therapy
- DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy)
- Therapeutic Parenting
- Psychotherapy

The importance of early intervention is vital to ensure successful adoptive placement and therefore the Post Adoption Service have provided therapeutic support to 6 children prior or during initial placement.

The ASF has been confirmed for a further 4 years but has recently been capped at £5,000 per child or up to £20,000 if match funded by the local authority. The ASF encourage Local Authorities to up skill their own staff to support adopters and claim for the cost via the ASF.

The ASF also encourage Local Authorities to be creative in supporting adopters. In response to this our post-adoption team is receiving higher level training (DPP2 and the Play Therapy Diploma) to enable us to be able to deliver high quality support that is able to be funded through.

14. Special Guardianship Orders

West Berkshire acknowledges the importance of families remaining together by encouraging family members to come forward during court proceeding and considering Special Guardianship Orders.

For the period April 2015 to March 2016, West Berkshire placed 21 children under Special Guardianship Orders with 15 family members. This is almost a 50% increase on the previous year when 12 children were placed under Special Guardianship Orders with 7 family members. Since April 2016, West Berkshire have secured a further 7 Special Guardianship Orders.

Overall the Post Adoption Support Service currently supports 50 Special Guardianship families with the majority of these families living in West Berkshire. Where children have been placed outside of West Berkshire the Post Adoption Service is responsible to support these families for the first 3 years post order. The Post Adoption Service also takes on responsibility for families living in West Berkshire after three years where children are placed by other Local Authorities.

15. Foster Care Recruitment

Recruitment of foster carers is targeted at those able to consider caring for children in the higher age range, sibling groups and across varying timescales. The web based on-line response form and targeted advertisements are aimed at encouraging interest in Long Term fostering, Teenage fostering and Short Breaks Carers. Short Breaks Care is an integral part of our overall Fostering Advertising and Promotional Plan and continues to produce a regular number of enquiries. Our focus is on generating web and telephone based enquiries driven by radio, press and social media based activities to maximize the range of carers we want to achieve in West Berkshire.

There is also a need to recruit foster carers who are able to meet the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children from areas such as Albania, Ethiopia, Syria and Afghanistan. West Berkshire also engages with members of the local Black and Minority Ethnic Forum who provide mentors for foster carers who look after children who are a different ethnicity from themselves.

The Fostering Service operates an equal opportunities policy in relation to all its work and carers, children and their families. Matching procedures attempt first to meet as many of a child's needs as possible and secondly identify any unmet needs in order to and put in place measures to address any shortfall in provision. Carers are strongly encouraged to attend training on valuing diversity. As part of preparation for the foster carers' annual reviews the views of the foster carers are always sought, as well as those of the children in placement, their parents and the foster carers' own children, regarding the service provided by the Fostering Service and ways that the Service can improve further.

In the year April 2015 to March 2016 West Berkshire received 98 fostering enquiries. 55 did not progress due to family circumstances, failure to respond, unsuitable accommodation or personal reasons. 45 information packs were sent out. During that period 24 prospective foster carers requested an initial visit and 21 took place. The remaining 3 that did not take place either withdrew or failed to respond; 10 foster carers were assessed and were subsequently approved, 2 of which are short breaks carers. West Berkshire also assessed 5 connected persons who went on to full approval. 4 fostering preparation groups were held over the year along with 1 preparation group for connected persons and we held 10 recruitment information sessions.

We are currently undertaking 14 fostering assessments (including 7 Connected Persons Assessments). We have had one connected person approval in September and we are in the process of transferring 2 fostering households to our fostering service from other fostering services. Additionally we now have 2 foster to adopt placement.


This year we have made the decision that, in order not to lose momentum when enquiries are made, we no longer wait to meet prospective carers at monthly information evenings but allocate and visit them as soon as they make contact.

The Recruitment activity has also been used to produce enquiries for Supported Lodgings Placement Hosts in conjunction with our main service provider Step by Step.

Advertising continues to be targeted throughout West Berkshire with particular attention paid to the different requirements of the East and Central/West regions of the area. Specific social media advertising through Facebook and Google + has proven very effective and together with radio and press advertising will form the basis of ongoing campaigns.

There is also a community based events programme run by volunteers and foster carers to ensure maximum exposure of the recruitment needs. For 2016 this events programme has been extended to cover the Crafty Craft Race, Hollybrook Festival, Newbury Carnival, Culture Fest, Newbury Agricultural Show and the Englefield Steam Rally, together with pop up stalls at various Newbury and Thatcham markets and events.

We are developing a new, more attractive website with our internal partners. The Family Placement Team has been exploring an intensive fostering placement scheme, provided by an Independent Fostering Agency who recruit foster carers with specialist skills to meet the needs of the most challenging children. This involves a wrap around support network to ensure that a high level of placement support is available at all times.



The introduction of a Placements Officer has proved to be very successful. The Officer has ensured that requests for placements are progressed in a timely fashion and backed up with a good quality referral that make clear the children's needs. When an in-house placement has not been available the Placements Officer has found high quality placements, sought information from other local authorities and negotiated the best value arrangement. The Placement Officer has also been reviewing our current residential and independent placement, visiting them to ensure they are providing the highest standard care and is working with the social work team to review and implement effective Individual Placement Agreements.

16. Children on the Edge of Care

Through improvement in the quality of social work across Children & Family Services we have seen a decrease in the number of looked after children. The use of Restorative Practice including Family Group/Restorative Conferences has also led to better outcomes for children within their families. We understand well the challenges some of our children face and have ensured particular focus on issues of Toxic Trio, CSE and those children who have been reported as missing. We recognise that children are often best brought up within their own family where it is safe to do so, but also understand that those on the edge of care occasionally need to receive short term respite to avoid complete family breakdown, whilst family work is brokered to help support and sometimes repair difficult family relationships.

2016 - 2017 Plan

There are 3 pillars to the plan of how we will meet the identified areas of need. These are Future Scoping – increasing capacity and choice; Value for Money – Quality Services and providers who deliver what our children need; Increasing Stability – improving skills and ensuring good outcomes

Planning Ahead - Capacity and Choice

We will continue to employ a range of traditional methods – radio, newspaper and events – to recruit the number and variety of carers we need.

With the help of West Berkshire Communications department we are redesigning our Foster Carer website to make it more appealing and a space where carers can also seek support and advice.

The decision to visit prospective carers as soon as they make contact should ensure a better 'conversion' rate from enquiry to approval.

We are keen, where it is in their best interests, to bring back to West Berkshire our children who are placed out of our area and in the New Year are working further with potential In-house carers to together devise support packages to ensure permanency.

With the particular needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in mind we have agreed with a national charity 'Home for Good' that they help us run a campaign in West Berkshire. At least 20 local families have registered an interest with them in providing a home for UASC. Home for Good is a charity focused on raising the profile of fostering and adoption, especially for those children who are hard to place, with church communities and through our initial discussions we hope to grow our placement options further.

We are also exploring with BAAFCorum the use of Activity Days for Fostering which is a new concept building on the success of Adoption Activity Days. Activity Days for Fostering will focus on finding loving, stable homes for children who need to remain permanently looked after under foster care arrangements. Activity Days for Fostering are designed to speed up and improve the process of matching children with a wider range of prospective foster carers.

It is clear, from our demographics and the likely extension of our duties, that accommodation for older young people and Care Leavers needs to be developed further. We will continue to support 'Staying Put' arrangements where the young person and carer are happy to progress this arrangement but this will of course have an impact on the placements available to younger children, giving extra impetus to our recruitment campaign.

For some of our older young people 'Foster Care' and 'Staying Put' are not the best options, this includes some of our older UASC. For others there is a need for a bridge

from family life to independence. With this in mind additional resources have been commissioned from Step by Step increasing in the capacity of one of our Supported Lodgings offer.

Some of our young people have struggled in placement and have moved to supported housing with Bramblings. Two projects aim to help these young people prepare for independence and increase stability. The Restorative Practice project will help the young people learn how to resolve differences in a productive and positive way and our project collaborating with Citizens Advice and the Benefits Agency will ensure they do not get into debt but are able to manage their finances and receive the correct benefits where appropriate.

Value for Money- Quality Services and Providers

The introduction of the Placement Officer has already paid dividends and will continue to ensure where at all possible that a child will be placed with our own foster carers. If this is not possible the Officer will seek good quality placements that provide what a child needs and are value for money. The consistent implementation of Placement Agreements will make sure we are clear what we have agreed and will be provided as part of the core contract to ensure there are no hidden costs.

The Children & Family Services Accommodation and Resources Panel also continues to ensure proportionate and cost effective solutions.

Through being a continued member of the South East Consortium ensures we are able to get the best price possible on a large number of independent foster agencies places. This is now to be extended to residential units and should allow for better cost avoidance.

A piece of work is also under way to review the support we give to our carers, including house carers; connected persons; adopters; special guardians and those with child arrangement orders. The aim is to make sure that payments are fair and equitable and training, support, respite and expectations are proportionate and clear.

Increasing Stability- skills and Good Outcomes

Key to the success of the strategy this year is to ensure West Berkshire foster carers are resilient, confident and competent and that our children's specific needs are met. The Looked After Children Service strives to ensure that children are not only safe but also that they feel safe. Our aim is that all those who provide a service to our looked after children have an understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment; how to parent

effectively using P.A.C.E. (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) and commit to Restorative Practice (Doing 'With'; not 'To' or 'For'). To this end a number of initiatives are under way.

A Task and Finish group began in November 2016 with social workers and foster carers meeting to ensure good communication and consultation. Among other things it will look at the Carers' handbook, allowances, recruitment, support and training.

Recently 5 of our carers attended a conference on 'The effect of trauma on a child' led by Dr Jonathan Baylin and Dr Dan Hughes and we are looking to build on this with more in depth training for those looking after traumatised children and young people.

Plans are being put together with to provide monthly group sessions for foster carers to share their experiences and become more skilled to cope with increasingly complex children. By understanding the impact of trauma and loss on the developing child and young person is hoped problems will be pre-empted, preventing crises and placement breakdown.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) pathway will be formally launched in the New Year but targeted work is already underway. In December Supervising and children's social workers will be trained in using the SDQ tool and supporting foster carers in completing the questionnaire. A monthly screening meeting attended by the Children in Care team manager, LAC nurse and EHA LAC clinician (soon to be joined by a LACES practitioner) has considered all children with a high or very high SDQ score. Plans are then put in place to address this need including triangulation; emotional health plans; referral to CAMHS or one-to-one/family work where appropriate. For those with lower SDQ scores it is important that emotional health is still part of their care plan. Training is to be provided to carers and workers so that they are able to provide support that may include a 5 Ways to Wellbeing Plan.

This approach forms part of a wider priority of ensuring the child's voice is central in our planning and there is a full understanding not only of their needs and circumstances, but also how their views are listened to and taken into account when securing placement arrangements.

Various approaches have been made to strength our approach to this, including the creation and distribution of Looked After Children Information Packs, ensuring young people know who to contact, the commencing of a new Children in Care Team website due to be completed in 2017 and a Refreshed Participation and Engagement Strategy to establish strategic principles.

All social workers and carers will access training to understand the impact of trauma and brain development and we plan to work closely with our foster carers to ensure training is arranged alongside need.

A key member of staff has been identified to undertake the Play Therapy Diploma and another key member of staff to complete Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy at Level 2. This will enable more timely and cost effective interventions. For some of this work we will also be able to charge back to the Adoption Support Fund for their time.

We understand that good quality contact is essential to achieve placement stability. We have begun work across the teams in Children and Families Service and with our Quality Assurance Service to identify areas of development. This includes working with our colleagues across the council and our communities to provide venues that promote parenting and respect. We are also focusing on our risk assessments and contracts to ensure everyone is clear about contact arrangements.

The creation of the new Children in Care team means that the children long term care are now given the highest priority. The provision of a more skilled and informed service means that children will feel safe, less pre-occupied, and better able to accept care and to make the most of their opportunities. This will lead to placement stability. Using restorative practice techniques pre-disruption meetings will identify support for placements at risk. Disruption meetings, also using restorative practice, will be held to learn what a child and carer may need in the future to make sure stability can be achieved. The focus is not only on ensuring good matches but also confirming at foster panel so that the child feels fully part of the family, and the carers feel this too and it has full panel scrutiny and ADM endorsement.

The monthly Permanency Tracking Meeting continues to monitor the progress of each child's plan and we continue to focus on Life Journey work which will help children understand their journey in care and settle in their placement.

Meeting the needs of older children is key to the success of the strategy. It is considered that with the creation of the new Children in Care Team that all children will have a more settled experience of care before approaching adolescence. This in turn should mean that young people will present with fewer complex and challenging problems, will not experience disruption and will stay within family settings. By having informed and skilled foster carers and social workers the response to the young people's behaviour will be measured, calm, consistent and authoritative.

For those young people coming into care at adolescence this will also mean a safer experience and less likelihood of escalation and need for out of area Independent Foster Agencies or Residential Units.

We know that one of the most effective forms of foster care recruitment is through 'word of mouth'. So if current foster carers are more confident about the service they receive it is likely we will attract more and higher quality carers.

The formation of the Looked After Children Service has already begun to lead to better transitions for children. A more consistent approach as children travel through the system will mean less disruption to their placements and care plans.

This approach also strengthens the consistency of relationships of our social workers and our Looked After Children. We recognize that in order for good bonding relationships to be formed between our LAC and social workers, consistency and stability is important. The below shows our progress in this.

Pie Chart 1



Conclusion

This Sufficiency Strategy sets the focus of how West Berkshire plans to meet our placement needs, so that we are able, wherever possible, to place our children and young people:

- with family and friend carers if consistent with their welfare and wellbeing;
- with in-house foster carers if available and consistent with their welfare and wellbeing;
- close to home;
- at a distance from their home to protect their safety and wellbeing;
- without disruption to their education, training or employment;
- together with their siblings;
- taking account of any disability or special needs; and
- within in-house placements.

The success measures for the Sufficiency Strategy will be:

- an adequate supply of quality placements for looked after children by in-house and external providers including for children with special educational needs;
- a range of placement types which have access to universal and specialist services;
- that all placements meet National Minimum Standards and regulatory requirements;
- a range of services to reduce the need/ prevent children needing to become looked after;
- more children will be placed within 20 miles of their home;
- less unplanned placement moves;
- an increase in fostering household internally; and
- improved education, health and wellbeing outcomes for our Children in Care

Future plans

There are a number of projects that have been proposed or that are underway that will have an impact on the sufficiency strategy. The sufficiency strategy will be further updated as these projects progress but include:

Supported Youth Accommodation for Care Leavers

- The proposal is to review supported accommodation for care leavers aged 17 plus who are in education, employment or training and who are independent/ semi-independent to act as a step towards full independence for the young people.

Leaving Care Commissioning


- West Berkshire are intending to redesign our approach to commissioning supported accommodation for care leavers to broaden the choice of local provision and support.
- This is necessary because the lack of an appropriate mix and balance of accommodations has created an over reliance on expensive spot purchasing solutions which are generally more expensive. It means that there are a number of care leavers in out of borough placements which cater for young people with a higher level of needs.
- The aim is to broaden the range of providers and provide clearer guidance and quality assurance to the providers we work with to ensure quality, but also identify differentiation, good practice and most importantly, client progress, either in terms of step down, actively promoting independence and lower levels of support promotions of provisions or routes into apprenticeships, employment.

Short break respite care for children with SEND

- Developments are being considered to increase the in house provision of Castlegate Unit based within West Berkshire to maximise our Short Break opportunities to some of our most high need Children with Disabilities
- The respite facility will allow families and the young person to have their child access a modern and high quality respite provision

In West Berkshire we are committed to ensuring the voice of our children and young people are heard, we have the sufficiency of placements to meet their needs in a timely way and are able to support as many children as we can to remain with their own families where it is appropriate and safe to do so.





We are committed to being accessible to everyone. If you require this document in an alternative format or translation, please call (insert officer's name) on Telephone (insert number).

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