

Buckinghamshire Council

Sufficiency Strategy

2021-24



Our strategy to help us provide the right place at the right time for our looked after children.

We want to make sure that we have appropriate accommodation options, both now and in the future, that support our looked after children to achieve the best possible outcomes, whilst ensuring best use of available resources.

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This strategy will be reviewed annually.

Views of our We do Care! Council

We Do Care! is a group of children and young people who are either looked after or are leaving the care of Buckinghamshire Council and want to make sure other looked after children and young people have their voices listened to.



Buckinghamshire Children in Care Council

What is covered in this strategy?

This strategy sets out a summary of the action we will be taking over the next three years to make sure that we can provide placements for all children who need care. It is made up of four main areas and within each of these it covers a number of topics.

1. Permanence

Where possible we want all our children to be in placements which will provide them with long term placement stability, and where appropriate to leave care. We describe this as achieving permanence for that child. Although it is sometimes necessary to move a child to provide them with a better placement our aim is to minimise the number of times each child changes placement as this can be very disruptive. To achieve permanence, it is essential that all our teams work effectively together to support each placement.

Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways, not simply through adoption, for example a child can move to a special guardianship order or be matched for long term fostering. Each of these options gives the chance for the child to achieve stability and achieve their potential.

2. Fostering recruitment and retention

There are three main types of foster care available to our children who are looked after. Where possible we keep children with people, they already have some form of relationship with, this type of placement is called family and friends foster care. When a child is first referred to us, we will speak to any proposed carers to assess whether they will be able to provide the support that child needs. If we cannot find a suitable related carer, we will try to place them with one of our Buckinghamshire Council carers or 'in-house' carers. Only where we cannot identify an in-house placement to meet their needs will we then look to place them with an independent fostering agency (IFA). These placements are more likely to be out of the county and are also usually more costly.

3. Commissioning

There are some services which we are unable to provide ourselves. This may be because we do not have the required specialist skills or may reflect the fact that we do not have sufficient capacity to deliver these services. Where this is the case, we will commission services from others; however, it is essential that we manage this effectively to make sure that these placements support our vulnerable children to achieve their full potential.

4. Residential care

Where children have needs which cannot be met through other types of placement we will seek to identify a residential home in which they can live. This more intense environment can ensure that children are given the help they need 24 hours a day. Where this type of placement is made we will review it regularly to ensure that it is still the best way to meet their needs and to support them to move to a fostering or more permanent placement when appropriate.

Vision for children looked after

Every parent wants the best for their child. When a child becomes looked after, the local authority becomes the 'corporate parent' responsible for the child during the period which they are in care. We want all children in our care to be healthy, safe and happy, do well at school and enjoy good relationships with their peers. We want our young people to be able to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults into higher education, good careers and jobs, and achieve financial security.

It is evident that the quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people 'doing well' in care – the higher the quality, the better children and young people do' (Sinclair et al, 2007). It is therefore the aim of this strategy to ensure that across all areas of our services supporting children who are looked after we aspire to achieve the best possible placements for our young people.

Legal context

Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.

Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a child looked after that: is near the child’s home; does not disrupt his/her education or training; enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling; where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and is within the local authority’s area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

Commissioning standards in the sufficiency duty statutory guidance are also important, emphasising individual assessment and care planning; commissioning decision; strategic needs assessment; market management; collaboration; and securing services.

Position statement

Buckinghamshire Council is located in the South East of England and has a population of approximately 540,100. This figure has risen steadily from 522,000 in 2014 and is forecast to increase by a further 70,400 by 2039 as a result of an ambitious growth agenda and plans for new housing¹.

Of this population, 19% are aged 65+ and 30% 0-24, this is similar to trends across the South East more widely although Bucks has a slightly higher proportion of young people than the rest of the region². 86% of the county population are of White ethnicity, the remaining 14% are defined as Black, Asian, mixed or other³.

Although overall the county population is the second least deprived in England, it does have a number of areas of deprivation, mostly in the urban areas or Aylesbury and High Wycombe (see appendix 1).

Our children looked after (CLA) needs analysis

Measure	31-Mar-19	31-Mar-20	31-Mar-21
Number of looked after children	513	492	512
Number and % of children in care living with foster families	342 67%	350 71%	360 70%
Number and % of children placed with a Buckinghamshire /in house carer	155 45%	189 54%	186 51%
Number and % of children placed with an Independent Fostering Agency	187 55%	161 46%	174 48%
Number and % of children in care living outside the local authority area	272 53%	227 46%	270 53%

¹ ONS population data
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/latest>

² Same source as above

³ Census 2011

Summary of progress over the past 3 years

Across the period of the sufficiency strategy we have focused on building close working relationship across the service and wider teams to ensure young people are effectively supported. In particular in the past 6 months we have worked closely with our partners in CAMHS to put in place training and support with a focus on therapeutic support and closer working with the virtual school. This ensures that our carers and staff are best able to support young people who have more complex needs.

Permanence remains a central focus across the service. Our aim is to ensure that whenever possible young people are placed in long-term placements which are able to effectively meet their needs. We continue to hold regular permanence tracking meetings to identify any blockers or issues which may be preventing a young person from achieving permanence. We have also increased resources focused on family finding and matching to help us identify the best matches for young people.

Covid-19 has significantly impacted the service. This has been really challenging time, for example, the extension of timelines for proceedings, have reduced progression and increased anxiety for carers/adoption. Although, we have also learnt a lot such as about alternative ways to engage carers and young people and this has been really positive. Our children's homes have remained open throughout the pandemic and have put in place extensive plans to respond to the virus. We have, however, seen a significant increase in the number of adopters and special guardians requesting support as a result of the additional pressures they are experiencing through Covid.

Over the course of the last 3 years we have delivered significant growth of our in-house fostering service. As of April 2021, we are now at 51% in-house and 49% external compared to April 2018 24% and 61%. (NB the 24% is for mainstream in-house carers only and doesn't include friends and family/connected persons carers, who we usually count as in-house. Adding those back in takes the in-house figure for April 2018 to 39%). We exceeded our target last year and remain on track to do this again. We have also continued to increase family & friends placements ensuring that this option is always considered first when we are looking for a placement. This ensures that young people wherever it is appropriate are given the opportunity to remain within their family network.

The adoption service has focused recently on maximising the impact of digital recruitment. Following an award-winning project to implement an online adoption readiness checker we have seen a significant increase in registrations of interest. We are now working on a second digital project which will enable them to identify where they can access support. The team have also expanded their support offer through the adoption support fund. This has enabled upskilling of staff and implementation of more specialist support groups to ensure all adopters and special guardians are able to access support which reflects their needs.

Since April 2018, we have opened 3 new children's homes and fully renovated our existing Aylesbury home. We currently have 7 children within our in-house children's homes. This will enable us to continue to place more young people within the county and ensure we are able to provide high quality placements. We have a 19 bed residential children's home service. Following the success of Newlands Ofsted registration on the 19th June 2021 we have 4 operational homes.

Our new children's Home provision Newlands located in High Wycombe was delayed in opening due to the pandemic causing a shortage of available building materials to proceed. However, since the ease of restriction the builders were able to continue the project which has now allowed the building works to be completed. Recruitment has been a challenge due to professionals not leaving their employment due to the uncertainty of COVID. The home is in the closing stages of full registration with Ofsted.

Buckinghamshire Council currently has 24 children aged 16 – 18 years and 36, 19 – 21-year olds placed in semi-independent placements. 14 of the 19-21-year olds are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers who do not have rights to social housing. The number of commissioned semi-independent provision has remained stable over the last 12 months. However due to mental health needs, we do have a higher number of children/care leavers with enhanced support packages.

Alongside developing our new children's homes, we have also renovated our existing Aylesbury semi-independence provision, Redwood house, to provide an opportunity for young people aged 18 to develop their independence. Following the opening of Redwood house, we initially opened 3 apartments, however from 01/07/2021 we have furnished the 4th apartment to allow opportunity for an UASC to be placed within the home. As part of this we have also focused on building stronger relationships with providers and implementing a set of minimum standards to ensure that all provision for 16 -18 year olds is of a high standard and supports young people to live independently. The aim of introducing minimum standards is to provide guidance relating to placing children looked after and care leavers age 16 & 17 (and in certain circumstances care leavers aged 18 and older) in placements and accommodation which is not regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000 and as a result is not inspected by Ofsted. The standards have been supported via a multi-agency approach which has welcomed by Thames Valley Police, Environmental Health and discussed within the Buckinghamshire Council Strategic Exploitation & Missing Meeting.

In order to support the delivery of local, good quality semi-independent placements that meets the needs of our young people, the Council has now established a Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) to procure and commission semi-independent accommodation for young people in Buckinghamshire. Potential suppliers will be required to go through an accreditation and enrolment process which sets out our minimum quality standards

required to join the DPV. If successful in meeting these minimum standards, the supplier will be enrolled on to the system and will be able to start offering services for young people in Buckinghamshire.

One area where we have focused specifically in the past 6 months is developing specialist placements alongside external providers to ensure we can meet the needs of all young people. This has included, working closely with our health colleagues, putting in place a project to develop specialist disability placements for young people who need step down provision from hospital. Within the fostering team we have now recruited to the fostering operations manager post which brings together both in-house and external fostering oversight to ensure a consistent and high-quality provision.

Our Priorities

If we are to achieve the best outcomes for all these children, we need to ensure that all our placement services are fit for purpose and continue to grow and develop. Across all of the services we deliver, we seek to make sure that all decisions are centred on the views of the child and family. We also aim to focus on reducing wasted time or resource so that we can focus on achieving the right outcomes for our children who are looked after. As a result of the increasing numbers of children in care and the pressure resulting from this, it is now more important than ever that we make sure that we focus on achieving these aims.

Priority 1

Ensure that all internal processes are focused on the child and maximise the impact of money spent to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved.

Actions:

1. Make sure that the voice of the child is at the centre of everything that we do.
2. Ensure that all processes are as efficient as possible and minimise any potential wasting of resources.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased value for money achieved across all placements.
- Clear decision-making processes and clarity around roles and responsibilities throughout the placement process.
- Better communication between teams and improved information sharing.
- All systems are fit for purpose and support effective management of information throughout process.

Priority 2

To work effectively in partnership across the whole of Children's Services to ensure that young people are effectively safeguarded in all placements, both internal and external, and that there are clear processes and procedures in place to manage this. This should include:

- Managing self-harm including putting in place additional training for staff and carers
- Ensuring all unregulated placements for over 16's provide high quality support and meet the needs of our young people and support referrals to CAMHS when appropriate
- Regular quality assurance monitoring across the service.

Actions:

1. All staff to regularly renew child protection training
2. Implement improved processes around tracking of LADO and safeguarding investigations and issues
3. Ensuring information is shared appropriately where transitions take place between service areas.

Expected outcomes:

- Clear decision-making processes and clarity around roles and responsibilities throughout the placement process.
- Better communication between teams and improved information sharing.

Priority 3

Increasing complexity of need presented.

Actions:

1. Review availability of in-house therapeutic support to allow us to provide more support to those children placed in-house.
2. Work closely together in partnership with services supporting looked after children with special educational needs.
3. Increase number of children in Staying Put arrangements

Outcomes:

- Better value for money.
- Higher proportion of children within residential placements located within the County and nearer to their home.
- Earlier recognition of any issues within placements to improve outcomes for our children who are looked after.

Priority 4

There is not always sufficient support available for children to achieve their long-term care plans and so looked after children are remaining in placements which may not best meet their needs.

Actions:

1. Continue to complete regular monitoring of the permanence arrangements and identify opportunities to remove blockers
2. Put in place necessary support for our carers and children in care to enable long term placements. This covers placement support such as therapeutic intervention but also investment such as capital funding to ensure the carer's home can meet the needs of the children placed with them.
3. Continue to raise awareness of and assist carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders wherever suitable to ensure that this option is available to achieve permanence for children who are looked after.
4. Review all approved connected carers at 6 months to see whether an SGO would be more appropriate to meet the child's long-term needs.

Expected outcomes:

- Increase placement stability and so minimise the damaging effects of additional placement moves for already vulnerable children.
- Granting more SGO arrangements will:
 - Enable young people to escape the intrusion and stigma that are sometimes attached to being looked after.
 - Young people have the security of knowing that they are legally part of their carer's family.

Priority 5

Further develop our long-term placement support services to achieve and secure improvements in service delivery.

Actions:

1. Increase our early intervention and therapeutic offer to provide the additional support for adopters funded through the Adoption Support Fund (government funding to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families) and also to special guardians.
2. Integrating our approach to adoption and special guardianship so that all long-term placement receives an equivalent level of support
3. Implement a digital project to raise awareness of the support that is available to adopters and special guardians.

Expected outcomes:

- Reduced placement breakdowns through ensuring placements are adequately supported, helping us avoid further disruption for vulnerable children.

Priority 6

Continuing to recruit sufficient adopters including targeting specialist carers for those who are longer to place.

We have used foster to adopt (Reg 24 or Reg 25) to place children with siblings already with adopters. Increased use of Early Permanence fostering and adoption of older children by their foster carers.

Actions:

1. Raise awareness of support for those who have adopted through more effective use of social media
2. Put in place recruitment activity to identify potential adopters to meet the ethnicity and needs of all young people placed for adoption
3. Maintain quality and quantity of matches through a review of processes to ensure they are robust and achieve what is right for the child.

Expected outcomes:

- Prevent placement escalation and support permanence
- Reduce risks for a child resulting from being looked after: already separated from the birth family and foster carer, breakdown of a placement with their permanent carers can be extremely disruptive for a child.

Priority 7

Providing a range of offers for those aged 18 and over to ensure they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be looked after.

Actions:

1. Put in place a supported lodgings offer through recruitment of foster carers who can provide a bed to those who are aged 18 and over within a family environment
2. Support those who are moving back home
3. Work with our housing teams to ensure that all young people are prepared for independence prior to their 18th birthday and where appropriate they are supported to access appropriate housing
4. Continue to develop our in-house semi-independence offer to provide a range of provisions for those aged over 16

5. Ensure a smooth transition process is in place where young people are moving on to be supported by adult social care services.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased availability of accommodation for Buckinghamshire young people particularly in the south of the county where there is currently a deficit.
- Increased placement stability and outcomes through better quality testing of local provisions to ensure they can meet young people's needs.
- Better local offer available to young people in terms of choice of locations and styles of accommodation and support.

Priority 8

The need to continue to grow our in-house services to meet the needs of more young people who need a fostering placement.

Actions:

1. Continue to review and improve our offer to potential carers to encourage them to foster with Buckinghamshire Council rather than an independent agency
2. Increase support and training for our carers to enable them to meet the needs of young people with more complex needs
3. Implement specialist recruitment to meet the needs of young people who have more complex needs, are aged over 10 and those who are part of larger sibling groups.

Expected outcomes:

- Continue to grow our in-house fostering service and meet the needs of all our young people
- Reduce the number of young people placed outside of the County.

Priority 9

Our limited control over the market is resulting in pressures within our external placements budgets and difficulty in identifying suitable placements for all children within the required timescales. We need to ensure that all young people regardless of where they are placed are supported effectively.

Actions:

1. Use business intelligence to direct commissioning practice and ensure a joined-up approach to managing placements whether in-house or through an external agency

2. Review and improve our unregulated placements to ensure these are always effectively monitored and meet the expected quality standards
3. Improve placement planning and deliver a joined-up approach to identification of specialist residential provision to reduce reliance on emergency placements
4. Work with our advocacy services to understand the needs of all young people placed with external agencies
5. Continue to integrate our in-house and external placement teams to ensure effective joint working.

Expected outcomes:

- Ensure value for money within services which are commissioned
- A joined-up approach to commissioning all services which we cannot provide in house
- Closer working with partners to ensure effective coordination of our needs and their offer.

Priority 10

The demand driven nature of preventative work which results in us not being able to provide support early enough to some of our most vulnerable children.

Actions:

1. More effective use of business intelligence to develop our edge of care service offer so that we can achieve the maximum impact in supporting vulnerable families and return children home.
2. Continue to extend our support offer to those involved in the adoption process including renewal of contract to support parents whose children have been removed
3. Put in place a contract to support those at high risk of repeat removals and explore putting in a PAUSE approach for vulnerable young people.

Expected outcomes:

- Earlier support for families, to prevent escalation of issues and where possible keep children at home.
- Give individuals the tools to help them solve their own problems and also be more resilient in the future while making sure they know where they can go for help when they need it.

Priority 11

The high proportion of children placed out of county. While this is appropriate for some young people due to their specific needs and complex circumstances, it has significant financial implications and can impact on positive outcomes for children.

Actions:

1. Embed our new children's home offer to deliver a consistent high-quality service to all young people placed in in-house residential
2. Explore opportunities to share spare capacity within our children's homes with other local authorities
3. Explore opportunities for additional block contracts to provide a level of pre-paid private residential placements within the county
4. Work closely with our partners in the CAMHS service to support all young people placed out of county.

Expected outcomes:

- A higher proportion of children within residential placements located within the County and nearer to their home
- Increased residential placement stability through more in-depth assessment of need and better-quality testing of local provision
- Improved value for money through reduced use of high cost external residential placements where this does not reflect the level of need.

Outcomes of this strategy

There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting families in the community or for improving outcomes for Children Looked After. Different cohorts of children require different approaches. This strategy has identified some of the key challenges we face in meeting our sufficiency duty and actions proposed to make sure we are better placed to meet these challenges and deliver financially sustainable services.

Our aim is to strengthen the range of preventative and support services/interventions we offer to ensure that our children who are looked after are able to achieve their full potential.

We will monitor this strategy by regularly measuring key performance indicators.

Throughout the life of this document we will continue to work with our children in care, care leavers and key partners to develop our plans and priorities. We want this strategy to be a 'live' document and so we will publish an updated version each year. We will also review this strategy every 6 months and if we believe significant change has occurred, we will also publish an interim update. A summary of the actions identified is set out in the below action plan which will be monitored by the children looked after project board which meets monthly and the change for children board which meets on a six-weekly basis.

Action plan

Category	Action	Details	Deadline	Lead individual	Progress update March 2021
Process improvements	Child focused approach	Make sure that the voice of the child is at the centre of everything that we do	August 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	As corporate parents we are working with our children and young people in care to ensure that they are given the opportunity to shape the services provided to them.
	Process review	Ensure all processes are efficient and minimise any potential waste of resources	October 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	A number of policy process reviews have been completed in the last year. Over the last year we have been members of the 'West London Alliance' which gives us access to more placements and helps us to ensure we are achieving best value for money options for external placements.
Safeguarding our children	Staff training	All staff to regularly renew child protection training	Commencing April 2021, bi-annually thereafter	Head of Children's Care Services	A training audit has been completed for all staff to ensure they remain compliant with all mandatory training including safeguarding training.
	LADO and safeguarding process	Review and implement improved processes around tracking of LADO and safeguarding investigations and issues	May 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	A review of the joint working protocol was completed in March 2021. The LADO service continue to provide a high level of support to the teams to ensure that all allegations against persons of trust are dealt with appropriately.
	Information sharing	Ensuring information is shared appropriately where transitions take place between service areas	Placement planning meetings held within 72 hours of a child being placed.	Head of Children's Care Services	Regular meetings take place between placements teams to manage placement transitions and ensure any safeguarding concerns are shared effectively.
Achieving permanence	In-depth review of placements	Review all looked after children placements to understand where there are opportunities to support permanence	Regular review through resource panel and additional extraordinary panels where required	Head of Children's Care Services	A twice weekly resource panel is held to review all new and extended placements to ensure that they continue to meet the child's needs. A monthly permanency tracking panel is in place to ensure that permanency plans are progressed within the child's timescales.
	Review of Resource Panel Process	Update processes for placement review via LCS to ensure all placements are regularly brought before resource panel and the details are captured within the child's records.	Annual review October 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	Process review has been completed and changes implemented.
	Edge of care support	Ensure all children who are at the edge of care and those becoming looked after are part of a Family Group Conference/Meeting. Maximise the FGC mediation offer for all 16 plus who have left home where there are no safeguarding concerns.	September 2021	Director for Children's Social Care	On track
	Placement support	Put in place therapeutic intervention, training, and investment for our carers to support placement permanence	Review of CAMH's contract March 2022.	Head of Children's Care Services	We have commissioned a CAMH's worker to work solely with the children placed within our children's homes.

					<p>We have named CAMH's Practitioners who have case discussions to the fostering/adoption teams.</p> <p>CAMH's are supporting the delivery of mentalization training for all carers – fostering, residential and adopters.</p>
Special Guardianship Orders	<p>Raise awareness of and assist carers to apply for SGO wherever possible.</p> <p>Identify a worker to lead on IFA carers who would support an SGO if the support package covered the financial support required.</p>	April 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	We continue to prioritise SGOs and have seen a steady increase in the number of SGO assessments and placements made over the past 18 months. Last year 17 SGOs were granted.	
Adoption Life story workers	Increase the number of life story workers available to work with all children whether their care plan is SGO, long term fostering or adoption	May 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	On track	
Connected carer reviews	Review all approved connected carers at 6 months to see whether an SGO would be more appropriate to meet the child's long-term needs	June 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	On track	
Adoption support fund	Increase our early intervention and therapeutic offer to provide the additional support for adopters funded through the Adoption Support Fund, government funding to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families	March 2022	Head of Children's Care Services	<p>We continue to grow and extend the support available to our adopters/SGO.</p> <p>The Adoption support fund has been agreed until March 22. We are in the process of exploring with Early Help Colleagues from Children and Adult Services what interventions they may be able to offer should the funding cease.</p>	
Adoption awareness	Use social media to raise awareness of adoption	Comms plan review to be completed by May 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	<p>Our move to digital recruitment over the last year has yielded positive results with 30 adopters being recruited. For the next 3 years we need to refine our recruit process to ensure we are able to recruit adopters who can accept children with additional needs, sibling groups and children from black and minority ethnic groups. We have held 2 focused 'it takes a village' recruitment campaigns and we aim to build on the success with future campaigns.</p> <p>We have seen positive engagement with our social media. We have delivered campaigns across this platform e.g. National Adoption Week, LGBT+ A&F week, Pride Month. Taking the purple ribbon theme, we have developed a colour and strapline to signal Bucks Adoption.</p>	
Adoption support groups	Increase targeted support groups for carers to allow early intervention where a	June 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	To enhance our universal offer to families we have embarked on a programme of training for staff in the team so that we can deliver	

		placement might be at risk of breaking down			additional group work and offer more services. We have recently put in place a younger people's group which has received a positive response.
	Adoption match quality	Maintain quality and quantity of matches through a review of processes to ensure they are robust – what's right for the child, as praised within the Ofsted report	Quarterly feedback to be provided by Adoption and Fostering Advisors at Team Meetings, commencing June 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	We have recruited 30 adopters in 2020/21, we aim to build on this success to recruit adopters for harder to place children.
	Semi- independent block contracted beds	Develop 32 block beds to develop equal provision in both the north and south of the county	June 2021	Head of integrated commissioning	This service offer is currently under review by the commissioning team
	Staying Close	Put in place the support for those moving home when they reach 18	Impact and Outcomes review to be completed September 2021	Director for Children's Social Care	We are currently undertaking a pilot of 3 young people to complete this work
Fostering recruitment and retention	Our offer to carers	Review the journey of all foster carers recruited over the last 3 years to assess whether any changes/improvements can be made to our offer to foster carers	May 21	Head of Children's Care Services	On track.
	Fostering support and training	Increase support and training for carers so that they will want to carry on working for us	June 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	During the pandemic all of our training has been provided virtually, as we move out of the restrictions, we will assess whether this continues to be the case or whether we will return to a mixture of virtual and classroom training.
	Increase local engagement	Raise awareness of fostering with Buckinghamshire. Support the fostering friendly scheme and encourage other businesses to become fostering friendly employers	Comms plan review to be completed by May 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	We continue to work with local businesses to engage them to support fostering. We have attended the Buckinghamshire Supplier Event to raise awareness of what we do as a fostering team and will also attend the next one of these. As a result of this one of our suppliers has registered as fostering friendly.
Commissioning services from others	Commissioning business intelligence	Use business intelligence to drive effective commissioning practice including use of a Dynamic Purchasing System or equivalent	Quarterly reviews of the data commencing June 2021	Head of integrated commissioning	. Through our membership of the West London Alliance, we have access to the 'Care Place' Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle. This helps us to make sure we have access to the most placements and that we are paying a fair price for each placement. In parallel we are also working closely with providers to help them to understand our needs and help them develop their offer to be sustainable.
	Specialist residential provision	Work with SEN to deliver specialist residential provision for looked after children with a high level of needs	SEN recruitment of specialist commissioner for residential schools and day schools July 2021	Head of Service for SEN	Review of joint working currently being undertaken between SEN and social care to ensure that we have clear remits, protocols, and procedures in place.

Residential care	Placement reviews	Review all out of county placements at least every six months and where it is safe and appropriate to do so, we consider alternative placement arrangements.	Every 6 months	Head of Children's Care Services	Every placement is reviewed through the weekly resource panel on a 6-monthly basis. This ensures we have regular oversight of all placements. As mentioned about the proportion of placements with external providers has reduced significantly in the past year which has meant we have been able to keep more young people within the county.
	In-house provision	Increase in house residential provision by opening four additional homes	June 2021	Head of Children's Care Services	Our fourth Buckinghamshire County Council home for looked after children is on track to open in May 2021. The project to develop our fifth home is currently under review to ensure that this is the best use of resources.
	Welfare bed	Develop a home with a welfare bed to reduce our dependence on external emergency placements	Complete	Head of Children's Care Services	Completed – Our third home has one welfare bed which can be used to place children for a short period of time ahead of them moving into a longer-term placement.
	Therapeutic support for homes	Review our therapeutic support to allow us to increase support to those children placed in-house	March 2022	Head of Children's Care Services	Complete - Working in partnership with CAMHS we have developed specialist support for our homes including access to a clinical psychologist and support with placement matching. Contract to be reviewed in March 2022
	Special Educational Needs	Work more closely in partnership to support those with special educational needs or disabilities	Ongoing	Director for Children's Social Care	SEND improvement project is working to ensure a joined-up approach to service delivery

