



**Sufficiency Strategy**  
**Children in Care**  
**2021 – 2024**

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Luton Councils' Childrens Sufficiency Strategy 2021 - 2024 is written on behalf of Lutons' Corporate Parenting Board and is underpinned by our Corporate Parenting Strategy. This strategy replaces the previous Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2018 – 2021.
- 1.2 The Childrens Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021 - 2024 sets out the strategic aims and objectives for children and young people in care and those on the edge of care, and links to the Fostering Services Improvement Plan 2020 - 2021 and Childrens Improvement Plan 2020 – 2024.
- 1.3 The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy defines our vision, priorities and work streams to support children and young people in care and those on the edge of care, and outlines key pieces of work we are doing to ensure our children and young people:
  - ✓ have the best possible chances in life;
  - ✓ experience safe, positive parenting;
  - ✓ are given every opportunity to achieve their potential.
- 1.4 Our Pledge to children looked after underpins our priorities to children and young people in care and reflects our commitment to ensure children and young people who are looked after have a positive care experience. Our pledges were developed in consultation with young people via the Young People's Panel and facilitated by the Youth Participation Officer.
- 1.5 This Strategy sets out how we will meet the sufficiency duty as described in Section 22G of Children Act 1989 to ensure that we as a local authority and corporate parent:
  - ✓ Have sufficient, appropriate and suitable accommodation to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in Luton
  - ✓ Have a sufficient and diverse range of service providers within the local area able to meet the varying needs of children and young people
  - ✓ Support and maintain a range of services that meet the needs of children in care including those on the edge of care who, without support, might be accommodated.
  - ✓ Support the market to deliver appropriate placements within the Local Authority area.

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- ✓ Have the appropriate mechanisms in place for the commissioning of appropriate placements and additional support outside of the local area, where the child's needs require this.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 This strategy describes how we propose to build on existing provision so that children and young people who are accommodated or on the edge of care are assured of the highest quality, child and family centered, personalised and responsive services as and when they need them.
- 2.2 The aim of any intervention is to achieve stability, improve parenting and family functioning in a way that keeps each child safe and allows the child to develop. Strengthening families and improving relationships enables children and young people to remain living within the family home safely and sustainably.
- 2.3 Through our family safeguarding model we adopt a whole family approach; identifying and addressing the root causes that are impacting on family functioning in order to build safer, stronger family units and prevent further escalation and referral to care proceedings.
- 2.4 We strive to ensure there is a continuum of services to address the various and complex needs of children and families so families are supported to care for their own children, preventing unnecessary entry into care or repeat admissions.

Examples of our services include:

- Family Partnership Service
- Edge of Care Services
- Wellbeing Service
- CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Parenting Offer
- Domestic Abuse Services
- VERU (Violence & Exploitations Reduction Unit)
- FDAC (Family Drug & Alcohol Court)
- SEND Services
- SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs Advice and Support Services)

More information about our services can be found in Section 15 below.

- 2.5 Wherever possible placing a child in care should be the last option after all prevention and intervention, universal, targeted and commissioned services have been exhausted.

### **3. Background and Legislative Context**

3.1 Section 1 of the CSWA 2017 establishes a set of principles aimed at bringing the focus back to the looked after child and reminds us as a local authority what it means to be a “corporate parent”; these principles apply to the whole local authority not just children’s services.

3.2 Section 1(1) of the CWSA 2017 provides that we, as a local authority, must have regard to the need to:

- Act in the child’s best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being.
- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- Take into account their views and wishes and feelings.
- Help children and young people to gain access to and make the best use of services provided by us and our relevant partners.
- Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people
- Ensure children and young people are safe, and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- Prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

### **4. Our Vision for Childrens Care Services**

The overarching aim for children looked after in our Corporate Parenting Strategy is:

*“To ensure that Luton’s children and young people are safeguarded and the right children come into care, at the right time and are placed in the right placement with support services to meet their assessed needs.”*

The overarching aim of our Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy is:

*‘Providing the right support and accommodation at the right time and investing in our children’s future’*

#### **4.1 Participation and Engagement:**

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Listening to the voice of stakeholders is essential to understanding what type of placements are required to be commissioned locally that meet needs, and to develop the market in response. An example of our participation and engagement approach is our Young Commissioners; in January 2019, NHSE Takeover Challenge funding was secured by Luton Council and Luton CCG to develop young people from the Children in Care Council and ex care leavers to become Young Commissioners. Supported by the Young People's Participation Officer, Young Commissioners have worked with Children's Commissioners to ensure the voice of the child/young person is reflected in our service specifications, commissioning intentions and strategic plans.

- 4.2 Through engagement workshops, Young Commissioners expressed a need for 16+ Semi Independent Accommodation Services to create a nurturing homely environment with
- Better Transition to adulthood
  - Good Accommodation
  - Good staff
- 4.3 Where services impact upon young people in care in a positive way and enable them to:
- thrive for life
  - have good mental health
  - pass skills onto others
  - have positivity towards themselves
  - have positivity towards the community
  - teach others how to get it right
- 4.4 Young Commissioners participated in the development the 16+ Service Specification and KPI's and the evaluation of the tender bids. Young Commissioners also participated in the evaluation of the Pan Bedfordshire tender for external fostering services.
- 4.5 Through our Pan Bedfordshire Provider Forums Young Commissioners worked with 16+ semi independent providers and Commissioners to drive up the quality of local provision.

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- 4.6 With the support of Childrens Commissioners and the Participation Officer, Young Commissioners have attended quality assurance visits of local 16+ provision. Using the 'Other Arrangements' framework, Young Commissioners reviewed documents, spoke to young people and staff on site and provided feedback on the suitability of the accommodation, making recommendations for improvements where appropriate.
- 4.7 Going forward there are plans to expand the Young Commissioners group to include children/young people who are not care experienced.
- 4.8 To drive and deliver our vision we ensure:
- ✓ We work collaboratively with families and our partners to support and enable children and young people to be cared for within their own families, wherever possible.
  - ✓ All children and families benefit from integrated and coordinated services enabling full participation in universal and mainstream services in their local communities.
  - ✓ Through robust assessment, planning and case review, we ensure that we place children and young people in care when it is the only way of ensuring their safety, protection and development.
  - ✓ Where children cannot be cared for by their birth parents we will first seek to provide placements within the extended family or friends network, where this is not possible we will seek other arrangements
  - ✓ Where we cannot place a child within a family setting, we will always maximise the use of internal fostering resources first before using external fostering resources
  - ✓ Where children cannot return home, we aim to secure legal and emotional permanence, preferably through adoption, Special Guardianship, Family Arrangement Orders, or where this is not possible, Long Term Foster Care.
  - ✓ We will avoid using residential care except when evidence shows it is the best way of providing the support needed to meet a child's complex therapeutic and educational needs.
  - ✓ The needs of young people leaving care and those who have left care will be assessed to receive the appropriate level of support and advice that enables a smooth transition to adulthood. This includes 'staying put' with their foster carer, access to suitable, high quality housing and opportunities to engage in education, employment and training.

## **5.0 Needs Analysis – current and future**

### **5.1 Why Children Come into Care:**

- Safeguarding: where a child or young person is at immediate risk of or is being caused harm the first option is to remove the child from the source of harm.
- Non-safeguarding: placing a child in care should be the last option after all prevention and early intervention and universal, targeted and commissioned services have been exhausted.

5.2 One of the key strategic goals of this strategy is for better data around the needs of children who require accommodation or edge of care services to inform evidence based decision making and commissioning at a local level.

5.3 In this strategy, we have attempted to establish the current need and to predict future need for accommodation and provider services. To assist us in identifying trends and patterns to inform future practice we will analyse reasons why our children enter care and the circumstances behind it, with a particular focus on older children/young people.

### **5.4 Luton Population**

Luton is a densely populated local authority in Bedfordshire with an area of 4336 hectares. Following several years of a fall in population, ONS mid-year data (2020 mid-year population estimate, ONS) shows Luton's population increased by 400 between 2019 and 2020 to 213,500. The population increase has been driven by a decrease in migration out of Luton to other parts of the UK. The latest population estimate translates into a population density of 49 persons per hectare; this figure is greater than many London Boroughs.

5.4.1 Luton has a younger population than the national average and the age structure differs from that of the population as a whole. The under 16 age group account for 24 per cent of the Luton population compared with 19 per cent nationally. (Source: 2020 Mid-year Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics).

5.4.2 The 2020 mid-year population estimate for 0-17 year olds is 57,500. The proportion of 0-17 year olds is 27% and accounts for more than a quarter of the total population in Luton, compared to 21.1% nationally.



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5.4.3 The population of children and young people is increasing and becoming more diverse; at the time of the 2011 census, the largest minority ethnic population was Asian/ Asian British (40%), however more recent patterns of migration from Europe has seen a rise in people from Poland and Romania. There are more than 150 languages and dialects spoken within our 'World Town'.

5.4.4 Luton is ranked as the 70th (out of 317) most deprived local authority. Four areas in Luton fall within the top 10 per cent of most deprived areas in England - two in Farley and one each in South and Northwell wards. Source: 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, MHCLG.

### 5.5 Population Projections

The population of Luton is projected to rise by 18.9% from 2011 to 2041 (Source: Luton Council using POPGROUP). Figure 1 shows the projected year on year growth for different age groups. The ONS projections look at birth, death and local migration rates but do not take into account local policies such as new housing developments. Therefore, Luton Council publishes its' own local population estimates and forecasts, which also include assumptions based on housing completions and recommended house builds.

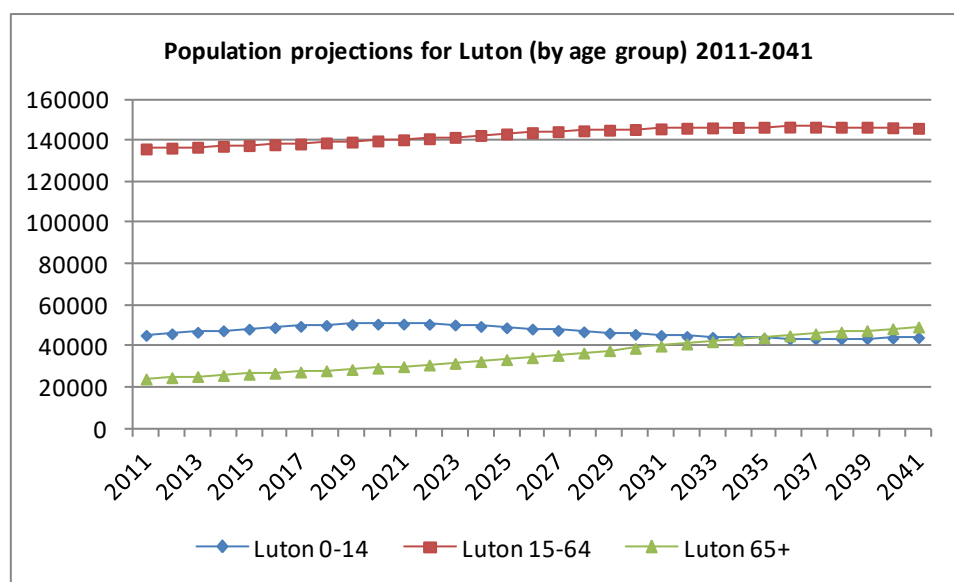


Figure 1: Population projections for Luton (by age group) 2011-2041

5.5.1 Luton's population is predicted to increase every year up to 2041. The data also indicates that recent trends in increases in very young children (under 5) are set to reverse. The 5-15 year old age group is projected to rise 23.2% from 2011 to 2024.

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The 16-19 year olds are projected to decrease up to 2021 but then increase by 24.61% to 2028 as shown in Figure 2. These results are based on trends prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic the birth rate in Luton had begun to fall and recent births data indicates that this trend has continued since lockdown. If this trend continues then the young population may not increase as much as previous trends suggested. Luton Council's Business Intelligence team are continuing to research this.

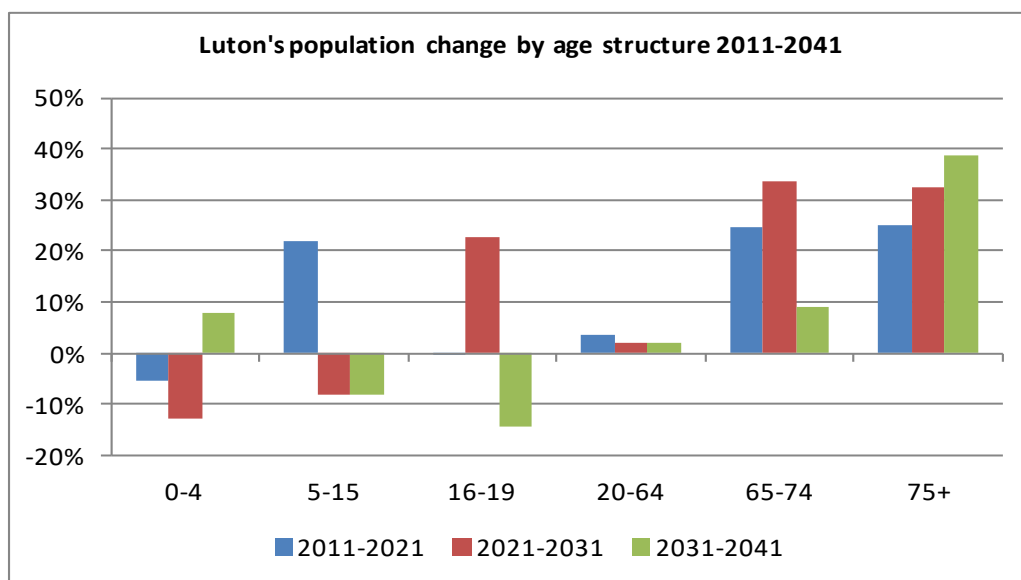


Figure 2 – Population change by age 2011 -2041. Source: Luton Council using POPGROUP

### 5.5.2 Ethnic group information

Ethnic group estimates from ONS for 2011 show Luton's younger population (0-15) to be very different from national and east of England estimates. In England as a whole, 73.9% of children aged 0-15 are White British; in Luton 31% of children are estimated to be White British. The next largest proportion of children is the Pakistani group followed by Bangladeshi and Black African groups (see Figure 3 below). Data from the 2021 Census will not be published until 2022 but local evidence from administrative data indicate that the proportion of the population who are not white British has increased.

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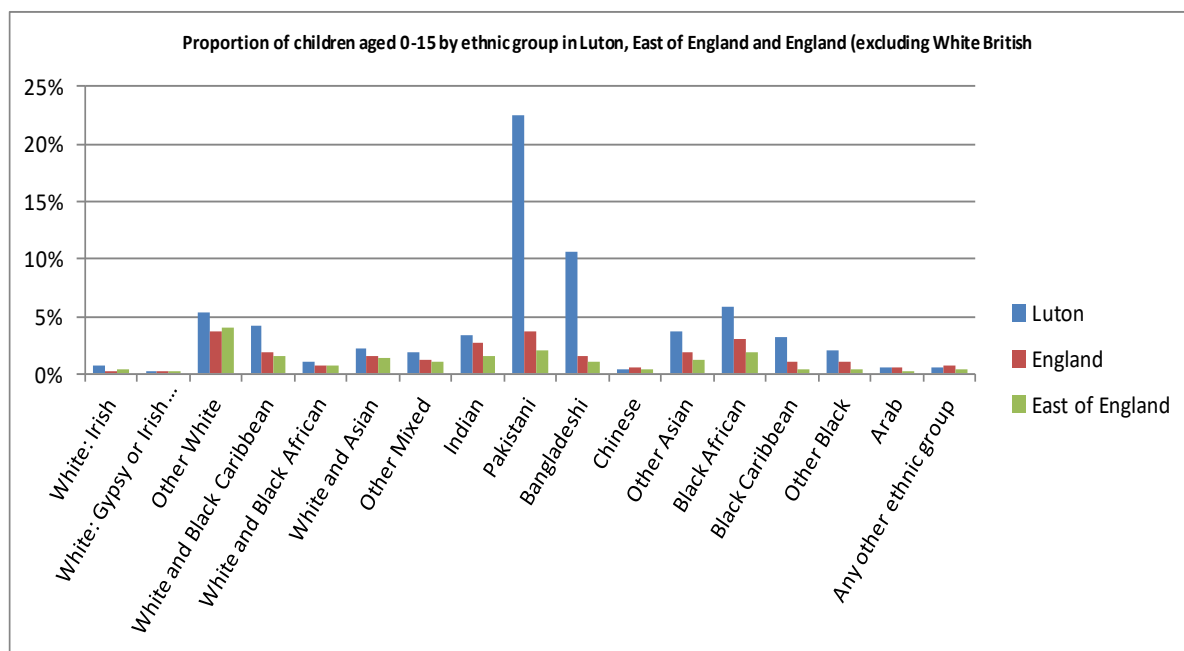


Figure 3 – Population by ethnicity (Source: ONS 2011 Census)

5.5.3 To address this need, Luton Council in partnership with Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Group (BLMK CCG) has commissioned an Interpreter and Translation Service. Services provided are gender, culturally and healthcare specific with an understanding and awareness of cultural, political, forensic and psychiatric sensibilities. This includes an understanding of the client group, as well as the cultures that they identify themselves with.

Interpreter and Translation services are available in the following formats:

- Telephone interpreting (2/3/multiway call)
- Virtual Remote Interpreting, Video Conferencing (2/3/multiway call)
- Professional Face to Face interpreting for all required languages and dialects most commonly found across Luton.
- Quality Translations – covering all languages and media sources used in Luton
- British Sign Language (BSL)
- Deaf Telephone
- Braille
- Touch Sign
- Makaton Proficiency

Interpreting and Translation service requirements specific to children looked after include:

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- Supervised contact
- Court work
- Fostering and Adoption preparation groups

Services are available for people with:

- Challenging Behaviours
- Autism
- Learning disabilities
- Mental Health
- Substance/Alcohol abuse issues
- Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- Homeless
- Offenders and Ex-Offenders

### **6.0 Children in Care Profile Luton Population Profile and National Comparison**

6.1 The number of children and young people looked after by Luton Council has varied year on year over a five year period, however since a peak in March 2019 of 406 children, Luton has reduced to 373 children at March 2021.

Luton is contradictory of national trend as published DfE performance for year ending 31 March 2020 states that nationally there has been a 2% increase in the numbers of children in care.

Furthermore, Luton's current rate per 10,000 population of 64.9 has reduced and improved and is now below the England average rate of 67.0 (increased from 65.0 last year) and statistical neighbours rate of 76.9.

6.1.1 The demographical profile of 373 children looked after as at 31 March 2021 is:

- 0-9 years was 31.6% at March 2021 an overall increase of 2.4% when compared to 29.2% in the previous year March 2020
- 44% are female (164) and 56% are male (209) – reflecting a 3.2% increase in females in care this year from last (40.8%)
- There are 25 Unaccompanied asylum seeking children which is below our quota of 38 children set by the government, and lower than the 36 children in the previous year (31 March 2020)

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6.1.2 Deeper analysis presents a shift in the age profile for children looked after as at 31 March 2021 compared to 31 March 2020. There is a move towards younger children aged 9 years and lower being in care, and reduction in older children:

- A lower proportion of children under 1 in care – 4.6% 2021, 4.7% 2020, 5% nationally
- An increase proportion of children aged 1-4 years demonstrating we are slowly moving towards the national profile of 14% with 11.5% in 2021 compared to 10.3% in 2020
- Similarly there has been an increase in children in care aged 5-10 years – 15.5% in 2021 compared to 14.2% in 2020 and 18% nationally
- There has been a slight decrease in children in care aged 10-15 years with 40.8% in 2021 compared to 41.3% in 2020, however, Luton remains above national percentage of 39%
- Children in care aged 16 years and over has reduced by almost 2% with 27.6% in 2021 compared to 29.5% 2020; Luton remains above national position of 24%
- Gender profile of children looked after at 31 March 2021 shows an increase in females: 44% female, 56% male, compared to that at 31 March 2020: 40.8% female, 59.2% male. Luton is exactly comparative to the gender profile nationally reported for year ending 31 March 2020

6.1.3 There are 46 children looked after at 31 March 2021 who identify as disabled, with 33 (8.8%) allocated to the Children with Disabilities Team. Children with disabilities account for 12.3% of our children looked after population (373).

6.1.4 There are 18 children with a disability placed with foster carers. Two thirds (66.7%) are in IFA placements (12 out of 18 children)

6.1.5 30.4% (14) of the 46 disabled children looked after at 31 March 2021 were placed in children's homes and residential schools, with 1 child residing independently, 1 child in NHS Trust placement and remaining 65% (30) residing with foster carers. Age ranges for the 14 disabled children placed in children's homes are: youngest of 10 years to 17 years – with majority 17 years.

These type of placements have a high cost impact, are resource straining and can potentially result in long term placements situated at a distance from the child's home address. They are however deemed necessary as they meet the complex disability needs of the child – in particular tripartite funding across education, health and social care.

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6.1.5 There is a need to develop local provision including residential and in-house foster care resources to support long term fostering for children and young people with complex needs (including for the provision of short breaks) to avoid over reliance on independent fostering provision and residential, some of which are in excess of 20 miles radius from Luton.

### 7.0 Accommodation/Deaccommodation Profile

7.1 There has been an overall trend that more children leave care than enter in a year, however the gap is now narrowing and a reduction can be seen in children coming into care to date. See Figure 5 below.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/2021
Becoming looked after in year	184	200	185	136	130
Ceasing to be looked after in year	198	191	170	159	144

Figure 5 – Children Becoming Looked After/Leaving Care

7.1.1. There has been an overall 35% reduction in children becoming looked after when compared to 200 children in 2017/18. The reduction is less noticeable when compared to last year with 130 children in 2020/21 and 136 children in 2019/20

7.1.2 The national picture for children starting to be looked after during 2019/20 has decreased to 30,970 from 31,770 – down 3%. Luton is following this trend with 35% reduction over a 4 year period, and in most recent year of 2019/20 - 2020/21 has seen a 4.4% reduction.

7.1.3 The age profile of Luton's children coming into care is different to that found nationally.

- Nationally 19% of children starting care are aged under 1 years, with Luton lower at 17.7%
- Children aged between 1 and 4 years nationally is 17%, with Luton over 3% lower at 13.8%
- The 5 to 9 years age group coming into care nationally is 16%, Luton is higher at 19.2%
- 10 to 15 years nationally is 27%. Luton is lower at 25.4%
- Young people aged 16 and over nationally is 20%. Luton is almost 4% higher at 23.8%
- Nationally, the gender profile is 43% female and 57% males, in Luton it is 44.6% female and 55.4% male

### 8.0 Foster care population

8.1 As at 31 March 2021, 74.3% (277) of our children looked after are placed in foster care, of which:

- 9.4% are in family & friends placements (35),
- 24.7% are placed with in-house foster carers (92)
- 40.2% in IFA placements (150).

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8.1.1 Figure 6 below provides further breakdown over a 5 year comparison period, in particular in terms of in-house foster care provision to that of agency provision:

Numbers and Percentages at 31 March						Travel
Placement type	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	
Family & friends	33 (9.1%)	49 (12.9%)	38 (9.4%)	35 (9.0%)	35 (9.4%)	↑
In-house fostering	114 (31.3%)	98 (25.7%)	81 (20.0%)	83 (21.4%)	92 (24.7%)	↑
IFA fostering	121 (33.2%)	134 (35.2%)	175 (43.1%)	170 (43.9%)	150 (40.2%)	↓
<b>Total</b>	<b>268/364</b>	<b>281/381</b>	<b>294/406</b>	<b>288/387</b>	<b>277/373</b>	↓
<b>% of Looked After population</b>	<b>73.6%</b>	<b>73.8%</b>	<b>72.4%</b>	<b>74.4%</b>	<b>74.3%</b>	↓

Figure 6 – 5 year Fostering population data

8.1.2 The data within Figure 6 above demonstrates three significant points over a five year period:

- The percentage of children placed in foster care placements as a proportion of all children looked after has remained stable around ranging from a low of 72.4% to highest of 74.4%
- Children being placed with family and friends was only high for 2017/18 at 49, but all remaining years are comparative at 35 children
- Performance has recognisably improved in all aspects but particularly for in-house fostering placements which have increased by 3.3%, resulting in a decrease in agency fostering placements of 3.7% as at 31 March 21.

## 9.0 Gender, Age and Ethnicity Profile

9.1 The gender split of the 277 children placed in foster care at 31 March 2021, showed 43% are female (119) and 57% are male (158). This is not much different than that of the children looked after population gender makeup.

9.1.1 Although there is a 14% gender gap, this increases further to 16.6% when comparing those placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) with 35.4% female and 52% male.

9.1.2 Age breakdown of those in all foster care placements are:

- 45.7% aged from 10-15 years,
- 18.8% aged 16 and over,
- 18.4% aged 5-9 years
- 14.1% aged 0-4 years.

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9.1.3 In comparison, IFA placements paint a different age picture with adolescents accounting for the majority with an increase of 8.3%

- 54% aged 10-15 years
- 21.3% aged 5-9 years
- 16.7% aged 16 years and over
- 8.0% aged 0-4 years

9.1.4 Just over half (51.6%) of all fostered children as at 31 March 2021 are of White ethnicity, with 19.1% from mixed background, 14.4% Asian, 13% Black and a small minority of 1.8% from any other backgrounds.

IFA ethnicity is less diverse, as the White population gap widens to 58.7%, mixed ethnicity background decreases to 15.3%, followed by Black ethnicity at 12.7% and Asian 11.3%.

9.1.5 10 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are in foster care placements, which constitutes 3.6% of all foster care placement children. These 10 children are equally split between in-house and IFA placements.

### **10.0 Placement Location & Distance**

10.1 As at 31 March 2021 there was a noticeable change in the number of children in foster care placements outside of the Luton area, reducing from 55.3% (163) at 31 March 2020 to 52.0% (144) at 31 March 2021.

10.2 In terms of distance for the 277 children in foster care placements, 30% are placed at a distance of greater than 20 miles from their home (83). 7 of these placements are with in-house foster carers, whilst the remaining 76 are IFA placements.

### **11.0 Legal Status National and Local Picture:**

11.1 The profile of legal status of children looked after at the end of the statistical period has slightly changed from last year. Children placed on interim care orders has increased by 3.4% from that reported previous year ending 31 March 2020. Luton's combined care orders result is 74.5%, which is higher than 70.2% year before but remains lower than national position of 77%.

11.2 There has been a distinct five percentage point reduction of children with a legal status of voluntary agreements under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989: 2019/20 – 21%, 2020/21 – 16%, which is more in line with national performance at 17%.

11.3 A notable positive is legal status of placement order. Luton presents 2.8% higher than that reported nationally of 6%. This could lead to an assumption that Luton will achieve improved adoption permanency for our children in the upcoming year 2021/22.



## 12.0 Youth Justice

All local authorities have a legal duty under Section 21 of the Children Act 1989 to provide accommodation for all children and young people remanded to local authority accommodation. These young people automatically have Children Looked After status.

12.1.1 Luton is typically characterised as an area of high use of custody amongst its youth offending population both in terms of remands into custody and custodial sentences. Between 2017 and 2019, Luton averaged 1.5 custodial orders per month, with a custodial rate that nearly trebled the national average. Therefore it is significant that Luton has achieved its lowest level of custodial orders in 2020/21 versus an annual reporting period, this represents a further 71% reduction on 2019/20 throughput. Luton recorded just 2 custodial orders, producing a rate per thousand population of 0.09. During the previous 3 year period Luton averaged 14 custodial orders per annual period peaking at 20 in the 2018/19 annual period.

12.1.2 Evidence shows young offenders are more likely:

- to have been excluded from school on at least one occasion,
- to use cannabis
- to have domestic violence and child abuse within their family background
- to be reported missing on multiple occasions between the ages 0-19 years
- to have speech language and communication difficulties
- to have special educational needs
- to be NEET (Not in education, employment or training)
- Two thirds of exclusions related to physical violence.
- Violent young offenders aged 13-15 more likely to target their friends and figures of authority

12.1.3 Age analysis identifies young people aged 14/15 with highest levels of reoffending versus each service domain. As these young people approach 17 years old and have a greater likelihood of entrenchment as they transition to adulthood, this could impact in terms of custody.

12.1.4 Vulnerabilities and Needs gathered from Asset+ scrutiny initially indicates the three factors of Significant Relationships (72%), Education Training and Employment (70%) and Substance Misuse (67%) are the most prevalent factors amongst those young people that go onto reoffend. Familial issues and the prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences feature strongly, 6 out of every 10 young people had significant concerns regarding Parental Ability and Skills (51%) had Care History concerns whether in the past or current and current environmental issues such as Accommodation (51%) and Neighbourhood tensions (54%).

12.1.5 When examining the differences between those that reoffended versus those desisting offending behaviour the factors concerning Neighbourhood environment and Offending by Family Members appear more prominently as the significant points of

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difference, whilst SEND features highly between the two YOS groupings along with those already listed above.

### **12.2 Bail and Remand**

12.2.1 In line with performance across the national indicators, Luton recorded its lowest level of new custodial remands managing just 3 secure remands during the span of the 2020/21 financial year. Luton has recorded an 60% annual decline in Bed nights and further 50% reduction compared to 2019/20 new episodes.

12.2.2 There is also a demand for PACE beds and with the remit of Police Custody Suites changing Luton has commissioned capacity through its Pan Bedfordshire Accredited Providers contract with a dedicated Youth Justice Lot to ensure capacity of PACE beds to meet the overnight requirements of this cohort of young people.

12.2.3 We will continue to monitor demand for these services closely. Further data is being collected nationally through the central placement portal for secure beds and with our regional partners which will inform our commissioning arrangements.

### **13.0 Placements Profile**

13.1 Placements have differed slightly in some categories. The main noticeable decline relates to male children placed in independent living, a fall of 1.3% from 7.2% in 2020 (28) to 5.9% in year ending March 2021 (22). This has resulted in a slight growth of females placed in independent living to 3.5% (13) from 2.8% (11) in previous year.

13.2 Children placed in children's homes has also seen a change towards equal gender distribution – 3.2% at 31 March 2021, compared to previous year 31 March 2020 were there were more males at 4.1% compared to females at 2.6%.

13.3 The highest change in numbers relates to other foster care provisions, with 242 children compared to 253 children year before, but the pie chart demonstrates that this change is still an equivalent proportion when calculated against the whole cohort.

13.4 There is a slight change in the number of young people placed in independent living, with 35 placed in 2021 compared to 39 in 2020.

### **14.0 Provision and Market Analysis**

In Luton, there is a broad range of provision available across the town provided by both the local authority and private sector. We continue to work with providers alongside our regional partners to expand what is available to meet the diverse needs of children in our care.

#### **14.1 Internal Fostering Service**

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14.1.1 The current provision for internal fostering service has 63 general fostering households, 2 contract care households and 1 pace carer household as at July 2021. This is broken down to 109 General Carers, 2 Contract Carers and 1 Pace Carer.

14.1.2 The proportion of in house placements versus external agency placements is currently 34% and 40% respectively. This is an increase on previous years 2020 & 2019. It is our intention to move to a 60/40 model by increasing the capacity of our in house service.

Our intention is to grow capacity through a 3 year plan to recruit sufficient foster carers to make net gains in 2022 of 2 new beds per month (1 household), rising to 4 (2 household) from September 2023 and to 8 (4 household) from September 2024

14.1.3 There is a specific focus on recruiting carers who are able to manage a variety of needs and age bands. As part of our Fostering Improvement Plan, we have reviewed and improved our offer to in house foster carers, with a tiered progression scheme and revised rates to put Luton on a competitive level and comparable with neighbouring authorities and independent fostering agencies.

14.1.3 The improved offer to foster carers includes provision of therapeutic support via our Educational Psychology Service. Therapeutic support is intended to provide our foster carers with psychological support to enable them to continue to provide good parenting to the children they look after and enhancing their skills in nurturing and therapeutic parenting. Further, support is intended to improve placement stability and avoid placement breakdown.

### **14.2 External Fostering Services**

We commission our independent fostering services jointly with Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils under a Pan Bedfordshire arrangement. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020, Central Bedfordshire Council published the IFA tender and contract notice on behalf of all 3 authorities and following evaluation and moderation, twenty seven (27) providers entered into a 4 year contract arrangement on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

There are 5 Lots within the contract intended to provide sufficiency to the three councils:

- Standard placements
- Enhanced placements
- Step Across from Residential care (See Residential Childrens Homes Section below)
- Parent and Child
- Youth Justice (including PACE [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984] and Remand to Local Authority accommodation [RLAA])

A summary of each Lot can be found in the sections below.

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14.2.1 Enhanced placements are required when a Child or Young Person demonstrates some, or all of the following:

- has consistent and variable challenging and sometimes violent behaviours
- is not or may not be attending and positively engaging with an educational placement full time
- is or has been experiencing health issues or behavioural disorders or has experienced trauma, including sexualised behaviours
- has specific needs to be kept safe and feel that they are safe. These specific needs may include (but not be exclusive of) sexual or criminal exploitation, involvement in criminal or dangerous risk-taking behaviours or,
- has a history of and demonstrates difficulties in making and maintaining relationships both with peers and adults.

14.2.2 Youth Justice – placements for a child/young person who requires safe family accommodation with Foster Carers who are confident and experienced in working in partnership with youth offending teams and managing Youth Justice requirements (e.g. tags/curfews). These type of placements are required when a Young Person is being discharged from Police custody into Local Authority care under Section 38 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE). Where children and young people under the age of 18 are denied police bail (i.e. held for court), we are required to provide accommodation under section 38 (6) of PACE (commonly referred to as a PACE Bed). PACE transfers take place in order to limit the amount of time children and young people are required to spend in police custody.

14.2.3 Remand to local authority accommodation (RLAA) – This type of placement means the local authority is responsible for providing the most suitable accommodation for a child once the court makes the direction. This can be living at home, with a relative, in foster care or in a children's home. Children not granted bail are remanded to local authority accommodation (RLAA) as conditions may not be met to justify remanding the child to youth detention accommodation.

14.2.4 Parent and Child – we have seen an increase in the number of court ordered parent and child placements. It is anticipated this new Lot within the IFA contract will meet demand for these places.

### **14.3 Residential Childrens Home Services**

We are aware of a cohort of young people who remain within residential care based on a lack of suitable fostering placements, rather than from a need for a residential placement. To address this concern, we ensured that in the new IFA contract arrangements we commissioned providers to support children and young people transition from residential to foster care. (See External Fostering Services above).

14.3.1 We currently operate one internal residential childrens home providing short breaks to disabled children, supporting families with their caring responsibilities and preventing the admission of children into care.

14.3.2 There are 15 children with disabilities, (including social, emotional and mental health) in residential placements; six young people are placed within the Luton area and nine are out of borough. Seven are jointly funded by education and social care and only three are tripartite funded between health, social care and education.

#### **14.4 Semi Independent Accommodation and Support Services**

In 2020, following delays due to Covid 19, we commissioned semi - independent services for young people aged 16 + including Care Leavers and unaccompanied asylum seekers on a three year contract with the option to extend for a up to two years.

31 providers were successful in joining our Accredited Provider increasing our capacity by 244% (up from 9). We have the option to open the APL annually to allow more providers the opportunity to join and encourage competition. We are planning to publish at the end of September 2021 with an anticipated contract start date of mid March 2022.

#### **Quality Assurance and Monitoring**

Luton use the 'Other Arrangements' framework to monitor and quality assure providers in the area, information is shared with our Pan Bedfordshire colleagues and has been actively involved in the development of National Standards for 16+ semi-independent (unregulated) provision, working closely with the lead authority, Hertfordshire Council and the DFE to produce a suite of documents for providers.

Provider workshops are planned for October 2021.

### **15.0 Our Services**

#### **15.1 Family Drug & Alcohol Court (FDAC)**

Pan Bedfordshire Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) is a partnership between Luton Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Council's Childrens Services.

FDAC is a collaborative partnership with:

- Office of Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire
- public health services
- Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- The Marks Trust

#### **15.2 Family Partnership Service**

The integrated family partnership service will offer support in two ways either by directly working with a family or family member on a one to one basis, at one of the hubs or within the family home or through group sessions.

It will deliver a range of services including:

- evidence based parenting programmes (such as parenting adolescents, parenting children with disabilities, reducing parental conflict) and parenting assessments

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- domestic violence interventions and support for the whole family
- school readiness support
- substance misuse guidance, advice and support for all family members that require it, through one to one and group sessions
- life story work to support children and young people going through fostering or adoption to gain an understanding of their personal journey, to help them integrate their past, enabling them to make sense of their present and develop a clear sense of identity for their future
- personalised support to young carers and their families
- mental health and self-esteem support for all family members that require it, through one to one and group sessions
- personalised support to prevent teenage homelessness
- support for families with no recourse to public funds including advice, guidance and limited support for people from abroad who are not eligible to receive benefits and are destitute but are 'ordinarily a resident' in Luton
- supervised contact providing advice and guidance to parents to help them build on their parenting skills in a safe environment
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support for children and young people and their families

### **15.0 Financial Analysis**

16. 1.1 Luton's expenditure on placements for children in care has consistently exceeded budget, This overspend is attributable to the complexity of need of some of our children/young people, the continued rise in agency foster care costs and lack of available foster carers nationally.

### **15.1 Total spend and Unit Costs**

- 15.1.1 Luton will renew focus on sourcing and developing in house and local quality provision that not only delivers the best individual outcomes for young people but also provides value for money quality outcomes for us as an authority. A review of children's services by People Too (2018) highlighted the need for more contribution from health for some children's placements. The Joint Commissioning Board comprising Health, Education and Social Care representatives has been established to provide Commissioners and Service Leads with oversight of and input into dual and/or tripartite funding arrangements for children and young people with complex needs.
- 15.1.2 A Section 75 pooled budget arrangement with Luton Clinical Commissioning Group is intended to enable and support an integrated personalised commissioning approach for the benefit of children and young people with complex needs including autistic spectrum disorder conduct disorder, challenging behaviour, disabilities, social emotional and mental health needs and complex health needs.
- 15.1.3 A summary of our expenditure for the last 4 years and predicted expenditure for 2021/2022 (based on Period 3 projections) is shown below. SPARC is no longer reported on separately as it was part of the previous contract arrangements and has not been included as a Lot in the new IFA contract 2020 – 2024.

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Year	Total Number of Children Looked After	Average cost per week	% Variance on previous year	Preferred IFA	Non Preferred IFA	In House FC	SPARC (specialist provision alternative to residential care)	16+	Tripartite Funded Resi	Non Tripartite Funded Resi	Total CLA Costs
2017/18	352	£833	-	£748	£833	£309	£1,369	£597	£2,637	£3,444	£13,840,152
2018/19	352	£981	18%	£776	£1,077	£327	£1,293	£1,008	£3,567	£3,978	£16,580,008
2019/20	368	£976	-1%	£769	£1,090	£373	£1,421	£1,103	£3,141	£3,656	£16,886,737
2020/21	354	£1,001	3%	£927	£954	£412	£2,303	£815	£3,757	£3,809	£16,728,104
2021/22	329	£1,017	2%	£792	£1,181	£394	0	£1,221	£3,745	£4,134	£15,562,226

Figure 10 – Summary of Expenditure

## 15.2 Foster Carer Fees and Allowances

15.2.1 An uplift of the fees and allowances has put Luton at a competitive level with neighbouring boroughs such as Hertfordshire, Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Milton Keynes. This is intended to attract and encourage people in Luton to become foster carers. Equally, the fees will encourage existing foster carers to remain foster carers in Luton.

## 16.0 Implementation and Monitoring Arrangements

16.1 Childrens Services Departmental Management Team (DMT) will be responsible for implementing this strategy. This is a proven and effective structure in improving childrens' services. Childrens Commissioning will be responsible for developing an implementation action plan and will report directly to DMT at their quarterly commissioning meetings and other local and relevant boards as appropriate e.g. Childrens Services Scrutiny Group & Corporate Parenting Board.

16.2 Childrens Commissioning and DMT will be supported by and connected to the Pan Beds Commissioning Group aligned to the Pan Beds Children's Strategic Leaders meeting. The strategy will be reviewed and updated annually.

## 17.0 Next Steps

The Sufficiency Strategy is supported by an Action Plan to monitor and track progress against agreed targets. The 2021 -2024 Action Plan is reviewed quarterly and attached to this document for information.

## 18.0 Corporate Parenting Pledge

Our Pledge to children in care is:

- You have the right to a good home where you feel cared for, safe and happy.
- You have a reliable and trustworthy social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who will listen to you and treat you with respect.
- Your care/LAC reviews will contain things you find important
- Your feelings and opinions are respected and as an individual you are involved in decision making about you.

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- You are informed of your rights and you can complain in confidence if you feel unhappy or unsure about something.
- You are supported with your education and learning.
- You are able to lead a healthy, happy and active life.
- You are encouraged to have hobbies and interests that you enjoy and to try new things.
- You can keep in touch with your family and friends, whenever and wherever possible.
- If you move to a new home you can take your personal things.
- When the time comes, you will be helped with the move into adulthood.
- If you need one, you can have access to an advocate (someone who speaks on your behalf) or an independent visitor.

### Review and Amendment Log

Version No	Type of Change	Date	Description of change
1	Text/data amends and updates from Fostering Service and YOS.	07/06/2021	Text and data provided by Service Director, Service Managers and Performance Team. Inserted 2020/21 SSDA903 performance data. Removal of duplicate info.
2	Text amends	20/07/2021	Minor text amends following DMT feedback. Inclusion of financial data.
3	Text/data amends	15/09/2021	Removed data charts as covered in sufficiency statement
4	Text/data amends	6/01/2021	Removed data charts as covered in sufficiency statement