



children AT THE **heart** OF **all we do**



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

Children in Care and Care Leavers - Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020

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Foreword

Welcome to Bradford Council's Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020 to 2021.

This document sets out our ambitions and plans for our children in care and for young people who have left care in the context of our duty to have sufficient placements to meet their needs. It should be read alongside our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2020 which also considers sufficiency alongside a wider range of duties and plans.

Our vision is that our children will all have the best start in life to be safe, healthy, happy and resilient.

Our aim is to consistently deliver services with care and compassion to strengthen families through a positive working relationship.

Our mission is to always put children at the heart of all we do

As Corporate Parents for over 1300 children Bradford Council has a unique and very special responsibility. Looking after these very diverse and highly vulnerable children and young people is one of the most important things that we do. We want our children and young people to be happy and healthy, both physically and emotionally, to be safe and protected from harm and exploitation, and to be supported to achieve their potential.

We have to be ambitious for our children. Children in care and care-experienced young people face challenges that their peers do not and life is often harder for them as a result of these experiences. All of them have experienced adverse experiences during their early lives and many have experienced trauma. We need to champion their rights and ensure that ourselves and all of our partners understand them and work together to help them to achieve their potential.

The Children Act 1989 requires us to take steps to secure sufficient accommodation for children in our care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in their best interest to be accommodated by us. This is commonly referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'.

The sufficiency duty is therefore a core part of how we will meet our broader duties to ensure that the needs of our children in care are fully assessed, that effective matching takes place and that regular reviews are held to evaluate whether the child's needs are being met and to address any emerging issues.

Securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of children in care is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes. Having the right type of placement in the right place, at the right time, is vital to improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes and a better transition to adulthood.

We need to do more than just ensure that accommodation is 'sufficient' in terms of the number of beds that we have available. We also need to secure a range of different accommodation and carers to meet a wide range of diverse and often very complex needs.

This document sets out how Bradford aims to meet our sufficiency duty in the context of increasing numbers of children entering the care system throughout the UK and national challenges in relation to placement availability. We need to ensure that there are sufficient resources of the right type to meet the diverse needs and circumstances of our children and young people.

Above all we need to provide our children and young people with the best possible placements.

Our strategy sets out what we have done already in relation to placement sufficiency but also acknowledges that we still have much to do. It invites us to work together to achieve our key priorities and to always put the care of our children in care and care leavers at the heart of everything we do.

DCS Mark Douglas and Cllr Adrian Farley

DRAFT 29.12.20

Introduction

Our vision is that all of our children and young people will have the best start in life to be safe, healthy, happy and resilient.

Our aim is to consistently deliver services with care and compassion to strengthen families through a positive working relationship.

Our mission is to always put children at the heart of all we do.

Bradford is a dynamic city with a rich cultural heritage. In terms of population size, we are the fifth largest local authority in England with over half a million people living in the district. We are also a young city, with a higher proportion of children and young people than average for the rest of England and over a quarter of Bradford's people are under eighteen. We are also an ethnically diverse district with more than a quarter of our residents describing themselves as Asian or Asian British.

In common with the rest of England, we have seen a rise in demand for children's social care services and an increase in the number of children in need of help and protection. We too have seen a significant increase in the number of children who need to enter care. Alongside this in September 2018 we were inspected by Ofsted and our services for children in need of help and protection were assessed to be inadequate leading to an overall inadequate rating. All of these factors present significant challenges in the context of increasing demand alongside an improvement process.

This strategy addresses the specific issue of placement sufficiency. It sets out our plans in relation to placement sufficiency for children in care and care leavers under four priority areas:

- developing alternatives to children entering or staying in care, through earlier intervention and at 'the edge of care'
- increasing our understanding of our children's needs in order to be able to match our placement offer to these needs effectively
- improving placement and care planning, to help us ensure that placements meet assessed need and to minimise the number of disrupted placements and unplanned moves
- developing our residential care and fostering offers in order to provide more placement options within the district including having sufficient short-break provision for disabled children.

The strategy links with others designed to promote children's health, safety and welfare. Its success will depend on the energy and vision on colleagues working across the Council and in partner agencies.

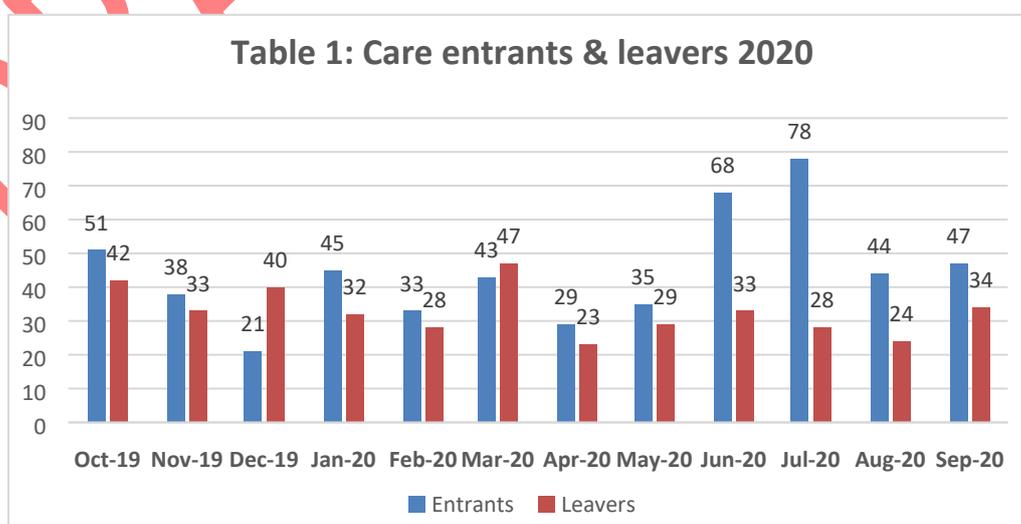
Our Aims

- To listen to and consider the views of children, young people and families and to ensure that their needs are at the centre of our planning, practice and commissioning.
- To ensure that the council and partners continue to support children in their family through partnership with universal, targeted and specialist services in order to reduce the need for children to enter care.
- To ensure that preventative services are of high quality and are available swiftly enough to respond to children's and young people's needs without delay.
- Where children cannot be safely supported within their immediate family, family and friend arrangements will always be explored as a preferred alternative arrangement where this is in the child's best interests. We will reduce barriers to this including the financial barriers.
- To ensure that we continue to work towards there being sufficient provision within Bradford to cater for the needs of our children in care who can safely remain in the district.
- To ensure that children are not placed far from home unless this is clearly the only way to keep them safe.
- To ensure that where externally provided placements do need to be used, and particularly where this provision is not registered with Ofsted, they are subject to good quality assurance incorporating the views of the child and their family about their experiences of the placement.
- To ensure that families with disabled children are able to access suitable short break provision based on a high quality assessment of their needs.
- To ensure that we improve the extent and timeliness of us achieve permanence for children and young people outside the care system and that we reduce or remove barriers to achieving this, including financial barriers.
- To increase the number of in-house foster carers by improved recruitment and retention and to support them to develop their skills and resilience.
- To work more closely with private sector and voluntary sector partners to commission independent fostering, residential and supported accommodation placements. This includes market development activities to identify gaps in the provision available; to shape the market; and, where needed, to work effectively with a wide range of high quality providers to develop a range of provision that meets the diverse needs of children and young people, in particular those who need very specific and/or specialist support to achieve positive outcomes.

Priority 1: Helping children and young people to stay within their families

What we know:

- In the last twelve months 525 children have entered care in Bradford. For some children this was a short period in care however for others it is a medium or long term arrangement. Some will remain in care for the remainder of their childhood.
- In the same period 388 children left care. This was for a variety of reasons. A significant number reached the age of eighteen, however other children left care due to rehabilitation or as a result of permanent arrangements such as adoption or Special Guardianship.
- These figures mean that on average 44 children have entered care in Bradford every month and 32 left care (see Table 1).
- As a result, the total number of children in care has continued to grow and in the last twelve months the overall number has grown by 137.
- This presents enormous challenges in relation to our ability to identify placements.
- It is acknowledged that for the vast majority of children, living with their parents or extended families will give them the best chance in life. We know that for some children who enter care, their outcomes are poorer than for their peers. For this reason, our first priority is to provide the right support at the right time, to help children to safely remain with their parents or if this is not possible, within their extended families, close to their friends, schools and communities.
- Key to this aim is the expansion of the early help offer across Bradford and the need for us to support all practitioners who work with children, young people and families to implement their duty to provide support at an early stage when additional needs are identified.



What we have done so far?

- We have recently developed and launched our Early Help Strategy and Improvement Plan and are working with partner agencies to support them to take on the role of Lead Professional. It is anticipated that this will enable needs to be addressed early with families, and thus avoid escalation into statutory protective services. As a result, we hope to reduce the number of children who need to enter care in the first place.
- In 2017 we adopted the No Wrong Door programme as part of “B Positive Pathways” (BPP). This programme has been funded via the Department of Education’s Innovation Programme. BPP is a large, multi-disciplinary service that provides both residential care, outreach support and therapeutic input to families in crisis where this is a high risk of a child coming into care or where a child has already entered care. Evaluation of this programme identifies that more than 90% of children and young people worked with were able to either remain with, or return to, their families. In the past twelve months alone, the service has worked with 120 young people and just eight have remained in care.
- In addition, our Intensive Family Support and Family Group Conferencing Teams have worked with large numbers of families with the primary aim of preventing escalation of concern and also engaging support from the child’s wider network.
- Our Problem Solving Court Team has worked intensively with families in care proceedings as a means of achieving sufficient change during the proceedings to allow the child to either remain at, or return home at the end of the court process.
- Our commissioned Positive Behaviour Service continues to provide intensive support to families with children aged 8 to 14 who have learning disability and who display challenging behaviour. The service continues to see good outcomes in terms of preventing the need for these children to enter full time care.
- We have introduced stronger mechanisms to track cases that are in the pre-proceedings stage of Public Law Outline (PLO). This process provides families with a final chance to work with us to make changes in order to avoid the need for us to make an application to court. The tracking process is designed to help ensure that agreed tasks are undertaken promptly, to avoid drift which has been a problem for us in the past. In the past twelve months 116 children who have entered pre-proceedings PLO have been able to remain with their families due to the work completed.
- When a child has needed to enter care, we have continued to prioritise the need for them to remain within their extended network if this can be safely achieved. As a result, more than 20% of children who entered care in the last twelve months have been placed with extended family such as grandparents, aunts and uncles or older brothers and sisters.
- We have ensured that our Family and Friends foster carers have had access to the same support as our mainstream foster carers.
- At present more than 40% of all of our children in care are placed in a regulated arrangement with a member of their family and the majority of these family members have been approved as foster carers either temporarily under Regulation 24 (which can last for a maximum of 24

weeks) or permanently following full approval by the Foster Care Panel and Agency Decision Maker.

- Many of these children no longer need the protection of the care system and could easily progress to permanence with their relatives outside of the care system via Special Guardianship. For some families there are barriers to this. These barriers can be financial or related to the support that the carers will receive if they cease to be foster carers. We have strengthened our support offer to Special Guardians via our Special Guardianship Support Team and we are in the process of amending our allowances policy so that there is no financial disadvantage to a carer taking on Special Guardianship. We hope that this will enable an increasing number of children to safely leave care whilst remaining with their families.
- In addition, of the children who left care in the previous twelve months more than 80 were able to return home to their parents or carers.

What do we still need to do?

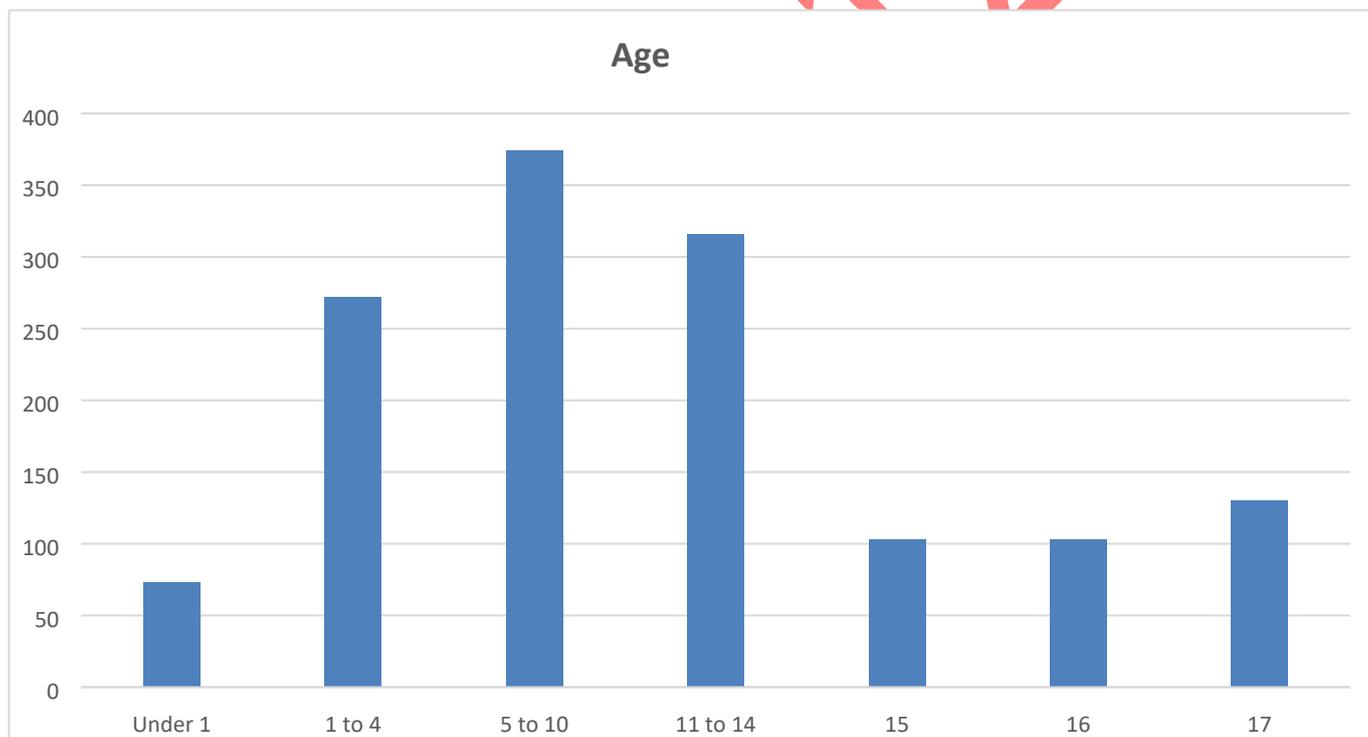
- Our new Early Help Strategy is in its infancy and we need to support our partners to develop the confidence to provide targeted and coordinated early help to families as a means of avoiding escalation into statutory protective services. We need to see a subsequent reduction in the number of families who need to be referred to statutory social care services.
- We are currently planning to strengthen services for families in crisis by expanding our BPP service in order to be able to support more families with an even more diverse range of support.
- We need to do further work on our payments scheme in order to remove the financial barriers that prevent some children moving to permanence with relatives via Special Guardianship. Many of these children do not need to remain in the care system and to do so can result in them standing out from their peers and also being the victims of conscious or unconscious discrimination.
- We are also reviewing our fee payments to Family and Friends foster carers to ensure parity with mainstream foster carers in order to remove the financial barrier to relatives putting themselves forward as substitute carers.

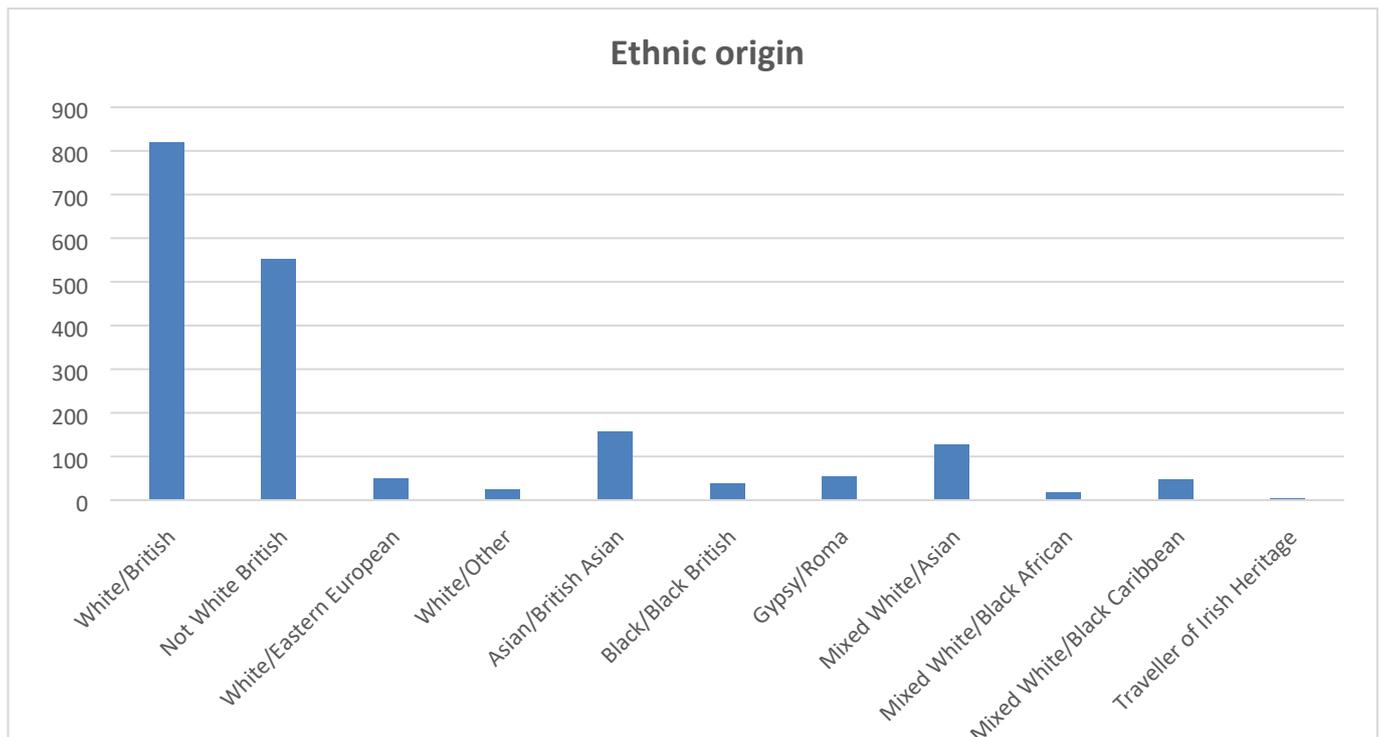
Priority 2: knowing our children and young people's needs

Meeting our sufficiency duty both in terms of the number and the type of placements that we can offer requires us to understand the needs of our current population of children in care but also be able to predict how this will change in the future. By doing so we can help to ensure that not only are we doing everything we can to reduce the need for children to enter care we are also able to provide appropriate placements for those who are not able to safely remain at home.

What we know

- We already know that our children in care and care leavers are a diverse group with diverse and sometimes complex needs.
- The tables below provide some demographic information of our current children in care





- Our children in care reflect our community in their diversity. This is not just about their ethnic origin but also about identity, sexuality, disability and other characteristics. In addition, the majority of our children in care have additional needs arising from their separation from their parents or families, their life experiences and experience of abuse, neglect, exploitation and trauma. These needs change over time. For example, issues such as gender identity or gang-related exploitation are not new, but greater awareness and improved assessment means that these factors are now identified more often in the lives of children in care. This means our carers must be able to learn and adapt in order to be able to respond appropriately.
- A group as dynamic and diverse as this requires us to have a diverse range of services and placements. Many of our children require specialist skills and high levels of care and resilience from substitute carers.
- In order to effectively meet these needs our carers both in foster homes and children's homes need to have different skills and knowledge and they also need to reflect the communities that we work with in terms of social background, faith and ethnic origin.
- Our children must be at the heart of everything we do. This includes supporting them to have an active voice in decisions made about their lives and also about the services that we deliver. All decisions made about the way in which we run our service should be informed by the views of our children.

What have we done?

- We have a Children in Care Council that meets regularly although the pandemic has had an impact on this.
- We have now established a Care Leavers Council and the role of Care Leavers Ambassador.

- We have now started a Participation and Voice Themed Group which includes representation from all areas of our service and which aims to share good practice and support the development of a Participation Strategy and Action Plan. Our placement finding teams and commissioners are part of this new group in order to support the inclusion of the child's voice in these activities.
- Young people have continued to be part of the selection process for foster carers and some staff groups.
- Within our children's homes, children's meetings are held frequently and young people have the opportunity to have influence over the way that the homes operate.
- We commission National Youth Advisory Service to provide advocacy support to help children contribute to Child Protection Conferences and Child in Care Reviews. As a result, the extent to which children and young people participate in these meetings has increased. For example, in the past 6 months we have held over 1800 statutory reviews and the child or young person's views were only not shared in eleven.
- We have continued to offer children the chance to use Viewpoint but we are currently considering other mechanisms to enable children and young people to engage and share their views online.

What do we still need to?

- We need to expand the role and influence of the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Council so that these become highly influential bodies that are listened to when we are considering changes to how we deliver our services.
- We need to develop mechanisms to ensure that we capture feedback from children and young people about their experience of the placements that we have provided them with, so that we can use this information, together with what we ourselves know about their needs, when we are developing our in-house services and when we are commissioning providers from the private sector.
- We need to work with young people to understand their views on the need for carers from a similar social background, faith and ethnic origin. We need to work with young people to identify whether there is a need to target staff recruitment activities in order to ensure our foster carers and residential staff are able to effectively engage with the children and young people we are working with.
- We need to use the Participation and Voice Group to develop a Participation Strategy and Action Plan that takes the above into account.
- We need to develop new ways to predict the way in which our cohort of children in care will change in the future. Although we have seen an increase in the numbers of children entering care, we are also implementing new ways to help children to safely remain with their families or to leave care more quickly. All of these factors will impact on the numbers of children needing a placement and predicting this is complex.

- However, this prediction is not just about the *number* of children and young people who need a placement. It is equally about the themes that are emerging. For example, an anticipated increase in the number of very young babies entering care would require us to have more carers who were able to care for babies. Similarly, an increase in teenagers entering care later in their teens would require a different set of skills. Whilst we are very good at knowing what the *current* situation is, we need to get better at predicting how this will change in the future. We need to better understand the factors for children entering care and have best practice responses in place amongst carers who are able to effectively engage with children, enable those children and young people to see how life could improve for them and build ambition for their future with our children and young people.

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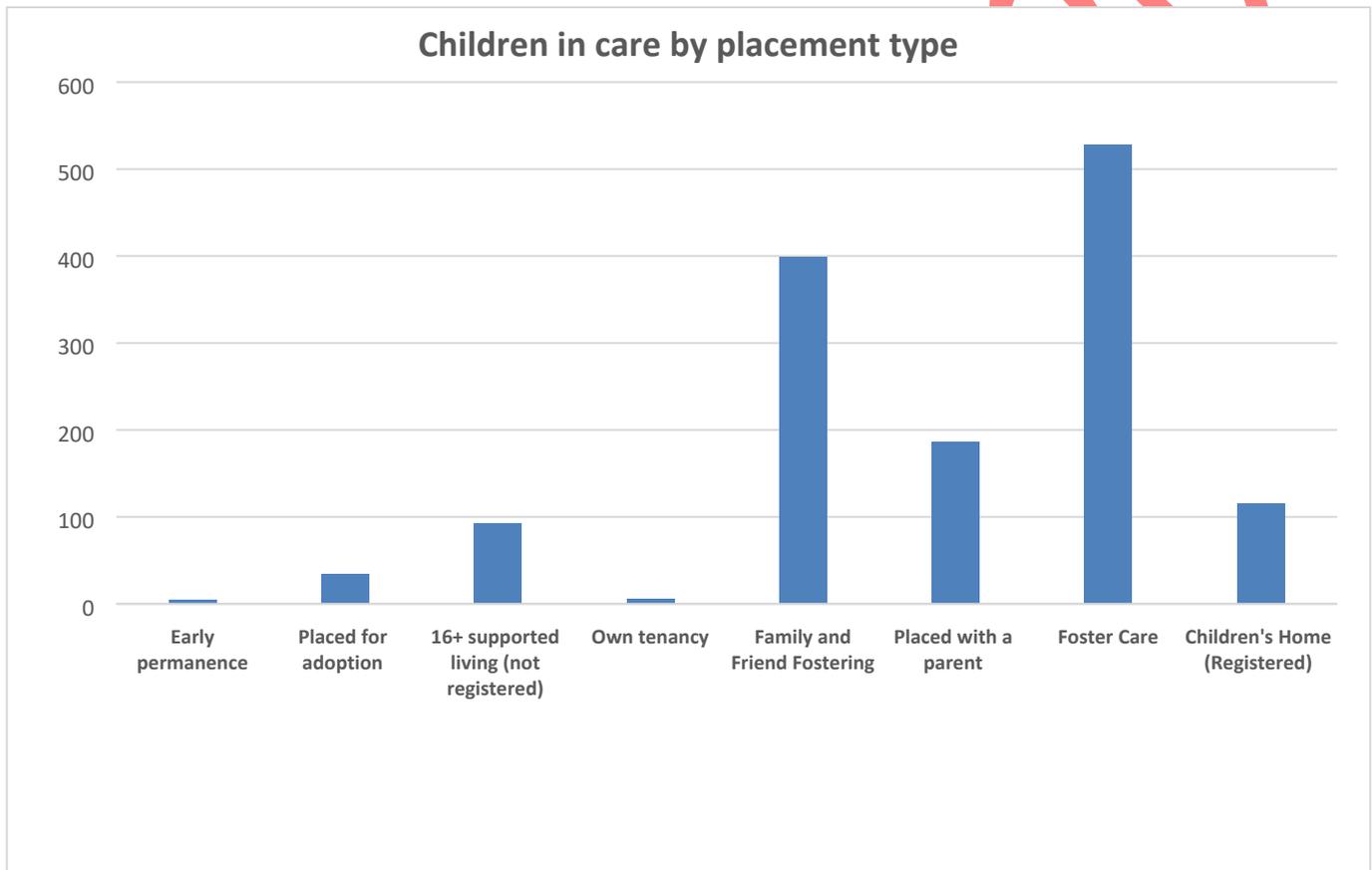
Priority 3: having a safe, stable and secure home

What do we know?

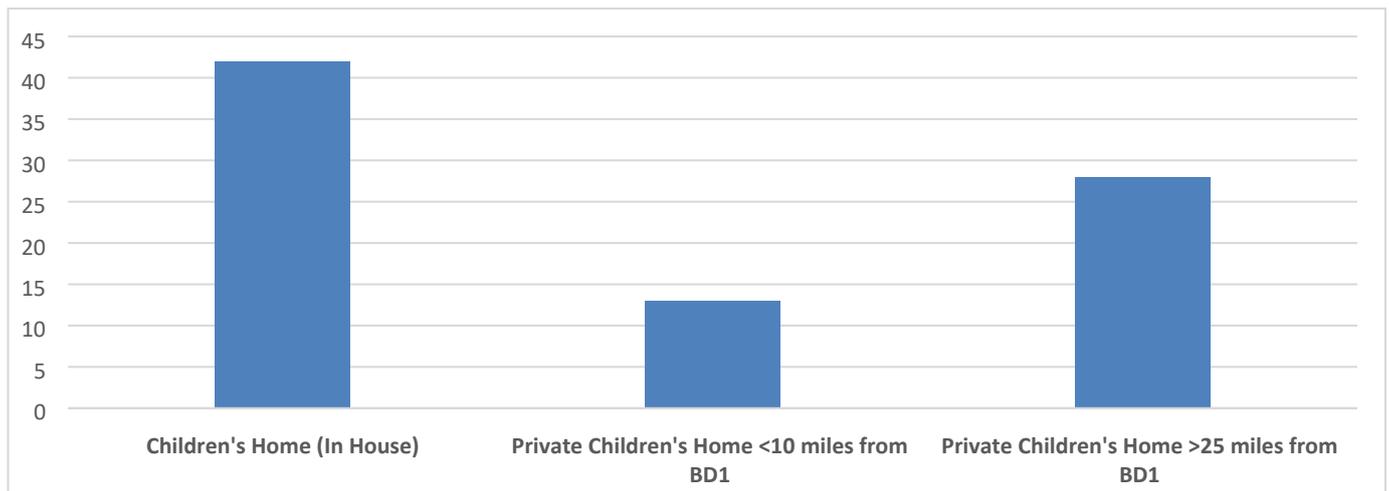
- Being a good parent means that we are responsible for making sure that our children and young people live in settled families where they can thrive.
- It also means that there has to be good, early decision-making and excellent multi-agency planning so that children don't drift or spend too long in temporary arrangements.
- This means seeking permanence for our children and young people at the earliest opportunity so that they know where they are going to be living for the rest of their childhood and who is going to be looking after them. For children who are in settled and stable placements, they should not spend too long in the care system if this level of protection is no longer needed.
- We know that children and young people in care have the best chance in life when they live in settled families and feel cared for. Children and young people need to feel loved and to be able to build relationships with people who they can trust and rely on, and who look out for them.
- However, this does present a huge challenge. The increasing number of children in Bradford who need to be in care means that it is getting harder to find the right places for children to live. Alongside this there is a national shortage of foster and children's homes, particularly for older young people or those who have complex needs or who can be challenging to look after.
- Another challenge is that Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) are able to offer financial rewards to their foster carers that a Local Authority cannot compete with and many Local Authorities have seen foster carers leave them in order to work with an IFA.
- These challenges sometimes mean that sometimes we do not have a lot of placements to choose from when we are looking for a home for a child, particularly an older child or someone who has complex needs. If we are not able to match children to placements well, the placement is more likely to break down and this places additional pressure on our placement capacity. Sometimes our children can end up placed a long way from home as a result and this is something that we need to try to prevent unless there is a very good reason for it.
- As well as the *number* of placements that are available, our Sufficiency Strategy also has to consider the *type* of placements that we can offer. Our children come from a range of backgrounds and have diverse needs and we need a variety of placements to meet these needs. This includes families who are themselves from a range of backgrounds and who reflect the needs of our children, those who can provide short breaks for disabled children, sometimes requiring specific medical training, to those who can provide emergency placements for teenagers who are in crisis for example due to mental health problems or involvement in criminal justice. We need a mixed economy of emergency, short term and long term placements and a cohort of carers from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of skills and experiences.
- The majority of accommodation that we use within the private sector is registered by Ofsted in the same way as our own, internal provision. This provides a really good layer of scrutiny

and assurance about standards that can help us to make good placement choices. In addition, our use of the regional White Rose Framework provides additional assurance. Prior to making a placement in the private sector we can read Ofsted inspection reports and other documents that will help us to know about the quality of the placement. However, in the 16 to 18 semi-supported living sector, the majority of provision is not registered with Ofsted and thus we do not always have the level of assurance that a statutory inspection framework provides. Therefore, our ability to make safe placements to an extent rests on us having trusted relationships with providers in this sector, built on feedback from young people, families and practitioners.

- The types of homes that our children currently live in are shown in the table below:



- Some of our children live in privately owned children’s homes and some of these are a long distance from Bradford as can be seen from the chart below. This is something that we want to address. The recent report from the Children’s Commissioner published in November 2020 highlights this as a national area of concern that requires a centralised response from the government. Although for some children the nature of their harm means that being placed at a distance from their home is the safest thing for them, for many others it is based on a lack of available resources closer to home and results in further separation from their families, friends, schools and communities.



- Although placement stability in Bradford has improved in the past year, we know that around 9% of children in care experience too many changes of placement and also too many changes of social worker. This is another area that we need to address through recruitment, training and support of carers and social workers and better care planning and support to fragile placements, and improved commissioning arrangements with the private sector.
- We need to develop our understanding of why placements breakdown in order to identify what support would have been effective to prevent that breakdown. For some children and young people every placement breakdown is a further rejection and a further confirmation of their lack of worth, which can significantly affect their attitude to future placements. We need to understand which young people are likely to require additional support in their first placement, in order to effectively provide that support to prevent an initial placement breakdown. This will break the cycle of rejection for children and young people and enable them to see a more positive future as possible.

What have we done?

- We currently have 1147 approved foster carers including Family and Friends and we intend to increase this number, to provide us with greater diversity and placement choice.
- Our carers already reflect the diversity of our communities and our cohort of children in care, with over a third of our carers being from backgrounds other than white/British.
- To increase the number of placements we have available, we continue to focus on recruiting new foster carers to Bradford. We have undertaken campaigns and have been reviewing the way we assess and pay our carers to make us as attractive as possible. This activity has not slowed as a result of the pandemic.
- At present we are specifically targeting people who could provide short break placements for disabled children and this campaign will continue for the rest of this year. Alongside this we have launched a specific Skills to Foster programme for carers who care for disabled children, or wish to do so in the future.

- We already have a competitive financial package but are also reviewing the way that we support and train our carers. By doing so we hope to attract new carers, keep hold of our existing carers and also improve placement stability by increasing the skills and confidence of our carers.
- As well as attracting new foster carers, we need to ensure that our existing ones stay with us. These are our most experienced foster carers and we must do everything we can to ensure that they feel valued, supported and safe.
- To this end we have successfully applied for a license to implement Mockingbird in Bradford. This scheme has been proven to support foster carers, to help retain them and also to affect placement stability. In some Local Authorities, Mockingbird has also helped them to recruit new carers because they can see what a supportive resource it is. We are expecting our first Mockingbird constellation to be live in February 2021.
- We have also been able to achieve Fostering Friendly status. This means that the Fostering Network has assessed that the council is a “fostering friendly employer” because we offer increased flexibility to any of our employees who are also foster carers. We hope that this will encourage some council staff to now choose to foster.
- All foster carers, including Family and Friends carers, have an allocated Supervising Social Worker in our Fostering Service and we have also increased the number of reviewing officers who are responsible for reviewing a foster carer’s registration every year. This means that our foster carers should be well supported and have help in identifying and meeting any learning needs.
- For those foster carers who undertake training and show particular skill, we are improving our Skills Payments system so that these carers can progress and receive greater rewards based on their levels of experience. We hope that they will be able to support less experienced foster carers but that this will also help them to stay with us.
- In the previous twelve months 60 children have progressed to permanence via Special Guardianship. The majority of these arrangements were with relatives however we have also had a number of mainstream foster carers choosing this path for children who live with them. This presents an opportunity but also a challenge in that it inevitably reduces our foster care capacity, however in all cases it has been the best thing for the child.
- In addition, 30 children achieved permanence by adoption in the previous twelve months and at present 33 children are placed with prospective adopters. We need to keep a tight grip on these cases to ensure that the case progresses to an adoption order without delay despite the impact of the pandemic on court timetables.
- We have 44 children who are subject to a Placement Order but who have not yet been placed for adoption and the majority of these have not yet been matched to an adopter. We need to ensure that we help these children achieve permanence without further delay even if this means that adoption is no longer the right outcome.

- Although we have no current plans to increase the number of beds we have available in our own children's homes, we are working to ensure that they are utilised well and that we plan ahead to reduce the need for children to be placed in the private sector.
- We are proud of our children's homes and the staff who look after our most vulnerable and complex children. Most of our homes are currently graded as good by Ofsted and this is a real achievement.
- We have increased the size of our Placement Coordination Team and reconfigured it to give more capacity for family finding and we have begun to work more jointly with our commissioning colleagues.
- We have introduced new systems that will help social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers to identify fragile placements and provide extra support to try to prevent breakdown.

What do we still need to do?

- We need to keep recruiting new foster carers at pace, particularly for complex children and short breaks for disabled children.
- We need to engage with the private sector in a more coordinated way so that when one of our children needs to live in a private children's home, this can be close to their home, friends, school and community unless this is not safe for them.
- We need to start routinely using feedback from children and young people when we are commissioning placements or services.
- We need to get better at helping children progress to permanent arrangements and doing this more quickly. This is something that we need to improve and which has been identified by Ofsted. Although we have new systems in place, it is an area that we must continue to focus on. Too many children spend too long in temporary arrangements without security so this is a key focus for us. We will need to work with our partners at One Adoption West Yorkshire to help reduce delays in children being matched or placed with adopters.
- We have also not always been consistently good at hearing from our children and young people about what they think about their placements or about being in care and then using this to change the way that we work. We need to do more of this in order to be able to change the way that we deliver our services but also to work with private providers who are commissioned by us.
- At present 399 children live with family or friends who have been approved as foster carers for them. Although this is an extremely valuable resource, these children are safe and well and many do not need the protection of the care system any longer. The care system can be stigmatising and can cause children in care to sometimes stand out from their peers. Children in care can also be discriminated against, both consciously and unconsciously. We need to reduce the barriers, including the financial barriers, to relatives pursuing Special Guardianship so that children can safely leave the care system without delays.

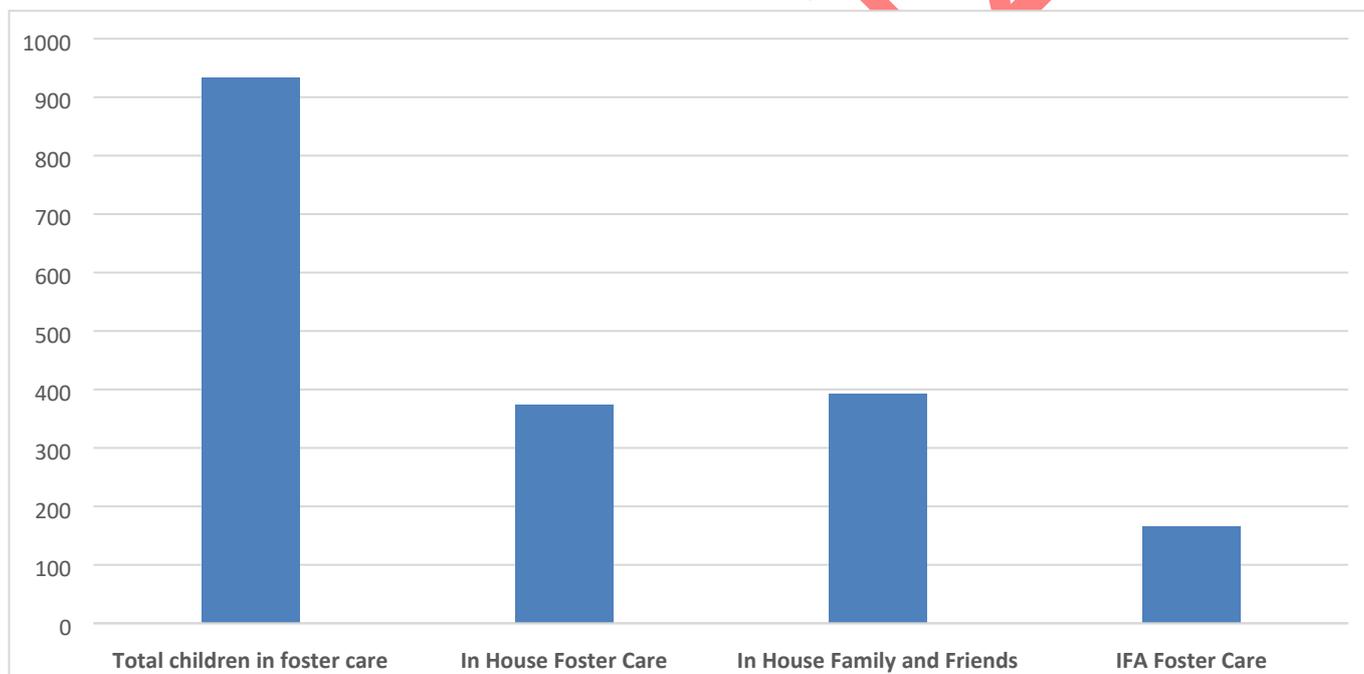
- We need to increase our effectiveness at supporting fragile placements to prevent breakdown. This needs to include identifying which children and young people are most likely to require additional support in their first placement, such as those entering care when older and those with a history of challenging behaviours in the community or in school. We need to consider how we ensure we are able to place those children in placements that they are able to engage with to prevent an initial placement breakdown.
- Due to the fact that it is usually not registered with Ofsted, we need to strengthen our relationships with the private 16+ sector to enable us to ensure that semi-supported, transitional accommodation is of sufficient quality. This includes the responsibility for this area of work moving to our specialist Placement Coordination Team and us adopting a system similar to the statutory, independent Regulation 44 Visits that we undertake in our own children's homes to ensure that the lack of Ofsted registration of these placements does not impact on the quality of placements that we provide.

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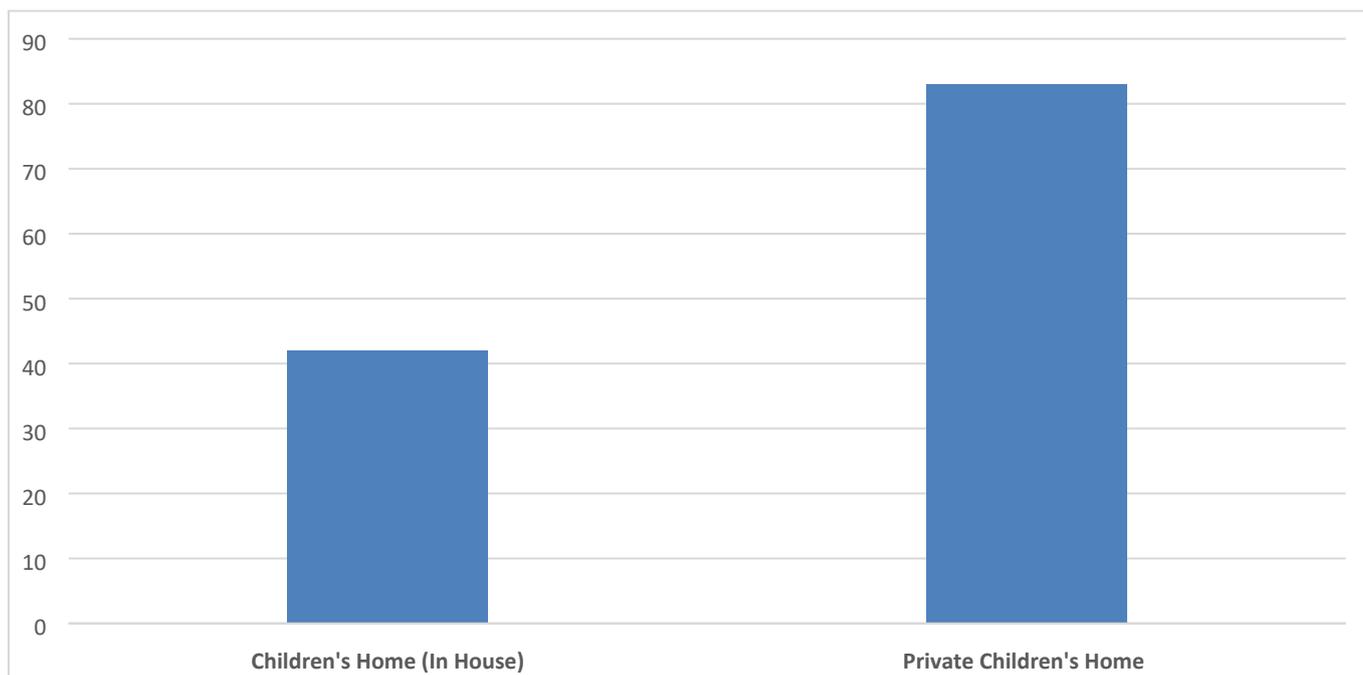
Priority 4: increasing our range of placements

What do we know?

- The majority of children in care live with foster carers, including family and friends who have been assessed and registered as foster carers specifically for children in their family. Our foster carers are one of our most valuable resources and make a huge and positive impact on the lives of our children. However, the availability of in-house placements has not kept pace with the increasing children in care numbers and in addition in all Local Authorities, some carers have transferred to Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). No local authority can compete with the financial rewards that can be offered by an IFA and thus we have to work extra hard if we want to attract and retain our carers.
- The breakdown of children living with foster carers in Bradford is below and as can be seen more than 80% of these children are living with carers who have been assessed, registered and supported by the council, with just 18% being with IFA carers:



- In relation to our children's homes the situation is different. Bradford Council has eight mainstream children's homes that at full capacity can look after a maximum of 43 young people.
- Children's homes remain the best option for a small number of young people who have found living successfully with a substitute family to not be achievable. Our children's homes tend to care for our most complex young people and the people who work in our homes are highly skilled and extremely resilient.
- We do not currently have plans to increase the number of in-house children's homes however we will be considering this in the light of the recommendations contained within the report by the Children's Commissioner published in November 2020.



- For some young people in care aged 16 and 17 neither foster care nor a children's home are the right place for them to live until they are eighteen. Some of these young people need support to live independently or semi-independently in flats, lodgings or other types of provider usually in the private sector.
- These types of accommodation provide "support" rather than "care" and thus do not need to be registered with Ofsted in the way that children's home do. They are known as "unregulated provision" and should only be used for young people in care who are 16 or 17.
- These types of accommodation can offer a valuable, positive and appropriate home for young people aged 16 and 17 who are able to live with a greater degree of independence and who require support rather than care during their journey to adulthood and beyond.
- Currently in Bradford we have 93 young people living in this form of accommodation and the majority of them will be entitled to ongoing support as a care leaver when they reach eighteen.
- As already stated in this strategy our young people have very different experiences and needs. This means that our carers need a diverse range of skills and backgrounds in order to meet these needs.
- We need to further develop our joint commissioning with colleagues in health and education in order to ensure that children with multiple needs are offered effective support that will meet their needs. We need to build on the Joint Placement Panel approach to build a shared understanding with other commissioners of the gaps in placement availability, particularly for children and young people with more complex needs and work jointly to build more effective placement and support offers to better meet need.

What have we done?

- We have embarked on a system-wide review of fostering in Bradford, designed to re-establish fostering as a central, valued and valuable means through which to provide vulnerable children with care and certainty.
- Bradford already provides a highly competitive financial support package for our foster carers and particularly those who are able to demonstrate the necessary skills to progress from Level 1 to Levels 2 and 3.
- In order to help us to recruit more foster carers to Bradford we have:
 - Reviewed the foster care recruitment process, from the way in which initial enquiries are handled to the point at which approval is granted by the Agency Decision Maker and a first placement can commence. We know from experience that the willingness of people to foster can be significantly influenced by the promptness, courtesy, clarity and enthusiasm with which fostering services respond to their enquiries. We are determined that Bradford's Fostering Service will become synonymous with everything that is best in public service, being highly efficient, productive, accessible, culturally competent and reliable.
 - Achieved Fostering Friendly status, awarded by Fostering Network to the council for being an employer that is supportive and flexible for employees who wish to become foster carers.
 - Our Marketing Officer has utilised social media more effectively to publicise our offer and attract new carers including use of You Tube videos involving existing foster carers and Fostering Service officers.
- In order to support retention of existing foster carers and to reduce the number who choose to cease fostering or move to an IFA:
 - We have developed new processes for consultation, training and review, so that foster carers can have a voice and influence in the development of the fostering service.
 - Communications and processes for handling complaints made by foster carers have been revised to enable us to respond more effectively in order to resolve issues
 - We are developing our relationship with the Bradford Independent Foster Carers Association (BIFCA) to promote communication and to address any gaps in support as they arise.
 - We are developing a new skills progression and assessment system, so that foster carers' capacities are increased and their contribution to children's welfare is properly acknowledged and rewarded.
 - We have developed a number of in-house support groups focussing on key issues for carers including one for children who foster; one for men who foster and one for carers

who look after specific groups of children including children with disabilities, babies and teenagers.

- Our implementation of Mockingbird will also support retention by providing an extra level of support to less experienced foster carers and an opportunity for the professional progression of more experienced carers.
- We have increased our capacity to review the registration of our foster carers as these are an important mechanism by which carers' skills and development can be recognised and areas for development identified. These reviewing officers now sit alongside our Independent Reviewing Officers in order to provide a more independent viewpoint but also to enable shared learning.
- Placement disruptions and breakdowns have a negative effect on our children and young people but also our foster carers who invest a great deal of time and emotion into the children they look after. They also place additional pressure on our placements service in terms of the additional need to find new placements. Our placement stability has improved but we have developed new mechanisms by which fragile placements can be identified and supported at an earlier stage.
- We have expanded our Placement Coordination Team to enable us to cope with the increased demand and to enable us to remain effective at working with the private sector to source appropriate placements for complex children.
- We have reconfigured our services so that young people in care move to our new 16+ team when they reach the age of sixteen. Although this means a change of social worker, it means that they will then have consistency through to adulthood and beyond which for children in care is a particularly challenging time. It also means that these young people can receive the expert support of a service that is focused on the journey to adulthood and thus make the transition to semi or independent living more quickly and more successfully.

What do we need to do?

- As indicated in relation to Priority 1, we need to develop new ways to predict the way in which our cohort of children in care will change in the future both in terms of number and also *nature*. Although we have seen an increase in the numbers of children entering care, we are also implementing new ways to help children to safely remain with their families or to leave care more quickly. All of these factors will impact on the numbers of children needing a placement and predicting this is complex. However, this information is essential when we are planning our recruitment of foster carers and commissioning external providers.
- We need to engage more effectively and proactively with the IFA and private children's homes sectors in order to be able to enter into commissioning arrangements that will give us increased local capacity and flexibility but which will also offer improved value for money.
- We need to explore options for commissioning placements that will provide better value and also give providers more security in order to be able to develop high quality provision locally. We need to do this with health and education colleagues to ensure that we are able to meet the holistic needs of children and young people effectively.

- We will need to get better at monitoring these contracts to ensure that they are delivering what we need, and we will need to ensure that this is supported by feedback from children and their families.
- We are transferring the procurement of placements in the 16+ unregulated estate to the Placement Coordination Team to ensure that these future plans are extended to this area of work.
- In addition, as stated earlier we need to strengthen our relationships with the private 16+ sector to enable us to ensure that semi-supported, transitional accommodation is of sufficient quality. This includes us adopting a system similar to the statutory, independent Regulation 44 Visits that we undertake in our own children's homes to ensure that the lack of Ofsted registration of these placements does not impact on the quality of placements that we provide.
- We also need to more robustly review the placements of children who are placed in high cost placements. Children and young people's needs do change over time and where it is safe and appropriate for a young person to return to Bradford either to a foster home or children's home, we need to get better at identifying this and implementing an appropriate plan with the child.
- We need to maximise the usage of our existing placements. Not all of our foster carers are operating to full capacity. There can be a variety of reasons for this including looking after very complex children or the carer's own circumstances, health etc. However, we need to be able to identify this and address it effectively so that we can offer placements to more children.
- In order to do this, we will need to enhance our fostering information systems to enable data to be more readily captured and analysed.
- Similarly, with our own children's homes we cannot *always* operate at full capacity. There can be a variety of reasons for this for example particularly complex young people. In 2020 the pandemic has had an impact on the ability of some of our homes to operate at full capacity. Going forward we need to explore ways to ensure that additional support can be provided to homes that are particularly challenged in order to maximise the number of placements they can offer. This will include engaging with the private sector in relation to peripatetic or interim staff etc.
- We have set ourselves ambitious targets in relation to the recruitment of foster carers. For example, by the end of the next financial year we anticipate having approved thirty new fostering households which will give us new capacity for between 25 and 75 children dependant on needs and complexity.
- In order to achieve our targets for the next three years we will need to continue to expand our online presence and will be working with a specialist marketing organisation to support our Marketing Officer in this.
- Research and experience tells us that Mockingbird not only impacts on placement stability and retention of foster carers, it can also be a key element in attracting new carers. Authorities that have implemented Mockingbird well have seen them attract new carers to the profession but also to attract carers back from the IFA sector due to the enhanced support that

Mockingbird offers. Therefore, we need to ensure that our plans to launch Mockingbird in early 2021 remain on track.

- The council has already achieved Fostering Friendly status but in 2021 we need to extend this to local employers in other sectors and we have set an ambitious target for this.
- We need to finalise our work on processes for the assessment of family and friends foster carers in order to safely remove some of the barriers to people coming forward to care for children within their family.
- Once this work is completed we need to undertake a similar review of our mainstream recruitment and assessment processes in order to safely remove some of the barriers that prevent people deciding to become foster carers.

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Doing what we say we will do – performance management and governance

Governance of the Strategy

The strategy is owned by the Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership to provide the initial governance to oversee the delivery of the strategy. Performance reporting and impact of practice will be submitted to the Children's Services Departmental Management Team, the Children's Improvement Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

How partners will measure progress and success

The multi-agency partnership has been established to develop and drive forward a shared vision and strategy for children in care, with a focus on improving outcomes and promoting the needs and interests of children in care and young people leaving care. The members of the partnership will be from the primary agencies whose services have a key influence or impact on the lives of children in care and those who have left care. It is important that we quality assure the work we do both in terms of the individual service user's experience and the overall effectiveness of services. In support of this there are a number of different ways the partnership will measure progress and the impact of the strategy.

Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan

The Sufficiency Strategy is supported by a comprehensive action plan that is reviewed regularly and scrutinised by a number of forums including the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategic Partnership and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A detailed annual action plan has been developed to support delivery of the priorities set out in this strategy.

The action plan addresses our priority areas, identifying key people and timeframes for the completion of each action. Many of the actions identified are subject to detailed specific plans and are monitored and evaluated within other forums. Where this is the case the detailed plans are referenced and links made to available evidence.

This action plan specifies a planned outcome from each action described and identifies a related performance measure with national benchmark information where available.

The action plan includes the means by which we will capture the views of the widest possible group of children in care and in out of area placements.

Progress against this action plan will be monitored quarterly by the Children in Care Strategic Group and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A schedule for the monitoring and review of the action plan to support the delivery of this strategy will be agreed with the Corporate Parenting Board and Children in Care Strategic Partnership on an annual basis.

The action plan will be subject to review and evaluation and the overall strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Progress through key measures

Various measures will apply to the delivery of the strategy both quantitative and qualitative measures. We will establish the baseline data against which the strategy will be evaluated.

These measures are detailed in our new Children in Care and Leaving Care Scorecard.

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Children in Care and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy Priorities and Key Actions

Priority 1	Priority Two	Priority Three	Priority Four
<p>Helping children to stay within their families</p>	<p>Understanding our children and young people's needs</p>	<p>Having a safe, stable and secure home</p>	<p>Increasing our range of placements</p>
<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Early Help Strategy • Expand services for young people at the “edge of care” via the BPP service • Remove barriers to permanence via SGO 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the role and influence of the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Council to how we deliver our services. • Develop mechanisms to ensure that we capture feedback from children and young people about their experience of the placements that we have provided them with. • Work with young people to understand their views on the need for carers from a similar social background, faith and ethnic origin. • Work with young people to identify whether there is a need to target staff recruitment activities in order to ensure our foster carers and residential staff are able to effectively engage with the children and young people we are working with. 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep recruiting new foster carers at pace, particularly for complex children and short breaks for disabled children. • We need to engage with the private sector in a more coordinated way • Routinely using feedback from children and young people when we are commissioning placements or services. • We need to get better at helping children progress to permanent arrangements and doing this more quickly. • We need to reduce the barriers, including the financial barriers, to relatives pursuing Special Guardianship so that children can safely leave the care system without delays. 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to engage more effectively and proactively with the IFA and private children's homes sectors • We need to explore options for commissioning placements that will provide better value and also give providers more security in order to be able to develop high quality provision locally. We need to do this with health and education colleagues to ensure that we are able to meet the holistic needs of children and young people effectively. • We will need to get better at monitoring these contracts to ensure that they are delivering what we need, and we will need to ensure that this is supported by feedback from children and their families. • We are transferring the procurement of placements in the 16+ unregulated estate to the Placement Coordination Team to ensure that

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to extend Fostering Friendly to local employers in other sectors and we have set an ambitious target for this.• We need to finalise our work on processes for the assessment of family and friends foster carers in order to safely remove some of the barriers to people coming forward to care for children within their family.• We need to undertake a review of our mainstream recruitment and assessment processes in order to safely remove some of the barriers that prevent people deciding to become foster carers.
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