

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub- Committee Supplementary Agenda



- 5. Budget Scrutiny Challenge (Pages 3 - 16)**
Appendix A - Scrutiny Budget Challenge Presentation

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Budget Scrutiny Challenge 23rd January 2024

Page 3

January 2024

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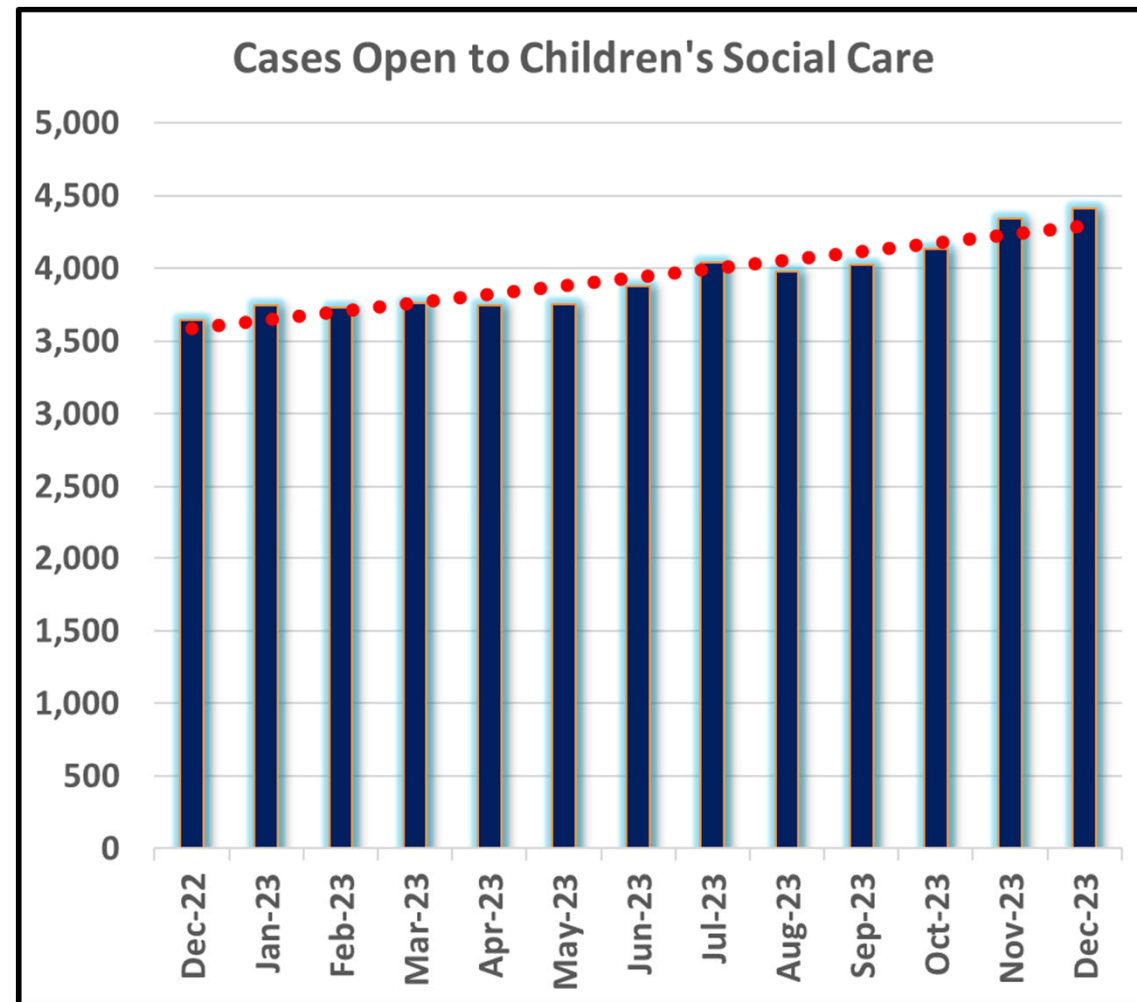
Agenda Item 5

SAV CYPE 001 Children's Social Care Staffing Budget Realignment: 2024-25 £1.1m

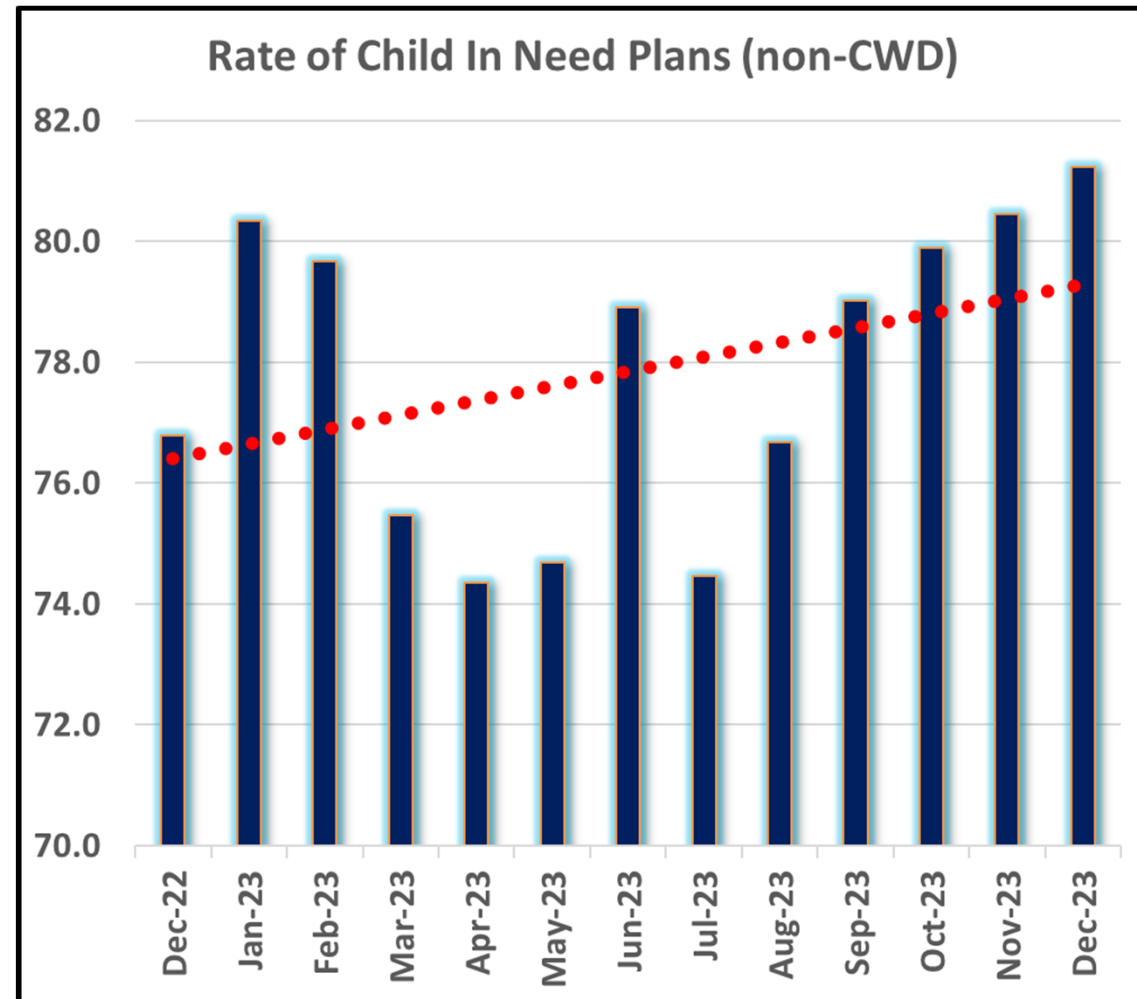
- Is the saving deliverable, sustainable and not an unacceptable risk.
- Is the impact on service users and the wider community understood.
- Have all reasonable alternative options been explored and do no better options exist.

This saving is to be achieved by applying a 7% vacancy rate across the children's social care staffing budget

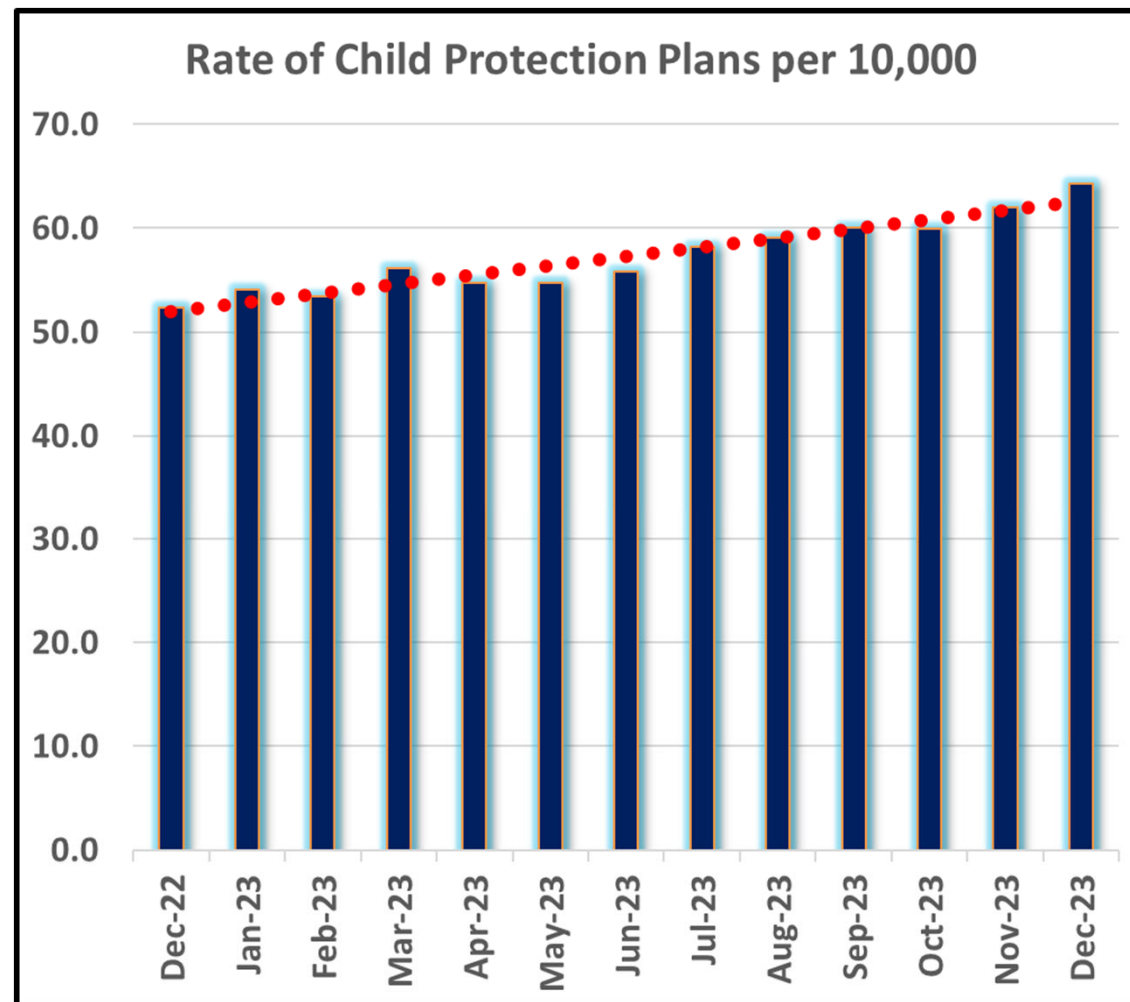
- Demand for statutory social work services has risen by 16% over 2022-23
- The presenting issues are families struggling to meet the needs of their children and therefore risk of neglect, impacted by the continuing cost of living crisis, insecure housing, rising rents and rising unemployment
- Children who lost out on education and social stimulation during the pandemic are presenting with higher needs, struggles with school attendance and increasingly vulnerable to exploitation by adults outside the family.

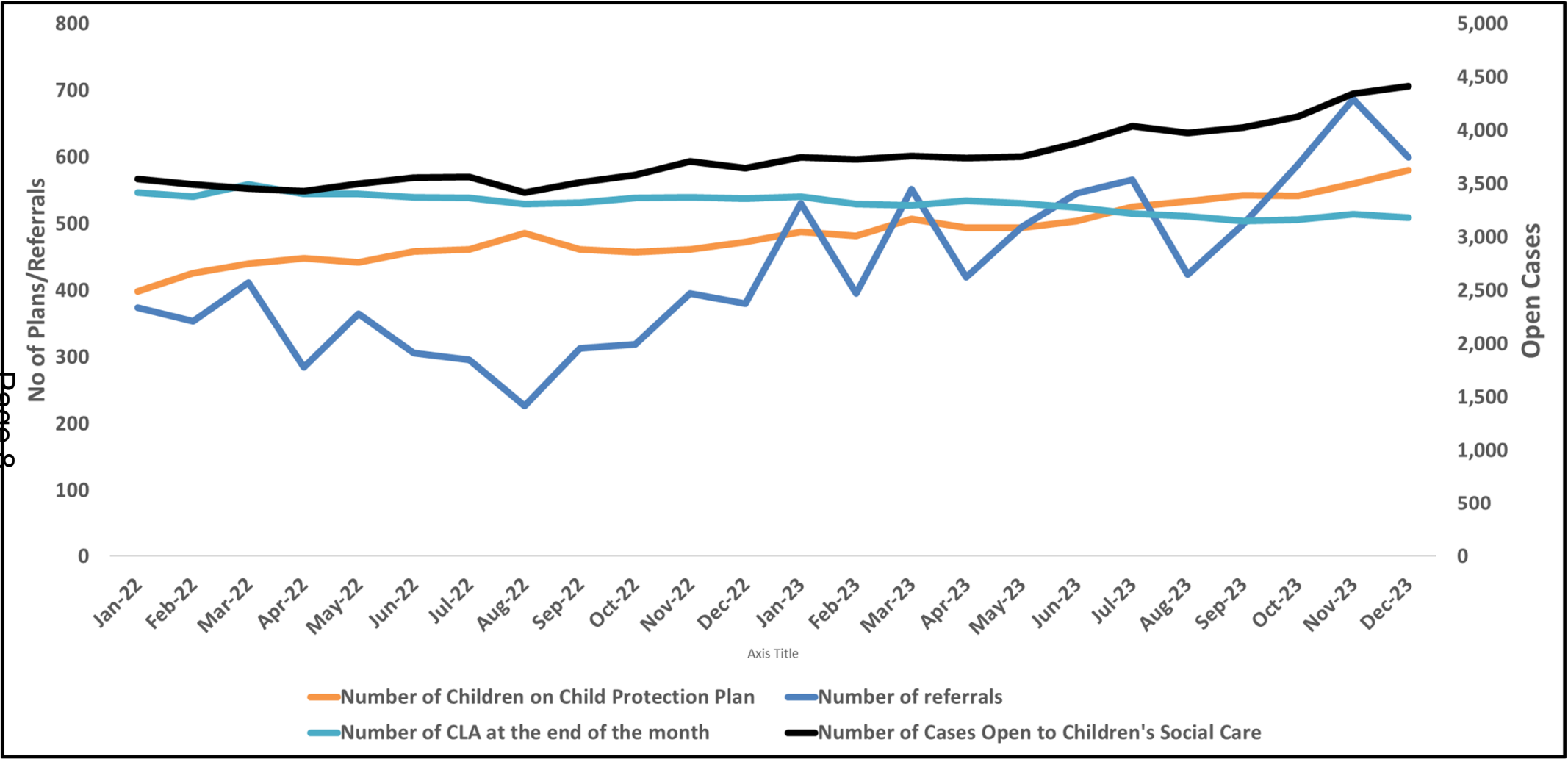


- Domestic abuse is experienced in the families of many children where children's services is asked to help through assessment and provision of intervention from early help or statutory social work services.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which responds to all requests for help requires sufficient staff who can analyse the needs of children, draw in partners to collate a holistic view to determine the level of risk or need and direct the right service to the child at the right time.
- Whilst variable, with increases often seen following school holidays, the overall trend is increasing rates of open child in need plans over 2022-23.



- The increased demand for statutory social work services has begun to flow through the social care system, from increased numbers of open cases through to child in need and child protection plans.
- There has been a 10% increase in the rate of child protection plans over 2022-23.
- Social workers cannot provide effective interventions if they are asked to work with too many children.
- While practice systems have been improved the combination of increase in volume and complexity of work has led to rising caseloads.





- Making a thorough comprehensive assessment of risk and need at the outset is crucial to preventing family breakdown.
- Similarly, when children require intervention through a child in need, child protection or legal proceedings to provide permanence outside of the child's family then the social work team must have the time to enable, facilitate and assess change that reduces risk, or identifies alternative care arrangements at pace to keep children in their families wherever possible, sustaining educational stability and leading the multi-agency network of support for children.
- As a result of the increased and more complex demands more capacity is needed in the Family Assessment Service & Social Work with Families Service to maintain manageable caseloads. We are unable to maintain appropriate levels of care and deliver a saving via a 7% vacancy level across children's social care.
- It has therefore been agreed that this MTFS saving will be removed from CYPE for 24/25.
- The scope and brief for a CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner includes a focus on the transformation of services and interventions to safely manage and limit demand, intervening at the point of greatest impact to reduce risks and therefore the need for costly statutory social care interventions.

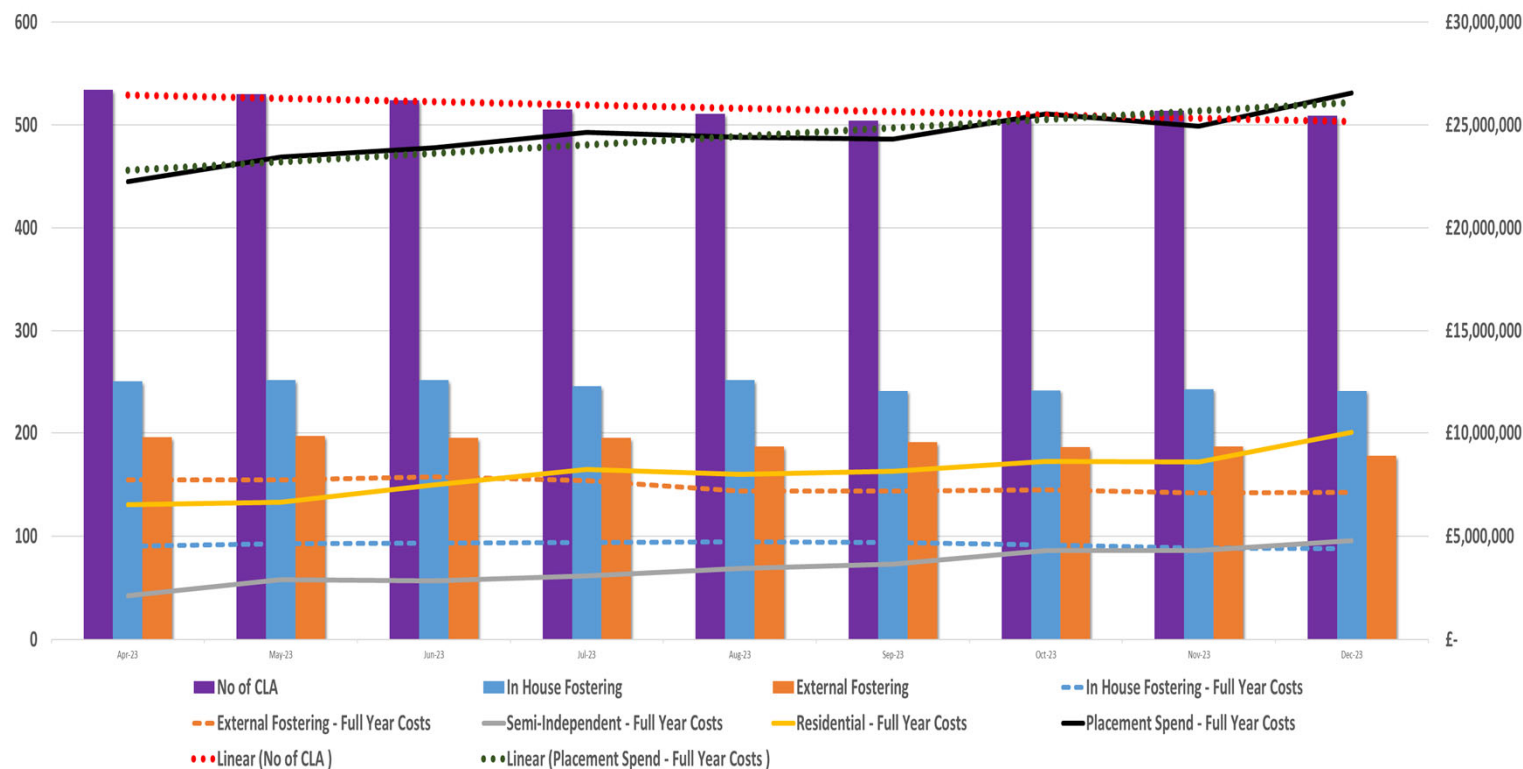
SAV CYPE 003 Review of Children Looked After Placements: 2024-25 £0.9m

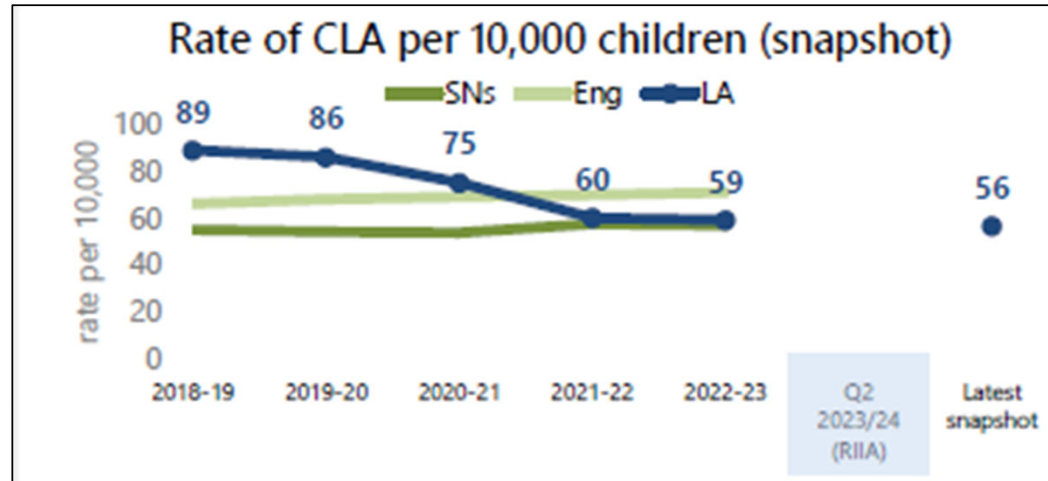
- Is the saving deliverable, sustainable and not an unacceptable risk.
- Is the impact on service users and the wider community understood.
- Have all reasonable alternative options been explored and do no better options exist.

This saving is to be achieved by continuing to work with families to keep children safely at home, and when children do come into our care to support them in family-based settings wherever possible.

“...it is estimated that English councils paid for approximately 120 placements costing £10,000 per week or more in the 2018/19 financial year, compared to over 1,500 in 2022/23”

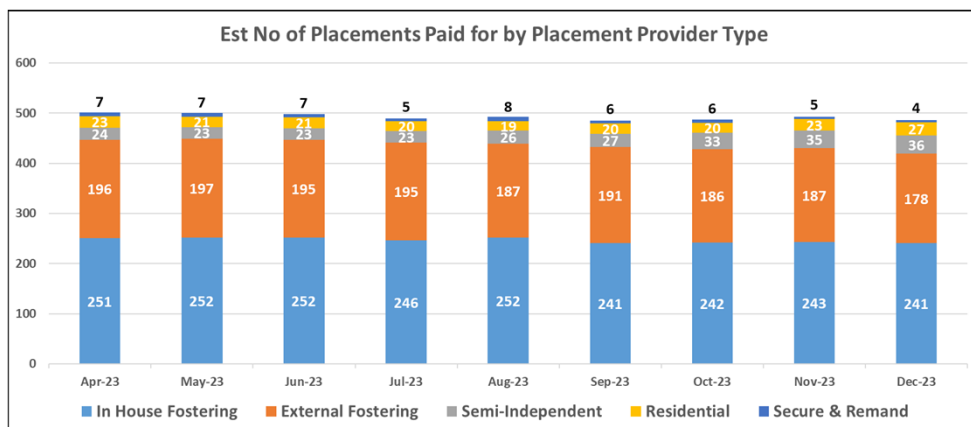
High-cost Children’s Social Care Placements Survey (Nov 2023)



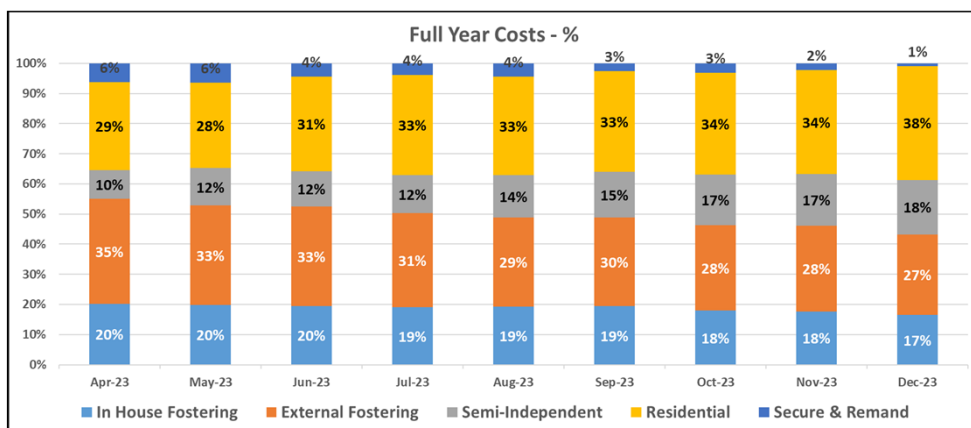


- Children’s social care continues to work hard to ensure the right children are in its care. Actions and approaches include:
 - Effective edge of care services that work with children and their families to keep them safely at home
 - A weekly care panel to explore all options when care is a consideration
 - When children do come in to care, working with families to safely reunify children
- The rate of children looked after has steadily reduced to below England and in line with our statistical neighbour averages. This is a significant improvement for Croydon.
- However, due to the increasing costs of placements, the increased complexity of children’s needs, and challenges in the provider market placement costs have continued to rise.

Changes in Placement Spend



- Increasing impact of Residential & Semi-Independent placements on overall placement spend
- Residential - 1% increase in overall use, increase 9% in overall spend
- Semi-Independent – 2.6% increase in overall use, increase 8% in overall spend



Estimating cost avoidance in CYPE003

Targets	Current		New		Additional Cost Avoidance / Saving
	Numbers	Annual Cost Avoidance / Saving	Numbers	Annual Cost Avoidance / Saving	
IFA to In-House	10	£ 142,490	25	£ 356,225	£ 213,735
Semi to In House	2	£ 157,290	5	£ 393,225	£ 235,935
Residential to In House	0	£ -	2	£ 463,274	£ 463,274
Total		£ 299,780		£ 1,212,724	£ 912,944

- CYPE 003 saving is based on a determined focus on moving more children into family-based foster care, ‘stepping down’ care costs.
- Challenges include:
 - The age profile of our current in-house foster carer cohort
 - Recruiting and retaining in-house foster carers in a competitive market
 - Improving interventions earlier in a child’s journey in the care system, to reduce risks, shorten the duration of care and reduce the need for bespoke care packages
- The scope and brief for the CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner specifically focuses on tackling the challenges to bringing down the cost of placements, working alongside services to plan and implement the changes required

Managing placement budget pressures

- CYPE003 is underpinned by a stretch target to step down the costs of care.
- However, the placement budget has been under pressure in 2023-24
- Work is planned to take place in parallel to tackle this in 2024-25

Intended actions include:

- Detailed analysis by the Strategic Transformation partner to identify the most impactful points to intervene earlier and avoid costly statutory interventions
- Peer learning with adult social care focused on care planning and cost control approaches e.g. Care Cubed, particularly in relation to children with disabilities and transitions.
- Continuous review and challenge to the efficiency of core services, maximising opportunities provided by whole-council improvements to reduce costs
- Proactive approach to regional and pan-London commissioning and market management

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