

London Borough of Croydon

**Looked After Children
Sufficiency Plan**

2018-2021

Delivering for Croydon

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Executive summary

Our looked after children cohort is unique. We have 783 children and young people who are looked after. Of these 488 are local looked after children and 295 are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) (31 March 2018). Croydon has the one of the highest number of looked after children of any London borough. This is due, in part, to the high numbers of UASC looked after by the borough as a result of a Home Office National Assessment Centre being located in Croydon. However, our cohort is gradually changing with a reduction in the numbers of UASC and an increase in the numbers of local children.

Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is critical to achieving placement stability and the best outcomes for our looked after children overall.

A high proportion of our looked after children are placed with foster carers (86%) provided through a mixed economy of in-house foster carers and independent fostering agencies. Up to 10% of Croydon looked after children are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 4% in residential placements (as at March 2018).

We have effective commissioning arrangements in place with the aim of ensuring we have the right placement at the right time for all children. This includes an improved model for in house foster carer recruitment, a framework contract providing access to high quality IFA placements, and a framework contract for the provision of standard and complex semi-independent accommodation placements. There is still more we need to do, however, to ensure that we have a choice of placements to meet even the most complex needs. We are working collaboratively as part of the South London Commissioning Programme to commission residential placements. We will continue to work hard to ensure that, through our commissioning and placement process, we are able to maximise the use and value of these options to best meet individual needs.

Placement stability is good with 74% of LAC (under 16 and in care for more than 2.5 years) remaining in the same placement for at least two years. This means children are benefitting from consistent relationships with their carers. A high proportion of Croydon looked after children (81%) also benefit from placements close to home (within 20 miles from home).

We are continuing to work hard on strengthening permanence for our looked after children, including through adoption and Special Guardianship Orders, as well as long term fostering. We need to continue to increase the pace at which we identify and implement permanence options for children where this best meets their needs, and avoid drift and delay. We have agreed processes and stronger practice to ensure that options for permanency are always considered and can be progressed at the earliest possible stage.

Our care leavers have effective support which means that a high proportion (83%) have suitable accommodation and 53% are in employment, training and education (at 31 March 2018). The Council has made a strong commitment to supporting care leavers, and set out a range of support and services available from across the council and its partners, in our local offer for care leavers, published in September 2018. This can be viewed at: <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/families/local-offer-for-care-leavers> . We will also continue to focus on ensuring effective pathway planning at an early stage.

We currently have a range of early help and support available to vulnerable children and young people and their families. Croydon's Partnership Early Help Strategy and delivery plan, agreed in October 2018, will allow us to provide a more effective, joined up, locality based, all age early help offer for our children. As the strategy is implemented and begins to impact, this will enable us to

prevent escalation, where safe to do so, and the demand on statutory services. This includes the number of looked after children. For young people with more significant needs, we also have a particular focus on strengthening our support for vulnerable adolescents, including those on the edge of care, those who go missing from care, or who are at risk of exploitation.

This plan presents the current needs and services available for children who are looked after, fulfilling our duty to provide sufficient accommodation. Our analysis of needs and implementation of actions in our key sufficiency areas is an ongoing task and this three-year plan will be refreshed annually to reflect this.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. We believe that children should grow and achieve within their own families when it is in their best interests and is safe for them to do so. The majority of children and families are strong and resilient and have good networks and resources to meet their needs. Some families will experience difficulties from time to time. However, there will be some children and young people who need to live, either in the short term, or permanently, with substitute carers.
- 1.2. We want to ensure that **we have the right placements available at the right time and in the right place to make sure our looked after children are safe, healthy and happy, and will aspire to be the best they can be.** Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. It is also a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in achieving outcomes for looked after children.¹
- 1.3. This plan provides a profile of our looked after children and care leavers, and our existing placement patterns, identifying ongoing and future needs. It forms a key part of our commissioning process for placements. It also summarises our wider offer of services provided to support our looked after children including services for care leavers, children considered to be at risk of becoming looked after, and early help services. As well as achieving positive outcomes for children and families, these services support the reduction in demand and impact on statutory services and prevent escalation, where safe to do so, to statutory and specialist services, including care. This continuum of support and services, alongside our placements for children and young people who are looked after, are vital to achieving our overall vision and outcomes for Croydon children and families.

Our Sufficiency Duty

- 1.4 This plan fulfils our sufficiency duty under The Children Act 1989 and set out in DfE's *Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children* (2010).
- 1.5 Local authorities have a statutory duty to take strategic action to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for children and young people who are looked after. This is a responsibility that can best be delivered with the support and contribution of our statutory partners.

Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 ('the 1989 Act') requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, **sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, to meet the needs of children who the local authority are looking after**, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty')

As set out in the statutory guidance, this also means having provision in place for earlier preventative action to support children and families so that fewer children become looked after, including those children and young people on the edge of care or at risk of custody.

- 1.8 Local authorities and their partners are recommended to:

¹ *Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children* (March 2010).

- Systematically review the current situation in relation to securing accommodation which meets the needs of looked after children and care leavers;
- Have regard to the standard for commissioning practice set out in the guidance; and
- Develop or enhance their strategic commissioning processes so that all relevant services, including universal services, make a full contribution to meeting the needs of looked after children and children in need, who are at risk of care or custody;

1.9 This plan was last published in 2017. The 2018-21 plan will be agreed by and progress reported to Croydon’s Corporate Parenting Panel. The data and actions will be reviewed annually.

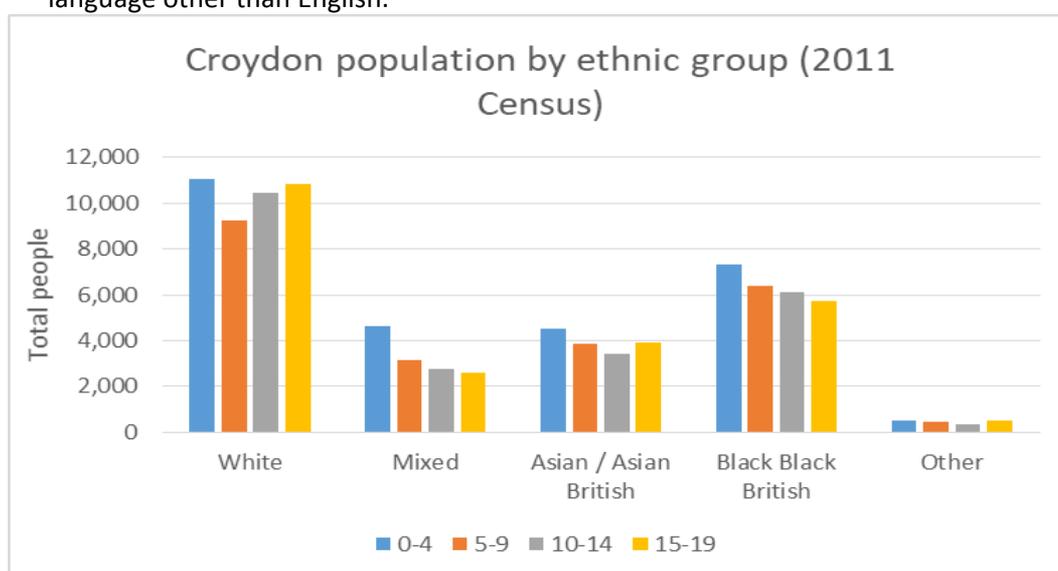
2. Croydon context

2.1 Croydon is a young, diverse London Borough with a population of 384,837² and in 2041 this is expected to reach 463,000³. Croydon has the 2nd highest population in London.

2.2 155,755 (40.5%) of the population is aged 30 or under (London 42.1%). 102,985 (26.8%) of the population are 0-19. (London 24.8%)⁴

2.3 Over the past 10 years, the 0-19 population has grown by 11.6%. By 2024, it is expected to reach an estimated 113,332⁵. Whilst the 0-4 age group are predicted to see the most limited growth during the same period (1%), they are set to remain as the largest age group within the 0-19 population.

2.4 Croydon has a diverse population. About 56.1% of the Croydon 0 to 24 population comes from non-white ethnic groups (London 51.2%) and 29.6% of Croydon residents were born outside of the UK, compared with 36.7% in London.⁶ 33.2% of school children have a first language other than English.⁷



² ONS Mid-Year Estimates 2017

³ GLA Housing led projections 2016

⁴ ONS Mid-Year Estimates 2017

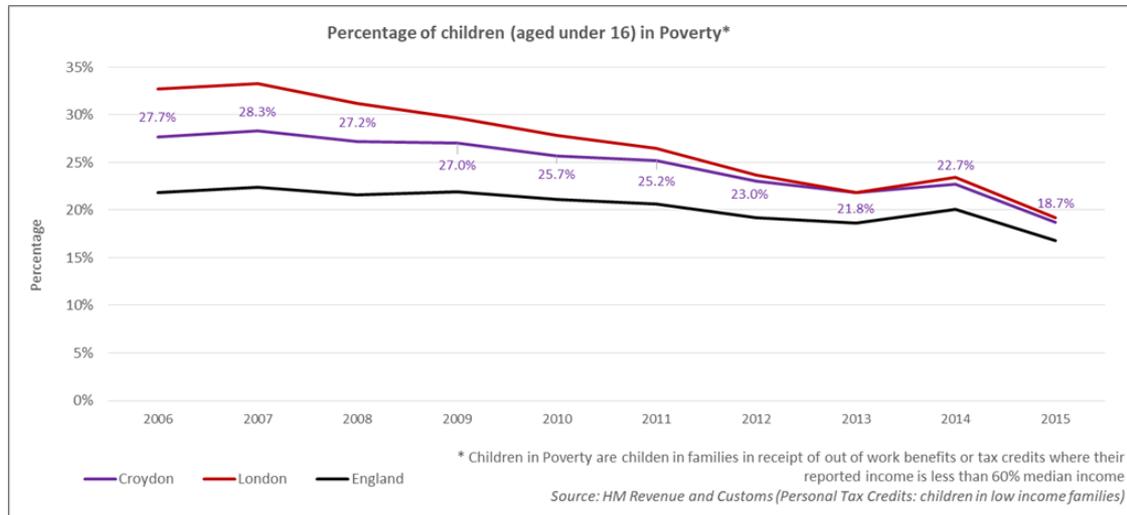
⁵ GLA Housing led projections 2016

⁶ Census 2011

⁷ School Census May 2018

- 2.5 Croydon is the 19th most deprived borough in London. 2.7% of people in Croydon live amongst the 10% most deprived area in the country and 21.9% live amongst the 20% most deprived.⁸

In 2015 18.7% of Croydon’s children were living in poverty. This is the 17th highest rate in London.⁹



- 2.6 Children’s social care is continuing to experience rising demand. There were 5186 open referrals at 31st March 2018. This represents a 28% increase from 31st March 2017 where there were 3708 open referrals. There had also been a 13% increase in the number of referrals open at any point from 8214 to 9612. Similarly, the number of children with Child Protection Plans increased by 39% from 349 to 568.¹⁰
- 2.7 Croydon has the one of the highest number of looked after children of any London borough. As of the end of March 2018 there were a total of 783 looked after children in Croydon, of these 295 were UASC and 488 were local looked after children.¹¹

3. Vision, Aims and Objectives

- 3.1 Croydon’s overarching vision for children is:

Children and young people in Croydon will be safe, healthy and happy, and will aspire to be the best they can be. The future is theirs.

- 3.2 We believe that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We believe that children should grow and achieve within their own families when it is in their best interests and it is safe for them to do so. By working together, we will develop flexible services which are responsive to children and families’ needs.
- 3.3 The delivery of Croydon’s Improvement Plan 2017/18 and Improvement Plan Refresh 2018/19 has given us renewed focus on strengthening our services for children and young

⁸ Indices of Deprivation 2015

⁹ HM Revenue and Customs 2015

¹⁰ CIN Summary 2017/18

¹¹ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

people following our Ofsted inspection in July 2017 which judged services to be inadequate. The work to strengthen our social work practice throughout the plan will have a positive impact for children and young people in care, or on the edge of care. Specific actions relating to our looked after children include:

- *Improving permanence planning across the wider service to ensure that the planning and timeliness of adoption improve for all children. Ensure that there is focused family-finding activity for children with adoption plans, to minimize delays.'*
- *Improve outcomes for care leavers.*

3.4 Our JSNA (joint strategic needs assessment) will also inform our ongoing service planning and commissioning for looked after children and across children's services, along with further work to strengthen operational data and business intelligence.

3.5 As a Council, Croydon is establishing a vision for the future which will shape the way that we support children and families, including those who are looked after. This will provide for:

- A system wide approach, with joint pooled resources and pathways
- operating across organisational boundaries
- An outcome focussed approach delivering long term sustainable solutions
- for individuals and families to secure resilience and independence
- A shift from acute provision to an increase in prevention and early help
- activity
- Evidence based services that are built around customer need
- Locality based delivery where appropriate- one of six key themes is "preventing issues becoming problems with services that are designed to identify issues early on and target support... to deliver long-term sustainable solutions" – and this will shape our approach to children and young people and their families.

4. **Our commissioning approach**

4.1 To meet the requirements of the sufficiency duty, local authorities, working with their partners, are expected to practise a level of commissioning which is commensurate with the standard outlined in the statutory guidance, covering six areas:

- individual assessment and care planning;
- commissioning decision;
- strategic needs assessment;
- market management;
- collaboration; and
- securing services.

4.2 To strengthen individual assessment and care planning, we have reviewed our placement process and made some initial improvements to streamline our approach, including a revised referral process. We are continuing to work on improving placement and associated business support processes, with the Placement team joining the Commissioning and Procurement division. In order to ensure the right placement at the right time, we need to ensure that we are able to use individual assessment and care planning effectively to inform decisions about individual placements commissioning.

4.3 Alongside this plan, we are completing a thorough needs assessment of children and young people as part of the JSNA (based on an analysis of available data) to inform service

planning and commissioning across Children's Services. Continued analysis of need and projection of demand will continue to inform placement commissioning.

- 4.4 Our category management approach provides effective support for strategic commissioning and market management, as part of the wider category management offer for children's social care. This includes the development of new commissioning and contracting models and multi borough integrated commissioning solutions. Our new commissioning models are developed through market engagement and closer collaboration with other local authorities and offer flexibility, incentives and opportunities for increased efficiencies, placement availability and improving outcomes for our looked after children and care leavers. This includes direct action to increase our own provision where appropriate (see section 7 on fostering, residential placements and semi-independent accommodation).
- 4.5 Croydon is working collaboratively with 11 other boroughs to develop an on-line integrated solution for residential and foster care placements, commencing January 2019. This work is led by the South London Commissioning Programme which is hosted by Croydon and funded with the support of a DfE Innovation Grant. As well as enabling Croydon to commission placements based on outcomes and needs of the children and young people, working with partner boroughs provides the leverage required to shape the market and the information required to look at our sufficiency in a more joined up, strategic way.
- 4.6 We are also embedding a refreshed contract management framework that effectively monitors achievement of individual outcomes and overall organisational performance with greater scrutiny on the quality of support provided to children who are looked after, those reported missing and at risk of exploitation, including child sexual exploitation. Engagement with children and young people underpins our new commissioning and contract management approach.
- 4.7 Embedding Safeguarding through commissioning and contract management guidance brings together a joint corporate approach for improving safeguarding practice across all commissioned services for children and adults.

Listening to children and young people

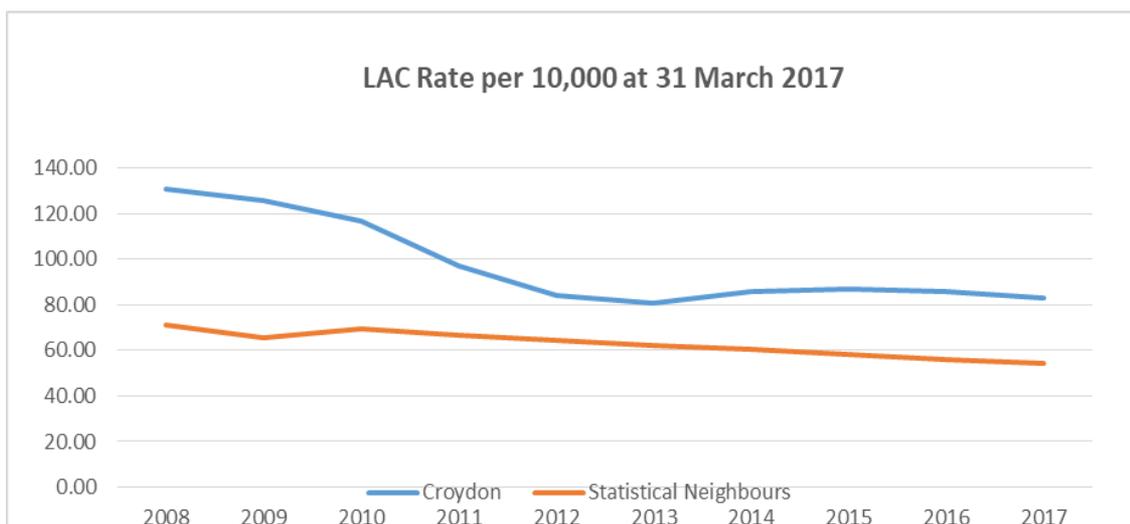
- 4.8 We want to ensure that Croydon's looked after children and care leavers are actively engaged and fully participate in decision-making about the services and organisations that routinely involve them. This includes decisions about their individual care through participation in LAC reviews.
- 4.9 We will strengthen the involvement of children and young people in our children in care council. This means that a wider representative group of young people are actively involved in informing our service design and delivery, and feedback from children is captured. This feedback informs quality assurance activity and service improvements. We specifically plan to involve the Children in Care Council in telling us what they would like from foster carers and/or their placements.
- 4.10 Work is also underway to enable young people to influence commissioning processes. Through the Young Commissioners programme, young people will be involved in commissioning activity across the Council, including services for Children and Young People. Croydon looked after children also have the opportunity to be involved in the South London Commissioning Programme's reference group from October 2018, which will help to shape the South London wide approach to commissioning residential placements.

5. Our looked after children profile

- 5.1. Our looked after children and young people are children aged from birth to 18 for whom children’s services have statutory responsibility for their care. Our care leavers are young people aged 18-25, in accordance with the duties under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- 5.2. Croydon has the one of the highest numbers of looked after children of any London borough.

We have 783 looked after children of whom 488 are local looked after children and 295 277 are UASC.¹²

- 5.2 This is annual figure for 2017/18, accurate at 31 March 2018. Since then, numbers have increased slightly to 799 at end October 2018, including 520 local looked after children.
- 5.3 There are ongoing small fluctuations in the overall number, and constant change within the cohort - 426 children started to be looked after in the 12 months to March 2018 and 442 ceased to be looked after.¹³
- 5.3 The Croydon LAC rate of 83 per 10,000 population (31 March 2017 and 31 March 2018) is higher than both the national average of 62 and our statistical neighbours’ average of 54.1 (31 March 17).



- 5.4 Croydon’s high rates of looked after children are, in part, due to our large UASC cohort which has resulted from the location of National Assessment Centre in Croydon. Of Croydon’s looked after children, 49% were UASC in March 2017 and 38% in March 2018. Nationally the average percentage in March 2017 was 6% and in Kent it was 26%. Our rate of LAC per 10,000 for local children only is 52 (31 March 2018).¹⁴

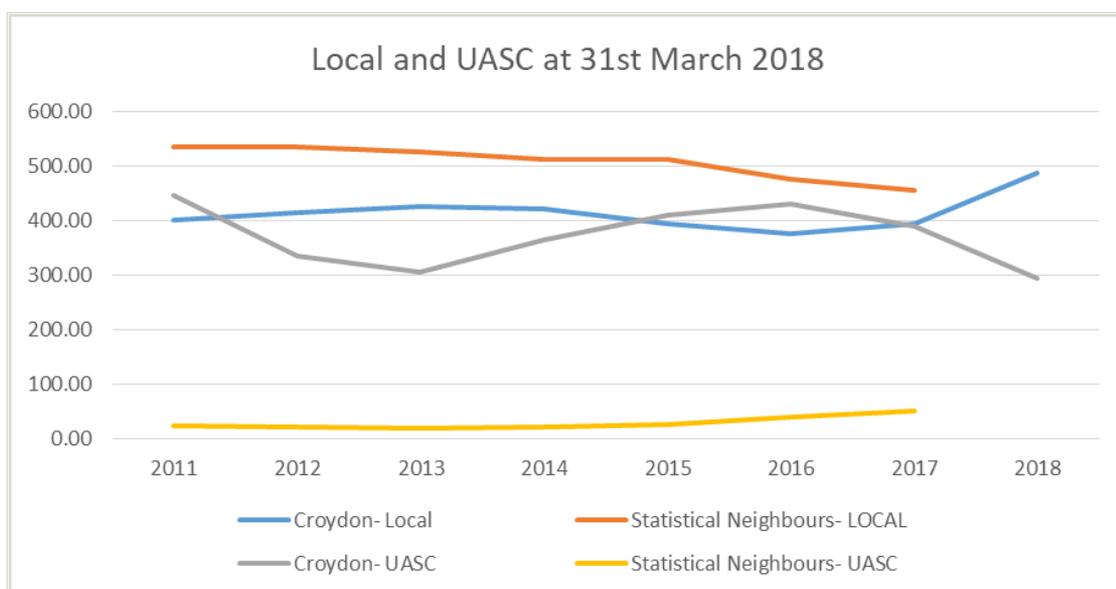
¹² 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

¹³ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

¹⁴ DfE SFR 2017 – 2016/17 903 data

- 5.5 However, following national changes in April 2017, we have seen a gradual decrease in our cohort of UASC. UASC arriving in Croydon are now managed through the pan-London rota (16/17 year olds) and more importantly the National Transfer Scheme (age 15 and under).
- 5.6 However, in the case of the National Transfer Scheme, the point at which a UASC become looked by Croydon and the point at which they transfer to another LA can be slow. This impacts on Croydon's need for short term placements for those who then move on. It also sometimes causes concern for the young persons' welfare, sometimes resulting in them not moving at all, and limits the ability to do long term planning from the outset.
- 5.7 Our overall numbers of looked after children have remained steady.

Whilst the overall number of looked after children is stable, the makeup of Croydon's looked after child population is changing, with a reduction in the proportion who are UASC and an increase in the proportion of "local" children and young people¹⁵.



- 5.7 Croydon's number of local looked after children has increased over 12 months (31 March 2017 to 31 March 2018) from 395 to 488, an increase of 24%. The current number (end October 2018) is 520. This is the highest number of local looked after children in over five years.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Croydon- Local	400	415	425	420	395	375	395	488

- 5.8 In addition to Croydon's large looked after children population, there are increasing demands across children's social care. We have seen an increase in the number of referrals to children's social care we keep open from 5195 in 2016/17 to 7090 in 2017/18 (as at 31st March 2018), an increase of 27%. Our referrals per 10,000 have increased from 550.1 to 750.7 against an England average of 548.2. Our rate of children in need was 392.7 per 10,000 in 2016/17 and increased by 28% to 549.1 per 10,000 in 2017/18 against an England

¹⁵ DfE SFR 2017 – 2016/17 903 data

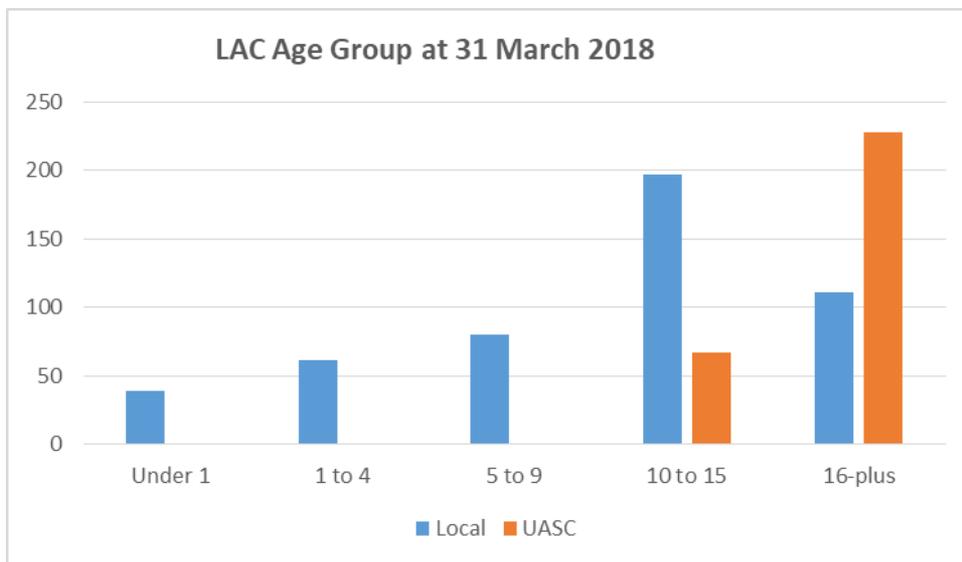
average of 330.4.¹⁶ Following this spike in demand, we are seeing a reduction to date during the current financial year (2018/19).

- 5.9 Therefore it is possible that our cohort of local looked after children may see a further increase in the coming 12 months. This means that the number of children who are looked after in Croydon overall, and therefore the demand for placements, is likely to continue to be steady in 2018/19, even if numbers of UASC continue to decline.
- 5.10 Longer term, the impact of the early help and support for children on the edge of care (see section 8) should see an impact on reducing the numbers of local looked after children.

Gender and age profile

A high proportion of children and young people who come into care in Croydon are 10-15 years old (33% / 264) or 16+ (43% / 339).

- 5.10 Whilst the age profile of children coming into care is influenced by the high numbers of UASC in Croydon, who are primarily aged 16+, it also reflects high numbers of local children over the age of 10 entering care.¹⁷



- 5.11 The overall gender split as at March 2018 was 33% female to 67% male¹⁸. The proportions of female to male for each age vary year-on-year. However, the higher proportion of male looked after children remains, as our UASC are predominately male.

Siblings

- 5.12 235 (30%) of our looked after children have siblings who are also looked after. This comprises 134 sibling groups of 2, 36 groups of 3 and 15 sibling groups of 4 or more.

Diversity

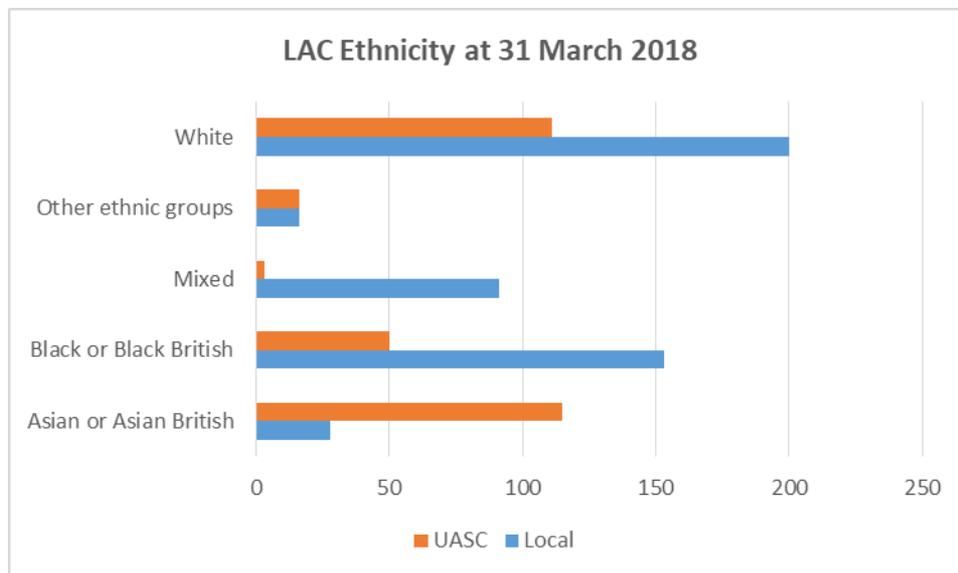
Our looked after children are ethnically diverse, as is the borough as a whole. This is true for our local looked after children as well as for UASC.

¹⁶ CIN Census 2017/18 submission

¹⁷ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

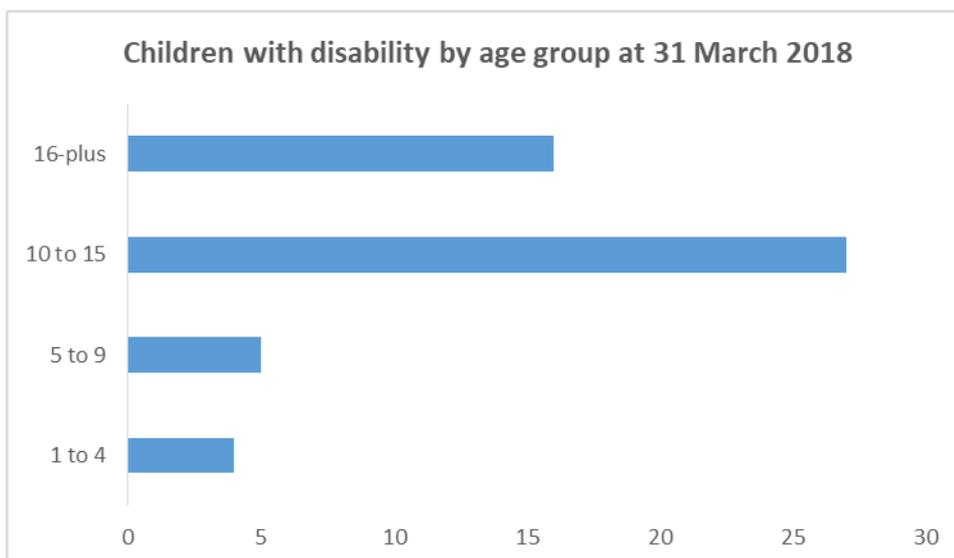
¹⁸ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

- 5.13 Nearly 39%¹⁹ of local children in care are white or white British (compared with 55% of the total population²⁰), 28% are black, or black British (compared with 20% of the total population); 17% are from mixed or other backgrounds (compared with 6.6% of the total population); and 15% Asian or Asian British (same proportion as all of Croydon).
- 5.14 The ethnic profile of UASC who began to be looked after in 2017/2018 differs. 35 % are Black, nearly 39% are Asian and 26% are white.
- 5.15 A high proportion of children in Croydon’s care overall are Muslim (26% as at 31 March 2018)²¹ compared to 8% of population who are Muslim in Croydon overall.²²



Looked after children with a recorded disability

- 5.16 51 (7%) of Croydon’s looked after children were recorded as having a disability, of whom 15 had multiple disabilities.²³



¹⁹ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

²⁰ Croydon Observatory Census data 2011

²¹ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

²² Croydon Observatory Census data 2011

²³ CRS 31 March 2018

Reasons for becoming looked after and legal status

- 5.17 The main reason for becoming looked after almost half of looked after children in 2017/18 was abuse or neglect (46%). This is similar to previous years. The second most recorded reason was absent parenting, often due to alcohol or substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health issues or a combination of these factors.²⁴
- 5.18 Of the local children looked after as at 31 March 2018, 42% were subject to a Care Order and 54% were looked after under Section 20. All UASC looked after had a legal status of single period of accommodation under Section 20 due to absent parenting.²⁵

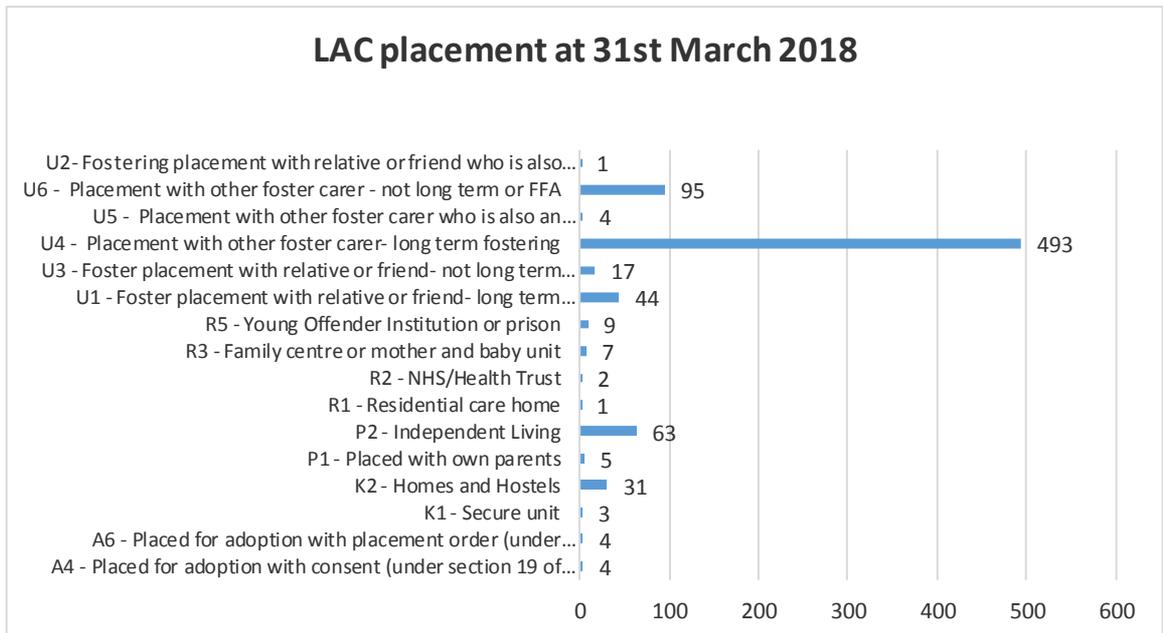
Care leavers

- 5.19 Croydon currently has 676 care leavers aged 19-21 at 31 March 2018.²⁶ This number has reduced slightly to 650 at end October 2018.

6. Placements

The majority of Croydon looked after children are placed with foster carers. Smaller numbers are placed in residential placements or semi-independent accommodation.

- 6.1 Croydon has the highest proportion of looked after children who have foster placements in London. 654 children (89% of our looked after children) were in foster placements at 31 March 2018.



A large proportion of Croydon looked after children benefit from stable placements close to home.

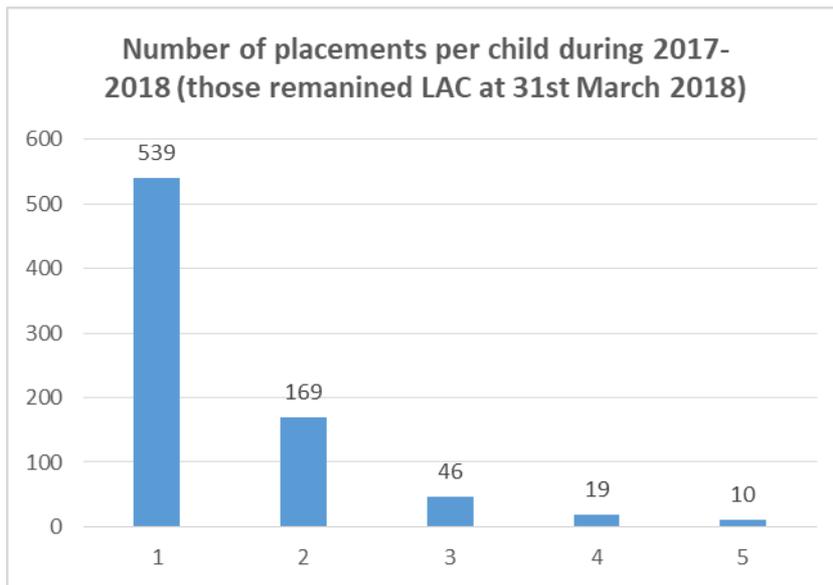
- 6.9 Croydon has a high placement stability rate. 69% of looked after children had only 1 placement during the year 2017/18. 10% had 3 or more placements. For children who have

²⁴ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

²⁵ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

²⁶ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

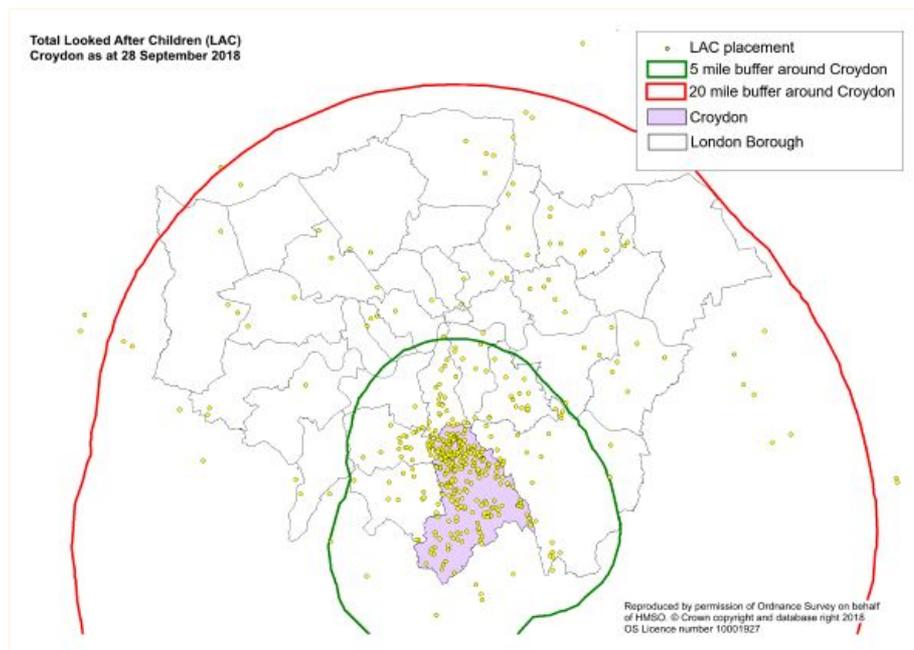
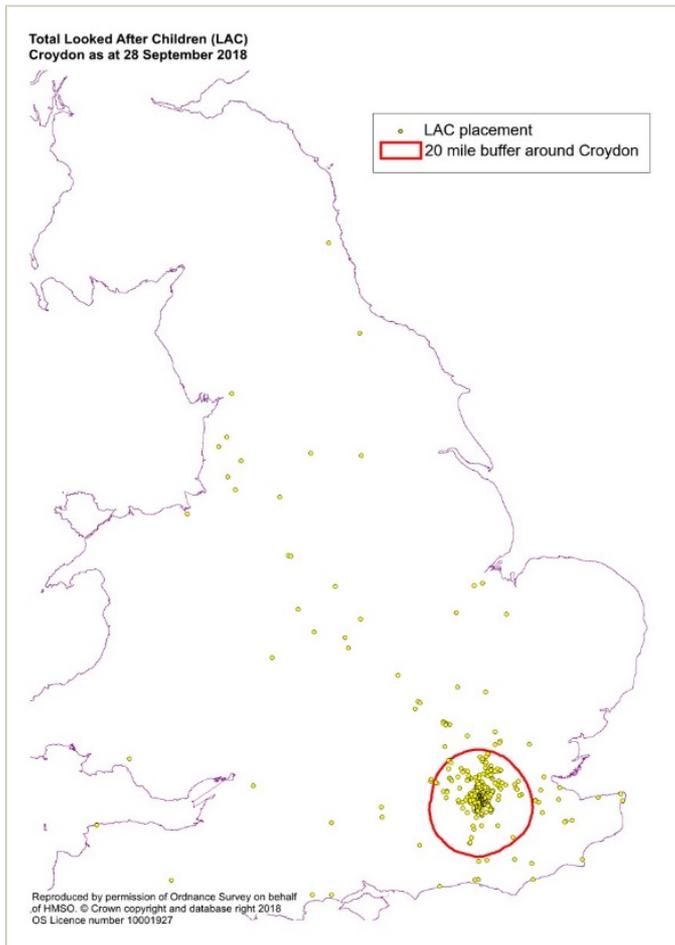
been in care for 2.5 years or more, 77% only had one placement during the year, and 3% had three placements or more.



6.7 Croydon has a high demand for local placements with 92% of all looked after children placed less than 20 miles from home at 31st March 2018. 62 children (8%) were placed more than 20 miles outside of Croydon's boundaries.²⁷

6.7 As at 28 September 2018, 52% are placed in Croydon, 23% are placed outside Croydon, but within 5 miles of the Croydon border, 25% are placed further than 5 miles from the Croydon border, and 12% are placed further than 20 miles from the Croydon border.

²⁷ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)



7. Sufficiency Areas

A. Fostering

- A1. Of our 654 foster placements, 62 (9%) children were being cared by parents or family friend member. Over half (34) of these children were under the age of 10.²⁸ The remaining 592 looked after children in foster placements are placed either with Croydon in-house foster carers or through an independent fostering agency (IFA).

In house foster care recruitment and assessment

- A4. Croydon had 237 foster care households as at 12 October 2018 who provided 337 in-house foster placements.²⁹ At October 2018, 85% of our foster carers had one or more child placed with them. 43% (103 families) had 2 or more children placed with them.³⁰

Placement Numbers per Family	Number of Carers / Families	Total Placement
1	98	98
2	74	148
3	25	75
4	4	16
No Placement	36	No Placement
Grand Total	237	337

- A5. The number of foster carers is relatively stable, with 50 new foster carers approved over the last three years. Ongoing recruitment of new carers is vital to maintain and grow our overall cohort of in-house foster carers. A larger cohort of in house carers would increase our ability to respond to the demand for foster placements. Wherever possible, in-house foster carers offer a flexible and more cost effective way to offer placements with foster carers, and are considered first before looking externally to IFAs.
- A6. However, turnover of foster carers, the introduction of staying put and the emphasis on long term placements means that there is increased pressure on our placements. In particular, 62 (26%) of our foster carers are aged 65 or above (30 of whom are 70 or above). This means that we need successful recruitment to maintain numbers, as well as to grow.
- A7. Croydon’s foster care recruitment and assessment service has been provided externally through a commissioned service since June 2015. Following a review of the delivery model and the development of a new recruitment pathway, this contract is ending. We have commissioned Coram (Thomas Coram Foundation for Children) to work with the Council from November 2018, managing the transformation of the service and facilitating the transfer back in house in November 2020. The Council has also been successful in obtaining grants for targeted recruitment for UASC and enhancing the skills and knowledge of our in-house foster carers working with UASC through a focused training programme.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

- A8. A Framework Agreement for IFAs was established in August 2016 for a period of three years with an option to extend for a further year, for the provision of standard placements, Parent and Child, remand and complex and challenging needs placements. The framework agreement is designed to create greater choice and flexibility in the range of provision in and outside the borough. The framework contract was refreshed in August 2018 resulting in the re-tiering of 30 providers who actively continue to provide services for Croydon. The refresh process identified an improvement in the overall quality of providers commissioned to deliver this service, with 90% being rated as Good and Outstanding by Ofsted.

²⁸ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

²⁹ CRS report on foster carers 12/10/2018.

³⁰ CRS report on foster carers 12/10/2018.

- A9. Of the 296 children and young people in IFA placements, the majority (84%) are framework placements. Off-framework placements are generally linked to overall market capacity for complex placements and to specific needs of a child.
- A10. There is an increasing demand for Parent and Child placements, as well as placement for children and young people with complex placements, which the Council is working with providers to meet to continue meeting their needs.
- A11. Croydon has a very competitive market for fostering and semi-independent placements, which is reflected in the large number of other children and young people looked after by other local authorities who are placed in Croydon. This puts additional pressure on the availability of placements in Croydon and impacts on the overall risk profile for our vulnerable adolescents placed within the borough.

Fostering as a route to permanency

- A12. Prioritising foster placements as a route to permanency is important for both local looked after children and UASC and searches for foster placements give consideration as far as possible to a long term plan for the child. When it is acknowledged that the long term plan for the child is for them to remain in foster care in the current placement, work is undertaken to agree the match through presenting the case to either the Fostering Panel or to a Matching Panel, offering long term stability to the child and foster carer. At 31st March 2018, 537 of a total of 654 foster placements (82%) were recorded as long term fostering. There were a further 5 placements with a plan to adopt.³¹

Staying Put

- A13. Social workers develop the pathway plan for young people approaching their 18th birthday and work with the young person and their foster carers to consider whether staying put is the most appropriate plan for each young person. At 31st March 2018, there were 25 care leavers who were staying put with their foster carer.³² At 31 October 2018, this had increased to 47.

Future needs for fostering

- *In-house foster placements that can meet the needs of Croydon children and young people:*
 - *Ethnically diverse*
 - *Can offer placements for older children and young people (10+) as well as younger children and babies*
 - *Can offer placements for children with complex needs*
 - *Can offer parent and baby placements*
- *Maintain and increase number of in-house foster carers*
- *Focus on effectiveness of arrangements for long term fostering placements to support permanency.*

Actions:

1. Implement our new model for foster carer recruitment and assessment, working with a new delivery partner

³¹ CSC Monthly dashboard, 31 March 2018

³² 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

2. Target the recruitment of in-house foster carers to Croydon's profile of looked after children and young people, including carers who can offer specialist and long term care.
3. Ensure options for permanency are considered and progressed, including long term fostering and fostering for adoption.
4. Implement revised staying put offer to ensure more young people have the opportunity to stay with their foster carer for longer.
5. Implement revised allowances for foster carers by April 2019.

B. Residential placements

- B1. We know that most children are most often better supported by families rather than being placed in residential care. Therefore, residential care is being used to meet specialist and specific needs where fostering does not currently offer the best option for the child. Croydon expects placements to be outcome focused, with a view to bringing the child home or close to home in Croydon. All residential placements are reviewed regularly by the Placement Stability Panel.
- B2. We have experienced an increase in residential placements (homes and hostels), however this remains below the national average. 31 children (4 %) are in residential placements (children's home, secure unit or hostel) as at end March 2018³³ against a national average of 11%. Children in residential are aged 9 to 17. 41% are 9-13 years old and 59% 14 to 17 years old, with equal distribution of gender.
- B3. Residential placement option are considered where they are the best fit for a young person's needs, either short or long term, including where a family-based placement is not suitable.
- B4. Currently, Croydon spot purchases from London Care Service contracted resources. Under the umbrella of the successful South London SEN Commissioning Programme, 11 boroughs have agreed to work with Croydon to establish an integrated commissioning solution for the commissioning of good quality residential placements for looked after children, at a fair price. As well as enabling Croydon to commission placements based on outcomes and needs of the children and young people, working with partner boroughs provides the leverage required to shape the market and the information required to look at our sufficiency in a more joined up, strategic way. There are clear benefits of moving away from spot purchasing to working together using an integrated commissioning solution such as a DPS including economies of scale, better pricing and discounting arrangements, agreements on the same contracts terms and conditions, sharing good practice & intelligence.

Future need for residential placements

- *Ongoing need for outcomes based residential placements, including short term placements and placements for young people with complex needs.*
- *Residential placements closer to home*
- *Residential placements that represent good value for money*

Actions:

³³ SSD 903 2017 -2018

1. Continue to work in partnership with other South London boroughs to establish an Integrated Commissioning Solution (Dynamic Purchasing System) for the outcomes based commissioning of Residential Placements.

C. Semi Independent accommodation

- C1. 63 looked after young people are living semi-independently (at 31 March 2018).³⁴ Our current cohort of young people in semi-independent accommodation is split equally between local young people and young people who are UASC.³⁵

The use of semi-independent accommodation continues to be the highest used type of placement after fostering placements.

- C2. Semi-independent accommodation can be offered where an assessment of independence skills indicates that the young person is ready to move towards greater independence.
- C3. The needs of looked after young people accommodated within semi-independent provision have significantly shifted from the previous year. 2016/2017 data shows that 80% were standard placements and 20% complex placements; however this position significantly changed by late 2017 with approx. 73% CLA placed in complex placements (24 hour / solo placements).
- C4. Croydon established a new Framework Agreement for Semi Independent Accommodation and Support Services for children looked after aged 16 and 17 in January 2017 for an interim period of 2 years (with an option to extend for a further two years). 22 providers were appointed to this Framework for the provision of standard and complex placements offering 24 hour units and support hours. This offers a good range of quality assured providers that effectively meet the demand for this service. This approach provides consistency in the commissioning and utilisation of semi-independent placements, and a continuum of support for young people moving from care to living independently in the community.

Future need for semi-independent accommodation

- *Ongoing need for semi-independent accommodation for both local looked after children and UASC, including a high proportion of young people with complex needs.*

Actions:

1. Ensure a sufficient and effective range of semi-independent options for young people through the semi Independent accommodation and support framework.

D. Adoption /Special Guardianship Orders

³⁴ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

³⁵ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

- D1. Planning for permanence is a key focus area for us, including effective planning and timeliness of adoption where this best meets children's needs, and focused family-finding activity for children with adoption plans, to minimise delays.
- D2. We have a clear expectation for planning for permanency at every stage of the child's journey, and monitor the time it takes from a permanence option being identified for a child, and that placement being formally recognised as a permanent placement.

Adoption

- D3. Croydon's percentage rate of adoption (4% at 31 March 2017 and 2.3% at 31 March 2018) is lower than the national average (14% at 31 March 2017). However, Croydon has a high proportion of UASC and these children are not normally placed for adoption, which negatively affects Croydon's performance rating on adoption.
- D4. The Croydon trend reflects a similar reduction in the number of adoptions as nationally due to a reduction the number of placement orders and the number placed for adoption. Whilst the numbers have reduced, Croydon is continuing to place children for adoption or where this is in the child's best interests and at September 2018, there were 19 children who were placed with families and are awaiting an Adoption Order.
- D5. Croydon is both recruiting its own adopters, utilising already approved and waiting adopters, and purchasing adopters from independent agencies. Croydon also took advantage of the grant from the DfE to purchase adopters from other agencies. In Croydon there were 37 approved adopters awaiting for a match as at 31 March 2018.³⁶
- D6. Significant improvements have been made in the average time it takes between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. At the end of 2017/18 the average time was 309 days, below the DfE threshold of 487 days.³⁷
- D7. It remains a challenge to secure adoptive families for children who have complex needs and/or disabilities, sibling groups and children from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. Therefore, our recruitment strategy is focused on improving the performance in this area. Croydon is also focusing on recruiting 'Foster to Adopt' carers. These are approved adopters who have a dual approval to foster a child and subsequently adopt the child when the LA is granted an order to place for adoption.
- D9. Croydon plans to further develop this model through the regionalisation agenda, and through internal recruitment. This resource will be closely aligned to our pool of existing in-house foster carers, approved and waiting to ensure babies and toddlers who become looked after are placed with foster to adopt carers. This will help to avoid placement moves and secure stability early on, contributing to better outcomes for the child.
- D10. Croydon is one of ten London Boroughs who will come together to form the South London hub of the London Regional Adoption Agency. London Borough have been working together, supported by funding from the Department of Education, to develop this model. From April 2019, Adopt South London will take over the recruitment and assessment functions regarding adopters as well as the adoption support functions offering an opportunity to further strengthen our practice.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)

³⁶ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

³⁷ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

- D11 25 children ceased to be in care as a result of a Special Guardianship Order in 2017/18. This is a reduction compared to 35 in 2015 /16 and 35 children in 2014/15³⁸.
- D12. Croydon has invested in six social worker posts to undertake SGO and Connected Carer assessments which will help ensure that SGOs can be identified and progressed effectively where this best meets the child's needs.

Future needs for adoption and SGOs

- *Targeted increase in number in the number identified adopters and long term foster carers, to match the needs of our looked after children and ensure that adoptive families can be identified more quickly.*
- *Stronger intelligence regarding permanency and progress to prevent drift and delay and increase speed and overall numbers for whom permanency is achieved.*

Actions:

1. Increase in the numbers of children leaving care through adoption, achieving a minimum of 20 adoptions each year.
2. Recruit more adoptive families for disabled children, BME groups and to keep siblings together.
3. Increase the number of foster to adopt families
4. Continue to improve performance in placing children through SGOs

E. Leaving Care

Croydon has the largest number of care leavers in London and one of the largest numbers of care leavers nationally.

- E1. The Leaving Care Service supports 676 care leavers aged 19-21, as at 31 March 2018.

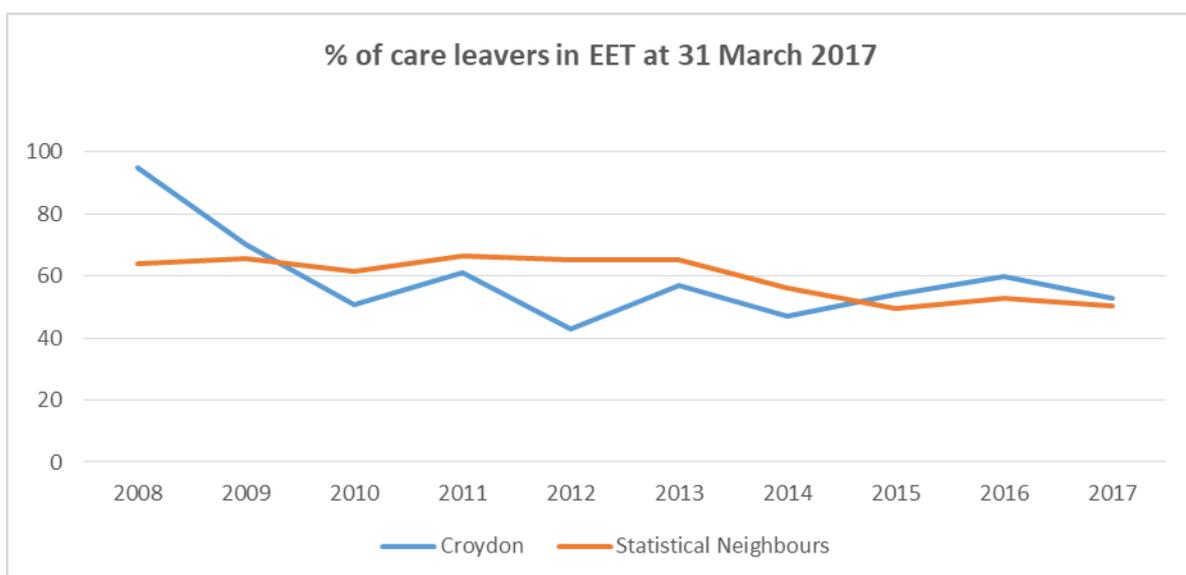
Gender	Aged 19	Aged 20	Aged 21	Grand Total
Female	54	49	46	149
Male	197	176	154	527
Grand Total	251	225	200	676

- E2. Croydon is unusual in that a high proportion of our care leavers, in common with our LAC cohort, are currently UASC.
- E3. Croydon Care Leavers' Local Offer, published in September 2018, outlines the services available and will be the benchmark against which we will measure our delivery. The leaving care service has expanded in size and reach as a result. The local offer will help ensure that all young people leaving care know what support is available, and PAs will follow up at each review meeting to confirm that they are aware of the offer.
- E4. Planning for leaving care starts before the young person's 18th birthday to establish their ambitions and aims for the future. The Leaving Care Team allocates a Personal Advisor to each care leaver who is 17 and over and amongst other duties they work with young people and the young person's social work team on the plans each young person has beyond their

³⁸ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

18th birthday. 98% of care leavers and 48% eligible looked after children had an up to date pathway plan at 31st March 2018³⁹.

- E5. At 31 March 2018, 76% of Croydon’s care leavers were in suitable accommodation.⁴⁰ This is a slight decrease compared to 31 March 2017 (77%), and lower than the national rate (84%) and statistical neighbours (82%).⁴¹
- E6. The housing needs of looked after young people approaching the age of 18 are considered through a housing panel who consider the options for each young person including the Landlord Guaranteed Rent Scheme or private tenancy. As far as possible, locations close to support networks, including relatives, or friends, colleges, or work are sought. Floating support may be offered if needed through Supported Housing Service. This panel also plans for those leaving semi-independent accommodation at 18.
- E7. We have a high number of care leavers living in independent accommodation, 492 as at 31st March 2018, of whom 334 are UASC⁴². Croydon has a range of options to support care leavers, to live independently and the Leaving Care team is proactive in supporting these young people; in meeting their housing needs and providing continued support with things like setting up home, budgeting for rent and other household costs, and links to other support services, once a home is found. The team works actively with the landlords to ensure tenancies are maintained and reduce the risk of eviction.
- E8. Croydon has a higher than average proportion of care leavers in education, training and employment (53%)⁴³, which enables young people to maintain a positive outlook and as consequence they are more likely to be stable in their accommodation. This decreased slightly to 50% in 2018.⁴⁴



- E9. Looking at Croydon’s current cohort of 16 and 17 year old LAC and care leavers (at Nov 2018) provides a further insight:

³⁹ CSC Monthly Dashboard 31 March 2018
⁴⁰ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)
⁴¹ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016
⁴² CSC Monthly Dashboard 31 March 2018
⁴³ DfE SFR 2017 – 2016/17 903 data
⁴⁴ 2017/18 Croydon 903 submission (unpublished)

16/17 year old LAC & Care Leavers - Participation Type (Nov-18)			
	Total	In Borough	OOB
Apprenticeship	2	2	0
6th Form	32	12	20
FE College	204	103	101
Secure	7	0	7
Employment	11	5	6
Other Post 16	3	0	3
Training ESFA Funded	2	0	2
Totals	261	122	139

- E10. A high proportion (78%) of post-16 LAC/care leavers are in college provision and low proportion (12%) in school sixth forms. The high volume of UASC in this age group is thought to be a contributing factor as school sixth forms curriculum is A' level dominated. UASC (particularly those who have arrived during key stage 4) are less likely to have received the required GCSE grades at age 16 to gain entry to A' level courses in academic year 12. The low apprenticeship rate is typical for this age group, as this tends to be a more popular option at 18+.
- E11. Croydon has a number of care leavers who present with additional risk or vulnerability from their involvement as victims of all forms of exploitation, or from involvement in gangs and/or criminal activity. We work closely with statutory services including the HM Prison Service and probation to ensure that discharge of young people from prison is done in a safe and planned way and they receive appropriate support in the community upon release.
- E12. An area of pressure on our services is accommodation costs of the young people who have no recourse to public funds, because their asylum claim has failed or they have exhausted all right so appeal to stay in the UK. As at May 2018 Croydon was home to 166 such young people. The policy of the Council in this area is currently under review.

Actions:

1. Implement and deliver the Local Offer, ensuring that care leavers know their entitlements and the support available to them so that they experience improved outcomes
2. Continue to work to better integrate pathways of access between children's social care, Gateway and Welfare, and Housing Need services, to ensure that planning for independent accommodation at a strategic and individual level happens at as early a stage as possible.

8. Support for children and families

- 8.1 As well as making arrangements for sufficient placements where a period of time in care is the right option for the child, we have support in place for children, young people and families to address emerging needs and issues before they escalate.
- 8.2 Early help means taking action to support a child, young person or their family early in the life of a problem, as soon as it emerges. For children who have been in care and are

returning to their family, these services can offer ongoing support to the child and family, to maximise the opportunity for the child to continue to be safe and achieve good outcomes. For other families, early help can prevent difficulties becoming more significant and escalating to the point of requiring social care involvement.

- 8.3 For young people already experiencing difficulties, we have targeted support available to either prevent care becoming necessary, or to support them through a period of time care with a view to returning home.

Early Help

- 8.9 Croydon's Partnership Early Help Strategy and delivery plan, approved in September 2018, will provide a joined up, effective early help offer for children aged 0 to 18 years and their families; which is delivered on a locality, evidence based model through a shared partnership approach to collectively delivering universal and early help services. It will enable families, communities and all professionals to:
- Respond quickly and effectively to the need for early help
 - Intervene and provide support to stop an issue escalating
 - Ensure there is consensual and partnership approach to working with all children and their families
- 8.10 The proposed delivery model is shaped around three Early Help locality hubs which provide a locality base for bringing together a range of practitioners and close collaboration and alignment of services.

Targeted support - children on the edge of care

- 8.2 To provide a better response to vulnerable adolescents before their needs escalate to this level, as well to the needs of looked after children, we have established a dedicated adolescent service. This services aims in particular to reduce risks around exploitation.
- 8.3 We have also established a collaborative partnership with Family Action, a national charity that has received funding to work with a local authority, to deliver an intensive support pilot for 30 families for 12 months from Sept 2018. Three family action practitioners offer an additional intensive Edge of Care Service to improve outcomes for children and families through either intensive, time-limited support to families (where a child is on the edge of care and child care proceedings are likely/imminent or intensive), or time-limited support to enable a better transition out of care. The Service is designed to enable us to pause before child care legal proceedings begin and give a family with a child on the edge of care a final opportunity to make positive progress through intensive, time-limited support tailored to their needs. Family Action will provide an evaluation and cost benefit analysis at the end of the pilot year, leading to a fully developed and evaluated Edge of Care model which Croydon, along with other local authorities, can adopt in the longer term.
- 8.4 If concerns about the care and protection of a child or young person have been identified, a S20 placement may be agreed by the Edge of Care Panel. A S20 placement may in particular be agreed if it is considered by a Family Group Conference (FGC) that significant progress can be made in resolving concerns within a specified period of separation for the child or young person from the care of their parent/guardian, and a commitment exists to resolve the presenting issues. This is intended as a temporary measure with a clear plan for the child or young person returning home at the agreed end date, or to undertake care proceedings if concerns are not resolved. The Council is developing a new FGC offer that will see the service developing more capacity in house and expanding support to children and families at PLO stage and early help. Ultimately this aims to reduce the number of young people coming into care / remaining in care.

Young people at risk of homelessness

- 8.5 The Council commission services from CAYSH, who are based at the Turnaround Centre, to be the first point of contact for 16/17 year olds who may have homelessness issues. CAYSH work with young people and their families to determine homelessness. This work will include assessment, support, advice and guidance and mediation between 16-17 year olds and their parent / carers.
- 8.6 Where a 16-17 year old is identified as being immediately homeless, this triggers a duty under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to initiate an assessment of need. Young people have to give consent to such assessments.
- 8.7 The assessment of need will determine if the young person meets the criteria of the Southwark Judgement. If the criteria is met, we have a duty to offer accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. If the young person does not want to become looked after and we do not consider that their needs are such that we should override their wishes in order to safeguard them, they will be signposted to housing services, including CAYSH, as they will be deemed being in priority need.

9. Summary of actions

	Action
Fostering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement our new model for foster carer recruitment and assessment, working with a new delivery partner 2. Target the recruitment of in-house foster carers to Croydon's profile of looked after children and young people, including carers who can offer specialist and long term care. 3. Ensure options for permanency are considered and progressed, including long term fostering and fostering for adoption. 4. Implement revised staying put offer to ensure more young people have the opportunity to stay with their foster carer for longer. 5. Implement revised allowances for foster carers by April 2019.
Residential placements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work in partnership with other South London boroughs to establish an Integrated Commissioning Solution (Dynamic Purchasing System) for the outcomes based commissioning of Residential Placements.
Semi-independent accommodation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure a sufficient and effective range of SIA options for young people through the semi Independent accommodation and support framework.
Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase in the numbers of children leaving care through adoption. 2. Recruit more adoptive families for disabled children, BME groups and to keep siblings together. 3. Increase the number of foster to adopt families
Leaving Care	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement and deliver the Local Offer, ensuring that care leavers know their entitlements and the support available to them so that they experience improved outcomes 2. Continue to work to better integrate pathways of access between children's social care, Gateway and Welfare, and Housing Need services, to ensure that

	planning for independent accommodation at a strategic and individual level happens at as early a stage as possible.
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