

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 21 May 2018

Subject: Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy Review - February 2018

Report of: Strategic Director of Children's Services

Summary

This report is an update of progress on the strategy to achieve 'sufficient' range and choice of care placements for Manchester's looked after children and care leavers.

Recommendations

Committee members are asked to:

1. Consider the progress that has been made to date and the actions that will be undertaken in 2018/19.
2. Request a further report in the 2018/19 municipal year to update on progress and impact.

Wards Affected: All

Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Manchester's looked after children will only prosper and contribute to a thriving city if they are provided with the secure base that is offered by a good quality care placement.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Our looked after children and young people need high quality carers and placements to benefit from local education and training opportunities, as do our care leavers in order to be successful.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Looked after children's lives can be transformed by the provision of high quality care placements, with care providers supporting children and young people to grow into responsible and contributing members of the community.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit,	We need carers and accommodation providers to make provision of care in Manchester so as to

work	provide local placements for children to grow up in and to work and settle in.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	We want to provide local placements for Manchester's children so they can benefit from being connected with their families, their schools, communities, friends, and the City itself.

Contact Officers:

Name: Paul Marshall
Position: Strategic Director of Children's Services
Telephone: 0161 234 3804
E-mail: p.marshall@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Sean McKendrick
Position: Deputy Director of Children's Services
Telephone: 0161 234 4934
E-mail: s.mckendrick@manchester.gov.uk

Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents identify important facts which has contributed to and informed the preparation of this report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

1. Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016-19
2. Placements North West Placement Census 2017 - published January 2018
3. Placements North West Placement Census 2017 Data Pack - published January 2018

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to review progress on the 'Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016-2019' which was produced in 2016. There was a full end of year review produced in 2017. This review is a brief update on progress as at the end of February 2018.

1.2 The original strategy sets out how Manchester City Council (the Council) will work with partners to meet the statutory 'Sufficiency Duty' set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, which requires local authorities to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area.

1.3 The strategy was aimed at encapsulating the way we work with children and young people to ensure that their lives are improved along with services that they receive from us. The original strategy document recognised that there are significant challenges within what is a very complex and evolving external placements market.

1.4 This review seeks to provide an update on the progress achieved to date on the original strategy, whilst acknowledging a changing demographic and evolving landscape. This includes a proposal to remodel the overall service offer to Care Leavers.

2.0 Background

Vision

Our vision for placement provision for looked after children as set out in the strategy was and is that:

2.1 Children will be supported to stay with their families where it is safe to do so.

2.2 We will achieve permanency through adoption, special guardianship and permanent fostering in a timely manner.

2.3 Most children will live in a local, family placement.

2.4 Children with disabilities will have the same access and opportunity for placements as their non-disabled peers.

2.5 Care leavers will be able to access 'Staying Put' foster care, supported lodgings and supported accommodation

2.6 We will improve the timeliness of care planning and utilise commissioning and partnership working

3.0 Summary Position as at end of February 2018

3.1 Need

3.1.1 As at the end of February 2018 the **total number of children looked after was 1,248**, an increase of 81 on the 1,167 looked after children at the end of 2016/17. For the two years previously the looked after children population had been steadily declining, in line with our strategy, with a reduction from 1,237 at the end of 2015/16.

3.1.2 In relation to admissions to care, the rate of admissions to care has increased from 37.1 per 10,000 at the end of 2016/17 to **45.4 per 10,000** at the end of February 2017.

3.1.3 The number and percentage of children being admitted to care as a result of Police Protection Powers has decreased this year. **At the end of October 2017 the percentage of children admitted to care via Police Protection Powers was at 10%** compared to 14.9% at the end of 2016/17. In total there have been 50 children subject to Police Protection Powers this year up to the end of February 2018 compared to 71 in total in 2016/17.

3.1.4 The number of looked after children who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) has increased as at February 2018 to 67 compared to 48 as at 31st March 2017, **representing an increase in UASC as a percentage of the looked after children population from 3.9% to 5.4%.**

3.1.5 There have been **56 'should be placed for adoption' decisions** made on looked after children so far in 2016/17 up to end of February 2018. There have been **50 children made subject to a Placement Order** (court order agreeing and permitting a child to be adopted) in that period. Numbers of children with adoption plans appear to be increasing following a previous reduction in numbers.

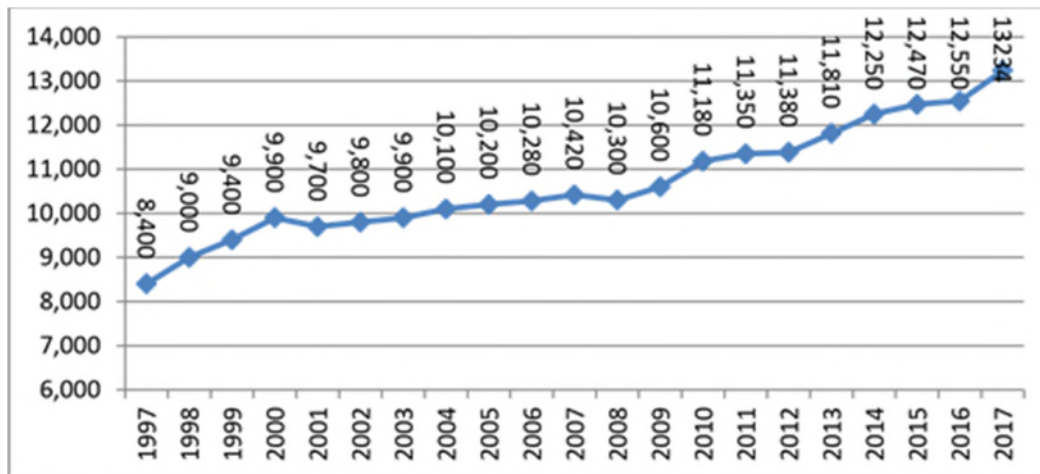
3.1.6 Alonzi House, our edge of care and short break service for teenagers, has worked with 266 young people and their families since March 2017. Of these, 28 of the young people were already in care when Alonzi intervention began, with the remaining 238 young people being on the edge of care. Of these 238 young people on the edge of care, 25 have since become looked after. The remaining 213 have been supported to stay with their families outside of care. This is equal to an **89.5% success rate in supporting young people to stay with their families.**

3.1.7 While the the rate of admissions has increased, the rate of discharge of children has slowed down, this was in many ways predictable as practice and care planning improves across Children's Services.

3.1.8 In relation to discharge, 45 children have left care via adoption. Last year in total 80 children were adopted in the full year. There have been 47 children who have left care via Special Guardianship Orders compared to 59 for the full year in 2016/17, 17 children have left care via a Child Arrangement Order, proportionately slightly more than the 17 who left care in this way for the full year last year. There have been 102 children so far this year who have left care to return home, representing 36% of discharges. It should be noted, the timeliness of decision making and planning for children with plans of adoption has continued to improve and was judged to be good by Ofsted in 2017.

3.1.9 Regional Comparator Data. The following graph shows the increasing number of looked after children across the 23 North West local authorities.

Number of LAC in the North West from 1997 to 2017 ([Placement North West Census 2017 published January 2018](#))



Source: 903 return from 1997 to 2017

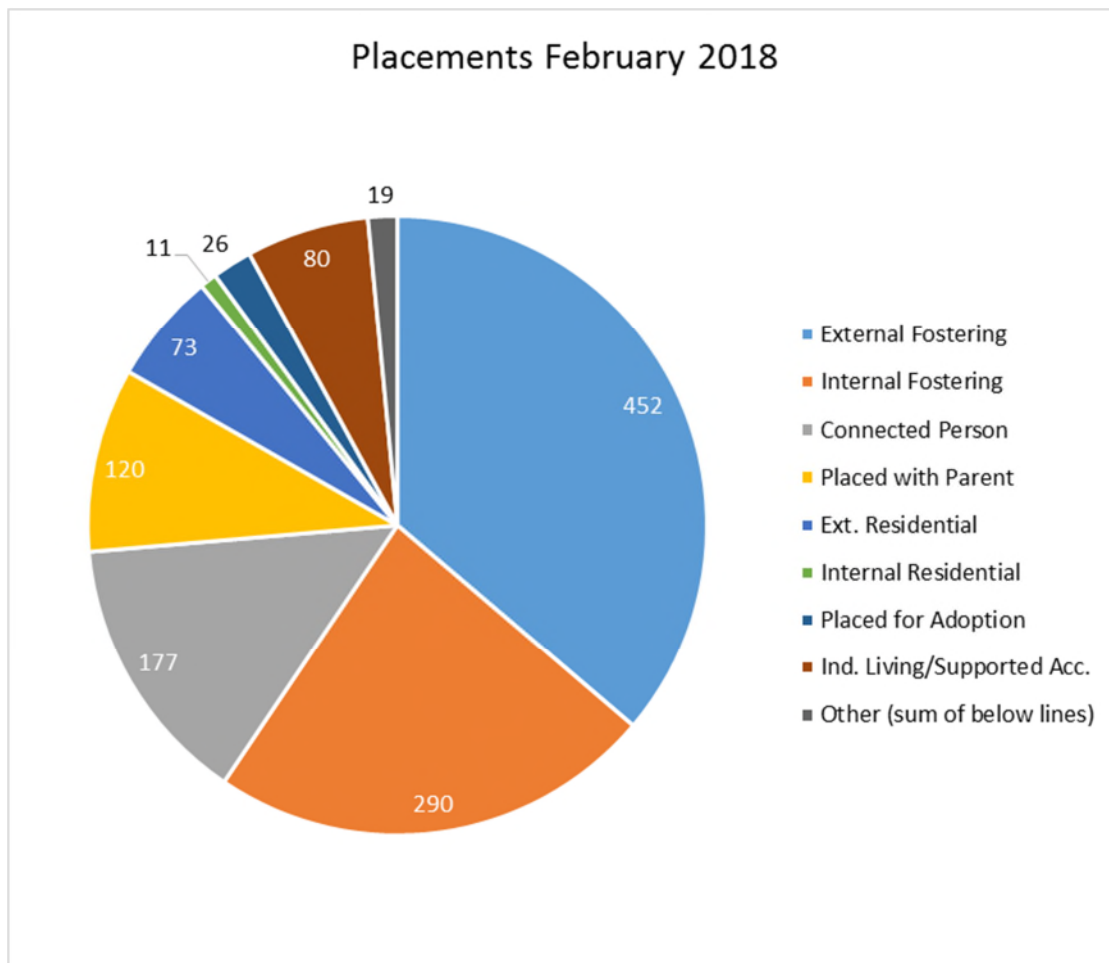
Analysis

3.1.10 In this reporting year, we have seen an incremental increase in the number of children whose needs are such to require the council to intervene and care for them. This is reflected by the number of children 'becoming looked after' being higher than 2016/17 reporting year. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care has increased and the national picture indicates this and the transfer of children will continue to increase. Clearly this increase in need places pressure on the range and choice of care placements. More positively, the number of children admitted as a result of Police Protection Powers had decreased. This suggests a more proactive and intervention approach by Children's Services and for the child minimises any potential trauma. At the same time the rate of discharge of looked after children has reduced, this is attributable to the fact the planning for children to secure permanence for children takes time and careful planning. Alonzi House appears to be supporting significant numbers of teenagers to avoid them becoming unnecessarily looked after.

3.1.11 In line with the picture in Manchester, evidence from the North West region and nationally is that looked after children numbers are increasing, placing additional demands on stretched placement and financial resources. This is indicated in the graph above.

3.2 Current Placement Type Composition

3.2.1 Diagram 1 - This pie chart shows the composition of placement type for Manchester's looked after children as at the end of February 2018.



3.2.2 As at the end of February 2018 there were 452 children placed in external fostering placements. This is a reduction of 37 children from the 489 who were placed in external fostering at the end of 2016/17 and 82 fewer than at the end of 2015/16. This is reflective of planning and budget strategy, as we strive to reduce reliance on expensive external fostering provision, which can often be at greater distance.

3.2.3 The number of children placed with internal recruited foster carers has increased this year from 229 at the end of 2016/17 to 290 at the end of February 2018. This is an increase of 61 placements this year and builds on the increase in the previous year when we increased numbers from 191 to 229. In total over the last 23 months we have increased the number of children placed with internal recruited foster carers by 99.

3.2.4 In addition to those placed with internal recruited carers, there were 177 children placed with connected persons foster carers at the end of February 2018 compared to 167 at the end of last year, an increase of 10 children.

3.2.5 In total, 73.6% of our looked after children were placed in foster care at the end of February 2018, either internally with recruited carers or connected person carers, or with external foster carers.

3.2.5 The number of children placed in residential placements has increased this year from 67 at the end of 2016/17 to 84 at the end of February 2018. In addition

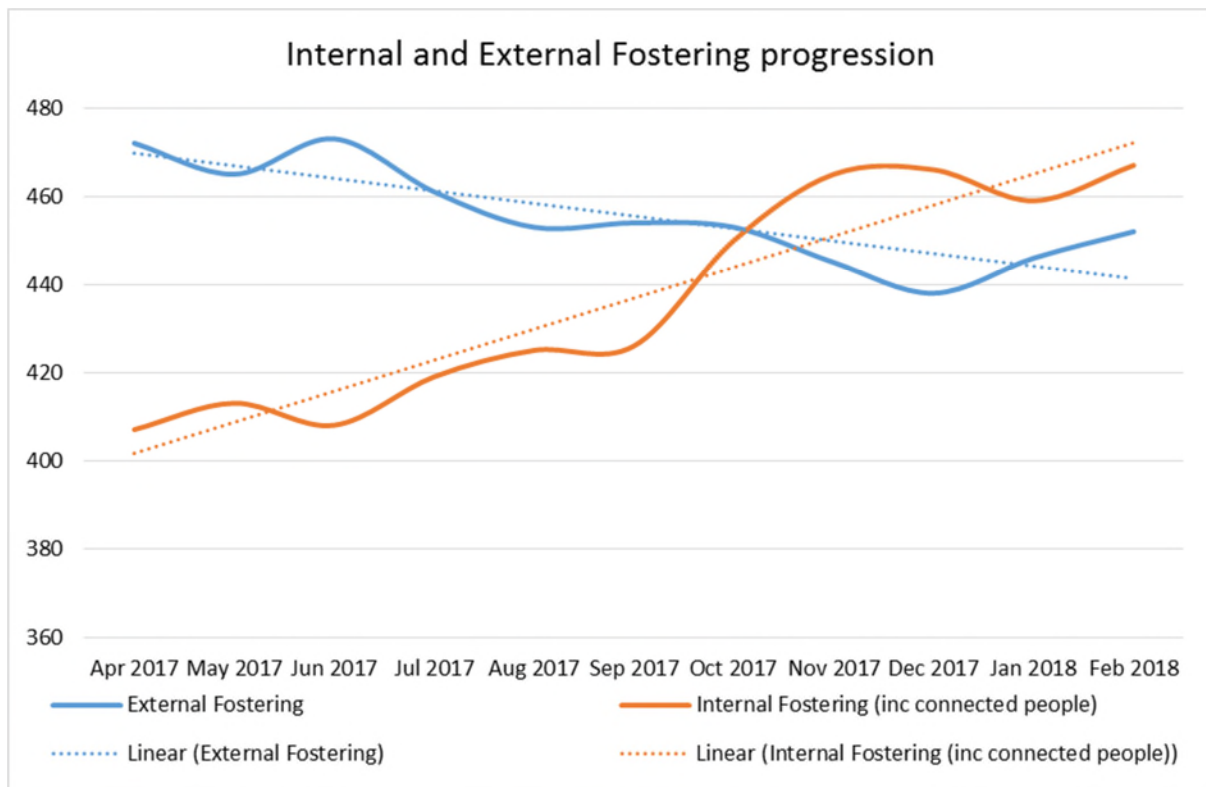
the split between internal provision and external provision has changed. At the end of 2016/17 there were 48 children in external residential provision and 19 in internal. At the end of February 2018 this had changed to 73 in external and 11 in internal. In percentage terms there are now 5.8% of our children placed with external residential providers and 0.9% placed in internal children's homes, **in total making that 6.7 % of our looked after children placed in residential provision.** This is an increase on the 5.7% placed in residential provision at the end of 2016/17 but still a relatively low proportion compared to national averages which is circa 11%.

3.2.6 At the end of February 2018 there were 26 children placed for adoption compared to 28 at the end of 2016/17. So far 45 children have been adopted in 2017/18. Timeliness continues to be good. It took on average for the 45 children adopted so far 410 days to move from admission to care to placement for adoption. This compares well against the Government target of 426 days. (A1 Scorecard Measure). For the same children it took on average just 63 days to move from Placement Order to a decision on a match, against a Government target of 121 days. (A2 Scorecard Measure).

3.2.7 Information provided by Adoption Counts, the Regional Adoption Agency which Manchester City Council is a member, reports the recruitment of adopters is so far in line with the target to maintain a 70/30 split of in-house and inter-agency adoption placements across the region in 2017/18. This is a higher proportion of in-house placements compared to the position last year for Manchester when we were a single local authority agency so this is positive progress.

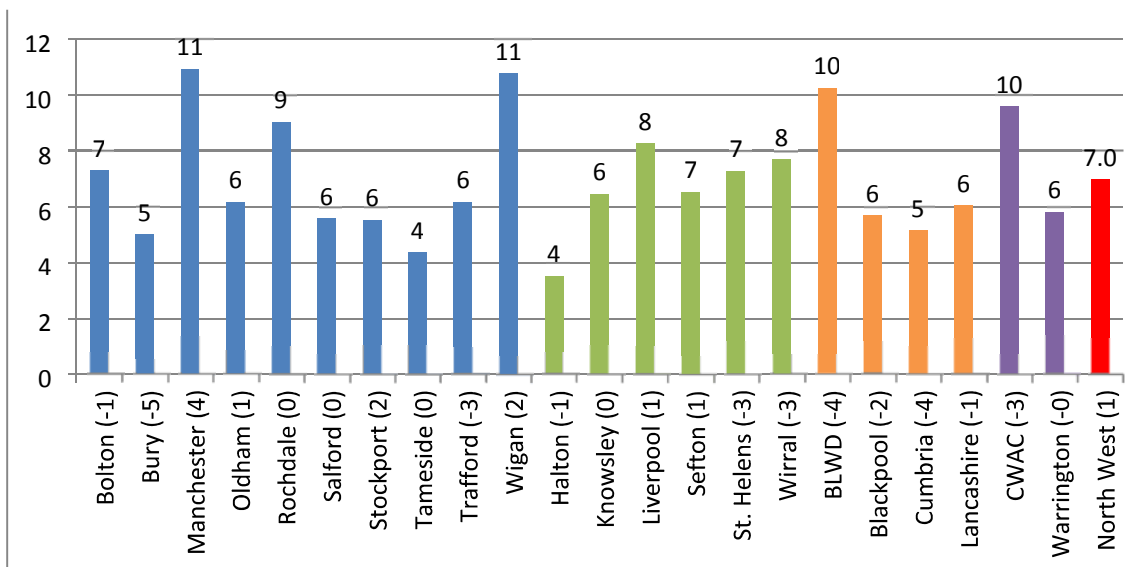
3.2.8 There were at the end of February 2018 89 care leavers aged 18 or over in Staying Put fostering arrangements. In addition there were 67 care leavers in supported lodgings placements.

3.2.9 Diagram/graph 2 - shows the number of children placed with internal foster carers compared with external carers over the year. This is a good illustration of how we have become less reliant on external foster carers and have been placing more children in-house with our own foster carers.



3.2.10 Regional Comparator Data

Fostering to residential ratio sorted by regional area

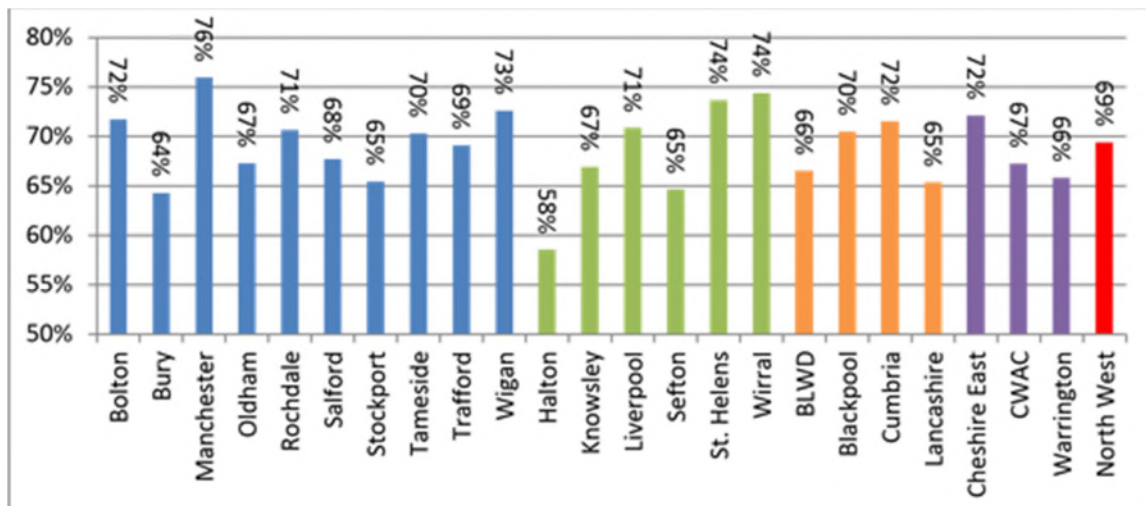


The brackets indicate change from 2014.

3.2.11 The bar chart above shows the ratio of fostering placements made to residential placements made in each of the 23 local authorities in the North West. Very positively, as indicated in the chart, we have the joint highest ratio of fostering to residential placements made, and our ratio has been increasing since 2014.

3.2.12 The following bar chart shows the percentage of looked after children placed in fostering placements in each local authority. Again we perform very well compared to the other authorities with the highest performance at 76%. Although this is data for end of 2017 and our percentage in fostering placements has fallen slightly to 74%, there is no other authority with more than 74%.

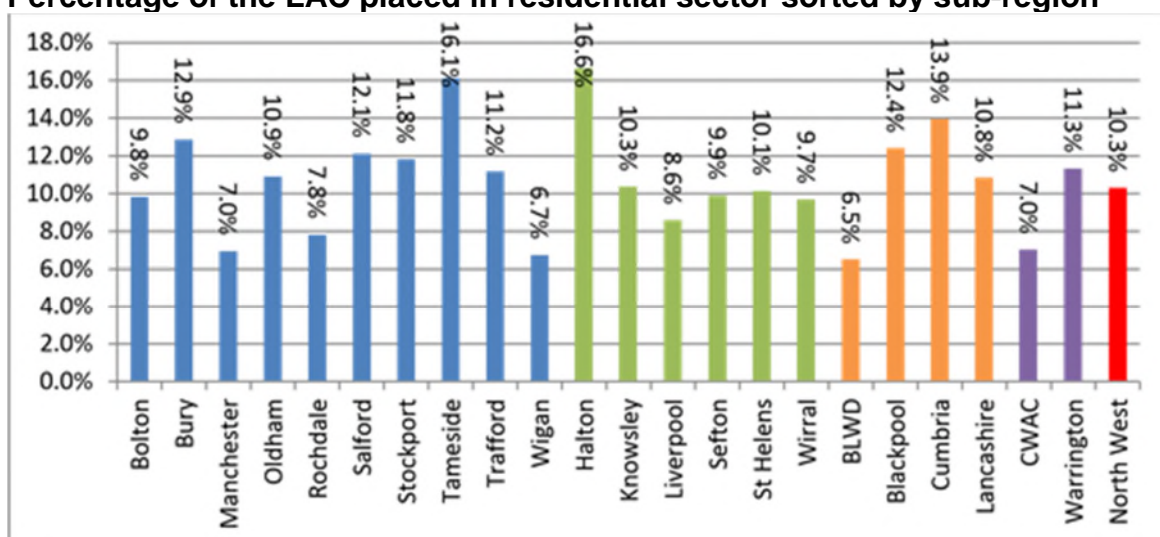
Percentage of the LAC placed in fostering sorted by sub-region



Source: 903 return 2017

3.2.13 The next bar chart shows the percentage of looked after children placed in residential care in each of the North West authorities. Again our performance compares well here with only two authorities with a lower percentage of looked after children in residential care than us.

Percentage of the LAC placed in residential sector sorted by sub-region



Source: 903 return 2017

Analysis

3.2.14 There is a considerable rebalancing of the share of fostering placements for Manchester's looked after children amongst internal and external fostering provision.

At the end of 2015/16 there were 534 external fostering placements compared to 367 internal fostering placements, a negative gap of 167. At the end of February 2018 this had changed to 452 external placements compared to 467 internal placements. This means we have turned a deficit of in-house fostering placements compared to external of 167 into a positive difference of 15 placements more in internal fostering provision than in external provision over the last two years. This is very positive but further work is required in recruiting and retaining internal foster carers in order to continue with this progress and meet budget challenges.

3.2.15 We are delivering on our aim to place as many children in family placements as possible with just under 74% placed in foster care and a low proportion, 6.7%, placed in residential care. In addition to the 74% placed with foster families there are also 9.6% placed with their parents, and 2.1% placed with adopters.

3.2.16 We can see from the regional comparator data set out above that we are performing very well compared to the other North West local authorities when it comes to provision of family based care through fostering for looked after children and have a very low proportion of children and young people placed in residential care. This is very positive for our children and will mean significant costs avoidance in relation to our care placements budget, with fostering provision being significantly less expensive than residential.

3.2.17 The most concerning aspect of the changes in placement composition in Manchester since last year is the increase in external residential placements. We know and planned for there to be less capacity in internal residential provision through our redesign but capacity was further reduced following inadequate inspection outcomes at Willow Vue and Lyndene Children's Homes. This, along with an increase in the number of children coming into care, has contributed significantly to the increased numbers in external residential provision. Willow Vue has since been re-inspected and rated 'good' and is now in the process of a schedule of planned admissions. There are four children placed at Willow Vue with a fifth scheduled to be admitted shortly. Lyndene is also now in a position to admit new children and currently has 3 vacancies we are planning to fill. Both developments will contribute to a reduced reliance on external provision and a reduction in external residential placement numbers.

3.2.18 There continue to be high numbers of care leavers placed in Staying Put arrangements or with our internal supported lodging providers.

3.3 Placement Resources and the Market

Internal Provision

3.3.1 There has been a small net gain of 3 internal recruited foster carers so far in 2016/17 up to end of February 2018, with 28 new carers recruited and 25 de-registered. The 28 new carers represent 60 new approved placements. We are projecting a total of 32 new carers approved for the full year, short of our target of 40, although this will represent 67 new approved placements. In the same period **the number of children placed with our internal recruited carers has increased by 61 from 229 at the end of 2016/17 to 290 at the end of February 2018.** This has

been achieved through an **increase in the ratio of children placed per foster from 0.91 children placed per carer at the end of 2015/16 to a ratio of 1.44 children place per carer** at the end of February 2018. This is because the profile and capacity of our current carers is more closely matched to the needs of our looked after children and the carers who we are gaining are on average approved to care for more children per household than the ones we are losing. This is positive in that we can care for more children and it is cost effective to have a higher child to carer ratio. However it is not a sustainable strategy in that there is a limit we have probably reached in relation to the child to carer ratio and we will need to increase carer numbers now to continue to care for more children.

3.3.2 The number of children placed with connected persons foster carers has increased so far this year compared to last from 167 to 177. As such connected persons foster carers are a significant placement resource for us, and it is in children's best interests to place them with connected persons, almost always family members, where it is safe and suitable to do so. It would place considerable additional pressure on the placement market were it not for the large number of children cared for by connected persons foster carers. However, where it is appropriate, we should be supporting family members to secure permanence for these children outside of care through Special Guardianship Orders. Under these circumstances it would be in line with strategic intentions for the number of connected persons foster carers to reduce. This work is ongoing.

3.3.3 Internal residential provision has reduced this year compared to last and there have been particular difficulties with the provision this year that constrained capacity further. Following the redesign of the residential service the capacity of the service, with our directly runs homes and our two wholly commissioned homes, was reduced from 35 beds to 16 long term beds plus 4 short break and 1 crisis response bed. This is as follows:

- Willow Vue (directly run) - 6 beds medium/long term
- Alonzi House (directly run) - 4 short break beds and 1 crisis bed Friday, Saturday and Sunday only
- Lyndene - (wholly commissioned) - 6 beds medium/long term
- Olanyian - (wholly commissioned) - 4 beds medium/long term

However, following an inadequate inspection outcome at Willow Vue all resident children were moved on and the home is now implementing a planned schedule for admitting new young people into the home. (Four young people are currently placed with a fifth young person to be placed shortly)

Similarly, an inadequate inspection outcome at Lyndene has resulted in an Ofsted restriction on the home accepting new admissions. The home now has 3 young people in placement and 3 vacancies, which will be filled in a planned way once the restriction has been lifted by Ofsted.

We anticipate that as we fill the vacant beds at Willow Vue and at Lyndene the number of external residential placements will reduce again.

The Supported Lodging service has 60 providers and has recruited 10 new ones up to end of February 2018

External Provision

3.3.4 The following details the key points of an analysis of the external placement market as discussed at the North West Care Planning and Permanence Forum, which was considered by the Strategic Leads for Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children Subgroup of the North West Association of Directors of Children's Services. It was intended to appraise Directors of the ongoing challenges in managing the market for external placements in the North West. This has been described as 'market saturation' amid a 6% growth in looked after children, albeit that demand for fostering (+4%) and residential (+3%) increased less markedly.

Challenges

3.3.5 National market - the market for purchasing children's homes placements in the North West is national one, with more than two residential placements from outside the North West for every placement made by the region. Business models are predicated on high levels of inward placements of Looked after Children across the country, impacting universal services and reducing local choice.

3.3.6 Calibration of market - despite a notional surplus of placements, the local market is not calibrated to meet local/regional needs and local authorities report a lack of provision for many looked after children. This can result in instability for young people and rapidly escalating cost. Early sharing of 2017/18 data shows short-term placement stability has worsened in 11 local authorities with 4.9%-13.3% of looked after children experiencing 3 or more moves.

3.3.7 Capacity for market management- increased national and North West demand is making placement finding resource intensive and increasing the use of weaker matched, higher cost, placements at a distance. There is work ongoing to redefine the activities of the Central Placement Team into distinct commissioning and placement finding responsibilities and work closer with Manchester Health and Care Commission to ensure the 'Manchester pound' is maximised. Notwithstanding this activities to managing a complex market have become more challenging. Placement finding, market shaping, price negotiation and quality assurance work is under-developed as summarised below;

3.3.8 Placement finding - increasing resource demands on placement finding teams locally does little to address significant duplication with multiple searches undertaken concurrently by neighbouring local authorities. Providers report being overwhelmed by high volume of referrals, resorting to solutions such as preselecting on referring local authority – often based on strength of relationships.

3.3.9 Choice – anecdotally increased incidence of placements not assessed as needed, but reflective of available capacity. Often at high cost and/or at a distance, these create increased demands on practitioners for travel and monitoring a service which is not known/quality assured. Increased risk of unexpected placement breakdown often resulting in an escalation of need and increased demand for urgent

new placement finding, contributing to demand on commissioning/placement finding functions.

3.3.10 Services not sufficient to meet individual children's needs – result in multiple placement moves and uncertainty over a significant period of time. Often lead to rapidly escalating placement costs and significant demands on social work staff to support.

3.3.11 Cost drivers - The quick wins of aggregation of need into shared procurement have been delivered and solutions require strategic collaboration to deliver a combined approach to market management and new ways of securing services. Despite control of unit cost between 2010 and 2016, increased demand has absorbed any savings on a regional basis. Changes to case law on payments at night and minimum wage have fundamentally changed the cost base for delivering residential care, exacerbating the scarcity of local supply resulting in a marked increase in unit cost.

3.3.12 The challenges set out above in relation to the situation in the region almost identically mirror the situation currently for Manchester. For us the external placement market is characterised by:

- Reduced capacity
- Reduced placement choice
- An increased need to place at distance
- Significantly increased placement fees for residential
- Increasing placement breakdown leading to further escalating complexity and cost.
- An increased demand on placement finding staff in our Centralised Placements Team translating into reduced capacity to undertake quality assurance and market shaping activity.

3.3.13 Mirroring the increase in the use of external residential provision in Manchester, we know that there has been an increase across the region. The latest Placements North West Census 2017 indicates that the number of external residential placements purchased across the region increased from 571 in 2015, to 646 in 2016, and to 836 in 2017. The spend on external residential placements across the region increased by £45 million between 2016 and 2017 to £145 million.

4.0 Progress on Actions up to end February 2018

4.1 Work with the external Fostering market to encourage the development of a wider pool of specialist foster care placements to meet high end complex needs - We have contributed to a regional-wide consultation and participated in the development of a new Fostering Framework for Placement North West. This new framework specification provides a new element of framework commissioning that enables users to model bespoke fostering provision to meet the needs of young people who require specialist placement.

4.2 Continually review and scrutinise the financial costs for children placed in residential care - all residential placements are being reviewed via regular panels

chaired by the Director. Weekly meetings are being held to review step down actions and progress. Identified children are being moved from external residential to fostering placements and into internal residential provision within the City.

4.3 Explore the joint commissioning with MHCC of a residential therapeutic home to meet the needs of children and young people with complex mental health needs - Initial costing exercise has been undertaken to inform this commission, identifying those young people known to the Centralised Placements Team who would be in scope for such provision as a step down from current high cost placement.

4.4 Explore options of recommissioning one of our partnership homes to provide accommodation for 4 children as opposed to the current 6 bed provision - this has been completed and Olanyian is now commissioned as a four bed home.

4.5 Assess and secure sufficient emergency placement and inclusion of suitable PACE placement options - We have begun negotiation with the DePaul Trust, who provide our Adults Services SafeStop provision, to develop an emergency placement with PACE option and waking night support staff in the city.

4.6 Systematically promote a new enhanced Special Guardianship Support offer to foster carers - This has been on-going and the dedicated SGO assessment team have been promoting the offer and undertaking the required assessments. In addition Manchester is among the first authorities in the country to commission a new Special Guardianship Support Service which provides an online support to all of the Special Guardians in the city. This is a new service delivered by Family Action.

4.7 Ensure Alonzi House links with other edge of care services to reduce admissions - the service appears to be performing well and a high proportion of children they work with are supported to stay at home, as detailed above. The home secured an Ofsted rating of 'outstanding' in August 2017. Work is need to review whether there is anything else that Alonzi might contribute to reduce adolescent admissions over all.

4.8 Accelerate internal foster care recruitment - carer recruitment work has been ongoing. We are projecting meeting our target to have recruited 40 foster carers in in the full year.

4.9 Accelerate adopter recruitment within the Regional Adoption Agency - The Regional Adoption Agency commenced on July 3rd 2017. The number of enquiries to adopt is comparatively larger now that last year when combining the 5 partner local authorities data.

4.10 Develop initiatives to increase the range and choice of housing options for care leavers - The Director of Children's Services hosted housing providers at a market testing event for our leaving care service in July and there has been active engagement with Manchester's Strategic Housing Board. Consequently commissioners in Housing and Children's Social Care meet to review on-going sufficiency needs informed by current data from PRI and are developing creative and

innovative options that will also support the forthcoming homelessness Act requirements.

Following our previous update on contract revision with Manchester Settlement we are currently meeting with the provider as they seek to achieve external funding to increase the range of supported accommodation they offer alike to First Key Homes. We made a commitment in our initial sufficiency strategy to ensure that the provision of accommodation to care leavers is well planned and that their entitlements are made known to them. We are currently reviewing our Leaving Care offer in advance of changes to legislation that comes into effect in April 2018.

4.11 We said we will utilise commissioning and partnership working to support the development of sufficiency and to ensure we achieve cost efficiencies -

Work is ongoing now between commissioners and operational managers to achieve efficiencies with independent fostering agency providers. Formal meetings have commenced with the 10 biggest providers and the two key agenda items are securing better value for the Council and widening placement choice to meet the needs of older and more complex children who need foster care.

We are taking a proactive response to external challenges in the regional market, revising our approach to provider engagement. This is being achieved through increased capacity and co-production between Commissioners, Contract Officers and Placement Staff. We are seeking to engage providers through an agenda of step down and bespoke placement provision for those young people who present the highest demand on service.

Commissioners have reviewed services in Fostering, including the independent support offer to foster carers. Under a revised service specification, the service has been retendered achieving savings of £40,000 while demonstrating strong performance in engagement and support of Foster Carers. Decommission of our Adoption Support Service to facilitate the purchase of membership in the Regional Adoption Agency has delivered saving of £13,000.

5.0 Next Steps/Actions for 2018/19

5.1 Work with service colleagues to better understand the increased demand and take action to reduce admissions. This work is ongoing. Alonzi House is stepping up provision of Family Group Conferences to strengthen the service support teenagers remain within their family where there have been relationship breakdown; which often can be a factor in requests for these children to become looked after.

5.2 Use the findings from recent auditing and reviewing arrangements to inform commissioning activity to meet the need of our most complex children and associated placement providers to ensure 'value for money' is achieved whilst securing positive outcomes for the respective child.

5.3 Accelerate rate of children leaving care via Special Guardianship. Target is to secure 25 per quarter.

5.4 Ensure that the Regional Adoption Agency reduces the number of Manchester children who have to be placed in inter-agency placements compared to last year and that such placements are contained within existing budget. So far the agency is on target.

5.5 Maintain focus and increase success in recruiting and retaining internal foster carers. To maintain an explicit focus on recruiting new carers for adolescents and in particular to offer emergency care.

5.6 Continue joint work between commissioners and operational managers to secure wider placement choice at better value through review meetings with key providers. To have secured improved value from all key providers by end of next quarter. This work has been ongoing with some success.

5.7 Develop improved relationships with external residential providers so that in the 'sellers market' that the placement market has become we are seen as the 'preferred partners' for scarce resources. Regular individual provider engagement meetings have already been taking place.

5.8 Develop and implement a smart commissioning strategy for external residential provision based on a thorough understanding of the needs of young people needing placements and securing/commissioning specific homes/providers to operate homes to meet the needs of identified cohorts of our young people. This will be a move away from spot purchasing and introduce 'outcomes based commissioning'. The Corporate Commissioning Team are already working on this strategy.

5.9 Make further progress exploring joint commissioning with Health of a specialist inreach residential service for our most complex children.

5.10 Continue work with partners and providers to block commission additional supported accommodation placements for care leavers so as to provide increased placement choice and better value for money. We know from Placements North West census data that local authorities block commissioning supported accommodation beds achieve significantly better value provision. Work has commenced.