

Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People: aligning to strategic planning across SEND, Early Help, Social Care and Commissioning

September 2023-2028

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Executive Summary

Key messages

- Herefordshire Council's children's services has a duty to ensure sufficiency of provision i.e. to ensure we have access to the right services, at the right time, in order to fulfil our statutory duties
- Placement sufficiency requires a mix of different arrangements to include but not limited to fostering, residential, supported accommodation and parent/child that meet assessed need and promotes outcomes for those accommodated
- Placement sufficiency will be determined by a range of factors to include demand across ages/complexity of need, impact of preventative and re-unification strategies, reputation and the market.
- Research undertaken across the region and nationally point to a critical lack of sufficiency across the market and significant challenges in achieving an improved offer to children and young people mirroring the experience within Herefordshire.
- Ensuring availability of placements that are quality and cost effective is everyone`s responsibility. All officers contribute to making Herefordshire a preferred partner and thus promote access to services within a challenging market. Opportunities to improve communication, engagement and payment arrangements will be proactively managed.
- Ensuring sufficiency of aligned services will promote effective care planning and engagement. Oversight of contracts and required procurement is essential especially in light of increased demand generated through effective early help/edge of care services to support families and promote reunification.
- Transition between services and through into adulthood requires timely oversight with an understanding of outcomes to be achieved at each stage.

Progress as of 1.4.23

- Since 2019 when the last report was written, much has changed. Despite new arrangements for early help support to families and the intention to robustly support return home where safe to do so, numbers of CLA have continued to rise to a figure of 415 April 2023 from 326 in 2019 (27%). Of significant impact is the growth in number of UASC. This compares to a national trend where entry to care has risen by 9% since 2019 (SSDA903).
- Herefordshire has experienced a growth in numbers of UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeking children) and expect the trend to continue as a result of requests coming from the national transfer scheme and local hotels. Recent court judgment has meant that children under the of 18 must not be placed within a hotel and this will impact requests for fostering and semi independent living. There are plans to develop specific training to enable local providers and foster carers to meet the cultural, religious and language needs of children and young people.
- Targets to build local in-house fostering and promote family based kinship care, published in 2019, have not been achieved however; considerable success in promoting re-unification and permanency planning since September 2022 has been reported. Child level reviews of practice records a clear understanding of the plans for children and young people and this provides a strong baseline for future sufficiency planning.
- Of the 481 children and young people accommodated during 2022-23, 31 turned 18 and continue to be supported as care leavers and 47 left our care. Twenty-nine children are living at home with their parents whilst assessments to discharge orders are undertaken and there is a plan for re-unification of a further 27 children currently in foster care.
- The fostering recruitment and retention strategy of May 2023 supports methodical and realistic net growth projections of 3 households (5 placements) in 2023-24 and 10 households (15 placements) annually 2024-28.
- Numbers of young people in residential increased from 46 in quarter 1 of 2022/23 to 52 in quarter 4 (13%). As of March 2023 49 children are accommodated in residential children homes, with 15 (31%) living within Herefordshire.
- The number of children and young people placed within residential homes out of area at a distance over 20 miles has reduced by 1 and the percentage has reduced from 74% to 63% over 2022/23. Whilst some children are placed within specialist provision and are therefore appropriately placed out of area there may be an opportunity for some children to transition to foster care. There is a clear improvement in local relationships with providers and the reputation of Herefordshire, which can only continue to provide enhanced choice for local placement.
- Of the 289 children living in foster care as of May 2023 (including those matched as long term), 70 are living with their family under kinship or regulation 24 arrangements.
- Power BI reports of March 2023 indicate 86 children living with IFA and 138 with Herefordshire in-house carers. Note ongoing review of numbers to align inconsistency across reporting periods.
- The number of children and young people placed within IFA out of area at a distance over 20 miles has increased numerically by 2 however, the percentage against total IFA placements has reduced from 29% to 27% over 2022/23.
- As of May 2023 8 young people aged 18-21 are deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation however all have active plans in place to support where this is the wish of the young person.
- As of internal review undertaken May 2023 there is no use of unregulated accommodation for children aged under 16.
- Ofsted report of September 2022 indicated significant challenges and areas for development. However an Ofsted Monitoring Visit focusing on early help, MASH and assessment undertaken 29 and 30 March 2023, noted incremental progress and a trajectory of improvement.

How we will promote placement sufficiency from September 2023

- A new five-year sufficiency strategy will be completed which builds on accurate data and an honest appraisal of the challenges faced locally, regionally and nationally.
- A whole service approach will be taken to show the part everyone has to play in making Herefordshire Children's services an organisation that is effective, efficient and forward thinking.
- We will focus on making sure our processes across all teams are effective ensuring that only those needing accommodation out of their family networks are referred and that all children are placed appropriately. Emphasis will be on tracking and measuring impact of our work: making a real difference. Commissioning plans will be formed using accurate baseline data and will align to strategic plans across children's social care, education, housing and health.
- Multiple approaches will be taken to build capacity across all placement types to include using existing services more efficiently and promoting positive take up of our referrals. This will mean working on improved provider relationships, market engagement, ensuring designated points of contact, improved regional partnership working and commissioning of new services where they are needed.
- Engagement with experts by experience will be promoted throughout the commissioning cycle.
- Recruitment, retention and training of staff in key areas will be prioritised to ensure referrals for placement are managed proactively achieving desired outcomes.

How will we know we are improving?

- All external services that are bought under contract will be reviewed to ensure the right children and young people are referred, accepted and supported to transition in a timely way avoiding drift, underutilisation or wait lists
- In-house fostering capacity will grow incrementally by 3 carers (5 net placements) in 2023-24 and 10 carers (15 net placements) annually 2024-28.
- In house foster carers will be retained for longer, supporting incremental net growth of capacity
- Foster carers will receive support to accept more referrals for children with complex needs, sibling groups and older children than the baseline position as of September 2023.
- Child level review of permanency plans undertaken May 23 report indicated 27 children in foster care have a care plan of re-unification. Routine reporting will show progress
- Currently 29 children are cared for under a SGO/CAO and a further 20 children may also benefit from this approach. Routine reporting should indicate that oversight is in place.
- We see improving outcomes for children and young people who are in the right type of placement and in the right area for the right duration evidenced by reduced moves and effective review/oversight of care planning.
- No young person is placed in residential care if a family is the preferred choice. Following a review of all placements eight children/young people will be supported to transition back into family based care within Herefordshire if it is safe to do so during 2023-24. For those young people requiring residential care we intend to develop more local quality provision within 2024-25 and improve percentage of children placed in area annually.
- We see an improved number of placements found first time that match referral request
- Where parents and their children require an assessment placement this will be undertaken within foster care wherever possible unless court ordered.
- Providers report improved confidence in Herefordshire as a partner of choice.
- Levels of breakdown through non child related reason i.e. non-payment reduce
- That opportunities to build regional partnerships are utilised fully improving Herefordshire`s understanding of the market and opportunities to commission collectively
- That a plan for future commissioning/procurement is progressed with a clear understanding of demand now and in the future

1. Purpose

1.0 The purpose of this document is to set out what Herefordshire Council will do to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation of different types for our looked after children and young people (CLA) and care leavers (CL). The strategy is part of a whole-system approach that includes early intervention and preventive services to support children within their family setting, as well as better support services for children who become looked after. This strategy builds upon known data collated through the needs analysis and review of national reporting. This strategy aligns to the agreed plans pertaining to short breaks, SEND, mental health, transition post 16 including care leavers, permanency, reunification and early help. Links into the forward plan for commissioning and procurement will ensure safe arrangements for delivery of aligned services.

1.1 Whilst the spirit and intention of the 2019 strategy remains, it is recognised that the landscape and context within which it is understood has changed impacting opportunities to deliver agreed activity. These changes both challenge and support the ability of Herefordshire Council and as such, a review of progress and impact is timely. In light of Covid, recent cost of living crisis, and a challenging market for social care there has been limited opportunity to promote and achieve improved capacity, quality and value as previously articulated within the sufficiency strategy. Equally, the impact of early help approaches may have been reduced as challenges for families have increased. Recent legal judgements and inspection visits have provided a strong incentive to deliver a robust programme of reflection and change and improvement. This document is therefore a revised plan, building on the 2019 strategy and extending the scope to include processes and services that may contribute to a stronger and more resilient infrastructure within which to make placements for those that need them. It is aspirational and seeks to achieve the vision outlined within the McAlister report and other key reports. This represents a proactive plan for the next five years.

1.2 The Sufficiency Strategy of 2019 was formulated on a hypothesis that improved early help approaches and effective care planning across adoption, placement with family networks and reunification would see an incremental reduction in children and young people needing a commissioned placement through increased numbers leaving care and reduction of new entrants. The impact of such activity on demand for placement has been difficult to quantify but the assumptions remain and inform ongoing plans.

1.3 The concept of measuring sufficiency is not simply counting available beds and projecting demand for different types of provision. Achieving sufficiency involves having choice available within quality and cost effective provisions and using a variety of mechanisms to commission a core offer whilst being able to flex at times of demand and to meet changing need.

1.4 This strategy seeks to enable Herefordshire to establish a clear understanding both at a child specific level and strategically as to whether current arrangements are sufficient, how use can be encouraged and where new arrangements are required.

2. Summary of needs analysis undertaken October 2022-April 2023

2.0 Having undertaken a review of current activity reports, patterns and trends for admission into care and current commissioned arrangements it is apparent that whilst Herefordshire follows the national trajectory in terms of demand and pricing there are specific local issues that influence sufficiency.

It is recognised that much of the work to achieve improved sufficiency has been started and that there is a good understanding of the issues. As such, this document indicates the direction of travel for commissioning alongside operational strategies and models of social work practice that promote children remaining within their family network or reunification when it is safe to do so.

Strategies to promote recruitment/ retention of in-house foster carers, re- and transition into independent living post 18 are now in place and are expected to inform future commissioning at a local and regional level.

Key findings from needs analysis conducted October 2022-April 2023 include:

- Review of the placement activity, trend and breakdown by type indicates that not only is there a growth in the total number of bed nights being used but the use of residential is also growing and the proportion of in house fostering is decreasing. This is a reversal of the proposed objectives submitted within the 2019 sufficiency strategy but aligns with the national trend.
- That over the last few years, Herefordshire has not been considered a referrer of choice and as such, we have not had access to the full range of local services at best prices.
- That accurate data needs to be available and used to support active mapping of where children/young people are placed, the quality of their experience and to ensure that the next steps to meet their care plan are identified

- That there is a willingness to address current challenges and to work collaboratively, building new evidence based practice and promoting outcomes for children.

2.1 Of concern is not only the increased requirement for commissioned provision at a time when the market is challenged by high costs and high demand but the lack of conversion between referral to local provision and placement experienced during 2022-23.

Matching and the individual needs of a child/young person at any point will always dictate the placement needed. As such, whilst recent engagement work has delivered improved access to residential and foster care options with local, quality providers Herefordshire has not always been able to utilise them. In some cases, providers have to accept placement requests from other authorities with the resulting challenge to education and health services.

A review of all children and young people accommodated or supported as care leavers undertaken May 2023 has informed the detail of this strategy, providing a baseline to measure impact. Opportunities exist to work more effectively with existing providers and to build new arrangements that meet identified need. This will require a whole system response and is not the responsibility of one service area.

3. Context to measure progress towards achieving sufficiency

3.0 Using data reported April 2023 covering a 12-month period the numbers of children and young people cared for by Herefordshire rose from 395 to 415- a growth of 5%. Growth was most noticeable within those aged 0-4 years (8.4%) and those aged 16-17 years (28.3%). Placements within Parent and Child provision (R3) almost doubled during this period and continues to grow. Placements within supported accommodation rose by 123%. The number of children who are of other Asian heritage rose by 69% and those of other heritage rose by 50%.

The rate of children looked after per 10,000 rose rapidly 2021-22 and did not mirror the pattern of growth across the West Midlands, England or that experienced by our statistical neighbours.

Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18

Local Authority, Region and England		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change from previous year
884	Herefordshire	60.00	67.00	75.00	79.00	84.00	87.00	92.00	97.00	87.00	112.00	25.00
984	West Midlands	72.00	73.00	74.00	73.00	75.00	78.00	82.00	82.00	85.00	88.00	3.00
	Statistical Neighbours	49.78	49.56	50.44	50.56	50.78	54.11	56.22	58.20	60.20	64.30	4.10
970	England	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	62.00	64.00	65.00	67.00	67.00	70.00	3.00

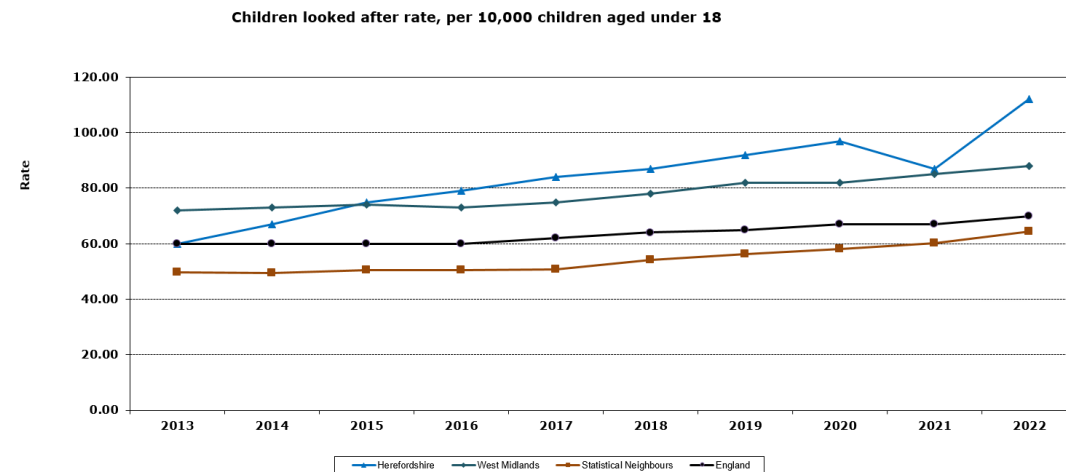
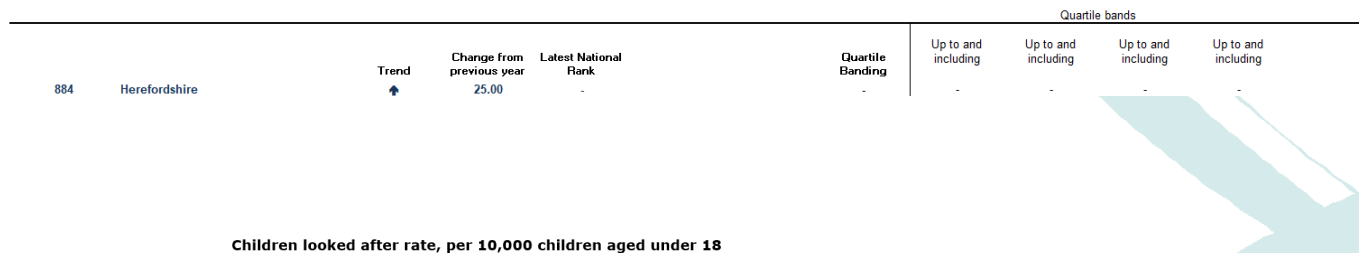
3.1 Children and young people placed within in-house foster placements rose by 15 across a 12-month period, a 2% increase in relation to total children in care. A similar trend can be seen within placements in IFA with a growth of 11 representing 1%.

3.2 When reviewing care packages across 2022/23 the total activity across kinship, residential, IFA and in-house foster care reduced from 428 in Q1 to 392 in Q4. Activity for children under 4 years was broadly stable whilst packages provided for young people 11-15 reduced over this period from 156 to 148 and for 16+ from 99 to 73.

3.3 When reviewed by type, package activity across 2022/23 saw a drop in delivery for in-house foster care from 154 to 129. Whilst residential activity remained stable, activity for children 0-4 years, (parent and child assessment placement) rose by 60% from five to eight and for those 16+ a 42% reduction from 31 to 18 was recorded.

3.4 Of the total bed nights recorded across all types (144,260):

- 28% were in house foster placements
- 26% IFA
- 17% Family and friends
- 13% residential



3.5 Analysis of patterns and trends can only provide an indication of demand as actual activity is impacted by the individual needs and complexity of children at any point and the robustness of recording. It is however, reasonable to highlight areas for future commissioning attention as being parent and child provision across residential and fostering and provision for young people 16+ into transition including those who have undefined status post 18.

3.6 Based on data provided by the Home Finding Team in 2022/23 across in-house fostering, IFA & Residential, there were 18 parent & child placements. Nine were fostering and nine were residential. The total spend for these placements was £645,678.

Placement Type	Number of Placements	Spend 22/23	Average Parent & Child Weekly Cost in 22/23	Range £
In-House & External Fostering	9	111,294	804	£341-£1750
Residential	9	534,384	4,272	£3900-£5750
Total	18	645,678		

3.7 In light of Covid, cost of living crisis, and a challenging market for social care there has been limited opportunity to promote and achieve improved capacity, quality and value as previously articulated within the sufficiency strategy of 2019. There are clear challenges at a local, regional and national level however, recent legal judgements and Ofsted inspection visits have provided a strong incentive to deliver a robust programme of reflection and change within Herefordshire.

- The McAlister report 2022 states that the current arrangements for delivery of residential and foster care are broken and focused on profit rather than quality and outcomes. He identified that some children were placed due to availability rather than matching of need.

- The Children’s Commissioner for England has published a set of reports about residential care to include **‘The children who no-one knows what to do with’** and **‘Private provision in children’s social care’** indicating the impact of care on children
- In **Children’s homes ‘vulnerable to cost pressures’ as staffing problems mount (communitycare.co.uk)** 2022, Turner found that staffing pressures, employee churn, the cost of living crisis were severely impacting operation and growth in delivery of new provision despite increased demand. Matching is challenged by increased complexity of referral, emergency placements and perceived risk to registration. This indicates a market that potentially is more challenging for a smaller provider and as such, the viability for LA to run their own residential provision, providing salaries in line with council terms and conditions and competing pressures needs to be understood.
- **<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/action-needed-on-dysfunctional-children-s-social-care-market>** The CMA report identifies significant concerns in how the placement market is functioning and reflects current concerns identified within Herefordshire Council re availability, matching, competency and price: highlighting that there will be no quick fix or single solution. Analysis of pricing, provider resilience and profits taken suggests indicates that the market is not yet working effectively. As such, the expectations for short-term improvement in unit pricing must be managed and processes to have oversight of commissioned arrangements need to be embedded to manage
- The McAlister report highlights research indicating that children say that they often have little choice over where they live (Coram Voice & the Rees Centre, 2020; the Independent review of children’s social care, 2021). “Too many are sent far from their communities, are matched with homes that cannot provide them with what they need... The constant making and breaking of relationships has a deep and negative impact on children’s mental health and sense of worth”.

3.8 The Ofsted inspection report on Herefordshire Children Services undertaken in July 2022 and published 21st September 2022 identified a number of weaknesses pertinent to the placement function and provision of sufficiency. This document seeks to address these areas and support a holistic approach towards improvement:

- There are challenges to provide choice of accommodation and an in-area offer, impacting on contact and sustained relationships
- Insufficient provision of quality foster care placements
- Multiple placement moves impact educational outcomes and EET
- Insufficient oversight of unregistered provision
- Insufficient support to young people under deprivation of liberty orders and assessment of their needs-specifically trauma
- There is lack of support to 16/17 year old young people experiencing homelessness
- Lack of effective consultation with stakeholders including care experienced young people
- Performance reporting and data collation remain a challenge.

3.9 During July 2022 the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities reported that in relation to the prevention of youth homelessness Herefordshire has strong corporate support and is on a journey of improvement. “You have a strong vision for strategic housing and a corporate strength based commissioning approach. There are excellent relationships between commissioners and providers”.

“Sufficiency is a significant challenge due to the geography of Herefordshire and the reputational damage of continual negative media reporting. Senior managers recognise that their sufficiency strategy is not underpinned by recent profiling that sets out local needs and is, therefore, out of date.”

4. Interface with strategic planning across mental health, SEND, early help, commissioning and transition post 18.

4.0 There is a clear interface between the strategic plans developed by service areas and wider sufficiency. Effective arrangements to support families, building resilience and promote re-unification when safe to do so, will affect demand for commissioned placements over time. It is recognised, however, that in order to achieve this it is likely that non-placement related services such as family group conferencing, interpretation; short breaks and quality parenting assessments will be needed, requiring access through compliant arrangements.

This sufficiency report seeks to reference key aligned strategies highlighting planned activity that will influence upon sufficiency and demand for services.

5. Mental health and well-being

5.0 In the recent report Children's Mental Health Services 2021-22 published March 2023, Dame Rachel de Souza reports that the mental health of children has deteriorated markedly in recent years. Thirty one percent of girls and young women aged 17 to 24 are estimated as having a probable disorder. Half of looked after children (49%) had 'borderline' or 'cause for concern' scores in 2020-21 based on their answers to the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, a measure of mental health and wellbeing. She concludes,

- "Access to timely treatment is vital. Without the right care at the right time, children can end up in crisis"
- An increasing number of children, many of whom have mental health difficulties but are not admitted to hospital, are being deprived of their liberty in other settings.

5.1 The information available on children in inpatient mental health settings is far from comprehensive with recent analysis indicating:

- 348 children were detained at the end of July 2022 (NHS England, Monthly Mental Health Services Monthly Statistics July 2022). However, research by the Children's Commissioner has previously shown that nearly a third of children on inpatient mental health wards are there informally, so this figure only provides part of the picture.(NHS England, Monthly Mental Health Services Monthly Statistic)
- The annual figures show that there were 869 detentions of children under the Mental Health Act 2021-22. It is notable that 71% of these detentions were of girls, while among adult detentions, 48% were of women (NHS England, Table 1e of Mental Health Act Statistics, Annual Figures, 2021-22)
- Over time, fewer children are being detained under the Mental Health Act, and that fewer children are being admitted to hospital for mental health treatment. In 2021/22, children spent 312,000 bed days in Tier 4 wards, a 33% decrease from 465,000 in 2017/18.

5.2 Herefordshire and Worcestershire Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2026 reports:

- 50% of those experiencing mental health problems first do so before the age of 14 and 75% do so before the age of 25 years.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death in those aged 15-29
- 3% of children with Herefordshire have social, emotional and mental health needs –this is above the national benchmark for 2019
- Key feedback from stakeholders are the need for improved accessibility, integration of services, effective communication and a focus on prevention.

5.3 Local arrangements seek to stabilise placement and where possible to avoid admission through provision of effective edge of care services. A programme of recommissioning 2023-24 will explore impact, review demand and develop specifications to meet identified need to include:

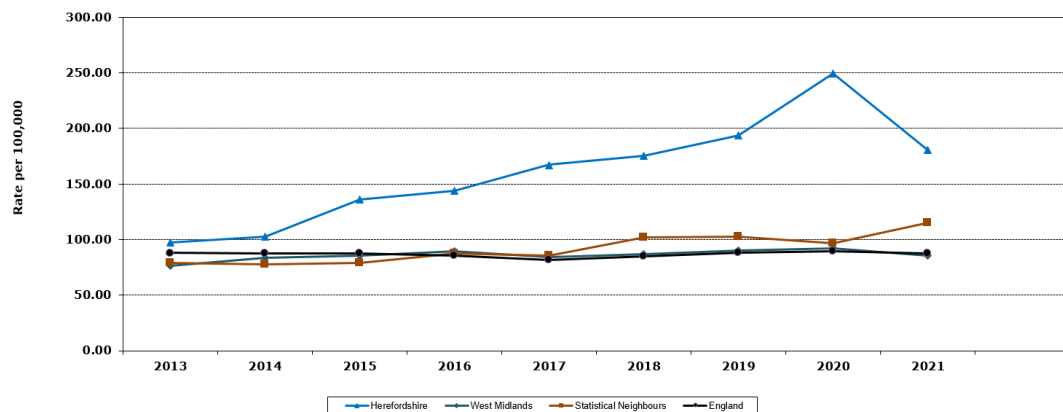
- New services to support young people with eating disorders and support young people through targeted youth engagement.
- The Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) providing guidance and signposting across all Herefordshire secondary schools and some primary schools.
- The ICB commissions an online mental health support service for anybody up to the age of 18. Confidential counselling is available alongside information and guidance.

Inpatient admission rate for mental health disorders per 100,000 population aged 0-17 years

Local Authority, Region and England		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	-	Change from previous year
884	Herefordshire	97.20	102.50	135.80	144.20	167.20	175.30	193.90	249.70	180.41	-	-69.29
984	West Midlands	76.20	83.60	85.70	89.70	84.30	87.10	90.20	91.90	85.70	-	-6.20
	Statistical Neighbours	79.18	77.75	78.97	87.28	85.62	102.25	102.68	96.47	115.06	-	18.59
970	England	87.90	87.40	87.70	85.90	81.50	84.70	88.30	89.50	87.54	-	-1.96

		Quartile bands							
		Trend	Change from previous year	Latest National Rank	Quartile Banding	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including
884	Herefordshire	↓	-69.29	147	D	64.72	83.68	110.04	263.45

Inpatient admission rate for mental health disorders per 100,000 population aged 0-17 years



5.4 The Herefordshire joint **health and wellbeing strategy 2023-2033** sets out how the council and its local partners plan to address the health and wellbeing needs of its population. There is a strong focus on prevention and early intervention and key targets will be achieving the best start in life for children and good mental wellbeing throughout life. Dame Rachel de Souza (Children’s Mental Health Services 2021-22) highlights the likelihood that children for whom it is deemed that a mental health admission would not be appropriate, but where no children’s home that can provide the necessary high level of both security and therapeutic are often deprived of their liberty under the ‘inherent jurisdiction’ powers of the High Court. In 2017-18, there were 103 children on applications before the High Court. The latest figures collected by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory shows that there were 125 applications in the month of January 2023 alone. (Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, National Deprivation of Liberty Court, Latest Data trends – January 2023)

5.5 Young people with DOL orders are reviewed regularly to ensure that any restriction is needed and is being managed appropriately. Numbers of such orders reduced from 7 in February 2023 and have remained stable at 4 from that point.

As of June 2023, the number has reduced to three. There have been regular DOLS Spotlight sessions between legal and the HOS for Corporate Parenting to review all children subject to DOLS. The DOL Action Plan template is used to ensure any restrictions being used are kept under regular review and to review the work to be undertaken to try to reduce the need for those.

5.6 Sourcing the right home for a young person and being mindful of local connection can support emotional well-being and thus promote stability. The odds of having 'very high' levels of well-being increased for those young people (all ages) who felt settled, liked school, had trusting and supportive relationships, felt included in decision making and didn't worry about their feelings or behaviour. Feeling safe where they lived and settled was important for children in care (all ages). Family time also contributes to high well-being scores. 10,000 voices 2022 <https://coramvoice.org.uk/>

Key challenges to high well-being scores were the ability to maintain friendships and placement moves. "Many of the comments from young people illustrated the importance of trusting relationships, but as children became older fewer reported trusted relationships. This is unsurprising, as adolescence is a time when trust in adults declines, and peer friendships become more important for all young people, but may also be affected by placement moves, changes of social workers and planning beginning for leaving care. A larger percentage of children and young people in foster care and kinship care felt more positive than those living in residential care or somewhere else." 10,000 voices 2022 <https://coramvoice.org.uk/>

5.7 Building on recent reports such as Future in Mind, The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and From the Pond into the Sea, the NHS Long Term Plan 2019 seeks to create a comprehensive offer for 0 to 25-year-olds that reaches across mental health services for children, young people and adults. It aims to deliver an integrated approach across health, social care, education and the voluntary sector. This includes people who are transitioning from children's services into adult services as well as those presenting for the first time. There is a recognition that current arrangements produce barriers to access and treatment, negating opportunities for early intervention. Fusar-Poll (2019)

5.8 The 2021 Time for Action report by the Centre for Mental Health recognises that 16-25 year olds are less likely to access help for their mental health. Transition into adult services is particularly difficult for young people with additional needs and those who are care experienced. As such, Herefordshire Children services are actively engaging with the strategic planning of new co-produced models 14-25 years to ensure that arrangements are fit for purpose and support children and young people in care across all settings and care leavers transitioning into independence. The proposed offer will align therapy services, vocational support, care co-ordination, youth development, peer support, lifestyle intervention services and family support with statutory social care ensuring the holistic needs of the young person will be prioritised; recognising the comorbidity of wider presenting issues.

6. Early help/edge of care

6.0 A deep dive approach was undertaken within the 2019 ChINA to explore specific hypothesis pertaining to well-being. (Children's Integrated Needs Assessment 2019: Summary Herefordshire Council Intelligence Unit, June 2019, v1.0). This resulted in the recognition that poor mental health of both children and their parents is an overarching factor influencing a wide range of long-term outcomes for children and young people, from their chances of needing social services' intervention, to their physical health and future skills and employment. Conversely, good mental health is a powerful protective factor in terms of ability to cope with adversity. The importance of family is also highlighted –the most common reasons for support from children's social services are parental issues such as mental health, substance abuse, and domestic abuse. This underlines the importance of a whole system approach in tackling the issues that affect the life chances of children and young people, with services for both children and adults working together and sharing information to best meet the needs of the whole family. The 2021 Children and Young People Quality of Life survey indicates considerable levels of anxiety and concern for family members, high levels of feeling not happy with their lives and significant rates of caring responsibilities for family members.

6.1 Herefordshire council is committed to securing legal, physical and emotional permanence for children and ordinarily this is best provided by their parents/ relatives in their family home. The aim is therefore to support more families to maintain care of their own children preventing entry to care when it is possible to do so and reducing the length of time they are in care progressing reunification when it is safe to do so. In the published Reunification Practice Guidance 2023 appendix C, factors associated with successful return home include effective care planning and engagement with existing carers across fostering and residential homes. Factors that negatively affected the chances of success were a history of placement breakdown and the age of the child. Thus, an understanding from all partners of their role in building stable, quality and supportive arrangements, promoting transition home is key.

6.2 Approaches to embed a restorative practice model seeks to repair existing family relationships that may have been strained and appeared broken, to enable children to remain within their family networks. Ongoing analysis of the expected impact of such endeavours suggests a potential reduction in the number of children looked after from 408 as of 31st March 2023 to 300 by 31st March 2025 and 280 by 31st March 2026. Levels of care leavers are expected to rise from 125 as of March 2023 to 140 in March 2025 before stabilising at 125 by March 2026. Such figures are projections and may be impacted by many factors. As such ongoing review across age, level of need etc. will be required to inform sufficiency planning going forwards.

6.3 Ongoing review of the offer to families on the edge of Care via the ECHO service and an enhanced Family group Conferencing service indicates that 27 children were prevented from entering care and received timely and effective support in recent months. The expansion of the service is expected to facilitate the return home of a number of children but will also prevent young people from entering the care system in each of the following 3 years. These services operate out

of hours and over the weekends, which means families can access support across the week preventing breakdown and de-escalating crisis. The target areas for ECHO will be teenagers and young parent/s. Teenagers are often the most expensive children to place and their outcomes are some of the poorest for children in care. To be provided with intensive, therapeutic and skilled support can often make the difference for families who are struggling but where there is attachment. The impact of such services will be reviewed against measures to be agreed and will inform all future activity within the sufficiency action plan.

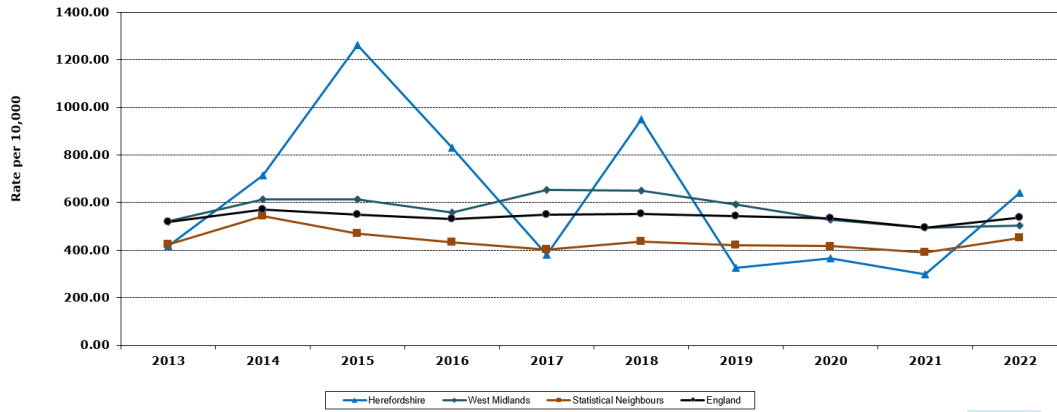
6.4 Review of permanency plans undertaken May 2023 confirmed that:

1. Of the 450 children accommodated 2022-23, 47 children left care through discharge of care orders or special guardianship arrangements. A further 84 children had re-unification plans and of these 28 are no longer in care, 29 are living with parents whilst undergoing assessment and 27 are in foster care preparing to return home. Additional social worker capacity has been sourced to ensure timely management and oversight of these plans under fast track procedures. Support from the ECHO team has also contributed to safe return home.
2. There are 29 children with a SGO/CAO plan and a further 20 children may benefit from this approach.
3. 29 children have a plan for adoption and joint work to avoid delay in achieving permanence where no other option is possible is being undertaken.

Rates per 10,000 of referrals to Children's Social Services												
Local Authority, Region and England												
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change from previous year
884	Herefordshire	418.90	714.40	1261.30	829.80	380.80	950.10	327.40	366.50	299.80	640.60	340.80
984	West Midlands	520.40	612.60	613.30	559.00	654.00	649.30	593.10	528.60	494.50	502.70	8.20
	Statistical Neighbours	423.70	543.89	470.87	433.83	402.36	436.31	421.76	416.33	389.22	451.97	62.75
970	England	519.50	571.70	548.30	532.20	548.20	552.50	544.50	534.80	494.30	537.70	43.40

Quartile bands											
		Trend	Change from previous year	Latest National Rank	Quartile Banding	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including
884	Herefordshire	↑	340.80	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Rates per 10,000 of referrals to Children's Social Services



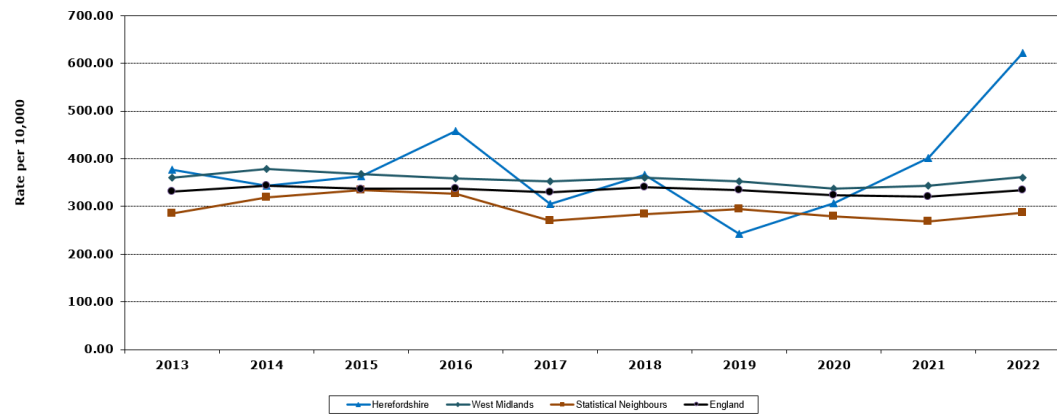
6.5 The current re-commissioning of early help services seeks to increase the percentage of families achieving sustainable change to 40% and to remove current wait lists for tier 3 service. Indicators of positive change align closely to demand for placement outside of the family network and as such, improved rates of change should align to reduced levels of crisis and demand for placement but also increased demand for support and allied services. Whilst a direct correlation between enhanced social work support and wider interventions against numbers of children accommodated in Herefordshire cannot be evidenced at this point, the national Supporting Families model provides a body of evidence to support this approach.

Children in Need rate per 10,000

Local Authority, Region and England

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change from previous year
884 Herefordshire	377.30	342.90	363.30	458.10	305.60	366.00	242.90	306.30	401.60	621.70	220.10
984 West Midlands	360.20	378.20	368.60	358.90	352.20	360.20	352.30	338.10	343.80	361.10	17.30
Statistical Neighbours	284.81	318.75	334.79	326.29	270.11	283.22	294.70	279.25	268.30	287.49	19.19
970 England	330.90	343.70	336.60	337.30	330.10	341.00	334.20	323.70	321.20	334.30	13.10

		Quartile bands							
Local Authority	Region	Trend	Change from previous year	Latest National Rank	Quartile Banding	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including	Up to and including
884	Herefordshire	↑	220.10	-	-	-	-	-	-



They see the following as indicators of stability and resilience within families:

- Getting a good education
- Good early years development
- Improved mental and physical health
- Promoting recovery and reducing harm from substance use
- Improved family relationships
- Children safe from abuse and exploitation
- Crime prevention and tackling crime
- Safe from domestic abuse
- Secure housing
- Financial stability

6.6 Soft market testing has indicated a pool of local providers operating broadly similar services and procurement via tender is proposed. There are however identified risks around the uncertainty of national funding post March 2025 which may influence the appetite of bidders.

7. Foster care strategy

7.0 Currently, with Herefordshire, 86 children are placed with IFA's, 138 children are placed directly with Herefordshire carers (including short breaks). A low level of enquiries and loss of carers over recent years means stability of carer capacity at best and potentially a reduction in placement capacity for mainstream care if no changes are made. The Foster Carer recruitment strategy 2023/24 seeks to generate a net growth of 3 carers and 5 placements 2023-24 and a further 10 carers (15 placements) annually via professional staff development, active marketing, and a carer retention strategy to include payments and training. Monthly targets of 32 enquiries should lead to two approvals per month with a time lag of 6-8 months. With increased use of kinship care, SGO and re-unification approaches, this should mean a significant reduction in the demand for IFA and the associated

reduced financial risk. There will be a clear focus on fostering for parent and child, siblings, children with disabilities, and children with complex needs as well as children aged 5+ and 11+ years.

7.1 Current proposals to transition 6 children from out of area residential into foster care 2023-24 is likely to mean that additional IFA placements are required should in-house options be unavailable. Oversight of current vacancies will support forward planning and matching of need to carer skill set and experience. Opportunities to recommission carer support services and develop new arrangements such as Mockingbird will be considered.

7.2 The Improving Practice and Delivering Best Value DRAFT Three Year Practice and Financial Plan (2023-2026) reported the requirement to financially invest and support service development through a review of fees and allowances. In addition, recruitment of a psychologist will provide therapeutic support to children and carers whilst in placement.

Proposals suggest a shift from use of IFA as follows:

Year 1 – move of 6 IFA to house carers

Year 2 – move of 14 IFA to in house carers

Year 3 – move of 24 IFA to in house carers

8. Use of alternative orders

8.0 The rate of Special Guardian Orders has significantly reduced between 21/22 & 22/23, this is described as being due to the introduction of a means test, this can put families off and they need to be re-assured about the process. If a targeted approach was adopted to those children within IFA's.

Year 1 - 6 children could transfer from an IFA to an SGO
Year 2 - 3 children could transfer from an IFA to an SGO

A clear and fair policy offer for Care leavers for Staying Put, would improve their long-term experience and outcomes and reduce the financial burden of paying for supported accommodation and associated support costs. (Source Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023)

9. SEN/D

9.0 Herefordshire has almost 36,000 children under the age of eighteen. Of these 4,500 are children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

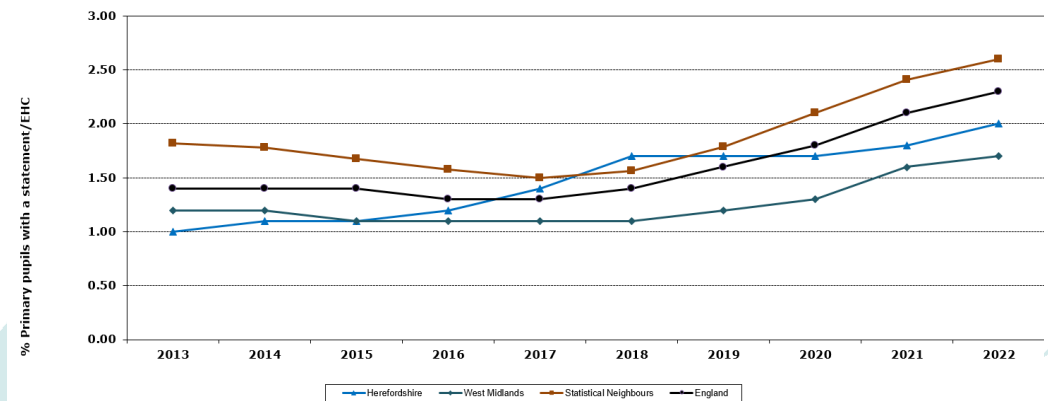
For the majority of children with SEND, their assessed needs are met by a universal offer of support and within mainstream educational provision; however, some disabled children may have a higher level of need that requires support from the council's Children with Disabilities (CWD) team and from specialist services. Since 2017 up to January 2023, the number of children and their families supported by the CWD team has increased from 168 to 240.

Currently most children and young people are able to access education locally unless there is a specific need for placement in a residential school however demand is threatening capacity especially across the cohort with social, emotional and mental health needs. An ongoing analysis of educational services and trajectory of demand for additional levels of support is ongoing. This will inform a programme of re-commissioning including a 5-year capital programme to extend current offer and develop specific new

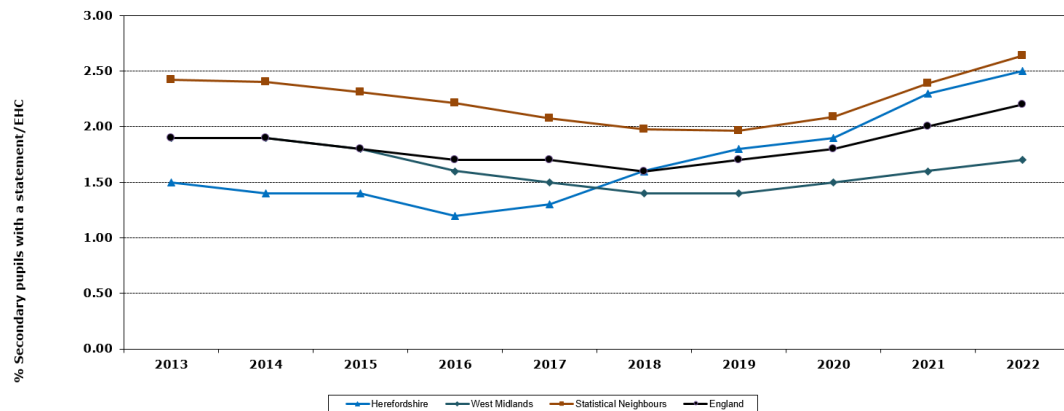
services. This will both inform and be informed by work to build sufficiency for residential care homes in county.

9.1 The number of school-aged children who had a statement for SEN or EHCP in Herefordshire increased by 28% over the last 4 years, from 711 in 2017/18 to 908 in 2021/22, this is now 3.8% of school-aged children (compared with 3.9% nationally and 3.6% regionally). Around half of these children will require assessed short break support. Activity to promote transparent access arrangements, choice and flexibility to meet statutory duties is ongoing and will be managed and reviewed as part of the SEND and Local Offer strategy and Short breaks commissioning plan 2023-28. Demand for most service areas have remained relatively stable over time, although take-up of the Targeted Allowance Scheme has significantly increased rising from 55 families in early 2017 up to 305 to date (Dec 2022).

% of pupils who have statement/EHCP of SEN (primary)



% of pupils who have statement/EHCP of SEN (secondary)



Work is ongoing to dovetail strategic planning across social care and education, recognising the interdependency of these work streams and the requirement to consider impact across the whole system. Access to specialist provision is currently challenged by increasing demand, especially from those who are in primary settings. Whilst there is a capital programme in place developing education provision in a short timescale is not realistic prospect, a new school is 5 years to opening. Accessing independent provision is often expensive and has addition costs for travel and therapy support.

It should be noted that any new educational capacity cannot be reserved for Herefordshire children and therefore any placement in county by another LA would affect access to services for our children. Care planning across services is therefore imperative to ensure delivery of a quality care, education and health offer to CLA and CL. Where any move of provision is proposed an early annual review, a formal consultation process and amendment of the EHCP will be needed and this will take a number of months.

9.2 Herefordshire Local Area SEND Self-evaluation January 2023 reported

- Of the 327 children looked after (CLA Nov 22) aged 2 or over, 45.9% have SEND. Nationally 50.6% of children in care have SEND.

- 23.1% of the children in our care have an EHC plan compared to 3.6% of all children and 22.3% of CLA nationally. 20.8% of care leavers have an EHC plan.
- 22.8% of Herefordshire's CLA have been identified as needing SEN Support on their school's census. This compares to 12% of all children and 28.3% of CLA nationally.
- Currently there are 138 statutory school aged looked after children (52.7%) who are identified as having a special educational need compared to 50% nationally. There has been an overall decrease in children currently identified as having SEND (down from 56% locally)
- The **Dynamic Support Register (DSR)** provides an effective mechanism for the earlier identification of those children and young people with LD/autism who are likely to go on to require residential accommodation as adults. ICB has been successful in bidding for funding to run a key worker pilot project to support families with young people on the DSR.
- The Herefordshire Multi-agency protocol for children and young people with disabilities and complex needs: preparing for adulthood promotes planning and transition into adulthood.
- A new policy has been published January 2023, which aims to **prevent unnecessary hospital admissions for people with a learning disability and autistic people**. The policy includes new guidance on the implementation of dynamic support registers (DSRs) and updates to the Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews (CETRs). The new guidance will support local NHS services to better understand the needs of people with a learning disability and/or people who are autistic in their area, so that they can make sure people receive the right support. By understanding people's needs and recognising early signs that might lead to a crisis it means that extra support can be put in place quickly, so the person doesn't end up going into hospital (or to other out of area placement) unnecessarily. This approach is due to be implemented by May 23.

Regional working across the SEND/short break agenda

Herefordshire are working in partnership with 14 other LA within the West Midlands consortium to support delivery of placements including independent schools. Key aims are to ensure oversight of quality, promote capacity and to ensure outcomes identified in children's care plans/EHCP are met. A market position statement is in development 23-24 and opportunities to promote working with voluntary sector providers will be promoted

Regional priorities have been identified as placements for those children who have experienced multiple breakdowns, complex behaviours, SEMH and for those stepping down from inpatient beds.

Market engagement events undertaken July 2023, both regionally and within Herefordshire, indicate a challenging market with providers struggling to source accommodation and staff. Opportunities for joint working are being explored as part of residential, foster care and short break conversations. Providers across residential and fostering services have been asked to consider delivery of respite support and this will be developed in the work plan being established for 2024-25.

In addition to placement sufficiency planning the opportunity to re-specify framework arrangements for spot purchased community based day provision is ongoing. Providers are being encouraged to register against new specifications in development with a deadline of December 2023.

- The opportunity to work in partnership with SEND Commissioners will support the development of specialist skills within Herefordshire and will inform improvement planning across service areas.

10. Overnight short breaks support

Element description		Children accessing service (Dec22)	Agreed per year	Average unit cost	2022/23 forecasted spend
Overnight short breaks	Foster care	6	144	£130 per night	£7,000
	Residential	10	264	£700 per night	£187,000

10.1 Analysis undertaken 2018 indicated that 10 children would require a residential short break totalling 550 nights pa. By December 2022, the number of nights required for 10 children (not necessarily the same cohort) following assessment has reduced to 264. Sourcing residential overnight support for children has been a continual challenge, with a small and shrinking market with no in county offer. Since the Covid 19 pandemic three respite schemes previously utilised are no longer providing overnight support (located in Telford, Dudley and Hereford). The council and parents are currently reliant on one residential provider, located just outside of border, who are reporting difficulty recruiting staff to be able to offer sufficient capacity.

10.2 In 2017, the council's fostering service launched a new sleepover scheme with the aim of delivering 600 foster care short break nights per year for 14-15 children. An analysis of needs of children open to CWD team, undertaken in December 2022, identified that demand had reduced to ten children who require 288 nights per year foster care. As of October 2022, the sleepover scheme had five registered carer households supporting six children. The remaining four children's needs are unmet and are receiving alternative support until fostering provision is identified able to meet their needs. It appears that the sleepover scheme received no referrals during 2021-22 and only two referrals 2022-23 from the CWD team. The referral process requires review to ensure it is well understood and effective. It is expected that the number of children requiring overnight short breaks will remain stable, with an equal split between requiring foster or residential care but there will be slight fluctuation in the total number of nights required.

10.3 Recent options appraisal aimed at developing a commissioning strategy for short breaks has highlighted the opportunities to deliver assessed need via local in-house foster care provision. The aligned recruitment strategy seeks to grow capacity by five carer households each year.

10.4 Currently the council and families are reliant on one registered provider for residential overnight short breaks. This provider is not in a position currently to consider a block contract for any beds but this will be revisited once they recruited to enable them to operate at full capacity. A market

testing exercise is required to identify whether there is any appetite within the provider market for a contract to secure residential beds for overnight short breaks. Options to expand the adult focused shared lives scheme will also be explored.

10.5 In order to promote a personalised approach towards delivery of overnight short breaks the council will look at new innovative alternative approaches to give families the choice to arrange their own overnight respite through a personal budget, which could include;

- a. purchasing of specialist disabled children's holidays across the UK
- b. family stay in a hotel or similar, whilst someone looks after their disabled child within the family home and/or
- c. a Personal Assistant, family member or friend goes on holiday with the family, to enable the parents to have breaks from their caring responsibilities, whilst on holiday.

By providing the right support at the right time, this will reduce number of families at crisis point and therefore prevent or delay children becoming accommodated. An increased budget for short breaks will be required as part of the admission avoidance approach towards supporting families.

Engagement with local providers has enabled one registered provider to widen their offer to shared care enabling creative and flexible sourcing of care when there is an identified need for such support.

Market engagement undertaken with 8 providers across residential and fostering services July 2023 indicated an appetite for the delivery of respite services in Herefordshire. Challenges include staffing, premises and registration but all could be managed through effective project management and communication. Follow up conversations to develop spot and potentially block arrangements are scheduled for the summer of 2023.

As part of wider commissioning activity to promote capacity for day time activities Herefordshire has undertaken a tender that will provide

group based activity from September 2023. Further procurement is being considered to offer 1:1 support.

The regional framework for non-placement related activity is developing an offer for community based services. Providers are being encouraged to join and this is expected to expand opportunities for children.

11. Accommodation for young people 16+ and Care leavers

11.0 The current strategy to manage the accommodation and support needs for young people 16+ is in development. This will include opportunities to build more capacity for supported lodging, staying close, staying put and channels into suitable accommodation when young people are ready for independence. There will also be support for vulnerable adults over the age of 18 years, who are at risk of homelessness or homeless. Those accommodated may have experienced traumatic upbringings, adverse childhood experiences and will often have multiple and complex vulnerabilities. They may be known to a number of agencies and as such the need for effective multi-disciplinary working is highlighted.

Young people who arrive as unaccompanied children and have unclear status post 18 may face particular issues and require support to manage practical challenges. As such flexible options for shared accommodation, access to education, support to manage trauma and accessing networks may be required.

11.1 Duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires the council to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness and to relieve homelessness by helping the customer to secure accommodation. Current contractual arrangements deliver 31 units of accommodation plus an emergency crash pad room with a further 4 units of dispersed accommodation in the community. The main accommodation service of 31 bed spaces is staffed 24/7, people accommodated in the dispersed units have access to intensive housing management, planned and crisis support (including evenings, overnight and weekends) as required.

This aligns with aligning with the Herefordshire Councils Housing Strategy 2021-2026 and links with the local Project Brave and MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) strategic approach.

- Project Brave is a multi -agency partnership initiative enabling and finding solutions for very vulnerable people at risk from homelessness, substance use, mental health, criminal experience and exploitation.
- Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) supports local areas across the country to transform services and systems to directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage

People experiencing homelessness have on average poorer health and die earlier than the general population. Analysis indicates the need to increase capacity and new contractual arrangements in place from August 2024 seek a minimum of 40 units as part of the new contract with one building (9 bed spaces) provided for 18-30 year old young people with priority given to care leavers and one building (22 bed spaces) utilised for people over the age of 25. Additional dispersed accommodation in the community will provide step down accommodation options to free up space for new applicants requiring intensive 24/7 support.

The overall aim of the service would include:

- People to be in accommodation suitable for their needs
- People to feel safe and are protected from harm
- People to be supported to live healthier lives
- People to be equipped with the skills necessary to live independently.
- People to be supported to prevent homelessness / reoccurrence of homelessness
- Increasing the variety of housing options in Herefordshire.
- Improving health outcomes for vulnerable people
- Helping to prevent escalation of needs among vulnerable people

There is an identified risk of limited/insufficient options for those young people who have not completed an evidence based programme of preparation of independence. It is thought that having dispersed properties attached to supported accommodation will assist move on, and enable people to transition in a planned way - from high-level support through to lower support levels and finally on to independent tenancy.

11.2 There are 25 care experienced young adults between the ages of 21 and 25 years. (Source - Care Leaver accommodation Tracker) These young people are currently living in supported accommodation. The Care Leavers service is reviewing all these young people and preparing them for independent living and assessing their ongoing needs and abilities. It is anticipated that 25 young adults will move from supported accommodation and into suitable accommodation either with family, into independent accommodation and for those who are in receipt of benefits they will be supported to claim the relevant housing support.

Year 1 -10 moves out of supported accommodation into independence.

Year 2 - 15 moves out of supported accommodation into independence

11.3 In the light of this review modelling to scope future commissioning of 18+ services and interface with housing services is required. Opportunities to support care leavers to develop required skills in a timely way, rent guarantor schemes and priority banding to access tenancy should all be promoted to avoid risk of homelessness, eviction or rent arrears.

12. UASC

12.0 The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) nationally is above pre-pandemic levels - after a 20% decrease (March 21), the numbers of UASC are up by 34%. UASC currently represent around 7% of all CLA, up from 5% last year (and up slightly from 6% in 2018). UASC are generally male (95%) an increase from 92% last year and are generally older with only 13% aged under 16 years, this is the same as in 2020 but down from 2018. Of care leavers aged 19-21 years, an increasing number and proportion were formerly UASC. This increase is due to the relatively high number of UASC since 2015 moving through the age groups and who are now care leavers.

A review of local process has resulted in more clarity for referral and going forward all will be managed by the Home Finding Team. Where it is in the young person's interest options to place within block, local framework and regional frameworks will be prioritised over spot and local placement over out of area. Concerns remain about linking young people into communities that can support their cultural and religious needs and whether this can be delivered within Herefordshire. Ongoing work to engage with the third sector and current providers to explore opportunities for enhanced cultural support is recommended and will be scheduled for Autumn/Winter 2023.

12.1 The ongoing data cleanse February 23 confirms 38 UASC are accommodated and of these most are 16+ and placed in supported accommodation. Further analysis is needed to understand the arrangements for these placements, their location and whether options to live within Herefordshire should be considered.

A review of recording, referral management and costs will inform practice and the need for further framework activity in 2023.

13. Next Steps

13.0 This strategy seeks to be a practical tool that supports the delivery of improved sufficiency and establishes a `pipeline` for targeted commissioning activity. Action plans have been developed across key areas.. Each plan

supports the development of robust reporting, monitoring of use and demand analysis. Key is the requirement to benchmark against national trends and be open to new ways of working.

Understanding sufficiency requires a collaborative approach across service areas and a clear recognition of the interdependencies. There needs to be a live interchange of data to ensure realistic targets and to avoid duplication of effort.

13.1 In summary, considerable work is being done to ascertain the demand for placements and to ensure effective use of commissioned services. In parallel, an extensive programme to improve social work practice, care planning and embed restorative practice is being developed as business as usual. Approaches need to be modelled and a clear mechanism to record impact both quantitatively and qualitatively is needed.

The current hypothesis is that if all current provision is utilised effectively, Herefordshire becomes a referrer of choice, early help approaches support families effectively avoiding admission into care and care planning informs timely transition alongside a pipeline into independence, then the council has the potential for a strong sufficiency offer and model for delivery.

A trajectory of reduced demand for residential and IFA in line with enhanced offer from in house foster carers, short breaks and family support should be evidenced over the lifetime of this strategy however need will inform demand and the safety of children must always be prioritised.

13.2 Key to ensuring an effective mix of provision will be the development of in-house foster care capacity that can offer emergency, short term and long-term homes for young people who are part of sibling groups, parent and child or who have complex needs to include trauma and mental health difficulties. Options for respite support as a short break are also required. Training and support to promote resilient carers will promote stability for children and young people and increase retention of carers in a difficult market.

13.3 Local registered residential options will be needed for a reduced number of children and effective transition into foster care/return to home will need to inform their statement of purpose. Alongside this will be the need to develop flexible arrangements for care leavers and support through to independent living with differentiated support packages. Recognition of the interface with housing services, SEND and management of the market will be crucial. Alongside delivery of placements, a programme of compliant procurement will be needed for a range of non-accommodation related activity.

13.4 This is however, an extensive programme of change that will require collaboration and buy in across departments and crucially sufficient capacity to undertake the work required and maintain robust reporting. Without this, children and young people will still face the possibility of being placed somewhere that does not fully meet their identified needs and multiple moves until a suitable placement is found. The current market is stretched and providers are able to choose from referrals across the nation. Provider engagement, effective communication from all officers, skilled referral and robust systems for payment are crucial to promote Herefordshire as a referrer of choice. Modelling of change across the system is complicated and will require whole system oversight to measure impact across multiple targets against benchmarked data.

13.5 Modelling of realistic targets is crucial to maintaining a trajectory of improvement, retaining staff and provider confidence. Numbers of Children in Care are increasing significantly in all areas of the country and thus it is appropriate to question whether 70 per 10,000 is a realistic target given national trends since 2021-22 and the fact that Herefordshire is starting from a higher than average position. It may take Herefordshire longer than 3 years to bring accommodation rates back safely to those of our statistical neighbour averages. Herefordshire has a very high rate of children in care compared to statistical neighbours and the England average rate. There were 408 children in the Council's care (as at 31 March 2023) which equates to a rate per 10,000 of the child population of 113 (Source: ChAT report). The most recently published rates per 10,000 for Statistical Neighbours and the England average were 64 and 70 respectively (2021-22). (as at 28.04.23 it is 411)

13.6 If our CiC assumes a 3 year target of similar ratio to statistical neighbours and the rest of England, then Herefordshire's CiC cohort should be approximately 252 children in care (equivalent to 70 per 10,000). That is a reduction of 160 CiC, whilst we will aim to ensure only the children who need to be in care, are in care, there will be some legacy cases, where children will now need to remain in Care. Therefore we will aim to see a net reduction over the 3 year period of approximately 128 CiC by year 3. Circa 280 children would be in care.

	31 March 2023 (baseline)	31 March 2024	31 March 2025	31 March 2026
Number of children in our care	408	350	300	280
Rate per 10,000	113	97	82	70
% in foster care	68% (277)	75% (263)	80% (224)	80% (184)
% in Herefordshire Council provision	37% (137)	45% (158)	60% (168)	75% (173)

13.7 If approaches towards reducing accommodation through robust early help and restorative practice models are successful then 129 of the current cohort of 412 would leave our care by virtue of reaching their 18th birthday within the three year period. The rate at which children have been coming into our care in recent months has been falling, and our annualised rate at the end of March was 30 per 10,000. The England average for 2021-22 was 26 per 10,000. If we maintained a rate coming in at 30/10,000 that would see 108 children coming into our care each year. Our annualised rate for children leaving care as at the end of March was also 30 (108 leaving each year). The England average for ceasing to be CLA was 26/10,000)

1. Year1 – 4 children have been assessed and being able to move from a residential setting in to family based care, either with foster carers or connected carers 2022-23. (Source the permanence tracker April 2023)- of these 2 IFA placements are needed.

2. In year 1 (23/24) 18 Children in Care currently living with foster carers can be returned home to live with their families.
3. Year 2 – 15 children placed with parents/supervision orders will have their care orders discharged.

13.8 Certain assumptions around success have been made to inform the modelling of future demand to include:

1. Over 2023-24 eight children currently in residential care will move into foster care – spread over IFA and in house provision.
2. 12 children will be supported to return home under reunification planning (excluding placement with parents). These children will likely be living in foster care (9) and residential (3).
3. Use of residential parent and child reduced from 6 down to 3 within foster placement. During 2023-24, this is likely to be IFA however going forwards this would be managed within in-house capacity.
4. 6 children will move from IFA into in house foster care 2023/24, 14 in 2024/25 and 24 2025/26.

13.9 If in-house foster care are expected to deliver a growth of three households (5 placements) in 2023-24 they are unlikely to be able to absorb six placements from IFA, three parent/child and four from residential unless reunification and SGO targets are met.

13.10 If approaches towards reducing accommodation through robust early help and restorative practice models are successful then 129 of the current cohort of 412 would leave our care by virtue of reaching their 18th birthday within the three year period. The rate at which children have been coming into our care in recent months has been falling, and our annualised rate at the end of March was 30 per 10,000. The England average for 2021-22 was 26 per 10,000. If we maintained a rate coming in at 30/10,000 that would see 108 children coming into our care each year. Our annualised rate for

children leaving care as at the end of March was also 30 (108 leaving each year). The England average for ceasing to be CLA was 26/10,000)

1. Year1 – 4 children have been assessed and being able to move from a residential setting in to family based care, either with foster carers or connected carers 2022-23. (Source the permanence tracker April 2023)- of these 2 IFA placements are needed.
2. In year 1 (23/24) 18 Children in Care currently living with foster carers can be returned home to live with their families.
3. Year 2 – 15 children placed with parents/supervision orders will have their care orders discharged.

Factors that will influence the opportunity to move towards delivery of sufficient, quality, local provision will include:

- Numbers of young people reaching 18 and leaving care
- Timely transition of care leavers into independence
- Number of UASC arrivals
- Placements taken up by staying put
- Effective social work practice and reputation

Action plan – reflecting work plans across service areas

1.0 Delivery of arrangements to support compliant procurement, care planning and effective decision making

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
1	Promote Herefordshire as referrer of choice. Activity to assist with this includes review of referral paperwork to ensure quality child centred information and clear request, providing contact point of reference, improving payment systems	Reduced complaints Improved reputation and take up of referrals	1.4.24 for 12m review
2	A programme of market engagement with foster care providers (IFA)	Increased volume of local carers Targeted recruitment in line with demand for teenage, siblings and parent/child	1.12.23 review point
3	Review of current mechanism for buying non-accommodation related support services. Market engagement to promote use of regional DPS (dynamic purchasing system)	Increase in providers listed across 20 existing lots to include parent/child assessments, FGC and SGO assessment. Timely support to deliver effective care planning to include assessments and interpretation and to promote re-unification reducing demand for placements.	1.12.23- review point
4	Extension of lots within DPS-as above	New arrangements for required activity to include age assessments, interpretation, family support and aligned services required to support care planning	1.4.24
5	Governance for uplift management and decision making locally/regionally	Timely decision and financial planning promotes improved relationships	30.09.23
6	Re-commissioning of aligned services to support early help and edge of care arrangements and collaborative working with ICB	to promote improved mental health and well-being and negate crisis situations/breakdown wherever possible	TBC
7	Maintain full staffing of Home finding Team and undertake training as per service improvement plan.	Improved reputation with providers and timely management of referrals/ expression of interest. Improved oversight of contracts including spot	1.9.23
8	Review of roles and responsibilities	Promote effective reporting and recording –interface for quality assurance and notification management.	1.4.24
9	Review of brokerage functions across SEN/D including short breaks and non-placement related services	Deliver timely offer meeting assessed need using safe, best practice mechanism	1.1.24

2.0 Developing Sufficiency for parent/child assessment all care placement types

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
1	Market engagement to increase number of providers on regional DPS Children and Families Support Services offering placements for parent/child	Increase capacity of approved providers and total providers on list	1.4.24
2	Engage with local/existing commissioned providers. Herefordshire led programme	Build position as referrer of choice and improve understanding of model and impact	1.1.24
3	Develop marketing campaign to recruit to carers with skill set to support parenting assessment.	As specified in fostering strategy Robina	TBC

3.0 Developing sufficiency in accommodation – foster care

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
1	Implementation of retention strategy	Promote capacity and retain local carers promoting stability and emotional well-being	1.12.23 - review point
2	Market engagement and stimulation of enquiries	Increased enquires and initial visits per calendar month should lead to having ten new carer households approved annually from April 2024.	1.4.24
3	Recommission support programme for Herefordshire carers	Promote confident management of challenging presentations and promote stability of placement, avoiding unnecessary placement in residential or IFA.	31.3.24
4	Review of funding arrangements for foster care	Enhance applications and promote retention	31.3.24
5	Review of training programme	Promote confident carers who deliver care from trauma informed and evidence based perspective	31.3.24
6	Recruit and train carers to undertake respite care. Undertake fee review.	Development of 5 new carer households annually who can offer short breaks to children with a disability	1.4.24 and annually
7	Engage with DFE plans to develop regional co-operative approaches towards cluster management of recruitment and front door	Potential for smarter working and access to resources/data	1.4.25
8	Engage with national strategic role out of Mockingbird via regional hub, consideration of impact/financial risk. To be progressed as part of fostering recruitment plan.	Enhanced support to carers and management of complex care, siblings etc.	1.4.25

4.0 Building sufficiency for local quality residential provision

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
1	Develop options to increase local registered capacity in Herefordshire. Implement delivery programme.	2 homes for up to 8 children/young people 11-18 with complex social and emotional needs.	1.4.23 Phase 1 1.4.25 Phase 2
2	Programme of market engagement to improve relationships and become a referrer of choice	Improve placements made in area and promote stability avoiding unplanned moves.	1.4.24 review point
3	Interface with short break strategy to build overnight respite capacity	Effective use of resources to avoid delay	1.9.23
4	A programme of market engagement with residential providers to develop skilled trauma informed provision that can support young people with complex needs without excessive staffing ratio or cost.	Key deliverables will be to promote matching, support reunification and avoid unplanned endings.	1.9.23

5.0 Building sufficiency in accommodation related services for young people 16+ and Care Leavers

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
1	Re-open local framework for supported accommodation to new providers	Minimum of 4 new providers offering 5 placements across differentiated arrangements including sole occupancy units and parent/child 2 bed properties. Improved management of the competitive process will ensure that those providers who offer best value alongside matching will receive placement. Engagement with operational colleagues will promote referral, matching and increase occupancy levels through robust referral	1.9.23
2	Development of regional spot contract documentation	Tighter control of quality and cost with effective protocol for information sharing. Reduced queries/concerns	1.4.24
3	SHAP bids are underway to promote additional accommodation	Increased opportunities for young people 18+ - this will include care experienced young people who are deemed homeless	1.4.24

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
4	Programme of housing acquisition under accommodation strategy will deliver a flexible offer to young people 16+ and care leavers 18-25.		Ongoing
5	Support and provide oversight of new Ofsted arrangements to ensure compliance with registration	Currently most providers are committed to undertaking registration and local support/references are being provided to encourage compliance. Review and oversight will highlight any risks allowing for planned movement of YP where appropriate. All arrangements for 16+ supported accommodation will require registration as mandatory from 1.10.23	1.4.24
6	Protocol for 16-17 homelessness to be agreed and implemented	Delivery of safe, timely and co-produced arrangements for assessment of homelessness and on-going support as per legal status. Ongoing review to monitor activity	1.9.23 and 6m review of impact ongoing
7	Programme of quality assurance	To ensure all arrangements across block, framework and spot are fit for purpose	ongoing
8	Accommodation strategy to include 18+ accommodation via tenancy and/or adult services	Clear strategy in place to meet need	1.12.23
9	Review of staying put, staying close and transition arrangements into adult services/or independent living to	Promote safe and timely care planning Promote strong relationships with trusted individuals	1.12.24
10	Implement new 16+ service	Promote confident skill base of staff Build trusted relationships Provide consistent care and support into independence	1.4.24

6.0 Services for young people 14-25 with mental health support needs

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
1	Work with H&W NHS trust to co-produce new pathway for young people 16-24 with mental health needs	Pathway to support young people including those in care and those who are care experienced to access appropriate support into adulthood and build resilience.	1.4.25

7.0 Strategic planning for overnight respite/short breaks and home based support services

#	Activity	Expected impact on sufficiency	Timescale
1	Develop sleepover scheme by supporting the council's fostering service to maintain the current carer cohort and recruit new carers. Review fees and allowances.	Grow further by five new carers each year. 20 carer households offering a minimum 520 nights per year for up to 21 children	By March 2026:
2	Develop arrangements to commission approx.500-550 nights of residential respite across a choice of local quality providers –both IFA and residential.	To engage with local independent fostering agencies and residential providers circulate all referrals for short breaks foster care through the West Midlands regional Fostering Framework.	1.9.23
3	Identify changes required to council's Shared Lives CQC registration,	Enable provision of respite for children aged 16+, subject to meeting registration requirements.	April 2023
4	Consider new innovative alternative approaches to give families the choice to arrange their own overnight respite through a personal budget.-	Build resilience and avoid need for shared care/accommodation on 38/52 week basis through personalised bespoke support plans	April 24
5	Review options for the council entering into a partnership with neighbouring authority to develop additional accommodation	Increased capacity and improved market share	1.1.24
6	Identify appetite within the provider market for a contract to secure residential beds for overnight short breaks.	Develop capacity and choice through compliant procurement	1.4.24
7	Engage with local providers to facilitate shared care offer	Improved flexibility and timely support when required. One provider with active offer May 23.	Ongoing
8	Partnership work with 14 LA (in region) to develop options for children's domiciliary service. to support children to stay at home to help avoid children coming into care	To allow children to stay at home or to support re-unification to reduce levels of accommodation when it is safe to do so	May 2023 onwards
9	A programme of co-production and market engagement will be undertaken to scope and promote overnight opportunities for a short break across residential/foster care.	Progress plans to build local quality offer Improved choice and flexibility	1.4.24
10	Commissioned programme of short break opportunities to include group based community services, home based support, direct payments and targeted grants will be developed as part of the local offer.	Reduce family crisis and emergency accommodation needed Maintain family and build resilience	1.4.24