

London Borough of Croydon

**Looked After Children
Sufficiency Plan**

March 2017

Delivering for Croydon

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Date for review

End March 2018

1. Background to Croydon¹

- 1.1. Croydon's population is growing. The borough is home to 380,700 people and this is expected to reach 465,600 in 2041.
- 1.2. Croydon has the largest population of 0-18 year olds in London at 97,200 residents (mid 2014 population estimate), which makes up 25.8% of the total population of Croydon. The number of residents aged 0-18 years will increase by approximately 8,200 residents by 2021.
- 1.3. About 56% of the 0 to 24 population comes from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.
- 1.4. In 2015 23.2% of Croydon's children were living in families affected by income deprivation. Croydon is promoting financial inclusion through a number of initiatives and helping families with the cost of living challenges they face (See section I Gateway Services)
- 1.5. The north of borough is more deprived than the south. Wards like Broad Green, Selhurst and South Norwood are among the most deprived; Fieldway and New Addington in the east also have high levels of deprivation, with Fieldway being the most deprived ward in Croydon.
- 1.6. Children's Social Care is continuing to experience rising demand. There was an increase in referrals to children's social care from 3700 as at December 2015 to 3839 in December 2016 and these are continuing to rise and has resulted in increased numbers of Looked After Children and children in need.
- 1.7. Croydon has the one of the highest number of looked after children of any London borough due to the high numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) looked after by the borough. As of the middle of February 2017² there were a total of 813 looked after children in Croydon, of these 402 were UASC looked after children and 411 were local looked after children.
- 1.8. The proportion of looked after children who are local to Croydon (non UASC) is below average at 43.5 per 10,000 in comparison to the national rate of 60 as at end of March 2016. It is acknowledged that the National rate includes 6% USAC, but Croydon's percentage is nearer 50%.

Key messages regarding our Looked After Children (LAC)³

- 2nd highest LAC rate in London
- Nearly 1 in 6 of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in London are in Croydon (430 out of 2,490)
- Highest proportion of male LAC in London
- Highest proportion of LAC who are 16 or over

¹ Children and Families Plan 2016-17

² 24th February weekly snapshot Croydon performance data

³ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

- Highest proportion of Section 20 LAC in London
- Highest proportion of foster placement LAC in London
- Highest number of LAC placed by other authorities
- 5th highest proportion of 19-21 year old care leavers in education, employment and training in London
- Highest proportion of 19-21 year old care leavers living in independent accommodation in London
- 2nd highest proportion of LAC missing without authorisation in London (experimental statistic)

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Croydon Council believes that for most children and young people, the best place to live is with their family of origin. However, there will be some children and young people who need to live, either in the short term, or permanently, with substitute carers.
- 2.2. This plan addresses the accommodation needs of children and young people from birth to the age of 21, (or 25 where Children's Services continue to have statutory responsibility) including disabled children and young people, who are, or who may be, accommodated by Croydon Council. It meets the requirements of the sufficiency duty (defined in Section 3) by collating needs and resource information. It also describes how services provided to these children are structured in a way that best meets their needs. It sets out the services provided for care leavers, children considered to be at risk of becoming looked after and early help services that reduce the need for children to come into the care system.

3. Definition of Sufficiency Duty

- 3.1. Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 ('the 1989 Act') requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, to meet the needs of children who the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').
- 3.2. In recent years there have been a number of legislative programmes aimed at improving services for vulnerable children with a particular emphasis on looked after children. Despite high national ambitions and a shared commitment for change, the outcomes for looked after children and care leavers have not improved sufficiently and there remains a significant gap between their life chances and those of other young people⁴.

⁴ Keep On Caring, Supporting Young People from Care to Independence July 2016

4. National Context

- 4.1. The following primary legislation/guidance governs commissioning in relation to looked after children:
1. Children Act 1989 & 2004
 2. Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
 3. Care Standards Act 2000
 4. Adoption and Children Act 2002
 5. Children and Young Persons Act 2008
 6. Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children 2010
 7. Guidance on the Provision of Accommodation for 16 & 17 year old young people who be homeless and/or require accommodation 2010
 8. Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Regulations 2010
 9. Promoting the Educational Achievements of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010
 10. The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
 11. Children and Families Act 2014
 12. Education and Adoption Act 2016
 13. Children and Social Work Bill 2016
- 4.2. Further guidance that has been recently released “Keep on Caring, Supporting Young People from Care to Independence” (July 2016) and “Putting Children First” -Delivering our Vision for Excellent Children’s Social Care” (DfE, July 2016) sets out a vision for the further reform of support for care leavers and the wider social care services based on innovation, system reform, and embedding the corporate parenting responsibility.
- 4.3. Sir Martin Narey’s⁵ report outlines the fragmented nature of the residential care market, where there is no simple linkage between need, or level of need and price to be paid for a placement. The report states that commissioning residential care through regional consortia will provide better value for money and improve supplier relationship management. He recommends that the Department for Education require Local Authorities to come together in this regard.
- Adoption Reform**
- 4.4. The Children and Families Act 2014 covers a range of areas and its provisions on adoptions complements the Family Justice Review and are designed to increase the number of children placed in adoptive families as well as speeding up the process for placement. The Government has introduced a 26 week time limit for care proceedings, a shorter adopters’ assessment period, a concurrent planning requirement and less emphasis on ethnic matching, all of which has required significant service reshaping by all local authorities.
- 4.5. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 reinforces the requirement to speed up the adoption process by giving the Secretary of State the power to direct a Local Authority to make arrangements for another Authority or agency to carry out certain adoption functions.

⁵ Residential Care in England, Report of Sir Martin Narey’s independent review of children’s residential care July 2016

5. Local Drivers

- 5.1. Croydon has a particular pressure in meeting the needs of UASC who arrive at the National Assessment Centre, which is located in Croydon. USAC currently account for just less than half of all LAC in Croydon.
- 5.2. In addition to Croydon's large looked after children population, there are increasing demands across children's social care. An overview is included below:
- High demand of placements from other local authorities - as at end of March 2016 a total of 555 children under 18 were placed in Croydon from other authorities⁶
 - The number of referrals has increased from 3700 as at December 2015 to 3839 in December 2016 an increase of 4%. The number of Children In Need (CIN) as at December was 679⁷
 - Housing remains a significant pressure for families. Issues include; homeless families, families in B&B, S.17 being used to finance accommodation for families, transfer of children on Child Protection Plans from other boroughs and suitable accommodation for care leavers in the borough who are not seen as eligible for priority housing⁸. Additionally, limited availability of housing stock, supported housing and affordable private rented accommodation in Croydon, greater reluctance to accept tenants receiving benefits and planning to evict 22 year old care leavers as their benefits reduce following legislation change.
 - Planning pathways which support effective transition to adulthood for young people with disabilities through partnership with providers established by Croydon's All Age Disability Service.
- 5.3. There is a continued focus on a holistic commissioning response, which will support children to remain with their families wherever possible and which will provide a range of effective options for those requiring alternative care arrangements.
- 5.4. Croydon is working with 9 other neighbouring boroughs to ensure that we are commissioning good quality residential placements for our children and young people with special educational needs, which meets the needs of this cohort and delivers lifelong outcomes. By working with neighbouring boroughs, we are able to do this in an efficient way, through avoiding duplication and sharing good practice. In May 2016, Croydon (along with the other 9 boroughs) started using an integrated commissioning solution to commission placements with quality assured SEN suppliers, based on outcomes as well as needs in an open, fair and transparent way.

Links to key Croydon's key strategic documents

- 5.5. The sufficiency plan should not be read in isolation and other relevant plans include:
- The Children and Families Plan 2016-17
 - The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment deep dive assessments
 - Croydon Safeguarding and Looked after Children Needs Assessment undertaken in 2014 (updated in September 2015)
 - LAC Strategy 2017-19 (currently in draft form)
 - LAC Service Plan
 - Improvement Plan for Children's Social Care, 2017-18

⁶ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

⁷ December Dashboard Croydon Performance data

⁸ Findings from Croydon Practice Week 2016

6. Vision, Aims and Objectives

- 6.1. Croydon's overarching vision for looked after children and those with complex needs is that: ***Children and young people in Croydon will be safe, healthy and happy, and will aspire to be the best they can be. The future is theirs.***
- 6.2. Within this overarching vision we aim to:
- Provide timely and high quality intervention to help children remain with or return to their families, as long as it is safe to do so
 - Provide and commission the right mix of placements , which provide stability and quality
 - Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs
 - Ensure that looked after children, young people and care leavers achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment, or training
 - Improve the health and emotional well-being of looked after children, young people and care leavers
 - Aim to keep looked after children, young people and care leavers safe through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time
 - Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood
 - Ensure that looked after children, young people and care leavers' views and experiences inform current and future service delivery.
- 6.3 In addition, our aims for delivering sufficiency of placements is informed by our approach to:
- **Demand management** including continued analysis of need and projection of demand
 - **Category Management** (Commissioning, Procurement and Governance) - development of new commissioning models including frameworks and integrated commissioning solutions through market engagement and closer collaboration with other local authorities. Our new commissioning models will offer flexibility, incentives and opportunities for increased efficiencies, placement availability and improving outcomes for our looked after children and care leavers
 - The **Transformation of Children's Services** and increased effectiveness of service delivery through a systemic approach and ensuring Children, Young People, and their families get the help at the right time
 - Embedding a refreshed **Contract Management Framework** that effectively monitors achievement of individual outcomes and overall organisational performance with greater scrutiny on the quality of support provided to children who are looked after, those reported missing and at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation. Engagement with service users underpins our new contract management approach
 - Reviewing our **Placement Process** with the view of achieving process efficiencies, improving the quality of information available to the market and encouraging a better market response
 - Continuing to **Develop Foster Carer Recruitment Services** and build the capacity of those providing services for highly complex and challenging needs
 - Scoping new commissioning models for **Leaving Care Services**

7. Analysis of Needs

Current numbers

Total numbers

- 7.1 As of the middle of February 2017 there were a total of 813⁹ looked after children in Croydon, of these 402 were UASC looked after children and 411 were local looked after children. The Croydon rate of 87 per 10,000 population is higher than both the national average of 60 and our statistical neighbours' average of 64.5 as at end of March 2016.
- 7.2 Croydon's rate is higher because nearly half the current number are UASC. Nationally the average percentage was 6% and in Kent it was 21%. Croydon's numbers have slightly decreased over the last 3 months, to February 2017. This is expected to change further over the next few years as the dispersal scheme develops. From 2016 -17 the Government's dispersal policy will mean that UASC who are already in our care will continue to be under our care until they are no longer eligible, but it is unlikely that we will have large numbers of new UASC coming into our care. Therefore UASC numbers will gradually decline over the period of this plan.
- 7.3 The proportion of looked after children who are local to Croydon (non UASC) is below average at 44 per 10,000 in comparison to the national rate of 60. It is acknowledged that the National rate includes 6% USAC, but Croydon's percentage is nearer 50%.
- 7.4 Additionally, Croydon has a high number of children (555¹⁰) from other Local Authorities placed within our boundary, which puts significant pressures on our local resources.
- 7.5 The number of local LAC has decreased over the last 3 years to the end of March 2016 when the number was 372 and as at February 2017 the figure was 411, a net increase over the last year. However, it should be noted that the numbers fluctuate and are relatively consistent when considered over a period of time, i.e. 445 in 2011 to 411 in 2017.
- 7.6 410 children started to be looked after in 2015-16 and 420 ceased to be looked after¹¹.

Gender and age profile

- 7.7 The age profile of looked after children as at end March 2016, shows that a significant proportion (50% or 400) are sixteen plus, and most of these are UASC. 85% or 680¹² children who are looked after in Croydon were aged 10 years and over in 2016 compared to 62% nationally.
- 7.8 The overall gender split as at October 2016 was 26% female to 74% male¹³. The proportions of female to male for each age will vary year-on-year.

Diversity

- 7.9 Croydon is an ethnically diverse borough. Nearly 23%¹⁴, of local children in care are black, or black British (compared with 20% of the total population¹⁵); 16% Asian or Asian British (Same proportion as all of

⁹ December Dashboard Croydon performance data

¹⁰ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

¹¹ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

¹² DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

¹³ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

¹⁴ SSD903 return 2015-16

Croydon); 17% are from mixed or other backgrounds (compared with 6.6% of the total population); and 43% are white, or white British (compared with 55% of the total population).

7.10. The ethnic profile of UASC who began to be looked after in 2015-16 is quite different with 18% being black, or black British nearly 43% being Asian or Asian British and 30% were white, or white British.

7.11. A high proportion of children in Croydon's care are Muslim (37% as at 8th March 2017)¹⁶. This is partly because of the UASC profile. The proportion of Muslims in Croydon's total population is 8%.¹⁷

Looked After Children with a recorded disability

7.12. At the end of March 2016, 38 (4.8%) of Croydon's looked after children were recorded as having a disability. Of this cohort 12 children (31%) were recorded as having multiple disabilities.

Reasons for becoming looked after and legal status

7.13. The main reason for becoming looked after for two thirds of local looked after children in 2015 -16, was abuse or neglect. This is similar to previous years. The second most recorded reason was family dysfunction, often due to alcohol or substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health issues or a combination of these factors.

7.14. Most of the local children looked after as at 31 March 2016 were subject to a Care Order (46.0%) or looked after under Section 20 (37.1%). All of the UASC as end March 2016 had a legal status of single period of accommodation under Section 20 due to absent parenting.

8. Voices of children and young people

8.1. The Local Authority wants to ensure that Croydon's looked after children (LAC) and Care Leavers are actively engaged and fully participate in decision-making about the services and organisations that routinely involve them¹⁸.

8.2. Recent areas of involvement have included:

- In 2016 young people in care were directly involved in procurement and commissioning activity related to the tendering of fostering and semi-independent services for placements for looked after children
- Young people have been involved in interviewing permanent social workers
- We have involved looked after children and their families in the recent 'Practice Week' initiative which gave rise to the following:
 - Stable placements is a key feature. Many looked after children are doing well in placement and report that placements are keeping them safe
 - Good outcomes for unaccompanied children are evident except for housing and their anxiety over their immigration status and Home Office decision
 - Young people need smoother transitions from LAC to Leaving Care services and adulthood in order to achieve independence. During transitions young people want to be informed, given choice, listened to and supported
 - Young people preparing to leave care need greater support focused on their future and their living arrangements

¹⁵ Croydon Observatory Census data 2011

¹⁶ Croydon performance report 8th March 2017

¹⁷ Croydon Observatory Census data 2011

¹⁸ Corporate parenting panel report 9th November 2016

- Young people want more information about rights and entitlements for example; foster carers and young people are not clear about 'Staying Put', their rights and the decision-making process
- The Children in Care Council has operated in several different ways over the last few years but this is an area identified for improvement

8.3. Other key messages from commissioning engagement events with young people include:

- Building a trusting environment for young people in placement is essential in achieving and progressing into adulthood
- There is a need to focus on the equality of the workforce employed to deliver keyworker support and staff training to meet the need of UASC population
- There is a need to raise the cultural awareness of the workforce working with vulnerable UASC.

8.4. Young people have been consulted about their expectations of our service. They have identified what they expect from professionals who work with them, and these standards are being incorporated into our induction, supervision and training of our staff¹⁹. We will continue to work with young people and families who use our services to ensure we meet these standards, and to seek their views about how we continue to develop and deliver our services to meet their needs.

Action:

- 1 Develop a coherent strategy for the engagement of children, including LAC, and families and how their voice shapes service provision.
- 2 Establish a process to collate information from a range of sources already in place
- 3 To identify a specific youth resource to support LAC youth engagement and participation.

Outcomes:

- 1 Children in care consider that they have influence and can effect changes to the service that enable them to live positive lives and achieve their goals.
2. Ensure that learning from engagement shapes service planning and delivery.

¹⁹ Improvement Plan for Children's Social Care 2017-18

9. Sufficiency areas

A. Early Help

- A.1. Across the Children's Strategic Partnership there are a range of early intervention and early help services delivered by partners. There is a strong commitment to partnership working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and families as well as a corporate commitment to invest in early help at a time of public sector financial constraint to reduce the escalation of complex needs. An example is the Best Start programme that integrates health and children's services and works with families where there is a child under 5 years including through Children's Centres, the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) and child care sufficiency.
- A.2. Croydon Council delivers a range of other family support services.
- A.3. These include:
- Family Resilience Service: following an Early Help assessment a direct delivery service for families with complex needs including an outreach service to families. The team provide intensive support and work to an outcomes plan for each family
 - Functional Family Therapy (FFT): is an evidence based programme of intervention aimed at diverting young people from the care and criminal justice systems
 - Evidence based parenting programmes: including Triple P, Parents as Partners and Mellow Bumps and Mellow Parenting
 - Gateway services: working with families at risk of homelessness, or with debt related problems
 - Early Help Hub: a point of coordination for advice and support for practitioners. This includes access to directly delivered interventions and signposting to community services. The service also logs early help assessments and provides capacity building support including training in the early help approach. The service works with MASH to enable access to early help services
 - Youth and Play: community engagement and specialist programmes (11-19) – Targeted community outreach and youth service
 - Family Justice Centre (FJC): Universal access advice service for victims of domestic abuse through the community based Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs). These advisors work in partnership with the police, early help teams, hospital and the community
- A.4. Following a recent review it has been recognised that more could be done to integrate across the partnership and to clarify the vision and the range of services on offer to ensure better joined up pathways of access and timely interventions. This will be developed over the coming 12 months.

Action:

1. Agree an early help strategy for Croydon
2. Improve and streamline referral and assessment processes that support early help, reduce MASH contacts and escalation to higher levels of intervention
3. Ensure that there are effective step up and step down pathways to both prevent escalation and build and support family resilience
4. Help families to understand and access early help

Outcomes:

1. Children, young people and families are helped at the earliest point to prevent escalation to more complex needs
2. All partners are working to a clear and understood early help strategy and priorities
3. Implementation of the early help commissioning intentions

B. Managing Risk for children on the edge of care

- B.1. There is an Edge of Care Panel chaired by the Head of Children in Need. Any social worker requesting that a child may need to come into care presents their case to the panel who consider whether a period of time in care is the best way to meet the needs of the child.
- B.2. Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 allows for any parent, guardian, or other person having parental responsibility for a child or young person and, who is temporarily unable or unwilling to care for the child or young person, to enter into an agreement with the local authority that the child or young person will be looked after by the local authority.
- B.3. If concerns about the care and protection of a child or young person have been identified, a S20 placement may be agreed by the Edge of Care Panel. This may happen if it is considered by a Family Group Conference that significant progress can be made in resolving those concerns within a specified period of separation for the child or young person from the care of their parent or guardian and a commitment exists to resolve the presenting issues. This is considered to be a temporary measure with a clear plan for the child or young person returning home at the agreed end date, or to undertake care proceedings if concerns are not resolved.
- B.4. Croydon is also designing a new model for the MASH to ensure families get the right support at first point of access. The new model will significantly enhance the quality and timeliness of multi-agency partnership working and decision making. This is crucial to identifying the children on the cusp of care and providing early help and support.

Young people at risk of homelessness

- B.5. The Council commission services from CAYSH, who are based at the Turnaround Centre, to be the first point of contact for 16/17 year olds who may have homelessness issues. CAYSH work with young people and their families to determine homelessness. This work will include assessment, support, advice and guidance and mediation between 16-17 year olds and their parent / carers.
- B.6. Where a 16-17 year old is identified as being immediately homeless, this triggers a duty under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to initiate an assessment of need. Young people have to give consent to such assessments.
- B.7. The assessment of need will determine if the young person meets the criteria of the Southwark Judgement in that:

- Is the applicant a child in need with Croydon who appears to need accommodation as a result of
 - there being no person who has parental responsibility.
 - being lost or abandoned
 - the person caring for the child is prevented from providing them with suitable accommodation or care.
- B.8. If the criteria above is met Children Social Care have a duty to offer accommodation under Section 20. If the young person does not want to become looked after, they will be signposted to housing services, including CAYSH, as they will be deemed being in priority need.

C. Adoption /Special Guardianship Orders

Adoption

- C.1. The number of children who ceased to be looked after and were adopted in 2014-15 was 30. The number in 2015-16 reduced to 16. The national figures also reflect a drop in 2015-6 due to a reduction the number of placement orders and in the number placed for adoption.
- C.2. Nationally, the number of new decisions to place children for adoption has decreased and continued to fall from 1,850 in quarter two 2013-14 to four, to 1080 in quarter 1 2016-17; a decrease of 42%. The number of new placement orders have also continued to fall from 1,630 in quarter two 2013-14 to 890 in quarter one 2016-17, a decrease of 45%²⁰. These two factors have an effect on the overall numbers adopted.
- C.3. Croydon's percentage rate of adoption (4%) is much lower than the national average (15%). However, as detailed in section 7, Croydon's has the highest number of UASC in London and these children are not normally placed for adoption. The number of UASC is directly and negatively affecting Croydon's performance rating on adoption. If the number of UASC leaving care is deducted from the total number of children leaving care, Croydon's rate of adoption for 2015-16 would be 7%.
- C.4. The number of children placed for adoption has fallen over the last two years due in part to the impact of two specific court judgements Re B (A Child) and Re B-S.
- C.5. The Re B (A Child) case emphasised that the child's interests are ideally best met by being brought up by their parents or wider family unless the overriding requirements of the child's welfare make it not possible. It makes it clear that adoption must be considered as a last resort when "nothing else will do and when all else fails."
- C.6. In Re B-S, the court required that available information is properly analysed, focused on the facts, evidenced-based and conclusions are justified. Even when the child is placed with prospective adopters, lapse and passage of time cannot be the determinative factor and the judge must not place undue weight to the adverse impact on the prospective adopters. The judge must always bear in mind that what is paramount in every adoption case is the welfare of the child "throughout his life". This has led to substantially more challenges in relation to adoption cases. Across the country, LA's are experiencing an

²⁰ DfE Adoption Leadership Board headline measures and business intelligence Quarter 1 2016 to 2017 update

increase of parents attempting to apply for revocations of placement orders, leave applications and opposing adoption proceedings.

- C.7. These cases reinforce the need to work closely with the judiciary to secure the best outcome for each child.
- C.8. Notwithstanding the above trends, Croydon is continuing to place children for adoption or Special Guardianship where this is in the child's best interests. The number of children for whom adoption is the plan was 25, as at December 2016, and those approved as suitable for adoption was 37²¹.
- C.9. In addition, Croydon works in partnership with LIFT - London Infant Family Team partnership, and with SLAM and the NSPCC to focus on achieving permanent solutions for children. Our Director of Early help and Children's Social Care is currently chair of London Regional Adoption Board.
- C.10. Nationally, registrations to become adopters have decreased by 13% from 840 in quarter 4 2015-16 to 730 in quarter 1 2016-17. The number of adopters approved also fell from the previous year. Croydon took a strategic decision not to recruit mainstream adopters who are usually only interested in babies and easy to place children. Instead we purchased adopters from independent agencies and utilised the already approved and waiting adopters. Croydon also took advantage of the grant from the DfE to purchase adopters from other agencies. In Croydon there were 19 approved adopters awaiting for a match as at Sept 2016.
- C.11. It remains a challenge to secure adoptive families for children who have complex needs and/or disabilities, sibling groups and children from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. Therefore, the recruitment strategy is focused on improving the performance in this area.
- C.12. Croydon will also be focusing on recruiting 'Foster to Adopt' carers. These are approved adopters who have a dual approval to foster a child and subsequently adopt the child when the LA is granted an order to place for adoption. In 2016/17 three adopters became foster to adopt carers from the previous year of one adopter.
- C.13. Croydon plans to further develop this model through a multi-faceted route which include partnership with Coram BAAF and TACT, through the regionalisation agenda and through internal recruitment. This resource will be closely aligned to our pool of existing in-house foster carers approved and waiting to ensure babies and toddlers who become LAC are placed with foster to adopt carers to avoid multiple moves and achieve stability early on and better outcomes for LAC.
- C.14. Croydon Council agreed to pursue the possibility of becoming a member of the London Regional Adoption Agency along with the majority of London Councils. London has been awarded funding from the Department of Education to undertake a project on developing this model. This will be concluded in September 2017 and would take over the recruitment and assessment functions regarding adopters as well as the adoption support functions.
- C.15. Significant improvements have been made since 2010, in the average time it takes between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family from an average of 2 years or 738²² days over 3 years to end of 2015, to 468 days in 2015-16 and a further improvement to Sept 2016 at 402 days, which is below the DfE threshold of 487 days.

Action:

1. Recruit more adoptive families for disabled children, BME groups and to keep siblings together.
2. Increase the number of foster to adopt families
3. Continue to work on the potential development of a Regional Adoption Agency.

²¹ December dashboard Croydon performance data

²² DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

Outcomes:

1. Increase in the numbers adopted and improved outcomes and life chances for these children and to achieve a minimum of 30 adoptions each year.
2. Early stability of for children coming into care leading to improved outcomes
3. Make a final decision on joining the Regional Adoption Agency when the Project have submitted their report.

Special Guardianship Orders

- C.16. In contrast to adoption, Croydon's performance on the use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) has continued to improve year on year.
- C.17. Thirty five children ceased to be in care as a result of an SGO in 2014-15 and this was maintained at 35 (or 8%) in 2015 -16²³. The number year to date was 36 at end October 2016. Croydon has recently invested in two social worker posts to undertake SGO assessments which will improve performance in this area even more. Nationally 12% of children ceased care due to a special guardianship order²⁴.

Action: Continue to improve performance in placing children through SGOs

Outcome: Achieve at least 40 Special Guardianship Orders²⁵ each year

D. Foster placements

In house and independent foster placements

- D.1. Croydon has the highest proportion of foster placement LAC in London. At the end of March 2016 690 children were in foster placement (86%) compared with (74%) nationally. Croydon's performance has improved from 77% of children placed in foster care in 2013.²⁶ About 55% are placed with in-house carers. The number of children placed in foster care rose to 736 as at the end October 2016. The proportion is still just over 86%, because the overall number of LAC has also risen. Analysis shows a continuing demand for foster placements.
- D.2. The total number of in-house foster care placements as at end October 2016 was 406, and 330 (or 39%) are being placed in the independent sector.

Connected persons

- D.3. Nationally almost one in six (16%) were being fostered by a relative or friend. As at end March 2016, in Croydon 44 children had been fostered by a family member or friend of the family²⁷.
- D.4. Croydon has taken account of the fact that nationally a number of Serious Case Reviews have focused on concerns regarding safeguarding of children by connected persons. Whilst the assessment and support has similar components to that delivered to foster carers, connected persons are specifically assessed concerning their ability to safeguard children before a child is placed.

Action: Ensure connected persons are fully supported in their fostering role through early referral and linked into training and development opportunities.

²³ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

²⁴ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

²⁵ LAC Commissioning Framework 2015- 19

²⁶ October Dashboard 2016

²⁷ SSD903 30 June 2016

Outcome: Connected persons feel enabled and supported to continue in their caring roles and children are safe.

Foster carer recruitment

- D.5. In recent years, there has been a continual increase in the number of LAC in the borough, especially UASC, which has put great pressure on the sufficiency of in-house foster placements.
- D.6. Croydon had 272 foster care households as at end December 2016²⁸, an increase of 49 foster carer households from the same time last year. Croydon is focusing on future recruitment on attracting families for local children and young people with more complex needs, those from particular faith groups and for sibling groups.
- D.7. The use of in-house foster carers is the preferred choice for both local LAC and UASC young people. A new model was developed in 2015 that resulted in outsourcing of the recruitment and assessment function for a term of 2 years with an option to extend for a further year. The new contract is based on a payment by results model and aims to increase efficiency in the recruitment of in-house foster carers; with an increased rate in the approved in-house foster carers and a reduction in the time taken from initial enquiry to panel approval.
- D.8. Croydon had 30 new foster carers, who are able to foster across the whole age range were approved in 2015-16 and 21 at end of January 2016-17. Over the next year, we are considering our future model for the fostering service.

Action:

1. Review the service to determine options and future model for foster carer recruitment.
2. Target the recruitment of in-house foster carers to care for children and young people with more complex needs, sibling groups and to meet the needs of particular faith groups.

Outcome:

1. Maintain the level of recruitment to achieve the targets set in the contract
2. More children placed locally with specialist foster carers and with a view to promoting fostering for adoption.

Staying Put

- D.9. Social workers develop the pathway plan for young people approaching their 18th birthday and work with the young person and their foster carers to consider whether staying put is the most appropriate plan for each young person. As at end January 2017 there were 59 young people aged 18 plus who are “staying put” with their foster carer.

Action: Improve the number of children staying put up the age of 21.

Outcome: More young people staying with the families where they have developed trusting and nurturing relationships

IFA Placements

- D.10. Croydon has established a new Framework Agreement with 39 Independent Fostering Agencies that went live on the 1st August 2016 for a period of three years with an option to extend for a further year. The new Framework Agreement for the provision of IFA placements will support the Council in securing a wider choice of external fostering placements and ensuring a diverse and quality assured market with

²⁸ December Dashboard Croydon performance data

clear agreed pricing structures. This will allow the service to continue to reduce the number of residential placements and create greater choice and flexibility in the range of provision in the borough.

Action: Develop the new Framework Agreements for Independent Fostering Agencies from 1st August 2016 over a period of 4 years

Outcome: further choice and flexibility, reduced cost of placement, wider range of placements within the Croydon area.

Stability of placements

- D.11. Nationally 10% of children had three or more placements. In Croydon 7% had 3 or more placements as at December 2016²⁹ but this the same as the previous year (7%).
- D.12. A stability panel meets every fortnight to review requests for change of placement and residential care placements.
- D.13. 68% of Croydon's looked after children under 16, who have been looked after for at least 2.5 years, were in the same placement for at least 2 years at the end of 2016 and Croydon's year to date performance has improved to 74% which is higher than statistical neighbours (68%)³⁰.

Distance from Home

- D.14. At the end of 2015 -16, 60 children were placed more than 20 miles outside of Croydon's boundaries (7.5%) compared with 14% nationally. Performance has consistently improved over the past 3 years from 15% in 2013. Some of these placements are in residential care see Section E below.
- D.15. The Executive Director of People approves any placement made 20 miles outside of Croydon's boundary and young children are only placed outside the local area when absolutely necessary.

E. Children's Homes, Secure Units, and Welfare

- E.1. We know that most children are most often better supported by families rather than being placed in residential care. Therefore, residential care is being used to meet specialist and specific need. Croydon expects that the service is outcome focused with a view to bringing the child home or close to home in Croydon. All residential placements are review regularly by the Placement Stability Panel.
- E.2. 20 children (3%) were placed in a secure unit, children's home or hostel as at end March 2016³¹ against a national average of 11%. Whilst nationally there is an upward trend in the number of children placed in these settings, over the last 3 years Croydon has continued to maintain a significantly lower number. Currently only 2% of all our LAC have their needs met through residential care. Children in residential are aged 9 to 17, 41% of these are 9-13 years old and 59% 14 to 17 years old, with equal distribution of gender. The average duration of children being in placement is 17 months with only 2 children staying in residential care for over 36 months.
- E.3. There was an increase in the average unit costs for residential care placements from £3,347.24 in 2015/16 to £3,464.83 in 2016/17 with the overall forecasted spend at £2,607,533 in 2016/17. This also reflects the increasing complexity and need of children accommodated in this type of placement with a high number of young people (13) with special educational needs.

²⁹ December Dashboard Croydon performance data

³⁰ December Dashboard Croydon performance data

³¹ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

E.4. Currently, Croydon spot purchases from London Care Service contracted resources. In December 2016, Croydon put together a Business Case to work with partner boroughs on the commissioning of these placements under the umbrella of the successful South London SEN Commissioning Programme. As a result, five boroughs have agreed to work with Croydon to establish an integrated commissioning solution for the commissioning of good quality residential placements for looked after children, at a fair price. This work will be led by the South London Commissioning Programme which is hosted by Croydon. As well as enabling Croydon to commission placements based on outcomes and needs of the children and young people, working with partner boroughs provides the leverage required to shape the market and the information required to look at our sufficiency in a more joined up, strategic way. There are clear benefits of moving away from spot purchasing to working together using an integrated commissioning solution such as a DPS including economies of scale, better pricing and discounting arrangements, agreements on the same contracts terms and conditions, sharing good practice & intelligence.

Action: Establish an Integrated Commissioning Solution (Dynamic Purchasing System) for the outcomes based commissioning of Residential Placements, in partnership with other Local Authorities, by the end of 2017.

Outcome: Outcomes based commissioning and contracting of specialist residential care placements for the small number of children and young people who need this service, in an efficient and innovative way.

Learning from placements informs and drives the development of Croydon's local provision.

Placement Process

E.5. Placement processes have recently been reviewed and improvements can be made to streamline our approach.

Action: Redesign LAC placement and business support processes.

Outcome: Achieve greater quality, and better outcomes for children.

F Semi Independent accommodation (SIA)

F.1. Nationally the numbers of children and young people in semi-independent transitional accommodation rose slightly from 9% to 10%.

F.2. The use of SIA continues to be the highest used type of placement after fostering placements and it is significantly more cost effective when compared to a placement with IFA or residential home provider.

F.3. Over 100 looked after children (10%), aged 16 to 18 year olds were living in semi-independent living. Based on the current levels of demand for this service, it is projected that over the next 4 years, the Council will need to provide this service for between 110 - 140 looked after children at any one time. The Council will need to ensure there is sufficient capacity for an additional 40% (approx. a total of 200 placements) of the borough's requirements due to the large and increasing number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

F.4. As a result, Croydon has established a new Framework Agreement for Semi Independent Accommodation and Support Services with effect from the 1st January 2017 for an interim period of 2 years (with an option to extend for a further two years). There is also ongoing development of a borough wide accommodation model for children and young people that will support closer alignment to Adults Services as well as various sub-regional initiatives for the procurement of accommodation. The new contracts will provide a consistent approach to the commissioning and utilisation of semi-independent

placements, providing a continuum of support for young people moving from care to living independently in the community.

Action: Develop a new Semi Independent Accommodation and Support Service from 1st January 2017 over a period of four years.

Outcome: An improved range of SIA options for young people.

G. Missing from care

- G.1. Nationally 8.6% of LAC went missing at least once in 2016. In Croydon there were 1,025 children looked after, of whom 9% had a missing episode³². 40 of Croydon's looked after children went missing more than once during the year. In addition, 190 children looked after in Croydon were away from placement without authorisation during the year, representing 16% of the LAC cohort and the second highest proportion in London. Over half of the missing episodes are by UASC.
- G.2. In order to understand the profile of children and young people who go missing, a return home interview is offered to every child who has a missing episode. Because so many of these are UASC, Croydon is targeting this group to understand the factors that make them go missing. Many missing children are at risk of exploitation or trafficking and so Croydon have a high risk panel chaired by our Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care. This a multi-disciplinary and integrated service panel, which includes health and police colleagues. It reviews the high risk cases and agreed actions on a monthly basis.
- G.3. A Joint Targeted Area Inspection was undertaken in May 2016 which included a deep dive focus on the response to child sexual exploitation and those missing from home, care or education and a focus on the multi-agency 'front door' of children's services. The inspection report identifies a number of key strengths and areas for improvement. The areas for improvement included:
- Inspectors found that the quality of frontline practice with children and their families to respond to and prevent child sexual exploitation is too variable, especially evident in those cases where the risk is less immediate.
 - When children go missing, it is not always clear whether they have received a return home interview. The local authority does not collate and analyse information on all the return to home interviews which limits the partnerships understanding of the cohort of missing children.

Action:

1. To increase capacity by training all social workers to undertake return home interviews using NSPCC model for return interview.
2. Take on the funding of the Missing Project within the Council (1:1 intensive service to high risk missing children).

Outcomes:

1. 100% of children and young people who go missing receive a return home or return to care interview.
2. The intelligence from these interviews informs actions to be taken to minimise risks to these children and

³² DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

helps stop them going missing in the future.

3. All partners are engaged in identifying and working with children at risk of CSE and missing children.
4. Reduce the daily number of missing children, reduce the duration of their missing episodes, increase the safety of high risk children and increase the number of social workers undertaking return home interviews.

H. Leaving Care

- H.1. Croydon has the largest number of care leavers in London and one of the largest numbers of care leavers nationally. The Leaving Care Service supports 751 young people, as of October 2016.
- H.2. In March 2015, 88% of Care Leavers were in suitable accommodation, showing an improvement against the statistical neighbours (81%), London (83%) and in England (81%). As of March 2016 Croydon's performance has improved to 94%.
- H.3. Croydon is supporting care leavers well, to live independently and has the highest proportion of 19-21 in independent accommodation in London. Out of 580 Care leavers now aged 19, 20 and 21, 360 of them are in living in independent accommodation³³
- H.4. Planning for leaving care starts before the young person's 18th birthday to establish their ambitions and aims for the future.
- H.5. The Leaving Care Team allocates a Personal Advisor to each care leaver who is 17 and over and amongst other duties they work with young people and the permanency social work team on the plans each young person has for housing beyond their 18th birthday, if they are not continuing to live with their foster carer (Staying Put).
- H.6. The housing needs of looked after young people approaching the age of 18 are considered through a housing panel involving housing representatives from the housing initiatives service, the social worker, the Gateway, and SNAP (Support Needs Assessment and Placement) teams. The panel considers the options for each young person including the Landlord Bond Scheme or private tenancy. As far as possible, locations close to supportive relatives, or friends, colleges, or work are sought. Floating support may be offered if needed through SNAP. This panel also plans for those leaving semi-independent accommodation at 18.
- H.7. We aim to better integrate pathways of access between children social care, Gateway and Welfare, and Housing Need services, to ensure that planning for independent accommodation at a strategic and individual level happens at as early a stage as possible.
- H.8. We have a high number of young people living in independent accommodation, 485 as at 16th December 2016³⁴. This is because the Care Leavers team is proactive in supporting these young people; in meeting their housing needs and providing continued support with things like setting up home, budgeting for rent and other household costs, and links to other support services, once a home is found. The team works actively with the landlords to ensure tenancies are maintained and reduce the risk of eviction.
- H.9. Croydon has a high proportion of care leavers in education training and employment, which enables young people to maintain a positive outlook and as consequence they are more likely to be stable in their accommodation.

³³ DfE SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016

³⁴ Croydon weekly performance snapshot 16th December 2016

- H.10. An area of pressure on our budget is accommodation costs of the young people who have no recourse to public funds, because their legal status is failed asylum seekers or they have exhausted all right so appeal to stay in this Country. As at February 2017 Croydon was home to 194 such young people. We continue to support and fund vulnerable young people with social care needs until the Home Office determines its course of action.
- H.11. National policy is expecting further reform of support for care leavers based on innovation, system reform, and the embedding of corporate parenting responsibility across society³⁵. In Croydon we wish to build on our strengths and achievements and are considering alternative delivery models to further improve the quality of service for care leavers.

Action: Develop an alternative delivery model for the leaving care service, which responds to national reforms, drives system change and embeds a culture of corporate parenting.

Outcome: Improved experience and outcomes for care leavers.

I. Croydon's Gateway Services

Income Maximisation

- I.1. We are aiming to improve families and young people's access to our Gateway Services.
- I.2. Social workers are able to refer young people needing support with income maximisation and housing before their 18th birthday.
- I.3. Income maximisation services offered include:
- By April 2016, the council became a full service Universal Credit (UC) area. In partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and JCP, budgeting support is provided to all residents migrating to UC
 - The Council aims to support 95% of its customers to be ready for Universal Credit and will have appropriate support in place for the 5% who are unable to manage the initial transition
 - Using funding secured from the DWP, Early Help and Gateway developed a Local Family Offer identifying and supporting financially unstable parents/co-parents at risk of poor parental relationships, thereby not only contributing to reducing the incidence of children in poverty but improving outcomes for those families in general.
 - Employment support, in collaboration with leaving care teams employment advisors
 - Enabling access to in work, and out of work benefits
 - Budgeting and debt support
 - Access to grants (such as Discretionary housing payment and Croydon discretionary support) to help to keep young people in private accommodation to prevent them accumulating rent arrears due to high rental costs in London.

Suitable Housing

- I.4. The importance of having a range of suitable affordable housing for adoptive families, foster carers and care leavers cannot be underestimated.
- I.5. This is especially the case for children with complex needs and disabilities and for larger family groups. Croydon has a well-established offer of supported accommodation for people with disabilities through

³⁵ Keep on Caring, Supporting Young People from Care to Independence" (July 2016)

the 'Shared Lives' scheme. There is a need to project future numbers who are anticipated to be supported in adulthood and make arrangements for Shared Lives provision that is matched to need.

- I.6. A priority for Croydon is the development of a joined-up housing strategy pulling together the key components that achieve sufficiency of placements within the Borough and for permanence. We also aim to better integrate pathways of access between children's social care and the Gateway team who run the housing access and homelessness services.

Action: Development of a joined up housing strategy.

Outcome: Better housing options for young people and families.

Summary of Priorities

Service area	Action	Outcome
Voice of children and Young People		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a coherent strategy for the engagement of children, including LAC, and families and how their voice shapes service provision. Establish a process to collate information from a range of sources already in place To identify a specific youth resource to support LAC youth engagement and participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in care consider that they have influence and can effect changes to services
Early Help		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To agree an early help strategy for Croydon Improve and streamline referral and assessment processes that support early help, reduce MASH contacts and escalation to higher levels of intervention. To ensure that there are effective step up and step down pathways to both prevent escalation and build and support family resilience To help families to understand and access early help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children YP and families are helped at the earliest point to prevent escalation to more complex needs All partners working to a clear and understood early help strategy and priorities To implement early help commissioning intentions
Adoption		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit more adoptive families for disabled children, BME groups and to keep siblings together. Increase the number of foster to adopt families Continue to work on the development of a Regional Adoption Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the numbers adopted and improved outcomes and life chances for these children Achieve a minimum of 30 adoptions each year Early stability of for children coming into care leading to improved outcomes
Special Guardianship Orders		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to improve performance in placing children through SGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve at least 40 Special Guardianship Orders each year
Foster care		
Connected persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure connected persons are fully supported in their fostering role through early referral and linked into training and development opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected persons feel enabled and supported to continue in their caring roles.
Foster care recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To review the service to determine options and future model for foster carer recruitment. To target the recruitment of in-house foster carers to care for children and young people with more complex needs, sibling groups and to meet the needs of particular faith groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To maintain the level of recruitment to achieve the targets set in the contract More children placed locally with specialist foster carers and with a view to promoting fostering for adoption
Staying Put	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the number of children Staying Put up the age of 21 or 25 years for YP with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More young people staying with the families where they have developed trusting and nurturing relationships
Independent Fostering Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of the new Framework Agreements for Independent Fostering Agencies from 1st August 2016 over a period of 4 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further choice and flexibility, reduced cost of placement, wider range of placements within the Croydon area
Children's Homes		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an Integrated Commissioning Solution (Dynamic Purchasing System) for the outcomes based commissioning of Residential Placements, in partnership with other Local Authorities, by the end of 2017. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes based commissioning and contracting of specialist residential care placements for the small number of children and young people who need this service, in an efficient and innovative way. Learning from placements informs and drives the development of Croydon's local provision
Placement process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redesign LAC placement and business support processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve greater quality, and better outcomes for children.
Semi Independent Accommodation		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a new Semi Independent Accommodation and Support Service from 1st January 2017 for a period of four years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An improved range of SIA options for young people including Shared Lives
Missing from Care		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase capacity by training all social workers to undertake return home interviews using NSPCC model for return interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of children and young people who go missing receive a return home or return to care interview. The intelligence from these interviews informs actions to be

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Croydon Council to take on the funding of the Missing Project (1:1 intensive service to high risk missing children) 	<p>taken to minimise risks to these children and helps stop them going missing in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All partners are engaged in identifying and working with children at risk of CSE and missing children. To reduce the daily number of missing children, reduce the duration of their missing episodes, increasing the safety of high risk children, increase the number of social workers undertaking return home interviews.
Leaving Care		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an alternative delivery model for the leaving care service, which responds to national reforms, drives system change and embeds a culture of corporate parenting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the experience and outcomes for care leavers
Housing		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a joined up housing strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better housing options for young people and families

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6. Croydon CIN review, September 2016
7. Findings from Croydon Practice Week, 2016
8. SSD903 return, 2015-16
9. Croydon Observatory Census data 2011
10. Corporate parenting panel report, 9th November 2016
11. Improvement Plan for Children's Social Care 2017-18
12. DfE Adoption Leadership Board headline measures and business intelligence Quarter 1 2016 to 2017 update
13. LAC Commissioning Framework 2015- 19
14. LAC Strategy 2017-19 (currently in Draft form)
15. Performance Dashboards, December 2016
16. Croydon weekly performance snapshot 16th December 2016