London Borough of Croydon
Department of Children, Families and Learning

SUFFICIENCY PLANNING

FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN 2011 – 2014

Revised December 2013
Introduction

The Children Act 1989 (Section 22 (G)) requires local authorities to take steps, as far as reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area and near to home; this requirement is termed the "sufficiency duty". The statutory guidance published in 2010 clarified this general duty placed on a local authority and required 1) that from April 2010 that local authorities should include planning for meeting the sufficiency duty in all relevant commissioning strategies; and 2) that from April 2011 local authorities (as far as reasonably practicable) must be in a position to secure sufficient accommodation.

The statutory guidance suggested a step change in the commissioning practices of local authorities so that they became “active in managing their market” to create a placement economy that is:

- Diverse and offers choice
- Local (neighbouring areas and sub-regional)
- Flexible to emerging pressures and needs
- Quality assured
- Supportive of the market but built on own capacity

The statutory guidance required that local authorities become effective commissioners, and the Commissioning Support Programme provided a range of support and training materials to enable a better understanding of the commissioning process; the most important drivers of good commissioning being:

- Accurate needs assessment
- Clarity about decision making
- Placements chosen for quality and cost
- Market management through competition
- Outcomes evaluated
- Predicts current and future demand
- Collaborative with partners
- Leadership of the local authority

The purpose of this sufficiency statement is to signpost the considerable work and developments that Croydon is undertaking to ensure that there will continue to be a sufficiency of placements in the locality, to manage the local and sub-regional market as an effective leader, and to ensure that looked after children are accommodated in high quality placements matched to need at good value to the local authority. Sufficiency planning and commissioning is a “whole system” and is impacted upon by a wide range of partnerships, strategies and ways of working throughout the council. This document, therefore, provides a signpost to those strategies, plans and actions that combine to create the sufficiency of placements currently required by Croydon, and that are shaping the market requirements for the foreseeable future.
Sufficiency: Croydon’s Vision of Integrated Planning and Commissioning

Children on the Edge of Care

The basis of a sufficiency plan is that accommodation is appropriate to the needs of looked after children, but also takes account of the needs of children on the edge of care. Croydon recognises that coming into care is likely to be the most significant and life-changing event in the life of a child and admission into care should only be considered when wholly consistent with the needs of the child and when there is no possibility for supporting the family to care for the child. Croydon continues to hold a Edge of Care, Complex Cases Panel to enable a multi-agency response to children on the edge of care and to review unplanned admissions (Appendix 1, CPP Terms of Reference).

The reorganisation of Croydon social; care in March 2013 resulted in the setting up of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. The MASH went live in October 2013 and with the multi-agency partnership working closely together to share intelligence and make a collective decision about a contact will improve the quality of the referral to Children's Social Care. Information sharing protocols for the MASH are in place and the new electronic referral form will also enable partners to record and evidence concerns prior to it being shared within the context of the MASH.

In August 2013 a Rapid Response Service was established within the Child in Need Service. Families will receive up to 12 weeks of intervention. There is no maximum or minimum number of hours within the 12 week allocation. Each family will have a bespoke package of intervention, consisting of social work, family therapy and project work/family support. This will be tailored to their individual needs.

12 to 16 year olds are the primary target group for the service, but the unit will hold case work responsibility for younger children, particularly if they are part of a sibling group. The key ‘entry’ question for referrers is whether the alternative to the use of the Rapid Response Service would be accommodation of the child or young person. If the answer is ‘yes’, then Rapid Response is the appropriate intervention, as this is the only other option to avoid care. An evaluation of this project will be undertaken in March 2014.

Pathways to Permanence

Permanent placement describes a range of family living arrangements for children and young people who are looked after and are intended to secure and promote the child’s welfare within their extended family or within a new family for the duration of their childhood. Permanent placements are made when it is not in the child’s best interests to live permanently with their birth
family. Pathways to permanence include Adoption, Permanent Fostering, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders as well as Connected Persons Placements, with person(s) known to the child. Of these pathways, Adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders are also legal arrangements through which parental responsibility is transferred either to the new family or shared between the new family and the child's birth parent/s.

It is a requirement of legislation and guidance that adoption is always considered as a permanent placement option for looked after children unless the plan is primarily and solely for restoration to the care of the birth parent/s or those with Parental Responsibility. From a previously low number of adoptions, Croydon has improved significantly, and in April 2012 its Adoption Service was given a judgment of Good by Ofsted. Special Guardianship Orders are increasing, and placements with connected persons (family and friends) are the placement of choice on admission into care whenever appropriate to the child’s needs and circumstances.

Croydon has provided training to all its managers and team leaders on the pathways to permanence and strengthened its procedures to ensure that all children have a plan for permanence by their second review, paralleled when appropriate, with a plan for reunification with their family.

The very first recommendation is to establish a multi-agency working group to oversee the development and implementation of the JSNA recommendations, and although the LAC Strategic Partnership launched in December 2011 has a much wider and more extensive strategic remit than this, these recommendations are embedded in the Forward Plan. Placement stability is achieved through partnerships that work together to ensure carers are supported to meet the needs of the children and young people placed with them.

**Placement Sufficiency: Commissioning and Quality Assurance**

Croydon has an integrated commissioning strategy across the council aimed at market development, service user participation and engagement, building partner capacity, and that is outcomes evaluated and achieving value for money. A categories management approach has been adopted together with an improved operating model (Appendix 2, Commissioning Strategy 2012). Commissioning of placements in the independent sector is undertaken by the Business Relationships Team (BRT), based in LAC services, which was established following the reorganisation of children social care in April 2012, the team was previously known as the Access to Resources Team. The team is headed by a Delivery Manager, Unit Manager and a team of social workers. The team has business and finance support from a dedicated group of staff.

The BRT identifies and agrees all independent placements, establishing the placement match with the needs of the child, cost, and quality assurance monitoring arrangements.
In July 2012 a Semi Independent Accommodation (SIA) Framework was launched. The delivery of SIA and support services to vulnerable young people in the care of the local authority between the ages of 16 and 17 years, has been identified as an important strategic service in achieving improved outcomes for Looked After Children. SIA provision offers supported accommodation and preparation for leaving care and independence, to assist young people with the transition process. The framework is banded in respect to cost and level of support hours; this can range from 5 hours key work support per week up to 24 hour on site support with additional key working hours.

In August 2012 the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Framework of providers was launched. The aim of this was to offer the Council the opportunity to build more effective relationships with providers in order to deliver outcomes and achieve best value. The needs bands are further split over four age bands. An additional split exists in the 15-18 years old age band between indigenous and unaccompanied asylum seeker children. Under the IFA framework placement costs vary depending on the level of support required. Placements costs also vary depending on whether the placement is for UASC or for Indigenous Children. This framework has two bandings, A and B with three categories of need within each banding; standard, enhanced and complex.

The lower the level of need the cheaper the placement, similarly UASC placements are typically less expensive as is placing on Band A. The bandings allow for children and young people to move through the framework depending on their assessed needs. For example a child who is placed with a foster carer and is receiving input from external agencies such as CAMHS may be assessed to require a standard placement cost however if additional support to the child within the home is required they can move to an enhanced placement cost which results in the agency providing this result. The IFA framework has enabled more children to be placed in foster care rather than in residential placements.

Croydon only places in residential units judged good or above by Ofsted, and the final choice of residential for a young person is only decided after a review of the homes statement of purpose, regulation 33 reports, references form other authorities with children in placement, a completed Service Provider Response Form and a joint site visit by a member of BRT and the child’s social worker. Regardless if education is to be provided on site or within the community all potential options are forwarded to the Virtual School who will consider the education provision within the home or the availability of education in the community for suitability by contacting the home and local education authority. If a residential placement is being proposed for a child with significant health needs or has a statement of special educational needs the case is presented to the Multi Agency Resource Panel where agreements are secured for tri-party funding (App 3 MARP ToR’s)
A Service Provider Response Form (SPRF) (App 4) is a quality assurance mechanism tool used when matching a child to any placement. Providers are expected to detail how their carers/agency will meet the needs of the young person as detailed within the referral form. For IFA placements the SPRF also allows for confirmation and dates of statutory health and safety requirements. Furthermore the foster carers last annual review, or if in their first year of fostering, their Form F is received.

The SPRF for SIA providers is also expected to detail all the health and safety checks of the property; these are crossed referenced with the data that was collected during the commissioning of this framework. Any new property procured by SIA providers is subject to a health and safety check’s and a visit by a member of BRT prior to the child being placed.

Through the charitable status some of an IFA and SIA provider the local authority have been able to utilise funding, they have secured, to work with children at risk of sexual exploitation and supplementary English tuition for UASC. (App 5 SAFE Project Proposal)

Placements Sufficiency Management

In October 2013 the posts of Delivery Manager for Fostering and Business Relationships were combined. The purpose of this was for to allow for a single point of contact and oversight to all placements for looked after children and to maximise the knowledge of the local market and shape the future needs of the looked after population.

All placements in the independent sector require authorisation by Head of Service or Director. Authorisation for our of authority placements is delegated to the Delivery Manager for Fostering and Business Relationships Team. All new admissions into care, transfers and discharges are monitored every two weeks by the Permanency and Stability Panel (App 5 ToR’s Permanency and Placement Stability Panel). This is chaired by head of service for looked after children and attended by service Delivery Managers across the social care directorate. The meeting identifies and tracks permanency arrangement’s to ensure they are secured in a timely manner; it monitors placement stability with change of placement requests being presented to this panel following a disruption meeting and/or LAC review. All requests for residential and welfare secure placements are agreed and reviewed at this panel.

There is no current shortage of placement capacity in the locality and sub-region.

Sufficiency: Croydon’s profile

Placements profile

Croydon has an indigenous LAC population of approximately 441 children and young people, and a UASC LAC population of approximately 362 children and young people. The UASC population has increased since by over a 100 children since April 2011.
The majority of indigenous LAC is placed with in-house foster carers, but if admitted into care above the age of 12 years they are more likely to be placed with independent foster carers. Over two-thirds of UASC are placed with independent foster carers because of their age on admission. Profile of children becoming looked after since April 2013 shows that the largest admissions are children in the 11+ age group followed by the 0 – 5

Croydon has a unique profile of looked after children because of its very large number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Despite the experience of post traumatic stress disorder invariably impacts on placement stability for UASC, and despite the pattern of accommodating teenage boys among the indigenous population, placement stability is nevertheless in line with the national average for Croydon’s looked after children at 10% (NI62) and 75% (NI63).

Croydon continues to have a low number of young people placed in residential care at approximately 1.6% of the total LAC population. All the children are placed with providers in the independent sector following the closure of the remaining children’s homes in 2012. This success is a considerable achievement by the council in securing good, high quality fostering placements for young people who would otherwise have been in residential placements. There is rigorous gatekeeping of residential care by senior management to ensure it is only ever an option when the needs of the child require this for a period of time. The young people in residential care are monitored every 2 weeks with the aim of ensuring they transfer to a foster placement as soon as this will be better able to meet their needs.

Commissioned placements budgets profile

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
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<tr>
<td>External Fostering</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Residential</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi Independent</td>
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<td>Secure</td>
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<td>UASC semi independent</td>
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<td>CWD external fostering</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWD external residential</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWD residential schools</td>
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Sufficiency Activity 2013 – 2014

Croydon has embarked on several major initiatives to ensure capacity matches projected needs and to achieve better outcomes for looked after
children at lower cost to the council as detailed earlier in this plan. These initiatives also mean that independent partners can plan their businesses on a more assured basis, confident in the market leadership provided by the council. These contracted placements initiatives are underpinned by the growth of the in-house fostering service, and the closure of the council’s two children’s homes.

Croydon’s fostering service was judged to be good by Ofsted in 2011. Current improvements are required to accommodate teenagers with additional or challenging needs. There remains a high demand for semi-independent care placements for young people aged 16 years and older, particularly for older UASC.

The recruitment of foster carers to the service has improved significantly in the period of 12/13, with a total of 39 foster carers approved compared to 9 in the previous year and for the this period, 13/14 the service is on target to approve at least 32 new foster carers.

In conjunction with the reorganisation of children’s services the fostering service was remodelled into three units. A recruitment unit, a unit focusing on providing services to children with disabilities and younger children and a unit to manage carers who work with adolescents. There is wide recognition within the service and wider department that a fundamental shift in the operation of the fostering service is required if we are to ensure any young person whatever their needs are can be cared for by an in house foster carer and to meet the demand of an increasing LAC population. For this reason a major programme of transformation of the fostering service has been commenced. The Fostering Service plan for 13/14 (App 7) identifies immediate on-going areas of work that the service must continue to improve on. There have been improvements in respect to the implementation and use of electronic recording systems and the communication between the service and the Croydon Foster Carer Association. (App 8 Fostering Transformation PID)

As part of the on-going remodelling of the fostering service the units will be identifying the type of support offered and ensure it is equipped to offer foster carers with increased support packages/better links with partner agencies and different types of therapeutic intervention to manage young people reducing the need to place children in the independent sector. Integral to this is a review of all systems within the service which fall into four categories;
- A review of the duty function (this is a combined duty service for internal foster placements and all commissioned placements).
- Finance process
- The recruitment of foster carers
- Foster carer supervision and support
Appendix Documents

1. Edge of Care / Complex Cases Panel ToR
2. Croydon Commissioning Strategy
3. Multi Agency Resource Panel ToR
4. BRT ‘Service Provider Response Form’
5. Safe Project Proposal
6. Permanency and Stability Panel ToR
7. Fostering Service Plan 2013/2014
8. Fostering Transformation PID