

Children Looked After:

Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2015-17

1. What is a Sufficiency Strategy?

This sufficiency strategy describes how we plan to put the right mix of services in place to meet the needs that we anticipate. For children looked after, the sufficiency strategy covers internal services such as foster care, and external services such as residential placements, adoption and other support services.

This strategy is focused on plans to meet the placement needs of children who are in care and young people who have recently left the care of the local authority and those who may be in care in the future. Harrow Council Children & Families Services have been successful in the award of DfE Innovation programme funding in partnership bids for funding to develop work with teenagers on the edge of care. As these evolve, we will be using the learning gained to inform future strategies and service plans to strengthen edge of care interventions to keep children with their families wherever possible.

This sufficiency strategy is underpinned by legislation and statutory guidance:

- **Section 22 of the Children Act 1989** (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that 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.
- **Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance** describes the accommodation required for a child looked after that: is near the child's home; does not disrupt his/her education or training; enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling; where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.
- **Commissioning standards** in the sufficiency duty statutory guidance are also important, emphasising: individual assessment and care planning; commissioning decision; strategic needs assessment; market management; collaboration; and securing services.

We have taken these elements, and our assessment of the needs of children in care and potentially entering care, to set out a new strategy to secure sufficiency of accommodation and other support services. We aim to be proactive in our plans to meet the placement needs of looked after children in Harrow. We aim to complete thorough outcome focussed assessments that achieve permanency swiftly and keep placement moves to a minimum.

2. Contents

This document follows the main sections of **Needs** Assessment, Service and **Resources** Assessment and **Conclusions**.

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3. Introduction

As corporate parents it is imperative that we commission the right accommodation and supporting services so that outcomes for each child and young person are the best possible. In the plan we set out the supporting legislation, needs of children looked after, and the resources at our disposal, and set out resulting actions for changing the internal and external market of services that we rely on.

We are committed to working with service users in our commissioning, service and market design, even more so as in this case we are the corporate parents. Therefore this strategy has been developed with and will evolve with input from representative children and young people, as well as input from providers and our frontline staff.

Our Plan: Children & Families is the overarching plan for children and family services in Harrow that this sufficiency strategy helps to deliver. We have high aspirations for our looked after children and we aim to deliver the universal outcomes described in the beginning of Our Plan for all children for whom we are the corporate parent.

At birth

- A healthy birth
- Baby is safe and cared for
- Brain is developing well and the baby is learning

By 2 years old

- Healthy and thriving
- Child is safe and cared for
- Continued brain development and learning

By 5 years old

- Healthy and thriving
- Safe
- Ready for school



By 11 years old

- Healthy and thriving
- Safe
- Learning to potential
- Preparing for transition to adulthood

By 18 years old

- Healthy and thriving
- Safe
- Contributing to society and potentially in further education

By 25 years old

- Independent and in employment
- Achieving to potential through life-long learning
- Contributing to society

We have drawn on Harrow's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in preparing this strategy, as well as other commissioning plans to ensure services are aligned across Harrow. The actions described later in this report have fed into the Children Looked After Service Plan.

4. Introduction: Aims

Based on feedback from children and young people in care, care leavers, and primary and secondary legislation, we have the following aims for our CLA services:

1. The views of children and young people are listened to and inform placement plans. Young people are given detailed information about their placements and where the placements are planned, young people are able to visit the placement prior to moving.
2. All children looked after are placed in appropriate placements with access to the support that they need, as identified in their care plan
3. We will aim to minimise disruption to children's education when they come into care or move placement and will provide additional resources where needed to achieve this
4. Resources are available to respond to predicted demand for a range of needs and emergencies
5. Services are provided within the local authority area as far as possible or within the West London Alliance boundaries, except where this is not consistent with the welfare of a child, or is a specialist placement that it is not possible to commission locally
6. Children and Housing services have robust joint working protocols to meet the needs of those who are at risk of becoming looked after at the age of 16 and 17 as a result of homelessness
7. A sufficient range of accommodation and support packages are available to care leavers to facilitate their pathway plans and to ensure all transitions are undertaken in a planned and supportive manner. This includes a clear staying put policy to enable care leavers to remain with their foster carers up to the age of 25 if desired and appropriate
8. Services are of a high quality and deliver the specific outcomes identified in the care plans of looked after children
9. A range of placement choices are developed to meet the needs of the diverse Looked after children population in Harrow
10. Systems are in place to ensure careful matching of placements and to prevent disruption and to ensure placement stability
11. Placement providers are encouraged to support children and young people to share their views

5. Introduction: Commissioning

This sufficiency strategy should be put in the context of how we operate commissioning across Children and Families Directorate. Our commissioning process follows the simple stages of Understand, Plan, Do and Review – with this strategy covering the understanding and planning.

We have also signed up to five cross-Council principles for commissioning which are adhered to in this strategy and in our operational commissioning of CLA services.



1. Our activities will be based on the delivery of our agreed vision and outcomes
2. We will seek to inform, involve and engage with residents, staff and partners at every opportunity
3. We will be ambitious, seeking to innovate and take managed risks, empowering all to put forward their ideas
4. We will be a learning organisation celebrating our successes and honestly evaluating where we fall short
5. We will be open, transparent and manage community and staff expectations through clear communications.

The most important principle for us is the co-design of our services with young people in our CLA Council, and the co-production of outcomes for each child and young person. I.e. for each decision about a placement or service, we make that decision with the child, not only improving stability, permanence and outcomes, but also improving the overall efficiency of our services.

6. Needs: Harrow Demographics

Located in North West London, Harrow is home to more than 240,000 people¹. It is a comparatively quiet and safe area by London standards, noted for good schools and plenty of green space, and a popular area for families and commuters. Were we to paint a picture of 'Harrow Village', it is thriving community, with many births, new and diverse families settling, good general health and low crime. Schools are being expanded to make space for the growing numbers of children.

The population is one of the most diverse in England, with established Gujarati and Irish communities and more recently Other Asian, African and Eastern European communities. Harrow does not have a majority ethnic group. Community cohesion is strong and this is an important success to build on. Unemployment is low, and Harrow has the lowest rate of young people not in education, training or employment in England, at less than 3 per 100.

Despite this positive picture, there are some significant challenges for local people. There is increasing deprivation, particularly affecting children and young families, and significant health inequality. On average, women in Pinner South can expect to live more than 10 years longer than women in Wealdstone. Men in West Harrow can expect to live for five and a half years longer than men in Greenhill ward.

The 2011 census data confirmed the extent of growth in the child population as it revealed a 33% increase in children 0-4 years old since the 2001 census. This is the largest increase of any age group by a significant margin (5 percentage points) and reflects Harrow's incoming population and higher birth rates, particularly amongst mothers who were not born in the UK. The GLA population projections forecast the 0-18 population to grow by 500 each year². The changing demography will increase costs across most of Children's Services, in particular children in the care system.

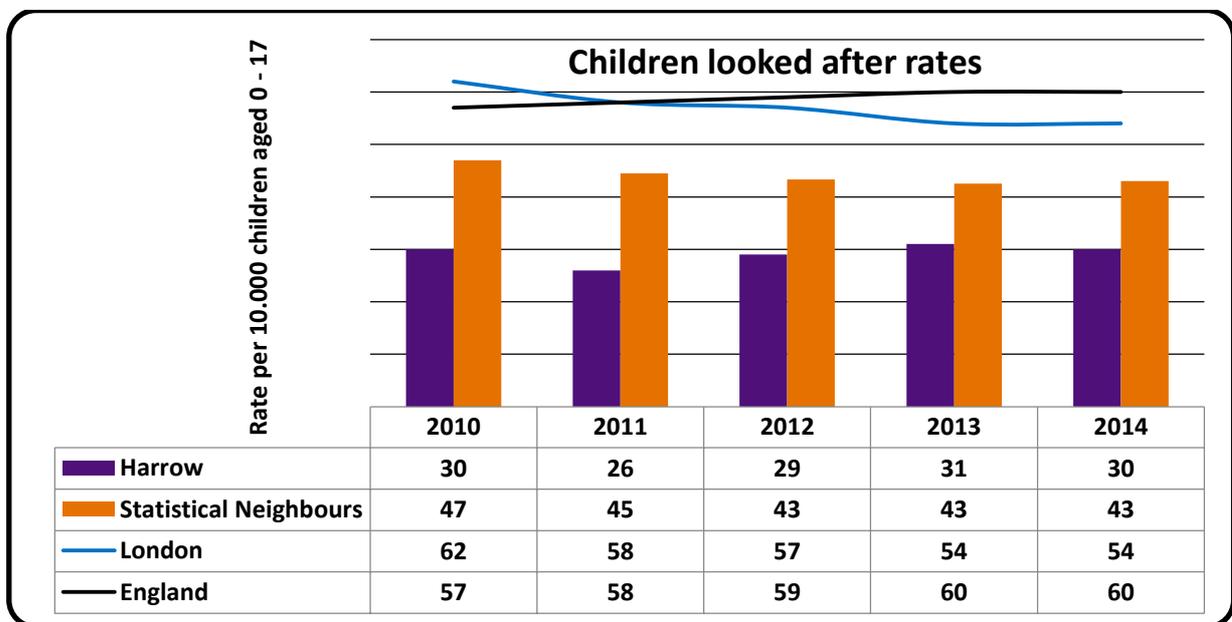
¹ ONS Mid-year estimates 2013

² ONS Mid-year estimates 2013

7. Needs: CLA Demographics

Harrow’s rate of Children Looked After (CLA) per child population has risen from 2010 to 2015 but remains below statistical neighbour averages. The rate of CLA per 10,000 has risen from 30.0 to 32.1 with actual numbers of CLA on 31st March 2015 amounting to 179 children and young people, compared with 167 in the previous year. A proportion of this increase can be attributed to a 2% rise in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. This growth in numbers of children in care has not been unique to Harrow, with rates for England also showing a 1% increase³ and whilst rates have remained stable in London, actual numbers of children taken into care have increased each year since 2011.⁴ Analysis of the statistical neighbours group shows that rates of CLA in Merton and Redbridge have remained stable. The statistical neighbour average is pulled up by Croydon, Hillingdon and Hounslow which have high numbers of asylum seeking CLA.

Some explanation of Harrow’s comparatively lower rate is provided by a more detailed look at our population. It is a comparatively affluent borough and its high levels of diversity reflect well established communities, particularly of South Asian origin. Strong extended family networks are common. At the same time, Harrow has significant areas of deprivation, and the incoming population and high birth rates suggest that CLA rates could increase further. Recent incoming population has tended to be from Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and East Africa, with a tendency towards higher levels of vulnerability.



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³ BAAF data

⁴ DfE 2014 LA tables revised

⁵ DfE 2014 Local Authority Interactive Tool

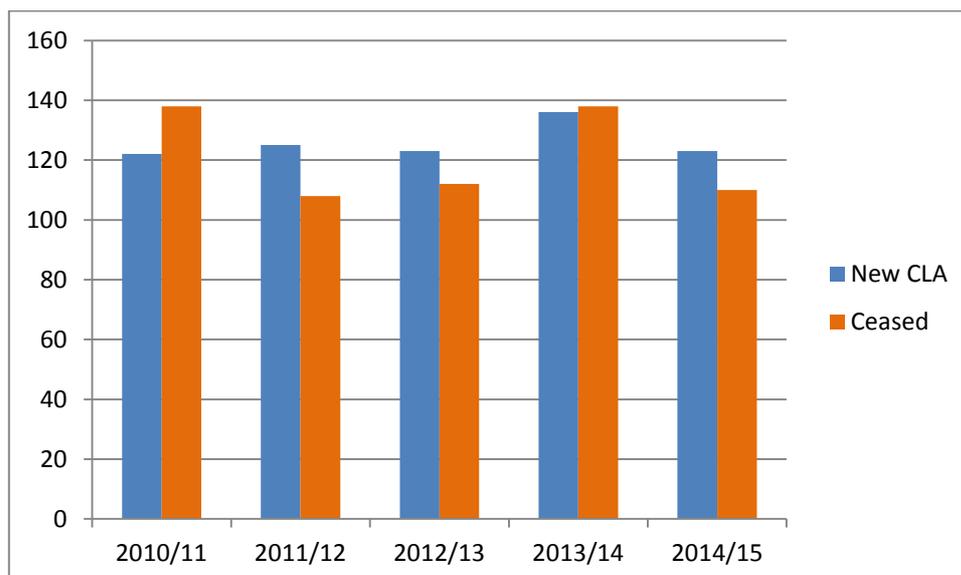
Over the last few years there has been an upward trend of the number of children entering care. Whilst there was a spike in the numbers in 2013/14, the numbers whilst dropping, are higher than comparable years. This increase in numbers is putting an additional demand on services, and also on the sufficiency of accommodation.

Number of Starter CLA Instances

Category	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Total Instances of New CLA*	122	125	123	141	126
Total Children (Individual)	104	121	118	136	123
Number previously looked after	39	32	22	18	18
% previously looked after	37%	26%	19%	13%	15%

We can also see that the numbers of children who have previously been looked after and are re-entering care each year, whilst decreasing still contribute a notable proportion of the total cohort. This would suggest we need to analyse this cohort to identify actions to prevent multiple care episodes where appropriate.

Another cause of the rise in numbers is the proportion of CLA who ceased to be looked after has not increased at the same rate as children becoming newly looked after – leading to a greater number of children in care. This would suggest that there is a need for those children to remain in care and alternative options for permanency need to be sought.



Numbers of children discharged from care by duration of stay:

Duration in Care	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Under 6 Weeks	59	29	22	33	35
6 Weeks to 6 Months	16	17	23	28	17
6 Months to 1 Year	8	18	22	18	23
1 Year to 2 Years	30	20	20	35	22
2 Years to 3 Years	10	6	6	8	8
3 Years and Over	15	18	19	16	5

The general trend is showing children are staying in care for shorter periods of time. There has been a significant reduction in the numbers spending more than 3 years in care. The data suggests work to return children home to their families as early as possible is being effective.

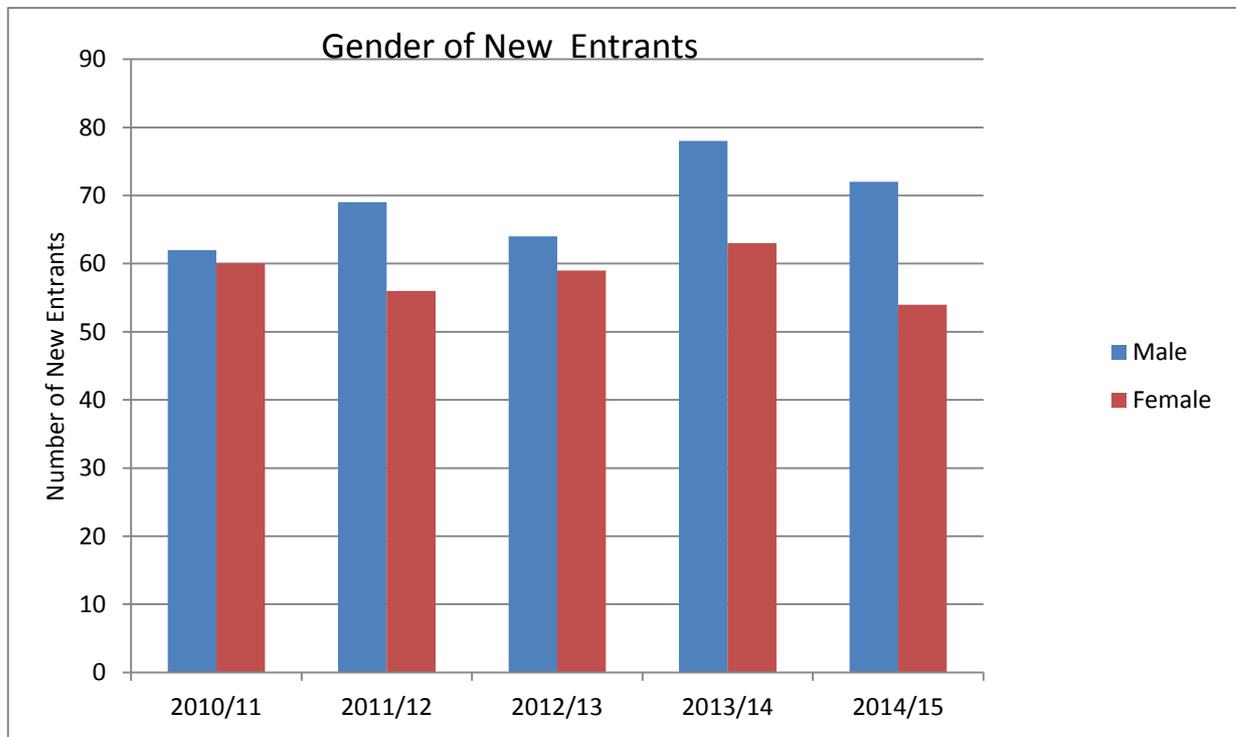
Numbers of children discharged from care by reason for discharge:

Discharge Reason	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Died	0	0	1	1	1
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	0	0	0	0	0
Returned home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility (not under a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order)	70	44	44	69	55
Moved into independent living	14	24	41	19	24
Transferred to residential care funded by Adult Social Services	1	1	2	4	1
Sentenced to custody	7	4	4	2	1
Adopted	12	7	6	10	5
Residence Order Granted	1	1	3	0	0
Special Guardianship Granted	13	5	2	13	9
Any Other Reason	20	22	9	20	14
Total	138	108	112	138	110

The most predominant reason for children being discharged from care (50%) is returning home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility, suggesting that work with the family was undertaken and it was deemed safe for the child(ren) to return home. Also that some entry into care might have been prevented by intervening earlier or resolving issues at crisis point. During 14/15 those who were most likely to return home were 10-15 year olds and the least likely were under 1's and 16+ .

The data also indicates for children looked after we had the lowest numbers sentenced to custody for over 7 years, which is hugely positive for the young people in our care and reinforces the need for good quality support and preventative services available in the community to support young people to remain at home or in foster care.

7.1. Gender



Historically, and in line with all but eight authorities in England, the number of girls coming into care (new entrants) in Harrow continues to be lower than the number of boys. Compared to London as a whole and our statistical neighbours, Harrow’s proportion of males to females is higher. This is likely to be a result of more boys coming into care in their teenage years which has an influence on the gender balance of those in care.

7.2. Age

Category					
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Age of Children starting 'Looked After' status					
Under 1	7	22	24	26	18
1 to 4	22	15	16	16	19
5 to 9	20	16	12	25	17
10 to 15	47	38	43	49	40
16 and over	26	34	28	25	32

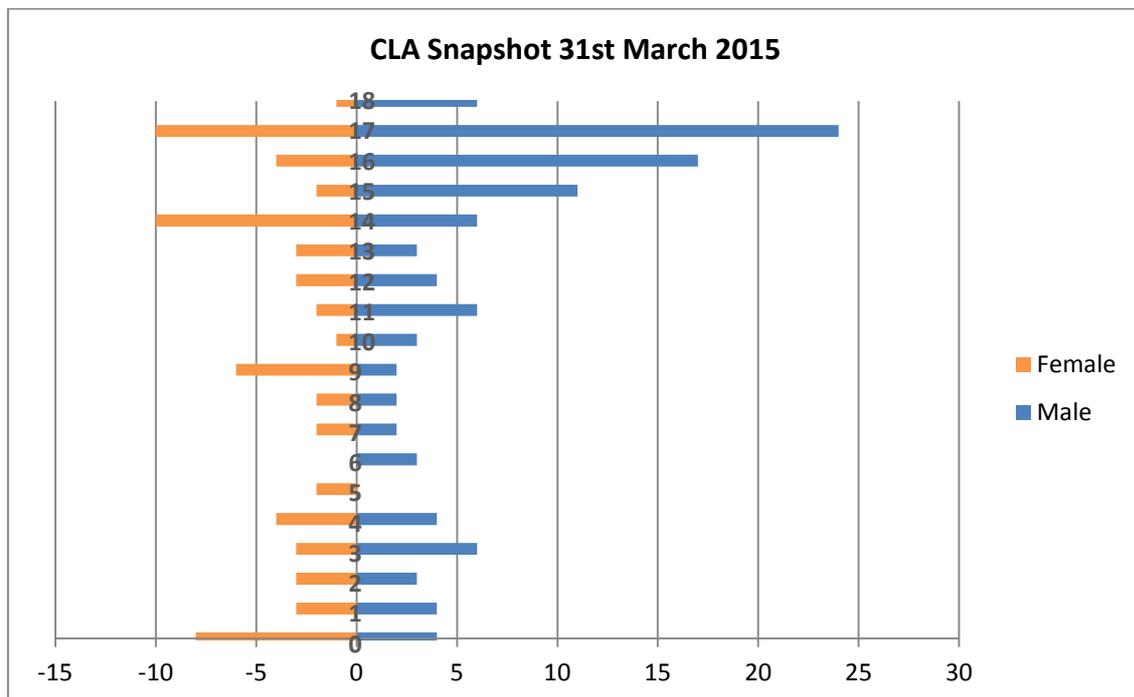
Over the last five years the number of teenagers entering care has continually outweighed the younger cohort, with the 10-15 year old age group having the most new entrants in each of the 5 years, averaging 36% of the cohort. This is in line with statistical neighbours and London. The 16's and over are the next highest with an average of 23%. When added together the two eldest groups contribute to an average of 59% of the total looked after population.

There has been a fluctuating picture in the under 1 cohort which had shown a consistent increase since 2009/10, but has now reduced slightly. The 1 to 4 age group has increased slightly. This age band comparison needs to be made with caution because numbers are small.

The increase in younger children entering care since 2011 is attributed to reviewing and lowering of social care thresholds at the front door and identifying children earlier who are more vulnerable.

7.3. Teenagers

From the snapshot of looked after population data below we can see a greater proportion of teenage young men driving up the number of children looked after from the age of 15 years. The age of female children looked after is more consistent through the age range, although some additional young people are coming into care at 14 and 17 years of age.

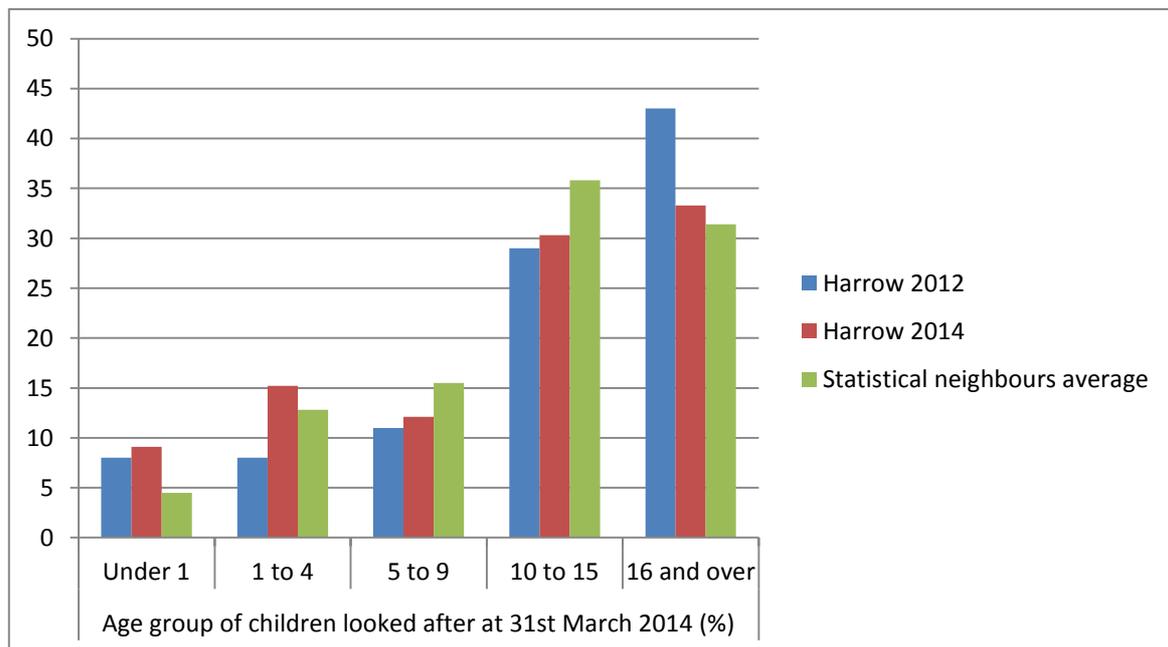


We are optimistic that through the development of two DfE funded Innovation Programmes, delivering new approaches to delivering services for teenagers on the edge of care will result in a reduction of the numbers of young people coming into and remaining in care. Better targeting of systemic practitioners and our commitment to Early Intervention Services will also result in better outcomes for children and families and we hope, safely reduce the number of children in care.

7.4. Vulnerable 16/17/year olds

The Southwark Judgement 2009 confirmed local authorities' responsibility to assess the needs of a young person who presents as homeless and to provide accommodation and support to homeless 16 and 17-year-olds under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 if the young person is assessed as a 'child in need'. Our aim, wherever possible is to support older children and young people to remain at home within their families. The Children's and Families and Housing Services joint protocol lays out our approach across the Council for children and young people of this age group who cannot remain within their families

As we can see from previous analysis, entry into care in the 17 year age band has contributed to a significant number of the looked after population. This represents a significant challenge as placements for older young people are more difficult to secure and more costly and the young people will continue to receive services up to the age of 21 (or 25 in some circumstances).



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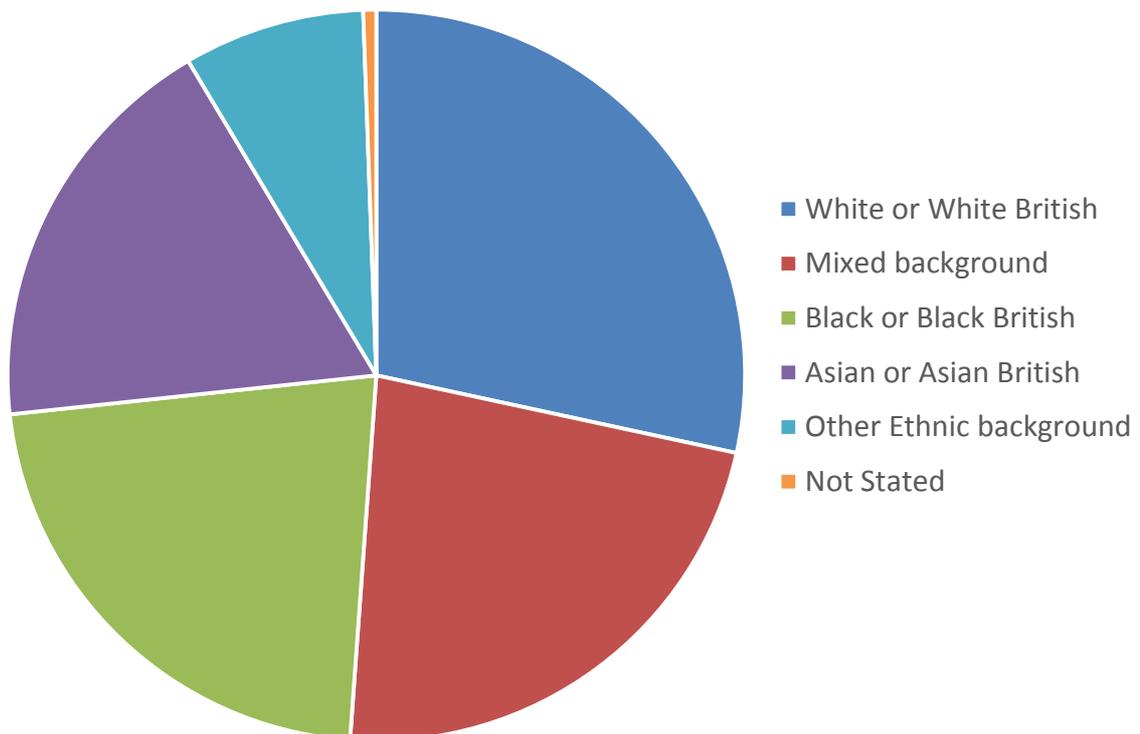
⁶ Source SSSA 903

7.5. Ethnicity

Harrow's population is one of the most diverse nationally. Diversity Indices rank Harrow seventh highest nationally for ethnic diversity and second for religious diversity⁷. The 2011 Census 69.1% of residents stated they are from minority ethnic groups, 31.9% of residents are White-British, 26.4% are of Indian origin, the largest minority ethnic group. Harrow is also home to the country's largest Sri Lankan born community. [Source: Census 2011]

This diversity is reflected in our CLA population, with over two-thirds of Harrow's CLA population from BME groups. However, there is an overrepresentation of children of 'Black' and 'Mixed' ethnicity in our CLA population and an underrepresentation of 'Asian' compared with the local population. The local diversity means the proportions of Asian and 'other' ethnic groups are substantially higher than London, England and our statistical neighbours. Therefore, there is a need to ensure foster carers and placement staff reflects the diversity of our Children in care.

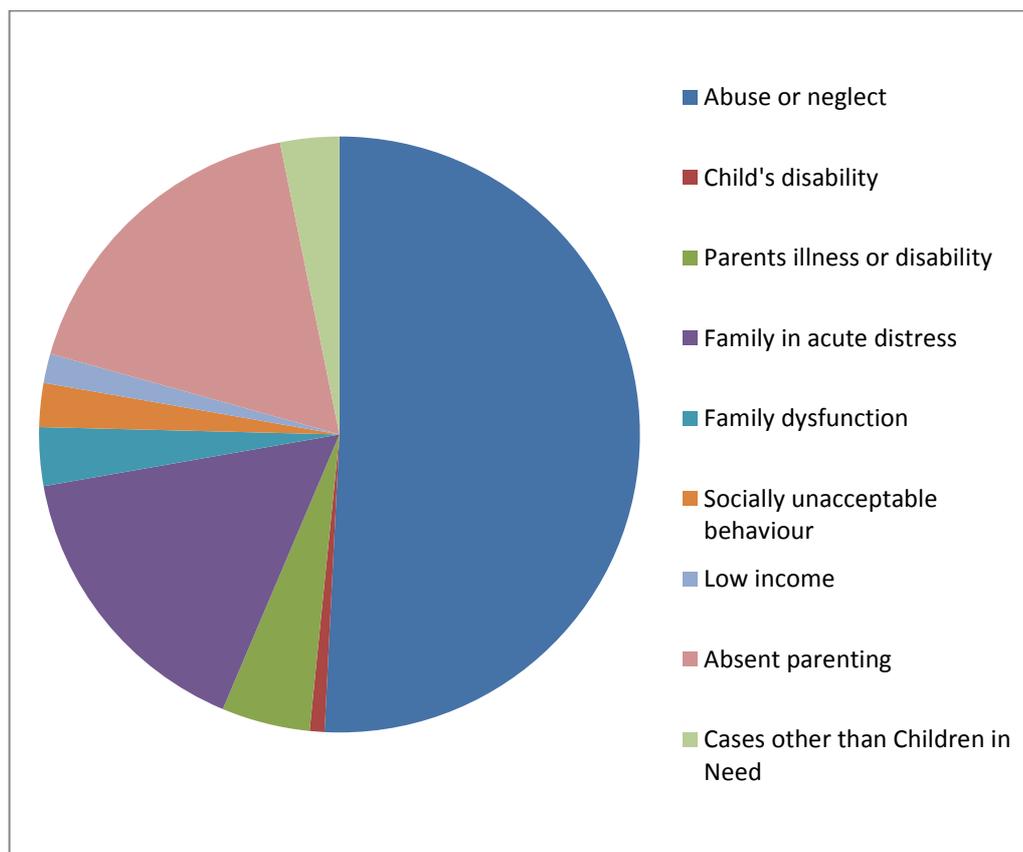
CLA Snapshot 31st March 2015



⁷ GLA 2011

8. Needs: Presenting Needs

Our analysis of presenting needs of children looked after shows over the last five years on average 50% of those coming into care is as a result of abuse or neglect. Since over half of all looked after children in England and Wales became looked after because of abuse or neglect in 2012/13 (NSPCC – Statistics on looked after children 2014), Harrow’s Looked After population has been comparable to the national picture. The pie chart below shows the breakdown of presenting needs for 2014/15.



There are two trends in statistics for presenting need when children are entering care. First, the number of children suffering abuse or neglect and subsequently coming into care (as a proportion of the total cohort) remains high, and secondly the numbers of families in acute distress and family dysfunction suggest a need for services to intervene earlier to address these changes. It is possible that this indicator is linked to changes in the economy and cuts in Council and partner services – we will need to continue to monitor this closely.

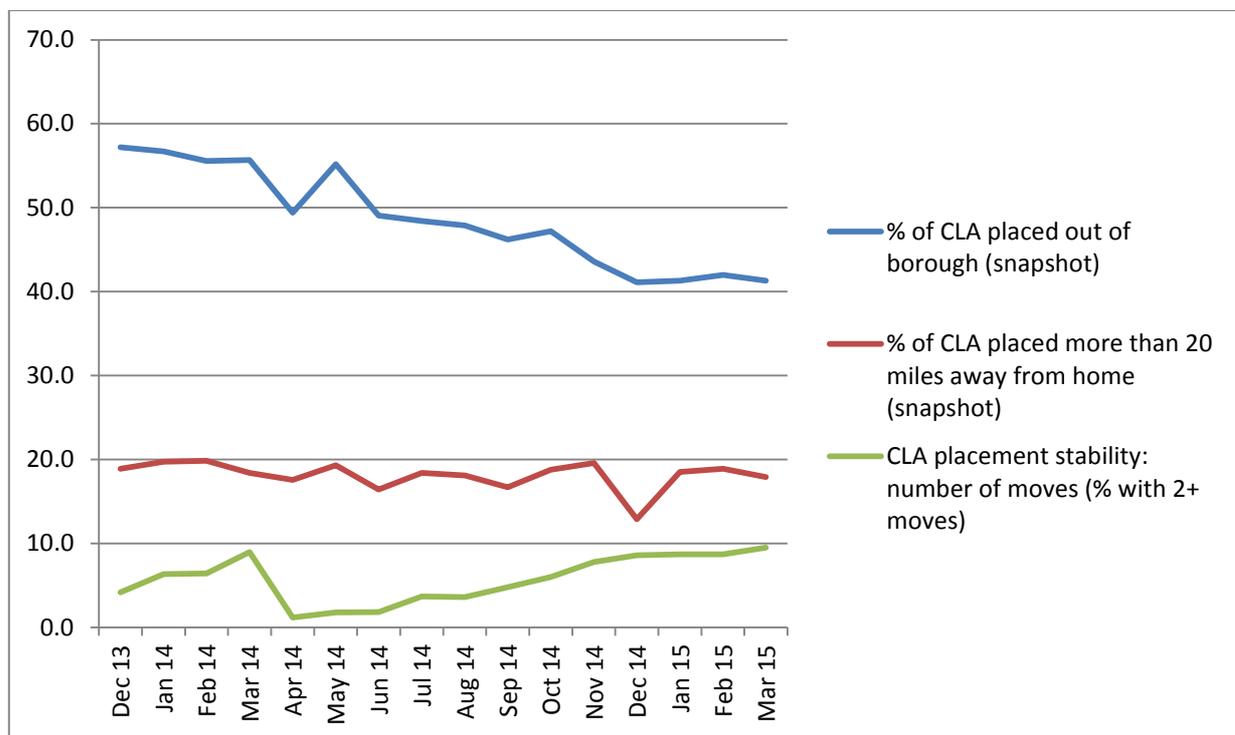
The second highest reason for children coming into care is as a result of absent parenting. Of these the majority are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. The number of UASC has remained static over the last few years and is similar to our statistical neighbours. However, this

situation is likely to change due to the impact of an increased number of people arriving in Europe from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries effected by war and poverty. It is estimated that the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum across the Continent has more than doubled over the last year. Equally the recent reduction of financial support for rejected asylum seekers and their families could also have an increase in the number of children becoming known to Children & Family Services.

Needs: Quality and Outcome Improvements

8.1. Placement Stability

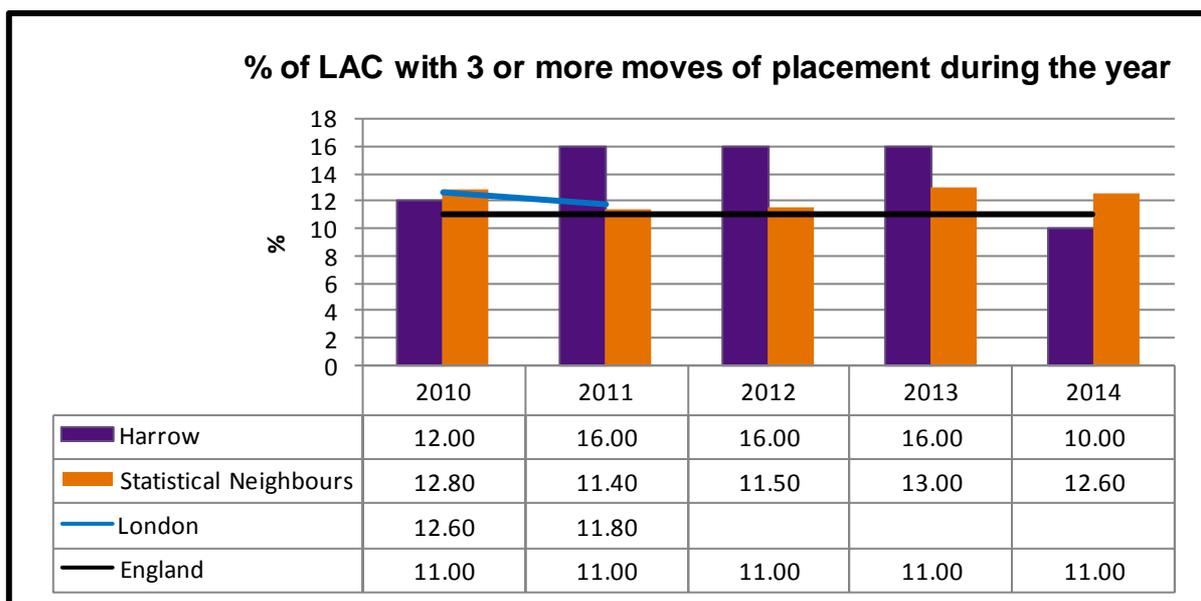
Placement stability is an incredibly important indicator of performance, as stability can be linked to permanence and better outcomes. Stability is therefore a good proxy-indicator for the outcomes we want to children to achieve.



The graph above demonstrates the positive trend in the reduction of Children being placed out of borough.

However, the number of CLA with 2+ moves shows an upward trend - although at times the number of moves has increased with a reduction in the numbers placed more than 20 miles from home, suggesting that placement moves involved children and young people returning to Harrow. For some this might be a return from custody. Returning to Harrow is generally a positive move both for the C&YP in being able to retain education placements, contact with support networks and also for Children & Families as local placements are more cost effective. Those placed more than 20 miles away (usually in residential accommodation) remains fairly static

Since 2010, the proportion of children who had three or more moves of placement within the year has fluctuated, from a high of 16% to a low of 10%. For the three years between 2011 and 2013 the proportion in Harrow was significantly higher than statistical neighbours, London and England, but this has now decreased and is less (10% compared to 12.6%). Age, behavioural difficulties and the absence of mental health support may contribute to placement breakdown.



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At 31 March 2015, 15 of 169 CYP had 2 or more placement moves compared to 31st March 2013, when 26 of 168 CLA had 3 or more placements during the year. Data on placement moves is no longer affected by children being missing placement.

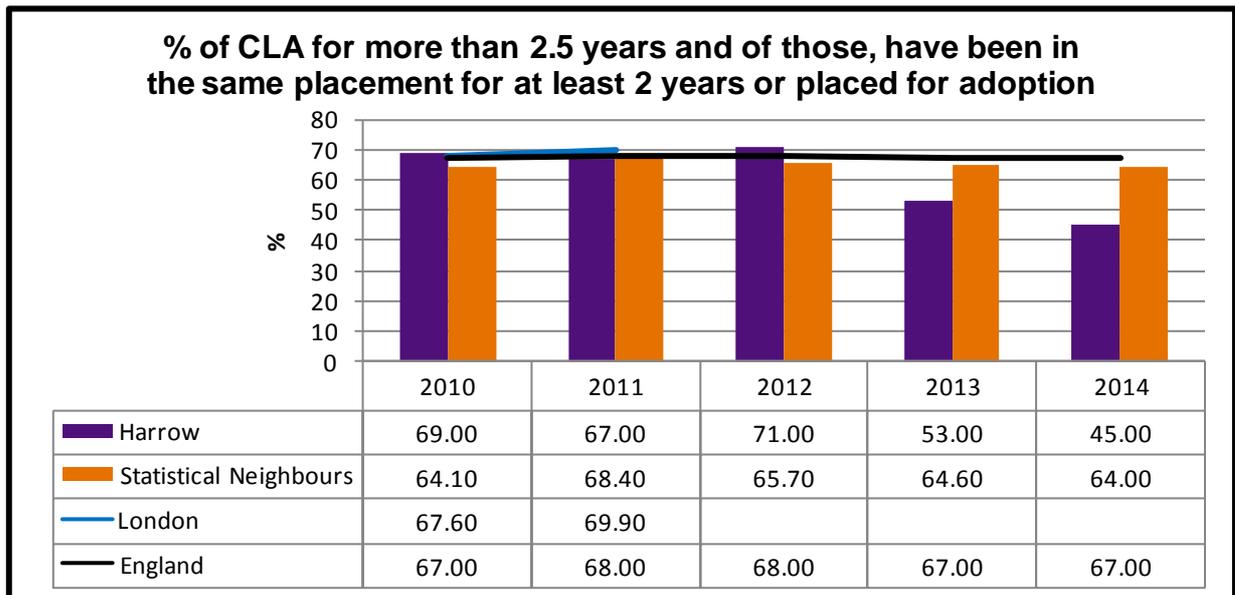
However, we recognise the significance of children being missing from placement on their wellbeing and placement stability. Reporting of children going missing has increased as a result of reviewing the processes and requiring referrals are made to the Missing Children Return Interview Service. As a result the incidents of CLA going missing increased to 352 in 2014-15 compared to 2012-2013 when there were 14 incidents of looked after children going missing, which increased to 39 incidents in 2013-14.

The processes for supporting children who go missing has been developed to ensure an early alert system is in place to inform those undertaking return interviews are ensuring that when children and young people return they are interviewed by an independent party. The

⁸ Source: SSDA 903; Local Authority Interactive Tool, DfE

provider who undertakes these interviews also deliver advocacy services for looked after children in Harrow.

The long term stability indicator measures the percentage of children aged under 16 who had been looked after for at least two and a half years, who had been living in their placement for more than two years. Harrow’s long term placement stability has declined, from a high of 71% in 2012 to 45% in 2014. As relevant CLA numbers are small and performance can change quickly, close monitoring will need to continue. The proportion of children having three plus moves between 2011 and 2013 is impacting on the longer term stability of placements.



Source: SSSA 903; Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT), DfE

Action is being taken to improve long and short term stability and a review of children with 3+ moves has been carried out. Of the 17 children with 3+ moves 9 are teenagers, 5 were aged 16+. Since April 2013, following the setting up of the Access to Resources Panel placement stability has improved significantly through initial placements being scrutinised more effectively to ensure a better, more realistic match, challenging placement move requests and additional support being provided to aid stability. Staying Put has also helped to increase placement stability for older children.

8.2. Outcomes and Quality

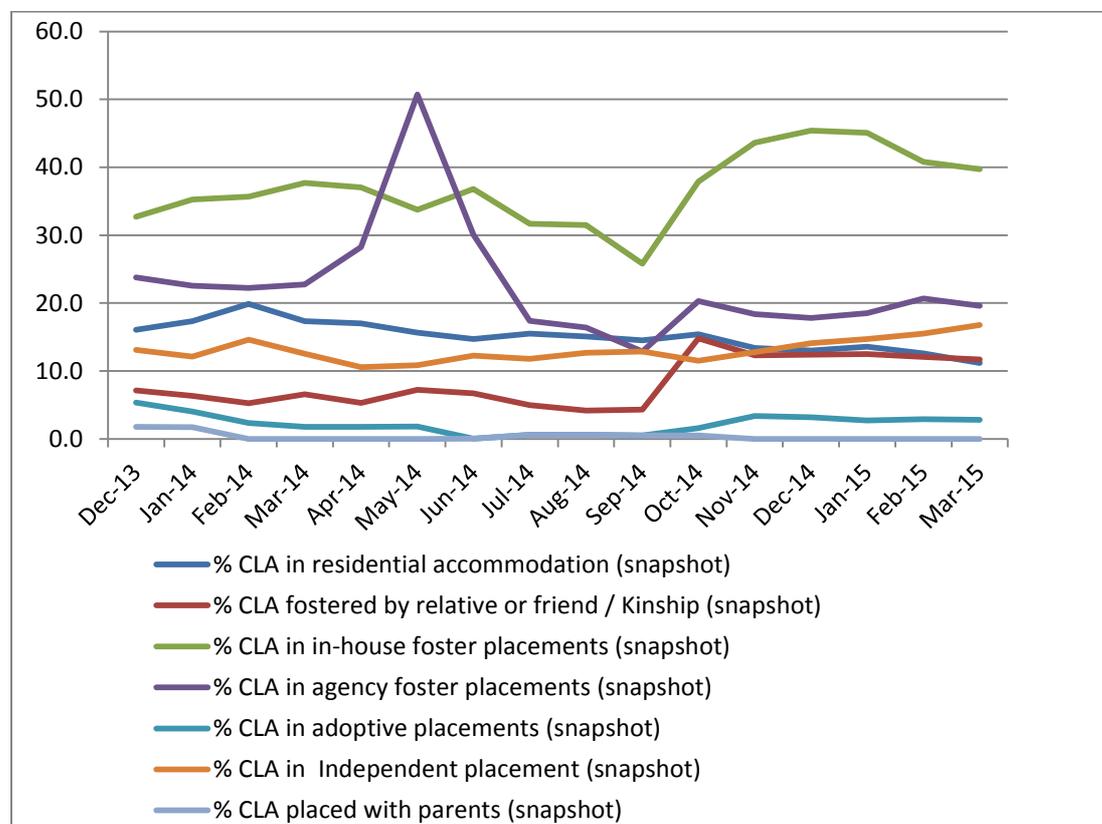
Harrow is working hard to improve the quality of both internal and external placements. Our policy is to use Ofsted rated Good or Outstanding providers wherever possible. Currently all IFAs are rated Good or Outstanding. Four residential placements are rated Adequate but these have been selected because of the fit of this provider to the specific needs of the young people placed.

To mitigate the risk of poorer outcomes we are exercising an enhanced quality assurance regime to visit and inspect the services more regularly ourselves. We consider this the best option for meeting the needs of the young people and assuring the outcomes that we expect from the providers. We receive monthly reports from the units where children and young people are placed, regular updates from the social workers attached to the cases and the Access to Resources Team also complete monitoring reports.

9. Services

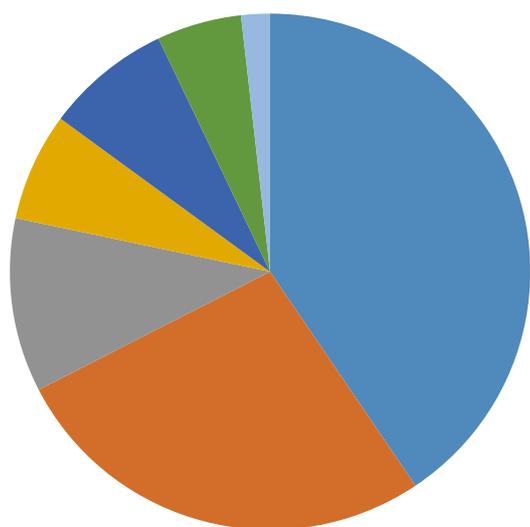
This section contains analysis of the services that we commission. The decision for a child or young person's placement is based on their need, and additional resources and support may be sought through the weekly Access to Resources Panel.

Despite there being higher numbers of children in care, the numbers placed with foster agencies has declined and the use of in-house foster carers has increased.

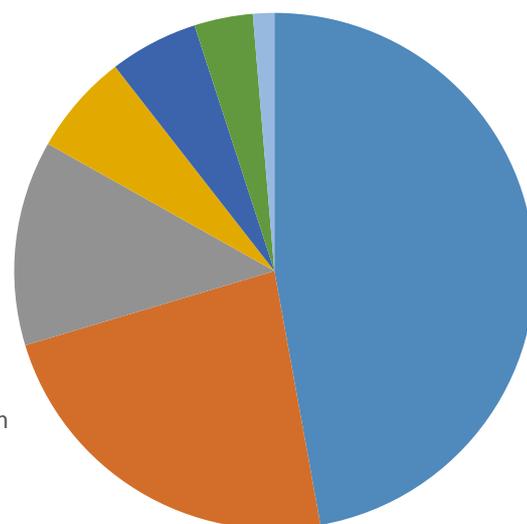


The following pie charts show a change in the financial spend on services for looked after children, principally due to the changing needs and ages of children coming into care. In particular we have seen that our use of Foster Care has been stable with a small reduction in the spend on Children's Homes. This complements our drive to provide more local and smaller settings which are more effective in achieving better outcomes for children.

2012-13

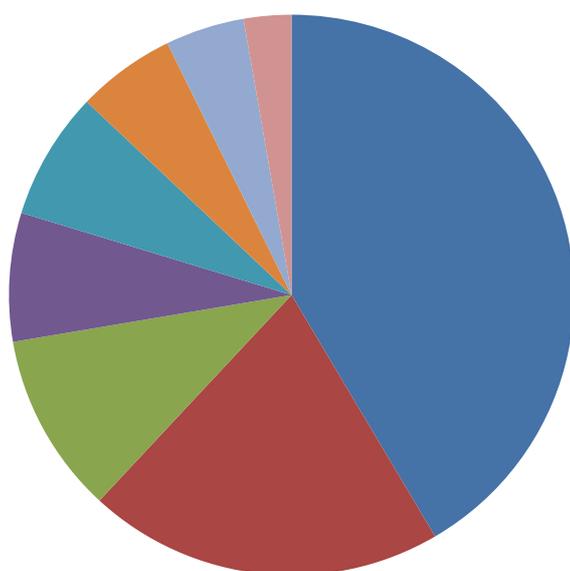


2013-14



- Fostering Services
- Children's Homes
- Leaving Care Services
- Adoption Services
- Unaccompanied Children
- Other CLA Services
- Residence Order

2014-15



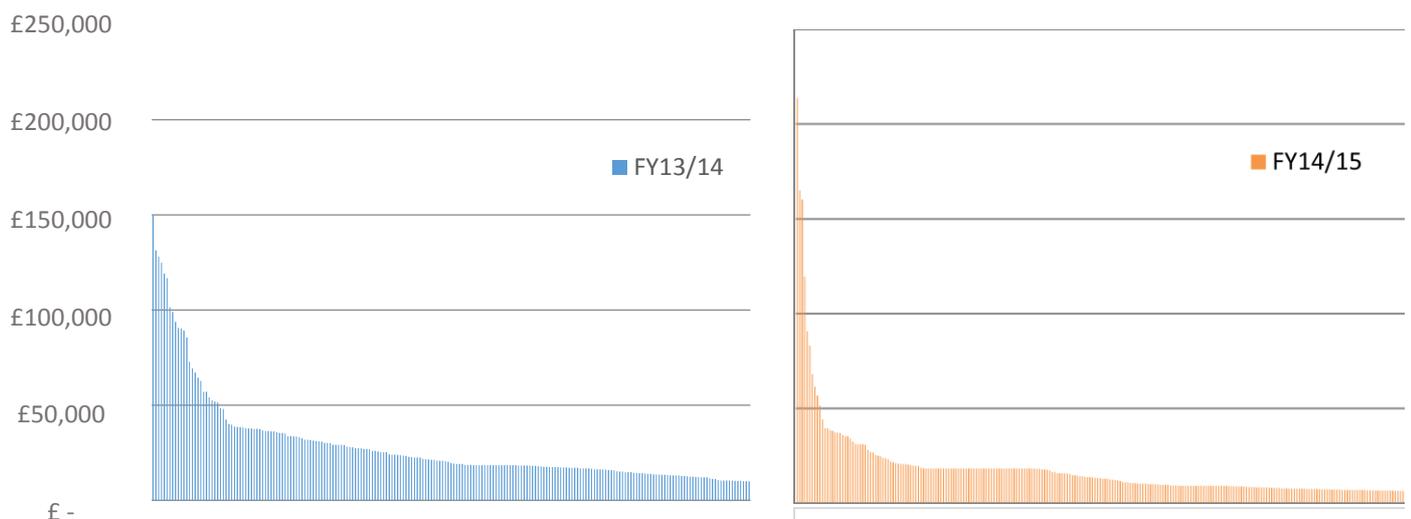
- Fostering
- Children's Homes
- Leaving Care
- Unaccompanied Children
- Adoption Services
- CLA
- CIN
- Residence Order

We have worked with families to improve the numbers of Relatives and Friends who are able to act as a foster placement. Internal foster care has been more stable as a result of an increased number and variety of placements, support to foster carers has increased, and improved matching processes are in place so as not to over load foster carers. Thus, the increase in the number of Children Looked After has been met largely by in house foster carers.

In comparison with London and England, Harrow has a similar distribution of placement types, although there are small discrepancies in terms of our under supply of foster care, and our greater use of other community placements.

The following analysis shows the whole care package (including transport, one off payments, etc.) for all children in care, where this is more than £5k. There has been some changes in the services we are purchasing, in particular a reduction in care packages between the £100k and £75k price and an increase in a small number of high cost packages of care.

Bi-annual reviews of high cost placements are undertaken to ensure the additional support charges are still required and to monitor planning for exiting care is in place. Whilst it is outside the scope of this report it will be helpful to explore these additional costs, as with decreasing resources available to Local Authorities this presents a further challenge to reducing our spend on placements.



9.1. Internal Foster Care

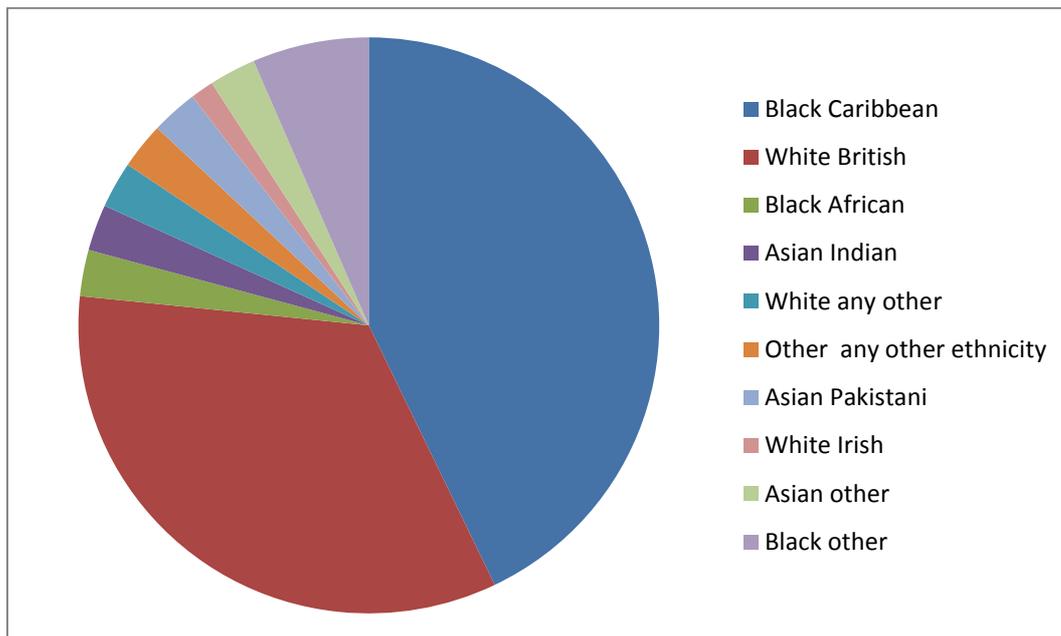
Harrow Council has 77 approved fostering households as of 31st March 2015. The Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2014-15 sets out plans to increase these numbers by recruiting carers who can meet local demands. In particular placements for children under 5, those with more complex needs, teenagers, large sibling groups, mother and baby placements and emergency placements.

Foster Carer Demographics

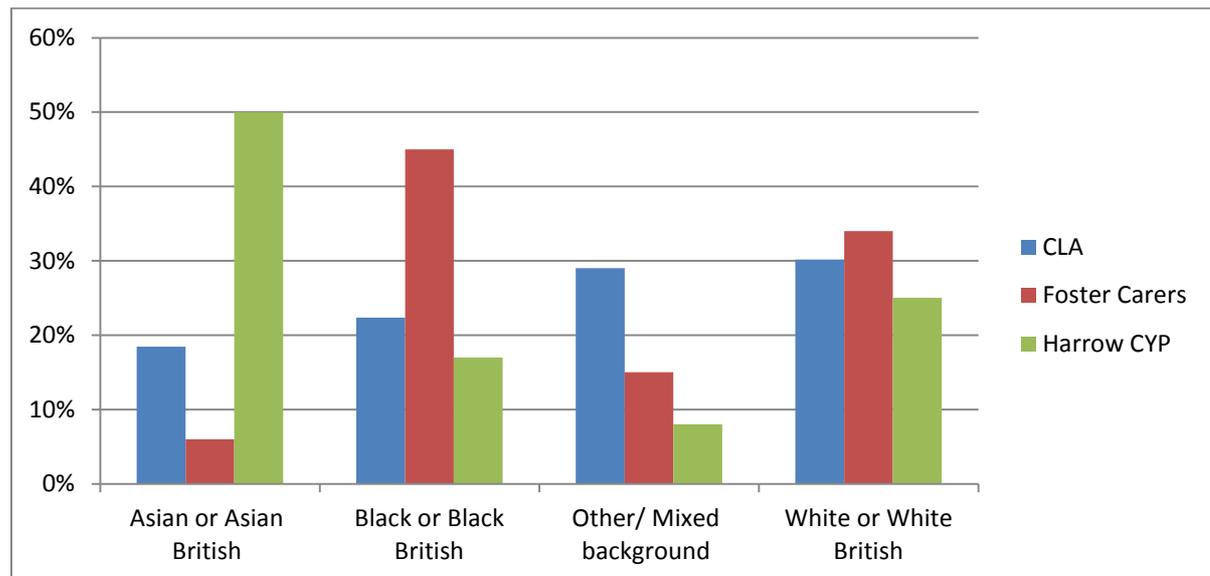
Length of Fostering Experience 31 st March 2015	#
<1 year	5
1-3 years	23
3+ years	12
5+ years	20
10+ years	7
15+ years	10

There has been a growth in the length of fostering experience due to foster carers continuing for longer.

There are a higher proportion of Black Caribbean and White British carers. Given the increase in CLA from backgrounds mentioned earlier in the report there is a need to recruit foster carers who are representative of the children in care, particularly from the following ethnic groups: Mixed (White and Black Caribbean), Black or Black British (African), Asian or Asian British Groups. The following pie chart shows the prevalent ethnic background of internal foster carers.



Comparing the ethnic background of our foster carers with current children looked after shows significant differences. With the increasing number of children from an Asian background both in care and in the local population there is a need to recruit foster carers who are representative of this diverse group. This graph also includes Harrow children and young people for comparison.



The majority of foster carers registered by Harrow Council Fostering Team are aged in their 40's and 50's. There has been a significant rise in the number of carers aged 50+. This is likely to be when their own families have grown up and left home. This could be a group to target in our recruitment strategy.

Age of Foster Carers 31 st March 2015	#
20+	2
30+	3
40+	19
50+	34
60+	17
70+	2

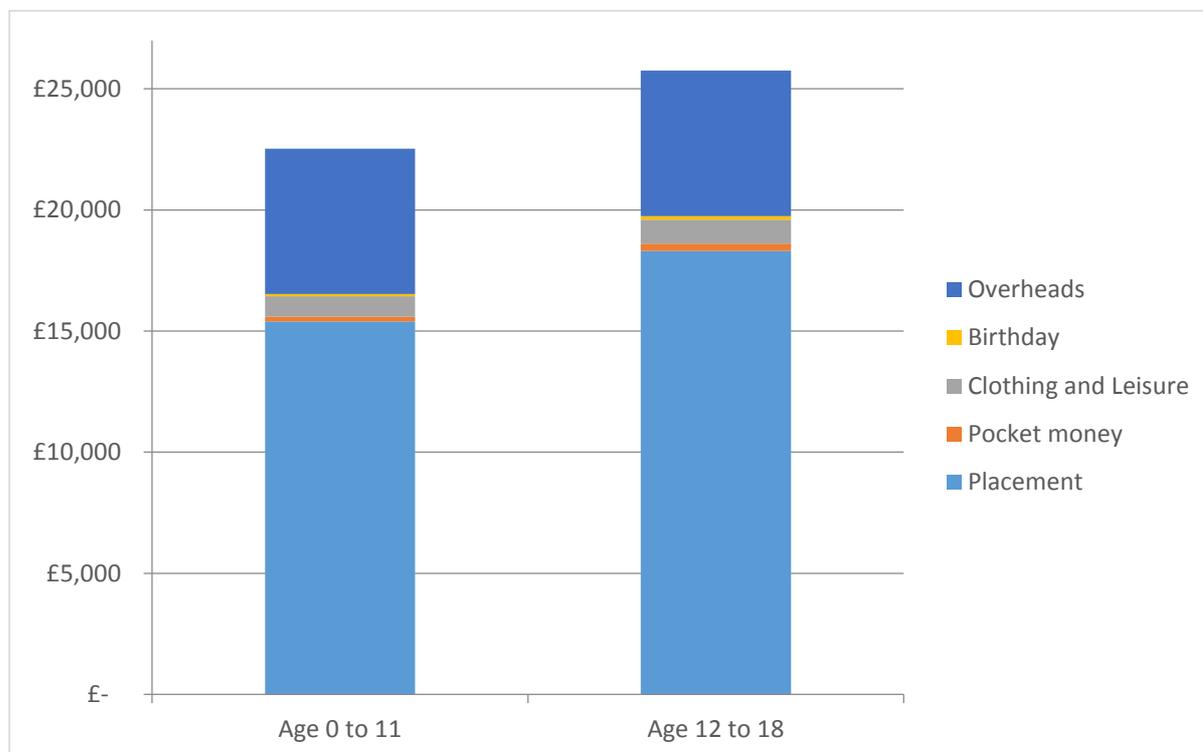
Length of Fostering Experience 31 st March 2015	#
<1 year	5
1-3 years	23
3+ years	12
5+ years	20
10+ years	7
15+ years	10

The average length of time for a foster carer working with Harrow Council is 6.8 years; this has decreased over the last two years as a result of the increase in new foster carers. 2014-15 saw 9 new families recruited. The Fostering team have set a target to increase the number of foster carers to 94 in 2015.

The following table shows the numbers and types of carers that have been approved and had their approval terminated over the past three years. The number of short break terminations has been high as the thresholds changed and the service demand was lowered. There were a high number of Connected Persons carers having their approval terminated as the majority of these carers were granted special guardianship orders. The number of approvals of new foster carers in 2014-15 was higher than the amount of carers having their approval terminated, resulting in a net gain of 4 foster carers.

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Connected Persons Approval	2	4	3	3	2
Connected Persons termination	6	6	5	2	1
Termination foster carer	4	4	2	3	7
Foster carer approval	7	6	9	7	11
Short Breaks Carers approval	12	2	0	0	0
Short Breaks Carers Termination	n/a	6	6	1	2

9.2. In-house Foster Care Costs



The above graph is included to show the average breakdown of costs for internal foster care. The foster carer payment per week is £352. This graph does not include transport costs or one-off payments. Overheads are included as an estimate of the internal support and operational commissioning teams – this requires further analysis to apportion overheads accurately as these are likely to be higher than estimated above.

During 2014-15 the total spend on carers payments was £852,694 for 68 children. This compares to £760,182 spend on IFA placements for 47 children, where the average placement cost per week with IFA providers is £736.

Of the 68 children in in-house foster care, 43 were in placement for the full 52 weeks and 21 of these had been in Harrow placements for a full year in 13-14. Thus approximately 30% of in-house foster placements are being utilised for long term placements. This indicates our foster carers are providing stable placements which are positive for children; however this also has an impact on a potential lack of new foster care placements available for new entries to care.

There were 6 children who remained in IFA placements for longer than two years, suggesting that IFA placements for the other 41 children were used as a short term solution.

9.3. External Foster Care

We placed 31 children in external foster care through West London Alliance in FY14/15 at a financial cost of £544,453. The number of children placed through the framework has fallen by over 50% from 70 in 2012/13. Some of this reduction can be attributed to the growth in the in house foster care provision. However, we need to explore the additional £170k spent on IFA's who are not part of the WLA framework and which option produces better outcomes and is more cost effective.

A central project within the WLA programme has been to develop a framework agreement to deliver more efficient commissioning arrangements for looked after children placed with external Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). The aim is to exploit the West London Boroughs' combined purchasing power to deliver financial efficiencies and a diverse and quality assured market, with clear pricing frameworks and specifications. Further negotiations are underway with IFA providers to recommission the framework.

Harrow Council's Cabinet agreed to the framework on 18th July 2013. The prices achieved through the framework are attractive, even more so in a challenging context for achieving further efficiencies from the IFA market in West London, due to the inflationary pressures and increased competition from other sub regions.

We have also sought to achieve the following benefits to improve accommodation:

- Sufficiency requirement – the framework has enabled Harrow Council to deliver its obligations and ensure a greater proportion of our foster placements are within a 20 mile radius of the borough.
- Market development – by awarding a framework contract for four years the West London boroughs will communicate a clear message of our joint intention to stimulate the growth of local capacity. This will be achieved by giving providers on the framework the confidence to increase their recruitment of local foster carers, resulting in more placement choice for commissioners and children and decreasing the likelihood of costly placement moves.
- Improvement in quality – by robustly specifying, tendering and monitoring Independent fostering placements within the framework IFA placements will be delivered to a better standard of quality and any underperformance will be subject to rigorous processes as set out in the Terms and Conditions of the IFA contract.

- Contract management – commercial contract management of the framework will be facilitated by the WLA in partnership with the boroughs ensuring robust quality performance management of providers.
- Placement searches/negotiation – having a framework of approved providers with tendered prices, discounts, specifications and referral processes will reduce officer time required for finding and arranging placements.

9.4. Internal Residential Care

Harrow Council Children and Families Directorate previously had two residential units. Honey Pot Lane Semi Independent Unit for 16 to 18 year olds closed at the end of October 2013 as part of the Councils spending review. The unit costs were higher than the market average and the seven placements that HPL provided were sourced at a better value for money from the private and voluntary sector.

The Firs is a residential short breaks unit for children with disabilities offering short breaks for children with a high level of need and challenging behaviour. The unit offers short breaks to 30 disabled children. The Firs is inspected by Ofsted every six months and has been graded as Outstanding for the past 6 years.

9.5. External Residential Care

During 2014-15 9 children were placed in residential children's homes (not including those at residential school or secure units). The total spend on residential placements over the year was £750,201. We are working with WLA to identify the most frequently used and high cost residential providers across the partnership to develop more efficient and cost effective commissioning arrangements across the nine boroughs.

Harrow has developed its Access to Resources team to ensure a robust approach to the commissioning and procurement of external placements. All external placements have appropriate contracts and Service Level Agreements in place and all arrangements are reviewed and monitored on a regular basis.

9.6. WLA Partnership – Key Achievements

- Savings of nearly £1m through procurement of Independent Fostering services and negotiations with special educational needs providers
- Launch of a West London SEN Commissioning Strategy
- Reducing the average cost of each SEN Placement
- New working groups set up to explore the impact of recent legislation - Children's & Families Bill and the SEND Reforms and Localism Act
- Launch of the Independent Fostering Services Framework
- Development of a Select List of Semi-independent care services
- Worked with west London children's home providers to develop the market
- Development of Care Place – a database to monitor placements made and spend

The West London Alliance is developing links with providers in the West London area to consolidate good local residential placements. St Christopher's a large voluntary sector charity is working in partnership with the WLA and has developed a seven bedded unit and a new project providing safe accommodation for vulnerable young women both in a neighbouring borough. Harrow work closely with colleagues within the WLA to exchange information regarding quality and costs of local residential placements. Regular monitoring visits are made by the Access to Resources Team to ensure high standards are maintained.

Harrow has developed positive professional relationships with local residential providers and this has enabled robust placement agreements and clear expectations regarding standards.

9.7. External Parent and Child Assessment

The WLA met with two main providers of Residential Parent and Child assessments and were able to negotiate contracts regarding quality and costs. Regular meetings have occurred with these providers to monitor performance.

The Family Justice review and the Public Law Outline have resulted in a need to consider how to facilitate good quality parenting assessments within reduced Court time tables. Harrow has been part of a four borough care proceeding (PLO is main focus) pilot with Ealing, Hillingdon and Brent to look at options and ways of improving practice. The appointment of a full time Care Proceedings Case

Manager has assisted with timeliness of evidence being filed and cases being tracked.

Additional resources are often required under the pre-proceedings process and would often include one or more of the following:

- Family Group Conference
- Parenting Assessment
- Hair strand testing
- Cognitive Assessments
- Compass assessment
- Psychological/Psychiatric assessment of one or both of the parents
- Viability assessments

Such resources clearly have a financial impact, which are considered at the weekly Access to Resources Panel, where senior managers consider care plans and agree resources outside of the court arena.

There has been a significant rise in the number of Family Group Conference applications (38) leading to earlier identification of alternative carers within the family network. There were 23 FGC applications made in 2013-14. In April 2015 an agreement was reached to explore bringing family group conferencing in-house and this is currently being scoped.

9.8. Semi-independent and Care Leavers

32 young people were in semi-independent accommodation in 2014/15. Over the last couple of years there has been an increase in the numbers of young people placed in semi-independent accommodation with support. This would suggest the young people supported in care and leaving care are more vulnerable and need additional support and perhaps there is more work for providers to do to prepare children for independent living. There is also a difficulty in finding independent living accommodation for young people to move into due to the increasing competition for one bedroom properties. This puts a further strain on resources, as although the young people are ready to move they remain in more expensive semi-independent placements until independent placements become available. Further work to develop plans to address this is required as part of the Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan.

Through the West London Alliance work is underway to address this unregulated area through monitoring, provider forums, exchanging information regarding providers and developing preferred provider lists.

Harrow Council has a Service Level Agreement with The Gayton a local specialist resource for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people. This has been a successful local resource in offering support, advice and accommodation to those newly arrived in the UK and services are provided from the unit to support young people to engage in leisure and development activities.

Harrow Council also has a service level agreement with the YMCA offering family based Supported Lodgings. We are currently reviewing the Supporting People contracts to ensure they are cost effective and achieving good outcomes for young people. All of the Supporting People placements were at capacity during 2014/15.

Harrow is developing other local partnerships with local providers to ensure a sufficient range of appropriate semi-independent provision to meet the diverse needs of our looked after and care leavers population. Harrow Children and Families and Housing Directorates have jointly updated the CLA/ Housing protocol in relation to homeless 16 and 17 year olds to ensure processes and responsibilities are clear between the two departments.

A Leaving Care charter, developed with young people clarifying what support and accommodation they can expect from the local authority is in place. An Independent skills manual has also been developed to assist them prepare for independence and progress their pathway plans. Harrow has also produced a Staying Put policy enabling Care leavers to remain living with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday providing appropriate support to those who need a longer transition to independence.

9.9. Adoption

Nationally, there were 5,050 looked after children adopted during the year ending 31 March 2014, an increase of 26% from 2013 and an increase of 58% from 2010. Although the number of looked after children adopted fell between 2010 and 2011, the number of these adoptions has since increased and is now at its highest point since the start of the current collection in 1992⁹.

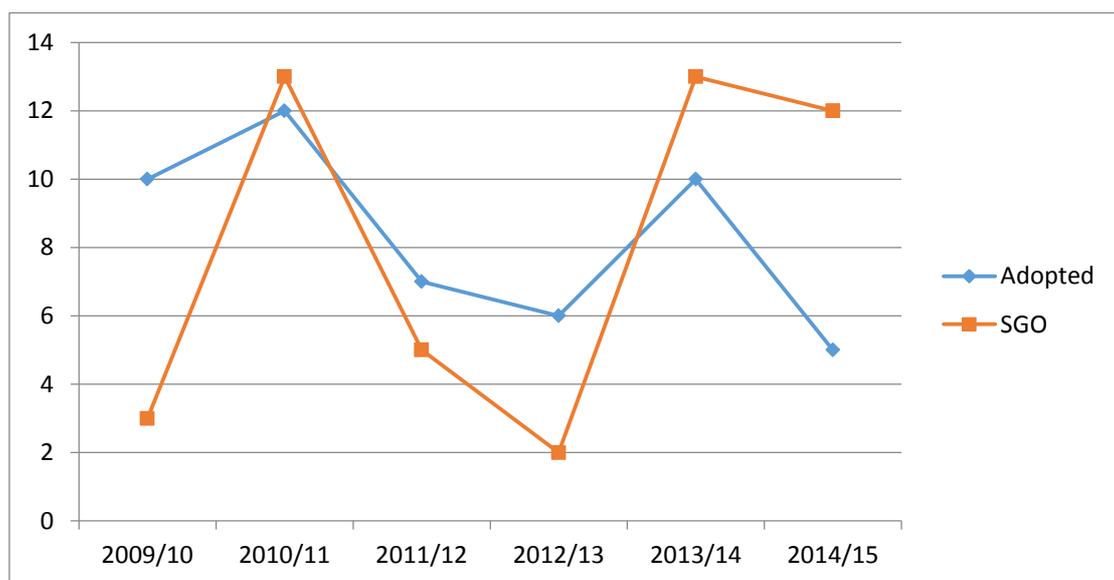
There have been fewer adoptions on the previous year, 5 between 2014 and 2015 compared to 10 between 2013 and 2014, a drop of 50%.

Rates of children placed for adoption are lower compared to other local authority areas. The percentage of children who were adopted in 2014 was 1.8%, compared to CIPFA Average of 4.9%. The numbers of children adopted have

⁹ DfE Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014, issued 30 September 2014

been fluctuating over the last 6 years, with numbers remaining below CIPFA averages.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adopted	10	12	7	6	10	5
SGO	3	13	5	2	13	12



Harrow’s rate of children ceasing to become looked after as a result of a special guardianship order has increased significantly over the last two years. With 14/15 data showing Harrow 10.1% and the CIPFA average being 8.9%. There is however, a need for continued analysis and data gathering of outcomes in particular around outcomes for children who have been placed with relatives subject to an SGO as opposed to adoption.

Coram’s Adoption Diagnostic undertaken in autumn 2014 identified;

- One third of children placed for adoption were Asian.
- 88% were placed for adoption before their third birthday and 44% before their first.
- Harrow placed a proportionately high number of sibling groups, but only one child aged 5 years or over
- No adoptive placements broke down during the two years covered by the analysis.

Coram

Harrow invested in domestic adoption partnership with Coram, a voluntary adoption agency in 2006. Three members of Coram staff are collocated with Children and Families social workers. This has enabled early identification and planning for adoption cases. Harrow have benefited from the specialist knowledge and resources offered by Coram through this partnership arrangement.

Under the Harrow partnership agreement Coram also provides advice and consultation on permanence planning to Harrow Children's Services for children entering care. Coram's involvement has sped up the decision making process, with children leaving care to return to their family, connected people or to be adopted more promptly. The contract has been renewed until 31st March 2016 and we are working with Coram to explore the potential impact of regional adoption agencies in future.

Coram's London Branch also runs a Concurrent Planning Project, to achieve early placements and avoids delay in children being placed with families whilst the courts decide on their future. This project is specifically designed to ensure that the delay for babies is minimised and the children do not suffer avoidable broken attachments.

At present the demand for adoptive placements for children nationally far outweighs the supply of approved adopters, which means far too many children for whom adoption is the plan are waiting too long for an adoptive placement, or are never moved on to permanence through adoption. Coram have committed to increasing their pool of approved adopters. To this end, a satellite team is being set up in South London, comprising of a manager and two adoption social workers, to recruit more adopters from South London and the South East. As a result Harrow should begin to see an increase in adoptive families available and a shorter time scale for placements to be found. Progress is monitored through meetings with the provider and will inform the re-tendering of the adoption service in 2015-2016.

10. Resources: Permanence Planning

There are signs of improvement in adoption timescales for the increased number of younger children coming into care with increasing number of children with placement orders. We will continue our drive to improve in this area increasing the numbers of children being adopted out of the care system.

Timely implementation of care plans is progressed through the Care Planning Group meets monthly to review all:

- Children subject to a legal planning meeting and the Public Law Outline pre proceedings process
- Children who are subject to on-going care proceedings
- Children who have a permanent plan of adoption
- Children who have a permanent plan of long term fostering

Individual Permanency Planning Meetings are held every six weeks on all these cases where the detailed implementation of the relevant care plans are discussed, developed and progressed. These complement the statutory review meetings which take place in accordance with the statutory review framework and ensure permanency is achieved in a timely manner.

11. Conclusions and General trends

- The numbers of Children Looked After are rising
- The fastest growing sector of the care population are the 16+ age group
- 10-17 Year olds consistently make up over half of the CLA population and are generally harder to find suitable placements.
- Young males aged 13-17 form over 37% of the looked after population
- Children are staying in care for shorter periods of time
- The proportion of children who have previously been looked after who return to care are decreasing, however still contribute to almost 15% of the total cohort.
- Each year 50% of children leave care and return home to their families,
- There is an increasing picture of the numbers leaving care and moving into semi-independent accommodation as opposed to independent living.

Response required

- Greater understanding of reasons for children entering and exiting care to develop predictive data modelling
- Increased resilience of young people and families through targeting resources to provide early intervention and intensive, immediate responses to families in crisis to prevent teenagers coming into care
- Better targeting of preventative services to reduce the number of children coming into care and re-entering care
- Increase the number of in-house foster carers to meet the increasing demand
- Increase the capacity of in-house foster care provision to provide more specialist provision
- Increase the number of children who become adopted
- Continue to increase the number of children subject to SGO's

Whilst there has been much progress in developing our range of internal and external services to ensure sufficiency of accommodation, we face the dual challenge of additional demand for services and increasing pressure on Council budgets. The actions set out in the attached action plan are designed to improve the quality of services for our most vulnerable children and young people, and improve how effectively we meet their needs and improve the outcomes that they achieve.

12. CLA Placement Sufficiency Action Plan

Action	Purpose	Owner	Review	Progress
1. Data review to be held with representatives from Business Intelligence Unit and Children & Families	To understand and identify future needs	Head of Service -Children Looked After and Placement Services Divisional Director	April 2016	
2. Measure the impact of children and young people's involvement in placement and other service decisions affecting their lives.	Role of YP involvement in decisions in placement stability	ART Team Manager Participation Officer	February 2016	
3. Increase sufficiency of appropriate placements for hard to place young people aged 13 to 17. Including in-house foster carers, IFA's and semi-independent providers	To ensure placements meet the needs of young people	ART Team Manager	March 2016	
4. Undertake needs analysis to ensure capacity in provision for children aged 17 to 21, in anticipation of increasing numbers coming into care and that are Staying Put	To ensure sufficient, cost effective placements that meet the needs of young people	ART Team Manager LCT Team Manager	March 2016	
5. Recruit and retain more foster carers with the skills to meet the placement demands and to increase sufficiency with a 2015/16 recruitment target of 16	A range of in-house provision is available to meet the diverse needs of looked after children	TM Fostering & Adoption	March 2016	

Action	Purpose	Owner	Review	Progress
6. To develop robust commissioning arrangements, including work with WLA to ensure cost effective provision of accommodation, and to continue managing and stimulating the local market	Services deliver the specific outcomes identified in the care plans of looked after children	Team Manager ART Head of Service-Children Looked After and Placement Services	April 2016	
7. Work with partners to review and respond to changes to the arrangements for Adoption Services (Regional Adoption Agencies)	To ensure all children with an adoption plan are placed effectively	Head of Service-Children Looked After and Placement Services Team Manager Coram Partnership	January 2016	Meeting with Coram September 2015
8. Undertake bi-annual audits to review high cost placements and themed audits to identify patterns and trends	To ensure placements are meeting the needs of children and providing VFM	Head of Service – Children looked After and Placement Services	December 2015	
9. Complete analysis to support the move of young people from semi independent living to independent living where they are ready to do so	To ensure young people are supported to live independently where appropriate	ART Team Manager LCT Team Manager	January 2016	