



London children, London lives:

Understanding under-utilisation of London's
residential provision by London children

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Executive Summary

Context

This research was commissioned by the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) to explore the factors behind the under-utilisation of London's provision by children from London in response to previous research. This report specifically focuses on placements for looked after children within residential children's homes who have high-cost, low-incidence needs. However, the recommendations that come out of this report do reference the role of bolstering alternative provisions such as specialist foster care and secure provision in improving utilisation across London for all looked after children.

Purpose

The purpose of this work was to identify the key drivers of under-utilisation of London provision through quantitative data analysis and qualitative fieldwork with stakeholders across London, and establish what could be done differently to support increased local placements for this group of young people. Based on the in-depth engagement work, this report makes a series of recommendations at a regional, sub-regional and local level under the following themes:

- Developing a strategic vision across London
- Building relationships
- Challenging assumptions and practice
- Understanding the market.

Methodology

Data for this report was gathered through an analysis of the existing Pan-London Snapshot developed by LIIA; a rapid context review of existing literature; a virtual social worker roundtable; virtual fieldwork interviews with a variety of stakeholders at six representative London boroughs and; interviews with additional key stakeholders.

Overview of findings

Through our analysis of the Pan-London snapshot, several key themes emerged.

- There are 790 placements by London boroughs in residential children's homes. Of these, 532 young people (67% of the cohort) were placed outside London
- There are 569 externally provided children's homes places in London of which only 35% is filled by London young people.
- There is significant variation across London in those boroughs who place outside of London, from 0% of children placed out of London in 2 LAs to 100% of children placed out of London in 3 other LAs.
- There is significant variation in the number of children's homes places in each borough. On average, Outer London boroughs have higher numbers of residential children's home places than Inner London. However, there is only a weak association between the number of children's home places per borough and the number of young people placed in residential homes.
- We have data on 536 places in residential children's homes. Of these, 117 are in London and 419 outside of London. This covers places in 47 local authorities, of which 35 are not in London and 12 are in London. The eight most frequently used local authorities are all outside of London and account for just under half of all placements for which we have data.

- There are specific cohorts of children and young people who are most likely to be placed outside of London due to the complexity of their needs. This includes young people with absconding and offending behaviour; young people with gang affiliation, involvement in county lines or exposure to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) or Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE); young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Learning Disabilities (LD), or Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs; and young people with mental health issues who have been discharged from Tier 4 provision.

There were also many barriers identified through our qualitative fieldwork that are impacting on the ability of authorities to place in London, including:

- The perceived benefits of placing young people out of London – there is an ongoing perception across the workforce that placing certain cohorts of young people at distance is likely to lead to improved outcomes, particularly for those at risk of CCE or CSE.
- Lack of specific provision – stakeholders identified that there is a lack of specialist foster carers and secure provision in London which could meet the needs of this cohort of children and young people. It was also highlighted that there is a lack of specialist residential provision which can provide the necessary wrap-around support for young people.
- Challenges with the market – the nature of the competition for places in London has led to provision being guided by what the market wants to provide rather than being truly needs-led. Local authorities do not feel they have the necessary levers to meaningfully shape what provision is available and are therefore unable to make effective use of the provision across the region.
- Behaviour of commissioners – there is a lack of consistent knowledge of what provision is available in London, therefore commissioners often make decisions on where to place children and young people based on existing relationships with providers, even if that provider is outside of London.
- Practice issues related to referral forms – the language used to describe young people is often not strengths-based and may over-emphasise the challenges. Providers have also identified that they are sometimes provided with inadequate information which leads to rejection of placements as they don't have the time to negotiate information.
- Costs – although cost is not the overwhelming factor leading to increased use of out of London placements, if we alleviated some of the issues related to availability, quality and capacity of placements in London then some of the challenges associated with costs would be alleviated.
- Barriers for providers – the decision of providers to reject more challenging placements is in part driven by concerns related to the potential impact on their Ofsted rating. The risk appetite of providers seems to be particularly low for young people from their immediate local authority. They are also struggling significantly with the ability to recruit and retain the necessary staff to successfully support and respond to more complex needs.



In spite of the barriers currently facing placing authorities, there was consensus that it is important for London children to stay in London:

- Diversity – a high proportion of looked after children in London are from racialised backgrounds and it is important to consider the impact of placing them in less ethnically diverse areas.
- Positive long-term outcomes – when young people get older they are likely to return to their home borough therefore managing placements locally ensure work is done to manage risks and identify the necessary support is crucial.
- Variance in proximity – there was a nuance raised about the necessity to consider proximity on a local basis. For example, placements just outside London might provide closer proximity to home for Outer London boroughs than placements across London.



Recommendations

Throughout the course of our research, we explored many solutions to enable more young people to be placed within London. All of these recommendations are informed by our conversations with stakeholders and our analysis of the available data.

Developing a strategic vision across London

- Developing the evidence base for the value of placing young people in London, particularly focusing on young people who are most likely to be placed outside of London such including those at risk of CCE/CSE, young people with ASD/SEMH/LD or young people with mental health issues who have been discharged from Tier 4
- Co-develop compatible sub-regional approaches aligned with ICS footprints, as well as borough-based approaches across London to build a picture of the market across the region, and the costs associated with it.
- Further survey work undertaken by LIIA to understand what needs can be met by London providers and develop a comprehensive view of the market to set clear aims for future provision

Building relationships

- Develop capacity across the region to support conversations between LAs and providers to improve trust, knowledge and transparency
- At an LA and sub-regional level, build relationships between providers and other local provision such as APs to improve overall wrap around support offer and outcomes for young people in local placements
- Develop a model of support for providers that raises their confidence in managing risk and therefore raises the confidence of LAs placing with them

Challenging assumptions and practice

- Adopt a strengths-based approach to language in referrals and involve children and young people in writing profiles to contextualise their behaviour and needs for providers
- Co-develop solutions-focused training for the whole workforce to tackle assumptions around out of borough placements
- Include external partners in this training such as the police, health colleagues and providers

Understanding the market

- Develop a London-wide directory of provision that includes information on all specialist provision and uniform costs, building on LIIA's existing work on Dynamic Sufficiency
- Progress the work being undertaken by LIIA to develop a pan-London vehicle for engaging with the market, including sub-regional joint frameworks where necessary
- Further in-depth work with local providers to understand the impact of Ofsted registration on their ability to accept placements

We acknowledge that even if all of these recommendations are fulfilled, then there would still be a shortfall in available placements therefore there will be a need to develop further provision across London which takes into consideration the findings of this research.

Introduction

The current environment is one in which budgetary pressures across London Boroughs for both High Needs and Children's Social Care are acute, and becoming greater all the time. Practitioners report a growing complexity of needs among children and young people, not least as the full impact of the Covid pandemic gradually becomes known. In this context, the very high costs needed to meet the placement needs of a small sub-section of young people, is an issue of serious concern. At the same time, despite the high costs, outcomes for these hard to place young people are often poor. At a time of high demand and increasing complexity it is essential that London boroughs are able to make most efficient and effective use of the placement and wider resources available. However, initial research undertaken by LIIA suggests that this is not the case.

Research undertaken by Isos Partnership on behalf of London Councils in 2017–18 identified myriad pressures on high needs and children's social care budgets in London Boroughs¹. The research aimed to identify some of the root causes and make recommendations for local, regional and national actions to alleviate those pressures. One area identified for further Pan-London focus was around commissioning placements to meet high cost, low incidence needs. The local authorities that contributed to the research frequently cited the difficulties associated with finding appropriate and reasonably costed placements for young people with the most complex needs. They questioned whether more collaborative, and cross-border commissioning approaches may allow for better and more cost-effective outcomes. Sub-national and regional commissioning bodies for placements have also been picked up as a recommendation in the recent Children's Social Care Market Study published by the Competition and Markets Authority².

LIIA has since undertaken further in-depth work around the issue of commissioning placements for complex needs in both special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and Children's Social Care (CSC). This work identified a discrepancy between the places potentially available in London, and how these places are being used (or not used) by London Boroughs. In short, the further investigations conducted by LIIA have identified that less than half the available placements in London are used by London children. Yet at the same time, borough commissioning teams continue to report a shortage of placements.

The focus of this research was therefore to look deeper at the issue of placement supply and demand, to better understand the barriers preventing existing placements in London being used for London children as well as the specific needs not being met by the current available provision. The research focused specifically on placements for looked after children in residential children's homes. This research will inform how LIIA supports sub-regional commissioning practice going forward, as well as boroughs own approaches to commissioning placements for those looked after children with more complex needs who might need a residential placement. The research will enable stronger dialogue between local commissioners and those placement providers. As such, this research is a timely and necessary next step in supporting better commissioning of placements for across London, with the potential both to improve value for money and importantly improve placement stability and outcomes for children and young people.

1 Isos Partnership, Under Pressure: an exploration of demand and spending in children's social care and for children with special educational needs in London, 2019

2 Competition and Markets Authority, Children's Social Care Market Study, 2022

Methodology

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Isos Partnership were commissioned by LIA to undertake research to explore the factors behind the low utilisation rate of London provision by children from London. Specifically, we were asked to test the validity of six hypotheses set by LIA following previous research. These hypotheses were:

- under-utilisation is a result of the available provision not matching the provision required to meet the needs of the children requiring placements.
- under-utilisation is a result of the quality of the provision not meeting the requirements of the placing authority.
- under-utilisation is a result of the practice of local authority placement managers and/or social workers.
- under-utilisation is a result of the cost of provision compared to alternatives.
- under-utilisation is a result of attitude to risk, either by the provider or the placing authority, possibly also linked to inspection.
- under-utilisation is a result of the provider's ability to field staff with the required skills and experience, potentially linked to recruitment challenges.

In order to carry out this research we developed a three-phase methodology, involving both quantitative and qualitative elements, which is described in detail below.

Phase 1: Preparation and understanding the context

Context Review of Literature

During phase 1 we undertook a short review of the relevant literature and research that has been conducted in this area to fully understand the context in which London Boroughs are working. The outcomes for looked after children and young people has strong correlations to the quality of placements and the links that they are able to maintain with their family and community. However, evidence suggests that particularly for London children, out of borough placements and out of London placements are widely utilised. Subsequently, in order to improve the rate of the quantity and quality of London placements available to London children, we must first seek to understand the factors contributing to the underutilisation of London placements. This review provided a summary of evidence in relation to the placement market and the needs of children and young people requiring foster care or residential placements.

Parameters were set for literature dated within the last 11 years, and for policy focused literature, the parameter for searches was set within the last 5 years. From initial searches, it proved difficult to source literature solely focused on London, consequently, the search was opened up to England. Articles were selected based on the content of information regarding London placements and relation to the review objectives. In total, 12 articles were used for this review.

The research sought to answer a series of questions:

- Is there research evidence/literature available on how placement commissioners make their decisions about where to place a child, and what does research say best practice looks like in this regard?
- What, if anything, does the research say about the unique features of the London market for placements?
- Is there any research on the benefits or risks, in terms of outcomes for young people, of placing them close to home versus placing them far from home? This might be particularly relevant for young people exhibiting at-risk behaviours.
- What research evidence is there about the range of placement costs, particularly for higher risk young people, and how these differ by region, age, behaviour?
- Is there research evidence on the young people who are hardest to place and why?
- Is there any research which looks at provider behaviours, capacity or skills and what leads them to either accept or reject a request for placement?
- How has Covid impacted on the market for LAC placements?

Preliminary Data Analysis

Alongside the context review of literature, we analysed and interrogated the evidence and data that the Pan London Commissioning Programme has developed on the issue of the under-utilisation of placements through the Pan-London Snapshot. This analysis had a specific focus on whether any themes or trends emerge from the data on placements in terms of costs, geography, the type of placement and the needs catered for. At this stage we also interviewed key policy officers within the programme and those who have been involved in the follow up work to gain a full understanding of the findings to date. Where possible this data was triangulated with and supported by publicly available data such as Children looked after in England including adoptions, 2021.

Developing a Sample of LAs

Based on the literature review and our preliminary analyses we then worked to develop the topic guide and interview framework for use in the fieldwork stage. We ensured that the questions directly addressed the six hypotheses as well as any further issues or themes suggested by the context review. We developed an analytical framework to explore the strength of the evidence in relation to each of the hypotheses and to identify any other emerging themes.

We worked closely with LIA to identify a sample of London Boroughs to invite to take part in more in-depth fieldwork. We aimed to include local authorities who have been involved in the initial follow up work and include some which may have had less representation to date, including from the East of the region. This involved using a sample framework to identify a good and representative spread against our two primary sample criteria:

- a) Rates of looked after children
- b) Percentage of places either void or used by non-London LAs

Rates of Looked After Children – 31st March 2020	Proportion of places which are void or used by non-London LAs			
		Low	Medium	High
	High	Lambeth Lewisham Barking and Dagenham Croydon Haringey	Greenwich Islington	Hammersmith and Fulham
	Medium	Bexley Hounslow	Bromley	Tower Hamlets Enfield Hillingdon Newham
	Low	Camden Kingston-upon-Thames	Barnet Brent Havering Merton Redbridge	Ealing Harrow Richmond-upon-Thames

To note: London Boroughs for which placement data was not available through the LIA data collection exercise were not included in the 'long list'.

We were also looking for a reasonably balanced sample in terms of size, deprivation, commissioning partnership, geographical location and ethnic diversity to ensure there were broadly representative of London as a whole. Once we had established the six key authorities through the initial sampling framework we then analysed these across additional key metrics.

LA	Deprivation	Size	Commissioning	Ethnic Diversity	Inner/Outer
1	H	M	SLCP ³	H	Inner
2	M	H	SLCP	L	Outer
3	H	H	NELCP ⁴	H	Inner
4	M	L	None ⁵	M	Inner
5	L	H	CA ⁶	L	Outer
6	M	H	CA	H	Outer

3 South London Commissioning Partnership

4 North East London Commissioning Partnership

5 There is currently no commissioning partnership in place in North London however in the past this has been delivered through the North London Children's Efficiency Partnership (NLCEP)

6 Commissioning Alliance

Phase 2: Fieldwork

Phase 2 consisted of the qualitative fieldwork activity which included:

A virtual social worker roundtable

This roundtable was facilitated through the Leadership in Colour (LinC) reference group, and twelve social workers from this group with experience of placing young people in residential provision participated. The social workers included representatives from boroughs across London, including those not taking part in the deep-dive virtual fieldwork.

The purpose of the roundtable was to explore some of the practical factors behind decision making on placements, as well as providing space to explore the barriers that social workers perceive to placing young people in London. Based on our initial data analysis and the key child support requirements that seemed most prevalent in placements outside of London, we developed three profiles of young people to discuss with social workers. These profiles included factors such as absconding/anti-social behaviour, CCE/CSE, ASD/LD/SEMH and self-harm.

Virtual fieldwork with six representative London Boroughs

In our in-depth fieldwork in the six representative London Boroughs we were seeking to gain a greater understanding of the local reasons for low utilisation rates and the barriers to placing in London.

We delivered semi-structured interviews to a wide variety of key internal stakeholders one-to-one or via small group. These were determined by the capacity of the individual LAs participating.

Across each local authority we aimed to speak to the DCS, the AD responsible for Looked After Children, the lead for children's placement commissioning and the lead for children's services finances. Given the challenges of the impact of COVID-19 on staff availability and local authorities' need to balance competing deadlines during March we were unable to speak to all the leads in each local area. However, we were able to meet with a good spread of colleagues across the LAs spanning different areas of Children's Social Care, including those outside our initial scope of stakeholders so we are confident that we have collected robust qualitative data.

During the fieldwork delivery we spoke with:

- Five Directors of Children's Services
- A Director of Children's Social Care for Corporate Parenting and Disability
- A Director for Early Help
- A Head of Service for Children Looked After (0–16)
- A Head of Market Management for Adults and Children
- Three Assistant Directors including those responsible for Children's Social Care and Corporate Parenting
- An Integrated Commissioning Director
- A Placement Commissioning Team Manager
- A Commissioning Officer
- An Access to Resources Team Manager
- Three Team Managers or Social Workers responsible for placing children
- A Lead for Children's Services Finance

Additional interviews with key stakeholders

To supplement the qualitative data gathered from local areas and social workers through the roundtable and local deep-dives, we also sought out additional interviews with stakeholders in collaboration with colleagues from LIIA. This included an interview with a Children's Services Commissioner at the Commissioning Alliance who is currently undertaking direct work with providers to understand their thoughts in relation to utilisation rates across London. A provider roundtable was included as part of the initial methodology, however in consultation with LIIA and the Pan-London Steering Group it was agreed that this resource should be used for social worker roundtable. However, at the social worker roundtable and throughout our interviews with key stakeholders the importance of the provider perspective was raised so the additional interview was sourced to ensure the voice of providers came through in the findings.



Background and context

Key findings from the context review of literature

- Balancing needs and cost; while cost was identified as a key consideration, local authorities stated that the central concern was finding a placement to meet the child's assessed needs⁷. The decision to place out of borough was usually attributed to finding a placement that would meet the young person's needs and provide a safe and supportive environment⁸.
- Placements varied considerably in the extent to which they were out of area, with over a quarter within the greater London boundary and 43% in the south east or home counties regions of England⁹.
- Some regions have far more places than others, for example the North West has 23% of all places in children's homes and 19% of looked-after children, while London has just 6% of places in children's homes and 12% of looked-after children¹⁰.
- The cons outweighed the pros, in terms of outcomes for young people placed far from home. Although some research found evidence of social worker's narratives revealing improvements in young people's behaviour and emotional states related to influence of placement, many more picked up on the fact that oversight could become reactive when problems surface or limited to statutory visits and occasional monitoring visits. Other studies also identified capacity issues for receiving authorities for necessary services such as CAMHS or PRUs¹¹.
- Where challenging behaviours were often the issue; the cases described by social workers highlighted the range of placement types and individuals for whom an out of area placement might be deemed appropriate. Social workers tended to think that the needs of this group were greater than those of children placed within borough boundaries¹².
- There appeared to be an association between the degree of specialisation required and the distance of the placement.
- There was a high level of agreement in terms of the reasons for use of out of area placements. Interviewees emphasised that appropriate placements were not always available in-house, and that in order to meet the needs of specific groups of children and young people – described as children with disabilities; children and young people with specific cultural needs; complex needs; sibling groups; those who had experienced or were at risk of gang involvement, offending or sexual exploitation; those who were abusive to others¹³.
- It was highlighted that large consortia in regions with high supply can have unintended consequences because those providers who are not on the framework are unable to obtain business locally. To survive they will have to seek business from local authorities outside the region. They may also be more inclined to accept children whose needs they may struggle to meet in order to maximise occupancy. Overall, this may result in a concentration of children with complex needs, living a long way away from their original homes, in residential settings that the receiving authority deem to be unsuitable for their own looked after children¹⁴.

7 Munro, E. R. et al, Children's Homes: Understanding the Market and Use of Out of Authority Placements, 2014

8 Brodie, I. et al, Out-of-Borough Placements for London's Looked After Children: A Research Study, 2014

9 Ibid

10 Competition and Markets Authority, Children's Social Care Market Study: Interim Report, 2021

11 Brodie, I. et al. 2014, Munro E. R. et al. 2014, Holmes, L., Children's Social Care Cost Pressures and Variations in Unit Costs: Research Report, 2021, Schofield, G. et al, Part of the Family: Planning for Permanence in Long-term Family Foster Care, 2012, Humphris, R. & Sigona, N., Outsourcing the 'Best Interests' of Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children in the Era of Austerity, 2017

12 Brodie, I. et al, 2014

13 Ibid

14 Monro, E. R. et al, 2014

- Over the Covid-19 pandemic more significant problems arose from a shortage of mother/ family and baby placements and from the behaviours of older children and young people who had found the constraints of lockdown too much to bear. There was little that could be done to correct the former deficit but when placements broke down for the reasons that children were beyond carers' control they were usually moved to residential provision, where it was available¹⁵.

Following completion of our initial review of the literature, the Competition and Markets Authority published the full Children's Social Care Market Study¹⁶ which has interesting findings which are relevant to our current research. Therefore, although the interim report was included in the literature review it is important to reflect on some of the key findings of the full report including:

- Over the past 5 years, the private sector's share of children's homes in England has risen by 26% while numbers of LA homes have declined by 5%. Therefore, because of rise in looked after children, there is also an increased gap between the number of children requiring placements and number of LA and third sector placements available.
- Capacity is being disproportionately added in areas that are already "oversupplied" such as the North West which saw an increase of 30% of new placements, as opposed to London which only saw an increase of 4%.
- There is an increased demand for residential care and specialist foster care related to the needs of young people coming into care. At the same time, these demanded services are struggling to recruit and retain key staff, particularly in London and the South East where average wages and house prices are higher driving workers into alternative employment and impacting on the number of foster carers with additional bedrooms.
- There is no clear quality difference across private and LA children's placements.



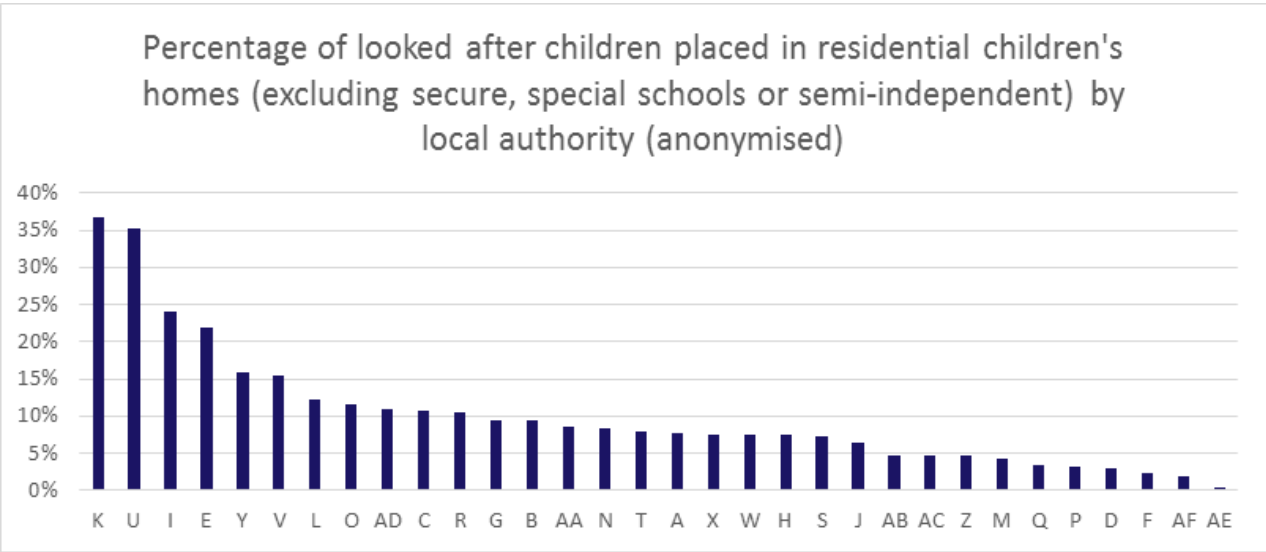
¹⁵ Baginsky, M. & Manthorpe, J, Managing through COVID-19: the experiences of children's social care in 15 English Local Authorities, 2020

¹⁶ CMA, Children's Social Care Market Study, 2022

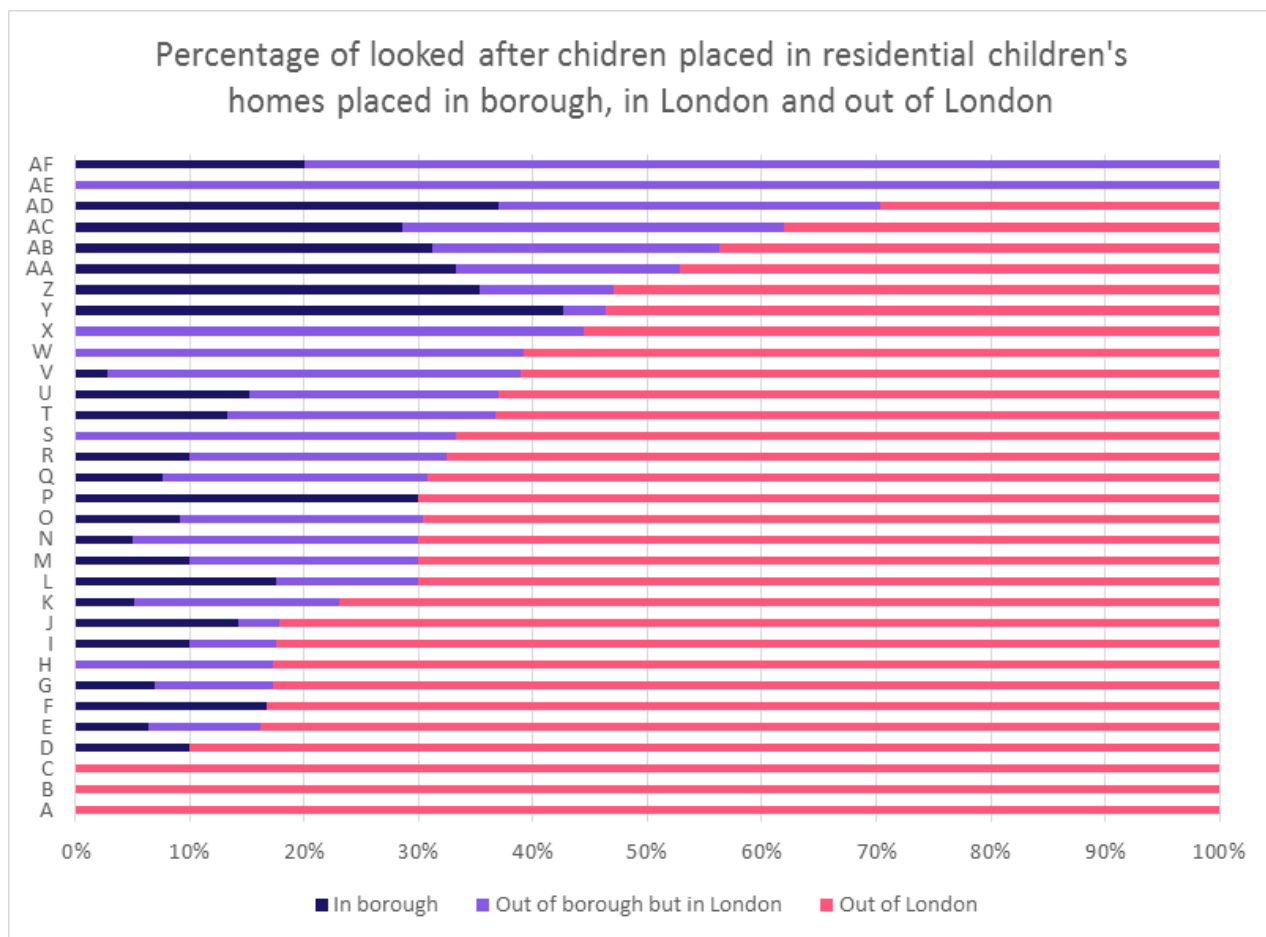
Overall Findings

General data analysis

The data analysis of the pan-London snap shot indicates that there are 790 placements by London boroughs in either externally provided or in-house residential children's homes. Of these, 532 young people (67% of the cohort) were placed outside London and 258 (33%) placed in London. At the same time, we also know that there are 568 externally provided children's homes places in London of which only 35% is filled by London young people.



Of those looked after children who are placed in residential children's homes, there is significant variation in the percentage placed in-borough and in-London with inner London boroughs are more likely to place in London but out of borough. Outer London boroughs are more likely to place in borough, but less likely to place in London but out of borough. However, importantly there is significant variation across London in those boroughs who place outside of London. Based on the available data this ranges from 0% of children placed out of London in 2 LAs to 100% of children placed out of London in 3 other LAs. Inner London Boroughs collectively place 67.8% out of London whilst Outer London Boroughs collectively place 70.8% out of London. However, it is important to note in this analysis that there are substantive differences in the size and overall population of looked after children between Inner and Outer London which may impact on the overall figures.

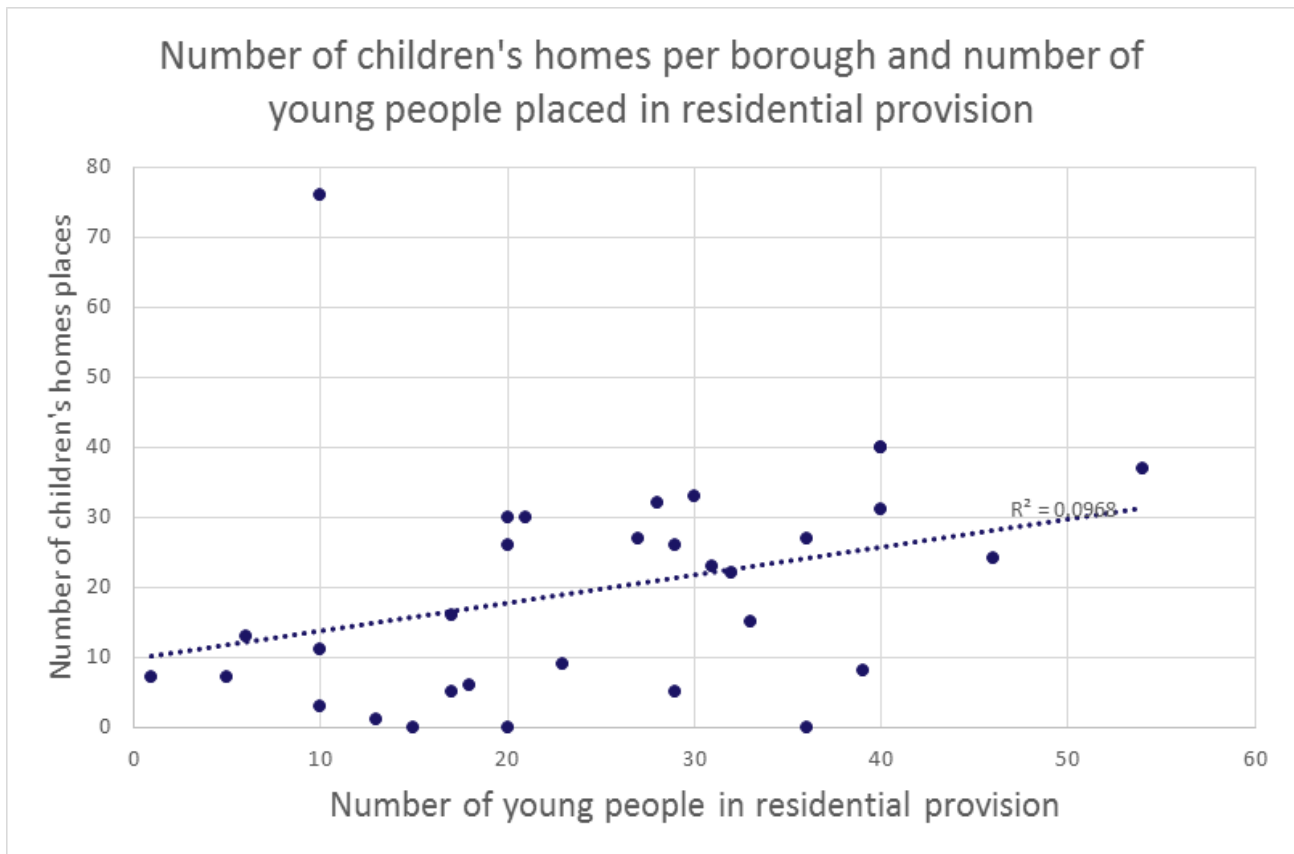


The characteristics of young people vary by placement type as set out below.

	Residential children's homes (externally provided)	In house residential children's home	In house fostering	IFA
Number of placements	772	63	2679	3271
Average age	14.8 years	16.0 years	11.7 years	12.4 years
Average percentage not White British	75%	62%	73%	76%
Average percentage male	58%	62%	53%	55%

Placement availability

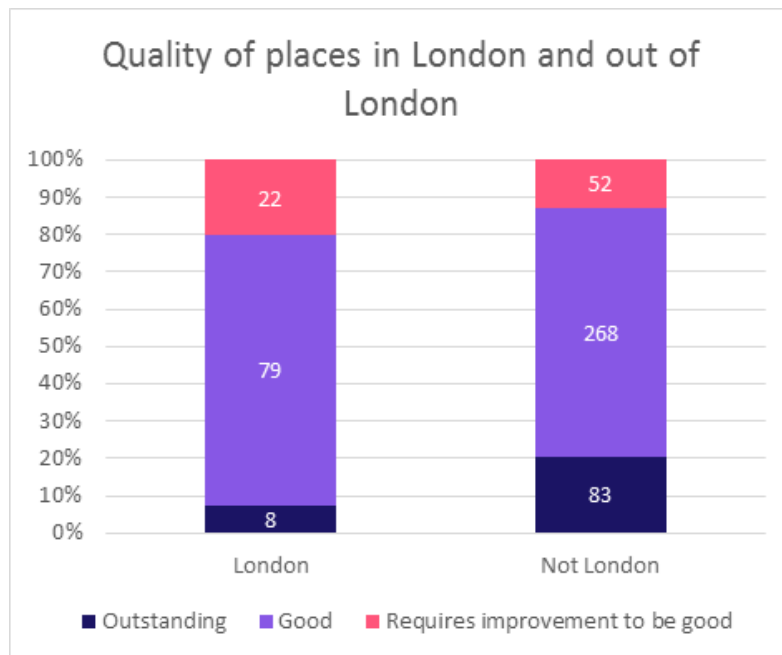
There is significant variation in the number of children's homes places in each borough. On average, Outer London boroughs have higher numbers of residential children's home places, 25.7 per borough on average, compared to 13.5 per borough on average in Inner London. The association between the number of children's homes places per borough and the number of young people placed in residential homes is weak and becomes weaker if we only look at externally provided children's homes.



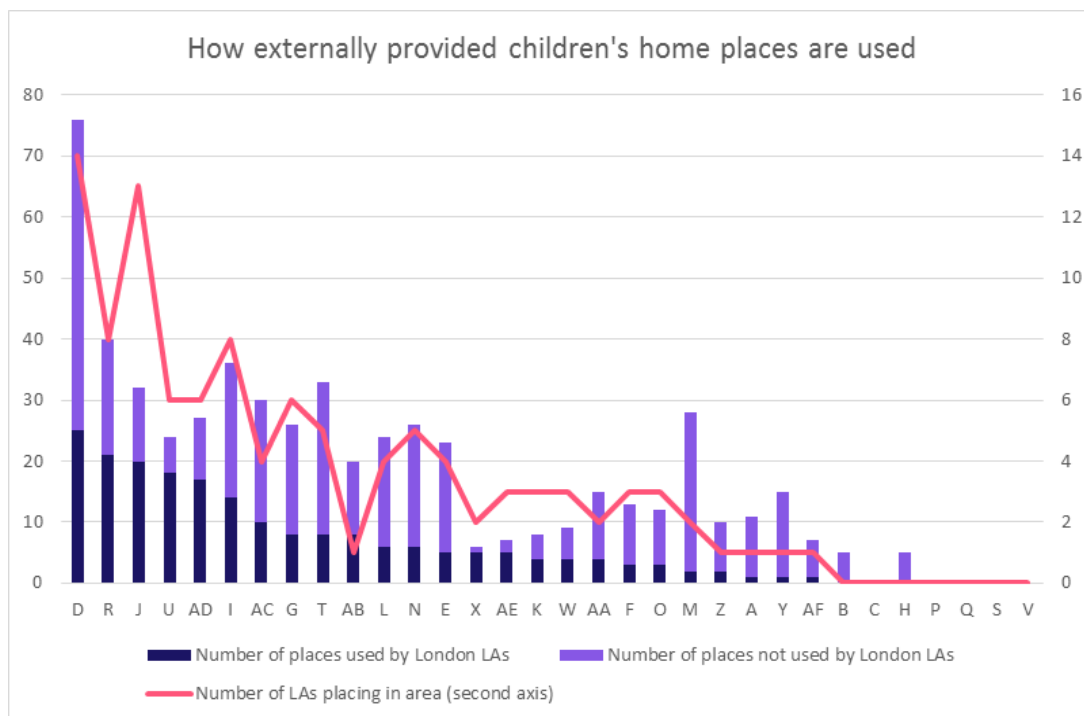
We have data on 536 places in residential children's homes. Of these, 117 are in London and 419 outside of London. This covers places in 47 local authorities, of which 35 are not in London and 12 are in London.

The most frequent destinations are Hampshire, Essex, Kent, Shropshire, Cambridgeshire, Telford and Wrekin, Norfolk, Cumbria. Together these 8 LAs account for just under half the placements for which we have information.

We have Ofsted ratings for 109 London placements and 403 non-London placements. In London 7% were outstanding compared with 21% outside London. On the flip side, 20% in London requires improvement compared with 13% out of London. In terms of size, London residential homes on average slightly smaller – 4.9 places per home compared with 5.2 outside London. This suggests that availability of suitable placements as well as the possibility of more high-quality provision outside of London could be a factor in placement decision making.



How are placements used?



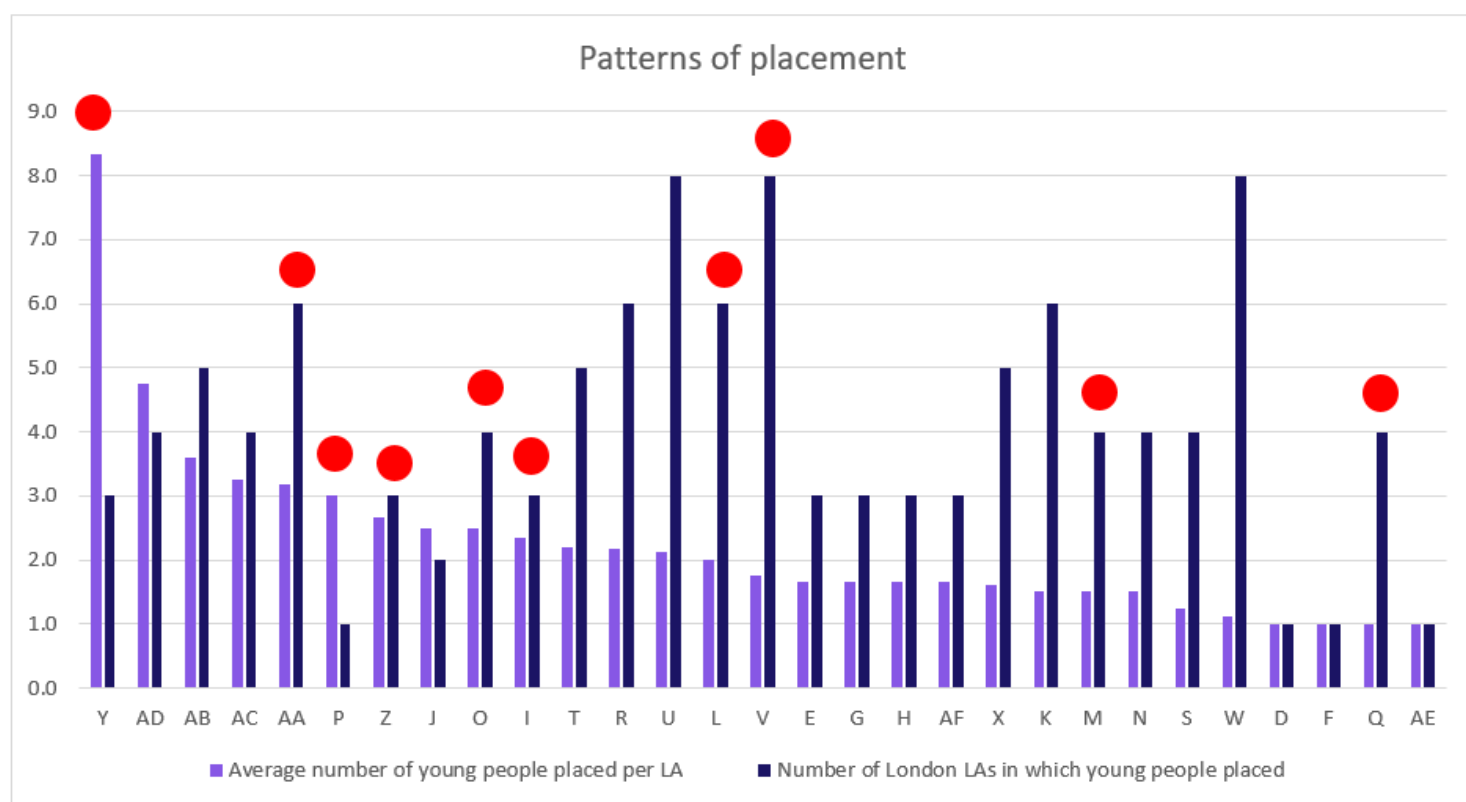
Overall there are 568 externally provided children's home places in London, of which 201 (35%) are used by London boroughs. For individual boroughs, there is significant variation in the percentage of places available used by London LAs ranging from 83% to 0%.

In addition, there is also significant variation in the number of individual London LAs placing in single boroughs – so at the high end 14 boroughs place in Redbridge. At the lower end, there are boroughs in which no London boroughs make placements.

Looking at the number of LAs in which each borough places young people and the average number of young people placed in each LA, may be a useful indication of commissioning approaches. In general, if LAs are spot commissioning we would expect to see single placements distributed quite widely across a large number of places and boroughs. If LAs are developing strategic relationships with individual providers we might expect to see concentrations of multiple placements in individual boroughs. Of the 14 LAs which average more than 2 young people placed per LA, eight of these have their own in-house provision.

The 11 LAs with in-house provision place an average of 5.7 young people per LA in in-house provision, but this ranges from 22 to 1. Only two of the LAs with in-house provision also place young people with other in-borough providers.

Those LAs with higher than average numbers of young people placed per borough which do not have in-house provision, tend to place a higher number in externally provided in-borough provision, suggesting a more strategic relationship has been created with in-borough providers. A small number of LAs appear to have created a more strategic relationship with one other borough, which is normally a neighbouring borough, or a borough such as Redbridge or Lewisham with a high number of externally provided children's homes places.



● LAs with in-house residential provision

Who are the children and young people most likely to be placed out of London?

Through our qualitative and quantitative research, it has become clear that there are several profiles of young people who are most likely to be placed outside of London due to the complexity of their needs. In the Pan-London snapshot there were several key child support requirements that were most prevalent in out of borough placements. These include:

- Absconding and offending behaviour
- Gang affiliation, involvement in county lines or exposure to CCE and CSE
- ASD/LD/SEMH
- MH/Self-harm discharged from Tier 4

These profiles were also identified by stakeholders interviewed as part of our fieldwork delivery as the cohorts of children and young people least likely to be accommodated by London provision. The profile with the highest level of consensus was young people exposed to CCE or CSE, with all six local authorities raising concerns about the capacity of provision in London to meet the specific needs required by this cohort.

Furthermore, two thirds of our fieldwork LAs also identified young people with ASD, LD or SEMH as another cohort who were likely to be placed out of London. One local authority raised particular concerns of young people with high needs ASD and SEMH who are non-verbal, display behaviour that challenges and their needs cannot be met in a special school needing extra support, in some cases 3:1. On top of this, one local area also flagged that children are being diagnosed from a far earlier age, sometimes from age 3-4, leading to an increasing cohort of children.

Four local authorities also shared concerns around young people with severe mental health challenges who are discharged from hospital but don't meet CAMHS bed criteria. One local area specifically raised concerns about the inability to meet the needs of teenage girls with mental health conditions who need to stay near their families in London.

There was also some consensus that absconding or offending behaviour was linked to greater rates of out of London placements, with two local authorities picking up on this profile. This was also identified in the social worker roundtable, with a particular example of young people having bail conditions precluding them from being placed within the boundaries of the M25.



The barriers to placing in London

The perceived benefits of placing out of London

Another key theme that emerged out of our qualitative research is that there is not a universal view that placing in London is better and that it is not necessarily prioritised by the system in all places. For practitioners, there are several perceived benefits of placing out of London which might be driving placement decisions. For certain cohorts of looked after children there is a belief within the workforce that a 'fresh start' outside of London may provide the best outcomes. For example, several practitioners within LAs thought that for those with gang affiliations, moving out of London might be one factor in a good placement. This perception was guided by the belief that sometimes moving to somewhere different can act as a break and a fresh start. Ideally, this would be managed so that the whole family can move out of London together to avoid severing ties. However, there was an acknowledgement that it needs to be part of a broader strategy for the young person otherwise they will just travel back to borough. Another practitioner felt that, for a young person at risk of gang exposure, placing outside of London acted as a 'witness protection' type of model, particularly for those at risk of harm or significant harm. In this scenario, stakeholders also raised that the decision to place young people exposed to CCE and CSE is also supported by external agencies, such as the police.

However, there is limited evidence that moving a young person out of borough actually leads to improved outcomes as identified in the context review¹⁷. Several practitioners have picked up on the prevalence of this notion in practice. One Assistant Director stated that in their borough three or four years ago there was a wisdom that if you could get young people in gangs or associated with CSE out of London and into a rural location it would be better. That view sometimes persists, although placing young people at a distance doesn't work for that cohort as when they go missing they come back to the borough which highlights the importance of local, relationship-based work for at-risk teenagers. Similarly, a DCS in another borough raised the need to challenge the naïve notion that placing a child at a distance and removing them from their external surroundings solves the problems therein. Instead, solving the problem needs to come from the young person and keeping them as close as possible to home, school, family and their social worker supports capacity to do that work.

There was an acknowledgement across fieldwork partners that there are some short-term benefits that can be derived from out of London placements. Placing at a distance may be preferable on a short-term basis where a young person has very significant risks to them from people in the community to manage the safeguarding risks. Additionally, a placement may be sought outside of London if they can provide access to specialist services, such as sexual abuse services which could be anywhere in the country. Some of these specialist provisions are designed to be rural and isolated to disrupt contact from exploiters and therefore require young people to be placed at distance from London. However, there seems to be a disconnect between the frontline practitioners organising placements and senior leaders within local authorities as to how to manage these external placements and for how long.

17 Brodie, I. et al. 2014, Munro E. R. et al. 2014, Holmes, L. 2021, Schofield, G. et al. 2012, Humphris, R. & Sigona, N., 2017

Lack of specific provision

Throughout the fieldwork interviews, stakeholders identified several key barriers preventing practitioners from placing children in London provision. One of the most common challenges that colleagues from local authorities identified was the lack of specific, specialist provision that could meet the needs of this cohort of children and young people. A specific gap that was raised was the shortfall in the foster carer market. At the social worker roundtable, it was flagged that there is a lack of foster carers with sufficient understanding of contextual safeguarding to keep young people safe. A challenge with this lack of specialist foster carers is that it leads to young people being placed in inappropriate foster care arrangements that breakdown and lead to the local authority having to find emergency residential placements in an unplanned way. One local authority stated that when foster placements break down in this way, the young person is often required to leave that day meaning the local authority is reliant on the available supply of the London market.

There is also a lack of residential provision that has the necessary wrap-around support to meet the needs of young people. One local area has a joint residential programme with several neighbouring boroughs and a provider that has 5 homes locally, however they have not placed a single young person in those homes as they are not able to meet the complexity of needs that their young people have. Another local area was also not convinced that adequate specialist placements exist that offer the required wrap around social support which often leads to the local authority having to source and pay extra for any additional support. This concern around the lack of children's homes addressing targeted specialisms such as gang affiliation, CSE or offering therapeutic support for mental health was shared in other boroughs. One stakeholder noted that a lot of the London homes are "general EBD" which stick rigidly to their "statement of purpose". However, it is not clear for placing authorities what "general EBD" means in terms of young people's needs and how that relates to Ofsted registration. Without that clear definition, there is a risk that providers are just drawing the lines themselves.

Across all of the fieldwork boroughs there was consensus that there are good providers within London, and that the issue is therefore with quantity not quality. Commissioners and senior managers shared the view that they never have a significant choice in places for residential placements and therefore decisions are driven by what is available rather than considerations of distance or costs. However, findings from our data analysis does suggest there is less outstanding provision and more placements that require improvements in London than out of London. In spite of this, it seems as though quality of provision is not driving more out of London placements.



Challenges with the market

There were also universal concerns across the local authorities that the market in London is not fit for purpose with one stakeholder saying "we have collectively slid into the position where we allow the market to make decisions for our children". Within the marketplace in London there are 33 local authorities competing against one another for specialist places for complex adolescents, causing the market to be led by supply and demand. There are specific difficulties that arise from there being a market led system. Firstly, where demand is higher than supply, there's the ability for providers to keep increasing those costs beyond what is effectively affordable. Additionally, one lead for Children's Services Finance commented that if the provider has demand over the available spaces they can almost lower their specification of needs so that they do not cater to the same level of need if they had vacant spaces. Therefore, if the market can pick and choose, they will choose easier young people.

Within the current private led market, LAs do not feel they have the levers to engage effectively with the market and shape what is available. Therefore, as long as the market remains unfit for purpose local authorities will continue to place children outside of London as the existing market is unwilling to accept them. Several stakeholders raised the need for there to be central management of that London market and cost control and buying specialism to support LAs in this. A pan-London vehicle for engaging with the market could lead to increase needs-led commissioning based on the population. This aligns with the findings and recommendations from the Children's Social Care Market Study which identified the need for sub-national and regional commissioning bodies to support local authorities' capacity to engage with the market¹⁸.

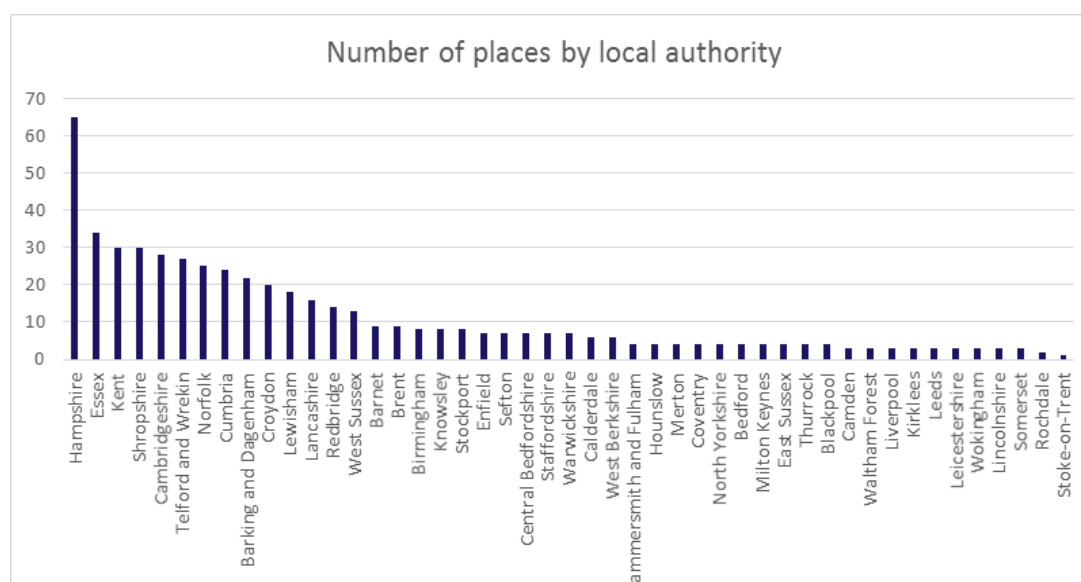
Behaviour of commissioners

Another barrier for successfully arranging a placement within London is the lack of accurate information about quality and quantity of placements across the whole region and how this is impacting on the behaviour of commissioners. One local authority raised that they rely on Ofsted ratings and team's knowledge about what placements work and don't work to build a picture of what's successful and not successful. This is supplemented by their local knowledge of complaints, compliments and success and outcomes for children for specific providers but there is limited pool to choose from. There are clearly pockets of knowledge held by commissioning teams across London based on anecdotal and experiential evidence of particular providers but no clear way of sharing this more widely. Therefore, commissioners will often place where they have placed successfully before and where they have relationships with providers, including with providers outside of London. Therefore, the decision to place out of borough or out of London becomes self-fulfilling.

The relationship between providers and LAs is also a driving factor in placement patterns. Commissioners from multiple local authorities stated that having a good relationship with providers is critical and that this positive relationship is often built up over years. This often leads to building high level of trust and reliance on particular providers. This trust not only allows placing authorities to feel confident of the outcomes for young people, and for the providers to feel they are getting accurate information about needs and post placement support the authority will provide. Although commissioners have good relationships with some providers in London, many also have relationships with providers in surrounding areas including Kent, Essex, Norfolk. Overall, they agreed they would rather use providers who they know, and where they are confident about the quality, rather than use a new untried home, even if that enabled a London placement.

Evidence of positive relationships with providers outside of London is clear in our data analysis.

Through the Pan-London snapshot, we have data on 536 places in residential children's homes, of these 117 are in London and 419 are outside of London. This covers places in 47 local authorities, of which 35 are not in London. The eight most frequent destinations used are in Hampshire, Essex, Kent Shropshire, Cambridgeshire, Telford and Wrekin, Norfolk and Cumbria. Together, these eight local authorities account for just under half the placements for which we have information.



The data analysis also confirms a pattern of placements that involves high levels of spot-purchasing in a large number of boroughs. In general, if local authorities are spot commissioning we would expect to see single placements distributed quite widely across a large number of places and boroughs. Eight London authorities meet this placement pattern and on average they place 71% of looked after children in residential placements outside of London.

Group	Description	Number of Boroughs that fit the description	Average % of young people placed in borough	Average % in London but OOB	Average number of London LAs in which young people placed	Average number of young people placed per LA
1	Boroughs which make very little use of residential children's home provision at all (<3% of LAC cohort placed in residential CH)	4	12%	45%	1.5	1.2
2	Boroughs with in-house provision (and more than 3% of LAC cohort in residential CH)	11	21%	16%	4.3	2.9
3	Boroughs which appear to have a more strategic relationship with external providers in borough, or in a nearby borough (average +2 placements per LA)	6	20%	23%	4.8	2.8
4	Boroughs which appear to have a more scattergun approach – placing young people across a wide number of LAs	8	3%	25%	4.5	1.5
5	Boroughs which place no young people in London	3	0%	0%	0	0

Practice issues related to referral forms/profiles

In several interviews, there were reflections raised that in our current practice of completing referral forms there is often an over-emphasis on the challenges of the young person and not the positives, which then gets into a negative spiral. Local authorities are aware that when providers see a lot of risks they are less likely to want to accept the child, therefore further work needs to be done to utilise trauma-informed practice when sharing a young person's history and presenting behaviours. Some local authorities have begun work to change the way they write profiles about young people, adopting strengths-based approaches and altering the language they use. One LA said that profiles are now generally reflective of the young person's predicament, and it is emphasised that behaviours are contextualised to avoid brash statements that may impact on placements and searching quite significantly. Another local authority has trialled asking a young person to write their own profile with a change in language to "what I need is..". This has proved effective in shifting the mindset of providers.

Feedback from providers confirms that the way in which we share information between LAs and providers could be improved to support more placements being accepted for London children. As providers receive so many referrals they often have to make quick snap judgements on requests. If inadequate information is provided on the young person's needs and what's expected of the provider they are likely to reject as they don't have the time to negotiate information. There is also a lack of information on what other partners are providing/other interventions the young person is receiving. Providers are unable to get a true picture of what is expected from them as the placement provider and what is being provided externally without this information.



Costs

Whilst colleagues in local authorities acknowledge the increase in cost for residential placements since 2021, there is agreement that the issue is about availability, quality and capacity of placements in London. If we could overcome these challenges collectively then financial challenges could be alleviated.

Currently, local authorities feel they have so little choice in placements that finance can't play a role in accepting placements. Senior leaders acknowledged that they wouldn't stop a child accessing a placement they needed because of cost, however this is carefully managed through placement panels and regular monitoring.

However, one LA did flag that non-identification of placement linked to the lack of specific provision in London generally requires them to go down bespoke route via spot-purchasing. This is a challenge because bespoke provision has a very significant premium in terms of cost and a degradation in terms of appropriateness and quality outcome.

Barriers for Providers

The barriers to increasing utilisation of London provision are not all from the local authority, many exist within providers. Feedback from both placing authorities and providers pointed to concerns around Ofsted inspections impacting on their decisions to accept placement requests for young people with complex needs. There seem to be a few factors behind the higher risk aversion for this cohort of young people. Firstly, providers are less inclined to take on young people with more complex needs, including those with deprivations of liberties, as they are unsure whether their behaviour may impact on their Ofsted rating. One placing authority said this was particularly true if providers already have other young people in placements with a similar profile. Secondly, the risk appetite of external providers seems to be lower for young people from their immediate local authority. One authority had tried to develop a relationship with a local externally run residential unit but they provider resisted taking their young people, even though they accepted similar young people from other LAs. It is possible this is due to their concerns of the young people being targeted by exploiters more easily.

Providers are also struggling to recruit and retain the necessary staff to meet the needs of this cohort of young people. The Children's Social Care Market Study has highlighted that this challenge is particularly pertinent in the South East and London as the average wage is higher and there are more employment opportunities in other fields¹⁹. The London market is also uniquely made up of more SME providers which do not have large staff banks for providers to draw up, therefore they can struggle to have the staff available when an emergency or same-day placement request is made. Therefore, the decision to accept or reject a referral request is not always made on the basis of risk appetite, but rather staff capacity to meet need.

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Why is it important for London children to stay in London?

Throughout our fieldwork, stakeholders raised several key reasons why it is important to find appropriate placements for London children within London. One key factor is the cultural diversity that London offers. A high proportion of looked after children in London are from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds and we need to consider the impact of placing them in residential placements outside of London in less ethnically diverse areas. Placing young people in considerably less diverse areas could create more of a disconnect with the culture and perpetuate the racism that they may experience.

Another factor raised was that when young people get older they are likely to return to their home borough. Therefore, if you can manage placements locally it is better for the long-term outcomes of the young person as work will have been done locally to manage the risks they face and identify the support they need. However, there was an acknowledgement that sometimes the best provision for a young person exists outside of London. In this instance, a London placement would not be made at the expense of quality, however a plan should be developed to bring the young person back to London in a planned way to support positive long-term outcomes.

There is a nuance in how we understand relative distance of placements, particularly between Outer London boroughs and Inner London boroughs. For example one of our Outer London fieldwork boroughs did agree that placing inside London is important, however placing in a neighbouring authority just outside London might be preferable to placing in a borough on the other side of London as relatively it is far closer to the young person's home.

Many of the LAs who engaged in the fieldwork identified the importance of keeping children in London and the processes they follow try to secure this. However, the challenge is that they are not receiving placement offers from London providers.



What needs to happen for more London Children to stay in London?

Throughout the course of our fieldwork, many solutions were suggested to enable more young people to be placed within London provision which can largely be broken down into the following categories.

Clarifying strategic vision across London

One DCS raised the need to clearly articulate the strategic priority across all London boroughs of increasing utilisation of London provision. There have been some small changes in practice and understanding of out of London placements but it would be important to capitalise on the findings of this report to develop clear strategic aims of increasing placements in London. This would be supported by developing a better evidence base of the positives and negatives of supporting young people with needs that are particularly hard to place in London closer to home as opposed to further afield, including those exposed to CCE and CSE.

There is also a need to do more work to build compatible sub-regional and borough-based approaches across London so we build a picture of the market across the region, and the costs associated with it. This will also need to include the areas immediately surrounding London as these may be pertinent to the placing decisions of Outer London boroughs.

Workforce development

Several local authorities identified that there was a need to increase the skill base of staff, particularly in relation to how we communicate the needs of young people on referral forms. Currently, the information we provide on referral forms is often cut and pasted from assessments and therefore is overwhelmingly focused on issues and events that have happened in a young person's life. There needs to be greater emphasis on the positive elements that a young person can bring to a placement and the adopting of a strengths-based approach that humanises the young people on the form. There is some good work underway in some local areas on this that we should be learning from as a region.

There is also scope for development work being undertaken among providers themselves so they are better able to manage risky behaviours. A stakeholder at the social worker roundtable flagged that increased trauma-informed practice training would allow providers to deal with the challenging presenting behaviours which are the manifestation of trauma and therefore provide more stability for this cohort.

Developing the right provision

There is also a clear need to develop the right provision across London. There is an evident need to increase the in-house specialist foster care market in London for children with high needs and reduce reliance on external IFAs. However, a current barrier to this is the higher cost of large houses in London which means that families will typically need two working parents to afford them. To overcome this challenge, S106 contributions could be used to provide affordable housing and extensions for foster carers.

There are also very few providers in London with education provision attached. This can be a challenge when young people being placed in generic homes have not successfully settled in mainstream schools and therefore social workers are required to identify further education support on top of a placement. Where young people need more tailored education in a smaller cohort this could be provided within a placement, however it may be unrealistic for small providers to develop high quality education services. Therefore, further relationships will need to be developed between the necessary education providers, such as local schools and AP settings, and placement providers.

Our qualitative research is telling us that across London there is too much of a generic residential market that is unable to meet need. Local authorities should be supported to engage with the market in a collective manner to ensure it is developed to address the needs of the young people that we have within London. There is also potential for single local authorities or multi-authority partnerships to develop new in-house provision and for them to work with the market to stimulate new provision given the evidence of demand²⁰. Ahead of this, further work is necessary to fully understand what needs can be met by London providers to provide a comprehensive view of the market.

Improved information sharing between Providers and LAs

Stakeholders have also flagged the need to improve the way information is shared between providers and LAs. Currently, providers are saying that they are not receiving all of the necessary information about a young person's needs at referral. This leads to them accepting referrals without the appropriate support, leading to subsequent placement break down. This is not only bad in terms of outcomes for the young person, but it also undermines the trust between a provider and a placing authority influencing future placing decisions. On the other side, some LAs have previously experienced providers taking on referrals at a higher cost without undertaking the necessary due diligence around matching leading to quick placement breakdown. Work is therefore needed to improve information sharing pathways and information about additional support in place around a young person to support placement stability.

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Conclusion

Based on the findings from our qualitative and quantitative research, we can confidently address the validity of the six key hypotheses that we sought to answer through the course of the project. Below is a breakdown of the key findings by hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 – under-utilisation is a result of the available provision not matching the provision required to meet the needs of the children requiring placements.

Overall this hypothesis was supported by both the qualitative findings of the research and the analysis of the pan-London snapshot. There was significant evidence that the existing provision in London is unable to meet the complexity of needs of looked after children in the capital. This is largely due to the fact that there is a lack of needs-led provision as choices for placements are driven by providers and what the market is willing to accept. It is especially hard to find provision for certain profiles of young people including young people with:

- Absconding and offending behaviour
- Gang affiliation, involvement in county lines or exposure to CCE and CSE
- ASD/LD/SEMH
- MH/Self-harm issues who have been discharged from Tier 4

There are particular challenges with these high end needs as the young people aren't meeting the threshold for specialist provision through secure beds or CAMHS beds but the existing residential provision is unable to meet those needs either so young people are often pushed into high-cost bespoke arrangements which are spot-purchased.

Stakeholders interviewed through the fieldwork identified specific gaps in provision, including a lack of specialist foster carers with relevant knowledge of contextual safeguarding and secure provision. There were also concerns raised that there is a lack of residential placements in London that include education provision for young people struggling to engage in mainstream education.

There is also a challenge of some practitioners believing that placements outside of London are still likely to yield better outcomes for particular groups of children and young people by nature of being removed from their surroundings, therefore no London placement would meet the requirements for this.

Hypothesis 2 – Under-utilisation is a result of the quality of the provision not meeting the requirements of the placing authority.

This hypothesis was not supported as quality did not come out strongly as a theme with only one stakeholder raising concerns that they do not have enough confidence in placements in terms of outcomes for child from some providers. However, the data analysis does suggest that on average London provision is of lower quality to provision outside of the capital so a further review of the quality of all providers across London may be necessary.

The issues identified through interviews with key stakeholders seem to be overwhelmingly with quantity or access to the existing provision. It was noted that there is high quality provision available across London but that all the boroughs are competing for a small pool of placements that can meet needs for this specific cohort of young people.

Hypothesis 3 – Under-utilisation is a result of the practice of local authority placement managers and/or social workers.

This hypothesis was supported by the qualitative research with several key areas coming up through our thematic analysis.

The first issue related to practice was the language used to describe young people in placement requests and profiles to providers. There were concerns that these profiles relied too heavily on information from existing assessments and therefore are overwhelmingly focused on issues and experiences in their lives. The approach to language in developing profile is clearly an area that LAs are seeking to improve. One LA reflected that significant work has taken place to develop their referral form so it gives a fair representation of the young person. The new standard process is for the commissioning team to send the referral form back to the social worker for review if they feel it doesn't give a holistic view of the young person. Other areas were also working on improving the strengths-based language used in profiles and using trauma-informed practice when sharing specific information about a young person's history to contextualise their behaviour.

There were also concerns raised about the quality of information provided to placement providers, with providers raising concerns that they aren't getting all the necessary information of a young person's needs meaning they have to make a snap decision to reject a placement as too much information is missing. When they do accept referrals without enough information they can often struggle to accommodate the young person's needs leading to placement breakdown and lower trust with placing authorities which can impact future placing decisions. There is also a lack of information of the support provided by other partners involved with the young person which would increase a provider's confidence that they can accommodate the young person with the necessary additional support.

The behaviour of commissioners was also identified as an area of practice that was driving decisions to place young people outside of London. The qualitative fieldwork strongly confirmed that commissioners tend to place based on relationships with providers. Therefore, it is likely that if they have placed outside of London in the past successfully then they will continue to do so unless equally positive relationships with providers in London are developed.

Hypothesis 4 – Under-utilisation is a result of the cost of provision compared to alternatives.

There was limited support for this hypothesis as there was low consensus that cost was a driver behind decisions to place out of London but rather that decisions were predicated on a variety of other factors. This is in part due to the fact there is no strategic approach to commissioning which means decisions are operationally based with individual placements sourced to meet needs in spite of cost.

Commissioners also raised the fact that the limited choice in placements meant that cost played a limited role in the decision-making process. The issue is therefore about availability, quality and capacity of placements in London. If we could overcome this, financial challenges could be alleviated.

Hypothesis 5 – Under-utilisation is a result of attitude to risk, either by the provider or the placing authority, possibly also linked to inspection.

There was strong support for this hypothesis from the qualitative research, and challenges with attitudes to risk were identified in both providers and placing authorities.

For placing authorities, there was a much higher risk aversion for young people linked to CCE or gang affiliation which impacted on their decisions to place out of borough. The perception that placing young people at risk of criminal activity at distance is still pervasive in the workforce, in spite of limited evidence to show the success of this strategy. For practitioners, there was also a reluctance to move young people back after placing them outside of London to maintain stability. Even if the reasons for placing at distance were linked to short-term outcomes.

From a provider perspective, there were clear concerns around risk of accepting placement requests for complex adolescents and their impact on the placement's Ofsted rating. This was picked up by both placing authorities and providers themselves. Providers are particularly risk averse to accepting young people linked to CCE or gangs, particularly from their home boroughs although the reasons for this are not fully understood. It is thought this is due to the risk of exploiters being able to access the young person locally.

There is also an element of the relationships between placing authorities and providers impacting on a provider's willingness to accept a 'riskier' placement. Providers are more likely to accept request from LAs they have a relationship with which can lead to providers accepting more young people from external LAs rather than their local LA or authorities across London. Equally placing authorities are more likely to seek placements from providers that have already been used effectively, including providers outside of London, and less willing to try new providers.

Hypothesis 6 – Under-utilisation is a result of the provider's ability to field staff with the required skills and experience, potentially linked to recruitment challenges.

This hypothesis was strongly supported as providers have identified that they are struggling to recruit and retain the necessary staff to meet the needs of young people across London. There were particular challenges around having the right gender balances among staff and balancing part-time and full-time staff.

They are also struggling to have the necessary staff available when emergency or same-day placements are required. London's market is made up mainly of SME providers who don't have large staff banks to rely on. Therefore, decisions to reject or accept a placement request are based on whether they have the appropriate staffing levels available at the time of placement.

Placing authorities also raised concerns that the risky behaviour presented by some of the more complex cohorts of young people could be managed better if generic providers had more trauma-informed practice training. They also flagged that given the fact that in the current market demand is outstripping supply, providers can lower their specification of needs so that they do not cater to the same level of need if they had vacant spaces meaning they don't have to invest in developing a workforce that has the required skills and experience to deal with London's most complex cohorts of looked after children.

Recommendations

In order to address the causes of under-utilisation of London provision by London children and the barriers identified by professionals across local authorities and providers, we suggest the following recommendations are taken forward. The recommendations are set out in line with some of the key themes that have been pulled out earlier in this report:

Developing a strategic vision across London

- Developing evidence base for the value of placing young people in London, particularly focusing on young people who are most likely to be placed outside of London such including those at risk of CCE/CSE, young people with ASD/SEMH/LD or young people with mental health issues who have been discharged from Tier 4
- Co-develop compatible sub-regional approaches aligned with ICS footprints, as well as borough-based approaches across London to build a picture of the market across the region, and the costs associated with it.
- Further survey work undertaken by LIIA to understand what needs can be met by London providers and develop a comprehensive view of the market to set clear aims for future provision

Building Relationships

- Develop capacity across the region to support conversations between LAs and providers to improve trust, knowledge and transparency
- At an LA and sub-regional level, build relationships between providers and other local provision such as APs to improve overall wrap around support offer and outcomes for young people in local placements
- Develop a model of support for providers that raises their confidence in managing risk and therefore raises the confidence of LAs placing with them

Challenging assumptions and practice

- Adopt a strengths-based approach to language in referrals and involve children and young people in writing profiles to contextualise their behaviour and needs for providers
- Co-develop solutions-focused training for the whole workforce to tackle assumptions around out of borough placements
 - Include external partners in this training such as the police, health colleagues and providers

Understanding the market

- Develop a London-wide directory of provision that includes information on all specialist provision and uniform costs, building on LIIA's existing work on Dynamic Sufficiency
- Progress the work being undertaken by LIIA to develop a pan-London vehicle for engaging with the market, including sub-regional joint frameworks where necessary
- Further in-depth work with local providers to understand the impact of Ofsted registration on their ability to accept placements

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Semi-structured Interview Questioning Framework

Overarching questions relevant to all hypotheses

- [For operational staff and managers] Talk me through how you would typically find a placement for a child?
- What is your aim in terms of proximity of residential placements – is this a factor you consider? How does it rank against other factors such as cost / quality etc?
- How do you decide what residential provision is best for a particular child? Are there policies in place or an overall strategic direction that guides that decision-making?
- If you have multiple places to choose from, what makes you select one over another? Is proximity an important factor in that decision?
- Why do you think it is that a high proportion of residential placements in London are not filled by children in London?

The hypothesis that the under-utilisation is a result of the available provision not matching the provision required to meet the needs of the children requiring placements.

- What, typically, are the needs of the young people for whom you need to find residential provision?
- Are there any specific trends in needs / patterns / changes in the last three years?
- Is there a group or groups of young people for whom finding the right residential provision is particularly challenging – what is the profile of these young people?

The hypothesis that the under-utilisation is a result of the quality of the provision not meeting the requirements of the placing authority.

- What are your views on the quality and quantity of placements available in London?
 - Do you normally have multiple places to choose from, or a very limited number that can meet need?
- What information do you have about providers locally and further afield – are there information gaps?

The hypothesis that the under-utilisation is a result of the practice of local authority placement managers and/or social workers.

- What information do you supply about the young person you are placing? Does this give the provider enough to make an informed decision?

The hypothesis that the under-utilisation is a result of the cost of provision compared to alternatives.

- What role does finance play in placement decision-making?
- What do you think is the financial impact of difficulties in identifying places for some young people?
- Do you think those financial challenges would be alleviated if more children could be placed in London?

The hypothesis that the under-utilisation is a result of attitude to risk, either by the provider or the placing authority, possibly also linked to inspection.

- Are there examples where a placement further away from home is a more desirable outcome than a placement closer to home?
- What are the specific needs that you believe cannot currently be met in London?

The hypothesis that the under-utilisation is a result of the provider's ability to field staff with the required skills and experience, potentially linked to recruitment challenges.

- Do you know enough about the capacity and quality of the residential providers in your borough and neighbouring boroughs?
- What influences whether a provider feels that they can meet need?

General follow up relevant to all hypotheses

- Would it be desirable for more London placements to be used by London children and why?
- What would need to change for this to happen and who has a role to play in making it happen?
- What are the opportunities and challenges in making this happen?

Appendix 2 – Young People Profiles for Social Worker Roundtable

Young Person 1 – Lee

Lee (13 years old) is the eldest child in his sibling group of 4. There are concerns that Lee is at risk of a local gang and criminal exploitation (county lines). Lee's mother, Cassandra, reports that Lee has gone missing on multiple occasions and he returns home with cash in his possession, which she has found from searching his room. Cassandra reports that when she has attempted to prevent Lee from leaving the home, he either leaves through his bedroom window or he can become very aggressive towards her; swearing and pushing, this happens in the presence of his younger siblings. Police reports received, show that during a few of the missing episodes Lee has been found in Leeds and Aberdeen. Lee's activity has meant that he has become a target for a rival local gang, and a few weeks ago he was nearly stabbed.

Young Person 2 – Troy

Troy (15 years old) has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and struggles with anxiety. He has challenging behaviour and can have periods requiring both parents to contain his behaviour, at times this has led to Troy sustaining minor injuries. Troy's parents both struggle with substance misuse issues. At school, Troy finds it difficult to make and maintain friendships, causing him to feel socially isolated and this in turn leads to Troy displaying disruptive and erratic behaviour in class. Recently, Troy has had two fixed term exclusions and there are growing concerns that he could be permanently excluded.

Young Person 3 – Joanna

Joanna (14 years old) recently presented at A&E with her mother Nicole, due to Joanna self-harming and reporting that she felt suicidal. Nicole has stated that she believes that Joanna self-harms for attention. Joanna is also at risk of child sexual exploitation; she is known to hang out with another young person who is known to actively recruit and groom girls for local gang members. Joanna has had 6 missing episodes over the past month and Nicole reports that she is struggling to manage Joanna's behaviour at home as they frequently have arguments. Nicole states that she can no longer care for Joanna as she is struggling with her own mental health and fears that she cannot protect Joanna.





United for a better childhood

The National Children's Bureau brings people and organisations together to drive change in society and deliver a better childhood for the UK. We interrogate policy, uncover evidence and develop better ways of supporting children and families.

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