

Improving quality, choice and cost in children's placements

This short paper provides background on the pressures across London in commissioning children's placements and the Pan-London Placements Commissioning Programme which has been developed to drive collaborative work to improve quality, choice and value for money.

London faces critical and increasing challenges in achieving good outcomes for children within the available budgets. There is an urgent need to mitigate and reduce pressures to achieve a sustainable position, with overspends pan-London exceeding £108 million in children's social care and £77million in SEND¹. A particularly acute challenge is the shortfall of high cost and low incidence placements.

Pan-London Placements Commissioning Programme

The London Children's Innovation and Improvement Board agreed the Pan-London Placements Commissioning Programme on 25th May 2020. The programme focuses on the area of greatest challenge, high cost and low incidence provision.

Understanding of need has already been deepened through two surveys of the challenges presented by Covid-19 in April 2020² and May 2020³. The Rees Centre, Oxford University, has also conducted an analysis of all children's sufficiency plans across London⁴. The Rees Centre report highlights the benefits of more integrated future planning and a stronger pan-London approach to market engagement. It also outlines opportunities for greater development provision in London, both in-house by individual and multiple local authorities and through engaging the market.

The development of the programme has been overseen by the Pan-London Placements Panel, chaired by the DCS for Barnet, with membership comprising the lead commissioners for each sub-region and other senior local authority commissioners. The key projects in the programme are outlined below.

London Accommodation Pathfinder

There is an urgent need to address the disproportionately high level of children in custody with a third of the children in custody nationally being from London, which is more than double the level of population of that age. Further, over three-quarters of the children in custody from London are from BAME backgrounds.

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

² ALDCS Covid-19 placement survey: commissioners' report (2020)

³ ALDCS Covid-19 placement survey 2: commissioners' report (2020)

⁴ Review of sufficiency strategies in London (2020)

LIIA has successfully secured a MoJ/YJB pathfinder project for London, with £1.03 million of funding, managed through Camden Council. The London Accommodation Pathfinder will develop innovative new provision in London, with a psychologically and trauma informed approach to young people's development to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes. The first centre will be in North London, based in Barnet, providing five places. Suitable accommodation is being sought in East, South and West London.

Improving quality, sufficiency and value for money for complex adolescents

There is an estimated shortfall in provision of 500 places for complex adolescents in London, many of whom are consequently placed in expensive provision often at a considerable distance which fail to achieve good outcomes for this key group. There is evidence of duplication and competition between London local authorities, leading to reduced influence over the market and increased costs⁵. The Rees Centre research on sufficiency in London highlighted opportunities to develop a more integrated and radical approach to in-house provision development and market engagement, to generate more efficiency out of the market. A business case for collaborative change is being developed to report in April 2021.

Improving quality, sufficiency and value for money in parenting assessments

A more strategic approach to parenting assessments pan-London will improve quality and reduce cost. Residential family assessments are currently often commissioned on a reactive basis in response to court requirements. Assessments are typically 12 weeks long, with a cost of several thousand pounds per week. There is a shortage of provision in London leading to high cost. Further, they often create an artificial environment for the family, which can then lead to a further period of assessment in the community. This project will develop alternative community-based provision, shared sub-regionally, with action to create greater confidence in the courts in such provision. Multi-authority block contracts will be explored to generate efficiencies and greater value for money. The project will enable a greater proportion of families to be assessed locally and in the community.

Improving provision and outcomes for children with ASD and social, emotional and mental health needs (ASD – autistic spectrum disorder)

Children and young people with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs were identified as very hard to place, with very significant shortfalls in provision offered by the market⁶. A series of multi-agency workshops have been held to draw together key partners and commissioners from across London to shape proposals to improve outcomes and achieve greater value for money for this cohort. A business case for change through collaboration pan-London is being developed, working with the pan-London SEND programme, to report in April 2021.

⁵ A review of commissioning arrangements for looked after children in London, Institute of Public Care (2018)

⁶ Under pressure: an exploration of demand and spending in children's social care and for children with special educational needs in London, Isos (2019)



ALDCS

Association of London
Directors of Children's
Services

Secure provision

Capital and project funding for secure provision in London is being sought from recent DfE allocations which will develop much needed provision in London. There is currently no welfare secure provision in London with the consequence that children are placed over a hundred miles from London. The business case for change has already been developed and will be implemented, subject to the funding being secured from DfE and local authorities.

Pan-London Vehicle (PLV)

An ambitious PLV will develop pan-London approaches to sharing risks and rewards of more coherent approaches to placement sufficiency and market engagement. This will build on and integrate current collaborative arrangements to improve the local supply of high cost and low incidence provision for London children.

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