

# **ROTHERHAM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN 2014/15**

## **1. Executive Summary**

### **1.1. Overview**

Where children in Rotherham are unable to live with birth parents or extended family, the Local Authority, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, is responsible for accommodating and caring for them. When children first enter local authority care, it is the legal responsibility of the Council to work with the birth family to return the child as soon as possible if and where this is consistent with the child's best interests. If it is not possible and safe for the child to live with the birth parents, then every effort should be made to enable the child to live with extended family members, preferably outside of the care system.

Where no alternative family members can be identified to care for the child, the Local Authority has a responsibility to plan an alternative 'placement' for that child. Legislation dictates that the Local Authority must consider adoption for all children who cannot return to birth parents or extended family.

Where adoption is not consistent with the child's best interests, or not achievable, alternative permanence arrangements must be made by the Local Authority. In such circumstances the Local Authority will look to secure a long term permanent placement for the child with a foster family or in a children's residential home.

The Local Authority in Rotherham makes provision of adoption, fostering, and residential placements directly through its own placement services and through placements commissioned from the voluntary and independent sector.

It is a legislative requirement for all local authorities to 'secure 'sufficient' accommodation for looked after children, so far as is reasonably practical, in their local authority area'.

This strategy sets out how the Local Authority in Rotherham intends to meet this requirement.

## **1.2. Sufficiency Strategy Aims**

This strategy aims to:

**1.2.1** Set out how the Local Authority will meet the legislative requirement to 'secure, so far as is reasonably practical, sufficient accommodation for looked after children in their (our) local authority area.'

**1.2.2** Make a significant contribution to improving outcomes for looked after children.

**1.2.3** Ensure that the Local Authority in Rotherham meets all of the requirements related to sufficiency of accommodation for looked after children detailed in the Ofsted inspection framework, 'Framework for the Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After, and Care Leavers'.

These are as follows:

- Children and young people live in live in safe, stable, and appropriate homes or families with their brothers and sisters when this is in their best interests. They do not move frequently.
- Children and young people who live away from their 'home' authority have immediate access to education and health services that meet their needs as soon as they begin to live outside of their 'home 'area'.
- The placement of children and young people into homes and families that meet their needs is effective because there is a comprehensive range and choice available.
- Family finding strategies are informed by the assessed needs of children and young people.
- Carers recruited to care for children are safe and sufficient in number to care for children and young people with a wide range of needs.
- Early planning and case management results in appropriate permanent placements, including Special Guardianship or Residence Orders.
- Children and young people are helped to develop secure primary attachments with the adults caring for them.

### **1.3. The Importance of the Sufficiency Strategy**

The sufficiency strategy sets out our strategic approach to ensuring that we can provide the right kind of accommodation in the right places to meet the differing needs of all our looked after children. As such the strategy is essential for improving outcomes for looked after children.

It is a statutory requirement under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 for local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practical, sufficient accommodation for looked after children in their local authority area.

There are a number of 'requirements' set out in the new Ofsted inspection framework related to sufficiency of accommodation that local authorities have to meet in order to receive a judgement of at least good. These are set out above in section 1.2.3.

### **1.4. Summary of Goals and Recommendations**

#### **1.4.1 Goals**

The overarching goal, objective, aim of this strategy is to 'secure, so far as is reasonably practical, sufficient accommodation for looked after children in our local authority area'.

In achieving this, we will aim:

- To provide a sufficient range and number of local placements for Rotherham's looked after children that contribute to improved outcomes and increased value for money.
- To reduce the number of children placed outside of the borough and at distance from their families and community.
- To ensure that where children are placed out of the borough, they are able to access education, health and therapeutic services to meet their needs, via sound and improved commissioning practices.
- To increase the proportion of children in family placements and reduce the proportion placed in residential care.
- To increase in-house fostering provision.
- To reduce the number of children placed both in independent residential and independent foster care.
- To increase placement stability for looked after children.

- To achieve the most secure form of permanence for children without unnecessary delay in particular through Adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders.
- To increase the percentage of children adopted from care and to improve the timeliness of such adoptions.
- To increase the number of care leavers who are offered the opportunity to stay living with their foster carer in a Staying Put/Supported Lodgings arrangement after they turn 18.

### **1.4.2 Recommendations**

**The strategy recommendations are:**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

To develop the Fostering Plus scheme to recruit fee paid and therapeutically supported foster carers for older children and those with complex needs. Develop the scheme so that it caters for a wide range of specialist need, to include, for example, sexualised young people, children at risk of sexual exploitation, young people remanded to local authority care, parent and child placements, disabled children.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

To review and revise the existing payment for skills scheme for in-house foster carers so that it more closely rewards carers for caring for children we most need placements for rather than skills payments being determined by experience and training record.

#### **Recommendation 3:**

To review the remit and size of Silverwood children's home. Options will include a reduction in capacity and maximum duration of stay from 20 to 12 weeks or change of remit to long term.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

To engage with the market and develop smarter commissioning to ensure independent providers make provision available in or very close to Rotherham. In particular to explore the possibility of residential providers opening new homes for our use in or very close to Rotherham.

**Recommendation 5:**

To establish smarter commissioning of out of borough placements which should involve liaison with multi-agency services in the commissioned placement area, so as to secure suitable therapeutic, health, and education services, and include a location risk assessment in relation to the risk and prevalence of child sexual exploitation

**Recommendation 6:**

To maintain investment in the Adoption Service and to recruit an increased number of adoptive families both from within Rotherham and the region, with a view to providing families for our own looked after children and those of other local authorities regionally. To use innovative marketing and recruitment activity to recruit adopters for difficult to place children and continue on-going use of new family finding events such as consortium wide Adoption Activity Days.

**Recommendation 7:**

To establish a Fostering to Adopt scheme to enable some children to be placed with prospective adoptive families before a court has granted a Placement Order, thereby meaning they will begin living with their forever family at a younger age and begin making attachments earlier.

**Recommendation 8:**

To review and potentially revise the financial and practical support arrangements for Special Guardians and Residence Order holders to ensure that we are doing all that we can to promote these legal forms of permanence.

**Recommendation 9:**

To deliver education and guidance to social workers about the duty to place with extended family members where possible, and explore any other potential reasons for the very low numbers of connected persons/relative foster carers in Rotherham.

**Recommendation 10:**

To promote the existing Supported Lodgings scheme to existing foster carers to increase the number of care leavers who can stay with their foster carers after turning 18.

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### 3. Situational Analysis

The situational analysis essentially explores and sets out ‘where we are now’ and the environmental factors we need to account for in making plans for moving forward.

So, to what extent are we providing ‘sufficient’ local accommodation for looked after children at the time of writing?

What is the demand for care placements and how does our supply of placement resources match up to the demand?

What are our gaps in provision?

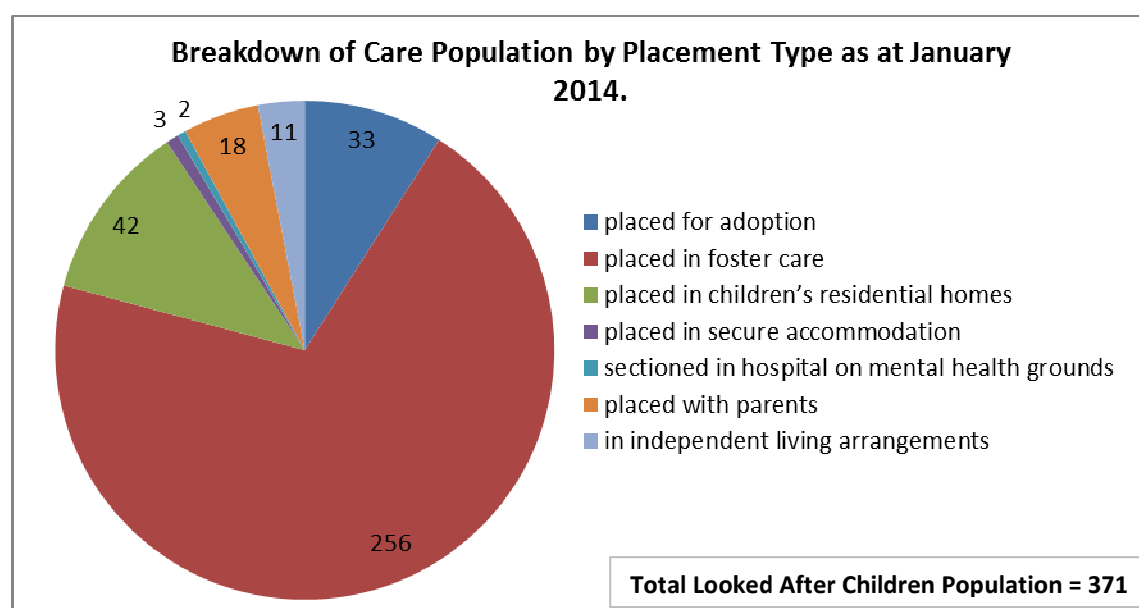
Are there any national or local policy developments we need to consider that might impact on how we provide sufficient accommodation?

#### 3.1 Care Population Analysis

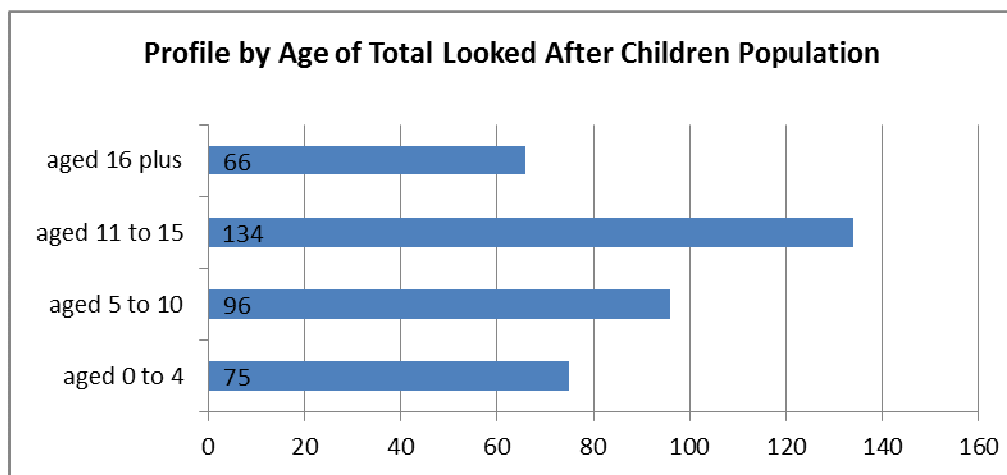
The following section provides a number of graphical illustrations profiling the current looked after/care population in Rotherham at the time of writing in January 2014.

The illustrations themselves should be self-explanatory. A summary analysis of the information provided in all of the following illustrations is provided immediately after the illustration section.

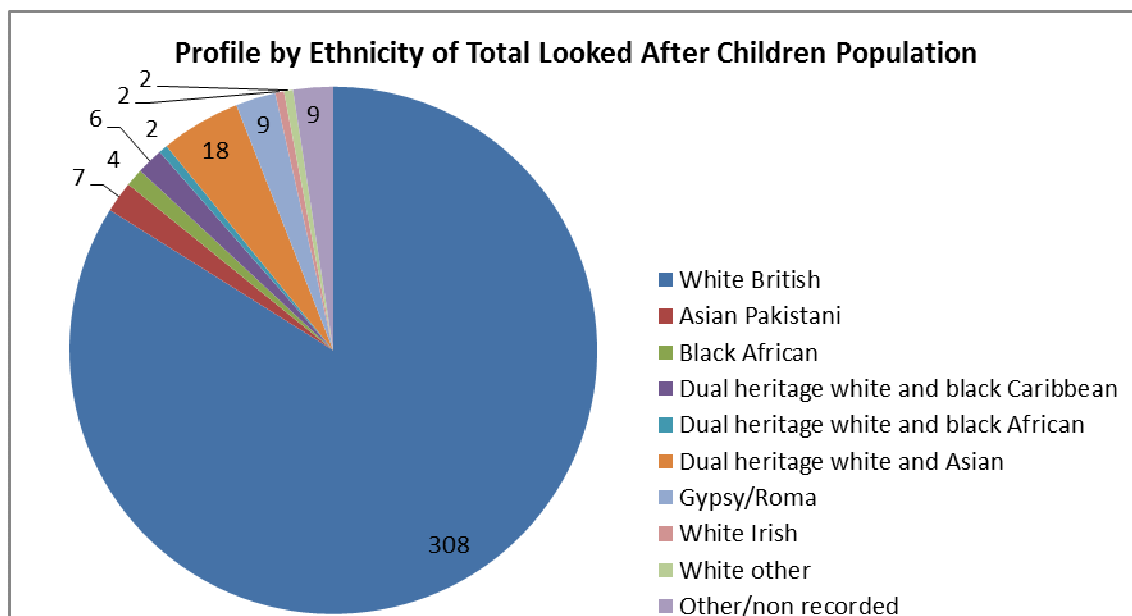
##### 3.1.1 Care Population by Placement Type:



### 3.1.2 Profile by Age:

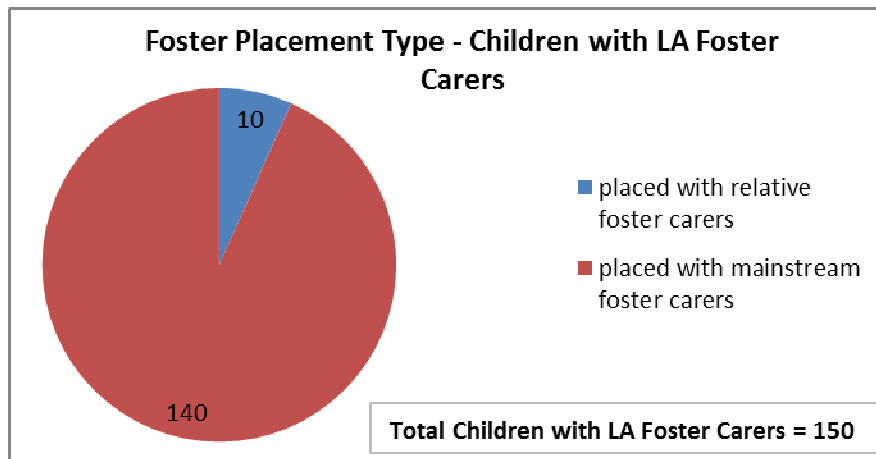


### 3.1.3 Profile by Ethnicity:

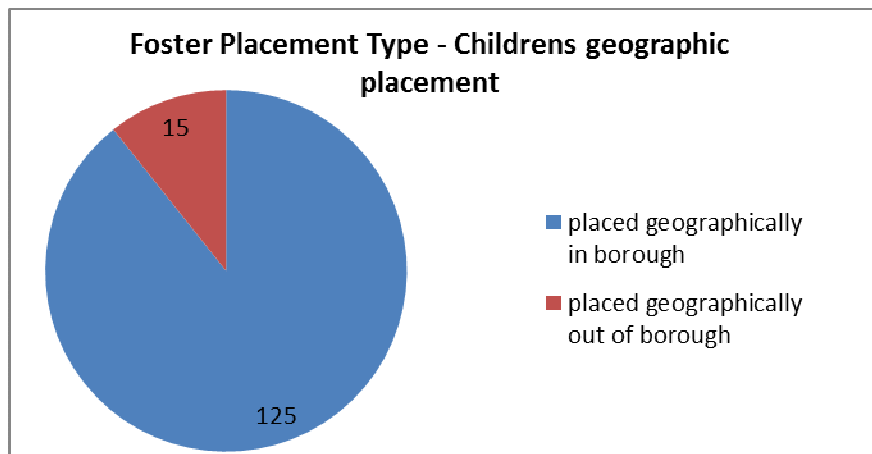




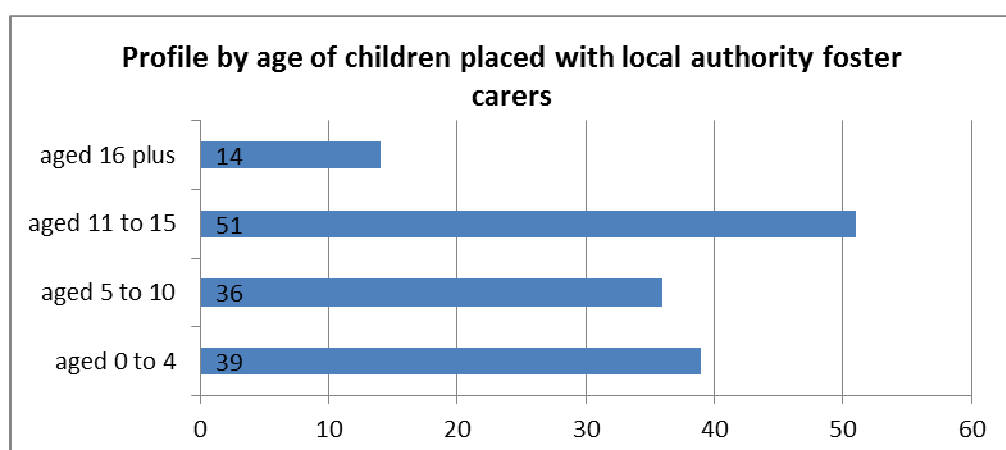
### 3.1.4 In-house Foster Placement Type:



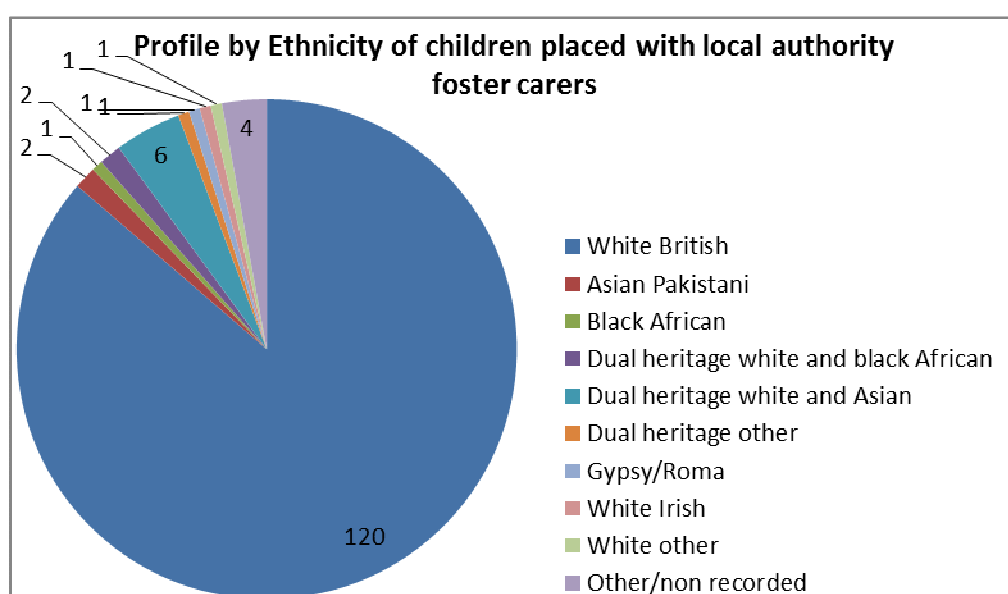
### 3.1.5 L.A. Foster Placement Location:



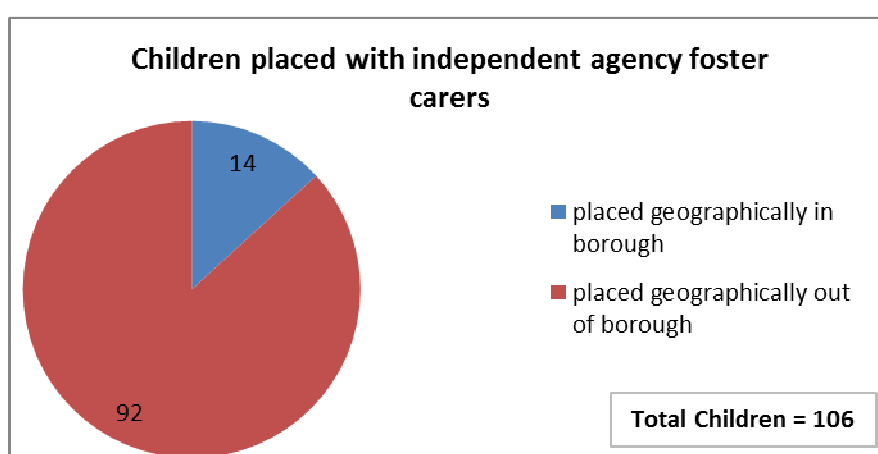
### 3.1.6 Age Profile with L.A. Carers:



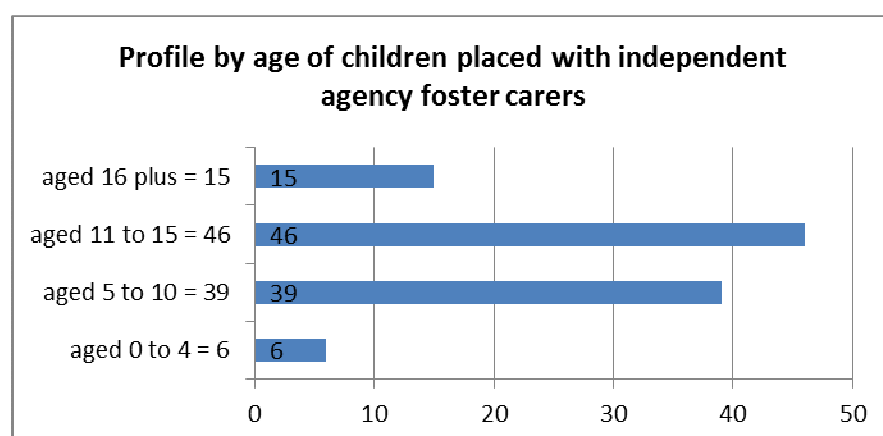
### 3.1.7 Ethnicity Profile with L.A. carers:



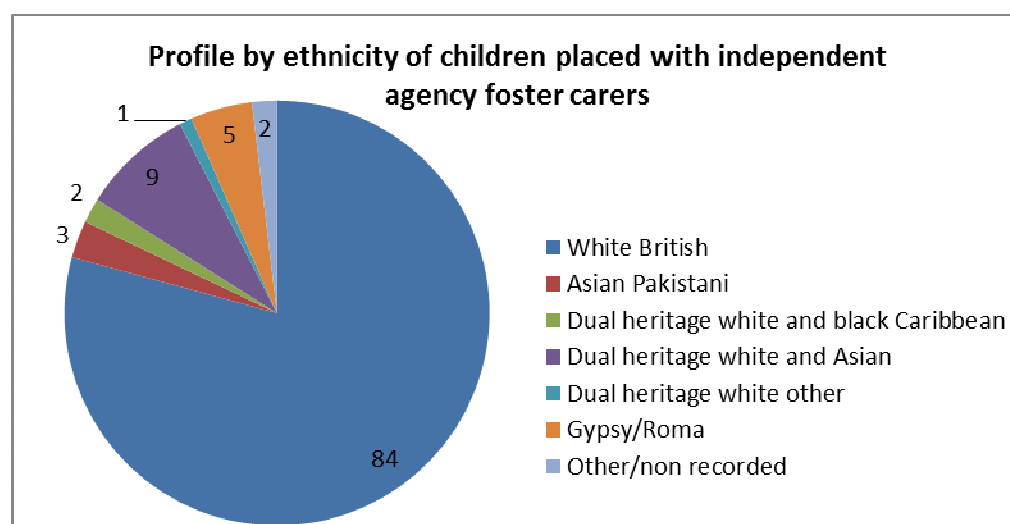
### 3.1.8 Independent Foster Placement Location



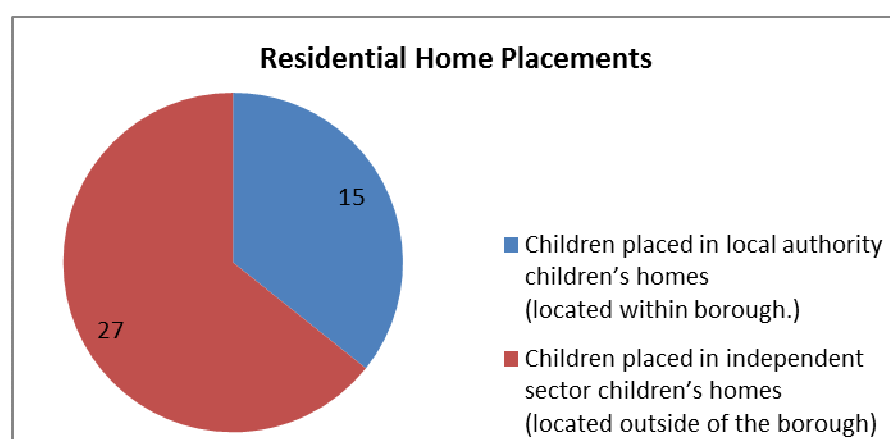
### 3.1.9 Age Profile with Independent Carers:



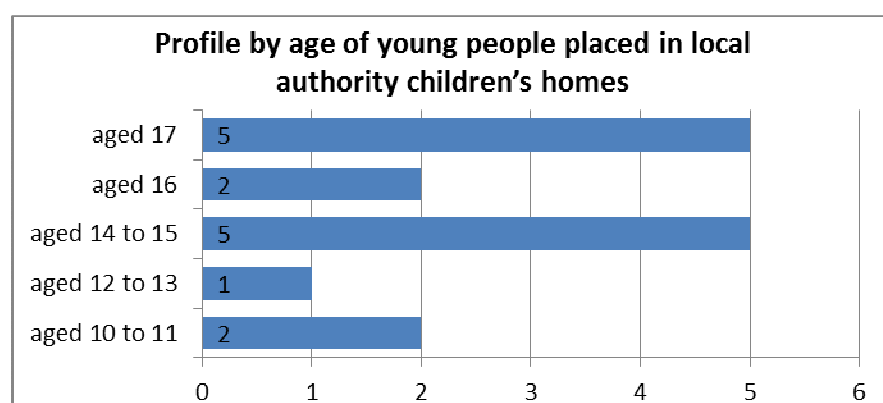
### 3.1.10 Ethnicity Profile with Independent Carers:



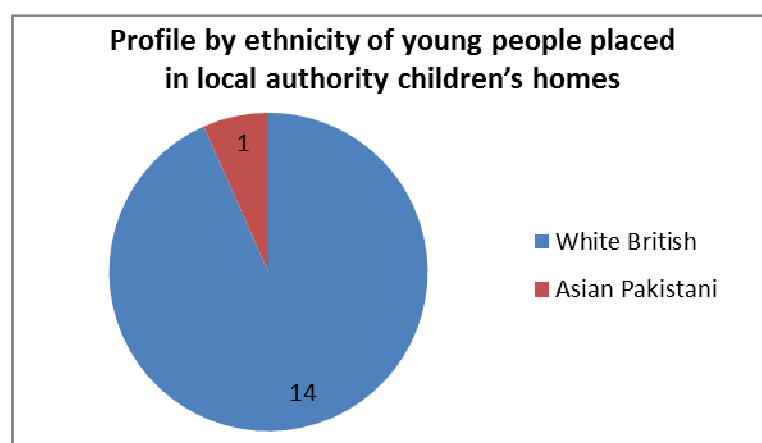
### 3.1.11 Residential Placements:



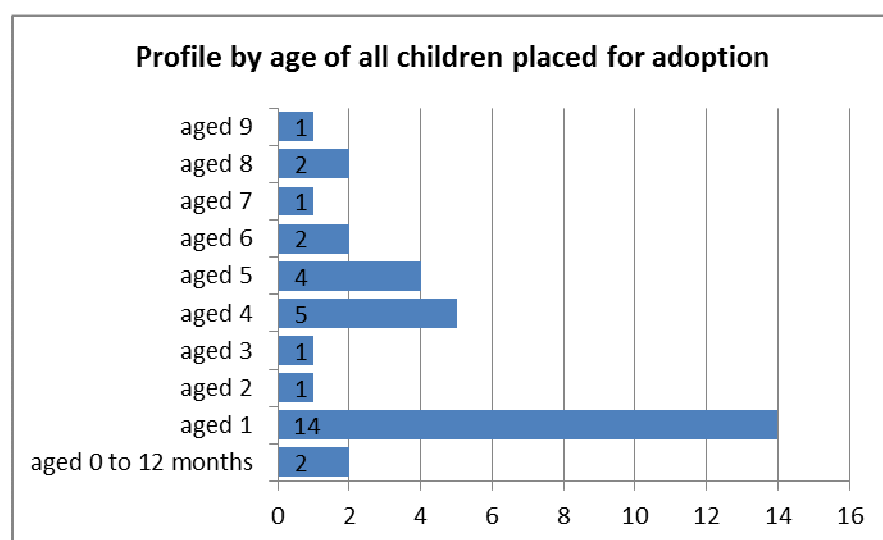
### 3.1.12 Age Profile in L.A. Homes:



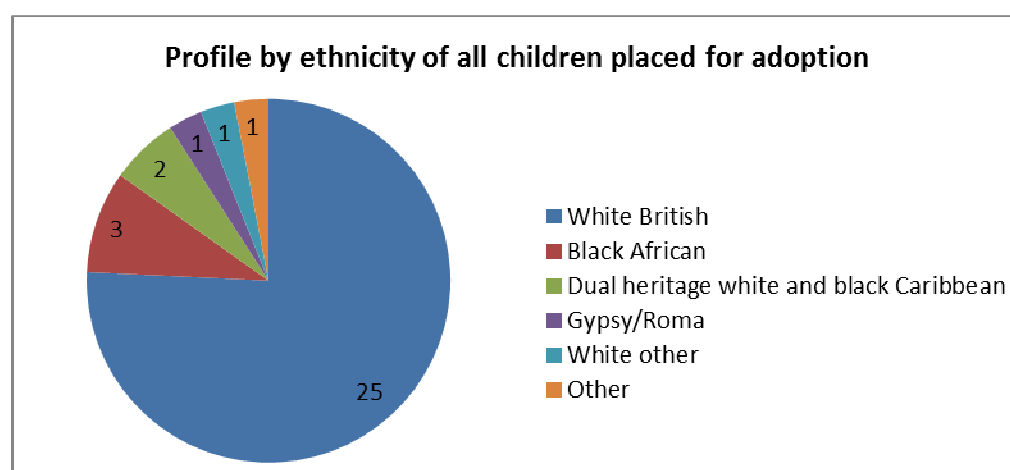
### 3.1.13 Ethnicity Profile In L.A. homes:



### 3.1.14 Age Profile of Children Placed For Adoption:



### 3.1.15 Ethnicity Profile of Children Placed for Adoption:



### 3.1.16 Summary Analysis:

Analysis of the above indicates the following:

- Of the 256 children placed in foster care, 150, or 59%, are placed with in-house local authority foster carers. The remaining 106 or 41% are placed with independent fostering agency foster carers.
- Of the 150 children placed with in-house foster carers, 125, or 83% are placed within Rotherham. Of the 106 children placed with independent fostering agency foster carers, just 14, or 13% of them are placed within Rotherham and 87% are placed outside of the Rotherham borough boundary.
- This suggests increasing the percentage of children placed with in-house carers as opposed to independent agency carers would be one clear route to increasing the number of children who are placed locally. A second route would be for commissioners to work with the market to increase the supply of local, in borough foster placements from independent agencies.
- The age profiles show us that independent sector carers care for less children aged under 10 than children aged 11 plus, whereas in-house carers care for more children aged under 10 than children aged 11 plus. We know that we have been gradually improving our ability in-house to care for younger age children and many of the children placed in independent placements now who are under age 10 will have been placed some time ago and have plans for permanence with those carers. However, we still have too limited an ability to place older young people in in-house foster care. Efforts will be made to increase the number of in-house carers who can care for older and more

complex children, through new recruitment activity and progressing existing foster carers.

- The majority of looked after children are white British, representing 83% of the total. However there is a notable dual heritage white Asian population with 18 children amounting to 5% of the total and a growing number of Gypsy/Roma children in care with 9, or 2.5%.
- Of the 42 young people placed in residential care, (not including secure accommodation) 15 are placed in in-house local authority children's homes and 27 in independent residential homes. All of the independent residential home placements are geographically placed outside of the borough, some at considerable distance. There are no independent residential homes located in Rotherham, so any independent provision will necessarily always be out of borough.
- Capacity for in-house residential placements is 22 (excluding short break beds for children with disabilities). Therefore there is considerable under-occupancy with just 15 children placed in-house. Efforts should be made to increase in-house occupancy rates so as to achieve best value and to offer more young people local placements. In addition, commissioners will need to work with market providers to increase the proximity of independent sector provision.
- Whilst we place a high number and percentage of children for adoption, approximately two thirds of our adoption placements are purchased from other local authorities or voluntary adoption agency providers. In addition, at the time of writing, Rotherham's Adoption Service had provided no adoptive families for other local authorities in 2013/14. We need to increase the proportion of children placed for adoption with our own approved adopters and increase the number of adoptive families we are able to provide for other local authorities in the region.
- Encouragingly, 8 of the 33 children placed for adoption are from non-white British backgrounds and 10 of the 33 are aged 5 or over. This indicates that we are achieving well on finding adoptive placements for some of the more difficult to place children. Efforts to maintain and build on this will continue, with more targeted adopter recruitment activity.

## 3.2 Placement Supply

### 3.2.1 In-house Provision

#### Local Authority Foster Care

Total number of approved foster carers	<b>174</b> <i>(Following significant net increase of 40 carers to date over the last two years)</i>
Number of children in placement	<b>150</b>
Number of approved mainstream non-relative foster carers	<b>164</b>
Number of children in placement	<b>140</b>
Ratio of children in placement to carers	<b>0.85</b> children placed per carer
Number of approved relative / connected person foster carers	<b>10</b>
Number of children in placement	<b>10</b>
Ratio of children in placement to relative carers	<b>1</b> child in placement per carer.
Current Vacant Approved Placements in Total for Local Authority Mainstream Foster Carers	<b>60</b> full time <b>22</b> for respite

<b>Full time vacancies by age category</b>	
Vacancies for children aged 0 to 4	<b>36</b> including <b>8</b> for sibling groups of 2
Vacancies for children aged 5 to 10	<b>19</b> including <b>8</b> for sibling groups of 2
Vacancies for children aged 11 to 15	<b>5</b> including <b>1</b> for a sibling group of 2
Respite vacancies	<b>22</b>

#### Local Authority Residential Provision

Rotherham has a total of five in-house residential homes. Two of these are specifically for children with disabilities and are detailed under the Placement for Children with Disabilities section. The three mainstream children's homes are as follows:

**Silverwood** – Maximum of 7 beds for the provision of emergency residential placements for mainstream/non-disabled young people aged 12

to 17. The maximum stay for young people in this home is 20 weeks.

- Woodview** – 6 bed home for the provision of long term accommodation for non-disabled young people aged 12 to 17.
- St. Edmunds** – 6 bed home for the provision of long term accommodation for young people aged 12 to 17.

### **3.2.2 Independent Fostering Agency Provision**

The Local Authority has a contract for the provision of independent fostering agency placements which is exclusive to six providers who were selected via a competitive tendering exercise. Such placements are commissioned on an individual basis by the Children's Services Commissioning Team. The team meet regularly with managers of provider agencies on the contract to undertake performance and contract management.

With 106 placements with independent agency providers we are over reliant on this sector. However placement numbers have reduced from high of 133 in 2012 and the direction of travel is positive.

This provision is generally higher cost than in-house fostering and also, as noted above most placements are not in borough. The commissioning team will need to work with providers to secure more local provision.

### **3.2.3 Independent Sector Residential Provision**

We currently have a total of 27 young people placed in independent sector children's homes, plus 3 young people placed in secure accommodation. All of these are placements outside of Rotherham and only 7 of these are placements in South Yorkshire. The rest, 23 young people, are placed at distance from Rotherham in places ranging from Southampton to Derby to Gateshead.

In addition there are 3 children sectioned in hospital in relation to their mental health needs and two children placed in residential schools.

Independent sector residential placements are commissioned by the commissioning team. Rotherham is part of a regional partnership commissioning residential placements via the White Rose contract. Regular contract and performance management meetings are undertaken as part of the quality assurance process.



### 3.2.4 Adoptive Placement Provision

The Adoption Service has invested in increasing staffing with the team in 2013/14 using Adoption Reform Grant funding. This has contributed to an increase in recruitment activity and higher numbers of adopters being approved. In 2012/13 the Service approved a total of 18 adoptive families. We have already exceeded this in 2013/14 and are on course for a projected total of 31 adoptive families approved in the year by the end of 2013/14.

At the time of writing, January 2014, the following details key projected year end adoption placement statistics for 2013/14 and targets set for 2014/15:

<b>Key Adoption Statistics for 2013/14</b>	
Number of Children Adopted in 2013/14	<b>35</b>
Adoptive Families Approved in 2013/14	<b>31</b>
Children Placed for Adoption in 2013/14	<b>45</b>
Children Placed with In-house Adopters in 2013/14	<b>16</b>
Children Placed with External Adoption Agencies in 2013/14	<b>29</b>
<b>Adoption Service Targets for 2014/15</b>	
2014/15 Target for Adoptive Families Approved	<b>42 (up from 31)</b>
2014/15 Target for Reduction in External Agency Placements to	<b>20 or less (down from 29)</b>
2014/15 Target for Provision of Adoptive Families for Other LA children	<b>5 or more (up from 2)</b>

Efforts will be made to meet further stretch recruitment targets in 2014/15 with recruitment specifically targeted at families to adopt sibling groups, older children, children with disabilities, and children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Adoption Service will aim in 2014/15 to increase recruitment of adopters from a projected 31 for this year, 2013/14, to 42, to reduce the use of adoption placements commissioned from other local authorities and the voluntary sector, and to increase the number of adoptive placements we are able to provide for other local authorities in the region and beyond.

### **3.2.5 Placement Provision for Children with Disabilities.**

#### **Fostering**

##### **Task Centred and Long Term Placements**

Many of our mainstream foster carers care for and offer task centred and long term placements to children with varying degrees of disability ranging from mild learning disabilities to severe learning and physical disabilities.

##### **Short Break Fostering**

Our 'Families Together' scheme provides short break care for children with disabilities as part of a support service to families in the community. Access to the Families Together Scheme is agreed via the Local Authority's Short Breaks for Disabled Children's Panel. Families Together carers care for children from age 0 to 17.

At the time of writing in January 2014 there are 19 approved Families Together offering short breaks to a total of 23 disabled children.

#### **Residential**

##### **Long Term:**

**Cherry Tree** – Cherry Tree is a 5 bed home for the provision of long term accommodation for severe learning and/or physically disabled children aged 8 to 17.

##### **Short Break:**

**Liberty House** – Liberty House is a 9 bed home for the provision of 8 short break beds for children with severe learning and/or physical disability and in addition has one emergency bed for the placement of a disabled child in an emergency for up to 12 weeks.

### **3.2.6 Accommodation Provision for Care Leavers**

Accommodation provision for care leavers in Rotherham is made up of two Local Authority run semi-independent units, several dispersed properties, and outreach service to support care leavers in their own tenancies and Supported Lodgings/Staying Put provision as follows:

#### **Nelson Street**

Nelson Street is a semi-independent unit with a capacity to accommodate 6 care leavers age 16 to 18. Nelson Street is almost always full to capacity.

## **Hollowgate**

Hollowgate is a semi-independent unit with a capacity to accommodate 10 care leavers. Hollowgate is also almost always full to capacity.

## **Dispersed Properties**

The Care Leaver Accommodation Service has access to up to 5 dispersed properties for care leavers. The service provides and outreach support service to care leavers in their own tenancies.

## **Supported Lodgings/ Staying Put Provision**

The Local Authority has a Supported Lodging scheme co-ordinator who is now located within the Fostering Service. The service is working hard to increase the number of care leavers who have the opportunity to remain in Supported Lodgings/Staying Put arrangements with their foster carers once they turn 18 and we currently have 13 care leavers in such arrangements.

## **Summary Analysis**

- The high number of independent sector fostering placements indicates that despite significant growth in the in-house foster carer pool over the last two years further progress is needed.
- It is particularly noteworthy that at the time of writing there were very low numbers of in-house foster placement vacancies for placements for children aged 11 plus, with 5, compared to 36 for children aged under 5 and 19 for children aged 5 to 10. In addition we currently have no in-house carers able to offer parent and child placements and commission these from independent agencies.
- This reflects the positive work done addressing a lack of provision for younger children and the need now to refocus on creating more foster carers for adolescents.
- The number of young people placed in independent residential placements is high at 27. The strategy needs to address the need for more local placements and for additional capacity in the in-house Fostering Service to care for some of these young people
- The number of children placed for adoption, at 45 in 2013/14 is high. However there has been a significant reliance on inter-agency placements with a projected 29 in 2013/14. The Service has set itself a target to increase

adopter approvals in 2014/15 and to use less interagency placements and provide more of our own placements to other local authorities.

- Placement provision for short breaks for disabled children is relatively good, with need being met for short breaks via both in-house fostering and residential provision. Whilst long term placements to meet disabled children's needs are also provided for through in-house fostering and residential provision, there is still a need to commission some placements from the independent sector. The new Fostering Plus scheme being launched will seek to recruit carers for young people with a range of complex needs including children with disabilities.
- There is a good range of accommodation options for care leavers and almost all care leavers are in suitable accommodation. There are 13 care leavers in Staying Put arrangements and we will be striving to offer this opportunity to as many care leavers as possible moving forward.

### 3.3 Placement Costs:

Unit costs per placement per week:	
Overall average unit cost of a child in care in Rotherham	<b>£883</b>
National average overall unit cost of a child in care	<b>£838</b>
Local authority foster care	<b>£360</b>
National average	<b>£428</b>
Independent sector foster care	<b>£942</b>
National average	<b>£864</b>
Local authority residential care	<b>£2481</b>
National average	<b>£2866</b>
Independent sector residential care	<b>£3231</b>
National average	<b>£2960</b>

## Summary Analysis

- The placement cost information above sets out how in Rotherham the average cost of a placement per week per child is higher than the national average by £45.
- Whilst the unit costs for Rotherham's own foster care and residential placements are lower than the national average local authority unit costs, our unit costs for commissioned placements in independent sector fostering and residential are higher than the national average.
- **We have an overall higher unit cost for children in care because we use proportionately more independent sector placements than the national average. These placements are more expensive in almost all cases than local authority provision and in addition Rotherham pays more for independent sector placements than the average local authority does.**

### 3.1. P.E.S.T. Analysis

This section lists political, economic, social and technological factors that may need to be accounted for in developing and delivering the strategy.

#### Political Factors:

- Sufficiency duty legislation
- New Ofsted framework for inspection
- View in the community and the political view amongst councillors about in-house versus external provision.
- Community view about the siting of existing and additional residential accommodation in Rotherham

#### Economic Factors:

- Our need as an LA to make significant savings on the cost of accommodation for looked after children and to achieve best value.
- The need to work in partnership with other local authorities in the region to achieve cost efficiencies and reduce costs on commissioning of placements.

- The reduction in the Adoption Reform Grant amount for 2014/15 compared to 2013/14. (We are currently awaiting confirmation of the amount Rotherham will receive)
- The reality that if we want to increase the number of in-house carers for older and more complex children we have to compete in the mixed economy for potential foster carers with independent fostering agencies. This means providing an attractive package of financial and practical support.

#### **Social Factors:**

- The potential impact of austerity measures on the community and care population now and in future.
- The increasing number of children and young people with increasingly complex needs requiring local authority accommodation.

#### **Technological Factors:**

- Need to make the most of technology for management information/performance and contract monitoring.
- Need to make the most of online recruitment and marketing for new foster carers and adopters.

### **3.2. S.W.O.T. Analysis**

The section is an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of our services and any opportunities for and threats to our success in improving sufficiency.

#### **Strengths**

- High numbers of children placed for adoption including difficult to place children.
- Improving trend in timeliness for adoption.
- Recent Ofsted rating of good for the Fostering Service.

- Significant recruitment of new foster carers for younger children over the last two years has eradicated our need to use the independent sector for children aged under 10.
- Sufficient existing staff resources in the Fostering Service to deliver new initiatives to improve recruitment of carers for older children and to improve support and supervision of carers.
- Lower unit costs in local authority residential care than councils nationally.
- The existence of our own Looked After and Adopted Children Support and Therapy Team to support care and adoptive placements.
- Dedicated Supported Lodgings Co-coordinator.
- Good range of accommodation for care leavers
- Skilled and motivated social work practitioners and managers in Fostering and Adoption Services who are enthusiastic about driving change and improvement

## **Weaknesses**

- Uncompetitive financial and practical support package for foster carers means we have difficulty recruiting carers for older children and those with complex needs.
- Whilst it may appear a strength that our unit costs for our own foster care are significantly lower than the national average, it is a reflection of the fact that our package for carers is uncompetitive and this in turn results in our high use of much more expensive independent sector placements, and so it is therefore a weakness.
- Our payment for skills scheme for foster carers does not reward carers for taking on the more difficult fostering roles.
- As a result of inadequate fostering resources in-house we commission too high a proportion of placements from the independent sector.
- The independent sector placements we commission, both in fostering and residential sectors, are more expensive than councils nationally are being charged for.
- In addition, the market is not working for us in terms of providing local placements. As a result far too many children are placed outside and at

distance from Rotherham. As well as not being in the child's interests in most cases, these placements are much more difficult and expensive financially and in staff travelling time to support and monitor.

- Our own emergency residential children's home, Silverwood, is at maximum a seven bed home. This is large even for a long term home and it might be argued that even a five bed home for emergency placements is too large to operate successfully. This is perhaps reflected in the occupancy rates, with Silverwood only rarely over the last year having five children in placement. Under occupancy results in higher unit costs.

## **Opportunities**

- Development of new scheme, Fostering Plus, using existing staff resources and 'pay as you go' funding from the out of authority budget that would otherwise have to be used to commission independent sector placements, to provide placements for older children and those with complex needs.
- Implementation of Fostering to Adopt scheme to increase timeliness in relation to adoption.
- Proactive re-engagement with the market to look creatively at how to provide more local independent sector placements.
- Review and revision of residential provision, and in particular Silverwood, to provide accommodation that better meets the needs of our looked after population and compliments the rest of our accommodation resources.

## **Threats**

- Increasing pressure on local authority budgets and reduced central government funding.
- Increasing need to provide placements for young people with very complex needs that necessarily involve high cost.

## **4. Strategy**

In moving to a position where we provide sufficient accommodation of the right type in the right place, which will almost always be in or very close to Rotherham, and



where we can provide such accommodation whilst achieving cost efficiencies on the current spend on accommodation, the following strategies will be applied:

**4.1** We will strive to ensure that we manage the demographics of the care population such that we make good early decisions to bring younger children into care rather than delaying decisions where there are unsustainable or unsafe family arrangements. This will mean children spend less time in difficult family circumstances and when they enter care at a younger age we have a better opportunity to secure good forms of permanence for them such as adoption or special guardianship. A different approach of support to sustain family arrangements for adolescents is required so that fewer adolescents come into care.

**4.2** We will move towards changing the composition of our placement types. We need to have more children in foster placements and less in residential. We need to have many more of our children and young people placed in Rotherham than is currently the case. And we need to move towards providing many more placements through our own fostering service and less via independent fostering agencies.

**4.3** We will pro-actively engage with independent sector residential and fostering providers and develop smarter commissioning which results in significantly more independent sector placements being provided in and very close to Rotherham.

**4.4** We will strive to maintain and improve upon the very high numbers of children we secure adoption for, we will continue to speed up our processes for moving children through the adoption process and we will improve timeliness of adoption through further innovative recruitment activity for families to adopt difficult to place children.

**4.5** We will actively promote legal permanence through Special Guardianship and Residence Orders where adoption is not achievable or suitable.

## **5. Strategic Actions**

**5.1** Development of Fostering Plus scheme to recruit fee paid and therapeutically supported foster carers for older children and those with complex needs.

**5.2** Review and revision of existing payment for skills scheme for in-house foster carers so that it more closely rewards carers for caring for children we most need placements for rather than skills payments being determined by experience and training record alone.

**5.3** Review and possible revision of the remit and size of Silverwood residential home. Options to include reduction in capacity and maximum duration of stay from 20 to 12 weeks and/or change of remit.

**5.4** Engagement with the market and development of smarter commissioning to ensure independent providers make provision available in or very close to Rotherham. In particular we will explore the possibility of residential providers opening new homes for our use in or very close to Rotherham.

**5.5** Use of innovative marketing and recruitment activity to recruit adopters for difficult to place children and on-going use of new family finding events such as consortium wide Adoption Activity Days.

**5.6** Establishment of Fostering to Adopt scheme to enable some children to be placed with prospective adoptive families before a court has granted a Placement Order, thereby meaning they will begin living with their forever family at a younger age and begin making attachments earlier.

**5.7** Review and potential revision of financial and practical support arrangements for Special Guardians and Residence Order holders to ensure that we are doing all that we can to promote these legal forms of permanence.

**5.8** Deliver education and guidance to social workers about the duty to place with extended family members where possible, and explore any other potential reasons for the very low numbers of connected persons/relative foster carers in Rotherham.

**5.9** Maintain on-going promotion and development of Supported Lodgings/Staying Put scheme and arrangements to ensure increasing numbers of care leavers have the opportunity to 'stay put' with their foster carers.

## **6. Financial Implications**

**6.1.** All new initiatives and strategic actions discussed above will need to be more than offset by resulting reduction of spending from other areas of the placement budget, given that one of the key aims of the strategy is to reduce overall spend.

**6.2** Delivering the strategy recommendations will require the current staffing establishments in placement services, including temporary posts originally funded via the Adoption Reform Grant, to be maintained.

**6.3** Maintaining existing resources in the Adoption Service will be cost effective, allowing the recruitment of even higher numbers of adoptive families in 2014/15

and enabling the service to achieve some income from providing adoptive placements for other local authorities.

**6.4** Investment in the Fostering Service in initiatives like Fostering Plus will result in reduced use of high cost external placements and thus be cost effective.

## **7. Controls and Evaluation**

**7.1** Monthly monitoring meetings will be held to record and analyse placement supply and demand in adoption, fostering and residential provision.

**7.2** Monthly monitoring of budget spending and activity in independent sector placements is undertaken.

**7.3** Monthly monitoring of foster carer and adopter recruitment activity and success against targets.

**7.4** On-going monitoring and promotion of Supported Lodgings/Staying put arrangements

**7.5** Quarterly monitoring of performance against national performance indicators such as those relating to placements stability.

**7.6** Termly monitoring of children's educational progress.

**7.7** Monthly monitoring of the make-up of the care population by placement type and proportion of placements that are local/not local and those that are family based compared to residential, and those that are local authority provision compared to independent sector provision.

**7.8** Monthly monitoring of number of children placed for adoption in-house and in inter-agency placements

**7.9** On-going monitoring of timeliness of adoptions as measured against the Adoption Scorecard Measures 1 and 2.

**7.10** On-going monitoring of the number of children placed in Fostering to Adopt placements

**7.11** On-going monitoring of the number of young people placed in Fostering Plus placements

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