

***“Our Children,
Resilient ★ Successful ★ Safe”***

**Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Sufficiency Strategy**

2023 – 2027



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1. Forward

Looked After Children Council



Cllr Victoria Cusworth, Lead Member, Children and Young People



Suzy Joyner, Director of Children's Services

2. Introduction

The purpose of this Strategy is to set out the vision for achieving Rotherham Council's commitment to improving the outcomes and life chances of the children and young people who are in our care and providing sufficient, safe, secure, and appropriate placements for looked after children and care experienced young people over the next 4 years.

An important element of planning sufficient accommodation is to take early, preventative action to support children and families so that more children can remain with their families and networks.

This Strategy considers information we know about our children, including their voices, and the information we know about local homes for children. This informs the activity we need to undertake and supports the delivery of Rotherham Council's Looked after Children promises.

2.1 Vision

We have a strong clear vision for children and young people's services - "Working with Rotherham's children, young people and families to be resilient, safe and successful", which aligns to the Council Plan: Council Plan 2022-25 – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

2.2 Principles

Activity to support children and families is underpinned by the Rotherham Charter (Four Cornerstones):

1. Welcome and care
2. Value and include
3. Communicate
4. Work in partnership

At the heart of these is trust.



1. Welcome and care

Our Rotherham Family Approach is informed by respectful, collaborative relationships and a stance of critical enquiry and "locating grand aspirations in everyday practice where the experience of the child is at the centre".

2. Value and include

Whilst the local authority is the lead agency in developing and implementing this strategy, it has been developed in collaboration with a wide range of partners and will be owned and implemented by all professionals working with children, young people, their parents, and carers.

3. Communicate

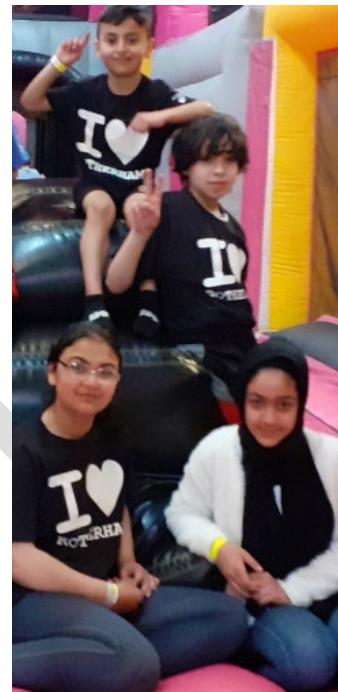
Rotherham Council are committed corporate parents, we use language that reflects this, we want everything to be the best that parents want for their children:

- That they are happy and healthy both physically and emotionally.
- That we keep them safe and protected from harm and exploitation.
- That we support them into adulthood and that we prepare them for independence.
- We are ambitious for our children; we want them to achieve their potential and participate in decisions which affect their lives.

4. Work in partnership

We want our children and young people to work with us and, along with parents and carers, shape the services we offer to them.

We value our children and young people and parents and carers as equal partners; this strategy is underpinned by our commitment to deliver the promises developed with our Looked After Children and Care Leavers.



2.3 Looked After Children and Care Leaver Promises

Corporate Parenting is the term used in law to describe our collective responsibility to care for, love and champion our children in care and our care leavers and ensure they have every opportunity to reach their full potential as they grow up in our family.

Rotherham Corporate Parents take our **Rotherham Family Approach** ethos of: *'would this be good enough for my child'* and have made the following promises, which came from our Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

Promise 1 - We will help you to live in a safe place where you are protected from harm

Promise 2 - We will listen to what you have to say and make sure it makes a difference

Promise 3 - We will help you to learn and do your best at school and college

Promise 4 - We will fully involve you in plans and decisions about you and your future

Promise 5 - We will help you to learn new skills as you grown up and become an adult

Promise 6 - We will help you take part in activities that you enjoy/are interested in

Promise 7 - We will help you to be proud of yourself and celebrate your individual beliefs

Promise 8 - We will help you to be happy and healthy

Promise 9 - We will help you to explore and be ready for the world of work

3. Policy Context

This document seeks to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people by providing guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 1989. Section 22G requires local authorities to take steps that secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after ('the sufficiency duty'). Section 27 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on other local authorities, local authority housing services and health bodies to assist the Children and Young People's Service in carrying out its functions under the Act. This includes assisting in the Corporate Parenting function and to provide joined up services that best meet the needs of the child.

In 2010, the Government published statutory guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 'General Duty of Local Authority to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children'. Since May 2014 there is a duty in the Children and Families Act (2014) for local authorities to have staying put arrangements in place to enable young adults to remain in their foster homes for children until they are 21 years old.

The Children & Social Work Act 2017 extended the duties on all local authorities to incorporate a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and care experience young people up to the age of 25

This Sufficiency Duty requires the Council to:



This strategy considers what is required by the local authority in terms of sufficient provision.

This strategy is linked to and informed by the following:

- The Joint Strategic Needs Analysis
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- The Corporate Parenting Promise to Looked After Children.
- The Pledge to Looked After Children.
- The Rotherham Offer to Care Leavers.
- The Early Help Strategy
- The Local Transformation Plan
- The Joint Commissioning Strategy

It takes into the account the criteria outlined for the inspection of Local Authority Children's Services 2018 (ILACS) and follows the journey of the child, considering the range of commissioned provision required from Early Help through to specialist placement provision.

4. Progress Since The Last Sufficiency Strategy

The previous LAC Sufficiency Strategy was approved by Cabinet in June 2019, progress against all priorities has been reviewed to support the development of the new strategy.

1. To reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies by recruiting more in-house foster carers

- Significant programme of work including significant investment in a digital marketing contract.
- Some successes in recruitment (at a time where this is a challenge nationally) and development of available fostering places, we have not increased the number of in-house foster carers.
- National issues impacting on retention of local authority foster carers, including the expansion of the independent fostering market, have impacted in Rotherham
- Programme of work now focuses on retention in addition to recruitment.

2. To develop local residential provision and secure block-bookings for Rotherham children where this will achieve best value

The February 2020 Cabinet report agreed a proposal to develop a range of in-house residential provisions, including emergency accommodation for Rotherham looked after children. 16 residential beds and 2 emergency beds across 7 registered settings.

- 4 new children's home purchased or acquired and fitted out to meet the specification informed by young people's service and Ofsted
- 3 children's homes opened with Ofsted registrations
- Ofsted rating of Good for all children's homes on first inspection

Block bookings were secured, however due to matching (identifying children who can safely live together and with the provider of a home) best value was not always achieved.

3. Explore opportunities for regional collaborative working arrangements.

- Rotherham continues to work with other authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber as part of the White Rose Framework regional collaborative arrangement for Fostering and Residential placements.

4. Review the Rotherham Fostering Framework to ensure that it continues to deliver high quality placements and value for money;

- Rotherham joined the White Rose Framework for fostering in April 2020.

5. Implement a Dynamic Purchasing Framework to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for Rotherham care leavers;

- Rotherham developed a 16+ Support and Accommodation flexible purchasing systems (FPS) which went live in January 2021.
- The FPS supports Rotherham to develop and shape the market; build relationships with existing and new providers; monitor quality and provide a compliant route to market.

6. Work in partnership with Adult Care & Housing to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for vulnerable 16- and 17-year-olds

- Collaborative working ensures sharing of good practice to inform the commissioning of accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds who are homeless.

Since 2019 there has also been national activity which has been considered in the development of this strategy.

In January 2021 the terms of reference for an independent review of children's social care were published. Following consultation, the case for change was published in October highlighting "the immediate pressure of there not being enough of the right homes in the right places." The national 'market' for homes for children is described as not working due to private providers setting the terms for engagement. This means Local Authorities need to use the homes for children that are available and can't always find the right homes for children to meet their needs.

There are 80,850 children in the care system in England, an increase of 1% from 2020 and an all-time high. In 2021 62% of Looked After Children were aged 10 years and over and 71% of Looked After Children were living with a foster family.

In 2021, 78% of children's homes were run by private providers and 41% approved fostering places are provided by independent fostering agencies.

The Personal Social Services Review Unit reported average prices are £4,865 a week for a local authority place and £4,153 for a private placement. This does not reflect the variance in the cost of private placements, some cost 2 and 3 times more than the average £4,153. The Competition and Markets Authority report profit margins for the 15 largest private children's home operators average 22.6% in The State of UK Competition, April 2022.



5. Supporting more children to live within their families and networks

In Rotherham, help is provided at the earliest opportunity and continues to be provided to support children and families, unless there is evidence of harm.

Help is provided as part of universal support from someone with an established relationship with the family, the Rotherham Partnership Early Help Offer and/ or the Rotherham Council Early Help Offer.

Harm is assessed by social care; child protection plans are utilised to measure progress to improve children's safety. Children can become looked after when there is no other option to secure their safety.



The 'wrap-around support' in our Early Help offer, Edge of Care offer and Pause (work with women who have babies removed to avoid repeat care proceedings) form a key component to delivering outstanding services for children, young people, and families in Rotherham. Supporting children into more appropriate permanence arrangements including safely returning home, adoption, special guardianship, and child arrangements orders. A range of evidence-based services and commissioned support form part of this offer to families.

Our therapeutic team have developed a 'wrap-around trauma' informed approach to support the safe 'step-down' of children and young people from residential care to family-based care. We have successfully identified, trained, and supported our first foster carers, and are working with two further foster carers in preparation for successful matching and working to identify further established and new carers. This means children in Rotherham in residential care will be able to return to family-based homes for children as soon as it is safe for them to do so.

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6. Children in the care of the Local Authority

Overview of Rotherham

Rotherham has 57,453 children aged under 18 representing 21.7% of the local population (ONS, mid 2020).

23% of children live in low-income families (England 18%). The free school meal entitlement rate is above the English national average (23.8% compared to 21.6% at Primary, 21.4% compared to 18.9% at Secondary – DfE 2020/21). 19.4% of Rotherham's school age population is from a BME background (England 35.1%) (DfE 2020/21).

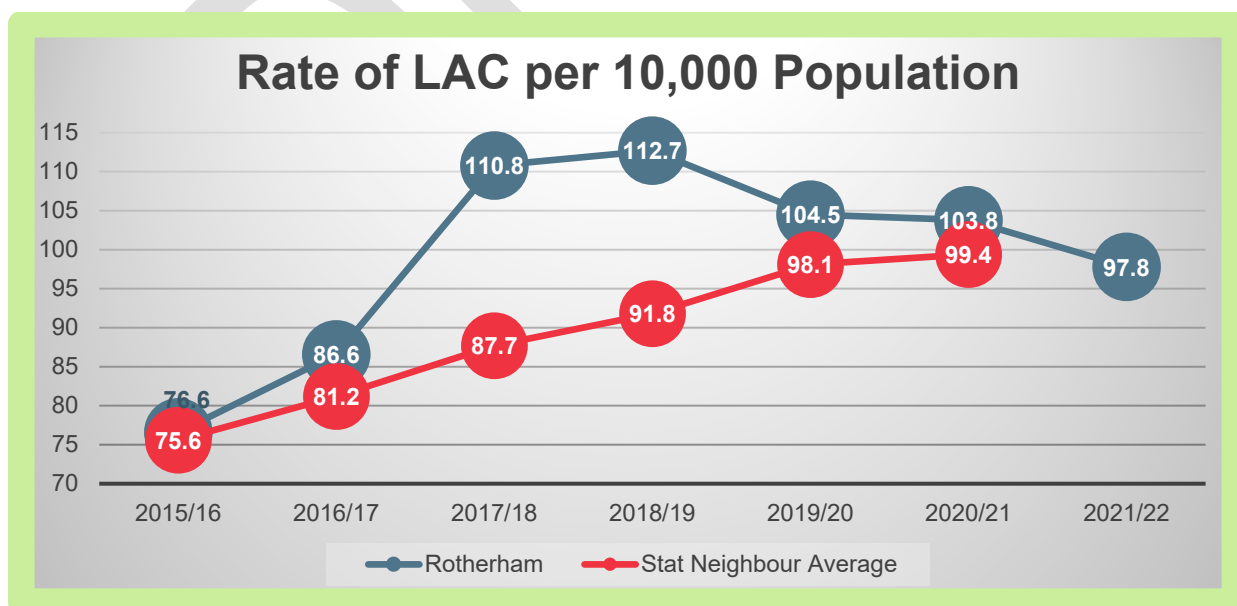
The rate of referrals for Rotherham Council in 2020/21 is 569 per 10,000 of children which was lower than the Statistical Neighbours average of 613 and higher than the national average of 494.

Looked After Children needing homes

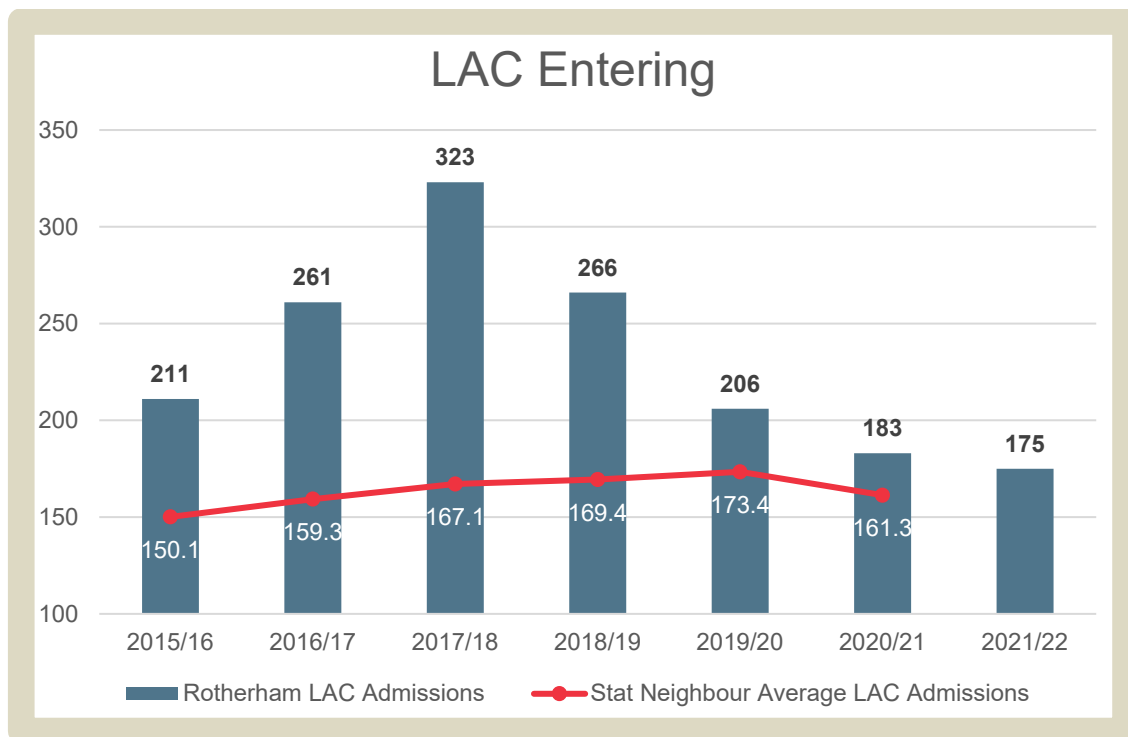
As at 31 March 2022, there were 563 Looked After Children and 293 Care Experienced Young People.

- 90% of these children are in care as a result of abuse or neglect
- 10% are in care due to family dysfunction, absent parenting, the family being in acute stress, parental disability or illness, socially unacceptable behaviour or the child's disability or illness

The rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 population has been safely reducing since 2019 from 112.7 to 97.8 per 10,000 (children under 18). This remains higher than the national rate. Over the last three years the trend has increased in Local Authorities which are Rotherham's statistical neighbours.

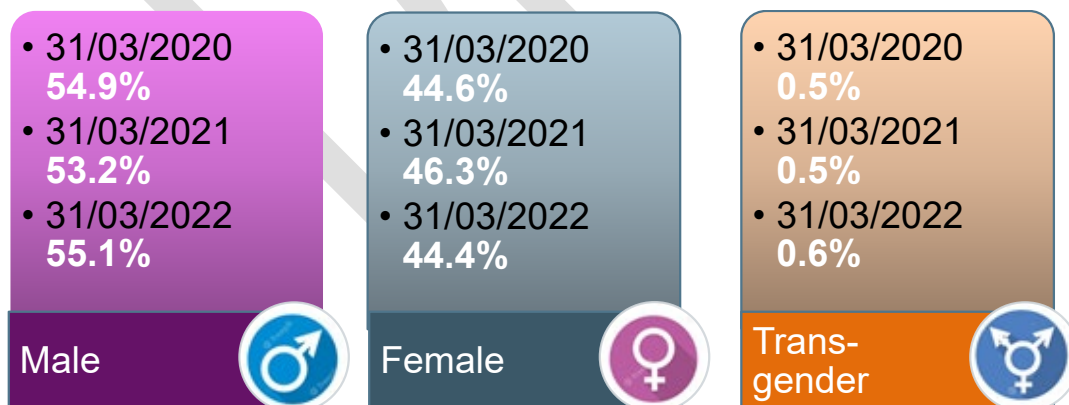


During the Covid-19 pandemic Rotherham children and young people's services maintained the help that was being provided to families through early help and child in need plans as well as continuing to recognise and respond to keep children safe from harm. This ensured the safe continuation of the reduction in the number of children entering care. Delays in court proceeding extended the period some children needed to be cared for.



Gender profile of Looked After Children

The number of looked after children identifying as male, female or transgender has remained relatively stable over the last three years with more than half consistently identifying as male.



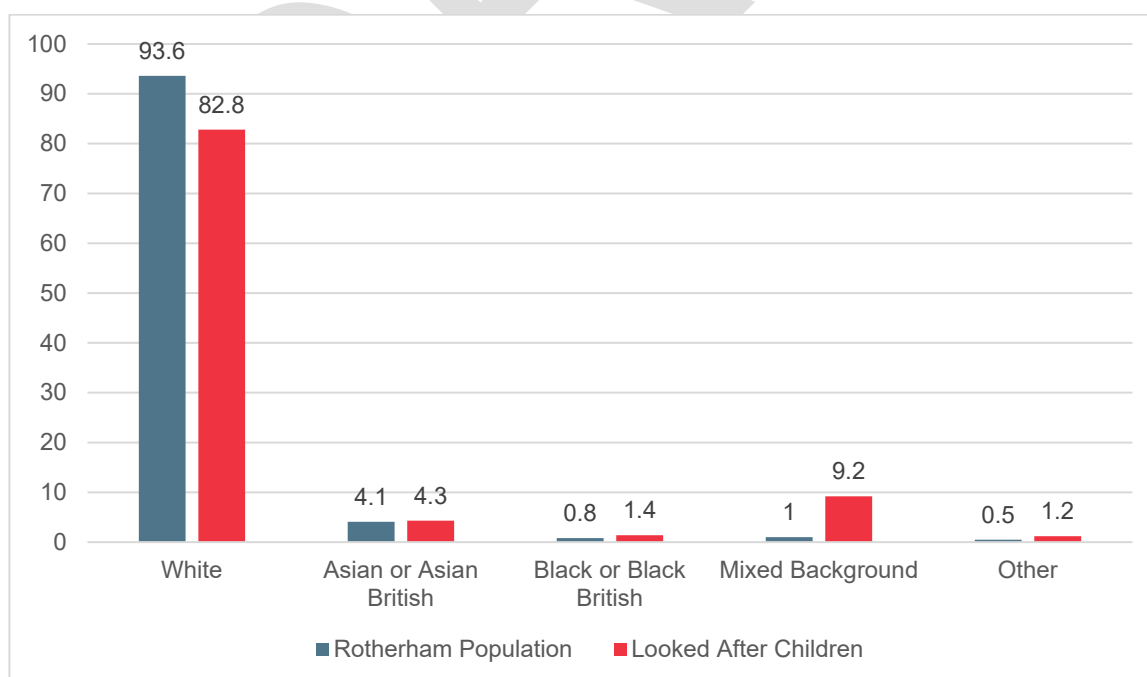
Age profile of Looked After Children

The biggest proportion of looked after children in Rotherham are aged 10 to 15 years old, this has been consistent over the last three years at just over 40%. During 2021 there was a slight increase in the proportion of children under 1, however this has now reduced again. The proportion of children aged 1 to 4 year olds has steadily decreased over the last three years and young people who are aged 16 have seen an increase in the same period.

AGE of LAC			
	31/03/2020	31/03/2021	31/03/2022
Under 1	6.2%	7.5%	5.7%
1 to 4	15.6%	14.9%	13.1%
5 to 9	18.9%	19.1%	18.3%
10 to 15	42.7%	41.0%	42.1%
16 and over	16.6%	17.6%	20.8%

Ethnicity of Looked After Children

The majority of looked after children are from White backgrounds, followed by children from mixed backgrounds (9%). Children from mixed backgrounds are over-represented among looked after children when compared to that of the population as a whole. At the end of March 2022 an increased number of looked after children in Rotherham are unaccompanied asylum seeker children than in previous years.



Looked After Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The proportion of looked after children with a disability has remained relatively stable over the last three years.

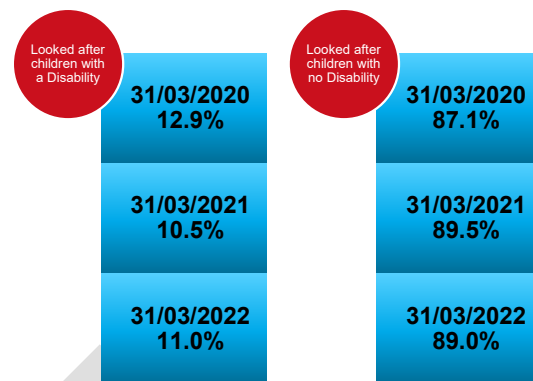
Between 31st March 2020 and 31st 2022 there was a 1.9% decrease in this cohort. Rotherham's position currently shows 11% for children

that are looked after have a disability (47 children).

Of the children identified with a disability the main need identified is learning (34%) followed by a those with a diagnosis of Autism or Asperger's syndrome (25.5%).

As at 31st March 2022, the largest proportion of looked after children in Rotherham who are identified with a disability are aged 11 and over (76.6%) which is a continuing trend from last year.

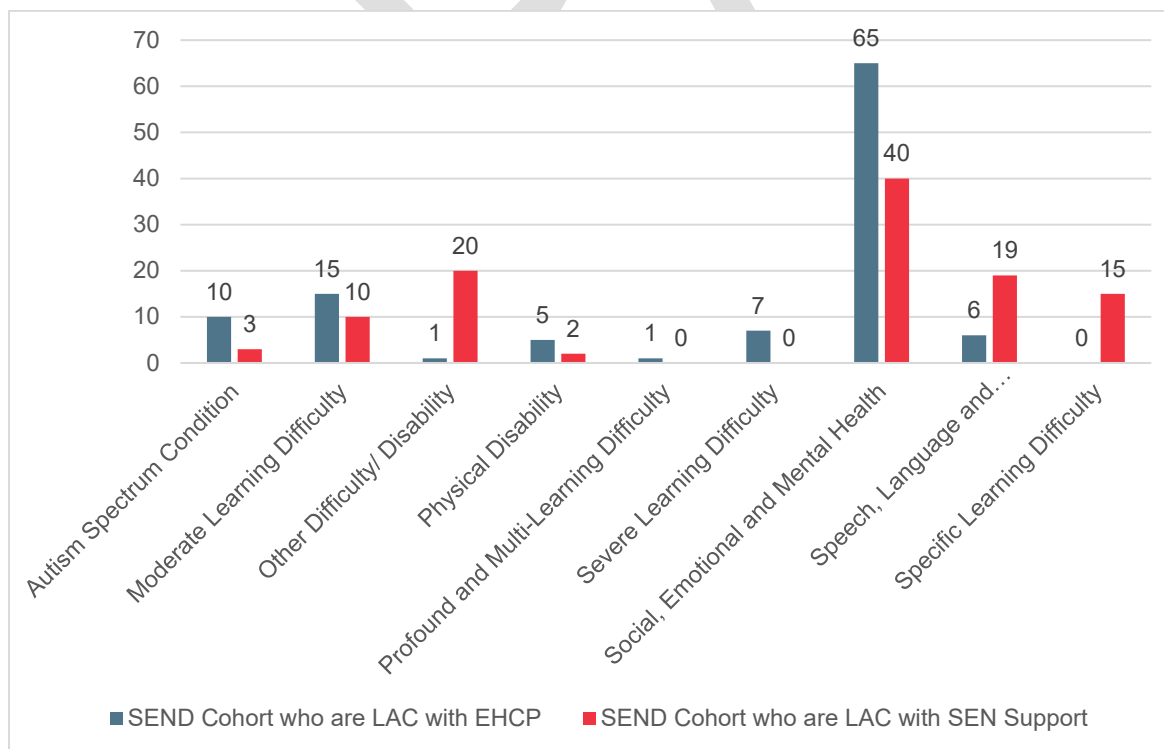
74.5% of children with a disability are White British which is slightly lower than the looked after children population as a whole (83%).



110 looked after children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) and an additional 110 are identified with needing Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support.

The majority of looked after children in Rotherham with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) have a primary need of Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH).

Most looked after children in Rotherham who are identified with needing Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support also have a high level of primary need being SEMH. Speech, Language & Communication (SLC) Difficulty and Specific Learning Difficulty are the next two highest identified needs for this cohort of children.

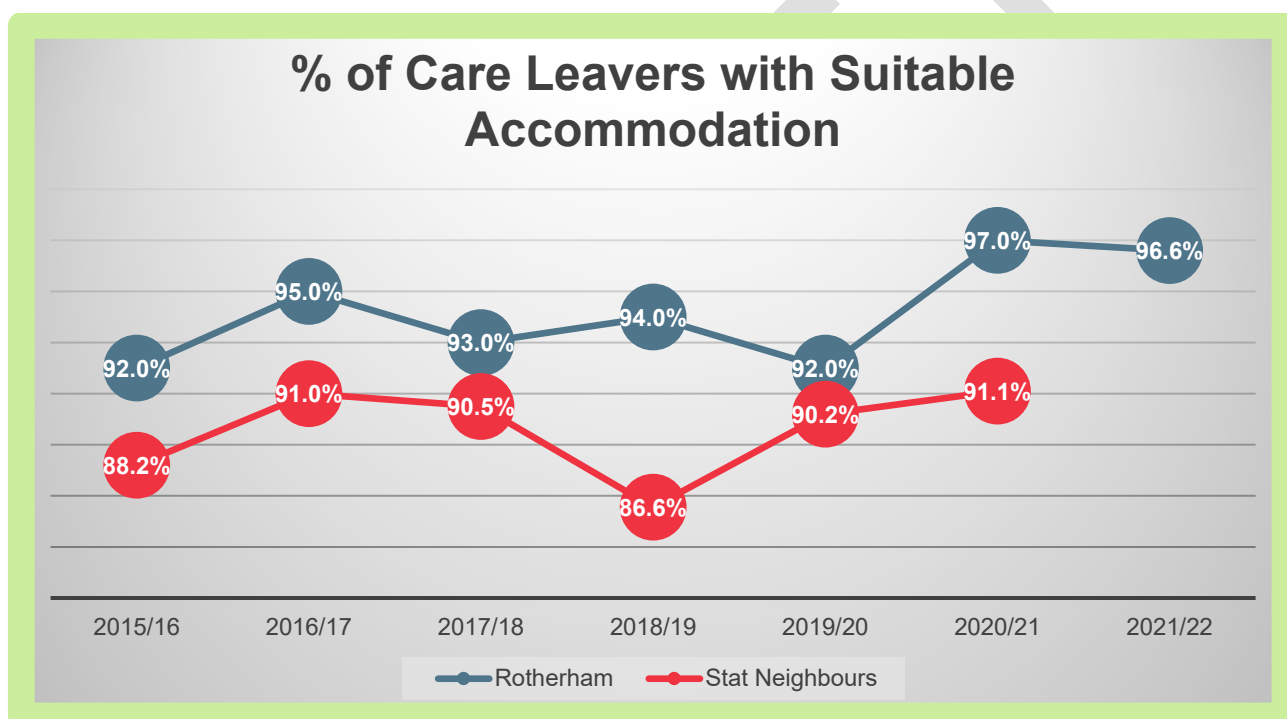


Looked After Children's emotional and behavioural health

In March 2020 comparative scores for Looked After Children in Rotherham were higher than in other parts of the country, reflecting a complex level of emotional need. Rotherham showed an overall score of 14.0 where 1-13 is normal and 14-16 is borderline, this score put Rotherham into the 3rd quartile. Nationally the score was 13.7.

Care Experienced Young People

On 31 March 2022, there were 293 Care Experienced Young People in Rotherham. The percentage with a suitable home has increased over the last three years and Rotherham continues its trend of remaining above its Statistical Neighbours.



Young people are supported into their adult years by a team of 11 personal advisors (PAs). The PAs support our young people find a home, jobs, training, or university place. They can help offer relationship advice or be a shoulder to cry on or someone to have fun with. The PAs have networks across universal services who they can call on to support young people. The Service has a hub called the Journey – it's a terraced house where young people can drop in, have a brew, watch TV, or do their washing.

Stability of a home for young people leaving care shows the majority have had no moves or only 1 move over the last 12 months (82.9%) with 98.3% having 3 moves or less. The 3 young people with 6 moves or more are aged between 22 and 24 making up 1.7% over the overall care leavers cohort.

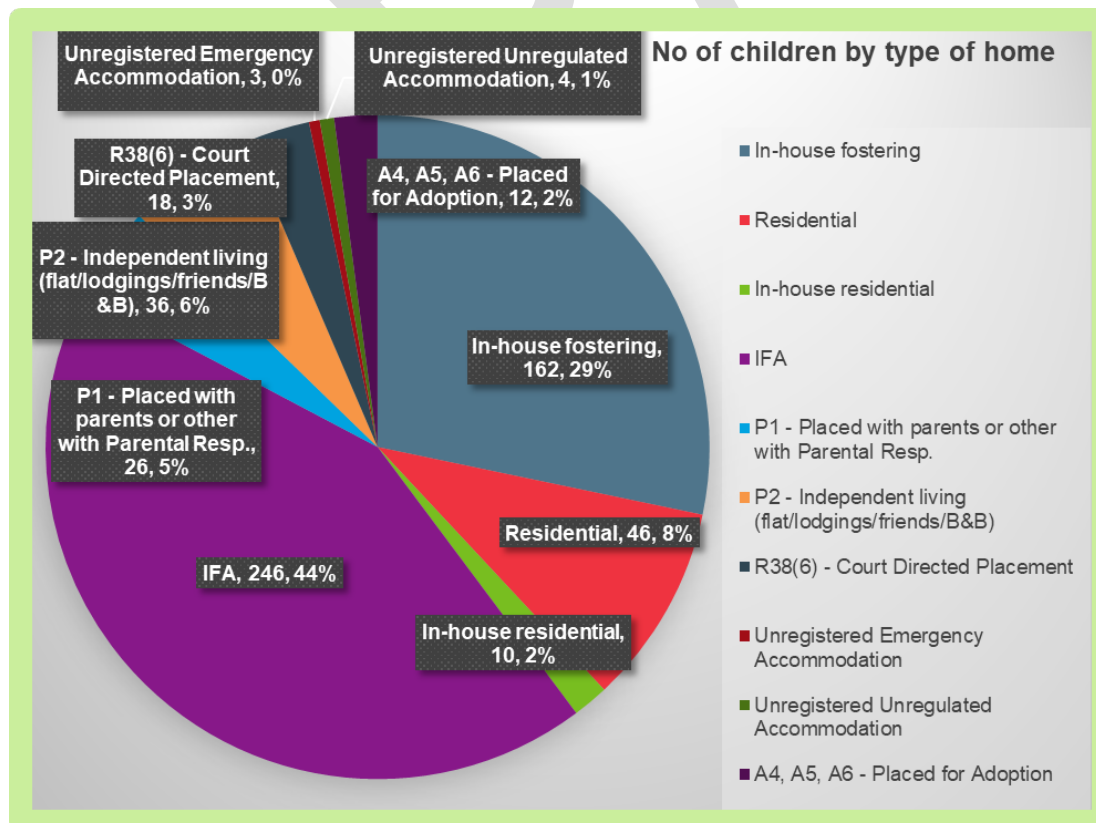
7. Homes for children in care of the Local Authority

Review of Current Provision and market analysis

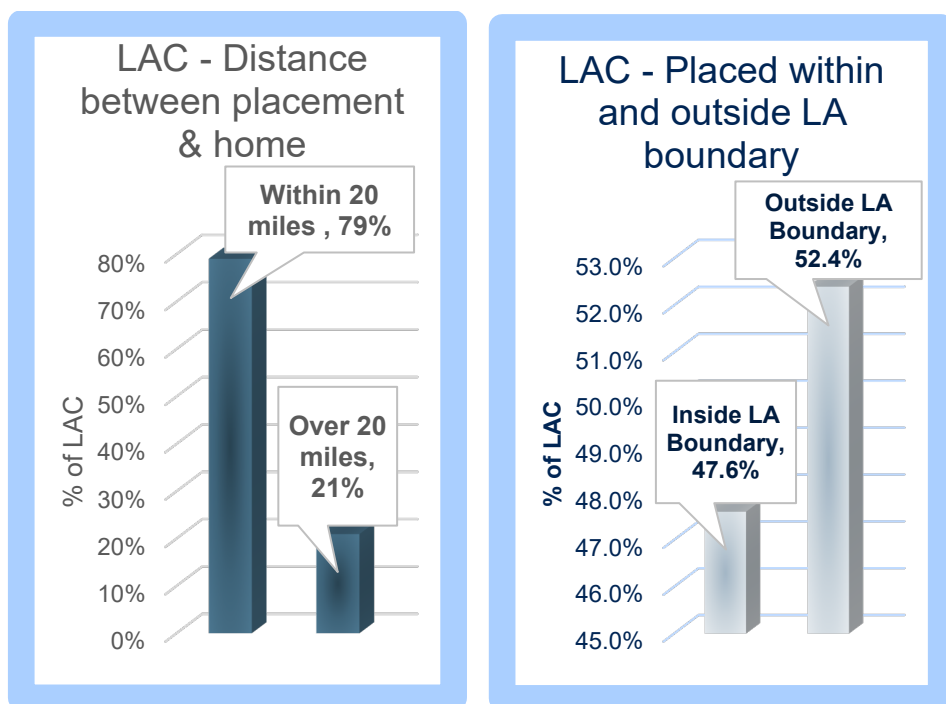
Rotherham Council operates within a mixed economy of internal and external provision. Homes for children are commissioned through framework and spot purchasing arrangements, some of which are regional. Despite additional investment in recruitment, and a targeted campaign to attract in-house foster carers, In-house foster homes (162) account for 29% of the total looked after children population, compared with 65% nationally.

Placement Type	2020/21		2021/22	
	Number	%	Number	%
Residential	47	9	56	12
Independent Fostering Agency	254	50	234	50
In-house fostering	140	28	122	26
Fostering F & F	64	13	56	12

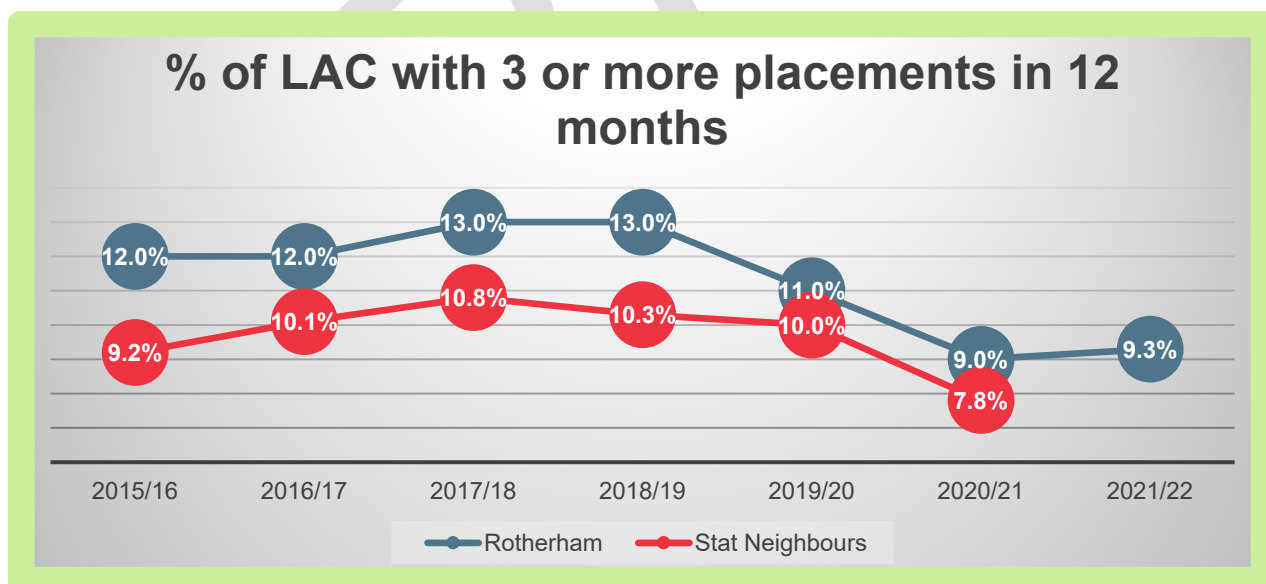
Despite work to stimulate local residential provision, there are limited private residential homes in borough, particularly when compared to local authorities across Yorkshire and Humberside.



79% of looked after children are in placements which are within 20 miles of home, with 21% of placements currently being more than 20 miles away.



Although the rate of looked after children with three or more homes within twelve months has been slowly declining over recent years and is in line with the national rate at 9%, Rotherham's rate remains higher than our statistical neighbours.



Independent Fostering Agencies

At the end of March 2022, of the 563 looked after children, there were 408 children in fostering homes (all-types), which is 73% of the LAC population.

Of the 408, 60.3% of children are placed with independent fostering agencies compared to 35% nationally.

Of the 246 children placed in an Independent Fostering Agency home at the end of March 2022, the largest cohort of children, 110 (44.7%) are aged 11 to 15, with 182 (74%) aged 5 to 15.

In-house Fostering

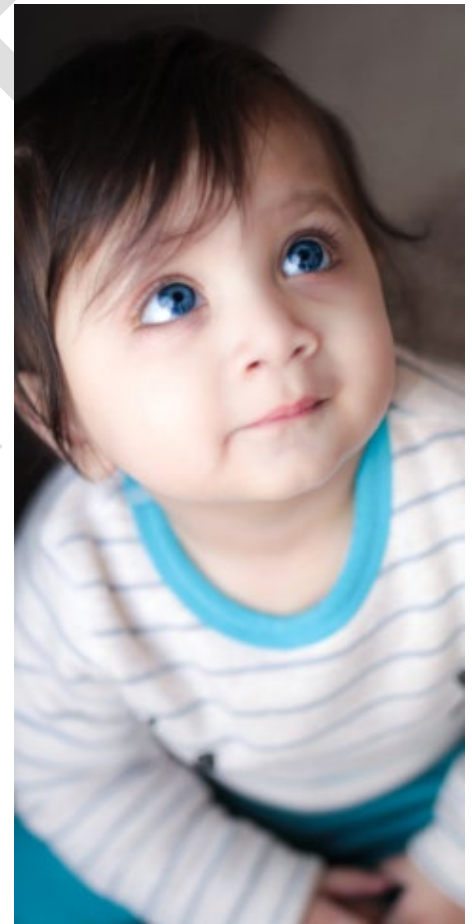
Of the 408, 39.7% of children are placed with in-house foster carers compared to 65% nationally.

Of our fostering families (162), 124 of them have children who are placed with approved carers (including kinship) with a further 36 placed with family and friends (Regulation 24).

Of the 162 children placed in In-house fostering, the ages are quite evenly spread with the largest amount of 29% in the age range 11 to 15, 27.2% in the age range 5 to 10 and 19.8% in the age range of 1 to 4.

Rotherham is a member of the White Rose Fostering Framework. The framework has four lots of which placements can be called from:

- Lot 1 – Standard Costs
- Lot 2 – Standard with Additional Needs
- Lot 3 – Intensive Support
- Lot 4 - Specialist placement 1 - parent and child fostering (fee based on age of child)
- Lot 4 - Specialist Placement 2 - parent and child Assessment (fee based on age of child).



The White Rose Consortium is in the process of developing sub-regional Quality Hubs, for the purpose of delivering its quality assurance/service improvement work via these hubs. This will complement our own quality assurance framework.

Residential homes

There are 56 children in Residential homes (In-house and OOA) which equates to 10% of the overall LAC population.

- 9 Private providers manage 12 children's homes.

- 5 Private providers manage 7 homes for young people aged 16 and above.
- Rotherham MBC manage 3 Children's homes, 1 Short Breaks home and 1 home for young people aged 16 and above.



Residential care homes (56) have most children over the age of 11 (89.3%), with 30 children aged 11 to 15 (53.6%) and 20 children aged 16 and over (35.7%). The remaining 6 are between 5 and 10 (10.7%).

293 young people are in post 16 years accommodation. The highest percentage were in independent living arrangements (32%) with the majority of them aged between 18 and 20 (86%).

Rotherham is a member of the White Rose Residential Child Care Framework which has:

1. Standard residential placements
2. Specialist residential placements
3. Specialist residential placements with education
4. Parent and child residential placements.

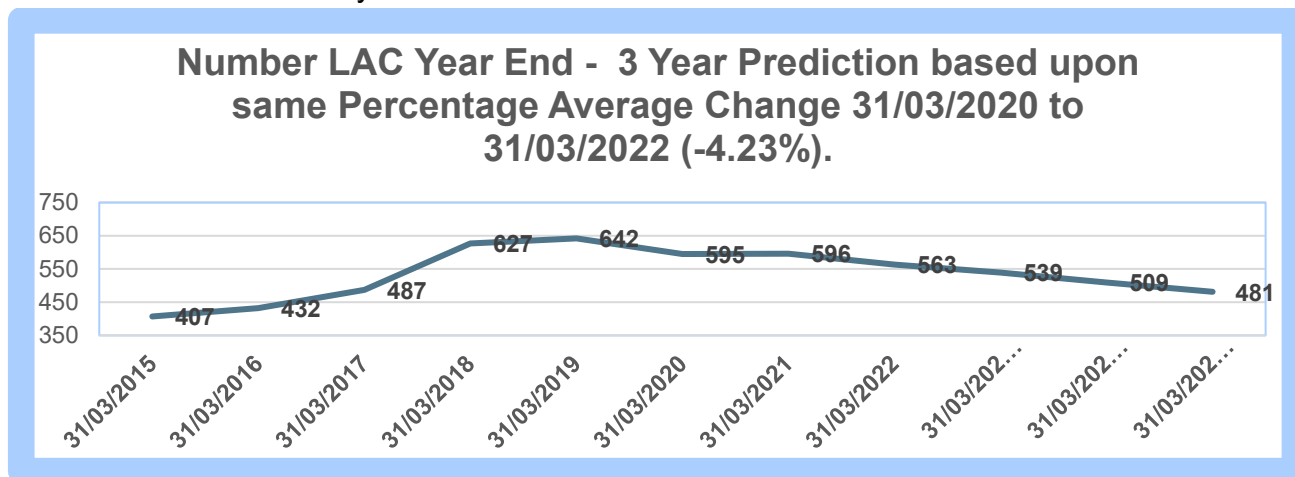
The commissioning activity is shared between the participating local authorities using shared procedures.

Rotherham has its own framework with providers of homes for young people aged 16 and above. This works well and will be supportive with regards to the planned regulation in this sector.

8. Future Need Projections

Number of Looked After Children

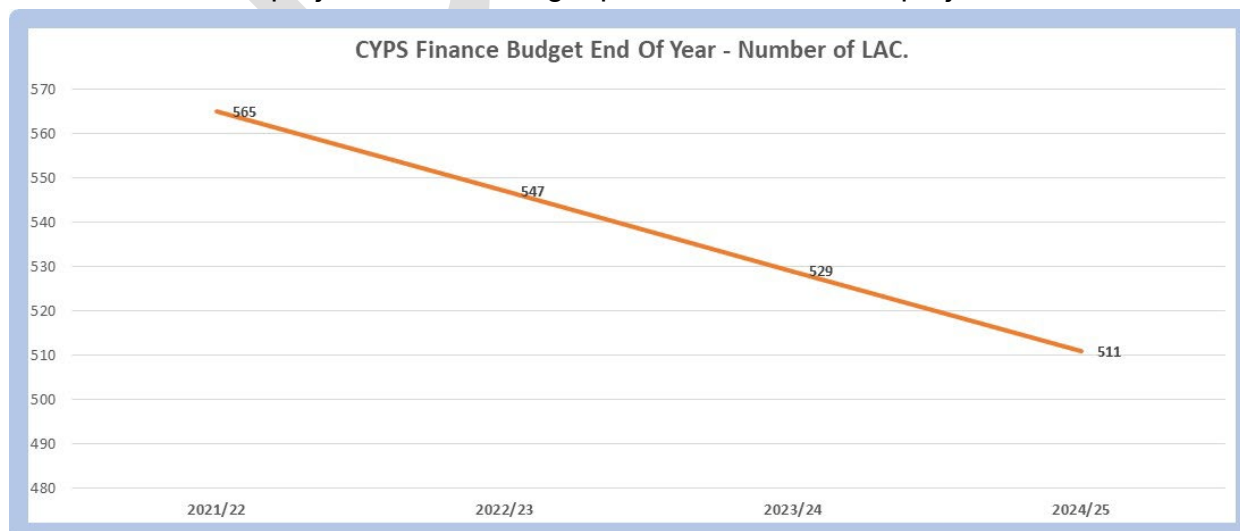
Based upon the average percentage change (taken from the numbers over the last seven years) the three-year prediction is a continued reduction in the number of Looked After Children in Rotherham by -4.23%.



The safe continuation of the reduction in the number of children entering care is reflective of the support that has continued to be provided to families, regardless to the covid-19 pandemic. This needs to be considered in the context of an increasing population. Rotherham has a greater proportion of under 15s than the national average (17.7% compared to 17% respectively): and the number of young people increased from 46,000 in 2011 to 47,100 in 2021 (a 2.4% increase). Implementation of the national transfer scheme has seen Rotherham receive an increased number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Children are remaining in care for longer.

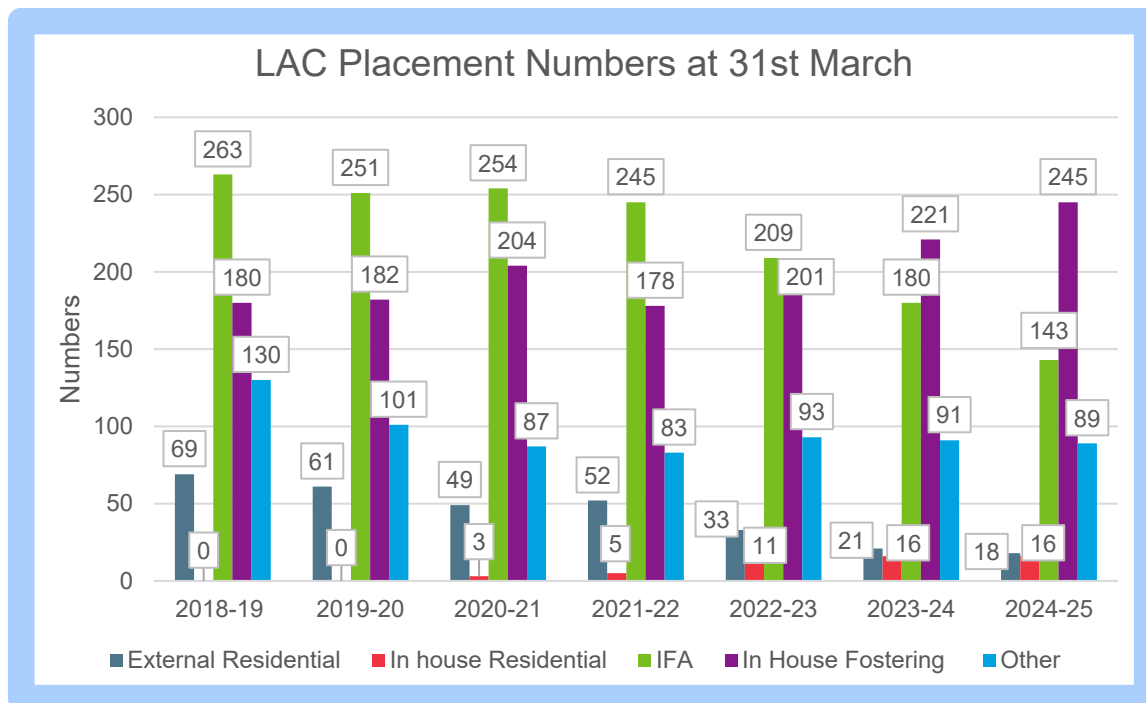
Looked After Children Projection

Based upon the prediction above a safe continued reduction in the number of looked after children has been projected. The budget plan is based on this projection.



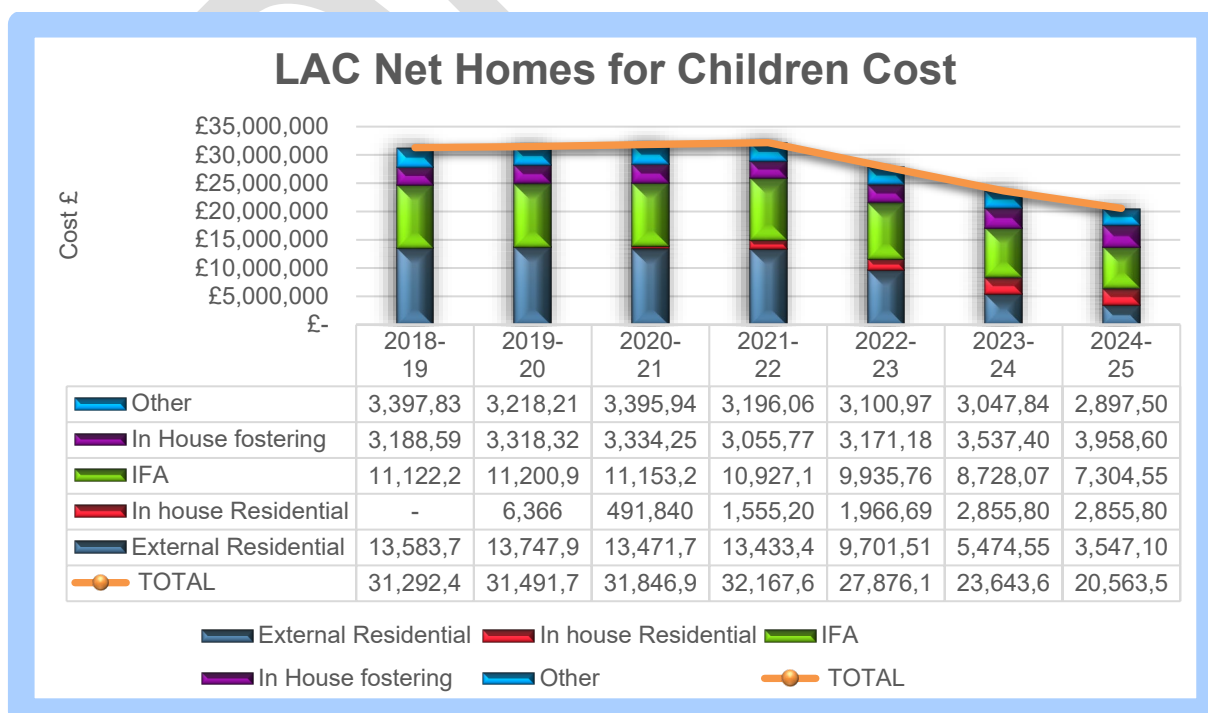
Homes for children Projection

Based upon a linear projection (taken from the numbers over the last three years) the three year prediction sees a continued reduction in the use of external residential homes, an increase in the use of in-house residential homes and a reduction in the use of Independent Fostering Agency fostering families and increase in the use of in-house fostering families.



Annual Expenditure Projection (2025)

Based upon the linear projection of homes for children above the three-year prediction sees a continued reduction in the expenditure on homes for Looked After Children.



9. Priorities

Based on the analysis of local need; we have identified the following priorities for the period of strategy. The delivery plan will be developed with key milestones for each of the objectives and outcome measures documented. Progress against the delivery plan will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board. Priorities will be reviewed annually by the Corporate Parenting Board based on updated annual sufficiency data and local / national drivers.

Our priority areas over the next three years are to:

- More Young People aged 10+ are able to be cared for safely in their families and communities.
- Children and young people have access to a range of homes (internal and external options) that meet their needs and improve their outcomes.
- All services take the Rotherham Family Approach to ensure all Rotherham children and young people are “resilient, successful and safe”, evidenced by Quality Assurance activity.
- Children and young people are able to access the support they need when they need it because Health, Education and Care Services share a joint understanding of the needs of children and young people in Rotherham and use this to inform commissioning and service delivery.
- Children and Young People and their families and carers are able to access CAMHs assessment and intervention when needed.
- Children, young people, families and carers benefit from additional social value in Rotherham e.g. more employment opportunities.
- More children, young people and families benefit from additional support to improve outcomes and access employment.

10. Measures of Success

Theme	Measure
Overarching	
Keeping families together / stronger	Reduction in the number of LAC
	Increased number of diversions from care - edge of care - duty - locality
Fostering	
Ensuring children have local family-based homes for children	Increased number of approved in-house foster carers / homes for children
	Increased number of children living with an in-house foster carer
	Increased % of children in a family-based setting (reg 24/38(6)/PWP)
	Increased % of our LAC who are in foster homes for children within a 20-mile radius
Right Child Right Care	
Increasing stability and permanence so children can thrive	Stabilise the number of children who have had 3 homes for children or more in 12 months
	Increased number of LAC in homes for children in Rotherham or within a 20-mile radius
	Increased number of children re-unified with parents / family members (PWP)
	Increased number of young people supported through the House project
	Increased number of children placed in Special Guardianship Order arrangements
	Increased number of children ceasing care linked to permanence
	An improvement in the timeliness of review Pathway Plans to support transition planning
Residential	
Ensuring children have the right quality care	A reduction in the number of LAC placed in out of authority residential provision
	Increased number of children / young people in in-house residential provision (at capacity)
	Increased number of residential beds available in planned timescales
	Reduction in the additionality of support within a child's placement (reduction in costs)
	Reduction in the length time spent being looked after - in the current financial year and overall
	Zero CYP in an unregistered (emergency) placement
	Zero CYP in an unregistered / unregulated placement

11. Delivery Plan

Objective (What do we want to do)	Outcome Measure (How will we know when we have done it)	Action Owner (Who will be responsible)	Timescale (When will it be done by)
Promote the Rotherham Family Approach to commissioned services.	All services take the Rotherham Family Approach to ensure all Rotherham children and young people are “resilient, successful and safe”, evidenced by Quality Assurance activity.	William Shaw	2023
Develop and deliver the Quality Assurance Framework to measure the use and impact of the methodological approaches with children and young people.		William Shaw	2023
Commission homes, interventions, and services that are high quality, compliant, regulated and deliver best value.	Children and young people have access to a range of homes (internal and external options) that meet their needs and improve their outcomes.	William Shaw	
Transform the offer to Rotherham Council foster carers to ensure all children, young people and families receive the help they need		Rebecca Wall	
Further investment to expand number of in-house residential children's homes.		Rebecca Wall	
Continued development of in-house residential children's homes, promoting residential care as an intervention not a destination		Rebecca Wall	
Work collaboratively with external residential and fostering providers to ensure all homes for children meet the required regulatory requirements and provide assurance of the quality outcomes delivered		William Shaw	
Ensure all homes for children meet the required regulatory requirements and provide assurance of the quality outcomes delivered by the Council.		Rebecca Wall	
Contribute to the delivery of the foster carer recruitment programme in line with development within the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.		William Shaw	2023
Contribute to the delivery of collaborative approaches, frameworks, and bodies to manage the market effectively in line with development within the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.		Helen Sweaton	2024-2027
Develop joint strategic needs analysis, commissioning processes and funding arrangements alongside partners.	Health, Education and Care Services share a joint understanding of the needs of children and young people in Rotherham and use this to inform commissioning and service delivery to	Helen Sweaton	2023

	ensure children and young people are able to access the support they need when they need it.		
Develop a CAMHs pathway to improve access to assessment and intervention for looked after children.	Children and Young People and their families and carers are able to access CAMHs assessment and intervention when needed.	Helen Sweaton	
Enable social value principles and outcomes to be integrated into the whole commissioning cycle for services for children and young people.	Children, young people, families and carers benefit from additional social value in Rotherham e.g. more employment opportunities.	William Shaw	
Develop and Deliver the Early Help Strategy	More Young People aged 10+ are able to be cared for safely in their families and communities.	David McWilliams	
Increase investment and capacity in Family Group Conferencing		David McWilliams	
Develop 'Wrap around' Edge of Care Services for families with young people aged 13+		Matthew Boud	
Expand the Supporting Families program.	More children, young people and families benefit from additional support to improve outcomes and access employment.	David McWilliams	

END