

# Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Analysis

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2025-2028



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## Our purpose and approach to sufficiency for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

### Purpose

As corporate parents, we have a **duty** to ensure that we achieve the best **outcomes** for looked after children and care leavers. Therefore, we must be able to access the right **accommodation** and **support** across a range of needs, in the right **place**, at the right **time**.

Based on our understanding of need and current provision, this means:

- Ensuring that placements, when a child becomes looked after, are as close to home as possible
- Encouraging placement stability and preventing placement breakdowns
- Achieving permanence
- Focusing on the best outcomes for looked after children and care leavers

### Approach

We will do this by:

- Working in partnership with framework and local providers to develop more provision in the vicinity of Bracknell that is closely aligned to need and works across sectors in the interests of the child or young person.
- Working in partnership with South East local authorities through frameworks and regional commissioning arrangements to share intelligence around the market.
- Working in partnership with all Berkshire local authorities, but with a primary focus on East Berkshire partners and Frimley ICB to explore more local provision for children and young people and fill gaps in the market.
- Focusing on Early Help and prevention, using the Family Safeguarding Model to keep families together where it is safe to do so.
- Developing our in-house fostering offer through the South East fostering partnership to increase the capacity and resilience within our in-house fostering workforce and to reduce our dependency on the open market.
- Having oversight of Supported Accommodation providers registration and working closely with the Supported Accommodation market.

This approach will help drive a reduction in cost associated with the current unsustainable and growing levels of demand and complexity.

### Introduction

This Sufficiency Plan will clearly set out our strategic intentions to achieve sufficiency for looked after children and care leavers' accommodation (Children & Young Person's Act, 2008).

It will include:

- An overview of the local and national context
- A summary of Bracknell Forest Council progress so far
- A summary of the changing needs profile, and demand for placements
- A high level action plan which outlines the priorities identified in this Sufficiency Plan

## Statutory Duties and Guidance

Local authorities have a number of duties towards children within their area which are related to the sufficiency duty. In particular:

### Children's Act 2004

'A whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after. For those who are looked after, Local Authorities and their Children's Trust partners should seek to secure a number of providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of looked after children and young people within their local area'.

### Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children

Requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty')

### Other Legislation

- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Children and Family Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010, 2015
- The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023

## Bracknell Forest Council Vision

Our vision for the borough is where **we put residents first, working together to grow sustainable, resilient, and inclusive communities.**

## The Pledge

The Pledge is the council's promise to children and young people who are looked after and to care leavers. The Pledge is currently in the process of review and an updated Pledge will be within the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

## National and Local Context

### National Context

Nationally the number of children looked after stood at 83,630 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 which is a 0.5% decrease from the figure of 83,760 in 2023. This is a rate of 70 children looked after per 10,000 children - the same as last year. Children looked after starting (CLA starting) has remained similar to last year at 33,050 (decrease of 0.5%) but children looked after ceasing to be looked after (CLA ceasing) have increased to 33,620 (increase of 6%).(1)

Many of the changes can be explained by the large increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in recent years.

### Local Context

Bracknell Forest is located in Berkshire, South East England. It is a unitary authority, having the powers of a non-metropolitan county and district council combined. The administrative area of Bracknell Forest covers approximately 110 square kilometres and encounters large rural areas which can make finding placements within the authority problematic. The average property prices as of March 2025 in Bracknell Forest are £399,573 which is 35% higher than the national average (2).

Bracknell Forest has a population of 124,600 and has increased by 10% in the last 10 years. Approximately 27,839 children and young people (aged under 18) live in Bracknell Forest and make-up 21% of the total population (3).

Bracknell Forest has no areas in the most deprived 10% in England. The greatest levels of deprivation within the area are in Wildridings and Central which is amongst the 30% most deprived LSOAs in the country (4). In 2023/24, there were 3,139 children under 20 in low-income families. (5).

- 186 children were subject to child protection plans in 2024-25, having been assessed by the Local Authority and other multi-agency partners as being at risk of significant harm.
- 124 children were looked after by the Local Authority, as of 31st March 2025, and were in the care of the Council either voluntarily (with the agreement of their parents), or by orders of the court.
- The number of children referred to social services had been similar in the last 2 years from 1,511 in 2024 to 1,533 in 2025.

## Progress so far

### Improving outcomes for children and young people

#### Children Looked After

- The creation of the Life Chances Service which includes CLA Team (for long term CLA), Family Placement Team, Life Chances Service and Youth Offending Team – this reorganisation promotes joint/shared working in respect of long term CLA and care leavers.
- Joint working between Operational and BFC Commissioning regarding concerns about placements, typically residential settings, to ensure robust monitoring of concerns, actions and progress.
- Phase 1 of the East Berkshire Complex Placements Project has been completed; this was a joint project with East Berkshire partners and Frimley ICB to consider the development of a residential offer in Berkshire for children with complex needs.
- Bracknell Forest are part of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG), which supports Bracknell Forest through shared quality assurance, joint risk assessment tools, collaborative working with other Local Authorities and access to national contact lists.
- Bracknell is part of the South Central Residential Framework and has supported the recommissioning of the Framework. The Residential Framework provides residential placement options for young people in addition to monitoring and oversight of these providers.
- Bracknell Forest is part of the South Central IFA Framework, membership to the Framework provides foster placement options for young people in addition to monitoring and oversight of these providers.
- Monitoring of residential placements via a monthly panel to track progress, therapy and step-down plans.
- Aim to place young people at risk of exploitation locally to ensure their professional support network is maintained.
- Review of permanency/long-term matching via monthly Panel.
- The PEP process is reviewed annually, PEPs audited and areas for improvement highlighted and addressed by the Virtual School Headteacher. Training is delivered to schools and social care teams at the start of and throughout each academic year. PEPs are held termly (3 per year/CYP), and the offer is extended to all care leavers to the end of Year 13, irrespective of the year they turn 18.
- The training offer from the Virtual School is open to Designated Teachers as well as all school staff (as appropriate), social workers and BFC staff. Training has included:
  - Working (Communicating) Together for Social Workers and Educators – a half-day session face to face in collaboration with Social Care
  - Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)
  - Supporting Vulnerable Pupils with SEMH
  - The Impact of Trauma on Sensory Processing
  - Zones of Regulation
- The Virtual School develop and deliver Attachment and Trauma training in our schools. The Virtual School also provides PACE training and Attachment and Trauma Virtual Reality experiences. The Virtual School raises awareness of the needs of our CLA primarily

through the delivery of attachment and trauma training for education provisions, foster carers and social care.

- The Virtual School Head manages the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) in accordance with the statutory guidance and ensures that the funding is allocated and utilised on a needs-led basis to improve outcomes for CLA.
- Earlier transitions planning ahead of 18th birthdays to confirm accommodation arrangements, including contingency plans, while also taking education into account.
- Virtual School deliver training to the Early Help Team for Attachment and Trauma (including a VR experience) and PACE. The Virtual School is also working with Early Help to establish a training programme in relation to Generational Trauma, with the aim to provide the workers with knowledge and strategies to work with families.
- Virtual School has representation at professionals' meetings including Foster Carer Meetings and CLA Reviews to enhance relationship building and collaboration and to ensure that education is considered.

## **In House Fostering**

- Analysis identified that the marketing budget for in-house fostering recruitment needed to be increased. The budget for marketing has now increased and there is a marketing plan in place for recruitment of foster carers for 2024/25.
- Recruitment of 2 Recruitment and Publicity Officers in 2024 following a long-term staff vacancy, there is 1 permanent and 1 temporary role as part of the Regional Recruitment Hub Project.
- A transformation project has been completed to increase the capacity and resilience within BFC's in-house fostering workforce to reduce BFC's dependency on the open market – this has allowed additional training and a 2-tier system for foster carers to support children with higher needs and to attain some progression.
- Bracknell has pooled resources with a number of other local authorities across the UK to co-produce marketing material including a short video, called "Any of Us", which went on to win the "Best Collaboration" and "Best Creative Comms" categories at the comms2point0 UnAwards which recognises excellence in public sector communications.
- Government funding has been allocated for the establishment of a Regional Fostering Hub, the project is underway which will include grouping local authorities into regions for fostering recruitment, Bracknell is leading a group of 20 different local authorities. This will allow for the development of a new dedicated fostering website, single point of contact across the region and will allow local authorities with part-time Recruitment and Publicity Officer such as Bracknell, to have full coverage across the week. The Regional Fostering Hub is now going into its 2<sup>nd</sup> year and is working well.
- Bracknell Forest's Fostering webpage has been updated and refreshed, along with an increased social media presence to attract more interest to individuals looking to foster. The webpage is being regularly updated to ensure that the information is up to date and correct.
- The training offer from the Virtual School to foster carers has been extended to include not only supporting the education of children from Early Years through the stages up to including university, but also Attachment and Trauma and PACE. Training offer from the Virtual School is also accessible in the coming year for both Foster Carers and staff.

## Care Leavers

- The Corporate Parenting Board and the Fostering Panel, now include a Care Leaver.
- Care Leavers assist with interviews for new staff.
- The Leaving Care Team are developing community links with local charities and Easthampstead Church.
- With the creation of the Life Chances service, all teams within the service work in the same location which has helped develop better working relationships between CLA and the Family Placement Team, benefitting our young people.
- The Leaving Care team have increased the number of contacts with young people, offering additional emotional and practical support.
- The Elevate Team provides careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) and support into education, employment and training (EET) to young people aged 14–18, or up to 25 if they are a care leaver or have previously had an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP). Support may include helping young people with CV writing, job/apprenticeship search and applications, interview techniques and returning to education by identifying an education pathway and applying to college or similar.
- The Elevate team has been developing links with The John Lewis Partnership who have been supporting our Care Leaver cohort with Work Ready programmes; sessions for drop-ins and tours; work experience at their Warehouse, as well as other work experience opportunities.
- The Elevate team offer weekly face-to-face Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) with appointments available at Braccan Walk every Thursday.

## Delivering value for money

- Membership of 2 Frameworks – Residential and IFA Provision
- Membership of Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group
- Adopt Thames Valley - Regional Adoption Agency



## Sufficiency

### Current Routes to Market (31<sup>st</sup> March 2025)

<b>124 Children Looked After</b>	<b>In house provision</b> <b>38</b> in-house foster care placements (not including placed with parents, connected people or adopted)	<b>External Provision</b> South Central IFA Framework (2022-2026) <b>116</b> providers across <b>4</b> Lots.
<b>External Provision</b> Children's Residential Placements – Consortia Commissioning (2024-2028) Framework <b>45</b> providers with <b>260</b> homes across <b>6</b> Lots	<b>External Provision</b> CCRAG Membership (Started 2023)	<b>Commissioned Service</b> Look Ahead – Accommodation Based Housing Related Support Service <b>83</b> beds across <b>4</b> Properties in Bracknell

### Local Provision

- **5 Specialist Residential Homes in Bracknell Forest with 2 Providers (4 homes for young males who display sexually harmful behaviour, 1 home for Short Breaks)**

Although in Bracknell there remains limited Children's Home provision, across Berkshire over the last 3 years a notable number of new Children's Homes have opened (there are 35 Children's homes across 21 providers in Berkshire not including Local Authority Maintained provision). Two new Children's Homes are planned to open in 2025 in Bracknell.

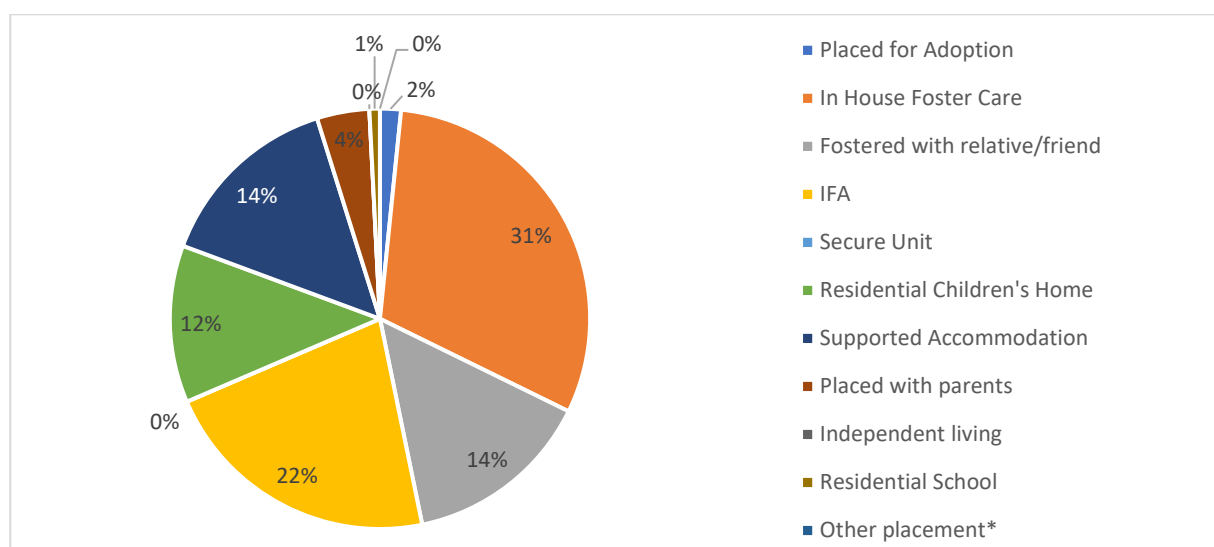
- **13 Supported Accommodation Settings in Bracknell Forest across 6 Providers –** Supported Accommodation registered with Ofsted can provide support to 16-17 year olds.
- **1 Independent Fostering Agency based in Bracknell Forest**

### Provision in Berkshire

- There are 35 Children's homes across 21 providers - this does not include Local Authority Maintained settings. 14 children's homes have opened since 2022:
  - 3 were registered in 2025
  - 5 were registered in 2024
  - 4 were registered in 2023
  - 2 were registered in 2022
- There are 96 Supported Accommodation settings in Berkshire, across 28 providers – 24 providers have fully completed Ofsted registration.
- There are 3 IFA Providers that are based in Berkshire, there have been no newly registered IFA providers locally in the last few years.

## Summary of Placement Types

### Placement Types as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025



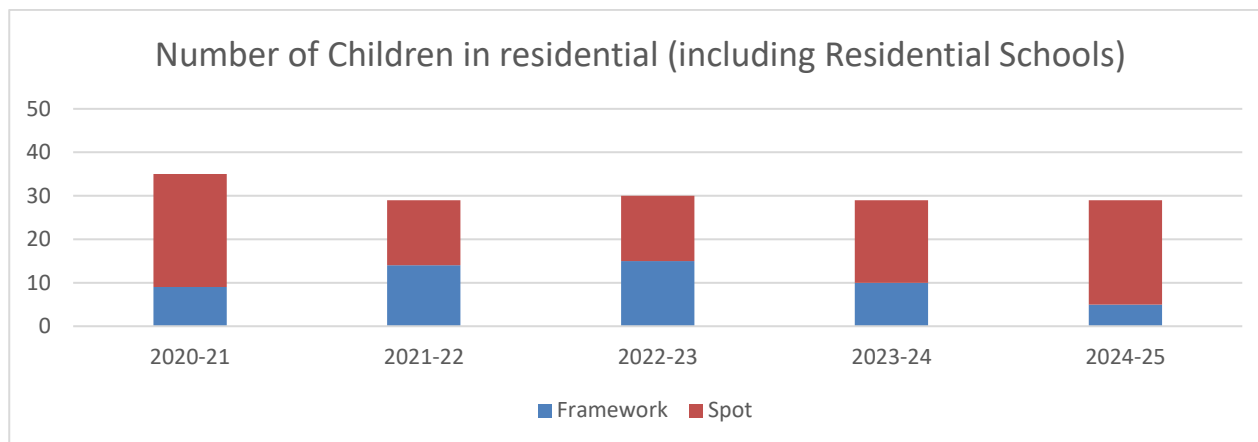
Source: Children's Business Intelligence

**In March 2025, 67% of placements were with Foster Carers - 45% of all placements for Bracknell Forest CLA were with in-house Foster Carers or Fostered with a Relative or Friend and 22% were with Independent Fostering Agencies.**

- Between March 2021 and March 2025, there was a 24% decrease in children placed with in-house foster carers, alongside a significant drop in enquiries since 2020-21.
- In March 2023 there were a significantly higher number of CLA from previous years, which was due to an increase of UASC - this resulted in an increase of placements with IFAs, fostered with a relative or friend and Supported Accommodation.
- The number of Residential placements for CLA has been largely stable since 2022.
- In March 2023 the number of CLA in Supported Accommodation placements was more than double the previous year. This is due to an increase of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in 2023, with many UASC placed in Supported Accommodation settings. In March 2024, numbers of CLA in Supported Accommodation had reduced and was more in line with previous years.

## Residential Placements

### Number of Placements

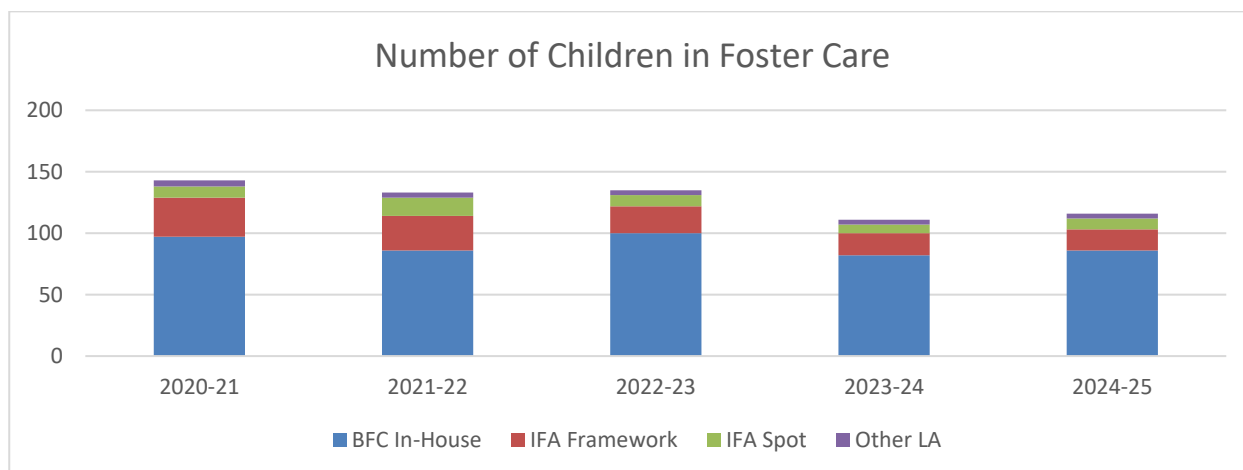


Source: Children's Finance – does not include Care Leavers or UASC

The number of children in Residential Placements has been stable since 2021-22. In 2023-24 and 2024-25 there has been a notable decrease in Residential Framework placements, the number of providers and homes on the Residential Framework has reduced significantly and there continues to be an increase in complexity of children particularly in younger children requiring residential care.

## Foster Placements

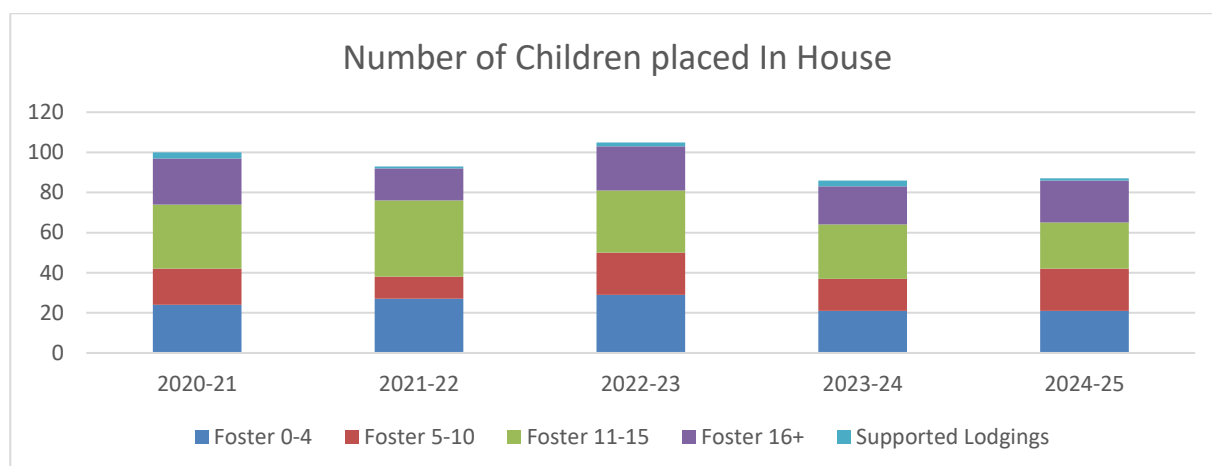
### Number of Placements



Source: Children's Finance – does not include Care Leavers or UASC

Bracknell Forest continues to place a high percentage of Children Looked After with In-House Foster Carers, however since 2019-20 there had been a declining trend of placing with In-House Foster Carers. There are challenges with recruitment and retention of foster carers nationally which has resulted in the reduction of IFA Placements made. In 2024/25, IFA placements decreased 7% from the previous year. Since 2022, there has been a year-on-year decrease in the number of mainstream fostering households in both IFAs and Local Authority sectors. In the last year, there has been a 5% decrease in the number of Local Authority households and a 2% decrease in number of IFA households. Nationally, the IFA sector now accounts for 44% of mainstream fostering households, up from 41% in 2020. IFAs now account for 48% of all filled mainstream fostering places (6).

## In House Fostering



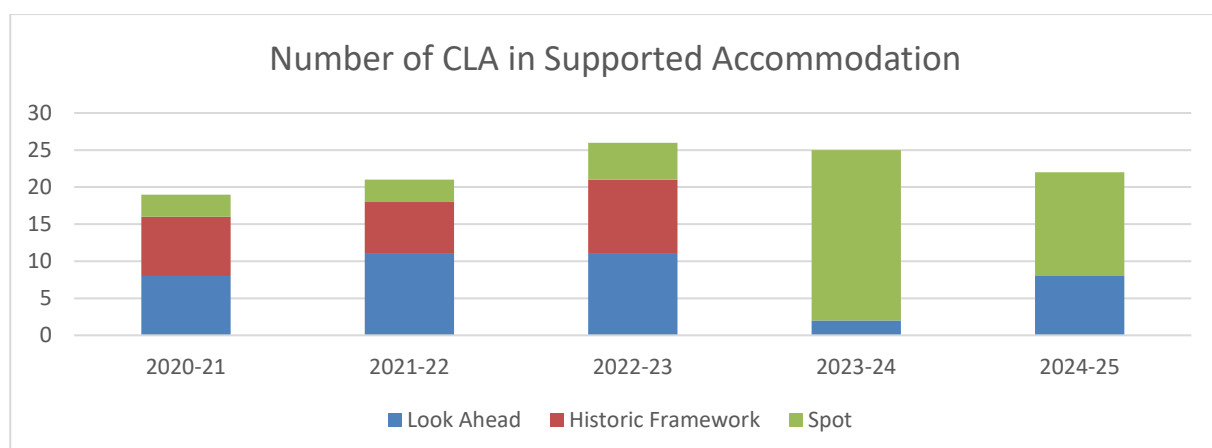
Source: Children's Finance – does not include Care Leavers or UASC

**Supported Lodgings-** Supported lodgings carers provide a safe and supportive environment where young people aged 16 to 18 years can develop the skills needed to live independently as young adults. The young person is usually in full time education, employment or training.

Bracknell Forest has an in-house fostering provision, which provides value for money, quality in-house foster placements. In-house foster placements include those placed with family and friends. Since 2019-20, the number of children and young people placed with in-house foster carers has been decreasing. However, in 2022-23 there was an increase again following an increase of children and young people being fostered by friends and family.

## Supported Accommodation

### Number of Placements



Source: Children's Finance – does not include Care Leavers or UASC

There have been no significant issues sourcing Supported Accommodation following the framework ending in January 2023. In 2024/25 the number of children in Supported Accommodation is the highest it has been within the last 5 years. The Framework for 16+ Placements ended in January 2023, any placements that are not with Look Ahead are Spot Placements, this is why there is an increase of Spot Placements in 2023-24 and no more Framework placements being made.

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Bracknell Forest Council is part of the National Transfer Scheme where Bracknell Forest support Kent and take the lead in caring for a number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). This has also impacted the demographic figures of Bracknell Children Looked After, with around 40% now identifying a BME/Global Majority.

In 2024/25 BFC supported a total of 58 UASC, this also includes Care Leavers. The majority of UASC are currently in full time or part time education with bespoke plan in place to assist the remaining one young person who is not currently in education. In 2024-25, the majority of UASC were in Supported Accommodation followed by IFAs. The average age of Bracknell Forest UASC is 17 years, meaning that based on assessment of their needs Supported Accommodation is usually suitable. There is an increased need for more local IFA placement options that support UASC as Bracknell takes on more UASC under 16, as there was an increase of UASC under 16 in 2023-24. There are a small number UASC placements that are supported by In House Foster Carers.

	Mar-22	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25
Total Number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children as of 31 <sup>st</sup> March each year	11	32	22	21

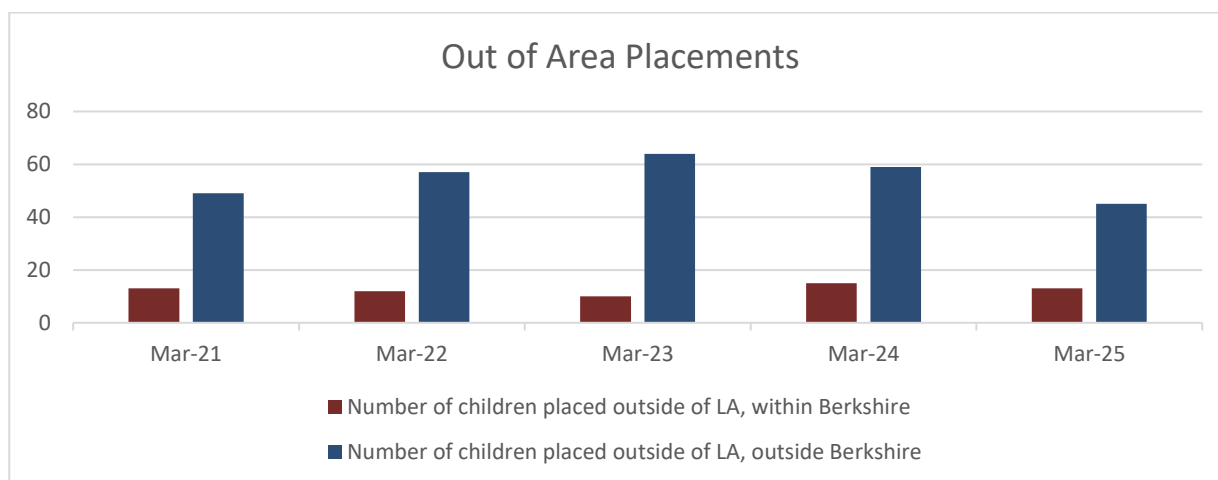
Source: Children's Business Intelligence

## Parent and Child Placements

Prior to 2024-25, there were no significant trends relating to Parent and Child Placements, with only a small number of children in these placements each year. In 2024-25, there was a notable increase of children in Parent and Child Placements.

## Location of Placements

Young people are often placed further away are in Residential settings, however this only relates to a small number of children looked after and usually due to being a provision that can meet the needs of the young person. The location of CLA placed within Berkshire but outside of Bracknell Forest has remained relatively stable. However, from March 2021 to March 2023 there has been an increase of CLA placed outside of Berkshire. Since March 2024 this had decrease again in line with the reduction of UASC as many UASC are placed at distance due to meeting their cultural needs.



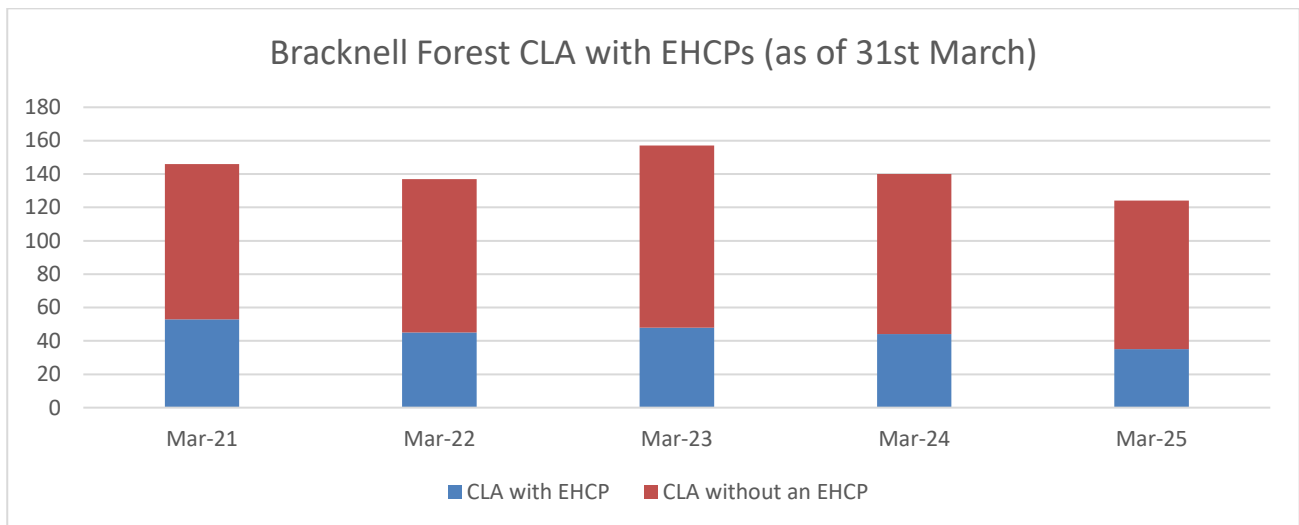
Source: Children's Business Intelligence

## Outcomes and Complex Needs

### Jointly Funded Placements

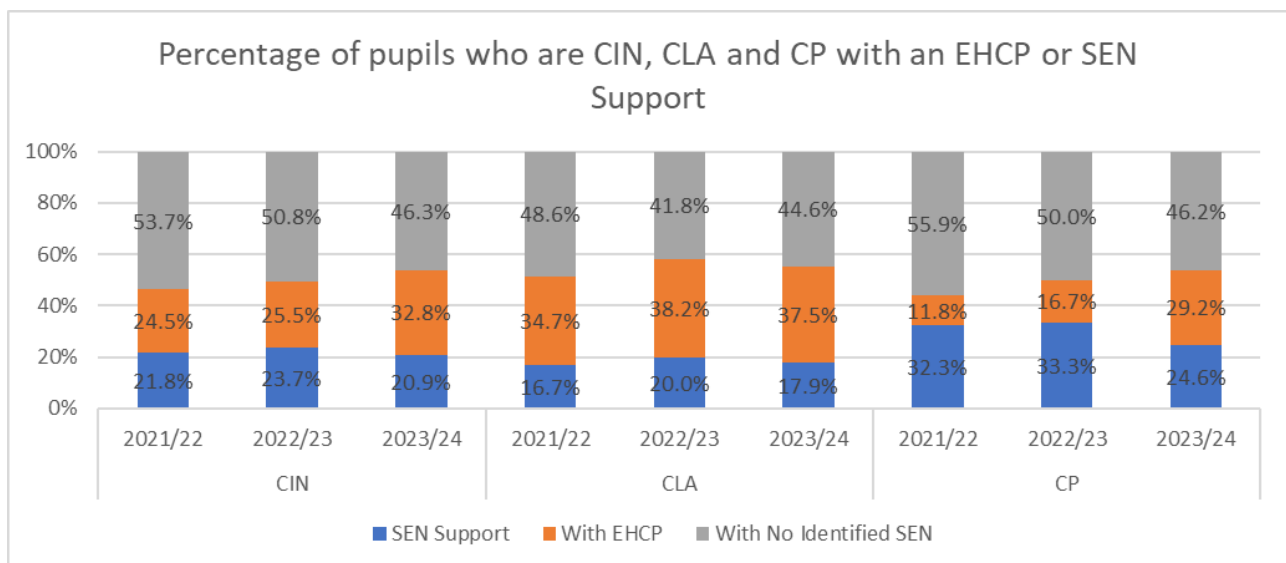
In 2024-25, the majority of jointly funded CLA placements were primarily funded by Children Social Care. Joint funding between Education, Health and Children Social Care is agreed as required for individual placements. The funding decision will be made by representatives from each funding partner. Health funding requests are made through an application process submitted to the Integrated Resource Allocation Panel (IRAP panel). The application is considered by Frimley ICB and the Clinical Review Group and subsequently the IRAP panel.

### CLA with EHCPs



Source: Children's Business Intelligence

The number of CLA with EHCPs has remained stable over the years, around 30% of CLA have an EHCP. In March 2025 there were a total of 35 CLA with an EHCP, this is a small percentage of children across Bracknell Forest with an EHCP - Bracknell Forest had a total of 1,654 children and young people with an EHCP in January 2025.



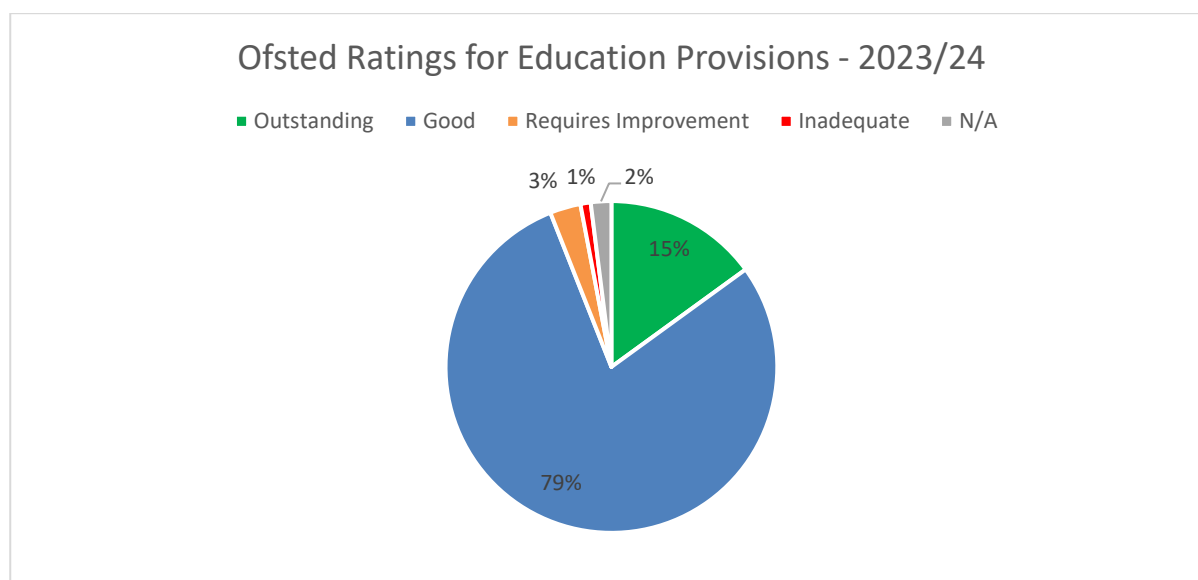
Source: gov.uk Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England

There has been an increase of young people with more complex needs, with an increase in percentage of CIN (Children in Need), CLA (Children Looked After) and CP (Children subject to a Child Protection Plan) cases requiring Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support or have an EHCP within each academic year.

More than half of pupils who are CLA have a degree of SEN input by Bracknell Forest. With an increase of children and young people with complex needs, there are challenges with finding appropriate placements as the options for placements able to support complex children and young people is more limited. There are challenges with having resilient foster carers which leads to many children, who could have been placed in foster placements, having to move to residential or supported accommodation placements, which will result in higher cost placements.

### Ofsted Ratings

In 2023-24 most Bracknell Forest's children looked after (94%) attend 'good' or 'outstanding' schools.



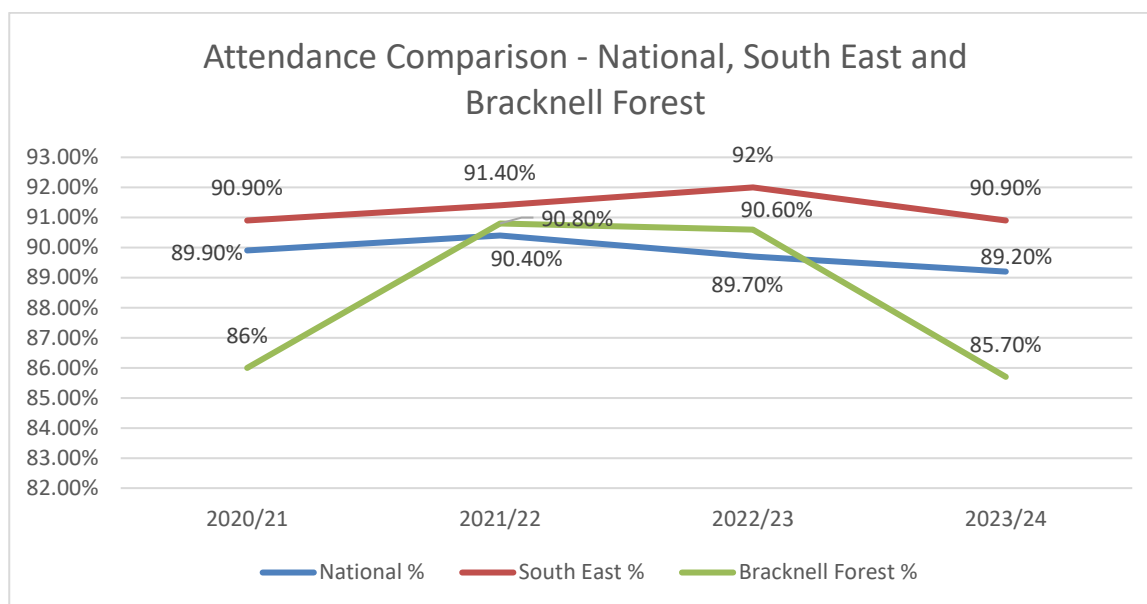
Source: Virtual School

BFC policy is to only place children in 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted placements. However, when children are placed at a school prior to a change of Ofsted rating, consideration must always be made by the Virtual School as to whether a fall in Ofsted grading would justify disrupting a child's education with a school move. However, should any BFC children be placed in a school that is rated less than 'good', there will be additional oversight as is deemed necessary, including unannounced visits and holding face-to-face PEPs.

### Attendance

The average attendance figure for Academic Year 2023/24 was 85.7% which is lower than last year's percentage (90.6%) by 5%. CLA should have at least 95% attendance. Since 2021/22 there has been a decline in attendance, attributable to a small number of children with persistent absence.

Children and young people's emotional wellbeing is the main barrier to attending school. The attendance figures attribute to a small number of CLA who are unable to access their school place due to complex SEMH needs and this is often after some placement instability - these children and young people may have experienced multiple placement moves in a short span of time.



Due to low numbers for Bracknell Forest, drops in attendance percentages will be attributable to a small number of children and young people who are struggling to engage and have an extremely low rate of attendance. As a result, Bracknell Forest figures for attendance may appear lower in comparison to National and South East data.

Attendance will be a focus for the Virtual School, working with schools, social care and Education Welfare team in Early Help to support our CLA to access education and improve attendance.

### Educational Stability

In 2023/24, 67% of children remained in the same school for the last 2 years, 23% experienced one school move, 7% experienced two school moves and 1% experienced three school moves.

Children move schools for several reasons which include:

- As a full foster family they move home/areas
- Permanency is secured by Adoption
- Because their care needs change, they move placement
- Need can be better met in another school / to facilitate greater impact on progress and learning
- Contextual safeguarding need
- Natural transition

The Virtual School supports Children's Social Care where a new school place is to be secured. Where possible, the Virtual School look to minimise moves especially during Key Stage 4.



## Voice of the Young Person

### Participation Work Programme

- **Bracknell Forest's Children in Care Council, Say it Loud Say it Proud (SiLSiP)** provides a forum for children in care to voice their opinions. SiLSiP is for all children who are in care or are leaving care. SiLSiP meets once a month to discuss important issues about care and try and make changes for the better. The regular membership of the council is between 8-10 young people. Support with transport is offered to individuals where needed to support them to attend. Young people with additional needs including ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) are welcomed to meetings and activities, and their needs are considered so they can be involved in a way that suits them. Those who are not directly involved in meetings are sent a SiLSiP newsletter with information on how they can get involved and what changes have been made. SiLSiP have invited Senior Leaders and lead Councillors to meetings, these are always face to face at young people's request.
- The participation worker liaises with Berkshire authorities to organise regular **Berkshire wide Children in Care Council (CICC) events**, any child looked after over 8yrs can attend these.
- Young people have been **involved in interview panels**. If young people are not available all recruiting managers have access to questions written by young people, so young people's voices can still be heard. The Children's Participation Development Officer (CPDO) continues to work with managers to support young people to be involved in employee interviews, interviews that young people have been involved are for a range of roles including Assistant Director Education & Learning, Social Workers, IROs and Personal Advisors.
- **Young People have the opportunity to voice their opinions in the "Big Ballot"**, where young people can choose a top issue for future work, on the day there will be the opportunity to meet senior leaders and take part in activities. The feedback is shared with the children looked after team who review and develop areas raised by young people.
- Since 2022, Bracknell Forest has hosted an **annual Celebration Event for Children and Young People Looked After**, and young people are consulted around the event. Young people choose the name of the event and can get involved in the decision making for the event.
- The **"Do you know?" training** provides a practical and fun session that offers a unique opportunity to individuals involved with children looked after to gain an insight into life experiences. This training is devised and co-produced with care experienced young people and is delivered by children and young people looked after. Sessions continue to evolve to include current issues identified as important to young people, including, who makes decisions and what young people want from their social worker visits.
- A short training session called **"No one thought it was possible"** was developed for the workforce and foster carers to help further their understanding of what it feels like being a young person in care and a care leaver, what worked for them and what we could have done differently. The training was developed with a Care Experienced Young Person. This training has been delivered to Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel (CPAP) and to in-house foster carers. The journey of the young person is shared, and the session is reviewed and updated to raise awareness of some of the common issues experienced by other care leavers, such as financial challenges.

## Participation Offer for Care Leavers

- There is a regular programme for care leavers which includes **monthly 'Meet & Eat' sessions** where Care Leavers and Personal Advisors can informally “check in” and care leavers can raise any issues or improvements in services to take to senior leaders, whilst taking part in an activity and having a meal. Meet & Eat sessions have now been formally adopted as ‘Care Leaver Council’ sessions enabling care experienced young people to contribute ideas for change and improvement in a way that meets their need for an informal session. In response to a request from care leavers, additional social activities have also been offered this year such as cooking and sports sessions.
- **Care Leavers living at Holly House and Rainforest Walk (Look Ahead)** had requested additional meetings with Senior Managers at Bracknell Forest Council and Look Ahead to share their views about areas they felt needed improving. Meetings are taking place quarterly, and any actions and issues can be followed up at Quarterly Monitoring Meetings with Look Ahead.
- Senior Leaders and the Care Leavers Council co-produced a **Care Leavers Survey**, that is used to seek feedback from care leavers around their experience of support for them around housing, social activities, jobs and training so it can be identified if there is anything that needs to be improved. Following the survey an action plan is developed. The survey for 2024 focused on the views around Pathway plans and building the care leavers community.
- In the Care Leavers Survey, it was identified previously that young people wanted more independence skills such as cooking. There has been a development of **pilot sessions to offer young people with Social, Community and Life Skills**. There were five pilot sessions for ‘Cooking on a Budget’ and these were offered at a local venue, the time and venue met the needs of those most in need of support. Nine young people had taken part in at least one session. As part of the offer, all young people were given a start-up kit of essentials which included items such as a chopping board, measuring jug, takeaway containers so meals could be taken home. Ingredients were purchased by staff in advance and young people were supported to follow recipes on the day. The sessions were very informal, it became clear from the first session that young people enjoyed the social aspect of cooking, arriving having a cup of tea and chatting. It was also a good chance to catch up with their Personal Assistant (PA) in addition to their usual visits. Young people were keen to have further sessions. Leaving Care service have identified this as an action once the team are fully staffed.

## Young Commissioners

- Care Leavers have an opportunity to join BFC Commissioning, Virtual School and Children Social Care on Supported Accommodation monitoring visits. Care Leavers can share their feedback to providers during the visit and contribute to visit reports. The role of Young Commissioners will continue to be developed with visits to other setting types to be included in future.

## Child's Voice and Participation within CLA Reviews

- The IROs and Social Workers ensure all children and young people are made aware of the advocacy service as part of their review process. The offer of advocacy support extends beyond CLA Review meetings and can be accessed by CLA at any stage.

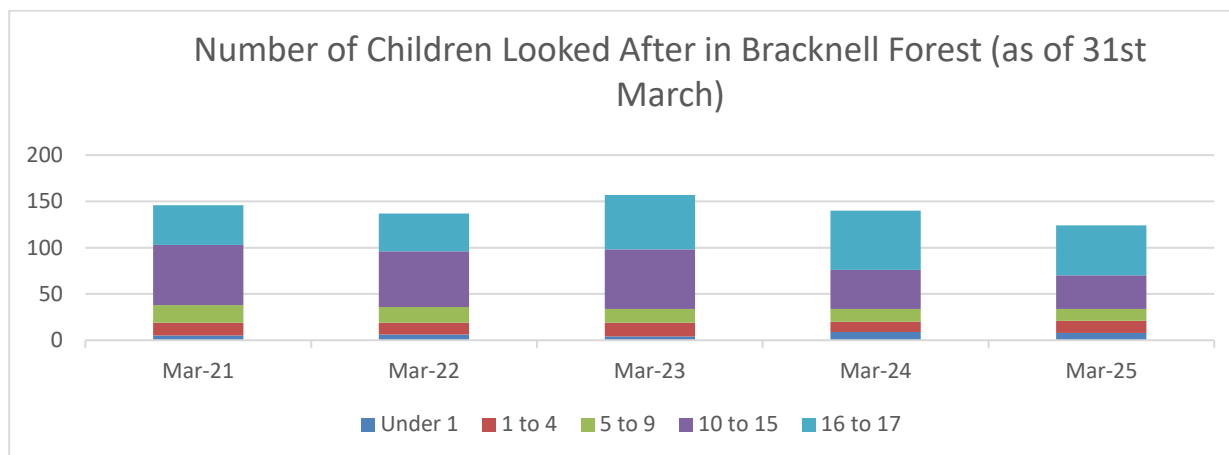
- IROs undertake pre-CLA Review visit to the children or young people to obtain their views and prepare them for their review meetings and/or see them prior to start of the review meeting. They structure the review in a way that ensures issues raised by children or young people are on top of the agenda. The IROs and SWs have discussions about review venues with a view to ensuring the venue and timing of the review is such that encourages children or young people attendance. All the IROs have sensory toys and a range of tools to engage and enhance the participation of children and young people in their statutory reviews.
- IROs are signed up to Mind of My Own and have been encouraging use of the app. A small number of young people have positively used the app to share views and challenge decisions. The app has been promoted via SiLSiP and in an updated leaflet called “My Reviews”.

### **Personal Education Plans**

Capturing the voice of the child or young person was previously identified as an area for improvement within the Personal Education Plans (PEPs), this has improved but continues to be to be an area that there is a focus on. Since 2022-23, schools have been asked to arrange for Bracknell Forest children and young people to attend the PEP and to present a piece of work that they are particularly proud of – the aim being to show that education can be positive. A postcard is sent to every child and young person with a personal message from their Education Support Officer on a termly basis and Education Support Officers gift a book to each child and young person at the face-to-face PEP meetings.

## Needs Analysis

### Number of Children Looked After

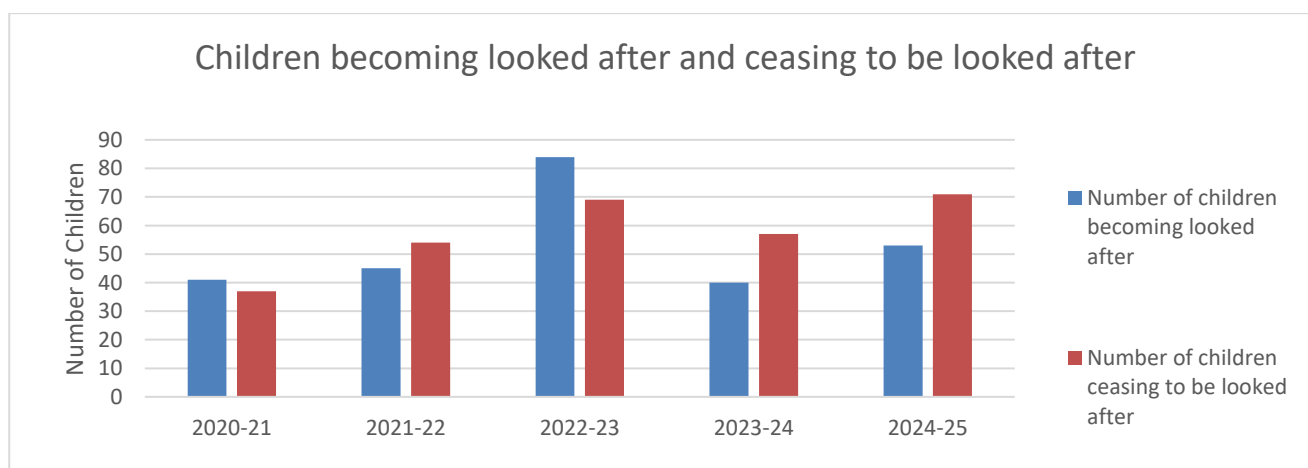


Source: Children's Business Intelligence

The number of Children Looked After in Bracknell Forest has not changed significantly over the last few years. March 2023 shows an increase of Children Looked After and an increase of Children Looked After aged 16-17. The increase in March 2023 is due to the increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children through the National Transfer Scheme. The increases have mainly been adolescent males broadly across all ages. Bracknell Forest's rate per 10,000 remains lower than the national and South East averages.

The national data is aligned with Bracknell Forest data from previous years.

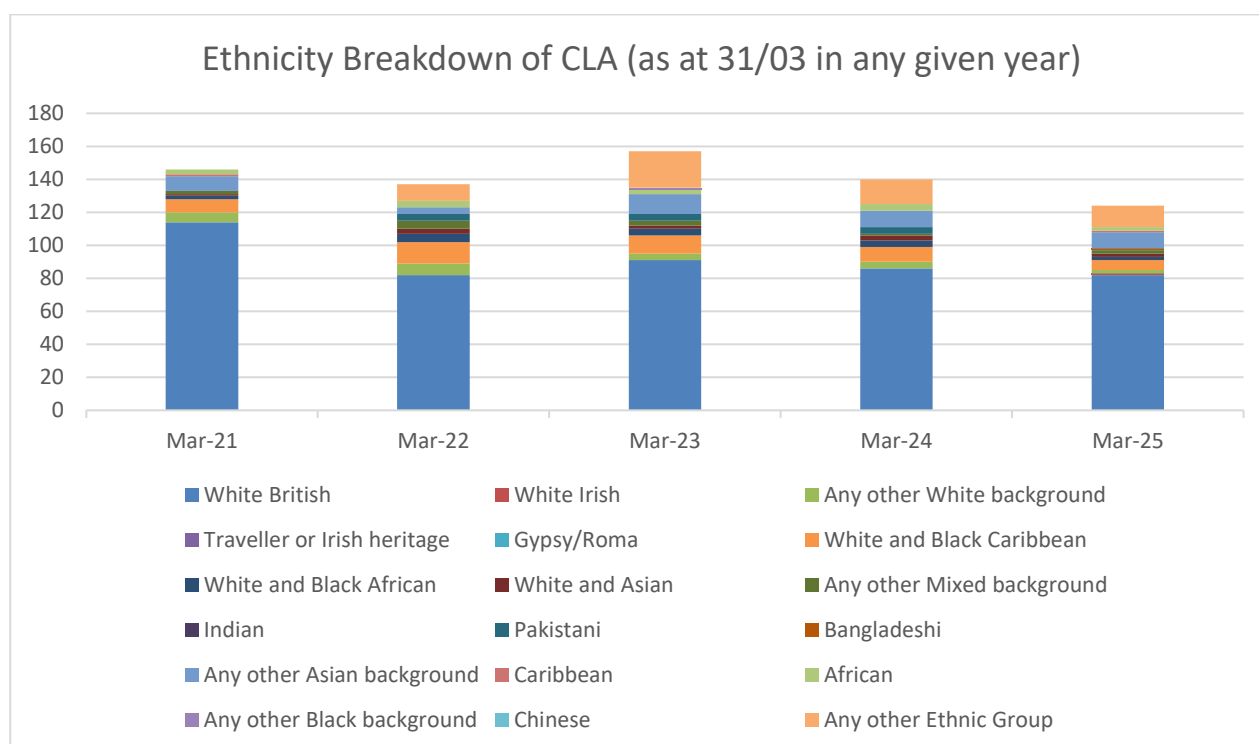
Age of Children Looked After in England				
Source: Accredited official statistics- Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2024				
Under 1	1 to 4 years	5 to 9 years	10 to 15 years	16+ years
4%	13%	18%	38%	27%



Source: Children's Business Intelligence

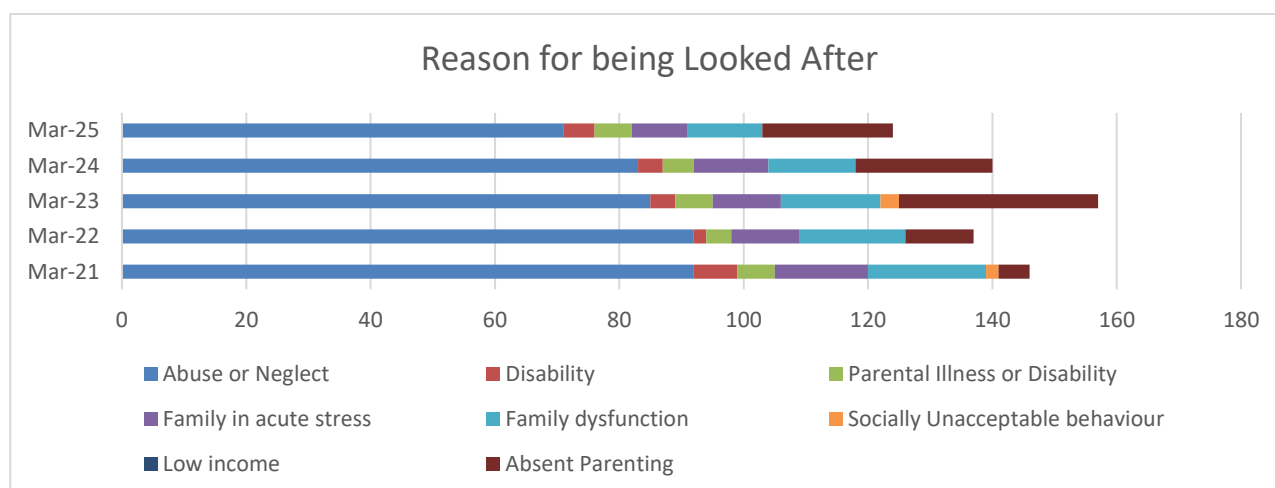
In 2022-23 there had been a significant increase in the number of children becoming looked after and the number of children ceasing to be looked after. The increases in 2022-23 are due to the high number of UASC being taken into Bracknell Forest, 2023-24 figures are similar to figures prior to 2022-23. There has been a trend of the number of children ceasing to be looked after being greater than the number of children becoming looked after which has resulted in a reduction of CLA in the last two years.

## Needs of Children Looked After



Source: Children's Business Intelligence

Most Children Looked After are White British and this continues to be the trend. However, since March 2022, there has been an increase in Children Looked After who are from several different ethnic groups. This is likely to increase further with the mandatory National Transfer Scheme. Bracknell Forest have a workforce and foster carers who receive training in relation to promoting the identity of all children. This work is reviewed via the Child Looked After Reviewing process. An area of focus is how we can ensure the diversity needs of all our families are met. Continued work around equality remains a priority for the leadership team and in respect of all children in care.

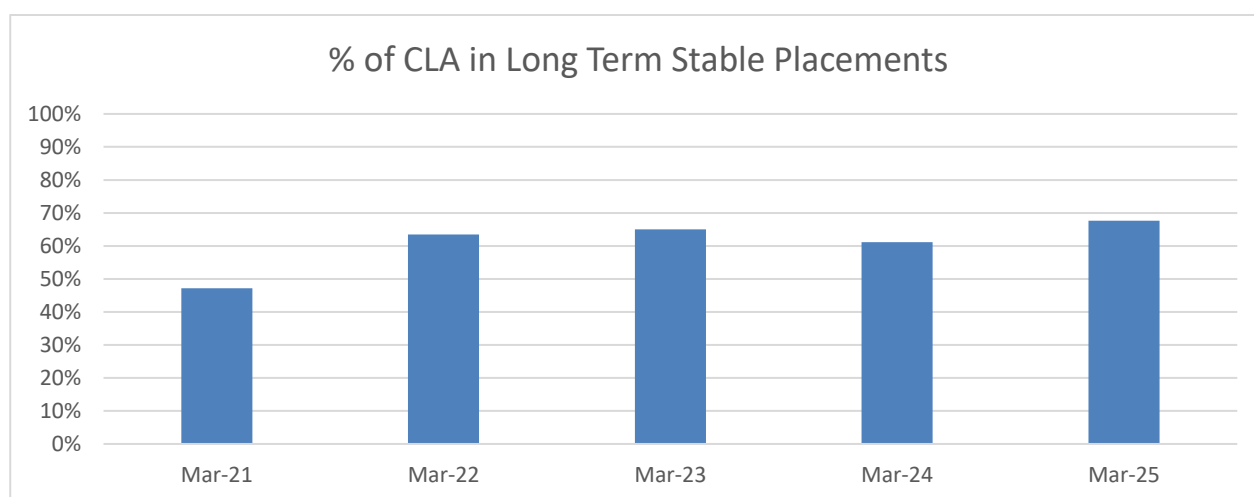


Source: Children's Business Intelligence

A high percentage of CLA were taken into care due to abuse or neglect, this has been the trend over the last few years. However, year-on-year there has been an increase of CLA taken into care due to absent parenting. In 2022-23, the number of CLA taken into care due to absent parenting had increased 3 times compared to the previous year due to the higher number of UASC. The figures for Bracknell Forest align closely with the national data.

Reason for being looked after in England	
<i>Source: Accredited official statistics - Children looked after in England including adoptions 2024</i>	
Abuse or neglect	66%
Child's disability	2%
Parental Illness or Disability	2%
Family in acute stress	7%
Family dysfunction	12%
Social unacceptable behaviour	1%
Absent parenting	9%

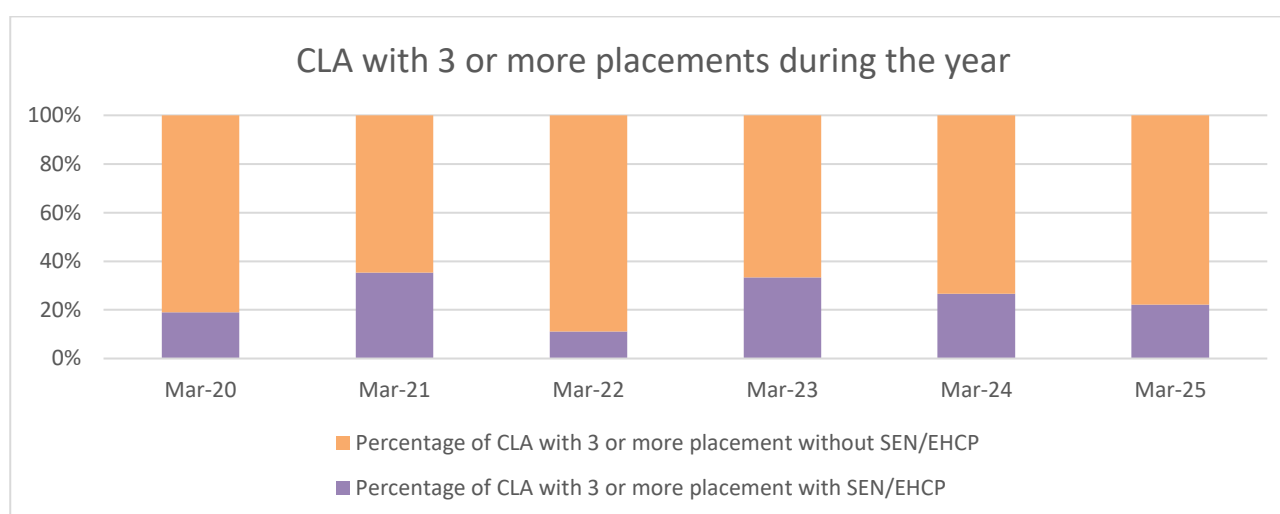
## Placement Stability – Length of Placement



Source: Children's Business Intelligence

Since March 2022 the percentage of Children Looked After aged under 16 in care for more than 2.5 years who were in their current placement for 2 or more years (in long term stable placements) has remained quite stable.

## Placement Stability – Multiple Placements

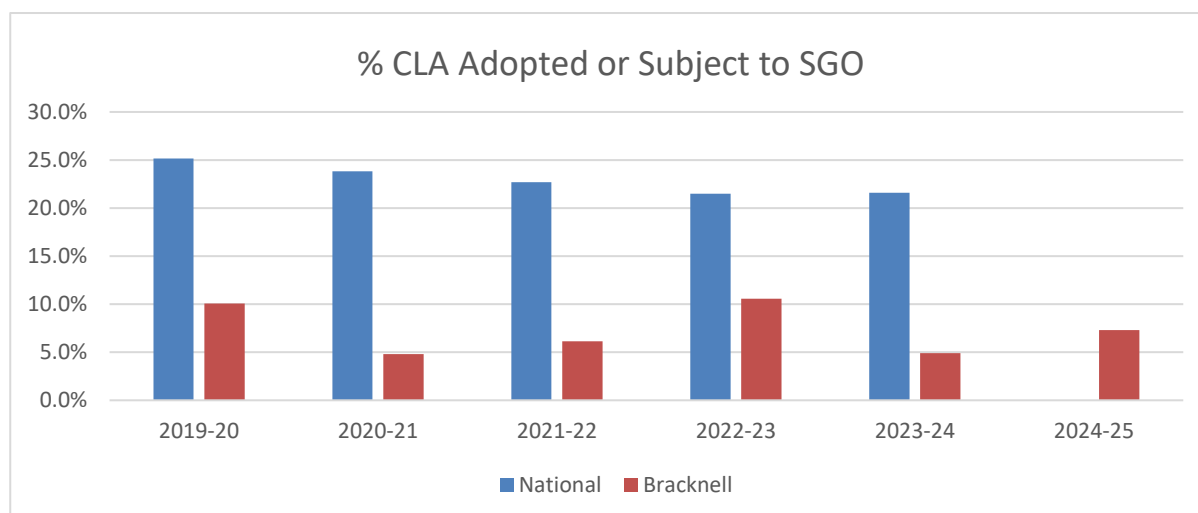


Source: Children's Business Intelligence

Since 2020-21, there has been a stable number of children and young people with multiple placements within the financial year – this would be between 11-15 each year. For a large percentage of children who had multiple placements, they had multiple foster placements in the year. Multiple placements do not always indicate a breakdown and may be part of a planned move

on. Each year between 10-35% of children looked after with 3 or more placements had SEN Support or an EHCP in place. There are different factors which may result in a child or young person having multiple placements and not just relating to complex needs.

## Placement Permanence



Source: Children's Business Intelligence – National Data for 2024-25 is not available as of May 2025.

**A Special Guardianship Order** (often known as an SGO) is a legal order where the court appoints a carer – usually a relative – as the 'Special Guardian' of a child until they turn 18. The Special Guardian then shares parental responsibility for the child with the parents and can make nearly all the major decisions about the child without having to consult them.

The percentage of CLA Adopted or Subject to a Special Guardianship Order in Bracknell is lower than the national figure with 5-10% of CLA in Bracknell Adopted or Subject to an SGO. There are many SGO panels held but the outcome for most children is for them to return home which is why the percentage of CLA Adopted or Subject to SGOs is lower than the national figure, this is a positive outcome for young people. In addition to the number of children and young people returning home, there are children and young people who are supported by Connected Person's foster carers which would not be accounted for in the above graph.

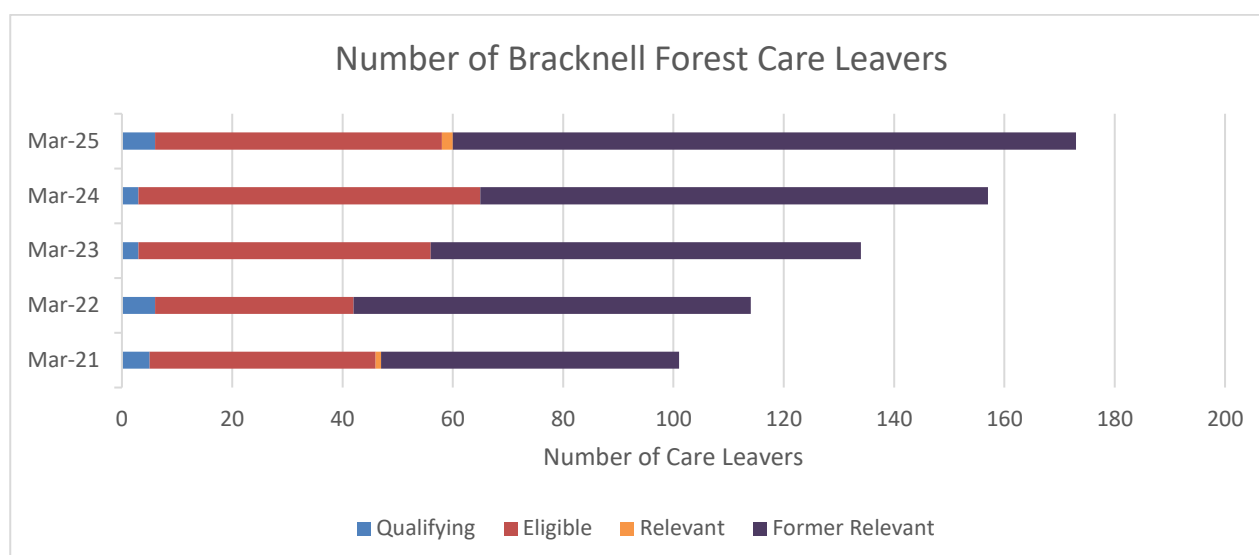
## Care Leavers

**Eligible child** is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after

**Relevant child** is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care

**Former relevant child** is a young person over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Councils support this group until aged 21, or longer if they are in education or training

**A qualifying care leaver** is aged between 16 – 25 and was looked after by Children's Services for a period of time between their 16th and 18th birthday



Source: Children's Business Intelligence

In Bracknell Forest there has been a year-on-year increase of Care Leavers since March 2021. Former Relevant and Eligible make up the largest number of Care Leavers in Bracknell Forest and has continued to be the trend over the years. As the number of Children Looked After increase in Bracknell, the number of Care Leavers will also increase. However, in the last 5 years there does not appear to be an increase of Children Looked After, so the number of Care Leavers may begin to plateau in upcoming years.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, the majority of Care Leavers are in Supported Accommodation provision, this would have previously been described as Semi-Independent. This is followed by Care Leavers living independently and living with Friends, Family or Partner. Look Ahead is currently the only commissioned service to support Care Leavers, however, may not always be a suitable option for all care leavers. Building on the introduction of priority housing for Care Leavers, a joint piece of work will be undertaken around the Care Leavers offer to consider further options for Care Leavers.

## Missing Children Looked After

In 2024-25, there were a total of 74 missing episodes for a total of 27 Children Looked After, this is significantly less than the number of missing episodes in previous years. On average, there were 22-28 Children Looked After who went missing each year, with an average of 2-7 missing incidents each. The most common placement type that Children Looked After went missing from were Supported Accommodation placements, followed by Residential Children's Home placements.



## Forecasting Future Need

In planning for the future, we need to take a view on how we expect numbers of looked after children to evolve over time – and therefore the demand for different types of placements. We will need to review these assumptions over time and update them as appropriate.

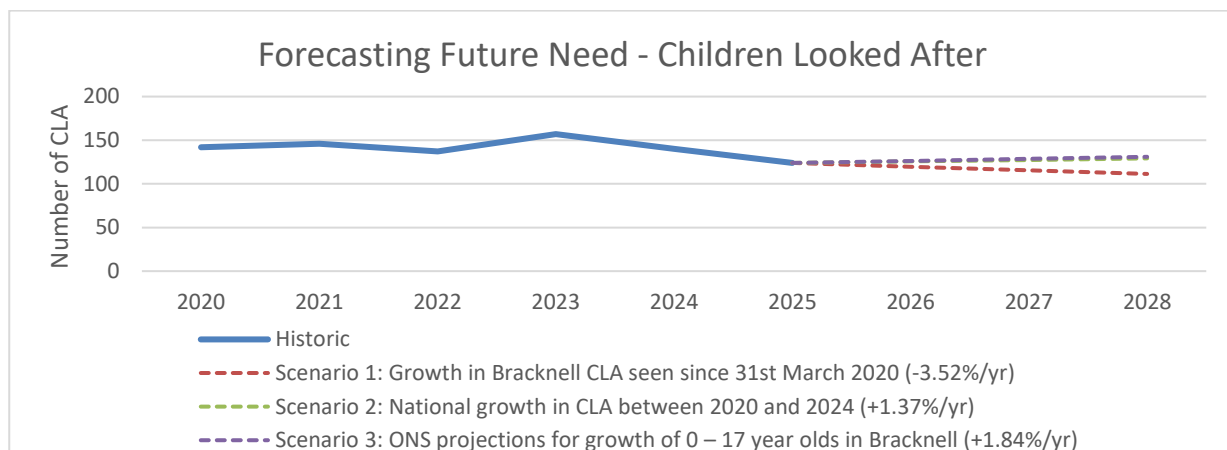
### Our approach to developing a forward view – 2025-2028

**For children looked after (excluding UASC), we have looked at the numbers implied if future annual growth were to be equivalent to:**

**Scenario 1:** Growth in Bracknell CLA seen since 31st March 2020 (-3.52%/yr)

**Scenario 2:** National growth in CLA between 2020 and 2024 (+1.37%/yr)

**Scenario 3:** ONS projections for growth of 0 – 17-year-olds in Bracknell (+1.84%/yr)



The number of Children Looked After has reduced in the past few years. Based on the 3 scenarios for forecasting future need, there will be minimal change in numbers for CLA.

The number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) had increased in previous years due to Bracknell Forest taking on an increased number of UASC as part of the National Transfer Scheme. This has plateaued as Bracknell Forest has taken in UASC closely in line with the 0.1% of child population. The forecasting scenario takes into the account of the 0.1% number to predict the number of UASC Bracknell will be supporting in the next 3 years. The forecasting predicts there will be a minimal increase, as Bracknell Forest is already supporting close to the 0.1% threshold.

## Summary Headlines

- There were no significant changes in the trend regarding the number of placements over the past five years; however, in 2024-25, there was an increase in the number of Parent and Child placements.
- Between March 2021 and March 2025, there was a 24% decrease in children placed with in-house foster carers, alongside a significant drop in enquiries since 2020-21. There is a recognised need to increase the diversity of in-house foster carers and improve support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). National challenges in recruiting and retaining foster carers have also led to fewer Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements, with a consistent yearly decline in mainstream fostering households in both IFAs and Local Authorities since 2022.
- The number of residential placements for Children Looked After (CLA) has remained largely stable since 2022. However, there has been an increase in the complexity of the young people placed, which, along with annual inflation, has contributed to rising placement costs year-on-year.
- The number of Supported Accommodation placements remains stable. In March 2023, there was an increase in the number of Children Looked After (CLA) placed in Supported Accommodation, primarily due to a rise in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) during 2023. To date, there have been no significant challenges in sourcing Supported Accommodation.
- In 2024-25, most Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) were placed in Supported Accommodation, followed by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). The number of UASC increased due to the National Transfer Scheme, with most placed in Supported Accommodation or IFA. There is a growing need for more local IFA placements to support UASC, especially those under 16 in Bracknell. A small number of UASC are placed with In-House Foster Carers. In March 2023, the number of Children Looked After (CLA) rose significantly compared to previous years, mainly because of the increase in UASC, leading to more placements with IFAs, relatives or friends, and Supported Accommodation.
- The number of Children Looked After (CLA) with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has remained stable over the years (around 30%). However, there has been a year-on-year increase in the percentage of Children in Need (CIN) recorded with a disability, as well as an increase in the percentage of CIN, CLA, and Child Protection (CP) cases requiring Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support or holding an EHCP within each academic year.

### What works well

- The majority of placements continue to be within Berkshire, with a significant number located within a 20-mile radius. Over the past three years, there has been a notable increase in local residential provision, both within Berkshire and nationally. Efforts are ongoing to collaborate with local residential providers to reduce the number of out-of-area placements where feasible.
- Participation in the IFA and Residential Frameworks has expanded placement options, with most Parent and Child fostering placements arranged through the IFA Framework.
- There have been no significant challenges in sourcing Supported Accommodation placements, including for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).
- Membership in the CCRAAG (Children's Cross Regional Arrangement Group) continues to support joint working and shared learning opportunities across regions.

### Key Themes for Consideration

- Meeting the needs of children and young people with more complex needs requires a coordinated, multi-agency approach. Effective partnership working ensures that support is timely, holistic, and tailored to the individual.
- Implement strategies to improve outcomes for children in residential care while ensuring placements deliver value for money.
- Develop the support offer for Care Leavers.
- Build on the voice of children and young people and incorporating the feedback to shape services they receive.
- Improving outcomes for young people through the review of existing practices and strengthened oversight.

## Progress from the 2021-2023 Sufficiency Action Plan

- **Fostering Placements:**  
The IFA Framework introduced a new Enhanced Fostering lot replacing the previous Alternative to Residential lot. This new lot requires evidence-based, time-limited interventions demonstrating clear benefits to the child.
- **Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs):**  
Small numbers of SGOs were attributed to many young people returning home following SGO requests.
- **Residential Placements:**  
A detailed analysis of residential placements informed the decision to re-join the Children's Residential Care framework.
- **Supported Accommodation Placements:**  
Although the Post 16 Semi-Independent Framework ended, local Supported Accommodation providers continue to facilitate placements for young people locally.
- **Supported Accommodation Regulation Changes:**  
Close collaboration with Supported Accommodation providers ensured compliance with new Ofsted regulations. The number of missing episodes significantly decreased in these settings.
- **Provider Engagement:**  
Quarterly forums with Supported Accommodation providers have been established to address emerging issues.
- **Multi-Agency Partnerships:**  
Improved collaboration with health colleagues has reduced the number of young people unable to leave hospital or requiring hospital admission due to placement challenges.

### References

- (1) [Children looked after in England including adoptions. Reporting year 2024](#)
- (2) [Compare UKHPI statistics across locations - UK House Price Index](#)
- (3) [2021 Census Profile for areas in England and Wales - Nomis \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](#)
- (4) [English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- (5) [Deprivation - UTLA | Bracknell Forest | Report Builder for ArcGIS](#)
- (6) [Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

### Data Sources

- Bracknell Forest Children's Business Intelligence
- Bracknell Forest Finance
- Virtual School Annual Report
- Participation Report
- IRO Report

## Appendix A - Action Plan 2025-2028

Priority	Action	Owner	Deadline
<b>Fostering</b>			
Continue to increase the in-borough local foster offer.	Regional South East Fostering Hub aims to increase the capacity and resilience within BFC's in house fostering workforce.	CSC	31st March 2026
	Continue to carry out the actions outlined in the BFC Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Strategy.	BFC Foster Carer Recruitment/ Publicity Officer	31st March 2026
Explore reasons for Bracknell adoption figures being lower than national average	Contribute to 2025 review of Adopt Thames Valley operating model led by Oxfordshire County Council to identify potential approaches to increase the numbers of Bracknell adoptions.	Strategic Commissioning / CSC	31st March 2026
Maintain membership in the South Central IFA Framework to access increased IFA provision	Engage with South Eastern Regional Care Cooperative (SERCC) to support the SERCC to host the South Central IFA Framework from April 2026.	Strategic Commissioning	31st March 2026
<b>Residential</b>			
Improve outcomes, ensure value for money for Residential Placements	Explore the development of a joint residential provision with East Berkshire Partners (with Slough and RBWM).	Strategic Commissioning	31st March 2026
	Explore how residential placement costs can be reduced/consider alternatives to Residential (carefully manage annual uplifts process and engage with providers to manage the market). Joint Commissioning/CSC/Education/Health annual visits planned to all BFC residential placements, with further visits as required.	Strategic Commissioning	31st March 2026
Maintain membership in the Children's Residential Care Framework to ensure continued access to a wide range of residential care options	Engage with South Eastern Regional Care Cooperative (SERCC) to support the SERCC to host the Children's Residential Care Framework from April 2026.	Strategic Commissioning	31st March 2026
<b>Supported Accommodation</b>			
Improve outcomes, ensure value for money for Supported Accommodation Placements including placements for UASC	Explore the development of an East Berkshire Supported Accommodation and Supported Lodgings Framework (with Slough and RBWM) including a provider quality assurance approach.	Strategic Commissioning	30 <sup>th</sup> November 2026
Continue to maximise utilisation of Look Ahead whilst ensuring that sufficient capacity is utilised for care leavers and UASC	Frequent meetings with Look Ahead around prioritisation and wait lists to ensure that there is utilisation of Look Ahead for Care Leavers and UASC.	Commissioning/ Housing/CSC	Ongoing

Priority	Action	Owner	Deadline
Market Development of external Supported Lodgings for young people including UASC	Undertake market research to identify local Supported Lodgings providers.	Strategic Commissioning	30 <sup>th</sup> September 2025
<b>Joint Priorities</b>			
Explore whether BFC has access to the right placements for the right children at the right time.	Review current BFC placements and placements made in the last 3 years to assess suitability and outcomes.	CSC	31st March 2026
Consider how feedback gathered from CLA and Care Leavers can be more effectively utilised to shape services	Continue to expand on the feedback currently gathered, further develop the role of Young Commissioner(s) & commissioning work experience opportunities and review existing BFC contract monitoring toolkit to ensure the voice of service users is also effectively captured.	Strategic Commissioning/ Participation Officer/ Provider Partners	Ongoing
Explore more accommodation options for Care Leavers	Building on the introduction of priority housing for Care Leavers, undertake joint work with Children Social Care and Housing to explore further accommodation options for Care Leavers.	Strategic Commissioning / CSC / Housing	31st March 2026
Identify best practice for CCTV in Supported Accommodation settings and agree key principles with Berkshire Local Authorities to disseminate to Supported Accommodation providers.	Strategic Commissioning to work with the BFC GDPR Lawyer to share learning from Supported Accommodation visits and to identify options for BFC to implement to ensure it is compliant with information governance requirements. Strategic Commissioning to share findings with Berkshire Commissioners to agree a Berkshire wide position on CCTV in Supported Accommodation.	Strategic Commissioning	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025 (COMPLETE)
Explore opportunities to improve joint commissioning and oversight of CLA placements with Health and Education partners	Consider processes and funding arrangements around jointly funded and tri-partite funded placements for CLA. Operational colleagues including Health to be invited to all in-person QA visits.	CSC / Strategic Commissioning / Education	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2025
Market development to identify more placement options for Parent and Child Placements	Identify more external parent and child providers (IFA and Residential Assessment) to onboard more suitable parent and child providers onto the Bracknell Forest's Approved Provider List	Strategic Commissioning	31 <sup>st</sup> August 2025
Maintain sufficiency data in relation to CLA and Care Leavers	Annual data analysis and refresh of Sufficiency data	CSC/ Strategic Commissioning	Annually

## Appendix B - Glossary

<b>BFC</b>	Bracknell Forest Council
<b>CCRAG</b>	Cross Regional Arrangements Group
<b>CLA</b>	Children Looked After
<b>EET</b>	Education, Employment and Training
<b>EHCP</b>	Education, Health and Care Plan
<b>Frimley ICB</b>	Frimley Integrated Care Board
<b>IFA</b>	Independent Fostering Agencies
<b>IRO</b>	Independent Reviewing Officer
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Education, Employment and Training
<b>PACE</b>	A therapeutic parenting model. The PACE acronym stands for the principles: Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy
<b>PEP</b>	Personal Education Plan
<b>SEMH</b>	Social Emotional Mental Health
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SGO</b>	Special Guardianship Order
<b>SiSiP</b>	Say it Loud Say it Proud (Bracknell Forest's Children in Care Council)
<b>UASC</b>	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children