
Hertfordshire Sufficiency Statement Summary:

The Accommodation of
Children & Young People
Living Away from Home

Annual Update:
2023



Children's Services

CLA and Safeguarding
Commissioning



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Introduction

The Children Act (1989) requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority's area boundaries which meets the needs of children that the local authority is 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').

When assessing 'sufficiency', Hertfordshire County Council considers:

- the condition of the local market, including the level of demand for specific types of providers in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists
- the development capacity of local providers
- the current resource and overall budget priorities of the council

This Hertfordshire Sufficiency Statement reports current levels of demand, our capacity to respond to that demand and key priorities for 2023/24. Data updates within this document relate to the period 1 April 2022 - March 2023. Any slight variations are the result of the volatility of the data and the fact that snapshots are being taken at slightly different times.

Key Achievements in 2022-23

Residential Strategy Continuing: Tenders ongoing to open three new Children's Homes
All In-house Residential Children's Homes rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' with Ofsted
Market engagement resulting in continued growth of Residential provision within Hertfordshire and creating more placement options for Hertfordshire children
Development of Mockingbird Family model and introduction of three new hubs
Creation of Emergency Fostering hub offering 10-day emergency placements
Increase in In-house foster carer pay by 9% in addition to 12.4% national minimum allowance uplift
Reduction in Overnight Short Breaks (OSB) hours due to re-modelling and re-commissioning of the service
Decrease in Children Looked After (CLA) by 5.1%, a result of early intervention and the right placements being identified at the right time
Successful tender of the Prevention of Homeless Service, awarded to Herts Young Homeless
New Housing Related Support (HRS) issued to continue providing Supported Hostel accommodation for 16- to 25-year-olds around the county
Preparation of the new Semi-Independent Framework for the implementation of the new Ofsted Regulation of Supported Accommodation

Strategic Position 2023/24

Where possible, we aim to keep children within their communities if it is safe to do so. However, we are facing increasing challenges in placement location, availability and choice. This is a national challenge that all Local Authorities are facing mainly due to age, urgency of placement needed, presenting needs and risks, the national shortfall in people wanting to foster and the residential market feeling under pressure and unable to manage the more complex children referred to them.

Hertfordshire County Council is constantly developing current services to meet the changing and emerging needs of children and young people and being innovative to create fresh solutions. Our Residential Strategy is creating more children's homes and placements within Hertfordshire and addressing that too many children are still placed outside of the county in this type of provision. The fostering service has continued to develop Mockingbird hubs within Hertfordshire to help foster carers provide placements for older children with complex profiles. There are now 7 hubs, along with the introduction of an emergency hub over the past year to provide 10-day placements, supporting the work of the Fostering Strategy.

Children Looked After (CLA) Data

The number of Children Looked After in March 2023 was 977, this is a reduction on the same time last year by 53 and equates to a 5.1% reduction. This is also an overall reduction on 2020-21 figures, a 1.9% decrease.

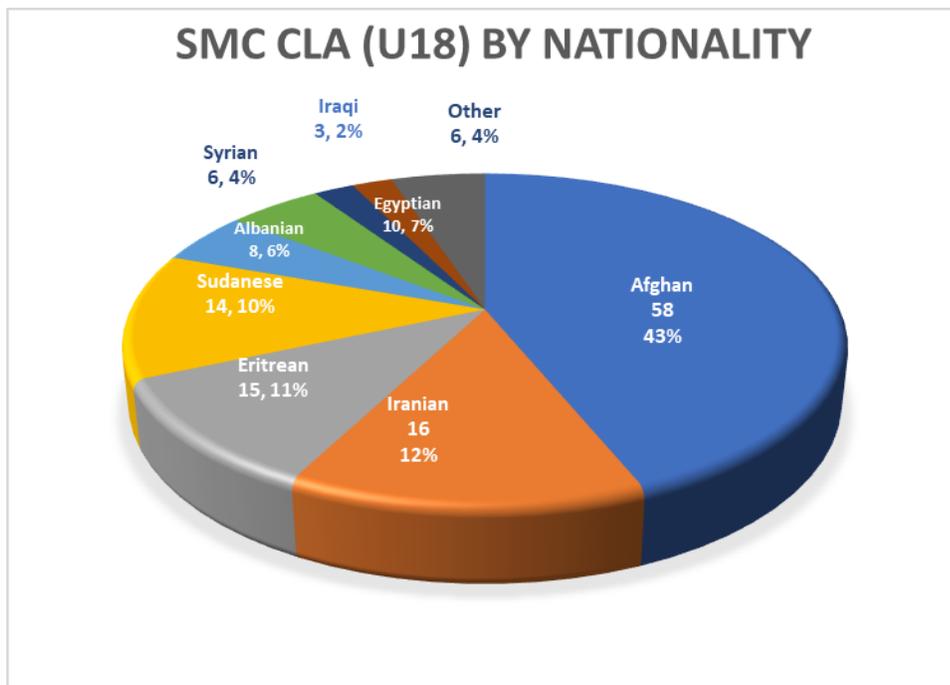
	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Number of CLA	996	1030	977
Variance on previous year	+ 4.7%*	+ 3.4%	- 5.1%

* This is based on 2019-2020 CLA figures

Separated Migrant Children

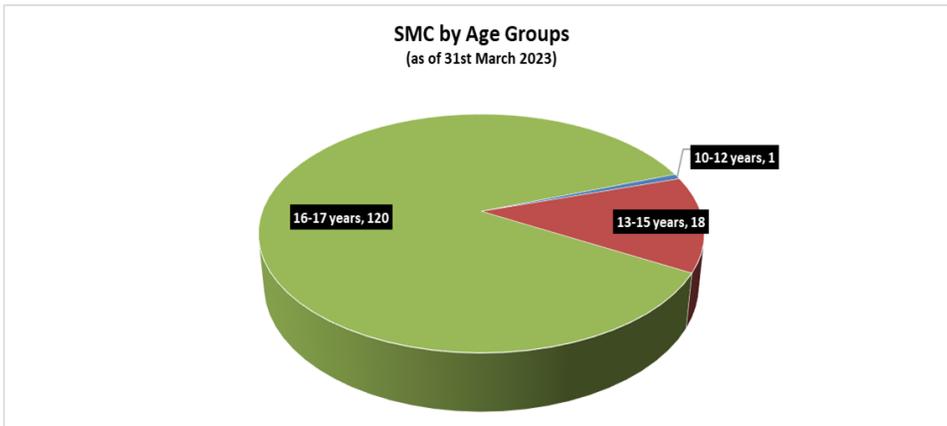
Of the 977 children, 139 (14.2%) are Separated Migrant Children (SMC). This is an increase from the same time last year, and a continuation of the growth in this category of CLA in recent years.

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Number of SMC	85 (8.5%)	111 (10.7%)	139 (14.2%)
Total Number of CLA	996	1030	977
Variance on previous year		+2.2%	+3.5%



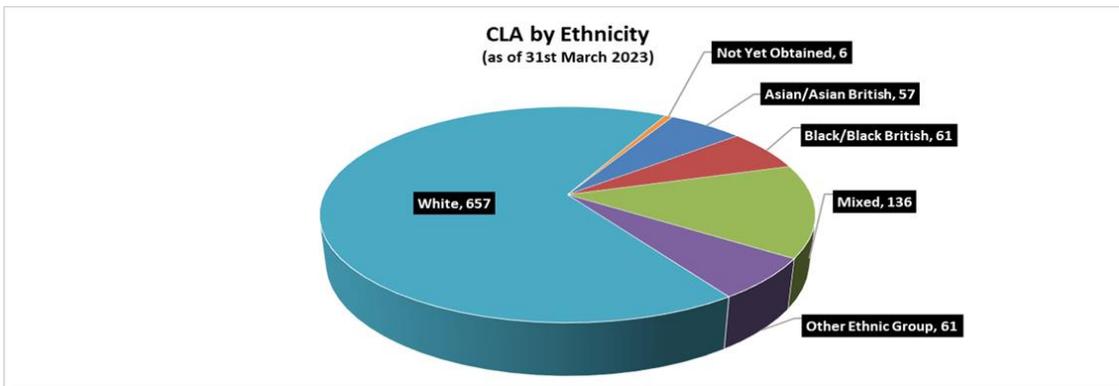
The majority of Separated Migrant Children are aged 16-17 years, with all arrivals being aged over 10 years. Of the 139 children, the majority are from Afghanistan, Iran and Eritrea. The children have mainly been placed via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) which is a voluntary scheme whereby SMC are transferred between local authorities ensuring that a small number of authorities are not disproportionately affected due to being points of entry.

Most of the other children are spontaneous arrivals (children that present in Hertfordshire)



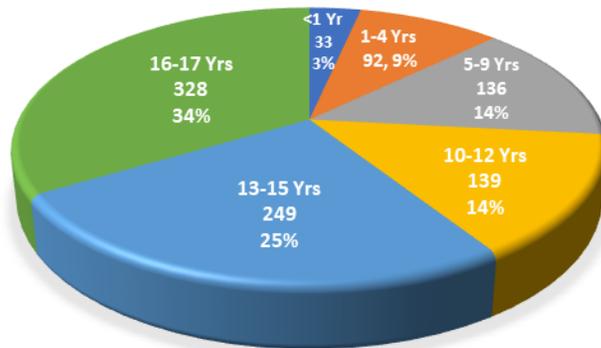
An overwhelming majority of SMC in Hertfordshire are male, 97.1% compared to just 2.9% being female.

Breakdown of CLA population as a whole



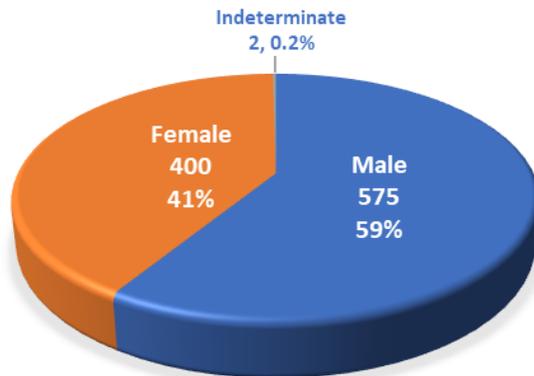
The CLA population is more diverse than the general Hertfordshire population with data from the 2021 census indicating that 81.8% of the population were White British and 18.2% other ethnicities. The CLA population split is 67.2% White British and 32.8% other ethnicities as shown.

CLA (U18) BY AGE



Compared to 2021-2022, there has been a change in age distribution for CLA. Whilst those aged 13-15 years and 10-12 years has remained static, there has been an increase for those aged 16-17 years by 2.1%.

CLA (U18) BY GENDER



The gender split has remained the same as 2021-2022

Disability Data

Of the CLA population, 13% have a physical or learning disability and of this 13% of children with a disability, 55% are placed with foster carers. This is a much lower figure than children without a disability at 73.1%. This trend is reversed for residential provision with 38% of children with a disability being placed in a residential children's home. This does include children that are placed in 52-week special school provision. Those without a disability is significantly lower at 13.7%.

Location of Placements

Ensuring that children and young people are placed within Hertfordshire continues to be a challenge for commissioners.

As of 31st March 2023, there were 386 children and young people placed outside of Hertfordshire's borders; 262 placed in Band 1 areas and 124 placed "At a Distance". Of those placed at a distance, there were 43 children placed 100+ miles from home, which equates to 35% of all children placed at a distance. This is an increase compared with 37 in March 2022, which equated to 30% of all children placed at a distance.

CLA placed at a distance by age shows that the highest number of children placed (40) fall within the 13 to 15 years age range.

CLA Age by Location Type	At a distance	Band 1	Hertfordshire	Total
Under 1 year	1	6	26	33
1 – 4 years	5	23	64	92
5 – 9 years	15	35	86	136
10 – 12 years	27	40	72	139
13 – 15 years	40	73	136	249
16 – 17 years	36	85	207	328
Total	124	262	591	977

As of March 2023, placement types were as follows:

CLA Placement Type	At a distance	Band 1*	Hertfordshire	Total
IH Family & Friends	8	29	86	123
IH Fostering	18	38	279	335
IH Residential Children's Home	0	0	23	23
IP Family Assessment Centre	0	1	0	1
IP Fostering	33	107	48	188
IP Residential Children's Home	42	25	15	82
IP Semi-Independent Living	5	39	103	147

IP Special School	12	4	3	19
Placed for Adoption	5	17	19	41
Placed with parents or other with parental responsibility	0	1	15	16
Young Offenders' Institution, secure unit, or prison	1	1	0	2
Total	124	262	591	977

**Band 1 comprises Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Kent, London and Peterborough.*

Placement Stability

There has been an increase of children having 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months from 8.6% to 9.36%. This is still lower than statistical neighbours at 9.8%.



Despite the increase in 3 or more placement moves, Hertfordshire's CLA population remains low at 36.1 per 10,000. National figures from March 2022 give the average at 70, with statistical neighbours at 50.6.

Independent Placement Average Weekly Costs

Provision	March 2019	March 2020	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023
Fostering	£982	£1049	£1071	£976	£1184
Residential	£4665	£4017	£4945	£5060	£6693
Semi-Independent	£1267	£1386	£1631	£1693	£2263

Average weekly costs for independent residential placements dipped slightly at the end of financial year 2019/20, but costs have continued to rise since. Due to the high cost and low volume of such placements, average costs fluctuate. With previous year on year

increases being low (2021-22 at 2%) there has been a marked increase in the last 2 months. This is due to the substantial increase in interest rates and the cost of living. The Council has also started to record average costs with additional support included. This will be reflected in future costs.

Overall placement costs for all placement types have risen in the last year, with more providers requesting additional support to manage placements, retain staff and carers.

Placement Sufficiency

Residential Care

Provision within Hertfordshire

There are more residential children's homes operating within Hertfordshire than ever before. This is a result of the work invested in the Residential Strategy and the time taken to engage with independent providers. Since the pandemic, a residential providers forum has been held virtually each month with in-house service leads and independent providers to share good practice, information and provide training opportunities.

There are currently 15 registered children's homes, operated by 10 different independent providers, along with 7 local authority homes. The independent homes include use of some of the Council's properties as part of the Residential Strategy.

In-House Residential

Our in-house residential services have seven homes currently operating;

- Three 5 bed homes
- One 4 bed home
- One 6 bed home for children with disabilities
- One 3 bed home to offer solo and short-term provision
- One short stay ARC provision

All our in-House homes have achieved a "Good" or "Outstanding" rating from Ofsted.

ARC Short Stays

ARC Services offer short stays as part of a family intervention program where there is the risk of family breakdown, and children are on the edge of care. The short-stay service is open 6 days per week. Over 90% of the young people have remained at home because of the ARC support. They have achieved an 'Outstanding' rating from Ofsted.

Independent Residential

There are now 15 independent homes within Hertfordshire offering up to 51 placements. Not all of the placements are available to the Council. Some of the homes form part of larger contract arrangements, some part of Hertfordshire contract arrangements and others are available as spot purchases.

Of the 15 homes, 4 were registered in the last 12 months. Two further homes are in the process of registration and the Residential Strategy will also mobilise another 2 homes in the next year.

In the year to come, the commissioning team will continue to focus on the mobilisation of Residential Strategy homes alongside independent providers as well as procurement activity on the final phase of the project.

Time will also be spent engaging with the local market to ensure that any new potential homes established meet the needs of children and young people locally and utilise local services. Given the gap between available independent residential homes and the number of young people in Hertfordshire who need a local provision, we encourage independent providers who wish to expand their services within the County.

Foster Care

In-House Fostering

As of 31st March 2023, there were 648 children and young people under 18 (SMC and not SMC which include Mainstream, Independent, Family & Friends, Adoption and Supported Lodgings) in foster placements, excluding those in “staying put” arrangements. Of the under 18s placed in an Independent fostering placement, there were 191 (29%).

There were 457 children placed in in-house foster placements as of March 2023. The table below indicates the breakdown of placement types;

Provision Type	Placements
IH Fostering	345
IH Family & Friends	107
IH Adoption	2
IH Supported Lodgings	3

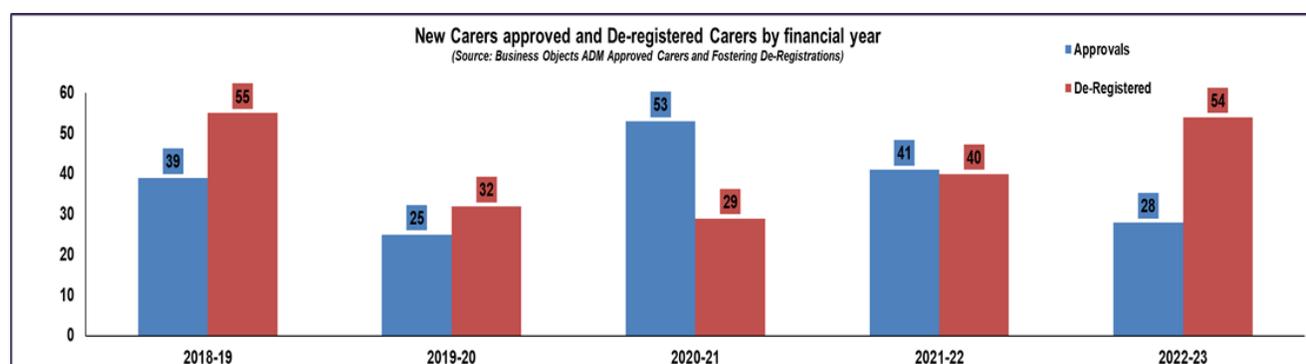
The Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment and support of the in-house fostering resources for children in Hertfordshire. Fostering provides care and support for some of the most vulnerable children in Hertfordshire. The focus of the recruitment strategy is to ensure sufficient recruitment of mainstream foster carers. The service recruits foster carers from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to reflect the diverse needs of children in care. The service welcomes applications from the LGBT+ community.

New approvals in Hertfordshire over the last 5 years have fluctuated significantly and reflect the national challenge of sustained recruitment and retention of foster carers to undertake the complex but rewarding task of caring for looked after children in partnership with the local authority. In the last financial year, Hertfordshire experienced a significant drop in Fostering enquiries and assessments, as well as a high number of de-registrations.

This can be seen with the fluctuating figures below:

- Net loss of 26 foster carers for 2022/23
- Net gain of 1 foster carer for 2021/22
- Net gain of 24 foster carers for 2020/21
- Net loss of 7 Foster carers for 2019/20

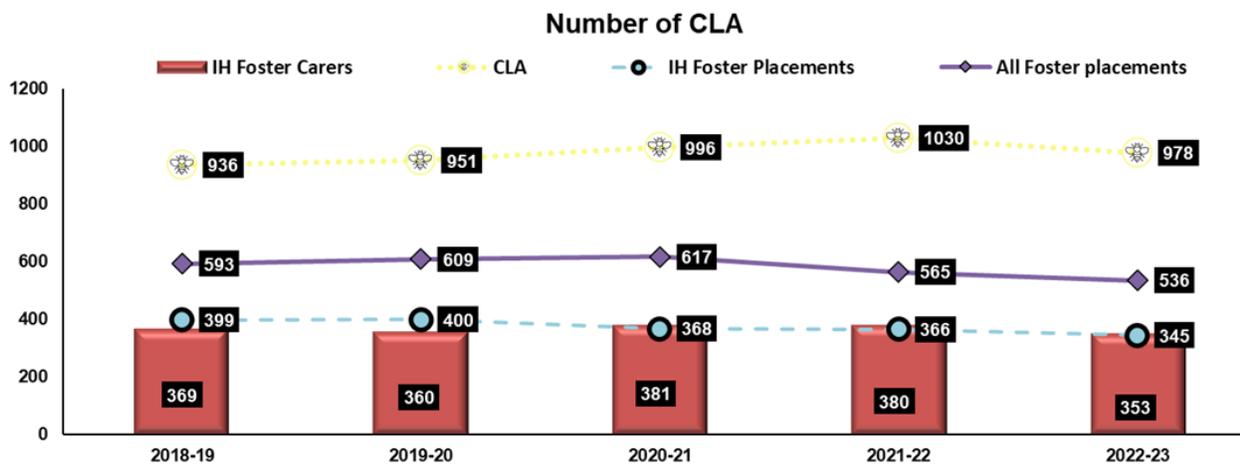
Over the last 5 financial years, there have been 186 new approvals and 209 de-registrations of carers (households)



Since 2018-19 (369 households), there has been a loss of 16 carers (households). This figure includes those who have moved to Friends & Family, Shared Care and Supported Lodgings.

The ratio of In House (IH) foster placements to all foster placements has decreased from 67% in 2018-19 to 64% in 2022-23.

The ratio of all foster placements to children looked after (CLA) has decreased from 63% in 2018-19 to 55% in 2022-23.



Over the last 3 years, service development has been focused on improving the support offer through ARC Fostering (Therapeutic parenting support) and the Mockingbird Family Model, to address the changing demands on foster carers to manage and care for older children with a complex profile and ensure that fostering remains a rewarding activity for all those already fostering and those wishing to foster in the future.

In 2022-23, we launched 3 new Mockingbird hubs and we now have a total of 7 Mockingbird hubs in Hertfordshire.

In response to the increased number of children coming into care in an emergency, in October 2022, the Fostering service launched the Emergency fostering hub scheme to provide 10 day emergency placements for children and young people.

Hertfordshire continues to work hard at recruitment and retention to ensure that we increase the current levels of in-house placement capacity and utilisation. Through the launch of the Fostering Strategy 'One Team Built Around the Child', focused recruitment drives, more accurate performance data alongside weekly target meetings, increased recruitment and retention continues to be seen from 2020 onwards. Recruitment, retention and utilisation of carers remain the key focus.

Independent Fostering

There are currently four independent fostering agencies registered within Hertfordshire. As of March 2023, the Council only had placements with two of the agencies (13) equating to 6.9% of all independent fostering placements.

Historically independent fostering agencies have reported that it is difficult for them to recruit foster carers within Hertfordshire due to the quality of the offer from the in-house fostering service. Independent agencies are experiencing the same difficulties in recruiting as the in-house service.

As the host of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG) Hertfordshire have worked with partners and developed an early alert function within the CCRAG database. The early alert function enables independent agencies to send early alerts to host placement/brokerage teams when they become aware of upcoming vacancies. The alert function was new for 2022-23 and commissioners continue to promote its use so that children can be placed closer to home and within their local areas.

Placements with independent fostering agencies has decreased in the last 12 months by two. Although a small decrease, this does represent a stable placement category.

The focus for 2023-24 will be to ensure that placements with independent agencies are made with local carers and that the early alert function within CCRAG is utilised as much as possible.

Semi-Independent Provision

Provision within Hertfordshire

The Council operates a Framework Agreement for the provision of Semi-Independent Supported Accommodation for 16- and 17-year-old children in care. Most children who access the Council's Semi-Independent provision are placed in Hertfordshire and sufficiency is not an issue with this cohort. Of the 117 children placed in 2022/23, 93 were placed in Hertfordshire and 22 in local authorities bordering Hertfordshire. The majority of the 22 children placed out of Hertfordshire were unable to live within Hertfordshire borders due to a risk to their safety if they remained in the County.

The Semi-Independent Framework runs separate lots for shared accommodation settings, solo accommodation settings, and settings for Separated Migrant Children. The profile of the young people in Semi-Independent provision ranges from young people who can live independently with minimal support, but others may present with mental health issues, risk of exploitation (CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation) and CCE), substance misuse, or possibly criminal behaviour. The framework has 9 providers across the various framework lots and secures the Council more competitive prices which ensures a high quality of provision.

The aim of this service is to support children with their transition to adulthood and towards living independently after 18. This is achieved by providing high quality accommodation and support whilst facilitating their personal well-being, ensuring safety, and equipping them with the skills required to sustain an independent tenancy long term.

With an increase in the expected numbers of Young People accessing this service in the next few years, the budget for 2023/24 has been increased to £6,724,642 (increase of 11.6% since 2022/23). The budget increase is due both to demographic changes and estimated inflation. The budget will be managed and regularly monitored to ensure that the resource is used effectively.

The current average cost of Semi-Independent beds in Hertfordshire, excluding additional support, is £1,469 per week and the Block purchase of the same type of beds is £950 per week. Therefore, a potential avoided spend of £519 per placement per week.

Budget/Spend	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Budget	£3,986,658	£4,247,443	£4,831,643	£6,025,642	£6,724,642
Spend	£3,946,966	£5,844,930	£5,431,315	£5,404,646	

Housing Brokerage and Care Leaver Accommodation

Care Leavers aged 18+ from 1 st April 2022 to 31 st March 2023	Total
18 years old	168
19 to 21 years old	467
22 to 26 years old	188
All Care Leavers 18 years +	823

Housing Brokerage work to meet Children Services other accommodation needs. This includes accommodation response for Care Leavers after they leave their care placements, as well as families with vulnerable children in need of accommodation support who are not eligible for support from the local district and borough councils in the County.

The Housing Brokerage Team have, until 23/24, primarily relied on accommodation services that have not been commissioned and are available on the open market, for example nightly let accommodation. However, in the year to come there will be a number of areas that the team will look to develop newly commissioned services. These will include:

- **Staying Close Accommodation:** Through funding from DfE (Department for Education), the Council will commission a pilot program of Staying Close accommodation for care leavers with additional support needs.
- **Separated Migrant Care Leaver Accommodation:** This will be specialist accommodation for former separated migrant children who are, at 18, still waiting for their leave to remain from the Home Office, and who remain the responsibility of children services to accommodate.

SEND Commissioning

Data – Children Looked After with SEND [JSNA \(Joint Strategic Needs Assessment\) documents \(hertfordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

1. According to Hertfordshire ICS, there has been a 49.4% increase in the number of children and young people in Hertfordshire with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) between 2015/16 and 2019/20.
2. On the 21st of March 2021, 13% of Children Looked After in Hertfordshire had a physical/learning disability according to the Hertfordshire Children Services Social Work database LCS.
3. Data from the Virtual School • In April 2021, the five most common primary needs for Children Looked After with EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) were:
 - Social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) (49.3%)
 - Moderate Learning Difficulty (21.5%)
 - Autistic Spectrum Disorder (7.7%)
 - Speech, Language and Communication Needs (7.7%)
 - Severe Learning Difficulty (3.8%)
 - Other difficulties included Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, Other Difficulty/Disability, hearing impairment, physical disability, Specific Learning Difficulty, and visual impairment.
4. According to the Hertfordshire Children Services Social Work database – LCS, the proportion of Children Looked After who had fostering placements was significantly lower in those with disabilities (55.0%) than those without disability (73.1%) and this difference was statistically significant. The proportion of Children Looked After who had residential placements was significantly higher in those with disabilities (38.0%) than those without disabilities (13.7%).

Provision within Hertfordshire

Short Breaks Services, including Overnight Short Breaks and Short Breaks Local Offer services, provide a break for parents and carers, whilst their children stay, for a short amount of time, in a safe and suitable setting. Having access to this support has important benefits for both carers and their children, helping the carer continue to care for their child and providing the child with a change from daily routine and an opportunity to develop new skills and mix with their peers.

Homecare Services have been commissioned to provide support to children and young people and their families with SEND within their home and local community to find solutions through integrated personalised commissioning.

These Services provide the valuable support and respite to parents and carers for their child to remain within the family.

Overnight Short Breaks

Overnight Short Breaks (OSB) are residential services for children and young people with SEND and complex health needs that live in Hertfordshire. These services operate during evenings, weekends and throughout the day during the school holidays.

The number of children and young people accessing OSB services at year end 2022/23 was 103, with the largest number of these children and young people having ASD and/or challenging behaviour, and second largest number having complex health needs. The number of commissioned hours for 2022/23 has reduced by 1,500 hours due to the re-modelling and re-commissioning of the service. The service is now modelled on a staffing ratio of 1-1 (previously 3-1) and emergency placement hours will be counted separately outside of the block OSB contracts, allowing for a more accurate reflection of OSB activity.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, and with the social distancing measures that were in place, all the three OSB services worked hard to keep their support available and to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable children were met. For the OSB providers, this meant having to look at their “business as usual” with fresh eyes, responding to new risks, being quick at identifying and sourcing new equipment, providing training and additional staff to make sure the service remained open and safe. In addition, OSB providers have gone above and beyond their usual day to day activities by supporting emergencies across children’s services. OSB services are now returning to business as usual (BAU), although they are facing carer recruitment issues.

An addition to the new OSB service specification: each service will provide an emergency bed for children and young people who meet the criteria to access the service and have an immediate need for accommodation because they cannot return home and for whom no other accommodation option is available. The expectation is that the Emergency Bed is used only for short admissions and that there is an expectation that the child/young person will be temporarily resident for no longer than 6 weeks. In addition, discharge planning will begin on admission, and will be co-produced with the family and child/young person, with the aim of working towards returning the individual to the family home or a suitable long-term placement within the 6-week timescale. The emergency bed will be funded by the placing service outside of the OSB Block Contract.

A review of Section 75 Agreement with Health is commencing June 2023 to look at the number of children and young people that attend Overnight Short Breaks with complex health needs. This review will help inform the financial contribution required from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for this service. Initial findings show that approx. 25% of CYP accessing OSB have complex health needs, equating to over £300,000 per year.

Strategies for 2023/2024

Residential Strategy

The strategy aims to create an additional 31 beds (both in-house and independent) within Hertfordshire by 2024/25, primarily by refurbishing properties within the HCC (Hertfordshire County Council) portfolio. The project started in 2020 and is programmed delays of 12 months.

The strategy aims to bring more of our young people closer to home, which will facilitate family contact and the possibility of reunification.

The homes will be a mix of short term/emergency and medium to longer term placements. In response to current needs, we are developing a mix of 4-bed homes as well as smaller 2/3 bed and solo provision. We hope by creating a variety of provisions, all our children, no matter what their needs, will have good options and the right type of care available. In addition to the new homes, we recognise that to meet the needs of children effectively, we need a holistic approach to care to include their education and health as well as their social care needs.

By creating local provision over the next 5-10 years, to provide at least **78%** of residential placements within Hertfordshire's borders or in neighboring local authorities noting there will always be a need to place some children out of area/at a distance due to presenting needs and the need for specialist provision which due to demand could not be replicated within Hertfordshire. With planned initiatives to reduce the numbers of children requiring residential care.

There are four key aims within the strategy:

- Ensuring the right children are in residential accommodation
- Creating high quality local residential accommodation
- Brokering a new relationship with our providers in Hertfordshire
- Making sure the best support and services are available for children in residential accommodation

Firstly, we aim to ensure that only the right children enter residential accommodation and that step-downs to foster care or return to family, where possible, are facilitated swiftly through improvements in the quality and support around placements. We aim to reduce the number of children in residential provision through linked initiatives including the Inside Out Project and the development of the Fostering Strategy. We are working closely across services to ensure that we know that only those children who need to be in residential care are accommodated and that the best matching possible is achieved for every child in placement.

Project Ambitions of the Residential Strategy:

Phase I and II summaries:

- In total 27 beds are in development or are ready as part of Phase I and II of the Strategy
- A minimum of 4 further beds must be identified for Phase III, to meet the 31-bed target.
- Additional properties may become available as part of the adult’s property disposal program.

Summary of current bed demographic:

- 24 beds within HCC properties are currently planned for use within the strategy.
- 4 beds have been purchased by the independent provider Keys Group as an extension within the Cross Regional Partnership
- Investigating solo block contract with provider.

Of those 24 HCC beds planned for use:

- 10 beds are now Ofsted registered
- 14 beds are in refurbishment stage
- More Solo/short term provision being investigated for use.
- Due to the complexity of needs currently presenting in children within the residential cohort there is a need for smaller homes within the strategy and delivery of the new homes is being adjusted accordingly.

	Property	Bed Spaces	Comments
Phase I	Greenway Lodge	2	Open
	Bright Skies House (PFI building)	3	Open
	Field View	4	Open
	Meadow View (PFI building)	4	Open
	Keys Property (private provider) Cross Regional Partnership contract	4	Open
Phase II	Private provider Block contract considered - on solo home only	1	Investigation
	Specialist Children’s Home – Joint funded with Health	3 + 1	Due to open 2023

	North Herts solo	1	Open
	East Hub - emergency short term	1	Start of quote works and variation of use
	North Herts rural	2	Refurb – due to open 2023
	Mid Herts	3	Refurb – due to open 2024

By creating new accommodation within the residential strategy, we expect not only to improve outcomes for children and their families, but also to reduce a significant overspend on the independent placements budget of £5.1m in 2019/20.

Expected Outcomes of the Strategy

The key outcomes that the strategy seeks to deliver are to:

- Improve outcomes for Children Looked After and their families
- Ensure the right children are in appropriate care, at the right time
- Increase the volume and uptake of in-house provision to reduce spend on independent provisions
- Increase the number of children placed within Hertfordshire
- Create stability and value for money within Hertfordshire residential placements
- Improve access to local health and education provision
- Improve chances of step down to foster care or return to family
- Create more local residential accommodation over the next 5-10 years so that at least 78% of residential placements are within Hertfordshire's borders or in neighbouring Local Authorities

Fostering Strategy

The One Team Fostering Strategy aims to grow and improve fostering in Hertfordshire and by doing this:

- have more skilled in-house foster carers who are able to meet the needs of the children and young people in our care
- there will be more choice of placement for children who are looked after in Hertfordshire and they will be able to achieve good outcomes in a local family environment, in line with Hertfordshires Outcome Bees framework

Progress update on the Fostering Strategy

- The Fostering Strategy has been updated to reflect current priorities such as cost of living and following consultation with key stakeholders. The new strategy will be published later in 2023.
- Hertfordshire County Council became a Fostering Friendly Employer in January 2023 to support its staff who are foster carers and encourage those who are considering it.
- Governance structures supporting the delivery of the strategy have been reviewed and new sub-groups are now in place including a focus on transitions, support and promotion of long-term fostering.
- A review of allowances and payments for foster carers was conducted resulting in an 9% increase in skills payments for all foster carers in addition to the 12.4% national minimum allowance to reflect more accurately the current economic environment.
- A new Emergency Foster Carers project was launched in October 2022 to provide short term placements of children in need.
- Foster carers and staff had the opportunity to feedback their thoughts on fostering in Hertfordshire and the progress of the strategy through a series of surveys and membership of working groups.

Semi Independent Provision Regulation

In 2023, Ofsted will introduce new regulations for Supported Accommodation. Hertfordshire County Council has been working closely with its Framework providers to ensure that they are ready for the change in regulations. All 9 providers on the Councils framework are registering with Ofsted before the October deadline, and there are no significant challenges that are expected from this change in regulatory framework.

Service Objectives 23/24

1. Work together with CLA and Leaving Care Services to prepare and plan for children leaving care.
2. Development and growth of accommodation options for more complex Care Leavers
3. Ensure that the Council's Semi-Independent Framework for 16- and 17-year-olds meets the new Ofsted regulatory standards, and that all providers are registered with Ofsted by 28th October.
4. Grow the options used by Housing Brokerage to respond to homelessness for care leavers and families, including more bespoke accommodation for separated migrant care leavers.
5. Ensure that the Housing Related Support (HRS) services around the County provide viable accommodation options to homeless young people.

SEND Commissioning - Extended Stay Provision

The overall aim of this service is to provide a flexible approach to preventing admission to general hospitals, tier 4 mental health units and other forms of institutional care, due to mental health presentation and/ or challenging behaviour. This will meet the needs of children and young people:

- who fall within the transforming care cohort (those with a diagnosis of autism and/ or a learning disability)
- SEND children and young people where there is a crisis and/or need for an emergency provision, but where support can be provided in the community

The focus is on developing services to provide local support to children and young people. With the view that if the right support is provided at the right time, we can reduce escalation and reduce reliance on hospitals and other forms of institutional care. To provide an 'extended short break' service, which will be short term (up to 75 nights) residential provision to either de-escalate a crisis, or act as a step down, facilitating discharges where there was a need for a hospital bed or where there are issues and delays in sourcing longer term placements or community support.

The provision will be accessed on a solo basis, and we will flex the service offered dependent on need, with the option of accessing for an overnight stay (up to 75 nights) on a planned and emergency basis. Or, if there is not a child requiring an overnight stay, we will use the provision flexibly enabling access to the building for a few hours during the day.

Hertfordshire County Council's current short break offer includes 3x large residential short break homes aimed to support a group of children and young people at a time. These services provide scheduled and regular overnight stays for children and young people for 1 or 2 nights at a time. Whilst this offer works for many, it does not enable crisis/ emergency stays, extended stays over and above 1 or 2 nights and is not effective when a child/young person requires a smaller more bespoke service. This provision aims to meet this gap, it will be an extension of Hertfordshire County Council's current short break offer but will be a small setting, which will operate as a short-term residential service providing a flexible offer to support children and young people with the most complex of needs.

We have identified many children who are falling within our risk of admission cohort are out of education, therefore use of the building during the day would ease pressures on families and reduce risk of family breakdown and provide routine and structure for the young people. We will consider how we work alongside educational colleagues where appropriate, facilitating access to some level of education. We will also look at providing a

base for young people to engage in activities which are not education focused. We are often in need of a building base to provide a safe space for a child to engage in an activity when busy community spaces are not suitable. In some circumstances, the building base may also act as a safe calm space for assessment and intervention from professionals, outside of a family home or clinical environments.

The team supporting this service will provide personalised support within the provision, as well as the option to provide intensive outreach support within the family home or another provision during a child's transition on from the service. The team will work in partnership with Hertfordshire CYP Mental Health Services including our PALMS service who offer positive behavioural support interventions for children and young people who are autistic and or have a learning disability. Links between the service's staffing team and PALMS will be important in ensuring the team understand and are able to follow the PBS plan to best support the young person within the provision and de-escalate crisis.

We recognise that considerations will need to be made around the environmental aspects of the provision and we will explore adaptations required to create a low arousal space which would meet the sensory needs of young people accessing the provision and keep them safe. The environment will need to be adaptable to meet the variety of sensory needs for this cohort and support access for all.

This extended stay will address some of our most complex gaps and challenges:

- An alternative to hospital (including general wards) where admission would be inappropriate and support needs can be met in the community.
- The need to provide a break in the cycle/ pause in crisis and offer a change of environment to support de-escalation.
- A safe space for assessment and support, to stabilise the situation and establish future plans, such as enabling a child to return home or identify what long term support is required. Also, to provide a safe space for assessment and develop an understanding of a child's presentation outside of the home/ hospital environment.
- To provide an alternative to a general hospital bed for ongoing crisis support where C-CATT have assessed a tier 4 inpatient bed is not required.
- To provide a short break for a child and family, who are unable to access current short break provision.
- Reducing overall length of stays in hospital by provision of short-term step-down/ steppingstone from hospital settings should there be delays in discharge due to issues identifying community provision.
- Reducing number of children in out of county education residential settings
- Increasing resilience in our families.
- Enabling children to continue living at home with families and accessing local school.

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- Reducing the number of children presenting in A&E or on general hospital wards.

The property identified a 4 bedded property with secure outdoor space in central Hertfordshire. The property will be available for 50 weeks of the year.

Jubilee House Trust will ensure that the property and service is registered with OFSTED and holds dual Ofsted and CQC (Care Quality Commission) registration. There will be a core 24-hour support team available comprising of a Deputy Manager, a support worker and a waking night, with the aim for this team to be available at short notice for emergencies. In order to ensure the provision is suitable for the cohort of children and young people, Jubilee House Trust will need to consider the environmental aspects of the provision and explore adaptations required to create a safe and robust environment suitable for a range of individuals, including sensory considerations. The environment will need to be adaptable to meet the variety of sensory needs for this cohort and support access for all and will be in line with Ofsted regulations.

The costings and project plan/ timeline for this proposal are based on Hertfordshire working in partnership with a local provider who have identified a property of which they own and would be suitable for this service. The provider is well known to Hertfordshire, and they manage 2x current overnight children's short break services as well as several adult supportive living and residential schemes. Currently the property requires some adaptations and refurbishments of which we are exploring funding through an NHS England Grant. Likewise, this Grant will cover the initial start-up costs, including management and registration under Ofsted and 1 year's retainer fee, to enable the provision to be available and utilised in an emergency basis and the additional costs required to support individual packages of support. Additional costs and ongoing costs of care packages will need to be met by the local authority past this initial year.

Inside Out

Inside Out is a programme that is testing an innovative approach to improving outcomes and stability for Children Looked After. The programme was initially funded through the Department for Education's Innovation Fund and commissioned in partnership with Essex and Norfolk County councils and was delivered by The Children's Society (TCS) on a pilot basis.

Following 3 successful years of the pilot project, the Inside out project has been re-contracted within Hertfordshire. The Children's Society (TCS) is the lead provider for the programme and continues to work in partnership with Essex and Hertfordshire to achieve positive outcomes for young people on the programme.

The Inside Out coaching service offers intensive support to children and young people in care, who may not be getting all the support they need from the current system of social care and support. The programme aims to provide the critical scaffolding to support a positive transition into adulthood. An Inside Out coach works 1:1 with a young person to establish a sense of stability by way of a positive relationship, encouragement to make positive decisions and resilience to face setbacks should they occur.

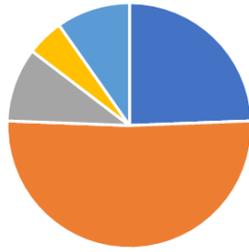
With the use of intensive coaching, the goal is to stabilise and enable children to return home, or successfully ‘step down’ to less intensive care wherever appropriate and possible. Other positive outcomes include engagement with education or training or a reduction in missing episodes.

Since the Inside Out Project mobilised in Hertfordshire in May 2019, it has had a significant impact on the young people that have been involved. Hertfordshire County Council has had a total of 61 young people involved in the project so far (June 2023), with another 5 young people due to start in July 2023. Of these, 35 young people have fully completed the duration of the project, 21 young people have successfully stepped down to less intensive care and 10 young people have successfully returned home whilst on the project.

A further break down of Inside Out Project figures since 2019:

YP in total	61
Live on project currently	6
Fully completed duration	35
Did not complete and closed	20
Due to start	5
Returned home on project and finished duration	10
Stepped down to less intensive care whilst on project and finished duration	21
Fluctuated in care intensity but did not step down however but completed project	4
Stepped down to lesser intensive care still live Project	2
Continuing to work on step down to less Care	4

Figure 2: Inside Out Cohort



- Returned home on project and finished duration
- Stepped down to less intensive care whilst on project and finished duration
- Fluctuated in care intensity but did not step down however but completed project
- Stepped down to lesser intensive care still live Project
- Continuing to work on step down to less Care

Summary

As outlined throughout, there is a need to continue increasing local provision. The national shortage of appropriate residential and fostering provision continues, especially in relation to teenage placements and placements for children with complex histories and high needs. Placement costs continue to rise placing pressure on placement budgets. A range of activity is planned over the coming years to address these challenges. The key activity for 23/24 is outlined below.

Key Priorities in 2023/2024

Prioritise placement stability initiatives across commissioning activity including the provision of additional support into placements
Prioritise placement stability initiatives across commissioning activity including the provision of additional support into placements
Timely Quality Assurance and monitoring of placements to ensure high quality care
Mobilise a further 2 children's homes; utilising existing HCC properties run by independent providers by March 2024
Mobilise the additional provision within the cross regional contract creating a further 4 beds
Continue to embed the fostering strategy to increase the number and range of in-house foster carers
Housing Brokerage to monitor children and young people placed on housing register to ensure they are on the appropriate housing register with any issues of move on quickly addressed with the Local Housing Authority
Ensure post 18 accommodation for Appeal Rights Exhausted/Intentionally Homeless and No Recourse to Public Fund families is sufficient to meet demand and best value via reduced spend on nightly let accommodation, reduced time spent in accommodation and increased pathway through services by HCC and district partners
Working with District Housing colleagues to review current hostel capacity to understand the current supported accommodation (hostel) provisions and the gaps in service, with a special focus on the impending changes to 16/17-year-old Care Leaver placements due to new Ofsted Regulations from 1st November 2023
Ensure existing and new supported accommodation providers meet the necessary quality standards to deliver high quality services to our young people under the new Ofsted Regulations from 1st November 2023
Staying Close accommodation to be delivered via funding from DfE, with Children's Services commissioning a pilot program of Staying Close accommodation for Care Leavers with additional support needs
Work with CCRAAG partners to develop the new monitoring module and publicise the Early Alert function to encourage local placements
Develop Extended Stay provision preventing admission to general hospitals, tier 4 mental health units and other forms of institutional care, due to mental health presentation and/ or challenging behaviour