

Ealing children in care and care leavers

Sufficiency Strategy

2025-2028



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Foreword

I am delighted to share with you our Sufficiency Strategy for 2025 – 2028. This is our strategy that outlines how we will provide holistic support for children in our care and care leavers.

We are very clear in our aim to support families to stay together wherever possible, when this is not possible, we will support children to live with other family members or a connected person. We are committed to providing as much support as possible to enable families to stay together and will continue to strive to create permanence for children within their networks of support.

When it is not possible for children to live with their family or a connected person, we will endeavour to find stable loving homes for children in the borough or as close to the borough as possible.

This Sufficiency Strategy sets out some of the challenges in the local and national context, but more importantly articulates how we will ensure that we have the right support at the right time for our children in care and care leavers.

The council takes its responsibility as corporate parents extremely seriously and we will continue to work together across all departments and with community partners. We are committed to working tirelessly to providing every child in care and care leaver the opportunity for success.

I would like to offer my thanks to all the families, members and officers who all play their part in making Ealing such a positive and thriving community.

Thank you,

Councillor Josh Blacker
Cabinet Member for a Fairer Start

Introduction

Acknowledgement of the role of council as a Corporate Parent

The council believes that for most children and young people, the best place to live is with their family of origin. However, there are some children and young people who need to live, either short term or permanently, in other care arrangements. Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 creates sufficiency duty that requires local authorities (LA's) to take steps that secure, so far



as reasonably practicable, a sufficiency of homes to meet the needs of these children. Furthermore, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority, or is under 25, and was looked after by that local authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the local authority becomes their corporate parent and there is a requirement to provide post care support.

This Sufficiency Strategy, developed using qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources (e.g. the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – JSNA), sets out the council's approach to meeting the needs of these children and their families and the statutory responsibility to provide safe and homes and support to children in care and care leavers when necessary. It is underpinned by "*Stable homes, built on love*" (the 2023 Government strategy to reform Children's Social Care) and subsequent policy (Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive 2024). These governmental directives align with the council's broader strategic vision (Council Plan 2022-26) core principle of a fairer start for all children. It is also informed by the Additional & Special Educational Needs, Disabilities Strategy (2023-27) and the national kinship care strategy (Championing kinship care – 2023). It prioritises permanency within the family, or with a connected person. If this is not possible then the council will prioritise a home with a foster family and residential homes only utilised if there are no feasible alternatives.

Sufficiency strategy overview

The strategy identifies the council's key principles and actions to identify and deliver high-quality care and support that will improve outcomes for Ealing's children. The aim is to continue to improve services for children and young people in the borough. Delivery will be aligned with programmes of work which enable the council to provide support as early as possible with children and families and drive forward partnership work that supports children to thrive. The document provides a high-level summary of need, the types of homes available, and includes current supply along with forecasted demand. Furthermore, it sets out the council's plans in relation to placement sufficiency under our priority areas, which are:

- developing, earlier, more in depth, and robust support to children and their families to prevent family breakdown, with greater use of the wider family and friends' network to support this when necessary.
- increasing our understanding of our children's needs to provide effective support. This includes increased and improved use of extended family and friends' networks to support and care for children when a family breakdown occurs.
- improving assessment, placement, care planning and matching, to ensure that identified homes meet assessed needs, thus minimise the risk of breakdown.
- developing our fostering and residential care offer to provide enhanced care options, that are, where possible, within the borough (including having sufficient short-break provision for children with disabilities).

Supporting a child will always begin in their own family and aim to maintain stability in the family home. If that is not feasible then attempts will be made to engage the extended family and friends' network in caring for the child. If a family or friend home cannot be found for the child then council approved foster carers will be the first consideration; if that is not possible, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or, if necessary, Residential Care will be considered.

When a non-family and friend network care arrangement is required, the council aim to ensure that homes for children:

- are in the borough, preferably near the child's home and avoid disruption to the child's education or training.
- allows siblings to live together if that is in their best interest.
- meet the child's unique needs.

The council is committed to its role as Corporate Parents for children and young people requiring care. If a child or young person becomes looked after, the council will work with the child, family, carers and partners to maximise the effectiveness of the support it offers through a collaborative and integrated approach to ensure the child thrives. Further improvement to the in-house foster care offer and the Commissioning of IFA and residential care homes is aimed at ensuring that the council's provision is efficient, effective, economic, high quality and child focussed. The council will continuously review the possibility to step down (for example from Residential to Foster Care) or return a child to the care of their family when it is in their best interests.

Regarding care leavers, the council will continue to provide quality support to ensure they are provided with opportunities and can transition well to independent living (as initiatives such as the Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers 2022 demonstrates). Through improved pathway planning and in partnership with carers and professionals, a bespoke approach will be co-produced with each young person that supports them in becoming positive, resilient, productive and thriving members of the community. By actively engaging and listening to young people the council has co-created a shared vision, which includes the following key commitments:

- building strong, empowering relationships with care-experienced young people.
- using these relationships as a foundation to help young people develop their attributes and skills necessary to lead enriched and fulfilling lives.
- embracing and fulfilling the corporate parent role for each young person, ensuring that they feel supported and valued.

- acting as a safety net when challenges arise, making sure young people are not left to navigate difficulties alone.
- standing alongside young people in all aspects of their lives, offering guidance and solidarity.
- advocating on their behalf to work with both internal departments and external partners.
- listening carefully to young people's voices and responding proactively to their needs and concerns.

The council takes its Corporate Parenting responsibilities very seriously. Our principle, "Stand Alongside You" (SAY), emphasises its commitment to supporting young people on their journey into adulthood and independence. This strategy aims to make sure that children and young people's needs are understood and met. It merges the council's vision with what our children and young people need, and it identifies the principles upon which it will act, as well as our key commissioning challenges and actions to drive better value. It clearly sets out how the council and strategic partners intend to make sure children are best supported to be happy, healthy and productive adults, who make a positive contribution to their community. Evidence based and advised by the voice of children and young people, it reflects the council's vision for children and young people.

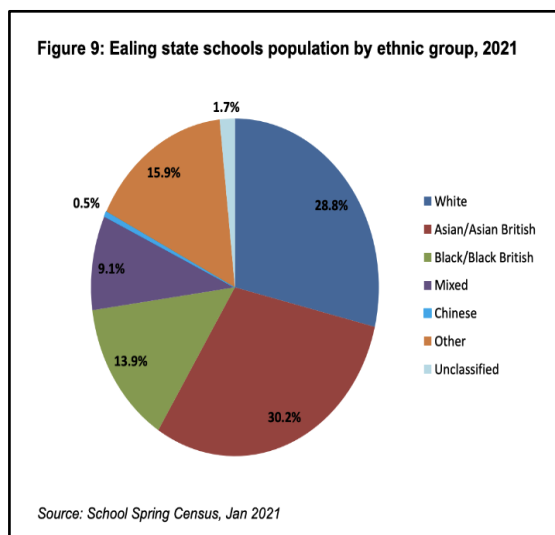
The council context

How the local environment influences Ealing's sufficiency strategy

Population growth: The council has the third largest population per borough in London and is home to 366,127 people. The total population of children aged 0-17 is 80,416, with those aged 10 to 17 making up 36,718 of the population. Between 2011 and 2021, Ealing's population grew by 8.5% with a disproportionate increase in the number of children aged 5-19.¹

This growth may have potential implications for the demand on children's services as a greater number of children living in the borough could result in greater demand for both support services and homes for children in care.

Population (000s)			
Year	0-15	16-64	65+
2001	59.7	212.8	34.7
2002	59.8	214.8	34.7
2003	60.0	213.5	34.6
2004	60.4	215.2	34.5
2005	61.1	217.2	34.5
2006	61.7	219.2	34.5
2007	62.6	221.5	34.6
2008	64.3	224.8	34.9
2009	66.2	228.4	35.4
2010	67.7	230.6	35.8
2011	69.2	233.7	36.5
2012	70.3	232.9	37.4
2013	71.6	232.4	38.5
2014	72.6	230.0	39.5
2015	73.5	229.1	40.4
2016	74.0	229.3	41.5
2017	74.2	226.0	42.5
2018	74.1	224.1	43.7
2019	74.5	222.5	44.8
2020	74.5	220.2	45.7
Change 2001-2020			
Number	14.8	7.4	11.0
Percentage	24.8%	3.5%	31.7%



Diversity and inclusion: The council is the third most ethnically diverse borough in the country; 69% of children aged 10 to 17 are from the global majority. There is a substantial polish community in Ealing, and the largest Sikh population outside of India. The student population in state-funded schools is highly diverse, with 84.4% of students identified as belonging to an ethnic background that is

non-white. In primary schools, 85% of students come from the global majority, compared to the national figure of 33.9% in 2020. In secondary schools, 83.4% are from the global majority, compared to 32.3% nationally.

¹ Ealing Council. (2018) *Ealing JSNA: Focus on Musculoskeletal Health*. Final version, February 2018. London: Ealing Council.

60% (32,880) of pupils in schools do not speak English as their first language, with a higher proportion of English as an additional language (EAL) in primary (63%) than secondary (56%).

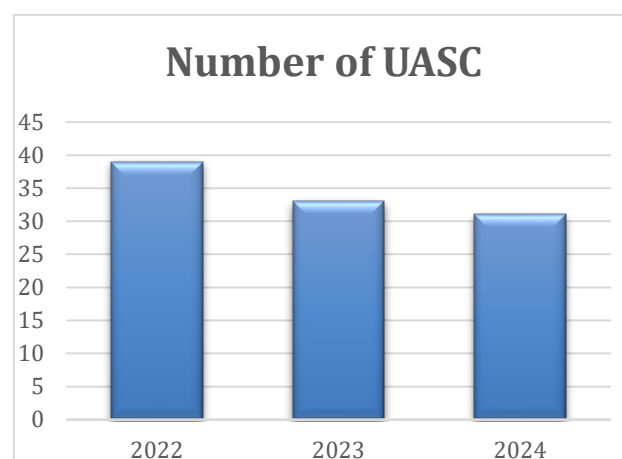
The highly diverse nature of the children's population has implications in the need for a range of care arrangements that can support the cultural needs and backgrounds of our children in care population.

Child poverty: child poverty levels have remained relatively stable over the past decade at 31%, close to the 32% mean average across London and equates to 13,000 children under the age of five who may be living in poverty².

A meta study of 90 papers found that changes in the economic conditions of family life alone, without any other factors, impact on rates of abuse and neglect”³. Given that there have been consistent levels of child poverty this would indicate that there will be consistent levels of demand on children services and care placements in relation to this factor.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking

Children: The number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) has steadily declined since 2022. As of August 2024, there were 31 UASC looked after by Ealing, down from 33 in 2023 and 39 in 2022. Despite this decrease, the challenges associated with supporting these young people remain significant. This group of young people can often present with complex emotional and mental health needs, requiring specialised support services.



² Trust for London (n.d.) *Ealing: Poverty and inequality indicators 2024*

³Department for Education, 2023. *Relationship Between Poverty, Child Abuse and Neglect: Executive Summary*

National - how the national environment influences Ealing's sufficiency strategy

Ealing is impacted by national market failures articulated in the 2022 Competition and Markets Authority (CMA⁴) report. The study was commissioned to examine the lack of availability and increasing costs in children's social care provision, including children's homes and fostering. The challenges set out in the report can be summarised as follows;

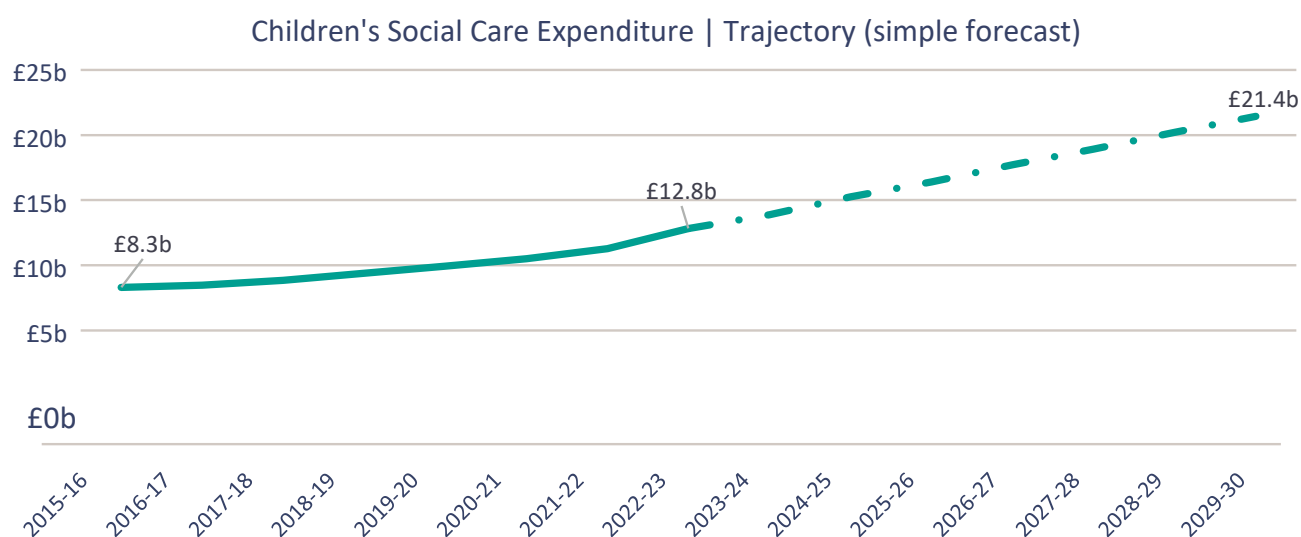
- imbalance of demand and supply: there is a higher demand for children in care homes than the available supply, creating pressure on services.
- lack of pricing transparency: across the market, pricing structures are often unclear, making it difficult for local authorities to predict costs.
- limited incentives for innovation: providers have little motivation to innovate or offer lower-cost homes for children.

The more recent 2024 IMPOWER (The Way we Care report⁵) builds upon the challenges set out in the CMA report and provides further analysis of the impact of these challenges and their 'root causes'.

The IMPOWER report outlines that there continues to be rising costs in providing homes for children in care, which have steadily increased over the past 7 years and is forecasted to continue to do so. This is representative of what is happening in Ealing and will be explored in greater depth in our local context. Due to the rising costs, a greater proportion of children's social care expenditure is needed for children in care, with a greater proportion of this expenditure on residential homes and other high-cost homes. The consequence is that children services lack capacity for investment in earlier intervention to prevent higher cost placements.

⁴ Competition and Markets Authority, 2022. *Children's social care market study*.

⁵⁶ IMPOWER, 2024, The way we care



The IMPOWER report also notes that more children are entering, and remaining, in care overall, and the mix of provision has changed with a greater number and proportion of children and young people placed in residential care, and less experiencing family life (through foster care for example). It is noted that although this is a national trend, this is not a trend that Ealing is experiencing. This will be examined later in the strategy.

The IMPOWER report articulates that there is not one particularly prevalent issue that is attributable for the challenge in the market but that the drivers are complex and multi-factorial and include the following:

1. lack of sufficient family-based care nationally (foster carers and kinship carers).
2. the sufficiency and 'value' of residential care, with an undervalued workforce.
3. lack of understanding of children and young people's needs, strengths and aspirations – and the application of this in practice, for example, home-finding and commissioning.
4. the prevalence of short-term, transactional relationships between commissioners and providers versus long-term relational partnerships and sharing of risk and investment.
5. the barriers presented by regulation.

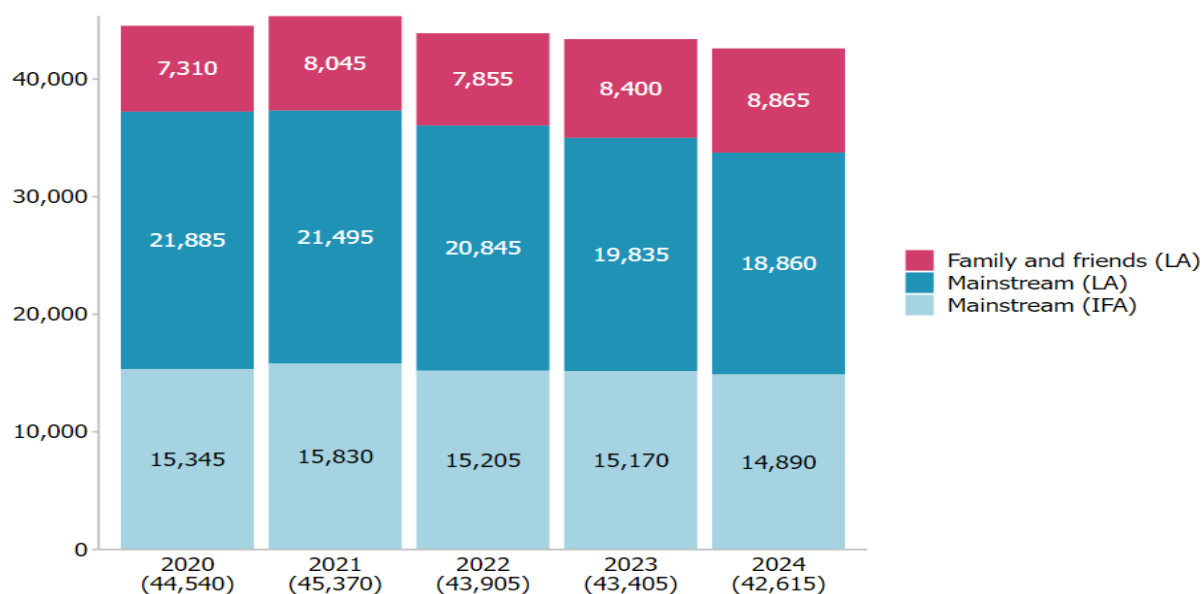
6. the impact of other services supporting children and young people who are looked after (including lack of access or availability for example, child and adolescent mental health services).

The council is disproportionately exposed to these national, independent market failures because of its greater London location, where higher wage expectations and housing costs exacerbate the problem.

The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a national crisis. Analysis from the Social Market Foundation (SMF) projects a shortage of 25,000 foster families across the country by 2026. Recruitment and retention efforts were greatly impacted by the Covid pandemic and lockdowns, while local authorities are also struggling to compete with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), which have larger marketing budgets.

At the end of March 2024, there were 42,615 fostering households in England. The number of households has decreased steadily since 2021, and the make-up has changed. Family and friends fostering is the preferred route in many cases, and it is increasingly common for this type of foster care to be used to meet the needs of individual children. The largest subset of fostering households is mainstream local authority households (18,860). These currently account for 44% of total fostering households (figure 1)."⁶

⁶ Department for Education, 2024. *Fostering in England*



The cost-of-living crisis and housing issues are adding significant strain to the fostering population. A 2022 survey showed that 97% of 1,036 respondents felt heavily impacted by rising living costs, with 54% considering leaving fostering as they feel they have no other option.

Sector stability

In the years since 2021, there have been year-on-year decreases in the number of approved or newly approved mainstream fostering households in both the independent fostering agency and local authority sectors.

There has been a 14% decrease in the number of approved or newly approved mainstream local authority households from 2020 to 2024.

Sector	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
IFA	220	485	-625	-35	-280
LA	-510	-390	-650	-1,010	-975

Year-on-year net change in mainstream fostering households by sector over the last 5 years

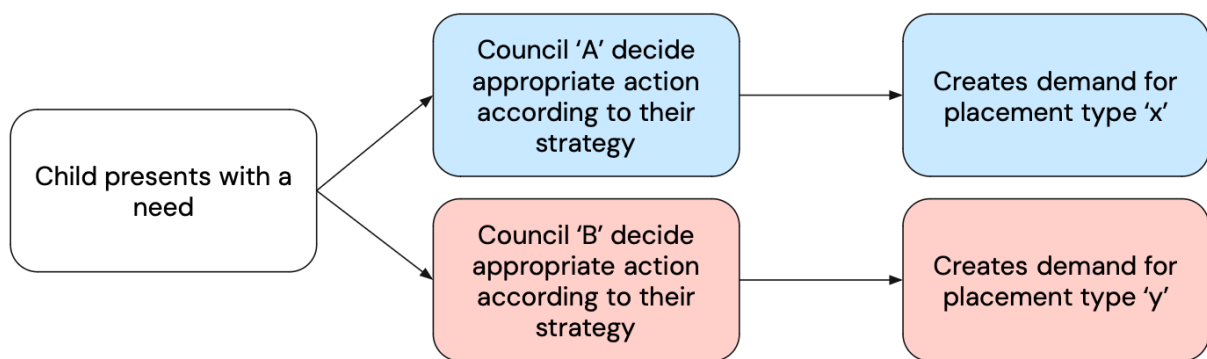
Although their numbers are reducing, in terms of the ongoing recruitment & retention of foster carers, independent fostering agencies continue to outperform local authorities. This is largely due to their domination of the paid digital advertising space, ranking higher in search results, reach and impressions over local authorities. The independent fostering agencies are more sophisticated in their approach and appreciate that digital marketing has the biggest reach and therefore target their resource which has resulted in their outperformance of local authorities.

As a result of independent fostering agencies' presence in the marketplace, they are creating the conditions where local authorities are effectively competing against each other through having to find different ways to attract carers and provide a range of enhancements and other incentives. Spot purchases have become common as some providers choose not to agree to framework prices to fill their capacity. Excluding staffing and infrastructure costs, the average in house foster care home is £501 per week, and the comparable average independent fostering agency costs £1,012. Enhanced offering for in house is £918, whereas independent fostering agency comparable is £1439. This discrepancy is compounded by the independent fostering agencies commonly stating that a child needs enhanced services if they have any form of additional care needs where this may not be the assessment of the social work team. Additionally, the inability to negotiate down independent fostering agency rates, especially in distressed purchasing situations, further exacerbates these costs. An additional risk is the over reliance on the private market, leaving local authorities exposed to changes in the market or individual companies that may lead to providers leaving the market unexpectedly. This puts all councils in a vulnerable position to increased costs and inability to forecast supply.

Projection on demand of homes for children in care and other services

Drivers of demand

Demand for homes for children in care is generated by the presenting needs of children, and the strategy of the council. For example, 2 councils may have the same number of children presenting with a certain type of need, but the demand for homes may differ due to how social work services interpret the child's needs.



The council's strategy is to maximise the use of kinship homes and support children and families to stay together. This is in line with the national strategy 'Stable Homes Built On Love', where the council will always seek to unlock family networks. Where this is not possible, the council would seek to find the best possible home for them with a local in-house foster carer. This keeps children connected with their communities and creates less demand for external provision and less dependency on high cost residential and IFA homes.

Demand for services

A central element of our strategy is to support families and communities so that children stay within their family network. In order to achieve this, the council is determined to identify the total addressable number of families who would benefit from support and meet this need through supply of services. Currently there are two core areas of support;

Prevention

- early help and prevention services – meeting need as early as possible and therefore preventing needs from becoming more acute and requiring statutory intervention
- edge of care – at a much higher level than early help (often for families who have had several previous interventions), this provides intensive support to families in crisis to help prevent family breakdown and the child/young person entering care.
- effective inter service and inter agency work e.g. between the youth justice service and social care or social care and the health service.

Reunification

- effective rehabilitation home – effectively supporting a child/young person in care, to successfully return, and stay, home.

Within prevention services, through specialized teams MAST (Multi-Agency Support Teams) and CONNECT (Court, Children in Care, Permanence and Fostering). has demonstrated measurable success in stabilizing homes and reducing reliance on out-of-borough care for children. Interventions include Short-Term Respite Care and Family Group Conferencing. It is difficult to have an accurate understanding of the total number of families who may benefit from using such services, as by the nature of hidden challenges, families do not present to the council at this stage. However, using other councils with similar socioeconomic markets as Ealing, of the 89,600 people under 20, it is possible that currently 1250 - 1750 children (1.6%)⁷ could benefit from Early help or edge of care support. ⁸

Reunification services are another core tool in ensuring the council's capacity and confidence in reuniting a child in care back to their family. The U.K. are outliers in OCED countries with significantly lower reunification levels (27%) than the likes of

⁷ MacAlister, J. (2022). *The Independent Review of Children's Social Care: Final Report*. London: Department for Education

⁸Ealing JSNA 2021: Population Characteristics, 2021

Ireland (47% reunification⁹), Germany and France (40% - 50%) and the U.S.A (45% - 55%). This difference may signify, in part, an unmet demand for assessment and support services for children and families once a child has gone into care. With greater assessment and review capacity, Ealing will be able to understand the demand for reunification support services.

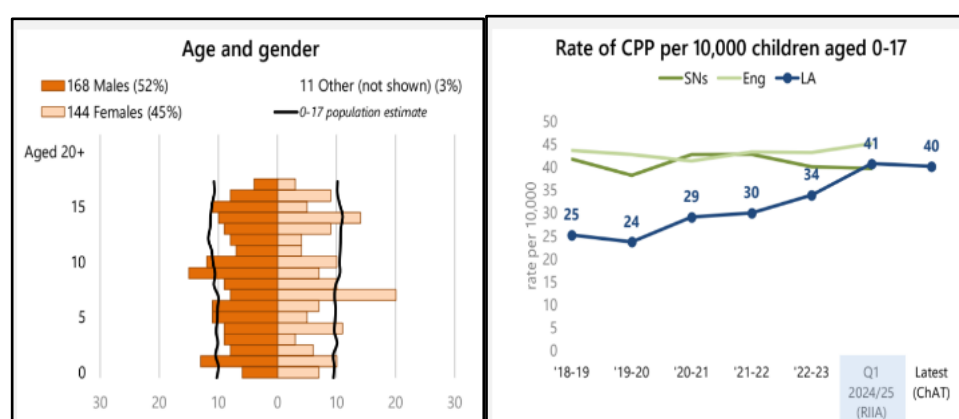
Demand for homes for children in care

To evaluate the demand for homes for children in care, the council will review;

- the total number of child protection plans (CPP)
- number of children looked after (CLA)
- breakdown of homes in kinship, foster, residential care, and care leavers homes.

Child protection plans

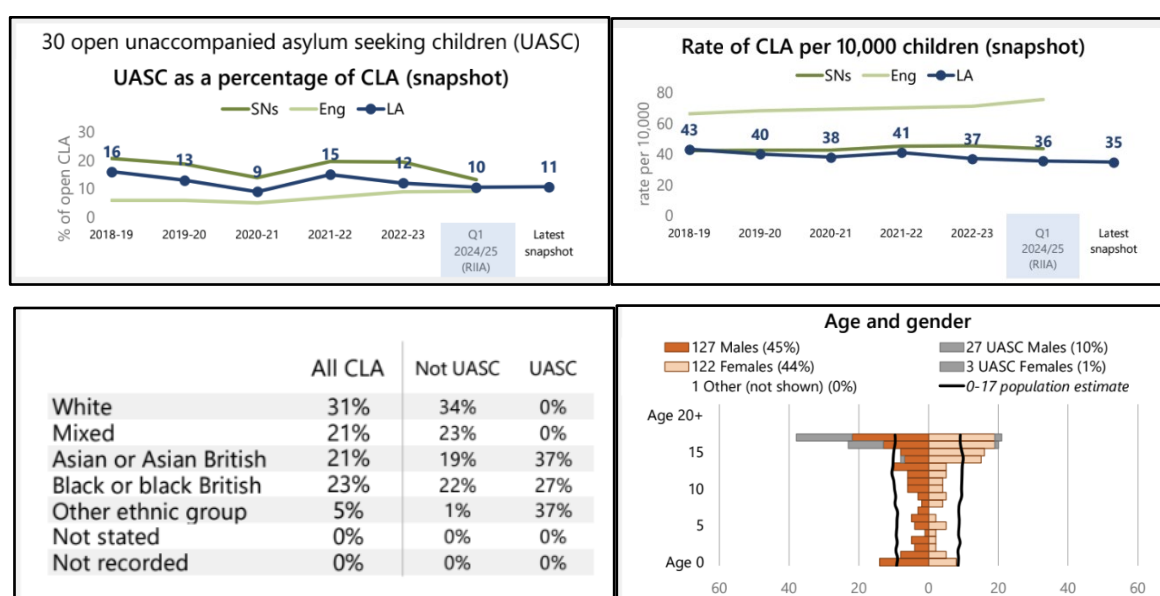
The number of children on a CPP was 323 as of September 2024, down from 334 in August but above 248 Same Time Last Year (+35%). This is the lowest in the year to date but amongst the highest number of CPPs in at least the last 3 years. The number is above comparators (Statistical Neighbours 242 and London 230) with plans per 10k of population at 40 (SN 39 and London 39).



⁹ Tusla (Child and Family Agency), AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, Federal Youth Welfare Office (Bundesjugendministerium, France Eurochild Report

Children looked after

The number of looked after children was 280 in September 2024, an 8% decrease from the same time last year of 306 CLA and the lowest since February 2023. This equates to 35 per 10k population which is below Ealing's statistical neighbours average (45), London (52) and the national average (70). Of the 280 CLA, there are 62 children on an interim care order (22%), 133 on a care order (48%), 8 children on a placement order (3%), 76 children under section 20 (27%) and 1 child on remand (1%).



The number of UASC is at 30, the lowest it has been in the last 3 years and low compared to its peak in Dec 2021 (54). Current UASC numbers represent 11% of the total CLA population.

Breakdown of children in care homes re kinship, foster, and residential care

Fostering and kinship

The council has and will continue to prioritise kinship care as the preferred option for children and young people when there are safe and appropriate carers within a child's network. As a result of this approach, the council has seen an increase in Kinship care arrangements. The table below highlights that the number of children in

the care of Ealing Council is reducing since March 2023 which aligns with the council's primary focus of keeping children at home through providing the right support at the right time. The table also evidences an increase in Kinship care since March 2023 and therefore an increase in the percentage of the children in care population living in kinship arrangements.

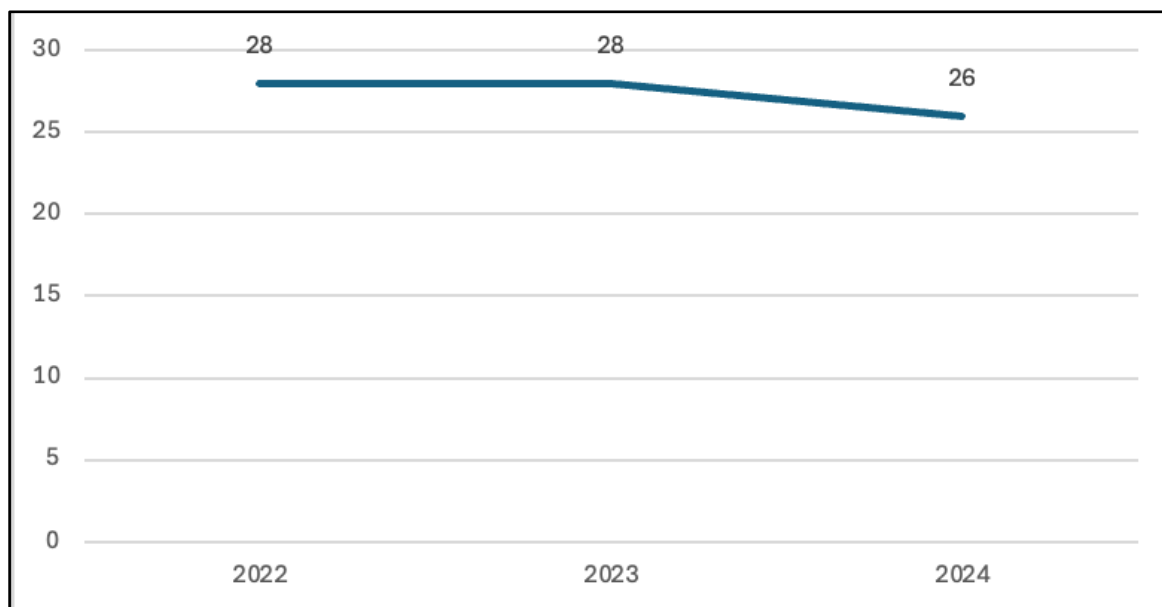
Placement Type Breakdown	Mar-23	Oct-24
Kinship Care	25	35
Overall CLA number	297	284
% of total kinship care as a proportion of overall CLA	8.4%	12.3%

The council is projecting that the total number of children in care is expected to fall between 5-10 over the following 3 years. These projections are based on the following indicators;

- CLA per 10,000 has reduced from 43 to 35 over the last decade
- the current and planned increase in preventative services, creating stronger community support for families and young children
- our continued focus on the unlocking of family networks and kinship care
- renewed focus on rehabilitating children back home with their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so. The total population of children is projected to decline over the next decade, most noticeably in the ages 0-14 years old.
- a third of the council's foster homes are currently 16-year-olds, and over half of the children will age out in the next 3 years. This year, only 52 children have become looked after in the council, with only eight being 16 years and older. The largest demographic, newborns, at 14 children will be prioritised for adoption or other long term permanent legal arrangements.

Residential

The demand for residential homes for children has stayed consistent over the last 3 years at 27, 28, 26 children living in such provision.



Residential homes for children 2022-2024

There is a national trend of children presenting with greater complexity of need, which in turn could contribute to an increase in the need for residential homes. Reports by Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner for England¹⁰ highlight that more children entering care are older, often teenagers, who require specialised support services due to higher support needs that are a result of trauma, mental health difficulties, exploitation, and behavioural needs. For instance, teenage entrants into care are significantly more likely to have experienced trafficking, gang involvement, drug misuse, leading to care arrangements that require higher levels of support in specialised or secure homes. However, The council have 3 core approaches that aim to reduce the demand for residential homes in the future;

- increase in house foster carers who have specific skills to care for children as an alternative to residential care

¹⁰Department of Health and Social Care, 2018. *The changing picture in the children's homes sector*

- increased preventive support for children, to reduce the need for residential care
- focus on supporting children to move out of residential care settings who do not require the nature of support that is provided in such settings. this may include a child's progress, a change in family's situation, or because an alternative home such as fostering would better meet the needs of the child.

Because of these key factors, numbers of residential homes are projected to decrease by between 3-7% over the next 3 years.

Although the council is projecting the number of residential homes to reduce, the average cost of homes for children in care is projected to increase, as with IFA costs, the shortfall in the market and lack of legislation around price controls means that councils compete with each other on a national basis for a limited number of homes for children.

This led to a 66.2% increase of costs in like for like homes between 2015/2016 - 2022/23. Without significant changes to the market dynamics and central government intervention and regulation, this trend is projected to continue at the same rate into the future at 15% increase per annum. As a result of this, the council will look to maximise the effectiveness of the Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV – a type a type of dynamic purchasing system) through collaborative working with the commissioning alliance and partner boroughs, reducing spot purchases.

Care leavers: there are 443 care leavers composed of eligible, relevant, former relevant and qualifying young people. Of which, there are 317 former relevant and relevant care leavers; 269 of which are aged 17-21 year olds. The majority of care leavers are living in semi or independent accommodation for both age groups, with over a third of the younger cohort staying with former foster carers under staying put arrangements, whilst a third of the older cohort are living independently.

Semi-independent accommodation (16-18): following the introduction of new national standards and regulations for semi-independent living arrangements, many providers are planning to raise their prices significantly. London Innovation and Improvement Alliance 2023 report¹¹ indicates that costs could rise by 15% to 30% over the next 3 years due to the additional expenses associated with compliance and regulation. Furthermore, a survey highlighted that over 90% of providers intended to increase fees as a direct response to these regulatory changes. This increase comes at a time when the demand for semi-independent living options has also surged, creating challenges for local authorities in terms of budget management and service provision.

Independent accommodation: the council strives to find the most suitable accommodation for young people who have been in their care, this is challenging. The Council currently does not have a sufficient supply of individual accommodation. As a priority the council has developed and enacted a series of initiatives to meet this demand.

The breakdown of the age of children in care has been relatively consistent with the previous 3 years, therefore the council anticipates that demand for care leaver accommodation is likely to stay stable for the next 3 years.

¹¹ Department for Education. (2023). *Demand and capacity of homes for children in care: report 2023*

Supply of homes for children in care

Strategic drivers for supply

As noted earlier, the council's strategy is to keep as many children as possible with their families, either through early help / edge of care support or in kinship care. If this is not possible, in-house foster care is the next option. Independent Fostering Agencies will be used when they represent the best match for the children's needs and/or there are no in-house carers who are a good match. Residential care should only be used for children who have higher support needs.

Supply of homes for children in care overview

There are several routes to accessing homes for children in care. There are some instances where certain homes are unavailable in the market when they are needed. A key focus of this report will set out the plan to ensure that the council is able to provide homes that best meet the needs of children when required over the next 3 years. The aim is to secure a sufficient supply of homes that are of high quality and accessible that also represent good value for the council.

Overview of placement mix and cost for children in care:

Placement mix	2022	2023	2024
Adoption	2	3	0
Kinship	54	56	45
Foster care in house	72	64	56
IFA	101	94	98
Residential	28	28	26
Semi-independent	54	42	29
Other	6	13	11
Temporary	4	1	3

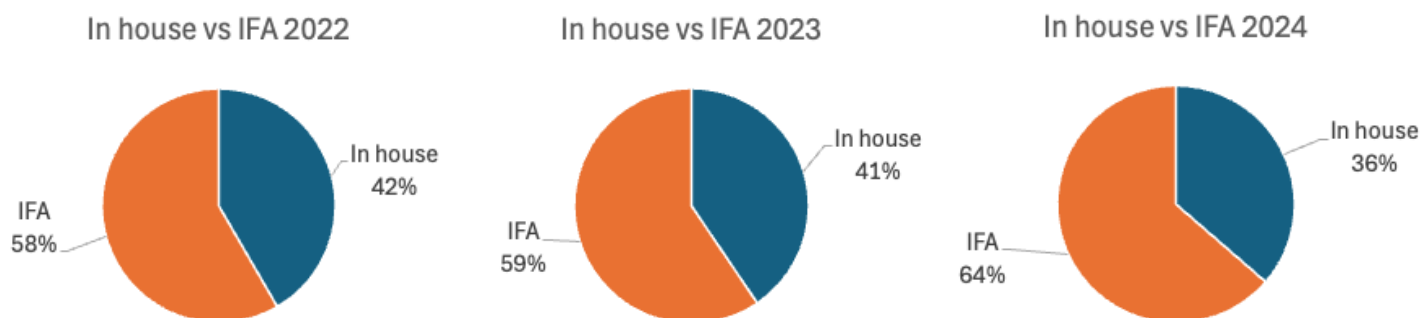
Placement type	Total number	Cost per week per child	Total cost per week	Total cost
Short term kinship care	11	£224	£2,464	£128,128
Long term kinship care	22	£321	£7,062	£367,224
In house foster care	56	£501	£28,056	£1,458,912
IFA - long term	24	£1,012	£24,288	£1,262,976
IFA - short term	74	£1,012	£74,888	£3,894,176

Supply of kinship and foster care

As of August 2024, the council has 45 children in kinship care, 98 children in independent fostering agency homes, compared to 56 in in house fostering homes. The higher use of independent fostering agencies contributes to increased financial pressure on the council.

In-house foster care numbers have been reducing from March 2021, from 29% (72) to 21% (56) of the council's total foster households. The number of independent fostering agency fostering households remained almost the same. In the same period, the number of children in care increased by 7%. The decline in house foster care is due to a combination of the retirement of foster carers and challenges in attracting new foster carers.

Comparison of in-house vs IFA across 2022-204



The council's current cohort of foster carers generally mirror the ethnic demographics of the child in the care population, except for Black carers who are over represented and carers of dual heritage who are under represented.

The percentage of children looked after who identify as Asian or Asian British is 21%, and the percentage of carers who identify as Asian or Asian British is 18%. Similarly with white children being looked after at 30% and white carers at 31%.

Carers identifying as Black or Black British are over represented at 44% of carers, compared to the percentage of Black or Black British children on Child Protection Plans 16% and Children Looked After (23%) of the total population. Whereas children within the mixed ethnicity group, 23% of all children are in care and only 1% of foster carers are within this ethnic group.

	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Mixed	White	Other	Not stated
Ealing's Child population	30%	14%	9%	29%	16%	0
Child Protection Plan	32%	16%	19%	24%	6%	2%
CLA	21%	23%	21%	31%	5%	0%
Foster Carer	18%	44%	1%	30%	3%	3%

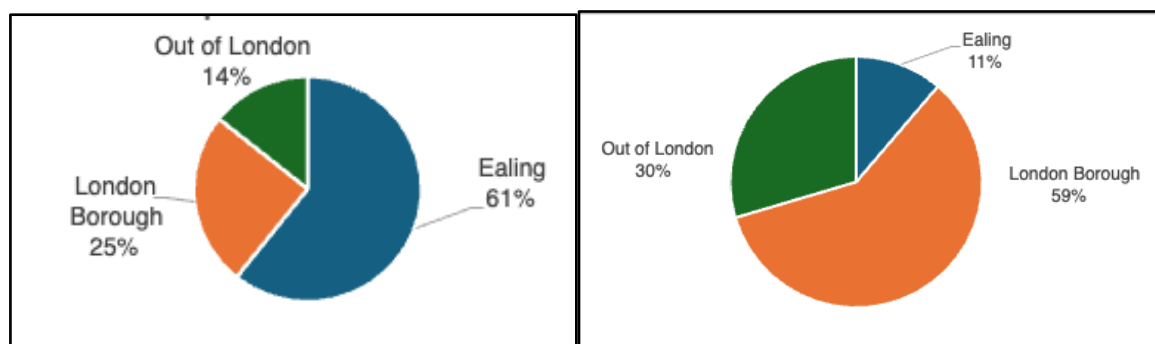
However, the current population of Ealing’s carers has a relatively small number of male primary carers and there is a lack of same sex couples who foster. This presents an opportunity to explore why this is and attract a new group to the foster care profession.

Sex	Carer 1	Carer 2	Total
Female	103	-	103
Male	4	51	54

Key performance indicators for kinship and foster care

Placed at distance

Of all independent fostering agency homes for children, 30% are outside of London, while the percentage of in-house homes outside of London is 14%. The in-house foster homes outside of London will include connected person / kinship arrangements so although the child is living at distance from their place of origin, it will be with a connected person which is a positive outcome for the child. 61% of placements in house are inside LB of Ealing , compared to only 11% of IFA placements.



Quality and stability

The council is proud of its 2024 Ofsted report which documents the significant progress that the service has made, stating that “most children in foster care are

achieving positive outcomes". Referring to the adoption of the Kinship first strategy, Ofsted writes "effective engagement with children and adults is promoting change and creating increased opportunities for children to live within their wider family networks". There are 35 children (12.5%) who have been in 3 or more homes for a rolling 12-month period, this metric remains higher than our comparators (Statistical Neighbours 9% and London/England 10%). Across both Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and in-house foster homes, 33% and 34% of children, respectively, had 1 placement move between April 2021 to March 2024

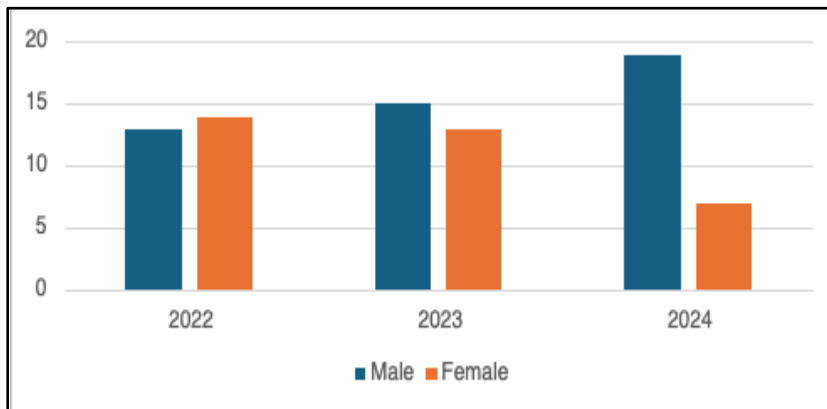
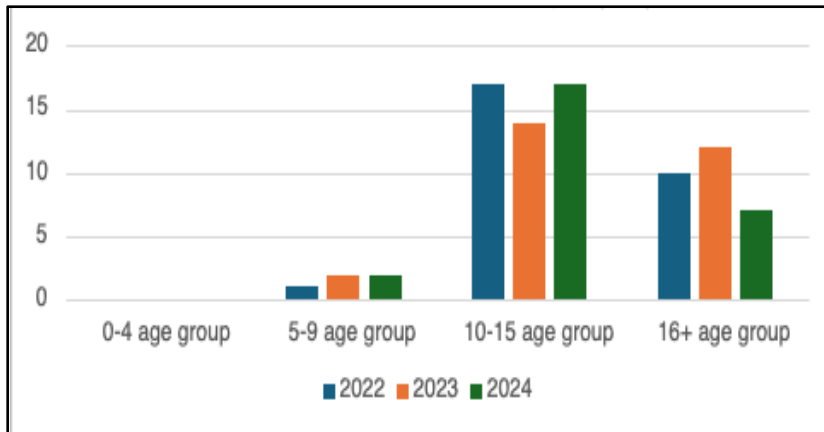
Supply of residential care

Overview of residential homes currently being used

The council partners with multiple residential care providers to support children and young people with higher support needs. As of August 2024, the council has 26 children in residential care. Because of the lack of incentive for providers to agree framework terms, 85% of residential care for children are procured outside of the DPV frameworks, at an average cost of £6,686 per week. As documented in an Independent Review of Children's Social Care¹² this challenge is systemic, affecting the majority of local authorities, particularly those where housing is more expensive. As would be expected the majority of 26 children are above 10 years old.

Accommodation type	Total number	Cost per week per child	Total cost per week	Total cost
Residential	26	£6,686	£173,836	£9,039,472
5-9 years old	2	£5,831	£11,662	£606,424
10-15 years old	17	£6,945	£118,065	£6,139,380
16+ years old	7	£6,248	£43,736	£2,274,272

¹² Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022. *The Independent Review of Children's Social Care: Final Report*.

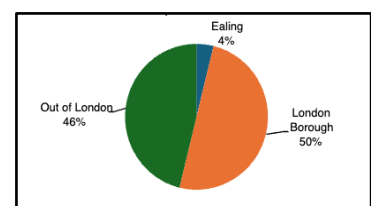
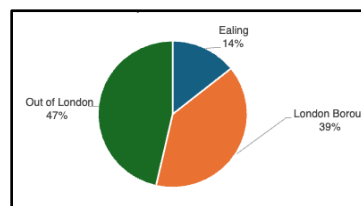
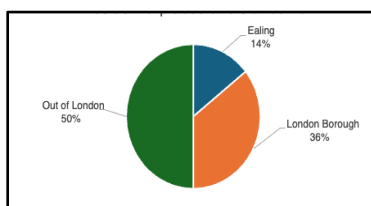


Residential breakdown by age group and gender

Key performance indicators for residential

Placed at distanced

Children placed in residential homes at a distance have continued to remain at a high level, this is defined by the Care Inspectorate as any placement of a child outside their home community¹³). At 42% of children 'Placed at distances' these homes for children are higher than the national average but lower statistical neighbours who range from 44 - 52%



Comparison of residential care placed at distance, 2022 (left), 2023 (centre), 2024 (right)

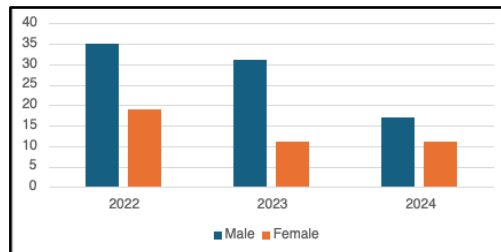
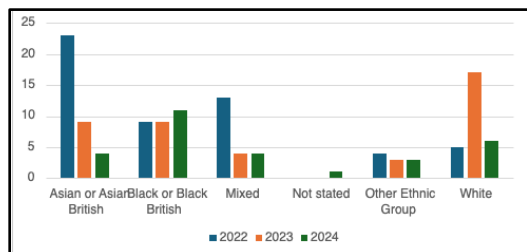
¹³Care Inspectorate, 2022. *Distance placements exploration report 2022*

Supply of care leaver support

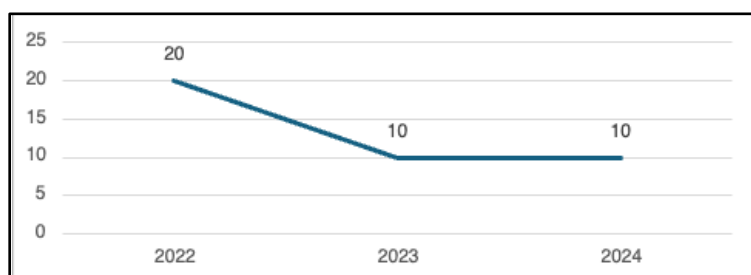
Overview of move on accommodation

Ealing has a total of 442 young adults open to the care leavers service aged 16-25 years. There are 72 care leavers receiving aftercare signposting and advice services aged 21- 30 years. 66% are living in supported accommodation, with one third living independently. The current average cost for young people living in semi-independent accommodation is £1,580 per week for 16-17 year olds, and £603 for young people over 18 years old. Staying put is the least cost at an average of £422 per week.

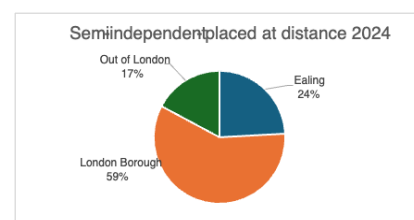
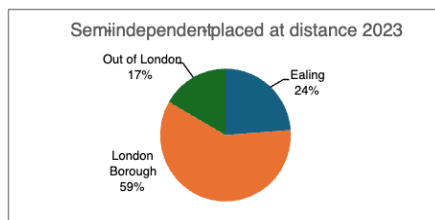
There has been a decline in UASC using semi-independent accommodation, from 20 in 2022 to 10 in 2024, this is due to the service creating tailored housing arrangements that are in line with young people's preference. There has also been a decrease in semi-independent accommodation, down from 44% to 24% between the same time period.



Semi-independent breakdown by ethnicity (left), and gender (right)



Semi-independent numbers of UASC

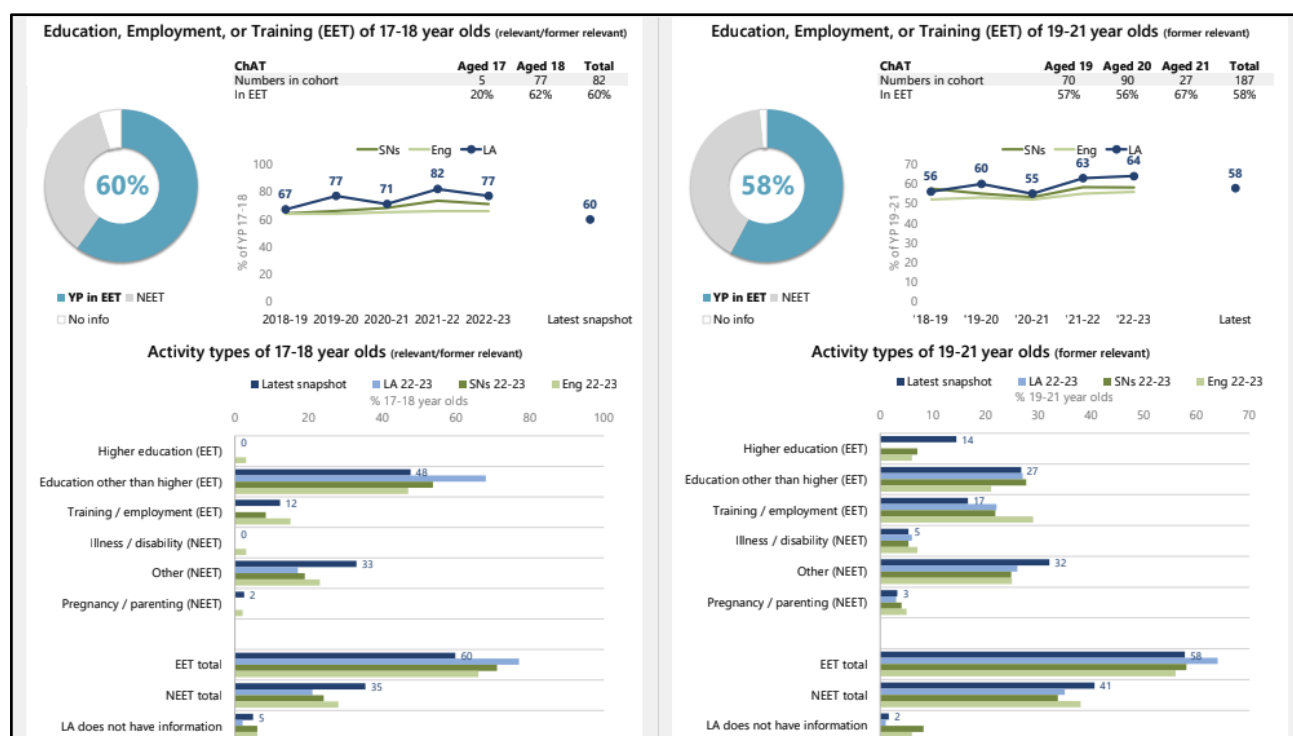


Semi-independent breakdown placed at distance, 2022 (left), 2023 (centre), 2024 (right)

Key performance indicators for care leaver support

Education, employment or training

The EET figures/charts are based on the 269 former relevant and relevant care leavers. Performance at the end of September for 17-18 y/o's at 60% (+2%), below comparators SN (71%), London (72%) and national average (66%). For 19-21 y/o's, young people in EET at 58% (+2%), just within the range of the council's comparators: SN (58%), London (60%) and national average (56%).



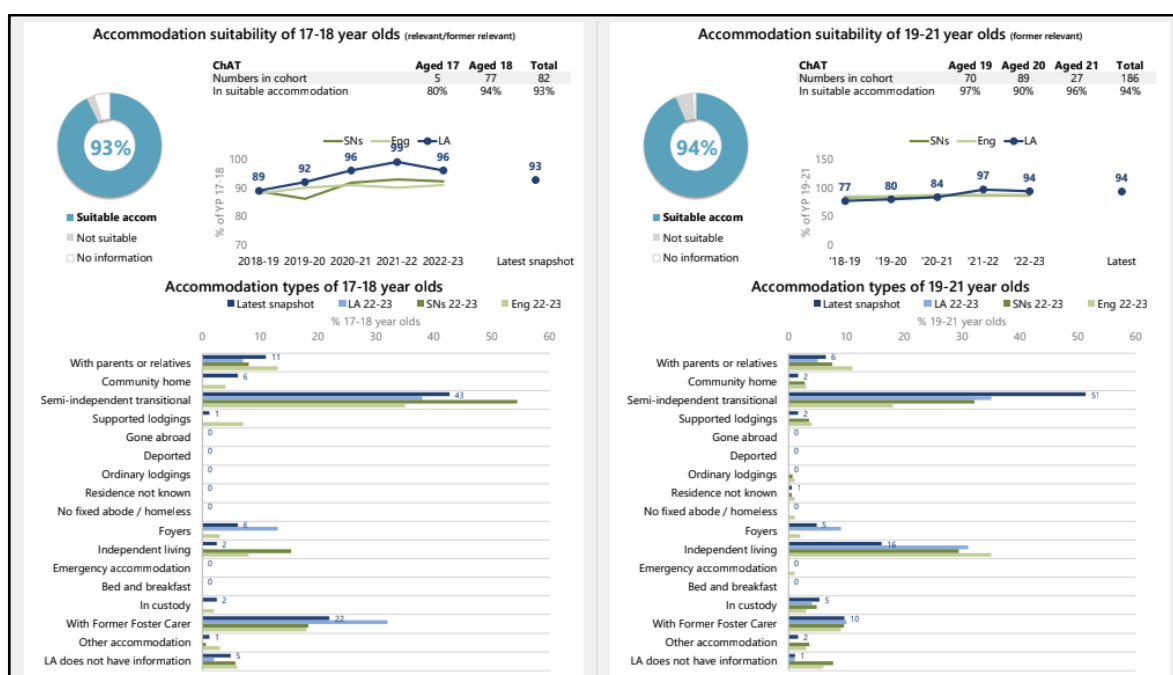
Overview of care leavers data

Suitable accommodation

As of June 2024, care leavers aged between 19-21 in suitable accommodation was 95%, compared to statistical neighbours 87% and nationally 88%. Representing an incremental increase from 94% of last year.

The council has historically had one of the top care leaving services in the country. The 33 young people in the 17-18 y/o cohort who are not in education, employment, or training are being supported to seek education, employment or training and all but 2 are living in suitable accommodations in August 2024.

79 young people in the 19-21 y/o cohort who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), of those, 9 are in custody with the remaining living in suitable accommodation. Performance shows a high proportion of care leavers remain in suitable accommodation for both age groups; for 17-18 y/o at 93% (-2%), which is above the council's comparators: SN (92%), London (92%) and national average (91%). For the 19-21 y/o at 94%, which is also above comparators: SN (87%), London (88%) and national average (88%).



Overview of care leavers data

Action plan

Ambition of the plan

Ealing Council's aim is to improve outcomes for children and families and to provide services in the most cost-effective way. Although not exhaustive, the council believes this can be achieved through the following core concepts.

Prevention: if a family can be supported to prevent a child from going into care, it is a better outcome for the child and avoids significant and unnecessary involvement for the borough.

Appropriate care levels: ensuring that all care providers are providing appropriate levels of support and that any additional support is reviewed continuously to ensure its effectiveness. This robust approach to ongoing review, reduces costs while ensuring that the support in place is proportionate to each child's respective needs.

Local, kinship/in-house homes for children: when a child enters into care, living with a local in-house carer maintains the child's connection with their community and continuity of any support services that they may be accessing. The benefits of local homes in Ealing mirror those set out in the 2023 Stable Homes, Built on Love report, including greater school attendance and progression, as well as improved relationship with parents, siblings and wider community¹⁴.

The council has 4 key objectives in the action plan. For each objective, there is a financial and social impact benefit forecast, as well as required investment, current and future activities.

1. Keeping children out of care

All activity within the social work service is focused on supporting children to remain within their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so. To support children to

¹⁴Department for Education, 2023. *Children's social care: Stable homes, built on love*

remain with their families, the service will explore the potential networks of family support and carers through family group conferences.

The Family Group Conference service is now located within the “front door” of children’s social care, enabling rapid input for referred children who require early intervention or statutory assessment and support. There is also presence at pre-birth panels and priority for children on the edge of care.

Potential Financial Advantages

Cost saving

- children not needing to live in residential or foster homes creates significant savings

Cost avoidance

- keeping children out of care will ensure that children are not subject to care leavers support in the future, avoiding costs and demand on services

Potential Social Advantages

Stability, sense of home

- staying with the family
- identity with the community

Locality

- staying within local authority and connection with the family network and other social activities and networks of support.

Current activity

Expanding family group conferences: increasing the availability of family group conferences

Intensive short-term breaks: the main focus of intensive support for children with complex needs is to prevent children from requiring long term residential support and being brought into care, whilst providing an enriching experience for the child.

Working in partnership with ICB (Integrated Care Board) and third-party

providers: The council is working in partnership with the North West London ICB and its partners to support children and young people to prevent children and young people from entering care. Examples of this work are behavioural support interventions that are sourced through the dynamic support register and other initiatives such as the hospital discharge project, which supports children and young people to return home.

Next steps:

- run a competitor analysis of the council's statistical neighbours' edge of care teams' size and capability. documenting their size and breath of professional services in family group counselling programmes.
- explore the use of AI and existing data to create actionable databases. potentially engage with London innovation and improvement alliance.
- estimate total addressable market and explore options for a new target operating model to meet the needs of this population
- explore the efficacy of increasing financial support at edge of care families

2. Increase in house foster care

Overview of the action

Fostering recruitment and retention is a national challenge and particularly acute for the council. The aim is to significantly increase the number of approved in house foster carers, which have been decreasing since 2019.

The council is committed to increasing in house capacity as it is in the best interests of our children. Increasing our in-house capacity will also result in financial savings for the authority.

Potential financial advantages

Cost saving

- significantly lower rates with in-house compared to IFA, which are also projected to increase.
- lower cost to social care department due to lower transport cost and team size

Potential social advantages

Locality

- children will maintain existing support services such as therapeutic interventions or mentoring.
- maintain school / education provision
- maintaining connection with the family network

Current action

In order to support the council's aims and main priority of increasing its in-house fostering capacity, there are 4 key areas that the service is driving.

1. **Strengthening service** – there is a range of activity and innovation that is being undertaken to make sure continuous improvement and innovation in the council's fostering service. The relentless focus on service development will support us to provide the best possible support to local children in care and also aid the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
2. **Improved offer to carers:** Ealing Council has identified the areas of greatest importance to our existing and prospective carers through a review of existing research and gathering data on all IFA and London boroughs' offers. This is to make sure competitiveness in supporting the recruitment and retention of local foster carers. The council has formulated a new foster carer offer which has recently been approved by cabinet (October 2024).
3. **Segmentation and marketing:** greater sophistication in the council's digital marketing to support the profile and awareness of the fostering service and maximise our reach in terms of the recruitment of new carers. The council will focus on key priorities in targeted digital advertising, the use of an insight-

driven creative approach to engage, tracking campaigns and learn from analytics.

4. **Partnerships**, The council will work in partnership Foster West London to find economies of scale, share best practice, combine data, and work to create a greater user experience of carers and potential carers. The council is also working in partnership with Foster Now on an exciting new initiative to recruit weekender foster carers.

Strengthening service

As of September 2024, Ealing council has been approved as a Fostering Friendly borough. The Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly employers' will enable The Council to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster. The council will now offer foster carers flexible working and paid time off for training and settling a new child into their home. Whilst the council believes it is incumbent upon them to provide additional support for foster carers who are employed, this newly approved scheme will also support the potential possibility of current employees becoming foster carers for Ealing Council, thus supporting its strategy of increasing in house fostering capacity.

Enhanced support for carers through the clinical psychology service, including individual support and support groups. The psychological support for the council's in-house foster carers is extremely strong with foster carers and children benefiting from the skills and expertise of the council's in-house clinicians. This is an area that will continue to support strong outcomes for local children and will now be highlighted in the community to make sure that prospective carers understand the outstanding support that the council offers which will aid recruitment and retention.

Creation of a Mockingbird constellation – a hub of connected fostering households who provide mutual emotional and practical support. Mockingbird is an evidenced based model that will provide additional support to the council's current carers and help to attract new carers.

Improved offer to carers

The council cabinet has recently approved a suite of incentives to support the retention and recruitment of in-house foster carers:

- full council tax exemption for residents and reimbursement for out of borough carers
- competitive fees and allowances - recent fee uplift of 18.5 %
- free parking in resident-controlled parking zones (CPZs) borough-wide
- free garden waste collection

This new enhanced offer has been devised with the clear objective of supporting both the retention of our current foster carers and attracting new carers to foster for the council.

New marketing activity

Demographic segmentation: the use of specialist intelligent prospecting technology to gather data and learn more about potential foster carers. The service will share the new suite of digital assets and content with users most likely to click, as well as targeting underrepresented groups such as men and same sex couples

Needs based segmentation: exploring how to attract in demand types of foster care, such as foster care homes for sibling groups, teenagers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), Parents and children.

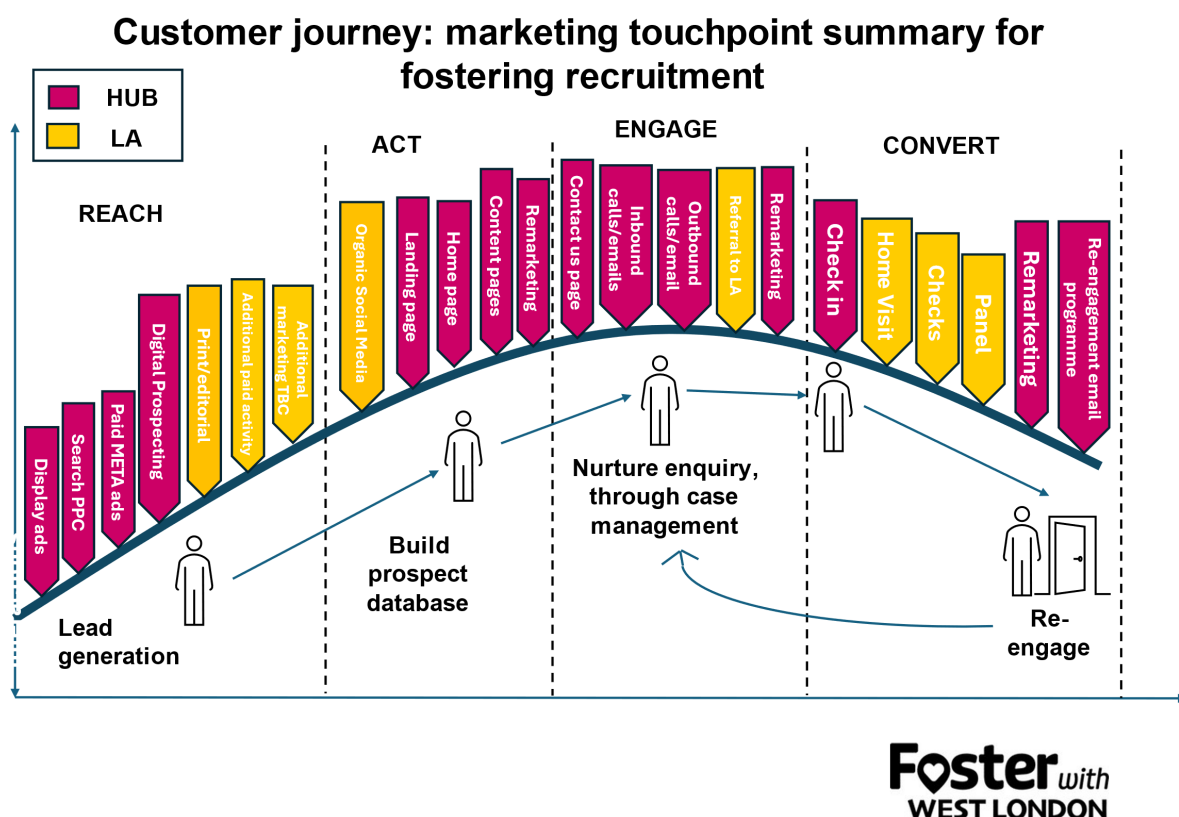
Media/marketing strategy: the council is working in partnership with Foster West London (FWL) supporting the digital strategy that is raising awareness and supporting recruitment of foster carers across the partnership. In addition to the digital work through Foster West London, a range of localised marketing activity is being undertaken, including outbound marketing, paid digital, below-the-line activities, organic social, print adverts, email marketing, events, word of mouth and influencers.

Partnership activity

The council is now part of the regional fostering hub of 8 boroughs called Foster West London). Foster West London is the new regional fostering recruitment hub. Combining eight Local Authorities from across West London, Ealing council is working in partnership with the other seven boroughs to support the ongoing recruitment of foster carers across the West London area. By working together, the vision is to have more children in our care for living in West London with higher quality, better supported foster carers, delivering improved long-term outcomes for children.

Digital marketing is one of the key tools to recruit new foster carers, so the council will benefit from the pooling of resources in this space. It will continue to work closely with the hub and key partners to make sure that all members benefit from the pooling of resources and the sharing of expertise. The council will continue to strive to have a more sophisticated online presence in order to make sure make sure that potential local foster carers are attracted to foster for the council

The council supports and shares the objectives of Foster West London and is working in partnership to streamline the enquiry process into a central hub and to improve the customer journey following the below pathway.



In addition to the collaboration with Foster West London, The council has partnered with NOW Foster to recruit a number of ‘weekender’ respite carers, this is an exciting and innovative project. These carers will provide additional caring relationships for children in care and support existing carers with some respite from caring.

3. Greater market management of both IFA and residential

Currently 45% of foster homes for children are managed through spot purchases. Increasing the ability for the council to purchase through a DPV would reduce cost, as well as make sure an improved standard of data visibility and governance of the placements.

85% of residential homes for children are made by the council are through spot purchases. As residential homes can be many times the cost of the average fostering home, reducing the reliance on spot purchase here would generate significant cost savings.

Potential Financial Advantages

Cost saving

- Using the DPV for finding homes for children helps to control the cost of each placement as providers agree to set terms and pricing
- Placements made outside of the DPV (Spot purchases), are not subject to these structures and are therefore more expensive
- Spot purchases results in greater work for the council in terms of labour that is required to make sure that the appropriate compliance is in place

Potential Social Advantages

Governance

- Providers that are on the respective IFA and residential DPV's need to meet the criteria and compliance regulations that are established by the commissioning alliance
- Making placements through the DPV make sure that the appropriate governance is in place without the need for additional tasks from the council

Investment required

Rather than financial investment, the council will invest time building relationships with other local authorities, supporting collective purchasing power and data sharing to facilitate better market management.

Current activity:

Commissioning Alliance: the council has been seeking to work closely with the Commissioning Alliance and member authorities in order to maximise the effectiveness of the DPV regarding residential and IFA homes for children. There is also an opportunity to work with councils directly on pooling resources regarding developing a secure children's home.

Reducing use of residential care: focusing on reducing the use of residential care where possible by working to keep children at risk of residential care from becoming looked after. Efforts are also being made to increase the availability of kinship and foster homes providing alternatives to residential care.

Robust monitoring: the council has implemented systems to support the robust monitoring of care arrangements for children to ensure that the support being provided is effective and is proportionate to the needs of each child. Robust monitoring will also make sure that arrangements to step down placements are made in the timeliest manner and support children to receive the right support at the right time. Next steps:

Market management: the council will continue to develop relationships with external providers and strengthen market engagement through enhanced communication and partnership working to help shape the provider market to provide the support that meets our children's needs.

Continuing to develop partnership: working with the North-West London ICB, ensuring that we are pooling resources and expertise to access the right support for our children within the appropriate clinical governance frameworks. This will include working in partnership with the ICB and the effective use of the dynamic risk register, and services such as functional accessing and positive behaviour support plans to prevent children entering care.

Strengthening collaboration within the adult team as part of the transition process to plan resources when they turn 18 and including adult colleagues at the earliest possible stage including joint funding panels.

4. Increase care leavers accommodation options

Overview of action

Finding suitable accommodation is a positive step for young people and it can be financially advantageous for the council when care leavers are provided their own accommodation without the need for additional support. Like many councils, especially in London, property and rent prices have increased exponentially. This combined with a general housing shortage has created challenges for care leaver accommodation, particularly when looking for independent accommodation.

Working to source accommodation from a range of avenues will increase the council's access and facilitate care leavers being able to access the right type of accommodation that meets their particular needs at each stage of their lives.

The council is currently seeking to develop and enhance its access to a range of different homes for care leavers. This will be done by enhancing independent housing options for care leavers, developing relationships and developing/improving arrangements with local providers. The council is also working in partnership with the commissioning alliance to strengthen its grip and management of the wider market via the alliance's DPV (dynamic purchasing vehicle) for semi- independent accommodation.

Potential Financial advantages

Cost saving

- By enabling care leavers to access independent accommodation for when they are ready, the council's weekly costs are removed.
Reducing the time that care leavers need to wait for their own accommodation will in turn reduce expenditure for the council
- Through market management we can reduce the unit costs of semi-independent accommodation provided to care leavers

Potential social advantages

Young persons development

- Delays in accessing housing impact on a young person's ability to live independently and thus their development as young adults
- Being unable to move onto independent living when ready may impact on a young person's self-confidence

Current activity:

Commissioning alliance: the council uses the commissioning alliance DPV to access the majority of its semi-independent accommodation. The council is working closely with the DPV to develop the market and make sure that it's using the collective buying power of the alliance to regulate cost and enhance quality.

Social housing: there has been an increase of 20% of social housing for care leavers in 24/25 and the council has been notified that it's retaining this increase for 25/26.

Care leavers pathway: there is now a written confirmation of care leavers housing pathways received by young people, which explains their eligibility and support provided. The council has a specialist housing acquisitions officer agreed for care leavers and our housing outreach worker grant extended for a year.

Housing stock: the council is currently reviewing existing council-owned housing stock for opportunities for supported tenancies for care leavers

Departmental collaboration: the commissioning service is also currently working with other internal departments to modify and make sure we make the best usage of existing block contract arrangements re semi-independent accommodation

Next steps

- The council is working in partnership with other councils that are members of the commissioning alliance to share our resources and enhance certain areas of practice.
- The council is exploring relationships with trusted local providers and will seek to have closer working relationships and arrangements in place in order that certain aspects of service provision can be tailored to meet the needs of local young people

Glossary of Terms

Care Experienced	A child / young person that in currently in care or has been cared for by the council. This could either be via a care order (S31 of the 1989 Children Act) or a voluntary agreement with the council (S20).
Care Leavers	A child that has previously been in the care of the council and has now left care.
CPP / Child protection plan	When a child is judged to be at risk of significant harm, significant harm being a level of harm that affects the health, welfare and development of a child. The Plan will say what the specific risks are to the child and the actions that will be needed to keep the child safe.
CLA/Children Look After/ CiC/ Children in Care	A child that is currently in the care of the council either via a care order (S31 of the 1989 Children Act) or voluntary agreement with the council (S20).
Commissioning	Commissioning is the continual process of planning, agreeing and monitoring services.
Connected person	A relative, friend or other person connected with a child. The latter is someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend', but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child. It could be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as (for example) a child-minder, a teacher or a youth worker." Relative is defined as "a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent."
Corporate parent	The collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for children who are looked after by them. The term is used when a child comes into care, and the council becomes the Corporate Parent. Corporate Parenting is intended to carry out many of the roles a loving parent should, and provide children and young people with the best possible support and care.

DPV/Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle	A procurement vehicle that has been set up by the Commissioning Alliance and is open to all Local Authorities (LA's) nationally to join
DSR/Dynamic Support Register	Dynamic support registers (DSRs) are the mechanism for local systems to identify children, young people and adults (with consent) who are at risk of admission to mental health inpatient services without access to timely dynamic support.
Family Group Conference	A family group conference is a family-led decision making process in which the family and friends network come together to make a plan for a child. The process is supported by an independent coordinator who helps the family prepare for the family group conference.
Impression	A metric used to quantify the number of digital views or engagements of a piece of content.
Kinship Care	Kinship care, also known as family and friends care, refers to the arrangement where a child who cannot be cared for by their parents goes to live with a relative, friend, or other connected person. It involves full-time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives, godparents, or other adults with a kinship bond.
Non-family and friend network placement	Any non kinship placement, ie a placement with an in house carer, residential or semi-independent accommodation.
Placement	A home for where a child lives when they are cared for by the council.
Short-Term Respite Care	Short-term respite care is a service that provides temporary relief for primary caregivers. It allows caregivers to take a break from their usual routine of daily care for a few hours, days, or weeks.
Spot purchases/Spot purchasing	The practice of buying services outside of established procurement processes. Spot purchasing occurs when there is an immediate need that cannot be met through existing contracts / frameworks.

Sufficiency/sufficiency of placements	Legal duty of 'sufficiency' that requires local authorities to ensure that, through direct provision or commissioned services, a range of placements sufficient to meet the needs of all children in care are available locally or that there is a plan in place to move towards that position.
Stabilizing placements	Ensuring that young people are settled and can remain living in their home.
Statistical neighbours	<p>Each local authority can compare its performance against other local authorities deemed to have similar socio-demographic characteristics (its statistical neighbours) rather than comparing itself with local authorities that share none (or few) of its characteristics.</p> <p>Ealing's statistical neighbours are – Hounslow, Merton, Harrow, Redbridge, Enfield, Barnet, Slough, Croydon, Brent and Hillingdon.</p>
UASC/Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child	A person under 18, or who, in the absence of documentary evidence establishing age, appears to be under that age, is applying for asylum in his or her own right and has no relative or guardian in the United Kingdom".