

Children in Care and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy Update (April 2019)

Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Key Data**
- 3. Actions taken since the last sufficiency plan was published**
- 4. Action plan**

Appendix 1 – Action plan tracker (subject to regular updates)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is a legal requirement for all local authorities to provide a Placement Sufficiency Strategy as set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. This paper sets out how Dorset Council will secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient, good or outstanding accommodation for looked after children within the Dorset Council area. This document offers a summary of the key data relating to children who are looked after (CLA) including information on demand, use and supply of placements. It outlines areas of placement provision where we need to develop further capacity and identifies the plans in place to address this.
- 1.2 The sufficiency of placements for children in care, care leavers and other vulnerable young people is a workstream that relates to work that is directed to changing the placement landscape for those children who are looked after as part of our statutory responsibility. The sufficiency work is placed alongside the work being undertaken to reduce the need for care through our approaches to early action and intensive support to those families whose circumstances reduce the ability to parent well.
- 1.3 This workstream is part of a suite of actions and projects aimed to make sure that Children's services have access to sufficient accommodation – including foster care, kinship care, residential care, semi independence provision and housing. Provision will be within Dorset or within a 20-mile radius of the child's home whenever possible and meeting their needs. The workstream is aligned to other work to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation and services in the region to provide family assessments, both residential and community based. Most importantly the projects must ensure that services represent value for money, help to improve the life chances of children and young people and help to reduce inequalities.
- 1.4 The sufficiency work is overseen by the Sufficiency Strategy Group that meets every two months and is chaired by the Assistant Director of Commissioning and Partnerships for Children's Services. Membership of the group comprises senior operational managers for the Care and Protection of children and Commissioners from Children's Services and Adult Services together with a finance representative.

- 1.5 The statistics used in this document are for the whole Dorset County Council area and not for the new Dorset Council area with the Christchurch Borough Council area disaggregated from the new Council.
- 1.6 The overall number of looked after children as at March 2019 is 446, up from 442 as at October 2017. The rate of looked after children per 10,000 children has also remained broadly similar during this period at 58 (March 2019) from 57.3 (October 2017). Over the last 12 months the proportion of children placed over 20 miles from their originating address is also stable at around 40%.
- 1.7 **Overall aim:** Restore children to birth families or to a family environment in line with the child's permanency plan and in so doing increasing the percentage of looked after children placed within family settings, whilst improving the pool of residential, emergency, short and long term, accommodation available within the Dorset Council area.
- 1.8 **Priorities:**
- 1.9 Increase in-house fostering provision by improving the recruitment and retention of carers including connected persons and establishing retained foster carers for emergency placements.
- 1.10 Enhancing services for the prevention of care including short breaks.
- 1.11 Ensuring maximum value in our work with Independent Foster Agencies.
- 1.12 Sufficient provision for care leavers including supported lodgings, supported housing, staying put and staying close provision.
- 1.13 Sufficient therapeutic residential provision.
- 1.14 Provision of emergency and short-term accommodation.
- 1.15 Promote the use of 'Shared Lives' placements and support successful preparation for and transitions to adulthood.

- 1.16 Identify additional sources of move-on housing accommodation for care leavers.
- 1.17 Develop capacity for good quality short term support packages for use when placements are not available.
- 1.18 Ensure education, health and social care partners decision making is robust and is consistent with achieving the child's permanency plan. This is to be reflected in the joint planning and funding agreements through the Joint Commissioning Panel.

2. Key Data

2.1 Children in care population

As at 31st March 2019, the children in care population in Dorset stood at 446 and at a rate of 58 per 10,000 population, lower than the national average of 64 per 10,000 population, but higher than the statistical neighbour average of 50 per 10,000 population and the South West rate of 55 per 10,000 population.

Table 1: Number and rate per 10,000 of looked after children

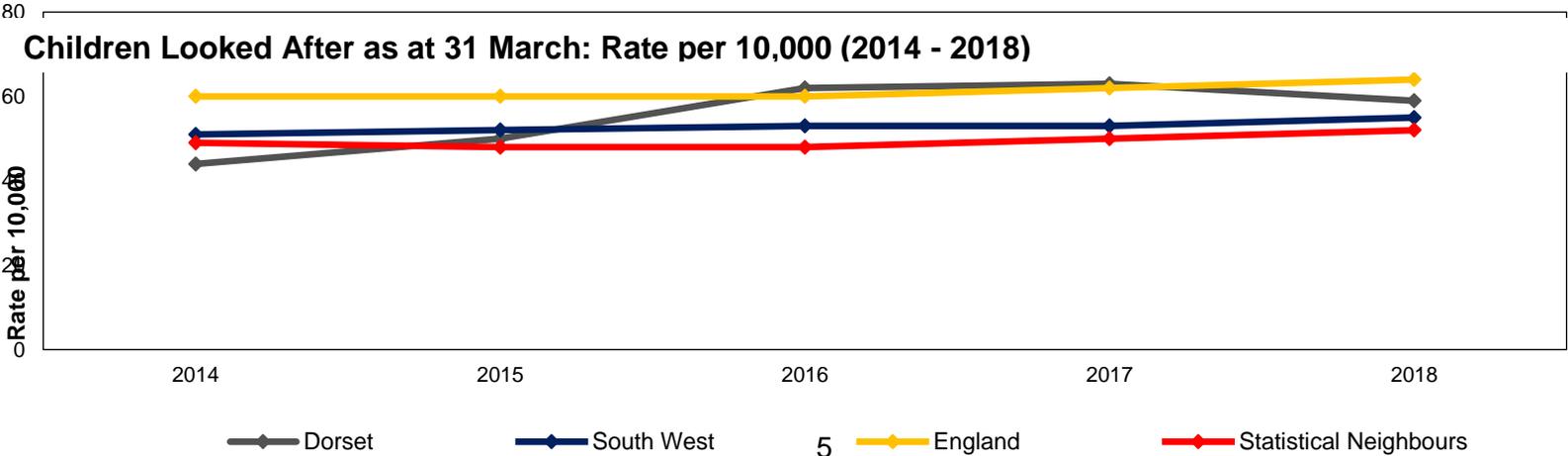
2018 - 2019											
Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
449	443	444	445	445	442	436	438	441	445	448	446
58.2	57.4	57.8	57.9	57.9	57.5	56.7	57.0	57.4	57.9	58.3	58.0

Figure 1: Changing rates of children in care: Dorset and comparators

Children Looked After as at 31 March: Rate per 10,000

Local Authority	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
West Sussex	36	38	37	39	41
Wiltshire*		39	40	42	42
Somerset	45	45	46	43	47
Devon	48	49	50	48	48
Gloucestershire	39	42	45	48	52
North Somerset	52	55	52	52	55
South West	51	52	53	53	55
Suffolk	48	48	52	55	56
East Sussex	55	52	51	53	57
Shropshire	45	52	47	49	57
Dorset	44	50	62	63	59
England	60	60	60	62	64
Worcestershire	56	60	60	66	68

Colour indicates change compared to previous year
 Improved (Green) No change (Yellow) Worsened (Red)

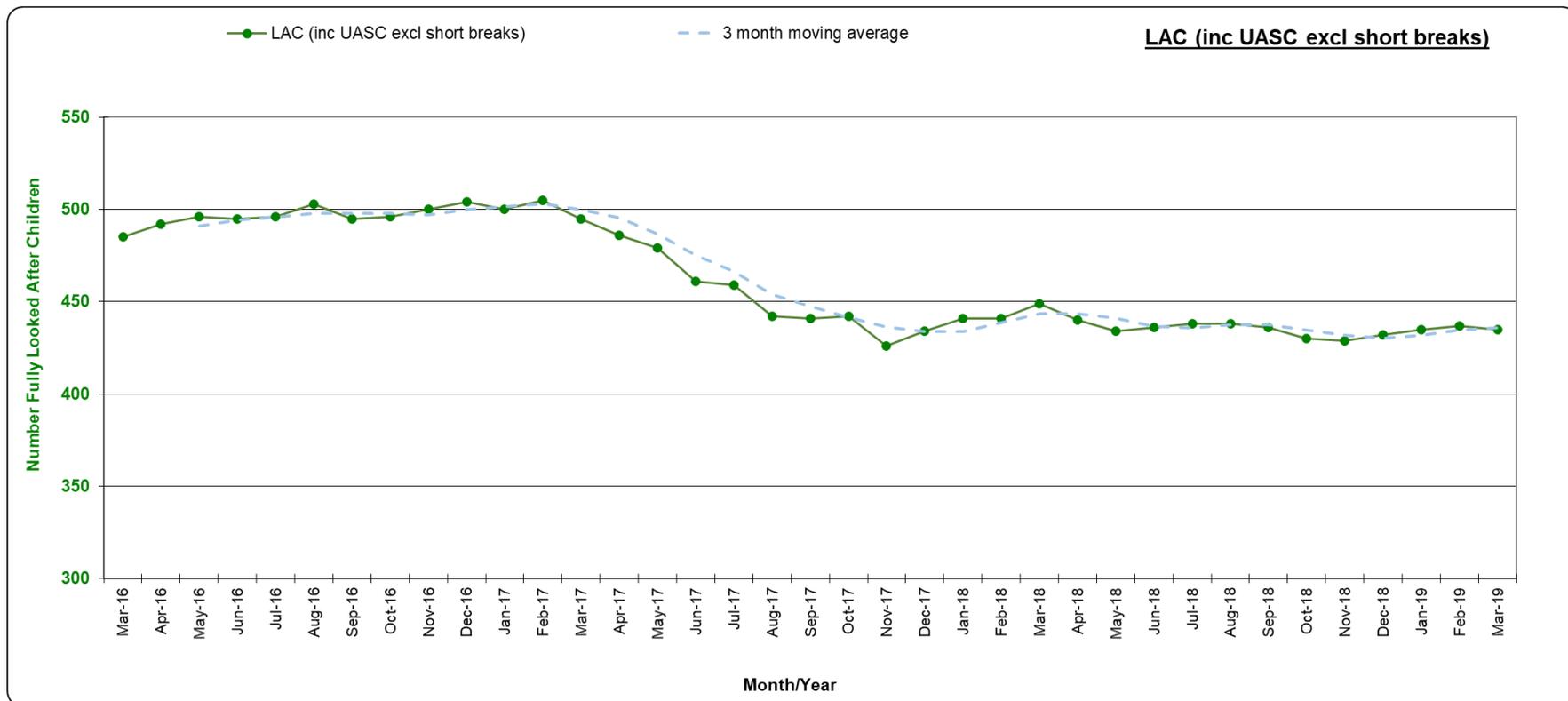


2.2 Trend analysis

As at 31st March 2019, the children in care population in Dorset stood at 446 and at a rate of 58 per 10,000 population.

Local data from our electronic case recording system shows the actual month on month numbers of children in care from March 2016 to March 2019. This table shows that the number of children in care began to fall and have since plateaued at close to the current 446.

Figure 2: Monthly trend analysis (Source: local case recording system)

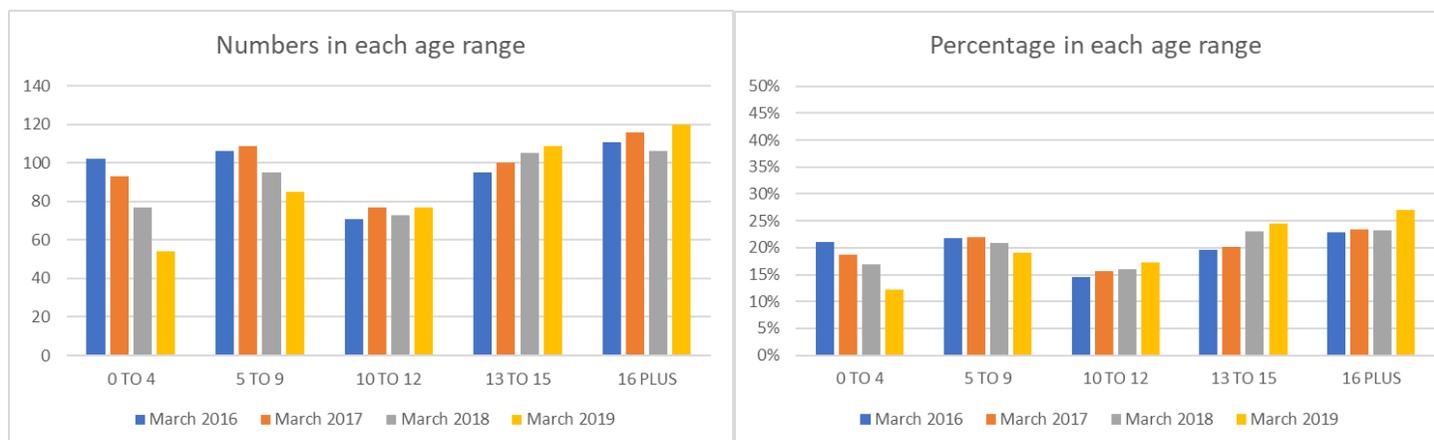


2.3 Profile of children in care

On March 31st, 2019 the largest age group of children in care in Dorset were aged over 12 years, with over two thirds of all children in care aged over 10 years. The only age group where the number of children in care has risen is the 10-15-year-old age group where there are 186 children compared to 166 children in March 2016. All the other age groups have seen falls of numbers of children in care. The average age of a child in care is 11.45.

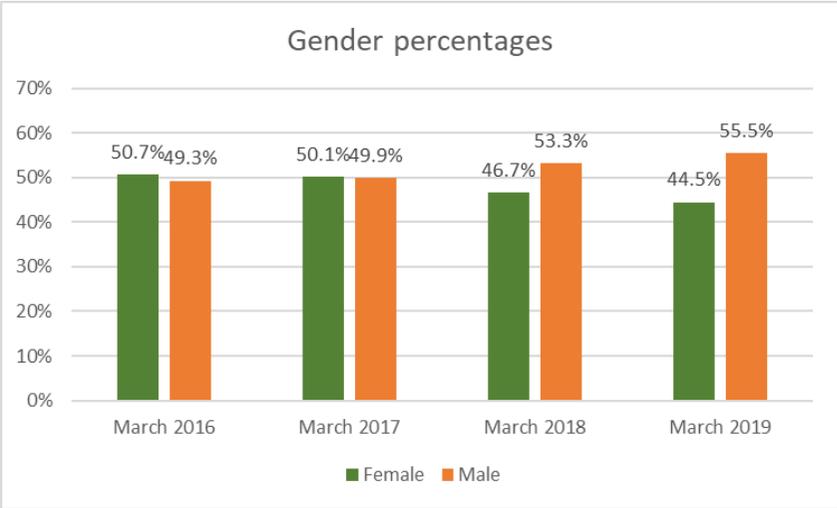
Figure 3: Age profile and average age of Children in Care – excluding children only looked after under a series of short breaks (Source – local monitoring) – see tables and graphs below

Year Group	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018	March 2019
0 – 4	102	21%	93	19%
5 – 9	106	22%	109	22%
10 – 12	71	15%	77	16%
13 – 15	95	20%	100	20%
16 plus	111	23%	116	23%
Average Age	9.98		10.45	
			10.79	
				11.45



As at 31st March 2019 there were 247 males (55%) and 198 females (44%) of children in care in Dorset. Since 31st March 2016 the gender profile of children in care in Dorset has changed from similar proportions of males (49%) and females (51%). At the time that was out of line with the gender profile both nationally and regionally where there was a greater proportion of males (56%) than females (44%) in care. (Source DFE - Children looked after in England including adoption)

Figure 4: Gender Comparison March 2016 (Source DfE – Children looked after in England including adoption)



2.4 Location of placements

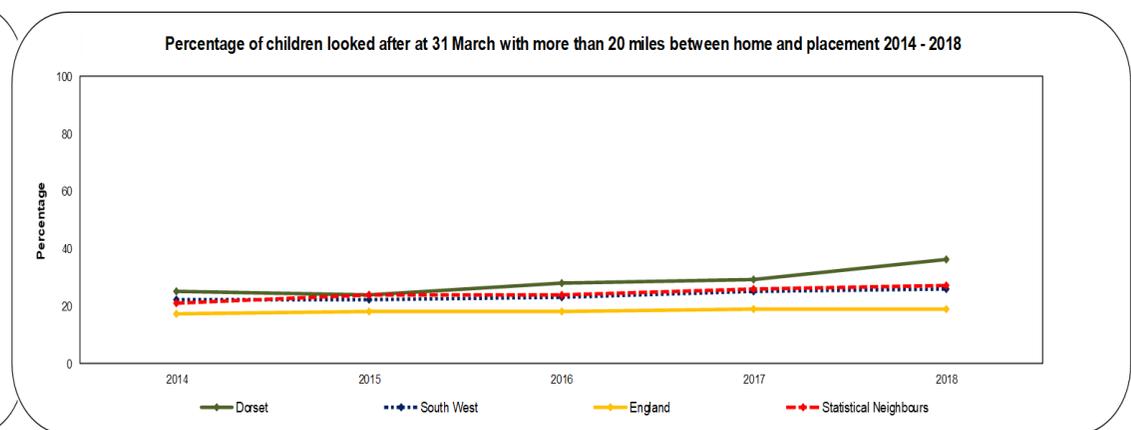
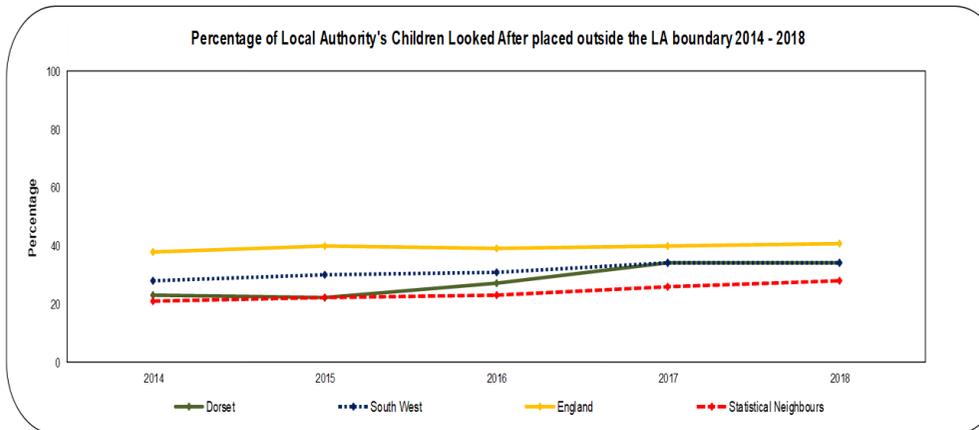
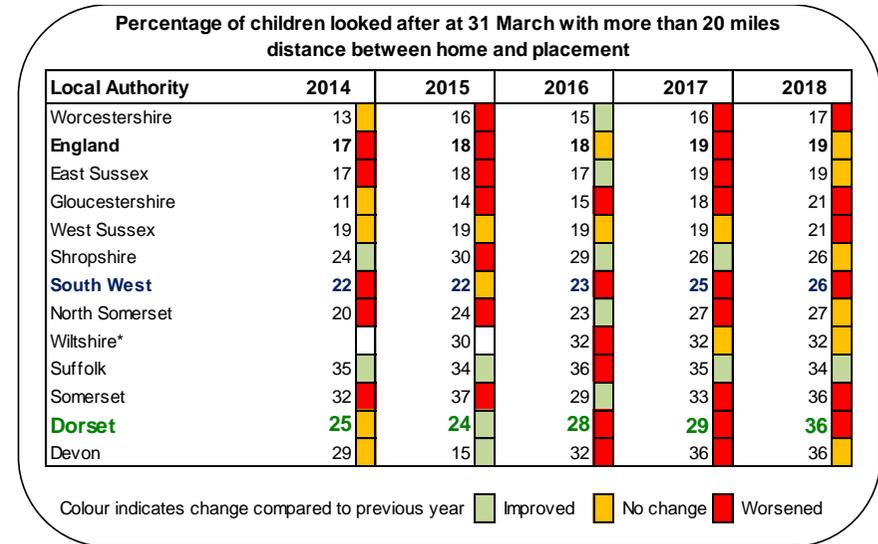
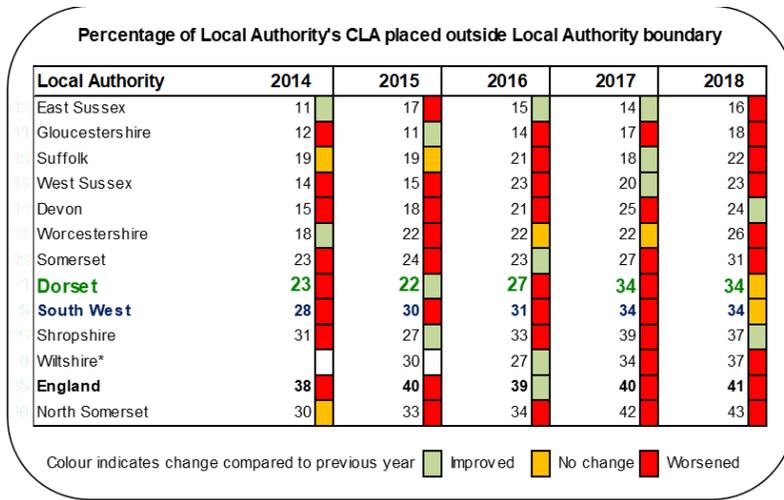
At the end of March 2016, 62% of LAC were placed within our borders. This is a slightly lower proportion compared to the South West (68%). A very high proportion of LAC (270) are living under 20 miles away from home within Dorset County Council border. And (65) LAC living under 20 miles away from home but in a neighbouring Local Authority. There are 130 LAC living over 20 miles away from home. Half are within the Dorset border and half outside of the border.

Figure 5: Looked after children by location of placement

(Source DfE – Children looked after in England including adoption) – see tables and graphs below.

Placement Inside or Outside LA borders

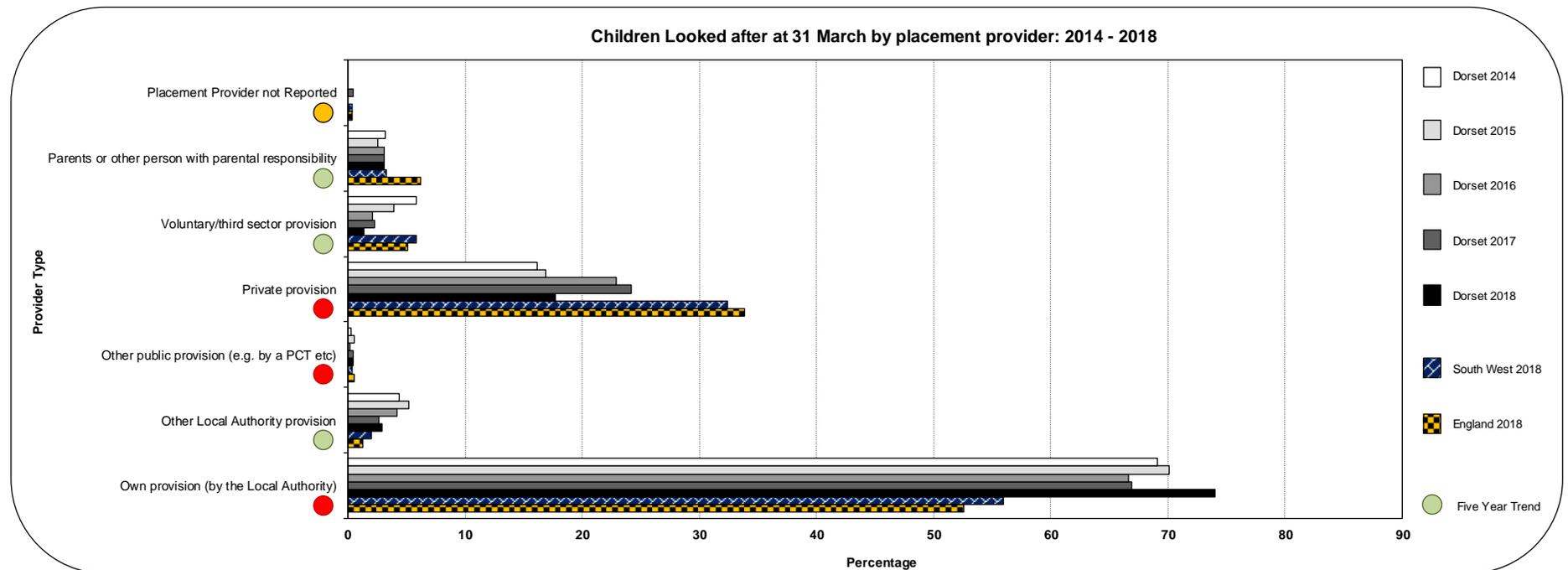
Placement Distance – over 20 miles from home address



2.5 Type of placement

There are a number of different placement options for children in care including: adoption, family and friends care, with parents (or person with parental responsibility), family-based care (fostering), residential care (children’s home), residential special schools and supported accommodation for 16+. These placements can be provided in-house by the local authority, or externally by private or voluntary sector. This section will describe the trends in the patterns of these different types of placements.

Figure 6: Children in Care by provision type (Source DfE – Children looked after in England including adoption)



2.6 Placement usage

2.61 Children placed in Dorset County Council Foster Care

We are working towards less usage of independent providers and making more in-house foster placements. Over the period 31st March 2018 to 31st March 2019 the overall number of carer households has remained constant at 141 with numbers of children placed slightly down to 160 from 165 over that period. However, a campaign to recruit additional carers is now in full train and we are confident of achieving a significant net increase in carer households by 31st March 2020.

2.62 Independent Fostering Agency Placements

Independent fostering agency placements have been made from the tendered sub-regional frameworks (South West until 31.3.17) and South Central since 1.4.17 that can provide for special and particular needs, where these cannot be met within local provision. There were 36 independent fostering service providers pre-qualified to provide placements on the South West framework. The South-Central Independent Fostering Framework provides the consortium of local authorities with 49 foster agencies able to provide standard foster placements, 43 children with a disability placement and 43 parent and child placements. This Framework has 9 providers who can provide a new service of Alternatives to Residential placements.

Usage of independent fostering placements

	South West Framework	South Central Framework	Off Framework
0-12	45	17	5
13-25	13	4	4
Children who are disabled (CWAD)	3	0	0
TOTAL IFA Placements:	91		

2.63 Children placed in Dorset Council's Children's Home

Dorset has one internally provided or 'in-house' residential children's home. This home is for children, between 4 and 18 years with severe learning disabilities and complex needs. Complex needs can include behaviours which challenge, physical disabilities, and issues around communication. The building is divided into 4 small self-contained units for compatible groups, including three for residential stays of a more permanent nature. The home is able to provide accommodation for up to 9 children of either sex who are aged below 18 years of age. The occupancy levels of each unit are determined by the

needs and the mix of the children. At the time of writing (April 2019) there are 5 children living at the home and the average number of children living at the home across 2018-19 was 5.

2.64 Children placed in independent children's homes

There are 5 Independent children's homes located within Dorset:

- One 4 bed home in Ferndown, Dorset
- One 4 bed home (currently for boys) in Sherborne, Dorset
- One solo home in Weymouth, Dorset
- One 1 bed home for children who are disabled in Weymouth (currently running as a solo)

From the 10 beds above – Dorset currently (as at 31 March 2019) occupy 4 beds. This is a fairly low figure, however is due to matching of young people to any available beds.

The remaining Dorset children placed on 31 March 2019, in children's homes were in the following areas:

20 are in the surrounding Local Authorities – Hampshire, Wiltshire, BCP, Devon and Somerset.

18 are placed further afield in Berkshire, Cambridge, Staffordshire, Derby, Surrey, Kent and Wales.

Usage of Independent Children's Homes

National contract (spot purchase)	24
South Central Framework	7
South West Framework	17
Total	48

There are 4 independent residential special schools in Dorset, offering various lengths of boarding:

- Purbeck View School
- The Forum School
- The Sheiling School
- Portfield School

2.65 Children placed in Supported Housing

The Supporting Housing Block Contracts (joint Adult Services and Children's Services) which focusses on accommodation (with support) for 16 – 21-year olds, went live in April 2016 and following an extension is now due to expire on 31st March 2020. There are five providers offering supported accommodation within Dorset through these block contracts.

This equates to 35 beds in the East Dorset and 50 beds in Mid Dorset and West Dorset. This has provided much of the resource required to meet the needs of this cohort of young people. However, it has still be necessary to spot purchase additional accommodation and support from other providers for a small number of young people (approximately 10 per annum). They are typically looked after children aged 16-17 requiring support to move out of residential/foster care, supporting them into independence. This is particularly for young people who are not able to move in to hostel/multiple occupancy provision (because of vulnerability or matching).

There is another cohort of young people with highly complex needs. This cohort of young people would typically be aged 17 and require a high level of support to keep them & others safe. Examples of young people in the cohort could be:

- Young people who have left a secure unit/custodial sentence
- Young people who are awaiting court & likely to have a custodial sentence
- Young people who have been evicted from other semi-independent provision.

Beyond this there is a growing need for move-on accommodation and support for care leavers and other vulnerable young people who are ready to progress further to independent living.

2.7 Analysis of the current position

In the 2 years to April 2019 the Dorset looked after population reduced by 8% against a national picture of increasing numbers of children needing care. On 1st April 2019 Dorset Council was caring for 417 children or 61 children per 10k. This is lower than the national average but higher than the regional (55 per 10k) and statistical neighbour (53 per 10k) averages. The age distribution of the looked after population is the same as national averages for ages 5-10 (19%) and 10-15 (39%) however we have noticeable differences at ages 0-4 where the national figure is 19% but in Dorset 12% and likewise for children aged 16 + nationally this is 23% but 28% in Dorset. The gender balance of looked after children is the same as the national picture.

The category of need reflects the national picture aside from in 2 key areas, where there are lower proportions of children in care in Dorset as a result of Abuse and Neglect (63% nationally, 53% in Dorset) and a higher proportion as a result of Family Dysfunction (15% nationally, 24% in Dorset). Dorset has a lower use of care orders (67%) than nationally (73%) and a higher proportion of children accommodated under section 20 (19% nationally, 23% in Dorset).

We have an increasing challenge over the availability of local placements as a result of limited growth in our local foster care provision and a lack residential provision locally that is able to meet the individual needs of the child. This results in too great a use of distant and out of area placements and an increasing use of the independent sector. We are also having to use unregistered provision when there is no provision available.

Our data suggests that there is a need to improve edge of care support for families experiencing difficulty, particularly with parenting teenage children to enable parents and the extended family to maintain care of their children. We also need to improve our offer to families affected by substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental ill health to address these issues and to enable families to stay together for longer. This would help us to reduce the number of children in care.

3 Actions taken since the last sufficiency plan was published (September 2017)

- 3.1 Much work on reshaping the fostering service has been undertaken including the addition of a Fostering Services Manager post and a re-structure of the team into one pre and two post approval teams. The pre-approval team's focus is on assessing and delivering new carers efficiently and effectively. The two post-approval teams offer a consistent approach to ensure foster carers receive a high standard of support, supervision and continued professional development as part of a strategy to retain approved foster carers. Fostering Social workers have been freed-up from the placement finding element of fostering duty, which is now covered by the Placements Team. The fostering team has established a long-term family finding role out of its existing complement of staff. A professional foster carer service has been established with a skills-based fees scheme (based on 4 levels of skill) incentivising learning and development and career progression. The Fostering Panel has become a Fostering and Permanence Panel so that all permanency planning/matches and changes of approval are presented to this panel. The Fostering Service's pre-approval team is working in partnership with an independent organisation, Whitehead Ross Education and Consulting, to achieve a significant net increase of foster carers through an agreed fostering marketing strategy which is being implemented.
- 3.2 The South-Central Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Framework has provided us with more choice and availability of IFA placements and almost all of our IFA placements are now made through this framework. These placements have been successful in meeting the needs of the children placed in them. The number of IFA placements has been between 95 and 110 over the last 18 months. Our work with the South-Central Consortium of local authorities and the contract coordination provided by Bournemouth Borough Council has helped inform providers of our needs and where they need to recruit carers and what type of carers are needed.
- 3.3 Measures have been taken to strengthen arrangements for connected persons placements and make these more appealing to prospective connected persons carers, who now receive the same offer of training, support and supervision as mainstream foster carers. This is also helpful as one of the possible longer-term outcomes is for connected persons placements to become special guardianship placements. This has been an element of permanency planning where we perform well.

- 3.4 Work has been undertaken to provide additional Supported Housing capacity within the Dorset area for 16 plus accommodation and support for young people with complex needs and for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16 and 17. Since February 2019 a South-Central Framework contract has been in place following a joint tender. This framework of 18 providers covering 4 lots (Looked after Children including UASC -16 providers; Care Leavers -16 providers; Young People with Complex Needs – 14 providers and parent and child – 7 providers) also provides us with the ability to block contract for specific numbers and types of placements.
- 3.5 The two Dorset County Council Children’s Homes for Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties have both closed in the last 18 months. To replace this capacity and better meet needs of children referred a project group has been investigating the feasibility for block contracts for therapeutic children’s home placements to be established in Dorset or close to Dorset’s boundaries. The group looked at a proposal to initially offer three therapeutic placements for children aged 8-12 with complex needs with a separate block contract of two therapeutic placements for young people with complex needs aged 13 to 16. We are considering running mini-competitions from the Local Authorities of the Southern Region (LASR) flexible framework for children’s home placements (612 homes are on this framework, however most of these homes are located in other local authority areas). Work is now in progress looking in to the feasibility of providing our own children’s homes. Drawing on this work the business case is now being established for 3 children’s’ homes in Dorset.
- 3.6 The LASR flexible framework is now ready for our use for calling-off placements as and when required in the following categories (*number of homes in each category shown in brackets*):
- i. Planned and Same Day Residential Care (214);
 - ii. Crisis Care (64);
 - iii. Residential Care with DFE Regulated Education (137);
 - iv. Residential Parenting Assessments (2);
 - v. Therapeutic Residential Care (161);
 - vi. Children with Disabilities (34).
- 3.7 We are also still able to source children’s home placements from the current South West Residential Framework which runs until 31st March 2020. This framework does not offer the option of block contracts.

- 3.8 There has been an increase in the number of children placed in long-term fostering from 8 in January 2018 to 27 by February 2019. In addition, other children have been placed in long-term fostering with a relative or friend increasing from 3 in January 2018 to 11 by February 2019. There are 50 permanence through long-term fostering arrangements. There were approximately 50 recorded permanence through long-term fostering arrangements as of 31st March 2019 and this continues to be an area of focus to promote stability of care arrangements for looked after children.
- 3.9 Dorset Police, Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset Council and the Borough of Poole Council have developed an Alternative to Police Custody Fostering/Supported Lodgings Scheme, through retained Carers from the Borough of Poole. This scheme began in early 2018 and supports compliance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which states that children under the age of 18 should not be held in police custody and should be transferred to the care of the Local Authorities, if it is not appropriate to return to their home address. As part of this scheme there is an agreed process to the transfer children and young people who are detained in police custody.

4 Action Plan

- 4.1 Support packages including alternative care are a potentially useful option for short term arrangements or where no placements are available. We will establish a quality-checked (safeguarding, quality and transparency of costs) list of providers to enable social workers to use the options available to create support packages covering: Transport of children who may be traumatised and/or showing challenging behaviour, support for young people in their community, family support (including parenting support and/or child care in their own home).
- 4.2 We will monitor the demand and effectiveness of alternatives to care services and if there is sufficient demand and these services provide useful support options. We would look to undertake a formal tender exercise during 2019/2020 for a framework of this type of provision.
- 4.3 The Fostering Marketing plan will ensure there is an ongoing recruitment campaign to generate more interest in fostering for Dorset Council and opportunities will be explored to find ways of using the Council's role to pass on any further benefits to our foster carers, for example free parking or discounted council tax. The Fostering Service will continue to work in partnership with Whitehead Ross Education and Consulting to recruit foster carers so there is a substantial net increase in foster carers.
- 4.4 We will undertake further analysis of the demand for therapeutic residential placements, in particular the frequency of demand and the likely length of such placements. The first option to consider for block contracts is to look to source these from providers on the Southern Residential Framework. Market engagement conversations with providers would be helpful to understand the market's appetite for such contracts and identify key considerations for block contracting generally.
- 4.5 We are in discussion with Adult Services colleagues in relation to the re-development of local authority and health sites in Dorset (Wareham and Bridport) for possible move-on accommodation for care leavers and other vulnerable young

people. Our needs relating to care leavers and our initial feedback based on intended living destinations for current LAC/Care leavers means we've identified a need for move on accommodation perhaps starter tenancies as our data shows a need for about 5 across 'East Dorset' (i.e. Purbeck and East Dorset). We will keep in touch with the Bridport Hub project too as we can see that by 2019 there will be 9 young people requiring move-on accommodation in West Dorset including 7 for anywhere in West Dorset. Meetings with Housing colleagues have commenced. A new allocations policy is being developed for 2021, beginning shortly with a process of consultation with key stakeholders. Children's Services are well positioned to be in the forefront of the consultation. Housing will feature on the new Children's Services Transformation Programme – details to emerge shortly.

- 4.6 We are also considering seeking tenders for block contracts for Supported Housing via mini-competition from the Supported Housing Framework for 6 places (possibly over 2 properties) within Dorset for 16 plus accommodation and support for young people with complex needs and for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16 and 17. Our experience shows that properties that can accommodate 2 to 3 young people, offer the best opportunity to progress successfully to independence. The tender would be looking for providers to offer local property within reasonable travelling distance (by public transport of local amenities including schools and training providers).
- 4.7 We are investigating the feasibility of expanding the current adults 'Shared Lives' family placement service to young people aged 16 plus for people with a range of learning disabilities who need ongoing care, support and the benefits of living in a family-based setting.