

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

### **Q1a. What is changing?**

This strategy sets out how Lambeth will meet its responsibilities to commission and provide secure, safe, and high-quality placements for children who are looked after. The Strategy also outlines placement needs for care leavers and is a legal requirement required by Ofsted.

The Strategy outlines 5 key objectives which form the centre of our approach to providing placements over the next three years.

**Objective 1: We will improve our placement commissioning arrangements, and sufficiency of placements, to deliver outcome-focused placements for children and young people.**

**Objective 2: We will expand our in-house foster care service; reducing the demand on commissioned and out of borough placements.**

**Objective 3: Establish a robust edge of care offer to provide support for children to remain at home where it is safe to do so.**

**Objective 4: Establish clear transition arrangements for our young people aged 16 years and over, to support a successful move into independence and adulthood.**

**Objective 5: Improve our performance monitoring systems ensuring information can be reliably used to inform service delivery.**

As corporate parents we are committed to commissioning the right accommodation for our young people. We commission services to ensure the best possible outcomes for every child and young person. This sufficiency strategy is underpinned by legislation and statutory guidance including: Section 22(G) of the Children Act 1989.

We also have considered other statutory requirements to support our young people including:

- The Concordat on Children in Custody (2017), requiring Local Authorities to review their arrangements for children in custody.
- The Local Offer (Covenant) to Care Leavers (Children and Social Work Act 2017).
- Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17-year olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation, considering the Southwark Judgement.

The Strategy outlines the wide range of placement types that are needed, for children who come into our care in Lambeth. This includes; in house fostering services, independent fostering agency placements, residential care placements, semi-independent placements, and specialist provisions.

The Strategy outlines a shift of approach, to strengthen our in-house foster care provision through a redesign of foster care services within the Borough. The strategy also promotes the greater use of obtaining suitable placements through the South London Commissioning Programme's placements offer.

The Strategy also advocates a reduction in the use of Semi-Independent Accommodation as part of a wider change of approach for housing options for care leavers. We intend to support young people over the age of 21, transition into independence as part of a new housing offer. Young people will also be directed towards staying in a family environment where it is in their best interest, through a revised staying put offer with our in-house foster carers.

The Strategy also references the development of a new Edge of Care service offer. This will aim to improve long term outcomes for children and families through diversion activities who may otherwise would come into care.

The Strategy does not commission services directly but acts as a strategic guide to help inform our future approach for children’s placements. Specific strategies and service offers are being developed for all these placement types, that will detail at a more granular level the mechanics of how these services will operate differently in the future.

A Sufficiency Working group is to be created to help design and mobilise these approaches. Once these have been designed, full EIA’s will be completed for each of these new service offers.

**Q1b. Who will be involved in approving this decision?**

Cabinet will be asked to sign-off the strategy on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

**Q2a. What do we know about the people who will be impacted by this change?**

Our strategy will impact young people from birth to 18 years of age who come into care and need placements. In some circumstances, this will also apply to care leavers who are aged between 18-25. This may be because they are in a specialist staying put fostering placement or in some circumstances in a Semi- Independent accommodation placement.

The Strategy contains a full assessment of the young people who are in care who will be impacted by the Strategy. The Strategy provides information relating to our young people’s background and ages. The document also outlines the types of accommodation that Lambeth provides for them currently. A synopsis of the key information is listed below, to demonstrate that we have considered a wide variety of factors that have shaped our approaches to this Strategy.

Between 2010 and 2020, Lambeth has experienced a gradual decline in the number of children we look after. However, in 2020 we are seeing a reversal of this trend, seeing an increase in the numbers of children coming into care. We are also seeing an increase in the number of care leavers.

We have reviewed the projected numbers of children who may come into care to help inform the strategy. We have ensured that this is reflected in the strategy in our future approach. Over the next 3 years, we project that between 360 and 400 children will become looked after. By assessing this information, we can understand what types of services we may need for our young people.

The table showing the age ranges of children who come into care is in the below table and can also be found inside the Sufficiency Strategy. The range of children who come into care varies. By understanding these age ranges this has allowed us to understand how we may need to adjust our approach to providing suitable placements.

Age entered care	2017		2018		2019		2020	
Under 1	49	12%	50	12%	51	14%	37	10%
Age 1-5	70	17%	66	16%	65	18%	71	20%
Age 6-11	127	31%	132	32%	106	30%	104	29%
Age 12-15	119	29%	109	27%	86	24%	80	22%
Age 16-17	49	12%	54	13%	44	13%	67	19%
	<b>414</b>		<b>411</b>		<b>352</b>		<b>359</b>	

Fig 1 - Ages of young people who have come into care 2017-2020

The Strategy considers the ethnicity of young people who come into care. Our children and young people in care are mostly of Black or Black British ethnicity. They account for over half of all our children who are looked after (51%). This group of young people is followed by children of Mixed Ethnicity (21%), who make up the second largest cohort. The third largest cohort of children who come into care are White British (18%).

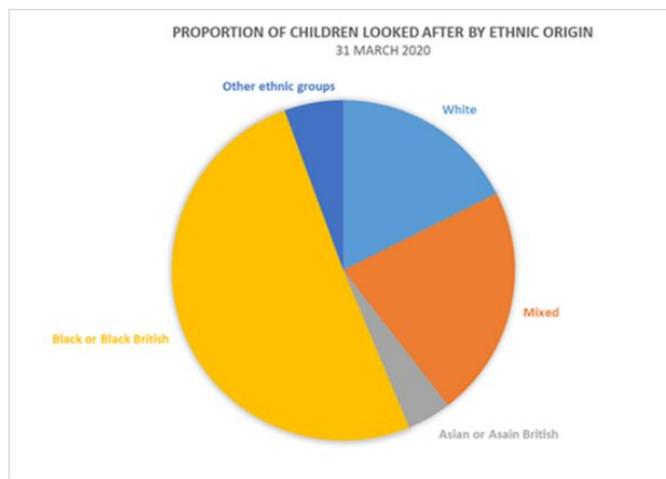


Fig 2 -Background of young people who come into care in Lambeth 2020.

The Strategy also considers the support we provide to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who are seeking asylum in the UK. These young people are uniquely identified in the Strategy.

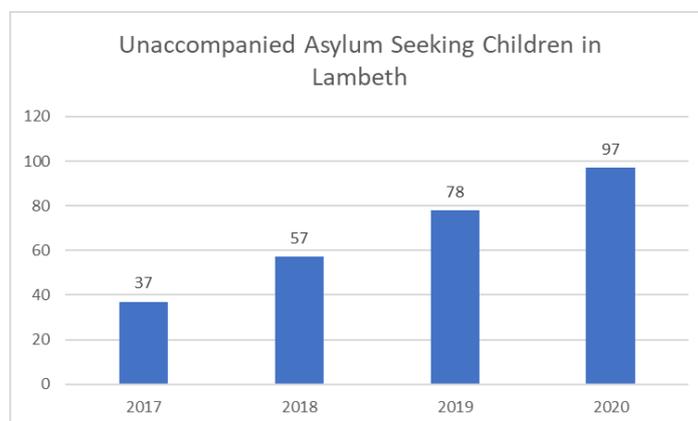


Fig 3 Numbers of children who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

All children in care receive both Social Work and Health assessments to help inform what placement is suitable for them to help meet their needs and how long an such placement should last. The Strategy references how we shape and support young people on an individual basis to ensure their needs are met.

In Lambeth up to the age of 18, young people receive a holistic health assessment that includes a review of their physical, emotional, and mental health. Our health care provider, Evelina London (part of Guys and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust), provide both Initial and annual Health Assessments for our children. This helps us to inform our placements for young people on an individual basis and ensure we can commission placements and services to meet their needs.

The Strategy also provides information relating to young people whose needs may be best met through an alternative plan of permanency. These alternative plans can include a Special Guardianship Order or Adoption where it is in the child's best interests.

**Q2b. How will they be impacted by the change?**

The Lambeth Sufficiency Strategy will positively impact on young people to help them stay in an appropriate placement to support their needs. Overall, we want to provide greater flexibility in our placements offer to meet the needs of all young people who are in care. The Strategy outlines how through dedicated offers we will be able to provide a wider range of placements that will improve outcomes for young people in care.

In the Strategy we set out our approach that, our preference is always to place our children and young people in a family environment. We have also considered the voice of the child in terms of shaping our thinking and this is reflected in the strategy.

Young people who are supported through in-house fostering arrangements, will see increased support being provided to them. This will be through a more holistic fostering service that provides social work support 24 hours a day, to help support a young person and their carer when they may need us most.

The proposal also will strengthen the financial support we can offer through our in-house fostering service. This includes increasing the amount of money paid to carers which will impact the quality of wider experiences a young person will receive.

Our Strategy also will provide greater clarity on how we support young people to leave care and move to independence. We will support young people to move to their own tenancy or stay put with foster carers in a more structured and defined way.

For younger people who may access a semi-independent accommodation now, we will in the future be able to offer them a staying put foster care arrangement where it is in their best interests to do so.

**Q3a. How do you plan to promote and deliver any positive impacts of the proposal?**

A working group to focus on making the changes, will be set up to help manage the transitions to the new service models over the next three years.

Formal Projects to support the delivery of new models for Fostering, Semi Independent Accommodations / Housing have been set up. These projects will start the work, to bring the objectives and activities set out in the Strategy to fruition. These will start formally once the Strategy has been approved and will be delivered over the timeline of this Strategy.

To help ensure that the objectives are met, we have developed a new performance framework to help us understand what placements we need and any adjustments we need to make. This will also help us see how we are performing against what we have set out in this Strategy with a suite of KPIs and indicators.

This will also ensure that our placements meet the needs of our children and young people. As part of our reviews to ensure that placements meet the needs of all children, we will ensure that young people who come from BAME backgrounds or who are unaccompanied asylum seekers for example, have their individual needs met. We will ensure that appropriate planning and support is put in place, to support any specific cultural or personal

requirement a young person may have as part of their individual reviews around their placement. This will also be factored into making sure that the outcomes of a young person's placement are captured and if these needs are not being met, then appropriate mitigation and proactive responses are put in place.

The framework will also help us to understand the usage of our placements. The framework will also let us know where, we need to work with providers and young people to improve outcomes for our young people individually.

New Performance booklets for Fostering, Residential, Semi – Independent and Specialist provisions, will help us undertake deep dive reviews, into the overall quality and usage of our services to make sure the needs of all children are being met. This will be broken down as well by specific cohorts of children such as UASC, to ensure that specific needs of young people are not going unmet and that this is captured in the monthly and quarterly monitoring of placements. This will allow us to monitor commissions and directly delivered services, allowing us to put in place checks and balances, to ensure a young person's holistic beliefs orientation or cultural background are acknowledged, understood, and respected.

### **Q3b How do you plan to address and mitigate any negative impacts of the proposal?**

There are several risks to undertaking this work that will need to be managed. These have been formally captured and are being reviewed as part of the formal projects that have been identified in this Strategy

As set out in the Strategy, there is a shortfall of approximately 7,200 foster carers nationwide. We also know from our evidence base that; these challenges are reflected in Lambeth. Therefore, if we are unable to recruit the numbers of additional foster carers then, the Local Authority will continue to have an over reliance on other provision outlined in this Strategy. The development of a new and revised fostering offer will help to manage and mitigate that risk to make Lambeth a more attractive place to foster.

There is a risk that if the work contained in the strategy does not materialise, then there may be an increased use of expensive residential placements. We will be closely monitoring the use of these placements to make sure that these are used where the needs of a child can only be met in this type of placement.

We currently have a large number of young people in semi-independent accommodation. Moving forward for older young people, we want them to access their own tenancy through a supported route or access a staying put placement. There is a risk that through the re-commissioning of these services, that there may not be adequate supply in the market for starter tenancies. This will be managed through a detailed review of all cases and we will support young people on a case by case basis to transition to independence alongside the re-commissioning of these services.

### **Q4. How will you review/evaluate your proposal, mitigating actions and/or benefits? Who will be responsible for this?**

Our strategy will be overseen by a strategic board with responsibility for ensuring the Lambeth Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2023 is successfully implemented. It will ensure that all associated activity is reviewed and evaluated, in accordance with the changes to placements that are outlined in the Strategy at both a strategic and operational level.

The Board will be chaired by the Strategic Director of Children's Services with support from other Directors across Children's Services. Information will also be provided to the Chief Executive via the Children at the Heart of Practice Board, which oversees the overall improvement of Children's Social Care.

Each of the Projects, will utilise corporate templates to ensure that benefits and measurable actions are tracked as part of the development and embedding of these new placement options.