

Sufficiency Statement

Looked After Children Placements



Placements, Commissioning and Contracts Team

December 2018

Parents want their children to have the best start in life, to be healthy and happy and to reach their full potential. Bath and North East Somerset Council's (B&NES) aspiration is that: ***"All children and young people will enjoy childhood and be well prepared for adult life"***. Children and Young People's Plan 2018-21 http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sitedocuments/Children-and-Young-People/ChildProtection/children_and_young_peoples_plan_2018-2021.pdf

As corporate parents, B&NES have the same high aspirations and seek to ensure that children and young people receive the care and support they need in order to thrive. B&NES seeks to find the right placement, in the right place, at the right time, for every looked after child.

Introduction

The Sufficiency Duty (under the Children Act 1989 - Section 22G) requires Local Authorities to: have 'sufficient' accommodation in terms of the number of beds provided, to secure a range of accommodation through a number of providers and have accommodation that meets the needs of its Looked After Children. The Sufficiency Duty requires Local Authorities to improve outcomes for Looked After Children, by requiring them to take steps that secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of children in their care, within the authority's area and within those adjacent Local Authorities.

We have produced our Sufficiency Statement using a range of sources:

- Statistical analysis of current demands on services for Looked After Children
- Analysis of trends, performance and projected demand
- A systematic review of the current situation involving key stakeholders
- Identification of areas of concern / pressure and areas for improvement with associated recommendations for action.

Headlines

- Children in care are at an all-time high. Currently the figure is 186 as at 20th December 2018
- There has been a significant increase in placements / spend on Residential Children's Homes – see section 2.5.
- B&NES has seen increased placements with 16+ providers – see Section 2.12
- Despite this, the team have delivered over £125,000 in savings — see Section 3

B&NES' Sufficiency Needs

B&NES' requirements remain similar to previous years:

- Foster placements in Bath city and within a reasonable travelling distance of B&NES schools.
- Foster placements for children aged 14 – 17 year with challenging needs.
- Residential step down placements within B&NES.
- Residential children's homes closer to B&NES who accommodate children with very challenging behaviour.
- Increased local market capacity for 16 - 25 accommodation and support.
- Appropriate placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).
- Solo/specialist foster and residential placements

2018: Imaginative, Creative and Person Centred Commissioning

There has been increased pressure on the market place for children's placements. This is due to:

- Increased number of children in care, locally, regionally and nationally
- Decrease in the number of fostering households
- 'Staying Put' legislation, allowing young people to stay in their foster placement.
- UASC children, who are predominately 16/17 year old males

As children in care numbers continue to rise, the market takes time to respond. This rise in number has been a constant feature over the last five years and there is a lag in the market place responding.

In order to manage these issues in the market place we have taken steps to address the issues, joining together with other local authorities to form a larger partnership for a dynamic purchasing system (DPS) for INMSS and now offering a DPS framework for 16 plus accommodation and support providers.

Where the Placements Contracts and Commissioning Team (PCCT) are made aware of potential placement breakdowns, we will commission additional support in order to maintain the placement, including supplementary respite for carers or extra activities for the children.

Where a foster placement has not been appropriate or achievable, we have considered short term alternatives to children's homes, to discourage placement 'drift' and encourage reunification with families, where possible.

For example a young person, exhibiting behaviour that was dangerous and risky in a 16+ placement was given notice.

PCCT searched nationally for a residential children's home but no offers received. We then considered an alternative short term placement that could offer intensive work and give him space away from his peers who were having a negative influence.

We found a placement on a canal barge in the north of England, which was extremely successful and gave him time to reflect, working with staff in a quiet setting. At the end of this placement he managed to return home safely.

1. Commissioning Placements

1.1 National view

Across the country, local authority children's services are under significant and increasing pressure. Numbers of children in care are at record levels, child protection enquiries have increased by more than 150% in a decade, and more families than ever are turning to children's social care for support. At the same time, government funding has reduced to the point that children's services will face a funding gap of almost £2 billion by 2020.

Of 12 million children in England in 2018, around 1% are in care (73,000) or on a child protection plan (50,000). (Ofsted)

A total of 75,420 children were in care at the end of March 2018, the figures published by the Department for Education stated the number of looked-after children is “now higher than at any point since 1985”.

| Year ending 31 March | Number of looked after children |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2014 | 68,840 |
| 2015 | 69,540 |
| 2016 | 70,440 |
| 2017 | 72,670 |
| 2018 | 75,420 |

Most children are in the care of LAs under a care order. The Department for Education (DfE) reported that as at 31 March 2017, 62 children per 10,000 of the population of children under 18 years were in care. The number has gone up in each of the last 9 years. This has put pressure on the LAs to provide placements and increased pressure on budgets.

Children in care (also referred to as children looked after) most commonly (around 75%) live in foster placements (52,000 children as at 31 March 2017). Of the other children, 11% (7,890) live in secure units, children’s homes and semi-independent living accommodation. Around 1% (1,080) live in other residential settings.

According to Ofsted (2017) there were 44,320 approved fostering households on 31 March 2016, which represented a small decrease (less than 1%) from the previous year (44,625).

1.2 Closer to home

In B&NES, there are just over 36,000 children and young people aged 0-19, which is 23% of the total population of 176,000. Males account for a slightly higher proportion of the younger population than females. 10% of school age children are from a Black or Minority Ethnic group. (Source B&NES Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, 2015).

1.2.1 Number of Looked after Children (LAC) as at 31st March

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Bath and North East Somerset | 144 | 152 | 163 | 168 |

It is evident that children in care numbers are on a steadily rising trajectory; this is in line with the regional and national picture. Currently (November 2018) the figure has jumped to 186, with a number of sibling groups coming into care.

1.3 Commissioning Arrangements

Bath and North East Somerset Council are part of the South West Consortium for integrated commissioning, using Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS) to tender for preferred provider lists of:

- Independent Foster Agencies (IFA)
- Residential Children’s Homes

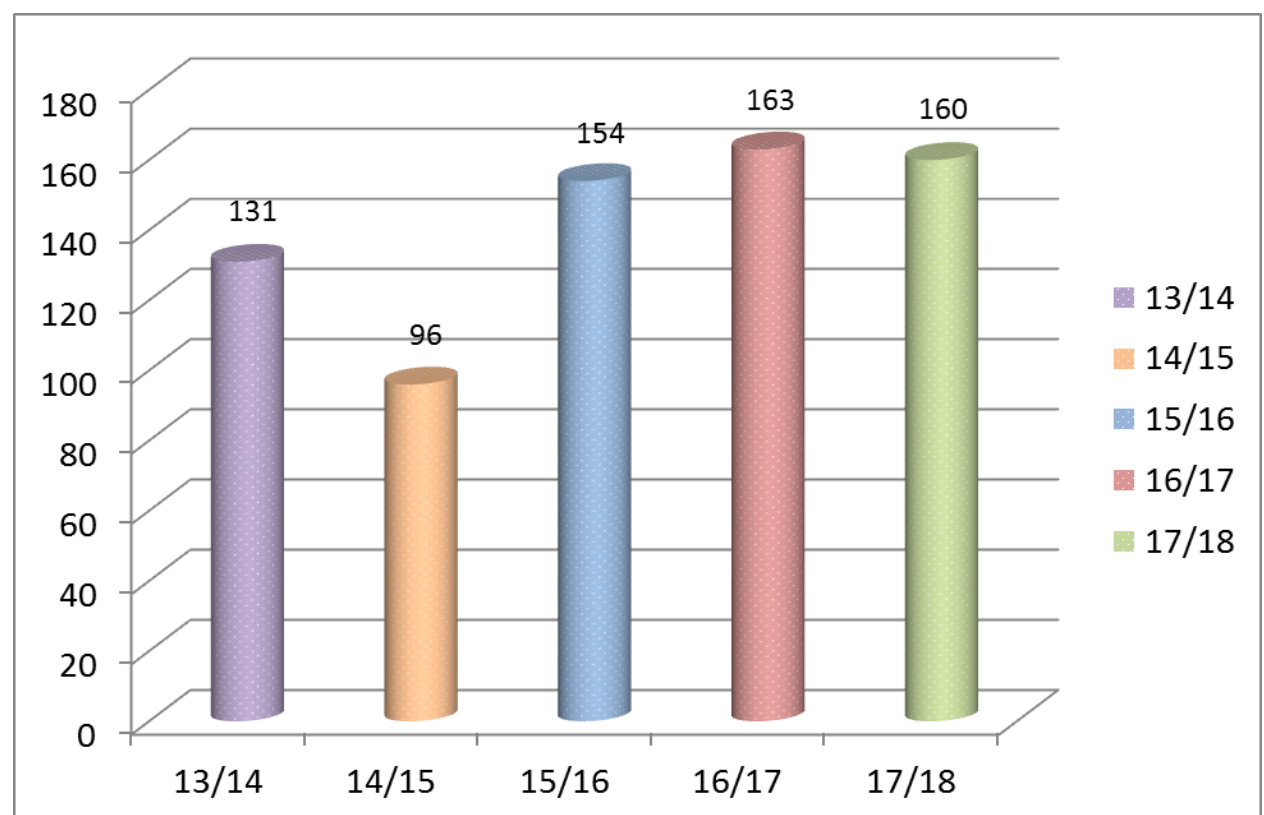
- Independent and Non Maintained Special Schools (now part of the West Sussex DPS)
- 16 plus accommodation and support
- Parent and Child residential Assessment Units

The consortium is made up of: Bath and North East Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, North Somerset, Swindon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset.

B&NES take a lead on the DPS's for Independent Foster Agencies and Residential Children's Homes. This generates an income to B&NES of £36,000 per tender.

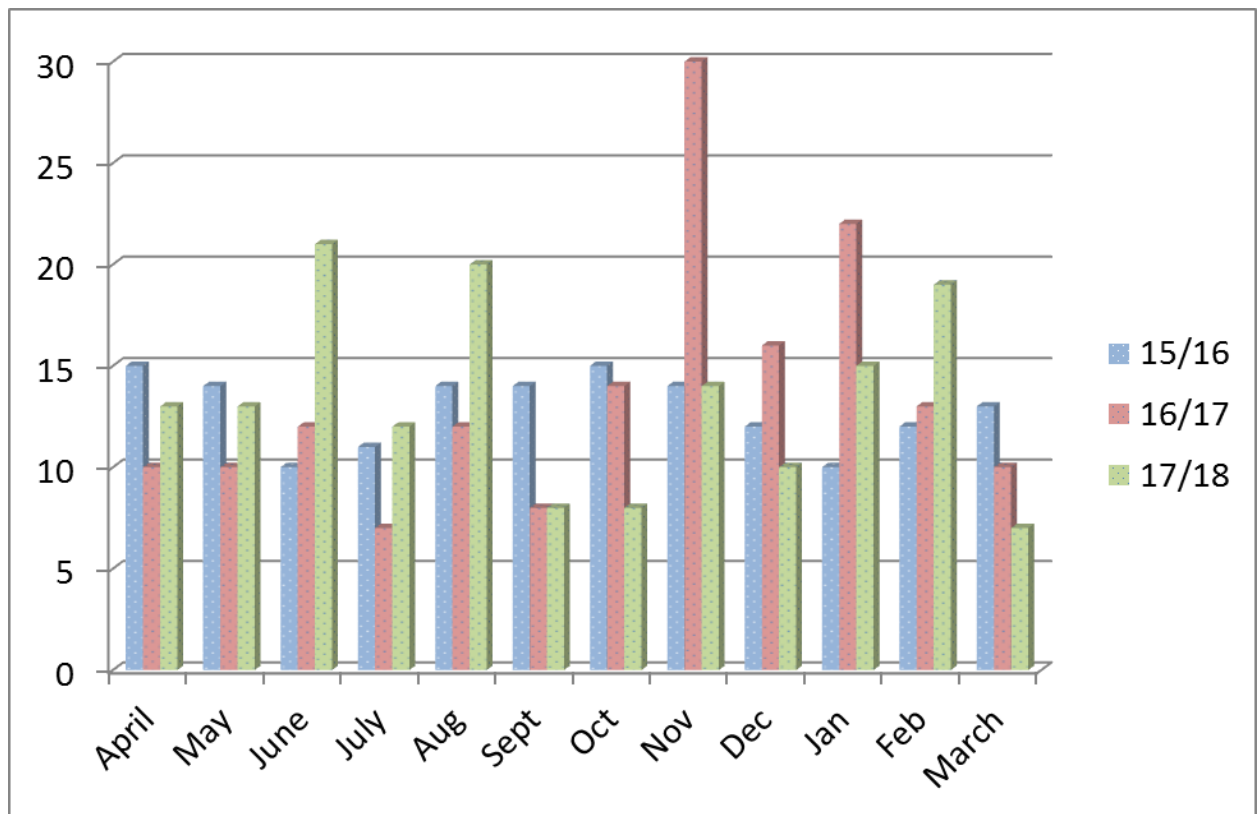
2. Statistical Analyses

2.1 Referrals by year



2017/18 referrals remained similar to the previous 2 years.

2.2 Referrals by month



We experienced 3 high referral peaks in June, August and February with 10 sibling groups being referred, alongside individual placements.

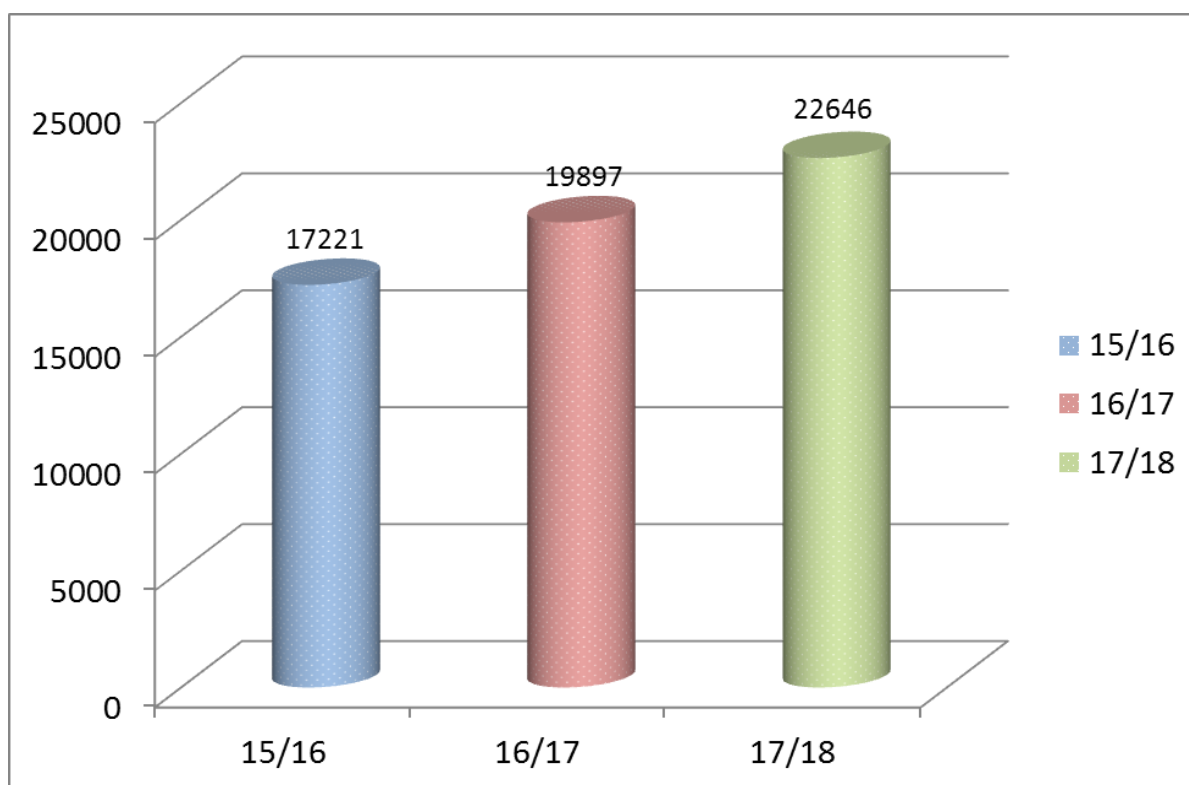
2.3 B&NES Fostering Team

The Family Placement Team (FPT) is the Local Authority's own 'in house' service responsible for the recruitment, training and support of foster carers.

As of 31 March 2018 there were 54 approved fostering households. There were 168 looked after children, of these 68 were in the Family Placement Team, making them the largest provider of foster placements delivering a greater number of placements than the independent agencies combined. There were 15 vacancies not available to be used linked to carers situation. There were 7 vacancies available to use on that day.

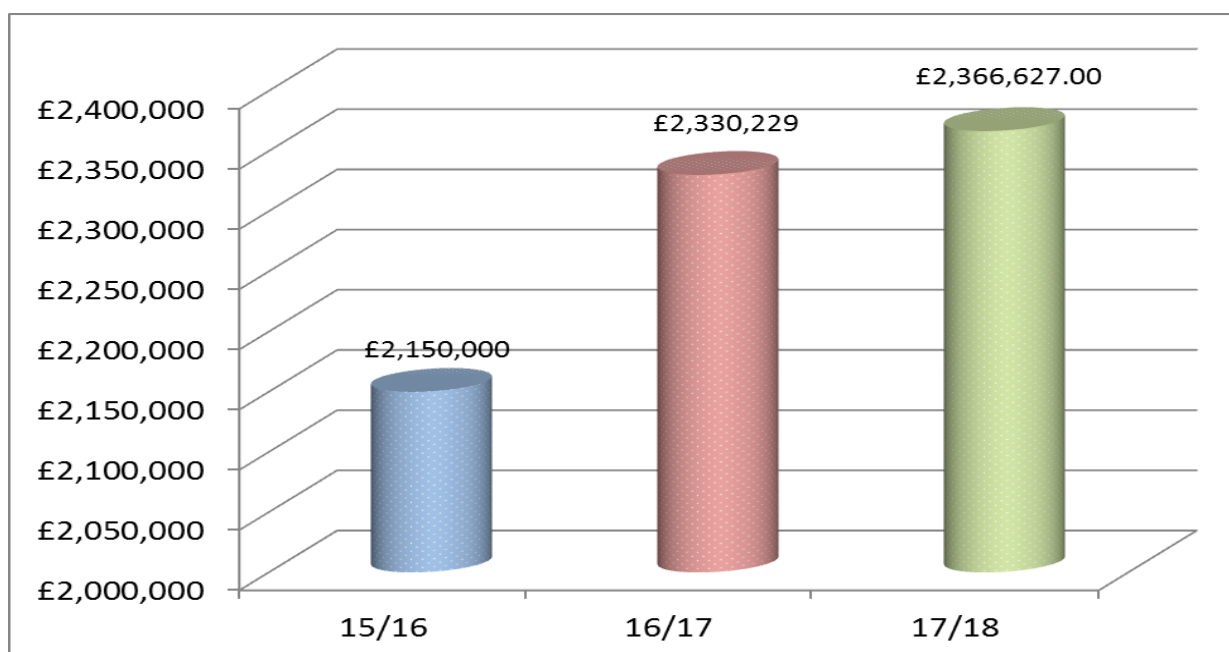
Over the course of the year FPT has seen a higher turnover of placements, which is mostly attributable to some of the placement types they provide. Preparing a child for their permanent placement is an example of a short term placement as part of a deliberate care plan e.g. 15 children were moved on to adoption over that time. FPT staff complete the viability and 'Regulation 24' assessments for connected people who wish to provide care to a child. We had 10 families approved on a Regulation 24 emergency basis, of these none went to panel to be formally approved. 4 went on to Special Guardianship Orders prior to panel date, 1 went to child arrangement order and 5 withdrew from the process as only very short term options. Whilst this will be the right outcome for the child, it is important to recognise that the transfer of an approved foster carer to a Special Guardian results in the carer being 'lost' from the fostering pool, despite the assessment, support and training offered during this process which is the same as a main stream carer.

2.4 Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) – Nights

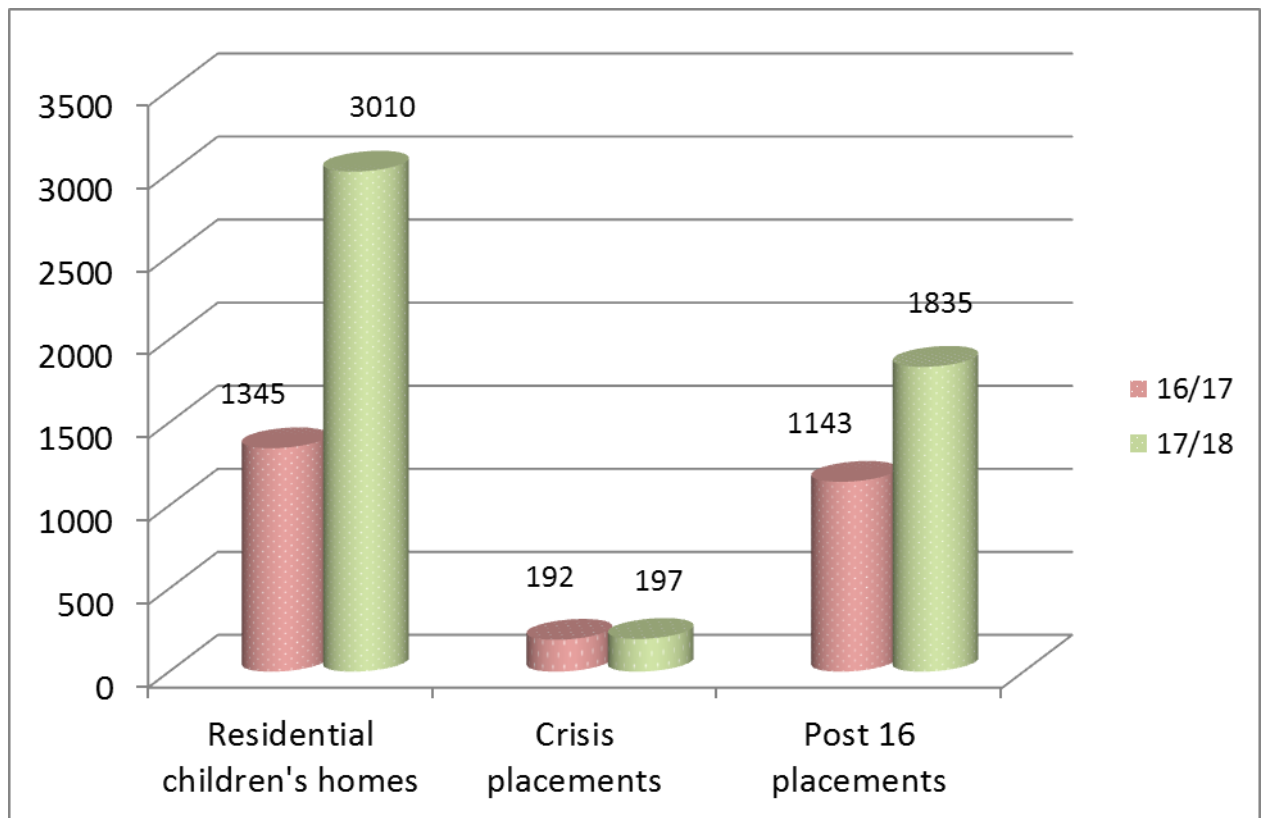


An increase of 2,749 nights purchased indicates placement stability and increasing numbers of children in care.

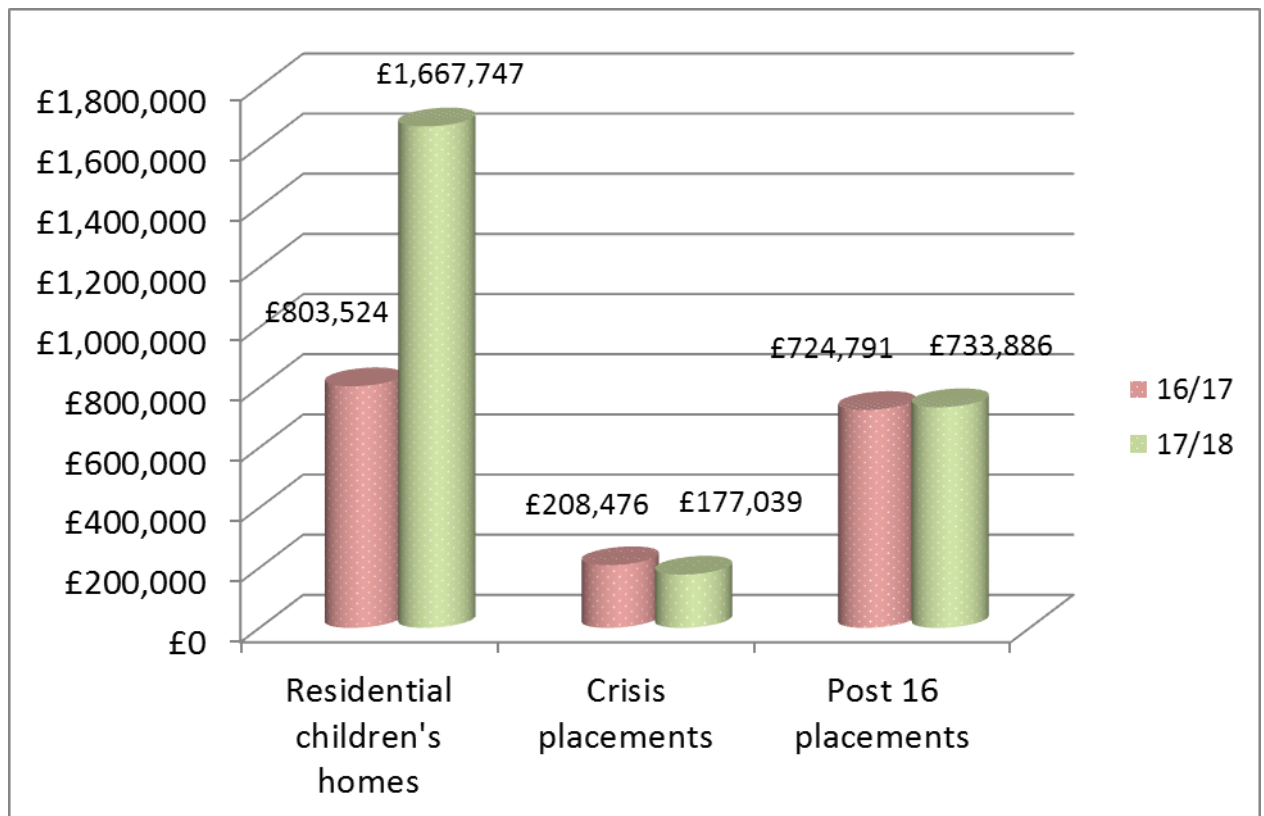
2.4.1 IFA's – Spend



2.5 Residential Children's Homes, Crisis placements and Post 16 placements – Nights



2.5.1 Residential Children's Homes, Post 16 placements and Crisis placements – Spend



As at 31 March 2018, there were 2,209 children's homes nationally, of all types, a 3% increase on the previous year (2,145). At the same time, LAs have reduced the number of children's homes they run by 3%, from 434 as at 31 March 2017 to 423 as at 31 March 2018.

Nationally, at any point in time almost 6,000 looked after children live in children's homes in England. Children are placed in homes by local authorities from around the country and whilst some local authorities continue to operate their own homes, the majority (70%) of places in homes are now in the private sector. This is a critical part of local authority expenditure on children's services.

Locally there is one, 4 bedded, residential children's home in Bath and North East Somerset run by an independent provider.

As at 31/03/18 we had 9 children in children's homes. During this period, 3 children under the age of 10 were placed in homes.

As of 01/12/18, we have 13 children in residential children's homes – 4 of which were moved from foster placements. One child was placed shortly before her 7th birthday.

Most significantly spend on children's homes had doubled.

2.6 Commissioning Team Activity

2.6.1 Outcome of referrals

Out of 160 referrals received by Placements, Contracts and Commissioning Team (PCCT), 43 became redundant (27%). Of these 43 referrals, 27 resulted in the children either remaining at home or being placed with family members. The financial impact of these coming into care would have resulted an addition £500,000 spend.

2.7 Out of Authority / Sufficiency

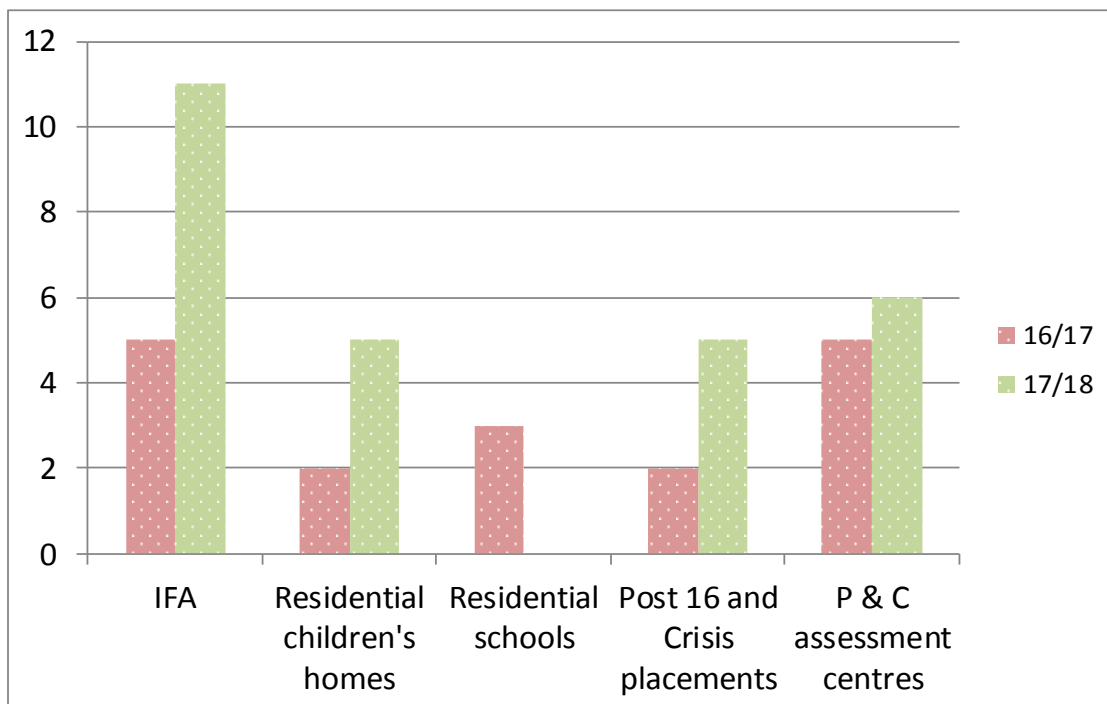
There are various ways of considering what constitutes living away from home that is at a distance. The definition 20 miles from the child's home is considered a reasonable definition. This would mean the child could be placed in the child's local authority or just outside the boundary.

This report takes the definition from: ***'from a distance: Looked after children living away from their home area', published April 2014***

Children who live out of area but in an adjacent authority often benefit from pre-existing close collaboration between agencies, or from continuing services from the home authority. Those placements can reasonably be considered to be 'local'. The nearer a child was living to home, the more likely it was that direct support from 'home' services, especially from education or health professionals could be offered or sustained.

B&NES have therefore counted children who were placed outside our adjacent local authorities – Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, North Somerset and Somerset.

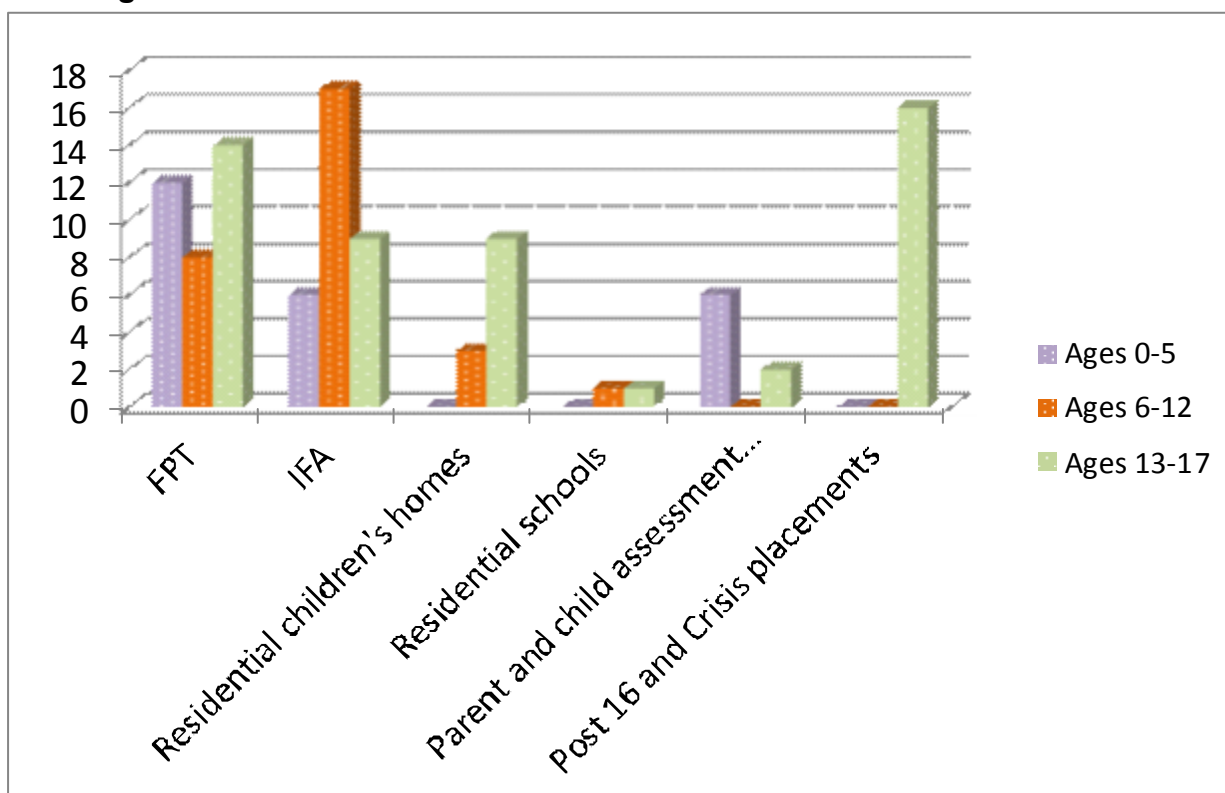
2.7.1 Total number of placements 'at a distance' (independent sector)



27 placements were 'at a distance' which represented 22% of the total placements made. All categories excluding residential schools had an increase of children who were placed "at a distance" this year with the biggest increase being seen with children placed with IFA's. PCCT strive continually to find placements as near to the young person's home as possible

The impact of children placed at a distance is increased travel time for social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers

2.8 Ages of children



The Family Placement (fostering) Team continues to care for the majority of our younger in-care population, whilst IFA's offer more placements for children aged 12+.

2.9 Parent and child residential assessment placements

During 2017/18, we had 8 children in court-directed parent and child placements. The relatively unpredictable nature and duration of the placements (often contested in Court) makes it impossible to predict demand or plan this service need with confidence. As a result our practice of 'spot purchasing' to meet this demand remains the most appropriate and best value option.

2.10 Post 16 placements (accommodation and support)

A post 16 placement involves support and accommodation, but no care element. This is significantly different from residential children's homes. Support can range from a few hours a week to 24/7; fees can therefore vary dramatically.

This market place is still in its infancy and subsequently there is a wide range in provision and in the quality of providers. Additionally, this market is not regulated by Ofsted or CQC. In order to ensure that all *providers reach a minimum level*, we have *accredited a preferred provider list through a DPS, led by South Glos.*

We have seen the increase in purchasing this provision partly due to the shortage of residential children's homes places, especially for teenagers with challenging needs. Often these children are not considered suitable matches for with younger children in homes and solo homes are both expensive and thin on the ground.

It is a less costly, more flexible alternative to traditional children's homes and enables young people to remain in their local areas when they are approaching adulthood.

In 17/18 there were 14 placements in residential provision (children's home and residential schools) and 16 in post 16 placements. Some of these packages were high cost but the Local Authority had the option to lessen support reducing the fees from £3,000 to £1,000.

Moving forward as this market place develops, B&NES needs to consider post 16 placements when residential placements break down. This will ensure we have more flexibility in terms of location and fees.

2.11 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

Nationally, at 31 March 2018 there were 4,480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, down 4% on the number at 31 March 2017. In 2018, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children continue to represent around 6% of all children looked after in England.

The position as at November 18:

Number of UASC in B&NES equates to 9% of LAC population

- 5 Spontaneous arrivals (3 Vietnamese, 1 Syrian and 1 Albanian)

- 11 children arrive via the NTS programme (3 Afghan's, 1 Vietnamese, 3 Iraqi's, 1 Iranian, 1 Eritrean, and 2 Yemeni.)
- We are currently supporting 17 children and young people

B&NES have had difficulties in placing children within the boundaries of the local authority. This however, is not a problem unique to UASC. The same issues apply to our LAC population.

3. Savings

The financial climate has become more challenging for all public sector organisations over the last 12 months. B&NES is not an exception.

PCCT continue our commitment to achieving the most appropriate placements for our children at the best possible price, being acutely aware of the rising cost of placements, year on year.

The team employ a number of means in order to keep costs to a minimum or reduce spending:

- To give B&NES more negotiating power in the market place, we work in partnership with 7 other local authorities, which allows us to achieve volume discounts we couldn't manage on our own.
- Maintain excellent, long standing relationships with providers allowing us to negotiate shorter notice periods or retention payments.
- Attending social work meetings to discuss what is included in placement fees and try to ensure we aren't paying twice for services or goods.
- Attend Placement Panel to offer alternative and, on occasion, less costly provision.
- Scrutinise placement costs to ensure the correct fees are being requested and discounts are being received – saving circa £125,000 per year
- Check invoices individually for errors - saving circa £30,000 per year

4. Workforce Development

The team contributes to services and service development as follows:

- Co-facilitating training with the Principle Social worker to improve social workers' skills in completing placement requests.
- Running continuous induction sessions for new social workers, including information on the cost of placements; another incentive to ensure that all other options have been explored before looking to place a child out of the family.
- Attending team meetings to talk about placements and the fiscal cost to B&NES and ensure social workers are aware of the cost schedule of the contract. That is to ensure social workers know what is included in the weekly price
- Ensuring social workers do not agree to payments for items or services included in the fee.
- Additional support packages are now 'time limited with review' with agencies being charged with providing evidence as to whether that support is still necessary.

5. Quality Assurance and Contract Monitoring

PCCT carry out:

- Contractual compliance visits to providers
- End of placement reviews
- Annual contract meetings
- Annual Safeguarding audit
- Collection of Ofsted reports for current providers
- Additional quality assuring of children's placement requests
- Joint Commissioning on behalf of the Joint Agency Panel (children's pooled budget)
- Promoting Sufficiency by working with and advising providers

This ensures we maintain a desired level of quality

6. Key Priorities 2019/20

- Adoption Tendering to be handed over to Adoption West
- Ongoing work around the SEND agenda
- Continue to chair the South West Children's Services. Placements, Contracts and Commissioning Group to increase our range of placements from external providers and opportunities to develop the provider markets.
- Ongoing work on the DPS Framework for 16 – 24 accommodation and support providers.
- The PCCT will continue to provide a core service in supporting social care teams. Searching for placements, appraising offers made, negotiating costs with agencies, drawing up and then monitoring contracts. Each of the above stages is considered thoroughly, alongside the placing social worker, which has led to successful, stable placements and excellent Placement Stability Figures.

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Alex Hughes, Placements and Purchasing Officer
(Contract monitoring)

Ruth Todd, Placements and Purchasing Officer
(Financial information and invoicing)

**This report will be presented at:
Joint Commissioning Committee
Corporate Parenting Group
Policy, Procedure and Performance Monitoring Group
Scrutiny Panel**

And distributed to all Providers (redacted).