

WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2014-17

1. INTRODUCTION

Wolverhampton City Council has a commitment to ensuring that the needs of children and young people who are looked after by the Local Authority (Looked After Children (LAC)) are met and this document forms part of a wider strategic context in terms of delivering better outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families. This wider strategic context includes the Children and Young People and Families Plan, the 'Families r First' Transformation Programme, and the Early Help Strategy. Consequently, this document should be read in conjunction with a range of relevant documents including 'Statement of Purpose' documents produced by key service areas. All these strategic contexts shared a common vision of ensuring that families get the right help, at the right time and in the right place. This approach applies as much to helping children and young people live safely at home and preventing admission to care, by embedding the Troubled Families approach and developing Early Help services, as it does to those children and young people who do become looked after.

A Sufficiency Duty was placed on local authorities in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 and this has been reinforced by the Draft Statutory Guidance Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2009). The strategy sets out how this duty will be met over the next 3 years.

The strategy document has been developed at a time when Wolverhampton's LAC population has been steadily rising since 2009. Between 1st April 2009 and 1st April 2014 the numbers of LAC have risen by 215% (from 363 to 783). Whilst there has been a general increase in the LAC populations of local authorities across the country, the size of increase in Wolverhampton has been above that experienced elsewhere. These circumstances have placed considerable financial pressure of the Council and its partners, however, the key focus of the Sufficiency Strategy has been on maintaining and improving the quality of services and ensuring that needs are appropriately met with the belief that in pursuing these priorities, improvement in the financial position will follow. The overall approach to LAC emphasises the need to ensure that only those children and young people who need to be in care are accommodated. Wolverhampton's Families r First Programme is predicated on the desire to do everything we can to allow children and young people to live and grow up safely within their families and communities. This has led to greater emphasis being placed on early help and prevention initiatives and the development of appropriate and effective alternatives to care. For those children and young people

who need to be in care, we continue to ensure that placements are the most appropriate and represent the best value for money.

1.1 Vision

Wolverhampton's vision is to provide sufficient high quality placements for children and young people in its care which enable them to achieve their potential. The aim of providing the right placement in the right place, at the right time lies at the heart of Wolverhampton's Sufficiency Strategy.

1.2 Key Statements

- Views and meaningful participation of children and young people to be sought wherever possible.
- Wolverhampton is implementing its 'Families r First' programme which focusses on supporting children and young people to continue to live safely with their families.
- We are hopeful that new ways of working, especially the New Operating Model, will result in more effective working with families which will contribute to safely reducing the number of children and young people being admitted to care.
- Wolverhampton Council aims to be the main provider of fostering for our children in care. To meet this aspiration our fostering service needs to continue achieving year on year growth.
- All our internal services will work towards obtaining, or remaining, "good" to "outstanding", as judged by Ofsted.
- Wolverhampton will work towards finding the widest possible range of placement choice, from within its own resources, to meet the demands of all children in care.
- Wolverhampton will ensure that placements meet the full range of needs.
- Wolverhampton will review its response and commissioning approach to meeting the most complex and unusual needs such as complex health and therapeutic needs and in particular those for adolescents.
- All placements to aspire to a no disruption principle.
- Medium to long term placements with Independent Fostering Agencies and the private residential sector will only be commissioned when the specific needs of the child or young person require a specialist placement that cannot be achieved from within the authority's own provision.

- We will commission short term or emergency placements from the independent and voluntary sectors, both fostering and residential, only when full internal capacity has been reached or when the specific needs of a child are such that their placement could not be made internally.
- Wolverhampton will seek to commission placements with independent providers as part of a larger regional commissioning group so as to assure best value.
- Permanence placements will be achieved through adoption, special guardianship and residence orders, with appropriate financial and aftercare support as appropriate and applicable.
- Foster placements which can meet the needs and wishes of children on a long-term basis to be developed and supported.
- Young people leaving care will be offered the opportunity to remain in their foster home or children's home until they reach 18 and, in the case of children in foster care beyond 18, if that is their wish through a Staying Put policy.

A range of other semi-independent living arrangements such as supported lodgings and semi-independent supported housing will be commissioned where young people choose not to, or are unable to remain in their foster home or residential unit until 18.

- This strategy will be reviewed each year to examine trends and act upon them accordingly.

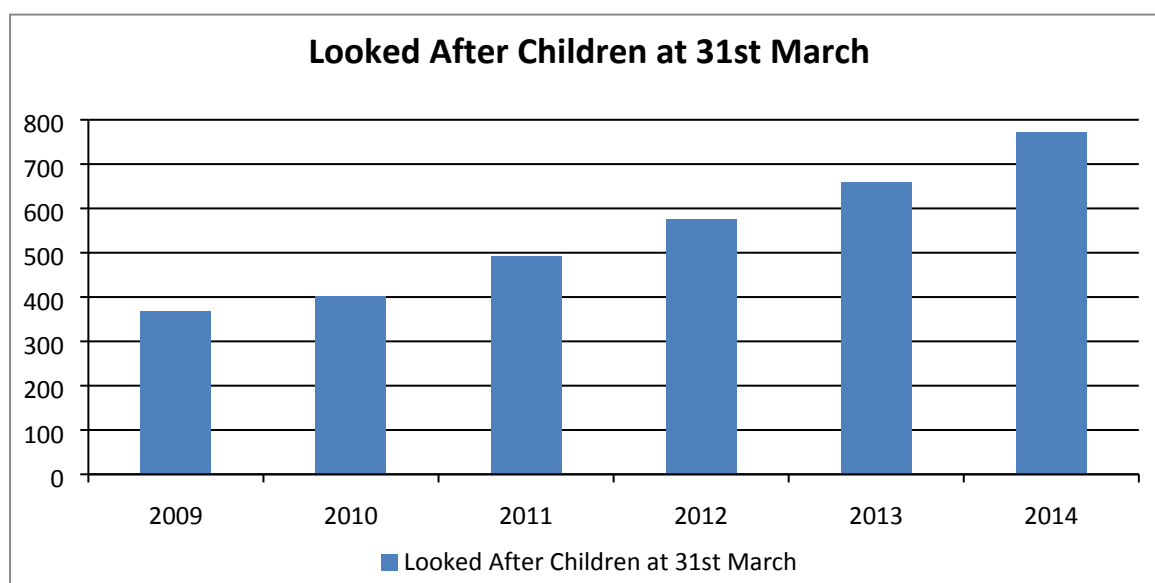
1.3 Key Targets

- To increase the number of new internal approved foster carer households by recruiting a minimum of 40 households a year, and losing a maximum of 15 fostering households per year.
- To review internal residential homes in line with the changing population and analysis of needs; outcomes; young person's views; available resources and balance between residential and family based care.
- To continue to explore and develop partnership working both regionally and sub-regionally.
- Market development and management (how? -strategically and operationally)
- To redress the imbalance between the use of internal and external placements in line with identified needs on a population wide and individual level.

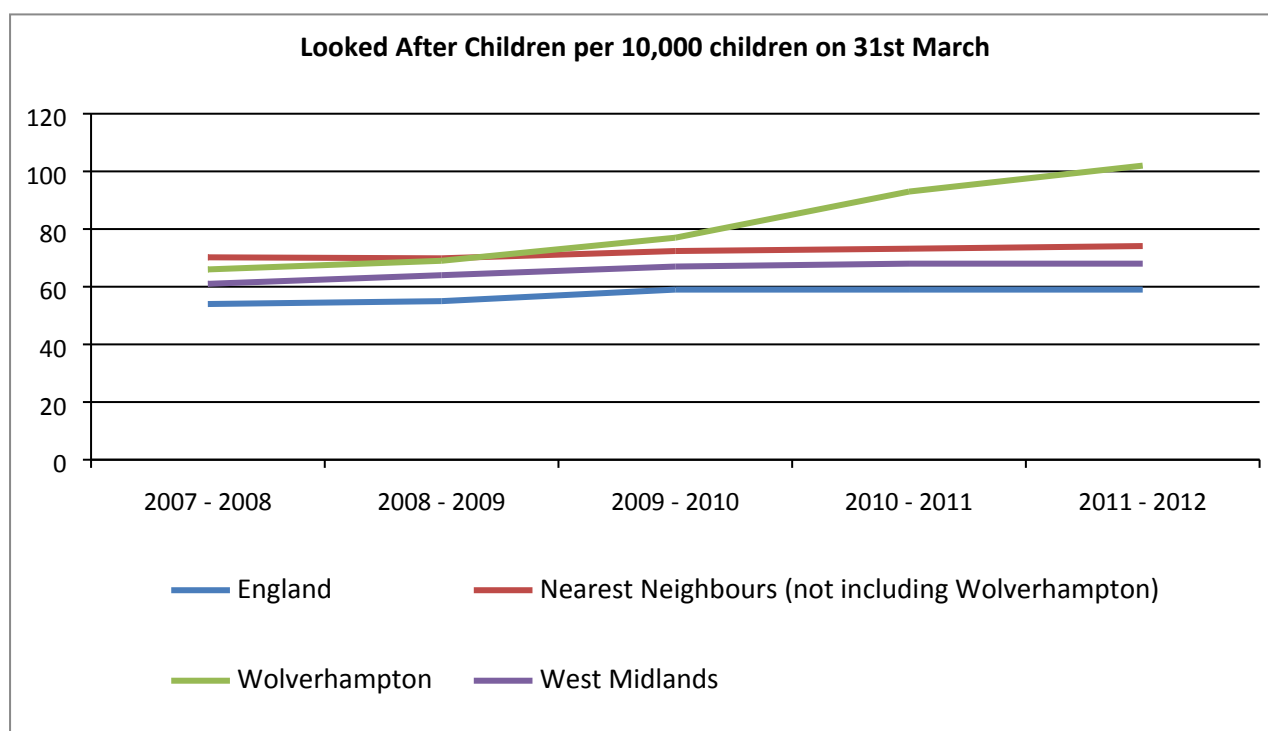
- To develop, maintain and support robust kinship care support arrangements as an alternative to placement within 'stranger' placements.
- To support pro-active discharge from care, where appropriate.
- To increase the number of Wolverhampton approved adopters each year for the next three years. The target for 2014-15 is 36 new adopters approved. As part of this, to show a proportionate decrease in the number of externally purchased placements and reduce the time children wait for a placement.
- To ensure transition and preparation for independence planning begins at 14.

2. NEEDS ANALYSIS

Between 31st March 2009 and 31st March 2014 the numbers of children and young people looked after by the Council increased by 215% (from 367 to 772).



The increase in numbers of children in care has not been unique to Wolverhampton. Both nationally and within Wolverhampton's statistical neighbour group of Local Authorities, increases in the number of children in care per 10,000 population has been experienced. However, the increase in Wolverhampton has been significantly greater than other statistical neighbours.



Age Breakdown of LAC

| Age (years) | 31 st March 2009 | | 31 st March 2010 | | 31 st March 2011 | | 31 st March 2012 | | 31 st March 2013 | | 31 st March 2014 | |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Under 1 | 26 | 7.1 | 27 | 6.7 | 36 | 7.3 | 34 | 5.9 | 46 | 6.7 | 51 | 6.6 |
| 1-4 | 68 | 18.5 | 96 | 23.9 | 139 | 28.2 | 156 | 27.1 | 169 | 25.6 | 174 | 22.5 |
| 5-9 | 89 | 24.2 | 84 | 20.1 | 99 | 20.1 | 133 | 23.1 | 154 | 23.3 | 193 | 25.0 |
| 10-15 | 135 | 36.8 | 149 | 37.1 | 166 | 33.7 | 193 | 33.6 | 217 | 32.9 | 248 | 32.1 |
| 16+ | 49 | 13.3 | 46 | 11.4 | 52 | 10.6 | 59 | 10.3 | 74 | 11.2 | 106 | 13.7 |
| TOTAL | 367 | | 402 | | 492 | | 575 | | 660 | | 772 | |

Numbers of Children and Young People in Care by Placement Type

| | 31 st March 2009 | | 31 st March 2010 | | 31 st March 2011 | | 31 st March 2012 | | 31 st March 2013 | | 31 st March 2014 | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Placed for adoption | 19 | 5.2 | 25 | 6.2 | 14 | 2.8 | 22 | 3.8 | 37 | 5.6 | 36 | 4.7 |
| Friends & Family | 28 | 7.6 | 24 | 6.0 | 27 | 5.5 | 34 | 5.9 | 44 | 6.7 | 44 | 5.7 |
| Internal foster care | 196 | 53.4 | 212 | 52.7 | 214 | 43.4 | 197 | 34.3 | 160 | 24.2 | 157 | 20.3 |
| Purchased foster care | 57 | 15.5 | 69 | 17.2 | 160 | 32.5 | 238 | 41.4 | 287 | 43.5 | 381 | 49.3 |
| Fostering Sub-Total | 300 | 81.7 | 330 | 82.1 | 415 | 84.3 | 491 | 85.4 | 528 | 80.0 | 618 | 80.0 |
| Secure | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 2 | 0.4 | 0 | -- | 6 | 0.9 | 2 | 0.3 |
| “Internal”* | 28 | 7.6 | 23 | 5.7 | 26 | 5.3 | 26 | 4.5 | 27 | 4.1 | 28 | 3.6 |
| “External” | 9 | 2.4 | 12 | 3.0 | 20 | 4.1 | 16 | 2.8 | 19 | 2.9 | 28 | 3.6 |
| Residential Sub-Total | 37 | 10.1 | 35 | 8.7 | 48 | 9.4 | 42 | 7.3 | 52 | 7.9 | 58 | 7.5 |
| Placed with parents | 19 | 5.2 | 22 | 5.5 | 21 | 4.3 | 30 | 5.2 | 52 | 7.9 | 56 | 7.2 |
| Independent living | 7 | 1.9 | 9 | 2.2 | 6 | 1.2 | 7 | 1.2 | 11 | 1.7 | 21 | 2.7 |
| NHS/Medical | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.2 | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 2 | 0.3 | 3 | 0.4 |
| Mother & Baby Unit | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 | 3 | 0.4 | 1 | 0.1 |
| YOI/Prison | 0 | -- | 4 | 1.0 | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 2 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.1 |
| Residential school | 2 | 0.5 | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 2 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.1 |
| Other | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 | 8 | 1.2 | 13 | 1.7 |
| TOTAL | 367 | | 402 | | 492 | | 575 | | 660 | | 772 | |

In terms the proportional use of different placement options, residential placements have decreased from 10.1% on 31st March 2009 to 7.5% on 31st March 2014. Fostering placements account for 80% of all placements and this has changed relatively little when comparing 31st March 2009 and the same date in 2014.

However, in terms of placement providers within these categories there has been a significant shift in the balance between “internal” and “external” provision. Residential has changed from a 3:1 ratio in favour of “internal” provision to a 1:1 ratio in March 2014. With regard to foster care (excluding Family and Friends) the ratio has changed from 3.4:1 in favour of internal foster care to 1:2.4 in favour of externally provided foster carers. (The number of LAC placed with external foster carers

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has increased over the 6 year period by 568%). There has also been an increase (+195%) in the number (and percentage) of LAC placed with parents 19 to 56.

There have also been positive increases in the number of children placed for adoption (+89%) and young people were in independent living placements (200%).

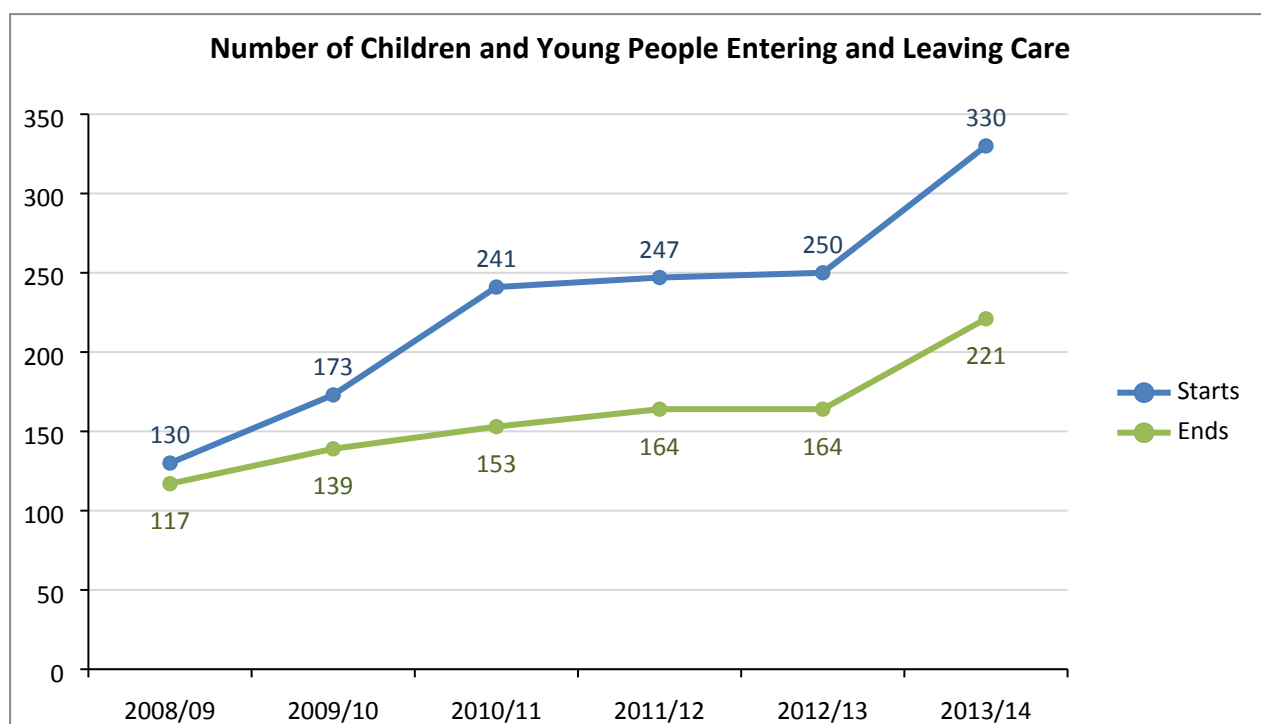
Number of Children in care by Ethnicity

| | 31 st March 2009 | | 31 st March 2010 | | 31 st March 2011 | | 31 st March 2012 | | 31 st March 2013 | | 31 st March 2014 | |
|---|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Asian / Brit - Bangladeshi | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.1 |
| Asian / Brit - Indian | 13 | 3.5 | 14 | 3.5 | 9 | 1.8 | 11 | 1.9 | 17 | 2.6 | 20 | 2.6 |
| Asian / Brit - Other Asian | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.1 | 6 | 0.8 |
| Asian / Brit - Pakistani | 0 | -- | 2 | 0.5 | 5 | 1.0 | 5 | 0.9 | 2 | 0.3 | 9 | 1.2 |
| Black / Brit - African | 2 | 0.5 | 4 | 1.0 | 2 | 0.4 | 5 | 0.9 | 12 | 1.8 | 22 | 2.8 |
| Black / Brit - Caribbean | 21 | 5.7 | 21 | 5.2 | 40 | 8.1 | 36 | 6.3 | 43 | 6.5 | 53 | 6.9 |
| Black / Brit - Other black | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.2 | 8 | 1.6 | 7 | 1.2 | 7 | 1.1 | 11 | 1.4 |
| Chinese | 4 | 1.1 | 4 | 1.0 | 6 | 1.2 | 3 | 0.5 | 3 | 0.4 | 3 | 0.4 |
| Declined to say | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 2 | 0.3 |
| Gypsy / Roma | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.1 | 1 | 0.1 |
| No information | 1 | 0.3 | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.2 | 3 | 0.5 | 5 | 0.8 | 2 | 0.3 |
| Mixed - other | 2 | 0.5 | 4 | 1.0 | 16 | 3.2 | 24 | 4.2 | 26 | 3.9 | 24 | 3.1 |
| Mixed - White/Asian | 13 | 3.5 | 8 | 2.0 | 9 | 1.8 | 11 | 1.9 | 13 | 2.0 | 15 | 1.9 |
| Mixed - White/ Black African | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 2 | 0.4 | 3 | 0.5 | 3 | 0.5 | 6 | 0.8 |
| Mixed - White/Black Carib | 39 | 10.6 | 37 | 9.2 | 38 | 7.7 | 50 | 8.7 | 57 | 8.6 | 68 | 8.8 |
| Other ethnic group | 16 | 4.4 | 16 | 4.0 | 16 | 3.2 | 10 | 1.7 | 28 | 4.2 | 28 | 3.6 |
| Traveller of Irish Heritage (CYP only) | 3 | 0.8 | 4 | 1.0 | 3 | 0.6 | 3 | 0.5 | 0 | -- | 0 | -- |
| White British | 248 | 67.6 | 282 | 70.1 | 328 | 66.7 | 392 | 68.2 | 429 | 65.0 | 490 | 63.5 |
| White - Other | 4 | 1.1 | 4 | 1.0 | 7 | 1.4 | 10 | 1.7 | 13 | 2.0 | 11 | 1.4 |
| TOTAL | 367 | | 402 | | 492 | | 575 | | 660 | | 772 | |

The overall rise in LAC numbers has been reflected in all ethnicity categories with the exception of Chinese and Traveller of Irish Heritage. Some of the increases in numbers have been relatively small and it should be borne in mind that the data in the table relates to “snapshots” taken on a particular day each year. The majority continue to be White British and whilst the numbers have increased, White British LAC proportionately made up a smaller element on 31st March 2014 (63.5%) than on the same date in 2009 (67.6%). In terms of proportional representation, there have been notable increases with regard to Pakistani, Black/British Other, and Mixed Other.

Entering and Leaving Care

Between 2009/10 and 2011/12 the gap between entries to and exits from care started to increase. The gap stabilised for two years but in 2013/14 the gap increased again. In 2014 Wolverhampton has initiated its Families r First Transformation Programme which going forward will have a significant impact in reducing the LAC population and its focus on this and promoting permanence will see this gap gradually reduced.



Number of Admissions to Care by Age Group

| Age (years) | 2008/09 | | 2009/10 | | 2010/11 | | 2011/12 | | 2012/13 | | 2013/14 | |
|--------------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Under 1 | 30 | 23.1 | 30 | 17.3 | 37 | 15.3 | 40 | 16.2 | 48 | 19.2 | 54 | 16.4 |
| 1-4 | 29 | 22.3 | 61 | 35.3 | 76 | 31.5 | 64 | 25.9 | 67 | 26.8 | 79 | 23.9 |
| 5-9 | 28 | 21.5 | 34 | 19.6 | 46 | 19.1 | 55 | 22.3 | 48 | 19.2 | 64 | 19.4 |
| 10-15 | 31 | 23.8 | 38 | 22.0 | 62 | 25.7 | 70 | 28.3 | 56 | 22.4 | 89 | 27.0 |
| 16+ | 12 | 9.2 | 10 | 5.8 | 20 | 8.3 | 18 | 7.3 | 31 | 12.4 | 44 | 13.3 |
| TOTAL | 130 | | 173 | | 241 | | 247 | | 250 | | 330 | |

Overall admissions to care have increased by 153% between 2008/9 and 2013/14. The age categories which have seen the biggest increases have been 16 years+ (267% - although this category has the lowest overall numbers), 10-15 years (187%) and 1-4 years (172%).

Number of children leaving care by duration of stay

| Duration of stay | | 2008/09 | | 2009/10 | | 2010/11 | | 2011/12 | | 2012/13 | | 2013/14 | |
|---------------------|---|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
| | | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Under 6 weeks | 6 | 15 | 12.8 | 28 | 20.1 | 37 | 24.2 | 35 | 21.3 | 27 | 16.5 | 49 | 22.2 |
| 6 weeks to 6 months | | 17 | 14.5 | 28 | 20.1 | 20 | 13.1 | 37 | 22.6 | 23 | 14.0 | 44 | 19.9 |
| 6 months to 1 year | | 6 | 5.1 | 19 | 13.4 | 16 | 10.5 | 21 | 12.8 | 20 | 12.2 | 22 | 9.9 |
| 1 year to 3 years | | 29 | 25.0 | 28 | 20.1 | 46 | 30.1 | 37 | 22.6 | 51 | 31.1 | 62 | 28.0 |
| 3 years to 5 years | | 14 | 12.0 | 20 | 14.4 | 11 | 7.2 | 15 | 9.1 | 16 | 9.8 | 23 | 10.4 |
| Over 5 years | 5 | 36 | 30.1 | 16 | 11.5 | 23 | 15.0 | 19 | 11.6 | 27 | 16.5 | 21 | 9.5 |
| TOTAL | | 117 | | 139 | | 153 | | 164 | | 164 | | 221 | |

In overall terms the number of children and young people leaving care has risen by 88% between 2008/09 and 2013/14. The number and proportion of children and young people leaving care after being looked after for 1 year or less has increased. In 2008/09 32% of children leaving care had been in care for 1 year or less compared to 52% in 2013/14.

The number of children and young people leaving care after 5 years or more was considerably less in 2013/14 compared to 2008/09 (long term comparison) but approximately the same as 2011/12 (mid term comparison).

Number of children leaving care by reason for leaving:

| Reason for Leaving | 2008/09 | | 2009/10 | | 2010/11 | | 2011/12 | | 2012/13 | | 2013/14 | |
|--|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Care taken over by another local authority | 1 | 0.8 | 1 | 0.7 | 2 | 1.3 | 3 | 1.9 | 0 | -- | 0 | -- |
| Returned home | 38 | 32.5 | 71 | 51.1 | 80 | 52.3 | 90 | 56.2 | 74 | 45.1 | 104 | 47.1 |
| Move to independent living | 13 | 11.1 | 8 | 5.7 | 9 | 5.9 | 7 | 4.4 | 6 | 3.6 | 1 | 0.4 |
| Transferred to Adult Social Care | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- |
| Sentenced to custody | 2 | 1.7 | 1 | 0.7 | 4 | 2.6 | 0 | -- | 1 | 0.6 | 4 | 1.8 |
| Reached 18 th birthday | 28 | 23.9 | 21 | 15.1 | 23 | 15.0 | 20 | 12.5 | 21 | 12.8 | 34 | 15.4 |
| Adopted | 24 | 20.5 | 19 | 13.7 | 21 | 13.7 | 21 | 13.1 | 36 | 21.9 | 50 | 22.6 |
| Residence Order granted | 1 | 0.8 | 4 | 2.9 | 4 | 2.6 | 9 | 5.6 | 7 | 4.3 | 2 | 0.9 |
| Special Guardianship granted | 5 | 4.3 | 7 | 5.0 | 7 | 4.6 | 8 | 4.9 | 17 | 10.4 | 24 | 10.8 |
| Any other reason | 5 | 4.3 | 7 | 5.0 | 3 | 2.0 | 6 | 3.6 | 2 | 1.2 | 2 | 0.9 |
| TOTAL | 117 | | 139 | | 153 | | 164 | | 164 | | 221 | |

Between 2008/09 and 2013/14 there were notable increases in the numbers of children and young people leaving care via adoption and Special Guardianship Orders. "Returning home", has been the most prevalent reason for children and young people leaving care year on year across the time period.

3. CURRENT PROVISION

FOSTERING

Fostering placement needs have continued to be met by the provision of both internal and external service provision. However, the ability to increase the internal foster carer pool has failed to keep pace with the rapid rate of increase in LAC population and therefore there has been a significant increase in the use of Independent Foster Care agencies to find placements.

Internal Fostering

As highlighted above the use of internal foster cares has declined. This reflects the fact that the overall pool of internal foster carers available has declined. The recruitment of new foster carers has continued to be a priority for the Council and there has been some success in this but the need to recruit even more foster carers remains a priority

The Council's foster care service has been restructured as part of the wider restructuring of Looked After Children's Services. The service fulfils a number of functions which include:

- Recruitment, initial contact, training, and assessment of foster carers which is delivered by a mixed model of service disciplines including the local authority's Marketing and Communications team and City Direct.
- Support and development which includes supervision, post approval training and support to temporary, permanent, and family and friends foster carers. In addition, assessments are carried out for existing foster carers who wish to consider permanent placements for children who are in their care. Again there is a mix of service provision with Heantun Care contracted to provide a peer-led support which includes a 24/7 helpline and a buddying scheme
- Family finding for permanency which identifies permanent families and assessing them for children who are requiring permanent placements with foster families.
- Family and Friends which provides training, assessment, development and support to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) foster carers.

In addition, both internal fostering and residential services are supported by the Placement Team which seeks to source the best matched fostering and residential placements for looked after children and young people.

External Purchased Fostering

With the rising LAC population the use of foster carers from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) has also risen significantly (by 568% - 31st March 2009 compared to

31 March 2014). Over the last three years Wolverhampton has used 44 IFAs to provide placements with the overwhelming majority (86%) being sourced from the regional foster care framework of which Wolverhampton is a part.

RESIDENTIAL

Residential placement needs have continued to be met by a mix of both “internal” and “external” placement options. On 31st March 2014 there were 51% more residential placements compared to the same date in in 2009. The size of “internal” provision has remained relatively constant over that time period (despite some changes noted below) and therefore the increased demand has been met by accessing “external” residential placements.

Internal Residential

On the 1st April 2014 “internal” residential provision consisted of 29 places which were provided under three categories of provision:

- Homes owned and managed by the Council
- Homes owned by the Council but managed by an external provider
- Homes owned and managed by and external provider working under a block contract

| Service Name | Provider | Units |
|-----------------------|--|--------------|
| Red Gables | City Council (owned and managed) | 6 |
| Upper Pendeford Farm | City Council (owned and managed) | 6 |
| Merridale Street West | City Council premises/service delivery - Advanced Child Care | 4 |
| The Wergs | City Council premises/service delivery - Advanced Child Care | 4 |
| Stafford Road | Advanced Child Care (Block Contract) | 4 |
| Brooklands Parade | Advanced Child Care (Block Contract) | 5 |
| Total | | 29 |

However, the Council has subsequently reviewed and agreed a strategic plan to change the Councils approach to residential care in general and its “internal” provision in particular. The plan aims to support the drive to increase the proportion of LAC who are placed in family settings and reduce the use of residential

placements. This will result in the phased decommissioning of the two homes owned and managed by the Council and the termination of the block contracts in relation to The Wergs, Stafford Road and Brooklands Parade. The arrangements for Merridale Street West will continue as this home provides for the needs of looked after children and young people with very complex needs.

External residential

Whilst the number of “internal” residential placements has remained static over the last three years the use of externally provided has increased by 211% (9 on 31st March 2010 compared to 28 on 31st March 2014). Over the last three years Wolverhampton has used 22 external residential placement providers who have been sourced from the regional residential framework.

Adoption and Permanence

In terms of recruitment and initial training of adopters Wolverhampton has been involved in developing Adoption Black Country (ABC) which is a sub-regional joint venture approach to adoption with the other three Black Country local authorities (Dudley, Sandwell, and Walsall). This collaborative approach to recruiting and training adopters was further enhanced recently by the opportunities provided by the Adoption Reform Grant.

The Council’s Adoption Team has three elements: Family Finding, Adoption Social Work and Recruitment. The Team provides a range of services including counselling, information, advice and training to help adopters meet the needs of their adoptive children.

In terms of other forms of permanence there has been a marked increase in Special Guardianship Orders granted, rising from 5 in 2008/09 to 24 in 2013/14, a 380% increase. This will continue to be a key area of work for the Council.

Leaving Care Provision/Independent Living

The Council’s LAC Transitions Team became operational as a multi-disciplinary team in July 2012. It works with looked after children and care leavers aged 14 to 25 years and aims to improve outcomes for these young people by providing them with earlier and better structured preparation for adult life. The emphasis on starting to prepare young people for adult life at an earlier stage affords them opportunity to develop at their own pace. Young people are encouraged from 14 to think about their post 18 options and to identify what they need to achieve to meet their goal whether this be going to university, living independently or ‘staying put’ with their carers’.

The Transition Team members work in close collaboration with specialists in housing support and education, training and employment to meet young people's needs. Young people themselves are encouraged to actively participate at both levels as we are committed to promote their influence in their own individual plans and in the development of the service.

The service faces challenges linked to the rising LAC population and the consequent increase in young people who are eligible for after care services. The number of properties available to the service has increased over recent years but the decommissioning of the Council's two residential homes will mean that 4 semi-independent living options will no longer be available. New policies such as Staying Put will place further expectations on the service.

The Council has also commissioned alternative supported housing options. For example YMCA is contracted to provide a supported lodging scheme which continues to expand its capacity. In past service has been under-utilised because of social workers lack of awareness of service and perceptions that carers would not be able to manage the level of complexity of many LAC. However, awareness raising initiatives have been undertaken which have resulted in a growing recognition that the service can meet a wider range of needs.

4. CONCLUSIONS/THE FUTURE

The Families r First Transformation Programme which has been introduced in the last 12 months has at its heart the principle of supporting children and young people to live and grow up in their own families wherever it is safe to do so. The expected result of the implementation of this programme over the next few years is that the LAC population will reduce from its current levels and thus will have a positive quantitative impact in terms of placement requirements. The Families r First Programme is also concerned with ensuring that children and young people who are admitted to care have their needs met, enjoy stable placements and that permanence plans are in place and actively pursued. Whilst the next three years will see added impetus to the desire to increase "internal" placement options, Wolverhampton's continuing collaborative working on a regional and sub-regional basis, especially through framework agreements will ensure that there is access to a large and varied market of providers which gives confidence that a match between LAC needs and placement services can be found.

There is a clear link and synergy between Families r First and the Sufficiency Strategy the aims of which for LAC are:

Overall

- To have as wide a range of placement options as possible in order to make the best possible match with the needs of LAC
- To maximise the use of family based placements

Fostering

- Continue with a mixed economy of placement provision but to grow and diversify the internal pool of foster carers so that there is less reliance on external provision
- Restructure and expand the internal foster care “offer” including increasing the number emergency foster carers and introducing a specialist foster care service
- Maintain and develop our relationship with external providers via a regional framework agreement

Residential

- Safely reduce the use of residential placements
- Decommission the 2 children’s homes owned and managed by the Council
- Terminate the majority of block contracts with external provider
- Maintain “internal” complex needs provision
- Maintain and develop our relationship with external providers via both a regional framework agreement and through direct contact

Adoption and permanence

- Increase number of LAC adopted
- Continue to develop the sub-regional Adoption Black Country arrangements (partnership with a Voluntary Adoption Agency)
- Increase the use of Special Guardianship Orders and residence Orders where appropriate
- Reduce number of LAC placed with parents by ensuring clear permanence plans are in place and actioned

Independent Living/Transition (giving LAC the best chances for transition to adulthood)

- Further develop independent living/transition services
- Maintain and seek to develop a range of placement options which meet the individual needs (maturity, resilience, life skills) of older LAC and give them the best chance of a smooth transition to adulthood

These key themes will form the basis for a Sufficiency Strategy Implementation Plan which will be used to monitor the achievement of the Strategy’s aims.