

Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2016 - 2017

London Borough of Merton

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Executive summary

This annual Sufficiency Statement is a needs analysis which helps us to deliver our commitment to making available the widest range of placements in order to support the individual needs of our looked after children and care leavers.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of looked after children in their community. This duty is supported by statutory guidance that makes it clear that children should live in the local authority area, with access to local services and close to their friends and family, when it is safe to do so.

The guidance emphasises that 'having the right placement in the right place, at the right time', with the necessary support services such as education and health in place, is crucial in improving placement stability, which leads to better outcomes for looked after children.

This Sufficiency Statement informs and therefore should be understood within the context of Merton's strategic priorities for looked after children and care leavers as summarised in;

- Children and Young People's Plan
- Looked After Children Strategy
- Care Leavers Strategy
- Annual Corporate Parenting Report(s)

Needs analysis 2014/15 key summary

Merton's rate of children looked after per 10,000 population has remained stable over the last five years (between 30-34 LAC per 10,000 population). We remain within range of our comparable statistical neighbours and low compared to London and National benchmarks.

However, our actual numbers of children in care each year has risen by 16% over the last five years from 220 children in 2010/11 to 255 children in 2014/15. This has placed additional demands on our placement budget. We have alleviated some of this additional demand by recruiting 36 new in house foster carers in the same period.

The reasons for the increase in Looked after Children are complex but include heightened national awareness of children's safeguarding, an increasing birth rate and more general demographic changes.

So far as practicable in all circumstances the authority is required to find a placement for each Looked after Child which;

- Distance:
 - Is near the child's home;
 - Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable
- Siblings: Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- Equalities: Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child;
- Education: Does not disrupt his/her education or training;

In the absence of national benchmarks and looking at the contributory factors, Merton is doing well in providing sufficient placements to meet the needs of some groups of looked after children. During the year Merton made 377 placements for 255 looked after children.

Of the children that were placed in provision with an Ofsted judgement, 95% were placed in Good or Outstanding provision. (31st March 2015, 130/137)

- Outstanding - 4% of children placed (5cyp)
- Good – 91% of children placed (125cyp)
- Requires improvement/adequate – 5% of children placed (7cyp)
- Inadequate – 0% (0cyp)

Distance

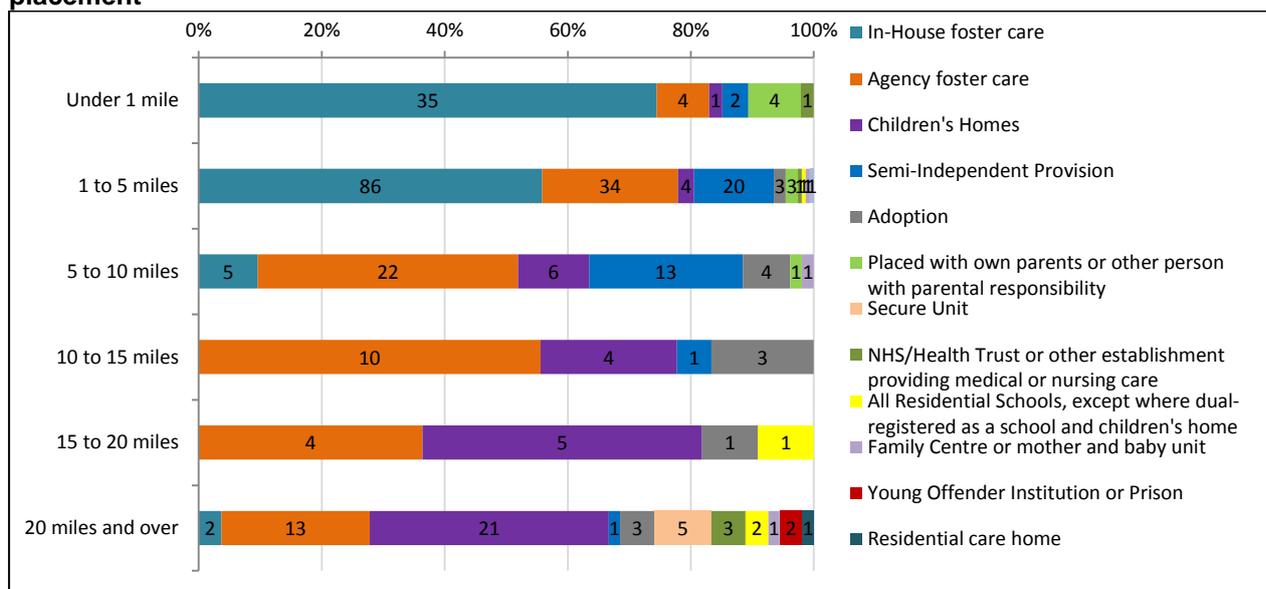
There are two nationally reported measures associated to placement distance, 'percentage placed in and out of borough and percentage placed over 20 miles'.

- Of all our placements made 16% were over 20 miles away.
- Of all our children placed 32% were placed in borough, although this seems low we are a small borough and this increases the challenge to provide placements within the borough boundary.
- In fact 60% of children were placed within 5 miles of their home address and 75% were placed within 10 miles. 41% of our in-house foster carers are not based in Merton
- We recruited 10 new foster carer families in 2014/15. All are within 5 miles of Merton and 6 were approved to offer placements to teenagers (a key need identified in our last plan).

Looked after children live away from their home authority for many reasons; Some need to be out of area to help keep them safe from dangerous influences closer to home. Others need the kind of specialist support that is not available in all local authority areas. Some looked after children are moved out so that they can live with brothers and sisters, or be cared for by relatives who are approved as foster carers.

We are committed to good placement stability, therefore where we place a child in Agency Foster Care Provision if the child is settled and happy we may decide not to remove them in spite of the cost implications to the authority. During 2014/15, fifteen of our looked after children were placed for adoption with permanent families outside of Merton. In this instance, distance from Merton is not the most significant factor as adoption will enable them to become permanent members of a family elsewhere. Five looked after children were placed in hospital and five within the criminal justice system. There are no secure units or young offenders institutions within the area and Health England has limited resources for young people with acute mental health difficulties. There are also no residential schools in borough and we had four children placed outside of Merton in stable residential placements.

Figure 1: Placement Distance from Home for all placements during 2014-15 by type of placement¹



Source: SSSA903 2014/15

¹ Excludes 41 placements where home address was not available – cases relating to UASC and those with no fixed abode

We can see from the graph above that the further away placements are the more specialist they tend to be and thus able to meet the needs of our most complex children

Education

Good practice also involves assessing whether placements allow a child to continue to attend their education or training and community contacts.

- Our Virtual School works with all looked after children placed both within and outside of Merton to support them with all aspects of their education.
- During the academic year 2014/15 only 14 children had to move their educational setting as a direct result of a placement move. This equates to 14% of the Merton LAC school roll (101 CYP, June 2015).
- The ART placement team and the Virtual School continue to work effectively together to minimise days lost during disruption.
- Findings from our Foster Carers Survey highlight that 92% of respondents felt the supported delivered by Merton's Virtual School was good or excellent. Additional 90% felt the child placed with them attended a school which was good or excellent.

Health

We know that when we move children a long way from Merton, they have more difficulty in accessing specialist health services.

- We have a protocol in place to ensure that our looked after children are able to access mental health services in a timely way where necessary if they are placed outside of Merton
- Our looked after children's nurse maintains contact with all looked after children, both within and outside of Merton

Sibling groups

We are required to enable children to live with their siblings where it is in the best interest of the children involved. We have successfully targeted previous In-house foster carer recruitment campaigns to attract foster carers willing to take family groups.

- During 2014/15 of the 255 children looked after 69 belonged to 29 sibling groups.
- 76% of the sibling groups were placed together, 22 of 29.
- Two thirds of the sibling groups were placed together within 5 miles of their home (15 out of 22 sibling groups placed together; 68%)
- 91% of sibling groups were placed together within 10 miles of home (20 out of 22 sibling groups placed together)
- 35% of our In-House foster carers are approved to take sibling groups

Equalities and disabilities

Merton's LAC gender distributions are similar to national averages, in that we (as nationally) have more boys than girls in care. However, there is still an over-representation of boys in our care compared to nationally (62% of Merton LAC are boys compared to 55% nationally as at 31 March 2015). Merton also has an over representation of older children in care, 38% of our LAC are aged 16 and over compared to 22% nationally (as at the 31st March 2015).

Drilling down we are able to evidence that a significant number of the boys in our care are teenagers. In fact 68% of our over 16s are boys, half of whom are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (32 in 2014/15). Other reasons for supporting such a large group of teenagers in Merton include breakdown of family relationships and a group of young people who become looked after by being remanded into the criminal justice system.

Nearly two-thirds of all placements made during 2014-15 were for children aged 12 or over (230 out of 377 placements; 61%), maintaining good levels of suitable provision for teenagers remains a key priority.

The majority of children looked after in Merton are from a white background reflective of the general Merton population. There are fewer Asian or Asian British (8%) than the “all persons” Merton population. Mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black or Black British heritage and ‘other ethnic groups’ have looked after children proportions greater than the resident population. Just over half of all placements during 2014-15 were for children from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds (206 out of 377 placements; 55%)

One in five placements were commissioned to care for disabled looked after children (80 out of 377 placements; 21%). Disabilities identified range from mild to the most complex as reported in the Child in Need record.

User Voice

Our User Voice Strategy 2014-16 states that we have the highest ambitions for all our children and young people, and that we judge our success by a range of criteria including being able to demonstrate that the views and ambitions of children and young people have informed and improved our service offer.

This year’s LAC Sufficiency Statement is informed by the following ‘User voice’ activity;

- Foster Carers Experiences 2015 (survey)*
- Young People’s Views on Placements (survey January – March 2015)**
- Independent Advocacy Service feedback
- Children in Care Council
- Independent Reviewing Officer Review feedback
- Complaints/Compliments

***The Foster Carer Survey 2015** captured foster carers’ views on the recruitment, retention and support services delivered to them by our fostering services, in order to identify good practice and areas for improvement. All 55 fostering households (as at March 2015), were contacted to take part in the survey using an electronic tool. 32 households completed the survey delivering a response rate of 58%; the survey was adapted from the Fostering Network national survey tool.

- *100% of carers say they would recommend fostering in Merton.*
- *92% rated the quality of training available to them as good or excellent.*
- *All carers have a personal development plan and access to training and supervision;*
- *However of the Carers who took children outside of their approval age range (18% of respondents) - 60% said that they received either partial or no support. This group also identified that helpful support included the out-of-hours service, and financial support for challenging placements.*
- *It should be noted that 86% of all respondents rated the Out of Hours service as good or excellent, compared to 44% nationally.*
- *36% of respondents reported not having adequate information about the child at the time of placement and 17% identified lack of information about the care plan. We must improve the quality of referral information that the foster carer receives and ensure that placement plans are available in a timely manner.*
- *97% rated their supervising social worker as good or excellent, compared to 73% nationally. 97% stated that they saw their supervising social worker at least every 6 weeks*
- *80% rated the child’s social worker as good or excellent, compared to 50% from the survey in 2012.*

****The ‘Young People’s views of placements’** report is a summary of 35 children and young people’s views as recorded by their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) during the

LAC review process. The vast majority of respondents - 86% - were aged 13 and over with the remaining 14% aged from 7-12 years. Thirty four per cent of respondents were placed with agency foster care, 31% with in-house foster care, 17% in semi-independent housing and the remaining 17% representing placements in residential children's homes, connected persons, and secure units. Below are key responses.

- *I am happy in my placement – 80%*
- *I am well looked after in my placement – 91%*
- *I am shown respect and treated with dignity – 80%*
- *I feel safe – 85%*

Areas progressed in 2014/15

Fostering

Research shows that children usually thrive from being part of a family group and for this reason, we consider fostering as a first option for our looked after children. We remain committed to improving our number of in house carers to ensure best choice and value to the Council. In 2014/15 we:

- Recruited 10 new foster carer families within 5 miles of Merton, 6 of whom are approved to offer placements to teenagers
- Undertook 5 preparation training groups for prospective foster carers
- Continued to involve our looked after young people and care leavers in delivering preparation training for our prospective foster carers and being involved in the assessment process
- Continued with targeted fostering recruitment campaigns to meet the needs of our young people based on the Sufficiency Strategy 2014/15
- Developed a good quality tracking processes to ensure we are providing suitable care to young people who need this
- Developed a Staying Put policy to enable our young people to remain in their placements post 18.
- Appointed to our specialist CAMHS posts to offer support to looked after children

Children's Homes

There are a small number of young people for whom it will be difficult to provide stability through a family based placement. As there are no mainstream Children's Homes of a good quality within the Merton area, we have always had to place our young people further away than we would like. In 2014/15 we have:

- Worked closely with existing providers to ensure best quality and value for money
- Begun to explore options around procuring a Children's Home in Merton
- Formed links with a new provider who is planning to open a Children's Home in Merton
- Begun to work with a voluntary organisation (Action for Children) with a Children's Home in a neighbouring borough which is planning to change approval to take young people with more challenging behaviours.
- Developed tracking processes to ensure we are using Children's Homes placements for the right young people.

Semi-Independent Provision

For young people aged 16+, semi-independent provision offers a level of independence and can support young people prior to a move into independent living. We have been keen to develop links in this area and, as this is an unregulated market, we have a duty to ensure good quality as well as best value. During 2014/15 we have:

- Developed a financial framework for providers of semi-independent accommodation
- Developed a quality assurance framework to ensure quality of provision
- Worked with specific providers of semi-independent and housing provision (Grenfell Housing and Notting Hill Housing Trust) to develop provision within Merton and to increase the menu of options of for care leavers
- Developed tracking processes to ensure we are using the placement we commission to continue to meet the needs of our young people and care leavers and support them towards independent living.

Other Relevant areas

As well as direct work with providers, in 2014/15 we have:

- Continued to work with colleagues in the South West London consortium for looked after children, sharing information and commissioning tools to procure good quality best value placements
- Continued to work with the South East London Commissioning Consortium to work with providers to provide discount for placements on a consortium basis.
- Become more involved in the South London SEN commissioning consortium, including being successful in securing a Go Procurement award and a DCLG grant towards setting up a dynamic purchasing system to ensure more efficient commissioning of independent school placements.

Future Plans

- A. Recruit 20 new In-House foster carers of which 10 should be targeted to teenagers (aged 12 – 15)
- B. Recruit as many carers within the Merton boundary so that our young people do not have to move away from the area.
- C. Recruit In house foster cares approved to take on short term (one month or less) emergency placements and those able to take on long term placements (1 year plus).
- D. Recruit younger foster carers able to replace carers to be lost through retirement and other reasons
- E. Review all existing In-house foster carer approvals to build in further flexibility specifically with regards to 'range of care provided' and aged of children able to care for
- F. Reinforce the need for quality referrals from all social workers to enable good placement selection in response to Foster Carers feedback
- G. Continue to explore the development of a Children's Home within Merton so that we are able to meet the needs of our young people in a high quality commissioned service in the local area.
- H. Work with existing and new Childrens Homes providers within 5 miles of Merton to develop closer commissioning relationships.
- I. Work closely with well-developed semi-independent and housing providers to encourage them to consider the options of supporting young people within Merton.

Policy context

In compliance with the statutory 'sufficiency duty' Merton's Sufficiency Statement sets out our strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our Looked After Children.

The sufficiency duty is understood in the context of the local authority duty under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989. The overriding factor is that placements must be the most appropriate placement available. Next, preference must be given to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a placement must be found, so far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:

- Is near the child's home;
- Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.
- Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- Does not disrupt his/her education or training;

Merton's Sufficiency Statement is also in compliance with the 2010 Sufficiency Statutory Guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for Looked after Children. The guidance implements Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 (inserted by Section 9 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) which requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children within their local authority area.

The 2010 guidance states that local authorities should have embedded plans for the 'sufficiency duty' as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, should be in a position to secure where reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children in their area.

Under the Equality Duty 2010, all local authorities have a statutory duty to consider and mitigate against any potential negative impact of services, policies, and procedures on people with 'protected characteristics'. The characteristics relevant to this policy are age, disability, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation.

Merton's Sufficiency Statement also takes into account UN Convention on the Rights of the Child especially, but not exclusively article 8 – preservation of identity; article 12 – respect for the views of the child; article 20 – children deprived of a family; article 28 – right to education.

Background information

Merton the place

Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 3,180 (7%) by 2017, within which we forecast a 20% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (2,270 CYP). We have a younger population than the England average and have seen a 39% net increase of births over the last ten years (2,535 births in 2002 rising to 3,521 in 2010). The birth rate reduced in 2012/13 and again slightly in 2013/14 suggesting that the rate is stabilising. However the last ten years alongside other demographic factors has placed additional demand on all children's services.

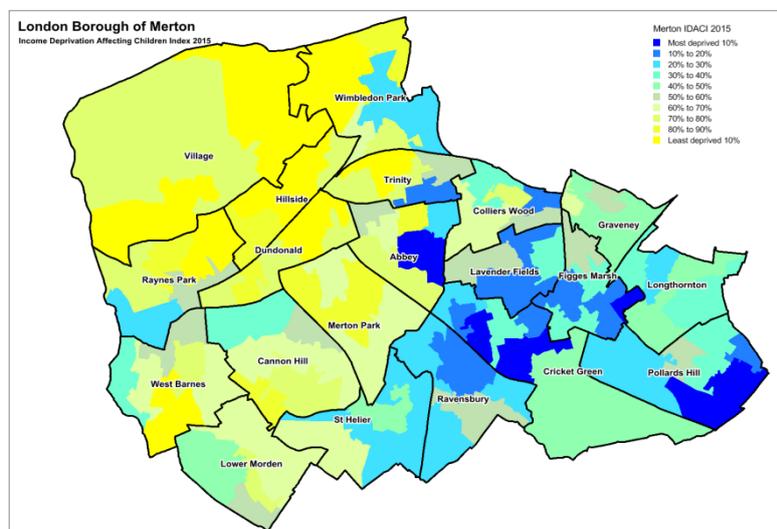
Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres; Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden. A characteristic of the borough is the difference between the more deprived east (Mitcham/Morden) and the more affluent west (Wimbledon).

There are a number of pockets of deprivation within the borough mainly in the eastern wards and some smaller pockets in the central wards. These wards have multiple deprivation, with high scores on income deprivation, unemployment and limited educational attainment.

Figure 2: Map of Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index Merton (IDACI 2015) Source: IDACI 2015

Since 2010 we have seen an increase of 31% of children who are eligible for free school meals (2010, 2881 FSM children, 2015, 3796 FSM children).

Thirty five per cent of Merton's total population is Black, Asian or Minority ethnic (BAME) - this is expected to increase further to 39% by 2017. Pupils in Merton schools are more diverse still, with 66% from BAME communities, 42% with a first language which is not English, speaking over 124 languages (2015).



The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities, Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents. The most prominent first languages for pupils apart from English are Tamil 5.7%, Urdu 5.8% and Polish 5.7%. The number of pupils with Special Educational Needs is also increasing, with SEN statements/EHC plans rising from 668 in January 2011 to 880 in January 2015 (an increase of 32%).

Merton’s Strategic Framework and Governance

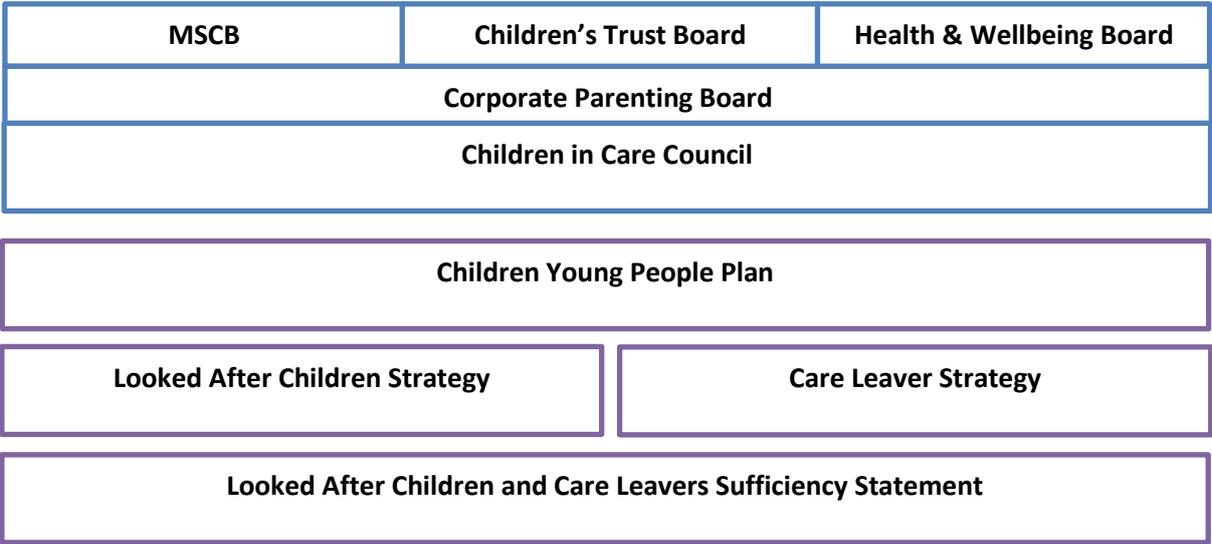
This Looked after Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency statement informs our Strategic plans, commissioning and procurement functions.

Our Children and Young People’s Plan sets out our ambitions for all our children and particularly those most vulnerable to poorer outcomes. The LAC Strategy and Care Leavers strategy, which are both endorsed and by the Children’s Trust, the Merton Safeguarding Children’s Board and the Corporate Parenting Board provider further focus for our collective ambitions. Placement Stability and Choice is one of eight key strategic priorities in Merton’s Looked after Children Strategy.

Looked After Children Strategy Strategic Priorities

1. Improving the **timeliness of care proceedings**
2. Improving **placement stability and choice**
3. Improving **educational outcomes** for Looked After Children
4. Supporting good **health outcomes** for Looked After Children
5. Encouraging **participation and positive activities**
6. Understanding the needs of and supporting **LAC in particular circumstance**
7. **Achieving permanency**
8. Supporting our **Care leavers** *(see also Care Leavers Strategy)*

The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members this chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton, ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our priorities.



Our Corporate Parenting responsibilities

The Children Act 1989 and the Leaving Care Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to protect children from suffering significant harm and to provide continued financial and transition support to care leavers aged up to 21 (or 25 if in full time education).

When a child comes into care, the council becomes the Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term ‘Corporate Parent’ means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council. Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people who are looked after and the services that they receive. This Sufficiency statement informs the Corporate

Parenting board of the numbers, characteristics and needs of looked after children and care leavers and an analysis of how effectively Merton is serving it's looked after population through the provision of appropriate placements.

Principles

Merton's services for Looked After Children form part of a comprehensive continuum of support for children and young people who may be facing difficulties at home. These range from family support, intensive community interventions, or permanent substitute care. In taking this approach we are committed to ensuring that the right children enter care and that their experiences are positive and opportunities many.

Services for Looked After children are delivered in accordance with the following principles:

- Safeguarding children is the paramount consideration and levels of risk are always thoroughly assessed.
- In terms of their experience of being cared for Looked After Children are the best experts we have, and we value their views. At every stage of planning, service delivery or change we will listen to what they say and act accordingly, providing access to advocacy support and an Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Alternatives to care will be considered before a child becomes looked after. This means ensuring that Merton's Early Intervention and Prevention processes and services effectively support families to prevent children from going into care.
- Services will offer support to families where a child has been returned to their care after being looked after for a period.
- Where a child does have to be cared for away from their family, placement decisions will be made on the basis of a thorough assessment of their needs.
- In this case, first consideration will be given to care provided through extended family or friends, and placement decisions will take into account the need to be near to family, friends and other support.
- We aim to make available the widest range of placements within or near Merton borough, in order to meet the individual needs of our Looked After Children, and to increase the chance of continuing in the same school, and having appropriate contact with their family and friends.
- Placement provision and placement planning will take into account children and young people's needs in terms of the equalities 'protected characteristics' – age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- Once a decision is made to look after a child this will be for as short a period as possible taking into account their best interests
- Decisions to find alternative and permanent placements for the child will be made within the shortest possible timescales.
- Where a child cannot go home, planning for permanence will always include consideration of adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement orders, thus reducing the role of the state in children's lives
- Where children remain looked after long-term, the overall aim will be to replicate the stability and level of care that any good parent would provide to their child, so as to give the child every chance of success.

Needs Analysis and Sufficiency review 2014/15

Overview of placements during 2014/15

In line with continuous improvement principles, the LAC Sufficiency Statement was reviewed this year's with a new approach agreed to support a greater understanding of placement needs. This 2014/15 needs analysis has reviewed all placements made during the financial year, identifying provision needs to guide commissioning and procurement.

Table 3: Demographics of Merton looked after children placed during 2014/15

All placements (2014-15)		No. of children	All placements (2014-15)		No. of children
Age at placement start date	Under 1 year	18	Ethnicity	White	115
	1 to 4 years	26		Mixed	31
	5 to 11 years	64		Asian	23
	12 to 15 years	78		Black	61
	16 years and over	86		Other	25
Total (no duplicates)		255	Total		255
Gender	Male	159	Disability	Disabled	57
	Female	96		Non-Disabled	198
Total		255	Total		255

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

There are thirteen types of placement provision as listed in the table below. During 2014/15, 255 looked after children were placed in 377 placements. The majority of children who came into care during the year were placed with our In House Foster Carers; this was an improvement on last year.

Table 4: Number of placements by placement type 2014/15 with 2013/14 benchmark²

Type of placement	2013-14			2014-15			Difference	
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements
In-House foster care	118	140	39%	131	149	40%	13	9
Agency foster care	72	78	22%	79	90	24%	7	12
Children's Homes	19	24	7%	26	41	11%	7	17
Semi-Independent Provision	36	45	13%	43	53	14%	7	8
Adoption	12	12	3%	15	15	4%	3	3
Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	14	14	4%	8	8	2%	-6	-6
Secure Unit	2	2	1%	3	5	1%	1	3
NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care	8	9	3%	5	5	1%	-3	-4
All Residential Schools, except where dual-registered as a school and children's home	3	3	1%	4	4	1%	1	1
Family Centre or mother and baby unit	8	8	2%	3	3	1%	-5	-5
Young Offender Institution or Prison	8	9	3%	2	2	1%	-6	-7
Residential care home	1	1	0%	1	1	0%	0	0
Independent Living	12	14	4%	1	1	0%	-11	-13
Total	250	359	100%	255	377	100%	5	18

Source: SSDA903 2013-14 & 2014-15

² Excludes short break and missing episodes

Of the children that were placed in provision with an Ofsted judgement, 95% were placed in Good or Outstanding provision. (31st March 2015, 130/137).

- Outstanding - 4% of children placed (5cyp)
- Good – 91% of children placed (125cyp)
- Requires improvement/adequate – 5% of children placed (7cyp)
- Inadequate – 0% (0cyp)

In the following chapters each of the main 'placement type' have been reviewed by the demographic characteristic of the children placed and by distance. All tables include a comparison between the specific placement cohort and the overall placement cohort (referred to as 'All Placements' throughout).

Foster Placements

A Foster Placement is provided by Foster Carers approved either by Merton Council (In House) or by an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). Merton approved foster carers can live either within Merton or outside. Most are within close travelling distance of Merton. Some are approved as Connected Persons for a specific named child or young person. Foster Carers approved by an Independent Fostering Agency may live in Merton or outside of the borough. Some may live a distance from the borough boundary.

Key Findings: In-House Foster Care	Key Findings: Agency Foster Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 149 In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 (40% of all placements during 2014-15) • 94% of In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 located within 5 miles of home address (121 out of 128 placements matched) • Two thirds of In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 located in Merton LA (94 out of 149 placements; 63%) • One-third of Looked After Children placed in an In-House foster placement as at 31 March 2015 had been in the same placement for 1 year or longer (22 out of 68 children; 32%) • 40% of In-House foster care placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted for less than 1 month (32 out of 81 placements ceased) • Nearly half of In-House foster care placements for children aged over 12 years old at placement start date (68 out of 149 placements; 46%) • 14 sibling groups placed together in In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 (24% of all placements during 2014-15) • Two-thirds of Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 located within 10 miles of home address (60 out of 87 placements; 69%) • Majority of Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 located outside of LA (76 out of 90 placements; 84%) • 60% of Looked After Children placed in Agency foster care placements as at 31 March 2015 had been in the same placement for 1 year or longer (24 out of 40 children) • One-quarter of Agency foster care placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted for 1 year or longer (12 out of 50 placements ceased; 24%) • Higher prevalence of Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 for children aged over 12 years old than In-House foster care placements (57% compared to 46% of In-House foster care placements) • Eight sibling groups placed together in Agency foster care placements during 2014-15

What we need to do:

- We will continue to target our recruitment of foster carers to provide more carers for teenagers aged 12+ of either gender. The recruitment target for 2015/16 target is 20 carers with at least 10 for target groups of teenagers. Recruiting foster carers for teenagers is a challenge as there is a competitive market with IFAs and other local authorities also trying to build up their own provision.
- Although we will recruit for our target group we are also aware that we need to ensure Merton will have enough carers for the long term to cover all ages. This includes ensuring that we have carers in the younger age group to replace those who will retire in the near future.
- We are confident that we are able to promote Merton as the local authority of choice for prospective foster carers by offering:
 - a) quick, well managed recruitment processes and assessments
 - b) good quality support to our carers
 - c) regular review to ensure competitive fostering rates in relation to local neighbours

Use of Foster Care

The proportion of Merton LAC placed in own provision (In-House foster placements) has improved from 35% in 2012 to 46% as at the end of March 2015. This is in line with our Statistical neighbours and the London benchmark. Increasing Merton's own provision offer (realised through greater numbers of In House foster carers being recruited) remains both a priority and a challenge.

Table 5: Percentage of Children Looked After placed in Own Provision against comparator data (as at 31 March: 2012-2015)

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Merton	35%	46%	40%	46%
London	45%	45%	46%	DNA
Outer London	47%	47%	47%	DNA
Statistical Neighbours	47%	47%	47%	DNA
England	59%	58%	57%	DNA

Source: DfE SFRs –SSDA 903

We use agency carers only when we are unable to place in-house or it is in the best interest of the child both in terms of safeguarding but also in terms of suitability match. Merton expects the highest standards of care for all our looked after children and we have a policy of not using external agencies to provide placements which are not rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted without Director/Senior management authorisation.

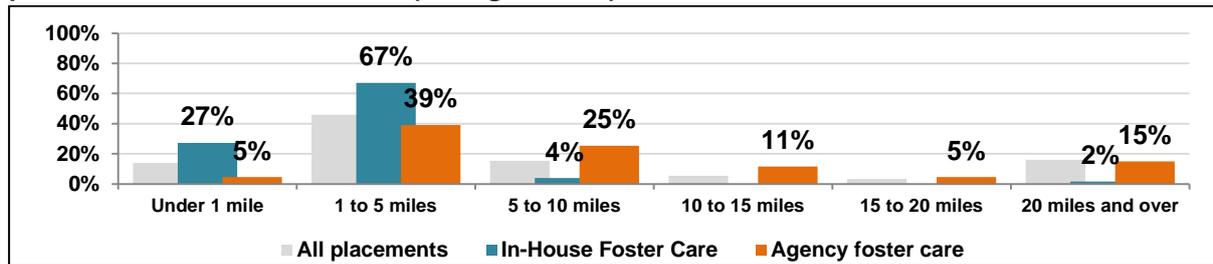
Placement distance and length

It should be noted that 37% of our In-house foster care provision is located Out of Borough, however 94% is within 5 miles of the child's parental home (126 out 128 placements matched to a home address; 94%). Placement distance varies more for agency placements, although the majority are still located within 10 miles of the child's home address.

Table 6: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by placement location (during 2014-15)

Location	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Merton	106	121	32%	86	94	63%	13	14	16%
Other LA	185	256	68%	52	55	37%	69	76	84%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

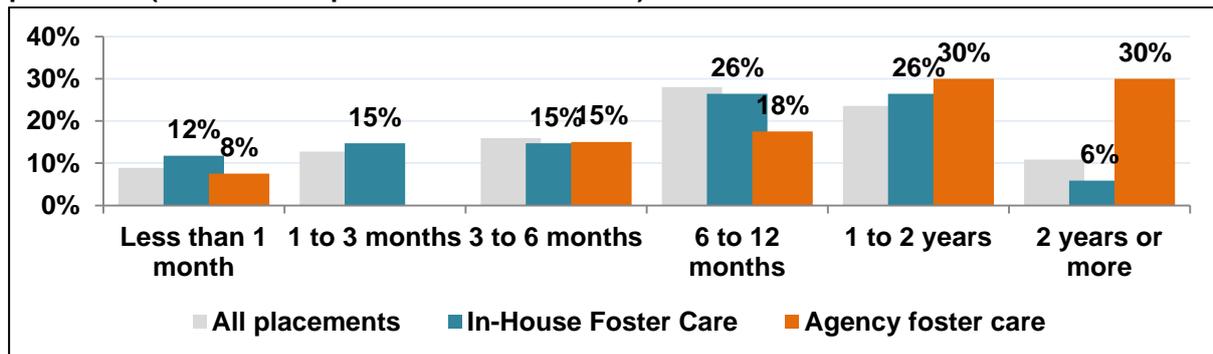
Figure 7: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by placement distance from home (during 2014-15)³



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Most of the In-House foster care placements have been open for between 6 months and 2 years as at 31 March 2015 (36 out of 68 open placements; 52%). Three times as many agency placements were open for a period of 2 years or more as at 31 March 2015 when compared to In-House placements open for the same time (12 agency placements compared to 4 In-House placements).. Foster Placements as a collective were open for longer durations as at 31 March 2015 than All placements, which suggests they are more stable than other types of provision.

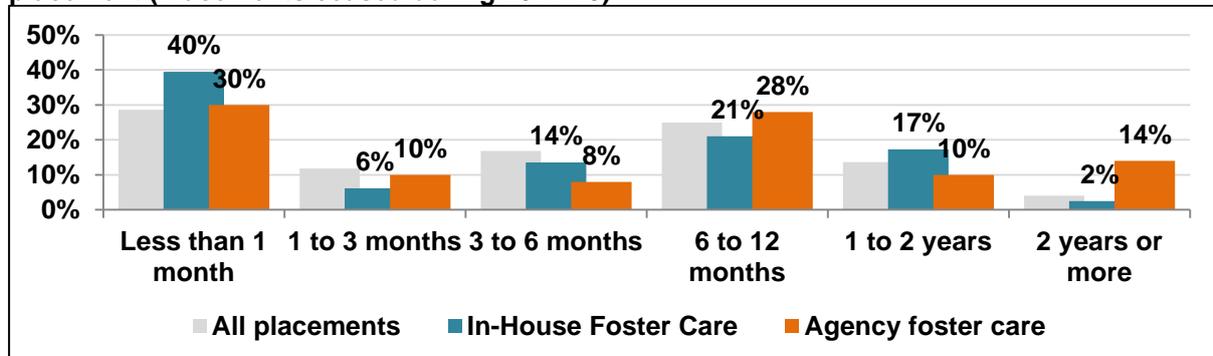
Figure 8: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by length of placement (Placements open as at 31 March 2015)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

As we are committed to good placement stability, we therefore bear the cost of Agency Foster Care Provision so long as the child is settled in placement, this is evidence above where 60% of agency provision has been open (in use) for over one year.

Figure 9: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by length of placement (Placements ceased during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

³ Excludes UASC cases and those where child's home address is unknown.

A high proportion of In-House and agency foster placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted for a period less than 1 month. The number of placements ending after 6 to 12 months with In-House foster carers can partly be explained by Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children arriving in Merton after the age of 17 and residing in the same placement until they turn 18 years old. In addition some children and young people return home or move onto permanent care arrangements in a timely manner since the improvement in timeliness of care proceedings during this period.

Gender, Ethnicity and Age

The gender breakdown of In-House foster care placements is broadly in line with the All placements cohort. However, a higher proportion of females are placed with agency foster carers compared to 'All placements'.

Table 10: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by gender (during 2014-15)

Gender	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Male	159	231	61%	79	88	59%	40	44	49%
Female	96	146	39%	52	61	41%	39	46	51%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Ethnicity for In-House and Agency foster care placements is broadly in-line with the All placements population.

Table 11: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by ethnicity (during 2014-15)

Ethnicity	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
White	115	171	45%	57	61	41%	41	46	51%
Mixed	31	52	14%	18	20	13%	10	10	11%
Asian	23	34	9%	11	16	11%	7	7	8%
Black	61	88	23%	34	41	28%	15	17	19%
Other	25	32	8%	11	11	7%	6	10	11%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Table 12: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by age (during 2014-15)

Age at placement start date	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Under 1 year	18	26	7%	15	17	11%	1	1	1%
1 to 4 years	26	39	10%	18	21	14%	8	8	9%
5 to 11 years	64	82	22%	39	43	29%	27	30	33%
12 to 15 years	78	104	28%	28	34	23%	30	35	39%
16 years and over	86	126	33%	33	34	23%	14	16	18%
Total (no duplicates)	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

The number of teenagers placed with IFA carers is a reflection of the challenge of recruiting experienced foster carers to Merton to manage children with complex difficulties. For example a high proportion of In-House and agency foster placements which only last less than 1 month are temporary LAC episodes.

Disability

Our provision for disabled children and young people in house is good but it is out stripped by demand. We need to continue to focus on recruiting in house foster carers able to support disabled children.

Table 13: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by disability status (during 2014-15)

Disability	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Disabled	57	80	21%	21	22	15%	19	19	21%
Non-Disabled	198	297	79%	110	127	85%	60	71	79%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Source: Policy, Planning and Performance Team

Profile of In-House Foster Carers

Key Findings: Profile of In-House Foster Carers

- 69 In-House foster carers were on the Merton Fostering Register during 2014/15
- Three-quarters of In-House foster carers offered Task Based or Short Term Care Provision (52 out of 69 carers; 75%)
- Majority of In-House foster carers aged over 50 as at 31 March 2015 (50 out of 69 carers; 73%)
- In-House foster carers predominately based in Merton and within 5 miles of the child's home residence
- Between 70% and 85% of In-House foster care placements were used by at least one looked after child at any given time during 2014-15

We would approach our in house foster carers for a placement before considering an agency placement. This is because

- we can be confident of the support they will receive,
- we can ensure the appropriateness of matching of any additional placements
- our in house provision is generally more local than IFA provision
- our in house provision offer better value for money to the Council

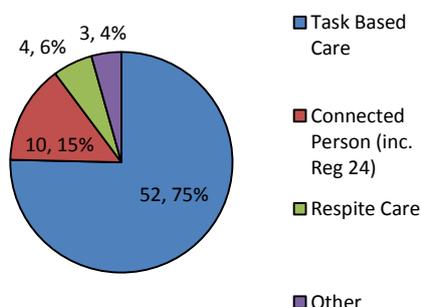
What we need to do:

- We will develop our existing pool of carers to ensure we are maximising their skills. This involves our Fostering Supervision Team working with carers as part of their annual review process to ensure they access appropriate learning and development
- As part of the annual review processes for foster carers, we will continue to ensure that we have carers with as wide an approval range as possible to provide flexibility and opportunities when placement finding.
- We will work to retain our current carers by ensuring adequate support is available for them when they take a placement. This includes improving the level of support for carers taking on children outside of their age ranges.
- We need to improve the quality of referral information that the foster carer receives and ensure that placement plans are available in a timely manner to support carers to take on young people with more challenging behaviours

In-House Foster Carer Provision - The Detail

The majority of Merton In-House foster carers provide 'Task Based Care' services (52 out of 69 carers; 75%). Task Based care is where carers are working towards a permanent plan for the child. This may be return home, adoption or another route to permanence. Eight In-House foster carers were classified under Regulation 24 care (12% of cohort). Regulation 24 states that a person connected to the child or young person can be approved as a temporary foster carer in an emergency, pending a full fostering assessment. This approval lasts for a maximum of 16 weeks with a possible extension of a further 8 weeks in exceptional circumstances to allow for completion of a fostering assessment. Once approved, these carers are called Connected Persons Foster Carers.

Figure 14: Percentage of In-House foster carers by type of care provided



We have good provision of In house Foster cares approved to care for most age ranges. However base on our use of agency carers and the numbers of children coming in to care, we should increase our provision for 12 – 15 years olds.

Figure 15: Number of In-House foster carers offering task based care during 2014-15 by ages of looked after children approved for

Carer Ref number	Ages approved for																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	[Blue bar]																	
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52	[Blue bar]																	
Age approved for (Years)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Number of In-House foster carers approved offering task based care	32	32	32	34	35	43	39	39	41	41	43	42	41	39	38	37	36	36
% of In-House foster carers approved offering task based care (out of 52)	62%	62%	62%	65%	67%	83%	75%	75%	79%	79%	83%	81%	79%	75%	73%	71%	69%	69%

Source: Fostering Register 2014-15 – Fostering Team

Distance

Most Merton In-House foster carers are based within the local authority and placements are often within 5 miles of the child's home address. Merton CSF have been able to recruit foster carers from neighbouring boroughs too, with several placements in Sutton, Croydon and Wandsworth. Those carers placed further afield are Connected Person's foster carers.

Table 16: Number and Percentage of In-House Foster carers by residence (as at 31 March 2015)

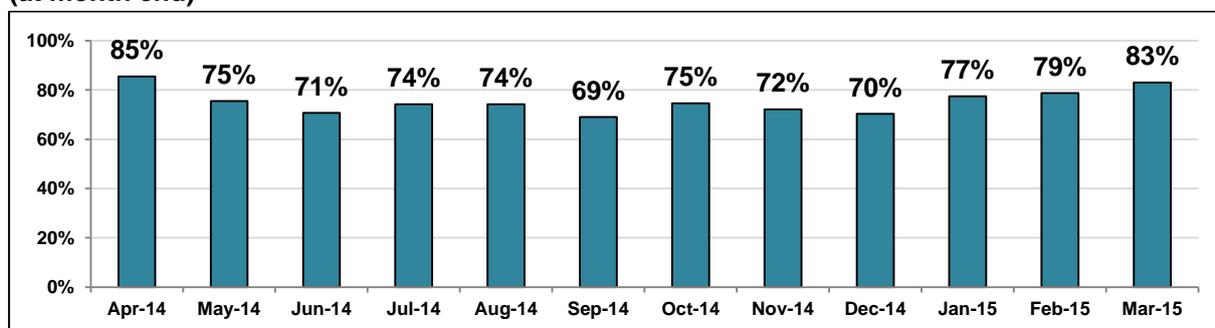
Location of foster carers	No.	% Total
Merton	40	58%
Sutton	9	13%
Croydon	8	12%
Wandsworth	5	7%
Lambeth	3	4%
Southwark	2	3%
Surrey	1	1%
Kent	1	1%
Total	69	100%

Source: *Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15*

Usage

Throughout 2014-15, between 70% and 85% of placements were being used by at least one child at any one time. To a certain extent, it is encouraging to see most placements filled, with spare capacity available for any new LAC starters who enter care. However there needs to be awareness that some placements will preclude a foster carer from taking an additional child or young person, due to behaviour of a child placed or space factors (e.g. a carer may have one spare room where a sibling group may be placed but not two unrelated children)

Figure 17: Percentage of In-House foster placements used by at least one child during 2014-15 (at month end)

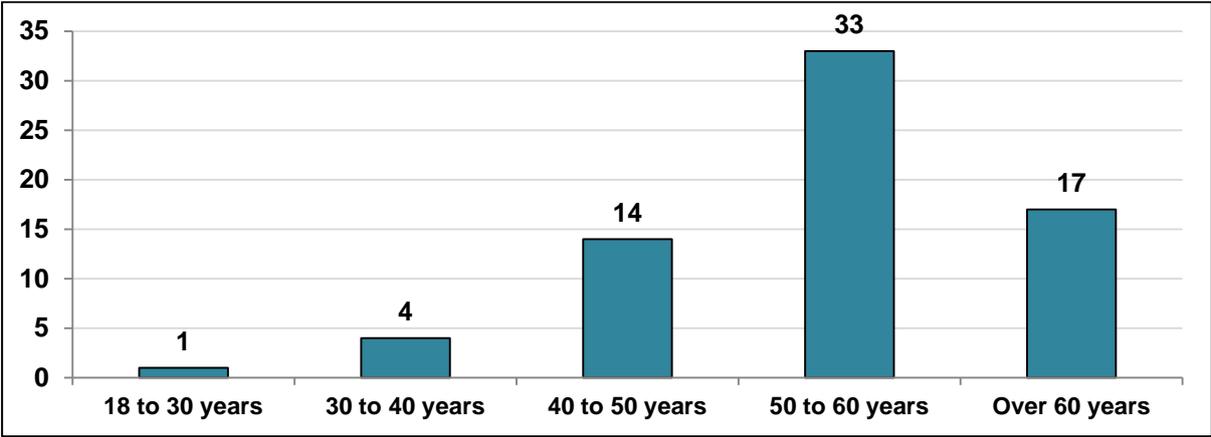


Source: *Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15*

Age of carers

A high proportion of Merton In-House foster carers are aged between 40 and 60 years old. However, a quarter of registered In-House Foster Carers are aged over 60 years (17 foster carer placements). Potentially, some of the older carers (those aged 60 or over) will retire and leave the fostering register over the next few years. As a result, the continuous drive towards recruiting a 'younger' profile of foster carers (those aged between 35-50 years old) will counter this risk, ensuring we have a stable number of foster carer for the long term.

Figure 18: Number and percentage of In-House foster carers by age range (age of foster carer as at 31 March 2015)



Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

Retention and Length of Approval

The recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers remains a priority. Over the last two years (April 2013-March 2015), 28 foster carers have been recruited by Merton CSF. Also, there were 25 foster carers who had been registered with Merton CSF for longer than 5 years.

Table 20: Number and percentage of In-House foster carers by length of time approved as a carer (as at 31 March 2015 or de-registration date)

Length of time approved as foster carer	No.	% Total
Less than 1 year	15 ⁴	22%
1 to 2 years	13	19%
2 to 5 years	16	23%
5 to 10 years	7	10%
More than 10 years	18	26%
Total	69	100%

Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

During 2014/15 10 In-house foster carers were permanently recruited, however 6 de-registered, this resulted in a net gain of four. Reason for deregistration included ill health of foster carer and a change of vocation. A lack of placements for the foster carers preferred child type, the end of a ‘connected person’s arrangement’ and the adoption of a Merton child.

Table 19: Retention of In-House foster carers during 2014-15

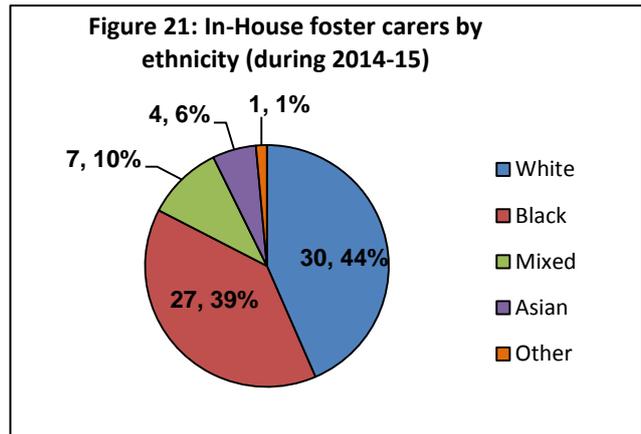
In-House foster carers	No. of In-House foster carers
Permanently recruited during 2014-15	10
De-registered during 2014-15	6
Net Gain during 2014-15	4

Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

Ethnicity

⁴ Includes three temporary approvals and two foster carers awaiting approval as at 31 March 2015

The ethnic diversity of Merton In-House foster carers is reflective of the ethnic breakdown of the LAC population. The majority of In-House foster carers are from White British, Black Caribbean and Black African backgrounds. The ethnicity breakdown of foster carers may change over the next few years as the borough's resident population becomes more diverse.



Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

Children's Homes

Children's Homes provide a residential setting for children and young people. Children's Homes are often run by private or voluntary providers. Merton has no full time Children's Homes of its own. Currently there is only one privately run Children's Homes in the Merton area with an Ofsted rating of higher than Requires Improvement. That provision offers a specific service to disabled children.

Key Findings: Children's Homes

- 41 Children's Home placements during 2014-15 (11% of all placements during 2014-15)
- A high proportion of Children's Home placements during 2014-15 for disabled children (25 out of 41 placements; 61%)
- Two-thirds of Children's Homes placements during 2014-15 for children aged 12 to 15 years old at start of placement (26 out of 41 placements; 63%)
- 88% of Children's Homes placements during 2014-15 for males (36 out of 41 placements)
- Majority of Children's Homes placements during 2014-15 located 15 miles or further from home address (26 out of 41 placements; 63%)

What we need to do

- We are creating a Business Case to progress the procurement of a Children's Home within Merton so that we are able to meet the needs of our young people in a high quality commissioned service in the local area.
- In addition, we will work with existing and new providers within 5 miles of Merton to develop closer commissioning relationships. There has been interest expressed by several providers in developing services in neighbouring authorities and we need to explore these further
- We will continue to work with providers to ensure quality and best value of placements through regular quality assurance visits and robust fee negotiations both on placement and at key points during changes in service delivery.
- We will maintain contact with a new provider who is planning to open a Children's Home in Merton. Once this provision is registered we will explore making placements here.
- We are working with Action for Children around their plans to consider changing registration of one of their children's homes in Kingston to meet the needs of more challenging young people. This may be an opportunity for us to commission placements nearer to Merton.

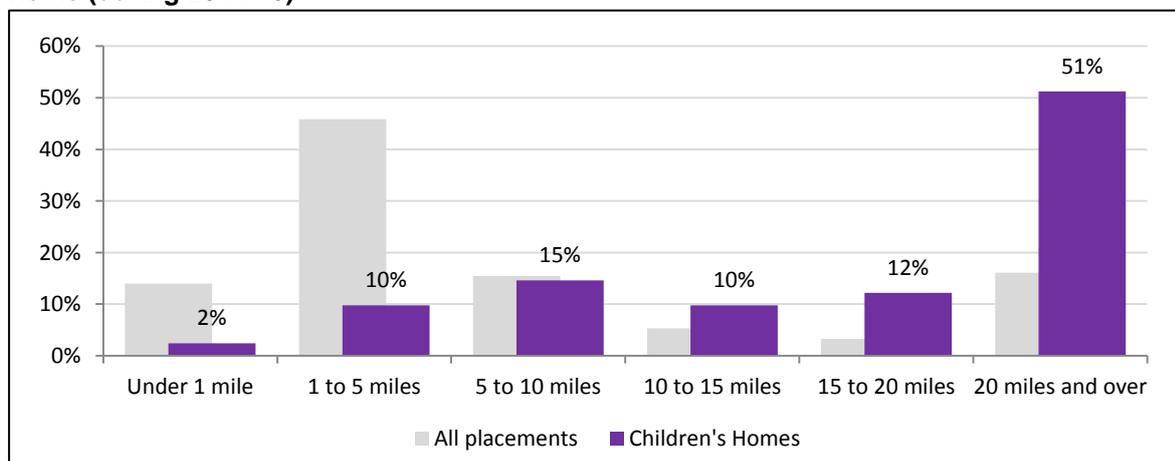
Use of Residential Children's Homes

There are no suitable children's homes within Merton which we would choose to use (except for Merton's own respite unit for children with disabilities and one other specialist provision). There are limited placement options within neighbouring authorities. There are significant increased cost implications for placing young people in residential Children's Homes

Distance

Children's Homes placements vary considerably in terms of placement distance from a child's home residence. Sometimes, it may be part of a care plan to place the child further away to safeguard a young person at risk of CSE or gang affiliation. In some situations, a young person will have more positive outcomes away from a negative peer group or area.

Figure 22: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by placement distance from home (during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Finding an appropriate children's home placement that for looked after children with complex needs can be challenging. Children's Home placements during 2014-15 were mainly utilised for older children aged between 12 and 15 years old at start of placement (26 out of 41 placements; 63%).

Age

There were a small number of younger children placed in Children's Homes, including two children aged 9 when they started the placement. One of these is a historic placements and the placement service would prefer not to place children under 10 in Children's Homes provision where possible.

Table 23: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by age group at placement start date (during 2014-15)

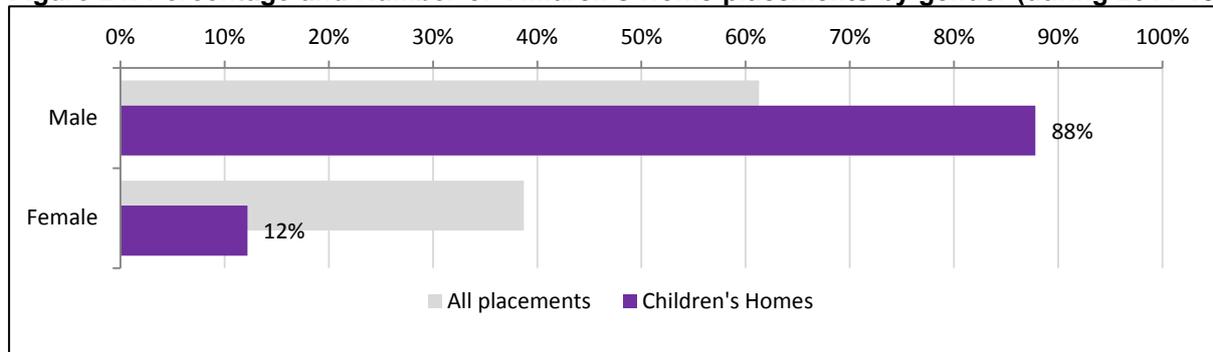
Age at placement start date	All placements			Children's Homes		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Under 1 year	18	26	7%	0	0	0%
1 to 4 years	26	39	10%	0	0	0%
5 to 11 years	64	82	22%	4	4	10%
12 to 15 years	78	104	28%	17	26	63%
16 years and over	86	126	33%	8	11	27%
Total (no duplicates)	255	377	100%	26	41	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Gender

Males were over-represented in Children's Home placements compared to all placements (36 out of 41 placements; 88%).

Figure 24: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by gender (during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Disability

A high proportion of Children's Home placements during 2014-15 were made for disabled children (25 out of 41 placements; 61%)

Table 25: Percentage and Number of Children's Home Placements by Disability Status (during 2014-15)

Disability	All placements			Children's Homes		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Disabled	57	80	21%	20	25	61%
Non-Disabled	198	297	79%	6	16	39%
Total	255	377	100%	26	41	100%

Source: Policy, Planning and Performance Team

Ethnicity

Ethnicity breakdown is broadly in line with the all placements cohort, barring the mixed background cohort. This figure is skewed by the fact that one child had seven children's home placements during 2014-15.

Table 26: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by ethnicity (during 2014-15)

Ethnicity	All placements			Children's Homes		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
White	115	171	45%	12	17	41%
Mixed	31	52	14%	4	12	29%
Asian	23	34	9%	2	2	5%
Black	61	88	23%	7	9	22%
Other	25	32	8%	1	1	2%
Total	255	377	100%	26	41	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Length of Placement

A third of Children’s Home placements (open as at 31 March 2015) had been used for between 1 and 3 months (7 out of 19 placements; 37%). Five children had been in the same Children’s Home placement for 1 year or more.

The majority of Children’s Home placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted less than 6 months (17 out of 22 placements; 77%).

Figure 27: Percentage and Number of Children’s Home placements by length of placement (Placements open as at 31 March 2015)

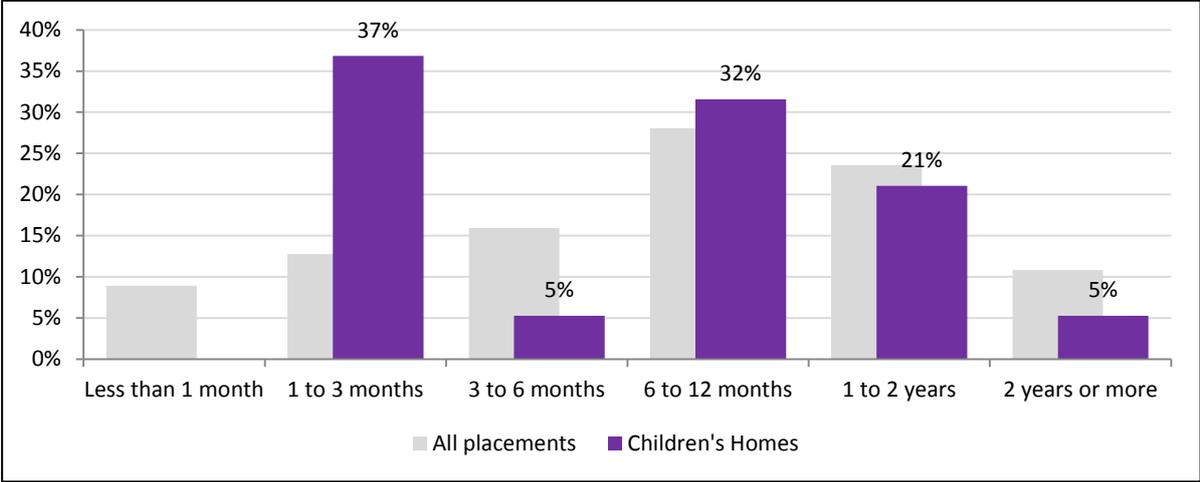
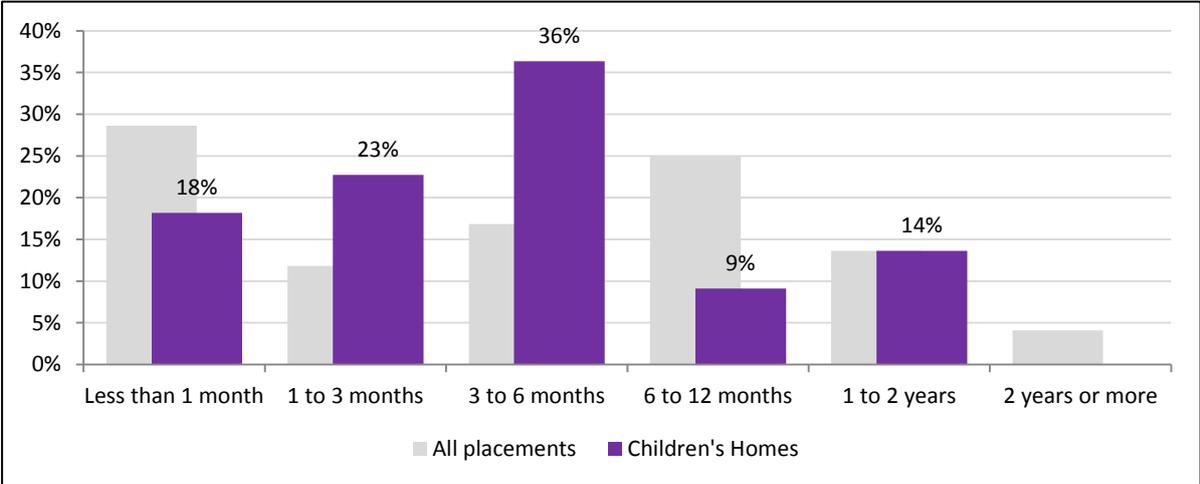


Figure 28: Percentage and Number of Children’s Home placements by length of placement (Placements ceased during 2014-15)



Semi-independent Provision

Semi-independent accommodation includes placements in residential accommodation which provide semi-independent providers. Many of these placements offer a support element. This provision is not subject to Childrens' Homes Regulations and is only available for young people aged 16+. This cohort of young people also includes those placed in supported lodgings placements. Merton has a small supported lodgings carer scheme for young people aged 16+.

Key Findings: Semi-Independent Provision

- 53 Semi-Independent placements during 2014-15 (14% of all placements during 2014-15)
- Three-quarters of Semi-Independent placements during 2014-15 for children aged 17 years old at start of placement (40 out of 53 placements; 75%)
- Majority of Semi-Independent placements during 2014-15 located outside of Merton local authority boundary (47 out of 53 placements; 89%). Although 94% were located within 10 miles of Merton (35 out of 37 placements)
- Two-thirds of Looked After Children in Semi-Independent Provision as at 31 March 2015 had been in the same placement for 6 to 12 months (8 out of 13 children; 62%)

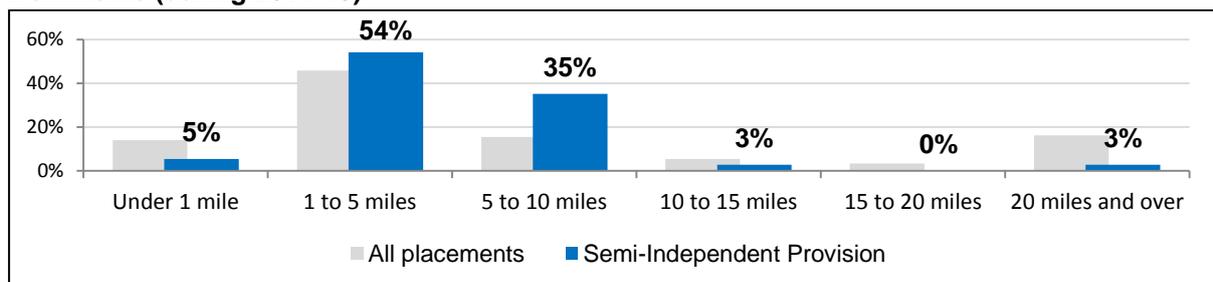
What we need to do

- We will work closely with well-developed semi-independent and housing providers to encourage them to consider the options of supporting young people within Merton. This would enable our young people to remain in the Merton area
- We will continue to embed established links with housing providers (Grenfell and Notting Hill Housing Trust) who have developed their services to better meet the needs of our young people and care leavers within Merton
- We will continue to embed our financial framework with providers to ensure that we are getting best value of placements made.
- We will work closely with our Housing colleagues to ensure we use our quota of Housing for our young people in a timely way where appropriate

Distance

The majority of Semi-Independent placements are located outside of Merton. However nearly all Semi-Independent placements are located within 10 miles of the children's home address (35 out of 37 placements; 94%).

Figure 29: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by placement distance from home (during 2014-15)

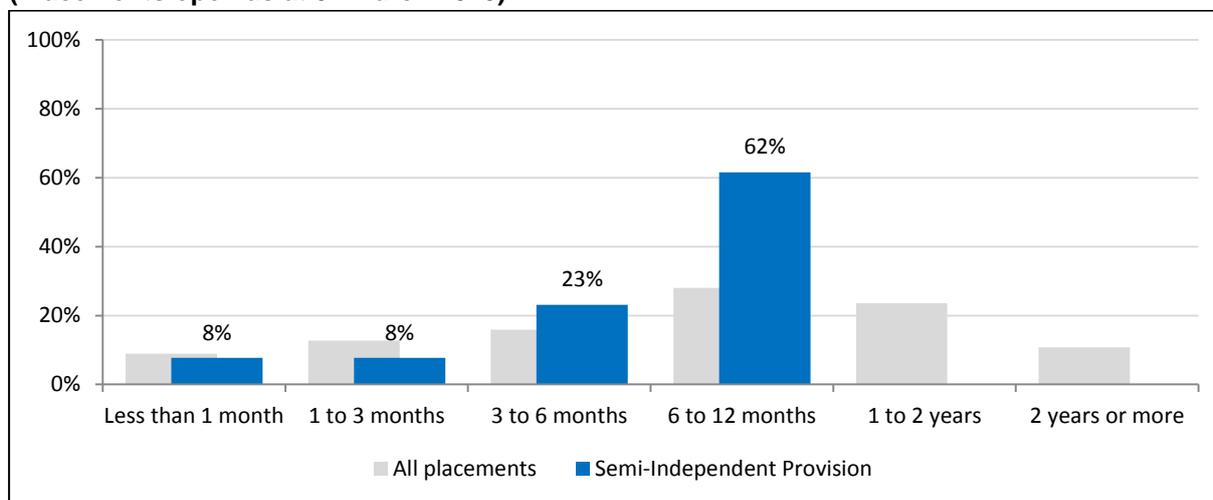


Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Length of Placement

Nearly two thirds of Semi-Independent placements for children looked after as at 31 March 2015 were open for between 6 and 12 months (8 out of 13 placements; 62%).

Figure 30: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by length of placement (Placements open as at 31 March 2015)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

A high proportion of Semi-Independent placements ceasing during 2014-15 had lasted between 6 and 12 months (16 out of 40 placements; 40%). Many semi-independent placements do not last longer than 2 years as they are aimed at older looked after children who will turn 18 before 2 years in the same placement have amassed.

Table 31: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by length of placement (Placements ceased during 2014-15)

Placement length (Ceased placements during 2014-15)	All placements			Semi-Independent Provision		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Less than 1 month	54	63	29%	7	7	18%
1 to 3 months	24	26	12%	5	6	15%
3 to 6 months	36	37	17%	7	7	18%
6 to 12 months	50	55	25%	15	16	40%
1 to 2 years	30	30	14%	4	4	10%
2 years or more	9	9	4%	0	0	0%
Total	155	220	100%	31	40	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

We currently have a designated quota of permanent housing for 15 young people who are assessed as being able to manage living independently. We work closely with our Housing colleagues to ensure that the right people are placed in this provision. In 2014/15 we used 14 places. We are already close to using our full quota for 2015/16. With the increase in our number of looked after children, there will be an increase in Care Leavers requiring accommodation, meaning that our current quota is likely to be insufficient for our future demand.

Gender

An appropriate proportion of young males and females are taking up semi independent provision.

Table 32: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by gender (during 2014-15)

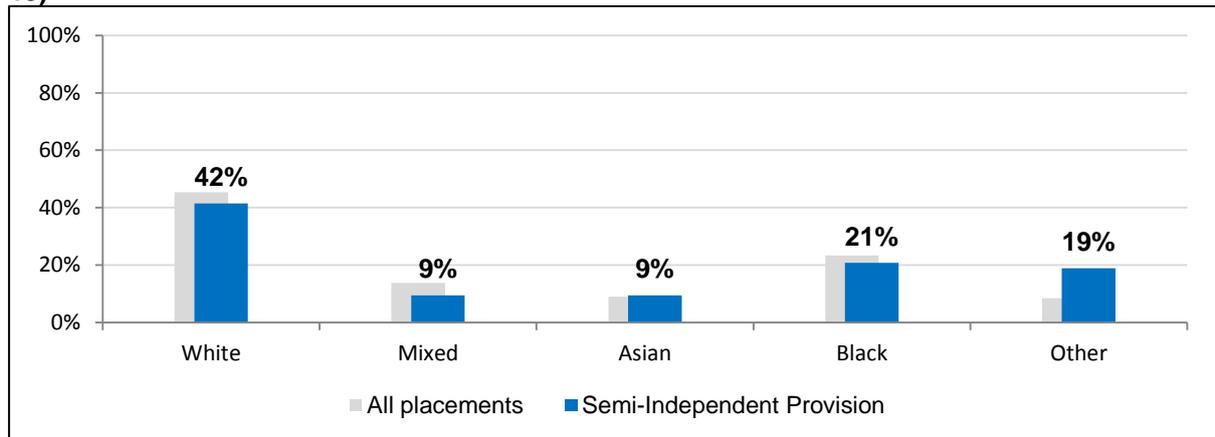
Gender	All placements			Semi-Independent Provision		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Male	159	231	61%	29	34	64%
Female	96	146	39%	14	19	36%
Total	255	377	100%	43	53	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Ethnicity

Similarly take up of Semi-independent provision by ethnicity is in proportion to the whole population and as we would expect.

Figure 33: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by ethnicity (during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15