

LBBD
Looked After Children
Sufficiency Strategy
2026-2030

**BELONG
MATTER
SUCCEED**



B&D
**IT STARTS
HERE**

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Introduction

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has refreshed and updated its Sufficiency Strategy for the period 2026-2030.

Ensuring we have a sufficiency of provision is an on-going, dynamic process and our new strategy builds on the priorities and actions of our previous one whilst addressing the many new challenges, complexities and changing circumstances.

Children tell us they want safe, nurturing care that helps them flourish. They don't want placements or beds; they want loving homes. (London Sufficiency Strategy 2026-29) Our aim through this strategy is to achieve this for our children in Barking and Dagenham.

We want the best possible outcomes for children and families. To do this we will build stability and sustainability in our care system by delivering a whole sufficiency pathway that provides accessible, high quality provision across all levels of need - from effective early help and support that prevents children coming into care in the first place, providing family help interventions and allowing reunification with family where safe to do so, through to specialist support for children with entrenched and highly complex needs.

This strategy will be reviewed and updated at regular intervals during its lifespan until 2030 and we will continually track trends and look to the future to ensure long term strategic direction is maintained.

The Sufficiency Duty

“Sufficiency” in the Children’s Act (specifically Section 22G of the 1989 Act) is the legal duty of local authorities to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that they have access to a sufficient range of homes and services to meet the needs of the children in their care. Our duty is to ensure that children are not in unsuitable, distant, or unregistered provision because of a lack of planning but receive the highest quality support possible based on need and directed by care

Looked After Children: Sufficiency extends beyond simply providing enough placements; it requires that we have access to a diverse range of high-quality providers and accommodation options including foster homes, residential children’s homes, supported accommodation, and short breaks services, ensuring that every child in care has a safe, stable and supportive place to live, where they can thrive and achieve their potential.

Children on the Edge of Care: We also have a sufficiency duty to provide effective support to children at risk of entering the care system through implementing early preventative measures and working widely with all partners to ensure that families receive intensive help at an early stage through a comprehensive Edge of Care offer.

SEND Provision: Ensuring adequate and highest-quality residential placements and support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) so they can access our high-quality local schools

Care Leavers: Equipping young people who are leaving our care with the skills to thrive as independent young adults.

Borough context



The population size in 2021 was **218,900**. This had grown by **17.7%** since 2011 – the third highest growth rate in England and Wales.

The population growth is expected to continue with a further **42%** growth expected by 2041.

This would equate to **310,000** residents

In 2021 **26.1%** (57,100) of residents were aged under 16 (highest rate of under 19 in the country)

If the same proportionality continued, then by 2041 there would be 81,031 residents aged under 16.

Average household size is **2.96** – 4th highest in England and Wales.

17.8% of households live in a property without enough bedrooms. This is the 2nd highest in England and Wales.

2 in 5 residents were born outside of the UK

The percentage of global majority residents increased by **18%** between 2011 and 2021. This is faster than anywhere else in England and Wales.

There are **9,400 (12.8%)** lone parent households with dependent children – the highest proportion in England

46% of children are estimated to live in poverty – 3rd highest rate in England and Wales. 62% households have at least one measure of deprivation – highest in England.

Barking and Dagenham is ranked 9 out of 317 Local Authorities on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), placing it in the most deprived category (top 2%).

On the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), Barking and Dagenham is also ranked 9, placing it in the most deprived category for child poverty (top 2%).

In 2024/25, there were **46,118** children eligible for free school meals in Barking and Dagenham across all state-funded primary and secondary schools.

5.6% residents aged 16 and over were unemployed (including full-time students) – 7th highest proportion in England.

18% of economically inactive residents aged 16 and over have never worked

There were 4,677 children in need (of any age) in March 2025

An estimated 4,500 children in Barking and Dagenham live in households where domestic abuse is present.

Facing a changing landscape

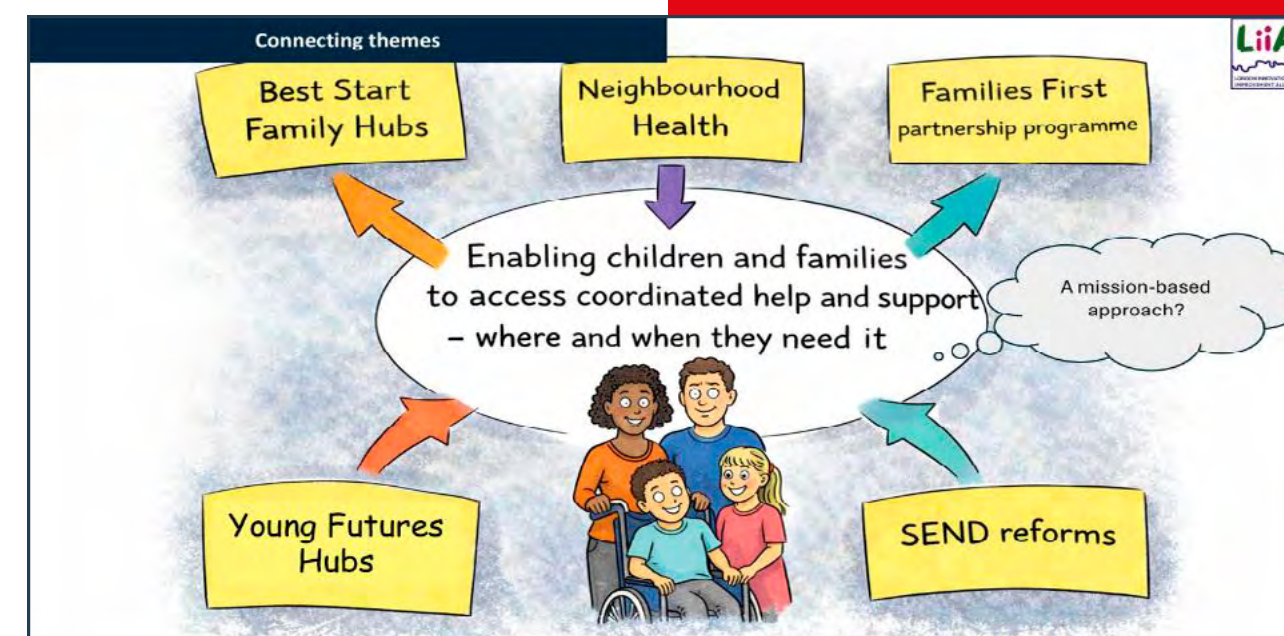
In considering Sufficiency we need to address a rapidly changing landscape of national policy initiatives, priorities and structural changes.

As part of this strategy we will:

- Review systems and processes to align our Sufficiency work with these evolving initiatives such as Families First Programme.
- Incorporate the new Childrens Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 into our Sufficiency planning as policy and guidance develops
- Incorporate and include administrative changes in the NHS structures (ICB and NHS England dissolution) and Neighbourhood Health developments into the into our Sufficiency planning
- Work in partnership across London (at regional and sub regional level) as part of regional care collaboration arrangements

National reform agenda

- The new Childrens Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026
- Families First Programme – children's social care reforms
- Best Start in life family hubs – new guidance
- Regional Commissioning Collaboratives
- SEND Reforms
- Administrative changes in the NHS structures (ICB and NHS England dissolution)
- Neighbourhood Health Programme
- Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services changes (OFSTED)
 - the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children, and enable families to stay together and get the help they need
 - the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including children who return home
 - the effectiveness of the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, in stable, loving homes, including adoption
 - the experiences and progress of care leavers



Our sufficiency challenges

Barking and Dagenham, like other authorities, faces many challenges in meeting its Sufficiency duty. These challenges were set out by Ofsted in its report on placement sufficiency for children in care and care leavers, published in November 2022. In the intervening 3 years, and in the wake of the cost of living crisis, these issues have only been exacerbated & become more entrenched. They include:

- an older profile of children
- an increase in children who require specialist provision that can support complex needs and in particular, mental health needs, with limited capacity in NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMSH) to meet those needs.
- a lack of secure provision for children nationally, meaning alternative places need to be found for children with complex needs
- issues with recruitment and retention of foster carers, residential care workers and other social care and wider children's professionals
- not having the right quantity and mix of provision for the children in their area
- difficulties in working in the private market, where private providers have more power and local authorities have little choice

A recent analysis of children's social care sufficiency in England Understanding children's social care sufficiency in England - GOV.UK also notes the 'increasing complexity of needs of children and a lack of suitable local provision', 'lack of timely access to CAMHS' & 'a lack of available foster carers'.

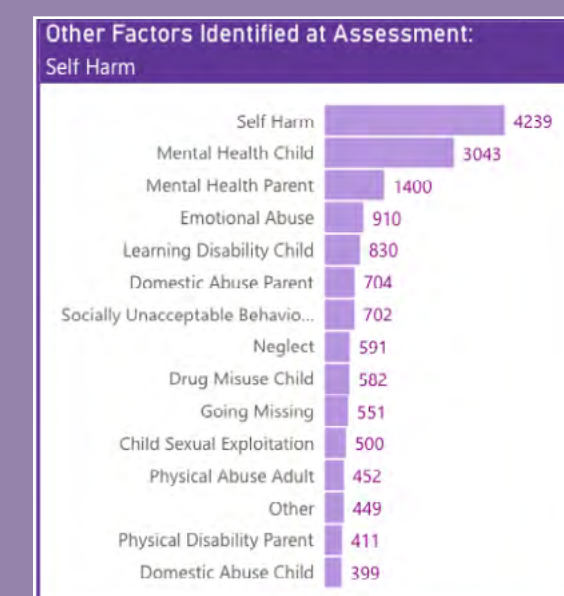
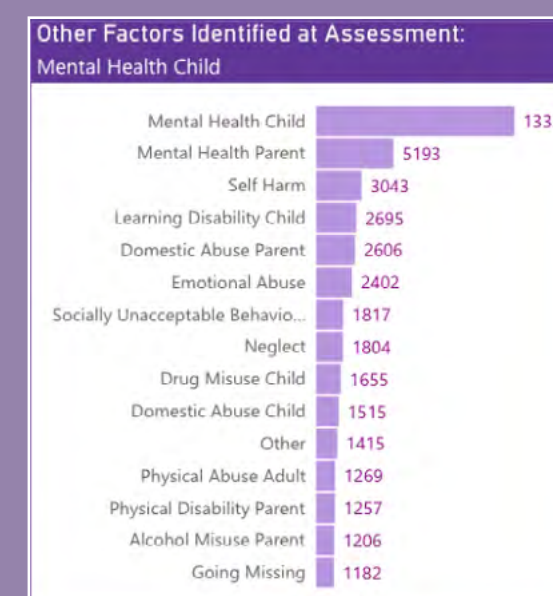
In Barking & Dagenham these challenges are also compounded (as noted in the previous section) by having the highest proportion of children (0–17) in the UK and child poverty amongst the highest in London boroughs and the country. This level of poverty erodes parenting capacity, it compounds family stress and is a key driver of family breakdown & children entering into the care system. Economic pressure causes psychological distress, trauma, conflict, domestic abuse and an increasing risk of neglect with a consequent increase in entries into care. There is also a significant lack of available parental mental health services due to ever rising demand. Waiting lists are long and even when receiving treatment & support many parents don't have the economic ability or flexibility to take the time needed to recover. This all means that many young people are living in situations where their carers are not receiving the level of support required.

It is also the case that there has been a major increase locally in the numbers of young people out of school due to school avoidance. This is now a substantiated trend with potentially serious consequences as school connectedness is a protective factor against the negative effects of social deprivation and can foster a sense of belonging.

All of these factors are putting significant pressures on the Children's Care system – driving increasing demand and bringing children into care. In response we face the urgent need as a borough to strengthen our Early Help and Edge of Care offer, through the Families First Partnership programme, further develop our Fostering service and design new commissioning arrangements which enable us to source placements in regulated care settings for all children who need them, and to ensure we have the right sort of specialist provision for children with highly complex needs.

The rising complexity of need

The reasons children become looked after in London can be explored through the Children in Need codes assigned by social workers during assessments. The most common reason for children entering care is abuse and neglect, followed by family dysfunction and acute family stress. However evidence from our own data and London's social care data shows that an important factor in many care assessments are issues associated with mental health, self-harm and autism



North East London Borough sufficiency strategies highlight the gap between growing complex mental health needs and available specialist placements. There is an increasing number of children who require therapeutic care, CAMHS input, or specialist mental health support. Barking and Dagenham and Hackney both report more children coming into care with serious mental health needs or emotional/behavioural disorders that mainstream placements cannot easily support. These children often present across various settings, including Tier 4 Mental Health wards and secure accommodation settings. They may have similar needs and are often the same children moving through multiple teams and professionals from different parts of the system.

Across the region however there are few specialist fostering schemes, local therapeutic children's homes, and specialist mental health provisions. Often, these children have to be placed far away to find appropriate care or result in expensive unsuitable solo accommodation and unregistered placements.

London Sufficiency Strategy & North-East London Sufficiency Needs Overview Recommendations

All authorities, through their sufficiency duty, have to produce their own local strategies. However a London wide strategy & NEL Sufficiency Overview both look more widely at the overarching sufficiency needs for children in care across the capital and in North East London and the challenges in meeting these needs. These offer different perspectives, insights and approaches (key points are summarised below) many of the

issues resonate with our own experience in the borough and as such we are committed to collaborative working wherever it is most efficient, effective, possible, practical and in the best interests of our children. We will seek to work with regional and sub-regional partners to create opportunities to meet these needs and challenges together through local arrangements and the development of RCCs.

London Sufficiency Strategy (2026-2029)

Key priorities from the strategy:

- Investment in the development of new types of family-based care that can meet a wider range of needs.
- Ensure that there is sufficient high quality accommodation within boroughs so those children who need residential care can access it more locally
- Challenge the disproportionality of the care system
- Do much more to develop appropriate support for those with complex placement needs
- Work in even closer partnership across Boroughs and partners

North East London Children's Services Sufficiency Needs Overview April 2025 to March 2027

Actions and key areas of challenge and priority from NEL strategy:

1. Increasing number of foster carers – in line with the Regional Care Collaborative aims and objectives and Families First programme. Delivered through supporting kinship foster carers and Newham DPS for IFAs
2. Increasing placements to support high needs and higher complexity placements particularly for emergency placements – at NEL level, alongside all the work about RCC development a relatively quick win is a NEL wide emergency placement protocol.
3. Increasing demand for supported accommodation – 16-18 and care leavers. Good examples of areas of focus across budgets include: training flats and building transitional skills.
4. Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers
5. Respite for children with disabilities – short breaks

Children in care in Barking and Dagenham

402 children were in our care as of April 2026. The number and rate of children in care have steadily declined from a peak of 68 per 10,000 in 2023-24 to 60 as of April 2026. Fewer children are coming into care – 191 entered over 2025-26 compared with 215 the year before - reflecting effective work to help children remain safely at home, including effective work for children with a child protection plan.

The number of children in residential care has slowly reduced over the last five years and is below benchmarks, reflecting positive work to keep children in family settings.

- **45 children** were in residential care in 2025-26, down from 54 children in 2020-21
- **11% of all children** in care were in residential care in 2025-26, compared with the national and London 2024-25 average of 13%

Most children in care continue to live close to home. 84% of children lived within 20 miles of their home over 2025-6 (similar to 2024-5) enabling continuity of school, friendships and family relationships – compared with 78% for England and 82% for London. Of those 16% that are placed more than 20 miles, we know that the majority are living in surrounding areas overall, for example Essex, Kent, and other London boroughs.

We want more children living in long-term stable homes. We have more to do in this area, although the picture is complex. A deep dive in 2025 identified that that challenging behaviour, complex needs or foster placement breakdowns are themes impacting this; and that positive reasons are also in play, including moves to be reunified with brothers and sisters or stepping down from residential to foster placement.

- **62% of children** in care were living in long-term, stable homes over 2025-26. This was 60% in 2024-25, below England and London benchmarks of 69% and 68%.
- **14% of children** in care had three or more placements over 2025-26. This was similar to the 13% in 2024-25 and is slightly above the England and London benchmark of 10%.

As noted in the next section Children in our care are generally older than the national profile, pointing to the need for care that meets the needs of older children. Children of a White British and children of mixed heritage backgrounds are also overrepresented in care, whilst children of Black or Asian ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented. However, there are indications this is changing over time, with the profile of children entering care moving towards more proportionate representation for children of a White British and Black ethnic background.

Demographics of Children Looked After (CLA)

(taken from North East London Children’s Services Sufficiency Needs Overview)

The overall number of children in care across North East London has been rising in several boroughs, driven by demographic growth and changing needs. This upward trend is across most boroughs, with Hackney consistently showing higher numbers, however the rate per 10,000 across boroughs shows that Barking and Dagenham have similar figures to Hackney, both with high CLA rates.

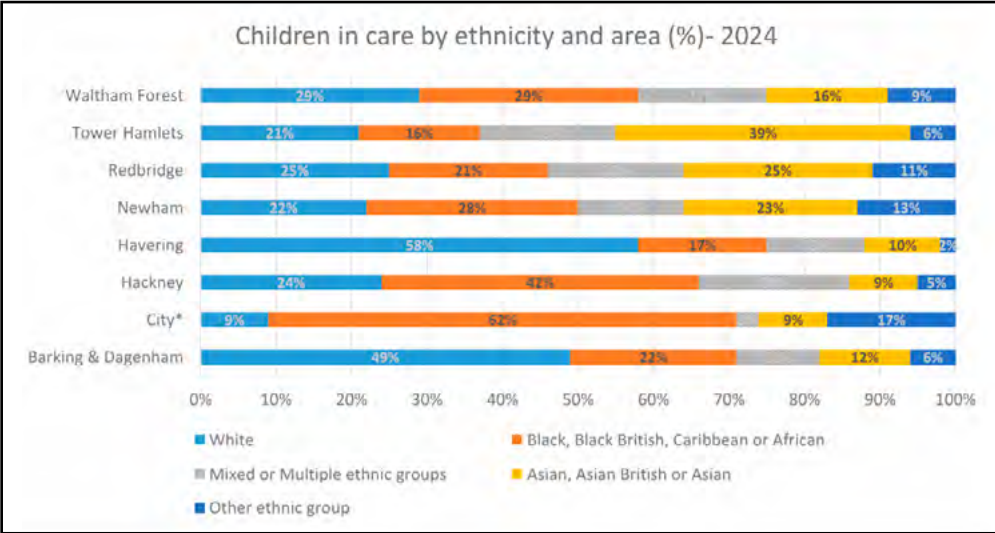
The age of children in care is shifting slowly upwards – 41% were aged 10–15 years over 2025-6, and 32% are aged 16–17 – and is

older still than national averages. This partly reflects timely, effective work with younger children, preventing unnecessary entry into care. Residential data also confirms this with the need for adolescent placements remains a critical pressure point within the system.

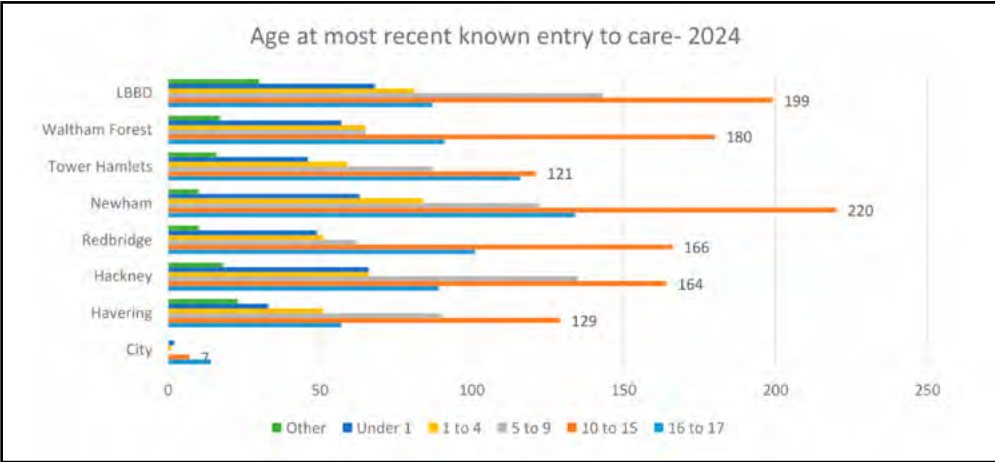
All boroughs recognise the need to plan for a likely increase in looked-after children over the next few years, particularly older teens and those with complex needs.



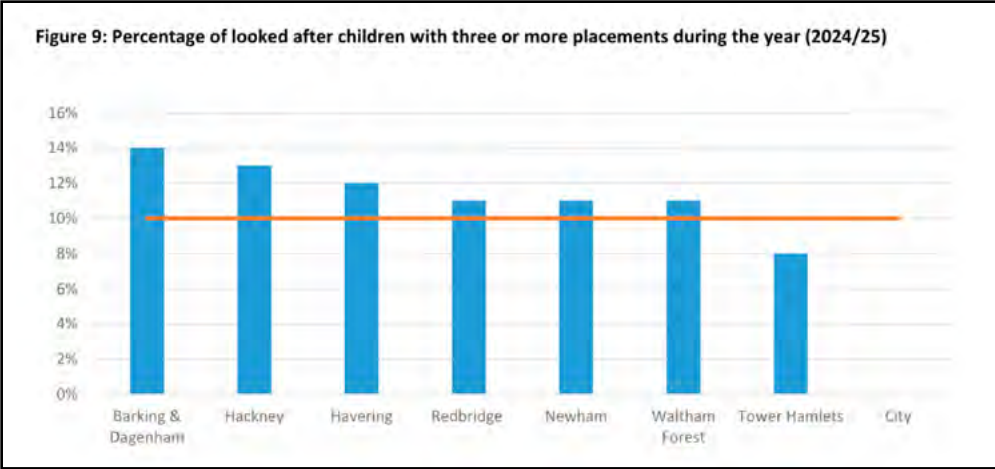
White children in care are over-represented in Barking & Dagenham



The highest number of looked-after children in each borough falls within the 10 to 15 age group



LBBD – had highest % of looked after children with more placement moves in 24/25



Local strengths and opportunities – building on a strong foundation

The previous strategy expanded on the success of robust services and focussed on developing and improving the sufficiency pathway across a child's journey from early help to preparation for adulthood. It led directly to the successful developments outlined. It built up strengths in consistency, collaboration and taking a wider view on sufficiency, drawing in expertise from across the council and the borough. **The new strategy continues to build on this base.**

Other new developments such as our **Best Start** programme, **Family Hubs and Families First Partnership** (detailed in sections below) are also significantly strengthening our ability to act earlier and prevent the entrenchment of issues that can ultimately lead to children coming into care.

The **CARES** approach runs through our support to children, with the values of compassion, accountability, respect, empowerment and sharing through participation. These shape our organisational culture and guide our work with children and families. This puts the child or young person and our relationships with them

firmly at the centre of our thinking and practice and sets a range of practice improvement objectives which we also expect from our statutory partners and those who provide services and provisions to the children and young people of the borough.

Another key development is the building of our **Neighbourhoods Programme and Neighbourhood Health pilots** in the borough. The programme aims to provide a range of clinical and community-based support directly within neighbourhoods, making it easier for people to access care. It builds these with residents empowering them to have a greater say in the care and support they receive within their communities and it works with partners to utilize common data, technology, and workforce approaches to support local service delivery and integration across health and social care. Whilst the initial focus has been on supporting adults, this is now developing a further focus on supporting children and families. This will greatly enhance our prevention work through extending our reach into the heart of communities.

Successes

- The Borough successfully bid for Department of Education Grant Funding to the tune of £5.4m now matched by the Local Authority to provide 17 placements between 3 children's homes across 7 properties between 2028 -2029.
- The development of a joint venture between the NHS and local authority around building a new NHSE funded crisis centre in the borough – an accommodation based facility for children with learning Difficulties and Autism Spectrum Disorder providing short term stabilisation and support, key to preventing hospital admissions or escalation into specialist residential care
- Annual fee reviews embedded for foster carers and a Specialist Foster Carer job description and fee structure.
- The successful creation of an open framework for supported accommodation and semi-independent provision,
- The re-tender of The Vineries provision and transport contracts
- Joining the Newham DPS for Independent Fostering Agency and Children Homes placements.
- The strengthening of Partnership relationships
- Significant improvements noted in our recent Youth Justice inspection which recognised the service as being 'aspirational for its children' and our recent Ofsted visit which recognised that 'Most children in care are making positive progress, with a strong, collective focus on their safety, developmental, educational, health and social needs.' Particular recognition was given to the following:
 - ✓ Our additional mockingbird constellation, making us a flagship borough across the Fostering network
 - ✓ Number of children adopted doubled from 8 to 16 in 25/26 - the highest in NEL and above the London average
 - ✓ A comprehensive Kinship Local offer published
 - ✓ A well-established child in care council providing challenge and contributing to service improvement
 - ✓ All homeless 16/17 year olds receive a joint assessment with housing and an opportunity to meet with an independent children's rights officer
 - ✓ Through DFE funding an established Lifelong links offer, supporting children in care and care leavers to reconnect with people who know and love them.
 - ✓ A well-established Resettlement panel supporting smooth transitions for young people leaving custody, with reduced re-offending rates.
 - ✓ Specialist intervention service provides a rapid response to young people at risk of coming into care, offering restorative intervention and family group conferencing

What our children and young people tell us



Feedback was gathered through direct engagement work during 2025 and early 2026 by the Participation Team in Barking and Dagenham. The most recent discussions with young people regarding accommodation and placement experiences took place around December 2025.

Young people have also participated in a recent Supported Accommodation tender and were able to express their views around the support they need.

Young People's Views:

- Overall, many young people reported feeling more listened to regarding their placements and accommodation arrangements.
- Many young people stated they generally felt safe within their placements.
- Where young people did not feel safe, they reported feeling that their concerns were listened to and acted upon appropriately, including consideration of alternative accommodation where necessary.
- Several young people stated they felt they had been appropriately matched and were generally positive about the trajectory of their current placements and support.
- Young people commonly expressed that feeling heard and involved in decision-making had improved their experience.
- Some young people expressed frustration regarding the length of time taken to move into more permanent accommodation arrangements, particularly 16+ and 18+ young people.
- Temporary accommodation was sometimes viewed as unsuitable for long-term living; however, young people generally understood when placements were being used as transitional or second stage arrangements.
- Young people highlighted the importance of carers and professionals understanding cultural needs and identity.
- In some cases, young people stated that positive relationships with support staff improved their experience even where the physical accommodation itself was less favourable.

Actions for this strategy:

- To develop an annual wider survey/consultation activity with young people relating to wider accommodation types of experiences
- To consolidate on co-production work, enabling children and young people in co-producing new services and procurements.
- Ensure Providers feedback suggestions as part of the children's views, wishes and feelings standard
- To utilise the Continuity Contracts in the new Supported Accommodation and 18+ provision open framework to reduce time taken to move between being accommodated and their own permanent provision
- To utilise the new Supported Accommodation and 18+ provision open framework to reduce time monitor and eliminate temporary accommodation.

Our aims and principles: Belong – Matter – Succeed

The aim for all our children in care is that they know they belong, they understand that they matter and they are actively supported to succeed.

- **Belonging:** to provide children wherever possible with loving homes that keep them safe and build a sense of belonging which will act as a “protective factor” in helping them navigate challenges and changes.
- **Mattering:** ensuring all our children in care have a voice and that it is acted on so that they know that we are invested in them and that they will receive the same high-quality support and opportunities that we would all strive to achieve for our own children.
- **Succeeding:** Providing the best possible opportunities for all children in care and young people leaving care and focusing on what they really need to thrive.

Our Approach

- **From placement-led to needs-led planning**
Moving away from matching children to available placements, towards designing provision around the **individual needs, strengths, and aspirations** of children and young people.
- **From volume to quality and outcomes**
Prioritising **high-quality, stable placements** that deliver positive outcomes, rather than focusing solely on increasing capacity.
- **From out-of-area reliance to local sufficiency**
Reducing reliance on distant placements by **developing local provision** that enables children to stay connected to their families, schools, and communities.
- **From reactive to preventative approaches**
Strengthening **early help and edge-of-care services** to prevent escalation and reduce the need for care placements where safe to do so.
- **From fragmented pathways to integrated support**
Ensuring better alignment between **social care, education, health, and housing**, creating a more coordinated system around the child.
- **From provider-led to partnership commissioning**
Working more collaboratively with providers to **co-design services**, shape the market, and ensure services reflect local needs.
- **From transition points to continuous journeys**
Improving planning for key transitions (e.g. into care, between placements, and into adulthood), ensuring **consistency and continuity of care**.
- **From standard provision to specialist responses**
Expanding provision for children with **complex needs, disabilities, or experiences of trauma**, ensuring the right support is available at the right time.

Our sufficiency model

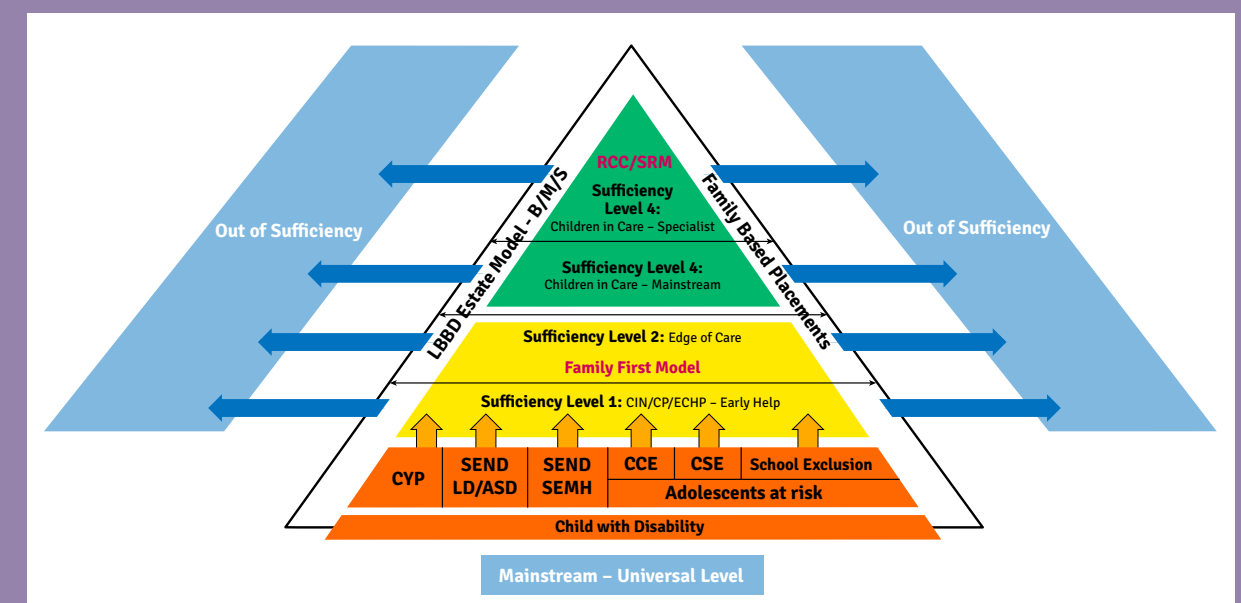
In thinking through and visualising our approach to sufficiency in the borough we have evolved a tiered model.

The Sufficiency Pyramid is a tiered system which distinguishes the levels by increasing complexity, intensity and the specialism and expertise of interventions required as well as the interrelationships between levels.

Most children grow up without needing any more than our universal services. But some children will have additional needs at any or all stages of their life journey. We know that in these cases children and young people will need help and support as early as possible to ensure the situation they find themselves in doesn't get worse.

These children will require tailored plans of support so that they can grow up successfully, in secure and healthy home environments. Our fundamental aim is to provide an effective continuum of support, across universal, early help, and Children's Social care.

We aim to identify needs as early as possible, and to work to prevent needs from escalating across the system.



Although these are shown as tiered services this is a step-up/step-down model of intervention, so high intensity services may be utilised in lower sufficiency levels to keep a family together and supported and to prevent a child from coming into care or escalating to higher needs provision. The key services and support that make up this model are detailed in the next sections.

The building blocks of sufficiency

As noted in the previous diagram we need to ensure that we have sufficient support available to Children Looked after across a wide range of needs and complexities and to also build our model flexibly so that we are able to step-up/step-down support as

children’s needs change (whilst at the same time focussing on providing stability).

Translated into services/areas of support these are the key building blocks for developing our approach to sufficiency:

Providing Universal Services

The journey of many children entering into the Care System starts at a very early stage. We therefore need to ensure that we have a focus on preventing these journeys from the very beginning by supporting our most vulnerable families right from the start. To do this we will provide well targeted universal services offering clear advice and practical help and support with parenting and managing the pressures of family relationships, finances and environment.

Family Help and Edge of Care

Sometimes Universal support is not enough and families can enter into a spiral of escalating difficulties caused by issues such as debt, domestic abuse, substance and alcohol misuse or mental ill health, that can lead to serious neglect. Again early support is key and acting on the first signs is vital to preventing children entering into care. To do this we will be investing in significantly boosting our Early Help and Edge of Care Offer through our Families First Programme.

Family Based Support / Fostering

For children and young people who need to remain in our care (where living with their birth family or wider network is not a viable option) we want them to find the right home the first-time round. Wherever possible, we want this to be with a fostering family in Barking and Dagenham. To do this we will improve overall in-house fostering capacity – increasing the availability, stability, and effectiveness of foster care placements.

Residential Support

As Barking and Dagenham have a successful fostering service it is only those children with more complex needs that are placed in residential settings. Our aim is to improve overall capacity to ensure there is sufficient provision of residential placements to meet these more complex SEND/SEMH needs, as close to home as possible.

Preventing Family & Placement Breakdown

Respite and Short Breaks are a key part of our proactive preventative offer. Providing regular breaks supports families to stay together and reduces the risk of family breakdown which can lead to periods of care. Developing crisis respite response to prevent children escalating into residential care is also a key objective of this strategy.

Providing Continuing Support - Post 16 and Care Leavers

As a borough we strive to ensure that the young people in our care are provided with every opportunity to become successful and confident young adults. So our providing sufficient good quality and safe provision of accommodation-based support for children in care post 16+ and care-leavers is extremely important to us.

- Supporting sufficiency through Universal Services

The keystone of our sufficiency model is a focus on systemic prevention – working with all partners to reduce the number of children entering the care system by ensuring that families are well supported at the earliest possible stage and that they are empowered to take control and find their own solutions to improve their life chances. This starts with our universal services such as our Best Start Family Hubs and 0-19 services. Some examples of our universal support offer are:

Best Start in Life (BSiL) – The key aim is to remove barriers and create equitable access to early education and family services for all children and reduce inequalities through targeted support for SEND, disadvantaged, and vulnerable children include children experiencing poverty, living in temporary accommodation, vulnerable under 5s and parental mental health.

Our objective is to focus on creating a coordinated, integrated approach across health, education, and family support systems to address the needs of children and families most effectively. We are working with our commissioned 0-19 service on developing integrated reviews and data sharing, drop-in play sessions with health reviews as well as new Three-Year Targeted Reviews. We are also working to ensure all of our children reach a Good Level of Development (GLD) and are collaborating across agencies including schools, Family Navigators, Targeted Early Help, Nursery Nurses, Oral Health, SaLT, and PEEP Early Intervention Workers to develop a new School and Nursery Readiness offer.

Alongside this, neighbourhood working offers a place-based model where local services collaborate to identify needs early, share pathways, and deliver consistent support close to families.

Family Hubs – we are continually developing our family hubs so we can extend our reach to welcome and support all the borough’s families. Our Hubs offer a wide range of information, advice, guidance and support to help families meet children’s changing needs including building positive family routines, specialist support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and offering a range of parenting programmes.

Money, Education and Advice – we recognise that poverty erodes parenting capacity, it compounds family stress and is a key driver of family breakdown and we provide universal services to support families into work. However we are also aware that many families struggle to manage the money they do have so we are commissioning, through our Neighbourhoods Programme a new a Community Money Education and Early Intervention Service. The aim is to provide preventative, community-based financial education and early intervention support, aimed at improving residents’ financial capability, confidence and resilience, and reducing escalation into crisis debt.

Together, these approaches strengthen system-wide coordination, improve accessibility, and ensure targeted interventions for families and vulnerable children through offering practical help and support to reduce inequalities and achieve better outcomes.

- Family Help and Edge of Care (Families First)

A primary focus of our Sufficiency Strategy is strengthening our Family Help and Edge of Care services to ensure that the families of children who are most at risk of entering care receive more of a comprehensive and intensive support offer. These include families where domestic abuse is present, where parental mental health needs have been identified or where there is drug and alcohol abuse.

The vehicle for delivering an effective early help and edge of care offer is our new Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP). The Barking & Dagenham FFP model is currently being designed in partnership with Children's Social Care Services and Commissioning and we will be working to ensure that the model is responsive to the growth and changes in our sufficiency needs.

The Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP) is a DfE sponsored multi-agency led restructuring and reframing of the way Children's Social Care services are delivered in England and represents the biggest change to service delivery models in a generation.

The aim of the programme is over time to reduce the proportion of children and young people entering the care system. In scope of the programme are four main areas of transformation:

- **Family Help** - Establish Multi-Disciplinary Family Help teams which bring together targeted early help, child in need and multi-agency child protection into one seamless system of help, support and protection and to establish a single front door for families to access help and support. To establish a new Family Help Lead Practitioner role.
- **One Assessment and Plan** - Create a single assessment and plan which stays with children and families but adapts as needs change.
- **Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT)** - Bring experts together across agencies who are skilled in identifying actual or likely significant harm and taking decisive action to protect children and to establish the Lead Child Protection Practitioner role.
- **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)** - Empower families and wider family networks to make plans to support children and help families to stay together safely. To integrate FGDM at every point from Family Help, into support, through multi-agency child protection and into care.



- Family based placements

If children and young people need to come into our care because living within their birth family or wider family network is not a viable option, we want to ensure that we find them the right home the first-time round and, wherever possible, we want this to be a family based placement with a fostering family in Barking and Dagenham.

Research indicates that placement stability for children and young people in care is an important factor in them having more positive outcomes during their lives. Changes of placement and primary carer causes instability in terms of attachment and can disrupt key aspects of their lives, such as education and friendships.

Whilst getting the right number and type of permanent placements is a significant challenge, it is vital to ensuring that our children and young people can thrive. In-house foster care provides a family-based setting within the local community, that provides the best outcomes and cost effectiveness for the local authority:

- **Outcomes:** Foster carers are the best placed to meet the needs of most of the children entering care in the Borough, with young people placed in family settings also having better outcomes than those placed in residential homes;
- **Balancing our budgets:** In-house foster carers provide the best value for money option as they are vastly less expensive than a residential placement and over £580/week cheaper than Independent Foster Carers' agencies, based on the median cost (the median cost per week of a residential placement is £7,972.50 and an Independent Fostering Agency placement is £1,125.09 per week).
- **Equality:** This maintains the service predominantly in the Borough. A diverse range of foster carers who reflect the local community demographics also ensures that children and young people's religious beliefs and cultural needs can be met, whilst improving the range of placements that are able to be offered for our children and young people, i.e. parent and child, sibling groups, children with disabilities.

To this end, having an effective and successful in-house fostering service is the bedrock of having a successful sufficiency offer. We have consistently developed and supported our in-house foster carer service and over recent years we have seen a significant and successful roll out of Mockingbird in the borough (one of the highest nationally).

We have also widened access to Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) through joining the London Borough of Newham Pseudo-DPS for Fostering and Children Homes and will be undertaking an evaluation of this as part of our sufficiency oversight work.

Snapshot:

In Barking and Dagenham placements for May 2026 indicate 310 (75%) children and young people are placed in Family-Based Placements, which is above the 71% for London. Of those in Family-based placements 251 (81%) are in foster care, with 19% placed for adoption, kinship orders or placed with parents. Of the 81% in foster care the Local Authority has 72% in foster carers registered with local authority. Levels of registrations locally are around 13 per year. The local authority has also contracted to a framework of foster carers run by London Borough of Newham for the last 2 years and is constantly reviewed.

- Improving fostering sufficiency

Fostering is the bedrock of our sufficiency strategy and our aim is to continue to increase and improve our overall in-house fostering capacity (general and specialist) through increasing the numbers of foster carers and their capacity to support more children and increasing the availability, stability, and effectiveness of foster care placements.

We are proud that most of our children in care grow up in family settings. 70% of children in care were in foster and kinship care over 2025-6, which is higher than the England, London and statistical neighbour averages for 2024-25 (67%, 68% and 66% respectively). 25 children started living with long-term foster carers over 2025-6. This reflects our clear sufficiency strategy and our commitment to ensuring children experience stable, nurturing family life wherever possible.

An average of 120 fostering households were active over 2025-6. We maintain a continual focus on recruiting and retaining high-quality foster carers. We want to ensure that foster carers match the changing profile of the borough and have invested in a permanent foster care recruitment manager to help with this. Foster carer recruitment activity has been shaped by joint work with Skittlz (our children care council) who emphasised the importance of foster carers being motivated by values rather than money earned.

Our Mockingbird Hub model is leading the way in how foster carers and children are supported and is the largest in the country. Eight hubs are operational, each supporting

approximately 10 families, creating an 'extended family' network with structured respite, peer mentoring and shared learning. Alongside this, foster carers access a high-quality training programme, including therapeutic input and monthly "creative clinics" focused on emotional wellbeing. Carers report feeling trusted, valued and well supported, and this is reflected in stable retention rates.

A key priority in developing our service further is to design and deliver a new model for providing additional specialist foster carers to support children with SEND – LD/ASD and those with complex Mental Health issues, thereby preventing placement breakdown; reducing admission to residential care; providing a faster step down from specialist treatment provision and enhancing the prospects of successful family reunification where viable

We are though currently facing a number of significant risks to our core in house fostering service. A high proportion of our foster carers are reaching retirement age and we are not recruiting sufficient new foster carers to take their place. Many neighbouring boroughs are struggling to recruit enough foster carers and have vastly improved their offer to them, including increasing rates and providing inducements such as full council tax rebates. Whilst, as a borough, we offer a very good package of support and training to our foster carers, this is making it more difficult for us to compete.

- Residential placement sufficiency

Complex care and SEND

Our aim in the previous strategy was to improve overall capacity and ensure there is sufficient provision of residential placements to meet a range of needs, particularly complex needs and disabilities, as close to home as possible. This remains our aim.

As Barking and Dagenham have a successful fostering service it is only those children with these more complex needs that are placed in residential settings and there is no demand for children’s homes in the borough to provide care for children who otherwise would be placed in fostering. Based on the current cohort of young people requiring residential placements, there is an increasing need for those presenting with mental health needs, Learning Difficulties and autism.

The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (NFJO) identifies those with the most complex needs as:

- Children with learning and physical disabilities needing support/ supervision: with challenging behaviours linked to their disability.
- Children who had multiple, complex needs, which were often recognised to be a response to complex and ongoing trauma: with needs primarily related to mental health concerns, self-harming behaviours and risk to others.
- Children experiencing or at risk of external or extrafamilial risk factors, such as sexual or criminal exploitation, with the immediate risk of exploitation, although the children in this group also had multiple, complex needs, often as a response to complex and ongoing trauma.

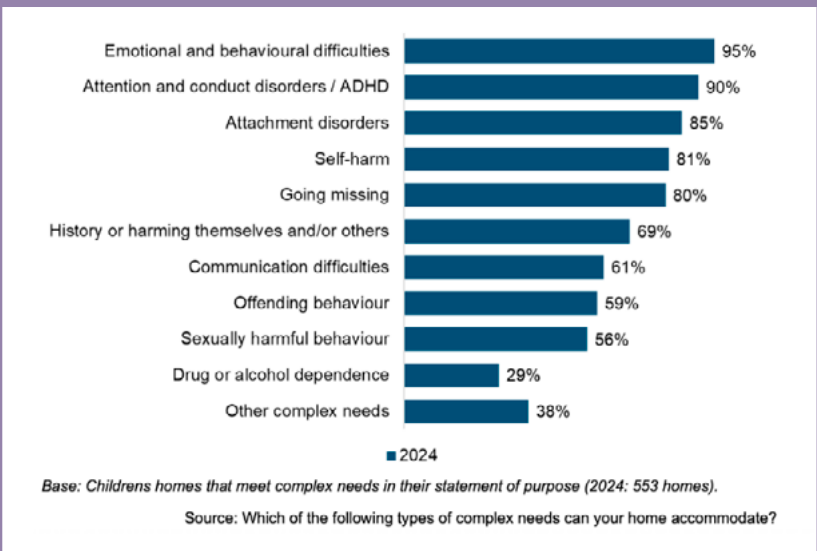
Sufficiency Actions:

- To improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers through developing the comprehensive business case for enhanced remuneration packages
- To rapidly review and revise recruitment advertising policies
- To increase the recruitment and development of Family Based Placements through the targeting of:
 - a. Special Guardianship
 - b. Connected persons
 - c. Foster carers
- To continue to identify and develop specialist carers - We have developed new job descriptions and fee structures for specialist carers and we are now looking at how we best build ongoing wrap-around specialist support and training packages they will need to have in place to maintain the role before we launch this.
- Develop a specialist Remand Fostering offer to ensure that Looked After young people in the criminal justice system can be placed with appropriate foster carers whilst awaiting a court date. This includes designing specialist support and training e.g. Supervising Social Worker training and development and developing ways to provide 24hr advice and support (in-house or commissioned)
- To continue to develop the Mockingbird Family Model arrangements
- Link Mockingbird approaches around children’s homes.
- To evaluate and continue the use of subregional frameworks.
- To work with and influence the development of Regional Commissioning arrangements around Foster Caring Hubs
- To undertake a review of unsuccessful registration applications
- To undertake a review of housing supply in the borough regarding foster care and continue to work with Housing to ensure on-going availability of 3-4 bed properties that enable us to expand our highly successful Mockingbird Programme.



The London Sufficiency Strategy notes that ‘When considering provision, analysis by the DfE found that, despite children’s homes’ statements of purpose claiming they can meet complex needs, providers are unable to meet a range of them. This makes identifying appropriate beds more challenging, especially in London, where there are relatively few beds’.

The data shows a limited number of providers who can meet the needs of those children with complex needs, drug and alcohol dependency, offending behaviour and harmful behaviours.



As shown above, both locally and nationally places are in high demand for children's homes that have the workforce with the necessary skills to support this cohort, making it much more likely that the children and young people needing this level of support are placed in homes that are not tailored to meeting their high levels of need. This is often compensated for by providers through allocating higher levels of staffing (sometimes as high as 4:1) to manage and restrict the behaviours of these children. A small number of these children can ultimately end up needing to be placed in unregistered settings as Ofsted registered provision is exhausted.

As of February 2026, there were 16 private children's Homes in the borough offering 59 placements registered with OFSTED and 59 properties registered for Supported accommodation offering 262 placements registered. However only 2 of these Children's Homes regularly accept placements for children with complex needs. The local authority requires homes that can care for those children with very complex needs and we will continue to work with and support existing local providers to develop their care ability in this area of expertise.

A key development to address this gap, which resulted from actions in the last strategy, is that the Local Authority, (match funded by the Department of Education), has agreed to the building of 3 new LBBD owned and managed children's homes within the borough that will be regulated by OFSTED. Through utilising local Authority owned land, this will provide 17 placements across 7 properties in the borough.

Designs have been completed and development work is well underway with the homes due to be opened from May 2028.

We will be commissioning a provider partner to develop the skilled team needed to staff the homes.

We are also developing a business case for a short stay crisis home in borough for children with complex needs including Learning Difficulties and/or diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The aim will be for short term stabilisation and support to prevent escalation into hospital admission or specialist, intensive residential care. This will form part of a wider crisis support pathway and is not intended as a place to provide long term support. Again this will utilise land owned by the council and NHSE capital funding, dependent on the business case being approved (this has already passed the first stage and we have been provided with NHSE funding to build this case).

We have also entered into a partnership with Purposeful Ventures to develop their **Reset** model in the borough – this will pilot a different way of working with children with complex needs who are deprived of their liberty and placed in residential settings struggling to meet their needs. The Reset programme is underpinned by the proven Breaking Cycles model and the aim is to stop defining children based on problems and service commissioning and enable professionals to help the most vulnerable children thrive through intensive 1-1 relationships and promotion of nurturing and pro-social activities.

As noted in the previous section we will be developing a specialist fostering offer for children with complex needs and working to build greater wrap-around support for these children through strengthening partnerships, joint commissioning and working arrangements with education and health. The aim is to develop more effective therapeutic interventions, both earlier in a child's

journey and to support children in foster care and those in residential settings.

To this end we will be hosting a series of 'complex cases' Partnership sessions to improve the way we work together. The aim of the sessions is to find ways to develop effective teams around the child, provide earlier more creative responses to meeting needs and better share responsibility (including risk) for the whole young person. We also have a regular children's placement review and analytics meeting as a means to keep oversight and understand trends which can shape our partnership and TAC approaches

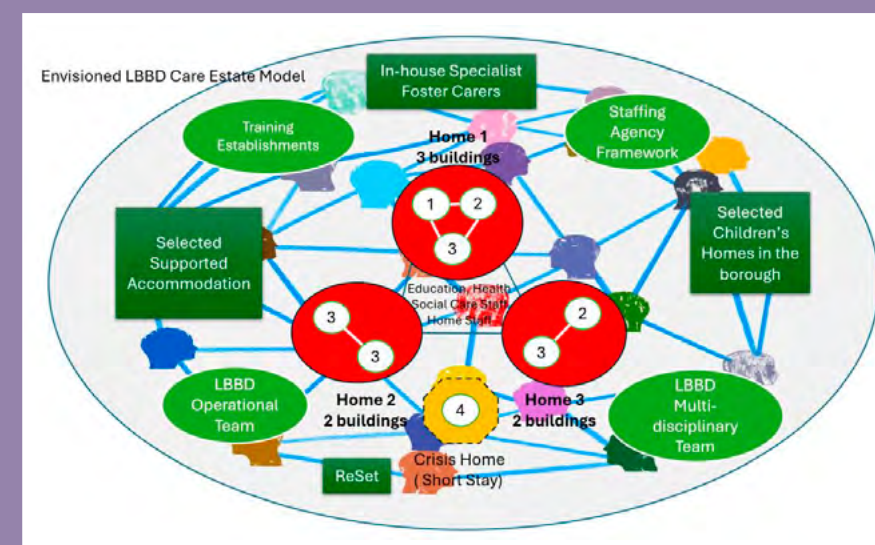
Alongside the changes in social care placements, evidence from education shows

an increasing use of specialist independent special and mainstream schools. It is important that any future commissioning arrangements incorporate education services. There are no Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) in the borough so any child requiring this kind of education has to leave the borough to board at one of these schools so we will also explore sub-regional commissioning so children can be maintained at home – improving outcomes and relieving pressure in the system.

All of the developments noted above are enabling us to plan strategically in a whole system way.

LBBD Integrated Care Estate Model

This is a new concept in Barking and Dagenham, the aim of which is to develop a local whole system approach to Sufficiency in and around the borough. It is a network of statutory and non-statutory providers across the borough to develop synergistic and mutually beneficial arrangements to improve outcomes, meet needs and reduce costs. There will always be children and young people, for whom the best placement option may be outside of the borough due to safeguarding or specific need requirements that cannot be met in the borough at that time. The concept is to enable the borough to improve outcomes and keep the children closer to their networks, to influence care costs, utilise existing services in the borough, in terms of social care, health and education, and development of a local workforce that can meet the needs of the borough children and young people.



Sufficiency Actions:

- To drive forward the development of the Specialist Children Homes Programme (SCHP).
- To continue with the development of the MHLDA crisis Home
- To devise a best-value/high skill approach for the local authority to commission operational management of its homes
- To develop a model of synergetic and beneficial partnerships within the borough to improve outcomes, meet needs and reduce costs.
- To block book or exclusively commission existing local providers to manage emergency placements
- To continue to develop arrangements between Health, Education, Social Care providers that develop a whole system approach.
- Explore sub-regional commissioning so children can be maintained at home – improving outcomes and relieving pressure in the system.
- To evaluate and continue the use of subregional frameworks to develop stronger connections and provide variety and choice in the system.
- To work with the developing Regional Commissioning arrangements re workforce development
- To advise potential new provider developments in the borough re the type of provision required prior to planning.
- To identify the shared beneficial arrangements that can reduce or eliminate care costs.
- To collaborate with all partners to develop capacity in a capable workforce
- Ensure DSR is linked to the regular and timely Sufficiency reviews.
- To widen estate to include both OFSTED and CQC registered provisions.

Stopping the use of unregistered placements

Addressing use of unregistered provision is a top priority, and we recognise that a national shortage in the supply of good quality, affordable residential care for children with high and complex needs increases the likelihood of using unregistered provision. A primary aim of this Strategy is to eliminate the need for such provisions.

As noted, we are seeing ever increasing numbers of children who present across our services with multiple, highly complex needs and serious ongoing concerns.

With the reduction in Tier 4 provision, it is essential to offer appropriate homes for children who cannot remain with their parents or wider family network. A cohort of these children will need residential settings. There is high demand for the relatively few children's homes that can manage these levels of need and many residential settings find themselves struggling to accommodate these children without putting ever increasing levels of restrictive management in place to try to control their behaviours. As a result some of these children and young people can escalate through the system from placement to placement, to the point of needing specialist, and often highly restrictive support. A small number of children even end up having to be moved

into unregistered settings with deprivation of liberty safeguards because there are literally no other providers who are able or willing to accommodate them. This can lead to further instability and poorer outcomes for these children.

Our new Homes will have a focus on meeting the needs of these children and will aim to break the cycle of escalation that leads to these placements of last resort being made. Other innovations such as creating a crisis house, developing the Reset model and building a highly specialist fostering offer will support this (as set out in the LBBD Estate model).

However these homes will not be available until May 2028 and other innovations will also take time to be developed, so we recognise the very urgent need to ensure all children are in suitable regulated settings and avoiding further use of unregistered placements going forward.

There were three children in unregistered provision as of June 2026, and we are now continuing our trajectory towards zero children living in unregistered provision through the long and medium term actions detailed elsewhere in this strategy and through the following additional short term actions:

Immediate Sufficiency Actions to stop the use of unregistered placements

- Ensure clear step-down plans for all children currently in un-regulated placements
- Review of policies and current planning arrangements.
- Prevent further admissions through:
 - a. Improved governance and oversight,
 - b. Short term actions to improve sufficiency,
 These include:
- commissioning of 'block contracts' with local providers to avoid emergency placements and develop improved care
- develop a Staffing Agency Open Framework to provide specialist support into local provision (and subsequently the Specialist Children Homes Programme)
- Working with partners to develop wrap-around and bespoke intervention packages for children at high risk of placement breakdown
- Accelerate progress of our collaboration with Reset to support children with complex needs. This brings a different approach to reduce the risk of the need for Deprivation of Liberty orders and get more children back to a family arrangement where possible.
- Strengthen partnerships, joint commissioning and working arrangements with education and health (including CAMHS) to develop more effective therapeutic interventions earlier in a child's journey

We will be hosting a series of Partnership sessions to strengthen the way we work together. The aim of the sessions is to find ways to develop effective teams around the child, provide earlier more creative responses to meeting needs and better share responsibility (including risk) for the whole young person.

Sufficiency for Adolescents at Risk

Our Adolescents at Risk pathway needs enhancement. There is currently a shortage of remand and PACE carers in the boroughs and the London Accommodation Pathfinder (LAP) which offered a residential alternative to custody for London children has recently closed down.

The table below shows a breakdown of the initial legal status of the 191 children and young people entering care in 2025/26 with the number of admissions into care on Police Protection decreasing from 54 to 35 over the past year.

We have an Adolescent service already in situ who specialise in working with children at risk of exploitation. This service will be enhanced through the Families first work, creating a larger specialist Adolescent family help service which will include alternatively qualified family help practitioners ensuring vulnerable adolescents and their families are supported through the continuum of need. The service is already aligned to the Youth Justice service ensuring collaboration as many of the children are jointly allocated.

Without these facilities, there would be reduced resilience in families and an increased risk of children coming into care.

Initial legal status	Number	Proportion (%)
Section 20 accommodation	103	53.9%
Interim Care Order	47	24.6%
Police Protection	35	18.3%
Remand to care	3	1.6%
Emergency Protection	0	0.0%
Other*	3	1.6%
Total new LAC in 25/26	191	100.0%

Sufficiency Actions:

- Actively engage with the London Remand Project.
- Recruit specialist Foster Carers for specific care roles – Remand, Respite, Short stay.
- The Specialist Adolescent Family help service will be developed as part of the families first programme.
- Review lessons from the LAP programme and support Pan London work to re-establish the programme to be able place appropriate adolescents.
- We are commissioning a thematic review into girls who experience or are at risk of significant harm. We anticipate this will provide learning regarding the specific care needs of this cohort of girls who are more at risk of residential provision.
- Define clear Sufficiency pathways for those with CCE, CSE and those excluded from school.
- Review partnership Data sets to improve capture of those entering care with child exploitation and entering from the criminal justice connection.
- Use the Reset pilot to reimagine what ‘secure provision’ means.

- Respite and short breaks sufficiency

Every child achieving and thriving underpins the reforms to the schools and SEND system in England. Whilst clearly centred around changes within the school system it also has a clear aim of shifting support from crisis intervention to early help, heavily focusing on improving access to respite care and short breaks for families. Children with SEND, including those with Social, Emotional & Mental Health Needs (SEMH) and their families rely on frequent short breaks for respite to enable them to relieve this stress, spend time as a family and do the things that other families do.

Under the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide access to Short Breaks and respite to eligible families with children with disabilities and other non-disabled children in need. They are part of local authorities’ duty to provide a proactive and preventative offer, which supports families to stay together and reduces the risk of family breakdown and periods of care.

It is also recognised, as noted in previous section, that developing crisis respite to prevent children escalating into residential care is a key objective of this strategy and is being taken forward through the development of crisis respite foster carers, the crisis house project and designing wrap-around the child crisis support team responses (being developed through the collaborative complex-cases work).

As such respite and short-breaks play an important role in our sufficiency planning. We are currently reviewing the LBBB commissioned Short Breaks services and undertaking a needs and gap analysis to underpin the business case/options appraisal for redesigning and recommissioning the service.

These plans will be included in the next refresh of this strategy.

Sufficiency Actions:

- Undertake market engagement work with providers to develop more activity choices and variation of short breaks.
- Work with providers to develop local overnight respite provision that could potentially be block funded.
- Explore developing jointly commissioned provision with neighbouring LA’s, particularly in relation to children with SEMH.
- Provide more opportunities to support universal services to become integrated into the model.
- Create a new strategy to recruit respite foster carers for children with disabilities.
- Develop a wider selection of preventative support-enhancing options available on DP (e.g. sleep training support, parent-led training packages such as in Autism Support or Challenging Behaviour management etc.).
- Reduce spot purchasing by undertaking a procurement exercise to develop new support (e.g. escort/buddying service to take children to activities, a personal care service, a respite for parent carers service).
- Look to commission a Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) provider to review on the highest levels of support to identify any amendments that may reduce long term support requirements.
- Continue to develop the Short Stay Crisis home support.

- 16+ accommodation sufficiency



As a borough we have a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient, good quality and safe provision for the young people in its care in accordance with Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 for our looked-after young people aged 16 and older (up to a maximum age of 25). As such we have recently run a very successful tender process to find suitably experienced and qualified organisations to join our new open framework of providers for the provision of Young People's Supported and Semi-Independent (SASI) Accommodation and Support Services.

The aim of the Open Framework is to establish a range of placement provisions that best meet the individual needs of our looked-after young people (who helped to design the tender), acknowledging that these needs are often ongoing.

The Open Framework is composed of four lots:

- Providers of supported accommodation for those aged 16-17 years, under the new supported accommodation regulations (OFSTED), that do not provide semi-independent accommodation

- Providers of semi-independent accommodation for those over 18 who have not, or cannot, move into independent accommodation, that do not provide supported accommodation;
- Providers of both supported accommodation and semi-independent accommodation types in order to ensure consistency and continuity of care and relationships for a Young Person; and
- Providers of both supported accommodation (OFSTED regulations) and semi-independent accommodation types in order to ensure consistency and continuity of care and relationships for Young People that are parents.

We had a massive response to the tender (over 60 providers) and the tenders involving 16+ and 18+ supported accommodation providers were evaluated by a young people's participation panel, where they reviewed the provider submissions/video presentations.

The development of this new framework will help us support this cohort of young people in a much more effective and individualised way and reduce time to be accommodated and eliminating the need for temporary accommodation.

- Care leavers sufficiency

Barking & Dagenham has a very good record in supporting care leavers, with all who are turning 18 being offered an allocated Leaving Care Advisor (LCA) to provide advice and practical support to access housing, education and training, work experience and health services. As a borough we also offer:

- Council tax cover up to 25 anywhere
- A dedicated housing worker through the vulnerable persons housing programme
- Priority access to affordable and local housing in the borough
- £1500 summer accommodation support for university students
- A £3000 leaving care grant
- Proactive resettlement planning and support for care leavers in custody
- Rent account programme and IHA to increase confidence in tenancy sustainment for care leavers
- A housing pathway to ensure sufficiency in move-on accommodation options into the future

However, as noted in the London Sufficiency Strategy a lack of housing supply across London, and the often complex needs of care leavers who are not ready for independent living, mean that many young adults require a range of offers depending on their needs and stages of development and wellbeing. For example some may require "staying put" arrangements with their existing foster carers or continuing to live in registered supported accommodation for some time after their 18th birthday.

The children's wellbeing and schools act 2026 amends the housing act 1996, in introducing new duties in supporting care leavers. This includes exemptions for care leavers from 'intentional homeless' decisions up to the age of 25 years. Our Housing services will be working closely with leaving care services in offering ongoing support to care leavers as the act extends the duties

and responsibilities of corporate parenting across the whole LA. We have also been in a position to negotiate reciprocals for YP who cannot live in the borough. Care leavers are now exempt from local connection rules when applying for social housing in England although may need to join a waiting list.

We are currently involved in a care leavers housing association pilot across London, 3 properties have been offered across boroughs and one of our YP secured a tenancy through this pilot to date.

Supporting transitions and preparation for adulthood for our children in care continues to be a key aspect of our corporate parenting promises, with specific improvements focusing on children with disabilities transitioning to adult social care. Children's corporate parenting service has enhanced its EET offer through the ongoing funding of an EET worker and an Emotional well-being practitioner supporting older adolescents in care and care leavers, both having a significant impact on young people as they transition into adulthood. We have recently commissioned Beam providing young people with independent living skills and Skillmill to support young people open to the Youth Justice service into further education and training.

Sufficiency Actions:

- As part of our sufficiency duty we will continue to work with housing departments to ensure that care leavers are prioritised for housing and to develop greater sufficiency of care leaver housing.
- We will also explore alternative family-based options that could be developed and increasing levels of wrap-around support to those who most need it.

Delivering through strong partnerships

Having strong partnerships is vital to the development of our sufficiency work, so building and maintaining relationships between people, between departments and between organisations is a key objective. Our primary relationships in respect of this strategy are with health, education, our providers, VCFSE partners and regional and subregional bodies, although relationships in other areas such as Housing and Universal Services are also important.

Health: This is a very important relationship to the successful delivery of our sufficiency strategy, particularly in regard to supporting children with complex mental health needs. The Local Authority, local ICB and local NHS Mental Health provider have worked together on the previous strategy to support in developing sufficiency and joint teams have supported in co-production of the Specialist Children's Homes programme and with financial support for the Crisis Centre for children on the DSR.

The BCYP Best Chance Strategy Board links to NEL wide strategic programmes and consists of ICB and Local Authority officers. It will provide overview of future joint working and progress. The Board is evolving into a Joint Strategic Commissioning Board for Children and Young People, with an updated Terms of Reference that will add value to the current approach to and strengthen collaborative working at place with all strategic partners, e.g. children's social care, education, NHS partners, VCSFE, parents and carers, on developing shared strategic commissioning priorities and plans. The board will drive the development and implementation of our CYP strategy for Barking & Dagenham

and better enable alignment of the local work programmes, e.g. FFP, SEND reform plan, neighbourhood health, BSIL and families hubs. A key aim of the board will be to achieve better value for the Barking & Dagenham pound across all partners, through reduced fragmentation and duplication of service delivery and simplifying support pathways offered to families.

Very specifically we are currently working with Health colleagues to strengthen our joint working arrangements in relation to developing more effective therapeutic interventions earlier in a child's journey and we will be hosting a series of Partnership sessions to find ways to develop effective teams around the child, provide earlier more creative responses to meeting needs and better share responsibility (including risk) for the whole young person

Education: As a borough we are continuing to see greater sufficiency demands for Residential Schools Placement. Whilst Barking and Dagenham have worked hard to develop 2 profound and multiple learning disabilities/ severe learning disabilities schools we remain under pressure due to growth in numbers, families moving into the borough and children being placed in the borough by other local authorities. We will continue to work closely together to meet these sufficiency needs and the partnership between education, health and social care was recognised in the 2024 OFSTED/CQC SEND as valuable in helping to identify needs accurately and provide appropriate support.



Another key aspect for sufficiency is Alternative Provision. In 2024 Barking and Dagenham had a 16% rate of absenteeism in the borough of which 10% missed 50% of attendance increasing risk of entering care. The Families First programme will put a specific emphasis on wrap around family help for children at risk of school exclusion, poor attendance as we recognise the direct link between non-school attendance, exclusions and entering care.

Education also takes the lead in Barking and Dagenham on Tripartite and Bipartite funded residential care, further work continues developing a Joint Commissioning approach, building on the previous strategy.

Sufficiency Actions:

- To continue to develop joint commissioning across education, Health, and social care.
- Undertake a strategic review to growth in numbers of SEND, reviewing both growth in numbers and complexity.
- A strategic analysis of the relationship between school exclusion, absenteeism and entering care to support the development of the Family Help model.

Providers: Many of our relationships with providers are transactional and we are seeing more conflict and negotiation in our dealings with suppliers, almost exclusively these focus on funding.

It is nationally recognised that the private market for children's care and support is dysfunctional and requires a longer term national solution. However, as we develop our approach to sufficiency we need to think about how we can develop better strategic relationships with providers locally that will assist us in promoting more positive interactions and outcomes.

As we improve our residential care sufficiency, we will be looking for local providers with whom LBBd can build these relationships and have recently started an engagement process with them.

Hand in hand with this approach is the need to improve the management of our contractual relationships with providers through more clearly defining and specifying the services to be provided and the expected outcomes. We also need to be clearer with suppliers about our monitoring expectations and how we will track these contractual requirements to ensure they are being met. To this end we will be undertaking a full review of our contracts, our contracting process and our contract monitoring.

Sufficiency Actions:

- Actively engage the local market and build partnerships with key providers including setting up joint development forums and training sessions.
- All placements and accommodation to be made through commissioned solutions, with preset quality and costs.
- To reduce spot purchase arrangements to a minimum.
- Ensure outcomes for the child will always be reflected in placement agreements that are reviewed regularly.
- Explore new and additional measurements of outcomes across our placement and accommodation to support providers performance and quality assurance framework.
- Review and revise IPAs so they detail the costs of Accommodation, Support, Therapy and additional Education separately and be supported by detailed pricing breakdown. This breakdown of costs must be supplied when producing invoices or in changes to the IPA.
- Introduce measures to support cost variations such as step down/step-up, short-term care plan impacts to ensure stability.
- A new fee increase review process will be devised to track and monitor fee requests that are not related to individual need but cost of living changes (Care Cubed).
- Work with developing Regional Commissioning Collaborative to develop workforce skills and career opportunities.

VCFSE: Our relationship with the sector in terms of sufficiency has been under-developed but increasingly we will be looking to develop partnerships around our early prevention and edge of care support. As a key development we will also be seeking to tender the management of our new children's homes to the sector to find a partner with experience of managing appropriate accommodation types that relate to needs and behaviour of our children and young people.

Regional and Subregional Collaboration: Our primary relationships moving forward are likely to be with Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs). These are local authority-led bodies in England designed to transform children's social care by collaboratively planning and commissioning fostering, residential, and secure care placements on a regional basis. They aim to reduce reliance on private providers, improve placement availability for complex needs, and keep children closer to home.

Two RCC pathfinders in Greater Manchester and the Southeast have provided valuable learning and insight into how the RCC model will be developed and have tested new approaches which show early signs of how a more coordinated regional model can support better outcomes for children and young people.

In addition, we are working with sub-regional and pan London colleagues on commissioning solutions for key sufficiency gaps, for example with Pan London services on developing a Tier 4 Secure Unit for London and new models around alternative provisions to prison.

We are also working with the NHS, ICB and North East London Commissioning

Partnership to develop and build a four placement short stay crisis home to support children with mental health, learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder with the aim of keeping families together and reducing the impact of numerous A&E and inpatient visits on the child or young person.

Sufficiency Actions:

- To support the proposed London RCC, develop its operating model through collaboratively working with London's local authorities, that provides equity, transparency and is fit for purpose.
- To participate, shape and support any future operational or governance change if required.
- To draw upon the RCC Sufficiency data and expertise whilst maintaining the Local Authority's sufficiency duties and ensure that the Local Authority does not compromise capacity for its children.
- To utilise the RCC facilities in brokerage and services whilst retaining full control over placement decisions for its children.
- To utilise the RCC arrangements to strengthen capacity, choice and workforce development.
- To ensure that RCC models operate equitably.
- To continue to support and work with Pan London and Sub regional partners developing services that would be uneconomical in terms of capacity and capability.
- To incorporate these policy and partnerships in the regular and routine mechanisms to review Sufficiency throughout the duration of this strategy.

Governance and Oversight

The successful implementation of this strategy will depend on maintaining progress on delivering the actions set out and maintaining the strategy as a living document.

To this end a Sufficiency Oversight Group including Health, Education and Operational colleagues will be set up to oversee the progress. It will receive updates from Children's Commissioning on achievements/ milestones and any risks and issues.

The Group will provide guidance; offer support and facilitation to clear blocks to progress (where possible) and will highlight any emerging needs.

This group will report into the Best Chance Joint Strategic Commissioning Board.



Sufficiency development planning

The key measurable development objectives of this strategy are:

- Increased support preventing children from coming into care
- Reduction in admissions and the number of children living in unregistered provision
- Increased local regulated placement capacity
- Increased fostering capacity/specialist fostering capacity
- Improved placement stability
- Increased numbers of children living close to home
- Reduced reliance on emergency and out-of-area provision
- Increased provision of short-term respite and crisis support
- Increased availability of provision for children with complex and specialist needs

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) around these areas will be set out in Sufficiency Development Action Plan.

This is a dynamic 4-year strategy so our intention is to develop annual plans through the sufficiency group to meet these development objectives.

Initial priorities are:

- Deliver the short term actions to eliminate the use of unregistered placements
- Progress the development of our in-house children's homes at pace
- Develop the Crisis House model and design ready for development
- Focus on actions to build and strengthen our in-house fostering offer including general recruitment and the development of the specialist foster-carer roles
- Build a strong Early-Help and Edge of Care Service through the design and development of our Families First Programme
- Enhance our Short Breaks support following the completion of the review

A workshop to go through the strategy and agree the initial 6-month Key Priorities and design a detailed Action Plan will take place in July 2026 then annually in Jan/Feb prior to the start of each new financial year.

Conclusion

We are committed to being the best Corporate Parents we can be. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out clear promises to children in care and care leavers, which are:

Promise 1:
To make sure you get the best care and support

Promise 2:
To help you build lasting relationships and stay connected to the people who matter to you

Promise 3:
To support your health, wellbeing and mental health

Promise 4:
To help you get the best possible education

Promise 5:
To help you achieve your goals, prepare for adult life and have a safe place to call home

This Sufficiency strategy is key to helping us meet these promises – through continually improving our sufficiency in the borough and meeting the many challenges we face.

To ensure we achieve this we will make sure this strategy remains a living document that is regularly reviewed. In doing this we will make effective use of our own data/localised information, other local authority data and national-level data to continue to predict need and plan for our sufficiency needs.

Developing our own children's homes and 'care estate' will massively change the landscape for us in Barking & Dagenham and will offer us the ability to support and nurture our children in care in a much better way.

However as we develop these homes we will still be maintaining our focus on developing models of intervention and support that reduce demand for these higher-level interventions and keep children out of the care system in the first place wherever this is possible.

As we progress we will also take the learning from both successful and unsuccessful initiatives within the strategy to understand the elements that contributed to this so that we can continually design better. We will continue to engage with and actively work with our care experienced children so that we can better understand their experiences and identify ways to improve services.

LBBD is determined to work collaboratively and effectively through this strategy with all our young people, service providers and partner agencies to improve the health, welfare, and educational outcomes of all our looked after children through ensuring that we provide sufficient services to meet their needs and that the support these services deliver is of the highest quality.



**BELONG
MATTER
SUCCEED**

