

# **Worcestershire Children, Families & Communities**

**Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy for Looked  
after Children and Care Leavers**

**2017-2020**



## 1. Vision and context

To ensure children feel safe and have the care and support they need to be healthy, happy and to live successful lives.

### *Worcestershire's Vision*

Children have better outcomes if they can be enabled to live within secure, stable homes and their lifelong welfare needs can be addressed. For the majority of children and young people this will be at home with their birth family, using community-based resources, universal services and targeted early help services when needed. Worcestershire has an Early Help Offer for families who may need extra help and Worcestershire County Council has commissioned a number of services including community-based provision for children with disabilities. The local authority works in partnership with health services to assist parents who may need support with their own needs.

Some children may be at risk of harm or they may have significant additional needs that cannot be met through early help and community services alone. At such times Children's Social Care will assess the child's situation and ensure services are in place to support the family and safeguard the child if needed. This will include aiding the family to look at their own extended networks to identify whether they may be able to help and support. The Council has developed a Kinship Strategy which, if needed, seeks to support other family members or non-related carers to provide the necessary care.

If extra support for the family does not change the situation and the risk of harm or family breakdown is too great, then the local authority may look after a child or young person on behalf of their family. The aim will always be to try to recover the situation with the family so that the child can go home or live with someone else in their wider network. Our aim is to ensure that children do not remain looked after if they do not need to. However, if they do need to be looked after, we aim to have the majority of children and young people looked after within Worcestershire in suitable placements that meet their needs.

For some children it will be better for them to be found an alternative permanent family through adoption, so that they can develop secure and safe attachments.

For some children the local authority needs to look after them through to adulthood because they cannot live with their birth family and adoption is not the right plan for them. For most of these children, an alternative long-term foster family will be found and the Council has a Fostering Strategy to ensure there are sufficient foster carers for these children.

A few children may need access to specialist care that can only be provided in a residential home. This Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy ("the Strategy") plans for the provision of sufficient suitable homes for these children.

This Strategy also addresses the needs of young people in transition to adulthood. The County Council and District Councils will work in partnership to identify suitable accommodation and support young people into independence as adults.

This Strategy aligns with commissioning of services for children and young people with special educational needs in line with the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) reforms.

When a child or young person becomes looked after, the Council becomes their corporate parent and will provide ongoing advice and assistance, if eligible, until at least the age of 21, with a duty to keep in touch until a young person is 25, and in higher education. Best practice is an offer to keep in touch with all care leavers up to 25 years.

The Strategy helps to ensure that we understand, plan and meet future demand for looked after children and care leavers within Worcestershire in order to improve their outcomes. It also helps us to reduce demand on services and ensure effective planning at an early stage.

Wider strategic objectives relevant to this Strategy are:

1. Prevent and reduce the number of children who need to be looked after through provision of earlier and targeted help to families
2. Ensure the right children are looked after in the right way, in the right placement, at the right time at the right cost
3. Ensure there are sufficient placements that meet the assessed need of children who are looked after in Worcestershire
4. Enable children to exit the care system at the right time into a safe and loving home
5. Improve the outcomes for all children who use the services provided by Worcestershire County Council

## **2. Progress against 2014-17 Strategy**

The last Strategy was developed in 2013, and covered the period to 2014-2017. Key areas of focus were agreed and services have been designed and commissioned to meet forecasted needs.

**Capacity was increased and services commissioned that are more cost-effective:**

- Maintained the same number of children in residential care but decreased the % of children placed in residential. (At the start of 2014-15 there were 11% of children looked after placed in residential care. This peaked at 12.4% in April 2015 and stands at 10% in February 2017).
- Slight increase in number of children adopted each year
- Increase in the number of conversions to Special Guardianship Order (SGO) from 85 at the start of 2014-15 to 114 in February 2017 - a rise of 34%
- Development of the Placement Plus service
- 1 new 3-bed residential unit
- New supported living unit for children with complex needs
- New short breaks home for children with complex needs
- 17 new in-house supported living units
- Revised external fostering framework agreements with external providers
- Family Group Meeting service brought in-house
- Refreshed fostering recruitment strategy
- Redesigned Family Front Door into early help services and social care
- Updated and redesigned financial monitoring and forecasting processes, and dashboard developed

The number of placements, with a cost, at December 2016 was 682. The number of LAC was 732, with the remaining children being placed with parents/friends at no direct cost to the Council. However the weekly spend was similar to that in March 2015 when there were 38 more children. The average weekly cost per placement was £964 (it was £1,021 at its highest in July 2015). The total weekly spend at the highest point was £638k when we had 662 children. We now have 20 more children and are spending £36k less per week i.e. we are spending less per placement.

A new method was agreed for tracking and forecasting the costs and sufficiency of provision for looked after children and care leavers. This was based on the number of children based on age and plan for the child in the context of the number of days, on average, the children in each cohort are looked after and the average cost of this on an annual basis. The Council used the average number of looked after children days/average cost in addition to the overall number of looked after children as a monitoring, forecasting and performance management tool.

This was then developed into a placements dashboard in July 2015 to give managers oversight and to monitor the plan against actual activity. This was used to indicate whether the plan was on or off track and to give managers information on which to make decisions for future investment or developments.

A revised placements budget of £35.3m has been set for 2017/18 based on the analysis of trends and forecast of effectiveness of new initiatives, alongside the need to make corporate savings.

This refreshed Strategy builds on the previous strategy and reflects **the commitment of the Council to invest in the right services at the right time for the right children.**

### **3. Summary of our strategy for the provision of suitable and sufficient accommodation 2017 - 2020**

- 3.1 We will ensure that sufficient high quality provision is available for all of our looked after children and young people, and care leavers, in order to support their achieving best possible outcomes**
- 3.2 Our aim is to ensure cost effective provision whilst not compromising on the quality. Worcestershire County Council will be the provider of choice if this is the most cost effective solution or if no external provider is able to demonstrate better outcomes
- 3.3 Resources will be directed to interventions that enable children and young people to remain with their birth families (or return to their birth families) where this is safe and meets their needs
- 3.4 Interventions will be evidence-based and staff will be skilled in their use
- 3.5 Resources will be targeted towards families who need it most
- 3.6 Children and young people will be enabled to remain within Worcestershire unless this does not keep them safe or it is not possible to meet their needs in the county
- 3.7 Young people will be supported on leaving care through Staying Put and staying Close arrangements where it is appropriate and possible to do so
- 3.7 We will work in partnership at a local and regional level with other local authorities, partner agencies and the external market to maximise shared resources and create economies in provision

#### **4. Wider activity within Children, Families & Communities which supports the delivery of this strategy**

- 4.1 Progress the Social Care Workforce Strategy to recruit, develop and retain a suitably skilled and sufficient workforce
- 4.2 Ensure that services for children in need, especially those on the edge of care, are aligned with the Early Help Offer
- 4.3 Ensure we listen to the voice of the child when developing and delivering service offers
- 4.4 Develop Edge of Care provision and re-unification support
- 4.5 Develop our Care Leavers Strategy including ensuring that there is sufficient, good quality and available accommodation for young people leaving care
- 4.6 Develop and continually improve the Kinship Strategy with partners to ensure kinship carers are supported and given priority when this will enable them to care for a child who would otherwise need to be looked after
- 4.7 Recruit and approve more internal fostering households to enable more children to live within the county in cost effective placements
- 4.8 Develop a Regional Adoption Service
- 4.9 Regularly monitor and forecast the average days children have been looked after to support regular placement planning and budget performance management

#### **5. What will success look like?**

By 2020 we will have achieved:

- 5.1 An increase in children in Worcestershire in-house foster carer placements (as a ratio to external) from 50:50 in 2017 to 70:30 and maintenance at this level
- 5.2 An increase in the number of Placement Plus foster carers by 8
- 5.3 A 10% year on year increase in children permanently placed via a Special Guardianship Order
- 5.4 An extra 10 in-house residential provision beds
- 5.5 An increase in children in Worcestershire in-house residential placements as a ratio to external from 40:60 in 2017 to 50:50
- 5.6 Extra 15 places in internal provision for young people who wish to live independently in supported accommodation including 4 places specifically for young people with complex needs
- 5.7 4 additional places for short breaks for children on the edge of care
- 5.8 Improvements that ensure that all care leavers are living in suitable accommodation

- 5.9 An increase in the proportion of housing support that is delivered to care leavers, 16/17 year olds (where appropriate) and young parents (10% increase in 2017/18 and in 2018/19)
- 5.10 Provision of an in-house parent and baby placement

## 6. Commissioning appropriate and sufficient provision

The refreshed Corporate Plan *Shaping Worcestershire's Future 2017 to 2022* sets out four areas which we believe continue to be fundamental to delivering our vision of a '*prosperous Worcestershire*'. These key areas of focus are:

1. **Championing Open for Business**
2. **Supporting Children and Families**
3. **Protecting the Environment**
4. **Promoting Health and Well-being**

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/corporateplan>

In Worcestershire the commissioning process is driven by fulfilling the needs of our residents, being open as to who delivers services across all providers in the local economy and having an absolute focus on outcomes for communities.

Commissioning means that across the organisation we need to apply a consistent and joined up process to source the right service from the right provider at the right price

Commissioning is informed by a comprehensive analysis of current demand, provision and forecast need. A comprehensive data set and analysis is contained in Appendix 1 to this strategy. In summary it tells us that:

- At 31 March 2016, Worcestershire's looked after children figure was the same as the national average but 12/10,000 greater than our statistical neighbour average. Worcestershire's number of looked after children at that point would have needed to be 132 lower to equal our statistical neighbour average.
- The numbers of looked after children has increased nationally and across our statistical neighbours between 2011 and 2016, however, Worcestershire's increase is significantly higher. The national increase was 7.5%, the statistical neighbour 9.1% with Worcestershire's being 17.8%.
- Our percentage of children in foster care is lower than the national average by 6%.

- Worcestershire currently has 25 vacancies for in-house fostering. Further work needs to be undertaken with these families in order to match them with children who require foster families.
- There are a high number of sibling groups who need to be placed with in excess of 50 sibling groups placed at the end of December 2016. Most of these are being placed in families via the external market as there is insufficient provision within the in-house service.
- Although the number of agency residential placements has decreased there are still more children placed in agency residential care than in internal residential units. Our external to internal ratio is 64:36. This is a decrease from 67:33 in April 2015. Further developments in this area are still required to even out the distribution.
- The number of children adopted has decreased in the last year.
- We have more children who have had three or more placements than our national and statistical neighbours. Placement stability is therefore an issue for Worcestershire and a focus on appropriate matching and placement choice is needed.
- We have a significantly lower proportion of children who are accommodated under s20 than the national average.
- There is an over-representation of males in the 16 plus age group.
- We have higher numbers of looked after children aged from 11 to 15 than the national average and the percentage is increasing.
- The percentage of children commencing care in Worcestershire is significantly higher than those leaving care.
- Worcestershire's turnover of looked after children is lower than the national or statistical neighbour rate, which demonstrates that children are staying in care longer. Worcestershire's exit rate is lower than the start rate.
- An analysis of unit costs demonstrates that internal fostering provision is 40% cheaper than the independent sector; supported living is also 40% cheaper and residential 18% less than the independent sector, on average.
- The average weekly cost per placement is £964 (it was £1,021 at its highest in July 2015). The total weekly spend at the highest point was £638k when Worcestershire had 662 children. Worcestershire now has 20 more children and is spending £36k less i.e. Worcestershire now spends less per placement than it did in previous years.
- Based on the needs analysis, and assuming the rate of looked after children remains consistent Worcestershire could have between 760 and 800 Looked After Children by the year end 2017/18 assuming there is no mitigation strategy in place. This is an



additional rise of between 60 and 100 children over and above the figure used to calculate the budget.

- The cost of caring for an additional 60 - 100 children is £2.9m - £4.8m which has been based on placing them for the full year, based on the December 2016 average cost of a placement. If more of them are placed in independent sector places this cost could be considerably higher.
- The number of care leavers in Worcestershire is higher than the national average. For Worcestershire the figure was 285 at the end of March 2015, rising to 305 at March 2016 i.e. a 7% increase which was an increase of 5.5% on the previous year.
- In March 2016 15 of Worcestershire care leavers were deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation, and there were 55 Care Leavers whose accommodation status was unknown. 135 of Worcestershire's Care Leavers were NEET and those whose education, employment or training position was unknown was 55. Tracking of Care Leavers remains an issue for all local authorities and a further focus on this for 2017 onwards is required.
- There is an increase in the number of placements held by young people over 18, some of whom have disabilities. Further work with the Young Adults team is required in order to support their transition into adult care.
- There is an increase in the number of young people remaining with their foster carers under Staying Put arrangements. This means that additional foster care placements will need to be recruited to take account of the young people remaining for longer.

As a result of this analysis the following actions have been identified as priorities for future commissioning to ensure the provision of suitable and sufficient accommodation for looked after children in Worcestershire:

- Focus on activity that leads to an increase in the proportion of looked after children who are able to:
  - live in Worcestershire,
  - live with foster carers,
  - live in settings that meet their assessed needs
  - access universal and targeted support in their communities
- Focus on the impact of early help and social care interventions, including reduction in demand for social care services and planning for those children on the edge of care, to increase the number of children able to be cared for safely within their own family, or only needing to be looked after for a time-limited period.
- Increase the number of available adoptive families and improve the adoption journey of the child to match the number of children identified as needing an adoptive family, especially those children who may be 'hard to place'.

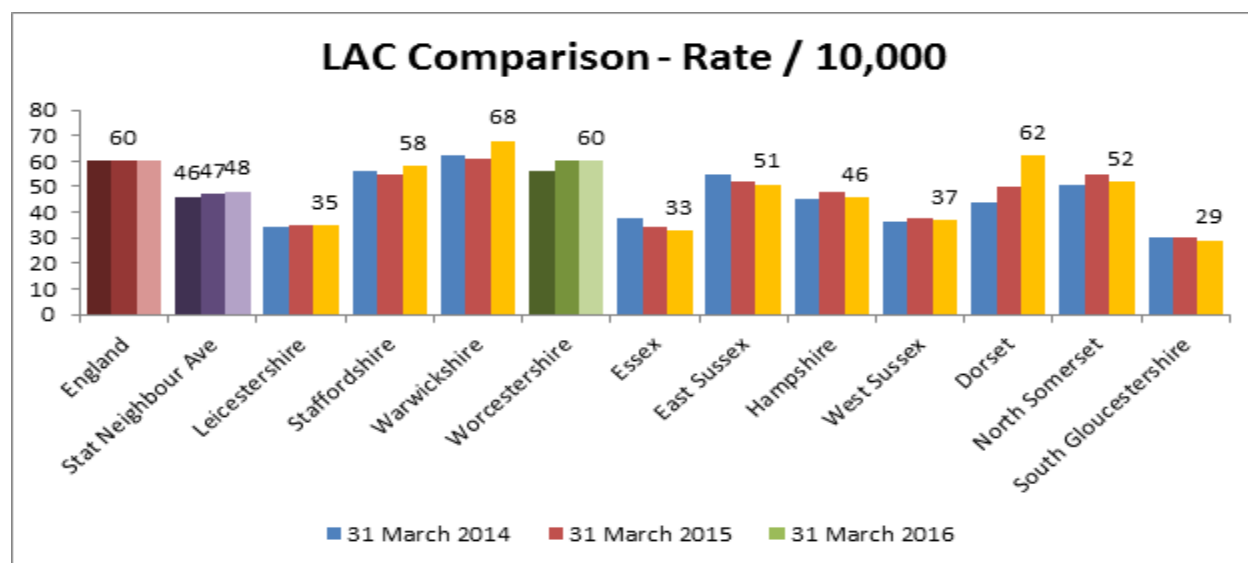
- Increase the ratio of children in Worcestershire in-house foster carer placements (to those placed in external placements). The focus of in-house provision should be to meet the needs of 'hard to place' young people, those aged 11 – 17, sibling groups and children with disabilities.
- Increase the number of Placement Plus foster carers - for those children who are hard to place or have challenging needs.
- Increase the % of children permanently placed via a Special Guardianship Order
- Increase internal provision for young people who wish to live independently (including those who are care leavers) in supported accommodation by 15 beds (including 4 for young people with complex needs)
- Increase in-house residential provision by 10 beds, with additional capacity for children with disabilities
- Increase in provision for short breaks for children on the edge of care by 4 beds
- Increase the proportion of commissioned housing support that is provided for targeted groups, e.g. care leavers, 16/17 year olds where appropriate and young parents
- Review all procurement frameworks relevant to external provision - including children with disabilities, fostering, supported living and housing support
- Undertake market development linked to the implementation of the activities within this strategy - where appropriate this will be at a regional level
- Participate in regional initiatives that support the above actions

## Appendix 1 – Needs analysis

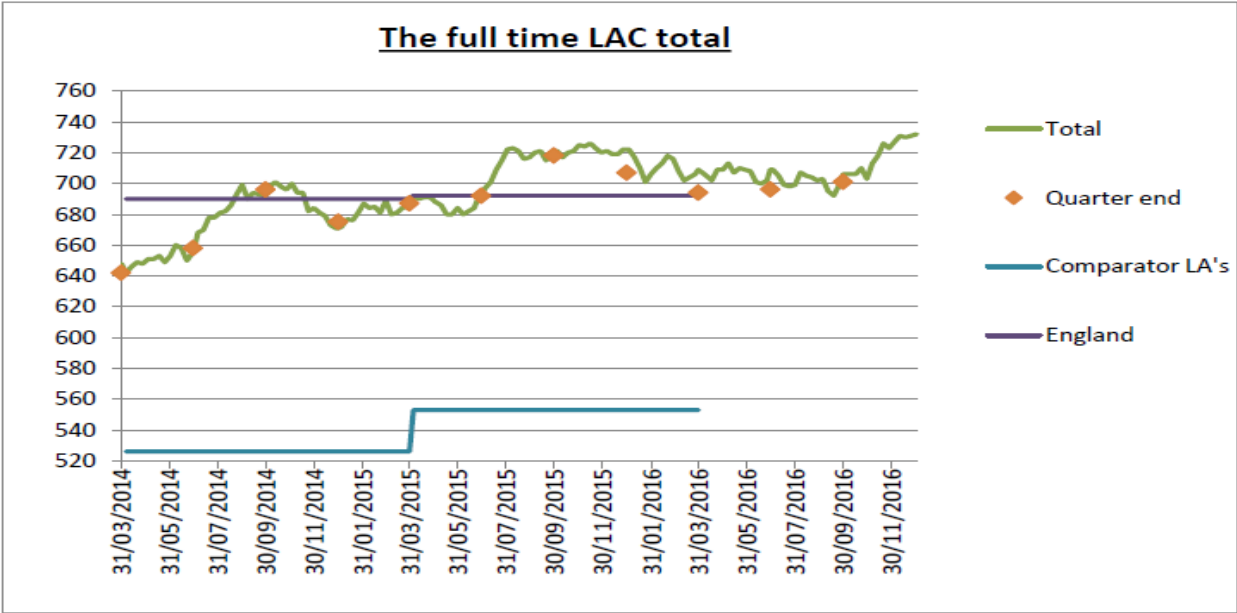
### WORCESTERSHIRE, STATISTICAL NEIGHBOURS AND NATIONAL TRENDS

#### Looked after children

The looked after children population is measured as a rate per 10,000 of the population. The English average at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 was 60 per 10,000 of population and the statistical neighbour rate was 48 per 10,000. Worcestershire's rate at that time was 60 per 10,000, however had risen to 64 per 10,000 at the end of December 2016.

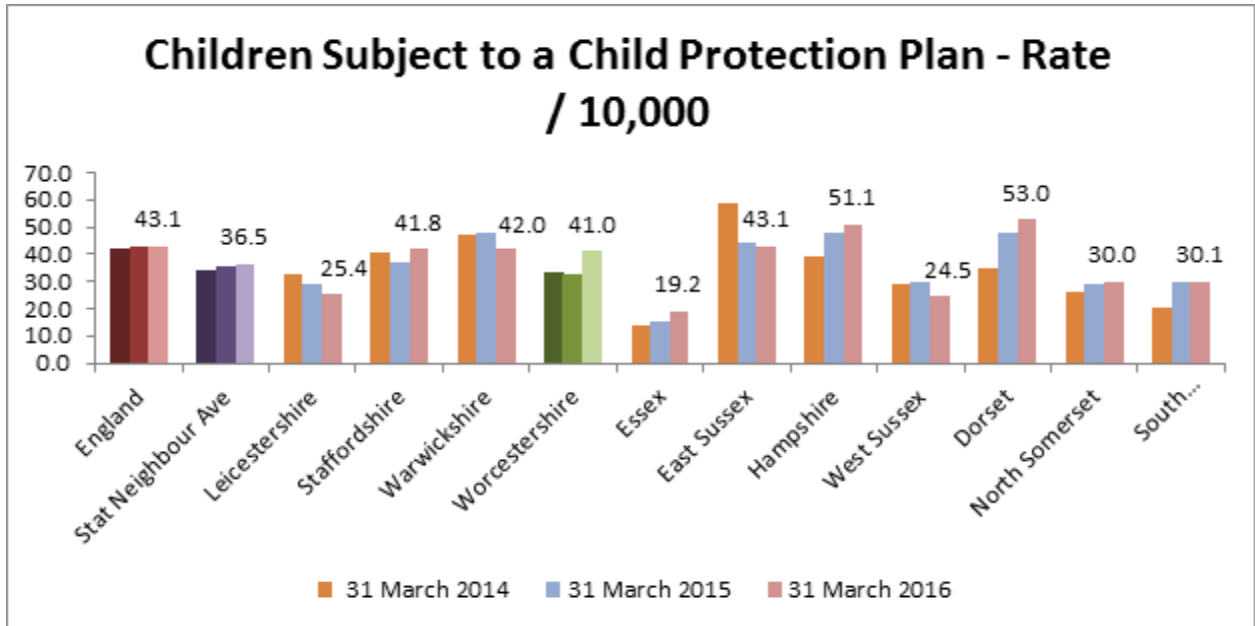


Since 2007/08 the looked after children rate per 10,000 children in Worcestershire has gone up faster than both the England average and the statistical neighbours average. The position at the end of December 2016 shows the highest point to date at 73.2. Worcestershire's rate continues to be above that of statistical neighbours and the national average.



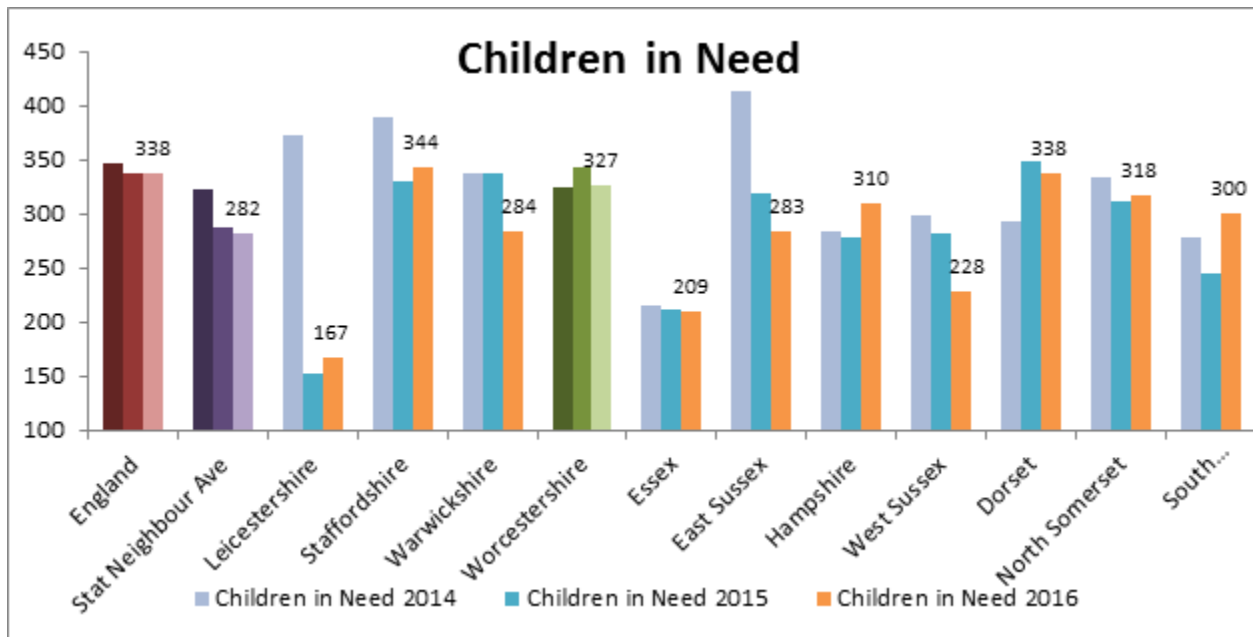
### Child Protection

The English average at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 was 43.1 per 10,000 of population and the statistical neighbour rate was 36.5 per 10,000. Worcestershire's rate at that time was 41 per 10,000, however had decreased to 37 per 10,000 at the end of December 2016.



## Children In Need

The English average at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 was 338 per 10,000 of population and the statistical neighbour rate was 282 per 10,000. Worcestershire's rate at that time was 327 per 10,000 as detailed in the graph below.



## Key Trends Nationally compared to Worcestershire

The key trends below help to highlight some of the trends nationally in comparison to Worcestershire in relation to Looked after children.

National	Worcestershire
<p>↓ Looked after children numbers went up in March 2016 by 1.4% from the previous year. There were 70,440 looked after children, an increase of 5% compared to 31 March 2012. The number of looked after children has increased steadily each year and is now higher than at any point since 1985.</p>	<p>↓ Looked after children numbers went up in March 2016 by 0.7% from the previous year. This represents an increase from 690 to 695 Looked after children. There has been an increase of 15.8% compared to March 2012, which is significantly higher than the national position.</p> <p>↓ The figures for December 2016 have demonstrated further increase to 732, an increase of 2.6% since March 2016. We do yet have the statistical or national data for this period</p>

↓ 77% of children who were looked after at March 2016 were in a foster placement, an increase of 0.7% from 2015.	↓ 67.5% of children who were looked after at March 2016 were in a foster placement, a decrease of 2.1% from 2015.
↓ 14% decrease of looked after children placed for adoption from 2015.	↓ 24% decrease of looked after children placed for adoption from 2015.
↑ 13% of looked after children cared for in secure units, children's homes and hostels, which is an increase of 6% since 2015.	↓ 12% of looked after children cared for in secure units, children's homes and hostels, which is a decrease from 16% in 2015.
↑ 7% of children looked after were placed with their parents. There has been an 8% increase in the number of children placed with parents from the previous year, but only a 0.5% increase in the percentage of the looked after children population.	↓ 5% of children looked after were placed with their parents, this figure has decreased from 6% in March 2015, despite an increase in the looked after population.

(DfE, 2016)

### Care Leavers

As at the end of March 2015, the national number of Care Leavers who were aged 19, 20 and 21 who were looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday was 26,010. This had increased to 26,340 at the end of March 2016, an increase of 1%.

For Worcestershire the figure was 285 at the end of March 2015, rising to 305 at March 2016 i.e. a 7% increase which was an increase of 5.5% on the previous year.

At the end of March 2016, 5% of Worcestershire Care Leavers were deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation, compared with the national position of 7%. Those Care Leavers whose accommodation status was unknown nationally was 11% with Worcestershire's at 18%.

Worcestershire was in touch with 79% of its Care Leavers, compared with the national position of 87%. 44% of Worcestershire's Care Leavers were NEET compared with 40% nationally, and Worcestershire's Care Leavers whose education, employment or training position was unknown was 18% compared to 11% nationally.

As at end of December 2016, the number of placements or Staying Put arrangements occupied by young people 18 and over was 49, compared with 29 at the same point in 2015, and 35 in 2014 and was broken down as shown below.

Type of provision	December 2014	December 2015	December 2016
Agency Residential		1	
In-house Residential			1
Supported Living	1	1	4
Supported Lodging	28	7	4
Student Accommodation			6
Safe Base			1
Staying Put		16	24
IFA	1	1	2
UASC	5	3	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>49</b>

This demonstrates the increased use of Staying Put arrangements and student accommodation, the decrease in the use of supported lodgings and the overall increase in the number of young people supported by Worcestershire post-18.

## SERVICE OVERVIEW

### Looked after children (LAC) Population

- On 31 December 2016 Worcestershire had 732 looked after children and 315 care leavers.
- 26% entered care through s20 arrangements.
- There were 500 children living in foster care. 286 lived with Worcestershire County Council foster carers (84 kinship carers and 202 non-related foster carers) and 214 with foster carers in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). 58 of the children living with IFA carers were outside the county boundaries.
- 27 children lived in local authority children's homes and 48 lived in residential homes run by independent providers of which, 39 were placed out the county.
- 2 children were placed in secure units outside the county.
- 3% of our looked after children had their disability as being the primary reason for becoming looked after.
- 145 children were non-white British.
- 39 looked after 16/17 year olds lived in supported independent living (this figure includes all young peoples in Independent living placements with and without formal support and excludes young people in supported lodgings, hostels, foyers).
- There were 70 children with a plan for adoption and of these 30 were placed with prospective adopters (*the number of children with a plan for adoption does not include parallel plans where one of the plans is adoption*).
- WCC currently has 42 approved prospective Adoptive carers awaiting a match.
- 369 had a plan to remain looked after until adulthood (*this figure only includes children & young people placed with foster carers (not relative/friend placements) or in residential placements*).

- 164 children were subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
- 49 children were subject to Child Arrangement Order (Residence Order).
- The families of 53 children were in receipt of Adoption Allowances.
- 166 Direct Payments were being made.

## **Provision**

- Worcestershire has a Fostering Service recruiting, training, assessing and supporting foster carers. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, there were 286 in-house placements, of which 200 children were placed with non-related carers, 2 children were placed with Placement Plus carers and 84 with kinship carers. At 31<sup>st</sup> December, there were foster carers with vacancies for 25 children.
- Worcestershire has a Residential Service supporting 7 children's homes with provision for 29 children, including 8 placements for children with disabilities. In addition, there are also 2 homes providing short breaks for up to 8 children with disabilities.
- There is one six-bed residential home identified for children on the edge of care (3 beds), for a child subject to Police and Criminal Evidence (1 bed) and for children placed in an emergency due to placement breakdown (2 beds).
- There are 40 young people aged 16/17 and 7 18 year-olds accommodated in supported living properties, of which, 20 were placed with in-house provision and 27 with external placement providers. 10 of the young people placed in external provision are outside the county.
- Worcestershire has an Adoption Service recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, 53 adopters were being supported post approval and a further 42 households were awaiting match.
- There are Framework Agreements in place to procure external foster placements and residential placements, and supported independent living providers. These ensure best value and quality assurance of external provision.
- There is a Child & Family Support Service and Outreach Team providing support for young people on the edge of care. The Outreach Team also supports young people in independent living.
- The Family Front Door, co-located with Police, Health and CAMHS takes referrals to social care and targeted family support
- There are 15 locality based Safeguarding Teams and 3 LAC Permanency teams working with children across the county who are subject to Child in Need, Child Protection arrangements and of whom are looked after.
- There is a Service for those young people who present as homeless.
- There is a service for young people who present as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- There is a specialist service for children with disabilities, including a Young Adults Team focussing on 16-24 year olds.
- There is an Integrated Specialist Service supporting the health, education and well-being of looked after and adopted children.



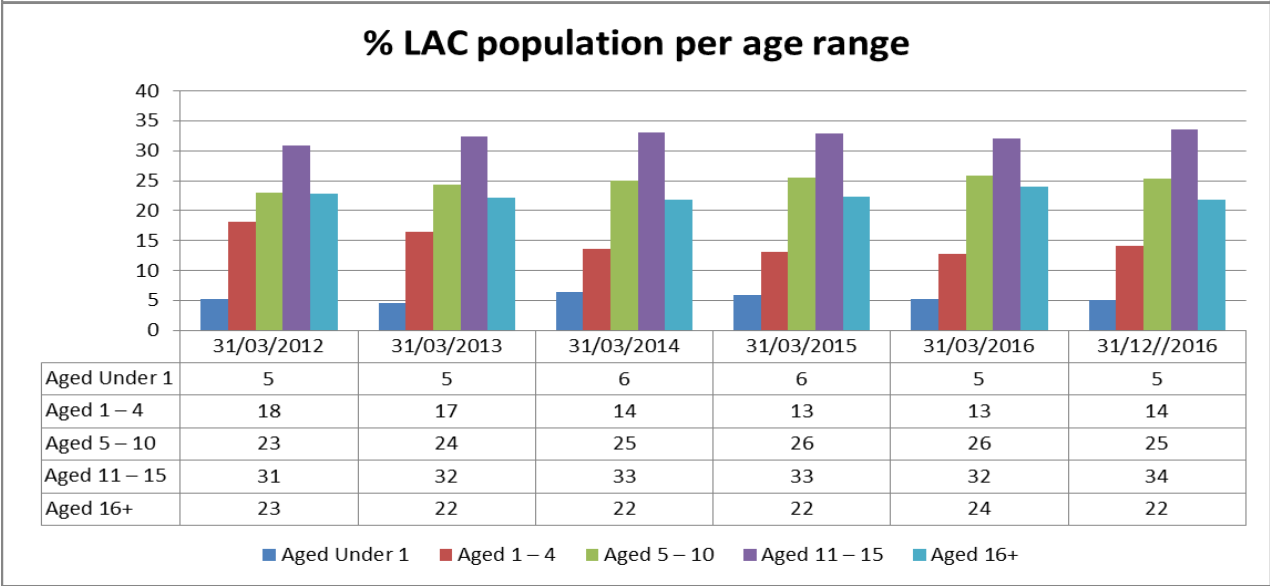
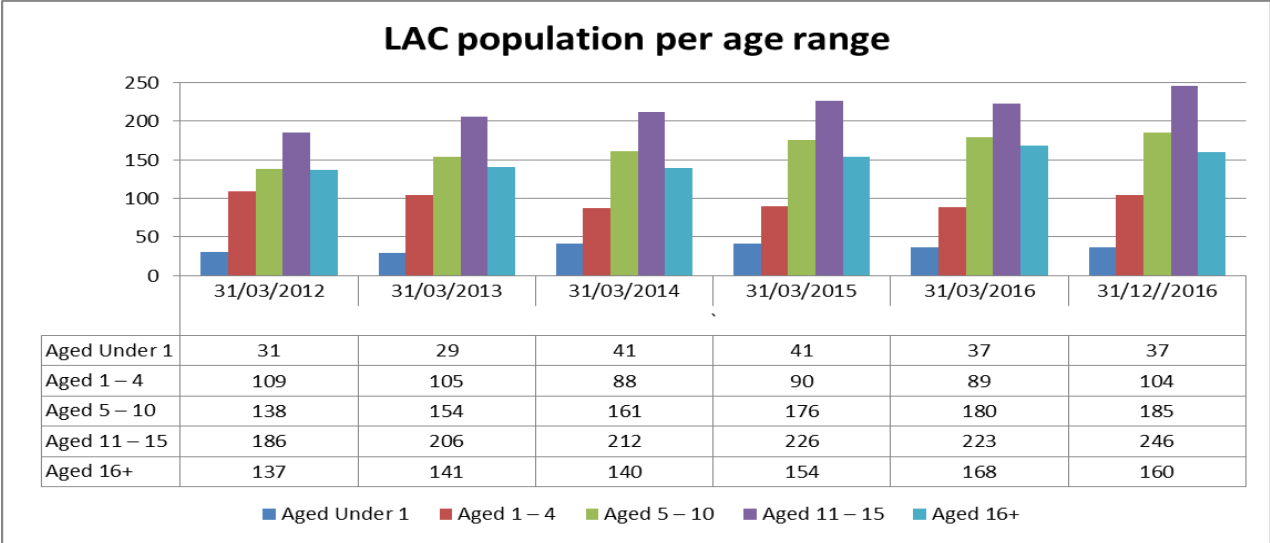
- This service also provides post-order support to adopted children and their adoptive parents and, children and carers living in kinship care arrangements under a Special Guardianship Order.

### **Outcomes**

- During 2015/16
  - 240 children started to be looked after and 235 ceased to be looked after.
  - 45 were adopted and 29 converted to Special Guardianship Order
- As at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016,
  - 12.7% of LAC were placed more than 20 miles from home, compared with a national position of 14% and a statistical neighbours position of 14.2%
  - the percentage of LAC with 3 or more placements in previous 12 months was 12.7% compared with a national position of 10% and a statistical neighbours position of 11.4%
  - 34.2% of our care leavers were NEET compared with a national position of 39% and a statistical neighbours position of 39.5%

### **SUMMARY OF NEEDS ANALYSIS**

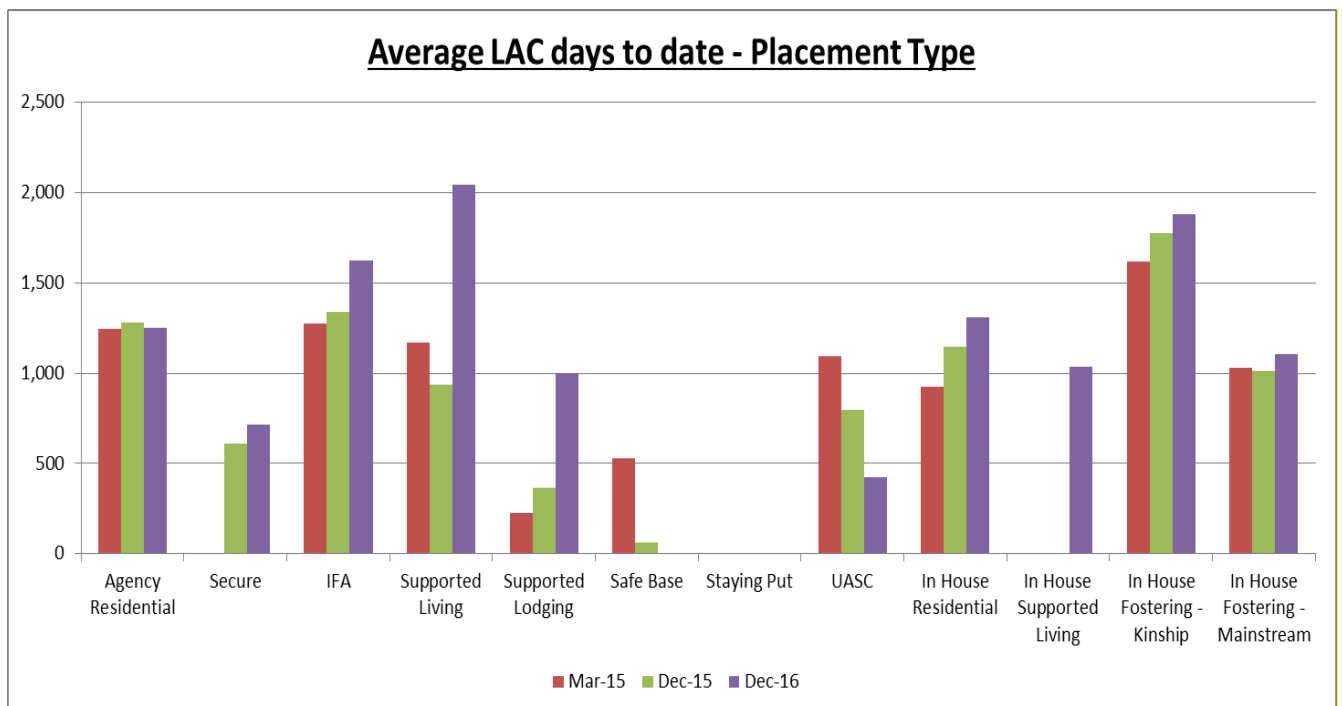
- The total number of looked after children as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016 was 732.
- The proportion of males to females mirrors the national average, but there is an overrepresentation of males in the 16+ age group (61%).
- The proportion of the looked after child population whose ethnicity is other than White British is greater than the proportion of the child population in Worcestershire and significantly greater than the national average (20% : 10.4% and 34% respectively).
- The national average for the use of s20 is 61%. Worcestershire's use of s20 at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016 is 20%.
- The highest numbers can be found in the 11 to 15 year age bracket with a total of 246 (34%) as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, having risen from 31% at March 2012. This is 5% greater than the national average of 29%.



- Children with disabilities only account for 3% of the looked after population as a whole but make up 30% of children in an external residential placement. Of the 25 young people who were looked after at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016 due to disability, 15 of those are in external residential placements. A possible reason for the high proportion of young people with a disability being placed in external residential placements could be that the external providers are able to provide specialist support for the individual's disability and may provide resources that are not available through internal providers.
- As at 31<sup>st</sup> December, Worcestershire had 68% of looked after children in foster care. This is 6% lower by comparison to the National average (74%). Since 2012 the percentage in foster care has decreased by 5%. However, we now have more children placed with parents and in supported living accommodation than we had at that time.
- 25% (185) of all looked after children and young people (732) are aged between 5-10 years, and 34% are aged between 11-15 years (246). Young people in the older cohort are

predominantly placed with external foster carer providers. We also have 160 (22%) young people who are aged 16 plus.

- Whilst action continues to be taken to increase the number of local authority foster placements, there is a risk that the number of in-house placements lost each year against those gained will not be sufficient enough to extend the placement stock with the speed necessary to ensure that there is both the volume and choice required to offset the cost of Independent Fostering Agency placements.
- The number of children adopted at March 2016 had decreased to 45 from 54 the previous year.
- The trend relating to the average days a child has been in each type of placement is shown below.

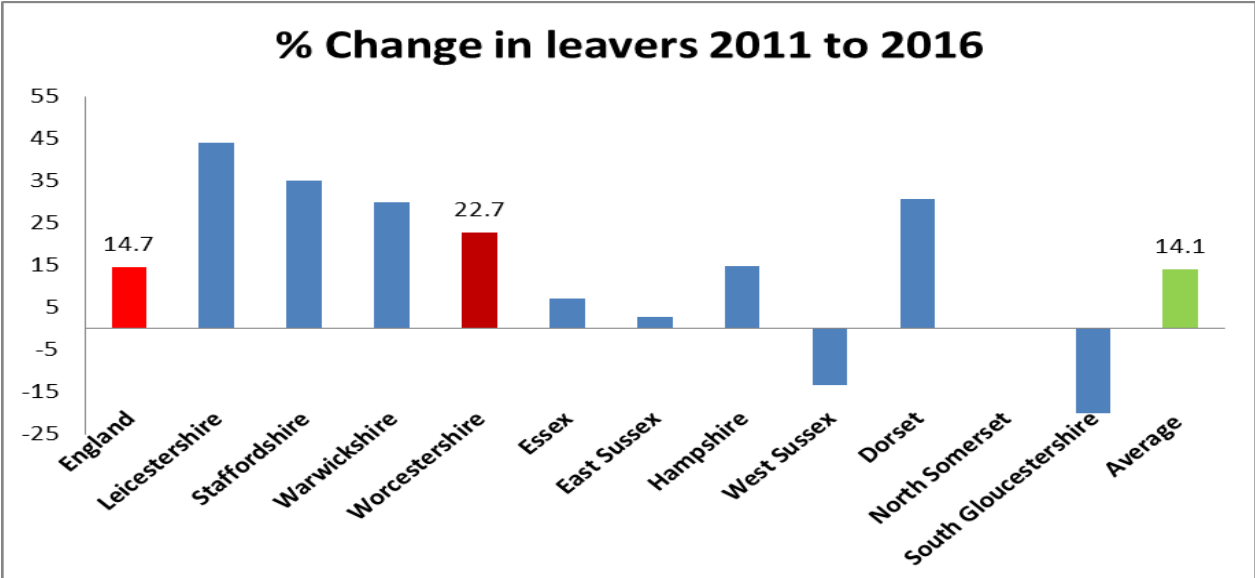
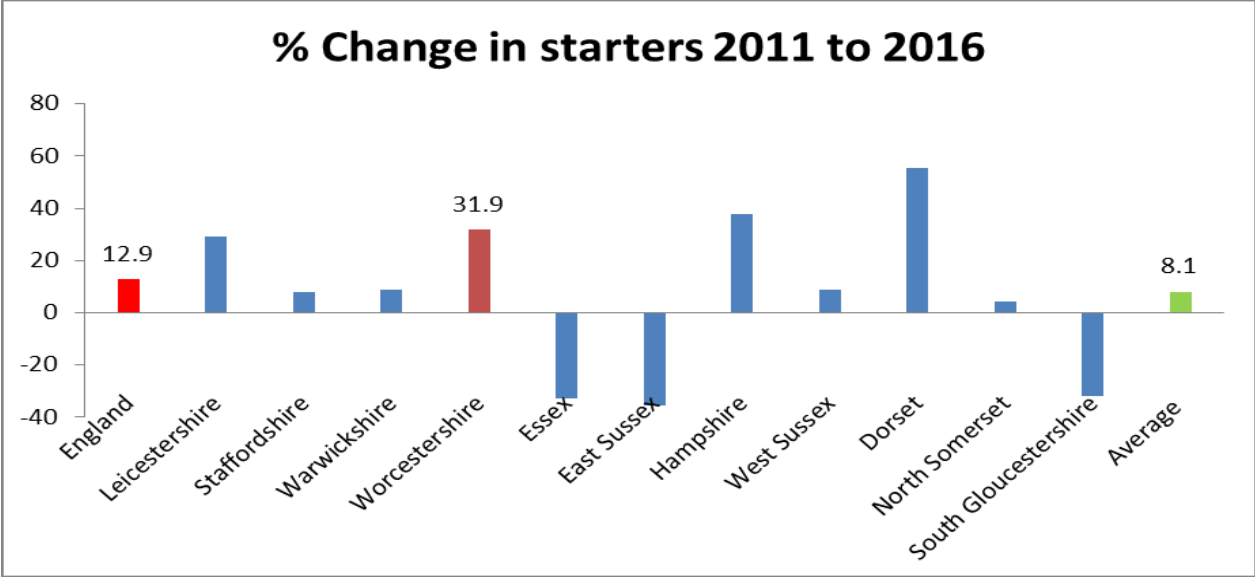


## STARTERS, LEAVERS AND TURNOVER

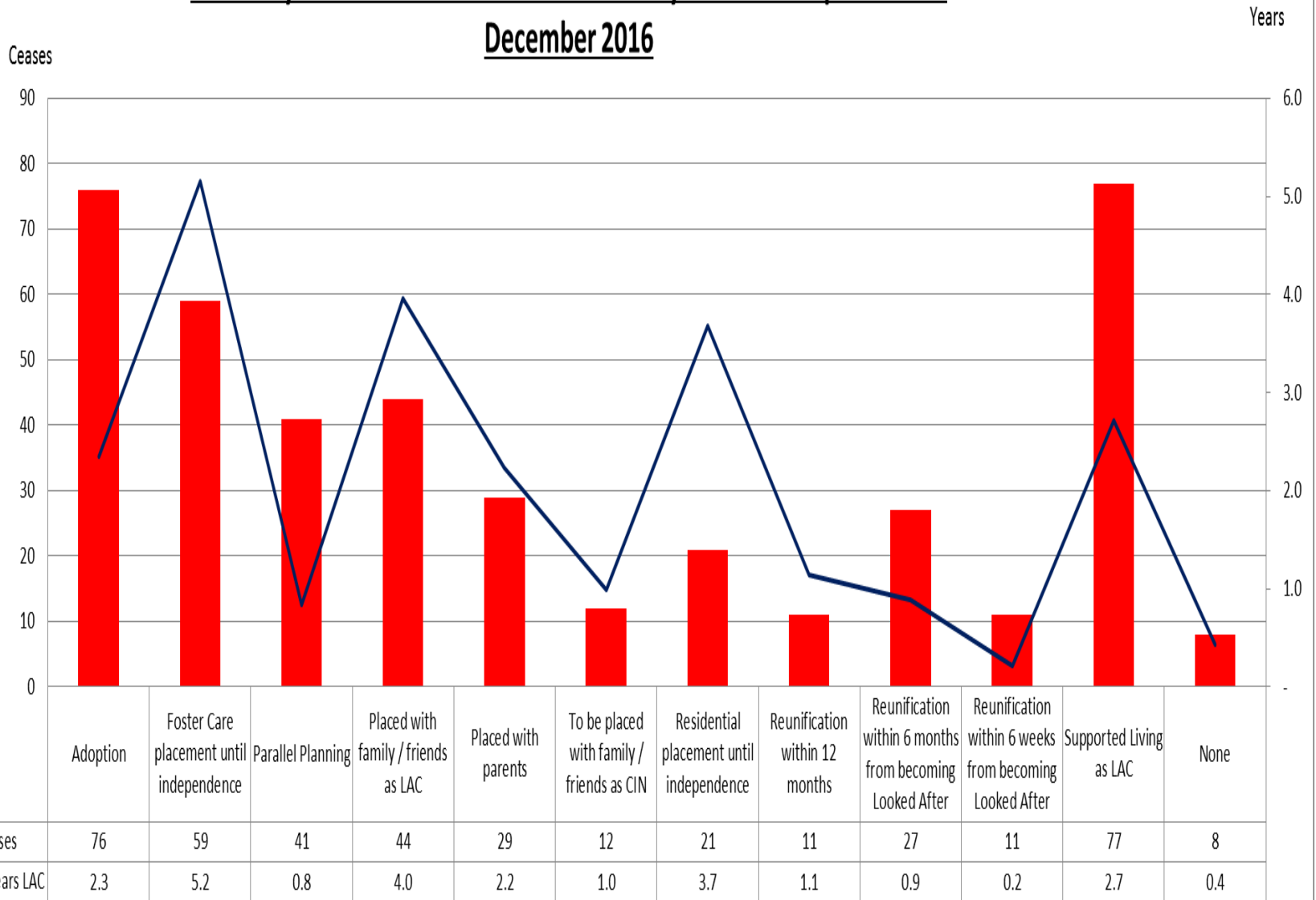
### Starters and Leavers

Along with the reasons for becoming looked after, the number of starters and leavers had been explored in order to identify the impact this had on the number of looked after children in Worcestershire e.g. does the authority have a high admission rate but low discharge rate hence the number of looked after children.

For both the national and statistical averages the percentage increase in leavers over the past 5 years has been higher than the percentage increase in starters; however the opposite is true for Worcestershire. The percentage increase in starters is significantly higher (31.9%) than the increase in leavers (22.7%).

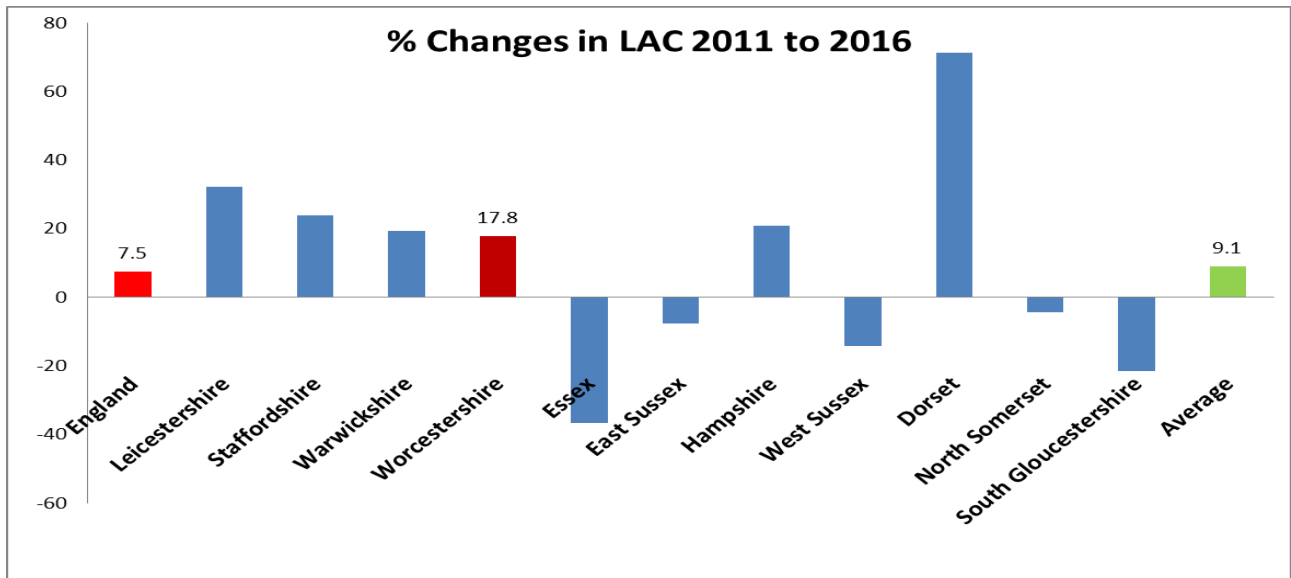


## Ave LAC years when child ceases to be LAC by Care Plan - April 2015 to December 2016

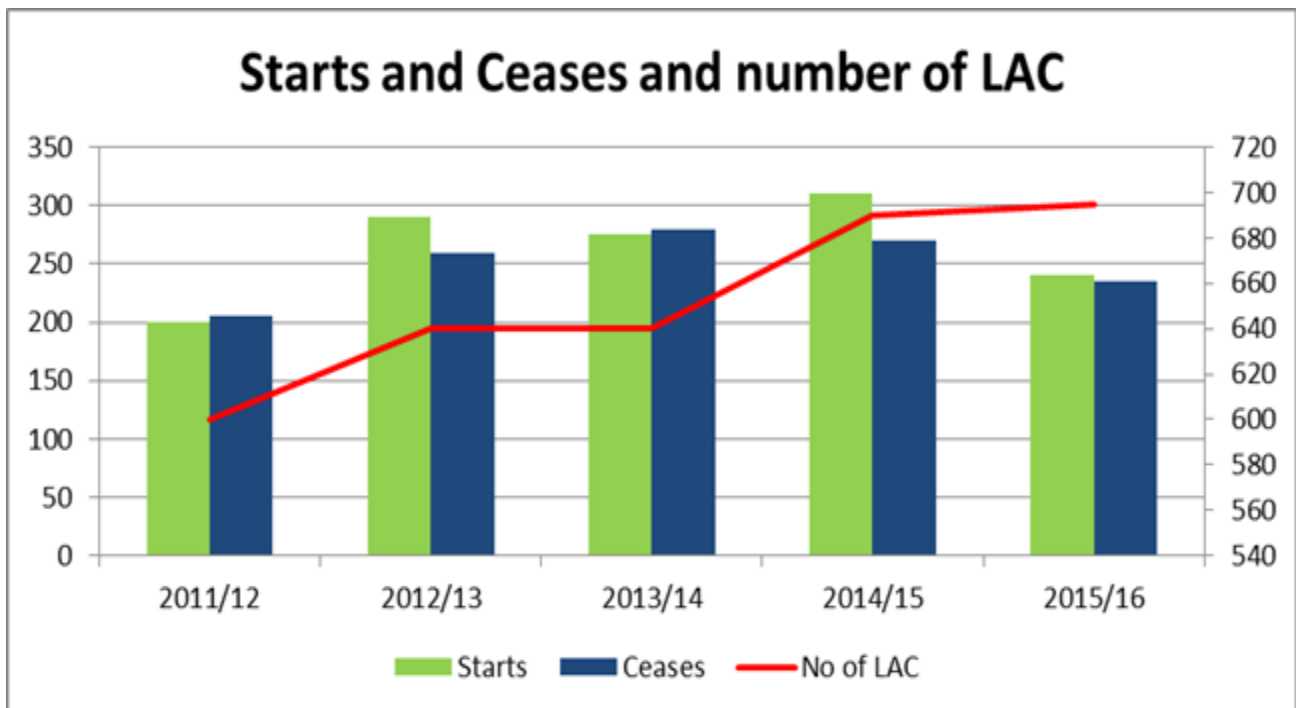


### Increase / decrease in Looked after Children

The graph below demonstrates that although the numbers of LAC have increased nationally and on average across our statistical neighbours between 2011 and 2016, Worcestershire's increase is much higher.

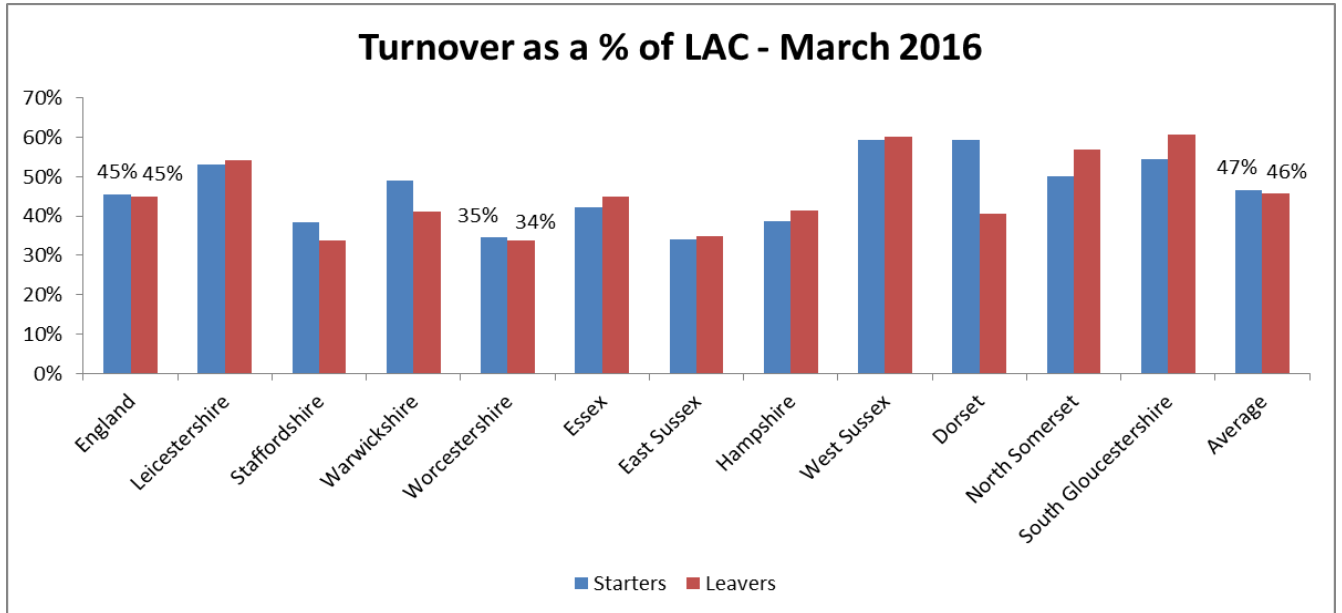


A summary of the starters, ceases and numbers of LAC over the last 5 years is shown below.



## Turnover of Looked after Children

The graph below shows that nationally there were 45% of the LAC population who started in care and 45% of the LAC population who ceased care in 2015/16. Our statistical neighbours turnover rate is slightly higher than the national picture but their leavers are slightly lower than their starters. Worcestershire's rate is much lower than the national or statistical neighbour rate. This demonstrates that children are staying in care longer and the exit rate is lower than the start rate.



## PLACEMENT MIX

### Where children are placed

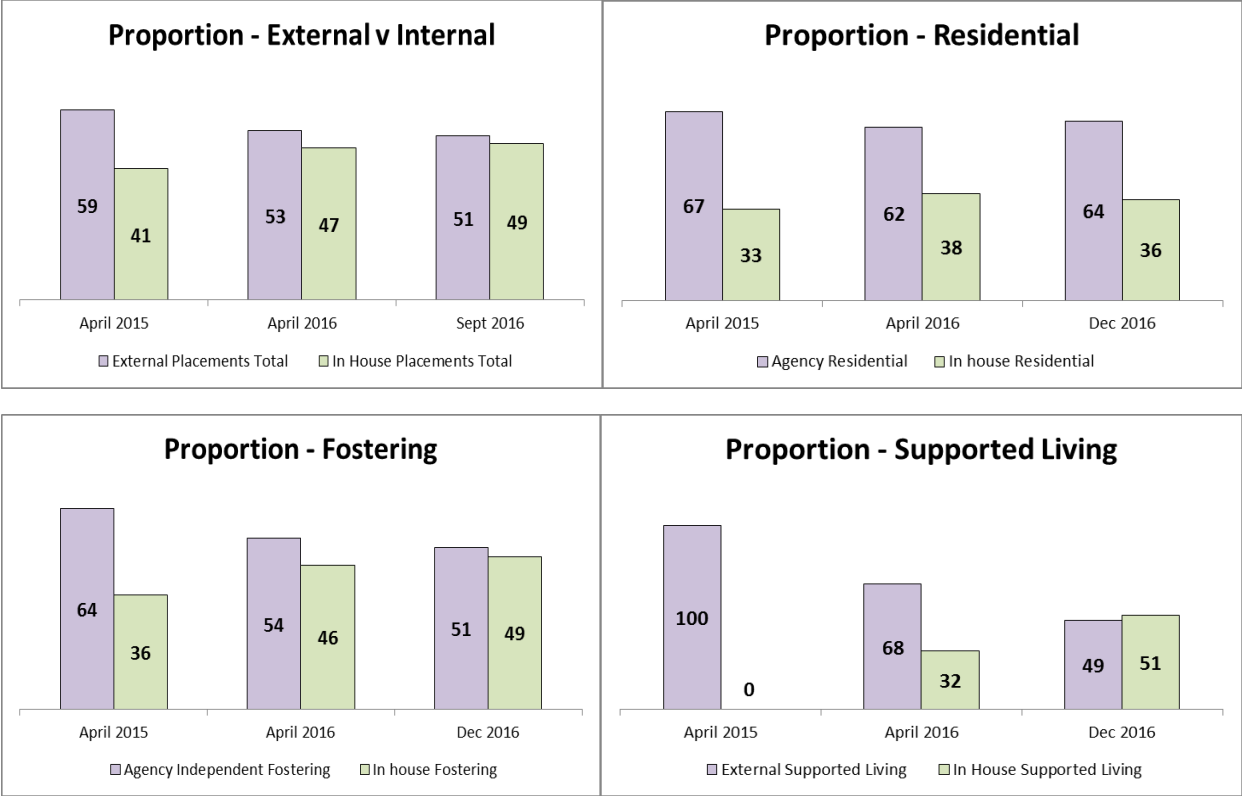
The following table provides a snapshot of the placement mix as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016:

	<b>31 December 2016</b>
Agency Residential	48
Secure Units	2
In-house Residential	27
IFA	226
In-house Fostering	202
Kinship Fostering	88
External Supported Living	27
Internal Supported Living	20
Safe Base / Supported Lodging	20
Placed with Parents / Friends (no cost)	74
<b>TOTAL LAC</b>	<b>732</b>
Staying Put Arrangements	26
Adoption Allowances	53
Special Guardianship Orders	164
Residence Orders	49
Direct Payments	166

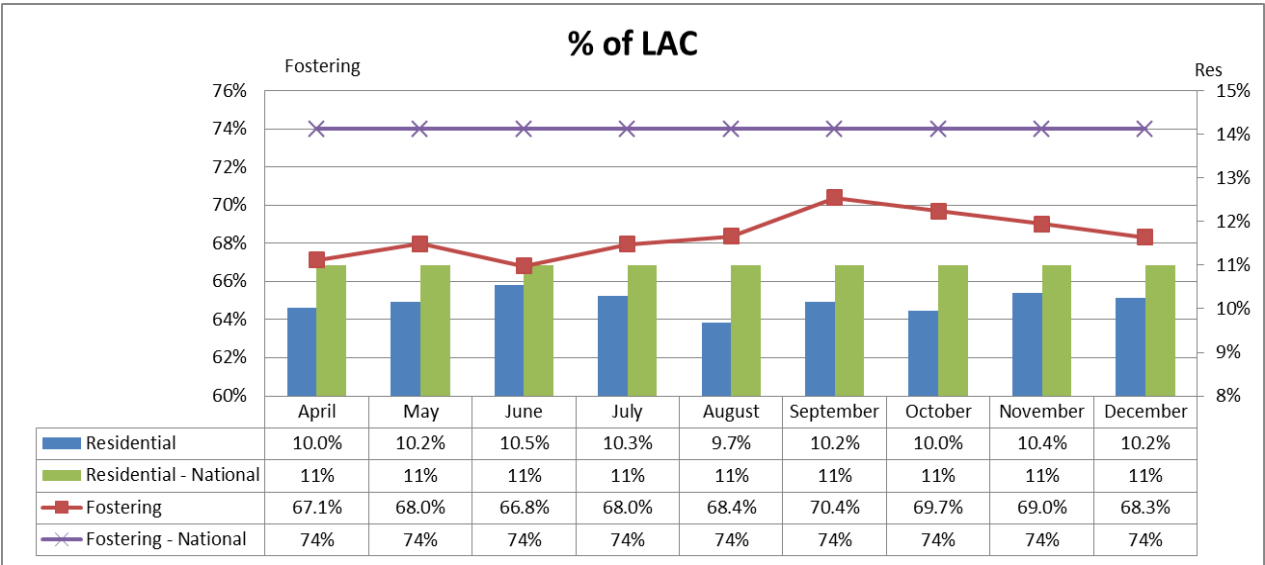
### Internal v External Placements

Worcestershire County Council utilises a wide mix of placements but over the last 2 years has concentrated on increasing the number of internal placements as demonstrated in the following graphs. Further work is needed in the residential area but in-house supported living and fostering provision is developing well.

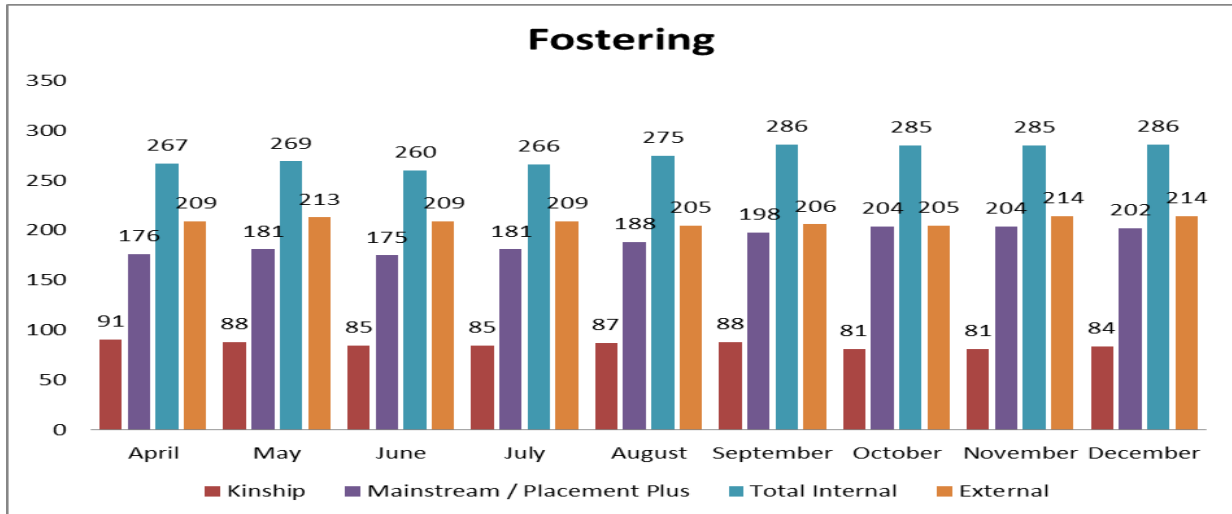




The number of children in external residential placements is still higher than internal placements but remains lower than planned. Nationally, 11% of LAC are in placed in residential care with Worcestershire's figure at 10.2% - this has decreased significantly and stood at 12.4% in April 2015. The move to in-house fostering is positive and for the last 17 months there have been more new children placed with in-house carers than external ones. 74% of LAC nationally are in foster care with Worcestershire's figure being 68.3%. Worcestershire has more children in supported living and placed with parents / friends than the national averages.



The trend through 2016 for fostering is shown below



### Placement Unit Costs

Unit costs continue to be reviewed and the analysis below demonstrates that internal residential, supported living and fostering provision is significantly more cost effective than external provision.

Placement Type	Average Weekly Cost - Net
Agency Residential	3,274
In House Residential	2,678
Secure	6,227
Independent Fostering	791
In-house Fostering	470
Kinship	387
Staying Put	156
External Supported Living	659
In House Supported Living	395
Supported Lodging	307
Student Accommodation	102
Safe Base	357
<b><u>Direct Financial Support Packages</u></b>	
Special Guardianship Orders	114
Residence Orders	93
Adoption Allowances	126
Direct Payments	72

Internal fostering provision is 40% cheaper than the independent sector; supported living is also 40% cheaper and residential 18% less than the independent sector, on average. Included in the calculations for internal provision are costs for additional services including the costs for administration and management, employee on-costs, outreach support, office costs, and payments such as the reimbursement of expenses to foster carers and training.

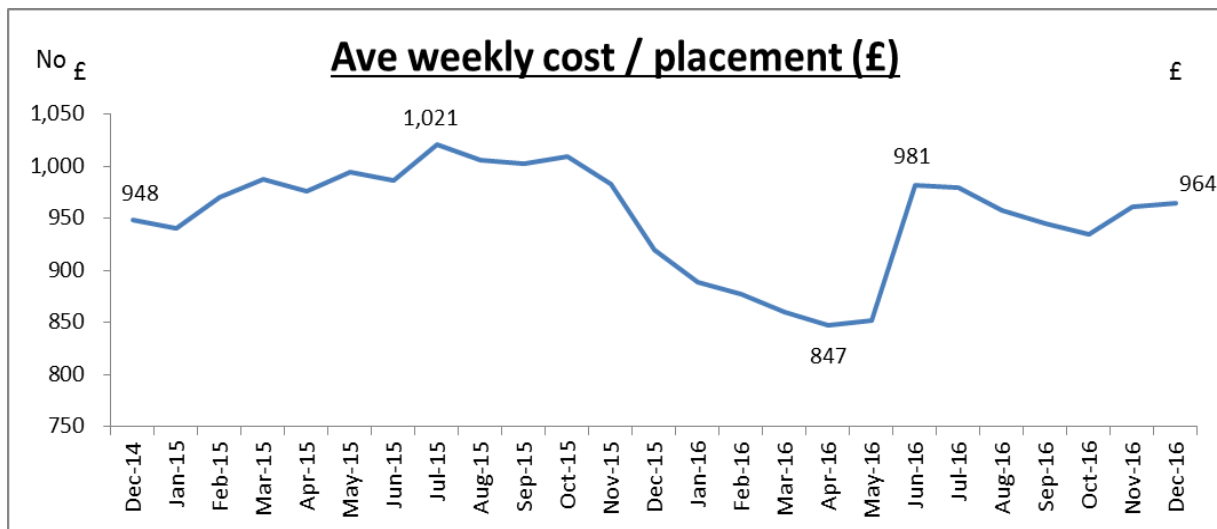
It is important to note that most providers in the independent sector operate on the principles of the private sector and provide services based upon an agreed profit margin. Prices across the independent providers vary considerably and purchasing on demand does not provide the best negotiating framework or necessarily the best value so the county has introduced a foster care framework agreement, which was reviewed in 2016, through which the cost of external placements have been renegotiated. A similar process is now in place for external supported living.

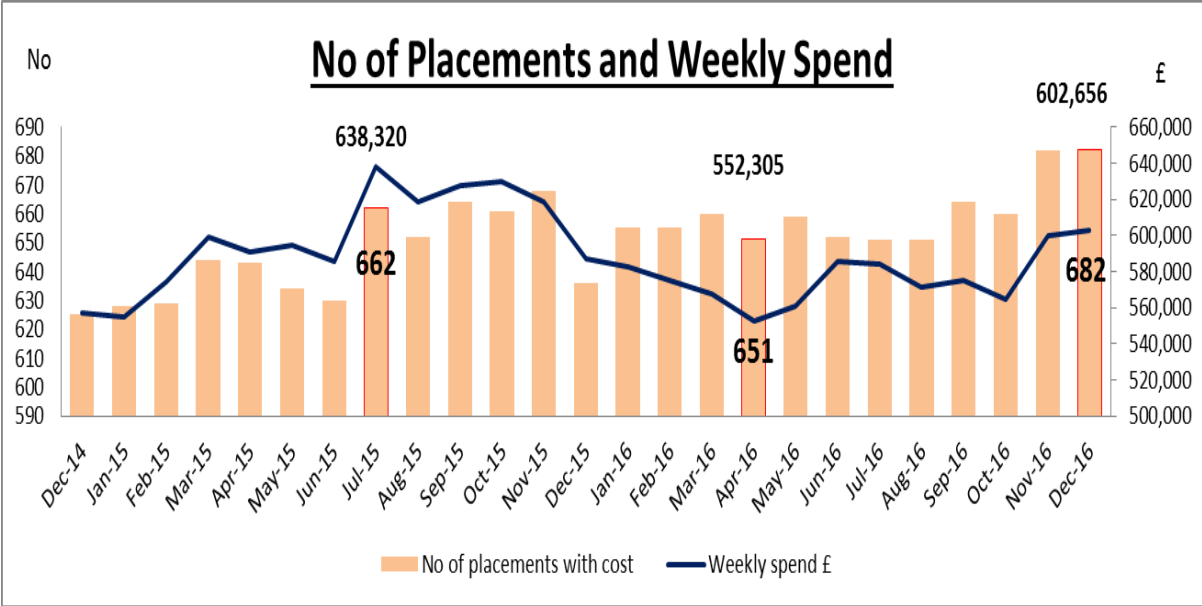
Worcestershire County Council continues to actively seek to increase the number of internal fostering households based upon an analysis of placement needs to reduce the need for external, high cost external placements.

### Average weekly costs

The average weekly cost per placement increased slightly between October and December 2016 as did the total weekly spend due to the increased number of higher cost placements over this period. However the weekly spend in December 2016 was similar to that in March 2015 when there were 38 more children.

The average weekly cost per placement is £964 (it was £1,021 at its highest in July 2015). The total weekly spend at the highest point was £638k when Worcestershire had 662 children. Worcestershire now has 20 more children and is spending £36k less i.e. Worcestershire now spends less per placement than it did in previous years.





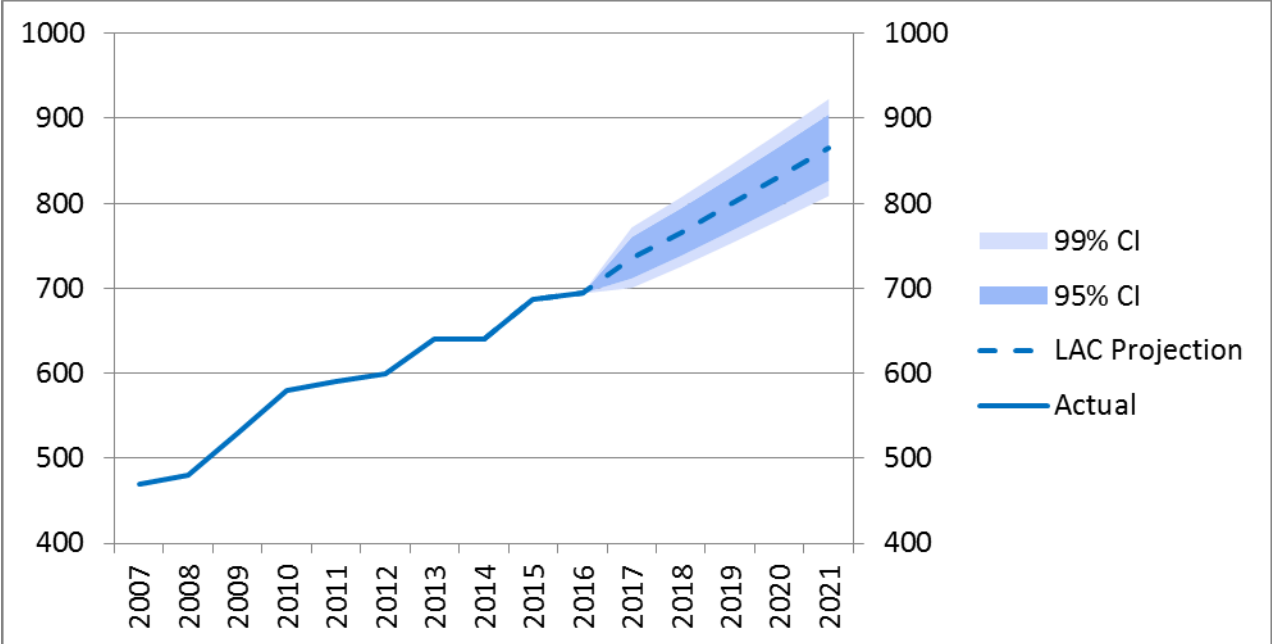
**FINANCIAL FORECAST**

**2017/18 position**

When the budget for 2017/18 was calculated in the summer of 2016, the number of looked after children was 699. By 31<sup>st</sup> December the number was 732. Further to the completion of the looked after children needs analysis, further modelling of costs has taken place. To ensure we account for a potential increase in new looked after children, as there is an expected increase in the population of children overall, we have attempted to highlight how the number of looked after children could rise if the last year rate increase continues year upon year, and no strategy is in place to reduce figures.

The graph below shows the forecast number of looked after children based on the assumption that the trend we have seen over the last 10 years will continue. The rate of LAC per 10,000 population under 18 in Worcestershire between 2007 and 2016 was used to identify the increasing trend. This trend was then projected up to 2021 taking into account the 2014 based ONS population projection for Worcestershire. The forecast is an estimate and therefore has some uncertainty around the actual level observed. The forecast line represents the middle of the range of forecast values and the blue shaded, fan shaped areas represent the range within which the forecast line may actually fall.

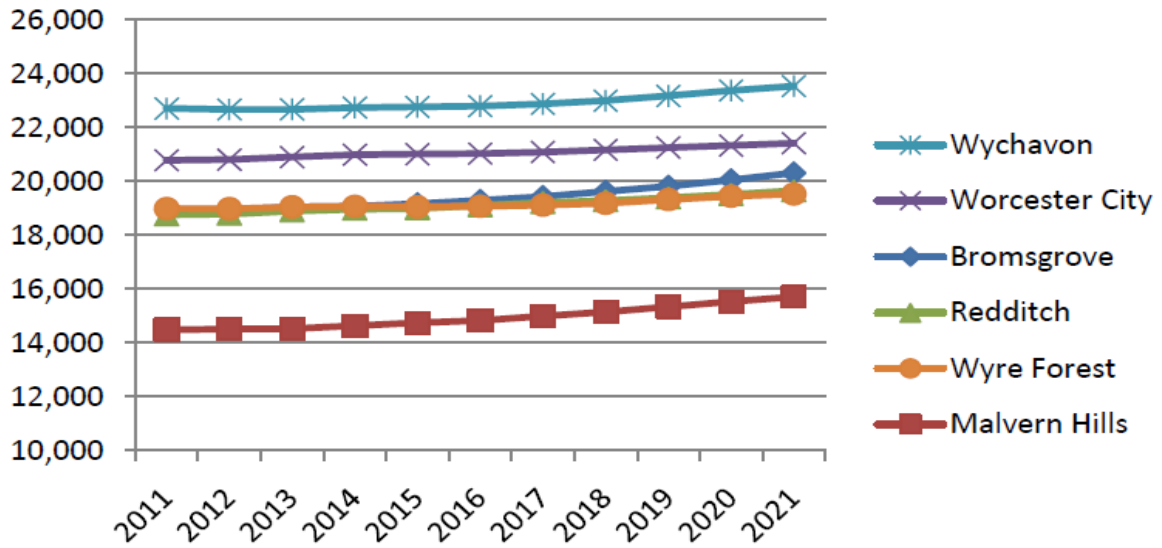
This shows that between 2017 and 2021 the trend in LAC numbers is expected to go from between 700 and 772 to between 809 and 923.



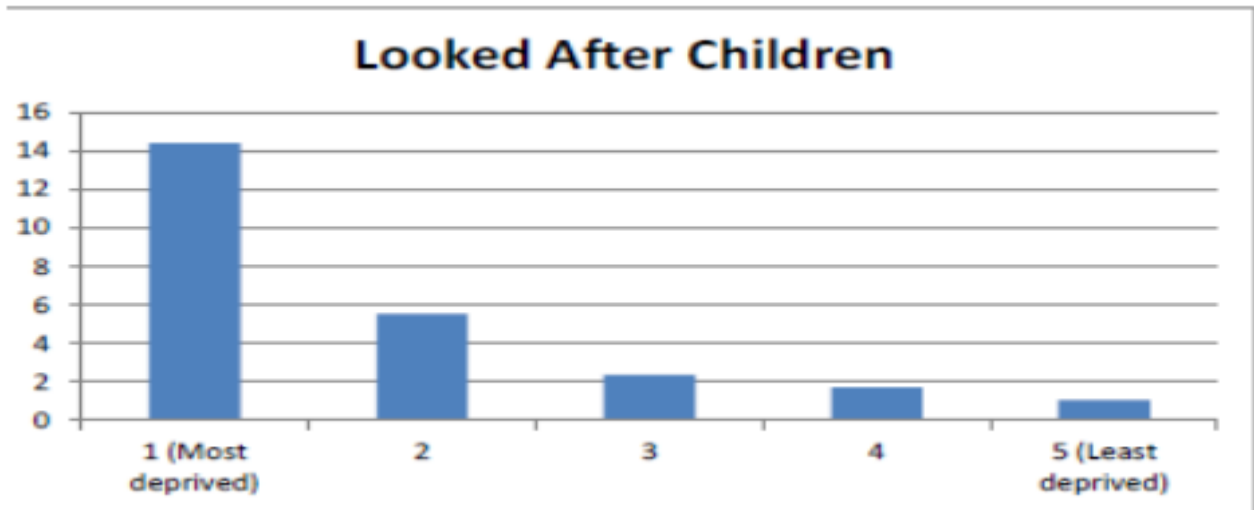
Using the graph above and assuming the rate of looked after children remains consistent it would give a figure of 760 - 800 by the year end 2017/18 assuming there is no mitigation strategy in place. This is an additional rise of 60 - 100 children over and above the figure when the budget was calculated. This is a net increase and there will obviously be a number of starters and leavers throughout the year. The cost of an additional 60 - 100 children is £2.9m - £4.8m which has been based on placing them for the full year, based on the December 2016 average cost of a placement. If more of them are placed in independent sector places this cost could be considerably higher.

There is also a prediction that the 0-17 population will increase in each of the districts as detailed in the graph below.

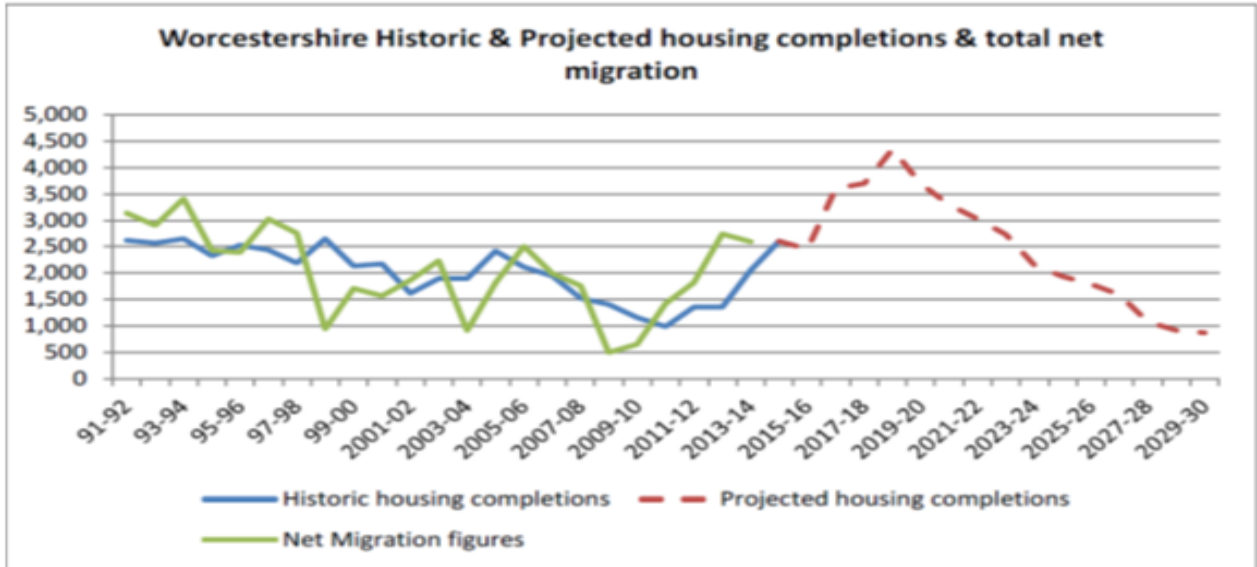
**Projected Population aged 0-17 by District, 2011-21**



The rate of LAC is higher in more deprived areas, as reported in the 2014 Public Health report with the rate per 1,000 being significantly higher in deprived areas as shown below.



There is also expected to be rapid growth in the housing market over the coming years.



Source: Housing completions taken from DCLG live tables on house building & Worcestershire Strategic Housing Market Assessment Monitoring Reports. Migration figures taken from ONS components of change 1991-2015

These projections highlight the need for our Looked after children & Care Leavers' Commissioning Strategy in order to manage the demand on Children's Services and in particular the cost of placements for Looked after children.