

Final Report – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022

# Under-utilisation of London Provision

# Purpose of the research

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Isos Partnership were commissioned by LIA to explore the factors behind under-utilisation of London placement provision.

Recent in-depth work undertaken by LIA has identified that less than half the available placements in London are used by London children. Yet at the same time, borough commissioning teams continue to report a shortage of placements.

Based on this previous research, six hypotheses were developed to be tested to inform future recommendations for practice.

# The six hypotheses

1. Under-utilisation is a result of the **available provision not matching the provision required to meet the needs** of the children requiring placements.
2. Under-utilisation is a result of the **quality of the provision** not meeting the requirements of the placing authority.
3. Under-utilisation is a result of the **practice of local authority placement managers and/or social workers.**
4. Under-utilisation is a result of the **cost of provision** compared to alternatives.
5. Under-utilisation is a result of **attitude to risk**, either by the provider or the placing authority, possibly also linked to inspection.
6. Under-utilisation is a result of the **provider's ability to field staff** with the required skills and experience, potentially linked to recruitment challenges.

# Methodology

## Stage 1

### Preparation and understanding the context

- Rapid literature review
- Preliminary analysis of data compiled by London Councils
- Sampling of LAs for later fieldwork

## Stage 2

### Fieldwork

- Virtual Social Worker Roundtable
- Virtual Fieldwork with six representative London Boroughs
- Interviews with key stakeholders, partners or other representative organisations

## Stage 3

### Reporting

- Development of a final report with clear findings and recommendations

# Key findings from Data Analysis

# Headlines from Data Analysis

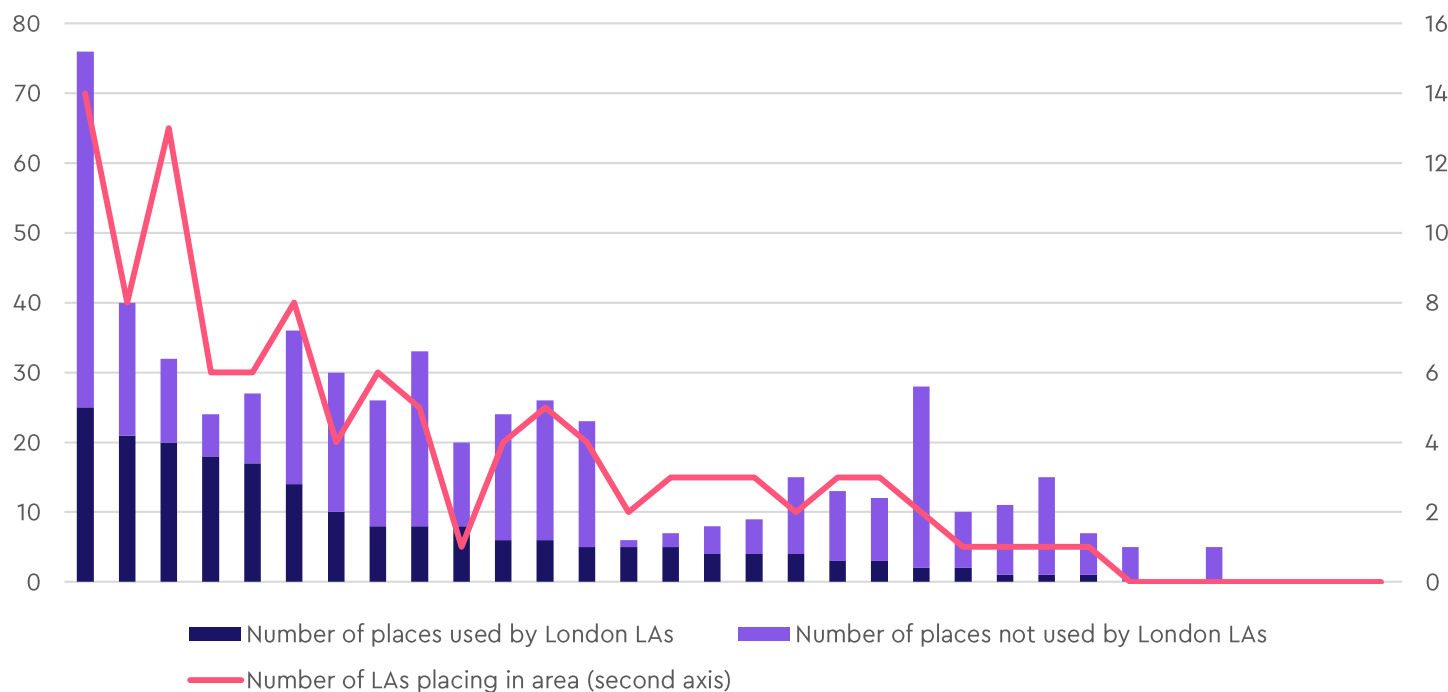
- The pan-London snapshot indicated that there are **790** placements by London boroughs in residential children's homes. Of these, **532** young people (**67%** of the cohort) were placed outside London
- There are **569** externally provided children's homes places in London of which only **35%** is filled by London young people.
- There is significant variation across London in those boroughs who place outside of London, from **0%** of children placed out of London in 2 LAs to **100%** of children placed out of London in 3 other LAs.
  - Inner London Boroughs collectively place **67.8%** out of London vs **70.8%** for Outer London Boroughs

# Placement availability

- There is significant variation in the number of children's home places in each borough. On average, Outer London boroughs have higher numbers of residential children's home places than Inner London.
  - However, there is only a weak association between the number of children's home places per borough and the number of young people placed in residential homes.
- We have data on **536** places in residential children's homes. Of these, **117** are in London and **419** outside of London. This covers places in **47** local authorities, of which **35** are not in London and **12** are in London.
  - The most frequent destinations are Hampshire, Essex, Kent, Shropshire, Cambridgeshire, Telford and Wrekin, Norfolk and Cumbria. Together these 8 LAs account for just under half the placements for which we have information.

# Variation in utilisation of residential placements

How externally provided children's home places are used



- Overall 568 externally provided children's home places in London, of which 201 (35%) used by London boroughs.
- For individual boroughs, significant variation in the percentage of places available used by London LAs – range from 83% to 0%.
- Also significant variation in number of individual London LAs placing in single boroughs – so at the high end 14 boroughs place in Redbridge. At the lower end, there are boroughs in which no London boroughs make placements



# LA behaviour patterns

Group	Description	Number of Boroughs that fit the description	Average % of young people placed in borough	Average % in London but OOB	Average number of London LAs in which young people placed	Average number of young people placed per LA
1	Boroughs which make very little use of residential children's home provision at all (<3% of LAC cohort placed in residential CH)	4	12%	45%	1.5	1.2
2	Boroughs with in-house provision (and more than 3% of LAC cohort in residential CH)	11	21%	16%	4.3	2.9
3	Boroughs which appear to have a more strategic relationship with external providers in borough, or in a nearby borough (average +2 placements per LA)	6	20%	23%	4.8	2.8
4	Boroughs which appear to have a more scattergun approach – placing young people across a wide number of LAs	8	3%	25%	4.5	1.5
5	Boroughs which place no young people in London	3	0%	0%	0	0

# Key findings from Fieldwork

# The barriers to placing in London

**The perceived benefits of placing out of London** - there is not a universal view that placing in London is better and that it is not necessarily prioritised by the system in all places

**Lack of specific provision** – a lack of specific, specialist provision that could meet the needs of this cohort of children and young people was commonly discussed by stakeholders. Particularly, specialist foster carers with knowledge of contextual safeguarding

**Challenges with the market** – currently London has a market-led not needs-led system and LAs do not feel they have the levers to engage effectively with the market and shape what is available.

# The barriers to placing in London

**Behaviour of commissioners** – local teams are not aware of all provision available in London and therefore rely on existing relationships with providers to source placements. Commissioners would rather use providers they know that use a new untried home, even if that enabled a London placement

**Practice issues related to referral forms/profiles** – profiles are often written with an over-emphasis on the challenges of a young person and not their strengths which is influencing provider's decisions to accept placements. Providers have also highlighted that they sometimes receive inadequate information on a young person's needs and the existing support around them leading to increased rejections.

# The barriers to placing in London

**Risk appetite of providers** – LAs and providers both identified that concerns around Ofsted inspections impacting on their decisions to accept placement requests for young people with complex needs. This seem particularly true for young people from their immediate local authority.

**Staff capacity of providers** - Providers are struggling to recruit and retain the necessary staff to meet the needs of this cohort of young people.

# Why it's important for London children to stay in London

**Diversity** - A high proportion of looked after children in London are from racialised backgrounds and we need to consider the impact of placing them in less ethnically diverse areas

**Positive long-term outcomes** - When young people get older they are likely to return to their home borough therefore managing placements locally ensure work is done to manage risks and identify the necessary support

**Variance in proximity** - Placements just outside London might provide closer proximity to home for Outer London boroughs than placements across London.

# Testing the hypotheses

# Hypothesis 1 (available provision not matching provision required)- Supported

- Main challenge is that provision is unable to meet complexity of need
- Lack of needs-led provision – market can provide what it wants to
- Certain profiles of young people are harder to place in London
  - CCE/County Lines/Gang influences
  - YP leaving in-patient stay for mental health issues
  - Young people coming into care late with entrenched issues
- There is a lack of specific provision including specialist foster carers with relevant knowledge of contextual safeguarding and secure provision
- Residential placements in London do not always include the education provision
- Perception that some young people would benefit from OOB



## Hypothesis 2 (quality of provision not meeting requirements) – **Not Supported**

- Did not come out strongly as a theme with only one stakeholder raising concerns that they do not have enough confidence in placements in terms of outcomes for child from some providers
- Issues seem to overwhelming be with quantity or access to existing provision
  - There is high quality provision in London but all the boroughs are competing for a small pool of placements that can meet needs for this specific cohort

# Hypothesis 3 (result of practice of placement managers/SWs) - Supported

- Language
  - Some challenges with the way that social workers are describing young people in placement requests/profiles which are not strengths based
- Challenges managing information in a YP's history and what is needed to be shared – need greater trauma informed understanding here
- Information
  - Quality of information provided – providers have to make snap decisions on placements and often too much information is missing
  - Providers aren't getting all the information at referral so they take YP who they struggle to accommodate leading to placement breakdown and lower trust with LAs
  - Lack of information on what other partners are providing the YP

# Hypothesis 4 (result of cost of provision compared to alternatives) – **Not Supported**

- Low consensus that cost was a driver behind decisions to place OOB but rather that decisions were predicated on a variety of other factors rather than cost
- No strategic approach to commission, means decisions are operationally based with individual placements sourced to meet needs in spite of cost
- Costs attached to placement breakdowns so using low cost provision that doesn't meet need could be a false economy
- Issue is about availability, quality and capacity of placements in London, if we could overcome this, financial challenges could be alleviated.

# Hypothesis 5 (result of attitude to risk from provider and/or LA)- Supported

- Risk linked to Ofsted inspection decisions identified by both providers and LAs
- Higher risk aversion in LAs for young people linked to CCE/gangs/county lines, particularly from their home borough
- Reluctance to move young people back after placing OOB to maintain stability even if outcomes are only short-term
- Role of relationships between LAs and providers in negotiating placements
  - From a provider perspective they are more likely to accept request from LAs they have a relationship with which can lead to providers accepting more YP from external LAs rather than their local LA or LAs in London
  - From an LA perspective, commissioners are more likely to seek placements from providers that have already been used effectively and less willing to try new providers

# Hypothesis 6 (provider's ability to field staff with required skills and experience)- Supported

- Providers have identified that they are struggling to recruit and retain staff – particular challenges around gender balance and part-time staff
- They are also struggling to have staff available when emergency placements are required – mainly SME providers who don't have large staff banks to rely on. Decisions to reject/accept are therefore based on who is available at time of referral
- Risky behaviour could be managed better by providers if they had more trauma-informed training
- If the provider has demand over the available spaces they can almost lower their specification of needs so that they do not cater to the same level of need if they had vacant spaces

# Recommendations for future practice

# Developing a strategic vision across London

- Developing evidence base for the value of placing young people in London, particularly focusing on young people who are most likely to be placed outside of London
- Co-develop compatible sub-regional approaches aligned with ICS footprints, as well as borough-based approaches to build a picture of the market across the region, and the costs associated with it.
- Further survey work undertaken by LIA to understand what needs can be met by London providers and develop a comprehensive view of the market to set clear aims for future provision

# Building relationships

- Develop capacity across the region to support conversations between LAs and providers to improve trust, knowledge and transparency, particularly providers not currently being used
- At an LA and sub-regional level, build relationships between providers and other local provision such as APs to improve overall wrap-around support offer and outcomes for young people in local placements
- Develop a model of support for providers that raises their confidence in managing risk and raises the confidence of LAs placing with them



# Challenging assumptions and practice

- Adopt a strengths-based approach to language in referrals and involve children and young people in writing profiles to contextualise their behaviour and needs for providers
- Co-develop solutions-focused training for the whole workforce to tackle assumptions around OOB placements
  - Include external partners in this training such as the police, health colleagues and providers

# Understanding the market

- Develop a London-wide directory of provision that includes information on all specialist provision and uniform costs, building on LIIA's existing work on Dynamic Sufficiency
- Progress the work being undertaken by LIIA to develop a pan-London vehicle for engaging with the market, including sub-regional joint frameworks where necessary
- Further in-depth work with local providers to understand the impact of Ofsted registration on their ability to accept placements