

Bristol City Council Commissioning Strategy- 16+ Children in Care and Care Leavers

1. Increase UASC provision

Develop shared houses for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, to create an additional 28 beds. Develop a move on property for UASC who have turned 18 but not yet able to move on to Home Choice properties.



2. Develop shared properties for CiC and Care leavers

Move away from single occupancy flats to create shared houses for 16/17 year old children in care/care leavers who will then move on to Home Choice. This will create an additional 14 beds, as an alternative to hostels and ESAs.



3. Join Southwest Regional Framework

Join the Southwest Regional Framework for purchasing 16+ supported accommodation. Moving across the providers on our existing Bristol Dynamic Purchasing System and creating opportunities for block arrangements.



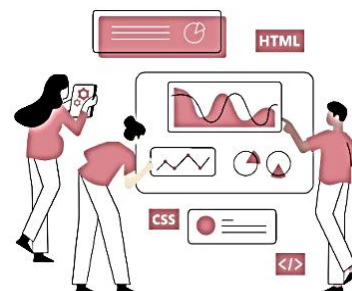
4. Strategic Partner

Procuring a strategic partner for the development of children's home provision in Bristol, with scope to grow and expand to include step down 16+ accommodation for planned on moves.



5. In house services

We will work more closely with housing to create improved flow through the system. This will include bringing one KBC housing property and branch out of the housing pathway and into children's services to increase the numbers of 16/17 years olds accommodated there.



Bristol City Council
16+ Commissioning Strategy
Children in Care and Care Leavers
Updated 2025

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Introduction

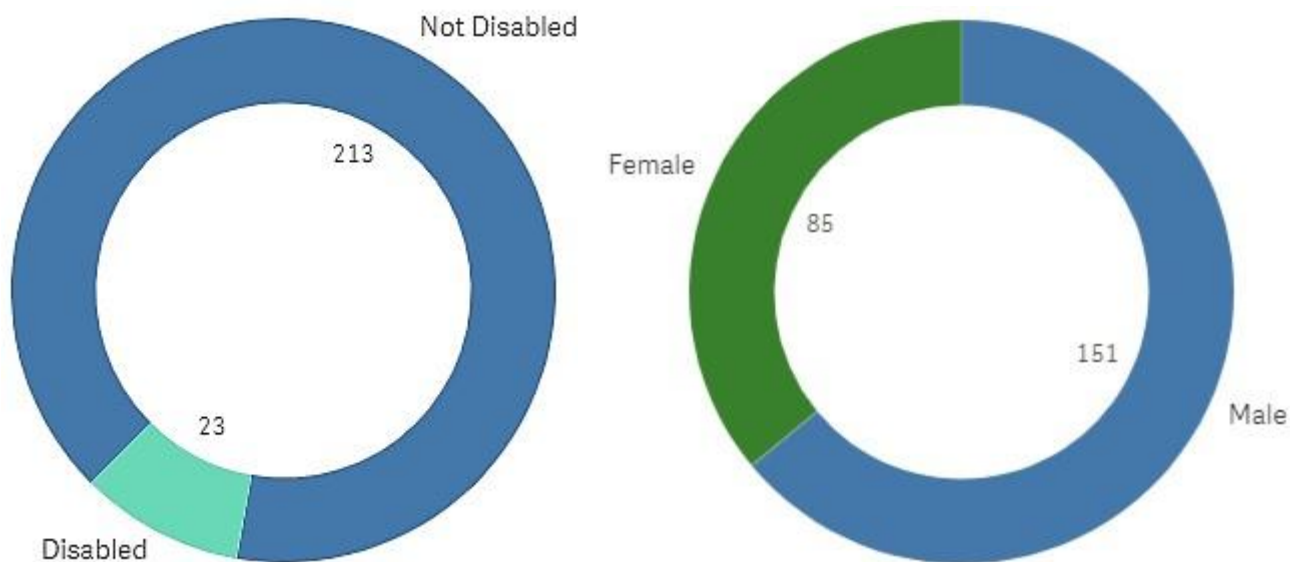
In Bristol the 16-19 population grew by more than 10% in the 5 years up to 2023. Population projections show that the 0-19 population is expected to grow by c.4%, by 2028 with the most significant segment within that being the 16-19 age group which is forecast to grow by 31%.

The 16+ age group represents our highest cohort of entrants to care. Given the high number of children already in care age 16+ due to become care leavers in the next few years, as well as the growing population projections, this age-group is a focus of our sufficiency planning where we are looking for quality and value for money as they approach adulthood. We will need a range of provision set at the right level of support within the City to prepare them for adult lives.

We know that the level of demand for 16+ accommodation has grown beyond our sufficiency planning, and this has caused a blockage in all types of accommodation, and a use of all available options, whether these were ideally suited to need, correctly priced or not. If we can get our 16+ offer right, this will filter through down the system, allowing us to place all children more appropriately to their need.

Needs data:

As of April 2023, there are 236 children in care aged 16+, representing 32% of all our children in care.



As children move through to Care Leaver status, while many will be able to 'stay put' within their fostering provision, some may go home and a few may re-locate or find private accommodation, others will need housing provision through a pipeline into the Housing Support Register. Numbers leaving care are projected as per the table below with a significant number requiring move-on through the Housing Support Register. Projections of numbers coming through are shown below:

Current	Feb-24	Feb-25	Feb-26	Feb-27	Feb-28
291	340	359	410	468	510

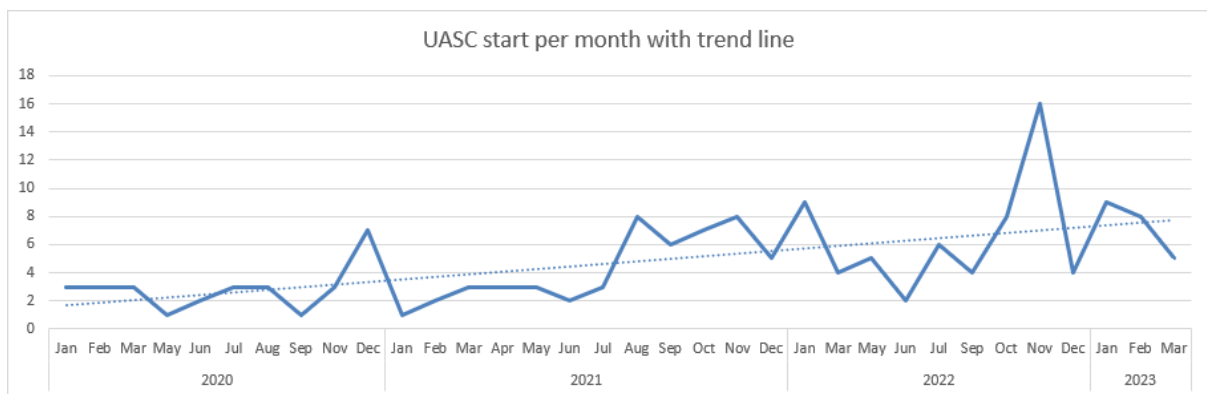
We have two significant cohorts of children in our 16+ care population:

- Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers
- 16+ Children in Care and Care Leavers – both those moving through care and late entrants to care, with a growing cohort of these coming in through the Homelessness route.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

As of September 25, Bristol has 70 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in care, equal to 0.1% of our population of children as required by the National Transfer Scheme. This cohort represents 11% of all children in care. Of these, 100% are male, 82 are aged 16+ and 23 will be turning 18 in the next 6 months.

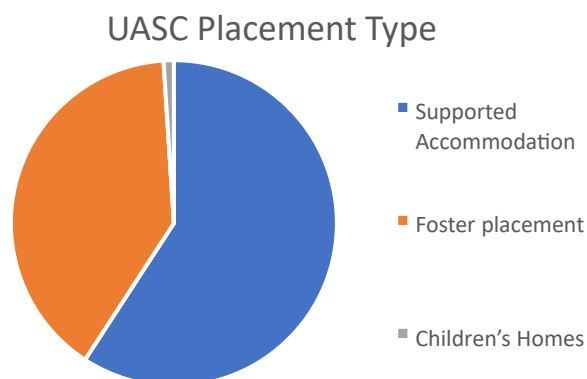
There has been a significant increase in numbers of UASC in our care over the past two years, both through the national transfer scheme and spontaneous arrivals, with the vast majority of our UASC coming from Afghanistan.



Bristol is a City of Sanctuary offering a strongly diverse population and the availability of cultural connectedness for those seeking a new life alongside familiar socio-cultural activity. Young arrivals prefer to live within the city centre because of access to these cultural links and services, and community of other young people from their cultural background. Sufficiency of homes within the city centre is limited due to the high costs of rents and limited housing stock, and it has been difficult to commission in this area at the pace needed for the constant new flow of young people.

For those under 16, most young people have been found homes through in-house provision or independent fostering, but the majority (88%) of our unaccompanied arrivals are over 16.

For those over 16, most are now placed in External Supported Accommodation (ESA), usually in shared provision and with a range of support hours available, often shared between all young people. We have utilised our residential provision for a small number with significant trauma.



50% of our young people in ESA provision are UASC, and 20% are over 18 and unable to step down into the housing pathway. 13 out of 75 of our children in care have refugee status and 57 out of 235 care leavers are still awaiting an outcome of their asylum claim.

This delay in leave to remain then causes blockages in the system and financial pressure to children's services. Young people are ready to move on, but there is nowhere for them to move on to, meaning properties we brought online for children and young people, become filled with young adults.

Children in Care / Care Leavers

The most recent 2022 ILACS inspection of children in care found that the experience of 16/17 year old children was inconsistent, stating that:

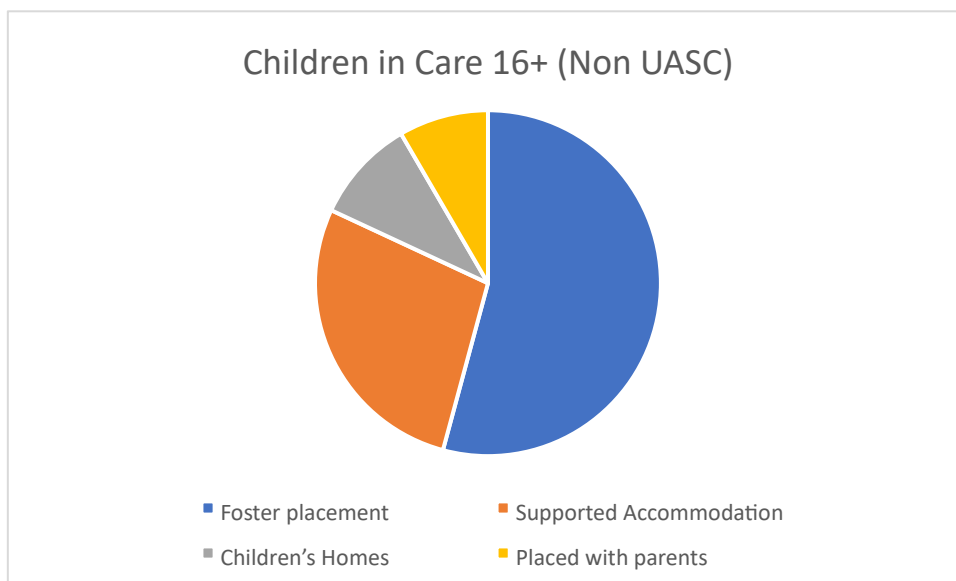
- Some children are not helped into safe and secure accommodation at the earliest opportunity.
- Some children are not afforded an assessment of their immediate vulnerability.
- Those children who can remain at home safely are helped to do so.
- Children are not benefiting from joint housing assessments.

In 2024/25, there were 97 young people aged 16–17 who entered care. Of these, 39 were identified as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Among the remaining 58:

- 20 were classified as homeless
- 34 required accommodation under Section 20 for a single period—typically linked to safeguarding concerns or a combination of homelessness and safeguarding needs
- 1 entered care via police protection
- 1 via an interim care order
- 2 were placed in care while on remand

Activity under Part 7 has been closely monitored during Quarter 4 of this year. During that period, 9 young people were supported under a primary housing duty. These individuals were either accommodated within Youth Pathway provision or are awaiting placement, with a duty to accommodate already agreed.

There is an even split of genders in our non-UASC cohort of the 16+ care population. Unlike our UASCs the majority of our young people in care remain in foster care post 16. These numbers are constantly changing due to children reaching 18 and/or new entrants to care but are accurate as of Sept 25.





For our young people, there are gaps in available support / provision for high support needs around mental health or translation needs; which are not commissioned by colleagues in Housing and Landlord Services.


Challenges:


There have been significant difficulties helping children and young people exit care meaning there are increased figures of those looking for supported accommodation with the move on pathways blocked. In September 2025 there are 191 people on the Housing Support Register with an average wait time 323 days.

Our key challenges are:

 The time it can take for UASC young people to be granted leave to remain – the funding we receive reduces when these children are 18, but we must hold them within children’s provision until they have status granted. Most unaccompanied children arrive aged between 16-18 with many of them already 17. They attain 18 quickly giving little time for status, and leading to a new child coming down the track that we need to take to meet our 0.1% quota.

 There is a general lack of move-on accommodation for care leavers and has been nothing specifically commissioned for adult asylum seekers, causing a blockage in the pipeline of services and leaving our commissioned 16+ accommodation 50% occupied by young adults who are unable to move on.

 Care leavers with generally higher levels of support need are not catered for within current HSR commissioned provision.

 Delays in care act assessments for those young people moving into adult services, can result in 18-year-olds residing in children’s services accommodation until this has been complete.

We are working closely with colleagues in housing to review our accommodation offer for young people aged 16+, with a view to recommission the entire youth pathway for 2024. Moving young people on from provision has been a challenge due to a lack of affordable housing stock in the city, Housing now have a Move-On Coordinator in post to address this.

As of April 2024, Ofsted registration became a mandatory requirement for supported accommodation for young people aged 16 and over. This change means that accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17 must now be registered with and inspected by Ofsted, in line with newly introduced national standards. The formal term for this provision is “supported accommodation for young people.” While the introduction of Ofsted regulation is a positive step towards improving quality, there is a potential risk that some providers may choose to leave the market, impacting sufficiency. However, this has not occurred to date. Providers of 16+ supported accommodation continue to demonstrate a commitment to enhancing service delivery in alignment with Ofsted standards.

Overview of Existing Services Available to Young People 16+

1. Residential children's homes/staying close	2. Foster care/staying put	3. Internal supported accommodation	4. External supported accommodation	5. Youth housing pathway
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5 Bristol City Council children's homes Staying close arrangements South Central residential framework	South Central IFA Framework Bristol City Council foster carers	KBC Housing (the projects) Branch out	High support DPS 6 intensive support flats (1625ip) 5 UASC shared houses, 22 beds (various providers)	St Georges house The Foyer Low support dispersed accommodation
Youth MAPS				

Children's Services Provision

Children's Homes:

Bristol City Council currently has five operational in-house children's homes with capacity for up to 14 children up to the age of 18. There are currently 8 young people in our children's homes aged 16+. There is a Children's Homes Re-profiling programme in place which plans for steady growth and changes from larger children's homes to smaller two-bedroom homes and increasing our capacity up to 24.

There is one privately run children's homes within Bristol City Council boundaries. We are a member of the South-Central Residential framework but is increasingly reliant on spot-purchasing provision as many providers choose not to join, or to withdraw from, the framework. Currently 7 young people aged 16+ are placed in private children's homes.

Foster Care:

In house - Bristol City Council offers 272 mainstream fostering households for our children in care. Bristol is also a member of the South-Central fostering framework for purchasing Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements, but we continue to require a level spot-purchasing provision as many providers choose not to join the framework. Currently 112 young people aged 16+ are in foster care.

Since 2013, 57¹ our foster carers and young people have embraced the "Staying Put" arrangements available to them. Staying Put supports a young person to remain living with their foster family beyond the age of 18. This gives our young people time to prepare for adulthood, experience a similar transition to their peers and avoids social exclusion.

Supported Accommodation:

From 1st April 2024, we joined the Southwest Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) Contract for the provision of 16+ Supported Accommodation Placements, led by Gloucestershire County Council. Regionally, the DPS also includes Wiltshire, North Somerset, and Bath & North East Somerset (BANES) Local Authorities.

Following two successful tender rounds, the DPS currently comprises 65 Ofsted-registered providers. This framework enables us to expand our placement search by accessing providers in neighbouring areas. To ensure high-quality provision aligned with Ofsted standards, participating Local Authorities collaborate closely and work in partnership with 16+ providers to drive continuous improvement in service delivery.

In addition to the DPS, we maintain block arrangements within Bristol, comprising 13 beds across 3 properties dedicated to 16+ Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).

¹ As of September 2025

Bristol MAPS:

Housing and Children's Social Care work in partnership with 1625 Independent People to provide a child-centred response to young people aged 16-24 experiencing homelessness through advice, support, and joint assessment (for 16-17 year olds) relating to their housing needs at Bristol Youth MAPS. The Bristol Youth MAPS service, (known as MAPS), is proactive in preventing young people experiencing homelessness through the provision of advice and assistance. The overall aim of MAPS is to enable young people to remain with their families/network, provided it is safe to do so, through advice, support, and mediation as it is generally considered that it is in the best interests of most young people to live within their family network. However, when homelessness cannot be prevented, a young person may be provided with appropriate accommodation by Bristol City Council.

Branch Out Supported Lodgings

Supported Lodgings (Branch Out) is accommodation young people who will benefit from lodging with a host in the host's home. Hosts are vetted, trained and supported by the BCC Branch Out team. Hosts are generally available in the evenings and often work so are not available for daytime support. This means that for young people aged 16-17 this is suitable only for those accommodated via S.20.

St George's House and The Foyer

St George's House and The Foyer are housing services' high and medium support hostels, catering for homeless young people predominantly aged 16-21 (but will accommodate young people aged 22-24 if the young person is particularly vulnerable). The two services provide 53 bed spaces combined, will provide on average approximately 2 hours support per week (flexible dependent on needs of the young people) with a 24-hour staff presence and managed front door.

Commissioning Intentions for 16+ Accommodation Services

Our key aim is to develop provision that will prepare our children and care and care leavers for adulthood and support them through to becoming tenancy ready.

16+ UASC Shared Houses:

Work has already begun on developing our offer to UASC, commissioning various block arrangements in the past year and growing our provision from 9 to 22 beds. We are looking to expand this offer, developing additional shared houses to create an additional 28 beds, and are in discussions with our framework providers to scale up provision in the City in response to our increased number of young people taken through the national transfer scheme. In particular, we want to develop provision in areas of the city with good cultural links and existing communities. This will take our UASC bed numbers from 22 up to 50.

In addition to this, we have jointly commissioned shared houses for 28 UASCs who have reached 18 and can claim housing benefit, but have been unable to move on due to a lack of provision within housing services. This will enable a move-on pathway and free up the provision intended for our 16/17 year olds, with the intention they will move into the housing pathway or private rented sector as soon as LTR is granted.

Shared Houses for 16/17 year old Children in Care / Care Leavers

There is currently a lack of shared housing for our non-UASC young people. We want to move away from self-contained single occupancy accommodation, which is not the norm for most young people living independently at 16-17. We will develop a number of shared houses, to create 14 additional beds as an alternative to hostels or ESAs for our young people who will then move to Home Choice properties or the private rented accommodation. We are looking to increase our provision for non-UASC young people from 6 beds, up to 40 which will include both internally and externally run provision.

Summary Of The Plans

Action	Date to be completed
Work with market around Ofsted Regulation	2025 onwards
New 16+ Framework Operational	2025/26
One KBC Housing property and Branch Out move to Children's Services	March 2026
UASC Shared Houses Scale Up	2025/26
Children in Care / Care Leaver Shared Houses Scale Up	2026/27
Strategic Partner Accommodation Development	2025/26