

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**23 August 2021**

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**CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE – OFF FRAMEWORK PLACEMENTS**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Scrutiny members with an overview of children in care who are placed in provision that is 'off – framework'. The report outlines several rationales to why off-framework provision is commissioned and demonstrates annual costing and comparison with placements made, 'on-framework'.

**Summary**

2. Once it is determined that a child requires a placement, ordinarily the placement pathway will be firstly; in house fostering search; DBC residential; then Independent Fostering Agency; external block contract (children's residential), framework agreement and if a placement still not secured, then off framework.
3. Off framework placements arise because of several complex factors which are dominated primarily by children's social care market forces, whereby placement demands significantly outstrips placement availability.
4. The number of off framework residential placements is 66% based on all residential placements made in the 2020/21 but is reflective of regional and national trends. Darlington have a comparatively very low number of off framework placement within Independent Fostering, comprising 25% of all placements at any one time.
5. There is greater value for money for Council's in spot purchasing off Framework as and when the need arises owing to the operating costs of this form of accommodation provision which is the same as a 3 bed children's home without the scale of economy.

**Recommendation**

6. It is recommended that the contents of the report are noted.

**James Stroyan**  
**Group Director of People**

No Background Papers were used in the completion of this report

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S17 Crime and Disorder	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	N/A
Diversity	N/A
Wards Affected	N/A
Groups Affected	Children in Care
Budget and Policy Framework	There is a financial impact relating to this report
Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
Council Plan	Promote sufficiency of placements for children in the care of the local authority
Efficiency	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

7. Once it is determined that a child requires a placement, ordinarily the placement pathway will be firstly; in house fostering search; DBC residential; then Independent Fostering Agency; external block contract (children's residential), framework agreement and if a placement still not secured, then off framework.
8. A Placement Officer sources a provider and any offers received are forwarded to the social worker to evaluate with the team manager. If an off-framework placement has been identified as being suitable for the child, Procurement Board will seek to approve the commissioning process; quality assurance and value for money. There are times when it is expedient for the child to take up placement prior to the Procurement Board process, however in the main, this is generally when only one provider offer is received to meet the complex needs of the child.
9. Off framework placements arise because of a number of complex factors which are dominated primarily by children's social care market forces whereby placement demands significantly outstrips placement availability. Placements aren't necessarily more costly just because they are off framework. The cost comparison below shows the different prices and spend of on and off framework placements.

<b>Residential Placements</b>				
	<b>YP</b>	<b>Placements</b>	<b>Average Weekly</b>	<b>Total 2020/21<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>On Framework</b>	8	8	£3,069.00	£1,072,244.10
<b>Off Framework</b>	17	19	£3,791.00	£2,573,734.89
<b>Block</b>	2	2	£3,060.00	£302,065.72
<b>Total</b>	26	29	£3,493.08	£3,948,044.71

10. The average off framework residential placement cost for Darlington in 2020/21 was £3,791 per week compared with £3,069 per week on Framework (which was one of the lowest in the region in previous benchmarking). The off framework average cost was however significantly skewed by two particularly high-cost specialist placements, 1 for a solo placement with 2:1 staffing and the second a 90-day emergency residential placement.
11. The number of off framework residential placements is 65% based on all residential placements made in the 2020/21 but is reflective of regional and national trends. The average off framework IFA placement cost for Darlington in 2020/21 was £864.82 per week compared with £770.29 per week on framework. Darlington have a comparatively very low number of off framework placement within Independent Fostering, comprising 25% of all placements made during 2020/21.

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<sup>1</sup> Spend is indicative and has not been validated by Finance, although has been taken from Controcc reports.

IFA Placements				
	YP	Placements	Average Weekly	Total 2020/21 <sup>2</sup>
<b>On Framework</b>	80	92	£770.29	£1,092,198.96
<b>Off Framework</b>	33	33	£864.82	£2,473,396.23
<b>Pre Dates</b>	5	5	£788.91	£151,469.93
<b>Total</b>	116	130	£795.00	£3,717,065.12

12. Detailed below are the factors which have generated the current off framework placements for Darlington Children and Young People.
- (a) Owing to the huge demand for children's social care placements, providers don't need to operate on framework contracts. Small residential providers (4 bed homes) receive in excess of 100 referrals every week and some larger national providers make strategic determinations not to participate in framework contracts. This is reflected in the Independent Children's Homes Association, December 2020 State of the Sector report, which highlighted that 54% of the independent children's home only operate on specific contracts and a further 17% do not engage in any framework or formal procurement. Increasingly providers are withdrawing from large scale framework contracts.
  - (b) Some small local providers find the bureaucracy associated with large framework contracts/procurements prohibitive. Several providers are well established with high quality care provision and don't need to go and seek referrals from surrounding councils or further afield. In these instances, the provider placement costs aren't necessarily higher, just reflective of an operational and engagement preference by the provider.
  - (c) Some off framework placements are reflective of the complex care needs of some children and young people. Providers of complex care generally don't operate on framework contracts, as the care package naturally can't be pre-set and to have a positive impact, it needs to be tailored to the individual requirements of the young person. These placements require joint working and negotiation with the provider and health and social care.
  - (d) Providers of more niche placement types such as solo placements, do not operate on frameworks as placement demand is so high and service provision comparatively small (equating to less than one solo home per Local Authority in the country). Additionally, as Council's requirements for this form of placement can be equally as small as one or two children a year, volatile in terms of when the need may arise, it is cost prohibitive for Council's to be direct providers of this form of care and accommodation on an ongoing basis. There is greater value for money for Council's in spot purchasing off framework as and when the need arises, owing to the operating costs of this form of accommodation provision which is the same as a 3 bed children's home without the scale of economy.

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<sup>2</sup> Spend is indicative and has not been validated by Finance, although has been taken from Controcc reports.

- (e) The timescale within which the placement is needed, and the geographical distance of the placement is a key factor, where a placement is needed urgently, and the child is a match with the carers/ or in the home. This is a primary consideration in progressing with a placement offer.