

Local authorities having to find homes for children at the 'last minute'

Press release

An Ofsted report published today, finds that local authorities are struggling to find homes for children coming into care.



Local authorities are struggling with a last minute dash to find homes for children coming into care due to the rising demand for places and a lack of suitable accommodation, according to Ofsted.

In a report published today, Ofsted found that the lack of enough suitable accommodation, and the need to find placements quickly, mean local authorities often struggle to plan for and meet their legal duty to offer sufficient accommodation for children in need of care. Difficulty forecasting demand and the need for urgent placements leaves local authorities with little option but to respond to individual cases as and when they arise.

Some local authorities told Ofsted that a lack of time and resources for forward planning results in a last-minute response when a child comes into care. Even when local authorities can plan, there is often a lack of available accommodation and care for children with more complex needs.

Local authorities also noted tension in their relationships with some private providers and their 'power' over the children's social care market. Some suggested that providers can cherry-pick certain children, making it difficult for them to follow their plan and fulfil their sufficiency duty. Conversely, other local authorities highlighted how positive relationships with providers mean they are better able to find homes for children with more complex needs and negotiate the cost of placements.

Ofsted's report draws on interviews and focus groups with social workers, regional commissioning groups and other local authority staff.

The research also found:

- local authorities' knowledge about providers and agencies is often held

- by individuals, which can be lost when there are staff changes
- some local authorities are concerned about the ageing population of foster carers in their area and their ability to plan for long term placements

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director for Regulation and Social Care:

Today's report lays bare some of the challenges facing local authorities when it comes to finding the care children need. More children are coming into care, many with high-level physical and mental health needs. The need to find places for these children quickly overrides local authorities' long-term planning.

It is clear that these findings are set against the issues affecting children's social care nationally, and local authorities cannot solve the sufficiency issue on their own. There is a lack of suitable homes in the right places, particularly for children with the most complex needs – this needs to be addressed.

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