

## EASTERN COLLABORATIVE CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL NETWORK MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



**Welcome to November's ECCRN newsletter.**

**Your monthly dose of news, articles, updates, insights (and more!) relevant to children and young people. In this issue we focus on 4 major issues that have the potential to directly affect Residential Child Care. Please absorb and enjoy!**

### **Government Announces Review Of National Protocol To Reduce Unnecessary Criminalization Of Children In Care.**

The improved protocol will be published in Spring 2026, however you can view the 2018 one [here](#) - essential reading for all those involved in Residential Child Care. The protocol encourages professionals to consider whether a child's behaviour would lead to arrest if they lived with their family. It also includes some important recommendations. However, it is not statutory and is inconsistently applied and will be revised to better support this vulnerable group 'treating them as children, rather than criminals' said Minister for Justice, David Lammy.

The announcement has been welcomed by Children's Commissioner for England Dame Rachel de Souza as analysis by her office revealed children in care are 10-times more likely to receive a caution or conviction. Rachel is calling for urgent action on the issue, including an enhanced, reformed joint protocol between the MoJ, Department for Education, and the Home Office. She has called on the government to consider making the existing protocol statutory, applied consistently across all local authorities and police forces, with a clear plan to monitor how effectively it is used.

**The Criminalisation of Children in Care Report** found that looked-after children with no previous history of offending were frequently charged with offences that would not attract police intervention in an average family home, such as lesser assault or low value criminal damage.

### Care experienced children are 10x as likely to be criminalised

The commissioner's office examined the records of all children born from 2000-2002 in England in relation to any criminal justice involvement from 2010-2020.

27% per cent of the care experienced cohort (10,038 children) had received a conviction or caution, 10x the proportion of the non-care experienced cohort (2.2% or 34,478 children).

*"When it comes to children in care, we take away their innocence. They are criminalised for lashing out and damaging property, often with the staff tasked with caring for them being the ones who call the police."* – Rachel de Souza

*"For any other child, these would not be 'incidents' documented in writing. They would be handled by parents or other caregivers in private, where children are allowed to be children."* – Rachel de Souza

See also: [Keeping Children In Care Out Of Trouble](#)  
The Prison Reform Trust

## A New Ecosystem Of Care?

For over a year, the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory have convened a peer collaborative focused on sharing insights about how children in complex situations are cared for.

**What is the issue the NFJO see?** The multiple, intersecting needs of children in complex situations are currently not being recognised or responded to adequately by children's social care and mental health services, despite children's long histories with them and the best intentions of the professionals involved. Delayed support can lead to escalation and crisis – and serious concerns about the levels of risk or harm.

Efforts to keep children safe when they have reached this point can include depriving them of their liberty, with a focus on managing immediate, short-term risks rather than providing recovery and opportunities to thrive in the long term. But placement options are limited, and if children are deprived of their liberty under the inherent jurisdiction of the high court they can be placed in unregulated and often unsuitable secure settings.

The group helped to develop a case for change and a vision for a new ecosystem of care (see below).

### Five Learning Points:

#1 The children aren't 'complex' – the services and systems are. We regard children and their needs as 'complex' – but the reality is that services and systems have failed to meet their multiple, intersecting needs.

#2 At crisis points, care is even less effective. As a child's distress increases, and a point of crisis is reached, services become less able to respond effectively – and children are less likely to be involved in decisions, listened to or heard.

#3 Services struggle to flex. Professionals are often constrained by service pathways, practice and culture – this can lead to mechanistic responses that prevent children from accessing the tailored care they need.

#4 Short-term decisions to keep children safe can cause long-term harm A preoccupation with eliminating risk can disconnect children from important relationships and their communities.

#5 The 'system' can make things worse for children, not better Overwhelmed, stuck and fragmented systems and services can be harmful.

## What Would A New Ecosystem Of Care Look Like?

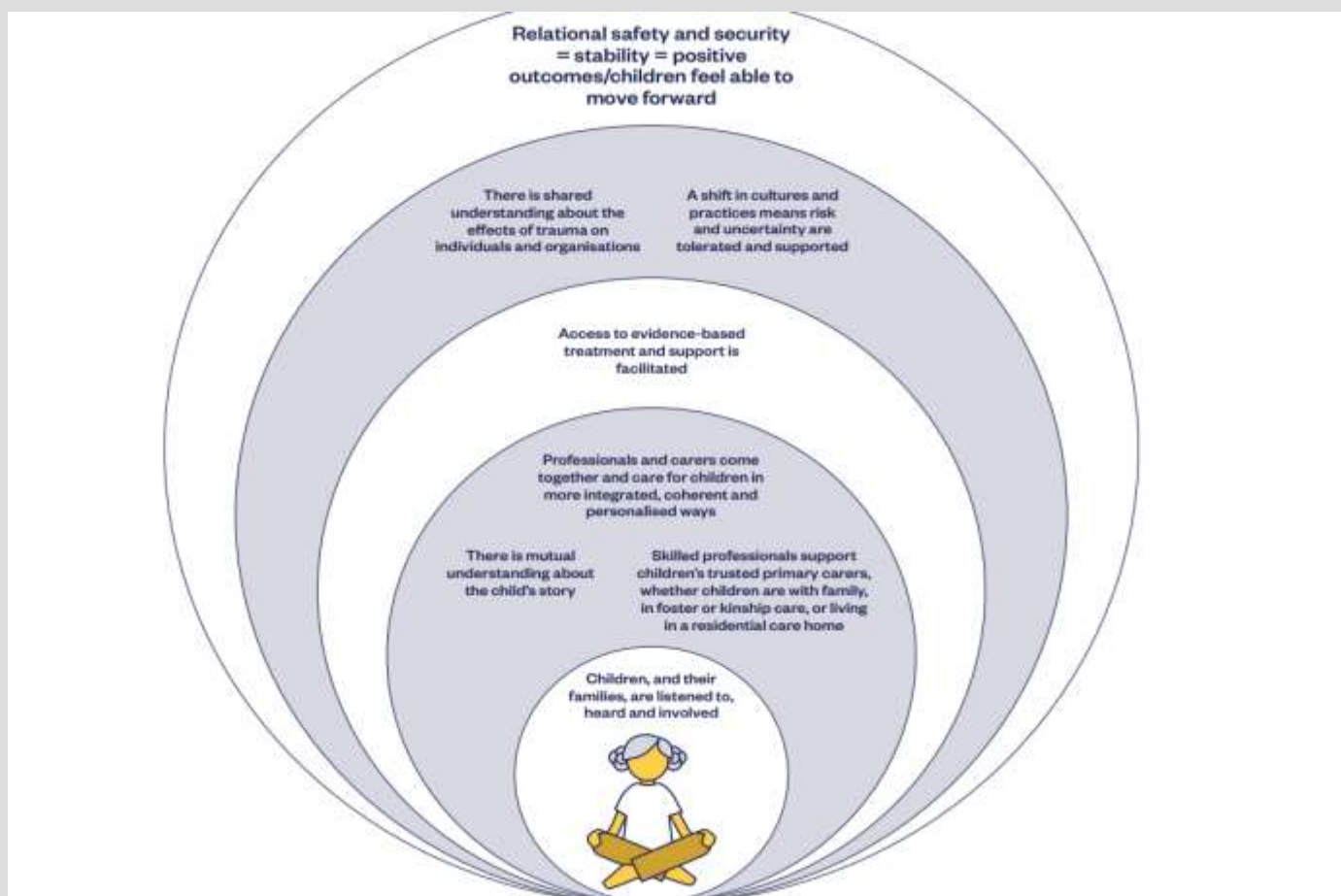


Image from [Caring for children in complex situations: Towards a new ecosystem – Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

**To achieve this vision, we need:** A clear signal from national leaders that services can and should work in a more integrated way / Space for local leaders to work on and reach agreement on new ways of working / Dedicated 'system integrators' – people who are skilled at connecting professionals and organisations / A national conversation about how risk is held and tolerated

**Lisa Harker Director of NFJO writes:**

*There is an urgent need to reset services for children who are experiencing the greatest vulnerabilities in our society. A new ecosystem of care would put children's long-term well-being at the centre, with children and their families listened to and involved in decisions. It would mean health, children's social care, police and education working together to better support them. Children deserve care from professionals who have a full understanding of their needs and circumstances and who can help them to access the treatment and support they need (NCERCC emphasis). Professionals are looking for a clear signal that the government actively supports integrated cross-sector working, and that services can and should be working in this way."*

**Read these short reports:**

[Caring for children in complex situations: Five learning points and a case for change](#)

[Caring for children in complex situations: Towards a new ecosystem](#)



### Questions For Evolving Systems

- How can we take joint responsibility and agree a way forward?
- Do we need to recognise and unpick differences between agencies? What models can help us navigate disintegration?
- Who can help navigate complexity and broker integration? How can we create capacity to do this?
- How can we co-produce new ways of working (pathways and practices)?

### Questions For Evolving Practice

- Are we prioritising organisational needs over the child?
- Is there a shared understanding of this child? What can be done to create this?
- Will managing short-term risks create risks to the child in the future?
- Are children and families informed and involved? Are their voices shaping practice?
- What is the long-term plan?

## Residential Child Care Money Matters In Parliament – Public Accounts Committee Inquiry



The Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has held its first evidence session on its inquiry into the financial sustainability of children's care homes. Members, & MPs, questioned senior leaders from the Department for Education, Children's Services and the Residential Child Care Private Providers.

The PAC inquiry was prompted by National Audit Office, research showing the cost of providing residential care placements has risen 96% since 2019/20, stretching many local authorities' budgets by becoming a large expenditure area by children's services.

CYP Now reported it as a *'lengthy, wide ranging and sometimes fractious hearing'*. Watch for yourself [here](#). Or read the [transcript](#).

## Key Points

\*Responding to questions about profits, Mark Kerr, CEO of the Children's Homes Association said labelling the entire sector as profiteering is unfair and does not consider that small providers "are not making large margins". He focused the PAC attention on larger private equity providers.

\*The ADCS were pressed about the use of unregistered homes and responded that it happens in *"very rare circumstances where you have both an absolute duty to place that young person in order to keep them safe and no regulated placement will take them"*. This was challenged citing '23-24 figures of an estimated nearly 1,000 children.

\*A 2024 Children's Commissioner survey around 775 children were in unregistered accommodation, with an average placement length of 185 days.

\*The PAC are expected to make recommendations for government action on the issue.

\*The CHA highlighted delays in the Ofsted registration process and the effects on providers' costs explaining that the registration target timeline has gone from 16 weeks to 18 months where a children's home has to carry senior staff teams. This adds to the fees.

\*Ofsted prioritises applications that are linked to government capital funding for areas where supply is short, and anywhere where a child who is subject to a deprivation of liberty order from the court is being accommodated in unregistered provision. Priority applications have a two to six-month timescale. Of registrations so far in 2025/26, 78% have been approved.

## New Statistics – Children Looked After: A Focus On Placement Location

As these newsletters have reported Children Looked After are placed out of the Eastern region. About 25% of places in the East have Eastern children. The ECCRN is involved in developing practice and taking action for more children to live in the East.

There is legislation in Parliament concerning distance of placements from family, separate but associated with the Children's Well Being Bill.

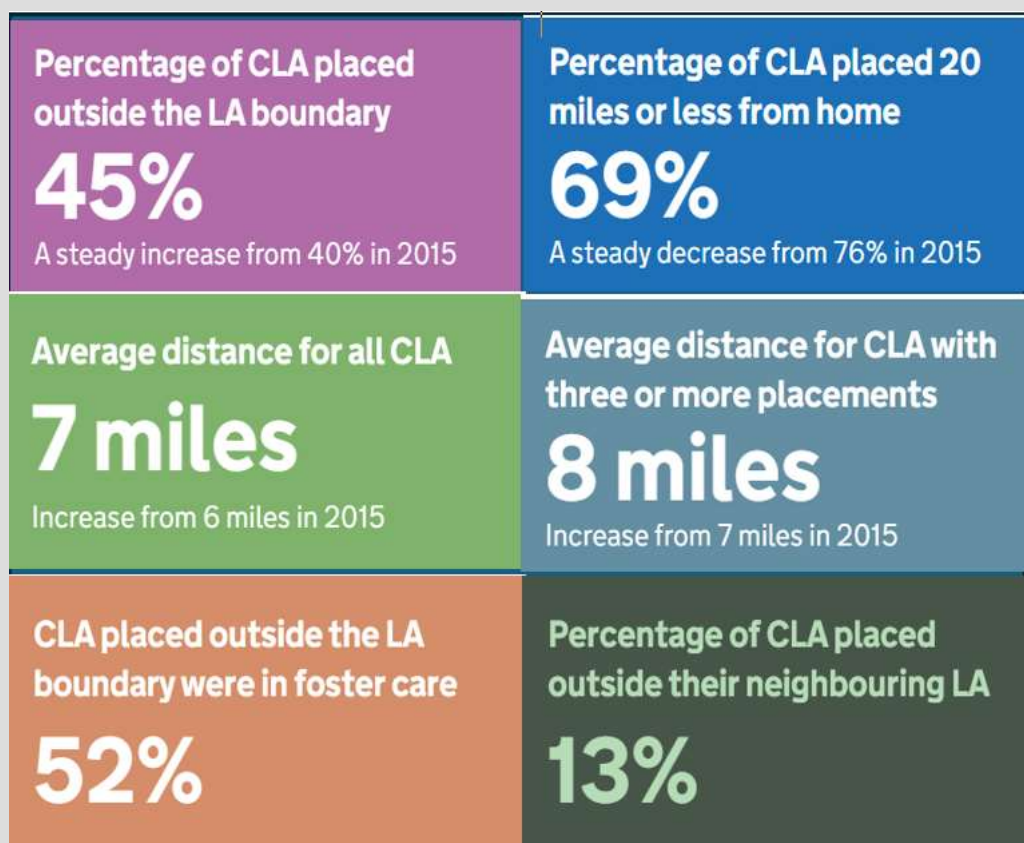
Become, the Children's Looked After charity, have a major #GoneTooFar campaign on the issue, see [here](#). They also have statistics on the number of children in care living away, see [here](#).

The issue is high in the All Party Parliamentary Committee concerns. See Report [here](#).

This analysis has been produced to provide additional insight into placements for children looked after outside the local authority boundary.



## Headline facts and figures – 2024



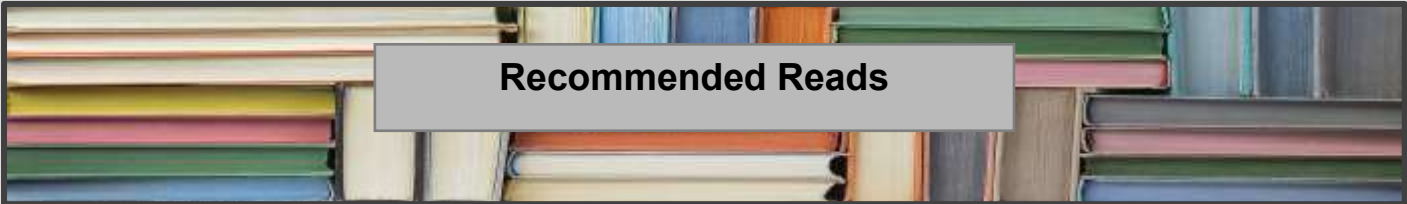
The total number of CLA has gradually increased over the last 10yrs from **69,460** in 2015 to **83,760** in 2023.

Many of the changes seen in the figures in the report can be explained by the large increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in recent years. UASC are a distinct cohort with specific characteristics, for example they are generally male, aged 16+ years, with relatively short period of care.

LAs in smaller, urban, densely populated areas, such as those within Greater London and major UK cities, often place CLA outside their jurisdictional boundaries. In contrast, larger and more rural LAs typically place children within their own boundaries.

The proportion of looked-after children placed in children's homes has risen from **9%** to **12%** in the past **3yrs**.

At 31 March 2024, **10,620 (13%)** of all CLA were placed 'outside the neighbouring LAs' at an average distance of **76 miles**. The North West receives a disproportionate proportion of CLA placed 'outside their neighbouring LAs' in children's homes (**16%** from Southwest and **11%** from South East).



## Recommended Reads

### Reading for grown ups

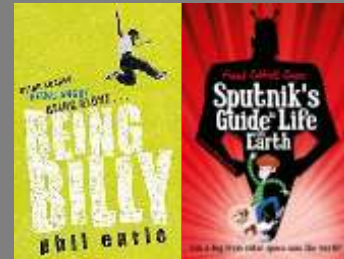


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Highlighted chapters:

**\*Debrief \*Self-harm \*Trauma**

### Books for Children



## A thought to finish

***“Change the way you  
look at things and  
the things you look  
at change.”***

Wayne Dyer

Thank you for reading our newsletter, your feedback would be very welcome. If you wish to be removed from the distribution or wish to add a colleague, please email us:

SLI Programme mailbox: [EasternRegionCIB@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:EasternRegionCIB@norfolk.gov.uk)

SLI website: [Commission East – Improvement East](#)

Linked In: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/improvement-east/>

See you at the next online ECCRN meeting!

