

# Children and Education overview and Scrutiny Panel

## Children in Care Fostering and Adoption Update

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# Demand – number of LAC

- BCC LAC numbers historically below what could be anticipated by SN comparison
- Reflected slower 'flow' of LAC through BCC system – admissions and discharges
- Ofsted inspections and Le Grande review pointed to 'unidentified risk'
- Deeper analysis directed by Lord Warner indicates a more likely number of 2,125
- Admissions to date have exceeded estimates, discharges have not kept pace
- Resultant rapid rise in LAC numbers and question as to stabilisation point
- Increases the pressure and imperative to deliver placement sufficiency
- BCC must also become better at moving LAC to permanence to operate within MTFs

Admissions have risen sharply following practice reform, discharges have not

# Demand – characteristics of LAC

- Younger children increasingly crowded out by adolescent LAC
- Case for coordinated cusp of care support system
- Under-representation of Asian children amongst the LAC population
- BCC LAC more likely to be female than LAC in SN areas
- More BCC LAC also abused and neglected than elsewhere

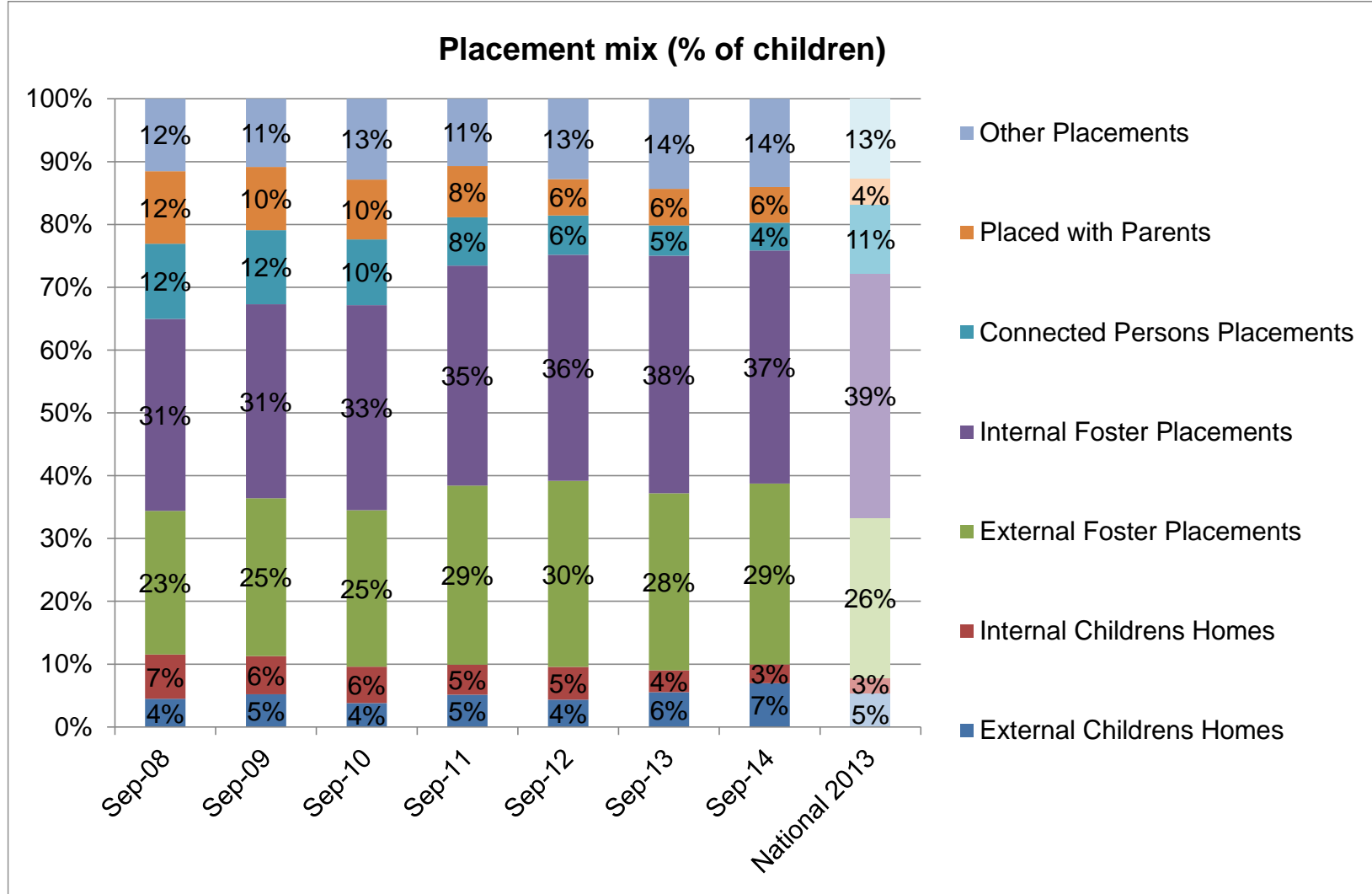
Relatively fewer younger, Asian and male children in BCC's care

# Outcomes

- School absence, crime and placement distance from home amongst LAC reducing and outperform SN picture
- Long term placement stability also strong and BCC has recently started to move more children to adoption more quickly, placing siblings together where that is the goal
- BCC care leavers also much more likely to find suitable accommodation than in other areas
- However, attainment at KS4 lags SNs, has not showed recent improvement and gap with all Birmingham children has widened
- Additionally, despite much recent improvement, 10% more BCC care leavers still not in employment, education or training (are NEET) compared to SNs

A mixed picture – KS4 attainment and care leaver employment are priorities

# Provision - context



Comparatively high use of residential and reliance on external fostering

- **Court proceedings:** significant reduction in timescales over past 18 months
- **Fostering:** in-house recruitment challenges, contraction in connected persons, over-reliance on external well developed IFA market; low unit costs across all family placements
- **Adoption:** historically poor performance, strong recent improvement, sustainability dependent on ongoing reform of family recruitment and matching practices
- **Residential:** continued externalisation and local market development, favourable external unit costs, mobilised outcomes-based step-down contract with ambition to extend and scale
- **Assisted orders:** usage on a par with SNs, but known opportunities to improve and increase include clearer guidance and family group conferencing, more timely assessments and more favourable financial support policies for foster carers
- **Care leaver planning:** good accommodation provision but, given EET outcomes, initiatives underway to enable better performance management of pathway planning, to create more apprenticeship opportunities and to encourage care leavers to help shape and implement developments

# Conclusions

- Admissions have risen sharply and, to ensure only the right children are in care, more must be done to provide assurance that need is identified and support provided at the right time (earlier), that all care cases are progressed and that plans for permanence and restoration are developed, pursued and achieved
- For children and young people who are in, or transition from placement, outcomes are mixed. Specifically, improvements seen in the attainment gap at Key Stage 4 and in employment prospects for care leavers must be consolidated and accelerated
- BCC continues to deliver placement sufficiency, however more children can benefit from placements in local family settings and this can be better achieved through expansion of the in-house fostering and connected persons services
- BCC must also provide greater permanence sufficiency, by engaging differently with families and communities on the needs of children for whom adoption or FPO is in their best interests, and finding more families willing and able to care for them
- BCC has achieved a economy and efficiency in placement provision and each of the above improvements also presents opportunities for better use of resources

# Summary of recommended actions

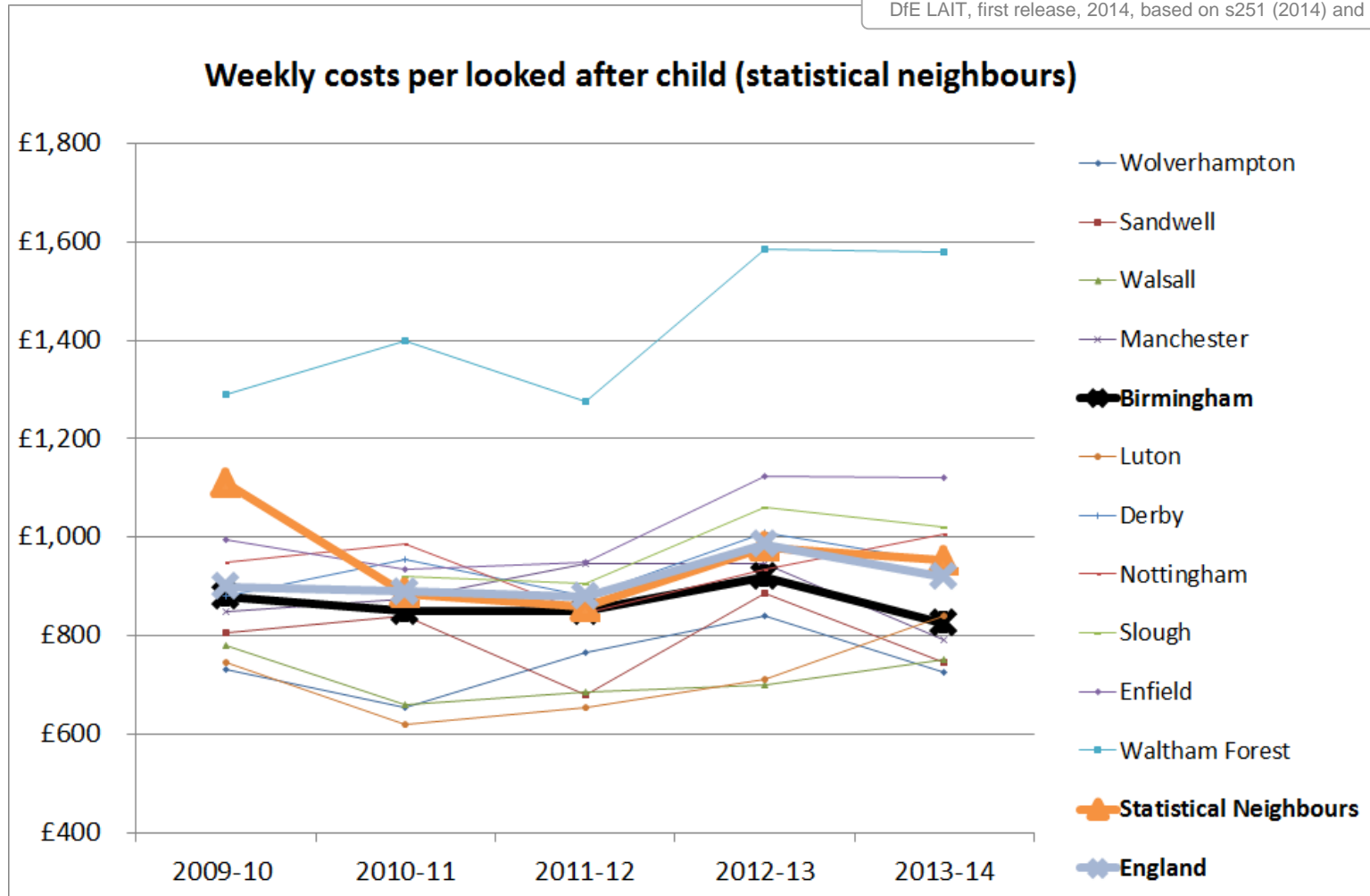
Strategic priority	Recommended strategic actions
The right help at the right time	<p>Cusp of care support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Early Help system definition, strategy and actions</li> <li>•Redeployment of placement expertise to cusp of care</li> </ul> <p>Social care - role, principles and policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Re-clarifying and 'socialising' care thresholds</li> <li>•FGC and Strengthening Families model for CPCs</li> <li>•Area-based resource panels</li> </ul> <p>Practice improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Delivery of the Children's Services Improvement Plan</li> <li>•Learning and changes from audits of older young people admissions</li> <li>•Placement allocation and review oversight</li> </ul>
Achieving potential	<p>Council-wide traineeship and apprenticeship programme</p> <p>Robust intervention and support model from KS2 to KS4</p> <p>Schools partnership working and staff training</p>
Local family placements	<p>Expansion of in-house fostering service</p> <p>Re-building connected persons</p> <p>Investing in step-down</p> <p>Re-establishment of placement policies and processes</p> <p>Case tracking and review</p>
Options for permanence	<p>Clarifying the place of, and journey to, Family Placements Orders</p> <p>Instituting Family Group Conferencing as a matter of course</p> <p>Unlocking the financial disincentive for foster carers</p> <p>Modernising adoption recruitment and family finding practices</p>

Identifying and exploring alternative delivery models throughout



# Financial – per LAC overall unit cost

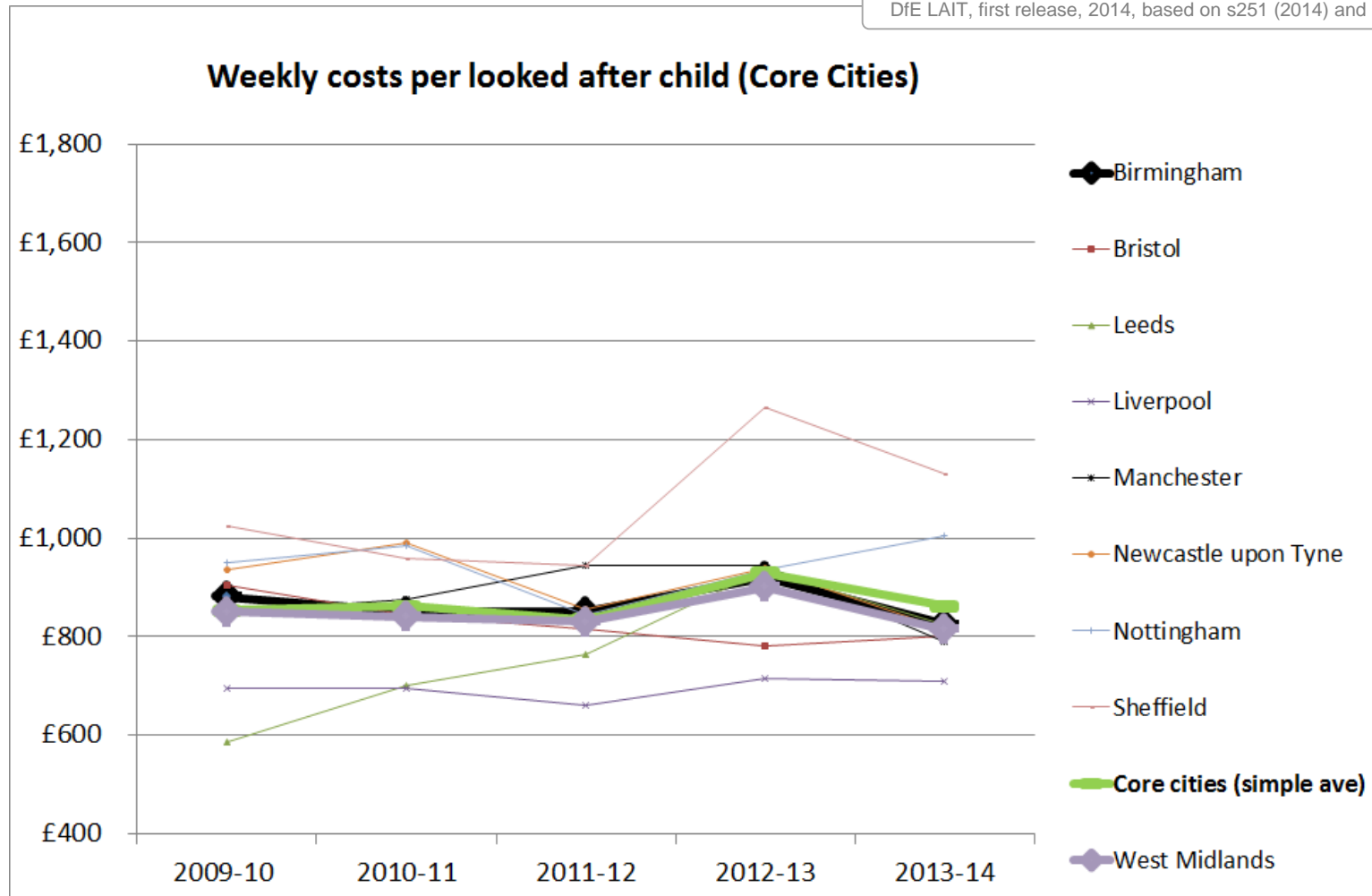
DfE LAIT, first release, 2014, based on s251 (2014) and OT (pre-2014)



BCC overall LAC unit costs are in the SN mid-range, and have remained steady

# Financial– per LAC overall unit cost

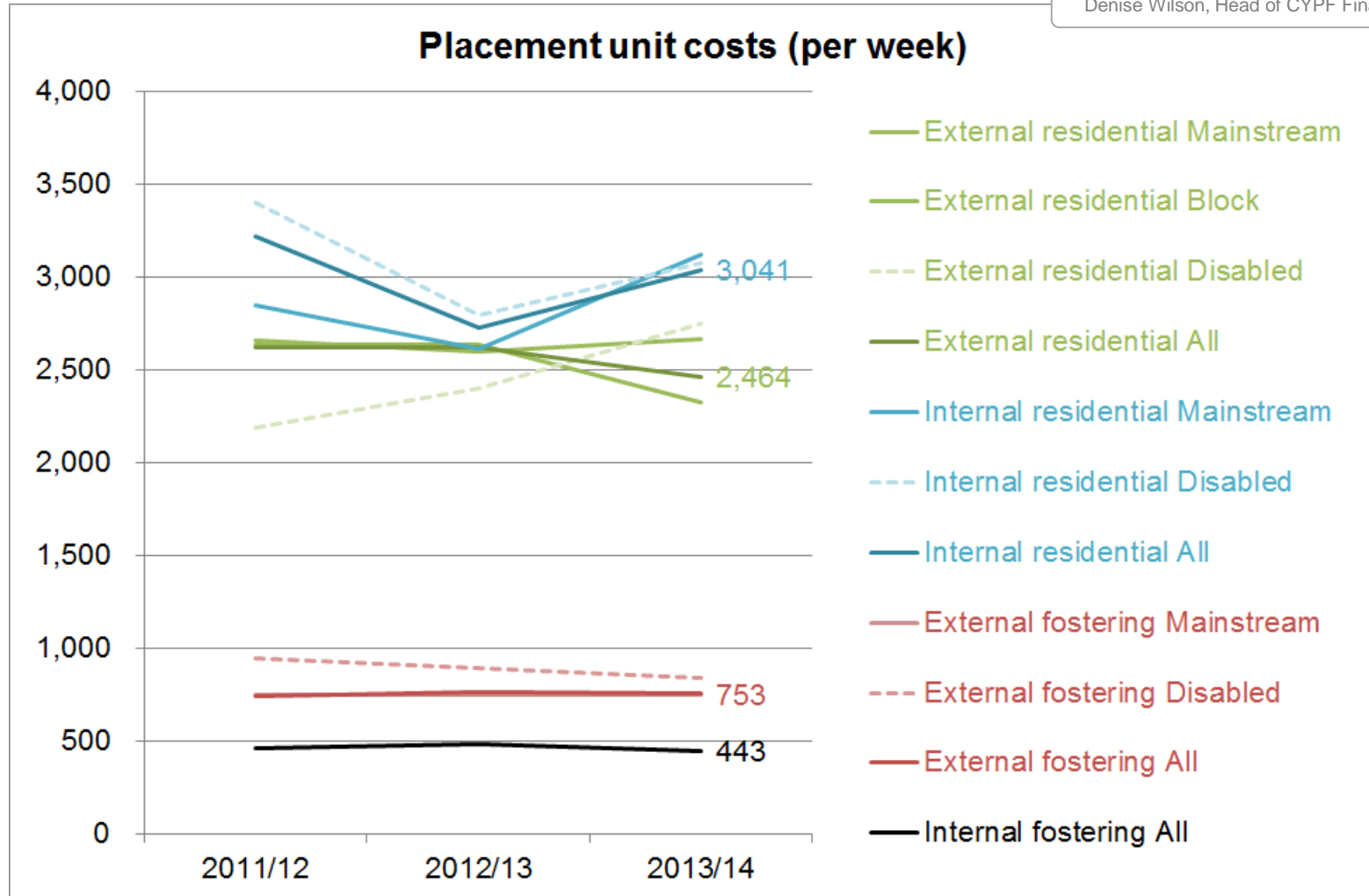
DfE LAIT, first release, 2014, based on s251 (2014) and OT (pre-2014)



And are in line with the Core Cities and regional average

# Core placement unit costs over time

Denise Wilson, Head of CYPF Finance



Internal residential unit cost growth (due to de-commissioning) countered by economies in external residential. Fostering costs have remained steady

# Comparative expenditure – per core

Placement types	National	BCC	Regional
External residential	2,927	2,464	Unknown
Internal residential	2,891	3,041	Unknown
External fostering	865	753	785
Internal fostering	441	443	481
BCC from Denise Wilson, Head of CYPF Finance, National from CIPFA CLA 13 benchmark, Regional from WMCSCG			

- Note - work is proposed with CIPFA and other agencies to strengthen confidence in comparatives (consistency of costing methods)

Comparisons suggest a favourable unit cost position across all but internal residential placements, which are diminishing

# Fostering and Adoption

Metric	BCC	National ave	Variance
Enquiries : LAC ratio (p.a.)	69%	71%	(2%)
Conversion rates (enquiries : approval) *	4%	11%	(7%)
De-registration rates	9%	12%	3%
Utilisation rates	73%	71%	2%
Capacity (approved places per carer) *	1.54	1.79	(14%)
Composite capacity and usage	1.13	1.28	(11%)

# The Issues

- The previous slide highlights two important performance opportunities. First, whilst the volume of enquiries is typical, the rate at which enquirers are approved as foster carers, is in the bottom quartile. A number of commentators have remarked upon the 'low profile' of the in house fostering service in terms of recruitment activity the lack of a presence in BCC publications with the workforce, the lack of a recruitment hub and absence of advertising. Foster carers themselves have commented on the limited extent of their engagement in the recruitment of carers.
- Second, the level of capacity which BCC foster carers provide, is markedly lower than the average.
- Were BCC able to achieve an average level of performance in these two respects, it would relieve a significant amount of financial pressure.

# What we are doing about it - Fostering

- improve recruitment process- fostering friendly, commercial links
- Including foster carers in recruitment and retention activity
- Developing more inclusive processes and procedures
- Concurrent stage 1 and 2 fostering assessments – approved 4 months
- Defining fostering task
- Reviewing fostering fees and recognition of the task they do in general

# What are we doing about it - Adoption

- Putting the child at the center of all our work
- Timely recruitment of the right adults for our children
- Developing partnerships within area teams to ensure efficient and timely family finding
- Development of support to all carers that provide permanence



# Outcomes

- **Increase number of foster carers**
- **Increased number of adopters**
- **Tracking and matching**
- **All children who are looked after by Birmingham City council have the right to live with their ‘forever’ family within 12 months of leaving their immediate family of origin.**
- **No child under the age of 5 should be in the care of BCC for more than 12 months, and those aged 5yrs to 10yrs should be exceptional.**