



# Commissioning Alliance

**Achieving More Together**

Feb 2025

Provider Engagement CYP  
Residential Block

# The problems we are trying to solve

- We want to have homes that care for our children and make their lives better
- We want a skilled and confident work force to care for our children who need the most help
- We want children to live close to their home communities when it's safe to do so
- We want children's homes well integrated into local services including education, health and skills
- We want services which are sustainable, invest and improve and are also affordable to the public purse

There is not one answer to these problems and will require many and interacting solutions



# Context

- Increasing numbers of Looked After Children in residential placements.
- Rising costs and high levels of out of Borough placements.
- West London appears to not have enough residential care provision and what exists is not fully engaged by West London Boroughs.
- The needs of vulnerable CYP are not adequately met through the range of residential provision currently available in West London.
- The market is currently not working. There is a mismatch - between demand and supply – both in terms of sufficiency and flexible and responsive residential provision that meets the changing needs of those coming into care.
- Previous analysis carried out by CA in 2022 revealed that West London Providers had an average 35% voids. (National average 17% - CMA report March 2022).
- WL LAs have asked Commissioning Alliance to engage with WL providers to see how we can work as a region to improve WL residential sufficiency.
- Project scope covers Looked After Children in residential care whose primary need is emotional and/or behavioural (EBD) in the following WL Boroughs: - Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow.

# Traditional Block Contracts

- A Traditional Block Contract is normally an arrangement between one LA and one Provider.
- A single LA usually holds 100% liability for the beds (occupied or not).
- It creates a strong partnership foundation, but with only one LA referring into the service, restricting the pool of potential referrals can hamper matching and blend (i.e. fewer CYP from which to match). This can then lead to tensions over referrals that are rejected by the Provider.
- Traditional block contracts began to fall out of favour in recent years, despite being promoted as suggested commissioning approaches both through the Narey review, and most recently in the CMA's Review of Children's Social Care and the Care Review.
- The emerging approach that has garnered substantial interest recently are known as 'Soft Blocks' or 'Collaborative Blocks'

# Soft Block - Concept

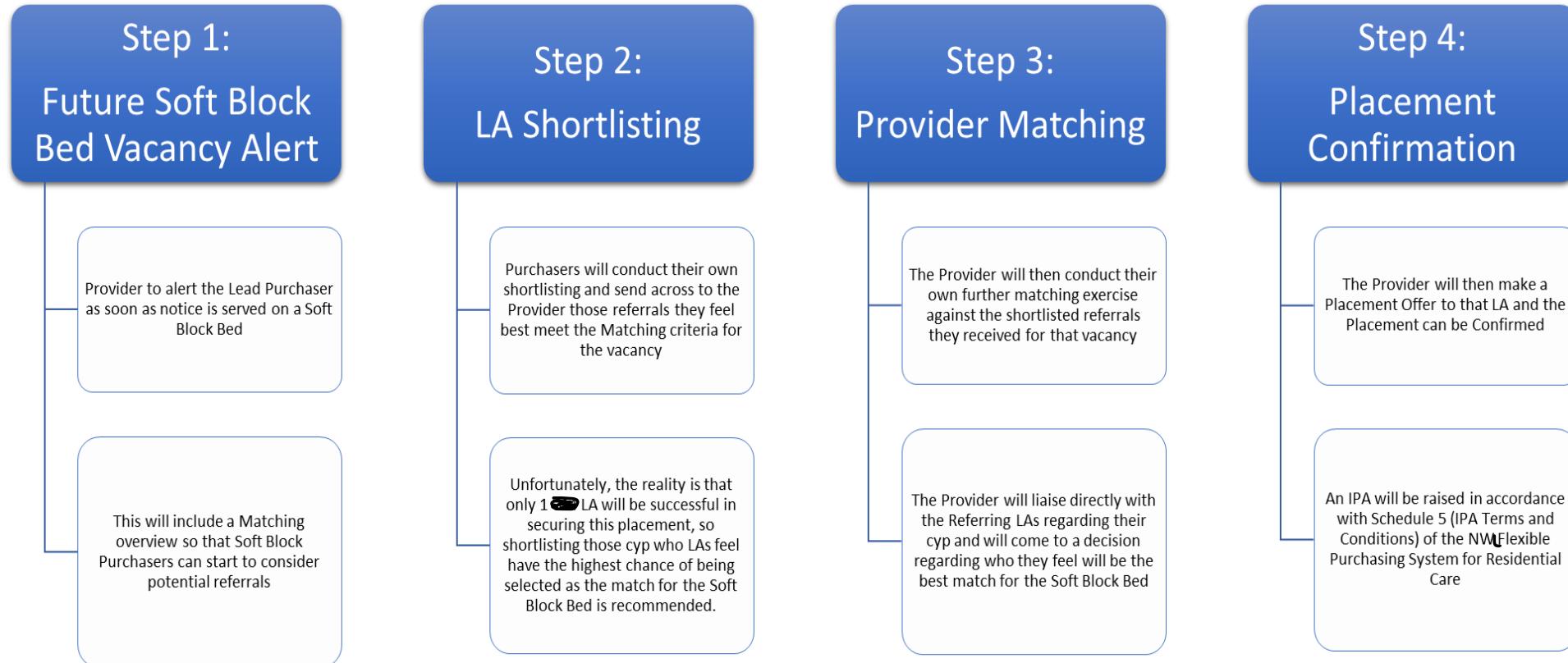
- Guaranteed purchase of beds in Partner Provider Residential Homes, including when the bed is vacant. Multiple WL LAs share access to these 'soft block' beds creating a sustainable, long-term and strategic contractual partnership.
- By guaranteeing purchase, access to these beds becomes ring-fenced to those participating LAs. This helps to improve sufficiency by virtue of securing local capacity and reducing the number of LAs competing for access to that service.
- Participating LAs refer against vacancies in the Soft Block Beds and the Provider determines which placement to proceed with based on the best match. Being able to consider more referrals from multiple LAs (than in a traditional one: one block model) enables greater opportunity for the Provider to secure a suitable match and better matches, which often leads to more stable and successful placement outcomes.
- There can be a time limit on any blocking, to mitigate risks for both sides



# Benefits to Providers

- A genuine sense of an equal partnership across a potential 5-year contract commitment.
- A fee model that means the broad financial package on offer through this Soft Block is more attractive than relying on framework / spot placements alone.
- Soft Block Partners will be included within the primary route to market options. This gives them earlier access to referrals enabling them greater potential to find the best possible matches.
- An Admissions and Matching Policy that was co-produced by Providers and LAs to ensure it protects services and ensures only the best matched children and young people are placed in the soft block beds. Allowing changes to practice that enables need to be better forecast and matching discussed with providers in a timelier way.
- Financial protection to hold any vacancy for up to TBC days after the bed becomes vacant for the Soft Block LAs.
- Closer support for children and young people in their care, as opposed to working with LAs placing at a significant distance.
- Guaranteed business which creates sustained business continuity over a longer period.
- A strategic focus on creating and building partnerships with the wider network of support infrastructure in West London
- Shared recognition of workforce challenges and opportunities to work together to address them as a system

# Referral Pathway - example



Thank you!

