



Lancashire CLA Sufficiency Strategy

2021 – 2024

Updated April 2022



1. Introduction

Lancashire County Council is helping to make Lancashire the best place to live, work, visit and prosper, where everyone acts responsibly.

We will work together with our partners in supportive, innovative, respectful and collaborative ways to ensure that children, young people and their families are safe, healthy and achieve their full potential.

We aim to deliver purposeful practice focused on prevention, participation and permanence by:

- Delivering the right service, at the right time, by the right people through effective wellbeing, preventative strategies and interventions.
- Building on the strengths of families.
- Engaging children and young people through effective participation activities.
- Meeting and surpassing statutory expectations.
- At every stage, actively considering, developing and delivering clear plans to achieve permanence.

We will ensure that everything we do makes a tangible, positive difference to the lives of the children we work for and that we intervene at the lowest and least intrusive level possible.

Lancashire County Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is a range of placements sufficient to meet the needs of the children and young people in the care of the local authority; and to make arrangements to promote co-operation with relevant partners to improve the well-being of children in the local area.

This strategy sets out how Lancashire County Council intends to meet its Sufficiency Duty for the children we look after, improve the quality and choice of placements, ensure value for money and minimise the likelihood of suitable placements not being available locally.

2. Analysis of our Children Looked After (CLA)

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE

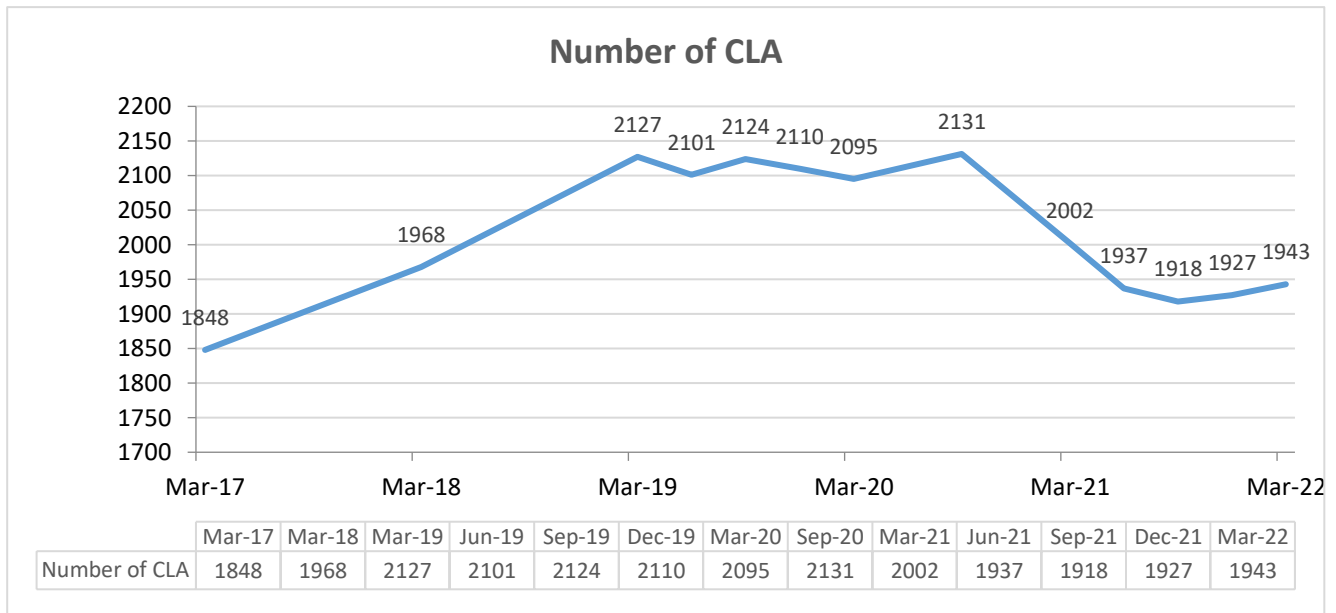
The number of children looked after (CLA) in England has continued to rise: by 4% in 2017/18; 4% in 2018/19; 2% in 2019/20; and 1% in 2020/21.

Lancashire's increase in CLA in 2017/18 and 2018/19 was significantly higher than the increase seen nationally (6.5% in 2017/18 and 8.1% in 2018/19). Numbers fluctuated throughout 2019/20, reaching a high in November 2019 of 2,128. However, by 31 March 2020 numbers had reduced to 2,095, a 1.5% decrease overall in 2019/20, compared to a 2% increase nationally.

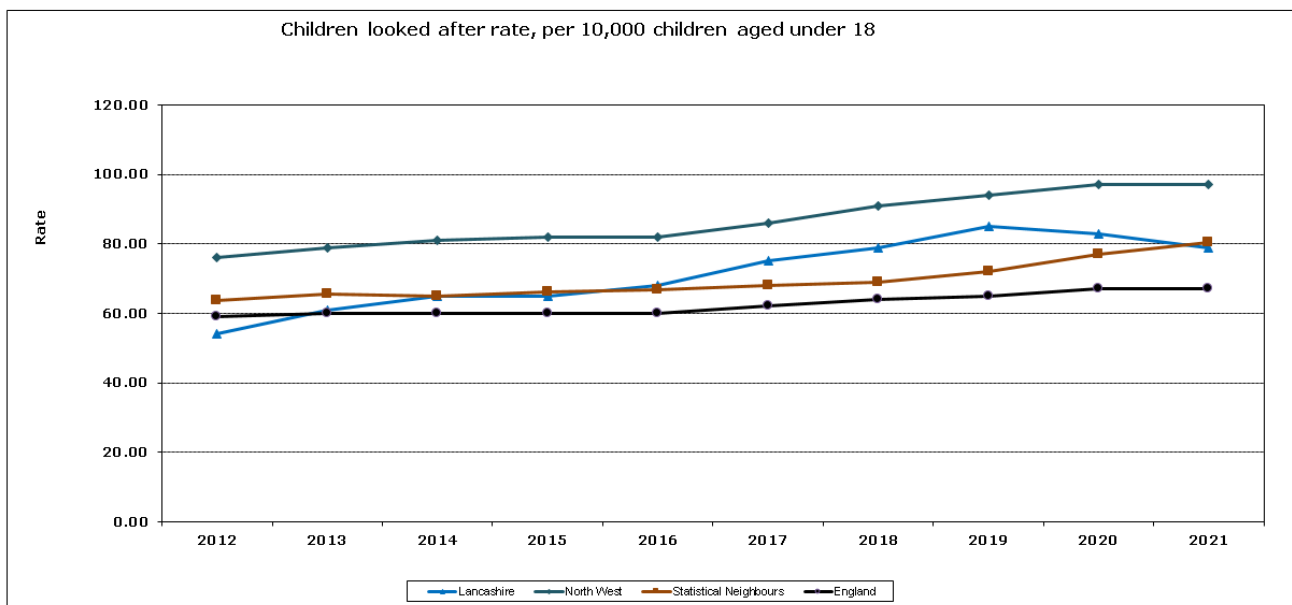
Numbers of CLA rose again in Lancashire during the first half of 2020/21 and by the end of September 2020 were 2,131. However, during the latter half of 2020/21 numbers fell significantly, particularly following the reorganisation of Children's Social Care and the introduction of the Family Safeguarding model. By 31 March 2021, numbers of CLA had reduced to 2,002, a 4.4% decrease, compared to a 1% increase nationally. Overall, between March

2019-March 2021, numbers of CLA rose nationally by 3% but reduced in Lancashire by 5.9%.

CLA numbers continued to fall in Lancashire during the first half of 2021/22, to 1906 by October 2021. CLA numbers rose again in the latter half of 2021/22, up to 1943 by March 2022. However, overall in 2021/22, CLA numbers in Lancashire reduced by 2.9%.



RATE OF CHILDREN IN CARE



In March 2019, the rate of CLA in England (per 10,000 population) was 65, an increase from 64 in 2018 and 62 in 2017 (an increase in the rate of 3 since 2017). The North West average rate also increased over the same period, but at a faster rate than the national average, from 86 in 2017 to 94 in 2019 (an increase of 8). The Statistical Neighbours average rate also increased over the same period from 68 to 72 (an increase of 4).

Lancashire's rate of CLA also increased over the same period, but at a faster rate than the North West average: from 75 in March 2017, to 79 in March 2018 and 85 in March 2019 (an increase of 10).

The rate of CLA in England continued to rise in 2019/20, to 67 (up 2) by March 2020, as did the North West and Statistical Neighbour rates (up 3 regionally and up 5 for Statistical Neighbours by March 2020). However, Lancashire's rate of CLA fluctuated throughout 2019/20, before steadily reducing to 83.9 (down 1) by March 2020 (the lowest rate seen since October 2018).

Lancashire Rates of CLA in 2019/20

Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
85.0	84.3	84.6	84.7	84.8	85.1	85.0	85.2	84.5	84.1	84.0	83.9

The rate of CLA in England remained unchanged at the end of 2020/21 (a rate of 67 by March 2021) and also remained unchanged for the North West (a rate of 97). The Statistical Neighbour average rate increased further (up 3, to a rate of 80). However, the CLA rate in Lancashire (whilst rising initially during the first quarter of 2020/21, to 85.3 in July 2020) reduced overall by 4 to 79.7 by March 2021, comparable to Lancashire rates back in March 2018 and below the Statistical Neighbour rate for the first time since 2015/16.

Overall, between March 2017 to March 2021, Lancashire's rate of CLA increased in line with the national rate increase (up 5), but significantly less than the regional rate increase (up 11) and the Statistical Neighbours rate increase (up 12).

Lancashire Rates of CLA in 2020/21

Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
84.1	84.9	84.8	85.3	85.0	84.9	84.8	84.1	83.9	82.0	80.6	79.7

Lancashire CLA rate continued to fall during the first half of 2021/22, to a low of 75.4 in October 2021. Although the CLA rate rose slightly in the latter half of 2021/22 (to 76.7 by March 2022), the rate overall since March 2021 fell by 3.

Lancashire Rates of CLA in 2021/22

Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
78.4	78.1	77.2	75.6	75.9	75.9	75.4	75.9	76.2	76.1	76.2	76.7

GENDER

56% of CLA in England are male and 44% are female (March 2021). These proportions have varied little over recent years. Lancashire has a lower proportion of males in the CLA population than the national average (around 53%-54%), which has also varied little over recent years:

	31/03/2015	31/03/2016	31/03/2017	31/03/2018	31/03/2019	31/03/2020	31/03/2021	31/03/2022
Male	852	883	989	1060	1133	1100	1075	1047
Female	782	782	859	908	993	986	921	891
Indeterminate					2	6	6	5
Total	1592	1665	1848	1968	2128	2095	2022	1943
% Male	53.5%	53.0%	53.5%	53.9%	53.2%	52.5%	53.7%	53.9%

AGE

The largest age group for CLA nationally in March 2020 was those aged 10-15 years (39%). This was also the largest age group for CLA in Lancashire (39%). However, a higher proportion of Lancashire CLA were in the younger age ranges: aged 5-9 years (21% compared to 18% nationally); 1-4 years (16% compared to 13% nationally) and under 1s (7% compared to 5% nationally). Lancashire had a lower proportion of CLA aged 16 years and over (17% compared to 24% nationally).

By 31 March 2021, the largest age group both nationally and in Lancashire continued to be those aged 10-15 years (39%). The proportion of 5-9 year olds had increased by 1% both nationally (to 19%) and in Lancashire (to 22%). However, the proportion of CLA aged 16+ increased in Lancashire by 2% (to 19%) compared to a 1% fall (to 23%) nationally. The proportion of CLA aged 1-4 years in Lancashire moved closer to national proportions, reducing to 15% (14% nationally). The proportion of CLA aged under 1 reduced significantly in Lancashire (to 4%), compared to no change nationally (5%).

As of 31 March 2022, the proportion of older age CLA in Lancashire had further increased (to 42% aged 10-15 and 20% aged 16+) and the proportions of younger age CLA had further reduced (to 14% aged 1-4 and 20% aged 5-9). The proportion of under 1s increased slightly to 5%.

Age range	March 2020		March 2021		March 2022
	Nationally	Lancashire	Nationally	Lancashire	Lancashire
Under 1	5%	7%	5%	4%	5%
Aged 1-4	13%	16%	14%	15%	14%
Aged 5-9	18%	21%	19%	22%	20%
Aged 10-15	39%	39%	39%	39%	42%
Aged 16+	24%	17%	23%	19%	20%

ETHNICITY

The ethnicity of Lancashire's CLA continues to be predominately white ethnicity, representing 87.0% of the total CLA population (March 2020). This is largely in line with the percentage of the general CYP population in Lancashire who are of white ethnicity, as reported in the 2011 census (87.3%). The proportion of CLA who are of white ethnicity reduced slightly in March 2021 to 85.7% and reduced again in March 2022 to 85.2%.

As of March 2020, 6.4% of CLA were of mixed ethnicity. This group is over-represented when compared to the general CYP population (2.5% - 2011 census). The proportion of Lancashire CLA who were mixed ethnicity rose to 6.7% in March 2021 and rose again to 7.5% in March 2022.

As of March 2020, 4.8% of CLA were of Asian ethnicity and this remained unchanged in March 2021 but reduced in March 2022 to 4.2%. This group is under-represented when compared to the general CYP population (9.7% - 2011 census).

As of March 2020, 0.4% of CLA were of black ethnicity, which is in line with the general CYP population (0.3% - 2011 census) and this remained unchanged in March 2021. However, the proportion of CLA of black ethnicity increased to 1% in March 2022.

The proportion of CLA whose ethnicity was classed as 'any other ethnic group' rose from 1% in March 2020 to 1.5% in March 2021 and to 2% in March 2022 (compared to 0.3% of general CYP population in 2011 census).

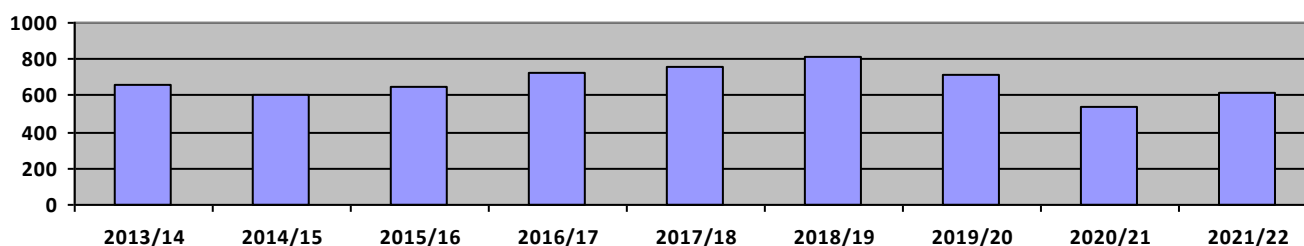
STARTED TO BE LOOKED AFTER

In the two-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19, the number of children who started to be looked after in Lancashire increased by 13.2% (compared to a decrease of 3.8% nationally, a decrease of 3.9% regionally and a decrease of 3.7% for Statistical Neighbours). However, during 2019/20, the number of children who started to be looked after in Lancashire reduced significantly (by 13%, compared to a reduction of 3% nationally) to lower levels than the previous three years.

A significantly lower number of children also started to be looked after in Lancashire during 2020/21 (down 25%, compared to a reduction of 8% nationally), with the lowest numbers during Quarter 4, following the reorganisation of Children's Social Care and the introduction of the Family Safeguarding model.

The number of children who started to be looked after increased in 2021/22 to 616 (up 83 compared to 2020/21) but remained at lower levels than in the previous five years.

Numbers of Lancashire Children Started to be Looked After Each Year (2013- 2022)



	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Started to be CLA	659	605	653	722	763	817	711	533	616

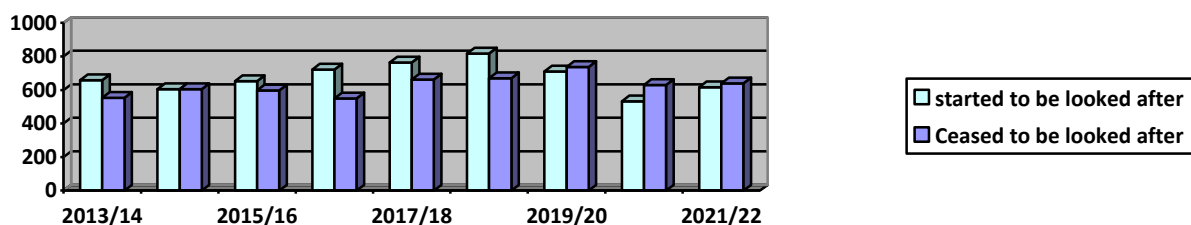
CEASED TO BE LOOKED AFTER

There was a significant increase in the number of children who ceased to be looked after in Lancashire between 2016/17 to 2018/19 (21.8%), compared to a much smaller increase across the region (1.1%) and a 6.2% reduction nationally. During 2019/20, the number who ceased to be looked after in Lancashire increased by a further 10% (compared to no change nationally) and for the first time since 2014/15, the number of children who ceased to be looked after was higher than the number of children who started to be looked after.

A significantly lower number of children ceased to be looked after in Lancashire during 2020/21 (down 14.5% compared to a decrease of 6% nationally). However, the number of children who ceased to be looked after in Lancashire in 2021/22 increased slightly (up 1.6%) and continued to be higher than the number of children who started to be looked after.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Ceased to be CLA	553	606	598	550	663	670	737	630	640

Number of Lancashire Children Started and Ceased to be Looked After 2013-2022



The proportion of children who ceased to be looked after because of a return home to live with parents (either on a planned or unplanned basis with no order) has increased from 13% in 2019/20 to 17% in 2021/22.

Reason for ceasing to be looked after	% in 2019/2020	% in 2020/21	% in 2021/22
SGO	17%	21%	19%
Adoption	12%	10%	11%
Return home to parents, either planned or unplanned (no order)	13%	15%	17%

SECTION 20 AGREEMENTS

Nationally, 15% of CLA are looked after under a voluntary agreement (under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989) compared to 7% in Lancashire (March 2021). The proportion looked after under a voluntary agreement rose slightly in Lancashire in March 2022 to 7.8%.

Most of the Lancashire CLA who are looked after under a voluntary agreement are aged 16-17 years, although the proportion of these has been falling over the last few years (from 71.8% in March 2020 to 66.9% in March 2022) and the proportion of 14-15 year olds has been increasing (from 12.8% in March 2020 to 19.6% in March 2022).

Age range of CLA accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Age Range	Number of s20 CLA at 31/03/20	Number of s20 CLA at 31/03/21	Number of s20 CLA at 31/03/22
0-5 years	9 (5.8%)	8 (5.7%)	10 (6.8%)
6-10 years	5 (3.2%)	6 (4.3%)	3 (2.0%)
11-13 years	10 (6.4%)	10 (7.1%)	7 (4.7%)
14-15 years	20 (12.8%)	22 (15.7%)	29 (19.6%)
16-17 years	112 (71.8%)	94 (67.1%)	99 (66.9%)
TOTAL	156	140	148

The proportion of Section 20 CLA who are voluntarily accommodated in Lancashire as part of the Homeless Protocol has been steadily falling in recent years, from 30% (47) in March 2020 to 18.6% (26) in March 2021 and 16.9% (25) in March 2022.

Significantly more Section 20 CLA were placed in agency children's home provision as of March 2022 (41) compared to March 2020 (25) and March 2021 (25).

Placement type of CLA accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Type of Provision	Number of s20 CLA at 31/03/20	Number of s20 CLA at 31/03/21	Number of s20 CLA at 31/03/22
Agency Leaving Care	44 (28.2%)	44 (31.4%)	35 (23.6%)
Block Purchased Supported Accommodation	39 (25%)	17 (12.1%)	16 (10.8%)
Agency Children's Homes	25 (16.1%)	25 (17.9%)	41 (27.7%)
In-House Fostering	20 (12.8%)	26 (18.6%)	22 (14.9%)
Agency Fostering	10 (6.4%)	7 (5%)	15 (10.1%)
In-House Residential	7 (4.5%)	10 (7.1%)	12 (8.1%)
Residential School	7 (4.5%)	4 (2.9%)	5 (3.4%)
Other	4 (2.6%)	7(5%)	2 (1.4%)
TOTAL	156	140	148

PLACEMENT LOCATION

Nationally, 57% of CLA are placed within their home local authority boundaries (March 2021). Lancashire performs much better than the national average, with 78% placed within Lancashire County Council boundaries in March 2022 (excluding those in confidential addresses). 10% of placement addresses in March 2022 were recorded as confidential.

Most of the remaining Lancashire CLA are placed in other North West Local Authorities or Yorkshire towns close to the Lancashire border. The number of CLA placed at a distance remains low but has increased slightly, from 51 placements in March 2020 to 54 placements in March 2021 and to 56 placements in March 2022.

The largest proportion of placements at a distance continues to be agency fostering placements (around 34% in March 2022, an increase from 18% in 2017). Most of these placements (13) are for sibling groups of 2 or 3 and a further three are foster placements with connected carers who live at a distance from Lancashire, which agency fostering providers have been commissioned to support.

There had been a significant reduction in the number of Lancashire children placed at a distance in agency children's homes (9 in 2017 compared to only 3 in March 2020 and 4 in March 2021). However, this increased to 12 in March 2022. Most of these placements commenced in late 2021/ early 2022 and are likely due to the current, very challenging market conditions.

	Placed at a distance (March 2020)	Placed at a distance (March 2021)	Placed at a distance (March 2022)	July 2017 % benchmark comparison
Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)	20 (39.2%)	22 (40.7%)	19 (33.9%)	17.9%
Placed with Parents	10 (19.6%)	11 (20.4%)	9 (16.1%)	16.1%
Connected Carers	7 (13.7%)	5 (9.3%)	6 (10.7%)	5.4%
Family Assessment Centre	6 (11.8%)	3 (5.6%)	4 (7.1%)	12.5%
OTHER (Hospital, remand, secure welfare, overnight short break, Reg 38.6, other)	4 (7.8%)	8 (14.8%)	5 (8.9%)	7.8%
Agency Children's Homes	3 (5.9%)	4 (7.4%)	12 (21.4%)	16.1%
Agency Leaving Care	1 (2%)	1 (1.9%)	1 (1.8%)	1.8%
Residential Schools	0%	0%	0%	1.8%
TOTAL PLACEMENTS	51	54	56	56

OUTCOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Lancashire CLA are:

- Less likely to reach the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths than statistical and regional neighbours and below the national average (based on latest available data – 20/21 published data cancelled).
- Likely to progress less well in school than the average of either the region or statistical neighbours.
- Less likely to achieve a higher level of attainment at KS4 than the region or statistical neighbours (excluding most recent data as not directly comparable due to COVID).
- Less likely to be excluded from school than statistical or regional neighbours and the exclusion rate is lower than the national average.
- Less likely to have a SEN with an EHCP than the regional average and less likely to have a SEN without an EHCP than the regional or national average.
- Less likely than the regional average and equal to the national average of being subject to a formal justice disposal.
- Less likely than children from statistical neighbours and national averages to achieve a score on the SDQ that is 'slightly higher' but more likely than regional.
- Less likely to have a missing incident higher than their regional or national averages.
- Less likely than the regional, Statistical Neighbours or national average to have 3 or more placements in a year.
- Less likely to be placed 20 miles or more from home than the regional, statistical or national averages.
- As likely as the regional, national and statistical neighbour averages to have been in the same placement for 2 years.

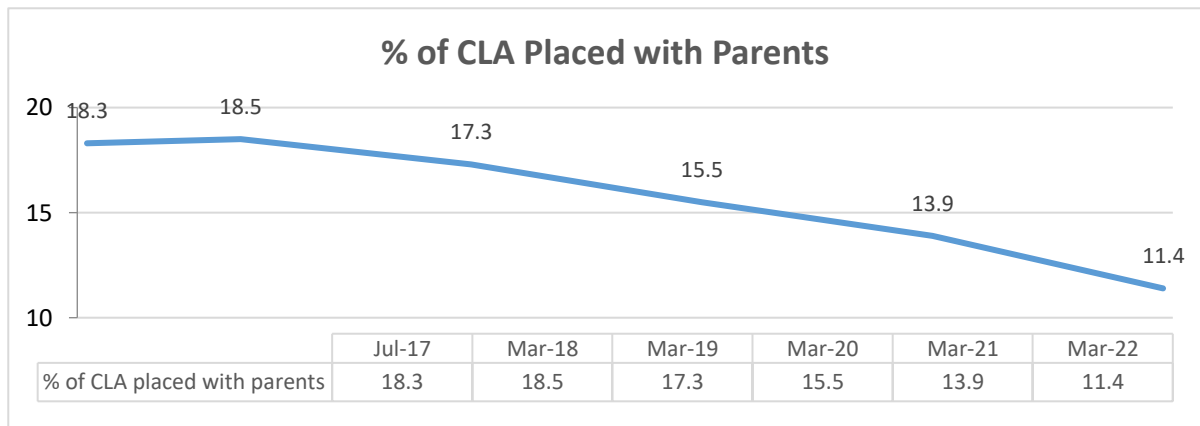
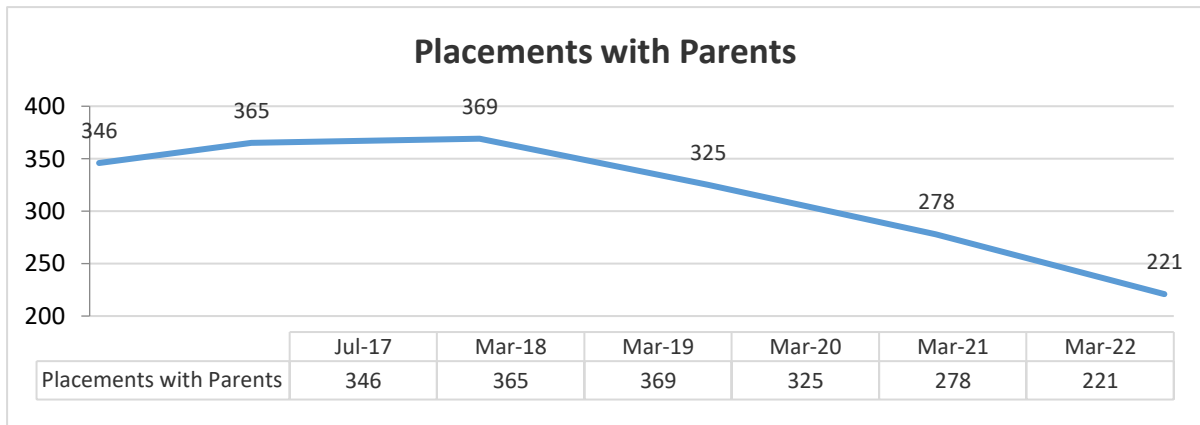
3. CLA Placement Analysis and Current Provision

Please note that Lancashire's previous Sufficiency Strategy (2017-2020) used July 2017 as a benchmark to measure progress.

PLACED WITH PARENTS OR OTHER PERSON WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

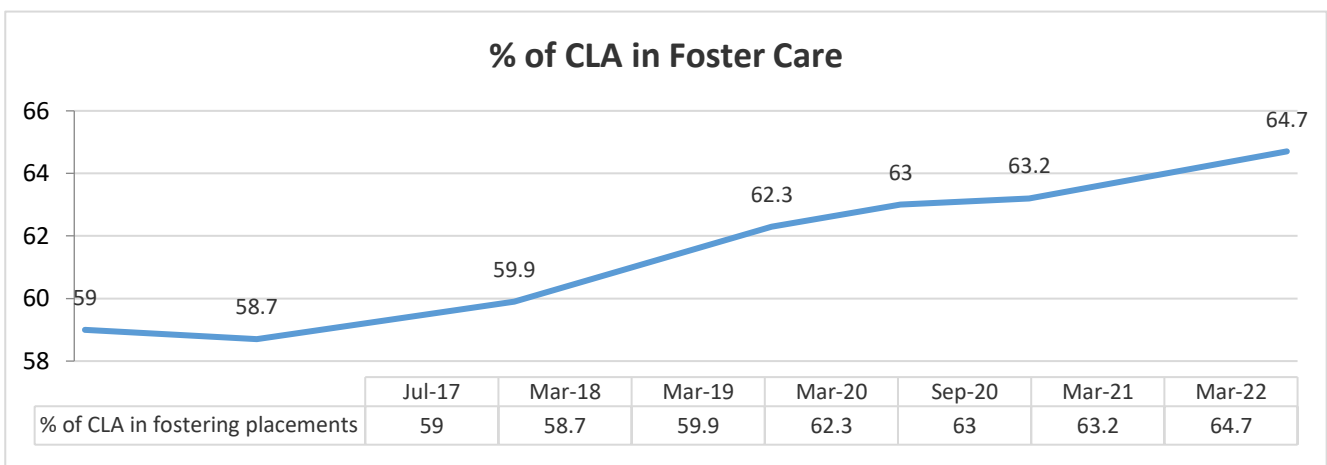
Between 2012 and 2017, Lancashire experienced a significant increase in the number of CLA placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility, with the proportion doubling from 9.6% in March 2012 to 18.3% in July 2017. This was significantly higher than the proportion of placements nationally (5.4% as of March 2016) and higher than the proportion regionally (12.5%). The number of placements with parents nationally has since increased to 7% (March 2021).

Targeted work in Lancashire to reduce the proportion of placements with parents has been successful. As of 31 March 2022, there were 125 less placements with parents, compared to July 2017, with most of the decrease (104 placements) occurring during 2020/21 and 2021/22. By 31 March 2022, the proportion of placements with parents had reduced to 11.4%.

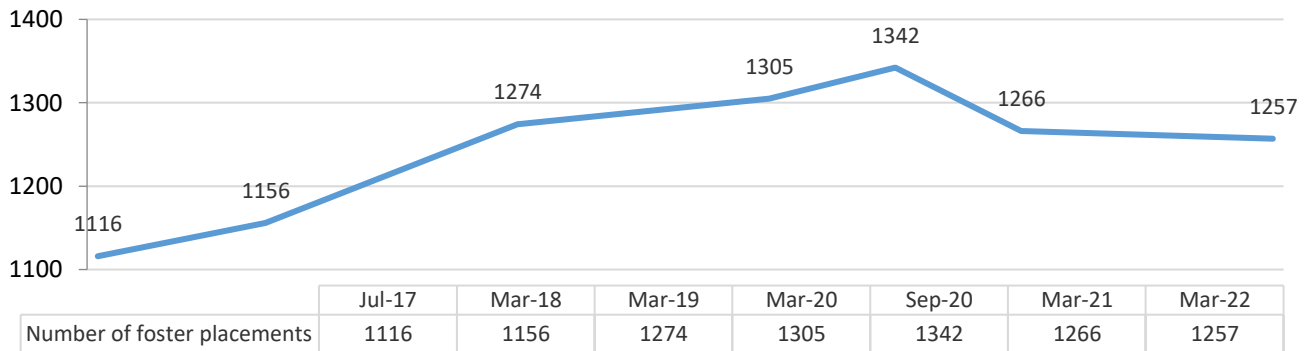


FOSTER CARE

Between 2016-2019, the proportion of children placed in foster care nationally fell (from 74% to 72%). Lancashire's proportion in foster care also fell (from 66% to 60%). By March 2021, the proportion nationally had fallen further to 71%. However, the proportion in Lancashire steadily increased, initially due to rising numbers of foster placements (during 2019/20 and the first half of 2020/21) and latterly due to the number of foster placements falling at a slower rate than the number of CLA overall. By March 2022 the proportion of CLA in Lancashire had risen to 64.7%.



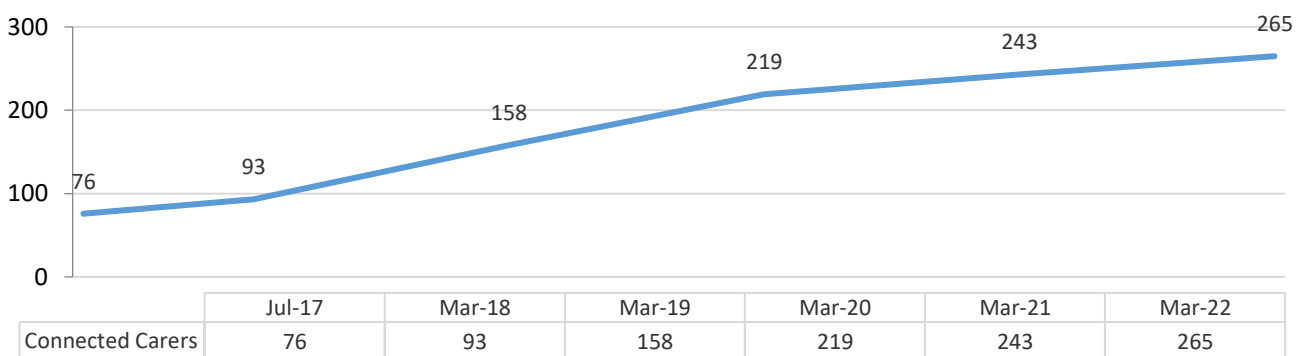
Number of Foster Care Placements



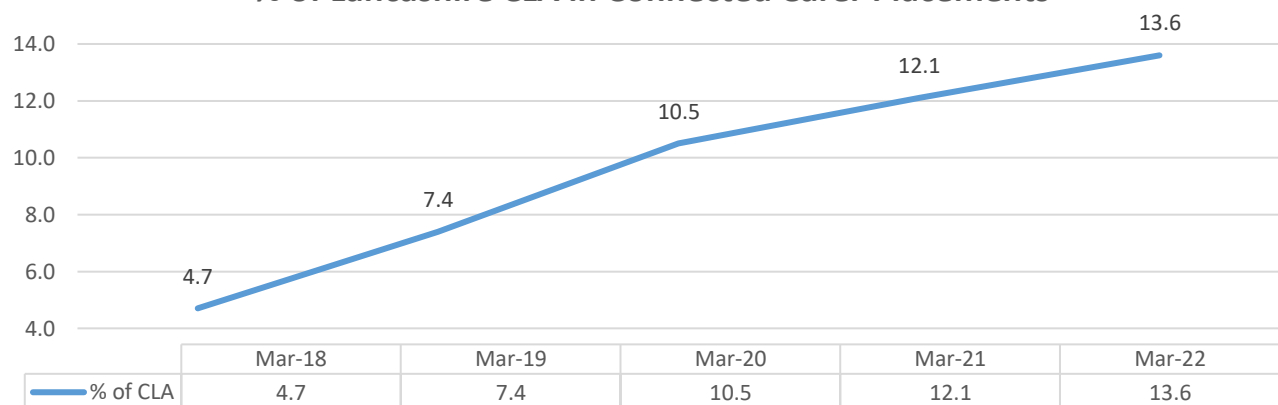
CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

The majority of the increase in foster care placements in Lancashire is due to a significant rise in the number of connected carer (kinship) placements, which has more than trebled since 2017. The proportion of Lancashire CLA placed with a connected carer has increased from 4.7% in March 2018 to 13.6% by March 2022, now more in line with the national average (16% in March 2021).

Number of Connected Carer Foster Placements

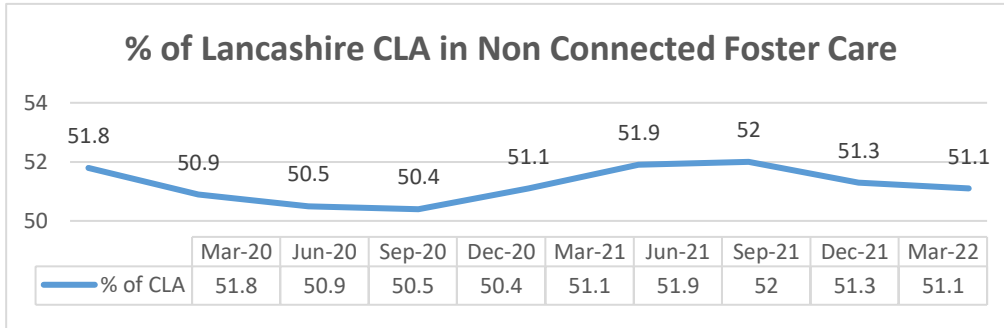


% of Lancashire CLA in Connected Carer Placements

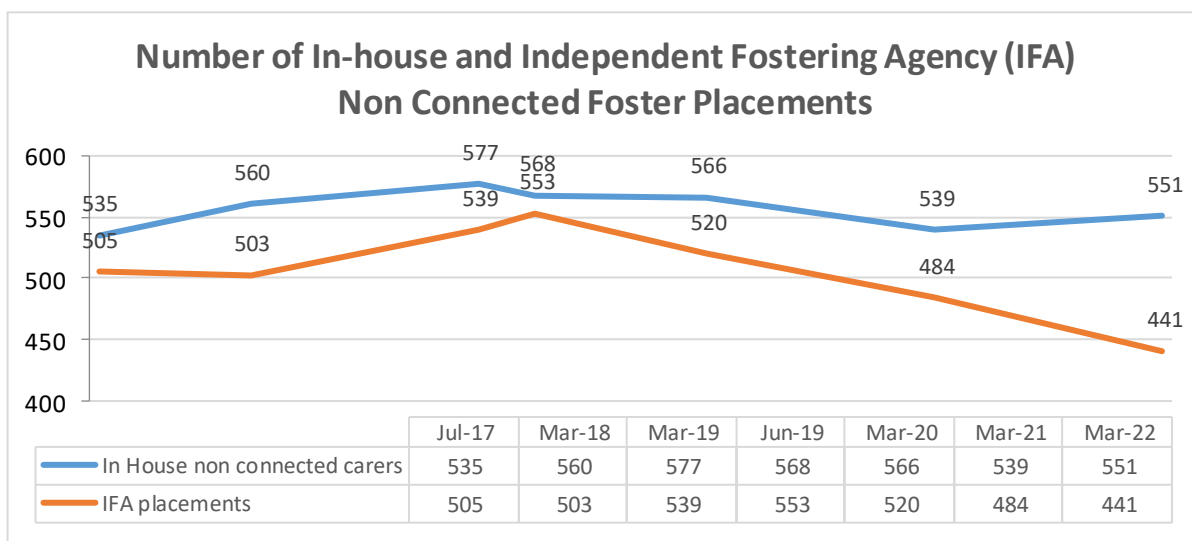
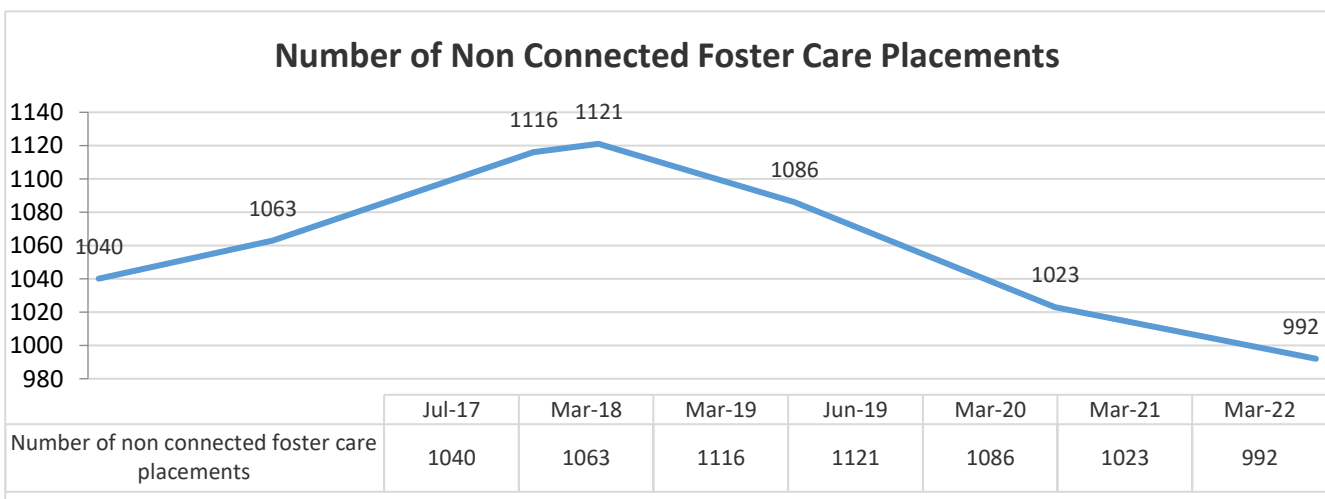


NON-CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

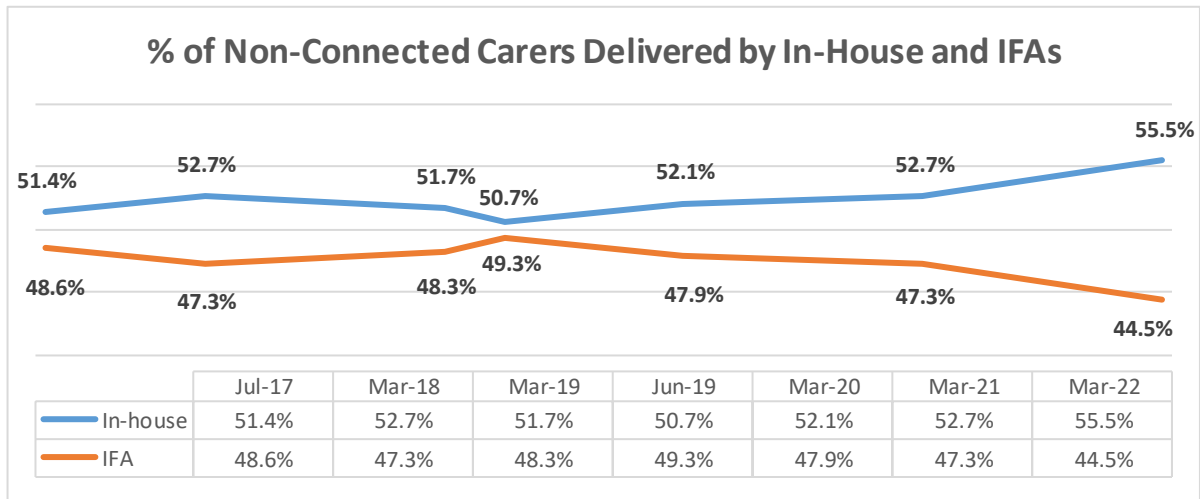
Nationally, 56% of CLA are placed with non-connected foster carers (March 2021, down from 57% in March 2020). This compares to 51.8% in Lancashire in March 2020 and 51.1% in both March 2021 and 2022.



Numbers of non-connected foster placements in Lancashire peaked in June 2019 (at 1121) but have fallen significantly since, to 992 by March 2022. The decrease in foster placements has been largely driven by a significant decrease in the number of placements delivered by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs).



At the peak in June 2019, the proportion of in-house non-connected foster placements to IFA placements was not far from an equal split (50.7% in-house compared to 49.3% IFA). Due to a greater reduction of IFA placements (down 121 since June 2019) compared to in-house placements (down 17 since June 2019), the in-house service increased the proportion of non-connected carer placements delivered to 55.5% by March 2022. Despite this, Lancashire continues to have a greater reliance on IFAs to deliver non-connected foster placements than other areas (45% compared to 35% nationally, according to Fostering in England report 2019).



The sharpest fall in IFA placements in Lancashire has been since the start of 2020. Alongside an overall drop in demand for foster placements for younger aged children, this is likely due to the refined placement finding processes introduced in late 2019, which has seen the in-house fostering service expected to provide placements for all children aged 0-5 years (unless the child is part of a large sibling group, there is a significant complex health need or a parent and child foster placement is required). This was extended to placements for all children aged 0-8 in July 2020.

The following table shows an almost 80% reduction in the number of 0-5 IFA placements between June 2019 and March 2022; a 36% reduction in the number of IFA placements for children aged 6-10; but only a slight reduction in the number of IFA placements for children aged 11+ (a 1.2% reduction).

Comparison of numbers by age range in in-house and IFA provision (made by Children's Social Care)

	0-5 IN HOUSE	0-5 IFA	TOTAL 0-5s	% Placed in IFAs	6-10 IN HOUSE	6-10 IFA	TOTAL 6-10s	% Placed in IFAs	11+ IN HOUSE	11+ IFAs	TOTAL 11+	% Placed in IFAs
Mar-19	195	66	261	25.3%	168	150	318	47.2%	209	308	517	59.6%
Jun-19	193	72	265	27.2%	161	151	312	48.4%	209	314	523	60.0%
Mar-20	192	57	249	22.9%	155	144	299	48.2%	212	300	512	58.6%
Mar-21	138	36	174	20.7%	164	121	285	42.5%	225	308	533	57.8%
Mar-22	161	15	176	8.5%	160	96	256	37.5%	219	312	531	58.8%

Agency Fostering Placement Costs

The annualised cost of agency foster placements has reduced by £3.7m (from £22.1m to £18.4m) between June 2019 and March 2022. This largely mirrors the overall fall in IFA

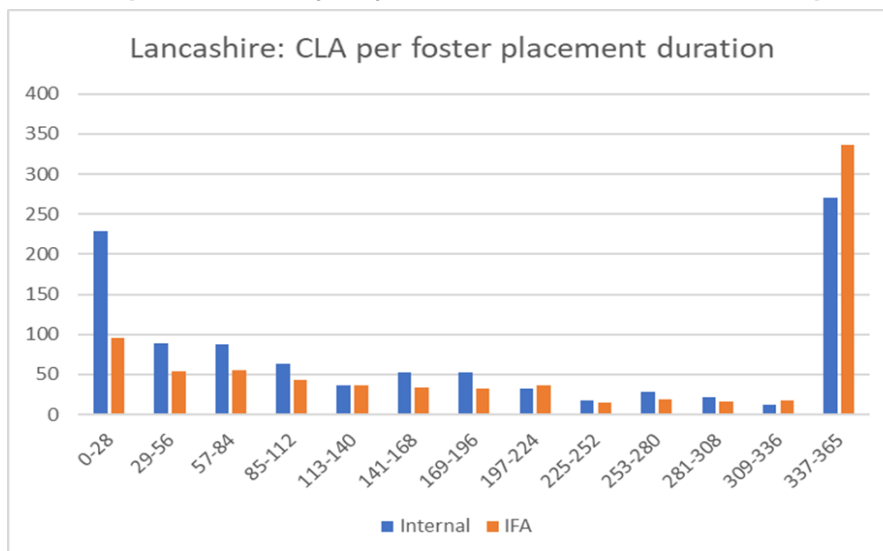
placements (from 553 to 441, down 112). The annual cost of an agency foster placement has increased from £770 per week in June 2019 to £805 in March 2022, likely because of an increased proportion of older age IFA placements and the increased use of higher cost placements, which have either enabled a young person to step down from a residential placement into fostering or prevented a move into a residential placement.

Duration of Non-Connected Foster Placements

An analysis of duration of Lancashire foster placements in a 12 month period up to the end of September 2019 showed that:

- CLA are twice as likely to be placed with in-house foster carers, than IFA carers, for placements of less than 85 days. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors, including the provision of specific in-house emergency foster carers but also the financial viability of very short placements to IFAs and their foster carers.
- Lancashire has a higher proportion of IFA versus in-house placements for longer duration foster placements. In terms of the number of days provided in the year, 69% of the IFA days are delivered in these longer episodes whereas the internal service provides 57% of their days in these longer episodes. This results in IFAs providing 55% of the placement days whilst only providing 45% of the placements over this period.
- Lancashire’s bias towards in-house versus IFA foster carers for these short and shorter-term placements, when the overall split is reasonably even, potentially means that the in-house foster carers may be less available for longer term/permanent placements. This in turn has consequences for on-going external cost commitments.

Number of foster placements by days duration for the 12 months up to 30/09/2019



Location of Non-Connected Foster Placements

Nationally, 61% of children in foster care (both connected and non-connected) are placed within council boundaries. Lancashire's figures as of 31 March 2020 were significantly higher than the national average (77%) for all foster placements. The proportion of non-connected foster placements placed within Lancashire's boundaries was also 77%, with 32% placed within their home district (i.e. the same district as the Children's Social Care team which supports them).

Theoretically, Lancashire has a sufficient number of non-connected foster carers to meet need. As of September 2019, the number of CLA placed in non-connected foster placements within Lancashire (1330) was 25% higher than the total number of Lancashire CLA placed in non-connected fostering placements (1065). 60% of IFA placements within Lancashire (475) were being used by children from other local authorities. Consequently, even though a high percentage of Lancashire's IFA non-connected placements are within the County Council boundaries, there is still significant opportunity to improve this balance over time.

Consultation with key IFAs indicates that only 55% of IFA placements based in Lancashire are being used by Lancashire children). Findings from a Fostering Feasibility Study undertaken in 2019/20, funded through the DfE project: *Improving Commissioning and Sufficiency Planning to Increase Stability and Permanence for Looked After Children (Fostering)*, suggest that a further increase in fostering placements and local sufficiency in Lancashire will not only require a focus on recruiting new foster carer households but also on making better use of existing local IFA placements:

'... In the context of the current local, regional and national levels of non-connected fostering household growth it will take many years to achieve a significant change in the fostering sufficiency picture through this route alone, particularly if it is predicated upon mainly local authority fostering service growth. However, the size and nature of the IFA sector provides an opportunity to move the sufficiency balance in the short to medium term through enhanced commissioning and placement finding approaches. The findings of this study suggest that both aspects need to be pursued as part of an overall fostering sufficiency strategy.'

Most IFA placements (97% in 2021/22) are commissioned through Lancashire's Fostering Framework, which has been in place since May 2018. New sub-regional commissioning arrangements (including Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Cumbria) will begin in June 2022. These new arrangements will enable a stronger, more collaborative relationship to be developed with key IFAs. As well as seeking to maximise the use of local placements for local children, it will also focus on the development and provision of more enhanced foster placements for children who have more complex needs or behaviours.

Hard to Find Fostering Searches

To maximise the chances of securing suitable foster placements, Lancashire adopts a dual search strategy for foster care requests (i.e. referrals are sent to in-house and agency providers at the same time), with the exception of placement searches for 0-8 year olds, which are sent to in-house only initially. During 2019/20, over 1100 requests for foster placements were received by Lancashire's Access to Resources Team (ART).

Type of fostering request	% and No. of placement search requests received	% and No. of each placement search type classed as 'hard to find'
Task Centred foster placement (up to 26 weeks)	62% (710)	18% (127)
Permanent foster placement	18% (188)	44% (83)
Respite foster placement	8% (93)	16% (15)
Mother and baby foster placement	8% (96)	19% (18)
Step Down into Fostering placement	3% (37)	95% (35)
TOTAL	100% (1137)	24% (278)

Most of Lancashire's fostering requests (62% in 2019/20) were for shorter term task centred

placements and almost a quarter (24% in 2019/20) of all fostering placement searches were considered to be hard-to-find (i.e. required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' was required due to a lack of offers from the referral).

Analysis of hard-to-find fostering placement searches in 2019/20 showed that:

- 54% of hard-to-find requests were for children aged 11+ (150 children)
- 35% were for children who were part of a sibling group (of between 2-5) (98 children)
- 30% were for permanent foster placements (83 children)
- 20% were emergency (same day) requests (56 children)
- 9% of the hard-to-find fostering searches in 2019/20 resulted in a young person needing to be placed in a children's home placement because a foster placement had been unable to be found (25 children).

More recently, both Lancashire's Access to Resources Team and Children's Social Care are reporting even greater challenges in sourcing foster placements, not just for older aged children or those with more complex needs and behaviours, but also for children aged 8+ for whom previously we would not have struggled to find placements. By Q4 of 2021/22, over a third (34%) of all fostering placement searches were classed as hard-to-find.

Step Down into Fostering Placements

A key priority in Lancashire's Sufficiency Strategy (2017-20) was to develop Step Down into Fostering provision in collaboration with IFA providers, for young people with a long-term plan for fostering currently in residential care. A target was set to deliver 10 new Step Down into Fostering placements each year.

A Step Down into Fostering lot was included in Lancashire's Fostering Framework (2018-2022). Between May 2018 (when the framework commenced) and March 2020, 12 stepdown placements were made: 6 during 2018/19 and 6 during 2019/20. An additional placement was made pre framework through the initial pilot phase. Of these placements, 6 were still active in March 2020 and one successfully transitioned to a mainstream in-house foster placement. Another placement ended due to the young person returning home. 5 placements (38%) were unsuccessful, with the young people returning to residential care, which is comparable to the national benchmark of a 60% success rate.

Although the framework had been successful in 2018/19 and 2019/20 in securing placements for some of the children and young people requiring a step down from residential care, the target of 10 stepdown placements each year had not been met. In July 2020, a retainer scheme (which allows a retainer to be paid for carers ahead of a young person being matched to them, to prevent them being lost to other local authorities or utilised for mainstream placements) was introduced. This was successful in increasing the number of stepdown into fostering placements made and enabled the target of 10 placements to be met during 2020/21. The 60% success rate was maintained.

The target was not quite reached in 2021/22, with eight stepdown placements commenced. This is likely a result of the very challenging market conditions during the latter part of 2021/22, where a higher number of placements for children aged 8+ were proving hard to find.

A Step Down into Fostering lot has been included in the new commissioning arrangements, which will commence in June 2022, and learning from this is being extended to the development

of an Enhanced Fostering lot, which is seeking to work collaboratively with IFAs to develop more enhanced support to carers to enable them to be able to care for children with more complex needs and behaviours. Lancashire's in-house fostering service are also developing a more enhanced, internal step down into fostering model.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

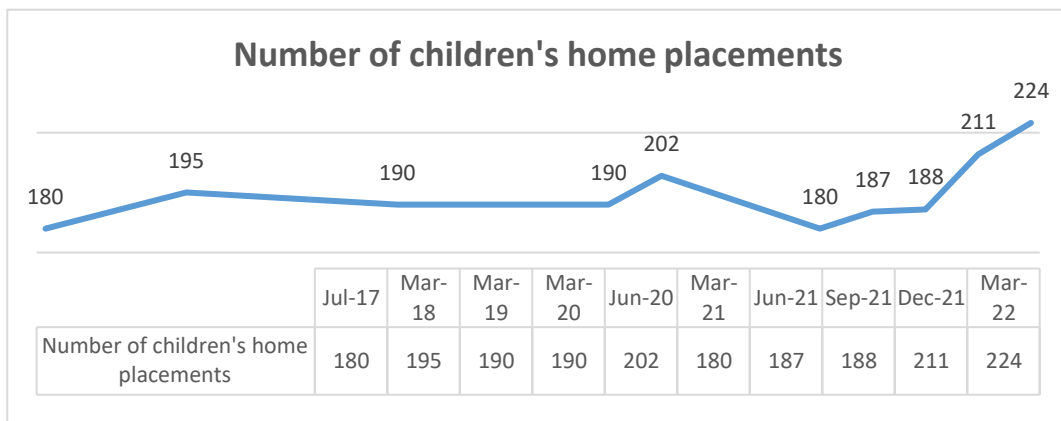
In March 2020, 19% of CLA nationally were placed in residential care: 14% were placed in children's home provision, secure welfare placements and semi-independent living accommodation (i.e. hostels and flats where staff are employed to provide support and advice); 3% were classed as living independently; and a further 2% were classed as living in a care home, residential school or in a remand placement. This proportion reduced to 18% by March 2021, with a 1% reduction in those living independently.

Lancashire followed a similar trend, with the proportion in residential care reducing from 17% in March 2020 to 16% in March 2021. As of March 2020, 9% were placed in children's homes/ care homes (190 placements); 0.1% were placed in secure welfare (3 placements); 1% were in a residential school or remand placement (22 placements); 5% were placed in hostels and flats where staff were employed on site to provide support and advice (94 placements); and 2% were living independently, with access to 'floating support' (41 placements). By March 2021, 9% continued to live in children's homes/ care homes (180 placements); 0% were placed in secure welfare placements; 1% continued to be placed in a residential school or remand placement (25 placements); and there was a 1% reduction (to 6%) of CLA placed in either hostels and flats where staff were employed on site to provide support and advice or in independent living accommodation with access to 'floating support' (115 placements).

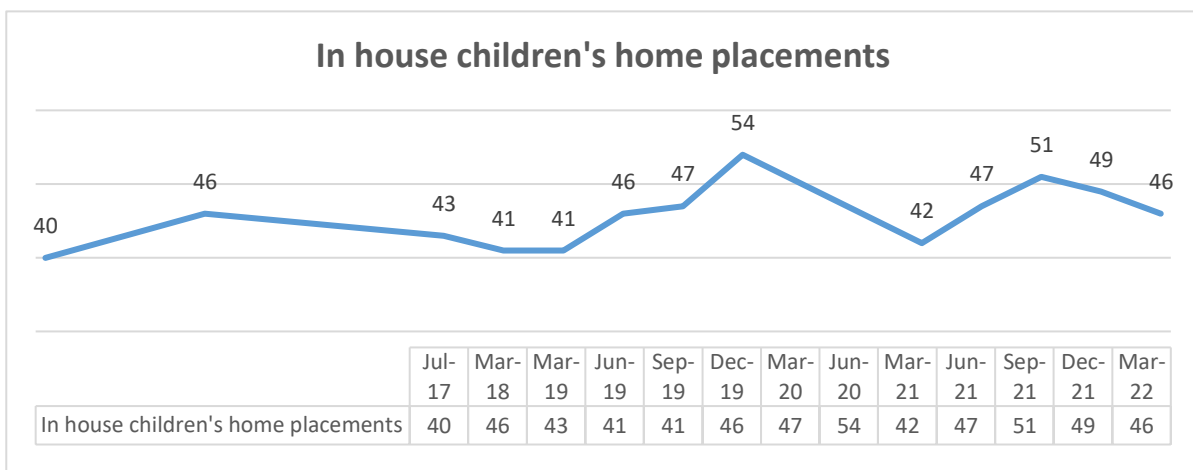
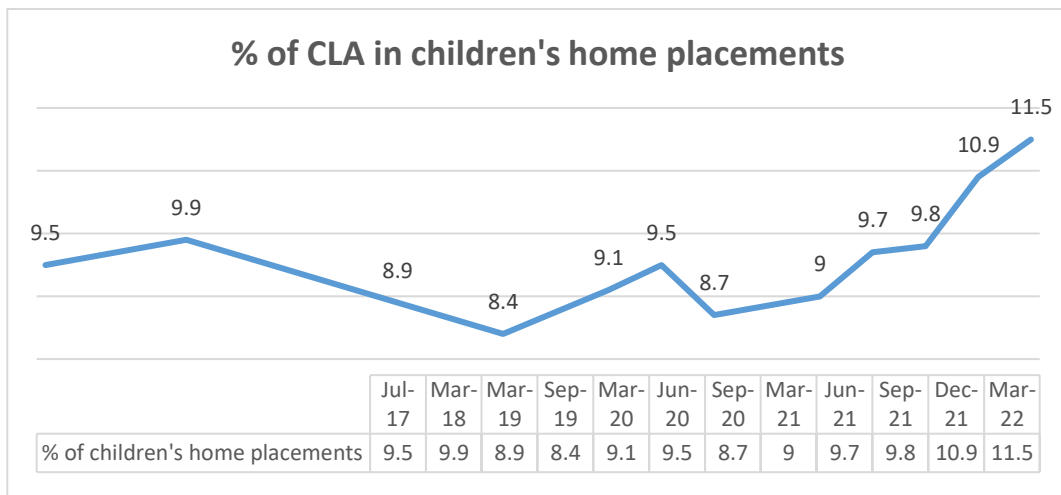
However, despite a fall in the number of CLA overall during 2021/22, the proportion of residential placements in Lancashire increased significantly to 18% (353 placements) by March 2022, driven by a sharp rise in the number of children's home/ care home placements. 11.5% of CLA were placed in children's homes/ care homes (224 placements); 1% in a residential school or remand placement (19 placements); and 6% (109 placements) in either hostels and flats where staff were employed on site to provide support and advice or in independent living accommodation with access to 'floating support'.

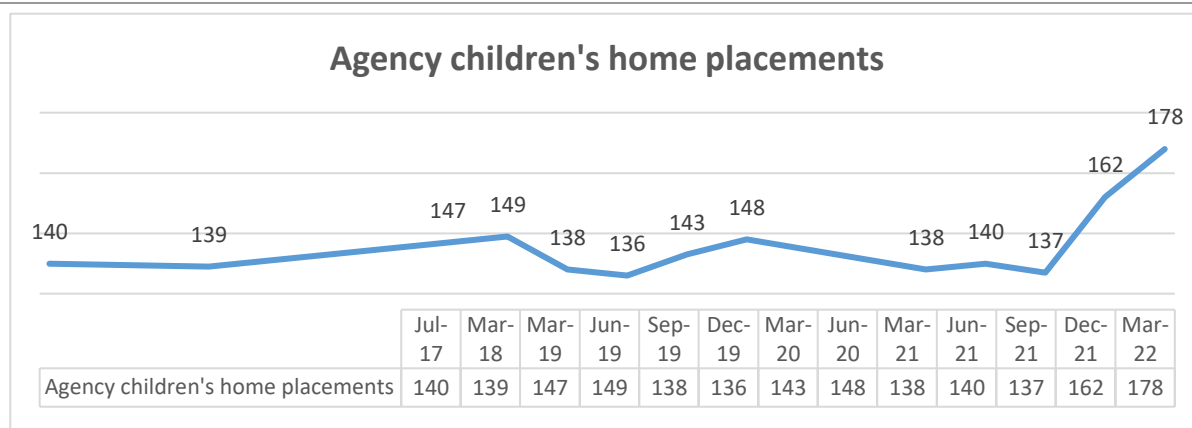
CHILDREN'S HOME PLACEMENTS

Since 2017, the number of Lancashire CLA placed in children's homes remained largely constant at between 180-190, despite significant changes in the number of children in care. However, the number of children's home placements (including care home placements and unregistered children's homes placements) rose significantly during 2021/22 (up 44), particularly during the latter half of 2021/22, and by 31 March 2022 had reached 224.



Despite fluctuating numbers, some progress had been made towards achieving the 2017-2020 target of reducing the proportion of CLA in children's home provision to 8.7%. The target was exceeded in Quarter 3 of 2019/20, before increasing back up to over 9% by the end of March 2020. The target was met again in September 2020. Despite lower numbers of children's home placements in March 2021, the proportion increased to 9% due to a greater decrease in the overall number of CLA. The proportion of children's home placements increased during 2021/22 as the number of placements grew and the number of CLA fell. By March 2022, the sharp increase in placements experienced in the last 6 months of 2021/22 increased the proportion to 11.5%.





Profile of Children Placed in Children's Homes

In Lancashire, a higher proportion of males are placed in children's homes compared to the general CLA population.

As of March 2020, 58% of the children's home cohort were male compared to 53% of the general CLA population. This was higher than in 2017 where 57% of the children's home cohort were male compared to 54% of the general CLA population. In March 2021, the proportion of males in children's home increased further to 63% compared to 53% of the general CLA population. In March 2022, the proportion reduced to 60% compared to 56% of the general CLA population.

The age profile of Lancashire CLA placed in children's home provision also changed between 2017 and 2021, with a higher proportion placed aged 11 to 15 (63.1% in March 2020 and 57.2% in March 2021, compared to 51.6% in 2017); a lower proportion placed aged under 11 (3.2% in March 2020 and 2.8% in March 2021, compared to 5.6% in 2017); and a lower proportion placed aged 16 and over (33.7% in March 2020 and 40% in March 2021, compared to 42.8% in 2017). Improved placement finding capacity/ processes and improved tracking, alongside the development of specialist step down into fostering provision, helped to drive the decrease in children's home placements required for children aged under 11. However, the current state of the fostering market is making it challenging to source fostering placements, even for children as young as 8 years old, which has now seen the proportions in March 2022 return to similar levels than in 2017. Except for in March 2020, those aged 16+ have continued to make up the largest proportion of CLA in children's home provision.

Age of Lancashire CLA placed in children's homes (July 2107, March 2020, March 2021 & March 2022)

AGE	TOTAL JULY 2017	% IN 2017	TOTAL MARCH 2020	% IN 2020	TOTAL MARCH 2021	% IN 2021	TOTAL MARCH 2022	% IN MARCH 2022
UNDER 11	10	5.6%	6	3.2%	4	2.8%	11	4.9%
11-13 YEARS	26	14.4%	39	20.5%	36	20%	37	16.5%
14-15 YEARS	67	37.2%	81	42.6%	67	37.2%	81	36.2%
AGED 16+	77	42.8%	64	33.7%	72	40%	95	42.4%
TOTAL	180		190		180		224	

During 2019/20, more than half of all requests for children's home placements (52%) and

placements made (51%) required a smaller home which could provide additional resources to meet a higher complexity of need/ behaviour. This trend has continued in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Hard to Find Children's Home Searches

To maximise the chances of securing suitable placements, Lancashire adopts a dual search strategy for all requests for a children's home placement (i.e. referrals are sent to in-house and agency providers at the same time). During 2021/22, 242 requests for regulated children's home placements were made to the Access to Resources Team (ART) from Lancashire's Children's Social Care teams.

There has been an increase in the proportion of children's home placement searches that are considered to be hard-to-find (i.e. required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' was required due to a lack of offers from the referral). Almost a third (30%) of children's home placement searches in 2019/20 were classed as hard-to-find. This increased to 40% in 2021/22, with most of these hard-to-find searches occurring during the second half of 2021/22.

Of the hard-to-find placement searches in 2021/22:

- 60% were for males.
- 60% were for young people aged 15 and 16.
- 70% of the hard-to-find placement referrals referenced emotional wellbeing needs - with 45% specifically referencing mental health issues; 36% specifically referencing self-harming behaviours and 36% specifically referencing suicide ideation.
- 67% referenced aggression (24% referenced verbal aggression only and 43% referenced physical aggression).
- 58% referenced missing from home incidents.
- 52% referenced criminal behaviours, with 36% referencing involvement in criminal activity or a high risk of criminal exploitation; 30% referencing damage to property; 22% referencing possession of knives/ weapons; and 13% referencing arson.
- 51% referenced special educational needs and disabilities, including 27% referencing ADHD; 15% referencing autism; 19% referencing an EHCP; 9% referencing personal care needs; and 10% referencing a physical health need.
- 45% referenced cannabis or other substance misuse.
- 31% referenced non-engagement in education.
- 21% referenced child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- 9% referenced a Deprivation of Liberties Order (DoLs)
- 25% of the hard-to-find placement referrals specifically requested the need for a solo or low occupancy home, although 39% of the hard-to-find placement searches resulted in a young person being placed into solo or low occupancy regulated provision.
- Although 19% had specific location requirements, only two were considered to have location as the primary cause of the placement being hard-to-find.
- Although 21% were requests for urgent placements, only one was considered to have urgency as the primary cause of the placement being hard-to-find.

Lancashire Internal Children's Home Provision

As of March 2022, the in-house children's residential service in Lancashire managed 12 children's homes (7 x 6 bed mainstream homes; 3 x 3 bed smaller homes which are able to care for children with a higher level of need/ behaviours; a 4 bed Adolescent Support Unit (ASU); and

a short-term crisis/ reception unit). In-House occupancy levels increased significantly, from an average of 76.9% in 2020/21 to 92.5% in 2021/22.

Due to high demand, the smaller in-house homes generally operate at full capacity. It was therefore agreed by Cabinet in January 2021 that two further 3 bed in-house homes would be developed, alongside an additional short-term crisis/ reception unit. Lancashire County Council was also successful in securing funding from the Department for Education to develop a short-to-medium term solo/ dual home, which is due to open in 2023.

The ASU provides outreach support and residential respite provision for families of young people on the edge of care to prevent unnecessary entries into care. The ASU, based in the North of the County, has been delivering support since Autumn 2017. As of January 2020, the ASU had supported 128 families, of which 99 cases had been closed. Twenty-three of the young people in the closed cases subsequently became looked after, demonstrating a 77% success rate, higher than the anticipated 60% success rate.

As of January 2020, finance reported savings to date achieved by the ASU of £6.476m since it opened in 2017. Savings were based on a young person remaining out of care for 61.53 weeks. As of January 2020, 43 of the 99 cases had met the full saving of 61.53 weeks. Savings for the remaining 56 cases were estimated and assumed children will remain out of care for the full duration. At a running cost of £0.480m per annum (circa £1m since opening), the anticipated savings represented a return on investment of 5:1, which is significantly higher than the original anticipated 2:1 return on investment.

There is sufficient demand for three ASUs in Lancashire, one in each geographical footprint. It was therefore agreed by Cabinet in January 2021 that two further ASUs would be developed.

Agency Children's Home Provision

Theoretically there are more than enough Ofsted registered children's homes within the County Council's boundaries to meet Lancashire's demand for placements. However, just over a third (35%) of agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire have Lancashire children living there.

In March 2020, there were 145 agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire County Council's boundaries, and Lancashire children were placed in 104 different homes but only half of these were in Lancashire. 37 homes used were in other North West local authorities; 2 homes were in neighbouring Yorkshire towns; and 3 homes were at a distance (in Shropshire, Staffordshire and Essex).

As of March 2022, the number of agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire County Council's boundaries had increased to 185, yet still just over a third (35%) of these homes (64) had a Lancashire child living there. In total, Lancashire children were placed in 108 different agency Ofsted registered children's homes in March 2022, with 44 homes outside of Lancashire's boundaries: 34 homes in other North West local authorities; 1 home in a neighbouring Yorkshire town; and 9 homes at a distance (in West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Gloucestershire and Wales). The rise in placements at a distance is likely a direct result of the current, very challenging children's home market conditions.

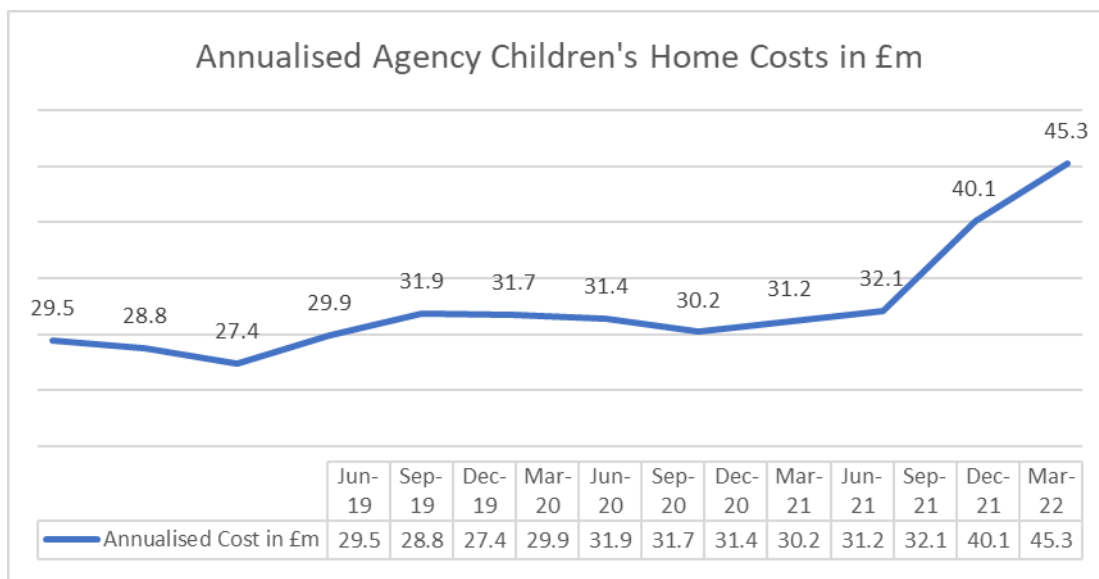
Lancashire County Council is seeking to increase the use of local children's home placements for local children through:

- a) A block contracting agreement, which has been in place since November 2019. Three providers were commissioned to deliver eight block contract beds each (including a mix of mainstream, complex and solo placements) for the exclusive use of Lancashire children. The number of beds delivered through the block contract agreement can be further increased (up to a maximum of 50 beds) based on need and individual provider performance.
- b) New Lancashire children's home commissioning arrangements which will commence in August 2022. The new arrangements will enable closer, more collaborative working with children's home providers to increase the use of local placements for local children. All eligible children's home providers are encouraged to join these new arrangements (which will be opened regularly to new applicants). Any eligible provider who is interested in working in a much more collaborative way to increase local placements is encouraged to apply to be on Tier 1.

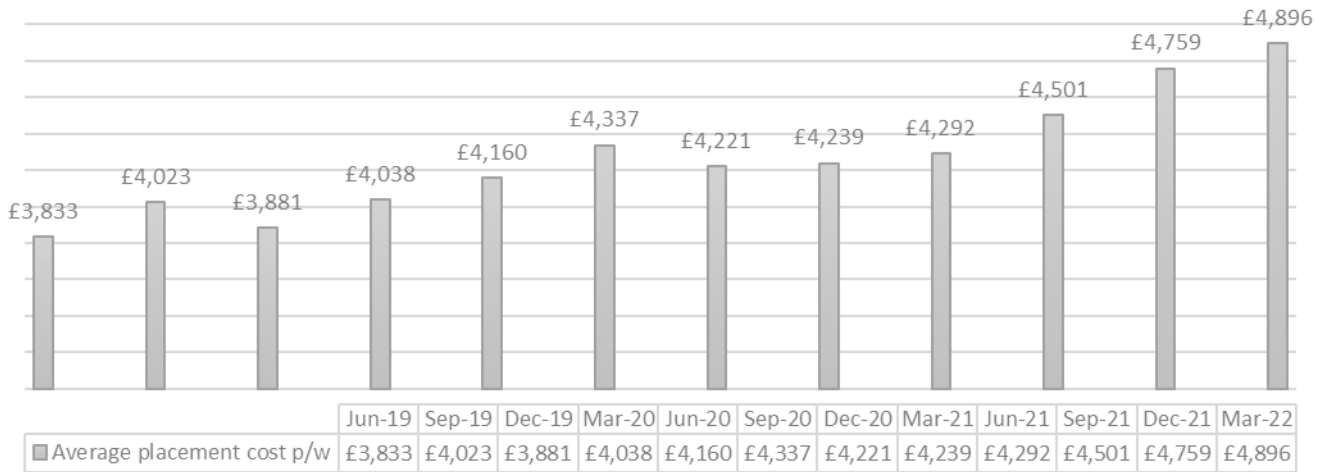
Lancashire County Council is also named on the Placements North West Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), which is used to source placements not able to be found through the block contract or Lancashire's own commissioning arrangements.

Agency Children's Home Placement Costs

The cost of agency children's home placements continues to increase. Despite there being 11 less agency children's home placements in March 2021 than in June 2019, the annualised cost of placements increased by £0.7m, driven by an increasing number of higher cost placements. As a result, the average weekly cost of an agency children's home placement rose by £406 (from £3,833 to £4,239 over the 21-month period). The significant annualised cost increase in the latter half of 2021/22 (to over £45m) is a combination of an increase in the number of agency children's home placements (from 137 in September 2021 to 178 in March 2022) and a further sharp rise in average weekly placement costs of £395 (over a six month period - from £4501 in September 2021 to £4,896 in March 2022).



Average children's home placement costs p/w



SECURE WELFARE PLACEMENTS

Despite increased numbers of children in care, the number of secure welfare placements utilised by Lancashire was the same in March 2020 as it was in July 2017 (3 placements). Lancashire tended to have an average of two secure welfare placements at the end of each month. However, due to unprecedented high demand nationally, no secure welfare placements were utilised by Lancashire during 2020/21, despite several Lancashire young people meeting the threshold for a secure welfare placement. A small number of secure welfare placements were utilised during 2021/22 and there was one secure welfare placement as of 31 March 2022.

Secure welfare placements are likely to be at a distance from Lancashire, with only two out of the 15 secure homes in England and Wales based in the North West.

FAMILY ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Lancashire's use of residential family assessment centres has more than doubled since 2017. As of 31 March 2022, Lancashire had 22 placements in residential family assessment centres, compared to 10 in July 2017. More family assessment centres have opened locally, enabling more Lancashire children to be placed within the County Council's boundaries. Previously most children in this type of provision were placed outside of Lancashire (89%). This reduced to 50% by March 2022, with only 4 placements needing to be made at a distance from Lancashire (all in South Yorkshire).

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The number of residential school placements has remained largely consistent (between 16-20 placements) since 2017. As of March 2022, 18 Lancashire children and young people were placed in residential schools. 39% of these placements (7) were within residential schools in Lancashire, 56% (10 placements) were in residential schools in other North West Local Authorities and 6% (1 placement) was in a residential school in a neighbouring Yorkshire town.

UNREGULATED PROVISION

A policy on the use of crisis and unregulated placements was introduced in Lancashire in

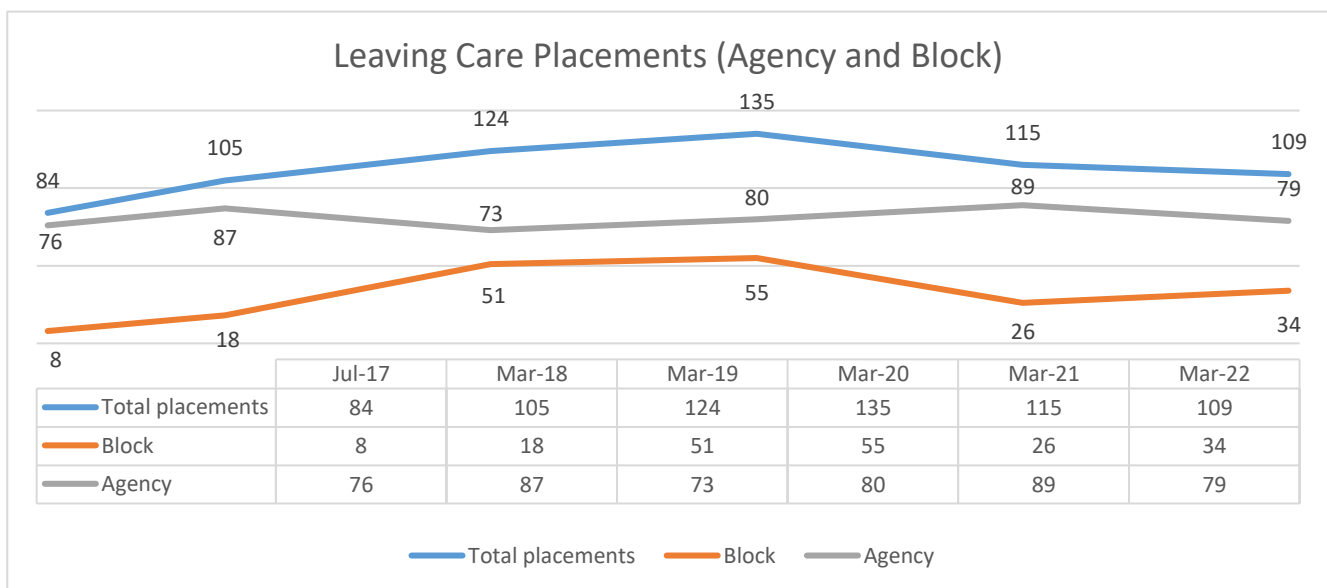
January 2020. This policy outlines the processes to be undertaken when considering such placements and the risk mitigations in place to ensure that all steps are taken to avoid children and young people being placed in unregistered provision (i.e. provision that is not registered with Ofsted but should be) and any child under the age of 16 being placed in any type of unregulated provision. The policy also includes ensuring that wherever possible young people aged 16 but still of statutory school age are placed in regulated provision.

The policy includes a higher level of monitoring and oversight from Children's Social Care, Independent Reviewing Officers and the Access to Resources Team for any unregulated placements which are classified as high risk, including any known unregistered placements and any unregulated placements where it is considered there is a potential that elements of care (and not just support) may be required/ are being provided, due to a child's age, complexity of need or high placement costs.

16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION/ INDEPENDENT LIVING (SAIL) PROVISION

Between 2017 and 2020, there had been a significant increase in Lancashire in the number of young people starting to be looked after who were aged 16-17 years (although not necessarily their first period of care): from 34 in March 2017 to 81 in March 2020. This was mirrored by a significant increase (60.7%) in the use of supported accommodation/ independent living (SAIL) placements between July 2017 and March 2020 (higher than the 45% growth reported across the North-West region). This growth was attributed to a range of factors including homeless legislative changes and policy application, greater identification of unmet need and pressures on capacity in other sectors.

The number of young people starting to be looked after who were aged 16-17 subsequently increased to 97 in the year to 31 March 2021 and reduced to 80 in the year to 31 March 2022. The proportion each year who started to be looked after under section 20 through the Homeless Protocol has, however, noticeably reduced from 55% (53 young people) to March 2021, to 33% (26 young people) to March 2022.



Despite there being no reduction in numbers starting to be looked after, demand for SAIL placements has been reducing since 2020. This is in part due to fewer young people becoming

looked after under the Protocol, but this trend also reflects the higher complexity of need being observed in young people – regardless of their former pathway. Consequently, a regulated setting that provides care rather than support is more appropriate for an increasing number of older teenagers.

For those young people for whom supported accommodation is the right option, our continued objective is to ensure that a wide range of accommodation options are available. The pooling of our Supporting People (housing-related support) budget and our 16+ agency placement budget in 2017 enabled scale of provision. In February 2022, following a targeted property scoping exercise that began in 2020, an additional 10-unit service (including 2 crisis beds) came on stream which increased our block commissioned bedspaces to 378 throughout the county. The services provide:

- Core 24/7 building-based accommodation (207 placements)
- Visiting support – a mix of building-based and dispersed (134 placements)
- Supported Lodgings (22 placements)
- Teenage Parent services (15 placements)

In accordance with Lancashire's Joint Homeless Protocol, the services can be accessed by young people aged 16-21 (24 in certain circumstances). A key objective of Lancashire's 2017 - 2020 Sufficiency Strategy has been to prioritise the usage of these block arrangements for our 16+ care leavers and 16-17 year old homeless young people. A young person who accesses a block-commissioned service at 16 or 17 can remain within the same -or alternative block-commissioned service - for up to two years. This approach seeks to ensure that when young people leave a service they are be more tenancy-ready and able to go on to live successful independent lives. It removes the "cliff-edge" that is often experienced by young people who are accommodated in private-provider services, where young people are typically expected to move-on within just weeks of their 18th birthday.

During 2021-22 the Access to Resources team received 606 referrals for supported accommodation searches, of which 387 (64%) were for young people aged 16-17. Of the 160 (of 387) referrals that had closed by 31 March 2022 with a successful placement, 76 young people (48%) had been accommodated in block-commissioned services. The number of Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children presenting (spontaneous arrivals or through National Transfer Scheme) has been fairly consistent in recent years but an increase is anticipated now that the National Transfer Scheme is mandated.

Through cohesive working relationships, with District Housing leads and providers, delivery of the co-produced Joint Homeless Protocol is largely working well with just a small number of services being under-utilised.

In those circumstances when a suitable block placement cannot be sourced at the right time, the regional Flexible Purchasing System (FPS) is utilised to commission on a spot purchase basis. This enables us to access smaller group living, floating support with accommodation (visiting support), and more bespoke solo arrangements for young people. The Minimum Standards required of providers were tightened in 2019, giving local authorities the confidence that services are of high standard. Whilst the number of providers reduced from 109 under the previous FPS to 63 at April 2022, there is generally sufficient capacity to meet the needs within Lancashire's

twelve districts, albeit not always in the preferred location.

The success of the current commissioning arrangements is evident through:

- 107 of 109 of the SaILS placements at 31 March 2022 are delivered by block commissioned or regional framework providers. The other two young people are accommodated with unregulated off-contract providers that provide a CQC-registered package of support required to meet need.
- 58% (187) of occupied block-commissioned placements at 31 March 2022 were being utilised by young people classified as high priority and 28% (91 placements) being utilised by young people classified as medium priority (generally young people aged 18-21 who have been previously known to Children's Social Care). This represents an increase from 54% high priority young people and 26% medium priority young people at 30 June 2020.

March 2022 data				
Capacity	Occupied	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
378	322	187	91	44
% of occupied total		58%	28%	14%
% of total beds		49%	24%	12%

- Continued strong engagement and working relationships with block providers, through a dedicated team focussed on SaIL placement finding and contract monitoring to work closely with providers.
- Improved placement finding and intelligence gathering.

There are some key challenges in Lancashire that impact on placement options:

- Lancashire has a lower proportion of local authority owned housing and a lower proportion of social housing than comparable larger authorities, making it more difficult for young people to move on from supported accommodation to an affordable tenancy. Rents charged by private landlords can, in parts of the county in particular, often be higher than the Local Housing Allowance rate adding to the challenges that young people face. It is evident that the inability for young people to move on creates a 'blockage' in the system which continues to impact on access into our block provision for priority young people at the point of need in their chosen location.
- The coverage across the county in terms of private provider services is patchy and so choice is more limited, for example group living services only exist in three of the twelve districts in Lancashire at present. This contributes to the higher proportion of young people having to live outside of Lancashire's boundaries than we would like. Sometimes an out of area placement is a young person's choice, but where that isn't the case young people are generally accommodated in neighbouring districts, for example at 31st March 2022 10 young were accommodated in services in Blackpool.
- Utilisation of our supported lodgings services is much lower than would be expected for the size of Lancashire, averaging only 40% during 2021-22. Providers report that recruitment is difficult, similar to the challenges faced by local authorities and IFA's in recruiting foster

carers.

- The increasing number of young people who are presenting with more complex needs, requiring greater levels of support is increasing our average cost of spot-commissioned SaLL placements.

To address some of the challenges:

- Lancashire has been successful in our bid to deliver a Local House Project through the National Housing Project charity. The project is Lancashire's first "in-house" service and will support a cohort of 8-10 17-year-olds each year who generally present with higher level of support needs. The success of other LHP's that already operate throughout the country is attributed to the strong focus on a peer support approach and to the commitment by each young person to complete a programme of learning and development prior to moving into their property. The key feature of the project is that the property can be a home for life for the young person and if successful, will prevent our young people becoming, or being at risk of becoming, homeless at 18+.
- a Care Leaver Protocol has been developed in conjunction with our Local Housing Authorities that formalises the commitment of partners to a corporate parenting approach, setting out roles and responsibilities of partner agencies to ensure that suitable and stable homes can be offered, in a consistent way where possible, to our care leavers.
- a review of the weekly amount that our commissioned supported lodging hosts receive is currently underway. The rate is lower than comparable authorities and recruitment is expected to increase if that barrier is removed.
- Establishment of a social worker post to support our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children has been agreed.

4. Commissioning Priorities

Prevention

Key to reducing our overall CLA numbers will be reducing the number of children who start to become looked after, by **providing the means for families to become more resilient and stay together where it is safe and in the child's best interests to do so**. We will do this by:

- Embedding the Family Safeguarding Model;
- Delivering the multi-agency Early Help strategy;
- Delivering the DfE funded Supporting Families; Investing in Practice programme to implement the Family Group Conference (FGC) Daybreak model;
- Ensuring our expanded Outreach Service is used effectively to support families of children and young people on the edge of care;
- Expanding our respite provision for children and young people on the edge of care through the development of further Adolescent Support Unit provision;
- Testing out new models of working, such as the Safe Families for Children approach, which will provide additional support for families of children on the edge of care;
- Strengthening our Targeted Youth Support offer, aligned to the implementation of new

structures within the Children's Social Care and Children and Family Wellbeing teams;

- Ensuring that all new Section 20 Agreements (where there are not child protection concerns) are only accepted after families have accessed the above offers;
- Rigorously enforcing our Section 20 Charging Policy;
- Systematically evaluating the impact of our preventative approaches and reshaping accordingly.

Placements with Parents or other person with parental responsibility

We will continue work to **reduce the proportion of placements with parents or other person with parental responsibility** by:

- Ensuring effective and robust care planning, with contingency planning;
- Supporting our staff to work more confidently within the court arena and with legal colleagues;
- Continuing to review all of our children who are placed at home with parents and seek revocation of orders where appropriate;
- Ensuring that where appropriate these families are supported by our wellbeing, prevention and early help services as they step down from high level intervention.

Foster Care

We will continue to **increase the number of in-house fostering placements provided** by:

- Ensuring robust placement finding processes are in place to make the most effective use of in-house foster carers;
- Implementing a more targeted marketing strategy to address gaps in provision, including in underserved areas and placements for older children and young people, sibling groups and parent and child placements.
- Implementing an increased offer of support to in-house carers to support retention including:
 - Establishment of a Foster Care Academy that supports the induction and skill building of newly approved foster carers;
 - Establishment of a Mentoring Scheme that supports new foster carers to feel supported during their first year of approval;
 - Establishment of a Fostering Communities Project that supports networking and support for foster carers that are isolated;
 - Establishment of an Enrichment Programme that supports the networking and family life of our fostering community;
 - Participation in the Reflective Fostering programme that is a study that supports foster carers to have a better understanding of the lived experiences of the child and thereby feel better equipped to support the children in their care.

We will continue to **work collaboratively with fostering providers to increase the number of local children placed with local IFA carers** by:

- Implementing new agency foster care commissioning arrangements, with neighbouring local authorities (Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Cumbria). These new arrangements

include the ability to work in a stronger, more collaborative way with key agency providers to provide not just mainstream placements but also placements for children and young people who require additional support and resources and step down into fostering placements.

Overall, by 2024, we aim to **increase the proportion of our fostering placements to 70%**.

Adoption

We will continue to seek to **match children who have a plan of adoption with the most suitable adopters as quickly as possible** by:

- Establishing and embedding the Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool;
- Increasing the pool of approved adopters to support matching with Lancashire and Blackpool children;
- Minimising delay by prioritising early permanence and early family finding, where appropriate;
- Developing a team in Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool that focuses on family finding at the earliest opportunity;
- Establishing an Adoption Support Team that supports families post adoption in order to prevent adoption breakdowns.

Children's Home Provision

The overarching priority is to **reduce the proportion of young people in children's home provision to 8.3%**. We will do this by:

- Tracking and regularly reviewing young people placed in children's home provision;
- Further developing effective placement finding processes and step down provision to support appropriate young people to move into foster care and semi-independent provision.

Ensuring appropriate children's home placements are available for our children in care, particularly those who require additional support and resources will continue to be a key priority. We will do this by:

- Developing further short-term in-house crisis/ reception placements to de-escalate behaviours and support the sourcing of the right placement to best meet need;
- Developing further smaller capacity in-house children's homes;
- Continuing to work collaboratively with our block providers to maximise use of contracted beds, including the potential to further increase the number of block beds delivered, based on need and provider performance;
- Implementing Lancashire's new children's home commissioning arrangements from August 2022, which will include the ability to work in a stronger, more collaborative way with key children's home providers to maximise the use of local placements for local children and address gaps in provision;
- Working with the market to develop bespoke options to meet the needs of our children and young people with the most complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- Develop alternative options to better support children and young people with the most complex emotional and behavioural needs to remain safely within a family setting.

16+ Supported Accommodation/ Independent Living (SAIL) Provision

Key commissioning priorities for 2022/23 are to:

- Support our first cohort of young people through the Lancashire House Project to achieve positive outcomes, and a successful transition to independence. The intention is then to scale up and deliver the project in other parts of the county.
- Work more closely with the private provider market to increase provision and choice in those districts where demand is not currently being met through existing services. This may include block commissioning group living placements.
- Commission more tailored services for our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. Demand is more predictable now that the National Transfer Scheme is mandated which provides an opportunity to contract with providers who have a strong focus on ensuring the best outcomes for this particular cohort of young people. A further priority is to work more closely with Housing partners to improve young people's transition to independent living where Leave to Remain status is granted.
- Fully understand the impact that regulation of the sector and the introduction of National Standards will have on the supported accommodation market. The impact of the Standards should be minimal for providers on the regional FPS because of the Minimum Standards that must already be met to be accepted. The implications for our block contracted services for 16-21 year olds are less clear and may require adaption of our current service models.
- Carry out strategic planning for 18+ accommodation with our Local Housing Authority partners, with the dual objective of both ensuring that young people can secure general needs or private landlord accommodation at the right time and ensuring that our block services have capacity to meet the needs of our highest priority young people.

5. Key Performance Indicators

The following Key Performance Indicators will be monitored and reported quarterly through the Data, Quality and Performance (DQP) Group:

Key Performance Indicator	Baseline Levels (March 2020)	Current Levels	Target	Impact since March 2020
Reduction in proportion of placements with parents or other person with parental responsibility	15.5%	11.4% (March 2022)	13.5%	↓ 4.1%
Increase the proportion of foster placements	62.3%	64.7% (March 2022)	70%	↑ 2.4%
Number of Step Down into Fostering Placements commenced	6 per annum	8 per annum (March 2022)	10 per annum	↑ 2 p/a
Reduction in the proportion of CLA in Children's Homes provision	9.1%	11.5% (March 2022)	8.3%	↑ 2.4%
Increase the usage of block contract supported accommodation provision for high priority young people	53% of occupied beds	57% of occupied beds (Dec 2022)	60% of occupied beds	↑ 4%