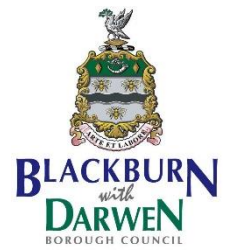


# Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services



**2024 - 2027**

## **Sufficiency Strategy**

Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Cared for  
Children and Care Leavers in Blackburn with Darwen

# Section 1 – Introduction to the Sufficiency Strategy

Blackburn with Darwen Council is committed to supporting a child's right to family life and we are focused on providing services that:

- Support families to care for their own children, preventing the need for children to enter the care system.
- Support extended families to care for children through kinship care arrangements
- Support children to live in a family setting wherever possible when in care
- Provide loving and stable homes for children while they are in our care
- Provide high quality and safe accommodation for care leavers when required, or supporting them to seek suitable tenancies.

When children enter our care, it is important that we are able to offer the right home that meets their needs and enables them to remain in touch with the people and communities that are important to them. As children leave our care and enter adulthood, we want to ensure they have the best possible access to high quality accommodation with the right support in place, by preparing them for adulthood in a timely manner that supports them to seek their own property where possible.

This strategy sets out how Blackburn with Darwen Council will meet these objectives. It sets out our understanding of current needs, availability of provision, and our plans for development over the next 3 years. Our ambitions for our children in care and care leavers have informed our 'Strategic Priorities' for this Sufficiency Strategy.

Our Strategic Priorities are to:

1. Support more children to stay with their birth parents or within their wider family networks through Kinship Care.
2. Increase the provision of local, high quality foster care so that more children who cannot live with birth family are provided with alternative family-based care.
3. Only place children and young people in residential care where their needs cannot be met within a family, and to increase local provision so that when we do so, we do not place them at distance.
4. Secure timely permanence outside of care through adoption and special guardianship for all children where this is in their best interests.
5. Raise our ambitions for our care leavers and increase the quantity, quality, and range of the provision for children in our care 16 plus and care leaver accommodation and support to promote stability, safety, and emotional wellbeing. Collaborate with housing providers to ensure care leavers have appropriate accommodation to seek their own tenancies.
6. Manage placement resources effectively.

The strategy sets out in detail how we will go about addressing each of those six Strategic Priorities and identify some high – level success measures. If we are successful in delivering this strategy, we would expect to see:

- Fewer children in care

- A higher proportion of children in care placed in foster care
- Fewer young people in residential care and more of those being placed in Blackburn with Darwen
- More children moving to adoption and special guardianship more quickly
- No care leavers in inadequate accommodation
- Well managed placement resources

*This strategy sets out how Blackburn with Darwen Council will meet these objectives. It sets out our understanding of our current needs availability of provision, and our plans for development over the next 3 years.*

**The Sufficiency Strategy is a three – year document and will be reviewed after 12 months.**

Blackburn with Darwen is committed to collaborating with partners across education, health, and social care to commission and deliver support for looked after children and care leavers. It is essential that we work together to support children to lead safe, happy, and healthy lives. To do this we will consult with looked after children and care leavers to better understand ‘what works’ and what does not.

Collaborating with partners will help us to understand the key challenges within the system and find solutions to overcome these.

**What will have been considered in assessing whether the local authority has sufficient provision?**

- We considered the types of provision needed, from short breaks and emergency placements through to adoption, fostering, kinship care, residential care and semi-independent accommodation such as supported lodgings for our older care leavers
- We considered the characteristics, skills and expertise of the carers needed to support looked after children and care leavers
- We considered physical adaptations needed for children with disabilities, including accessible housing stock
- We considered the need for a range of provision to meet the needs of care leavers including arrangements for young people to remain with foster carers (‘staying put’) and other supported accommodation, and where possible for those exiting residential care to ‘stay close’. Children and young people will be supported to stay with their families where it is safe to do so
- Children and young people should only enter care if there are no other viable options, and they should remain looked after for the minimum possible time
- Children and young people should be able to stay close to their local connections
- Support should be available to all looked after children and carers to maintain placement stability and avoid placement disruption
- Children and young people should have a permanence plan in order to have a secure future
- Children and young people with disabilities will have the same access and opportunity for placements as their non-disabled peers
- Children and young people’s placements should meet their care, health and education needs

- Children and young people should be supported to maintain their education placement and maintain access to their local health services, including mental health services
- Children and young people's aspirations for the future will be maximised and they will be supported to develop the skills they need to live independently
- Care leavers will be able to access 'Staying Put' in foster care, or 'Staying Close' options within supported lodgings or supported accommodation
- Sibling groups will be supported to remain together wherever possible
- Wherever possible our children and young people will be cared for in a family setting through kinship care and be supported to retain links with their birth family.

## Section 2 – What principles drive sufficiency in Blackburn with Darwen?

In Blackburn with Darwen there is a commitment to support people to 'start well, live well, age well and **die well**'. Our vision is that *we want every single resident, no matter who they are to achieve a good quality life.*

Blackburn with Darwen's corporate missions are:



A more prosperous borough where no one is left behind.



Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential.



Deliver our climate emergency action plan.



Build happier, healthier, and safer communities.

If we are making progress on our missions, we will see:

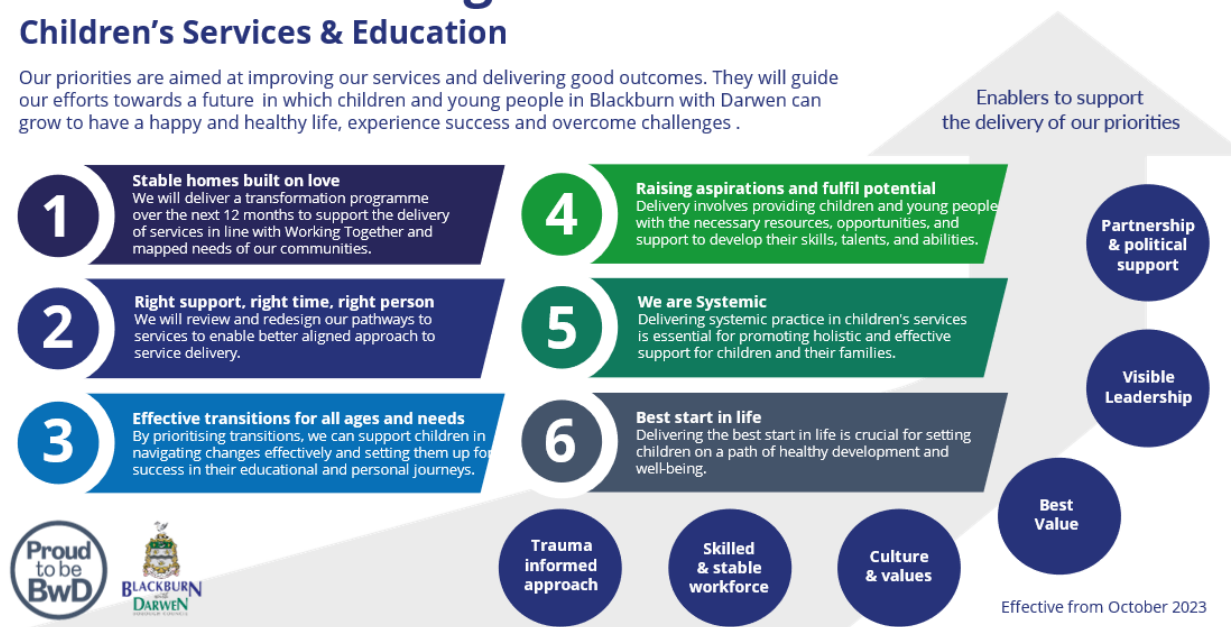
- Fewer people living in deprivation.
- Increased life expectancy
- Borough closer to carbon neutral
- Higher educational attainment
- More people who need help or support continuing to live in their own homes

Children's Services & Education have six priorities which are aimed at improving our services and delivering good outcomes. They will guide our efforts towards a future in which children and young people can grow to have a happy and healthy life, experience success and overcome challenges. Our six priorities are:

## Priorities on a Page

### Children's Services & Education

Our priorities are aimed at improving our services and delivering good outcomes. They will guide our efforts towards a future in which children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen can grow to have a happy and healthy life, experience success and overcome challenges.



Following an Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the government published a new strategy 'Stable Homes Built on Love', which brings forward a range of plans to reform how children's social care is delivered and has changed the national context for social care placement sufficiency. These reforms are being tested through a number of different pathfinders, the most relevant of which to this strategy are the 'Families First' and 'Regional Care Cooperative' pathfinders.

### Families First

Within Blackburn with Darwen we have built upon our well established early help model to respond to the family first initiative this draws up the well established relationships and delivery programmes that have supported our services to respond to the local needs of the children, young people and families within our borough. We have focused on ensuring that we concentrate on the following:

- Family Help – establishing locally based multi-disciplinary teams that work collaboratively with partners to provide intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families.
- Child Protection – a more specialised service response involving workforce transformation.
- Family Networks – greater use of family care and support, with earlier use of family group decision making, with support to enable more children to live at home or to transition into kinship care. To have a 'family first' culture by default and to engage family networks throughout decision making, so that we empower families by prioritising family-led solutions, working collaboratively with family networks and



- give family-led plans a central position in practitioners' plans wherever possible.
- Safeguarding Partners – greater clarity on multi-agency roles and responsibilities, and an increased role for education providers.

## Regional Care Cooperatives

Regional Care Cooperatives have been recommended to address challenges with care provision across the country. They are described as a model for providing homes for children where responsibility for planning, commissioning and delivery sits at a regional level, rather than with individual local authorities.

Blackburn and Darwen lead on the Foster with Us Hub this is a joint collaborative recruitment hub to recruit foster carers on behalf of Blackpool, Lancashire, Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness councils.

Within in the hub we are required to focus on the following activities:

- Recruiting more foster carers through a regional recruitment support hub and improving the support offer to both new and existing foster carers in the form of pre-approval training and peer support.
- Carrying out data analysis and forecasting future sufficiency needs for children and young people in care, placing local children in local placements.
- Developing and publishing a regional sufficiency strategy setting out current provision with a focus on the retention of foster carers as well as enhancing recruitment and enquiries.
- Market shaping, working as one customer with providers to address local needs, improve value for money and commission the fewer foster placements with external providers.

The Hub is DfE funded until March 2025 and sustainability for further continuation of the programme is dependent upon the following aims and objectives:

- To increase enquires into the Hub by 20%
- To meet and exceed the annual Local Authority target of foster carer households
- To increase and enhance the pre-approval training offer available to applicants, to support carer retention, resilience in the early stage of the fostering journey and upskilling foster carers from the very start so that placement stability improves for our children and young people.
- Reduce the timescales and pathway from enquiry to assessment through to approval at panel.
- Reduce the number of foster placements commissioned with the Independent Sector, and to ensure children and young people are placed within the Lancashire and Cumbria footprint.

## The Blackburn with Darwen Promise

It takes a community to make a difference to the lives of our care experienced children and young people. This strategy is aimed at ensuring a sufficient quantity and range of high-

quality care placements and accommodation for children in care and care leavers so that we support improved outcomes.

Our Blackburn with Darwen Promise to children in care and care leavers makes a number of commitments to how we will work with and support our children and young people by:

- Honouring our TRACK Values
- Listening to you and involving you
- Working with you
- Helping you to be safe
- Supporting you with your health and wellbeing
- Supporting you to live your life by providing you with opportunities and activities and celebrating your achievements.
- Helping you to have aspirations for your future
- Supporting you to be steady and settled as an adult.

## Section 3 – What do we know about looked after children and care leavers in the borough in 2024?

Our aim is to keep our children close to home and to be the best corporate parents we can be. Where we can we want to support families to stay together. Where children and young people do need care, we want to make sure this is in family-based care wherever possible, and that we support extended family networks to be able to raise their children.

We will actively seek out and work with a child's direct and extended family and friends in considering the best forms of support.

We will prioritise loving relationships for all children in care and care leavers and ensure we have a wide range of care options in place locally by ensuring we have the right number, type and quality of foster carers, residential homes, and accommodation.

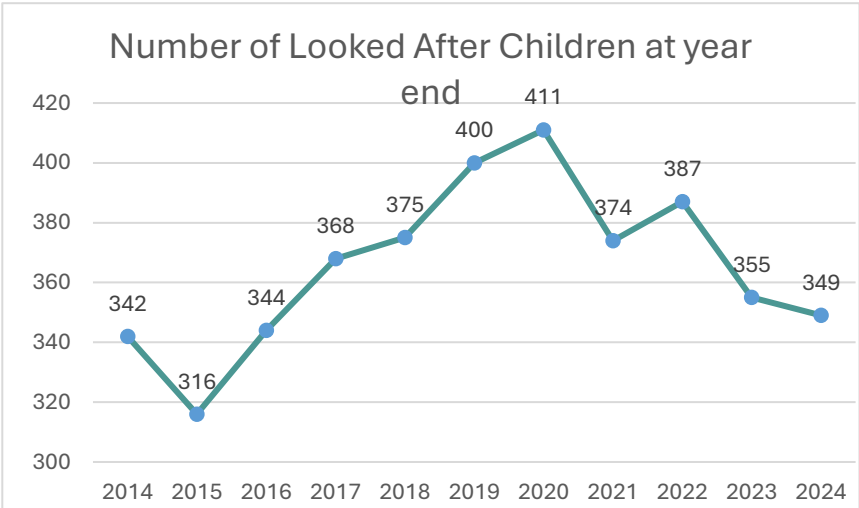
Where children cannot return to birth family, we want to secure timely and successful permanence through adoption wherever this is the best plan for the child.

We want to reduce inequalities for children in care and care leavers ensuring we improve their health and wellbeing and are ambitious for them to achieve their potential, recognising the important foundation that stability and consistency of relationships with care providers gives.

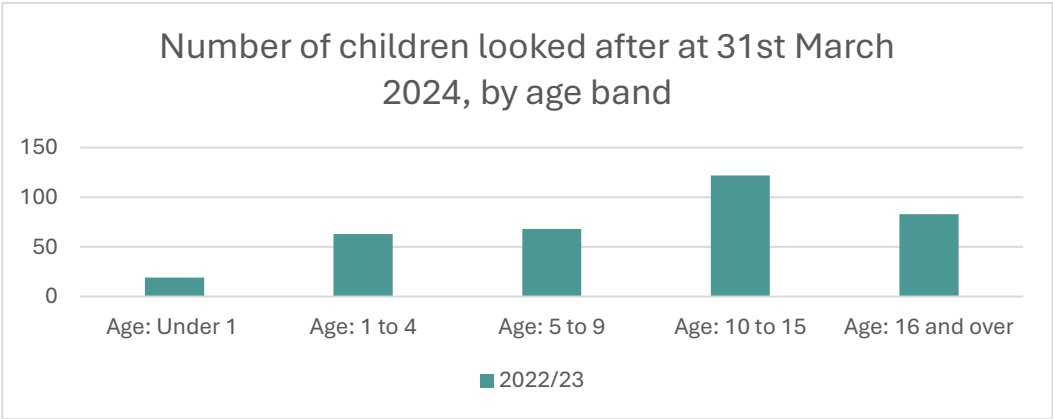
In addition, we want to make sure that there are a range of short breaks available to support families with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities to be able to continue to care for their children.

Our ambition is that more of our children and young people, who need care, are cared for in Blackburn with Darwen. When a child or young person needs care, if they are closer to their home and community, the people, and the services they already know will be able to continue to help them, this helps to ensure better outcomes for young people.

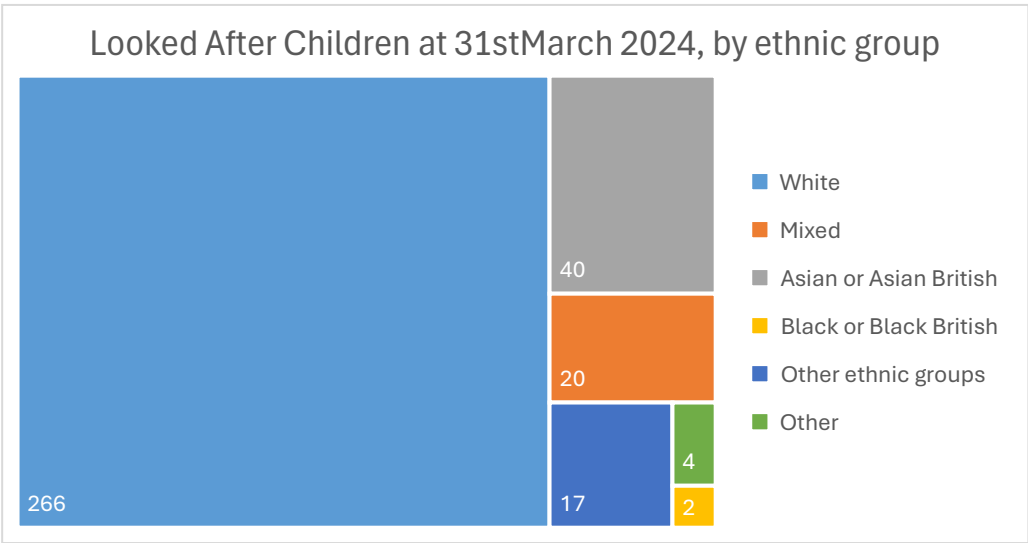
Looked after children at year end



Age profile of looked after children

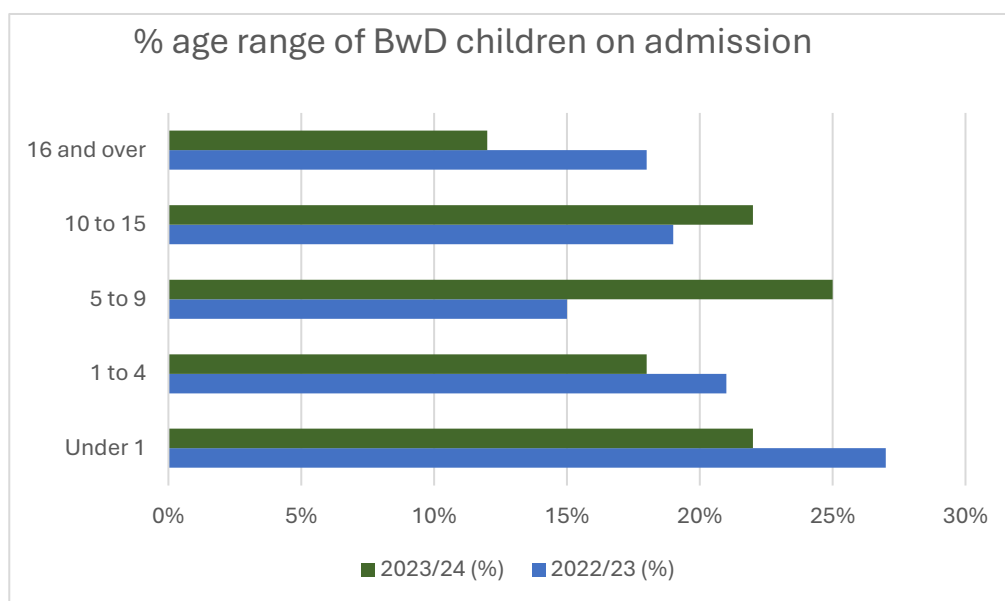


Ethnicity of children in our care





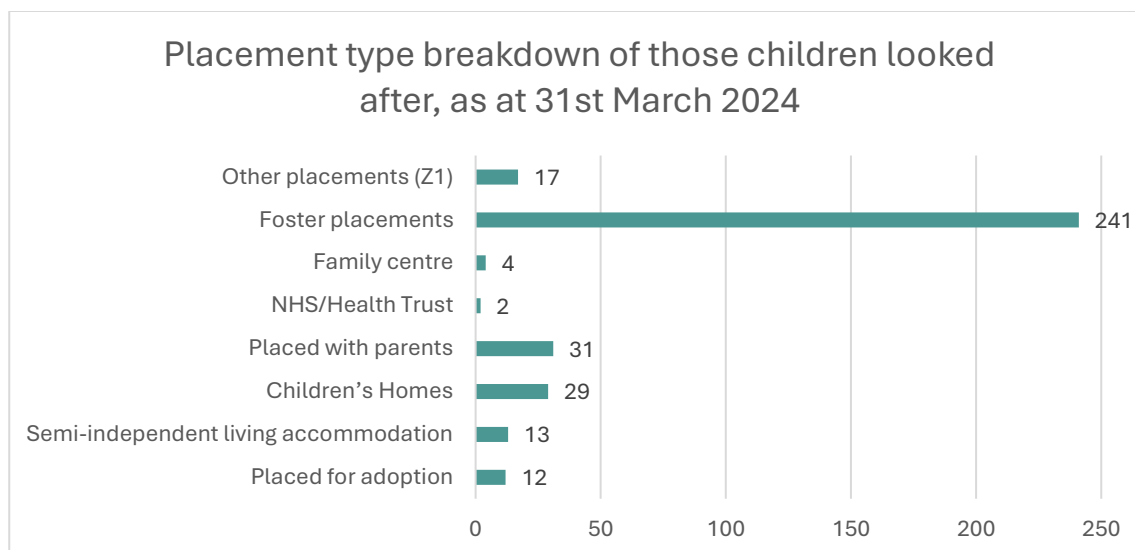
## Percentage age range on admission – BwD comparison between 2022/23 and 2023/24. Updated national comparison will be available in Nov/Dec 2024.



## Percentage of looked after children placed out of borough

We currently have 47% of Looked After Children placed Out of Borough (as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024). This is down four percentage points since last year.

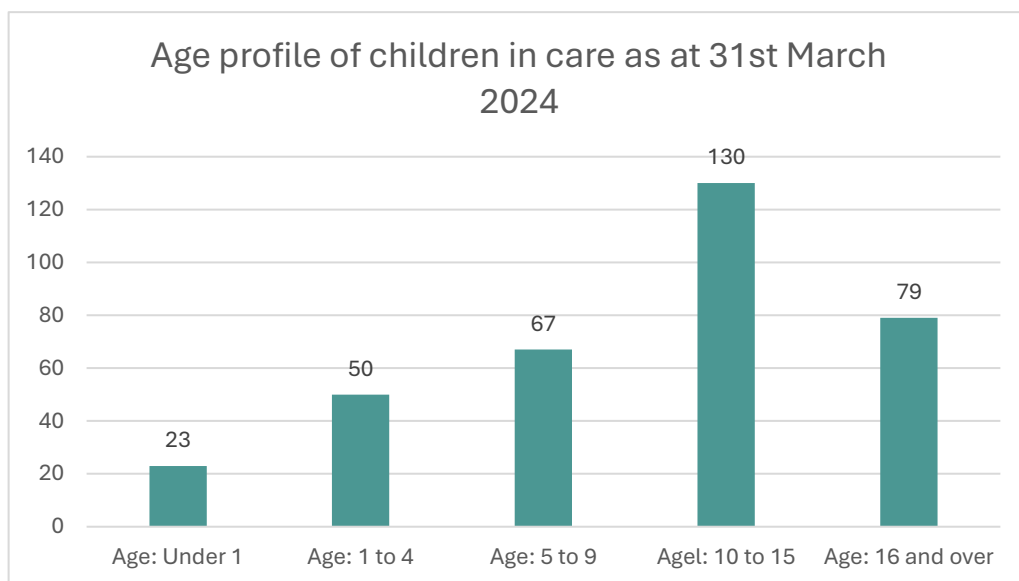
## Where are children in care placed?



The majority of children in our care are placed with in house foster carers. Across the range of placements, in March 2024, 69% of our looked after children were in foster care. In May 2024, we launched our Foster with Us recruitment hub, which focuses on really boosting foster carer enquiries and approvals so that more of our children and young people can live in local foster families. As a result, within Blackburn with Darwen we will not only look to focus on recruiting new foster carer households but also on making better use of existing local IFA carers. 60% of Independent Fostering Association (IFA) homes within the region were being used by children from other local authorities. Therefore, within Blackburn with Darwen we work closely

with IFA to ensure we develop strong relationships that support our children and young people being placed close to home and to ensure we have quality provision.

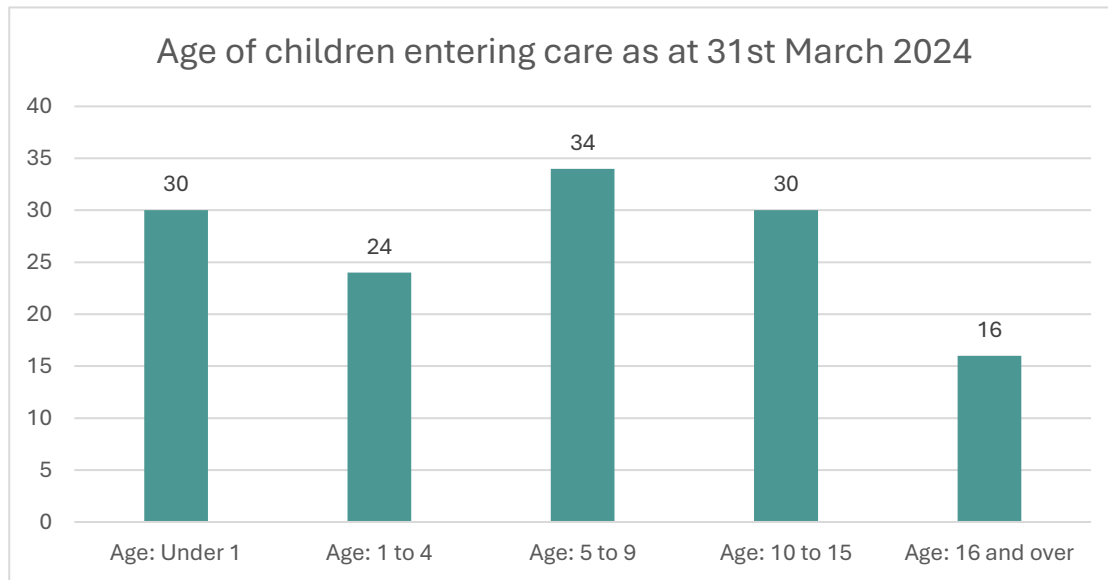
### Age Profile of Children in Care



### Destinations of care leavers

Reason for care episode ceasing	Number
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	1
Return home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility as part of care planning process	19
Return home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility NOT as part of care planning process	2
Moved into independent living and no longer looked after	2
Transferred to residential care funded by Adult Social Services	1
Care ceased for any other reason	21
Sentenced to custody	1
Applied for an adoption order	26
Adoption consent dispensed	9
Left care to live with parents, relatives or other person with no parental responsibility	5
Age assessment determined child is aged 18+	2
Aged 18+ and remained with current carers (including Staying Put arrangements)	22
Special guardianship for former foster carers who are a relative/ friend	16
Special guardianship for foster carers other than a relative/friend	6
Special guardianship made to carers other than foster carers who are a relative/ friend	6
Special guardianship made to carers other than foster carers other than a relative/ friend.	2

## Age of children entering care



## Useful information about Foster Care

At the end of March 2024, the position with regards to foster care was as follows:

- **62** children were placed with Kinship carers since March 2024
- **113** children were placed with internal foster carers since March 2024
- **66** children placed with IFAs since March 2024
- **69%** of our Looked after children are in foster care placement since March 2024
- Our target for mainstream approvals in 23/24 was 12 households, we reached 9 new households with a continued target to meet or exceed 12 households for 24/25.

Most of the IFA homes lived in by Blackburn with Darwen children are commissioned through either the new sub-regional commissioning arrangements (including BBCL) or through the Placements North West regional commissioning arrangements.

As well as seeking to maximise the use of local foster homes for local children, the sub-regional commissioning arrangements also focus on the development and provision of more enhanced foster homes for children who have more complex needs or behaviours. Regular forums whereby social workers can discuss children's foster care wishes and requirements, directly with IFAs, have been facilitated in order to improve matching as well as providing opportunities to share good practice and intelligence to promote service development.

A key priority for Blackburn with Darwen moving forward is 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.

## Useful information about the Mockingbird Model and Launch:

- The Mockingbird Model is a global award winning and pioneering programme led by The Fostering Network in the UK that delivers sustainable foster care. It is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides.

- The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. Each constellation will include a hub foster carer, 6- 8 satellite fostering households and a Liaison Worker who will be a qualified social worker.
- The first constellation at Blackburn with Darwen was launched in October 2024 with the plan to launch the next constellations in early 2025. The constellation consists of kinship carers alongside foster carers and enables children and carers to access wider support networks and dynamic support systems.

### Useful information about Residential Placements

- Blackburn with Darwen do place a very small number of children in residential settings for specific reasons including the lack of a suitable foster home.
- Blackburn with Darwen currently runs two homes offering short breaks, including one that offers breaks for children with severe and profound disabilities (judged Outstanding by Ofsted) and one for children 'on the edge of care' with dual registration to support long term if deemed appropriate (judged Outstanding by Ofsted).
- Children who require residential placements to meet complex needs require flexible packages of support which range in intensity at different times. Moving forward we are seeking to work collaborative with sector partners to develop provision responsive to needs of children and young people with complex needs alongside health.
- Blackburn with Darwen wants to ensure that children whose placements disrupt, experience the minimum disruption to their education as possible.
- There are 2 private providers of residential homes in Blackburn with Darwen. Neither of these homes are on the Placement North-West or Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Blackpool Council and Cumbria County Council (BBCL) sub regional framework and therefore we do not place children in these homes.
- We are seeking to expand the residential portfolio of homes and work with local providers to ensure we expand the homes available to Blackburn with Darwen children in-house. These homes will seek to address the needs of children with complex and or additional needs.

### Useful information about 16+ accommodation for Care Leavers

- Looked after children aged 16+ also have the opportunity to live in semi-supported accommodation. These homes are provided through the Placements North-West Framework or a Leaving Care bed.
- Alongside the above, we also commission a number of semi-supported accommodation providers in the borough of Blackburn with Darwen directly which is facilitated by the Leaving Care service.
- Each accommodation provider on these two frameworks have formally registered their intent with Ofsted to become registered as per legislation.
- Factors linked to young people aged 16 and 17 years old becoming looked after for the first time and accommodated under S.20 is largely linked to being children and young people seeking asylum.
- Floating support can also be offered to care leavers to manage their first tenancy in line with their Pathway Plan and their needs. This can be provided by Adult Services

as well as the Leaving Care service.

- There is a lack of long-term accommodation options for young people with complex disabilities within Blackburn with Darwen.
- Accessing permanent tenancies in mainstream housing is sometimes difficult for care leavers due to perceptions of landlords wanting to take on tenants from the age of 18 years. Legal criteria with under 18 year olds - [Shelter Legal England - Tenancies for children and young people - Shelter England](#).
- General needs housing for young people aged 16+ does not always consider flexible support options for people who have experienced trauma or express challenging behaviour which can sometimes result in eviction and/or a young person being labelled as making themselves intentionally homeless. Intentionality decisions are very rare, however, an eviction from a social rented tenancy can have implications and could render the young person 'ineligible' to join the allocations scheme for a significant period of time.

### Useful information about Adoption

- Children with a permanence plan of adoption, are managed through the Regional Adoption Agency called Adoption Now. Adoption Now was established in November 2017 and combines the Local Authority Adoption Services of Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Bolton, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside. There are two voluntary adoption agency partners Adoption Matters and Caritas Care. The shared adoption service is hosted by Bolton Council and is a Hub and Spoke model with its main Hub in Bolton. There are three teams (Adoption Support, Recruitment and Assessment and Care Planning and Family Finding) supported by five team managers. There is also a panel advisor that supports all Adoption Now adoption panels. The managers are supported by the RAA Head of Service and a Deputy.
- Adoption Now works closely with each Local Authority's Children's Social Care Service and reflects each Council's commitment to 'Best Practice' in the provision of an Adoption Agency.
- The six Local Authorities believe that children should experience permanence and security throughout their childhood and that it is best for a child to live within their birth family, if it is safe to do so. Where this is not possible, all six Councils aim to provide, in conjunction with Adoption Now, permanent alternative families who will promote the child's well-being and development by providing the highest possible standards of care to meet his, her or their individual assessed needs.

## Section 4 – How can providers respond to gaps and priorities linked to achieving placement sufficiency

### Sufficiency priorities for Blackburn with Darwen

**To increase the number of in-house foster homes provided by:**

- Robust home 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.
- Implementing an increased offer of support to in-house carers to support retention including establishment of a Foster Care Academy, Mentoring Scheme, Fostering Communities Project, Enrichment Programme and Participation in the Reflective Fostering programme.
- Work collaboratively with agency fostering providers to increase the number of local children placed with local IFA carers.
- Continue to develop the Fostering and Recruitment Hub.
- Expand the Mockingbird Fostering model.
- Focus on placements and services that assist the authorities to reduce the length of time children spend in our care.
- Help us return children to family settings from residential care, if this is in the child's interest
- IFAs within the BBCL Framework will prioritise all children remaining closely to home
- Recruit foster carers who are skilled and able to take children in an emergency
- Increase foster carer placements in the following areas: parent and child foster carers; foster carers for sibling groups; children from minority communities; risk taking teenagers with complex and challenging needs; children with disabilities and additional health needs
- Work with foster carers to understand the importance/ benefits of offering "staying put" placements to young people in order to increase numbers

**Ensure appropriate children's homes are available for our children in care, particularly those who require additional support and resources by:**

- Providers and local authorities taking joint responsibility to engage in dialogue to change how we respond to challenges and demands
- There is a role for both providers and local authorities in understanding local need
- Prioritising matching of local children and young people into placement options to ensure education and health services can respond to complexity.
- Improve the quality of residential provision in Blackburn with Darwen so that all provision is good or outstanding
- To support young people with health needs and offer an opt in/ out model of therapeutic support so that where their needs can be met by other core service, this can be maintained and accessed locally without incurring further costs
- Develop further short-term in-house crisis/ reception homes.
- Develop further smaller capacity in-house children's homes.
- Continue to work collaboratively with our block providers to maximise use of contracted beds.
- 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.



- Developing alternative options to better support children and young people with the most complex emotional and behavioural needs to remain safely within a family setting.

#### **Aspire for 100% of care leavers to live in suitable accommodation by:**

- Following the review of accommodation for Care Leavers which is now coming to an end. Our intent is to map out the right accommodation for those who are 18 plus alongside our commissioning, Providers and Housing Needs Colleagues, and this will be initiated as of April 25. We need to focus on supporting accommodation for our Care Leavers, based on the fundamental principles of preparation for adulthood and support our children in care to develop the appropriate skills in line with their needs so that post 18, they are supported wherever appropriate to become tenancy ready. We intend to have varying forms of accommodation that enable those who aren't at that stage, to become tenancy ready timely, by providing accommodation that enables them to be supported within a tenancy with the offer of additional support hours tailored to their individual need. This will allow them to pay bills, manage a home, claim the right benefits or even contribute to the rent if they are working. Finally, seek the right amount of provision for those who are not ready at 18 due to their ongoing complexity or vulnerability, or for those young adults, who have not yet got the right to remain.
- Work more collaboratively with the private provider market to increase provision and choice within respective neighbourhoods as demand is not currently being met, with a focus on sustainable, affordable homes.
- Commission more tailored services for our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. Develop high quality and sustainable options of accommodation for our care leavers including use of "staying put" options
- Ensure that we start early to help young people prepare for living independently by developing budgeting and living skills
- Ensure care leavers with complex needs can receive support flexibly so it can be stepped down without them having to move home.
- Accommodation/ placement providers developing strategic partnerships with other providers who can offer short term support in a crisis on a spot purchase basis to maintain placement stability

## **Section 5 – Commissioners and Providers working together to deliver change and innovation**

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council is committed to commissioning high quality services which are outcome focused, deliver value for money, and prepare young people for adulthood.

We want to collaborate with providers collaboratively within the Blackburn with Darwen

local area to develop more specialist provision. In identifying future partners, we want to collaborate with providers who deliver enabling models of support, which develop independence skills and links the young person to local and sustainable networks of support.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council is a participant or named partner in a number of regional and sub-regional frameworks for accommodation for looked after children. These are:

- Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Cumbria and LCC (BBCL) Framework - Blackburn with Darwen is part of the BBCL collaborative sub-regional framework. This framework sources independent agency foster placements within Blackburn with Darwen when we cannot provide our own in house foster carers. This framework has helped to generate success in providing 'closer to home' placements in the Lancashire footprint. Blackburn with Darwen's Fostering Front Door builds and improves relationships with providers from the BBCL Framework to identify and pre-empt placements that will become available, to ensure that we are being prioritised with those independent fostering households that are local to us.
- North West Regional Fostering Flexible Purchasing Scheme
- North West Residential Flexible Purchasing Scheme

Linked to gaps and priorities we would particularly wish to meet:

- Partners delivering alternatives for supporting looked after children in family settings.
- Support our providers in adapting to the changes they will experience from the regulatory reforms.
- Re-commission our block provision to have new contracts in place by early 2024/25 that address some of the inconsistencies of service provision throughout the county.
- Organisations which are keen to form strategic alliances or consortia with others, either locally or delivery within adjoining local authorities.
- Providers to work alongside educational settings to offer alternative choices for supporting children and young people with the most complex needs.
- Providers who have developed best practice around offering placement options to teenage looked after children.
- Providers who work with care leavers to develop sustainable, independent tenancies of their own.
- Providers who wish to work with Blackburn with Darwen Council to ensure Blackburn with Darwen children and young people are placed locally.
- Providers with interest in developing specialist services for people with complex and challenging behaviours linked to disability and mental health.
- Housing providers who can offer 'general needs' housing for people ready to move on from supported accommodation.

Information about formal tendering opportunities is published on the North West Local Authorities procurement portal The Chest and interested and current providers are advised to register.



Outside of this we also want to welcome providers to contact Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's commissioners by emailing [commissioning.team@blackburn.gov.uk](mailto:commissioning.team@blackburn.gov.uk).

In the future we expect to have more regular and ongoing conversations with providers, via forums both in Blackburn with Darwen and across the North-West. We would like to work collaboratively with providers to develop provision within the borough, which meets the



**BLACKBURN**  
*with*  
**DARWEN**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Blackburn with Darwen  
Children's Services

**Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – 2027**

For more information, please visit