

Blackpool Sufficiency Statement for Children Looked After 2022-24

Blackpool Council



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1. Introduction

This sufficiency statement sets out how well we are able to support, through the market, the accommodation and support needs of children and young people who need to live away from their family home in a place which is arranged for them by the Local Authority. It covers the function which our children have asked us to call “Home Finding”. The statement is designed to help providers of services for children who are looked after understand where the area has sufficient provision, and the areas where we welcome some growth in the market to increase the choice for children.

In developing this statement and the key messages we consulted with:

- Our Children’s Social Care Management Team
- Just Uz
- Our Home Finding Team
- Health partners

In this statement you can expect to find information about where we want to see growth in the choice of quality provision to support children and young people who are looking for a home, and those areas where we are not supportive of market growth at this time. The period covered is 2 years and this statement will be refreshed in 2024 or earlier if there is a significant shift in need.

Our aim is to ensure that whenever it is the right thing for the child or young person, we will be able to provide a home for them in the local area (within Blackpool or Lancashire).

We want to achieve the following outcomes from our work with providers of support for children who are looked after. Children should be able to live in:

- A home that offers safety, stability and love
- A home that is responsive when they experience challenge and which doesn’t reject them
- A home that helps them explore their ambitions and engage in good quality education and employment opportunities
- A home that respects their identity and supports them in building and maintaining self-esteem and confidence
- A home that provides boundaries but enables them to have the freedom that is appropriate to their age and maturity

For a number of reasons pressure on the market of quality provision for children who are looking for a home is high. Many local authorities across the region and the country are seeing increased pressure on their services and more children are coming into the care system. This places pressure on the availability of homes for children and can make it more difficult to find the right placement for the right child at the right time. We consider a good market to be one that has some capacity available at all times to meet a range of needs and that offers stability to our children and young people.

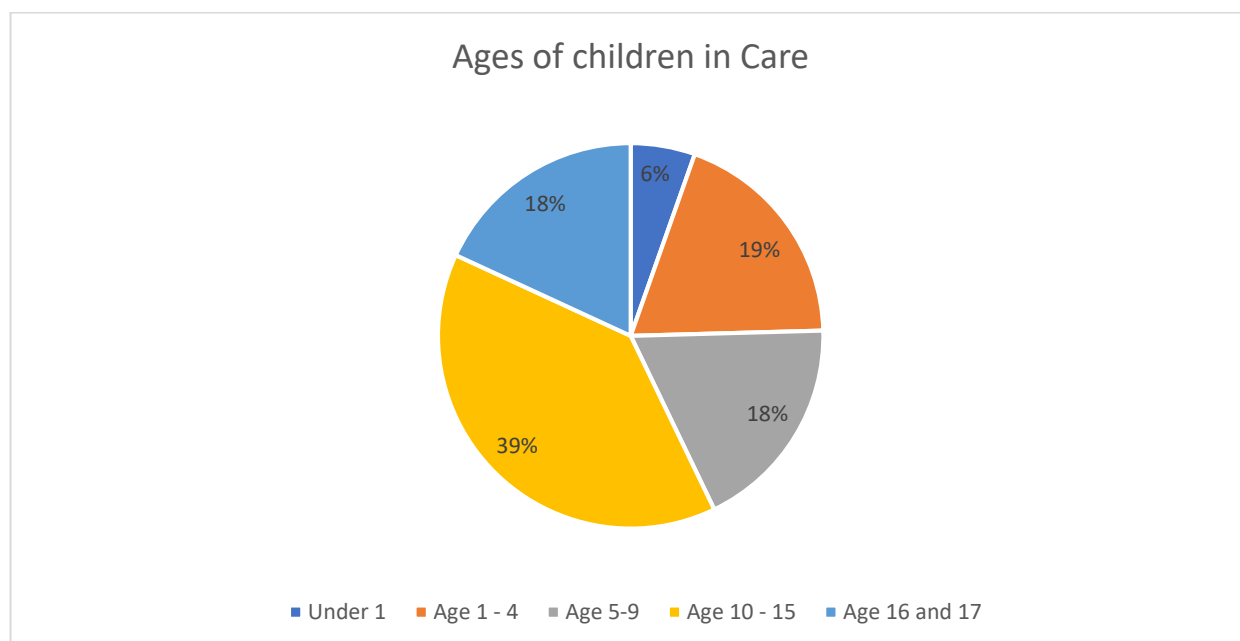
2. The Blackpool Picture

Although there is growth nationally in the number of children looked after, in Blackpool we expect the number of children overall in our care to reduce over the next 2 years because we are strengthening our approach to supporting more children to remain in the care of their families. This does not reduce the need for us for us to ensure that we are working with our market in Blackpool and Lancashire to make sure that there is good quality provision available to meet the needs of those children who are in our care.

Our aim in Blackpool is to deliver trusted, focused direct work with our children and families and over time, safely and successfully reduce the number of children in Blackpool who are in our care. This is practice led by the social care team, but is supported by the commissioning function which is adapting to ensure that impactful services are available to meet the needs of our children and young people within and around the family home.

This statement is based on what we know about our current market, and the plans already in place to grow quality across the market, and develop additional capacity where it is currently lacking.

Some facts and figures about the children who are looked after by the Council



Most of our children aged between 0 and 16 live in a family home, be it their own, with friends or family or with a foster carer arranged through home finding support.

- **27%** are living with family or friends
- **24%** are living with Foster Carers who are supported directly by the Council
- **32%** are living with Foster Carers who are supported by an Independent Foster Care Agency (IFA)
- **11%** are living in Residential Care

For young people aged 16 and over:

- **34%** of looked after young people who are 16+ are living with family or in a foster placement
- **12%** of looked after young people who are 16+ are in children's homes
- **50%** of looked after young people who are 16+ are living in Semi Independent, Supported Living or Independent living
- We have **no** children in unregulated placements

The need for good quality children's care and support accommodation within Blackpool is acknowledged. There are 32 private provider registered residential homes in Blackpool, offering 75 beds. 25 of these homes are rated by OFSTED as "good" or "outstanding" with 6 "requiring improvement to be good". One home has recently opened and is not yet rated. We believe that this figure represents sufficiency in the residential market locally, and any new developments in general residential are not supported in terms of need by the local authority. What we know is that some children have needs that require a more specialist approach than that which is available in this market, and tailored developments to meet very specific needs are always supported where in the best needs of the child (for example, in cases where there is a joint health and social care need).

Daily meetings with social care managers help the commissioning team to know which children may be in need of home finding support, and the team horizon scan across internal and external fostering and residential for current and expected vacancies. We monitor the availability of support in the market through daily provider engagement. A recent "snapshot" of market availability in the Fylde Coast area showed availability across the key market areas. This means that there was available provision in fostering, residential and semi-independent homes. However, the number of available beds in each of these provisions was not high and our market meets the needs of other local authorities as well as Blackpool's own needs. Although there are vacancies in all provision types, in foster care in particular, capacity is insufficient to ensure confidence that we will always be able to find the right home for a child.

More placements were available in foster care for very young children, with more challenge in availability for older children and sibling groups.

Across the market of support for children in care we do not see enough stability. Some of our children have had to move from their home multiple times because the support provided has not been able to meet their needs and either the provider or the local authority has decided that a new home must be found.

In the coming year, we will continue to work with providers and partners to explore how we can collectively work together to support greater placement stability. We know that some placement instability centres around whole system, including health and education as well as social care, (in)ability to increase support when things at home are not going well.

3. Market Challenges

It is well documented that pressure on the fostering and residential care markets is high nationally at the moment and there is no foreseeable reduction in this demand in the future. At this time, more than ever, making sure the right home is found for a child or young person first time and wrapping support around when it is needed to maintain stability is key. There is a lack of capacity in particular to support young people, usually older teenagers, who because of trauma and/or poor mental health can sometimes exhibit behaviours which are a risk to their welfare and that of their peers and people who care for them.

This has led to some use, post-16, of unregulated providers to support young people subject to a range of restrictions approved by the court because there are no regulated providers who are willing and able to offer support. Alternatives such as welfare secure or tier four mental health provision, are simply unavailable or considered not to be appropriate. Sometimes, children will be admitted to hospital and it can be difficult for health and social care to coordinate effective support to enable discharge back to the community when acute care is no longer needed.

The cost of delivering good quality care for children is rising. It is more challenging for providers to recruit and retain staff in regulated settings, and this places pressure on pay related costs. Across residential, fostering and semi-independent provision the increase in fuel, food and other essential costs also impacts on providers. We have recognised the pressures on the market as a challenge in our medium term financial strategy and remain committed to transparency in our work with providers and neighbouring local authorities who face similar cost inflation and demand pressures. Transparency is key in ensuring that the fees we pay to providers offer value for money to the public purse and enables providers to deliver good quality services.

4. Demand for Services

Foster Care

Over the next two years we would like to see the percentage of children who are looked after in foster homes **rise**. We would like most of the growth to be in our internal Foster Care market, this is because we are investing in our foster carers who work directly for the Council and want to support more children in Blackpool, offering a stable home for as long as it is needed. However, we want to grow the relationships we have with our Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) care market, this is because we know that there are some excellent foster carers who choose to work with our IFA's who offer stable and secure family homes to support children and young people. Too many young children are in residential care because we have been unable to find a lasting home for them with a foster carer who can meet their needs – especially children with disabilities and/or long-term health problems.

Our primary objective working in partnership with the Foster Care market is to reduce the number of younger children in residential care, and to reduce for all our children the number of times they have to make unplanned moves because a home is not suitable to meet their needs. Unplanned moves contribute to poor outcomes for our children.

Residential Care

Over the next two years we would like to see the percentage of children living in residential care **reduce**. We want to reduce the percentage of the children who are looked after who are in residential settings – which is why we are looking to grow the number of foster carers who are working with us. When a residential home is the right home for a child or young person, we would like this almost always to be close to home.

Preparing for Adulthood

We would like to see the percentage of our children who are 16+ and are living with family or in a foster placement **rise**. We want young people who are approaching adulthood to feel that they can stay with the family that have provided them with a home, and to leave when they are ready to be more independent. Increasing the opportunity for young people to “stay put” as they mature is something we would like to achieve and young people tell us they value.

We want the number of children of all ages who are in children's homes to reduce, and so we would expect to see this reflected in our post 16 population along with other age groups.

Good quality independent and supported accommodation is valued by our young people and enables them to grow in their independence. We welcome the move to increase the oversight from OFSTED in this area of work, but anticipate it may destabilise the market for a short period. We want to make sure that this does not diminish the range of opportunities available to our young people.

5. Market Development

Residential Care

In summary – there is sufficiency in the market for OFSTED registered residential care for most children to find a placement that can meet their needs in Blackpool and the wider Lancashire area. We have a range of quality providers, medium and large, who are experienced, well established and who are fully OFSTED regulated working with us at this time. Providers with specific and proven expertise in offering regulated provision to support children who can display significant and sustained periods of challenging behaviour and who need a high level of support are invited to talk to Blackpool council about their offer.

Our plan to reduce the proportion of our children living in residential care has two main threads – a preventative plan – where we strengthen the support provided when placements are under stress, which can lead to placement breakdown and escalation in to residential care; and a de-escalation plan, where there is a focused review of all children and young people in residential care to develop the right plan for permanence.

We believe that market sustainability will not be enhanced by the introduction of new providers in this market, which is already facing increasing cost pressures and challenges in the recruitment, development and retention of staff.

If a provider is looking to open a new residential care home in Blackpool they will require planning permission. We will only support this from a Children’s Services and Commissioning perspective if the provision is going to meet a need for a child that is not currently available and delivered by an established OFSTED regulated provider who is already working with Blackpool. No general non specialist/ tailored growth in provision will be supported through the planning process. Providers securing permission must undertake to work with the Council to ensure they are meeting the needs of Children within Blackpool and Lancashire as a priority. In support of our aim to ensure good quality developments in family oriented areas planning will be usually be refused if within the inner area or in close proximity to an existing provision.

Our strategy for Residential Care is to continue to build and maintain positive relationships with providers established in the area, have a good or better rating for their establishments with OFSTED; and who are able to work with us to flex to meet the needs of our children.

Foster Care

In summary – we support growth of the capacity in this market, but do not think that there needs to be a growth in the number of providers competing to recruit foster families. There is not sufficiency across existing fostering families to be able to ensure that every child who would benefit from support in a foster family home can access this. However, we have a range of quality providers, medium and large, who are experienced, well established and who are fully OFSTED regulated working with us at this time.

Providers are actively recruiting across Lancashire, including Blackpool, and we share their ambition to have more foster carers registered across the area. We are particularly keen to welcome more foster carers who are;

- skilled in supporting children with additional needs including disabilities, autism and neurodiversity;
- able to support more sibling groups to live together.
- able to support older children, who may be at risk of exploitation and need skilled support.

When a family is considering becoming a foster family in Blackpool or the wider Lancashire area, we believe that there are a good range of providers they can choose to work with.

There is significant investment in developing resilience, broadening the skills and increasing the capacity in our internal foster care service. We are ALSO undertaking targeted recruitment of skilled foster carers for our young people who have experienced placement breakdowns.

We do feel that there is room for growth in both our internal and the external foster care capacity. We work in partnership with Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Council and Cumbria Council on a shared commissioning approach with Independent Foster Care Agencies. The purpose of this approach is to ensure that they are able to flexibly respond to the needs of our children and can offer the placement support and stability they deserve. We have collectively identified shared goals in working with the market, and have launched a new framework that aligns our contracts. Learning from others, we are creating capacity to develop closer relationships with IFA's to ensure our children are matched well and that retainers are used when it is sensible to do so.

Supported and Semi Independent Living

In summary – we support steady growth of quality and choice in this market to make sure that young people can access this support as they develop their skills for independence. Some young people want to live in small group as they develop their independence, and some young people want to live on their own with support. We know that irrespective of the setting young people say that they want support from people who know them well and who can help them to maintain their home and engage in education and employment opportunities. They want people to treat them as young adults and to respect the decisions they make about their lives. They want good quality accommodation that is safe and secure and gives them the freedom to make it their home.

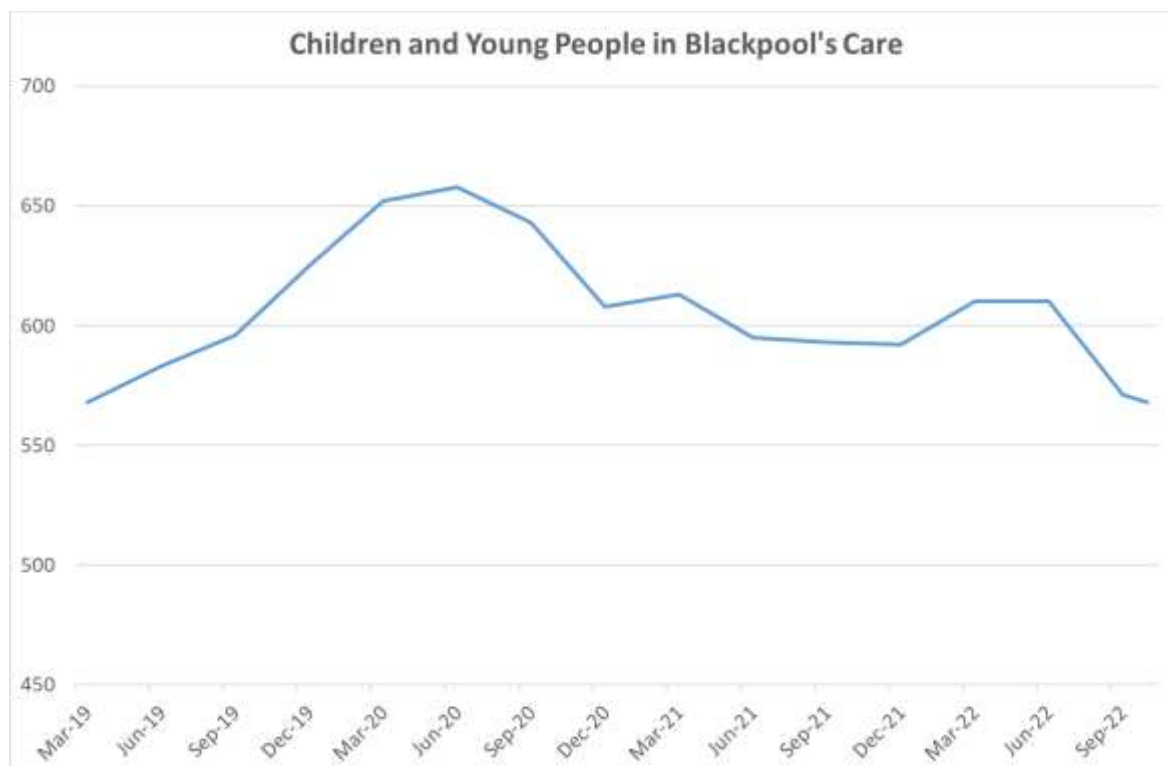
In Blackpool we have a wealth of semi-independent and independent living accommodation for young people, which varies in quality of support and location. We have worked with our young people to put in place standards for semi-independent living and we are developing a local commissioning framework to ensure that consistently high quality provision is available for our young people as they progress to independence. Young inspectors are now a key part of our quality monitoring function for services for children and young people.

At this time, Semi and Supported Living for children 16+ is not regulated by OFSTED. This does not mean that the work of these service is not monitored for quality and outcomes, but this is currently done by the local authority as the contract holder. OFSTED have consulted widely about the potential to introduce regulation to this area of provision and we recognise that the uncertainty about what regulation might look like is a challenge for the sector. We want to work with the providers in Blackpool and the surrounding area so that when guidance is shared by OFSTED providers feel well supported in meeting the requirements for registration and in preparing for any inspection framework.

Planning permission is required to open a supported living residence in Blackpool, and in support of our aim to ensure good quality developments in family oriented areas it will be discouraged if within the inner area or in close proximity to an existing provision.

Appendix 1 – Key facts and figures

There has been a fall in the number of children in care since mid-2020. We envisage that this will continue and move towards 500 over the next 2 years



Homes for Our Children, split by type of home and age

<i>All Children in Blackpool's care</i>						
<u>Type of home</u>	<u>Age Band</u>					<u>Total</u>
	<u>Under 1</u>	<u>1 - 4 Years</u>	<u>5 - 9 Years</u>	<u>10 - 15 Years</u>	<u>16 - 17 Years</u>	
Adoptive home		17	5			22
Placed at home with parents	3	17	12	20	7	59
Emergency Friend/Relative	2	5	2	1		10
Foster Care - Connected Carer		17	19	24	3	63
Foster Care - FFA	1	1				2
Foster Care - IFA		20	40	91	13	164
Foster Care - In-house	23	28	21	41	12	125
Mother & Baby Unit	2				1	3
Children's Home			7	45	12	64
Secure					1	1
YOI					2	2
Supported Accommodation					51	51
Total	33	105	106	222	102	568

Slightly under two thirds of children entering care in the past 12 months have been aged 9 years and younger – all but two of these children are placed in family home settings of different types. The two other children who are not are placed in children's homes. We strive to avoid such placements, but the availability of suitably skilled and supported foster carers, especially for children with additional needs, sometimes means that it is unavoidable. One can also see 9 children aged between 10 and 15 years of age currently living in children's homes – again something we would wish to avoid, especially for the younger children in that age group.

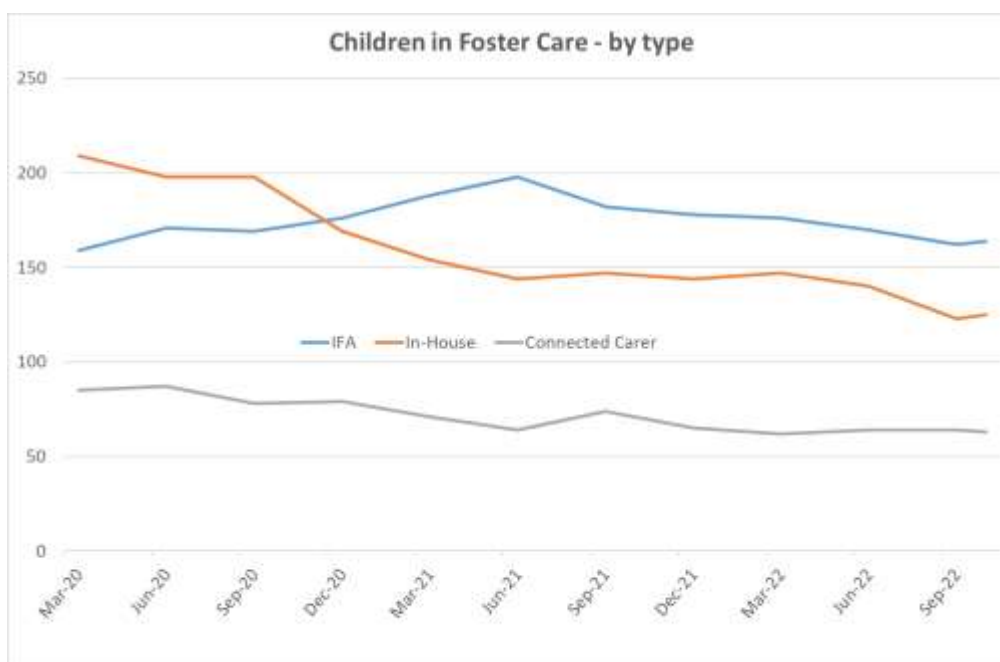
Children who entered Blackpool's care in the last 12 months - current home						
Type of home	Age Band					Total
	Under 1	1 - 4 Years	5 - 9 Years	10 - 15 Years	16 - 17 Years	
Placed at home with parents	3	7	6	14	2	32
Emergency Friend/Relative	2	3	2			7
Foster Care - Connected Carer	2	2	4	2		10
Foster Care - FFA	1					1
Foster Care - IFA		8	9	6	1	24
Foster Care - In-house	23	17	5	3		48
Mother & Baby Unit	2					2
Children's Home			2	9		11
YOI					1	1
Supported Accommodation					13	13
Total	33	37	28	34	17	149

Ethnicity of children in care	
	Children
White (British)	508
White (Irish)	4
White (Any other White background)	7
Asian or Asian British (Pakistani)	2
Asian or Asian British (Any other Asian background)	6
Mixed (Any other mixed background)	7
Mixed (White and Asian)	8
Mixed (White and Black African)	10
Mixed (White and Black Caribbean)	5
Other Ethnic Groups (Any other ethnic group)	11
Total	568

The ethnic make-up of children in care in Blackpool reflects the local child population and is heavily weighted towards White/British children and young people. Small numbers of children from other ethnicities are also in our care, including 8 unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC), who are almost all placed outside Blackpool in culturally appropriate homes in the larger cities in the region.

Foster Care

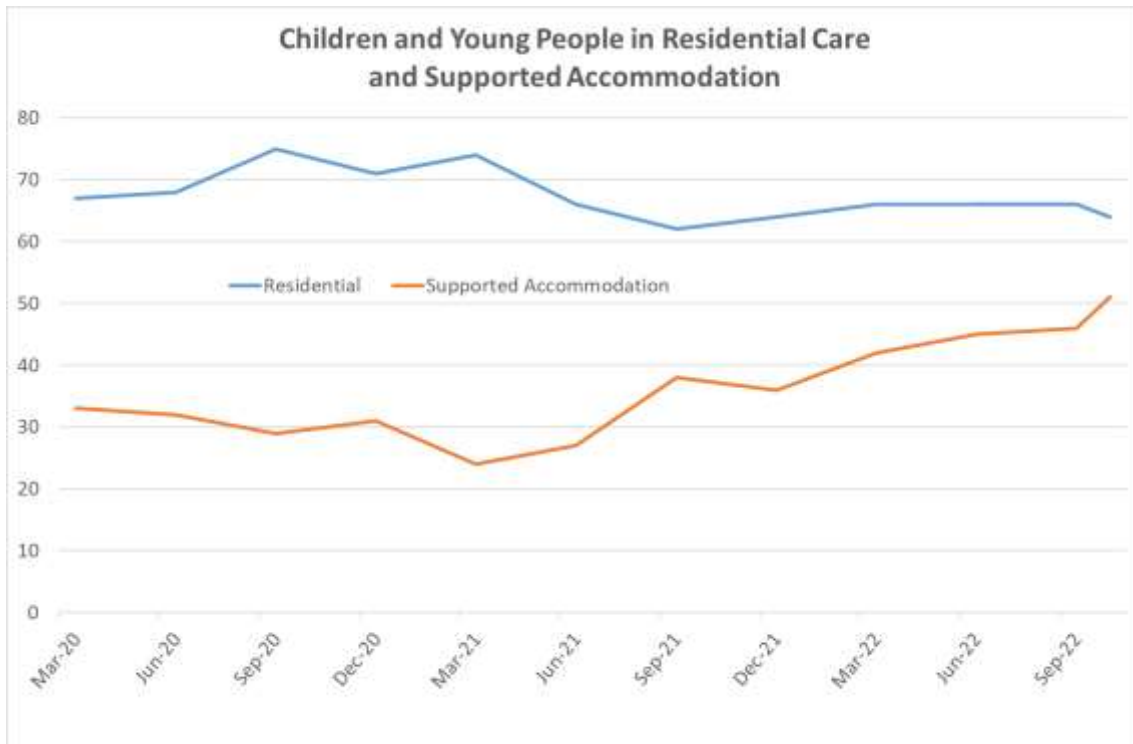
78% of children in care live in family homes of various types, with 64% living in approved foster homes – lower than the national average of 71%. The decrease in the past year reflects children in settled home leaving care permanently, often from settled foster homes.



Over time, the number of children supported by Blackpool's own foster carers has diminished, with greater use of IFA placements. One can see the impact of falling rates of entry into care in the figures since late 2021.

Residential Care and Supported Accommodation

Over the past two years, between 60 and 70 children and young people have lived in Children’s Homes. Reducing the number has been a constant aim for the council, although our ability to achieve this has been negatively affected by the absence of appropriate alternative family-based homes within the market. As noted earlier, we are well supplied for good quality children’s homes and also supported accommodation. The council’s use of supported accommodation to meet the needs of older young people in our care has grown over the past two years and will continue to do so.



Secure

Blackpool is a low user of secure provision, with commonly only one child, or no child in provision.

Location of Homes for Our Children

Three quarters of children in Blackpool’s care live either in Blackpool or on the Fylde coast. Nearly 90% of all our children are in homes within the county of Lancashire and 96% live in homes within the North West.

Location of homes		
	Children	
Blackpool	282	50%
Fylde & Wyre	130	23%
Lancashire	91	16%
North West	40	7%
Outside Region	25	4%
Total	568	

Children and young people are only rarely placed outside the North West because of market insufficiency – more common reasons for more distant placement are living within extended family or in an adoptive home. A small number are placed in secure provision, or Young

Offender Institutes. Only 4 children and young people are living in Children’s Homes outside the region.

Outside Region - breakdown by placement type	
	Children
Adoptive home	4
Placed at home with parents	1
Emergency Friend/Relative (38/6)	2
Foster Care - Connected Carer	6
Foster Care - In-house	2
Mother & Baby Unit	1
Children's Home	4
Secure	1
YOI	2
Supported Accommodation	2
Total	25

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