



Lancashire's Children in Our Care Sufficiency Strategy 2025 - 2028



INTRODUCTION

Lancashire County Council is helping to build a better Lancashire where everyone can live their best life through stronger communities, a growing economy and high-quality public services.

We will work together with our residents, partners, councillors and colleagues in supportive, innovative, respectful and collaborative ways to ensure that more children and young people have the best start in life, families are more resilient and that everyone can live a healthy and happier life.

We will ensure that everything we do makes a tangible, positive difference to the lives of the children we work for. We strive to do this in the least interventionist way possible - responding to the needs of children, young people, and their families as quickly and early as possible, providing the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

The best outcomes for children and young people are normally met in their own family. However, for children who cannot stay in their families, we work as quickly as we can to help them have a lasting home where they can feel settled and belong. When it is in a child's best interest to do so, we want Lancashire children in care to live in Lancashire homes.

We strive to provide the same standards of care and support that we would expect for our own children. Everything we do is underpinned by the seven corporate parenting principles:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and young people;
- To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people;
- To help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for children and young people;
- For children and young people to be safe, and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

SUFFICIENCY DUTY

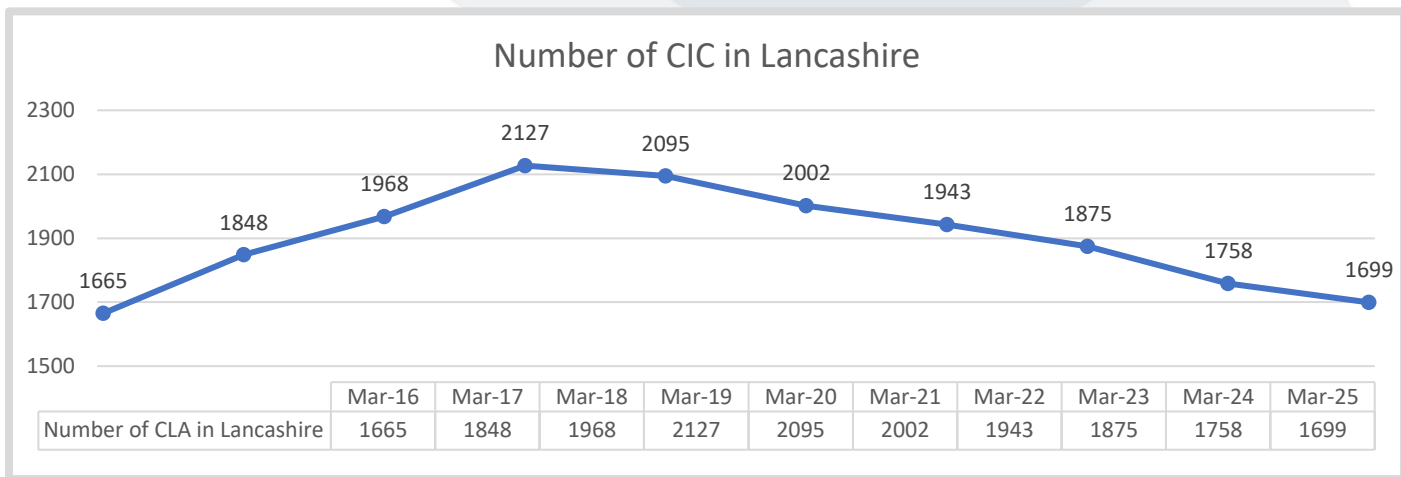
Lancashire County Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is a range of local homes available, sufficient to meet the needs of the children and young people in our care; and to promote co-operation with relevant partners to improve the well-being of children in the local area.

This strategy sets out how we intend to meet our Sufficiency Duty for the children in our care, improve the quality and choice of homes, ensure value for money, and minimise the likelihood of suitable homes not being available locally.

ANALYSIS OF OUR CHILDREN IN CARE

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE (CIC)

Our number of children in care (CIC) has reduced significantly since 2019 and is now the lowest it has been for over eight years.

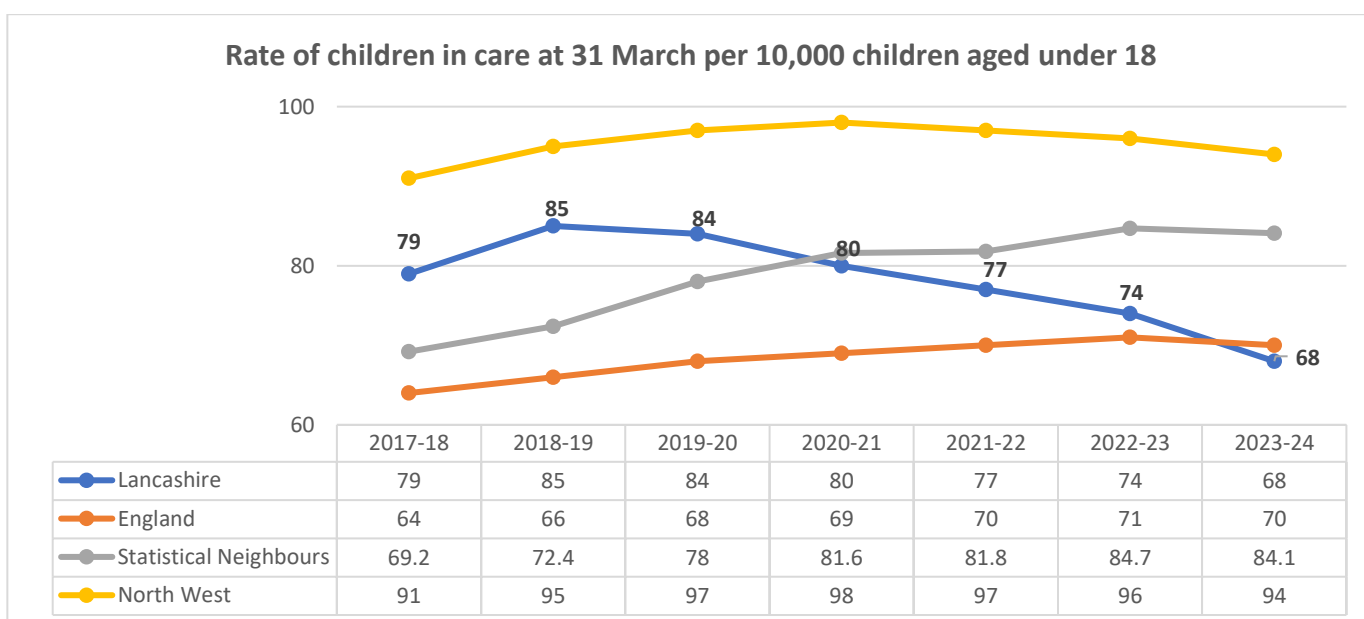


Between March 2016 and March 2019, our increase in CIC was considerably higher than the national average (*a rise of 28% compared to 11% nationally*). However, since 2019, our number of CIC has been reducing, compared to a continued increase nationally. Between March 2019 and March 2024, the number of CIC in England rose by 7% and our number of CIC decreased by 19%. By 31 March 2025, we had 1699 children in our care, 428 less than in March 2019.

% increase in CIC	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Nationally	UP 4%	UP 4%	UP 2%	UP 1%	UP 2%	UP 2%	DOWN <0.5%	Awaiting figure
In Lancashire	UP 7%	UP 8%	DOWN 2%	DOWN 4%	DOWN 3%	DOWN 4%	DOWN 6%	DOWN 3%

RATE OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Previously, our rate of CIC (per 10,000 population) was significantly higher than the England average and the average of our statistical neighbour comparators. Our work to support families to remain together, whenever it is safe and, in a child's best interests to do so, has seen our rates fall to below that of our statistical neighbours since 2021 and below the England average since 2024. Our rate of CIC was 66.4 in March 2025.



SEX

57% of CIC in England are male and 43% are female (*March 2024*). These proportions have varied little over recent years. We have a lower proportion of males in our CIC population than the national average (*around 53%-54%*), which has also varied little over recent years.

% of CIC in Lancashire by Sex

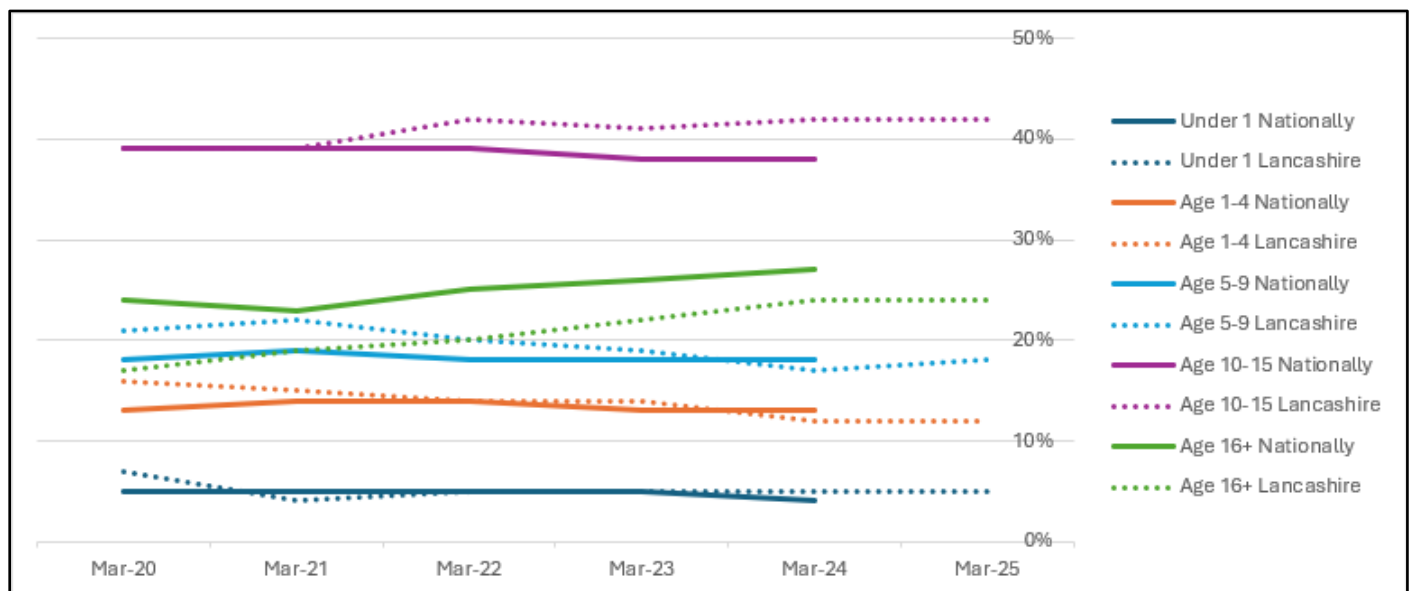
	31/03/2017	31/03/2018	31/03/2019	31/03/2020	31/03/2021	31/03/2022	31/03/2023	31/03/2024	31/03/2025
Male	989	1060	1133	1100	1075	1047	1009	949	924
Total	1848	1968	2128	2095	2022	1943	1875	1758	1699
% Male	53.5%	53.9%	53.2%	52.5%	53.7%	53.9%	53.8%	54.0%	54.4%

AGE

A higher proportion of our CIC are aged between 10-15 years than the national average (*42% compared to 38% nationally - March 2024*) and a lower proportion are aged 16+ (*24% compared to 27% nationally – March 2024*).

In March 2020, a higher proportion of our CIC were aged under 10 in comparison to the national average (*44% in Lancashire, compared to 36% nationally*). However, the proportion of our CIC aged under 10 has decreased and is now in line with the national average (*March 2024 - 35%*).

Age range	March 2020		March 2021		March 2022		March 2023		March 2024		March 2025
	England	LCC	England	LCC	England	LCC	England	LCC	England	LCC	LCC
Under 1	5%	7%	5%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%	5%	5%
Age 1-4	13%	16%	14%	15%	14%	14%	13%	14%	13%	12%	12%
Age 5-9	18%	21%	19%	22%	18%	20%	18%	19%	18%	17%	18%
Age 10-15	39%	39%	39%	39%	39%	42%	38%	41%	38%	42%	42%
Age 16+	24%	17%	23%	19%	25%	20%	26%	22%	27%	24%	24%



ETHNICITY

Our CIC population continues to be predominately white ethnicity, representing 84.1% of the total CIC population (*March 2025*). This is an over-representation when compared to the general CYP population in Lancashire who are of white ethnicity, as reported in the 2021 census (*81.9%*). The proportion of Lancashire CIC who are of white ethnicity has reduced from 87.0% in March 2020.

7.7% of our CIC are of mixed ethnicity (*March 2025*). This group is over-represented when compared to the general CYP population (4.0% - 2021 census). The proportion of Lancashire CIC who are mixed ethnicity has increased from 6.4% in March 2020.

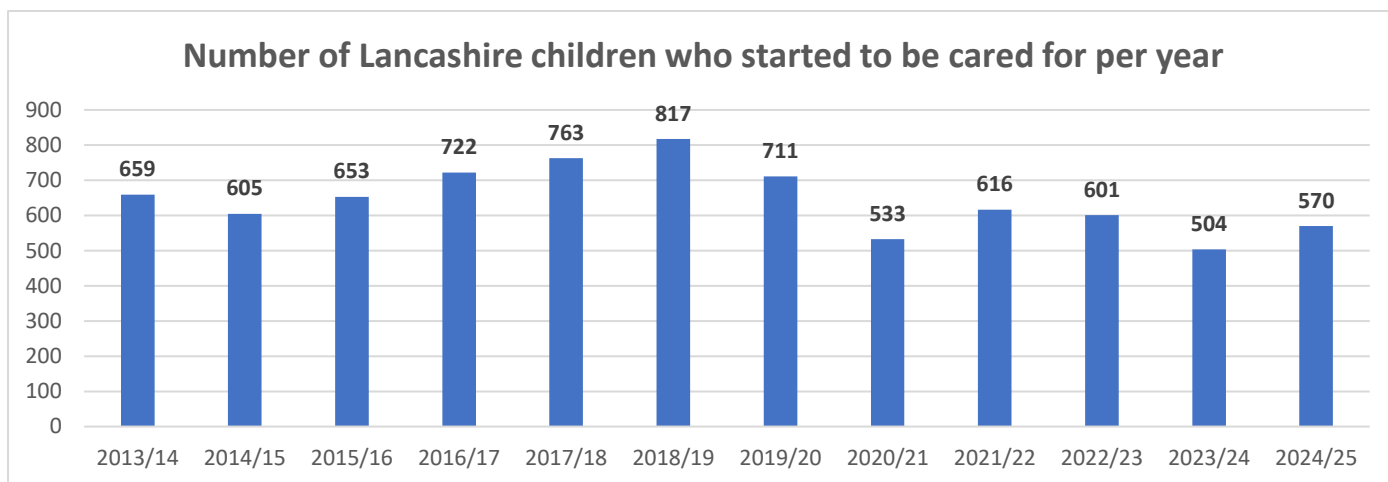
4.8% of our CIC are of Asian ethnicity (*March 2025*). This group is under-represented when compared to the general CYP population (12.5% - 2021 census). The proportion of Lancashire CIC who are of Asian ethnicity had been reducing (4.8% in March 2020 and 2021, 4.2% in March 2022 and 3.7% in March 2023) but is now the same as in March 2020.

1.5% of our CIC are of black ethnicity (*March 2025*), which is an over-representation when compared to the general CYP population (0.7% - 2021 census). The proportion of Lancashire CIC who are of black ethnicity has increased from 0.4% in March 2020.

The proportion of CIC whose ethnicity is classed as 'any other ethnic group' is 1.8%. This group is over-represented when compared to the general CYP population (1.0% - 2021 census). The proportion has increased from 1% in March 2020, but has reduced from 2.8% in March 2024.

STARTING TO BE CARED FOR

Our number of children starting to be cared for each year reached a high of 817 in 2018/19. During 2019/20, our number reduced significantly (*by 13%*) and has continued to fall since. Last year, the number of Lancashire children who started to be cared for each year was at the lowest levels seen for over ten years (504 in 2023/24). The number increased in 2024/25 to 570.

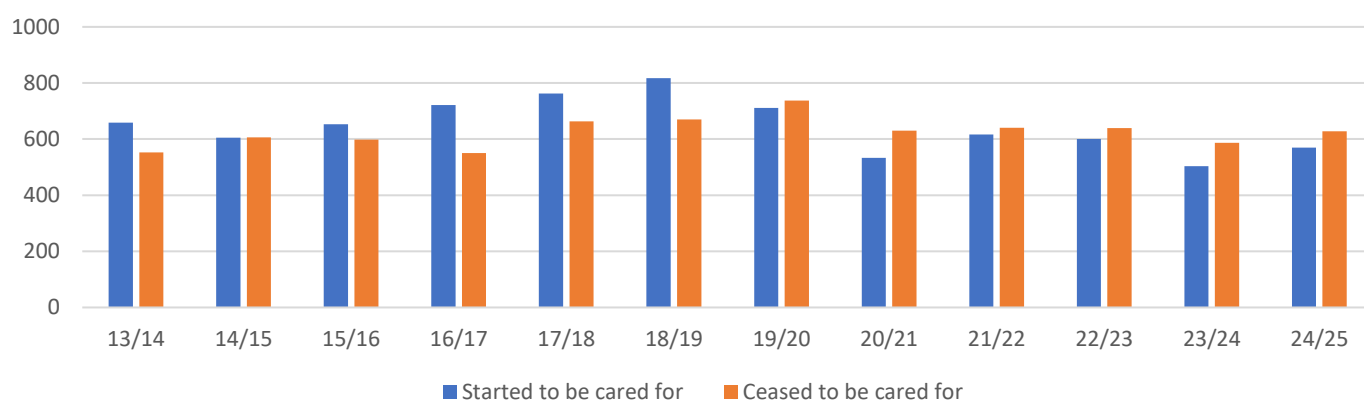


CEASED TO BE CARED FOR

For the last six years (since 2019/20), our number of children who ceased to be cared for has been higher than our number of children who have started to be cared for.

	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Ceased to be CIC	553	606	598	550	663	670	737	630	640	639	587	628
Started to be CIC	659	605	653	722	763	817	711	533	616	601	504	570
Difference in number of CIC	106 more	1 less	55 more	172 more	100 more	147 more	26 less	97 less	24 less	38 less	83 less	58 less

Number of children in Lancashire started to be and ceased to be cared for (2013/24 to 2024/25)



The proportion of our children who ceased to be cared for 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 19% in 2022/23 and 18% in 2023/24 and 2024/25*). The proportion of children who ceased to be cared for because of adoption had reduced significantly (*from 12% to 6% in 2022/23 and 7% in 2023/24*) but has since increased to 11% in 2024/25. The number of children who ceased to be cared for because of a Special Guardianship Order has reduced from 21% in 2020/21 to 13% in 2024/25.

Reason for ceasing to be cared for	% in 19/20	% in 20/21	% in 21/22	% in 22/23	% in 23/24	% in 24/25
Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	17%	21%	19%	16%	18%	13%
Adoption	12%	10%	11%	6%	7%	11%
Return home to parents, either planned or unplanned (no order)	13%	15%	17%	19%	18%	18%

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC)

The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) being cared for by Lancashire County Council increased significantly between 2016 and 2022 but has remained largely stable since then.

YEAR	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
No of LCC USAC	1	12	15	15	17	27	43	44	43	36

As of March 2025, Lancashire County Council was caring for 36 UASC under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and had 133 UASC Care Leavers. Most of the 36 UASC were male – only 4 of the 36 UASC in our care and 2 of the 133 Care Leavers were female. 75% (27) UASC were aged 17 as of 31 March 2025. 6 UASC were aged 16 and 3 were aged 15.

Of the 36 UASC in our care as of 31 March 2025, 23 (64%) were living in semi-independent and supported accommodation type homes. Most of the young people are very self-sufficient and have not required any extra support other than that delivered from universal services. 10 children were living with foster carers, 2 children were living in our in-house children's homes, and 1 child was living in hospital. No UASC were living in agency children's homes.

In the main, we do not struggle to find suitable homes for under 18 UASC. However, it can be challenging to find suitable social/ private rental housing options once Leave to Remain status has been granted.

SECTION 20 AGREEMENTS

Following a family court ruling in 2015 on the use of voluntary agreements, there had been an increase nationally in both the number and proportion of children cared for under a care order, and a decrease in the number and proportion cared for under a voluntary agreement (under section 20 of the Children Act 1989). However, nationally, the proportion of CIC cared for under a voluntary agreement rose from 15% in March 2021 to 19% by March 2024, reflecting the increase in UASC who are usually voluntarily accommodated. Our proportion of CIC cared for under a voluntary agreement also rose (*from 7% in March 2021 to 11.7% in March 2024*). The number of Lancashire children cared for under a voluntary agreement reduced to 9.9% in March 2025.

Most of our CIC who are cared for under a voluntary agreement are aged 16-17 years, although this proportion has fallen from 71.8% in March 2020 to 65.1% in March 2025.

Age range of CIC accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Age Range	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/20	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/21	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/22	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/23	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/24	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/25
0-5 years	9 (5.8%)	8 (5.7%)	10 (6.8%)	17 (9.3%)	20 (9.7%)	12 (7.1%)
6-10 years	5 (3.2%)	6 (4.3%)	3 (2.0%)	2 (1.1%)	12 (5.8%)	10 (5.9%)
11-13 years	10 (6.4%)	10 (7.1%)	7 (4.7%)	10 (5.5%)	10 (4.9%)	8 (4.7%)
14-15 years	20 (12.8%)	22 (15.7%)	29 (19.6%)	32 (17.5%)	37 (18.0%)	29 (17.2%)
16-17 years	112 (71.8%)	94 (67.1%)	99 (66.9%)	119 (65.0%)	127 (61.7%)	110 (65.1%)
TOTAL	156	140	148	183	206	169

Our proportion of Section 20 CIC who are voluntarily accommodated as part of the Homeless Protocol has been steadily falling in recent years, from 30% (47) in March 2020 to 13.0% (22) in March 2025. Our largest proportion of CIC who are voluntarily accommodated are living in supported accommodation/ independent living provision (33.1% - March 2025). Over a quarter (26.6%) of our Section 20 CIC are living in agency children's homes.

Type of home lived in by children who are accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Type of Provision	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/20	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/21	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/22	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/23	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/24	Number and % of s20 CIC at 31/03/25
Agency Leaving Care	44 (28.2%)	44 (31.4%)	35 (23.6%)	57 (31.1%)	52 (25.2%)	32 (18.9%)
Block Supported Accommodation	39 (25%)	17 (12.1%)	16 (10.8%)	18 (9.8%)	28 (13.6%)	24 (14.2%)
Agency Children's Homes	25 (16.1%)	25 (17.9%)	41 (27.7%)	34 (18.6%)	50 (24.3%)	45 (26.6%)
In-House Fostering	20 (12.8%)	26 (18.6%)	22 (14.9%)	20 (10.9%)	24 (11.7%)	20 (11.8%)
Agency Fostering	10 (6.4%)	7 (5%)	15 (10.1%)	21 (11.8%)	14 (6.8%)	12 (7.1%)
In-House Residential	7 (4.5%)	10 (7.1%)	12 (8.1%)	13 (7.1%)	16 (7.8%)	16 (9.5%)
Residential School	7 (4.5%)	4 (2.9%)	5 (3.4%)	3 (1.6%)	3 (1.5%)	3 (1.8%)
Other	4 (2.6%)	7(5%)	2 (1.4%)	17 (9.3%)	19 (9.2%)	17 (10.1%)
TOTAL	156	140	148	183	206	169

LOCATION OF HOMES

Nationally, 55% of CIC live within their home local authority boundaries (*March 2024*). We perform much better than the national average, with 73% (*March 2025*) of our CIC living within Lancashire

County Council's boundaries (81.5% when confidential addresses are excluded). 11.5% of home addresses in March 2025 were recorded as confidential.

Most of our CIC who do not live in Lancashire live in other North West Local Authorities or Yorkshire towns close to the Lancashire border. Our number of CIC living further afield (at a distance) remains low (2% of all CIC - 36 in March 2025).

Despite us having significantly more agency foster carers and Ofsted registered children's homes within our boundaries than local need requires, it can still be challenging to find local agency homes for our children in care, due to the very high number of out of area children being cared for within Lancashire. A lower proportion of children in agency foster care were living in Lancashire in March 2025 compared to March 2024 (68% compared to 70%). However, a higher proportion of Lancashire children in agency Ofsted registered children's homes were living within Lancashire's boundaries in March 2025 compared to March 2024 (76% compared to 68%).

Location	Children living with agency foster carer in March 2024	Children living with agency foster carer in March 2025	Children living in an agency Ofsted registered children's home in March 2024	Children living in an agency Ofsted registered children's home in March 2025
Lancashire	224 (70% excl. confidential addresses)	186 (68% excl. confidential addresses)	129 (68% excl. confidential addresses)	149 (76%)
North West/ Neighbouring	82 (26% excl. confidential addresses)	75 (27% excl. confidential addresses)	57 (30% excl. confidential addresses)	45 (23%)
At a distance	13 (4% excl. confidential addresses)	14 (5% excl. confidential addresses)	3 (2% excl. confidential addresses)	3 (2%)
Confidential	28	25	1	0
TOTAL	347 (319 excl. confidential addresses)	300 (275 excl, confidential addresses)	190 (189 excl. confidential addresses)	197 (197 excl. confidential addresses)

Our largest proportion of children living at a distance from Lancashire are with agency foster carers (39% in March 2025 – 14 children). 9 of the 14 children are living with connected carers, with support being provided to the carers by an agency fostering provider, as the distance is too great for the carers to be effectively supported by Lancashire's in-house fostering service. 3 of the 14 children are living at a distance due to family links in the area. The remaining two children are living in a home at a distance because it was the only one available that could allow the two children (siblings) to remain together.

Our number of children living at a distance in agency children's homes (including homes that are not registered with Ofsted) remains low (5 in March 2025). One of the children is living at a distance due to family links in the area. The rest of the children are living at a distance because a suitable, closer home was not able to be identified that could meet the children's complex physical and/ or mental health needs.

It remains a key priority for Lancashire Children's Services to work effectively with our partners to ensure that children with complex physical and/ or mental health needs can live in a local, good quality, good value home that meets their needs.

Type of Home	Living at a distance (March 20)	Living at a distance (March 21)	Living at a distance (March 22)	Living at a distance (March 23)	Living at a distance (March 24)	Living at a distance (March 25)
Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)	20 (39%)	22 (41%)	19 (34%)	17 (49%)	13 (33%)	14 (39%)
Placed with Parents	10 (20%)	11 (20%)	9 (16%)	2 (6%)	3 (8%)	2 (6%)
Connected Carers	7 (14%)	5 (9%)	6 (11%)	4 (11%)	7 (18%)	9 (25%)
In-House Foster Carer	0%	0%	0%	2 (6%)	2 (5%)	2 (6%)
Family Assessment Centre	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	4 (7%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Agency Children's Homes	3 (6%)	4 (7%)	12 (21%)	4 (11%)	8 (21%)	5 (14%)
Agency Leaving Care	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
OTHER	4 (8%)	8 (15%)	5 (9%)	3 (9%)	5 (13%)	4 (11%)
TOTAL	51	54	56	35	39	36

OUTCOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN IN CARE

Lancashire CIC are:

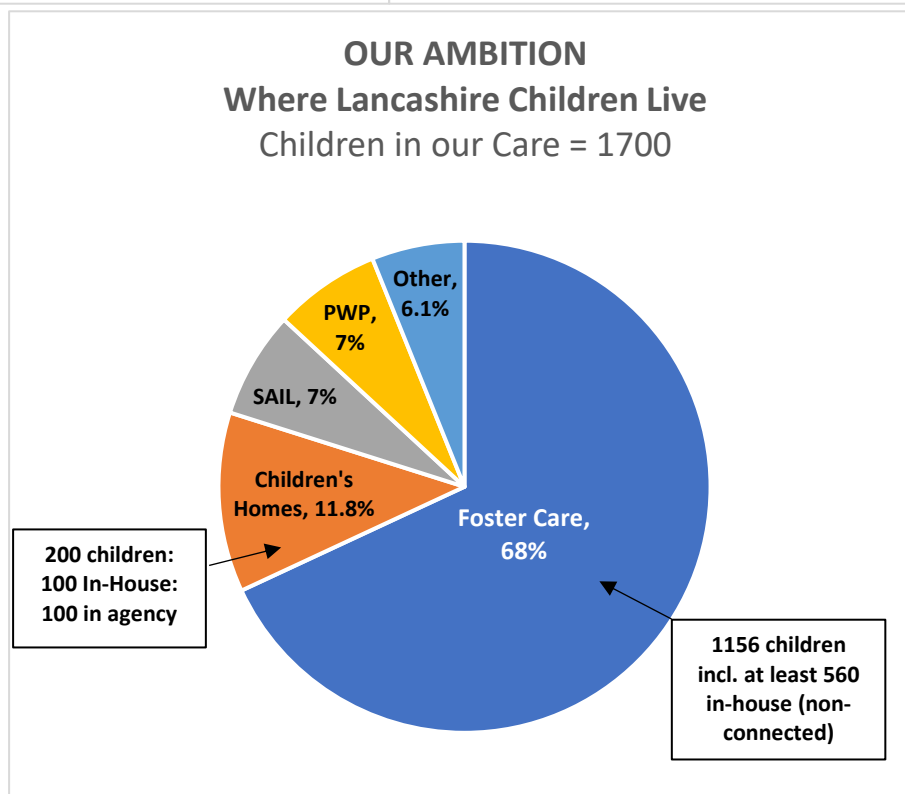
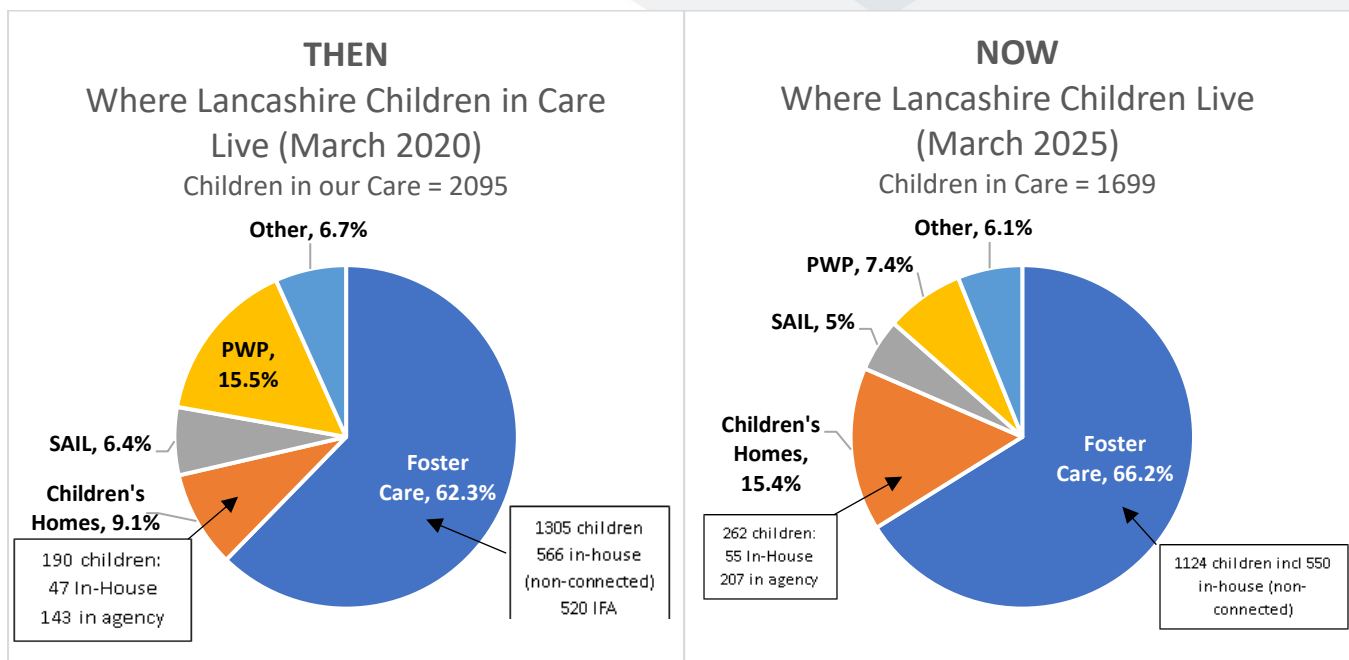
- As likely to reach the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths than statistical neighbours and national averages (2023/24).
- More likely to progress better in school than the national, regional or statistical neighbour averages (2023/24).
- More likely to achieve a higher level of attainment at KS4 than the region or statistical neighbours (2023/24).
- More likely to be suspended from school than statistical, regional neighbours and national averages (2022/23).
- Less likely to have a SEN with an EHCP than the national and statistical neighbours and less likely to have a SEN without an EHCP than the statistical neighbours, regional and national averages (2022/23).
- Less likely than the regional, national and statistical neighbour averages of being subject to a conviction, final warning or reprimand (2023/24).
- More likely than children from regional to achieve a score on the SDQ that is 'slightly higher' and similar to that of England (2023/24).
- More likely to have a missing incident higher than the regional, statistical neighbour and national averages (2023/24).
- Less likely than the national, regional and statistical neighbour averages to have 3 or more homes in a year (2023/24).
- Less likely to be placed 20 miles or more from home than the statistical neighbour or national averages (2023/24).
- More likely than the regional, national and in line with statistical neighbour averages to have been in the same home for 2 years (2023/24).

ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOME AND CURRENT PROVISION

OUR AMBITION

The following charts compare where Lancashire children were living when our number of CIC was significantly higher (March 2020) and where they are living currently (as of March 2025). Some good progress has been made in areas such as bringing our number of children in foster care and placed with parents (PWP) more in line with national averages. However, our ambition is to further increase

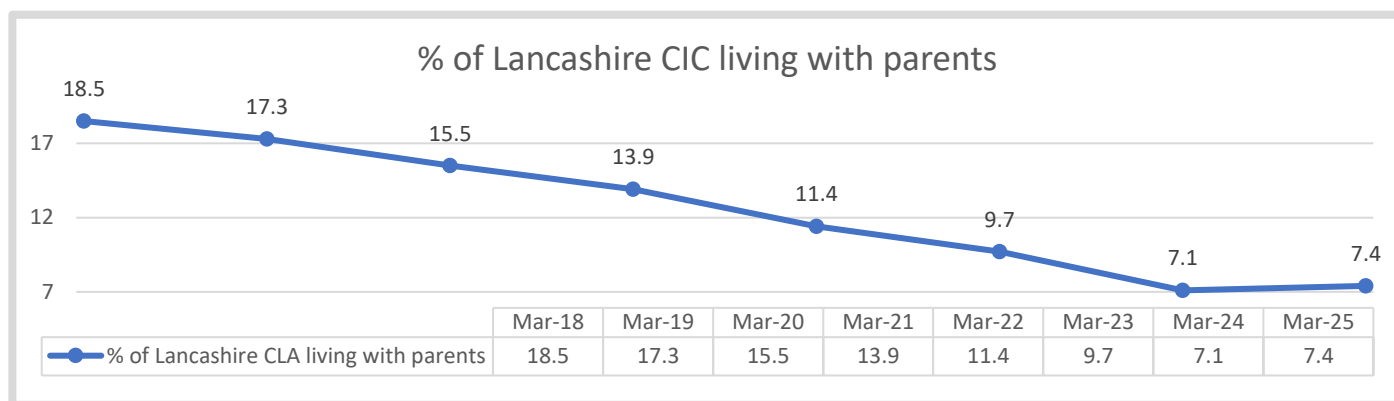
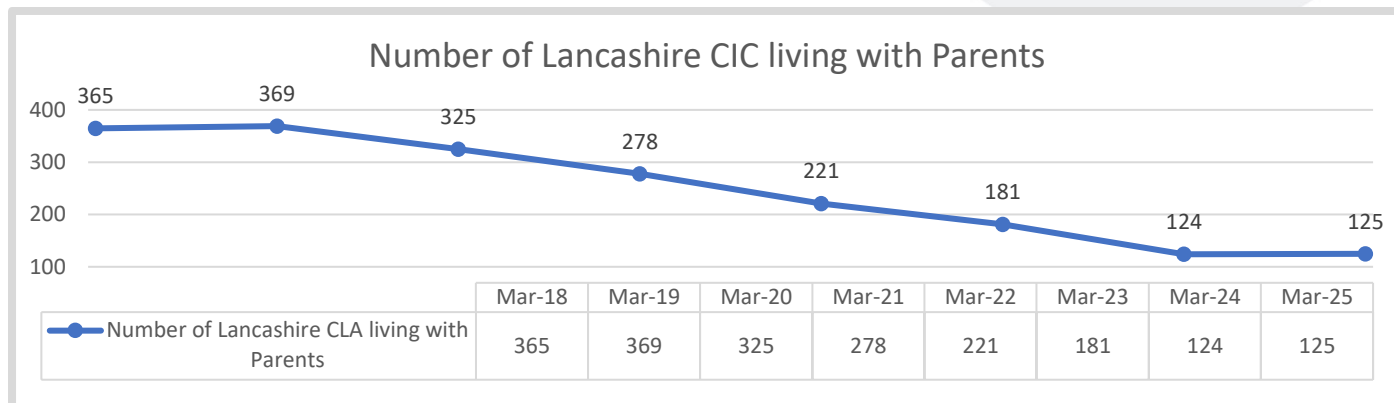
the proportion of children living in a foster home to be better than the national average and to reduce the number of children who are living in a children's home, particularly in agency children's homes.



LIVING WITH PARENTS OR OTHER PERSON WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

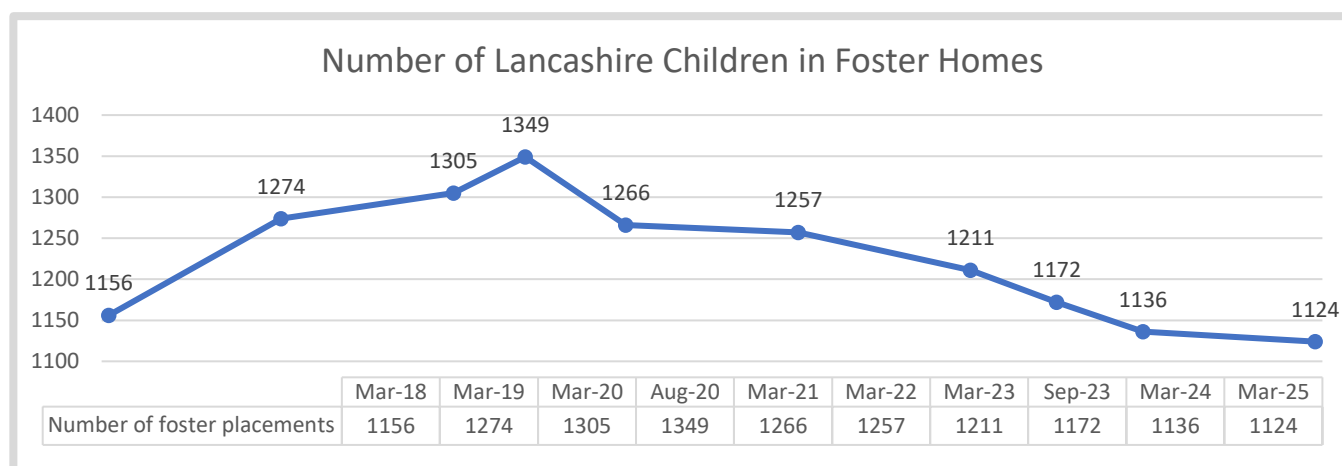
Between 2012 and 2018, there was a significant increase in the number of our CIC living with parents or other person with parental responsibility, with the proportion almost doubling from 9.6% in March 2012 to 18.5% in March 2018. This was significantly higher than the proportion nationally (6% as of March 2018) and higher than the proportion regionally (12.5%).

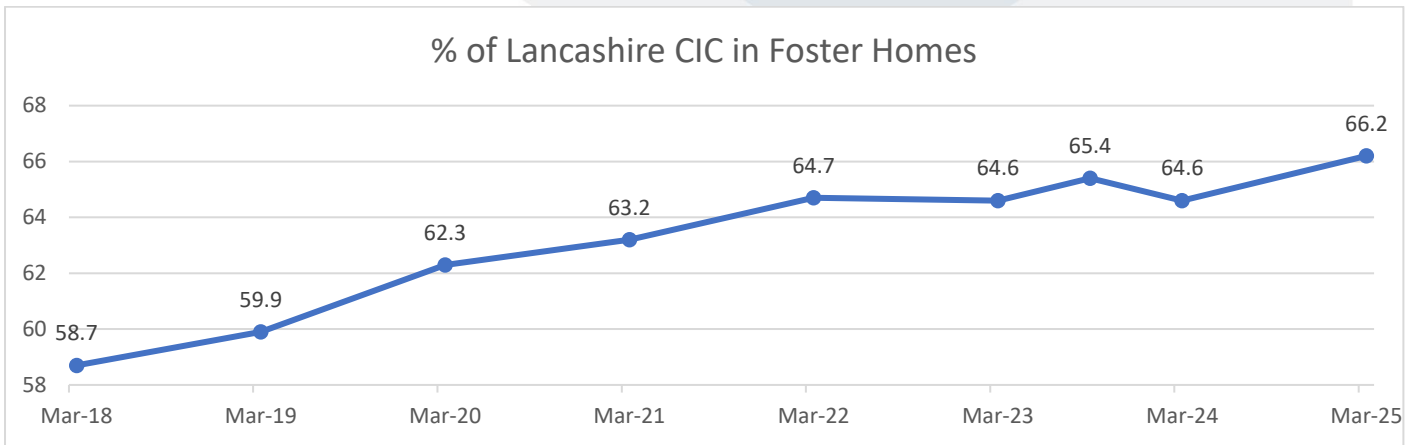
Our targeted work to reduce the proportion of Lancashire CIC living with parents has been successful. As of 31 March 2025, there were 240 less CIC living with parents, compared to March 2018 and the proportion had reduced to 7.4%, much closer to the national average (6% - March 2024).



FOSTER CARE

Nationally, the proportion of children in care living with a foster carer has fallen from 72% in March 2019 to 67% in March 2024. However, during the same period, the proportion of Lancashire children in foster care has steadily increased (from 59.9% to 64.6%), initially due to rising numbers of children in foster homes (*during 2019/20 and the first half of 2020/21*) and latterly due to the number of children in foster homes falling at a slower rate than the number of our CIC overall. By March 2025, the proportion of Lancashire children living in foster care had increased to 66.2%.





Excluding children who live in an address marked as confidential (14.2% of children in foster homes), 82% of Lancashire children living with a foster carer live within Lancashire County Council's boundaries (March 2025). This is the same proportion as in March 2024.

KINSHIP/ CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

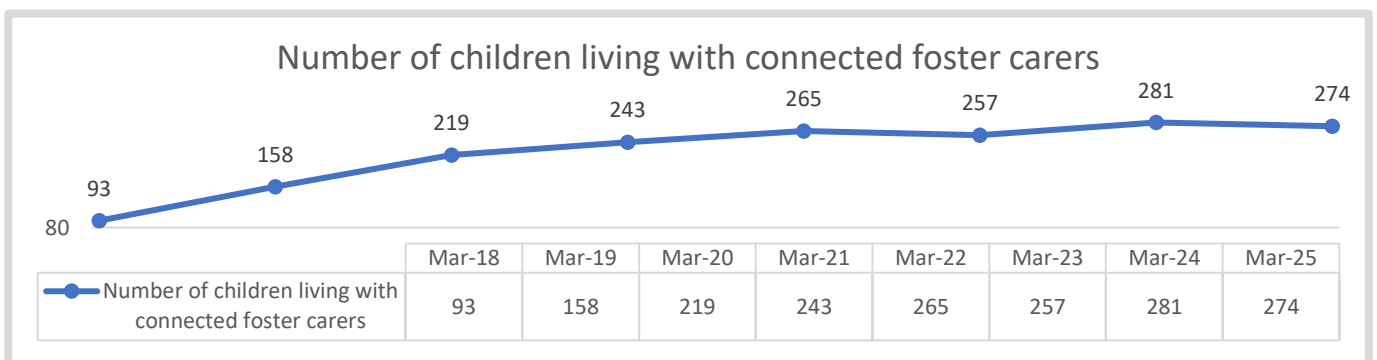
Kinship care is where a child lives with a relative or a close friend, who is not their parent. These carers are often referred to as kinship carers, family and friends carers, or connected carers. Kinship care aims to provide a stable and nurturing environment for children who cannot live with their parents. Kinship carers can include grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, or other relatives, as well as close family friends or neighbours. Research indicates that children in kinship care often experience greater stability and maintain family relationships better than children who live with non-connected carers.

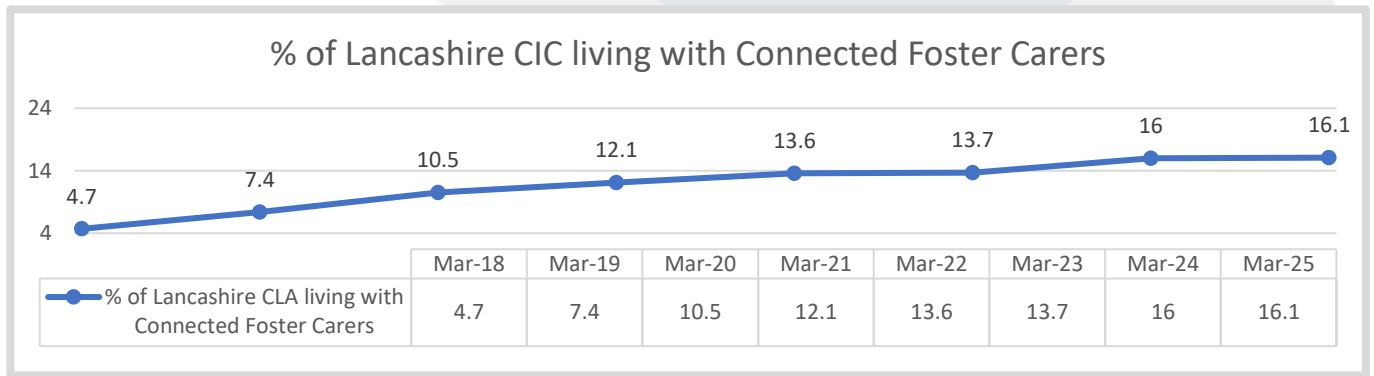
There are various kinship care arrangements, including:

- informal arrangements made between families;
- formal arrangements like Special Guardianship Orders, as an alternative to a child being in care;
- connected foster care arrangements, where the child is in care.

One of our key priorities is to support more children to live with kinship carers as an alternative to coming into care.

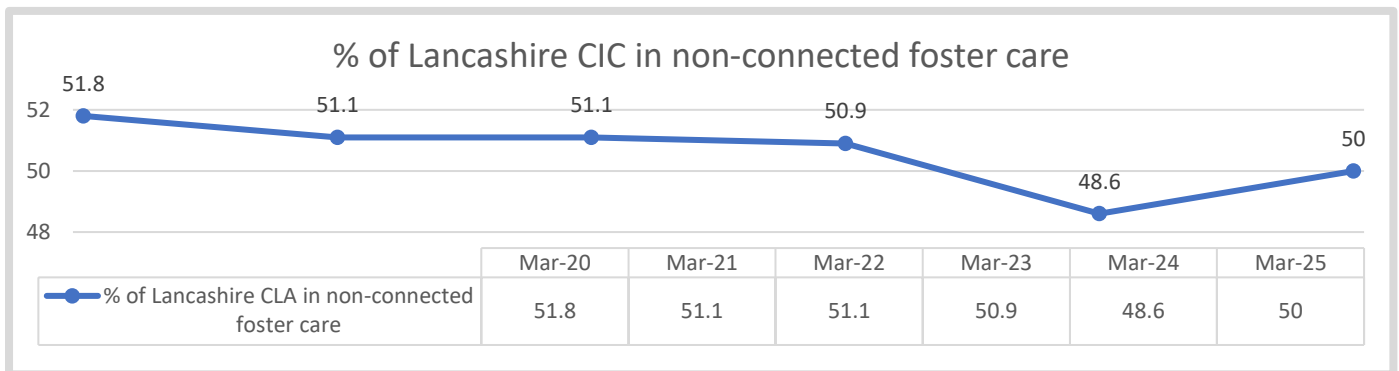
Our number of children in care living with connected foster carers has trebled since 2018. The proportion of our CIC living with a connected carer in March 2018 (4.7%) was significantly below the national average at the time (13%). By March 2025, our proportion had increased to 16.1%, to be in line with the national average (16%) and 24% of Lancashire children in foster care were living with connected carers, also in line with the national average.



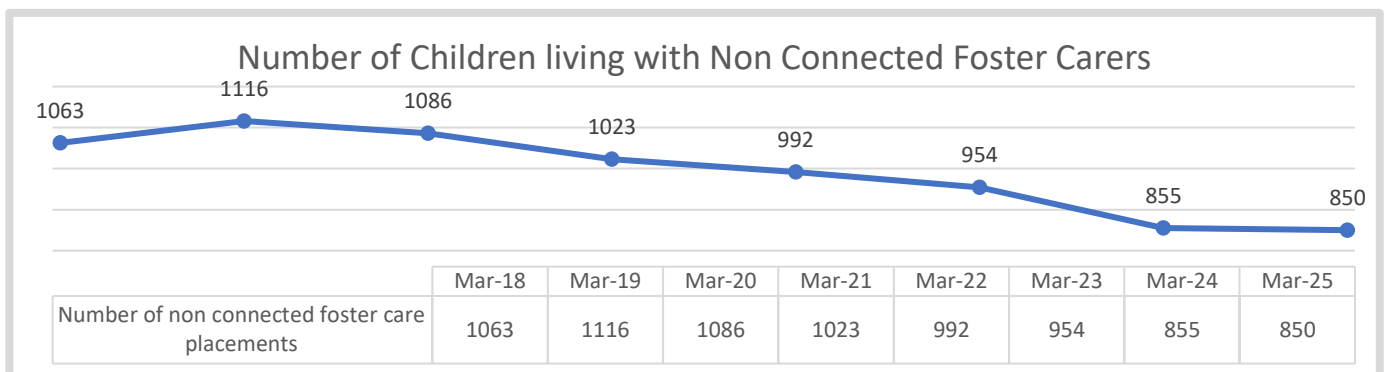


NON-CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

Nationally, the proportion of children in care who are living with non-connected foster carers has been falling (*from 57% in March 2020 to 53% in March 2023*). Our proportion of children living with non-connected carers also fell during the same period but at a slower rate (*from 51.8% in March 2020 to 50.9% in March 2023*). Our proportion fell more sharply in 2023/24 to 48.6% but increased back to 50.0% by March 2025.

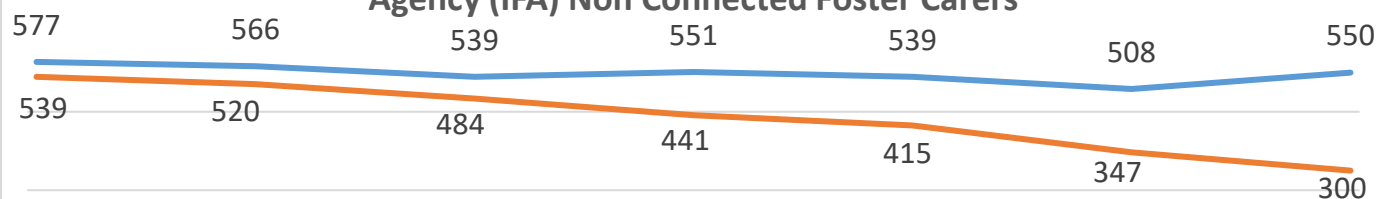


The number of our children living with non-connected foster carers peaked in June 2019 (*at 1121*) but has fallen significantly since (*to 850 by March 2025*). This is mainly because of a significant reduction in the number of children living with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) carers (*239 less children living with IFA carers in March 2025 than in March 2019*). The number of our children living with in-house non-connected foster carers has only reduced by 27 over the same period.



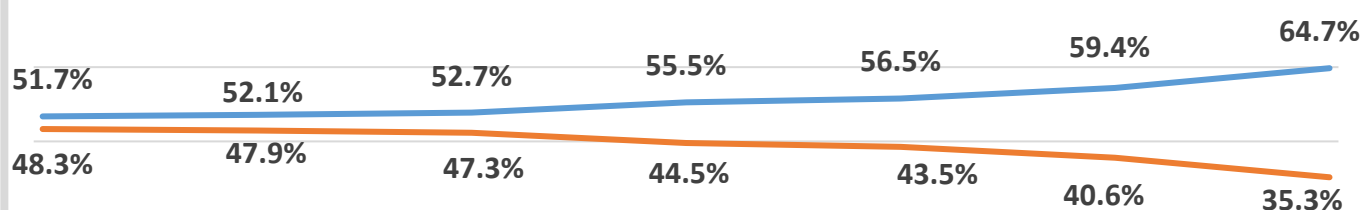
According to The Fostering in England Report (2024), IFAs provide 48% of the homes for children living with non-connected foster carers nationally and this proportion has increased from 42% in 2019. IFAs provide a much lower proportion of homes for Lancashire children living with non-connected foster carers compared to those seen nationally (*35.3% in March 2025, which has decreased from a higher than national average level of 48.3% in 2019*).

Number of Children living with In-house and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Non Connected Foster Carers



	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25
In House non connected carers	577	566	539	551	539	508	550
IFA placements	539	520	484	441	415	347	300

% of Non-Connected Carers (In-House v IFAs)



	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25
In-house	51.7%	52.1%	52.7%	55.5%	56.5%	59.4%	64.7%
IFA	48.3%	47.9%	47.3%	44.5%	43.5%	40.6%	35.3%

Our number of children living with IFA carers has been falling since 2019. Alongside an overall drop in demand for non-connected foster homes for younger aged children (*26% less children aged 0-5 and 43% less children aged 6-10 in March 2025 compared to March 2019*), changes to our home finding processes (introduced in late 2019) are also likely to have had an impact. A clear expectation was set for our in-house fostering service to care for all children aged 0-5 years who required a non-connected foster home (unless the child was part of a large sibling group, there was a significant complex health need, or a parent and child foster home was required). This was extended to all children aged 0-8 in July 2020. As a result, by March 2025, IFAs were caring for only 4.1% of children aged 0-5 years in non-connected fostering (*compared to 25.3% in March 2019*) and 29.3% of children aged 6-10 (*compared to 48.2% in March 2020*).

Number and % of children in non-connected foster homes cared for by IFAs

	0-5 IFA	% 0-5s cared by IFAs	6-10 IFA	% 6-10s cared by IFAs	11+ IFAs	% 11+ cared by IFAs
Mar-19	66	25.3%	150	47.2%	308	59.6%
Mar-20	57	22.9%	144	48.2%	300	58.6%
Mar-21	36	20.7%	121	42.5%	308	57.8%
Mar-22	15	8.5%	96	37.5%	312	58.8%
Mar-23	14	7.4%	98	39.8%	303	58.5%
Mar-24	8	5.1%	83	38.6%	256	52.9%
Mar-25	8	4.1%	53	29.3%	239	50.2%

Overall, between March 2019 and March 2025, there has been an 88% reduction in the number of our children aged 0-5 living with an IFA carer (*compared to a 5% reduction with in-house carers*) and a 65% reduction in the number of children aged 6-10 living with an IFA carer (*compared to a 24% reduction in-house*). During the same period, there has been a smaller reduction in the number

of children aged 11+ living with an IFA carer (*down 22%*) but an increase in children aged 11+ cared for by our in-house carers (*up 13%*).

Number of Lancashire children in non-connected foster homes (in-house v IFAs) 2019 compared to 2025

	Total 0-5s	0-5 In-House	0-5 IFAs	Total 6-10s	6-10 In-House	6-10s IFAs	Total 11+	11+ In-House	11+ IFAs
Mar-19	261	195	66	318	168	150	517	209	308
Mar-25	193	185	8	181	128	53	476	237	239
DIF 2019-2025	68 LESS DOWN 26%	10 LESS DOWN 5%	58 LESS DOWN 88%	137 LESS DOWN 43%	40 LESS DOWN 24%	97 LESS DOWN 65%	41 LESS DOWN 8%	28 MORE UP 13%	69 LESS DOWN 22%

AGENCY FOSTER CARE COSTS

Our annualised spend on agency foster homes has reduced by £7.4m between June 2019 and March 2025 (*from £22.1m to £14.7m*). This largely mirrors the overall fall in children living with IFA carers (*from 553 to 300 - down 253*). The average cost of a child being cared for by an agency foster carer increased from £770 per week in June 2019 to £948 in March 2025. This is in part due the introduction of new commissioning arrangements in 2022, which include an annual fee uplift to IFAs in line with inflation, but is also likely due to an increased proportion of older age children living with an IFA carer which have a higher weekly cost (*a rise from 57% of Lancashire children cared for by IFAs being aged 11+ in March 2019 to 80% in March 2025*) and the increased use of more specialist, higher cost foster homes, which have either enabled a young person to step down from a children's home into fostering or prevented a move into a children's home.

LOCATION OF NON-CONNECTED FOSTER HOMES

66% of our children living with a non-connected carer (both in-house and IFA) live within Lancashire County Council's boundaries (*March 2025*). This is lower than in March 2020 (70%). Excluding children living in confidential addresses, the proportion increases to 80% (March 2025).

Theoretically, we have enough non-connected foster carers to meet need. As of September 2019, the number of CIC placed in non-connected foster homes within Lancashire (1330) was 25% higher than the total number of Lancashire CIC placed in non-connected foster homes (1065). 60% of IFA homes within Lancashire (475) were being used by children from other local authorities, suggesting that there was opportunity to further increase the number of local IFA homes being used for Lancashire children.

Targeted work with IFAs had seen the proportion of Lancashire children in an IFA home within the County Council's boundaries increase - from 61% in March 2020 to 65% in March 2024 (*in both years, there were similar proportions of IFA foster home addresses marked as confidential - 9% and 8%*). However, it is becoming increasingly challenging to find suitable, local agency foster carers and the proportion of children living with an IFA carer in Lancashire has reduced to 62% in March 2025. Excluding confidential address, the proportion of our children cared for by IFAs and living in Lancashire increases to 68% (March 2025). Work with IFAs will continue to explore how greater use can be made of local agency foster homes for Lancashire children.

The majority of the IFA homes lived in by Lancashire children (96% of new homes in 2024/25) are commissioned through either the sub-regional (including Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness) or the Placements North West regional commissioning arrangements. The sub-regional agreement enables a stronger, more collaborative, relationship to be developed with key IFA partners. Greater governance, sufficiency reporting and

aligning provider costs to inflationary pressures that utilises a consistency methodology, has provided our partners with confidence that relationships, a local first principle and quick and appropriate fee decisions are prioritised. This approach has ensured that most of our agency foster homes are commissioned through our preferred contracted route. Only 3 IFA homes in 2024/25 were made with an off-contract provider.

HARD-TO-FIND FOSTER SEARCHES

To maximise the chances of securing suitable foster homes for our children, 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 searches for 0-8 year olds, which are sent initially to in-house only. During 2024/25, over 595 agency foster home requests were sent to providers by Lancashire's Access to Resources Team (ART). The number of requests has fallen from 622 in 2023/24 and 693 the previous year, equating to a 14% reduction in requests since 2022/23. The most common request from Lancashire (53% in 2024/25) is for shorter term task centred care.

The proportion of foster home searches which have been classed as 'hard-to-find' has reduced to 37% from 44% in 2023/24. This is also slightly lower than in 2022/23 (39%). A foster home search is considered to be hard-to-find if it has required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' of providers was required due to a lack of offers from the electronic referral.

Analysis of hard-to-find foster searches in 2024/25 showed that:

- 71% of hard-to-find requests were for children aged 11+ (155 children)
- 16% were for children who were part of a sibling group (of between 2-6) (36 children)
- 8% were searches for permanent foster homes (46 children)
- 30% of the hard-to-find foster home searches in 2024/25 resulted in a young person needing to be placed in a children's home because a foster home had been unable to be found (66 children). This has reduced from 32% (87 children) in 2023/24 but represents significant increases from 20% (53 children) in 2022/23 and 9% (25 children) in 2019/20.
- 12% of all searches were emergency (same day) requests. This is down from nearly a quarter, 24%, in the previous year.

Both Lancashire's Access to Resources Team and Children's Social Care continue to report significant challenges in sourcing foster homes, not just for older aged children or those with more complex needs and behaviours, but also for children aged 8+ for whom previously we may not have struggled to find homes for.

Type of fostering request	% and No. of home search requests received	% and No. of each home search type classed as 'hard to find'
Task Centred foster home (up to 26 weeks)	53% (313)	16% (95)
Permanent foster home	17% (100)	8% (46)
Respite foster home	13% (80)	4% (22)
Parent and child foster home	9% (55)	2% (9)
Step Down into Fostering home	4% (21)	4% (21)
Enhanced foster care home	4% (26)	4% (26)
TOTAL	100% (595)	37% (219)

ENHANCED FOSTER CARE PROVISION

A key priority in Lancashire's Sufficiency Strategy remains to develop and secure enhanced foster care provision, in collaboration with IFA partners, for young people with a long-term plan for fostering currently in residential care (Step Down) or for those young people requiring a more sustained period

of intensive support within their foster home (enhanced care). A target was set to deliver 10 new Step Down into Fostering homes and a further 10 enhanced support arrangements each year.

Step Down into Fostering provision has been included in Lancashire's Fostering Agreements since 2018. Over this period to March 2025, 48 step down homes were made (*6 each year between 2018 and 2020, 10 in 2020/21, 8 in 2021/22, 9 in 2022/23, 7 in 2023/24 and 2 during 2024/25*). An additional home was made pre-framework through the initial pilot phase. The 2 children placed over the previous 12 months were to in-house foster homes so no IFA Step Down homes were secured during 2024/25. Of the 49 homes, 5 were still active in March 2025 and of those that have ended the Step Down support; 20 either remained but as a 'standard' foster care home, moved to another fostering home, remained as Staying Put, transitioned to supported accommodation or returned home. 24 homes were unsuccessful, with the young people moving to residential care, which is lower (51%) than the benchmark success rate of 60%.

In terms of Enhanced Care provision, since being included in the 2022 agreement, 54 enhanced care arrangements have been commissioned (*18 during 2022/23, 20 during 2023/24 and 16 in 2024/25*). Of these, 18 were still in place in March 2025 and of those that have ended 26 young people have either remained with foster carers with the enhancement removed, moved to another enhanced care arrangement, moved to an in-house foster care home, turned 18 or remained as Staying Put. 10 (19%) of the 54 young people have moved to residential care.

Regular forums (where social workers can discuss children's foster care wishes and requirements directly with IFAs) have been facilitated to improve matching as well as providing opportunities to share good practice and intelligence to promote service development.

POLICE AND CRIMINAL EVIDENCE (PACE) FOSTER CARE

This type of foster care is a request made by the police for a child or young person, under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. This can be due to circumstances in the child or young person's home, or due to criminal activity. PACE carers provide care until the morning of the next working day. This could be for a single night or a few nights over a weekend or Bank Holiday.

According to Lancashire Constabulary data, all requests for PACE beds for children living in Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool (including out of area children) in 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 did not result in a PACE bed being provided. Please note that these requests will not solely be for Lancashire children. Data provided by Lancashire's Criminal Youth Justice System (CYJS) is more reflective of demand for PACE beds for Lancashire children:

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of requests for PACE beds (Police data)	50	65	66
Number of requests for PACE beds (CYJS data)	12	15	17
Number of PACE beds provided	0 (police data) 3 (CYJS data)	0	0

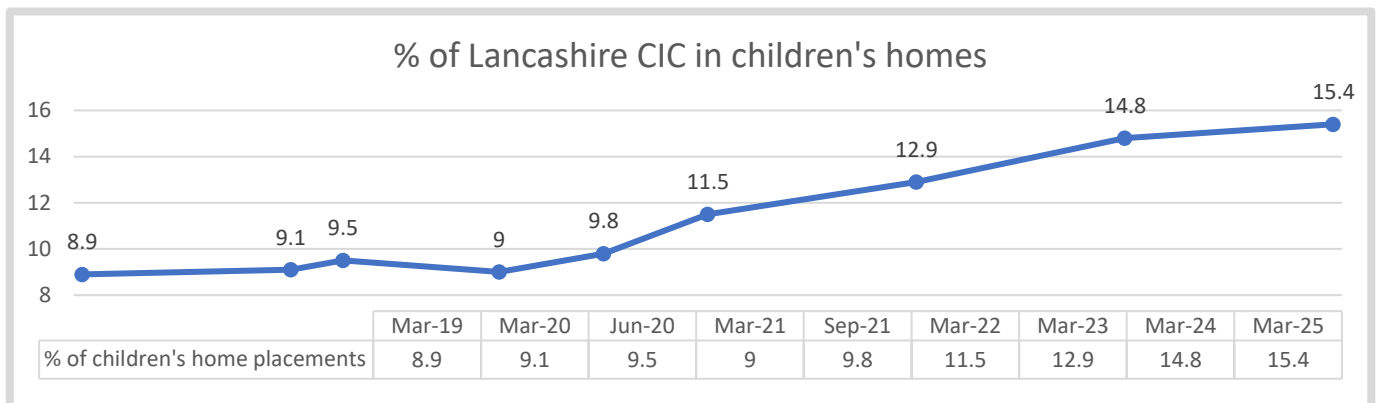
It is challenging to find a PACE foster carer. This is for several reasons:

- Currently Lancashire County Council only has 3 in-house foster carers who will accept PACE referrals, and one of these carers will only accept a request for females.
- The children requiring a PACE bed usually have complex needs and more riskier behaviours.
- Due to the irregularity of this type of request, a PACE foster carer could have their bed empty for most of the year waiting for a PACE request.
- The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) have reported that they can struggle to contact PACE foster carers on occasions.

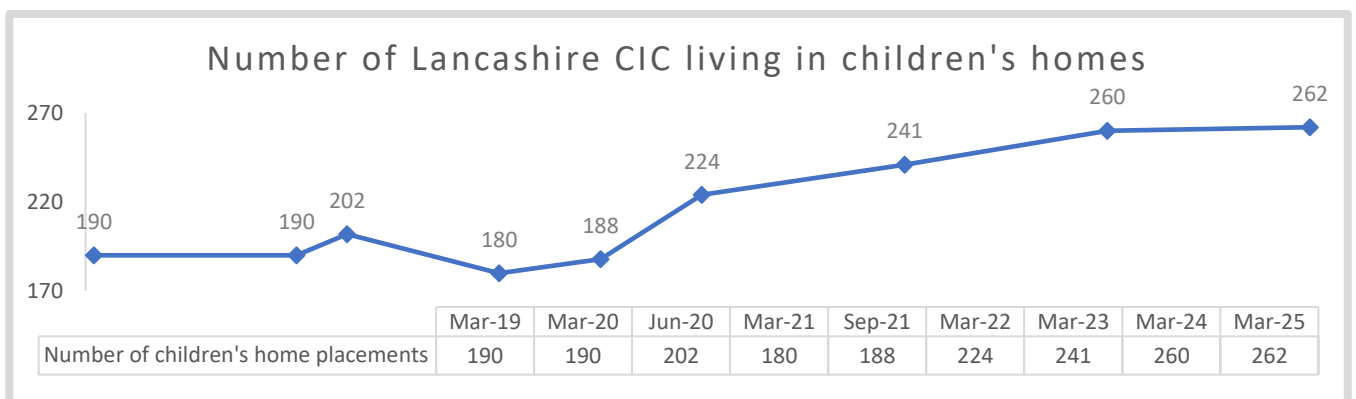
- Some carers do not have availability at the time a PACE bed is required, due to taking other children under other fostering arrangements.
- The cut off period for a request for a bed to a PACE carer is midnight. Some requests continue to be made after midnight and the police has advised that this is often out of their control as it would depend on the length of time for an investigation to take place and the child to be interviewed.
- Some of the requests that have been made for PACE beds have been inappropriate, such as requests for secure PACE beds, which foster carers are not able to provide - this requires a request to a secure children's home.

CHILDREN'S HOMES

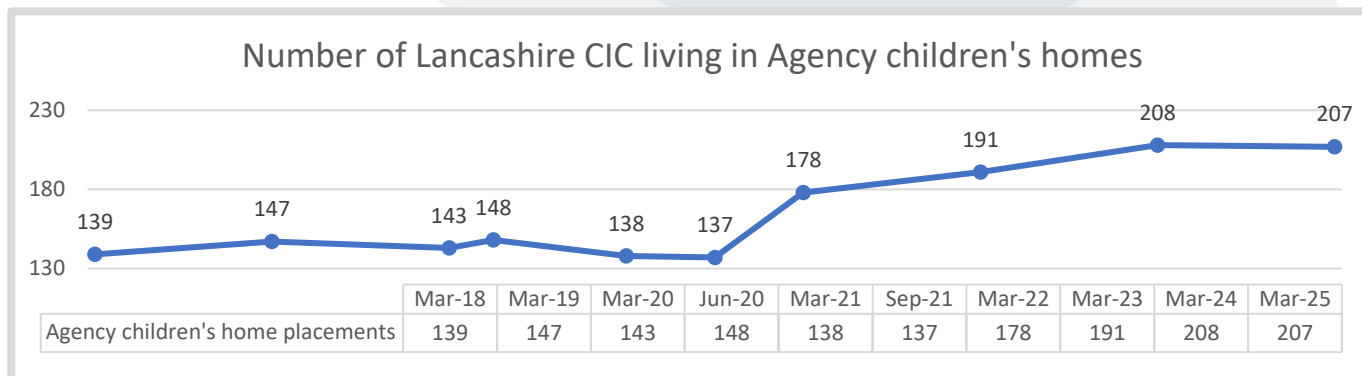
Nationally, 10% of CIC live in a children's home (*March 2024*). Prior to September 2021, the proportion of Lancashire CIC living in a children's home was largely in line with the national average at the time (*9%*). However, since September 2021, the proportion has risen significantly (*to 14.8% by March 2024 and 15.4% by March 2025*).



Prior to September 2021 (except for a brief increase following the end of the initial COVID lockdown period in June 2020), the number of our CIC living in a children's homes remained largely constant (*at around 180-190*), despite significant changes in the overall number of children in care during this period. Since September 2021, the number of Lancashire children living in all types of children's home (including Ofsted registered homes, CQC registered homes and unregistered children's homes) has risen significantly (*from 188 in September 2021 to 262 in March 2025*).



By March 2025, there were 74 more children living in children's homes, compared to in September 2021. Most of the increased demand for children's homes has been met by agency providers, with 70 more children living in agency children's homes in March 2025, compared to September 2021.



MOVES INTO OFSTED REGISTERED CHILDREN'S HOMES

During 2023/24, 126 Lancashire children moved into an agency Ofsted registered children's home. 69% (87) of these children moved into a home within Lancashire's boundaries.

Between October 2024 and March 2025 (6-month period in 2024/25), 51 Lancashire children moved into an agency Ofsted registered children's home. 2 of these children moved into a solo home (4%); 18 children moved into a 2-bed home (35%); 9 moved into a 3-bed home (18%); and 22 children (43%) moved into an agency home that was 4-bed or larger. 90% (46 out of 51) of these children moved into a home within Lancashire. Only one child moved into an Ofsted registered children's home at a distance from Lancashire, which was in line with their care plan.

PROFILE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CHILDREN'S HOMES

A higher proportion of our children who are living in children's homes are male compared to our general CIC population (61% compared to 54%).

	% of children living in children's homes that are male	% of CIC population that is male
March 2020	58%	53%
March 2021	63%	54%
March 2022	60%	54%
March 2023	58%	54%
March 2024	60%	54%
March 2025	61%	54%

In March 2025, 5% (14) of our children who were living in children's homes were aged under 11 (which has increased from 3% in March 2020). 49% (129) of children were aged 11-15 (which has decreased from 63% in March 2020) and 45% were aged 16+ (which has increased from 34% in March 2020).

Number and % of Lancashire CIC living in all types of children's homes by age

AGE	MARCH 2020	% 2020	MARCH 2025	% 2025
UNDER 11	6	3.2%	14	5.3%
11-13 YEARS	39	20.5%	40	15.3%
14-15 YEARS	81	42.6%	89	34.0%
AGED 16+	64	33.7%	119	45.4%
TOTAL	190		262	

HARD-TO-FIND CHILDREN'S HOME SEARCHES

A quarter (25%) of children's home searches during 2024/25 were classed as 'hard-to-find' (*i.e. required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' due to a lack of offers*). This is a reduction from 40% in 2021/22, 43% in 2022/23 and 32% in 2023/24. Most of the hard-to-find searches were for a smaller children's home (homes for 2 or 3 children) with a higher staffing ratio (of at least 1:1), able to meet the needs of children with a higher complexity of need/ behaviours.

Securing homes for children with the following needs/ behaviours is particularly challenging:

- Complex mental health needs
- Criminal behaviours, including high risk of exploitation, damage to property, possession of knives/ weapons, and arson
- Aggression/ violence
- Harmful sexualised behaviours
- Complex Autism
- Children with profound physical and/ or learning disabilities.

LCC INTERNAL CHILDREN'S HOME PROVISION

Lancashire County Council's Children's Home Service currently manages 17 Ofsted registered children's homes, able to care for up to 55 CIC (full time); up to 8 children at any one time in the Supporting and Preventing Additional Care Episodes (SPACE) hubs (edge of care); and up to 12 children at any one time in the overnight short break homes for children with disabilities:

Type of in-house children's home	Number of homes	Number of beds
Large (6-bed) mainstream home	7	42
Smaller (3-bed) home	3	9
Small (2-bed) home	2	4
Supporting and Preventing Additional Care Episodes (SPACE) Hub	2	8
Overnight short break home for children with disabilities	3	12

As of end of March 2025, occupancy within Lancashire's in-house children's homes (excluding the SPACE hubs and overnight short break homes) was 98% and during 2023/24 and 2024/25 the homes regularly operated at 95% occupancy or above.

Due to the continued challenge of securing smaller, more specialist and crisis homes for children with a higher complexity of need/ behaviours, further in-house children's homes are being developed, and existing provision is being repurposed. This is being completed in two waves:

Wave One:

Wave One is underway and, once complete, Lancashire County Council's Children's Home Service will manage 21 homes, able to care for up to 60 CIC (full time), up to 12 children at any one time in the SPACE hubs (edge of care) and up to 12 children at any one time in the overnight short break homes for children with disabilities:

Type of in-house children's home	No. of homes	No. of beds	Expected operational date
Large (6-bed) mainstream home	6	36	Already operating
Smaller (3-bed) home	5	15	3 already operating 2 expected in 2025

Small (2-bed) homes	3	6	2 already operating 1 expected in 2025
Specialist (3 bed) short term home for children with complex mental health needs (collaboration with health)	1	3	Expected in 2025
Supporting and Preventing Additional Care Episodes (SPACE) Hubs – Edge of Care	3	12	2 already operating 1 expected in 2025
Overnight short break home for children with disabilities	3	12	Already operating

Wave Two:

In April 2024, Lancashire County Council's Cabinet approved the further expansion of up to 15 more children's homes, the majority of which being 2-bed homes. This would deliver up to 40 additional in-house children's home beds, increasing our overall number of beds up to 100. The expansion programme will be reviewed after the delivery of the first 9 homes and two Pause and Reflect (crisis) beds to determine whether the remaining beds are required.

AGENCY CHILDREN'S HOME PROVISION

Children's homes are not evenly distributed across England. Over a quarter of all children's homes are in the North West of England (26.5% as of 24 March 2025).

Theoretically there are more than enough Ofsted registered agency children's homes within Lancashire to meet our demand. Lancashire has the largest number of children's homes within our area than any other local authority in England. 8% of children's homes in England and 31% of children's homes in the North West are in Lancashire County Council's boundaries, with most operated by agency providers (330 out of 347 as of 24th March 2025). The number of Ofsted registered homes operating in Lancashire is increasing at a higher rate than nationally - a 54% increase in Lancashire (March 2023 to March 2025) compared to a 31% increase nationally.

Local Authorities with the Highest Number of Ofsted Registered Children's Homes in their area	Number of Ofsted Registered Children's Homes (March 2023 Ofsted Register)	Number of Ofsted Registered Children's Homes (March 2025 Ofsted Register)	DIFFERENCE (Mar 23 and Mar 2025)
Lancashire	226	347	Up 121 (Up 54%)
Staffordshire	149	197	Up 48 (Up 32%)
Kent	94	107	Up 13 (Up 14%)
Shropshire	78	85	Up 7 (Up 9%)
Birmingham	73	94	Up 21 (Up 29%)
Leicestershire	64	88	Up 24 (Up 38%)
Derbyshire	62	79	Up 17 (Up 27%)
TOTAL IN ENGLAND	3209	4209	Up 1000 (Up 31%)

In February 2025, half of all children's homes in our area were in four district council areas: Fylde, Wyre, Lancaster and Preston. The significant growth in Fylde and Wyre is very likely to be because of the planning changes implemented by Blackpool Council, which has pushed the opening of new homes over the border into neighbouring Lancashire districts.

80% of new homes (that have opened in Lancashire in the last two years and were still operational in February 2025) are in five districts: Fylde, Wyre, Preston, South Ribble and Chorley.

DISTRICT	No. of Ofsted Children's Homes (March 2023)	No. of Ofsted Children's Homes (Feb 2025)	Difference (Mar 2023 to Feb 2025)
Fylde	24	51	Up 27 (Up 113%)
Wyre	23	44	Up 21 (Up 91%)

Lancaster	29	33	Up 4 (Up 14%)
Preston	22	39	Up 17 (Up 77%)
Rossendale	26	30	Up 4 (Up 15%)
West Lancs	26	28	Up 2 (Up 8%)
South Ribble	15	30	Up 15 (Up 100%)
Chorley	14	27	Up 13 (Up 93%)
Burnley	13	16	Up 3 (Up 23%)
Hyndburn	13	19	Up 6 (Up 46%)
Pendle	10	14	Up 4 (Up 40%)
Ribble Valley	4	5	Up 1 (Up 25%)
TOTAL	226	336	Up 117 (Up 54%)

According to the Ofsted Register of Children's Homes (March 2025), there were up to 980 registered places in agency children's homes in Lancashire. However, as of 31 March 2025, only 149 Lancashire children were living in an agency Ofsted registered children's home in Lancashire - which equates to only 15% of agency children's homes beds in Lancashire being used to care for Lancashire children.

Only 34% of agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire (*113 out of 330*) had Lancashire children living there in March 2025. 96 agency providers operated children's homes in Lancashire in March 2025, but only 42 of these providers (*44%*) were caring for Lancashire children.

In March 2025, 45 of our children were living in an agency Ofsted registered children's home outside of Lancashire (*44 in the North West, 1 in a neighbouring town in Yorkshire and 3 at a distance – in Staffordshire, Wolverhampton and Berkshire*).

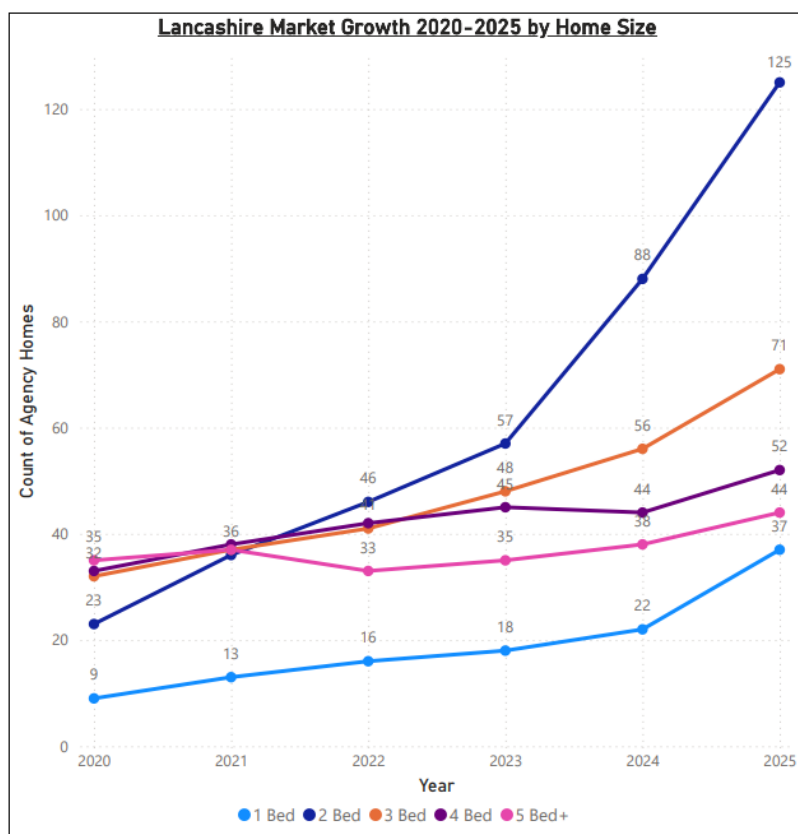
Lancashire Children's Services is clear that there are too many homes in our area that are not caring for Lancashire children, and we do not need any more homes that do this in Lancashire. **Any provider who is considering opening a new home in Lancashire is encouraged to speak to Lancashire's Access to Resources Team (ART) so plans can be fully understood. Failure to do this is likely to result in Lancashire Children's Services not supporting a planning application.**

SIZE OF AGENCY CHILDREN'S HOME IN LANCASHIRE

The number of 2-bed children's homes in Lancashire grew sharply between 2023 and 2025 (*from 57 to 125*). 38% of agency children's homes in Lancashire are 2-bed homes (*March 2025*). As a result, we are now finding that we are regularly receiving multiple offers for these types of homes from agency providers for our children. Offers are considered in ascending order of cost, and therefore less cost-effective homes are less likely to be considered. We are also finding that some providers are offering their 2-bed homes for children that we do not consider require such a home.

Due to this, very careful consideration will be given to whether an agency 2-bed home will be supported by Lancashire Children's Services at planning stage. Any provider who is considering opening a new 2-bed home in Lancashire is encouraged to speak to Lancashire's Access to Resources Team (ART) so plans can be fully understood. Failure to do this is likely to result in Lancashire Children's Services not supporting a planning application.

As of March 2025, 22% of agency homes in Lancashire were 3-bed children's homes (71 homes) and 11% were solo children's homes (37 homes). 29% of children's homes in Lancashire were homes able to care for 4 or more children (96 homes).



SOLO CHILDREN'S HOMES

Solo children's homes will only be used for Lancashire children in very specific circumstances and would not usually be a child's long-term plan. Solo homes will only be considered for a very small cohort of our children, whose needs have been assessed as very high risk at that time, with the impact being such that other children could not safely live alongside them, or because this would further increase the risk to the child. Children who need a solo home tend to be in a period of crisis, with frequent incidents of concern and daily worries for the child's safety and well-being. However, children do not tend to remain with such level of need in the longer term, and with the right care and intervention, we expect to see levels of risk reduce and for children to make progress. Solo homes are considered periods of intervention whilst children receive the necessary support to reduce risk and to move on to their longer-term home.

To reduce the need for a child to experience an additional move, our preference would be to place a child who requires to live on their own into a home that could in the future support another child to move in (i.e. the first child into a dual home).

In March 2025, there were 37 solo children's homes in Lancashire. Most of these homes were not caring for Lancashire children. Therefore, Lancashire County Council's Children's Services is very unlikely to support any further solo children's homes being opened in Lancashire.

CHILDREN'S HOME COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

Our primary route to market for agency children's homes is Lancashire's own children's home commissioning arrangements (Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System – PDPS) which commenced in August 2022. These arrangements enable closer, more collaborative working with children's home

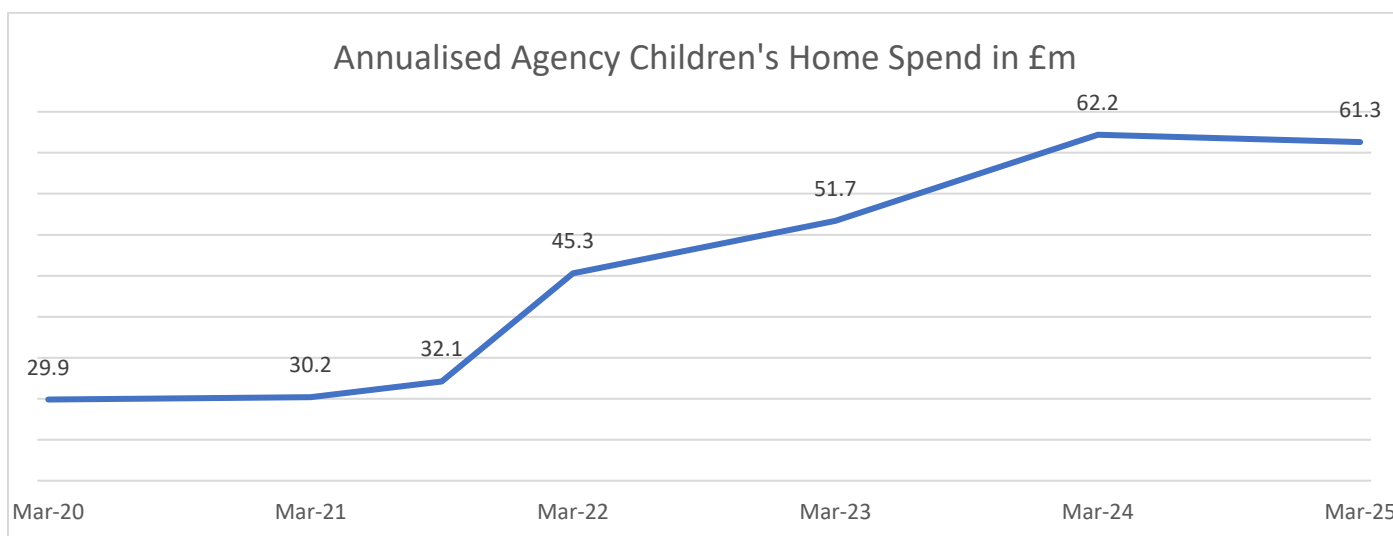
providers to increase the use of local homes for Lancashire children. All eligible children's home providers are encouraged to join these arrangements (which are opened regularly to new applicants). Any eligible provider who is interested in working in an even more collaborative way to increase the use of local homes for Lancashire children is encouraged to apply to be on Tier 1.

Lancashire County Council is also named on the regional Placements North West Dynamic Purchasing System, which is used to source children's homes not able to be found through our own children's home commissioning arrangements.

In February 2025, 72% (142) of our children living in agency Ofsted registered children's homes were being cared for in homes delivered by providers who were part of Lancashire's children's home commissioning arrangements. 15% (29 children) were living in homes delivered by providers who were part of the Placements North West commissioning arrangements. 14% (27 children) were being cared for by off-contract providers, who were not part of either the Lancashire or regional commissioning arrangements.

AGENCY CHILDREN'S HOME COSTS

The amount we spend annually on agency children's homes rose significantly between September 2021 and March 2024, almost doubling from £32.1m to £62.2m. This was due to both an increased number of children living in an agency children's home and a significant rise in the average weekly cost of these homes. The amount we spend on agency children's homes reduced to £61.3m in March 2025, despite having a similar number of children living in these homes.



Since 2022, we have embedded the national benchmarking tool, CareCubed, into our processes. This has given us a much better understanding of agency fees, what constitutes a fair cost of care and has been used to inform our decision-making. According to analysis undertaken by Placements North West (on behalf of the 24 North West local authorities), the average weekly cost paid by the region in March 2025 for a child to live in an Ofsted registered agency children's home was £6,324. Our average weekly cost of an Ofsted registered agency children's home was £793 below this regional average (£5,531) in March 2025.

In March 2025, seven Lancashire children were living in high-cost agency Ofsted or CQC registered children's homes (costing Lancashire County Council £7,500 or more per week), compared to 19 Lancashire children in March 2024.

UNREGISTERED CHILDREN'S HOMES

A policy on the use of crisis and unregulated homes was introduced in Lancashire in January 2020. This policy outlines the risk mitigations in place to ensure that all steps are taken to avoid children and young people living in unregistered homes (i.e. homes that are not registered with Ofsted but should be).

Where the difficult decision must be made for a child to live in an unregistered home, weekly robust, Director level oversight is in place to ensure that the child is safe and everything is being done to find a suitable, regulated home as soon as possible.

Our use of unregistered children's homes reduced significantly in 2024/25.

SECURE WELFARE HOMES

Our usage of secure welfare provision is low, in part due to low demand locally. However, when a secure children's home has been required for a Lancashire child, it has been challenging to identify one due to high demand nationally. In March 2025, one Lancashire child was living in a secure children's home in Scotland.

FAMILY ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Our use of residential family assessment centres had more than doubled between 2017 to 2022, with 22 children living in family assessment centres in March 2022 (*compared to 10 in 2017*). In March 2024, the number of children living in family assessment centres had reduced to 16 and in March 2025 the number had reduced back down to 10.

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 living outside of Lancashire (89%). This reduced to 50% by March 2022 and to 25% by March 2023. By March 2024, the proportion of children living outside of Lancashire in family assessment centres had reduced to 19%, with only one child needing to live at a distance (*in South Yorkshire*). By March 2025, only one child was living in a family assessment centre outside of Lancashire, in a neighbouring local authority (10%).

Residential family assessment centres are not homes that we find difficult to source for our children in care and therefore are not considered to be an identified gap in local provision. Therefore, it is very unlikely that Lancashire Children's Services would support a planning application for such a home.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The number of our children living in a residential school has remained stable. In March 2023, March 2024 and March 2025, 14 Lancashire children were living in a residential school.

More children are now living in residential schools in Lancashire in 2025 than in 2022. In March 2022, 39% of children in a residential school were living in Lancashire and the rest were living in other North West Local Authorities or a neighbouring Yorkshire town. In both March 2023 and March 2024, 43% were living in Lancashire and the rest in other North West Local Authorities (with the exception of 1 child living in County Durham in March 2024). In March 2025, 54% of children in a residential school were living in Lancashire.

16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION/ INDEPENDENT LIVING (SAIL) HOMES

There are approximately 175 young people who are in the care of the Authority who turn 18 each year and require a transitional home at some stage between the age of 16 and 18 to support their pathway to a long-term stable home. This slight reduction on last year's figures can be attributed to CIC figures reducing.

The number of young people starting to be cared for who were aged 16-17 during 2024/25 remained at a similar level as 2023/24. (*74 young people, having reduced from 89 in 2023/24*). The proportion each year who started to be cared for after under section 20 through the 16/17 Joint Homeless Protocol has slightly increased to 35% (*from 31% during 2023/24 from 33% in each of the years to 31st March 2023 and 31 March 2022*).

The number of 16/17 year olds who are in our care is lower than in the previous two years, hence the proportion who live in supported accommodation type services has slightly reduced:

As at 31 st March	Total no. 16/17 year olds	No. in supported accommodation	% in supported accommodation
2025	402	84	21%
2024	424	116	27%
2023	395	124	31%
2022	367	108	29%
2021	375	112	30%

SAIL COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

One of our key objectives is to ensure that young people have a broad range of housing options available to them. From 1st November 2024, we recommissioned our supported accommodation homes (*referred to as core services homes*) and have an enhanced and varied offer across the county. Supported accommodation contracts have been commissioned through a block contract arrangement and additional provision has been included to ensure the right home for young people as they navigate their way towards independence.

Across the county, there are a total of 387 beds that have been commissioned. Currently, due to mobilisation timescales, a total of 343 units are available. Services including supported lodgings in central districts, a new 24/7 building- based provision in Burnley and dispersed homes with visiting support in north and central districts are being developed.

Overall, breakdown below illustrates new arrangements;

- 24/7-staffed building-based accommodation- 236
- Visiting support – a mix of building-based and dispersed- 121
- Supported Lodgings- 30 (an increase on the previous arrangements and spread across all districts)

Included with the offer above is specific support to young pregnant females and teenage families. This includes one building- based provision and dispersed properties with visiting support across central and north localities. There is already a very well-established service that covers east districts which has increased slightly from 11 to 14 units.

ACCESSING SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

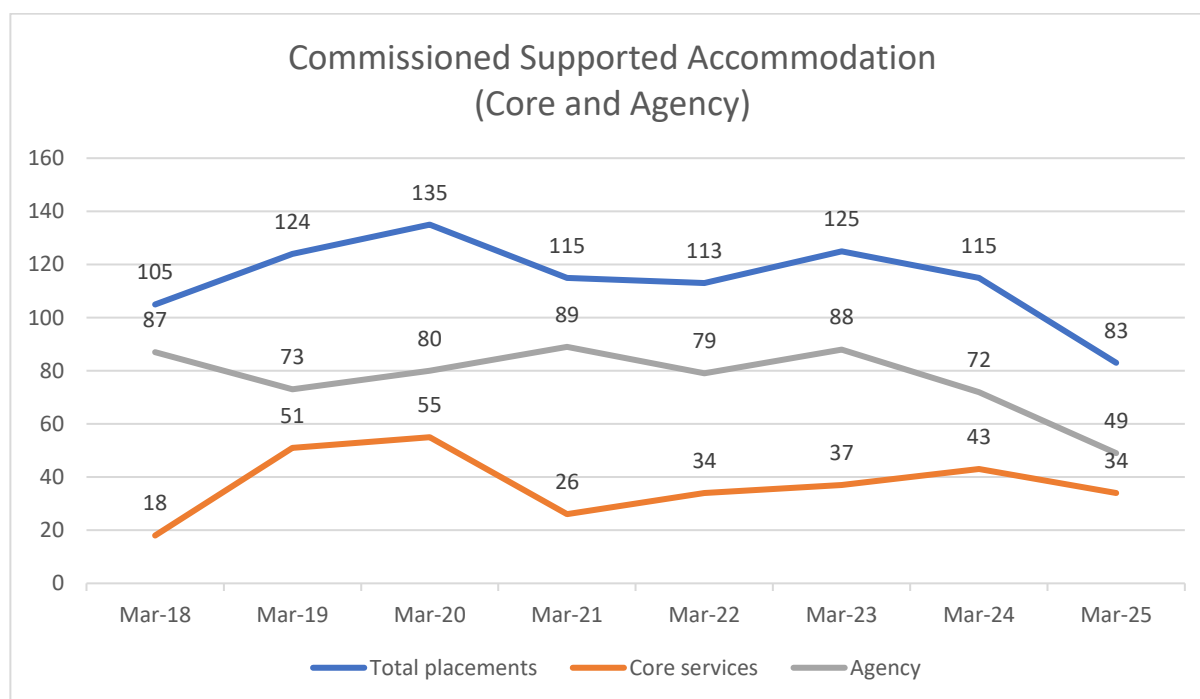
Under the 16/17 Joint Homeless Protocol, the core accommodation services can be accessed by young people aged 16-21^[1] for up to 2 years. This includes children who are in our care, 18+ care leavers and young people who are assessed under the Homeless Protocol. One of the key objectives identified in the Lancashire Sufficiency Strategy was to prioritise access for 16/17-year-olds (both care leavers and young people presenting as homeless). This is a continued priority and will be strengthened through the refreshed 16/17 Joint Homelessness Prevention Protocol, due to be published in the summer of 2025.

When a suitable core supported accommodation home cannot be sourced either due to availability or because of the individual needs of a young person, homes are sourced through the North- West regional Flexible Purchasing System (FPS).

During 2024/25, the Access to Resources brokerage team received 557 referrals for supported accommodation searches, a small increase compared to 2023-24 (574 referrals).

Of the 557, 344 (61%) were for young people aged 16-17.

During the period 2024- 25, 229 (62%) successful placements were made, compared to 224 in 2023- 24. Of the placements, 143 young people (62%) were able to secure a home with one of our core services providers.



At 31st March 2025, there were 83 children living in SAIL homes, of which 41% were living in homes delivered by for core services providers. Whilst the proportion is higher than last year (37%), it is relevant to note that the proportion of children in our care is lower than last year. It is also worth noting that the smaller number of 16/17 years in core services is due to the move on challenges being experienced by young people already living in the services who are ready to move on.

^[1] Up to age 25 in some circumstances

The regional FPS was established in 2023, following the introduction of the Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 and Quality Standards, and currently includes 75 providers, a small increase from last year (74). 19 of these providers operate in Lancashire.

The FPS is currently open for tender, and the process will be completed in the summer of 2025. Alongside our plans for our core provision with several new services mobilising, it is expected that there is sufficient capacity in Lancashire to meet local need.

The success of the current commissioning arrangements is evident:

31 Dec 2024 Occupancy Data				
Capacity	Occupied	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
343	335	176	72	30
% of occupied total		63%	23%	11%

- The above table demonstrates capacity and occupancy by young people's priority status. Due to new contracts mobilising on 1st November 2024, data does not show the full quarter. The table above describes the occupancy levels for the number of mobilised units on 31 Dec 2024 which stood at 343 which demonstrates a positive trajectory. This is out of a total of 387 units which will be available once mobilised.
- Strong relationships have been built with Core Providers by the SAILs ART Brokerage Team. The SAILs ART team is now fully staffed which will ensure a greater focus on contract monitoring and quality assurance. Supported Accommodation Commissioners continue to work with providers to ensure that new contracts are fully mobilised.

In addition to commissioned services, Lancashire established its House Project in 2022 through which cohorts of CIC aged 16/17 join the project each year. The project in Preston is progressing well and further future homes are being identified in surrounding parts of Preston. With the support of four local registered social landlords, nine young people have moved into social housing accommodation during 2024- 25. The service is looking to increase the number of landlords and homes so that up to 20 young people can benefit from this opportunity in the future.

Funding has been secured to scale up a second project in the east of the county and plans are developing to explore additional homes in Burnley and the surrounding areas with Registered Social Landlords within their housing districts.

Some of the key challenges faced in sourcing supported accommodation and independent living homes for young people include:

- Lancashire has a lower proportion of local authority owned housing and a lower proportion of social housing compared to similar large authorities. Lancashire's District Housing Authorities continue to experience unprecedented demand for housing (e.g. increased homeless presentations and insufficient temporary accommodation and affordable move on options to meet need). Delayed move on options for young people ready to leave supported accommodation continues to have a significant negative impact on the availability of our core provision for high priority young people.

- There is a significant issue within districts whereby there are not enough 1- and 2-bedroom properties which would be suitable for young people in terms of affordability and location.
- The increase in demand for social and private rented housing means that young people struggle to secure a suitable, long-term affordable home when ready to live independently. The cost of private rented accommodation can often be higher than the prevailing Local Housing Allowance rates adding to the challenges that young people face. There was a longer-term challenge in that there hasn't been a wide enough range of suitable provision across the county. In light of the new offer, the core supported accommodation offer has been enhanced with a wider range of service type available across the majority of districts. Previously, in some districts, supported lodgings and dispersed homes with visiting supported had been available. This has been increased across all districts and providers are being supported by Commissioners to mobilise throughout 2025. Referrals are already increasing for supported lodgings in the central districts, including Preston and the number of host householders being recruited is on a positive trajectory.
- Spot-commissioned homes are typically higher cost than core services and cannot be self-funded by young people post-18. Spot-commissioned homes also create a further move for young people that is dictated by age rather than the preparedness of the young person. Furthermore, these provisions are not recognised as supported accommodation within the allocation policies of the Choice Based Lettings Schemes, meaning that young people are not prioritised under the banding system- further exacerbating the move-on challenges.
- Utilisation of our supported lodgings services continues to be much lower than would be expected for the size of Lancashire. However, focused promotional work is taking place to raise awareness about the benefits of the service and to target recruitment of host householders.

To address some of the challenges:

- Through focused work in recommissioning and increasing our offer, we have been able to ensure more young people can access Core Services rather than framework providers which ensures young people can remain in their homes post 18. This increases their chances of maintaining a successful tenancy when they move towards independence.
- Through the multi-agency Housing Reference Group, our partnership work with District Housing authorities is seeking to ensure that:
 - The Care Leaver Homelessness Protocol will be revised, with agreement from District partners to ensure that priority to care leavers is consistent across all parts of the county
 - The principles and joint working practices outlined in the refreshed 16/17 Joint Homelessness Prevention Protocol are agreed and embedded.
 - The housing needs of Care Leavers are considered in their strategic housing planning and building applications.
- Locality Cluster Group meetings are commencing in 2025 to bring together local providers and representatives from Children's Social Care, including Permanence and Leaving Care. These will take place in Care Leaver Hubs across the county. Leaving Care Services will be bringing the previous Lasting Homes Panel into the Hubs to ensure consistency. Emphasis in this groups will be on reviewing local trends and issues and what solutions can be put in place to ensure young people are able to live in the district/ home they wish.

- Core Providers are supported at a regular Provider Forum to share learning, experiences and best practice. The forum is well attended and includes representatives from the Permanence and Leaving Care teams and the Leaving Care Housing Officers. The Forum provides space for learning, identify areas of development and strengthen relationships between providers and Children's Services.
- Support to UASC young people is being provided by the Refugee Integration Team to Core Providers to ensure that they are confident to deliver support to separated migrant young people from a wide range of backgrounds. This includes cultural awareness sessions, in addition to an overview of the Home Office processes.
- The new Separated Children and Families with No Public Funding Team is being recruited for in Spring 2025, comprising 1 Team Manager and 4 Social Workers. This team will work closely with our services.

COMMISSIONING PRIORITIES

PREVENTION

We will continue to strive to support families to remain together where it is safe, and in a child's best interest to do so. We strive to do this in the least interventionist way possible - responding to the needs of children, young people, and their families as quickly and early as possible, providing the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

We will do this by:

- Continuing to deliver the Family Safeguarding Model;
- Implementing the Contextual Safeguarding Model;
- Continuing to deliver the multi-agency Early Help strategy;
- Continuing to deliver effective Family Group Conference support;
- Supporting more children to live with kinship carers instead of coming into care;
- Expanding and remodelling our Outreach Service and Supporting and Preventing Additional Care Episodes (SPACE) Hubs to further improve our offer to families of children and young people on the edge of care;
- Ensuring clear pathways for families to access Prevention and Diversion support in the Child and Youth Justice Service when the risk of entering care is linked to a risk of also entering the criminal justice system;
- Continuing to deliver the Safe Families for Children approach, which provides additional support for families of children on the edge of care;
- Continuing to work with partner agencies to ensure that the right children receive the right service at the right time;
- Prioritising prevention activity within the 16/17 Joint Homelessness Strategy, in partnership with third sector organisations and internal Local Authority services.

FOSTER CARE

Overall, we aim to **increase the proportion of our children living in foster homes to 68% and increase our number of children cared for by in-house non-connected foster carers to 560.**

We will continue to **increase the number of in-house foster homes provided** by:

- Continuing to monitor and develop robust home finding processes to make the most effective use of in-house foster carers;
- Continuing the rollout of Pause and Reflect fostering arrangements to ensure a wider choice of matching options in an emergency;
- Working with our partners in the Fostering Regional Recruitment Hub to improve regional recruitment of new fostering families;
- Implementing a 5-year marketing strategy to increase the overall cohort of our foster carers and to improve provision for older children and young people, sibling groups and parent and child;
- Working with wider regional partners to improve the provision for UASC, including targeted recruitment of foster carers for UASC;
- Implementing an increased offer of support to in-house carers to support retention including:
 - Establishment of a Mockingbird constellations that supports peer support and retention;
 - Participation in Fostering Connections research study;
 - Establishment of Roommaker to increase the offer of bedroom capacity with our fostering families;
 - Improved offer of support to fostering families' own children to enhance their understanding of their role and improve foster carer retention;
 - Establishment of an enhanced offer of children stepping down from residential care to ensure better stability and support for children and the fostering families and thereby enhancing stability;
 - Establishment of Activity Days to enhance the options of children being matched to fostering families;
 - Participating 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;
 - Establishing a Fostering Friendly scheme to enhance the offer to staff that also foster, engage all departments in fostering recruitment and engage our workforce to offer fostering homes for our children.

We will continue to **work collaboratively with agency fostering providers to seek to increase the number of Lancashire children placed with local IFA carers.**

PACE FOSTER CARE

We will seek to **improve the availability of PACE foster homes by:**

- Increasing the number of Lancashire County Council foster carers who would be willing to take children under PACE, including developing a briefing and Q&A session with existing foster carers to try and identify more;
- Exploring the feasibility of commissioning a Pan-Lancashire PACE service with an agency provider;
- Reviewing provision of support to children in police custody so that as many children as possible are released on police bail rather than being detained overnight.

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:**

- 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;
- Development of the adopter community to support adopters;
- Continued development of adoption services, taking into account research and with the continued collaboration of adopters, birth families and adoptees.

CHILDREN'S HOMES

Overall, we aim to **decrease the proportion of our children living in children's homes to 11.8%**. We will seek to ensure that **appropriate, good value children's homes are available for all our children who need one** by:

- Expanding our current In-House Children's Home network;
- Building on "what works" by taking lessons learnt from the existing In-House Children's Home network and modernising residential services;
- Developing specialised in-house children's home provision to meet the changing needs/risks and demographics of our children in our care;
- Working jointly with our health partners to ensure that local homes that can meet need are available for children with complex physical and mental health needs;
- Continuing to work collaboratively with Lancashire's contracted providers to maximise the use of 'Lancashire homes for Lancashire children' and address gaps in provision;
- Developing relationships with local and regional providers who do not currently offer homes to Lancashire children;
- 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;
- Further extend the use of the Care Cubed benchmarking tool to ascertain whether homes are delivering a fair cost of care.

16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION/ INDEPENDENT LIVING (SAIL) HOMES

We aspire for 100% of our care leavers to live in suitable accommodation by:

- Continuing supporting providers in adapting to the requirements of the regulatory reforms so as to minimise the impact that the changes will have on sufficiency in the market.
- Working with Core Contract providers through the new commissioning arrangements. These services will continue to provide the option for young people aged 16-21 to be supported for up to two years, regardless of their age at point of access. The new contract arrangements aim to re-balance our building-based provision to better meet demand, and as examples include proposals to establish new services in three areas of the county, and a broadening to a countywide footprint our supported lodgings and dispersed visiting offers.
- Strengthening understanding of localised challenges and to further develop partnership working, cluster arrangements will be introduced for our core service contracts. Providers within each locality cluster will meet regularly to discuss specific issues and challenges within their districts and will share best practice. This is a new approach and commissioners will be involved with developing these arrangements through the lifetime of the agreement.
- Focusing on shaping a strong commissioned supported lodgings offer, including recruitment of suitable host households for our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking cohort. We will consider new

approaches in partnership with the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership and our supported lodging providers to share and learn best practice.

- Launching the third Local House Project in the county for an additional cohort of up to 14 young people.
- Working more collaboratively with the private provider market to increase provision and choice in districts where gaps are identified.
- Ensuring that services meet the needs of our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, contracting with providers who have a strong focus on ensuring the best outcomes for this cohort of young people. A further priority is to work more closely with Housing partners to improve young people's transition to independent living once Leave to Remain status is granted.
- Developing and strengthening our partnership work with District Housing authorities, through the multi-agency Housing Reference Group, to ensure that:
 - The housing needs of Care Leavers are considered in their strategic housing planning and building applications.
 - The principles and joint working practices outlined in both the 16/17 Joint Homelessness Protocol and the Care Leavers Protocol are embedded.

HEALTH

The *NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) Children in Care and Care Leavers Health Strategy 2024-2026* sets out the significant role the NHS has in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of health services to children in care and working closely with local authorities to improve the well-being of children in the local area.

The strategic vision is to ensure all children in care and care leavers will be afforded the opportunity to achieve positive health outcomes. This will be facilitated by the effective commissioning and delivery of health services across the ICB to reduce any unwarranted variation in service offer, scope of service and equity of access. The ICB has pledged to move to a Trauma Informed system, which will continue to build health commissioned services that will deliver trauma practice, with a skilled workforce who are knowledgeable around their individual roles and responsibilities as corporate parents.

The strategy sets out outcomes and deliverables to be achieved. Key outcomes and deliverables relating to this Sufficiency Strategy include:






- Children in care will have access to timely, trauma informed statutory health assessments which will agree with the child a plan of care, identify any early vulnerability to risk, share key public health messages and access support from other services as required to keep them safe.
- All health service delivery will be trauma informed.
- Children and young people report to living in homes and communities where they feel safe.
- There are effective communication and information sharing pathways between health and regulated / unregulated residential care providers.
- Children in care and care leavers have dedicated timely access and have good outcomes from dedicated specialist emotional health provision.
- `Health` are embedded in care planning processes to facilitate seamless transfer of care to prevent any delays in provision.
- Collaboration with key partners and stakeholders to support high quality residential provision for children in care to minimise breakdowns in these arrangements.

Lancashire County Council and NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB are working collaboratively to open a 3-bed specialist Ofsted registered children's home for Lancashire children experiencing

complex mental health needs and challenging behaviour. The home is expected to be operational in Autumn 2025.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

PERFORMANCE AGAINST PREVIOUS KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (2021-2024 CLA Sufficiency Strategy)

Key Performance Indicator	Baseline Levels (March 2020)	Levels (March 2024)	Target	Impact since March 2020
Reduction in proportion of placements with parents or other person with parental responsibility	15.5%	7.1%	13.5%	 8.4%
Increase the proportion of children living in foster homes	62.3%	64.6%	70%	 2.3%
Number of Step Down into Fostering Homes commenced	6 per annum	7 per annum	10 per annum	 1
Reduction in the proportion of CLA in Children's Homes provision	9.1%	14.8%	8.3%	 5.7%
Increase the usage of block contract supported accommodation provision for high priority young people	53% of occupied beds	56% of occupied beds	60% of occupied beds	 3%

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (2025-2028 CIC Sufficiency Strategy)

The following KPIs will be reported monthly and reviewed on an annual basis as part of the CIC Sufficiency Strategy annual update:

Key Performance Indicator	Baseline Levels (March 2024)	Target
Increase the proportion of children living in foster homes	64.6%	68% Currently at 66.2% (March 2025)
Increase the number of children being cared for by non-connected in-house foster carers	508	560 Currently at 550 (March 2025)
Number of children in enhanced agency foster care homes	20 per annum	15 per annum Currently 16 per annum (March 2025)
Number of Step Down into Fostering Homes commenced	7 per annum	5 per annum Currently at 2 per annum (March 2025)
Reduce the proportion of children living in Children's Homes	14.8%	By March 2026: 13.8% By March 2027: 12.8% By March 2028: 11.8% Currently at 15.4% (March 2025)
Reduce the number of children living in agency children's homes	208	160 – 100 as more in-house homes open Currently at 207 (March 2025)
Increase the proportion of children living in Children's Homes that are delivered by our in-house service	20%	25% - 50% as more in-house homes open Currently at 21.0% (March 2025)
Increase the usage of core supported accommodation for high priority young people	56% of occupied beds	60% of occupied beds Currently at 63% (December 2024)
Increase the proportion of children in our care living in core services supported accommodation homes compared to agency leaving care homes	37%	40% Currently at 41% (March 2025)

