

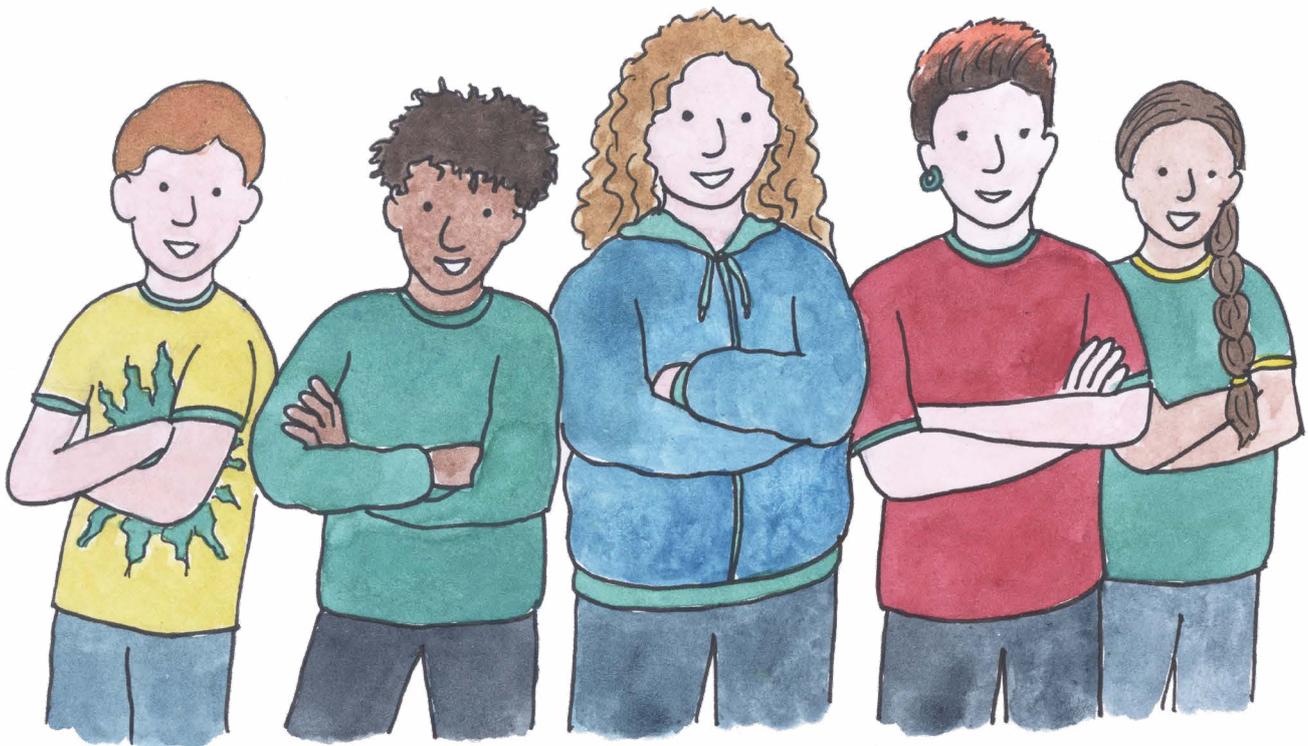


# Westmorland and Furness Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People's Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028



# Contents

Purpose	3
Vision	4
Introduction	6
Sufficiency Challenges - The National Picture	7
Westmorland and Furness Summary	8
Our Strategic Approach to Sufficiency	12
Market Position Statement	12
Preventing Care Admissions	12
Our Approach to Placements	13
Developing Our Partnership Working	17
Our Commissioning Approach	18
Our Strategic Priorities	19
Appendix: Relevant Local Strategies and Policies	23



# Purpose

Local authorities have a Sufficiency Duty under the Children Act 1989 (Section 22G) to, as far as reasonably practical, provide sufficient accommodation within the authority's area for children cared for by that local authority, and to take steps to develop local provision to meet the needs of their cared for children and care experienced young people.

The 2010 '[Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children](#)' (DCSF 2010), together with the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#), sets out local authorities' responsibilities in relation to care planning, placement and review for young people.

The guidance gives an example of what "effective practice in securing sufficiency" would look like<sup>1</sup> and includes:

**An effective placement strategy puts the needs, rights and well-being of each child at the centre. It means making sure that every child is cared for in a placement that is right for them - close to home, where possible, and where they can access the support and services they need to thrive.**

**When a local placement is not in the child's best interests or is not possible, there should be clear systems to find the best alternatives nearby, across regional or sub-regional areas, still keeping the child's welfare as the top priority.**

To make this happen, we will carefully forecast the number and types of placements children will need, and ensure universal, targeted and specialist services are well coordinated and responsive. Services will work together, around the child, to provide consistent and joined-up care.

Professionals involved in making placement decisions will work closely with partners and have access to accurate, up-to-date information about the availability, quality and suitability of placements. This ensures that children are matched to homes that meet their individual needs, in their own communities wherever possible.

This strategy sets out how we will manage and monitor sufficiency in Westmorland and Furness. It also sets out what we have achieved, are progressing and planning over the next three years to meet our Sufficiency Duty and provide cared for children and care experienced young people with support in suitable local homes. Where children are unable to remain within their local area, our intention is that they will reside in the best home possible until they are able to return to their own home area where this is in their best interests.

In addition to being used by the Council, this strategy is also designed to inform the provider market, families and carers, and multi-agency partners.



<sup>1</sup>Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children; DCSF-00186-2010

## Vision

Our vision aligns with our [Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People's Strategy](#): "For our cared for and care experienced children and young people to be safe, happy, and healthy, to enjoy life and realise their potential." One of the 5 priorities of that strategy is 'Home – Stability and Security'. "Stability and consistency in good homes is paramount for children and young people to feel safe, loved and cared for. If children do have to move homes, then it is important that children know why this is happening, that moves are planned, and where possible there should be time built into the plan so that children get to know their new home and carers. A stable family home provides a sense of belonging and permanence. It contributes to a strong identity and connection to our communities."

To achieve this, we envisage a vibrant, effective and sustainable local market that incorporates varied services from universal to specialist, and a broad and clear placements pathway for cared for and care experienced young people. Through innovation and strong partnerships, we aim to work productively to successfully accommodate and care for children with a diverse range of needs.

## A message from Cllr Janet Battye, Cabinet member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

Making sure that our cared-for and care experienced children and young people are living in the best place to meet their needs, must be a high priority for us as a caring and ambitious Council. This strategy is intended to set the framework for that. As Corporate Parents, we want our children and young people to grow up knowing that they are valued and can look forward to a worthwhile and satisfying adult life – and that who they are matters to us. I commend this strategy to ensure that we have sufficient, high quality placements available for our children and young people.



Cllr Janet Battye, Cabinet member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

## A message from Milorad Vasic, Director of Children's Services

As Director of Children's Services, I am proud to share our commitment to ensuring that every child in our care is placed not just somewhere – but somewhere right for them. At the heart of our work is a simple but powerful principle: every child deserves to feel safe, loved, supported and seen, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances.

This strategy sets out what effective practice in securing sufficiency should look like and that is we place children at the centre of all planning and decision-making. Our goal is to ensure that all children are offered placements that meet their needs, close to their communities, with the right support wrapped around them. We recognise that this is not always straightforward, and where local placements are not possible, we are committed to widening options regionally whilst still prioritising each child's individual welfare.

Achieving this requires more than just good intention. It takes careful planning, shared responsibility, and meaningful collaboration. We will work closely with our partners across health, education, and housing to forecast demand, improve the range and quality of placements, and coordinate support services that work together around the child. Our professionals will be trauma informed, equipped with the tools and information they need to make informed decisions that are in the best interests of our children and young people.

This strategy reflects our unwavering belief that every child in our care should grow up with stability, love and opportunity and that starts with having a home.



Milorad Vasic, Director of Children's Services

## A message from Sharon Simpson, Assistant Director for Commissioning and Procurement

I am really pleased to be able to introduce our first Westmorland & Furness Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People's Sufficiency Strategy. This is an important document for the Council and those providers and partners we work with; it explains how we will continue to monitor and manage our sufficiency over the next 3 years and introduces our plans for those areas we would like to develop further; including to provide cared for children and care experienced young people with support in suitable local homes wherever possible. It links with the Council's Commissioning Strategy and our vision to become an innovative and effective commissioning organisation. To achieve this, we need to develop and have access to vibrant and sustainable provider markets. As Commissioners we recognise the importance of ensuring sufficiency with quality and high performing services from trusted providers; and we will continue to manage these important relationships through robust commissioning processes.



Sharon Simpson, Assistant Director for Commissioning and Procurement

## Introduction

The Council came into being in April 2023. We are an ambitious council, and we place people at the centre of everything we do as we look to deliver the best possible outcomes. We are ambitious for our communities too and work to enable all our villages and towns to thrive; and for our residents to lead healthy, happy lives. Our priorities for people are to support active, health happy lives and to support people in need and reduce inequality.

It is imperative for every child to have the best. Our goal is for them to grow up in a happy, loving and caring home. Our [Ambition for Every Child - Children and Young Peoples Plan](#) sets out how we will make a difference to local communities and children. We always seek to keep children and young people within their family networks, doing all that we can to enable families to stay together. In some situations, we take the difficult decision to place a child in our care. When that happens, we identify the strengths and assets as well as the needs and difficulties of children, young people, and families. We prioritise maintaining relationships with families and friends, working towards safe and timely reunification.

There are a variety of different home settings that a child might live in when they are cared for by us. Our goal is for our children to live in a loving home that keeps them as close as possible to their community, friends, family and school.

We will manage our Sufficiency Duty through a diversified strategy with a variety of approaches including early intervention and prevention, fostering, residential and supported accommodation provisions. Using a blended approach, we strive to provide the right care at the right time for all our children and young people.



# Sufficiency Challenges - The National Picture

A growing number of cared for children and an increase in the complexity of presenting needs, alongside a decline in foster carers has led to changes to the market. The Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) published its '[Children's social care market study Final report](#)' in March 2022 found that "there are significant problems in how the placements market is functioning". In particular they found that:

- A lack of placements of the right kind, in the right places, means that children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs;
- The largest private providers of placements are making materially higher profits, and charging materially higher prices, than we would expect if this market were functioning effectively; and
- Some of the largest private providers are carrying very high levels of debt, creating a risk that disorderly failure of highly leveraged firms could disrupt the placements of children in care.

There has been a significant rise in the number of private children's homes setting up in specific areas of England such as the North West, resulting in more children being placed at a distance from their homes.

Sourcing placements for children with more complex needs has become increasingly challenging due to the lack of availability of homes and staff with the required levels of skill.

All cared for children should be living in regulated placements. Due to market challenges this is not always possible.

The [MacAlister's Independent Review of Social Care](#) and the [Children's Social Care Market Study \(CMA\)](#) in 2022 suggested that the issues facing the social care system can only be addressed through a radical reset. More recently, the Social Care Reforms set out in the [Children's Social Care National Framework 2023](#), and [Keeping Children Safe Helping Families Thrive](#) DfE 2024 paper propose changes to be implemented across the sector to improve the sufficiency and quality of homes for children through a multi-system approach to change.



# Westmorland and Furness Summary

## Our Local Area

Westmorland and Furness is England's third largest unitary authority by geographical area and the most sparsely populated local authority area. This presents challenges in terms of sustaining and delivering services, transport, and connectivity. The largest proportion of the population lives in Barrow-in-Furness. 17% of the council area is in the worst 10% in England for health deprivation.

The total population is forecast to increase over the next 20 years from 225,385 in 2021 to 227,977 in 2041. That growth is predicted in the 65 plus population, while numbers of children and young people and people of working age are expected to decrease.

Area	People per sq km
Westmorland and Furness	60
Eden	25
Barrow-in-Furness	864
South Lakeland	68

Barrow-in-Furness, as the most densely populated area has the greatest number of our cared for children, while socio-economic factors influence housing type and recruitment of foster carers. Conversely, as we move east towards Kendal and into the Eden area, rurality and isolation make access to a variety of children and family services more difficult and costly.

On 31 March 2025 there were 261 children cared for by Westmorland and Furness Council, a rate of 67 per 10,000 child population. This is lower than most recent comparable data for England (70) and the North-West (94) (31 March 2024).

For further local information see our [Council Plan](#).

## Local Placements

Children and young people consistently tell us that what is most important to them is to have a stable home, feeling secure and welcome in their local community supported to attend school and have fun with friends. For this reason, we will focus on stable local placements, where that is in the best interests of the child or young person. The accepted national definition of a 'local' placement is within a 20-mile radius of home or within the local authority area. We are making more local placements. In March 2025, 46% of children were placed within 20 miles of their home (40% in 2024) and 59% within their local authority boundary (54% in 2024).

We have seen an improvement in our local sufficiency, with a high proportion of children living in Westmorland and Furness with our own internal carers and residential homes. However, in certain circumstances placements need to be made out of area. We know for some children and young people this has been a result of a paucity of available and appropriate local placements and too few foster carers. This is particularly the case for children with complex needs. For some children however, we are confident that a significant geographical move is right for them.



The nature of our local area can present challenges. Our rurality can make it difficult to keep children living close to their homes as road and public transport connections can make it difficult for families to keep in contact. Travel to work times are exaggerated and access to affordable homes can be deterrent to the recruitment and retention of care staff. Travel times from Kendal to Barrow are circa 1 hour and up to 2 hours from Barrow to Eden in the North East of our footprint.

### Stability

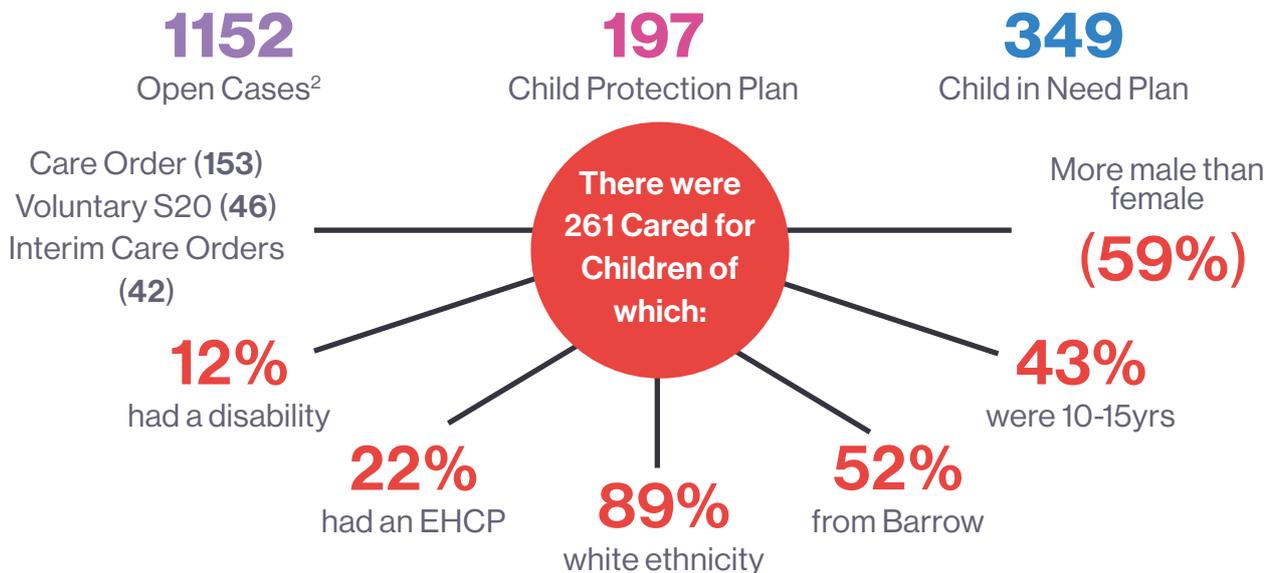
Stability supports placement sufficiency. Children with complex needs are more likely to need a higher level of support and be placed at a distance from home, experiencing multiple moves with different providers. This means that the individuals who are responsible for the child may change frequently, testing the trust and attachment children need to feel safe and secure.

We identify when placements may become unstable and implement support as early as possible. Where a breakdown is unavoidable, we have exit interviews and multi-agency reviews to understand why and work extensively with the child. Our placement stability has improved in 2025 with 5.4% of children experiencing 3 or more placements compared to 10.5% last year, and National and Statistical Neighbour averages in March 2024 of 10% and 12% respectively.

### Headline Data

As a new Council and Children Services Directorate, our approach is to understand the Westmorland and Furness context; to that end we are data driven and needs led. We recognise that we cannot accurately predict need, so our demand modelling takes into account our knowledge of our children, local area socio-economic factors and market management to anticipate and plan our short to medium term sufficiency requirements.

On 31 March 2025 there were:



**Unaccompanied Children<sup>3</sup>:**

<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>
all male, 15+yrs, 8 supported accommodation, 4 fostering and 2 residential	remaining in supported accommodation 18+yrs

<sup>2</sup>Where a child meets statutory threshold criteria, and further action is required.

<sup>3</sup>A person under the age of 18 who is not in the care of a parent or legal guardian, and who is either separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver.

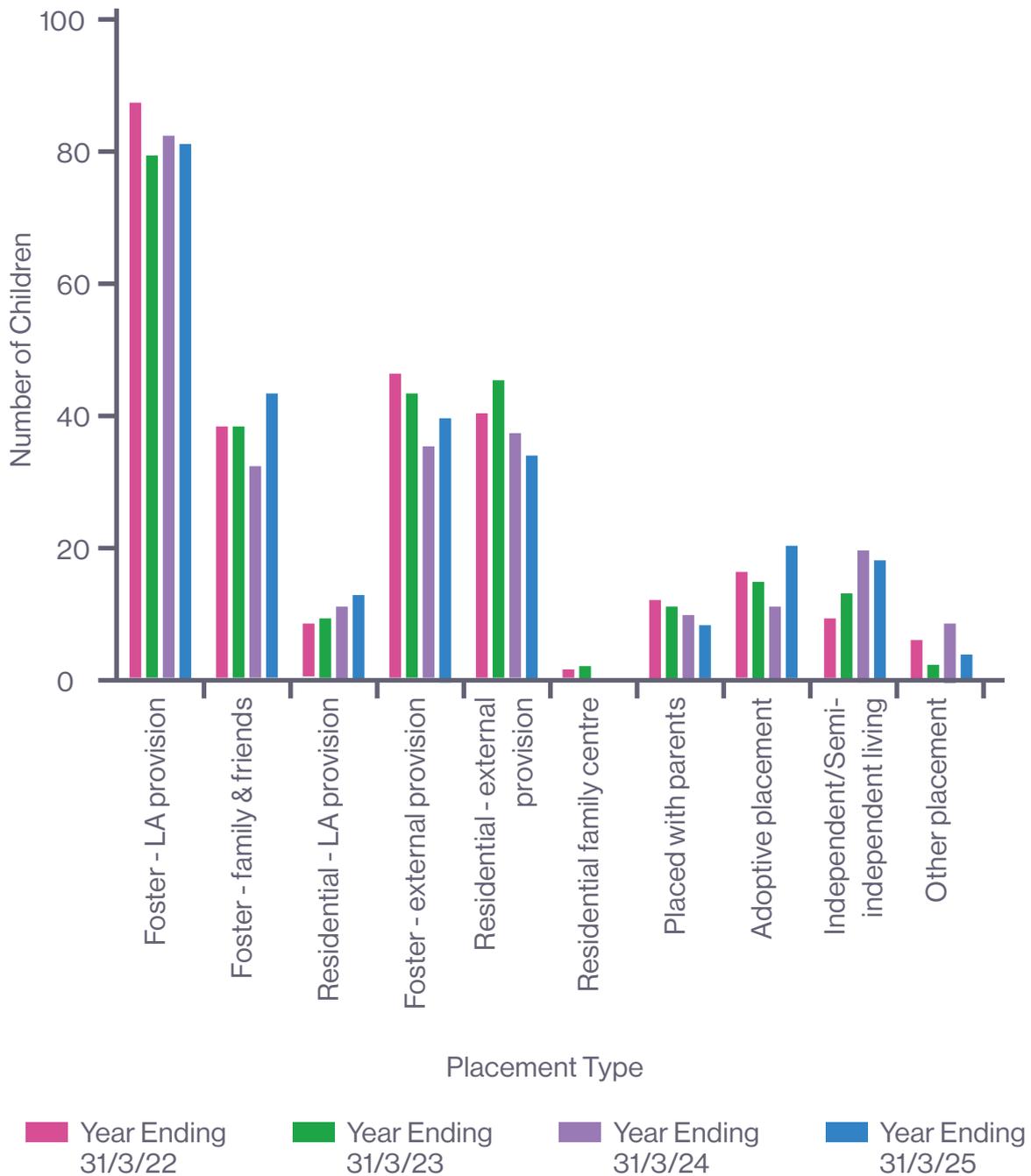
## Accommodation Types

Like all local authorities we use a range of internal and private accommodation. Through our investment into specialist teams and improved preventative work with good social care oversight, placement stability has improved.

During the 2024-2025 financial year, there has been a small decrease in the use of external residential placements alongside an increase in external foster placements. Internal foster carers, (part of a hosted service with Cumberland Council), are decreasing in number, with the regional Foster with Us initiative yet to have an impact for us in 2025.

There has been an increase in placements with 'family and friends' foster carers and 'placed with parents', together amounting to a quarter of our cared for population. We have seen an increasing need for expensive therapeutic care therefore our intention is to work to create local therapeutic care through a mixed market.

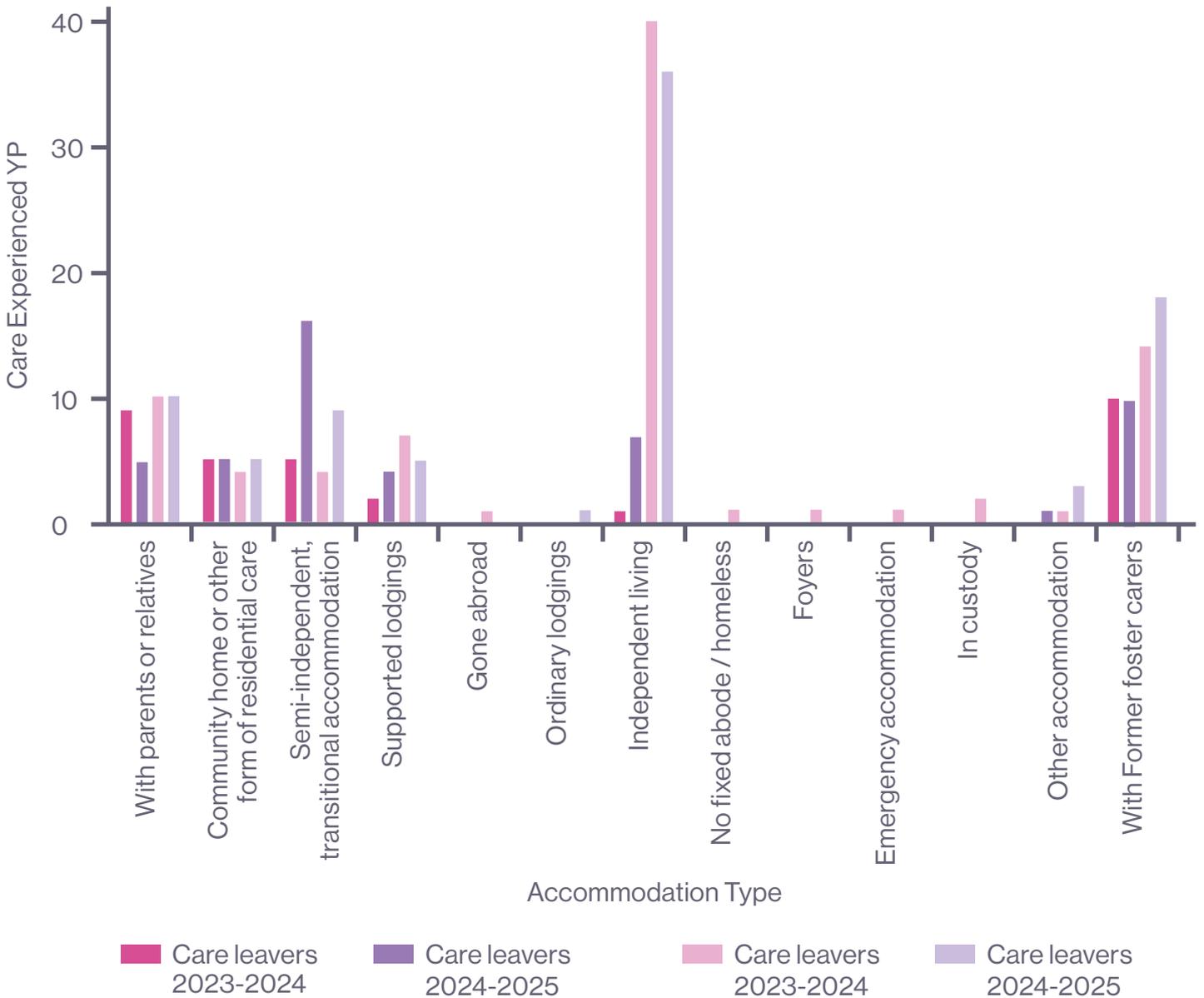
**Cared for Children Placement Types**



## Care Experienced Young People

Over the past year there has been an increase in the number of care experienced young people aged 17-18, with the highest number living in semi-supported accommodation, followed by former foster carers. The highest number of care experienced young people aged 19-21 years live in independent living accommodation.

Care Experienced Young People Accommodation



Aged 17-18

Aged 19-21



# Our Strategic Approach to Sufficiency

## Market Position Statement

Our strategic ambition is a market position where:

- Children are living in local regulated homes that are child centred and improve outcomes.
- There is an adequate mix of local authority and private provision that can meet the varied individual needs of all our children.
- Local providers maintain high quality loving homes that are outstanding and therefore value for money.
- Providers work closely with us as partners, prioritise local children, and transition children back to their family where this is in their best interests.
- There are more foster carers available in our footprint to care for our children.
- Local private children's homes are caring for our more complex children.
- There is a clear local supported accommodation and move on pathway for older cared for children and care experienced young people, including clear transitions when moving on to Adult Services.

## Preventing Care Admissions

For most children, living with their family is the best and most beneficial option. When families face challenges, it is often in the child's best interests to remain at home with the right support in place. If this isn't possible, we prioritise care within the wider family network through Kinship Care or Special Guardianship arrangements so that children can remain connected to people they know and trust.

Wherever possible, we aim to prevent children from entering care. To support this, we offer a strong Family Help and Edge of Care package. This includes services such as Family Hubs, the Healthy Child Programme, Youth Support, Targeted Help, and evidence-based parenting approaches.

By investing in early and preventative support, we aim to strengthen families and reduce the demand for formal placements, ensuring that more children can safely grow up in their own families and communities.

## Family Help and Edge of Care

'Family Help' includes Early Help, Early Intervention and Prevention, and is a partnership model where Health, Police, Education, Local Authority, Voluntary and Community sectors work together to identify needs within families as early as possible. For further information see our [Family Help Strategy 2024-2028](#).

Our co-produced and re-designed front door has increased support, guidance and advice for our partners. The Family Help team engage with our schools via our Team Around the Setting approach, and work with 80 schools to manage low level difficulties to prevent unnecessary escalation. We have developed a wider range of specialist teams such as Domestic Abuse, Complex Safeguarding and Resilience to focus on earlier preventative action for children on the edge of care.



We have two Short Breaks Homes, with a maximum of 11 beds for children with severe learning disabilities rated 'Good' by Ofsted in March 2025. They enable children to remain at home in the care of their parents. At April 2025, 61 children were accessing these homes, with 30 children on a waiting list.

Our Family Help and Edge of Care services are designed to ensure that only children who genuinely need to enter care do so. When this happens, we continue to work with children, families and friends to maintain positive connections. We assess changes in circumstances and aim to transition children back to parents, extended family or friends where this is in their best interests.

Our Resilience Team provides timely support through targeted intervention including short term crisis situations. The team works with young people to maintain placements by supporting them to manage emotions, navigating life experiences and addressing risk-taking behaviours. They also deliver therapeutic parenting support to foster carers. Ofsted recognised:

***“This involvement has a positive impact on progressing plans and improving outcomes for children and families, preventing some children from having to come into local authority care and supporting others to return home from care.”***

## Kinship Care and Special Guardianship Orders

In line with the children's social care reforms, we are developing our Kinship Care and SGO support services so children can remain living with family and connected individuals where possible. There has been an increase in the number of our children living with SGO carers from 177 in 2023 to 188 in 2025.

Where children are unable to remain with their own or connected families, our first preference is for them to continue to live in a family setting such as adoption or foster care.

## Our Approach to Placements

All cared for children have their needs assessed and recorded in their Care Plan that are regularly reviewed within specified timescales. Alongside this, children have placement plans reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure children are being cared for in a home that remains right for them where they are safe, loved, and progressing. Throughout, children's views are crucially important, with their voices heard and listened to when decisions are being made.



## Foster Care

We have successfully maintained a strong proportion of children in foster care, with 63% placed in fostering arrangements at 31 March 2025. During the 2024-2025 financial year, the overall number of children in our care increased, largely due to a rise in family and friends (kinship) placements.

However, finding suitable foster carers is becoming increasingly difficult - even for younger children. The challenge is even greater when seeking placements for older children, those with more complex needs, sibling groups, or children needing bridge-to-foster care.

To meet the needs of our children, we urgently need more foster carers, with local carers fostering our children, so that children can stay close to their homes, schools, and support networks wherever possible.

## Local Authority Foster Carers

Cumberland Council currently hosts the internal fostering service across Cumbria on behalf of both Councils. We are working with Cumberland to disaggregate this service.

On 31 March 2025, there were 89 mainstream / short breaks internal foster carers living within Westmorland and Furness, with 6 new approvals and 8 deregistrations / resignations during the year.

**Foster With Us** - We are part of a regional fostering and retention hub, working in partnership with Cumberland, Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen, and Blackpool Councils. This hub publicises, communicates and engages with potential foster carers, to increase the number of initial enquiries.

**Mockingbird** - This programme helps to improve the stability of fostering homes and strengthens relationships between carers, children, fostering services and birth families. This model is based on an extended family model, in the form of 'constellations' which consist of a 'hub' home and several 'satellite' homes nearby. The specially recruited and trained hub home carers offer sleepovers, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities. We received DfE funding to commence our first constellation in 2024. Following its success, we are seeking to open a second in Westmorland and Furness in 2025.

## Independent Fostering Agencies

In 2025, there were 8 independent Fostering Agencies with around 30 foster care households located within the Westmorland and Furness area. Just over 25% (12) of our children in IFA placements were living within Westmorland and Furness.

## Residential Children's Homes

As a result of a change in our approach since 2023, we have seen a downward trend in the number of our children living in children's homes, with 7 fewer in April 2025. However, there are circumstances where children are placed in residential homes due to a lack of fostering placements. When this happens, we continue to look for appropriate family home environments (which may be return to family or step down to foster care).

Where our children have complex care needs and benefit from the higher level of care provided in a residential home, we work closely with health colleagues, providers and wider partners to secure suitable placements, developing individual bespoke models with wrap around support.

## Internal Residential Children's Homes

Cumberland Council currently host 6 children's homes across Cumbria, on behalf of both Councils. As with internal fostering, we are working to disaggregate this service. Four homes are located within the Westmorland and Furness footprint. One of these is an edge of care home registered for up to 4 placements and three are long stay children's homes registered for up to 14 placements. On the site of one of the homes there are two Ofsted registered supported accommodation flats able to take up to 3 children. We plan to open an additional internal residential home by 2026.

## External Residential Children's Homes

This is a complex and changing marketplace, with the majority being private providers, many of whom are larger national or regional companies. In March 2025 there were 25 external Children's Homes provisions located within Westmorland and Furness registered with Ofsted. The provisions range from solo to 6-bed homes and include some short stay assessment placements. Four have on-site residential special schools. Three are multi-building homes with four properties registered to each home, further increasing the actual number of homes in our area. Other homes are seeking to open during 2025. The current number of registered places are 78 in children's homes, and 34 where the sub-type is a residential school (excluding one that is closing in 2026).

In March 2025, 11 of our 34 children placed in external children's homes were living within Westmorland and Furness. We are working to increase this proportion, keeping more local children close to home, utilising existing provisions. The number of external homes and places registered in our area exceeds local demand.

The majority of children living in Westmorland and Furness external private residential homes are from other local authorities. While we understand the need for some children to be placed away from their birth areas this impacts on vacancies for local children, particularly those with more complex behaviours. This also increases demands on local facilities and universal services (i.e. health care, schools).

While there are many private residential homes within our area, not all of these offer the models of care that we need for our children and therefore do not meet the sufficiency needs for our cohort, and often care for children from across the country.

In 2026 a private children's home with school on site is closing their residential provision leaving a potential gap for children with complex SEND needs. We will monitor this and use emerging trends to shape our response to the changing market.

## Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation placement numbers for cared for children remained static between 2024 and 2025 (20 on 31 March 2024 and 18 on 31 March 2025), with the majority being unaccompanied children (72%). Currently none of our unaccompanied young people live within Westmorland and Furness due to predominantly being an area of white population and limited services that meet cultural needs, resulting in us placing in other nearby areas that can better meet these needs. We are working to address this including plans to build a local mosque. A high number of unaccompanied young people continue to live in supported accommodation following their 18th birthday.

We avoid the use of unregulated providers and have worked with our local providers to ensure they are Ofsted registered. There are four Ofsted registered Supported Accommodation providers in our footprint.



We are reviewing availability and demand to better understand our sufficiency requirements in this area, and as a new unitary authority, we are working more effectively with Housing colleagues to ensure that we can offer sufficient, good quality homes for young people. The Westmorland and Furness [Housing Strategy 2025 to 2030](#) sets out that as a housing authority and a corporate parent we are dedicated to offering the highest quality care and support to our cared for children and care experienced young people/adults. Meeting their housing needs is a key priority.

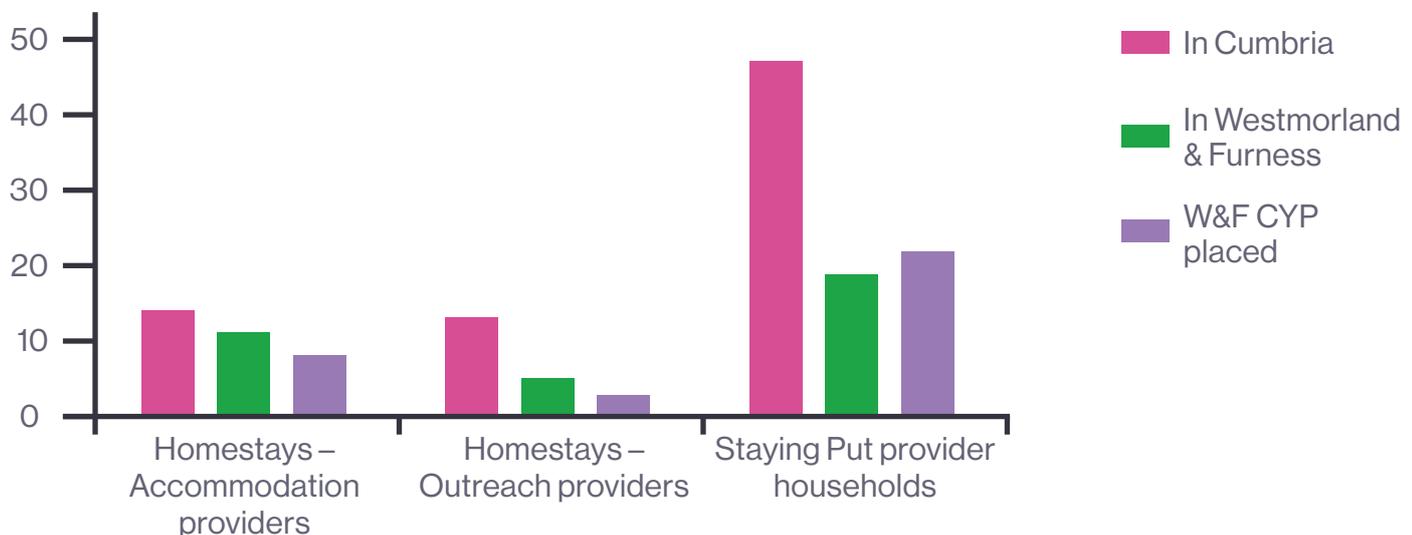
Our Joint Homeless Protocol / Positive Housing Pathway service supports young people to access appropriate local housing including prioritising care experienced young people in our Housing Related Support for Young People service. Between October 2024 and March 2025 14 care experienced young people accessed the service.

### Staying Put and Homestays Supported Lodgings

The Council supports as many children as possible to remain living with their foster carers after they turn 18 in internal Staying Put arrangements. Alongside this the Council operates a Homestays supported lodgings scheme. These Cumbria-wide Ofsted Registered services are positive options for care experienced children to remain living within a homely environment.

During the 2025 financial year approximately 83% of our 18-year-olds in foster care, who ceased to be looked after on their 18th birthday, remained with their former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement three months later. The proportion of our 19 and 20-year-olds continuing to live with their foster carers was 52%. This compares well to national data in 2024 of 62% and 32% respectively.

### Homestays and Staying Put Providers in Cumbria



### Adoption

Cumberland currently hosts the Cumbria wide adoption service on behalf of both Councils. Westmorland and Furness Council is working in partnership with Cumberland to establish a Cumbria-wide Regional Adoption Agency in September 2025. During 2024-2025:

- 35 Cumbria children were adopted of which 13 were from Westmorland and Furness.
- 21 children were matched with adopters (a decrease from 39 the previous year) of which 12 were from Westmorland and Furness.
- 8 of the 12 children were placed with Cumbria Adoption approved families and 4 with adopters approved for other agencies.
- 27 children had a decision made for a plan of adoption, of which 11 were from Westmorland and Furness.

## Adopters

During the 2024-2025 financial year, Cumbria Adoption approved 10 adopter households. This was a decrease from the number of approvals achieved in the previous 2 years and reflective of the national picture in that there is insufficiency in the number of adopters coming forward.

The Adoption Service was supporting 22 approved households on 31 March 2025 through family finding, matching and placement and to the final order.

## Adoption Support

There were 83 children accessing post adoption services at the end of March 2025. Work offered includes direct / therapeutic work to promote attachments, managing extremely challenging behaviour and enhanced / therapeutic life story work. Also, as of the end of March 2025 29 people accessed the offer of counselling and Intermediary Services.

The Affected by Adoption worker is currently involved with 10 birth parents and has developed positive relationships with many birth family members who return to the Service each year for support with their mailbox exchange.

Since the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund in 2015 many individuals across Cumbria have benefitted from therapeutic intervention applications. The reduction in the fair access limit for this fund from £5,000 to £3,000 for the coming year means that the Adoption Service, families and therapeutic providers will face challenges where costs exceed this amount.

## Developing Our Partnership Working

Effective partnership working is key to managing our sufficiency and securing quality local homes. The Corporate Parenting Board, Cared for Children and Care Experienced Partnership Board and the Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership are key strategic partnerships. We work across the Council and with external partners through universal and targeted services including health, police, schools, voluntary and community sectors, out-of-school activities, families and friends, and commissioned providers to establish improved processes to better meet needs.

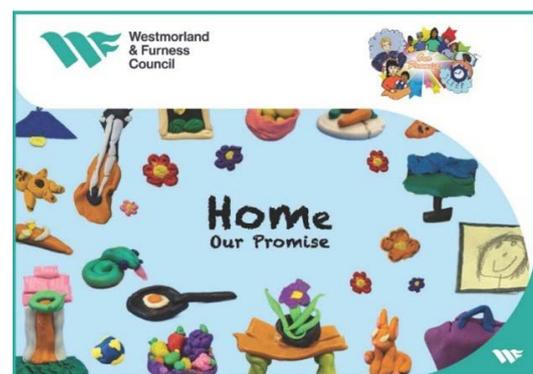
We also come together for individual children, identifying needs and support required on a multi-agency basis.

Working together through shared accountability and inter-agency cooperation will improve outcomes for children and drive efficiencies better meeting statutory responsibilities.

## Voice of the Child / Young Person

We listen to and act on the voice of children and young people. Children's views are at the forefront and a crucial thread throughout our intentions.

The work of **Our Voice**, a group of our cared for and care experienced children and young people provide valuable insights into their lived experiences. Their work on the Home Project has supported us to understand **What every good home needs...**



## Regional Care Cooperatives

As part of reforms to the children's social care system, the Department for Education (DfE) is partnering with local government to develop Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs). The ambition is for RCCs to plan, commission and deliver children's care places in fostering, children's homes and secure homes. Two pathfinder regions (in Greater Manchester and the South East) were established in 2024. We will draw on learning from these pilots to understand how we might engage with future developments.

## Our Commissioning Approach

Our [Commissioning Strategy 2024-2027](#) sets out our approach "to become an innovative and effective commissioning organisation, with access to vibrant and sustainable markets whilst maintaining positive trusted relationships with our partners".

This is a core basis of our Sufficiency Strategy. We are building a clear picture of our marketplace and working closely with partners, listening to our children and young people to understand what is working well to make ambitious achievable improvements to provide sufficient placements for our children.

Commissioning includes assessing demand and reviewing the range of provisions to strengthen market management and to expand appropriate, good quality local placements. Our internal and external home finding teams work to ensure that each child is placed in the best possible home.

We have strong relationships with external providers, holding regular meetings and events. In addition to commissioning frameworks and contracts we are considering other options such as purchasing systems and block arrangements to reduce spot purchasing, and give us more control over quality, location and cost. By developing the range of commissioning options, we will increase the ability to place with the local market, meeting the diverse needs of children.

We work at local, sub-regional and regional levels to provide commissioning options for sufficient and appropriate services, where it has not been possible to place children locally. Regionally we are a member of Placements Northwest (PNW) undertaking collaborative commissioning with 23 other Councils to develop the market and maintain standards, including information sharing, governance groups, forums and other commissioning activity. We are also part of a sub-regional Foster Care Framework.

The high costs involved when placing children in private residential homes puts increasing strains on the Council's budget, particularly specialist therapeutic homes for children with complexity of need. We are looking at ways to better manage this spend, providing the appropriate care at the right time whilst reducing long term costs.



# Our Strategic Priorities

Our strategic priorities are based on the best interests for children and young people and our understanding of the prevailing market. We will be responsive and transparent about our progress, setting annual delivery plans which will enable us to respond to changing trends and work innovatively and creatively with our partner organisations to achieve our key strategic priority areas. Realising these intentions will impact positively on local sufficiency.

## Strategic Priority 1 - Prevention:

To support more children to stay with their birth parents or within their wider family networks we will:

1. Strengthen our parenting offer to include pathways of support from pre-birth to teenagers.
2. Develop internal provision to reduce waiting times for children and their families in need of short break care.
3. Increase the number of children living with Kinship Carers and Special Guardians, considering all connected people who might successfully parent a child and enhancing our tailored support offer.

## Strategic Priority 2 - Fostering:

To increase capacity and maintain stability within both local authority and independent foster care homes we will:

1. Manage the impact of disaggregation of internal Fostering and ensure carers are fully engaged and well supported.
2. Develop the Westmorland and Furness Fostering offer, providing a robust training and support package, and open our second Mockingbird constellation.
3. Work in partnership with external fostering agencies for children to remain in local family homes.
4. Sustain and enhance our Staying Put model so that young people in foster placements have the option to remain in their homes into adulthood.

## Strategic Priority 3 - Children's Homes:

To develop provision within our footprint so that more children live in children's homes closer to their home locality we will:

1. Ensure high quality within existing local children's homes.
2. Open more of our own internal children's homes, including one in 2026.
3. Strengthen relationships with external residential providers, and look to block purchase beds within our footprint.
4. Review and develop Staying Close arrangements.

## Strategic Priority 4 - Supported Accommodation:

To increase the quality, quantity and range of local supported accommodation for young people transitioning to adulthood we will:

1. Review local provision and develop plans to improve the range and choice of suitable accommodation.
2. Increase the number of young people living in supported lodgings.
3. Continue to develop a robust Local Offer and Care Leavers Hub, working collaboratively with our care experienced young people to develop services.
4. Support young people to sustain tenancies, minimise moves, and have smooth transitions to new homes.
5. Recruit a Housing Tenancy Coordinator to work collaboratively with housing providers to secure effective and timely access to accommodation for our care experienced young people.

## Strategic Priority 5 - Unaccompanied Children:

To develop our approach for placing young people in appropriate local accommodation within a connected community we will:

1. Review local options and work with providers to develop provision that can meet the specific needs of these young people, including clear transitions post 18 years.
2. Improve access to local services that meets cultural and social needs.
3. Work with providers, staff and carers to understand specific needs and trauma experiences and have skills, knowledge and training to provide high quality care and support.

## Strategic Priority 6 - Children with Complex Needs:

To develop our accommodation options for children and young people with physical and learning disabilities or complex Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs we will:

1. Forecast demand and develop enough local homes (including fostering and residential) that can meet a range of additional needs, including SEMH, autism, physical and learning disabilities and some complex health needs. As well as better meeting children's needs, success in this area would reduce the fees for some higher cost placements.
2. Monitor placements closely and work with partners to achieve high quality sustainable outcomes.
3. Where young people require continuing care into adulthood, work with Adults Services, Health and provider partners to ensure transitions are well-planned and seamless, establishing a clear strategic approach in this area.

## Strategic Priority 7 - Adoption:

To progress more and successful adoptions for children we will:

1. Recruit more adopters, including to meet the needs of children across specific cohorts.
2. Provide high quality support to children and their adopted family through our Adoption Support Team.
3. Implement Regional Adoption Agency arrangements.

## Strategic Priority 8 - Commissioning:

To commission services that improve access to a range of quality local provisions we will:

1. Develop local and regional contracts and purchasing systems that meet new procurement regulations.
2. Work with Health, providers and other partners so that every child has access to the best home with multi-agency support.
3. Develop proactive market management systems and new ways of working and to help us find the most appropriate placements and improve cost control.
4. Develop systems to make better use of data to support sustainability and forecast future need.
5. Proactively respond to changes to the market, including where providers open or close provision.
6. Consider how we can engage with Regional Care Cooperatives to strengthen our offer.

## Strategic Priority 9 - Quality Assurance:

To ensure internal and external homes in our footprint and where we place children are of the highest quality we will:

1. Devise a new Quality Assurance process with multi-agency input.
2. Routinely monitor key data and information about our placements at both operational and strategic levels.



## Delivery and Governance

Delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the Multi-Agency Cared for Children and Care Experienced Partnership Board, with regular updates provided to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Children in Care Council and the Care Experienced forums will receive feedback and have opportunity to contribute to developments. This strategy will be delivered alongside the Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People's Strategy 2024-2028.

The Delivery Plan will set out the main actions, measurable key performance indicators, responsible officers and timelines for delivery.



## Appendix: Relevant Local Strategies and Policies

Our Sufficiency Strategy has been written to support the below:

The Corporate Parenting Pledge where, as corporate parents, we are dedicated to offering the highest quality care and support to our cared for children and care experienced young people/adults.

The [Ambition for Every Child \(Children and Young People's Plan\)](#) which sets out how we will make a difference to local communities and children.

Our [Cared for Children and Care Experience Young People's Strategy 2024-2028](#) which sets out the Council's direction to enhance the lives of our children.

The [Family Help Strategy 2024-2028](#) which describes our approach to early intervention and prevention which will work to reduce the sufficiency demand.

The [Commissioning Strategy 2024-2027](#) which sets out how we intend to commission and develop services to meet needs over the next few years.

The [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2034](#) which describes our ongoing commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of our community.

The [Housing Strategy 2025 to 2030](#) outlines our vision for housing across Westmorland and Furness, our priorities, and the actions we will take over the next five years.

The [Joint Protocol to Address the Needs of Homeless 16- and 17-year-old Young People](#) sets out how Westmorland and Furness will address the needs of young people, aged 16-17, who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.





## Translation Services

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