



**Market Position
Statement
April 2024:
Children's Homes**



Where we are now

Higher numbers of children living in children's homes, despite a fall in the number of children in our care overall.

- **Less Lancashire children in care:** 337 less Lancashire children in care in March 2024 compared to March 2021 (1758 children in care as of 31/03/24).
- **Sharp increase in the number of Lancashire children living in children's homes** (increase from 180 in March 2021 to 260 in March 2024).
- **80 more Lancashire children living in an agency children's home** in March 2024 compared to March 2021.

There are more than enough children's homes in Lancashire to meet local demand, but we can still struggle to find suitable homes.

- **Lancashire has the largest number of children's homes within its local authority area than any other local authority in England.** 8% of all children's homes in England are in Lancashire County Council's boundaries, with most operated by agency providers.
- **There are more than enough children's homes in Lancashire to care for Lancashire children, yet we still cannot place all our children locally.** According to Ofsted's register of children's homes (April 2024) there were a total of 267 Ofsted registered children's homes run by private providers in Lancashire, able to care for up to 830 children. As of 31 March 2024, only 129 Lancashire children were living in an agency Ofsted registered children's home in Lancashire. 60 other Lancashire children were living in an agency Ofsted registered children's home outside of the county, with most living there due to a lack of offers from Lancashire homes, not because it was part of their care plan to live at a distance from their community.
- **Only 29% of agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire have Lancashire children living there (March 2024).** Lancashire children were living in only 78 of the agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire County Council's boundaries. Another 44 homes outside of Lancashire had to be used to care for Lancashire children, in the main due to a lack of availability, as Lancashire homes were full of children from other Local Authority areas.
- **More and more agency children's homes continue to be opened in Lancashire,** despite already high numbers. There were 56 more Ofsted registered homes in Lancashire in April 2024 than in April 2023 (a 25% increase in homes in one year, compared to a 14% increase nationally). Only 29% of the new children's homes that opened in 2023/24 were caring for Lancashire children as of 31 March 2024. More homes in our area further exacerbates the already challenging staff recruitment and retention issues being faced by children's home providers in Lancashire. The increasing number of out of area children cared for in these homes has a significant impact on local services.

Very high numbers of children in care living in Lancashire from other local authority areas significantly impacts on local services.

SCHOOLS

- As many children in care have special education needs or have a history of disrupted education, high numbers of children in care from out of area is placing a high demand on alternative educational provision (i.e. Pupil Referral Units or PRUs). Secondary PRUs and special schools in Lancashire are already over capacity and this additional demand is impacting on the local



authority's ability to fulfil statutory duties for excluded pupils (which is the main purpose of a PRU).

- There are capacity issues in secondary schools in East Lancashire and Preston so the opening of new homes in these areas is likely to put additional strain on already very stretched capacity. As the number of children's homes in other districts continue to increase this is likely to be replicated elsewhere.
- The high number of out of area children in care that are moving into children's homes is putting a strain on admissions in both secondary and primary schools. This is impacting on our ability to find school places for Lancashire's own children in care, as schools are routinely reporting that they cannot meet any further demand due to the high numbers of children in care they already have on roll.

HEALTH

- There are over 1000 children from other Local Authorities living in Lancashire for whom health have a responsibility to complete statutory health assessments and act as lead health professionals.
- These children tend to have a higher complexity of health needs and require various health services. This puts a high demand on already stretched services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Accident and Emergency Services.
- Increasingly out of area children move to Lancashire without any or very little prior planning, which can mean that children are moving into Lancashire without a robust plan for how their health needs will be met.
- An average of 4 young people per day (who have been admitted due to emotional and wellbeing needs) are unable to move out of hospitals in our area because there is not a suitable home for them to move to.

POLICING

- Evidence shows that 1 in 10 children in care will be reported missing. Children in care will be reported missing on an average of 5 occasions as opposed to 2 occasions for children not looked after by the local authority.
- In a 12-month period (September 2022 to September 2023) a total of 2,568 missing investigations (across Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool) were undertaken by the Police for children in care living in our area.
- The large number of homes in Lancashire is making meaningful, regular engagement between Missing Person Prevention Officers and children's homes difficult to achieve.
- There were 2,230 incident logs recorded in the same 12-month period against children's homes across Lancashire. 1,363 related to non-crime investigations (such as children being missing) and 867 to crime related incidents such as criminal damage, theft and physical and sexual assaults.

It can be very challenging to find suitable homes for some of our children in care.

- **More than half of Lancashire's requests for children's homes are for smaller homes** (caring for 3 children or less).
- **32% of Lancashire's searches for a children's home are 'hard-to-find'**, with most being for smaller homes able to meet the needs of children with a higher complexity of need/ behaviours.
- **More children with a plan for fostering are living in children's homes**, due to fostering sufficiency challenges. These children are more likely to be prioritised due to their lesser complex needs/ behaviours, further exacerbating the challenge of finding homes for our children with a higher complexity of need/ behaviours.



Where we want to be

- **More agency children's homes in Lancashire caring for Lancashire children.**
- **A higher proportion of children living in children's homes that are delivered by the Local Authority** (increase from 20% to 25% initially and then 33%; and an aspiration of 50% longer term).
- **More smaller homes that will prioritise Lancashire children and that are able to effectively care for the following needs/ behaviours:**
 - 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
 - Autism
 - Children with physical and/ or learning disabilities

What we don't need

- **Any more agency children's homes opened by providers who do not prioritise providing a home for a Lancashire child:** Further children's homes opening that take children from outside of Lancashire will put further pressure on health services, schools and police. They will also further exacerbate the current staff recruitment and retention challenges.
- **Any further residential family assessment units:** We have enough locally to meet demand and do not struggle to secure this type of provision.
- **Larger children's homes or those aimed exclusively at younger children (i.e. under 11),** as we do not tend to struggle to secure these types of homes.

Who we need

Good quality and good value providers who are willing to work collaboratively with Lancashire County Council to deliver local homes for Lancashire's children in care.

Please contact artenquiries@lancashire.gov.uk for any further discussions

