



WARRINGTON
Borough Council

Sufficiency Strategy

2023-2025



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Introduction

This statement sets out our commitment and ambition as well as some of the challenges for ensuring that we can support children in care to live in a place they are happy to call home where they feel safe and loved.

Our aim is sharing information that can inform and guide all those with an interest in supporting Children in Care to understand the 'bigger picture' and take steps to provide support in any way that they can.

Local profile

Warrington's resident population now stands at **211,580** (mid-year estimate 2022). This represents an increase of **353** individuals (0.2%) from the 2021 estimates. One of the contributing factors to the change in population from 2021 to 2022 is the number of births and deaths in the borough, often referred to as Natural Change (number of births – number of deaths). The Natural Change in 2022 was less than previous years (number of births = 1,942, number of deaths = 2,064), caused by an increase in the number of deaths, combined with an increase in the number of births from 2021 (number of births = 1,881, number of deaths = 2,148).

Of the 211,580 people living in Warrington (mid-year estimate 2022), 20.5% (43,468) are children aged under 18, 60.0% (126,997) are adults aged 18 to 64 and 19.4% (41,115) are aged 65 and over; 2.2% (5,038) of the resident population are 85 and over. This compares to 21.1% aged 0 to 17, 60.1% aged 18 to 64 and 18.8% aged 65 and over for the Northwest region as a whole, and 20.8%, 60.6% and 18.6% for England.

Breaking down Warrington's population by age shows that there are 57,151 children and young people aged 0-24 in the borough (mid-year estimate 2022). Warrington has a lower proportion of children and young people aged 0-17 (43,468) than commonly found across the Northwest (Mean = 45,207) and 18–24-year-olds (13,683 compared to a Mean of 18,357).

Although recent data for adults is not readily available, we can gauge the current ethnicity in Warrington's children through the School Census for Warrington schools. According to the January 2023 School Census, the average proportion of pupils classified as White British is approximately 79.7%, higher than the Northwest (71%) and England (62.6%).

In Warrington in 2023 the percentage of pupils from Asian origins was 7.6%, the percentage who were classified as Black ethnic origin was 1.1%, and those classified as mixed race made up 3.9% per cent of the school population. A further 5.2% per cent of the pupils were classified as any other white background ethnic origin.

In the North West region the percentage of the population who identified themselves as white in 2021 was 86%, the percentage who identified as Asian or Asian British was 8%, the percentage who identified as black or black British was 2%, those who identified as mixed race made up 2% of the population and those who identified as other ethnic group made up 1% of the population. This compared to Warrington where the percentage of the population who identified themselves as white was 94%, Asian or Asian British was 3%, Black or Black British was 1%, mixed race made up 2% and other ethnic groups made up 1% per cent of the population.

As of the 31st March 2023 there were 331 children in our care.



The sufficiency of accommodation in Children’s Social Care has been under immense pressure over the past 2 years, and certainly since we last published our Sufficiency Statement in 2020. Children in care numbers across England & Wales have increased by 15,000 since 2015, and Local Authority spending has increased exponentially from £4bn to £7bn, with private provider profit increasing year on year.

The “Big Ask”

Fundamentally, the accommodation available must meet the needs of our children. In 2022 Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children’s Commissioner conducted a survey of 600,000 children ‘The Big Ask’ the largest ever survey of children in England.

The findings continue to be relevant and a focus for our work - Children in care wanted to feel safe, stable, and loved; to maintain the vital relationships with friends and family; to be able to pursue their own interests and make plans for the future, and to be helped and supported when things go wrong, just like their peers.

‘The Big Ask’ identified four key things which children needed when in contact with children’s social care:

1. To be listened to and responded to. Children and families should not experience things being done ‘to them’ but with them, services should respond to their needs cohesively rather than in silos, and at all levels plans should be a collaborative process.
2. To have relationships that are trusting and stable. This means at least one positive, trusting relationship through which to engage the system. Interactions with the system should be built around this relationship, rather than expecting these relationships to stem from the system.
3. To feel loved, supported, and stable. Children need to feel able to make plans and put-down roots, then they need to be able to maintain relationships. This means long-term planning for children in care, and in leaving care. Families need to know they can rely on services to be there for them when they need it.
4. To be able to access practical help and support. Expectations placed on children or families should always be matched by help to meet these. Support should happen at the point it is needed, before needs escalate. This applies to support for both children, and their families where that is the cause of their vulnerability.

Through talking to children in care, along with wider research, in addition to the above and in respect of accommodation, they want:

- Wherever they are to feel like a home, where they feel safe.
- To trust and feel close to those that care for them. To be loved.
- To have choice and a say about where they live.
- To live in their local community, remaining in the same school, close to friends and family.
- To have as much information about a placement before they move.
- To have reassurance when they like a placement that they can stay there.

With the above in mind, in relation to sufficiency there are five critical areas, summarised below that this statement seeks to address:

- **Permanency Planning:** Ensuring legal permanency is achieved for our children in care, underpinned by a commitment to permanency being our obsession, promoting reunification, special guardianship, and adoption where appropriate.

- Accommodation Options: the extent to which the range of provision and providers (internal and external) can meet the diverse and changing needs of children in care in a responsive way. The availability of accommodation in Warrington, the different types of provision is essential to meet immediate, short, and long-term needs of children and young people, including ethnic, cultural, physical and learning needs.
- Complex Needs: to ensure we can meet the needs of our most vulnerable children in care, who suffer from emotional health & wellbeing issues, or are being exploited.
- Placement Stability: children need to feel safe, attached to carers and in settings that provide stability, and we must wherever limit changes which are known to be disruptive and have a negative impact on outcomes. Which in turn lead to further instability, increased need, and higher placement costs.
- High Quality and value for outcomes: Carers and those looking after children need to have the right skills, settings must be designed to meet the child's needs and to offer them security. They also need good support. Alongside this there needs to be assurances that services are good value for money.
- Early help and prevention: alongside the push for improving services when children come into care, we want to prevent children, young people and families reaching crisis point through a range of innovative services.

Preventing needs escalating by addressing the conditions that contribute is central – this includes support to children in care that are reunified with families.

Our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-25 is the framework by which agencies and services in Warrington will contribute to ensuring that children in care have the same opportunities as their peers to enable them to fulfil their potential and make a good transition into adult life. The Strategy and sufficiency statement are aligned to ensure there are shared priorities for children and young people in care.

Executive summary

This summary provides an overview of key issues and themes that are covered in more detail throughout the rest of the document.

Official figures show that nationally there are, as of March 2023, now 83,840 children in care. This is a 7% increase from the official figures from March 2019, where it was reported that there were 78,140 children in care in England.

As of March 2023, in Warrington there were 331 children and young people in care. These children are described as being 'in care' and are the statutory responsibility of the local authority that becomes, in effect, their 'corporate parent.' As a 'corporate parent,' our role is to ensure there are 'sufficient' numbers, types and quality of homes and accommodation available to ensure children's safety, welfare, and emotional/physical wellbeing.

From March 2020 to March 2023, the number of children in care within Warrington increased, to a peak of 383 in October 2020, to a low of 323 in January 2022, before stabilising in March 2023 at around 331.

It is important to note that our children in care figures have reduced during a time when nationally numbers have increased.

Whilst in the main the age profile and reasons for being in care correlate with those of other Local Authorities, the 'rate' of children in care in Warrington compared to the population remains higher than our statistical neighbours and the England average.

Despite the total number of Children in Care decreasing the impact and demand on sufficiency remains significant. There is increased competition for placements in the residential sector as the needs of children become more complex, we welcome unaccompanied children into our care, alongside the wider (regional and national) challenges in the recruitment of foster carers.

The impact of complexity and scarcity limits the choices professionals and children have in where they live and create difficulties in matching children to a placement. The impact of this early-stage compromise driven by sufficiency can lead to further problems of placement instability.

From the 331 children placed in care, 54% (179 – 168 In-House FC & 11 Internal Residential) children were placed within Warrington's own provision, this compares to the national figure that is reported as 55%.

Breaking down the type of provision further (internal & external), approximately 66% were placed with foster carers, 14% of all children in care were in a residential setting, this includes all children's homes and residential care homes.

Warrington is not alone in having to care for children who have very complex (often emotional & mental health) needs and particularly challenging behaviour. Their history and experience of trauma means these children can be particularly vulnerable to sexual and criminal exploitation. Such children often have a high number of agencies involved in their care planning arrangements, and as such have complex care arrangements. Increasingly their needs can only be met by solo or therapeutic placements. Unfortunately, these placements are limited in availability and incur considerable costs. Whilst it remains a small number, we have in the last 12 months continued to see several placements costing £7.5k - £24.5k per week with independent residential providers a financial increase of c15%. A number of these children are also subject to 'Deprivation of Liberty'

requiring a high level of support and surveillance. These are commonly semi secure and short-term assessment placements.

To help counter the rise in admissions and address budgetary pressures, the Families and Wellbeing directorate established an Edge of Care service in July 2016 targeting families with children and young people at risk of coming into care and putting in place additional support to enable families to sustain the changes required for them to keep their children safe. This service, along with new 'edge of care' services and focus on legal permanence has contributed to our reduction in our Child in Care numbers.

We continue to be a partner in the Northwest collaborative approach to the contracting of independent residential and fostering placements for children in care and care leavers via Placements Northwest. We, like other authorities continue to place more children outside the collaborative contract because the search process is widening and with a rise in complexity more single provider arrangements are emerging. There continues to be strong and positive networking between Authorities in relation to sector management, monitoring, and development.

We have also started to see the need to place a very small number of children in unregulated care settings, which is usually rented accommodation with 'wrap around' care. This is not acceptable.

Warrington's central geographical position in the Northwest means it still benefits from a good quality and a range of nearby private/independent fostering and residential services for children in care and this supports our ambition and commitment for our children to stay local. Positively overall, 88% of children in Warrington's care were placed within 20 miles of their home, this is an increase from 2021 where the figure reported was 81%.

With increasing children in care numbers across the Northwest, accommodation options within Warrington and neighbouring boroughs continue to face challenges when meeting the needs of our local cared for children.

Placement stability for children having three or more placements a year had been a concern for Warrington in 2017/18, with data reporting that 14% of children in care had three or more placements within the year. However, we have seen improvements in this area and short-term stability has improved over the past six years and now stands 10% (31) children in care having had three or more placements during the year.

Warrington had traditionally performed well against comparators in terms of children who stay in the same placement for two or more years. In 2018 it was noted that the picture was worsening with 65% of children in the longer-term cohort staying in the same placement for two years or more. However, there have been improvements over the past six years with 68% of children now in the same placement for over 2 years, which presents an improving picture of long-term stability. Furthermore, when considering the high number of children exiting care to special guardianship this is good.

Since the last Sufficiency Strategy was finalised in 2020 a lot of work has taken place to increase sufficiency through in-house development and innovation, as well as finance from the DFE to help support the growth of our internal residential provision. However, whilst improvements in local options, practice and outcomes are positive, there is always work to do and several key areas of development are detailed below:

Internal Fostering: Since 2020 Warrington have continued to be part of the Foster4 Recruitment & Marketing Hub, alongside Halton and Cheshire West / Chester. From April 2021 we have seen the

number of foster placements decline from 185 to 168 in March 2023. Developing our in-house fostering provision is a continuing significant priority. In December 2023 we were awarded funding from the DfE to extend the Foster4 Hub, across Cheshire & Mersey, to include Cheshire East, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helen's, and Wirral. We hope that the funding will assist us to recruit and retain more foster carers and improve placement sufficiency across the region. Warrington will be leading on the project. Over £1million of the funding will go towards delivering a new, larger, and improved Foster4 Recruitment Hub, which will launch in April 2024. The improved hub will help all councils in the consortium to deliver a more joined up approach to foster care recruitment and provide an offer that is attractive and supportive to prospective carers. The remaining £1million funding will go towards the Mockingbird programme – which supports looked after children and their foster carers.

Mockingbird

Mockingbird is an extended family model which was conceived in Washington State USA in 2004 by The Mockingbird Society. The aim was to have a positive impact on the public perception of children and young people who were fostered, and to work with fostering families and child placing agencies to improve outcomes for children and fostering households. The Mockingbird family model was introduced to the UK in 2015- 2016 and Warrington have successfully launched 3 Mockingbird constellations since the last sufficiency strategy, with plans to launch a 4th in 2024.

Placement stability

It was noted 2017 & 2018 that we had seen a decline in our overall placement stability. Over the last six years, 2018 to 2024 we have seen improvements. This has been achieved through, regular assessment and permanence meetings, the support of our fostering service, our Families First team & Systemic Hub working with children (and their foster carers) on the 'edge of residential' care and keeping children at the centre of everything we do.

Residential Redesign

This is a key strategic outcome of the Living Well Strategy 2024-28 and is associated with the wider programme of transformation over the past 5 years, which included a successful application to join the Department of Education's (DfE) Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme and roll out the No Wrong Door model, and DfE Capital Bids to open three new Children's Homes in the borough; a short break unit for children on the edge of care, a complex needs hub and a new medium to long term residential home.

In the context of increasingly expensive and limited choice of external (private) residential care placements, there is an on-going commitment to retain and grow some of the council's internal residential provision for children in care. This supports children in care to remain close to their home, community, and school. It is also linked with the council being more efficient. The redesign will increase the bed capacity of the council's residential provision, from 11 beds to 25 by January 2025. This would mean more children in care would live locally and within our own resources.

No Wrong Door (The Lighthouse)

The council have successfully taken part in the DfE's Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme, which saw £2.7 million in funding over two years from the DfE to support the implementation of the No Wrong Door model in Warrington. The No Wrong Door model integrates residential care, foster care, speech and language support, mental health services and the police into a single hub that is based in a residential home.

Short Break Home (Anchor House)

Anchor House was renovated using funding from the DfE 'Children's Home Capital Fund' in November 2022. It is a home that looks to support children with complex needs. The home offers a range of targeted intervention that looks to support multi agency working, support and accommodation in the form of short-term breaks and outreach support. The Home provides short term breaks for a maximum of 4 young people aged 11-17 of either gender at any one time ensuring that they receive positive intervention and support built upon nurturing relationships, with the aim of preventing them entering our care on a full-time basis.

Complex Needs Hub

The proposed model, a mixture of residential (4 beds with 2 bed move on accommodation) & outreach services seek to fundamentally change the way we work with children to provide a locally based multi-agency delivered short/medium term care and therapeutic outreach model for some of our most complex children young people reducing the requirement to access and place young people into out of area placements and with external providers. This we believe will provide a much better experience and outcomes, and significantly reduce costs as system whilst ensuring future sustainability of provision. In support of the capital funding WBC were successful in their application for funding from DfE 'Children's Home Capital Fund' in November 2022. This is a match-funded capital bid and properties/land to be developed must be owned by the Local Authority (LA). We anticipate the Hub will open in late 2024.

Mid to Long Stay Children's Home

In recognition children are still entering our care and being placed in residential care we were successful in a third application for funding from the DfE 'Children's Home Capital Fund' to build a new 4 x bed children's home with 'move on' accommodation. We anticipate the new home will open in early 2025.

Transition to Adulthood and Care Leavers

At the end of March 2023, the largest age group (41%) of children in care are aged 10-15 years, a reduction of 4% since 2019. 28% are aged 16 years and over, an increase of 9%. We have started to see a change the age ranges of the children we care for, and the impact of edge of care work. With a high number of 16 & 17 years olds predicted to leave the care system, by virtue of the fact they will become adult in the next 2 years. However, once in our care most of these children are unable to return home to their families and therefore, we must ensure that we have sufficient accommodation to meet their needs as they transition to and move into adulthood.

From March 2019 there were a total of 42 individuals age between 17 to 21 years old placed in supported accommodation or in independent living placements, with this figure increasing to 59 individuals by March 2023. It was noted in our last sufficiency strategy that the costs for these placements had increased by 20%, which was impacting on our overall spend. As a result, we set up our own supported accommodation service. With a total of 12 beds across the service. Ofsted registration has been applied for under the Supported Accommodation Regulations 2023. We have also commissioned a service from a local provider and 'block booked' 5 trainer flats and 2 x 2-bed outreach flats for over 18s.

Warrington do not place 16- & 17-year-olds in B&B accommodation, and we also have a commitment not to place our care leavers in B&B accommodation demonstrating how well housing and children's social care work together. However, there is a shortage of social housing across the town. A 'Homelessness Summit' took place in October 2023 via a collaboration between Warrington



Borough Council and Neil Morland & Co Housing Consultants. Warrington Borough Council wanted to explore the causes and solutions to homelessness in the local authority area, which included our housing offer to care leavers. During the summit WBC considered a full range of issues that affect the levels of homelessness including:

- National factors, such as immigration policy, local housing allowance rates, etc.
- Local housing demand and supply.
- Social housing – social rent and affordable rent rates and the role of registered providers.
- Private sector housing market.
- Approach to commissioning.
- Collaboration and cooperation across WBC and with other public bodies, registered providers, voluntary organisations, and others.

To try and start to address some of the gaps in sufficiency children’s services have been working in collaboration with our colleagues in commissioning and housing services, to develop a portfolio of 18 plus accommodation for our care leavers.

Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP)

The objective of SHAP is to increase the supply of high-quality accommodation with accompanying support to address gaps in homelessness pathway provision. SHAP will be targeted at two groups: those with the longest histories of rough sleeping or the most complex needs, to help them recover from rough sleeping and its associated traumas; and vulnerable young people (age 18-25) at risk of or experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping. The focus will be on longer-term accommodation. In 2023 Warrington Borough Council were successful in a levelling up bid to renovate and provide 6 x 1 bed flats to 18–25-year-old care leavers. We anticipate that the accommodation would be ready in early 2025.

Working with third sector providers

We have been working with providers in the local area to commission 10 x 1 bed flats for 18 – 25-year-olds. Building work is nearing completion and the accommodation is due to open in mid-2024.

We are also to link in with housing providers in the independent sector to ensure that children who are transitioning to adulthood have access to good quality housing. We have commissioned Vulnerable Tenant Support Scheme (VTSS) to work with our care leavers to ensure that they are supported to maintain their own tenancy.

Cost and Funding

The current and predicted future financial position across local government means there continues to be 4 substantive challenges:

1. To maintain and where possible extend effective early intervention and alternatives to care, keeping children safe at home and reducing the overall number of children entering care, whilst discharging children from care via discharge of care orders or special guardianship.
2. To recruit and maintain our own local carers to keep children in a family environment (fostering, family, or friends) and children in their local community. Particularly carers who have experience in caring for adolescents or children with a disability.
3. To reduce the number of children in residential care and in externally commissioned placements.

4. To grow our internal provision of residential care, supported and 18 plus accommodation to ensure we can provide quality local services which are more cost effective.





Key issues Summary

Key background influences and issues that affect our current sufficiency position and our ability to improve outcomes are summarised below:

- Warrington saw an unprecedented increase in the number of children in care by 73%. (A rise of 169, from 232 in March 2014 to 401 in March 2018). Since 2018 we have seen our children in care numbers reduce significantly, and as of the 31st March 2023 the number was 331. This compares well with other local authorities but is still higher than our statutory neighbours and the England average.
- Increased challenges around sufficiency across fostering and residential services, within the local authority and private sector, has led to less choice.
- We always recognise that placement stability, is key to permanency planning and good outcomes for children. This involves not only in the continuity of placement but also in the support around the placement itself. It is important that we continue to focus on placement stability to ensure the least disruption to children's lives as possible. We have significantly strengthened this area of work, via the work undertaken by 'The Lighthouse' and Systemic Hub.
- A continuing pattern of older (aged14+) children needing care and protection with very complex needs and the lack of specialist placements to meet these needs.
- Given the overall rise in care numbers – a rising number of care leavers, particularly unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- Keeping children safe and managing risks associated with child / criminal sexual exploitation (contextual safeguarding) and missing from home episodes.
- The challenge of finding emergency short term or urgent placements where stability and assessment are needed and medium/long term placements that offer security and permanence for a longer period.
- Recruiting and retaining Warrington Borough Council foster carers that can meet the range and level of needs presented.
- Supporting families under stress where children/young people have significant special needs that without support can lead to care.
- The supply of social housing and the need for a more diverse range of accommodation and support options for care leavers that need a blend of support and independence.

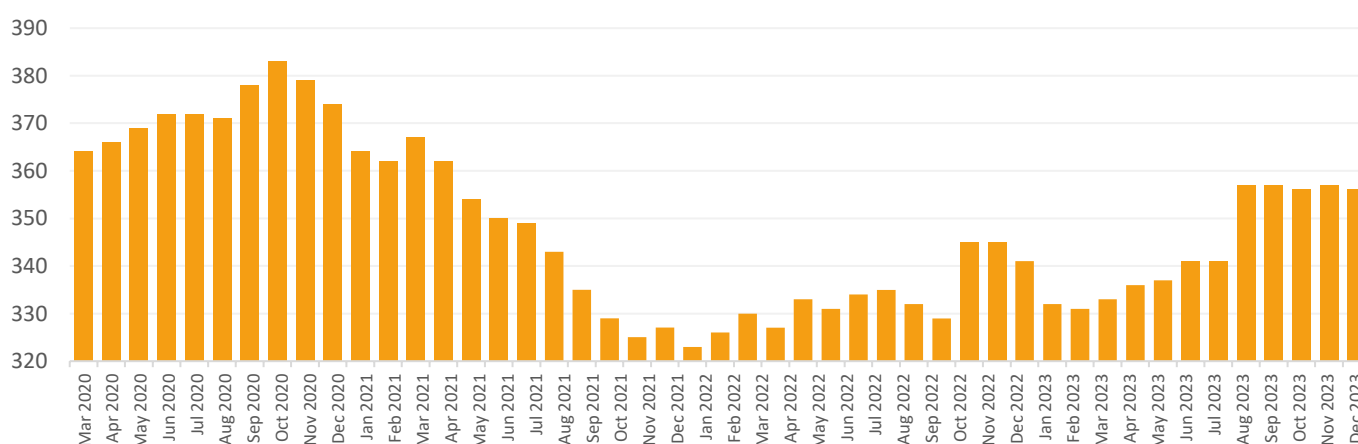
Review of the current position and profile

This section summarises some of the key trends and patterns associated with accommodation for children in care, care leavers and those who are ‘entering’ care.

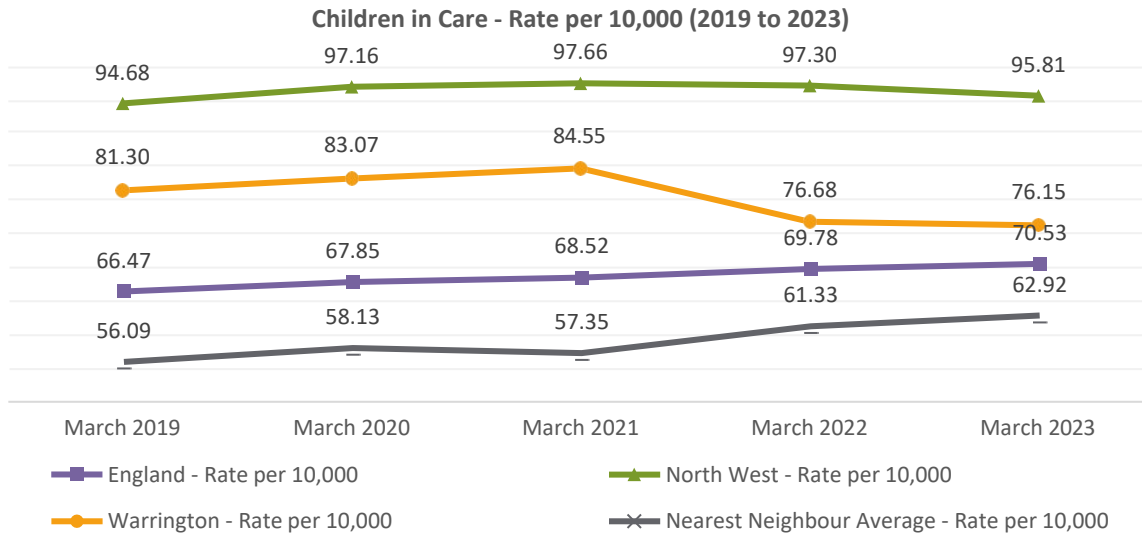
Child in care population

Between March 2020 to October 2020 the number of Warrington children in care increased from 364 to 383 individuals. From January 2022 the figure decreased to 323, due to our robust work regarding permanency planning. After June 2023, the number of children in care started to rise again and was 356 in January 2024 (latest available Warrington Data). In the main this was due to a number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children becoming ‘cared for’ by Warrington following placements by the Home Office in Adult hotels.

Warrington: Number of Children in Care and Rate per 10,000



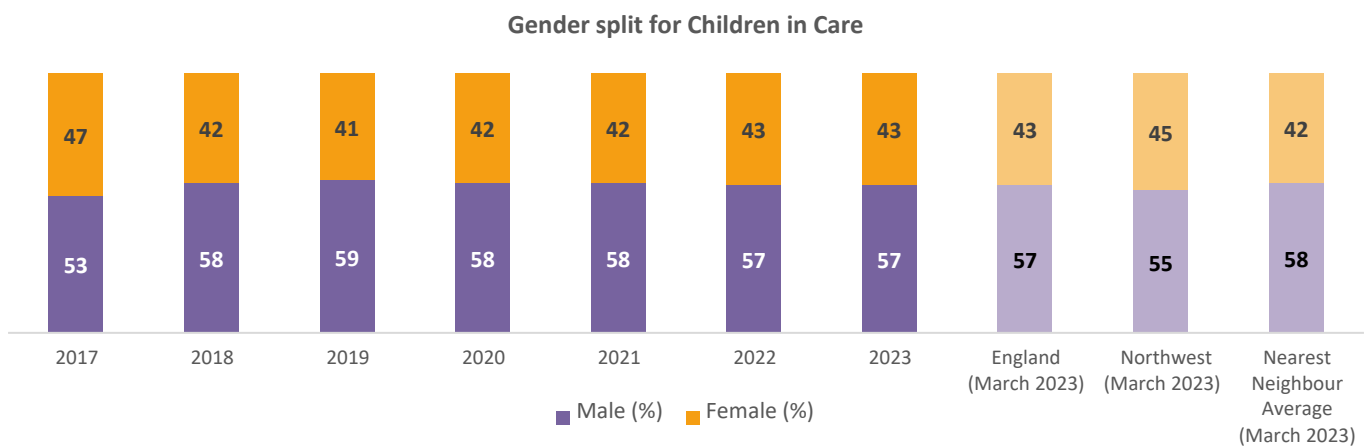
From March 2020 to March 2021, the rate of children in care rate per 10,000 increased from 81.30 to 84.55. Over the same period, the figures for England, the Northwest and the CIPFA nearest neighbour average also increased. Warrington rate then decreased in March 2022 and continued to decrease by March 2023, whereas the Northwest and the CIPFA nearest neighbour continued to increase.



Following a slight increase in our children in care rate per 10,000 from March 2019 to March 2021, between March 2019 and March 2023 we have seen an overall decrease in the rate from 81.30 to 76.15. This is against a context of the England average increasing from 66.47 to 70.53, the Northwest rate from 94.68 to 95.81 and our nearest average neighbour from 56.09 to 62.92. The decrease in Warrington was due to our new edge of care model, robust pre-proceeding process and focus on discharge of care orders (to parents and to special guardianship).

GENDER

From 2017 to 2023, Warrington has had a consistently higher proportion of males to females than our comparators, with a split of 58% to 42% in March 2023. This split is also reflected nationally, regionally and within the average of the CIPFA nearest neighbours.



As of 31 March 2023, we had 190 males in our care, 20 of these were UASC, all males, 10.5% of our male cohort. As recognised in our last sufficiency strategy we also have a number of males who are reported to display complex behaviours linked to neurodiversity, criminality, and exploitation. We continue to commission services such as 'Advanced Solutions' via the Integrated Children's Board (ICB). (Appendix A). We also consult closely with the Police, who are

support our edge of care services at 'The Lighthouse' and now have an 'All Age Exploitation Strategy' in place. ETHNICITY

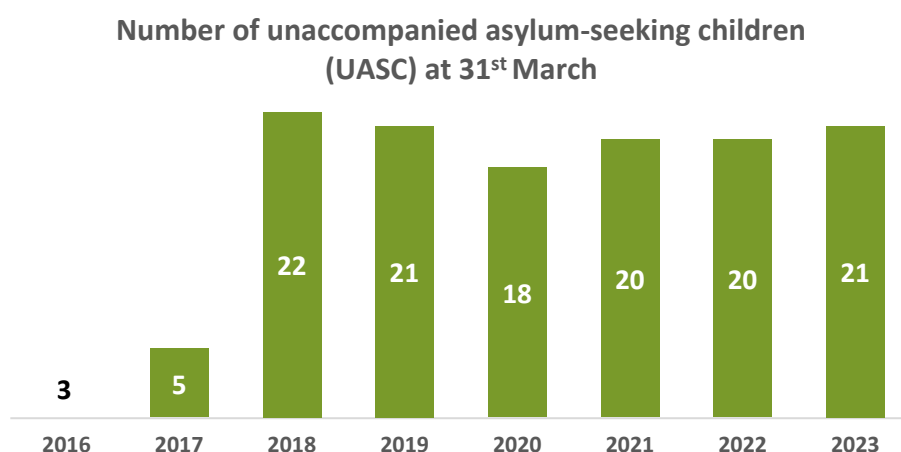
Warrington children in care continues to have a larger percentage (79.7%) of White British origin than that of England (62.6%), the Northwest (71%) and its CIPFA nearest neighbour cohorts (78.2%). This presents us with some challenges when we are placing children of other ethnicity or cultures.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

At the end of the March 2023, there were 21 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), 6% of the total Warrington children in care population. This group is older (aged 16-18 years), boys, and are in need due to absent parenting. There were also 37, formerly UASC young people who qualified for Care Leavers status. They majority of our children in care and care leavers were placed in the Greater Manchester region, with either an Independent Fostering Agency or in Supported Accommodation. Warrington are committed to supporting USAC and we actively continue to take children under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). However, the demand for placements following the opening of Asylum hotels in June 2023 alongside the NTS has meant that the provision of placements remains a challenge. To meet this challenge, we have:

- Expanded our supported accommodation offer – working with third sector providers we have block purchased 1 x 2-bedroom house, 4 x 1-bedroom flats and 2 x 2-bedroom flats all in the Warrington area. All of which are now operational.
- As part of our DFE fostering collaboration bid a regional USAC worker has been appointed to support the recruitment and retention of a more diverse range of foster carers.

Moving forward we have committed to 'block purchasing' 10 independent flats via a third-party provider for Care Leavers, including UASC.

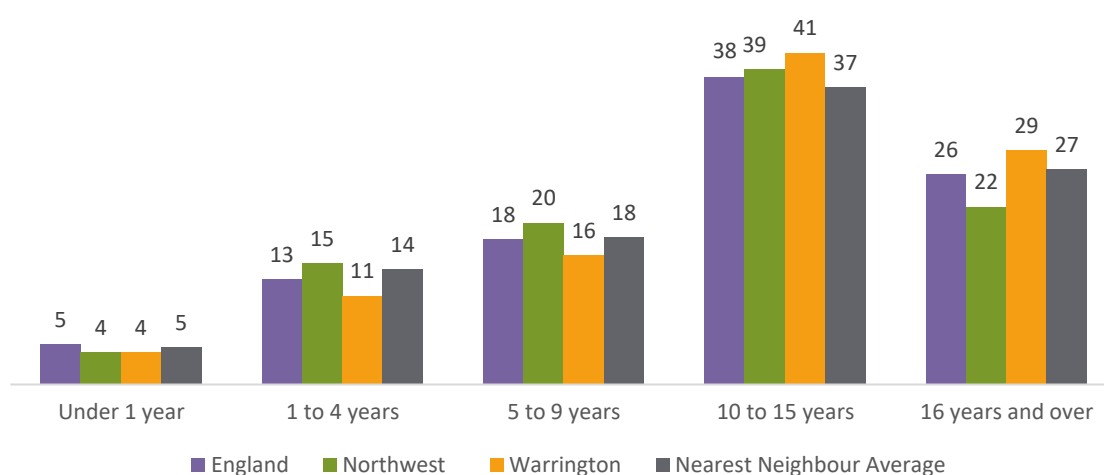


Age

At the end of March 2023, the provisional data shows that the largest age group of children in care within Warrington are aged 10 to 15 years old (41%). The next largest age group are those aged 16 years and older (28%), with children aged 1 to 4 years old having made up 11% of those in care and children aged 1 and under making up the final 4%.

Comparing the figures to the England (38%), Northwest (39%) and nearest neighbour cohort average (37%), Warrington has a larger percentage of 10 to 15 years olds than those areas. This is due to our increase in children entering care from 2014 to 2018 who are now older, and an increase in USAC. As above this does present additional challenges for finding suitable accommodation, particularly as these children move to the 16+ category and options can become more limited.

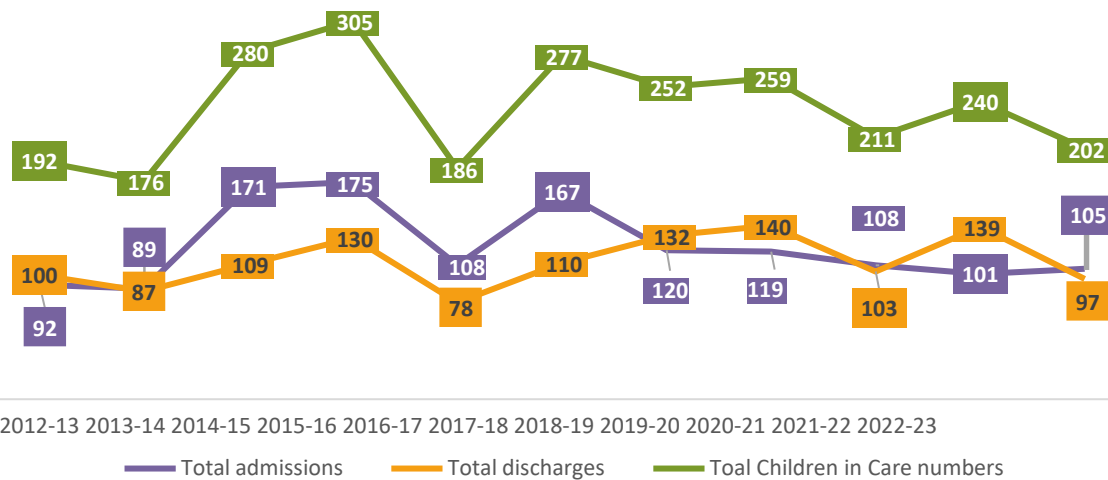
Percentage split - children in care by age group March 2023



Admissions and discharges

The chart below highlights the admission and discharge numbers since 2012/13 and illustrates the overall sharp increase in numbers between 2013 and 2016. Changes to the court process, the impact on practice of high-profile abuse cases, increased accountabilities for Local Authorities around UASC, homelessness and young offenders, along with a national and regional increases, impacted on figures.

Children in care - Number of Admissions and Discharges



Since 2018/19 the number of children entering care had seen a year-on-year downturn, whilst in parallel the number of children being safely discharged from care has increased. This has led as noted to an overall reduction in our Children in Care numbers in Warrington. This reduction is due to accumulation of a number of factors, including a robust early help offer, increased and well-resourced edge of care service, a focus on good quality pre-proceedings work and legal permanence for children exiting our care.

However, we continue to anticipate pressure in relation to a few areas including:

- Court directed Mother and Baby Placements.
- Accommodation for young people with high level risk to self or others and needing semi-secure, therapeutic and or solo placements in residential settings.
- Sourcing family placements for adolescents and large sibling groups.
- Provision for children with physical and learning care needs and those that may require medical care.
- UASC.
- Supported Provision for 16- to 18-year-olds and care leavers up to 21 years old and in some instances 25.

Admissions by age

From the 903 (return) 2023 data, the percentage of babies under one year old (4%) was below the national figure (5%) and the nearest neighbour cohort average (5%). For those aged 1 to 4 (11%) and 5 to 9 years old (16%), Warrington has a smaller proportion than England (13%, 18%), the Northwest (15%, 20%) and the nearest neighbour cohort (14%, 18%).

Where Warrington has a larger percentage is for those aged 10 to 15 years old (41%) and 16 years and over (29%). These are higher than the figures for England (38%, 26%), the Northwest (39%, 22%) and the average for Warrington's nearest neighbours (37%, 27%), in the same period.

The Council successfully took part in the DfE's Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme, which saw £2.7 million in funding over two years from the DfE to support the implementation of the No Wrong Door model in Warrington from 2021.

In 2022-23, 67 young people accessed No Wrong Door/Lighthouse services. Most (51) young people open to the Lighthouse in 2022-23 were a child in need at referral (76%) either on the edge of care or edging to care. Six young people were on a child protection plan and ten young people were already in care and received either placement support and/or stayed in the residential hub. Out of the 67 young people open or closed to No Wrong Door in 2022-23, the majority worked exclusively with outreach (64%, n=43). A smaller number have stayed in the residential hub only (31% n=21) whilst the remainder were supported across both sides of the service (5%, n=3).

In the first two years, there was an 8% reduction in overall numbers of children in care in Warrington, falling from 362 in April 2021 to 333 in March 2023. Numbers increased to 341 at the end of August 2023, representing an overall decrease of 6% since the start of the programme.

The Lighthouse works with young people in care aged 12-17. By removing Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) from this cohort (as the No Wrong Door model can have little influence), numbers increased by six, from 178 in April 2021 to 184 in August 2023. This is an increase of 3%. It could be argued that without our Edge of Care service, this figure could be higher.

Out of the No Wrong Door Edge of Care cohort who were on a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan at referral, and who are now stepped away from the service, 67% remained out of care and returned to, or remained in a family setting by the end of March 2023. This is a further improvement on the 2021-22 figure, when 62% of closed Edge of Care cases remained out of care by the end of the first year. This covers both outreach and residential sides of the service.

Twenty-four young people stayed at the Lighthouse in 2022-23, many as an emergency. Stays in the Lighthouse, rather than being placed in external residential placements, may have led to an approximate cost avoidance of between £848,665 and £1,247,898 over year. This is based on the number of nights and the daily external residential unit costs at the start of the year (£539) or end of the year (£792) and assumes all young people may have gone into external residential placements.

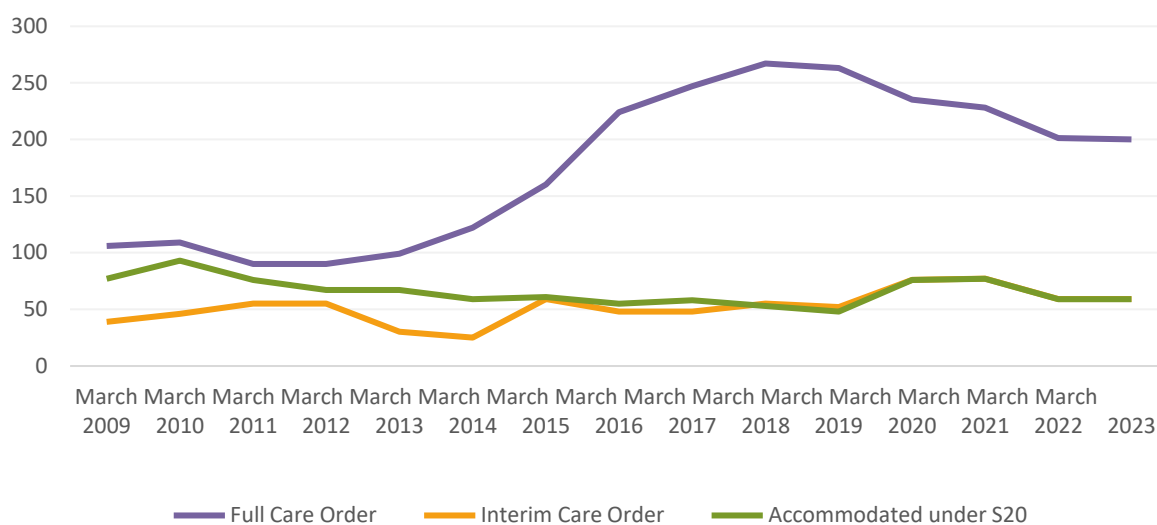
Arrests and charges remained low and missing incidences showed a downward trend in 2022-23. Since October 2022 none of the young people open to the Lighthouse have been charged with a criminal offence. Arrests have declined.

By March 2023 only 5% of the NWD cohort were missing from home.

Legal status

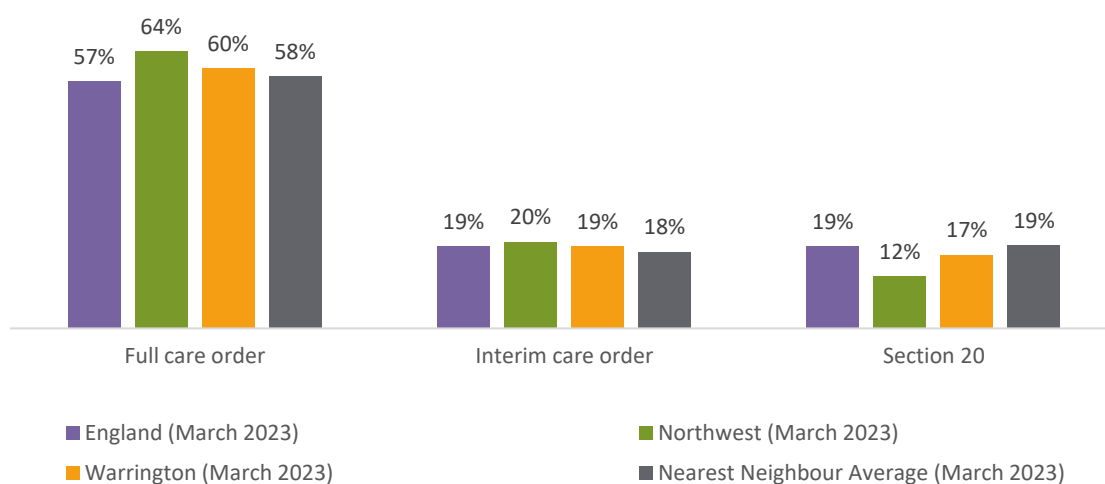
The status awarded through the legal process to children in care is significant, as it does affect the options for accommodation in the short, medium, and longer term. With the current levels of children in care for recorded for Warrington remaining steady between March 2022 and March 2023 has been reflected in the number of children receiving a Full Care Order, Interim Care Order or being Accommodated under S20.

Full care orders, Interim care orders and Section 20 (31st March 2023)



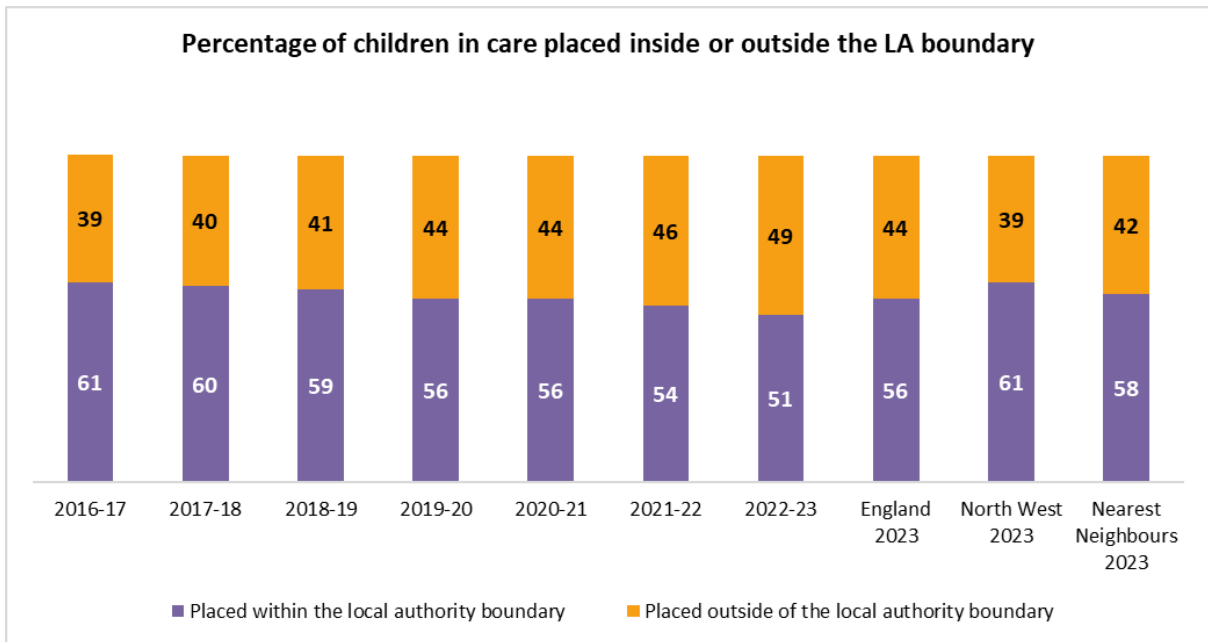
From the latest data available:

Percentage of children in care by selected legal status



Placed close to home

Data from March 2023 shows that 51% of Warrington children in care are placed within the borough’s boundary. This is below both the figures for the comparator areas of England (56%), the Northwest (61%) and the nearest neighbour average (58%).

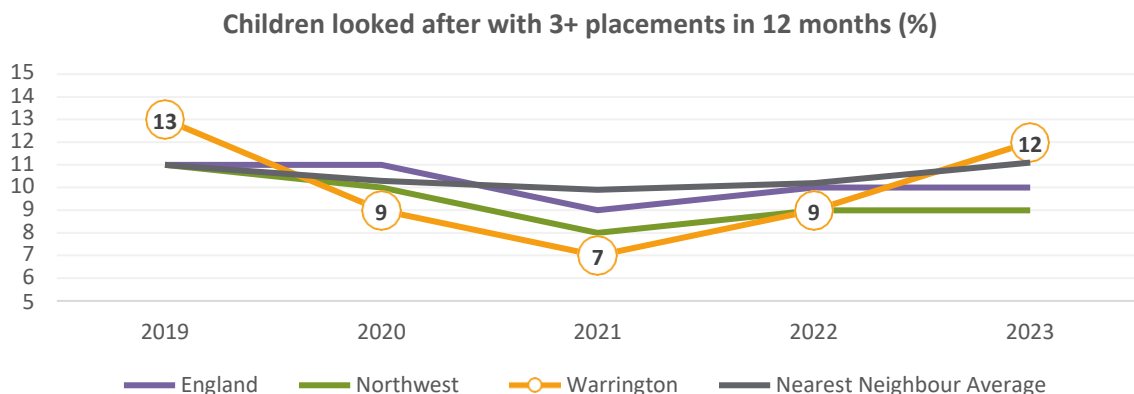


Of those placed within the borough, all 50% of those were placed within 20 miles of their family home. This is the same as the nearest neighbour cohort average (50%) above the same figure for England (48%) but below that recorded for the Northwest region (56%).

Where children are placed in care, 88% are placed within 20 miles of the borough boundary, and 12% 20 miles outside of the boundary. In comparison, the figure for being placed 20 miles outside the boundary in England is 17%, the Northwest 11%, and the nearest neighbour average is 16%. So, although a number of children are placed outside the Warrington boundary a high % are placed within 20 miles, so the majority of children remain close to Warrington.

Stability

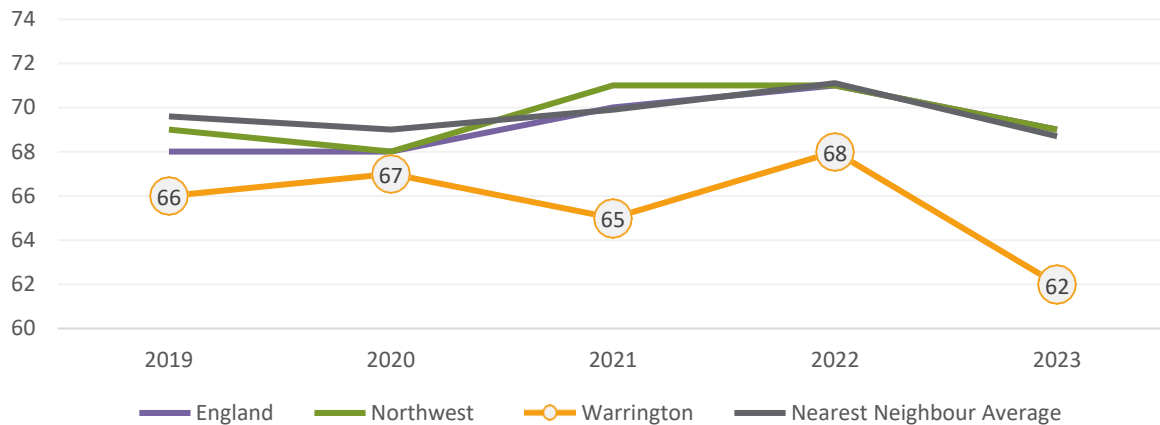
The percentage of children in care that have had 3 or more placement within a 12-month period has increased to 12% as of March 2023 from a low recorded in March 2021 of 7%. During March 2021, Warrington had a lower percentage than that of England (9%), the Northwest (8%) and the nearest neighbour average (10%) but as of March 2023, is above all three comparator areas.



Since the Covid-19 pandemic we have seen greater instability in placements, with the needs of the children we care for becoming more complex.

Similarly, the percentage of children, looked after for 2.5+ years within the same placement has also reduced over the same period. Whilst this may not appear to be positive, this in part can be attributed to the number of children placed with foster carers (including kinship carers) for over 12 months who have achieved legal permanence via Special Guardianship Allowance or have been actively discharged from care, so they are no longer subject to a Care Order.

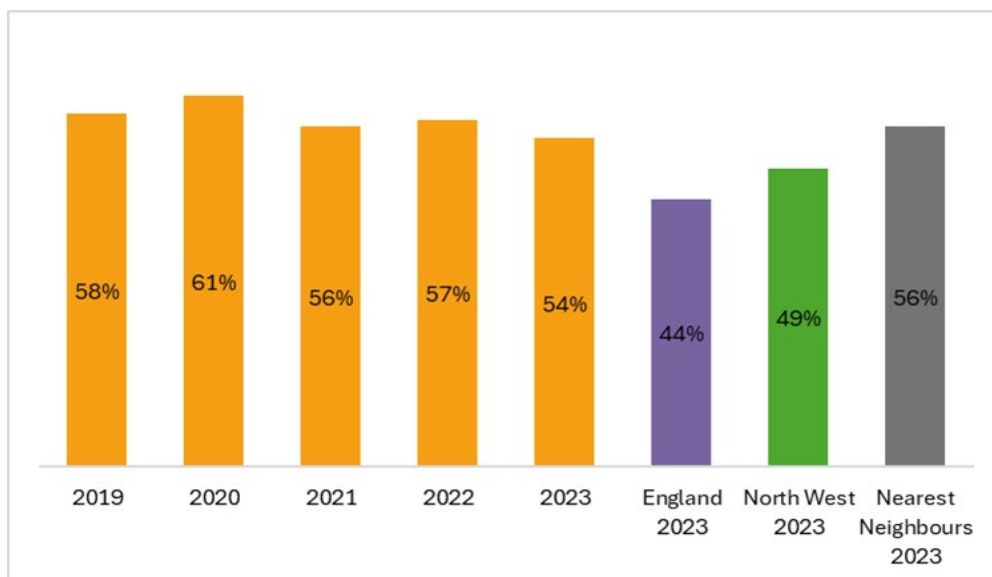
Children looked after for 2.5+ years in the same placement (%)



Placement provider and type

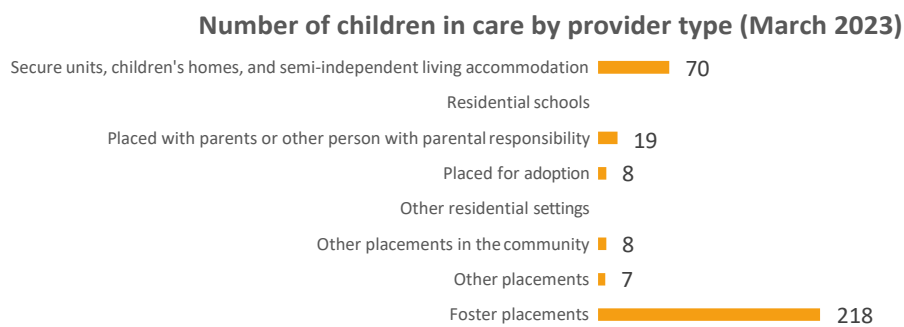
Provider

Data from March 2023 shows that 54% of children in Warrington’s care have been placed with the Local Authority’s own provision, this equates to 179 individuals. This is a lower figure than the previous years from 2019 up to 2022 but it is in line with the CIPFA nearest neighbour average figure (56%) and is higher than that of figures from England (44%) and the Northwest (49%). This demonstrates that Warrington are proactive in utilising internal resources.



Type

Placements are distributed between the 'main' areas of fostering, residential and kinship carers accounting for almost 90% of all placements as summarised below.



As of 31st March 2023:

- 218 (65%) Children were in foster placements

This is a reduction of 43 children from the same period in 2019, where the figure reported was 261 children.

Although this is a reduction of 44 children from the same period in 2019 when there were 261 children in foster placements, (a decrease of 17%), the overall proportion of children in foster care remains similar at 68%.

Overall numbers of children in care fell over this period from 385 to 333.

- 70 (21%) children were placed in Children's homes (including secure units and semi-independent living)

This is an increase from the same period in 2019, where 51 (13%) children had been placed in this category, representing an increase of 37%.

- 19 (6%) were placed with parents or other persons with parental responsibility

In 2019, 46 children had been placed with parents or other persons with parental responsibility, this figure decreased by 27%, when in 2023, 19 children were placed within the same type of care.

The accommodation offers for children in care and care

The next section summarises some of the issues and patterns associated with the approach to delivering sufficient provision i.e., ensuring there are the right type of placements in the right place at the right time to meet our children's needs.

Warrington fostering (Foster4)

Our aim is to meet the needs of as many children as possible within appropriate family care arrangements foster care, including kinship carers.

The preferred option for every child who cannot live with their parents is to grow up in the care of their family or with an adult with whom they have an existing meaningful relationship (kinship care). This is fully supported by the 'Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy' 2023.

The fostering service works closely with the social work teams when undertaking viability assessments in respect of kinship carers who may be able to provide placements for children in care, and now have 2 specialist assessors within the fostering team to expediate the process.

When a child cannot be placed with a kinship carer a placement with Warrington local authority foster carers remains the next best option for most children who are unable to live with their birth parents or relatives. The provision of a high quality, effective, child centred, in-house fostering service is a core objective for improving outcomes for children and young people and ensuring placement within local communities.

On 1st April 2018, a collaborative foster carer recruitment hub (Foster 4) was launched. This involved four local authorities working together on the recruitment of foster carers across the Cheshire region: Warrington, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Halton.

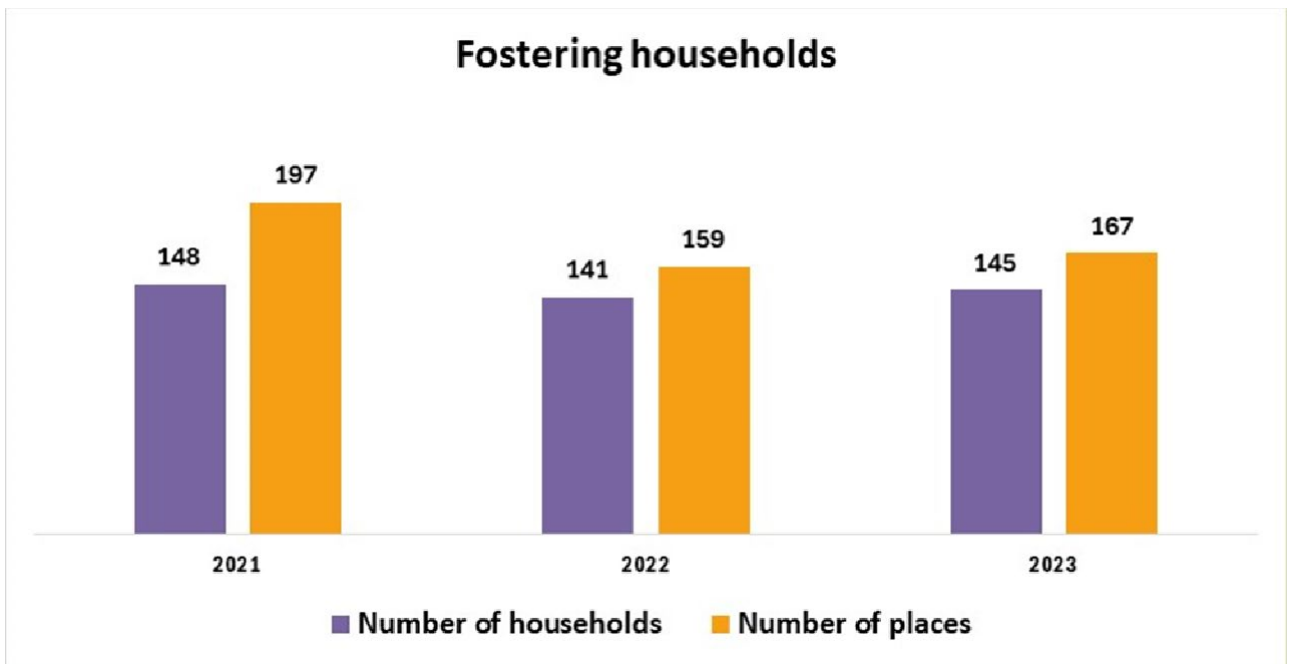
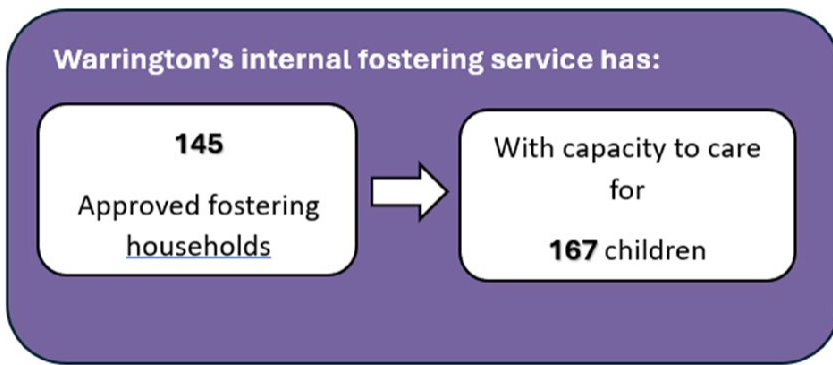
In December 2023, 8 Local Authorities secured over £2.3million in Department for Education (DfE) funding to transform fostering recruitment and retention across Cheshire and Merseyside. We hope that the funding will assist us to recruit and retain more foster carers and improve placement sufficiency across the region. Warrington will be leading on the project and working with seven other local authorities – Liverpool, Wirral, Knowsley, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton, and St Helens to deliver the programme over two years.

Over £1million of the funding will go towards delivering a new, larger, and improved Foster4 Recruitment Hub, which will launch in April 2024. The improved hub will help all councils in the consortium to deliver a more joined up approach to foster care recruitment and provide an offer that is attractive and supportive to prospective carers.

The remaining £1million funding will go towards the Mockingbird programme – which supports looked after children and their foster carers.

We hope this will promote the new and improved offer that will attract and support foster carers for years to come.

The number of foster carers (recruited and kinship) within the fostering service has decreased in the past three years, from 154 households to 145 households.



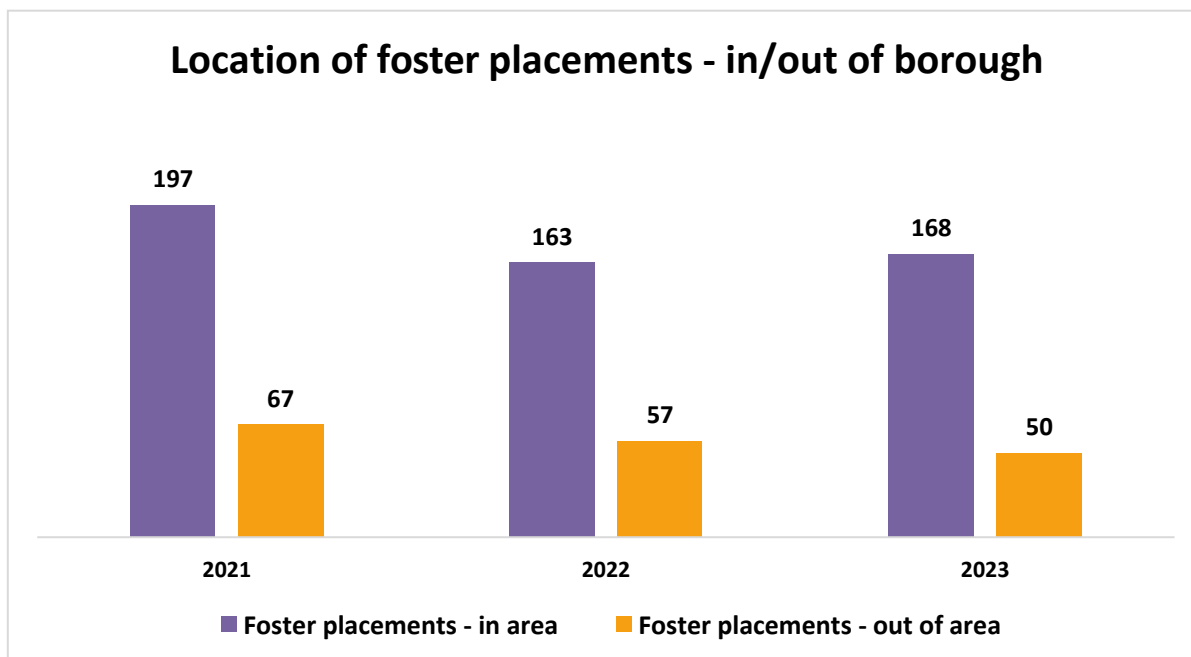
Of our 145 households; 102 are with mainstream Foster Carers, 43 with Family and Friends Carers.

During the financial year 2022/2023, there were 18 approvals of recruited foster carer households within Warrington. This includes 5 mainstream Foster Carer households, 13 Family and Friends Carers. This is a significant decrease since our last sufficiency statement in 2020, and demonstrates the challenges facing local authorities, not just in Warrington, but regionally and nationally.

During 2022-23, 30 households were deregistered (inclusive of 14 Family and friends' households). An almost equal split between family and friends and recruited carers.

At the end of March 2023, there were 218 children and young people in internal foster care.

The following chart illustrates the distribution of fostering placements for the last three years.

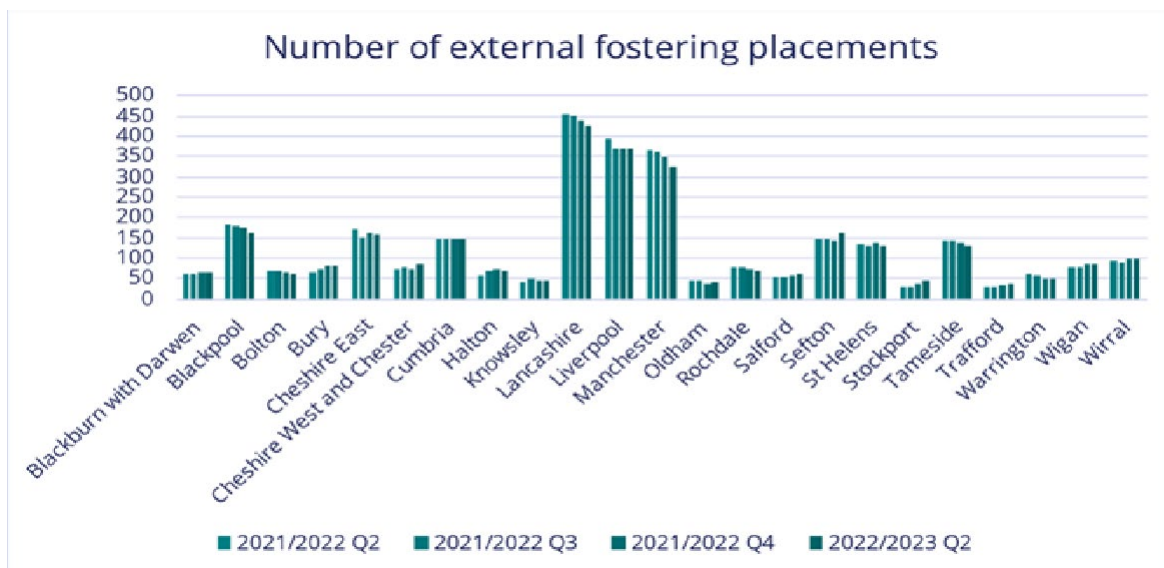


There has been a decrease in foster placement outside of the borough, but it is important to acknowledge that Warrington will inevitably have more out of area placements with it being a small. Most of these children are placed in neighbouring boroughs, well within 20 miles of their original home.

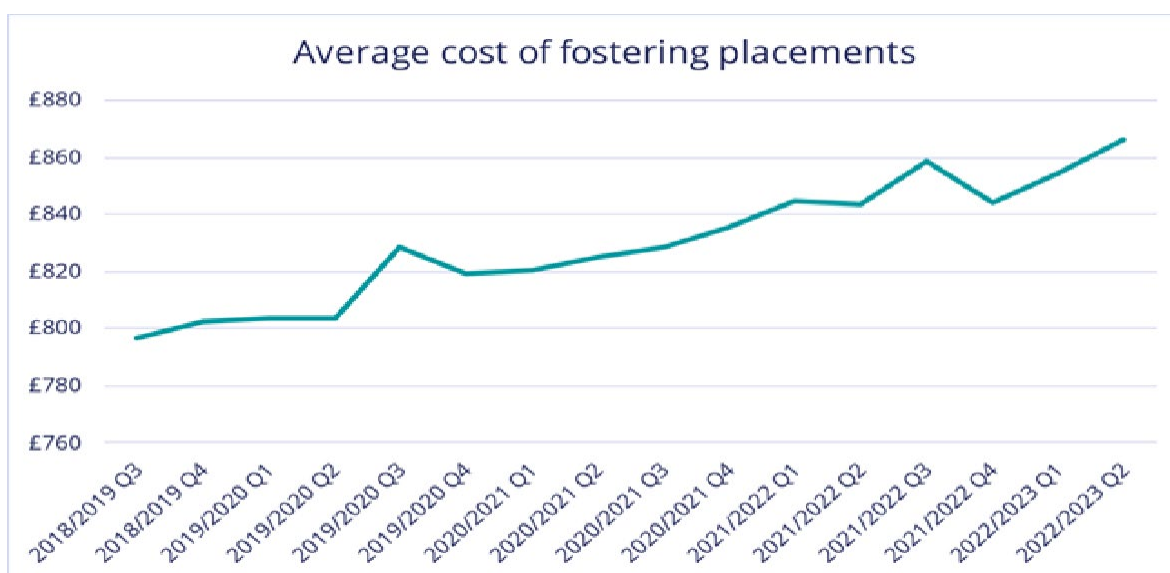
Independent fostering agencies

According to the Placement Northwest Census, the number of children placed with Independent Foster Agency placements rose in recent years from 41 in July 2014 to a peak of 66 in March 2021. As children in care numbers have fallen alongside a recruitment drive for our own foster carers.

Regional analysis shows there was only a 2% increase in the use of IFA placements across the Northwest based on the periods December 2018 and December 2022. According to the latest figure (March 2023) from the Placement Northwest Census, 48 of our children in care were in external placements. In March 2023, around 79% are purchased via the Northwest framework which offers confidence of quality and value for money. However, this was previously 90% which again demonstrates how the pressure in the fostering sufficiency has increased over the past few years.



In March 2023, the average weekly cost of external fostering costs across the Northwest was £879, an increase of 7% from the same period in March 2020. Costs in Warrington also rose by 7% over the same period, from £854.49 in 2020 to £913.85.



Residential

The use of any residential provision should be in exceptional circumstances and where all options of a family placement have been explored and are not possible. The previous increase in Warrington’s use of residential provision was driven mostly by rising numbers of teenagers requiring placements coupled with increasing levels of complexity and need which they often present. This can include but is not exhaustive risk of criminal / sexual exploitation, sexualised / challenging behaviour, offending and poor mental health. Since 2015 the number of children in residential care has remained stable.

The proportion of our children in care in residential placements has decreased slightly since March 2022 from 22% to 21% in March 2023, and we are higher than our comparators. Placement of children in residential settings as a proportion of the total children in care population was 17% in England, 15% in the Northwest with our statistical Neighbours at 19% in 2022-23. This is based on

the DfE published data definition of residential, including children’s homes, secure units, and semi-independent living (including hostels).

When looking at the data in detail the number of children in residential children’s homes has increased from 34 to 47 since 2019. The biggest increase in relation to the placement type was in supported accommodation, which increased from 19 to 34 at the same time, with increasing numbers of children being moved from foster / residential care into more flexible supported accommodation. As well as ‘preparing children for adulthood’ who had support needs, this also may have been indicative of the lack of sufficiency in foster and residential care.

Description (March)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of Children in Care in residential accommodation (includes 8 internal places)	38	48	49	45	40	50	47	52	70	81
Percentage of Children in Care in residential accommodation	16%	16%	14%	12%	11%	13%	12.9%	14.1%	21.2%	24.4%

According to the Placements Northwest (PNW) Census, the number of children in care in external residential children’s home placements has increased regionally. Numbers increased in the Northwest by 4.5%, from 1046 in March 2019 to 1093 in March 2023. Warrington’s external placements almost doubled, increasing from 17 to 35 over the same time.



In the Northwest, average weekly costs have increased by 37% from £3693 in March 2019 to £5084 in March 2023. In Warrington, average weekly costs also increased by 37% from £3730 in March 2019 to £5117 in March 2023.



In March 2019, total weekly spends on external residential in Warrington was £63,408. This increased by 182% to £179,085 in March 2023.

In Warrington we now have (31.3.24) 4 mainstream Children’s Homes (1x 6 bed / 1x3 bed / 1x2 bed / 1x1 bed – awaiting Ofsted registration) and 2 short break homes; 1 for children with a disability and 1 for children on the ‘edge of care’ (awaiting Ofsted registration).

We have 1 home with an Ofsted Rating of Outstanding and 3 rated as Good.

We are currently awaiting Ofsted registration of 2 of our new homes and have plans to open 2 more homes in 2024/5. One of these will be a 4 bed complex needs hub for children with emotional and behavioural needs, we anticipate this will need to be joint registered with Ofsted and the CQC. The other home will a 4-bed medium to long term residential home, which is a new build.

Residential commissioned provision

97% of external residential placements for our children and young people are secured via the Placements Northwest Regional framework, led by Stockport Local Authority, for Residential Homes and 98% of Semi and Independent Living (SaLLs). These Flexible/Dynamic Purchasing Systems is reviewed annually.

Prior to any residential placement being considered, all attempts to find a fostering placement have been exhausted. The decision is search for a residential placement is based on a thorough assessment of the needs of each child to determine if a residential placement is the only setting which can meet their needs. Over the last 12 months training sessions have been delivered via Placements Northwest to improve the quality of referrals.

In March 2023, 87% of Warrington children and young people living in an external residential setting, were in a home that had been rated as Outstanding or Good (29 of 33). Only 1 was living in Home with a Requires Improvement. 1 Home received an inspection rating of Inadequate, and a planned move for an alternative Home was commenced immediately. Where a service is rated as ‘Requires Improvement,’ enhanced pre-placement checks, frequent and robust quality assurance, and ongoing collaboration with these Providers to support their improvement action plans ensuring the Ofsted guidance is adhered to.

There is 1 CYP living in Homes regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) which adheres to a different quality and safety inspection legislation and 1 CYP living with a Provider regulated by CQC.

Although the number of Warrington residential placements with external providers is rising, in March 2023, there were 33 children and young people living in external residential children's homes (excluding Secure or Parent & Child Units). 15 children had been living in the same home; 7 over 2 years, 1 over 3 years, 5 over 4 years and 2 over 6 years. This is evidence that the home is providing a safe, secure, stable setting and confirming that the initial matching, the needs and risk assessment and care planning is personalised to each child, minimising moves, and improving the outcomes achievable for each child.

The stability of the residential placements is encouraged by collaborative collaborating with stakeholders and providers with effective care planning and 'move on' accommodations being identified at an early stage. Children are fundamental in the decision-making process to identify their semi-independent accommodation.

Special guardianship

Over the last 5 years there has been a rigorous focus on securing legal permanence for older children through Special Guardianship. In Warrington we have a 'no detriment' policy which ensures our 'Kinship Carers' and Foster Carers are provided with the same allowances and benefits as a recruited foster carer, so there are no barriers to legal permanence for a child.

Securing legal permanence for a large cohort of our children in care via Special Guardianship has been key to promoting their sense of identity and belonging, whilst also significantly reducing our children in care numbers.

- 2019-20 = 17.9% of those children who ceased to be in care) were discharged from care to Special Guardianship.
- 2020 – 21 = 22%
- 2021 – 22 = 27%
- 2022 – 23 = 19%

We expect that the % of discharges from care to Special Guardianship will now stabilise, but we will continue to advocate for legal permanence for our children in care.

Adoption & permanence

Together for Adoption, (TfA) Regional Adoption Agency is a shared Local Authority Service of five partners: Halton, Cheshire West and Chester, St Helens, Warrington, and Wigan. The service went live on the 1 September 2017. The partnership was formed in line with the Government Policy Paper, "Regionalising Adoption" in 2015. All Local Authorities are required to regionalise their adoption services by 2020.

Wigan Council is the host Authority, and Cheshire West and Chester Council operates as the lead commissioner.

Together for Adoption's hub base is in Warrington, a central point in the geographical footprint for the partners:

1 Time Square, Warrington WA1 2NT

The shared adoption service is part of the wider Children's Social Care Service in all five local authorities and reflects each council's commitment to 'best practice' in the provision of an innovative adoption service.

Together for Adoption has three Voluntary Adoption Agencies included as part of our development and governance of our adoption service; Adoption Matters, Caritas Care, and Nugent Care Their inclusion draws on the best practice from each of the partners and helps meet changing demands through the pooling of expertise and resources.

Vision for TfA

- All children for whom adoption is the plan for permanence are provided with an adoptive family that meets their needs.
- Those affected by adoption receive the information, support, and advice that they need to understand their adoption journey.
- TfA families are well prepared, enabled and supported to care for children with plans for adoption.

In Children's social care reform: a vision for change (2016) the government outlined its overarching vision for transforming the quality of children's social care services by 2020. In respect of adoption, the government's vision is for an adoption system where:

- Decisions about placements are always made in children's best interests.
- Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence.
- Social workers are highly skilled professionals who make quality, evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care.
- Matches are made without unnecessary delay.
- Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a right to a high quality, specialist assessment of need.
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services.

Together for Adoption aims to:

- Provide all children who have a plan for adoption with an adoptive family that meets their needs.
- Reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted.
- Ensure that those who are affected by adoption, receive the advice support and information they need.

Together for Adoption delivers the following services.

- The recruitment of persons as prospective adopters.
- The assessment of applicant's suitability to adopt a child.
- The approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt a child.
- Identifying a particular approved prospective adopter with whom it proposes a child be placed, as soon as reasonably practicable.
- Managing the process by which recommendations in individual cases are formally submitted to Adoption Panels and to facilitate consideration by the relevant local authority decision-maker.
- The provision of adoption support services, including facilitating post adoption contact with birth families, and access to birth records for adopted adults.

In Warrington, in 2022-23, 13 children were adopted during the year.

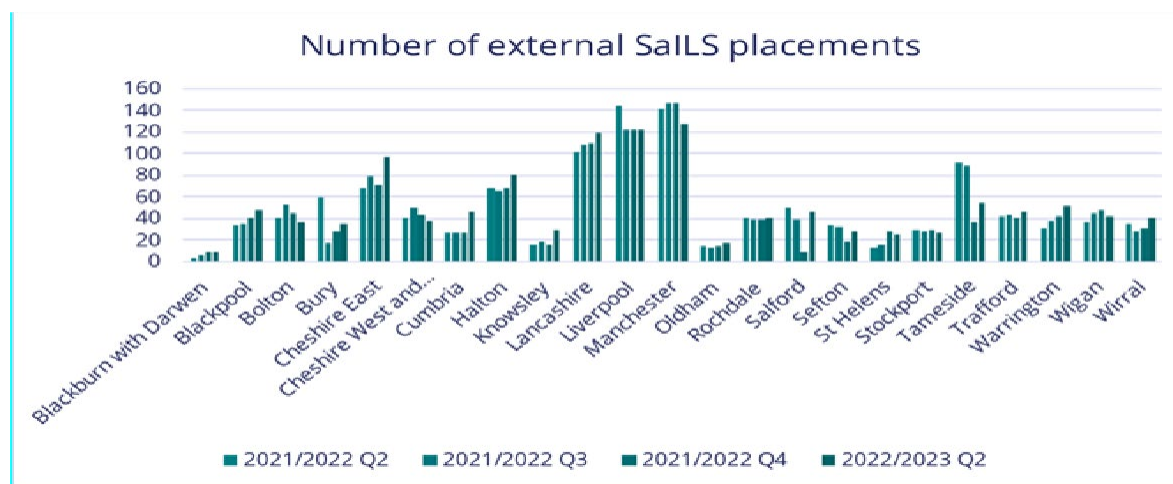
Young people aged 16+ and care leavers; group, supported, semi-independent and independent living development & plans

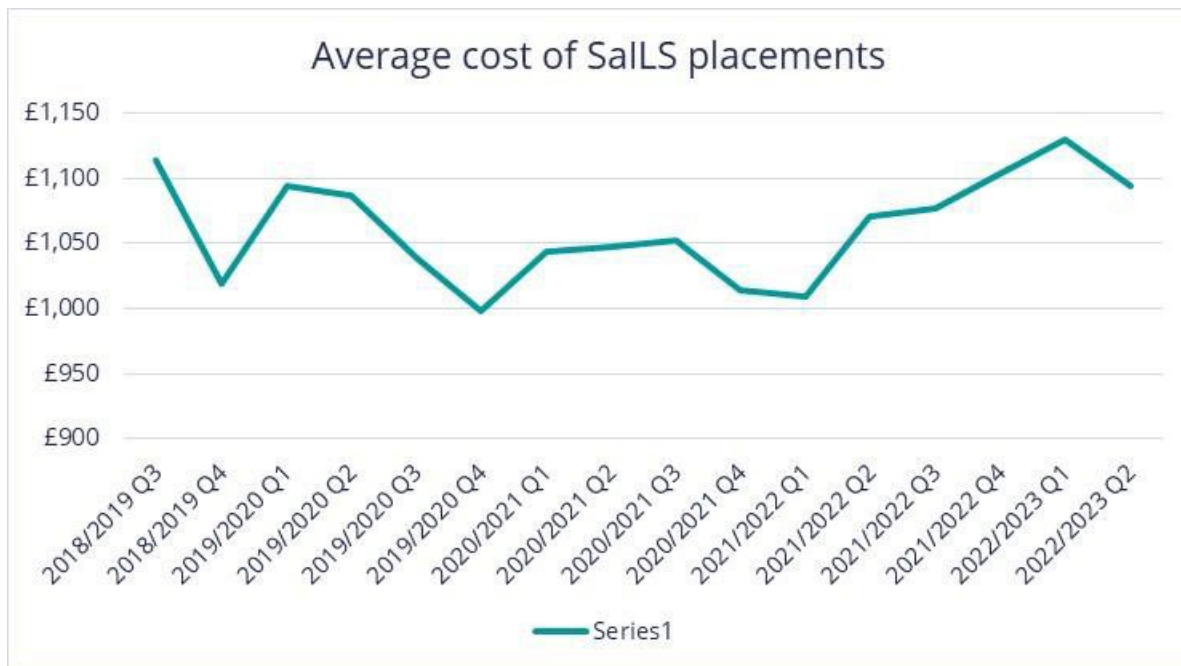
16+

Warrington prides itself on offering suitable accommodation to children aged 16+ and this will continue to be a priority for the council. As of the 31st March 2023 there were 93 children aged 16 plus who are children in care. We have seen this number increase over the past 3 years, which is indicative of a high number of children entering care in previous years.

When we last published our sufficiency statement a high majority of these children remained in fully supported placements (foster care /children’s home). However, as sufficiency regarding foster care and therefore residential care has decreased more children aged 16 plus are being placed in supported accommodation.

According to the Placements Northwest Census, in March 2023, we had 57 children aged 16 plus residing in these types of placements. This is a significant increase since March 2019 (24) an increase of 137%. The average costs have risen by 8%. This is currently lower than the regional average which was 10%.





Over the past 3 years we have launched our own Supported Accommodation scheme. We currently have; 2 x 2 bed flats (1 bed for an YP) and 4 x 3 bed supported accommodation homes (2 beds for YP). A total of 10 beds. We have applied for Ofsted registration, and plan to extend the scheme further over the next few years.

We also have Supported Lodging scheme with 2 x Hosts approved to date.

We have recently entered a contractual arrangement with Bedspace and commissioned ‘Oasis’ which provides us with 2 outreach flats, with 2 beds within each and 5 trainer flats, each with 1 bed.

Care leavers

At the end of the March 2023, provisional data indicates there were 244 Care Leavers, an increase of 86 since 2019, including:

- 69 eligible care leavers
- 1 relevant care leavers and;
- 128 former relevant care leavers.
- 46 Former relevant care leavers turning 21.

For those who were aged 19-21 in 2022 - 23, 60% were in education, employment, or training (EET), above national and regional averages.

92% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation, again above national and regional averages. This is an improvement since our last sufficiency strategy was published in 2019. The suitable accommodation covers young people living with parents or relatives; still placed with former foster carer (Staying Put); Foyer accommodation providing EET support; supported lodgings; Semi-independent transitional accommodation; community home or other form of residential care and in independent living.

Staying put or other arrangements are used to minimise disruption whilst accepting that for some young people they will seek independence and need support to do this safely, through assessed packages of support.

Whilst our aims have remained the same, to provide a provision that will support young people to develop practical skills and emotional stability, recognising most young people will require assistance with practical tasks such as cooking, budgeting and shopping economically, while others will need more emotional support, since our last sufficiency strategy in 2020 – 2023 the way in which we provide supported accommodation services to children in care aged 16 plus has changed.

Furthermore, we are also working with Bedspace to provide ‘move on accommodation’ for our Care Experienced young peoples: Stanley House will provide us with 10 self-contained flats with a concierge service on site. We hope by providing ‘move on’ accommodation directly to our Care Experienced young people they will have a more successful transition into independence whilst increasing sufficiency in our supported accommodation which often becomes ‘blocked’ when young people are awaiting social housing.

Our long-term objective is to build relationship with local housing providers to offer more secure tenancies to young people, whilst ensuring seamless support as they move from child to adulthood.



Disability, special education needs development and plans

The Special Educational Needs Residential framework was subject to the tender process in 2021. In first instance, if we were to commission any education placements that contained a residential element, we would use the Northwest Flexible Purchasing System.

As of the 31st March 2023 we had 5 children placed in residential educational provision, across 4 external providers. Average cost of placement was £123,776.81.

Warrington operates a short break residential service for children with a disability, which has been an 'Outstanding' provision for over 10 years. The Short Break Home provides short-term residential breaks, to young people and children with Physical disabilities or learning disabilities. In addition to this excellent support to young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Children can access the service from aged 3 to 17. The home can provide residential breaks for up to three children or young people of either gender, at any one time.

There are currently 28 children and young people who access Westlands Drive. 25 of these children have overnight respite and their packages vary depending on their assessed need. During the school week the children attend straight from school and then return to school the following morning. During weekends and school holidays the children arrive at 11.30am and return home at 10am the following day. The remaining 3 children and young people access the small outreach service. In 2023 the estimated unit cost per session of a child attending Westlands was £604. It has been identified that:

- There is a waiting list, however several children are due to turn 18 over the next 12 to 24 months, which will release spaces for new referrals.
- There is currently no family-based care provision for children under S17 with disabilities.
- There is limited in-house family-based care provision for children in care who have disabilities or additional needs.

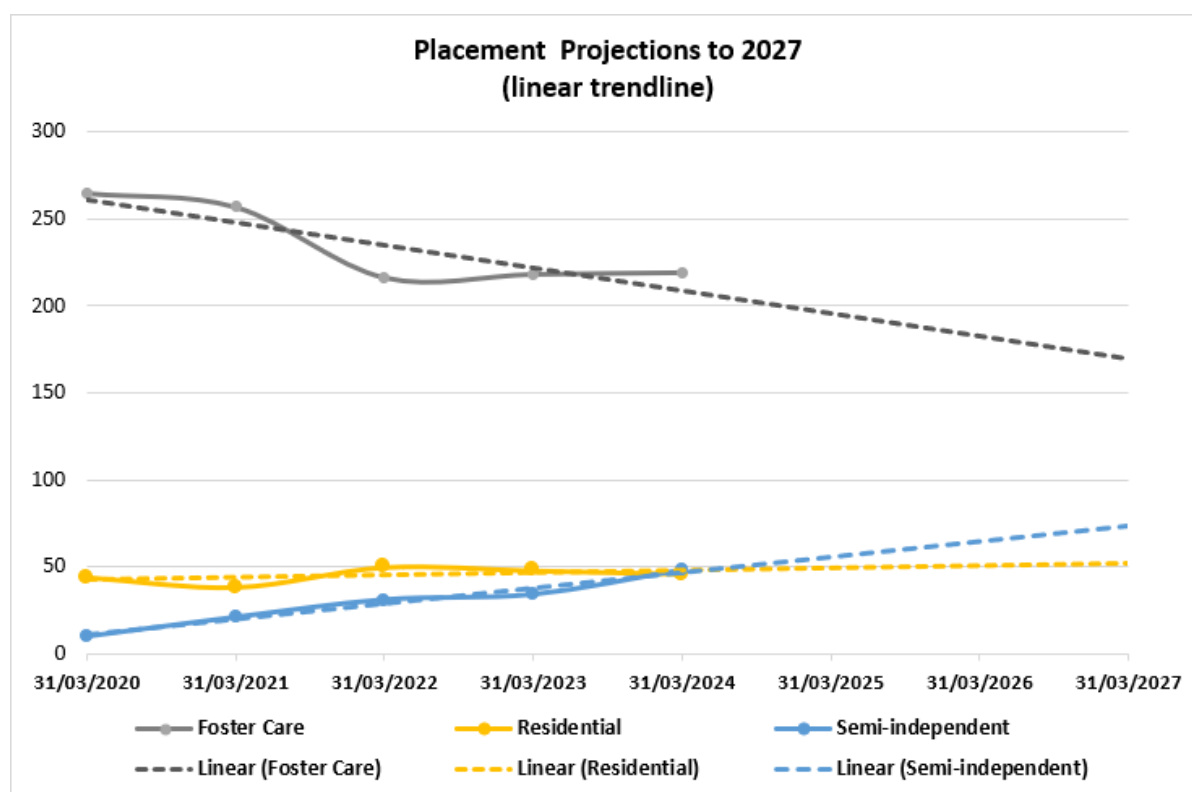
More local options are required to meet the needs of children in care that have special educational needs and or disabilities and we continue to explore how this may be achieved.

Projections

Since our last sufficiency strategy, we have also experienced a national pandemic which has impacted our fostering provision and led to a downward trend in the number of fostering households and fostering child placements (internally & externally). This in turn has led to more children not being able to live in a family home.

We have simultaneously seen an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (from 17 to 27) and demand for residential and supported accommodation placements for children aged between 12 and 18 years.

Even though we have increased our internal residential and supported accommodation provision, this has not been enough to prevent the use of expensive external provider, which has placed our placement budget under considerable pressure. Having reviewed our performance information over the past 3 years we have been able to predict our potential sufficiency deficits over the next 3 – 4 years, and if we do not take pro-active steps to increase our internal provisions, we will continue to need to utilise expensive external provision which in the long term is not feasible.



To increase sufficiency and reduce cost the council needs to purchase its own accommodation for children in care and care leavers.

Once our Complex Needs Hub and new Medium to Long Term children’s home opens, we will have:

- 19 Children’s Homes beds
- 22 Supported Accommodation beds

Based on current figures we need an additional:

- 29 Children's Home Beds
- 26 SA beds





Innovation

Mockingbird

Mockingbird is an extended family model which was conceived in Washington State USA in 2004 by The Mockingbird Society. The aim was to have a positive impact on the public perception of children and young people who were fostered, and to work with fostering families and child placing agencies to improve outcomes for children and fostering households.

The Mockingbird family model was introduced to the UK in 2015- 2016 with The Fostering Network piloting the programme in England with initially 8 fostering services with the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme and The Mockingbird Society in America.

The underpinning principals of Mockingbird are:

Community based care – All children and young people deserve to live in settings that reflect their need for age-appropriate freedom and autonomy while ensuring their safety and the safety of the community. They also deserve to grow up in a community that is familiar to them, and close to their birth family members if appropriate.

Unconditional care – All children and young people deserve a safe, warm nurturing environment in which they can thrive. This approach is focused on social learning and the concept of the whole child with a lifelong perspective.

Normalisation of care – Children and young people in foster care need to receive the same opportunities and support as well as facing the same challenges as their peers so they can learn, develop, and make full use of opportunities available to them.

Continuity of care – All children and young people benefit from continuity in their lives, same community, same school, same sports, arts, and leisure opportunities.

Cultural relevancy – Children do best when connected with the culture they identify with. Children and young people say they feel more comfortable, and research suggests they do best when, they are connected to their cultures and live in families that reflect their ethnicity and values.

Birth family viewed as partners and future support – The Mockingbird Family Model supports practice that enables children and young people to receive age appropriate and accurate information about their past and to learn the skills and boundaries necessary to establish and maintain safe relationships with their birth family into the future.

Foster care support – Take good care of the adults who take good care of children. It is essential to take good care – with training, practical and emotional support, and supervision – of the foster carers who take good care of children and young people.

In 2019 the Council was successful in its application to implement Mockingbird as part of the Department of Education's (DfE) Supporting Families, Investing in Practice Programme. The Mockingbird Model delivers foster care using an extended family model which centres on a constellation where one foster home acts as a hub, offering planned and emergency sleepovers and short breaks, advice, training, and support, to six to 10 satellite households.

The model should allow children with more complex needs to be supported in fostering placements, instead of going into residential care. The model is expected to have many positive outcomes for our children and foster carers, including:

- Improved placement stability.
- Stronger birth family and sibling relationships.
- More successful, early reunifications with birth family.
- Increased successful transition to other permanence options.
- Improved foster carer retention rates.



As of March 2023, Warrington Fostering Service had 3 Mockingbird constellations, with 34 children placed within the constellations. The model supported the ‘step down’ of one child from residential care into a foster home in a Mockingbird constellation. This placement remains stable. There are plans to extend the model to 4 Mockingbird constellations in 2024.

The LGA Peer Review 2022 stated ‘The Mockingbird and No Wrong Door approach... is highly valued’.

One of our hub home foster carers stated:

‘When I first learned of Mockingbird it was one of those moments where I thought WOW! What an amazing idea...we are proud and honoured to be a part of and involved in Warrington’s very first Mockingbird constellation.’

Our constellation foster carers have stated:

‘I have learnt a lot about Fostering since being in Mockingbird, * & * have been great always there to help with advice and support. I enjoy the monthly meetings and getting together with all the children, I would say it has been greatly beneficial knowing and growing and being able to socialise with other people from Fostering, So glad I’m part of this great team’.

'We absolutely love * and *. We would not want to change to any other mockingbird hub carers. They give us brilliant advice and help us with sleepovers when needed. They let us talk and vent, whilst also understanding what we are going through because they are so experienced. Makes any trivial problems we have non existential after speaking to them. We feel we can really relate to them both and we think they are just fab. We love the bond that * has with the kids. As a mum of a child with complex needs, the fact little * has let * into his world shows you the warmth that * has for them. They put time and effort into every kid's activity and meeting that they do. Additionally, our kids love * and * and love sleepovers there.'

'Both * and * have maintained the valued support over the past year. As well as sleepovers, they have offered flexibility with dates and have had the children at short notice where possible. The monthly meetups and meetings are very much valued by the children and carers, and they bring a 'family' ethos into it all. As well as being fabulous at being the mockingbird hub they are also great friends, offering help and support whenever it's needed.'

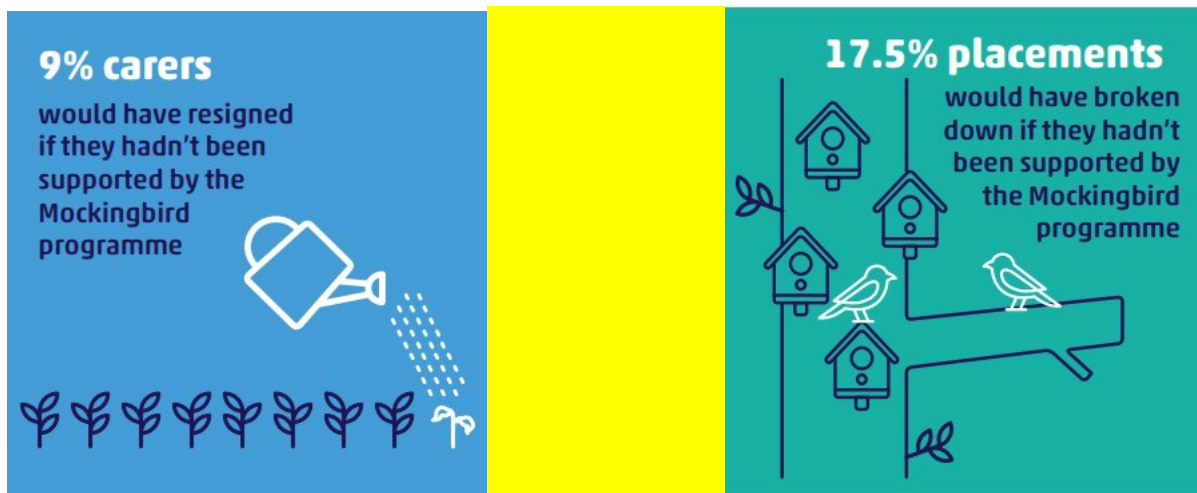
Outcomes of the UK Mockingbird Programme to date (Mockingbird Impact Report 2022)

Mockingbird is an invest to save model. Independent evaluation of 12 services between 2017-2020 found that for every £1 invested in the programme by a fostering service there has been a saving of 99 pence.

The infographics below show cumulative estimated costs avoided using data collected 2018 – 2022. The programme has grown each year and some satellite carers and children, and young people will have joined or left in a particular year or continued participating through multiple years.



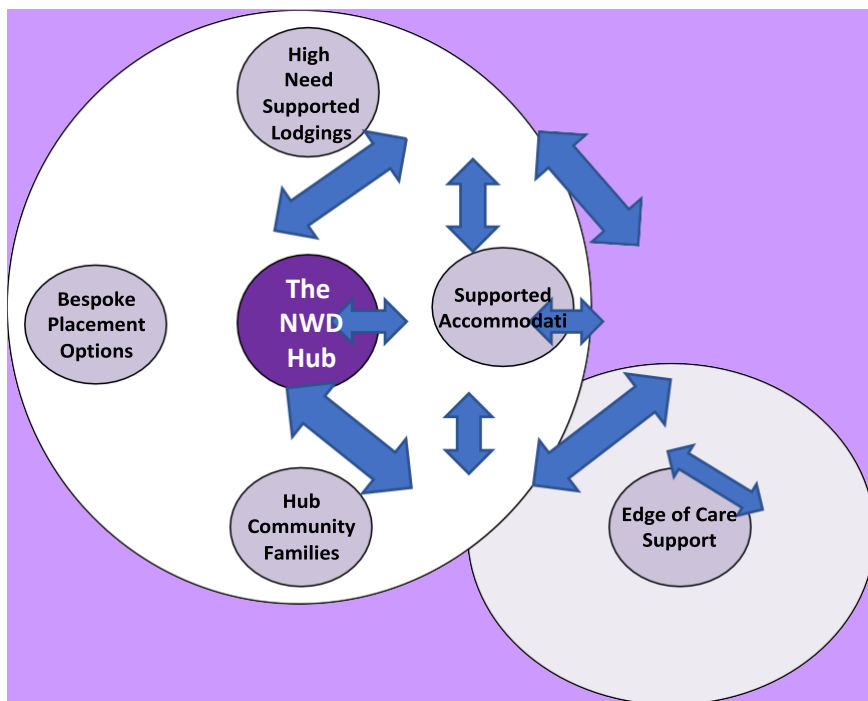
Of the 1,775 satellite carers participating in the programme between May 2018 and March 2022, services reported 162 would have resigned without the support provided by the Mockingbird programme. Of the 2,175 children and young people in placements participating in the programme between May 2018 and March 2022, services reported 382 placement breakdowns have been avoided.



No wrong door

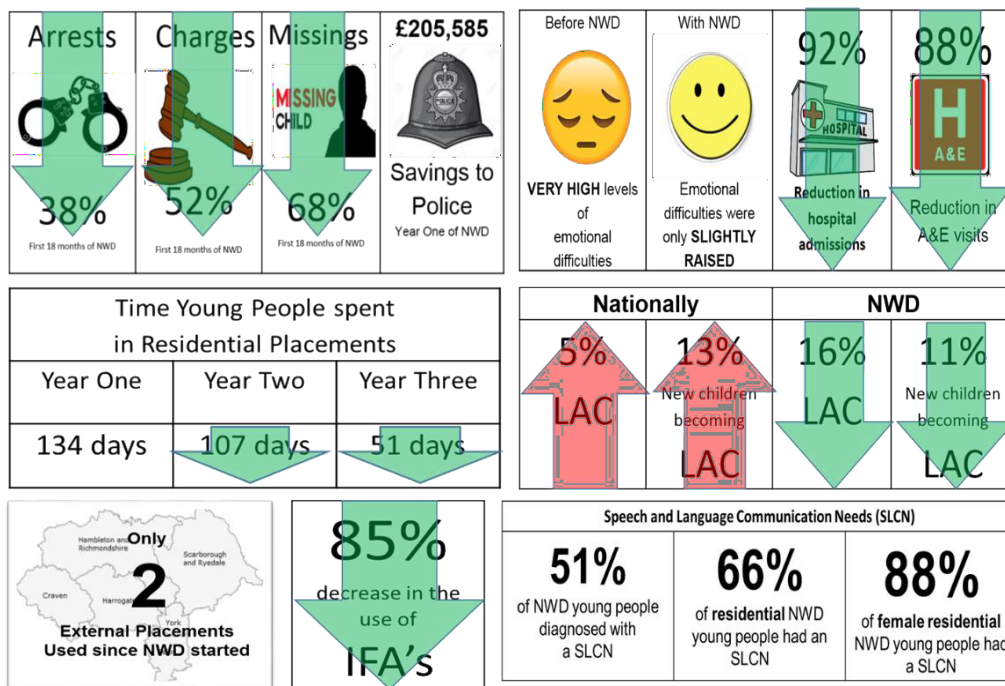
The council took part in the DfE's Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme, following its successful application in 2020. It received an estimated £2.7 million in funding over two years from the DfE to support the implementation of the No Wrong Door model in Warrington.

The No Wrong Door model is an innovative approach to edge of care provision first developed by North Yorkshire County Council. The model supports adolescents who are in or on the edge of care. It integrates residential care, foster care, speech and language support, mental health services and the police into a single hub that is based in a residential home.



©North Yorkshire County Council

Evidence shows that No Wrong Door model provides extensive benefits to vulnerable children and young people, and system wide.



©North Yorkshire County Council

The launch of the No Wrong Door model in Warrington took place in April 2021.

In the first two years, there was an 8% reduction in overall numbers of children in care in Warrington, falling from 362 April 2021 to 331 in March 2023. Numbers then increased to 342 at the end of August 2023, representing an overall decrease of 6% since the start of the programme.

12+ in care: By removing Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), numbers increased by six, from 178 in April 2021 to 184 in August 2023. This is an increase of 3%. It could be argued that without our Edge of Care service, this figure could be higher.

Forty-seven young people stepped away from the service and remained closed to the Lighthouse on 31st March 2023.

With the closed edge of care cases, 67% of young people on the edge of care at referral (39), were not in care on 31st March 2023 (26).

This is higher than 62% in 2021-22.

Estimated cost avoidance from closed cases, 2022-23 = £4,513,088

Families first

The edge of care project called Families First has been running from July 2016. The aim of the service is to improve outcomes for children and where appropriate, prevent children entering the care system, prevent children needing residential care or support their exit from care. The offer includes:

- PAM Assessments which support the social work assessment process. PAMS are often completed during Pre-Proceedings or care proceedings. As well as undertaking the assessments, the PAMS workers offer support to parents to assist them in making positive changes with their parenting skills.

- Intensive Family Support for families with children of primary school age where the child is subject to a child protection plan including issues surrounding neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, drug & alcohol misuse, poor mental health, and domestic violence.
- 1: 1 parenting work with a staff member who is qualified in undertaking training in parenting courses.
- A 16/17-year-old Homelessness service which provides support and mediation to potentially homeless young people aged 16 and 17 years and children who potentially are on the edge of care to prevent entry into care. This service supports the joint housing assessment process.
- The four Verve Place Direct Access Beds provide short-term emergency accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17 years at risk of homelessness.
- Reunification Support is available for children who have returned to live with a parent following a period of care.
- Foster Carer support to children at risk of needing to move to live in Residential care.
- Special Guardianship Support to potential Special Guardians and recently approved Special Guardians.
- A Family Time Service to support all children in care to have the opportunity, in line with their care plan, to be offered quality supervised time with their parents.
- Family Group Conferences aim to assist the family and their wider support network in developing their own plan to ensure that the child remains at home or within the extended network.

This service is providing high levels of intervention early in the process in order to prevent that escalation in risk and thus reducing the inflow of children into care. Furthermore, Families First work with families whose children are subject to child protection plans to improve parenting and reduce risk.

Complex needs hub (opening 2024)

Using DfE funding this proposed model, a mixture of residential (4 beds with 2 bed move on accommodation) & outreach services seeks to fundamentally change the way we work with children to provide a locally based multi-agency delivered short/medium term care and therapeutic outreach model for some of our most complex children young people reducing the requirement to access and place young people into out of area placements and with external providers.

Short break unit anchor house (opening 2025)

Anchor House was renovated using funding from the DfE 'Children's Home Capital Fund' in November 2022. It is a home that looks to support children with complex needs. The home offers a range of targeted intervention that looks to support multi agency working, support and accommodation in the form of short-term breaks and outreach support. The Home provides short term breaks for a maximum of 4 young people aged 11-17 of either gender at any one time ensuring that they receive positive intervention and support built upon nurturing relationships, with the aim of preventing them entering our care on a full-time basis.

Key sufficiency action and priorities

The main areas for development over the next 2 years:

- A continued emphasis on permanence for all our Children in Care, through prevention, effective and timely care planning (including robust Pre-Proceedings) and a focus on legal permanence, to safely reduce our numbers of children in care and the length of time children spend in our care.
- Grow and sustain our Edge of Care provision through our 'The Lighthouse,' 'Anchor House' and Complex Needs Hub. Thus, preventing children from entering the care system through offering support and interventions which are specific and reflect our systemic model of practice, and when children do enter care ensure that their assessed needs are met in a timely way, and that we can respond flexibly and effectively as these needs change.
- Ensure that we focus and continuously develop our services to meet the needs of our Child in Care population, expand our provision particularly in relation to older children, via supported accommodation and lodgings and for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- Keep children 'closer to home' and within their local communities. This includes children who are at risk of child and criminal exploitation, therefore offering them stability in other areas of their lives (education, family time, friendship groups) and enabling us to work with our local partners (health, police, youth offending services) to manage and reduce the risk of harm they face. Open our 4 'Staying Close' supported accommodation flats.
- Through our 'No Wrong Door' model provide emergency accommodation and medium-term care for children so we can undertake quality multi-agency assessment so we fully understand their needs and can match them accordingly with the correct placement type.
- Reduce the number of children we have placed in residential provision, particularly those children aged 12 and under.
- To continue to work with Placements Northwest and regional colleagues to manage the independent market by sharing information and collaborating in relation to best practice, innovation, and developments, so we understand the strengths / weaknesses of the regional market and can respond accordingly to any issues regarding sufficiency.
- Achieve a balanced budget, which will in turn offer the council more financial stability, by significantly growing our own internal provision and by ensuring that when we do commission services from external providers via the NW framework these arrangements offer us good quality and value for money.
- Continue to increase the number and range of our foster carers, who can support children of all ages with varying needs, particularly older children, children with additional needs (physical / learning difficulties) and children of other ethnicity and cultures (unaccompanied asylum seekers). Make sure that foster carers remuneration matches their skill set and they are offered good quality training and opportunities for continuous development in challenging areas, such child exploitation and emotional health / wellbeing.
- Implement our 4th Mockingbird constellation to increase placement stability for children and enhance the relationships children have with their immediate and extended foster family.
- Actively encourage children to 'stay put' with their foster carer and when they choose not to provide them with the right steppingstones to independence.
- Ensure we maintain family connections wherever a child is placed and that prior to children leaving our care we bring family members together to work together to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood via our Later Life Links Model.

- Improve our housing offer to Care Leavers to ensure that those who are most vulnerable have access to good quality accommodation and receive the support they require to maintain this accommodation. This will be achieved by 'block purchasing' bespoke flats from our third sector providers and via SHAP funding.

Get in Touch

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this statement or contribute to the work that is happening to support Children in Care in Warrington, then please get in touch.

We are particularly interested to hear from any organisations and providers that may already be working in Warrington or thinking of doing so. Please make contact via the children's commissioning team cypscommissioning@warrington.gov.uk

Appendix A – advanced solutions

- Weekly Community Network group: A informal learning opportunity for parents and carers and supporting professionals with a themed workshop each week. Open access, no need to book.
- Neurodevelopmental Conditions Learning Programme: A structured learning programme consisting of 6 sessions covering the most commonly occurring neurodevelopmental conditions.
- ND and Me: A six-session learning programme for children and young people – (8- 11) (12- 15) delivered in a school setting and in community venues.
- Professionals learning workshops: A full day learning workshop on neurodevelopmental conditions.
- Whole family learning and coaching offer for children in care and at the edge of care: Supporting foster carers, residential children’s home staff and neurodiverse CYP in care or at the edge of care.



Appendix B – fostering placements

Description	Mar-17	Mar-18	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23	Statistical Neighbours	England	North west
All Children in care	380	401	385	364	363	330	333			
All foster placements	250	285	261	269	264	287	217			
Percentage of Children in Care in all foster placements	66%	71%	68%	73.9%	72.7%	86.9%	65.2%	72%	69%	72%
Number of Children in Care cared for by relatives or friends	60	78	75	74	62	46	52			
Percentage of Children in Care cared for by relatives or friends	16%	19%	19%	20%	17%	13.9%	15.6%			
Number of Children in Care in foster placement excluding placed with relatives or friends	190	207	186	195	202	241	165			
Percentage of Children in Care in Foster Placements excl. Placed with Friends and Relatives	50%	52%	48%	54%	55.6%	73%	49.5%			

