

Lancashire Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2021 – 2024

1. Introduction

Lancashire County Council is helping to make Lancashire the best place to live, work, visit and prosper, where everyone acts responsibly.

We will work together with our partners in supportive, innovative, respectful and collaborative ways to ensure that children, young people and their families are safe, healthy and achieve their full potential.

We aim to deliver purposeful practice focused on prevention, participation and permanence by:

- Delivering the right service, at the right time, by the right people through effective wellbeing, preventative strategies and interventions.
- Building on the strengths of families.
- Engaging children and young people through effective participation activities.
- Meeting and surpassing statutory expectations.
- At every stage, actively considering, developing and delivering clear plans to achieve permanence.

We will ensure that everything we do makes a tangible, positive difference to the lives of the children we work for and that we intervene at the lowest and least intrusive level possible.

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

This strategy sets out how Lancashire County Council intends to meet its Sufficiency Duty for the children we look after, improve the quality and choice of placements, ensure value for money and minimise the likelihood of suitable placements not being available locally.

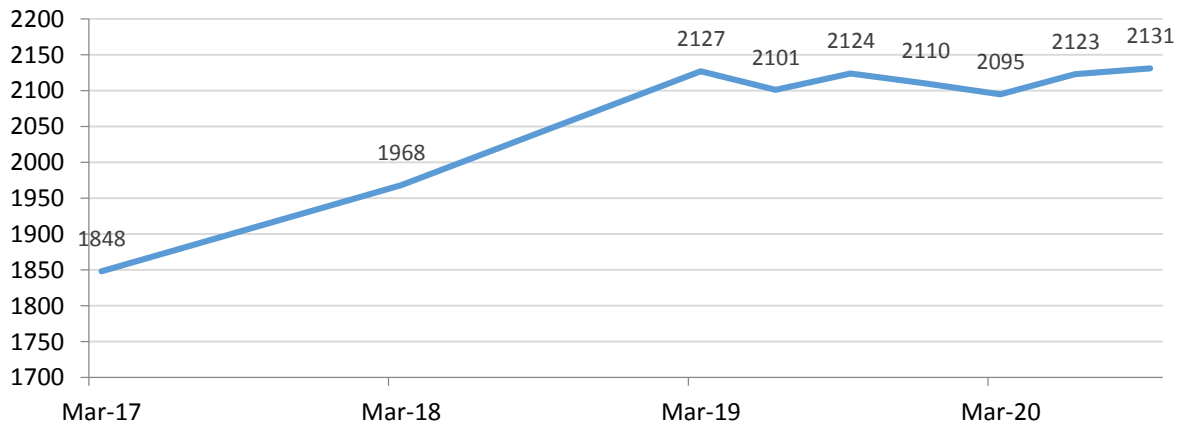
2. Analysis of our Children Looked After (CLA)

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE

The number of children looked after (CLA) in England has continued to rise, increasing steadily between 2017 and 2019. There were 78,150 CLA in England in March 2019, an increase of 3.7% compared to March 2018 and an increase of 7.6% compared to March 2017.

In comparison, Lancashire's percentage increase in CLA has been significantly higher. There were 2,127 CLA in Lancashire in March 2019, an increase of 8.1% compared to March 2018 (159 more CLA) and an increase of 15.1% compared to March 2017 (279 more CLA). Numbers fluctuated throughout 2019/20, reaching a high in November 2019 of 2,128. Since November 2019, numbers steadily fell and by 31 March 2020 reached 2,095 (a 1.5% decrease - 32 less CLA) compared to the previous year. Numbers of CLA rose again during the first half of 2020/21 and by the end of September 2020 were 2,131.

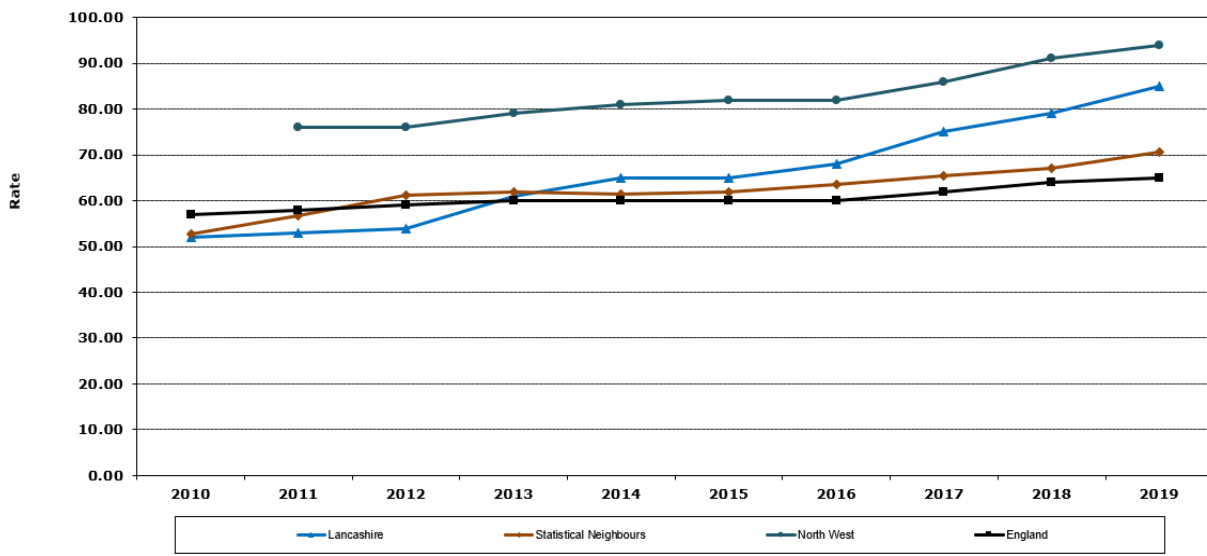
Number of CLA



Number of CLA	Mar-17	Mar-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19	Mar-20	Jun-20	Sep-20
Number of CLA	1848	1968	2127	2101	2124	2110	2095	2123	2131

RATE OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18



In March 2019, the rate of CLA in England (per 10,000 population) was 65, an increase from 64 in 2018 and 62 in 2017 (an increase in the rate of 3 since 2017). The North West average rate also increased over the same period, but at a faster rate than the national average, from 86 in 2017 to 94 in 2019 (an increase of 8).

Lancashire's rate of CLA also continued to increase over the same period, but at a faster rate than the North West average: from 75 in March 2017, to 79 in March 2018 and 85 in March 2019 (an increase in the rate of 10 since 2017). Only seven other North West Local Authorities experienced a similar or higher increase in their rates. Four North West Local Authorities saw a decrease or no change in their rates. Only two of Lancashire's statistical neighbours saw a similar or higher increase in their rates of CLA.

North West Local Authority CLA Rates (2017-2019)

	2017	2018	2019	Increase in rate		2017	2018	2019	Increase in rate
England	62	64	65	3	Manchester	97	104	106	9
North West	86	91	94	8	Oldham	83	93	86	3
Blackburn with Darwen	96	97	105	9	Rochdale	89	95	108	19
Blackpool	183	185	197	14	Salford	95	103	103	8
Bolton	87	91	95	8	Sefton	85	90	98	13
Bury	82	77	78	-4	St Helens	117	121	127	10
Cheshire East	57	63	63	6	Stockport	53	58	57	4
Cheshire West and Chester	72	73	70	-2	Tameside	104	124	132	28
Cumbria	68	72	74	6	Trafford	70	69	74	4
Halton	94	92	93	-1	Warrington	86	90	87	1
Knowsley	89	87	90	1	Wigan	66	70	66	0
Lancashire	75	79	85	10	Wirral	113	123	123	10
Liverpool	122	127	140	18					

Lancashire Statistical Neighbour CLA Rates (2017-2019)

	2017	2018	2019	Increase in rate
Essex	33	33	34	1
Hertfordshire	34	33	34	0
Derbyshire	41	46	52	11
Nottinghamshire	47	48	52	5
Kent	57	49	47	-10
Staffordshire	59	65	69	10
Northamptonshire	61	65	65	4
Lancashire	75	79	85	10

The rate of CLA in Lancashire fluctuated throughout 2019/20, reaching a high in November 2019 of 85.2, before steadily reducing to 83.9 (the lowest rate seen since October 2018):

Lancashire Rates of CLA in 2019/20

Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
85.0	84.3	84.6	84.7	84.8	85.1	85.0	85.2	84.5	84.1	84.0	83.9

As of September 2020, the rate of CLA in Lancashire had risen to 84.9.

GENDER

56% of children looked after in England are male and 44% are female (March 2019). These proportions have varied little over recent years. Lancashire has a lower proportion of males in the CLA population than the national average (around 53%-54%), which has also varied little over recent years:

	31/03/2015	31/03/2016	31/03/2017	31/03/2018	31/03/2019	31/03/2020
Male	852	883	989	1060	1133	1100
Female	782	782	859	908	993	986
Indeterminate					2	6
Total	1592	1665	1848	1968	2128	2095
% Male	53.5%	53.0%	53.5%	53.9%	53.2%	52.5%

AGE

The largest age group for CLA nationally is those aged 10-15 years (39% - March 2019). This is also the largest age group for CLA in Lancashire (39%). However, a higher proportion of

Lancashire CLA (as of March 2020) are in the younger age ranges compared to national statistics: aged 5-9 years (21% compared to 18% nationally); 1-4 years (16% compared to 13% nationally) and under 1s (7% compared to 5% nationally). Lancashire has a lower proportion of CLA aged 16 years and over (17% compared to 24% nationally).

ETHNICITY

The ethnicity of Lancashire's CLA continues to be predominately White British, representing 87% of the total CLA population (March 2020). This is largely in line with the percentage of the general CYP population in Lancashire who are of white ethnicity, as reported in the 2011 census (87.3%).

6% of CLA are of mixed ethnicity. This group is over-represented when compared to the general CYP population (2.5% - 2011 census). 5% of CLA are of Asian ethnicity. This group is under-represented when compared to the general CYP population (9.7% - 2011 census). 0.4% of CLA are of black ethnicity, which is in line with the general CYP population (0.3% - 2011 census).

STARTING TO BE LOOKED AFTER

The number of children starting to be looked after each year in Lancashire increased from 722 in 2016/17 to 817 children in 2018/19, a growth of 13.2% over two years, compared to a decrease of 3.8% nationally, 3.9% regionally and 3.7% for our statistical neighbours. During 2019/20, new cases coming into care in Lancashire significantly reduced (by 13% compared to 2018/19 – 711 cases) to lower levels than the previous three years.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Started to be looked after	659	605	653	722	763	817	711
Ceased to be looked after	553	606	598	550	663	670	737

CEASED TO BE LOOKED AFTER

There was a significant increase in the number of children ceasing to be looked after in Lancashire between 2016/17 to 2018/19 (21.8% - 120 more CYP) compared to a much smaller increase (1.1%) across the region and a 6.2% reduction in the numbers ceasing to be looked after nationally.

During 2019/20, numbers ceasing to be looked after in Lancashire further increased to 737 - a rise of 10% on numbers in 2018/19. For the first time since 2014/15, the number of children ceasing to be looked after was higher than the number of children starting to be looked after.

During 2019/20, the most prevalent reasons for ceasing to be looked after were: Special Guardianship (17%); Return home to parents, planned or unplanned (no order) (13%); and Adoption (12%). The number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) granted has been similar over recent years. In contrast, the number of children being adopted each year has fluctuated:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
No. SGOs granted	118	121	126	127
No. of adoptions	73	86	68	91

SECTION 20 AGREEMENTS

Nationally, 18% of CLA are voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1989 (March 2019). The number of CLA voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 in Lancashire is lower than the national average and has fallen since 2017, from 10% (195 CLA) to 7.8% (156 CLA) in March 2020. 30% (47) of our Section 20 CLA in March 2020 were voluntarily accommodated as part of the Homeless Protocol.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of Section 20 CLA in Lancashire aged 14-15 years since 2017 (20 CLA in March 2020 compared to 46 CLA in 2017). A higher proportion of Section 20 CLA are aged 16-17 years (71.8% compared to 56.4% in 2017) and there has been a significant increase in the use of the more cost effective block purchased supported accommodation provision for this cohort of Section 20 CLA (39 placements in March 2020 compared to only 8 in 2017 – 25% of placements provided, compared to only 4% in 2017).

Placement type of CLA accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Type of Provision	Number of s20 CLA at 31/3/20	Number of s20 CLA at 31/7/17
Agency Leaving Care	44 (28.2%)	31 (15.9%)
Block Purchased Supported Accommodation	39 (25%)	8 (4.1%)
Agency Residential	25 (16.1%)	46 (23.6%)
In-House Fostering	20 (12.8%)	33 (16.9%)
Agency Fostering	10 (6.4%)	44 (22.6%)
In-House Residential	7 (4.5%)	16 (8.2%)
Residential School	7 (4.5%)	13 (6.7%)
Other (Hospital; Short Break; Regulation 38.6; placed for adoption)	4 (2.6%)	4 (2.1%)
TOTAL	156	195

Age range of CLA accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Age Range	Number of s20 CLA at 31/3/20	Number of s20 CLA at 31/7/17
0-5 years	9 (5.8%)	14 (7.2%)
6-10 years	5 (3.2%)	11 (5.6%)
11-13 years	10 (6.4%)	14 (7.2%)
14-15 years	20 (12.8%)	46 (23.6%)
16-17 years	112 (71.8%)	110 (56.4%)
TOTAL	156	195

OUTCOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Lancashire Children Looked After are:

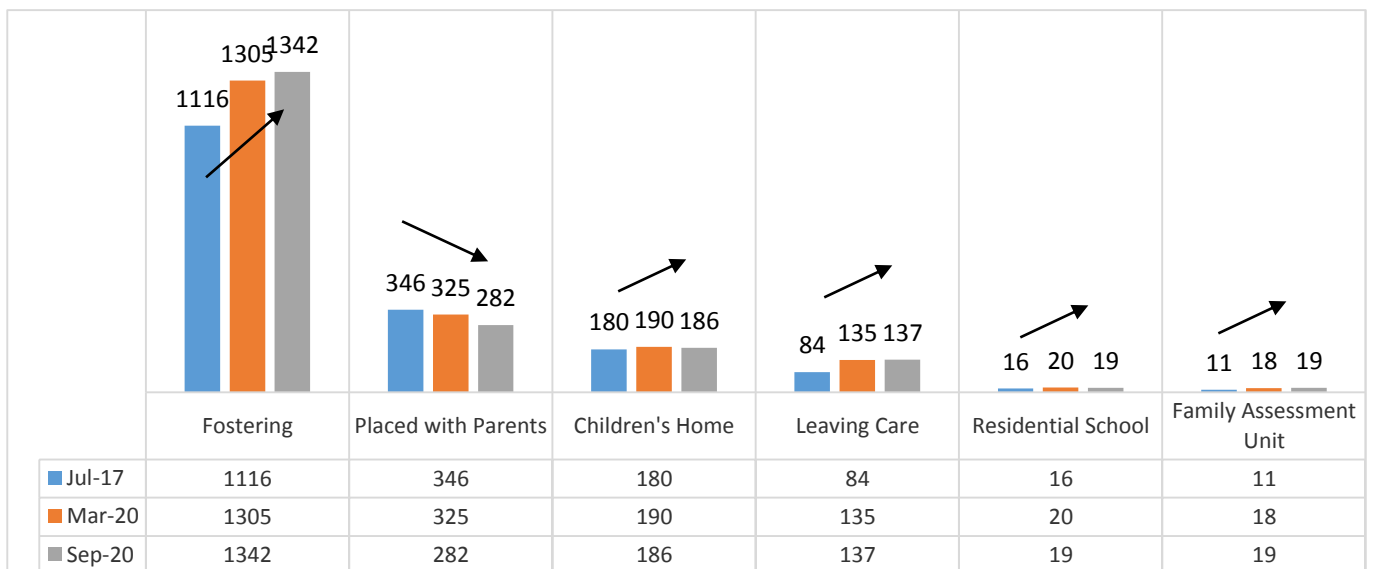
- Less likely to reach the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths than statistical and regional neighbours and below the national average.
- Likely to progress less well in school than the average of either the region or statistical neighbours.
- Less likely to achieve a higher level of attainment at KS4 than the region or statistical neighbours.
- Less likely to be excluded from school than statistical or regional neighbours and the exclusion rate is lower than the national average.
- Less likely to have a SEN with an EHCP than the regional average and less likely to have a SEN without an EHCP than the regional or national average.

- Less likely than the regional average and equal to the national average of being subject to a formal justice disposal.
- Less likely than children from statistical neighbours to achieve a score on the SDQ that is 'slightly higher' but more likely than regional or national averages
- Less likely to have a missing incident than their statistical neighbours, regional or national averages.
- More likely than the regional, Statistical Neighbours or national average to have 3 or more placements in a year, although prior to 2019 was less than the regional and on the national average. In 2019, there were 226 children with 3 or more placements and increase of 34 young people.
- Less likely to be placed 20 miles or more from home than the regional, statistical or national averages.
- As likely as the regional, and national averages to have been in the same placement for 2 years and less likely than the statistical neighbours. 535 children and young people have been in the same placement for 2 years.

3. CLA Placement Analysis and Current Provision

COMPARISON TO 2017 BENCHMARK

Lancashire's previous Sufficiency Strategy (2017-2020) used July 2017 as a benchmark to measure progress. The below chart shows how placement type has changed from July 2017 to March 2020 and to September 2020.



LOCATION

Nationally, 58% of looked after children are placed within their home local authority boundaries (March 2019). Lancashire performs much better than the national average, with 75% placed within Lancashire County Council boundaries (March 2020). Half of the children and young people placed within Lancashire (whose address was not recorded as confidential) were placed within their home district (i.e. the same district as the Children's Social Care team which supports them).

16.6% of Lancashire CLA were placed in other North West Local Authorities or Yorkshire towns close to the Lancashire border. Only 2.4% (51 placements) were placed further afield, compared to 3% in 2017 (56 placements).

	Placed at a distance (March 2020)	% of total at a distance placements	% compared to July 2017
Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)	20	39.2%	17.9%
Placed with Parents	10	19.6%	16.1%
Connected Carers	7	13.7%	5.4%
Family Assessment Centre	6	11.8%	12.5%
OTHER (Hospital, remand, secure welfare, overnight short break, other)	4	7.8%	7.8%
Agency Residential	3	5.9%	16.1%
Agency Leaving Care	1	2%	1.8%
Residential Schools	0	0%	1.8%
TOTAL PLACEMENTS	51 PLACEMENTS		56 PLACEMENTS

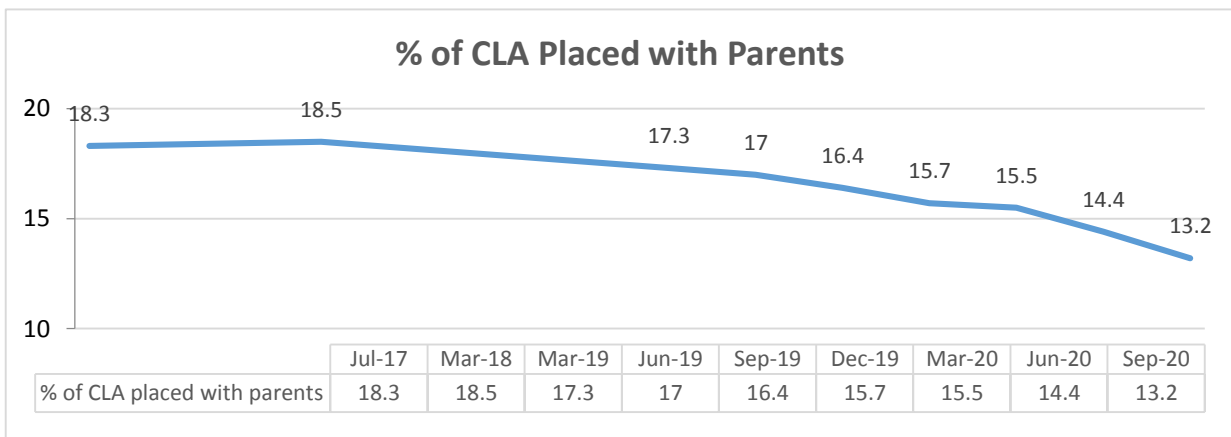
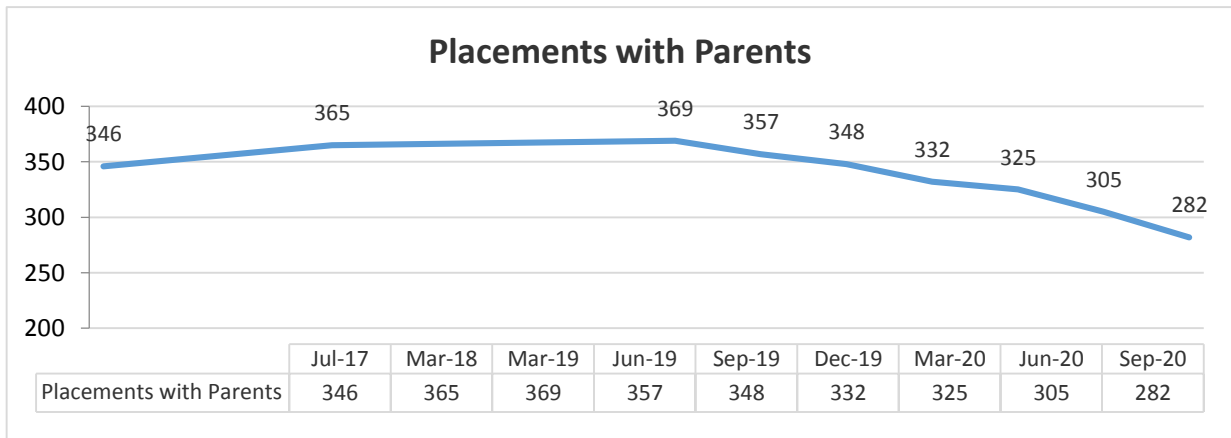
Almost 40% of placements at a distance (20 placements) were agency fostering placements, an increase from 18% in 2017. Half of these placements (10) were larger sibling groups of 3 and 4 and a further four were foster placements with connected carers who live at a distance from Lancashire, which agency fostering providers had been commissioned to support.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of children placed in agency children's homes at a distance from Lancashire (9 in 2017 compared to only 3 in March 2020); evidence that our improved placement finding processes and collaborative work with providers is having a positive impact.

PLACED WITH PARENTS OR OTHER PERSON WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Between 2012 and 2017, Lancashire experienced a significant increase in the number of CLA placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility, with the proportion doubling from 9.6% in March 2012 to 18.3% in July 2017. This was significantly higher than the proportion of placements nationally (5.4% as of March 2016) and higher than the North West proportion (12.5%). Numbers of placements with parents further increased nationally and as of March 2019 were at 7%.

Targeted work in Lancashire to reduce the proportion of placements with parents has seen a significant fall in our numbers, particularly over 2019/20 and continuing into 2020/21. As of September 2020, 13.2% of Lancashire CLA were placed with parents.



Number & Percentage of Placements with Parents by District (Mar 19, Mar 20 & Sept 20)

Date	Lancaster	F&W	Preston	CSR	West Lancs	HRV	Burnley	Pendle	Rossendale	County
MAR 19	28 (12.5%)	22 (11.3%)	70 (21.5%)	48 (17.2%)	18 (13.5%)	60 (23.9%)	51 (18.7%)	40 (19.5%)	25 (25%)	369 (17.3%)
MAR 20	30 (12.5%)	28 (14.1%)	46 (13.9%)	20 (9.0%)	21 (16.8%)	52 (21.0%)	44 (14.8%)	55 (26.6%)	22 (24.2%)	325 (15.5%)
SEPT 20	25 (10.8%)	39 (18.3%)	35 (10%)	19 (8.7%)	14 (11.5%)	43 (16.8%)	39 (13.5%)	51 (23.6%)	15 (15.3%)	282 (13.2%)
Dif Mar 19 to Sept 20	DOWN 3	UP 17	DOWN 35	DOWN 29	DOWN 4	DOWN 17	DOWN 12	UP 11	DOWN 10	DOWN 87

KEY (Getting to Good Target):

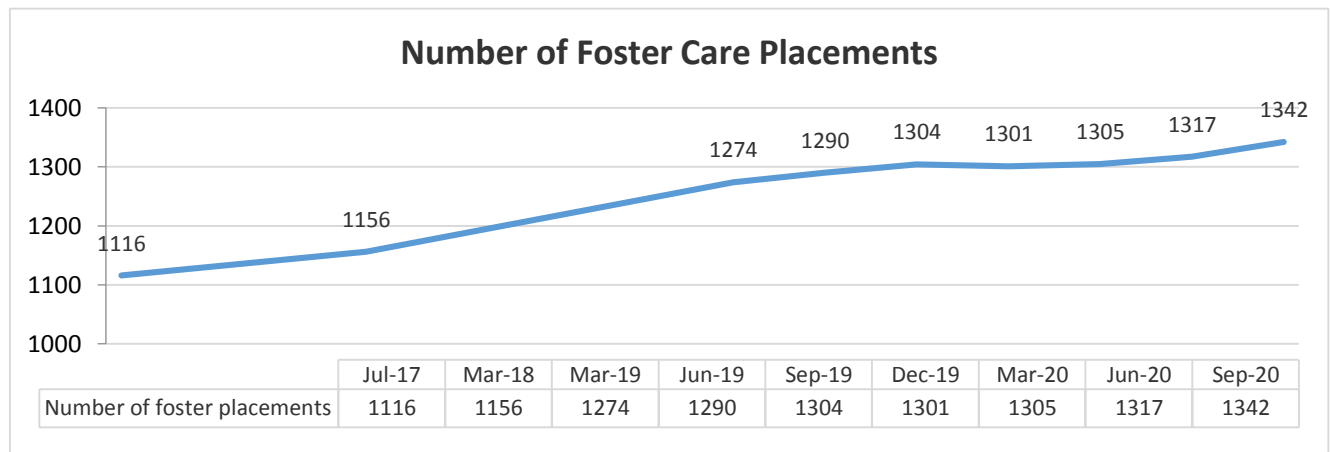
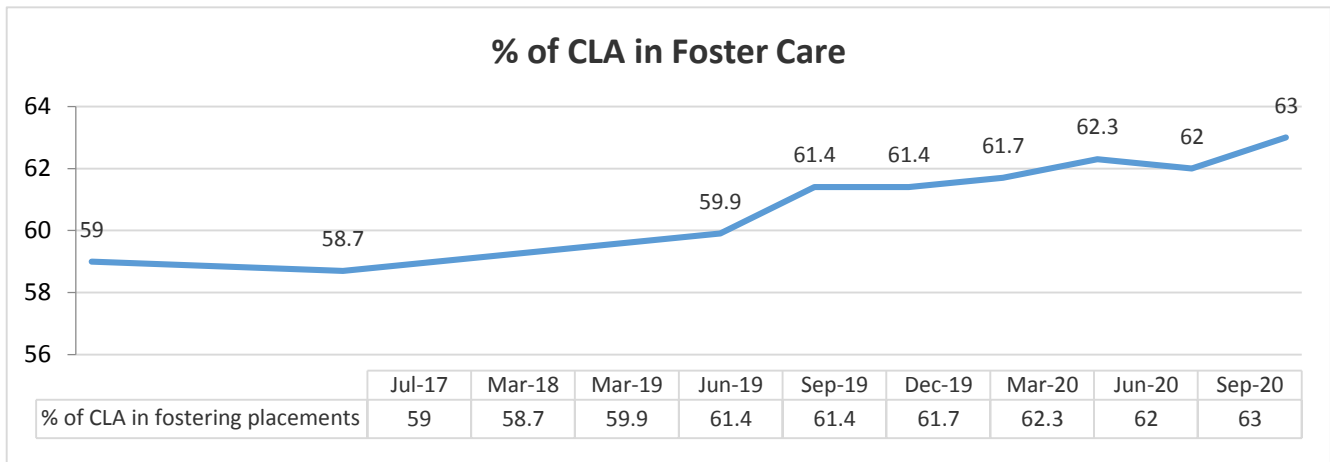
on track (13.5-15%) **Low (more than 18%)** Requires Improvement (15.1-17.9%) **Above (Less than 13.5%)**

Significant reductions have been made in Preston and Chorley & South Ribble since March 2019. Further work is required to halt the continued rise in Pendle and Fylde & Wyre and continue to reduce numbers in Hyndburn & Ribble Valley and Rossendale.

FOSTER CARE

Nationally, there was a fall in the proportion of children placed in foster care between 2016 and 2019 (from 74% to 72%). Lancashire's proportion in foster care also fell (from 66% in 2016 to

60% in 2019). However, there has been a steady increase in the number and proportion of foster placements during 2019/20 which has continued into 2020/21. As of September 2020, 63% of Lancashire CLA were placed in foster care.



Number & Percentage of Foster Placements by District (Mar 19, Mar 20 & Sept 20)

Date	Lancaster	F&W	Preston	CSR	West Lancs	HRV	Burnley	Pendle	Rossendale	County
MAR 19	145 (64.7%)	119 (61.3%)	190 (58.3%)	170 (60.9%)	82 (61.7%)	149 (59.4%)	177 (64.8%)	140 (68.3%)	52 (52%)	1274 (59.9%)
MAR 20	162 (67.5%)	121 (60.8%)	214 (64.7%)	163 (73.1%)	82 (65.6%)	145 (58.5%)	191 (64.3%)	124 (59.9%)	50 (54.9%)	1305 (62.3%)
SEPT 20	151 (65.1%)	122 (57.3%)	234 (66.7%)	156 (71.2%)	81 (66.4%)	167 (65.2%)	189 (65.6%)	127 (58.8%)	62 (63.3%)	1342 (63.0%)
Dif Mar 19 to Sept 20	UP 6	UP 3	UP 44	DOWN 14	DOWN 1	UP 18	UP 12	DOWN 13	UP 10	UP 68

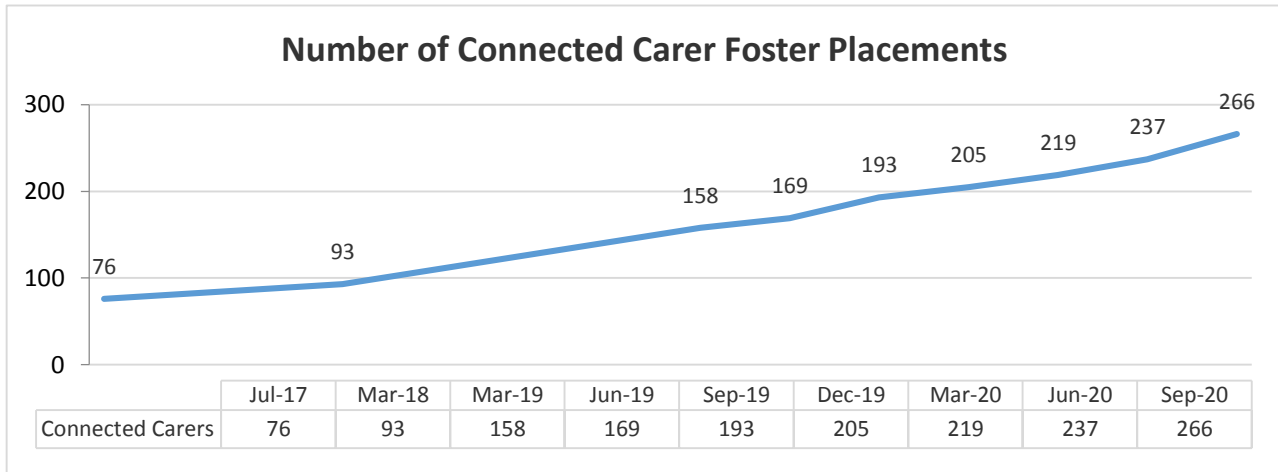
KEY (Getting to Good Target):

on track (60-70%) **Low (less than 58%)** **Requires Improvement (58-60%)** **Above (more than 70%)**

Significant increases in foster placements have been made in Preston, Hyndburn & Ribble Valley and Rossendale since March 2019. Further work is required across the county to continue to increase the proportion of our CLA placed in foster care.

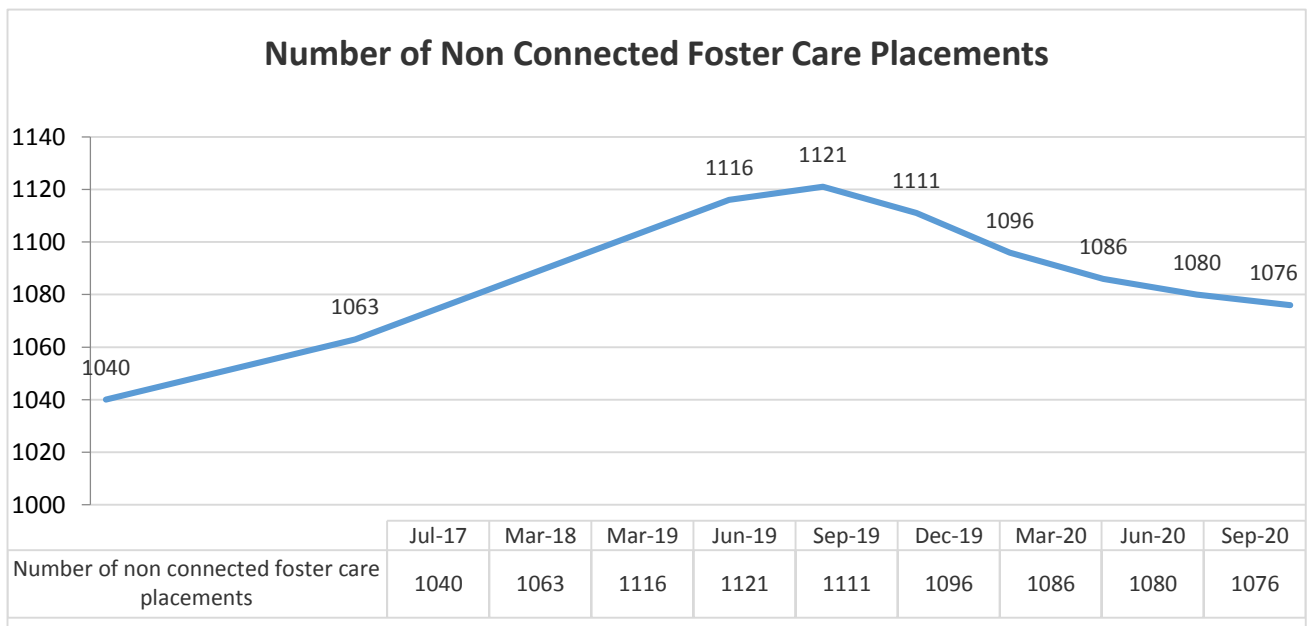
CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

The majority of our increase in foster care placements is due to a significant rise in the number of connected carer placements (placed with family or friends), which has more than tripled between 2017 and September 2020 (from 76 to 266, an increase of 190 placements). Nationally 13% of looked after children are placed with a connected carer, compared to 11% in Lancashire in March 2020, rising to 12.5% in September 2020.



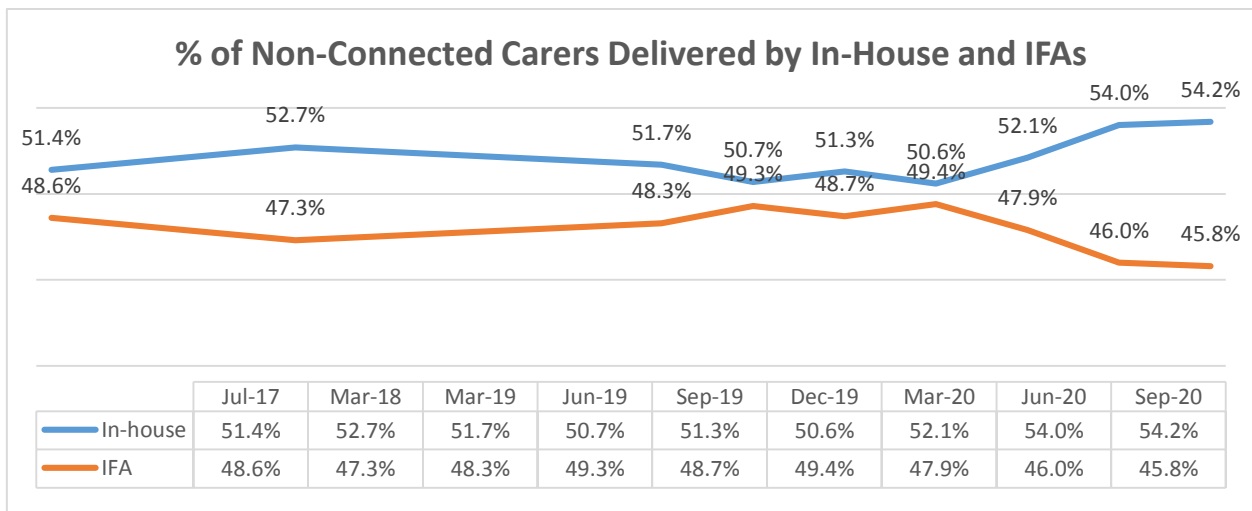
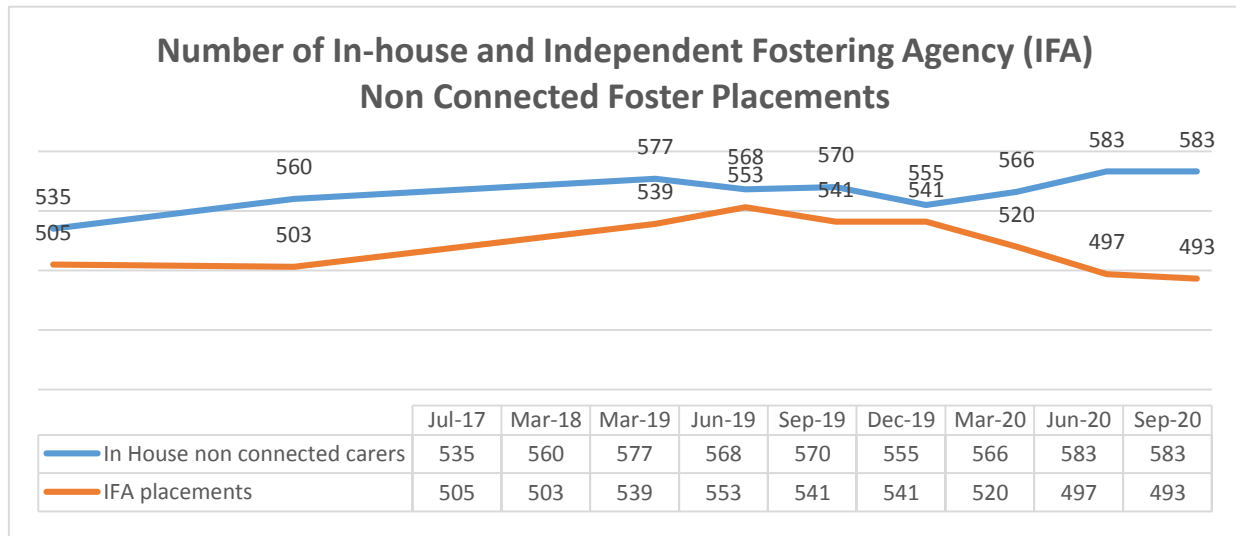
NON-CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

Nationally 58% of looked after children are placed with non-connected foster carers. This compares to 51.8% in Lancashire in March 2020, falling to 50.5% in September 2020. For Lancashire to have been at the national average (58%) at the end of September 2020, there would have had to have been a further 160 non-connected carer placements (1236).



Numbers of non-connected foster placements peaked at 1121 in June 2019, but have fallen since then to 1076 (September 2020). At the peak in June, the proportion of in-house non-connected foster placements to Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements was not far

from an equal split (50.7% in-house compared to 49.3% IFA).



Although in-house non-connected foster placements have increased since the peak in June 2019 (15 more placements), this has not been enough to counteract the significant fall in the number of IFA placements (60 less placements), with the sharpest fall (48 placements) since the start of 2020. This is likely in part to be due to the refined placement finding processes introduced in late 2019, with the in-house fostering service expected to provide placements for all children aged 0-5 years (unless the child is part of a large sibling group, there is a significant complex health need or a parent and child foster placement is required). This was extended to placements for all 0-8 year olds in July 2020.

However, as the following table shows, the fall in our IFA placements made by Children's Social Care is not simply due to a reduction in demand for agency placements for young children. Our numbers of IFA placements have fallen across all age groups since June 2019, albeit by a lesser extent (around 5% for 11+ placements and 13% for 6-10 year olds, compared to a reduction of 34% in 0-5 year old IFA placements).

Comparison of numbers by age range in in-house and IFA provision (made by Children's Social Care)

	0-5 IN HOUSE	0-5 IFA	TOTAL 0-5s	% Placed in IFAs	6-10 IN HOUSE	6-10 IFA	TOTAL 6-10s	% Placed in IFAs	11+ IN HOUSE	11+ IFAs	TOTAL 11+	% Placed in IFAs
Mar-19	195	66	261	25.3	168	150	318	47.2	209	308	517	59.6
Jun-19	193	72	265	27.2	161	151	312	48.4	209	314	523	60.0
Oct-19	182	76	258	29.5	163	140	303	46.2	206	306	512	59.8
Dec-19	180	71	251	28.3	157	143	300	47.7	212	309	521	59.3
Mar-20	192	57	249	22.9	155	144	299	48.2	212	300	512	58.6
Sep-20	180	46	226	20.4	174	131	305	43.0	222	298	520	57.3

Despite an increase in placements provided by the in-house fostering service, Lancashire continues to have a greater reliance on IFAs to deliver non-connected foster placements than other areas - Fostering England 2019 suggests IFAs provide 39% nationally, compared to 46% in Lancashire (September 2020).

The majority of IFA placements are commissioned through Lancashire's Fostering Framework, which has been in place since May 2018 and runs until 2022. Twenty-nine providers are on Lancashire's framework, who provide around 95% of agency foster placements. Consultation with key agency providers indicates that only 55% of IFA placements based in Lancashire are being used by Lancashire children.

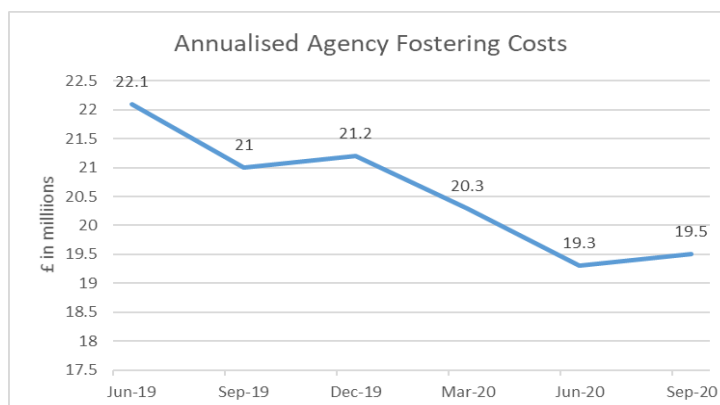
Findings from a recent Fostering Feasibility Study, funded through the DfE project: *Improving Commissioning and Sufficiency Planning to Increase Stability and Permanence for Looked After Children (Fostering)*, suggest that a further increase in fostering placements and local sufficiency in Lancashire will not only require a focus on recruiting new foster carer households but also on making better use of existing local IFA placements:

'... In the context of the current local, regional and national levels of non-connected fostering household growth it will take many years to achieve a significant change in the fostering sufficiency picture through this route alone, particularly if it is predicated upon mainly local authority fostering service growth. However, the size and nature of the IFA sector provides an opportunity to move the sufficiency balance in the short to medium term through enhanced commissioning and placement finding approaches. The findings of this study suggest that both aspects need to be pursued as part of an overall fostering sufficiency strategy.'

Agency Fostering Placement Costs

Annualised costs for agency foster placements have reduced by £2.6m between June 2019 and September 2020, from £22.1m to £19.5m. This mirrors the overall fall in IFA placements (from 553 to 493 - 60 placements).

The average cost of an IFA placement has remained largely consistent at circa £770 per week. This compares to an average weekly cost for all IFA placements across the North West of £809.



The average cost of IFA placements by age group (as of September 2019) was:

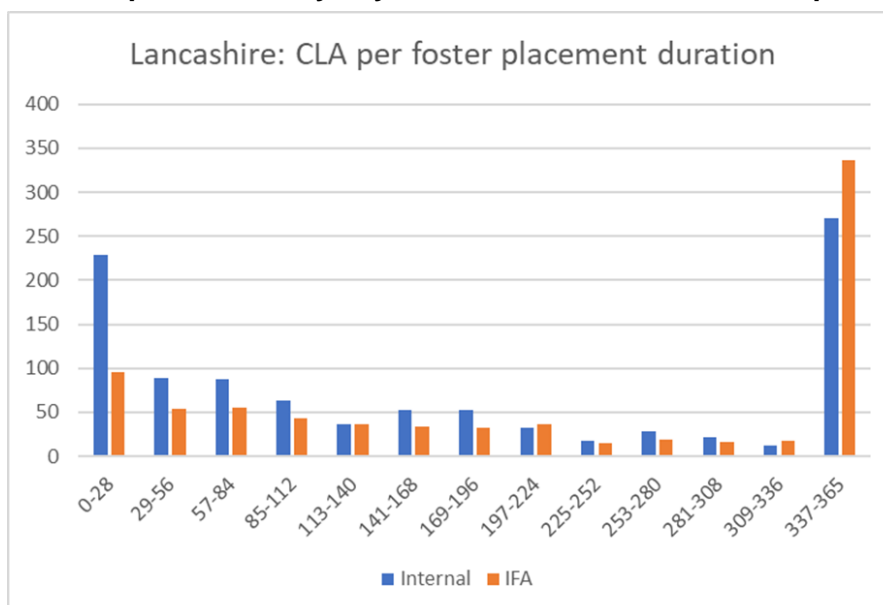
Age Group	Placements made in the last year	All Placements
AGE Band 1 - aged 0 to 4	£710.36	£698.62
AGE Band 2 - aged 5 to 10	£768.30	£746.28
AGE Band 3 - aged 11 to 15	£852.46	£781.25
AGE Band 4 - aged 16+	£844.78	£796.49
Parent & Child	£1,480.73	£1,480.73
All Age Ranges	£825.79	£775.24

Duration of Non-Connected Foster Placements

An analysis of duration of foster placements in a 12 month period up to the end of September 2019, shows that:

- Children Looked After are twice as likely to be placed with in-house foster carers, than IFA carers, for placements of less than 85 days. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors, including the provision of specific in-house emergency foster carers but also the financial viability of very short placements to IFAs and their foster carers.
- Lancashire has a higher proportion of IFA versus in-house placements for longer duration foster placements. In terms of the number of days provided in the year, 69% of the IFA days are delivered in these longer episodes whereas the internal service provides 57% of their days in these longer episodes. This results in IFAs providing 55% of the placement days whilst only providing 45% of the placements over this period.
- Lancashire’s bias towards in-house versus IFA foster carers for these short and shorter-term placements, when the overall split is reasonably even, potentially means that the in-house foster carers may be less available for longer term/permanent placements. This in turn has consequences for on-going external cost commitments.

Number of foster placements by days duration for the 12 months up to 30/09/2019



Location of Non-Connected Foster Placements

Nationally, 61% of children in foster care (both connected and non-connected) are placed within council boundaries. Lancashire's figures are significantly higher than the national average (77%) for all foster placements. The proportion of non-connected foster placements placed within Lancashire's boundaries is also 77%, with 32% placed within their home district (i.e. the same district as the Children's Social Care team which supports them).

Theoretically, Lancashire has a sufficient number of non-connected foster carers to meet need. As of September 2019, the number of CLA placed in non-connected foster placements within Lancashire (1330) was 25% higher than the total number of Lancashire CLA placed in non-connected fostering placements (1065). 60% of IFA placements within Lancashire (475) were being used by children from other local authorities. Consequently, even though a high percentage (60%) of Lancashire's IFA non-connected placements are within the County Council boundaries, there is still significant opportunity to improve this balance over time.

Hard to Find Fostering Searches

To maximise the chances of securing suitable foster placements, Lancashire adopts a dual searching strategy for the majority of foster care requests (i.e. referrals are sent to in-house and agency providers at the same time), with the exception of placement searches for 0-8 year olds, which are sent to in-house only initially. During 2019/20, over 1100 requests for foster placements were received by Lancashire's Access to Resources Team (ART).

Type of fostering request	% and No. of placement search requests received	% and No. of each placement search type classed as 'hard to find'
Task Centred foster placement (up to 26 weeks)	62% (710)	18% (127)
Permanent foster placement	18% (188)	44% (83)
Respite foster placement	8% (93)	16% (15)
Mother and baby foster placement	8% (96)	19% (18)
Step Down into Fostering placement	3% (37)	95% (35)
TOTAL	100% (1137)	24% (278)

The majority of Lancashire's fostering requests (62% in 2019/20) are for shorter term task centred placements. More than a third (36%) of fostering requests during 2019/20 were for same day/ emergency placements and almost a quarter (24%) of all placement searches were considered to be 'hard to find' (i.e. required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' was required due to a lack of offers from the electronic referral):

- 54% of hard to find requests were for children aged 11+ (150 children)
- 35% were for children who were part of a sibling group (of between 2-5) (98 children)
- 30% were for permanent foster placements (83 children)
- 20% were emergency (same day) requests (56 children)
- 25 of the hard to find searches resulted in a young person needing to be placed in a children's home placement because a foster placement had been unable to be found.

Step Down into Fostering Placements

A key priority in Lancashire's Sufficiency Strategy (2017-20) was to develop Step Down into Fostering provision in collaboration with IFA providers, for young people with a long term plan for

fostering currently in residential care. A target was set to deliver 10 new Step Down into Fostering placements each year.

A Step Down into Fostering lot was included in Lancashire's Fostering Framework (2018-2022). Between May 2018 (when the framework commenced) and March 2020, 12 step down placements were made: 6 during 2018/19 and 6 during 2019/20. An additional placement was made pre framework through the initial pilot phase. Of these placements, 6 were still active in March 2020 and one successfully transitioned to a mainstream in-house foster placement. Another placement ended due to the young person returning home. 5 placements (38%) were not successful, with the young people returning to residential care, which is comparable to the national benchmark of a 60% success rate.

The age range of the children extended from 9 to 16 years of age – of the 13 placements, 2 were aged 9; 2 were aged 11; 2 were aged 12; 4 were aged 13; 2 were aged 15 and 1 was aged 16. There were 8 boys and 5 girls. The average length of the 7 completed placements was 19 weeks, with a range of between 3 and 57 weeks. The average length of the ongoing placements is 50 weeks, ranging from 16 to 83 weeks. As the length of placement is an indicator of stability, the five placements that exceed 6 months (plus the two positive transitions) constitute successful placements.

The profile of the referrals included a significant number of referrals in the 14-15 age group – which may indicate a gap in service and/or the requirement for additional placements as an alternative to placement in residential care.

Although the framework has been successful in securing placements for some of the children and young people requiring a step down from residential care, the target of 10 step down placements each year has not been able to be met. More targeted work is required to ensure that more effective use can be made of the very limited number of step down into fostering carers.

Sub-Regional Collaboration

Lancashire led the successful application for seed funding from the DfE to explore how the neighbouring Local Authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Cumbria and Lancashire (BBCL) can work better together to improve sufficiency of foster care through the collaboration of internal fostering services and working differently with IFAs to increase the proportion of CLA placed locally.

The BBCL Authorities have identified that work with the independent sector to develop capacity for hard to place cohorts of children and young people or in providing capacity in under-served areas might be better addressed at a sub-regional level. This includes improving access to local capacity at the point of need for local children; the distribution of local capacity in relation to hard to place areas within BBCL; and the availability of placements for children with a specific need profile – some shared across BBCL and some specific to an authority.

Authorities within BBCL have relationships with the market through a variety of contractual arrangements shaped by local demand and local capacity. The Authorities have assessed that acting as BBCL will strengthen the commissioner's role in influencing local capacity and shaping capability. It will also afford opportunities to aggregate some specialist needs and engage the market in sub-regional solutions.

In addition, the BBCL project identified the potential for sub-regional collaboration in relation to recruitment of in-house foster carers, building on elements of promising practice in Blackburn with Darwen, successful elements of the North West's 'You Can Foster' marketing approach, Cumbria's recent success, other sub-regional approaches and good practice from local authorities and IFAs.

Further work will be carried out across BBCL Authorities and IFAs to develop the above areas.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

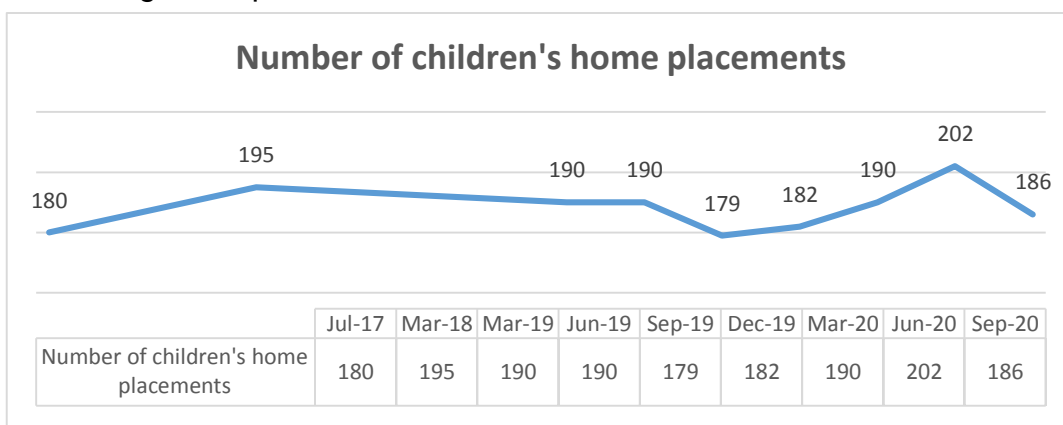
In March 2019, 12% of CLA nationally were placed in residential care (which includes children's homes provision, secure welfare placements and semi-independent living accommodation i.e. hostels and flats where staff are employed to provide support and advice). An additional 4% were classed as living independently.

As of March 2020, Lancashire had 13.7% (287) of CLA placed in children's homes, secure welfare and semi-independent provision (9.1% in children's homes - 190 placements; 0.1% in secure welfare - 3 placements; and 4.5% in hostels and flats where staff were employed on site to provide support and advice - 94 placements). A further 2% (41 placements) were living independently, with access to 'floating support'.

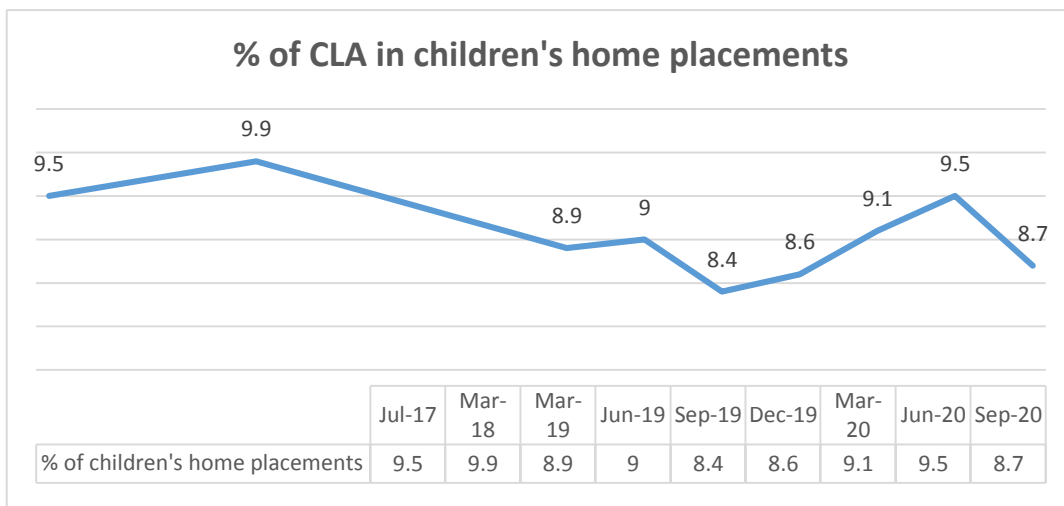
For Lancashire to have been at the national average (12%) at the end of March 2020, there would have had to have been 36 less children's home/ secure welfare/ semi-independent placements.

CHILDREN'S HOME PLACEMENTS

The number of Lancashire children and young people placed in children's homes has fluctuated between July 2017 and September 2020. The increase in the first half of 2020 is in part due to the tightening of processes to ensure that wherever possible young people of statutory school age are placed in regulated provision.



Despite fluctuating numbers, some progress has been made towards achieving the 2017-2020 Sufficiency Strategy target of reducing the proportion of our CLA in children's home provision to 8.7%. The target was exceeded in Quarter 3 of 2019/20 but increased back up to 9.1% by the end of March 2020 and 9.5% in June 2020, before reducing back to 8.7% by September 2020.



Preston and Chorley & South Ribble saw significant increases in their number of children's home placements between March 2019 and September 2020. Further work is required to reduce the proportion of CLA in children's homes in these two districts as well as Lancaster and Fylde & Wyre.

Number & Percentage of Children's Home Placements by District (Mar 19, Mar 20 & Sept 20)

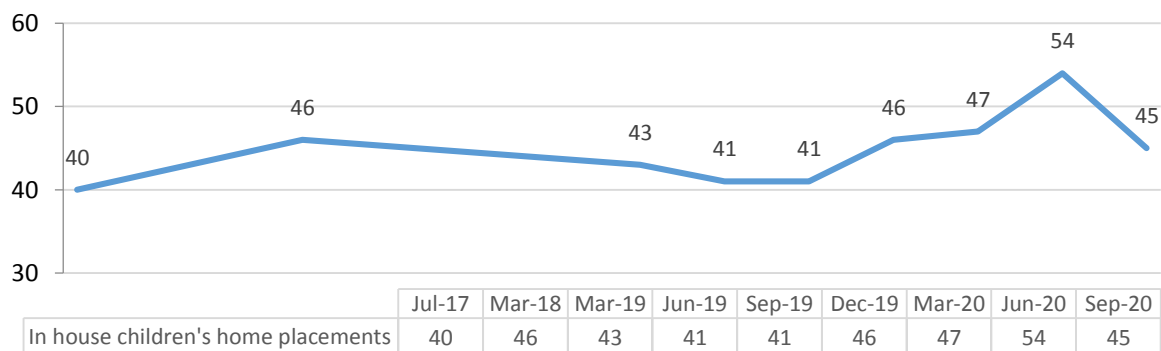
Date	Lancaster	F&W	Preston	CSR	West Lancs	HRV	Burnley	Pendle	Rossendale	County
MAR 19	24 (10.7%)	26 (13.4%)	26 (8%)	18 (6.5%)	14 (10.5%)	21 (8.4%)	22 (8.1%)	14 (6.8%)	11 (11%)	190 (8.9%)
MAR 20	24 (10%)	25 (12.6%)	33 (10%)	16 (7.2%)	13 (10.4%)	22 (8.9%)	26 (8.8%)	13 (6.3%)	8 (8.8%)	190 (9.1%)
SEPT 20	23 (9.9%)	25 (11.7%)	33 (9.4%)	24 (11%)	10 (8.2%)	20 (7.8%)	21 (7.3%)	13 (6%)	7 (7.1%)	186 (8.7%)
Dif Mar 19 to Sept 20	DOWN 1	DOWN 1	UP 7	UP 6	DOWN 4	DOWN 1	DOWN 1	DOWN 1	DOWN 4	DOWN 4

KEY (Getting to Good Target):

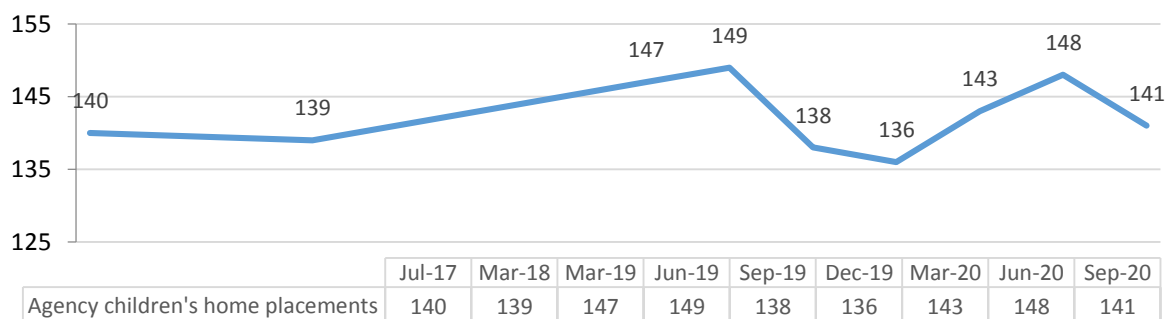
on track (8.3-8.7%) **Low (more than 9%)** **Requires Improvement (8.8%-8.9%)** **Above (less than 8.3%)**

Progress has been made during 2020 in increasing the number of young people who are being placed in our in-house children's home provision, with occupancy levels rising to a high of 93% in June 2020. Despite the overall number of children's home placements being higher in September 2020 than in July 2017, the increased use of our in-house provision has meant that the proportion of children's home placements delivered by agency providers has reduced from 78% to 76%.

In house children's home placements



Agency children's home placements



Profile of Children Placed in Children's Homes

A higher proportion of males are placed in children's homes in comparison to the general CLA cohort. As of March 2020, 58% of the children's home cohort were male compared to 53% of the general CLA population. This was higher than in 2017 where 57% of the children's home cohort were male compared to 54% of the general CLA population.

The age profile of Lancashire young people placed in children's home provision has also changed since 2017. In March 2020, a higher proportion were aged 11 to 15 (63.1% compared to 51.6%) and a lower proportion were aged under 11 (3.2% compared to 5.6%) and aged 16 and over (33.7% compared to 42.8%). Improved placement finding capacity and processes, alongside the development of specialist step down into fostering provision has driven the decrease in children's home placements required for children under 11. The introduction of tracking processes for the older age cohort in children's home provision has facilitated improved identification and transition into semi-independent provision for young people for whom this is considered suitable.

Age of Lancashire CLA placed in children's homes (July 2017 & March 2020)

AGE	TOTAL JULY 2017	% IN 2017	TOTAL MARCH 2020	% IN 2020
7	1	0.6	0	0.0
8	4	2.2	0	0.0
9	5	2.8	2	1.1
10	0	0.0	4	2.1
11	1	0.6	11	5.8

12	11	6.1	13	6.8
13	14	7.8	15	7.9
14	29	16.1	30	15.8
15	38	21.1	51	26.8
16	57	31.7	49	25.8
17	20	11.1	15	7.9
TOTAL	180		190	

During 2019/20, more than half of all requests for children's home placements (52%) and placements made (51%) required a more complex type of placement (i.e. smaller home providing additional resources to meet a higher complexity of need).

Hard to Find Children's Home Searches

To maximise the chances of securing suitable placements, Lancashire adopts a dual searching strategy for all requests for a children's home placement (i.e. referrals are sent to in-house and agency providers at the same time). During 2019/20, 312 requests for children's home placements were received by Lancashire's Access to Resources Team (ART). 39% (121) of the requests received were for an emergency placement (i.e. required same day).

Almost a third (30%) of placement searches during 2019/20 were considered to be 'hard to find' (i.e. required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' was required due to a lack of offers from the electronic referral):

- 95% of hard to find searches referenced aggressive, threatening or violent behaviours
- 86% referenced mental health issues
- 80% referenced emotional behaviours/ needs
- 77% referenced missing from home incidents
- 74% referenced young people displaying behaviours which put other young people at risk of harm
- 74% referenced smoking or substance misuse
- 57% of hard to find searches were for males
- 38% were emergency (same day) requests

85% of hard to find placements made during 2019/20 were placed in agency children's home provision.

Lancashire Internal Children's Home Provision

The in-house children's residential service in Lancashire currently delivers 12 children's homes (8 x 6 bed mainstream homes; 2 x 3 bed complex homes; a 4 bed Adolescent Support Unit; and a newly established short term crisis/ reception unit). As of the end of March 2020, overall in-house occupancy was 86%. Due to high demand, the in-house complex homes generally operate at full capacity.

Adolescent Support Unit

The Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) provides outreach support and respite residential provision for families of young people on the edge of care to prevent unnecessary entries into care.

The ASU, based in the North of the County, has been delivering support since Autumn 2017. As of January 2020, the ASU had supported 128 families, of which 99 cases had been closed. Twenty-three of the young people in the closed cases subsequently became looked after, demonstrating a 77% success rate, higher than the expected 60% success rate in the original business case.

As of January 2020, finance reported savings to date achieved by the ASU of £6.476m since it opened in 2017. Savings are based on a young person remaining out of care for 61.53 weeks. As of January 2020, 43 of the 99 cases had met the full saving of 61.53 weeks. Savings for the remaining 56 cases are estimated and assume children will remain out of care for the full duration.

At a running cost of £0.480m per annum (circa £1m since opening), the anticipated savings represent a return on investment of 5:1, which is significantly higher than the original anticipated 2:1 return on investment.

Agency Children's Home Provision

Theoretically there are more than enough children's homes within Lancashire County Council's boundaries to meet our demand for placements - according to Ofsted, there are 145 agency children's homes in Lancashire County Council's boundaries and as of 31 March 2020 Lancashire children were placed in 104 different children's homes. However, only just over a third (36%) of the agency children's homes in Lancashire were providing placements for Lancashire children. A further 52 homes outside of Lancashire's boundaries provided placements for Lancashire children: 37 homes in other North West local authorities; 2 homes in neighbouring Yorkshire towns and 3 homes at a distance (in Telford, Stoke and Essex).

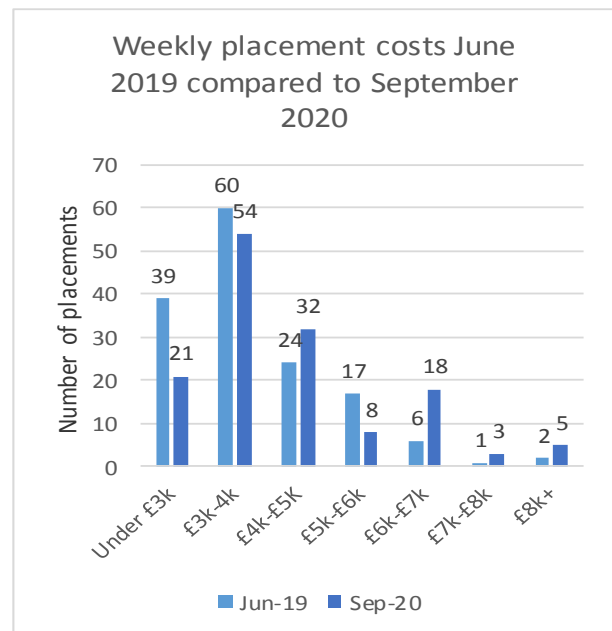
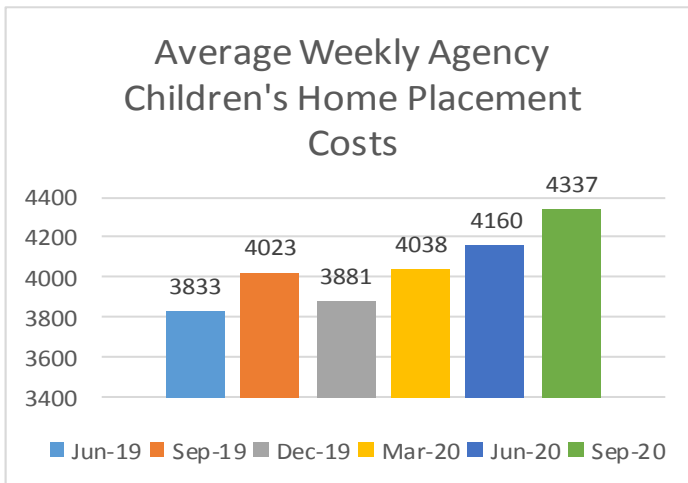
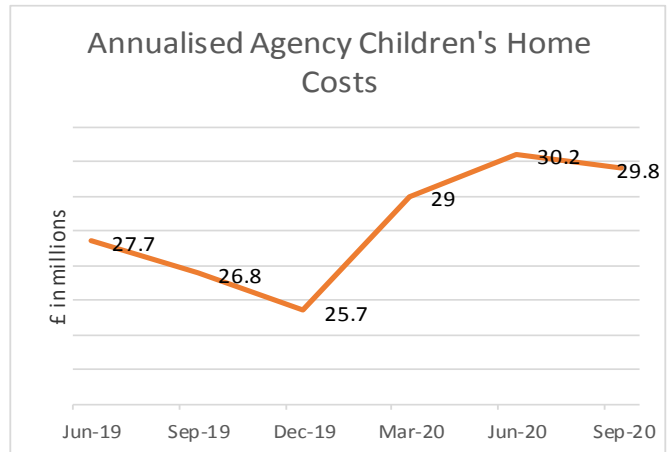
Agency children's home placements are commissioned in a number of different ways:

- a) Through a new block contracting agreement, which has been in place since November 2019. Three providers have been commissioned to deliver eight block contract beds each (including a mix of mainstream, complex and solo placements) by January 2021. Good progress is being made by all three providers to develop this provision and all are on track to deliver the additional capacity on time. The number of beds delivered through the block contract agreement has the potential to be further increased (up to a maximum of 50 beds) based on need and individual provider performance.
- b) Via Lancashire's Flexible Agreement, which has been in place since August 2016 and runs until 2022. 35 residential providers with homes inside or within 20 miles of LCC boundaries are included on the Flexible Agreement. In March 2020, 78% of all our children's home placements were delivered by providers on the Lancashire Flexible Agreement (19 out of the 35 providers).
- c) Lancashire is also named on the Placements North West Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), which is used to source placements not able to be found through the block contract or Lancashire Flexible Agreement.
- d) Where the above options have been unable to source a placement, off contract providers are contacted and placements are spot purchased on an individual basis.

Agency Children's Home Placement Costs

The costs of agency children's home placements are increasing at an unsustainable rate. Despite there being 8 less agency children's home placements in September 2020 than in June 2019, the annual cost of placements increased by £2.1m, driven by an increasing number of high cost placements (over £5k per week) - 34 in September 2020, compared to 26 in June 2019.

Average weekly agency children's home placement costs have increased by over £500 between June 2019 and September 2020. Urgent action is required to address spiralling costs.



SECURE WELFARE PLACEMENTS

Despite increased numbers of children in care, the number of secure welfare placements utilised by Lancashire was the same in March 2020 as it was in July 2017 (3 placements). Lancashire tends to have an average of two secure welfare placements at the end of each month. However, due to unprecedented high demand nationally, no secure welfare placements have been utilised by Lancashire since April 2020, despite several Lancashire young people meeting the threshold for a secure welfare placement. Secure welfare placements are likely to be at a distance from Lancashire, with only two out of the 15 secure homes in England and Wales based in the North West.

FAMILY ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Lancashire's use of residential family assessment centres has almost doubled since 2017. As of 30th September 2020, Lancashire had 19 placements in residential family assessment centres, compared to 10 in July 2017. The majority (89%) of children and young people in these placements were placed outside of Lancashire (9 within other North West Local Authorities and 8 at a distance from Lancashire – in South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Derbyshire).

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

As of September 2020, 19 Lancashire children and young people were placed in residential schools - 32% (6 placements) within schools in Lancashire and 68% (13 placements) in schools within other North West Local Authorities. This compares to 16 children and young people in July 2017, of which 44% were placed within residential schools in Lancashire (7 placements), 50% (8 placements) were within other North West Local Authorities and 6% (1 placement) was at a distance - in County Durham.

UNREGULATED PROVISION

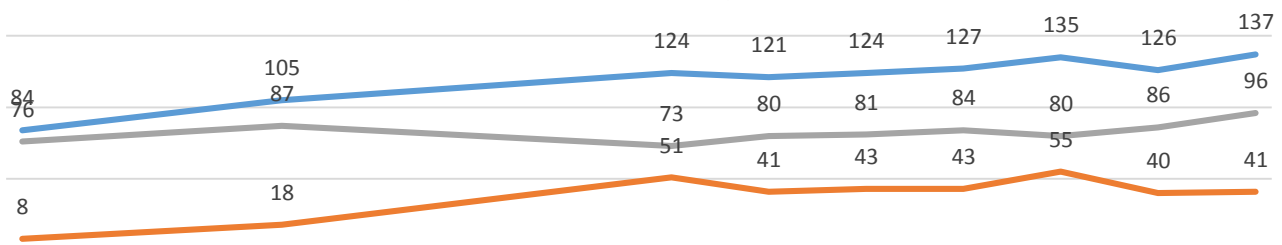
A new policy on the use of crisis and unregulated placements was introduced in January 2020. This policy outlines the processes to be undertaken when considering such placements and the risk mitigations in place to ensure that all steps are taken to avoid children and young people being placed in unregistered provision (i.e. provision that is not registered with Ofsted but should be). This includes ensuring that wherever possible young people aged 16 but still of statutory school age are placed in regulated provision.

Unregulated placements are classified as high risk where it is considered that there is a potential that elements of care (and not just support) may be required/ are being provided, due to a child's age, complexity of need or high placement costs. These placements are closely monitored and have increased oversight from Children's Social Care, Independent Reviewing Officers and the Access to Resources Team.

16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION/ INDEPENDENT LIVING (SAIL) PROVISION

Over the past three years, there has been a significant increase in Lancashire in the number of young people starting to be looked after who are aged 16-17 years (although not necessarily their first period of care): from 34 in March 2017 to 81 in March 2020. This is mirrored by a significant increase (60.7%) in the use of supported accommodation/ independent living (SAIL) placements between July 2017 and March 2020 (higher than the 45% growth reported across the North West region). This growth is attributed to a range of factors including homeless legislative changes and policy application, greater identification of unmet need and pressures on capacity in other sectors.

Leaving Care Placements (Agency and Block)



	Jul-17	Mar-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19	Mar-20	Jun-20	Sep-20
Total placements	84	105	124	121	124	127	135	126	137
Block	8	18	51	41	43	43	55	40	41
Agency	76	87	73	80	81	84	80	86	96

— Total placements — Block — Agency

Number & Percentage of SAIL Placements by District (Mar 19, Mar 20 & Sept 20)

Date	Lancaster	F&W	Preston	CSR	West Lancs	HRV	Burnley	Pendle	Rossendale	County
MAR 19	6 (2.7%)	10 (5.2%)	30 (9.2%)	27 (9.7%)	8 (6%)	14 (5.6%)	10 (3.7%)	4 (2%)	9 (9%)	124 (5.8%)
MAR 20	14 (5.8%)	13 (6.5%)	30 (9.1%)	18 (8.1%)	6 (4.8%)	20 (8.1%)	16 (5.4%)	8 (3.9%)	6 (6.6%)	135 (6.4%)
SEPT 20	21 (9.1%)	13 (6.1%)	32 (9.1%)	13 (5.9%)	10 (8.2%)	11 (4.3%)	20 (6.9%)	8 (3.7%)	7 (7.1%)	137 (6.4%)
Dif in first half of 2020/21	UP 7	SAME	UP 2	DOWN 5	UP 4	DOWN 9	UP 4	SAME	UP 1	UP 2

KEY (Getting to Good Target):

on track (6.4%) **Low (less than 5.4%)** **Requires Improvement (5.4%-6.3%)** **Above (more than 6.4%)**

The trend in increased used of SAIL placements has continued in most Lancashire districts in the first half of 2020/21, with the exception of Chorley & South Ribble and Hyndburn & Ribble Valley.

Due to the sector being unregulated, it is widely acknowledged that the ability to commission quality accommodation for young people in the right location at the right time can be challenging. Our aim has been to have a wide range of options available to our young people, regardless of their former pathway. The pooling of our Supporting People (housing-related support) block budget and our 16+ agency placement budget in 2017 has enabled scale of provision. 368 former Supporting People placements continue to be block commissioned across the county providing:

- Core 24/7 building-based accommodation (197 placements)
- Visiting support – a mix of building-based and dispersed (134 placements)
- Supported Lodgings (22 placements)
- Teenage Parent services (15 placements)

A key aim of Lancashire's 2017 - 2020 Sufficiency Strategy was to prioritise the usage of these block arrangements for our 16+ care leavers and 16-17 year old homeless young people (classified as high priority). Through cohesive working relationships, alongside District Housing leads and providers, delivery of the co-produced Joint Homeless Protocol is largely working well, the success being evident through:

- Increasing the number of CLA accommodated in the services from 8 in 2017 to 55 in 2020. In July 2017, the proportion of block leaving care placements was only 9.5% of total SAIL placements. This increased to 40.7% in March 2020. Whilst the proportion fell to 30% in September 2020, this was mainly due to young people in placement turning 18 and remaining in the provision. These young people continued to be classified as high priority as they were CLA at the point of access;
- 54% of occupied placements (167) at 30th June 2020 being utilised by young people classified as high priority, and 26% (81 placements) being utilised by young people classified

as medium priority (young people aged 18-21 who have been previously known to Children's Social Care);

2020/21 Q1 data - actuals				
Capacity	Occupied	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
368	309	167	81	61
% of occupied total		54%	26%	20%
% of total beds		45%	22%	17%

- Stronger provider engagement and working relationships, partly through establishing a dedicated SAIL placement finding / contract monitoring lead to work closely with providers;
- Improved placement finding and intelligence gathering;
- A reduction of £342/week in the average cost of a CLA SAIL placement in March 2020 compared to July 2017.

In addition to our block provision, we have continued to access the regional Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). This offers access to smaller group living services and greater access across the county to floating support with accommodation (visiting support) services.

Key findings in terms of location and quality of service utilisation are that:

- Young people are not always accommodated in their preferred location, therefore limiting their access to education, employment, training and social/family networks. The largest gaps are evidenced in the Preston and Hyndburn districts;
- Locations where providers set up are not always desirable for vulnerable young people;
- A higher proportion (over 25%) of young people live outside of Lancashire's boundaries than we would like, as a much smaller proportion is through choice.

Key findings in terms of the types of services commissioned for young people aged 16+ are that:

- Utilisation of supported lodgings is much lower than would be expected for the size of Lancashire;
- A higher proportion of our young people live in higher-cost group living placements compared to our regional neighbours, without direct correlation to higher levels of need.

Lancashire has a lower proportion of local authority owned housing and a lower proportion of social housing than comparable larger authorities, making it more difficult for young people to move on from supported accommodation to an affordable tenancy. This creates a 'blockage' in the system which is impacting on access into our block provision for priority young people at the point of need in their chosen location.

Despite the scale of provision, it is challenging to understand all of the causes that are shaping the levels of supply and demand with such diverse demographics across the county. The current service offer is not consistent across the county and, whilst it is not expected that there would be identical offers in each of the 12 districts, particular pressures in some districts more urgently

need addressing.

In 2019, Lancashire launched a local Purchasing System with Lots to enable the commissioning of the full range of services that are currently delivered through our block and the regional DPS. This will become the first route to market and will:

- enable more collaborative working with local providers to shape local provision to meet need;
- provide greater quality oversight, to simplify the commissioning process longer-term;
- achieve value for money.

4. Commissioning Priorities

Prevention

Key to reducing our overall CLA numbers will be reducing the number of children who start to become looked after, by **providing the means for families to become more resilient and stay together where it is safe and in the child's best interests to do so**. We will do this by:

- Embedding the Family Safeguarding Model;
- Delivering the multi-agency Early Help strategy;
- Delivering the DfE funded Supporting Families; Investing in Practice programme to implement the Family Group Conference (FGC) Daybreak model;
- Ensuring our expanded Outreach Service is used effectively to support families of children and young people on the edge of care;
- Exploring the expansion of our respite provision for children and young people on the edge of care through the development of further Adolescent Support Unit provision;
- Testing out new models of working, such as the Safe Families for Children approach, which will provide additional support for families of children on the edge of care;
- Strengthening our Targeted Youth Support offer, aligned to the implementation of new structures within the Children's Social Care and Children and Family Wellbeing teams;
- Ensuring that all new Section 20 Agreements (where there are not child protection concerns) are only accepted after families have accessed the above offers;
- Rigorously enforcing our Section 20 Charging Policy;
- Systematically evaluating the impact of our preventative approaches and reshaping accordingly.

Placements with Parents or other person with parental responsibility

We will continue work to **reduce the proportion of placements with parents or other person with parental responsibility** by:

- Ensuring effective and robust care planning, with contingency planning;
- Supporting our staff to work more confidently within the court arena and with legal colleagues;
- Continuing to review all of our children who are placed at home with parents and seek revocation of orders where appropriate;

- Ensuring that where appropriate these families are supported by our wellbeing, prevention and early help services as they step down from high level intervention.

Foster Care

We will continue to **increase the number of in-house fostering placements provided by:**

- Further developing placement finding processes to make the most effective use of in-house foster carers;
- Exploring collaborative opportunities for foster carer marketing and recruitment with the neighbouring authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Cumbria (BBCL), with a particular focus on digital marketing;
- Implementing a more targeted marketing strategy to address gaps in provision, including in underserved areas and placements for older children and young people, sibling groups and parent and child placements.
- Implementing an increased offer of support to in-house carers to support retention including:
 - Establishment of a Foster Care Academy that supports the induction and skill building of newly approved foster carers;
 - Establishment a Mentoring Scheme that supports new foster carers to feel supported during their first year of approval;
 - Establishment a Fostering Communities Project that supports networking and support for foster carers that are isolated;
 - Establishment an Enrichment Programme that supports the networking and family life of our fostering community;
 - Participation in the Reflective Fostering programme that is a new study that supports foster carers to have a better understanding of the lived experiences of the child and thereby feel better equipped to support the children in their care.

We will continue to **work collaboratively with fostering providers to increase the number of local children placed with local IFA carers by:**

- Continuing to apply and refine the approaches developed as part of the DfE Improving Commissioning and Sufficiency Planning to Increase Stability and Permanence for Looked After Children (Fostering) project: BBCL Exchange Days with IFAs and Fostering Referrals Decision-Tree process;
- Exploring collaborative sub-regional commissioning opportunities and options with the BBCL local authorities, including:
 - Consideration of the development of a sub-regional fostering framework;
 - Placements for children and young people who require additional support and resources;
 - Same day and short notice placements;
 - Specialist placements for Children with Disabilities.
- Further development of the Step Down into Fostering model, including commissioning additional Step-Down placement capacity through a 'retained placement' arrangement.

Overall, by 2024, we aim to **increase the proportion of our fostering placements to 70%.**

Adoption

We will continue to seek to **match children who have a plan of adoption with the most suitable adopters as quickly as possible** by:

- Establishing and embedding the Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool;
- Increasing the pool of approved adopters to support matching with Lancashire and Blackpool children;
- Minimising delay by prioritising early permanence and early family finding, where appropriate;
- Developing a new team in Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool that focuses on family finding at the earliest opportunity;
- Establishing an Adoption Support Team that supports families post adoption in order to prevent adoption breakdowns.

Children's Home Provision

The overarching priority is to **reduce the proportion of young people in children's home provision to 8.3%**. We will do this by:

- Tracking and regularly reviewing young people placed in children's home provision;
- Further developing effective placement finding processes and step down provision to support appropriate young people to move into foster care and semi-independent provision.

Ensuring appropriate children's home placements are available for our children in care, particularly those who require additional support and resources will continue to be a key priority. We will do this by:

- Exploring the development of further short term in-house crisis/ reception placements to de-escalate behaviours and support the sourcing of the right placement to best meet need;
- Exploring the development of further smaller capacity in-house children's homes;
- Continuing to work collaboratively with our block providers to maximise use of contracted beds, including the potential to further increase the number of block beds delivered, based on need and provider performance;
- Recommissioning Lancashire's Children's Home Flexible Agreement by July 2022;
- Working with the market to develop bespoke options to meet the needs of our children and young people with the most complex emotional and behavioural needs, including the development of alternatives to secure welfare placements.

16+ Supported Accommodation/ Independent Living (SAIL) Provision






It is anticipated that the demand for SAIL provision will continue to increase over the next year given the recent trend of higher number of 16/17 year olds starting to become looked after and the high prevalence of young homelessness reported in the North West. However as we succeed in reducing our CLA population overall, it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in new care leavers and therefore a reduction in demand for accommodation by the latter 6 months of this strategy.

Our objectives are to capture innovation and learning from best practice. We will **strengthen partnership working with District Housing and social housing providers to seek their support in co-producing services and achieving our key aims** to:

- Deliver the 16+ accommodation tender across all commissioned services by September 2021 seeking to ensure that accommodation is increasingly in appropriate locations. We aim to increase the usage of block provision to 60% for high priority;
- Undertake an options appraisal exercise with partners to develop a sustainable, effective prevention service that can respond to different demands across the county. The service will build upon the successes of the Trailblazer project and increase access to mediation services for young people and families;
- Provide sufficient emergency ('crash-pad') provision locally;
- Explore how staying-close arrangements can be developed and maximised, particularly with our in-house children's home services;
- Develop greater supporting lodgings capacity to support a cost-effective care leaver accommodation pathway offer;
- Establish trainer flats to better prepare young people for sustainable independent living;
- Expand our block purchase arrangements to include smaller group living settings for young people with more complex needs;
- Work with partner agencies to ensure that we have a robust quality assurance framework in place, overseen by a dedicated SAIL Quality Assurance Manager;
- Improve the timeliness of planned moves to ensure that young people have the best opportunity possible to secure the right type of accommodation, in their preferred location at the right time.

5. Key Performance Indicators

The following Key Performance Indicators will be monitored and reported quarterly:

Key Performance Indicator	Current Levels	Target	Impact
Reduction in proportion of placements with parents or other person with parental responsibility	15.5% (March 2020)	13.5%	 2%
Increase the proportion of foster placements	62.3% (March 2020)	70%	 7.7%
Number of Step Down into Fostering Placements commenced	6 per annum (March 2020)	10 per annum	 4 p/a
Reduction in the proportion of CLA in Children's Homes provision	9.1% (March 2020)	8.3%	 0.8%
Increase the usage of block contract supported accommodation provision for high priority young people	53% of occupied beds (March 2020)	60% of occupied beds	 7%

Progress of meeting commissioning priorities and actions will be reviewed and reported annually. Targets will be also be reviewed on an annual basis.