Knowsley would benefit from additional high-quality children's home provision primarily by better meeting its statutory sufficiency duty, keeping more children closer to home/networks, improving outcomes, and reducing reliance on costly/out-of-area external placements.

Knowsleynews

Legal and strategic context (sufficiency duty)

Under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, local authorities must (so far as reasonably practicable) secure sufficient accommodation in their area that meets the needs of looked-after children. Ideal placements should be near the child's home, avoid disrupting education/training, allow siblings to stay together where appropriate, suit any disabilities, and be within the authority's area.

knowsleychildcare.trixonline

Knowsley's own Sufficiency Position Statement (2022–2025) and related updates treat residential provision as a core part of meeting this duty. The council's four in-house children's homes form "a key component of the borough's sufficiency strategy." Recent scrutiny updates confirm ongoing challenges and a proactive response focused on strengthening in-house residential and fostering capacity.

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Current pressures and evidence of need

Rising numbers of looked-after children: Numbers rose significantly from 317 (November 2024) to 388, creating additional sufficiency challenges. Earlier data showed rates around 84–90 per 10,000 children (higher than the national average of ~67).

Knowsleynews

Heavy reliance on external residential placements: Historical FOI and sufficiency data showed far more children in external children's homes than in-house ones (e.g., ~40 external vs. a small number in-house at one point). National trends show a ~24% rise in residential placements, driving costs and pressure.

Whatdotheyknow

Market and local supply issues: There are multiple private providers and places in the borough (recent figures: 23 providers operating 33 homes with 83 places), but availability of the right type of provision (especially for complex needs, emotional/behavioural difficulties, or younger children) remains constrained. Some private homes have faced quality issues (e.g., Ofsted "Inadequate" ratings). Council strategy emphasises the need for the right provision in the right places at consistently high standards.

Knowsleynews

Sufficiency gaps highlighted in strategy documents: Past closures or poor Ofsted ratings on in-house homes increased demand for external places, especially for children with complex mental health/emotional difficulties needing small, individualised settings. Edge-of-care and short-breaks services are valued for preventing full care entries.

Knowsley

How a (well-run) children's home meets sufficiency needs and delivers benefits

Local placement capacity — Directly increases beds within Knowsley, helping fulfil the duty

to provide accommodation in the area. This reduces out-of-borough placements that disrupt education, family contact, and community ties.

Better matching and outcomes — In-house homes (all currently rated Good by Ofsted, some with Outstanding features) demonstrate strong practice: children form positive relationships with staff, access education with excellent attendance, receive support for health/learning needs, maintain family links, and engage in activities. Short-breaks/edge-of-care homes help families stay together and prevent care entry. Expansion to younger children and more short breaks is already being explored.

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Cost and control advantages — External residential care is a major expenditure pressure (Knowsley spends tens of millions annually on children looked after, with residential a significant share). In-house provision gives the council more control over quality, matching, and costs compared with the private market, which has seen rising fees and variable standards nationally and locally.

Alignment with wider strategy — Supports priorities around kinship care, in-house fostering growth, edge-of-care services, and regional collaboration (e.g., Foster4). It complements rather than replaces family-based care, targeting children whose needs cannot be met in foster placements (complex needs, sibling groups, teenagers, etc.).

Quality and safeguarding — Council-run homes have a track record of Good Ofsted judgements and positive feedback from children/parents on stability, relationships, skill development, and family support. This contrasts with some private provision that has faced serious safeguarding shortfalls.

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Summary of benefits for Knowsley

Helps meet the legal sufficiency duty by increasing suitable local capacity.

Supports better outcomes (stability, education, family contact, wellbeing) by keeping children closer to home and networks.

Reduces financial pressure from expensive external/out-of-area placements.

Strengthens the overall local offer (including short breaks that prevent care entry).

Provides higher-quality, more accountable provision under direct council oversight.

Caveats: Not every additional home is automatically beneficial—provision must match actual need (age, complexity, location), be high-quality/regulated, and fit within a balanced strategy that prioritises family/kinship/foster care where possible. The private market has expanded in the area, and Ofsted has noted saturation risks in some regions. Any new home should be assessed against current gaps (e.g., complex needs, younger children, short breaks) rather than assumed demand.

Liverpoolecho

Primary sources include Knowsley Council's Sufficiency Position Statement, Children's Scrutiny updates, Ofsted reports on council homes, and related official updates. For the most current figures or a specific proposal, check the latest Knowsley Council children's services documents or contact the relevant team.