



Knowsley Children's Social Care

Sufficiency Position Statement 2022 - 2025

Sufficiency Position Statement & Action Plan 2022-2025

Executive Summary

Under the Children Act 1989, Local Authorities are required to take steps to secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of Children Looked After (CLA). In Knowsley, the Sufficiency Strategy 2018-21 successfully reduced demand for placements for Children Looked After. Evidence shows that over the last three years (2018/19-2020/21), while overall numbers of Children Looked After having remained stable, that fewer children are coming into and out of care.

However, changes to the external market (primarily in the independent fostering and residential sectors) and increasing numbers of children who present with complex emotional and mental health needs, along with challenging behaviours, continues to place pressure on sufficiency in Knowsley. The current position is that while the turnover of Children Looked After has reduced, there are increased numbers of younger children looked after on full care orders. In terms of future demand, the current age profile of children looked after means that there is likely to be sustained demand coming from these children for placements over the next 10 years, and this could potentially create greater pressure on foster care and residential placements as these children grow older.

Through analysis of changes in placement trends and current data in relation to Children Looked After, emerges 'key themes' that the refreshed Sufficiency Action Plan sets out to address. The Action Plan will be refreshed annually throughout the lifetime of the Sufficiency Position Statement. The 2022-25 Strategy has identified the following themes:

- Theme 1 – Growth of In House Fostering & the quality of provision
- Theme 2 – Market Management
- Theme 3 – Residential Strategy
- Theme 4 – Permanence & Emotional Wellbeing
- Theme 5 – Demand Management – Children Looked After & Edge of Care

Key Themes

(1) Growth of In House Fostering and the quality of provision. Fostering Provision

- **Age profile of Children Looked After in Knowsley** – Knowsley has a greater rate of younger Children Looked After in comparison to national rates. There are far more Children Looked After in Knowsley who are aged 5 to 10 years old, and there is a much lower rate of children who are aged 16 and over. This age profile will have implications for long-term planning for Children Looked After, with the potential for long-term demand coming from this age group as they grow older.
- **Foster Carers**

As of 1st December 2021, there are 67 mainstream fostering households offering 144 placements. The average age of Knowsley foster carers is 56. The recruitment of younger carers over the past five years has been successful and the service met the target of net gain of fifteen foster placements. The impact of this has lowered the average age of foster carers in Knowsley from 67 in 2016 to 56 in 2021. It is important to note the length of time carers have been with the service and the age they were when they enquired. Of those who were recruited in the past 5 years, the average age is 49 which allows more opportunity for long term placements to be made.

Although the average age of foster carers has reduced, foster carers aged 61 years and over account for 40% of the current cohort. Therefore, it is anticipated that, due to the ageing demographic of Knowsley foster carers, there would be an increase in retirement over the next 5 – 7 years. Combined with the type of placement offered by the group of carers aged 60+ being 'long term' there is also the likelihood that the placements may be lost due to staying put or SGO.

As foster carers reach their 60s and 70s, there is an increased likelihood of retirement, which will continue to affect our ability to retain foster placements.

Based on the placements this current demographic of carers offers and the likelihood of retirement from the age of 65, a reduction of 48 foster care placements is estimated between 2022 and 2025 due to retirement alone. Therefore, the recruitment of 16 fostering placements alone will be required to meet the anticipated de-registrations each year.

- **Foster Care and Skills payment rates**

Initial comparative work indicates that Knowsley skills payment rates have fallen behind LCR neighbouring authorities. As a result of this it is recommended that a review of skills payments and foster care policies is undertaken to identify any areas for improvement. The timescales for this will be to come back with recommendations in time for the 23/24 financial year. As an interim arrangement it is recommended that all skills payments will be uplifted by 7.5% in line with other similar arrangement such as direct payments which reflect a real time up lift in the national minimum wage which increases to £10 from 1 April 2023.

- **Capital grant support for extensions to Foster Carers homes**

Consultation with Foster carers has indicated that some would be prepared to have additional children or sibling groups if they could extend their property. As part of the sufficiency and financial strategy a capital grant of £0.100m is being recommended to be set aside to accommodate this demand.

- **Meeting Needs**

Children Looked After are presenting with increasingly complex and challenging needs. There is a gap in the number of foster carers with higher levels of skills; there are currently two in-house carers receiving Level 4 skills payments, and another 46 have Level 3 skills payment. Whether it be internal fostering provision, or within the external fostering market, there needs to be a focus on both upskilling foster carers and recruiting new, skilled carers to support children more effectively within a family environment. As part of

this three-year strategy, it will be important to review the foster skills payment policy to ensure this is fit for purpose going forward and the skills payments paid are in line with neighbouring authorities to ensure we can retain and recruit new foster carers.

(2) Theme 2 – Market Management

Market Management – External Residential

- **Cost and availability of residential placements** – in the North West the culmination of trends over recent years creates a perfect storm for rising residential costs; increased demand and plateauing fostering use has led to a 21% increase in residential placements made by North West local authorities, alongside a 4% rise in average weekly cost of external placements in the last two-year period (Dec 2018 – Dec 2020). Due to the closure of internal residential homes, Knowsley's demand for external residential placements has increased over the last two years. There is a particular demand related to those children with complex mental health or emotional difficulties, along with challenging behaviours, who require a setting where there is an opportunity to receive individual care in a small provision.
- **Quality of provision** – Ofsted reports show that our own residential provision is at least 'good' in Knowsley. At the December 21, 80% of external placements used by Knowsley were rated 'good' or 'outstanding'. The other 20% were rated as "requires improvement".
- **Distance and availability in the local area** – increasing numbers of Children Looked After are being accommodated within Knowsley or neighbouring authorities. This is in part due to the work with the Liverpool City Region Children's Market Reform Programme, which has established a mini framework of local providers; with this as a specific aim. However, there remains a particular issue in the number of children accommodated more than 30 miles away. While this is often the result of Police or Court advice, it is also indicative of changes in the market, and the demand on external residential placements in the North West. The impact on children is considerable, as they are taken outside of their communities, schools and away from familiar settings. It can also affect the services that they are able to access locally, including mental health services through CAMHS, the local Youth Offending Service, or lower intervention services and interruptions in educational support.
- **Capacity of the Whole Life Commissioning Team** – the increasing demand on the commissioning function (including rising spend on commissioned placements) and market conditions has stretched resources away from strategic developments, and more towards day-to-day operational activity. However additional commissioning resource was provided in the form of two new commissioning officers for SEND as part of the 2020/21 budget setting process.

(3) Theme 3 – Residential Strategy

The in-house residential strategy has been impacted by two inadequate OFSTED judgements on two of the residential homes in the last two years. This has resulted in no children being placed in these homes since that time. Consequently, there has been an increase in demand for external residential places. An improvement plan and revised strategy for the homes is in progress and is currently being implemented. The key recommendations from this are as follows:

- To retain the three-bed residential home
- To retain the existing four bed residential unit and reduce the capacity down to a three-bed unit.
- Retain the edge of care service at its current location and undertake an evaluation of the service to determine whether there is further demand for the service and whether expansion to a larger property would be needed.

(4) Theme 4 – Permanence & Emotional Wellbeing **Emotional and Wellbeing Support for Children**

- **Children presenting with challenging or complex needs** – this includes Special Education Needs and Disabilities, mental and emotional health needs, and challenges that manifest in relation to child exploitation, in particular criminal exploitation. Much of this is related to children's experience of neglect in their earlier life, and the severity of needs is often in relation to abuse, emotional difficulties and mental ill health. There are also a number of children who have high needs through Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
- **Pressures and gaps in emotional health commissioned services** – there are significant pressures, and unmet needs, in respect of health commissioned services for Children Looked After with emotional and mental health needs. National pressures on CAMHS services are reflected in Knowsley, and while KMBC have invested in Tier 2 services to plug gaps (e.g. an enhanced emotional health & wellbeing service for CLA), there remain gaps around early prevention for more general emotional health and wellbeing for primary aged children and Tier 2 services in Knowsley (for example, Kooth is only available in Kirkby High Schools) as our other Tier 2 services are for children affected by domestic abuse, or suffering bereavement or loss. With children in residential placed outside of the Liverpool City Region there can be additional difficulties in getting timely access to support services also. Temporary funding of £0.110m is requested for a further twelve months to ensure sufficient support in this area.
- **Impact of the gaps in services** - More complex needs often create pressure on carers and placements, resulting in placement breakdown and multiple moves. In comparison to those with multiple placement moves, children in long-term stable placements have much fewer missing from care episodes, school changes and long-term absence from school.

(5) Theme 5 – Demand Management – Children Looked After & Edge of Care

New demands on Children Looked After (CLA)

The Children's Social Work Act 2017 increased the upper age limit whereby Local Authorities are required to support care leavers from the age of 21 years to 25 years. The Government did not provide any funding for this new burden. In 2020, it was anticipated that the Council would need to support an additional 23 young people in each of the next two years. The number of care leavers requiring support is still anticipated to plateau in 2022. At this time, we have 7 full and 2 part time Personal Advisors successfully recruited to post. There are currently 60 young people over 21 years and 86 between 18 and 21 years open to the team. Additionally, due to the additional capacity that is now in place, there are 30 young people aged 17 years of age open to the Personal Advisors which will assist their transition from children looked after to becoming care leavers. The average case load is 19.5 which is in line with the National Care Leavers Benchmarking Forum report that caseloads nationally should preferably be at 20 per Personal Advisor. Any new care leavers who return for additional support will be manageable with this current structure, so no additional support or resource is required at this time.

Managing Demand

Edge of Care services will work to support families to avoid children becoming looked after and therefore reduce the demand on the costs to the Local Authority in relation to placements/demand on foster carers.

There are a range of services that provide this vital support within the Local Authority.

MST-CAN

The primary focus of MST-CAN is to prevent children aged 6-17 (5 if already in school) entering care due to parental/caregiver physical abuse and/or neglect. The intervention focuses on keeping the children safely at home whilst working with caregivers, family, and other professionals to target the main causes of the abuse and neglect. MST-CAN is an evidence-based, behavioural intervention based on the MST analytical process and theoretical underpinnings. It incorporates a number of Principles as well as a 24/7/365 on-call system and stringent clinical quality assurance processes.

The team are additionally trained in a range of evidence-based interventions for serious mental health issues to be used as required such as: Reinforcement Based Treatment (RBT) for adult substance abuse, Prolonged Exposure (PE) treatment for adults experiencing PTSD, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) for children who have experienced trauma and CBT for challenges with anger management.

Oasis

Oasis is a Short Breaks Edge of Care Service that aims to minimise the risk of young people coming into care. The primary aims are to provide a service to young people:

- Aged 11–18 years old (either gender) who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Who are at risk of family/carer/placement breakdown?
- Who are at risk of coming into care?
- Who require emergency accommodation?
- Require additional support and or short break/respite care to assist in rehabilitation back home.
- Who require stability and support to safeguard themselves and live healthy lifestyles?
- Require one-to-one support to progress personal goals/aspirations.
- Require interventions to assist families in coping with difficult behaviour.

A key priority is for young people to remain at home or in a suitable living arrangement as long as possible and to promote their health, safety and welfare in a manner that avoids the need for institutional care. Our aim will be to keep families together by providing individual programmes of support and ensuring solution - focused strategies are put in place to retain their independence. Parents will retain parental responsibility throughout our involvement, and we will seek to strengthen their role by assisting them to build the skills necessary to cope independently with any future challenges.

- **Family group conferences -**

In 2020 Knowsley was successful in gaining Government funding to pilot Family Group Conference services. Family Group Conference model is internationally recognised supporting children and families. It is originated in New Zealand and is now widely operated in the United Kingdom. The use of Family Group Conferences is shown to support families and improve the quality of services, when implemented at an early point it is shown to reduce demand, particularly avoiding children entering the care system.

The current Department of Education pilot is funded for 18 months, and funding is due to end in April 22. The pilot will be subject to national evaluation to demonstrate the impact on improving outcomes for children and the reduction in numbers of children becoming looked after. It is recommended that two Family Group Conference posts are extended for a further twelve months whilst this evaluation work is undertaken.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the preventative services will be undertaken during year one of the strategy to substantiate the need for further investment in these services.

7. Further Demands and Pressures

Mother and Baby Unit placements

Over the past eighteen months there has been significant demand for Mother and Baby units with demand not seen at this level under the term of the previous strategy. Some of

this relates to Covid so it will be important to keep this under review. The financial strategy has built in six placements a year going forward.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children

The National Transfer scheme is now mandatory and at the current time it is known that the North West region is projected to be allocated 44 directed transfers under the scheme. Knowsley is projected to be allocated a total of 2 transfers from the next 652 referrals. This works out as a proportion of 0.31% of placements nationally. The decision is temporary and in response to the critical situation in the South East. Knowsley have received 4 USAC children since July – November 2021 under the voluntary scheme. Knowsley have an indicative mandatory allocation of 2 children. The allocation for Knowsley seems reasonable and proportionate although there is no indication over what period these 2 children will arrive but is expected quickly in the new year. If this figure is correct and the recruitment of 2 social workers is successful for the Young Persons team, then this is not an area of concern or risk going forward as there will be capacity within the service to accommodate this mandate.

8. Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

Together these critical issues (the cost of the external market, the suitability of the internal residential placements, the challenges relating to foster carers and the wellbeing of vulnerable children) point to the need to increase local sufficiency of placements, to ensure the capability of each placement to meet the needs of children, however complex their needs, and ensure that there is sufficient skilled support available for children.

Improving placements and placement stability should underpin improved outcomes for children – reducing the threat of exploitation and provide the foundation for an improved and stable relationship with education.

Good performance management of the sufficiency action plan is critical to ensure that both the sufficiency strategy and supporting financial strategy can be delivered. The sufficiency working group will meet monthly to ensure the plan stays on track.

Evaluation of the preventative initiatives

Evaluation of the various preventative services has now commenced. The evaluations will be presented to the sufficiency working group and will be reported back to the Children's Finance and Performance group as and when they are completed in 2022.

Sufficiency: Evidence Base

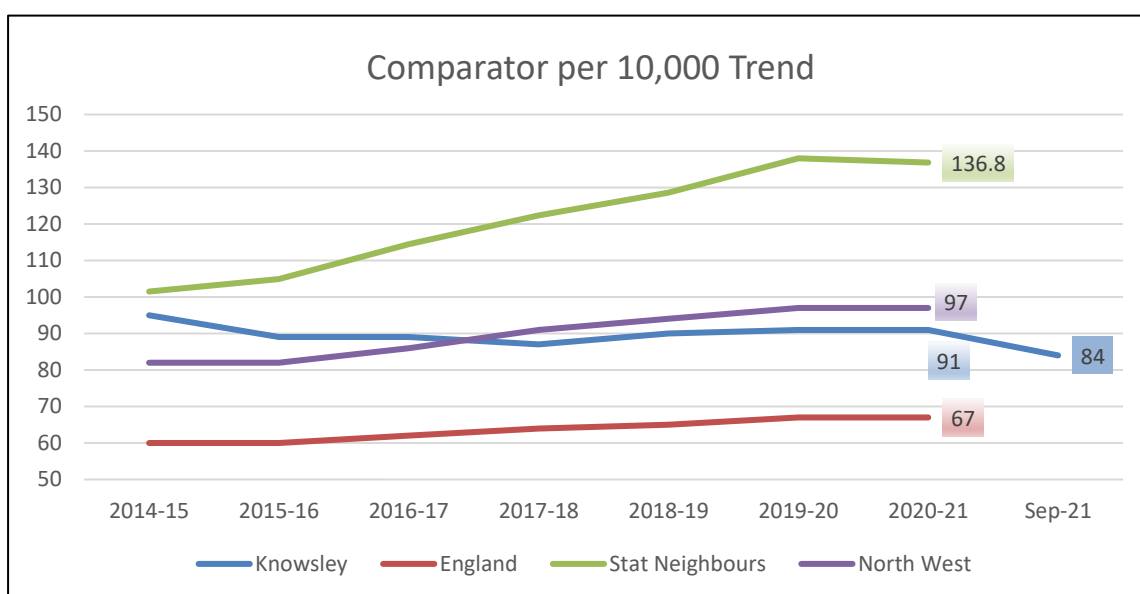
1.0 National demographics of children looked after show that:

- 1.1 **Population** - The number of looked after children continue to increase; it has increased steadily over the last nine years. From 2017-18 data, there has been an 11% increase, bringing the total population of Children Looked After to 80,850. This equates to a rate of 67 children per 10,000 as of 31 March 2021.
- 1.2 **Changes to population** - For the last two years, the changes seen in the characteristics of looked after children, those who become looked after and care leavers, are influenced by the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children cohort who tend to be non-white British, older children, with a main category of need of absent parenting.
- 1.3 **Gender** - There are slightly more males than females looked after – at 31 March 2021, 56% of looked after children were male and 44% were female. This is unchanged from previous years and remains stable.
- 1.4 **Ethnicity** - Looked after children are predominantly white. 75% of looked after children at 31 March 2021 were white, 10% were of mixed ethnicity, 7% were black or black British, 4% were Asian or Asian British and 1% were other ethnic groups.
- 1.5 **Ages** – Age ranges of children looked after nationally since 2016-17 remains unchanged, with the majority of CLA children in the 10-15 years old range (39%). 23% of children at March 2021 were 16 and over, 19% between 5 and 9, 14% between 1 and 4 and as seen historically the smallest age range of CLA children is those under 1 years of age, just 5% of the national cohort.
- 1.6 **Legal Status** - 59% (47,460 children) were looked after as of March 2021 under a full care order, unchanged from previous 3 years. 20% (15,860 children) were looked after under an interim care order and 15% (4,660 children) were accommodated under a Section 20 agreement, a slight reduction on the previous year (17%) and a more substantial reduction from 2016-17 which was 23% of children accommodated under a S20.
- 1.7 **Number of placements** – 9% of children looked after had 3 or more placements within the year in 2020-21, an improvement from previous year's short-term stability (11%).
- 1.8 **Placements** – 57,330 children were in foster placements, unchanged from 2019-20 however an increase of just over 7% from 2016-17 (53,420 children in foster care).
- 1.8 **Reason for being looked after** - When a child is assessed by children's social care their primary need is recorded. For children who are looked after at 31 March 2021, the proportions of children with each recorded category of need is very similar to previous years. 62% of children were looked after due to an initial need of abuse or neglect, 13% due to family dysfunction, 10% due to absent parenting and 8% due to family being in acute stress.

2.0 Demographics of Children Looked After in Knowsley

2.1 Knowsley's population of Children Looked After has remained stable over the previous 3 years, consistently above England rates and below Stat Neighbours and North-West averages. At March 2021, the per 10,000 figure for CLA was 90 per 10,000, however recently overall CLA figures have been falling with more exits than entrants into the system.

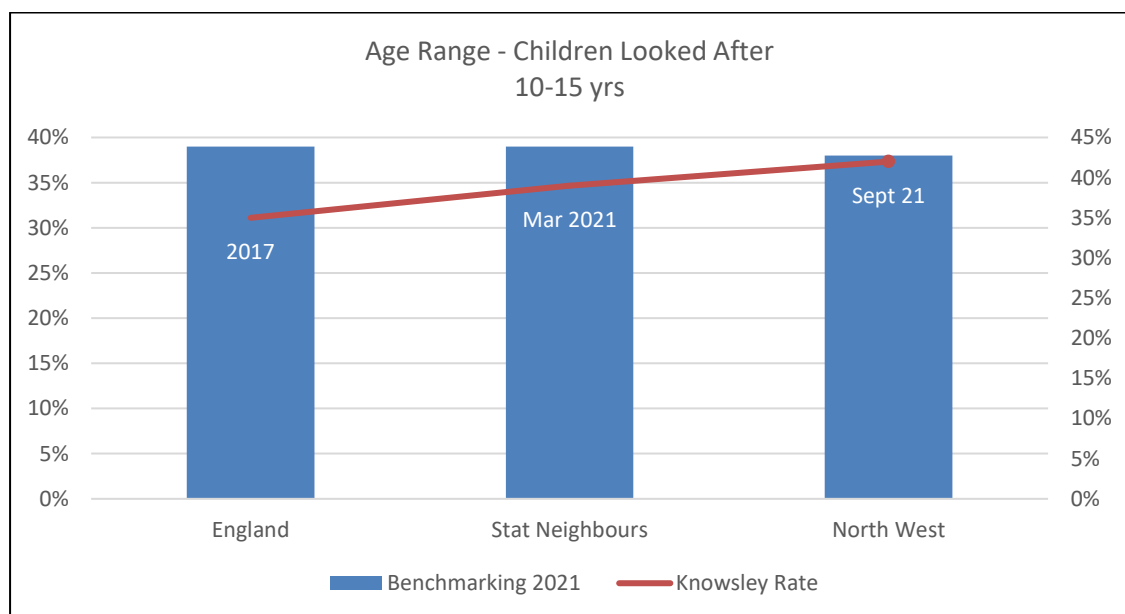
As of September 2021, the rate of CLA stood at 84 per 10,000, although this is still in keeping with most current benchmarking it is notably lower than previous seen in Knowsley for the past 7 years. Currently Knowsley have 289 children looked after. This is the lowest rate of CLA in the borough since January 2019. 75% of the current cohort have previously been subject to a Child Protection Plan, increasing the need for scrutiny around the current record high CP numbers evolving into looked after numbers.



2.2 Gender – Historically within Knowsley, gender has been evenly split, with slightly more males than females becoming looked after, this is in keeping with all comparators. At March 2021, the CLA cohort was split 55% male and 45% female, the most recent figures (Sept 21) show the same split within a slightly reduced cohort. A small number of children in the looked after cohort currently identify as transgender however due to the small numbers within the borough the data is compressed to maintain confidentiality.

2.3 Ethnicity – Knowsley's Children Looked After population is less ethnic diversity than the national demographic and this has been shown historically. As of September 2021, 95% of Children Looked After are White (White British and White Any other background) accounting for 274 children. 3% are from Mixed backgrounds, 1% were Black British and 1% were Asian. This is in keeping with previous years outturns and is to be expected however, it is important to be aware of the diversity of Children Looked After when recruiting foster carers.

- 2.4 Age** – Majority of current CLA within Knowsley as fall within the age range of 10-15 years old, this is a shift from the previous 3 years which saw most children looked after in the younger cohort of 5-9 years old. At year-end trend March 2020-21, Knowsley's were on trend with all comparators however in September 2021, 42% are between 10 years and 15 years of age, slightly higher than England (39%) and North-West and Stat Neighbour averages (39% and 38% respectively). The increase within this age cohort shows that more adequate planning is needed for this age range in terms of possible higher cost provisions moving forward. This is also reflected in the increase of 16+ figures (22% CLA are currently 16 or over, an increase from 20% in March and from 15% in 2017).



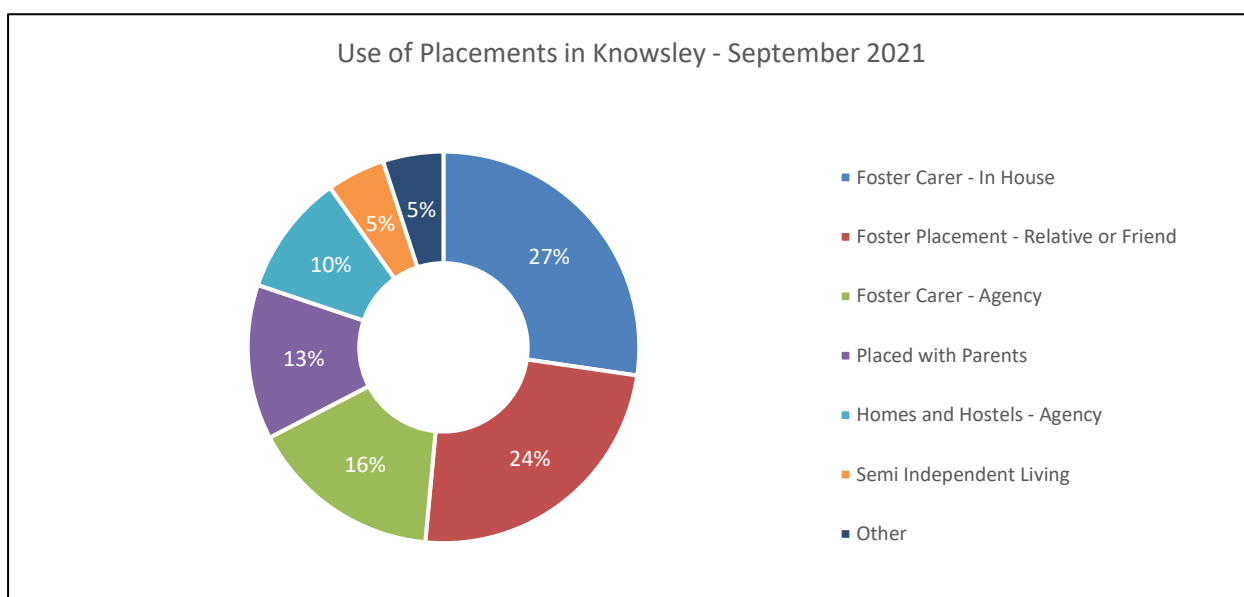
- 2.5 Legal Status** - 73% of CLA children are currently on a Full Care Order. 21% on an interim Care Order, 4.5% are subject to a S20 and 1.5% of children are under a different legal status (Including on Remand/Trial/Placement Orders). These current figures are in keeping with previous years, showing a slight decrease in S20 (4.5% in September compared to 7% in 2017). There has been a small increase in children on remand seen in 2020-21 (4 children in the year) from 0 in 2017, showing that the trend may continue to increase.
- 2.6 Sibling Groups** – one of the ongoing challenges for sufficiency in Knowsley has been accommodating large sibling groups together. Of those children becoming looked after in 2020-21, 54 separate sibling groups were identified, 2 of which had 3 or more children in the group (1 family with 7 siblings). Of the children becoming looked after between April 2021 and September 2021, there have already been 24 separate sibling groups identified, of these 4 families have more than 3 siblings (1 family with 6 siblings requiring placing).
- 2.7 Locations of highest need in the Borough** – Northwood in Kirkby and Stockbridge Village have the highest rate of Children Looked After, with Prescott South and Page Moss also having had high rates of children becoming looked after.

3.0 Current use of placements – September 2021

Most children are currently accommodated in Foster Care placements, as has been historically seen in Knowsley. 27% are placed with in-house foster carers, 24% are placed with Friends and Family carers and 16% are placed with agency foster carers. This equates to 67% of all CLA in a Foster Care setting. This is a slight increase from the previous year (65%). There has also been an increase in children placed in Parent and Child units (currently 4 children compared with 2 in the previous year) and a 300% increase in children placed in secure settings (from 0 in 2020 to 3 in September 2021).

There has been a net decrease of 35% between 2020 and 2021 in the number of children placed with parents, currently 37 children are in placed with parents' placements (13%). Decreases have also been seen in Homes and Hostel placements (currently only 1 child in a residential home, 1% of the CLA population) and a decrease of 67% in YOI/Prison placements (currently 1 child).

Knowsley differs from national placement trends in the higher proportion of children who are placed with parents; 13% of Knowsley CLA were placed with parents compared to a national figure of 7%. However, Knowsley's use of Foster Placements is in keeping with comparators.



3.1 Fostering – Use of placements

The use of foster care has changed slightly over the previous 3 years. In-house fostering placements have reduced. Of the total CLA cohort; in 2019 - 49%, 2020 - 44% and 2021 - 41%. Family and Friends fostering placements have increased over the past 3 years, as of September 2021, 36% were in this category of placement, up 6% from 2020 and 28% from 2019. Average time in In-house or Family and Friends foster placements stand at 1092 days.

For children looked after by KMBC mainstream and Family and Friends fostering.

- 94% placed within 20 miles of home
- 90% are aged under 16
- 50% have been in their current placement for 2.5 years and over
- Equal split 50/50 male and female
- 10% have a disability

Agency fostering has also increased slightly over the previous 3 years, 24% are in an agency foster placement as of September 2021 from 22% in September 2019. Average days in an agency placement is 1367.

For children placed in agency foster care;

- 96% placed within 20 miles of home
- 87% are aged under 16
- 65% have been in their current placement for 2.5 years and over
- Equal split 50/50 between male and female
- 13% have a disability

The difference in the long-term stability of these placements is significant – in-house placements are less stable than independent foster care placements for children under 16. This is connected to how well children are initially matched to a foster carer, and how well their needs are met.

Foster Carers Recruitment and De-Registrations:

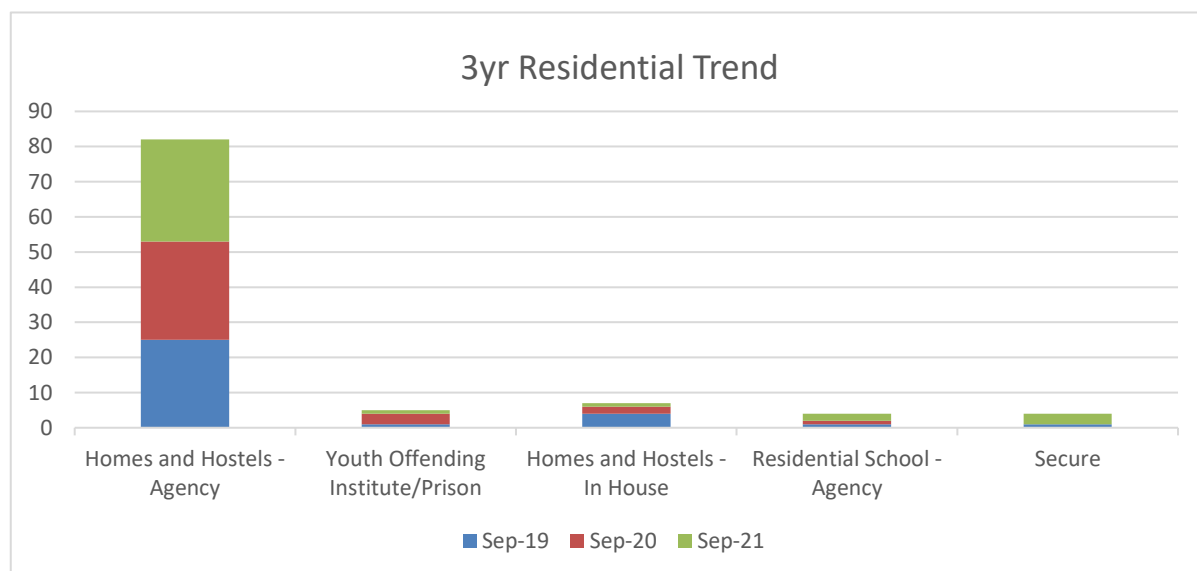
- In 2020/21, there were 90 enquiries to become a foster carer with Knowsley MBC, resulting in the approval of 6 mainstream foster carers, and 28 Family & Friend foster carers.
- The percentage of enquiries resulting in an approval declined from 10% in 2019/20 to 7% in 2020/21, with 37% of enquiries resulting in an Initial Home Visit and 18% of Initial Home Visits progressing to approval.
- In 2020/21, there were 27 de-registrations of in-house foster carers; 19 of these were Friend and Family foster carers and 8 were mainstream foster carers. 6 of those de-registering did so under Special Guardianship Orders.

Projections for fostering:

The numbers of younger children looked after means that there will be long-term demand for placements to be met through foster care. In addition to gaps in relation to accommodating older children with behavioural challenges, disabled children and large sibling groups, the foster care market also struggles to provide sufficient placements for all children aged 12 and older, which needs to be addressed through diversifying the in-house foster carer cohort. As there has been a national reduction in the numbers of people applying to become foster carers for both local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies, this will mean that Knowsley will have to buck the national trends and be in a position to recruit more foster carers over the coming years, as well as upskilling existing carers to meet emerging, more challenging needs.

3.2 Children in Residential Care

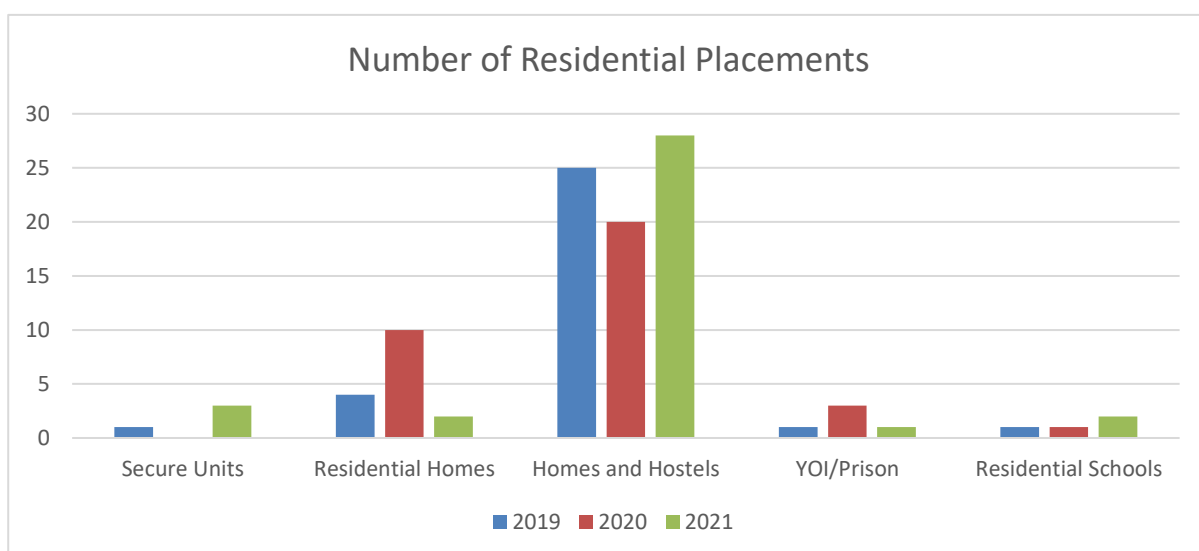
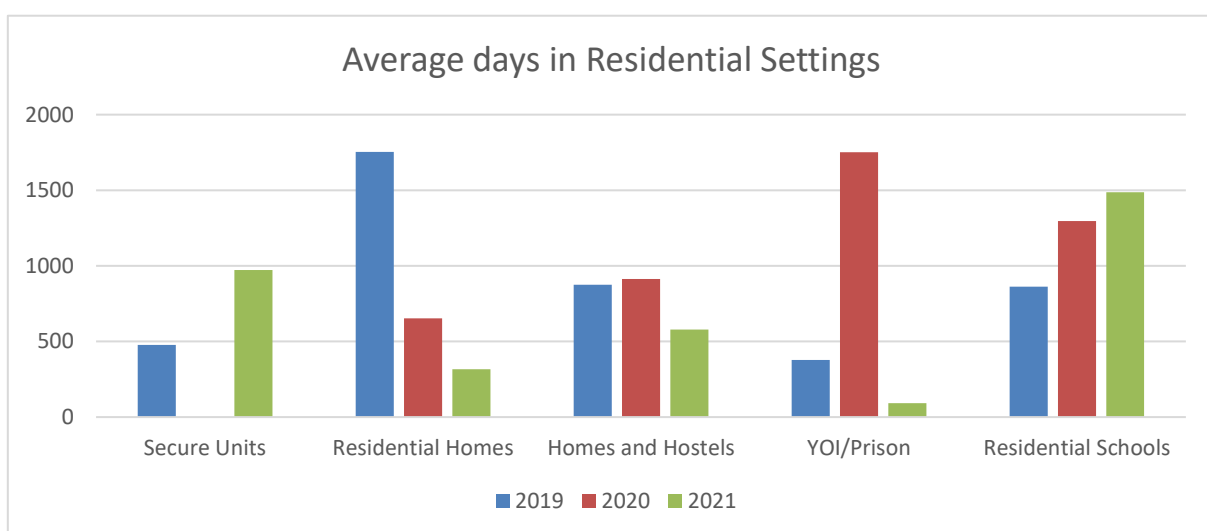
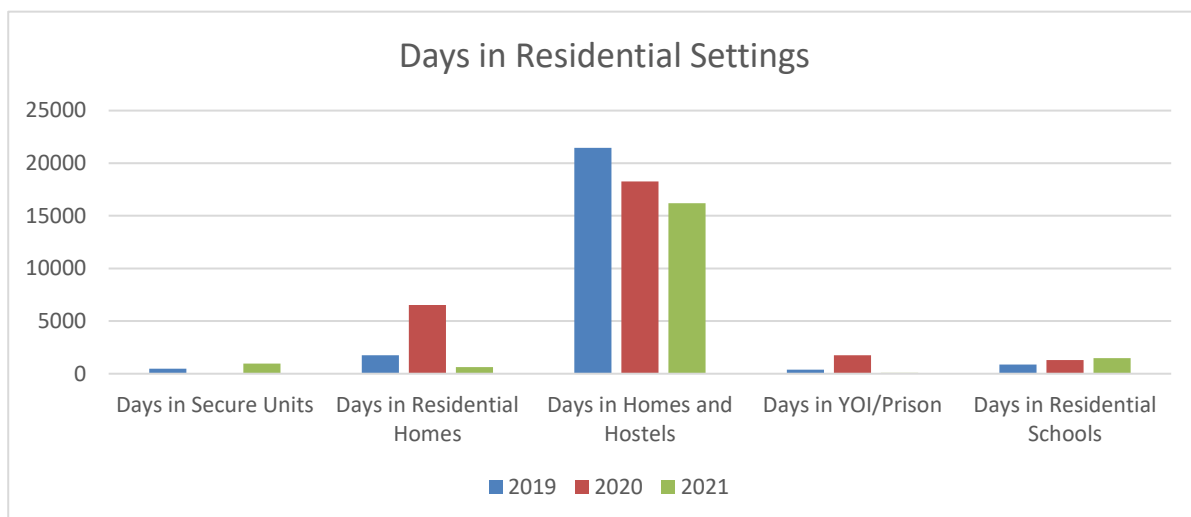
As of September 2021, there were 36 children in a form of residential care. The demand for residential care has increased 2% year on year since September 2019 and most of the demand is still met through external agencies.



The demographics of children in residential care has changed over the last three years:

- There are slightly more children overall;
- Males are still the predominant gender within residential settings however as of September 2021, 14% increase in females from the previous 2 years;
- Fewer children subject to Section 20 orders in residential, between 8-10% over the previous 3 years however there has also been a gradual year on year reduction in children under a Full Care Order and a slight increase in those in Remand (as of September 2021, 3% of children in Remand compared with 0% in September 2019);
- The largest change in the cohort is the increase in children within the 10-15 years of age band, which has been increasing year on year and as of September 2021 is higher than any year previous (September 2021 – 75% within this age band compared with 62% in 2020 and 53% in September 2019).
- Less children are placed within Knowsley however more children are placed less than 20 miles from their home address – 53% placed less than 20 miles from home in September 2021 compared with 38% in 2019.

The below charts show how residential placements have been used in the last three years. The charts show the total number of placements used, total number of days spent in placements and average days in placements:



Projections for residential:

Demand for residential placements has reduced slightly over the three-year period, but current and future demand will be focused on complexity and supporting young people who have behavioural challenges. With the age group 10-15 years old being the largest proportion of Children Looked After, over the next five years, there is potential for increased demand on residential placements as these young people (majority of whom are on full care orders) may require residential accommodation. It will be increasingly important to understand the profile of children requiring residential services, to identify triggers earlier.

3.3 Supported and Independent Living (SAIL)

As of September 2021, there were 16 young people in independent/semi-independent living, this has increased 1% from the previous year however young people in these placements has remained stable since 2018-19, between 4-6% of the overall CLA cohort. Information about children in supported and independent living placements shows that: 69% of those in placements are male, which is historically the case. 13 of these semi-independent/independent placements were out of borough with only 3 in Knowsley. 9 of the placements were determined as a young person's permanent placement.

Projections for SAIL:

There are 75 Children Looked After aged 14 to 16 years old, 0 of whom are in semi-independent placements, a welcomed improvement from previous 2016-17 report which saw 3 children in the age range in semi-independent placements. The current cohort of children who are in semi-independent placements are children who have had multiple placements often in residential homes. There are currently 21 children aged 14-16 years old that are in residential placements, some of whom are accommodated under Section 20, and have had multiple placements. Based on current figures, the numbers of children requiring semi-independent placements is not expected to exceed the current rates. With the amount of movement seen in these placements, it will be the quality of independent placements that requires consideration.

3.4 Secure and Youth Offending Institute Placements

As of September 2021, there had been a 300% increase from the previous year of children in Secure Units, this accounted for 3 children in 2 different secure placements. Over a three-year period, there has been a total of 9 secure placements used, totaling 1,066 days in this period. While this is a small cohort of children, and slight fluctuations can make a significant difference to the figures, the main difference is that the average days spent in secure have gotten marginally longer – from 123 in 2016/17 to 267 in 2021/22.

Nationally, the availability rate of secure children's homes has fallen, while the occupancy rate has remained stable, and there has been an overall increase in the proportion of children accommodated for longer.

3.5 Projections for Knowsley CLA Population

Factors which are likely to influence the Children Looked After population within a local authority are:

- Change in size of child population;
- Change in demographics;
- Economic climate (both in terms of pressure on families and impact on public services);
- The number of children subject to child protection plans;
- The number of children and young people seeking asylum;
- Local or national research or reviews related to childcare services;
- The Council's involvement in the Signs of Safety as a practice framework.

In the last five years, the numbers of Children Looked After have been within 230 and 315 children at any one time. In the next three years, it is anticipated that this will be a narrower range – between 270 children and 310 children. In the current cohort of Children Looked After, there is a greater proportion of children in the age range of 10-15 years of age. In addition, the improvement of the early help offer in Knowsley could support fewer children requiring care in the longer-term.

3.6 Strengths & Challenges

Knowsley's Children Looked After population has been stable over the past three years. The fluctuations and the churn of children becoming looked after has reduced, while the overall rate of children looked after remains well above national levels. This stability within the numbers of Children Looked After should allow for improved planning in relation to placements, and how well the needs of children are met.

In addition to the stability in demand, there are fewer older children coming into care on Section 20 orders. Part of the Edge of Care strategy was designed to specifically target this group of children who had driven demand for residential placements, and therefore the strategy has proven to have had a positive impact over the period.

However, despite this greater stability and overall reduced use of external placements, there are increasing financial and sufficiency challenges locally (reflecting the national picture) which – alongside the projections for Knowsley's CLA population and complexity - need to be addressed over the coming years.

4. Market Developments in Knowsley

One of Knowsley's commissioning priorities is to ensure that the Borough has sufficient placements available locally to meet the needs of our children and young people. It is often in the best interests of a child to reside inside the Knowsley borough as this will help to ensure stability with education and ability to maintain close links with family and friends. Where Knowsley's in-house provision (residential children's home or foster carer) cannot meet need, our aim is to work closely with external Providers to ensure that sufficiency is met.

There may be occasion where some Knowsley children may not be able to be placed locally due to risk, and where this occurs an appropriate out of borough placement will be sourced to meet specific need.

4.0 Residential Children's Homes

Including KMBC, there are 9 providers of residential children's home within the Knowsley borough. In total there are 19 children's home accounting for 62 beds overall. 13 beds belong to KMBC, and 49 beds belong to private providers. In terms of geographical spread across the Borough, they are located as follows:

- 1 x Cronton,
- 6 x Kirkby,
- 5 x Huyton,
- 7 x Whiston/Prescot.

Supply has increased slightly over the past three years, with the opening of new provision from new providers (Attivo Care Ltd. and Omega Care Group). However, despite this apparent increase in sufficiency, Knowsley has just one placement (as of November 2020) with a private provider within the borough. Although, there are six placements within the Liverpool City region.

Home	Provider	Classification	Beds	Postcode
Mals House	Attivo Care Ltd	EBD	3	L36
Farnworth House	Continuum	EBD, MH	2	WA8
Logwood	IDEM	LD, PD	3	L35
The Holt	KMBC	EBD	4	L32
Fullerton Grove (Short Breaks)	KMBC	LD, PD	4	L36
Bedford Close	KMBC	EBD	3	L36
Oasis (Edge of Care)	KMBC	EBD	2	L32
Rose House	Lytham Care	EBD, LD	2	L32
Lytham House	Lytham Care	EBD, LD	5	L32
Westfield	Lytham Care	EBD, LD	1	L32
Lily House	Lytham Care	EBD, LD	2	L32
Brook Cottage	New Start	EBD, LD	4	L34
Spencer House	New Start	EBD, MH, LD	4	L35
Fieldview	Progressive Futures	EBD	3	L34
Mercury House	Omega Care Group Ltd.	EBD, MD	3	L34

Wayside	QPC	LD	5	L36
Bluebell Cottage	QPC	EBD, LD	4	L35
Derby Cottage	QPC	EBD	3	L34
Lawrence House	QPC	EBD	5	L36
19 Homes	9 Providers		62	

Knowsley is part of the collective North West approach to commissioning residential placements via the regional Flexible Purchasing System (led by Placements North West), which came into place in April 2018 (replacing previous iterations of the regional framework arrangements). This is Knowsley's primary route-to-market for sourcing external residential placements, with increasing numbers of placements being made via this route (i.e., 'on framework') than previously.

Liverpool City Region Children's Market Reform Programme

Partner Provider Agreement (LCR PPA)

The Knowsley Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2023 approved by Cabinet in February 2020, included a priority around developing the market through effective engagement, market shaping and collective commissioning. This included improved collaboration and robust approaches at the local and sub-regional level, to secure quality placements and outcomes for Knowsley children, and to prevent unnecessary placement breakdown.

This localised arrangement became the LCR Partner Provider Arrangement (LCR PPA) as part of the wider LCR Children's Market Reform Programme; and went live December 2020 for an initial five- year period.

Following the conclusion of Round 2 for applications on the LCR PPA framework in May 2021, an additional 2 residential providers were successful, taking the total number of providers on the Framework to 24 – 12 residential (approx. 44 homes) and 12 independent fostering agencies.

Residential Alternatives

In addition to the LCR PPA, the LCR Market Reform Programme's plan is to increase the percentage use of the 'not for profit' market / voluntary and Social Enterprise sector, whilst developing In-house provision.

Following an internal review of Knowsley's in-house residential provision that concluded in February 2021, it was recommended that there continues to be an in-house offer. Development of this offer is well underway and is being coordinated by the Knowsley Residential Services Advisory & Operational Board, looking at opportunities to increase capacity within the existing provision.

As part of the LCR Children's Market Reform Programme, Knowsley and Local Authority partners are working in collaboration with Capacity Lab to develop a network of 10 staff owned Social Enterprise Residential Children's Homes. The first

home is called Juno, which will be based in the Wirral and is anticipated to be fully operational in 2022.

4.1 Supported and Independent Living (SAIL)

The provision of SAIL accommodation for 16/17 years old Children Looked After is not a regulated sector (unlike children's homes, which must be registered with Ofsted). This means it can be difficult to fully track and profile the provision within any Local Authority area, including Knowsley. Moreover, there are three strands to this market:

- 1) Group living units (e.g., multi-occupancy house, with support staff on-site)
- 2) Accommodation with floating support (e.g., a 2-bed house with support staff)
- 3) Floating support only (e.g., staff supporting a young person in their own property)

However, there is a North West framework of providers who have met minimum standards, and the ones with 'group living' accommodation in Knowsley are listed below:

Type	Provider	Area	Postcode
Group Living	After Care: The Next Step	Huyton	L36
Group Living	Continuum Support	Prescot	L35
Group Living	Revolve Therapy	Huyton	L36

For SAIL placements, Knowsley's primary route-to-market is via the regional 'Dynamic Purchasing System', which came into place in 2014. The existing framework has 63 providers, with 20 operating in the Liverpool City Region area alone; given the low demand for such placements (see 3.5 above), there therefore appears sufficient provision locally, and regionally. However, irrespective of quantity, Knowsley – as part of a Liverpool City Region approach – are working to put into place clear expectations (i.e., LCR Quality Standards) for local providers to work towards and are keen to shape this alongside local providers. Knowsley aim to ensure that local providers can deliver a high-quality offer and good standard of property for our young people in areas that will meet their need.

Knowsley Council also has in place a formal agreement with Livv Housing Group to allow 16/17-year-old Children Looked After, who are tenancy-ready, to access 1-bedroom flats (with KMBC acting as the guarantor and licensee, until the young person turns 18 and can inherit the tenancy), with floating support commissioned separately. This is a model that was being rolled out across Liverpool City Region with other Registered Social Landlords, as it had been acknowledged as good practice and facilitating flexibility for care leavers to move across local boundaries whilst remaining close to local links (college, family, etc.). However, progress had been impacted by COVID and will be resumed immediately.

4.2 Fostering

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) provide a valuable resource for local authorities in sourcing foster placements both locally and further afield – particularly when in-house foster provision has been exhausted. The number of IFA carer households within Knowsley has increased slightly in the last year, which mirrors the regional picture of the market – for instance, the estimated number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) households across the North West has risen 4% over the last two years (2030 households in 2020, up from 1961 in 2018).

IFA Households in Knowsley <i>(Source: Placements North West census data 2018-2020)</i>			
Organisation	2018	2019	2020
Alpha Plus	2	2	2
Barnados	6	4	5
By the Bridge	3	5	5
Care Today/Parallel Parents	3		
Compass			1
FCA	4		
Five Rivers		4	
Foster Careline	2	4	5
Fostering Care Associates		3	5
Fostering Limited	4		
Fostering Matters	2		4
Fostering People	4	3	
Fostering Solutions	7	10	10
Lorimer			2
NFA	7	5	5
Orange Grove	1	2	1
Parallel Parents		2	2
SWISS	1	1	1
TACT	1		1
Three Circles	1		
Together Trust	1		1
UK Fostering		1	1
Grand Total	49	46	51

Similarly, within Liverpool City Region (LCR), the number of IFA households is estimated to have risen by 10% over the same two-year period (459 households in 2020, up from 417 in 2018). However, despite this increase, we are continuing to see a rise in demand regionally for foster care placements, which is exceeding capacity and impacting on the ability of IFAs to take new placements. In the LCR region for 2020, all Local Authorities were recording as significantly making more placements above their local IFA placement capacity with only Knowsley indicating that 4% of IFA households within the borough were estimated to be without a placement. This is suggestive that despite the growing IFA households locally, there continues to be insufficient capacity to meet increasing demand. As a snapshot of local IFA usage, in November 2020,

Knowsley had placements with 8 (of the 51) in-borough IFA households.

A knock-on effect of this saturated fostering market is that children who would normally be placed in a fostering placement are having to be found alternative placements, mostly in the residential sector (and so increasing demand in this sector). This indicates that supply is not keeping up with demand, and there is a clear need - both locally and regionally - for more foster carers, particularly with specialist skills in working with more challenging behaviour, primary-school age up to adolescents, and having the capacity to take sibling groups.

5.0 Leaving Care and Care Leavers

5.1 Leaving Care and Care Leavers

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday. Care leavers will often be living independently at age 18, whereas national data shows that 50% of all 22-year-olds remain living in their family home. Those leaving care may struggle to cope with the transition to adulthood and may experience social exclusion, unemployment, early pregnancy, health problems, end up in custody or homeless.

There are no official statistics on some aspects of care leavers' lives, such as whether they have timely access to health services, whether they feel they left care at the right time, or the extent to which they have poor social outcomes such as unemployment, homelessness, mental illness, or criminal activity.

5.2 National data on Leaving Care

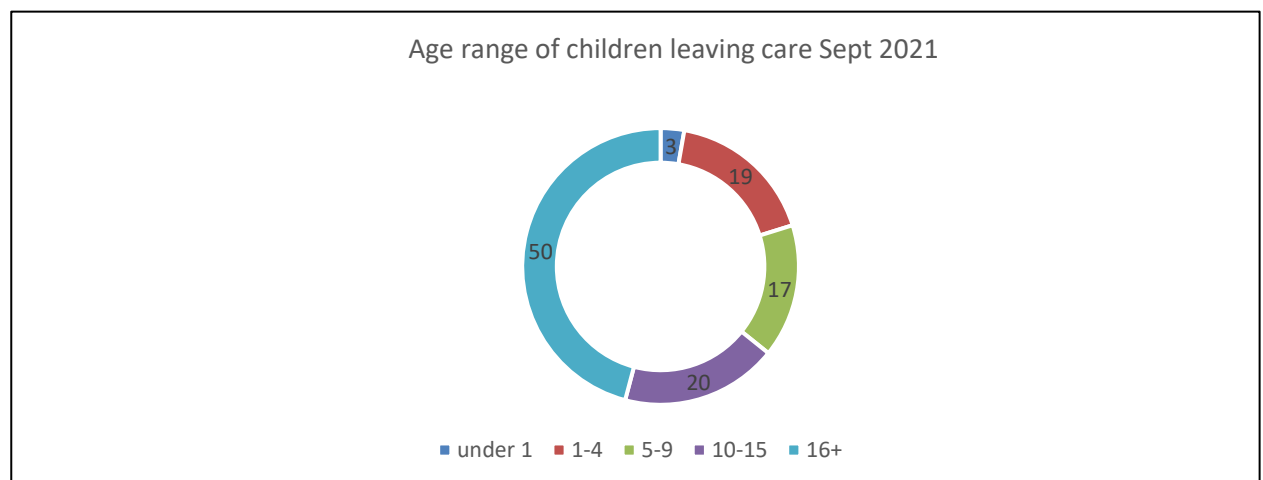
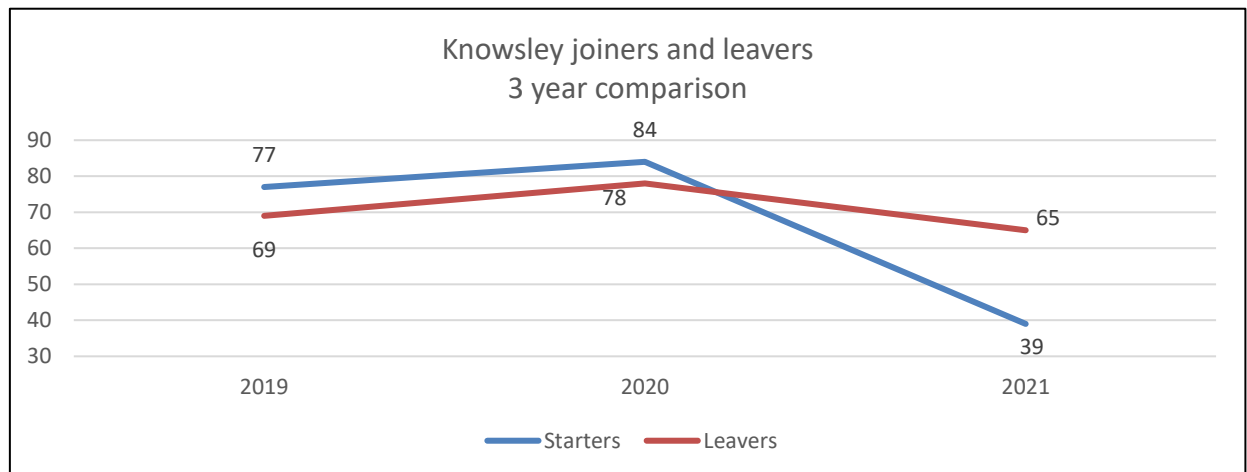
The number of Children Looked After who ceased to be looked after decreased in 2020-21 to 28,010. This is a decrease of 5% on the previous year and has been falling steadily over the past 6 years. It is a decrease of just over 10% from figures seen in 2016-17 (31,250 children).

39% of those children leaving care left on their 18th birthday, an increase on previous years although the overall number of care leavers has fallen. The next largest age group of those leaving care is those aged 1-4, in keeping with previous years national outturns (5,980 children, 21% of cohort). This is still 2nd largest group; however, it has decreased from previous year.

Adoption as a reason for children leaving care has decreased in 2020-21 to 10% from 12% in the previous year (from 3450 children adopted to 2870). 13,350 children remained looked after until their 18th Birthday, 81% of children leaving care.

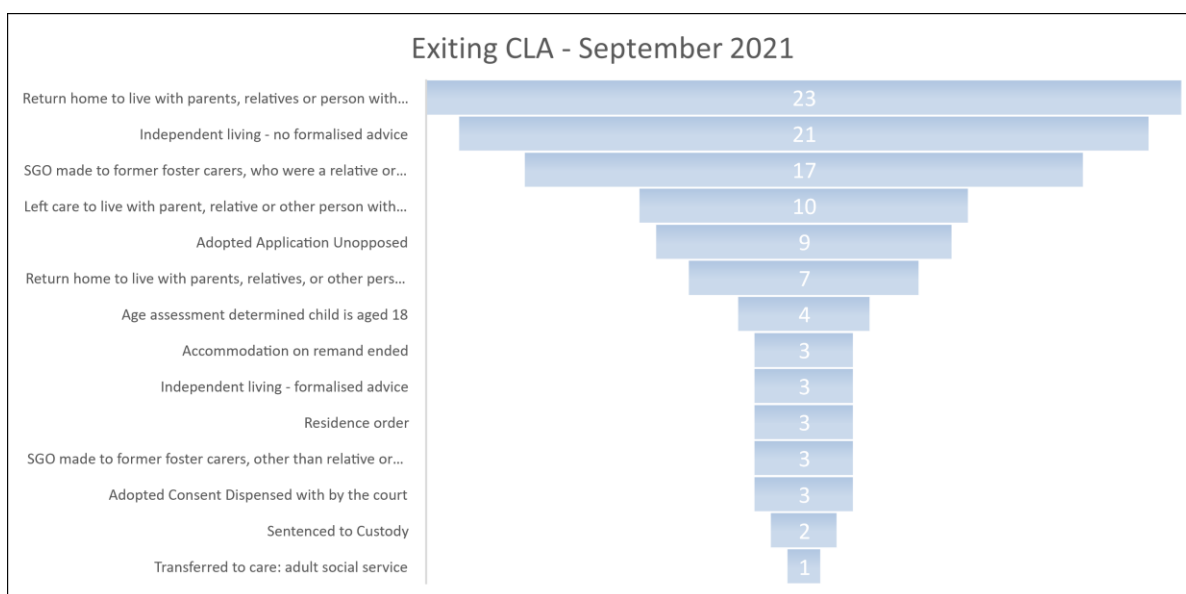
5.3 Leaving Care in Knowsley

Over the last three-year period, the rate of children exiting care has increased over the overall entry numbers into care, with the greater stability in the cohort showing a reduced number leaving care. In 2020-21, there has been a noticeable reduction in the numbers of children leaving care after a brief period (0 to 3 months), with more children leaving care after years rather than months. This can be affected by factors such as fewer children being adopted, and fewer children looked after under Section 20 orders.

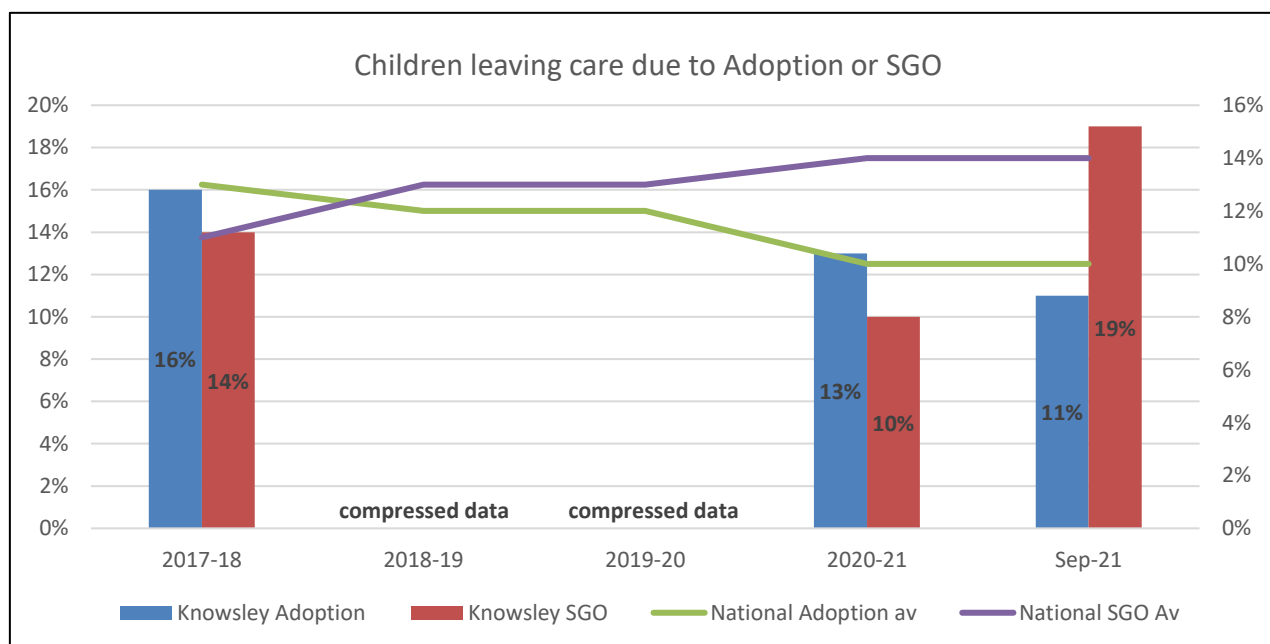


Leavers by length of time in Care	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
0-3 months	9	6	6
4-6 months	14	13	12
7-12 months	14	6	19
1-2 years	11	15	17
2-3 years	10	12	16
3 yrs+	27	26	39
TOTAL	85	78	109

5.4 Exit from Care



In the last three years, 30% of children left care to return to their parents or relatives; 19.7% left care under a Special Guardianship Order and a further 12.7% of children were adopted. 12% of children were 18 and over, including those who have transitioned to adult social care. 18.8% of those who care were designated as “care ceased for any other reason”. There has been positive development on the increasing numbers of children who have left care for Special Guardianship Orders.



5.5 Care Leavers

In Knowsley, there are 151 young people open to the Young Person's Team (including older Children Looked After), and of these 91 are ex CLA 17-20 years old. As of September 2021, 62 are regularly 'in touch' with the Young Person's Team as Care Leavers. The number of young people classed as care leavers has increased since previous Sufficiency statement following the change in legislation to extend care leavers duties to age 25.

	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Rate per 10,000	Trend	Increasing/ Decreasing
Care Leavers	123	136	151	45	▲	INCREASING

5.6 Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation

The department for Education collects information from local authorities on where care leavers are living on or around their 19th, 20th and 21st birthdays and whether this accommodation is deemed 'suitable'. As of September 2021, 92% of in touch care leavers were in suitable accommodation.

5.7 Staying Put

The numbers of Care Leavers who 'stay put' with their foster carers increased slightly towards the end of Q2 2021-22 however over the previous 12 months, an average of 16 young people were classed as staying put which is in keeping with expected trends.

5.8 Custody

Nationally, care leavers are over-represented in the criminal justice system. Research by the Ministry of Justice found that 24% of the adult prison population had been in care at some point as a child. In Knowsley, 9% of the care leavers' cohort are in custody, and this has been a consistent position for the last two years. Children Looked After are often vulnerable to exploitation, and criminal exploitation (in relation to Organised Crime Gangs and County Lines) is a particular vulnerability. Currently, there are 14 Children Looked After who are open to Shield (Knowsley's services to safeguarding children exposed to exploitation) for criminal exploitation. There will be significant future risks for these children, in terms of both their health and wellbeing and future risks of criminality.

Knowsley is still below national, regional, and statistical comparators for care leavers in education, employment, and training. The challenge for some care leavers in that they have been exposed to intergenerational worklessness and low paid work and overcoming this is an ongoing challenge. Current figures as of September 2021 show 48% are in a form of Education, Employment or Training.

Complex Need

Since the last sufficiency statement, demand for placements has been more stable, but there has been an increase in cases where children presenting with complex needs. This includes Special Education Needs and Disabilities, mental and emotional health needs, and challenges in relation to child exploitation.

6.0 Placement Stability

Placement moves and breakdowns can contribute to poor outcomes for children and are often symptomatic of children's previous experiences and difficulties. While planned moves may support long-term stability and improved matching between children and foster carers,

The age that a child enters care can affect placement stability, with teenage entrants to care being the least stable group of children looked after, as they are likely to have strong attachments to birth families, are more likely to have complex needs and present challenging behaviours. More complex needs often create pressure on carers and placements, resulting in placement breakdown and multiple moves.

6.1 Three or more placement moves

Placement stability in Knowsley remains a positive for the borough. As of September 2021, 7.3% of children had 3 or more placement moves within the last 12 months. This remains below the local target of 10% and equates to 21 children.

Of the 21 children, 19% were in fostering placements with relatives/friends and 19% were living in semi-independent accommodation. 14% were in long term foster placements with foster carers.

Of these children with 3 or more placements, most children are older. 38% were aged between 10-15 and 33% were aged 16 or over. Of these children aged over 10, just over only 30% had been in care for more than 2 and a half years, showing correlation between children coming into care at an older age having less stability.

Slightly more females had 3 or more placements than males (52% compared with 48%).

Placement stability has remained stable throughout the year and is unchanged from September 2020 (7%). 75% of children had just 1 placement in the previous 12 months (216 children).

6.2 Long-term stability

136 children under 16 have been looked after for two and half years or more. 92 of these children have remained in the same placement for 2 or more years, 68% of eligible children looked after. This figure has remained stable over the previous 12 months and Knowsley remain below all comparators.

6.3 In comparison to those with multiple placement moves, children in long-term stable placements have much fewer missing from care episodes, school changes and long-term absence from school.

6.4 Missing episodes, higher rates of absence from school and school moves are all linked to increased vulnerability, in particular risk of exposure to both sexual and criminal exploitation. The reduced engagement with education (high rate of absence) also puts these children at risk of becoming NEET in future years.

6.5 Missing from Care

Children who are missing from care are monitored by SHIELD, and independent return interviews are carried out by Catch-22. Data quality for recording missing episodes (especially for children who have high rates of missing episodes) has been an area of focus for SHIELD in 2021. Data shows that over a three-year period the number of Children Looked After who have had missing episodes, and the number of missing episodes has increased:

Although the change in numbers of Children Looked After with missing episodes is not significant, the numbers of missing episodes have increased by 55% since 2018/19. This is further reflected with the current cohort of Children Looked After, where missing episodes have increased.

6.6 Children with Disabilities

At September 2021, there are 37 children with disabilities that are also looked after; accounting for 13% of the total looked after population. In addition, there are 57 children who are on Child Protection and Child in Need plans receiving short breaks. The most common causes of disability in children looked after are learning disabilities and children who have been diagnosed with autism.

Knowsley's rate of children looked after with SEND is in alignment with national levels:

	% CLA – SEN support	% CLA EHCP
National	29.6%	26.7%
Knowsley	27.5%	26.8%

Since 2014, there has been an overall downward trend for Children Looked After with EHC Plans, and an overall increase in Children Looked After receiving SEN support. From 2014 onwards there was an overall increase in the Children Looked After

population in Knowsley (stabilising in 2016 onwards), and from the figures show that as the population has increased the numbers on EHC Plans has decreased.

6.7 Strengths & Challenges

Since the last sufficiency statement, demand for placements has been more stable, but there has been an increase in cases where children present with complex needs. This includes Special Education Needs and Disabilities, mental and emotional health needs, and challenges in relation to child exploitation, in particular criminal exploitation. The closure of the in-house residential homes has resulted in an increase in demand for external residential beds. As part of the three-year strategy, it will be important to reopen the in-house homes to avoid further increases in the external residential placement. There has been significant improvement in placement stability over the past twelve months.

More complex needs often create pressure on carers and placements, resulting in placement breakdown and multiple moves. In comparison to those with multiple placement moves, children in long-term stable placements have much fewer missing from care episodes, school changes and long-term absence from school.

It is acknowledged that there are significant pressures, and unmet needs, in respect of health commissioned services for Children Looked After with emotional and mental health needs. National pressures on CAMHS services are reflected in Knowsley, and while KMBC have invested in Tier 2 services to plug gaps (e.g., a dedicated emotional health & wellbeing service for CLA), there remain gaps around prevention and Tier 2/Tier 3 services in Knowsley. Knowsley will seek to take a joint approach with colleagues across the CCG and Public Health to address this over the coming years, particularly in the context of the children's mental health transformation plan.



Knowsley Council

If you would like to discuss Knowsley's Sufficiency Position Statement in more detail,
or have any queries on projected needs or placements, please contact:

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