

**Sufficiency Strategy**  
Children's Services  
2021-2024

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# 1

## Sufficiency Strategy

### Children's Services

## Introduction

### Why we are writing the strategy?

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All Local Authorities (LAs) are required to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in care within their local area. In 2010, the 'Statutory Guidance for the Sufficiency Duty' was issued. The guidance is explicit in placing a duty on LAs to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring that they include, in relevant commissioning strategies, their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.

The Children Act 2004 defines sufficiency as "a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after. For those who are looked after, LAs and partners should seek to secure several providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of looked after children and young people within their local area."

Our ambition is for our sufficiency strategy to be a "live" document, allowing providers to respond more dynamically to our local need. This means including the most recent data and forecasting to future-proof commissioning plans. Effective use of business intelligence and web publishing can link online sufficiency statements to real-time data and ensure that plans are current

In early 2019 we launched a 3-year sufficiency strategy for the borough, which was intended to meet the placement needs of current and projected future children looked after and care leavers. However, the national and local picture, and market conditions have changed to such an extent, which has been exacerbated by Covid-19.

Whilst several steps have already been taken to address this, it is our intention to refresh the sufficiency strategy to respond to the needs of our young people and the market conditions.

# 2

## Sufficiency Strategy Children's Services

### Policy & Wider Context

There is growing momentum behind calls nationally for greater oversight into the structure and functioning of the children's placement market. This is about challenging issues surrounding financial risk of heavily debt- loaded companies, the impact of the biggest companies dominating market share and the nature of profit within the sector. Since February 2019, there have been several key papers published and most recently the government commissioned 'Independent Review of Children's Social Care'. See Table 1.

**Table 1.**

Paper	Date	Link
HCLG Select Committee Enquiry	Feb - July 2019	<a href="http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1638/163802.htm">www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1638/163802.htm</a>
Changing Nature of company ownership, private equity and the impact on the services delivered for children. (Adrian Rocks & Allan Madeley, 2019)	Summer 2019	Paper available alongside minutes
ADCS President's address at the National Children and Adult Services Conference 2019, Rachel Dickenson	Nov 2019	<a href="http://www.adcs.org.uk/general-subject/article/presidents-speech-ncasc-2019-press-release">www.adcs.org.uk/general-subject/article/presidents-speech-ncasc-2019-press-release</a>
LGA, Profit making and Risk in Independent Children's Social Care Placement Providers.	Jan 2020	<a href="http://www.revolution-consulting.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Profit-Making-and-Risk-in-Independent-Childrens-Social-Care-Placement-Providers-Final-29-Feb-2020-report.pdf">www.revolution-consulting.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Profit-Making-and-Risk-in-Independent-Childrens-Social-Care-Placement-Providers-Final-29-Feb-2020-report.pdf</a>
Children's Commissioners Office, Private Provision in Children's Social Care	Nov 2020	<a href="http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/cco-private-provision-in-childrens-social-care.pdf">www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/cco-private-provision-in-childrens-social-care.pdf</a>
Independent Review into Children's Social Care, Josh MacAlister (Chair)	25th Jan 2021	<a href="https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/case-for-change/">https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/case-for-change/</a>

## GM children and young people's plan 2019-2022

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The Greater Manchester Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2022 contains the wider context of Greater Manchester's ambition for children, young people and their families. It also includes a commitment to review "placement sufficiency across Greater Manchester to capture the varied needs of looked after children alongside the current offer of placements and the requirements of placements in the future" and to "develop a Greater Manchester Commissioning Plan and Sufficiency Strategy to ensure children coming into care are provided with a quality placement which meets their needs, ensuring permanence is achieved at the earliest stage."

This Greater Manchester Children's Sufficiency Strategy seeks to contribute significantly to the ambitions for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers highlighted in the GM Children's Plan as follows:

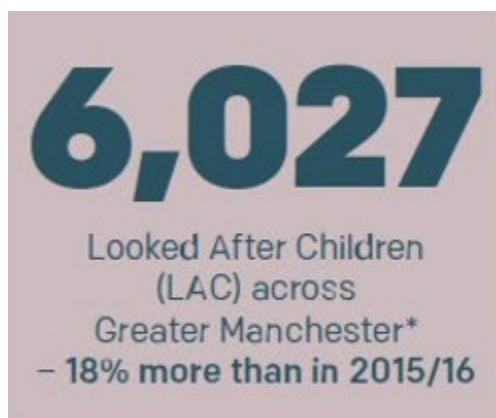
- Looked after children and care leavers will be supported through quality placements that meet all of their needs and support them to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve.
- All looked after children presenting emotional and mental health needs, particularly in response to childhood trauma, will receive swift and quality assessment and support.
- Looked after children and young people are able to access high quality education and training opportunities to support their aspiration and opportunities post 18.
- Care leavers are supported to independence with access to good quality housing, employment opportunities and further education.
- Children and young people are able to contribute meaningfully to the services and opportunities available to them through a range of participation and engagement mechanisms. This input is used to inform service design and commissioning intentions.
- Children and young people are reunited with their birth family wherever possible and for those who do remain in care, they are supported through stable and quality placements.

## GM sufficiency strategy 2020-2022

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Strategic ambitions:

- Increase the % of GM placements made within GM
- Increase the % of in-area placements made across fostering, residential and SaLLs
- Reduce the number of LAC placed outside of GM, particularly the number placed outside of the NW entirely
- Increase the numbers of foster carers across Greater Manchester



# 3

## Sufficiency Strategy Children's Services

### Wigan – the place

#### Wigan Context

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Wigan has an estimated population of 328,700, with approximately 75,500 children and young people, aged between 0-19. The population is 97.3% White British and the Borough is made up of several towns and villages. Around two-thirds of the borough is formed of countryside and green spaces. In a recent population survey, 71% of people reported that they are in good health.

An estimated 35,046 children and young people across the borough of Wigan (46%) reside in one of the top 30% of deprived areas for Wigan. This deprivation underpins some of the challenges we face relating to the large numbers of children who need help and support.

There has not been a fundamental review of Early Help in Wigan Borough since 2016. The existing Early Help Strategy needs to be more robust in its alignment to the current strategic context, in particular the improvement plan for Children's Social Care, the Education & SEND Strategies, the Deal for Children and Young People Plan and 2030 and in response to the recovery from COVID-19.

We have seen a significant increase in demand (and repeat demand) and it is imperative that we ensure that there is capacity in our wider system to support our safeguarding response. A review of Early help is being undertaken in recognition that the Early Help services that we deliver with our partners are critical to this, as it is the opportunity to provide support to families and their children before concerns reach the level for the statutory involvement of Children's Social Care. Taking a "Think family" approach our aim is to ensure that families receive the right support at the right time from the right person.

The permanence agenda starts from the premise that children should be supported to stay within their families in so far as is possible. We continue to build on place-based approaches to support children and young people through their own communities and natural support networks, with schools and settings and GP practices at the heart of this response.

Overall, we have a well performing education system with 91% of all schools rated good or outstanding and strong peer to peer support networks, which we continue to develop. However, we know that secondary provision does need to improve further. We are strengthening relationships with Health services through Start Well and have enabled better relationships between GPs and head teachers through our placed based working.

# 4

## Sufficiency Strategy Children's Services

### The Vision for Wigan

#### The Deal and Deal 2030

The Deal Principles define the overarching approach to support for everyone in the Borough.



This has been translated most recently into the Deal 2030 priorities which outline our organisational priorities for the next decade. At the heart of the Deal for 2030 are children and young people within the borough. We will support Children and Young People to achieve the Best Start in Life. Together, as a partnership, we will ensure the best start in life for every child and young person in our borough. Our ambitions for children and young people are for them to grow to be happy, healthy and safe.

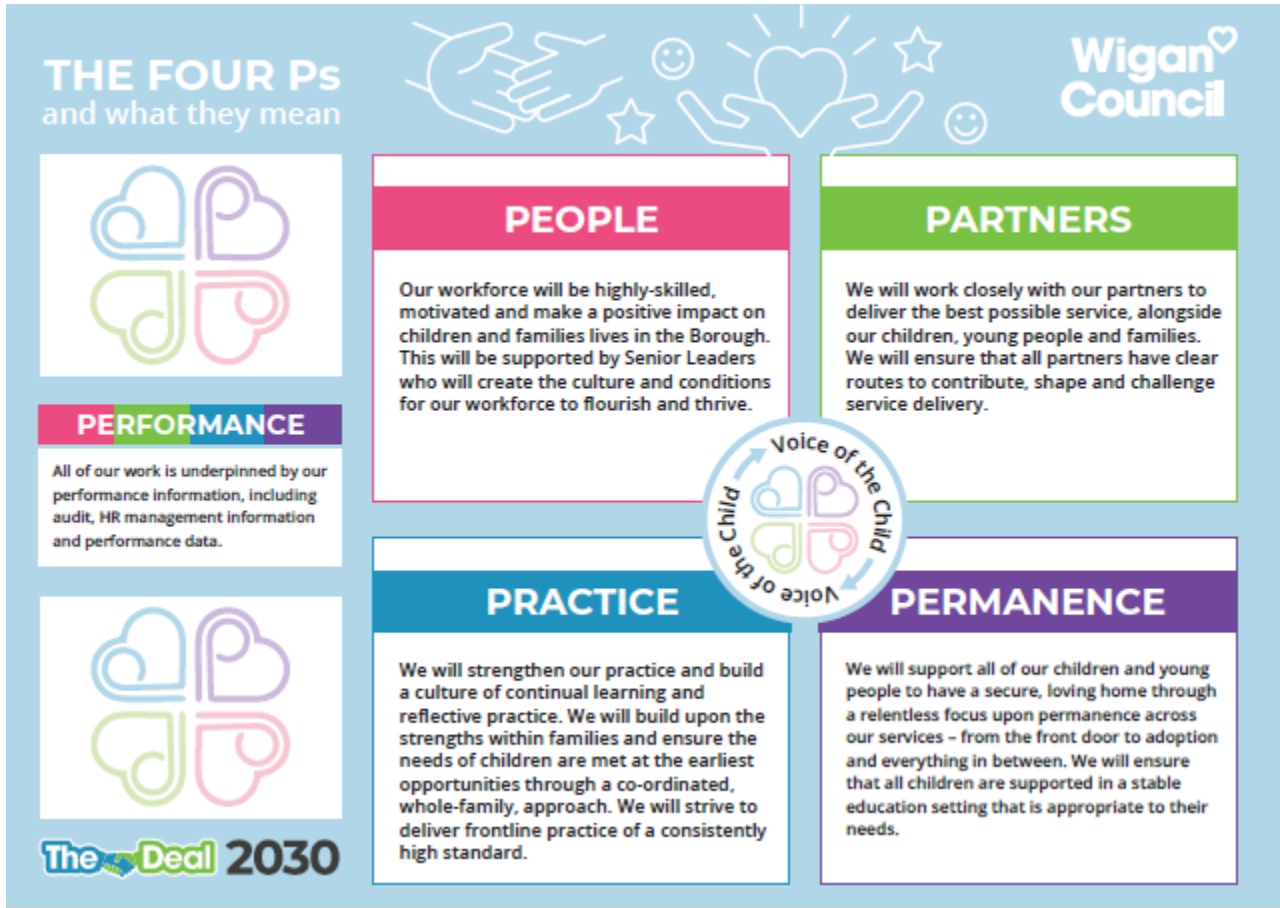
Alongside this, The Deal for Children and Young People is our promise to all children and young people and outlines how we will support them. The vision for children and young people in Wigan is as follows:

*We want all children in Wigan to be happy, healthy and safe; to feel listened to and to have the maximum opportunities to be ambitious. If children or their families need help and support it should be at the right time, by the right person and in the right place for them.*

## Our Practice Model

Our practice model for delivering the best outcomes for Children and Young People is Signs of Safety, which enables all front-line practitioners to adopt an innovative and strengths-based approach to working with our children and families across the early help partnership and social care.

This approach complements the work of the Deal as it is grounded in partnership and collaboration and involves working with families to identify strengths and community assets, while providing the framework and practical tools to support staff delivering this holistic, whole family approach to practice.





## Key Messages from Permanence Strategy

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Our strategy is built on the following principles:

- Is this good enough for my child?
- Will this support a child or young person to become a confident resilient adult?
- Providing the right support for children and families at the right time by the right person and in the right place.
- Wherever possible children and young people have the right to be supported to grow up in their own families and communities.
- The question, "How are we meeting the child's permanence needs?" is at the core of all social work practice with families.
- Prevention of children drifting when they need to become cared for and exploring all permanence options.
- We want to give children security, stability and love through their childhood and beyond to ensure the best outcomes as they become confident and resilient adults.

We deliver on these by:

- High quality and timely assessments of a child's needs.
- Assessment to include the child/young person's lived experience.
- Clear plans that include clear timescales, identifiable outcomes, support services and provision and actions to meet those needs.
- Regular care planning meetings to monitor progress.
- Multi-agency commitment and effective joint working.
- Robust reviewing arrangements.
- Lived experience of the child to be heard and evidenced in their plan and to include their views and feelings.

We want permanence to be everybody's business and to be planned for in every aspect of service delivery across the partnership. We know that children and young people thrive in stable environments and that we get better outcomes when they get to know and trust the adults that are working with them. We want to help our most vulnerable children and young people edge away from care, safely and appropriately. Children achieve better outcomes when they stay with their families where they can, as "permanence begins at home".

We are working to strengthen our residential provision and in-house fostering so that we are less reliant on the external market, independent and agency placements. Where we do have children in care, we want to maximise opportunities for them to be safely reunified with their families.

We will work with our finance teams to ensure that we invest in the areas that will be the most effective. We have highlighted a specific theme of support linked to Youth Homelessness as we recognise that this is an increasing issue in Wigan and the wider Greater Manchester region.

## Community Wealth Building

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In Wigan we use a progressive approach to sufficiency to ensure that the delivery of provision builds community wealth. We are committed to ensuring that public money spent in Wigan has the widest possible impact on the local economy, delivering wider social value for its residents. In this context we are particularly keen to attract and work with locally owned providers and providers that employ, buy, and invest locally, however we recognise and value the role of providers with an operating presence that reaches beyond the borough, but who are able to localise their approach as part of their social and financial commitment to Wigan as a place and community aligned with the principles of the Deal.

We want to build a strengthened partnership with providers that share our passion for Wigan as a place and its residents, which is characterised by:

- Business models which channel investment to local communities whilst still delivering steady financial return and profit.
- Employment strategies which promote recruitment in low-income areas, inclusive employment practices, supported employment, and apprenticeships.
- Using local supply chains, small businesses, local enterprises for goods and services, as these types of businesses are more likely to support local employment and invest in local communities.
- Continue to grow our local workforce promoting fostering as a career option to our residents, providing fostering growth with long term homes for our most vulnerable children and young people.
- Engagement with our corporate Housing Solutions Board to help identify local developers and care providers who are investing in Wigan and work with them to market shape and create the right placements and accommodation for our most vulnerable young people.

# 5

## Sufficiency Strategy Children's Services

### Current local provision

#### Fostering Service

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At the 1 April 2021, we have a total of 182 approved mainstream fostering households, a net gain of 6 households from the previous year. During the year 22 new fostering households have been approved and 16 households ceased fostering with us. The national trend shows that fostering agencies lose between 10 and 15 percent of their fostering households on an annual basis due to older foster carers retiring and carers leaving the fostering role. Our ambition for 2021/22 is to increase the number of available placements by 60 and aim to secure an additional 35 fostering and supported lodging households to achieve this.

As part of the recruitment strategy our fostering service has a dedicated recruitment and assessment team who deal with all initial enquiries and applications of intent to foster. This approach has been very successful and has demonstrated an improvement in the consistency of information being shared and the timeliness of responses to those seeking to become foster carers. This team deliver the preparation course and are continually reassessing the "Skills to Foster" training course to ensure Wigan carers have the relevant knowledge and skills to foster.

There is an increasing demand for foster carers and we aim to recruit carers who have the skills, emotional resilience, and asset-based support to become successful foster carers and achieve better outcomes for children in our care.

We offer an extensive training and support package for foster carers. Further developments will include the introduction of a therapeutic trauma informed model of care and bespoke support aligned to the specific needs of children.

Early support and intervention is key to ensure the right support is put in place for carers and children at the right time to improve the chances of achieving early permanence and placement stability. This will be delivered by improvements in initial placement matching and planning. Early support and intervention are key to retaining carers and improving placement outcomes for children and decreases the sufficiency demand for more carers and placements.

With the complexities of young people increasing and the need to utilise and maximise the use of our internal resources, we are strengthening The Deal for Foster Carers and we have begun to scope out and deliver a number of innovative and attractive schemes to attract and retain foster carers, targeting those who live in the Wigan area.

The Fostering Service works closely with The Council's Communication and Marketing team to implement our Recruitment & Engagement Strategy and Marketing Plans to promote fostering and raise awareness for the need to recruit more carers.

In 2021, we have started a strategic review of fostering allowances, staying put and supported lodging allowances to improve the retention of foster carers and recruit carers and increase placement availability and choice for children in care and care leavers. Carers have been actively engaged with the review through a series of consultation sessions and the implementation of an allowances steering group of foster carers. The proposals for the review of allowances were agreed at Cabinet in July 2021.

All foster carers receive rewards, benefits and incentives with the Council which includes long service awards of up to £1000, access to discounted gym memberships, Max cards, counselling, and financial advice through our Employee Assistance Programme.

The Invest to Save bid for fostering has enabled us to increase staff to reduce caseloads to recruit and assess more carers, retain and support foster carers to prevent unplanned endings and increase placement stability. We are recruiting for emergency/crisis foster carers and therapeutic/ specialist foster carers to meet the demand for skilled carers who can care for children with complex needs.

There are three Mockingbird constellations in the service, and we will be implementing a third constellation by 2022. The model is a pioneering vision for foster care providing a different and positive way of delivering support to fostering families and the children placed with them. The evidence shows improved outcomes due to a reduction in placement endings and placement moves for children and an increase in the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

It is estimated for every additional child placed with a Wigan foster carer rather than placed with an IFA there will be an annual saving of almost £25,000

Part of our sufficiency ambitions will also see us investing in our special guardianship orders as these are a crucial towards securing permanency for our children and young people.

Our investment case will enable us to appoint two key roles to lead on this and help to strengthen the support offer and delivery of services.

## Commissioned Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

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Wigan utilises IFA's to provide foster placements for our children looked after, when an IFA placement provides a more suitable match or when there is no availability of Wigan recruited foster carers. As of 31st March, there are 69 children accommodated with IFA's .

We remain committed to partnership working with IFA's for sourcing placements as we continue to increase the number of recruited Wigan carers and develop our skills, knowledge and expertise to better equip carers to meet the age requirements and level of complexity of children placed.

## Wigan Council Residential Provision

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### **BASE Children's Home, Leigh – Autistic Spectrum Condition / Complex Needs**

BASE is a four-bedroom registered provision with Ofsted, the home has recently submitted a refreshed Statement of Purpose to offer either shared care for up to three children whom have a diagnosis of ASC / Complex needs

or regular short breaks for a period of time to maintain permanence within their family setting. BASE have successfully supported families from an outreach offer whereby the teamwork with parents / carers in upskilling and developing their understanding around caring for children with complex needs / disabilities. BASE have maintained support to families throughout covid working with up to 42 families at any one time.

### **Ladies Lane, Short Term Breaks Home, Hindley- for Children with Complex Disabilities**

Ladies Lane is a five bedded children's home registered with Ofsted caring for children between the age of 8 to 17 years whom have significant healthcare needs resulting from their complex disabilities. The home can care for up to four children where there is a positive match. Ladies Lane have remained open throughout the Covid pandemic where they have maintained safe bubbles of three children at a time.

## ATOM

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Within ATOM we have three residential HUBs which are registered with Ofsted, the HUBs offer a variety of care options for children between the ages of 11 - 17 years. The homes are registered to offer care and support to children with EBD (Emotional behavioural difficulties).

Mill Dam grange is our larger home, offering medium to long term care for up to five children.

Ridyard Street is our smallest home, offering medium to long term care for up to two children. We have exciting plans to increase capacity to offer a third placement as a transitional bed for one child to experience semi supported care and work around independence.

The View is our edge of care short break home and immediate care provision. Children that are open to ATOM's edge of care service are allocated a keyworker to undertake direct work with both the children and their families around emotional wellbeing, attachment and communication. Short breaks maybe offered as part of a short-term intervention. Where children require emergency or immediate care The View will offer up to a maximum of 72 hours care. This will enable children's services to develop a wraparound support to families or identify a suitable placement for the child to transition too.

ATOM is a multi-disciplinary team where each of our HUBs can access support from our Speech and language therapy, Advanced Mental Health Practitioners and Clinical Psychologists. We work closely with our social workers to ensure children have good formulation accessing therapeutic evidence-based models of care such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Dialectic Behavioural therapy, or None-violence resistance approaches. We have strong links with Education, Health and the Police.

## Commissioned Residential Provision

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The national lack of foster care placements has seen an overall growth in the use of residential placements for children. Wigan like other LA's have seen a steady increase in these types of placements. We recognise that for some young people their own preference may be for a residential provision rather than family-based care and for some young children a period of residential care and stability will support them to access a stable family-based placement in the future.

Wigan aims to only place children in residential provision that is Ofsted rated as good or outstanding. Positively, for children in care with providers whom Ofsted regulate, over 90% are rated good or outstanding providers.

If a residential placement is considered the 'best fit' for a young person, the service aims to move them on as soon as is viable and when it is in the child's interests to do so, through careful care planning with a long-term ambition for family life (at home or within a foster placement) or supported semi-independent living. Robust and focussed plans to achieve the exit strategy for children in residential care are challenged and tracked through Placement stability meetings with our Children's Social Care, Commissioning colleagues and Multi Agency Partners.

To maximise our ambition of supporting children and young people transition to a family-based care from residential provision we have implemented improved foster carer recruitment processes linked to ATOM which allows foster carers to work from hubs building up positive relationships and trust with young people to enable a planned transition and improved 'step down' pathway.

A significant demand upon the placements budget comes from the commissioning of residential provision. Robust governance processes are in place to challenge our system to place our children within a family setting. However, we recognise that we need additional residential beds in borough to reduce the amount of out of borough placements and ensure that our children remain connected to the assets in their community. Working with partners we plan to increase capacity by providing an additional ten residential placements.

## Adoption

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Together for Adoption, (TfA) Regional Adoption Agency is a shared Local Authority Service of five partners: Halton, Cheshire West and Chester, St Helens, Warrington, and Wigan.

The national picture as provided by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Board demonstrates that there continues to be a decline in the number of Placement Orders made in respect of children considered by the Local Authority as suitable for adoption and an increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders.

Within Wigan there has recently been an upward trend in respect of decisions being made for a plan of adoption (ADMA) 2019/20 saw 14 ADMA's and 2020/21 this increased to 39. Likewise, there has been an increase in Placement Orders being granted (22). This will in part be attributable to the

significantly lower number in 2019-2020.

The target set for the percentage of children to be placed with Together For Adoption (TfA) families is 80%. This year TfA matched 71 children for adoption, as a regional Adoption Agency, 70.4% of these children have been placed with TFA families, which is a similar number to the previous year which was 71%.

In respect of Wigan 2020-2021 there have been 11 adoption orders granted with a further 8 children placed for adoption. All the children placed for adoption by Wigan in 2020-2021 (14) have been placed with families from TfA.

The aim of TfA continues to be to promote innovation and efficient child focused ways of working with the overall aim of achieving permanence, to achieve reduced timescales and minimal adoption breakdowns due to a comprehensive adoption support package and an increased number of placements available, particularly for those children with more complex needs.

## Leaving Care Provision

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Care Leavers are young people aged over 16yrs leaving authority care. Their journey to adulthood is much earlier than their peers, who tend to remain at home into their 20s. Young people who have been in care are at higher risk of social exclusion than young people who have not been in care. They are also at risk of low educational attainment, unemployment, poverty, mental health problems, social isolation, homelessness, and involvement in crime.

Care Leavers need the practical, social and emotional support that any good parent gives their child, from help to find the right accommodation, to guiding them through job applications and interviews, to making sure they know where to turn if they are having trouble. This means having access to stable accommodation, where they feel safe and secure so they are more able to live independently and live happy, settled and fulfilled lives.

Although Wigan has a range of housing options, it is recognised that currently there is a gap in supported accommodation available to those young people who need additional support after the age of 18. We know that we require more supported accommodation to meet the needs of broader groups of young people and those with additional complexities and vulnerabilities.

We are working closely with colleagues in Adult Health and Social Care to explore the development of:

- staffed short stay units,
- specific accommodation for those with high level needs,
- dispersed lodgings with visiting support,
- supported lodgings and specialist accommodation for those coming out of custody.
- emergency placement options such as crash pads, trainer flats or placements within family settings that can be accessed 24/7 for young people in crisis.

## Staying Put

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Staying Put means that young people can remain with their foster carer after once they have reached the age of eighteen. This enables them to experience a transition from care to independence and adulthood that is like that which most young people experience, based on need and not on age alone.

There are several benefits to young people being able to stay with their foster carer:

- It gives them greater control of the timing of their transition from care to independent living.
- They are offered the chance to experience transitions that are akin to their peers and it offers continuity and stability in a nurturing family environment.
- They can remain in stable families and important family relationships are promoted.

Currently Wigan has low numbers of young people in Staying Put arrangements. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the number of Staying Put arrangements were 15. We recognise that significant to this is the reduction in rate when moving from the fostering allowance to the Staying Put Allowance which challenges carers financially). The strategic review of Fostering Allowances will address this disparity and aim to make the payments more competitive so we can reach our Staying Put Target and increase to 22 arrangements by April 2022.

## Supported Lodgings

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Our 16+ Supported Lodgings Scheme aims to offer our young people stability and a chance to gain essential independent living skills to become a responsible adult and enjoy rewarding lives. Supported Lodgings hosts provide a young person with a room of their own and approximately seven to ten hours per week support. This may be showing a young person how to cook, budget or anything that constitutes supporting a young person to become practised in independent living skills. Often this means having someone that can provide some emotional support who will listen to them and help them make decisions. This type of help and support is needed to enable our young people to get ready for adulthood.

Supported Lodgings payments have been updated as part of the Fostering Allowances review. This will help us to increase our Supported Lodgings placements by 2022.



# 6

## Sufficiency Strategy Children's Services

### Current picture and future forecasts

Our market position statement sets out the profile of our providers and our ambitions to work closely with them to improve the quality and affordability of local care for our most vulnerable children. Through the development of our provider forum, we will be working to improve Quality Assurance, availability and employ retention arrangements, ensuring providers in Wigan are offering children a place as in their hometown as a priority.

Wigan currently outperforms statistical neighbours in sourcing appropriate high-quality placements for our children and young people. We know that we do well in keeping our children and young people in borough with foster carers or in residential children's homes where this is most appropriate for them, so they are connected with their community and education. Positively, for children in care placed in residential children's homes, over 90% are rated good or outstanding providers. This is a success measure that we are proud of and work hard to maintain

Approximately 20% of Wigan children in care (109/534) live outside of the borough compared to 40% in our Statistical Neighbour Councils (result as at 31 March 2020, the latest date national comparative data available). As at the 1 April 2021, our percentage had increased to 25% (160/644). As at the 1 April 2021, 60% of children in care live with a Wigan Foster Carer (385/644).

Compared to our neighbouring Local Authorities in Greater Manchester, this is a significant achievement for Wigan and is acknowledged as strong performance by our colleagues in GMCA. We believe this is due to the quality and performance of our internal fostering services.

While we still perform well in placement sufficiency, we are concerned about increased challenges in identifying in borough children's homes and we are seeing an increased reliance on residential care because of lack of availability of foster homes. This brings associated financial pressures. Whilst we have taken steps to mitigate this it remains a big challenge for Children's Services going forward.

Demand for out of borough placements has been rising steadily since the summer 2019, this is linked to the number of children in care that has also increased in the last 12 months. There are 110 more children in care, comparing 31 March 2020 to 30 March 2021. Although Wigan is still below the level of its statistical neighbours, our rate at 31 March 2021 as 95 per 10,000 compared to 100 per 10,000 in statistical neighbour councils. Our year-on-year rate increase was 23%.



## Placement type as of 1 April 2021

**25+** (2 UASC)

Semi-independent unregulated placements

**157**

commissioned placements

**1**

Mother and baby units

**69**

IFA placements

**6**

residential schools

**53**

residential

**1**

residential Short term breaks respite

## Weekly placement cost

£0 - £1000

**77**

£1000 - £2000

**16**

£2000 - £3000

**10**

£3000 - £4000

**20**

£4000 - £5000

**12**

£5000 - £6000

**13**

£6000 - £7000

**2**

£7000 - £8000

**0**

£8000 - £9000

**4**

£9000 - £10,000

**1**

£10,000 - £11,000

**1**

£11,000 - £12,000

**1**

Placement sufficiency has become a challenge in the last year as demand for our services started to increase, and the capacity of the provider market in our region started to reduce. Covid-19 has had the impact of compounding this further.

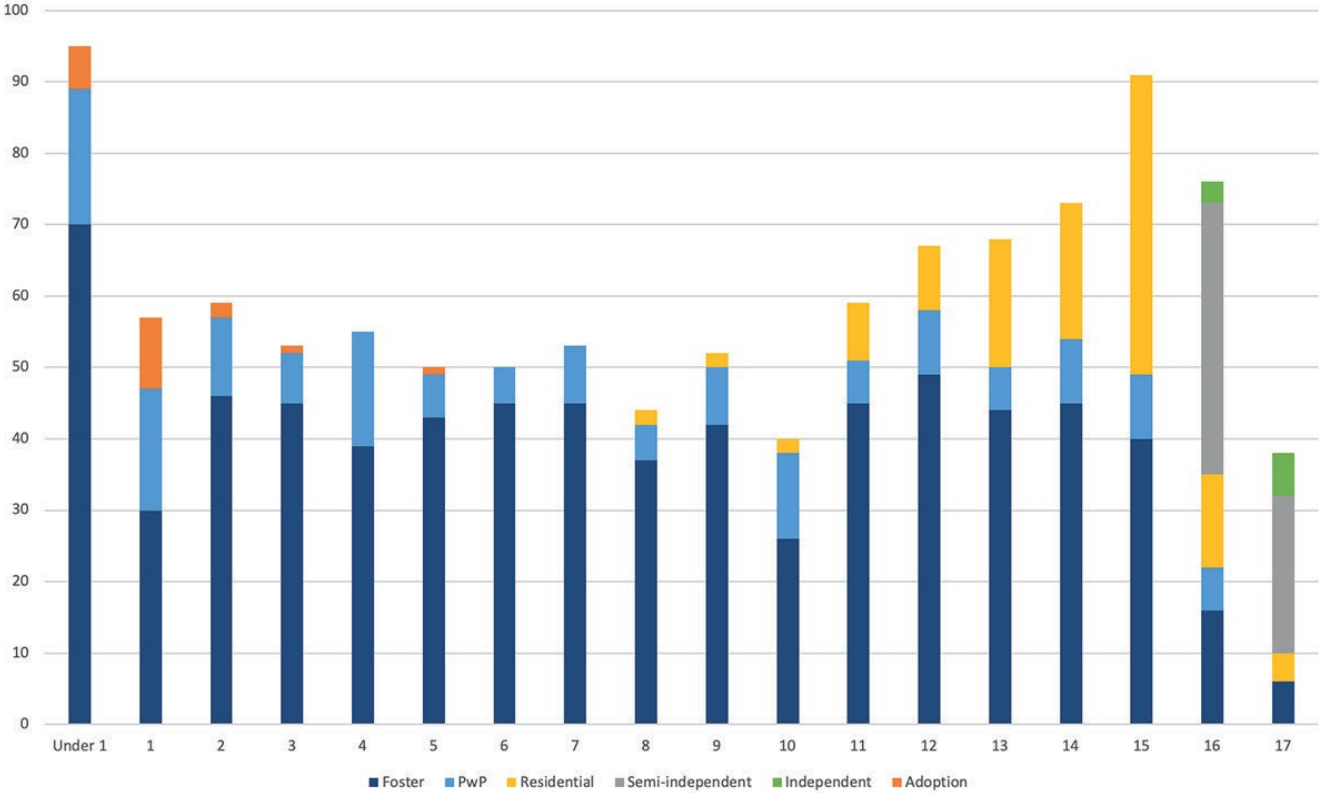
Like many other Local authorities, capacity in internal provision has not been increased in line with this demand. We have seen a decline in the numbers of children we are able to place internally from 80% in quarter 3 2019/20 to 74% of quarter one 2020/21.

Demand projections provided by our Joint Intelligence Unit suggest that we will need 60 more placements in the next six months, and recruitment of internal foster carers, the availability of other placement types (with parents, inhouse residential, adoption) cannot keep pace with that demand.

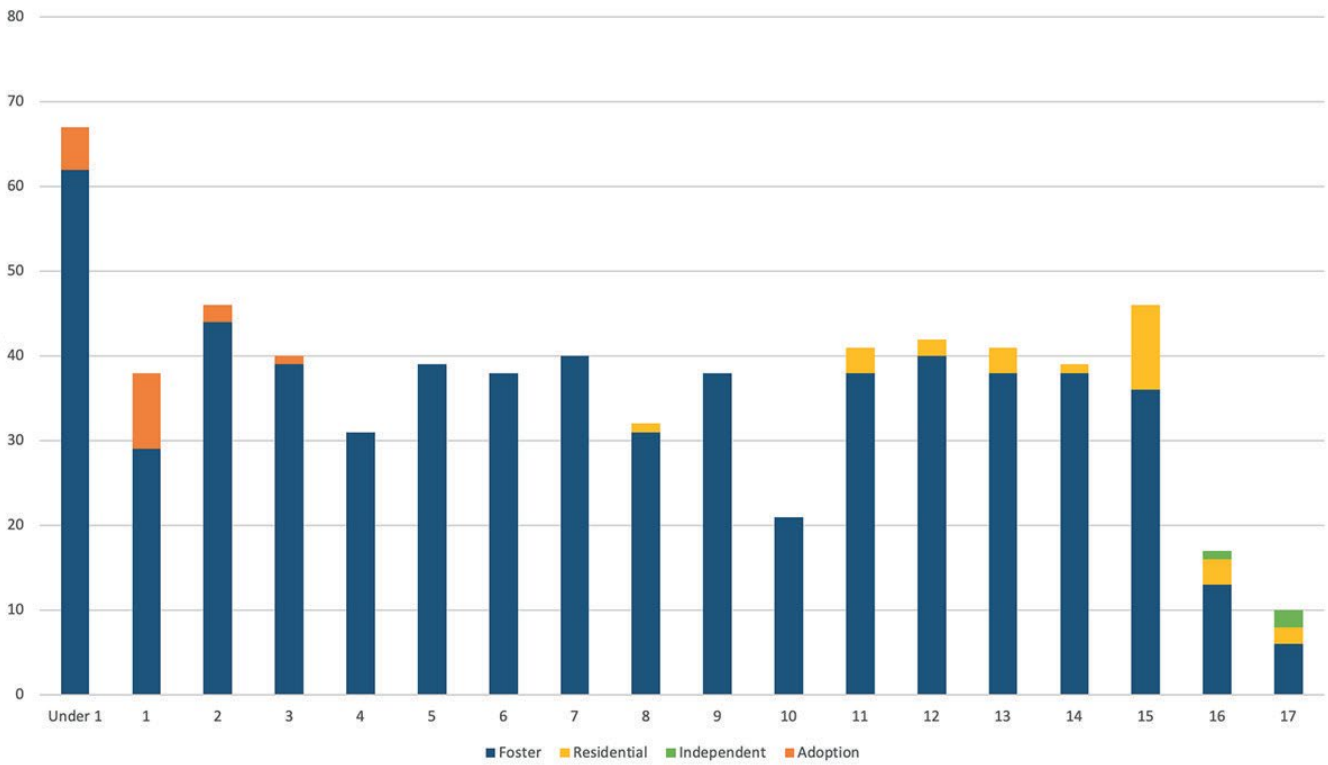
Analysis of placement information provides evidence that demand for foster placements for young people aged 10 – 15 years have increased, and this is our area of greatest challenge.

The graphs below provide further information in the age and placement distribution of children and young people entering care.

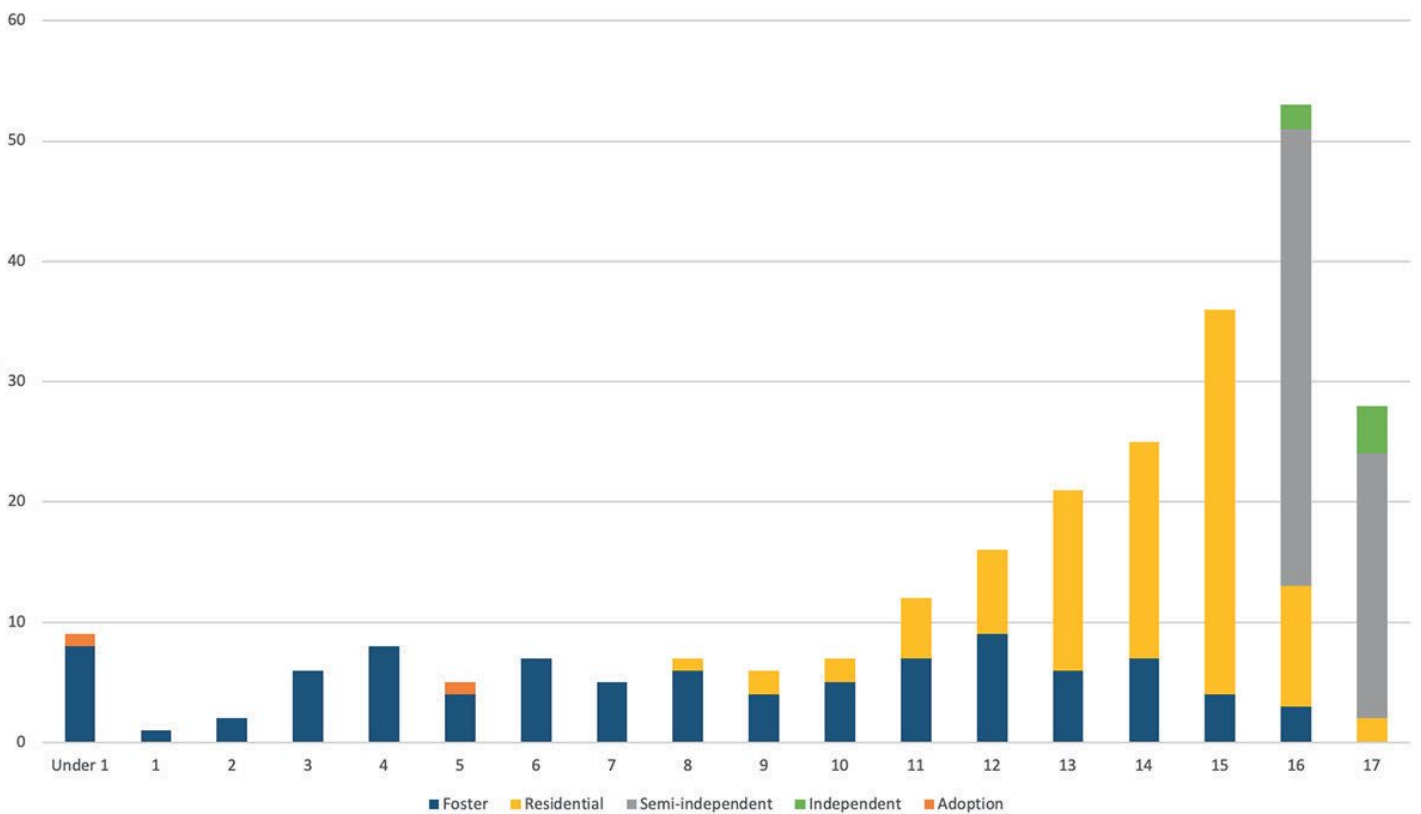
Distribution of age at entry to care by frequency in placement type



Distribution of age at entry to care by frequency in placement type - Internal Provision



Distribution of age at entry to care by frequency in placement type - External Provision



### **Moving to Independence**

The numbers of 16- and 17-year-olds presenting as homeless has doubled in 2019/20 comparing this to the previous year. There were around 50 children who presented last year and of them 15 were homeless or assessed to be at the point of facing homelessness.

We need to ensure that there is sufficient provision to support young people in the transition to adulthood. In order to do this, we work with providers of semi-independent accommodation on the North-West Framework. This is an area in which demand has grown and we are mindful of the need to ensure there needs to be sufficient choice in this area.

In common with other councils nationally, the use of unregulated provision is an area that we have become increasingly aware of and concerned to use appropriately. In order to offer support to young people leaving care as part of their Pathway Plan we would utilise this provision. For example, if there was a 16-year-old whose main need is to develop independent living skills and settle into the community, a semi-independent placement would be appropriate.

### **Mental Health**

In line with national reports, there has been an increased prevalence in children aged 13 plus with mental health needs being referred to us when they are hospital inpatients, where placements are required to support discharge planning. We have seen the number of these cases increase in the last six months to 12 months. These children often present with complex risk-taking behaviour linked to self-harm and suicidal ideation. They are often open to CAMHS but do not meet thresholds for inpatient treatment, but often present with too much risk for them to be able to live with parents. They are assessed as having complex behavioural needs rather than a mental health diagnosis. The market is also often unresponsive to meeting these needs.

### **Children with Disabilities**

There has been an increase in referrals for children with disabilities during the Covid period. We know from engaging with Parent Carer Forum that the pandemic has been very difficult for children and their families.

We have reviewed our short break arrangements to provide additional resource for children with Autistic Spectrum Condition to prevent family breakdown. The lockdown was also particularly difficult as it restricted the range of activities that could be provided to children and families for several months. Consequently, we saw increased referrals for social care support, and an increase of children with disabilities becoming looked after. We have seen six children with disabilities come into care who have required a placement in the last six months up to 1 April 2021. All six children were placed out of borough because of lack of local placement availability.

# 7

## Sufficiency Strategy Children's Services

### **Independent sufficiency review by Grant Thornton**

Alongside the work we have been doing as a service in the past 12 months we have benefitted from working in partnership with Grant Thornton to provide independent support and challenge to our sufficiency plans.

Their review showed that our focus is in the right areas (increasing capacity), given the significant challenge with the number of external residential placements escalating by 150% over the past 18 months. They acknowledged that Wigan is not alone in this, with other councils experiencing similar trends, particularly since July 2020, which has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns.

The concentrated focus in increasing internal capacity will be fundamental to reducing the number of out of borough placements, and the impact of this should start to be felt over the coming 12 months and will aid in shifting the trajectory of the placement mix.

Across both fostering and residential services, the average weekly package costs are higher for external placements than the GM average, although fostering costs showed a decline during 2020. Whilst it may be a few months before the data reflects the impact of current actions being undertaken, the focused relationship development with key providers will have a positive impact in reducing these costs and improving placement stability.

# 8

## Sufficiency Strategy Children's Services

### Meeting future sufficiency

The importance of engaging & supporting families at the earliest opportunity is now more important than ever as we recover from the pandemic. The range of services available as early intervention under the “Think family” approach is critical to re- balance the system and enable children to achieve permanence through their families and local communities without the need to enter the care system.

While future numbers of looked after children can be hard to predict, the data points to the trajectory of children in care numbers being likely to increase over the next 12 months, consequently, so will the demand for placements.

To help meet the needs of children and young people, our aim for placement sufficiency is to ensure we have a range of placements available within the Wigan borough boundary and wider local area. We want to have ‘the right placement in the right place, at the right time,’ with the necessary support in place such as education and health.

Based on our current analysis, the increasing levels of complexity, and significant financial pressure there are a number of challenges that must be an area of focus in Wigan over the next 12 months. These have been set out as part of our sufficiency action plan which can be found within Appendix 1. A summary of our sufficiency targets can also be found over the page in table 4.

## Table 4 - Summary of Sufficiency Targets 2021/2022

Area	Current	Growth Target
Internal Fostering	182 fostering households	Increase of 35 households
Mockingbird	2 constellations supporting families.	Develop 3rd constellation supporting an additional 10 families
Staying Put	15	22
Supported Lodgings	5	12
Internal Residential beds & short break provision	21	Develop and procure a further 10 residential beds.
SGO's	182 fostering households	Plus 10%
Reduction in unplanned endings (internal and external)	2017/18 56 2018/19 39 2019/20 28 2020/21 42 internal unplanned endings.	Reduce our unplanned endings
Adoption – TFA matches	70.4%	80%

# Sufficiency Strategy

## Children's Services

### Appendix 1

#### Aim

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Understand and respond to the needs of children and young people who come into care by ensuring that we have sufficient and suitable placements available.

#### How we will achieve this aim

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1. Governance arrangements for placement sufficiency via the Out of Borough panel with appropriate escalation and accountability.
2. To work in close collaboration with health and education partners to secure appropriate provision for children and young people who have complex needs.
3. Develop an annual sufficiency strategy to increase placement sufficiency that reflects the needs of our Child Looked After and Care Leaver population. Review and implement the fostering data set and recruitment and marketing strategy.
4. Embed and communicate the new placement finding and decision-making process, refresh our quality assurance and compliance approach and strengthen our oversight of existing out of borough placements.
5. Increase the number of children living in homes that can meet their needs.
6. Increase placement stability for our most vulnerable children and young people.
7. Through the community wealth building programme develop a joint carer recruitment strategy with Adult Services combining recruitment approaches and assessment where relevant (fostering, shared lives, staying put, supported accommodation)
8. Grow our local workforce promoting fostering & shared lives as a career option to our residents.
9. Develop a market position statement.
10. Develop a Commissioning and Market Shaping Strategy. Working with colleagues from adult services to maximise placement and care opportunities.
11. Refocus ATOM, our three Ofsted registered residential HUBs, offering a variety of care options for children between the ages of 11 - 17 years. The homes are registered to offer care and support to children with EBD (Emotional Behavioural Difficulties), as part of our edge of care provision to prevent the pressure on placements ensuring children can remain at home.
12. Submit investment business cases for:
  - third Mockingbird constellation,
  - BASE (a children's home in Leigh for Autistic Spectrum Condition and Complex Needs children),
  - children's residential provision.
13. Refresh our fostering / residential staff training programme based upon the needs of children in our care.
14. Ensure seamless and well-co-ordinated transitions from Child Looked After to Care Leavers provision



15. Ensure Children Looked After / Care Leavers emotional and mental health and wellbeing needs are identified and effectively supported with a clear offer of support that promotes placement stability.
16. Young People at risk of homelessness get the help they need.
17. Refresh and launch our joint protocol for children and young people at risk of homelessness.
18. Ensure our services are compliant with the legislation regarding the provision of accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds who may be homeless and / or require accommodation.
19. Ensure that all children at risk of homeless have a Child and Family Assessment and a clear plan of support
20. Continue to engage with Greater Manchester local authority partners, to develop a strong offer to young people, including Care Leavers, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
21. Strengthen our planning for permanence throughout the child's journey.
22. Permanence starts at the first point of contact. This will be developed and embedded as a policy, supported by procedures that are understood by all staff

## Outcome

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- There will be greater placement choice and capacity within the borough to ensure that we can meet the needs of CLA and Care Leavers.
- Children will be robustly matched to any placement and have a placement plan and care plan that ensures children's needs are met, with appropriate cost and quality.
- Our foster carers and ATOM / children's residential staff will feel confident and equipped to meet the needs of Children Looked After
- Our voluntary and private provision will have the same ambitions and stickability to our children.
- Our Children Looked After will become Care Leavers who are confident independent adults living independently in their local community.
- We will always consider education as a priority when placing children and young people. We will maintain education placements where possible or ensure that suitable education is found and that transitions is secured.
- The emotional and mental health and wellbeing needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers are understood and inform the commissioning intentions of services.
- Children Looked After will know what services and support is available to them.
- Carers will understand children's emotional health needs and have the skills and confidence to support them more effectively.
- All staff understand and contribute to supporting children achieve permanence.
- Children will have a plan for permanence by their second review and care plans will drive progress to realise permanence.

## What difference will it make to Children

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- Children will say, I am consulted about where I am going to live, and I am part of that decision-making process.
- My home will keep me connected to the people and places that matter to me, like my family, friends, and school.
- If I move home, it will be done in a planned way.
- Young People will say, when I move into adulthood, I will still have a place I can call home with ongoing support if I need it.
- Children will say, my emotional and mental health needs are understood, I, practitioners and services will know how they can help.
- I know where I can go for help and support.
- Children will say, I know why I came into care and the important things in my life will continue to be captured.
- I know where my forever home is going to be.
- Children will say, services do all they can to help me to stay at home with my family.

