



**Wigan[♥]
Council**

Looked After Children

Sufficiency Strategy 2025 - 2028

Wigan Council

Children's Services

April 2025

www.wigan.gov.uk

Our Sufficiency Duty



In Wigan we are passionate about keeping our children in care, close to home, by providing local loving and good quality homes. Our sufficiency strategy in Wigan is informed by our corporate Progress with Unity Strategy, which has two missions:

- Create fair opportunities for all children, families, residents & businesses.
- Make all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish for those who live and work in them.

Fulfilling our sufficiency duty by proactive collaboration with local ethical providers in order to respond dynamically to our local need will support children and families to have fair opportunities. This means working with the sector to shape the market locally and establish choice in local provision for children.

We have developed a robust framework for listening to our children and young people to make sure we understand their needs for safe, loving, happy and secure homes.

The Children Act 1989 requires all Local Authorities to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in care within their local area. We want to keep children within Wigan where we can, so that they remain close to family, to professionals who know them and can support them effectively and do not have their education disrupted.

The following priorities are addressed in this strategy:

- Shape the local provider market and strengthen our new era ambitions.
- Improve the quality and cost of homes for our children.
- Continue to shape the market locally and ensure we work with ethical local care providers as opposed to large national private equity companies whenever possible.

- Securing Wigan beds for Wigan children, reducing the number of local beds occupied by other Local Authorities.
- Maintaining direct contact with each provider organisation as well as developing a community approach through the Provider Forum and Registered Managers Forum.
- Work with GM to identify and develop projects that bring benefits across the region by shifting the balance in the residential care market away from private companies.
- Remain focused on the marketing, recruiting and retention of foster carers both within Wigan and in collaboration with Greater Manchester Local Authorities and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority through the Foster for Greater Manchester campaign and recruitment hub.
- Match more children to fostering households.
- To source more homes for the number of separated children that are arriving in our borough.
- Prevent the use of unregistered children's homes.
- Where there is a plan for independence, we will move children from residential homes to supported accommodation as a part of their transition to adulthood.
- Ensure that our providers of supported accommodation are Ofsted compliant.



Colette Dutton

Director of Children's Services



As the Lead Member for Children's Services, and a Corporate Parent to children in care and care leavers in Wigan, I recognise that it is important that we are the best possible parents we can be. This means we need to give our children in care and care leavers a safe place to live. This refreshed strategy will continue to help us to understand the changing needs of our children, in order, to determine where the right place is for children to live and who the right people to look after them are.

We know the lifelong difference it can make for the children in our care, when they have love and stability. We understand how they can flourish in their education, employment, wellbeing and relationships when they have a place, they feel settled and people who value them. We listen carefully to the wishes and feelings of children to inform our strategic plans, and they are an integral part of this strategy.

I am confident that children and young people will have a key role in scrutinising the progress of the Sufficiency Strategy 2025 – 2028 through the Progress with Unity Childrens Board.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Bullen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cllr Jenny Bullen
Lead Member for Children's Services

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Summary

Key Messages in Wigan

- The population of children in care had increased by 39% over the last 5 years (2019 to 2024) but has recently reduced again.
- 741 children were looked after as of March 31st, 2024, this had reduced to 672 by the end of year December 2024.
- Forecasting of children in care that does not include separated young people (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) predicts a continued reduction to the end of March 2026.
- Reductions in care are being driven by less children aged under 12 coming into care, more children aged 16 and under leaving care and due to a reduction in the number of separated young people in care although this is subject to fluctuation.
- The number of adolescents entering care has slightly increased year on year for the last 3 consecutive years.
- 71% of children in care were placed within the LA boundary at 31st March 2025. A position that has been maintained at year end.
- 72% of children were placed in foster households and 12% were in residential settings at 31 March 2025.
- We want to increase our use of the residential capacity already available in Wigan and place more children in our local area.
- We will work with partners to develop an additional residential home for children with more complex needs. The home will offer clinically recognised specialist interventions that prevent escalation to Tier 4 provision.
- In March 2025, there were 55% of children cared for by Wigan approved recruited carers.
- We want to increase the number of foster carers in Wigan, especially carers offering homes for teenagers.
- In the past 2 years our children living with Independent Fostering Association providers has increased by 35.6%.
- Our numbers of young people 'Staying Put' has increased significantly in the last 12 months, and our performance is comparable to other across Greater Manchester.
- As the number of separated children and young people grow, Wigan is looking to enhance and grow the choice and diversity of our accommodation offer alongside the wider offer referred to above.
- Wigan has a higher prevalence of pupils in receipt of Special Educational Needs (SEN) support when compared nationally and regionally with a widening gap. As a percentage of the pupil

population Education Health and Care (EHC) is comparative with national average but below regional and some local statistical neighbours.

- Primary need for EHC plans has changed since 2020 with a significant increase in plans where primary need is ASD, SEMH and Speech and Language followed by moderate learning difficulties. Wigan has more children placed in special school than national and regional, including post 16 specialist, but is in line with comparison for mainstream school.
- Due to the significant rise in numbers of children and young people presenting with SEND, we have seen a rise in demand for requests for Short Breaks for our children and young people with SEND and their families. We have also seen an increase in demand for residential care for young people with learning disabilities.

Greater Manchester (GM)

Wigan's challenges align with the regional and national picture

- A shortage of residential childcare staff is having a critical impact on the availability of services in Greater Manchester.
- The residential market is struggling to meet the needs of children and young people with more specialist / complex needs.

Foster Care

- There are not enough foster carers in Greater Manchester to meet the needs of our children.
- Despite demand for homes increasing, we have seen a decline in the numbers of foster carers across GM. It is essential that we see growth.

Supported Accommodation

- In recent years, demand for supported accommodation homes has grown at the fastest pace of any children's social care home.
- There are wide variations in quality standards across the supported accommodation market. A number of factors have contributed to the rising costs in the sector for example annual uplifts, increase in National Insurance and general inflationary costs. There is a

perception that regulation of the sector has increased costs, however this has not been quantified to date.

- As of March 2024, the proportion of GM care leavers described as being accommodated in a 'suitable' setting – that is, accommodation judged to be safe, secure and affordable had increased to 89% with Wigan achieving an increase of 11.2 percentage points on the previous year, now up to 92% (March 2025).

Policy & Wider Context

There is growing momentum behind calls nationally for greater oversight into the structure and functioning of the children's home market as a result of 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. During 2021-2023 there were several key papers published, see Table 1 below:

Table 1: Key Publications		
Paper	Date	Link
National standards for independent and semi-independent provision for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17	December 2021	Introducing national standards for independent and semi-independent provision for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17 (publishing.service.gov.uk)
Competition and Markets Authority Children's social care market study	March 2022	Children's Social care market study (publishing.service.gov.uk)
The Independent Review of Children's Social Care	May 2022	The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf (childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk)
Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Child Protection in England	May 2022	Child Protection in England - May 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)
Safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings	October 2022	Safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Children's Social Care: Stable Homes Built on Love.	February 2023	Children's social care: stable homes, built on love - GOV.UK
Children Well Being and Schools Bill	December 2024	Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024: policy summary - GOV.UK

Greater Manchester Children's Sufficiency Strategy

The Greater Manchester Children's Sufficiency Strategy seeks to contribute significantly to the ambitions for looked after children and Care Leavers highlighted in the GM Children's Plan as follows:

- Looked after children and care leavers will be supported through quality homes that meet all their needs and support them to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve.
- All looked after children presenting with 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 homes.

Progress with Unity: A new era for Wigan Borough

What is it about?

The Progress with Unity plan is a new movement for change for the next decade.

It builds on the successes and opportunities created during the last 10 years but also the lessons we have learned along the way.

We know that the world around us has changed significantly and the challenges and opportunities that our communities are living through requires a bold response.

As a partnership between residents, businesses, public services and community organisations we have reflected deeply on what our strengths are - but also where we have not gone far enough or had the impact we had hoped for.

Therefore, Progress with Unity is the culmination of a research project and is influenced by all of our partners and independent experts

What will it mean?

Two key missions have been identified that the council and its partners are committed to delivering:

- **Create fair opportunities for all children, families, residents and businesses**
"Together, we will break down the barriers that create financial, health, education and environmental inequalities in our borough."
- **Make all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish for those who live and work in them**
"Together, in genuine partnership with our residents and businesses, who know our communities best, we will help each town and neighbourhood in the borough to celebrate and maintain their identity whilst understanding and helping to achieve what is needed to thrive."

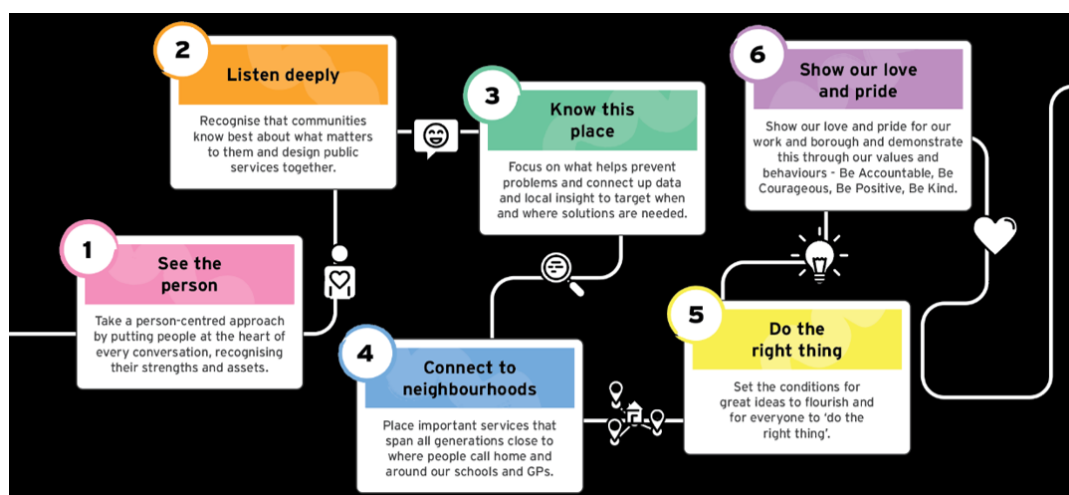
How will it be achieved?

We have a unique and genuine commitment to work together as a collective for the good of the borough.

The success we've had has come from our culture, behaviours and approach to working alongside our communities.

Through 'Progress with Unity' we will strengthen the way we work through the following six tried and tested ways of working to achieve long-lasting change.

1. See the person – Take a person centred approach to putting people at the heart of every conversation, recognising their strength and assets
2. Listen deeply – Recognise that communities know best about what matters to them and design public services together
3. Know this place – Focus on what helps prevent problems and connect up data and local insight to target when and where solutions are needed.
4. Connect to our neighbourhoods – Place important services that span all generations close to where people call home and around our schools and GPs.
5. Do the right thing – Set the conditions for great ideas to flourish for everyone to do the 'right thing'.
6. Show our love and pride – Show our love and pride for our work and borough and demonstrate this through our values and behaviours - Be Accountable, Be Courageous, Be Positive, Be Kind.



We see the work of our providers, partners and community groups (VCSFE Sector) and the commitment they have made to this way of working to ensure we meet our children and family's needs and achieve our sufficiency ambitions.

Wigan Context

From the 2021 Census, Wigan has a population of approximately 329,330 with 74,300 children and young people, aged between 0-19yrs.

In the 2021 census there were 3759 more residents identifying as White than in 2011. 95% of Wigan’s residents identify with the White ethnic group, followed by 2% with the Asian ethnic group and 1% with the Mixed multiple ethnic groups. School census data indicates that the child level population is likely more diverse than the total population, 15.4% of pupils in Wigan are ethnic minority compared to 84.6% White pupils. Whilst Wigan’s population of ethnic minority pupils is low compared to the national average of 36.8%, it has steadily increased over the last decade from 7.6% in 2015 illustrating a place that is becoming more diverse.

As at 31st March 2024, there were 741 Children Looked After, 2024 saw an increase of 9% from the previous year’s Children Looked After (679). In the 2023/2024 reporting year, 215 children ceased to be looked after whilst 280 children started to be looked after. As at the end of December 2024 the children in care population had reduced again to 672.






In Wigan

74,300 children 
aged 0-19

This is 22.5% of the total Wigan population, below GM average of 25.3% and just under the England average of 23.1%, however, this varies across the borough accounting for 26.4% in Pemberton to 19.1% in Wigan Central

0-4	5.4%
5-19	5.8%
10-15	7.2%
16-19	4.1%

143,101
households

-  Fuel Poverty - 13.3% compared to 31.1% nationally
-  Deprivation - approx 35% of children live in deprivation but this varies from 50% in Ince, Hindley, Abram, Platt Bridge area to 11% in Wigan North
-  Relative Poverty - 14,096 under 16 or 1 in 5 children lives in relative poverty
-  Overcrowded - 2.4% of wigan households classed as overcrowded
-  Cold home - approx 33% of households at risk of being a cold home

	Wigan	England
	Rate per 10k	
Children in care	95	70
Child Protection	38	42
CIN	99	86
Early Help	290	200
Referrals	493	545

127 Schools

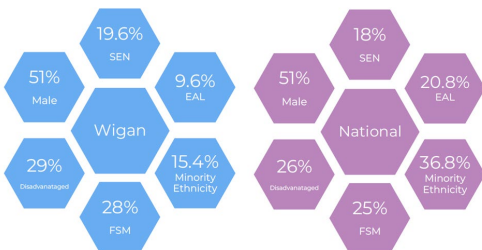


96 Maintained
31 Academies

32% of pupils attend an academy or free school compared with 60% nationally

24% of pupils have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which is in line with the national average

23% of pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), slightly above the national average of 21%



	Wigan	England
	Percentage of pupils	
GLD	64%	68%
Phonics	80%	80%
Key Stage 2 RWM	64%	60%
Key Stage 4 Eng &	40%	45.9%
Maths 5+		
NEET	5.8%	8.4% (2023)

 **3545**
EHC Plans

Further demographics can be accessed via this link:
[Census 2021 \(wigan.gov.uk\)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/census2021)

During 2022, we developed the Keeping Families Together and Reach – Adolescent Safeguarding Service as part of our Early Help and Edge of Care services.

The service aims to prevent family breakdown and children/young people going into care, improve family relationships and to work with families and other professionals to bring about positive change and reduce risks to children and young people. The Service includes the following elements:

- Intense ‘rapid response’ and developing longer term planned approaches.
- Family Group Conferencing to be integral to the new Service.
- Staff training plan to be designed around solution focused approaches; trauma informed practice; restorative practice; reducing parental conflict.
- Development of a proactive offer targeting children in need/children protection children, young people and families
- A clinical base within the service
- A flexible out of hours response
- Safeguarding Children at Risk Outside the Home – Complex Safeguarding Team.

Key Messages from Permanence Strategy

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.
- Proactive support to improve home stability through bespoke consultation and timely therapeutic intervention.

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 homes. 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

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 our 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.

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 homes and accommodation for our most vulnerable young people.

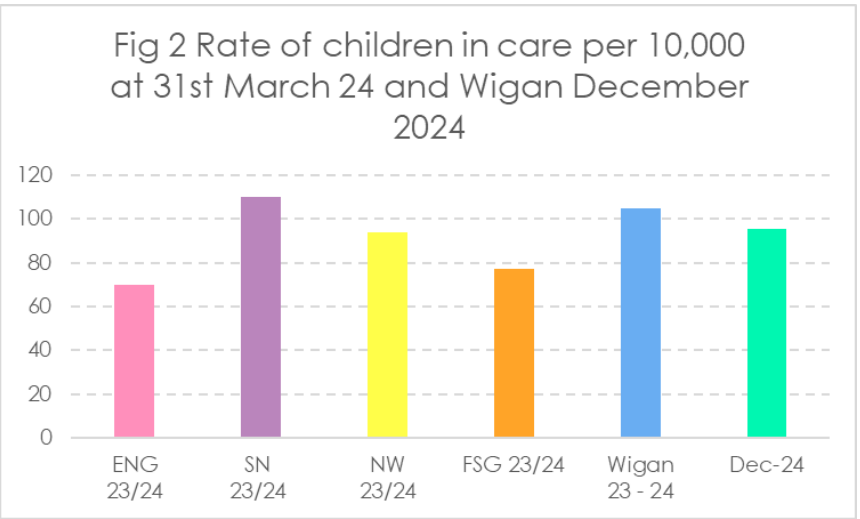
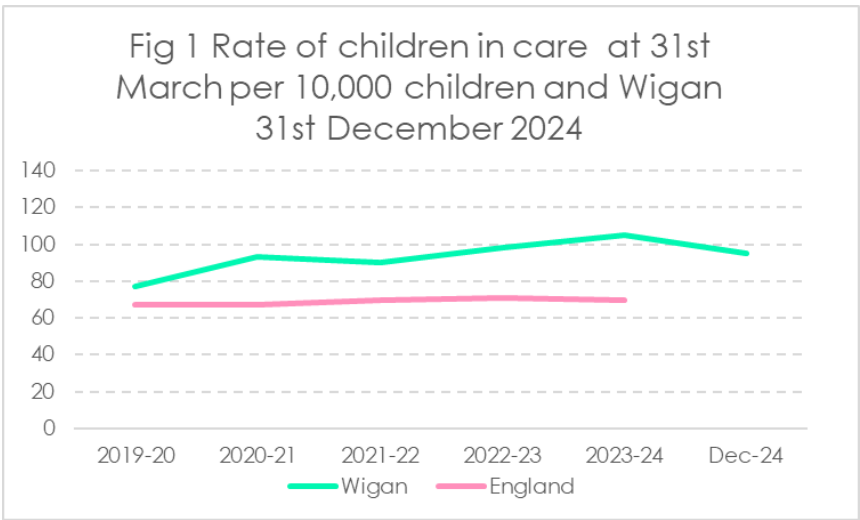
Demand for homes

Population of Looked After Children

As at 31st March 2024, there were 741 Children Looked After, 61 (8%) of those were Separated Children and Young People (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People).

2024 saw an increase of 9% from the previous year’s Children Looked After (679). In the 2023/2024 reporting year, 215 Children ceased to be looked after whilst 280 children started to be looked after.

Fig. 1 and 2 show the rate of children in care per 10,000 children. Although the rate had fallen by the end of December 2024, Wigan was above the England and Family Safeguarding family averages. We are lower than our statistical neighbours (110) and in line with North West (94).



Separated Children and Young People

Historically, Wigan has relied on a small number of providers to respond to the needs of Separated Children and Young People (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people) as they have arrived. Our number of separated young people increased 446% since February 2022. By end of March 2024 separated young people accounted for 8% of our child in care population. This has decreased to 5% by end of December as demand has reduced and there were 32 separated young people in our care.

Although demand has fluctuated and recently reduced, we must work on the basis that in August 2022, the thresholds for the number of Separated Children and Young People that each Local Authority was responsible for were increased from 0.07% to 0.1% of the child population. Based on Wigan's mid-year population estimate 2024 of 70,544, 0.1% of this population would be 70 children.

Within our current cohort, all of these are male, aged between 15 to 17 with the majority speaking Arabic, and top three nationality descriptions of Sudanese, Afghan and Eritrea.

What is significant to note is that, in terms of age the majority of this cohort are 17 years old, which means that in the next 12 months these young people will be transferring to the Leaving Care service as a 'former separated children and young people' cohort.

Our current 'former separated children and young people' cohort is 83 young people, who are aged between 18 to 22 years old and are predominately male. The majority of the cohort have an ethnicity of Other Asian Ethnicity with the main language being Kurdish. The majority of the young people are showing an immigration status of Asylum Seeking or have time limited leave to remain. In this cohort, 71% are engaged in education training or employment.

The majority of 'former separated children and young people' are placed in semi-independent living with some living independently. 47% of young people are placed in Liverpool and 23% are placed within the Wigan borough. The remaining are placed within North West neighbouring Local Authorities e.g. Bolton, Salford etc.

As the number of separated children and young people grow, Wigan is looking to enhance and grow the choice and diversity of our accommodation offer alongside the wider offer referred to above. We acknowledge that some young people may wish to be placed out of borough however we also have a duty to further develop a local offer to meet the needs of children and young people who would like to remain in Wigan. This requires us to have a different conversation with the provider market to shape an offer that meets need for both young people arriving in

Wigan via the National Transfer Scheme or for those arriving through other routes.

Our data analysis informs us the Semi-Independent provision is the only placement type where ethnic minority children (excluding white minorities) are more likely to be placed than the White group as a whole. This is specifically because of our separated young people.

As corporate parents we welcome separated children and young people into our locality and will strive to continue to improve the local offer by:

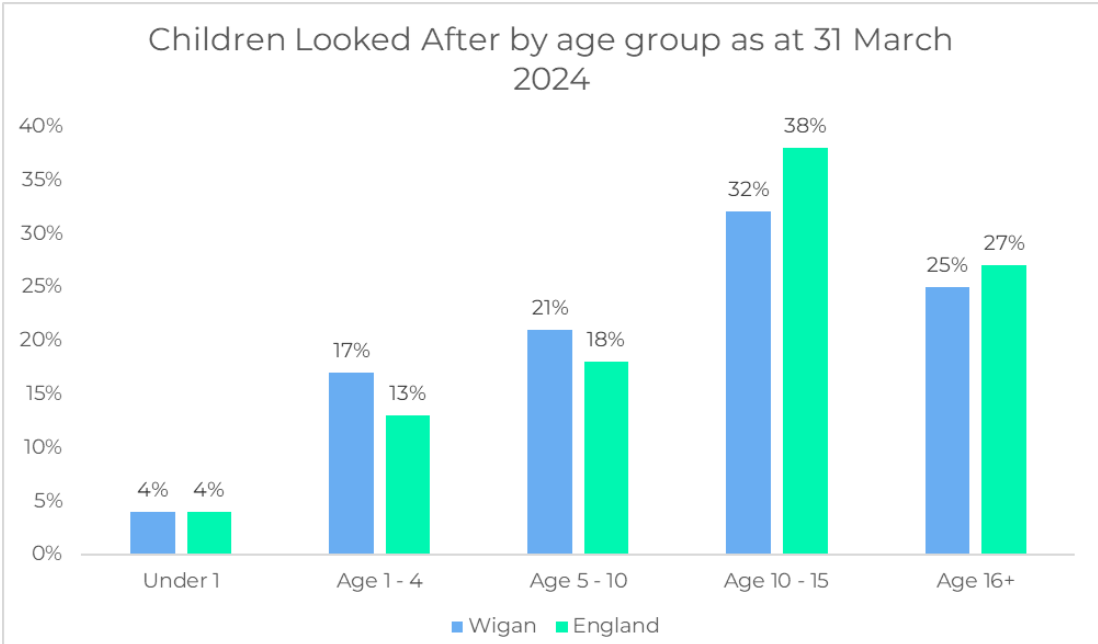
1. Relationship building with a wider group of providers who have skills, experience and who are willing to work more closely with Wigan to grow our post 16 supported accommodation offer for separated children and young people.
2. Dedicating the next quarterly Wigan Provider Forum to a partnership approach across the LA, health, education, college and providers to ensure as a whole system we are in a responsive not reactive position.
3. Ensuring that as part of the wider sufficiency strategy and action plan explores all potential routes for loving homes for our separated children and young people cohort such as in-house or external fostering, supported accommodation and supported lodgings.
4. Engaging with providers who have:
 - good links with legal firms experienced in the asylum process.
 - relationships with affordable move on housing as young people transition to adulthood.
 - a high level of sensitivity to and track record of being able to respond to a diverse range of need acknowledging the trauma, loss and separation this cohort of children and young people have experienced.
 - Separated children and young people cohort being a priority in the refresh of this Sufficiency Strategy.

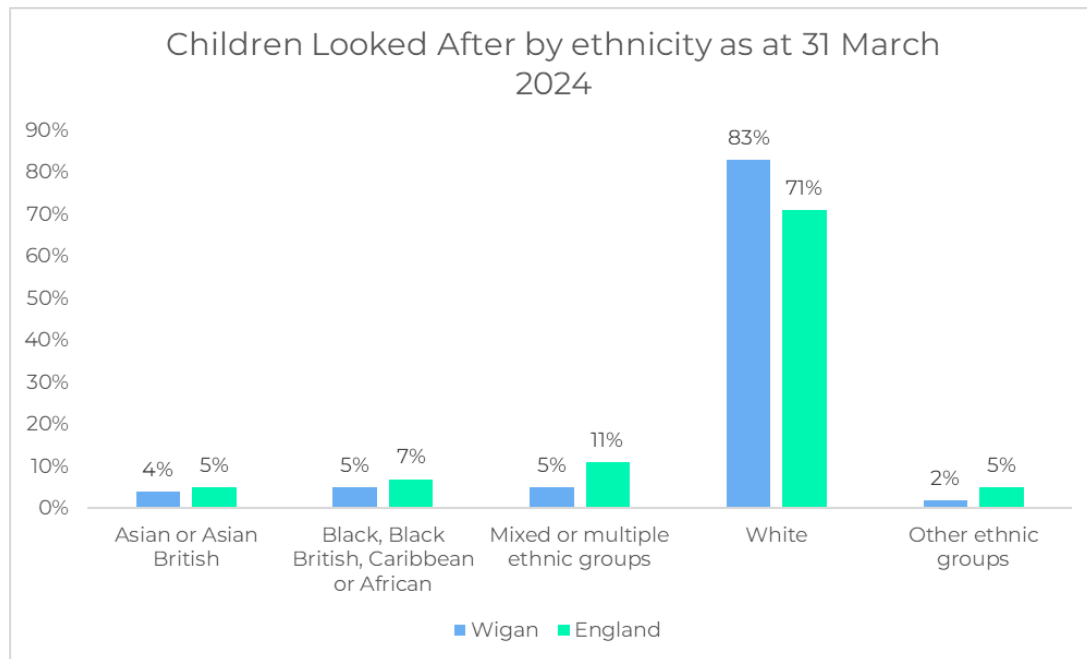
Demographic of Children in Care

The rate of children starting to be looked after during the year (2023/2024) was 40 per 10,000 0-17 compared to England. 28 statistical neighbours were lower at 39 and the North West region were also lower at 31. By end of December 2024 this had fallen to 28 per 10,000 children and young people in Wigan, driven by a reduction in separated young people starting care. In addition, children aged under 12 starting care has reduced by 20% at the end of December 2024 when compared to March 2024. This decrease was anticipated as a result of our new practice model, Family Safeguarding. While under 12's has decreased adolescents entering care not including separated young people has slightly grown year on year.

Key facts

- 66% of children starting care in 2023-24 were male which was higher than all comparator area averages but this was impacted by the unusually high level of separated young people starts in the year. The highest age groups starting care are children aged 0-4 but this is followed by 16+ again impacted by the increase in separated young people.
- Children aged 10-15 make up the highest proportion of children in care in Wigan – just under a third (32%) this is compared to 38% for England but notably Wigan has significantly higher than average proportion of 1-4-year-olds in care and to a lesser extent a higher proportion of 5-9 year olds.
- 57% of children looked after are male, 43% female. This is consistent with the trend for England.
- 16.2% of Wigan's child in care population is ethnic minority which places this rate slightly above the latest pupil population of 15.1% that can be reported but lower than the England average of 29%. Wigan rate is in line with pupil rate of 15.1%





Homes by ethnicity of children

It is important that we take steps to understand whether children from ethnic minority backgrounds have similar or varying needs from children from the White ethnic group (including white ethnic minorities). We have analysed two years of placement data. We have removed semi-independent placement data from the cohort of children analysed as due to the high prevalence of separated young people in this data as it causes skew. Our analysis illustrates that:

- White children are 60% more likely to reside in family and friends foster placements than children from different ethnic minority groups. There were no Black or Asian children placed in this type of home. White children were twice as likely as children with a Mixed ethnic background and 11 times more likely than children from Other ethnic groups (although these numbers were very small).
- For all other placement types examined the likelihood overall was similar once data was standardised and fell within the bounds of relative risk that is not considered statistically different (0.80-1.25)
- Ethnic groups of children combined were most likely to be placed in mainstream foster care. 59% of children from ethnic minority groups were placed in mainstream foster care compared to 54% of children from the White ethnic group, however, when examining this by each ethnic group this rises to 83% for Black children and 67% for Asian children.
- 41% of children from ethnic minority groups were placed in independent foster placements compared to 26% of children from the White ethnic group (including White ethnic minorities) demonstrating the importance of the independent fostering market to meet the cultural needs of children.

- Notably White children were 12 x more likely and 8 x more likely to be placed at home with parents than Black and Asian children respectively; this type of placement was rarely used for Black and Asian children.
- In the context of sufficiency it is clear that as our child level population diversifies we will need to ensure we have a range of foster placements to meet our children's cultural needs and promote their identity looking to increase recruited carers, including family and friend carers, as well as engaging with the IFA market particularly as the wider Wigan population is 95% White as per the 2021 census.
- Black children and children with a Mixed ethnic background are our two biggest ethnic minority groups of children experiencing placements over the last 2 years.

2022-2024	Placements	White (inc White minorities)	Ethnic Minorities	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	White (inc White minorities)	Ethnic Minorities	Relative Risk	CI Lower	CI Upper
Homes	Number			Number				%		Number		
	2285	2066	219									
Foster Family & Friends	331	311	20	0	0	16	3	15%	9%	1.6	1.60	1.70
Foster Mainstream	1243	1113	129	16	34	62	17	54%	59%	0.9	0.82	1.02
Residential	251	224	27	5	5	10	7	11%	12%	0.9	0.83	0.93
Placed at home	254	229	25	3	2	14	6	11%	11%	1.0	0.85	1.11

Care Leavers

Care Leavers are particularly vulnerable, and it is vital that we get the right support in place to help with their transition from leaving care in order for them to live successful adult lives.

The options available post 18 include living independently, staying put (with previous foster carer), supported lodgings or accommodation funded by Adult Social care such as supported accommodation, Shared Lives or a specialist residential home depending on assessed need.

The majority of care leavers are in suitable accommodation, except those who are in custody and a small number in temporary accommodation at any one time.

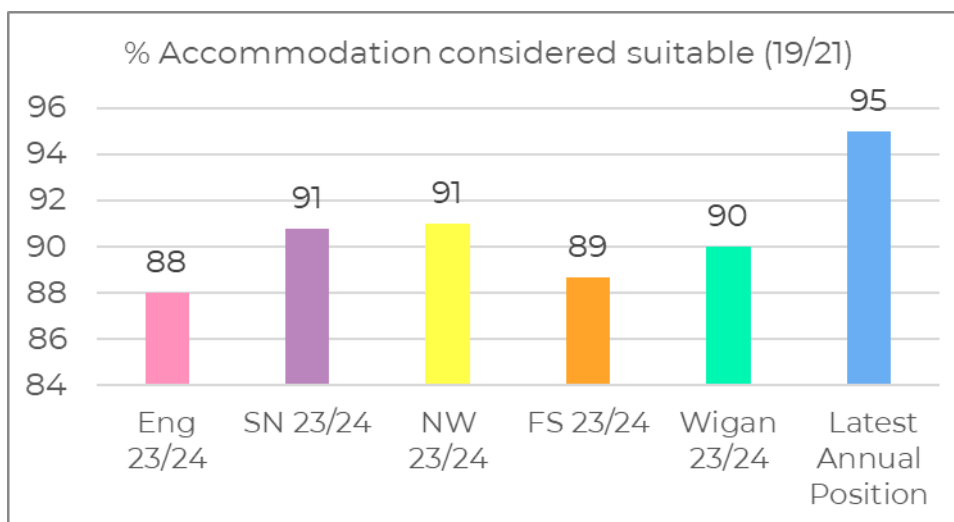
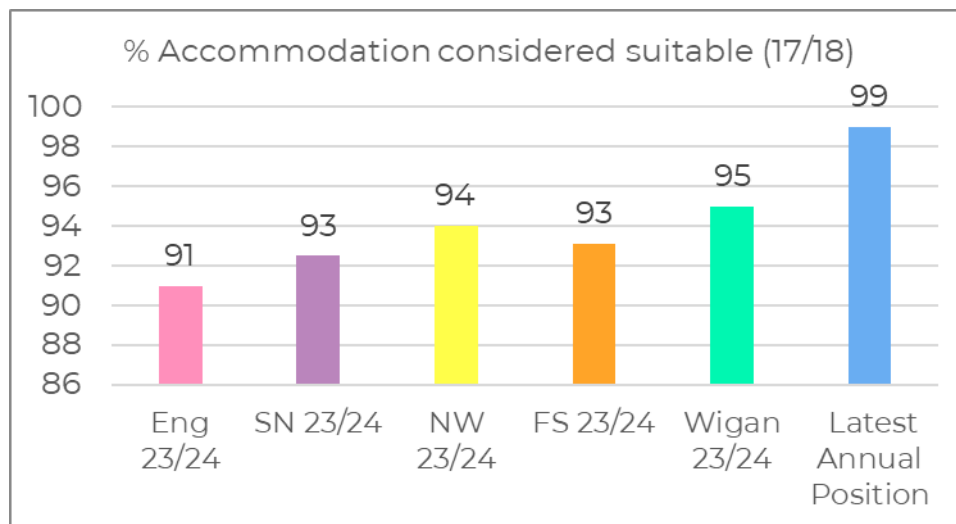
13% of 17–18-year-old and 51% of 19–21-year-old care leavers live independently, the national rate is 9% and 34%, respectively, so it is vital that we ensure that all of our care leavers have the skills and confidence to live independently and have their own successful tenancy. One way of doing this is by having a 'step down' from their residential or foster homes to a semi-independent home by the age of 17 so that the right support can be provided and any gaps in skills can be identified and addressed before they live independently. There is a significant responsibility for our providers to work in partnership with us to ensure our young people develop independence, skills and confidence to live independently.

We have a dedicated transition panel that meets monthly and includes colleagues from housing and adult social care to ensure that the right referrals have been made, assessments are completed timely, and housing options are made available to ensure a smoother transition from leaving care.

In March 2024, there were 99 17-year-olds who were leaving care which is rising significantly and remains an area of challenge due to the accommodation requirements and ensuring we have the right home in order to give them the best start to their adult life.

Suitability of Accommodation for Care Leavers in Wigan

Wigan has improved accommodation status for care leavers significantly.

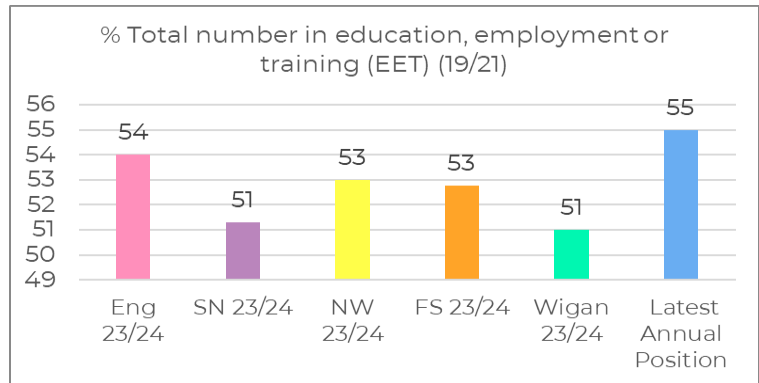
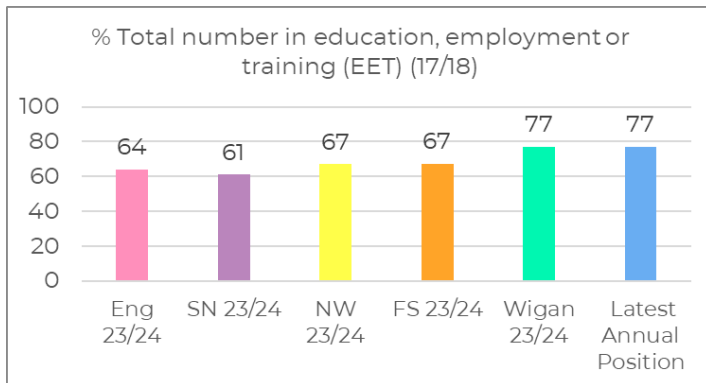


In terms of employment, education and training outcomes for care leavers, the monthly tracker which is updated with the Leaving Care Team and Aspiring Futures service, shows the following data:

- For the 17-18 cohort 23% were NEET at year end compared to 45% 19–21-year-olds. These rates can fluctuate throughout the year, but the picture is one of improvement in Wigan.
- This has been impacted by our locally developed EET offer for looked after children and care leavers, we have an established and bespoke offer of Traineeships, Supported Apprenticeships and specific pre 16

programmes for looked after children, in terms of supporting raising aspirations into further and higher education options.

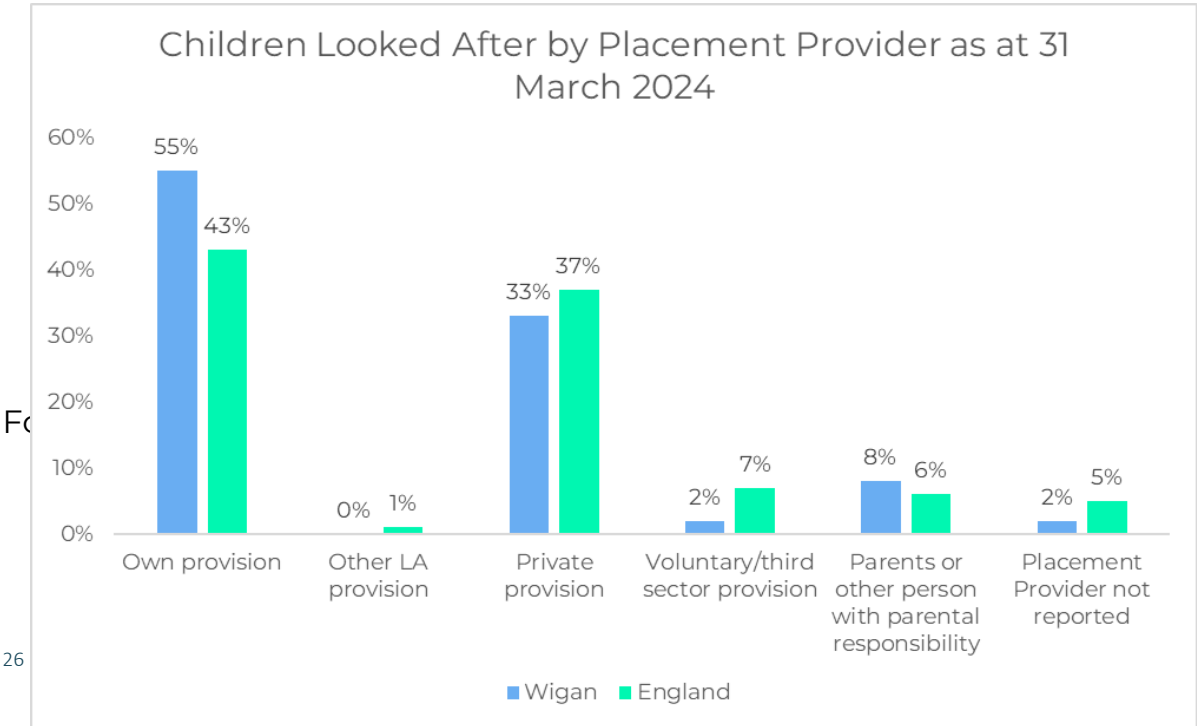
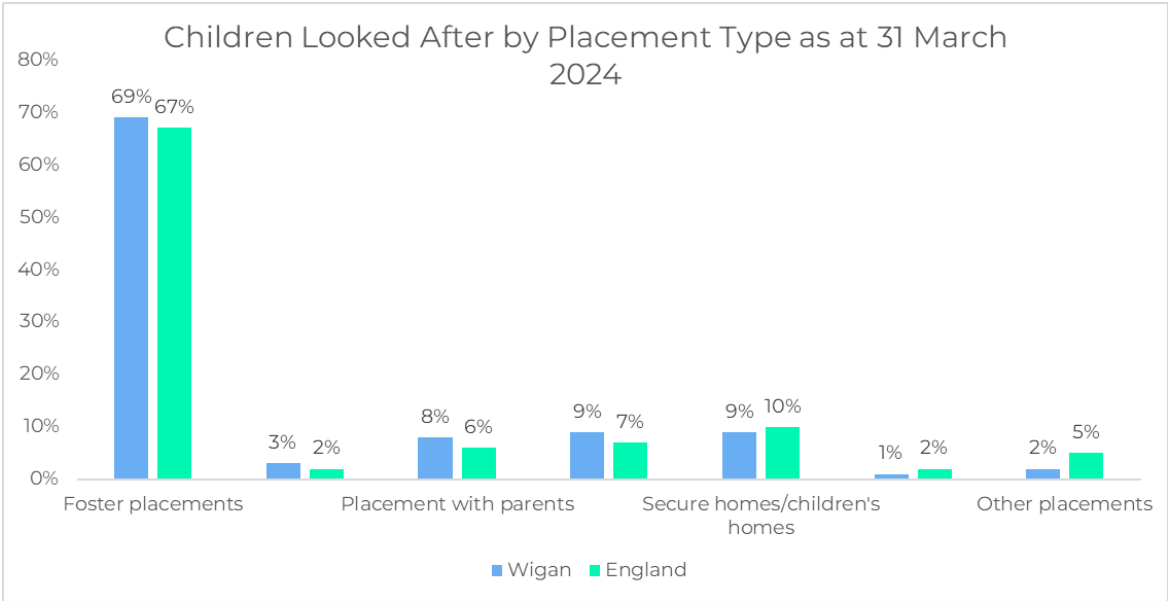
- The post 16 options and support offer means that there is an enhanced pathway for EET and improved plan for NEET reduction for our care leavers and looked after children. Having close links to the business community and putting corporate parenting at the heart of the social value commitments for learning providers and employers is a key priority.

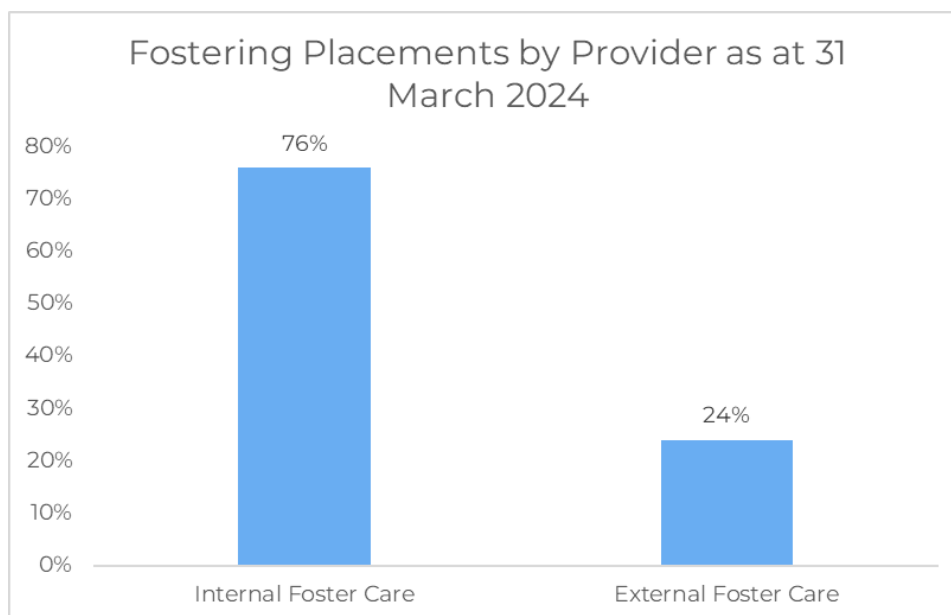


Supply of homes

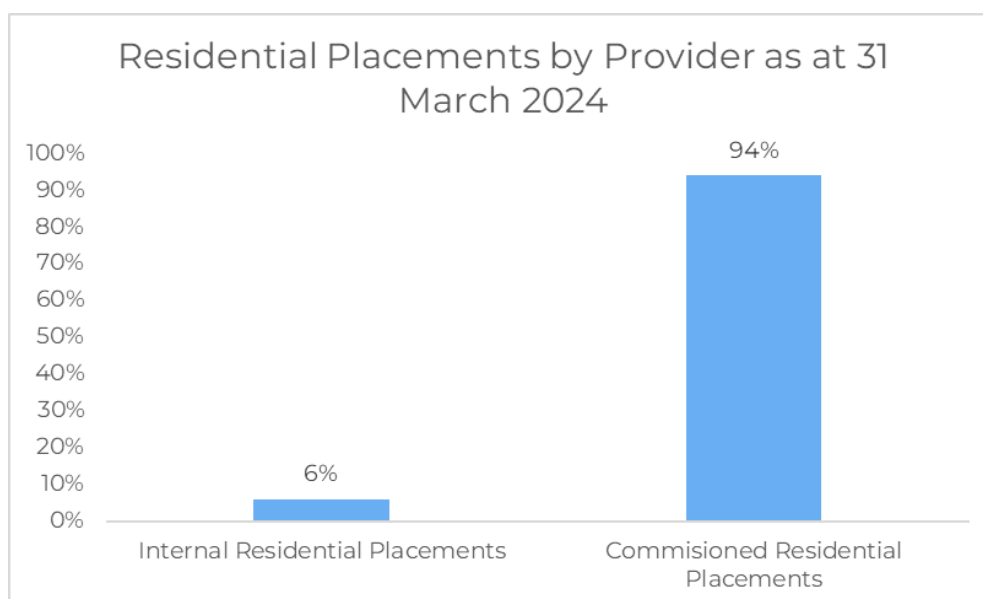
Provision of homes

As at 31 March 2024, most (69%) of looked after children in Wigan were placed in a foster home which was slightly above the England average of 67%. 76% were Wigan Council foster homes. Just over half (55%) of Wigan's homes are an internal provision which is higher than the average for England at 43% partly due to an increase in family and friends homes.





Residential Homes as at 31 March 2024



Figures- growth of residential children's home past 2 years.

In response to our previous sufficiency strategy, couple with broader regional growth, we have seen the market respond and have seen an increase in the numbers of residential children's homes both regionally and locally in Wigan.

As at December 24 in Wigan we have 49 Ofsted registered children's homes with a registered capacity of 136 beds. This has increased from 28 homes in 2020.

Furthermore, planning applications have been granted for 13 additional residential children's homes offering a projected additional 31 beds (projected).

As has been set out within the strategy our CLA trajectory is reducing, and our numbers of children with a care plan for residential children's homes has remained within a range of 72-80 for the financial year 24/25.

This demonstrates that we have an oversupply of children's residential homes based on local children's needs.

Our strategy has been one of increasing our utilisation of existing homes in borough, and positively we have steadily increased the number of children living in residential homes within the borough boundary – from 23 in December 23 to 31 as of March 25 (40%). Whilst care plans will determine needs cannot always be met in borough, we will continue to seek to increase our utilisation wherever possible.

The above shows us that whilst 31 Wigan children reside in residential homes in Wigan, based on Ofsted registered capacity would indicate over 100 children from out of area also reside in Wigan Ofsted registered residential homes.

We also know that predominantly the homes statement of purpose relates to supporting children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), as above we are now in an oversupply of these homes.

Like other local authorities we experience challenge in placing children with more complex needs, for example learning disabilities, neurodiversity and social / emotional mental health. We will continue to engage with the market to ensure the needs of our children can be met through a variety of homes which offer more specialist support.

Supported Accommodation

According to the Ofsted Social Care Providers list the number of supported accommodation settings open or proposed to open increased by 9% on the previous quarter bringing the total to 2,130 across the North West. This has led to an increase of 6% in the number of places, a total of 3,721. This is a significant level of oversupply given the total of 1,194 placements made by North West authorities. Supply is not consistent across the region with the three largest authorities reporting significant oversupply and some smaller authorities, Blackpool, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Wigan showing an undersupply.

However, we believe our supply of supported accommodation is adequate. We have seen a growth in the number of UASC who have turned 18 without being granted status, therefore remaining in supported accommodation until this has been resolved which compromises the integrity of our reporting. This is placing demand on the sector and availability of provision.

In Wigan we have grown our supported accommodation market both in size and range of providers who deliver for our young people. We currently

have 11 different providers operating 29 homes which provides an Ofsted registered capacity of 77 beds.

Currently Wigan is an outlier in terms of the number of separated young people who have turned 18 but remain in supported accommodation due to their application status, which causes a pressure on the supply of existing provision. This is further compounded by a lack of one and two bedroomed accommodation both with our internal housing stock and social landlords.

We continue to work with our colleagues in adults, housing and ethical landlords to address this challenge.

Supported accommodation provides accommodation with support for 16- and 17- year-old looked after children and care leavers, to enable them to live semi independently. As children grow up and approach adulthood, they gradually gain more independence from their parents. The care system seeks to replicate this transition to independence for children. While most children in the care system will be best placed in foster care or a children's home, from the age of 16, a looked after child can leave care (becoming a 'care leaver') and/or move to supported accommodation if they are ready for it. This provision can be appropriate for some older children where it is what they want, and it can meet their needs and keep them safe as part of a carefully managed transition to independence. The aim of supported accommodation is to support young people to develop their independence in preparation for adult living while keeping them safe in a homely and nurturing environment. Until recently this type of provision had no independent scrutiny, potentially leaving children at risk in unsafe or unsuitable accommodation.

From October 2023, all services that provide Supported Accommodation will need to be registered with Ofsted, whether this is a registered children's home or 16yrs plus provision. Regulation and inspection will provide crucial oversight of the sector and will assess whether accommodation is safe and meets children's individual needs.

Ofsted will register the provision at provider level not as individual settings. Ofsted will consult on proposals for the new inspection methodology in summer 2023 and will run pilot inspections in the autumn. Inspections of supported accommodation began in April 2024.

We are working closely with our Provider Forum to support them to be 'Ofsted ready' and our Quality Assurance Officers are monitoring the progress against this.

Follow this link to access the Ofsted Guidance and Quality Standards:

[Supported accommodation: registering with Ofsted - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supported-accommodation-registering-with-ofsted)

Location of homes

85% of children looked after were placed within 20 miles of their primary address on 31st March 2024 and this had increased to 90% at end of March 2025. The rate for England is 69%.

More than two-thirds of children are placed within the Local Authority boundary. Of those:

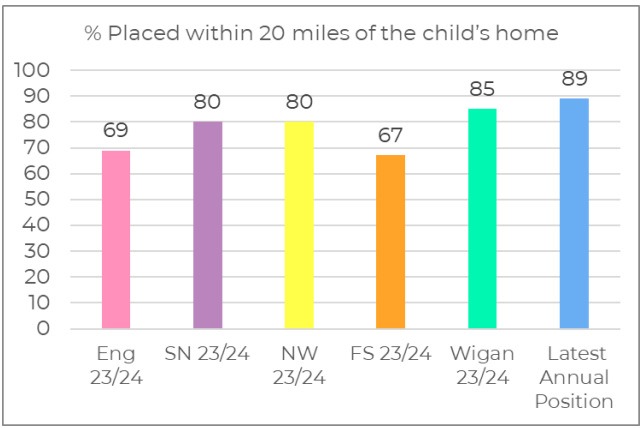
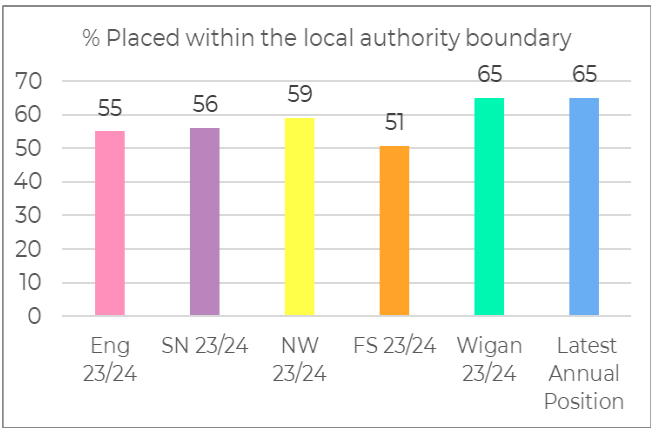
- 67% were living with a Wigan Council foster carer
- 12% were living with an independent foster carer
- 1% were in an internal residential home and 5% were external residential homes (within the LA Boundary)

The remaining children were in other homes such as living with parents, adoption homes, and supported accommodation.

Our capacity at a local level to place our children close is now impacted by the number of looked after children from other local authorities.

There are a small number of children whose care plan states they need to be placed at a distance to keep them safe but otherwise it is integral to Wigan that we place children close to home in order to promote their cultural links, identity and sense of belonging. We also understand from our data that children placed closer to home are less likely to experience contextual harm.

We need to work with providers to ensure that provision is more varied to respond to the needs of children in Wigan.



Cost of Homes

Since 2021, our actual spend across external residential, independent fostering agencies (IFA's) and supported accommodation has increased.

The amount we have spent has increased as a result of an increased number of children who require homes across the three provision types. As an example over the past two years, we have doubled the number of children living with IFA's. In addition to numbers rising, costs have accelerated with weekly fees increasing across all provision types. This in part has been as a result of increased utility costs, national living wage and the current fiscal pressures. As previously stated, there are an increased number of children with complex needs who require therapeutic support often met by solo provision.

When we compare ourselves to our Northwest Local Authority Colleagues, our average costs have historically been in either the third or bottom quartile. We are pleased to have made an impact in this area and are now reporting more competitive costs when compared to our Northwest neighbours.

Our priority is to work with the marketplace and encourage ethical providers to shape new provision with us in Wigan or close to Wigan. This will help us to achieve better quality, caring homes that are value for money.

Projections on Demand for Homes

Moving to Independence

In the period 1st March 2024 to 29th Feb 2025, we had 73 contacts for 59 individuals where they were 16/17 with one of the following contact reasons - 16/17 homelessness, homelessness/risk of, housing issues.

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 supported 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. We are working closely with our adults and housing colleagues to improve the choice and quality of accommodation for our care leavers.

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 homes 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. Our local position mirrors national findings as set out in the following report [ADCS_Safeguarding_Pressures_Phase9_FINALv1.pdf](#).

We recognised that there was a gap in our ability to meet the therapeutic needs of children who did not meet the CAMHS threshold and were keen to ensure we could offer a timely and flexible service to children and carers. Home stability is the single most important factor in promoting good outcomes for Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

We have worked with colleagues and young people to commission a service “Our Safe Space” that supports the emotional, health and wellbeing of our children. The service offers entry to care screening, provide specific support to social workers and the team around the child, comprehensive therapeutic training to our foster carers, group consultation and individual support to foster carers and fostering families in relation to the children they care for and one to one therapeutic support to a mutually agreed number of children a year.

This service enhances our Corporate Parenting role as the overall aims for this service are to ensure:

- Children and young people in Care and Care Leavers have good mental health,

- Children and young people in Care and Care Leavers have healthy relationships,
- Children and young people in Care and Care Leavers have stable and consistent homes,
- Children and young people in Care and Care Leavers have a positive experience of care and support from the service.

Children with Disabilities

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) outlines that Wigan's birth rate has declined over a ten-year period in line with national decline observed of 10% with some fluctuations to be expected between years.

Across Wigan as a whole, premature births are significantly higher than the national rate with some known impact on neuro- development.

Wigan has a higher prevalence of pupils in receipt of Special Educational Needs (SEN) support when compared nationally and regionally with a widening gap. As a percentage of the pupil population Education Health and Care (EHC) is comparative with national average but below regional and some local statistical neighbours.

Primary need for EHC plans has changed since 2020 with a significant increase in plans where primary need is ASD, SEMH and Speech and Language followed by moderate learning difficulties. Wigan has more children placed in special school than national and regional, including post 16 specialist, but is in line with comparison for mainstream school. In absolute terms more children have been placed in mainstream schools since 2016 followed by special schools.

20% of children and young people with SEND were also known to children's early help and social care services at a point in time. This compares to 19.2% of the pupil population demonstrating overall there isn't a disproportionate representation. Examination of this prevalence by need demonstrates a disproportionate level of children requiring more acute support from Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) Speech and Language. Profound and Multiple Learning disability was also more prevalent; however, this is to be anticipated due to these children likely being known to the children with disabilities team and requiring packages of support and statutory support in line with the Children's Act 1989.

There is joint multi agency whole system governance through monthly Multi Agency Resource Panel (MARP) and the Dynamic Support Register. This allows for robust joint decision making for our most complex and high needs/high-cost children and young people.

Short Break Sufficiency

Due to the significant rise in numbers of children and young people presenting with SEND, we have seen a rise in demand for requests for Short Breaks for our children and young people with SEND and their families.

The number of families in receipt of a direct payment award has significantly increased over the past 4 years, the pandemic saw a vast rise in numbers and has continued to rise in the post covid period. The Children with Disabilities panel have been creative with the flexible use of direct payment awards and a change in focus to grow sufficiency within the local community through the awards of Short Break Grants to universal and targeted providers.

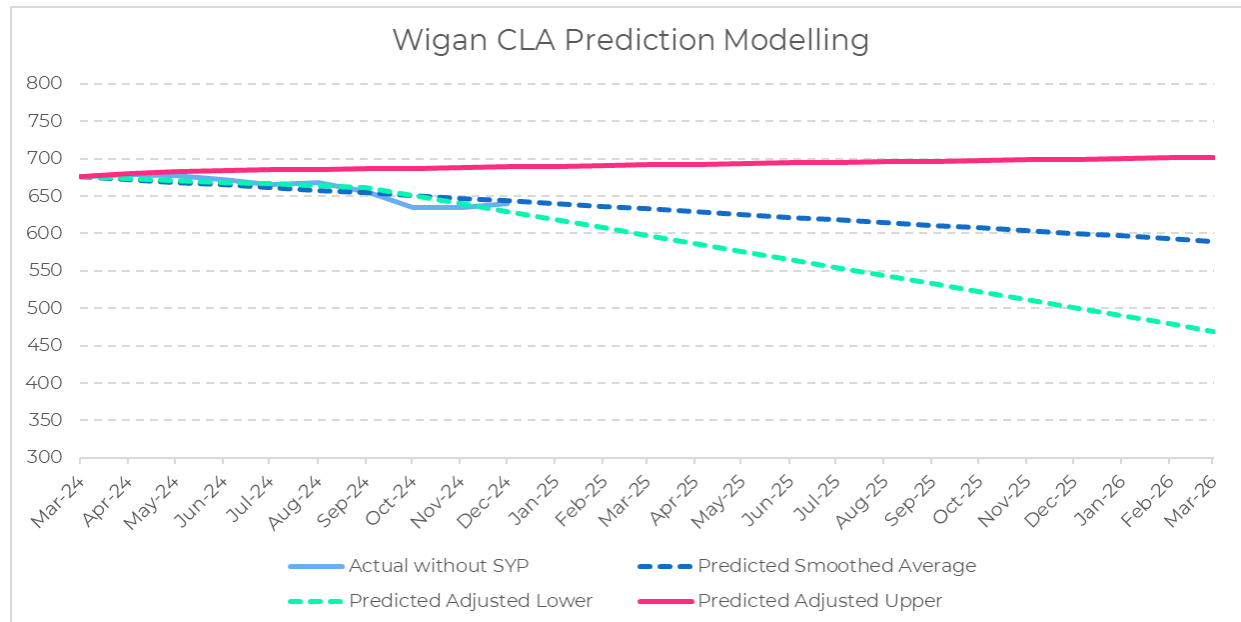
Within the borough there are two overnight residential short break provisions operated internally - Ladies Lane and BASE, both are at capacity with their current staffing model. Further increase in sufficiency of overnight short breaks now is to focus on family-based care including the use of Foster Care and Shared Lives Care.

Demand for Homes

Wigan's forecasting tool which accurately predicts our demand shows that at present we are forecasting a reduction in the number of children in care to the end of March 2026 in large due to our interventions including:

- Family Safeguarding Practice Model
- Reach and our edge of care offer
- Widened use of family group conferencing and meetings
- Improved practice in pre-proceedings

The following chart does not include separated young people as this cohort of young people make forecasting tools unreliable. We must bear in mind that we could experience another increase in this group of young people at any point. If we discontinued our current interventions we could expect the number of Wigan resident children in care to rise to 700 by March 26. However we are currently on track to reduce our number of children in care to around 600 by March 2026.



Projection and Demand for Homes

Based on current proportions we anticipate the following requirement for placements. The requirements are projected for all the above scenarios giving a range to work within.

If we were to experience an increase in separated young people, we could anticipate an additional 30 places required in supported accommodation provision and 10 in foster care for younger separated young people.

By March 2026

Based on assumption average composition of use of placements remains similar

Mar-26	Numbers		
	Predicted Smoothed Average	Predicted Adjusted Decrease	Predicted Adjusted Increased
	590	468	702
In care			
External Residential Settings (K2 / R1 / S1)	71	56	84
Semi Independent (K3)	47	37	56
CLA fostering Family and Friends	112	89	133
CLA fostering Wigan	206	164	246
CLA fostering IFA	94	75	112

Meeting Our Future Sufficiency

We have highlighted a number of areas through this sufficiency statement which will be the focus of our work in the coming three years. This will help to develop the local provider market and increase the quality and availability of homes for our cared for children.

Our priorities are:

- Shape the local provider market and strengthen our new era ambitions.
- Improve the quality and cost of homes for our children.
- Continue to shape the market locally and ensure we work with ethical local care providers as opposed to large national private equity companies whenever possible.
- Securing Wigan beds for Wigan children, reducing the number of local beds occupied by other Local Authorities.
- Maintaining direct contact with each provider organisation as well as developing a community approach through the Provider Forum and Registered Managers Forum.
- Work with GM to identify and develop projects that bring benefits across the region by shifting the balance in the residential care market away from private companies.
- Remain focused on the marketing, recruiting and retention of foster carers both within Wigan and in collaboration with Greater Manchester Local Authorities and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority through the Foster for Greater Manchester campaign and recruitment hub.
- Match more children to fostering households.
- To source more homes for the number of separated children that are arriving in our borough.
- Prevent the use of unregistered children's homes.
- Where there is a plan for independence, we will move children from residential homes to supported accommodation as a part of their transition to adulthood.
- Ensure that our providers of supported accommodation are Ofsted compliant.
- Continue our work with Wigan and Leigh College, developing more 'step up to social care' courses to address the national shortage of qualified residential staff.
- Deliver the Keeping Families Together Service offering intensive support and clinical leads to support parents to care safely for children

at home and embed our integrated Wigan Safeguarding Adolescent Service.

- Delivering our in-house No Wrong Door and residential edge of care services which continue to support homes stability and have introduced our new family finding model - working closely with fostering to step our children into fostering households.
- Embedding our newly commissioned Emotional Health and Well Being offer for cared for children.
- Continue our journey to outstanding with our in house residential and short breaks provision.
- Commission a supported lodgings provider to offer further homes for our cared for children.

Outcomes

- There will be greater home 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 home 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 arrangements where possible or ensure that suitable education is found and that transitions are 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 it will make to children

- 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.

Appendix

A1. Population of looked after children

Table A1. Population of looked after children during the year ending March 31	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Children looked after	533	646	614	679	741
Children who started to be looked after	207	246	184	181	280
Children who ceased to be looked after	129	136	220	245	215

A2. Supply of foster homes

Table A2. Number of fostering households, 2021	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of fostering households (internal)	227 (482)	236 (488)	242 (511)	255 (520)
Number of fostering households (IFAs)	69	83	98	125

Note. The table includes the number of fostering households (internal) and the number of fostering households (IFA) at March 31 of each year.

A3. Supply of residential homes

Table A3. Number of residential places and number of beds, 2024	Council	Private/ Voluntary	N. beds
Children’s home	5	36	121
Secure homes	0	0	
Residential schools	0	0	

Note. The table includes the number of children's home, secure homes, and residential schools owned by the council (including both those owned by the Local Authority and the Health Authority) and privately owned (including those owned by the third sector).