

Cheshire West and Chester Children in Care and Care Leaver

Accommodation Strategy 2022-25

Summary

We are pleased to introduce this 2022 – 2025 strategy regarding our Accommodation for our Children in Care and our Care Leavers. This strategy seeks to outline the local and national picture in relation to strategic direction and outline our key priorities in ensuring we are committed to improving accommodation options for those children, young people and young adults to whom we hold corporate parenting responsibilities.

We hold strong aspirations for the children and young people in our care, taking seriously our responsibility as corporate parents. This document outlines our commitment to building our offer of suitable and targeted accommodation for our children in care and care leavers; both at the point they need care, including the family time we support for them with the people important in their lives, through to how we best provide homes fit for purpose as our young people transition to independence.

Local, regional and national challenges regarding sufficiency of accommodation has experienced further pressures as a result of the global pandemic. Over the past 12 months, the numbers of children coming into our care has grown as we recognise the impact upon families of this unprecedented time. We know that we can build upon positive work within borough in order to ensure we can be the best corporate parents to those children who need us.

This strategy seeks to outline nine key priorities for how we set to achieve our response to areas of need for growth and development, along with an overview action plan as to how we will seek to deliver upon this strategy.

The strategy has been written in consultation with both of our children in care councils, through surveys with both our children in care and our care leavers in hearing what is important to them, connecting closely with our model of practice “Our Ways of Working”, and engaging with stakeholders both within the council and across our partnership. Our Children in Care and Care Leavers have helped shape the priorities and their direct feedback is included within the strategy – with a focus on us working together to aspire for every child in our care to share the following feedback given by a young person:

‘I love where I live and I wouldn’t change anything about it here’.

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1) Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to define our key priorities in ensuring we continue to develop accommodation within our local authority which meets the needs of the children in our care and the young people leaving our care.

The Children Act 1989 section 22 requires the local authority to ensure and secure accommodation for children and young people in their care, wherever possible this should support children and young people to remain either within borough or within 20 miles of their home local authority (where appropriate and safe to do so). This strategy details both local and national context, key areas of pressure and increasing demand, and maps out key priorities in response. This strategy includes the input and views of both our children in care and care leavers throughout – both in terms of current experiences and future aspirations.

2) Vision

This strategy builds upon the Children's Social Care vision of “**Enable, Empower, Deliver**”; to develop our approach to Enable Practice, Empower People and Deliver Progress across Children's Social Care services.

Our strategy **vision** is that there is sufficient accommodation available locally in Cheshire West and Chester to support our children in care and care leavers to fulfil their potential within the borough, supporting them to be part of their local community which supports their identity and provides opportunity to thrive.

This infrastructure will seek to ensure there is a range of placement choices to meet the complex and varied needs of children in our care. With these foundations in place for a quality care experience for all, our children will be supported in their education, health and wellbeing and in transitions to be able to fulfil their potential.

Our strategy **mission** is to offer our children and young people the right accommodation for their needs, keeping them closely connected to their identity and supporting them to meet their full potential. We want all of our children in care and care leavers to feel valued, cared for and part of our family.

We recognise that this strategy is being prepared at a point of recovery from the global pandemic of COVID-19. This has impacted both children and families in our communities and our foster carers in both resilience and capacity.

3) Our Corporate Parenting Vision

Critical to this strategy is the recognition of the vital important in recognising our role as a corporate parent to the children in our care.

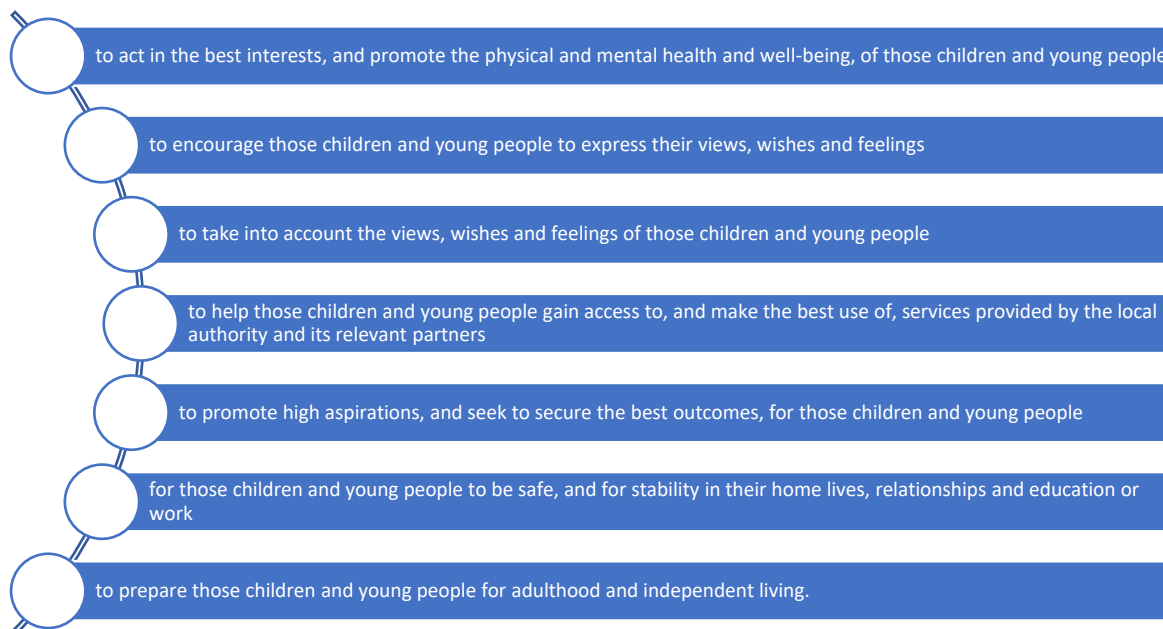
Looking after the children in our care is one of the most important jobs that Cheshire West and Chester Council must undertake as a corporate parent. Where a child is considered to not be able to safely reside at home, for whatever reason, and comes into the care of the local authority then as a Council we have a key role to act as corporate parent to these children. This includes ensuring accommodation is fit for purpose, both as a child and as a care leaver.

When considering what this corporate parenting role means in practice, we have engaged with our children in care and care leavers to consider this concept in line with national guidance. As a corporate parent, the following fundamental principle should be considered; ‘... *if this were my child...*’ which recognises as a local authority we have a significant duty to ensure we lead and champion the cause of the children in our care, including once they have left our care at 18 years of age.

Our vision as corporate parents is outlined as follows:



The Children and Social Work Act 2017 is clear in the direction that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority or is under 25 and was looked-after by the authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent. This means that corporate parents should seek:



(information drawn from Department for Education Working Together Statutory Guidance 2018)

What the children in our care and care leavers said “corporate parenting” means to them:

- *Ensuring equal opportunities to those who haven't been in care*
- *To not to feel any other different or standing out*
- *For the corporate parent to be “on the ball” as new things come through*
- *Having equal rights to health and support, even after turning 18*
- *People still being as bothered if I need help after 18*
- *Same opportunities to support in the community*
- *Knowing that I will be supported as any other child would be by their parent*
- *Pledge underpins everything*
- *That you can come back to your parent; as any parent would if you were unwell, struggling or sick.*
- *Believing in what we can achieve*
- *Opportunities to have a voice and that our young people have influence!*

This strategy needs to consider how we ensure we recognise the breadth of this corporate parenting responsibility; ensuring we listen to our children and young people alongside ensuring accommodation for them meets their needs and is of good quality.

4) Our Pledge to our children in our care: www.cicc.org.uk

In 2021, the Pledge was updated and recognised the feedback of our children in care council input. This Pledge is a promise made by the Council and it's partners to our children and young people in care and our care leavers about the quality of care and support that they will receive from us as their corporate parent.

We have committed to the children and young people in our care and our care leavers that we will be as passionate and committed to looking after them as we would our home grown children – and want no less for them. *Being in care will not be a reason for our children to be missing out.*

This pledge has been drawn up by experts, namely those who have first-hand knowledge of growing up in care. Our aim is for all children and young people in Cheshire West and Chester to receive the best parenting possible.

1. *We will actively involve you in making decisions that affect your life.*
2. *We will keep you safe and help you to keep yourself safe.*
3. *We will help you achieve your full potential in your education and dreams.*
4. *We will respect you as individuals.*
5. *We will help you stay in touch with people who are important to you.*
6. *We will make sure you have named workers, who will stay with you whilst you grow up, whenever possible.*
7. *We will support you to have different experiences.*
8. *We will help you to keep healthy and well.*
9. *We will help and support you to sort out any problems or worries you have.*
10. *We will help you with your future.*

Cheshire West & Chester Council



cicc Children in Care Council Cheshire West and Chester

1 WE WILL ACTIVELY INVOLVE YOU IN MAKING DECISIONS THAT AFFECT YOUR LIFE

- We will ask you what you want to say and listen to your views.
- We will act on what you say and tell you what we have done and when we have done it.
- We will give you clear information about the bigger picture too, like policies that affect you, and let you know in a language you can understand, not just big documents.
- We will give you lots of opportunities that let you participate on your terms.
- We will give you structured opportunities to be involved in the recruitment of all staff and foster carers, as well as staff appraisals.

2 WE WILL KEEP YOU SAFE AND HELP YOU TO KEEP YOURSELF SAFE

- We will make sure you live in a safe place where you are well looked after.
- We will not move you from your home / placement unless there is an issue around your welfare – if there is we will explain this clearly to you.
- We will check you are given good quality care. We will check that you are happy and settled.
- We will listen to you when you have concerns.
- We will make sure we get back to you with answers to your questions as soon as possible.

3 WE WILL HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR FULL POTENTIAL IN YOUR EDUCATION AND DREAMS.

- We will listen to your views about your school and help you to attend one that suits you.
- We will listen to your views on education and respond and act quickly.
- We will help you grow in confidence, be proud of yourself and make positive decisions.
- We will make sure you don't have to change school whenever possible, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- We will keep you safe in school and make sure that you feel safe.
- We will help you understand what Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) is and how it's being spent to help you. PPP can be used by schools to help you with your education and wellbeing.
- We will produce documents that are easy to understand.
- We will help you in education and if you get Pupil Premium Plus, we will make sure you have a say in what it is spent on.
- We will make sure that you get a copy of your Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- We will help you achieve the things that are important to YOU.
- We will help you move into Further Education and training beyond 16 and support you during this time and help you plan for your future.
- We will help you to join in with activities in school, after school and within your community.
- We will celebrate your achievements.

4 WE WILL RESPECT YOU AS INDIVIDUALS.

- We will respect your rights in relation to disability, sexuality and race.
- We will support your right to follow both your culture and religion if that is your wish.
- We will appreciate and understand that at different ages your needs and wishes may change.
- We will make sure everyone is encouraged to participate at a level that they are comfortable with.
- We will make sure that everyone is actively listened to, whatever their age or ability.
- We will continue to make sure that listening to you is part of everyday life in Cheshire West and Chester.
- We will give you extra support when you need it.
- We will respect your right to privacy.
- We will only share information with people that need to know as and when they need it.

5 WE WILL HELP YOU STAY IN TOUCH WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU

- We will support you to keep in touch with friends and family.
- We will help you to stay in touch with previous foster families, friends and other people who are important to you where possible and if this is what you want to happen.
- If this can't happen, we will be upfront with you, and explain in detail the reasons why.
- We will help keep things safe that are important to you.
- We will make sure that you understand what Your Story Work is.

6 WE WILL MAKE SURE YOU HAVE NAMED WORKERS, WHO WILL STAY WITH YOU WHILST YOU GROW UP, WHENEVER POSSIBLE

- We will provide you with a qualified named Social Worker.
- We will make sure you have stability. Your worker will only be changed when it is absolutely necessary.
- Your worker will always send you a goodbye card when they leave or complete a goodbye visit.
- We will make sure that all workers employed by Cheshire West and Chester are safe people to be around children.
- All workers will let you know when they will visit and tell you if they can't make it.
- We will let you know ways to contact your worker and if you leave a message for them, someone will get back to you as soon as possible and ALWAYS within 2 working days.
- When your Social Worker meets with you in a public place they must not wear their ID Badge if you don't want them to.
- We will write to you, call you and use text messaging and emails to contact you unless you tell us differently.
- Your Social Worker will tell you about your entitlements like -
 - The Children in Care Council (CICC)
 - The CICC Trust Fund
 - The Free Leisure Pass
 - Advocacy Service and what it does
 - Independent Visitor Service and what it is.
 - The Pupil Premium Plus.
 - Caring to Care Service and what it is for.

7 WE WILL SUPPORT YOU TO HAVE DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

- We will help you find activities, hobbies and clubs that you enjoy. We will support you to be able to join in with these.
- We will help you access community resources.
- We will help you apply to the Trust Fund. This is a discretionary fund that is assessed on a case by case basis. Funding is not guaranteed.
- We will reward and celebrate achievements in your lives and education.
- We will offer you a free leisure pass.
- We will give you support in all aspects of your life. To give you more support and opportunities you can apply for money from the CICC Trust Fund.

8 WE WILL HELP YOU TO KEEP HEALTHY AND WELL

- We will help you access appropriate and clear information about your health.
- We will make sure all hospital/ GP and dental appointments are kept and that you are supported to attend.
- We will give you guidance about healthy living, diet and exercise.
- We will give you a free Swim Pass to you and your Carer.
- We will let you know where and how to get confidential help and advice.
- We will make sure there are safe places for you to play, that you can get to easily.
- We will contribute to issues around road safety and environmental concerns that affect your health, as a good parent would do.
- We will provide you with access to the 'Caring to Care' service.
- We will make sure you know how to access Mental Health Services.

9 WE WILL HELP AND SUPPORT YOU TO SORT OUT ANY PROBLEMS OR WORRIES YOU HAVE

- We will support you if you have a comment, complaint or grievance to make.
- If you are unhappy about something we will support you to make a complaint.
- We will make sure that you can contact an independent advocate easily to help you with this.
- We will make sure that you can speak to who you need to about any concerns or issues you may have. We will make sure you know how to get hold of them, this may mean having access to a phone and if you have no credit on your mobile we will help you with this.
- Lead council members and senior staff responsible for children's services will make sure that our complaints system is easily accessible to you.
- All Care Leavers will have a named Personal Advisor.
- We will provide you with information and support through the Local Offer For Care Leavers and make sure you know about this.

10 WE WILL HELP YOU WITH YOUR FUTURE

- We will make sure that YOU WILL NOT pay Council Tax until you are 21 if you live in Cheshire West and Chester.
- We will support you to apply for apprenticeships within the council.
- We will support you to have a range of high quality work experience placements.
- The council will act as a 'FAMILY' firm and give you different opportunities where possible.
- We will give you practical help like some starter driving lessons, interview clothing and different experiences.
- We will help you to learn about how to manage your finances.
- We will help you fill out forms with other agencies such as housing and help you with all the negotiations.
- We will support you if you make mistakes and help you get back on track.

5) National Context

The Children Act (1989) remains our key legislation with relation to our legal duty to children and young people who reside in our borough, which includes the local authority responsibility duty to investigate, the legal remit of a child or young person entering local authority care, and specifically for this strategy; section 22G as the local authority duty to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area.

Working Together 2021 is the key piece of national guidance that for the purpose of this strategy recognises the partnership responsibility for supporting children and families, including those children in our care.

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) strengthened the role of local authorities as corporate parents and sets out what it means to be a good corporate parent and set out principles for local authorities to be the best corporate parent it can be. It introduced the duty to publish on the council's local offer, including both the statutory entitlements for Children in Care and what else is on offer locally. The Act also introduced the requirement for local authorities to provide optional personal advisors for care leavers, regardless of whether they intend to pursue education or training. Corporate parenting is founded on the principle that the local authority should offer the kind of support that any good parent would provide to their own children. Agencies which are corporate parents include the local authority, education and further education providers, housing, DWP, police etc.

The National Care Leavers Strategy (2013) is based on the principles for good corporate parenting and sets out the government's commitment to remove some of the practical barriers that care leavers face as they progress into adulthood. The government aimed to see holistic and quality support provided in all mainstream and specialist services by: local authorities; Jobcentre plus; housing; health bodies; the justice system; and, educational institutions.

In 2016, the Keep on Caring strategy laid out a vision and aims for supporting young people from care to independence. It stated that in the best performing authorities, effective partnerships with Housing Services were providing care leavers with a range of independent and semi-independent accommodation options to reflect their different levels of readiness for independent living. The strategy identified five outcomes for care leavers to: be better prepared and supported to live independently, have improved access to education, training and employment, be experiencing stability and feeling safe and secure, have improved access to health support, and be achieving financial stability. Through provision of accommodation, these outcomes can be supported by providing a safe and stable place to live.

The implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014, part 5 (98) means that local authorities in England are required to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for fostered young people until age 21, where this is what they and their

foster carers want and it is line with the welfare of the young person. 'Staying Put' provides the sort of gradual transition to adulthood that is enjoyed by the majority of young people in the general population. The 'Staying Close' policy is for young people leaving residential care, which will enable young people to live independently, in a location close to their children's home with ongoing support from that home. Both critical elements for this strategy to consider.

For those care leavers who do become homeless or are at risk of homelessness, guidance for local authorities was published in 2018 and updated in 2021, which outlines approaches to suitable accommodation for care leavers. This includes:

- Housing authorities and children's services authorities should adopt a shared strategic approach.
- All authorities should be aware that care leavers who are homeless will be particularly vulnerable and in need of support.
- There should be no blanket presumption that at 18 a young person who has left care will be ready for their own tenancy; this should be a matter of individual assessment.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation, including hotels and nightly let accommodation with shared facilities, is **not** considered suitable for care leavers aged under 25 and should only be used in exceptional circumstances and for short periods.
- The specific needs and circumstances of care leavers should be taken into account in determining suitability of accommodation in relation to its location.
- Housing authorities may want to involve Personal Advisers in decisions about the suitability of accommodation and inform them prior to making an offer of accommodation, with the young person's consent.

The Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) released an interim report in 2021 which found that there is a shortage of appropriate places for local authorities seeking to place children, and that there are often no placements available, including within children's homes or with foster carers or in independent accommodation, that fully meet the needs of children – with some being too far away or requiring siblings to be separated. The report states that because local authorities must find an appropriate placement, often under considerable time pressure, they are often paying private providers for those placements at prices that are higher than they would otherwise be. Further report consideration and action is being progressed in relation to this report,

in line with the independent review of Children's Social Care – currently in process nationally.

What does suitable accommodation look like for a young person?

Central government concludes the 84% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation, however, only 67% feel their accommodation is right for them and one third of care leavers do not feel safe in their accommodation. As of 2021, the government has now introduced a ban on the placement of under-16s in semi-independent or unregulated provision. Research in Practice outlines the following matters which should be considered when determining the suitability of accommodation:

- Young person's views about accommodation
- Young person's understanding of their rights and responsibilities in relation to the accommodation
- Young person's understanding of funding arrangements
- Facilities and services
- State of repair
- Safety
- Location
- Support available

In 2021, the Case for Change report, the first report of an independent review of children's social care led by Josh McAllister, presented ongoing issues and issues highlighted by the pandemic which need tackling in UK social care. The report states that urgent action is needed for children who need secure accommodation, given longstanding issues and growing pressures on secure accommodation. More homes, however, are not necessarily a long-term solution. The report states that children entering care are not getting the mental health support they need, and recommends that there is more to be done to support children in care to achieve their potential, including providing more consistent support across areas and the homes they live in.

The Research in Practice strategic briefing paper (2017) highlights research that has shown that care leavers feel ill-equipped to deal with the responsibility of managing accommodation, maintaining education or finding work and the challenges

of accessing services and systems that are complex and often inflexible. This contrasts to the experiences of most young people, a fifth of whom remain living with parents until at least age 26 and most of whom receive practical and emotional support, retaining the option to return home for short or long periods of time long after they move out. This strategic briefing also set out guidance for what local authorities can do, including providing 'training flats' where young people can experience living alone while they remain in their care placement, and having a focus on supporting young people with emotional resilience and relationships, in addition to the help learning practical skills.

The Case for Change report, Bright Spots and Research in Practice all found that children often have to leave their residential home and enter independent or semi-independent accommodation before they are ready. Continuity of relationships, suitable and sustainable accommodation a support to develop skills to live independently can all help to ease this transition for young people.

This leads to critical consideration for this strategy to consider our current and future population of children in care and care leavers, to develop our priorities for progress to continue to ensure we can meet our duty to provide suitable accommodation alongside looking at how we build upon areas of strength within our current offer.

We know in particular that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a national impact upon children entering care and the availability of suitable accommodation

We recognise that our current accommodation offer is not able to continue to meet the demand faced within our borough, in particular in our aspiration to give our children opportunities to live in our care within (or close) to their home authority.

6) Local Context

The ***Council Plan (2020-24)*** commits to playing a part to support young people to get the best start in life and achieve their full potential by supporting young people leaving our care into independence and taking a whole borough approach to improving our accommodation offer. The Plan demonstrates dedication to increase spending on children and families, including the use of Council resources directed to housing for Children in Care.

This strategy aligns with the Council Plan as it will set out a strategic plan, supported by a detailed action plan, of how accommodation for Children in Care and Care Leavers and the surrounding support will be developed over the coming years.

The ***Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2019-23)*** set out five priorities; being a good corporate parent, quality care experience, good health and wellbeing, to achieve potential, and successful transitions to adulthood. This Strategy builds upon this as it seeks to consider our local context and how we can increase the accommodation offer across the borough for both our Children in our Care and our Care Leavers; to ensure that this accommodation offer is in line with growing trends and need specific.

Cheshire West and Chester Sufficiency Duty Strategy 2021-2024

This was developed with Children in Care and Care Leavers in mind and, when placing them in accommodation, highlights the importance of:

- young people understanding what is happening to them in terms of care services and processes
- not being separated from siblings where appropriate and as part of the child's plan.
- having the opportunity to visit the placement first before moving in and
- having choice about where they are going to live

Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to promote educational achievement as an integral part of their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children they look after. Therefore, as Corporate Parent, we should:

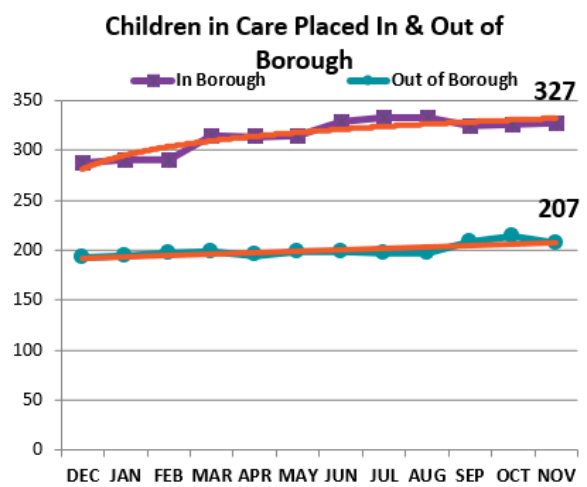
- try to ensure that the child or young person can continue in the same school even if they can no longer live in the immediate neighbourhood if it is in their best interests; in order to fulfil this obligation transport may need to be provided.
- Ensure that prior to changing placement and disrupting the child's education provision, all other options have been explored and exhausted and that the reasons recorded within the PEP.
- Consult with the Virtual School Head Teacher and the Designated Teacher of the school that the young person is registered with, prior to a placement decision being made. If placement involves a change of school then the designated teacher of the proposed new school will also be consulted and the PEP amended accordingly.

- Ensure that where it is impossible for the child to remain in his/her existing educational placement the care placement will not, except in an emergency, be made unless the education provision is made at the same time.
- Consult with the Virtual School Head Teacher and the Designated Teacher of the school that the young person is registered with, prior to a placement decision being made. If placement involves a change of school then the designated teacher of the proposed new school will also be consulted and the PEP amended accordingly.
- Ensure that where it is impossible for the child to remain in his/her existing educational placement the care placement will not, except in an emergency, be made unless the education provision is made at the same time.

Current Picture – needs assessment summary

As of November 2021, Cheshire West and Chester have responsibility for 534 children in our care, of which 10% are due to reach 18 years of age in the next 12 months.

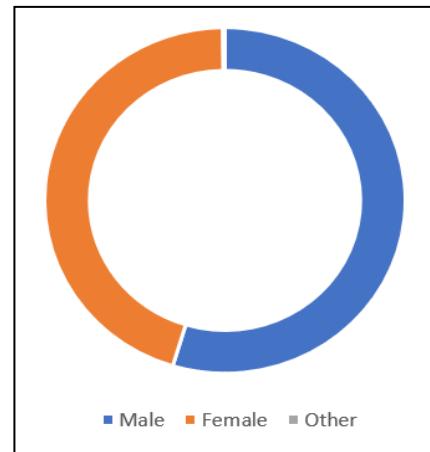
Of these 534 children in our care, this can be broken down into 327 children living within borough and 207 children living out of our borough.



The age range of the children living in our care is broken down as follows:

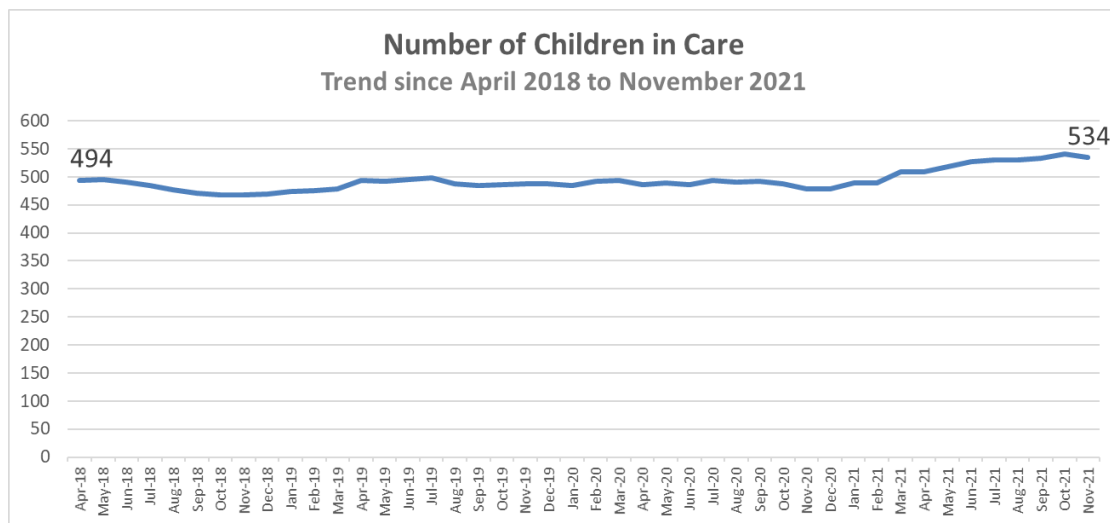
Age Group	No. CIC	% CIC
Under One	19	3.6%
1 to 4	73	13.7%
5 to 9	124	23.2%
10 to 15	197	36.9%
16 Upwards	121	22.7%
Total	534	100.0%

The gender recorded of children in our care can be shown as slightly greater male gender:



It is also notable that 131 (24.5%) of the children in our care have an Education Health Care statutory plans, and 77 of the children in our care (14.4%) have special education need support. Every child in our care has a Personal Education Plan.

Our children in care numbers have shown an overall growth in numbers between April 2018 and November 2021, with some noted increase in growth particularly during 2021.



Since 2018/19, the number of children in our care has gradually increased, with a significant rise since January 2021, which is expected to continue in the future. Demand on services has intensified not only numerically, but in complexity as children and young people are presenting with multiple and complex needs.

We continue to have more children in our care than the national average, and we are seeing this grow at a higher rate than has been seen over the last 4 years, alongside costs of placements for children increasingly difficult to locate and increasingly

expensive. We have also reflected upon the impact of the pandemic upon our carer workforce.

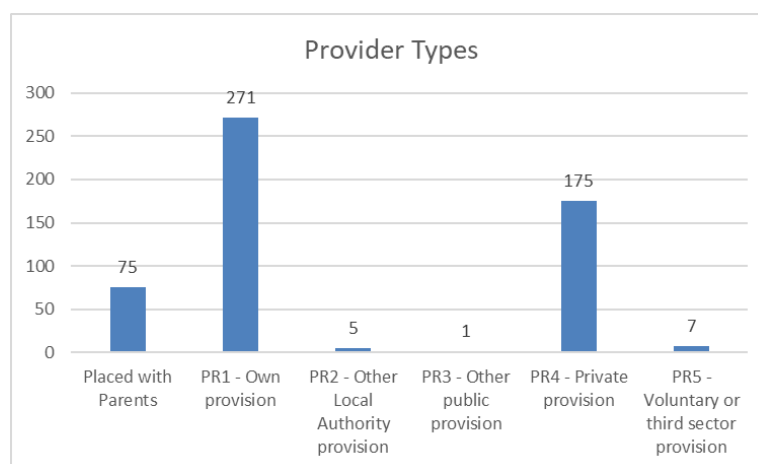
Demand on services has intensified not only numerically, but in complexity as children and young people are presenting with multiple and complex needs.

As our children in our care numbers have grown, so has the pressure upon our family time offer for children to have the opportunity to maintain positive relationships, develop their understanding of identity, and for the appropriate consideration of potential reunification. Our accommodation for family time is currently very limited and not fit for purpose. We have a real aspiration that family times is a positive experience for both children and their families, therefore we need to swiftly consider the appropriate venue and space for the sufficient resourcing of high quality family time.

Types of home for our children and young people in our care

There are many different types of homes for the children in our care, which includes placement with parent arrangements alongside both foster carer provision and residential provision. For the children in our care who are aged 16 or 17, semi-independent provision is considered whereby these young people have support rather than care needs as we look to support them towards independence in the future.

The breakdown of our placement types for the children in our care to live are broken down below:



In-house Fostering Provision

Our in house Mainstream Fostering placements have been fully utilised during 2020/2021 and as of November 2021 have only one true vacancy. There are two sets of foster carers lined up for children who have ART referrals. At November 2021, he

eight households that have been approved since April 2021 are all matched with children according to what they are offering.

We have 120 Mainstream Foster Carer households and 71 Connected People Foster Carer households. There are eight ongoing mainstream assessments with one application to be allocated as at November 2021. Skills to Foster training has been offered online since the beginning of the pandemic and this has enabled the Supervising Social Worker who presents this to fully meet the needs of applicants in respect of times, dates etc.

We have continued to have a higher level of retirements/resignations during 2020/2021, with twelve fostering households resigning between 1/4/21 and 30/11/21. Six of these resignations were retirements, and the rest were due to changes in family circumstances (one family moved to live abroad). The pandemic has definitely impacted upon Carers' decisions to retire/resign since March 2020.

Our Foster4 Recruitment Hub continues to take the lead on the recruitment of foster carers for Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Foster4 are tasked with delivering all marketing activity to generate enquiries and undertake the initial recruitment activity in relation to fostering. This includes handling enquiries that they receive face-to-face, via telephone, email, web form and social media; providing advice to prospective carers; delivering information sessions, and completing expressions of interest, before handing over to the fostering team. The Mainstream Fostering Team then undertake the remainder of the recruitment process, with Foster4 continuing to track the progress of applicants through to approval, reporting quarterly on trends and progress to the Foster4 Management Board. Foster4 also play a role in retaining and supporting existing carers, delivering many engagement initiatives throughout the year.

As a result of Covid 19, the fostering sector is facing huge national challenges in terms of recruitment and retention of foster carers. The COVID-19 pandemic hitting just 18 months into Foster4's operation has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the traction that had been gained. Enquiries have been very 'peak and trough', in line with the course of the pandemic, with many people enquiring initially as a result of being furloughed or losing their jobs, and either not being suitable or then not wanting to continue with their application as things stabilised.

Pleasingly however, conversion rate from expression of interest to approval is now at an all-time high, at 26.7%; meaning over a quarter of those completing expression of interest forms now go on to become approved foster carers. This evidences that the Foster4 team are providing a robust advice and screening service, ensuring candidates who are referred through to the fostering team are high quality and 'ready to go', meaning greater efficiency for the fostering teams, with less time and money spent on undertaking negative initial assessment visits and incomplete assessments.

The Mainstream Fostering team respond within 24 hours on weekdays (and immediately after the weekend) to any Expressions of Interest. Initial Visits are arranged to suit the needs of the Enquirer and are undertaken by a Supervising Social Worker. Once an application form is received, it is allocated immediately in most cases and assessments are completed within 16/18 weeks.

Our Local Authority run Children's Homes

Cheshire West and Chester has a four-bed residential home, for young people aged 12 and up, situated within the Chester locality of the borough. **Woodlea** as a home provides care for children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The length of placement at the home will vary in accordance with the individual needs; the home takes both planned and emergency admissions. Care is provided by skilled residential care workers who have received relevant training, this includes specialist training in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, a model that teaches staff how to respond effectively to children and young people in crisis situations and helps young people to develop constructive ways to deal with frustration, anger, rejection and depression (or complex emotional traumas that they may be experiencing).

Cheshire West and Chester also has a two bed therapeutic Children's Home in Elton; **Arden**, for children under 12 years of age. A child can live at the home for up to two years, whilst they receive therapy and preparation to enable them to return to live in a family setting. To provide a therapeutic intervention the staff team are supported by The Caring to Care Team - a commissioned specialist service (consisting of Therapists and Psychologists) ringfenced to support the emotional and psychological wellbeing of our children in care. The young people all attend local education provision and receive support through a dedicated mental health practitioner.

Both homes have been judged as being good by Ofsted, with monthly independent visiting and review established through NYAS. At the last NYAS review, the homes were both found to benefit its young people by engaging them in education and/or employment and support with future planning. The home environments were deemed to be suitable for children and young people, with a safe and pleasant family space and private bedrooms. Children and young people are consulted with on a daily basis about their lives, which activities they would like and choice for direction of their bedrooms. The reports regularly highlight that both homes consider views, wishes and feelings of the children and young people regularly by providing weekly planners, holding monthly house meetings, keeping achievement logs for praise and reward, and one to one direct work sessions.

We currently have no in-house solo provision for a child in our care with complex needs. This presents particularly challenges when considering out of hours urgent response or support young people where detailed risk management is required.

Independent Fostering Provision / External Residential Care and Semi Independent Provision (including independent Parent and Child Placements

When we are unable to meet the needs of our children and young people in or care through in-house fostering provision, we then approach independent fostering agencies to explore families who can provide care for our children. A similar approach is undertaken where we are unable to meet the needs of our children and young people in or care through in-house residential provision; our approach is to then work with external providers of children's residential care.

The local authority engages external fostering, residential and supported living placement through our Access to Resources Team. Placement requests are circulated electronically and then following up by personal contact with providers by the team. These requests are supported by the social worker completed a trauma informed referral through to our Access to Resources Team for placement matching.

The Access to Resource Team is currently responsible for commissioning the following provision for children and young people who need to be cared for by the local authority:

- Independent fostering placements
- Residential placements (care only)
- Residential care and education placements (38 and 52 weeks)
- Short breaks and respite placements (fostering and residential)
- Parent and child (fostering and supported living)
- Supported living provision in either a tenancy or group home environment.
- Staffing support

All external placements are currently commissioned on a spot purchase basis, primarily through the Northwest commissioning frameworks

Providers on the North West Commissioning Frameworks have been through a tendering process which has resulted in selection on the basis of value for money and quality responses to tender questions. A standard set of terms and conditions for each placement type is in place with on-contract providers.

The Access to Resource Team will only commission placements with other providers when there are no placements available that can meet the needs of our children and young people and only after the quality of the provision has been established through scrutinising the provider's statement of purpose and Inspection Reports and the taking of references from other placing local authorities.

Adoption

Adoption is considered for the children in our care where we consider nothing else will do in order to provide a plan of permanence and stability. This necessarily requires robust consideration, evidence and court oversight.

The Government Policy Paper, "Regionalising Adoption" in 2015. All Local Authorities were required to regionalise their adoption services by 2020 and so a partnership in the form of Together for Adoption, (TfA) was created. The Regional Adoption Agency is a shared Local Authority Service in the form of five partners; Halton, Cheshire West and Chester, St Helens, Warrington, and Wigan. The service went live on the 1st September 2017 and since that date, has had responsibility for discharging the responsibilities of the five Local Authorities. Wigan Council is the host Authority, and Cheshire West and Chester Council operates as the lead commissioner. The staff are currently seconded to TFA.

Together for Adoption has three Voluntary Adoption Agencies included as part of our development and governance of its adoption service; Adoption Matters, Caritas Care, and Nugent Care. Their inclusion draws on the best practice from each of the partners and helps meet changing demands through the pooling of expertise and resources.

Achieving adoption for children contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in line with priorities outlined in our Council's plans. The shared adoption service is part of the wider Children's Social Care Service in all five local authorities and reflects each council's commitment to 'best practice' in the provision of an innovative adoption service.

Certain adoption functions that are central to adoption care planning for a child in care are retained by each LA. Together for Adoption executes service delivery in relation to:

- a) The recruitment of persons as prospective adopters.
- b) The assessment of applicant's suitability to adopt a child.
- c) The approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt a child.
- d) Identifying a particular approved prospective adopter with whom it proposes a child be placed, as soon as reasonably practicable.
- e) Managing the process by which recommendations in individual cases are formally submitted to Adoption Panels and to facilitate consideration by the relevant local authority decision-maker.
- f) The provision of adoption support services, including facilitating post adoption contact with birth families, and access to birth records for adopted adults.

A snapshot of our current adoption figures as at November 2021:

Last year in Cheshire West and Chester – 25 children adopted and to date this year's adoption activity is as follows:

Number of children with ADM decision of should be placed for adoption is currently 10 children.

Number of children with a Placement Order but not yet matched/placed for adoption is currently 16 children.

Number of children placed for Adoption (Adoption Order not yet applied for/granted) is currently 10.

Out of Borough Placements

An out of borough “placement” is any placement not in the local authority’s geographical boundaries. These include placements in local authorities which have a geographical boundary with the home local authority .

A distant “placement” is a placement “outside the area of the responsible authority and not within the area of any adjoining local authority”.

Both these types of placement cover the cross range of different offers; we recognise in particular family and friends can live out of borough but can be significant link to positive identity and belonging.

Cheshire West and Chester currently has 61.2% of children and young people residing in provision within our Borough, via both in-house and independent provision. This will also include a number of our own foster carers who live outside of the borough and outside of a 20-mile radius. This is primarily due to the geographical size of our borough.

Every child and young person who is looked after outside of the borough has a detailed plan and individual placement agreement, which focuses clearly on their needs and how the provision is meeting them.

This includes working towards their care moving back in borough where this is suitable. However, for some young people who require specialist care or a requirement for specialist education provision then care outside of the borough is entirely appropriate.

Provider types by In/Out borough	IN	OUT	Total
Placed with Parents	61	14	75
PR1 - Own provision	203	68	271
PR2 - Other Local Authority provision		5	5
PR3 - Other public provision		1	1
PR4 - Private provision	62	113	175
PR5 - Voluntary or third sector provision	1	6	7
Total	327	207	534

National/local comparison

Children looked after as of by placement type from last national submission 2021 (DfE):

Placement type	England	North West	Statistical Neighbours	Cheshire West & Chester
Foster placements	71%	67%	70%	329 (65%)
Placed for adoption	3%	2%	3%	9 (2%)
Placement with parents	7%	13%	9%	83 (16%)
Other placement in the community	2%	2%	2%	0 (0%)
Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation	14%	12%	15%	84 (17%)
Other residential settings	1%	2%	1%	c
Residential schools	~	~	0%	c
Other placement	1%	1%	2%	0 (0%)

This data highlights that we have overarching similar performance to our regional and national comparators, although of note is our slightly higher rates of both children placed in children's homes or semi independent accommodation, alongside placement with parent arrangements. This is key to consider as we look at our priorities for accommodation for the future.

Key challenges regarding current placement sufficiency

There are key local, regional and national challenges in relation to placement sufficiency:

- Lack of local, regional and national sufficiency. Compounded by the number of Out of Borough placements from other local authorities within the Cheshire West and Chester footprint.
- Rising complexity of the needs of our children and young people - increasingly challenging for foster carers to manage.
 - *Increase in teenagers using high risk self-harming strategy as a coping mechanism, e.g. cutting, overdose, ligaturing.*

- *Impact of chronic neglect compounded by autism spectrum disorders/ADHD*
- *Increase in number of young people exhibiting complex sexually inappropriate & harmful behaviours.*
- *Increase in young people being sexually and criminally exploited.*
- *Increase in number of adoption breakdowns and the impact of emotional harm caused by the rejection.*
- *Increased number of young people aged 15yrs requiring care who are exhibiting violent behaviours.*
- Young people placed in out of borough residential care placement often choose to remain in that area as they move in to support living settings. However, they are not eligible for social housing as a care leaver outside of our borough.
- There is a lack of integrated residential care and education provision in borough which contributes to the need for distant placements, which is notable given number of the children in our care required additional support in education.
- The demand for care provision outstrips supply and we are competing with other local authorities for fostering and residential beds within the borough.
- There are currently insufficient fostering beds within the borough to meet demand.

Impact of Complexity on Placement Finding

- *Lack of foster care availability fuels the need for residential care.*
- *Struggle to match complex young people in a family/foster care setting.*
- *Need for high cost solo and dual bed placements to meet need and manage risk.*
- *Need for higher support ratio's 1:1, 2:1 support, waking nights to manage risk and protect both the child alongside the reputation for the Council as the corporate parent.*
- *Increased scrutiny and direction during court process.*

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

As at November 2021, Cheshire West and Chester care for 8 Asylum Seeking Children and Young People under the age of 18 years. These young people are predominantly placed in supported accommodation with dedicated support that considers their independent living skills, supporting them within appropriate education, connecting them culturally to a community, and ensuring they are fully supported in their application for leave to remain.

Care leavers

Cheshire West and Chester Children's Service has a comprehensive Local Offer to its care leavers. Some of the initiatives within the Local offer are:

- Partner with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) whereby Children's Services require a one bed tenancy for a young person aged 16 – 17 which they move into and are provided with floating support, as they make the transition to living independently. then on their 18th birthday the tenancy is transferred to the young person. This combats against a care leaver developing a transient lifestyle and affords them the security of their own home; so, they can concentrate on education, training and employment, so to achieve good outcome.
- As a proactive Corporate Parent Cheshire West Council gives all its cares leaver absolute housing priority above all those in other housing priority groups.
- To enhance accommodation choice and affordability the Council pays the Council Tax for all its care leavers up to the age of 25.

Other strategic approaches are:

- Strategically commission the 'floating support' elements of provision historically provided as part of spot purchase arrangements.
- The Supporting Independence Team work with young people earlier (from the age of 15) with young people placed in residential care to ensure a smoother transition to semi independence.

7) Voice of our children in care and care leavers

We have ensured consultation with our children in care and care leavers throughout the development of this strategy. This consultation has included engagement via our children in care council and care leavers forum (we have both a younger age and older age children in care council, so the questions were age appropriate and reflected below), alongside survey's with targeted exploration of accommodation themes across all of our children in our care and all of those young adults who have left our care.

The below detail summarises the key powerful feedback from those who are care experienced:

'It's fun and I have lots of food.'

'Because I am safe and secure, we have lots of fun at the caravan.'

- **What is good about place young children in care council live?** - *Close to school, treated like a real child and one of the family, carers treat the same as others in the house, those in foster placements in school look out for each other, house live in is "home" and so is perfect, area live in is important, like shops and people nearby.*

'The family I live with are amazing and I couldn't ask for a better family. They treat me like their own which reassures me that everything is going to be OK.'

- **What is good about place older children in care council/care leaver forum live?** – *living in area gives independence and good links, good space, garden, nice and quiet, nice neighbours, Staying Put has been helpful and like where living, people been in respite with have been ok but hard to have to move stuff, place moved into was nice and refurbished and this helped to settle in, support from neighbours.*

'I love living in my own place in Chester. Having the freedom to do it up to how I like it. I am currently re-doing my hallway. I have lived on my own for 3 years now.'

'Better if carers were a bit more understanding sometimes but nobody is perfect.'

- **What could be better about where young children in care council live?** – *if moved out of area this can be hard, lose friends, school far away.*

'I want more animals.'

- **What could be better about where older children in care council/care leaver forum live?** – one felt flats feel not great, cracks and mould, noisy neighbours can be difficult, thin walls, not enough buses in area, when moving away from staying put not easy to get accommodation with people not in care.

I am happy with where I am now and I am settled. It'll be hard to move somewhere else for uni and I am uncertain about where I can stay after Christmas but I guess I shouldn't worry too much and enjoy it for now'.

- **What is important about where young children in care council live?** – near family, should keep together with siblings when can, keeping sibling bonds, important that foster carers are caring and make me feel special, foster carers that create special days, carers that are kind and support with school work, better quality accommodation, having leisure activities close by.

'I'd like to always live in a house like I'm living in now'

- **What is important about where older children in care council/care leaver forum live?** - area and location are most important, cleanliness of accommodation too, regular transport links, option to be with people outside of care, having choice is important.

'I'd like to live in my own flat.'

Our aspiration is that every child in our care and young person leaving care reflects the feedback given by one young person:

'I love where I live and I wouldn't change anything about it here'.

8) Our Local Needs Analysis

From reviewing all our current data trends and practice regarding accommodation for our children in our care and our care leavers, the following key pressures can be summarised:

Our key pressures

- *Local foster carers who can confidently support children and young people with complex needs or contextual risk*
- *Local children's home provision within borough which prioritises our own children.*
- *Solo or emergency children's home provision where we need to respond to a crisis position. We currently have no in house solo provision for a child in our care with complex needs.*
- *Care leaver group accommodation capacity*
- *Appropriate accommodation for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children where this is close to relevant community and cultural networks.*
- *Sufficient single bed flats for our care leavers with floating support*
- *Accommodation where young people in our care can learn skills for independent living*
- *Accommodation for children with escalating mental health needs or ready for discharge from Tier 4 hospital stay where return home is not an option.*
- *The rising costs of care provision alongside availability of placements nationally.*

We know that we cannot as a corporate parent do nothing in response to the challenges we are facing.

We are facing a critical point where we need to grow our accommodation options for our children and young people both in our care and leaving care – this will both ensure we are acting as a responsible and ambitious corporate parent, alongside recognising where we have delivered strong in-house models that can be built upon collaboratively or where we can develop collaborative relationships to commission key targeted options.

9)  **Our Key Priorities:** 

1) Foster carers who can support children and young people with complex needs or contextual risk

- *Salaried carers to be explored who can build the offer particularly around young people to enable them to remain in a family environment and remaining within borough.*

2) Local children's home provision

- *Building upon the positive outcomes of our own in borough provision; increasing the number of beds for children to live in high quality local provision, owned and run by their corporate parents.*

3) Solo or emergency children's home provision

- *Solo bed registered provision for our complex young people requiring a crisis response or a period of solo accommodation that meets need and ensures stabilisation with wrap around local support*

4) Care leaver group accommodation

- *Building upon our local Brook Street Accommodation offer; developing increase offer of support group living accommodation with relevant support for independence, local to community support and transport links.*

5) Supported tenancy for our care leavers with floating support

- *Priority options of quality accommodation owned by the corporate parent and shared with the young people with whom we have a responsibility as a corporate parent; in borough for our care leavers close to their area of identity and embedding them into communities.*

6) Accommodation where young people in our care can learn skills for independent living

- *Local accommodation where young people preparing to leave local authority care can be intensively supported to develop those skills for independent living whilst still have the support of established care provision.*

7) Children with escalating mental health needs or ready for discharge from Tier 4 hospital stay where return home is not an option

- *We are acutely aware that specialist provision to support vulnerable children and young people where they are experiencing complex mental health needs is limited. We recognise we are seeing a growing demand through our front door of families experiencing mental health crisis and locating therapeutic placements to meet this need where a child cannot return safely home is a significant challenge.*
- *“The Nook” is a current proposal which we are exploring collaboratively with our CWP colleagues to support children and families where we can work together to support transition out of Tier 4 provision and prevent the child experiencing entry to our care, rather a supportive and therapeutic offer to enable a supported discharge and transition home.*

8) Providing accommodation that is fit for purpose for children in our care for family time, alongside a venue suitable for relevant participation and inclusion

- *As our children in our care numbers have grown, so has the pressure upon our family time offer for children to have the opportunity to maintain positive relationships, develop their understanding of identity, and for the appropriate consideration of potential reunification. Our accommodation for family time is currently very limited and not fit for purpose, it relates to buildings currently requiring significant refurbishment. We have a real aspiration that family times is a positive experience for both children and their families, therefore we need to swiftly consider the appropriate venue and space for the sufficient resourcing of high quality family time.*

9) *Integrated residential care with education*

Looking to explore increased provision of residential care which is combined with education provision to support children in our care with the most complex and challenging needs the option of education

10) How will we achieve this?

We recognise these nine key priorities are wide ranging and will have individual time scales. The timescales provided are aspirational and mapped out initially to provide indicative planning, however it needs to be recognised that these will need to be flexible based on identification of appropriate relevant properties, relevant staffing recruitment, and where necessary regulator registration.

Priority	Objective	Timescale
1) Foster Carers who can support children and young people with complex needs or contextual risk	<i>i) Develop a specialist carer role description and outline that focuses on a professional career choice to be a specialist carer.</i>	<i>April 2022</i>
	<i>ii) Start staff recruitment to wrap around team for this specialist carer role, including publicity campaign</i>	<i>July 2022</i>
	<i>iii) Targeted recruitment to initial two specialist foster carers.</i>	<i>May 2023</i>
	<i>iv) Review impact of specialist foster carer roles.</i>	<i>July 2024</i>
	<i>v) Targeted recruitment of two further specialist foster carer roles.</i>	<i>July 2024</i>
	<i>vi) Targeted recruitment of another two further specialist foster carer roles.</i>	<i>July 2025</i>

<p>2) Grow our local children's home provision</p>	<p>i) Recruit addition Children's Social Care senior manager capacity to ensure there is appropriate resource to develop our children's residential provision.</p> <p>ii) Develop key business case proposals relating to the growth of our local children's homes – with a focus on two further children's homes being proposed to care for up to eight children overall.</p> <p>iii) Identification of appropriate property 1.</p> <p>iv) Develop and Open property 1, including ensuring staffing and appropriate Ofsted registration.</p> <p>v) Identification of appropriate property 2.</p> <p>vi) Develop and Open property 2, including ensuring staffing and appropriate Ofsted registration.</p>	<p>February 2022</p> <p>May 2022</p> <p>Sept 2022</p> <p>Sept 2023</p> <p>Jan 2023</p> <p>Jan 2024</p>
<p>3) Develop a solo / emergency children's home provision</p>	<p>i) As per 2i).</p> <p>ii) Develop key business case to analyse target cohort for registration consideration for registered solo/emergency provision, including collaboration with key partnerships.</p> <p>iii) Identification of appropriate property.</p> <p>iv) Develop and Open property 2, including ensuring staffing and appropriate Ofsted registration.</p>	<p>February 2022</p> <p>July 2022</p> <p>Dec 2022</p> <p>Sept 2023</p>
<p>4) Develop care leaver group accommodation</p>	<p>i) Develop key business case proposals relating to the</p>	<p>March 2022</p>

	<p><i>growth of our care leaver group provision, building upon our established model and determining priority locations which match need against our cohort.</i></p> <p><i>ii) Commissioning exploration of opportunities aligned with our business case agreed model.</i></p> <p><i>iii) Develop and open property 1.</i></p> <p><i>iv) Develop and open property 2.</i></p>	<p><i>June 2022</i></p> <p><i>Dec 2022</i></p> <p><i>Sept 2023</i></p>
<p>5) Grow supported tenancies for our care leavers with floating support</p>	<p><i>i) Develop key business case proposals relating to the growth of our care leaver tenancy requirements, working with our key stakeholders and determining priority locations which match need against our cohort.</i></p> <p><i>ii) Planned model of growth in offer, including commissioning exploration for floating support alongside tenancy availability.</i></p> <p><i>iii) Agreed accommodation stock for our care leavers in place and reviewed quarterly.</i></p> <p><i>iv) Collaboratively explore the development of a Supported Living Provider Panel for young people and young adults leaving our care with needs that challenge services – to enable wider offer to our care leavers across the borough where we can champion them as a corporate parent.</i></p>	<p><i>April 2022</i></p> <p><i>July 2022</i></p> <p><i>Dec 2022</i></p> <p><i>Sept 2022</i></p>
<p>6) Develop accommodation where young people in</p>	<p><i>i) Develop key business case proposals relating to the</i></p>	<p><i>July 2022</i></p>

<p><i>our care can learn skills for independent living</i></p>	<p><i>needs of our young people and exploration of offer required.</i></p> <p><i>ii) Explore connectivity of opportunity with 5ii).</i></p> <p><i>iii) Aspiration for this provision to go live.</i></p>	<p><i>Aug 2022</i></p> <p><i>July 2023</i></p>
<p><i>7) Develop accommodation specifically catered to children with escalating mental health needs or where they are ready for discharge from Tier 4 provision but return home is not an option</i></p>	<p><i>i) Explore local need across bordering local authorities to consider opportunities for collaboration around commissioning residential therapeutic provision.</i></p> <p><i>ii) Business case to be developed to explore proposals that meet local need.</i></p> <p><i>iii) Work with our health colleagues to develop the current “The Nook” Proposal, seeking collaborative approach to preventing children with complex mental health needs entering local authority care or remaining in Tier 4 provision for long periods of time.</i></p>	<p><i>April 2022</i></p> <p><i>Sept 2022</i></p> <p><i>Sept 2022</i></p>
<p><i>8) Develop accommodation for the children in our care to experience high quality family time in a building that is fit for purpose</i></p>	<p><i>i) Business case to be developed to explore proposals that meet local need and reflect the challenges of the current family time environment. This will include opportunities to consider other areas of work with children and young people where we could create collaborative approaches to participation and inclusion.</i></p>	<p><i>July 2022</i></p>

	<i>ii) Explore Council property that could be developed to meet key need identified.</i>	<i>Sept 2022</i>
9) Develop integrated residential care within our borough which is combined with education provision	<i>i) Business case to be developed jointly with Education to explore proposals that meet the needs of our current cohort of children in our care requiring this provision and reflect the challenges of the current commissioning of these specific placements. This will include opportunities to collaborate with our local specialist education providers alongside exploration with private providers.</i>	<i>January 2023</i>

There is a key initial need to grow our Children’s Social Care Senior Manager establishment as the first priority in progressing this key action plan, recognising there is additional resource required for responsible individual oversight and strategic drive for the action plan.

11) What “Success” would look like?

When considering the recommendations within this strategy, in line with our outlined context and current local position, it is important to reflect back as to what we are trying to achieve and what this “success” would look like. By returning to our aspiration as a good corporate parent, a real success would overall see a greater number of our children in our care being able to live within our local authority footprint, a reduction in spent on residential provision out of borough, and ensuring a growth of comprehensive choice in local accommodation alongside wrap around support locally for our care leavers.

Specifically for Priority 1,2 and 3; success is very much around growing upon our local offer reflecting on our key areas of pressure and recognising the importance of specialist carers in meeting the needs of our children in care. We know in particular the success

of our local children's home provision through Arden and Woodlea is that we have good quality, outcome focused care for our children, with strong and stable staff teams.

When this also considers specifics of Priority 4,5 and 6; success would specifically mean greater choice and meeting individual needs of our care leavers, supporting towards independence and recognising their identity within their community.

In relation specifically to Priority 7, it is hoped that the outcome of the strategy would lead to less young people entering our care at point of Tier 4 discharge and ensuring a partnership approach to comprehensive support packages for our children on our footprint, linking to our local services.

In relation to Priority 8 and 9; we are really seeking to stimulate the provider market locally so they are ready and willing to work with us, building upon established positive relationships we have due to the quality of our work and care.

From a child's point of view – repeated positive feedback about their home and care will be the significant indicator of success.

We recognise all of these priorities are fundamentally about **relationships** – the relationships we have with our children in our care, our care leavers, our carers, our partners, and our providers on our local footprint. We would seek for our customer feedback to recognise the targeted approach to the growing accommodation offer to our children in care and care leavers, supported by the numbers of children placed either out of borough or in private provision reducing.