



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

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ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

ST HELENS SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2020-2027

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1. INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS OUR PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

We believe in supporting all our children and young people to have a safe and stable home where they can live and thrive.

We recognise that most children and young people are best brought up within their own families, however where this is not possible, we find a family or a home that best meets their needs and offers access to the support and opportunities needed for success and happiness in later life.

To meet this vision, we need to have the right home, in the right place, at the right time.

OUR OBJECTIVES

The Right Home: To secure high quality homes that meet the individual needs of our Children and Young People

The Right Place: To provide St Helens Children and Young People we look after with the appropriate homes in St Helens or the local area
Rarely, and only where it is in the best interests of the Child or young person the right place may be outside of our local area

The Right Time: We believe emergency moves for children and young people should be the exception, and that moves are in the child's timeframe and well planned

WHAT DO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WE LOOK AFTER ASK US TO REMEMBER

WE ARE NOT A POLICY OR PROCEDURE

YOU ARE WORKING WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES

NOT JUST A NAME ON A PAGE

ASK YOURSELF, WOULD THIS BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOUR CHILD?

OUR PRIORITIES

Working together with our children and young people to ensure they all have a positive start in life; our priorities are those things that together will make the biggest difference in the shortest time to improve the lives of our children and young people.

We will ensure that our children and young people are:

- Safe and protected from harm and abuse.
- Healthy, including vaccination take-up, dental hygiene, fitness, obesity, teenage pregnancy and social, emotional, and mental health.
- Aspirational that our children and young people are encouraged to make the most of their potential.

We will be obsessive about:

- **Inclusion:** we promote inclusion to reduce inequality. We actively work together to champion the needs of disadvantaged children and challenge every organisation and profession across the borough to do the same.
- **Attendance:** all learners of all ages have the right to the best quality of education
- **Wellbeing:** we focus on the needs of children and young people, rather than the needs of institutions or groups.

Supporting Priorities:

Prevention: providing early help and family hubs to support children on the edge of care and safely reduce the number of children that need to be looked after

Tackling Neglect: we will work with parents and ensure there is effective support and clear child protection plans in place.

Educational Attainment: by working with local schools as well as National Government to review the curriculum and help those in greatest need to catch-up.

Reducing Child Poverty and Inequality: we will work together to tackle the impact and prevalence of deprivation and poverty.

Permanency: every child and young person in care has a plan for achieving permanence at the earliest opportunity and they have a clear understanding of their plan for their future.

Safe and Stable Homes: we will ensure that all our children have a safe, stable home environment.

OUTCOMES WE WISH TO ACHIEVE

The Outcomes below are what our young people want to achieve.

They are based on feedback from children and young people about what is most important to them and as such they are central to our ambitions.

I am Healthy

I am happy, I am thriving, I choose healthier lifestyles.



I am Aspirational and Successful

I achieve my potential and make good progress in education. I have high expectations for my future and have skills that prepare me for adulthood.



I am Heard

I know that I am listened to and my contribution is important.



I am Safe and Secure

I live free from harm and abuse and live in a stable home.



Hello!

I am one of 36,682 children in St Helens.

I am 7 years old so I missed the first year of school due to Covid 19. It is expected that I may well see life in the next century!

You asked me and my friends what we wanted from life, we said:

"To be happy.
Have a good career.
Have a family.
Have a nice house.
Be loved.
To be my true self."

and our concerns are:

"Climate crisis.
Being listed to,
being safe in St Helens"

We also said

"we need you to listen and to help!"



LOCAL AUTHORITY

Good quality local homes for our children

Network of partners understanding and supporting our children

System financial balance

2. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The following primary legislation governs our commissioning in relation to looked after children:

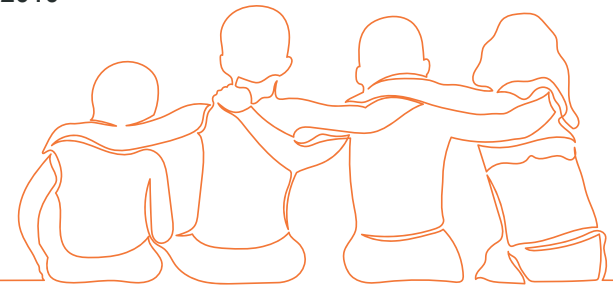
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Planning Review and Regulations 2010
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children Act 1989 & 2004
- Children and Family Act 2014
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Guidance on the Provision of Accommodation for 16 & 17 year-old young people who be homeless and/or require accommodation 2010.
- Promoting the Educational Achievements of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2018
- Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children 2010
- The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015
- The Health and Care Act 2022
- The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
- The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

We will ensure adherence to our statutory duties through our governance framework

- Ratification of Sufficiency Strategy through Cabinet stewardship
- Accountable to the Corporate Parenting Board
- Information sharing and assurance to the Children's Getting to Outstanding Board
- Adherence to Safeguarding Policies and Processes through our Local Safeguarding Partnership
- Financial accountability

Equality and Diversity

- We will give due regard to our statutory duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010
- We ensure our children and young people are treated fairly, giving them equal access to information, opportunities, services, and employment.
- We recognise, acknowledge and respect differences within our community, and that children and young people have different needs based on characteristics they share with others, and that each child also has a unique background and identity, as an individual. We consider the different needs of individuals and groups within our diverse community, and wherever possible we ensure that children and young people who share different protected characteristics feel they have participated fully in processes to inform the design of welcoming, safe, and inclusive services.
- We collect appropriate information and conduct sufficient analysis to assess the impact that Council decisions, policies, service, and contract delivery arrangements will have on people with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010.



3. PARTNERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

We are working with children and young people to improve their lives and the services they receive - listening to and acting on what children tell us about their everyday experiences of being looked after and how they think our services should be run.

We are doing this by:

- Giving children and young people the opportunity to hold us to account for the promise we make to them.
- Co-production and engagement with our Children and Young People, their families, carers, and staff
- Equipping our workforce with the skills to enable a conversation with our children, young people and their families about what matters to them.
- Commissioning a children's rights service - to hold us to account as an organisation - includes Independent Advocacy and Visitor services enabling children to speak to people who can help amplify their voice regarding their care and support.
- Maintaining the highest expectation of all partners via our Corporate Parenting Forum
- Working co-operatively with Regulators who hold us and our Partners to account for the quality of service provided and welcoming opportunities to learn.
- Linking with wider system partners e.g. Early Help, Emotional, Health and Wellbeing, Education, Youth Justice, Housing and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who enable support for our children, young people and their families in all aspects of their lives.
- Working with our Integrated Care Board and Local Authorities across the Liverpool City Region, Cheshire and Mersey Partnership and the North West to enable best use of resources across the region.
- Using data, information and robust analysis to inform our thinking and planning.
- Adhering to corporate / council expectations relating to value for money and making the most of our budget.



VOICE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FRAMEWORK

In St Helens we are driven by the influence of the children we look after and those with care experience. The Children and Young People's Voice Framework sets out how we listen to, and act upon the voice of our children and young people in Social Care; how we work with and for them, support them to take the lead and acknowledge them and their needs as individuals.

As we continually look to improve the experiences for our children and those with care experience, we are working in partnership with our Children in Care Community, our Care Leaver Forum and via a partnership with a Community Interest Company, The Vision.

Our Corporate Parenting strategy sets out 5 workstreams, one of which is the Voice of the Child and Care Experience. This workstream reports to the Corporate Parenting Forum at each meeting and every third meeting of the Forum is led by young people.

We are committed to working with Coram Bright Spots to ensure an independent analysis of what our children and young people are saying is in place. Having focused on the under 18s in 2022-3, we are focusing on care leavers in 2024-5. Each survey results in an action plan which is monitored by the Corporate Parenting Forum.

Specific sessions have been commissioned for our unaccompanied children seeking asylum and those adults waiting for their claims to be resolved, "Inner Sparks", as part of our Staying Close offer. This ensures we understand and respond better to children and young adults in that group.

This work culminated in the Promise to the Children We Look After and the Pledge to those adults with Care Experience which is regularly updated and publicised on the Care Leaver local offer web site. www.sthelens.gov.uk/futures

Furthermore, via our partnership with Advocacy Focus, we learn from any areas of complaint, comment or compliment via their workers.

We have developed a training session for all elected members, not just those on Corporate Parenting Forum, to ensure the widest understanding of the needs and sharing of the aspirations for our children and young people.

All these influences are then reflected in Service and Team Plans.



OUR PROMISE TO THE CHILDREN WE LOOK AFTER

We asked you “what do you want us to promise you to keep you happy, healthy, safe, achieving and getting involved?”

You told us and we have heard you say:

“ HELP US KEEP SAFE ON SOCIAL MEDIA. BE MY GUARDIAN ANGEL.

TEACH US HOW TO KEEP OURSELVES HEALTHY, GIVE US THE LIFELONG HEALTH SKILLS.

BE KIND TO US, HAVE OUR BEST INTERESTS AT HEART. HELP TO ENSURE YOUNG PEOPLE DO NOT GET PREGNANT AT A YOUNG AGE, WHEN THEY ARE NOT READY.

MAKE SURE WE GET FRESH AIR, ARE TAKEN OUT AND GET TO ENJOY NATURE. MAKE SURE WE HAVE CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS. GOOD MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT.

MAKE SURE I HAVE A SAFE PLACE FOR MY SPECIAL THINGS LIKE PHOTOS AND MEMORIES. TO GIVE ME A GOOD LIFE AND EXPERIENCE.

CLOTHES THAT LOOK NICE. HELP US EAT VEG. STRANGER DANGER - WE NEED TO LEARN HOW TO KEEP OURSELVES SAFE.

MAKE EVERYONE INVOLVED IN KEEPING US HAPPY, HEALTHY AND SAFE. GET US INVOLVE IN PLAYING SPORT. MAKE SURE WE HAVE A HEALTHY START IN LIFE.

GET US PLAYING. HELP US HAVE FUN AT CONTACT - FAMILY TIME. OFFER HELP WHEN WE NEED IT. KEEP DOING WHAT YOU ARE DOING.

GO TO THE DENTIST. WE NEED TO BE HAVING FUN. GET CHANCES TO WATCH SPORT. HAVE HEALTHY FOOD. TREAT ME THE SAME AS YOUR BIRTH CHILDREN.

(TO LIVE) SOMEWHERE I FEEL SAFE AND SECURE. INTRODUCE ME TO MY PERSONAL ADVISOR EARLY. WHEN I AM 18, LET ME DECIDE WITH MY CARERS HOW TO CELEBRATE.

HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO TALK TO IF I AM WORRIED. LISTEN TO MY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS. TO BE ABLE TO TRY OUT NEW ACTIVITIES.

HAVE WORKERS WHO ARE NICE. BE INTERESTED IN HOW I AM DOING AT SCHOOL AND HELP ME WHEN I NEED IT. HELP ME GET A JOB AND KNOW WHAT TO DO IN APPLYING FOR ONE.”

OUR PROMISE TO THE CHILDREN WE LOOK AFTER

SO HAVING HEARD YOU WE PROMISE TO...

Emotional Health and Wellbeing	Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood	Safe and Stable Homes	Being Heard	Raising Aspirations
Teach you about online safety and share tips on how to keep yourself safe online	Ensure your school/ college and carers help you to develop lifelong health skills throughout your life	Ensure you get opportunities to get fresh air, are taken out and get to enjoy nature	Tell you regularly who the people are who can help you or you can talk to	Show you the wide range of the world of work to inspire you
Be your 'guardian angel', check you are OK and offer support when you are not	Introduce you to your Personal Advisor as early as possible	Ensure you are offered a range of activities and events for you to get involved in	Ensure your workers listen to you and involve you in decisions about your life	Be interested in how you are doing at school or college or training
Keep you at the centre of everything we do. Check that changes we make to our services do not have a negative effect on you	Plan for your transitions and future with you	Ensure you get to plan celebrations for key life events, and we will celebrate with you too	Make sure you have a safe place for your special things like photos and memories	Link you with the people who can mentor and support your individual aspirations
Involve you in planning how family time will run	Check that the people and services that help and support you treat you like they would their own children	Work hard so you have a safe and secure place to live	We will check with you that you feel you have someone to talk to when you are worried about something	Explain the process of applying for a job, including developing your interview skills
Get you access to good mental health support and seek feedback from you on the support you get	Make sure you are able to celebrate relevant cultural celebrations	Ensure you have opportunities to get involved in watching or playing sport or the arts - whatever your passion is	Check that your workers have recorded what you have said and feel, and they act on your wishes or explain why it is not possible	Encourage you to be in school or college or training and help to remove any barriers to you being there ready to learn

Emotional Health and Wellbeing	Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood	Safe and Stable Homes	Being Heard	Raising Aspirations
Check with you that you have clothes and toiletries that you need to take care of yourself and feel good about yourself	Have as few changes in workers as possible and where change is needed, that we support you to meet the new person	Make sure that you know how to keep yourself safe in different environments, school, community, etc	Involve you in planning Family Time sessions	Help to ensure young people do not get pregnant at a young age, when they are not ready
Promote all the people and places that you can get help when you need it	Explain why you are in care - this will be age appropriate and this will be re-visited during your time in care. We will develop 'Later life letters'	Skill you up to know about housing options for your future	Meet your needs communication needs - Neurodiverse, Hearing or visually impaired, SEND etc.	Enable you to participate in society and remove barriers to doing so
Ensure you have access to your family health history and your Health Passport	Support you through the transition of leaving care, both practically and emotionally	Offer support and guidance to your carers, including training	Ensure that we understand what it is like to be you, sometimes known as your lived experience. We will support staff to do this really well and to make sure that what they learn from you is captured on your records and informs the plans for you	Listen to your passions and aspirations as you enter Year 9. If you choose, we will link you up with someone in Children's services who can help you to achieve your passion or career choice
To promote who you are as an individual and ensure services across the partnership meet your individual needs	Ensure you have the knowledge and access to after care services	Ensure you get access to advocacy services and that if you live in one of our own children's homes, that they visit you there to check you are ok	Check to ensure you are visited at home and get the chance to be listened to by your social worker alone	Help you to apply for jobs, college or training
Ensure that your voice and lived life experience is sought, understood, recorded, and informs your plans and meetings	Ensure that your voice and lived life experience is sought, understood, recorded, and informs your plans and meetings	Ensure that your voice and lived life experience is sought, understood, recorded, and informs your plans and meetings	Organise group and activities to listen to you and engage with you	Ensure that your voice and lived life experience is sought, understood, recorded, and informs your plans and meetings

4. DEMOGRAPHICS

Our borough is situated in Merseyside and is proud to be part of the Liverpool City Region. The population of St Helens is 183,248 with approximately 36,682 children living in the borough. It is a place with a strong identity and cultural history, rooted in our world-famous rugby league team and our proud industrial heritage including England's first canal and the world's first passenger railway, as well as pharmaceutical, coal and glass industries.

It is a place with many strengths and opportunities. Our strategic position at the heart of the North West provides excellent connections to and from our borough. Its semi-rural nature, with over 65% of the area green belt, and with almost 95% of primary schools judged good or outstanding makes for a very attractive place to live, with strong growth in new housing and increasing numbers of people choosing to live here.

Our greatest assets are undoubtedly our children and young people who live, grow-up and learn in our caring and close-knit community.

The economic problems that the country faces, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, worries about the climate crisis, some global conflicts and the enormous changes brought about by new technologies have had a profound impact on the everyday lives, ambitions, concerns and hopes of our children and young people. These events have exposed and exacerbated some of the existing health and social inequalities faced by our communities and we know that more of our children and young people are likely to need much more support as a result.

At the same time, we are optimistic for the great potential of positive transformation.

We recognise that to achieve our ambitions we need to:

- Consider what local demographic data is available to us and through analysis determine what it is telling us.
- Set ourselves aspirational targets.
- Acknowledge that we 'don't have all the details' and that our journey will be incremental.
- View this strategy as an opportunity for continual review, development, and improvement.
- Acknowledge that the influences which will impact on our ability to model a future projection are varied and complex.
- Acknowledge that local current and planned developments and system improvements as well as government policy will impact on the number of children coming into care, the availability of suitable homes and overall sufficiency planning.
- Work collaboratively to succeed.

Comparator data often lags because of the way it is collated e.g., Placements North West and Regional Information Group data is collected and reported quarterly, and national data is collated and distributed annually.



GROWING UP IN ST HELENS



36,682
Children and young
people live in
St Helens



89%
Schools are
Good or
Outstanding



29%
Children live
in poverty



1,307
Children's social
work cases



4th
highest rate of
admissions for
mental health
in North West



1,577
Children
in Need



44%
of 11 Year olds
overweight or
obese



20%
Children and young people
have special educational
needs and disabilities



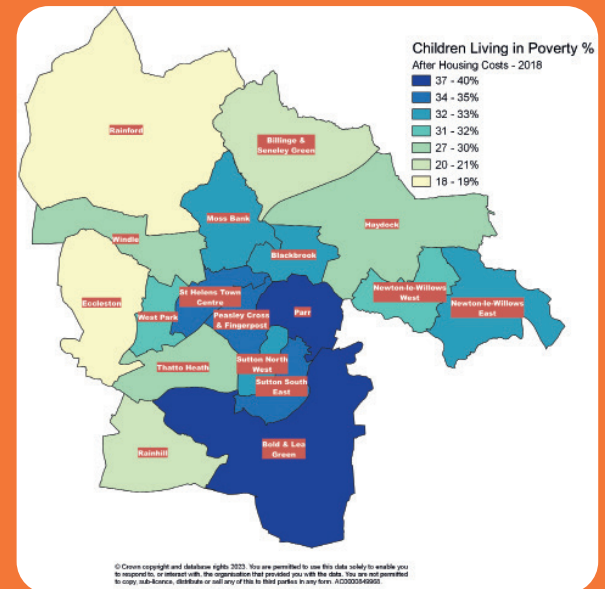
45.8
GCSE Average
point Score 1.4
points below na-
tional



129
First Time Entrants
to Criminal Justice
- rate per/100,000

489

Children and
young people
are looked
after



OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE: DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



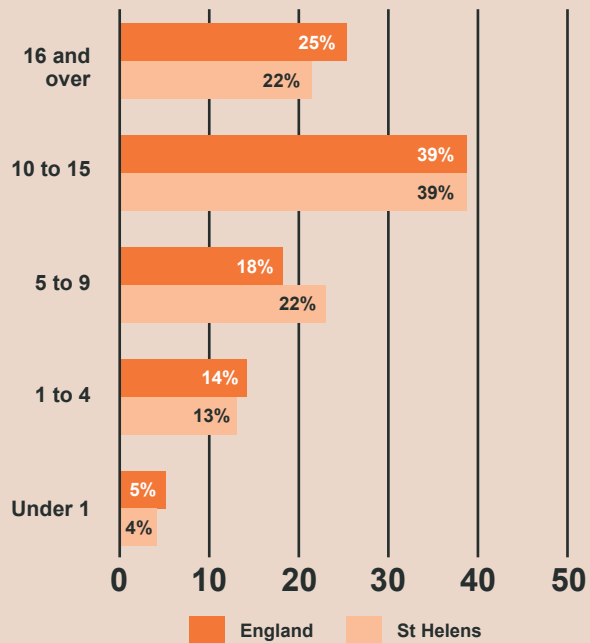
489 children and young people are cared for by St Helens Borough Council as of 31st March 2024. The number of children cared for by St Helens Borough Council has increased by **4%** in the past 12 months but is **15%** higher than the CLA population reported in March 2017



The number of children and young people cared for by St Helens Borough Council continues to be **well above** comparable regional and national averages



Age Profile for children cared for at 31st March 2024



St Helens Borough Council cared for a total of **660** children and young people throughout the 23/24 year

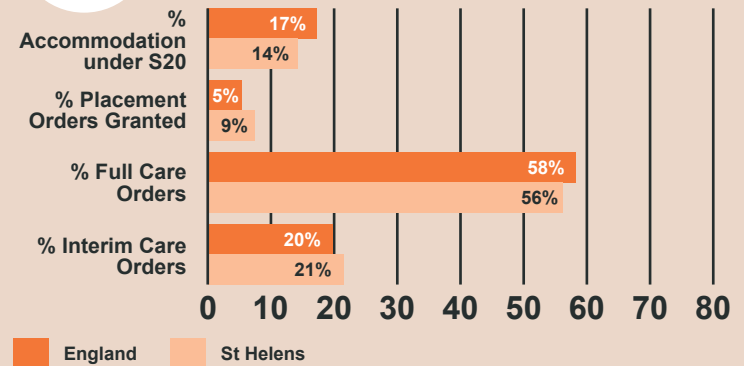
270, 45% of children cared for by St Helens at 31st March 2024 are male (56%*)

444, 91% of children cared for by St Helens at 31st March 2024 are of White Ethnicity (73%*)

45, 12% of children cared for by St Helens at 31st March 2024 are Disabled



Legal Status for children cared for at 31st March 2024



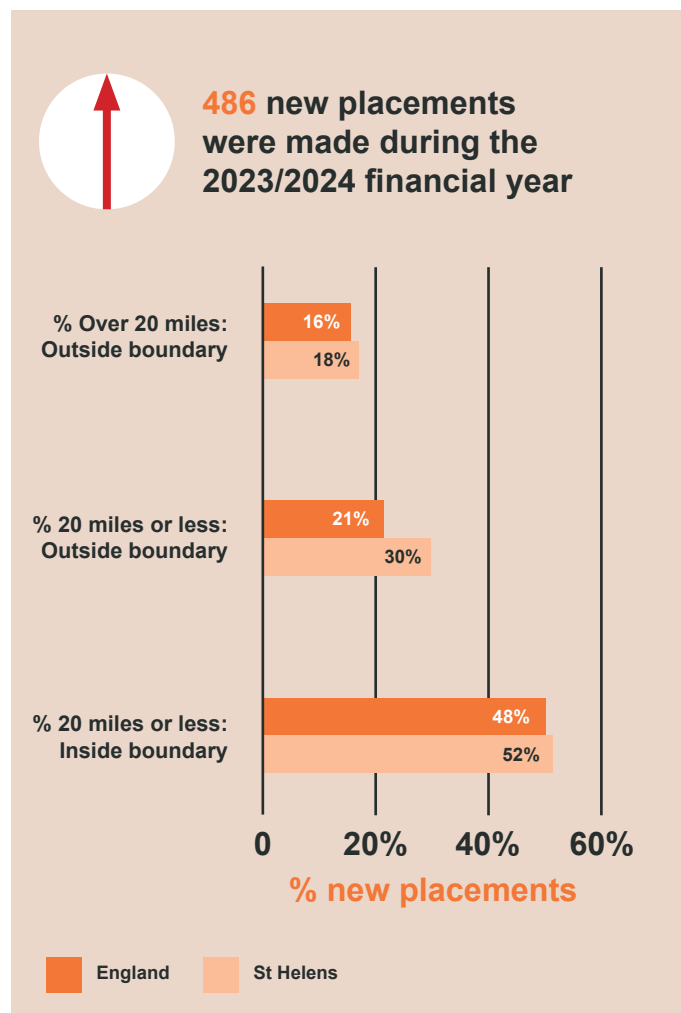
National average refers to 2022

Ethnicity	Number	%
White British	435	92.8%
Any other Ethnic Background	7	1%
Any other Black Background	5	1%
Any other Asian Background	4	1%
Any other Mixed Background	4	1%
White and Asian	3	1%
D2 - Black African	c	0%
White and Black Caribbean	c	0%
Asian/Asian British Indian	c	0%
White and Black African	c	0%
White Irish	c	0%
Grand Total	469	100%

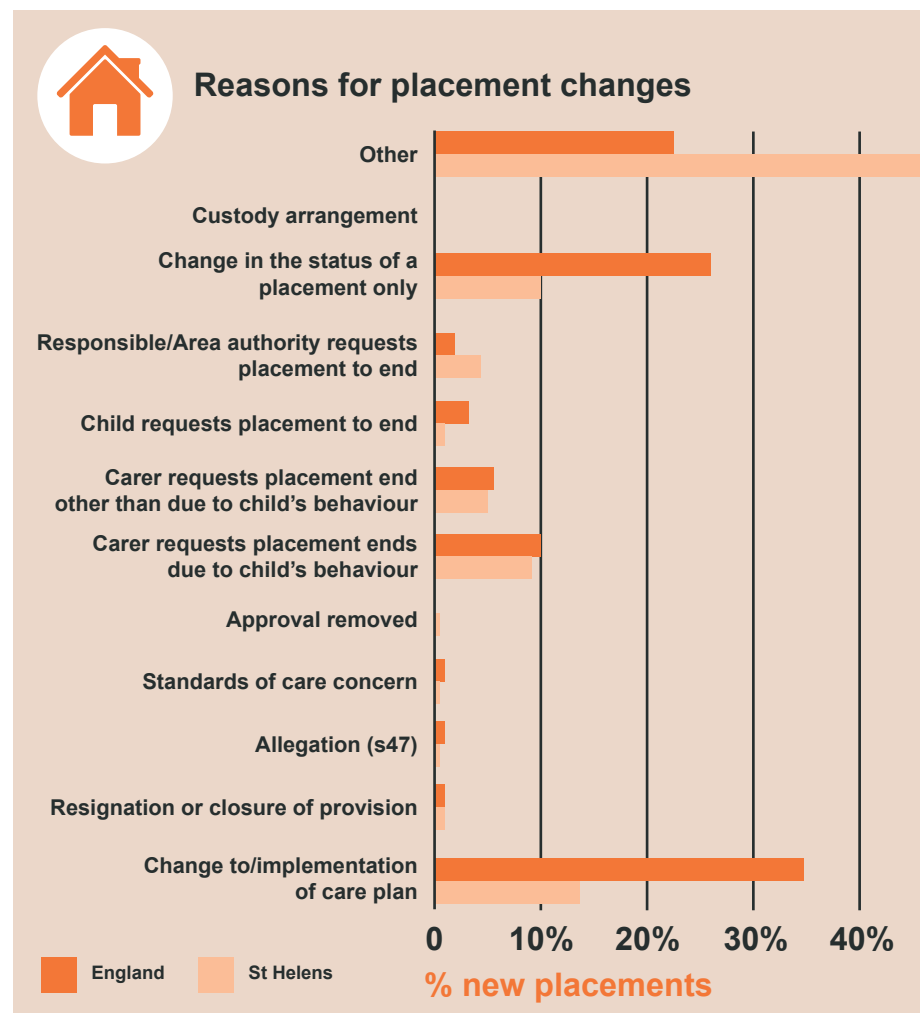
Footnote: c - number has been suppressed due to being a small number

A PLACE TO LIVE, YOUR HOME

We aim for the majority of our children and young people to live within the local area or close to their home. However, we recognise that sometimes it may be in the best interest of the child or young person to live outside of the local area (for example, for their own safety or need for specialist support).



National average refers to 2022



National average refers to 2022

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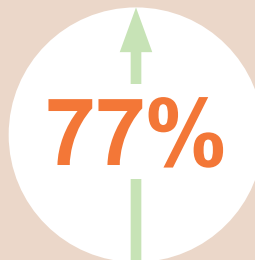


Percentage of children looked after at 31st March 2024 placed in St Helens or within 20 miles of their home

We want all of our children and young people to feel safe and secure at home. Our strategy focuses on finding homes that create stability. Stability remains positive in St Helens. The number of children experiencing 3 or more moves in 12 months, continues to remain below the national average of 9%.



Children looked after at 31st March 2024 with three or more placements during the year



CLA in care at least 2.5 years at 31st March 2024 living in their current placement for at least 2 years



CLA at 31 March 2024 placed outside St Helens boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live

A PLACE TO LIVE, YOUR HOME

Our vision is for all children in foster care to have stable lives, establish trusted relationships, to feel cared for and to benefit from high quality foster care for as long as they need it.

63%

Percentage of children and young people cared for by St Helens Borough Council at 31st March 2024 placed with Foster Carers

8%

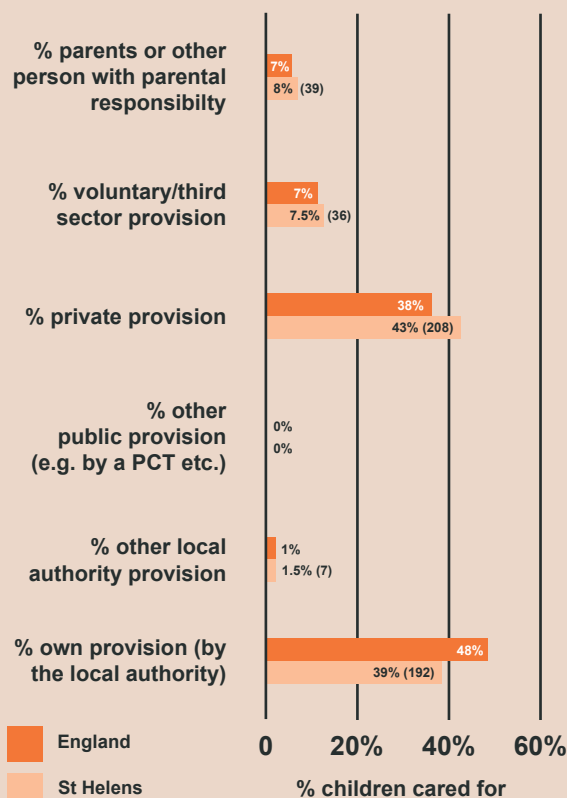
Percentage of children cared for by St Helens on the 31st March 2024 placed with parents

39%

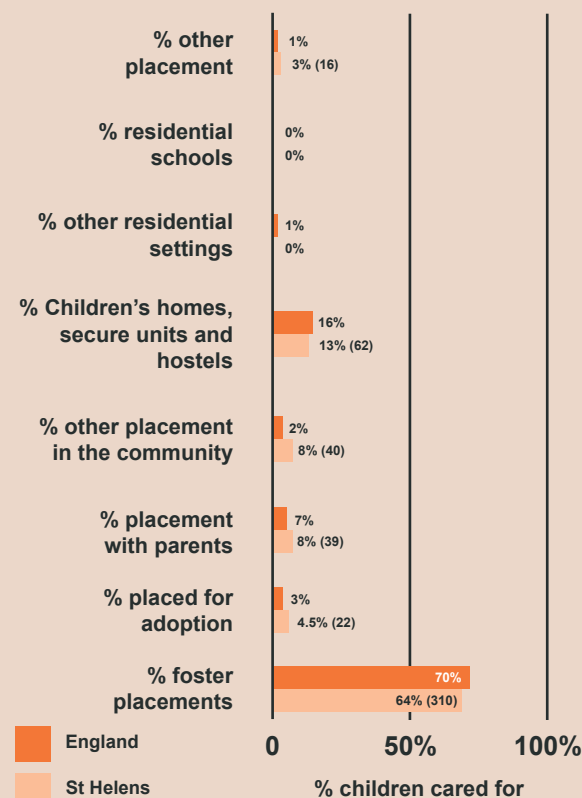
Percentage of children and young people cared for by St Helens Borough Council at 31st March 2024 placed in own provision (by the Local Authority) - lower than 2023 national (44%) and Statistical neighbour averages (55%)



Placement Providers for children cared for at 31st March 2024



Placement Type for children cared for at 31st March 2024

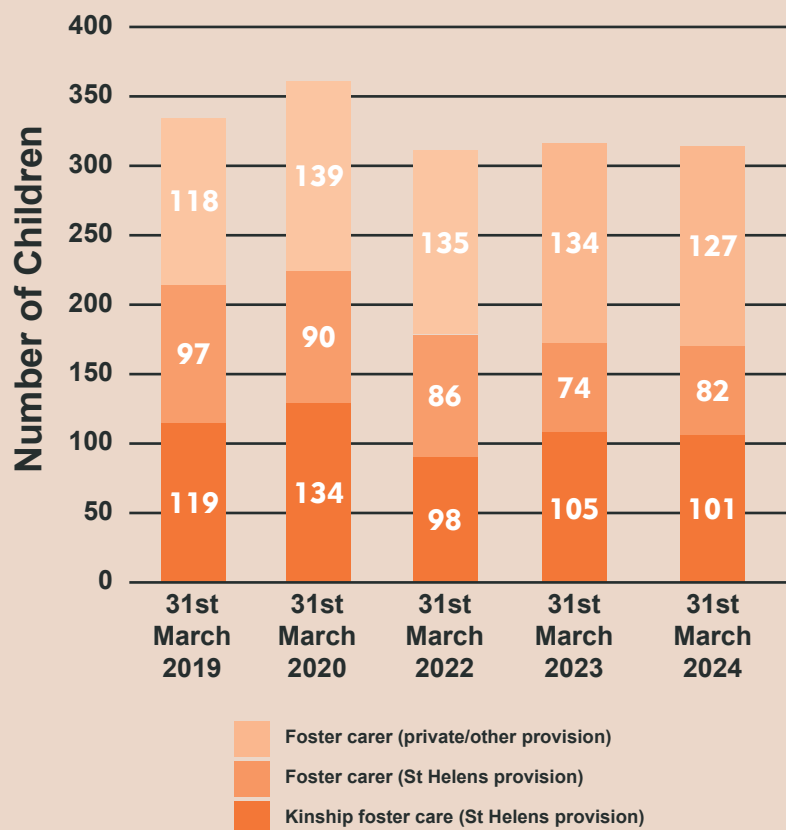


A PLACE TO LIVE, YOUR HOME

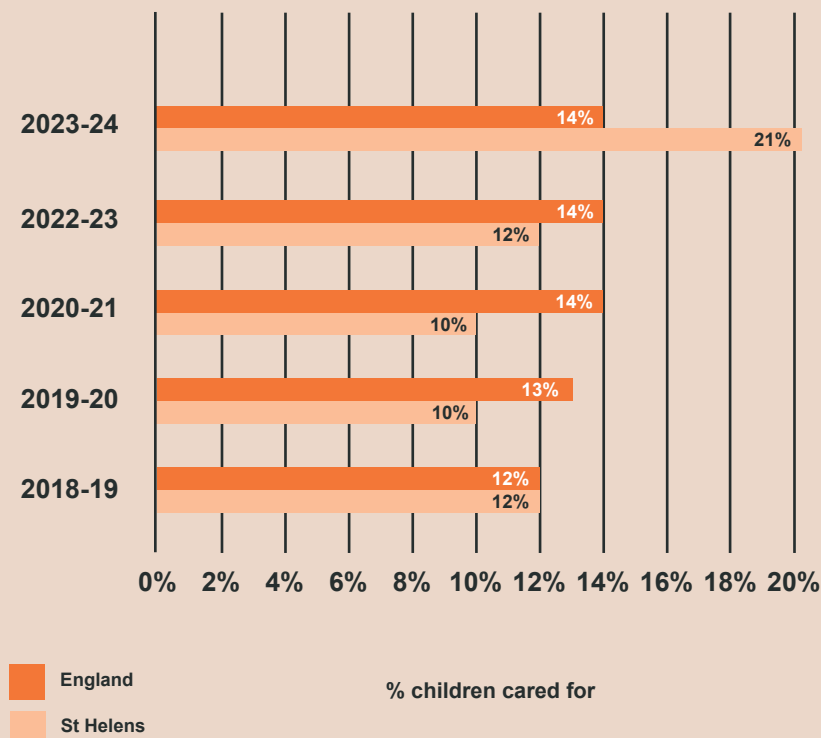
Most looked after children are accommodated in foster care placements with 64% children looked after at 31 March 2024 placed with a foster carer

At 31st March 2021 10% of children looked after were placed in secure units, children homes and semi-independent living arrangements.

Foster Care Provision

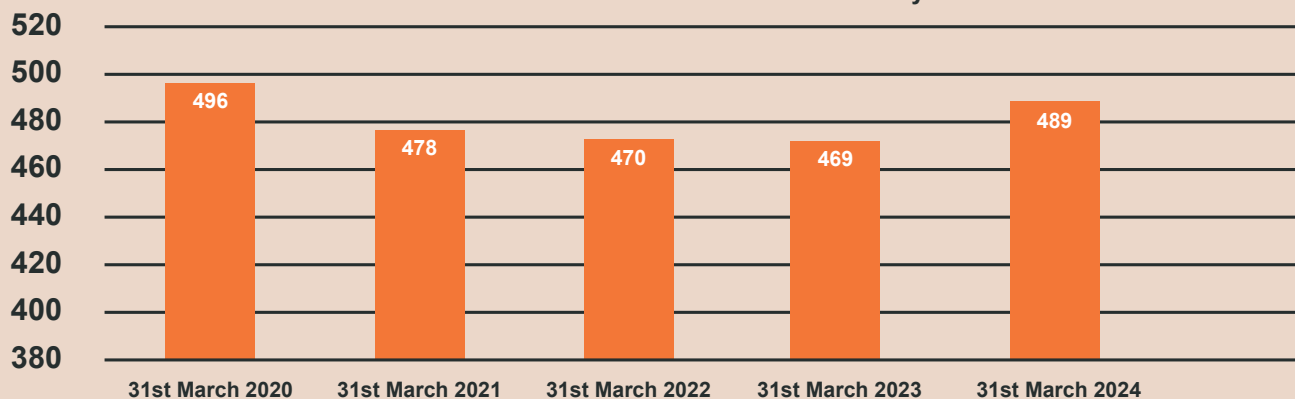


% children cared for at 31st March each year placed in Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation

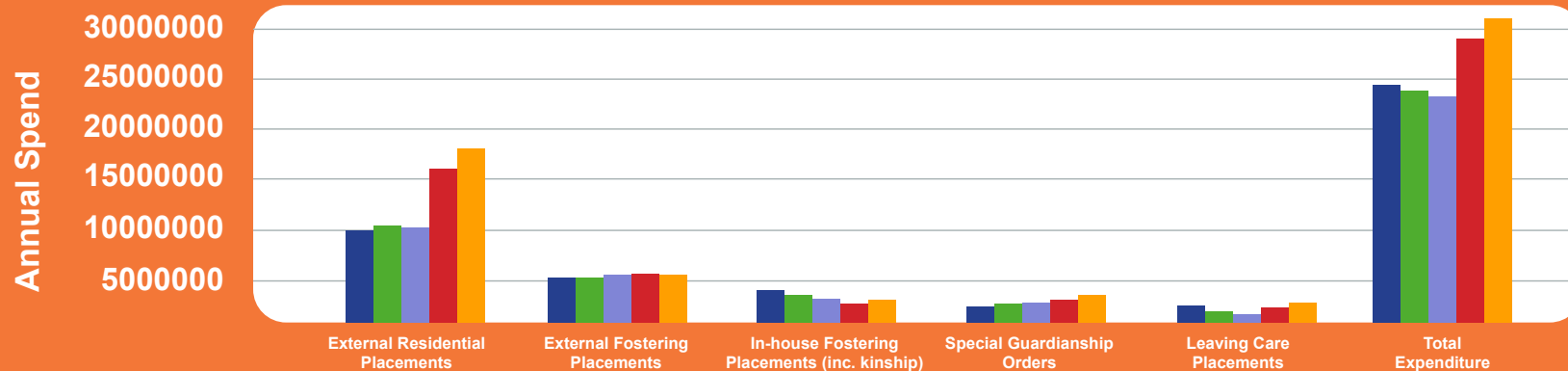


A PLACE TO LIVE, YOUR HOME

Number of Children in care at 31st March each year

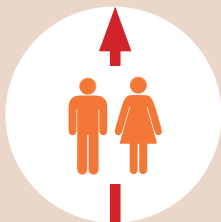


COMPARISON YEAR ON YEAR SPEND



Category		2019/20	10,426,649	5,552,197	4,208,305	2,037,655	2,131,914	24,356,720
		2020/21	10,936,824	5,552,021	4,072,230	2,162,932	1,542,783	24,266,790
		2021/22	10,934,677	5,667,534	3,868,567	2,341,437	957,495	23,769,710
		2022/23	15,206,127	5,690,266	3,625,791	2,766,811	1,872,838	29,161,833
		2023/24	17,838,951	5,617,570	3,703,057	3,352,734	2,319,922	32,832,233

CHILDREN STARTING TO BECOME LOOKED AFTER



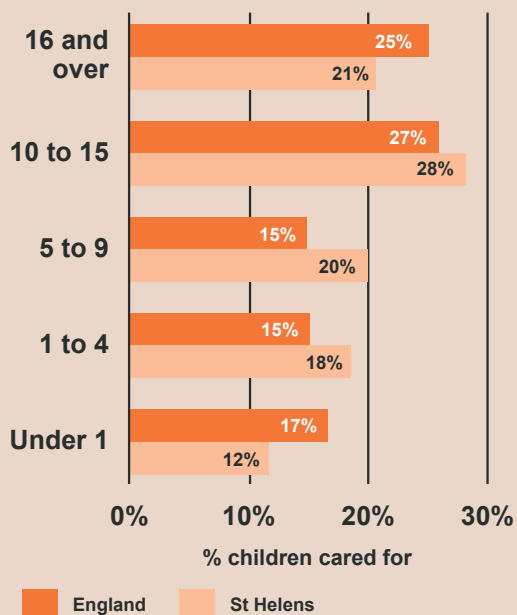
191 children and young people started to be looked after by St Helens Borough Council during the 2023/24 financial year



The number of children and young people becoming cared for by St Helens Borough Council in 23/24 is well above comparable regional and national averages



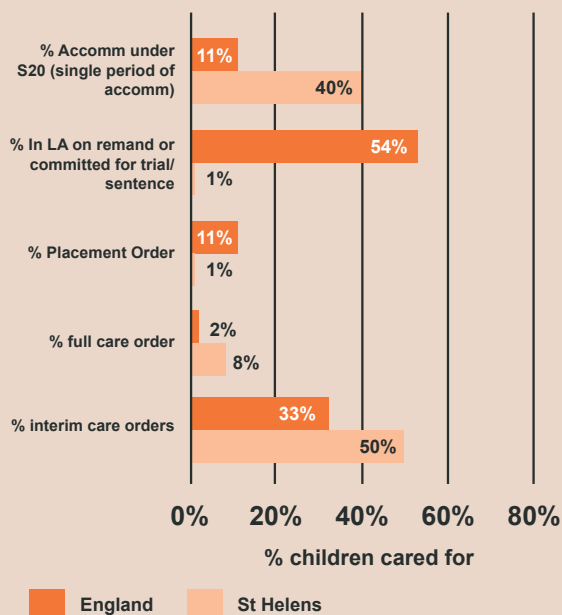
Age Profile for children becoming cared for in the 23/24 year



National average refers to 2022



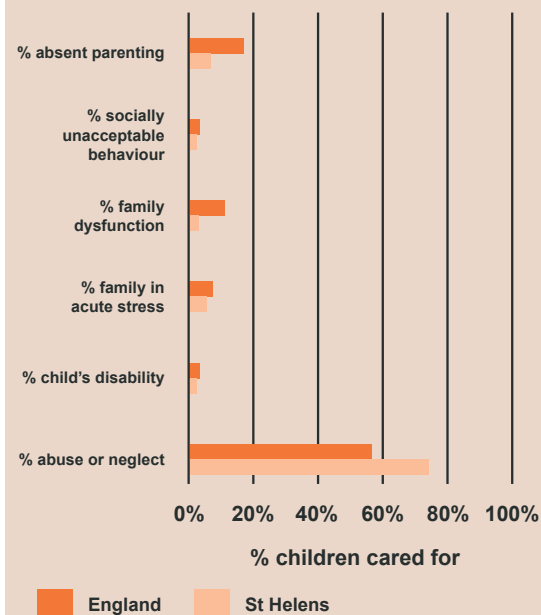
First Legal Status for children becoming CLA in the 23/24 year



National average refers to 2022



Children starting a LAC episode by category of need in the 23/24 year



National average refers to 2022

CHILDREN CEASING TO BECOME LOOKED AFTER



170 children ceased to be cared for by St Helens during the 23/24 year



The percentage of children and young people that ceased to be cared during the 23/24 year who were adopted



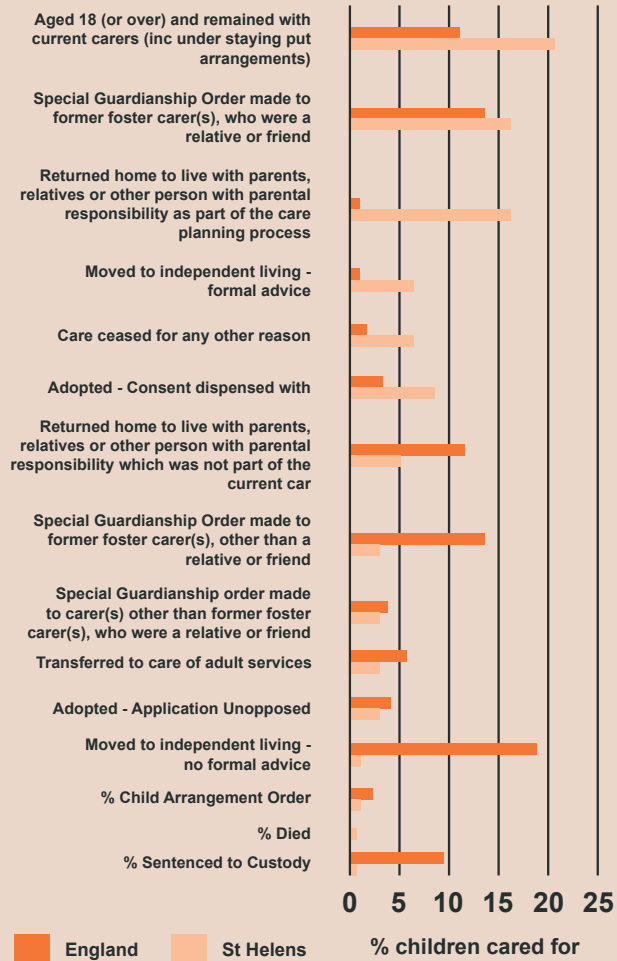
The percentage of children and young people that ceased to be cared for during the 23/24 year who were discharged with a Special Guardianship Order



The percentage of children ceasing to be looked after that returned home to live with parents or relatives as part of care planning process



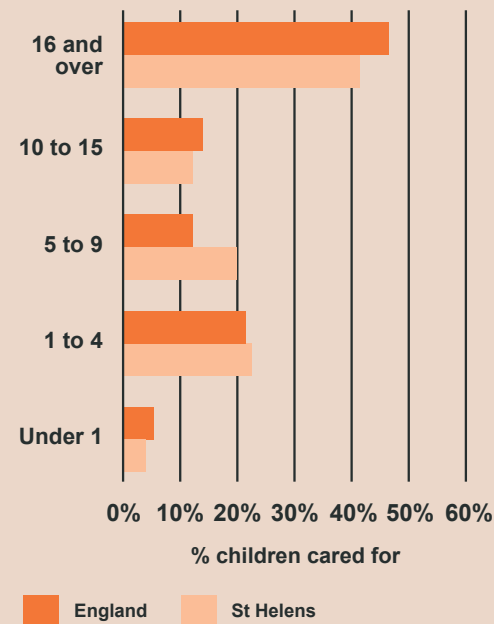
Reason for leaving care (2023/24 financial year)



National average refers to 2022



Age profile for children who ceased to be cared for in 23/24



The percentage of children ceasing to be looked after that left care on their 18th birthday

A PLACE TO LIVE, YOUR HOME

RATES FOR THE CHILD POPULATION AND COMPARATOR DATA

Number and rate of children looked after

		31st March Each Year				
		2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
St Helens	Number	496	478	470	469	489
	Rate per 10,000	135	130	128	127	132.5
Stat neighbours	Rate per 10,000	101	102	107	TBC	TBC
England	Rate per 10,000	67	67	70	71	TBC

NET INCREASES IN EACH OF THE LAST 5 YEARS SINCE 2017

Number of children becoming looked after alongside the number of children discharged from care

	Actual Numbers of children starting/discharged from care					
	2018/19 (Full Year)	2019/20 (Full Year)	2020/21 (Full Year)	2021/22 (Full Year)	2022/23 (Full Year)	2023/24 (Full Year)
Children becoming Looked After	127	187	115	131	150	191
Children ceasing to be Looked After	103	162	134	144	151	170
Net CLA population increase/decrease	+24	+25	-19	-13	-1	21

DATA ANALYSIS

Our forecast data tells us:

The demand modelling tool produced by Data to Insight uses our reported DfE 903 data from 2020 to 2024 to forecast what may happen through to 2026. The tool provides forecasts within a set of best- and worst-case parameters based on this data.

Our projections show a gradual reduction of children we look after. There is a similar decline in the number of children living in foster homes and supported accommodation with children's homes remaining broadly similar. Our strategies aim to accelerate a reduction in the number of children we look after with the aim of more children remaining with their families.

We are investing in our early help and edge of care offer to enable families to stay together.

We will reverse the trend in the reduction of foster homes through development of our own community fostering team, the partnership work we are doing with Foster4 and relationships with Independent Foster Agencies all working together to attract and retain carers so our children can live in a family home in or as close to St Helens as possible.

The number of children living in children's homes is at a high for the borough. We will ensure that children who require residential care are able to live in well-run, cost-effective homes in their home town. We are developing our own children's homes and continue to work in partnership with providers who share our vision and values.

Although we are modelling a drop in the number of children requiring supported accommodation, our policy will be that St Helens children and young people should live in St Helens, so we are creating capacity within the borough with our own Staying Close offer and established local providers.

Other data tells us:

- Our Child Protection Review timeliness is over 92% compared to the national, North West and statistical neighbour rates which are 88% or below.
- Despite our Looked After Children volume rates being above all our comparator rates, our CLA Health rates (Immunisations, Dental Checks, SDQs, Health Assessments) are inline or above national, North West and statistical neighbour rates.
- The number of early help episodes starting has risen by 6% in the last year while the number of social care referrals starting has dropped by 10%
- The number of missing from care episodes has been reduced by 22% in the last year.
- Our placement stability figures have been strong this year; the % of looked after children who have had 3 or more placements in the year dropped to 7% - below our stat neighbour rate (10%), the national rate (10%) and the North West Rate (9%)
- 77% of children under 16 looked after for over 2.5 years had been in the same home for 2 years (or placed for adoption). This is above the national rate (69%) North West rate (69%) and statistical neighbour rate (68%)
- The latest snapshot of 17–18-year-old care leavers in Education Employment and Training shows at 74% - a jump of 10% in the last 12 months and above national, North West and statistical neighbour rates.

5. CURRENT PROVISION

Families Staying Together

In December 2023, our edge of care model was subject to an internal review which included a return to an intensive intervention model to reach a specific cohort of children and families and renamed Families Staying Together (FaST).

The service currently comprises of 1 Specialist Manager, 2 FaST Senior Social Workers, Family Intervention Team, Family Group Conferencing Team and Family Time Team and once fully implemented will include a Therapeutic Parenting Practitioner and a Life Coach.

The revised offer comprises of Duty and Assessment Teams identifying their Top 20 cases for support on a 12-week rolling cycle. A case discussion following receipt of a support request and individual plan of intervention is implemented and reviewed at week 6 and final review at week 12.

The Senior Social Workers support with systemic practice, such as genogram's, trauma/nurture timelines, social graces, and reflexive discussions. Future developments for Edge of Care, building on the intensive support provided to children and families, include the development of an Edge of Care Hub providing a base to provide community support, assessment and respite to children and families in crisis.

In creating further developments, the edge of care offer in St Helens will continue to build interventions and targeted support which seeks to reduce the gaps in support, respite and understanding of our children and families to ensure we have the right plans and interventions in place for positive outcomes to be achieved.

We are working with the police to seek an opportunity to provide an emergency out of hours provision if there are no suitable homes or family members initially identified to avoid any children needing to be supported at police stations.

Care Proceedings

The ongoing delays in the conclusion of care proceedings impacts on achieving permanence for children within the Public Law Outline (PLO) timescale of 26 weeks.

The average number of weeks for open care proceedings and closed proceedings in St Helens was lower than the regional average however did not meet the 26-week statutory timescale.

Engagement in regional and national pilots will continue to focus on the President of the Family Division's aim to achieve outcomes for children in a timely manner. A focus on Pre-Proceedings also ensures that work is undertaken with children and families to frontload assessments before a decision is reached regarding the need for proceedings.

A recent Focus Visit by Ofsted confirmed that children subject to child in need or child protection planning in St Helens receive a consistent and effective service and pre-proceedings work also received positive feedback. This was also recognised within the ILAC inspection.

FOSTER CARE - ST HELENS LA

Wherever possible we always seek to enable Children We Look After to live with their own family or family and friends (connected carers) when possible. Where this is not possible, we would like to offer our children the opportunity to live with a foster family.

St Helens is committed to enabling all children and carers who want to remain together post the 18th birthday of the child to do so. We have robust arrangements in place with associated support to carers and children. Whilst this potentially reduces the pool of foster care availability for younger children. Currently 10% of our care experienced adults, aged 19-21, are living in a Staying Put arrangement.

Children living in stable, long-term foster care can have similar outcomes to adopted children and this is a positive permanency option for those children who still identify with, and wish to maintain links to, their birth families. It can also be a positive option for children with complex care needs or those who are harder to place for adoption, such as sibling groups or older children, providing them with long-term stability and ongoing care and support.

If long-term foster care is the plan for a child, it is important that work begins early to prepare the child for this, and to ensure that the 'match' between the child and the foster family is right, along with putting in place long-term support for the placement. We can offer this support from within our in-house fostering team and wider partners.

We aim:

- To provide a safe caring environment with foster carers who will enable children and young people to develop their full potential throughout their childhood and into independence
- To provide a Fostering Service that recognises the diverse nature of the community within St Helens in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, disability and sexual orientation
- To provide a Fostering Service which is conducted and managed by professionals with appropriate skills and experience
- To recruit, support and train a diverse range of foster carers including specialist foster carers and carers who can offer short breaks, support for existing foster families, family parent and child placements and carers for unaccompanied children seeking asylum
- To provide supervision, support including therapeutic support, and a full range of training for foster carers

F⁴OSTER

St Helens
Borough Council

To be a Foster Carer for St Helens Borough Council, contact www.foster4.co.uk

FOSTER CARE - ST HELENS LA

Our own, valued carers are able to offer long term fostering, short term fostering, short-term and short breaks care. The majority of our current foster carers have a preference for offering placements to younger children (under the age of five years) and to single children or small groups of brothers and sisters. This is different to the profile of some of the children coming into care which includes older children with more complex needs and those in larger family groups. We are developing a mocking bird constellation which offers peer support to foster carers.

Given the significant number of children in care within St Helens and the competitive market in which fostering services operate, the aim now is to be more targeted in terms of the recruitment of specialist foster carers. It is envisaged that these carers will have experience of working with children who require a greater level of support such as residential support workers, teaching assistants, teachers, and social workers. These foster carers will be matched with those children and young people who are either initially identified as harder to place or those who wish to move from a residential placement to a fostering household. However, in addition to these specialist carers we continue to require carers for children of all ages including very young children.

We aim:

- To retain our existing foster carers
- To increase the number of local authority foster carers so we can reduce the number of our children placed within external placements so they can live in their own community supported by our local services.
- To recruit and develop specialist foster carers for those children and young people with additional or complex needs.
- To increase the number of long-term foster carers who will care for children into adulthood.
- To increase the number of foster carers for children aged 10 and above.
- To increase the number of foster carers for sibling groups particularly carers for larger sibling groups of three or more children
- To increase the number of foster carers who can offer short breaks and support for other carers on a short term basis.
- To increase the number of carers who can care for unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

FOSTER CARE - INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCIES - NORTH WEST

In the North West since December 23 there has been a 2% increase in the number of children in external fostering provision bringing the total to 2924 in March 24 but still a decrease of 1% on March 2023.

Commissioners continue to report a shortage of foster carers of all types across the North West and increasing use of children's home provision where the plan for the child is for fostering or carers looking after children outside the Local Authority and immediate neighbouring LAs.

Data from Ofsted from 31 March 2023 indicates a loss of 3% of places available in local authority fostering households in the North West since March 2022. Over the last year external providers have reported an 8% decrease in the number of fostering households in the North West and a corresponding decrease of 10% in the number of registered places. (Note 1). There is also indication of a decrease in the number of local authorities fostering households regionally in line with that seen with external providers.

St Helens remains insufficient in fostering households for children of all ages and there has been an estimated reduction of 8 IFA households locally since 2021.

As St Helens is insufficient in local foster families, we rely heavily on placing our children into our neighbouring boroughs. Increased use of carers and falling household numbers in these boroughs too means that Foster Carer availability is very limited within easy travelling distance of St Helens.

Increasingly fostering homes are becoming harder-to-find (i.e., required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' of agencies) due to a lack of offers from the initial referral. The impact of this lack of appropriate homes is significant across the whole system.

Collaborative working is in place to try and retain and maximise use of fostering households through improved and more detailed referrals improving matching and acknowledgement of societal impact including cost of living increases on fostering households and prospective carers. Additional training for enhanced carers to meet additional needs and complexities with multi-agency approaches to support for carers is being encouraged.

Unitary Authority Boundaries

Independent Foster Placements

Scale: 1:360,000

Date created: June 2024

Drawn by: Corporate GIS (JC)

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As of March 24, St Helens has a rate of 35.23 children in Foster Care per 10000 which is the third highest in the North West. 55% of our placements are made with Independent Fostering Agencies.

RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES - NORTH WEST

In March 24 there were 892 registered children's homes in the North West, 88% (782) of these are run by private providers. There has been a growth of 112 homes in the last 12 months.

8% (78) were local authority run and 4% (36) were run by voluntary organisations.

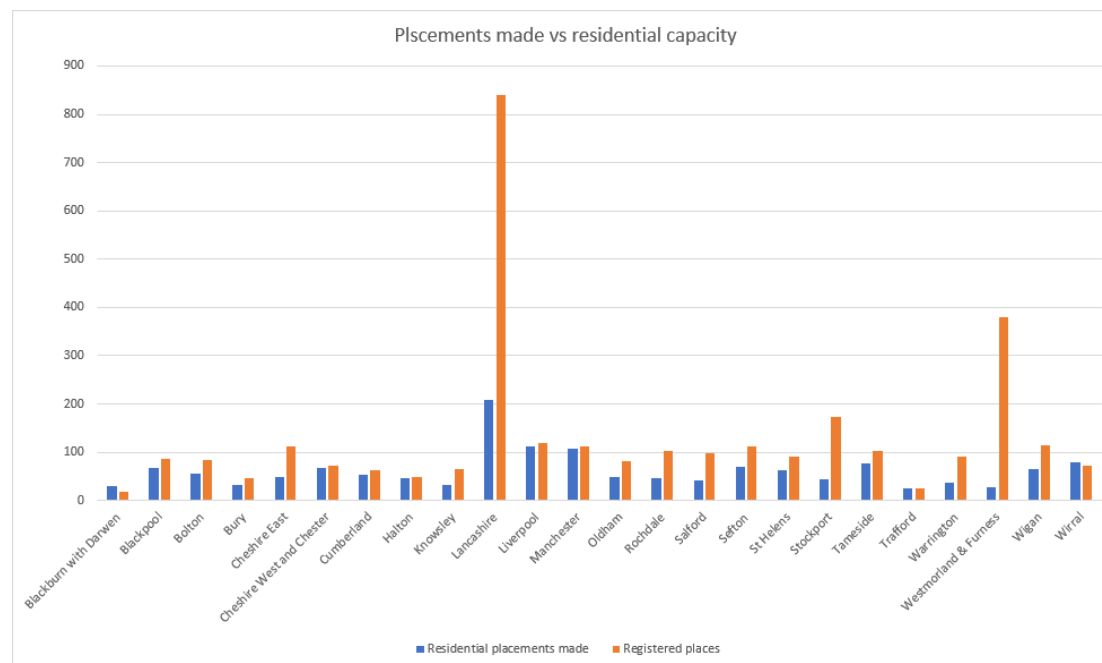
Across all homes there were 3104 registered places, more than double the number of placements made by the North West authorities.

However, this is an increasingly national market and there are significant numbers of children from other regions living in the North West. This linked with challenges around matching and meeting more complex needs means the apparent 'theoretical sufficiency' is not reflective of the experiences of placement teams who continue to regularly struggle to find appropriate local placements for children as children's homes are not distributed evenly across the country.

In the last 12 months the total number of children in external children's homes rose by just under 2%. Anecdotally some of the children placed are due to a lack of fostering carers availability at point of placement.

The average weekly cost for children's homes increased by just over 10% 2023 to 2024.

As at Mar 24 739 placements were made through the NW Residential FPS, 50% of all placements.



Data source: Placements North West

RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES - ST HELENS

As of June 24, there are 37 registered children's homes in St Helens run by 16 Providers. This is a net increase of 3 homes this year.

1 home is Local Authority run, 2 Voluntary Sector and the rest Private provision. There are 17 solo homes; the remainder are a mix of 2,3, 4 and 5 bed homes. There is one 12 bed Secure children's home and one Short Breaks children's home. There are several new homes in the planning process for both the Local Authority and Private Providers at the time of writing.

Homes in St Helens cater mainly for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties with a small number offering services for social and emotional mental health and/or learning disability.

24 homes (65%) were good or outstanding with one home rated inadequate. This is slight decrease in overall ratings this year.

St Helens is in the top 10 Local Authorities in the North West for demand for children's home places. Our aim is to reduce this over time.

St Helens has sufficient general children's home capacity however availability can be an issue due to wider market demand.

There is insufficient local children's home capacity for children who require therapeutic mental health care, care for very complex needs, ASD, physical disability/medical needs and homes who are skilled in working with children at significant risk of exploitation and who demonstrate trauma related responses. There are services in development that will cater to some of these needs however remains a proportion of children's home searches that are 'hard-to-find'.

All settings caring for children within St Helens should be Ofsted registered.

We have a Secure Unit in our borough, but we do not have any priority for allocation of beds. Secure welfare placements are likely to be at a distance from St Helens with only two out of the 15 secure homes in England and Wales based in the North West and only one of these accepting welfare placements. There is investment being made into the secure estate which will increase the number of places locally.

St Helens generally receives more children into the borough into children's homes than St Helens makes outside the borough. We would like to work with providers so that St Helens children are always considered first for any vacancies.

RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES - ST HELENS

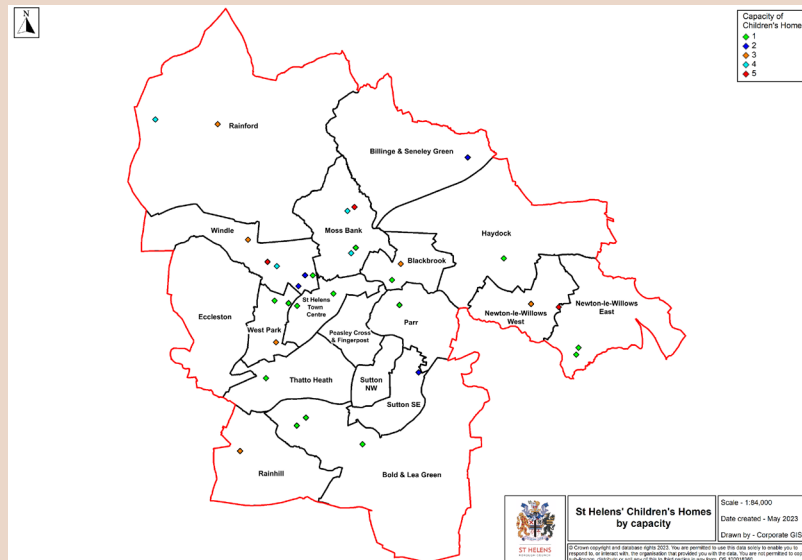
There are homes situated in all wards across the borough. We are often approached by Providers stating they want to set up homes in St Helens.

These approaches are often without any location risk assessment or prior discussion of whether capacity/ specialism is needed and would strongly encourage any providers to contact us before progressing any plans.

In St Helens most Providers prefer to work with St Helens LA and our neighbouring LAs with just a few actively seeking placements from elsewhere, but some do work with Local Authorities placing children at considerable distance and the Secure Unit is a national resource. Where Providers located in St Helens are unable to fill a placement with a St Helens child, we would like consideration to be given to children from our neighbouring boroughs in the first instance so children can remain close to their homes.

St Helens Borough Council Children's Homes - building capacity in St Helens

Based on demand, the Local Authority will be increasing our internal children's homes over the next 4 years with a phased increase. We have approval to open 6 new homes catering for a range of needs. The council will purchase homes for our children which will be a combination of sizes, from small homes for one child up to a larger home for four children to live. To create these new homes, work is underway to obtain the properties for the council. A tender to operate and manage the homes will be undertaken and the council will work in close partnership with the successful provider(s). This arrangement will ensure that as many children remain in their home borough as possible and that pooling resources and working together improves both the quantity and quality of homes for our children.



RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES - OUT OF BOROUGH

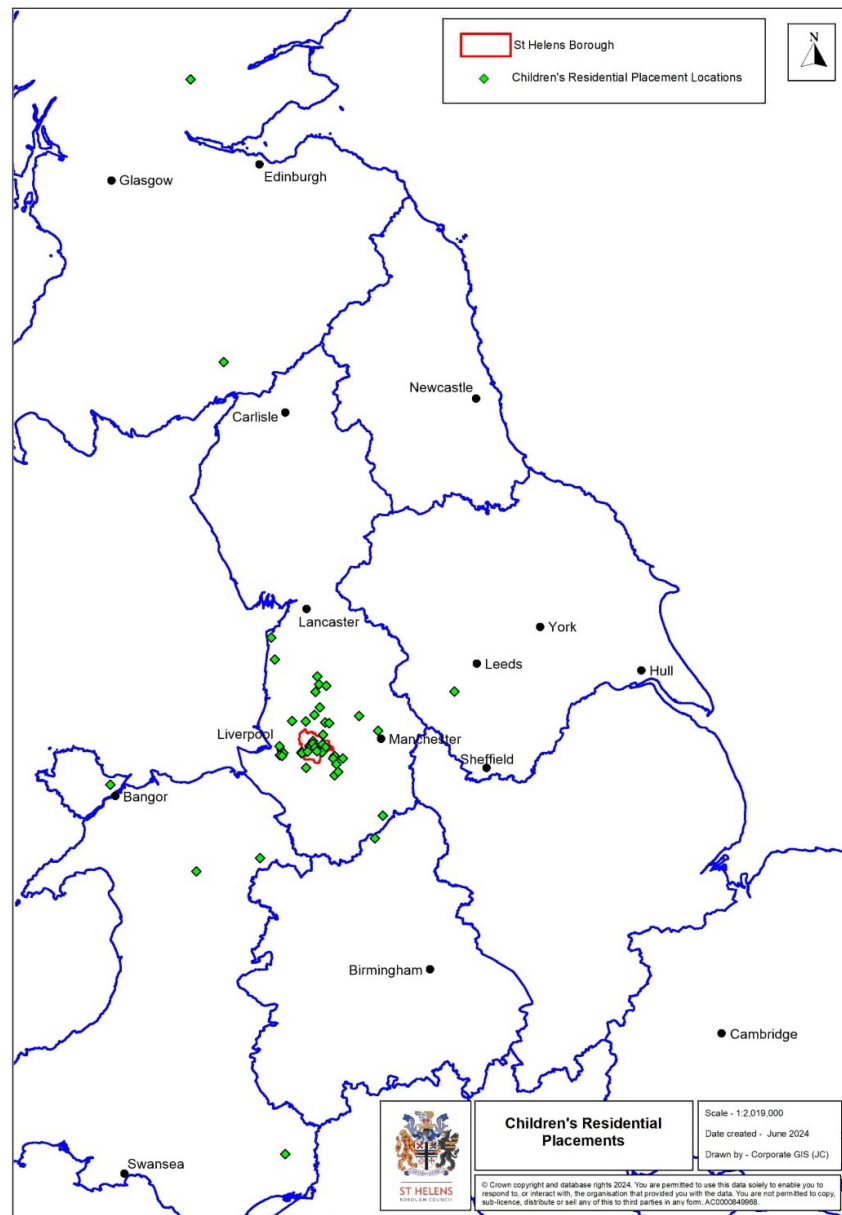
At year end 23/24, 62 of our children lived in children's homes (K2 Homes and Hostels).

68% of these homes were within 20 miles of St Helens which was slight increase on the previous year when it was (65%).

When children live outside St Helens the top locations locally were Lancashire, Knowsley, Liverpool, Warrington and Wigan.

Some children live at distance to reduce risks to them in the local area or for specialist care. 46% of our children home placements were within Liverpool City Region.

Our continued strategy is to increase the number of children placed within St Helens, reduce the number of children placed at distance outside of St Helens and to maximise use of resource within the Cheshire and Mersey footprint to support local children.



16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

Across the North West the total number of children placed in Supported Accommodation provision has increased since 2021 but has decreased by 4% in 2023/24.

The number of places registered or proposed to be registered in supported accommodation settings in the North West is 3174, an increase of 7% from December 2023. This is over twice the number of children placed in these settings by the North West authorities. (Placements North West May 24)

Locally we are generally sufficient in this area with several new providers having opened recently or with schemes, including our Local Authority Staying Close offer, in the pipeline. Any further growth needs to be carefully considered.

The growth in our number of young people requiring supported accommodation has been mainly through the allocation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and delays in these young people getting decisions regarding their asylum claim.

Regulation of this sector is now in place and will provide greater oversight of the sector and will raise overall standards. To meet the requirements set out by regulation, the North West Local Authorities have set up a new purchasing system which started in July 2024.

Ofsted have had an increased focus on ensuring that this sector is not operating unregistered children's homes. We will advise Ofsted of any provision locally found to be operating outside regulatory requirements.

Our key priority is to provide affordable, sustainable housing for young people leaving our care.

Most of our children leaving care remain in St Helens. Where children are placed outside St Helens this can be to remain near family members, former foster carers or through their choice due to a preference for city living for family or cultural reasons.

We have a range of options of accommodation and support in Group living settings and Supported Lodgings as well as bespoke services. The regional Flexible Purchasing System (FPS) is utilised to commission on a spot purchase basis. This enables us to access smaller group living, floating support with accommodation (visiting support), and more bespoke solo arrangements for young people. We also access housing block contracted accommodation for our 16+ care leavers and 16–17-year-old homeless young people.

A young person who accesses a block-commissioned service at 16 or 17 can remain within the same or alternative block commissioned service for up to two years. This approach seeks to ensure that when young people leave a service, they are more tenancy-ready and able to go on to live successful independent lives. It removes the "cliff-edge" that is often experienced by young people who are accommodated in private provider services, where young people are typically expected to move on within just weeks of their 18th birthday.

16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION (CONT.)

Following a successful bid to DfE, the Council is implementing the plan to develop a service which will offer wrap around support for those 17 and 18-year-olds leaving children's homes and supported accommodation. This will see a multi-agency team including support workers, psychological therapeutic support, education and employment support as well as a wide range of agency drop-in services operated both from a hub and outreach basis. This is in addition to the provision of 6 trainer flats which will be registered provision for our young people leaving children's homes and other settings, which are currently in development.

Our strategy is to support our children into independence at 18 and beyond by promoting Staying Put, increasing access to Supported Lodgings Placements where young people can stay within family/carer households and working with our Registered Housing providers, Housing Department and Adult Services to deliver sustainable housing options. We are consciously using Local Lettings Policies for new build accommodation to include at least one 1 bed unit for young people leaving care.

Utilisation of our Supported Lodgings Service has grown slower than anticipated and we need to recruit more hosts and to promote the positive outcomes that can be achieved for young people accessing this service.

The number of young people staying put in Foster Care has increased incrementally which is positive but also has the effect of reducing capacity for foster homes.

The increasing number of young people who are presenting with more complex needs, requiring greater levels of support is in turn, increasing our average cost of spot-commissioned Supported Accommodation.

There has been a strategic review of local services who accommodate and support young people and adults who present as homeless; Housing are working with providers to look at the eligibility threshold, referral pathways and oversight of individuals matched to the accommodation.

The Local Authority led Youth Homelessness board actively works to ensure joint protocols are embedded to reduce youth homelessness.

Young people leaving custody.

The Local Authority seeks to work with providers who have a trauma informed approach and can offer a positive experience for young people leaving custody. By working together good pre-release planning can enable this cohort of young people to transition successfully back into their community however the impact of Government Policy around early release can mean children present with little or no notice.

Our Care Leavers local offer can be found at: www.sthelens.gov.uk/futures



UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC)

An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded. A person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government. The Local Authority care for a number of unaccompanied children. The children either become looked after either through the managed National Transfer Scheme or in some cases spontaneous arrival, e.g., via the local motorway network.

The children come from all around the world and are often from countries affected most severely by war and political instability. Although in recent years the number of unaccompanied children has been relatively low, there has been a significant increase in the last 2 business years which is anticipated will continue. Providers of homes for these children need to take into account the risk of them being exploited and a heightened risk of going missing as well as the trauma many of them have faced both in their home country and on the perilous journey many have undertaken to reach St Helens. The full range of children's care, support and accommodation provision will be considered for these children dependent on their presenting needs, personal autonomy and what will make them feel safe.

The number of unaccompanied children presenting (spontaneous arrivals or through National Transfer Scheme) will continue to increase now that the National Transfer Scheme continues to amend the allocation numbers based on arrivals to the country as a whole. Whilst St Helens has accepted more than our allocation to date (Jun 24) the allocation methodology may change. We therefore may need a higher range of options available in St Helens including foster carers, children's homes, supported accommodation including supported lodgings hosts and access to housing post 18 with community services available to support young people's individual needs.

The demographic profile in St Helens means that services to support children and young people seeking asylum are not as well developed as in other areas and this is an area for development locally.

We are experiencing and anticipate a worsening delay in decisions regarding leave to remain which may require support and accommodation to remain available post 18. The increase in demand for supported accommodation provision from unaccompanied children is leading to challenges moving young people onto independent living and is influencing capacity of available local supported accommodation and housing options.

We seek to support unaccompanied children by:

- Increasing the awareness about the circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees by helping to foster positive relationships with the local community.
- Supporting asylum seekers and refugees by treating them with respect and dignity so that they receive the same care and access to opportunities as any other person in the community.
- Empowering asylum seekers and refugees to be self-sufficient so that they can be recognised as valuable contributors to the community and the economy.
- Supporting asylum seeking children and young people to access education and training opportunities.
- Seeking to address the service gaps in support networks by quickly addressing unmet and emerging needs.

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC) - (CONT.)

Age Breakdown

	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Totals
2019-20	2	3	0	5
2020-21	0	2	1	3
2021-22	0	0	6	6
2022-23	1	5	7	13
2023-24	1	6	19	26
Overall Total	4	16	33	53

Gender Breakdown

	Male	Female	Totals
2019-20	5	0	5
2020-21	1	2	3
2021-22	5	1	6
2022-23	11	2	13
2023-24	24	2	26
Overall Total	46	7	53

National Transfer Scheme

	Yes	No	Totals
2019-20	0	5	5
2020-21	0	3	3
2021-22	4	2	6
2022-23	8	5	13
2023-24	13	13	26
Overall Total	25	28	53

Country of Birth

	Afghanistan	Chad	Egypt	Pakistan	Albania	Eritrea	Iran	Iraq	Sudan	Vietnam	Turkey	Somalia	Syria	Other	Totals
2019-20	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	5
2020-21	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3
2021-22	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	6
2022-23	4	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	13
2023-24	10	0	0	1	0	2	2	2	4	0	1	1	2	1	26
Overall Total	14	1	1	2	1	3	9	4	7	5	2	1	2	1	53

RESIDENTIAL FAMILY CENTRES

Residential Family Centres

A Residential Family Centre is an establishment that provides residential services for parents and their children. The purpose is to monitor and assess the parents 'ability to respond to their children's needs and to safeguard and promote their children's welfare.

As of June 24, there are:

- 101 registered Family Assessment Centres in England - 29% increase in the last year.
- 27 in the North West - 42% increase in the last year.
- 10 in Liverpool City Region a 25% increase in the last year
- 2 in St Helens. Increased access to local provision, including places for the exclusive use of St Helens families through a pilot scheme with a local voluntary sector provider and a private provider opening in our area means more of our families are being assessed in their home area.

74% of North West provision is Ofsted Good including the centres in St Helens. No homes are inadequate. 4 homes are yet to be inspected.

Use of Family Assessment Centres can be determined by court direction or as part of the LA plan. St Helens use starting in each year below.

Year	Number	Placed locally within Liverpool City Region
2019/20	8	6
2020/21	14	5
2021/22	9	5
2022/23	10	10
2023/24	7	2

There are some specialist Providers of family services which are not regulated by Ofsted but by CQC as they offer rehabilitation for drug and alcohol issues however there are no services of this type in the North West.

The Local Authority can offer community-based assessment and commissioned 24/7 assessments so families can be assessed and supported within their own home and community where this is the best option for the family.

HEALTH

St Helens offers a range of universal, targeted and specialist health services for children who are Looked After.

There is a dedicated Looked after Children's health team led by a Named Nurse for Looked after Children who have responsibility for ensuring the co-ordination and completion of timely statutory health assessments.

The team will retain children and young people who are new into care and placed within a 20-mile radius on their caseload. This supports continuity and a consistent approach.

The Looked after Children's Health Nurse ensures that the child receives the highest standard of care by co-ordinating and referring the child into relevant local services as required. The Looked after Children's Health Nurse is also part of the child's care planning process and receives regular supervision on each child from an appropriate professional.

All children and young people new into care will be offered an initial health assessment. The aim is to complete and return this to the Local Authority within 20 working days. If this is declined by the child, the nurse will offer (with consent) a nurse led health assessment and collate a health plan.

Review health assessments are undertaken 6 monthly if under 5 and annually for the over 5's. The review is written to the child and a copy of the health plan is provided. Visits will be undertaken as determined by the RAG rating which is reviewed at each contact.

A health passport is provided to the young person prior to their 18th birthday. A copy of this is shared with the GP and the local authority.

Prescription exemption certificates can be funded (if appropriate) for care leavers up to the age of 25.

St Helens children can be referred to the Dental Project for Looked after Children (if required) to ensure they receive annual reviews with a dentist as part of their health review.

Following the review health assessment, the Looked after Children's Nurse ensures that the child receives the highest standard of care by co-ordinating and referring the child into relevant local services as required. The Looked after Children's Health Nurse is also part of the child's care planning process and receives regular supervision on each child from an appropriate professional.

The Healthy Child Program will be offered to all St Helens children and young people by a Public Health Nurse dependant on appropriate residence and school attendance.

Wellbeing services available in St Helens can be found here: <https://thrivesthelens.my.canva.site/>

Children In Care of Another Local Authority (CICOLA)

If the child or young person is registered with a St Helens GP and the originating ICB Place area request a health assessment, review Health Assessments will be offered in line with national statutory guidance and will be conducted by the child's named health professional.

Within St Helens this will be a Nurse from the Looked after Children's health team.

All review health assessments are quality assured to maintain a high standard of assessment. As part of the assessment the strengths and difficulties questionnaire will be completed (if requested). The placing area are requested to complete a transfer of care document to ensure appropriate information is shared.

EDUCATION AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Supporting the education of our Looked After Children is integral in ensuring positive outcomes. However, there are certain circumstances and complexities that can create additional challenges when it comes to securing or maintaining school places.

In most cases, professionals will work to ensure a child or young person can remain on their school roll and that they are within a commutable distance. However, there are some circumstances where this is not possible and subsequent issues can arise.

These can include:

- **Home moves** – when a child moves to a new home, there can be times when the current school cannot be maintained, due to distance or capacity in local schools for example. However, if a child or young person moves home and a new school is not identified, this can create issues around education.

As a result of not having an identified school place, there may be periods where the child is not in education which can create gaps in learning. Similarly, if professionals do not know the destination school, this makes it difficult to complete essential transition work that is fundamental for the child or young person.

- **Specialist settings and alternative provision** – if a child or young person is not, or has not been attending a mainstream setting, and they require alternative provision, it can be difficult to source places and funding within other Local Authorities. This is particularly difficult when a child does not have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities** – where there is a child with an Education Health and Care Plan who is moving out of borough, it is imperative that St Helens SEND team is consulted, as well as the SEND team from the area the child is moving to. There will need to be a robust transition process, including the reassignment of the EHCP and the commencement of the consultation process. There can also be additional financial implications depending on the provision identified for the child or young person, and so these need to be taken into consideration. It is therefore essential that all schools, education settings, social workers and key partners consult with the Virtual School around any educational placement of a Looked After Child.



SEND (SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES)

For our children with additional needs, we want to have local provision that can:

- Keep our children and young people close to their families and support networks.
- Ensure that our children are happy and enjoy their childhood.
- Ensure that our children are visible, included and feel valued by having the opportunity to grow up and participate in activities in their local communities.
- Ensure our children and young people fulfil their potential, achieving positive outcomes.
- Ensure that our children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and can live as independently as possible as they become adults.

We want families to be confident their children are receiving the best possible care and are supported by services to meet their individual needs.

Social care, health and education colleagues work together to identify homes and related services that can meet the needs of individual children.

We have excellent resources in the borough; all three of our maintained special schools are rated either Ofsted Outstanding or Good and our Residential Short Breaks Home for children with complex needs is consistently rated Ofsted Outstanding.

Our schools and home have high demand and as a result they are not always able to meet the needs of all children and some children attend external schools or live in homes identified specifically for them, within the borough or neighbouring boroughs. We rarely need to utilise residential special schools.

Our greatest area of need for children with additional needs is for specialist foster carers who can care for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities both full time or for short breaks and for children's homes who can work with children with the most complex needs who require specialist care including those who are neurodiverse, or who have social emotional and/or mental health needs.

We will ensure that the needs of children and young people with SEND we look after are considered within decisions about provision. We will identify suitable provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND we look after, ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made where required to provide them with a home that meet their needs.

Our local offer can be viewed at SEND: <https://new.sthelens.gov.uk/SEND>



6. QUALITY ASSURANCE

FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE WE WILL:

- Report via the Safe and Stable Homes workstream to the Corporate Parenting Board as one of our five key priorities.
- Utilise a Sufficiency Dashboard that will centralise all information from relevant interdependencies further developing and gathering key data in relation to internal and external placement provision to ensure a dynamic Sufficiency of Accommodation Strategy
- Regularly review all our children's provision for value via Placement Panel
- Develop working with Young Inspectors to monitor our children's homes
- Utilise feedback from children, statutory reviews and visits, partners and commissioned services to assess the quality of provision.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING WE WILL:

- Benchmark against statistical neighbours
- Benchmark against regional and national indicators
- Learn from peers - what is working well and what is not working as well and introduce best practice as identified.

7. MARKET POSITION STATEMENT

Our market position statement utilises the information contained within this Sufficiency of Accommodation Strategy alongside other relevant local Strategies and Action Plans so that existing and potential providers are aware of the demand and priorities within St Helens.

As part of the Sufficiency of Accommodation Strategy and ongoing service improvement we understand that our relationship with providers is crucial to the shaping and development of high-quality services.

A major challenge for the council and our providers is to deliver an increased quality of service, improving outcomes for children and young people within budget.

We wish to work with providers delivering locally to co-produce creative, collaborative solutions with us and will therefore seek to proactively engage with the provider market locally and will continue to build relationships with the clear purpose of shaping local solutions to meet local need.

The quality of a child or young person's home is a significant factor in improving the outcomes and prospects for a child or young person who is looked after.

We want to partner with a range of outstanding, innovative, and flexible providers of homes for our children that are able and willing to be a vital member of the team around our most vulnerable children and young people with the aim of improving their outcomes.

In addition, a focus will also be on homes for our children and services that assist the council to reduce the length of time children spend in our care or help us return children to family settings from children's homes, if this is in the child's interest.



MARKET POSITION STATEMENT (CONT)

St Helens Borough Council works collaboratively with regional partners to shape the market for services for children looked after and secure quality provision.

We will:

- Maintain a clear focus on Permanence and embed Permanence Planning throughout our approach.
- Ensure quality of referrals, care planning and social care work.
- Support transition from children's home to family home where this is in the best interests of the child.
- Increase momentum for achieving long-term fostering for children by continuing with dedicated matching panels.
- Work with partners and providers to safely protect those young people with a pattern of missing and / or at risk of exploitation and harm.
- Work collaboratively across internal departments and with external partners to offer a range of targeted, universal and specialist services to respond to the needs of children when they need them.
- Work tirelessly to identify homes for children within St Helens where it is safe to do so.

Additional St Helens priorities for existing and potential providers to recognise are:

All children looked after will be:

- Supported to maintain family contact where this is in their best interest.
- Prepared for independence and a healthy adulthood.
- Supported to access quality education services.
- Supported to access quality health services.
- Receive services that are of high quality to secure the specific outcomes identified in their care plans.



COMMISSIONING PRIORITIES

Voice of the child

We will work with children and young people to better understand their views about their homes and use this information to both raise standards and to inform this sufficiency strategy.

We will do this by:

- Use a range of communication methods to gather views including surveys, recording and sharing children's feedback from visits and reviews.
- Involve young people in quality monitoring activities. This will place young people at the heart of quality assuring services and ensure that the views and experiences of care experienced young people will inform future commissioning activity.
- Develop a robust system for care experienced people to scrutinise our performance and that of the children's homes we place our trust in to ensure the best care is provided for our children.

Prevention

We will reduce the number of children who are looked after, by providing the means for families to become more resilient and stay together or by reunifying families where it is safe and, in the child's, best interests to do so.

We will:

- Embed 'Families Staying Together' to ensure a robust approach to edge of care and family support, family group conferences, reunification and risk management.

Foster Care

We aim to reduce the numbers of children that unnecessarily escalate to care in children's homes because of a shortage of foster family availability. Growth of foster care is critical to achieving this.

We aim to place all our children with families in St Helens or as local as possible.

We will:

- Develop our in-house fostering service in a way that ensures a range of carers including specialist carers to meet the complexity and diverse needs of the children we look after.
- Improve retention of foster carers to prevent foster carers leaving the sector entirely.
- Implement a targeted marketing strategy through Foster4 to address gaps in provision, including in underserved areas e.g., short breaks and respite, homes for older children and young people, children with additional needs, sibling groups and parent and child.
- Continue to work collaboratively with fostering providers to increase the number of children placed with local Independent Agency carers particularly for children coming into care and needing a local foster family, children who have initially been placed out of the local area and for children with complex needs who may now be ready to live in a family.

Children's Homes

We will reduce the proportion of children in children's home provision.

We will:

- Track and regularly review children and young people placed in children's home provision through placement panels.
- Continue to refine referral and home finding processes.
- Develop step down provision to support appropriate children and young people to move into foster care and supported accommodation provision when they are ready.

We will ensure appropriate children's homes are available for the children we look after, particularly those who require additional support and resources.

We will:

- Develop smaller capacity in-house children's homes.
- Consider partnership routes to ring-fence capacity to ensure local services benefit local children and young people.
- Encourage development by providers who can work with children with complex needs.
- Encourage regulated emergency children's home care that can offer short term/time limited high intensity placements to meet the needs of more complex young people while a permanent home can be found.
- Work with external providers in St Helens to address gaps in provision ensure local homes are delivering services which meet the needs of the children and young people we look after to reduce use of 'at a distance placements'.
- Provide support and challenge to providers throughout the duration of a child's stay in their home.

16+ Supported Accommodation Provision

We will ensure appropriate supported accommodation is available for children leaving our care.

We will:

- Ensure all provision commissioned meets the National Standards for supported accommodation.
- Develop internal leaving care staying close provision and work closely with the private and registered provider market to increase provision and choice to meet forecasted increase in demand.
- Participate in strategic planning with our Housing partners, with the objective of ensuring that young people can secure supported accommodation general needs housing through Under One Roof or private landlord accommodation at the right time.
- Work alongside Housing partners to obtain and use nomination rights for care leavers on new build developments of affordable housing where a local lettings policy is to be put in place.
- Work closely with adult social care to ensure an appropriate range of accommodation options are available for young people in transition that secures continuity into adulthood wherever possible.
- Commission tailored services for our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children locally.
- Further develop and promote our Supported Lodgings offer for young people leaving care.



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