

My Place My Home Children in Care and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2024-27

March 2024



Foreword

In Oldham we want all our children and young people to be safe, happy and healthy with access to a great education which gives them the best possible start in life. We put children and young people at the centre of everything we do both as a Council and as a multi-agency partnership.

We recognise that parenting is a demanding task, and many parents need help sometimes. We know that by providing help to families earlier they are more likely to resolve any difficulties they are experiencing successfully. The importance of early intervention and prevention in working with children, young people, and families is therefore critical to ensuring they can remain together wherever this is safe and in the best interests of the child or young person.

My Place My Home Placement Sufficiency Strategy outlines how we plan to ensure that when children and young people cannot live with their families, we will provide them with the safety and stability of a permanent home where they can get the support they need to thrive and have happy and successful lives. We are committed to keeping Children Looked After and Care Leavers close to home in Oldham and one of our strengths is the large number of Children Looked After placed in foster care with Oldham carers.

As part of the development of this strategy we have reviewed our own residential estate and the provision we commission, to ensure that we are achieving the very best outcomes for our children and young people. We have worked with our Children Looked After and Care Leavers to enable them to help shape, plan and organise our services to ensure we are delivering the right support at the right time. We will know that we are getting this right by continuing to actively seek, listen to, and act upon the views of Children Looked After and Care Leavers, as well as taking the opportunity to celebrate their achievements. We aim to ensure Oldham children and young people can live in Oldham if they wish and where safe to do so.

Successful delivery of the strategy is also dependent upon the support and commitment of our partners including the Corporate Parenting Panel, Children's Safeguarding Partnership, Strategic Transitions Board and Strategic Provider Partnership, alongside schools and colleges, the Integrated Care Partnership and the wider voluntary and private sector.

This strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of an Annual Sufficiency Statement and progress against the strategy will be monitored via the Corporate Parenting Panel and Children's Transformation Board.

Gerard Jones
Managing Director of Children and Young People (DCS)

1 Introduction

Oldham's My Place My Home Placement Sufficiency Strategy details how Oldham Council intends to meet its duties as set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989. This duty requires all local authorities to 'secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children', including residential children's homes and foster care provision. Within the strategy we set out our intentions to meet the needs of Care Leavers under s24 of the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

As part of this duty the Council is required to publish an annual Sufficiency Statement which sets out our achievements, our shared priorities, and the actions to be taken to make a positive difference to the lives of Children Looked After and Care Leavers in Oldham. Progress against the strategy will be monitored via the Corporate Parenting Panel and Children's Transformation Board.

We will explore the needs of our Children Looked After and Care Leaver population and assess these against our current in-house provision and commissioning frameworks and outline how we plan to discharge our duties for children and young people. The detail on demand, profiles and placement breakdown contained within the strategy will be refreshed on an annual basis.

The strategy makes clear that we aim to be the most successful and ambitious parents we can be for the children and young people we look after, continuing this into our support for those young people who are leaving our care. We want all our children and young people to reach their full potential, academically, socially, and emotionally and will strive to provide the best opportunities for this to happen. This includes enabling their full participation in decisions about them and shaping the services we provide. Through the delivery of this strategy, we will ensure the provision of a safe and secure home environment for them to develop and achieve and we will take pride in every achievement each child and young person makes along the way.

2 Our Vision



Oldham Children's Social Care and Early Help service has in place a Getting to Good

Strategy which sets out our cross-cutting priorities for all stages of a child and young person's journey from earlier support, statutory referral, through to specialist services and adulthood.

In developing our improvement priorities, we have put children, young people, and their families at the centre of everything we do, and we aim to work with them to develop their strengths and resilience, ensuring all children and young people have a stable family life and reach their full potential in all areas of their lives.

We are taking a strength-based approach and working restoratively with children, young people and families using a systemic approach from which families are empowered and supported to make positive changes, enabled to make self-determined choices and seek their own solutions.

For those children and young people on the edge of care, we aim to build on existing strengths and resilience within the family network and wherever possible for families to remain together. Where this is not achievable, we will ensure the child or young person is assessed and their plan for permanence leads to their placement in a setting which they can regard as their permanent "home".

The My Place My Home Placement Sufficiency Strategy will make a significant contribution to our overall vision and ambitions for Oldham children and young people as set out within the Getting to Good Strategy and in particular the following areas:

- Develop our Early Intervention and Prevention offer to ensure that children are responded to effectively and they do not remain in neglectful circumstances for too long.
- Strengthen our permanence planning arrangements focussing upon timely decisions to secure permanency at the earliest possible stage.
- Implementation of our ambitious transformation and sustainability plans for increasing availability of local foster carers, residential and semi-independent provision, and supporting more care leavers to live independently.
- Ensure children, young people and families are at the heart of everything we do, and their lived experiences are heard and shared.

3 Local Context – Population and Demand

Oldham's population has 62,439 residents (2022 latest available data) aged 0-18 years, which is 27% of the population, higher than GM (24%) and England (22%). We provide school places for 45,986 pupils and 8,2897 (18%) of school age pupils have a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND).

High levels of child poverty, deprivation, the Covid-19 pandemic, and cost of living crisis have had a disproportionate impact on children, young people, and families in Oldham. Oldham has sustained a high rate of referrals to Children's Social Care services with increased case complexity for early help, social work, domestic abuse, and corporate parenting services.

Oldham has the 5th highest rate of child poverty in England (38.5%, 2022 latest available data) which is a major determinant of physical and emotional health in later life.

Oldham's overall rank in the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) has maintained a clear downward trend. In 2019 (latest available data), Oldham was ranked the 19th most deprived LA in England. Five of our local areas are ranked amongst the top 1% most deprived areas in the UK. These areas also our most diverse populations.

Oldham has a diverse population with 34.8% of residents, 46% of school pupils and 35% of children open to Children's Social Care from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. (2021 Census, School Census January 2023, Mosaic October 2023).

Our services, and those of our partners, are flexible and culturally sensitive to ensure a fully inclusive offer to all children, young people, and their families. Working with our Voluntary, Community and Faith sectors has been key to building relationships with our diverse communities.

Prior to 2019/20, Oldham had been experiencing a steady rate of referrals into Children's Social Care, however, since then we have seen significant and sustained year on year increases in the numbers of Children in Need, Children Subject to Child Protection Plans, Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The increase in demand has added pressure across the children's social care system which can be seen in the table below putting Oldham above regional, statistical neighbours and England averages.

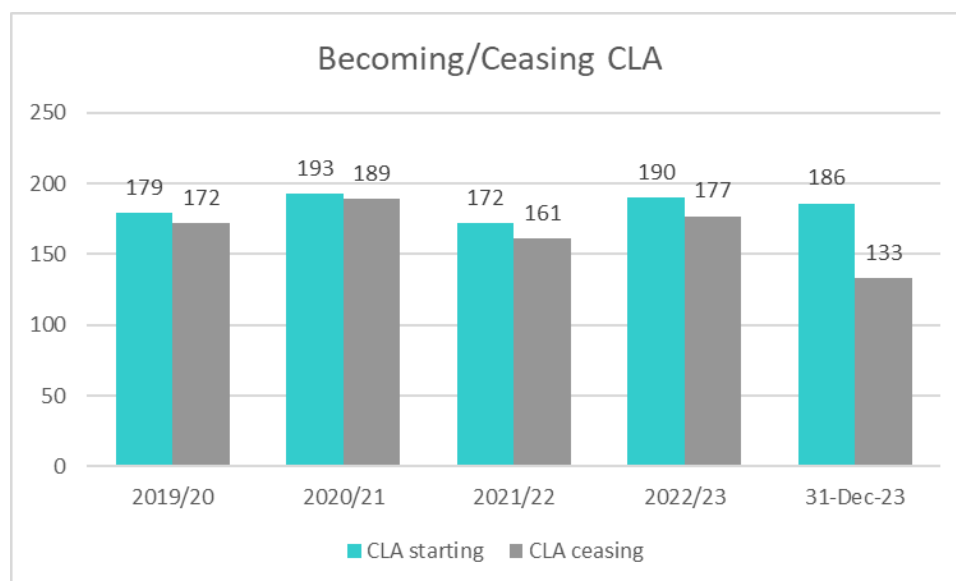
Period	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	31-Dec-23
Total Referrals to Children's Social Care (in year)	3871	4294	4837	5707	4219
Children Subject to Child in Need Plans	402	440	575	1053	1058
Children Subject to Child Protection Plans	386	440	438	507	519
Children Looked After	520	529	537	543	577
Care Leavers (18+)	182	171	181	212	231

Whilst children and young people with an open Child in Need (CiN) Plan and children and young people subject to Child Protection Plans (CPP) do not form part of the Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers population for which placement sufficiency planning is relevant, it is important to monitor and consider trends across these cohorts to assist in the projection of potential future demand.

4 Children Looked After and Care Leavers Profile

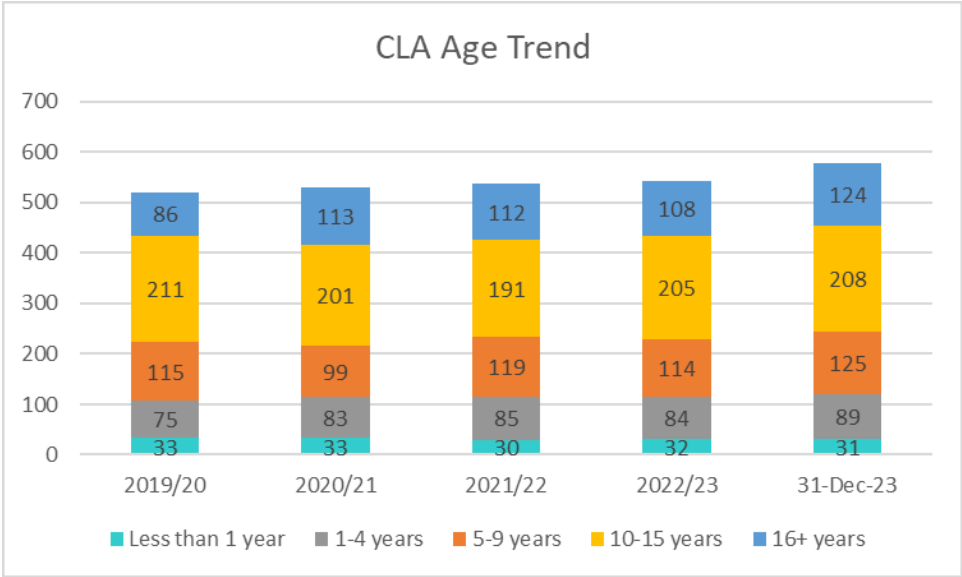


Prior to 2023, the rate of Children Looked After had remained relatively stable. During 2023 we have seen a significant increase in the number of entrants into care, increasing the rate of Children Looked After (93) to be in line with statistical neighbours (96) and significantly above England (71) in December 2023. The number of Care Leavers in receipt of leaving care services has seen a year-on-year increase over the past three years and was at the highest level in December 2023 with 231.



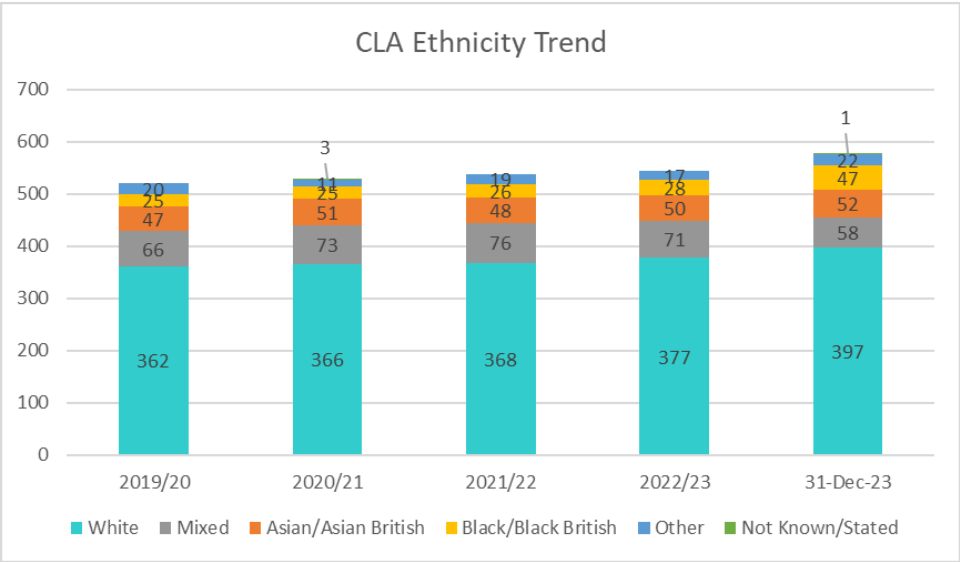
Oldham has seen placement demand increase year on year since 2019/20 and this continues through an increased need for more bespoke, specialist placements for children and young people with more complex needs including mental health, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and illness related, as well as accommodation for some large sibling groups. This has led to a review of how residential services in Oldham should operate moving forward to meet the needs of the children and young people in our care.

The age profile of Children Looked After and Care Leavers shows a rise in those aged 5-9 years and over 16 years. An increase in entrants into care aged 16 plus means current and future accommodation provision for this older cohort needs to be planned for.



48.8% of Children Looked After and Care Leavers are male and 51.2% are female. This has remained a similar trend over the past three years.

70.6% of Children Looked After and Care Leavers are of White ethnicity. This has been the trend for the past three years. We are however seeing a rise in children from Black/Black British ethnicity, and we must ensure internal and commissioned services and placement matches are sensitive to meet the diverse needs of the children, young people and families being supported and coming into our care.



We have seen an increase in the numbers of children becoming looked after under a Section 20 voluntary agreement (6%) over the last three years. This is still well below statistical neighbours (9%) and England (17%).

In 2022/23 we have seen a 0.57% decrease in the number of children in care under a Full Care Order since 2021/22 and a 1.33% decrease in Interim Care Orders. This is in line with the trend across our statistical neighbours and England.

CLA Legal Status	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	31st Dec 2023
Interim Care Order	74 or 14.20%	105 or 19.85%	109 or 20.30%	103 or 18.97%	141 or 24.44%
Full Care Order	367 or 70.60%	347 or 65.60%	366 or 68.16%	367 or 67.59%	347 or 60.14%
Section 20	34 or 6.50%	40 or 7.56%	33 or 6.15%	38 or 7.00%	56 or 9.71%
Placement Order Granted	44 or 8.50%	34 or 6.43%	29 or 5.40%	34 or 6.26%	32 or 5.55%
Youth Justice Codes	1 or 0.20%	3 or 0.57%	0 or 0.00%	1 or 0.18%	1 or 0.17%

We recognise that permanence planning is key in the timeliness of care proceedings cases. More children are achieving permanence outside public care through adoption, special guardianship order (SGO) and reunification with parents, and timeliness of the public law outline (PLO) process is a strength. However, we recognise we need to further embed permanency planning and tracking including earlier pre-birth assessments within social work teams.

5 Early Intervention and Prevention

As part of our transformation plans, we intend to focus resources on those children and young people whose family vulnerabilities and experiences evidence that they may require additional outreach support, to assist them in remaining together so that children and young people have access to earlier help to support them and their families when problems emerge. We know that providing earlier help is cost effective and there is much evidence to show how challenging it can be to reverse the impact of family breakdown and to reconcile families after the event.

The transformation and sustainability programme includes plans to reduce demand for statutory children's social work by enhancing the council's early intervention and prevention offer. The "Earlier Support for Families" programme is focused on demand reduction through a strength-based integrated family help model, based around family hubs and schools. This will enable families to access the right support through a network of professional and community-based services to build resilience, reducing the need for requiring statutory involvement. Recognising this will take time to embed, there remains a focus on increasing local placement supply, reducing costs to the council, and improving access to services that meet the needs of and improve outcomes for Oldham's children and young people.

Sufficiency requirements

We believe that a good Early Intervention and Prevention offer is one that successfully supports children and young people and their families through a flexible, targeted, and responsive approach which addresses a range of identified needs to prevent the risk of family breakdown. We will build on our existing strengths within the Early Help Service and Adolescent Support Unit through a strength-based model, enabling families to identify the steps needed and putting in place a network of professional and community support to build resilience, which includes outreach family

support and in-house respite provision using research and evidence of innovative practice to further develop our early intervention and prevention offer.

6 Oldham Provision



We are committed to providing a family setting for all children in our care, especially those children and young people with physical and emotional complexities that might otherwise require a complex health care package and will likely be placed in an out of borough residential placement with limited options to step down. 59% of Children Looked After are accommodated within our own provision. This is a strength compared to statistical neighbours (45%) and England (44%).

Most children are placed within 20 miles of Oldham with our own foster carers, in placements that are matched to their needs. We are committed to ensuring that where possible children and young people are placed close to home by delivering a comprehensive and sufficient mix of high quality, local accommodation choices both internally and through commissioned arrangements. Oldham Council has three internally run Ofsted registered provisions and two semi-independent living units that provide support to young people who are in transition to living independently. We seek to commission all other placements through the Placements Northwest Framework covering fostering, residential, semi-independent, supported living and SEND provision.

The following table provides a breakdown of Children Looked After by age and provision type:

CLA placements broken down by age and provision type at 31st March 2023

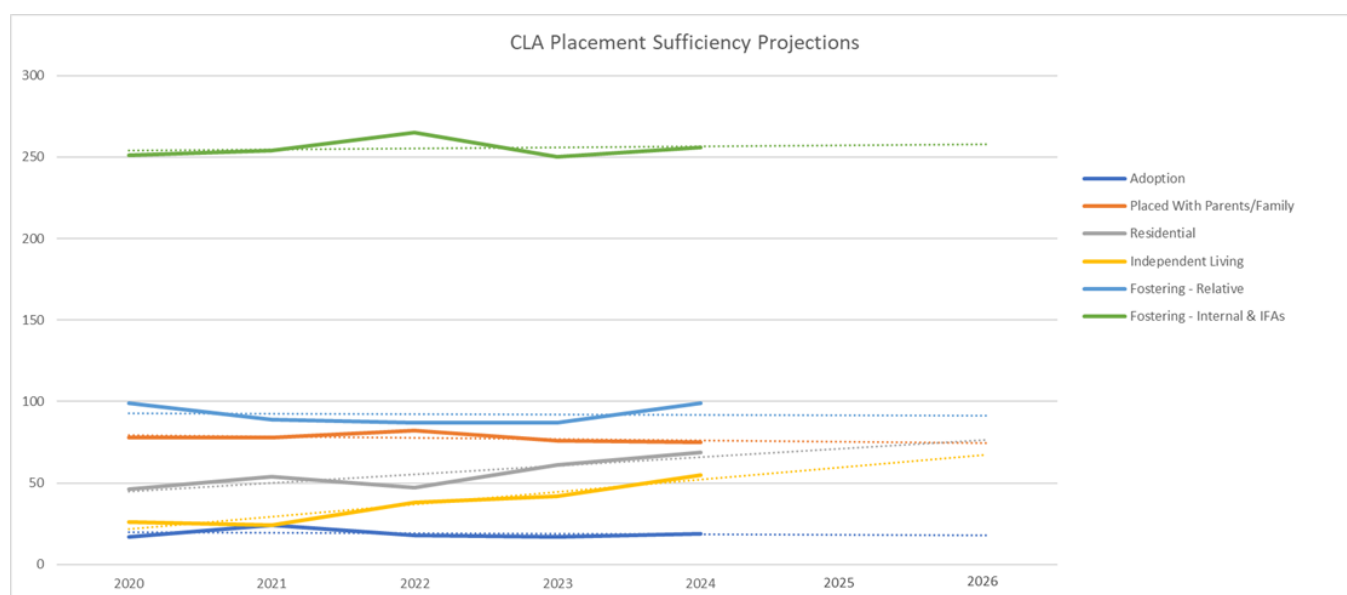
Provision Type	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-15 years	16+ years	Total	%
Placed for Adoption	13	1	0	0	14	2.4%
Oldham Fostering Service (OFS)	56	59	77	23	215	36.7%
Independent Fostering Agency	7	16	27	10	60	10.2%
Placed with OFS Kinship Carers	25	30	36	14	105	17.9%
Placed with Parents	18	17	27	5	67	11.4%
Residential (Internal)	0	0	2	2	4	0.7%

Residential (Out of Authority)	0	3	44	12	59	10.1%
Secure Welfare/Remand	0	2	2	0	4	0.7%
Semi-Independent (Internal)	0	0	0	7	7	1.2%
Semi-Independent (Private)	0	0	0	49	49	8.4%
Parent & Child Assessment Centre	2	0	0	0	2	0.3%
Total					586	

Oldham has seen a 7.2% placement growth at the end of 2022/23 from demand in 2021/22. There has been an upward trend of increasing numbers of children and young people in external provision with 59 children and young people in external residential provision, 60 in Independent Fostering Agency provision and 49 in semi-independent placements within the private sector.

The national shortage of residential placements is driving up the demand and costs for places and there is an increasing pressure on Local Authorities to find suitable arrangements for children and young people that meet their emotional, physical, and mental health needs. As a result, the average weekly spend for external residential placements has and continues to increase significantly.

Based on the Oldham children in care and care leaver profile outlined in section 4 and taking into account the increases in children looked after over the past five years, the projected placement demand forecast is that this trend will continue over the next two years as outlined below.



Graph shows data based on snapshot of Children Looked After cohort's placement information at end of each financial year 2019/20 through to 2023/24 as submitted with Oldham's 903 statutory returns (2023/24 is provisional) with trend lines indicating anticipated future demand in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

All external placement provision is overseen and reviewed at the multi-disciplinary Access to Resources Panel which meets weekly and is chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help to ensure that the child or young person's needs are robustly considered in accordance with their care plan and best value for money provision. As part of regular Reg 44 inspections, we have consulted Children Looked After and Care Leavers to ensure that the residential offer achieves Oldham's commitment to providing high quality, safe and stable placements that prepare young people for adult life.

6.1 Fostering

At the end of March 2023 Oldham had 212 approved fostering households, this was a decline in households from the previous year in line with the local and national picture.

In 2022/23 financial year, 8 mainstream households were approved as foster carers. This is a decrease compared to 13 in the previous year. The percentage of children placed in internal mainstream foster care is 58%, IFA's 17% and Kinship carers at 25% as outlined below. Oldham provides more internal foster placements than other Local Authorities within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority which is a strength.

Date	In-house	IFA	Kinship	Total
31-Mar-18	286	53	62	401
31-Mar-19	331	52	85	468
31-Mar-20	336	27	103	466
31-Mar-21	229	24	91	344
31-Mar-22	222	46	87	355
31-Mar-23	195	60	84	339

Oldham Fostering Service has restructured into three teams to have dedicated focus on our key priorities: recruitment and retention, placement stability and kinship care.

Oldham launched its first Mockingbird specialist foster care constellation in March 2024 to improve placement stability for Children Looked After, prioritise sibling connections, support permanence and improve the support to foster carers. With funding agreed from the DfE we will launch a second constellation in June 2024.

For children and young people who cannot be matched with an internal carer, we seek placements with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) sourced through the Placements Northwest Framework in the first instance, there are a total of 48 providers on the Framework. We share information using the My Place, My Home referral form.

We had 60 children and young people placed with IFA carers on 31 March 2023. The average weekly cost of these places is £931.00 per week. We establish and maintain relationships with IFAs and seek innovative ways of working with our partners to increase IFA foster care provision to meet needs. This has included working with a national provider to match our children and young people to carers approved through their rigorous selection process.

Foster Care Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention remains a key priority for Oldham. The council has recognised the valued contribution of foster carers by increasing foster carer allowances in 2023, with a number of good quality enquiries and initial visits being progressed. In addition to Oldham's internal recruitment 'Ruby and Noah's story' campaign, we are working in collaboration with Oldham's 12

Foster Care Ambassadors and Greater Manchester Combined Authority on a joint campaign 'Fostering Unfiltered' and, with funding from the Department for Education (DfE), launching a combined foster care enquiry hub from April 2024.

The Oldham Fostering Service has improved the quality of support offered to foster carers, including working with foster carers to establish the foster carer forum and improve our consultation and communication within our fostering community. We have consulted with our carers and taken onboard advice and suggestions from them in respect of the payment guide and developed the personal development framework, which was launched in October 2023 to support foster carers and evidence more clearly the impact their training and development has on placements, with additional oversight from Oldham's Independent Fostering Panel.

Kinship Carers

Oldham Fostering Service Kinship and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) team are focused on investing and building on the foundations of Kinship care. We have refreshed our SGO Policy, leaflets to carers and processes and developed an SGO hub which will launch in April 2024. The Fostering team have plans to improve the offer further in 2024 through the development of specialist training which meets the specific needs of Kinship carers and upskilling Kinship Supervising Social Workers in progressing applications to the Adoption and Special Guardianship fund.

In Oldham, Kinship carers have the same opportunities as mainstream carers to develop their skills through the Personal Development Framework and training pathway, they receive the same level of financial support through child allowances, birthday and festival payments and mileage. They have also benefited from the 10% increase in allowances. They can access uplifted skills payments once they have completed training, evidenced impact, and met the criteria for Group 2, 3 and 4.

We are seeing an increase in children and young people remaining within their communities through increased Kinship care. In October 2023, Oldham had 71 kinship/connected/family friend fostering households who care for children and young people who are looked after which compares to 62 households in March 2023.

At the end December 2023 we have had 7% of children exiting care through SGO, this is a 1% increase from July 2023, and we expect this to increase once the SGO hub commences in April 2024.

Sufficiency requirements

There is a shortage of IFA carers nationally, regionally, and locally. Through our active involvement in Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) initiatives such as Skills Bootcamp and through our local foster care recruitment and retention offer and strengthened financial package we will continue to increase in-house mainstream and Kinship carers and commissioned IFA carers.

6.2 Therapeutic Support Team

Following the restructure of the Fostering Service there is a small team of therapeutic non case holding Supervising Social Workers who are trained in DDP 1 or 2, Theraplay and PACE to provide planned and crisis support to mainstream and kinship carers. They work closely with the Clinical Psychologist and the commissioned Early Break service.

We will review the impact of this support, alongside MAPAS and our embedded placement stability meetings with the aim to formalising Oldham's vision and connectivity to our partners in Health, CAMHS, Early Break and Virtual School and launch this vision in September 2024.

We have worked with our colleagues in CAMHS, Health and Education to map Oldham's Emotional Wellbeing Mental Health services and provide a resource for Foster Carers, Social Workers and families.

6.3 Adoption

Adoption services are delivered by Adoption Now Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) on behalf of six local authorities – Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham, and Tameside.

The responsibility for the sufficiency of adoptive placements is held by the RAA, though responsibility for children with plans for adoption remain with the Local Authority. The sufficiency strategy takes account for these working arrangements and respective responsibilities of Oldham Children Social Care and Adoption Now in future plans.

The Local Authority Adoption Team are involved in the early legal care planning stages as part of our focus on early permanence through case progression for children where there is an identified early permanence plan for adoption consideration and assessment. Permanence is tracked from legal planning and there is a drive to increase the number of early permanence placements for babies and young children, with the RAA providing training for safeguarding teams.

In December 2023 18% of children were adopted which is above both the Statistical Neighbours (9%) and England (12%) averages. The A10 year to date is 537 days, 4 of the 8 adopted children exceeded the government timescales due to protracted care proceedings, a finding of fact hearing and challenges from family members within the Courts. A2 is an improved picture at 142 days (year to date). The factors which contribute are children being placed in early permanence placements at the point of placement order and a child being placed with sibling adopters who had already been reapproved pre-placement order being made due to early links being identified before the placement order has been made.

6.4 Residential provision

In Oldham there are 22 residential children's homes for children and young people aged 6-18 years. 82% of provision in Oldham is judged 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. Provision is broken down as follows:

Ownership	Number of homes	Number of beds	Emergency beds
Oldham Council	3	14	1
Private children's home	19	60	0

Oldham Council operates three registered provisions:

- A 4 bedded Adolescent Support Respite Unit: The Unit provides short breaks and outreach services for children with significant emotional and behavioural difficulties where there is a risk of family breakdown. As part of a 'wrap around' service, a team of Family Support Workers work with families in conjunction with the staff at the Unit. The contribution of the Adolescent Support Unit to the development of our Early Intervention and Prevention offer has been recognised and will play a key role in our future planning and delivery.
- A Short Breaks 6 bedded Unit: The unit has a dual purpose; to provide a short break to families of children with additional and complex needs with an overnight stay, and to provide emergency accommodation for a child with additional and complex needs to help families through real crisis periods, or for safeguarding reasons. The unit accepts referrals for children from Rochdale and Trafford as part of their commissioned contract and moving forward the unit will continue to develop an integrated approach with Adult Services and partner agencies regarding our transitions offer through to adulthood.
- A Children's Home: a 4 bedded medium to long term home.

Oldham Council has received positive Ofsted inspection outcomes for internal residential homes, which evidences continuous improvements in service delivery and support to children, young people, and families in these units. Regulation 44 visits to council owned provision have shown positive outcomes and support for children and young people to meet their needs.

Oldham commissions placements for children in care through the Placements Northwest Framework, which has 150 providers registered. Providers on this framework operate in Oldham, the Northwest and Nationally.

There are 19 private Ofsted registered children's homes within Oldham:

- 4 offer a specialist male only service and are perpetually at maximum capacity so are unavailable for use by Oldham Council.
- 3 homes offer placements for the younger cohort so are not used by Oldham Council as we try to accommodate within a foster placement.
- 1 home is currently closed.
- 2 homes are for solo placements only and are at full capacity.
- 6 homes offer a comparable service to Oldham's internal provisions and are used on occasions when internal or alternative options are not available.
- 3 homes in which Oldham commission placements.

A small number of Oldham Children who are Looked After are placed in these private children's homes with the remaining places purchased by other LAs. We are working closely at an operational and strategic level to engage and manage the market and encourage providers to:

- Review their statements of purpose and any specialist support to better reflect the needs of Oldham's children and young people.
- Match children and young people to forthcoming vacancies arising from planned moves for long term placements from other LAs.
- Attend regular Provider Forums in partnership with Oldham's LADO and wider partnership.
- Understand the wider partnership approach to the transformation of residential provision.
- Establish and maintain strong partnership working arrangements with each of the providers to ensure Oldham's children and young people are considered first. This will include regular visits to their provisions.
- Sign up to the Provider Pledge that outlines the principles of working in partnership and expectations providers can have of Oldham Council.

Sufficiency requirements

There has been a noted change in the needs and profile of children and young people who have been accommodated in Oldham with drug misuse, criminal and sexual exploitation, emotional and behavioural difficulties, increasingly identified as part of the assessment process. The challenges in finding placements locally, particularly in a crisis and for children with complex needs, has been identified as a priority in the GM placement sufficiency strategy as it is the case that children with more complex needs are much less likely to be placed within the Greater Manchester area due to the limited number of specialist placements available locally.

Along with our neighbouring authorities in Greater Manchester (GM) and across the Northwest region we require better access to local residential provision and whilst there are enough beds in Greater Manchester for the children and young people who require residential settings to live in the region, access is a challenge due to competition from LAs outside of the Greater Manchester region who are commissioning the beds. Oldham Council are committed to supporting the delivery of Project Skyline as part of GM and local sufficiency plans and partnership work with GMCA. Project Skyline will realise 10 new residential settings and 24 additional placements within the GM footprint over the next 18 months. Properties will be purchased and owned by GMCA on behalf of all GM Local Authorities and will be operated by a provider/s appointed through a transparent commissioning and procurement process.

The local placement challenges have resulted in some children and young people aged 14-18 years being placed outside of the borough due to a lack of local, more suitable provision. In response the Council are opening three new children's homes to build on the strengths of our existing provisions and will contract commissioned arrangements with local private providers through effective market management and improved relationships as part of our transformation and sustainability programme to meet placement needs.

6.5 Semi-Independent and Independent Living

Oldham Council operates two leased and managed Semi-Independent Units for 16-18-year old's who are transitioning out of care. Across both units there are 9 beds plus 2 emergency beds.

Semi-independent (SI) and supported accommodation is commissioned through the Placements Northwest Framework, 67 providers are registered to provide high quality semi-independent group living and/or packages of floating support within 20 miles of Oldham town centre.

Providing suitable accommodation for Oldham Care Leavers remains consistently high at 97%. It is worth noting that new requirements for providers to be Ofsted registered may have implications for the availability of suitable accommodation options for young people aged 16/17. This will need to be considered in terms of commissioning intentions and market management.

In Oldham we are aware of 11 providers operating SI provision accommodating 19 Oldham young people. In March 2024 we commissioned 65 placements in this type of provision with a weekly average cost of £1,312.00.

We actively promote Staying Put and Staying Close arrangements for young people to provide support to delay moving out of their foster placements where it is appropriate. Oldham's Staying Put Policy includes supportive information that is easily accessible for carers and young people. Our strategy for pathways plans and transitions to independence is being developed from pre-16 onwards, to allow carers and the young people to explore all options and plan for this in advance.

In addition, the Council is committed to its role as Corporate Parent and has adopted a policy of determining all Care Leavers under the age of 25 to be in 'Priority Need'. This ensures that there is a duty to provide temporary and permanent accommodation for this group and reduce the likelihood of Care Leavers becoming homeless as they get older. A joint homeless young people protocol is in place between Housing Services and Children's Social Care, which covers both 16-17-year-olds and Care Leavers. The protocol reflects both statutory guidance and legislation, as well as local procedures for accessing support and services. We work with a local housing provider to support Care Leavers to develop skills for independence through our Semi-Independent Units with access to trainer flats for young people upon reaching the age of 18 years.

Sufficiency requirements

Whilst we recognise that it is often right and in the interests of the young person to remain with their foster family beyond their 18th birthday, we also accept that further work is needed for our broader leaving care accommodation offer. The staying put offer is one alternative that can be accessed and is supported by the Staying Put Policy, however we also want to enable young people to have opportunities to move into supported or independent living, where it is safe and practicable to do so.

With increasing demand and the extended duties towards assisting and supporting Care Leavers up to 25 years of age, we will continue to work with a range of local partners, providers, and private landlords to increase and improve accommodation choices for semi-independent and independent living.

7 Placement Distance and Stability

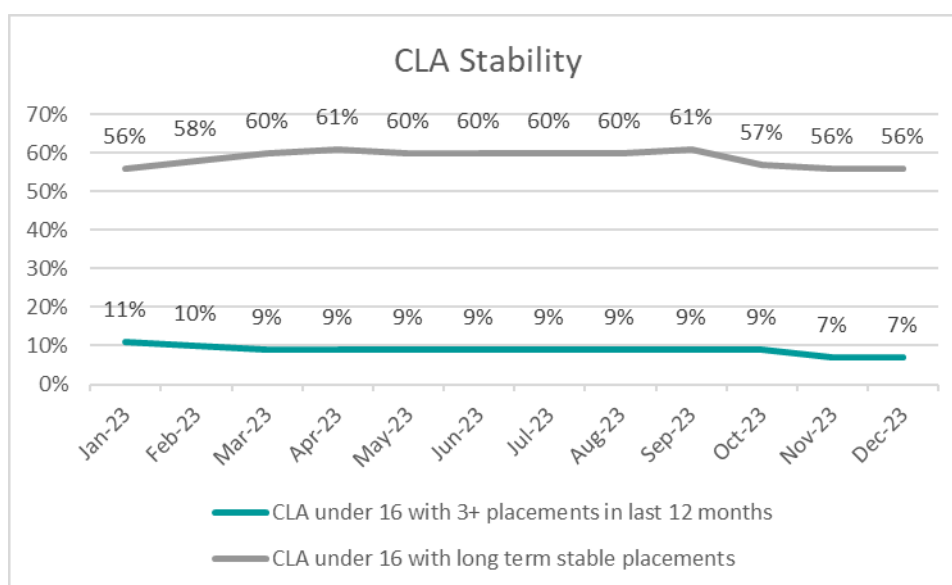
The average distance of all non-adoption placements within the Oldham CLA population is 9.38 miles. A total of 42 placements (8.61%) exceeds 20 miles from central Oldham, 19 of which are in residential provision. 56% of all commissioned Independent Foster Agency placements are in

Oldham, 46% are outside Oldham. 14% of all commissioned residential placements are in Oldham, 86% are outside Oldham.

We are committed to bringing as many of these children back to Oldham through the development of an enhanced in-house specialist fostering offer and multiple transformation developments in our edge of care provision and expansion of internal residential children's homes.

All external placements are reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine the quality and appropriateness of the placement with a view to matching these children or young people with foster carers selected to provide a specialised offer to meet needs locally.

In December 2023, the average number of placement moves in the last 12 months for all CLA placed at greater than 20 miles is 0.8, with 12 CLA having more than 1 placement move. 7% of all CLA have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months. This indicates that Oldham is performing in line with statistical neighbours and the national trend.



In December 2023, 56% of Children Looked After were in long term placements. This is in line with the statistical neighbours and England averages. However, we are committed to ensure all our Children Looked After live in safe, secure, stable, and caring placements as we have seen a decrease in overall stability since 2020 (67%).

Sufficiency requirements

We want to further improve placement stability for children and young people by reducing the number of placement moves and enabling foster carers and placement providers to access the right services and support that results in them being more likely to become permanent living arrangements for children and young people. We intend to do this by further embedding permanency planning and matching and through the delivery of specialist foster care Mockingbird constellations to support Children Looked After to remain in their foster care and prevent them being moved into residential care. Through early warning systems where children experience more than one move, we will provide timely and additional support services to reduce the risk of placement disruption.

8 Feedback from Children and Young People



The views of children and young people who live in our in-house or commissioned residential provision, along with the staff and managers who support them, have been sought to shape the residential offer they would like to see put in place in Oldham. We include feedback from children, young people and families in Regulation 44 reports which are undertaken by an independent, impartial commissioned provider for all our internal provision.

Young people have told us what they expect to see from our internal or commissioned residential provision:

- **No Stigma** - the home should blend into the street with no obvious signs that it is a Children's Home. No labelling or attaching stigma to young people living there.
- **Staffing** - they would like to see a mix of staff but asked for older staff if possible. They want to be involved in staff recruitment. They want staff who are genuine and attentive. They refer to 'Tough Love' and the importance of boundaries. They asked for staff who 'parent' them to be attentive, interested, aware and to help and support them.
- **Good Communication** – staff need to explain why rules are there and make them relevant to the children and young people living there now and not based on previous children's behaviours.
- **Model of Provision** - they want mixed homes. They asked for well decorated, clean, comfortable, and furnished homes. They want them to feel modern and new. They would like double beds in their rooms as they are "comfier and you can spread out" and be able to personalise their own rooms. The children asked for smaller homes that feel like home as they feel these are less daunting.
- **Participation** – they want to be actively involved in decisions on new young people coming to the home. They want to get involved in the changes that will be taking place to ensure their perspective and opinions help shape the plans.

Young people from the ASU shared their views with Ofsted inspectors in February 2024. They said:

- They love spending time with staff who help them make positive changes and improvements in their lives.
- Staff make sure that stays at the short-break service are always positive and pleasurable.
- Staff provide lots of positive activities that they thoroughly enjoy.
- Staff make sure they provide a welcoming, warm, homely and comfortable environment.
- Staff work with social workers, families and schools to make sure that they benefit from the best possible help and support.
- They have excellent relationships with staff who help and support them in all areas of their life.
- 'I really do like it here...Staff are really nice and they're dead supportive. They are also very inclusive and know how to listen to children...It's amazing.'

We have used this feedback alongside that from our semi-independent and residential settings in our plans to expand our residential estate and we are fully committed to the involvement of Children Looked After in the development and delivery of our new homes.

9 Placements Costs and Joint Commissioning

We are committed to making sure that we have the right provision at the right time and in the right place to meet children and young people's identified needs. We want to make the most effective use of our capacity and resources as a system wide partnership moving towards a more consistent approach to joint commissioning working with education, adults social care and health services to ensure we have a consistent holistic approach. This includes seamless transitions from children to adult's social care and health services as appropriate to needs.

9.1 Average Cost Per Week

Nationally the weekly cost of placements in private residential children's homes has significantly increased. In Q3 2023/24, the average cost of Oldham placements through the Placements Northwest Framework is £5,339 per week. The average cost of all external registered residential placements across the region is £5,573 per week. This has increased from the average in 2021/22 of £4,557 per week.

An additional budget pressure has been identified as a result of providers within the Placements Northwest Framework arrangements requesting fee uplifts from 1 April 2024 of up to or above 8.5% for all new placements. A number of providers within the framework have also requested fee uplifts of up to 7.1% for existing placements.

9.2 Year on Year Placement Cost Increases

Placement costs in Children's Social Care have been increasing year on year and are 71.6% higher in 2022/23 than in 2019/20. Over this period internal foster care placements costs have decreased but out of borough, IFA, residential, semi-independent, and secure provision costs have and continue to increase, as outlined below:

Financial year	Spend £s
2019/20	16,114,753

2020/21	20,911,399
2021/22	22,196,815
2022/23	27,658,040
2023/24 (projected)	37,362,196

We have seen increasing costs due to service demand and placement availability across GM, NW, and nationally, in addition to the requirement for more specialist and complex provision which has added to placement costs increases.

9.3 Complex Cases Funding

Complex placements and care packages are provided through joint planning across Children's Social Care, Health, and Education services. The element to be funded by each agency is determined through the Complex Case Funding Panel. Shared funding arrangements are considered for all children and young people who have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), where this is indicated.

Sufficiency requirements

There are some good examples of effective multi-agency funding arrangements where children and young people are placed in residential, out of borough or semi-independent provision. There has been a reduction in multi-agency funding in financial year 2023/24. 87% of placement spend comes from Children's Social Care with the remaining 13% split between Education and Health. The Complex Case Funding Panel will ensure the determination of agency responsibilities to meet the needs of Children Looked After from the start of their care journey.

9.4 Children and Young People's Commissioning

The Oldham Placement Provider Forum brings together senior leaders from Oldham Council, Integrated Care Partnership (Oldham), local education and learning settings and local health and care providers. The partners share the common ambition to ensure placements are of the highest quality and meet the needs of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Our aim is to place Oldham children and young people in Oldham whenever possible dependent on individual needs and safeguarding considerations.

We engage with the market to ensure Oldham's children and young people are considered first for any existing or forthcoming vacancies in Oldham. The Children and Young People's Commissioning Team along with partners are committed to co-production principles in all aspects of our work to secure placements and deliver high quality outcome-based support services. Young people are involved in all areas of the commissioning process and our Children in Care Council and Barrier Breakers group have produced a video – What commissioning means to me. This can be accessed via the link <https://youtu.be/226xCne977c?si=OIY1Eawo90iZqw5->

Work is underway with Oldham Integrated Care Partnership and Adult Social Care to establish joint commissioning principles and processes for placement sufficiency and funding a range of service offers.

Meet the market events were held with providers during 2023 for both residential and semi-independent provision to share our vision and explore innovative partnership approaches to

ensure our transformation ambitions are realised. Providers and the Council have worked together to co-produce a range of options for future delivery of residential and semi-independent sufficiency in Oldham. This has included working with private landlords to ensure appropriate provision is in place for our young people aged over 18 who currently have not been granted the right to remain by the Home Office (subject to appeal) and therefore have no recourse to public funds.

We will continue to explore and test the market in 2024/25 and establish a clear suite of requirements to accompany any tendering documents to ensure we engage with providers that will meet the current and future needs of our children with disabilities.

We will continue to develop positive relationships with CLA placement providers particularly focusing on those in Oldham as we acknowledge that in order to meet our Sufficiency Duty, we must have a broad range of services and settings to match the needs of our children and young people, and that it would not be economically sustainable for Oldham to operate the variety of settings needed on an exclusively in-house basis. We want to continue to utilise local provision as a first choice, where in the best interests of the child or young person and where that provision is judged by Ofsted as 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

10 Plans to Improve Placement Sufficiency in Oldham

As part of local market management we are actively working with existing and new providers that are opening registered children's homes and IFAs in Oldham to ensure they can deliver good quality homes that match our children's identified needs.

Our ambitious children's transformation and sustainability programme is the vehicle to improving placement sufficiency in Oldham to deliver the identified requirements, working alongside the Corporate Parenting Panel, the "Home for Every Child in Care" programme will:

- Increase the number of mainstream and Kinship foster carers that can care for Children Looked After to enable them to live in a family setting.
- Deliver six Mockingbird foster care constellations over the next three years (two per year) to support foster carers to care for children and young people with complex needs to reduce the risk of placement breakdown and improve placement stability.
- Expand our internal residential provision to provide more local residential placement for Children Looked After through the repurposing of an existing asset into a 1 x 4 bed children's home for 3 placements and purchase and refurbish 2 x 3 bed homes acquired on the open market for 4 placements, providing an additional 7 local residential placements from April 2025.
- Work with GM LAs and GMCA as part of Project Skyline to deliver ten registered children's homes for 24 placements across the GM footprint from 2025 onwards to meet residential homes sufficiency demand.
- Increase semi-independent provision in Oldham to provide more local supported accommodation for 16-18 years olds by working with private providers.
- Contract commissioned arrangements with local private providers to increase fostering, residential and semi-independent placements through effective market management and improved relationships, working with partners in the planning department to ensure we are aware of plans for all new provision in our area at the earliest opportunity.

- Support more Care Leavers into independent living through guarantor and first month rent offer for privately rented accommodation, working with local housing providers and private landlords in Oldham to prioritise homes.
- Develop an enhanced Early Intervention and Prevention multi-disciplinary outreach offer to rapidly support children, young people, and their families when the alternative is for the child or young person to come into care, by providing temporary respite and evidenced-based and targeted systemic interventions.
- Deliver effective management and reviews of complex cases through the complex cases funding panel to agree joint funding arrangements across social care, education and health for new and existing placements and complex care packages.

By delivering a comprehensive and sufficient mix of high quality, local accommodation choices both internally and through commissioned arrangements, there are a range of benefits to ensure the children in our care live in a safe, secure, stable, and caring home. These include:

- Children and young people remaining close to their existing support networks such as family, friends, school, and communities.
- Familiar settings that improve placement stability.
- Access to local education, employment, and training opportunities.
- Wider accommodation choices enabling better matching of accommodation, that offer the right environment to give children and young people the best chance of reaching their full potential, academically, socially, and emotionally.
- Increased local job opportunities for our residents as part of the operational delivery model.

11 Conclusion

Oldham Council intends to improve placement sufficiency in Oldham through a hybrid model of internal, commissioned, and innovative partnership approaches.

The governance arrangements for delivering the “Home for Every Child in Care” programme will be through the Children’s Transformation Board, Corporate Parenting Panel and Financial Sustainability Delivery Board.

We will work with children, young people, and their families to deliver on our commitments outlined within this strategy and ensure their lived experiences are heard and recognised.

We will review our My Place My Home Placement Sufficiency Strategy on an annual basis as part of the production of an Annual Sufficiency Statement and we will ensure that our Children Looked After and Care Leavers play an active part in the process to ensure they live in high quality, safe and stable homes where they can grow and develop.