



# **Market Position Statement January 2025: Agency Foster Care**

## Where we are now

**Decreasing numbers of children being cared for in an agency foster home and higher numbers of children living in a children's home.**

- **Fewer Lancashire children in care:** 284 fewer children in care at end of January 2025 compared to April 2021, 14% less.
- **Significant reduction to children in an agency foster home:** 170 fewer children in an agency foster home at end of January 2025 compared to April 2021, 35% less.
- **Sharp increase in the number of children living in children's homes:** 179 children in a children's home in April 2021 compared to 265 in January 2025, 86 or 48% more.
- **Non-connected carers:** 36.2% of non-connected carers were from an agency foster home in January 2025, compared to 47.2% in April 2021. The UK average in March 2024 was 48% of all filled mainstream fostering places were from an IFA.
- **Overall decrease in LA fostering capacity within the northwest.** Between March 2023 and March 2024, a 4% decrease in both the number of agency and local authority approved fostering households in the region.

**There is enough foster home capacity in Lancashire to meet local demand, but we can still struggle to find suitable homes.**

- **Local arrangement remains the primary route for making agency foster home placements.** In January 2025, 85% of agency foster home places were made through the Lancashire agreement. 97% of all agency places were made through either the local or regional contracts.
- **Low sufficiency usage.** 27% of reported in area agency foster home places are caring for a Lancashire child. This equates to over 500 approved places either as homes for children from outside of the Authority, on hold or unfilled, although the actual figure could be much more.
- **Reduction in the need for emergency foster home places.** 29% of agency foster home requests related to emergency needs in April 2021, compared to just 4% in January 2025.
- **Significant decrease in number of children supported via the Step Down into Fostering model.** 24 Step Down into Fostering placements, on average 8 per year, were made April 2021 to March 2024. The year to January 2025, no agency step down into foster homes have been found.
- **High number of enhanced support arrangements.** Since April 2021, 70 additional enhanced support arrangements in place, including 15 between April 24 and January 2025.
- **Increase to LA provided fostering households.** Between March 2023 and March 2024, a 3% increase in the total number of local authority fostering households in Lancashire.

**Very high numbers of children in care living in Lancashire from other local authority areas significantly impacts on local services.**

**SCHOOLS**

- As many children in care have special education needs or have a history of disrupted education, high numbers of children in care from out of area is placing a high demand on alternative educational provision (i.e. Pupil Referral Units or PRUs). Secondary PRUs and special schools in Lancashire are already over capacity and this additional demand is impacting on the local authority's ability to fulfil statutory duties for excluded pupils (which is the main purpose of a PRU).
- The high number of out of area children in care that are moving into Lancashire is putting a strain on admissions in both secondary and primary schools. This is impacting on our ability to find school places for Lancashire's own children in care, as schools are routinely reporting that they cannot meet any further demand due to the high numbers of children in care they already have on roll.

**HEALTH**

- There are over 1000 children from other Local Authorities living in Lancashire.
- Health has a responsibility to complete statutory health assessments and act as lead health professionals. This can also involve public health services such as school nursing.
- Many of these children can have a higher complexity of health needs and require various health services. This puts a high demand on already stretched services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Increasingly out of area children move to Lancashire with very little prior planning, which can mean that children are moving into Lancashire without a robust plan for how their health needs will be met.

**POLICE**

- Evidence shows that 1 in 10 children in care will be reported missing. Children in care will be reported missing on an average of 5 occasions as opposed to 2 occasions for children not looked after by the local authority. In 2024, 18% of children missing in care incidents related those in a foster home.
- In addition to police responding to children being missing, police also respond to crime related incidents linked to children in care

**It can be challenging to find local foster homes for some of our children.**

- **More than half of Lancashire's requests for agency foster homes are for 11-year-olds and over.** 28% of all requests relate to 11 to 13-year-olds.
- **High number of Lancashire's searches for an agency foster home are 'hard-to-find'.** 36% of all searches are 'hard-to-find', most relating to over 11-year-olds. This includes where no suitable foster homes can be found due to reported capacity.

- **West Lancashire, Lancaster, Chorley and South Ribble are areas with the highest 'hard-to-find' home requests.** In addition, Lancaster, Preston and Burnley represent 55% of agency foster home requests year to date.
- **More children with a plan for fostering are living in children's homes** due to challenges in finding suitable local foster homes. These children are more likely to be prioritised by children home providers due to their lesser complex needs/ behaviours, further exacerbating the challenge of finding homes for our children with a higher complexity of need/ behaviours.

**We are in more need for foster carers who can care for older children, sibling groups and children with complex social and emotional behaviours.**

- **Low number of younger children in an agency foster home.** Only 11% (34) of children in an agency foster home were 8 years-old and under in January 2025, compared with 20% in April 2021.
- **Sibling requests related to 14% of agency requests** between April 2024 and January 2025.
- **Searching for over 20 new enhanced foster homes at any one time.** On average there are up to 4 new enhanced (including Step Down) foster home requests made each month for children with complex social and emotional needs.

## Where we want to be

- **More agency foster carers in Lancashire caring for Lancashire children.**
- **Increase the proportion of our children living in foster homes to 68%** (66.8% January 2025).
- **Increase the number of foster carers that can support children with complex social and emotional needs, including those children moving on from a children's home with needs/behaviours such as:**
  - Emotional behaviour and attachment needs
  - Children with physical and/ or learning disabilities
  - Challenging or risk-taking behaviour, including damage to property or aggression, risk of child exploitation or missing from home
  - Aggression / violence
  - Harmful sexualised behaviours
  - Missing education.
- **Increase the number of children cared for by in-house non-connected carers.**

## Who we need

Building upon existing strong relationships with providers who are willing to work collaboratively and creatively with Lancashire County Council to deliver local homes for Lancashire's children in care.

Please contact [artenquiries@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:artenquiries@lancashire.gov.uk) for any further discussions