

Care Closer to Home Placement Commissioning Strategy

Care Closer to Home Flintshire County Council's Placement Commissioning Strategy

From 2022 to 2025
(Version_6)

23/6/2022



Consortiwm Comisiynu
Cymru ar gyfer Plant
Childrens' Commissioning
Consortium Cymru
Cydwethio Er Gwell • All Together Better

Section 1: The Background & Context

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Social Care and Policy Context

Section 2: The Data, Facts & Feedback

- Looked After Children Data and Trends
- Placements Profile
- Current Placement Provision
- Outcomes of Stakeholders Consultation

Section 3: The Analysis, Gaps & Options

- Projection of our Future Needs
- Financial Analysis
- Gap Analysis
- Options for Future Provision

Section 4: The Decisions, Planning & Strategy

- Commissioning Intentions
- Action Plans for Implementation

This is the initial Strategy outlining our strategic ambition. The Strategy has been written within a tight time frame and will be a live document subject to further work in consultation with the 4C's, North Wales Regional Commissioning Board and local review.

SECTION 1

1. Executive Summary

This strategy details Flintshire County Council’s intentions to deliver safe, high quality, supportive placements that support children and young people to develop the skills and resilience to lead fulfilled lives.

The strategy is set out in 4 sections. The following table provides a summary of the main themes within each section:

Executive Summary	
Section 1 The Background and Context	Our ambition is to ensure every child has a safe, stable and loving home. Our main aim is to support families to safely care for their own children. However, we recognise that family and friends may not always be appropriate carers. This Strategy: i) sets out the actions we will take over the next 3 years to enable more children to live closer to home and ii) outlines the resources that we need to deliver this ambitious programme.
Section 2 The Data, Facts & Feedback	As of March 2022: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 248 children looked after in Flintshire • There are 38 children placed with independent foster carers • There are 2 children placed with 3rd sector foster carers • There are 34 children placed in independent residential care • There are 7 children in supported accommodation • Flintshire's comparative rate of children looked after is below the Wales average figure • The majority of children in care are aged between 5-15 • 83% live with their parents or foster carers or kinship carers • 60% of looked after children live in placements in Flintshire • 23% live outside Flintshire but in Wales • Over the previous 3 years, an average of 94 children were placed into foster care. With 27%, 34% and 20% placed with external fostering providers • National benchmark for external foster placement utilisation is 23%
Section 3 The Analysis, Gaps & Options	Foster care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in foster care provision include support for older children, sibling groups, and parent and child placements • Our data forecasting identifies that we need to recruit 59 foster carers over the next 3 years within a highly competitive market with finite foster carers • Realistically demand will need to be met through in house expansion and new innovative partnerships Residential care

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in local residential care include placements for teenagers who often have complex needs, underlying trauma, and can show behaviours of concern • Placement options for children 16+ are extremely limited and can necessitate bespoke arrangements that operate outside of RISCA registration • We have some excellent Providers, with specialist skills and resources, and clear values and principles that place children at the heart of their work • There are significant workforce recruitment and retention pressures 						
<p>Section 4 The Decisions, Planning & Strategy</p>	<p>Flintshire’s strategic commitments are to:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="448 674 1374 1823"> <tr> <td data-bbox="448 674 639 1010">Expand</td> <td data-bbox="639 674 1374 1010"> <p>Targeted Intensive Family Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ further investing in Family Group Conferencing ➤ commissioning parent advocacy ➤ working with Health and Education to provide targeted support for children and families with neuro diversity <p>Maethu Flintshire / Foster Flintshire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ recruiting more foster carers ➤ creating an additional Mockingbird Hub </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="448 1010 639 1585">Build</td> <td data-bbox="639 1010 1374 1585"> <p>In house residential care including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ an assessment and support home with MST therapy ➤ 4 bedroom Homes providing permanent homes ➤ a crisis flat ➤ small group Homes supporting 1 or 2 children ➤ provision for unaccompanied asylum seeking children ➤ independent supported living for 16/17 year olds <p>Our workforce capacity and skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ social work capacity to assess and support more foster carers ➤ recruiting a Children’s RI, Registered Managers, Deputy Managers and Therapists ➤ recruiting and developing residential care staff ➤ providing training on DBT and PBS </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="448 1585 639 1823">Embrace</td> <td data-bbox="639 1585 1374 1823"> <p>Work with high quality Providers who deliver positive outcomes and are committed to the values and principles of ‘not for profit’. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing a partnership approach to specialist, therapeutic fostering - working with local quality providers who have specialist expertise and resources </td> </tr> </table>	Expand	<p>Targeted Intensive Family Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ further investing in Family Group Conferencing ➤ commissioning parent advocacy ➤ working with Health and Education to provide targeted support for children and families with neuro diversity <p>Maethu Flintshire / Foster Flintshire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ recruiting more foster carers ➤ creating an additional Mockingbird Hub 	Build	<p>In house residential care including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ an assessment and support home with MST therapy ➤ 4 bedroom Homes providing permanent homes ➤ a crisis flat ➤ small group Homes supporting 1 or 2 children ➤ provision for unaccompanied asylum seeking children ➤ independent supported living for 16/17 year olds <p>Our workforce capacity and skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ social work capacity to assess and support more foster carers ➤ recruiting a Children’s RI, Registered Managers, Deputy Managers and Therapists ➤ recruiting and developing residential care staff ➤ providing training on DBT and PBS 	Embrace	<p>Work with high quality Providers who deliver positive outcomes and are committed to the values and principles of ‘not for profit’. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing a partnership approach to specialist, therapeutic fostering - working with local quality providers who have specialist expertise and resources
Expand	<p>Targeted Intensive Family Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ further investing in Family Group Conferencing ➤ commissioning parent advocacy ➤ working with Health and Education to provide targeted support for children and families with neuro diversity <p>Maethu Flintshire / Foster Flintshire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ recruiting more foster carers ➤ creating an additional Mockingbird Hub 						
Build	<p>In house residential care including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ an assessment and support home with MST therapy ➤ 4 bedroom Homes providing permanent homes ➤ a crisis flat ➤ small group Homes supporting 1 or 2 children ➤ provision for unaccompanied asylum seeking children ➤ independent supported living for 16/17 year olds <p>Our workforce capacity and skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ social work capacity to assess and support more foster carers ➤ recruiting a Children’s RI, Registered Managers, Deputy Managers and Therapists ➤ recruiting and developing residential care staff ➤ providing training on DBT and PBS 						
Embrace	<p>Work with high quality Providers who deliver positive outcomes and are committed to the values and principles of ‘not for profit’. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing a partnership approach to specialist, therapeutic fostering - working with local quality providers who have specialist expertise and resources 						

Eliminating Profit from Care

This Strategy has been produced within the context of Welsh Government's commitment to *'eliminate private profit from the care of looked after children during the next Senedd term.'* This commitment is about rebalancing the market so that the duties on local authorities in relation to looked after children are not contracted out to for-profit companies and remain with public sector or not-for-profit providers.

The intention of this commitment is to remove all private profit from the care of children in relation to children's care homes, foster care, supported accommodation for young people up to the age of 25 and specialist care at home for children including disabled children. An important element of this work is a strong focus on ensuring children are cared for and supported closer to their communities.

Delivering this Strategy

There are currently 38 children placed with independent foster carers and an additional 2 children placed with 3rd sector foster carers. There are also 39 looked after children supported in residential care. Rebalancing the children's care market within Flintshire in accordance with the stated aims of Welsh Government to eliminate profit will necessitate significant investment in support across from children on the 'edge of care', foster care and residential care.

Our analysis is that to rebalance the market over the next 3 years we would need to recruit 59 foster carers and develop in-house residential care for 20 children. We are realistic about the challenge and the interrelationship with working in partnership with Providers to develop a shared approach.

Our Ambition: Foster Care

Flintshire is proud to be part of the local authority Maethu Cymru: Foster Wales family. As part of the national approach a Flintshire Recruitment and Retention strategy has been developed. The strategy outlines our approach to ensure the sufficiency of in-house foster carers to meet the needs of children looked after in Flintshire County Council. It also outlines the actions undertaken and those planned to ensure foster carer retention. The Recruitment and Retention strategy complements and enables the delivery of this wider Placement Commissioning Strategy.

Our Ambition: Residential Care

Flintshire County Council has commenced an ambitious programme of developing in house Residential Children's Care Homes as part of its Care Closer to Home programme. During 2022/2023 we will be opening 4 registered provisions in Flintshire each with its own individual offer and focus. Where appropriate we are working on a sub-regional level with 2 of

our local provisions forming a partnership with Wrexham and our Health Board. These are being funded through the new RIF funding programme. These provisions are Tŷ Nyth and a crisis flat.

Tŷ Nyth: Assessment and Support Centre & Crisis Flat

Tŷ Nyth will provide short term, accommodation for 8-16 weeks with an intensive MST Therapeutic team on site to support safe family/carer reunification. In addition we are developing a separate provision on the Tŷ Nyth site to provide regulated short term placements in emergencies

We have sought Regional Integrated Fund (RIF) revenue funding to support this development.

Park Avenue and Bromfield park (temporary names)

We have 2 Homes currently under development for Flintshire children – Park Avenue and Bromfield Road. A combination of grant funding has supported the capital development costs associated with these provisions (ICF and Safe Accommodation Grant). However, there are significant revenue costs associated with developing the infrastructure for these provisions as we recruit, and develop staff, prepare our policies and procedures for CIW registration and then commence a careful process of placement matching. This process requires financial ‘front loading’ as the service builds up to run at its optimum and reach a position where we can reduce our reliance on the independent sector, and out of county/ out of Wales placements and begin to realign placement costs to fund local authority based provision. We have used the framework for costing developed by 4C’s to inform the financial forecasting for Bromfield Park which amounts to £345k.

Supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children

We are about to embark on the refurbishment of a 3 bedroom property to provide long term independent supported living accommodation for UASC. Given the level of work that is required it is likely that this provision will open in 2023/24.

Ambition for 2023- 2025

If additional funding was available our plans for residential care could be extended to develop a further 2 registered provisions. We have identified 2 further properties that have the potential for refurbishment and registration as residential Care Homes for children. One could provide support as a general residential care home and the other have a focus on supporting 16-17 year olds who need support with independent living. We have found

particular challenges with supporting this latter group of children and are increasingly reliant on bespoke arrangements that are operating outside of RISCA registration.

We have employed an architect to undertake a feasibility study with costings for these properties to inform a business case for consideration. It is clear that to take the developments forward capital funding would be required for the 2023/24 financial year and revenue funding for the 2024/25 financial year and beyond. It is anticipated that subject to business case approval, indicatively each prospective development would require approximately £0.8-1.0 M in initial capital funding and additionally continued revenue funding of approximately £0.345m per annum when the services become operational.

Working with local providers

If funding was provided the developments would give us a total of 17 placements for our young people. This would not enable us to completely remove our reliance on the independent sector. Our intention would be to work with high quality local providers in Flintshire to develop partnerships that support the principles of not for profit, with surpluses being re-invested into caring for children recognising that this will be a journey, delivered in phases, to reach a position where care services are locally based, locally designed and locally accountable.

Workforce infrastructure

It is also clear that we would require investment to employ a specific Children's RI to become RISCA compliant. This post will need to be recruited and funded with immediacy to help drive this strategic programme.

Financial ask

Year	Capital	Revenue	Total
2022/23	£50k	£350k	£400k
2023/24	£1.8m	£350k	£2.150m
2024/25		£350k	£350k
Total	£1.850	£1.050m	£2.900m

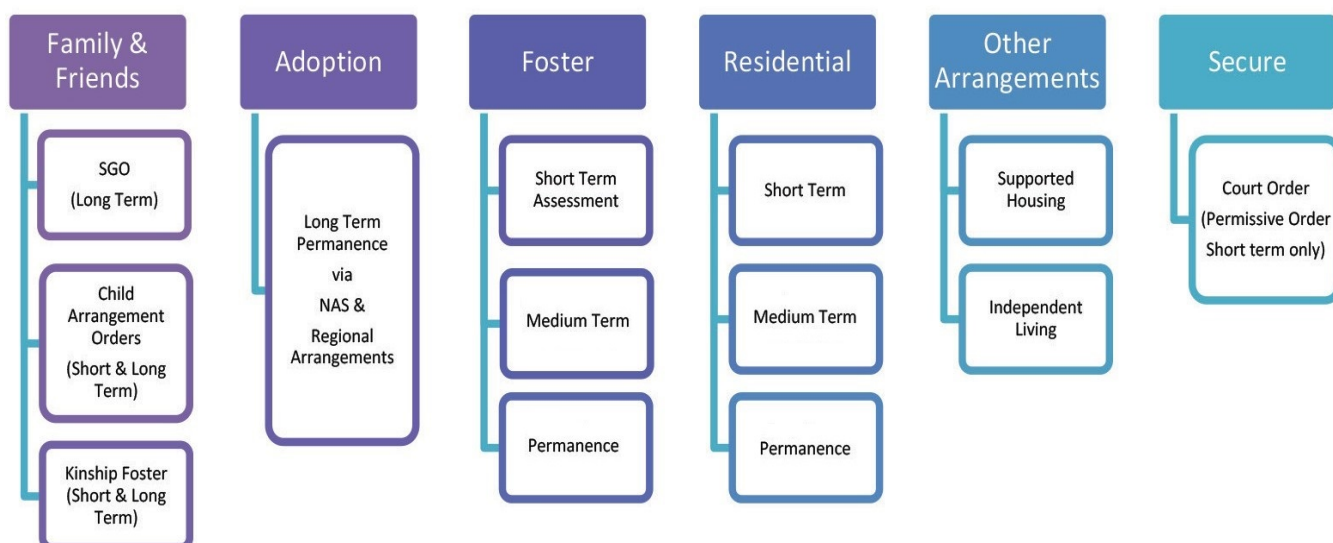
2 Introduction

Looked After Children are those children and young people aged between 0 to 18 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the Local Authority. Children are accommodated by the Local Authority either through parental agreement or as a result of court proceedings because they are at significant risk of being harmed. A significant proportion of children coming into care have a history of neglect or abuse. Some may have experienced the death of a parent or have parents who are unable to care for them because of illness or disabilities.

The majority of children and young people looked after by Flintshire County Council are placed in foster care. However, there is a growing proportion of young people who need residential care, usually due to their more complex needs.

Our main aim is to support families to care for their own children. This is what the majority of families want and where most children will best achieve their potential. This document is therefore aimed at those children who will only thrive where intervention is needed and placements need to be arranged in the best interests of the child.

For the purpose of this strategy, placement types are represented as follows:



2.1 Purpose of the Strategy

Our ambition is to ensure every child has a safe, stable and loving home. Our main aim is to support families to safely care for their own children. However, we recognise that family and friends may not always be appropriate carers. This Strategy: i) sets out the actions we will take over the next 3 years to enable more children to live closer to home and ii) outlines the resources that we need to deliver this ambitious programme.

This strategy:

- **Shapes** our internal services to support children locally and to maximise the benefits of public sector provision in terms of quality and value for money;
- **Commits** to collaborative working with public sector partners across the Regional footprint where this offers identifiable benefits;
- **Requires** us to increase placement choice, supplemental to our sufficiency duty to enable good matching;
- **Defines** our relationship to be based on the co-production of outcome focused services, acknowledging that there are a range of different methods for strategic commissioning with multiple partners who may be co-operatives, charities or commercial partners who can work with us to deliver models where surpluses are re-invested into caring for children

The six Local Authority partners in North Wales are signed up to the 'Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs)' National Frameworks for Foster Care and for C&YP Residential Care services.

Representatives from each of the six Local Authority partners participate in the evaluation of potential providers when the 4Cs opens each of the National Frameworks and also in the 4Cs Annual Quality Performance Assessment (AQPA) review of providers on the frameworks. This ensures that the commissioning requirements of the Local Authority partners are addressed when the 4Cs opens each framework, and that through the AQPA the Local Authority partners are actively involved in working with providers to ensure that the type and quality of support meets the needs of LAC&YP.

Representatives from each Local Authority partner meet regularly with the 4Cs to ensure that there is a shared understanding of local need and that any identified gaps in services are understood / addressed.

The 4Cs worked with Local Authority partners to develop the 'Children and Young People's Residential Care and Fostering North Wales Market Position Statement (April 2021 to April 2023) ('the MPS')' which has been published. The purpose of the MPS is to provide an update to providers explaining the current demand and projected future need for foster care and C&YP residential care services in North Wales.

The North Wales Partnership Children's Services Group (which consists of the six Local Authority Heads of Children's Services and strategic leads from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB)) has regional oversight and responsibility for the MPS. The Group is committed to working with providers to ensure that there is sufficient provision locally (of acceptable quality) to meet the Local Authority partners sufficiency duty.

2.2 Priorities and Desired Outcomes

Flintshire County Council is committed to deliver safe, high quality, supportive placements that support children and young people to develop the skills and resilience to lead fulfilled lives.

Flintshire will seek to support children to remain with their parents, or connected persons, where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Appendix 1 sets out the factors that will be considered when making placements. Where placements are commissioned we will seek to support locally based provision wherever possible, and where this is consistent with the needs, circumstances and wishes of the child/young person. Where local based provision is not available we will seek to provide support in North Wales and within third sector and not-for-profit provision before then considering the rest of Wales and England.

A consistent message from many respondents who took part in the consultation for the '**North Wales Population Needs Assessment**' (Published in April 2022) was that there is a significant gap in children's mental health services, waiting lists are too long and families are struggling.

Specific recommendations for improvements were:

- Better access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the neurodevelopmental team for young people. (Please note these are two separate teams).
- Integrating mental health services into schools, especially counselling for primary school children and raised awareness of trauma amongst staff.
- Increasing the number of Looked-after Children nurses.
- Joint working between mental health services and other children's services to streamline care.
- Increasing psychological support for children, especially those in care and less reliance on medication as an intervention.
- More counsellors, especially male counsellors and counsellors speaking Welsh, Polish and other languages.
- One stop shops to find out about and access all services in a local area.
- Making the transition from child to adult services more user-friendly for young people and tailored to the individual's developmental needs.

The work to date on developing the '**North Wales Market Stability Report**' has identified the following:

The number of children receiving care and support has increased

In 2020, there were almost 2,900 children receiving care and support across North Wales. This is 2,300 children for each 100,000 children in the population, which is slightly lower than the rate for Wales as whole of 2,550 children in need for each 100,000 children in the population. The numbers vary across North Wales and over time with no clear trend.

In 2018-19, there were 575 children on the child protection register in North Wales. Although the numbers vary year to year for each local authority, overall for North Wales, the level has remained similar, with a small decrease of 3% (15 children). Due to the small numbers involved it is not possible to identify clear trends as, for example, a dramatic change from one year to the next may be due to one family moving to or from an area.

The number of looked after children is not expected to continue to increase

Although the overall figures for all looked after children have shown a steady increase year-on-year to date this is not expected to continue in the future (Regional Partnership Board, 2019).

Children who are care experienced were more vulnerable to the pandemic

The Rapid Review of the Population Needs Assessment (Regional Partnership Board, 2020) highlighted the impact of the pandemic on care experienced children which included isolation and loneliness and disruptions in access to services. In North Wales, there was an initial dip in child protection referrals but then the rate of referrals returned to expected levels. An increased level of monitoring visits took place to households where there were children on the child protection register – weekly visits instead of the 10-day timescale.

There is an increase in newly accommodated looked after children and young people

In 2021 there were 1,470 local children and young people looked-after by North Wales local authorities which is similar to the national picture across the whole of Wales. The number of children looked after in North Wales has increased by 350 during the time frame between 2017 and 2021. North Wales has a lower number of children looked after per 100,000 population than the rest of Wales, however there are significant variations across the region, from 800 in Flintshire to 1,300 in Wrexham. It is important to note that the number is currently fluctuating rapidly with a significant increase in newly accommodated young people.

Market overview

Despite a shared commitment to prevention and early intervention, there will always be a small proportion of looked after children who need residential placements. Depending on care needs this may be in a:

- Residential Care Homes with paid care staff
- Secure Accommodation Unit
- Residential Family Unit

The updated Market Position Statement (Regional Partnership Board, 2019) provided a breakdown of residential care provision in North Wales. As at 31st March 2020, there were 70 North Wales children living in a care home. The total number of children living in a children's home increased by 133% in North Wales

between 2016 (30 children) and 2020 (70 children).

There is a shortage of local residential providers

In August 2020, ADSS Cymru published a report which examined the case for rebalancing social care provision in Children's Services (ADSS Cymru, 2020). The report identified a significant imbalance of power in the children's residential care market, which is affecting placements and choice, the ability to make the best match to a child's needs, the workload, and the outcomes for children. Without rebalancing, there will be a continued reliance on private providers with, in some cases, high cost, and questionable value for money, greater instability for children and poor outcomes. The aim of any rebalancing must be to develop stable, resilient markets, which offer options and choice, quality care, fewer placement breakdowns, and good outcomes for children.

An increasing demand for residential placements and a lack of supply in local residential providers has resulted in a 'providers market'. Providers are able to be more selective of the young people they accept, which may result in those with higher levels of complex needs and behavioural challenges being more difficult to place. This may be due to the skill / expertise of the provider, a concern about how behaviour might impact other residents and the local community, and worries that all of this might impact upon the outcomes of the service.

Alongside the financial pressure, there is also a pressure on staff time. In the event of a bed becoming available, a number of local services may be seeking to secure it, resulting in competition.

This high demand puts pressure on local authority finances, with providers able to dictate the cost of the provision. There is a risk that expenditure on out of county placements increases as placement costs increase in a demand led market.

North Wales is currently reliant on the independent sector for children's residential care provision. The Children's Transformation Programme and Integrated Care Funding has been used to increase in house provision and fund preventative activity. Local authorities continue to explore opportunities to facilitate a different approach to help reduce the reliance on out of county placements which lead to unsustainable financial pressures for social services and education.

There is a shortage of specialist provision for children and young people with complex behavioural and emotional needs

In 2019 for over half of children placed in residential care were receiving care primarily due to emotional and behavioural needs and two thirds of those children were aged between 13 to 16 years old (Regional Partnership Board, 2019).

There is a significant shortage of specialist placements for young people with significant emotional and behavioural needs in North Wales. Children are often placed in England, away from their families. There is limited provision in England. Social workers struggle to place children with severe needs as providers tend to reserve places to try to place a child with less severe needs.

Some children may have received their education through the Welsh language and therefore have difficulty coping in an English medium school and needing tutor or assistant to provide additional support.

Young people in crisis often attend Accident and Emergency and stay in hospital settings in an emergency situation.

There is a shortage of emergency accommodation

Social services across the UK are facing increased pressures to find placements in emergencies. Locally, we do have situations where no placement can be sourced for a child. This necessitates the development of a holding position to provide accommodation and support until a placement can be found. These situations may arise from difficulties in placing young people following the breakdown of relationships at home, transfer of children where the police have used their powers of protection to remove children and a lack of secure beds for young people with high level needs and welfare risks.

It is important to emphasise that these arrangements are used as a last resort in emergency situations, due to exceptional circumstances and for a short period until a regulated provision can be sourced. Safeguards around unregulated placements include the need for senior manager approval, notification to Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as our regulator, a care and support plan, completion of social work visits, involvement of Independent Reviewing Officers and supervision of social workers to look at arrangements/ move on plans.

The arrangements that local authorities have to put in place in emergencies can amount to unregulated placements. Under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 it is an offence for a person to provide a regulated service without being registered in respect of that service.

Local market overview

The Market Position Statement 2021 appraised the market and set out what is happening, residential services needed for children in the region and aspirations for future providers.

- The number of children who live in a children's home has increased, some of these children are able to live in a foster placement but there are currently not enough foster carers with the right skills to support them.
- Some of our children who live in a children's home live outside of local authority boundary despite sufficient in-area capacity.

What we don't need:

- We do not encourage expansion in North Wales by independent providers of residential care for children whose services are not developed to meet the needs of our children.
- We do not want providers to operate children's homes without a clear model of care or deliver standard provision only.

What we want:

- We want to work with new and existing providers and support them to deliver models of care that will meet the needs of our children.
- We want to work with new and existing providers and encourage them to develop their businesses in a way that, in addition to improving outcomes for our children, also provide a wider social value to our communities.
- We want providers who are able to safely care for our children with multiple high needs and are able to provide alternative accommodation to secure welfare provision.
- We want providers who will work in partnership with us during periods of transition including stepping down to live with a foster carer or reunification with their family.
- Welsh culture is very important to us as a region and we want more providers who are able to deliver their services in Welsh.

Current and projected trends

- Challenges in accessing secure welfare beds and local alternatives that provide crisis intervention and diversion from secure accommodation.
- Challenges in sourcing appropriate local placements for children and young people with complex needs.
- Need for additional and appropriate short term care arrangements and facilities for children. This also includes children with additional needs and on occasions their siblings.
- Children aged 16+ often have complex needs and placement options are limited, a strategic approach is needed in supporting the accommodation and support needs of young people ages 16-18 and for care leavers.

Impact of commissioning practices on the market

All Wales Frameworks are used to commission individual placements across a range of placement types. These frameworks deliver strategic level partnerships with providers in fostering and residential services. The frameworks are used where either the Regions Sufficiency Duty necessitates external commissioning or where best quality, outcome delivery and value for money is achieved through external commissioning rather than internal service delivery. The All Wales Frameworks are managed by the 4C's.

The vehicle used for e-tendering external fostering and residential placements is the Children's Commissioning Support Resources (CCSR) which offers transparent and outcomes focused placement commissioning for both Framework and Non-Framework regulated placements and allows compliance with the relevant procurement guidance and regulation that underpins commissioning.

Provision of service in the Welsh language

Children who are placed out of country due to lack of specialist placements do not have the option to receive care services in Welsh. This is a particular issue in Gwynedd.

2.3 Methodology

This strategy is being refreshed in light of Welsh Government's commitment to eliminate private profit from the care of looked after children.

The First Minister and the Deputy Minister for Social Services are clear that the 'Eliminate private profit from the care of looked after children' Programme for Government commitment is a top priority for delivery. This commitment itself builds on the long held view of Ministers that private profit be removed from the care of looked after children and aligns with calls made by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Voices from Care.

Further, children themselves have expressed upset at being looked after by profit making organisations, that they feel 'bought and sold'.

"Eliminating profit making from the care of looked after children is one of the highest priorities for this Government. We believe that public care should mean that children are cared for by local authorities or other not for profit providers where social values and the best interests of and outcomes for children are the overriding motives".

[Deputy Minister for Social Services](#)

The provision of public/not-for-profit foster, Kinship and Special Guardianship placements are inextricably linked to the delivery of this commitment. The wider Programme for Government commitments place an emphasis on increasing the focus on keeping families together. Where children cannot remain with birth parents, we want to increase the use of Kinship and Special Guardianship arrangements where it is possible and in the best interests of the child to do so.

Our strategic direction is to rebalance provision in line with this commitment. This work is underpinned by intelligence gathered for the development of key documents that are in development:

The North Wales Social Care and Well-being Services Improvement Collaborative, together with the involvement of all six North Wales Local Authorities and BCUHB has published the second regional Population Needs Assessment (PNA) and is working with Local Authority and BCUHB partners to publish a regional Market Stability Report (MSR).

The PNA and MSR will be the foundation for the future commissioning of services for C&YP across the regions Health and Social Care Sector ensuring that C&YPs needs are met sufficiently.

The PNA and MSR will be continually reviewed in order to ensure that partners have a shared view on need and sufficiency on a regional basis.

Work undertaken to formulate the MSR has identified the particular need to increase the availability of emergency and longer term accommodation for

C&YP with complex needs including mental health, learning disability and emotional behavioural needs.

Other relevant reference sources include:

- Market Position Statement (MPS) for Children and young people's residential care and fostering and secure accommodation.
- Foster Wales Flintshire Recruitment & Retention Strategy 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2025

3 Social Care & Policy Content

3.1 Relevant National Legislation and Guidance

Flintshire County Council will ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for all types of children who are looked after under Section 79 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act).

The Local Authority has a duty to ensure the placement is made within the local authority's own area (section 81(9) of the Act), unless it is not reasonably practical to do so or there are overriding reasons for placing a child out of area, the primary overriding reason being safeguarding.

In keeping with the duty and aim of promoting the upbringing of a child by their family, there is a clear emphasis in the Act that, unless it is not consistent with the child's well-being, arrangements must be made for the child who needs accommodation to live with a parent or a person with parental responsibility or residence/child arrangement order. Where this is not possible, preference should be given to placement with a relative, friend or other person connected to the child or young person.

If neither of these is possible, a range of sufficient alternative provision should be available within the Local Authority, including foster carers and children's homes, supported lodgings and secure accommodation.

It is this 'sufficient alternative accommodation' that is the focus of this Placement & Commissioning Strategy.

Under the Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, Flintshire County Council has a duty to take into account the well-being of individuals when creating sustainability plans. The well-being goals of the act will inform how sufficient alternative accommodation will be sourced, taking into account its effect on the wellbeing of the individual as well as its wider impact on sustainability in Wales.

For individuals with additional learning needs, The Local Authority must adhere to the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, which creates a duty to consider how barriers to learning will be overcome as part of the placement brokerage process, ensuring that the learner's views, wishes and feelings are at the heart of the process.

As a Welsh Local Authority, we must also comply with the Welsh Language Standards Regulations 2017, and will take into account individuals preferred language for communication and correspondence when seeking placements.

Welsh Government have set a clear vision for services for looked after children and care leavers. As part of this vision eight 'Programme for Government' commitments have been developed to improve the lives of care experienced children and young people and families on the edge of care. Taken together, these commitments will help transform the way care is provided for looked after children in Wales.

Other sources of relevant legislation and guidance include:

- The Children's Commissioner for Wales 'No Wrong Door' report;
- Part 1 Scheme for Children and Young People under the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010;
- 'Five Ways to Wellbeing';
- ADSS Cymru report which examined the case for rebalancing social care provision in Children's Services (ADSS Cymru, 2020).

Central to the Vision is Welsh Government's 'Programme for Government' (Removing profit from care) which details their commitment to eliminate private profit from the care of looked after children. Welsh Ministers are clear that profit should not be made from caring for vulnerable children and their families. The aim is to ensure that public money invested in accommodation for care experienced children does not lead to profit, but instead any surpluses are reinvested into children's services to deliver better outcomes, service improvement and further professional development. This means that the care of looked after children in Wales will be provided by public sector, charitable or not for profit organisations.

To support the journey needed to transition to a not-for-profit system Welsh Government have announced a £30m funding package over the next 3 years - £10m each year.

3.2 National Context

- The Children's Commissioner for Wales 'No Wrong Door' report;
- Part 1 Scheme for Children and Young People under the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010;
- 'Five Ways to Wellbeing';
- Welsh Government 'Programme for Government' (Removing profit from care);
- ADSS Cymru report which examined the case for rebalancing social care provision in Children's Services (ADSS Cymru, 2020).

The Children's Commissioner for Wales 'No Wrong Door' report has been a driver for commissioning external consultancy support to assist the Partnership Children's Services Group in formulating a strategy to develop improved working and ease of access to Local Authority, BCUHB and CAMHS services. The initial phase of the commissioned support was focused on developing the strategy for this, and will be followed by the implementation of the strategy phase in 2022 / 2023.

The Emotional Health Wellbeing and Resilience workstream (part of the C&YPs Transformation Programme in North Wales) funded by the Welsh Government Transformation Fund was established with the purpose of implementing service

models that will enable access to support that builds emotional resilience in children, young people and their parents / carers and addresses the root causes known to contribute to emotional distress and risk of family / placement breakdown which, in the worst case scenario, leads to children and young people becoming looked after. The aim of this workstream is to reduce the escalation of need and risk, improve personal outcomes and build capacity for all C&YP to access information, advice and assistance in a timely manner.

Identifying need at the earliest point and providing the appropriate information, advice and assistance and early help where required can delay or prevent escalating need. Therefore, the focus of the early intervention workstream is to implement a collaborative approach across North Wales partner agencies (Local Authorities; Education and Children's Services; Health; CAMHS) through the development of a meaningful integrated framework and working model with guiding principles for supporting the healthy development of emotional health, wellbeing and resilience of children and young people aged 0-18 years, in support of the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' principles.

The [Programme for Government](#) sets out the ambitious commitments Welsh Government will deliver over the next 5 years. These will tackle the challenges that are faced and will improve the lives of people across Wales.

In relation for this strategy, areas of consideration are:

- Provide additional specialist support for children with complex needs who may be on the edge of care.
- Explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers.
- Eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after.
- Fund regional residential services for children with complex needs ensuring their needs are met as close to home as possible and in Wales wherever practicable.
- Strengthen public bodies in their role as 'corporate parent'.

Across Wales there are a number of areas where significant pressures are being experienced in relation to children's services in Wales. These can be summarised as:

1) Responding to the Pandemic

Children's services across Wales met the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to provide services, including face-to-face work with vulnerable families, with creativity and determination; driven by a focus upon public duty and keeping children safe.

As restrictions ceased, we have seen changing complexity and increasing demand for services as the aftermath of the pandemic takes its toll. We are seeing the associated increases in poverty, domestic abuse, unemployment, isolation, family breakdown and homelessness, linked to the pandemic. These issues will continue to have an impact upon people's mental health and well-being, to the extent that

more parents and children will need services across the spectrum of need, delivered by a resilient and robust workforce.

2) Prevention and Family Support.

Working on the underlying causes that prevent children from entering the care system needs to be a national priority for all public services. With the right investment, local authorities can continue their already well-evidenced drive to improve interventions and services that support families and prevent family breakdown. These centre on well targeted, evidenced and strength based therapeutic interventions that are centred around trusted relationships.

3) Safeguarding

Safeguarding and supporting the well-being of children and families is everybody's business, and it requires a multi-agency and community response. In the year ahead, Safeguarding Board Member Agencies will re-design their multi-agency safeguarding response to the increasing number of young people who are exposed to harm by influences outside the home, such as criminal exploitation.

Responding to the needs and challenges of adolescents is one of society's more complex issues and we can conclude that the current looked after system does not always deliver best outcomes. We need to better understand what works for children in these circumstances.

4) Children in care

At present, Wales faces a crisis in the shortage of available and suitable placements for young people. The consequences present an impending perfect storm where authorities may find themselves unable to safeguard a child in the foreseeable future. The impact of this for children and their families is considerable.

This is despite the concerted efforts by local authorities to increase the supply of suitable placements. Alongside partners and stakeholders, we need to continue to overcome barriers involved in the provision of sufficient, suitable, stable, and resilient local foster homes, children's homes and supported accommodation. Alongside this, we need to continue to recruit adopters who can meet the needs of children with an adoption plan.

There has been a significant shift in the provision and ownership of residential care placements, with local authorities less likely to own and operate children's homes. It is clear the current market model is not delivering sufficiency. There is more that can be done to re-balance and re-shape the care placement market, so that there is a mixed economy of service provision and placements, which actually meet the real and present needs of children in care today.

Welsh Government's investment to allow local authorities to purchase, enhance or remodel assets in a phased way is integral to facilitating this rebalance of care.

5) Workforce

Workforce well-being is a critical factor in delivering effective social care. There is a shortage of experienced qualified social workers within children's services.

Immediate investment in this workforce is required so that, over time, capacity mirrors demand.

6) Resources

Disruption to children's education, social and family lives means that it is vital that sufficient sustainable resources are in place to ensure capacity can meet demand.

It is of critical importance that Welsh Government continues to support local authorities in their work as they seek to intervene with families earlier and prevent problems from escalating.

3.3 Key Messages: Research and Good Practice

Flintshire work closely with the principles of Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru, also known as the 4C's. This approach works to improve the way local authorities commission looked after children placement services. As well as significant cost savings, benefits include improved management information, consistent and secure collaborative tools and processes across authorities to facilitate individual placement matching, contract award and contract monitoring, collaborative risk management, and quality assurance of providers; sustained reduction in prices; and an environment of partnership with the independent sector to commission.

Flintshire are using research done into new sustainable care models that support individuals care and support needs on an ongoing basis. This will help maintain the level of provision that is available for children.

Outcome focused practice will be essential to providing appropriate placements for children and to make sure that they are supported in what matters to them. This will be bolstered by an efficient process to find the best placement at the best time.

Flintshire aims to bring together both commissioners and practitioners to create a close working understanding of the strengths, knowledge and possible barriers both may face. Creating strong partnership working with both health and education is also vital to determine how cases are progressing and ensuring individuals have holistic support for their needs. Individual Placement Agreements are used in Flintshire to clearly outline and evidence why a placement is being purchased and what agencies are responsible for delivering on that support.

Flintshire understand that in order to source good, supportive and sustainable placements we must explore all avenues of support and placement types to help make a well informed decision for the child.

Throughout the whole process Flintshire is committed to keeping the child central to the whole process and to be mindful throughout of what matters to the individual and making sure that they are appropriately informed.

In addition to the key messages given in section 2.2 above, the work to date on developing the '**North Wales Market Stability Report**' has also identified the following:

Fostering services

Population overview:

The number of children is predicted to decrease

The estimated number of children (aged 0-15) in 2020 and the projections for 2040 demonstrate the number of children in North Wales is predicted to decrease over the coming years (Welsh Government, 2020). This decrease can be seen across all of the local authorities in North Wales, with the exception of Gwynedd which is predicted to have a slight increase (1.8%). Overall the number of children in North Wales is expected to reduce by 6.1%.

The Market Position Statement update published in 2021 gave an overview of key statistics;

- The number of children who required a foster placement increased by 34% during the period April 2016 (600 children) to March 2020 (805 children).
- As at the 31st March 2020, there were 805 North Wales children living with a foster carer, 40% (325 children) were living with an independent foster carer and the majority of those children required a specialist placement in order to support their needs, which could not be supported by our in house services.
- There are currently 11 children who are living in a children's home who could be supported by specialist foster carers. There are not enough foster carers with the right skills to support the needs profiles of our children.
- During the period April 2020 to the end of February 2021, there were 34 children who required a parent and child placement and assessment.

Demand for foster care has increased

The number of children in foster care in North Wales has increased year on year since 2015 to around 945 in 2020. Wrexham had the largest increase, with the number of children doubling. Gwynedd also saw a significant increase. Numbers in the other local authorities have fluctuated.

Despite the increasing numbers in foster placements, the Market Position Statement (2019) expressed that a large increase was not expected in the future.

Local authorities have in-house foster care places and independent fostering agencies providing places. Some of the independent foster agencies are charities or co-operatives.

Predicted increased demand for foster parents

The National Foster Network calculated a need for, an estimated, 550 new foster parents across Wales every year to keep up with demand. This suggests there could be a shortage of foster placements in coming years, given the increasing demand.

Sufficiency issues for some children

The Market Position Statement (Regional Partnership Board, 2019) identified sufficiency issues with finding placements for children with particular needs including:

- Respite care
- Young offenders
- Refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers
- Young parents
- Sibling groups
- Emergency situations

The stability of the workforce is an issue, with increasing demand for placements and the number of placements projected to not meet with the forecast demand.

The Foster Wales website facilitated the joining of the 22 Local Authorities to form a national network of local fostering expertise. Its focus is to make a bigger impact on a national level, working together with foster carers, to build better futures for local children. Sharing one brand and, one voice, to strengthen recruitment and support of foster carers.

The National Fostering Framework

The National Fostering Framework (2018) finds children who live with foster

carers in their own locality more likely to thrive and children in local authority provision more likely to stay in their home authority, enabling them to maintain important links. It is vital local authorities increase local placements and reduce out of area placements.

According to the National Fostering Framework (2018), connected fostering (with family or friends) has seen increased demand. It also finds that local authority placements have better outcomes for children. The framework states that local authorities need to be able to have capacity to facilitate this or otherwise ensure that the child has opportunities to maintain connections if placed in alternative fostering.

Market stability

Regional challenges:

The Market Position Statement (2019) and 'Foster Wales' (2021) identified challenges to the stability of fostering services in North Wales and Wales as a whole listed below:

- Recruitment and retention issues
- Placements for children with particular needs including; respite care, young offenders, refugees/immigrants/asylum seekers, young parents, sibling groups and emergency situations
- It is estimated that Wales will need 550 new foster parents every year to meet demand.

Consideration of market quality

The State of the Nation report from the Fostering Agency (2021) provided insight into the quality of foster services across the whole of Wales, the key findings were:

- 44% of independent and 51% of local authority foster carers said they were not supported to maintain contact with children they had cared for. Foster carers perceived this as 'cruel', ending significant relationships for children who have experienced so much loss already.
- Some fostering services are not maintaining foster carer approval, even if they intend to continue fostering. This, and dropping financial support, are barriers to young people entering 'When I am Ready'.
- 20% independent and 12% local authority foster carers have no children in their care. It recommended better use of foster carers skills to meet the needs of children.
- 57% local authority foster carers had an agreed learning and development plan, 31% did not and 12% didn't know. 66% independent foster carers had a learning and development plan, 22% didn't and 12% didn't know
- Local authority foster approvals were more restrictive and limited than

independent approvals, it recommends local authorities assessments use broader approval statuses, robust matching procedures and placement stability processes

- Foster carers would like to build relationships with social workers and children in their care to have stability and continuity of social worker. Over the previous two years, 53% of foster carers had one supervising social worker, 29% had two, 12% had three and 6% had four or more
- Foster carers felt 'dismissed', 'ignored' and their role is not valued by the social care workforce. Lack of respect for their commitment, skills and dedication is a long-term, well reported issue in fostering
- Foster carers want allowances to cover the full cost of caring for a child and payment reflecting their value as a member of the team around the child. Sufficient payments are a must to attract new skilled, committed foster carers
- Lack of placement choice. To secure good matches for children, services would need to see a significant increase in access to local, quality placements
- Staffing levels are not sufficient to provide required support for foster families. Services would like staffing to enable best practice and improve standards
- Trauma-informed practice – concerns about access to training and additional services for those caring for traumatised children. Services would like children looked after to have priority status for services across health and education
- Support for foster carers with improved peer support services and out of hours provision. Services with this support saw improved retention and stability.

Current and projected trends

Key current trends and projections for the future of foster services:

- Increased demand for placements
- Lack of places for older children
- Lack of places for children with complex care plans / behavioural issues
- Lack of foster parents with skills to support children with complex needs
- Projected increase in demand for placements
- Predicted potential shortage of placements, supply not matching demand.

Adoption services

Population overview

Number of children looked after placed for adoption by the local authorities

in North Wales in 2020 / 2021 was 44.

North Wales Adoption Service overview

The North Wales Adoption Service provides a regional adoption service on behalf of Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Conwy, Gwynedd and Anglesey local authorities. Working regionally helps find new families more effectively, place children quicker and improve adoption support services. In April 2014 it was integrated into the National Adoption Service. The services comply with updated adoption legislation, regulations and statutory guidance in line with the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (RISCA) and with the policy and procedures of the service, within the resources allocated. There is a framework which aims to make it easier for adopters, children and young people get support when needed.

Services provided by the adoption service include:

- Preparing the child for adoption
- Family finding and matching
- Safeguarding children
- Provision of adoption support
- Recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters
- Preparing to adopt training (pre/post approval)
- Adoption support (pre/post adoption, buddy system, post adoption contact)
- Birth parent counselling
- Relinquished babies
- Services for adopted adults.

Current and predicted trends

The following issues were raised with regards to adoption services for children:

- Highest placement need is for children from the East
- Highest number of adopters are from the East
- Fewer adopters in the West and children need to be placed away from the East
- Nationally there are more children than approved adopters available
- Consideration of the number of Welsh language speakers (adopters / children)

The following issues were raised with regards to adoption services for adults:

- Adults requesting their birth records to find their birth parents was shut down during the pandemic, majority of services have resumed

but there is a backlog

- Staffing - 43 staff, 10 are off or due to go off on maternity leave, it is difficult to recruit to fixed term posts so the ability to assess may be impacted in 2022 / 2023.

Quality reports

The Quality of Service Review from the North Wales Adoption Service (2020) highlighted the following areas to improve market stability:

- Increase the number of approved adopters
- Reduce the number of children waiting for an adoptive family
- Develop the adoption support service
- Recruitment - sessional workers and adoption panel vacancies

Care inspectorate Wales (2019) inspection identified these areas for improvement:

- Further develop quality assurance processes and assessment of the degree to which aims and objectives of the statement of purpose are met and evidence demonstrating how these support well-being outcomes for children
- The availability of the 'Active Offer', to provide services in the Welsh language
- The statement of purpose and adopters' information pack includes information about the independent review mechanism so adopters are aware of this
- Intermediary files should include a clear audit trail of work undertaken

3.4 Local Context

A developing North Wales Market Position Statement (MPS) provides information on the current demand for residential care placements/fostering placements and secure accommodation placements for looked after children and young people from across North Wales, and the ambition.

The MPS communicates the North Wales region's joint vision for the strategic commissioning of placements to the market, which is to:

Meet our Sufficiency Duty by providing the right placement choice and enable good matching based on our regional needs, through;

- Shaping our internal services which will enable us to support our regional partners;
- Working in partnership with stakeholders, and a range of public and private sector partners;

- Working in collaboration with public sector partners across the regional footprint where this offers identifiable benefits;
- co-produce outcomes focussed services, acknowledging that there are a range of different methods for strategic commissioning with multiple partners who may be co-operatives, charities or commercial partners.

This also supports Welsh Government's commitment to eradicating profit from care.

Flintshire had mapped the current service commission of high cost low volume placements for Looked After Children and is heavily reliant on independent provision in this purchase having no residential service provision within its local authority area. As a result, the Council are addressing this through the development of innovative models to build local, not for profit capacity to support positive outcomes for children and young people looked after. These are described in section 6.

However, whilst the new provision is in development, the levels and complexity of referrals at a local level remain high. It has become increasingly difficult to source suitable placements, and the Council is finding itself in a position where short term bespoke local arrangements have been necessary outside of RISCA regulation.

3.5 Existing Strategic Placement Commissioning Partnerships

The North Wales region consists of Wrexham, Gwynedd, Flintshire, Anglesey, Denbighshire and Conwy local authorities. Local authorities work in partnership with social services, health, the third and independent sectors, carers and others in order to ensure that the care provided to children is of the highest quality and provides value for money, and most importantly provides the best outcomes.

The local authority partners are full members of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) and commission fostering, residential and independent supported living placements via the 4C's Frameworks. Where placements are not available through the Frameworks arrangements are in place to commission placements 'off framework'.

The Council are part of [Maethu Cymru/ Foster Wales](#) the national network of Local Authority fostering services across Wales. Maethu Cymru/Foster Wales is raising the profile of local authority fostering in Wales, with a view to increasing the number of foster carers and families available to the growing number of children who need them, and provide a more consistent and quality service to foster children and families alike.

Flintshire are working closely across North Wales and with Health services to develop a strategic response to the 'A Healthier Wales plan developed by Welsh Government. We are also developing proposals to enhance placement choice and stability for looked after children in the area.

Flintshire County Council works in partnership with Action for Children, who run a service called Arosfa, to deliver short breaks and respite to children and families with disabilities.

Flintshire County Council also works in partnership with Universal Assist to deliver supporting housing arrangements to Young People who are preparing to leave care. This partnership is via a Service Level Agreement.

Flintshire County Council also work alongside Wrexham County Borough Council in the development of services that will provide short term residential accommodation for four children, plus one emergency room, for children aged 11 to 18 years.

3.6 Corporate Priorities

Flintshire has a number of other strategies, groups and plans which will feed into and support the placement strategy.

These are:

- Looking after you: Flintshire Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan (which includes Care Leavers)
- Flintshire County Council Plan
- Flintshire County Council Well-being Plan
- Social Services Programme Board
- Looked After Children Permanence Policy
- Public Service Board and Regional Partnership groups
- Procurement & Commissioning Strategy 2016- 2021
- Foster Carer Retention Schedule and Development Plan
- Flintshire Fostering Friendly Policy
- Flintshire being a 'foster friendly' employer.
- When I am Ready framework
- RAP (Repatriation and Prevention) – a joint venture with Action for Children, CAMHS and Flintshire County Council.
- A developing North Wales Social Care and Wellbeing Services Improvement Collaborative (NWSCWSIC) Market Position Statement (MPS) for Children and young people's residential care and fostering and secure accommodation
- Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy

SECTION 2

4 Looked After Children Data and Trends

The primary method of establishing sound statistics to inform Flintshire's Placement Strategy is via research and data analysis.

In 2021 there were 1,470 local children and young people looked-after by North Wales local authorities. Of these, 53% were boys and 47% girls, which is similar to the national picture across the whole of Wales (*Reference: North Wales Population Needs Assessment*).

The number of children looked after by Local Authorities in North Wales has been increasing steadily over the 5 years prior to 2022, at a rate of between 5 and 8 per cent per year. At the end of March 2022 however, there were 248 children looked after in Flintshire, slightly fewer than at the end of the previous year. Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, 62 children started to be looked after, and 67 children left care. There were 191 placements made in the year, for 124 children. The majority of placement moves are planned and those coming into care in an emergency will also experience a placement move shortly after becoming looked after.

From national comparative data for March 2021, Flintshire's rate of children looked after was well below the Wales average, and the lowest in North Wales. The cohort of children and young people that are coming through are, on the whole, children with more complex needs, which is creating a challenge in finding appropriate placements with increasing demand for accommodating children, which has risen incrementally during the last decade.

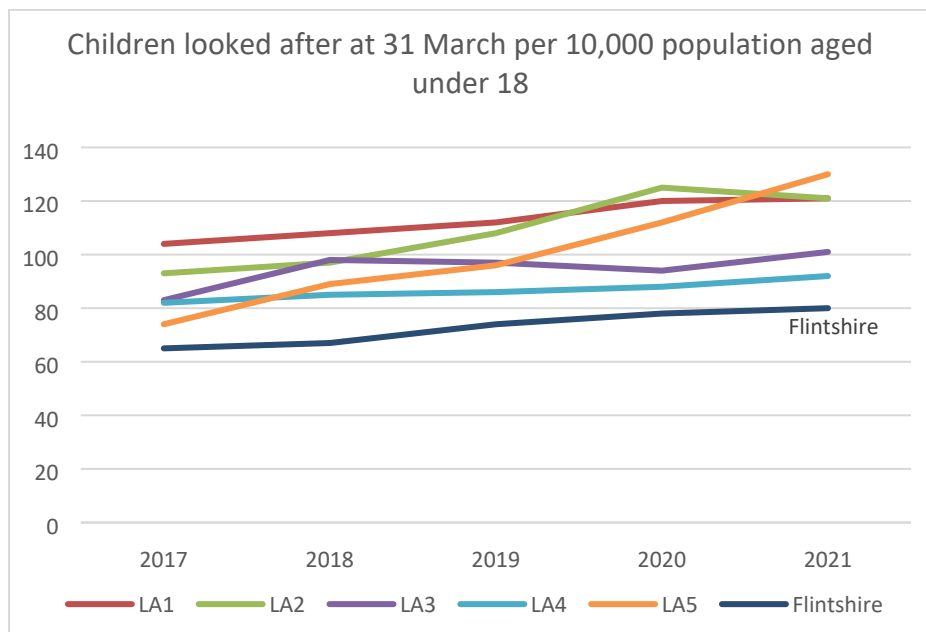
The percentage usage of residential placements hasn't altered since last year. However, we are using slightly fewer in-house foster care placements, and slightly more connected person placements and Independent Fostering Agency placements. The percentage of placements made outside Wales remains low for a Local Authority that borders England, at 16%. However, we have seen a significant increase this year in children placed within the Flintshire boundary, rather than in other Welsh authorities. We closely monitor the number of children placed out of county, and having previously identified the need to develop viable alternatives to placing children in residential placements out of county, our strategy now includes the development of in-house provision.

248 children were looked after by Flintshire on 31st March 2022, with the following profile:

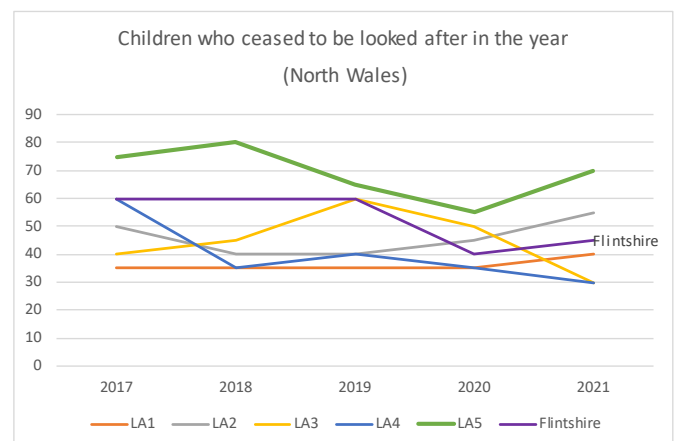
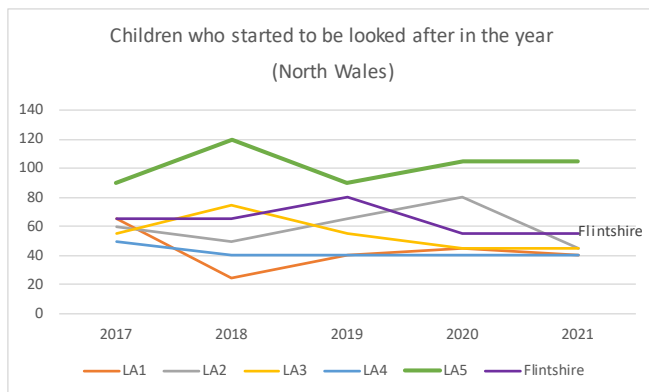
Children looked after on 31 March 2022, by legal status, age and gender

Legal Status	FEMALE						MALE					TOTAL	
	<1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+		<1	10-15	1-4	16+	5-9		
Full Care Order		9	16	44	20	89		43	9	23	26	101	190
Interim Care Order	2	4	2	1	2	11	1	5	4		4	14	25
Placement Order Granted	1	9	4			14			7			7	21
Single Period Accom Sec 20/76				4	2	6		3		3		6	12
TOTAL	3	22	22	49	24	120	1	51	20	26	30	128	248

The chart below shows the trend over 5 years of rate of looked after children per 10,000 population by North Wales Local Authority, recorded on the census day of 31st March. Flintshire's numbers have remained comparatively low, and significantly lower than the Welsh Average, but following an upward trend. [Data is sourced from <https://statswales.gov.wales/> and numbers have been rounded to preserve anonymity]



Comparative figures for children entering care and children leaving care are presented below:



The profile of Flintshire children entering care between April 2021 and March 2022, by age, gender, legal status and reason is given below:

Children who started to be looked after in the year (April 2021 to Mar 2022), by legal status, reason, age and gender

Legal Status	FEMALE					MALE					TOTAL	
	<1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+	<1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+		
Emergency Protection Order								1	1		2	2
Family in acute stress								1	1		2	2
Full Care Order										4	4	4
Family in acute stress										4	4	4
Interim Care Order	3	4	2	1		10	1	3	2	2	8	18
Abuse or neglect	3	3	2	1		9	1	1			2	11
Family dysfunction		1				1		1		1	2	3
Absent parenting								1	2	1	4	4
Single Period Accomm Sec 20/76	1	2		5	1	9	1			4	6	15
Abuse or neglect	1	2			1	4	1			1	2	6
Disability or illness										1	1	2
Family in acute stress				3		3				1	1	4
Family dysfunction				1		1				1	1	2
Absent parenting				1		1					1	1
Under Police Prot - In La Accm		3	1	5	2	11		4	3	4	12	23
Abuse or neglect		3	1	4	1	9		4	3	4	12	21
Family in acute stress				1		1					1	1
Absent parenting					1	1					1	1
Grand Total	4	9	3	11	3	30	2	7	6	11	6	32

Reasons for children leaving care in the same 12 month period were as follows:

Children who ceased to be looked after in the year (April 2021 to Mar 2022), by age and reason for ceasing

Reason for leaving care	<1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+	Total
When I Am Ready					3	3
Adopted		4	1			5
Returned home	2	11	8	17	6	44
Special Guardianship Order		2	2	1		5
Independent Living with support					6	6
Independent Living - no formal support					2	2
Transferred to Adult Services					1	1
Other reason					1	1
Grand Total	2	17	11	18	19	67

5 Placements Profile

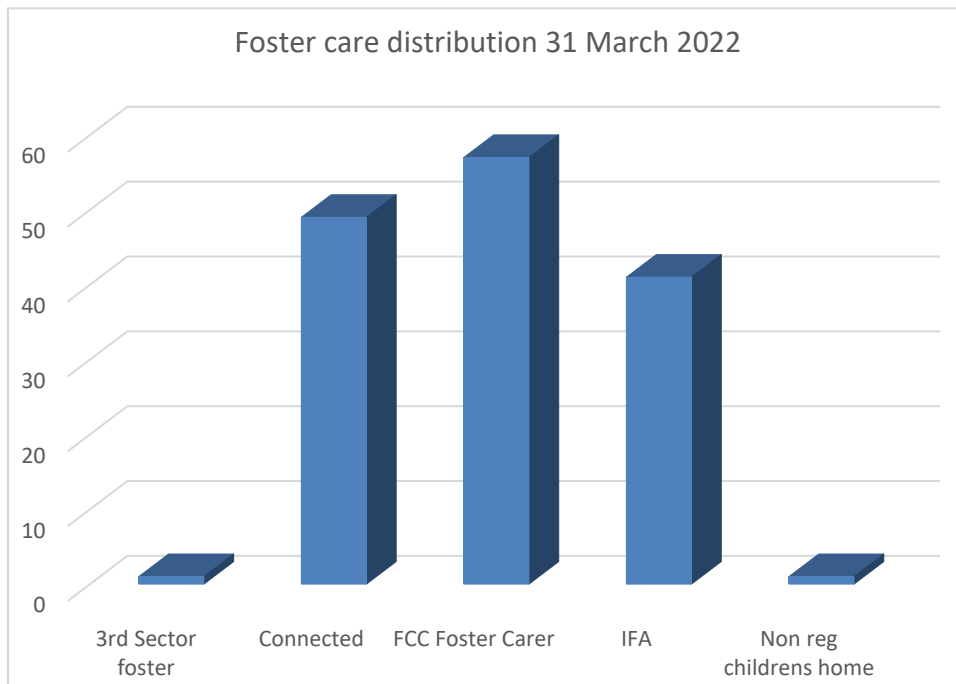
The following charts show the profile of a snapshot of children looked after on 31st March 2022, by age and placement type:

Row Labels	<1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+	Total
In Flintshire	3	22	38	61	24	148
Children's Home				5	7	12
Connected person placement	1	4	8	14	5	32
FCC Foster Carer	1	3	9	21	7	41
Independent Fostering Agency		4	3	7	2	16
Independent living					2	2
Adoptive placement		1				1
Parent & Child 3rd sector		1				1
Placed with parent	1	9	18	14	1	43
Outside Flintshire in Wales	1	15	9	23	9	57
3rd Sector foster carer				1		1
Children's Home				6	2	8
Connected person placement		3	3	3	2	11
FCC Foster Carer	1	3	4	4	1	13
Independent Fostering Agency		6	2	9	3	20
Independent living					1	1
Adoptive placement		3				3
Outside Wales		5	5	16	17	43
Children's Home				7	4	11
Connected person placement			3	3		6
FCC Foster Carer			2	1		3
Independent Fostering Agency		3		1	1	5
Independent living					4	4
Non-registered children's home					1	1
Adoptive placement		2				2
Placed with parent				3	5	8
Residential School				1	1	2
Secure accommodation					1	1
Total	4	42	52	100	50	248

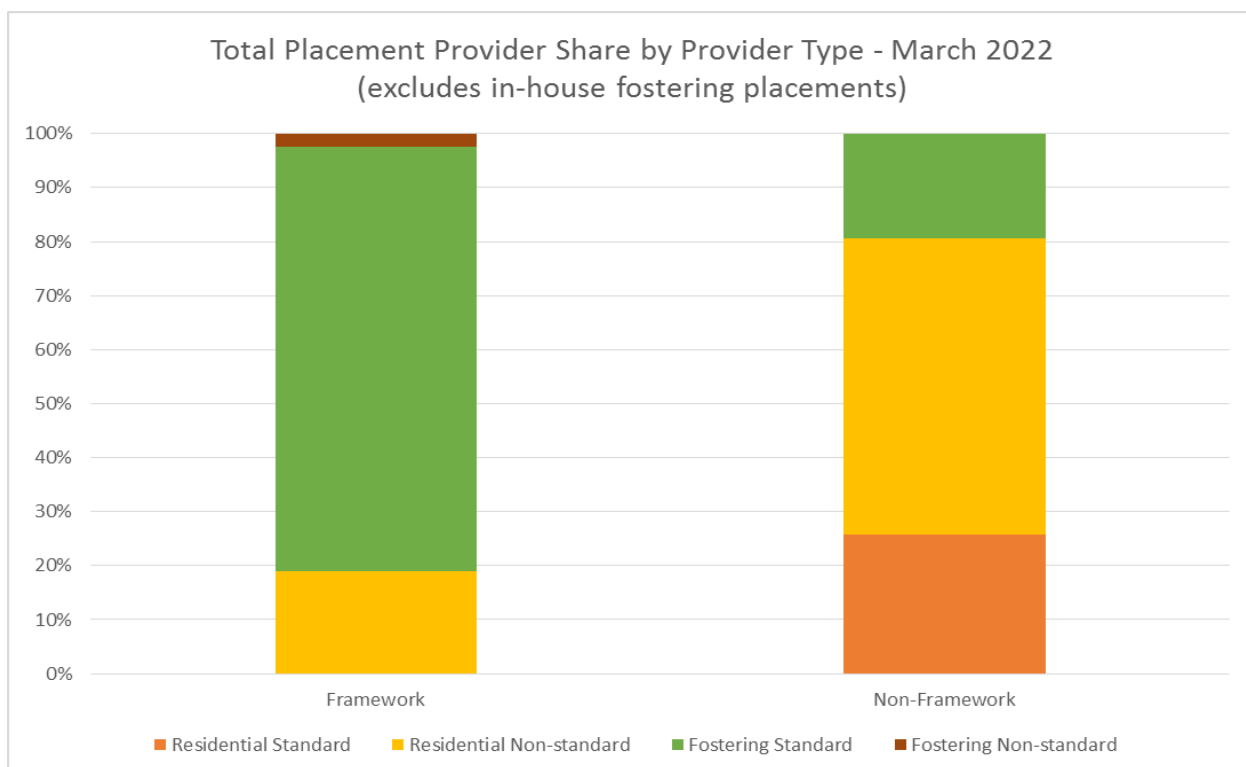
The chart above tells us that:

- 60% of looked after children live in placements in Flintshire, and another 23% live outside Flintshire but in Wales.
- The majority of children in care are aged between 5-15.
- 83% live with their parents or foster carers or kinship carers.

The following chart shows the profile of a snapshot of foster care placement distribution on 31st March 2022, by foster care placement type:



The following chart illustrates the placement provider share by provider type for framework and non-commissioned framework placements.



6 Current Placement Provision

North Wales Data on Residential and Fostering Provision

- The detail on private / commercial C&YP residential care settings in North Wales is:
 - Number of settings = 40
 - Number of beds available = 153*(Source = CCSR as @ 22nd June 2022)*
- The detail on charitable / third sector C&YP residential care settings in North Wales is:
 - Number of settings = 2
 - Number of beds available = 9*(Source = CCSR as @ 22nd June 2022)*
- The detail on Local Authority C&YP residential care settings in North Wales is:
 - Number of settings = 3
 - Number of beds available = 17*(Source = CCSR as @ 22nd June 2022)*
- The detail on private / commercial fostering capacity in North Wales is:
 - Number of settings = 207
 - Number of beds available = 472*(Source = CCSR as @ 22nd June 2022)*
- The detail on charitable / third sector fostering capacity in North Wales is:
 - Number of settings = 7
 - Number of beds available = 16*(Source = CCSR as @ 22nd June 2022)*
- The detail on Local Authority fostering capacity in North Wales is:
 - Number of settings = 453
 - Number of beds available = 776*(Source = CCSR as @ 22nd June 2022)*

Rebalancing Local Foster Care Provision

We have a pool of experienced and committed foster carers and have been able to grow our foster care numbers. Applications for fostering are typically made after a 'skills to foster' course. The reality is that we have not had the capacity to respond to the pace of placement demand. The provision of appropriate kinship placements is significantly greater than that of 5 years ago and the focus of this work, within the context of court timescales, has impacted on the overall capacity of the Fostering service. It is recognised that investment in fostering is a critical interdependent component of reducing, and managing, the demand for residential placements.

Recruitment targets need to reflect the current use and loss of our available provision, considering current placement availability, unmet need, annual terminations of approval and looked after population.

The recruitment targets identified for 2022-25 are based on current and predicted service need and aspirations, the profile of the children that we couldn't place during 2020-2021 and the Local Authority's placement sufficiency strategy. Our realistic targets are reflective of the local authority's strategic financial planning and are aligned to the child and family service improvement program.

Approval Targets

Placement type	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total
Short Term	8	9	10	27
11+	4	5	6	15
Children with complex needs	0	0	0	0
Sibling Groups	1	2	2	5
Parent and Child	0	1	1	2
Respite	1	1	2	4
UASC	2	2	2	6
Total	16	20	23	59

Calculation figures above reflect the total amount of approvals needed to recruit new foster carers in Flintshire. However, 2019-2022 showed an approval figure of 19 over three years. Therefore in the current circumstances, an approval of 59 new foster carers between 2022 – 2025 is outside of current capacity and will require a focus on partnership delivery within the ethos of moving towards a 'not for profit' approach .

Our Special Guardianship Support Service continues to go from strength from strength. Foster carers who take out a SGO continue to receive the support necessary from their supervising worker easing their transition.

Work continues to support a small number of looked after children through the Rehabilitation and Prevention Service (RAP). The service provides intensive therapeutic support for looked after children with support from experienced foster carers. The service is a partnership between the local authority, Health, CAMHS and Action for Children. The Service is split into two elements:

Children and young people referred to the RAP service all have severely disrupted and abusive backgrounds and their needs are among the most complex conceivable. The service provides intensive therapeutic support to the child/young person and their carers to stabilise their placement and encourage the development of healthy attachments for the individual children and develop their ability to regulate their emotions.

Practitioners also work alongside Social Workers and Education staff to develop positive plans for the future, promote positive contact with birth families and to support the child's access to and use of education. The aim of this service is to maximise the potential for positive future outcomes for this vulnerable group of children and young people who are at significant risk of developing mental health problems, drug and alcohol addictions, criminal pathways and social exclusion. Involvement in this service could continue as long as 18 months, or longer dependant on the needs of those involved.

The service deals with a huge range of referrals including behavioural management problems; anxiety and phobic issues; distress caused by parental separation; trauma from past neglect, abuse or exposure to domestic violence; children who are at risk of losing their place at home or with foster carers as a result of their challenging

behaviour. These interventions vary in length depending on the complexity of the case.

As part of the Council's commitment to enhance the Fostering service, the [Mockingbird](#) family model has been implemented. This model replicates an extended family in 'Constellations of 6-10 fostering households. Groups of Mockingbird Carers are called a Constellation. A Constellation comprises of 6 – 10 satellite Fostering Families who are supported by a Hub Home that is operated by an experienced Foster Carer and offers advice, training and peer support, planned and emergency sleepovers. It also facilitates positive relationships and visits for sibling groups who are in care, but not in the same care setting. Each constellation is supported by a Mockingbird Liaison Worker who provides support and a link between the Constellation and Fostering Service.

Therapeutic services within Mockingbird provide additionality, focusing on support for foster carers to discuss the children's behaviour directly with the therapist and receive support and develop strategies for meeting the holistic needs of the children.

Following the launch of the 1st constellation in January 2020, and the second in February 2021, a third constellation has now been established in November 2021, and supports 4 satellite families, comprising 8 looked after children, and 5 birth children.



The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme

The 'Adaptations to Foster Carers' Homes' policy was introduced in 2020, supporting foster carers make necessary adaptations to their home to provide adequate space for children/young people. It supports; sibling placements, the needs of children with multiple disabilities, secure extra capacity for foster placements and to meet health and safety requirements which would otherwise result in a child being moved.

Funding compliments existing support and is a step forward in securing local and stable placements for children. Applications for grant funding will be considered up to £36,000, and £20,000 for relocation to a more suitable property. To access the grant, carers and social worker must first exhaust other options/resources.

Grants are also available to; existing or prospective adoptive families, family and friends/carers of children under a Special Guardianship Order and carers who are committed to their caring role for the long term, or at least until the child reaches 18.

Rebalancing Local Residential Provision

Despite the commitment to prevention and early intervention, there will always be a small proportion of looked after children who need residential placements, and Social Services want to make sure that these children and young people can remain close to home.

Teams have continued work to meet objectives in providing local residential care within Flintshire, utilising funds from the young people's Transformation Programme. This also serves to meet Welsh Government's Programme for Government ambition to eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after through establishment of Local Authority provision.

Tŷ Nyth

Tŷ Nyth in Mold is a property that has been acquired by Flintshire Council on behalf of Flintshire and Wrexham, and will provide short term residential accommodation for four children, plus one emergency room, for children aged 11 to 18 years.



Alongside the residential Care Team a specialist MST-FIT (Multi-Systemic Therapy Family Integrated Transition) Team will be on site to support young people accommodated at the service alongside their families. The Team will identify the issues which may present difficulties in order to plan a successful return home. This is the first provision of its type in Wales.

Whilst in the residential assessment centre, the residential team will work on a number of skills with the young people through an Integrated Treatment Model (ITM), including mindfulness, emotional regulation, distress tolerance and interpersonal effectiveness and Social Skills

The residential team will provide day to day support, care and supervision of the young person, including but not exclusive:

- ensuring they continue to attend their school and support them with homework;
- provide and cook their meals;
- support them in any contact they may have with family / carers;
- support the young person to stay safe both physically and mentally;
- provide any support the young person may require with meeting other professionals.

The residential team will also be responsible for the day to day running of the assessment centre, including but not exclusive:

- ensuring the policies and procedures are up to date and adhered to;
- the centre is adequately staffed 24 hours a day every day of the year;
- the building is kept secure and safe at all times;
- the building is kept clean and tidy, with adequate food and other provisions.

The property will be operational by November 2022, following registration.

Park Avenue

Alongside the Tŷ Nyth site and being refurbished at the same time is a 4 bedded residential children's home for long term placements for young people from Flintshire. The property will be operational in November 2022, following registration.

Small Group Homes

Bromfield Park offers care and support including accommodation for two young people between the ages of 8 years – 18 years and 3 months who are supported by Flintshire County Council. It is recognised that the young people who live at Bromfield Park are likely to have experienced trauma which may have impacted on their ability to manage their feelings and emotions, communicate their wants and needs effectively and to form positive attachments.

Young people living here will be supported to prepare for their future which might include a foster arrangement and/or independent living arrangement. The amount of time that young people will be living at Bromfield Park will vary depending on their age, needs and individual circumstances. This will be determined in their care plans and personal plans.

Following the assessment and understanding of the young person's care and support needs; the team will ensure that the appropriate care and support is put in place and available to all young people living at Bromfield Park. We believe that by providing young people with a clear care and support plan and co-produced personal plan, that fully and clearly reflects their individual needs, it will allow them the opportunity to explore, reflect upon and manage the impact that the trauma they have experienced has had on their social, emotional and cognitive development.

Refurbishment is well underway to provide two further small registered homes to accommodate children and young people from Flintshire who need long term residential care. The build programme is scheduled to be completed by the autumn of 2022. Indicatively we are seeking to commit to 6 small group homes over the next 3 years.

Accommodation for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

A 3 bedded Council property is being refurbished as accommodation for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. Support for residents will be provided externally by those with specialist skills and experience, sourced through the 4Cs Framework. This will be based on a Supported Living model. This property will be ready by the end of 2022, subject to RISCA registration.

Arosfa

The Arosfa Short Breaks Service, delivered by Action for Children, offers short term residential breaks at regular defined intervals which include overnight, mid-week and weekend stays for children and young people with profound disabilities. Utilising funds from the Integrated Care Fund, an unused wing at Arosfa has been refurbished, and this has increased the service capacity

In April 2021 the refurbishment work at Arosfa was completed increasing the provision to 5 beds at Arosfa. These beds bring capacity to accommodate permanent long-term residents, and provide a quality local service as an alternative to out of county placements and again, meeting priority areas by working with third sector organisations to remove the profit from care services.

Unregulated Placements

Whilst bringing enhanced local placement capacity, these developments are within the context of a national shortage of residential placements for children. We know that

across Wales there is a significant shortfall in placement sufficiency leading to unprecedented reliance on unregulated arrangements. It is important to emphasise that these arrangements are used as a last resort in emergency situations, due to exceptional circumstances and for a short period until a regulated provision can be sourced.

Locally we currently have a number of children supported in unregulated placements. We also have a sibling group of 4 children in regulated, out of county placements, who are at significant risk of losing their placements and require a bespoke provision to ensure placement stability and the delivery of positive support to their lives which currently feature behaviours of concern, vulnerability of exploitation and episodes of missing from care. The reality is that this sibling group require the immediate development of a bespoke provision/s in county.

The development of options for this sibling group forms part of a wider strategic approach to developing local provision that takes stock of the national and local context and aligns placement demand/need, sufficiency, accommodation, education, workforce, and finance/funding.

7 What Stakeholders Say

The Regional Partnership Board has established a Children & Young People Sub-Group. The Sub-Group will provide specific focus on the needs of C&YP, ensuring that their needs are understood fully and their views contribute towards setting future commissioning planning;

The 4Cs has an active Young Commissioners Group and undertakes regular consultation with C&YP with experience of being looked after. Young commissioners are involved in the selection of providers when the 4Cs tenders and in the ongoing quality monitoring of providers on the National Frameworks;

The North Wales Social Care and Well-being Services Improvement Collaborative has an 'Engagement Officer' in post. The Engagement Officers' role involves consultation with service users and their families / carers, partners and stakeholders (including commissioners and commissioned providers) to ensure that the views of individuals are heard and contribute towards commissioning of services.

Children's Social Services are proud to support the Young Voices Out Loud group, who continued to meet during the pandemic, although online. This group is made up of young people with lived experience of the care system. The group missed meeting as a group, and as restrictions have been lifted, they are now meeting face to face.

The group recently had a discussion about how young people are addressed in colleges and schools when tutors or teachers are discussing parental roles, and how it makes them feel. They have met with professionals from a number of agencies including Voices from Care and Tros Gynnal Plant Advocacy service as well as the Children Looked After Nurse and Volunteer Mentor Coordinator to offer more information on support that is available to them.

Young people from the group are also welcome to attend the Children's Services Forum, which opens up more opportunities for care experienced young people to make a difference to how services are delivered locally.

Children and Family and Safeguarding Services have identified a need to introduce a

more efficient method of consultation and engagement with our looked after children and young people consistent with how we believe that children and young people prefer to communicate.

Therefore, we are looking to procure an app-led suite of products and services that modernises the processes and systems used to gather the views of children and young people (up to 25) using social care services. The app will be used by staff, our looked after children and care leavers.

The App will promote and improve communication and understanding, will complement the more traditional methods of engagement with young people through group activities, forums and face to face meetings. Importantly, it will also provide an additional means of communication for children who are living in placements outside of Flintshire.

The North Wales Market Position Statement for children and young people's residential and fostering services (2021) provides recent feedback and discussion from stakeholders in North Wales.

The [North Wales Population Needs Assessment](#) (2022) has also gathered feedback from stakeholders of Children's services and provides an overview of services currently delivered across the region.

SECTION 3

Refer to Plan Section within the Commissioning Strategy Guidance document for good practice suggestions and actions

8 Projection of Future Needs

There are a number of identified pressure points and ways that these can be supported. They are:

Children age 10-18

Flintshire needs to develop some step down options for Children should their care and support needs decrease and be ready to explore at earlier stages a possible integration back into birth family, where it is safe to do so. Mostly, children wish to maintain strong ties with their immediate family and Flintshire must be sure to take adequate steps to make this a reality.

Connected Persons

A robust service to support connected persons is essential to be developed. Flintshire recognises that in future connected persons will require robust training and support to help them maintain a placement and to keep a child within the family network. Flintshire will also need to support and encourage Special Guardianship Order's be undertaken and that support is in place to make the SGO's a continued success.

Children at Crisis Point

Flintshire recognises that whilst in a placement, children can still come into crisis, and ensuring that there is contingency support should this be the case is crucial. The need for respite to be built into a care plan to support the maintenance of a placement and having carers that are adequately skilled in managing challenging cases and individuals. Flintshire County Council also recognize a growing trend in the number of children becoming looked after who are in their older teenage years and will take steps to meet this need but to also prevent situations escalating into crisis to begin with.

Older Children

The trend of older children coming into local authority care is notable. Flintshire must ensure that Foster Carers are adequately trained to support these older children and that links are built with housing, education, and residential providers to meet this need.

No Wrong Door

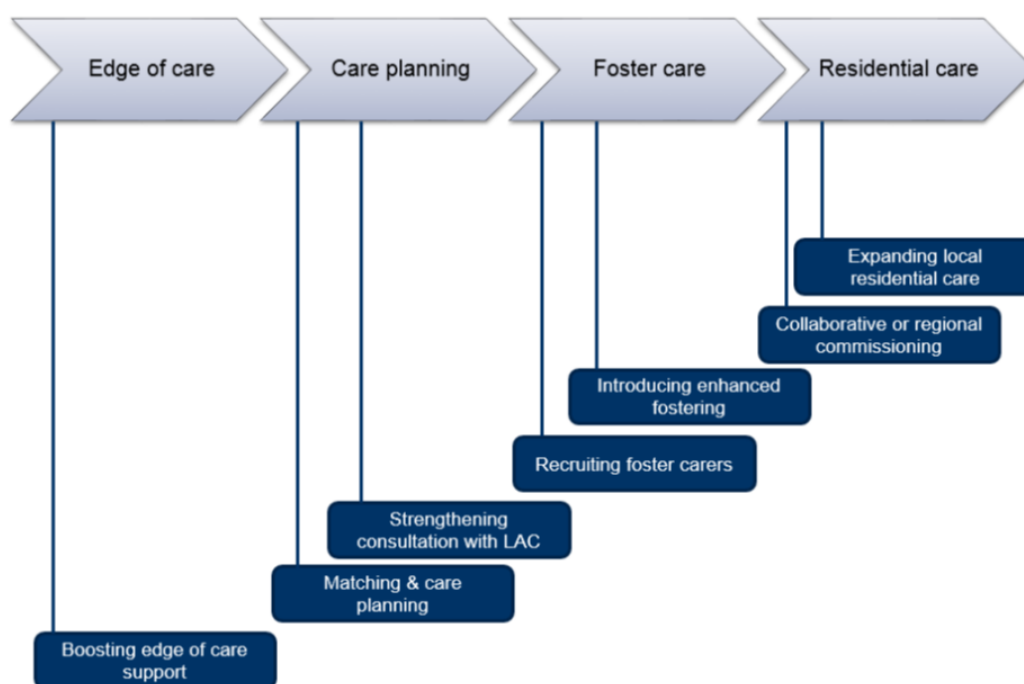
The Children's Commissioner for Wales has asked every region to adopt a 'No Wrong Door' commitment so that children and their families would not get bounced between services or get doors shut in their faces. Every Regional Partnership Board has a plan for children's provision, and has begun to make changes towards a No

Wrong Door approach.

The [NEST Framework](#) is a planning tool for Regional Partnership Boards that aims to ensure a 'whole system' approach for developing mental health, well-being and support services for babies, children, young people, parents, carers and their wider families across Wales. The NEST/NYTH framework includes No Wrong Door as one of its key principles. Boards have engaged positively with the new NEST / NYTH framework and all have a plan to work within this framework

9 Are Current Services Meeting the Needs?

The challenges in effectively managing demand and providing effective, appropriate support to meet the needs of children and families is clearly articulated in the 'Care Crisis Review'. The Review reflects that there is no single fix or 'silver bullet' to managing demand but there are core components that can, collectively, reduce the need for Residential Care. Research undertaken by Cordis Bright across 13 London local authorities in 2017 has summarised this continuum of support as having the following characteristics:



Edge of care

Support for families with children on the edge of care. For example Flintshire will closely scrutinise decisions about whether older young people should be taken into care and, in particular, what difference can be achieved at this relatively late stage.

Care Planning

Improving matching and care planning. For example Flintshire will look at improving care planning to anticipate and respond to possible placement breakdown and review the method of scrutiny of whether older children should be taken into care and whether it is realistic that significant improvements in protection and outcomes can be achieved through removal.

Strengthening consultation with young people. For example Flintshire will look at the area of consultation with looked after children about their placement. Focusing on ways that help identify areas for improvement for looked after children as a whole but also to provide earlier warning of any potential placement breakdown and respond proactively and pre-emptively.

Foster Care

Delivering our Maethu Flintshire: Foster Flintshire Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Residential care

Regional working Flintshire will work with North Wales local authorities to explore the options and benefits of developing a regional provision for children with complex needs.

Flintshire at present is meeting the needs of children and young people

- Flintshire to explore providing appropriate training and remuneration to Foster Carers in order to create capacity to support the needs of high risk individuals, to ensure closer proximity to supportive networks (education/peers etc.) and reduce cost of out of county placements.
- Current Service provision is aligned with Corporate Priorities to support well-being and ensure the individual is at the centre of the plan around them.
- Whilst there are examples of strong relationships with other organisations, both statutory and third sector, there is still considerable work needed to create strong relationships that can work collaboratively and effectively to meet the needs of the individual in a meaningful way. This includes cross boundary working (on both a Local Authority Scale and a National Scale)
- The Service follows closely the principles of the Social Services and well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and regularly reviews what matters to the individual who is receiving care and support to ensure that their personal outcomes are being met through the services that are delivered and the placement in which they reside.
- Performance is measured closely through regular audits of systems and panel meetings and LAC reviews. An amendment to current practice which has been received from the participation groups is to remodel LAC reviews to bring focus onto the child so that the review is happening 'for' the child and not 'to'.

10 Financial Analysis

The figures below indicate the costs for internal placement and external placement commissioning for the financial years from 2017/18 onwards.

FINANCIAL YEAR	<i>Internal Placement Costs</i>	<i>External Placement Costs - Out of County Expenditure</i>
2017-2018	2,685,241	5,135,514
2018-2019	2,702,137	5,161,096
2019-2020	2,827,923	6,881,497
2020-2021	2,843,270	8,273,704
2021-2022	2,633,642	9,393,621

The figures for placement costs illustrated above indicate the budget pressures within Children's services and highlight the significant increases in external placement costs in recent financial years. Flintshire are looking to invest and develop in-house service provision which is in accordance with the ethos of transitioning to a not-for-profit system. Although it is anticipated that this will be beneficial in terms of outcomes for individuals in receipt of services and associated stakeholders, any effect that this may have in terms of cost efficiencies and mitigating future budget pressures is difficult to accurately forecast.

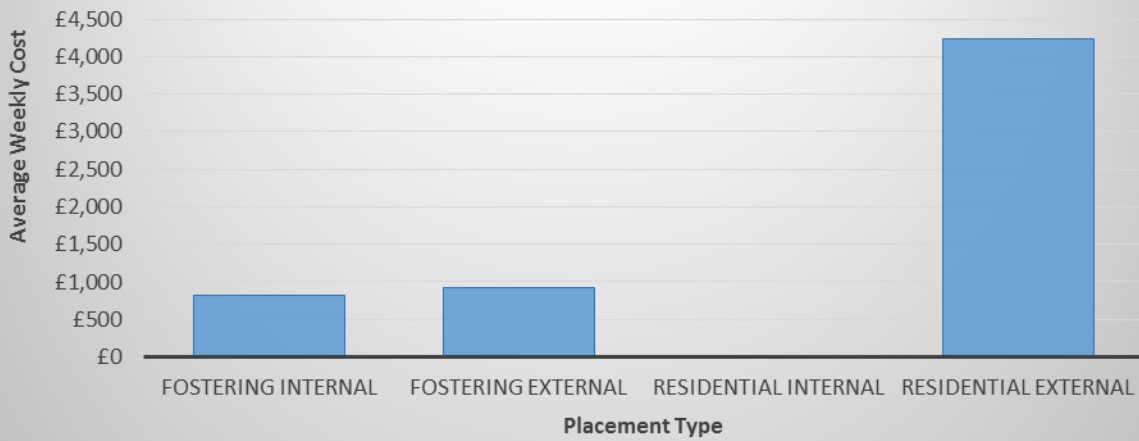
Spend for the external placement costs alone for the 2022/23 financial year is projected to be at least 6.2% higher than the figure for the 2021/22 financial year. It is acknowledged however that this forecast is projected on current known placements only and is based solely on data from Quarter 1 of the current financial year. Consequently, the rise in spend is likely to be considerably in excess of the current projected figure which creates both budget pressures and some degree of uncertainty in informing future budget planning requirements in the short term and also for the local authority's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The following charts indicate the average weekly costs of placements by placement type and whether services are commissioned internally or externally and also via framework or non-framework sources.

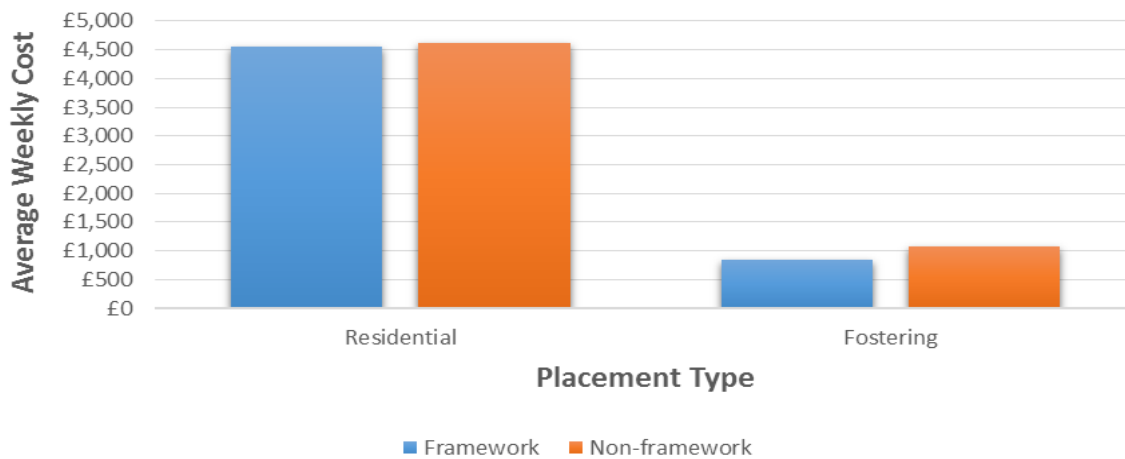
It should be noted that the data for the table for the cost of internal versus external costs relates to average costs for the 2021/22 financial year whereas the data for the framework versus non-framework costs represents a snapshot from March 2022. Data from earlier quarters of the same financial year indicate a larger disparity between framework and non-framework residential placements than that illustrated for the period in the graph below.

Data for both charts was sourced from the quarterly local authority returns for the 4C's QBDR summary data.

Average weekly cost for 21/22 financial year (snapshot date - March 2022)



Average weekly cost of placements for 21/22 financial year (Framework vs Non-Framework)



11 Gap Analysis

For the Regional Market Stability Report, the local authority identified the following market sufficiency issues:

- Need to meet the forecast demand with in-house foster carers
- Foster parents to support children in the age categories 10 to 14 and 15+
- Sourcing appropriate local placements for those with complex needs
- Meeting demand for children who need complex multi-agency care packages or have challenging risk management plans, example behaviours include anger management issues, verbal and physical aggression towards adults
- Shortages for sibling groups and children with disabilities
- Not enough skilled foster parents for children at the highest end of needs profile, those currently living in care homes
- Insufficient placements lead to children being placed in unregulated settings
- Not enough carers who speak Welsh
- North Wales has a shortage of parent and child places, especially in Wrexham and Flintshire

Flintshire along with other local authorities have experienced that a lack of supply in local residential care means that providers were often able to 'pick and choose' which children and young people they support. There is often a reluctance to take children and young people with complex needs and behavioural challenges. This may be due to a number of reasons including the lack of skill/expertise, a concern about how behaviour might impact other residents and the local community, and worries that all of this might impact on their inspection judgement.

Alongside this, the capacity of the workforce presents a risk. The challenges with social care recruitment are well versed and reflected in recent efforts to recruit to our developing in-house provision. The approach is to recruit based on aptitude, values, and potential, as opposed to direct experience. This does create risks which are likely to compound as we extend our provision at a time when neighbouring authorities will start to expedite their own plans to expand in-house provision and the associated workforce expansion. There will be an increasingly competitive market. Demand for staff for children's residential services, especially Residential Managers will be in high demand, with local authorities paying different rates.

In order to operate the in-house provision as outlined in this document, 33 residential staff are required. Alongside the time taken to recruit, additional time is needed to develop these new staff and support them through a wealth of training to enable us to develop a quality service. Whilst incurring this additional expense, the local authority will still be funding the current cohort of placements, resulting in budget pressures.

The Council are also mindful of the risk that the new resources will have on the current sector, in that there may be movement between private and local authority provision. There is a need to work collectively and collaboratively to ensure businesses remain viable businesses, and placements are still made with local providers to prevent destabilisation

Given the Council's ambitious plans, investment will need to be made in building Responsible Individual capacity. Flintshire is in a current period of expansion in other areas of social care, including in-house residential care for older people and Extra

Care. With these new services coming online, additional capacity will need to be considered to meet the need of the growing children's residential provision alongside this.

The Council are in the early stages of exploring residential educational provision for children with physical and learning disabilities. This will provide an offer local to home, which is currently not available. Learning has been taken from across North Wales to develop a business case to take this forward. Alongside this, there is scope to explore additional options for young people with Learning Disabilities post-16 through existing partnerships with third sector organisations. The accommodation needs to this cohort will also need consideration of whether there is a local educational option to out of county residential college.

There are further educational considerations. We need to ensure that as more children and young people with complex needs will be accommodated closer to home, that there is appropriate educational provision in place to meet their needs. The need to review the range and capacity of specialist educational provision across the authority has been identified by the Education & Youth Portfolio and as such, has been included as an ongoing priority area within the Council Improvement Plan. To inform the requirements, a review and feasibility study were commissioned to provide information regarding the level and areas of need for specialist provision and potential options to address these.

The review identified the following:

- A shortfall in provision for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)
- A shortfall in specialist provision for pupils with Autism
- A need for additional capacity within the existing specialist schools to meet the level of demand
- A specialist Resourced Base provision for a small number of pupils with moderate learning difficulties.
- A shortfall in residential provision for pupils with additional learning needs

In response to the review, the Council has invested £6m in the development of a purpose built facility for pupils with BESD. Plas Derwen pupil referral unit (PRU) opened in September 2021 providing a specialist setting for a greater number of Flintshire pupils. Flintshire is one of only two councils nationally to have made a significant investment in their PRU facilities in recent years, offering an improved learning environment for some of our most vulnerable pupils.

A feasibility study has been completed to outline the potential options for the Council to address the other identified shortfalls in provision. A range of options have been identified and these proposals will now be considered as part of the Council's strategic development of its educational provision.





SECTION 4

Refer to Plan and Deliver Section within the Commissioning Strategy Guidance document for good practice suggestions and actions

13 Commissioning Intentions

Mockingbird

Following the successful development of 3 Mockingbird constellations, a further (4th) provision will be developed.

Training for Foster carers

There is need to commission and develop robust packages of support for Foster Carers who are caring for children with complex needs. Adequate training and support for carers is paramount to Flintshire so that we can provide appropriate, loving and supportive care to those children who have the most complex needs in an environment most similar to a family home.

Residential Provision

Having care facilities and placements delivered by registered providers both locally and in the region of North Wales is a strong intention for Flintshire going forward. If additional funding is available then there is a clear commitment to extend the development of Small Group Homes over the next 3 years.

Work is also developing on a provision to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) as the authority has been allocated 10 children through the initial phases of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) that will require support as looked after children. This number is likely to increase as part of national allocations through the Home Office.

Edge of Care

Flintshire want to invest in children who are deemed to be on the edge of care. This support will ensure that children do not necessarily become looked after due to inadequate support that may prevent care and support needs escalating to a point beyond the immediate family's ability to maintain the child. This will also ensure that Flintshire will be aware that those who do become looked after will come into care with more intensive and complex needs that we can support accordingly. This edge of care support will also look at commissioning short periods of care on a temporary basis where necessary so that appropriate work can be done to facilitate ongoing family reunification.

RI Capacity

With these new services being developed, additional capacity will be needed to meet the need of the growing children's residential provision alongside development in adult's services.

Advocacy

Development and focus on advocacy for parents as part of the national service development.

The voice of children and young people

The Council are to commission an App to support feedback from children and young people in receipt of services

	Outcome Desired	Action	Performance Measure	How will we do this	Who will do this	Timescales
1	Keep more Children living locally.	Increase the proportion of foster care provision within Flintshire County Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of foster carers residing within the Local Authority area. • % of CLA in foster placements within the Local Authority. • Target reduction in the number of foster placements provided out of area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and improve foster care recruitment strategy • Explore opportunities for regional commissioning for specialist areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering Manager • NFF Regional Lead 	TBD
2	Develop Registered Provision locally.	Develop robust provision for looked after children within Flintshire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Commissioning guidance. • Increase in capacity for local placements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the 'Mockingbird' model in Flintshire. • Develop small group homes scheme. • Develop Assessment Centre • Develop provision for unaccompanied Asylum Seekers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborations and Business Relations Officer. • Fostering Manager • Senior Manager, Children's Services. 	TBD

3	Providers are able to 'Meet the commissioner' and develop close links with Flintshire.	Create strong relationships with a wide and varied range of residential/specialist foster placement providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of providers Flintshire are aware of and can engage with. • Number of events run by Flintshire to facilitate engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run events for providers to meet with Flintshire Commissioners. • Review existing partnerships with providers. • Ensure Flintshire has a robust market position statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering and Permanence Teams • Collaborations and Business Relations Officer. 	TBD
4	Support other North Wales Local Authorities.	Work across a regional footprint to pool resources and work closely with other authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce Collaborative work streams with other LA's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a regional work programme • Engage in National Fostering Framework principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFF Regional Lead 	TBD
5	Out of county placements.	Implement Out of County Placements in an effective way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in number of out of county placements • Out of county placements are stable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete detailed market research where possible before commissioning and Out of County Placement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of County Panels (Education/Health/Social Services) • Collaborations and Business Relations Officer. 	TBD
6	Children able to live safely with immediate families.	Decrease need for number of placements outside of the family unit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of children living with immediate families, with LA support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work closely with families and children to develop safety plans. • Include RAP where necessary • Implement short term placement plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering and permanence Teams 	TBD

7	Children on the Edge of Care are supported.	Children potentially becoming looked after receive timely and effective support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in number of children becoming looked after • Assessments noting that children are at risk of becoming looked after early on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective training for staff and support workers. • Targeted intervention and working closely with what matters to the child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Services Frontline Staff • Fostering Teams 	TBD
8	Flintshire have a wide and varied range of support available/	Develop innovative approaches to delivering support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in bespoke packages of care for looked after children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Positive behavioural support training and approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering Teams • Foster Carers/ Residential Providers. 	TBD
9	Care Leavers are safe.	Care Leavers have access to appropriate accommodation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children report being better equipped for adult life. • Care leavers able to access safe and affordable housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend housing support to 16-years-old, taking an early intervention approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's Services Senior Manager • Housing Managers • Supported Living Staff 	TBD
10	Looked after children have a voice in the delivery of their care and placement choice.	Engage with individuals Use co-productive approach throughout.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better lines of communication between children and decision makers. • Children are central to the process throughout. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged looked after children through a variety of forums and methods • Bring looked after children to professional meetings where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation Officer. • Social Work staff. 	TBD

Appendix 1

The following factors are always considered by Flintshire County Council when making placements;

- Is the placement in the best interests of the child?
- Can the placement meet the needs of the child as set out in their care and support plan, and subsequent pathway plan?
- Does the placement support continuity in the child's education or training?
- Is the provision not for profit / Third Sector?
- Does the placement enable the child to live together with any siblings who are also being looked after by the local authority?
- That the placement will support positive contact arrangements with family and known support network;
- That arrangements are made to spend time with friends and maintain sporting, social and leisure pursuits.
- If a child is placed outside of immediate family members, is the placement within a reasonable proximity to immediate family, with safety considered at all times.

It is also vital that Flintshire County Council consider;

- The views, wishes and feelings of the child (in accordance with the child's age and understanding);
- The views, wishes and feelings of parents or other person with parental responsibility (as appropriate);
- The child's religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background
- The child's sexuality and gender identity;
- Does the child have any additional needs or sensory impairment, including any emotional, behavioural and mental health needs?