

A sense of belonging

Wirral's Young Person's Guide to the Sufficiency* Strategy

*sufficiency means making sure we have enough safe, secure and good quality accommodation and support for our children in care and care leavers



Message from Councillor Sue Powell-Wilde, the Lead Councillor for Children and Young People

I am delighted to launch the Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2026 for our Children and Young People. As a corporate parent and Lead Member for Children, it is important we have the right type of home for our Looked After Children. We want our children and young people to feel supported, safe and have a sense of belonging to the communities and homes they live in.

We are fortunate to have very committed and professional Foster Carers who provide wonderful homes for our children and young people. We will continue to recruit Foster Carers to enable more of our children and young people who need looking after to be cared for by our highly trained carers.

For those children and young people who require a different type of home, the Providers of these homes will ensure they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in providing this provision for our children and young people.

We will work with supporting our Foster Carers and Providers to ensure that any home our children and young people are placed in, that they feel safe, secure, and supported.



S Powell-Wilde



What is the Sufficiency Duty?

- We are required, by law to ensure there are enough homes and support to meet the needs of all children and young people in care in Wirral, and for those who left our care at the age of 18. This includes making sure all accommodation is of good quality and no one is ever left in poor quality accommodation
- This sufficiency strategy sets out how we will deliver on our duty to provide accommodation and be good corporate parents for all children in care

Who are Corporate Parents?

- The Council is the 'corporate parent' for all children in care. This means we are responsible for making sure you are looked after and all of your needs are met, and you are supported to do as well as you possibly can
- We are as responsible for you as we are for our own children and we are responsible to you for making sure you are happy, healthy and safe
- We have a Corporate Parenting Strategy*, which sets out how we will look after all children in our care and what they can expect from us
- Our vision for all children and young people in Wirral is the same regardless of whether or not they live in care, or have lived in care

*If you want to read the Corporate Parenting Strategy you can find it [here](#).



A Sense of Belonging

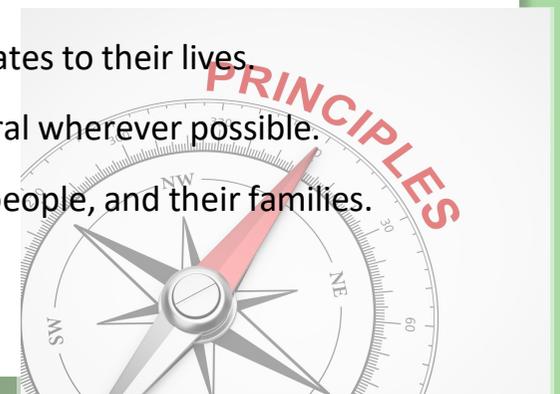
Our aim in Wirral is to support children and young people to be cared for by people who develop positive, caring and loving relationships with them. We want our children and young people to feel a sense of belonging. Belonging to families, belonging to communities, belonging to schools and belonging to friendship groups.

These are our four ambitions for children and young people:

- **To support children to remain at home with family/carers** - Strengthening families to support children remaining living at home.
- **For all children to find a place called home** - Identifying caring homes in Wirral where children can live safely and achieve their potential.
- **Supporting stability at home** - Safe and stable homes mean that children remain secure and build positive attachments.
- **Achieving steps to independence** - Promoting independence based upon the individual needs of children.

We have five principles which guide our work:

1. Children and young people are best brought up in families.
2. Children and young people have a right to have their voices heard in decision-making that relates to their lives.
3. Children and young people who are in Wirral's care should be able to live and grow up in Wirral wherever possible.
4. Improved outcomes depend upon the building of trusted relationships with children, young people, and their families.
5. Working with children restoratively and in trauma-informed ways, leads to better outcomes.



Children in Care in Wirral—Facts and Figures (as at the 31st March 2023)

772 Children in Care in Wirral



553 living with foster carers



89 living in a residential placement



45 living semi-independently



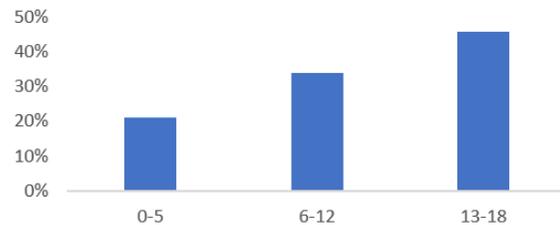
89 living with their parents



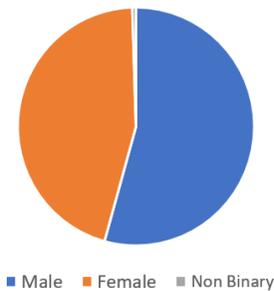
17 living in adoption placements



Children in Care in Wirral by Age



by Gender



by Ethnicity



by Disability



Wirral has seen a decrease in the number of Children in Care. This has been a combination of less children becoming looked after and high numbers leaving care



Local Demands and Trends

Demand

- The highest demand for children becoming looked after is for children aged 10-15
- The 10-15 age group is the hardest to find placements for
- Our use of foster carers is slightly higher than the national and north west figures
- Our use of residential placements is lower than the national and north west figures
- 12% of our children in care are placed with their parents. This is higher than the national figure of 7%, but the same as the north west figure
- 9% of our children in care are placed outside of Wirral. This is much lower than the national figure of 23% and the north west figure of 26%
- 65% of our children in care have been looked after for longer than 2 years



Trends

- Fewer children are coming into care in Wirral. In 2018 we had 850 children who were looked after, and this has reduced to 772 in 2023
- Covid has had a knock on impact on a lot of children. We have seen an increase in children needing support for their mental health
- There is a limited number of specialist mental health units available to us. This has meant we have had to purchase expensive packages of support
- We have had to use more residential and supported living placements for some children because of a lack of available foster carers
- We have supported more children to remain living locally to Wirral
- There are more children coming into care with additional support needs, for example children with disabilities and complex mental health needs
- Fewer children are being placed for adoption locally and nationally
- More children live with family members under 'kinship care' arrangements
- There is increased demand for housing locally, which exceeds supply. Demand for placements is likely to increase by 6%
- The numbers of unaccompanied and separated children, for example those seeking asylum, or children from Ukraine, has increased. Wirral is proud to house and support these children
- The law now requires providers of supported accommodation to be registered with Ofsted. This might affect supply of placements

What Children and Young People Told Us and What We're Doing

Decisions about 'Staying Put' and the way in which it is communicated can lead to young people feeling insecure in placement. Young people say they need transparency around future planning and honest conversations with foster carers and their social worker.

What we are doing: The Care Leavers team are putting in place improved and supportive communication on the issue of 'Staying Put.'

Accommodation after University can be difficult to find as young people go on to the bottom of property pool lists.

What we are doing: Accommodation post University is supported by the PA service to ensure that care leavers are prioritised with housing services.

There is a lack of available supported accommodation.

What we are doing: Supported accommodation is being expanded with the commissioning service ensuring that new providers meet regulations.

Young people would like trained mentors to help with a wide variety of issues from housing, to accessing health needs and talking through their employment and training options.

What we are doing: 'Staying Close' service will provide mentors aimed at intensive support for care leavers (implementing July 2023).

Young people would like more training for foster carers to happen in the evening so that young people are able to attend.

What we are doing: It is challenging to fit training in the evening consistently, but some later courses are being considered by the fostering service.

Young people often struggle to get a guarantor when trying to move into a property.

What we are doing: The Guarantor scheme was implemented in July 2023 as part of a long-standing Corporate Parenting Operational Group action.

Sufficiency Priorities—A sense of belonging

1. **Early Help**— We work with our early help partners to ensure children and families to get the right help at the right time. Families are supported to avoid the need to receive support from children’s social care. Developing our early help support is a key priority and we have developed a mix of online resources and direct work with families aimed at supporting them and their children in the community. The available early support should also help reduce the number of children young people entering care as well as reducing the number of children experiencing harm

2. **Fostering**— For children in care fostering can be a short-term or long-term option depending on their individual circumstances. We want to meet the individual needs of children and young people living with fostering families. This means ensuring that their racial and cultural needs, their learning style, their age and stage of development and ability is reflected in the fostering placement provided. Our ambition is to enable 80% of children in care to live in foster care.

We appreciate the key role foster carers have in caring for and supporting children and young people. We want them to be recognised and rewarded for all they do. Payments for foster carers were uplifted in May 2023, and this will also help us recruit and retain the very best foster carers.

3. **Residential Children’s Homes**— Wirral has worked closely with a local ethical company, and in May 2023 the first children’s home opened it is to create a family/community feel where children experience love and nurture and that their placements are planned to be supported for the duration they are needed. There are 10 homes planned for the Liverpool city region and a second home has been purchased in Wirral and is in the process of being re-developed.

Working with the NHS we are in the process of purchasing a three bedded home focusing on short-term/ respite/crisis care for children with a learning difficulty and/or autism.

A further development for short-term care for children experiencing mental health problems is being provided by Council and the NHS. The home is in the early stages of development, but when completed will help keep children out of hospital wherever possible, and supported in their community.



Sufficiency Priorities—a sense of belonging

- 4. Right Support for Children with Additional Needs**— We have increased the capacity of our Willowtree provision for children with disabilities. This facility now supports six (long term) placements for children and three placements for respite support. This means that we have increased the capacity of our local service to make sure that more children remain in Wirral and do not have to be placed outside of the borough.
- 5. Family Reunification**— We are committed to supporting children coming into our care to be protected from harm. However, we are also committed to supporting children to return home where it is safe to do so, and we will support parents/carers alongside the assessment and review process to make that happen wherever possible.
- 6. Residential to Foster Care**— Currently there are 10% of children in residential homes. Our ambition is to reduce numbers of children in residential care by 15% through targeted recruitment of specialist foster carers and the use of regulated supported accommodation
- 7. Supported Accommodation**— Young people, although approaching adulthood still need to feel cared for, have positive boundaries and guidance in place to support them in making that transition. We will ensure they are well-prepared to leave our care and have a range of accommodation options available to them.
- 8. Adoption** — For those children where return to their birth family is not a safe option, adoption is a secure form of care. permanence. Adoption In Merseyside (AIM) is the regional adoption agency covering Wirral and Merseyside This footprint creates a larger pool of potential adopters and shares resources
- 9. Special Guardianship**— We are committed to supporting connected (family) carers as well as foster carers to pursue special guardianship orders to care for children and young people where appropriate
- 10. Leaving Our Care**— We want care experienced young people to live in safe, stable, and affordable homes which will provide their foundation for independent life. We want all of our children and young people to have a great *sense of belonging.*



More Information and Support

<https://www.therightsideofcare.com/> - The dedicated website for children looked after in Wirral. The website contains information about fostering and adoption, keeping safe, how to get involved, leaving care, health, advocacy and where to get help

<https://www.therightsideofcare.com/our-space>—Our space is the dedicated premises for children in care and care leavers. Located on Argyle Street in Birkenhead, and including a shop and café, Our Space is the place to meet and to speak with members of the leaving care team

<https://www.zillowirral.co.uk>—Zillo is a dedicated website for children and young people in Wirral. It includes information about events, arts, culture, news, and health and wellbeing advice

<https://familytoolbox.co.uk/> - Another dedicated Wirral website, the Family Toolbox is full of tips, guides and links to people and places which can offer all levels of help and support

<https://www.sendlowirral.co.uk/> - The SENDLO website includes information about local services and support for families with children and young people aged 0-25 who have special educational needs or disabilities

