

Children Looked After and Care Leavers

JSNA

September 2015 (new data released November 2015)

This report

This report has been prepared by Knowsley Council in consultation with the Knowsley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and partner organisations of the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB). Its purpose is to set out current understanding of issues relating to the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Knowsley, based on analysis of the latest available data.

It is one of a series of reports that inform Knowsley's understanding of local health and wellbeing priorities, based on analysis of needs, and set out in its Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Other JSNA reports cover topics that relate closely to children and young people's mental health, and these are available on the Knowsley Knowledge JSNA website. They include:

- [Looked After Children](#)
- [Children In Need or at risk of harm](#)
- [Child & Family Poverty](#)
- [Children with Disabilities & Complex Needs](#)
- [Schools Capacity & Admissions](#)
- [Educational Attainment and Attendance](#)
- [Employment and Unemployment](#)

This report is based on the most recently published formal statistics. Where later data is available but still classed as 'provisional' it will only be referenced if it signals significant change. New data releases will be monitored to ensure that the report can be updated as necessary.

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Further information

For a PDF copy of this report, and other research intelligence products, visit **Knowsley Knowledge** – the website of Knowsley's JSNA

This review deals specifically with Children Looked After referred to and supported by Knowsley Children's Social Services. Whilst Children with disabilities and complex needs and children's educational attainment are included in the analysis, specific intelligence on these topics is covered in separate Joint Intelligence Reviews.

Children become looked after when their birth parents are unable to provide ongoing care in either a temporary or permanent capacity. Children can either be looked after as a result of a voluntary agreement by their parents or as the result of a care order. Wherever possible, Knowsley Council works in partnership with parents when taking on the role of a Corporate Parent.

A number of acronyms are used throughout this document:

CLA – Children Looked After

DfE – Department for Education

CIN – Children in Need

CLASB – Children Looked After Short Break

CINSB – Children in Need Short Break

IFA – Independent Fostering Agency

SEN – Special Educational Needs

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Scheme

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

MADE - Making a Difference Everywhere

Although not included in the CLA cohort, there can be significant overlap between services supporting children involved in anti-social behaviour, gangs and other Youth Offending issues, intelligence on this is included in the Crime JSNA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What are the most critical Children Looked After challenges facing Knowsley?

- There are now significantly more children looked after in Knowsley at the end of 2014/15 than there were at the beginning. At the end of March 2015 there were 306 children looked after, an increase of 19% from 258 in March 2014 and the largest number of children looked after for five years.
- Along with national trends of more children becoming looked after and more children being subject to protection plans, Knowsley has seen an increase in cases connected to neglect, domestic violence and issues relating to child sexual exploitation, gun and knife crime, and issues around substance abuse.
- Greater complexity of cases has resulted in more children requiring specialist provision or accommodation, often using agency/independent provision. More children are now accommodated in residential placements, both in-house and agency than previously, and there have been five children in secure units throughout the course of the year.
- Changes in legislation and statutory guidance; i.e. LASPO and regulations for family and friends assessments, entitlements for care leavers in 'staying put'.
- At the end of March 2014 there were 306 children looked after, during the course of 2014/15, there have been 165 children becoming looked after, and 121 leaving care (with 11 becoming adopted, 23 leaving care to independent living as adults).
- The increase of children looked after has had a significant impact on resources – in terms of available budget, and workforce. At the end of the financial year, there was an overspend of £3,872,000 on independent placements. There has also been significant impact on workloads of staff with increasing caseloads, and more complex cases coming through.
- Greater volumes of children have been coming into care over the last two years; as at March 2013 there were 70 children coming into care in Knowsley, by March 2015 this figure had increased to 165..
- Demand has outstripped availability in terms of in-house provision, with significant growth in numbers of children looked after being accommodated by agency foster carers .
- There are higher numbers of placement breakdowns in the foster sector, and, the number of children placed in foster placements is higher than in any other sector.
- Challenges to recruit greater numbers of foster carers to keep pace with the increases in children looked after.
- Outcomes for health and wellbeing in children looked after are especially poor when compared to their peers. CLA often suffer from complex physical and mental health needs; they have a five-fold increased risk of mental disorders (42% versus 8% amongst ages 5-10). These health issues usually stem from neglect or mistreatment in early life which increase the risk of children going into care.

What is the scale of the problem in Knowsley?

At the end of March 2015, there were 306 children looked after in Knowsley. Growth in the total numbers of children looked after in Knowsley has been consistent since January 2014 and peaked. In the last 12 months, a total of 165 children have come into care, which is higher than the previous 12 month totals which stood at 113 children. The cumulative increase in numbers of children looked after has put increased pressure on resources including staff and the availability of placements, especially for hard to place children (children who have been approved for adoption but whose age and challenging circumstances make adoption unlikely).

Emerging pattern is that children when entering care are also staying longer.

There has been an increase of children accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, whereby the parent retains parental responsibility for the child, but they are placed in foster care. These placements are not ordered by the courts, and children often return to their parents after a period of time.

In 2014 the children most likely to be in care included:

- children who have suffered: abuse and / or neglect (47%); dysfunctional families (38%) acute stress (6%); socially unacceptable behaviour (7%) parental illness/disability (1%);
- children aged between 0 and 9 years old; 17% of CLA in Knowsley are aged between 0 and 4 and 33% are aged between 5 and 9 years old;
- Males; for 2013/14 146 (56%) referrals were made for males compared to 115 (44%) for females;
- The majority children looked after in Knowsley are in care for three years or longer (56%).

Have things been improving or getting worse?

- More children have been entering care over a 4 year period in Knowsley; the numbers of entrants quadrupled between 2011/12 and 2014/15 jumping from 39 to 165 children.
- There have been significant and increasing pressures in Knowsley regarding the number of cases and the complex needs that children looked after experience. The increased number of children is placing greater financial pressure on resources, including staff and the availability of placements, especially for hard to place children. A complexity of cases can be seen within older children in care and include gun crime, sexual exploitation and mental health issues.
- Children are however spending less time in care; in 2014 12% left care after only 0-3 months of being looked after. This has partly been attributed to the increase of children accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, whereby the children usually return back to their parents. Although there is a significant risk that these children will return to care in the future.
- Children looked after are proportionally more likely to be vulnerable to, or victims of child sexual exploitation, than children who are not looked after. This higher risk is due to both potential contact from the child's environment pre-care, and risks associated with the care environment itself. This issue is explored in the Child Exploitation JSNA.

How are things expected to change over the next few years?

Following the Ofsted inspection in 2014, an improvement plan has been put in place. Children looked after was identified as an area that required improvement especially in terms of achieving permanence for children, ensuring that all children benefit from stable placements. The improvement plan has committed Knowsley Council to a wider range of progressions, including:

- Improving the matching process so that children looked after requiring long term placements have greater stability and permanence
- Ensure that robust permanency plans are in place for all children looked after
- Educational attainment and progress to improve, and the gap between children who are looked after and those who are not to narrow.
- Ensuring that adoption as a permanence option is fully understood and embedded across the children's social care workforce, through adoption champions in each social care team, and creation of an adoption tracker to monitor cases more effectively.

The improvement plan covers all aspects of practice, including early help and child protection services. With improved practice and better interventions, especially for those who are at the edge of care, there should be fewer children coming into care services in the long term and these families should be supported to stay together. However, it is anticipated that there will be an increase of both Children in Need and Children Looked After in the short and medium term. Changes in practice, improved processes and any change in understanding or policy relating to CSE may lead to an initial increase in children becoming looked after.

However, with projections regarding improved practice and fewer children becoming looked after, there will remain in place children who are subject to long-term care plans, and numbers of children who will come into care in the future. Despite early help and preventative support, there will still be families who require interventions and children to be looked after. This is largely exogenous, and outside of the control of the local authority, whose priority is to ensure the ongoing safety of the children, especially the most vulnerable children.

As both the Health Select Committee inquiry into CAMHS¹ (2014) and the Chief Medical Officer's annual report for 2012 cite evidence suggesting a rise in the levels of psychological distress in young people across the country we can also expect more children with borderline mental health issues, such as depression, high anxiety and personality disorders.

How do we compare with national and regional averages, and statistical neighbours? (2013/14 comparative data used, 2014/15 data released November 2015)

- On 2014 the population of children looked after in Knowsley was 73 per 10,000; this is notably higher than the national average of 60 per 10,000, but lower than the North West at 79 per 10,000 and significantly below Knowsley's statistical neighbours at 95.8 per 10,000 (2012/13).
- In Knowsley child neglect and abuse accounts for 47% of CLA; this is significantly lower than the nationally average of 62%. However Knowsley has a significantly higher level of entrants due to family dysfunction (38%) than England (15%). Other reasons for children requiring services include family in acute stress (6%, 9%); parental illness/disability (1%, 4%) and socially unacceptable behaviour (7%, 2%).
- The proportion of children looked after under a Care Order in Knowsley is considerably higher than the national figure at 71% compared to 59%. Children looked after on remand or committed for trial in Knowsley is also higher at 0.8% than the average for England at 0.5%. This has increased due to the implementation of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, which states that all children remanded by the courts will become looked after.
- The percentage of children looked after under placement order in Knowsley is 14%; this is the same as national average. Knowsley has a considerably lower proportion of children looked after under voluntary agreement (16%) when compared to England (27%).
- In relation to time spent in care only 19% of looked after children in Knowsley wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. This is significantly

¹ House of Commons Health Committee, 'Children's and adolescents' mental health and CAMHS.' (2014)

below Knowsley's statistical neighbours and the national average which stand at 61% and 55%.

- The number of children in care placed more than 20 miles from their home is 8.46% in Knowsley. This is similar to the North West average of 8.4% and considerably lower than the national average of 12%.

How good is the available intelligence, and where are the gaps in our knowledge?

- Children Looked After is a relatively data rich area; local authorities have a duty to carry out sufficiency work and national data and intelligence is submitted regularly to the Department for Education (DfE). This information is published by DfE, allowing for comparisons with national numbers and other local authorities. However, there may be gaps in terms of analysis of published national material.
- Much of the available local intelligence depends on the quality of the data provided by social workers, which can occasionally be subject to inputting error. However, as this data is subject to government submission it is thoroughly checked and cleansed.
- Projections for the future are difficult as the number of children in care is determined by external factors such as the local courts, the police and the behaviour of families. In terms of children leaving care, projections can be made based on the age of child and forward planning; it is the numbers of children coming into care that are unpredictable, although 'Staying Put' is expected to have a significant impact on both absolute numbers and resources.
- There are gaps in knowledge relating to the long term outcomes for looked after children, especially for care leavers; more specifically those without disabilities or in receipt of services from adult social care.
- Where children are placed in schools outside of the Borough, the exchange of information can be challenging, especially where there are limited resources.
- In terms of health data children looked after are assessed on entry to care and have either a health visitor (for those aged 0-4) or a school nurse (5+) assigned to them. Children looked after have regular assessments throughout their time in care, which assess their overall health and mental wellbeing.
- However, intelligence on the health of children looked after is an area of weakness. The lead nurse for CLA in Knowsley has recently started a new performance regime for the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). This new regime monitors numbers of health assessments, how timely they are, and how many children there are with health needs above universal health needs. A data audit is underway to explore the timeliness of assessments/referrals/treatment for out of borough placements. No long-term view of health has been produced for CLA. Comparator data for health is also limited or not used by practitioners. There is however reciprocal information sharing agreements with neighbouring authorities.
- There is existing work through MADE Together to gather an understanding of CLA, although this has been identified as an area for improvement Whilst CLA views on services and the support they receive are well documented nationally and locally, wider CIN categories are not consulted as part of a statutory national framework.

We have a commitment to broaden consultation with young people and their families will be developing an insight plan to mainstream consultation processes in order to support service development and better hear the views of young people accessing our services.

Consultation should be designed with particular regard to the Office of the Children's Commissioners recommendations on hearing the voice of the child published in their report of December 2014 "Children and young people giving feedback on services for children in need: ideas from a participation programme"

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

1. WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT ISSUES IN REGARDS TO CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER?

Children become looked after when their birth parents are unable to provide ongoing care in either a temporary or permanent capacity. Children can either be looked after as a result of a voluntary agreement by their parents or as the result of a care order. Wherever possible, Knowsley Council works in partnership with parents when taking on the role of a Corporate Parent. Many children and young people who become looked after keep strong links with their families and may eventually return home.

As Corporate Parents, Knowsley Council holds responsibility for ensuring that every child and young person looked after is supported to be safe, happy, healthy, and to achieve their full potential. Children looked after share many of the same challenges and problems as their peers, but they often enter care with a worse level of development and health than their peers, in part due to the impact of abuse, neglect, and poverty. As Corporate Parents for children in Knowsley's care system the primary objective is to ensure that these inequalities do not continue and that our children leave care with the same positive outcomes as their peers.

There are statutory duties in place for local authorities in relation to children looked after. This includes the 'sufficiency duty', which:

"Requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after"

The sufficiency duty also requires local authorities to do more than ensure accommodation in terms of the number of beds provided; there must be regard to the benefits of securing a range of accommodation through a number of providers, and the accommodation must also meet the needs of children. The consequences of this duty are significant, especially in financial terms. A good placement and effective support is imperative for children looked after, but cannot always be provided within Knowsley or by in-house providers. This means that out of borough or agency providers are used for placements, and these are often more expensive than in-house providers. This can have detrimental effects upon budgets and the financial stability of the service. It is therefore important to understand the needs of children looked after, so that services and placements can be planned to align with the needs of children looked after more efficiently. Projections for the next year indicate that the number of Children Looked After will continue to increase, to as many as 350 children.

Children Looked After represents the escalation of the Children's Social Care system. While most children thrive, and have happy lives with their families, this is not possible in all cases. Even with additional support, there are some families where Knowsley Council is required to intervene to ensure that the safety, health and well-being of children is protected. In many cases families will have been in receipt of services before they are escalated to becoming looked after. Children looked after services are therefore linked to and affected by early help services, safeguarding, children in need, and services for children with disabilities. There are also significant interdependencies between children looked after and education, health services and the police.

2. WHAT IS THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE FOR KNOWSLEY?

In terms of the current position in relation to children looked after, it is important to look at the number of children joining care and leaving care. This allows services to understand the number of children who need to be accommodated and for services to be put in place, from education to health services. This section looks at the demographic information of children looked after, and what is understood in regards to the general needs of children. Also, the needs in terms of education and health are addressed to further understand the scale of the challenge faced by children looked after in Knowsley and in providing services.

Numbers of Looked After Children:

In the last 12 months, a total of 165 children have come in to care, which is higher than previous 12 month totals:

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
	At 31/03/2012	At 31/03/2013	At 31/03/2014	At 31/03/2015
Total CLA	255	237	257	306
Joiners	39	70	113	165
Leavers	63	95	92	121

While there has been a significant increase in the numbers of children joining care, the numbers leaving care has also increased from previous years. In 2011/12 and in 2012/13 the number of children leaving care outpaced the number of children joining care, however, figures for 2013/14 and 2014/15 show that this is no longer the case and the numbers of children entering care has increased above the rate at which children are leaving care.

The population of children looked after per 10,000 in Knowsley is currently higher than the national average, but is significantly below Knowsley's statistical neighbours:

	CLA
England (2013/14)	60 per 10000
North West (2013/14)	81 per 10000
Stat Neighbour (2013/14)	97.9 per 10000
Knowsley (2012/13)	72.3 per 10000
Knowsley (2013/14)	80.0 per 10000
Knowsley CLA Mar 15	94.5 per 10000

Prior to December 2013, children and young people were becoming looked after later than would be in their best interests, subsequent targeted work has been undertaken to ensure that children become looked after and interventions are made earlier. Since December 2013, changes in legislation have led to national rates of children looked after increasing, with greater proportions of children now looked after by families and friends. In the coming years it is expected that up to 30% of all children looked after will be placed with family and friends carers.

Time Spent in Care

Leavers by length of time in Care	31/03/2012	31/03/2013	31/03/2014
0-3 months	4	15	26
4-6 months	3	13	20
7-12 months	1	4	8
1-2 years	12	8	8
2-3 years	2	5	5
3 yrs+	41	50	25
TOTAL	63	95	92

There have been significant changes in terms of the patterns of children and young people leaving care. With the increased numbers of children becoming looked after as a result of a Section 20 placement in 2013/14, more children are leaving care after having been placed for a short period of time. Section 20 placements occur when the parent retains parental responsibility for the child, but they are placed in foster care. These placements are not ordered by the courts, and children often return to their parents after a period of time.

Time in care

Length of Time Children Looked After	31/03/2012	31/03/2013	31/03/2014
0-6 months	12	27	49
7-12 months	20	19	23
1-2 years	31	21	28
2-3 years	35	26	14
3 yrs+	157	144	143
TOTAL	255	237	257

This information further reinforces the changes that have occurred in 2013/14 with greater numbers of children entering care. In comparing the three years detailed above, the numbers of children looked after for 0-6 months have risen significantly. From the above figures, it is evident that in 2011/12, 12 children entered care in a six month period, in 2013/14, 49 children entered care in a six month period also. In the first six months of 2013/14 there was effectively four times as much pressure on the service than two years earlier.

The number of children who have been looked after for 3+ years has fallen every year since 2012. Over the last three years, 64 children have left care aged 18 and over, reducing the overall number of Children Looked After for three years and more.

Children Looked After Demographics

This section looks in detail about the current cohort of children looked after to understand their needs and how the placement system is working to provide them with sufficient accommodation and care.

In comparison with national figures, Knowsley has low numbers of looked after children in the 0-4 age range, but has a higher proportion of aged 10+ children.

Age group	Total	Percentage	Knowsley Age 0-17 population
Under 1	7	2.69 %	6.0%
1 to 4	37	14.23 %	22.7%
5 to 9	65	25.00 %	26.4%
10 to 15	98	37.69 %	32.7%
16 plus	53	20.38 %	12.3%

The current cohort shows a significant difference in the number of males, compared to female children looked after. Whilst males represent a little over half of all 0-17 year olds, they account for almost 57% of Children Looked After. This is an important issue, as with mixed sibling groups when the children are older and they cannot share a bedroom. So while a foster carer may be approved to take multiple children, if there are not enough bedrooms to take mixed siblings, the placement cannot be used

Gender	Total	Percentage	Knowsley Age 0-17 population
Female	112	43.08 %	48.7%
Male	148	56.92 %	51.3%

The ethnicity of children looked after in Knowsley follows that of the overall population, with the vast majority of children looked after coming from white British backgrounds.

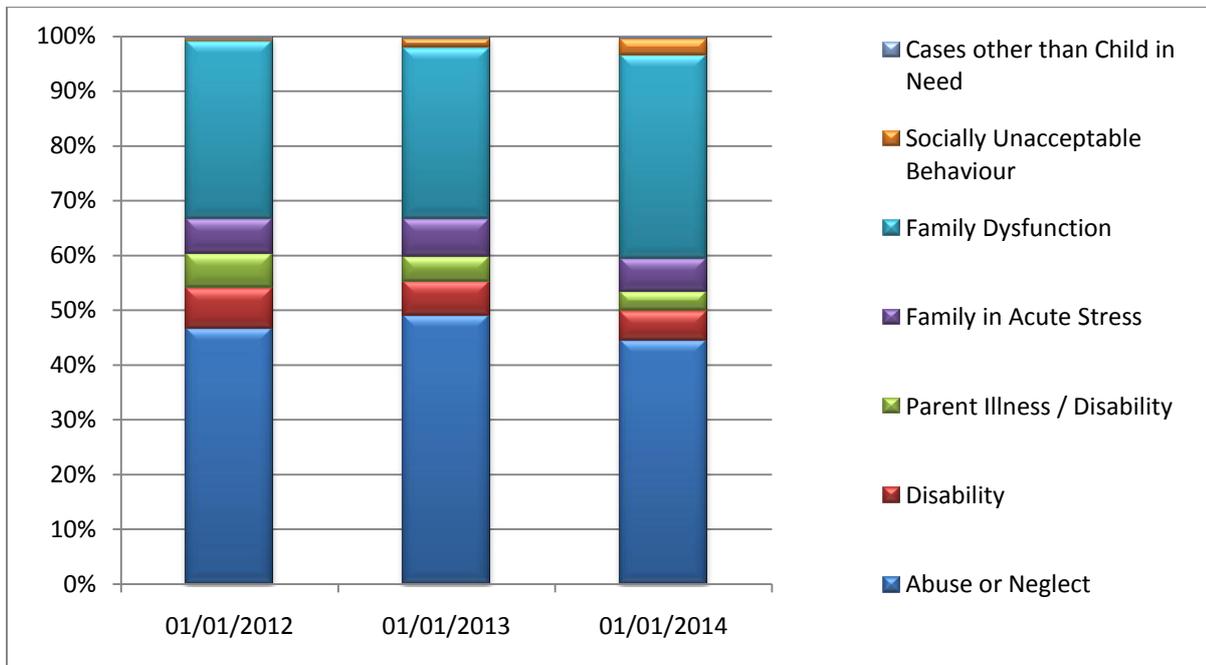
Ethnicity	Total	Percentage	Knowsley Age 0-17 population
White - British	246	94.6	95.5
White - Any Other Background	3	1.2	0.79
Mixed - White + Black African	3	1.2	0.82
Mixed - Any Other Background	5	1.9	0.41
Black/Black British - Other	1	0.	0.05
Other Ethnic Group - Any Other Group	1	0.4	0.15
Undeclared/Not Known	1	0.4	0.15

Need:

The proportions of children in each of the categories of need have remained stable over the last three years, with the majority of children looked after being in care due to abuse or neglect or family dysfunction. However, as these terms are generic, it does not reflect the needs of each individual child, but should enable planning in the types of assessments and services that children looked after will require.

In line with national trends, the primary reasons for children becoming looked after, is due to abuse or neglect or family dysfunction. The generic terms are limited in terms of the amount of information that we can understand about the needs of the cohort. However, there are a relatively low number of Children Looked After due to disability, especially in terms of those entering care in the last three years.

Category of Need	31/03/2012	31/03/2013	31/03/2014
Abuse or Neglect	119	116	114
Disability	19	15	14
Parent Illness / Disability	16	11	9
Family in Acute Stress	16	16	16
Family Dysfunction	83	74	95
Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	1	4	8
Cases other than Child in Need	1	1	1
TOTAL	255	237	257



Hard to Place Children

Children looked after often have more complex needs than children who are not looked after. In addition to the universal needs of all children, children looked after can have a range of physical and learning disabilities, and mental and emotional needs, making placements that can meet their needs more difficult to find.

Finding short break foster care for children with disabilities is also challenging as there only small numbers of respite carers available in Knowsley. Children can also be hard to place due to sibling group sizes (accommodating three or more children in one placement), age (with fewer placements for teenagers and a higher rate of placement breakdown for teenagers) and issues due to challenging behaviour.

Disability

Children looked after are often identified as having multiple disabilities, in addition to any emotional or mental problems they may experience, which can make the child harder to place.

The Children's Outreach and Residential Disability Service (CORDS) provide short breaks for Disabled Children at Fullerton Grove. At end of August 2015 37 children were accessing overnight short breaks. Three of these children receive short breaks under section 20, and a further two are permanently Looked after by other carers and accessing short breaks with ourselves.

The remaining 32 children access stays under section 17 of the Children Act. This figure will be subject to change due to children accessing and leaving the service.

Sibling Groups:

The below table shows only a four month period, but sibling groups make up a significant number of children who become looked after. Even groups of 2 siblings can be hard to place, especially if the children are older and different genders (requiring their own rooms). The multiple numbers of children from larger sibling groups (three siblings and over) can create significant pressures on the Knowsley placement market and accelerates increases in the numbers of Children Looked After.

Sibling group size	April Joiners	May Joiners	June Joiners	July Joiners
1 child	6	2	4	1
2 children		5		3
3 children	2	2		
4 children				
5 children				1
TOTAL	12	18	4	12

National research² has indicated that one in three children taken into care is separated from their siblings. These situations often arise where there are larger groups of siblings (three or more) brought into care or where the children have complex needs that cannot be met within one placement. In cases where the court orders that siblings are not to be separated, IFA placements and out of borough placements are used if there is not a suitable placement with capacity amongst the in-house placements.

Placements

Placement occupation – 2012-2014

The below table shows the placements occupied as at 31st March of each of the years, and provides a snapshot of what placements are needed and used at this point, to show trends.

² Action For Children [“One in three children split up from siblings in foster care”](#) 8th September 2014

The proportion of children placed with in-house foster carers has decreased, whereas the proportion placed with agency foster carers has increased. This represents a significant financial risk to Knowsley Council because of the greater costs of agency foster care.

Placement Type	31/03/2012 %	31/03/2013 %	31/03/2014 %
Foster Carer – In House	49	47	40
Foster Carer - Agency	11	14	17
Foster Placement – Relative or friend	13	12	14
Placed with Parents	14	12	11
Home and Hostels – In House	2	3	2
Home and Hostels – Agency	4	5	7
Residential School - Agency	1	1	2
Independent Living - Agency	4	3	2
Youth Offending Institute/Prison	0	0	0
Secure Unit	0	0	1
Parent and Child Unit	0	0	1
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	0
Placed for adoption with current foster Carer	0	0	1
Placed for adoption not with current foster Carer	2	1	3

The overall number of foster carers has fallen since 2012, with slightly fewer places available. This fits in with the overall imperative to use agency placements more. Reasons for the reduction in capacity could include foster carers adopting children looked after, or young people staying put. In Knowsley there are a number of fosters who are aged 60 and older, and while they bring significant experience to foster caring, there needs to be recruitment put in place for when older foster carers decide to retire.

Foster carers who are approved for 3 or more children are a significant gap for Knowsley. From April to July 2014 there were seven groups of 3 or more siblings becoming looked after, if these children are ordered by the court to be placed together, an out of Borough placement or agency placement would be procured.

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Approved foster carers	184	248	133
Approved carers who are friends/ family		42	36
Approved carers, short breaks only		6	8
Total number of carers	184	296	177
Approved foster places	192	141	183
Filled places	157	141	139
Not available	N/A	0	4
Vacancies	35	0	40
% places filled	82%	100%	76%

Although in 2013/14 there have been higher numbers of children being looked after, not only is there a higher vacancy rate with only 76% of places filled, there are also markedly fewer approved foster carers when compared to 2011/12. The Borough's shortage of places is due to too many of the wrong kind of placement, and shortages in specific geographical areas.

Age groups that in-house foster carers are approved to look after:

Age Group	0-4	5-11	12-15	16+
Number of Households approved for this age	24%	30%	21%	24%

The highest proportion of Children Looked After are aged between 10 and 16, (38% of current cohort), whereas there are more foster carers approved for younger age groups. This is an example of where the foster care market is not aligned with need in Knowsley.

Numbers of children foster carers are approved to place (excluding family and friend) in July 2014:

Approved for 1 child	25
Approved for 2 children	29
Approved for 3 children	20
Approved for more than 3	1

While there are 20 in-house placements approved to accommodate three children, there is only one placement approved for more than three children. When children are placed in sibling-groups, practitioners often find it challenging to place children together and have to place the children in an agency placement.

Placements

This table shows what placements have been used throughout each of the years, and how long for. The majority of the tables in the report use snapshot data at the end of the year, to show what the current Children Looked After population is, whereas the above table shows the total number of children who were looked after over the course of the year, and provides a better reflection of the accommodation that has been provided to children and young people in Knowsley.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
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Placement	No of Placements	Days in Placement	Average Days	No of Placements	Days in Placement	Average Days	No of Placements	Days in Placement	Average Days
Foster Carer - Agency	39	11,634	298.3	51	12,771	250.4	80	19,731	246.6
Foster Carer - In House	188	58,560	311.5	212	62,128	293.1	211	59,684	282.9
Foster Placement - Relative or Friend	63	21,951	348.4	57	17,449	306.1	56	15,149	270.5
Homes and Hostels - Agency	28	8,708	311.0	17	4,815	283.2	27	6,586	243.9
Homes and Hostels - In House	15	4,116	274.4	15	4,112	274.1	32	6,620	206.9
Independent Living	29	6,633	228.7	32	7,591	237.2	18	5,222	290.1
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	0.0	1	360	360.0	2	107	53.5
Parent and Child unit	2	730	365.0	0	0	0.0	2	73	36.5
Placed for adoption NOT with current foster carer	22	6,991	317.8	20	6,083	304.2	16	3,445	215.3
Placed for adoption with current foster carer	1	365	365.0	2	420	210.0	6	1,423	237.2
Placed with Parents	52	16,658	320.3	48	15,334	319.5	47	13,687	291.2
Residential School - Agency	4	1,460	365.0	4	996	249.0	10	2,313	231.3
Secure Unit	3	645	215.0	3	887	295.7	7	1,067	152.4
Youth Offending Institute/Prison	5	1,347	269.4	3	696	232.0	7	1,270	181.4
Grand Total	451	139,798	310.0	465	133,642	287.4	521	136,377	261.8

This information shows that:

- There has been an increase of 70 children looked after from 2011/12 to 2013/14; that days in placements decreased overall and that children/young people were looked after for longer in 2011/12
- Increases in numbers of children looked after have been accommodated by agency foster carers, with double the number of placements with agency foster carers over the course of two years, and double the number of children accommodated in homes and hostels
- Parent and child units are not reflected in the 31st March figures, but have been used over the 12-month periods. These young people are often placed in Sheffield, and the placements are expensive and temporary.

Demand has outstripped availability of appropriate in-house provision to meet needs, with a significant growth in numbers of children looked after being accommodated by agency foster carers doubling from 2012 to 2014.

Out of Borough Placements

Out of borough fostering placements, independent living providers, and residential placements are an integral part of a sufficiency system for children looked after. Children looked after can often experience a range of complex needs, and to be accommodated safely, need specialist foster carers. This can include agency foster care, secure units and specialist care through mother and baby units. The specialist nature of this provision means that it is provided in few areas, and is often costly.

Police and court orders for placement outside Knowsley can be related to wider crime incidents and issues, and for the safety of the children these requests are made. This means that the

service within Knowsley has to make the placements outside of the Borough, even if in-house placements have been identified.

Numbers of children looked after accommodated outside of the local authority boundary and more than 20 miles away:

England (2012/13)	12%
North West (2012/13)	8%
Statistical Neighbours (2012/13)	7%
Knowsley (2012/13)	4%
Knowsley (2013/14)	7.8%

Placement Stability

This table shows the number of children who have had multiple placements in the 2013/14 year. 68% of children have had only one placement through the year. The more stable placements tend to be those children who have been fostered for longer periods of time. Just under a third of children have had more than one placement, with 10 children having four or more placements over the last 12 months. Placement stability has continued to decrease throughout 2014, especially in comparison to national figures and statistical neighbours:

Number of Placements	Number of children
1	179
2	50
3	22
4	6
5	1
6	2
8	1
Grand Total	261

Placement Breakdowns

Breakdowns by Age Group

As consistent with national patterns, most placement breakdowns occur within the 11 to 15 age group. Proportionally, Knowsley has a higher number of children looked after in this age range than national averages.

Age Group	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Grand Total
11-15 years	11	10	14	40
1-4 years	1			1
5-10 years	4	3		7
Over 16	5	3	4	13
Grand Total	21	16	18	61

Breakdowns by Gender

Gender	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	July 2014/15	Grand Total
Female	7	4	5	3	19
Male	14	12	13	3	42
Grand Total	21	16	18	6	61

While there is a higher proportion of placement breakdown among the male cohort, there is also a greater number of male children looked after compared to female children looked after.

In a focus group with children currently in care in Knowsley, there was a difference in perspective in placement breakdown from male and female participants. Male participants identified their own bad behaviour as a significant factor in placement breakdown, with escalation to residential placement in one case. Female participants said that placement breakdown was often due to clashes within the placement, and deterioration in personal relationships between the child and foster family.

Breakdowns by Placement Type

Placement Breakdown Type	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Grand Total
Residential	3	5	9	20
Foster Placement	15	8	8	33
Other	3	3	1	8
Grand Total	21	16	18	61

There are higher numbers of placement breakdowns in the foster sector, however, the number of children placed in foster placements is higher than in any other sector, so proportionally speaking residential placement breakdowns are more likely to breakdown.

There is not a huge variation in the number of placement breakdowns over the last 3 years, with a slight fall since 2012. However, the proportion of residential placements that have broken down has grown proportionally over the last 3 years.

Education

Looked after children are known nationally to suffer from poorer educational outcomes than non-looked after children; a higher proportion have special educational needs, and looked after children face significant challenges relating to behavioural and emotional wellbeing.

In Knowsley, looked after children's educational attainment mirrors the trends of overall achievement in Knowsley; when compared with national averages, results at Key Stage 1 are slightly lower, much higher at Key Stage 2 and lower at Key Stage 4. In Knowsley, children who are looked after perform worse than those who are not looked after, and the attainment gap at Key Stage 4 is significant.

Special Educational Needs:

A high proportion of children who are looked after have Special Educational Needs, and there are often challenges relating to behaviour and emotional health.

Table x: Children Looked after with SEN needs

	% with SEN statement	% with SEN but no statement	Total
Knowsley	36.5%	29.2%	65.7%
England	28.5%	39.4%	67.9%

Children looked after often experience developmental delay due to neglect in early life; they also can have difficulties with communication, in addition to specific conditions such as autism or Aspergers. The above table shows how in Knowsley there is recognition of SEN status in children looked after, more so than nationally, in terms of those pupils who are statemented. With SEN statements pupils are eligible for greater support.

Educational Attainment

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile:

This shows the EYFS scores for looked after children in Knowsley schools, not the number of children from Knowsley who are looked after and being assessed at EYFS. As this has consistently been a relatively small cohort of children, the actual pupil numbers are also shown:

% achieving a 'good level of development'

Year	Knowsley CLA	Knowsley overall	National average
2013	66% (2/3 CLA)	55%	52%
Change in national framework			
2012	60% (3/5 CLA)	66%	64%
2011	44% (4/9 CLA)	62%	59%
2010	50% (5/10 CLA)	57%	56%

Knowsley scores higher than the average and the figures above show that looked after children are not lagging behind non-looked after children nationally and at a local level.

Key Stage 2:

At Key Stage 2, Knowsley pupils do tend to perform in line with the national average, and while looked after children do perform less well than non-looked after children, they outperform the national average in maths and reading:

Percentage achieving at least Level 4 in the following:

	Mathematics	Reading	Writing
Knowsley CLA	66% (6/9)	66% (6/9)	44% (4/9)
England CLA	59%	63%	55%
Knowsley All	87%	85%	82%
England All	85%	86%	83%

Key Stage 4

In 2013, the largest cohort of looked after children were assessed at Key Stage 4

	5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent	5+ GCSEs A*-C inc English & maths	A*-C GCSE in English & maths
Knowsley CLA	35% (6/17)	6% (1/17)	6% (1/17)
England CLA	36.6%	15.3%	16.1%
Knowsley All	74.9%	43.7%	44.4%
National All	81.8%	59.2%	59.0%

Although 35% of looked after children have achieved 5 A*-C (or equivalent) at GCSE, only one looked after child has achieved A*-C in English and maths. Comparing to the results of Knowsley non-looked after children, it is evident that the attainment gap is significant at Key Stage 4.

Nationally, looked after children do have lower rates of attainment at Key Stage 4, and while Knowsley looked after children attain a similar level of 5 A*-C GCSEs, there is a clear difference with performance in English and maths, with Knowsley looked after children lagging behind.

How have educational outcomes changed for looked after children?

- Comparing to previous years, the proportion of looked after children achieving 5 A*-C was higher in 2011 (37.5%) and in 2012 (42.1%) than in 2013.
- The attainment gap in 2011 was 37 percentage points between looked after children and all children, and in 2012 the gap was 31.5 percentage points. However, in 2013 this has increased to 40 percentage points.
- In 2013, there were fewer looked after children being assessed at KS4 than in 2011 and 2012, and yet performance at 5A*-C is worse in 2013

Post-16 Provision:

Knowsley compares favourably with national figures in terms of care leavers being in education, employment or training at age 19:

	2011	2012	2013
Knowsley	84%	71%	64%
England	61%	58%	58%

3. HEALTH

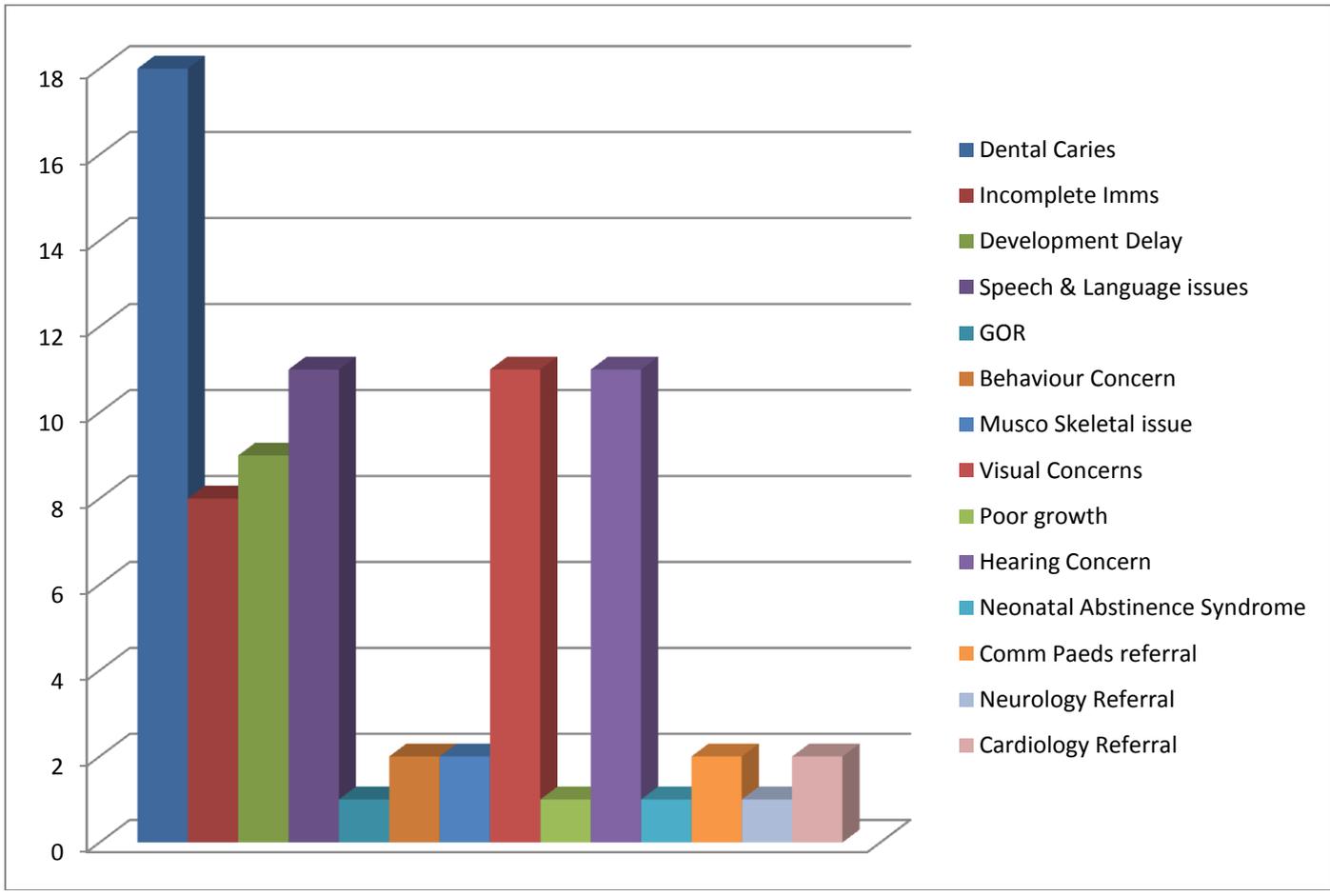
Despite performing better than national averages with high a proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training, there has been a significant fall of 22 percentage points in Knowsley from 2011 to 2013. Although national figures also show that there has been a drop in the numbers of care leavers in EET, this is not to the same extent as in Knowsley. The proportion of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is higher than the Knowsley NEET average (8.9%).

The Looked After Children Health Team has a pivotal function in coordinating the statutory health care for children and young people looked after in Knowsley. The key functions of the team are to develop, review and update policies and protocols in relation to LAC to support community health practitioners; ensure appropriate information sharing between; ensure appropriate information sharing across boundaries when children are placed outside of the LA to ensure continuity of care; facilitate statutory initial health assessments (IHA'S) and review health assessments (RHA's) for Looked After Children within statutory timescales.

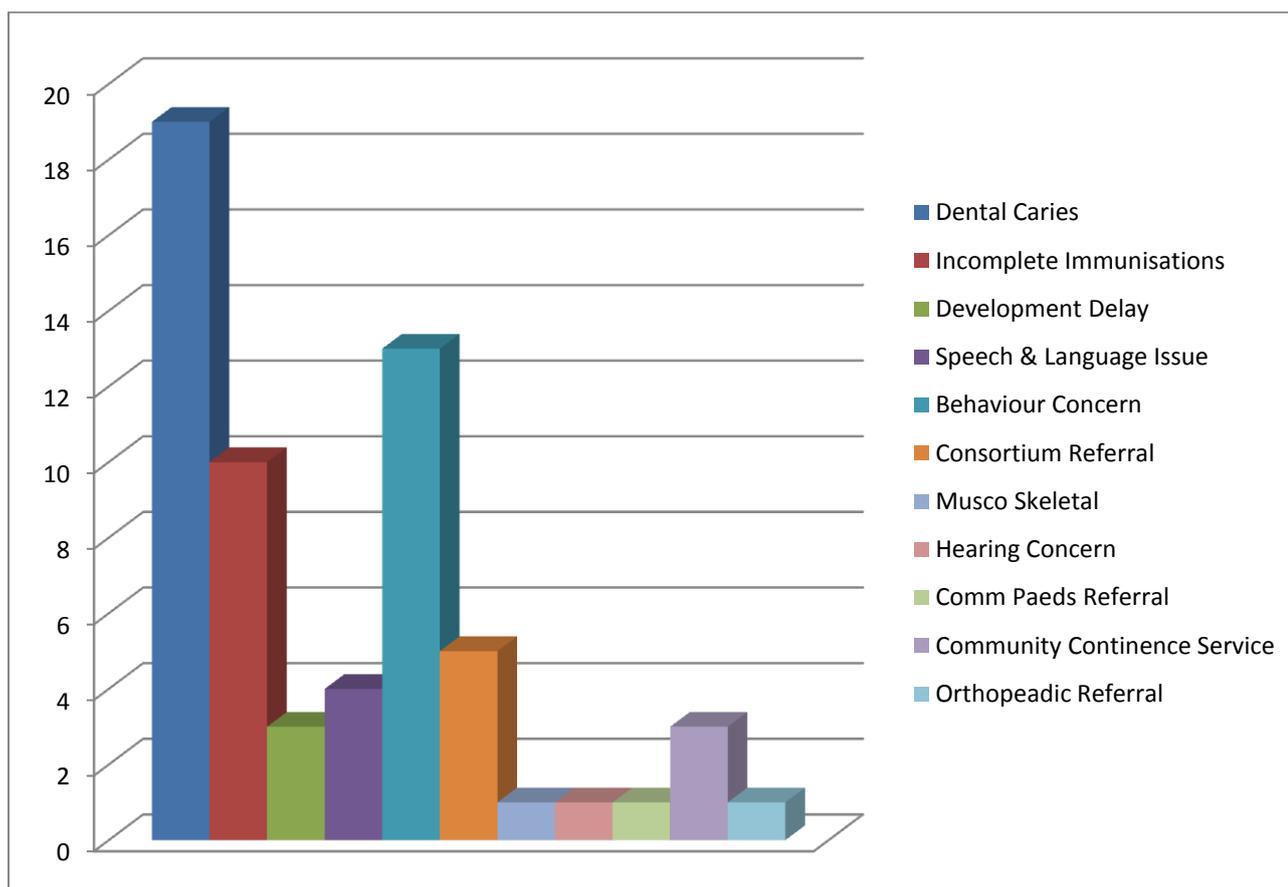
Every child and young person is offered a holistic initial health assessment (IHA) on entering care which is undertaken by Community Paediatricians who are employed by the Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust with the assistance of the LAC Support Worker.

During past 12-months, 22 children and young people in the age range of 0-18 years had an IHA completed in which no health needs were identified and would therefore be categorised as within normal health expectations and not requiring services above universal child health. 31 had pre-existing health needs and were deemed to be receiving appropriate services and one child with multiple congenital abnormalities had all appropriate health services in place to meet their needs.

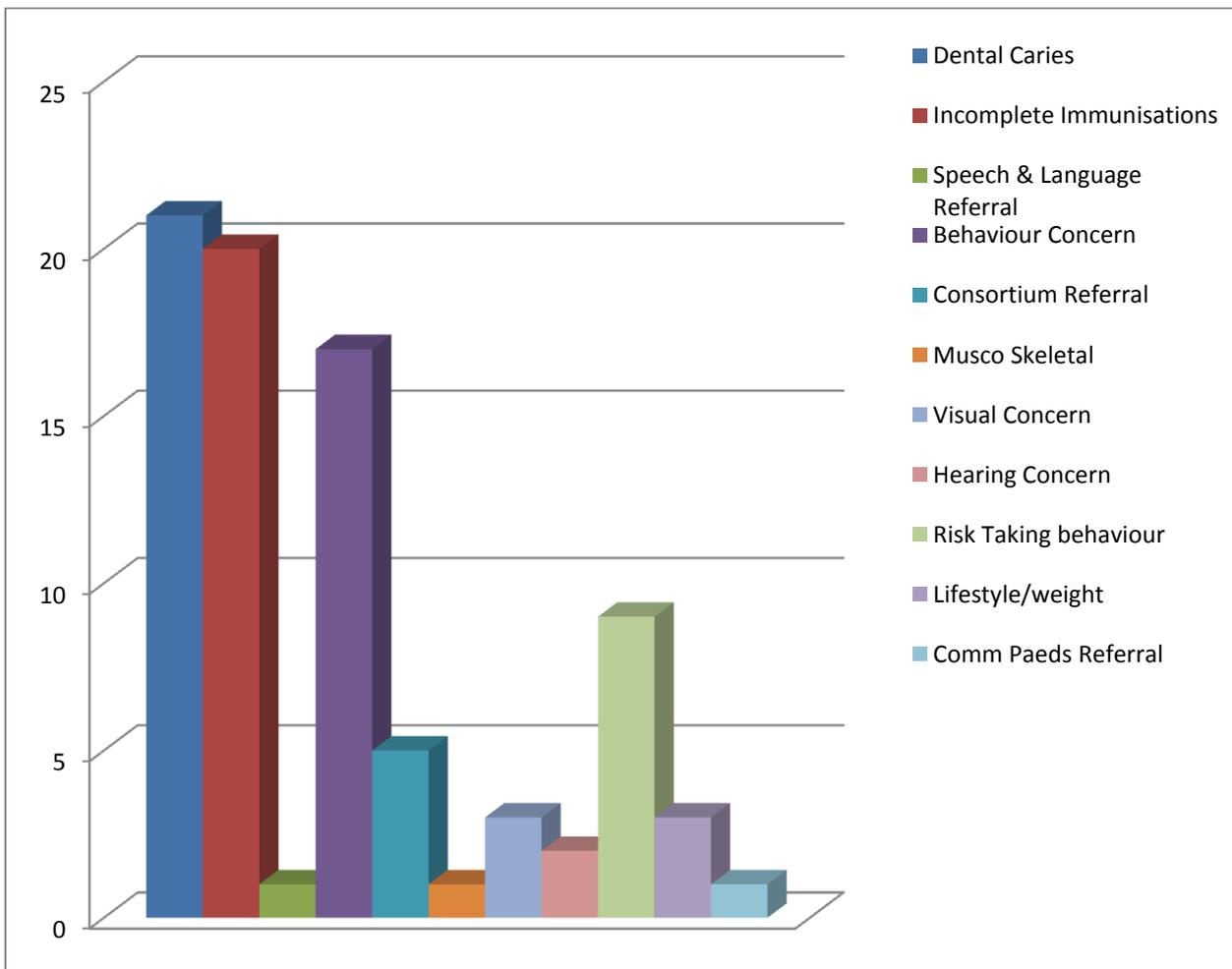
The most prevalent health need identified for **children under 5** was dental care and incomplete immunisations, followed by identified problems with speech and language development. A similar number were also identified as having vision and hearing problems:



For children **aged between 5-10**, the most prevalent health issue identified was also dental care and incomplete immunisations. Significant behaviour concerns also emerged as a problem for this age range:



Dental care and incomplete immunisations were again a significant factor in the assessments of **children and young people over age 10 years**. Significant behaviour concerns were also identified as a problem for this age range also and some also disclosed involvement in risk taking behaviours:



The IHA figures demonstrate that Knowsley looked after children have similar health issues as reflected in national research. Collation of data in relation to how these identified needs are addressed, (annual dental checks, immunisation status), are a reporting requirement for the local authority key performance indicator set and Knowsley has consistently performed above the national average in previous years in addressing these needs.

Mental health – provision of services for mental health of children looked after is divided into ‘complex’ and ‘preventative’ services. Services for children considered to have complex mental health needs is currently delivered by Kooth, and they have a current caseload of 18 cases. Prevention support is provided ‘Forward Together’ consortium, who have worked with 30 cases.

4. WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Children looked after represent a relatively small proportion of the children and young people in Knowsley. However, they tend to be the most vulnerable children, and are often from the most deprived areas of the borough, and from families who face a range of problems from drug and alcohol addiction, mental and physical disabilities and a range of complex challenges that include domestic abuse, poverty and gang related crime.

There is a wide range of reasons why children become looked after, with the predominant reasons being abuse, neglect or family dysfunction in Knowsley. Over the last three years there has been a notable increase in the numbers of children becoming looked after due to abuse/neglect and dysfunction. The highest risk is held by the children who are not safe within their own families, especially those who are currently unknown to the local authority. Those who are most at risk of

becoming looked after are considered to be at the “edge of care”, these families and children are those who are subject to a child protection plan, and are often already in a position where they are in contact with social services.

Children who come into care face significant risks in terms of their own development, especially where they experience development delay or health concerns. There are also significant risks in regards to child sexual exploitation. Young people who go missing from care are especially high risk in terms of child sexual exploitation. This is an area of developing work in Knowsley

Families with complex problems

An extensive body of national evidence shows how factors such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental health problems and learning disability undermine parenting capability and increase the likelihood of significant harm, particularly when they occur in combination. Moreover, parenting does not take place in isolation. Parents are also influenced by stressors within the wider environment and family, such as poor housing, poverty and unemployment that make parenting more challenging and increase the likelihood that difficulties will arise.

Families with disabled children

Families with children who have severe disabilities (physical, medical or mental) can be at risk of becoming looked after if parents cannot cope with or manage their child’s condition in the most extreme cases. Families with older children with severe autism present a particular risk, especially in single parent households. To assist such families, Knowsley Council offers short breaks and respite services to some of the most complex cases, to allow parents and families respite.

5. WHICH AREAS OF THE BOROUGH ARE MOST AFFECTED?

Children Looked After is a Knowsley-wide issue. There are high concentrations of Children Looked After coming from Longview, Stockbridge, Whitefield, and Page Moss; all of which have high levels of deprivation and unemployment. It is important for planning placements to know where children looked after come from. In consultations with foster carers, they said that a priority was that children, who are placed with them, be a significant distance away from their parents’ homes. Foster carers said³ that in instances where children were placed too close to their original home, they were likely to go missing from care and return home. Other considerations include what school the child attends and accessibility.

³ Foster Carers Consultation 2014

Joiners by Family Home Address	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	Total
Cherryfield	2	2	5	9
Halewood North		1		1
Halewood South	3	7	2	12
Halewood West			4	4
Kirkby Central	3	3	2	8
Longview	3	8	24	35
Northwood		1	12	13
Page Moss	3	10	8	21
Park	3	1	11	15
Prescot East	1	1	1	3
Prescot West		2		2
Roby	2		3	5
Shevington	3	2	4	9
St Bartholomews			4	4
St Gabriels	1	3	2	6
St Michaels		6	5	11
Stockbridge	3	12	9	24
Swanside	1	1	2	4
Whiston North	1		1	2
Whiston South	3	4	3	10
Whitefield	7	6	10	23
Whiteside			1	1
Grand Total	39	70	113	222

6. HOW DO RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS VIEW THIS ISSUE?

The views of care experienced children and young people in Knowsley are represented by MADE (Making a Difference Everywhere) Together. This group represents Knowsley's Child in Care Council, and collates the views of care experienced young people through MADE consultation sessions, workshops and discussions with children looked after and young people leaving care groups. As such, MADE have worked with Knowsley Council to establish what Children Looked After expect, and Knowsley Council have made pledges to ensure delivery of these universal needs:

- We will make sure to have suitable training available to the adults in your life who are responsible for you to help them to understand what its like to be a young person who is in care or care leaver.
- We will make sure that the adults in your life encourage and empower you to have a say in the decisions that affect your life no matter what your age or personal circumstances.
- We will continue to support the voice of children looked after and care leavers to have a say in the service that they receive from corporate parents by listening to them and responding to them in meaningful ways.

In addition, there have been a range of focus groups on placements with older children looked after and care leavers, and foster carers, to gain insight into placements, in particular. The young people who are looked after and recent care leavers said that for them, the biggest issue was being in care, all of them wished that they were not in care, even though they recognised that their birth parents could not look after them. Some respondents voiced that as older teenagers they would like to return to their parents, as they know how to look after themselves and could help

their parents, whereas other respondents said that there “is nothing there for them at home”⁴, and that they recognised that they were better off in their foster placement. Respondents were consistent in voicing that as young people in care they should be given greater choice in where they live and what placements they have.

During the focus group, the young people were asked what, from their perspective, makes a good placement and the predominant response was about how welcome they were made to feel within the placement. The atmosphere within the placement family is key to how welcome the child or young person is made to feel. In terms of avoiding placement breakdown young people identified not being able to communicate as a key issue, and not given opportunity to settle in a placement.

7. HOW DOES THIS ISSUE IMPACT ON SERVICE PROVISION AND USE?

There has been an increase across Children’s Social Care (CSC) services in all aspects of work, including an increase in referral rates, children subject to CP Plans and CLA numbers. This may be a consequence of a limited early help offer, and CSC either dealing with families too late or too many times before the right intervention is provided.

Cases of children and young people being referred appear to be more complex and often regarded as “high tariff”. Examples would include those young people at risk of CSE in the community and those involved in gun and gang crime. There also appears to have been an increase in cases referred due to neglect.

This is the continuation of a wider national trend as identified in the October 2012 ADCS report ‘Safeguarding Pressures Phase 3’. Neglect is the most cited reason for children to be referred to children’s social care and for becoming looked after. The report suggests cases are increasingly complex, requiring more time and resources. Qualitative research also suggests that domestic violence is an increasing concern as a contributory factor in child social care referrals.

These increases in need and the growth in the complexity of cases alongside falling budgets inevitably leads to reduced resources and puts additional pressure on services to effectively deliver for the most vulnerable. Service delivery now has a higher profile following public inquiries into a series of major cases. Political, public and press focus has undoubtedly added to these pressures.

8. DO WE HAVE EVIDENCE OF WHAT WORKS?

Guidance from the Department for Education provides a clear direction for how local authorities should work to improve outcomes for children looked after, which relates not only to placements, but how services should engage with children looked after:

- a) All children are placed in the local authority areas, except where this is not consistent with their needs and welfare
- b) All children with a plan of adoption are placed with an adoptive family within 12 months of that plan being approved
- c) There is a diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together to meet children’s needs, including children and young people who are already cared for as well as those at risk of becoming cared for or going into custody

⁴ Appendix X Focus groups – Children Looked After and Care Leavers

- d) The Children's Trust work together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become cared for at the age of 16 and 17
- e) Services are available in adequate quantity to respond to children and young people including predicted demand for a range of needs and emergencies
- f) In addition to meeting relevant National Minimum Standards, services are of a quality to secure the specific outcomes identified in the care planning process for children and young people
- g) Services are situated across the local authority area to reflect geographical distribution of need
- h) Placement providers are linked into the wider network of services and work with these services to offer appropriate support to deliver identified outcomes for cared for children
- i) Universal services know when a child or young person is cared for and have good links with the range of targeted and specialist services which support them, including placement providers.
- j) There are mechanisms in place to ensure that professionals involved in placement decisions have sufficient knowledge and information about the supply and quality of placements and availability of all specialist, targeted and universal support services within the local authority area.

9. WHAT IS THE CURRENT POLICY DIRECTION?

Government policy in relation to children looked after is to reduce the overall number of children looked after, and improve outcomes for those children who are looked after. To achieve this, the Department for Education has pledged to:

- Maintain the current programme of evidence-based early interventions for looked-after children and for those on the edge of care
- Ensure the virtual school head (VSH) in every council arranges for children in care to get the support they need to succeed at school
- Hold quarterly meetings between children in care and ministers to make sure our policies take their views into account

To improve the quality of care in children's homes, the government will:

- hold local authorities and residential care providers to account by gathering data on their performance and making it available to the public
- explore new ways of commissioning care placements, for example, through the Innovation Programme

To support children and young people who have left care, it is intended that young people will be offered opportunities to stay with their foster carers until the age of 21.

Education:

The main national policy direction is to reduce the gap in achievement between children looked after and non-children looked after. In Knowsley, at Key Stage 4, there is a significant gap in attainment between Knowsley pupils and national attainment results. To ensure that children looked after in Knowsley achieve the same level as children not looked after.

Local

Strategy for Knowsley

The Strategy for Knowsley: the Borough of Choice is the overarching strategy for the Borough. Its primary objective is to outline the Knowsley Partnership’s long term vision to make Knowsley a place where people want to live and work.

All council and partnership strategies, plans, policies and programmes should ultimately support the achievement of this vision. Ten strategic outcomes have been agreed to help the partnership to achieve its vision for Knowsley. Five of these relate directly Children Looked After and are highlighted below.

Empowered, resilient, cohesive communities	Safe, attractive, sustainable neighbourhoods	Children get the best possible start in life and have opportunities to reach their potential	Everybody has the opportunity to have the best health and wellbeing throughout their life	More people look after themselves and support others to do the same
People are protected from risks that can affect their health and wellbeing	Quality infrastructure and environment	Improved outcomes for our most vulnerable young people	Knowsley has the conditions in place to support sustainable business growth	Knowsley residents are empowered to realise their economic potential

10. CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS

Strengths

The following strengths have been identified in Knowsley’s Children Looked After services:

- Children looked after in Knowsley benefit from regular health, dental and optical assessments, including assessment of their emotional well-being.
- When children transfer to the looked after children’s team they benefit from stable relationships with their social workers. These children are listened to and their wishes and feelings are explored and recorded. Many are positive about their placement and the relationships they have with their carers.
- For children who go missing from care, missing from education or are at risk of child sexual exploitation, there are established systems to ensure their wishes and feelings are considered when they return.

- 'Making a difference everywhere' groups comprising representatives of children looked after in Knowsley perform a valuable role including collecting and representing the views of children and young people to inform service delivery.
- Care leavers in Knowsley are well supported, live in suitable accommodation and are accessing education, training and employment.
- Provisional education results for Key Stage 4 in 2014 are good, and show improvements from previous years.

Challenges

The main challenge for services relating to Children Looked After will be ensuring consistent improvement. In the Ofsted Inspection report, experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence were identified as requiring improvement, and adoption services were judged to be inadequate. The Ofsted report identified the services and the Local Safeguarding Children Board to be inadequate overall, and a notice to improve has been issued by the Secretary of State.

Other challenges include:

- Keeping pace with increases of Children Looked After in terms of recruiting new foster carers and upskilling existing foster carers to provide homes for a range of children.
- Managing increasing complexity of cases – from a health perspective younger children tend to come into care with consistent needs (developmental delays, neglect in terms of appointments for health), but older children are coming into care have increasing emotional and behavioural needs (exposure to social media, sexualised behaviours, gangs). This could potentially require specialist support in the future, and offers risk for children's long-time wellbeing.
- Health data – the lack of readily available health data is a risk, especially for children who do not have severe conditions or disabilities, but ongoing conditions. Without regular access to this data, there is a risk that commissioning will not be targeted at children's needs.
- Education – weaker future cohort at GCSE in 2015 than in 2014 and challenges in managing changes to education.

11. SOURCES OF EVIDENCE AND FURTHER INTELLIGENCE

Direct sources of intelligence and evidence

- KMBC CSC CLA cohort data (end of year report) 2014
- KMBC CSC Monthly activity report
- KMBC CSC Monthly Scorecard
- KMBC Children & Young People Needs Assessment, 2013
- Knowsley Safeguarding Children Board Plan 2013/14 [Knowsley Safeguarding Children Board Plan 2013/14](#)
- Knowsley response to ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Research: Phase 4, 2014 Annual Children in Need Census DfE [Characteristics of Children In Need 2012/2013 & 2013/14](#)
- Ofsted Inspection Report 2014 [Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers](#)
- ADCS 'Safeguarding Pressures Phase 3' summary report <http://www.adcs.org.uk/news/safeguarding-pressures.html> 2012

- [Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\)](#) DfE 2014