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# Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children and Young People in Stockton-on-Tees 2024-26

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## Foreword

From the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Deputy Leader Lisa Evans

To be written once strategy is approved

## Executive Summary

The Children Act (1989) sets out the statutory sufficiency duty for local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within their area which meets the needs of children that are in the care of the local authority, and when it is consistent with their welfare to be provided in the local authority area.

This strategy document sets out how Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council intends to meet its sufficiency duties to provide a range of accommodation and support services that:

- Keep children with their families of origin, wherever it is safe to do so.
- Provide children with alternative, nurturing homes if they need short, or long-term alternative care or support arrangements.
- Enable our children and young people with disabilities to live an ordinary life.

As Corporate Parents we have high aspirations for our children, our ambition for the children and young people in our care is the same as our ambition for all children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees, that they live in safe, secure, and loving environments and are happy and healthy.

Along with many Local Authorities across the Country, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is experiencing substantial challenges within the accommodation market for care and support, which is demonstrated through a sharp increase in provider fees since 2020 alongside a reduction in the availability of care and support that can meet the needs of our children and young people<sup>1</sup>. Based on the analysis of our data, the sufficiency challenges currently faced by the Council include:

- The proportion of children in the care of the authority has remained consistently higher than statistical neighbour averages over the last 5 years.
- There has been a substantial increase in the number of young people aged 16 years and over (increasing from 64 in 2018 to 126 in 2023), the profile of need for our young people aged 16 years and over has also increased due to changes in the national transfer scheme increasing the proportion of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children being brought into the care of the authority.
- We have more foster carers leaving the profession than we have new foster carers registering, and a shortfall across both our SBC mainstream and independent foster agency foster carers.

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<sup>1</sup> Competitions and Markets Authority (2022) Children's Social Care Market Study available at [Final report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

- We do not have enough prospective adopters that can meet the needs of our children.
- There is a shortfall of affordable housing options for families and care leavers within the borough.
- There is substantial competition in the market for a limited number of residential placements, particularly for young teenagers with complex trauma, attachment, or mental health needs.
- There is an undersupply in the borough and across the region of solo or small capacity residential children's homes and supported accommodation that can meet the needs of our children and young people.
- Our children and young people with disabilities and their families have told us that short breaks help families stay together – but they are unclear about what short break services are available to them, and that choices are limited for older young people.
- Transitions from children to adult's services are inconsistent for young people with disabilities, or children in our care and some young people are coming to attention of services too late to ensure a well-planned, supported transition takes place.

Over the next two years, the priorities and actions that we will take to improve our sufficiency will be governed through our Corporate Parenting Board and the Councils Powering Our Future Transformation Programme. The Council intends to have a wide-reaching approach in its Sufficiency planning and will not focus on placements sufficiency in isolation, as analysis of the data suggests that too many children and young people are in our care. As part of our Sufficiency Strategy, we are committed to strengthening the help we give to families so that their children and young people can stay with them, instead of coming into care. We expect that this will mean the number of children we care for reduces over time.

Therefore, during 2024-26, we will:

1. Redefine our strategy for Early Help within the Borough, collaborating closely with our partners, to support children, young people and families at the earliest stage, with the ambition to keep children and young people safely within family homes and local communities wherever it is safe to do so. This is a priority of the Powering our Futures programme.
2. Evaluate our Edge of Care service to understand the impact it is having to keep children, young people and families together and, if appropriate, expand this approach.

3. Continue to develop our approach to reunification, ensuring that children, young people and families receive support from Children's Services and our partner organisations to help them stay together.
4. Strengthen our support offer to families with kinship care to increase stability for children and young people, and in turn encourage more families to apply for special guardianship orders.
5. Review our governance processes and associated panels including chairing arrangements and membership to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny, and that solution-focused support is provided to embed effective planning for children, young people and families.
6. Increase sufficiency across all aspects of our family-based foster placements (both SBC and IFA) including short breaks, all age groups, sibling groups, parent and child placements, children with additional needs and stepping down from residential care, so that all our children and young people can live in a family environment wherever possible.
7. We will increase the number of prospective adopters who can meet the needs of our children, and to increase early permanence into adoption.
8. We will increase the sufficiency of in-house supported lodgings providers. Our evidence of impact to date indicates that supported lodgings can meet the needs and improve outcomes for a considerable proportion of young people who are currently in other forms of supported accommodation.
9. We will increase the diversity of representation across all elements of our sufficiency to meet the cultural and religious needs of our children and young people.
10. We will work with the market to increase sufficiency that can support teenagers with complex trauma, emotional and mental health needs.
11. We will increase the sufficiency of smaller or solo children's homes to be able to match and place our children who are experiencing significant complexities. Due to the number of placement breakdowns experienced with providers and the substantial associated costs, this would be most effectively managed as SBC internal provision.

12. We will develop a 'Stockton first' approach with the external residential children's home market based in the borough to maximise our access to local children's home provision.
13. We will explore and develop the range of our supported accommodation options to meet the needs of young people who are ready to move on to independence through to those with more complex support needs, and to identify where this is best delivered in house or commissioned from the external market.
14. We will work with our strategic housing partners to develop innovative approaches across both the private and social housing sector to increase access to larger affordable properties for foster carers, to support kinship arrangements and reunification of families.
15. We will work with our strategic housing partners to develop innovative approaches across both the private and social housing sector to provide more affordable move-on options for young people leaving care.

## Section 1: Purpose of the Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy

### 1. Purpose of the Strategy

1.1 A 'Sufficiency Duty' is placed on Local Authorities under the Children Act 1989. This Duty requires local authorities to ensure that there are sufficient placements within their geographical area to meet the needs of children and young people in care, and to take steps to develop provision to meet the needs of all children and young people in care locally as far as is possible.

1.2 Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of children in or on the edge of care is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes. In addition to the quality, location, and type of placements, meeting the sufficiency duty requires a whole system approach which includes early intervention and preventative services.<sup>2</sup>

1.3 In recent years, independent reviews of the Children's Social Care system and the placement market (the arrangements that local authorities have in sourcing and purchasing placements for children) have identified significant challenges including:

- A lack of placements of the right kind, in the right places, means that children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs.
- Pressure in the care system leading to an increase in unregulated placements and a lack of flexibility in existing care standards to allow for the creation of bespoke packages of care, in the most extreme circumstances leading to children being deprived of their liberty by courts because there are no homes that can meet their needs.
- the largest private providers of placements making materially higher profits and charging materially higher prices, with no evidence indicating that higher costs lead to higher quality.

1.4 In response to the recommendation from independent reviews. In 2023 the DFE (Department for Education) set out a vision for the reform of children's social care 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'. The strategy proposes a number of reforms over the next two years including:

- A national fostering recruitment and retention programme.
- A National Kinship Carers Strategy and the development of a training and support offer to kinship carers.
- Develop a programme to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children's homes sector.
- Introduction of a financial oversight regime to cover the largest providers of children's homes and fostering agencies.

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<sup>2</sup>DSCF (2010) Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children

- Introduction of Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) to plan, commission and deliver care places.

1.5 This strategy for children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees is our response to the changing strategic context and emerging trends of need locally. It sets out how we intend to meet the Sufficiency Duty and provide a range of accommodation and support services through the development of our own local authority provision and by working with external providers and other partners to shape a local market that will meet the needs of children close to their community whenever this is appropriate.

#### **Vision and Principles for the Borough**

1.6 In Stockton-on-Tees, wherever possible, we want the children in our care to grow up in stable and safe homes with a loving family, close to their family of origin, their community and with the additional support of professionals when they need it.

1.7 Whenever possible, we aim for this care to be with extended family or family friends, and if this is not achievable, through appropriately skilled and experienced foster carers who are able to create a warm, loving, and supportive family home for our children and young people.

1.8 A small number of children may need a residential care setting either temporarily or on a longer-term basis. Where a residential setting is right, or necessary in the short term to provide some stability or as an opportunity to solve problems or change circumstances, or for the long term as a permanent home this should be local, high quality, a "family size" and style of home and ensure warmth, care, and support alongside professional skills.

1.9 We recognise that for some young people the type of accommodation that they require as they approach adulthood will change with the need for greater autonomy and support, rather than care in many instances. Some young people will also require care into adulthood. We will make sure that we have a range of supported accommodation that can meet diverse needs into early adulthood, and we will develop strong pathways to ensure consistent provision for those entering adult social care.

1.10 Our children with additional needs and disabilities may require additional support or services to meet their needs. Through coproduction work with children, young people, and families, we are committed to ensuring that they can take part in enriching social activities and have the access to the same experiences as their peers to support their journey to independence.

1.11 We are committed to working with our partners to further develop a whole system approach to both increase the protective factors for families that reduce the risk of children coming into the care of the Council and to improve the outcomes for children when they are in our care.

#### **Strategic Context and the Council's approach to sufficiency**

1.12 The 2023-2026 Council Plan sets out a vision for the Borough, based on three key priorities:

- A place where people are healthy, safe, and protected from harm.
- A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed.
- A place that is clean, vibrant, and attractive.

1.13 As Corporate Parents we have high aspirations for our children, our ambition for the children and young people in our care is the same as for all children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees, that they live in safe, secure, and loving environments and are happy and healthy.

1.14 The Council is currently consulting on principles that will shape our Corporate Parenting approach and ensure that our children and young people receive the love, warmth, care and support they need to thrive:

- **Safe and stable homes** – where children and young people feel safe, secure, and cared for
- **Education, employment, and training** – Opportunities and support to achieve and progress
- **Connections and community** – building and maintaining networks, opportunities to participate and have fun
- **Being heard** – Supporting children and young people to share their views, wishes and feelings and ensuring we listen, feedback, and take action
- **Healthy lives** – having good physical and emotional health and wellbeing now and in the future
- **Prepared and supported** – helping our care experienced young people to prepare for adult lives
- **Being effective corporate parents** – Supporting and advocating for our children and young people and challenging others to do the same

1.15 There are some children and young people who need to live, either in the short term or permanently, in other care arrangements. Our approach in Stockton is to where possible enable our children and young people to live with alternative nurturing and supportive families. If we are unable to provide a family setting or if this may not meet the child or young person's needs, we will seek to provide a children's home which replicates family life as closely as possible. We will enable our young people to live in supported accommodation, which includes supported lodgings, staying with their foster carers or group-based supported accommodation depending on their needs, to help them move towards independence.

1.16 There is a breadth of evidence that maintaining continuity in areas of a child's life including access to education, friendships, social and community networks can both improve the outcomes of a care placement and maintain protective factors that ensure reunification with birth families is permanent<sup>3</sup> The Council believes that wherever possible the children in our care should live close to their communities to maintain contact with friends, family and the people that are important to their lives.

### **Voice of Children and Young People**

1.17 One of our key responsibilities as corporate parents is to consider the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people (Children and Social Work Act 2017). As corporate parents, we are committed

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<sup>3</sup> Hood et al., 2022, 'Improving the chances of successful reunification for children who return home from care: a rapid evidence review', What Works Centre for Children's Social Care

to championing the children and young people who are in our care, putting their views and voice at the heart of everything we do to support them to thrive.

1.18 Let's Take Action is Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Children in our Care council which provides young people in care and care leavers a voice and encourage them to take an active role in shaping and influencing strategy and our local services. The group meets monthly. Let's Take Action provides a sounding board and consultation group to managers, policy makers and councillors and are consulted with on policy that affects children in care. To support ensure the lived experience of children and young people in our care and care leavers is heard, there are wider participation of all children in care and care leavers, wider opportunities are delivered throughout the year and during school holidays to for children and young people to provide views, wishes and feelings through activities, events, and care planning.

1.19 We have a range of direct work tools that staff use to capture the views and wishes of children and young people, to enable their voice to shape the planning of their care and what they need for their home to feel safe and secure. A snapshot from our 2023 Independent Review Unit report highlighted that 25% of children and young people attended their review and provided their views as part of this process, either verbally, non-verbally or through a trusted adult or advocate. In addition, 55% of children and young people did not attend in person but shared their views through an advocate or other trusted adult. The remaining 15% of children either did not attend or are under the age of 4 years.

1.20 We also provide children and young people with the opportunity to access independent advocacy services through NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service). During 2023/24, 62 children and young people accessed advocacy services.

### **Governance**

1.21 This strategy will be monitored through the Council's Corporate Parenting Board, with 6 monthly update reports to provide oversight of progress against our sufficiency commitments.

1.22 The Powering Our Future programme is a new and ambitious long-term vision for the future of Stockton-on-Tees to reshape what we do for the better. Within the Powering Our Future Programme, Children in our Care is a key focus for transformation within the programme to ensure we are making the best use of our resources while continuing to improve outcomes for our children and young people. This strategy forms a key part of the transformation programme for Children in our Care, and our transformation board will receive regular update reports.

## Section 2: Summary of the Borough

### Headlines



The Borough of Stockton-on-Tees is home to around 196,600 people (ONS, 2021) and is made up of seven towns (Billingham, Eaglescliffe, Ingleby Barwick, Norton, Stockton, Thornaby, Yarm).

The population has grown by 2.6% since the 2011 census and is projected to rise to around 200,450 by 2030 (ONS, 2021).

There is substantial variance of affluence and deprivation across the 27 wards within the Borough. Overall, the Borough ranks as the 73<sup>rd</sup> (out of 317) most deprived local authority area in England (IMD, 2019).



56,424 people, or 28.7% of the Borough's population, are aged 0-24 (ONS, 2021). There are 34,397 pupils across nursery, reception, early years and KS1 to KS4 (DfE, 2023).

The 0 to 24 year age population is projected to decrease from 57,721 in 2024 to 55,745 in the ten-year period to 2034, a decrease of 3.42%.

15.1% of school pupils are from a minority ethnic background (DfE, 2023). 7.3% of our children's first language is not English (DfE, 2023). Our largest ethnic groups in the Borough are Asian/Asian British (4.6%) and Black/Black British/Caribbean/African (1.1%) (ONS, 2021).



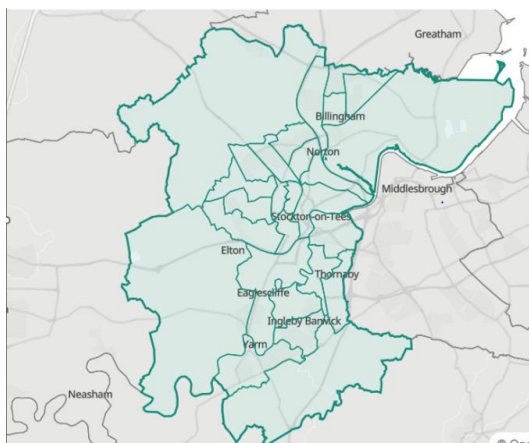
Around 9,000 children live in households with "absolute low income" (Department for Work and Pensions, 2023).

27.2% of our school pupils are eligible for free school meals (FSM) below the 30.4% average for the North East but higher than the 23.8% national average (DfE, 2023).

### Borough Overview

2.1 Stockton-on-Tees is a vibrant Borough, with a strong economic and cultural heritage. Comprised of seven townships (Ingleby Barwick, Stockton, Billingham, Thornaby, Norton, Yarm, Eaglescliffe) with their own diverse characteristics, the Borough has a wealth of assets within its communities, people, and places.

Figure 1: Stockton-on-Tees Borough boundary map (OpenStreetMap, 2024)



2.2 Stockton-on-Tees is the largest unitary authority within the Tees Valley Region, made up of 26 wards which are home to 197,348 residents<sup>4</sup>. Overall, the Borough is ranked as 73<sup>rd</sup>, out of 317 local authorities for overall deprivation, with 9 wards in the 10% most deprived in the country<sup>5</sup>.

2.3 Deprivation and poverty are among the factors that both create and compound adversity within families and are key drivers of poor health and social outcomes including increased risks of children being taken into care<sup>6</sup>. The differences within the Borough in the conditions in which people work and live contribute to avoidable differences in outcomes for our children and young people, with children living in more deprived areas more likely to experience poor outcomes by the time they start school compared to their more affluent peers. In addition, the impact of these differences is demonstrated in the substantial variance of healthy life expectancy rates between the most and least deprived wards for both men and women born in the borough<sup>7</sup>.

2.4 The Borough has some of the most affluent neighborhoods in the country which sit alongside a number of the most income deprived. Within Stockton-on-Tees, 39 neighbourhoods (lower layer super output areas or LSOAs) are among the 20 percent most income deprived in country and 24 in the 20 percent least income deprived – illustrating the wide-ranging disparity in affluence across the Borough, where only 1% of people living within the Borough's least deprived neighbourhoods are estimated to be income deprived, compared to 53% of residents in the most deprived<sup>8</sup> (MHCLG, 2021). In addition, the Borough has a higher proportion of children in low-income families than the national average and that of statistical neighbours and has a higher proportion of neighborhoods in the 10% most deprived nationally across a number of categories within the index of multiple deprivation.

**Table 1: IMD (index of multiple deprivation)- proportion of LSOAs in 10% most deprived nationally (Stockton-on-Tees compared to compared to our 2 closest local authority 'near neighbours') (LG Inform, 2019)**

	<b>Stockton-on-Tees</b>	<b>Darlington</b>	<b>Calderdale</b>
Employment	<b>20.83</b>	18.46	14.84
Health deprivation and disability	<b>28.33</b>	24.62	10.94
Income deprivation	<b>21.67</b>	18.46	15.63
Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI)	<b>19.17</b>	21.54	12.50

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (2021)

<sup>5</sup> Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019)

<sup>6</sup> Bennet et al (2022) Child Poverty and Children entering care in England, 2015-2020, a longitudinal ecological study at the local area level. The Lancet.

<sup>7</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2013)

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (2021)

## Section 3: Progress since our last sufficiency strategy.

In 2019-21, the Local Authority's sufficiency and commissioning strategy set out a number of priorities for action. The Covid 19 pandemic impacted progress against these priorities and has also led to changing needs across our population of children, young people and families. It is within this context that the below progress updates are provided.

Our Commitments (we said)	Our Progress (we did)
<p>To redevelop early help services, collaborating with our partners, to better support children, young people, and families at an earlier stage, with the ambition to keep children and young people safely within their homes and communities.</p>	<p><b>Developed an in-house adolescent approach to reduce risk and harm outside of the home</b>, including exploitation and targeted youth support teams. Our Exploitation Team work with children/young people from the age of 10-18 years of age who are likely to suffer harm from exploitation. Our targeted youth support team provide face to face contact and direct work, individual to the child or young person's needs.</p> <p><b>Developed an in-house edge of care service</b>; Our edge of care team, made up of experienced social workers, work with identified families that are at immediate risk of breakdown to provide an intensive package of support.</p>
<p>Continue to look at increasing social work capacity and develop smarter ways of working to enhance support to children, young people, and families</p>	<p><b>Launched a Social Work Academy</b>, which offers newly qualified social workers the support to make the transition from academic study to the world of work, nurturing them through their assessed and supported year in employment to become capable practitioners with the ability to critically analyse and evaluate their practice and always keep the child at the heart of everything that they do. The academy operates based on the Relationship Based model of practice as developed by Stockton-on-Tees Children's Services.</p>
<p>Continue to develop our Going Home work stream with a culture and vision for services which promotes safe and sustainable reunifications within families.</p>	<p><b>Launched a reunification team</b> which works alongside Children's Services staff, parents/carers and children and young people to support reunification to ensure it is well planned, based on a robust assessment of risk and in the best interest of the child.</p>

Our Commitments (we said)	Our Progress (we did)
<p>Extend our use of the Valuing Care approach with a clear focus on the needs of the child or young person to help us to ensure that, when we do have to place them away from their family of origin, the placement will support their needs and help to reduce them over time.</p> <p>Continue to research opportunities to develop innovative approaches to support Special Guardianship arrangements and review the support package for carers.</p>	<p><b>We continue to use the Valuing Care approach to describe our children and young people’s needs</b> to support the matching of placements and to track outcomes. However, we have not yet fully embedded its use to understand needs at population level and for this to then influence sufficiency planning and commissioning arrangements.</p>
<p>Explore the feasibility to increase in house residential care capacity.</p>	<p><b>Received DFE Capital Grant Funding</b> for the development of 2 additional children’s homes in the Borough.</p>
<p>Continue to explore improved commissioning approaches for external placements to deliver strong placement matches and ‘best value’</p>	<p><b>Implemented a review</b> as part of the Councils Powering Our Futures Programme to transform our commissioning approaches</p>
<p>Work with our partners across the children and young people’s mental health system to ensure that the emotional health and wellbeing needs of children in our care are prioritised and appropriate support and services are accessible.</p> <p>Work to prioritise the health needs of children and young people in our care and coproduce a model which will improve recorded health outcomes within the next 3 years.</p>	<p><b>Developed our commissioning partnership with Tees Esk and Wear Valley Trust</b> to provide a Children in Care therapeutic support offer which includes a psychologist and 2 clinical nurse specialists offering consultation and guidance to social workers and family workers, assessment and delivery of interventions and workforce training.</p> <p><b>Introduced the No Limits Programme</b> to provide a voluntary opportunity for employees to spend time with a young person one-on-one to be offer them opportunities to engage in social, leisure, recreational and sporting activities.</p> <p><b>Worked in partnership with the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Health Care Board to reshape and recommission the Tees wide Children in our Care Health contract</b>, this contract is still in recovery mode following the COVID pandemic.</p>

Our Commitments (we said)	Our Progress (we did)
<p>Continue to work on improvements in the range of accommodation and support packages for Care Leavers and seek to commission a dispersed accommodation model in which support is wrapped around young people who live in their own properties in the community.</p>	<p><b>We have opened our No Limits Hub</b> in Stockton town centre to give young care leavers a dedicated space where they can develop a range of independent living skills. The hub provides a safe space for support with learning, health, housing and employment and training and an informal opportunity to influence and shape service delivery.</p> <p><b>Introduced a Place of My Own Scheme:</b> A partnership with a social landlord where young people can transition into a tenancy of their own.</p> <p><b>Refreshed our Care Leavers Offer</b> – working in partnership with Strategic Housing partners to understand the needs of our population and propose models of accommodation.</p> <p><b>Commissioned in borough Supported Accommodation Provision specifically for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People</b> to offer young people coming into the care of the authority group-based living with onsite support or smaller dispersed accommodation with floating support to meet their needs.</p> <p><b>Increased our staying put arrangements post 18 years</b> – 100% of young people who have chosen to remain with their foster carer or supported lodgings provider have successfully had staying put arrangements put in place.</p>

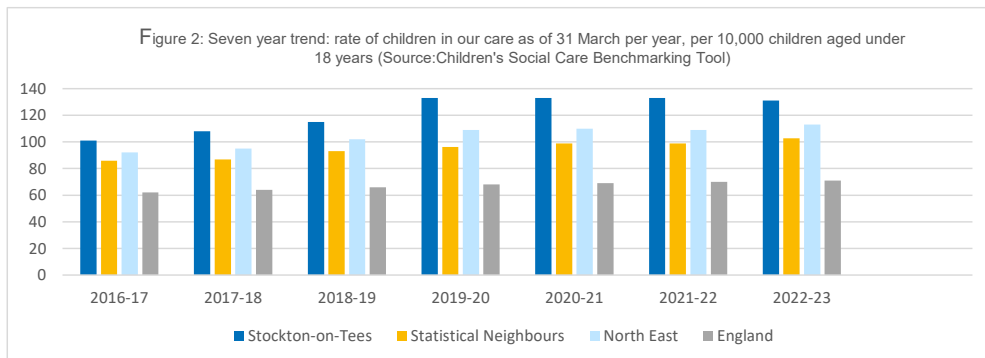
## Section 4: Overview of children in our care and care leavers

This section provides an overview of the number and rate of children in care, demographic information, and legal status information of the children in our care compared to our statistical neighbours, regional and national averages.

### Headlines

- Whilst the rate of children in care has remained stable in recent years, this still represents a 30% increase from 2016 and is substantially higher than statistical neighbour, regional and national rates.
- The rate of children ceasing to be looked after in Stockton-on-Tees has remained higher than statistical neighbour and national averages since 2020.
- The largest proportion of children in our care are in the 10–15-year age range.
- There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of children in care aged over 16 years over the past five years.
- The majority of children in care are accommodated within the Borough under a full care order.
- While the proportion of children in care with Special Educational Needs has remained at approximately 50% over recent years, there has been an increase within this group of children with Education Health and Care Plans, rising from 21% in 2017 to 27% in 2022.
- The number of children leaving care into adoption or Special Guardianship Orders has reduced in recent years.

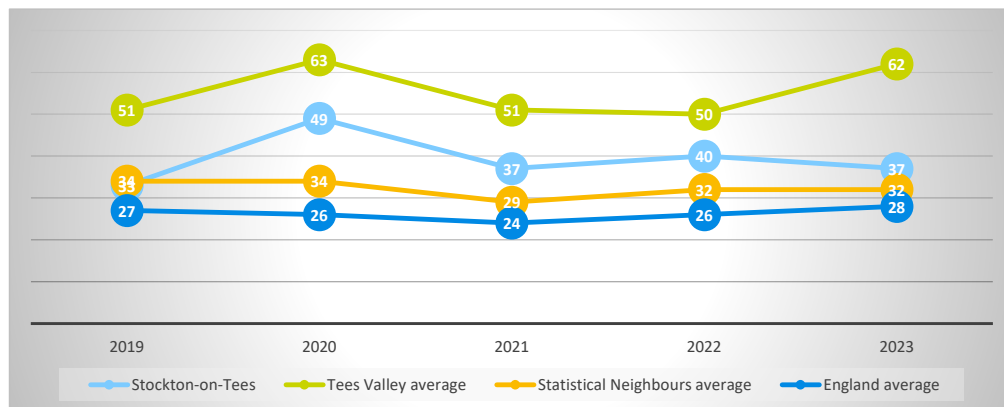
4.1 As at April 2024, there were 581 children and young people in the care of the Council. Seven-year trend data highlights the rate of children and young people in care in Stockton-on-Tees has remained consistently higher than statistical neighbours, North East and England averages since 2016. The rate of children and young people in our care has risen from 101 (per 10,000 population under 18 years) in 2016 to 131 (per 10,000 population under 18 yrs.) in 2023.



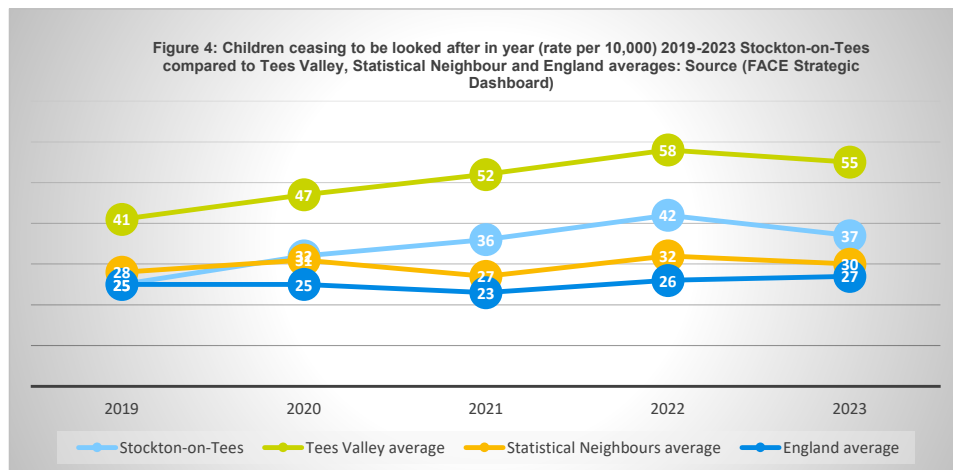
### Entering and leaving care

4.2 Whilst the rate of children and young people in care has remained higher than our statistical neighbors and England averages, there has been a reduction in the number of children entering care in recent years, reducing from a peak of 201 in 2019-2020 to 161 in 2023. Since 2020 the rate of children starting to be looked after in the Borough has reduced, and in 2023 was 37 per 10,000, similar to statistical neighbour and England averages, and lower than the Tees average rate (62 per 10,000 population under 18 yrs.).

Figure 3: Rate of Children Entering Care in year - 5 year trend. Stockton-on-Tees compared to Tees Valley, Statistical Neighbour and England averages



4.3 Since 2019 the rate of children ceasing to be looked after in the Borough has followed a similar trend to the Tees average and increased until 2022, before reducing in 2023. In 2023, the rate of children ceasing to be looked after was 37 per 10,000, higher than statistical neighbour and England averages, but lower than the Tees average rate (55 per 10,000 population under 18 yrs.).

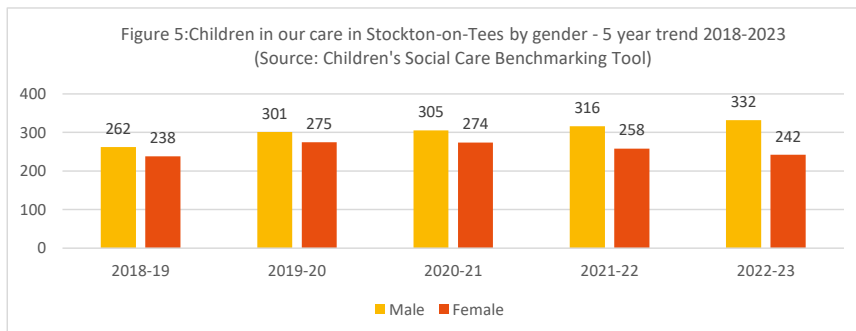


4.4 Since 2016, the profile for children entering care within the Borough has changed. While abuse and neglect were by large the primary reason for children entering care from 2016-2020 and remained so in 2023 (74 children entering care due to abuse or neglect), the number of children entering care with a primary need of family dysfunction, family being in acute stress and absent parenting have all increased over this time period (please note, this change could also be influenced by changed recording methods).

4.5 Since 2016, the majority of children and young people have returned to live with parents or relatives when leaving care. Over recent years (2021 onwards) the number of young people aged over 18 years who remain with their carers has increased which demonstrates the success of staying put arrangements locally.

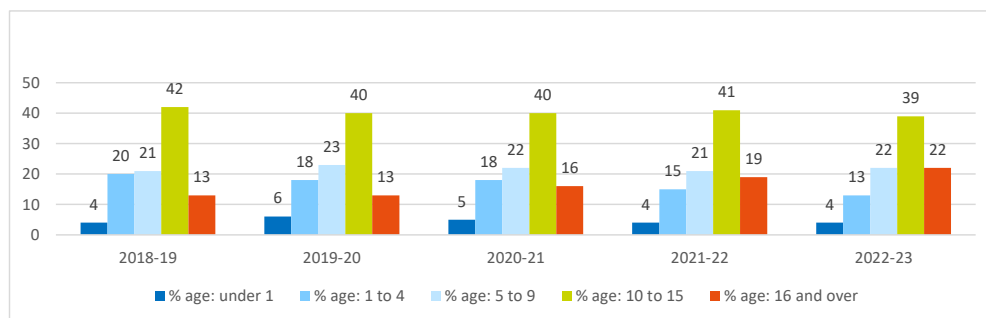
#### Demographic information

4.6 As at April 2024, there is a higher proportion of males (n341 58%) compared to females (n245, 42%) in the care of the authority. Over the past 5 years the proportion of children in care who are male has been consistently higher than females, increasing by 27% over 5 years.



4.7 Over the past 5-year period, the largest proportion of children in care have been within the 10 to 15 age range (40%), which is similar to statistical neighbour and England averages. There has also been a notable increase in the proportion of those aged over 16 years from 13% (n64) in 2018 to 22% (n126) in 2023.

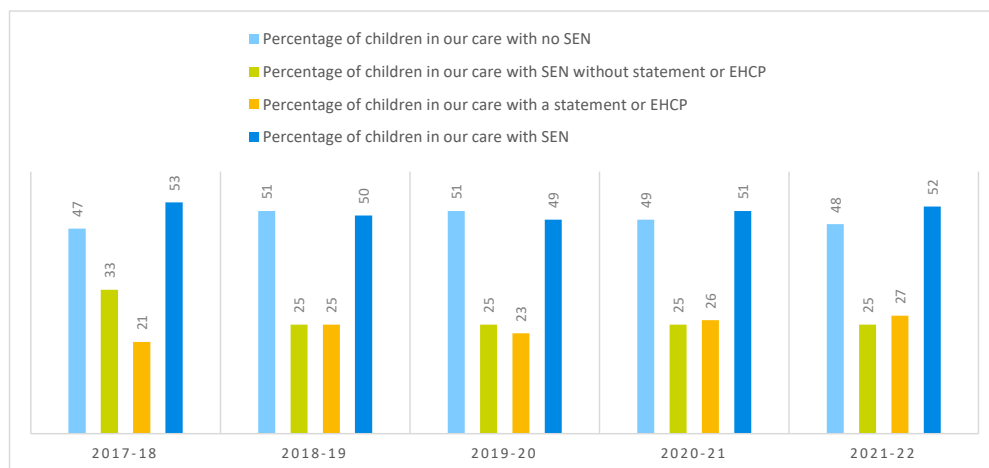
Figure 6 Age profile of children in our care in Stockton-on-Tees: 5-year trend (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)



4.8 The majority of children in care are white British (n494), followed by mixed ethnic origin (n34), Asian or Asian British (n20) and Black or Black British (n13).

4.9 Over the past 5 years, the proportion of children in care who have Special Educational Needs has remained at around 50%, and there has been a slight increase of the proportion of children with Special Educational Needs who have an Education Health and Care Plan, rising from 21% in 2017 to 27% in 2022.

**Figure 7 Proportion of school aged children in care in Stockton-on-Tees by special educational needs (SEN)**



#### Legal Status of Stockton-on-Tees Children in Care

4.10 As of April 2024, the majority of children were in care under a full care order (n426), followed by children with interim care orders (n70). In addition, the majority of children in care were placed within the Borough under a care order (62% n366).

**Table 2: Legal status of Stockton-on-Tees children in our care snapshot as of 9 April 2024 (Source: Internal FACE Team Dashboard)**

Total of children in care, broken down by type of care order.	No.	No. UASC	Placement in Borough (no. + %)		Placement out of Borough (no. + %)	
Total CIOC	587	27	366	62%	221	38%
Interim Care Order	70	0	47	67%	23	33%
Full Care Order	426	0	270	63%	156	37%
Placement order granted	22	0	13	59%	9	41%
J1 Remanded to local authority accommodation or to youth detention accommodation	3	0	0	0%	3	100%
V2 Single period of accommodation under Section 20 (Children's Act 1989)	66	27	40	61%	26	39%

4.11 The proportion of interim care orders has reduced over recent years, which is a positive trend and reflects more children and young people coming into care in a planned way. As of 31 March 2023 (the most recent full year data) a lower proportion (11% n61) of children were in care under an Interim Care Order (child is taken into care on a temporary basis while care proceedings take place) compared to statistical neighbours, North East and England averages. In addition, a higher proportion of children in Stockton-on-Tees were in care under a Full Care Order (75% n428) compared to statistical neighbours,

North East and England Averages. A similar proportion of children had a placement order granted (11% n21) for adoption.

**Table 3: Children in our care by legal status of interim care order, full care order, placement order and section 20 as of 31 March 2023.**  
(Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

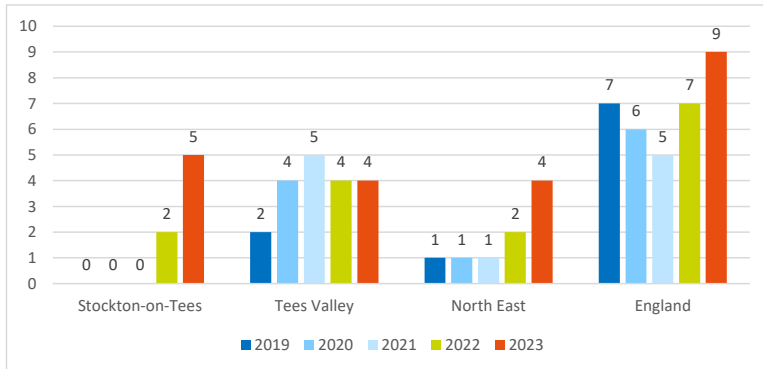
	Stockton-on-Tees		Statistical Neighbours		North East		England	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Interim care orders	61	11%	129	19%	1,050	18%	15,550	19%
Full care orders	428	75%	441	63%	3,680	62%	47,880	57%
Placement order granted	21	4%	28	5%	340	6%	4,350	5%
Accommodated under Section 20	63	11%	83	13%	910	15%	15,740	19%

### Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

4.12 In 2022, the Home Office mandated Local Authorities to participate in the national transfer scheme and take into their care a proportion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children via a national Rota system, transferring the children to their care within 10 working days of a referral. When the National Transfer Scheme was established, Stockton-on-Tees was required to accommodate up to 31 children and young people aged under 18 years old (0.07% of under 18-year-old population). This has recently increased to 43 (0.1% of the under 18-year-old population).

4.13 As at April 2024, the Borough was home to 27 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people aged under 18 years with the majority aged between 16-17 years. The last full years' data (March 2023) highlights that 5% of children in care were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, a similar proportion to statistical neighbours (4%), North East (4%) and lower than the national average (9%).

Figure 8 Percentage of children in our care who were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) – 5-year trend between 2019 and 2023  
(Source: FACE Strategic Dashboard)



**Care Leavers**

4.14 As at April 2024, there were 458 care experienced young people aged 17 years and over, out of the 458, 60% (n278) were continuing to receive support from the local authority (i.e. a pathway plan and support from personal advisors).

4.15 The number of young people who request and receive leaving care services reduces substantially when they reach 22 years. All young people who request support from us as a care leaver receive it, and the reasons why young people choose not to remain in touch with care leaver services can be an indication that they are living independently and no longer require support, or that they no longer wish to identify as a care leaver. In the following section we discuss that as our young people get older, the proportion in suitable accommodation and employment reduces, therefore we need to increase our care leaver offer so that our young people choose to remain in contact with us and receive leaving care services.

Table 4: Status of care leavers – April 2024 by age (Source: FACE Team Dashboard)

	Entitled to receive leaving care services	Receiving a leaving care service	% uptake
<b>17-18</b>	169	133	78.6%
<b>19-21</b>	165	126	76.3%
<b>22+</b>	124	19	15.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>60.6%</b>

## Section 5: Outcomes for children and young people in our care and care leavers

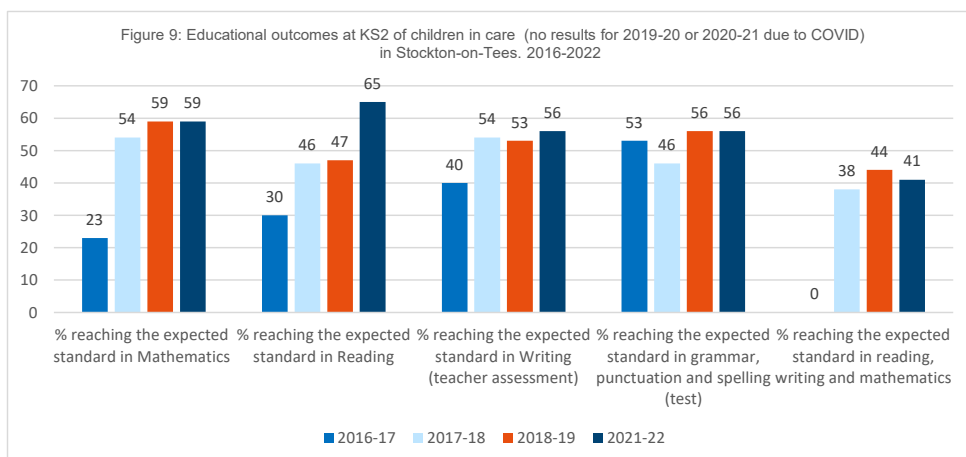
This section provides an overview of the educational and health outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people over recent years compared to statistical neighbour and England averages.

### Headlines

- The majority of educational outcomes for children at KS2 and KS4 have improved steadily for children and young people over recent years and the proportion of children achieving expected standards at KS2 in core subjects and A-C at GCSE in mathematics and English are higher than both statistical neighbour and England averages.
- The proportion of care leavers in Education, Employment and Training has fluctuated over recent years, a similar trend seen within statistical neighbours. However, data for the most recent year (2022) indicates that a lower proportion of care leavers are in Education Employment and Training compared to statistical neighbour and England averages.
- The proportion of care leavers aged 17 and 18 years in suitable accommodation has increased over recent years, however for our care leavers aged 19 years and over the proportion in suitable accommodation dropped to 84% in 2022-23 and is now lower than statistical neighbour and England averages.

### Educational outcomes

5.1 Over the past 4 years the educational outcomes for children in care at KS2 have improved across all core areas of assessment; the proportion of children reaching expected standards in Stockton-on-Tees in 2021/22 (most recent year available) across core subjects (41%) is higher than both statistical neighbour (35%) and England (31%) averages.



5.2 At KS4 the proportion of children in care in Stockton achieving A\*-C grades in English and mathematics has increased year on year since 2018, rising from 21% in 2018 to 28% in 2022. For the most recent years data that is available (2021-22), the proportion of children at KS4 achieving grade A\*-C grades (28%) is higher than both statistical neighbour (24%) and England (22%) averages.

5.3 Our Stockton Virtual School monitors the progress of the children and young people in our care in their education setting, providing advice, training, and support to schools to help our children and young people realise their aspirations. Our virtual school team supports schools to embed attachment and trauma informed approaches across their settings, and the impact of these approaches is demonstrated in the educational outcomes for our children and young people.

Table 5: Key Stage 4 outcomes for children in care 2016-2022. Stockton-on-Tees compared to statistical neighbour and England averages (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Proportion (%) of pupils achieving A*-C in both English and Mathematics GCSEs		
	Stockton-on-Tees	Statistical Neighbours	England
2016-17	X	17	18
2017-18	C	14	18
2018-19	21	19	18
2019-20	24	26	24
2020-21	33	30	29
2021-22	28	24	22

\*Where X or C is shown in a data table, this denotes the figure is small and therefore is suppressed to protect confidentiality in line with The National Statistics Code of Practice.

### Emotional health

5.4 All children in care are supported to complete a Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire to support the assessment of their emotional wellbeing. Since 2018 while overall there have been small fluctuations in the proportion of SDQ scores banded as normal from 47% to 49%, overall, the trend has remained similar to statistical neighbour and England averages.

### Care Leaver Outcomes

5.5 Since 2018 the proportion of care leavers in education, employment and training aged 17-18 years has been broadly similar to statistical neighbour averages and below England averages, ranging from 59-70%, however this dropped in 2022 to 55% and is now lower than statistical neighbour (60%) and England averages (66%).

Table 6 Care leavers aged 17 or 18 in education, employment, or training (EET) (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
% in education, employment, or training (EET)	63	59	58	70	55	62	58	61	59	60	64	64	65	66	66

5.6 For our care leavers aged 18 years, overall, a lower proportion are in education, employment or training compared to care leavers aged 17 or 18 years, which is broadly reflected in our statistical neighbour and England averages. However, the trend since 2018 for Stockton has remained lower than statistical neighbour and England averages and has reduced from 63% in 2019 to 55% in 2023.

Table 7 Care leavers aged 19, 20 or 21 in education, employment or training (EET) (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
% in education, employment, or training (EET)	50	45	47	46	48	54	52	51	52	54	52	53	52	55	56

5.7 Over recent years the proportion of care leavers aged 17 or 18 years in suitable accommodation has fluctuated above and below our statistical neighbour and England averages, for the last year that data was available (2021-22) 100% of care leavers aged 17 or 18 years were in accommodation that was considered suitable for their needs (please note that due to small numbers data for 2022 – 23 has been suppressed).

Table 8: Care leavers aged 17 and 18 years by suitability of accommodation (Source: Children’s Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
% accommodation considered suitable	97	73	89	100	c	93	92	93	91	92	88	90	91	90	91

\*Where X or C is shown in a data table, this denotes the figure is small and therefore is suppressed to protect confidentiality in line with The National Statistics Code of Practice.

5.8 During 2019- 2022, the proportion of care leavers aged 19 years and over in suitable accommodation remained on average at 90%, similar to statistical neighbour averages and higher than the England average. However, during 2022-23 the proportion in suitable accommodation reduced to 84% and is now lower than both statistical neighbour and England averages. This highlights the challenges in the availability of affordable housing within our local housing market.

Table 9: Care leavers aged 19, 20 or 21 by suitability of accommodation (Source: Children’s Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
% accommodation considered suitable	91	92	95	94	84	91	91	93	90	89	85	85	88	88	88

## Section 6: Children with additional needs

This section provides an overview of the number of children with additional needs, demographic information, and service provision for children with disabilities assessed under section 17.

### Headlines

- Where children and young people have received an assessment the following the most recorded primary needs are Learning Disabilities and Autism. While Learning Disabilities remains the highest recorded primary need this has decreased over the last 7 years with Autism seeing a 12% increase from 2016 to 2023.
- The number of children who require specialist services has not followed a consistent trend over the years with some increases and decreases across the last 7 years, however there is an overall 12% increase from 2016 to 2023.
- The largest proportion of children who require specialist services are in the 10–16-year age category.
- Families have told us that transition into adulthood can be a challenging time and sometimes more support is needed to keep families at home together.

6.1 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires local authorities to provide short break services to support those who care for children and young people with disabilities to allow them to:

- Undertake education, training, or regular leisure activity,
- Meet the needs of other children in the family home more effectively,
- Carry out day to day tasks which they must perform to run their household.

6.2 Within the Borough, families can access a range access universal and targeted services without an assessment of need however some families will require specialist services, these needs, and services to meet them, are assessed through a Child in Need Assessment.

6.3 Our disabled social work team put in place a range of services available to meet assessed needs for children and young people. Support is focused on short breaks to provide carers with a break from their caring responsibilities whilst providing an opportunity for children and young people to enjoy something fun, spend time with other children or develop their skills to prepare for independence.

6.4 For some families, support within the home or community enables carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities as well as enabling the child to engage in a fun activity for a few hours. For some families a longer break may be needed, and families may access overnight short breaks within the local authority's internal provision, Hartburn Lodge, or alternative provision that is commissioned.

6.5 Families can also opt to receive a direct payment, which is a cash amount to meet the needs identified in their assessment. This enables families to have more choice about how their needs are met and can provide families with opportunities to be more creative about the support they put in place.

6.6 Stockton-on-Tees has a short break grant which is available to families who have an assessed need. The application has clear eligibility criteria and can be used to enable families to access universal or specialised activities, purchase of equipment or sometimes financial support to access a residential short break.

6.7 Caring for a child with disabilities can be complex and challenging and access to advice and support can help prevent families going into crisis or experiencing breakdown. There is an established multi-agency, collaborative Dynamic Support Register (DSR) process in place to ensure that all children and young people with a diagnosis of autism and/or a learning disability are offered a Care, Education and Treatment Review (CETR) prior to admission and discharge from hospital to ensure that they are in receipt of suitable support or care services within the community. The DSR process enables multi-agency support planning to support families and providers to prevent admission to hospital and improve outcomes for children and young people.

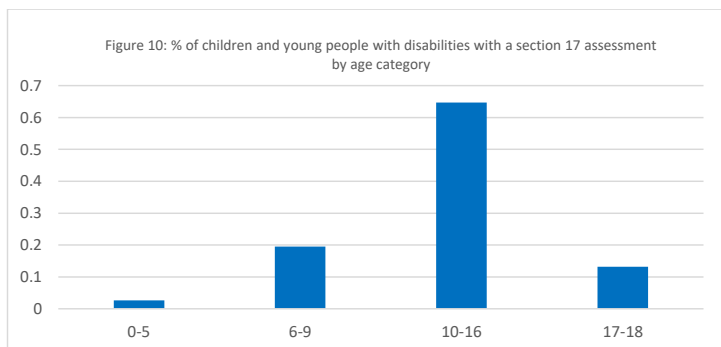
6.8 The table below indicates the number of children and young people accessing the range of services currently available.

**Table 10: Number of children and young people accessing support following a Child in Need Assessment:**

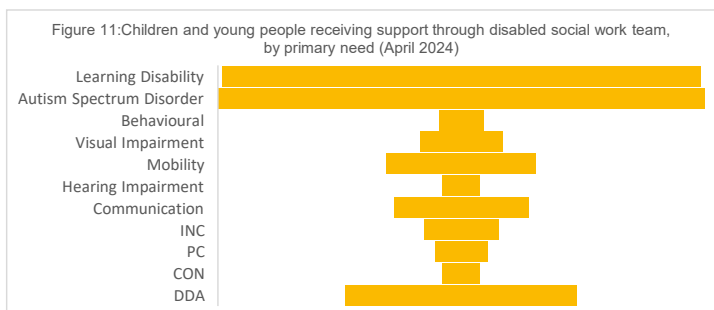
Service provision	Number of families accessing service / number of sessions accessed per year
Home and community support	65
Direct Payments	69
Short breaks grant	14
Internal short breaks overnight provision	Approx 673 overnight support per year
Internal short breaks afterschool provision	Approx 117 afterschool sessions per year
Internal short breaks day care provision	Approx 286-day care sessions per year

6.9 As at April 2024, there were 191 children open to the Disabled Children’s Social Work Team of which 157 have a Child in Need Plan.

6.10 A high proportion of children with disabilities receiving support are white British and over half of the children (65%) are aged 10-16 years of age, 13% of children aged 17-18 years of age and 67% of those receiving support are male.



6.11 For children receiving support through our disabled social work team, the most common primary need is Learning Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Whilst this remains the most common primary need, the proportion has reduced year on year since 2016. Conversely children with a primary need of autism spectrum disorder have seen an increase from 24% in 2016 to 36% in 2023 (NB it is noted that this increase may have been impacted by amendments made to the diagnostic pathway).



\* INC- Inclusion, PC- personal care, CON- cognition, DDA- Disability Discrimination Act

6.12 Families have told us that transition into adulthood can be a challenging time. During transition age, there may be a change in the young person's level of need and more support may be required to support families to remain together at home. It can be more difficult to provide services for young people as their needs change and full-time education provision ends, which can result in a gap in provision from a family's perspective to provide opportunities throughout the day in place of full-time education. Preparation for this stage is crucial.

6.13 Where a residential placement is required there is a challenge to provide this for children aged 17 years due to the regulatory changes from OFSTED to CQC for children's homes and adult's provision.

6.14 When a child or young person has health needs that cannot be met by existing health and social care services, a children's continuing care package may need to be jointly commissioned between social care and the Integrated Care Board for North East and North Cumbria. During 2023-24, six young people aged 14-17 years had jointly commissioned packages of care in place.

## Section 7: Provision available in the Borough

This section provides an overview of fostering, supported lodging, children's homes and supported accommodation within the borough, both delivered in house and through independent, private, and voluntary providers (see appendix 1 for overview of internal and external residential children's homes and supported accommodation providers).

### Headlines

- There are 6 internally resourced registered children's homes in the Borough, the majority rated good to outstanding providing places for 22 children with a range of needs. Our homes provide between 3 – 5 places each. As at April 2024, 18 children were living in our internally delivered homes.
- There are 11 registered children's homes in the Borough delivered by private or voluntary organisations, the majority rated good or outstanding. As at April 2024, 21 (42%) of the 50-placement capacity within externally delivered Borough children's homes was filled by placements for Stockton children.
- Due to the needs of our children and young people it is becoming increasingly challenging to match the needs of children living in larger residential homes.
- There are 6 supported accommodation providers within the borough, the Council has block contracts in place with 4 of the supported accommodation provisions within the borough
- The demand for all types of affordable housing within the borough far exceeds the available supply.

7.1 For the majority of children and young people who come into care, the best option is to return home as soon as it is safe to do so. The care model for Stockton-on-Tees places a focus on working with families whilst children are in care, to support reunification as a permanence option. Our model offers intensive support, family group conferencing, parenting programmes and therapeutic approaches to birth families whilst children are in care, where it is in the best interest of the child, to supporting families to address any parenting capacity issues and understand their children's needs.

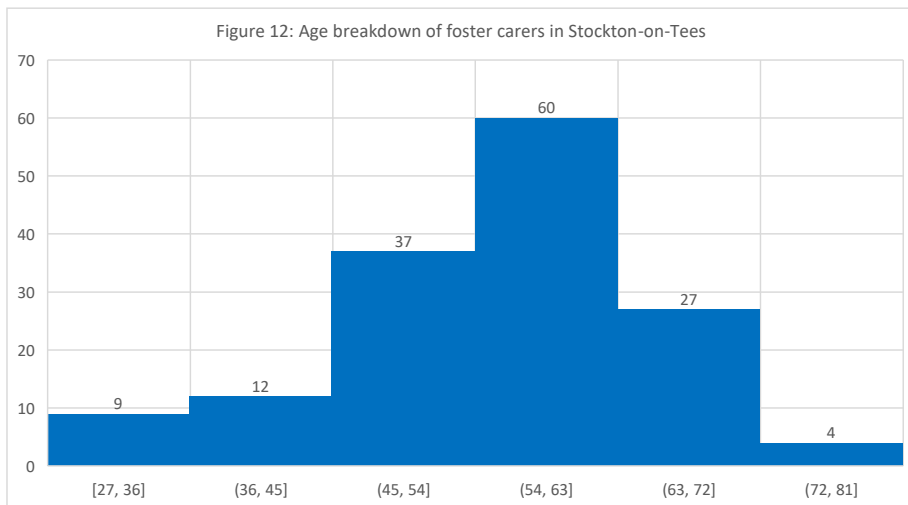
7.2 The evidence-based Valuing Care framework is used to support placement planning for our children and young people and guides the process of identifying the needs and strengths of a child or young person, enabling the sourcing a placement closely matched to their needs and an ongoing monitoring of outcomes to adapt care and support as their needs change.

### Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Fostering Service

7.3 Our fostering services provide a nurturing, family-based environment for our children and young people who cannot live with their families. This year Stockton-on-Tees participated in the launch of the 'Foster with North East hub' as part of regional arrangements for the 12 North East local authorities to provide a regional approach to recruiting and supporting prospective foster carers. To date, there have been 26 prospective foster carers referred to Stockton:

- 2 have been approved as foster carers
- 6 are currently being assessed as foster carers
- 6 are at enquiry stage
- 11 have not progressed beyond the initial enquiry

7.4 As at April 2024, we had 85 registered foster carer households in Stockton-on-Tees. Of these, 64 households had two people registered together as couples and 21 were single foster carer households. In total, these households comprise of 84 female foster carers and 65 male foster carers (n149). The average age of our foster carers is 61 years, with the youngest aged 31 and the oldest aged 81. However, the majority are aged between 54 to 68 years.



**Table 11: Approval profile for foster carers**

Maximum number of children approved to be looked after by a foster carer	Number of foster carers approved to provide care for this number of children
1 child	25
2 children	27
3 children	26
4 children	5
5 children	1
6 children	1
7 children	1

7.5 When registering as foster carers, our carers are approved for an age range of children and young people they are looking to foster. Currently 18 of our registered foster carers are approved for children aged 0 – 5 years, and an additional 11 approved for children aged under 12 years.

#### **Mockingbird Model**

7.6 In 2023, Stockton implemented the Mockingbird Project for foster carers and Children in Our Care. The Mockingbird programme is led by the Fostering Network UK and is a model of foster care based on nurturing the relationships between children, young people and foster families and supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. Constellations (6-10 foster families) come together, supported by a hub home carer and liaison worker, to offer each other support, advice, social activities, learning and development opportunities and some sleepovers. Stockton now has three Mockingbird constellations made up of between 8- 9 families each.

#### **Independent Fostering Agencies, special guardianship order and adoption**

7.7 As of April 2024, 110 children were in an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placement, with 25 of these children living in the Borough.

**Table 12: Overview of IFA placements 2024.**

IFA Placements	Total CIOC IFA placements	CIOC placed in the Borough	CIOC placed outside of the Borough
	110	25	85

7.8 Since 2019, the number of special guardianship orders put in place (32 in 2019 – 21 in 2023) has reduced overall.

7.9 There has been a similar trend in a reduction in the number of children being adopted over recent years (26 in 2020 – 17 in 2023). The decrease in 2021/22 is acknowledged to be as a result of an increase in the number of children leaving care into special guardianship orders, alongside a national suspension of adoption hearings due to the Somerset Ruling (relating to concerns that Agency Decision Makers may have approved plans without having had sight of the child’s adoption medical record). During 2022/23,

there were delays to a small number of local adoption orders due to the support needs of prospective adopters which therefore impacted on the reduced number of children leaving care to be adopted.

**Table 13: Number of children leaving care into special guardianship and adoption. Stockton-on-Tees 2019-2023.**

	Stockton-on-Tees			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number children leaving care into special guardianships	32	30	40	21
Number of children leaving care to be adopted	14	26	16	17

7.10 When compared to statistical neighbour and England averages, until 2022/23 the proportion of children leaving care into special guardianship orders for Stockton-on-Tees was above average. In addition, the proportion of children leaving care for adoption has reduced from being above statistical neighbour and England averages in 2020/21 to now being similar to both averages.

**Table 14: Proportion of children leaving care into adoption or special guardianship order. Stockton-on-Tees compared to statistical neighbour and England averages 2019- 2023.**

	Stockton-on-Tees				Statistical Neighbours.				England			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
% of children leaving care into special guardianships	23	19	22	13	17	18	18	18	13	14	13	12
% of children leaving care to be adopted	10	16	9	10	15	10	13	11	12	10	10	9

### Residential Children's Homes

7.11 For our children and young people who have needs that are best met in a group living environment, our 6 internally run children's homes within the Borough offer short to medium term care, enabling our children and young people to stay close to their support networks and communities. The majority of our homes have between 3-4 places each. As at April 2024, 18 of our children were living in our internally run homes.

7.12 In addition to our children's homes, there are 11 private and voluntary run registered homes within the borough with a combined 50 places, with the majority of homes have between 4-5 places each.

7.13 When comparing the number of residential children's home placements that are located within the borough with the number of residential children's home placements made, if every placement were available in the local authority for Stockton children (snapshot of in Borough places across internal and

external provision as at April 2024 - 72 places), it would still not be enough capacity to place all of our children in area (snapshot of all children placed in residential homes in April 2024 – 84).

7.14 It should be noted that that is purely numerical sufficiency and does not consider children who are required to be placed out of area due to safeguarding concerns, or those who are placed out of area because the provision in borough cannot meet their needs. Analysis of the profile of children and young people requiring residential care in recent years highlights an increase in those with complex therapeutic, emotional wellbeing and trauma support needs, alongside a lack of providers with staffing expertise to manage complex behaviour who can support children or young people dealing with episodes of trauma.

7.15 Over recent years, we have also experienced increased challenges in being able to match the presenting needs of a child or young person with the needs of the other children and young people living in the residential home. Good matching within homes is fundamental to ensuring that a child's living arrangement and care packages remain stable, however this can be difficult to achieve in larger residential homes.

### Supported Accommodation

7.16 As our children move into young adulthood, their needs may change and they can benefit from a home environment that supports them to develop their independence and prepare for adulthood. This may be in the form of staying with their foster carer, living in a family environment through a supported lodging, or living in shared accommodation with other young people with access to support to develop their independent living skills.

7.17 There are currently 6 Supported Accommodation Providers within the borough, and the Council holds block contracts with 4 of these providers, with the majority of our contracting arrangements in place until Autumn 2025.

**Table 15** Placements in Supported Accommodation as of April 2024- (SA provider has URN or has begun the process for Ofsted registration for under 18 provision)

	Stockton	Tees Area	North East	Outside of North East
<b>Under 18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>18 +</b>	<b>30</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>

7.18 In addition, we have 4 staying close flats linked to our internal children's homes and 9 supported lodgings providers registered in the borough. Our supported lodgings scheme offers young people a bedroom in a family home where the host provides them with emotional support and support to develop their independence skills, while our in-house services provide supervision and support to hosts. Our supported lodgings scheme is currently relatively small, but we are encouraged by the positive outcomes

experienced by young people in these settings, including their continued engagement in either employment or education.

7.19 With the majority of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) coming into the care of the council aged over 16 years, we have worked with the local market over the last 2 years to increase our sufficiency of accommodation within the Borough to meet the cultural and support needs of our young people. In January 2024, we commissioned our first group living supported accommodation provision specifically for UASC aged over 16 years in partnership with ROC Solid. In addition, a partnership with Community Campus CIC provides us with 3 x 2 bed accommodation and low-level support for our young people whose needs are best met in the smaller, more independent provision than our group living model provides.

#### **16 -17-year-olds at risk of homelessness**

7.20 Whilst the majority of young people come into care in a planned way, as with the majority of local authorities across the country, there are times when young people come into care or become at risk of homelessness, in an emergency or with no notice. Analysis undertaken with our accommodation team and emergency duty team estimates there are 2 to 3 'emergency' placement requirements for the 16 to 17 years age range every month. Whilst every effort is made to secure placements that meet the needs of young people immediately, when there is no availability in the market, we have used 'crash pad' facilities within regulated provision, or as a last resort supervision in temporary accommodation arrangements.

#### **Affordable Housing.**

7.21 In recent years, most new build affordable homes developed in the Borough have been 2 and 3 bed family homes. However, during this time there has been a growing demand for both 1 bed affordable homes and larger family homes. Our Strategic Housing services are working with developers and the registered provider market to understand how we can overcome the challenges that developers face in providing a wider range of homes, and for registered providers to then be able to bring such developments into their housing portfolios.

**Table 16 Development of affordable homes in the borough from 2018- 2023 (source SBC Housing)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>New Affordable Homes</b>
<b>2018/2019</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2019/2020</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>2020/2021</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>2021/2022</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>72</b>

**Table 17 Snapshot of new builds in Borough Quarter 1, 2 and 3 2022-23. Data Source: SBC Housing.**

New Builds completed in Borough	
1 bed dwellings	0
2 bed dwellings	33
3 bed dwellings	58
4 bed + dwellings	3

## Section 8: Placement trends and stability

This section provides an overview of the different types of placements that our children and young people live in, along with trends over recent years including placement stability.

### Headlines

- The majority of children in care are living in foster care arrangements (n 363) including kinship foster care, independent fostering agencies and in house fostering.
- The number of mainstream foster carers has reduced by 17% since 2020, from 103 in 2020 to 85 in 2023.
- The proportion of care leavers aged over 19 years living independently has reduced from 56% in 2018 to 30% in 2023 and is now lower than statistical neighbour (43%) and England averages (35%).
- The proportion of children who had a missing episode during the year has increased from 11% in 2018 to 16% in 2023 and is higher than statistical neighbour (11%) and England averages (11%).
- While the proportion of children placed within 20 miles of their home has reduced from 92% in 2018 to 85% in 2023, this remains similar to the statistical neighbour average (87%) and higher than the England average (70%).
- Since 2018, the proportion of children being placed more than 20 miles from their home (9% in 2023) has consistently remained lower than statistical neighbour (11% in 2023) and England averages (21% in 2023).

### Placement snapshot

8.1 As of April 2024, the majority of children in care were placed in fostering arrangements (n 383) including kinship foster care, independent foster agencies and in house fostering<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> SBC placements dashboard

Table 18 Placement Type snapshot 2024 (children in care aged under 18 years)

PLACEMENT TYPE	NUMBER PLACED
Kinship Foster Care	160
Independent Foster Agency	113
In-House Fostering	110
External Children's Home	63
Placed with Parents	53
Supported Accommodation	36
Internal Children's Home	21
Other Placement (e.g. bespoke packages)	10
Adoptive Placement	10
Young Offenders Institute	4
Other Local Authority Foster Carer	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>581</b>

Table 19: Children in our care by placement type as at 31 March 2023 (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Stockton-on-Tees		Statistical Neighbours		North East		England	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Foster placement	378	66%	459	66%	4,190	70%	57,020	68%
Placed for adoption	10	2%	14	2%	170	3%	1,990	2%
Placement with parents	65	11%	70	11%	490	8%	5,730	7%
Other placement in the community	36	6%	36	4%	130	2%	2,300	3%
Secure units, children's homes, and semi-independent living accommodation	76	13%	91	15%	850	14%	14,580	17%
Other residential settings	0	0	43	3%	60	1%	1,270	2%
Other placement	6	1%	15	2%	100	2%	860	1%

8.2 As at 31 March 2023 (the most recent full year data) the majority of children in the care of the authority were accommodated in foster placements (66% n 378), followed by secure units, children's homes or supported accommodation (13% n 76) and placement with parents (11% n 65). These proportions are similar to that of statistical neighbours, the North East and England averages.

Table 20 Children in our care by placement type as at 31 March 2023 (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

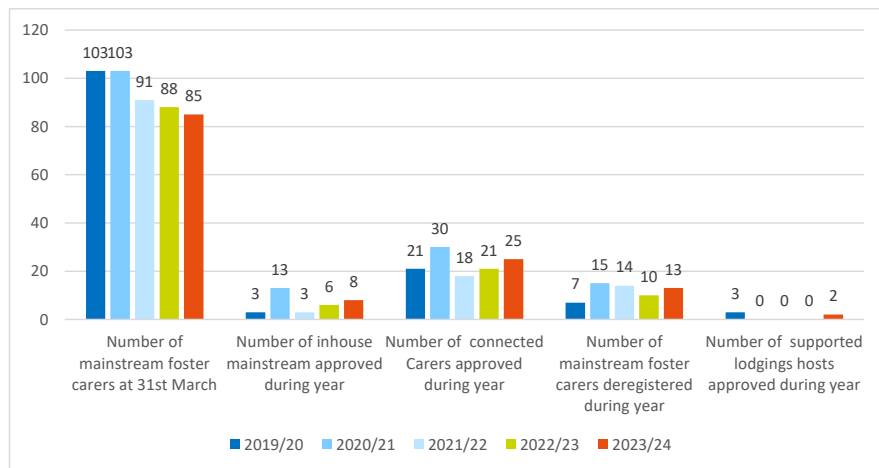
	2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
	Number	Percentage	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	number	%
Foster placement	333	67	410	71	411	71	382	67	378	66
Placed for adoption	C	C	19	3	11	2	13	2	10	2
Placement with parents	78	16	66	11	69	12	71	12	65	11
Other placement in the community	15	3	C	C	15	3	30	5	36	6
Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent	65	13	62	11	73	13	75	13	76	13
Other residential settings	C	C	C	C	0	0	C	C	C	C
Other placement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1

\*Where X or C is shown in a data table, this denotes the figure is small and therefore is suppressed to protect confidentiality in line with The National Statistics Code of Practice.

**Fostering Placements and adoption.**

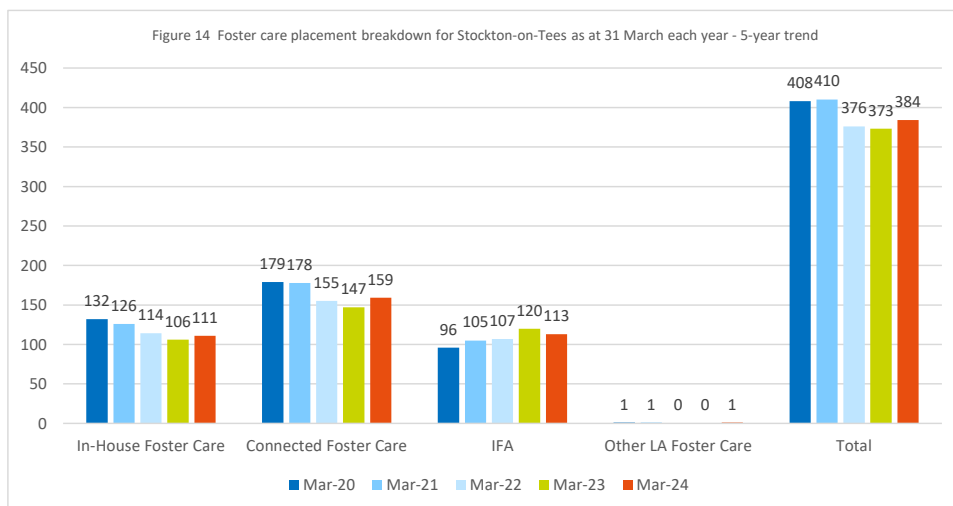
8.3 Since 2019, the number of mainstream carers within the in-house fostering service has reduced by 17%, from 103 in 2019 to 85 in 2023. In addition, the number of foster carers deregistering each year has been higher than the number of new foster carers that are coming in to in house services – in 2023 we had 13 foster carers deregistering, alongside 8 new foster carers registered.

**Figure 13 Number of foster carers, new registrations, and deregistration's across Stockton-on-Tees – 5-year trend (Source: FACE Strategic Dashboard)**



8.4 In addition to the number of mainstream foster carers reducing over recent years, this has impacted on the overall number of placements available through foster care, reducing 16% from 132 children placed in in-house foster care in 2020 to 111 in 2023. As a result of reduced in-house sufficiency of fostering care, placements through Independent Fostering Agencies have increased since 2020 by 15%, from 96 placements in 2020 to 113 in 2023. During the COVID pandemic, a number of foster carers stopped taking placements due to ill health and then made the decision to leave the profession. A small number of foster carers have chosen to de-register and seek other employment.

Figure 14 Foster care placement breakdown for Stockton-on-Tees as at 31 March each year - 5-year trend



8.5 The number of adoption orders made in year has reduced from 19 in 2019 to 10 in 2023. This trend is similar to a reduction in the average number of adoption orders made within statistical neighbours during the same period. There are a number of factors that have influenced this reduction, including a current lack of prospective adopters who can meet the needs of our children and young people.

#### External Residential Childrens Homes

8.6 Since 2017, the number of children living in externally provided children’s homes increased to a high of 69 in 2020 and is currently 63 (April 2024). Whilst the number of children in care has remained stable over recent years, there has still been an increase in the number of children and young people placed in residential care since 2021. There are a number of factors that contribute to this including breakdown of family based fostering placements, no matches available in either foster care or independent foster care, or the needs of children and young people requiring a residential home environment.

Table 21: Number of Children in External Residential Placements as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017-2024

Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of children in external residential placements 31 <sup>st</sup> March	50	52	52	69	54	57	63

#### Unregulated provision

8.7 In April 2024 there were 6 unregulated placements for children and young people with a range of complex needs who are being supported with a bespoke package of support. Unregulated placements are only put in place when every other option for care and support has been explored. Whilst every effort is made to secure regulated provision for all of our children and young people, there are times when the regulated market cannot meet their needs and bespoke packages of care are then developed whilst placement searches continue. Each of our unregulated placements are notified to Ofsted and senior management oversight is in place and, where possible and appropriate to the child or young person’s needs, a move to a regulated setting is made as quickly as possible.

**Commented [GM1]:** Change unregulated provision to unregistered provision

#### Secure accommodation and Tier 4 provision

8.8 Where children require treatment in a Children’s Mental Health in-patient setting it can often mean a child is placed far from home due to reduced capacity locally. The closure of West Lane Hospital in Autumn 2019 resulted in a reduction in beds. A new specialist adolescent mental health service has opened within Acklam Road Hospital during the last year and provides ten beds to children and young people between the ages of 13 to 18 years with mental health needs.

## Care leavers

8.9 The majority of care leavers aged 17 and 18 years live with parents, relatives or with former foster carers. There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of care leavers remaining living with their former foster carers from 18% in 2018 to 29% 2023, demonstrating the impact of our local 'staying put' arrangements. In addition, the proportion of care leavers remaining with their former foster carers in 2023 (29%) is higher than statistical neighbour (18%) and England averages (18%).

8.10 When care leavers reach 19 years of age, the majority are living either with parents or relatives (29%) or are living independently (30%).

**Table 22 Care leavers aged 17 and 18 accommodation 2018-2023. Stockton on Tees compared to statistical neighbours and England averages.**

\*Where X or C is shown in a data table, this denotes the figure is small and therefore is suppressed to protect confidentiality.

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
% with parents or relatives	34	24	33	25	24	18	15	21	18	24	13	12	14	13	13
% semi-independent transitional accommodation	24	C	C	C	23	C	C	C	C	C	26	29	31	31	35
% supported lodgings	C	C	C	C	8	C	C	C	C	C	7	7	7	7	7
% independent living	C	32	24	18	11	16	20	16	17	17	12	11	11	9	8
% with former foster carer	18	19	C	36	29	20	21	20	18	18	19	18	19	19	18

8.11 The proportion of care leavers aged 19 and over who are living with parents or relatives has increased since 2018 from 15% to 29%, which is higher than both statistical neighbour (16%) and England averages (11%). The proportion of care leavers aged over 19 years living independently has reduced from 56% in 2018 to 30% in 2023 and is now lower than statistical neighbour (43%) and England averages (35%). This demonstrates the lack of sufficiency of affordable housing options for care leavers in the housing market.

Table 23: Care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 by accommodation type (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	-19	-20	-21	-22	-23	-19	-20	-21	-22	-23	-19	-20	-21	-22	-23
% with parents or relatives	15	16	22	30	29	18	16	16	15	16	11	11	11	10	11
% semi-independent transitional accommodation	C	C	C	9	8	8	9	11	11	11	14	15	17	18	18
% supported lodgings	C	5	C	7	7	6	7	10	5	3	4	4	4	4	4
% independent living	56	57	48	34	30	40	44	44	43	43	35	35	36	36	35
% in custody	7	5	C	5	C	4	4	3	2	4	3	3	3	3	3
% with former foster carer	8	C	9	9	9	11	10	10	10	10	8	8	8	9	9

\*Where X or C is shown in a data table, this denotes the figure is small and therefore is suppressed

### Placement Stability

8.12 The proportion of children who had a missing episode during the year has increased from 11% in 2018 to 16% in 2023, the proportion of children who have had a missing episode during the year in Stockton is now higher than statistical neighbour (11%) and England averages (11%). The average number of missing episodes per child has remained on average as 6 since 2018, which is the same as statistical neighbour and England averages.

Table 24: Proportion of children in care with missing episodes during year. Stockton-on-Tees compared to Statistical Neighbours and England averages 2018-2023/ (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
% of whom had a missing incident during the year	11	10	10	13	16	11	10	10	11	11	11	11	10	11	11
Average no. of missing incidents per looked after child who went missing	6	8	6	6	6	6	7	6	7	7	6	7	7	6	6

8.13 Whilst the proportion of children placed within 20 miles of their home has reduced from 92% in 2018 to 85% in 2023, this remains similar to the statistical neighbour average (87%) and higher than the England average (70%).

8.14 The proportion of children placed over 20 miles from their home has fluctuated between 6-9% since 2018 and has consistently remained lower than statistical neighbour (11% in 2023) and England averages (21% in 2023).

**Table 25: Percentage of children looked after at 31 March by placement in or out of local authority area (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)**

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
% placed within 20 miles of the child's home	92	90	92	93	86	88	88	88	87	84	73	73	74	72	70
% placed over 20 miles from the child's home	C	8	C	6	9	11	12	12	11	11	20	20	21	21	21

\*Where X or C is shown in a data table, this denotes the figure is small and therefore is suppressed to protect confidentiality in line with The National Statistics Code of Practice.

8.15 The proportion of children in our care with 3 or more placements during the year has increased from 8% in 2018 to 12% in 2023. Our current proportion of children with 3 or more placements is slightly higher than statistical neighbour (9%) and England (10%) averages. During this period, we have experienced increase in the number of providers serving immediate notice to cease provision, due to their assertion that they are no longer able to meet the needs of the child due to their level of complexity or challenging behaviour.

**Table 26: proportion of children in our care with 3 or more placements during the year. Stockton on Tees compared to statistical neighbour and England averages 2018-2023 (Source: Children's Social Care Benchmarking Tool)**

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
%	8	12	8	10	12	11	10	8	10	9	11	11	9	10	10

8.16 The proportion of children living in the same placement for at least 2 years has remained on average at 72% since 2018, this is higher than statistical neighbour (68% in 2023), but lower than the England average (89% in 2023).

**Table 27: proportion of children in our care living in the same placement for at least 2 years, Stockton-on-Tees compared to statistical neighbour and England averages 2018-2023**

	Stockton-on-Tees					Statistical Neighbours					England				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
%	72	73	68	71	72	68	69	71	72	68	68	68	70	71	69

## Section 9: Cost of placements and modelling future need

### Overall placement costs

9.1 The Council is facing the same challenges as other local authorities across the country in the cost of care and support arrangements for our children and young people, influenced by significant cost of living pressures, rising utility costs and the cost impacts to providers from the implementation of the new regulatory framework for supported accommodation. In particular, expenditure for external residential and leaving care placements (including supported accommodation provision) has increased since 2020.

9.2 During 2020 to 2024 the number of children in external children's homes increased from 52 to 63 (21% increase), with our overall costs increasing by over £8 million (89% increase). Within our support arrangements for children aged over 18 years, we have experienced an increase in expenditure of £2.5 million from 2020 to 2024.

Table 28. Net expenditure by placement type 2020-2024.

Service Area	2020/21 Net expenditure £	2021/22 Net expenditure £	2022/23 Net expenditure £	2023/24 Net expenditure £
Adoption Service	935,079	815,030	911,808	873,138
External residential care	8,938,476	10,624,697	13,117,530	16,929,947
Independent Fostering Agency	3,989,179	4,097,897	4,503,522	5,292,916
In-House Fostering Service	4,366,467	3,985,849	3,959,148	3,985,384
In-House Residential Care	2,624,259	2,577,143	2,436,715	3,575,562
UASC				529,631
Supported Accommodation and Leaving Care	1,489,866	2,293,062	3,128,380	4,066,156

### Average placement costs and highest cost placements.

9.3 As at March 2024, the average annual cost for an external residential children's home placement was £267,687, an increase of approximately £55,000 per year compared to average annual costs in 2020 (£211,852).

9.4 For our highest cost external residential placements, there has been a substantial increase during this period. In 2020 our highest cost placement was £414,796 per year, rising 98% by 2024 to £821,049. This demonstrates the significant challenges of meeting the needs of our children and young people with significant needs within an external residential market of rising costs and reduced placement availability.

9.5 For external fostering placements, our average annual cost per placement in 2024 was £46,352, an increase of approximately £6,000 per year from 2020 costs. However, there is a similar trend to our highest cost packages in external residential provision. In 2020 our highest cost external fostering package was £65,018, rising 70% (over £45,000) to £110,798 in 2024.

**Table 29 Average costs for different placement types 2020.**

	Average Cost of Placement £	Highest Cost Placement £	Lowest Cost Placement £	Average Weekly cost £
External Residential Home	211,852	414,796	109,096	4,063
Internal Residential Home	99,105	N/A	N/A	1,901
External Fostering Placement	40,377	65,108	32,545	774
Internal Fostering Placement	16,528	22,264	7,878	317

**Table 30 Average costs for different placement types 2024.**

	Average Cost of Placement £	Highest Cost Placement £	Lowest Cost Placement £	Average Weekly cost £
External Residential Home	267,687	821,049	149,903	5134
Internal Residential Home	162,526	N/A	N/A	3117
External Fostering Placement	46,352	110,798	34,517	889
Internal Fostering Placement	18,875	22,463	12,326	362

**Weekly placement costs – compared to the North East region.** (Please note that these figures are drawn from national statistical returns during 2023, and so will differ slightly from internal financial figures presented in the tables above).

**Table 31: Weekly expenditure for residential children’s home placements. Stockton-on-Tees compared to North East Local Authorities 2018-2023 (source Ig inform)**

Outturn weekly expenditure £ per child - Residential Care (from 2018/19 to 2022/23) for Stockton-on-Tees

Period	Outturn weekly expenditure £ per child - Residential Care			
	GBP per week per child			
	Stockton-on-Tees	Minimum for All local authorities in North East	Mean for All local authorities in North East	Maximum for All local authorities in North East
2018/19	3,140	3,140	3,862	4,750
2019/20	3,100	3,100	4,301	5,275
2020/21	2,975	2,975	4,568	5,905
2021/22	4,395	3,945	5,124	8,020
2022/23	5,950	4,245	6,080	8,050

9.6 For external residential placements (both internal and external), in comparison to the North East region, the Council pays slightly less per child per week on average. During 2022/23 the Council paid an average of £5950 weekly per week per child, compared to a regional average of £6,080 per week per child. During this period, the highest weekly average cost for the region was £8,050.

**Table 32: Weekly expenditure for foster placements. Stockton-on-Tees compared to North East Local Authorities 2018-2023 (source Ig inform)**

**Outturn weekly expenditure £ per child - Fostering (from 2018/19 to 2022/23) for Stockton-on-Tees**

Period	Outturn weekly expenditure £ per child - Fostering			
	GBP per week per child			
	Stockton-on-Tees	Minimum for All local authorities in North East	Mean for All local authorities in North East	Maximum for All local authorities in North East
2018/19	440	355	485	580
2019/20	380	380	484	630
2020/21	375	375	524	675
2021/22	360	360	516	795
2022/23	375	375	540	670

9.7 In comparison to the North East region, the Council has the lowest weekly expenditure per child on foster care placements (both internal and externally purchased), with an average £375 in 2022/23 compared to a regional average of £540. This is likely to be influenced by a number of factors including the different bandings of foster care support adopted by many regional local authorities, compared to the 2 level rates for foster carers utilized in Stockton-on-Tees.

**Modelling Future Need**

9.8 The Data to Insight placement modelling tool is a web-based tool developed to support local authorities to model estimates of demand for residential, fostering and supported accommodation placements. Funded through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and tested with a range of Children’s Services data analysts. While the full project is still under development, the tool is available as an online resource and uses the data from statutory returns to model into the future the potential demand based on past trends.

9.9 The modelling currently projects an increase in need, rising to a total of 647 children in our care in Stockton-on-Tees by February 2030. For the different types of placements, modelling predicts that, if other variables (including quality of social work practice) do not change, by 2030:

- The number of children in fostering placements is projected to rise to 401 – an estimated 5% increase from the 383 children in foster placements as of April 2024
- The number of children and young people in residential placement are projected to reach 108, an estimated 29% increase from the 84 children and young people living in residential care as of April 2024.
- Supported accommodation placements are projected to also rise to 43 in February 2030 from 36 in March 2023, an estimated increase of 19% from the 36 young people (under 18 years) in supported accommodation as of April 2024.

Table 33: Projections for different placement types 2023-2030 (source data to insights)

Projections of CIOC population number by placement type	April 2023	March 2025	March 2030
Fostering (all types)	383	386	401
Residential	84	106	108
Supported	36	38	43

9.10 As at April 2024, there are approximately 190 young people in the care of the local authority aged 14-16 years. A high-level review of the needs of the young people carried out by Children’s Services accommodation team and strategy and commissioning team estimated that, if the young people were to remain in the care of the local authority when they reached 16 years:

- Approximately 110 would benefit from either staying put arrangements with their current foster carers or from family-based provision such as supported lodgings.
- Approximately 75 would benefit from a supported accommodation living model, either group based or smaller dispersed support.
- Approximately 5 would potentially benefit from a solo placement with high levels of staffing.

9.11 The information within the Data to Insight tool can only model based on historical information and will not be able to consider trends such as the reduction in foster care capacity increasing the need for residential placements, rather than increased numbers of children requiring residential care to meet their needs. In addition, the projections cannot account for the impact of work taking place to both reunify families and to prevent children coming into care. However, when considered within the context of the data analysis presented it suggests that:

- Interventions, system working and services to keep families together are of critical importance to avoid children and young people entering care where possible and safe to do so.
- Increasing capacity, stability and expertise within foster care must be the priority for our sufficiency work, to avoid the continued trajectory of increasing need for residential care when a child’s needs would be better met in a family environment.
- We have a substantial proportion of children in our care who will be starting their journey into adulthood over the next few years, and therefore it is likely that we will require a wider range of accommodation that supports them to develop their independence and autonomy.

## Section 10: Our Key Sufficiency Trends and challenges

The data and intelligence gathered to inform our strategy has identified the following key trends and sufficiency challenges facing us as a Council:

### **Children in Care**

10.1 The proportion of children in the care of the authority has remained consistently higher than statistical neighbour averages over the last 5 years and within this period the highest proportion of young people have remained in the 10–15-year age range. In addition, there has been a substantial increase in the number of young people aged 16 years and over (increasing from 64 in 2018 to 126 in 2023). The profile of need for our young people aged 16 years and over has also increased due to changes in the national transfer scheme increasing the proportion of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children being brought into the care of the authority.

### **Kinship and Foster Care**

10.2 We have more foster carers leaving the profession than we have new foster carers registering. This has led to a shortfall across all our fostering provision (independent fostering agencies, respite, long term fostering, fostering for children with complex needs). This shortfall in fostering placements in turn places increased demand on children's residential home placements, as due to a lack of sufficiency in fostering placements we have no other option than to place children in residential children's homes when their needs have been assessed as suitable for fostering.

10.3 There is a shortfall of affordable housing options for larger properties within the borough (e.g., 4 bedroom) which can impact on our sufficiency when connected carers need to increase their living space, potential foster carers require bigger homes or families need larger affordable accommodation to facilitate bringing children back into the care of their parents.

10.4 We only have a small number of foster carers who are of ethnic origin other than white British, which impacts on our ability to achieve cultural and religious matching.

10.5 The proportion of new Special Guardianship Orders put in place each year has reduced since 2021, leading to a reduction in the overall number of Special Guardianship Orders in place in the local authority. Special Guardianship Orders can be key to long term security for children while maintaining links with their birth parents.

### **Residential Children's Homes and Supported Accommodation**

10.6 There is an undersupply of residential children's home provision within the borough. When comparing the number of residential children's home placements that are located within the borough with the number of residential children's home placements made if every placement were available in the local authority for Stockton children (snapshot as of April 2024 – 72 places), it would still not be enough capacity to place all children in area (snapshot of all children placed in residential homes in April 2024 – 84). It should be noted that this is purely numerical sufficiency and does not consider children who are required to be placed out of area due to safeguarding concerns, or the type of provision that is needed to meet the needs of individual children and young people.

10.7 Since 2022 the proportion of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children being brought into the care of the authority has increased, with the majority in the 16–17-year age range. This has impacted on our sufficiency for supported lodgings, IFA placements and other forms of supported accommodation. Sufficiency for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children is difficult to plan for due to the variability when children are referred to Stockton through the National Transfer scheme, and the 10-day period in which referrals are expected to be accommodated.

10.8 There is substantial competition in the market for a limited number of placements, particularly for young teenagers with complex trauma, attachment, or mental health needs. There is an undersupply in the borough and across the region of solo or small capacity residential children's homes and supported accommodation that can meet the needs of our children and young people that have significant needs.

10.9 In a small number of cases, there are no registered providers in the market who offer placements that can meet the complex needs of children and young people. This leads to the Council having no other immediate options available but to put in place bespoke packages of care and support which are then unregulated. For some children and young people these placements can be the best form of care to meet their needs, with increased scrutiny and oversight from senior management.

10.10 The majority of our placements for external residential children's homes and supported accommodation are 'spot purchased.' Previous regional and Tees level frameworks that Stockton were part of have now ended, and during the period that the frameworks were active, most providers were either not registered with the framework or would not work within its terms and conditions including fees. This represents the challenges that are currently in the market, with frameworks offering little benefit to providers, and limited success to commissioners to set standard fees for different placement types.

10.11 There are only a small number of supported lodgings providers registered in the borough, which means that young people who are assessed as benefitting from a supported lodging arrangements are instead needing to be placed in group based supported accommodation provision either in or out of area.

10.12 The supported accommodation market is changing in response to the new Ofsted regulatory framework, which has led to some providers exiting the market.

### **Young People Leaving Care**

10.13 There is a shortfall in affordable housing options for care experienced young people across the Borough. For some young people this means that they remain in supported accommodation provision when their needs indicate that they are ready to move on to independent living.

### **Children with Disabilities**

10.14 The opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to access inclusive activities in their local communities alongside their peers are limited. Our families tell us that these opportunities are central to supporting children to living a full, happy, and independent life.

10.15 Our families tell us that short breaks help families stay together – but they are unclear about what short break services are available to them and that choices are limited for older young people.

10.16 Transitions from children to adult's services are variable, and some young people are coming to attention of services too late to ensure a well-planned, supported transition takes place.

10.17 There are limited options to support young people with disabilities who require residential provision at 17 years. Short term placements are unavailable within the market and adult providers cannot legally accommodate the young person until they turn 18 years.

10.18 There is a gap in short breaks provision for young people with disabilities who have significant or complex needs. For some families this can lead to a large package of support being offered to prevent breakdown or changes to short breaks provision to offer a solo placement which impacts on wider sufficiency of provision.

## Section 11: Our Sufficiency Priorities

<b>Early Help and Prevention</b>		
<b>Our key challenges</b>	<b>Our Sufficiency Priorities to meet the challenges</b>	<b>Our action over the next two years to deliver on our priorities</b>
The proportion of children in the care of the authority has remained consistently higher than statistical neighbour averages over the last 5 years.	We need to strengthen the help we give to families so that their children and young people can stay with them, instead of coming into care. We expect that this will mean the number of children we care for reduces over time.	<p>We will redefine our strategy for Early Help within the Borough, collaborating closely with our partners, to support children, young people and families at the earliest stage, with the ambition to keep children and young people safely within family homes and local communities wherever it is safe to do so. This is a priority of the Powering our Futures programme.</p> <p>We will evaluate our Edge of Care service to understand the impact it is having to keep children, young people and families together and, if appropriate, expand this approach.</p> <p>We will continue to develop our approach to reunification, ensuring that children, young people and families receive support from Children's Services and our partner organisations to help them stay together.</p>
<b>Governance</b>		
The proportion of children in the care of the authority has remained consistently higher than statistical neighbour averages over the last 5 years.	We need to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny, and that solution-focused support is provided to embed effective planning for children, young people and families.	We will review our governance processes and associated panels including chairing arrangements and membership
<b>Fostering, kinship care and adoption</b>		
We have more foster carers leaving the profession than we have new foster carers registering, and a shortfall across all our fostering provision (independent fostering agencies,	We require more sufficiency across all aspects of our family-based foster placements – including short breaks, all age groups, sibling groups, parent and	We will increase the number of in house foster carers by 30 – which is the maximum that we can accommodate within our existing in-house structures.

<p>respite, long term fostering, fostering for children with complex needs), which in turn is increasing our use of residential children's homes provision as we do not have enough supply to meet demand.</p>	<p>child placements, children with additional needs and stepping down from residential care, so that all children can live in a family setting wherever possible.</p> <p>We need to increase the diversity of representation within our foster carers to meet the cultural needs of children and young people.</p>	<p>We will review our foster care support model as part of the Council's Powering Our Futures transformation programme to ensure that we can recruit and retain foster carers through our in-house services and increase the stability of placements.</p> <p>We will develop bespoke materials to increase awareness of our fostering offer when potential foster carers are identified through the foster with North East Hub.</p> <p>We will continue to work as part of regional commissioning arrangements for independent fostering agencies to ensure that we have a wide range of providers that can meet the needs of our children and young people, and that we increase the range of providers within our frameworks.</p>
	<p>We need to strengthen our support offer to families with kinship care to increase stability for children and young people, and in turn encourage more families to apply for special guardianship orders.</p>	<p>We will review our kinship care offer of support and training packages to ensure that whenever possible and right for the child, they remain with their family of origin.</p>
<p>The number of children leaving care into adoption has reduced in recent years</p>	<p>We require a broader range of prospective adopters who can meet the needs of our children.</p>	<p>We will continue to work with Adoption Tees Valley to promote our adoption service.</p>
<b>Children's Residential Homes</b>		
<b>Our key challenges</b>	<b>Our Sufficiency Priorities to meet the challenges</b>	<b>Our action over the next two years to deliver on our priorities</b>
<p>We are undersupplied with registered children's homes provision in the borough</p> <p>We have registered children's homes with the borough that we are not able to place with, either through matching,</p>	<p>We require more sufficiency within local Children's Homes in the borough.</p>	<p>We will develop a 'Stockton first' approach with the external residential home market based in the borough to maximise our access to local children's home provision.</p> <p>We will develop provider networks to further develop relationships with and support the practice within our in-borough children's homes providers.</p>

needs of the child or placements being filled from outside of the borough.		As part of the Councils Power our Futures transformation programme, we will reshape our in-house commissioning approach to individual placements to strengthen our work with the market and ensure that our placements are high quality, make the best use of resources and improve outcomes for our children
There is substantial competition in the market for a limited number of either small or solo placements, particularly for young teenagers with complex trauma, attachment, or mental health needs. Our data and analysis tell us that these are often our most fragile and cost intensive placements.	We need to increase the sufficiency of smaller or solo children's homes to be able to match and place our children whose needs cannot be met by shared residential settings.	We will explore capital and invest to save resource to develop up to two solo children's residential homes within the borough, to provide intensive support close to home for our children and young people whose needs cannot be met in group settings.  We will extend the sufficiency that we have through our in-house residential children's homes to provide care for our children and young people with complex needs to increase their stability.
	We require more sufficiency within the regulated market that can support teenagers with complex trauma, emotional and mental health needs.	We will open two new children's homes within the borough that have been secured through DFE funding, to increase our internal home capacity by three beds focused on children and young people who require therapeutic support, and four beds for short term support with the aim of reunification or step down to foster care.
		We will continue to work with our Integrated Care Board and regional commissioners to explore joint commissioning and capital development opportunities to provide integrated respite and care for our children with trauma, attachment, and mental health needs.
<b>Supported Lodgings and Supported Accommodation</b>		
<b>Our key challenges</b>	<b>Our Sufficiency Priorities to meet the challenges</b>	<b>Our action over the next two years to deliver on our priorities</b>
The proportion of young people aged 16 years and above in our care has increased over recent years, and we have a substantial proportion of children	We require a greater range of supported accommodation options to meet the needs of young people who are ready to	We will continue to increase our staying put arrangements, so that when it is right for the foster carer and young person, the young person is able to stay with their foster carer when they turn 18 years.

<p>in our care who will be reaching 16 years over the next 2 years.</p> <p>We have a number of block contract arrangements ending in Autumn 2025 for supported accommodation, and during the contract period the needs of our young people have changed, and the market has also changed with the introduction of Ofsted regulations.</p>	<p>move on to independence through to those with more complex support needs.</p>	<p>We will engage with the market to develop a more dynamic and flexible commissioning approach for supported accommodation to meet a range of needs from 2025 onwards.</p> <p>We will work with our supported accommodation market to explore the feasibility of developing dispersed accommodation models to increase options for young people who do not require high levels of support or 24/7 onsite provision.</p> <p>We will work with our supported accommodation market to identify commissioning solutions to increasing the sufficiency of placements closer to home for solo placements for young people with more complex needs.</p> <p>We will explore alternative arrangements when young people require interim support due to unplanned entry into care or emergency arrangements.</p>
<p>We only have a small number of supported lodgings providers registered in the borough (9), and we know that this model provides good outcomes for young people and has the potential to substantially scale up.</p>	<p>We need to increase the diversity of representation within our supported lodgings providers to meet the cultural needs of our children and young people.</p> <p>We require substantially more sufficiency for in-house supported lodgings providers. Our evidence of impact to date and the needs of our young people indicate that supported lodgings could meet the needs of a substantial proportion of young people who are in other forms of supported accommodation where their outcomes could be improved.</p>	<p>We will increase our in house supported lodgings providers by 10 providers, which is the maximum we can accommodate within our in-house structures. In addition, we will review the internal capacity and investment required to allow us to substantially increase our supported lodgings provision.</p> <p>We will develop bespoke marketing and recruitment materials to increase awareness of our supported lodgings scheme and recruit new providers.</p>
<p><b>Affordable housing and care leavers</b></p>		

<b>Our key challenges</b>	<b>Our Sufficiency Priorities to meet the challenges</b>	<b>Our action over the next two years to deliver on our priorities</b>
<p>There is a shortfall in affordable housing options for care experienced young people across the Borough. For some young people this means that they are remaining in supported accommodation provision when their needs indicate that they are ready to move on to independent living. This in turn is affecting our ability to keep young people in area when they need to be placed in supported accommodation</p>	<p>We require more affordable move on options for young people leaving care.</p>	<p>In partnership with strategic housing services, we will work with social and private landlords to expand the range of affordable move on options for our care leavers, and for affordable family accommodation.</p>
<p>There is a shortfall of affordable housing options for larger properties within the borough (e.g., 4 bedroom), which impacts on our sufficiency when connected carers need to increase their living space, potential foster carers needing bigger homes or families need larger affordable accommodation to facilitate bringing children back into the care of their parents.</p>	<p>We require larger affordable properties to enable us to increase sufficiency within our foster carers, to support kinship arrangements and reunification of families</p>	
<b>Children and young people with disabilities</b>		
<b>Our key challenges</b>	<b>Our Sufficiency Priorities to meet the challenges</b>	<b>Our action over the next two years to deliver on our priorities</b>
<p>Our families are unclear about what Short break services are available to them, and that choices are limited for older young people.</p>	<p>We require a broader range of short breaks options for children with disabilities, particularly for those who are approaching transition into adult services.</p>	<p>We will undertake market engagement to explore how we can increase the range of short breaks options for our children with disabilities (including those young people who are transitioning to adult services) to meet assessed need through social care packages</p> <p>We will collaborate with parents and providers to co-produce our offer for families of children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who require packages of support through social care services.</p>

		<p>We will work with communities to increase opportunities for families of children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to access inclusive provision across the borough.</p>
<p>Transitions from children to adult services are not consistent, and some young people are coming to attention of services too late to ensure a well-planned, supported transition takes place.</p> <p>There are limited options to support young people with disabilities who require residential provision at 17 years - short term placements are largely unavailable within the market and adult providers cannot legally accommodate the young person until they turn 18 years.</p>	<p>We need to ensure more well planned, supported transitions for young people</p>	<p>As part of the Council's Powering our Futures transformation programme, we will develop a life course approach to supporting transitions for children and young people, including how we use data, systems and planning to improve the journey of families.</p>

## Appendix 1: Childrens Homes and Supported Accommodation within the Borough

**Table 34 Internal Children’s Home Provision as at April 2024**

Type of provision	Capacity	Children Placed	Ofsted Rating
<p>Oak View</p> <p>Care for up to three children with social and emotional needs, aged between 7 and 17 years of either gender.</p>	3	3	Good
<p>Tilery</p> <p>Care for up to three children with social and emotional needs aged between 7 and 17 years of either gender.</p>	3	2	Good
<p>Rose House</p> <p>Short to medium term placements for up to 3 children with social and emotional needs aged between 7 and 17 years of either gender.</p>	3	2	Good
<p>Piper House</p> <p>Short to medium term placements for up to 4 children with social and emotional needs aged between 7 and 17 years of either gender.</p>	4	3	Good
<p>Ayton Place</p> <p>Short to medium term placements for up to 4 children with social and emotional needs aged between 7 and 17 years of either gender.</p>	4	4	Good
<p>Our Place</p> <p>Short- and long-term care for up to 5 children who experience physical disabilities, social or emotional difficulties aged between 7 and 17 years of either gender.</p>	5	4	Requires improvement to be good

**Table 35 External Children’s Home Provision as at April 2024**

Type of provision	Capacity	Stockton Children Placed	Ofsted Rating
Red Plains (Spark of Genius North East) Provides care for up to five children who may have social and emotional difficulties aged between 8 and 18 years old, mixed gender.	5	4	Outstanding
Fairview (Spark of Genius North East) Provides care for up to five children who may experience social and emotional difficulties, aged 8-18 of mixed gender.	5	3	Good
The Old Vicarage (Spark of Genius North East) Registered to provide care for up to five children with social and emotional difficulties aged 8-18 years of mixed gender	5	5	Good
The Willows (Ar Curam Ltd) Provides care and accommodation for up to five children who may have social and emotional difficulties aged between 8-17 years old	5	2	Good
Beech Lodge (Hennessy House) Provides care for up to six children who experience social and emotional difficulties and who may have mental health issues from 8 to 18 years old, mixed gender.	6	3	Good
The Oaks (Ar Curam Ltd) Provides care for up to four children who may experience social and emotional difficulties, aged between 8-17 years of age	4	0	Good
No. 57 Ltd (No. 57 ltd) Provides care for up to three children who may experience social and emotional difficulties aged between 8 and 18 of any gender identity.	3	0	Good
Pennington House (Amber Care Group UK Ltd)	1	0	Good

Type of provision	Capacity	Stockton Children Placed	Ofsted Rating
Provides care for one child who may experience social and emotional difficulties, and who may have learning disabilities, and with drug and alcohol dependency between the ages of 13 years to 18 years old where it has been assessed that they need to be accommodated in a solo occupancy care home.			
Elm Bank (Witherslack) Provides care for up to five children who experience social and emotional difficulties, including children who are at risk of, or vulnerable to, child sexual exploitation. Aged 7-17 years, girls only	5	0	Good
Norton Court House (Active Young People Ltd) Registered to provide full-time care for up to nine children with learning disabilities aged up to 18, all genders	9	4	Requires improvement to be good
Sissay House Provides care for up to two children who may have social and emotional difficulties	2	0	Good

**Table 36 Supported Accommodation Provision within the Borough.**

Type of provision	Capacity	Stockton Children Placed	Ofsted Rating
Supported Lodgings 9 providers providing placements on a license agreement	14	12	Registered – awaiting inspection
Staying Close Flats (Internal provision) 4 flats attached to our children's homes, providing support for young people aged 16 years and over in preparation for independence.	4	4	
Transition flats – A Place of my Own Partnership with a local social landlord where the local authority pays the rent for a solo flat and supports the transition of a young person into the flat to take over as their own tenancy when they reach 18 years.	2	2	
Staying Put Arrangements		29	Registered – awaiting inspection
ROC solid Hope Hub self-contained units of accommodation within a block. Support is on site and 24 hours and included in each package of support is 1.1 support to young people.	7	0	Registered – awaiting inspection
Sanctuary Supported Living self-contained units of accommodation within a block. Support is on site and 24 hours and included in each package of support is up to 10 hours of 1.1 support to young people.	12	9 (over 18 years)	Not Ofsted registered
Prefer Homes self-contained units of accommodation within a block for young men. Support is on site and 24 hours and included in each package of support is 1.1 support to young people.	6	1	Registered – awaiting inspection
Community Campus 3 unit of dispersed shared accommodation	6	6	Registered – awaiting inspection

Type of provision	Capacity	Stockton Children Placed	Ofsted Rating
<p>Parkfield Hall</p> <p>Self-contained units of accommodation within a block. Support is on site and 24 hours and included in each package of support is up to 10 hours of 1.1 support to young people.</p>	10	10	Registered – awaiting inspection
<p>Indigo Care</p> <p>Solo Supported Accommodation and Support for young people with high needs.</p>	5	5	Registered – awaiting inspection
<p>ROC solid Hope Hub (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People)</p> <p>self-contained units of accommodation within a block. Support is on site and 24 hours and included in each package of support is 1.1 support to young people.</p>	7	7	Registered – awaiting inspection

## Appendix 2: Our provision to support children, young people, and families

Appendix 2 provides an overview of the commissioned and in house services from short breaks for children with disabilities through to provision for care leavers.

Provision	Description
Hartburn Lodge Short Breaks Service	Internal provision. Registered children's home and specialist centre providing after school, day care and overnight support for children and young people aged 4-17 years with physical, learning disabilities and complex needs.
Short Breaks and personal care for children with assessed need.	Commissioned and spot purchased. Commissioned service for children with an assessed need providing home and community based personal care and outreach services to provide a break for families and provide opportunities for children and young people to engage in a range of opportunities to develop their independence, spend time with other young people and try different activities.  A range of providers are commissioned through a spot purchasing agreement and provide outreach support to children and young people with Autism to access a range of activities on a 1:1 (or 2:1 depending on assessed need) or within a group setting.
Short Breaks Grant	In House, co-produced with Stockton on Tees Parent Carer Forum Small grants to help towards the cost of activities without requiring an assessment of need. Although no assessment of need is required there is eligibility criteria that must be met to apply for the grant.
Shared Lives	In House 13 registered carers. Shared Lives provides an opportunity for people aged 18 years + who require care and support to live independently in the community and can be an alternative to living in a care home, housing with care or housing with support. The Shared Lives scheme matches people who need care and support with an approved carer. The carer shares their family and community life and gives care and support to the person with care needs.
In House fostering	An in-house service that directly recruits and supports foster carers for a range of foster placements including short term, temporary, respite, emergency and connected care placements.
Mockingbird Constellations	In House Fostering Service 3 Constellations of foster families supported by a hub home carer and liaison worker, offering each other support, advice, social activities, learning and development opportunities
Foster with Northeast	Regional support hub for 12 North East Local Authorities to recruit and support prospective foster carers.

<b>Provision</b>	<b>Description</b>
Independent Foster Agencies	Regional call off framework When matches are not available through in house carers, the SBC fostering team will approach Independent Fostering Agencies through a regional call off framework.
Adoption Tees Valley	Regional Adoption Agency Adoption and post adoption family support including support groups, life story work, training, and therapeutic interventions.
Children's Homes	Internal provision. Six homes including short term, edge of care support through to longer term support.
Therapeutic Support and Therapeutic Practitioners	In house and commissioned services. In house therapeutic practitioner offering 1-1 evidence-based support and intervention to children and young people Commissioned Children in our Care therapeutic model with Tees Esk and Wear Valley Trust psychologist and clinical nurse specialists offering consultation and guidance to social workers and family workers, assessment, delivery of interventions and workforce training.
Four Staying Close Flats	Internal provision Attached to our children's homes, providing support for young people aged 16 years and over in preparation for independence.
Staying Put Arrangements	Facilitated through in house fostering service. Arrangements to allow young people to remain with their foster carer after they turn 18 years.
Supported Lodgings	Facilitated through in house accommodation service. Family based placements where the young person has access to support from the adult host and use of the hosts household facilities
Tees Valley Home Finder	Tees Valley wide. Housing register for allocation of social housing across the Tees Valley area. All care experienced young people are encouraged to register applications on Tees Valley Homefinder through personal advisors and provide supporting documentation in order that their accounts can be verified, allowing them to bid for properties,
Transition flats – A Place of my Own	Up to 10 flats commissioned through local social landlord.
Intensive supported accommodation with support for 16 years +	A mix of contracted services and spot purchased individual placements Group living arrangements for young people aged over 16 years with 24/7 on-site support.
Dispersed accommodation and support for 16 years +	A mix of contracted services and spot purchased individual placements. Contracted shared living arrangements for young people aged over 16 years with floating support

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<b>Provision</b>	<b>Description</b>
Agency Framework.	Delivered in partnership with commissioned service Magnit Global. Framework to draw on agency support when creating bespoke packages of care for children and young people when the provider market cannot meet the needs of children and young people.