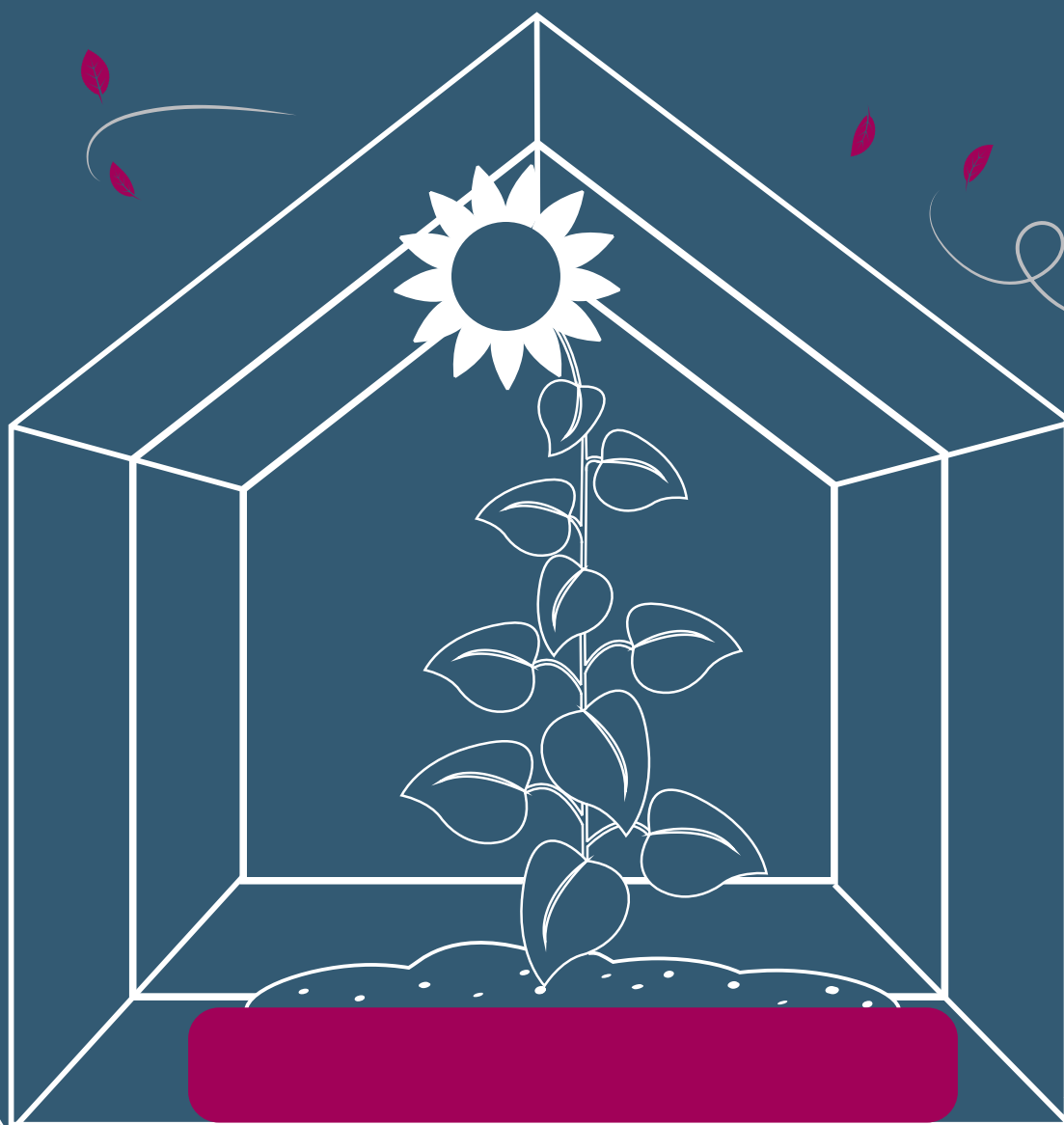


Stoke-on-Trent

Placement Sufficiency Strategy

for Children in Care
2020 - 2023





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STOKE-ON-TRENT CORPORATE VISION



The Stronger Together vision sets out the priorities for Stoke-on-Trent City Council (city council) and the wider city. The strategic plan has been shaped by the political ambition of the city council's leadership, as well as the values and aims of the organisation. As such, it is as much a corporate plan for the council's directorates and teams as it is a strategic blueprint for improving Stoke-on-Trent as a city. Our Stronger Together principle is embedded into every strategy inclusive of our local sufficiency strategy which is set out within this document

Our young people are the future of the city; we need to ensure they have the best possible start in life, as well as access to every opportunity open to them as they grow. We will continue to invest in children, delivering our improvement plan for children's social care, raising educational attainment levels and ensuring our schools enable all of our young people to achieve their potential. We are also focused on creating and sustaining a successful economy, leading on regeneration, investing in diversification of the housing market and creating the conditions for businesses to grow and thrive. Investment will drive employment growth, push wages up and increase prosperity for our residents and communities.





Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well

- Transform outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in the city.
- Help to protect vulnerable adults from neglect and harm
- Work with Partners to tackle the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping
- Protect families from the harmful impacts of drug and alcohol misuse
- Address financial hardship and improve access to affordable financial services



Enable our residents to fulfil their potential

- Improve education and skill levels for residents of all ages
- Protect and improve mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Improve the quality and supply of housing in the city
- Enable our residents to secure and progress in sustainable employment
- Transform digital infrastructure to improve access to online services



Help businesses to thrive and make our city more prosperous

- Foster enterprise and entrepreneurship to support local business and growth
- Deliver a high quality transport system that boosts community and enables productivity
- Prioritise the redevelopment of derelict and brownfield sites in strategic places across the city.
- Celebrate and promote a great city as a destination for business heritage and culture



Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable

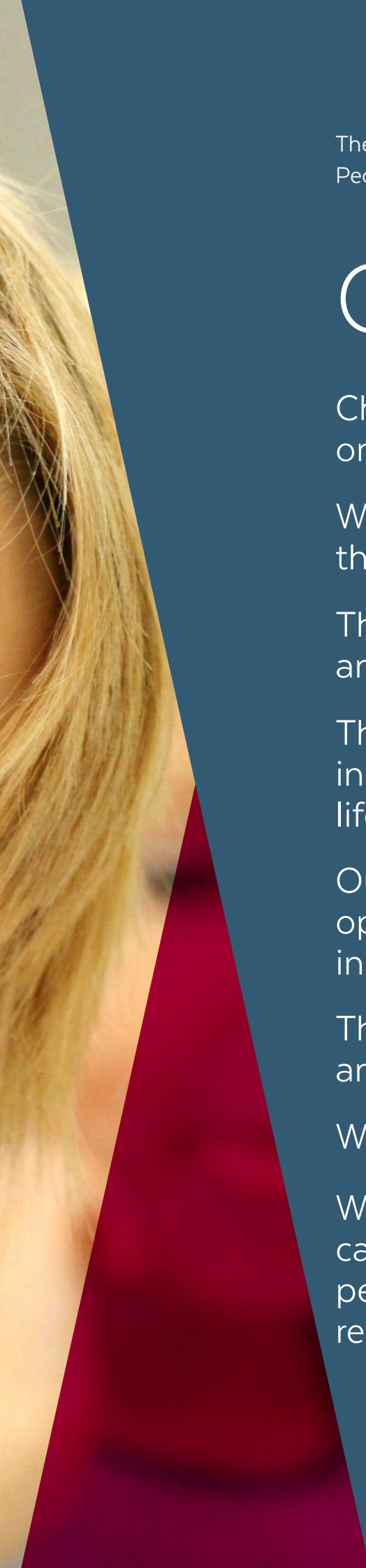
- Improve the environmental sustainability of our towns and communities
- Work with residents and partners to make our communities safer, cleaner and healthier
- Reduce the numbers of empty properties to enable our town centres to thrive
- Transform community involvement in tackling issues which hold our city back
- Invest in communities to help build resilience and grow social capital



An innovative and commercial council, providing effective leadership to help transform outcomes

- Deliver more joined-up services to maximise efficiency and achieves improved outcomes
- Ensure the continued financial stability of the City Council
- Work with Partners to devise innovative and collaborative approaches to local challenges
- Deliver a wide range of commercial services and invest to enable the city to prosper
- Improve the use of data in decision making and service improvement





The strategy adopts the overarching vision of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board.

OUR VISION

Children and young people are the number one priority for the city of Stoke-on-Trent.

We want them to thrive and be the most that they can be.

They should be safe, healthy, nurtured and loved.

They should have the best possible start in life, the best education and the best life chances.

Our young people should be enthusiasts, optimists, creators, entrepreneurs and innovators.

They should be kind, empathetic and compassionate.

We want to hear their voice.

We need every adult in Stoke-on-Trent to care passionately about children and young people and express that through relationships, community and business life.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The city council is committed to providing the best opportunities for every child in our city. How we provide for our children in care is a litmus test of that commitment.

This sufficiency strategy (2020 – 2023) is part of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's overall approach to deliver for and with our children and young people, as outlined by the vision in our new and ambitious Children and Young People's Strategy (2020-24) and our Children's Improvement Programme.

This sufficiency strategy has direct links to the Children and Young People's Strategy to ensure we maximise the same opportunities for all our children in care and align actions for children and young people's individual needs. The Strategy is also guided and supported by a number of other strategies which are referenced at page ???.

By 'sufficiency', we mean making sure there are enough good quality services available to support children in care (and at risk of being in care); including accommodation, health, social care, education and support services to support them to grow up and thrive in Stoke-on-Trent.

Our Sufficiency Strategy outlines our current challenges, issues and opportunities in providing effective accommodation and services to support our children at risk of coming into care and those in care.

This strategy directly addresses these key challenges, weaknesses, areas of development and opportunities within the 'Actions We will Take' sections within the strategy and a delivery plan will explicitly address how key objectives and targets will be measured.

By taking these actions we will achieve better outcomes for children in care, on the edge of care and care leavers. It describes how we need to work together more effectively with our children and young people, our foster carers, wider council colleagues, statutory partners and community organisations. Together we can jointly address these challenges and improve our offer and enable our children and young people in care to thrive.

The sufficiency strategy describes our children and young people in care, their wellbeing, the services we offer and how we will be improving on sufficiency to improve the current offer. It identifies the key enablers required and how we can turn our vision of sufficiency into a reality.

The strategy describes what we need to do differently and how we will do it, how we will improve community involvement and how this will make services better for our children and young people.

What we need for children and families and why?

The snap shot below gives an idea to readers of what to expect to see in more detail, as they move through the strategy focusing on:

Supporting children to stay at home with support and find permanent new families



- Families need a better early help and support offer
 - We need edge of care service that supports families to remain together, where appropriate.
 - Families need more wrap around support including emotional wellbeing and mental health support for themselves as parents and their children.
 - We need to ensure that we are using Family Group Conferences and Restorative Justice programmes to support families to stay together with community and statutory services support.
 - We need to do more to plan for permanency planning to find our children new adopted families
-

Ensuring we co-produce with our young people, families, foster carers and wider communities



- We need to do more to co-produce with our children and young people. The solutions to the issues and concerns young people have around placement breakdown, support needs and transitions can be found by co-producing with our children and young people
 - We need to increase our market engagement with current and potential providers including in-house foster carers, independent foster care agencies and residential providers. This needs to enable improved quality, engagement and efficiencies by working together
 - We need to focus the City as a whole community resource, working with the Council in supporting children in care through accomodation, community support and employment opportunities.
-

Making sure we support children/young people in care



- All children and young people need effective emotional wellbeing and mental health support. This is particularly important for our children in care, recognising the trauma they may have faced.
 - We need to ensure we maximise the opportunities for young people in care through education and employment in the city, through Virtual School and post 16 Training, Education and Employment opportunities
 - We need to encourage our young people to access wider opportunities in their community including sports, arts and culture.
 - Some of our young people are at risk of exploitation; we need to ensure we work closely with these services and partners to ensure we effectively protect our young people at risk from exploitation.
-

Providing a good home for our children in care



- Our children and young people want the opportunity to live more locally.
- There needs to be an increase in diversity of foster carers to ensure we can match foster carers to our young people's individual needs
- There needs to be even more in-house foster carers.
- Our providers need to be able to meet our young people's changing emotional, social and physical needs.
- We need to develop more specific local residential provision for children and young people who need to be accommodated in residential care.
- We need to ensure our semi-independent provision for care leavers meets their needs and change this offer to better prepare them for adulthood.



What we need to do together to improve sufficiency?

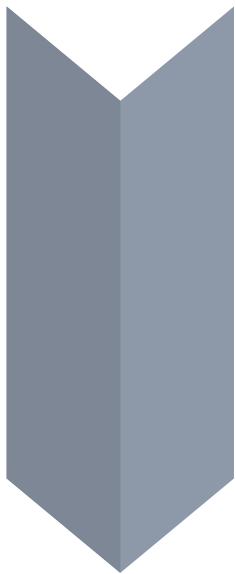
The snap shot below gives an idea to readers of what to expect to see in more detail, as they move through the strategy focusing on:

- ✓ Co -Production
- ✓ Successful Community Provision
- ✓ Early Help and Intervention, and use of asset-based services
- ✓ Right Place, Right Time, Right Home (improve long term care services)
- ✓ Develop outcome focused services for all children in care, on the edge of care and care leavers

How will improved sufficiency give better outcomes for our children and young people?



How will improved sufficiency give better outcomes for our children and young people?



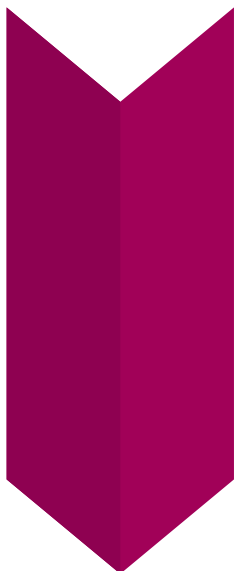
What does this mean for Stoke-on-Trent?

- Less children in care
- Less emergency placements
- Less placement breakdowns
- Less demand on long term care
- Children stay local
- Control over budget
- Focus on Permanency
- Availability to grow connected carers
- Availability to grow and recruit fostering placements
- More choice and options for siblings
- Better staying put arrangements in contract offers
- Improved workforce development
- Step and Step down options for packages of care



What does this mean for the children and young people of Stoke-on-Trent?

- Increased Independence
- Support with transition to Adulthood
- Increased participation
- Support around aspirations
- Available mentors
- Community networking
- Improved accommodation
- Choice of accommodation to suit need
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Better access to health and social care services
- Siblings to be accommodated together
- Better life /risk management skills
- Stability
- Packages of care to suit individuals



What does success for everyone look like?

- Better outcomes for children
- Staff with expertise providing a seamless service by working with others
- Restorative practices to support communities
- Better services
- Better capacity
- No wrong door
- Rewarding tasks for staff
- Better care planning
- Co-production with Children/Young People
- Co-production with Partners
- Better safeguarding and protection
- Better Quality Assurance of our services
- Services fit for purpose that can support the city

INTRODUCTION TO SUFFICIENCY

In Stoke-on-Trent we have been working with our children in care and our partners to improve our services. We would like to thank our partners for work thus far and also offer a big thank you to our children and young people who have already contributed to the design of services and shared their knowledge and experiences, allowing us to make improvements upon our current sufficiency offer. Our children and young people will continue to be actively involved in shaping and developing services, have a voice and feel part of communities. Their ideas and aspirations matter and can make a big difference to other children who may be going through similar situations and are having to use the services that the city council provides, in order to keep them safe.

This strategy provides a high-level overview of need, available accommodation and current supply. It highlights what we already know about the needs of our children in care, those on the edge of care, and the challenges that we need to address in order to improve outcomes for children and young people. The strategy considers support and access to services as well as wellbeing for children and young people (mental, emotional and physical) whilst considering the overall accommodation need.

This strategy sets out how we as a city council will focus on change, the right support at the right time. Execution of sufficiency actions will support our children and young people to thrive. It will also show how we intend to meet our statutory duties around sufficiency.

Guiding Legislation

The Children Act 1989 (section 22g) requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for children and young people under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in their best interests to be accommodated within the local authority's area (for example, in order to stay at the same school or near to other family where contact can easily take place). This is commonly referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'.

The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010) which states that:

"Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for looked after children."

The decision to bring a child into care should only be considered when all other strategies to ensure the child's welfare have been exhausted and/ or aren't viable to safeguard the child.

Key principles and requirements

These responsibilities for local authorities are driven by a number of key principles:

- To help to maintain children within their family environment wherever it is safe enough to do so
- To endeavour to safely reconcile families where ever possible, to minimise the duration of children staying in care
- To secure permanency at the earliest opportunity for children who become accommodated by the local authority
- To minimise the duration of children staying in care

The city council will commit to providing high quality placements in a timely manner, based on the individual needs for our children in care. Careful consideration will be given to matching need, placement and locality to ensure the optimum outcomes for Stoke-on-Trent's children in care. This is in line with our commitment to providing the 'right home, for the right child, at the right time' for our children and young people.

The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the city council is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy and practice is part of the "market management"
- That the Duty applies also to meeting the needs of children at risk of care or custody
- Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families.

This Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy is also guided and supported by wider national legislation and other local strategies and procedures.

Local Strategies and Procedures

- Placement Sufficiency Audit
- Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Fostering Statement of Purpose
- Permanence Strategy
- Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2020/2021
- Commissioning Strategy
- Early Help Strategy

National Legislation

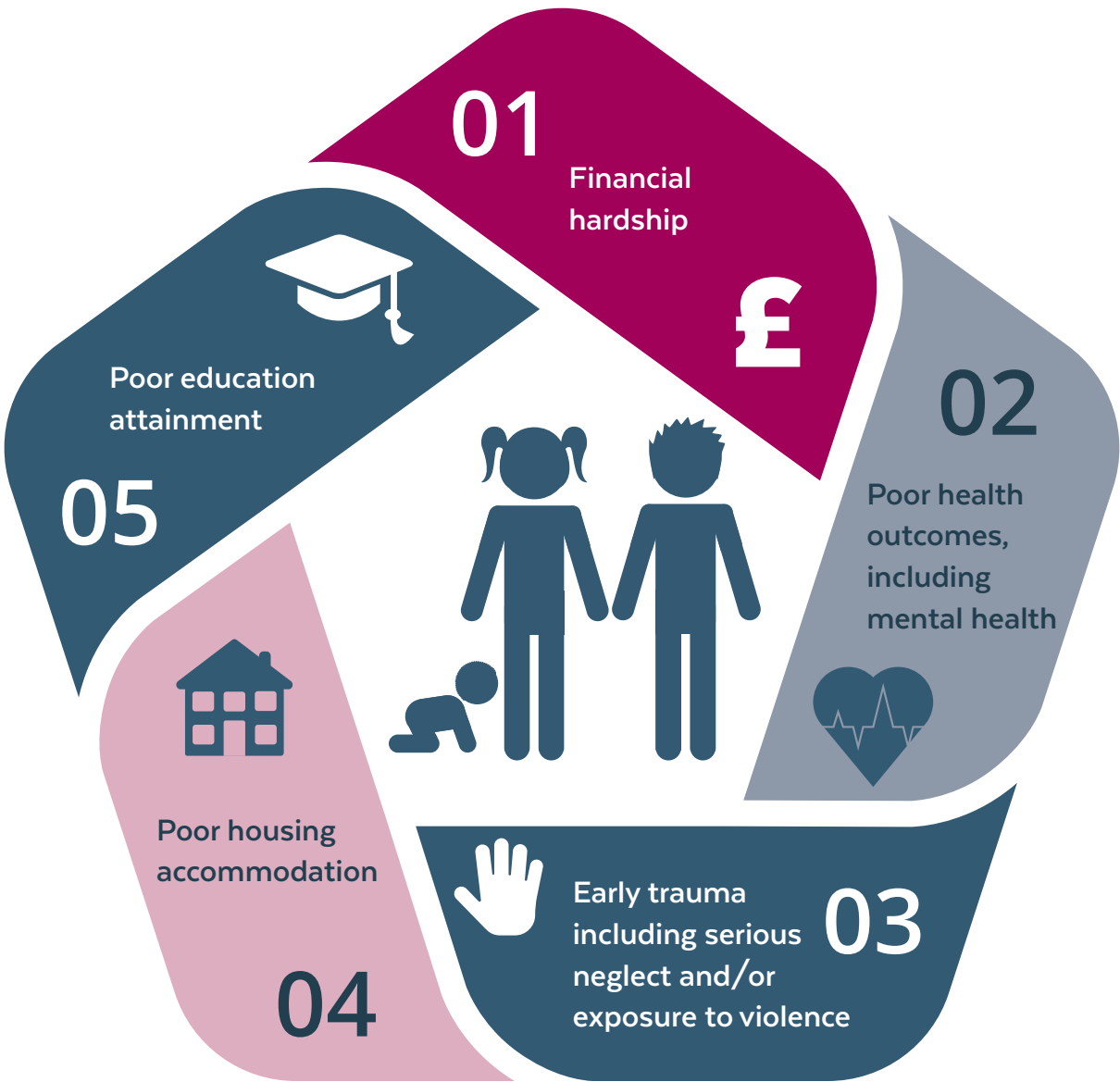
- The Housing Act 1996
- Children and Families Act 2014
- The Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Children's Act 1989

OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Our city has a large population of children and young people.



The main concerns for children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent are:



For some of our children, living in poverty affects early development, creating a barrier for children and young people in achieving their aspirations as they grow older, hindering opportunities for employment and independence in adulthood.

Health deprivation for children consists of problems like tooth decay and obesity. Lack of nutrition through wrong diet can cause deficiencies in bones and brain development; it also has an impact on low birth weights for babies and infant mortality rates. Health literacy is crucial to our children and families to enable healthier lifestyles, supporting them to manage risk and make better health choices.

There is strong evidence that early exposure to neglect, abuse, violence and other serious adverse events can have long-term traumatic impact on a child. This can manifest in poor attachment, weak empathy and social skills, behavioural issues and poor mental health.

Housing also has an effect on a child's development and health as poor living conditions can also cause long-term health issues like asthma. While we generally have a high-quality social housing stock, there are issues in the private rented sector where some of our most vulnerable children live. Despite recent improvements, too many of our children in Stoke-on-Trent are not hitting the right education attainment levels and this starts with lack of school readiness. The numbers of our children obtaining opportunities to go into higher and further education in comparison to the rest of England is rising but low.

All of the above deprivations can put considerable demand on services, however our duties mean we still need to ensure the safety of all our children and young people.

By working together with all stakeholders and children and young people we can overcome and defeat some of the contributory factors our city has around deprivation and make a positive impact on young lives.



Contributory factors for demand on services

- Socio-economic impacts of the city
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Low education attainment
- Poor lifestyle choices
- Industrial area increases co-morbidities

Effect on current services

- High demand for foster care
- Reactive services rather than preventative and proactive
- Children may not be in the right place at the right time
- Budget pressures on education, accommodation and health services
- Large cohort of children in care

Impact on city council

- Not enough foster care support
- Costly education packages that may not be tailored to every child
- Risk of placement breakdowns
- Shortages on mental health and advocacy services
- Not enough children's engagement around services
- Not enough step up and step down options

Impact on our children and young people

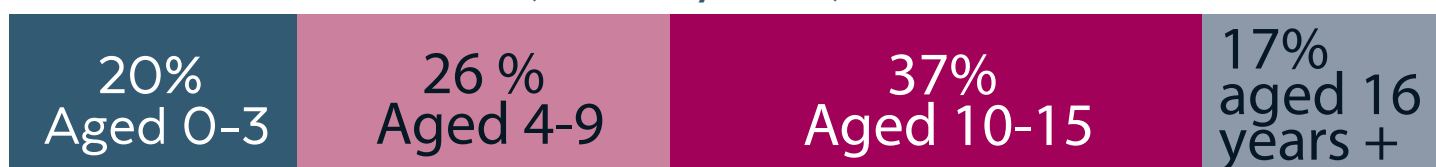
- Short term placements
- Low education attainment
- Lack of opportunities to grow
- Not in a position to make important, lasting relationships
- Not enough opportunity to look at life goals or time to prepare for adulthood
- Not enough services to support with trauma and mental health

The city councils' ambition is to support children better to obtain the education, health and social care support they need to live healthy, happy lives, giving them 'room to grow'. We can do this through ensuring families receive help early and that this makes a difference, giving children better life chances. However, we also need to make sure we have the right provision in place for those that have to come into care or are already in care, giving them the same opportunities as children who are living at home.

Children in care

Sufficiency considers capacity and demand when looking at provision of long-term accommodation and services that can support children to grow and thrive. Services also need to have an aim of enabling reunification where possible. There are currently 935 children in care, including Young Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. This needs to be reduced through restorative working practices that can build resilience in children and families around their level of support need and by training providers to recognise when children are ready to be stepped down back to families, to connected carers or into adoption placements.

935 children in care (as at May 2020)



Ethnicity profile for children in care reflects the ethnicity profile of the general child population in the city

49% of our children and young people are female (this is higher compared to some other local authorities)

Entering Care

The main reasons for children and young people entering care in Stoke-on-Trent is abuse (including sexual and emotional abuse). Other reasons include parental factors around disability and substance misuse, as well as Domestic Abuse i.e. children living in unhealthy dangerous environments. Other categories include offending, whereby parents may have committed crimes and are convicted, and homelessness, when a family is at risk of having no fixed abode.

Unsafe environments heighten the risk for children and make them more vulnerable to exposure to exploitation, modern slavery, radicalisation, trafficking and criminal/gang related groups.

In Care

As with the National picture, the number of children looked after in Stoke-on-Trent has increased over the last five years. In comparison to our statistical neighbours, where Stoke-on-Trent has seen an increase of 35% over the last five years, our statistical neighbours have only seen a 23% increase, a 12% difference.

93 Children with an Education
Health Care Plan

22 Unaccompanied
Asylum Seekers

935 Children in Care

134 Care Leavers

488 Young People
in Foster Care

82 Children with
Disabilities

Although the rate of increase has reduced, it is evident that a focus on edge of care interventions such as Family Support and Family Group Conferencing as well as commissioned interventions such as local volunteer support and partnership working with community groups will improve the effect on progressing permanence for our children and young people. This will continue to support the reduction of children entering care and ensure that families are supported to remain together.

Most of our looked after children are between 4 and 15 years with the majority being in the 10-15 year age bracket. The children in the 10-15 year age bracket are the ones that will struggle to be placed or have permanency arrangements if we do not use restorative practice to get children back home or with connected carers or kinships where possible. For younger children there needs to be greater focus and urgency on creating paths to permanency, including adoption.

Leaving Care

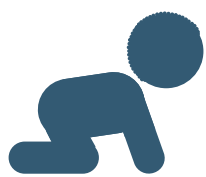
The number of children and young people who are classed as care leavers is lower than the number of children that are currently entering into care in Stoke-on-Trent. However, those who have left care have either gone on to suitable supported accommodation or have gone back to families/ or connected carers. We are committed to giving children a better chance of living in a family environment or having the right support when embarking on independent living.

We need sufficiency to increase support to children to enable them to get home earlier where possible, (reunification of families) or increase permanent foster and adoption arrangements to create stability. Our job for those who are leaving care by transitioning into adulthood is to make sure they are supported by the city council offering sound parental advice around finding the right accommodation, employment opportunities and give guidance around money management.

We need to ensure the wrap-around support of other agencies, and we need to offer practical, emotional and social support as any good parent would to young adults embarking on a new chapter in their lives.

The figures below based at 2019/2020 show that children leaving care is low compared to those entering care

259 children entered care → **143** children leaving care




24.7% of children entering care in the 0-4 age group




36% of the children leaving care returned home




Actions we will take



Review and improve the early intervention offer to support reunification and keep families together.



Work with the market to ensure the right support is available. Work with local community organisations to increase representation from under represented communities to become foster carers.



Engage with children and young people to support with transition from being in care to leaving care, ensure adequate services information and advice are available.



Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

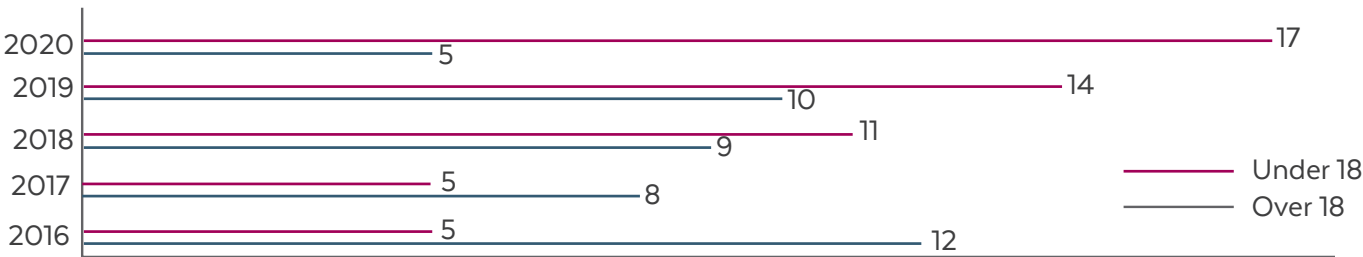
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK, who have been separated from their parents or carers. While their claim is processed, they are cared for by a local authority.

Some of these children are particularly vulnerable to different types of abuse. UASC have no access to public funds, young people are at risk of being drawn into modern slavery, trafficking and gang related activities. We need to work together with our partners to safeguard and protect these children and families, by working in collaboration and sharing information.

There are currently

22 UASC **87.5%** are male **62.5%** in Foster Care
children **37.5%** placed within Stoke-on-Trent

The number of UASC has seen a steady increase over the last three years



Actions we will take



Continue to plan ahead to ensure that cultural and individual needs are met



Review existing accommodation options available inclusive of matched foster placements within the city



Secure local, cost effective accommodation provision to meet the long term needs of those with no recourse to public funds

Care leavers



81%

of care leavers aged 19-21 are considered to be in suitable accommodation



19%

Care leavers aged 19-21 are being actively supported in finding more suitable accommodation if, for example, they are in houses of multiple occupation.

Zero (0)

Numbers of homeless care leavers in Stoke-on-Trent

The city council's Next Steps Team along with support from the Learning Disability Transition Team provide support to care leavers, ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and the support they need to transition into adulthood and leaving care. Any challenges around care leavers' accommodation is always resolved jointly with our Housing Partners.

Types of accommodation that are deemed suitable

- With Parents
- With former foster carer
- Accommodation providing EET support
- Supported lodgings
- Ordinary lodgings
- Semi-independent transitional accommodation
- Independent living

Types of accommodation that are not deemed suitable

- Emergency accommodation
- Bed and breakfast
- In custody
- No fixed abode/ homeless
- Accommodation where by the Local Authority do not know where a care leaver resides.

Transitioning into adulthood

The Children in Care Social Work teams work closely with the 18+ Care Leavers services to ensure a smooth transition for young people turning 18 years. Personal Advisors are allocated to young people at aged 16; professionals work jointly on the pathway plan and prepare young people for independence. Support during this transition is crucial, ensuring that young people are able to work towards managing independent living and achieve their potential around health and education outcomes, which promotes resilience and independence, leading them towards becoming successful independent adults.

Staying Put arrangements

Staying put arrangements are to ensure young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood.

Recruiting foster carers that are willing to keep young people in a placement post 18 years is a challenge. Despite this, the city council are committed to ensuring that young people are able to 'Stay Put' wherever possible whilst entering into adulthood, and we strive for this when recruiting foster carers.



Access support from Adult services and community, give support around work or further education / training, including apprenticeship; and voluntary work (supporting Social Value)



Permanency support, giving young people skills to understand independent living and what it involves to make it sustainable



Ensure tools are given to support and manage their health and education needs.

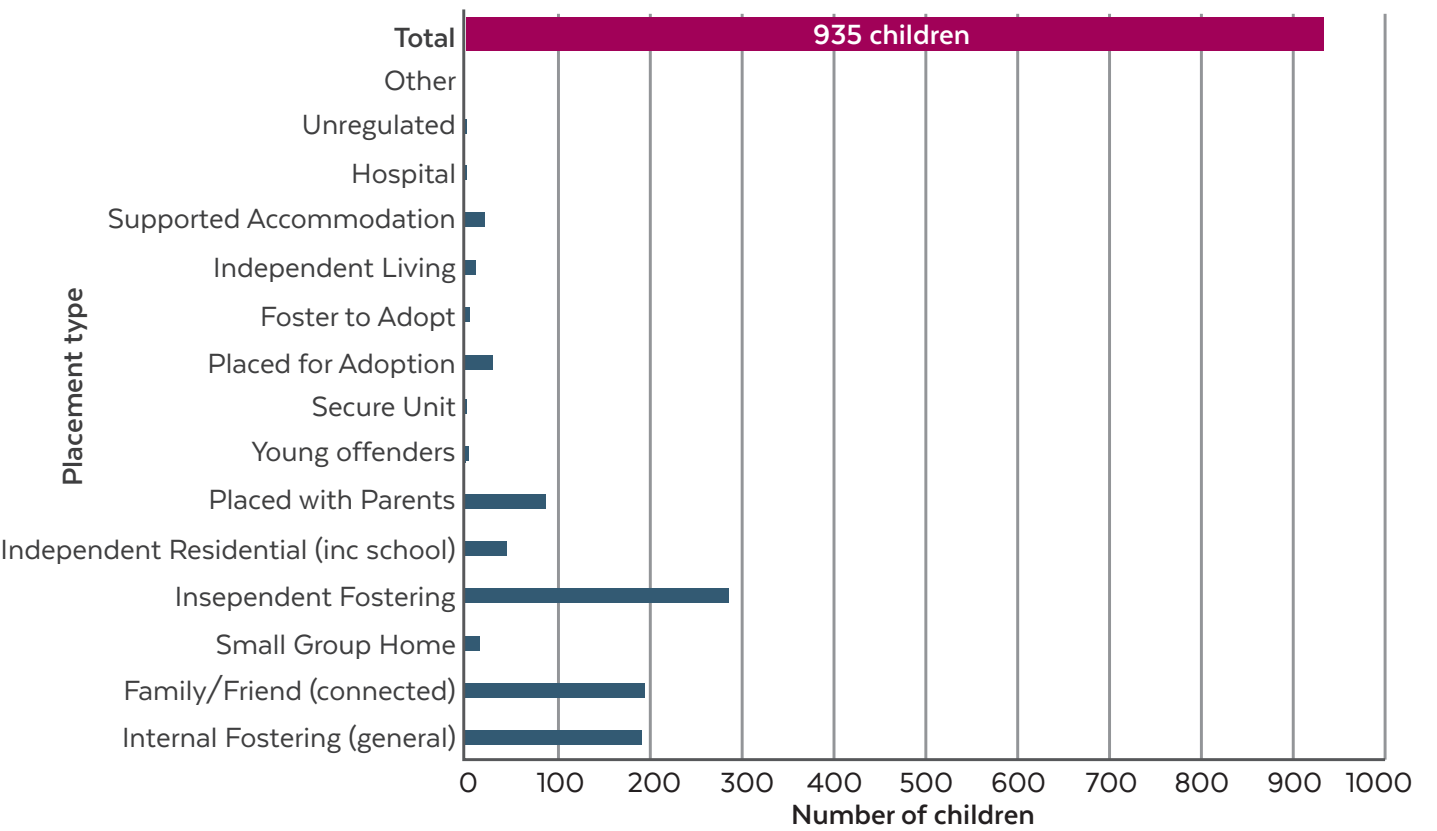
A PLACE TO LIVE

The city council are here to support our young children to live and thrive in our City.

Stoke-on-Trent’s Corporate Parenting Pledge reinforces and emphasises our commitment and responsibilities as a corporate parent, to ensure we provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people in care, as any good parent would their own child. Our aspiration for children in care is to give them the opportunity to live in a family environment wherever possible. To fulfil this pledge, we have various different types of environments and services for our children and young people in care. We assess each child based on their support needs and complexities. The services we have in place are designed to provide protection, care, safety and stability, allowing children to be nurtured and supported with their growth. The strong relationships with housing partners improve upon the accommodation offer. There is a dedicated Housing Officer attached to the care leavers’ team in order to manage suitable accommodation decisions for children in care.

Overview of placements

Number of Looked after children and placement type April 2020



As stated earlier, there are currently 935 looked after children utilising services. Fostering is the largest form of provision with 488 children in total split across in house-fostering and Independent Foster Agencies. There is a need to reduce the number of Independent Fostering Agencies and focus more on placing with parents/families and also for fostering to adopt.

Fostering

134 general Foster Carers supporting **195** children

137 connected carers supporting **201** children

291 children are with Foster Carers in Independent Fostering agencies



Stoke-on-Trent remains committed to increase its in-house foster placement capacity by 20% annually for the next 2 years. 43% of all CiC with In-House Foster Carers by 2022.

Our objective for children in care is to give them opportunity to live in a family and/ or friends' environment wherever possible. For children who need to be fostered we are focused on ensuring that we place locally in and around Stoke-on-Trent City in quality well trained and supported foster carers. The current Fostering offer comprises of our In-house Fostering provision and our Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) on a regional framework. We have a clear focus and drive to increase the recruitment of In-house Foster Carers and ensuring that we are able to attract a wide range of foster carers to meet children's emotional and social needs and to increase the diversity of our foster carers from religious and cultural backgrounds.

The council is committed to meeting the placement needs of sibling groups of children, every attempt will be made to keep siblings together wherever possible. When this is not possible efforts will be made to encourage contact arrangements and close geographical proximity between siblings.

Permanency planning will fully consider the wishes of a sibling group to be found a placement together.

When a decision is taken to place siblings separately, the reasons for this must be fully explained and recorded. An assessment should be completed that determines whether it is in the sibling groups best interest to be placed together or separately. The assessment will be based on direct observations of sibling relationships, consideration of the history of these children, plus includes the views of those who have care of and regular contact with the children.

The assessment recognises that ‘sibling relationships are likely to last a lifetime and can be an integral part of a child’s sense of identity, while potentially also providing support, companionship, continuity, annoyance, competition and conflict’.

We need to increase the number of short-term and long-term foster carers for older children. We also need to increase the number of short break foster carers and increase the number of placements for children, sibling groups and young people who are more difficult to place. We can achieve this through targeted recruitment campaigns and specialist training and support packages. We will also be increasing our ‘connected carers’ and our ‘staying put’ placements.

We need to ensure the following to increase in-house Foster Care:

- Fostering recruitment campaigns – employee strategy; fostering fortnight May 2020; fostering friendly employer status
- Refresh the foster carer offer
- Foster carer allowances need to be reviewed
- Upscale the recruitment drives through to attract more Foster carers and adopters
- Strategic partnerships with organisations that can increase our reach into particular communities.
- Cover a wider geographical area in relation to recruitment
- Support an offer that is encouraging to carers to ensure consistency add on additional incentives when looking at staying put and permanency arrangements

Approval Targets for Fostering Recruitment

The Children in Care Social Work teams work closely with the 18+ Care Leavers services to ensure a smooth transition for young people turning 18 years. Personal Advisors are allocated to young people at aged 16; professionals work jointly on the pathway plan and prepare young people for independence. Support during this transition is crucial, ensuring that young people are able to work towards managing independent living and achieve their potential around health and education outcomes, which promotes resilience and independence, leading them towards becoming successful independent adults.

Approval Target 2019/2020

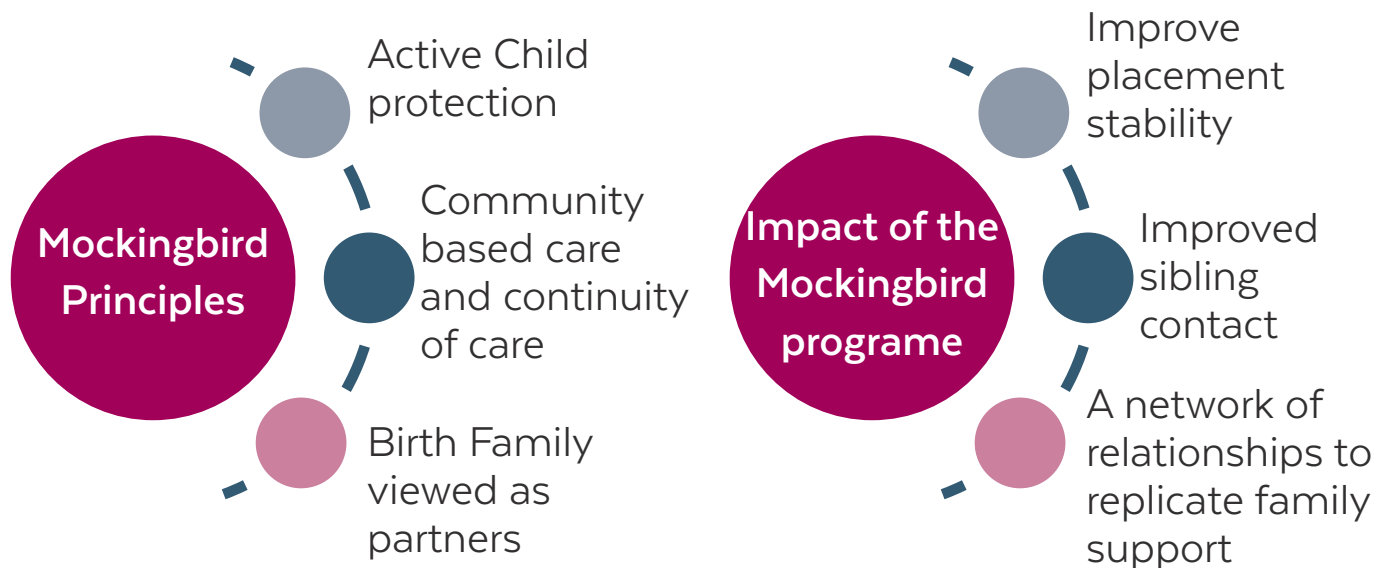
Target 2019/2020 was 30 new households approved for foster care – 25 were recruited

Approval Target 2020/2021

Target 2020/2021 is 33 new carer approvals, comprising of therapeutic carers, respite carers, parent and child carers and generic approvals

Working Practices that support Foster Services

The Mockingbird Programme creates strong relationships between carers, children in care and birth families. The Mockingbird Programme supports how we deliver the Fostering services. It is part of working practice aimed at stabilising fostering placements; examples of Mockingbird Principles and impact of the programme are below:



Our Stoke-on-Trent Recruitment strategy 2020/2021 shows the approach and plans for recruiting foster carers and foster placements and complements the Children in Care sufficiency strategy and the Mockingbird Programme.

Our recruitment and strategy aims:

- Provide an effective, high quality and best value fostering service for children in care
- Increase the number of short term & long-term foster carers
- Increase the number of placements for sibling groups and young people who are more difficult to place
- To increase the number of in-house placements and create a step-down programme for children in residential care
- To ensure that all people who are interested in becoming foster carers are welcomed without prejudice
- Improve placement choice and stability for children and young people
- Place particular focus on increasing options for older children and children with disabilities
- Targeted recruitment campaigns and specialist training and support packages
- Reducing the number of children placed within Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and private residential agencies
- Promptly give clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval and support services.



Actions we will take



Continue to increase In-house Fostering
Complete targeted marketing for sibling groups, children with disabilities and children aged 4-17 years



Continue with implementation of the mockingbird fostering model to stabilise foster placements



Increase the number of connected carers bringing children closer to home.
Increase the number of Foster Carers for older children and children with complex needs



Adoption and permanency

Improving on Adoption and Permanency

A Regionalisation of Adoption Framework is being put in place. Four local authorities – Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire County Council, Shropshire County Council and Telford & Wrekin Council have come together to create the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership, which is branded Together4Children. The partnership is formally recognised and supported by the Department of Education (DfE).

The focus of this arrangement is on improving outcomes for all children in care who require permanency away from their families of origin.

The ambition of the Partnership goes beyond adoption, and focuses on permanency outcomes including adoption, long-term fostering, special guardianship and children living with kinship carers. This is a regional permanency arrangement, which operates across a large geographical footprint, maximising resources, capacity and flexibility; and should lead to improvements in effective practice and long-term outcomes for our children.



The city council are working hard to deliver the functions of the Regional Adoption Agency, some of the key outcomes which will be delivered by the new model are:

- One regional 'brand' with one regional point of contact for Adoption Recruitment
- Regional marketing and recruitment activity
- One pool of children with an adoption plan and one pool of regionally approved adopters.
- Improved commissioning on a regional scale, improving quality and choice, and ensuring value for money.

The city council will commit to a high-quality adoption service and ensure that children are involved in the improvement of the service. The Regional framework as well as looking at other ways to encourage adopters will have beneficial outcomes for children, examples are listed below:

- Improved connections and functionality in social settings and surroundings
- Opportunities to form attachments
- Less poverty and deprivation for children in an adoptive environment
- Better support through development stages in their life
- Secure and nurturing environments can reduce behavioural issues
- Education can be improved as support is in place to allow the child to grow



Actions we will take



Utilise and support the transition to the new Regional adoption arrangements



Improve the quality assurance frameworks and monitoring arrangements



Ensure the Regional Adoption arrangements meet the needs of the young people and offer permanency options

Permanency

Permanency for children and young people who cannot return home is a fundamental responsibility of the city council as a Corporate Parent. When children become looked after and are in long term care the city council will prioritise the achievement of permanency. Planning for Permanency will be embedded in social care working practices through the permanency strategy and be supported by our sufficiency strategy bringing together security, continuity, identity and belonging to each child.

Principles of permanency are illustrated below

- securing permanent care with family and friends
- permanency will support children to fulfil their potential
- care planning will focus on nurturing homes in Stoke-on-Trent
- encouragement to stay in contact with family where possible
- children will be consulted
- aim to keep siblings together



Actions we will take



Permanency planning will be child-focused

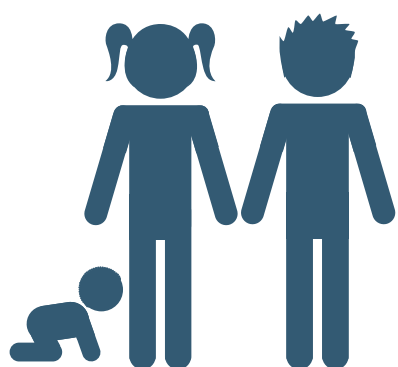


Children placed with matched carers that will support them to achieve goals and aspirations



Child's wishes and feelings, as well as long term aspirations will be at the centre of the decision making process

Residential homes



65

of our children are placed in a residential home.

47%

of placements are spot purchased

53%

are placed on the Regional Framework

A reduction of **20 children** in the last 6 months in residential care
23 children are placed in residential homes in Stoke-on-Trent.

A small number of children need to be placed in residential homes and units to meet their needs; either temporarily or on a longer-term arrangement. Children in residential homes need this interim support to prepare them for a future family environment where possible.

Although there is a need for residential homes the city council is committed to ensuring that children and young people wherever possible reside within a family home and that residential placements are by exception and for as short a period as possible.

Within Stoke-on-Trent we do have established providers of children's residential care; however, there isn't enough sufficiency locally which has led to children being placed out of area which can cause part of the problem of placement breakdowns. There is a lack of provision for children with high needs, for example Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLs orders), 2:1 staffing and solo provisions which means we are lacking in sufficiency in this area. This can lead to providers taking on children they are not trained to cope with, again resulting in placement breakdowns with no solution-focused support/alternative placement options, leading to increased costs with very limited information explaining why additional services are required.

A key priority is to improve the residential offer within the city based on a therapeutic model that supports young people to recover and develop to the extent that at least some will be able to thrive within a family home.

As part of our In-house offer we have 12 Small group Homes (SGH) who currently utilise a therapeutic model around children and young people, creating a homely environment that replicates, and is similar to, other homes within the area in which the home is located. It is hoped that living within communities will support young people to develop their social skills and build a robust support network in preparation for transition into independence.

In order for young people to achieve their full potential it is important to provide a safe, secure, nurturing and learning environment. Therefore, each home has a small team of qualified and experienced Residential Care Workers that are able to build meaningful relationships and support young people's individual needs.

We are signed up to the West Midlands Regional Framework for children's homes, which allows us to manage the market at a regional level and share quality monitoring duties giving shared resource. Uplifts are agreed via a regional network offering value for money as all authorities come to a decision on the approach with providers around finance.



Actions we will take



Work with current and potential local providers to expand more local residential provision



Improve quality of provision via improved monitoring and quality assurance processes



Review the wrap around services which may be needed in order to develop and utilise more local provision

Supported accomodation

We have access to the Regional Supported Accommodation Framework and have also commissioned our own supported accommodation through Concrete.

- 17 young people in placements via the Framework -13 other authorities besides us utilise the regional framework
- 16 accessing a placement through Concrete – via Housing Partners, 3 are UASC and 2 are over 18

The Concrete contract, is currently at 50% occupancy. Ensuring suitable placements to maintain occupancy levels is a priority

Supported Accommodation provides life skills and support with transition into Adulthood and Adult services where required. Life skills on offer should be around employment opportunities, further education, money management.

A review of the local provision is required to ensure it continues to meet the needs of young people and to identify the level of capacity the local offer needs to present.

Joint working with all Local Housing Associations as well as internal stakeholders is important to map out capacity against demand for the service.



Review service provision to ensure it meets demand



Improve housing , commissioning and social care joint working



Engage with Regional Authorities to improve Regional Framework offer for future demand

HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN IN CARE

A clear distinction is often made between ‘mind’ and ‘body’. However, when we are considering mental health, physical health and emotional health, the three should not be thought of as separate.

We have a well-established partnership between education, health and the local authority already to support with day to day service delivery around health and wellbeing. This is monitored by the Health and Wellbeing Board and supporting the role of the Health and Wellbeing Board is the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership Board.

As part of sufficiency, it is our responsibility to ensure there is capacity to manage the demand from children in care for services around health and wellbeing. We need to maintain current services and expand the offer through more community support and through working in partnership better with other governing bodies like CCG’s and the NHS, North Staffordshire Combined NHS Trust, Safeguarding boards and Ofsted.



Universal support

As a Corporate Parent we have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children we look after, protecting physical, health and emotional wellbeing of a child or young person. Children in care must have their views considered (according to their age and understanding) when their health assessments and care planning are being developed. Care leavers will also have a plan in place so they can continue to obtain the health care support they require upon leaving care.

Delays in identifying and meeting emotional well-being and mental health needs can have far reaching effects on all aspects of young lives, including chances of reaching their potential and leading happy and healthy lives as adults.

Our statutory duties are met through working with health partners, commissioning effective services, working with provider organisations, and through individual practitioners providing co-ordinated care for each child in collaboration with social workers.

- All children and young people need access to universal services as well as targeted and specialist services where necessary
- Health assessments should address
 - the child's state of health, including physical
 - emotional and mental health
 - the child's health history including, as far as practicable
 - his or her family's health history
 - the effect of the child's health history on his or her development existing arrangements
 - the child's health and dental care appropriate to their needs, which must include routine checks
 - preventive measures such as vaccination and immunisation, sign up to a registered GP in the local area
 - screening for defects of vision or hearing

Emotional wellbeing and Mental Health Services

The city council and the CCG have an agreed 'pooled' budget for a number of preventative, early intervention, advice and guidance services:

- Early intervention and targeted support for children and young people experiencing mild to moderate emotional wellbeing/mental health issues, to support children and young people's improved emotional wellbeing and mental health
- The city council have Mental Health Services that are directly commissioned to support the emotional needs of children for therapeutic placement, trauma informed practice, and adverse childhood events (ACEs). Commissioned services include 'Staying Well' and 'Changing Minds'. The Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is a CCG commissioned service that our children and young people can access
- The mental health of all children is important. With half of adult mental health problems starting before the age of 14, early intervention to support children and young people with mental health and emotional and physical wellbeing difficulties is very important

The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is used to measure the wellbeing of children in care who have been in care continuously for at least 12 months. A higher score indicates greater difficulties (a score under 14 is considered normal, 14-16 is borderline cause for concern and 17 or over is a cause for concern).

The Difficulty Score in Stoke-on-Trent is

14.3 compared with 14.1 for England

This is average difficulties score for Children in Care (aged 5-16) who had been in care continuously for 12 months

49% of Children in Care in the city had an average difficulty scored considered normal

9% were borderline cause for concern

42% were a cause for concern

These are similar to national averages



Children with complex needs

Tripartite panels are useful for joint support around children who may have multiple and complex needs.

Health organisations input into placements where required and where there is a health and social care need. Co-ordinated and timely decisions on services and funding are made between Commissioners to ensure the best outcomes for each child and family.

These need to include:

- shared responsibility around outcomes for the children who need health and social care support
- pooled resources in order to support funding pressures
- provides a joined up approach across social care and mental health which will create a more seamless service

Promotion of mental wellbeing and resilience for children and young people and their families and the prevention of mental ill-health developing, focuses on providing knowledge and skills to children and young people and parents. Enabling children and families to better manage mental wellbeing identify and respond well to emerging issues.

A review in partnership with the CCG is currently underway. This review will look to identify if what we have in place is an effective joint working model. There are children who may require support from a number of organisations due to their specific needs and we need to ensure that all needs can be supported together.

Education and wellbeing

Supporting children and young people with a learning disability and some children and young people who may require more help to learn and develop than others need emotional wellbeing to be a consideration when developing their education, health care plan (ECH).

Education has a positive relationship on physical and mental and emotional wellbeing and this is enhanced by our schools' support with general wellbeing for children and young people. Children and young people advancing from good quality teaching can be offered support to achieve their full potential and strive towards meeting their own aspirations. Education can provide spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical guidance, and can support and prepare children and young people for experiences in later life.

Some of our children in Stoke-on-Trent have access to joint health and education care packages through our Special Educational Needs and Disability service (SEND). When looking at sufficiency we will be considering how we can better integrate social care and education services for children with disabilities, those with behavioural issues and how education can be more robust for care leavers, SEND assessments will need to include a greater focus on preparation for adulthood and the transition pathways to adulthood.

Access and support services

Youth and community support and specialist services

Youth services help to support children and young people in care through positive enablers (for example sport). Youth services have helped children and young people who have been identified as being involved in or are at risk of offending or other destructive, deviant behaviours and can be preventative in supporting vulnerabilities around potential modern slavery, trafficking and gang affiliated abusive situations for children and young people. Putting energy and time into services that benefit mental and physical health also reduces self-harming, harming to others and creates a way of learning how to make and maintain positive relationships.

Youth Offending Team

Youth offending teams can offer guidance around certain choices children and young people make, their support can reduce overly sexualised behaviour (another form of self-harming). Being able to talk and stay in touch with these groups means children and young people can be assessed regularly on where they are, how they are feeling and if it is that they are reverting back into old behaviours. The Youth Offending Team can also access the safeguarding teams and NSPCC to offer the child and young person further advice and support.

Sex, teenagers and relationships services (STAR)

STAR provide accessible services where by young people have access to information and advice around relationships to help build resilience and improved decision making. They provide access to the C Card scheme, free contraception and a range of Individual and group sessions to discuss topics around sexual behaviour, choices, sexual diseases, how to form positive relationships and access to the teenage pregnancy team.

Substance misuse services (SAFE)

Working with children and families to build resilience and educating about substance misuse, there is the offer of group sessions, drop ins to discuss experiences of living and how to cope with someone with a substance misuse issue. Free confidential non-judgemental advice is provided around alcohol and substance misuse and the harm it can cause to young people and the people that are a part of their lives.

Short Breaks

Short breaks are designed around children with disabilities. Weekend short breaks respite ensures that parents of children with a disability are given a break from their caring responsibilities.

Short breaks for children with disabilities is our early intervention and prevention offer. Strong links with other short break providers and the social work team are evident, through the Multi-Agency Short Breaks Forum, and play support with the prevention of escalation to statutory services.

Direct Payments Support Service – with People Plus is also another avenue where by parents can access short breaks and respite via agency or the PA route.

Residential Short Breaks:

Our in-house unit, Woodview, is up to capacity with no planned moves until 2021; therefore, any overnight residential short break is currently spot purchased due to lack of capacity in our inhouse unit. Future commissioning work needs to be completed to understand demand in order to create further sufficiency in the City around short breaks/ respite.

Support for our most complex children is being spot purchased from agencies at high cost where it is available and where we have been unable to identify sufficient support, a joint commissioning arrangement with learning services and the CCG is required for purchasing support for these children, through Transforming Care to ensure we are meeting sufficiency.



Actions we will take



Ensure we effectively support providers to be able to support children/young people to develop and maintain relationships



Provide health services that will support resilience, build confidence for the child and support to achieve goals and ambitions



Promote CAMHS and other early intervention services to provide a wrap around of support



We need to be influencers to expand the market for specialist residential placement offers that can accommodate a wide range of complex needs



Creating therapeutic environments

Therapeutic environments for children in care are centered around having a staff team who are highly trained in areas such as; understanding the child's past experience(s), understanding trauma informed care, and detailed knowledge of attachment theories. Staff need to know how to provide the best support to children experiencing trauma in order to support their emotional needs and wellbeing, supporting the balance of physical and mental wellbeing.

The city council need to ensure internally with our own staff and externally where we use provider care provision that the training is equal so that the child has a more rounded package of care that suits their individual need so the support offered is right and purposeful for recovery.

The concept is to support the child's emotional health and well-being in order to be more productive in maximising their social and life skills, including education; building their resilience to future difficulties and providing support on how to manage these. All providers should have comprehensive assessments when the child enters the provision and a comprehensive support plan based on their individual needs, needs should be inclusive of therapy, preparation for adulthood, positive activities and motivational and emotional support.

Plans should involve the children and young people, and should be tailored, they should be able to access community services in order to support with maintaining positive relationships where they live and later in life as they grow.

Outcomes should be reviewed with children and young people to establish if they have been reaching towards their full educational potential, they are maintaining a healthy lifestyle, they take part in activities to keep themselves safe, they are learning to become resilient and have good coping mechanisms and are able to recognise and make good decisions.



Actions we will take



All staff are trained in therapeutic parenting principles, and have access to specialist additional training where needed



Develop purposeful therapeutic support plan and therapeutic action plans



Review plans regularly to ensure children are meeting their outcomes as needed in order to transition into adulthood



Maintaining important relationships

Ability to form and maintain relationships is essential to every child and young person in order to function well in society and throughout their Adult life. It is a key component to being mentally healthy, and having a positive sense of wellbeing.

Children and young people who are securely attached are better at managing their own feelings and behaviours, and able to relate to others better and therefore children that have had a poor start in life will struggle to develop emotional attachment in a positive way. This is true for children and young people of all ages, from the very early years through to the teenage years, which is why it is important to create nurturing, safe environments, which supports the offer of creating therapeutic environments for those in care.

The first two years of a baby's life are crucial to their development and future mental health and wellbeing. The brain is developing and it is at its most adaptable during these early years of life. So how we interact with the child can be critical for their healthy development, which is why when in care, children and young people need to be supported

The city council need to support children and young people with building and maintain good relationships and this will be from making sure they have a safe and non-judgemental environment to live in, and be comfortable with stability so that they can focus on re-connecting and maintaining contact with family. Maintaining important relationships can reduce risk taking behaviours without positive relationships risk taking behaviours like criminal activity or sexualised behaviour.



Give children and young people the tools to support maintaining healthy relationships



Widen access to support groups that can have a positive impact on mental and physical wellbeing



Make sure placement breakdowns are prevented by matching properly and ensuring all providers can offer therapeutic environments for children.

HOW WE WORK

We are committed to seeking and capturing the voice of children and young people to influence, develop and improve the quality of the services that they access.

We want to be open and honest with children about our services, and want to encourage them to be constructively critical in order for us to be able to drive change to give them better outcomes.

Listening and engaging with children and young people

There are a number of ways in which we collect feedback from children and young people to capture their views. There are groups and forums that are attended by both younger and older children, where they share experiences, debate about services and convey their wants needs and aspirations.

Other methods of engagement are through 1:1 social work interaction, statutory Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's), Parent Engagement Group (PEGiS) and through digital applications such as social media.

An example of participation where children and young people are able to share their views is the Children in Care Council (CICC) where they are involved in a range of activities including:

- Interviewing staff – their feedback is included in the decision-making process for appointments
- Interviewing foster carers – their views form part of our approval process for foster carers
- Our Children in Care Council have recently presented their life experiences of being in care at staff briefings. There was a focus of keeping the child in the centre of social work practice through bringing the journey of a child in care to life.
- Two young people recently attended the Corporate Parenting Panel and gave powerful accounts of their experience.



What have our Children and Young People been saying about their care and accommodation?



"I wouldn't change anything about my foster carer, she's great."

I was placed out of area it was too far away. I missed my family it was much better for me when I came back to Stoke.



I liked living with Mr E because I go out with a family who were lovely it would have been better if I could have had more contact with friends

Being placed in Stoke-on-Trent means it still feels homely even though you're not in the same house as your family and you have the familiarity of somewhere you know. New and current friends are not always too far away.



We have some great feedback! The children and young people feel involved in services; however, we can still improve and make it even better.

How can we listen and understand better?

We want to provide children and young people with the opportunity to become more involved, so we can fully understand their aspirations and expectations and utilise their innovative ideas which will give valued support in the development of current and future services. Young people's views will improve quality, and highlight where there are gaps in service.



Develop and Young Inspectors and Commissioners programme



Work with Councillors to create a Youth Parliament



Identify and implement ways to actively engage and co-produce with children and young people

Listening and engaging with carers, providers and partners

‘Stakeholders’ are everyone who uses, provides or interacts with services and has ideas about a service that can work better for the city.

We have internal partners in Housing, Public Health and Adult Social Care, as well as Councillors that get involved with our services, to ensure that they are fit for purpose, meet the needs of our communities and provide value for money. We include and work jointly with partners to share knowledge, information and resolve issues around services that need input from other areas of the city council. External stakeholders are inclusive of wider community, providers, emergency services, local businesses and other governing bodies, families and young people.

We collect feedback on current services, and there are forums in which providers can discuss services and experiences. An example of this is the Independent Fostering Association, which can be pro-active and vocal in supporting children’s needs around service improvement. However, we need to do this better to ensure all services are focused and capture the needs of the children and young people who use them.

Foster Carers Feedback

Below are some examples where by foster carers have described their experiences with children they are looking after.

“

Mrs B said:

“Fostering is about providing a template for how family life can be, to share that with young people so that when they go on to have their own children they know the environment to create for them. It is a hard job, but it is very rewarding. It is about giving a child life experience – experiences that we may have taken for granted in our own childhood, which they have never had. It’s helping children have the chance to have a brighter future

”

There is a couple that have been fostering for 12 years in Stoke-on-Trent. In that time, they have provided long-term foster care for five young teenage boys to give them the support they need as they reach independence as an adult. They have also provided respite care for other families and have taken two short-term placements.

“

Mr P added:

“As an association we are making great strides working alongside the management at the council. I sit on the corporate parenting board and attend the West Midlands forum. I went through the care system as a child and I have worked in nursing. We need more foster carers to come forward to support children in the city.”

”

Another couple have fostered more than 80 children over the past 17 years. One is the chair of the Foster Carers Association and the other chairs the association's buddy service which has grown to 13 members since it launched three years ago – a service which brings foster carers together to share experiences and provides emotional support.

“

Mrs R said:

“We have supported a lot of children from birth right up to the age of 18. A lot of our work now is with the parent and their child, so for example we have been supporting a young teenage mum straight from giving birth. It is another side to fostering that people may not realise is needed, but we need more people to come forward.

”

Actions we will take



Actively engage with all key stakeholders throughout the whole commissioning process, including reviews, service development and quality monitoring and improvement



Identify innovative ways to co-produce and improve services to maximise input from a wide range of stakeholders



Work with all key stakeholders to understand the support they require and how we can work together to improve the lives of the children and young people within the city

Co-producing services

Engaging, consulting and co-producing with children and young people, community and other stakeholders will provide a positive impact around outcomes for children.

Current ways of engagement	New ways to engage
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CICC• PEGIS• Mind of My Own (APP)• Participation Officers• 1:1's with social workers• Social Media• Statutory visits by IRO's• Interviewing Panels for foster care providers• Engagement around policy• Engagement around working practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being part of interviewing panels for social workers, providers of all services that involve children and young people• Attending Tender Panels• Interviewing future providers• Observing provider presentations and providing feedback• Asking their own questions on panels• Research - what good looks like• Participation with the Quality Assurance Team on visits• Use new technologies to give input into how they want to engage and what they want to use• Creating young commisisoners• Enable school representatives to be part of engagement

Benefits to Children and Young people and the City Council

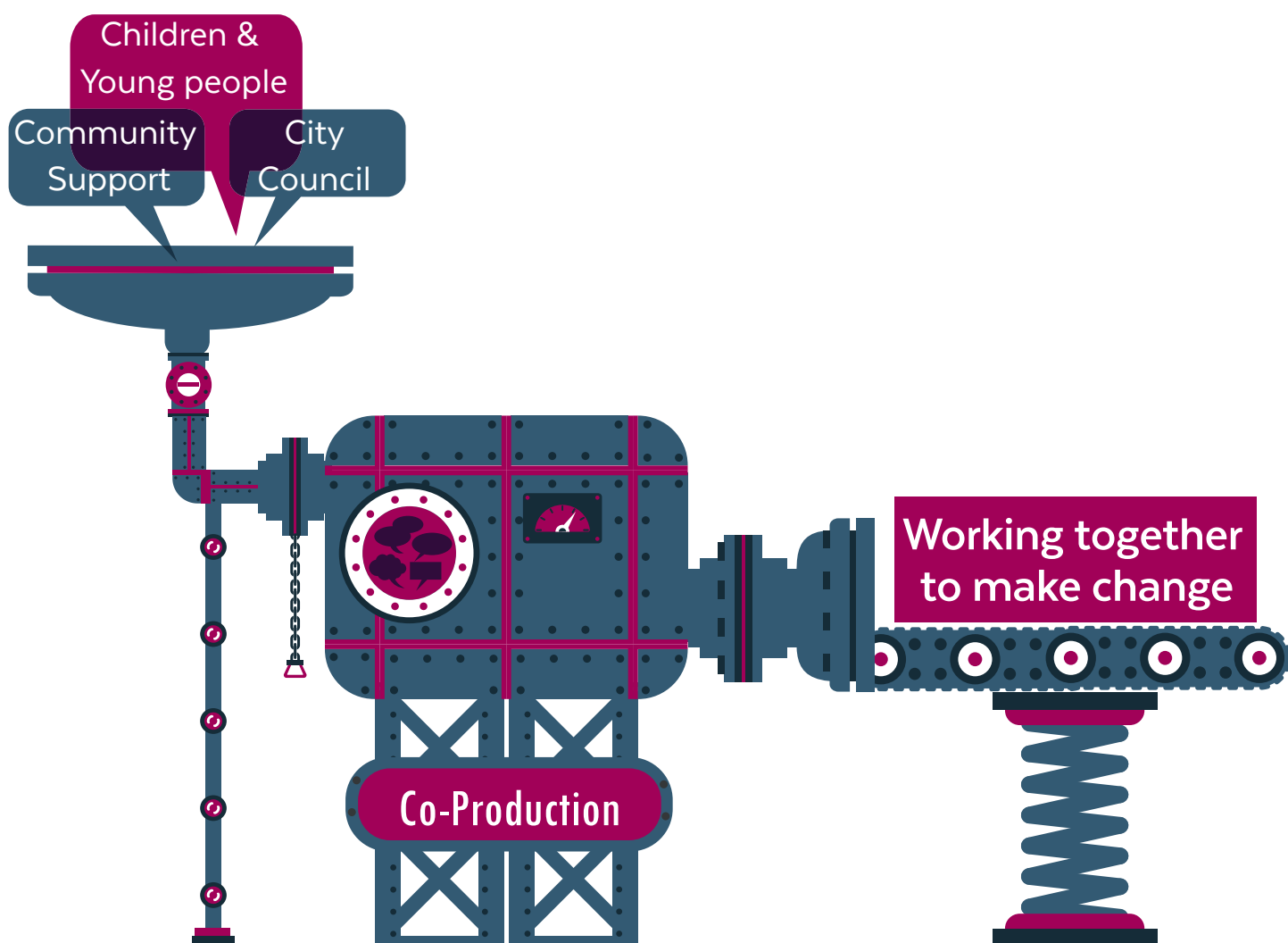
- More say in services
- More say in who they have to deal with on a day to day basis
- More information around communication and how it needs to be done
- More reponsibility around their own care planning
- More say around access to activities
- Learned life skills around work values
- More understanding on how councils create the services they use
- Councils can be more focused around specific need
- Councils will have more insight into how to create outcomes that are meaningful and improve health and wellbeing
- We will have more understanding around accommodation
- All services will have more understanding around what is important to children

How engagement can support co-production

Our aspirations as a city council is to change the culture around how services are designed for children and young people. We want all our children and young people to have an active voice and input into the decisions made about them, by making them together. Children and young people can provide direct lived experiences, identifying what is needed to promote change around the quality of services and supporting positive changes for future service delivery.

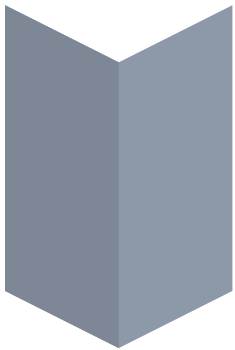
Co-production with community partnerships for children and young people

We want to be bolder, more focused and innovative on how we engage and co-produce with young people. We want to work with young people themselves and organisations with more experience in youth co-production such as Ruff and Ruby and YMCA to create a new young people's co-production and engagement programme, with particular focus on Children in Care.



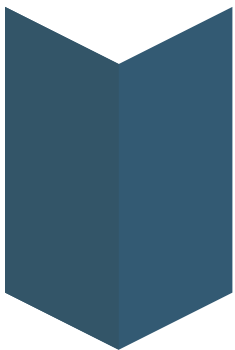
What does co-production with community look like for Children and Young People?

- Encouraging mentoring, giving the children opportunity to be influencers of the city and encourage other children in care to use their voice
- Increase opportunities for volunteering, educational support and work experiences to support with life skills
- Children in care and young people getting involved in local community events gives opportunity to input on shaping their city and local environment
- Provide mentoring and buddies for children in care from older leaving care members who can help them and understand services
- Support from businesses around life experiences, with mentoring, training, counselling and advocacy support
- More local faith group support and guidance
- More say around service delivery as businesses will learn what is important to children and young people



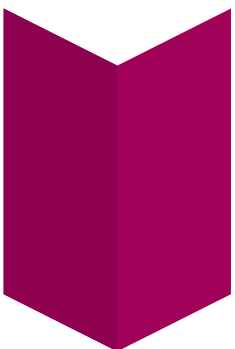
Current Engagment

- Associations are set up for providers
- Access to social workers
- Good relationships with the placement teams
- Annual reviews of services



New ways to engage

- Sharing experiences
- Understand what trends and themes create blockages around placements
- Better feedback mechanisms in place around quality assurance
- Regular monitoring discussions
- Open door approach -access to Commissioners
- Postive participation in reviews
- Opportunity to discuss provider issues



Benefits

- Better services for children
- Better quality services
- Good relationships to negotiate packages
- Training to manage difficult placements
- Reduced placement breakdown
- More joined up working
- Creation of provider networks that can access community advice
- Review support, encouraging recognition of step up and step down options

Co-production with stakeholders- creating better outcomes for Children and Young People

Offering Foster Carers and stakeholders more access to local voluntary services and linking them in with faith groups and small counselling and advocacy services can offer a more rounded offer for children and young people. Foster Carers can become more experienced in meeting children and young people's outcomes through being able to gather their own information and advice. It would build confidence in taking on more difficult placements and support placement breakdowns. Foster Carers and providers will also be able to plan better, using employment and education advice from the community assets for each child that may be moving towards leaving care.



Develop a co-production service to work with children and young people



Provide and embed training for staff on co-production and its importance



Work with all stakeholders to understand the importance of co-production and how they can influence and shape services

KEY ENABLERS

Our key enablers identified in this section will support us in achieving our ambitious plans for the future of children services, joint working will assist us to deliver great outcomes for children, the key enablers will broaden our sufficiency offer and improve on what we already have in place for children in care.

Workforce

Stoke-on-Trent city council will invest to unlock the potential of the current and future workforce providing skills and training, and match those skills to employment opportunities in children services. We also need to support agencies to upskill the workforce to manage more challenging young people and those with complex disabilities to support placement stability and permanency.



Develop clear process and paperwork for operational colleagues to follow for complex case panel discussions.



Work with the market to ensure services are available to meet the needs of our children and young people.



Understand services to recognise what training requirements they need to meet complex needs of children and young people

Effective commissioning

A restructure within the Local Authority to integrate the commissioning and quality improvement of adults, children and public health services has taken place. The new structure has created a dedicated children's commissioning team covering 0-25 years, with an overlapping commissioning team covering 18+ years to ensure consideration for those in transition.

This team will develop commissioning practices that evidence robust decision making, ensure services are effective and offer value for money and will support operational teams to develop processes and identify gaps in provision.

The Quality Monitoring and Improvement Team now includes children's brokerage function who will negotiate placements and ensure that children are placed in the most appropriate setting. These functions also include contract management, design and development of monitoring tools and schedules, tracking themes to support safeguarding and low-level concerns.



Develop quality assurance schedules for all services



Develop relationships with providers and support with contracts



Engage with young people to capture voice and use to review service



Children's panels and decision-making processes

We ensure that we are making the right decisions for our children and young people, using the right information, from the right people at the right time. We do this through a range of means including our panels where we agree the decisions for starting, changing or continuing a placement and the planning needed to make this happen.

We know that these panels are vital in making sure that the right decisions are made using the voice of the young person, social worker knowledge, wider professional network and commissioning and brokerage expertise.

The city council have several panels that are utilised to discuss children in care, children on the edge of care and care leavers. Relevant attendees are at the meetings to ensure the correct decisions are made. The members of the panels have excellent knowledge of universal services we have available and this ensures that we are not commissioning services when we already have these in place.


We have recently reviewed the term of reference for these panels.

We are planning to do further work around protocols and pathways for decision making processes around these panels. The aim of these reviews and changes are:


- Improve multi-agency information sharing to enable effective decision making
- Improve our brokerage and market management process
- Ensure effective use of resources




Actions we will take



Ensure that the new governance arrangements for panels are implemented and reviewed to ensure improvements in decision making.



Review roles and responsibilities of those involved in the panel decision making process to ensure that this is transparent and effective.



Ensure that the trends identified at panels around individual children are used to effectively plan for future needs to commission services.



Community organisations supporting children in care

Our community and voluntary sector in Stoke, have a huge part to play in supporting children to be supported by their family and wider community. Children in care vitally need the support of our wider community organisations, as well as their foster carers or residential homes.

We need to ensure we connect more effectively our voluntary and community sector organisations, including faith groups to support the various elements of this strategy; including wider support networks for children in care, publicising support to community organisations to offer support and supporting recruitment of foster carers from our communities.



Link in with small businesses, third sector organisations and faith groups in order to publicise and promote offer for our children and young people



Involve communities of all six towns in order to encourage buy in into the changes to the childrens services offer



Create social value opportunities through our In - house and commissioned services in order to support and give back to communities

Joint working with housing

The needs of children and young people are currently considered and included Housing Strategies and Policies in relation to accommodation settings, however more co-production working is required to enable the city council to have new housing initiatives.

Social care will be actively involved in working with Housing partners and collaborating to ensure that children's needs are captured when mapping accommodation requirements across the city. Joint working will improve on the sufficiency duties and be considerate of the permanency strategy and the children's looked after strategy.

Collaboration will mean:

- Active involvement and input into the current Housing stock
- Reviewing a home's suitability against need as a council (inclusive of social care need from children's services)
- Provision of access to Housing Officers to advise and work with social care to increase accommodation that will allow for larger group foster placements
- Give more opportunities to grow local foster carers – suitable accommodation is key
- More choice to care leavers on accommodation settings
- Housing support where required to families that may have children on the edge of care where by accommodation is a factor



Actions we will take



Improved communication between operational, housing partners and commissioning teams



Briefings around Housing related services to brief operational children's services staff



Link in with operational staff to support with reviewing the service

Asset based property management will also be an important factor in order to develop children's services. The city council need to be able to deliver services from appropriate and cost-effective buildings. Buildings across the city can support with Early Help and Prevention services and strengthen community level partnership working around community and locality hubs which could include support to disabled children and their families and could improve the quality of front-line services.



Actions we will take



Develop links with property management services to establish what is available in order to support community services and more statutory services



Align the property management to service need, challenging the use of property and continually review assets



Accurate property data in place. Efficient and effective property processes, including good governance arrangements



Finance and resources

We recognise that we need to utilise financial resources effectively when commissioning placements.

- Panel structures need to be designed to support multi-agency decision making where appropriate
- To ensure that multi-agency placements identify agreed fee breakdown and any education and / or health contributions are agreed in advance of the placements being made
- An effective scheme of delegation needs to be in place to ensure that managers and panel members act within financial regulations
- To develop brokerage skills to ensure that they have the ability to effectively negotiate any spot purchase packages of care
- To ensure that wherever possible placements are made using agreed frameworks and fees are based on individual need
- Ensure that we are maximising the resources available considering the full range of commissioning processes:



Ensure the Regional Framework brings efficiencies



Work with local providers around our local arrangements and costings



Ensure effective processes are in place around brokerage and that panel decisions around individual packages of care are based on the needs of the child

TURNING THE VISION INTO REALITY

The city council will be responsible for implementation of a delivery plan that can drive forward the 'Actions We Will Take' within this document. The Sufficiency Strategy will be reviewed annually, actions will be monitored in order to ensure we are effective around sufficiency.



Supporting young peoples needs

- Actively engage with children and young people and co-produce services
 - Fully understand the needs of the children and young people within the city to ensure that service provision reflects the diverse needs
-



Working together to make a difference

- Develop positive working relationships with all stakeholders to provide seamless services, appropriate support and that resources are effectively utilised
 - Reduce the number of children entering care, increase the number of children rehabilitated back home
-



Market development

- Work with providers to develop an understanding of the care market and how we can better work together to meet the needs of children and young people
 - To develop frameworks with local providers to better utilise resources, improve quality and to keep children locally where appropriate
-



Reviewing to make sure we are doing it right

- To develop a robust quality assurance framework to ensure that we can improve quality, ensure contractual requirements are delivered and prevent placement breakdown
 - Where the children cannot live at home ensure that the placements are suitable and match and have cultural and diversity considerations applied before placing
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Overcoming financial challenges

- To effectively, pool resources in order to support funding pressures
- Forward plan and fully utilise resources and negotiate price based on individual need

CONCLUSION

Stoke-on-Trent is committed to ensuring our children and young people in care are able to fulfil their potential; socially, educationally, emotionally and financially. We know that to improve young people in care's experiences and outcomes we need to ensure young people are actively involved in the commissioning, delivery and review of services and this needs to happen developmentally, however at pace.

There are elements of this strategy which link in with other Children's Improvement Strategy themes and wider council priorities, this will act as an enabler to ensure we effectively deliver to agreed outcomes and timescales.

The actions identified in this strategy and action plan will be monitored through different programmes around commissioning and practice and will link to the Children's Improvement Plan.





City of
Stoke-on-Trent