

Stoke-on-Trent Children's Services

# Sufficiency Needs Assessment and Strategy

September 2023 – March 2028



# 1. FOREWORD

**When children are cared for by Stoke-on-Trent City Council they mostly live in great homes with great carers and get the help they need to live happy, healthy lives.**

However, there are high numbers of children in our care and this reflects the complex pressures that many of our families face. We believe that almost every child could be better off with their birth families and it is our mission to reduce the number of children we care for, not by reducing our safety standards, but by improving the support we give to struggling families.

Our outlier status tells us we need to change some of our ways of working if we are to achieve the very best for all of our children.

We also know that not all our children and young people are living in the right homes and getting the right support for them to thrive.

This strategy sets out how we plan to make sure that everyone we care for, gets the homes, help, care and support that they need, when they need it.

This Sufficiency Strategy and Plan is aligned with our overall Ofsted improvement plan and recognises how other activity will support more of our families to safely care for their children.


This strategy and plan only form one part of the work we are doing to improve outcomes for our children when in care. For example, we are also working closely with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to improve how children and young people get support when their health causes them difficulties.

This Strategy is a living document that we will update and adapt in response to changing needs of our cared for children. It will guide our future commissioning and help us ensure we create the best possible system to care for our children and young people.

## 2. AMBITIONS

The Ofsted inspection in 2019 highlighted significant issues with the way that children were kept safe in the City.

Reassuringly a follow up inspection in October 2022 found that:



Services to children in care and care leavers in Stoke-on-Trent have improved significantly since the inspection in 2019. There is a focus on achieving permanence, with an increasing number of children placed with adopters, special guardians and long-term foster carers. This provides children with the necessary stability to flourish.

Now is the right time to maintain our safety thresholds while tilting our corporate emphasis towards more preventive and early help work.

We do this because:

Children who grow up in safe family homes, generally have better outcomes than those who are cared for by the Local Authority.

Stoke-on-Trent is committed to ensuring all of our children can develop the skills and attributes to grow into happy, healthy, fulfilled adults.

## Our ambitions can be summarised as:

- ✓ We will help our children to maintain family relationships and live in the family home unless to do so is unsafe. We will prioritise keeping children safe within the family home. When that proves unachievable, we will work with young people and their families where there is the potential for those young people to move back to the family home or live with other family members.
- ✓ When in our care, we want our children to live in local homes, in local communities and to be attending local schools and colleges, wherever it is safe for them to do so.
- ✓ Whatever the care context, we want our children and young people to have every opportunity and the support they need to be the best they possibly can be.
- ✓ We will give our children stability, understanding, encouragement, positive relationships, and help them to heal from past harm.
- ✓ We will support our children to build resilience and adopt aspirational goals.
- ✓ We will provide practical and emotional support to help our young people grow into adulthood where they will thrive.
- ✓ We will support young people to build meaningful and long-lasting relationships with people they live with and who support them.
- ✓ We will ensure that our social workers and staff are trained to be the best they can be, to care for and support children and young people in our care and who leave our care.

**To achieve our vision, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and its partners will embrace the following values:**



Children and young people's safety are the most important thing for us



Family life matters and wherever possible we want our children and young people living in loving families that are supported to thrive.



We listen to children and young people's needs and wishes and try to act on what they tell us



Children and young people should feel loved and cared for



We believe in our children and young people, especially when they appear not to believe in themselves and will work relentlessly to help them all to fulfil their potential



Things can always get better!



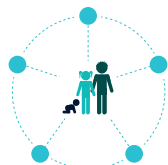
Children and young people's behaviour is a form of communication. Our role is to understand what they are communicating and to respond in a way that helps; we do not just react



Children and young people are most likely to thrive when all key partners collaborate in order to meet their needs.

### 3. KEY ACTIONS

Stoke-on-Trent City Council will:



#### **Work to enable children to remain safely cared for within their families and communities**

- Strengthen our reunification offer so that more young people have the opportunity to live successfully in the family home again having been brought into care.
- Review how we can use Early Help services, parenting support and contextual safeguarding, to enable more children aged 10 to 15 to safely remain at home.
- Review our work with diverse communities to better understand why numbers in care from some ethnic groups differ significantly from local demographics.



#### **Partnership working**

- Collaborate with our local ICB to reduce the number of occasions that children enter care because of parental ill health.
- Explore reasons for Stoke-on-Trent having more young children in care than might be expected. This will concentrate on those system issues that we can affect so that families are better able to cope with the multiple difficulties of living in a city that experiences substantial deprivation.
- Work with statutory partners to review services for children where there are concerns about harmful sexual behaviour, identifying the need for additional service development
- Work with partners to strengthen Pathways for children with high levels of need for mental health support, including pathways for receiving and stepping down from Tier 4 Mental Health Provision.
- Continue to work with the ICB to ensure joint funding panels are timely and effective, focussing on improving outcomes for children.
- We will work with Adult Services and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to develop access to high quality, homecare that can support children to stay at home or help in a crisis. We will work across adult social care and health to develop a new all-age care at home service to support vulnerable children and adults, We will secure this at the best value currently available in the market.
- We will ensure that all those with a corporate parenting responsibility, including our partners in the police, schools and health come together to agree how to jointly provide the care our children need. A City-wide response is needed to improve the quality of life for our children.



## Fostering and adoption

- Improve our offer for our local foster carers, particularly for those who look after multiple children with the intention of reducing reliance on private agencies
- Review the initial training and CPD for our foster carers so that more of them are trained as therapeutic carers.
- Recruit a greater number of foster carers from non-white backgrounds.
- Support our foster carers to become Staying Put hosts where this is right for young people. We will hope to see our rates of Staying Put increasing until they are broadly in line with the national average (62%)
- Improve our partnerships with local Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and seek to establish agreements with them to preference children from Stoke-on-Trent, when vacancies arise in our city.
- Grow the number of children that can be cared for by in-house foster carers by 2% each year. We acknowledge that this will be a challenging target to achieve, as it will be against a national trend of a decrease of 4% in fostering households and 5% in approved fostering places since 2018
- Maintain high numbers of children being adopted.



## Residential Childrens home and supported accommodation provision

- Remodel our in-house children's home provision so that it is able to reliably care for those we find hardest to help. This will include considering whether they should operate as therapeutic communities.
- Open one additional four bed home in 2024/25 and following a review of this, consider proposing a second in 2025/26. Additionally, we will expand our respite home to create a long-term home for up to six children with complex disabilities.
- Reduce need for temporary and agency staff through a review of our recruitment and retention processes with a specific focus on children's homes.
- Become a preferred customer of local children's homes so that fewer of our children have to live away from Stoke-on-Trent.
- Develop meaningful strategic relationships with a smaller number of children's home providers in order to better be able to match our children to good quality homes in the region. As part of this we will explore the development of flexible, soft block contracts with our preferred providers and will recognise where not for profit organisations are able to offer better value for money than those who are oriented to maximising profits.
- We will ensure minimal voids in our children's homes and we will monitor closely ensure that we can maximise SGH usage and thus avoid the need for external homes.
- Children's Services will work with Housing and Adult Services to jointly commission a range of Supported Accommodation that young people can stay in until 21 and that can meet the range of needs that our young people have.
- Review and then develop its offer to young people leaving care and homeless young people using the framework developed by St Basils and Barnardo's.

# 4. CHILDREN IN CARE

## - THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Nationally and locally there has been a growth in the number of children in care

The number of children in care in England has risen from **75,360** in 2018 to **82,170** in 2022, an increase of **9%**

Over the same period, the increase in Stoke-on-Trent was an extraordinary

**38%**

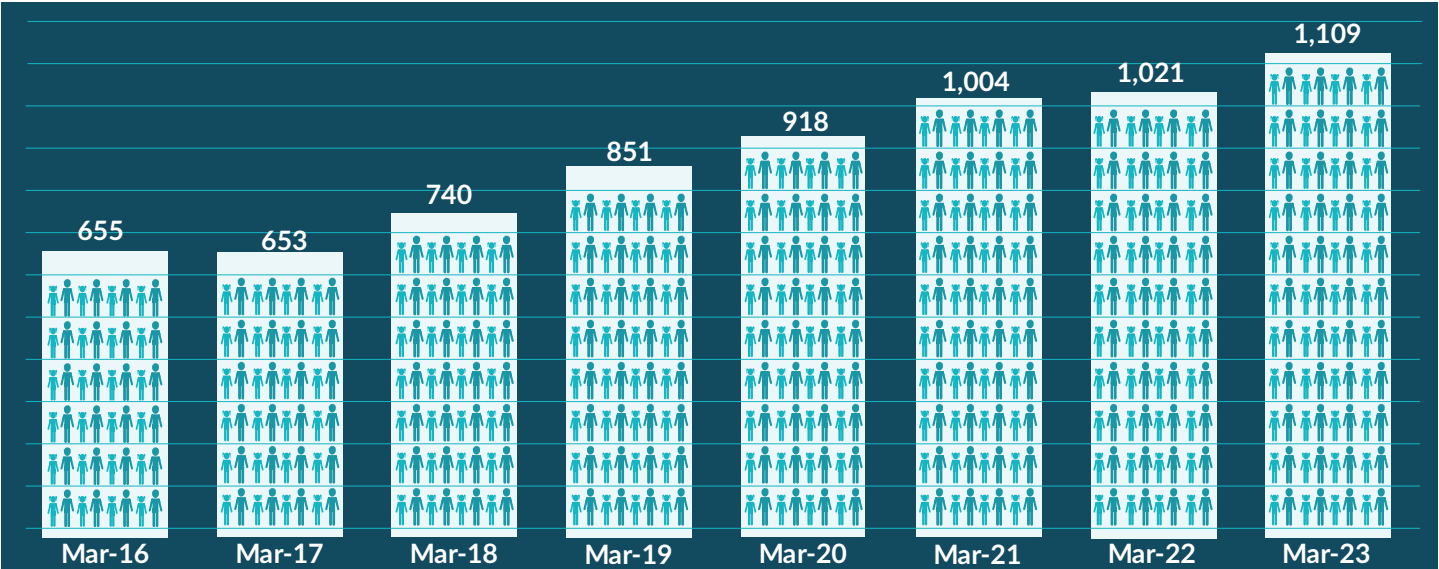
The number of children from Stoke-on-Trent who are in care has increased from **610** in March 2015 to **1,109** in March 2023



The reasons for this large increase in numbers are complex and merits further detailed investigation. In the early period, through to 2019, the increases were in significant part down to poor practice as referenced in the Ofsted ILACs inspection in 2019.

As Stoke-on-Trent improved its children’s services, it has been consistently found to be bringing the right children into care as it responds to many situations where children needed protecting. The main reasons now lie further upstream in terms of the wider pressures on families and the significant reduction in family support services due to budget reductions over the last decade.

Chart 1: Number of Children in Care





To understand Stoke-on-Trent’s position more clearly, we can compare ourselves against other councils which are considered similar. These are called statistical neighbours.

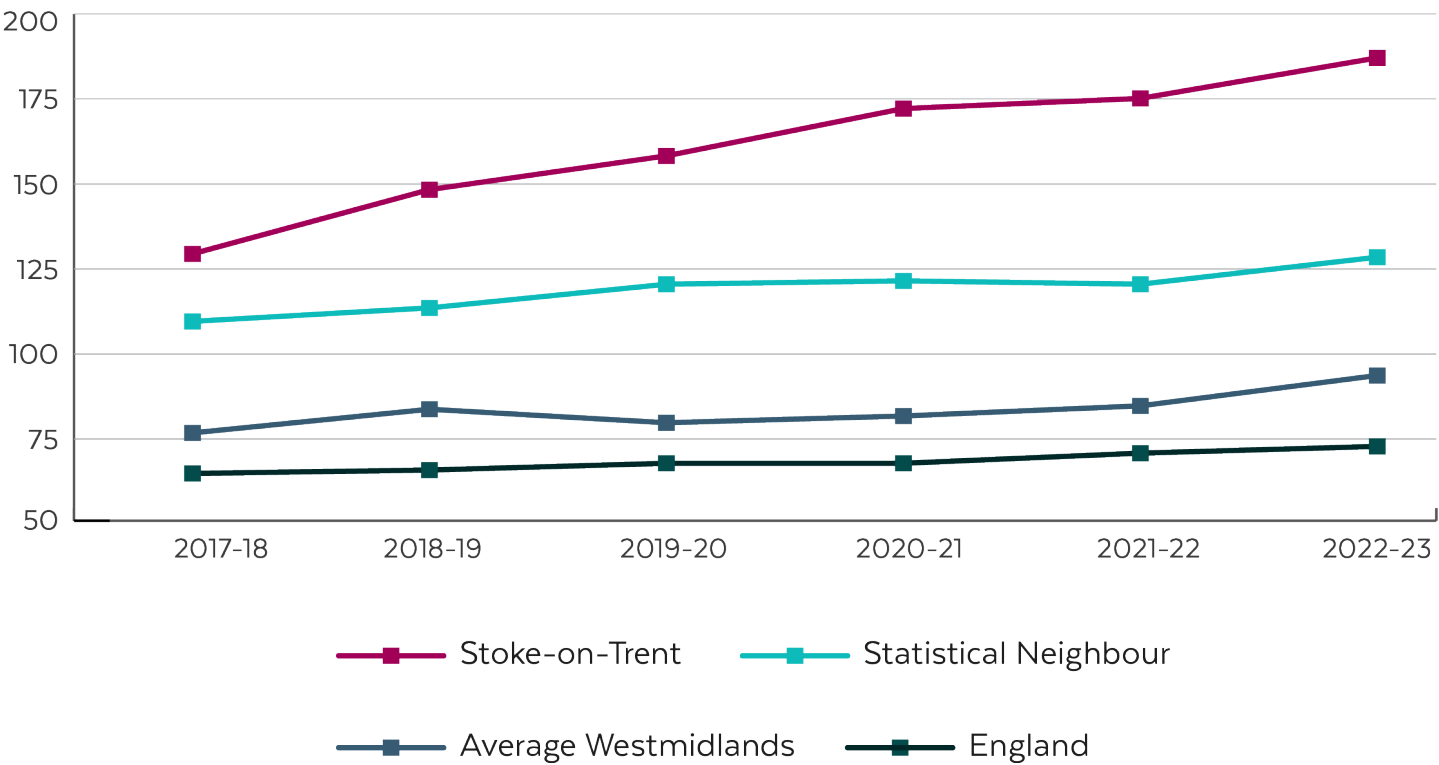
Stoke-on-Trent’s statistical neighbours are:

- Barnsley
- Blackpool
- Doncaster
- Kingston upon Hull
- Middlesbrough
- North East Lincolnshire
- Rochdale
- Rotherham
- Tameside and
- Walsall.

National data from November 2022 (Chart 2), shows the comparative rates of children in care per 10,000 children, for Stoke-on-Trent, our statistical neighbours, the West Midlands region and England as a whole.

Chart 2, clearly shows how, from what was already a high baseline in 2017, the increase in the rate at which children come into care has been greater in Stoke-on-Trent than in other areas. Only one of Stoke-on-Trent’s statistical neighbours, NE Lincolnshire, had a higher rate and no council in the West Midlands region has a higher rate.

**Chart 2: Children in Care – Rate per 10,000**

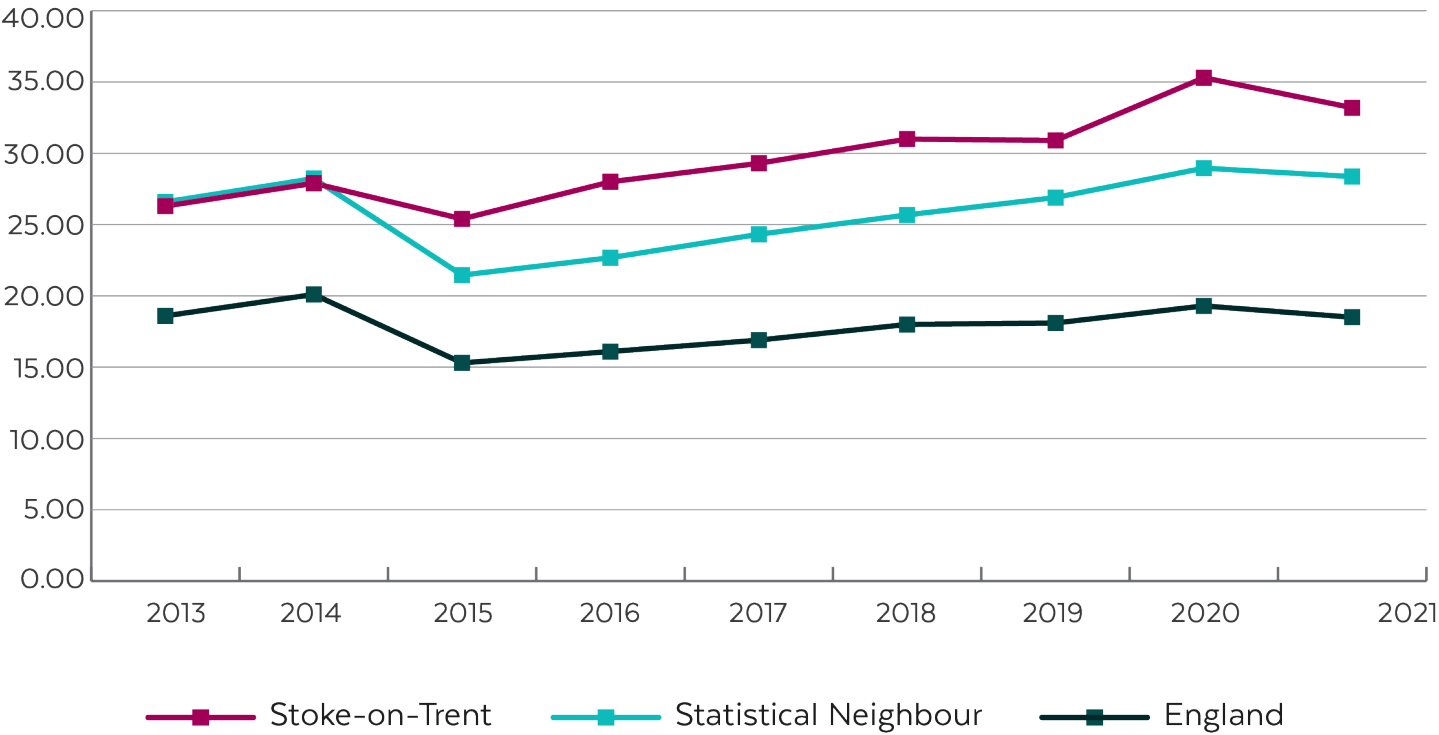


A study by the University of Liverpool and published in the BMJ showed that high rates of poverty and deprivation are associated with higher rates of children being in care. (Bennett DL, Mason KE, Schlüter DK, et al. Trends in inequalities in Children Looked After in England between 2004 and 2019: a local area ecological analysis. BMJ Open 2020;10:e041774. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2020-041774)

**Stoke-on-Trent has a relatively high proportion of children living in poverty. The percentage living in poverty increased from 27% in 2013 to 33% in 2022.**

Chart 3 shows the percentage of children living in low income families when measured against Stoke-on-Trent’s statistical neighbours. This table is created using data provided by the Government, this is the most recent data provided at local government level.

**Chart 3: Percentage of Children in Low Income Families**



Using the latest available data, from 2022, Stoke-on-Trent has the ninth most children living in poverty in England.

**Table 1: The local authorities with the highest proportions of children aged under 16 in Relative and Absolute low income families, England, financial year ending 2022**

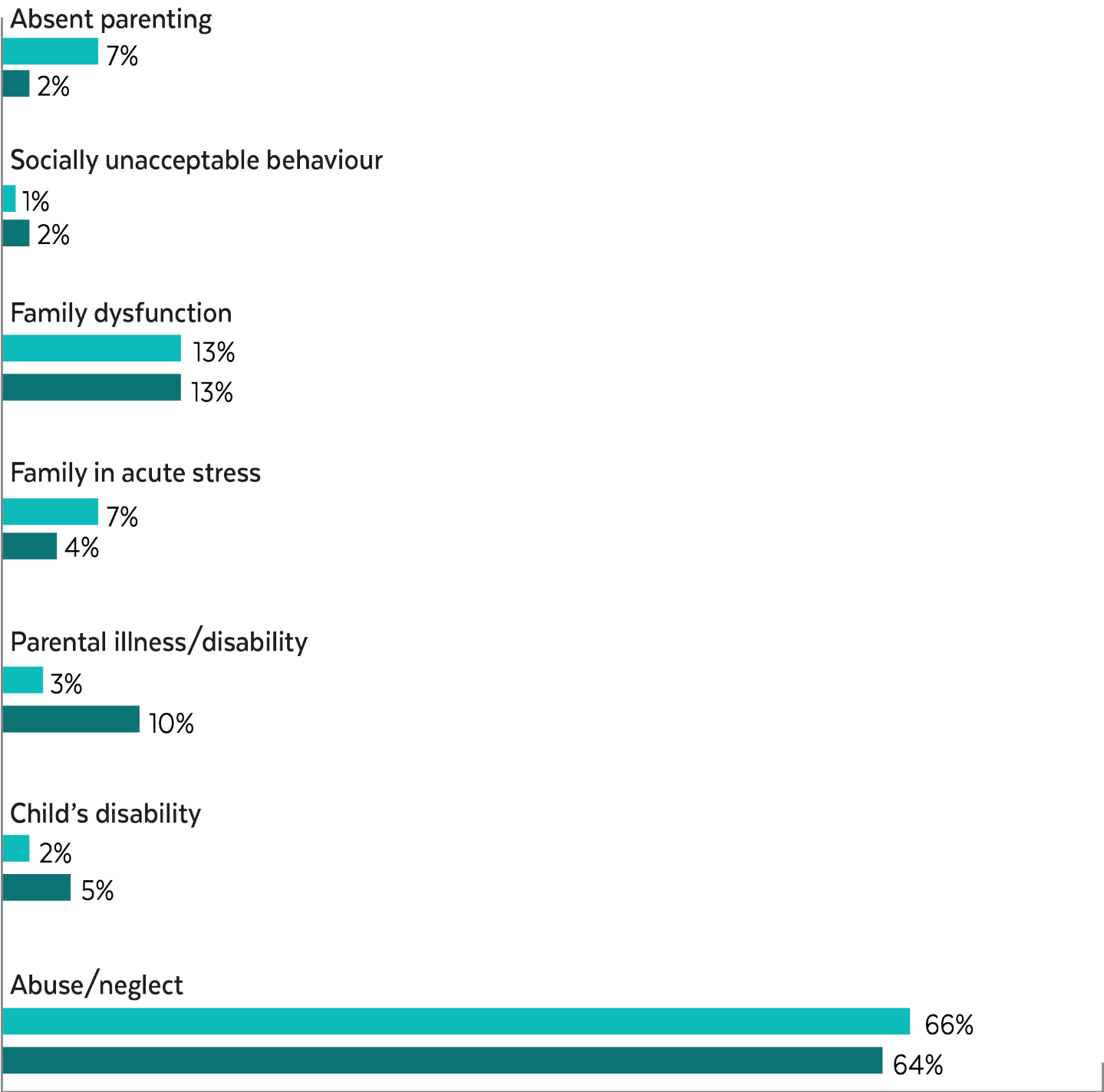
Local Authority	Relative - proportion of children (%)	Absolute - proportion of children (%)
Leicester	41.7	35.3
Nottingham	40.9	33.9
City of London	40.8	38.9
Birmingham	38.6	31.5
Pendle	38.5	28.7
Oldham	38.5	28.9
Middlesbrough	37.4	31.8
Blackburn with Darwen	36.5	25.8
<b>Stoke-on-Trent</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>29.0</b>
Bradford	35.6	28.9



Chart 4 shows that most children in Stoke-on-Trent are in care because of abuse or neglect. This matches the national picture; however, it is notable that more children in our area are also cared for because of their own or a parent’s disability or illness.

**We will collaborate with our local ICB to ensure that health provision for at risk families is as effective as possible including ensuring a joined up approach with health to meeting the needs of our families.**

Chart 4: Reasons why children are in care





Another reason why we have so many children in care is that they tend to be in care for longer than the England average of 895 days (year ending March 2022). During the same period, Stoke-on-Trent children were in care on average for 1,080 days (an additional six months). In 22/23 the length of time our children were in care rose again to 1,264 days. This demonstrates the scale of work that often needs to be undertaken once a threshold is reached for involvement of statutory services. A sharper focus on multiagency support to families, both before and after statutory involvement, would likely contribute towards reducing the length of time children need to remain in care.

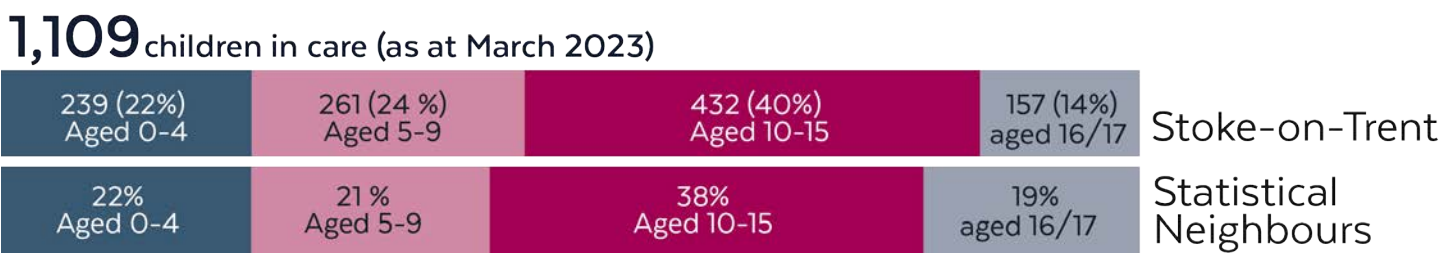
Children's Social Care (CSC) are reviewing all children in foster care for 2 plus years, who are both long term matched and not long term matched, to work to secure Special Guardianship Orders where this is in keeping with the child's best interests and to progress long-term matching for children who are not yet long-term matched. Children in residential placements are reviewed on a regular cycle to support step-down into foster care where this is in keeping with their plan.

We are also introducing a reunification team who will ensure that when children are able to return home, they do so safely and promptly.



# 5. WHO ARE OUR CHILDREN IN CARE AND WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

The age of Stoke-on-Trent’s children in care on 31st March 2023 is shown in the graphic below.



46% of our cared for children are aged under nine years of age compared with 43% in our statistical neighbours.

Table 2 shows the ages of children who entered and left care in 2022-23. The greatest number of children were those aged under five, which is primarily linked to safeguarding issues and the vulnerability of the child.

Although the greatest number of children entering care were aged under five, the greatest area of growth is the age range 10-15 years. This reflects the difficulties of helping older children who have often had very traumatic backgrounds.

Table 2: Ages of children entering and leaving care

Age Range	0-4	5-9	10-15	16 / 17	Total
Entered Care	111	35	80	24	250
Left Care	83	44	34	20	181
Difference	+28	-9	+46	+4	+69

We will review with partners how we can use universal services, support services, parenting support and contextual safeguarding, to enable more of this cohort of children to safely remain at home

Table 3 shows where children live when they come into care.

The table shows that 252 children entered care in 22 / 23 and are still in care.

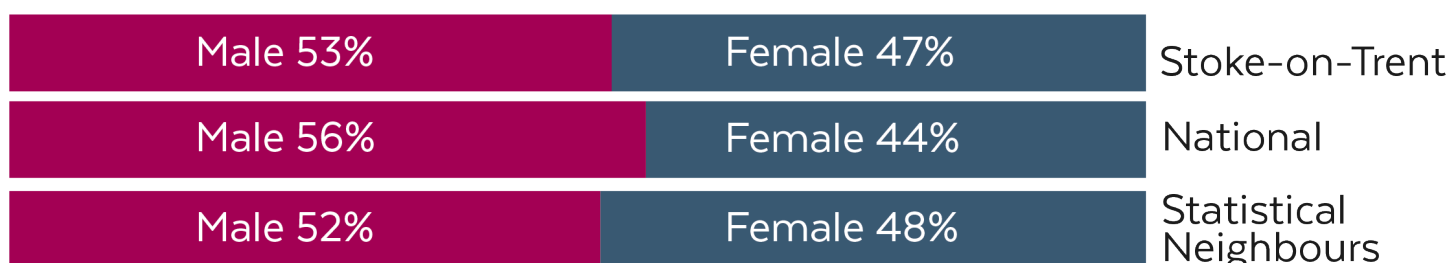
The proportion living in children's homes or Supported Accommodation is 14% which compares favourably with the national average of 16% but the volume is still very high.

69% of Stoke-on-Trent children are in foster care which is very similar to the national average of 70%. Approximately 34% of foster placements are with Independent Fostering Agencies.

**Table 3: Where children who entered care between April 2022 and March 2023 are living**

Age Range	0 - 1	1 - 5	5 - 10	10 -15	16 / 17	Total
Connected Person Foster Care	4	14	5	18	3	<b>44 (17%)</b>
Parent & Child	2	0	0	0	0	<b>2 (&lt;1%)</b>
Foster Carer	27	36	26	24	10	<b>123 (49%)</b>
Foster to adopt	7	0	0	0	0	<b>7 (3%)</b>
Placed for adoption	3	2	0	0	0	<b>5 (2%)</b>
Placed with Parents	0	9	8	16	1	<b>34 (13%)</b>
Children's Home	0	0	3	13	8	<b>24 (10%)</b>
Supported Accommodation	0	0	0	0	11	<b>11 (4%)</b>
Custody	0	0	0	1	1	<b>2 (&lt;1%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34</b>	

The gender of children in care has been stable over the past five years -



Stoke-on-Trent is very similar to statistical neighbours but differs significantly from the national average. We have a lower proportion of males in our care and a higher proportion of females.

It is not clearly understood why there is this difference, however the fact that it is repeated across the region suggests that it need not be a cause for concern.

The ethnicity of children in care has been stable over the same time period.

Children with Asian heritage appear underrepresented in our care population when compared with local demographics.

Children from mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds appear overrepresented in our care population. This mirrors the national picture where it has been noted that children from Black, Mixed and Other ethnic groups are overrepresented. (Owen and Statham (2009) Disproportionality in Child Welfare The Prevalence of Black and Minority Ethnic Children within the ‘Looked After’ and ‘Children in Need’ Populations and on Child Protection Registers in England)

**Table 4: Ethnicity of Children in care**

	Percentage of Care Population	Percentage of the total Stoke-on-Trent Population
Asian/Asian British	4%	10%
Black/Caribbean/Black British	3%	3%
Mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds	11%	2%
White	80%	83%
Other/Not Available	2%	2%

**We will review our work with diverse communities to better understand why numbers in care from some ethnic groups differ significantly from local demographics.**

**Over 95% of the City’s foster carers are from a White British background. Stoke-on-Trent City Council needs to recruit a greater number of foster carers from non-white backgrounds.**



The majority of Stoke-on-Trent's children in care, 848 (78%), live in the city or within 20 miles of their home address.

There are 246 children who live further than 20 miles from their home address. These children mostly live in the West Midlands, but some are placed further away as they need to access specialist services or their family members, who are their carers, live further away. Children who are able to live locally, generally have better outcomes than those who become disconnected from their local communities. We will continue to try to secure local homes for our children where appropriate.

Table 5 shows proportion of children in care living with Stoke-on-Trent based carers. These carers are provided by the City Council or by private companies. There has been an increasing trend to source care within the city.

**Table 5: Proportion of Stoke-on-Trent children living in local provision**

	2018/19	2019-20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Children living with Stoke-on-Trent Carers	323	381	282	422	533
Proportion living with Stoke-on-Trent based carers	38%	42%	28%	41%	48%
<b>Total in Care</b>	<b>851</b>	<b>918</b>	<b>1,004</b>	<b>1,021</b>	<b>1,109</b>

Stoke-on-Trent currently purchases foster care for 369 children from Independent Fostering Agencies. Of these 369 children and young people 274 are living outside of the city with a total of 173 foster carers.

In April 2023, 18 IFAs had a presence within the city. There are 92 IFA fostering households. These families are approved to look after a maximum of 219 children.

Stoke-on-Trent has 94 children living with these carers, so we are using 43% of the available local IFA capacity. We aim to increase this proportion so that the majority of children being cared for in our city are from our city.

**We will improve our partnerships with these 18 IFAs and seek to establish agreements with them to preference children from Stoke-on-Trent, when vacancies arise in our city.**

# 6 SUITABILITY AND STABILITY OF HOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN

## Placement stability in Stoke-on-Trent is good.

Our city outperforms both statistical neighbours and the England average for both short and long term stability.

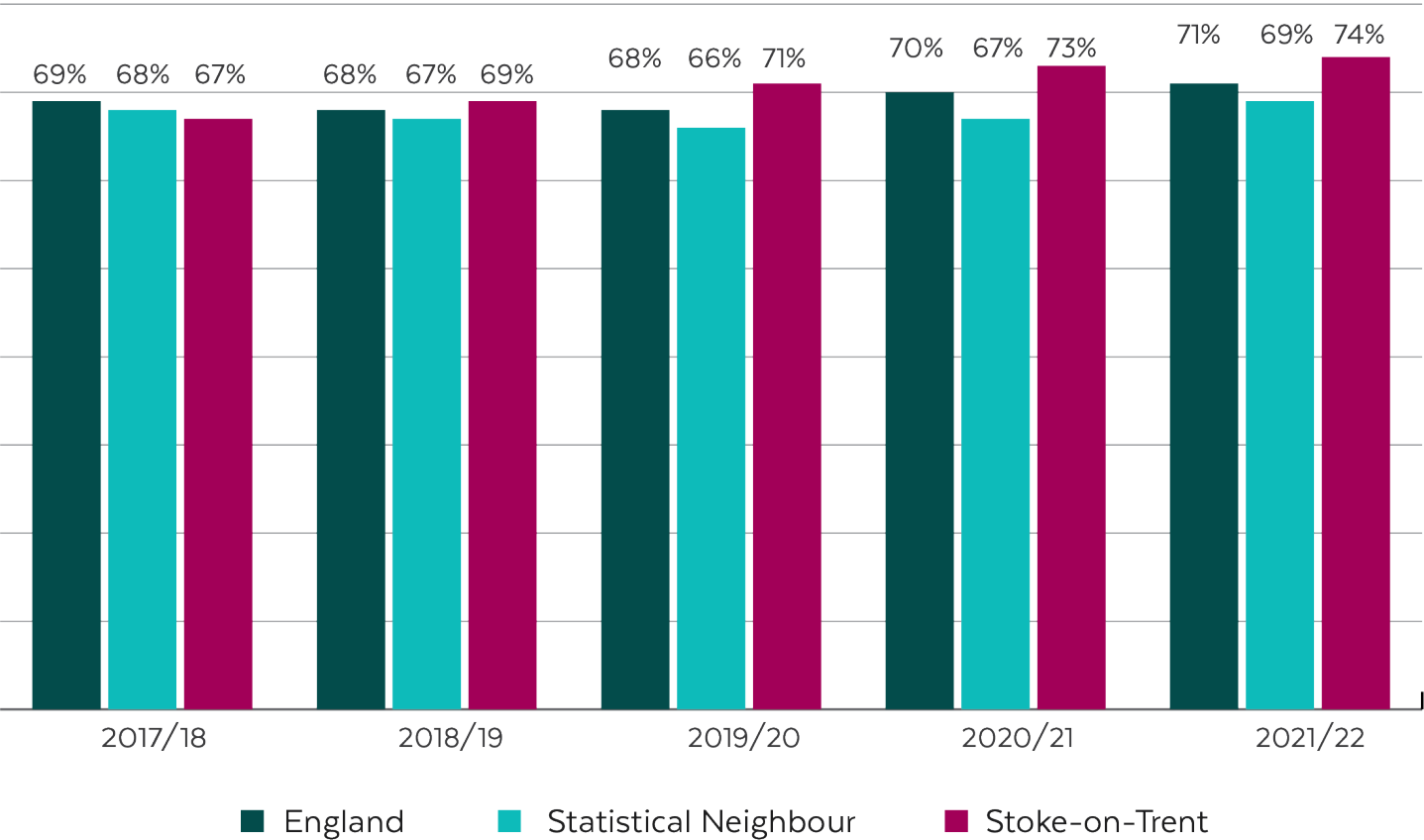
There are two measures of placement stability:

- a. Children who have been in care for at least 2.5 years who have been in the same home for at least 2 years, and
- b. Children who have had 3 or more homes in the previous 12 months.

Stoke-on-Trent’s long-term stability, when compared with statistical neighbours and England is shown in Chart 5. It shows that from a weak position in 2018 there has been continuous improvement, so that now, children in care from our city are more likely to have a long-term stable home, than in other areas.

We will build on this improvement as detailed below.

Chart 5: Long term placement stability



Short-term stability is shown Chart 6 below. Over the past five years, Stoke-on-Trent’s performance has fluctuated between nine and 10% (low is good).

**Chart 6: Short term placement stability (3+ placements in 12 months)**



In spite of our strong performance, we still have over 100 children who have had three or more moves in 12 months.

Most of the children who have multiple moves are those who present us with the greatest challenges. Carers often struggle to safely manage their behaviours and as a result the placement breaks down.

Whilst some of these hardest to help children, are looked after by our in-house provision, the majority tend to be cared for by independent sector organisations.

Often, neither in-house, nor independent sector homes can be identified for these children without extensive searching over an extended period.

The result of this is that some of our most vulnerable children, spend their time in care, repeatedly moving from one home to another. Each time their home changes, it is another rejection and often adds further to their trauma.

This is a pattern that is repeated in many Local Authorities and reflects a disconnect between the needs of children and the market for care. The Competition and Markets Authority report in 2022 found that, “The UK has sleepwalked into a dysfunctional children’s social care market. This has left local authorities hamstrung in their efforts to find suitable and affordable placements in children’s homes or foster care.”

Although we can be optimistic that some improvements can be achieved through developing strategic partnerships with our local providers, unless we are also able to create stable loving homes for those children we find hardest to help, a significant cohort of our most vulnerable children will continue to experience multiple moves.

Since it is not possible to rely upon the independent sector to provide the homes our children need, the City Council should aim to remodel its in-house provision so that it is able to reliably care for those we find hardest to help. This will include considering where we should collaborate with neighbouring authorities to create specialist provision.

If our in-house provision was able to care for those children we find hardest to help, we are much more confident of being able to secure homes for less complex children in private sector foster care or children's homes.

For Stoke-on-Trent City Council to do this would require

- **Reduce need for temporary and agency staff through a review of our recruitment and retention processes with a specific focus on children's homes.**
- **Review of the initial training and CPD for both foster carers and children's home workers to support them to care for the children who challenge us the most.**
- **Review of the operating model within our children's homes so that it closely aligns with the needs of the hardest to help children and has psychological input embedded.**
  - **This will include a consideration of whether some or all of our homes would benefit from operating as therapeutic communities: [The Consortium for Therapeutic Communities \(external link\)](#)**

Both local and national data currently shows that in-house children's homes provided by the Local Authority are more expensive than the average cost to purchase equivalent care from the independent sector.

The local cost of care is detailed in Table 9 towards the end of this report.

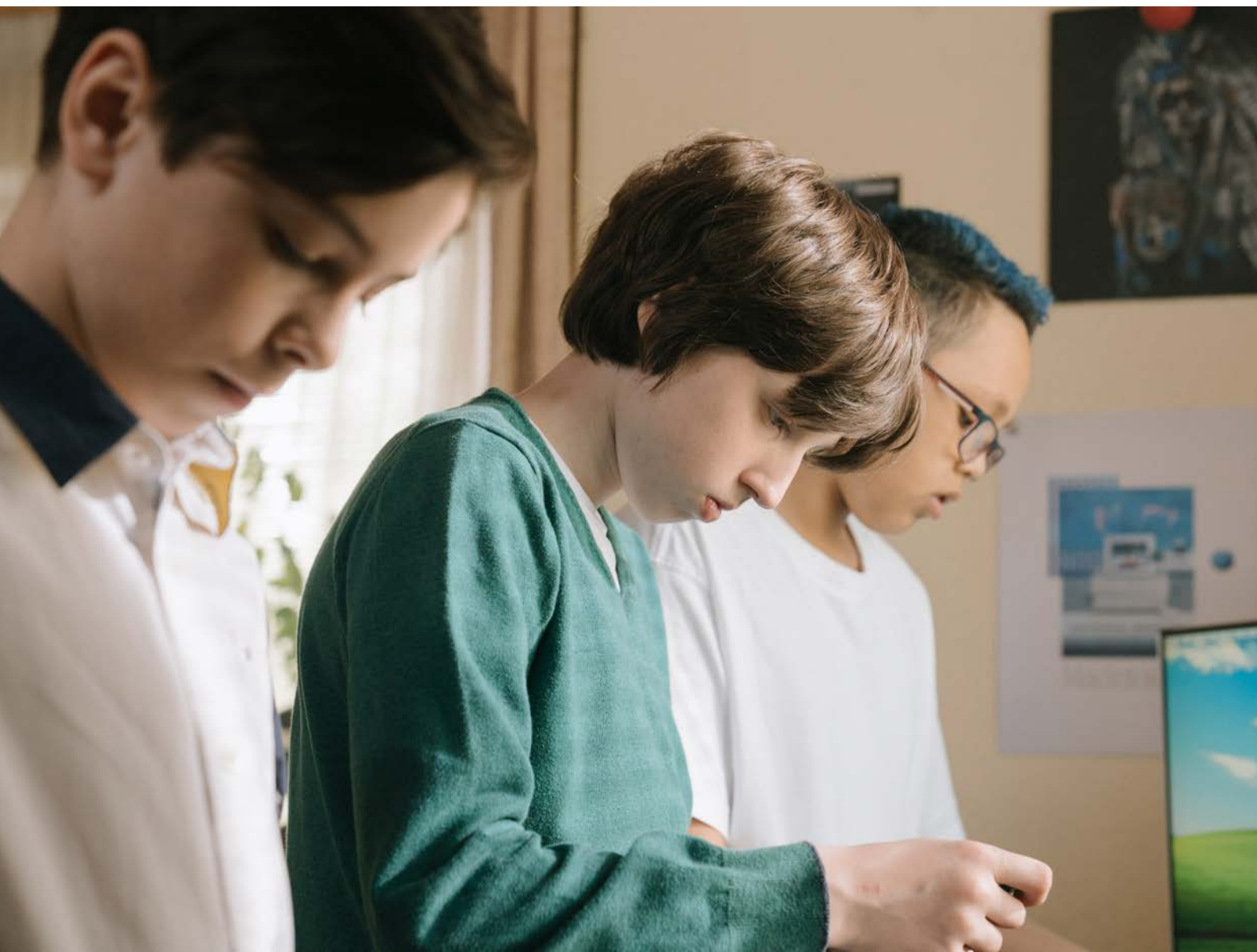
In order for the Local Authority to be able to afford to provide the in-house care needed, we should create a number of four or five bed homes to complement the existing two bed, small group homes.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council will review how to secure more, permanent workers in our homes, including considering engaging specialist recruitment support.

A further advantage of providing slightly larger homes is that it could support the development of a therapeutic community model.

Although it may appear counterintuitive, there is evidence that many children do better when living in slightly larger homes. Martin Narey's 2016 report into residential care noted:

**There is no evidence to suggest a home of three or four places is likely to be any more effective than a home of six or seven beds** and also quoted sector leaders who believed that some of the hardest to help children can struggle with the intensity of relationships in very small homes.



## 7. FORECASTING FUTURE DEMAND

Forecasting placement demand is not an exact science.

Forecasting placement demand is not an exact science. There are many variables which can affect demand and these are difficult to model. In spite of this, we have estimated the number of children in care over the next five years.

There are a host of different activities taking place to limit the numbers of children needing to be in care. This includes initiatives such as the development of the Family Hub programme, introduction of Pause and the development of our Community Catalyst service. We expect these activities to make the greatest difference to our numbers of children in care when they are first introduced. After the initial introduction, we expect these initiatives to continue to contribute to avoiding the need for children to enter care, but without this leading to a further decline in the overall numbers of CLA.

Our best judgement is that through the development and embedding of an enhanced family and community support model that will provide help before the need for statutory intervention, the number of children in care will reduce until we are more aligned with statistical neighbours. Because of the complex safeguarding needs apparent in the City this will likely still show Stoke-on-Trent as a place with higher rates of children in care than the England and regional average but we anticipate much closer alignment with statistical neighbours.

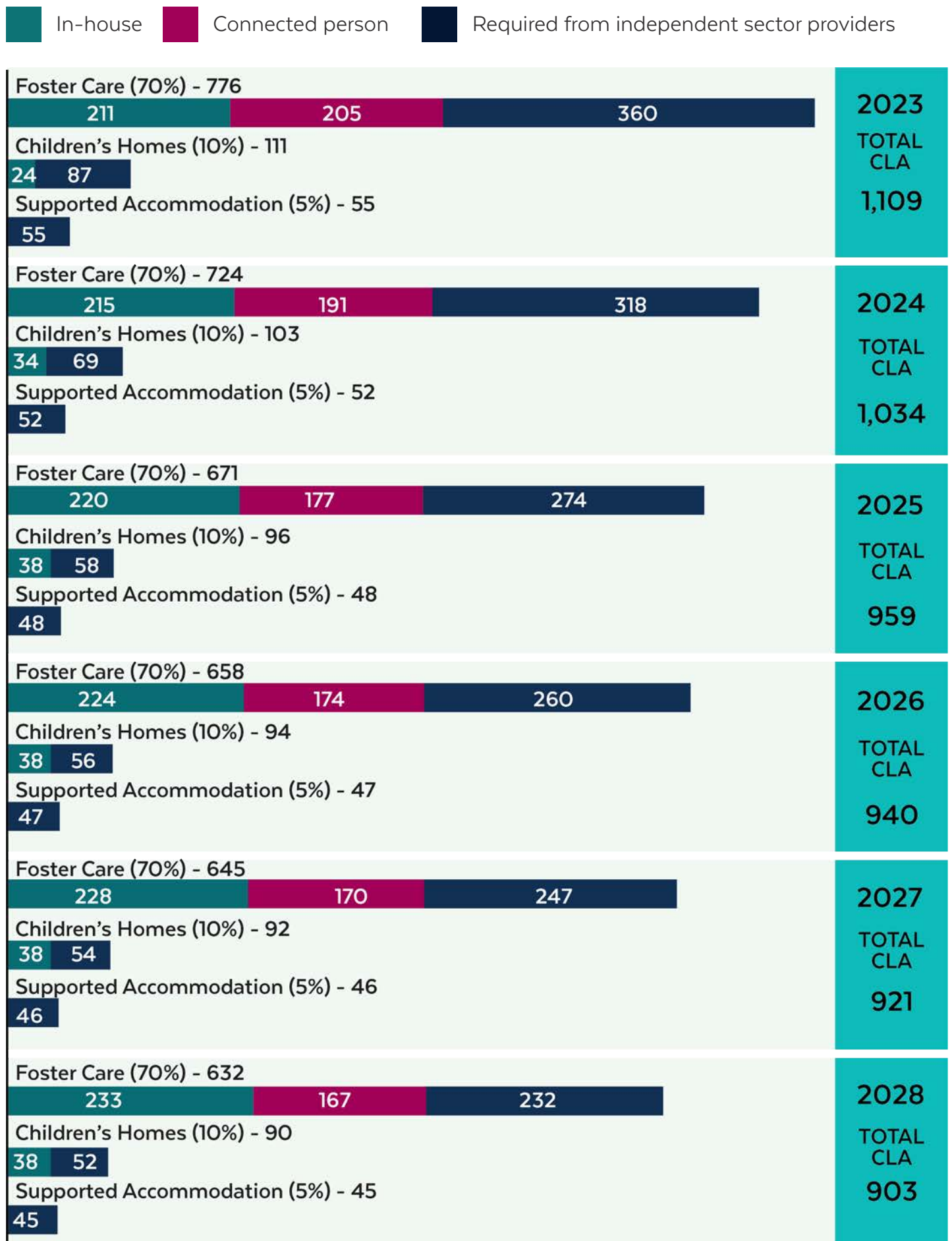
For the purposes of planning, and based on our estimate of the overall impact of changes to how we support families, we project a reduction in our cared for population, of 150 in the first two years and then a further 2% year on year reduction, but, recognising that this will be dependent on the effective implementation of enhanced family and community support, we will keep under review and adjust our planning accordingly.

The figures in the chart 7 also presume the opening of a second four bed home in 2025. This will only happen subject to further formal decision making following a review of the outcomes achieved in the first new home to be opened in 2024

Alternative models showing no change in how many children we care for and showing a 2% year on year increase, are included in Appendix 1



Chart 7: Projected need for different care settings



## Fostering

The data for fostering in Table 7, presumes that the proportion of children with connected carers, remains the same throughout the period.

Regional data from March 2022 shows that Stoke-on-Trent City Council is able to meet a lower proportion of placement requirements using in-house foster care than the regional average (34% vs. regional average of 38%). This illustrates how an ambition to grow the number of children we care for by 2% each year should be readily achievable.

**We will grow the number of children that can be cared for by in-house foster carers by 2% each year.**

**Table 6: Fostering by West Midlands Councils March 2022**

Council	No. of Council Approved Fostering Households	Max. Capacity of Children	Children in Care	Max. Proportion of demand
Birmingham	375	650	2,094	31%
Coventry	200	385	723	53%
Dudley	115	235	585	40%
Hereford	110	215	378	57%
Sandwell	100	175	837	21%
Shropshire	75	145	609	24%
Solihull	60	100	528	19%
Staffordshire	270	515	1303	40%
<b>Stoke-on-Trent</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>1022</b>	<b>34%</b>
Telford	125	250	423	59%
Walsall	115	210	661	32%
Warwickshire	165	340	822	41%
Wolverhampton	180	255	521	49%
Worcestershire	125	235	890	26%

Note: Approved fostering households does not include connected carers





## Children's Homes

**We will open one additional four bed home in 2024 / 25 and following a review of this will consider opening a second in 2025 / 26. Additionally, we will expand the respite home to create a long-term home for up to six children with complex disabilities.**

The most significant difficulty we experience in being able to care for our children in our own homes, is being able to recruit and retain sufficient, high calibre staff to be able to provide safe care. The homes are currently heavily reliant on agency staff and overtime which is not sustainable and offers poor value for money.

At the 31 March 2023, there were 93 of our children living in private children's homes, operated by 59 different companies. Working with such a large number of different organisations makes it very difficult for the council to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with providers.

Within our city there are 20 privately managed children's homes, provided by 10 different organisations, offering homes for up to 57 children.

Currently Stoke-on-Trent City Council only utilised three of these 57 places with the rest being taken up by children from other areas.

Since it is usually better for our children to live close to their home communities, these homes currently constitute a mostly untapped resource for the city.

**We will seek to become a preferred customer of these local homes so that fewer of our children have to live away from Stoke-on-Trent.**

**We will develop meaningful strategic relationships with a smaller number of providers in order to better be able to match our children to good quality homes in the region. As part of this we will explore the development of flexible, soft block contracts with our preferred providers.**

**As Stoke-on-Trent City Council improves its partnerships with providers, to become their purchaser of choice, we expect over time, for a majority of children living in local homes to come from our city.**

This will support our children to achieve improved outcomes and also reduce our costs through lessening the time that our social workers must spend travelling to visit children in distant homes.

Whilst there is more work to do to ensure that strategic partnerships that we develop with IFA and children's home providers are able to respond to the specific needs of our children, there are also some children who would benefit from community-based services.

In particular we have significant numbers of children who have shown sexually harmful behaviours. 11 of these children are in care.

**We will work with statutory partners to review services for children where there are concerns about harmful sexual behaviour, identifying the need for additional service development**

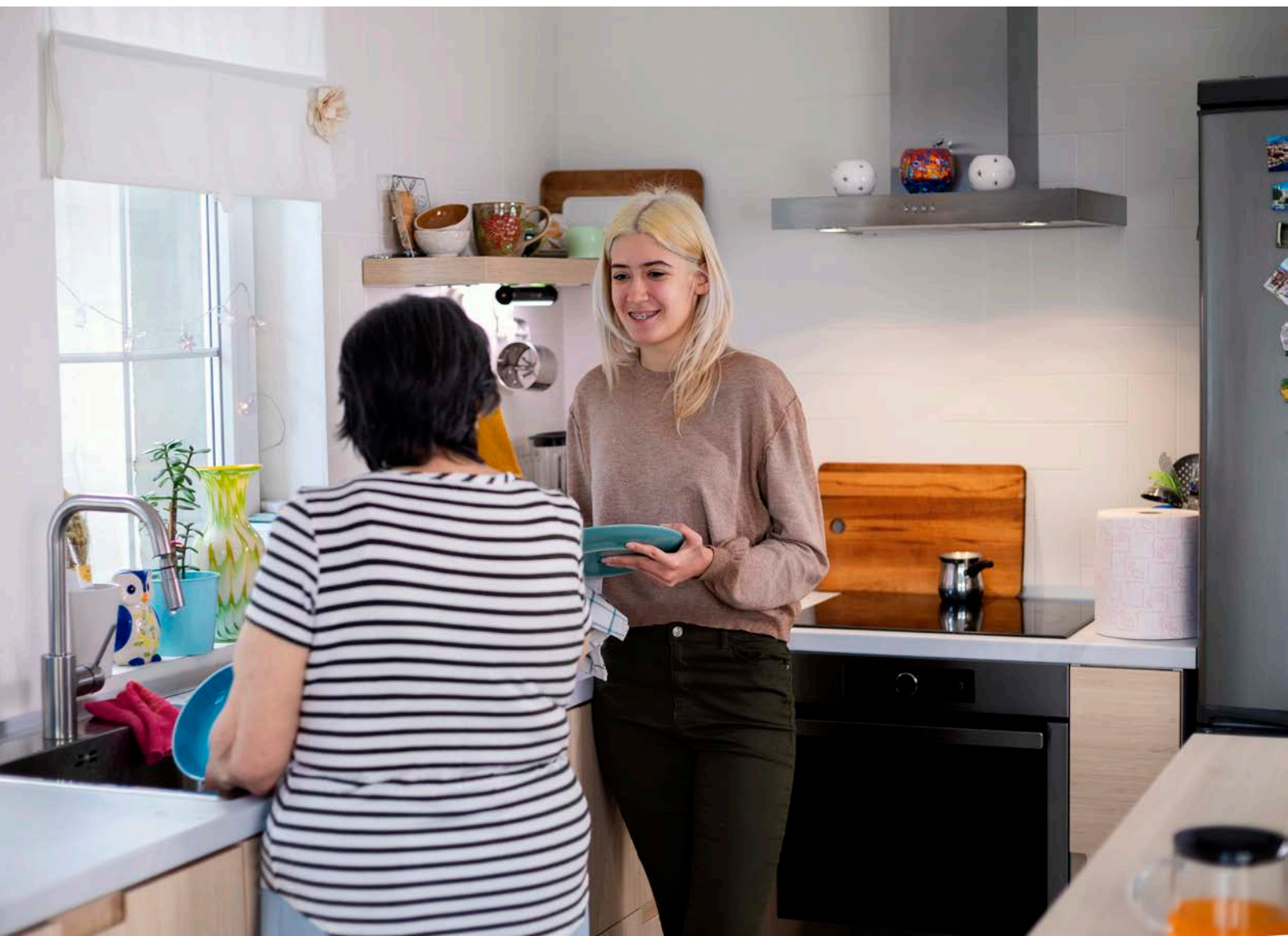
## Supported Accommodation

As the young people growing up within our care get older, they need to learn new skills to prepare for living more independently. For most of our young people this happens in their foster home or with their family.

Where appropriate young people at 18 have the option to stay with their former foster carer(s) as part of Staying Put. The use of Staying Put has almost doubled since 2019 with 31 young people currently living with their previous foster carers.

Although Staying Put is increasing in Stoke-on-Trent, we still make considerably less use of it than most other areas. Nationally, 62% of 18 year olds remain with their former foster carers. The comparison for Stoke-on-Trent is approximately 40%. Consequently, some young people may not be benefiting from the stability that could be afforded by Staying Put as they begin their adult lives.

**We will support our foster carers to become Staying Put hosts where this is right for young people. We expect to see our rates of Staying Put increasing until they are broadly in line with the national average (62%)**



The City uses Supported Accommodation for young people aged between 16 and 18 who move from fostering or children's homes as part of their care plan. Annually 15 young people move into supported accommodation after they turn 16 and finish Year 11 at school.

Stoke-on-Trent runs the House Project which provides a carefully managed route to independent living for a small number of children. The Project is excellent, but cannot work with everyone who needs intensive support.

The City has two frameworks for contracting for supported accommodation. In both contracts there are four types of supported accommodation available.

- a. Self-contained apartment/flat for a single person
- b. Shared accommodation, with young people having their own bedroom, with daytime staff and overnight staff on-call
- c. Shared accommodation, as in b, but without day staff always on site, however, with staff on site and awake at night time
- d. Shared accommodation, as in b, but with staff on site and on duty 24 hours per day

All of these are compatible with the new Supported Accommodation Regulatory Framework.

All of our arrangements for Supported Accommodation end when the child becomes an adult at 18. This imposes another move on young people and makes it difficult for them to fully invest in their home.

In spite of having two frameworks, we still often struggle to secure the right kind of supported living for our young people.

**Children's Services will work with Housing and Adult Services to jointly commission a range of Supported Accommodation that young people can stay in until 21 and that can meet the range of needs that our young people have.**

**Stoke-on-Trent City Council will review and then develop its offer to young people leaving care and homeless young people using the framework developed by St Basils and Barnardo's:**

**[Finalframework2\\_CareLeavers\\_A4.pdf \(stbasils.org.uk\)](https://stbasils.org.uk/Finalframework2_CareLeavers_A4.pdf)**

## 8. THE COST OF CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN

The market for children's social care has been described by the Competition and Markets Authority as dysfunctional.

The dysfunctional nature of the market is reflected in:

- Insufficient homes of the right type in the areas we need them
- Unjustifiable profits, especially from larger providers of children's homes
- High levels of debt amongst some large providers risking their viability
- Unaffordable costs to local authorities

The increase in costs to Stoke-on-Trent City Council over the past three years is shown in Table 8.

**Table 7: Cost of different care types 22/23**

Care Type	Total number of children	Total bed nights used	Total Expenditure	Unit Cost/ week
Internal Fostering (carer payments only)	313	69,757	£4,126,866	£414.12
Connected Carers (carer payments only)	268	57,079	£2,812,500	£344.92
IFA	500	142,745	£17,418,553	£854.18
Small Group Homes	-	7,052	£5,370,000	£5,231
Private Children's Homes	106	23,166	£16,698,177	£5,045.64
Supported Accommodation	59	17,984	£3,057,607	£1,190.13
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,276</b>	<b>306,457</b>	<b>£49,482,590</b>	



**Table 8: Cost increase by care type**

Care Type	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Internal Fostering	£3.74m	£4.02m	£4.13m (+10.4%)
Connected Carers	£2.37m	£2.38m	£2.81m (+18.6%)
IFA	£12.92m	£15.47m	£17.42m (+34.8%)
Small Group Homes	£3.16m	£4.31m	£5.26m (+66.5%)
Private Children's Homes	£8.78m	£9.77m	£16.61m (+89.2%)
Supported Accommodation	£2.6m	£2.01m	£3.06m (+17.7%)
<b>Total Spend</b>	<b>£33.57m</b>	<b>£37.97m</b>	<b>£49.38m (+47.1%)</b>
Number of children in care during the year	1,196	1,275	1,414 (+18.2%)
<b>Annual cost per child in care</b>	<b>£28,068</b>	<b>£29,780</b>	<b>£34,922 (+24.4%)</b>

Tables 7 and 8 illustrate a number of different points:

- The number of children being cared for has increased by 18% however over the same period our total costs have increased by 47% and the average cost per child has increased by 24%
- The increase in expenditure on the highest cost options (residential homes) is far greater than the increase in lower cost options.
  - This reflects our increasing numbers of children in care. 10% of CLA living in residential homes is broadly what would be expected. Since the total number of children in care in our City has risen each of the last several years, the numbers needing expensive residential care have also risen.
- Our in-house homes are on average, more costly than those we purchase from the private sector. However, this does not take account of the complexity of children living in homes and therefore the nature of the care packages needed for them to thrive.
- Although it is often surprising to people that in-house residential can be more expensive than that provided by the private sector, this is supported by research into the average cost of care, carried out by the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the University of Kent. Their research showed LA homes to cost £5,045 whilst private homes were £4,307 (2021 figures)
- In spite of significant work to recruit additional foster carers, our spend on in-house fostering has grown more slowly than most other care types. This reflects how difficult it is to secure the additional carers we want, leading to a continuing over reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies.
- Occupancy of in-house foster care places has increased during the last 12 months and the average occupancy is now 85%
- We will continue to monitor occupancy as we seek to maximise the use we make of in-house foster care.

**In order to minimise the need for children to enter care, we will work with Adult Services to develop access to high quality, home care that can support children to stay at home or help in a crisis. We will secure this at the best value currently available in the market.**

## Appendix 1

### Effect of changes in CLA population on need for different care types

For each table below, it is presumed that in-house foster care grows at 2% p.a. and that 10 new in-house children's home places are created in 24/25 and a further four in 25/26.

#### 2% reduction of CLA each year

■ In-house ■ Connected person ■ Required from independent sector providers

Foster Care (70%) - 776			2023 TOTAL CLA 1,109
211	205	360	
Children's Homes (10%) - 110			
24	86		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			2024 TOTAL CLA 1,087
55			
Foster Care (70%) - 761			
220	201	345	
Children's Homes (10%) - 108			2025 TOTAL CLA 1,065
34	77		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 54			
54			
Foster Care (70%) - 746			2026 TOTAL CLA 1,044
220	197	329	
Children's Homes (10%) - 107			
38	69		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 53			2027 TOTAL CLA 1,023
53			
Foster Care (70%) - 731			
224	193	314	
Children's Homes (10%) - 104			2028 TOTAL CLA 1,002
38	66		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 52			
52			
Foster Care (70%) - 716			2029 TOTAL CLA 981
228	189	298	
Children's Homes (10%) - 102			
38	64		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 51			2030 TOTAL CLA 960
51			
Foster Care (70%) - 701			
233	185	283	
Children's Homes (10%) - 99			2031 TOTAL CLA 939
38	61		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 50			
50			

## No change in CLA each year

■ In-house 
 ■ Connected person 
 ■ Required from independent sector providers

Foster Care (70%) - 776			2023 TOTAL CLA 1,109
211	205	360	
Children's Homes (10%) - 111			
24	87		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			2024 TOTAL CLA 1,109
55			
Foster Care (70%) - 776			
215	205	356	
Children's Homes (10%) - 111			2025 TOTAL CLA 1,109
34	77		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			
55			
Foster Care (70%) - 776			2026 TOTAL CLA 1,109
220	205	351	
Children's Homes (10%) - 111			
38	73		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			2027 TOTAL CLA 1,109
55			
Foster Care (70%) - 776			
224	205	347	
Children's Homes (10%) - 111			2028 TOTAL CLA 1,109
38	73		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			
55			
Foster Care (70%) - 776			2029 TOTAL CLA 1,109
228	205	343	
Children's Homes (10%) - 111			
38	73		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			2030 TOTAL CLA 1,109
55			
Foster Care (70%) - 776			
233	205	334	
Children's Homes (10%) - 111			2031 TOTAL CLA 1,109
38	73		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			
55			



2% increase in CLA each year

■ In-house ■ Connected person ■ Required from independent sector providers

Foster Care (70%) - 776			2023 TOTAL CLA 1,094
211	205	360	
Children's Homes (10%) - 109			
24	87		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 55			2024 TOTAL CLA 1,131
55			
Foster Care (70%) - 791			
215	213	374	
Children's Homes (10%) - 112			2025 TOTAL CLA 1,153
34	79		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 56			
56			
Foster Care (70%) - 807			2026 TOTAL CLA 1,177
220	213	374	
Children's Homes (10%) - 114			
38	77		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 57			2027 TOTAL CLA 1,200
57			
Foster Care (70%) - 823			
224	217	382	
Children's Homes (10%) - 116			2028 TOTAL CLA 1,224
38	80		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 58			
58			
Foster Care (70%) - 840			2029 TOTAL CLA 1,248
228	222	390	
Children's Homes (10%) - 118			
38	82		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 59			2030 TOTAL CLA 1,272
59			
Foster Care (70%) - 857			
233	226	398	
Children's Homes (10%) - 121			2031 TOTAL CLA 1,296
38	84		
Supported Accommodation (5%) - 60			
60			



City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**