



Corporate Parenting Panel

Date **Friday 17 February 2023**
Time **9.30 am**
Venue **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

Business

Part A

Items which are open to the press and public

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2023 (Pages 3 - 10)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Number of Children Looked After and Care Leavers - Verbal update from the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
6. Ofsted Updates - Verbal update from the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
7. Proud Moments - Verbal update from the Strategic Manager
8. Children in Care Council Update - Presentation by the young people from the Children in Care Council (Pages 11 - 14)
9. Participation and Engagement, Safeguarding and Professional Practice Service, Children's Social Care - Report of the Service Improvement Manager (Pages 15 - 28)
10. Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2022-2024 - Joint Report and presentation of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning for County Durham ICB and Durham County Council (Pages 29 - 100)
11. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

12. Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information.

Part B

Items during which it is considered the meeting will not be open to the public (consideration of exempt or confidential information)

13. Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes - Joint Report of the Head of Children's Social Care and the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children (Pages 101 - 112)
14. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Helen Lynch

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
9 February 2023

To: **The Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)
Councillor M Walton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, C Bell, J Charlton, I Cochrane, B Coult, S Deinali, J Griffiths, O Gunn, T Henderson, C Hunt, B Kellett, J Miller, A Reed, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, A Sterling, S Townsend and C Varty

Co-opted Members

J Bell, C Brown, J Gamble, S Neale, W Taylor and R Woods
Young persons representative of the Children in Care Council

Contact: Jill Hogg

Tel: 03000 269 711

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 27 January** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Panel:

Councillors M Walton (Vice-Chair), R Adcock-Forster, B Coult, S Deinali, J Griffiths, T Henderson, C Hunt, B Kellett, J Miller, A Reed, K Robson, K Rooney, A Sterling, S Townsend and C Varty.

Co-opted Members:

S Neale, Billie-Leigh, Luke and W Taylor.

Also Present:

Laura Counce – Service Manager for Children and Young People
Rachel Farnham – Head of Children’s Social Care
Andrea Fletcher – Lawyer for Children, Adults and Health
Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager
Jodie Henderson – Practice Lead, Children and Young People
Rob Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children
Lee Peacock – Participation and Engagement Officer
Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School
Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Charlton and from Co-opted Members J Bell, J Gamble and R Woods.

2 Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

- The alignment of elected members to children's homes in respect of Regulation 44 had been updated;
- Information had been circulated regarding the Care Leavers Challenge, however currently no members had indicated their participation. Members taking up the challenge were asked to inform Jayne Watson, Senior Partnerships Officer and Rob Johnson, Project Manager for Investing in Children;
- Information had been circulated to members in relation to Care Day which will take place in February;
- The initial 'Ask for Angela' meeting took place on 24 January, with IIC and leads from across the Council. It was agreed that the Project Manager for Investing in Children would meet with the young people to clarify their ask, which would then be followed up with relevant officers within the service and there will be further engagement with members when actions are agreed;
- Investigations are ongoing regarding the possibility of establishing a pooled budget from neighbourhood budgets, to support children and young people looked after and care leavers;
- The proposed date for the next joint CICC / CPP meeting was 27 April from 5:30 – 7:00 pm at the Sjovoll Centre. An invitation will be circulated to members.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children Looked After and Care Leavers

Martyn Stenton, Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that the total number of children looked after stood at 1,034 and, of those, there were 36 young people placed for adoption and 32 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. The number of care leavers stood at 293 which included 24 unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers.

6 Ofsted Updates

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that Ofsted recently carried out an unannounced assurance visit to Aycliffe Young People's Centre and further information would be provided in due course.

Laura Counce, Service Manager for Children and Young People was pleased to report that the recent Ofsted inspection of Newton Drive children's home judged the home good in all areas, with no recommendations.

Officers acknowledged the good outcome for Newton Drive was testament to the hard work carried out by managers and staff over recent months.

An assurance visit had also been carried out to Hickstead Rise children's home and members would be updated on the outcome as soon as possible.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 Proud Moments

Proud moments of the month were reported by the Service Manager for Children and Young People who shared examples of children and young people who were participating in their own decision making, understanding the positive and negative impacts of their choices, accepting responsibility for their actions and making good decisions as a consequence.

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People referred to Luke's commitment to supporting children looked after and care leavers in the work he does in addition to his contribution to the Corporate Parenting Panel and alongside his studies. The Practice Lead informed the Panel that Luke attends regular meetings with the Chief Executive to discuss what more the Council can do for young people in care and care leavers. The Panel commended Luke's commitment to championing the care community.

8 Children in Care Council Update

Billie-Leigh and Luke explained that under the Equality Act 2010 some characteristics are protected, therefore it is against the law to discriminate against a person because of these characteristics which include age, disability, pregnancy and religion. There are increasing moves for care experience to be recognised as a protected characteristic and Billie Leigh and Luke provided examples of local authorities throughout the country that have agreed to make care experience a protected characteristic. The young people of the Children in Care Council would therefore like Durham County Council to consider adopting care experience as a protected characteristic.

The Head of Children's Social Care requested that she and the Practice Lead for Children and Young People meet with the young people to discuss the processes which would be required to have the proposal formally considered by the Council.

Members spoke in support of the proposal and highlighted the good work done by the young people to bring the matter to the Panel's attention.

The Project Manager for Investing in Children commented that Luke and Billie-Leigh are shining examples of how committed the young people are and he encouraged members to attend the Care Day event on 18 February, as they will meet many more young people who share the same passion and who are planning some exciting activities for the day.

9 Language Update

The Panel discussed words and phrases posed by the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children, in order to consider whether their use was appropriate for children and young people and to suggest alternative words and phrases. The words and phrases considered were 'designated teacher', 'PEP Plan' (Personal Education Plan) and 'NEET' (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Officers highlighted that many words and phrases are used in line with statutory guidance. The Head of the Virtual School referred to work done in response to discussions on language held with young people, for example, a leaflet was designed with young people to help younger children understand the PEP process and how the young people's views had influenced policymaking.

Members referred to the increasing use of acronyms and abbreviations and suggested they should be avoided and, when they are required to be used, definitions should be included.

10 Virtual School Annual Report Summary

The Head of the Virtual School, Melanie Stubbs, presented a report and delivered a presentation which provided a summary of the Virtual School's annual report for 2021-22 (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that the report focused on children and young people of statutory school and that, at July 2022 there were 676 Durham children looked after of statutory school age, 47.5% of whom were of primary school age and 52.5% were secondary school age. The majority (80.3%) attended County Durham schools. The Head of the Virtual School explained that wherever possible children and young people are placed in schools which have Ofsted ratings of good or better and approximately 70% of the children attended a school with an Ofsted rating of good or better.

Information was provided on provision for those with special educational needs and education, health and care plans and the number of school moves.

The Panel noted that in 2021-22 there had been a decrease in the number of school moves of 52% from the previous year and good attendance rates were reported with overall attendance for the whole children looked after cohort being 92%. The presentation included graphs showing examination results with a return to formal examinations after the Covid-19 period at Key Stage 4. Despite the challenges, most of the young people performed in line, in the basics, when compared to the last formal examinations in 2019.

Actions for the future include the continued support for children and young people in the key transition years, ensuring the appropriate curriculum pathway for each child. Work will be further developed with the SEND team, the Full Circle therapeutic team and colleagues in health and social work teams and with the Children in Care Council. Work will also continue to increase the awareness of the impact of early trauma.

Councillor Walton referred to the dip in performance at Key Stage 2 and asked if there were any indications to show the situation is improving. The Virtual School Head confirmed that she will be holding meetings in the near future to monitor progress and pupil premium plus monies will be made available if additional support is necessary.

Councillor Coult highlighted that the number of children looked after continues to rise and asked what action is being taken to ensure there is sufficient provision. The Head of the Virtual School responded that statutory guidance recommends that in respect of school admission, the highest priority is given to children looked after and those previously looked after and there is an increasing amount of work being done to support special and mainstream schools with their offer.

Councillor Miller was pleased to see the support mechanisms in place for the mental health needs of children and young people. He referred to those not in education, employment and training and asked what options are promoted as alternatives to continuing in education. Councillor Miller also observed that the data presented emphasised performance by gender and he asked why it was necessary to do so. The Virtual School Head clarified that it was a requirement that the data includes a break-down by gender in order that historical trends can be monitored, which have traditionally seen boys outperforming girls in maths and girls outperforming boys in English. Further information on the offer for those not in education, employment and training would be provided later in the meeting.

Members commented on the good work by staff and young people who were working hard to achieve their goals.

Councillor Hunt referred to a lack of information available for kinship carers with regard to pupil premium plus monies. The Virtual School Head replied that schools must be notified before the October census to enable the funds to be allocated to the school budget for the following April and she agreed to discuss the matter with Councillor Hunt after the meeting.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

11 Supporting Care Experienced Young People into Education, Employment and Training

Helen Radcliffe, Strategic Lead for Progression and Learning presented an update on the support available to care experienced young people to enable them to progress into education, employment or training (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Summarising the report, the Strategic Lead updated the Panel on various programmes to support children in care and care leavers for their successful progression into post-16 learning. She explained that the DurhamWorks Programme for schools had worked with 157 young people since 2020 through a range of support including mentoring, careers guidance and employability skills. This year had seen a New Workplaces project to help young people with additional vulnerabilities to gain experience of work environments in order to make entering the workplace a less daunting prospect.

DurhamWorks, DurhamWorks 3 and DurhamWorks Futures programmes help those who need extra support to enter employment and to sustain it. Other programmes of support include the Sessional Employment Programme which enables care experienced young people to gain a paid work placement with Durham County Council. In addition, the pupil premium plus pilot for post 16 year olds provides a £20 per week incentive to attend a further education college. A bus pass scheme is also in place to assist those attending colleges in Durham.

The Strategic Lead for Progression and Learning pointed out the large cohort of care experienced young people and Durham's performance in respect of those aged 19-21 compared favourably both regionally and nationally.

In respect of those not known, the Strategic Lead confirmed that steps are taken to reach out to those young people adding that evidence had been observed that the Covid-19 pandemic had adversely impacted young people's mental health and levels of motivation.

The Panel noted that all Durham Works programmes are funded by the European Social Fund funded and that the funding will end in December. The service is therefore working hard to investigate other funding options.

The Strategic Lead agreed to discuss some specific issues with Councillor Varty after the meeting, with the Service Manager for Children and Young People.

Councillor Walton asked for assurance that Durham Council was doing all it could to maximise education, employment and training opportunities for care experienced young people. The Strategic Lead commented on the benefit of having a dedicated member of staff to focus on the Sessional Employment Programme and Pupil Premium Plus pilot scheme and the regular meetings held with officers of the Council to increase the support for young people. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the IIC to gather feedback from the young people themselves, to update the Panel at the next meeting.

Councillor Miller observed that the employment hubs are located in the larger towns and he expressed his concern that these would be inaccessible for young people in other locations of the county. The Strategic Lead explained that the employment hubs were developed by the Department for Work and Pensions during the Covid-19 pandemic and were focused on three main towns. She stressed that the Progression and Learning teams work in all areas of the county and staff travel throughout the county to visit young people and provide support where needed.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

12 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

13 Quality and Safety Reviews – Response to the National Recommendation

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People presented a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

14 Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes

The Service Manager for Children and Young People presented the monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Panel discussed and agreed future reporting arrangements.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Presentation by Billie-leigh and Luke
CiCC CPP representatives
and Robert Johnson ~ Investing in Children



Durham Children in Care Council (CiCC) –February 2022

- Care Day 2023 – why is it important?
- CiCC will have an idea area at this year's Care Day - where people will share their ideas to make things even better for children and young people.
- The ask of CPP is to consider these findings in their work and demonstrate how they will respond to them
- How can CPP contribute to Care Day next year? Bigger and better?
- Don't forget to use Campaigns - Film '*Don't forget about us*' will be played in the meeting
- Billie-Leigh was supported by IIC staff to develop the script for the film with another care experienced young person from a partner project. The script writing day took place in Doncaster.

Promoting the Rights of Children and Young People



Presentation by Billie-leigh and Luke CiCC CPP representatives and Robert Johnson ~ Investing in Children

- Other young people from different parts of the country helped through a partnership approach.
- IIC can access equipment to beam the film onto buildings.
- As it's care day 2023 today across the UK – The Ask of CPP is to read the letter accompanying this presentation and back this campaign and take the questions seriously at the end of film.
- [Care Day 2023 - Awareness Days Events Calendar 2023](#)



Promoting the Rights of Children & Young People

February 2023



Don't forget us – help us to shine light and raise awareness of children in care

Dear Corporate Parenting Panel

I am writing to you on behalf of a group of young people living in care, who would like your help to raise awareness of issues that face young people growing up in the care system.

You may have seen [the Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) which the Government carried out last year to look at how they could improve the lives of young people who can no longer live with their families. The Care Review is the first review of its type and they spoke to thousands of children in care - it calls for a radical, revolutionary, reshape of the existing service. We don't want the Government to forget about what children in care told them as part of this review, so IIC with partners created a campaign to raise awareness, in the hopes that people, society and the government take seriously what they have heard and read about in the Care Review and that they, "**Don't Forget Us!**".

Don't Forget Us! campaign

The young people want to raise awareness and share the findings of the Care Review, bringing it to life in a fun and accessible way. Our partners worked with the young people to create this short film. Billie Leigh from Durham took a leading role in developing the script

We would like it to be seen by as many people as possible!

We would like to project this film onto buildings so passers-by can see, and then also:

- Film this projection and share it on social media
- Work to get the campaign as much recognition and coverage as possible
- Our aim lunch the campaign at Durham CICC Care Day – connected with the UK's biggest celebration of people with care experience which this year is 17 February 2023.

How can the Corporate Parenting Panel help

- Please could you grant us permission for the short film to be projected onto a wall in a pedestrian area? We don't need power or any AV support; just your permission to shine some light! **Could it be connected with Lumiere this year?**
- Could you and DCC marketing team work with us to make sure that the campaign gets as much engagement as possible?
- Perhaps you have a large screen in your office, shops, foyer, that you could load the short film onto.
- We're open to any other ideas you might have as to how you can support this campaign.

The short film

Don't Forget Us will be shown at the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 17 February.

If you would like any more information or have any questions about this campaign, please do not hesitate to get in touch using my details. I would love to have your support in shining a light on the voices and stories of children in care in 2023; it would mean so much to them to see their work making such an impact.

Rob, Investing in Children (IIC)

The Sjevoll Centre, Front Street, Framwellgate Moor, Durham, DH1 5BL

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Corporate Parenting Panel

17 February 2023

**Participation and Engagement.
Safeguarding and Professional Practice
Service, Children's Social Care****Report of Rachel Harris, Service Improvement Manager,
Safeguarding and Professional Practice, Children and Young
People's Services, Durham County Council.****Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an overview, with some examples, of the engagement and participation work that takes place across Children's Social Care (CSC) with children and young people, including the work of the Participation and Engagement Officer within the Safeguarding and Professional Practice Service. This report also shows the main priorities for the coming year and developments being made to increase the participation and engagement of our children and young people in the improvement and development of our service.

Executive summary

- 2 There is a variety of participation and engagement work taking place across the whole service. This includes practitioners working with individual children and young people (and their families and carers) to seek a good understanding of their lived experiences and to hear their wishes and feelings about their own circumstances and their own plan. Practitioners, managers and the Participation and Engagement Officer also seek the participation and engagement of children, young people, their families and carers to understand better what it can feel like to receive a service from us so that we 'know ourselves well' and consistently see things from other's perspectives that can sometimes help us to see things differently and further improve or alter our practice and services.
- 3 We have a wide range of participation and engagement activities in place, which included co-production of new and revised services. Examples of this include:
 - Young people and the parents being involved at the very beginning when the Adolescent Safeguarding Exploitation Team

(Asets) was just a concept. They led on the remit and approach the team adopted.

- The children and young people's Full Circle Therapeutic Team Steering Group who design new therapy rooms and reception for our refurbished building. They worked with interior designers and a graffiti artist with a grant from the Arts Council.

4 Our priority is to show how and what we learn from our children, young people, their families and carers and to ensure this strongly influences and shapes the further improvement and development of our current and any new services.

Recommendation

5 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:

- (a) Note the contents of the report.

Background

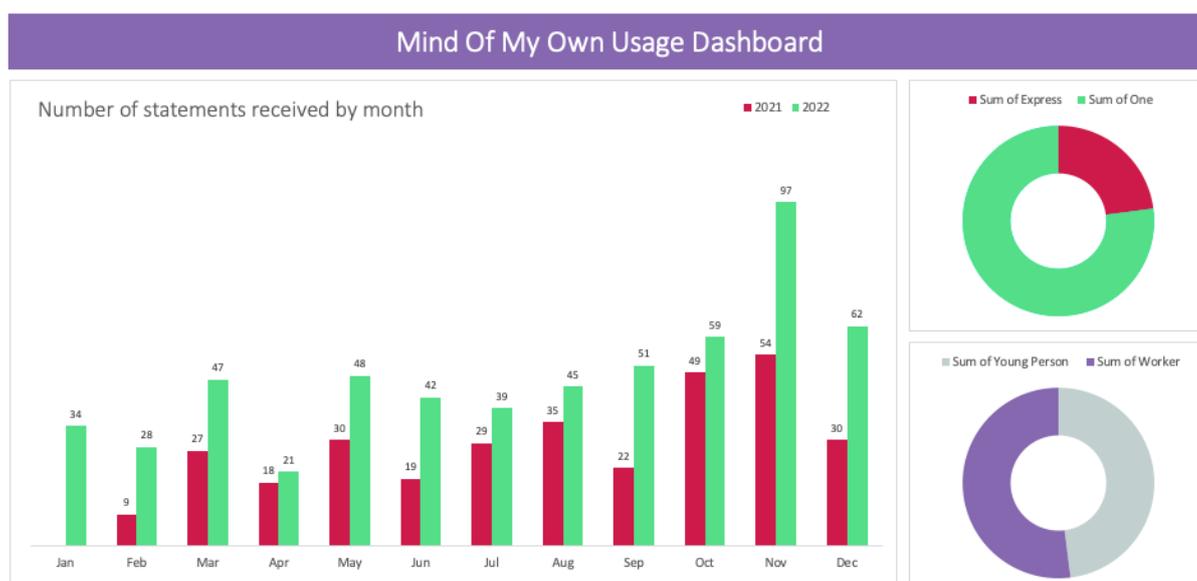
- 6 All Children's Social Care teams work with children and young people who they engage and encourage to participate in the creation and fulfilment of their own plans (the planned work that they, their family and carers and social workers know needs to happen to keep them safe, happy and fulfilled). Hearing, understanding and responding to the child and young person's voice and their day to day lived experience is a huge part of the work social workers, family workers and specialist practitioners do every day.
- 7 We, as a whole service, also seek the participation and engagement of children, young people and their families to help us understand what it feels like to receive a service from us. We seek feedback, through a variety of means, on what works well (so we can keep doing this and build upon it), and any learning about what we need to improve or do differently. It is this type of participation and engagement that this summary report focusses on.
- 8 Hearing the voices of our care experience children and young people: those who are children who are looked after and care leavers, and their families is, and always will be a priority. We are striving to move from consultation to a much truer participation approach with a wider and more representative group where children and young people can also set the agenda rather than us only consulting with them on the things we see as important as they may have differing priorities.
- 9 Since mid 2019, Children's Social Care has had a Participation and Engagement Officer who is based in the Safeguarding and Professional Practice part of the service. This officer is required to work with practitioners and managers across all of Children's Social Care to ensure the voice of children and young people is clearly heard and informs the day to day practice of social workers and contributes to service improvement and development work. They are required to work with staff across the service to improve the rates of participation and engagement which secures the voice of children and young people and ensure actions taken have meaningful impact on outcomes. The new Participation and Engagement Office came into this post in mid-September 2022.
- 10 This report focuses on the work of the Participation and Engagement Officer with children who are looked after and our care leavers only. Some of the work undertaken is done collaboratively with the Children in Care Council.

Strengthening the Voices of Children and Young People

Mind Of My Own

- 11 The implementation of Mind Of My Own (MOMO) is a key responsibility of the Participation and Engagement Officer. MOMO is an application that children and young people (all children and young people involved with a worker from CSC and Early Help) can use on electronic devices such as mobile phones and laptops. It is an app that provides an additional way by which children and young people can be heard and involved by expressing their views, ask questions, giving feedback, prepare what they want to be said at their meetings and many other scenarios. The great thing about MOMO is that it can be at any time of the day or night that suits the child or young person.
- 12 MOMO has two parts designed for children of different ages and abilities. Both of these, One app and Express app, were launched on 24th February 2021 in Durham for the Independent Reviewing Officer service and Children in Our Care (children looked after) and Fostering and Children's Homes (Residential Services) Teams. From May 2021, training was made available for all CSC teams. All children and young people can have access to MOMO by either setting up their own One app account if they have their own email address or by accessing the apps via a worker's account if a child or young person cannot access them on their own. A group of children and young people designed posters and launched the apps. Their work was recognised nationally by the Mind Of My Own annual awards where they won the Creativity Award.
- 13 We continue to have an extensive training plan and offer support sessions to promote the use of MOMO in order to further strengthen the child's voice and involvement. To date, 361 of 668 staff in CSC have been trained to use MOMO (54%). Children who are in our care can be supported by their social worker and their Independent Reviewing Officer to use MOMO.
- 14 The increasing usage by children and young people of MOMO to engage, communicate, feedback and share with their workers and their managers is evident in **Table 1** below. The red columns show usage month by month in 2021 (year one) and the green columns show the use, to date, in 2022 (year two). This is encouraging but is not yet where we want it to be.

Table 1



Next Steps

- 15 Training will continue through 2022/2023 to further support the use of MOMO as an additional way of supporting children to participate and engage with their workers. It is agreed that there will be a re-launch of MOMO in early 2023. A five point plan is being devised which will include young people ambassadors, using pioneering teams and our Voice and Change Champions (staff representatives from teams and children's homes) to re-enthuse and set expectations for services.

Collaborative Evaluations and Family Satisfaction Surveys

- 16 CSC has an audit programme which includes auditing children's whole file and thematic audits. Our full file audits are known as collaborative evaluations. These involve an auditor (a manager who is not the line manager for objectivity) and the social worker looking at the child's file together and evaluating the child's journey through our services. Part of this evaluation includes the auditor speaking directly with the parents, carer and or the child or young person to gain their views on what we have done well, the impact we have made and what we could learn or have done better.
- 17 The benefit of including family feedback in this way was noted in the Ofsted inspection in In the May 2022, "the majority of audits include family feedback, which adds richness to the audit and ensures that the voice of the family is informing practice learning".

18 The feedback we receive from children, young people, families and carers is predominantly very positive, below are some recent examples of what has been said:

- “*Mr P (a father)*. was keen to highlight he felt *H, the social worker*, support has been great and asked that this be fed back. *Mr P.* feels *H* work has had a significant impact on their family, the work she has done as been 'excellent' and *Mr P.* feels as a family they 'wouldn't be where we are now if it wasn't for *H.*”
- “*K (a young person)* feels that she has been involved in the plans and has been kept up to date. *K* feels that the care team have worked well together and supported her.”
- “*H (a young person)* on speaking about her Social Worker described *C* as the best Social Worker that she could have had. she saw her through some dark times and offer her support which was a million percent, stating that she could not have done it without her. *H* recognises that without all of the support network, she would have found it difficult to be where she is today. All the help and advice have helped her to date either, through education or financial advice and a Personal Advisor for the future. This is one area that *H* feels really grateful for, that workers did not judge but were patient and helped support her when she started to build her relationship with her mother. Being close to her friends and her boyfriend have also been a high priority, one that *H* feels *C* did support her with.
- “They (*social worker*) have helped me (*young person*) find support in my friends and family as before I wouldn't open myself up about how I was feeling”
- “(*Child*) spoke to me (*auditor*) and said he is very happy and everything is going well...(*child*) feels supported and listened to and wouldn't change anything

19 This positive feedback offers assurances that we are providing a good service. We also learn from the more critical feedback even though this is in the minority.

Children, Young People and Family Feedback Questionnaires

20 Annually, we seek the views from our children who are looked after and our care leavers, along with the views of their adults around them. The Service Managers for Children in our Care and Care Leavers have recently met with some children and young people to explore what and how they would like to be asked about our services. Once refined,

these will form a survey. During a set two-week period, likely to be during Quarter 4 (January, February or March) our care leavers and children in our care will be asked if they would like to complete the survey either online or in person, supported or unsupported by their social worker or young person's adviser. The responses will then be collated, analysed and reported on and use to inform service improvement and practice development.

Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership

- 21 Using kind, non-blaming, precise and easy to understand language when speaking with and writing about children, young people and their families is essential in building helpful, trusting relationships and true engagement. This is a whole service focus. The Language that Cares guidance ([Durham's Language that Cares](#)) for which the CiCC developed a chapter in 2019, continues to be an actively used tool in staff inductions, training, briefings and practice conversations. During the Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership's (DSCP) Safeguarding week in November 2022, a care leaver and members of the Safeguarding and Professional Practice Service presented a workshop on 'The power of language' to over 70 practitioners from CSC, Early Help and other partner services and agencies.
- 22 We know from our auditing programme, that the language used when speaking and writing about children and young people is becoming kinder, less blaming, specific and easier to understand. Significant improvement has been achieved, but we still want to improve this further.

Care Experienced Youth Support Apprentice

- 23 CSC has a Youth Support Apprentice post which has recently been appointed to. This post is ring fenced for our care leavers to give them an opportunity to have a 'job in the family firm'. The new Youth Support Apprentice commenced work in the Care Leavers Team in September 2022. This role is being shared between the Care Leavers teams and Safeguarding and Professional Practice team in order to make the apprenticeship more varied.
- 24 The apprentice works with and supports the work of the Young People Advisors and the Participation and Engagement Officer. As a care experience young person, the apprentice also provides valuable insight, ideas and is in a unique position to facilitate and support children and young people in expressing their ideas, thoughts and feelings. To date, she has: been part of the young people's interview panel for the Head of Service; supported a Christmas party for some young people who live in supported homes (supported lodgings); been involved in training

planning and sessions for multi-agencies and our newly qualified social workers.

Collaborative Working

- 25 Corporate Parenting Panel is fully aware and regularly informed of the wonderful and valuable participation and engagement work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC). CSC supports the work of the CiCC by the Participation and Engagement Officer attending the CiCC monthly meetings, supporting the implementation of the CiCC work and helps to build upon their work, supporting their events and facilitating forums for their views to be heard by the service. An example of this is some CiCC members shared the view that it is helpful and reassuring to know a little about your worker other than just their name before you meet them for the first time. The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) already have worker profiles for children and young people. CiCC have developed a template and the Participation and Engagement Officer will start to role this out across the service. The Participation and Engagement Officer will also be supporting CiCC with 'gatekeeping' and the prioritisation of requests and approaches from CSC and Early Help to the CiCC.
- 26 This support and co-working is also reciprocated, in that members of the CiCC will often support us in service development, consultation and training. Examples of this include two young people from CiCC offering to provide a training session to the Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Safeguarding Week in November 2022.
- 27 The young people decided what they wanted the session to focus on and designed and presented the session with the support of the Participation and Engagement Officer. Their interactive workshop was called 'What it means to me to feel safe' and looked at two aspects of safety from the perspective of a child and young person: the pushes and pulls of exploitation and the importance of listening and hearing the child or young person's perspective of the worries we hold. The workshop was deemed to be very helpful and valuable. One attendee wrote, "I really enjoyed the training and fed back to my team in our team brief this morning. This was really powerful training as it came from the child / young person's voice. This training is really important to make us reflect and make sure we think about have we made them feel safe."
- 28 One young person for the CiCC also supported the CSC Signs of Safety celebration conference in November 2022, for which she worked with other CiCC members and created a poem, "It's The Small Things" about belonging, feeling safe and cared about, which she read as part of the opening remarks. The impact this had on the attending practitioners and managers was evident throughout the day with them frequently referring

back to the 'small things' that are important to and have an impact on children and young people and make them feel really safe and cared about. CiCC member also provide other training including that to foster carers and newly qualified social workers annually.

- 29 Other examples of CSC participation and engagement includes us contributing to Care Day in February 2022, by facilitating and supporting children and young people's ideas which included: a play about the importance of promoting relationships with brothers and sisters; young people sharing their stories, poems, achievements and experiences and a Virtual Quiz - young people v staff.
- 30 Also, in July 2022, Children's Services held an Ofsted briefing where two young people, who are CiCC members, supported and co-hosted the event alongside the senior management team. They shared some of their poetry and communicated the final Ofsted outcome. Other care experienced young people met with Ofsted inspectors during the inspection in May 2022.

Bespoke Participation and Engagement Groups

- 31 Teams also develop their own local groups as part of their commitment to getting and maintaining their Investors in Children Award.
- 32 In addition bespoke children, young people, family and carer engagement groups and individuals across the service are regularly created and used for specific service development, training and other tasks. The work of these types of groups have included:
 - Informing and supporting the service design of the new Adolescent Safeguarding Exploitation Team (Aset)
 - Creating appreciative enquiry videos featuring children, young people, their family members and foster carers for staff training
 - Initial evaluation of the Signs of Safety practice model implementation
 - The development and changes to the Child and Family Plan
 - The use of Words and Pictures (a way to work with parents to develop a words and picture explanation for their child explaining why they have a social worker and what the family plan is to keep them safe and that allows everyone to use a honest and shared language around the worries that are held and what is being done to keep the child safe)
 - The development of videos and direct work tools by children for children

Voice and Change Champions

- 33 The Participation and Engagement Officer leads the Voice and Change Champions (VCC) who are made up of practitioners from teams within CSC and these include two representatives from the Children Looked After service and the Youth Support Apprentice. This group meets every three months to share good practice and champion the voice of the child, their engagement and participation. On occasions, young people are invited as guest speakers. The VCC are responsible for promoting good engagement work in their own teams, including MOMO (please see paragraphs 10-14 inclusive), the use of the questionnaire (paragraphs 17&18) and supporting language that cares (paragraphs 19-21 inclusive).

Developments and Priorities

Collation, Analysis and Action

- 34 A key priority is to develop further our process of pulling together all that we are learning from children, young people and their families and carers from across all the mechanisms we use and identifying themes and responses.
- 35 It is of the utmost importance for participation, engagement and feedback to create a greater understanding, change and improvement: you said and we heard is only part of the story. Going forwards, part of the Participation and Engagement Officer's responsibility is to collate and analyse what we learn from our children, young people and their families and carers. This will be presented to the Quality Improvement Board (QIB) with suggested actions and improvement work. The development of a You Said, We Did, type of communication for children, young people and our practitioners and managers, is under development. This will share the themes found from the different types of participation, engagement and feedback practice and the changes this has led to.

Seeing Our Own Social Care Records

- 36 In October 2021, a group of children in our care and care experienced young people, practitioners and foster carers had VIP seats at the Durham Book Festival to see Lemn Sissay facilitated by the Participation and Engagement Officer. Lemn Sissay is a care experienced poet and author of My Name Is Why. He spoke about his memoirs which includes reflections around the impact of receiving his care files and the use of language within them. This prompted some young people to have conversations with the Service Improvement Manager about their own records. Following on from this plans to seek feedback and evaluate how it feels to receive a copy of your care

records (Subject Access Requests - SARs) and our services around this has commence. We, officers and the young people who prompted this, will be devising a plan that will includes hearing from some young people who are care leavers and who have received a copy of their files (SARs) in the last two years about their experiences and ideas on how to further improve this part of our service. Last year, the Care Leaver Teams invited one of the young people to speak with them about her experiences of requesting and receiving her files to help influence good practice.

Poetry Book

- 37 Inspired by some of the poetry form our children, Corporate Parenting Panel have requested that a book of poems by care experiencing and care experienced children and young people be created. This will be made during the latter part of this year with children and young people, with the support of the Virtual School, Participation and Engagement Officer and other CSC staff.

The Voice of Our Young People Living Outside of County Durham

- 38 We always strive to keep our young people living close to their families and communities to support and improve relationships. Keeping them living within County Durham usually helps them to get better, more responsive care and support. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, young people need to live further away, making it more difficult for them to become involved in the CiCC. We want to ensure they, as a specific minority group, still have good and varied opportunities to have their voice loudly heard. This is a project the Participation and Engagement Officer will be developing this year.

Overview and Scrutiny by Care Experience Young People

- 39 A new care experienced young people's group is currently being developed by young people. They have the support of the Participation and Engagement Officer and direct links with the Practice Lead, Children in Care and Care Leavers, both of whom are championing their work and ambitions for the group. The young people have just started to explore what they want the group's remit to be, how they will work and what they want to call their group. They are exploring how they can further influence, feedback on, and approve new services/teams and other developments within CSC.

Conclusion

- 40 This report shows the main mechanisms we use to gather the views of children, young people, their families and carers and some of the work of our Participation and Engagement Officer. We have a good foundation of engagement and participation work, which compliments

the work of CiCC and IIC, and we will be working to increase and develop this in the coming year.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Children Act 1989 places a legal duty on the Local Authority to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child. Both the Children Act 1989 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child both have general and underpinning principles of the child's welfare and best interests being the paramount concern.

Finance

Limited, the Service Improvement Manager has a small budget which currently covers gratuitous provided to children and young people who give up their free time to help us design, understand our services and their impact.

Consultation

Consultation with our children and young people form part of our practice model in informing service design, delivery, policy and procedures that have an impact on them

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

CSC has a duty to consult with and listen to the view of children, young people and their parents and carers of all backgrounds and abilities.

Climate Change

No impact.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

CSC has one permanent and full time Participation and Engagement Officer

Accommodation

None.

Risk

There is risk associated with not engaging and encouraging participation with children, young people and families as without this we cannot know our services and their impact well.

Procurement

None.

Corporate Parenting Panel

17 February 2023

**Sufficiency and Commissioning
Strategy for Children Looked After and
Care Leavers 2022-2024**



Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Sarah Burns, Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning for County Durham ICB and Durham County Council

Councillor

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an Executive Summary in relation to the new Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2022-24 (appendix 2 of this report).
- 2 The Strategy outlines the sufficiency position at a point in time, providing local intelligence and data and identifies a series of key priorities and actions which will improve the council's overall sufficiency of placement provision for children and young people who can no longer live with their family.

Executive summary

- 3 The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy sets out Durham's strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our children looked after.
- 4 It considers the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 2 years, how this has affected our sufficiency and the steps we are taking to ensure that our sufficiency offer is robust and continues to meet our changing needs.
- 5 The increasing demand and pressure placed on council's to meet their sufficiency duty is a position that is replicated across the UK and has

recently been highlighted in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care by Josh MacAlister (May 2022) which proposes to "reset children's social care".

- 6 The Sufficiency Strategy outlines a number of challenges and pressures, including:
 - a. An increase in the number of children and young people that we look after. Between March 2015 and March 2022, this has increased by 62%, with numbers continuing to increase to 1,034 as of the October 2022 and as predicted in the strategy.
 - b. We have an increasing number of older teenagers coming into care, who are often difficult to find suitable provision for due to their needs.
 - c. A small number of delayed discharges from tier 4 hospital, due to limited specialist local regulated provision.
 - d. Use of external residential provision has increase by 50% between 2020 and 2022.
 - e. The need to increase the number of available foster carers to meet our increasing demand.
 - f. Increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children moving to Durham placing pressure on already stretched resourced.
 - g. Placement stability – increasing number of breakdowns and moves.
 - h. An increasing number of children, young people and families requiring support who are on the edge of care.
 - i. More families require respite services for their children who have a disability, particularly overnight provision for children with complex needs.
- 7 The strategy identifies a series of objectives and short to medium term key priorities, many of which are ongoing and being developed, to improve and broaden our current sufficiency offer.
- 8 There are six overarching objectives within the strategy, including:
 - a. Grow our number of in-house foster carers, support the retention of carers and work with IFAs to ensure that children and young people can live with foster carer families when it is in their interests to do so.
 - b. Increase the number of adopters

- c. Continue to develop and broaden our residential homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so.
 - d. Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers.
 - e. Improve our sufficiency offer for UASC and reduce waiting times.
 - f. Broaden our short breaks offer for disabled children and their families.
- 9 Each objective proposes a series of key priorities / actions to support their delivery. A total of 39 priorities are identified. These are identified in appendix 3 of this report.
- 10 Capital funding to the value of £2.2m has been secured through DCC capital bidding rounds to support the development of new children's homes, which are in the process of being developed.
- 11 A further £1.6m capital funding has been requested to support the development of specialist homes for children with disabilities and short break provision offering planned respite for children with complex needs.

Recommendations

- 12 Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:
- a) Note and comment on the Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers set out in Appendix 2.
 - b) Note and comment on the strategic priorities contained within Appendix 3.

Background

- 13 The council has a duty, as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children looked after within their local authority area. The 2010 guidance on the 'sufficiency duty' states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working with Health and other partners, to meet the duty. The Children Act 1989 also sets out Health's statutory duty in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of health services to children and young people who are looked after.
- 14 The sufficiency duty must take account of the requirement, under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989, that the overriding consideration for placing a child is that the placement must be the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs. If a child cannot live with their parent or a person with parental responsibility, preference must be given to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a placement must be found, as far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:
- (a) Is near the child's home;
 - (b) Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable;
 - (c) Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
 - (d) Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
 - (e) Does not disrupt his/her education or training.
- 15 The priorities and indicators within the Strategy will be monitored on a 6 monthly basis and used to understand and determine our ongoing changing needs in relation to placement sufficiency.

Being a Corporate Parent

- 16 Looking after and protecting children and young people from harm is one of the most important jobs that Durham County Council must undertake.
- 17 The term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees and partner agencies in providing the best possible care and support to children and young people who we look after. A child in the care of the council, looks to the whole council to be the best parent it can be, and every member and employee has a statutory responsibility to act in the best interests of children and young people in our care.
- 18 A LEAN review of the children's home development process has recently been completed. This explored opportunities for streamlining

processes and developing new homes in the shortest timeframe possible. The review made a series of recommendations including the need to carry out further targeted work with elected members to outline our collective corporate parent responsibilities and in particular the need to develop new Local Authority operated children's homes within County Durham and the role that Members have in highlighting the importance of these services within their local community. The work is planned over the coming months.

Key Achievements

- 19 The Covid-19 pandemic presented the council with many challenges over the last 2.5 years, in relation to being able to provide sufficient living arrangements to children and young people in our care and ensuring that these continued to provide good quality provision.
- 20 Despite the challenges, the council has strived to continue developing and improving service provision, including, but not limited to:
 - (a) Developing a new Rapid Response Service preventing admission and readmission to tier 4 mental health hospital beds.
 - (b) Improved brokerage capacity to support children's home searches.
 - (c) Continuing to support providers to develop 'Durham First' homes and influencing service development in line with our ongoing needs. This has enabled children and young people to continue living in County Durham.
 - (d) Recommissioning the Independent Fostering Agency Framework, resulting in 18 providers now being part of regional commissioning arrangements, with new providers able to join monthly moving forward.
 - (e) A new Supporting the Provider Market Team working with social care providers to support the recruitment of staff and workforce development. An initial pilot focused on the supporting the recruitment of in-house children's home staff.
 - (f) We opened two new children's homes in 2021 each caring for three children and young people; a new home in 2022 caring for up to two children and young people; and we have two further homes due to open in the coming months (a solo home and a home for up to two children). These homes enable children and young people to continue living locally in regulated settings.
 - (g) Launching new local provider forums to support improved dialogue with the provider market, to share information about our gaps in service provision and to maximise opportunities for collaboration.
 - (h) Secured DfE Staying Close Funding and launched a new Staying Close Pilot Programme, supporting young people to move on from their children's home with ongoing, consistent, familiar support.

Overview of the Strategy

- 21 The Sufficiency Strategy was reviewed in 2022 and sets out the council's approach to securing sufficient local living arrangements for children and young people in our care and provides information about the social care landscape and the ongoing challenges and pressures, our current offer and how this continues to meet the needs of children and young people and the ongoing cycle of improvements that we are driving forward to broaden our sufficiency offer in County Durham.
- 22 As of November 2022, 70.3% of children and young people in the council's care live in County Durham, with 29.7% living in out of county arrangements. Of those living outside of County Durham, 17.5% live under 20 miles from their originating home address and 12.2% of children and young people live 20 miles or more from their originating address. We always seek to secure appropriate homes locally when it is safe to do so and, in the child, or young person's best interests. Some children and young people live in out of area provision, due to limited availability to meet their complex needs within County Durham. The Strategy outlines a range of development priorities which will create additional local sufficiency options, enabling a greater proportion of children and young people to live locally.
- 23 Whilst the council is able to provide good quality care and support to the vast majority of our children and young people, we continue to be presented with a number of challenges and pressures, including:
- a) An increase in the number of children and young people that we look after. Between March 2015 and March 2022, this has increased by 62%, with numbers continuing to increase to 1,034 as of the October 2022 and as predicted in the strategy.
 - b) We have an increasing number of older teenagers in care who are experiencing multiple moves and it is difficult to find suitable provision to meet their complex needs. This has resulted in the use of unregulated provision for a small number of children and young people.
 - c) Use of external residential provision has increased by 50% between 2020 and 2022.
 - d) The need to increase the number of available foster carers to meet our increasing demand.
 - e) Increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children moving to Durham placing pressure on already stretched resources.
 - f) Placement stability – increasing number of breakdowns and moves.
 - g) An increasing number of children, young people and families requiring support who are on the edge of care.

- h) More families require respite services for their children who have a disability, with increasing gaps in service provision, particularly overnight provision for children with complex needs.
- i) A small number of delayed discharges from tier 4 hospital, due to limited specialist local regulated provision.

24 Following the review the Sufficiency Strategy a series of priorities have been identified which will broaden and improve our sufficiency offer in County Durham. These are outlined in appendix 3 of this report.

Listening to children and young people

25 As an authority we are committed to listening to children and young people and have embedded this practice across Children and Young People's Services.

26 Whilst children and young people are not involved in identifying gaps in sufficiency, which is based on data and local intelligence, care experienced children and young people play a key role in the co-production and shaping of services which directly impact them. Their engagement this way is meaningful and enables the voice of young people to be listened, considered and acted upon.

27 We work in partnership with a social enterprise called 'Investing in Children'. They deliver a range of children's participation services on our behalf and implement several schemes through a contract arrangement:

- Facilitation of young people's participation / reference groups;
- Facilitation of the eXtreme group to ensure that the voice of children and young people with disabilities are listened to and acted upon;
- Coordination of the Children in Care Council;
- Management of the Drive Project – by listening to young people this project enables some young people to learn to drive;
- Management of the Freedom Card – by listening to young people and their carers this offers free access to DCC leisure centres and access to a range of leisure activities at a discounted price;
- Management and facilitation of the Investing in Children Membership Programme – all services and teams across CYPS are reviewed annually to ensure that they meet award criteria. All teams across Children's Services have either achieved Investing in Children Membership or are working towards this. The 'Investing in Children membership', is a kite mark which demonstrates that Children Looked After and young people feel valued and are listened to by adults.
- Examples of co-produced services include, but are not limited to:
 - The development of our new Edge of Care Home. Care experienced young people played an active role and identified key

- features within the home, how the home could better meet the needs of young people and the name of the new home.
- The commissioning of independent fostering households and the involvement of children and young people in the tendering / procurement process, which influenced the outcome of the exercise.
- The involvement of children and young people in staff recruitment i.e. young people being part of the interview panel and having an influence over the recruitment of new Registered Managers for children's homes.
- Ensuring that children's social care providers listen to the views and wishes of the children and young people that they care for and use this information to make ongoing improvements.

Providing Stability to Children and Young People

- 28 When children and young people are unable to live with their birth families and they need to come into care, it is important that care provides them with the stability they need to feel safe to build relationships with their carers.
- 29 Currently in County Durham, we are struggling to do this, and it is usual for children to have to move at least once when they come into care. That means that they have lived in at least two homes, three if their family home is included.
- 30 The stability of homes available to children in care is recorded as a measure of overall children's social care performance (Placement Stability). This is measured by Ofsted for children aged under 16 who have been in care for at least 2.5 years who have stayed living in the same home for more than 2 years.
- 31 In Durham, we have 64% (251) children under 16 who have been looked after for a minimum of 2.5yrs who have been in their current caring arrangement for less than 2 years. 34% of children who have been in care for more than 2.5 years have remained living in the same care arrangement for more than 2 years. In the last year we have 58 children who have moved three times and there are seven children who have moved more than seven times.
- 32 This is in part explained by the ongoing work that has been undertaken to support children and young people to return to the care of their parents. It is however accepted that this is an area for improvement, and we need to be able to offer a wider range of homes with carers that are trained and supported to meet the children's needs.

Out of Area Living Arrangements

- 33 As a result of a lack of available homes in Durham that can meet the needs of our children and young people who have needs that challenge services, we sometimes need to place children outside of County Durham.
- 34 Finding these children homes at a distance from Durham results in a number of challenges for them including needing to move schools and make new friends but also making it harder to see the people that they need to have trusting relationships with including their parents and families.
- 35 There are 306 children and young people placed outside of Durham in a range of different care arrangements. Some of these children and young people have been placed for adoption, are with family members or attending colleges, making their move out of area a positive development for them. Other children live in fostering homes or within private children's homes outside of the county. Most children who live outside of County Durham live in the region, but this is not the case for all children, and we have children placed as far away as Inverness and Plymouth.

Conclusion

- 36 As Corporate Parents we must ensure that we have a range of good quality local placement provision that is able to meet the varying needs of our children looked after and our care leavers.
- 37 The strategy sets out our current position in being able to meet these needs and the challenges presented to us and outlines the key priorities that we will deliver over the coming two years to address gaps in provision and to broaden our local sufficiency offer for children and young people.

Authors

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Local Authority has a legal duty to provide sufficient accommodation options for children and young people who are looked after and those that are care leavers.

The strategy outlines a number of key priorities which will enable us to continue meeting are changing needs and to minimise any reputational and political damage with regulators such as Ofsted.

Finance

A number of the proposals set out in this strategy will require either capital and/or revenue investment in order to take forward.

These will be subject to individual business cases, setting out the rationale and justification for services and the funding requirements.

Capital funding of £2.2m has been secured in previous years to develop a number of new children's homes. A further £1.6m capital request is subject to ongoing consideration and will enable the development of some specialist homes for children with disabilities, which is an emerging sufficiency gap and identified in the July 2022 Ofsted Inspection.

Revenue budgets for new homes are being built based on the re-alignment of existing costs being paid for through the Children Looked After budget i.e., a child being stepped down from a secure home with an existing cost to the Local Authority or a child in an out of county high-cost placement that needs to move back into county provision. Work is ongoing with finance colleagues to consider individual young people and their accommodation costs, alongside revisiting the revenue budgets required to operate a children's home.

Consultation

The Local Authority will be required to consult with elected members and local communities when developing many of the services as outlined in the strategy. This will be completed as part of the formal planning process.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Authority is required to ensure that all children looked after have equality of opportunity, to ensure best outcomes.

Human Rights

Young People who are in the care of Durham County Council have the right to be provided with suitable and appropriate local care which can meet their needs to enable them to successfully move into adulthood.

Crime and Disorder

Non applicable.

Staffing

The strategy sets out the development of a range of new services which will broaden and enhance our current sufficiency offer. These services will require new staff to support their operational delivery. The recruitment of new staff is aligned with the development of new children's homes.

Accommodation

The report provides information about the range of accommodation options available for our children and young people and also proposes a suite of new service developments to broaden and improve our sufficiency offer.

All proposed service development involving new accommodation will be subject to individual business cases.

Risk

There is a significant risk to the Local Authority if we are unable to provide suitable local accommodation and care options for our children and young people.

There is both a legal and reputational risk to the Local Authority if it is unable to safely care for children and young people and offer a broad range of living arrangements to meet individual needs.

Procurement

When commissioning new services, the Contract Procedures Rules will be adhered to, and Corporate Procurement Colleagues involved.

Appendix 2: Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for children looked after and care leavers

Attached as a separate document

Appendix 3: Sufficiency Priorities

No.	Overarching Objective	Priorities	Completed by
1	<p>Grow our number of in-house foster carers, support the retention of carers and work with IFAs to ensure that children and young people can live with foster carer families when it is in their interests to do so</p>	Recruit 35 new foster carer households in 2022/23 and a further 35 new foster carer households in 2023/24	March 2023 and March 2024
		Develop and launch the new fostering website	December 2023
		Launch the Mockingbird Model to support our in-house foster carers	July 2022
		Review the current Payment for Skills Model in consultation with foster carers, which seeks to improve our sufficiency of in-house foster carers, by attracting new carers and retaining existing carers and implement findings	October 2023
		Develop a 'wrap around support' team that will work intensively with our in-house foster carers to promote placement stability and prevent placement breakdown	March 2023
		Develop the respite foster care offer for children and young people with a disability	September 2022 – March 2024
		We will continue to work regionally with other Local Authorities to ensure that the new commissioning solution continues to be fit for purpose and to encourage off framework providers and new providers to join.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will launch a new Provider Forum with our IFAs outside of our regional arrangements to share information about our demand, gaps in provision and to maximise effective partnership working.	September 2022

2	Increase the number of adopters	Ensure that the transition to Adopt Coast to Coast does not impact on the recruitment improvements made in 2020-2022.	March 2024
		Work collaboratively with RAA partners to develop practice around linking and matching, to reduce the waiting time for children when being matched to their forever family.	March 2024
3	Continue to develop and broaden our residential homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so	Develop up to 4 x smaller children's homes. Two will accommodate up to two children and young people and a further two homes will accommodate one young person each. Homes to be operational in 2022 and 2023.	December 2022 and December 2023
		Develop an Edge of Care home	August 2023
		Re-provide a children's home for three young people	November 2023
		Continue to develop the residential peripatetic staffing team to support capacity and reduce the use of agency staff within homes.	April 2022 – March 2024
		Continue to have close oversight of the residential workforce to ensure that the experience and skills of the workforce continues to meet our sufficiency needs.	April 2022 – March 2024
		Continue to review the upper bedding capacity in our existing children's home, taking into account ongoing sufficiency press	April 2022 / March 2024
		Develop a step down to foster care children's home for younger children, by reviewing our existing children's home provision	March 2024
		Develop a children's home for disabled children and young people, in line with feedback from Ofsted. We will consider both DCC and provider led options, including new build options.	March 2025
		Develop a specialist short break home which offers planned respite for up to two children / young people with complex needs. We will	March 2025

		consider both DCC and provider led options, including new build options.	
		Develop a Staying Close Programme for a small group of identified young people	July 2022 – March 2025
		We will continue to work with providers to sustain children and young people’s residential home arrangements, offering support and solutions which minimises moved for children and young people.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will continue to work closely with providers that wish to develop new Durham First services in County Durham, to shape services and to positively challenge development when this does not meet our needs.	April 2022 / March 2024
		We will review our potential future use of parent and child residential units and encourage providers to develop these services when there is an identified need.	March 2024
		We will explore options for working in partnership with a provider to develop a solo / dual registered children’s home in County Durham, specifically for our use.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will continue to play an active role in the NE12 regional consortia, working with neighbouring Local Authorities, to understand regional challenges, demand and to work collaboratively.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will launch a new Provider Engagement Forum with our residential homes providers. This will be specific to Durham’s local needs.	July 2022
		We will work with health partners to develop a new registered step down from hospital offer to meet the needs of children and young people with ongoing mental health needs.	March 2024
		As our capacity increases within in-house residential home provision, we will review our out of county placements, to understand which	Ongoing

		children and young people have a plan to move back into the area.	
4	Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers	Review the marketing and recruitment strategy for Supported Lodging providers	March 2023
		We will open up the Supported Accommodation Provider Panel for young people with complex needs, broadening our pool of providers.	October 2022
		Establish a new Provider Engagement Forum with supported accommodation providers.	September 2022
		Work with supported accommodation providers in relation to the regulation of provision, to understand any potential impact or emerging gaps in provision.	August 2022 – March 2024
5	Improve our sufficiency offer for UASC and reduce waiting times	Work with local supported accommodation providers to explore the extension of existing services to meet our increasing accommodation and support needs for UASC.	December 2022
		Consider options and funding opportunities to develop a local supported accommodation and assessment hub, which will assess UASC over a 6 – 12-week period, before moving young people onto suitable long-term supported accommodation.	December 2022
		Develop a new supported accommodation assessment service for UASC	September 2023
		Continue to work in partnership with regional LAs to explore opportunities for joint commissioning	April 2022 – March 2024
6	Broaden our short breaks offer for disabled children and their families	Develop a Short Breaks Sufficiency Action Plan which highlights the range of actions that will be taken forward to address the ongoing challenges and gaps in provision, and to improve both the universal and statutory short breaks offer for children, young people and their families / carers	July 2022

		<p>Deliver a programme of non-assessed community short break improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Ensure that organisations maximise inclusion for disabled children in community activities across County Durham and have the right skills and experience to respond to young people's needs. (ii) Further invest to enable children and young people with disabilities to access local universal activities, ensuring that parents / carers access regular breaks when these are needed and reducing the reliance on commissioned assessed services, preventing escalation of family needs. (iii) Continue to commission a menu of community activities for children unable to access the community due to their disability, without the need for a statutory assessment, whilst ensuring that providers are upskilled to respond to specialist needs. 	July 2022 – March 2024
		<p>Deliver a programme of assessed specialist enhanced short breaks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Ensure that the provider market has the capacity, experience and skills to meet to children and young people's short break needs, either at home, in the community or in a residential setting. (ii) Develop specialist and inclusive community hubs to enable complex young people to be supported within their local area. (iii) Review overnight respite provision at Park House, alongside the wider overnight respite offer in the region, propose options to meet all needs, including those young people with complex disabilities / challenging behaviours that post a risk to other children. Develop a model and service provision for overnight respite (this 	July 2022 – March 2024

		<p>action overlaps with Priority Number 9 within the In-House Residential Homes section of this strategy).</p> <p>(iv) Change our commissioning approach to block investment with existing providers to develop, stabilise and upskill the workforce so it can respond to short break demand, particularly for those young people with autism and challenging behaviours.</p>	
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Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2022-2024

May 2022

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Please note that the most up to date available data has been used in the writing of this strategy.

Issue Date	Date of Next Strategy Review	Lead Service(s)
May 2022	January 2024	Integrated Commissioning Service

1. INTRODUCTION

The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy sets out Durham's strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our children looked after.

It looks closely at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, how this has affected our sufficiency and the steps we are taking to ensure that our sufficiency offer is robust and continues to meet our changing needs.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

The council has a duty, as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children looked after within their local authority area. The 2010 guidance on the 'sufficiency duty' states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty.

The sufficiency duty must take account of the requirement, under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989, that the overriding consideration for placing a child is that the living arrangement must be the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs. Next, preference must be given to a living arrangement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a living arrangement must be found, as far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:

- Is near the child's home;
- Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.
- Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- Does not disrupt his/her education or training.

3. BEING A CORPORATE PARENT

Looking after and protecting children and young people from harm is one of the most important jobs that Durham County Council, as a Local Authority must undertake. Where a child cannot remain safely at home for whatever reason and comes into the care of the Local Authority and becomes 'Looked After' the council becomes the 'corporate parent' for that child. They are also the corporate parent for any young person who is under 25 and has been looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday.

The term 'corporate parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding support for the children and young people who

are looked after by the council. A child in the care of the council looks to the whole council to be the best parent it can be to that child. Every member and employee has a statutory responsibility to act for that child. Our commitment is to all children and young people living in foster care and children's homes, placed for adoption, those living in supported lodgings or at home under Placement with Parent Regulations, as well as those living in secure establishments or in custody.

4. POSITION STATEMENT

As an Authority we:

- Will work collaboratively with families and our partners to offer family support and enable children and young people to be cared for within their own families wherever possible.
- Offer a range of early help services to support children subject to a Child Protection Plan and their families and prevent entry into care. This includes Family Group Conferencing, our Supporting Solutions Service (Edge of Care service) and direct social work interventions from our One Point Service and Families First Teams.
- Will undertake robust assessment, planning and case review to ensure that we only look after children and young people for whom being in care is the only way of ensuring their safety, protection and development.
- Will continue to work with those with parental responsibility to help a child or young person in care return home safely, wherever this is possible.

When it is not possible for a child or young person to remain with their family, we will seek to provide high quality care which meets their individual needs and as near as possible to the child or young person's home to maintain links with birth parents, relatives and their communities (where appropriate).

As an Authority we:

- Will aim to secure legal and emotional permanence, preferably through adoption, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Orders or where this is not possible, through long-term foster care.
- Will maximise the use of internal foster care resources before using local external fostering agencies.
- Will avoid using children's homes except when it is in the best interests of the child / young person and meeting their complex needs.
- Are committed to be the best parent we can be for our Children Looked After and Care Leavers and strive to ensure that we deliver support and care that is as good as every good parent.
- Are committed to ensuring that Children Looked After and Care Leavers have the best opportunities available to them to achieve their potential and that these are at least as good as the opportunities available for all other children. We recognise that many children and young people face significantly greater levels of challenging circumstances before reaching

adulthood than their peers and that this may mean that they have the need for additional support.

- Are committed to ensuring that services are designed with and for Children Looked After and Care Leavers to meet their needs.
- Want all our Children Looked After to live in loving, stable and safe homes in a place that they can 'call home'.
- Want the people who are caring for them to be fun, loving, skilled, enthusiastic, ambitious and fighting their corner every step of the way.
- Want our children and young people to form good, trusting, nurturing relationships with their carers and have positive experiences.
- Want our children and young people to live in stable living arrangements and only having to move when it is in their best interests or when they have chosen to do so.
- Are ambitious for our children and young people and want to encourage them to dream big and fulfil their potential.
- Are committed to ensuring that they receive the best education in the best schools and get additional support if they need it; that they are well prepared for independence and work through apprenticeships, high quality training, supported into higher education and into university for those who aspire to do so.
- Want our children to be well, healthy and have good emotional and mental health.
- Want to celebrate their achievements, whether big or small so that they can be proud of themselves and know that we are proud of them.
- Want them to have fun and be able to develop their own interests and hobbies so that they can develop in confidence; develop friendships and memories that they can fondly look back on in later years.
- Are committed to listening to our children and young people, hearing what they have to say and acting on it wherever possible. We will develop our services based on this feedback and regularly check with them that we have got it right. We will be open to change and challenge.
- Want our care leavers to be well prepared for adulthood and ensure that they feel that they are part of a wider extended family who will be there for them if they are needed.
- Want our care leavers to feel safe and to receive the appropriate level of support and advice to enable them to transition to adulthood. This includes young people living in staying close arrangements and staying put arrangements with their carer(s) and having access to suitable high-quality supported living or independent living provision. We recognise how big a challenge this is and that many of our young people do this at a much younger age than many other young people.

- Want our young people to be able to make mistakes and know that they will be supported to learn and that someone will be there to help them pick up the pieces.

5. LISTENING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

As an authority we are committed to listening to children and young people and have embedded this practice across Children and Young People's Services. We work in partnership with a social enterprise called 'Investing in Children'. They deliver a range of children's participation services on our behalf and implement several schemes through a contract arrangement:

- Facilitation of young people's participation / reference groups;
- Facilitation of the eXtreme group to ensure that the voice of children and young people with disabilities are listened to and acted upon;
- Coordination of the Children in Care Council;
- Management of the Drive Project – enabling some young people to learn to drive;
- Management of the Freedom Card – enabling Children Looked After and their carers to access a range of leisure activities at a discounted price;
- Management and facilitation of the Investing in Children Membership Programme – services are reviewed annually to ensure that they meet investing in children criteria.
- Ensuring young people's views and thoughts are captured when we develop new services i.e., Edge of Care Home, recommissioning the Independent Fostering Agency Framework and the service specification for our new children's homes.

All teams across Children's Services have either achieved Investing in Children Membership or are working towards this. The 'Investing in Children membership', is a kite mark which demonstrates that Children Looked After and young people feel valued and are listened to by adults.

6. CHALLENGES

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented the council with many challenges over the last two years, in relation to sufficiency of living arrangements for children and young people and the ongoing work with social care providers to ensure that children's living arrangements are stable and that they continue to provide good quality care.

An increase in the number of Children Looked After by the Authority

Whilst the number of children in need has been relatively stable over the last four years (3,570 in 2017/18, 3,571 in 2018/29, 3,551 in 2019/20 and 3,683 in 2020/21), the number of children looked after by the Local Authority has risen by 62% from 615 as of 31 March 2015 to 982 as of 31 March 2022. Based on recent increases, it is forecast that CLA numbers will increase to 1015 by

December 2022 (see Appendix 2 – Table 1). The current rate of CLA is 96 per 10,000 which is above the national average (67), however remains below the NE average (108).

From March 2020 we experienced an accelerated increase in the number of children looked after as a direct result of COVID, which was above the long-term forecast. Delays at court, as a result of the pandemic also prevented children and young people who had plans to return home to parents or family, from returning home, which resulted in fewer children leaving the care of the local authority. When courts re-opened this enabled an increasing number of children and young people to return home between June and August 2021 (Appendix 2 – Table 3), however with a steady increase in the number of children coming into care and a reduction in the number of children leaving care, the overall number of children that are looked after, has continued to increase, placing ongoing pressure on services across CYPS.

Our number of under 1-year olds (24%) remains around the regional 2020/21 benchmark (national – 20%; regional – 23%) and is the second lowest it has been over the last 12 months. The proportion of 16/17 year olds have increased to 13% over the last 12 months bringing us in line with statistical neighbour and regional average. Our biggest increase has been in relation to teenagers aged 14–15-year-olds, with a 31% increase. Our Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan focuses on the development of new smaller, local children’s homes to meet this increasing need.

There has been a growth in the number of older children looked after by the Local Authority, that present with complex needs and behaviours:

- Environmental factors: attachment difficulties, parental conflict, domestic abuse, homelessness.
- Internal factors: social communication difficulties including Autism, mental ill-health, behaviours that challenge services.
- External factors: interpersonal relationships, criminal and sexual exploitation, alcohol and substance misuse, serious youth violence and bail, licence and discharge conditions.

Where living with family cannot be maintained, securing safe, local accommodation and care that can meet the often be-spoke needs and requirement of this age group can be both complicated and very costly and represents a particularly volatile area of increasing demand.

This has presented many challenges for services across the Authority, ensuring that appropriate living arrangements that meet the individual needs of children and young people can be secured

Ensuring that our children and young people live locally

The sufficiency duty requires Local Authority’s to “take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children looked after within their **local** authority area.

A large proportion of our children and young people live in County Durham, with 70.3% living in county and 29.7% living in out of county arrangement. Of the

29.7% of children and young people that live outside of County Durham, 17.5% live under 20 miles from their originating home address and 12.2% of children and young people live 20 miles or more from their originating home address.

We always seek to secure appropriate living arrangements locally, when it is safe to do so and in the child or young person's best interests. A small proportion of children and young people need to live away from their local area (+20 miles) due to the immediate risks and challenges this presents, however some children and young people live in out of area provision, due to limited availability to meet young people's complex needs within County Durham. This Strategy outlines a range of development priorities which will create additional local sufficiency options, enabling a greater proportion of children and young people to live locally.

The Transforming Care Agenda

During 2019 the Multi-agency Collaborative Care Meeting (MACC) was established. This ensures that all children and young people with a diagnosis of autism and/or a learning disability are offered a Care, Education and Treatment Review (CETR) prior to admission and discharge to or from hospital to ensure that they are in receipt of suitable support or care services within the community.

The numbers of County Durham children placed in Tier 4 beds remains relatively stable, although there is a notable increase in the number of children and young people being admitted who had not been previously known to social care services. There is also a high number of children and young people at risk of admission due to an eating disorder.

The Closure of West Lane Hospital in Autumn 2019 has resulted in Children and Young People requiring treatment in a Children's Mental Health in-patient setting often having to be placed far from home due to bed shortages in the area or placed on adult wards. Ferndene Hospital in Northumberland and Acklam Road provide tier 4 CAMHS hospital provision for children and young people, with 7 Durham young people currently inpatients at these settings.

The MACC group was re-launched in October 2020 and takes place monthly to ensure any urgent multi-agency discussions can take place as soon as possible, with professional seeking advice and guidance from the MACC group when they are concerned about children and young people who are at risk of in-patient admission.

Durham's new Rapid Response Service, providing support to children, young people and their families / carers, to prevent admission and readmission to tier 4 hospital provision, works closely with children and young people identified and discussed within the MACC meeting.

Mental Health Offer

The emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people continues to be key priority for the council.

All children have been impacted one way or another during this period i.e., face to face family time moving to virtual means, children not being able to see their friends, not being able to participate in group activities and sports and most significantly, not accessing education for a substantial period of time. Whilst these restrictions are no longer in place and we learn to live with covid, the pandemic has had a lasting impact on many young people, particularly in relation to poor mental health, with a significant increase in demand on community health services.

The Council, TEWV and other health partners worked collaboratively to develop a new support offer for children, young people and their families to prevent admission to tier 4 mental health hospital provision, launching the Rapid Response Service (RRS) in July 2021.

The RRS was developed in response to an identified need for additional services to support young people and their families where there is a high level of risk of young people being admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act. Support is focused specifically on young people who are identified in the Dynamic Support Register. The offer of support includes intensive support and packages of intervention tailored to the particular needs of the young person and their family / carers.

When children and young people need to be discharged from tier 4 hospital into the care of the Local Authority, there is often limited suitable local provision that can provide the specialist care and support that young people require. To enable the timely discharge of children and young people back into community-based provision, a dedicated specialist service is required. Work is ongoing to explore all available options to meet this particular sufficiency need, prior to any service development.

Sourcing suitable living arrangements and matching children and young people

Over previous years, CYPS has rolled out signs of safety training and practice support across all Social Work Teams and this is now captured within our children and young people's risk assessments. Producing strength-based information has improved the quality of information that we share with a provider which improves opportunities for children and young people.

Matching children and young people in residential provision given existing young people in the setting and their presenting risks continues to present us with an ongoing challenge. Given the complexities of some of our children and young people we have a greater need for smaller regulated children's home settings which is identified as a priority within our Sufficiency Action Plan.

As our use of externally commissioned children's residential home provision has increased by 50% between 2020 and 2022, with 69 children and young people living in children's homes managed by providers, we have developed a dedicated brokerage function within our Commissioning Service, to support with the increasing number of children's home searches and activity. This investment consists of a new Placement Team Manager post and two additional Placement Officer posts, to support the existing post within the Commissioning Service.

Availability of Foster Carer Households

The availability of foster carer households for children and young people, particularly those aged 13+, continues to be a pressure across the service. This has resulted in a small number of children and young people accessing children's homes given the lack of availability. These young people's plans continue to be monitored closely.

The number of children and young people living within in-house foster care provision reduced to 375 in November 2021, however this has gradually increased, month on month, with 408 children and young people currently living within in-house foster carers (41.3% of all CLA). Covid had a significant impact on the availability of in-house foster care provision.

Due to limited availability in-house, this has placed a reliance on the use of IFAs, which peaked at 174 in February 2022, however over recent months has started to gradually reduce.

It is our ambition to care for an increasing number of children and young people with Durham foster carers, with a target of 48% by March 2023. As such, we continue to focus on the recruitment of new foster carers for teenagers, sibling groups, UASC, children with a disability and respite for children with a disability, whilst continuing to support the retention of current foster carers.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

In line with the new mandatory National Transfer Scheme, Durham is required to accept approximately 4-5 UASC per cycle, with over 50 UASC expected over the coming months. The Local Authority must identify suitable care or support arrangements, dependent on each young person's needs. To date, the majority of young people referred have been aged 16+ and their needs have been primarily met in Supported Lodgings or Supported Accommodation, with a smaller proportion of children identified as being under the age of 16.

Identifying suitable living arrangements for this cohort of children and young people, does present sufficiency challenges i.e., suitable living arrangements need to be sourced within 10 days, there is limited information available about UASC, many UASC wish to live in cities and not rural areas (Durham is predominantly rural) and there are already pressures in relation to securing regulated provision for children that are under the age of 16.

Whilst our UASC require accommodation, care and support, it is important that they can access other key services such as health, education, mental health, advocacy, translation services and an independent visitor, when there is a requirement for one.

The offer available to UASC is being developed on both a regional and local level to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet our ongoing needs. Sufficiency options to improve capacity are currently being developed, within our wider supported accommodation provision.

Children's Home's in County Durham and securing 'local' provision through a Durham First Approach

Durham has the highest percentage of children's homes per population in the region, with 467 children's homes in the North-East (81%) judged good or above (August 2021), which is a reduction from 88% in August 2019.

Whilst there is a high percentage of children's homes in Durham given its rural nature and more affordable property, there is also a high proportion of children placed in these homes from Local Authorities across the country, which often makes it difficult to identify suitable, local children's home provision for Durham children and young people and places significant pressure on services such as the Police, CAMHS and Education.

In order to maximise our access to local children's home provision, we remain in regular contact with providers to understand current and future vacancies, so children who require children's homes provision, can access this in a planned way.

We continue to work with external providers to shape and influence the services that they are developing for children and young people and to ensure that these meet our sufficiency needs, particularly smaller solo or dual registered homes, where there is an increasing demand for this type of provision.

When providers seek to develop new homes that do not meet our local needs, we positively challenge these during the early stages of their development and through the statutory planning process taking into account Planning Policy Guidance (Children's Home Planning Policy 18).

We work closely with Durham Police to consider new developments and sign-post providers to the police for locality risk information when considering the suitability and safety of a location.

Where the council has a definitive need for the service that is being developed, we ask that the provider enters into a 'Durham First Approach', enabling Durham County Council to access local provision or services, first and foremost. This approach enables us to secure provision in the local area, as it is generally in children and young people's best interests to live within Durham, close to family, friends and support networks. However, it should also be recognised that some young people benefit from living at distance, either due to risks in the local area or the need to access more specialist provision out of area.

Supporting Stability of Living Arrangements

Given an increasing number of breakdowns in children and young people's living arrangements and moves, there is an ongoing drive to support stability and to offer increased support and intervention to carers if there is a risk of breakdown, across all our types of living arrangements. Those carers who work with children and young people with particularly complex and challenging behaviours often require support or respite for short periods of time.

To respond to this particularly need, we are taking steps to develop and implement an improved support offer for our in-house foster carers. This consists of a 'wrap around support' team that will work intensively with our foster carers to promote stability and prevent breakdown of living arrangements. The Mockingbird Model is also being implemented which will offer improved support networks and respite for our foster carers.

To further support our children, young people with disabilities and their carers, we also plan to develop our in-house foster care offer to enable children and young people to access planned respite, as we have an increasing demand for respite at our Short Break Children's Home (Parkhouse) and this will enable us to expand our respite offer.

Families on the Edge of Care

Families on the edge of care, often require outreach support and respite to prevent children and young people from coming into care.

The Supporting Solutions Service has been operating since 2018 offering crisis support to young people aged 11-17 and their families / carers. The service is expanding its offer, supporting children and their families / carers for children aged 7-11. The service offers:

- Edge of Care support – intensive intervention to young people, parents and carer where there has been a relationship breakdown and without support it is likely that the young person may need to become looked after or experience a move.
- Family Group Conference – support to families to identify and establish a sustainable plan to meet the needs of children and young people within their family unit.
- Missing from Home Coordinator – co-ordination and deliver of services for children who are Missing from Home.
- Child Exploitation Workers – offering support and interventions to young people at high risk of child exploitation.
- Access to a crisis bed – providing an out of hours, one night only crisis bed for a young person when all other options have been explored and exhausted.

During 2020/2021 the service supported 179 young people and their families, in comparison to 101 young people supported in 2019/20. Of those young people support during 2020/21, 74% continued to live at home / with extended family or have remained in their long-term living arrangement. 28 young people (15%) who accessed support, became CLA after Supporting Solutions interventions and this is a clear increase from the previous year. These young people could not continue to live at home with family as it was not safe to do so. Some of these young people remained open to the Supporting Solutions Service in the hope that in the future a return to family care can be supported. 11 young people moved to a new living arrangement as relationships with carers had completed broken down.

The number of young people who remained open to an edge of care worker, has increased during 2020/2021, with 88 young people in 2019/20 and 132 young people in 2020/21, highlighting a 50% increase. This period covered the

second covid lockdown, when some families were struggling to care and support their children at home and required intensive support and ongoing interventions.

The service continues to demonstrate the positive work that it undertakes to support children to continue living with their family, where it is safe and possible to do so.

To further support our Edge of Care, Supporting Solutions Service, we plan to open a new Edge of Care home in summer 2023. The new home will support children and young people on the edge of care, offering planned respite. The home will also support children who are looked after and whose living arrangement may be at risk of breaking down. This will enable CYPS to broaden its current Edge of Care offer with dedicated respite provision.

Child Sexual Exploitation – Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team

There is an increase nationally, regionally and locally in Durham of adolescents experiencing extra-familial harm and young people presenting with complex issues including mental health and substance misuse who require a different model and approach outside of the traditional child protection framework and operating model.

The (ASET) Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team was established in early 2022 and consists of a Team Manager, Social Work Consultant and 6 Social Workers.

The vision for the team “is a future where young people feel safe beyond their own homes because their communities and our safeguarding system can, and will, protect them from harm”.

ASET will provide assessment and care-planning in line with statutory safeguarding procedures and deliver interventions to young people who are victims or at risk of extra-familial harm or experiencing complex issues and comorbidities. The team provides specialist advice and guidance to workers where a young person and/or their siblings are already open to services. This will reduce the need to change workers while ensuring young people receive a specialist service. ASET are a specialist knowledge hub who will provide advice and guidance and support the delivery of evidence-based practice while upskilling of the wider workforce.

Short Breaks for children, young people and their families

Both during and following the pandemic the Council has experienced an increase in the demand for both non assessed and assessed short breaks, with an increasing number of families seeking support. It is important that assessments are holistic and understand the overarching needs of children and their families with a range of different options being explored, working with the voluntary community sector.

Following the pandemic, the provider market is in a weakened position, with the following intelligence gathered:

- Current providers on commissioning frameworks are not able to meet all needs – both volume and needs
- Ongoing staffing issues in relation to capacity
- New providers developing within the market, who require intensive development support
- Lack of experience in the workforce
- Difficulty meeting the needs of the most complex children and young people
- Ratio of support to children is increasing, therefore placing more pressure on providers and cost impact on the Council
- Delays in securing services for children, young people and their families / carers
- A reduction in families use of direct payments

Work is ongoing with the provider market to review the ongoing challenges and to develop creative solutions. An Action Plan is being developed which will capture all key improvement areas, including, exploring the development of:

- A long-term children's home for disabled children and young people;
- An improved overnight short break offer for children and young people with highly complex needs;
- In-house foster carers that can offer respite to disabled children and young people

Supported Accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17

Our use of supported accommodation arrangements for young people aged 16 and 17 has more than doubled since pre-pandemic (22 in June 2021, increasing to 43 in April 2022). It is likely that demand will continue to increase as we receive UASC through the National Protocol Arrangements.

In order to broaden our Supported Accommodation Offer we will open our preferred provider list in October/November 2022, enabling new providers to join and deliver services to young people in Durham.

We will work with providers during 2023 in relation to the introduction of new national standards and the Ofsted-led registration and inspection framework, to understand any impact on sufficiency.

Supporting the Provider Market

The Supporting the Provider Market Team within the Commissioning Service now works with providers offering services to children and young people to improve services and to support market stability and sustainability.

The team focuses on five key areas:

- Recruitment and retention of staff
- Training and development
- Proactive interventions
- Technology and innovation
- Provider interfaces with health and social care

The County Durham Care Academy managed within the team, offers a routeway course for individuals wishing to work in adult or children social care. The 6-week programme does not affect an individual's benefits and results in a guaranteed interview with a provider and a transferrable DBS.

The children's routeway has been piloted with Durham County Council's Children's Residential Service to support recruitment and will be rolled out to support a wider range of providers supporting children and young people in County Durham.

This new offer has come at a time, when many providers are struggling to recruit and retain staff, as the country continues to recover and adjust following the pandemic and workforce sectors evolve.

Spend Position

The increasing number and complexity of children that are looked after by the council is continuing to result in increased social care costs for children and young people.

The outturn position for 2021/22 for CLA living arrangements, excluding in-house services was:

- Budget - £30.817m
- Actual - £33.993m
- Overspend - £3.176m

CLA budgets have increased year on year in line with increasing demand for services. This will increase by a further £2.863m in 2022/23 plus price inflation.

All costs are considered in a range of decision-making panels, where suitability of the living arrangement in line with the care plan and value for money are considered and scrutinised.

The priorities set out in this Strategy are subject to individual business cases, considering rationale, cost, impact, value for money and sustainability. Proposals will demonstrate best use of public funding, alongside our ongoing need to meet our sufficiency duty.

7. IN-HOUSE FOSTERING

We have an extensive in-house fostering offer, which we utilise for children and young people who cannot live with their families and whose needs would be best met in a family environment.

- Pre-covid in March 2020, we had 430 children and young people living in in-house fostering households, accounting for 48% of all CLA.
- In December 2021, 41% (378) of our CLA were living in in-house fostering provision, which was a significant reduction and resulted in the increasing use of IFA provision.

- Of the 378 children living with an in-house foster carer as of December 2021.
- 1 in 5 children had been in their current living arrangement for 5 years or more (21%); almost a quarter (23%) have been living in their living arrangement for less than 6 months.
- We experienced a reduction in children placed with our in-house foster carers directly following the first national lockdown in March 2020 primarily as a result of carers own ill-health and concerns about taking new children into their own homes during the pandemic.
- As of May 2022, we have 411 children and young people (41% of CLA) that are accommodated in this type of living arrangement. There has been an increasing number of in-house foster care households made in the last two months.
- During 2021/22, 29 new foster carer household were recruited, against a target of 30 households.
- Our Marketing and Recruitment Strategy focuses on ongoing media campaigns using TV adverts, digital advertising, social media, radio and a new promotional sign located outside of County Hall.
- Work is ongoing to make improvements to the website.
- Almost half of enquiries (49%) in 2021/22 have come from the website enquiry form, followed by email (37%). Website hits are increasing month on month.
- Social media campaigns have been targeted based on ongoing demands. These include campaigns focusing on the recruitment of new foster carers for children with disabilities, UASC, teenagers and sibling groups.
- In order to remain competitive with the independent sector and to attract and retain foster carers we will review our current Payment for Skills Model. It is important that we develop a foster carer 'offer' where all carers are incentivised and incorporates the following: competitive financial incentives for caring for children/young people (particularly those with more specialist behavioural and health needs), good quality support and training and development. Whilst this will require changes to the payment structure, an increase in the number of these foster care households will be a key enabler in improving outcomes and reducing the overall cost of provision in the longer term.
- We are in the process of implementing a Mockingbird Model, which will ensure that our foster carers receive ongoing, appropriate, experienced support and planned respite when it is required. Hub carers are being appointed which will support stability and the retention of foster carers. The new service model is being launched in July 2022.

Priorities

1. Recruit 35 new foster carer households in 2022/23 and a further 35 new foster carer households in 2023/24.
2. Develop and launch the new fostering website by December 2023.
3. Launch the Mockingbird Model to support our in-house foster carers in July 2022.
4. Review the current Payment for Skills Model in consultation with foster carers, which seeks to improve our sufficiency of in-house foster carers, by attracting new carers and retaining existing carers; and to implement the findings by October 2023.
5. Develop a 'wrap around support' team that will work intensively with our in-house foster carers to promote stability and prevent breakdown and implement by March 2023.
6. Develop the respite foster care offer for children and young people with a disability.

8. INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCIES (IFAs)

When we are unable to meet the needs of our children and young people within in-house foster care provision, we approach Independent Fostering Agencies.

- Durham is currently part of the new NE12 Regional Framework, which enables the council to purchase independent foster carer household arrangements.
- From July 2022, IFA households are commissioned through one single regional commissioning solution, involving all 12 regional Local Authorities. Extensive consultation and market engagement has been carried out to help shape and influence a commissioning model, that meets the needs of Local Authorities and is fit for purpose for participating providers.
- As our CLA numbers have continued to increase, our reliance on IFAs has increased also, with 158 IFA arrangements in June 2021 (similar to pre-Covid rates of 159/18%) rising to 172 arrangements in April 2022, equating to 17.5% of all CLA living with IFAs.
- As of December 2021, 28% of our children and young people were living with an IFA household for 6 months or less; 14% between 6-12 months, 47% between 1 and 5 years; and 11% lived in an IFA household for 5 years or more, demonstrating the high proportion of children who have a plan of permanence and who are settled.
- Children and young people live in IFAs, primarily due to brothers and sisters needing to be placed alongside one another, limited availability within in-house foster care provision and matching criteria.

- Due to the increasing needs of a small cohort of young people, when a foster care can not be identified, a children's home has been considered and secured. This change in provision has been considered and informed by the care team with the change in the young person's care plan ratified.
- As our number of children and young people placed in in-house foster care starts to increase, we aim to reduce the number of children and young people living in IFAs by 15% by March 2024. This would equate to approximately 147 children and young people living in an IFA household.

Priorities

1. We will continue to work regionally with other Local Authorities to ensure that the commissioning solution continues to be fit for purpose and to encourage off framework providers and new providers to join.
2. We will launch a new Provider Forum with our IFAs outside of our regional arrangements to share information about our demand, gaps in provision and to maximise effective partnership working.

9. ADOPTION

Adoption gives vulnerable children, including many with complex needs and a history of ill-treatment, the greatest possible stability, in a permanent home with a permanent family.

In April 2021, Adopt Coast to Coast launched as the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for Durham County Council with two partners, Cumbria County Council and Together for Children who provide children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council. The RAA is a partnership model whereby the central function of marketing and recruitment activity are centrally located in the hub with each partner retaining their adoption team who respond to enquiries in their allocated area and assess / support enquirers throughout their journey. All enquires received through the new enquiry and outcomes system where the enquirer has a Durham postcode, lives South of the Durham boundary or chooses Durham to receive the interest.

- In 2021/22 there has been 217 adoption enquiries, in comparison to 100 in 2020/21 and 165 in 2019/20.
- There was an 18% conversion rate from enquiries to approvals in 2021/22, a reduction in comparison to 2020/21 (41%) but an improvement from 2019/20 (15%).
- There were 66 placement orders in 2021/22, an increase from 2020/21 (58).

Recognising the sufficiency challenges across the region, a contract with ARC Adoption North-East provides the three spokes of Adopt Coast to Coast with exclusive access to prospective adopters they are assessing until they are approved as prospective adopters. This is in place to support early linking prior to a Placement Order being granted to reduce the time a child waits to be placed with their adoptive family.

Priorities

1. To ensure that the transition to Adopt Coast to Coast does not impact on the recruitment improvements made in 2020-2022.
2. To work collaboratively with RAA partners to develop practice around linking and matching, to reduce the waiting time for children when being matched to their forever family.

10. IN-HOUSE CHILDREN'S HOME PROVISION

The council recognises that group living in residential homes is a positive choice for some young people and is the best way to meet their assessed needs.

We are committed to looking after as many of our own children as possible as we believe this enables children to be close to home and their family. This offers the best opportunity of achieving good outcomes and stability for children and young people. This approach also ensures that resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

We are committed to ensuring that all of our children and young people with a plan of care are living in provision that is regulated with Ofsted.

Existing Offer and Usage

- Durham continues to deliver an in-house residential home offer to children and young people. Eight of Durham's children's homes are rated by Ofsted to be 'good', one new home is awaiting its first Ofsted Inspection and one requires improvement with plans in place to address all areas of improvement.

Table 1 – In-house residential home provision

Children's Home	Type of Provision	Number of Beds	Age Group
West Rainton	Long-Term	3	12-17 years
New Lea House,	Long Term	4	12-17 years
High Etherley	Long Term	3	12-17 years
Framwellgate Moor	Long Term	5	12-17 years
Moorside	Long Term	5	12-17 years
Coxhoe	Long Term	3	12-17 years
Hickstead	Long Term	3	12-17 years
Orchard House	Long Term	3	12-17 years
The Manse	Medium / Long-term	2	12-17 years
Park House	Short Break/Respite for disabled children/ young people	6 + 1 emergency bed	7-17 years

Over the last 12-24 months we have:

- Changed the registration of our children's home in West Rainton from a children's home for young children (7-11) which supports them to step down into foster care, into a home for young people aged 12+. The statement of purpose was reviewed to reflect our ongoing pressures for young people aged 12+. There are however an increasing number of younger children that require residential home provision, so we will seek to re-provide the step down to foster care model in the future.
- Re-provided our children's home previously at Cedar Drive. Our new children's home cares for up to three young people.
- Developed and opened a new children's home (Orchard House) for up to three young people.
- Developed a new smaller home for up to two young people aged 12-17. This was registered with Ofsted in June 2022.
- Used our short breaks home for both short breaks and short-medium term care arrangements, whilst alternative provision was identified for children and young people. This supported some of our immediate accommodation pressures but reduced the number of available overnight short breaks. The home has since reverted back to a short break only home with one emergency bed.
- Closed a children's home in Tow Law, as the building was no longer considered fit for purpose. An alternative property has been identified and the home is being re-provided.
- The council has increased its' number of long-term children's homes from 7 to 9, with 31 beds available for children and young people.

As of May 2022:

- 31 children and young people were accommodated within in-house children's home, in comparison with 26 children and young people accommodated in March 2020.
- An increasing number of females are accommodated in our in-house children's homes (52% as of May 2022 and 43% in March 2020). 42% are male and 6% are transgender.
- 45% of young people accommodated are aged 11-15 years old with this trend being consistent since 2019 (46% in October 2019); an increasing number of young people are aged 16+ (52%); with 3% of children under the age of 10 (1 child), which was 11% in 2020.
- We have 13 young people (42%) that will be turning 18 over the next two years, whereby improving the sufficiency across our children's homes and reducing our reliance on independent children's home providers. We will also focus on reviewing young people's care plans at the age of 16 to determine if children's home provision continues to be the most appropriate type of provision to meet their needs.

- There has been a lot of movement within our homes over the last 3 months with 9 new arrangements made. 11 young people have been in their home for less than 1 year; 8 young people have been in their home for just over 1 year.
- Our future demand for residential provision is dependent on the number of children that are becoming looked after and the complexity of their needs; the number of children that are due to exit the service and our plans for bringing children back into Durham from out of county provision. As our children looked after numbers continue to increase, children continue to present with a range of complex behaviours where their needs cannot be met in fostering provision and we are increasingly placing young people out of area, with demand for local residential provision continuing to be high. Whilst there is limited capacity to accommodate further young people and little flexibility within in-house homes to move children if a situation arises, this presents a clear rationale to grow and broaden our in-house offer.
- Given the ongoing demand for smaller children's residential homes to meet the needs of our complex and challenging young people who can't be safely matched into larger homes, we have secured investment to develop a number of new, smaller children's homes over the next 3 years.

Residential Transformation Programme – new children's homes

Due to our ongoing demand for children's residential home provision, with up to 30 children and young people being searched for at any one time, and ongoing challenges identifying smaller homes that can safely manage the needs of some of our more complex children and young people, we are committed to developing a number of new smaller children's homes in County Durham.

This will ensure that we have sufficient, smaller local children's home provision, reducing the need to place children and young people at a distance or to place young people in unregulated arrangements for short periods of time. Homes will either be purchased, leased or new builds. Given the lead in time for purchasing / building and setting up children's home, a number of temporary medium-term options have / are being developed through lease agreements.

We are in the process of developing the following children's homes:

- Up to **4 x smaller children's homes for children and young people aged 12-17**. Two homes will each provide accommodation and care for two children, with a further two solo homes (with one overarching Registered Manager), each providing accommodation and care for one child. Two homes will be operational by the end of 2022, with the further two homes operational by the end of 2023.
- The development a new **Edge of Care Children's Home**. This new service will support our children and families on the edge of care preventing them from entering statutory services and will support children who are currently looked after, offering planning respite with a view to supporting stability and preventing breakdown. The home is forecast to be operational from summer 2023.

- **Re-provide a home for three children and young people** that was closed in 2020. The home is forecast to be operation in Autumn 2023.
- The ongoing development of a **'Peripatetic Residential Staffing Pool'**. This will provide greater capacity and will reduce our use of external agencies.
- We are continuing to improve our quality assurance and oversight, systems and records and investing in our workforce to ensure that services provided to Durham children and young people are good or above, in relation to Ofsted's Quality Improvement Framework.

Given the needs of children and young people, it is increasingly difficult to match children and young people into either a 4th or 5th bed within a children's home. This is evidenced in our occupancy information for larger homes. As such, all new homes developed will have an upper limit of three young people.

We propose to review the upper capacity of our established larger homes, when our new homes are developed, however this this must be considered carefully alongside our ongoing sufficiency needs.

Based on our ongoing sufficiency pressures we have identified gaps in the following types of service provision and will explore a range of delivery options including the development of services that DCC will operate, and provider delivered services:

- Children's home for disabled children and young people
- Specialist Short Break Home which offers planned respite for up to two young people with complex needs

The above gaps in service provision were also identified by Ofsted in their July 2022 inspection.

STAYING CLOSE

When young people transition from their children's home and into supported accommodation or independence at the age of 18, this is often described as a 'cliff edge'. Staying Close looks to improve the outcomes for young people transitioning from their children's home, by providing continual, ongoing, familiar support from their keyworker or children's home staff as they transition into adulthood, for an agreed period of time.

The development of a Staying Close offer is a key priority and as such we now wish to develop and pilot this, capturing all learning and feedback and use this information to inform and shape Staying Close as we move forward.

We will be working closely with the DfE and other pilot providers / Local Authorities following a successful funding bid which will fund the programme over a 3-year period, enabling an increasing number of young people to access staying close, year on year.

Priorities

1. Develop up to 4 x children's homes. Two will accommodate up to two children and young people and a further two homes will accommodate one young person each. Homes to be operational in 2022 and 2023.
2. Develop an Edge of Care home and open the home in summer 2023.
3. Re-provide a children's home for three young people by Autumn 2023.
4. Continue to develop the residential peripatetic staffing team to support capacity and reduce the use of agency staff within homes.
5. Continue to have close oversight of the residential workforce to ensure that the experience and skills of the workforce continues to meet our sufficiency needs.
6. Continue to review the upper bedding capacity in our existing children's home, taking into account ongoing sufficiency press
7. Re-provide a step down to foster care children's home for younger children, by reviewing the use of our existing children's homes.
8. Develop a children's home for disabled children and young people, in line with feedback from Ofsted. We will consider both DCC and provider led options, including new build options.
9. Develop a specialist short break home which offers planned respite for up to two children / young people with complex needs. We will consider both DCC and provider led options, including new build options.
10. Develop a Staying Close Pilot Programme for a small group of identified young people.

11. EXTERNAL CHILDREN'S HOME PROVISION

Given our increasing demand for children's home provision and the lack of in-house capacity, we are placing more children with external residential providers.

There are currently 41 registered children's homes in the County Durham area:

- 1 x Secure Children's Home operated by Durham County Council
- 9 x Children's Homes operated by Durham County Council
- 31 x Private/Voluntary Sector Children's Homes

Private and voluntary sector children's homes meet a range of needs i.e., emotional behavioural difficulties, learning disabilities, sensory needs and physical disabilities. The size of homes ranges from 8 beds to 1 bed, with the average home caring for 4 young people.

A high proportion of children and young people from out of area, are accommodated in children's home in County Durham.

Existing Offer, Usage and Gaps

- We are using 47 external residential home providers as of 4 April 2022, in comparison to 27 providers in March 2020. Our use of the external market has increased significantly.
- 7% of CLA are now living in external residential homes, in comparison with 3.6% in 2019.
- As of February 2022, there was a 3% increase in the overall number of new CLA starts since March 2020, and a 31% increase in 14–15-year-olds in external children's homes. Demand is therefore not being driven by new young people coming into care, but by movement within existing children looked after and young people.
- We have had an 82% increase in the use of external residential homes since pre-covid, with 31 living arrangements in March 2020 increasing to 69 living arrangements in April 2022.
- We have seen an increase in the number of young people who have entered care and been accommodated in a children's home, rather than a foster carer household, due to their level of needs and complexity.
- We have started to place a small number of under 10-year-olds in residential homes, compared to zero children in March 2020. This highlights the increasing complexity of our younger children, and the inability to meet their needs within foster care provision.
- 40% of our children living in external residential homes are aged 14-15, in comparison to 16% in March 2020 (26 compared to 6 children, a 333% increase).
- 4 in 10 moves to external children's homes are from another external children's home. 45% of these are aged 14-15. 66% are age 13-15. This highlights providers difficulty in sustaining living arrangements for children and young people.
- There are very few 1 or 2 bedded homes in County Durham, that can offer specialist care and support to meet the needs of our most challenging children and young people. We have an increasing need for smaller homes and as such are working with a number of providers to shape and influence the services that they are developing.
- In 2016, the council joined the Regional Children's Home Framework, given our increasing use of external residential home provision. Whilst we continue to be part of this regional solution, Durham makes very few children's home arrangements with framework providers, with many providers choosing to remain off framework.
- Given the significant demand for external children's home provision (with demand often outstripping supply), independent providers can be selective regarding any future admissions, which often results in the most challenging

and high-risk young people with limited home opportunities, being placed at a distance. Given the lack of suitable local provision, we must therefore develop services that can meet this need.

- Whilst our use of parent and child residential units remains relatively low, when we need to secure this type of arrangement for a parent and their child, which is often directed by court, there are limited local options available.

Durham First Approach

Due to the ongoing pressures in securing appropriate, local children's home provision, whilst we continue to focus on developing and broadening our in-house children's home offer to meet a range of needs, it is equally important to work closely and in partnership with the private and voluntary sector to ensure that we have a mixed sufficiency offer that Durham children and young people can access.

A 'Durham First Approach' has been adopted which allows us to shape and influence new services being developed by external providers, so these meet our sufficiency needs and to ensure that Durham has access to these services first and foremost. This usually takes place prior to the formal planning process and has resulted in the size of the development being reduced and the scope of the service being adjusted, so that services met Durham's sufficiency needs.

There are a number of new homes currently being developed which will result in 10 new vacancies in the county which can be accessed by Durham children. To date we have worked with providers to develop five Durham First homes, which can be accessed subject to suitable matching and assessment of risks.

All providers delivering care to children and young people are allocated a Link Officer with the Commissioning Service. Link Officers offer support and guidance, have oversight of complaints and LADO involvement and develop a positive working relationship with the provider.

Step Down Provision from Tier 4 Mental Health Hospital

During 2021/22, we have had to secure provision within the community for a number of children and young people that have been discharged from Tier 4 hospital. Given the complexity and the ongoing risk that children and young people continue to present this is often difficult; and sometimes results in a delayed discharge from hospital, requiring the development of bespoke regulated living arrangements, which requires a significant lead in time.

It is important that we develop a dedicated regulated offer that can support children and young people for a period of time, until the young person can be carefully transitioned into their long-term community living arrangement or is able to go home. Whilst the provision will provide onsite ongoing intensive care and support for a small number of young people, the service would also be able to provide an element of out-reach wrap around support to young people not accommodated on site, but who are at risk of being admitted to hospital. We will explore options for developing an Intensive Home Treatment Plus Model that is able to provide specialist support into the service and into the homes of

identified young people who are looked after and at risk of admission to hospital.

Priorities

1. We will continue to work with providers to sustain children and young people's children's home provision, offering support and solutions which minimises moving children and young people.
2. We will continue to work closely with providers that wish to develop new Durham First services in County Durham, to shape services and to positively challenge development when this does not meet our needs.
3. We will explore options for working in partnership with a provider to develop a solo / dual registered children's home in County Durham, specifically for our use.
4. We will review our potential future use of parent and child residential units and encourage providers to develop these services when there is an identified need.
5. We will continue to play an active role in the NE12 regional consortia, working with neighbouring Local Authorities, to understand regional challenges, demand and to work collaboratively.
6. We will launch a new Provider Engagement Forum in July 2022 with our residential home providers. This will be specific to Durham's local needs.
7. We will work with health partners to develop a new registered step down from hospital offer to meet the needs of children and young people who are in our care and who have ongoing mental health needs.
8. As our capacity increases within in-house children's home provision, we will review our out of county living arrangement, to understand which children and young people have a plan to move back into the area.

12. SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION AND CARE LEAVERS

Supported accommodation provides a stepping-stone for our young people aged 16 and 17 and care leavers, supporting the development of skills for life as young people transition into adulthood.

Many young people's needs can not be met in traditional accommodation options such a children's homes, with assessments determining that young people no longer require care but would benefit from ongoing support in their day to day lives.

- Our use of supported accommodation provision has increased since pre-covid by 187% (15 YP increasing to 43 YP), which accounts for 4% of our CLA.

- In 2020/21 we had 78 care leavers aged 17-18 that we supported, which is a slight reduction, from 84 in 2019/20. The number of care leavers aged 19-21 has however increased from 175 in 2019/20 to 197 in 2020/21.
- In 2020/21 we had 275 eligible care leavers aged 17-21 and 278 eligible care leavers as of the 8th April 2022, with number remaining relatively static over the 2 year period.
- 92% of our care leavers aged 17-18 are in suitable accommodation, which is above the national benchmark (91%) but below the statistical neighbour (93%) and regional (94%). Our number of care leavers aged 19-21 in suitable accommodation is also 92%, which is above the national (88%) and regional benchmark (91%) and on par with the statistical neighbour benchmark.

Supported Accommodation Offer

In order to meet the accommodation and support needs of our 16- and 17-year-olds, Durham has a range of 16+ unregulated accommodation options. These include:

<p><u>In-House Provision:</u> Supported Lodging Carers</p> <p><u>Commissioned Services:</u> Hedley House – Changing Lives (block contract) Staying Put (through IFAs) YMCA (spot purchase) ROC Solid (spot purchase) Moving on (spot purchase) Jigsaw Recovery Project (spot purchase) Home Group Staying Close (see in-house residential)</p> <p>Durham Local Letting Agency for general needs housing options for young people.</p>	<p>Low-Medium Level Needs</p>
<p><u>Commissioned Services:</u></p> <p>Supported Living Provider Panel for young people aged 16-17 who have needs that challenge services – consisting of 11 providers</p>	<p>High Support Needs</p>

The current supported accommodation provider panel is due to be opened in October 2022, giving new providers an opportunity to join and deliver services for young people, whose needs are best met in a solo occupancy accommodation. This will broaden our current availability of supported accommodation services for young people.

New National Standard and Ofsted-led registration and inspection

We will be working with supported accommodation providers when further information is published by Ofsted in relation to the new national standards and the registration and inspection regime.

Discussion will be facilitated through Provider Engagement Forums to understand any additional support required, the potential impact on providers due to regulatory changes and to understand any emerging gaps in service provision.

Homelessness

When young people aged 16 and 17 present as homeless, they are assessed as being children in need, (CLA would not be considered as homeless) and are considered within joint housing protocol meetings, to explore suitable accommodation and support, if their assessed needs can be met through support accommodation.

Housing Solutions have a dedicated officer who works with Care Leavers to assist within the Homeless Reduction Act when a care leaver is homeless or threatened with homelessness, to help access the most appropriate accommodation to meet their needs.

Housing Solutions will work with the care leavers social worker or young person's advisor using the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Protocol, to help source accommodation and discuss any additional support requirements that may need as part of their pathway plan.

Priorities

1. To review the marketing and recruitment strategy for Supported Lodging providers, which seeks to recruit new carers.
2. We will open up the Supported Accommodation Provider Panel for young people in October 2022, broadening our pool of providers.
3. Establish a new Provider Engagement Forum with supported accommodation providers.
4. We will work with supported accommodation providers in relation to the regulation of provision, to understand any potential impact or emerging gaps in provision.

13. UNACCOMPANIED ASSYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC)

Durham is working in partnership with regional Local Authorities to explore how best to meet the needs of UASC coming into the region, alongside the development of regional and local commissioning solutions. This includes:

- The North-East Migration Partnership acting as a brokerage service on behalf of all 12 regional LAs, when seeking to identify appropriate provision

for under 16's from IFAs through the NE12 Tyne Tees Regional IFA Commissioning Solution.

- The allocation and management of the UASC living arrangements are made based on their location. This does not change the number of UASC allocated to each LA.
- The targeted recruitment of foster carers and supported lodging providers that can care for UASC.
- Development of pooled resources i.e., training, legal and age assessments, pathways and living skills documentation.
- Exploring the development of a regional short-term residential service, where UASC live whilst assessments are concluded, and independent living skills are developed. This type of service would enable LAs to meet the 10-day lead in time for placing children and young people, when all other options had been explored.

As demand for suitable provision will continue and will not reduce, our accommodation options must also be expanded to meet this unprecedented need. One single service will not meet our overarching accommodation and support needs, instead a range of sufficiency options need to be explored and developed.

Priorities

1. Work with local supported accommodation providers to explore the extension of existing services to meet our increasing accommodation and support needs for UASC.
2. Consider options to develop a local supported accommodation and assessment hub, which will assess UASC over a 6 – 12-week period, before moving young people onto suitable supported accommodation.
3. Continue to work in partnership with regional LAs to develop a commissioning solution for UASC.

14. SHORT BREAKS FOR DISABLED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES / CARERS

The Council has a legal duty under the Children Act 1989 to provide services for children in need and their families. This includes children who are disabled.

Parent and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and / or disabilities tell us that they often need a short break from their caring role. Children and young people would ordinarily take part in social opportunities outside of their education, providing a break for their parent / carer which is intended to prevent children requiring statutory services or becoming looked after.

The Council provides a two-tier short break offer:

- (i) Non-Assessed Community Short Breaks – providing 2-3 hours of community activities, which offer support and a regular break to parents and carers
- (ii) Assessed Specialist Enhanced Short Breaks – offering enhanced support to children and young people with more complex needs, which enables young people to access the community and overnight respite following a statutory assessment. This can be secured through the following:
 - a. Direct payment – personalised response for the family
 - b. Domiciliary Care – going into the young person’s home to provide assistance with personal care, feeding, washing, sitting services etc
 - c. Health services – into the home for children with health needs
 - d. Specialist community-based services – hub-based delivery in very small groups or outreach into the community
 - e. Overnight respite within a regulated residential setting

Responsiveness, Gaps and Challenges

- Some providers are unable to offer non assessed short breaks to children and their families as they are unable to provide specialist support required by children.
- As of the 1 April 2022, 242 statutory short break assessments identified that a short break service should be commissioned for a young person and their family. Of the 242 assessments:
 - 1.7% - had been agreed at panel and were due to be actioned
 - 4.6% - no service had been identified
 - 10.3% - service identified but not yet commenced
 - 83.4% - service is being delivered
- There has been a drop in families use of direct payments, with further work ongoing to understand why this is the case, however early indication is that there are ongoing problems in relation to attracting direct payment workers.
- There has been a significant increase in demand for specialist community short breaks, however providers have often been unable to respond to needs. This is in terms of both volume and complexity of children and a lack of providers within the market. During the pandemic some families were waiting 12 months for support due to provider availability.
- The market is unable to respond to overnight respite referrals due to limited availability. There is also limited availability within DCC’s in-house respite home, Park House, due to a number of young people being accommodated on a longer-term basis (until they can be transitioned into an alternative home), which is bed blocking.

- There is limited-service provision within hospices, due to inadequate Ofsted judgements, leaving fewer beds available.

Priorities

1. In order to commission services in line with needs, a whole system approach is required to re-shape, stabilise, capacity build and upskill the market.

A Sufficiency Action Plan will be developed and implemented which will Short Breaks highlight the range of actions that will be taken forward to address the ongoing challenges and gaps in provision, and to improve both the universal and statutory short breaks offer for children, young people and their families / carers. This includes:

Non-Assessed Community Short Breaks:

- A. Ensure that organisations maximise inclusion for disabled children in community activities across County Durham and have the right skills and experience to respond to young people's needs.
- B. Further invest to enable children and young people with disabilities to access local universal activities, ensuring that parents / carers access regular breaks when these are needed and reducing the reliance on commissioned assessed services, preventing escalation of family needs.
- C. Continue to commission a menu of community activities for children unable to access the community due to their disability, without the need for a statutory assessment, whilst ensuring that providers are upskilled to respond to specialist needs.

Assessed Specialist Enhanced Short Breaks:

- D. Ensure that the provider market has the capacity, experience and skills to meet to children and young people's short break needs, either at home, in the community or in a residential setting.
- E. Develop specialist and inclusive community hubs to enable complex young people to be supported within their local area.
- F. Review overnight respite provision at Park House, alongside the wider overnight respite offer in the region, propose options to meet all needs, including those young people with complex disabilities / challenging behaviours that post a risk to other children. Develop a model and service provision for overnight respite (this action overlaps with Priority Number 9 within the In-House Residential Homes section of this strategy).
- G. Change our commissioning approach to block investment with existing providers to develop, stabilise and upskill the workforce so it can respond to short break demand, particularly for those young people with autism and challenging behaviours.

15. CONCLUSION

The aim of this Strategy is to ensure that children and young people in care live in stable, high-quality settings, where their needs can be met and their outcomes improved, enabling them to return home where this is in their best interests.

As corporate parent, the whole Council has a role to play to improve the outcomes for Durham's children looked after and care leavers. This Strategy and the delivery of its outcomes form just one part of our overall approach to supporting children looked after and care leavers and those on the edge of care and should be read in conjunction with other local strategies for children and families in need of support and protection.

16. PRIORITIES

Based on the analysis of the needs of children looked after and care leavers, an understanding of the market locally and a range of research, four main objectives have been identified within this Strategy to contribute to achieving the authority's sufficiency duty and meeting the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

The six objectives are set out in Appendix 1 of the Strategy and will shape the activities, we as an authority believe will best deliver this outcome.

As we make progress with these objectives, we will achieve the quality, sufficiency and value for money we need in order to achieve the best for children and young people in County Durham

17. INDICATORS

A range of 'Indicators' have been identified and will be reviewed on a 6- monthly basis, to help inform and assess the Authority's effectiveness in delivering its overall sufficiency duty.

These are set out in the table below.

1.	Number of children that are looked after
2.	Number of children that are adopted
3.	Number of children living with in-house foster carers
4.	Number of children living with independent fostering agency carers
5.	Number of children living in in-house children's homes
6.	Number of children living in external children's homes
7.	Number of children living in supported accommodation / living
8.	Number of UASC accommodated
9.	Number of living arrangements endings which are at the carers request due to a child's behaviour (looking at age of the child and length of time in their living arrangement)
10.	Percentage of children who are looked after with 3 or more living arrangements during the year

11.	Percentage of children looked after continuously for 2.5 years or more aged under 16 who are living in the same living arrangement for at least 2 years
12.	Number of children with a plan of permanence
13.	Percentage of care leavers living in suitable accommodation
14.	Number of unregulated living arrangements made for children who required care
15.	Number of out of county living arrangements made
16.	Number of children and young people with a disability who live with their family and who are accessing respite

KEY PRIORITIES

No	Overarching Objective	Priorities	Completed by
1	Grow our number of in-house foster carers, support the retention of carers and work with IFAs to ensure that children and young people can live with foster carer families when it is in their interests to do so	Recruit 35 new foster carer households in 2022/23 and a further 35 new foster carer households in 2023/24	March 2023 and March 2024
		Develop and launch the new fostering website	December 2023
		Launch the Mockingbird Model to support our in-house foster carers	July 2022
		Review the current Payment for Skills Model in consultation with foster carers, which seeks to improve our sufficiency of in-house foster carers, by attracting new carers and retaining existing carers and implement findings	October 2023
		Develop a 'wrap around support' team that will work intensively with our in-house foster carers to promote stability and prevent breakdown	March 2023
		Develop the respite foster care offer for children and young people with a disability	September 2022 – March 2024
		We will continue to work regionally with other Local Authorities to ensure that the new commissioning solution continues to be fit for purpose and to encourage off framework providers and new providers to join.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will launch a new Provider Forum with our IFAs outside of our regional arrangements to share information about our demand, gaps in provision and to maximise effective partnership working.	September 2022

2	Increase the number of adopters	Ensure that the transition to Adopt Coast to Coast does not impact on the recruitment improvements made in 2020-2022.	March 2024
		Work collaboratively with RAA partners to develop practice around linking and matching, to reduce the waiting time for children when being matched to their forever family.	March 2024
3	Continue to develop and broaden our residential homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so	Develop up to 4 x smaller children's homes. Two will accommodate up to two children and young people and a further two homes will accommodate one young person each. Homes to be operational in 2022 and 2023.	December 2022 and December 2023
		Develop an Edge of Care home	August 2023
		Re-provide a children's home for three young people	November 2023
		Continue to develop the residential peripatetic staffing team to support capacity and reduce the use of agency staff within homes.	April 2022 – March 2024
		Continue to have close oversight of the residential workforce to ensure that the experience and skills of the workforce continues to meet our sufficiency needs.	April 2022 – March 2024
		Continue to review the upper bedding capacity in our existing children's home, taking into account ongoing sufficiency press	April 2022 / March 2024
		Develop a step down to foster care children's home for younger children, by reviewing our existing children's home provision	March 2024
		Develop a children's home for disabled children and young people, in line with feedback from Ofsted. We will consider both DCC and provider led options, including new build options.	March 2025

		Develop a specialist short break home which offers planned respite for up to two children / young people with complex needs. We will consider both DCC and provider led options, including new build options.	March 2025
		Develop a Staying Close Programme for a small group of identified young people	July 2022 – March 2025
		We will continue to work with providers to sustain children and young people’s residential home arrangements, offering support and solutions which minimises moved for children and young people.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will continue to work closely with providers that wish to develop new Durham First services in County Durham, to shape services and to positively challenge development when this does not meet our needs.	April 2022 / March 2024
		We will review our potential future use of parent and child residential units and encourage providers to develop these services when there is an identified need.	March 2024
		We will explore options for working in partnership with a provider to develop a solo / dual registered children’s home in County Durham, specifically for our use.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will continue to play an active role in the NE12 regional consortia, working with neighbouring Local Authorities, to understand regional challenges, demand and to work collaboratively.	April 2022 – March 2024
		We will launch a new Provider Engagement Forum with our residential homes providers. This will be specific to Durham’s local needs.	July 2022
		We will work with health partners to develop a new registered step down from hospital offer to meet the needs of children and young people with ongoing mental health needs.	March 2024

		As our capacity increases within in-house residential home provision, we will review our out of county living arrangements, to understand which children and young people have a plan to move back into the area.	Ongoing
4	Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers	Review the marketing and recruitment strategy for Supported Lodging providers	March 2023
		We will open up the Supported Accommodation Provider Panel for young people with complex needs, broadening our pool of providers.	October 2022
		Establish a new Provider Engagement Forum with supported accommodation providers.	September 2022
		Work with supported accommodation providers in relation to the regulation of provision, to understand any potential impact or emerging gaps in provision.	August 2022 – March 2024
5	Improve our sufficiency offer for UASC and reduce waiting times	Work with local supported accommodation providers to explore the extension of existing services to meet our increasing accommodation and support needs for UASC.	December 2022
		Consider options and funding opportunities to develop a local supported accommodation and assessment hub, which will assess UASC over a 6 – 12-week period, before moving young people onto suitable long-term supported accommodation.	December 2022
		Develop a new supported accommodation assessment service for UASC	September 2023
		Continue to work in partnership with regional LAs to explore opportunities for joint commissioning	April 2022 – March 2024
6	Broaden our short breaks offer for disabled children and their families	Develop a Short Breaks Sufficiency Action Plan which highlights the range of actions that will be taken forward to address the ongoing challenges and gaps in provision, and to improve both the universal and statutory short	July 2022

		breaks offer for children, young people and their families / carers	
		<p>Deliver a programme of non-assessed community short break improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Ensure that organisations maximise inclusion for disabled children in community activities across County Durham and have the right skills and experience to respond to young people's needs. (ii) Further invest to enable children and young people with disabilities to access local universal activities, ensuring that parents / carers access regular breaks when these are needed and reducing the reliance on commissioned assessed services, preventing escalation of family needs. (iii) Continue to commission a menu of community activities for children unable to access the community due to their disability, without the need for a statutory assessment, whilst ensuring that providers are upskilled to respond to specialist needs. 	July 2022 – March 2024
		<p>Deliver a programme of assessed specialist enhanced short breaks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Ensure that the provider market has the capacity, experience and skills to meet to children and young people's short break needs, either at home, in the community or in a residential setting. (ii) Develop specialist and inclusive community hubs to enable complex young people to be supported within their local area. (iii) Review overnight respite provision at Park House, alongside the wider overnight respite offer in the region, propose options to meet all needs, including those young people with complex disabilities / challenging 	July 2022 – March 2024

		<p>behaviours that post a risk to other children. Develop a model and service provision for overnight respite (this action overlaps with Priority Number 9 within the In-House Residential Homes section of this strategy).</p> <p>(iv) Change our commissioning approach to block investment with existing providers to develop, stabilise and upskill the workforce so it can respond to short break demand, particularly for those young people with autism and challenging behaviours.</p>	
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KEY DATA TO SUPPORT THE STRATEGY

-All data is based on information available as of 31 March 2022-

Table 1: CLA Forecast (April 2022 onwards)

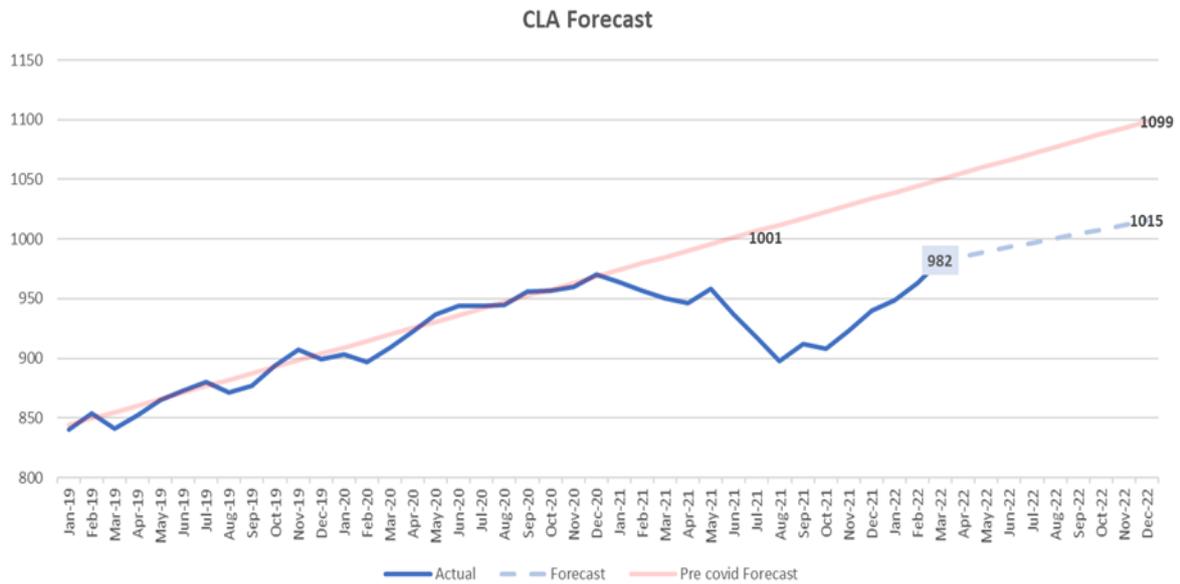


Table 2: Comparative CLA rate (per 10,000 population)

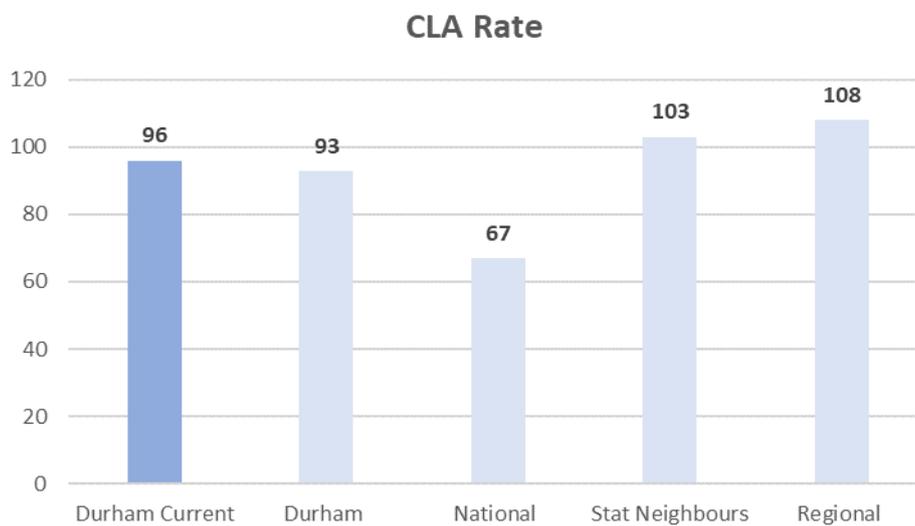


Table 3: CLA Starts and Ends

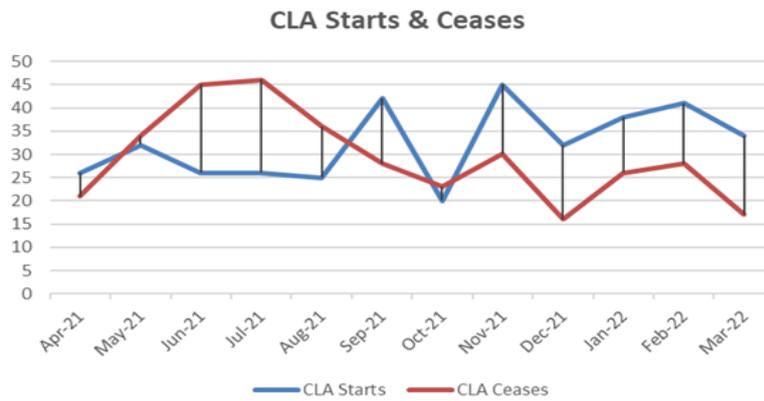


Table 4: CLA Start Rate

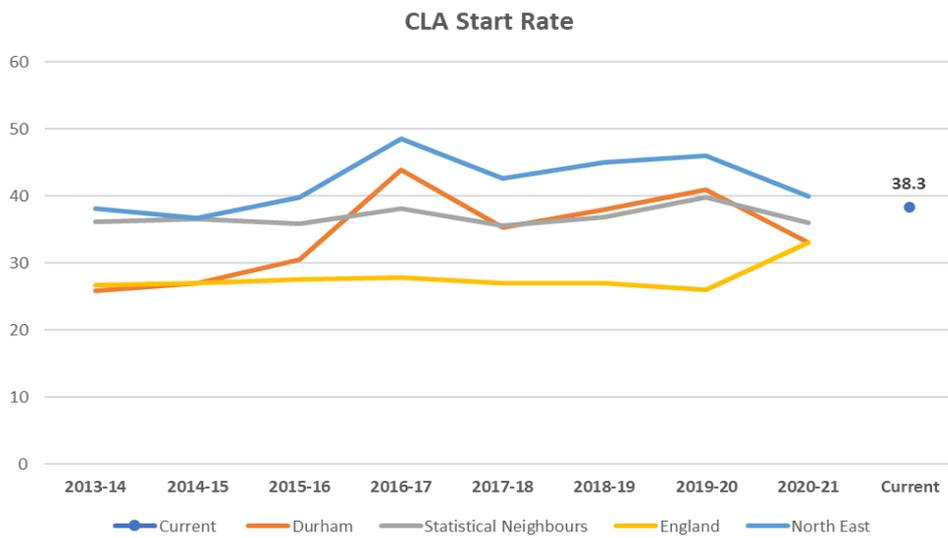


Table 5: CLA Cease Rate

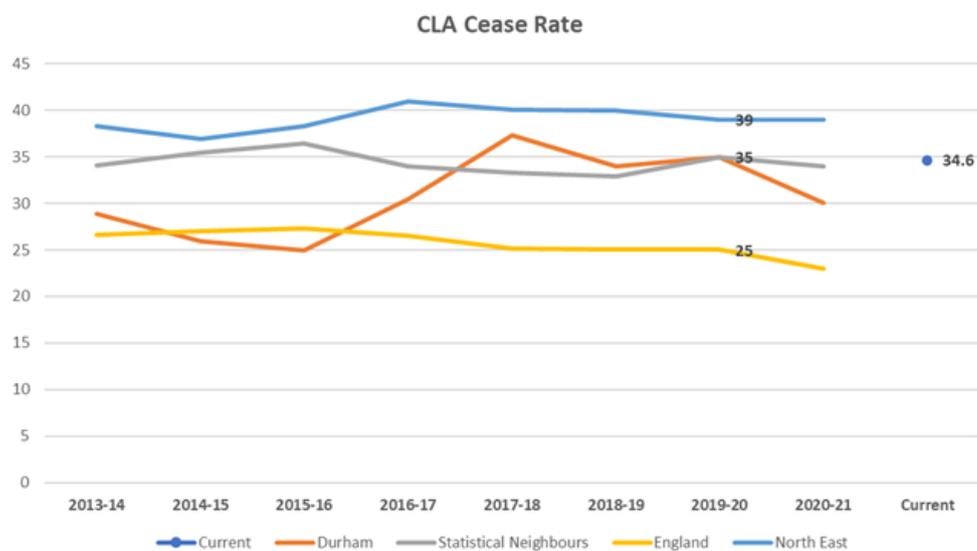


Table 6: Under 1 CLA starts

Select Indicator from drop down list
(LAC2.11) CLA started in the year by age: % Age: Under 1

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Latest	% change from '19-20 to '20-
Durham	31	25	23	33	27	28	29		Up 4%
England	19	18	18	19	19	19	20		Up 5%
Statistical Neighbours	24	24	23	23	23	24	22		Down -10%
North East	22	22	21	24	23	22	23		Up 5%

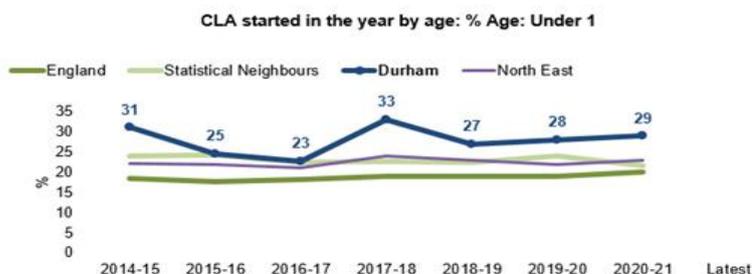
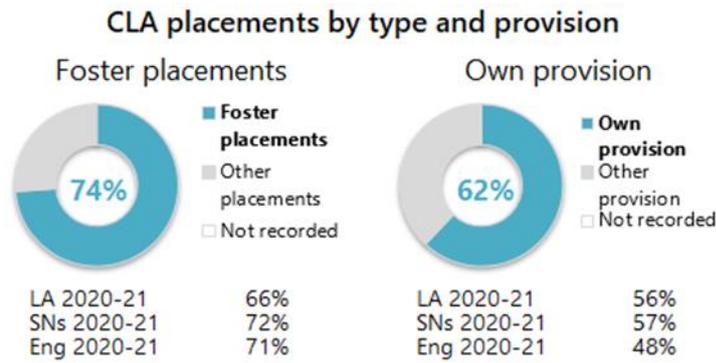


Table 7: CLA Analysis

CLA Placement Type Analysis											
Placement Type	04-Jun-19		11-Mar-20		04-Apr-22		No. change	% change on Jun19	No. change	% change pre-COVID	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%					
External Residential	31	4%	38	4%	69	7%	38	123%	31	82%	
Friends and Family	134	15%	126	14%	143	15%	9	7%	17	13%	
IFA	126	15%	159	18%	172	17%	46	37%	13	8%	
In House Foster Care	422	49%	430	48%	411	42%	-11	-3%	-19	-4%	
In House Residential	31	4%	26	3%	31	3%	0	0%	5	19%	
Independent Living	9	1%	8	1%	4	0%	-5	-56%	-4	-50%	
NHS/Health Trust	2	0%	1	0%	1	0%	-1	-50%	0	0%	
Placed For Adoption	24	3%	23	3%	38	4%	14	58%	15	65%	
Placed With Parents	66	8%	62	7%	63	6%	-3	-5%	1	2%	
Full Care Order	57	7%	47	5%	47	5%	-10	-18%	0	0%	
Interim Care Order	9	1%	15	2%	18	2%	9	100%	3	20%	
Residential School	2	0%	2	0%	0	0%	-2	-100%	-2	-100%	
Unapproved Carers - Court Directed*					1	0%					
Unapproved Carers - Not Court Directed*					1	0%					
Unregistered Placement*					2	0%					
Secure	1	0%	1	0%	4	0%	3	300%	3	300%	
Supported Lodgings	12	1%	15	2%	43	4%	31	258%	28	187%	
YOI/Prison	1	0%	1	0%	0	0%	-1	-100%	-1	-100%	
Grand Total	866	100%	902	100%	983	100%	117	14%	81	9%	

Table 8: Living Arrangement by type and provision



Placement type (open CLA)	Own LA	Private	Other	Total
Foster placement	550	161	12	723
Placed for adoption	11	0	27	38
Placed with parents	0	0	64	64
Independent living	13	24	11	48
Residential employment	0	0	0	0
Residential accommodation	0	0	0	0
Secure Children's Homes	2	1	0	3
Children's Homes	31	69	0	100
Residential Care Home	0	0	0	0
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	1	1
Family Centre	0	0	0	0
Young Offender Institution	0	0	0	0
Residential school	0	0	0	0
Other placements	0	0	0	0
Temporary placement	0	0	0	0
Total placements	607	255	115	977

Table 9: Number of moves in the last 12 months

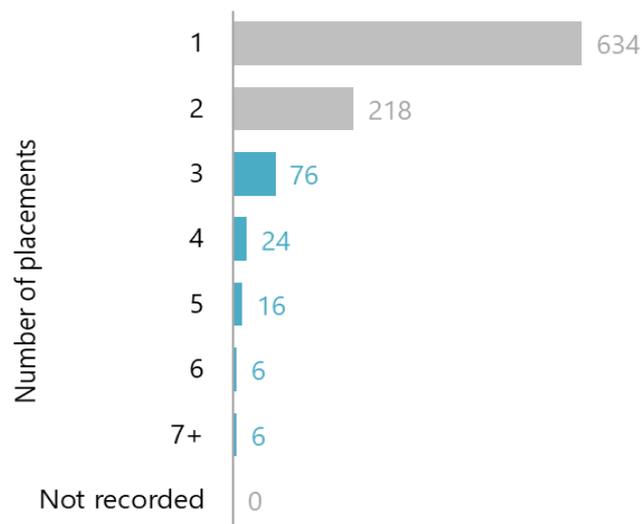


Table 10: Duration of latest living arrangement for each current CLA aged under 16 who have been looked after for 2.5 years or more

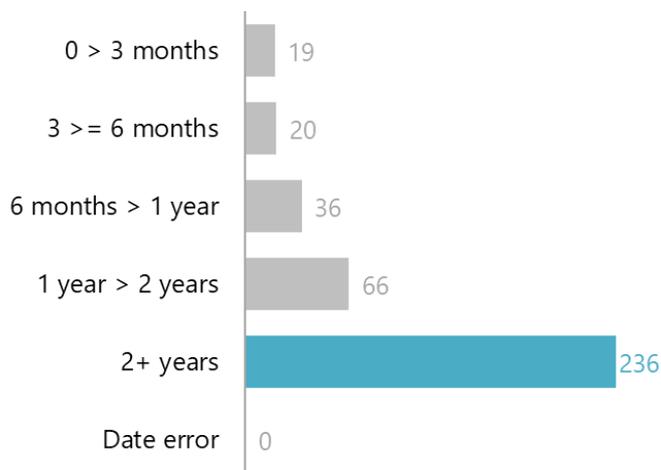


Table 11: Adoption year on year comparative data

	Initial enquiries	Conversion Rate	Approvals of prospective adopters	Placement Order	Matched
2019/20	165	15%	25	66	64 (24 with in-house carers)
2020/21	100	41%	41	58	60 (42 with in-house carers)
2021/22	217	18%	40	66	65 (31 with in-house carers)

Table 12: CLA age profile (as of 31 March 2022)

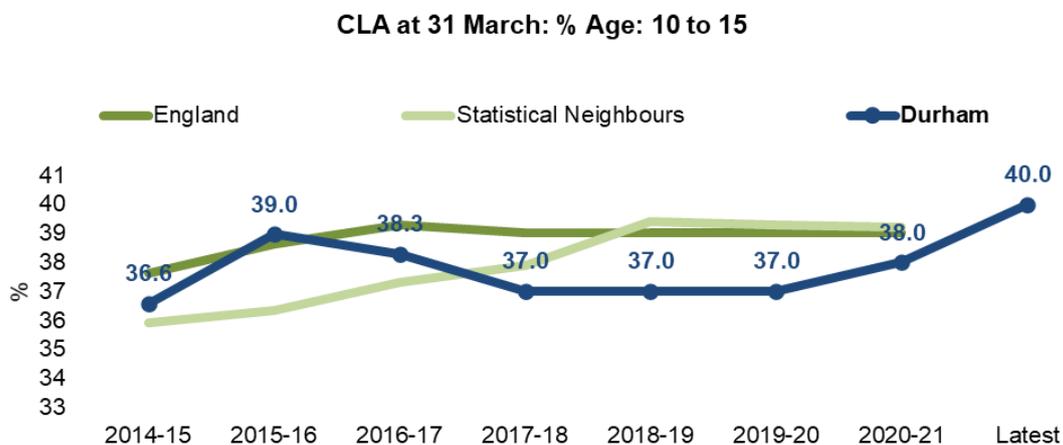


Table 13: CLA age 16 and over (as of 31 March 2022)

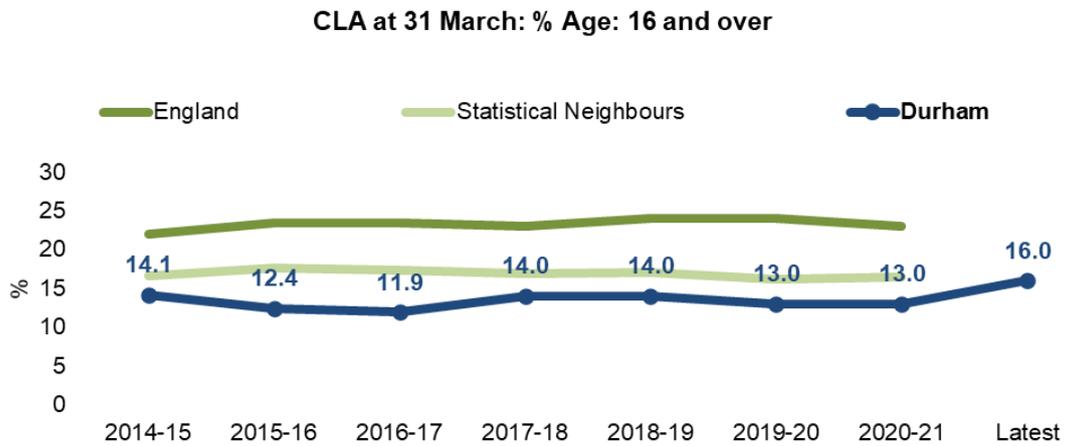


Table 14: External Children’s Home Usage Trends

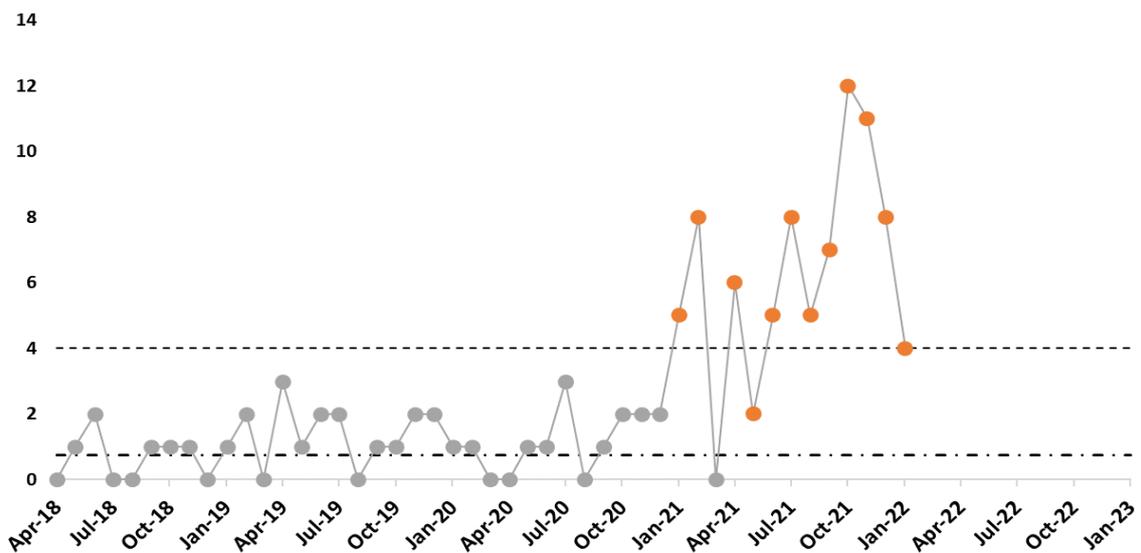


Table 15: CLA at 31 March

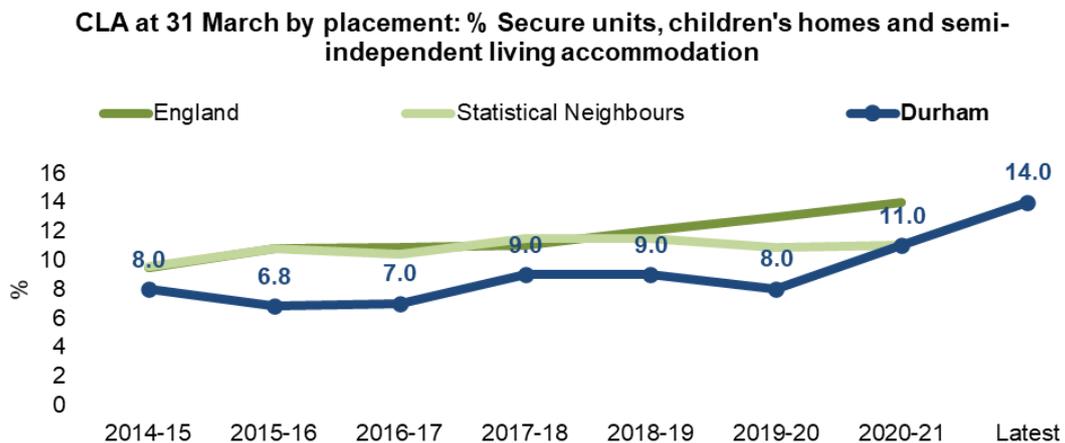


Table 16: Stability

Regional Benchmarking	North East	Darlington	Durham	Gateshead	Hartlepool	Middlesbrough	Newcastle upon Tyne	North Tyneside	Northumberland	Redcar and Cleveland	South Tyneside
Placement stability (LAC at end of period with 3 or more placements/LAC at end of period with 3 or more placements/LAC at end of period)	8.5%	10.0%	10.5%	8.7%	2.6%	10.3%	7.4%	10.0%	9.3%	9.0%	8.8%
Placement stability (Number of Children Looked After for and aged under 16 at end of Month, and in last 2 Years) – number who have been in last 2 years/LAC at least 2.5 years at end of period	69.0%	73.5%	62.0%	71.3%	73.6%	63.1%	69.5%	69.0%	68.1%	71.3%	68.8%

Table 17:

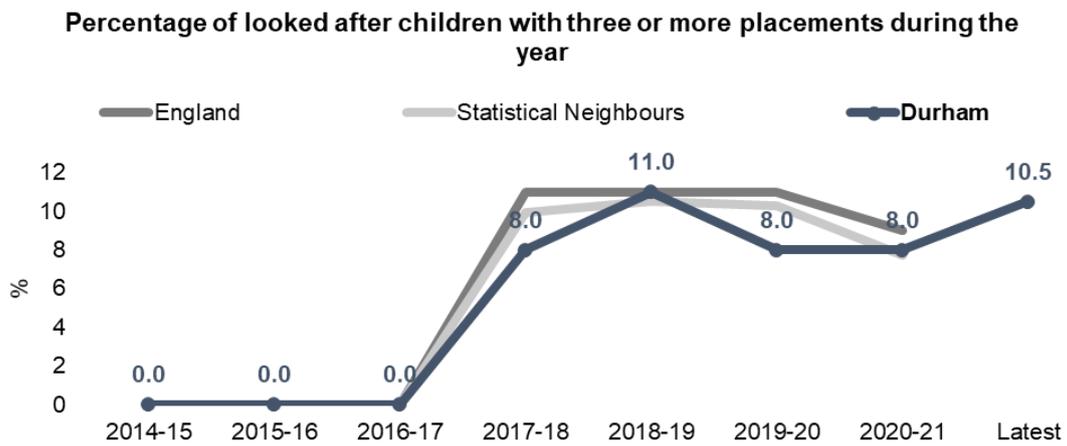
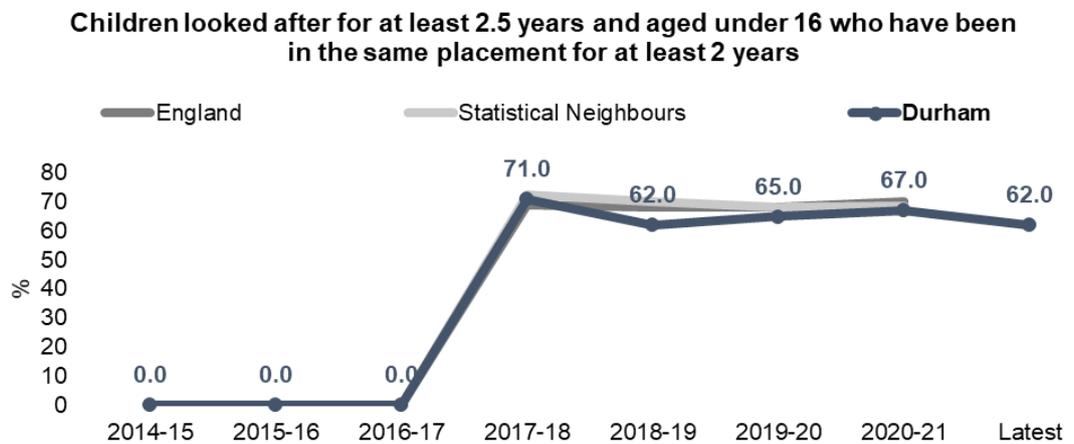


Table 18:



Impact of sufficiency strategy and additional resources

In-house Residential Home Provision

Current Provision

- 31 beds available across children's homes (medium/long term living arrangements)
- 6 beds current available in our short breaks home (with one additional emergency bed).

Additional Provision to be developed to meet need

Funding approved

- 9 beds for children and young people with emotional behavioural difficulties who require smaller homes
- 3-4 beds for children on the edge of care beds who require planned respite from their family

Funding / Arrangements to be approved

- 3 beds for children and young people with a disability
- 2 beds for children and young people with a disability who have complex needs and need to access a planned short break in a smaller setting
- 3 specialist beds for children and young people stepping down from tier 4 hospital provision
- 1-2 beds for children and young people with complex needs who need to live in a smaller setting (delivery in partnership by a provider)

Up to 23 additional residential children's home beds

For further information contact:

AHS.Commissioning@durham.gov.uk

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03000 261 381

Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2022-24

Presentation to Corporate Parenting Panel



Introduction and Context

- Durham’s strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our children looked after and care leavers.
- Sufficiency Duty: “as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children looked after within their local authority area”.
- Covers a 2-year period (2022-2024) focusing on our current offer, challenges, gaps in services / provision and the actions identified to address these.
- Ongoing actions and projects underway and future actions we are proposing to take as a Local Authority – some of which are subject to funding availability.
- The Strategy has been approved at CMT and Cabinet.
- Final stage – to seek approval from Corporate Parenting Panel Members today

Achievements over the previous 2 years....

- Developed a new Rapid Response Service preventing admission and readmission to tier 4 mental health inpatient provision
- Improved placement brokerage capacity to support residential home searches
- Continuing to roll out a 'Durham First Approach' with providers in Durham and influencing service development
- New Supporting the Provider Market Team – recruitment, training etc
- Opened 2 x new children's homes in 2021; 1 x new children's home for 2 children in 2022; with 2 x smaller homes due to open in the coming months
- Launched new Local Provider Forums to improve communication and collaboration with the provider market
- Secured DfE Staying Close Funding and launched a new Staying Close Pilot Programme for our children's homes

What does the strategy tell us?

- Number of children in care is increasing in Durham
- 70.3% of our CYP live in County Durham. Most of our CYP that live outside of County Durham live within the region
- Increasing number of teenagers in care with multiple accommodation moves
- Delayed discharges from tier 4 hospital, due to limited specialist local regulated provision
- Use of external residential provision has increased by 50% between 2020 and 2022
- Need to increase the number of available foster carers to meet ongoing demand
- Increasing number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) moving to Durham through the mandated Home Office Scheme, placing pressure on available resources
- Placement stability – increasing number of breakdowns and moves
- Increasing number of children and families being supported on the edge of care with opportunities to broaden the service further
- Gaps in respite services for C/YP with learning disabilities and complex needs, particularly overnight

Key Development Priorities

The local authority has identified **six overarching objectives** within the strategy, which will address current gaps in provision and will seek to broaden and make improvements to our sufficiency offer in Durham. These are:

1. Grow our number of in-house foster carers, support the retention of carers and work with Independent Fostering Agencies to ensure that children and young people can live with foster carer families when it is in their interests to do so.
2. Increase the number of adopters
3. Continue to develop and broaden our children's homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so.
4. Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers.
5. Improve our sufficiency offer for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) / Young People and reduce waiting times.
6. Broaden our short breaks offer for disabled children and their families.

Key Development Priorities

- Under each objective is a series of key priorities, which relate to the development of new services and improvements to support our range of needs for children and young people. All **39 priorities** are outlined in Appendix 1 of the Strategy.
- Key areas of development include (but are not limited to):
 - Review the payment for skills (foster care payment model) to improve sufficiency by attracting new carers and retaining existing carers
 - Develop a wrap-around support team in fostering to promote stability and prevent breakdown
 - Development of new smaller children's homes to meet the needs of our most complex young people and reduce out of county provision
 - Development of a new Edge of Care Home
 - Develop new accommodation and support options for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people
 - Develop overnight short breaks provision to meet the needs of our most complex children and young people

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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