

Sufficiency Strategy

Homes for Children in our Care

With pride. With purpose. With you.



Executive Summary

Children in our Care deserve to have the very best support on offer in order to achieve their potential, and that starts at home.

Staffordshire County Council is driven to work alongside families so they can access the right support, in the right place at the right time. Our Early Help Strategy details how we will support families to stay together and thrive in their own communities. Unfortunately, for a small minority of children and young people, their family home may not be safe for them to live, meaning they come into the care of the Local Authority. Whilst in our care, it's imperative we are able to offer children and young people a home that keeps them safe, makes them feel loved and wanted, and equips them with the skills necessary to make a positive difference in their own lives, and their own communities.

This strategy intends to inform the reader of our aspirations over the next three years and how we intend to deliver them.



Neelam Bhardwaja

Director for Children and Families Services and
Chair of Staffordshire's Families Strategic Partnership Board



Introduction

Staffordshire County Council's Sufficiency Strategy – Homes for Children in our Care 2023-26 aims to address the 'Sufficiency Duty' of the Local Authority – determined by Section 22G of the Childrens Act 1989 - which requires each local area to ensure sufficient accommodation for children in care.

We are required to take steps to secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children and young people.

To increase placement stability, we endeavour to have the right children in the right place at the right time, which in turn will create better outcomes for children such as, timely access to services and maintained education, with lasting local connections with family and friends. We will endeavour to create an active and vibrant market delivered both internally and externally.

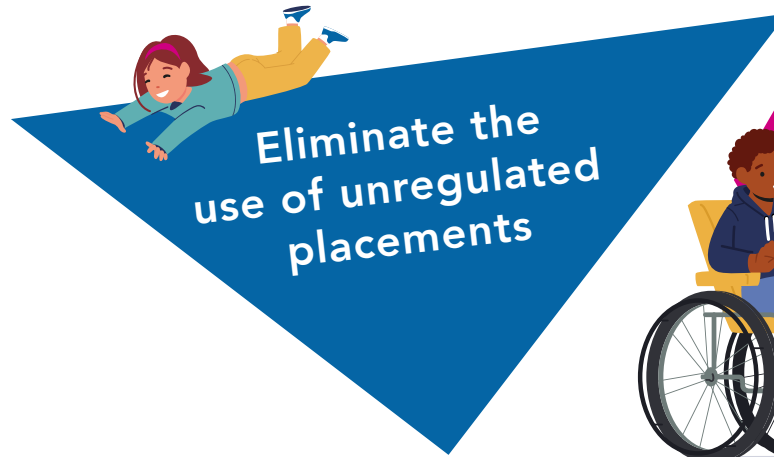
By the end of 2026, we expect to;



Increase the number of Children and young people returning home if it is safe to do so



See our children living locally in the right home to meet their needs



Eliminate the use of unregulated placements



The right children in the right place at the right time



Where are we now?

Staffordshire County Council Children’s Services went through a Transformation in October 2021. As part of the Transformation, an aspiration was to see more children and young people living with their family where it is safe to do so, with a reduction in the number of children and young people in care.

We’ve seen an increase in children in our care (currently 1370), up 110 from the previous 12 months. This works out at 80 children per 10,000 as opposed to the national average of 70. Nationally, there has been an increase of 8.3% of children in care from 2020/21-2021/22 year whereby Staffordshire’s has increased by 20%.

Like most authorities, Staffordshire County Council rely heavily on independent providers to care for our children. Internally, we have a residential offer of 5 homes with a total of 19 beds with varying provisions, and an internal fostering sufficiency for approximately 358 children, comprising of different models of foster care. We currently have around the same amount of children and young people living within independent foster care which indicates there is a need to expand our internal fostering provision.

Our in-house residential offer covers a broad spectrum of needs when working at full occupancy. It consists of;



Two residential homes comprising of a 4-bed property for short to medium term stays, and a 3-bed provision for longer-term stays that is due to open in early 2023.



Two 4-bed provisions for children and young people with learning disabilities and physical disabilities offering Short Breaks as per the Children’s Act 1989.



A 4-bed provision designed to offer young people on the cusp of coming into care a short break offer to enable them to remain with their families. The service also offers outreach support and has been used to accommodate our children and young people requiring a placement in an emergency.

Currently, none of our homes are operating at full occupancy, resulting in a reduction of children who can access our provisions and subsequently placed in the independent sector. Subsequently, we are relying on the independent market more and more to meet our needs.

Externally, there are circa 500 residential beds within Staffordshire (excluding Stoke on Trent). Excluding placements for children and young people with physical disabilities and residential schools, the Local Authority only have 36% (41 of 113) of our residential children and young people living within Staffordshire. The two figures suggest there is enough sufficiency in Staffordshire for our children and young people to remain here as part of their own communities rather than move out of county.

Our internal foster care offer consists of:

- **General Foster families providing short breaks, task-centred or long-term care**
- **Resilience carers**
- **Disability short break carers**
- **Supported Lodgings hosts**
- **Turnaround carers providing short term emergency placements.**



Current Trends

We are seeing an increasing number of children with multiple and complex needs whereby a suitable home, in a suitable location that will meet their needs doesn't necessarily exist, or the demand is so high that the likelihood of securing such provision in a timely manner is slim.

Subsequently, our most vulnerable children and young people can end up living in solo or unregulated placements that do not meet their needs. Whilst the cost of these placements is high and unsustainable, the young person's journey through the care system to this point can also be traumatic and full of complexities for them to navigate.

In addition, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee published a paper in December 2021, Children & Young People's Mental Health, which it notes.



"there are too many children and young people in inpatient units subject to inappropriate care: far from home, without adequate understanding of their rights, and subject to restrictive interventions. In the vast majority of cases, the most appropriate and most compassionate care for children and young people will be in their community near their families." [1]

Health partners have subsequently and understandably moved to reduce the use mental health inpatient beds. However, as an unintended side effect, this has now put more pressure on Local Authorities to provide care for this cohort of children and young people with unmet multiple and complex needs. We are no different. Ofsted have recently published a paper referencing this exact point, stating;



"It means that there are now more children who have complex needs or are a significant risk to themselves or others, but who cannot be detained under the Mental Health Act. These children either do not meet the criteria for a secure accommodation order, cannot be placed in a secure children's home (SCH) because of severe placement shortages, or a SCH would not meet their needs even if there was space available. This means that children's social care services are now having to find and fund provision for children who might otherwise have been in these facilities." [2]



Nationally

It is evident that across England, Wales, and Scotland that there are concerns around how the children's social care market is currently operating, specifically the issue of how sufficiency continues to be a major challenge for every LA.

What does some of the national data in publications tell us?



Children in our care are predominantly older - 10 to 15 year-olds account for 39% of children, 25% were aged 16+ years, 18% aged 5 to 9 years, 14% aged 1 to 4 years and 5% aged less than 1 year. (1)



There were 2,873 children's homes in England on 31 March 2022; of these, 79% were run for profit. There were also 316 independent fostering agencies operating in England on 31 March 2022; of these, 85% were run for profit. (2)



Providers now have more power in the market and can choose which children they take. This means that it takes much longer to find homes for children. It also means that providers are less willing to enter block contracts. (3)



Unregistered provision is used too often because of a lack of suitable regulated alternatives. Too many children, particularly those with the most complex needs and including those deprived of their liberty by court order, are living in unregistered provision. This provision has no regulatory oversight of the suitability and experience of the staff, the facilities, or the care arrangements. (4)

Independent providers receive many "request for placements" from local authorities across the UK and therefore have considerable options when matching against their homes' Statement of Purpose and children and young people already within the home.



Locally

When we look at the data (Appendix 1, Graph 1) we can see:



From 2017/18 up to 2020/21 there was a steady reduction of children and young people coming into care, whereas 2021/22 saw an increase of 17%, along with a noticeable increase in 17 and 18-year-olds entering care.



As at 07/10/2022 states that 7.1% of children in our care (1344) have lived in 3+ placements within a 12-month period.



64.9% of all looked after children have lived in the same place for 2+ years.



We know that on average the more placement moves a children and young people has had, they are less likely to remain within Staffordshire and their placement costs are generally higher.



For children in our care, 66% live within Staffordshire, this is largely due to the number of children with internal foster care.

Staffordshire works with 13 Local authorities and Children's trusts across the region along with the West Midlands Commissioning Hub for joint commissioning arrangements such as, West Midlands Foster Framework, Residential Flexible Contract Arrangement (FCA) and the Supported Accommodation Framework, which Staffordshire leads on. The West Midlands Commissioning Hub, support and facilitate with regional arrangements, including but not limited to Strategic Commissioning Network (SCN) and Operational Commissioning and Contract Group (OCCG) workplans, along with annual data collections across LA's, used to inform future commissioning intentions. This is an important part of our journey as much of our work is commissioned regionally.

Our work is underpinned by restorative practice, this means the view of children and young people is important. Children and families tell us ?



Improved effectiveness of interventions with learning from interventions such as Edge of Care and YOS Prevention. Whilst increasing awareness of Staffordshire's Early Help Strategy.



Developing Family Support Offer including reunification support offer for gradual reunification and expanding the Family Support Offer e.g., mental health support for Children in care and increasing services for short breaks.



Improve Care Planning, reviewing procedures for thresholds for coming into care and exit planning, along with improve Life Story work.



Improve placement sufficiency, understanding the needs of our children to improve placement matching, along with expanding our inhouse residential offer and recruitment of foster carers.



Children in care have access to high-quality education placements and the local authority takes into account their duty to promote educational achievement.

The way we operate is predicated upon the assumption that children's outcomes will generally be better if they remain outside of the care system, preferable within their family network. To help address the rise of children coming into care and remaining in care within Staffordshire (Appendix 1 Graph 2), a Children in Care action plan has been devised, which will be an important part of achieving our plans.

There are a range of different types of homes our children are placed in. As of February 2023, overall actual spend is £55.4m broken down to:

£31m
for 119
children in
residential
care



£16m
for 376 children
in independent
foster care

£5m
for 68 children
in supported
accommodation
(Non UASC)

£14m
for 354 Children
living with in-house
foster carers

£1m
spent on unregulated
placements



Residential

Staffordshire has enough independent residential sufficiency within its borders to place all children and young people currently in Residential care, 3.5x over, however, as a Local authority we do not utilise this capacity to our advantage with only 36% usage (Appendix 1, Graphs 3/4/5). Neighbouring authorities placed more children within Staffordshire than we did in the same period. Although independent providers feedback that they have a positive working relationship with Staffordshire, clearly there is work to be done to improve our use of local sufficiency and understand the barriers.

Staffordshire is part of the Residential Flexible Contract Arrangement (FCA), which is intended to develop market analytics, co-production, fair pricing, and creative solutions to meet services gaps. The FCA currently holds 119 providers with 555

Homes across the UK. Currently (12/12/2022) Staffordshire has 72% of residential placements using the residential FCA. We are seeing an increase in providers exiting the framework to become spot providers.



What's working well?

- **66.1% of children living same place for 2+ years**
- **Sufficient residential provision within Staffordshire.**
- **The introduction of the Residential Block Contract with two independent providers for 3 beds each, this contract will be 3 years with option to extend for up to 2 years.**

What isn't working well?

- **Low levels of sufficiency for homes that can meet the needs of children with complex behavioural and mental health needs. Staffordshire providers aren't prioritising our children and young people.**
- **Our children and young people are remaining in residential care too long.**
- **Lack of emergency provision**
- **Recruitment and retention of residential workers is impacting on internal provision**
- **An increase in children aged 12 and under living in residential care due to the lack of foster care sufficiency**
- **Pressures with sufficiency for young adults (16 Plus) with complex needs (learning difficulties, physical disabilities and mental health) not old enough for adult's social care services, but minimal options for children's residential care**
- **Lack of short breaks and community support for children with disabilities.**
- **Sufficiency for secure accommodation continues to be an issue across England for our children and young people with the most complex issues.**

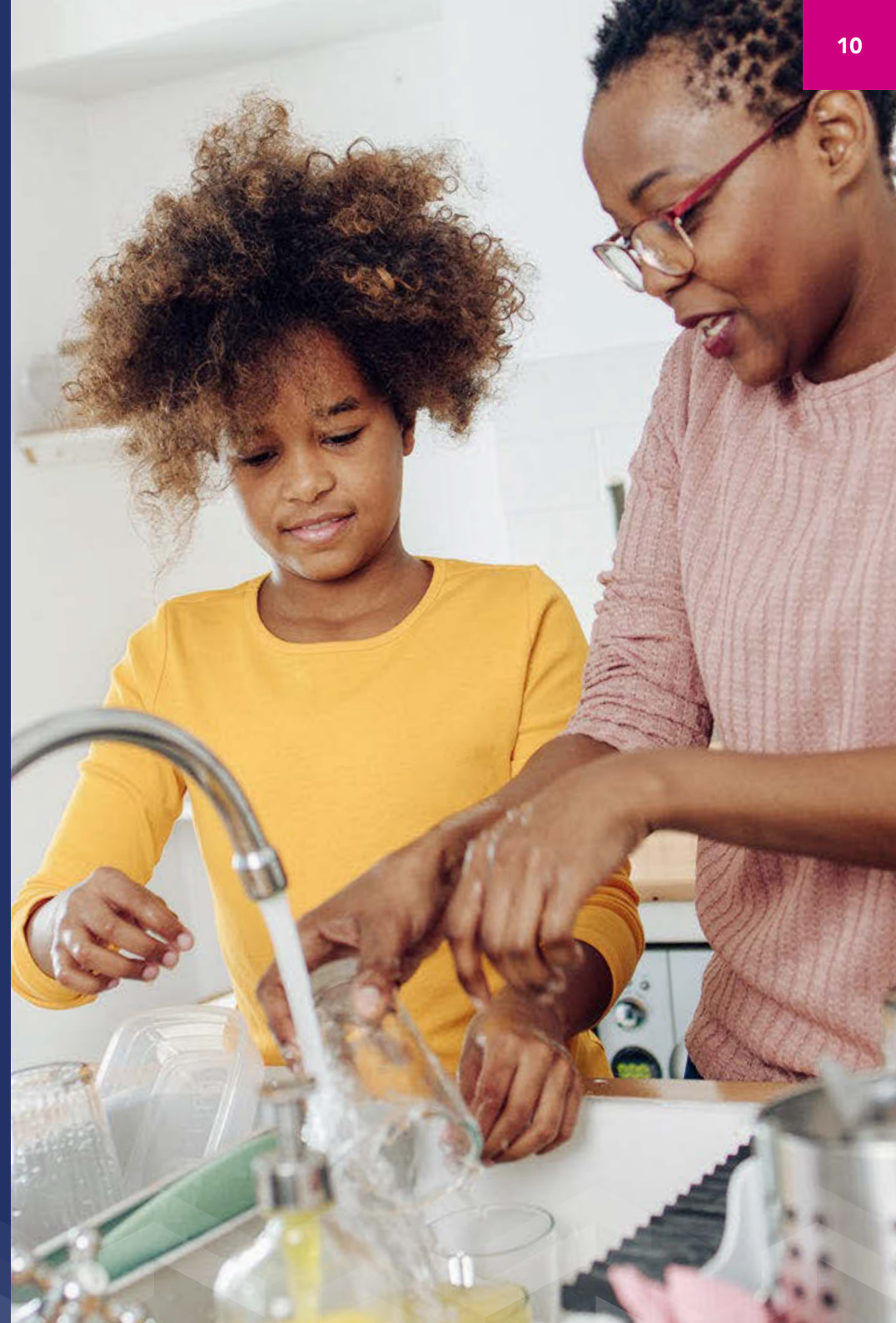
What needs to be done?

Internally we need to...

- Utilise our internal residential provision and deliver care that can meet the varying needs of our children and young people.
- Review the strategies to recruit and retain residential workers
- Explore options for innovation in this market.
- Develop family support offer, including improving returning children to their families where appropriate.

Within the team we will....

- Evaluate relationships with Staffordshire providers and review the commissioning model to understand what the barriers are and what is needed to meet our children and young people's needs.
- Improve data collection for need and demand of children requiring care.
- Develop regional secure unit.
- Develop short breaks sufficiency strategy.



Fostering

(Appendix 1, Graph 6) Staffordshire County Council has seen an overall decline in making fostering placements compared to 2021 data however, more placement requests were made in 2022. Our internal fostering sufficiency is utilised therefore we have high demand for independent fostering placements. There are not enough foster carers in Staffordshire to meet the needs of our children, it is essential we see growth.

Along with an increase of 40% in fostering agencies who target the population of Staffordshire, Local Authorities are not able to compete with independent fostering agencies' recruitment campaigns, for example offering a financial incentive to carers who refer friends and family with positive assessment outcomes (Appendix 1, Graph 7).

Our foster care offer has evolved over time, introducing different fostering schemes to increase the number of children in foster care, such as our internal Residential to fostering scheme and commissioned service, Big Fostering Partnership (BFP), along with the Mockingbird pilot which all provide enhanced, bespoke support to children and their carers. Our commitment to ensuring as many care experienced children and young people as possible live within a family environment has seen us be proactive in identifying children and young people in residential homes who could live in foster care with the right support, utilising the approach of the Residential to Fostering team and the partnership with BFP.

Between January 2021 to November 2022- There have been **88** children placed in Residential when the placement request was for foster care. When we compare the **average yearly cost** for Foster Care vs Residential care for these 88 children there is a yearly difference of **£17.5m**. From this data it is evidence that we need to invest in our foster care offer to ensure children do not enter residential care because of a lack of fostering provision. This correlates to the findings within the independent review of children's social care which stated.



"There are many children living in children's homes today who would be better suited to living in a family environment with a foster carer if we had enough foster carers in the right places, with the right parenting skills to meet the varying and complex needs of children. This will require a "new deal" with foster carers." (3)

What's working well?

- Introduction of the Mockingbird pilot with Together4Children, working alongside 3 other local authorities to deliver foster care using extended family model which provides sleepovers, short breaks, peer support, regular joint planning and training and social activities.
- Internal fostering has 65% of children living in the same place for 2+ years.
- Staffordshire offers a large training package to equip foster carers with knowledge and skills to care for our children and young people.
- Staffordshire has seen an increase in Family and Friends Foster carers.

What isn't working well?

- Lack of carers for: Children over 10, complex needs and disabilities and sibling groups, resulting in an increased reliance on the private residential sector.
- Struggle with internal recruitment and retention of foster carers. Staffordshire previously saw 600+ applications for fostering a year in comparison to recent year being only 375 with 1/10 getting to the point of offering a placement to a child.
- Whilst Staffordshire currently has 5 turnaround carers who provide emergency foster care for up to 72 working hours which is often extended for the maximum duration due to a lack of suitable placement in a timely manner.

What needs to be done?

Internally we need to...

- Look into innovative ways to support and retain foster carers.
- Review foster carer rates/fees to determine whether the remuneration and package of support offered matches the profession they work within, skills they have, and the time and dedication needed to care for our children, specifically adolescents and those with more complex needs.
- Build better relationships with our external providers
- Participate in the creation of the new regional fostering framework
- Evaluate our internal fostering service to ensure provision is created which will see a reduction in children going into residential care who have a care plan of fostering.
- Explore options for emergency foster care, specifically for families in crisis out of hours.

Within the team we will...

- Work with regional colleagues to develop the new West Midlands Fostering framework.
- Explore ways to commission IFA placements differently given the challenges Staffordshire faces in accessing IFA within our borders.



Supported Accommodation and Unaccompanied Asylum seekers

Since 2012 Staffordshire has led on the sub-regional Supported Accommodation Framework, with the most recent Framework commencing in 2022. The purpose of this framework is to increase sufficiency and provide consistent care across the region for our young people aged 16 plus.

With the welcomed regulation of supported Accommodation by Ofsted, we are working with regional colleagues to support providers with this change and understand how this will impact sufficiency and costs across the sector. To date hosted 1 virtual provider event with over 150 providers in attendance, with plans to host a further event Face to Face in spring 2023.



What's working well?

- YMCA in Rugeley is commissioned to provide accommodation-based support for both those at risk of homelessness and homeless.
- Excellent utilisation of Supported Accommodation Framework Providers and access to existing and new providers.
- Comprehensive engagement with providers around the pending Ofsted regulatory requirements.
- Good relationships with supported accommodation providers who are responsive to placement searches, such as same day / emergency and planned.

What isn't working well?

- Young people approaching 18 with high packages of support due to complex needs which don't meet the threshold for adult services, resulting in drastically reduced support with minimal timescales.
- Post-18 Pathway - We have found mixed responses from professionals when seeking their views around preparation for adulthood.
- Difficulties in forecasting sufficiency for our UASC cohort due to the unpredictable way some come into care, for example in November 2022, we had 10 UASC's enter care in one day due to the home office "stepping up" 2 hotels in Staffordshire. There are currently 6 hotels part of the home office dispersal within Staffordshire.

What needs to be done?

Internally we need to...

- Implement greater oversight of young people who have bespoke packages of support by hosting regular meetings with Supported Accommodation providers and social workers
- Work with social work teams to consider preparation for independence and ensure support hours/packages are reasonable in line with preparation.
- Explore plans to retain Supported Accommodation properties to meet the needs of our UASC population due to the emergency nature of this cohort entering care.
- Support the Supported Accommodation sector in preparing for Ofsted regulation to ensure children in care aged 16 plus have good quality support provision to prepare them for independent living.

Within the team we will...

- Proceed with commissioning the National House Project for our children in care and care leavers.
- Develop a partnership approach for PFA to secure a smooth transition.



Children with disabilities

Staffordshire currently has over 40 children with disabilities in care and provides short breaks for children and young people with disabilities. We also commission services for community support - to support children and young people to remain with their families and reach their potential.

Children with disabilities often have lifelong multiple and complex needs requiring specialist support from health and social care agencies which will remain into adulthood. Where possible, we need to strive to maintain children living at home with their families by offering appropriate, fit for purpose packages of care in the community to enhance day to day family life. Internally we need to ensure need and demand is captured to inform the market of the needs of our children with disabilities. It is becoming increasingly challenging to identify the right home for a child with complex needs and disabilities and we need to collaborate with providers to understand the reason behind this, and how we can improve outcomes for our children in our care moving forward.

Additionally, we need to ensure homes for children in our care are the least restrictive possible, allowing them to gain skills and promote independence that will prepare them for adulthood. We would not be preparing our children for adulthood if we didn't support independence as much as possible.

What's working well?

- Relationships with partners around the Preparing for Adulthood programme are improving to provide appropriate placements.
- We have 3 different short break provisions around the county.

What isn't working well?

- Access to community support and/or short breaks has not been consistent which has impacted on children's stability at home.
- We have not done well in analysing our data to understand need and demand effectively.

What needs to be done?

Internally we need to...

- Review the offer within the resource centres to encompass more families in need of short breaks and outreach support.
- Introduce internal workstreams to look at preparation for adulthood to understand pathways and barriers for young people with health needs, in conjunction with health and adult's colleagues.

Within the team we will....

- Improve relationships with providers specifically who could care for our children and young people into adulthood and gather data intelligence to shape sufficiency need.
- Identify gaps within the market that do not currently cater for the emerging needs for our children and young people in care.
- Conduct a needs analysis of children who have moved from residential care into adulthood, that will form our commissioning intentions moving forward.



Supported Lodgings

Staffordshire aims to recruit an additional 5 hosts per year over the next three years, with currently 29 active hosts. We have seen a reduction of Post 16's placed in supported lodgings in 2022



What's working well?

- High levels of recruitment and retention of supported lodgings hosts across the county.

What isn't working well?

- 2022 saw a reduction in the numbers of children and young people placed with supported lodgings carers (Appendix 1, Graph 8).

What needs to be done?

Internally we need to...

- Ensure Supported Lodgings is seen as a viable option for Children in Care by raising awareness of its benefits and positive outcomes.
- Promote the benefits of Supported Lodgings with social work teams to ensure this option is explored for our young people aged 16 plus.

What do we need to do now

Staffordshire County Council made a commitment in the Staffordshire County Council Strategic Plan to provide children in our care with the best possible experience that supports better lifelong outcomes, to do this we need to ensure that;

Aim	Objectives	Goals
<p>See our children living locally in the right home to meet their needs therefore we expect to see overall costs of care reduce.</p>	<p>Growth and development of foster care internally and independently to improve foster care sufficiency.</p> <p>Increase access to Staffordshire’s external residential homes and develop strategies to address gaps in provision.</p> <p>Equip the placement finders with the tools and knowledge to be able to target Staffordshire homes utilising the frameworks in place as a first port of call.</p>	<p>Staffordshire children in care to have access to a home that meets their needs and is local.</p> <p>Reduction of children and young people living in residential care.</p>
<p>Eliminate the use of unregulated placements.</p>	<p>Evaluate the type of provision we need to commission in collaboration with Mental health services for children presenting with high levels of trauma and distress, who therefore require specialist robust provision with a highly skilled staff team.</p>	<p>Ensuring complex children and young people have the provision in place that meets their needs.</p>

Aim	Objectives	Goals
<p>Reduce placement breakdowns.</p>	<p>When returning to family isn't an option, we want to increase the percentage of children living at the same place for 2+ years from 65% to 85%. By developing and implementing pathways to provide support for providers, social workers to prevent/minimise placement breakdown for children and young people.</p> <p>Children living in homes rated good or outstanding.</p>	<p>Having the right home to live in at the right time where no additional moves are made, is a vital factor in improving stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in achieving better outcomes for children in care and care leavers.</p> <p>Improved analysis and oversight of placement breakdowns so that they can be prevented in future.</p>
<p>Ensure the right Staffordshire children receive services at the right level of intervention when they are most needed (the right children, at the right place at the right time).</p>	<p>We will endeavor to work with families to build resilience, improve parenting and offer support at the earliest possible opportunity to prevent an escalation of need and the requirement for children to come into care. Where there is no viable alternative to care, we will match placements to children's needs, ensure timely permanency decisions and prevent drift in achieving the best possible outcomes for our children.</p>	<p>An enhanced care experience for our children with reduced drift, improved relationship. based social work practice and a multi-agency approach.</p> <p>A reduction in the number of children in care in Staffordshire.</p> <p>A reduction in the length of time that children spend in care in Staffordshire.</p> <p>A reduction in placement costs.</p> <p>Wide awareness of the programme and engagement with internal and external partners, children and their families.</p>

Closing Summary

As a result of our key priorities and aims being achieved, we expect to see an increase in children and young people returning home to their families if it is safe to do so, more of our children living in Staffordshire, a reduction in placement breakdowns and the elimination of unregulated placements. We will encourage children and young people to be central to the dialogue with providers and will amplify their voices when it comes to developing sufficient provision to meet their needs. A governance plan will be introduced to oversee and guide workstreams focusing on our areas of improvement. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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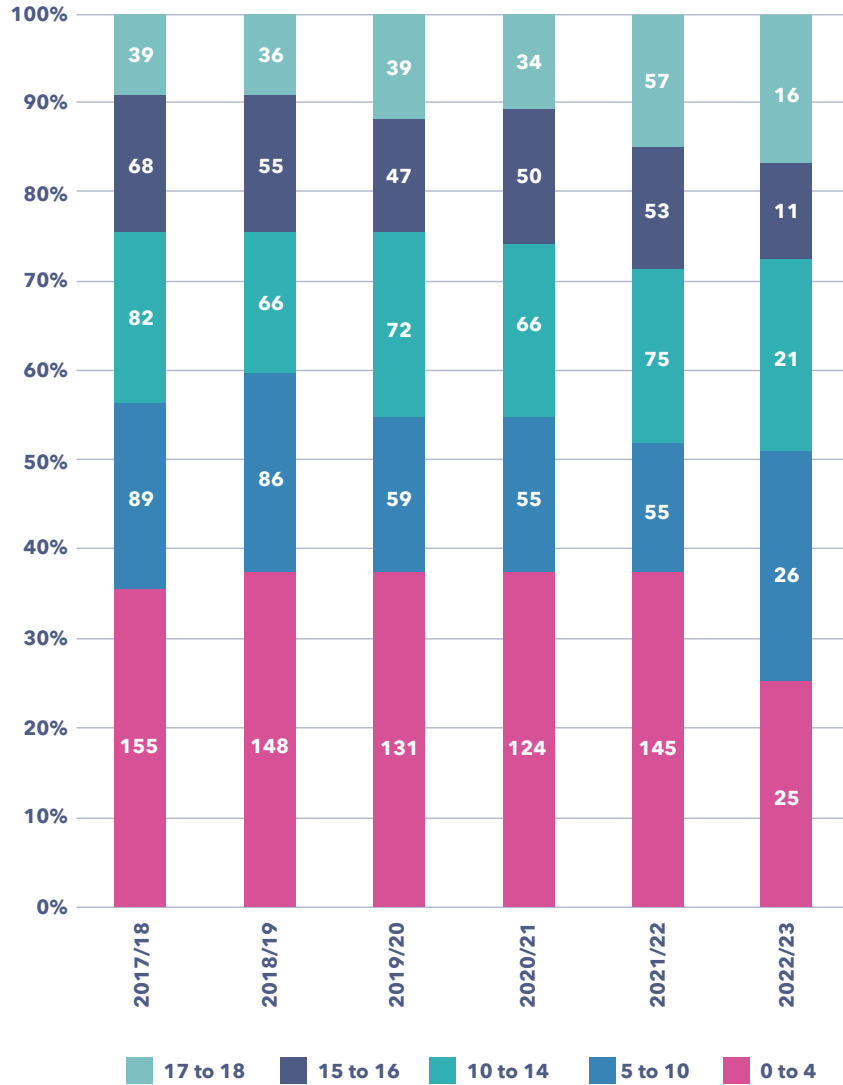




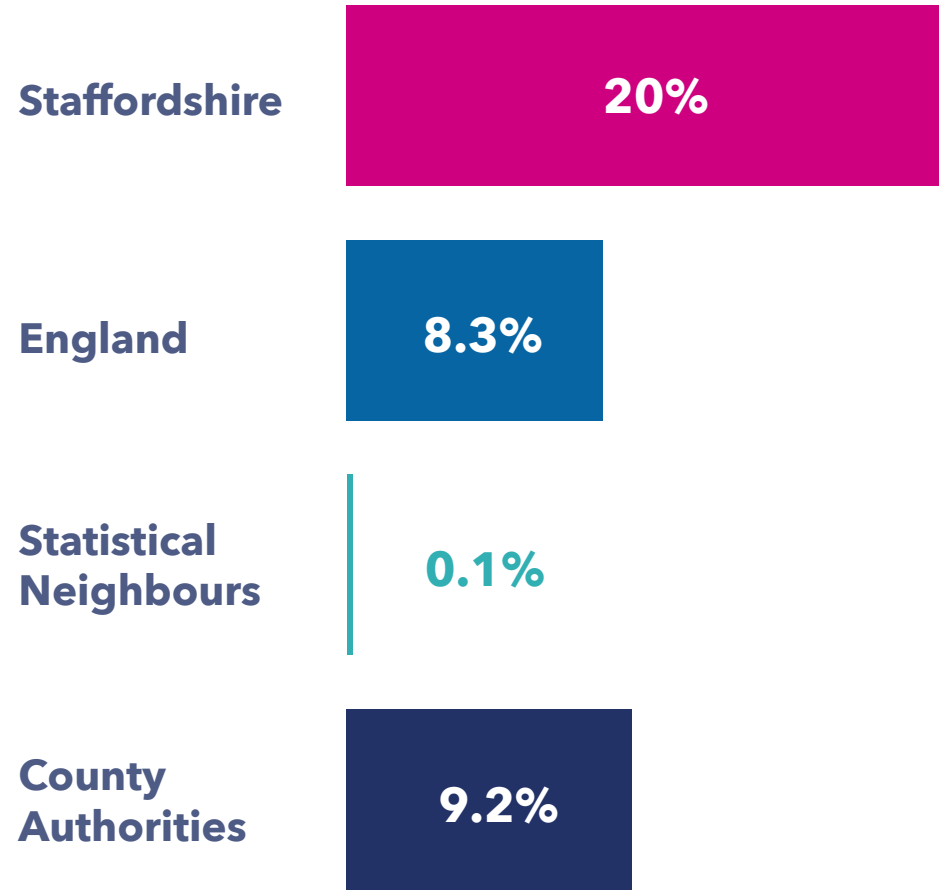
Appendix



1. Percentage of Children coming into care by Age

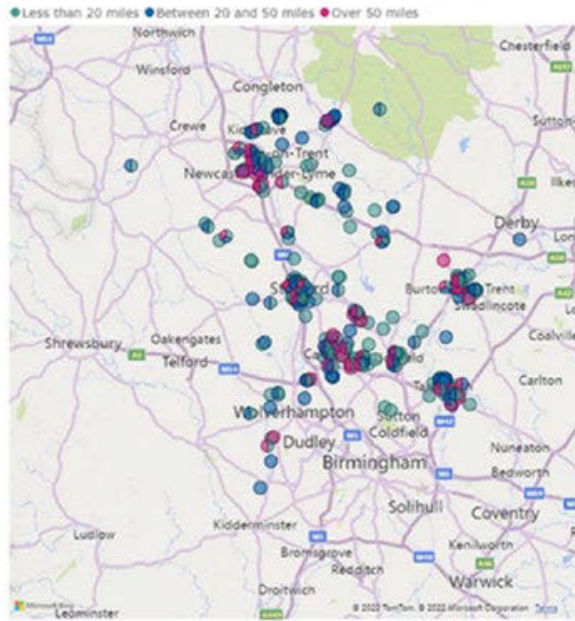


2. Percentage change children coming into care - 2020/21 to 2021/22

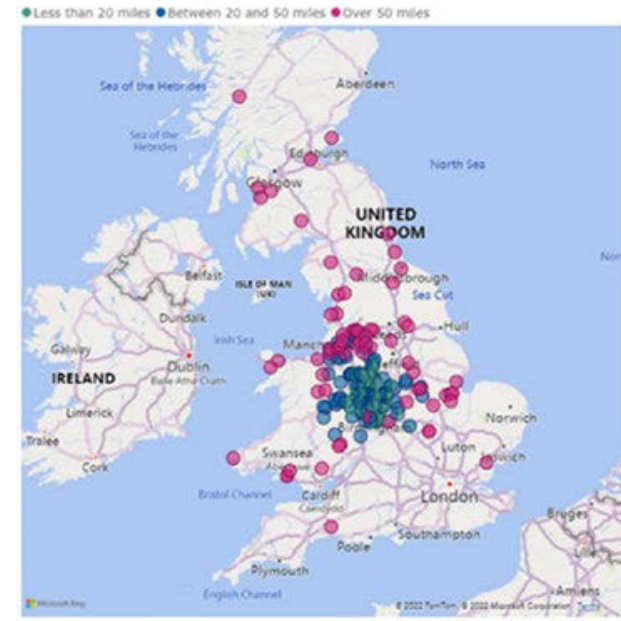


3. Distance of children living in residential care from home address

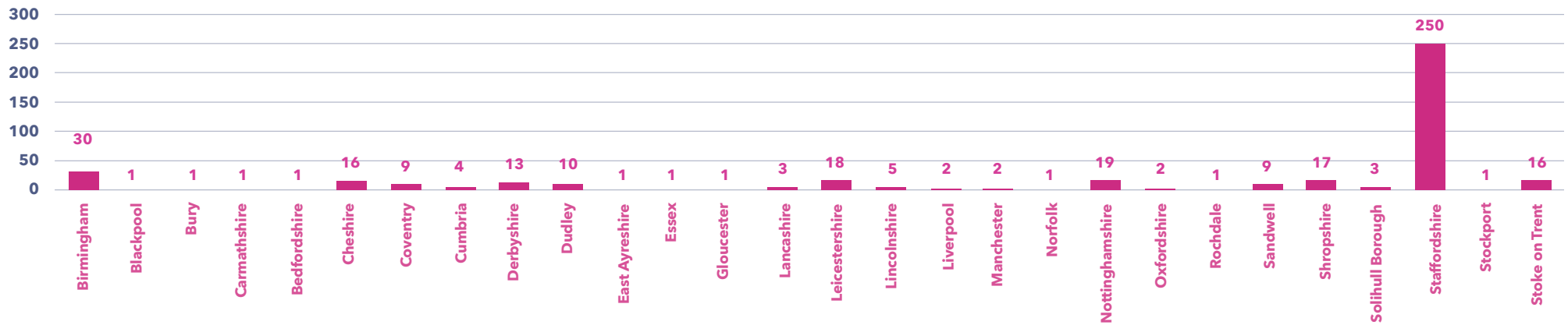
Home postcodes of children living in residential placements by placement distance from home (last 3 financial years)



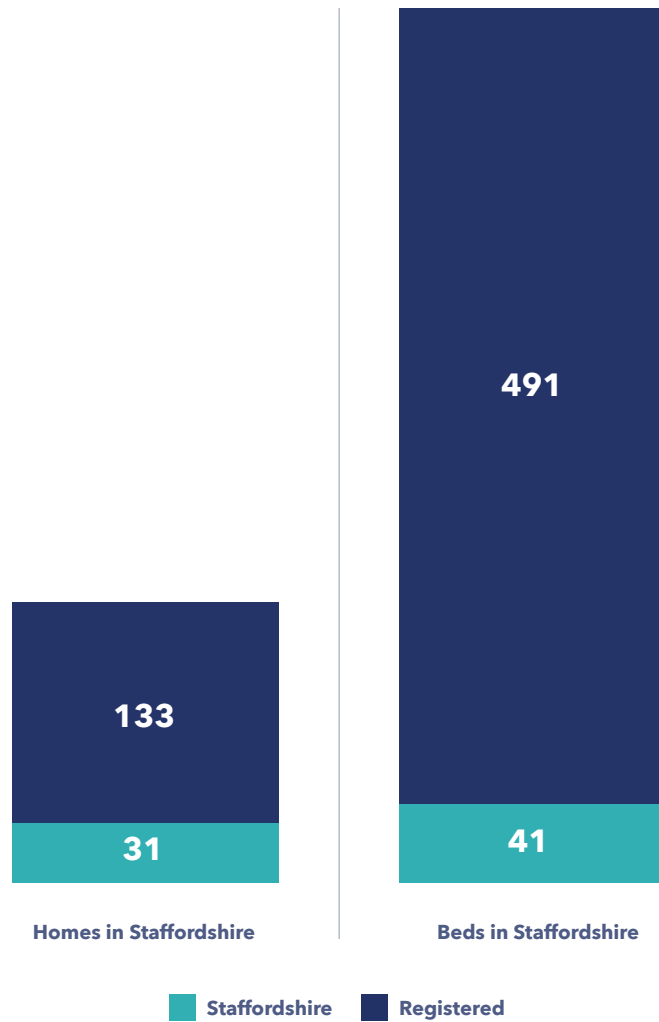
Placement postcode of children living in residential placements by distance from home (last 3 financial years)



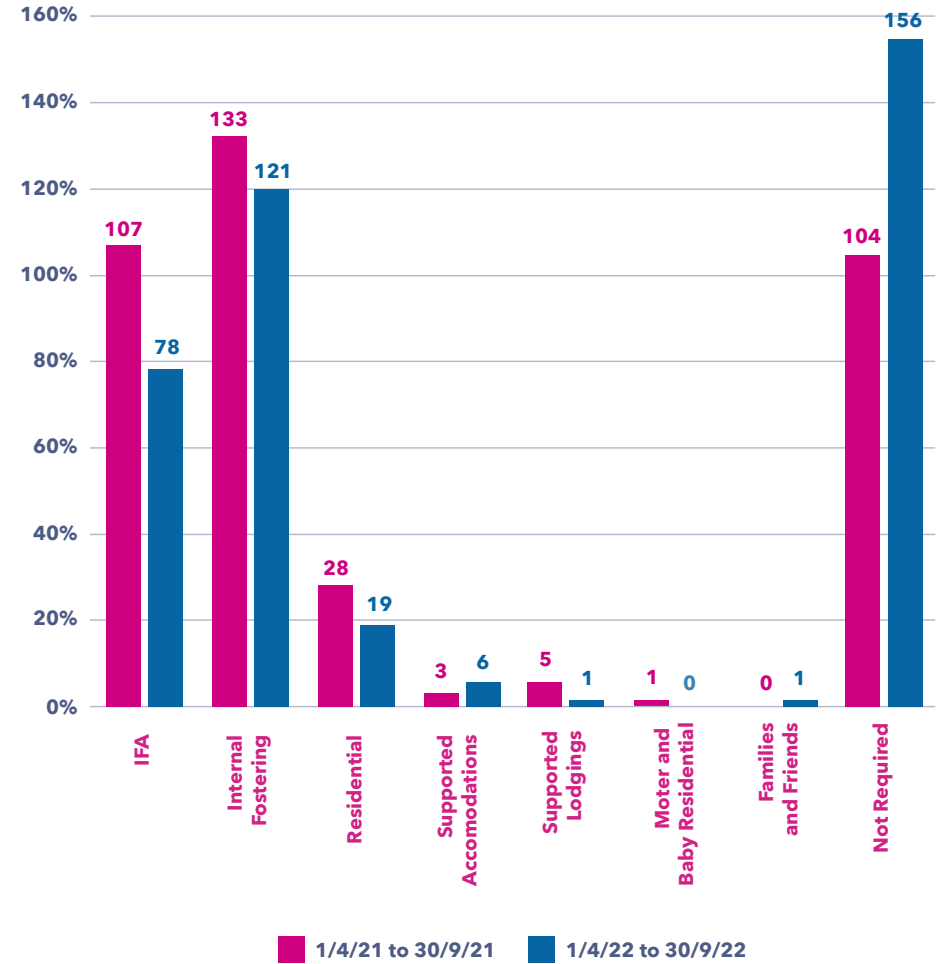
4. Staffordshire's Independent Placements by Local Authority locations



5. Number of Ofsted Childrens Homes and Beds Vs Take Up



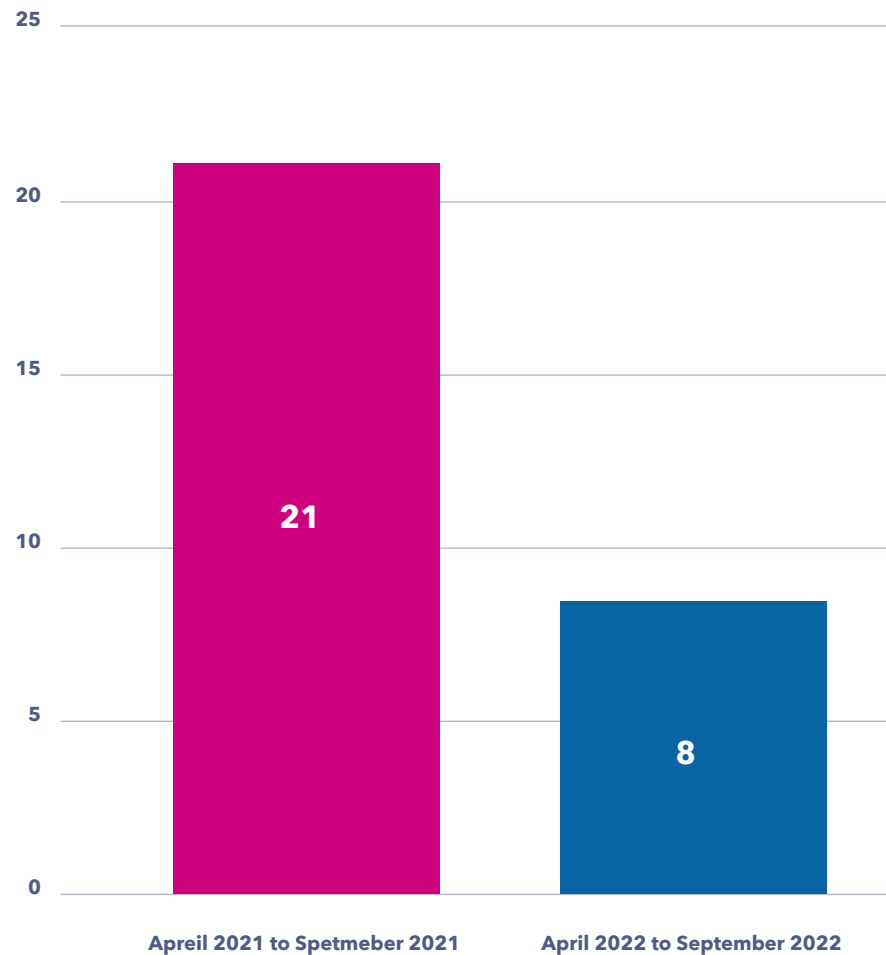
6. Number of Ofsted Childrens Homes and Beds Vs Take Up



7. Fostering recruitment - Enquiries vs Starters

FOSTERING	Enquiries						Starters					
	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23
April	47	40	34	62	31	30	1	2	1	3	0	4
May	57	46	44	36	35	46	1	4	3	1	5	1
June	48	59	50	41	21	39	1	1	2	5	4	0
July	52	41	34	31	28	34	2	1	9	4	4	3
August	51	46	35	19	30	22	0	3	3	1	2	1
September	46	68	56	40	33	46	2	2	2	3	5	0
October	52	56	39	39	26	32	6	3	5	2	4	2
November	41	40	36	28	27	n/a	1	2	2	4	2	n/a
December	33	38	25	28	30	n/a	3	3	2	4	0	n/a
January	66	78	104	58	36	n/a	3	2	3	1	1	n/a
February	57	57	54	32	23	n/a	2	4	5	3	2	n/a
March	34	52	48	34	41	n/a	1	8	5	2	2	n/a
TOTAL	584	621	559	448	361	249	23	35	42	33	31	11

8. Number of Ofsted Childrens Homes and Beds Vs Take Up



Sufficiency Strategy

Homes for Children in our Care

