

Kirklees Children's Services

Sufficiency needs assessment & strategy

January 2023 to March 2025

Executive Summary

This sufficiency needs assessment and strategy for 2023-2025 is set out to provide a framework for understanding and forecasting the needs for high quality homes and care environments for our children and care experienced young people in Kirklees. The strategy reflects upon the progress made by Kirklees Council in meeting and reducing the number of children requiring to be looked after (hereafter referred to as Children Looked After (CLA)) since 2020. The Strategy describes how the Council will continue to meet its Sufficiency Duty. This needs assessment and strategy is a statutory requirement set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989.

The Sufficiency Duty requires "local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area."

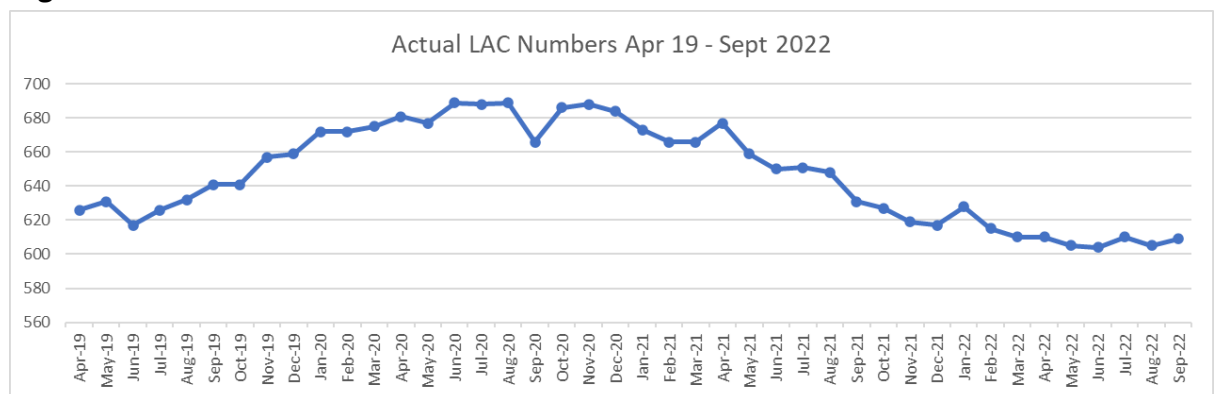
Kirklees Council is ambitious for the children it is responsible for and as set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, we want our children in care and care leavers to be happy, healthy, and successful. We are committed to providing children and young people with high quality parenting, care and the right support, to enable them to aspire, achieve and live healthy, independent, and fulfilling lives. This document will identify what we have done and what we need to do to achieve these outcomes for children and young people.

1. Introduction

1.0 Kirklees Council has prioritised resources to support families at the earliest opportunity, and this has had a dramatic impact upon the numbers of children who either require a child protection plan or who are required to come into our care as Children Looked After (CLA).

1.1 Figure 1 below shows how the population of children in care has reduced from 698 children in March 2015 to 604 in March 2022. The graph below shows the fluctuations on a month-by-month basis from April 2019

Fig 1.



1.2 This position is unique in the Yorkshire and Humberside region and amongst our statistical local authority neighbours. In all these comparative councils there has been an increase in the numbers of children in care and those children who are placed in Residential Children's Homes.

1.3 During this period Kirklees has also increased the numbers of children living with their relatives as connected carers and has increased the number securing permanence through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). Overall, 89% of children in care are living in a family setting including fostering households, Kinship and Connected arrangements. These efforts to maintain children in family arrangements has also ensured that the authority has maintained a higher than average percentage of our children remaining close to home defined as living in Kirklees or within 20 miles of their home address.

1.4 Like other local authorities we have not been immune from the recent and enduring national and international economic situation which has seen a dramatic rise in living costs. We are aware that these challenges will add to those faced by the families across Kirklees and are monitoring the potential for an increase demand on our children's services. As well as the costs of delivering our

service increasing, we are mindful of the potential rise in the demand for statutory children's services and in turn the potential necessity to put in place additional resource required to meet this need. Office of National Statistics (ONS) data shows that poverty in Kirklees has worsened in recent years with the authority moving from 93/317 most deprived to 73/317 between 2015 and 2019. (https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/information-and-data/pdf/KMC_ID2019.pdf) We know that poverty creates hardship and risk to many families and these factors may lead to an increase in the numbers of families facing hardship and becoming more reliant on public services including children's services.

- 1.5 Based on this continuing pressure on our families and communities and in considering the regional and national increase in the number of children entering care, including those at an older age, we are predicting a likely increase in the numbers of children requiring additional support including care. A priority for our services is to increase the number of our internal foster carers along with expanding our capacity to provide specialist internally provided children's home placements.
- 1.6 This sufficiency needs assessment and strategy describes the current care population and provides our forecast of the future care population to March 2025 based on current evidence and assumptions.

2. Current Children in Care Position

- 2.0 As reported on the 31st March 2022, the children in care population was 604, and the rate per 10,000 had reduced to its lowest level. Figure 2 below shows how the numbers of children in care have fluctuated over the past few years though shows that Kirklees has remained significantly lower than the average for our statistical neighbours.

Fig 2

Kirklees	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Children Looked After	673	621	665	661	604
Rate/10,000	67	62	66	66	60
Yorkshire & Humberside	8,190	8,570	8,970	9,210	9,300
Rate/10,000	71	74	77	78	81
Statistical Neighbours	6,950	7,391	7,467	7,410	7,320
Rate/10,000	86	92	92	93	92

England	75,360	78,140	80,000	80,780	82,170
Rate	64	65	67	67	70

2.1 The children in care 'rate' since 2017/18 shows that the gap between the rate of children in care between Kirklees and the Yorkshire & Humberside region has increased from 4/10,000 population to 21/10,000 and the gap between Kirklees and its Statistical Neighbours has increased from 19/10,000 to 32/10,000. These are significant differences, none of Kirklees' statistical neighbours had a lower rate and only 4 councils in the region have a lower rate.

3. Where Children Live

- 3.0 On the 31st March 2022 Kirklees' children in care were living in a range of settings as shown in figure 3 below.

Fig 3

Care Type	Number of Children	
Fostering- Unconnected Person	349	530 in family-based care
Fostering- Connected Person	112	
Placed for Adoption	19	
Placed with Parents	38	
Regulation 38(6)	12	
Children's Homes	32	74 in group care or supported living
Residential School	0	
Supported Living	35	
Other	7	
Total	604	

- 3.1 530 (88%) of Kirklees' children in care live in Kirklees or within 20 miles of their home address. The 72 children who live further than 20 miles from their home address are primarily living in the Yorkshire region, but some are placed further away as they need to access specialist services or their family members, who are their carers, live further away.
- 3.2 The proportion of children in care placed with Kirklees based carers has increased since 2018. The table below at figure 4 shows the number of children in care and the proportion placed outside of the council's boundaries.

Fig 4

	2017/18	2018/19	2019-20	2020/21	2021/22
Placed inside of Kirklees	366	343	370	378	353
Total In Care	673	621	665	661	604
Proportion placed inside of Kirklees	54%	55%	56%	57%	58%

- 3.3 Most of Kirklees' children in care, 530 are living within a family care setting and the number of children living in a children's home has reduced as a proportion of children in care as shown in Figure 5.

Fig 5

	2017/18	2018/19	2019-20	2020/21	2021/22
Children Living in Children's Homes	65	51	42	26	30
Total In Care	673	621	665	661	604
Proportion living in children's homes	9.7%	8.2%	6.3%	3.9%	5%

4. Placement Stability

- 4.0 There are two measures of placement stability;
- Children who have been in care for at least 2.5 years who have been in the same arrangement for at least 2 years, and
 - Children who have had 3 or more arrangements in the previous 12 months.
- 4.1 Kirklees' performance when benchmarked against the region and England is shown in figure 6 below to be higher and to outperform the region and country in every year. However, the exceptional performance in long term stability seen in 20/21 was not repeated in 21/22. This is primarily due to the number of eligible children reducing as they left care.

Fig 6

Long term stability (Higher % = good)			
Year	England	Yorkshire & Humberside	Kirklees
2017/18	69%	69%	71%
2018/19	68%	68%	71%
2019/20	68%	66%	73%
2020/21	70%	70%	80%
2021/22	71%	71%	74%

- 4.2 Our review of performance of short-term stability shows a worsening trend as set out in figure 7 below. During the last year Kirklees' performance dropped significantly and analysis of the first six months of 2022 shows that 55 children have had at least three placements in the previous 12 months.

Fig 7

Short term stability (Lower % = Good)			
Year	England	Yorkshire & Humberside	Kirklees
2017/18	11%	11%	8%
2018/19	11%	11%	7%

2019/20	11%	11%	8%
2020/21	9%	9%	7%
2021/22	10%	9%	10%

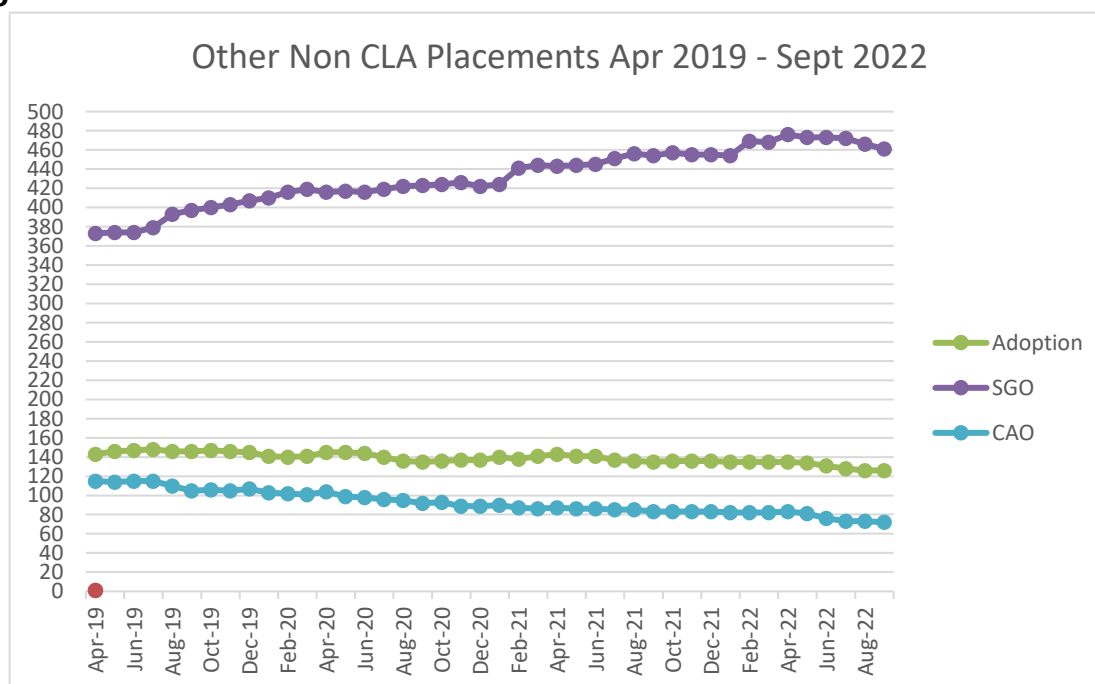
5. Forecasting Future Demand

5.0 Understanding and forecasting placement demand is not an exact science and is complex requiring consideration of a multitude of factors. These factors include positive preventative services such as receiving good parenting as a child, engagement in education, positive supportive networks as young people become adults, early help in the community when a person becomes a parent, and responsive statutory services when help is required. These services can mitigate risks linked to isolation, parental mental health, confidence, and skills etc. However, alongside these protective factors there are an equal number of risk factors that in some cases are difficult for children's services alone to mitigate against. These include severe mental health, uncontrolled drug use, learning disabilities and harmful behaviours and most significantly poverty which we know is increasing in our communities.

5.1 Our frontline children's services in Kirklees have been highly effective at supporting families without the need to remove children from their parents' care. When this is required a greater number of children are being cared for by their extended family and the council is continuing to see a significant number of children having their futures secured through special guardianship orders (SGOs).

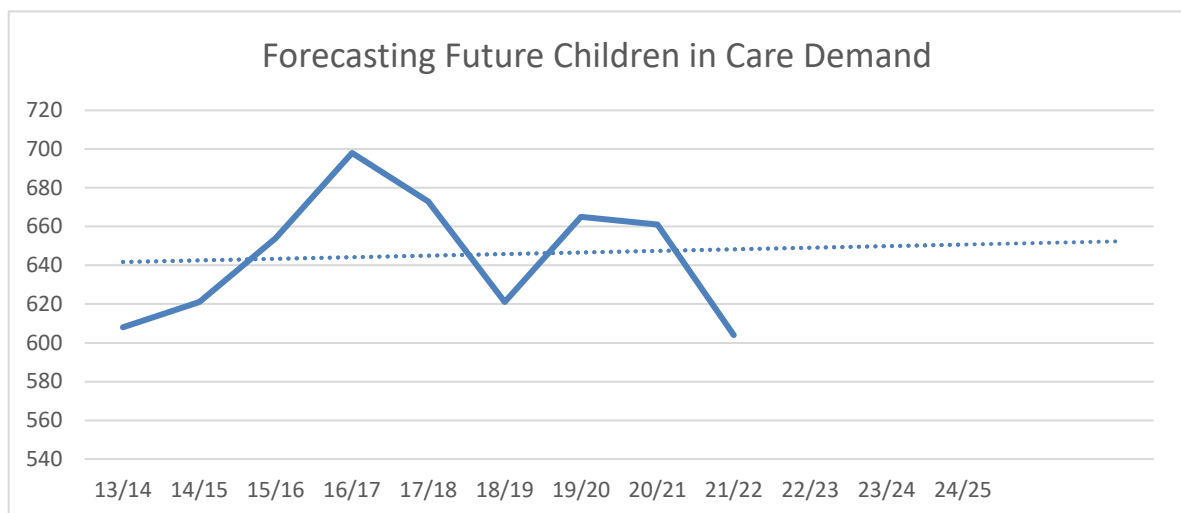
5.2 The table below shows the impact of this on the numbers of children who would otherwise have been in care.

Fig 8



- 5.3 Kirklees has reduced its care population by 57 children between 2021 and 2022, a reduction of 8.6% though it's notable that between April and the end of September 2022 the care population has shown a rise by 9 children to 613.
- 5.4 Whilst our care population has been at its lowest level for over a decade the national trend and risk indicators would suggest that there is a likely hood that we will see an increase in need and a resultant rise in the number of children requiring care provided by the local authority.
- 5.5 The following table was provided in response to the Dept. for Education in the winter of 2021 and has been updated with the SS903 data for March 2022. The dotted line is the forecasted growth, which by March 2025 estimates 650 children in care.

Fig 9



- 5.5 Based on this projection and considering the likely resultant demands on arrangements for placement types, we can assess a need to increase our in-house residential by circa 7 and fostering provision by 41. This is from current position where we are seeking to grow current capacity to return children from commissioned provision to our own delivered services.
- 5.6 In forecasting our future demand we have also had access resources provided to us as members of the 'White Rose Consortium of councils'. This has enabled us to consider predicted demand using the forecasting tool provided by Social Finance. The work by Social Finance for the consortium has not been finalised but will be fully available during 2023.

6. Placement types

Family based care

6.0 Children looked after by the authority are cared for in a range of different settings primarily based on their assessed needs, though increasingly also determined by capacity in the volume of provision.

a) Connected carers temporarily approved as foster carers under Regulation 24.

These are people who are known to the child, either as a relative or a friend or in another capacity such as a teacher. They are identified in an emergency as a potential carer and a 'Viability Assessment' is undertaken by the social worker. If this is positive the child is placed with the carer and this can lead to a full fostering assessment being undertaken.

b) Connected carers approved at the Fostering Panel.

Following the assessment, the carer is considered at the Fostering Panel and are approved for a named child only. This means they cannot foster other children that are not connected to them. These foster carers are then registered with Kirklees Council. These carers can typically be relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.

c) Unconnected foster carers.

These are people who have been formally recruited following an application by the carer to be assessed as a foster carer. They are approved for several children, usually with a specific age range. The children they look after are unknown to them prior to the placement starting. These foster carers are then registered with Kirklees Council.

d) Independent Fostering Agency foster carers.

These people are similar to those described in paragraph c. above, but they have been assessed and approved by a private or voluntary fostering agency. They are registered with their agency, and the council contracts the agency.

6.1 On the 31st March 2022 the type of family based carers and the number of Kirklees' children they were caring for is set out below.

Fig 10

Type of Foster Carer	No. of Carers	No. of Children Placed
Regulation 24	35	46
Connected Person Foster Carer	42	64
Unconnected Kirklees Council Foster Carer	120	169
IFA Carer	126	180
Confidential	1	1
Total	324	460

- 6.2 The annual national report of fostering in England provides a snapshot of fostering activity. The table below at Figure 11 shows the number of approved fostering households for the Yorkshire & Humberside region, with the maximum capacity of children they are approved for, alongside the number of children in care at the 31st March 2022. The table shows the capability of councils to provide the required fostering provision for its children in care population. Kirklees' performance is the median figure for the region, with the maximum capacity of 47% of its children in care population. As highlighted previously, Kirklees has a high proportion of children in family groups, so this proportion requires Kirklees to purchase a significant number of foster placements from the private sector.

Fig 11

Council	No. of Council Approved Fostering Households	Maximum Capacity of Children	Children In Care	Max. Proportion of demand
Barnsley	135	240	348	69%
Bradford	280	495	1447	34%
Calderdale	80	155	337	46%
Doncaster	110	215	589	37%
East Riding	100	215	325	66%
Kingston Upon Hull	200	400	886	45%
Kirklees	170	285	604	47%
Leeds	525	1075	1373	78%
NE Lincolnshire	105	270	615	44%
N Lincolnshire	110	230	192	120%
N Yorkshire	190	330	429	77%
Rotherham	125	200	557	36%
Sheffield	270	450	666	68%
Wakefield	135	260	650	40%
York	80	250	277	90%

- 6.3 Kirklees currently purchases 180 ‘placements’ from Independent Fostering Agencies, the same amount as Leeds which has just over double the number of children in care. These arrangements are currently necessary to meet the demand placed on our children’s services to identify family-based care. Of these 180 children and young people 138 are living outside of Kirklees with a total of 102 foster carers. There appears to be very little difference in the level of need or complexity, of the children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies and our own Kirklees foster carers.
- 6.4 Analysis of the local independent fostering sector undertaken in 2021 showed 52 Independent Fostering Agency fostering households registered across 15 separate independent fostering Agencies, living within Kirklees. At the time of our review of these carers 60% of capacity was being used by other local authorities placing children within Kirklees. Whilst we develop and extend our own capacity to meet the needs of our children in care we know that we need to engage those providers in our local area to establish better ability to access local resources to keep our children and young people in and near to their home communities.
- 6.5 The combined total of approved foster carers in Kirklees is 273 (221 Kirklees and 52 IFAs). We know that we are currently accessing 102 Independent Fostering households located outside of the Kirklees area.
- 6.6 Given our current demand together with our predicted potential increase in the numbers of children in need of care from the local authority we assess our need to secure a minimum of 100 fostering households over the next 3 years.
- 6.7 By increasing our ‘in-house’ fostering capacity we aim to achieve:
- a. Increase the number of local placement options for our children
 - b. Increase the number of children living close to family, friends, schools and health services
 - c. Reduce the costs associated with placing children in private and more costly arrangements
 - d. Increase the stability of arrangements for children accommodated by the authority
- 6.8 In addition to expanding our ‘in-house’ fostering capacity we will also develop our strategic partnerships and commissioning arrangements with the 15 local Independent Fostering Agencies to establish our authority as a council of choice for their local carers.

7. Children's Homes

- 7.0 Kirklees Council currently operates five children's homes, with a sixth planned to open in the spring of 2023.
- 7.1 Our current plans for improvements across our residential estate set out our intention to have three of our homes registered to provide care and support for up to four children with emotional and social needs, two homes providing care for children with complex health needs and disabilities (one for six young people in permanent care and one short breaks provision). A further home identified focussed on supporting children and young people where there is a plan for the to return to family settings, with a programme of support and 'treatment' utilising the MST-FIT programme.

Fig 12

Home Name	Registered Bed Number	Client Group
Healds Road	4	MST home
Copthorne	4	Emotional & Social
Woodlands	4	Emotional & Social
Magdale House	4	Emotional & Social
Elm Grove	6	Children with Disabilities
Orchard View	8	Residential Short Breaks

- 7.2 The success of our residential homes will rely significantly upon ensuring that the homes function and deliver the support, as set out in their individual statements of purpose. Ensuring that our MST FIT home is used exclusively for children confirmed as planned to return home and where there has been a joint assessment between the social work team, MST team and the registered home manager will be essential.
- 7.3 Whilst much has been done to reduce the use of children's residential care with the current capacity, the authority can only meet 35% of its requirement, which means we are currently reliant on 2/3rds of residential care being provided from the independent and private sector.
- 7.4 At the 31st March 2022, we have 16 of our children living in 13 separate homes, operated by 9 different companies. 10 of these children were placed outside of our authority.
- 7.5 When reviewing the levels of needs of our children who are living in children's homes against those of other local authorities, it is evident that our children have, on average, had a higher rate of disruption in past home living arrangements. In available research papers it has been shown

that children living in a children's home had on average 5 previous placements prior to entering a children's home for the first time. For our children the average is 7. Additionally, comparison regarding the levels of needs, as demonstrated through having in place an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) showed that there were 50% of children in homes nationally, for Kirklees' children this is 82%.

7.6 We know from a review of our children in residential children's homes arrangements that our children and young people had the following characteristics:

- 82% have an education and health care plan
- All have experienced years of chronic parenting issues, including drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and neglect prior to entering local authority care
- All presented with emotional and behavioural challenges
- All expressed a desire to maintain contact with their families

More specific characteristics, which are not common to all of the children were identified as:

- ADHD diagnosis
- History of, and at risk of being exploited
- Education in special schools
- Multiple placement breakdowns

7.7 We know that locally there is a higher-than-average number of independent and private providers in the Kirklees area. This is largely due to the housing market. At the time of writing there were 30 private homes based in Kirklees, offering 99 places for children and young people to live that were operated by 15 different registered companies. On the 31st March 2022 Kirklees was accessing just six of places from this capacity, This has wider implications for our authority and services due to the potential high number of children and young people from other local authorities living in our area. These children and young people are likely to require a range of specialist's support services. The current data from the Dept for Education shows that Kirklees has 221 children from other councils living in the Borough, with over 40% having the highest level of needs and living within a children's home.

7.8 As part of existing **Homes for Children strategy** we plan to expand our in-house provision and are currently working to establish a new children's home bringing additional in-house capacity with a further four bedded home and separate additional smaller homes linked to existing registrations due to open in 2023.

8. Supported Living for Care Leavers

8.0 As the young people growing up within our care get older, the focus of the care and support given by carers is for our young people to be prepared to move into more independent living in our communities. For most of our young people this will take place in their fostering and or family living settings. Where appropriate our social work and fostering team will work to support young people remain within their fostering family setting through continued support through 'Staying Put' arrangements.

8.1 For young people growing up in our children's homes, as these settings are subject to national regulations, there is a requirement to support young people to move out, usually by the summer following their 18th birthday. For some of these young people continued support accommodation will be appropriate.

8.2 For a relatively small number of our young people they will leave their children's home or fostering arrangement after they are 16 and will be suited to more 'Semi-Independent' supported accommodation. We currently support this through a small number of Supported Board and Lodgings (SBL) carers and through commissioning Supported Living Accommodation from the independent and private sectors. This type of accommodation is not currently regulated by Government however at the time of writing Ofsted are consulting on the proposed regulatory framework due to take effect in 2024.

8.3 We currently have in place a commissioning 'framework' for contracting for Supported Living Accommodation. There are 5 types of accommodation and support available:

a) Group Living

The providers of Group Living arrangements offer furnished accommodation where a young person lives within a multioccupancy property and either has shared communal facilities or lives within a self-contained 'bed-sit' or apartment type living space within a larger building.

b) Supported Tenancy with Floating Support

The providers here provide community based furnished accommodation with a bespoke package of floating support from experienced staff.

c) Transferable Supported Tenancy and Floating Support

The providers here provide community based furnished accommodation with a bespoke package of floating support where, the tenancy is transferred to the young person on their 18th birthday.

d) Floating Support

Floating support providers deliver community based support to the young person in their own, or separately commissioned accommodation to manage their independent living skills, practical skills, and emotional resilience.

e) Short Stay

This is essentially emergency and urgent crisis accommodation and delivers community based furnished accommodation with a bespoke package of support from experienced staff on a short-term or emergency basis.

8.5 At the time of writing there were 31 individual companies on our commissioning framework for these type of supported, unregulated, provision who are either inside of Kirklees or within 20 miles of our boundary. Where these companies are unable to meet the needs of our young people, we have engaged other similar providers on bespoke contracting arrangements.

8.6 As referred to above, Ofsted have launched a consultation process relating to the anticipated regulatory framework for this sector. We will be responding and will update our sufficiency plan's following the response and resulted impact on the sector.

9. Services for Children with Complex Health Needs and Disabilities (CHAD)

9.0 Our resources for children with complex health needs and disabilities include services delivered through our 'Short Breaks Registered Children's Home'. Short breaks can be for a couple hours through to longer overnight stays. They can take place with foster carers or in our specialist registered children's home. In some cases a young person and their family will receive a personal budget and they can create their own short break package with their own carers.

9.1 We know that demand for our short breaks is high and consequently we are aiming to create additional capacity to enable young people to receive more short breaks within our fostering service and residential services. In order to maximise our ability to need needs we have contracted with a local provider 'Holly Bank Trust' to support additional short break capacity.

9.2 At the time of writing there are 25 children and young people with disabilities who are in the care of the local authority either by virtue of Section 20 or Section 31 of the Children Act. 14 of these children live with foster carers and 11 are in specialist residential children's homes. Our current maximum capacity for providing long term residential care is for up to six young people.

10. Market Engagement

10.0 As set out in the assessment above, there is a continued need for our authority to maintain a mixed economy of in-house and commissioned provision. Our forecast signals a likely increase in the number of children cared for by the local authority, which will require us to increase provision. We know that whilst there is a significant number of providers who have resources in our authority, only a very small proportion are accessed by us. We therefore need to better engage with the provider market and to be able to describe our needs and create partnerships to deliver the

additional and specialist services that we require.

11. Our Sufficiency priorities and strategy to deliver.

a) Where possible children in care live in family homes.

We will maintain our investment and focus in family support, Connected Carers and Special Guardianship support. This will be supported by re-aligning our services to best meet the needs of our carers, including Kinship and connected carer households.

b) Expand our Fostering Services to delivery more fostering homes for our Children.

We will invest in our fostering services to ensure that it has effective capacity and resource to deliver our aspirations to build our fostering community and ensure that the corporate centre recognises and promotes fostering for Kirklees as a top priority for the authority.

c) Ensure our Residential Children's Home deliver outstanding care

We will invest on our residential estate to ensure that the homes we provide deliver best quality Outstanding care for our children. We will modernise our residential workforce with a refreshed training and progression pathway and ensure that the levels or accountabilities for our regulated roles are effective.

d) Ensure that our children and young people have access to a spectrum of placement options to best meet their individual needs.

We will ensure that our recruitment of in house foster carers is based on a current understanding of demand and that our focus remains to increase our services in house capacity. We will establish effective commissioning arrangements that build strong partnership and join working based on safe and effective commissioning principles.

e) Build and develop our local relationship with the independent sector through effective market engagement to develop and manage a mixed economy of provision.

We will facilitate local market engagement events involving independent providers to discuss our local need assessment and opportunities to work together to provide the required range of diverse high-quality provision. We will work across the region with our West Yorkshire local authority partners to ensure that we are maximising our access to meet need local need.

f) Ensure that we can response to urgent / crisis need for accommodation for children and young people by developing our

in house and commissioned provision designed to offer immediate access where required.

We will work with the independent, private and voluntary sector to establish a partnership to maximise our access to accommodation and resources to support children and young people.

Appendix One

Placement Sufficiency Headline Plan

Delivering these priorities will be achieved through focussed 'Continuous Service Improvement Plans' for our Fostering, Residential and Placements services. These plans are supported, monitored, and driven through our governance arrangements set out in our Homes for Children improvement Board.

Area	Outcome	by
Fostering	Increase the number of Kirklees Council Foster Carers	• Ensuring that fostering is recognised as a LA priority driven by our Corporate Parenting strategy • Ensure that our finance arrangements for foster cares are competitive against IFA and neighbouring LAs • Deliver an effectively resourced marketing strategy

Children's Homes	Expand our in-house capacity for caring for more children in our homes	• Open our newly planned home 'Magdale House' in the spring 2023 • Re-open our currently Closed home Healds Road in the spring 2023 • Develop a business case based on invest to save principles, to expand our bedded in- house capacity by developing a small number of one and two bedded homes for children and young people, linked to our existing estate.
Supported Living	Develop the range of independent/semi-independent accommodation options for our older young people in our care and those with care experience from our authority.	• Review our commissioning arrangements and agree a new fit for purpose commissioning framework • Explore the potential for partnerships with local third sector organisations to enhance our offer for Care experienced young adults