

November 2023 v0.8

Placements Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy

For Looked After Children and Care Leavers

2023 - 2028



Nottingham
City Council

1. Introduction

Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure sufficient accommodation for its looked after children and young people under section 22G of the Children Act 1989. This 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” (‘the sufficiency duty’).

This duty should be undertaken within the context of the planning and co-operation duties which the 2004 Children Act places on key partners and local agencies to improve the well-being of children in the local area.

This Strategy responds to the duty by setting out the vision for achieving our commitment to improving the outcomes and life chances of the children and young people who are in our care and providing sufficient, safe, secure, and appropriate placements for looked after children and Care Leavers over the next 5 years.

This Strategy considers information we know about our children and what they have told us, what we know about local homes for children and the how well the current arrangements are working, informing the activity we need to undertake to deliver our priorities for our children in care and care leavers.

Note: 2023 figures are subject to DfE (Department for Education) validation throughout.

Vision

Our vision is a city where every child can enjoy their childhood in a warm and supportive environment, free from poverty and safe from harm; a city where every child grows up to achieve their full potential. We want to ensure that all our children in care and care leavers have the right home and support to keep them safe and well. We strive to help them grow into happy, healthy, successful and fulfilled young adults who are optimistic about their future.

[\(Children and Young People’s Plan, 2021-24; Children In Care and Care Leavers Strategy \(2021-23\)](#)

This links to Nottingham City Council’s strategic aim of being a child-friendly city ([Council’s Strategic Plan \(2023-27\)](#)) with delivery supported by the [Children and Young People’s Participation Strategy 2023-2025](#).

Corporate Parenting priorities

Corporate Parenting is the term used in law to describe our collective responsibility to care for our children. We believe that children in care have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe as other children. We also recognise that there are unique challenges that children in care and care leavers face. We are committed to ensuring that corporate parenting principles are embedded in the wider work of the City Council and work collectively to address these challenges.

Our work is guided by the promises outlined in our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy. New pledges are currently being developed by the Children in Care Council and Corporate Parenting Board and will be our commitment to children and young people in care going forward.

Ofsted inspection feedback has also shaped our thinking.

Placement commitment

For placements, our vision is for placements to be right first time, on time, every time. We are committed to providing every child and young person with the best possible placement, which meets their needs, considers their wishes, and provides them with the opportunity to thrive and achieve.

We pledge to drive a dynamic, outcomes-focused, and child-centered placement market, which offers best value, quality and choice, to ensure that the right placement is found the first time, on time, every time.

For all our children and young people, Nottingham City Council commits to:

- **Ensuring the best possible placement and matching for every child and young person in a timely way, including meeting of cultural needs.**
 - **Improving outcomes through improved placement stability and permanence.**
 - **Keeping our Children in Care close to home. We are currently achieving our ambition to place a minimum of 80% of our children and young people locally i.e. within 20 miles of the centre of Nottingham. For those placements made outside of the local area, we will ensure that the same levels of monitoring and quality standards are applied.**
 - **Regularly reviewing the appropriateness of placements and placements plans, supporting children to be reunified with their family, wherever safe and in their best interests to do so.**
 - **Listening to children and young people and maximise opportunities for their feedback to inform and influence service delivery.**
 - **Measuring children and young people's outcomes across all placements, ensuring an understanding of what does and does not work and acknowledging when something needs to change.**
 - **Achieving consistency in the quality, support and provision offered within all placement provision, through using regulated provision, standardised specifications, and contracts.**
 - **Achieving best value, through using a range of commissioning mechanisms as appropriate and undertaking regular benchmarking.**
 - **Articulating to providers what excellent outcomes look like for each child and young person and be open to exploring incentives for over-achievement.**
 - **Implementing effective early intervention, for example;**
- Making a financial commitment where a specialist/therapeutic placement is required, for a period of time, determined by a qualified professional or**
- Escalating and recommending change when a young person has experienced multiple placement breakdowns.**

- **Collaborative Redesign and Market Development:**
 - Developed our collaborative commissioning across D2N2¹, including sharing intelligence, best practice, and joint commissioning, including collaboratively commissioning a Supported Accommodation framework and an outcomes-based support programme for children in care and on the edge of care (through the STARS social impact bond).
 - Collaborated on wider local and national initiatives.
- **Fostering:**
 - Invested in our in-house fostering service by establishing a fostering support team and out of hours foster carer support service.
 - Collaborated with D2N2 partners to ensure best practice and quick wins across all areas with an immediate focus on pre- and post- approval training.
 - Implemented local initiatives aimed at developing a better understanding of our carers and their needs and wishes.
- **Residential:**
 - Significantly increased the number of placements available in the residential block contract and reconfigured this to ensure more young people are placed locally.
 - Reconfigured in-house residential homes to accommodate more complex young people, resulting in smaller homes.
- **Supported accommodation:**
 - Implemented both a new Nottingham City-only block contract increasing local provision and a new collaborative D2N2 Supported Accommodation framework.
 - Piloted a supported lodgings service for specific cohorts 16 years plus as an alternative to Supported Accommodation placements.
- **Joint work with health to support children with complex health needs:**
 - Collaborated on the development of a residential children’s home provision for looked after children with specialist mental health needs, together with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and D2N2 local authorities.

National developments

Since 2021 there have been a number of national policy and legislative changes which have influenced this strategy development including: findings from the Competition and Markets Authority [Children's social care market study](#), the [Independent review of children's social care](#); and subsequent government response [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#), and [The Supported Accommodation \(England\) Regulations 2023](#)

COVID-19 and financial pressures have impacted upon local sufficiency requirements and our ability to meet the needs of our children and young people.

This strategy has also been updated with learning from the [effectiveness of sufficiency strategies on market stewardship](#) and best practise and guidance for consistent minimum market information ([LGA- commissioned national Sufficiency template](#)).

¹ D2N2 includes Derbyshire County Council, Derby City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council

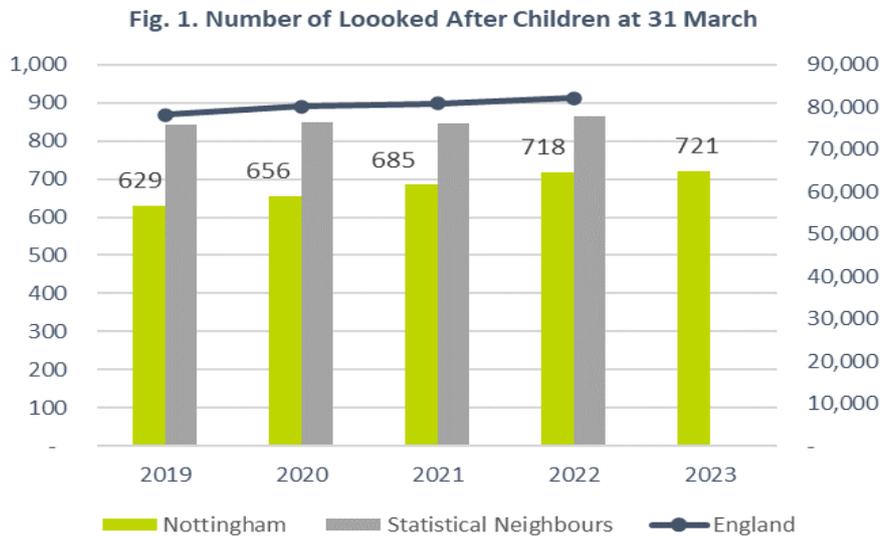
2. Demand for placements

Nottingham has 66,000 children aged under 18 representing 20% of the local population (ONS (Office for National Statistics) 2021). It is the 11th most deprived area in the country with 30% of our neighbourhoods in the 10% most deprived in England overall. There are high levels of child poverty in the city with around a third of children and young people living in households with no working adults.

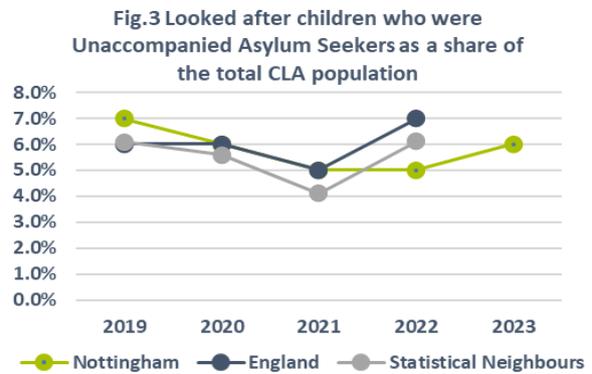
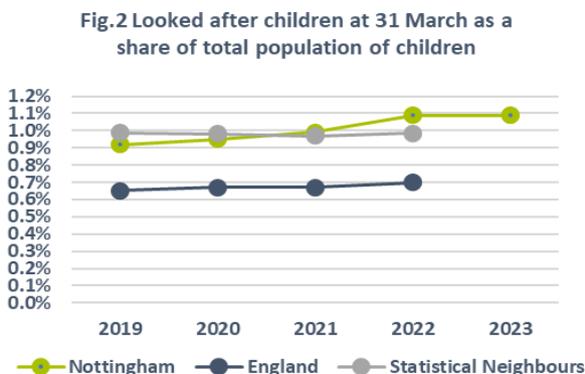
Population of looked after children

On 31 March 2023 there were 721 looked after children.

The number of children in care in Nottingham has increased over the last 4 years by 14% compared to a 5% increase across England and 3% increase experienced by its statistical neighbours. However, the rate of increase slowed between March 2022 and March 2023 to 0.4%. (Comparative figures not yet available for statistical neighbours 2023).(fig 1)



In the year to March 2022 the number of children looked after by Nottingham City as a proportion of the total child population exceeded those of both England and its statistical neighbours (fig 2).

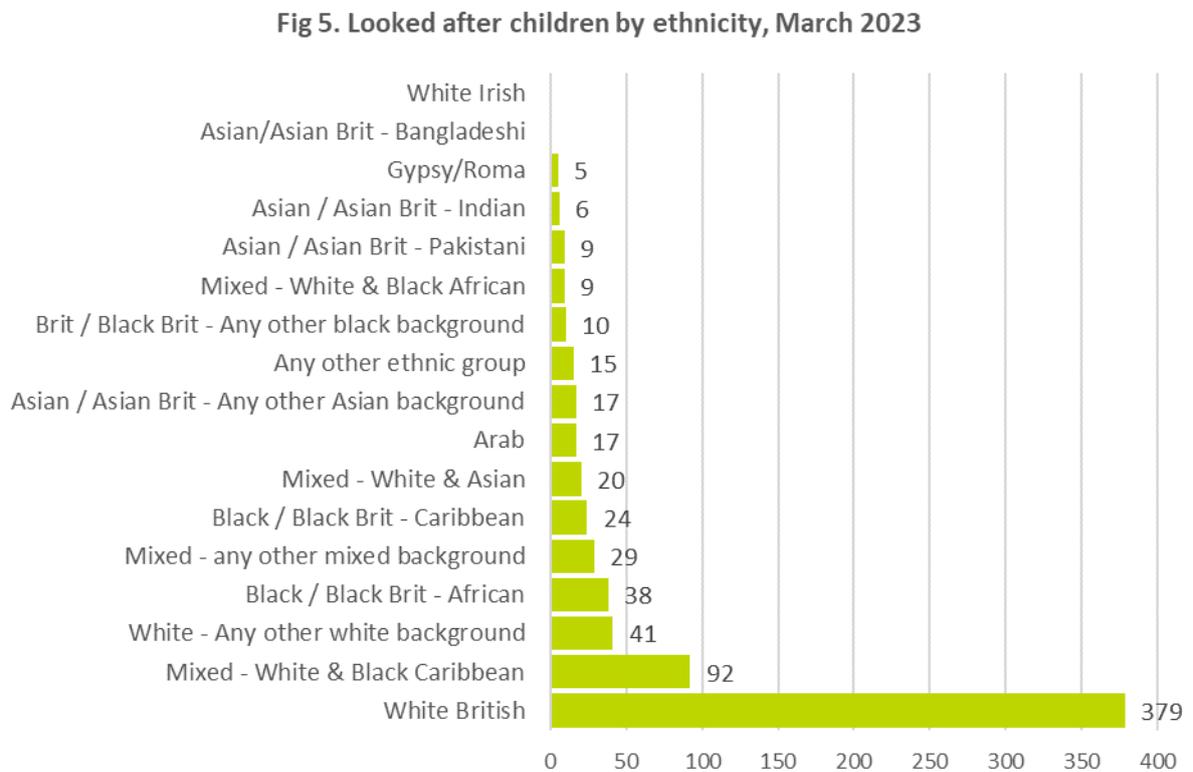
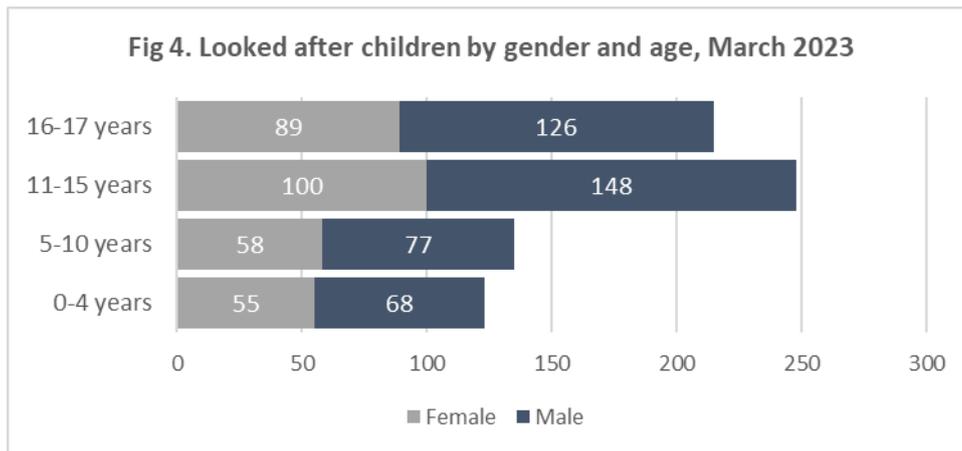


In the same period, the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as a proportion of all children in care was lower than both England and its statistical neighbours (fig 3); this proportion is expected to further rise in line, in the short to mid-term.

Characteristics of looked after children

Of those children looked after at 31 March 2023, 64% are 11 years or older and 38% of all children looked after are male and over 11 years. The majority are white British ethnicity (53%).

The age and gender of our children in care population is influenced by UASC, of which there is a high proportion who are older and male.



Needs of looked after children

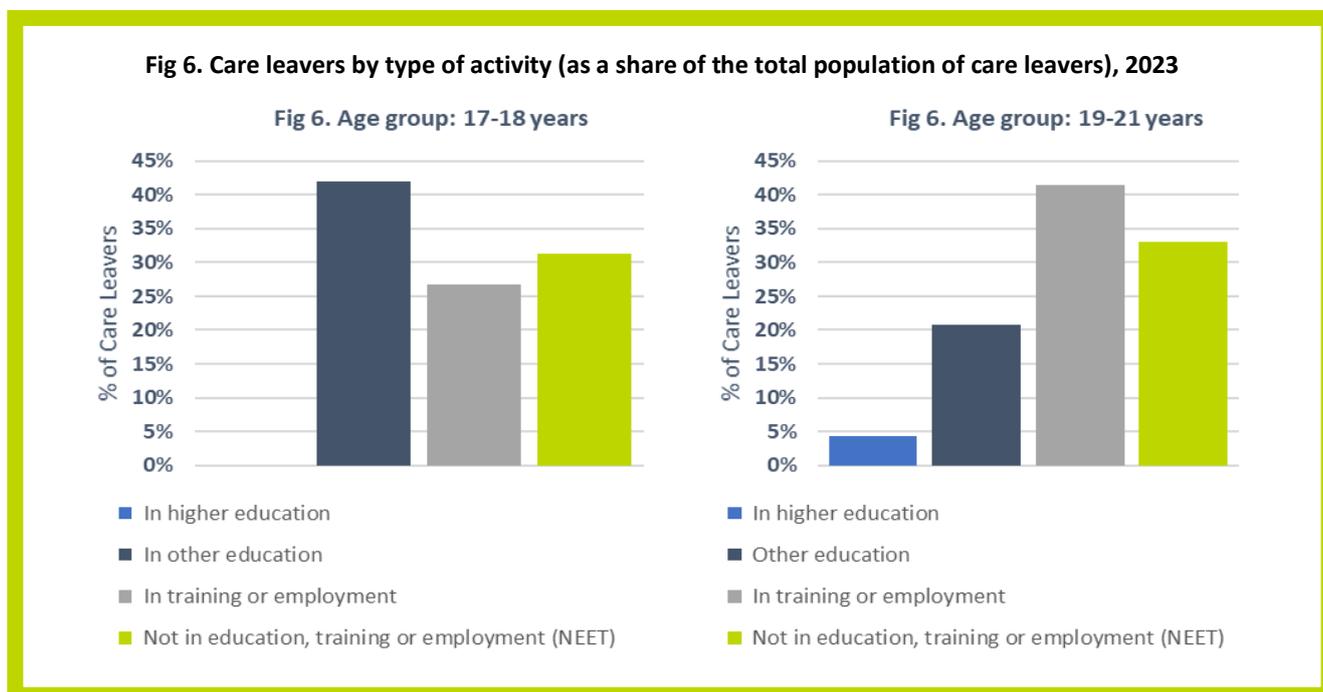
Of our looked after children as at 31 March 2023:

- 21% have a statement or Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) and 39% have Special Education Needs (SEN) support²,
- 16% have a disability and
- Over half (56%) have a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score at a level of concern³ (2023) compared to a national average of 37% (2022).

The majority of our children present with needs that are deemed typical of Children in Care and can be well met within a nurturing family environment. However, for some of our children, due to adverse childhood experiences of neglect, abuse and trauma, their needs are more complex, and they may require more coordinated, intense support. Complex needs include mental health issues, self-harming and sexually inappropriate or challenging behaviours. Some of these children and young people are at risk of, or engaged in, child sexual and criminal exploitation (CSE/CCE). Placements that can meet the needs of these children, particularly when a family environment is deemed most suitable, are difficult to source.

Care leavers

Specific work undertaken to support care leavers includes the progression of our staying close offer, support to sustain tenancies, minimise moves at transition, and working with housing services to extend the Care Leavers accommodation pathway.



Note: The figure includes care leavers in the year ending March 31, 2023, aged 17 and 18 and 19 to 21 who were looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday. The figure does not include care leavers for whom the activity is not known

² As a proportion of the number of children looked after at 31 March who had been continuously looked after for at least twelve months and matched to census data

³ Children looked after continuously for 12 months at 31 March for whom a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was completed

- As at 31 March 2023, there were 112 Care leavers (now aged 17 and 18), and 284 Care Leavers (now aged 19, 20 and 21).
- 22 care leavers aged 18 during the year were accommodated with former foster carers.
- The majority of care leavers aged 17-18 years are in 'Other' education, with the majority of those aged 19-21 years in training or employment.

3. Supply of placements

We place children and young people across a range of internal (local authority) and external (private) placement provision.



Fostering

In line with other local authorities, in March 2023 the majority (60%) of children were placed in foster care, with 30% placed with inhouse carers and 30% placed with external providers (fig 7).

- However, when comparing to March 2022 national and statistical neighbours' statistics, Nottingham City had a lower proportion of children placed in foster care (at 64%) and higher proportion placed in Secure, Childrens homes and semi-independent.
- Our proportion of foster placements as a percentage of all care placements fell further to March 2023, to 60% (fig 7).
- The overall number of fostering placements between March 2022 and 2023 fell by 30, from 463 to 433. This change is consistent with the decrease seen by inhouse fostering (28), whilst the number of placements provided by the external market remained largely constant (fig 9).



Residential and Supported Accommodation

There has been a significant increase in both residential and supported accommodation placements between March 20.

- Residential placements increased by 24 (22%) on top of a 22% increase seen the previous year, and supported accommodation increased by 25 (40%) (fig 9).
- 88% of residential and 90% of supported accommodation placements are commissioned externally (fig 8).
- Whilst inhouse supported accommodation appears to show fewer placements, this is because almost half of this accommodation is used by UASC who remain after their 18th birthday and are not included in the data as a looked after child.

The steep increase in external residential placements over the last 24 months has been the result of a lack of fostering placements to meet demand. This means more children where fostering would have been a suitable option, are being placed in residential homes, impacting further on the availability of residential placements for young people with complex/challenging behaviours. Anecdotally, local providers have suggested that the strict application of Ofsted standards have influenced their decisions to accept challenging placements and also cited workforce challenges.

Fig. 7. All children looked after by type of placement (as a share of the total CLA population), 2023

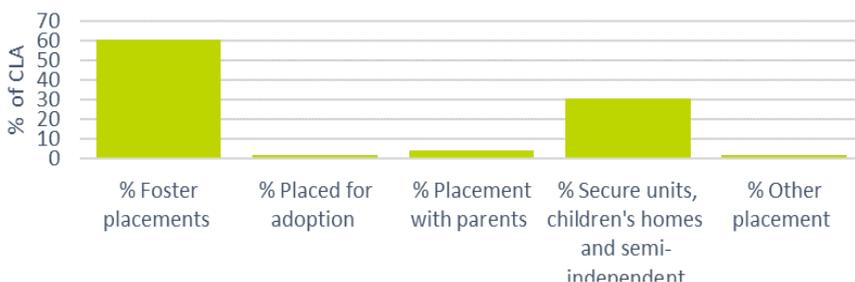


Fig. 8. Looked after children by placement provider (as a share of the total CLA population), 2023

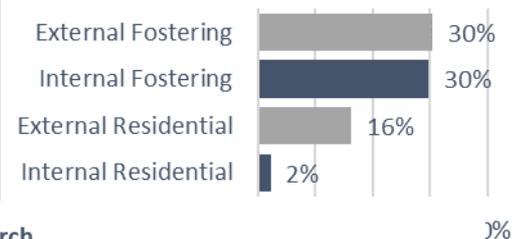
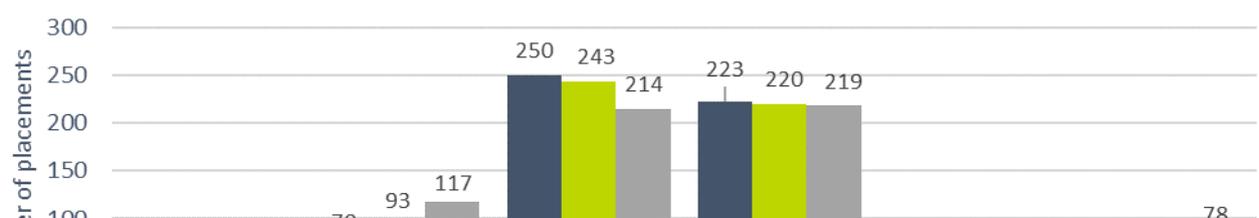


Fig 9. Placement type, as at 31 March



Placement stability

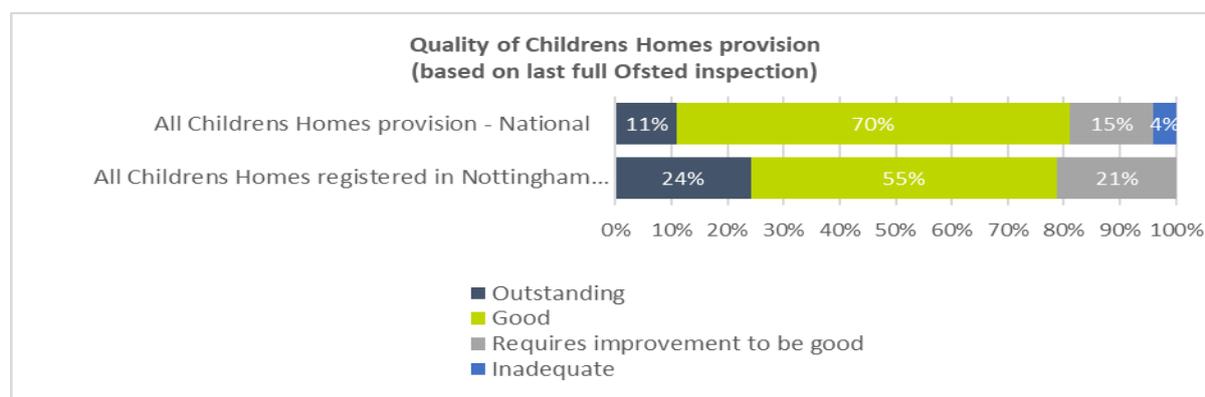
Placements moves during the year (table 1) indicates a worsening position relating to short term placement stability whilst long term stability remains constant.

Table 1. Stability of placements for children looked after	2022	2023
% of children looked after with three or more placements during the year	8%	12%
% of children looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years aged under 16 who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years	71%	71%

Placement stability is part of our transformation programme, which includes robust exit interviews to better understand placement breakdowns and the development of a Stable Homes policy which aims to identify early when placements may become unstable and implement support in a timely way.

Quality of local provision

79% of Childrens homes registered in the city are rated good or better, which is slightly below the national average of 81%.



Location of placements

Due to the compact nature of Nottingham City, placements may be deemed outside of the local authority area but still close to the city – we therefore define a ‘local’ placement as anywhere within a 20-mile radius of Nottingham City Centre. Where appropriate, the aim is for children and young people to remain living locally, taking into consideration the maintenance of a young person’s educational, health, social and cultural connections, and access to resources.

In March 2023 79% of children and young people were placed within 20 miles of their home and 40% placed within the local authority boundary.

All inhouse residential homes and inhouse supported accommodation provision/placements are within the City boundary, together with 40% of inhouse foster placements.

For placements with external providers:

- the majority (74%) of supported accommodation placements are within the city boundary, with 87% within 20 miles
- 21% of external fostering placements are within the city, rising to 72% within 20 miles.
- 49% of all external residential placements are over 20 miles from the city.

Fig 10. Looked after children where distance between placement and home is less than 20 miles (as a share of total population of CLA)

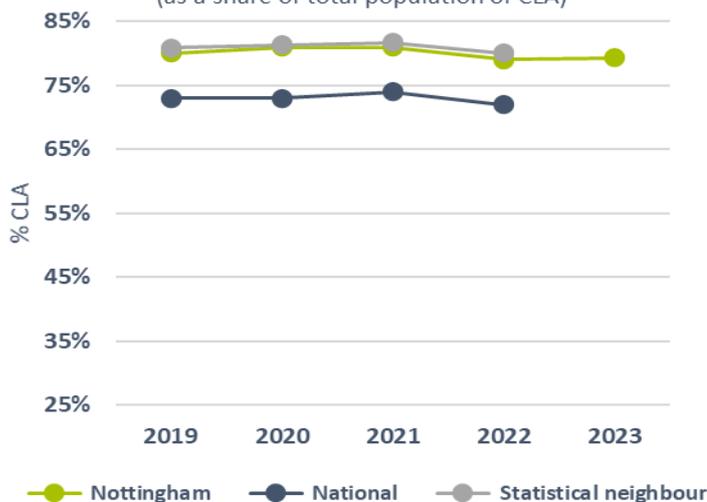


Fig 11. Looked after children placed within LA boundary (as a share of total population of CLA)

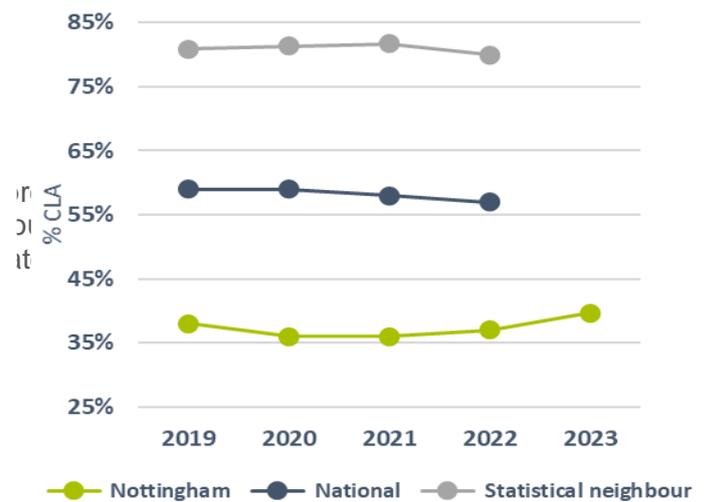
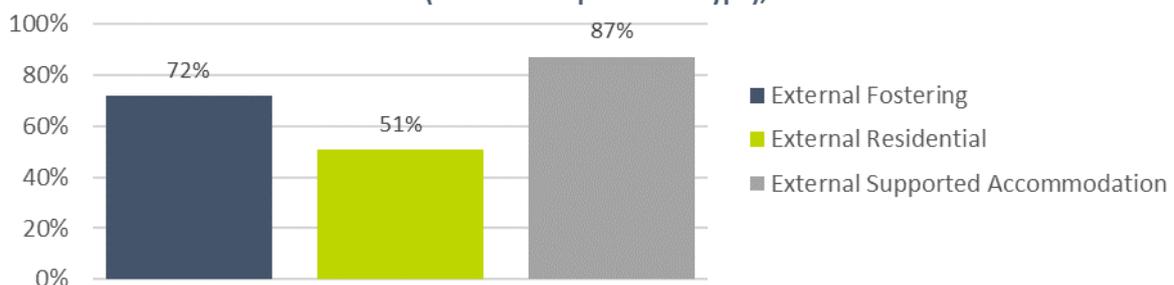


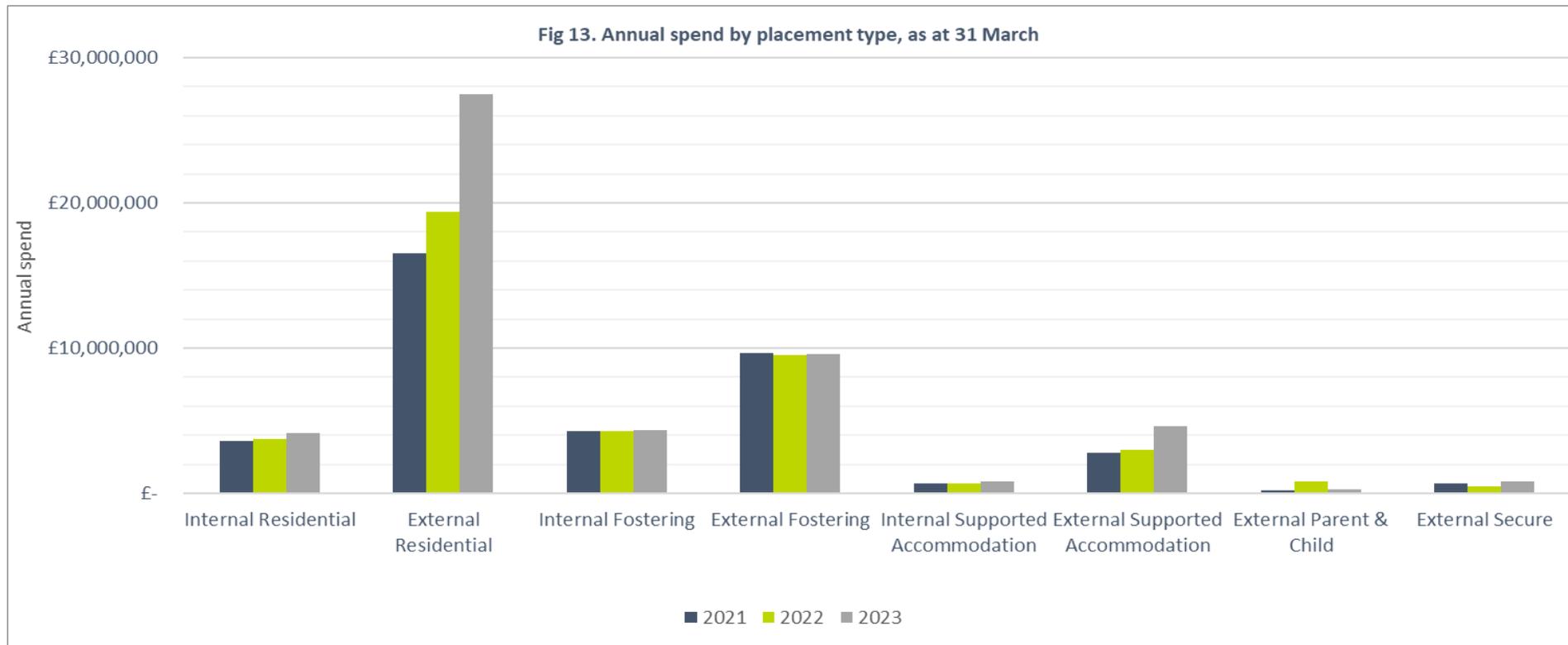
Fig 12. Looked after children where distance between placement and City is less than 20 miles (as a share of placement type), 2023



Cost of placements

The overall spend on placements during 22/23 was c£57m, an increase of 27% over the previous year. This was due to an increase on spend for all external residential-type placements, such as Secure provision (increased 84%) and residential homes (increased 42%).

The increase in residential homes spend is reflective of the increase in number of placements. The impact of the wider inflationary factors within the current economic environment is expected to impact more significantly during 2023/24.



4. Approach and Provision

Early Help and Strengthening Families

In Nottingham City we remain committed to supporting children and families facing difficulties. In the first instance this includes providing intensive support to those families where there is risk of relationship breakdown and where there is risk of children needing the Local Authority to provide care for them. We recognise that for many children remaining in the care of their parents or wider family network is in their best interests and should be supported as a priority. We work to identify and support families as an alternative to care and we have a range of Strengthening Families at Home services which are provided to those families with increased risk of breakdown either due to relationship difficulties or concerns about the care of the child.

Our Transformation work strand 'Preventing Long term entry to care' is aimed at reducing both the numbers of children and length of time children are on child protection and children in need plans and have successfully reduced the number of children on child protection plans by 25%, which, over time will result in fewer children in care.

We are changing practice so more children can be placed with families through special guardianship orders, child arrangement orders and as connected carers and achieve permanence out of care. Support for these carers is being strengthened together with regional collaboration on kinship care improving advice and support. Reunification policies and procedures are being redesigned as part of our transformation programme, all aimed at keeping more children with their families.

As part of achieving permanence, Nottingham City's adoption services are now part of [Adoption East Midlands](#) supporting D2N2 authorities.

Nottingham City is an active contributor to both regional and sub-regional commissioning partnerships. The East Midlands Commissioning leads undertake regional development work, including on fees, the wider market, best practice and quality. The D2N2 partnership has a number of framework agreements and collaborative workstreams, outlined within.

Voice of the child

Aligned to the Nottingham City Council strategic aim to achieve UNICEF accreditation as a Child Friendly City, and adopting a child rights-based approach, the voice of the child has been recognised whilst writing this strategy.

Children in care and care leavers have told us what they want to see from their accommodation and where they live, and the Children in Care Council is working with the Corporate Parenting Board to refresh the Children in Care and Care Leaver pledge.

This approach will feature within the future Action Plan, exploiting the opportunities the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy provides and the Child Friendly Nottingham badge for Communication and Leadership, whereby children and young people are actively involved and empowered to contribute to local decision making. Currently children can use advocacy services with feedback shaping the recommissioning of services which affect them however, specific feedback will be sought where existing services are being recommissioned or new services developed.

Inhouse Provision

Where children and young people are looked after, Nottingham City Council has a range of internal provision which complements externally commissioned arrangements:



Inhouse Residential

The Local Authority has seven registered children's homes located in the city, caring for up to 17 children and one short breaks home, caring for up to 11 children. The homes are rated by Ofsted as either Good or Outstanding apart from one home requiring improvement.

Regional development initiatives include working together to overcome sector-specific challenges such as recruitment and retention and training and pay.

In-house Fostering

Over recent years the proportion of fostering placements with inhouse foster carers has continued to fall; at March 2023, half of fostering placements are now with internal foster carers. There was a total reduction in inhouse foster placement of 12% from the previous year, whilst the total number of external placements remain roughly constant. The number of fostering households has also reduced.

We are strongly committed to increasing the capacity of the fostering service. The immediate priority is to recruit and retain more carers, and better utilise carers we do have. A significant programme of investment activity is supporting this, including:

- Our 'Modernising Fostering' transformation work, which has resulted in an increase in enquiries, applications and carers, and a reduction in negative resignations.
- Establishing a fostering support team and out of hours foster carer support service, who are therapeutically trained and there to support carers when challenges arise,
- Collaborating with D2N2 partner local authorities to ensure best practice and quick wins. Work to date has included pre and post approval training. Going forward, we are participating in the national pilot for pan-LA collaborative foster carer activity, covering recruitment and the Mockingbird foster-carer support model. Other potential future

collaboration areas include wider foster carer support and specialist carers (i.e., Parent and child).

- Implementing local initiatives aimed at developing a better understanding of our carers and their needs and wishes.

Our Fostering Service Statement of Purpose will shortly be updated to reflect these changes.

It is anticipated that this will enable more children to be placed locally, reduce external spend and achieve improved placement management throughout a child’s journey through care, ultimately leading to overall improved outcomes.

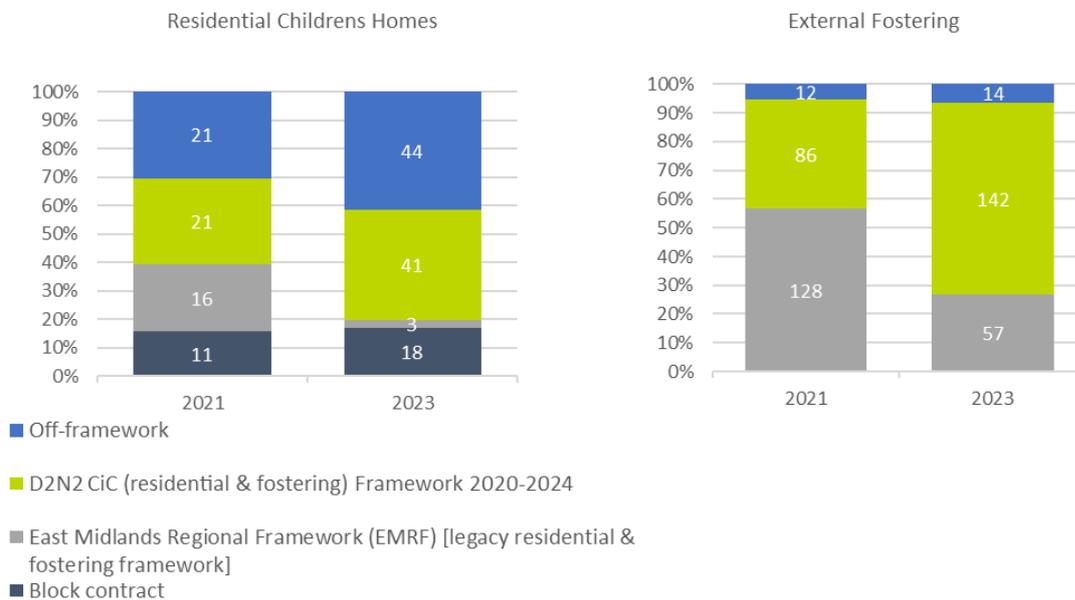
Inhouse Supported Accommodation

Nottingham City Council has five supported accommodation homes able to care for up to 20 young people, including children in care and care leavers. These provisions are well-established and support young people reaching independence and are currently being prepared to meet the new Ofsted Supported Accommodation standards. Key challenges include recruitment and retention of staff.

External Provision

The external market meets over 75% of our residential, fostering, and supported accommodation placement needs through a range of framework, block contracting and spot purchasing arrangements. For all placements we would initially seek to source through either inhouse or block contracted provision before using frameworks then spot purchasing arrangements. Most fostering placements are consistently sourced through frameworks.

Externally commissioned placements from 2021 and as at March 2023 (fig 14):



The D2N2 Children in Care (Residential and fostering) Framework is used to source residential placements. This framework went live in January 2020, with an initial period of 4 years, and is currently being extended until 2026. The four local authorities jointly fund a D2N2 Contracts officer post that is currently hosted by Nottinghamshire County Council.

The framework has specifications for both residential and fostering, standard and specialist provision and supports a locally competitive market by enabling new providers to regularly join.

The framework superseded the wider East Midlands Regional Children's Framework (residential and fostering) which ended in 2020. Working as a smaller collaborative, benefits providers through fewer and more consistent and coordinated processes, contract management and performance monitoring, than would be required when dealing with multiple local authorities, with local authorities benefitting through local efficiencies, shared risk, enhanced buying power and market influence, and information and resource sharing.

Residential Block Contract

The local authority has one block contract (in place since 2015) for residential Children's home provision, which was expanded over 2022/23 and the initial part of 2023/24, now including 23 beds across 8 homes. The contract has increased the number of young people living locally (aided by recent reconfiguration) and brought benefits of increased accessibility to local support services, with the relationship approach enabling more efficient placement provision and easier planning.



External Fostering

Most new external fostering placements are made through the D2N2 CiC (Children In Care) framework. Whilst the number of external fostering placements within the city boundary is not high, this rises to 72% within 20 miles of the city. The number of external fostering placements sourced has remained constant. The DN2 STARS programme also includes a step down to foster opportunity and provides fostering stability support.

External Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation is externally sourced through a small block contract (established in 2022), the D2N2 framework for Supported Accommodation (also established in 2022 and managed by Derby City Council) with the remainder sourced through spot purchasing. Overall, use of supported accommodation has increased with 90% of all supported accommodation for under 18s sourced from external providers.

The new Supported Accommodation regulations will come into effect from October 2023 and bring Ofsted regulation to this market which is likely to have a significant impact on the market.

Supported Lodgings

Supported lodgings is currently being piloted, which provides additional accommodation options for young people up to 21 years.

Care Leavers

Our Care Leavers offer is available on [AskLion](#) and currently being refreshed, with our Staying Close model in development. Going forward we are also working on a housing pathway and solutions to support young people to retain tenancies.

5. Gaps and Issues

We know there are gaps in provision to meet some specific needs areas:

Foster Care

Challenges meeting the needs of children requiring fostering provision

- We are unable to source a fostering placement for all our children and young people who have a fostering care plan, particularly those with more complex needs. This means more children and young people are placed in residential provision than we would like.
- We need more foster carers, specifically for young children (under 3 years), teenagers, parent and child fostering, large sibling groups (3-4 siblings) or for children with disabilities. . We also need more foster carers for young people with specialist needs, specifically mental health, CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation) and challenging behaviours which may suit therapeutically trained carers.

Residential Care

Challenges meeting the needs of children requiring residential provision

- Current challenges with residential provision include only 49% of residential placements being within 20 miles (despite an expansion and reconfiguration of the block contract); an increasing number of off-framework placements (c40%) and lack of specialist placements being offered by D2N2 framework providers and the wider market.
- Going forward we need to secure more residential placements close to the city. This includes increasing the number of local providers on the framework, developing closer tied relationships with providers potentially through hard or soft block contracting arrangements, and specific contracting for residential provision for young people with challenging behaviour.
- We need more residential placements emergency/short term/assessment places enabling needs to be assessed prior to finding an appropriate long-term setting and small setting/solo provision for children who tend not to thrive in standard settings
- We also need residential placements for young people with specialist complex needs, specifically mental health, or specialist physical and learning disability presenting behaviours that challenge.

6. Commissioning approach 2023-2028

Market Position

This strategy will be updated annually to reflect current data and provision and will inform commissioning plans and intentions going forwards.

We believe that the market should be:

- Composed of a mix of small, medium, and large organisations from the public, private, voluntary, and not for profit sectors, to achieve variety, sustainability and ensure competition and choice.
- Dynamic, flexible, and responsive, proactively adapting to changing demand and need.
- Person-centred and outcomes focused.
- Efficient, effective and provide best value.

Our commissioning intentions are to:

- Provide early help services and support to strengthen families, minimising the number of children needing to be cared for outside their families.
- Where children and young people do become looked after, ensure choice and diversity by continuing to operate a **mixed economy of internal and external provision**.
- Commission external provision through a **range of mechanisms**, aimed at incentivising specific outcomes wherever possible. This includes **frameworks and block contracts and minimising the use of spot purchasing**.
- Commission at both a **single local authority and partnership level** (either sub-regionally (D2N2) or regionally where beneficial), providing a balance of benefits and control.
- Build upon **strategic regional and sub-regional (D2N2) networks**, collaborating on areas with shared aims and objectives, problem solving and market management and to develop a better market for children's placements.
- Ensure **strategic, evidence-based, and needs-led** commissioning, making use of robust procurement and contracting functions.
- **Maximise use of internal provision**, with particular development of fostering.
- Place children according to what **best meets their needs**. To ensure this we will consistently apply processes across internal and external provision. Where we can meet the needs of a child through an internal placement, this would be our preferred option, as it allows us to offer fully joined up services for our children.
- Drive **up quality, ensure greater placement stability and de-escalation of need** through timely interventions, leading to better outcomes for children. We recognise that the greater placement stability and improved outcomes for our children and young people, the greater our influence is on costs and ensuring value for money.
- Further integrate Health, Education and Social Care through joint planning, funding, and commissioning, sustaining shared accountability and inter-agency cooperation, driving efficiencies, and better meeting the needs of our children.

Short term Market Position statement

The following have been identified as gaps where more provision is needed.

Residential

- Residential placements closer to the city
 - This includes increasing the number of local providers on the framework, developing closer tied relationships with providers potentially through hard or soft block contracting arrangements, and specific contracting for residential provision for young people with challenging behaviour.
- Specific types of residential provision:
 - Emergency/Short-term/Assessment placements: Accommodating urgent need for children needing a short-term setting to allow time for their needs to be assessed to find an appropriate longer-term placement. This should reduce the number of placement break downs going forward.
 - Specialist Residential Provision: for children with complex behavioural needs that tend not to thrive in standard residential settings.
 - Smaller residential settings: Solo or Dual Occupancy: More intensive support in a smaller environment.
 - Residential homes close to Nottingham City that operate using a step-down model for children and young people with a medium to long term plan to live with a foster family.
 - Therapeutic Residential Homes offering a clinically validated therapeutic environment.
- Provision meeting the following needs: Specialist complex needs, specifically mental health, and specialist physical and learning disability presenting behaviours that challenge.

Fostering

- Foster carers specifically for young children (under 3 years); teenagers; parent and child fostering; large sibling groups (3-4 siblings); children from black and ethnic minority backgrounds; for children with disabilities.
- Foster carers for young people with specialist needs such as mental health, CSE and challenging behaviours, which may suit therapeutically-trained carers.
- Specialist / Therapeutic carers for children stepping down from residential placements.

We are looking to jointly develop services with providers and draw from their experience around what they believe works best and are open to a range of commissioning approaches.

7. Action Plan

Fostering

Internal

- Increase the number of bed nights the inhouse fostering service can care for, by increasing recruitment and retention and utilising current carers more effectively.
- Implement additional recruitment campaigns to target specialist carers for those groups where more foster carers are needed, such as for:
 - Young children (under 3 years), teenagers, large sibling groups, children with disabilities, children from black and ethnic minority backgrounds.
 - Children with specialist needs, and those stepping down from residential provision.
- Provide greater specialist training and support for inhouse foster carers, such as therapeutic training for experienced carers.
- Understand what works to enable carers to continue caring for children with complex needs and develop specialist training for carers in this specific area.
- Evaluate support requirements and provide support for male carers and birth children.
- Develop a parent & child fostering offer.
- Continue to work collaboratively across D2N2 developing training and sharing learning and best practice.
- Explore the benefits of a sub-regional fostering agency.

External

- Maximise the STARS programme to support complex and challenging children to live within a family setting, including step down from residential provision.
- Work with the fostering market to enable carers to take children with needs where they would be best accommodated in a family setting, to avoid the needs for residential placements.

Residential

External

- Improve the proportion of residential placements sourced through the D2N2 framework, including market engagement with local providers to explore barriers.
- Consider requirements and need for solo provision for young people with high needs, reducing the need for unregistered provision and ensuring regulated placements.
- Scope requirements for emergency provision, further reducing need for unregistered placements.
- Scope the requirements to meet specialist residential needs and implement small contracting arrangements (either D2N2 or Nottingham City only) to meet demand locally.
- Progress D2N2 Specialist therapeutic homes model with ICB, ensuring specialist provision for young people with emotional/psychological deregulation and/or challenging behaviour.
- Recommission residential block contract provision, scoping needs covered by the existing block contract (due to end March 2025) and additional requirements, improving local residential sufficiency.
- Explore wider (soft) block contracting arrangements, both through D2N2 (harnessing the benefits of pooling places) and as a sole commissioner (with the benefit of control), also improving local sufficiency.

Internal

- Improve recruitment and retention of residential home staff, working with the region/sub-region to share best practice.

Supported Accommodation and Supported Lodgings

External

- Manage the current block contract to ensure children and young people are placed in quality, local provision that represents best value. Consider additional developments within the contract to meet emerging needs as required.
- With D2N2 LAs, develop the D2N2 Supported Accommodation framework so more provision is sourced to these standards and ii) that the provision sourced offers best value.
- Review of supported accommodation sector and provision used by NCC including framework, off-framework, and block, to ensure best meeting needs and value for money.
- Provide ongoing support and monitoring of provider-specific and the sector-wide response to meeting the Supported accommodation regulations, with appropriate management of risk and impact.
- Review the impact and outcomes from supported lodgings pilot, further commissioning as appropriate.

Internal

- Ensure inhouse provision effectively meets the new Ofsted regulations.

Care Leavers

- Develop a targeted offer for Care Leavers, including a robust Staying Close model.
- With Housing partners, remodel the Care Leavers Pathway and Protocol for accommodation, clarifying responsibilities to ensure an integrated offer.
- Explore sub-tenancy arrangements for care leavers which minimises moves.

Kinship care

- Regionally, share learning and best practice to further develop our Kinship care offer.

Partnership working and Internal governance

- Continue to work regionally (East Midlands) and sub-regionally (D2N2) to harness learning and best practice where appropriate.
- Ensure robust contract management processes and monitoring to support good outcomes and best value across all contracts.
- Strengthen the visibility of the voice of the child and their wishes and feelings when part of the placement search process.
- Continue to work collaboratively with providers to:
 - Ensure their workforce is equipped to meet the outcomes of our young people,
 - Ensure standards within contractual agreements are upheld and
 - Gain feedback regarding the quality of referrals and communication/engagement.
 - Continue to link with Child Friendly City to ensure the voice of the child is heard.

Communications and Engagement Strategy

To be developed by March 2024 for providers and citizens

Appendix 1

Governance Arrangements.

Decision making forums

In addition to the Looked After Child planning and review process, a number of decision-making forums review the quality and appropriateness of placements, impacting on placement demand:

- **Strengthening Families at Home Panel**

This year we have rebranded our range of Edge of Care services to 'Strengthening Families at Home' – this name better reflects the purpose of our work. We have a range of Strengthening Families at Home services which can be accessed via a weekly panel, chaired by the Head of Service. Services are provided to those families with increased risk of breakdown either due to relationship difficulties or concerns about the care of the child. The Strengthening Families at Home panel provides a robust process for determining the threshold for children being accommodated. Through a menu of alternative interventions, such as Multi Systemic Therapy and wrap around support in the home, the Edge of Care Panel can prevent inappropriate admissions and facilitate timely rehabilitation where this meets the needs of the child.

- **Placement Panels:**

Our Placement Panels are focused and have specific themes:

- **High-Cost Panel:** Focuses on the quality of a placement and whether the placement is consistently meeting the needs of the child or young person. We also seek to ascertain whether the placement delivers value for money. Decisions whether to increase or decrease additional support take place through informed discussions involving key professionals that work with the child or young person.
- **Transition Panel:** Focuses wholly on transition planning for young people to fully prepare them to live independently at 18, where appropriate. Housing and Education representatives attend this Panel, which is chaired by the Leaving Care Service Manager.
- **Exceptional Panel:** Established to identify children currently placed in residential children's homes that could now be more suitably placed within a foster placement, whether this be standard, specialist or therapeutic. Key professionals that work with the child or young person attend and contribute to Panel discussion and decision-making. We also consider children that may be ready to move into supported accommodation to help grow their independence skills where this is appropriate.

These Panels meet on a weekly rotation and a key part of their success is ensuring the right children come to the right Panel at the right time.

Contract Management

The Placement Service undertake sourcing, contract management and quality assurance for all external placements.

All commissioned placements are underpinned by an Individual Placement Agreement (IPA) and these form a contractual agreement between the local authority and the provider. The IPA provides detail on specific aspects of the placement, the expected objectives/outcomes, fees and consenting signatures from the local authority and the provider.

Meetings are held with all providers of commissioned placements a minimum of once every six months and consider contract and compliance monitoring, performance management, business

development, feedback from social care, health, education, young people, opportunities for improvement/increased value for money and individual placement needs/outcomes and support. For D2N2 framework providers, meetings are coordinated with other local authorities.

Quality Assurance

Our quality assurance processes ensure placements and providers are well matched, high quality and provide value for money. The level and frequency of quality assurance visits is determined considering business viability, inspection judgements, history, and complexity of current placements. Visits are undertaken by the Placement Service's Quality Assurance Officer and selected social care professionals. Placement feedback from Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and children and young people is gathered to support quality assurance processes. Clear service protocols determine the required actions to be undertaken by Nottingham City Council where quality concerns are identified.

For D2N2 framework providers, quality assurance is coordinated with a partnership commitment to annually quality assure providers. This includes joint provider visits or conducting visits on behalf of D2N2 and using regular meetings to share information of quality assurance visits and their outcomes, best practice, and provider concerns.

Local quality assurance processes for supported accommodation provision includes an accreditation system involving DASH (Decent and Safe Homes) accreditation (East Midlands Decent and Safe Housing service which is hosted by Derby City Council) and provider commitment to meeting Nottingham City Councils specified standards. Awareness raising activity has been undertaken with local authority professionals to better communicate the role of quality assurance. This, coupled with improved internal data and tracking systems, ensures that placement-specific interventions can be provided in a timelier way following concerns, issues, or feedback etc.

Our ambition is to only place with Ofsted judged 'Good' and 'Outstanding' providers. However, the demand for both fostering and residential placements locally, regionally, and nationally, combined with the type and level of young people's needs that are often evident when a placement is required at short notice, mean that we do have to consider offers from providers with lesser Ofsted judgments. When considering placing a young person with a provider that has an Ofsted rating of less than 'Good' we ensure that our expectations for the service and what is required to meet the needs of the young person are very clear. We work with the provider on action plans to establish and evidence ways in which they will reach a 'good' status and carry out robust and timely quality assurance supporting the provider to improve to a level of 'good' within a prompt timescale.

The new Supported Accommodation regulations come into effect from October 2023 which are intended to improve quality within a previously unregulated sector. We are supporting providers to meet the new regulations by providing a mechanism for sharing learning and feedback and linking to the national Sector Awareness program

