



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

STOCKTON-ON-TEES

2011-2013

Final Draft for Cabinet 16th June 2011

INDEX

Section	Page No.
Purpose	2
The Pledge	2
What Is Corporate Parenting?	4
Who Are Corporate Parents?	4
Participation Of Children In Care	5
Profile Of Children In Care	6
Provision For Children In Care	6
Care Placements And Planning	8
Efficiency, Improvement And Transformation (EIT) Review Of Child Placements	9
Strategic Links	10
Needs Assessment And Priorities	10
Delivery of the Strategy	13
Appendix 1: Profile Of Looked After Children 2006-11	18
Appendix 2: Care Placements: Policy and Practice	20
Appendix 3: EIT Review Of Child Placements – Executive Summary Of Children & Young People Select Committee Report	23
Appendix 4: Summary of Key Performance Indicator Data	26

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this strategy is to set out our¹ ambitions to improve outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers² of Stockton-on-Tees Council.

THE PLEDGE

2. The Council makes the following pledge to our children and young people in care and care leavers. This pledge has been developed with the Let's Take Action Group (our local Children in Care Council).

Stockton-on-Tees Pledge to Children and Young People in Care

Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to thrive. We protect and support our children against the perils and risks of life. We are ambitious for them; we want them to reach their potential. We celebrate and share in their achievements. A child who is cared for by the Local Authority has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

To fulfil this pledge we make the following commitments.

STAYING SAFE

- *We will do our very best to make sure you feel safe, have private space and time for yourself.*
- *You will have a place to live with carers who will look after you.*
- *We will make sure that you feel welcome and we will explain the 'house rules' regardless of where you live.*
- *You will have a Social Worker or Personal Adviser to support, guide and assist you.*
- *We will ensure you know how to contact your Social Worker or a duty Social Worker in case of an emergency.*
- *You will be helped to keep in touch with your family wherever possible if that is what you want and it is safe for you to do so.*
- *We will encourage you to make friends, keep in touch with old friends and build relationships.*
- *If you need to talk to someone independent of those who care for you, you can have access to an independent visitor, independent advocate or a Children's Rights Officer to support you.*

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

- *You will get the right support and help to do the things you need to do because of your culture, religion, sexuality or ethnic background.*
- *We will only share your information with those who need to know.*

¹ 'Our' means the Council, working in conjunction with its partners represented on the Children's Trust Board.

² In this strategy the terms 'Children in Care' (used in the national 'Care Matters' policy documents) and Looked After Children (used in the Children Act 1989) are used interchangeably.

- *You will be consulted about your care, and will have an up to date care plan, which covers the things that are important for you and your future.*
- *We will explain, in a way that you will understand, how and why decisions are made about you.*
- *You will have an Independent Reviewing Officer, to chair your Looked After Review.*
- *If you feel you have been treated unfairly or if you want to say anything about the services you receive, we will make sure that you know how to make a comment, compliment or complaint.*
- *At an appropriate age, should you request it, we will make sure that you have access to information that makes sense to you about being in care (i.e. access to your file).*

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING

- *At your school you will have a designated teacher to make sure you get the help you need.*
- *You will have a Personal Education Plan that is meaningful to you.*
- *We will make sure that you have access to safe and secure IT provision.*
- *We will encourage and support you to enjoy leisure activities, including sport, music, the arts, hobbies, after school clubs and young people's organisations.*
- *We will encourage and support you to move on to further / higher education, training or employment..*
- *We will make sure that you have the chance to go on holiday.*

BEING HEALTHY

- *You will receive a health assessment when you first become looked after, and a health plan will be agreed and reviewed regularly.*
- *We will ensure services are in place to support your emotional wellbeing.*
- *You will get access to good quality advice to help you lead a healthy lifestyle.*

YOUR FUTURE

- *We will provide you with a Personal Adviser to support you from the age of 16 through to 21, or 24 if you are studying at university.*
- *You will have a Pathway Plan that sets out the help and support you will need as you move into independence.*
- *If you cannot return to live with your own family we will help you to move into good quality accommodation.*
- *We will seek to create work opportunities for you with the council and other local businesses.*

WHAT IS CORPORATE PARENTING?

3. 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (the government's policy document on children in care) states:

"Every child needs a good parent who looks out for them, speaks out on their behalf and responds to their needs. For children in care, this is a statutory role for local authorities – all local councillors and council officers share the corporate parenting responsibility. This responsibility is paramount and councillors and council officers should carry it with them as they go about their daily business. They should also be clear about how, as corporate parents, they work with and support the Lead Member and Director of Children's Services, in their strategic roles.

However, it is not just local authorities that have a parenting role. In the same way that a family shares responsibility for bringing up their children with their extended family members, the corporate parenting responsibility must be shared by everyone involved in supporting children in care. This includes health bodies, education services such as schools and colleges, the police, youth and youth justice organisations, and the private and third sectors too."

4. This strategy aims to ensure that the Council and all its partners are working together to act as responsible parents for our children in care, based on the above definition.

WHO ARE CORPORATE PARENTS?

5. The following people and organisations have a key role in enabling the Council to be an effective corporate parent.
- a) Members of the Council – i.e. Councillors elected to serve on the Council. Through their work on different Committees of the Council they are in a position to ensure that the needs of children and young people in care and care leavers are championed and are considered in any new policies adopted by the Council.
 - b) Lead Member – i.e. the Councillor who is a member of the Council's Cabinet and has a particular responsibility for children and young people.
 - c) Director of Children's Services – in Stockton-on-Tees this is the Director of Children, Education and Social Care. As the Council employee who provides leadership of all the Council's services for children and young people, the Director must ensure that the needs of children and young people in care and care leavers are taken fully into account in the professional advice that is given to inform the decision making of the Council and its Cabinet.
 - d) Senior Officers – all those who work in senior positions in the Council have a responsibility to ensure that the services they manage are aware of the corporate parent role, take into account the impact of their services on children and young people in care and care leavers, and seek opportunities to improve outcomes for them.
 - e) Partners – the Council must work closely with many other organisations to help improve services for children and young people in care and care leavers. Key partners in particular are Health Services, Schools and Post-16 Providers, the Police, and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

- f) Children's Trust Board – this is the partnership that represents, at a senior level, the partners who must cooperate and collaborate in order to deliver the local priorities for all children and young people as set out in the Children & Young People's Plan.
- g) MALAP – is the Multi-Agency Looked After Children Partnership. This is the key forum for bringing together representatives of those partners who have a corporate parent role, to champion the needs of children and young people in care and care leavers, to monitor outcomes for them, and to challenge services to further develop and improve services.

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE

- 6. Listening to the voice of children and young people in care, and enabling them to take part in decisions about their lives, is central to the aims of this strategy.
- 7. The Let's Take Action Group is the name of our Children in Care Council. It is the local voice of looked after young people in our area. Its name reflects the wishes of the young people to focus on getting things done, rather than focus on them being 'in care'.
- 8. The group has been established to gather views, represent the interests of, and raise awareness of the issues for, children and young people who are looked after by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The group is supported by the Children's Rights Officer and other local authority staff. Its key roles are:
 - to support and give advice to other children and young people in the care of the Council;
 - to seek the views of other children and young people in care;
 - to represent the views of the young people to the Director of Children's Services and to the Lead Member for children's services;
 - to be actively involved in shaping the services that support children and young people who are looked after by the Council and promoting these to other children and young people in the care system.
- 9. Representation on the Let's Take Action (LTA) Group has focused in the past on 12 to 19 year olds who are in the care of Stockton Borough Council, or who remain eligible for the provision of services as a care leaver. However, there is now work in hand to establish a group of under 12 year old children in care, to broaden the range of the LTA Group.
- 10. There are a number of other ways in which the voice of children and young people in care is routinely heard and considered:
 - statutory Looked After Children reviews;
 - exit interviews;
 - visits from the Children's Rights Officer;
 - complaints from children and young people in care;
 - pupil / student feedback to the Virtual School.

PROFILE OF CHILDREN IN CARE

11. This strategy is issued at a time that sees the number of children in care at its highest ever level. The table at **appendix 1** gives data about the profile of children and young people in care over the past five years. Analysis of this data indicates the following points of particular significance.
 - a) The rate of LAC per 10,000 population has been well below that of comparator groups in the past; the rate at the end of March 2010 however (67 per 10,000) had increased to a level above the national rate of 58, but below the North East regional average of 69.
 - b) The increase in numbers has been relatively greater within the very young (under 5yrs) and older (16+) age groups.
 - c) There has been a particularly significant increase in boys aged 16-17 yrs old (more than threefold).
 - d) The large majority of LAC continue to be placed with foster / kinship carers (over 70%) in line with the national trend.
 - e) 'Abuse or neglect' is the reason for children coming into care in the large majority of cases, and has increased as a proportion of the total.
 - f) As numbers of LAC have increased, there has been increasing reliance on the use of IFA (Independent Fostering Agency) provision.
12. These trends in the profile of children and young people in care have significant implications for resourcing the demand on services, and for the commissioning of future provision. An aim of this strategy is to provide the framework within which partners can work together to address these challenges.

PROVISION FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

13. There are a number of teams within the Council's Social Care Services that work with and support looked after children, as detailed below.
14. **Child Placement Team.** Social workers in this team recruit, assess and train foster carers and adoptive families. They identify placements for looked after children and support foster carers and adopters throughout their placement. They also offer post-adoption services to both children and their families. When placements are not available within Stockton they secure placements with independent providers.
15. **Specialist Social Work Teams.** The duties of these four teams, each covering a geographical area, include responsibility for the care planning and support for looked after children under 13 years of age. Social workers and support workers from the team are often involved with children and their families prior to them entering the care system and take the lead in protecting children as part of a multi-agency protection plan. They instigate care proceedings when children are not appropriately safeguarded and arrange permanent placements for children when there is no prospect of them returning home to family.
16. **Complex Needs Social Work Team.** This Borough-wide service has responsibility for the care planning and support of those looked after children who have a complex need. The team also supports disabled children and young people who become looked after through respite provision.
17. **Young Persons Looked After Team.** The team offers a service to looked after young people aged 13 who have a plan for permanence and support them throughout their period in and up to leaving care. They are responsible for care planning, monitoring and supporting the young person and their carers and family.

18. **Leaving Care Team.** The team has a number of personal advisors who work with young people who have left care from the age of 16 up to 21 or 24 if they are in full-time education. They support young people in their accommodation and employment, education or training and ensure that their care plan is implemented. .
19. **Resource Team.** The team manager is responsible for the management of three children's homes within the borough. Residential placements with external providers are arranged where necessary, and these are reviewed twice per year. The team has responsibility for the supported lodging scheme and recruits, trains and assesses families to take care leavers and vulnerable 16 /17 year olds. Support workers in the team work with young people and providers of accommodation to ensure placement stability. The team works closely with other service providers who are commissioned to offer supported living for care leavers and vulnerable young people.
20. Other public sector support services available to looked after children and their families are outlined below:
21. **Children and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) Looked after Children Service.** There is a dedicated CAMHS service for looked after children placed in the borough. The service offers a range of support: therapeutic direct work with children, delivered by a range of professionals; consultation, advice and guidance to social workers; and direct support to foster carers and residential staff. The service also provides bespoke packages of training for workers or carers.
22. **Virtual School for Looked After Children.** The Virtual School has adopted a structure which mirrors that of a school, and has a key role in ensuring that services in relation to the education of all looked after children in Stockton are co-ordinated effectively to raise achievement. The School has a Head Teacher and a number of staff designated to support schools and pupils, including pastoral oversight. The school has a register of all LAC pupils and tracking and monitoring systems to ensure that targeted support is given to those who require it. MALAP (the Multi Agency Looked After Children Partnership) serve as the governing body for the Virtual School.
23. **Looked after Children Education (LACE) Team.** The team, working closely with the Virtual School Head Teacher, is an outreach support team providing time limited and focused educational support and mentoring for looked after children. The team works directly with children and young people, their carers and schools to support them in their learning, improve school stability, promote the importance of education and raise achievement and aspiration.
24. **Education Transport Service.** This service ensures that when a child or young person has a placement move, and continuity of school placement is required, transport arrangements are made to enable this. This is particularly important for young people who are in the last two years of compulsory education and working towards their GCSE or equivalent exams.
25. **Looked After Children and Young People Health Services.** There is a dedicated Senior Nurse for Looked After Children, co-located with the Young Persons Looked After Team, who co-ordinates health services for those in care. The Senior Nurse and a team including school nurses and health visitors work directly with children and young people to undertake annual health assessment reviews, and provide support for a range of issues including smoking ,alcohol, drugs and contraception .In addition there is a part-time Specialist in Community Paediatrics who undertakes initial health assessments for looked after children.

26. The Council has commissioned a number of other organisations to provide dedicated services to looked after children and their families.
27. **National Youth Advocacy Service.** The service provides advocacy for children and young people, to assist and support them at their review or with any complaints they may have with the council.
28. **Barnardos Independent Visitors Scheme.** This scheme provides volunteers who will befriend and support looked after children and young people who do not have a significant or appropriate adult in their lives, particularly those who have no contact with their family. This is a statutory duty under the Children and Young People act 1989.
29. **Bridgeway Service.** Bridgeway offer therapeutic counselling service to children and young people and their families and carers where there has been sexual abuse. It also works with young people who are the perpetrators of sexual abuse.
30. **Brookleigh Contact Service.** This service facilitates and supervises contact for looked after children and young people with their families when necessary will supervise where it is felt to be risky.
31. **Supported Accommodation for Care Leavers.** Carr-Gomm housing association provides supported tenancies in purpose built provision for care leavers, including support for young people who are pregnant or teenage mums. They have an emergency crash pad that can be accessed out of hours. Tees Valley Housing Association are commissioned to provide a 6 bedded supported hostel for care leavers.
32. **Leisure Services.** Tees Active provides free access to leisure facilities for children and young people in care placed in Stockton and care leavers. In addition they offer a discounted rate for foster carers and their families, and for residential staff. Discount cards are commissioned as part of the regional Max Card scheme which provides discounted or free access to a range of cultural venues throughout the North East. .

CARE PLACEMENTS AND PLANNING

33. We believe strongly that the stability of relationships and environment are the most important factors in helping children to flourish and develop as healthy adults with a sense of permanence. Our strategy for the placement of children and young people in care is fundamental, therefore, to realising our aspirations as corporate parents. Accordingly, this new Corporate Parenting Strategy builds on the previous Placement Strategy, and takes account of the findings of the comprehensive EIT (Efficiency, Improvement & Transformation) Review of Children's Placements undertaken during 2009-10.
34. This Strategy has been developed alongside work within Children's Social Care to develop a 'Vision for Children in Need'. The Vision will provide an overarching set of principles to assist staff in achieving stability and a sense of permanence for children in need, and those on the edge of care, based on their assessed needs. This Corporate Parenting Strategy is one of the documents that will support delivery of the principles to be embodied in the Vision for Children in Need.
35. Details of current policy and practice in relation to placements are set out in **appendix 2** of this strategy. Policy is underpinned by the following key principles.
 - Children should be placed in family situations where possible.

- Parents and carers should be supported to provide children with stable living arrangements, secure relationships and a healthy, safe environment in which to grow and flourish.
- Where it is not possible to achieve this within the child's birth family, timely plans should be made to secure these aims within wider family networks or, if that is not possible, through the provision of substitute care.

36. Our practice is focused in four areas:

Pre-placement:

- assessment of needs and support to parents / carers in meeting children's needs within their own family or kinship networks;
- developing the breadth and range of supportive services to children and young people in need and their families.

Placement Support:

- meeting the child's needs within placement;
- clear planning to achieve a permanent, stable set of secure relationships – either through rehabilitation to family or kinship networks or achieving permanency through adoption, special guardianship, residence order, foster care, or long-term residential care.

Long-term Placement:

- achieving permanence within clear timescales;
- support to the child and carers within their permanent placement, including post placement services where need is assessed.

Post Placement support:

- provision of appropriate after care services when children leave care.

EFFICIENCY, IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION (EIT) REVIEW OF CHILD PLACEMENTS

37. The EIT Review was undertaken during 2009-10 as part of the first year of a three year programme of EIT Reviews, led by the Council, to examine opportunities for securing improvements and efficiencies in service delivery. This review was undertaken by the Children & Young People Select Committee, which reported on its findings in March 2010. The Executive Summary of the Select Committee's final report is attached as appendix 3 of this strategy. The full report (which is available on the Council's website) gives details of current placement arrangements, examines the strengths and weaknesses of these arrangements, and analyses the costs and benefits associated with the different range of placement options.

38. The recommendations in this report, as agreed by the Council's Cabinet, are a key aspect of delivering this Corporate Parenting Strategy. The agreed actions are:

- recruitment of more foster carers;
- development of a Kinship Care policy;
- supporting sub- regional work to develop provision for children who have particularly complex needs;
- development of additional local authority residential provision;
- improving access to therapeutic interventions for children who have been adopted.

39. These actions form a key element in delivery of the improvement priorities identified in this Corporate Parenting Strategy.

STRATEGIC LINKS

40. The Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) provides the overarching strategic framework and priorities for developing services, and improving outcomes, for all children and young people in our area. Stockton-on-Tees Children's Trust Board is responsible for the development of the plan and for ensuring that actions to deliver the plan are implemented. The Board is comprised of all partner agencies and organisations, across the statutory sector and voluntary and community sectors. Young people are represented on the Board through elections from our Youth Assembly.

41. Improving outcomes for children in care is one of the key strategic priorities in the CYPP, and this Corporate Parenting Strategy is central to delivering that priority. MALAP (the Multi-Agency Looked After Children Partnership) is the partnership group responsible for overseeing development and delivery of this strategy and will account to the Children's Trust Board for progress in achieving the aims and objectives of the strategy.

42. This Corporate Parenting Strategy is also linked to a number of other strategies and plans that contribute to the overall priorities in the CYPP. Whilst this strategy is focused on those who are in or leaving care, it needs to be seen in the context of a wide range of activity and developments that are focused on early intervention and prevention as a means of addressing the needs of those who are vulnerable to poor outcomes and who may be on the edge of care. It is also linked to the range of developments overseen by the Stockton Local Safeguarding Children Board aimed at protecting children at risk of harm. The following documents are of particular relevance to this broader framework:

- Young People's Homelessness Strategy
- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
- Children & Young People's Substance Misuse Strategy
- Care2Work Strategy
- Transitions Strategy
- 14-19 Strategy
- Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board Action Plan

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITIES

43. The following section identifies the priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people in care, based on an evaluation of strengths and areas for development identified through:

- analysis of performance indicators at regular performance clinics (see **appendix 4** for details of performance indicator data);
- feedback from consultation with young people in care;
- outcomes of service inspections;
- feedback from elected Members of the Council through their Regulation 33 visits to Children's homes;
- review and challenge of outcomes by MALAP;
- outcomes of the Ofsted Safeguarding and LAC Inspection.

44. **Priority: Ensure that LAC and Care Leavers have access to health services that are responsive to the particular needs of LAC and Care Leavers.**

What is going well.....

- An action plan is attached to each annual health assessment, and is monitored by the Independent Review Officer.
- The LAC team in CAMHS ensures a good level of support for emotional and mental health.
- There is robust follow-up of health assessments and plans, and of SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) results.
- There has been good take-up of annual medical and dental checks, although there has been recent pressure in sustaining performance in this area.

Areas for further development.....

- Young people often say that services do not always understand the particular needs of children and young people in care.
- As a result of the increasing number of children in care, there are some delays in undertaking Initial Health Assessments.
- Ensuring the uptake of dental checkups by children and young people in care.
- Ensuring immunisations are given, particularly for very young children in care.
- Extending the use of SDQs to post-16 yr old young people.
- Reducing the under-18 conception rate amongst young people in care / care leavers.
- Ensuring protocols are in place to support young people's emotional health needs as they progress in to adulthood.

45. Priority: Ensure an appropriate range of local placement support and resources for LAC, Care Leavers, and those on the edge of care.

What is going well.....

- Good levels of short term placement stability have been achieved over recent years.
- The quality of provision in the Council's maintained Children's homes is judged good or outstanding.
- A new protocol has been developed with local partners in relation to children missing from home.
- Development of Parkfield Hall has improved access to supported temporary accommodation.
- Supported Lodgings scheme has continued to grow and has extended to homeless young people
- Homeless 16/17 young people continue to receive initial assessments, accommodation and support via a named personal advisor from the leaving care team.

Areas for further development.....

- Improving the stability of longer term placements, to reverse the recent decline in performance in this area.
- Improving the local range of placements, to support choice and meet the aim of all LAC being placed in the local area.
- Ensuring appropriate financial support for care leavers moving into accommodation.
- Maintaining regular contact and engagement with LAC placed in out of area provision.
- Supporting those on the edge of care to prevent admission to care.

- Development of emergency and temporary accommodation for care leavers and homeless young people.

46. Priority: Develop and implement revised independent review and monitoring processes.

What is going well.....

- Good levels of performance are achieved in ensuring LAC Reviews are undertaken on a timely basis, with the opportunity for the child or young person to be involved and contribute their views.

Areas for further development.....

- Implementing new statutory guidance regarding the role of IROs (Independent Reviewing Officers) in relation to LAC.
- Manage the capacity within the IRO team to respond to the increasing volume of cases.

47. Priority: Improve educational outcomes.

What is going well.....

- Virtual school established, providing support and challenge to schools.
- MALAP operating as the Virtual School Governing Body.
- Low levels of school absence for LAC.
- Financial support for access to sport / leisure facilities and participation in extra curricular opportunities.
- Supported transport arrangements to maintain stability of school placement.
- Financial support for access to a wide range of educational, cultural and recreational activities.

Areas for further development.....

- Continue development of Virtual School to embed improvements.
- Tracking and monitoring of pupil progress.
- Specialist support for Early Years and post 16 phases.
- Access to individual support in schools for children in care.
- Review current approach to Personal Education Plans to ensure a clear focus on targets and outcomes.

48. Priority: Further develop the means by which the voice of LAC and Care Leavers is heard and responded to.

What is going well.....

- There are regular communications with LAC through newsletters etc.
- Arrangements are in place for responding to feedback through complaints and exit interviews.
- LAC are involved regularly in staff recruitment for social care posts.

Areas for further development.....

- Strengthen the role of the Children in Care Council, particularly in relation to younger children.

- Make more effective use of electronic / IT communications to engage with, and promote awareness of LAC.
- Extend involvement in recruitment processes more widely across the Council and partners.

49. Priority: Extend work-based training opportunities for LAC and Care Leavers within the Council and partners in the Children's Trust Board.

What is going well.....

- Close monitoring of care leavers moving into EET.
- Focus on LAC in specific employment programmes e.g. Care2Work.

Areas for further development.....

- Ensure LAC needs are reflected in the Transitions Strategy.
- Improve access to further education, training and employment opportunities.

50. Priority: Embed the corporate parenting role across the Council and Children's Trust Board partners.

What is going well.....

- Strength of Council Members' commitment endorsed by Ofsted inspection.
- MALAP established with broad cross-service representation to champion the needs of children and young people in care.

Areas for further development.....

- Ensure corporate parenting is incorporated within Member induction, training and development programmes.
- Work with partners in the Trust Board to secure commitment to the needs of LAC in their future planning, through the high level priorities in the Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) and the priorities set out in this strategy.

DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY

51. Putting this strategy into practice will require action across a number of services and partner agencies. The priorities outlined above need to be taken into account by all these agencies when developing their service and business plans. MALAP, as part of its annual work plan, will have a key role in monitoring and challenging progress in delivery of the strategy, and will seek to ensure that partner agencies are taking account of the priorities and have developed relevant action plans.

52. The following section indicates the key areas of improvement activity required to deliver each priority, and the success criteria that will help to review and evaluate the impact of the strategy.

Priority 1: Ensure that LAC and Care Leavers have access to health services that are responsive to the particular needs of LAC and Care Leavers.	
<p>Improvement activity to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop the use of SDQs (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires) across the whole age range of LAC. 2. Ensure access to Community Paediatric staff for initial health assessments. 3. Improve knowledge and understanding of the emotional and mental health needs of LAC, for staff across health partner agencies. 4. Review the SLA for Dental Services. 	<p>Key partners:</p> <p>SBC: Children's Social Care Services.</p> <p>PCT.</p> <p>Foundation Trust.</p>
<p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of SDQ scores will enable timely interventions to be made to address emotional and mental health needs. • All LAC will receive an initial health assessment within 28 days. • The proportion of LAC taking up an annual health review will be at least 90%. 	

Priority 2: Ensure an appropriate range of local placement support and resources for LAC, Care Leavers, and those on the edge of care.	
<p>Improvement activity to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the new Foster Care Marketing role. 2. Develop a Kinship Care policy. 3. Support the development of sub-regional provision for children with complex needs. 4. Develop local residential provision. 5. Raise awareness of adoption issues and the role of agencies within the Children's Trust. 6. Further improve support for homeless 16/17 year olds. 	<p>Key partners:</p> <p>SBC: Children's Social Care Services; Housing Services.</p> <p>Tees Valley Councils.</p> <p>PCT.</p>
<p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater proportion of LAC will be placed within the sub-region. • Longer term placement stability will be improved (LAC who have been in care for over two and a half years, in the same placement for at least two years - improve rate to 65% by 2013). • The range of permanency options will increase through kinship care placements, special guardianships, adoption, long term foster care, and residence orders. 	

Priority 3: Develop and implement revised independent review and monitoring processes.

<p>Improvement activity to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementation of new statutory guidance on the role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). 2. Review the arrangements for: the review of pathways plans; foster carer reviews; adoption reviews; the review of disruption meetings; the review of supported lodging placements. 3. Review the role of the Children’s Rights Officer. 	<p>Key partners:</p> <p>SBC: IRO Service; Children’s Social Care Services.</p> <p>Let’s Take Action Group (Children in Care Council).</p>
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- Success criteria**
- Capacity within the Review Unit is sufficient to meet national guidance.
 - All LAC are able to contribute to, and participate in, their reviews.
 - Feedback from review processes is used to inform future service development.

Priority 4: Improve educational outcomes.

<p>Improvement activity to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embed the Designated Teachers network. 2. Ensure access for LAC to individual support in schools where required. 3. Improve monitoring of pupil progress, through further development of PEPs. 4. Further develop use of data to track progress, including post-16 destinations. 5. Work with specialist educational support services to develop greater focus on the needs of LAC in the early years and post-16. 	<p>Key partners:</p> <p>SBC: LAC Education Team; Virtual School; Children’s Social Care Services; Business Support & Improvement Service.</p> <p>Schools.</p> <p>Post-16 Providers.</p>
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- Success criteria**
- Students make progress in line with their targets, their EYFS profile, or post-16 Pathway.
 - School attendance remains above the national average for LAC and persistent absence remains below 6%.
 - Post-16 students are engaged in meaningful participation in education, employment or training.

Priority 5: Further develop the means by which the voice of LAC and Care Leavers is heard and responded to.	
<p>Improvement activity to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop the use of electronic communications to facilitate consultation and engagement with LAC. 2. Extend LAC involvement in recruitment processes for relevant posts. 3. Evaluate arrangements for exit interviews of care leavers. 4. Strengthen the role of the Children in Care Council, taking account of the age range and specific needs of younger children. 5. Ensure full awareness of / access to independent advocacy services. 	<p>Key partners:</p> <p>SBC: Children's Social Care Services.</p> <p>Let's Take Action Group (Children in Care Council).</p>
<p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from LAC indicates that they feel they have been listened to, and that they understand the ways in which they can have their voice heard. 	

Priority 6: Extend work-based training opportunities for LAC and Care Leavers within the Council and partners in the Children's Trust Board.	
<p>Improvement activity to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivery of the Care2Work action plan. 2. Implement the LAC Apprenticeship scheme. 3. Improve access to work experience opportunities for LAC within the Council and Trust Board partners. 	<p>Key partners:</p> <p>SBC: Children's Social Care Services; Integrated Youth Support Services; Regeneration and Economic Development.</p> <p>Trust Board Partners.</p>
<p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual targets for the proportion of LAC in EET are achieved. • A greater number of young people move in to training / employment within the Council and other Children's Trust Board partners. 	

Priority 7: Priority: Embed the corporate parenting role across the Council and Children's Trust Board partners.	
<p>Improvement activity to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All partners to the Children's Trust Board to sign up to the Pledge to Children in Care. 2. Review training and information programmes for members and partners in relation to the Corporate Parenting role. 3. Provide opportunities for members to share practice and develop skills in relation to regulatory visits to provision for children in care. 	<p>Key partners:</p> <p>All Trust Board partners.</p> <p>SBC Elected Members.</p>
<p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Children's Trust Board partners will have signed up to this Strategy and the Pledge within it. • All Council members have received information / training about their role as corporate parents. • Feedback from regulatory visits is used to support the review and development of provision for children in care. 	

Children in Care Profile (data at the end of March 2006 to 2011)	Appendix 1
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Boys	Mar-06	Mar-07	Mar-08	Mar-09	Mar-10	Mar-11	
Under 1:	7	4	9	5	14	10	
1 - 4:	12	13	20	28	36	41	
5 - 9:	18	23	22	25	33	44	
10 - 15:	55	50	62	52	45	49	
16 - 17:	9	13	16	21	31	26	
Total:	101	103	129	131	159	170	
Girls							
Under 1:	6	7	5	8	13	9	
1 - 4:	19	17	26	27	25	36	
5 - 9:	17	22	18	18	31	22	
10 - 15:	35	29	36	39	43	46	
16 - 17:	11	9	10	13	16	10	
Total:	88	84	95	105	128	123	
Total LAC at 31 March:	189	187	224	236	287	293	
Legal status							
Care Orders:	Interim	25	29	37	37	35	51
	Full	100	101	107	116	114	108
Voluntary agreements (S.20)	47	46	62	69	113	92	
Freed for adoption	13	1	1	0	0	0	
Placement Order	4	10	16	14	25	42	
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	0	0	1	0	0	0	
Emergency orders or police protection	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Placement type (all LAC)							
Foster Placement:	In LA	110	114	146	128	145	144
	Out of LA	30	33	33	32	56	54
Foster placement with relative or friend	In LA				21	34	27
	Out of LA				3	5	5
Children's home:	In LA	14	12	12			
	Out of LA	4	3	5			
Secure unit	1	1	2	0	0	1	
Homes & Hostels				16	20	25	
Residential schools	0	0	2	1	2	4	

Corporate Parenting Strategy Stockton-on-Tees 2011-2013

Other residential settings	3	3	2	5	2	0
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)	10	5	10	10	7	12
Placed with own parents	11	11	6	13	11	17
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently	6	5	6	7	5	4
Category of Need						
Abuse or neglect	144	139	168	178	236	243
Disability	8	5	6	7	8	3
Parental illness or disability	7	10	11	11	12	12
Family in acute stress	14	18	14	18	15	13
Family dysfunction	12	8	9	7	7	15
Socially unacceptable behaviour	0	2	6	7	6	5
Low income	0	0	0	0	0	0
Absent parenting	4	5	10	8	3	2
Ethnic origin						
White	184	180	209	217	260	264
Mixed	5	5	9	13	19	10
Asian or Asian British	0	1	4	5	3	7
Black or Black British	0	0	1	0	4	11
Other ethnic groups	0	1	1	1	1	1

CARE PLACEMENTS – POLICY AND PRACTICE

Appendix 2

Our emphasis is on supporting parents / carers in meeting the needs of children and young people. The stability of relationships and environment are both important factors in helping children grow up to be healthy adults, along with a sense of permanence. The aims of our approach to care placements are:

1. To develop a range of preventative / support services to reduce the need for a child and young person to become or remain looked after.
2. To maximise the life chances of a child or young person remaining within their own family and prevent the need for accommodation.
3. To ensure that wherever possible children and young people are cared for locally with the minimum of disruption.
4. To ensure placement stability wherever possible and that children and young people are securely attached in a permanent placement, e.g. kinship care; special guardianship; adoption; residence order; long-term foster care; residential provision.
5. To have a range of services to support Looked After Children and young people and their carers.
6. To ensure children and young people are consulted in placement and service planning.
7. To have a choice and range of adoptive fostering and residential placements which are developed around the needs of the child and young person.
8. To ensure children and young people moving into independent living are appropriately prepared, supported and have access to a range and choice of suitable accommodation.

CONTEXT

National

The statutory framework for supporting children in care is primarily set out in the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children (Leaving Care Act) 2002. The Green Paper, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care (October 2006) and Care Matters: Time to deliver for Children in Care (March 2008) set out the Government's programme for the delivery of local change to transform outcomes for children and young people in care.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008:

- restricts local authorities from placing children "out of authority", requiring local authorities to adopt a pro-active approach to the local provision of services;
- requires consideration to be given to family and friends carers, at the first and every subsequent stage of decision making;
- enables local authorities to provide improved support for family and friends carers, with a greater level of discretion to provide financial support and reduce the barriers which families face when obtaining Residence and Special Guardianship Orders.

More recently the Sufficiency Statutory guidance on securing accommodation for looked after children (March 2010) made it clear that local authorities are required to take steps to ensure that sufficient accommodation is available locally, to meet the needs of those children looked after.

Local Provision

The 2009-10 EIT Review (as referred to in this strategy – paragraph 35 onwards, ndix 3) made a detailed analysis of current provision for placing children in care, looking at the strengths and weaknesses of these arrangements and the costs of the various types of placement.

PROCESS AND STRUCTURES

The Council's Children, Education and Social Care (CESC) Services have developed a robust system and audit process to ensure that our placement decisions meet the needs of the children. To this end the following structure is in place.

The Child Placement Panel

The Child Placement Panel is a joint Adoption and Fostering Panel convened under statutory legislation. The Panel considers a wide range of issues relating to the Local Authority's duties and responsibilities for children who are looked after. These include children for whom we share parental responsibility and those children who are voluntarily accommodated.

Matters which require presentation to the Child Placement Panel are as follows.

- Recommendation for approval of a plan for adoption for a child.
- Recommendation for approval of a plan for long term foster care for a child who was under 12 years of age when the plan was made.
- Recommendation of approval for prospective adopters.
- Recommendation of approval for prospective adopters for inter county placements.
- Recommendation of approval for the match of a child with a prospective adopter.
- Recommendation of approval for adoption allowances.
- Recommendation of approval of prospective foster carers and the terms on which approval is to be given.
- Recommendation of approval of a match of a child with long term foster carers.
- Recommendation of approval of family and friends as foster carers.
- Consider the first annual foster care review of an approved foster carer.
- Consider representation from a prospective foster/adoptive carer where the department has decided not to proceed the application to approval stage.
- Consider representation from prospective foster carers where the fostering service proposes to terminate a foster carer's approval status.
- Act as a consultation body to the Adoption Agency and Fostering Service in relation to policy and procedures.

Accommodation and Resource Panel

The decision to accommodate a child or young person is a serious one and no decision regarding a child being accommodated should be made prior to consultation at the Accommodation and Review panel. The function of the panel is to consider:

- Whether accommodation is an appropriate decision, if so to agree on the most appropriate resource and timescale. The panel is able to monitor resource shortfall over a number of areas including support services.

- Where a child has been accommodated in an emergency i.e. to ensure that a child is protected. The panel will still consider retrospectively the appropriateness of placement and timescales.

The Fostering Service and Placement Scrutiny Panel

The purpose of the Panel is to formally consider issues relating to the Fostering Service and placement of children which are governed by regulations but are not presented to the Child Placement Panel. The panel will quality assure, offer advice and guidance and in certain matters has delegated approval powers in relation to a number of areas:

- annual Foster Care Reviews;
- outcomes of child protection allegations and serious complaints against foster carers, members of their families or supported lodging providers;
- outcomes of serious complaints against foster carers, members of their families or supported lodging providers;
- disruption information of long term fostering placements;
- long-term matches for children aged 12-14 years;
- private fostering arrangements;
- family and friends placements;
- placement with Parent Regulations;
- supported lodgings applications and annual reviews;
- Residence Order applications by foster carers; and
- Special Guardianship Orders.

CMAP (Children's Multi Agency Panel)

Where the needs of a child or young person cannot be met locally and / or they require specialist provision, they will be referred to CMAP. Prior to any referral to CMAP, the Accommodation and Resource panel must have considered resources and concluded that they are either not available or do not meet the assessed needs of the child or young person. The CMAP will consider whether joint or tripartite funding is appropriate. In addition the CMAP monitors any agency placements subsequently agreed and receives regular updates.



Children and Young People Select Committee - Review of Child Placements 11 March 2010

Executive Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) review covered a huge and extremely complex area. In order to provide some structure the review was divided into separate, but linked, workstreams. Where recommendations are made they have each benefited from the Independent Officer providing his professional perception of the likely risks involved in their adoption or rejection. More detail of the risk analysis can be found in the main body of the report following each recommendation.

Fostering

1.2 Stockton Borough Council's Children, Education and Social Care (CESC) department maintains its own fostering service provision and also 'spot' purchases placements with the independent and voluntary sector when required.

1.3 Stockton Borough Council is involved in a North East regional project which is considering how collaborative arrangements between the authorities can make fostering services more efficient.

R1 The Committee acknowledge the work that the Corporate Director for Children, Education, Social Care is doing with the Regional, Improvement and Efficiency Partnership and the work with the Director colleagues in the sub-region and the Committee would recommend that this continues. (para 4.8)

1.4 The Review Project Board identified that the service needs to be able to meet the current and future demand for placements, able to recruit more foster carers who are able to take placements of sibling groups, teenagers and who are able to commit to children in the long term. Recruitment and marketing is a specialism but this is often an added pressure for social workers and, as such, Stockton may well improve its ability to recruit and compete with other providers if its recruitment and marketing strategy was professionalised.

R2 The Committee recommend the creation of a specific full time officer post to deliver the marketing of the fostering service on a 2 year fixed term contract. The location of the officer is to be determined as this post could be part of the Council's centralised communication team or be located within the children's services department. (para 4.20)

Placements with Family and Friends

1.5 Stockton Borough Council's responsibility for assessing family and friends as foster carers is jointly owned by the Child Placement Team and the integrated service areas. A protocol is in place which identifies the circumstances under

which a referral should be made which states that priority is given to those cases where it is envisaged that the fostering arrangement will continue in the medium to longer term. For cases considered to be a short term measure the children's team make arrangements to have their suitability to foster assessed.

- 1.6 The Committee was alerted to the tension between the legislation, which promotes family and friends wherever possible, as giving preference over 'stranger' foster carers. Fostering service regulations and standards require that family and friends foster carers be assessed in the same way as 'stranger' foster carers.
- R3 The Committee recommend that the Council develop a kinship care policy which will identify the levels of advice, information and support that would be available in differing circumstances. Any developments within the policy would be subject to available finances. (para 4.45)**

Children with Complex Needs

- 1.7 Stockton's Special Education Needs (SEN) Section manages the local authority's statutory responsibility to identify, assess and provide for children with SEN. This includes securing out of borough residential placements for a small number of children and young people whose needs are unable to be met by Stockton Borough Council provision.
- 1.8 The team's strengths lie in the specialist, experienced teaching and support staff who can provide individualised teaching, re-integration and promote access to alternative provision as necessary. However, a number of challenges are recognised to exist. These include an increase in the number of secondary aged students with increasingly complex mental health needs being referred which is putting pressure on the provision at Redhill; providing for an increasingly diverse and personalised curriculum in a range of settings and across a wide range of ages; the development of a new single hospital with increased emphasis on community based services; and the building at Redhill not being wholly fit for purpose.
- R4 The Committee recommend to increase availability of sub-regional provision for "hard to place" children / young people with Complex Needs and that officers be given the flexibility to develop the appropriate provision on a Borough-wide basis should this be necessary. The Committee support and encourage the continuing work of the Tees Valley Directors' Group in this regard. (para 4.62)**

Residential Care

- 1.9 Stockton Council place some young people out of borough in variety of settings and for a number of reasons. This includes specialist placement when it is required and there is no local provision, secure accommodation, 52 week residential school, crisis intervention, respite provision, and sex offenders who require specialist/therapeutic help.
- 1.10 As of 31 March 2009, the Authority had 33 looked after children placed out of the area, of these, 15 were placed within external residential placements, at an annual cost in excess of £2.5 million. The placement costs are high in comparison with in-house provision due partly to capacity with only 6 long-term residential placements within Stockton and also due to the complexity of some of the placements.

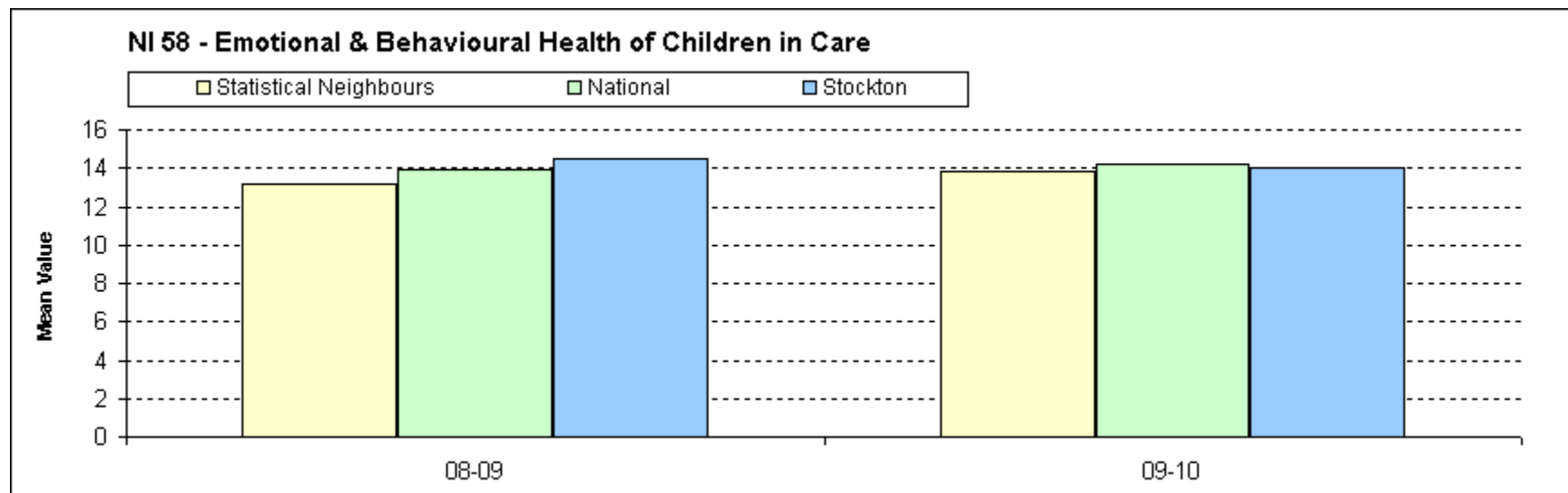
- R5 The Committee recommend that, subject to further appraisal of the financial implications, Stockton Borough Council develop additional local authority residential provision for looked-after children. (para 4.90)**

Other Issues

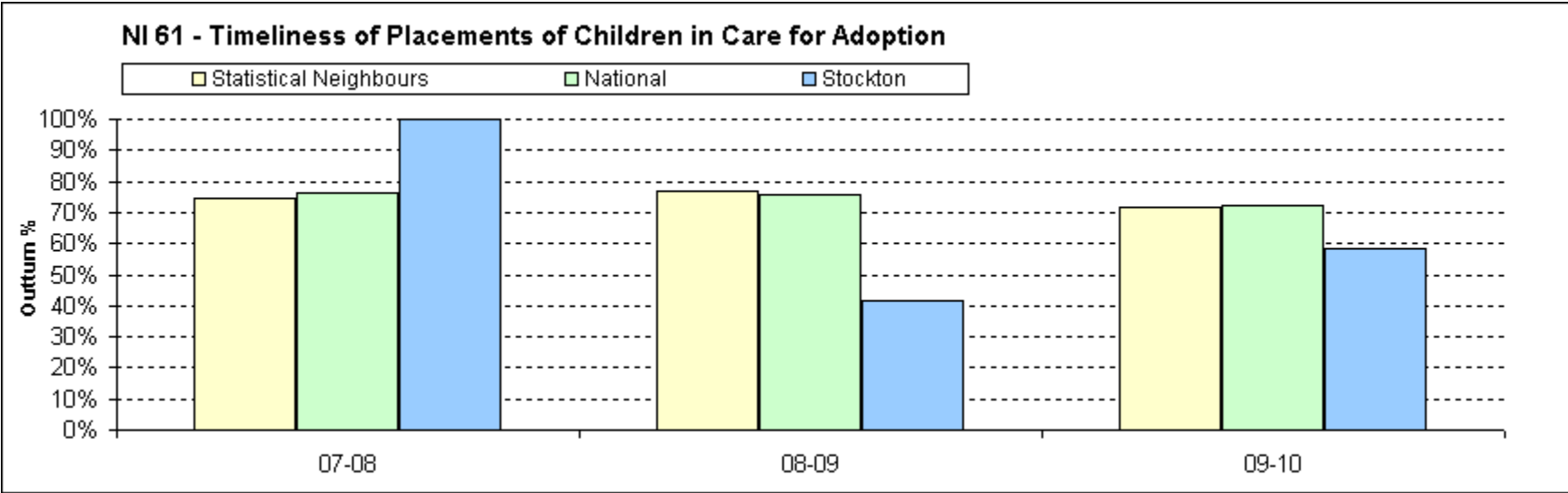
- 1.11 Towards the end the Committee had discussions with officers to determine any other aspects that should be considered before the review concluded. Adoption services, which the Committee learned about when taking evidence along with fostering services, was not chosen but at its final meetings the Committee was again informed of concerns that would benefit from its views and opinions being presented elsewhere.
- 1.12 In particular, an increase in the number of adopted children being referred to Social Care and the Children and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) was being experienced. Increasingly children are being diagnosed with attachment disorders or difficulties, which in turn can place considerable pressure upon the adoptive family. The expected challenge will be to develop a coordinated response to adoption support from all of the agencies who may come into contact with the children.
- R6 The Committee recommend that the Council look to explore with Children's Trust partners opportunities to commission therapeutic interventions for children who have been adopted. (para 4.101)**
- 1.13 In addition, children being placed for adoption are in need of skilled and time - intense preparation work prior to being placed.
- 1.14 The Committee believe that the challenge for Stockton Council is to be able to work with looked after children moving into permanent care via adoption, permanent fostering, or kinship care, in a way that offers the right support at the right level for as long as it is needed.
- R7 The Committee recommends that the Council and its partners in the Children's Trust explore ways of raising awareness of adoption issues and the role of agencies within the Children's Trust. (para 4.104)**

Appendix 4: This appendix shows comparative Council, Statistical Neighbour, and National performance in the national indicators relating to Looked After Children, for the last three years.

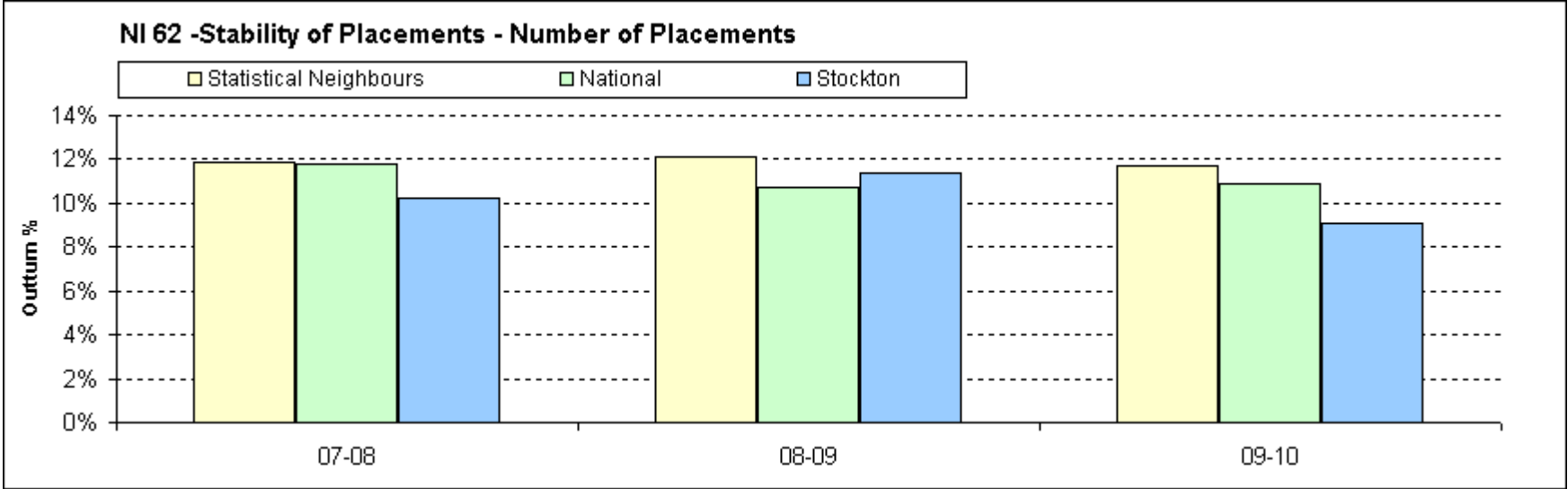
Indicator	NI 58: Emotional and Behavioural Health of Children Looked After
Rationale	Looked after children experience significantly worse mental health than all children. An estimated 45% of looked after children ages 5 to 17 have mental health problems, over 4 times higher than for all children. This measure will assess progress in improving the emotional and behavioural health of looked after children,
Definition	The local authority score recorded through the National Indicator Set will be the mean value of the child level SDQ scores for each child or young person aged 4 to 16 who has been looked after for a year. (Good performance is indicated by a low number.)



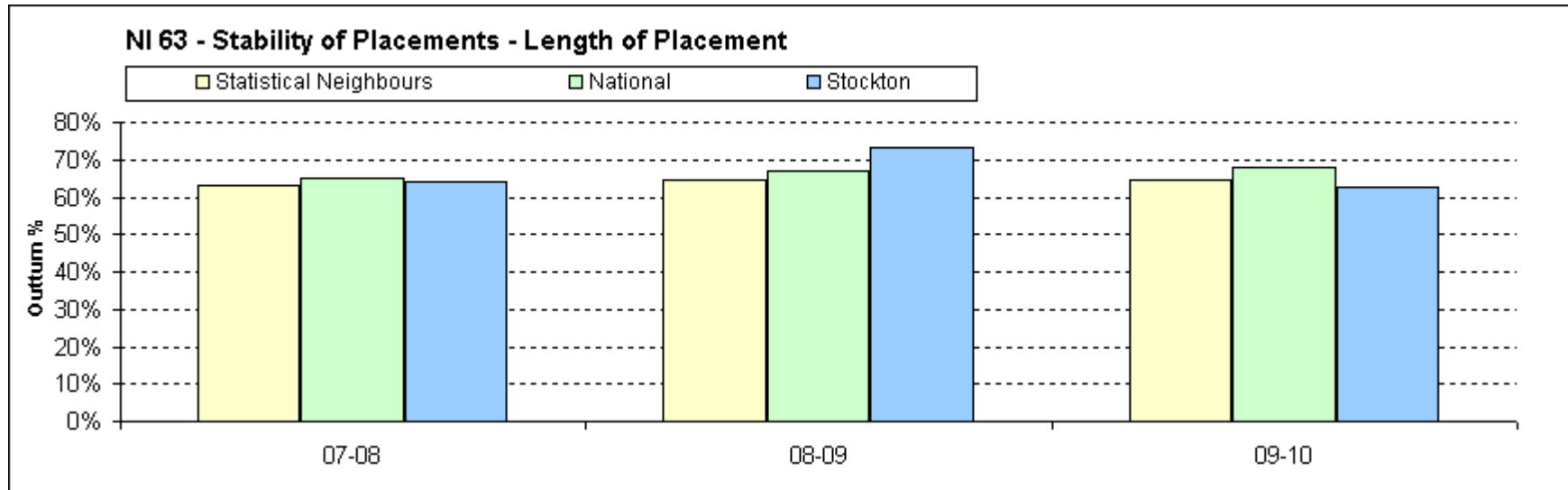
Indicator	NI 61: Timeliness of placements of looked after children for adoption following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption.
Rationale	The indicator is intended to show the effectiveness of an important part of the adoption process. A high figure is good performance and a low one, poor performance. Local information should be available to assess how often adoption was not the outcome once a decision had been reached to place the child for adoption. Timescales for placing children for adoption will be affected by how easy or difficult it is to place them. Older children with more complex needs will take longer to place, as will sibling groups, disabled children and children from black and minority groups. It is important to ensure that councils are not achieving a good outcome on timescales by only making adoption decisions for younger children and / or those with less complex needs.
Definition	The percentage of children in care adopted during the year who were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that they should be placed for adoption, and who remained in that placement on adoption (Good performance is indicated by a higher percentage)



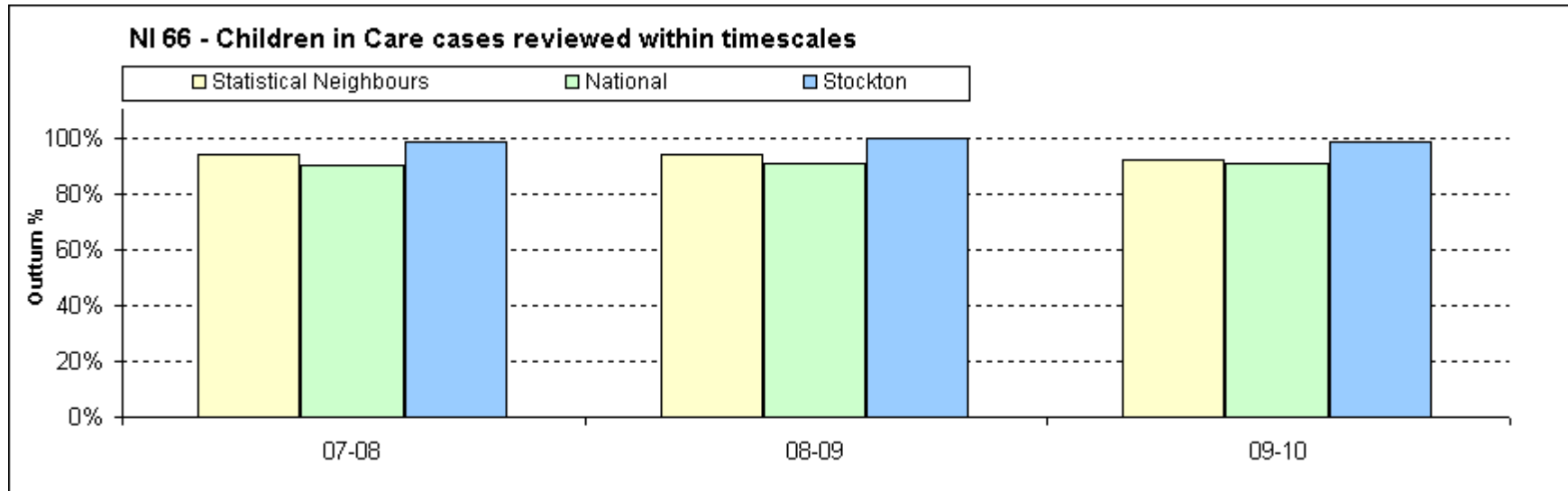
Indicator	NI 62: Stability of placements of looked after children – number of placements
Rationale	On the whole, stability is associated with better outcomes. Placement instability has been highlighted as a ke barrier to improving educational outcomes. Proper assessment and an adequate choice of placements to meet the varied needs of different children is essential if appropriate stable placements are to be made. Inappropriate placements often break down and lead to frequent moves. Nevertheless, the circumstances of some individual children will require 3 or more separate placements during the year if they and others are to be kept safe.
Definition	Of those CiC at a point in time (excluding series of short-term placements), the percentage that had 3 or more separate placements in the previous 12 months. (Good performance is indicated by a lower percentage. However it is important to note that as a Key Threshold Indicator performance of less than 20% can limit performance judgements)



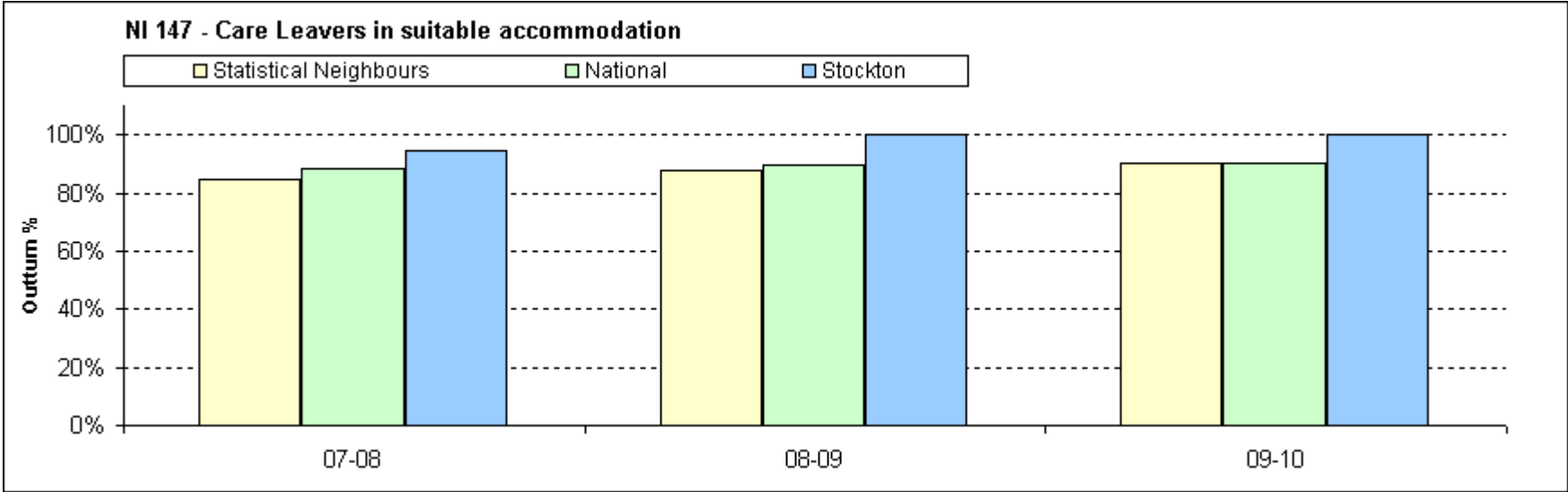
Indicator	NI 63: Stability of placements of looked after children – length of placement
Rationale	To increase the long term stability of children who remain in care for significant periods of time. Placement instability is highlighted as a key barrier to improving educational outcomes. Some planned placement changes may be made in a child's best interest, but placements break down if they are not sufficiently well matched to children's needs, or of sufficient quality, or because they are not well supported.
Definition	The percentage of children aged under 16 at 31st March who had been in care continuously for at least 2.5 years, who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption. (Good performance is indicated by higher percentages. However, performance should never reach 100% as some placement change is deemed as always necessary)



Indicator	NI 66: Looked after children cases which were reviewed within required timescales
Rationale	To improve compliance with local authorities 'legal' requirements under the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991. The review is one of the key components within the core processes of working with children and families. The purpose of the review is to consider the plan for the child's welfare, to monitor the progress of the plan and amend as necessary in the light of changed information and circumstances.
Definition	The percentage of children looked after cases which should have been reviewed during the year ending 31st March that were reviewed on time during the year within required timescales (Good performance is indicated by a higher percentage)



Indicator	NI 147: Care leavers in suitable accommodation
Rationale	The indicator measures accommodation outcomes for young adults formerly in care – a key group at risk of social exclusion. The indicator is intended to increase the proportion of former care leavers who are in suitable accommodation. This will help minimise the risk of care leavers being in unsuitable housing or becoming homeless.
Definition	The percentage of former care leavers aged 19 who were looked after under any legal status (other than V3 or V4) on 1 April in their 17th year, who were in suitable accommodation. Accommodation is regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision. (Good performance is indicated by a positive increase in percentage)



Indicator	NI 148: Care leavers in education, employment or training
Rationale	The indicator measures the levels of participation in education, employment or training (EET) for young adults formerly in care. The indicator is part of the Social Exclusion PSA and is intended to drive improvements in long-term outcomes for care leavers, by ensuring they receive the support they need to access EET
Definition	The percentage of former care leavers aged 19 who were looked after under any legal status (other than V3 or V4) on 1 April in their 17th year, who were in education, employment or training. (Good performance is indicated by a positive increase in percentage)

