

Overview Report

Children and Young People Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2022

9 February 2022

Children's Services

Context

Members are reminded of the Council Plan priorities:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm. This means the Borough will be a place where:

- People live in cohesive and safe communities
- People are supported and protected from harm
- People live healthy lives

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive. This means we will enjoy:

- Great places to live and visit
- Clean and green spaces
- Rich cultural experiences

A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed. This means that the Borough will have:

- A growing economy
- Improved education and skills development
- Job creation and increased employment

The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve. This means that we will make sure that we provide:

- Financial sustainability and value for money
- Dedicated and resourceful employees
- Strong leadership and governance

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR>

Council Plan 2021-2024

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

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The key 2021-2022 priorities for Children's Services are attached at Appendix 1.

Performance Reporting

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Children's Services - Director – Martin Gray

1. Relevant services are:
 - a. Help and Support
 - b. Children's Social Care
 - c. Education Improvement Service
 - d. Special Educational Needs and Inclusion
 - e. Systems, information and improvement

Children's Services change programme

2. We analysed ourselves in depth following the 2019 Ofsted inspection and the SEND local area inspection and following peer reviews, work undertaken by external experts and lessons and learning from COVID-19.
3. The demands on Children's Services are complex and increasing, and there are national challenges around capacity and funding across the whole system.
4. However, we also know that there are a number of areas we need to change and improve to make sure we can continue to provide the best support to the children and young people in the Borough and respond to our increasing demand, external inspection outcomes and financial pressures.
 - a. Currently our services are not as joined up or as proactive as we would like. We respond, in many cases very well, to a referral or request but only when concerns have reached a certain level.
 - b. We also need to be better at considering the effectiveness or sustainability of our intervention or the impact on families or we risk repeat assessments, repeat plans with not enough impact.
 - c. We need to improve our use of data and feedback, including the views of children and families, to continually shape and evolve our approach.
 - d. We sometimes don't get the right support to families as soon as possible, and so can't achieve our objectives of right support at the right time.
 - e. In addition, we continue to have very high rates of children in our care. This makes it increasingly difficult to support children in good placements and is leading to increasing financial pressures.
5. We therefore identified some fundamental changes in how we work across the directorate which can together deliver the type of whole system change we need. The changes we have identified that are needed are:

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- a. A clear vision, framework and system wide approach which sets out our ambitions, our culture, our practice model, our ways of working - so we can be clear on what we are trying to achieve and have a consistent practice model and tools we use across the system.
- b. An operating model which is clear about how we work together, and how we are organised to deliver this approach - so our ways of working are clear to staff and partners and we have the best chance of delivering our vision.
- c. A workforce strategy which support staff at all levels to understand our approach, our model, and what is required to deliver it - to recruit and develop staff at all levels, have an understanding of what skills and approaches we are seeking to build and a specific plan for social care to manage recruitment and retention.
- d. A clearer guide to our services and how to access them - to ensure families understand what we do, and what is available, ensure staff understand our offer, model and services and to make access and contact with services easier.
- e. A stronger focus on the importance of early years - to address fragmentation across the system and reduce the need for more intrusive involvement.
- f. Closer working with schools on vulnerable children and an integrated support approach - to identify needs and target resources effectively.
- g. A more integrated approach to assessment and support - to get multi agency support to families as soon as possible and helps to build capacity in families
- h. An integrated family support service - to enable families to help themselves and support effective early intervention
- i. An integrated youth and schools support service - to enable young people to help themselves and support effective early intervention, working closely with schools and learning from the good practice established around joint working, outreach and risk assessment during the pandemic.
- j. Reshaped services and approach to children in our care - to reduce the need for children to be in care, reduce length of time in care and reduce expenditure
- k. Reshaped services and approach to SEND and inclusion - to address inspection outcomes, support mainstream schools to meet need, develop new provision and reduce expenditure
- l. Reshaped support services - to improve support to all of our services and consolidate our approach to sufficiency planning, placement and contract management, quality assurance, practice development, workforce development, use of systems and information, programme and project management, service improvement

Implementing change

6. A key building block has been a review and re-organisation of the directorate to ensure we have the right functions, services, teams and people organised in the best way to address all of the changes described above. We carried this out in two phases.
7. In phase 1 the directorate was re-organised into five service areas:

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- a. Children's Help and Support (re-named from Early Help), led by Assistant Director – Children's Help and Support
 - b. Children's Social Care, led by Assistant Director – Children's Social Care
 - c. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion, led by Head of SEND & Inclusion
 - d. Education, led by Head of Education
 - e. Systems, Information and Improvement, led by Assistant Director – Systems, Information and Improvement
8. In phase 1 a new senior leadership structure was created, covering the first two tiers of leadership in the directorate. The first tier of the new senior leadership structure represents the five posts referenced above that each lead one of the five service areas. The second tier of the senior leadership structure represents a number of posts designated Service Leads for their respective service areas. This senior leadership structure went live on 1 March 2021.
 9. Phase 2 was a subsequent structure review of all of the service areas. This was designed as a programme of reviews owing to the volume of posts involved and the scale of change.
 10. A financial review is being carried out alongside the structure review. This is being led by the Assistant Director – Systems, Information and Improvement working closely with finance colleagues and in consultation with Children's Services Leadership Team (CSLT).
 11. The first stage of the financial review informed the MTFP approved at Council in March 2021. Included in this phase were the financial implications of phase 1 of the structure review, specifically the cost of the senior leadership structure which was effectively cost neutral.
 12. The next stage involved allocating the additional funding included in the approved MTFP to address a range of budget pressures and anomalies within the directorate. Additional funding was largely allocated to the cost of children in our care but also to address staff cost pressures within specific service areas e.g. social care teams, IRO team, SEND team.
 13. There are also some invest to save business cases that have been developed and built in to the revised budgets. This is to ensure we have the staff resource to deliver planned savings. This specifically affects the SEND and Children's Social Care services areas.
 14. In addition to general fund budgets this financial review has also included a review of dedicated schools grant funding and budgets. This is specifically high needs funding in relation to the SEND and Inclusion service area.

Help and Support – challenge and opportunity

15. We continue to perform well on the uptake of free education for disadvantaged 2 year olds. We have maintained a high rate of take up, with 614 registrations in 2021, at a time when nursery attendance was impacted by Covid19¹.

¹ SOURCE: Education provision: children under 5 years of age. Number of Children Registered by Age and Provider Type (2018 to 2021)

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16. Available childcare places continues to be monitored closely as part of the rollout of the free education entitlement to eligible 3 and 4 year olds. Our rate continues to be high with 4,572 registrations in 2021, at a time when nursery attendance was impacted by Covid19¹.
17. There continues to be a major focus on the provision of early help support to families through a variety of programmes and initiatives.
18. A new strategic partnership with Family Action has been established to deliver effective family work and to provide contact for birth parents. This service currently covers to key service areas:
 - a. Supervised Family Time
 - a. Family Outreach and Volunteer Service
19. Restorative practice is now an established model of working, including a focus on working with schools on 'restorative circles'.
20. The Council is playing a leading role in the transformation of CAMHS services through the Whole Pathway Commissioning pilot led by TEWV. Schools in Billingham are also benefiting from a pilot programme for mental health in schools teams as part of a national rollout of this approach. A further cluster should become operation in 2023.
21. Voice of the child continues to be a major theme guiding the work of Children's Services. Bright Minds, Big Futures continues to be a successful and developing movement for young people.
22. We continue to have a strong youth offer supporting the local VCS with Youth United for Stockton, low NEETs and Not Known, Targeted Youth Work supporting the reduction for ASB and young people at risk of exclusion and a recently outstanding Youth Offending Team.

Help and Support priorities for the year ahead

23. Implement the review and embed the new structure: multi agency response; family work and youth work.
24. A stronger focus on the importance of early years through our new 'From conception to reception strategy' - to address fragmentation across the system and reduce the need for more intrusive involvement.
25. Even closer working with schools, learning from our experiences of working collaboratively with schools during the pandemic. Sharing information, sharing visits, risk assessment and joint planning.
26. A more integrated approach to assessment and support – SMART (Stockton Multi Agency Response and Assessment) which gets multi agency support to families as soon as possible and helps to build capacity in families - to avoid multiple lengthy assessments instead of providing support, embedding Valuing Care and Valuing SEND within our standard ways of working across as many of our services as possible.
27. Development of the contextual safeguarding approach, the proposed subject of a scrutiny review in 2022/3.

Children's social care – challenges and opportunities

28. The Ofsted ILACS inspection in May 2019 found many examples of excellent practice and delivery but also identified a number of key areas for improvement, in the overall 'Requires Improvement' judgement. These related in the main to overall 'grip' and management to prevent drift and delay; the extent to which our

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interventions are resulting in lasting impact for families; our oversight and tracking of cases especially in the Public Law Outline, the effectiveness of supervision and the need for suitably qualified staff to oversee cases.

29. The Focused Visit in December 2021 noted that:

A stable and focused leadership team is driving progress in areas of permanence for children. Children's services are well supported by strong corporate and political backing. Elected members provide scrutiny, challenge, and support to senior leaders through oversight of data and information. Children's services have received significant financial investment. Increased service lead capacity is driving robust oversight to secure permanence for children in care. Strong strategic relationships are established with the local judiciary assisted by senior leaders' contributions to the local family justice board. The judiciary report that improved, focused decision making is informing assessments and applications to care. Good quality performance data provides senior leaders with contemporary information relating to the progress of children's plans. This generates robust scrutiny and challenge to managers and informs improvement activity.

- 30.** There continues to be demand pressure across children's social care services, with high rates of contacts and referrals, leading to rates of children in need, and in particular rates of children in care which are considerably higher than the national average.
- 31.** The Children's Hub is proving very effective at securing effective partnership involvement and data analysis to support decision making. We are now working with Hartlepool Borough Council and Cleveland Police on the development of a response to contextual safeguarding.
- 32.** Performance in relation to statutory timescales for assessments, reviews remains strong and is monitored through regular performance clinics.
- 33.** There continue to be issues around the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers. The review reorganised our teams into more, smaller teams, and we will be stepping up our focus on recruitment and also in supporting more newly qualified social workers to stay with us. The Ofsted inspection was able to identify that social workers feel well supported and like working for the Council.
- 34.** The Council's approach to children in care and corporate parenting has been refreshed in 2021, and an action plan is in place before we plan to refresh the overall strategy in 2023. Progress this year has been reported to the Corporate Parenting Board and can be seen here <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/our-people/children-in-our-care/>
- 35.** The number of children in care has stabilised since April 2020. We have been very successful in being able to place children in the care of their wider families where possible – 29% of our placements are family and friends placements double the national rate.
- 36.** The rate at which children left care due to adoption has increased, as Adoption Tees Valley continues to make progress in increasing the number of successful adoptions.
- 37.** The percentage of care leavers who are in education, employment and training continues to be a focus, and was the subject of a recent scrutiny review. There is an action plan in place to improve performance which will be monitored by the Committee.

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38. All of the Council's residential homes are graded 'good' or 'outstanding' with one exception which was not related to any issues about safeguarding. All of the Spark of Genius homes similarly are rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.
39. The More Stuff Like This Please! Programme, funded by the Council and Future Bridge North east, and delivered by ARC and Blue Cabin CIC has continued to bring cultural and creative opportunities to young people and resulted in a book produced of their experiences.
40. The Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children Partnership is resulting in an increasing focus on practice for safeguarding, and a culture of action learning is being established. The annual report for the Partnership was presented at the Health and Wellbeing Board and is available here: <https://hsscp.co.uk/publications>.
41. The focus for 2021, has been on 4 key priorities (2 thematic, 2 business focused):
 - a. Contextual safeguarding
 - b. Domestic abuse
 - c. Learning form reviews
 - d. Governance and engagement

Children's Social Care – priorities for the year ahead

42. The key priorities for 2022 are:
 - a. Implementation of the new structure which includes a different way we are organised as the front door to Children's Services and which prioritises multi agency assessment AND response.
 - b. Development of a workforce strategy which is clear about recruitment, development and retention, and which also ensures that SWs are able to spend as much time as possible working with children, young people and families, with others roles being undertaken by support services and administration.
 - c. Implement a new improvement plan and framework focusing on outcomes, practice, service standards and performance management responsibilities.
 - i. A clear plan and approach for children in our care - to reduce the need for children to be in care, reduce length of time in care, reduce expenditure
 - ii. The operation of regional frameworks for sourcing placements;
 - iii. Increasing capacity of in house fostering
 - iv. Increasing in house residential care
 - v. Seeking to expand the number of public sector placements, working in cooperation with Tees Valley authorities

Schools – challenges and opportunities

43. Our schools continue to gradually fill up as our population rises. Although the majority of children are able to get into their first choice of school, at both primary and secondary, there are challenges around over-subscribed secondary schools especially in the south of the borough.
44. Our schools perform well overall – although national comparative data on performance is not available for the past 2 years, we know that 93% of secondary schools are good or better (62% nationally), and 97% of primary (87% nationally).

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However, but there issues about geographical variations in outcomes, and there are some issues about the gap between those children from poorer backgrounds, those with special educational needs and for children in care where the gap with peers needs to continue to close.

45. The key challenge for many of our schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has been to ensure that children are safe, that they have been able to access an effective remote education where necessary, and that families have been supported to cope with the challenges of lockdown.

Schools – priorities for the year ahead

46. The key challenges for 2021/22 are:
- a. Continuing to support ongoing responses to the pandemic and to support catch up and recovery;
 - b. The specific challenges of continuing to focus on narrowing the gap (for children in care, those with SEN, those on free school meals; gender; BAME
 - c. The development of emotional health and wellbeing support for schools, including the launch of a new 'healthy schools framework'
 - d. Ongoing work to ensure sufficiency of school places especially in response to the ongoing popularity of secondary schools in the south. This work also includes the responses to where there is significant new housing development such as in the west of Stockton where additional primary and secondary capacity is required.

SEN and Inclusion – challenges and opportunities

47. We have made considerable progress in responding to the local area inspection in 2019, with major developments in areas such as the joint commissioning of speech and language; a redesigned EHCP plan and process.
48. A new outcomes framework has been developed and a new SEND strategy was agreed in April 2021.
49. A new Quality Assurance approach has been developed, including the use of a new tool to assess the quality of EHCPs.
50. The implementation of Valuing SEND is a key element in our approach to assessing needs and in preparing schools for the level of support they can and should be providing.
51. Through our remodelled Enhanced Mainstream Schools we are continuing to keep more children in mainstream schools rather than needing to attend special schools.
52. Sufficiency of placements for children continues to be an area of focus. Work is currently ongoing to develop new primary places, there are additional places at Abbey Hill and a new independent school, operated by North East Autism Society opens in 2022, along with the Tees Valley free school in Redcar & Cleveland.
53. The development of the multi-agency front door to Children's Services will enable a more joined up approach to the identification and delivery of help and support to children and families.
54. The implementation of specific support to children and families affected by autism continues. A new pathway referral process has been put in place for neurodevelopmental conditions (ASD and ADHD).
55. We have remodelled provision for those pupils who are at risk of being excluded, through the development of a new support service, and the introduction of a new alternative provision framework.

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56. In addition, provision for permanently excluded children has also been remodelled to include a new type of provision – pathway development centres for key stage 2 and 3.
57. Bishopton Centre transferred Academy Status in 2021 and is now part of the Tees Valley Collaborative Trust.

SEN – priorities for the year ahead

58. The key priorities for 2021/22 are:
 - a. Implementing Valuing SEND model which will, over time, enable a sharper focus on needs (to ensure children receive the right support) and the ability of providers to meet needs.
 - b. Local area inspection preparation will continue – a revisit was scheduled for Feb-May 2021, but has now been delayed due to COVID-19.
 - c. Placements – work will continue to develop new forms of provision, including through the potential expansion of King Edwin School, part of our Joint Venture.
 - d. Reshaped services and approach to SEND and engagement - to address inspection outcomes, support mainstream schools to meet need, develop new provision and reduce HNF overspend
 - e. The plans in place to address funding challenges include a focus on earlier intervention, the use of Valuing SEND, and the development of a regional placement function to support placements.

Systems, information and improvement – challenges and opportunities

59. Some of the key challenges and opportunities are:
 - a. Design of performance improvement frameworks and a focus on continuous improvement, embedding some of the work we undertook in 2019/20;
 - b. Embedding the new system for early help.

Systems , information and improvement – priorities for the year ahead

60. Key priorities for implementation include:
 - a. Implementation of systems – the development of a new system for Adult Social Care, and work to procure a new education system;
 - b. Implementation of Liquid Logic – further development and implementation of the system, including the use of the early help module as part of our proposed integrated front door (SMART);

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

61. Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-2023. Using the information provided as part of the performance updates and this Overview meeting, the Committee is invited to identify potential topics for review within this theme.
62. Proposed topic suggestion to be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 22 March 2022.
63. Although there are many areas of potential deep dive focus which could be identified as part of the overview report as above, it is suggested that the Committee might like

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to focus on a major piece of work around contextual safeguarding and youth violence for 2022/23.

- 64.** Such a focus could include:
 - a. An assessment of data;
 - b. A review of the current proposals for a contextual safeguarding hub.
- 65.** IT is also suggested that an additional task and finish piece of work be carried out on School Governor support. This area would review the opportunities for the Council's service to further expand.
- 66.** A number of other areas of focus have also been considered, and are suggested a priorities for 2023/34:
 - a. Family support, and in particular the effectiveness of the strategic partnership with family Action which will have been in operation for one year;
 - b. Born into care – a review of our approach to preventing repeat care proceedings, and the effectiveness of the PAUSE and Start Well programmes.

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Appendix 1: Council Plan – Key Priorities 2021-2022 (Children’s Services)

Making the Borough a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm means creating a place where:

- People live in cohesive and safe communities
- People are supported and protected from harm
- People live healthy lives

We have identified these key priorities for 2021-22 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Improve the support we give to families to help them stay together where they can and to provide more capacity in the Borough to support children where this isn’t possible.
- Help schools to improve pupil wellbeing, reduce exclusions, improve careers advice and to continue the drive to improve educational attainment for all pupils, including those with additional needs, recognising the disruption caused by COVID-19 and the ‘catch up’ support required.
- Develop a new approach to support the best start in life through a focus on ‘pregnancy, birth and beyond’, and an emphasis on speech, language and communication development.

Making the borough a place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed means creating:

- Improved education and skills development

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Appendix 2 – Summary of current performance data

The following provide a commentary on the current position:

Social care and early help - key headlines

1. **Referrals** into social care have reduced by 5% to a rate of 677/10,000. Unfortunately, this rate remains well above the regional average of 565/10,000 and the national average of 481/10,000².
2. The **re-referral** rate has reduced and now stands at 23%² – this is an indicator of specific interest in terms of addressing the stop / start nature of how we work, as this measures the number of referrals within 12 months of a previous referral and so is a proxy measure for the effectiveness of our work with families. Our rate is slightly higher than the regional average of 22%².
3. There has been an increase in the **rate of assessments** being undertaken to 764/10,000, as is the case with all Tees authorities. The regional picture is more mixed, with some authorities seeing a significant reduction, but the overall regional rate is 657 /10,000³
4. However 95% of these are still **assessments undertaken within 45 days**, well above the regional rate of 83% and the national rate of 88%².
5. There has been an increase in the **rate of Section 47 investigations being undertaken**, with the rate now at 265/10,000. In comparison, the regional rate is slightly lower at 237/10,000².
6. There has been a reduction in the rate at which **initial Child Protection conferences** are being held, to 99/10000, compared to a regional rate of 101/10,000².
7. Although the **percentage of which child protection conferences held within 15 days** has reduced to 85%, this is still in line with the regional average of 85%².
8. The **rate of child in need** has increased slightly to 529/10,000. This is substantially above the regional average of 461/10,000². It does however remain well below the rate across Tees authorities
9. There has been decrease in the **rate of children subject to a child protection plan**, with the rate now being 73/10,000. The regional rate is however 67/10,000². But, between 2020 and 2021, we experienced a twice as large reduction in this rate compared with the region.
10. Encouragingly, there has been a reduction of 17% in the **rate at which children become subject to a child protection plan**, down to 89/10,000 which compares very closely with the regional rate of 90/10,000³. This may be an indication of the effectiveness of earlier intervention avoiding the need for a child protection plan
11. However, the percentage of **repeat child protection plans** remains higher than the regional average of 21%, at 27%², which is continued evidence of the stop / start nature of our system and the lack of lasting impact of some of our interventions.
12. There has been a substantial (24%) reduction in the **rate at which children start to become looked after**. The rate now stands at 37/10,000². In comparison, across the region, the rate is 40/10,000². Furthermore, the reduction in this rate for us between 2020 and 2021 was in absolute number terms twice as large as it was for the region.
13. The **rate of children in care** increased by 1% to 132/10,000 and is higher than the regional average of 108/10,000². Our rate is however lower than the rate across Tees authorities.
14. There was also a 13% rise in the **rate at which children leave care**, with the rate now 36/10,000 being slightly lower than the regional rate of 39/10,000².

² SOURCE: LAIT (Local Authority Interactive Tool). December 2021.

³ SOURCE: Data2Insight Benchmarking Tool (2020-2021)

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15. There has been a notable 6% point increase in the **proportion of children leaving care who were adopted**. Now at 16%, this remains above the regional rate of 13%² and also above the Tees average.
16. Most recent data (for the period 2017 – 2020) shows that there has been a 5% reduction (27 days in total) in the **time between a child entering care and being adopted**, down to 464, compared to 409 days regionally².
17. The **number of days between an adoption order being granted and a match being made**, continues to be 166 days. In comparison, across the region on average it is 183 days².

Special Education Needs and Disabilities

18. In 2021, in Stockton-on-Tees 4% of pupils had a statutory **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** and a further 11.9% receive **SEN support in school**². Across the region, the numbers of pupils are 3.8% and 12.9% respectively².
19. Regulations set out that the **overall time it takes from the Local Authority receiving a request for an assessment and the final EHC plan being issued (if one is required)** should be no longer than 20 weeks. In 2020, in Stockton-on-Tees, 96.5% of EHCPs – excluding exceptions were issued in this time frame. This is higher than the regional average of 75.9% and the national average of 58%. It is also 3% points better this year versus last year². In exceptional cases, LAs may take more than 20 weeks to undertake an EHCP assessment. Also in 2020, with an outturn of 68.6% we performed better than the region on average (67.5%) and England overall (55.6%) in that respect².
20. In 2020, the **number of mediation cases** held in Stockton-on-Tees was 21. This is lower than the regional average of 25⁴. The proportion of such cases that went on to appeal was 46.2%, which is higher than the regional average of 25.8%⁴. The SEND tribunal appeal rate was 1.0% in Stockton-on-Tees, which is the same as the rate across the region overall⁴.

Schools

21. The latest proportion of schools Ofsted rating for schools rated good or outstanding are⁴:
 - Primary: 98.2%
 - Secondary: 96.8%
 - Combined: 97.7%

⁴ SOURCE: NCER (National Consortium for Exam Regulations), 28/01/22