

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

#### **REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES** **Prepared by Angela Askins, Jonathan Fawcett Accommodation & Placement** **Support Team** **Lead Officer, Jo Lee Service Lead Childrens Care and Complex Needs**

#### **MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS OF EXTERNAL REGISTERED CHILDREN'S HOMES – REPORTING PERIOD 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022**

##### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report is intended to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with a summary overview of the monitoring process in regard to external residential children's homes, where children in our care live. It is also intended to provide information in regards to the quality of the care provided from these homes. This report provides an update on the previous report 2020 - 2021.
- 1.2 When there is a need to place a child in residential care, the Local Authority consider its internal residential placements in the first instance. There are, however, times when these placements are not appropriate or not available. In such situations, we turn to our joint venture partners, Spark of Genius and only when this option has also been exhausted, we would seek to purchase a placement from other providers, preferably and when appropriate, within the local area.
- 1.3 The importance of placing children in our care in suitable and safe accommodation remains high on our agenda. The Accommodation and Placement Support Team alongside colleagues in Procurement and wider Regional Commissioning teams, are committed to ensuring all care provided for our children is of a high standard. To that end, we work together to monitor placements and provide advice and support to providers as appropriate, to help them to attain the standards expected.
- 1.4 The Accommodation & Placement Support Team have responsibility for sourcing placements and subsequently monitoring those placements for those children who require such placements. The team work with procurement colleagues to support the regional monitoring of residential providers regardless of children from Stockton on Tees having placements in these homes. This provides a wider platform to engage with providers and

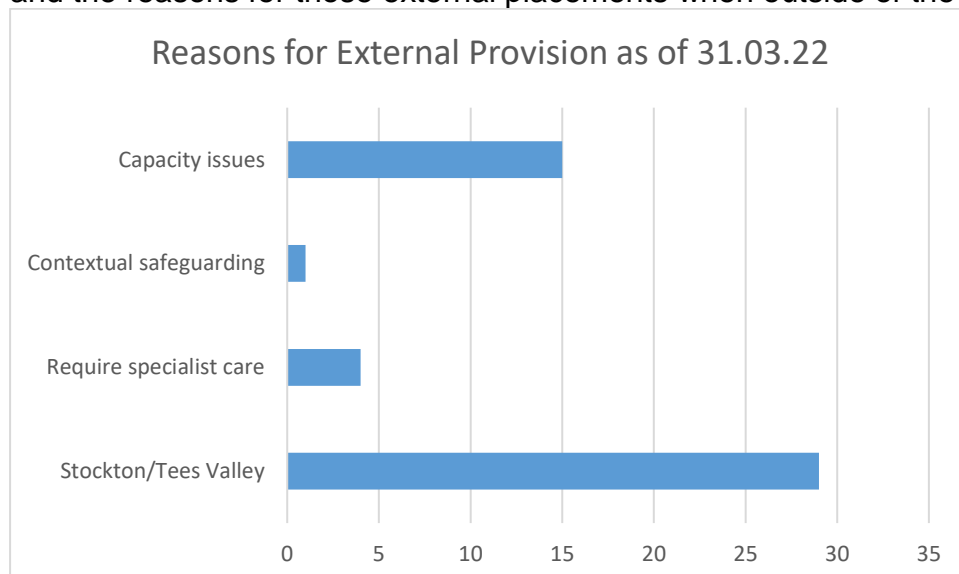
strengthens opportunities to share information about good quality homes as well as where there are concerns. As we continue to emerge from the impact of Covid 19, the Accommodation & Placement Support Team have been able to reinstate the monitoring visits in person as opposed to virtually (as was necessary throughout the Covid pandemic and imposed restrictions).

- 1.5 This report combines summative data from Ofsted inspection judgements and in house monitoring visits, thus providing information on the number of monitoring visits undertaken in this period and the quality of placements where our young people are placed. Additionally, the report captures collective themes and concerns from visits, provides information in regards how these concerns have been addressed, as well as referencing any feedback from providers on their experiences of working with the Local Authority.

## 2. DATA RELATING TO EXTERNAL PLACEMENTS

- 2.1 The increasing demands for placements continues to impact on capacity in house making it necessary for placements to be sourced externally.
- 2.2 Those responsible for securing residential placements for children who need them continue to be proactive in cultivating and forming positive relationships with external providers both locally and outside of the local boundaries.
- 2.3 Regionally, the NE12 residential framework is available in an effort to source placements near to the local area.
- 2.4 Demand for residential placements continues to be high. Despite efforts to keep children close to Stockton on Tees, lack of provision to meet demand and/or the complex needs of young people, often means that children placed externally, are placed outside of Stockton on Tees and the Tees Valley area.

The Chart below shows the numbers of children placed in external provision and the reasons for those external placements when outside of the region:



- 2.5 A snap shot of data relating to children placed in external residential homes showed that on the 31.03.22 a total of 49 children were placed in external residential placements. This is a reduction of 5 when compared to the figures of this time last year.
- 2.6 29 of the 49 children were placed within Stockton on Tees and the Tees Valley area (Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough) in external placements.
- 2.7 Of the remaining 20, 4 children were suitably placed outside of the local and regional area in order to meet needs and/or required specialised provision (i.e., Learning difficulties, Sexualised Harmful Behaviour)
- 2.8 1 child was suitably placed out of area due to contextual safeguarding concerns within Stockton on Tees.
- 2.9 The remaining 15 children, were placed out of area due to capacity issues and could have safely been cared for locally had there been provision available.
- 2.10 Ofsted have provided data that note's nationally, children placed outside of their home local authority has increased by around 28% between 2010 and 2020.

### **3.0 APPROACH TO THE MONITORING AND AUDITING OF EXTERNAL PROVISION**

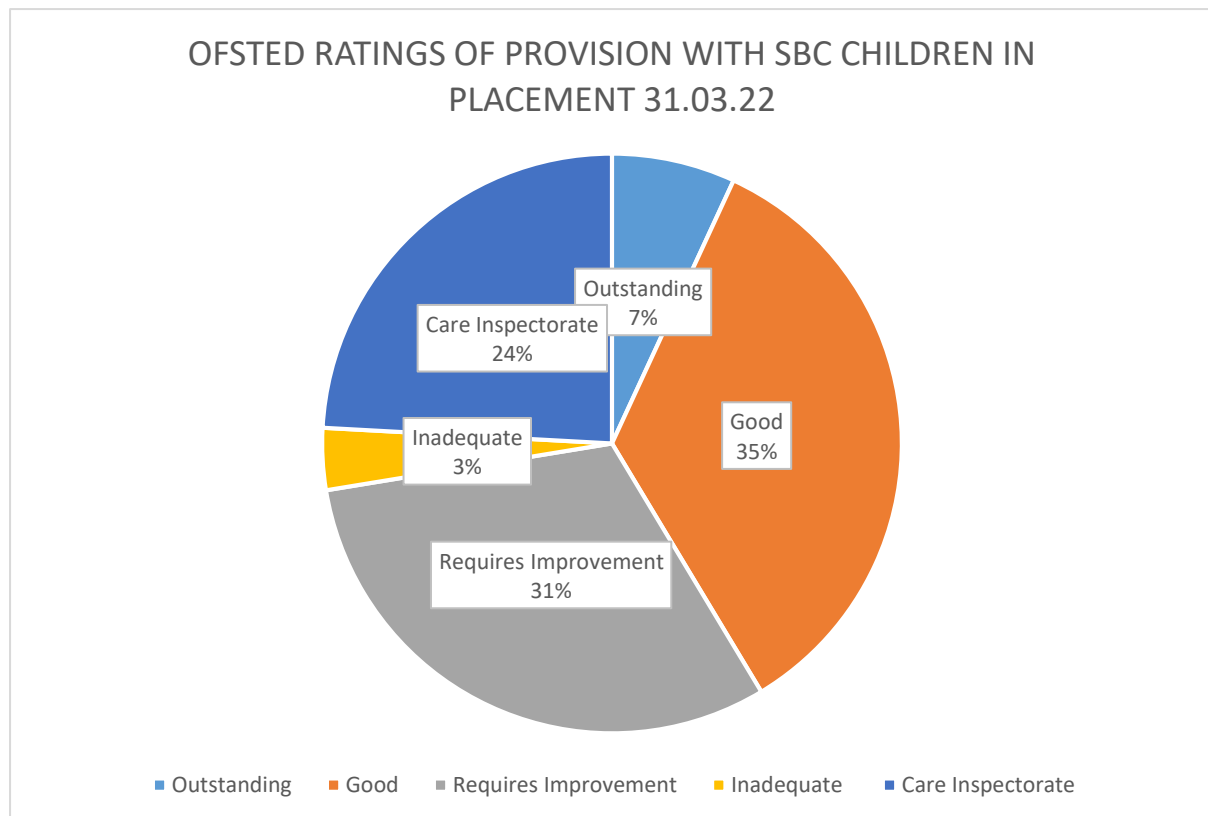
- 3.1 During the pandemic, Ofsted suspended routine inspections however these have since been reinstated from April 2021. Many providers have experienced changes in grades following the reinstating of inspections and Stockton on Tees have noted that there has been a decrease in our children living in what were previously graded by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding performing homes.
- 3.2 The Local Authority has in place arrangements for the of monitoring external placements which is outlined in the relevant policy. Monitoring visits should be conducted at least annually by a suitably experienced officer within the Childrens Care and Complex Needs Service area.
- 3.4 Where difficulties or a safeguarding concern is evident in a placement that is of a substantial worry, or there is a significant decline in an Ofsted rating as a result of a safeguarding concern, this would prompt an early or additional monitoring visit. Concerns are shared with other placing Local Authorities and, where appropriate, the officer from the Accommodation and Placement Support Team works together with other Local Authorities with the provider and commissioner to address concerns and improve the care provided.
- 3.5 During the monitoring visit the child is seen and spoken to alone. Staff are spoken to, records are examined in the home and feedback is obtained about

the quality of care from the child’s social worker, family, IRO and other placing authorities as felt appropriate.

- 3.6 At the end of the monitoring visit, the visiting person produces a report for the home and child’s social worker, summarising their findings with any recommendations. These are followed up with further visits or communication as felt necessary in order to provide the assurances required to demonstrate the expected quality of care.

#### 4.0 DATA SUMMARY RE QUALITY OF PROVISION

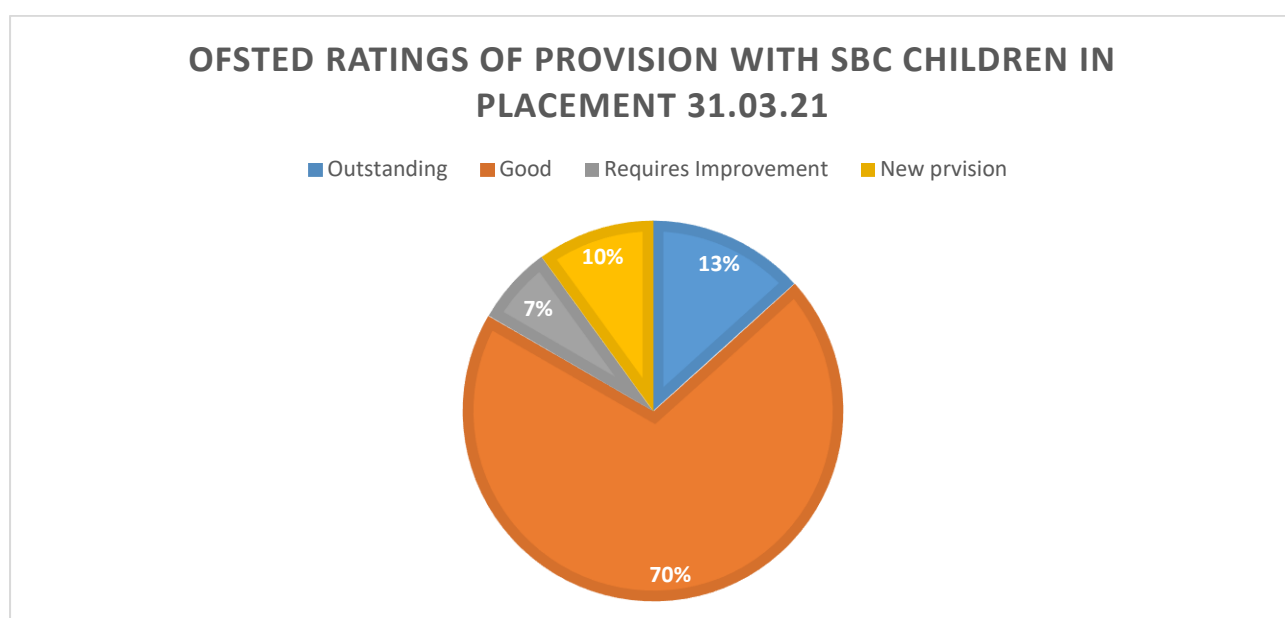
- 4.1 Placements are aimed to be made in a home judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.
- 4.2 As of 31.03.22, the 49 children in external provision are placed across 29 different registered home in England and Scotland. Many homes have several Stockton children in placement.
- 4.3 The chart below gives the percentages of the grades for each of the homes’ most recent Ofsted inspection where our children were placed. For the purposes of this report, the data in the chart below includes provision in Scotland which is overseen by the Care Inspectorate.



4.4 A breakdown of this information shows us that of the 29 home's children are placed in, they are:

- 2 Ofsted graded Outstanding
- 10 Ofsted graded Good
- 9 Ofsted graded Requires Improvement
- 1 Ofsted graded Inadequate
- 7 in Scotland and Inspected by Care Inspectorate. They do not provide overall gradings.

4.5 The current gradings contrast against the previous information available for last year as the chart below shows.



4.6 It is clear that there has been a reduction in the number of children placed in provisions that are graded as Outstanding and Good.

4.7 It is of note that when the last report was produced, Ofsted inspections were suspended during the pandemic. Whilst Monitoring and Assurance visits were carried out during this time, they were not full inspections, therefore the outcome of said visits did not affect the overall rating.

4.8 During this reporting period, there were 14 children placed across 9 homes graded Requires Improvement (RI). Of these 14 children, 9 were placed when the home was Good or Outstanding (or not yet inspected).

4.9 Of the 5 children placed after the RI grading, 4 were placed in provision where we already had other children living in the home or were providers we have worked with extensively over a number of years.

- 4.10 These homes had also received monitoring visits from the Local Authority within the last 12 months prior to placement which did not raise significant concerns.
- 4.11 1 child was placed in an RI home not previously accessed by Stockton on Tees Local Authority. In order to seek assurance that this was a suitable placement, prior to admission, discussions took place with the home's manager in regards to progress as outlined in a Ofsted Inspection Report.
- 4.12 During this reporting period there have been no children placed in homes awaiting their first Ofsted Inspection.
- 4.13 24 of the external children's homes caring for children in the care Stockton on Tees Local Authority, have received a Monitoring Visit as of 31.03.22. 5 homes are yet to receive a monitoring visit are scheduled to be conducted in line with our relevant policy and timescales.

## **5.0 THEMES**

- 5.1 The team has dealt with safeguarding concerns over the past year relating to external placements. Examples of actions taken by the team to address issues can be seen below:
- 5.2 **1.** Significant concerns were raised regarding an out of area provider regarding a high number of incidents and safeguarding concerns relating to a number of children, that had not been reported to Ofsted. Once aware, Ofsted subsequently issued an immediate suspension notice on the home. In response to these issues, the Accommodation and Placement Support Team worked with the SEN team (special educational needs), care team, other LAs and additional agencies to formulate and action an appropriate plan to safeguard the child.
- 5.3 **2.** A Tees Valley Local Authority raised concerns regarding an external children's home operating within Stockton on Tees. As the host authority, the Accommodation and Placement Support Team worked in partnership with other Tees Valley LA's to discuss the concerns, formulate an action plan to resolve the issues with the provider and share the information with the regional Link Officer from the Procurement Team in order other LA's were fully informed of the issues and progress to improve the quality of care. The Accommodation and Placement Support Team provided mentoring support to the homes manager that included sharing of good practice, targeted visits to the home and shadowing opportunities in Stockton on Tees provision in an effort to improve safeguarding in the placement and address concerns.
- 5.4 Further work has also been completed with other regional LA's and with National Youth Advocacy Services (NYAS).

- 5.5 This partnership work continues to develop alongside regional colleagues and internal services to strengthen monitoring and provide assurances of placement suitability as well as establishing partnership working with a range of LAs across the country.
- 5.6 The general themes from providers continue to be that they feel they have an excellent working relationship with Stockton on Tees Borough Council workers. Social workers are reported to respond in a timely manner when information is requested and that they make visits to the young people over and above the required legal requirement.
- 5.7 There continues to be concerns raised by providers in regard to the high level of frequency our children experience a change of social workers. This at times makes it difficult for providers to progress plans for young people, providers were advised to contact the Accommodation and Placement Support Team should they need any assistance or support in this regard.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The LA's Accommodation Placement Support Team members have excellent relationships with providers offering not only guidance but practical support that is available to residential children's homes as demonstrated in response to concerns.
- 6.2 Monitoring from the team continues to play a vital part in ensuring our children are receiving the highest level of care. There is a schedule of monitoring visits planned for the next year.
- 6.3 Visits have been prioritised to those provision where concerns have been shared in order to obtain the assurances that children in our care are in safe and are in stable placements.
- 6.4 We currently have more children placed in not Good or Outstanding provision than previous years. Providers need to be monitored closely and further work will be undertaken to understand if this is a local issue or a trend that is emerging nationally.