

Date:

Wednesday 15 July 2026 at 5.00 pm

Venue:

Council Chamber, Dunedin House, Columbia Drive, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees TS17 6BJ

Cllr Carol Clark (Chair)

Cllr Barbara Inman (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Sally Ann Watson and Cllr Katie Zagoria

Agenda**1. Livestreaming**

This meeting will be filmed for live and / or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The whole of the meeting will be filmed, except where there are confidential or exempt items, and the footage will be on the website for 12 months. A copy of it will also be retained in accordance with the Council's data retention policy.

If you attend and make a representation to the meeting, you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed. When admitted to the Council Chamber you are also consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for livestreaming and / or training purposes. If you do not wish to have your image captured, please contact Democratic Services prior to attending the meeting.

If there are any technical difficulties with the livestreaming, the meeting will still proceed.

2. Evacuation Procedure (Pages 7 - 10)**3. Apologies for Absence****4. Declarations of Interest****5. Minutes** (Pages 11 - 14)

To approve the minutes of the last meeting held on 13 May 2026.

6. The Annual Children's Services Complaints Report 2025/26 (Pages 15 - 36)**7. Monitoring - Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment**
(Pages 37 - 66)

8. Scrutiny Review of Additional Resourced SEND Provision (Pages 67 - 90)

To consider the final report for submission to Cabinet.

9. Scrutiny Review of Alternative Provision (Pages 91 - 96)

To receive an introductory presentation and consider the draft scope and project plan for the review.

10. Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme (Pages 97 - 98)



Ged Morton
Director of Corporate Services
Tuesday 7 July 2026

Members of the Public - Rights to Attend Meeting

With the exception of any item identified above as containing exempt or confidential information under the Local Government Act 1972 Section 100A(4), members of the public are entitled to attend this meeting and/or have access to the agenda papers.

Persons wishing to obtain any further information on this meeting, including the opportunities available for any member of the public to speak at the meeting; or for details of access to the meeting for disabled people, please.

Contact: Judy Trainer, Democratic Services Manager on email judy.trainer@stockton.gov.uk

Key – Declarable interests are :-

- Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI's)
- Other Registerable Interests (ORI's)
- Non Registerable Interests (NRI's)

Members – Declaration of Interest Guidance

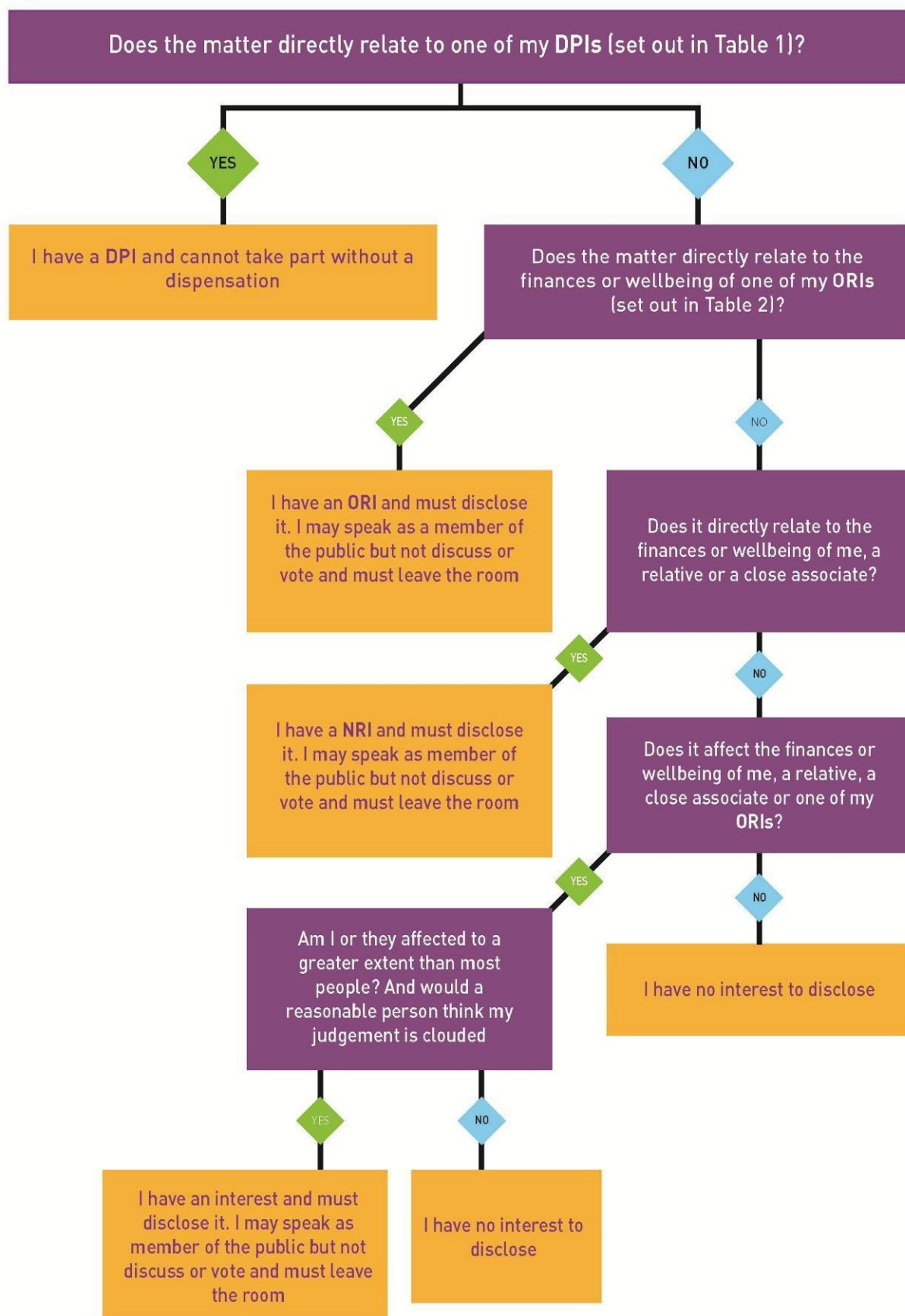


Table 1 - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land and property	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. 'Land' excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the councillor's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body where— (a) that body (to the councillor's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and (b) either— (i) the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners have a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

Table 2 – Other Registrable Interest

You must register as an Other Registrable Interest:

a) any unpaid directorships

b) any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority

c) any body

(i) exercising functions of a public nature

(ii) directed to charitable purposes or

(iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management

Council Chamber, Dunedin House Evacuation Procedure & Housekeeping

Entry

Entry to the Council Chamber is via the Council Chamber Entrance, indicated on the map below.



In the event of an emergency alarm activation, everyone should immediately start to leave their workspace by the nearest available signed Exit route.

The emergency exits are located via the doors on either side of the raised seating area at the front of the Council Chamber.

Fires, explosions, and bomb threats are among the occurrences that may require the emergency evacuation of Dunedin House. Continuous sounding and flashing of the Fire Alarm is the signal to evacuate the building or upon instruction from a Fire Warden or a Manager.

The Emergency Evacuation Assembly Point is in the overflow car park located across the road from Dunedin House.

The allocated assembly point for the Council Chamber is: D2

Map of the Emergency Evacuation Assembly Point - the overflow car park:



All occupants must respond to the alarm signal by immediately initiating the evacuation procedure.

When the Alarm sounds:

1. **stop all activities immediately.** Even if you believe it is a false alarm or practice drill, you MUST follow procedures to evacuate the building fully.
2. **follow directional EXIT signs** to evacuate via the nearest safe exit in a calm and orderly manner.
 - do not stop to collect your belongings
 - close all doors as you leave
3. **steer clear of hazards.** If evacuation becomes difficult via a chosen route because of smoke, flames or a blockage, re-enter the Chamber (if safe to do so). Continue the evacuation via the nearest safe exit route.
4. **proceed to the Evacuation Assembly Point.** Move away from the building. Once you have exited the building, proceed to the main Evacuation Assembly Point immediately - located in the **East Overflow Car Park**.
 - do not assemble directly outside the building or on any main roadway, to ensure access for Emergency Services.

5. await further instructions.

- **do not re-enter the building under any circumstances without an “all clear”** which should only be given by the Incident Control Officer/Chief Fire Warden, Fire Warden or Manager.
- do not leave the area without permission.
- ensure all colleagues and visitors are accounted for. Notify a Fire Warden or Manager immediately if you have any concerns

Toilets

Toilets are located immediately outside the Council Chamber, accessed via the door at the back of the Chamber.

Water Cooler

A water cooler is available at the rear of the Council Chamber.

Microphones

During the meeting, members of the Committee, and officers in attendance, will have access to a microphone. Please use the microphones, when invited to speak by the Chair, to ensure you can be heard by the Committee and those in attendance at the meeting.

This page is intentionally left blank

Children and Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday 13th May 2026.

Present: Cllr Carol Clark (Chair), Cllr Barbara Inman (Vice-Chair), Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Emily Tate and Cllr Sally Ann Watson

Officers: Majella McCarthy, Elisha Dyball, Sharon Stevens and Judy Trainer

Also in attendance: Cllr Clare Besford

Apologies: Cllr Sufi Mubeen and Cllr Katie Weston

CYP/6/26 Livestreaming

The Chair announced to those present that the meeting would be live streamed.

CYP/7/26 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CYP/8/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interests recorded.

CYP/9/26 Minutes

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CYP/10/26 Scrutiny Review of Children Not in School

The Select Committee reviewed the draft final report following its review of Children Not in School.

The Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services attended the meeting for the item and commended the Select Committee on its work.

AGREED that the final report be approved for submission to Cabinet.

CYP/11/26 Presentation - SEND Reform - Education White Paper

The Select Committee received a presentation on the recent White Paper on SEND reform.

The vision of the White Paper was summarised as:

- Inclusive Mainstream System
- Specialist Support for Children that need it

- Effective and efficient local delivery
- Stretching, enriching and inclusive school experience for all.
- North East Mission – emphasis on disadvantaged, white working-class children

The presentation covered the implications of the White Paper for:

- Curriculum
- Attendance and Suspensions
- School Governance
- Implications for the Council
- Consultation and Key Dates

Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- Members asked what provision was being made for rising SEND numbers - Officers advised that SEND numbers had been increasing and were forecasted to rise up to 2029. Stockton was projected to reach 19–20% SEND prevalence compared to approximately 15% nationally. This increase was driven by more complex needs, particularly speech, language and communication needs (which had doubled in three years) and autism (which had increased by 30%). Plans assumed continued growth
- Members asked what strategies would be implemented to achieve the 1.3% attendance improvement target or would this be on a school-by-school basis - Officers advised that the current focus had been on SEND reform deadlines, with attendance work to follow. It was anticipated that schools would be organised into clusters, enabling sharing of good practice and targeted support in areas with high absence. Work would commence once the wider framework was clearer
- Members asked whether there was any disparity between SEND levels in Stockton compared with other Councils - Officers explained that Stockton was not a significant outlier regionally, with similar levels observed across the Tees Valley and North East. While slightly above the national average, figures were consistent with statistical neighbours. Recognising the levels of deprivation and poverty within the region, a model and mission for the North East would be key. A particular focus on early intervention and prevention was important to support children and families who would potentially be at risk
- Members asked whether Individual Support Plans (ISPs) would be standardised across the Borough - Officers confirmed that a national digital template would be introduced by the Department for Education. There would likely be tighter guidelines for schools and a quality assurance framework
- Members asked whether sufficient funding would be available to support training, staffing and implementation - Officers acknowledged that funding was unlikely to fully meet demand given the scale of need and existing DSG deficit. While additional funding had been welcomed, the Council would still need to maximise investment through partnership working and balancing immediate support with early intervention and prevention
- Members asked whether an ongoing action plan would be made available to the Committee to review - Officers confirmed that a Local Area Reform Plan would be developed, approved and shared in due course. This would then be supported by a detailed project management plan

It was noted that under the proposals, schools would have their own inclusion hubs rather than SEND Units or Additionally Resourced Provision. Given the change, the Scrutiny Officer would collate the evidence gathered to date for the Select

Committee’s previous review of Additional Resourced SEND provision, which had been paused, and present to the Select Committee for consideration of the implications of the White Paper.

AGREED that the presentation be noted.

CYP/12/26 Chair’s Update and Select Committee Work Programme

AGREED that the work programme be noted.

Chair:

This page is intentionally left blank



Children's Services Complaints Annual Report 2025/2026

Contents

Section	Page no
Purpose of report	3
Summary	3
Background	3
Profile of Stockton on Tees	4
What is a complaint	4
What may be complained about	5
Who can make a complaint	5
The complaints procedure	6
Information and Accessibility	7
Review of complaints received in 2025/2026	8
Complaints received by service area	8
Complaints received by stage	8
Themes of complaints	9
Who complained?	9
Advocacy services provided	10
Outcomes of complaints	10
Findings	10
Learning and Service Improvements because of complaints	11
The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	17
Timescale performance	17
Financial remedies	19
Training	20
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	21
Conclusion	21

1. Purpose of report and summary

The Children's Annual Complaint report provides an overview of complaints received by children's services, including social care complaints and wider children's services complaints. The report covers themes of the complaints received, response times and outcomes. The report is produced annually as a statutory requirement for Stockton on Tees Borough Council and is essential for ensuring that the voices of children and families are heard and that our services are improved following the feedback received from complaints.

This report provides information about complaints received during the twelve months between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 and will be presented to the Children and Young People Select Committee, which is chaired by Councillor Carol Clark.

2. Summary

There was a 37% increase in complaints from the previous year, rising from 117 to 160. Complaints about social work teams more than doubled from 68 to 104, and complaints related to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) increased from 17 to 28.

Parents and their advocates/representatives remain the largest group who raise complaints about children's services, with 115 of the 160 complainants coming from this group (72%). This is similar to the previous year when 86 of the 117 complaints received were from parents (73.5%). Only three complaints were received from young people including one care leaver and while children/young people are supported to resolve concerns without formal recourse through the complaints process, there is a concern that the voice of parents not necessarily raising complaints in the interests of the child/young person is louder than the voice of that child/young person.

Communication and information sharing continues to be a prominent area of complainant's dissatisfaction, and this year has seen a significant increase in complaints where this is a factor. Complaints about staff contact have reduced by over 50%, however there has been an increase in complaints where support to families, placement and stability or educational support features

There has been an increase in complaints escalating through both corporate and statutory processes. This has been affected by the change to the corporate process, but it is concerning that we are seeing a year-on-year increase in children's statutory complaints progressing to Stage 2 and 3, although numbers are still relatively low.

3. Background

Children's social care complaints are handled in line with the Children Act 1989 Regulations 2006 and Getting the Best from Complaints guidance 2006. There is a legal requirement for all local authorities to have a complaint process in place in accordance with these regulations, The Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and related guidance. The statutory complaints procedure is designed with the needs of the child at the heart of the process.

Some complaints about children's services do not fall within the scope of the 2006 regulations (e.g. complaints about Educational and Health Care Plans or handling of child protection concerns under Section 47 of the Children's Act), these are addressed within the Council's corporate complaints process.

There is a legal duty to arrange advocacy for children and young people; to be able to make their views and comments about the services and care they receive under Children's Services, in line with the Advocacy Regulations 2004.

The purpose of the children's statutory complaint procedure is to ensure that the views of those receiving social care, their carers, and families, are made known, so that those views are dealt with effectively and can inform the planning and delivery of services.

Our aims are to:

- Resolve complaints quickly and where possible using informal measures.
- Reduce escalations through the process.
- Learn lessons from complaints to improve our services.

The Council has appointed a Complaints Manager who is independent of operational line management and of direct service providers (e.g. children's social work). Their role is to oversee the complaints procedure, maintain a customer focus and support the Council to ensure that complaints are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

4. Profile of Stockton on Tees

It is estimated that 206,800 people live in Stockton-on-Tees (MYE, 2024), 39,649 of which are children aged 0-15 years. In 2025/2026 we received 12000 contacts to our Front Door Service for children in need and child protection. 22% of children in need are supported due to their families experiencing acute stress, 86% of child protection plans were initiated due to concerns about neglect and 51% of childrens were supported because of concerns about abuse or neglect.

Stockton-on-Tees is the 69th most deprived local authority in England (out of 296). Almost one in five (19%) neighbourhoods (or lower super output areas) are in the 10% most deprived nationally while one in 10 (11%) being in the 10% least deprived. 17% of children in the borough live in the highest level of income deprivation nationally; and 22% of children aged under 16yrs live in absolute low-income families.

4.7% of school pupils in Stockton on Tees have SEN statement or EHC Plans (equal to the national percentage), and 29.2% of children who are looked after have an EHC Plan (the national percentage is 33.9%). 30% of Key Stage 2 children are meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, which is equitable to the north-east and national picture. 18.9% of 16-17 years olds with special educational needs are recorded as either Not in Education or Training (NEET) or not known. This is higher than the percentage for the north-east (14.3%) and across England (10.2%).

5. What is a complaint?

Getting the Best from Complaints says that a complaint may be generally defined as:

“an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.”

Children and young people often express complaints as 'problems not being sorted out'. A common theme amongst children and young people is the need for complaints procedures to be both fast and effective: complaints procedures should 'get it sorted' straight away.

Representations may not always be complaints; they might also be positive remarks or ideas that require a response from the local authority. Enquiries or comments about the availability, delivery or nature of a service which are not criticisms are likely to constitute representations, for example, children and young people should be able to put forward ideas or proposals about the service they receive, or the establishment they live in, without having this framed as a complaint.

6. What may be complained about?

Complaints can arise because of many things relating to statutory social services functions such as:

- an unwelcome or disputed decision.
- concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service.
- delay in decision making or provision of services.
- delivery or non-delivery of services including complaints procedures.
- quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service.
- attitude or behaviour of staff.
- application of eligibility and assessment criteria.
- the impact on a child or young person of the application of a local authority policy; and
- assessment, care management and review.

However, this is not an exhaustive list. and the Complaints Manager will seek legal advice as necessary.

7. Who may complain?

Complaints about children's services can be accepted from:

- a child or young person (or a parent of his or someone who has parental responsibility for him) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need.
- a local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies).
- children leaving care.
- Special Guardians.
- a child or young person (or parent of his) to whom a Special Guardian order is in force.
- any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F(3) or (4)
- a child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians.
- persons wishing to adopt a child.
- any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend.
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians; and
- such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant his representations being considered by them.

We expect complaints be to be made within 12 months of the incident about which the complaint relates. We can in some instances consider your complaint if the incident occurred more than 12 months ago.

8. The complaints procedure

All our officers are aware of the complaints process and can pass details of any complaint to the appropriate person.

The Information Governance Team oversee the complaints process; their contact details can be found below:

- Email: foiandcomplaints@stockton.gov.uk
- Telephone on 01642 527521 between 9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday
- Address: Information Governance Team, Corporate Services, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Dunedin House, Columbia Drive, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 6BJ.

The Information Governance Team works closely with all the service teams to ensure responses to complaints and enquiries are completed in a timely way. It should be noted that Children's social care complaints can often be complex by their nature or involve more than one service/ agency or have a concurrent investigation underway, which may override or impact and delay a complaint investigation and response. The complaints team keeps the complainant informed in such instances.

All complaints will be assessed to determine the most appropriate way for them to be addressed. Some matters that are not appropriate for consideration within the complaints process include:

- Complaints about schools – are generally managed within each school's own complaints procedure.
- Appeals – there are separate appeals procedures for matters such as school places (dealt with under School Appeal Process), and school transport (handled through Home to School Transport Appeals)
- Education, Health and Care plans – disputes are considered through appeals by Statutory Appeals Tribunals.

We will record and acknowledge all complaints and will try to resolve them as quickly as possible. Complaints are shared with the relevant head of service for consideration. Where required, officers will talk to complainants to ensure we really understand the issues they have raised, how this has affected them, and what they want to happen to resolve the issues. If we can resolve the complaint without full investigation, we will do so in a timely manner, we call this Early Resolution. If we cannot quickly resolve the issues, they will be progressed through to the formal stages of the complaints process.

The three stages of the Children's statutory complaints procedure are as follows:

Stage 1 - Local Resolution stage (10 - 20 working days)

Stage 2 - Independent investigation stage (25 – 65 working days)

Stage 3 – Independent Review Panel (30 working days for a Panel to be held,
5 additional days for the Panel to issue its findings,
15 further days for the Council to respond.

Complaints concerning education and special educational needs, as well as some wider complaints relating to children’s services, are investigated in line with the Council’s Corporate Complaints procedure. The LGSCO published its new Complaint Handling Code for corporate complaints in February 2024, and the Council adopted the code from 1 January 2026. From 1 April 2026, the LGSCO will start to take the new code into account when reviewing Council’s performance. The new code brings in some further changes to the way complaints are handled, such as shorter response times and automatic right to escalate complaints. These changes have been reflected in an updated Corporate Complaints Policy. The stages of the corporate process are as follows:

Stage 1- Local Resolution (15 – 25 working days)

Stage 2 – Review (20 – 40 working days)

The final stage for both corporate and statutory children’s complaints, is escalation to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

Complaints will only be shown to those people that need to know about it in order that we can resolved the problem. The investigating officer will review records, speak with staff and gather all necessary information. They may contact complainants to clarify details or discuss progress. Complainants will receive a written response that explains our findings, decisions, and any actions we will take because of the complaint. We keep all complaint information confidential and only share it where necessary to investigate or resolve concerns.

9. Information and Accessibility

We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services, including the complaints procedure. To help make sure the complaints procedure is easily accessible we have produced the following information leaflets:

You and your points of view	Leaflet developed with and aimed at young people
Your Right to Complain	General Leaflet
Your Right to Complain	Easy to read leaflet

All new users of children’s services are provided with a copy of the leaflet and further copies can be requested from key workers and the Information Governance Team. Information about the complaints processes is available on the Council’s website and can be requested in other formats.

To support submission of complaints an online form is available our website that includes targeted questions to support the Council to fully understand what has gone wrong, how it has affected the

complainant and how they hope the matter can be put tight. Complaints can also be submitted by email, telephone or during interaction with a council officer.

As soon as possible after receiving a complaint or representation, the Council will provide the complainant with details of the relevant procedure and signpost to advocacy services. The Council will make arrangements for the provision of advocacy services to children or young people making or intending to make complaints through the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS).

10. Review of complaints received in 2025/2026

Table 1 – Complaints received by service area

Service area	2024/2025		2025/2026	
	Number of complaints	% of total complaints	Number of complaints	% of total complaints
Adoption Tees Valley	1	1%	5	3%
Assessment Teams	5	4%	4	3%
Children with Disability	1	1%	3	2%
Children's Care & Complex Needs	3	3%	2	1%
Children's Strategy & Commissioning	1	1%	1	1%
Early Support & Projects	1	1%	0	0%
EDT	5	4%	2	1%
Education 0-11 Early Years	0	0%	1	1%
Family Support	0	0%	3	2%
LADO	0	0%	2	1%
School Inclusion & Vulnerable Learners	0	0%	1	1%
SEND Assessment & Reviews	5	4%	8	5%
SEND Placement & Governance	12	10%	20	13%
Social Work Teams	68	58%	104*	65%
Through Care Teams	15	13%	4	3%
Total	117		160	

* 1 complaint assigned to SEND Assessment and Review also related to the Childrens with Disability service area. 01482/2526.

There has been a 37% increase in the overall number of complaints received compared to the previous year. Complaints about social work teams have more than doubled since 2024/2025, increasing from 68 to 104. There has also been an increase in complaints received about Special Educational Needs (SEND), with 28 complaints being received compared to 17 the previous year.

Table 2 – Complaints received by stage

2024/2025	2024/2025	2025/2026
Early Resolution	108	83
Corporate Stage 1	21	75

Statutory Stage 1	2	6
Corporate Stage 2	3	19
Statutory Stage 2	2	4
Statutory Stage 3	1	0

94% of complaints received, were either resolved or the complainant was uncontactable, so the complaint was withdrawn. This compares to 87% in 2024/2025.

There has been a significant increase in complaints progressed to Stage 2 of both the corporate and statutory processes, as well as an increase in the number of Stage 3 review panels requested under the statutory process. While this can be attributed in part to changes to the corporate process whereby the Council is no longer able to decline requests for progression where any earlier response is considered to be robust, it reflects complaints dissatisfaction with the Council's early attempts to resolve matters.

10. Themes of complaints

Complaints often cover more than one theme, and the following captures the types of issues complained about:

Theme	24/25	25/26
Communication & Information Sharing	37	69
Staff Conduct	32	13
Decision Making	13	8
Child Protection & Safety	13	16
Support to Families	9	22
Educational Support	7	12
Family Contact & Visitation	6	2
EHCP Assessment & Plan Issues	3	7
SEND Support & Provision	3	4
Placement & Stability	2	12
Transition & Leaving Care	2	0

Complaints are typically varied by their nature. Some complaints may seem straightforward and easy to fix –such as a miscommunication or a delay with a service. However, complaints can also be extremely complex and sensitive. Communication and information sharing continues to be a prominent area of complainant's dissatisfaction, and this year has seen a significant increase in complaints where this is a factor. Complaints about staff contact have reduced by over 50%, however there has been an increase in complaints where support to families, placement and stability or educational support features.

11. Who complained?

Parents and their advocates/representatives remain the largest group who raise complaints about children's services, with 115 of the 160 complainants coming from this group (72%). This is similar to the previous year, when 86 of the 117 complaints received we from parents (73.5%).

Only three complaints were received from young people, including one care leaver. While this is higher than the one complaint received from a young person in the previous year, it raises a concern as to whether the voice of young people is heard within the complaints process. It should

be noted that Independent Reviewing Officers and Personal Advisors support children in our care and care leavers to seek their views and address concerns outside the formal complaint process. Children in care also give their feedback through their looked after reviews. Other groups who complain are relatively small numbers and include complaints made by other relatives and adults involved in a child/young person's life.

12. Advocacy Services provided

Children and young people are entitled to make a complaint or other representations with the help of an advocate, and the Council has duty to provide advocacy in line with the advocacy regulations. Of the 160 complaints received three complaints received from children/young people, all were provided with advocacy services through the North East Advocacy Service (NYAS).

13. Outcomes of complaints

There are generally four outcomes of a complaint, these are:

- Upheld – where we agree with the complainant.
- Partially upheld – where we agree with the complainant in part, but not fully.
- Not upheld – where we do not agree that there has been a service failure.
- Resolved with complainant without formal written response.

11 complaints were not accepted for consideration within the complaints process. The reasons for exclusion included:

- Investigation could prejudice an ongoing police investigation.
- Matter should be or are being considered within legal proceedings.
- Complainant is not eligible to raise matter.

Table 3 – Complaint findings

Corporate and Children's Statutory Complaints

	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved with complainant	Withdrawn	Refused	Ongoing	Total
Corporate Stage 1	9	10	36	5 (without formal response) 1 (resolved early)	2	11	1	75
Corporate Stage 2	1	7	10		1			19
Statutory Stage 1	1	3	2					6
Statutory Stage 2		1			1		2	4
Statutory Stage 3								

TOTAL	11	20	47	6	3	11	1	
--------------	----	----	----	---	---	----	---	--

A small number of complaints have been resolved without formal response being required or have been withdrawn by the complainant. This evidence that attempts to resolve the matter being complained about continue even after a complaint has been raised.

The 'partially upheld' and 'inconclusive' outcomes are currently being phased out in line with LGSCO advice.

Complaints are often about decisions made by the service and not necessarily about the department making poor decisions. Rather, that they disagree with the rationale or policy on which the decision is based.

Of the remaining complaints that were investigated the outcomes can be found below

- 11 (14%) complaints were Upheld
- 20 (26%) complaints were Partially Upheld
- 47 (60%) complaints were Not Upheld

14. Learning and Service Improvements as a result of complaints

Complaints provide invaluable information which may be used to identify issues in services, help officer learning and also identify any risks and so improve services for the future. We use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements, update procedures, and provide feedback to staff so that issues do not happen again. The learning from complaints is fed into children's services quality assurance systems with outcomes fed back into operational delivery. The Council also holds an Annual Complaints Forum to disseminate key learning from complaints to line managers to ensure that information derived from complaints is used to contribute to practice development, commissioning and service planning. Monitoring highlights how effective communication is within the Council and to the children and young people receiving our services, where staff training is required and whether resources are targeted appropriately. This is fed back into the system to facilitate and improve policy and practice.

Table 4 – What you told us and what we did...

Below is a summary of learning that has been identified from the complaints that have been investigated.

Corporate Stage 1 Learnings

Team	Theme	Learnings and actions
Social Work Teams	Child Protection & Safety	Officers will ensure that going forward they will inform parents of the names of the social worker and team manager upon allocation. Agreed that communication with families about decision-making could be better and that when possible, safety planning will be agreed in person and will be recorded clearly. When parents raise safeguarding concerns, these will be taken seriously and acted on in a timely manner. This will be reviewed

		through the PLO process for cases and escalated as part of our internal learning process. Agreement to explore and improve how we a gather the wishes and feelings of a child who is non-verbal requiring specialist communication approaches.
Social Teams	Work Decision Making	Transfer discussions should take place if case responsibility for a child or young person needs to change, to promote information sharing and reduce potential delay.
Assessment Teams	Communication & Information Sharing, Staff Conduct	For Children's Hub: When contacting families to follow up on a referral officers should confirm the family and child's details before disclosing information about the referral. For SBC school admissions: Officers should ensure that all processing of personal information remains accurate. Where data is identified as being inaccurate, prompt action will be taken to erase or rectify that data.
Social Teams	Work Placement & Stability	Management involved will complete a structured reflective learning process on: how their actions were perceived, what could have been done differently, how to avoid future applicants feeling judged, how to improve transparency during sensitive conversations. We will strengthen our recruitment communication by: • ensuring candidates clearly understand their legal duty to disclose any convictions, • explaining in advance when a manager needs to be consulted, • avoiding conversations that may appear secretive or excluding, • ensuring sensitive information handling is explained
Social Teams	Work Communication & Information Sharing	Team discussions took place about how to have positive communication with families, however challenging this may be.

Assessment Teams	Communication & Information Sharing	Team discussions took place about ensuring that full consideration is given to children's religious and cultural backgrounds when assessments are undertaken, to strengthen our practice.
Social Work Teams	Communication & Information Sharing, Support to Families	Staff training conducted on distinguishing between fostering, kinship, and private arrangements. Improved communication protocols during emergency placements. Clearer guidance on financial support and legal responsibilities.
Social Work Teams	Placement & Stability	The complaint found that we were not clearly explaining to care leavers their responsibility to keep rent payments up to date. As a result, the Higher Education Policy was updated and now includes clearer guidance around student accommodation. We now seek to secure 52-week accommodation wherever possible or make appropriate alternative plans, in advance if this cannot be arranged. In addition, we have introduced a written agreement that will be shared with and signed by the young person so that their responsibilities are clearly understood from the outset.
SEND Placement & Governance	EHCP Assessment & Plan Issues	Complaint related to lack of funding for activities identified in a young person's EOTAS (Education Otherwise than at School) plan. Complaint found that the Council has a duty to fund the provision outlined in the EOTAS package.
SEND Assessment & Reviews	Educational Support	All staff were reminded of the expectations regarding timely and appropriate responses to parent communication. The complaint highlighted an important area for improvement which was taken very seriously.

Corporate Stage 2 Learnings

Team	Theme	Learnings and actions
Social Work Teams	Communication & Information Sharing	A review about how safety plans are explained, agreed, and shared with families to ensure expectations are consistently clear.
Adoption Tees Valley	Communication & Information Sharing	Stage 1 complaint responses should sufficiently articulate decisions made and reasons for those. Safeguarding processes and associated terminology are inherently complex, and any lack of clarity can understandably give rise to confusion or concern for families.

Emergency Duty Team	Communication & Information Sharing	Health colleagues via, Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership, will be made aware of the differing responses from professionals (GPs in this case) when referrals are being investigated, and the impact this can have on the child, the family and service delivery.
Social Work Teams	Support to Families	Strengthened recording and communication: Where significant concerns are discussed with families, these should be clearly reflected in case records and followed up in writing where appropriate, to ensure transparency and a shared understanding of the issues being raised. The complaint has reinforced the importance of using formal multi agency forums, such as strategy meetings and conferences, to ensure concerns are tested, shared openly, and subject to appropriate professional challenge rather than relying solely on informal discussion. Clearer explanation of changes in professional assessment: Where professional views evolve over time, this will be explicitly explained to families, including what new information or patterns of concern have contributed to the revised assessment, to reduce the perception of sudden or unexplained changes in position. Practitioners will be reminded of the importance of ensuring parents understand the purpose of processes such as Child in Need and safeguarding escalation, what these frameworks mean in practice, and how parental views are considered within decision making.
Assessment Teams	Communication & Information Sharing, Staff Conduct	When developing Stockton Council's new Family Help Point service, additional check points will be instigated to avoid the incorrect linking of information. For example, police referrals received into the Family Help Point will be triaged before being accepted into social care systems. This additional due diligence will give us the opportunity to check the accuracy of data before accepting a referral. The process and systems around this will be reviewed to understand what improvements can be made to ensure data accuracy.
SEND Placement & Governance	Educational Support	SENDMAP panel feedback processes will be reviewed to ensure that there is no use of unexplained acronyms in correspondence, that referrals are fully and accurately reflected to the panel members and chair, that assumptions are not made beyond the evidence presented, and communication with parents is clear, jargon free and respectful.
Social Work Teams	Communication & Information Sharing	Action has been taken to remind staff to record all types of communications and evidence decision making.

Social Work Teams	Communication & Information Sharing	To ensure that all workers clearly record that information has been shared with parents/carers around the reason for the referral and the purpose of the assessment. It will be communicated to all social workers to ensure that families are provided with information to explain the remit in which there is social care involvement.
-------------------	-------------------------------------	--

Children's Statutory Stage 1 Learnings

Team	Theme	Learnings and actions
Adoption Tees Valley	Support to Families	An assessment process was adversely affected by procedural errors at the school and a lack of adaptability by a commissioned service. ATV have arranged to review the services provided by the commissioned service with Stockton Borough Council's Commissioning Team to prevent further issues occurring. Any future work with that commissioned service will be subject to a satisfactory review.
Adoption Tees Valley	Communication & Information Sharing	Changes have been made to communication about the VMB system to ensure that birth families and adoptive families can have their questions about the VMB platform answered more promptly and are supported by workers with the appropriate knowledge and experience. KiT team will ensure that they do not suggest to family members that questions for the adopters are included in updates for adopted children. The manager has strengthened their understanding of complaints processes and procedures and have taken proactive steps by enrolling in relevant training. Officers will actively engage birth family members when a Keeping in Touch update is sent or when there is an update from an adoptive family. This is through telephone contact, and one to one visits currently but

Children's Statutory Stage 2 Learnings

No further learnings were identified at Stage 2 that had not been determined at Stage 1.

Children's Statutory Stage 3 Learnings

A learning action plan has been agreed in relation to one complaint considered by a children's statutory stage 3 review panel. The following service improvements are being taken forward in relation to this complaint:

1. We are reviewing our decision-making processes to ensure a clear and consistent pathway for accessing support. This includes strengthening the consistency of respite recommendations and establishing a more robust, multi-agency panel to guide and quality-assure decisions.
2. Adoption Tees Vallet are strengthening their support to families which will include a more bespoke plan for meeting the adoptees understanding of the intervention/therapy.
3. We are developing a standardised leaflet regarding child protection strategy meetings to be shared with parents/carers and this will be embedded it into practice workflows, to ensure it is accessible. We will monitor its use through audits and parent feedback.
4. As part of our ongoing service improvement work, we will continue to encourage social workers to provide reports to parents as early as possible.
5. The Emergency Duty Team telephone systems have been updated and, Netcall system is in place. Netcall helps improve clear communication by bringing all customer contact—phone, email and chat—into one platform so information isn't lost or repeated.
6. We are reinforcing expectations of both internal and external practitioners for challenging inaccurate minutes and using formal escalation pathways. This is being taken forward through the Hartlepool & Stockton Safeguarding Children's Partnership Policies and Procedures Group to ensure escalation routes are clearly embedded within all relevant policies and procedures, and it will also be picked up through the Engine Room for ongoing oversight.

15. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

4 of the 8 complaints investigated by the Ombudsman related to children's services, all four complaints were upheld. Two of the complaints related to SEND, two to children's social care. One decision relating to SEND was made a public report and the Ombudsman recommended that the Council write to 99 other parents who may have been affected. The Ombudsman was satisfied with the actions taken by the Council following their decisions being made.

Complaints	Service	Outcome	Findings
Failure to progress a complaint to Stage 3 under the Children's Statutory process	Childrens Social Care	Upheld	The council had investigated at Stage 2 of statutory process but agreed with complainant that they would refer early to the Ombudsman. Ombudsman found that to be fault and recommended we arrange a Stage 3 panel which was held in December 2025
Failure to provide equipment specified in EHCP	SEN	Upheld	Fault found in delay in providing a laptop that the Local Authority said they would provide for a young person with an EHCP. Council apologised.
Related to issues at neighbouring childrens home	Childrens Social Care	Upheld	When receiving complaints about a Council run children's home we will work with residents to resolve matters.
The Council failed to secure special educational provision in the EHCP, and also failed to carry out the annual review of the plan, despite sending letters saying we had done so. 99 others also received annual review completion letters when no meeting or consultation had taken place.	SEN	Upheld	A Public Report was issued by the Ombudsman. The Council failed to secure the special educational provision in the child's EHCP. It also failed to carry out the annual review despite sending letters saying it had done so. This resulted in the child missing out on their special educational provision and caused the family uncertainty, distress and frustration. 99 others also received annual review completion letters when no meeting or consultation had taken place.

16. Timescale Performance

Table 5 – Early Resolution

	2024/2025	2025/2026
Number of complaints received	117	160
Resolved at Early Resolution	84	76
Progressed to Childrens Statutory Process from Early Resolution	2	2

Progressed to Corporate process from Early Resolution	12	3
Uncontactable	5	2
Withdrawn	5	0
Not appropriate for ER	9 (all to Corporate)	21 (4 to Children's Statutory and 17 to Corporate)
Entered at Stage 1 Corporate	Not applicable under new corporate process	56 straight to S1 under new corporate process

Table 6 – Early Resolution Response Rates

Within timescales	Took over 5 Working Days	% resolved within timescales
62	19	77%

3 - Availability of Complainant

16 - Availability of Service

1 - Complexities of Complaint

(1 case selected more than 1 option)

Corporate Complaints Process

Table 7 – Complaint Response times Stage 1

Complaints responded to on time	Complaints responded to late	Complaint not responded to
60	7*	6 - refused 1 - no consent 2 - court proceedings 1 - matters already addressed 2 - another route available 2 complainants uncontactable 1 withdrawn

* One is still ongoing and being led by Hartlepool Borough Council

Table 8 – Complaint Response times Stage 2

Complaints responded to on time	Complaints responded to late
16	3

Childrens Statutory Complaints**Table 9 – Complaint Response times Stage 1**

Complaints responded to within 10 working days	Complaints responded to within extended 20 working days	Reason for extensions/late responses
	1	5 (3 – availability of staff, 2 – complexities of case)

Table 10 – Complaint Response times Stage 2

One case progressed to Stage 2 but was later withdrawn

One case is ongoing at Stage 2.

Complaint Response times - Stage 3

Two complaint that had been received in 2024/25 progressed to Stage 3 in 2025/26. One complaint was led by Redcar and Cleveland Council. No learnings were identified for Stockton Council. The other related to post adoption support and the Stage 3 review panel was held within the defined timescales.

17. Financial Remedies

Financial remedy was made in respect of 2 complaints. The table below shows the amount paid and reasons:

Table 11 – Financial Remedy

Amount of Remedy	Service Area	Reason for remedy
£730.98	Social Work Teams	Reimbursement/Cancellation of Care Fees
£2982 plus	SEND Placement & Governance	Loss of Service

18. Training

There is a training programme in place to ensure that officers investigating complaints have the necessary skills and experience to do so. The complaints manager offers bespoke training sessions each year to officers dealing with complaints under the corporate complaints process and also the children's statutory process that relate to Childrens Services. Training available through the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is also highlighted to officers. A complaint forum is also held each year giving complaint handlers across the Council to come together, share experiences and hear about how we have improved our services following our consideration of complaints.

The Children's Service management team work alongside the Information Governance Team to support collaborative working practices and develop internal processes and monitoring arrangements for complaint handling.

The Council ensures that the complaints procedure is known and understood by all staff, Elected Members, Investigating Officers, Independent Persons, Review Panellists, service users, their carers and representatives.

The Complaints Manager should consider the contributions that these groups can make to training and discussions about the delivery of the complaint's procedure.

Tailored training is available to staff at all levels of the authority. Our training strategy includes a basic E-Learning tool to give officers an introduction to the principles and working of the complaint's procedure, alongside bespoke training sessions to help officers develop the skills they need to handle complaints effectively and efficiently. The training explores the relationships between the complaints procedures and related policies, including confidential reporting whistle blowing and the duties of staff under the authority's Code of Conduct to report improper behaviour and wrong doing. Training also includes raising understanding of the cultural and special needs of individual complainants so that practice can be tailored to suit their needs.

19. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

Each year the Ombudsman publishes its annual letter and summary of statistics on the complaints and enquiries it has received about Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and the decisions made. The Council has received the latest report for the financial year 2025/2026.

Of the 51 complaints and enquiries responded to by the Ombudsman in 2025/26, 7 were progressed to investigation, with all 7 of the complaints being upheld. 4 of the 7 complaints related to Children's Services - two related to SEND and two related to children's social care.

Although the Ombudsman upheld all 4 complaints, in one case the Ombudsman decided not to investigate the matters themselves as they were satisfied that the Council had already accepted the fault they identified and remedied the issues to prevent the faults happening for others. The Ombudsman felt they could not achieve anything further for the complainants by investigating matters.

One decision relating to SEND was made a public report and the Ombudsman recommended that the Council write to 99 other parents who may have been affected.

20. Conclusion

Complaints and feedback are used to better understand the needs of our customers and offer and opportunity to learn and improve. As a direct result of our complaints in 2025/2026 the Council we have improved communication with families, made changes to policy and processes and staff and managers have attended specific training sessions. The Council's Information Governance Team is a centralised team which has responsibility for the coordination of all complaints across the Council. The Complaints Manager holds regular meetings with senior officers in Children's Services to expedite and support complaint resolution. Key priorities for the Information Governance Team working with Children's services next year will be continuation of effective communication channels, ensuring quality and timely responses and in particular:

- **A culture of accountability**, where mistakes are acknowledged and learned from, to ensure services are improved. Addressing issues raised in complaints quickly demonstrates a commitment to improvement.
- **Clearly explaining decisions** to families and documenting the rationale behind them to build trust and reduce complaints.
- **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** Independent reviews of complaints and continuous feedback loops help identify systemic issues and drive service improvements.
- **Effective Complaint Handling:** A fair, transparent, and accessible complaint-handling process will encourage families to raise concerns without fear of reprisal and ensures issues are resolved constructively. These key lessons contribute to building a more responsive, compassionate, and effective children's social care system.

Majella McCartney

Director of Children's Services

6 July 2026

REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

15 JULY 2026

Monitoring of Recommendations – Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

Summary

Members are asked to consider progress updates in relation to the Appreciative Inquiry into Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

Detail

1. The Committee's final report of the Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment was considered by Cabinet in October 2024 who accepted all the recommendations.
2. The benefit of the AI approach has been in the awareness raising of the issues. It has also brought all stakeholders together at events and secured support for agreed objectives and future action.
3. The review culminated in a report setting out 17 recommendations, as follows:

That Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council works collaboratively with partners and key stakeholders to deliver the following shared objectives:

1. Improve attendance

Support schools to improve attendance:

- Encourage school leaders' use of the Attendance Self Evaluation Toolkit to identify what is working well, and areas which could be developed
- Promote an inclusive and relevant curriculum - where a young person wants to attend
- Work with the Team Around the School Service.
- Ensure that schools are equipped to deal with health issues.
- Identify individual barriers to attendance to better target support and intervention with specific reference to young carers

2. Forge positive relationships

Ensure that school culture proactively forges positive relationships between pupils, staff and parent/ carers:

- Promote respectful behaviours from all partners including teachers.
- Involve parents in school life.
- Extend opportunities for enhanced transition.

3. Improve communication

Design, deliver and support parent/carer communication strategies:

- Use new technologies and apps.
- Implement communication strategies early ensuring that good communication is embedded across the school community.
- Consider single points of contact and how best to communicate (not relying on technology alone).
- Offer parent/ carer engagement training for all staff.

4. Identify and support young carers

- Raise awareness of young carer identification and support for pupils.
- Extend the range of opportunities for young carers to link with others socially.

5. Managing emotions

Strengthen environment and opportunities for pupils to manage emotions:

- Engage with the Healthy Schools Programme and Healthy Settings Programme
- Design and delivery of courses to meet pupil need and support parents, with specific reference to:
 - managing behaviour effectively.
 - supporting mental health and wellbeing – especially to de-escalate heightened behaviour or to reduce stress levels.
 - positive parenting skills.
- Strengthen the use of pupil voice to support development of school environments which better support them to manage their emotions.

6. Refine teaching strategies

Further refine teaching strategies to improve lesson enjoyment, encourage speaking and listening and strengthen understanding also ensuring that teaching is tailored to the needs of the individual child.

7. Developing speaking and listening skills

- Ensure the curriculum and school clubs provide opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, for example through debating clubs.
- Raise awareness of regional and national opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills

8. Extend enrichment offer

Strengthen and extend curriculum enrichment offer which better matches pupils needs and interests:

- Extend enrichment to include kick-boxing; boxing; coding; cooking clubs; sports clubs and story.
- Extend and promote the Tees Active Offer to include First Aid, paddle boards (team building) and extend offer within school holidays.
- Engage with the Healthy Schools Programme and Healthy Settings Programme

9. Celebrate achievement

Extend the range of opportunities to celebrate achievement including recognition for out of school activities and engagement with local, regional and national awards and competitions.

10. Enhance curriculum development

Work with partners and labour markets, making more explicit links to future employment.

- Innovate a local curriculum.

11. Strengthen understanding of career pathways

Clarify pathways to careers early in school life:

- Design and delivery of courses to clarify current career pathways for pupils and parents, including vocational careers and options other than traditional routes.
- Employment & Training Hub to link with schools to notify parents of apprenticeships events.
- Promote aspirational/motivational approaches.
- Strengthen links between schools/parents/careers advisor.
- Share best practice regarding "careers" evenings/ events in primary and secondary schools.
- Invite parents into school who have unusual careers.
- Educate parents on opportunities post 16.

12. Strengthen transition arrangements

Ensure that transition arrangements better fits bespoke pupil needs, with specific reference to vulnerable pupils:

- Ensure plans are put in place well in advance of any transition.
- Consider transition to post-16 and post-18/19 as well as primary and secondary and school readiness.
- Consider transition between year groups as appropriate.

13. Enhance skills to respond to special needs

Increase range of opportunities to enhance skills in mainstream schools to respond to Special Educational Needs (SEN), Child Protection Plans (CPP) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA):

- Share best practice of integrating SEN pupils into mainstream schools.
- Promote vocational opportunities.

14. Review behaviour policies

Review behaviour policies to ensure that they are appropriate and proportionate and that inclusion policies align with behaviour policies:

- What happens when a young person is removed from the classroom. Where do they go? What teaching takes place?

15. Embed and extend pastoral support

Embed and extend pastoral support in schools targeted to need.

- Engage with the Healthy Schools Programme and Healthy Settings Programme.

16. Strengthen support for parent/carers to develop language and reading skills

Design and deliver courses and activities to develop reading and language skills.

- Promote Functional English Courses.
- Invite parents/ carers to support reading groups at primary school.
- Promote reading through free Enrichment/after school clubs.
- Ensure parents understand the importance of reading.
- Use school social media to help parents/carers learn
- Ensure materials are easy read/jargon free to involve parent/carers.
- Key messages being shared from antenatal contact.
- Work with Read Easy Charity - helping people learn to read.

17. Review cost of living responses to diminish impact

Review Cost of Living responses to diminish its impact, with specific reference to period poverty, food poverty and school uniform:

- Work with Child Poverty Network.
- Work with schools to better promote/communicate Cost of Living interventions.
- Encourage all schools to 'Poverty Proof the School Day'.

4. Given the breadth of the work, a recommendation lead has been identified for each objective. Now that action plans have been submitted in respect of each recommendation, progress updates will be presented focusing on progress and impact.
5. At the July 2026 meeting, progress updates will be presented in respect of recommendations 4 and 16.

Background Papers

None

Name of Contact Officer: Judy Trainer

Post Title: Democratic Services Manager

Telephone number: 01642 528158

Email Address: judy.trainer@stockton.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1

PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

SCRUTINY MONITORING – PROGRESS UPDATE	
Review:	Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment
Recommendation Lead:	Ellen Parkin

Updates on the progress of actions in relation to agreed recommendations from previous scrutiny reviews are required approximately 12 months after the relevant Select Committee has agreed the Action Plan. Progress updates must be detailed, evidencing what has taken place regarding each recommendation – a grade assessing progress should then be given (see end of document for grading explanation). Any evidence on the impact of the actions undertaken should also be recorded for each recommendation.

Recommendation 4:	Identify and support young carers
Responsibility	Ellen Parkin
Date:	July 2025
Agreed Action:	Research: 1. Ensure a clear system for identification becoming known to schools and the support services 2. Embedding a consistent offer of support for young carers within schools. What does that look like? 3a. Mapping with schools to understand what their knowledge is around young carers and 3b. Identify what support they would need to develop a robust offer of support within their setting. Communication 1. Awareness raising across schools around young carers and the role of schools. 2. Ensure that the profile of AI is raised within Operational Group as a standard agenda item. Events: 1. Young carers conference to be held annually. 2. Raise the agenda and profile of young carers internally.
Agreed Success Measure:	Research: 1. Review current policy and strategy to identify: a. What works well at present b. What needs to be improved Prepare any recommendations. 2. Review current offer: a. What works well at present b. What needs to be improved Prepare any recommendations.

APPENDIX 1

PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

	3. Embedded within Health Schools Criteria- to apply a level of consistency across all schools. 4. Gather school intelligence on what schools know about young carers and related services – prepare overview report 5. Develop a clear map of support for young carers to support them in their setting to: • Have early and increased identification for young carers. • Reduce absences from school for a young carer. • Increase use of young carers card. 6. Increase staff awareness within schools around the role of young carers Communication: • School to embed a clear process to support and identify young carers. • Developed processes or defined offer of support within schools. • Increase in identification of young carers. • Accountability for driving tasks forward. Events: • Increased attendance of educational settings. • Staff have an increased awareness of young carers.
Evidence of Progress: 15 July 2026	Development of young carers card; this has been coproduced with young carers accessing Eastern Ravens service Five task-and-finish group meetings have taken place, each exploring how awareness of young carers within schools can be strengthened. As part of this work, a school questionnaire assessing baseline understanding of young carers' needs was circulated to all Stockton-based schools. Although the response rate was limited, the findings clearly demonstrate a need for further training, which can be delivered through Eastern Ravens.
Assessment of Progress: (include explanation if required) 15 July 2026	2 – On Track Mandatory E-learning which will sit in My Development has been produced Eastern Ravens, as the commissioned young carers support service, report a notable increase in requests from schools for assemblies, staff training, and online delivery. During this period, 15 primary, secondary schools and college's have received interventions, representing a marked increase on the previous year
Evidence of Impact: 15 July 2026	The Strategic Partnership reviews referral information and case studies. It is clear that focused work with Eastern Ravens is increasing schools understanding of young carers and referrals into services continue.

Assessment of Progress Gradings:	1 Fully Achieved	2 On-Track	3 Slipped	4 Not Achieved
----------------------------------	---------------------	---------------	--------------	-------------------

Appreciative Inquiry Recommendation Lead Update

Ellen Parkin

Recommendation 4

Identify and support young carers

Research:

- Ensure a clear system for identification becoming known to schools and the support services
- Embedding a consistent offer of support for young carers within schools. What does that look like?
- 3a. Mapping with schools to understand what their knowledge is around young carers and
- 3b. Identify what support they would need to develop a robust offer of support within their setting.

Communication

- Awareness raising across schools around young carers and the role of schools.
- Ensure that the profile of AI is raised within Operational Group as a standard agenda item.

Events:

- Young carers conference to be held annually.
- Raise the agenda and profile of young carers internally.

Action Taken

Development of young carers card; this has been coproduced with young carers accessing Eastern Ravens service

Five task-and-finish group meetings have taken place, each exploring how awareness of young carers within schools can be strengthened.

As part of this work, a school questionnaire assessing baseline understanding of young carers' needs was circulated to all Stockton-based schools. Although the response rate was limited, the findings clearly demonstrate a need for further training, which can be delivered through Eastern Ravens.

What is Working Well

Mandatory E-learning which will sit in My Development has been produced. This can be accessed by SBC staff.

Eastern Ravens, as the commissioned young carers support service, report a notable increase in requests from schools for assemblies, staff training, and online delivery. During this period, 15 primary, secondary schools and college's have received interventions, representing a marked increase on the previous year

Review of the Strategic Partnership Terms of Reference and regular meetings are being held.

Our Learning

Persistent approach around raising awareness is needed and is the focus of the strategic partnership. We know a strong communications strategy is needed to support this and will be focus over the next term.

It has been recognised that frequent staffing changes within services impact on knowledge, the development of accessible E-Learning for staff will help address this.

The partnership governance structure is being revised to enable a stronger focus on operational delivery. As part of this change, two distinct groups will be established: a strategic group responsible for overall direction and oversight, and an operational group, focused on implementation and day to day activity.

Following an adult review of the pathway between young carers and adult carers services, a review commenced to ensure clearer and smoother transition between the services.

Impact so far

Positively after an event in a college a young person stepped forward and recognised that they are a young carer; given their age support was to access an adult carers assessment. This resulted in the young person being given some money to access activities to allow for some respite from caring.

Ian Ramsey has a dedicated email for communication with Eastern Ravens and identifying young carers.

Any questions?

This page is intentionally left blank

APPENDIX 1

PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

SCRUTINY MONITORING – PROGRESS UPDATE	
Review:	Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment
Recommendation Lead:	Craig Taylor

Updates on the progress of actions in relation to agreed recommendations from previous scrutiny reviews are required approximately 12 months after the relevant Select Committee has agreed the Action Plan. Progress updates must be detailed, evidencing what has taken place regarding each recommendation – a grade assessing progress should then be given (see end of document for grading explanation). Any evidence on the impact of the actions undertaken should also be recorded for each recommendation.

Recommendation 16:	Strengthen support for parent/carer to develop language and reading skills
Responsibility	Craig Taylor
Date:	August 2025
Agreed Action:	Research: 1. Identify existing literacy provision / funding within adult learning sector to support parent / carers 2. Identify and appraise what existing opportunities are currently promoted and delivered through existing school networks including: • Reading Groups • Enrichment/After School Clubs • Social Media 3. Identify and appraise existing marketing / communication / engagement channels currently used to target parent / carers 4. Identify and appraise existing literacy resources / materials being used and shared in current channels to ascertain they are easy read / jargon free in line with expected parent / carer reading level Communication 1. Establish Working Group Membership, Terms of Reference and Objectives 2. Establish engagement opportunities with key school stakeholders to target support to parent / carers 3. Develop formal portfolio of literacy support from all stakeholders to share through networks Events:

APPENDIX 1

PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

	1. Undertake review of Stockton Learning and Skills Service Curriculum Plan to ensure funded adult literacy provision and pathways are in place to support parent / carers Receive curriculum plan and funding approval for any proposed adult literacy provision from primary funding body TVCA 2. Launch promotion campaign for identified priority provision including: - Functional English Courses - Primary School Parent / Carer Reading & Enrichment Groups - Innovative social media literacy activities
Agreed Success Measure:	Research: • Initial Review Complete. As a result, new 'bitesize' (1-3 hour) funding model for literacy, numeracy and digital programmes has been successfully negotiated with TVCA and ringfenced to Local Authority providers. This delivery will enable us to target parents/carers in new innovative, flexible and non-threatening ways for the new 25/26 academic year. • Collaborative working group developed with representation from Schools, Family Hubs and School Support Advisors. Feedback provided highlighted some existing opportunities as well as new potential new opportunities, particularly including Bitesize delivery, which has helped inform new Learning and Skills Service Curriculum Plan for 25/26 Academic Year. • Further work to be conducted to specifically focus on promoting aforementioned literacy provision through these existing/new channels. New links have been made with the Strategic Education Board in July 2025 to help promote offer and review existing communication channels. • Analysis to be specifically undertaken with schools in new academic year to identify literacy resources being used with parents / carers Communication: • Working Group established with representation with from Schools, Family Hubs and School Support Advisors. Group membership to be consistently reviewed and aligned to target actions • Working Group representatives including School Support Advisors and Curriculum Managers to engage and support roll out of new Learning and Skills Service Literacy provision for 25/26 Academic Year. • New Learning and Skills Service prospectus shared with stakeholders. Bespoke bitesize funding and provision co-developed with schools to be branded and shared formally through networks Events: • Curriculum Plan review complete. New 25/26 Delivery Plan approved from funding body TVCA to deliver literacy provision including new 'bitesize' literacy programmes. • Learning and Skills Service marketing campaign commenced 3rd August 2025 including prospectus being delivered to every household in Stockton-on-Tees, alongside accompanying Social Media campaign, and a series of 'Enrolment Day' engagement events.

APPENDIX 1

PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

	Subsequent campaigns to be delivered in partnership for planned programmes with Schools and Family Hubs.
Evidence of Progress: 15 July 2027	13 courses successfully delivered with partners such as Oak Tree Primary, Fairfield Primary, Mandale Mill, Thornaby C of E, St Josephs Primary, High Clarence Primary, and Stockton Family Hubs. New end of course survey launched to measure impact on parent/carer support for their child 26/27 Delivery Plan submission to TVCA to secure 'Raising Aspirations' funding to ensure continued delivery of targeted programmes to specifically support parents/carers in the next academic. Delivery Plan agreed in principle June 2026.
Assessment of Progress: (include explanation if required) 15 July 2026	
Evidence of Impact: 15 July 2026	79 Parents/carers have been supported between September 2025 and June 2026 in short programmes including literacy skills, healthy eating, and arts & crafts for wellbeing 100% of participants agreed that they had seen an improvement in their confidence and wellbeing 89% responded to confirm the course have improved their ability to support their child's learning 89% said they would read with their child more following the course 100% stated the course offered 'great support' and provided 'an excellent course for meeting other parents Community Engagement Team Feedback: "I know the parents have loved it. The timing of the sessions has worked well. Both Tutors are fab and have a great rapport with parents...they tailored the sessions to suit the parents (i.e. more crafts than sat doing theory). It has been lovely to observe and I hope we can get more!" School Feedback: "I would say the enthusiasm from the parents has been fantastic. Each week they have made a point of finding us to update us on the progress of the courses. The parents have loved having a 'double whammy' and camped out in our community room for lunch before they start"

APPENDIX 1
PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

--	--

Assessment of Progress Gradings:	1 Fully Achieved	2 On-Track	3 Slipped	4 Not Achieved
---	----------------------------	----------------------	---------------------	--------------------------

Appreciative Inquiry Recommendation Lead Update

Craig Taylor

Adult Learning and Skills Manager

Recommendation 16

Strengthen Support for Parent / Carers to Develop Language and Reading Skills

Initial Key Requests:

- Design and deliver courses and activities to develop reading and language skills
- Promote Functional English courses
- Use school social media to help parents/carers learn
- Ensure parents understand the importance of reading

Recommendation 16

Strengthen Support for Parent / Carers to Develop Language and Reading Skills

Subsequent Requests:

- Design and deliver courses to support wider school engagement barriers such as health, wellbeing and nutrition
- Specifically measure the impact of programmes on parents/carers
- Secure medium-term funding to ensure parents/carers continue to be supported beyond the current academic year

Action Taken

August 2025 – June 2026

- Collaborative Working Group developed with representation and input from Learning and Skills Service, Family Hubs, Schools / School Support Advisors
- Identify and appraise existing opportunities currently promoted through existing school networks (e.g. Reading Groups, Enrichment/Afterschool Clubs, Social Media)
- Undertook review to identify existing literacy provision / funding within the adult learning sector to support parent and carers
- Developed new curriculum plan including not just literacy support, but wider health, wellbeing and nutrition support to tackle issues which affect pupil attendance and development

Action Taken

August 2025 – June 2026

Those topics included:

- Literacy Skills to Improve Your Child's Learning
- Arts and Crafts to Improve Wellbeing
- Parent and Child Story Books (Arts and Crafts developing vocabulary)
- Cookery - Healthy Eating and Nutrition
- Early Intervention to support learning through play (phonics focus)
- ESOL integration to address language barriers
- Money Management to help develop stable homes / routines
- Building Positive Relationships Skills (Conflict / Behaviour Management)
- Supporting Digital Communications
- First Steps into learning and employment

What is Working Well

Successful Courses

- Literacy Skills to Improve Your Child's Learning
- Arts and Crafts to Improve Wellbeing (Christmas Eve Boxes / Bear Hunt)
- Parent and Child Story Books (Arts and Crafts developing vocabulary)
- Cookery - Healthy Eating and Nutrition

What is Working Well

Partnership Working

- SBC Family Hubs and Community Engagement Team
- Schools Supported: Oak Tree Primary
Fairfield Primary
Mandale Mill
Thornaby C of E
St Joeseph's Primary
High Clarence Primary School

Impact So Far

Positive Feedback

- 13 courses successfully delivered with 79 Parents / Carers supported
- 100% of participants agreed that they had seen an improvement in their confidence and wellbeing
- 89% reported the course improved their ability to support their child's learning
- 89% said they would read with their child more following the course
- 100% stated the course offered 'great support' and provided 'an excellent course for meeting other parents'

Impact So Far

Partnership Feedback

Community Engagement Team:

“I know the parents have loved it. The timing of the sessions has worked well. Both Tutors are fab and have a great rapport with parents...they tailored the sessions to suit the parents (i.e. more crafts than sat doing theory). It has been lovely to observe and I hope we can get more!”

School Feedback:

“I would say the enthusiasm from the parents has been fantastic. Each week they have made a point of finding us to update us on the progress of the courses. The parents have loved having a ‘double whammy’ and camped out in our community room for lunch before they start”

Next Steps

September 2026 – July 2027

- Funding secured to specifically continue to support parents/carers into 26/27
- New academic year for the Learning and Skills Service commences September 2026
- Summer marketing and engagement campaign commenced July 2026
- Continue to engage with Schools / School Support Team / Family Hubs to further promote and develop the offer



Any Questions?

This page is intentionally left blank



Scrutiny Review of Additionally Resourced SEND Provision

Children and Young People Select Committee, September 2026

Contents

Select Committee – Membership..... 3

Acknowledgements 3

Foreword 4

 Cllr Carol Clark, Chair4

Original Brief..... 5

1.0 Executive Summary..... 8

 Key Findings and Conclusions 9

 Recommended 9

 That Cabinet note the contents of the report..... 9

Appendix 10

2.0 Summary of Evidence 10

 Background 10

 SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Service 11

Glossary of Terms 23

Select Committee – Membership

Councillor Carol Clark (Chair)

Councillor Barbara Inman (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Bob Cook

Councillor Ray Godwin

Councillor Jack Miller

Councillor Sufi Mubeen

Councillor Emily Tate

Councillor Sally Ann Watson

Councillor Katie Weston

Acknowledgements

The Select Committee thank the following contributors to this review:

Elisha Dyball - Strategic Lead - SEND Practice

Stockton Parent Carer Liaison Forum

North East and North Cumbria ICB

St John the Baptist Primary School

Billingham South Primary

North Shore Academy

Bishopsgarth Academy

Contact Officer

Judy Trainer, Democratic Services Manager

Tel: 01642 528158

Email: judy.trainer@stockton.gov.uk

Foreword

TBA

Cllr Carol Clark, Chair



Councillor Carol Clark
Chair – CYP Select Committee



Councillor Barbara Inman
Vice-Chair – CYP Select Committee

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

This work aligns with the Council's priorities to ensure that all children have a bright future and a sense of belonging and giving children the best possible start in life, this is greater achieved when our children are educated and build connections within the borough. It aligns with the council vision to have a sustainable community where everyone belongs and is valued.

The review supports Stockton on Tees Plan Priority One – The best start in life to achieve big ambitions and key move – Giving children and young people the best possible start, in an inclusive community where everyone can thrive.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Since 2017, Stockton on Tees have had an enhanced mainstream school (EMS) model in place which supports children who require additional support than normally available in mainstream when they have a particular area of need i.e. a cognition and learning difficulty. In recent years, these placements have been overpopulated (for example for children who have language and communication needs) and underutilised in other areas (HI/VI & Physical Needs), resulting in high levels of high needs funding been distributed to settings without the children in situ to receive support.

In October 2024, the Council began a consultation to repurpose its EMS provision into Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) and SEND Units. This would allow for the flexibility to meet the demand for placement, give parents the right to choose these placements for their children and also bring the provision in Stockton on Tees in line with Department for Education guidance by registering the provisions as resourced provision.

Additionally resourced provisions in mainstream are designed to support children with SEND who require more tailored support but do not require a place in a special school.

In December 2024, the government requested that all Councils begin to consider creating resourced provision within their mainstream's schools, with an announcement of further funding awaiting in Spring 2025. This new funding can be used to adapt classrooms to be more accessible for children with SEND, and to create specialist facilities within mainstream schools that can deliver more intensive support adapted to suit the pupils' needs and this coincides with the work already in development in Stockton.

It is anticipated that creation of these provisions will reduce the number of children who are attending schools out of the area to have their needs met, this reduces the reliance on community transport and ensures that our children can foster a peer group within the local community, also potentially reducing future reliance on social and welfare services, such as housing or adult social care. It is also anticipated that placing children in the right provision at the earliest opportunity will to some extent reduce suspensions and exclusions and increase attendance within the borough.

Sustainable investment in inclusive school facilities future proofs educational infrastructure, creating accessible environments that benefit not just children with SEND, but the wider school community, leading to more inclusive, economically resilience and sustainable educational settings.

The Council is currently spending £1.9m on EMS provisions for 209 places in Stockton schools. The agreed plan is to transfer these into SEN Units/ARPs and creating up to 100 additional places for children across the borough. There has been an agreement to invest £730k per year (assuming all placements are full) from high needs funding in addition to current spend. This will be in place from September 2025.

This will ultimately save £5.3m of High Needs funding per year (assuming all places are filled).

	2023-24 £m	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m
Unmitigated Cumulative DSG deficit	3.57	5.31	11.51	21.24	34.84
Increase capacity in SBC mainstream prim/sec schools (cumulative savings).		(1.29)	(6.55)	(13.35)	(23.64)
% of overall deficit					67.8%

Cost and savings based on an additional 100 places:

Financial Year	2025/26 (part yr)	2026/27 (full yr)	2027/28 (full yr)	Total
Cost of 100 places in Independent Special #	£3.5m	£6m	£6m	£15.5m
Additional cost of 100 places in SEN Units/ARPs	£430k	£730k	£730k	£1.89m
Annual saving against unmitigated forecast	£3.07m	£5.27m	£5.27m	£13.61m

Based on average £60k p.a.

** Assume all places filled from September 2025

In January 2025, Cabinet received a report detailing the outcome of consultation relating to increasing capacity in mainstream schools within Stockton-on-Tees, by transferring current Enhanced Mainstream Schools (EMS) to Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) and SEN Units. The consultation was largely positive and Cabinet:

1. Supported the recommendation to transfer Enhanced Mainstream Schools to ARP and SEN Units from September 2025.
2. Agreed to invest up to an additional £730,000 p.a. into these provisions from the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.
3. Agreed to allocate £85,000 from the High Needs provision capital allocations for investment in the SEND Unit at Preston Primary School to increase capacity from 8 to 16 places in September 2025.

A number of schools have applied to be additionally resourced provision. However, interest from the secondary sector has been disappointing and some secondary schools with EMS have chosen not to transfer into ARPS, meaning there are less secondary schools involved in the process.

The purpose of this scrutiny will be to receive update on the implementation of the transfer from September 2025 and engage with the secondary schools to secure additional applications from the secondary sector and fully understand the barriers to the schools becoming ARPS, identifying ways in which we may overcome this to secure the provision required for children and young people in the borough.

Not having a full complement of secondary schools taking up the places risks undermining the effectiveness and reach of this key element of the local SEND Strategy and means that there may be implications for children upon transition to secondary that there may not be the same type or level of support available to them, potentially creating pressure on special school places and missed opportunities for inclusive education in mainstream settings.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- How will the transfer improve the outcomes for children with special educational needs across our Borough?
- How does the project support the Council's vision and strategy for SEND provision?
- What does DfE Guidance tell us?
- Will the changes ensure that there is sufficient and suitable educational provision for SEND pupils in both primary and secondary?
- What are the barriers to secondary schools becoming additionally resourced provision?
- How can the number of ARP placements in secondary be increased?
- To what extent do families and schools understand the changes and how will they be engaged during implementation?
- Can lessons be learnt from the primary ARP model and the higher uptake?
- Is the funding provided to ARP adequate and sustainable for them to provide the support needed?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, schools, parents, other stakeholders.

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

Five months:

Scope and Project Plan – 11 June 2025

Evidence gathering – June to October 2025

Draft Recommendations – 12 November 2025

Final Report – 17 December 2025

Submission to Cabinet – 15 January 2026

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

Legislative background

DfE Guidance – SEND Code of Practice 2015

Review of Enhanced Mainstream Schools – Consultation Document October 2024

Cabinet reports – September 2024 and January 2025

Consultation responses from parents, schools and partner agencies

ARP Policy May 2025

Service Level Agreement – ARP

Options Appraisal – December 2024

Local Area Inclusion Plan December 2024

New information:

Views of Headteachers, specifically those in secondary schools

Views of parents

Views of partner agencies such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy

Records of monitoring

Comparisons from other local authority models.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report summarises the findings of the Children and Young People Select Committee's scrutiny review of Additionally Resourced SEND Provision.
- 1.2. At the outset of the review a number of schools had applied to be additionally resourced provision. However, interest from the secondary sector had been disappointing and some secondary schools with Enhanced Mainstream Schools (EMS) provision had chosen not to transfer into Additionally Resourced Provision (ARPs).
- 1.3. The purpose of the scrutiny was therefore to receive an update on the implementation of the transfer from September 2025 and engage with the secondary schools to encourage additional applications from the secondary sector. The Select Committee wanted to fully understand the barriers to schools becoming ARPs and identify ways that that these could be overcome to secure the provision required for children and young people in the Borough.
- 1.4. The Committee were mindful that not having a full complement of secondary schools taking up the places risked undermining the effectiveness and reach of this key element of the local Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy and meant that there might be implications for children upon transition to secondary. For example, there might not be the same type or level of support available to them, potentially creating pressure on special school places and missed opportunities for inclusive education in mainstream settings.
- 1.5. The Committee agreed the following key lines of enquiry for their work:
 - How will the transfer improve the outcomes for children with special educational needs across our Borough?
 - How does the project support the Council's vision and strategy for SEND provision?
 - What does DfE Guidance tell us?
 - Will the changes ensure that there is sufficient and suitable educational provision for SEND pupils in both primary and secondary?
 - What are the barriers to secondary schools becoming additionally resourced provision?
 - How can the number of ARP placements in secondary be increased?
 - To what extent do families and schools understand the changes and how will they be engaged during implementation?
 - Can lessons be learnt from the primary ARP model and the higher uptake?
 - Is the funding provided to ARP adequate and sustainable for them to provide the support needed?
- 1.6. Contributions were obtained from Council Officers, Stockton Parent Carer Liaison Forum, North East and North Cumbria ICB and Stockton-on-Tees Primary and Secondary Schools.
- 1.7. Early in the scrutiny review, the Government announced that it would be publishing a White Paper outlining the intended approach to SEND reform. The announcement came amid increasing calls for action regarding the rising number of registered SEND pupils and the associated challenges faced by councils. Following the announcement, the Select Committee decided to pause the review to await the detail of the White Paper.
- 1.8. In May 2026 the Select Committee received a presentation on the White Paper and considered the implications for their work. The Select Committee agreed to summarise the evidence

collected and key findings and advise Cabinet that they would be concluding their work given that the Government was now making plans to direct all schools to have Inclusion Hubs.

Key Findings and Conclusions

- There has been a rise in demand for SEND provision, including increasing EHCP numbers, with a projected further 9% increase, placing ongoing pressure on the system
- Parents have low confidence in mainstream secondary provision, with 90% expressing concern that needs cannot be met without additional specialist support. Feedback from families highlights insufficient capacity, limited choice and gaps in provision, alongside practical barriers such as distance and transport. Parents report significant concerns about children's wellbeing, including anxiety, school refusal and risk of harm where needs are not adequately met, and strongly favour smaller, specialist or adapted environments. There is a consistent call from parents for a more flexible, needs-led system, with greater emphasis on tailored support, continuity, and meaningful parental involvement
- The ARP model significantly increased local capacity, with 155 additional places created across primary and secondary phases, improving the availability of SEND provision within mainstream settings
- The development of ARPs was strongly collaborative, involving the Council, schools, health partners and families
- Early evidence indicates that ARPs are enabling better outcomes for children and more inclusive practice
- Schools report that ARPs and inclusive approaches are having a positive impact on pupil outcomes, including improved attendance, engagement, independence and achievement
- Inclusive practice is also benefiting the wider school community, with improved staff skills, stronger school ethos and greater acceptance of diversity
- Site visits confirmed that inclusive, well-led school environments can deliver strong outcomes, even with high proportions of SEND and disadvantaged pupils
- The national SEND White Paper introduces significant future changes, including a shift away from ARPs and SEND units towards school-led inclusion hubs and a stronger universal offer. These reforms will require the Council to adapt its current model

1.9. Overall, the evidence shows that the move from EMS to ARPs and SEND Units has been a positive and necessary step in modernising SEND provision in Stockton-on-Tees. It has created additional capacity, improved local access to education, and strengthened inclusive practice within mainstream schools. Feedback from school visits and early indications suggest better outcomes for children and a more sustainable financial position for the local authority.

1.10. Looking ahead, the Council will need to adapt its current model to respond to national SEND reforms, which may require further transformation towards inclusion-focused approaches within mainstream schools. Ongoing focus on early intervention, workforce capacity, and co-production with families will be critical to ensuring that all children with SEND receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

Recommended

1.11. That Cabinet note the contents of the report.

2.0 Summary of Evidence

Background

- 2.1. Since 2017, Stockton-on-Tees had an enhanced mainstream school (EMS) model in place which supported children who required additional assistance than normally available in mainstream schools when they had a particular area of need i.e. a cognition and learning difficulty. In recent years, these placements had been overpopulated (for example for children with language and communication needs) and underutilised in other areas (HI/VI & Physical Needs), resulting in high levels of high needs funding been distributed to settings without the children in situ to receive support. The EMS review confirmed that the EMS model was oversubscribed and revealed that the admissions criteria was not reflective of current cohort, funding was not enough to meet need, and the model was too rigid in meeting needs.
- 2.2. In October 2024, the Council began a consultation to repurpose its EMS provision into Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) and SEND Units. This was to allow for flexibility to meet the demand for placements, give parents the right to choose these placements for their children and also bring the provision in the Borough in line with Department for Education guidance by registering the provisions as resourced provision. The Council consulted with service users, with 64% of responses strongly agreeing with proposals and 19% agreeing. Comments received included:

Parent: "I strongly agree we that need this in Stockton; it is so important that my child attends a provision that meets their needs."

Governor: "In my opinion, there is a significant shortage of provision to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children in the borough."

School: "Schools are really underfunded and overstretched. We want to support our children, but we don't have the environment, skills or resource to do so. Some children need more."

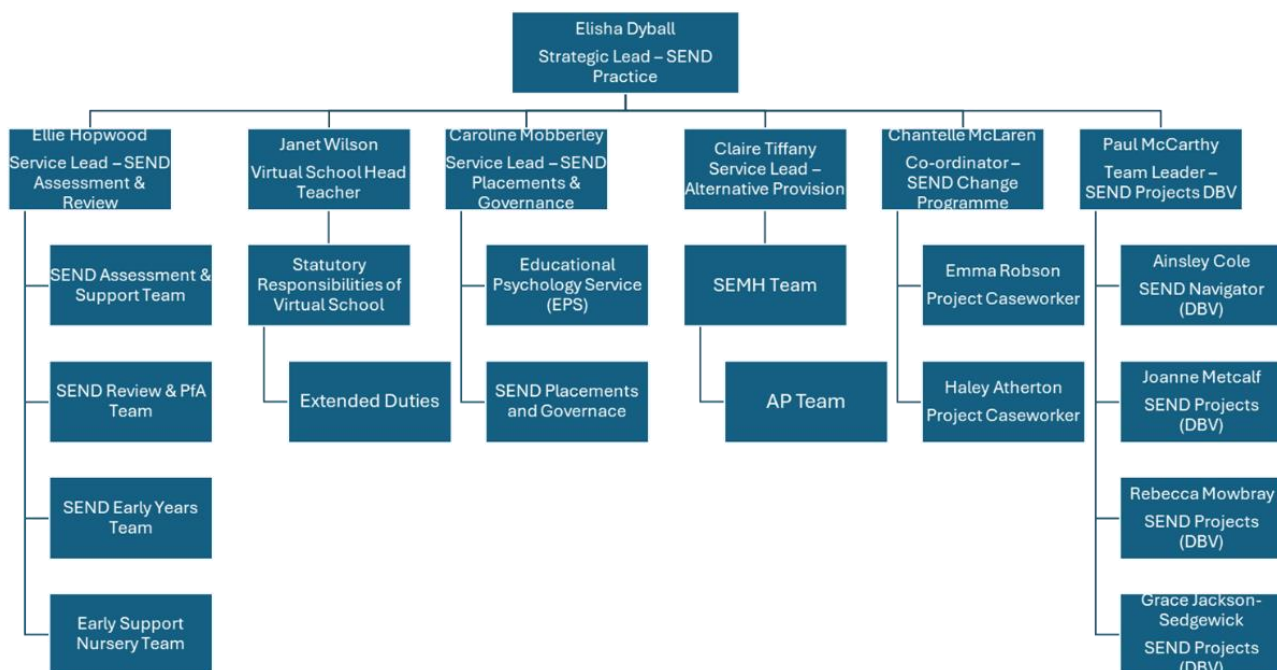
- 2.3. In December 2024, the Government requested that all Councils begin to consider creating resourced provision within their mainstream schools, with an announcement of further funding awaiting in Spring 2025. Additionally, the Department for Education (DfE) announced a £740 million investment to create 10,000 new specialist places for pupils with SEND, focusing on mainstream schools. This funding will help create more inclusive environments and address the gap in provision, with a particular focus on SEN units and resourced provisions within mainstream schools. This coincided with the work already in development across the Borough.
- 2.4. In January 2025, Cabinet received a report detailing the outcome of consultation relating to increasing capacity in mainstream schools within Stockton-on-Tees, by transferring current Enhanced Mainstream Schools (EMS) to Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) and SEN Units. Cabinet supported the recommendation to transfer Enhanced Mainstream Schools to ARP and SEN Units from September with an investment of up to an additional £730,000 per annum into these provisions from the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- 2.5. The Council was spending £1.9m on EMS provisions for 209 places in Stockton schools. The agreed plan was to transfer these into SEN Units/ARPs and create up to 100 additional places for children across the Borough, with an additional investment of £730,000 per year (assuming all placements were full) from high needs funding from September 2025. It was estimated that

this would ultimately save £5.3m of High Needs funding per year (assuming all places were filled).

- 2.6. Additionally resourced provisions in mainstream were designed to support children with SEND who required more tailored support but did not require a place in a special school. It was anticipated that the creation of these provisions would reduce the number of children attending schools out of the area to have their needs met, thereby reducing reliance on community transport and ensuring that children could foster a peer group within the local community, also potentially reducing future reliance on social and welfare services such as housing or adult social care. It was also anticipated that placing children in the right provision at the earliest opportunity would to some extent reduce suspensions and exclusions and increase attendance within the Borough. Sustainable investment in inclusive school facilities would future proof educational infrastructure, creating accessible environments that benefit not just children with SEND, but the wider school community, leading to more inclusive, economically resilient and sustainable educational settings.
- 2.7. The Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP) requires that all mainstream schools provide high quality provision, embedding inclusive practice throughout and that there will be sufficient educational placements to meet the current and future needs of children and young people in the local area.
- 2.8. At the time of the scrutiny review there were 4,216 children aged 3–16 registered as SEND Support in Stockton-on-Tees and 2,650 children had an EHC Plan aged 0–25.

SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Service

- 2.9. The service is responsible for executing the duties laid out in The Children and Families Act 2014 which states that councils are responsible for the following:
- Identification, Assessment and Planning for Children and Young People 0-25 with SEND
 - Ensuring sufficient and suitable SEND and AP placements
 - Coordinate statutory Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC) Needs Assessments, ensuring compliance with legal duty
 - Working with health, social care and parents collaboratively to co-produce services that meet the needs of the local area
 - Ensuring that services are accessible to families, publishing a clear and informative local offer



ARPs and SEND Units – Primary

- 2.10. To access provision, children had to have an EHC Plan, places are additional to a school's PAN (Pupil Agreed Number) and parents are able to preference the provision. Funding is in additional to the recommended funding from DFE.
- 2.11. The Admissions criteria was co-produced with schools and placements opened September 2025.

Primary	SEND Unit	
Communication and Interaction & Cognition and Learning		64
St John the Baptist CE Primary School	SEND Unit	24
Preston Primary School	SEND Unit	16
Hardwick Green Primary Academy	SEND Unit	16
High Clarence Primary Academy	SEND Unit	8
Yarm Primary School	SEND Unit	8
Pentland Primary School	SEND Unit	8
Communication and Interaction & Social, Emotional and Mental Health.		16
Bowesfield Primary School	SEND Unit	8
Vacant		8

Primary	ARP	
Area of Need	Type of provision	Total Places
Communication and Interaction		60
Junction Farm Primary School	ARP	10
Rosebrook Primary School	ARP	10
Preston Primary School	ARP	10 (From January 2026)
Priors Mill CE Primary School	ARP	10
Vacant	ARP	10
Cognition and Learning		50
Myton Park Primary School	ARP	10
Billingham South Community Primary School	ARP	15
St John the Baptist CE Primary School	ARP	20
Social, Emotional and Mental Health		30
St Marks CE Primary School	ARP	6
Pentland Primary School	ARP	10
Vacant	ARP	10
Sensory and Physical		15
Billingham South Community Primary School	ARP	5
St John the Baptist CE Primary School	ARP	10
Speech and Language	ARP	
Mill Lane Primary School		10 (TBC)

ARPs and SEND Units Secondary

Secondary	ARP	
Area of Need	Type of provision	Total Places
Communication and Interaction		50
Northfield School	ARP	10
North Shore Academy	ARP	10
Thornaby Academy	ARP	10
Vacant	ARP	20
Cognition and Learning	ARP	40
Outwood Academy Bishopsgarth	ARP	25
Vacant	ARP	15
Sensory and Physical	ARP	10
Outwood Academy Bishopsgarth	ARP	5
Northfield School - HI/VI	ARP	5

Evidence from North East and North Cumbria ICB on ARP Implementation

- 2.12. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council worked closely with schools, stakeholders, parents and carers to transform the existing Enhanced Mainstream School (EMS) model into Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs). This collaborative approach resulted in the creation of 155 additional school places, including 60 in secondary schools and the remainder in primary settings, complementing existing ARP provision across the borough.
- 2.13. The introduction of ARPs, implemented from September 2025, ensured that children and young people with SEND were supported in the right place, at the right time, and as close to home as

possible. This expansion significantly increased the number of school places within the Borough to meet a wider range of needs and strengthened inclusive practice across mainstream education.

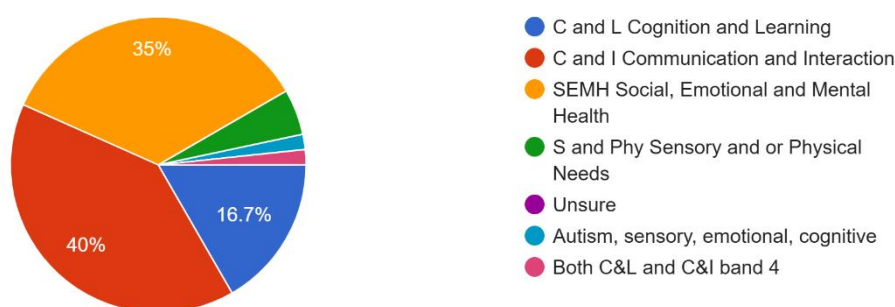
- 2.14. The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) was fully sighted on the development of the ARP programme, which was reflected in jointly produced strategic documents including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF). Strengths of the approach included earlier identification of need, particularly in primary settings, increased local provision for younger children, and improved pathways of support. Rising levels of need, including an increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in the early years, meant that children's needs were met more effectively as they entered school, while established pathways into health services remained unaffected.
- 2.15. Partners maintained existing pathways into health provision, with continued oversight through the JSNA, SEND Development Group and SEND Strategic Group. Any emerging risks or issues identified by the ICB were escalated through these governance structures via the Strategic Lead for SEND, ensuring a coordinated and responsive approach.
- 2.16. Members noted the scale of the additional provision and expressed confidence that the ARP programme would be able to meet the needs of children with SEND more effectively within mainstream schools. However, it was recognised that a key challenge was ensuring that children were placed on the most appropriate pathways at the right time so they received the support they needed as early as possible.
- 2.17. Officers highlighted that funding arrangements, including the £730,000 annual investment, had been co-produced with stakeholders to reflect the actual costs of delivery and would be kept under annual review. Robust performance measures were established, supported by dedicated capacity to monitor provision, including regular visits to schools. Members also noted an anticipated 9% increase in demand for places and emphasised the importance of continuing to support mainstream schools over the following 12–18 months, particularly as meeting needs earlier could reduce demand for more specialist provision later in a child's educational journey.

Evidence from Stockton Parent/Carer Liaison Forum

- 2.18. Views were sought from parent carers on the current situation regarding secondary ARPs in Stockton. Sixty responses were received, of which 83% were from parents of children with an EHCP. Ninety percent of respondents expressed concerns that their child's needs could not be met in a standard mainstream school. The child's /young person's need were identified as:

What is your child/young persons primary need

60 responses



- 2.19. In response to the question, “What are your current feelings about secondary education, thinking about your individual child’s needs being met?”, the feedback showed overwhelming concern and a lack of confidence in the secondary SEND system. Although examples of effective practice were cited, the dominant message was that mainstream provision was insufficient, specialist capacity was too limited, and families feared serious negative outcomes for their children without significant changes to provision, resourcing and approach.
- 2.20. Key themes from the comments received included a strong preference for specialist or small-scale provision, with many parents feeling that mainstream secondary schools could not meet needs. There were repeated calls for smaller class sizes, higher staff-to-pupil ratios, and specialist or SEN units (ARPs/bases). Respondents also highlighted insufficient local provision and limited availability, including too few SEND and SEMH placements, a limited number of schools offering ARPs or SEN bases, and geographical barriers such as distance and transport difficulties.
- 2.21. Parents reported high levels of anxiety, fear, and distress, with concerns focusing on deterioration in their child’s mental health, the risk of school refusal, anxiety or disengagement, and fears of bullying, exploitation, or harm. Mainstream schools were seen as unsuitable or overwhelming, with a common perception that secondary schools were too large, busy, and overstimulating. Additional concerns included a lack of individualised support, one-size-fits-all approaches, gaps in SEND support and poor implementation, difficulties in transition from primary to secondary education, and concerns about inclusion in practice. Parents feared significant consequences if needs were not met.
- 2.22. In response to the question, “Why is having additional choice for your child’s education important?”, the feedback showed that additional choice was fundamentally about ensuring appropriate, needs-led education rather than increasing options for its own sake. Parents wanted a broader and more flexible system of provision that enabled children with SEND to access education safely, maintain wellbeing, and achieve their potential, rather than being placed in unsuitable settings with negative consequences.
- 2.23. Key themes included the need for provision that matched individual needs, the importance of tailored and flexible support, and a desire for children to thrive rather than simply cope. Parents emphasised mental health and wellbeing, equity and fairness, and the importance of avoiding negative outcomes such as exclusion or lost education. They also highlighted the value of

specialist and smaller environments, the importance of parental insight and involvement, and the need for continuity of support. Additional comments highlighted significant dissatisfaction with the current SEND secondary system, particularly in relation to lack of provision, limited flexibility, and barriers to accessing support, with calls for a more inclusive, better planned, and needs-led system to improve outcomes for children and families.

- 2.24. Other comments invited highlighted significant dissatisfaction with the current SEND secondary system, particularly around lack of provision, limited flexibility, and barriers to support. Parent called for a better planned, more inclusive and needs-led system, with greater specialist capacity, improved mainstream support, and clearer guidance, to prevent poor outcomes for children and families.

School Presentations

- 2.25. Kerry Coe, Headteacher, St John the Baptist Primary reported that the school had two ARPs with a total of 30 places, a 24-place SEND unit. It had also taken in children excluded or at risk of exclusion and ran a virtual school hub for 32 children who had been in care.
- 2.26. She challenged the narrative that some children were too difficult to include. The new provision had resulted in improved progress and attainment although the impact on overall school performance could be an issue for some schools, and for some children it could take a long time to see small progress.
- 2.27. Another barrier was that some children had multiple, overlapping and complex needs. However, barriers to learning needed to be removed and children with SEND needed to be able to access activities the same way as other pupils. Funding was not considered to be a barrier and schools were challenged to think more creatively about how they used their funding.
- 2.28. The presentation from Kerry Coe, Headteacher, St John the Baptist Primary outlined:

Defining Our Moral Purpose as:

- Every decision is rooted in doing what's best for children
- We are driven by equity, compassion, and ambition and most of all LOVE
- Education as a tool for transformation
- Inclusive practices in teaching and leadership
- Celebrating diversity and removing barriers

The strategy for Improving Outcomes included:

- High-quality teaching and learning
- Targeted support and interventions
- Data-informed decision making
- Staff development and wellbeing
- Parental involvement
- Multi-agency

Our Wider Officer: Inclusion in Action:

- Every child deserves access to enriching experiences — regardless of background or need.
- Trips and experiences are free or heavily subsidised
- ARP pupils are included in all mainstream opportunities
- Examples : ice skating, farm visits, theatre, sleepovers, residential

Impact so far:

- Improved progress and attainment for individuals
- Positive pupil voice and engagement
- Staff reflections on inclusive practice
- Strong parent feedback
- Positive impact on mainstream pupils

Barriers:

- Complexity - Many pupils present with multiple and overlapping needs, including often unmet SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health), which make daily school life a challenge — for them, staff, and peers
- Data vs. Humanity - These children may impact headline data, but they are not just numbers. Their stories matter. Their progress may not always be linear, but it is meaningful
- Beyond Categories - Pupils don't fit neatly into boxes. We must move beyond labels and see the whole child.
- We must challenge the narrative that some children are too difficult to include

Call to Action:

- Encouraging reflection and collaboration
- Identify and remove barriers
- Funding – to suit the needs of the child
- Invest in supporting parents
- Reaffirming collective responsibility

2.28. Andrew Murphy, Senior Executive Principal at Northern Education Trust and former head of North Shore Academy which has a communication and interaction ARP, encouraged every school to have an ARP in their building as it added so much to school life. He advised that parents had reported a real difference in their relationships with their children at home and that children were succeeding under the new provision. It had also made a huge difference to the children that were not yet diagnosed but needed extra support. He commented that it was not just about GCSEs, but the life chances and making sure those children could communicate and add to society.

2.29. The presentation from Andrew Murphy, Senior Executive Principal, North Shore Academy outlined:

- ARPs across the Northern Education Trust
- The ARP at North Shore was referred to as the “Hub” – a protected area of the school

Why we have said yes to an ARP?

- We recognised that we need to adapt in response to the levels of need coming through our doors
- We needed to have a provision that promotes inclusivity and can adapt to meet the needs of our complex EHCP students
- We wanted a space that bridges the gap between school and home. A mainstream school that caters for students who may have not been successful or be able to transition to secondary school
- A space that provides their key person and an opportunity to regulate in a safe space
- We wanted these students to be successful, to achieve GCSEs, to develop life skills and to be able to go to their local school
- We wanted the resources and funding to be able to develop expertise and provide appropriate ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) support working with Stockton Local Authority to develop and improve

What does it bring to our Academy and Trust?

- It brings inclusion
- It develops our CPD (Continuing Professional Development), our expertise, our experiences
- It promotes a school wide commitment to HQT (Highly Qualified Teachers), adaptive practice and meeting student's needs – being a core part of the school ethos
- It brings a richer, more diverse learning environment
- It allows NSA (North Shore Academy) students to fully accept inclusion and potential differences
- It upskills our staff to use expertise from our Hub into mainstream lessons

Opening the Hub doors...

- It allows the expertise we develop and space we have created to access other vulnerable students in our academy
- We promote social inclusion - so hub students regularly interact with other students

Enrichment/ PFA (Preparing for Adulthood)

- SEND / Hub specific enrichment
- Trips

The Impact

- One student had never attended a PE lesson at primary school – he now attends
- One student couldn't change himself – he now is independent in changing for PE
- One student refused technology lessons – it took a while, but he now goes
- One student refused to engage with other students – he now has friends
- One student hid under the table in transition – he finished year 7 at 98% attendance
- One student would bolt home to play on this play station – he now stays for enrichment twice a week
- One student never received praise in an educational setting but now floods the room with positive praise cards
- One student wouldn't leave the safety of the Hub but now goes to meet friends at social time
- One student would never give themselves credit but now is understanding he can overcome challenges he couldn't in the past
- One student will now attend 1:1 maths tutoring with a separate member of staff

Challenges – Things to consider

- NSA go through a formal EHCP consultation process for students being named in our ARP
- It is really important that we (NSA and Stockton LA) get the right students named
- Too complex needs “unsettles”, consumes resources, impacts on the success of other students
- Early intervention before barriers escalate
- Parent/ carers, LA and setting to work together
- Clarity and strong parental engagement from the start is crucial with a clear understanding of what our expectations are and what provision will be in place
- In the current “SEND crisis” the importance of innovation and shared success
- We constantly need to develop and evaluate our inclusive practice so it becomes a thread across everything that we do

Observations from Member site visits

North Shore Academy

- 2.29. The visit included a tour of SEND facilities, including The Bridge, ARP Hub and Abbey Hill classrooms, alongside observation of English lessons. Discussions with staff highlighted the

strong benefits of collaborative working between specialist and mainstream provision, enabling pupils with additional needs to access inclusive education and aspire to GCSE outcomes. Conversations with pupils demonstrated improved attendance, resilience and pride in achievement. The Bridge was used to transition pupils back into the school in a non-threatening environment.

- 2.30. The school presented as calm, inclusive and well-structured, with pupils engaged and keen to learn. Inclusivity was clearly embedded, with SEND pupils fully integrated into mainstream classes and supported through tailored EHCPs and Individual Learning Plans. Practical approaches, such as the Red/Amber/Green system, effectively removed barriers to participation.
- 2.31. A strong culture of praise was evident across the school, with recognition systems encouraging confidence, motivation and a sense of achievement among pupils.
- 2.32. Despite a high proportion of SEND and disadvantaged pupils, the school maintained high expectations and strong outcomes. Leadership was clearly focused on a child-centred, outcomes-driven approach, with inclusive practices benefiting all pupils.
- 2.33. Educational attainment was extremely good given the high numbers of SEND and pupil premium students with 55% of pupils achieving a 4 and above in English and Maths.
- 2.34. Overall, the visit was highly positive, with the school providing an inspiring and supportive learning environment for its pupils. A strongly inclusive approach to integrating SEND pupils into school life was evident.

St John the Baptist Primary

- 2.35. The school demonstrated a strong culture of inclusivity, where all pupils were clearly valued equally. Children with complex needs were very well integrated into the school community and supported effectively.
- 2.36. The relatively large staff team (including part-time staff) enabled children with additional needs to be taught in smaller groups, ensuring they received more tailored support.
- 2.37. The outdoor provision was a significant strength. The school benefited from a large, well-equipped outdoor area, including gardens and trees, where children were actively encouraged to play and explore.
- 2.38. Pupils also benefited from a wide range of enrichment opportunities. These included educational visits and residential experiences, such as trips to Robinwood, where they were able to take part in outdoor activities and develop confidence and independence.
- 2.39. The school clearly went above and beyond in supporting its pupils.

Billingham South Primary

- 2.40. The visit included discussions with senior staff and a tour of the school, including two ARP units supporting pupils with physical/medical needs and cognition/learning needs. The school had a high proportion of SEND pupils, with around 100 identified and approximately 40 with EHCPs. Strong systems were in place to assess pupils prior to admission and ensure appropriate placement.
- 2.41. The ARP provision was well-integrated, with pupils accessing mainstream classes where appropriate, supported by tailored adaptations and access to on-site therapies such as

physiotherapy and occupational therapy. A satellite provision with Ash Trees further supported inclusion, allowing pupils to integrate socially and academically with their peers.

- 2.42. The school environment was highly nurturing and child-centred, with a clear focus on inclusion, belonging and positive outcomes. Individual programmes were developed for all pupils, with staff making informed adaptations without waiting for formal diagnoses. There was a strong emphasis on flexibility, with provision regularly reviewed to meet changing needs.
- 2.43. Outdoor provision was a notable strength, with extensive, well-adapted spaces supporting a range of abilities and offering opportunities for both active play and quieter, sensory experiences.
- 2.44. Leadership demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusive practice, and the established ARP model was well embedded. Positive transition arrangements to secondary school were also evident, supported by close partnership working.
- 2.45. Overall, the school provided a highly supportive and inclusive learning environment, with strong leadership and a clear focus on meeting the diverse needs of its pupils.

Bishopsgarth Academy

- 2.46. The visit highlighted a school in transition from an Enhanced Mainstream School to an ARP, with increased SEND provision and plans to further align staffing and budgets in the following year. The ARP cohort had grown significantly, with a focus on Year 7 pupils who had experienced enhanced transition arrangements and gradual integration into mainstream school life. SEND pupils were supported effectively to access mainstream lessons, often with one-to-one assistance, and were able to make good progress, including working towards GCSE outcomes.
- 2.47. Discussions with staff demonstrated a strong commitment to pupil achievement and tailored support, particularly through targeted reading interventions and the use of varied learning resources to meet individual needs. Pupils were engaged and supported to develop confidence and independence, as reflected in conversations with both KS3 and KS4 students.
- 2.48. The school environment was welcoming and inclusive despite an increased pupil population. SEND pupils were well integrated while still able to access specialist provision when required. A strong emphasis was placed on balancing academic progress with life skills, enrichment activities and external opportunities, which contributed to positive outcomes, including apprenticeships and reduced exclusions.
- 2.49. The school responded proactively to its challenging catchment through family engagement and careers support, particularly for SEND pupils. While challenges remained around attainment measures and recruitment of teaching assistants, leadership had addressed needs through strategic staffing, including appointing specialist primary-trained teachers.
- 2.50. Overall, the visit presented a positive environment, with pupils appearing engaged and supported.

Schools White Paper – SEND Reform

- 2.51. The SEND White Paper “Every Child Achieving and Thriving” was published in February 2026 and set out the Government’s plan to overhaul support for children with special educational needs. The reforms are intended to create a system where help is provided earlier and easier to access. The White Paper also places strong emphasis on inclusion in mainstream schools and

earlier intervention. A key impact on the review was that schools are to have their own inclusion hubs rather than SEND Units and ARPS.

2.52. The Select Committee received a presentation outlining:

White Paper Vision

- Inclusive Mainstream System
- Specialist Support for Children that need it
- Effective and efficient local delivery.
- Stretching, enriching and inclusive school experience for all.
- North East Mission – emphasis on disadvantaged, white working-class children

Curriculum

- Every teacher a teacher of SEND
- National curriculum refreshed for first teaching from 2028
- Updated GCSEs from 2029
- Changes include: integrating oracy, digital and media literacy, financial literacy
- Introduction of a new enrichment entitlement
- Reform of Progress 8 to place greater weight on creative, language, and humanities subjects alongside core academic subjects
- Investments: money to go in over three years to support up to 400 schools in deprived areas meeting enrichment benchmarks

Consultation Phase

- Strong universal offer for SEND
- Schools to produce inclusion strategies backed by national inclusion standards and changes to complaints process re: SEND Support.
- Updated 0-25 SEND Code of Practice and new primary areas of need.
- Universal – Targeted – Targeted Plus – Specialist
- Updated Tribunal Powers
- Experts at Hand
- SEND Practitioners in Family Hubs
- Schools to have their own inclusion hubs – no more SEND Units and ARPS as they will transition into specialist units commissioned by the council with schools.

Attendance and Suspensions

- Target: Improve overall attendance by 1.3 percentage points by 2028–29
- Introduction of pupil engagement framework measuring belonging and engagement
- Behaviour reforms include Reintegration Support Partnerships, Attendance and Behaviour Hubs, and new suspension supervision options

School Governance

- Gradual movement of all schools into trust structures, with new Trust Standards and systemic inspection
- Enhanced local authority role for strategic planning, admissions, SEND sufficiency, and attendance oversight
- LA or groups of un-academised schools can create trusts - but doesn't give a date of when this needs to happen by

- New independent school standards

What does this mean for the Council?

- Local area partnerships are to deliver LARPs
- Govt will use these plans (and from regular progress reviews) will support decision making
- When each LA has approval for their LARP from the SoS; investment will be put in place to clear 90% of SEND debt through a debt relief offer
- Local Area SEND Reform Plan must include Vision, Strategy, the Plan, Monitoring, Governance
- Plan to be jointly owned by the LA and the ICB but written by the LA
- Must be an ongoing and embedded plan deployed across all educational settings, EAH offer to be in place by 2028/29
- Key Expectations – EAH offer, Sufficiency and place planning, Universal offer, Effective partnerships, Effective co-production strategies
- Year One expectations – clear, testable workstreams, robust financial baseline, steps toward the experts at hand,; strengthened governance and partnership arrangements; workable system for monitoring and evaluation
- Experts at Hand - provide a defined route for mainstream settings to access specialist support (EPs, Ots, SALT); shifts away from 1:1 to group offers; build embedded capability within mainstream
- Health ICB role in developing plan: Joint vision and KPIs, Commissioning plan and funding approach, Workforce and Capacity plan, Pathways and access standards; Assessment and review participation

Key Dates:

- Response to consultation deadline – 18th May 2026
- LARP Deadline – 1st Draft – 14th June 2026
- Planning & Legislation Changes – 2026-2028
- Experts at Hand to commence - 2028/29
- Assessments under new framework to begin 2029
- ISP to be in place from 2030

Next Steps

- DFE Advisor - monthly
- Change of Governance and oversight arrangements i.e. SEND Operational Group.
- Briefings & Webinars
- High Needs Funding Deficit – Statutory Override
- Expert at Hand Guidance – expected late May
- High needs Capital Allocation – expected late May
- Guidance on Inclusion Bases – expected late May
- Submit Local Area SEND Reform Plan

Glossary of Terms

ARP	Additionally Resourced Provision - A specialist provision within a mainstream school offering targeted support for pupils with particular needs.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development - Ongoing training and learning activities for staff to maintain and improve professional skills.
DfE	Department for Education - The UK government department responsible for education policy and children's services.
EAH	Experts at Hand - A core element of SEND reform providing mainstream settings with access to specialist education and health professionals (e.g. EPs, SALT, OTs).
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan - A statutory plan for children and young people (0–25) with significant special educational needs, outlining required support.
EMS	Enhanced Mainstream School - A mainstream school with additional resources, expertise, and staffing to support pupils with more complex SEND needs while remaining in a mainstream setting.
EPs	Educational Psychologists - Specialists who assess children's learning, behaviour, and emotional needs, and advise on support.
HI&VI	Hearing Impairment & Visual Impairment - Refers to specialist services or needs relating to pupils with hearing or vision impairments.
HQT	High Quality Teaching - An approach emphasising inclusive, effective teaching strategies to meet the needs of all learners, including those with SEND.
JSNA	Joint Strategic Needs Assessment - A local authority and NHS assessment identifying current and future health and wellbeing needs of a population.
LAIP	Local Area Inclusion Plan - A locally developed plan outlining how inclusion will be improved across education services in an area.
NENC ICB	North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board - NHS body responsible for planning and commissioning health services in the North East and North Cumbria.
OTS	Occupational Therapy Service - Provides support to help children develop skills for daily living, sensory needs, and participation in school activities.
PFA	Preparing for Adulthood - A framework supporting young people with SEND to transition to adult life, focusing on employment, independence, health, and community inclusion.
SALT	Speech and Language Therapy - Specialist support for children with communication, speech, and language difficulties.
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health - A category of SEND relating to difficulties in emotional regulation, behaviour, and mental wellbeing.
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - Refers to children and young people who need additional support due to learning difficulties or disabilities.

Children and Young People Select Committee
Alternative Provision (AP)
Scrutiny Review
Outline Scope

Scrutiny Chair (Project Director): Cllr Carol Clark	Contact details: carol.clark@stockton.gov.uk
Scrutiny Officer (Project Manager): Judy Trainer	Contact details: 01642 528158 judy.trainer@stockton.gov.uk
Departmental Link Officer: Claire Tiffany	Contact details: 01642 527191 claire.tiffany@stockton.gov.uk
Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address? This work aligns with the Council's priorities to ensure that all children have a bright future and a sense of belonging and giving children the best possible start in life, this is greater achieved when our children are educated and build connections within the borough. It aligns with the council vision to have a sustainable community where everyone belongs and is valued. The review supports Stockton on Tees Plan Priority One – The best start in life to achieve big ambitions and key move – Giving children and young people the best possible start, in an inclusive community where everyone can thrive. This scrutiny review would also support delivery of the following design principles: • reduce inequality and prioritise prevention • put communities at the heart of everything we do • use data and intelligence to inform our decision	
What are the main issues and overall aim of this review? This scrutiny review will examine the Council's approach to Alternative Provision (AP), assessing whether current arrangements meet need and improve outcomes. There are increasing concerns about rising youth anti-social behaviour, persistent school absence, and pupils with complex needs remaining in mainstream settings without timely or effective intervention. Together, these issues suggest that some children may not be identified or supported early enough, resulting in poorer outcomes for individuals, schools, and the wider community. The review will consider whether Stockton has sufficient high-quality AP places, clear and timely referral pathways, and strong partnership working with schools and community-based providers.	

It will also examine current capacity and demand, waiting times, access thresholds, and the balance between early intervention and more reactive placements.

There is significant interest from residents, schools, and families in ensuring that behavioural and educational issues are addressed early, and that communities remain safe and welcoming. High-quality Alternative Provision can play a critical role in reducing anti-social behaviour, improving attendance, preventing escalation into criminal or exploitative behaviour and improving life chances.

Effective AP also brings wider benefits. It can contribute to safer neighbourhoods, reduce long-term costs associated with exclusion, youth justice, and social care, and ease pressure on schools and public services. In addition, reducing anti-social behaviour supports the better use and enjoyment of public spaces, improving overall community wellbeing.

The review will aim to identify how the AP system can be strengthened to support earlier and more effective intervention, reduce exclusions and persistent absence, lower repeat incidents of anti-social behaviour, and reduce future demand on other support services.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- What are the reasons that children are placed in alternative provision?
- How has demand changed over time? What does the data tell us?
- Are particular groups more likely to access alternative provision?
- What proportion of children return to mainstream education? How is this managed?
- What is the AP Framework? How is quality measured?
- What are the outcomes for children accessing alternative provision? How is progress monitored? How is attendance tracked?
- How is alternative provision commissioned and monitored? What is the average cost per placement? Is there sufficient local provision? How is provision regulated?
- How do we ensure robust safeguarding in all AP settings?
- What do children and young people say about their experience of AP? How are their voices heard? How are mental health and emotional wellbeing supported?
- How do we engage with parents/ carers?
- What preventative strategies are in place in mainstream schools?
- How well do partners work together? Is there a shared AP strategy?
- What are the rules around OFSTED registration?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, schools and other partners

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

Six months:

Scope and Project Plan – 15 July 2026

Evidence gathering – September 2026 – December 2026

Draft Recommendations - 16 December 2026

Final Report – 13 January 2027

Submission to Cabinet – 15 February 2027

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

Data
Quality Assurance Reports
AP Plans
Government Guidance
Local Area Reform Plan – Draft
AP Framework

New information:

SEND and AP Ofsted Report and Action Plan
Views of children and young people, parents/ carers
Views of partners

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)

Council Officers

Partner Agencies

Parents/ Carers

Young People

School Support

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

Data on AP capacity, demand, costs, and outcomes; explain commissioning, safeguarding, and referral processes; highlight risks, gaps, and planned improvements; demonstrate how AP aligns with wider strategies (education, inclusion, early help).

Insight into multi-agency working; what are the outcomes for children accessing AP?; provide evidence on effectiveness of provision; identify systemic issues and opportunities for joint working and early intervention. How do providers feel about navigating the framework?

Lived experience of the referral process and support received; highlight barriers to accessing AP; provide feedback on communication, quality of provision, and impact on their child; suggest improvements from a family perspective.
Young People perspective

First-hand insight into the quality of education and support; describe whether they feel safe, engaged, and supported; highlight what works well and what doesn't; inform whether AP is helping them progress and achieve positive outcomes.

Early intervention and behaviour support strategies; pressures and gaps in provision.

How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey) Committee meetings, visits to alternative provision, talking to young people
How will key partners and the public be involved in the review? As above.
How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty? The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics, including Disability. The Council is under a duty to: • Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act. • Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. • Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The review will contribute towards meeting the Council's requirements under this Duty, particularly in relation to the outcomes for more vulnerable children. Completion of an Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA) will be integral to the Select Committee review.
How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy? <u>Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2023:</u> All children and families get the best start in life. All people in Stockton-on-Tees live well and live longer. All people in Stockton-on-Tees live in healthy places and sustainable communities.
Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation: The review would aim to: • Assess whether current AP provision meets local need • Identify gaps in availability, quality, or referral processes • Explore opportunities to support community-based providers, such as voluntary or third-sector organisations • Make recommendations to improve outcomes for young people and communities • The overall aim is a coherent, high-quality Alternative Provision offer that reduces exclusion and promotes youth engagement

Project Plan			
Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	June 2026	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	25 June 2026	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member, Director, Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Agree Scope and Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee and Introductory Presentation	15 July 2026	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	N/A		
Obtaining Evidence		16/30 September 2026 TBC 14 October 2026 11 November 2026	Select Committee
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	16 December 2026	Select Committee (Informal Session)
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	January 2027	Scrutiny Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBA	Select Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, Cabinet Member, Director, Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Final Agreement of Report by Select Committee	Approval of final report by CYP Select Committee	13 January 2027	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny	Consideration of report	19 January 2027	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet/Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	11 February 2027	Cabinet

This page is intentionally left blank

**Children and Young People Select Committee
Work Programme – 2026-2027**

Date	Item	Attending
15 April 2026 Formal Session	Overview and Performance Meeting	Cllr Clare Besford Louise Hollick Lynn Stoneley Jane Smith
Informal Session	Review of Children Not in School – Evidence – Summary of Evidence	Elisha Dyball Vanessa Housley
13 May 2026	Review of Children Not in School – Evidence – Final Report	Elisha Dyball Vanessa Housley
	Presentation SEND White Paper	Elisha Dyball
17 June 2026	CANCELLED	
15 July 2026	Monitoring – Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment	Vanessa Housley Craig Taylor (Rec 16) Kellie Wigley/ Ellen Guest (Rec 4)
	The Annual Children’s Services Complaints Report 2025/26	Majella McCarthy/ Gemma Jackson/ Lisa Williams
	Scrutiny Review of Additionally Resourced SEND Provision – Final Report	Elisha Dyball
	Scrutiny Review of Alternative Provision for Children and Young People – Scope and Project Plan	Claire Tiffany
16 September 2026	Review of Children Not in School – Action Plan	Elisha Dyball Vanessa Housley
	Overview and Performance Meeting	Cllr Clare Besford Majella McCarthy
	Monitoring – Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment	Vanessa Housley Mandie Rowlands (Recs 11 and 15) Amit Law (Rec 12)
	Monitoring – Holidays are Fun	Mandie Rowlands
	Scrutiny Review of Alternative Provision for Children and Young People – Evidence	Claire Tiffany

14 October 2026	Scrutiny Review of Alternative Provision for Children and Young People – Evidence	Claire Tiffany
11 November 2026	Scrutiny Review of Alternative Provision for Children and Young People – Evidence	Claire Tiffany
16 December 2026	Scrutiny Review of Alternative Provision for Children and Young People – Draft Recommendations	Claire Tiffany
13 January 2027	Scrutiny Review of Alternative Provision for Children and Young People – Final Report	Claire Tiffany
10 February 2027	TBC	

Items to be scheduled each year

Children and Young People Performance Reports
Overview of Children and Young People's Services

Progress Updates

Contextual Safeguarding and Youth Relationships TBC
Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment – Ongoing
HAF – September 2026
CNIS - TBC