



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL



North East and
North Cumbria



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

| Section | Contents | Page Number |
|----------------|--|--------------------|
| | Foreword | |
| 1 | Co-producing our strategy | 3 |
| 2 | Stockton-on-Tees context | 4 |
| 3 | Our vision for children and young people | 5 |
| 4 | Local governance | 7 |
| 5 | Joint Commissioning | 8 |
| 6 | Our strategy and commitments | 9 |
| 7 | How will we know if we are making a difference | 14 |
| 8 | Glossary | 15 |

Foreword

Placeholder

DRAFT

1. Co-producing our strategy

During 2025, we have jointly developed our SEND and AP Strategy with children, young people, parents and carers and partners including education settings, health, and care professionals. We have listened and gathered feedback through consultation including stakeholder meetings, surveys, face to face engagement and SEND focused events across the borough to develop priorities and commitments in this strategy.

Our strategy is grounded in principles that have been co-produced with children, young people, parents and carers. These principles guide how we, as a local SEND system, works with and supports them:

We work together for a good life. Children, young people, and their families are at the heart of the way we work. We treat one another with dignity, empathy, and curiosity to discover what a good life looks like, focusing on what matters not just what's the matter.

Nothing about us without us. The views of children, young people and families inform decisions about their lives, the planning, delivery, and commissioning of services

Inclusion. Children and young people are supported to live an ordinary life.



2. Stockton-on-Tees Context



56,424 children and young people (28.7% of the population) aged 0-24 (ONS, 2021).

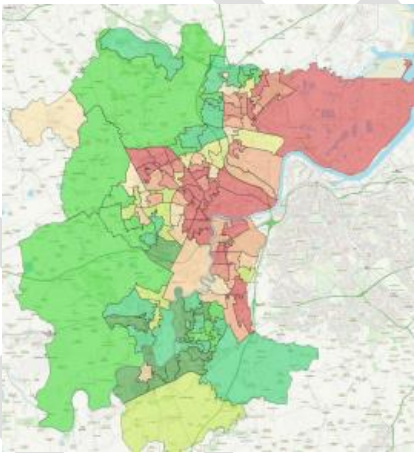
Around **7,000 children** live in households with “absolute low income” (19% of children in the Borough) (DWP 2024).

In 2025 **2,578** children and young people had an active EHCP

In 2025 **4,665** children and young people received SEND support

In 2024 29.2% of **children in our care** held an EHCP

Stockton-on-Tees –
key information and
numbers



The Borough of Stockton-on-Tees is home to around 196,600 people (ONS, 2021) and is made up of seven towns (Billingham, Eaglescliffe, Ingleby Barwick, Norton, Stockton, Thornaby, Yarm).

The proportion of 0–24-year-olds in our population is projected to reduce from 57,613 to 55,000 by 2034 (ONS,2021).

There is substantial variance of affluence and deprivation across the 27 wards within the Borough. Overall, the Borough ranks as the 73rd (out of 317) most deprived local authority area in England (IMD, 2019).



4 Family Hubs



84 schools



9 libraries



95% of schools rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ (Ofsted, 2024)



More than 30 parks and green spaces

3. *Our vision for children and young people*

Our vision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities or who may require alternative provision is the same as for all children and young people: ***that Stockton-on-Tees is a great place to grow up, where children and young people are protected from harm and supported to be the best they can be in life.***

We will realise this vision by creating an inclusive local area that enables children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, or who may require alternative provision, to thrive and achieve their potential. We aspire to ensure that we have clear communication between families and professionals, strengthen our journey to coproduction and are accountable to each other as partners, having a shared commitment to addressing the challenges within our local area whilst fostering a culture of inclusion and achievement for all children and young people.

We believe that, where possible, every child and young person from Stockton-on-Tees should be supported in the community where they live. This should be through access to high quality early years provision, schools, and further education settings. In addition to learning and education opportunities, children and young people should be offered access to local health and care support which is appropriate to their assessed needs. We are committed to our assessment of need, placing a focus on the identification of individual strengths and understanding children, young people, and families' skills, knowledge, confidence, and resilience. By placing lived experiences at the heart of planning and decision making, we will ensure that services truly reflect the needs and aspirations of the community.



Our strategy has been developed in a time of significant national challenge across the SEND system. A 2024 report commissioned by the Local Government Association and County Councils network highlighted the key challenges that the system is facing:

- More children than ever before are being identified as having SEND, with the rise in the number of pupils in schools with Education, Health and Care plans outweighing the overall rise of the school population.
- More children and young people require specialist provision, leading to a sharp rise in placements in independent and non-maintained special schools.
- Although investment in SEND is increasing, it's not keeping pace with spending. This creates significant budget pressures for councils, schools, and health services.
- Outcomes for children and young people with SEND overall have not improved.

In Stockton-on-Tees, these national challenges are being felt locally by our children, young people, parents, carers and services, with increasing financial pressure across our social care, adult, health and education services and budgets.

As a local area partnership, we do not underestimate the challenges and difficult decisions that are ahead of us. We are clear that we need to make the best use of the resources that are available to us in a way that puts us in the strongest position to improve outcomes for children and young people – through partnership working, a focus on early intervention, putting children and young people's voice at the centre of how we work and delivering support in the right time in the right place.

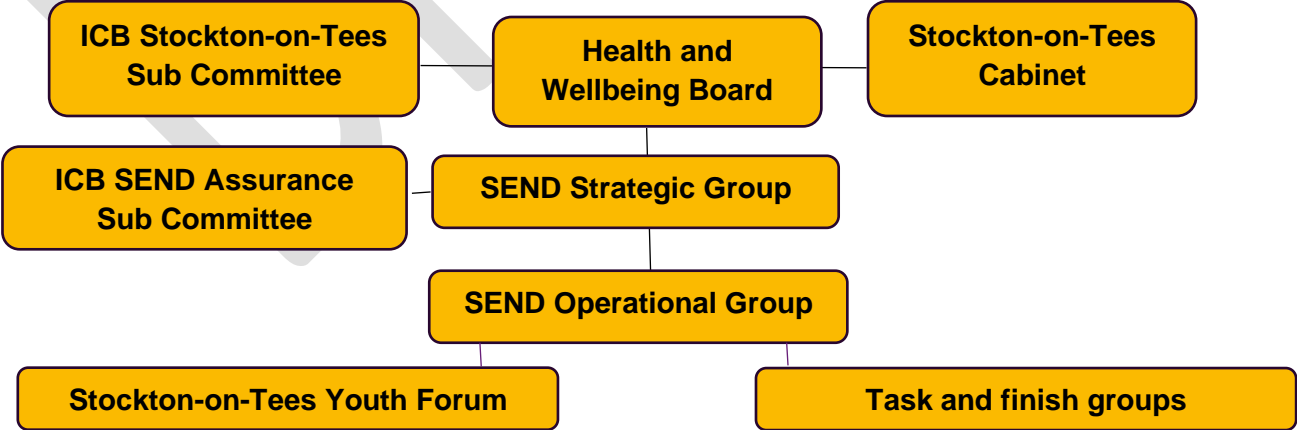
Our strategy is bold and ambitious; our children and young people deserve nothing less. We recognise the scale of the challenge and are determined to deliver these improvements in a financially responsible way while making a real difference to the lives of children, young people, and their families.

4. Local Governance

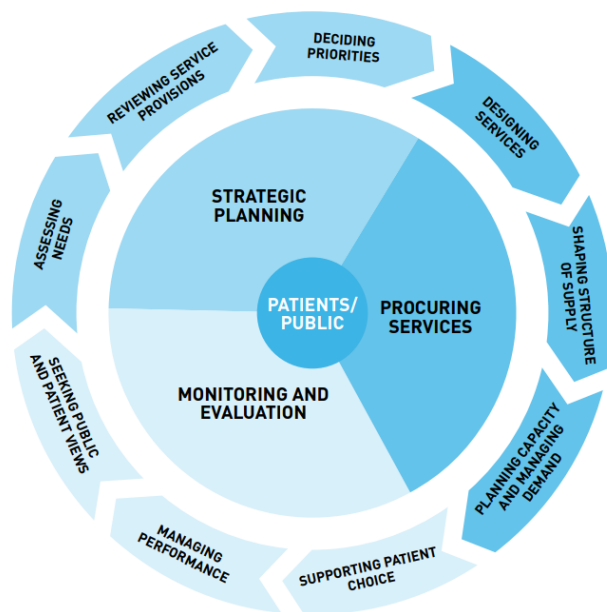
Our local area partnership brings together children, young people, parents, carers, education, health and social care services, all of whom share responsibility for the strategic commissioning, management, delivery and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 years and those who may require alternative provision in Stockton-on-Tees.

Our strategy is informed by laws and regulations for children and young people with SEND including the statutory requirements of the *Children and Families Act 2014* and *SEND Code of Practice*. These laws and regulations are in place to ensure that as a local area, we are meeting the responsibilities to our children, young people, parents, and carers.

Our governance arrangements are in place to oversee the progress that we make against the priorities in this SEND and AP strategy, ensuring that we are accountable to children and young people with SEND and their parents / carers. Our SEND Strategic group and our SEND operational group have representation from across the local area including the parent carer forum, local education, health and SEND services.



5. Joint Commissioning



Commissioning is the process of identifying the needs of an individual or community and planning services to meet those needs. As this is a continuous process it is known as the commissioning cycle.

Joint Commissioning is where the assessment of need and planning of services is undertaken by two or more agencies working together. The purpose of joint commissioning for SEND is to ensure the best possible response to a child's or young person's needs.

Joint Commissioning can reduce unnecessary duplication of, or barriers between provision and the development of more efficient and cost-effective service provision. Through working together and joint decision-making processes, Joint Commissioning can support early identification of needs, prevention and outcome focused service delivery and improve the experiences of services that children, young people and their families have. In Stockton-on-Tees the local area partnership works together across the commissioning cycle to assess need, review and plan services, both on an individual and strategic level.

The local area partnership has worked together to produce our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for SEND, which considers the needs of children and young people aged 0-25 years with SEND, and sets out the key themes and priorities for the local area, which underpin all areas of our strategy. Our approach to Joint Commissioning supports us as a local partnership to:

- Make decisions based on a clear understanding of need and rationale for improving outcomes.
- Develop and support integrated approaches to service provision.
- Work towards simplified funding streams where it brings added benefit across partners via pooled or aligned budgets
- Be committed to prevention, early identification and intervention

6. Our Strategy and commitments

Our strategy priorities are based on key outcomes that support preparation for adulthood:

- **Being as healthy as possible.**
- **Building relationships with friends, family, and the community.**
- **Developing independence.**
- **Accessing quality education, training, and employment opportunities.**



These outcomes form the foundation of our strategy, guiding our commitments over the next five years. They reflect our vision and ambition to create an inclusive local area where children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or those who may require alternative provision, can thrive, and reach their full potential.

Each of the four areas is presented across five headings, using co-designed 'I' statements to set out the difference that our strategy and commitments will make to our children, young people, and families:

| What children and young people say is important to them | What parents and carers say is important to them | What our local area partners say is important | Our commitments – the area partnership will: | The difference this will make to our children, young people parents and carers |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| <i>A summary of what our children and young people say is most important to them</i> | <i>A summary of what parents and carers said was most important to them</i> | <i>A summary of what our local area partners said was most important to them</i> | <i>The commitments to children, young people their parents and carers made by the Local Area Partnership</i> | <i>The difference that our strategy and commitments will deliver for our children, young people, parents, and carers.</i> |

| 1. Being as healthy as possible | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| What children and young people say is important to them | What parents and carers say is important to them | What our local area partners say is important | Our commitments as a local area partnership: | The difference this will make to our children, young people parents and carers |
| <p>Being able to keep fit and healthy and maintain a healthy weight.</p> <p>Having opportunities to exercise regularly.</p> <p>To learn about and eat the different foods that keep them healthy.</p> <p>That they receive support for their mental health when they need it and have time in school to be able to regulate themselves when they need to.</p> <p>That they know about the things that are bad for them (including drugs, alcohol, and vaping)</p> | <p>Being physically healthy is important, but opportunities can be difficult to access.</p> <p>Eating healthily can be difficult for children due to sensory needs and limited diets. It is important to have more advice and support around this.</p> <p>Being happy, their children's mental health is the most important thing for them. It can be difficult to access timely support for mental health needs.</p> <p>There needs to be more training for healthcare staff around SEND.</p> <p>The impact of the internet and social media, parents worry about the effect of this on their children.</p> <p>It is difficult to find out about and receive support for sensitive issues including child to parent violence.</p> | <p>To offer more support for healthy lifestyles including healthy diets, opportunities to exercise, and sensory-specific support.</p> <p>Supporting parents and carers to receive as much help as they can about being healthy, including medical advice, counselling, and support groups for their children.</p> <p>To ensure and help children to understand emotional regulation and how to self-regulate.</p> <p>To ensure our services are trauma informed</p> <p>To reduce risk taking behaviour and promote the education around issues such as drug use/alcohol and vaping.</p> <p>To support young people to understand about having healthy relationships.</p> | <p>We will train and support our workforce across education, health, and social care to ensure they have the skills to understand and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>We will work with our education, health, and social care services to deliver healthy lifestyles information and education for our children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>We will implement the I-Thrive Framework for system change, as an integrated, person centred and needs led approach to delivering mental health services for children, young people, and families, which will include services that are trauma-informed and can provide trauma focused interventions.</p> <p>We will work together to develop our needs-led approach across the whole system of care to provide support at the right time.</p> <p>We will improve the waiting times for access to specialist health assessments and support.</p> | <p>I will understand how to have a healthy lifestyle and receive local services to keep me healthy when I need them.</p> <p>I will have the best physical and mental health that is possible for me.</p> <p>I will know what it means to have good mental and physical health and the people around me will support me when I need them to.</p> <p>I will be able to choose from a range of ways to be physically active in my local community.</p> |

| 2. Family, Friends, and Community | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| What children and young people say is important to them | What parents and carers say is important to them | What our local area partners say is important | Our commitments as a local area partnership: | The difference this will make to our children, young people parents and carers |
| <p>Being able to spend time and do things with their whole family.</p> <p>Having good relationships with friends and family.</p> <p>There should be more clubs and activities that they can attend.</p> <p>Sometimes they feel like they belong in their communities, but often activities are not available to them, or they do not feel confident trying them.</p> <p>Sometimes they do not feel safe when they leave their homes.</p> | <p>Being able to attend and receive services and take part in activities as a whole family is important. Having children with different needs and ages can make this difficult.</p> <p>For their children to take part in inclusive activities alongside their peers. Social connections are vital for their children's wellbeing.</p> <p>For more support groups to be available for parents.</p> <p>For their children to have somewhere to go that they could access as individuals.</p> <p>Travel and cost can be an issue to get to and take part in activities that are inclusive.</p> <p>They do not always feel it is safe for their children to be out in their local community on their own.</p> | <p>Parents and carers know about and take part in support networks when they need them.</p> <p>To increase accessibility of services and activities.</p> <p>To work with providers to provide inclusive activities and clubs that are accessible for children and young people.</p> <p>A range of different channels needs to be used to give families clear information about what our services offer.</p> | <p>We will work with our community groups, culture, and leisure services to help make local spaces, clubs and activities inclusive and welcoming for children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>We will enhance our Local Offer website and expand how we share information so that children, young people, parents, carers, and professionals can easily find the right support, in the right place, at the right time.</p> <p>We will amplify the voices of children, young people, parents and carers in decision making by increasing their participation and how we work in co-production. This includes refreshing and embedding our co-production charter across the local area.</p> <p>We will develop our market position statement and sufficiency strategy to include SEND provision, to ensure that there are enough local specialist and mainstream places that meet the needs of our children and young people.</p> | <p>There will be activities that my family and I can do together.</p> <p>I will feel that I belong in my community.</p> <p>I will be with my friends and make friendships in spaces where I feel safe.</p> <p>I will know what is available for me and my family in Stockton-on-Tees.</p> <p>I will feel safe and be able to travel on my own to places locally.</p> |

3. Getting ready for independence

| What children and young people say is important to them | What parents and carers say is important to them | What our local area partners say is important | Our commitments as a local area partnership: | The difference this will make to our children, young people, parents, and carers |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Understanding what opportunities are available to them for their future.</p> <p>Being able to do things independently and feeling safe.</p> <p>Having opportunities to learn practical skills to build their confidence in managing daily routines independently.</p> <p>Being part of social groups to encourage confidence and a sense of belonging are essential for independence.</p> <p>Being focused on aspirations and future careers – some children and young people can struggle to know what they want for themselves in the future.</p> | <p>For children and young people with SEND to be valued members of society.</p> <p>For children and young people to receive tailored support to develop their independence.</p> <p>Individual support that recognises the diverse needs that children and young people have, which helps them reach their potential.</p> <p>For children and young people to have equal access to activities, experiences and support that prepare them for independence.</p> | <p>Activities, experiences and support for preparation for independence to be wide ranging and provide children and young people with real life experiences in all settings.</p> <p>Careers advice given at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Supporting and empowering parents and carers, this leads to positive outcomes for the whole family.</p> | <p>We will develop clear pathways that equip young people with confidence, skills, and opportunities to develop independence across all areas of their life including travel, decision making, daily living and employment.</p> <p>We will ensure all our children and young people experience well planned transitions at all phases through to adulthood, which are informed and led by their views and wishes.</p> <p>We will maintain a rigorous focus on strengthening support and intervention in the early years delivered across health, education and council services, that build the foundations of communication and social interaction.</p> | <p>I will have the skills to help me look after myself and take part in activities for daily living.</p> <p>I will feel safe when I do things independently in my local community.</p> <p>I will be able to live as independently as possible in the future.</p> |

4. Having good education, employment and training opportunities

| What children and young people say is important to them | What parents and carers say is important to them | What our local area partners say is important | Our commitments as a local area partnership: | The difference this will make to our children, young people, parents, and carers |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Being included and feeling that they belong within their school community.</p> <p>Having friends and being part of a group in school.</p> <p>Taking part in activities that make learning exciting and meaningful - art, reading, PE, school trips.</p> <p>Supportive teachers and being able to access calm or quiet spaces when needed.</p> <p>Feeling confident in their school environment and having trusting relationships with the adults that support them and their peers.</p> <p>Receiving certificates, awards, and positive reinforcement to boost their confidence and motivate them.</p> | <p>Equal opportunities - every child and young person has the right to education and employment, irrespective of their needs or disabilities.</p> <p>Good transitions – the transition to different school phases can be challenging for SEND children and young people.</p> <p>Schools support children to reach their potential and provide support to overcome barriers and gain confidence, self-worth, and life skills.</p> <p>Earlier intervention and sustained efforts to meet the needs of children and young people.</p> <p>Consistency – parents and carers have inconsistent experiences with schools and the support they provide.</p> | <p>Working in partnership with parents and carers is key to better outcomes for children and young people.</p> <p>To be able to respond to changing needs. What SEND looks like in mainstream is changing, with speech, language and neurodevelopmental difficulties increasing.</p> <p>All pupils should be offered the same inclusive education regardless of school setting.</p> <p>An inclusive, child and whole family focused approach.</p> <p>To provide education and training opportunities for our young people, which help them to gain employment.</p> | <p>We will work with our education settings to embed inclusive approaches to education, so that all children and young people with SEND receive education that enables them to reach their potential.</p> <p>We will further develop and embed a response across health, social care and education that provides early intervention and prevention of Emotional School Based Avoidance.</p> <p>We will expand and enhance the range and quality of Alternative Provision and put in place pathways of multi-agency support that help children and young people successfully reengage with education.</p> <p>We will further develop the range of local mainstream and specialist provision, training and support that meets young people's aspirations and promotes meaningful pathways into adulthood.</p> <p>We will work together to identify and implement evidence-based approaches to supporting attendance and reducing suspension and exclusions.</p> | <p>I will feel happy and have a sense of belonging in my education setting or workplace.</p> <p>I will know what I want to achieve and will be supported by the people around me to reach my potential.</p> <p>I will have fair and inclusive educational opportunities.</p> <p>I will have friends and a network of support in my education or workplace setting.</p> <p>My educational and training achievements will be recognised and celebrated.</p> |

7. How will we know if we are making a difference?

A yearly action plan will detail how we will deliver on the commitments within this strategy, including key milestones and measures that will track the impact that we are making. This plan will be driven by our SEND Operational Group, with regular updates on progress to the SEND Strategic Group.

Our Stockton-on-Tees Self Evaluation Framework (SEF) has been developed with members of organisations from across the local area partnership through workshops, focus groups and interviews with children, young people, and their families as part of an ongoing process to bring together our collective knowledge of local needs. Our SEF will be updated twice a year and will tell us how our strategy is improving experiences and outcomes for children, young people, and their families.

We will continue to listen to the views of children, young people, parents, and carers through a range of methods including:

- Our Youth Forum
- Our continued partnership with the Parent Carer Forum
- Engagement events throughout the year
- Learning and feedback from the EHCP process

As well as listening, we commit to a 'you said, we did' approach and communicating with our children, young people, parents, and carers to provide regular updates about the progress we are making.

8. Glossary

| | |
|---|--|
| Alternative provision | Educational arrangements provided by local authorities or schools who cannot attend mainstream education due to reasons such as exclusion, illness or other personal circumstances |
| Children and families act 2014 | UK Legislation aimed at providing greater support and protection for children and their families. |
| EHCP | Education, Health and Care Plan – A legal document outlining a child or young person's special educational needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they are working towards. |
| Emotional School Based Avoidance (ESBA) | A term used to describe children and young people who experience anxiety or emotional distress that affects their ability to attend school. |
| i-Thrive framework | A person-centred, needs-led approach to delivering mental health services for children and young people, focusing on early intervention and integrated care. |
| Local offer | Information published by local authorities about the support available for children and young people with SEND and their families. |
| SEND | Special educational needs and disabilities. A child or young person has special educational needs and disabilities if they have a learning difficulty or disability that means they need health and educational support. |
| SEND code of practice | A statutory guidance document established under the Children and Families Act, providing directives for supporting children and young people aged 0 to 25 years with special educational needs and disabilities. |

