

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES Prepared by Angela Askins, Jonathan Fawcett Accommodation & Placement Support Team

MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS OF EXTERNAL REGISTERED CHILDREN'S HOMES – REPORTING PERIOD 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is intended to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with a summary overview of the monitoring process in regard to external residential children's homes, where children in our care live. It is also intended to provide information in regard to the quality of the care provided from these homes. This report provides an update on the previous report 2021-2022.
- 1.2 When there is a need to place a child in residential care, the Local Authority consider its internal residential placements in the first instance. There are, however, times when these placements are not appropriate or not available. In such situations, we turn to our joint venture partners, Spark of Genius and only when this option has also been exhausted, we would seek to purchase a placement from other providers, preferably and when appropriate, within the local area.
- 1.3 The importance of placing children in our care in suitable and safe accommodation continues to be a key area of focus. The Accommodation and Placement Support Team alongside colleagues in Quality Assurance and Compliance Team as well as wider Regional Commissioning teams are committed to ensuring all care provided for our children is of a high standard. To that end, we work together to monitor placements and provide advice and support to providers to help them to attain the standards expected.
- 1.4 The Accommodation & Placement Support Team here in Stockton-on-Tees have responsibility for sourcing placements and subsequently monitoring those placements. All Monitoring Visits are completed in person.
- 1.5 This report combines summative data from Ofsted inspection judgements and in house monitoring visits, thus providing information on the quality of

placements where our young people are placed. Additionally, the report captures collective themes and concerns from visits, provides information in regards how these concerns have been addressed, as well as referencing any feedback from providers on their experiences of working with the Local Authority.

- 1.6 There is also an overview of numbers of children placed in external provision and reasons for these placements, as well as ongoing work that is planned for the future to help improve our own capacity and ability to meet demand for residential services.

2. SUMMARY REGARDING THE USE OF EXTERNAL PLACEMENTS

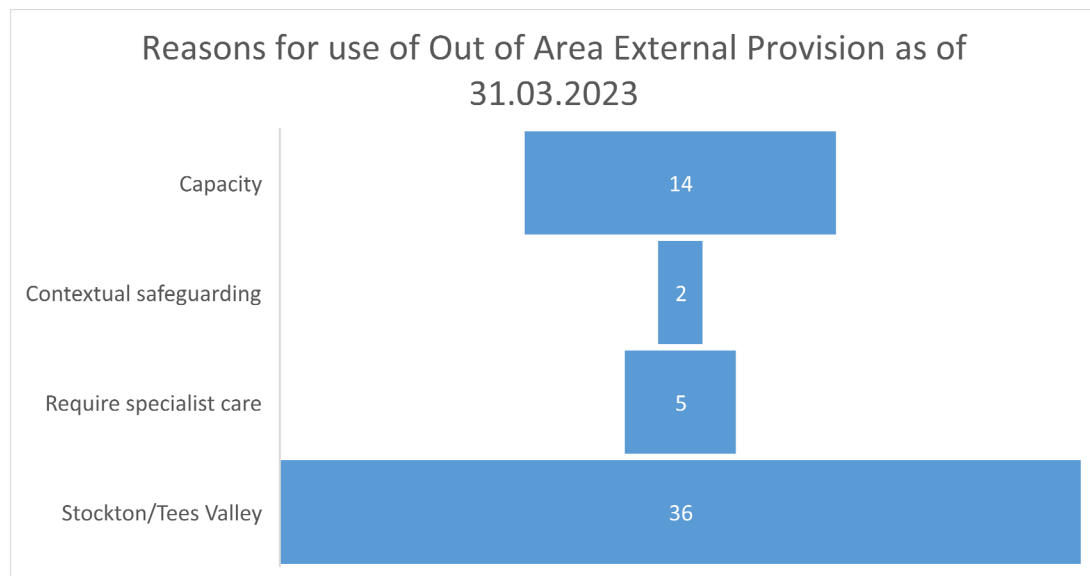
- 2.1 The increasing demand for placements continues to impact on capacity in house making it necessary for placements to be sourced externally. However a recent report produced by the charity BECOME identified that Stockton on Tees were the top performing authority in England in terms of placing children and young people within 20 miles of their homes when placing outside of the Local authority boundary .(information taken from statutory returns)
- 2.2 Those responsible for securing residential placements for children who need them continue to be proactive in cultivating and forming positive relationships with external providers both locally and outside of the local boundaries.
- 2.3 Regionally, the NE602 residential framework is available in an effort to source placements near to the local area, alongside our partnership with Spark of Genius, which operate 3 residential homes within Stockton locality.
- 2.4 Demand for residential placements continues to be high and, despite efforts to keep children close to Stockton on Tees, lack of provision to meet demand and/or the complex needs of young people, often means that children placed externally are placed outside of Stockton on Tees and Tees Valley area.
- 2.5 Further to this, it is recognised that reduction in capacity within Fostering services has impacted on demand for residential placements. Our recent Ofsted inspection identified that: **There has also been a lack of targeted recruitment of foster carers which mean that there is to few foster carers to meet demand, which has impacted and increased the need for residential. Senior leaders are aware of the national challenges for children's social care and have secured funding for in-house residential provision.**
- 2.6 Stockton, like every authority across the country, also has a duty to place unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people as part of the National transfer scheme.
- 2.7 Due to increased demand for placements, there are instances when there is no alternative but to use unregulated placements for children and young people. This is always a last resort and, where in use, monitoring of these placements

is completed. During the inspection, Ofsted commented that: **There is not a sufficient wide range and choice of placement to meet the individual needs of all the children in care. A small number of children are living in unregistered homes for short periods of time due to lack of suitable registered homes that meet specific need. Senior leaders are aware of the nature of these placements and seek to avoid these placements where possible. Where unregistered placement is used social workers and managers and senior leaders have close oversight of the care children receive during this period until they can move to suitable regulated care.**

- 2.8 Our approach to unregulated placements and the monitoring, even short term, is the same as our approach to regulated external provision.

DATA RELATING TO USE OF EXTERNAL PLACEMENTS

The Chart below shows the reasons for external placements:



- 2.5 A snap shot of data relating to children placed in external residential homes showed that on the 31.03.23 a total of 57 children were placed in external residential placements. This is an increase of 8 when compared to the figures of this time last year.
- 2.6 36 of the 57 children were placed within Stockton on Tees and the Tees Valley area (Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar) in external placements. This is an increase of 4% compared to the previous year, evidencing efforts made to try and keep children close to their homes.

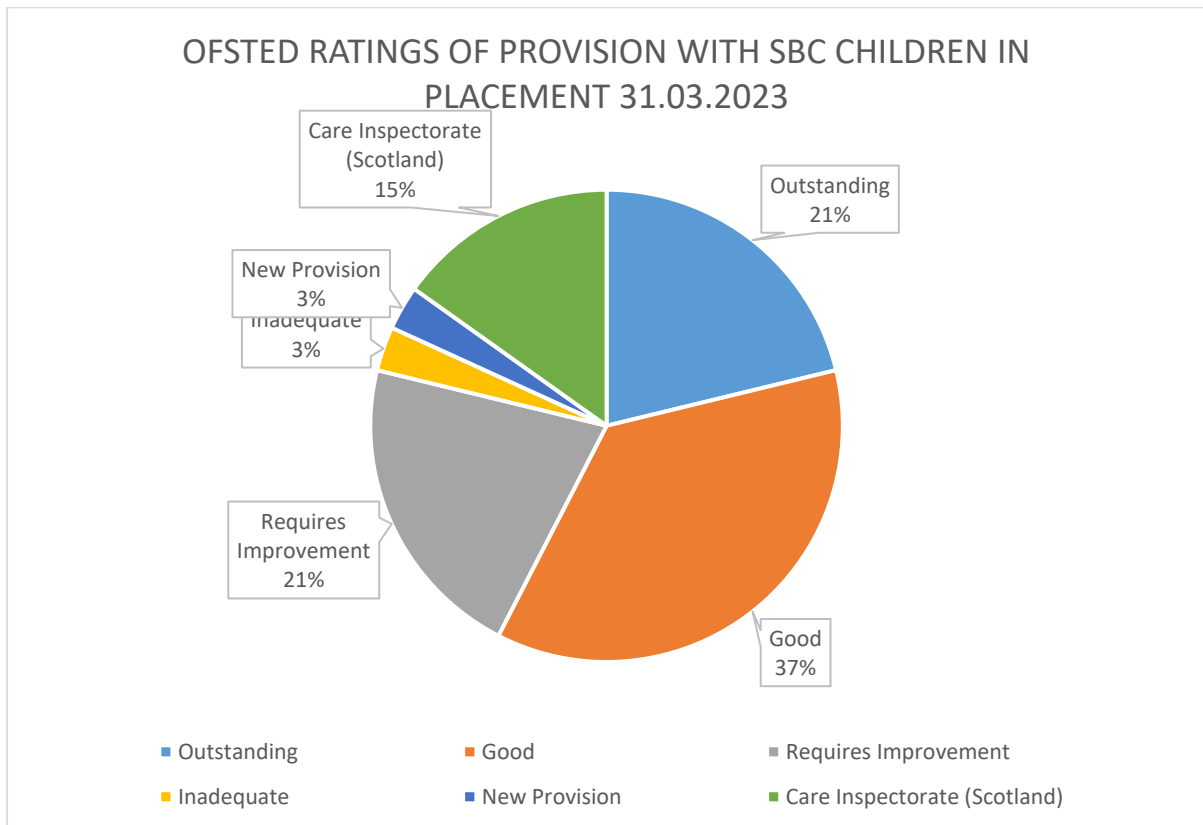
- 2.7 Of the remaining 21, 4 children were suitably placed outside of the local and regional area in order to meet needs and/or required specialised provision (i.e., Learning difficulties, Sexualised Harmful Behaviour)
- 2.8 2 Children were placed outside of the local and regional area due to Contextual Safeguarding concerns.
- 2.9 The remaining 14 children were placed out of area due to capacity issues and could have safely been cared for locally had there been provision available.
- 2.10 Returning children placed out of the area back to Stockton remains a priority for Stockton. During this period, 3 children have returned from external provision outside of the Tees Valley area into placements closer to home. To this end, Stockton is actively undertaking work to increase our own in-house capacity and help more of our children reside in the local area.
- 2.11 There has been one instance of use of a Secure Residential Home by Stockton during this period of time.

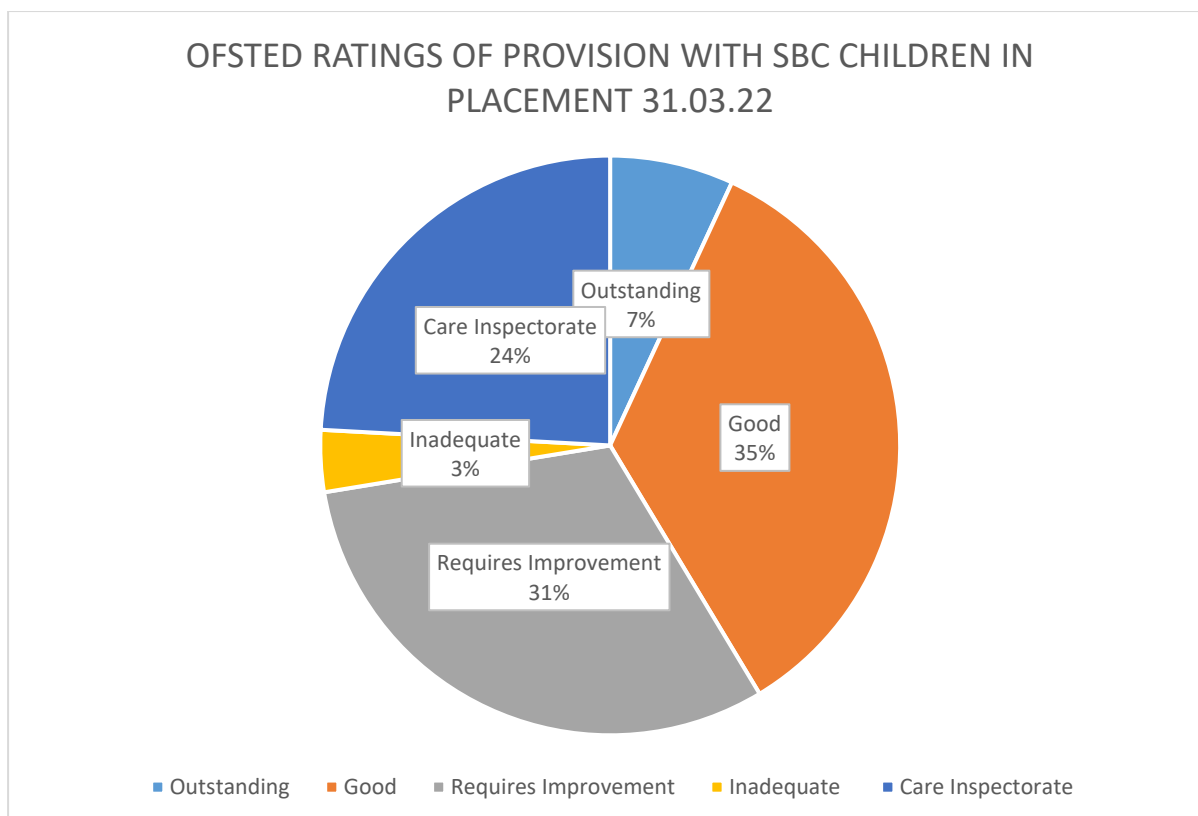
3.0 APPROACH TO THE MONITORING AND AUDITING OF EXTERNAL PROVISION

- 3.2 The Local Authority has in place arrangements for the of monitoring external placements which is outlined in the relevant policy. Monitoring visits are conducted at least annually by a suitably experienced officer within the Childrens Care and Complex Needs Service area. Social workers visit children in residential care regularly, even when the child is placed at a distance.
- 3.4 Where difficulties or a safeguarding concern is evident in a placement that is of a substantial worry, or there is a significant decline in an Ofsted rating, this would prompt an early or additional monitoring visit. Concerns are shared with other placing Local Authorities and, where appropriate, the officer from the Accommodation and Placement Support Team works together with other Local Authorities with the provider and commissioner to address concerns and improve the care provided.
- 3.5 During the monitoring visit the child is seen and spoken to alone. Staff are spoken to, records are examined in the home and feedback is obtained about the quality of care from the child's social worker, family, IRO, and other placing authorities as felt appropriate.
- 3.6 At the end of the monitoring visit, the visiting person will produce a report for the home and child's social worker, summarising their findings with any recommendations. These are followed up with further visits or communication as felt necessary to provide the assurances required to demonstrate the expected quality of care.

4.0 DATA SUMMARY RE QUALITY OF PROVISION

- 4.1 Placements are aimed to be made only in a home judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.
- 4.2 As of 31.03.23, the 57 children in external provision are placed across 33 different registered home in England and Scotland. Many homes have several Stockton children in placement.
- 4.3 The chart below gives the percentages of the grades for each of the homes' most recent Ofsted inspection where our children were placed. For the purposes of this report, the data in the chart below includes provision in Scotland which is overseen by the Care Inspectorate.





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

- 7 Ofsted graded Outstanding
- 12 Ofsted graded Good
- 7 Ofsted graded Requires Improvement
- 1 Ofsted graded Inadequate – going home
- 5 Scottish Placement which are inspected by Care Inspectorate. The Care Inspectorate does not provide overall ratings for their homes.
- 1 newly registered provision, which has not yet been inspected by Ofsted

4.5 The information shows a change in overall rating for Children's Homes where Stockton Children and Young people are placed in comparison with the previous reporting period, with more providers now rated as Good or Outstanding and less graded Requires Improvement.

4.6 58% of providers used are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, a rise on previous year, with an increase of 14% of providers rated as Outstanding. In addition, the number of providers that Require Improvement to be good, has reduced by 10% compared to previous years.

4.6 Whilst one provider is graded Inadequate, plans are in place for the CYP within this provision to move to alternative arrangements. SBC has worked closely with the provider to ensure the best possible outcome for the CYP in

this provision. However, of note when the child was placed the Ofsted rating was good.

- 4.7 During this time, SBC was using one Children's Home that had not been inspected by Ofsted, as it was newly registered. Prior to placement, all relevant discussions and documents were obtained to offer assurances of suitability of placement.
- 4.8 Due to highly competitive market conditions, it is not always possible to place children in homes which are rated good. If a child is placed into a home rated as Requires Improvement, the Accommodation and Placement Support Team, will seek assurances from the home that required steps are being taken to address any actions identified in said inspection, as well as discussions with the home manager to understand the reason for this judgement and consider any action plans in place. This info is also shared with social worker, IRO and Virtual School to help inform if placement will be suitable.
- 4.9 29 of the external children's homes caring for Stockton children have received a Monitoring Visit as of 31.03.23. Four homes are yet to receive a monitoring visit are scheduled to be conducted in line with our relevant policy and timescales

5.0 THEMES

- 5.1 The team has dealt with safeguarding concerns over the past year relating to external placements. These have been in relation to young people interacting with organised crime gangs, criminal and sexual exploitation, suicide ideation and extreme self-harm. These are areas in which providers report that they struggle to manage need and safeguard against.
- 5.3 Tees Valley Local Authority raised concerns regarding an external children's home operating within Stockton. As the host authority, the Accommodation and Placement Support Team worked and continue to work in partnership with the home and will continue to offer advice. It is clear to see that they are taking the advice and guidance on board which hopefully will be acknowledged by Ofsted at their next inspection.
- 5.4 This partnership work continues to develop alongside regional colleagues and internal services to help provide assurances of placement suitability as well as establishing partnership working with a range of LAs across the country. Stockton is currently working alongside Childrens Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG) and our internal colleagues in Service Improvement and Quality and Compliance to further develop our monitoring processes going forward.

- 5.5 Themes from providers continue to be that they feel that they have positive working relationships with Stockton on Tees Borough Council workers and staff. They feel that social workers and other staff respond in a timely manner, have good communication and that they visit children in placement over and above legal requirements.
- 5.6 Providers have expressed continued concerns in regard to the high level of frequency our children experience a change in social workers. Senior Stockton Leaders recognise that this is an issue and continue to explore ways to recruit and retain staff to help combat this.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The LA's Accommodation Placement Support Team members have excellent relationships with providers offering not only guidance but practical support that is available to residential children's homes as demonstrated in response to concerns.
- 6.2 This extends to working relationships with other Children's Services staff, such as Social Workers, Independent reviewing officers and external services.
- 6.3 Monitoring plays a vital part in ensuring our children are receiving the highest level of care. There is a schedule of monitoring visits planned in for the next year and a policy which informs how these are undertaken and how frequent.
- 6.4 Visits have prioritised to those provision where concerns have been shared in order to obtain the assurances that children in our care are in safe and are in stable placements.
- 6.5 Demand for placements continue to be high, with challenges regarding the market, competition for placements, reduced capacity in fostering and additional pressures to place children.
- 6.6 Use of unregulated placements is limited and are used only as a 'last resort' but are monitored effectively to ensure suitability and safety.
- 6.7 More children are placed within the Stockton on Tees or Tees Valley area than previously, ensuring children remain close to their family, education and other links, minimising disruption.
- 6.8 The overall number of children in providers that are rated Good or Outstanding has increased and numbers of children in providers that Require Improvement has reduced.

6.9 Support and assurances are in place to monitor providers that do Require Improvement or are Inadequate.