

Attendance Strategy 2023-2026

Stockton-on-Tees



DRAFT

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Section 1:

Our vision for Stockton-on-Tees



Our vision for Stockton-on-Tees is that attendance is everyone's business and that by working together as a whole community we will make a difference to the lives of our children and young people.

In Stockton-on-Tees, we understand and believe that good attendance at school is key to achieving success in education, in learning skills to forge and maintain positive relationships and will have a positive impact on adult lives.

Our vision is for every child and young person to have excellent attendance at school, where they are excited to learn and grow every day. We believe that good attendance not only affects academic attainment and progress but also helps to build stronger social and emotional connections in turn fostering a sense of belonging and wellbeing for all. We want our young people to leave school with a deep love of learning, a strong sense of purpose, and the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their chosen path. We believe that maintaining good attendance is a crucial part of this journey and we are resolute in making that a reality for all children and young people across our Borough.

Section 2:

National context and evidence base

The right of every child to an education is embedded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. In addition, UK law entitles every child of compulsory school age to full-time education suitable to their age and any special educational need they may have. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have a legal duty to ensure their child attends that school every day it is open.

While attendance at early education settings is not set out in law, there is compelling evidence that attending early years education from as young as two years of age has benefits for the emotional, social and cognitive development of children (DFE 2022). In addition, regular attendance at settings in the early years carries forward into the routines of children and parents when they start their school journey.

In May 2022, the DfE published Working Together to Improve School Attendance - guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities, with a commitment for the guidance to become statutory from September 2023. The guidance outlines a clear message that improving attendance is everyone's business and requires close collaboration between local authorities, education settings, families, communities and services that are involved in the lives of children and young people.

There is robust evidence that high levels of attendance directly impacts and improves children and young people's achievement, wellbeing and their future life chances. Every day spent in the classroom gives children and young people more opportunities to learn, and in turn to perform well in assessments, with higher rates of attendance consistently associated with higher levels of attainment in learning assessments and exams (DfE 2019). In addition, education also provides children and young people with a range of enriching opportunities that benefit their learning and wider social development, supporting them to find their talents and passions to reach their potential and lay the foundations for a happy and healthy future.

Attendance at school and education settings keeps children and young people safe. For many children and young people attendance is a both a protective factor and provides the best opportunity for needs to be identified early and support provided. A national review by the Child Safeguarding Review Panel in 2020 highlights the complex and damaging effect that being drawn into exploitation can have on children and young people, their family, friends and wider communities. We know that the structure and routine of attending school and education settings can substantially reduce the risk of children and young people being exposed to situations which may increase their vulnerability to criminal or sexual exploitation.

The culture, ethos and environments of schools and education settings play a vital role in promoting and protecting the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented disruptions to the education of children and young people, which has had a lasting effect on attendance, with the proportion of children and young people with persistent absence (missing 10% or more of school) and severe absence (missing 50% or more of school) more than doubling compared to levels before the pandemic (DfE 2019). Research shows that COVID-19-related disruptions have worsened educational inequalities and had an impact on the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people - with the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and young people and their peers widening and increases in anxiety and mental health related school absences (EEF 2022).

Some children and young people may find it harder to attend education than their peers and need additional support to help them access school and education settings. For example, supporting children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities, or children with medical conditions requires joined up working between education, local authorities, health and care services. In addition, barriers to attendance can be complex and outside of the control of schools and education settings alone. For example, the responsibilities of young carers can lead to them being at higher risk of regularly missing education.

The evidence for the positive impact of good attendance is strong, and national guidance from DfE outlines approaches to attendance that will soon become statutory for schools/education settings and local authorities. While the approach to improving attendance will depend on the context of the individual school or education setting, the evidence base and guidance identify common approaches that achieve high levels of attendance and minimise persistent absence:

- A relentless focus on attendance, embedded across the whole school or education setting.
- Systematic use of data to identify patterns and trends.
- High expectations for attendance, clearly communicated to children and young people and parents.
- Listening to parents and children and young people about why they are not attending and putting support in place to overcome barriers.
- Working closely with families, communities and other services involved in the lives of children and young people so that attendance is everyone's business.

DfE (2022) Study of early education and development SEED. Available at: Study of early education and development (SEED) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

DfE (2019). The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4. Available at: The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4, Academic year 2018/19 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

Education Endowment Fund (2022). The impact of Covid-19 on learning: A review of the evidence. Available at: Best evidence on impact of COVID-19 on pupil attainment | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Section 3:

Local context

Stockton-on-Tees is a vibrant borough made up of six towns drawing on a range of community assets including the river Tees, green spaces, parks and a strong culture and arts heritage. However, within our communities, inequality is a particular challenge. Stockton-on-Tees has a mix of some of the most affluent wards in the country alongside some of the most deprived, with nine of our twenty-six wards among the 10% most deprived wards in the country. These inequalities can lead to avoidable differences in the outcomes for our children and young people.

In recent years, overall absence for all children and young people attending primary, secondary and special schools within Stockton-on-Tees has followed a similar trend to the regional and national average, with the overall absence of all children and young people increasing from 4.8% in 2018/2019 to 7.7% during the 2021/2022 academic year (compared to 7.6% nationally during 2021/22).

Since 2018, the proportion of persistent absences (children and young people missing 10% of education – equivalent to one day or more a fortnight over the academic year) has more than doubled. During the 2018/2019 academic year 10.8% of all children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees had persistent absence rates, increasing to 23.4% during the 2021/2022 academic year. These challenges are reflected in both the regional and national averages (a regional rate of 24.7% for 2021/2022 and a national rate of 22.5% for 2021/2022) for persistent absence, which have also doubled over the same time period.

The proportion of severe absence (children and young people missing more than 50% of education) in Stockton-on-Tees has also increased during this time period, from 1% in 2018/2019 to 1.8% in 2021/2022, a trend that follows our regional and national averages (1.9% regionally in 2021/2022 and 1.7% nationally in 2021/2022).

Over recent years the proportion of 16–17 year-old young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) has risen overall, with

the proportion of young people aged 16 – 17 not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Stockton-on-Tees (5.3%) is currently higher than the national average (4.7%).

Within Stockton-on-Tees we recognise from our data that there are some groups who are more vulnerable to lower attendance and higher absence. These include:

- Children and young people of secondary school age
- Children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- Children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans
- Children and young people who are entitled to Free School Meals
- Children and young people who are in care
- Children and young people with a social worker
- Children and young people who receive multiple suspensions
- Girls (since 21/22)
- Children and young people of some ethnic minorities

Whilst some of these groups of children and young people have attendance at the same as or higher than national averages for similar groups, their attendance is lower than that of other children and young people who do not have these characteristics.

The vision and priorities described within this strategy document have been informed by collaboration with our families, children and young people, education settings and partner services. During November 2022, education settings, parents and carers, police, support services and council services came together to discuss the current local context, the challenges to attendance across the borough, and the outcomes that good attendance could support. Key themes that emerged from discussions are summarised on the next page.

Summary of key themes

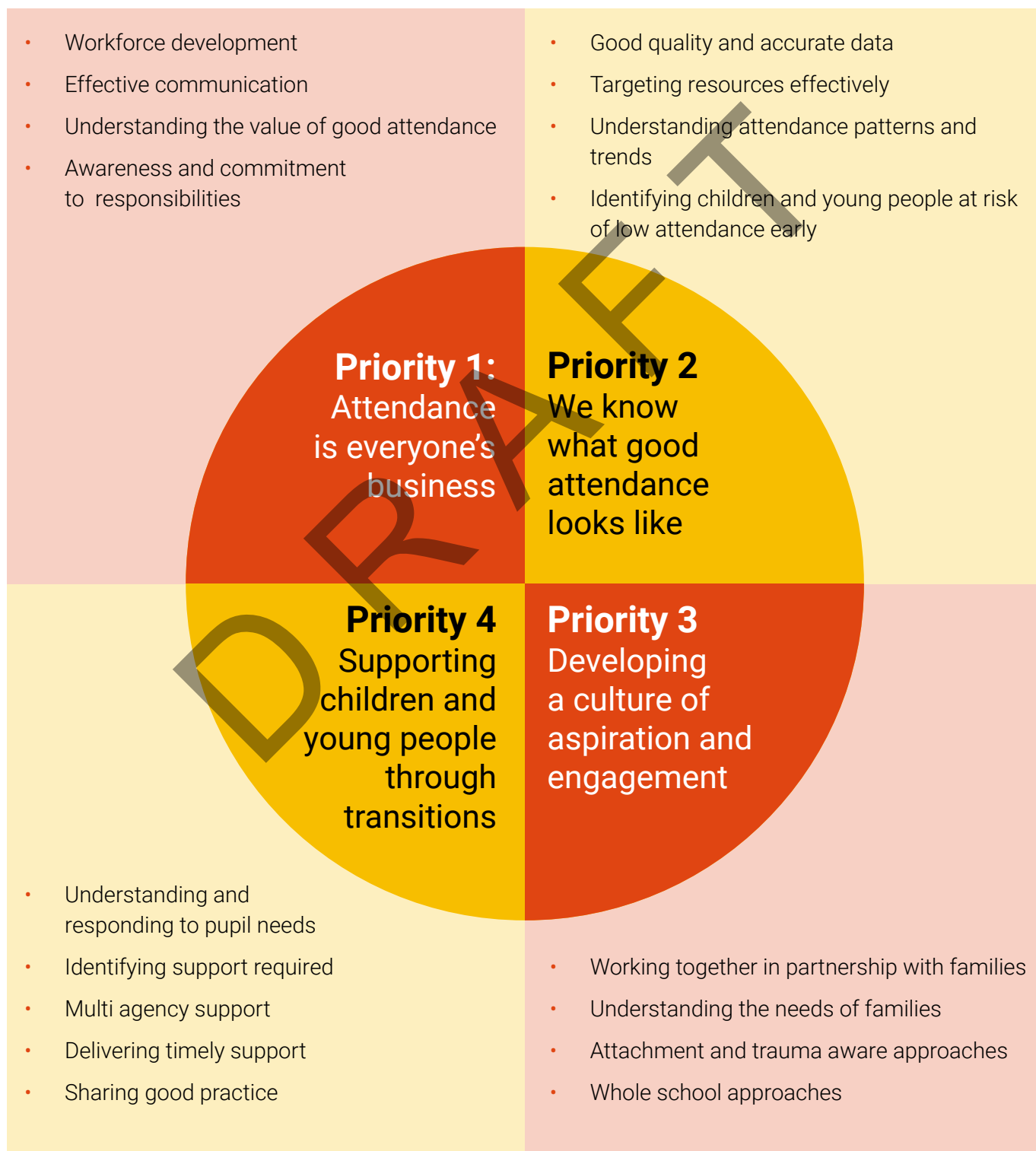
What are the barriers to good attendance?	Why is good attendance important?
<p>Difficult relationships between school and some families</p> <p>Whole school cultures can feel negative for some children and young people</p> <p>Poor and unsupported transitions</p> <p>Lack of understanding of the impact of low attendance in some agencies and families, children and young people</p>	<p>Establishes good habits and routines from the early years onwards</p> <p>Increases aspirations which impact on life chances</p> <p>Increased capacity to support children and young people in other areas of their learning and development</p>
What do we need to improve?	What are the benefits?
<p>We need a shared vision held by all agencies</p> <p>More consistent approaches across education settings and partner services</p> <p>Better communication and early intervention</p> <p>Improved relationships between schools and some families</p> <p>Whole school cultures that engage all children and young people and where children and young people feel safe</p> <p>Better use of data and analysis</p> <p>Increased support is needed for some families</p>	<p>Supports the developments of friendships, relationships and life skills</p> <p>Safe and healthy children and young people</p> <p>Early identification of families needing more support</p>

Section 4:

Our priorities

To achieve our vision, we have identified four priorities informed through:

- Discussions with partner agencies, schools, families and children and young people
- Knowledge of local data
- Understanding the evidence base of what promotes good attendance
- Understanding the evidence base of what the barriers are to good attendance.



Priority 1:

Attendance is everyone's business



This means that as professionals, families, and services we know and accept that we all have collective responsibility for promoting and supporting good attendance for our children and young people. For families and children this can help them to understand the roles and responsibilities that they have regarding attendance at school, and for our wider services a clear understanding of how they can help to support attendance in their day-to-day work with families.

Fostering good habits of attendance early provide a solid foundation for our children and young people as they grow into adults. However, this can only be achieved through understanding the context of our Borough, and the needs of our families and communities within it.

"I work closely with school, and I know who to contact if I have any concerns. I have a named contact to report any absence and discuss any concerns. They work with parents and pupil to ensure needs are met and my child is supported." **(Parent)**

We will:

- Through network meetings and a range of communications equip the whole workforce to understand their responsibility and the impact they can have in supporting children and young people to attend school regularly.
- Provide training for the workforce to support them in being able to address absence as early as possible and to be able to support and challenge when attendance is low.
- Develop clear processes between services and share with families so that everyone has clarity regarding early intervention, roles and responsibilities, processes and procedures.
- Ensure that all services are explicit about how their work contributes to improve the attendance of children and young people across the Borough on a day-to-day basis.

"I never realised that I could affect attendance of children in my current job role. Now I realise there is so much more we could do in our team to support."
(Partner agency within the wider council)

Priority 2:

We know what good attendance looks like



This means as a Borough we understand how absence impacts on academic and social and emotional development of children and young people. In order to improve attendance we must have access to high quality accurate data which is up to date so that we can identify any trends and emerging patterns as early as possible. Using regional and national benchmarks can inform us of how well we are doing, but our ambition is for the attendance of all our children and young people is to be as high as possible for them as individuals. This can only be achieved using “professional curiosity” when reviewing or analysing attendance data of individual or groups/cohorts of children and young people to help to identify when and where our resources are needed most.

We will:

- Further develop data systems to ensure that agencies have access to detailed and accurate attendance data.
- Through network meetings and focused visits, support schools where necessary to be able to fully understand their attendance data and how it compares to local, regional and national trends.
- Analyse data to identify groups who are vulnerable to low attendance at an early date and to identify where groups of children and young people have good or better attendance in order that good practice can be shared.
- Ensure that data is used to identify and target support where it is needed most.

“It would be good to have attendance data broken down into categories. That would give a much more accurate reflection of why the percentage is the way it is.”

(Parent)

“Having the right data is vital to analyse issues, provide the right support and identify next steps at whole school, cohort or individual level.”

(Headteacher)

Priority 3: Developing a culture of aspiration and engagement



This means we recognise that our children and young people are our next generation of adults who will make valuable contributions to the communities they live in and serve at local through to global level. We strive for our children and young people to have dreams about their future and be able to be supported to work towards them despite any barriers they may believe will prevent them from reaching those dreams in the future. We want our children and young people to be excited about their futures and to be aware of all the opportunities open to them. We recognise that for some children and young people their life experiences may impact on their ability to feel safe and secure which in turn may prevent them from achieving their aspiration. We aim to have a consistent approach between families, schools and other agencies which is based on the understanding of attachment and trauma informed practice. This will enable us to give our children and young people what they need to engage and to achieve both now and in their future.

*"The more time you are in school
the more you learn"*
(Pupil)

We will:

- Continue to gather feedback and listen to our children and young people and families so that we can better understand their needs and the barriers that may be preventing their children from attending and engaging in education.
- Work in partnership with our families for the best interests of their children.
- Support all agencies and schools to commit to and embed using attachment and trauma aware approaches in their work.
- Work together with all our schools to further develop whole school approaches that foster aspirations and inspire our children and young people to accomplish their dreams.

Children who have experienced attachment difficulties and trauma often have significant gaps in their development which can impact on attendance. By using attachment aware and trauma informed strategies that are supported by neuroscience, schools can support children to regulate their emotions, moderate their anxiety and develop their executive functioning skills, ultimately supporting their school attendance.
(Virtual School Headteacher)

Priority 4: Securing good transitions

This means that we realise that good transitions lead to successful changes. As children develop into independent young adults, they experience a range of transitions, including the different phases of education which move them through to employment. In addition, for some children and young people, help and support from a range of agencies will be needed to ensure they have a positive experience in their transition from home to school, and throughout their school day.

While many transitions can be planned for, some will be unexpected. Significant events within families can lead to substantial changes in the lives of children, including bereavement, family breakdown, and relationship or economic difficulties. Families may need support from a number of agencies during these times, working together to reduce the impact on the wellbeing of children and young people within families.

In addition to working with individual families, some of the biggest issues facing attendance within the Borough will only be addressed through agencies working together to understand and address barriers to attendance at a community level.

We know that transitions can manifest in many ways and that some may appear smaller whilst others more significant. Despite the nature or size of the transition this can have an impact on a child or young person's academic progress and/or their social and emotional well-being. We know that a transition that is not positive can lead to reduced attendance and engagement in education. We will serve to raise the profile of the importance of all transitions and how children and young people can be supported through them. We will work in a multi-agency manner when required to give children and young people the support they may require during times of transition.

"Having that one person who got to really know me, who took time to understand me helped me to look forward again. It's important not to rush and to take it slow and to build real connections."

(Pupil)



We will:

- Listen to children and young people about how different transitions impact on them and their attendance.
- Raise the awareness across schools, agencies and families of the social, emotional and academic impact of transitions and how this can affect a child or young person. Where patterns of attendance are good following transitions we will share the elements of good practice with schools, families and partner agencies so that they may adopt similar approaches.
- Ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the support they can offer during transitions no matter how big or small they are.
- Identify what support can be offered during times of transition and action this support wherever possible.
- Share good practice and commit to work together as multi agencies to support children and young people in times of transition.

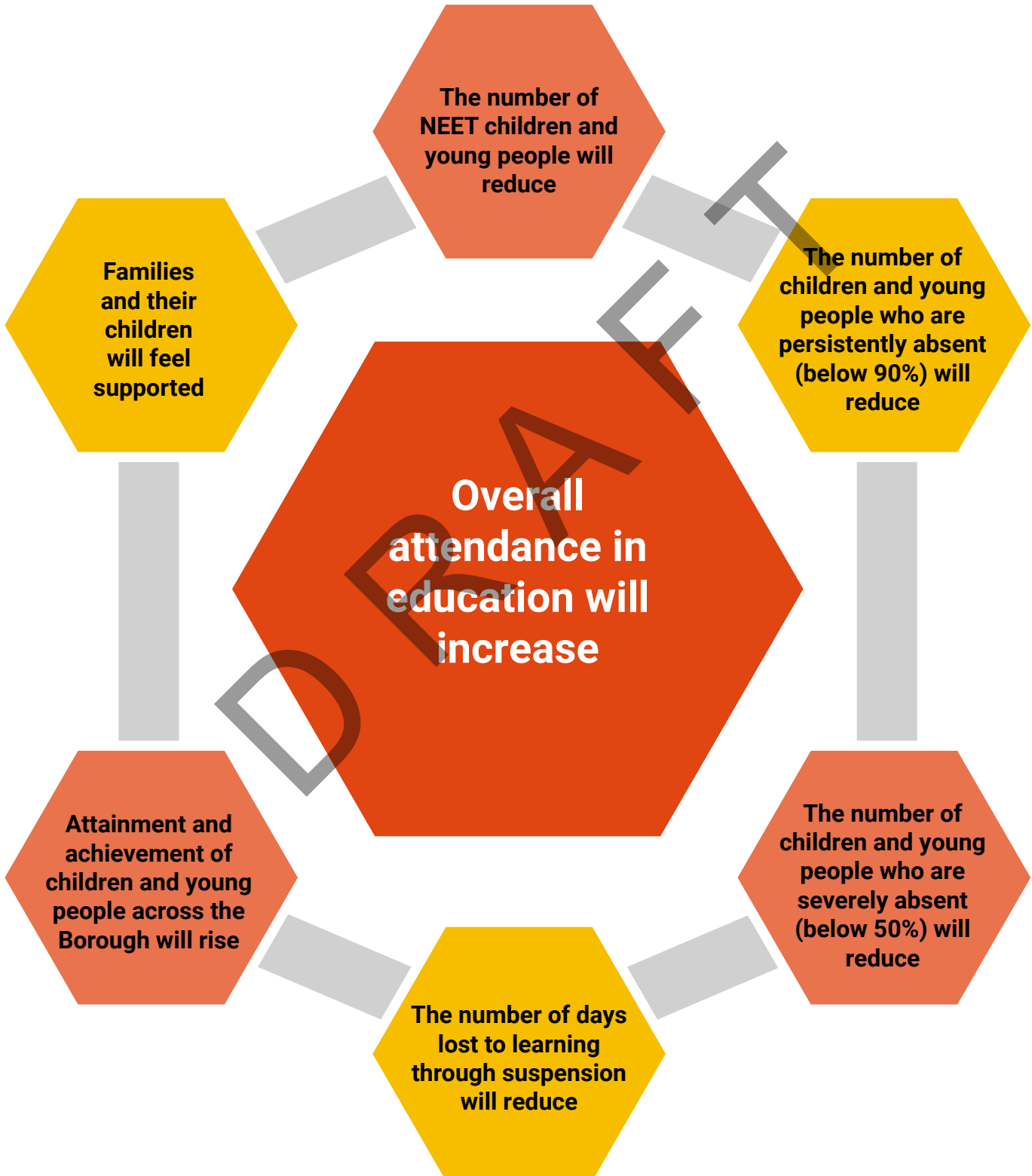
"Having regular contact/visits from school and the Local Authority teams made the most difference to my son's attendance along with a referral to young carers support. Being supported to help me be firmer when he wasn't as ill as he said he was helped too."

(Parent)

Section 5:

How will we know we are making a difference?

There will be various indicators that will tell us that we are making a difference through the delivery of this strategy. These include:



Section 6:

How will we take the strategy forward?



The delivery of this strategy will be led by an attendance strategy group using a multi-agency approach who will work to deliver the shared vision and commitments towards the four priorities as set out in this strategy.

- Working groups and task groups will be created as needed to complete discrete pieces of work which may be necessary to fully implement and embed the priorities within this strategy.
- Progress of the strategy will be monitored and scrutinised by the Children's Service Leadership Team to ensure that attendance for our children and young people is improving.
- An action plan of delivery of the commitments made for each service area will be developed, finalised and added to this strategy within the first 6 months of the launch of the strategy.
- A summary of progress towards each priority will be shared twice a year.
- Pupil and parent voice will be captured on an annual basis and will help in the review of the priorities each year.

Appendices



Appendix 1

Guidance which relates to the strategy and priorities within it.

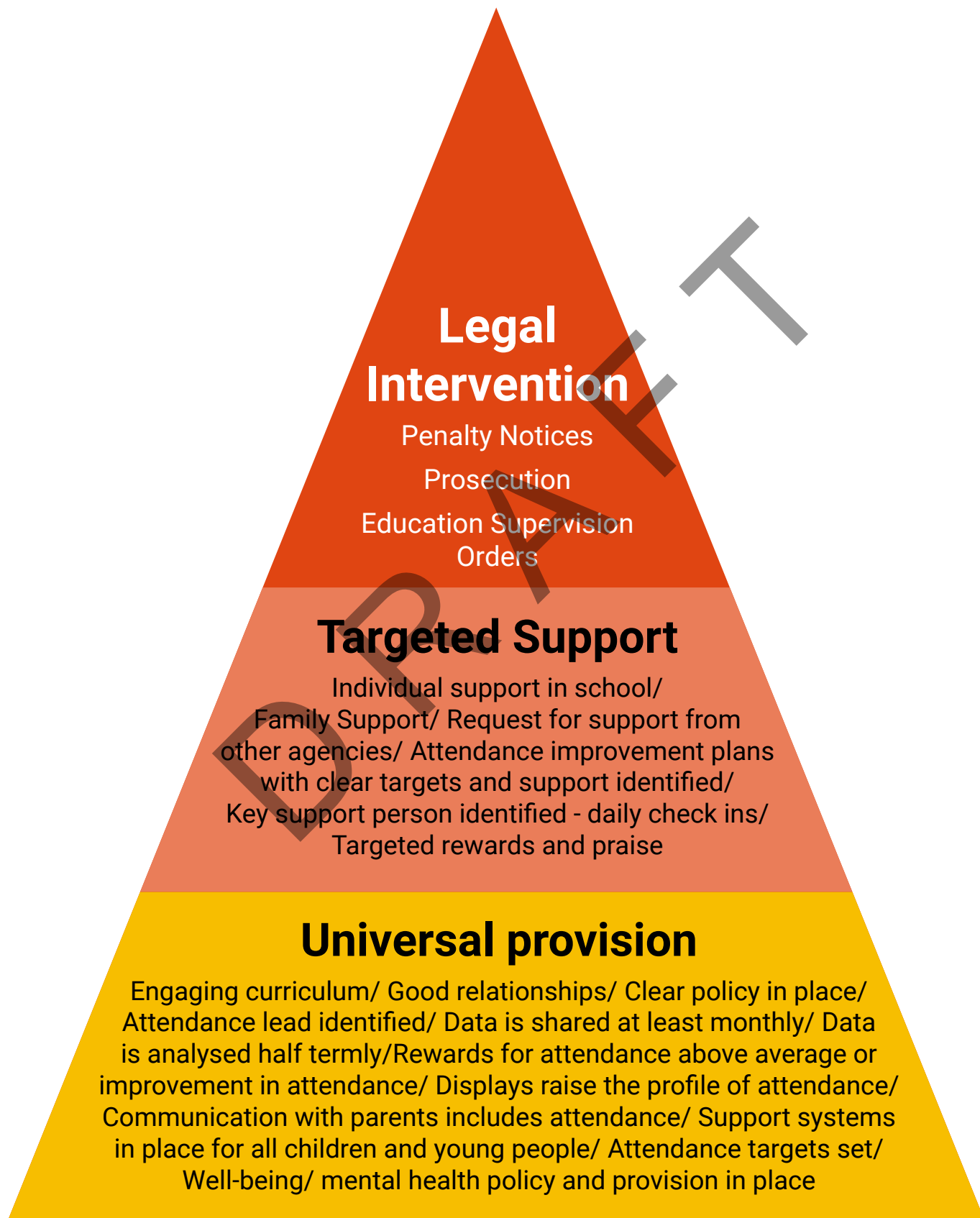
- 1. DfE, “Working Together To Improve Attendance” (May 2022)**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1099677/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance.pdf
- 2. DfE “Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance - Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities” (May 2022)**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1073619/Summary_table_of_responsibilities_for_school_attendance.pdf
- 3. Ofsted “Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence” (Feb 2022)**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-good-attendance-and-tackling-persistent-absence/securing-good-attendance-and-tackling-persistent-absence>
- 4. DfE “Study of early education and development (SEED)” (Nov 2021)**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1034423/SEED-Age_3_RESEARCH_REPORT.pdf
- 5. DfE “Persistent absence for unauthorised other reasons: who is at risk” (May 2023)**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1157219/Persistent_absence_for_unauthorised_other_reasons.pdf

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Appendix 3

Stockton-on-Tees Attendance Provision Map

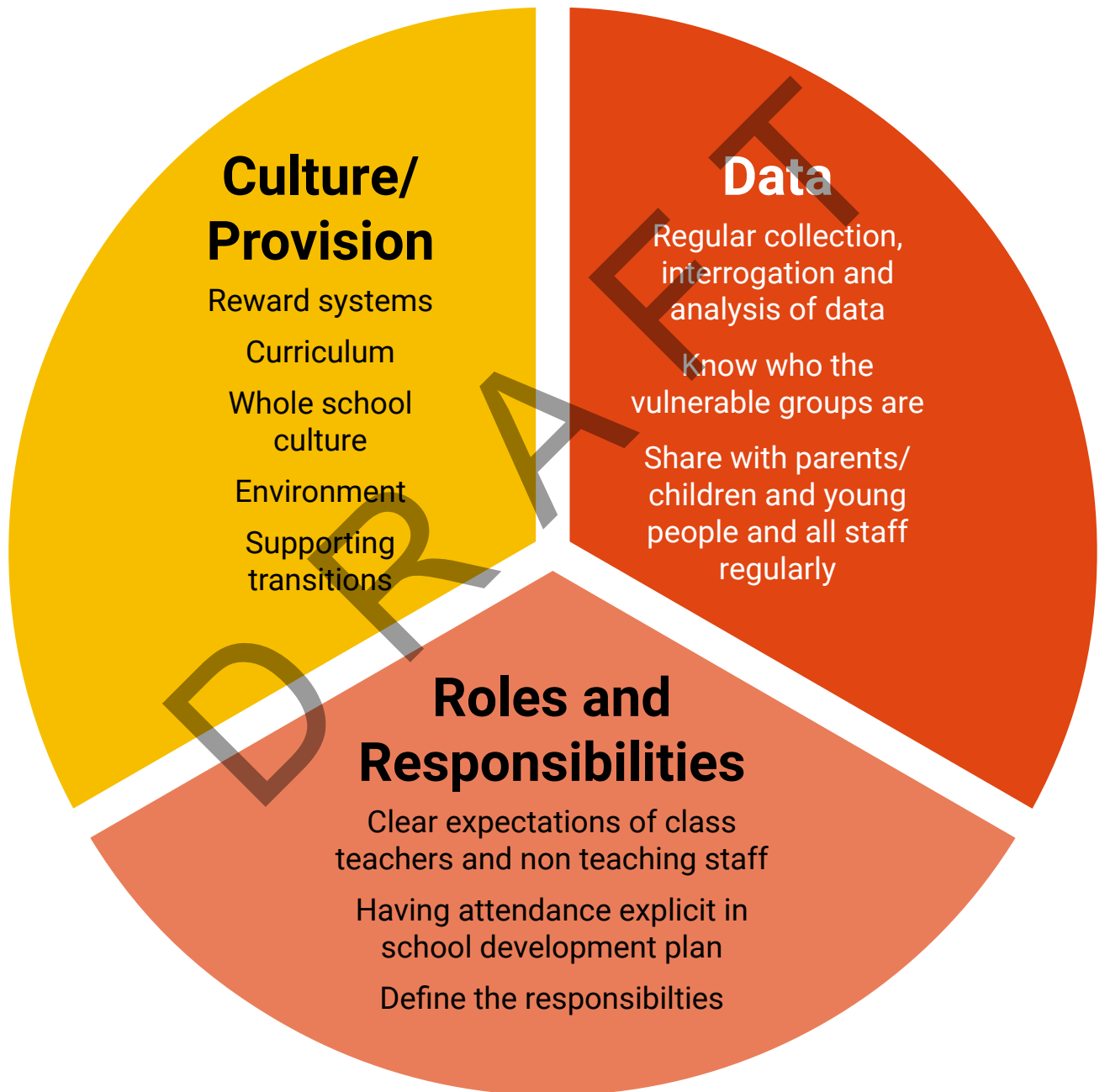
This provision map gives examples of what provision can be expected for all children and young people and for those who are vulnerable to low attendance. It can be used at a whole school or individual pupil level and should be amended/added to depending on the school/setting.



Appendix 4

School/Setting based provision to increase attendance

This diagram shows the three key elements that should be in place within schools/settings to have a positive impact in attendance. All elements are intertwined and have a symbiotic relationship and give a solid foundation for schools/settings to use to improve the attendance of their children and young people.



Appendix 5

Stockton-on-Tees statutory attendance procedures

Working together to improve attendance

Guidance for schools regarding referrals for statutory attendance procedures
“Procedures for accrued unauthorised absence”

Introduction

The new DfE guidance “Working together to improve attendance” came into effect in September 2022. This guidance makes clear reference to attendance being the responsibility of all stakeholders. As such we aim to work together in partnership to improve and maintain good attendance of all children and young people across Stockton-on-Tees.

Aims of this leaflet

- Give advice and guidance to schools and settings
- To clarify expectations of the support schools and settings should be putting in place for children and young people prior to a referral being made
- Offer examples of the support that can be offered to children and young people when schools and settings are helping them to improve their attendance

Making a referral

Referrals and evidence for statutory attendance procedures can be sent to the locality team within the vulnerable learner’s team using the email address overleaf.

We ask that you seek to familiarise yourself with the information overleaf regarding the support that should be given prior to the referral being made.

The support at Tier 1 and 2 **must** be evidenced prior to making the referral

When a referral is received it will be quality assured to confirm that your school/setting has met the criteria of support offered in Tier 1 and Tier 2.

Please note that if it becomes evident that the support outlined at school level and advice taken from other agencies has not been actioned then the referral will be declined, and you will be asked to use the information overleaf to help you plan the support for the pupil before resubmission.

Tier 1 – School Level Interventions

- 1st day response
- Regular home visits
- Regular (and more than 1) meetings to discuss concerns and support. These must be minuted and include an attendance improvement plan
- Attendance plans must have targets that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific) and detail the support to be given
- Parent and pupil views must be evidenced
- Escalation to the senior lead for attendance in the school e.g., records of meetings/logs
- Details of reasonable adjustments – academic/ pastoral/ adjustment to school day

Tier 2 – Support from other agencies

- Advice and guidance from the school support adviser
- Offer of early help (Help and Support)
- SBC SMART service referral (if appropriate)
- Request for outreach for children and young people with SEND needs, for example SEMH support
- Specialist referrals to other agencies, for example, mental health, 0-19 service etc
- Reviews for EHCP children and young people where appropriate
- Referrals of a safeguarding nature, for example MACE, CHUBB
- Evidence of attendance being discussed at other meetings e.g., CIN/CP/PEP

Tier 3 – Referral to Vulnerable Learners Team

1. Please use the email address below to make the referral if the above support has been given and the attendance has not improved significantly, and the rate of unauthorised absence remains high.
2. Please also email the evidence for the referral to **attendance.vlt@stockton.gov.uk**

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all agencies, schools and families who contributed towards this strategy in the best interest of the children and young people of Stockton-on-Tees.

We would like to acknowledge the time and valuable contributions made by the following to support the writing of this strategy:

Parents

Children and young people

Stockton Parent Carer Forum

Schools and Settings

SEND & Inclusion service

Education Improvement Service

Quality and Improvement Service

Help & Support Service

Children's Social Care

School Admissions

Legal Services

Strategic Planning and Performance Service

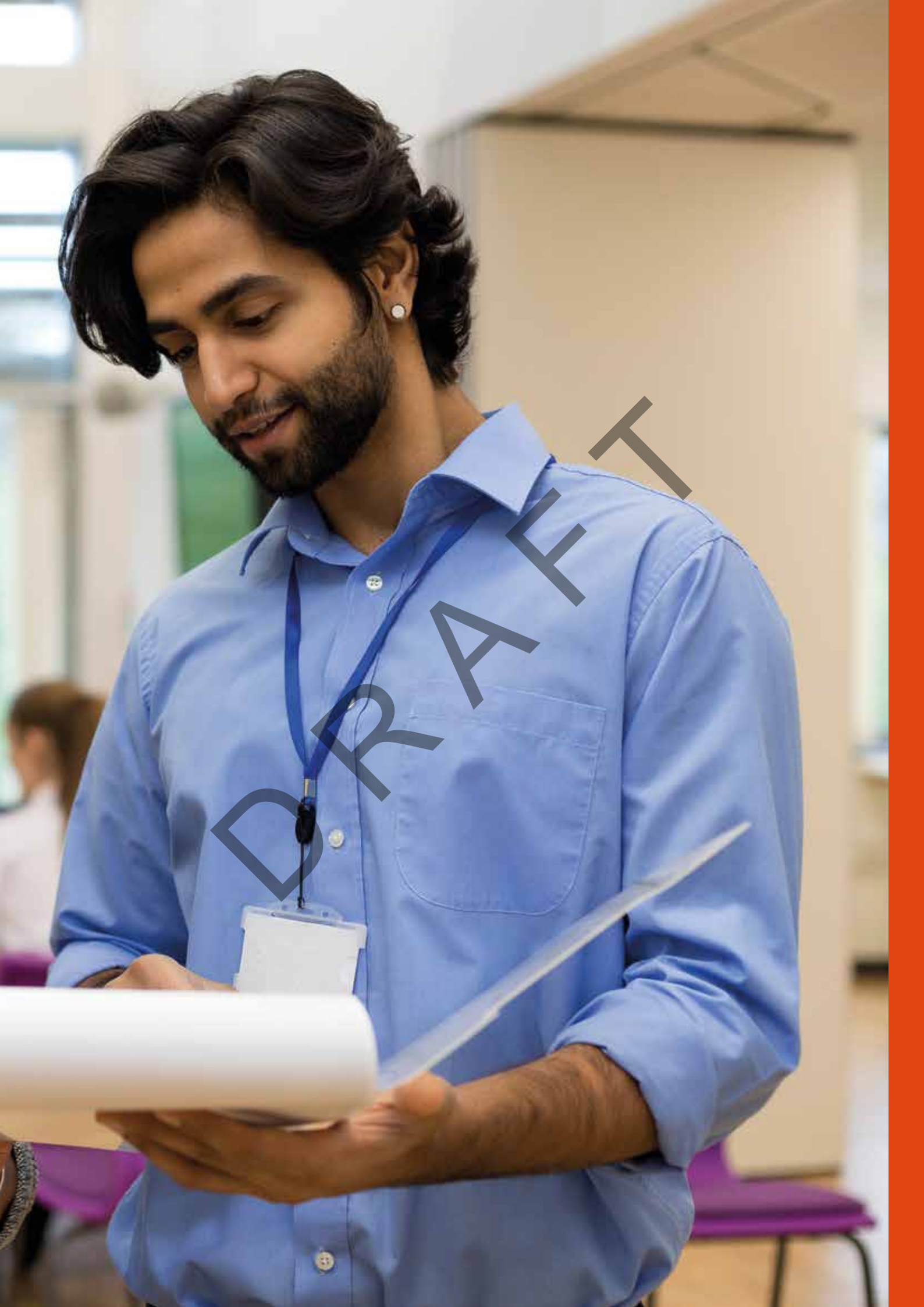
Health Services

Police

Housing

Finally, we would also like to thank everyone who helped to finalise this strategy through offering valuable suggestions and going forward, to everyone who commits to making attendance of our children and young people "their business" to secure the best outcomes for all.





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