



## **Bristol City Council**

# **Sufficiency Strategy - Placements for Children in Care and Care Leavers**

**2023**

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## Introduction

We have a legal duty to take steps to ensure that we can provide children in care with homes that meet their needs, within our area. This involves making sure there is a sufficient range and number of providers capable of meeting the differing needs of our children in care and care leavers.

Bristol's Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2023 was written before the emergence of the Covid pandemic and, although still relevant in most aspects, now lacks current context. Therefore, a strategy refresh has been required and is intended to signal current priorities. This is a 12-month strategy and will be reviewed in March 2024 and annually thereafter.

## Local Policy Context

This sufficiency strategy is part of a broad range of activity that supports our shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care leavers including:

### **Bristol Corporate Strategy 2022-27:**

Theme 1: of the Corporate Strategy 2022-27 is Children and Young People with the top-level aim of achieving "a city where every child belongs and every child gets the best start in life, whatever circumstances they were born in to".

#### 1. Child friendly city

Children and young people are supported by the city, their community, and the council to have the best possible start in life. They can reach their full potential and are kept safe from and supported to overcome violence, abuse, and other adverse childhood experiences, whatever the circumstances of their birth.

#### 2. Supported to thrive

Children and young people are supported by the city, their community, and the council to have the best possible start in life. They can reach their full potential and are kept safe from and supported to overcome violence, abuse, and other adverse childhood experiences, whatever the circumstances of their birth.

#### 3. Intergenerational equality

Lead city-wide approaches to tackling the root causes of structural inequality, breaking cycles of disadvantage, poverty, and trauma across generations to improve health and life opportunities.

This is supported by the Belonging Strategy

### **The Belonging Strategy:**

The Belonging Strategy sets out our vision and key priorities for the provision of services and support for children and young people in Bristol, within four segments of the life-course. At its heart is inclusion and equality, and these key principles are the drivers for our sufficiency improvements:

- [Belonging from the Beginning](#)

- [Belonging in Education](#)
- [Belonging in Families](#)
- [Belonging in the Community](#)

## Our Vision

Our vision for children and families in Bristol is that they get the right response and the right help at the right time. We are committed to working with families and children in need to support them to stay together where this is safe and in the child's best interest to do so.

Where care becomes necessary, we will explore options for living with wider family and friends' networks wherever possible; and as Corporate Parents, we hold high aspirations for the children and young people in our care.

Bristol is committed to being an effective, caring and ambitious corporate parent and we will show this through our love, our language and our actions. We will do everything we can to make sure that our care-experienced children are set up for life.

We will ensure the same standard of care as any good parent which means we will have high aspirations for our children and will be strong advocates for them. We will do everything we can to equip the children and young people with the skills needed to live a fulfilling, successful, and rewarding life that is full of love. We want Bristol to be a 'Care Aware' city that champions our children in care and our care leavers. We will take bold and innovative steps to ensure that the people who are privileged to parent our children have the right training, support, knowledge and skills that our children need and deserve. ([Bristol Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2023](#))

## Our Aims

### 1. Keeping children local – Prevention of Care and Children in Care

#### Preventing children and young people entering care:

We want to keep children at home with their families, wherever this is safe to do so. We will do this through increased targeted early support for families on the edge of care.

Bristol is one of 75 local authorities that has been selected by the Government for £4.8m of funding, to support the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme in the local area. The programme's core objective is to improve access to integrated universal and early help family services, including Start for Life services, in areas with the highest levels of deprivation and disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes.

The aim of the Family Hubs programme is to provide support as early as possible, so parents / carers feel supported and empowered in caring for and nurturing their children, ensuring they receive the best start in life and preventing family breakdown. This in turn will improve health and education outcomes for babies and children and support them to thrive in later life and remain at home with

their families. In addition, a DWP grant of £97k over two years will support our family hub delivery of effective relationship support to reduce parental conflict in the home.

### Local Sufficiency:

We want to increase local sufficiency to place children in care either within or as close to Bristol as possible. This will ensure children and young people retain consistent links and access to local education, health and social care services. Contact with families will also be easier to facilitate. We will increase our fostering provision to include more intensive fostering and support packages for family care and we will develop additional post-16 housing as well as ensuring there is a pathway for our care leavers to achieving good, independent accommodation when they are ready.

## **2. Developing sufficiency for same day and urgent need**

We need short-term provision for children in Bristol who have an urgent need for safety and with a staff team comprising Health and Social Care. This provision will enable us to properly assess children who are in crisis and to stabilise them and prepare them for a more permanent living arrangement that fully meets their needs. These children may be highly emotionally dysregulated or may be stepping down from remand or other secure accommodation.

## **3. Increase placement stability**

Placement instability reduces a child's opportunities to develop secure attachments, and it can also compound any existing behavioural and emotional difficulties. As we increase the numbers of children living in and around Bristol, we will expand our therapeutic support models for carers and for our children and young people which will help to reduce the need for a child who is having a difficult time to move.

We know that school attendance is a stabilising factor for children, and we see that placements for children often disrupt when they are not attending school. We will work to always promote the need for inclusivity but will also review our alternative learning provision to ensure that it matches to the complex needs of some children.

## **What Children in Care Said**

Bristol's Annual Children in Care Survey found that:

- 97% of children in care trust the adults they live with
- 95% felt safe in the home they live in
- 90% like their bedroom
- 95% feel happy where they live
- Disabled children all reported feeling happy and safe where they lived

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people were less likely to report feeling listened to in decision making (56% strongly agreed they felt listened to vs 82% of peers in care of similar age). Since this survey we have done significant work with our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people through

Welcome Wednesdays and established a new UASC Social Care team to address this. UASC reported they didn't want a family setting but rather shared homes with other young people seeking asylum so they could support each other, this has informed our sufficiency plans.

## Provision Bristol Has Access To:

### **Children's homes:**

Bristol City Council currently has five operational in-house children's homes with capacity for up to 15 children. There is a Children's Homes Re-profiling programme in place which plans for steady growth and changes from larger children's homes to smaller two-bedroom homes and increasing our capacity up to 24.

There is one privately run children's homes within Bristol City Council boundaries, however there are 5 within neighbouring authorities and the Healthier Together ICB footprint.

Bristol is a member of the South-Central Residential framework but is increasingly reliant on spot-purchasing provision as many providers choose not to join, or to withdraw from, the framework.

There are two Short Breaks homes in Bristol providing short breaks to disabled children, which are not in the scope of this sufficiency plan. Since the closure of St Christopher's in 2019 there have been no residential homes for disabled children and young people within Bristol.

### **Foster Care:**

In house - Bristol City Council offers the following carers for our children in care:

- 272 mainstream fostering households
- 52 alternative carer/respice
- 93 kinship carers

Independent Fostering Association - Bristol is a member of the South-Central fostering framework but continues to require a level spot-purchasing provision as many providers choose not to join the framework.

### **16+ Accommodation:**



The majority of our supported accommodation for those aged 16 and over is delivered via a dynamic purchasing system. The DPS currently has 18 providers on - there are 5 providers with properties in Bristol, with most of the accommodation in nearby Gloucestershire and Somerset. Providers have reported it is easier to secure accommodation in neighbouring authorities due to lower house prices and rents.

In addition to the DPS we have several block arrangements within Bristol for 6 independence flats and 3 shared properties for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). We have brought an

additional 10 beds online in the past year to meet the increased demand of places for our UASC young people.

In house, we run a range of supported flats for young people called The Projects and a successful supported lodgings scheme Branch Out, both of which enable young people to move towards independence while living in a supported environment.

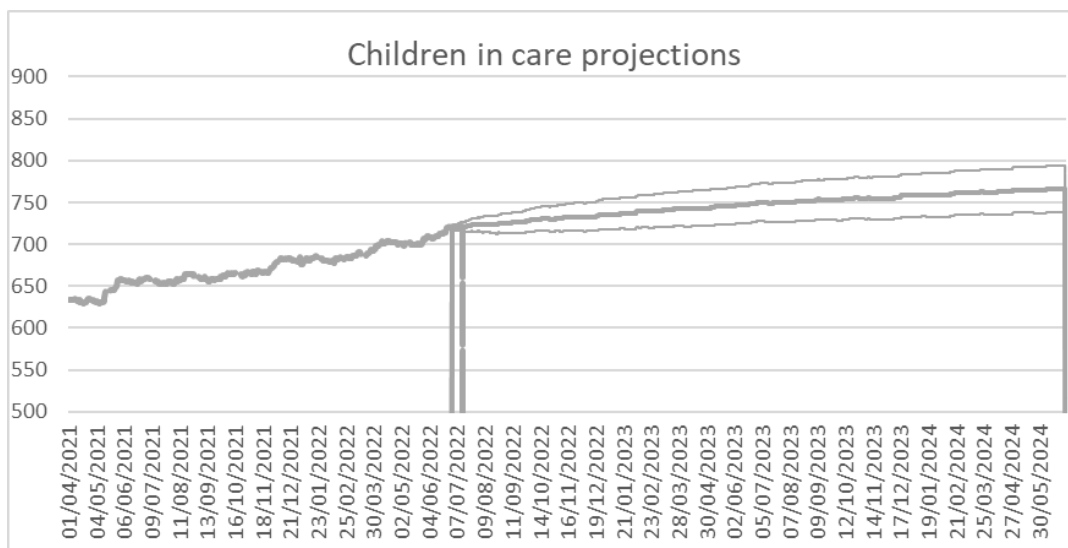
## Our Key Challenges in the Development of Sufficiency

-  Over the past 3 years Bristol has had an increasing percentage of children in care placed at 20 miles or more away from home, from 21% in 2019/20 to 23% in 2021/22, the national performance for this measure is 17%. For our children in external residential provision, this rises to 71%.
-  There has been an increased reliance on using residential placements - from 12% at the end of 2020/21 to 16.8% at the end of 2021/22.
- ↓ Data shows us that the South-West region is home to only 7% all Children's Homes and 6% of all places – the joint lowest region with London. As numbers of children in care have increased in the region, average placement costs across the South-west rose by over 30% during the period between 2016/17 and 2020/21 compared to a national increase of around 20%, contributing to the increased number of high-cost placements.
- ★ The impact of children with very complex needs is a key challenge for Bristol and for all LAs in the South-West (see SW Sufficiency Programme Market Position Statement). Numbers of children with an EHCP have increased year on year, and children with neuro disabilities whose families are unable to manage their behaviours have risen in visibility, necessitating high levels of care and support which the external market is currently not meeting.
- † The population profile, including the intake of UASC children shows that we need to increase our range of provision for older teenagers and care leavers.
- ✘ Extra-familial harm for adolescents means that they may not be safe in the City. We need to work with specialist exploitation services to keep children and young people safe from and supported to overcome exploitation, including CCE, CSE, Radicalisation and Serious Youth Violence.

## Updated Needs Data:

### Children in Care

Bristol has seen a progressively increasing rate of children in care over the past 18 months. As of November 2022, there are 729 children in care, if current trends continue Bristol's care population is predicted to be between 736 and 790 children by the end of 2023/24. An expected care population of 763 would be an increase of c. 50 children (7%) from Bristol's current care population and significantly higher than 637 at the end of March 2021 (These projections are based on data submitted for the SSDA903 children in care annual return and Q1 2022/23).



### Population Growth and Forecasts

To understand some of the reasons for the increase, our JSNA data shows that the 10-15 and 16-19 population grew by more than 10% each in the 5 years up to 2023. In addition, up to 2028, the 0-19 population will grow by c.4%, but the most significant segment within that is the 16-19 age group which is forecast to grow by 31%.

Age Segment	2018	2023	5Yr Change	5Yr Growth (2023/2018)	5Yr rollover	Projected Change	5Yr Growth (2028/2023)
0-4	29,000	28,900	-100	-0.3%	28,800	-100	-0.3%
5-9	28,200	26,300	-1,900	-6.7%	28,900	2,600	9.9%
10-15	28,500	31,700	3,200	11.2%	26,300	-5,400	-17.0%
16-19	22,000	24,300	2,300	10.5%	31,700	7,400	30.5%

Source: [Population of Bristol](#)

### Leavers and Joiners

2021/22 data shows a dramatic increase in rate of children coming into our care – from 20 children per 10,000 in 2020/21 to 28 in 2021/22 – now above 2020/21 England average (24) and moving to be in line with 2020/21 statistical neighbour average (31).

This comes after a 4-year reduction in rate of entrants to care, from 33.7 children per 10,000 in 2015/16 to 20 in 2020/21.

The rate of children ceasing care has been reducing since 2014/15 from 41 children per 10,000 to 18 in 2020/21. This is the highest differential (9.9 per 10,000) in rate of care entry and exit Bristol has experienced and has continued into rolling year to Q1 2022/23.

### Teenage Entrants to Care

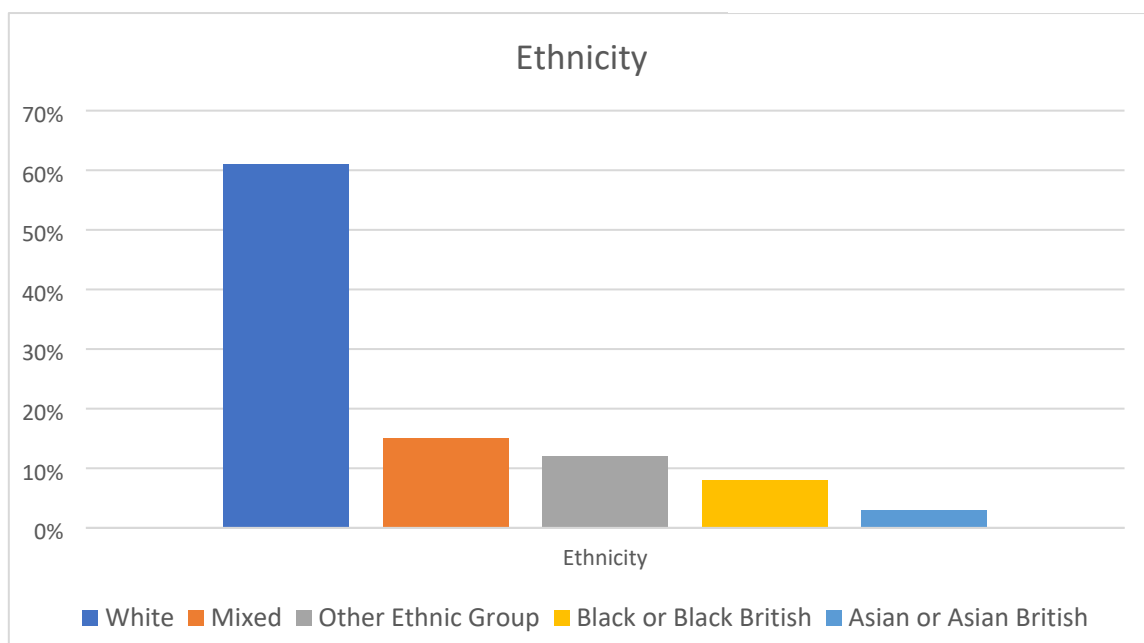
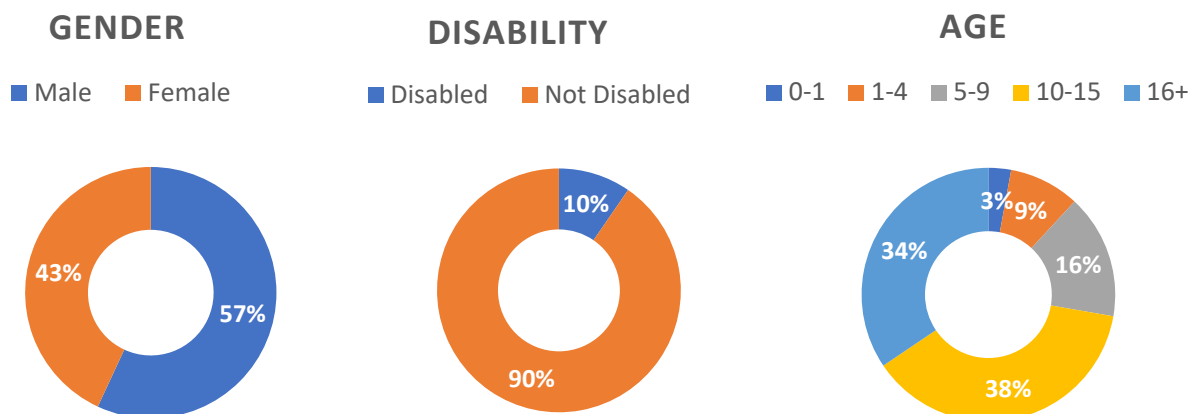
Some Teenagers coming into care prefer to be placed in residential accommodation as opposed to fostering provision; this is because they already have families, and many do not want to be involved in another / placed in a family setting. Teenage entrants to care come in when trauma is compounded and has often become complex with intersectional need. This results in coping behaviours that can make them harder to care for and more at risk which, in turn, increases the cost of their care.

For the past 3 years Bristol has had a higher rate of children entering care aged 10 or older than the national average - 51% in 2019/20, 47% in 2020/21 and 60% in 2021/22. The national average is 46%. When looking at the entrance to care in 2021/22 excluding those that were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) 52% were aged 10 or older that suggests that although the increased UASC population is exaggerating the shift, there was still a very high rate of teenagers entering care in 2021/22.

The post-Covid effect of increased emotional and mental health concerns has been clear to see for teenage entrants to care. The impact of difficult family life alongside absence from school and normal developmental activities and experiences has been a surge of young people needing urgent care and support.

For 2021/22 this was coupled with a significant increase in the total number of children entering care from 193 in 2020/21 to 251 in 2021/22. This now means that 71% (68% excluding UASC) of Bristol’s current care population are aged 10 or older (higher than the national average of 62%) and are unlikely to cease care prior to their 18th birthday. A breakdown in the age of children in care tells us that 265 children are 16 and over and will exit care over the next three years, leading to significant pressure in the housing pathway.

### Demographics





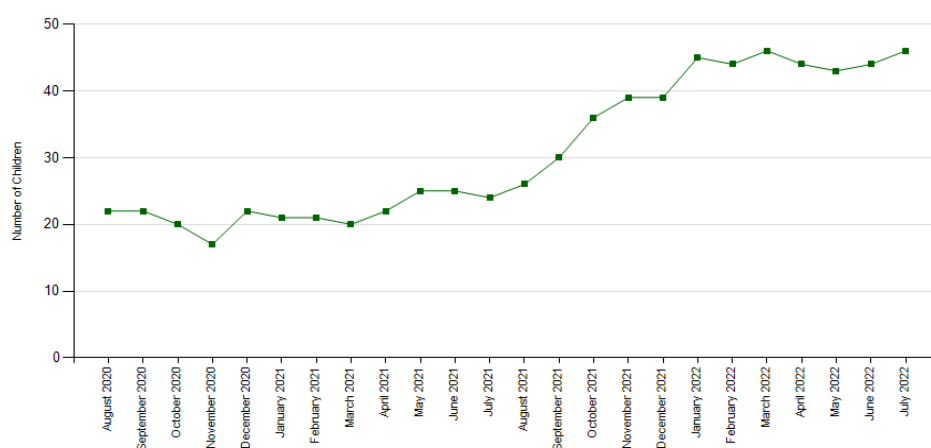
## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

At October 2022 there are 85 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in care, the new allocation of 0.1% of our population of children (national transfer scheme) will take this to 92. Since the published sufficiency strategy was written, there has been a significant increase in numbers of UASC in our care, both through the national transfer scheme and spontaneous arrivals.

For those under 16, most find homes through in-house or independent fostering, although we have utilised our residential provision for a small number with significant trauma. Our asylum-seeking young people aged 16+ prefer to live within the city centre because of access to cultural links and services and other people from their background.

The impact of higher numbers of asylum-seeking children is seen in the sufficiency pressures within independent fostering and semi-independent and independent housing for move on.

### Monthly UASC Arrivals - August 2020-July 2022:



## Care Leavers / 16+

As of November 2022, there were 367 Care Leavers open to services.

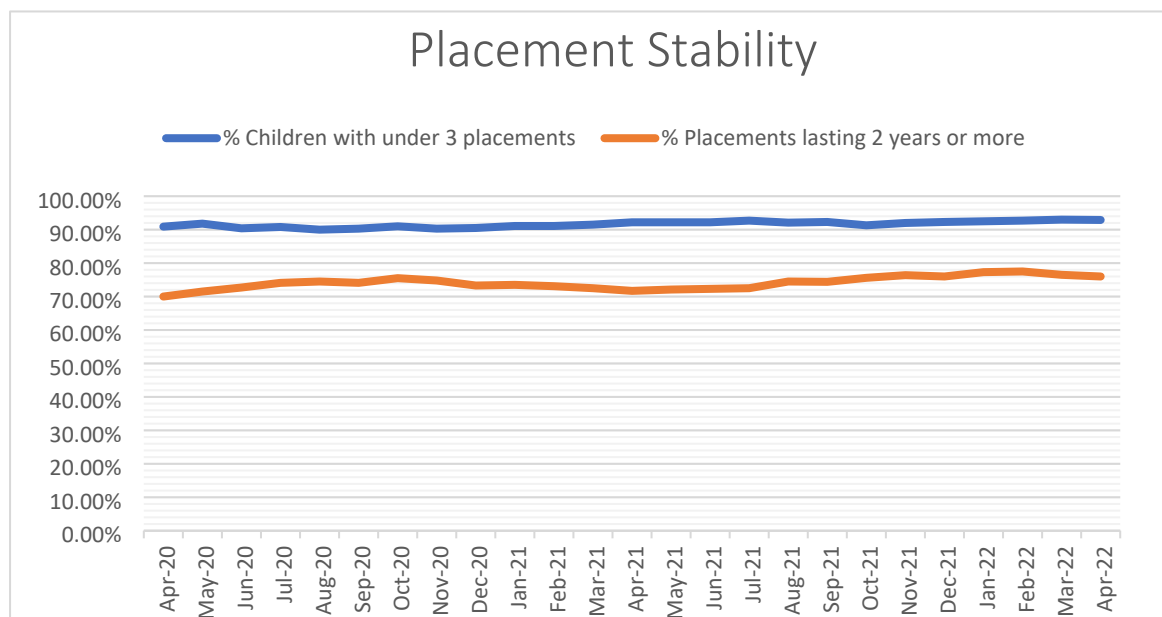
Throughout Covid there have been significant difficulties helping children and young people exit care meaning there are increased figures of those looking for supported accommodation with the move on pathways blocked. This has meant that 70 young people over 16 are living in 'external supported accommodation' (15 of these are over 18) with medium to high levels of support. In September 2022, 190 young people were on the waiting list for Housing through the Housing Support Register.

Reviewing the age of children in care, we can see that 265 are 16 and over and that a focus on supporting young people to move on where they want to will be a key focus for us going forward, and that we will need a range of provision set at different levels of support. We are due to jointly re-commission our Young Peoples' Accommodation pathway in 2024 and we will develop a whole system structure.

## Placement Stability

The graph below shows both long term placement stability (measured by the number of children under 16, who at 31 March had been in care for at least two and a half years, and have remained in

the same placement for at least two years) and Short term placement stability (measured by how many children in care have three or more placements in the space of a year). Despite the number of children in care increasing significantly, placement stability has increased over the past two years.



Despite increases in placement stability, there is still a cohort of young people with significant numbers of placement moves. 48 young people have had at least 3 placement moves in the last 12 months, with 2 young people having more than 5 moves.

In response, we need to develop more resource to support children in these situations, either reconciling their difficulties in placement or helping them move in a planned way. We will develop a Mockingbird model of fostering and increase our therapeutic service offer to provide additional support where needed.

### Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

#### Children with Disabilities:

As of November 2022, 81 children in care are classed as disabled.

We know that children and young people with SEND have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. Many suffered isolation and had their access to education, health services and social, emotional, and mental health support disrupted. This led to more families of children with SEND in crisis and increased concerns over safeguarding due to social workers not being able to see children in person. Families reported concerns and reluctance over sending their children to short breaks services during the pandemic due to increased vulnerability to the virus, this reduced take up of short breaks services compounded pressures families were facing. As a result, we have seen more families at the edge of breakdown requiring additional respite services and support in the home to be arranged.

We are expecting the cost-of-living crisis and increased energy costs to further impact on families of disabled children. Children with certain health conditions will need access to life-saving equipment powered by electricity, some disabled children are less mobile and get colder quicker whilst others have health conditions that mean they can't regulate their body temperature therefore need increased heating. This financial pressure may push more families into crisis.

We are finding it increasingly difficult to find high quality homes for our children and young people with disabilities; this is in part due to the fact that there is a national shortage of foster placements for children and young people with SEND, particularly for children who use wheelchairs.

We also have a number of disabled children who can no longer be cared for in a family setting and require residential children's home placements that can meet their complex health needs. Since the closure of St Christopher's in 2019 there have been no residential children's homes for disabled children within Bristol.

In addition, we will work with providers to ensure they support young people to develop the skills and resilience they need to make successful transition to adult services and independence.

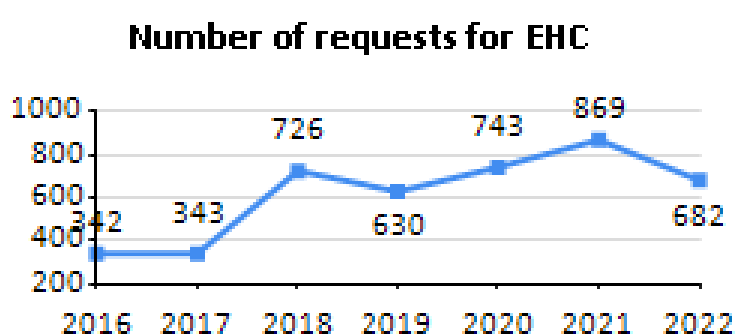
**SEN:**

As of November 2022, there are 24 children aged 5- 18 in care in residential Independent / Non-Maintained Special School / College Placements. Of these, 10 are Social Care led placements, meaning the child or young person has been placed there due to a lack of appropriate social care placements available; and 21 of these young people also have specialist health provision and are tripartite funded.

A recent [Children's Safeguarding Practice Review report](#) highlights the need for strong quality assurance for these vulnerable children who are often living at a distance. We will lead on a project through a regional programme to support closer and more standardised communication and information sharing with INM providers and to develop standard frameworks for assurance.

There was a significant increase in requests for EHCP Needs Assessments in 2021 and we see this trend continuing into 2022 as shown in the graph from August 2022 below. Using the most recent school census data (January 2021) the two biggest categories of SEN primary need amongst school age children in Bristol, have been identified as 'Speech, Language and Communication' (25%) and 'Social, Emotional & Mental Health' difficulties (23%). For children with an EHCP the largest category of need is 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder' (33% of children with an EHCP).

We have a target of developing an additional 450 Special School places in Bristol by 2024 which is on target but will always need INMs for children needing a more immersive specialist provision.



There are currently no independent residential schools in Bristol, meaning all children in residential schools are placed out of area.

## Development Plans

## **Prevention**

We will develop more targeted early support for families on the edge of care, exploring more community-based support such as the Safe Families model which has been implemented by a number of other local authorities. The Safe Families model works with volunteers who provide befriending to families, short stay hosting (planned and emergency) to provide respite for families, and donations of basic goods and services if a need arises (e.g., DIY, providing a washing machine, oven, or bed etc.). This model enables de-escalation of cases from statutory services to a lower level of support and preventing families in crisis escalating further.

## **Residential Care**

There is a lack of independent sector provision in and around Bristol and market engagement tells us that this is due to the cost of property and a national shortage of registered managers and of staff. We want to work creatively with providers and neighbouring authorities to increase the number and range of provisions in and close to Bristol.

Bristol currently has 5 in-house children's homes, there are 15 beds available currently and we plan to bring another 19 beds online in the next 2 years, through both reprofiling and transformation development plans, taking our total up to 32.

For our more complex children and young people, we need more provision in and bordering Bristol to maintain networks and access to the City of belonging, to education, health and social care. We are interested in working with providers who are able to demonstrate a strong alignment to our trauma-informed model of care and who could support us with several priority groups:

- Children under the age of 12 who require nurture and stability to support a transition back to family based foster care
- Children and young people who have been involved in the criminal justice system and where there may be concerns around extra-familial harm

We will be developing:

- A Children's home to support children with mental health needs to live in the community through a collaborative model of delivery with Health, Education and Social Care. These children will have experienced acute Health settings and require clinical and social care to enable discharge and/or to prevent hospital admission and re-admission.
- A new home for adolescent boys aged 15-17+ with challenging behaviour. This will provide a therapeutic treatment setting for restorative care, for young men with criminal justice involvement and where exploitation is part of their risk profile.

We will be commissioning a provider to run these homes and look to secure a strategic partner to help us achieve our vision for increased sufficiency in Bristol. These homes will be linked up and work closely with our internal children's homes, in order to enable children to step down into our in-house provision when their needs reduce.

We want to develop two residential Care Hubs in the city (North and South) which would provide a base for a variety of services including out of hours support, co-parenting work, a foster carer hub or home from home service to prevent placement breakdown. These hubs would not be permanently

staffed, but instead flexibly staffed by in-house services, commissioned services and agency staff according to need.

To meet the needs of our disabled children, a proposal has been put forward to develop existing Bristol City Council housing stock into a three bed disabled children's home, with suitable adaptations that replicates the home environment for the children. This home will allow the council to keep these children local, which would enable them to maintain family connections.

### **Fostering Provision**

We have an incredible group of foster carers in Bristol and most children in our care live in family based fostering care. We also use a lot of independent fostering agencies to find appropriate homes for our children, and this is most effective when those home are in and around Bristol to enable our children to stay in local education and to access locally commissioned health care.

Our aim is to develop a group of foster carers who could work with children where they have previously experienced fostering break-down, or where we feel they are ready to move out of residential care and back to a family. Our data shows us that we have a number of children who could have remained in foster care if we had a differentiated service to support higher levels of need. We are interested in developing this either in-house, as an arm's length service, or with an independent provider. We could see this operating in a Mockingbird type formation with clusters of carers being strongly supported by a co-ordinator.

We would also want this model to be able to respond to care for children in emergencies and provide respite where placements are at risk of breaking down. One option is to block book / retain emergency foster care beds and we will work with the market to develop this.

### **Post 16 (Care Leavers, UASC, Section 20/Part 7)**

We are working closely with colleagues in housing to review our accommodation offer for young people aged 16+, with a view to recommission the entire youth pathway for 2024. Moving young people on from provision has been a challenge due to a lack of housing stock in the city, and this will be a key focus of the recommissioning.

Work has already begun on developing our offer to UASC, bringing on line two block arrangements in the past year, with the ambition to further expand this offer. We are in discussions with our framework providers to scale up provision in the City in response to our increased number of young people taken through the national transfer scheme.

Two Bristol City Council Properties have been identified for use as 16+ accommodation. This will provide a move on option for the young people resident in our in-house children's homes, enabling staying close. Longer term we will look to develop a pod in the grounds of property. It is our intention to run one of these services in-house and go out to the market to commission a provider to run the other. This will bring another 10 beds online.

In May 2021 Ofsted announced that they will be introducing regulation to the 16+ market. The regulation of this provision will mean that, for the first time, all provision offering care and support for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17 will be registered and inspected by Ofsted, and national standards introduced. This provision will be formally called "supported accommodation for

young people”. Formal guidance is expected to be issued in January 2023 with the regulation to become mandatory from Autumn 2023 and inspections undertaken from April 2024. We will support our providers to register to ensure we retain sufficiency in this area.

### Special Schools

Bristol City Council is running Specialist Places project to create an additional 450 specialist places as pledged by the mayor. This increase of local special school places could stop young people going out of area due to lack of an education placement, thereby helping us to maintain children’s local and family connections.

In addition to this, we are running a tender to block book 30 places within an Independent Special School in Bristol. This will enable us to keep children local, who for lack of appropriate local independent, may otherwise end up moving out of area. It is our intention to develop a residential offer to go alongside this, enabling children placed at residential schools at a significant distance to return to Bristol.

## Summary Sufficiency Plans

Area	Plans	Timeframe
<b>Prevention &amp; Early Intervention</b>	Implement Family Hubs and Start for Life programme in Bristol	April 2023
	Develop targeted early support for families on the edge of care e.g. Safe Families model	2023
<b>Local Residential Sufficiency</b>	Develop short-term provision for children in Bristol who have an urgent need for safety, with a team comprising Health and Social Care staff.	2024
	Work creatively with providers and neighbouring authorities to increase the number and range of residential provisions in and close to Bristol.	2024
	Develop a tier 3.5 home to support children with mental health needs to live in the community through a collaborative model of delivery with Health, Education and Social Care.	2024
	Develop a new therapeutic home for adolescent boys aged 15-17+ with challenging and aggressive behaviour.	2024
	Develop two residential Care Hubs in the city (North and South) to provide a base for a variety of services.	2024

<b>Fostering</b>	Implement a Mockingbird style fostering approach.	2023
	Block book / retain emergency foster care beds and we will work with the market to develop this.	2023
<b>16+</b>	Review our supported accommodation offer for young people aged 16+, with a view to recommission the entire youth pathway.	September 2024
	Further develop UASC block arrangements.	2023
	Utilise BCC Property for 16+ Move On.	2023
	Support providers of supported accommodation for young people with Ofsted registration process.	Autumn 2023
<b>Therapeutic Support</b>	Expand therapeutic support models for carers and for our children and young people which will help to reduce the need for a child who is having a difficult time to move.	2023
<b>Education</b>	Promote the need for inclusivity in schools and review our alternative learning provision to ensure that it matches to the complex needs of some children.	2024
	Block book with independent special schools and develop a residential offer to go alongside	April 2023