

FINDING A PLACE CALLED HOME

Providing
permanence,
stability and loving
care for children
and young people
with care
experience



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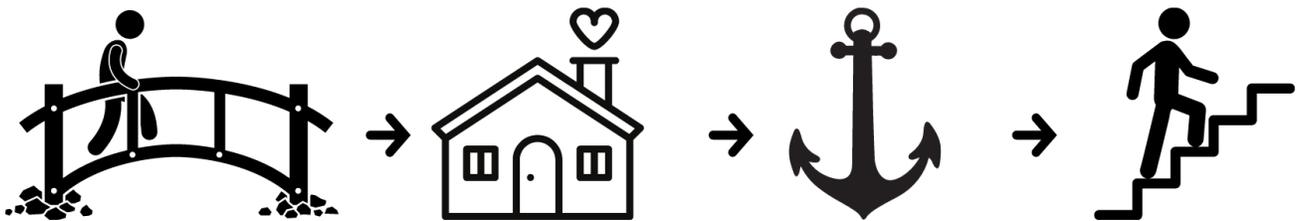
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Strategy on a page

Delivering sufficiency across children's social care is about meeting the individual needs of children and young people, and promoting good outcomes for them, at important points throughout their childhood and early adulthood.

Our strategic priorities for sufficiency in Devon are split into four key outcomes, which cover the experience of children and young people at different points in their interaction with children's social care. While each is distinct in the actions it represents, they do not work in isolation. Rather, our progress against each outcome is dependent on the others.



1

BUILDING BRIDGES

Protecting children and young people, and strengthening families, so they can live safely at home

Outcome:
Fewer children and young people are coming into care

2

FINDING A PLACE CALLED HOME

Providing caring family homes in Devon for children and young people in care

Outcome:
More children, while in our care, live in family homes in Devon

3

PROMOTING STABILITY

Offering safe, stable and caring places to live, so children and young people can get the most out of life

Outcome:
Children and young people in care have their individual needs supported at the right time in a safe, stable and caring environment

4

STEPPING FORWARD

Supporting young people to be where they need to be in life so they can thrive and be independent

Outcome:
More children move to homes which are most suited to them, and young people find suitable and affordable places to live after leaving care

Duties, responsibilities and principles

We have a responsibility, by law, to provide sufficient accommodation and support which meets the needs of children and young people in care, and those who have recently left our care at the age of 18.

Our Sufficiency Strategy sets out how we will deliver on our duty to be good corporate parents for children and young people with care experience. Our strategic aims come in the context of the impacts of the pandemic on the lives and prospects of children and young people, as well as resulting pressures on the local market and workforce. The strategy should also be considered alongside the priorities of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, [Integrated Care System for Devon](#) and the [Devon Children and Families Partnership \(DCFP\)](#).

The Sufficiency Duty

The 'sufficiency duty' requires Local Authorities and children's safeguarding partners to ensure that there is sufficient local accommodation and support to meet the needs of all children and young people in care, or that there is a plan in place to move towards that position. We are required to produce a strategy that describes how we, working with our local partners, intend to meet this duty for the children and young people in our care. Commissioning standards on securing sufficient accommodation and support for children in care, also apply to children in need who are at risk of entering care or custody.

This duty is set out in law through the Children Act 1989. It has since been strengthened by the introduction of [Sufficiency Statutory Guidance \(2010\)](#) and the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations \(implementation April 2011\)](#).

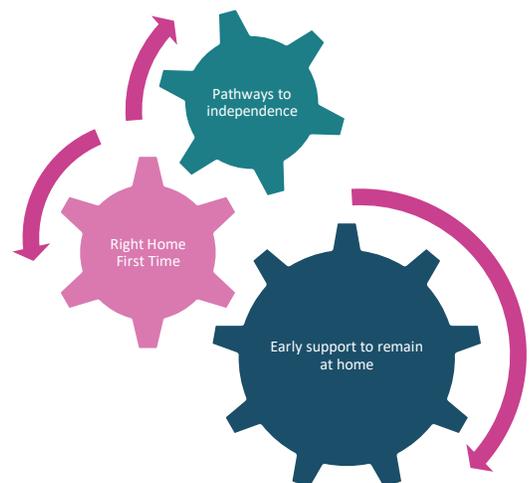
Our approach to Sufficiency

We are committed to supporting families to remain safely together and, if children and young people come into our care, we will do all we can to help them return safely and swiftly back to their families. Our approach to sufficiency is built on the principle that children are best brought up in families.

Like all local authorities, Devon has faced increasing demand for its services in a climate of challenging budgets, and increasingly costly accommodation for children who need our care. In this context, to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families and provide stability and sustainability to the care system as a whole, we are focused on providing the right help at the right time in order to prevent risks and needs escalating.

For children and young people in our care, where living within their birth family and wider network is not a viable option, we want them to find the right home first time round. Wherever possible, we want this to be with a fostering family in Devon.

Our responsibilities as corporate parents also extend to those young people leaving our care who are approaching, or who have reached, adulthood. We are committed to equipping young people leaving care to thrive as independent young adults. This involves supporting their access to affordable housing which meets their individual needs, circumstances and aspirations.



Guiding principles

1. Children and young people are best brought up in families
2. Children and young people have a right to have their voice heard in all decision-making about their lives
3. Children and young people in Devon's care should be able to live and grow up in Devon wherever possible
4. Building trusted relationships with children, young people, and their families, and working *with* them restoratively and in trauma-informed ways, leads to better outcomes

Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting is the responsibility of Devon County Council, working with our partners, to be loving, caring and aspirational for all children and young people who are in our care, or who have recently left our care as adults. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-24 sets out our vision for all care-experienced children and young people, the principles which underpin our approach to corporate parenting, and the outcomes we will work together to achieve.

Our vision is the same for all children and young people in Devon. Regardless of whether or not they have experience of living in care:

Every child and young person in Devon should have the best possible start in life and the opportunity to thrive. We want to ensure children and young people receive the right support, at the right time, and in the right place.

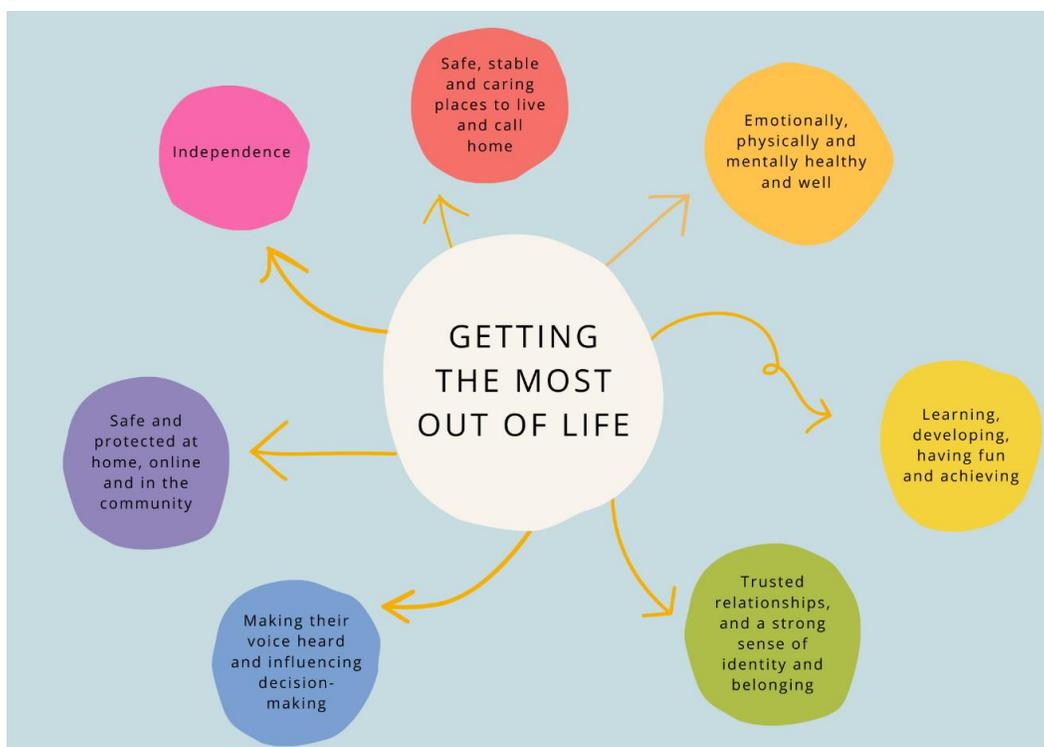
Being responsible and effective corporate parents, above all else, means protecting children and young people from harm and keeping them safe. But, importantly, it is about always striving for their best interests, nurturing their ambitions and helping our children and young people get the most out of life. Ultimately, it means they grow into independent and thriving young adults. At its heart, Corporate Parenting means always asking ourselves “**would this be good enough for my child?**”¹.

Our corporate parenting outcomes

Our strategy is built on seven corporate parenting outcomes which, together, enable care-experienced children and young people to get the most out of life. One of these is that children and young people have safe, stable and caring places to live and call home. We recognise the importance of the places that children and young people live in enabling them to be mentally and physically healthy and well, remain safe and protected and go on to learn, develop and achieve. The Sufficiency Strategy is the vehicle through which we aim to deliver on this.

Having the right place to live, and the right support at the right time, is fundamental to achieving our vision for children and young people with care-experience. As corporate parents, it is our responsibility to make sure that children in Devon, who cannot live with their birth families, live in homes where they are safe, nurtured, can have fun and are supported to get the most out of life. To do this, we have to have enough of the right kinds of homes: emergency homes, foster families, residential homes, kinship carers, adopters, and a range of suitable and affordable accommodation for care experienced young people.

¹ [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)



Delivering on our aims and making a difference

We are committed to delivering what we say we will do in this strategy in order to make a positive difference for children and young people and help them achieve good outcomes in their lives. To do this, we will turn our words into action, by putting in place the necessary resource and ambition, tracking our progress over time and holding each other to account against what we set out to achieve.

Below this strategy, sit our plans which cover the commitments we make in this document and include more detail on what we will do. These will be delivered by the relevant services. Governance for the Sufficiency Strategy will come through the Place Called Home Programme Board, which will report to our Corporate Parenting Partnership Board. This ensures our ambitions for securing safe, stable and caring homes for children and young people, are aligned and connected with our strategic aims for the other areas of children and young people's lives, including their education, health and wellbeing and independence. This is where we will be accountable to children and young people, elected members (representing the general public) and each other.

The Corporate Parenting governance structure can be found in the [appendices](#).

What our children and young people tell us about where they live

Over the last 18 months, through meetings with senior leaders, regular engagement groups and events, as well as surveys and polls online, we have heard directly from children and young people about their lives and experiences living in care in Devon. A key part of this has been about hearing from them about what life has been like for them during the pandemic, and what some of the specific impacts have been on those with care experience. What we say in this strategy comes out of these conversations with our young people. On the following page, are the key themes of what they tell us about where they live and how they are supported to get the most out of life.

“We don’t like moving lots, and we don’t like being with people we don’t really know and who don’t like the same things as us. If we stay in the same place for a while, we are more likely to be able to call it home.”

“Our individual needs should be considered so you can support us in the ways we need it. We want you to always see our strengths, not just the things we’re not so good at.”

“Foster carers and professionals need the right support to be able to help children and young people.”

“Residential homes can sometimes be inclusive and supportive communities, but other times they feel scary and threatening.”

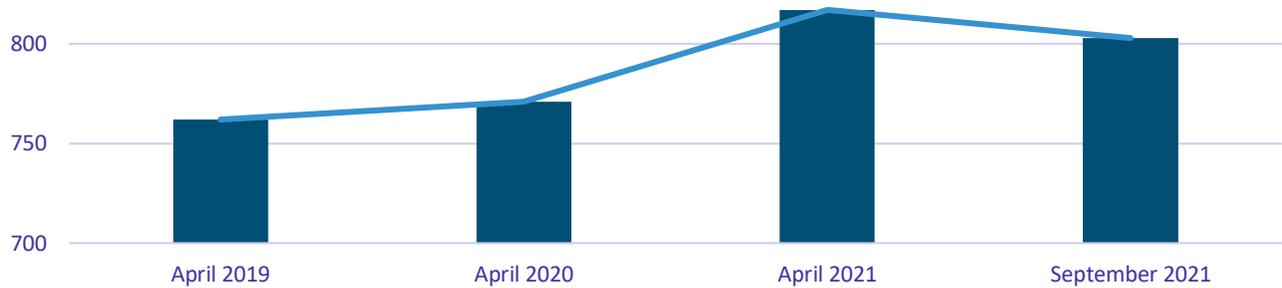
“We don’t want to live in places that are a long way from family and friends.”

The Devon context

Children in our care and our care experienced young people

The number of children and young people in our care rose by 4% between April 2020 and September 2021. 56 in every 10,000 under 18s in Devon are now in our care. Since April 2021, the total care population has fallen slightly.

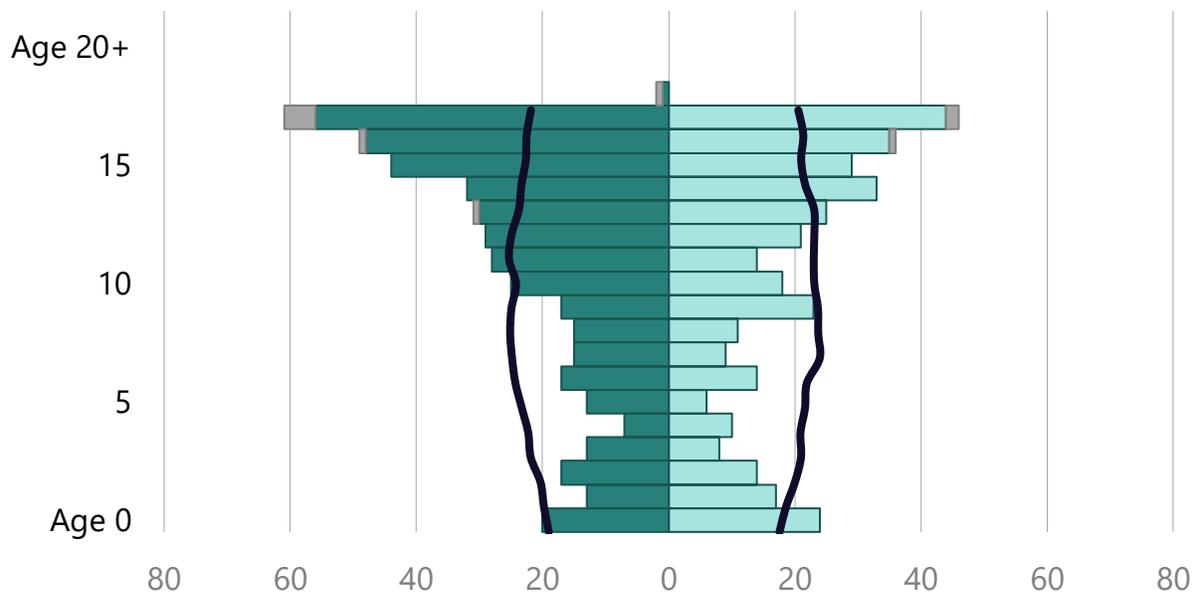
Number of children in the care of Devon County Council



Age and gender profile of children and young people in our care (September 2021)

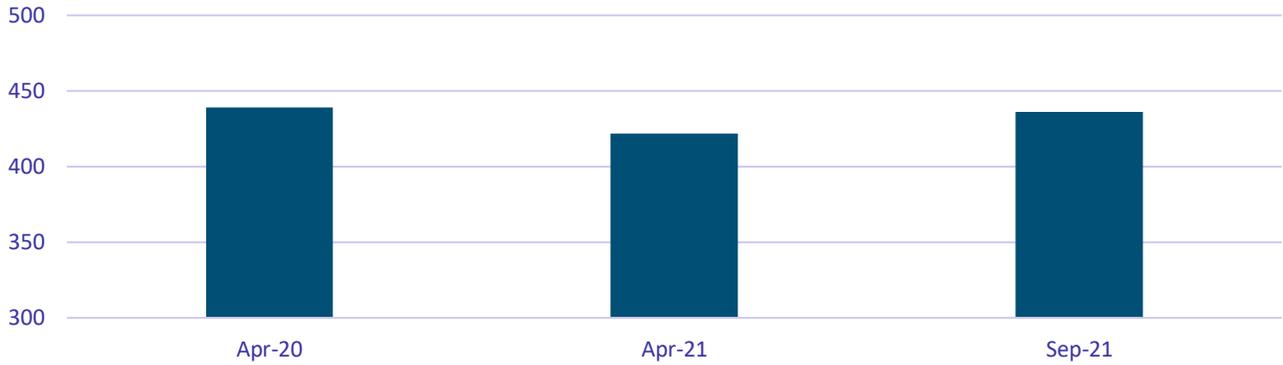
The majority of children and young people in our care are over 12 years of age, and almost a quarter are within 2 years of becoming adults. As of April 2021, 23% of children and young people in our care were aged 16+, down from 25% in April 2020. This compares to a national rate of 24% in 2019 and 2020.

- 440 Males (55%) ■ 8 UASC Males (1%) ■ 355 Females (44%)
- 3 UASC Females (0%) 1 Other (not shown) (0%) — 0-17 population estimate



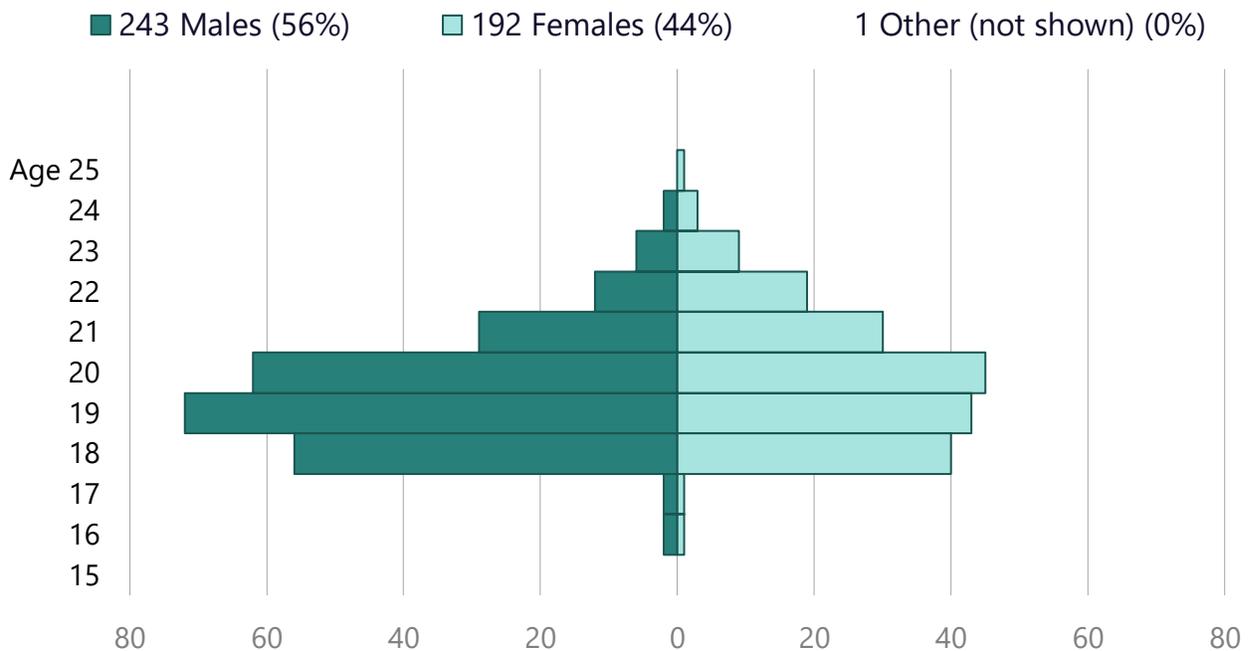
The number of young people receiving leaving care services from us has dropped since 2018. However, we expect this trend to reverse over the coming years, with the high proportion of young people, aged 16+, in our care turning 18. There are now 436 young people receiving leaving care services from us.

Number of young people receiving leaving care services from Devon County Council at financial year-end



Age and gender profile of young people receiving leaving care services (September 2021)

The male care-experienced population in Devon currently outnumber the female population. However, with a recent rise in the number of teenage girl care entrants, we expect this trend to reverse.



Where children in care and care-experienced young people are living

Children and young people in care (figures current at 31 August 2021)

Accommodation type (children in care)	Internal	Private	Other	Total	Percentage
Foster home	398	179	0	577	71.3%
For adoption	-	-	30	30	3.7%
Living with parents / person with parental responsibility	-	-	24	24	2.9%
Supported living	0	43	0	43	5.3%
Independent living	0	0	0	0	0%
Residential children's home	0	89	0	89	11%
Secure Children's Homes	0	1	0	1	0.12%
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	1	1	0.12%
Family Centre	1	2	1	4	0.5%
Young Offender Institution	0	0	0	0	0%
Internal residential special school	4	0	0	4	0.5%
Other accommodation (incl. friends and family carers)	0	0	7	7	0.86%
Internal residential respite home	5	0	0	5	0.62%
Short Breaks	21	0	0	21	2.6%
Exceptional arrangements	-	3	-	3	0.37%
Total accommodation	429	314	63	809	100%

Care-experienced young people

- 15% of 17-21 -year-olds continue to live with their former foster carers after leaving care
- Of the 67 young people living with former foster carers, under staying put arrangements, 15% are supported by IFAs and 85% through our in-house fostering service
- 19 young people live in commissioned supported lodgings after leaving care. These are houses where we commission both the accommodation and support.
- 84% of 19-21 -year-olds are living in suitable accommodation after leaving care, compared to 67% in 2019/20

Sufficiency trends and challenges

- 1. More children are coming into our care** - the number of children in our care is now up 4% in the last 18 months during the pandemic. A notable proportion of children entering our care are adolescent girls.
- 2. Insufficient Devon-based emergency foster carers has increased our reliance on residential care** - although the Bridges (Edge of Care) service is beginning to have a positive impact on reducing the number of children who come into care, from time-to-time children will need additional support and care in an emergency. The use of residential care has increased from 8% in 2015/16 to 10% and children coming into care in crisis has contributed to this in recent months.
- 3. More children and young people in care are living outside Devon** – 26% of children and young people in care are living outside of the Devon local authority area, up from 22% during 2019/20. Children and young people living with foster carers are more likely to be in Devon, compared to residential settings.
- 4. More children, who are coming into our care, have additional support needs** – Currently, 39% of all children and young people in care now have an Education, Health and Care Plans and a further 24% receive SEN support in school. There are currently insufficient Devon-based foster carers who are able to care for children with complex needs, including younger children, to ensure they can live in a family home while in care.
- 5. More children now live with family members under kinship care arrangements** - this is a positive trend, allowing more children in care to maintain strong links with their families. However, we want to ensure those children avoid the need to come into our care in the first place.
- 6. Fewer children are being placed for adoption** - the number of children being placed for adoption has decreased by almost 30% in the last 5 years.
- 7. The use of ‘exceptional arrangements’, with children living in unregistered care arrangements, has increased** - this is as a result of the national shortage of secure children’s home beds, and homes that can meet the needs of children with complex mental health needs
- 8. There are increasing pressures on the local housing market, impacting on the availability and cost of one-bedroom accommodation in Devon** – this trend has been worsened by the pandemic and places challenges on our ability to support care-experienced young people live independently in suitable accommodation after leaving care

Our response to emerging trends and challenges

	Our aim	What we will do	What we will see
1.	Safely reduce the number of children who need to come into our care	Provide effective multi-agency services to support children to live with their families or to return home from our care when it is possible to do so.	Fewer children come into our care and, when they need to, they do so in a planned way, and return home as quickly as it is safe to do so.
2.	Find suitable foster homes for children who need to come into our care in an emergency which can meet their individual needs	Expand our emergency fostering offer – using homes from both our internal service and external provider market.	Fewer children who come into care move into a residential home when it is not in their best interests to do so.
3.	Provide more foster homes which are based locally in Devon	Increase the number of Devon-based foster homes available for Devon’s children.	More children live with Devon-based foster families, close to their homes and communities
4.	Recruit, train, and support more foster carers to care for children with additional support needs	Through our in-house fostering service, and our provider market, target our recruitment on foster carers who are approved to provide homes to children and young people with additional needs. Provide ongoing training and support to ensure homes are stable.	Fewer children and young people are living in residential settings, especially younger children, and more are living in Devon
5.	Continue to support more family members and friends to care for children when it is right and appropriate for them to do so.	Develop bespoke training and support for kinship carers.	Children live in stable homes with their families who can meet their needs.
6.	Support children to be adopted where it is the best option for them	Through Adopt South West, find and approve more local adopters for Devon’s children and ensure a swift, effective and robust approving process	Children find loving adoptive families to grow up in. High-quality and effective care planning is in place when children first come into care.
7.	Children and young people are living in suitable registered homes that meet their individual needs.	Increase available homes by working with our local provider market, for children with the most complex needs.	No children live in exceptional arrangements.
8.	Young people leaving care will be equipped to live independently and thrive in the community that they choose.	Support more young people to continue living with their foster carers in staying put arrangements and work with all young people from as early as possible to develop the skills to be independent.	Young people live independently in the community with the right skills and develop long term resilience

Sufficiency Priorities

Building bridges: Protecting children and young people, and strengthening families, so they can live safely at home

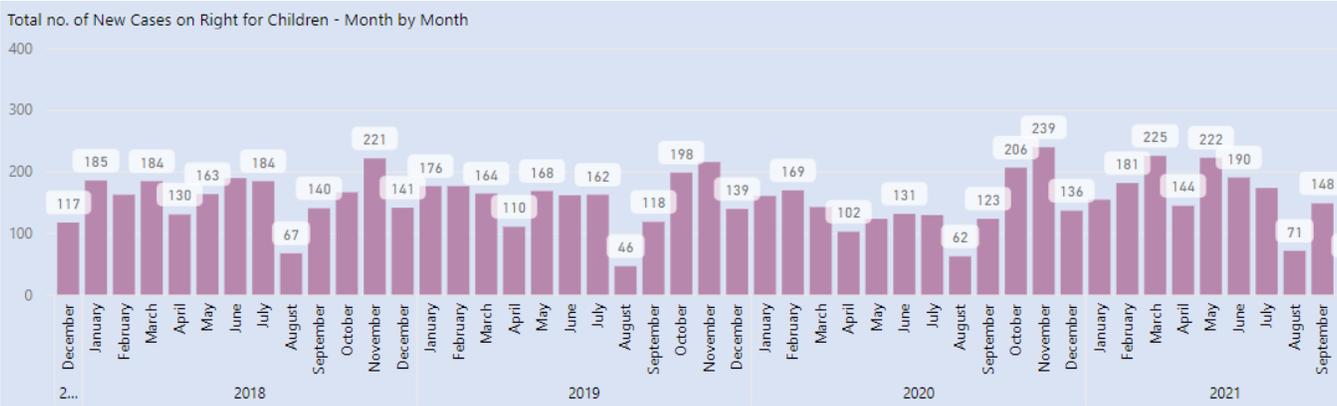
Building bridges is all about restoring otherwise damaged or disconnected links and relationships, starting afresh when things may not have previously worked well, and taking advantage of the mutually-beneficial opportunities on offer. For children and young people, this means they live with their families in safe, loving and nurturing environments which give them the foundations to get the most out of their childhood and adolescence.

Our values are about working *with* children and families. This means placing their best interests at the heart of all that we do, building on their strengths and empowering them, through developing resilience and independence, to be in full control of their own lives and outcomes. We want to support children and families with their holistic needs and circumstances at the earliest opportunity, and in so doing, minimise the use of statutory thresholds wherever possible.

Early help

Working across the Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP), our multi-agency Early Help system ensures children and families get the right help at the earliest opportunity. As a result, children and families avoid the need to receive more intensive support from statutory safeguarding services. Strengthening and developing our early help support is one of our key priorities. Ultimately, the effectiveness of these services will have an impact in reducing the number of children and young people coming into our care and support us to achieve sufficiency, ensuring that the right children and young people come into our care at the right time.

The number of new children and families supported through Early Help each month, during the pandemic, has been consistently above previous years' levels during 2021 (see bar graph below).



Alongside this, since April 2021, as pandemic restrictions eased and more children returned to school, enquires into MASH have begun to exceed the previous two years

Total MASH Enquiries 2019-2021



What we will do

- Review our Early Help system to ensure it is comprehensive and effective in delivering multi-agency support for children and families at the earliest opportunity as need arises.
- Shape Early Help in ways that develop trusted relationships with families and that build on their strengths. We want to identify and co-develop shared solutions with them to the challenges they may face.
- Roll out and embed restorative practice across children's services, and our partner agencies, through training, workshops, and supervision, so that we work better *with* families rather than *to* or *for* them. By working restoratively, we will build on the strengths and resilience of families.

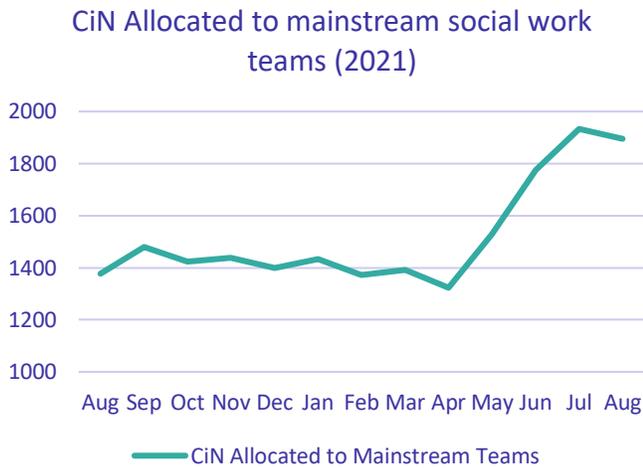
Statutory social work services

Improving the quality and consistency of our social work practice is essential to improving children and young people's circumstances. Early, thorough, and effective intervention reduces the likelihood of risks increasing and children being unable to remain living at home with their families.

In response to recruitment and retention pressures in social work teams working with children in need and children on Child Protection Plans, Devon County Council has made a significant financial investment to recruit and retain a stable, well-qualified workforce. Increasing the number of permanent qualified social workers and other staff, is the foundation for our ambitions to improve how we work with families and support good outcomes for them.

Built on this, a comprehensive and detailed improvement plan is in place to ensure social workers, and other staff, are supported to do the best work possible. As well as supporting children, young people and their families, getting our work right the first time reduces pressures in the system, as a whole, by reducing the numbers of re-referrals and repeated assessments.

The number of Children in Need (CiN) and Child Protection Plans have increased in recent months, as we have emerged out of the pandemic. The number of children with a Child Protection Plan is now 16.6% up compared to August 2020.



What we will do

- Recruit and retain the best staff, by ensuring they are trained, supported and professionally challenged to provide effective and consistent services to children. We will do this through our Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

Bridges: our service supporting children and young people at risk of coming into our care

By focusing on the children and young people, who are most at risk of needing our care, we can successfully support them to safely remain with their families. Bridges is our service which works with these children and young people, and their families, to help them stay safely and sustainably together. Although in its early stages, the service is already demonstrably improving children and young people’s lives and helping them avoid the need to come into our care. Bridges will play a key role in achieving sufficiency in Devon’s Children’s Social Care. Our intention is for the service to be fully self-financed through savings resulting from reduced care entry.

Through Bridges, we want to reduce the number of children who otherwise would have needed our care by:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
12	23	25

More information on Bridges, and the outcomes for families it is supporting, can be found in the [appendices](#).

What we will do

- Continue to monitor the development and outcomes of Bridges, including by hearing the lived experiences of children, young people, and their families.
- Expand the evidence-based, therapeutic and trauma-informed support to build on the strengths of families and develop their resilience

Protecting children and young people from exploitation

Alongside our partners, we recognise the risks children and young people face from all kinds of exploitation. Children and young people who experience forms of exploitation, often need to come into care, and too frequently end up living a long way from their homes, friends and families.

Through our Adolescent Safety Framework 'Safer Me', we are working together, under an established and evidence-based approach, to identify and reduce the contextual risks that children and young people face in their lives. In this way, we want children and young people, who have been at risk of exploitation, to instead live safely with their families and in their local communities. More information on Safer Me can be found on the [DCFP website](#).

Local Context

A single snapshot of need shows 98 children receiving coordinated multi-agency support through a 'Safer Me' assessment (March 2021). Of those young people:

- **48%** were at risk of criminal exploitation
- **27%** sexual exploitation
- **19%** multiple forms
- **3%** modern slavery
- **1%** gangs
- **12%** are still in assessment.

What we will do

- Increase the use of Safer Me, across all safeguarding partners, as a tool to assess and disrupt risks to children, improving their lives, and their likelihood of needing our care
- Implement a multi-agency strategic approach to reducing forms of exploitation and improving outcomes for children and young people, based on the 'Critical Moments' in a child's life

Understanding risk, contingency planning and assertive outreach

To support children and young people who may need our care, together with our partners, we will seek to understand the risks and vulnerabilities in their lives. From a position of understanding the circumstances and needs of children and families, we will make sure effective and outcomes-focused contingency plans are in place. These plans will focus on improving outcomes for children and young people, enabling them to have stability and be able to remain living safely in their homes and communities.

What we will do

- Develop our risk assessment, contingency planning and wrap around to support children and young people with additional, complex and/or challenging needs
- Assess and understand local needs, before developing a framework contract for intensive family support providers.
- Alongside our partners, develop assertive community intervention and outreach for young people with autism and complex needs, as set out in our [Joint SEND Commissioning Plan](#).

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- Expand the use of the Dynamic Support Register (DSR), alongside our health partners, to assess the needs of children with learning disabilities or autism, who are at risk of a mental health crisis, review stability and develop a multi-agency plan of action to reduce the risk of crisis.
 - Progress the transformation of SEND services in Devon to join up multi-agency teams and services. We want to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, and their families, earlier, more consistently and more effectively.
 - Roll out a pilot of [Pause](#) in Devon to work with care-experienced women restoratively to support them to keep their young families together safely and avoid the need for children to come into care
 - Review our pre-proceedings pathway to ensure it is as effective as possible in making sure care entry is the last resort and that all viable alternatives have been explored with families

Finding a place called home: Providing loving and caring family homes in Devon for children and young people in care

Fostering

For children and young people in care, where family reunification, adoption or special guardianship is not an viable option, we want them to live in loving and caring fostering homes, where they are safe, protected and able to be themselves. We want to meet the individual needs of the children and young people living with fostering families, including their racial and cultural needs, learning style, age and stage of development and abilities. In this way, they are homes that, not only provide a roof over their heads, but instead they equip and enable young people to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

What we want to achieve

Our target is for over 80% of our children in care to be living in a family home. We have sustained performance at 72% for the last three years, but we are ambitious to increase this. Currently 69% of our foster homes are with our in-house service.

To achieve 80%, we will need expanded capacity in both our in-house fostering service and our IFA market.

Context

Fostering Devon, our in-house fostering service, has a total of 306 fostering households registered, supporting an additional 145 Friends and Family homes. Friends and Family fostering arrangements have provided the largest proportion of growth in the last year in our locally-available fostering homes.

Of the 306 households, 16 are for parent and child homes and 14 for short breaks and respite. The remaining 276 households have capacity for 493 children. By September 2021, 398 children were living in a fostering home with our internal service. This left homes with capacity for a total of 95 children which were unavailable, 63 of which were vacancies.

Recruitment between 2018 and 2021 has been between 20 and 25 households each year, however, this is offset by losses in the same years of between 17 and 33 households. For 2020/21, we predict the recruitment of 30 households during 2021/22, with a further 20 anticipated to retire or leave in 2021/2022. Therefore, recruitment has only been able to maintain existing levels of permanent carers over the previous 4 years.

What we will do

- Ensure we have a consistent approach to recruiting and supporting foster carers across the whole of Devon
- Carry out targeted recruitment and marketing activity to expand overall numbers of foster carers and dedicated capacity for specific cohorts (outlined below)

We will deliver these through our Fostering Service Improvement Plan.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

Our Peninsula Framework agreement (2018-2022) continues to provide increasing volumes of family-based care. 97% of our external fostering homes are sourced from the Framework. There are currently 15 IFA's on the Framework, 13 of which provide homes locally. The total potential capacity is 498 fostering

households offering homes for 1,036 young people. Of these, 185 households are in Devon. 93% of IFA homes used, have been located in Devon or a neighbouring authority.

What we will do

- Re-commission the Framework agreement for a new contract in April 2022.
- Develop strong relationships with our providers, so that they best meet the needs of our children and young people. We will look creatively at all options with them in order to navigate emerging local challenges in the market.

Taking focused action

To support more children and young people to live in family homes, rather than residential homes, we need to take focused action to support the individual needs of different groups. Through both our in-house fostering service, and our provider market, we need to do more to ensure there are suitable and appropriate fostering homes for the following cohorts:

Older young people

There are only 19 fostering households registered with Fostering Devon for the 13+ age range – this represents 6% of all registered households and is not sufficient to meet needs of our children in care population.

Children and young people with additional needs

A high proportion of young people in residential children's homes have complex and additional support needs, who are often unable to be sufficiently supported in a fostering home due to the level of care they require.

Brothers and sisters

There are only 10 groups of brothers and sisters, of 3 children or more, who are living together in a fostering home. This is out of a total of 58 – representing a proportion of 17%. We know how important it is for siblings to grow up together while they are in our care, so we need to do more to ensure as many sibling groups as possible stay together. Currently, 194 households are registered to support more than 2 places, and so could take a sibling group. We want foster carers to be fully supported and remunerated for their roles, so they are able to provide homes for groups of siblings together.

Residential Children's Homes

When children need to live in residential homes, they should receive high-quality care in safe and enriching environments, where they are supported by skilled adults who understand their individual needs. In residential homes, we want to deliver outcomes-focused and child-centred care. We will do this, by supporting their return to family homes (fostering or reunification), building their independence for early adulthood, and always having high aspirations for them.

What we will do

- Reduce the number of children living outside Devon or our neighbouring authorities, from 33 to 25 in 2021/2022. We will do this by:
 - Developing local emergency children's home and IFA provision. We will review the impact of this in April 2022 to inform the further development of an in-house crisis offer.
 - Securing additional children's home capacity by working with our local market to encourage new investment to grow the market capacity by a further 25 places in mainstream residential homes by April 2022. This will result in a total capacity of 160 children's home beds, with 4 of these being for the purpose of emergency crisis assessment and 20 having a specialism in autism and/or learning disability.
 - Strengthening matching processes, focusing on the individual needs, interests and circumstances of children and young people
 - Re-launching the bed retention programme, for a limited period of time, in advance of the market launch of a children's home block contract opportunity by January 2023.
- Revisit the business case to develop in house emergency crisis assessment provision, after plans were put on hold as demand reduced and earlier intervention was effective.
- Develop a multi-disciplinary model of residential assessment provision for children in crisis by November 2022. The service will focus on meeting the needs of children with complex needs particularly Autism. This will operate to support the emergency children's home provision
- Develop new models of care through preventative community services, with Provider Collaboratives, in order to prevent escalation to Tier 4 or local authority secure accommodation.
- Re-commission the children's home sub-regional framework agreement, by February 2023.
- Strengthen shared training and recruitment opportunities with providers. By April 2022, we aim to achieve 75% of providers being rated good or outstanding, up from 69% in January 2021.
- Deliver robust quality assurance and monitoring of residential children's homes to support them to achieve good or outstanding Ofsted ratings. We want at least 75% of homes to be rated good or outstanding.

Headlines

- Of children living in a residential children's home, 9 are under 12, and 2 of whom are living outside of Devon or a neighbouring authority.
- Almost half (47%) of children living in a residential children's home, moved into their current home during 2021 so far.
- 49% of children living in a residential children's home are in Devon, 21% in a neighbouring authority, and 30% outside of Devon or a neighbouring authority (at distance).
- The majority (62%) of young people living 'at distance' are between 15 and 17 years of age.
- Half of all young people living in residential homes, whose living costs are part-funded by Health, moved into their current accommodation between January and May 2021. A further 4 are part-funded by Education.

Promoting stability: safe, stable and caring places to live so children and young people can get the most out of life

Fostering

We are committed to helping our foster carers support their children and young people to get the most out of life. We know that, from what children and young people tell us, as well as local and national evidence, the importance of a stable home life for being healthy and well, achieving highly at school, being safe, and going on to be independent and thriving adults, cannot be understated. This is all part of the human experience of needing people and places that we can rely on in life.

The following principles and values underpin our approach to promoting safe, stable and caring fostering homes in Devon:

- Children in care are part of their foster family and will not be treated differently to the foster carer's own children
- Carers should have the necessary skills to meet the child's needs and be committed to supporting their individual interests and aspirations
- Foster carers, and their home environment, should be conducive to children and young people doing the best they can in their education, learning and development
- Foster carers should be fully supported, and treated as key partners in delivering our vision for corporate parenting in Devon, in order to support children and young people to the best of their ability

To support stability, Fostering Devon has an in-house dedicated Promoting Stability Team. The team offer therapeutic support and guidance 7 days a week, including during unsocial hours, to families where there are risks to the stability of home life.

We are also beginning a pilot of [Mockingbird](#) - an extended family approach to foster care. Foster carers will benefit from a peer network and increased wrap-around support. Nationally, the approach has built resilience within families and led to better outcomes for children and young people.

What we will do

- Develop a dedicated support offer to former foster carers when young people remain at home after they turn 18 through staying put arrangements
- Equip and support foster carers to help young people with independent living skills and the transition to adulthood
- Conduct life-story work to help young people understand their own journeys, feel safe and secure where they are living, and develop their resilience
- Provide early, wrap-around support for young people, and their foster carers to maintain stability at home
- Roll-out the Mockingbird model in Devon to promote support between foster carers and stability and positive outcomes for children and young people
- Review our service delivery design for our Promoting Stability team, with a view to extending the reach of the team
- Review our Promoting Stability strategy to focus on early intervention and reviews of the effectiveness of interventions
- Ensure staff understand and are aware of the offer from the Promoting Stability team

-
- Understand the skills and capacity of our current approved foster carers so we can offer the best possible matches for children and young people, and they can live with people who share common interests and can meet their individual needs
 - Support foster carers to be trauma-informed and work restoratively

Providing the right care and support for children and young people with additional needs

The availability of locally-based specialist care for children and young people with additional physical and/or neurodevelopmental needs remains a key challenge. In recent months, compounded by the closure of a large provider in Devon, there are significant pressures on the number of available homes in specialist care settings locally.

Ensuring children and young people who have a learning disability and/or autism, and who display challenging and complex behaviours, have appropriate and effective care and accommodation when they need it is particularly important to get right. Coming into care in crisis can be an extremely distressing and traumatic time for the young person and their family alike. Both locally and nationally, securing suitable accommodation, and delivering effective, evidence-based interventions, for children and young people in these circumstances is a significant challenge.

The Integrated Care System for Devon (ICSD), in their delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan on a local level, have a key strategic priority to deliver a preventative approach to escalating neurodevelopmental needs among children and young people leading to crisis. This will be done through an expansion of integrated community-based support, using early preventative models of care, and developing alternative mental health crisis pathways to avoid inpatient or care entry.

What we will do

- Consider, review and consult on local options, including the use of in-house short breaks provision, to increase the availability of 52-week care for disabled children
- Run workshops for providers, alongside our community health provider, to increase market capability to develop specialisms within the market
- Work with Health partners, through the ICSD, to review and further develop preventative, integrated and community-based approaches to supporting children and young people with neurodevelopmental and mental health needs to avoid the need for crisis care

Unregistered accommodation

Due to national pressures on provision for children with the most complex needs, during the last year 10 children have spent periods of time in unregistered accommodation. This only occurs when no other alternative is possible, close management oversight ensures the accommodation is suitable and that the child only stays there for the minimum amount of time possible. The aim of the sufficiency strategy is to ensure a suitable range of accommodation is available for Devon's children to prevent the need to use unregistered provision.

Stepping forward: Supporting children and young people to be where they need to be in life so they can thrive and be independent

Family reunification

When children and young people come into our care our priority is securing their protection from harm. However, wherever possible, we are committed to ensuring they are able to leave our care and be reunited with their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Early and robust care planning and IRO-led reviews ensures we work with families proactively and explore options for children and young people's safe return home. In addition, the Bridges service works with children in our care where family reunification has been identified as a viable option. Professionals within Bridges work more intensively with the child and their families to secure a safe and lasting reunification.

Currently, of the 139 children and young people coming into our care in the 6 months to September, 6% had been in care previously. This is down from 14% of the 146 children and young people coming into our care during the 6 months to April 2019, and 11% to April 2020.

Residential to fostering

Wherever possible, we want children and young people in our care, to live with foster carers, rather than in a residential home. While for some, depending on their individual needs and circumstances at any given time, it may be best for young people to live in a residential children's home. However, we believe that everyone has the right to grow up in a family environment, and that, in principle, this is best for them and their life chances. The sufficiency of suitable foster carers should never be a reason why any young person is not benefitting from a supportive family environment.

In this context, we want to support more young people to be able to move from residential to fostering homes safely and sustainably. Overall, we want to see the number of young people living in a residential home decrease by at least 10%, from 89 to 80 young people, by April 2024.

What we will do

- We will keep under review the needs and interests of all children and young people living in residential settings to ensure that this continues to be the most appropriate place for them to live.

Adoptions and Special Guardianship Orders

Where it is not appropriate for a child or young person to return home to their birth family, adoption or a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) may be a good option for them. Adoption allows the adoptive families to have sole parental responsibility. In this context, there is often no, or limited, contact with the birth family. SGOs are a Family Court arrangement which allows a child or young person to live with someone, other than their parent(s) – often an extended family member, friend or long-term foster carer – on a long-term basis. While special guardians have day-to-day parental responsibility, SGOs are designed to be a longer-term option which maintains links with the birth family.

In the last three years, we have seen a drop in the numbers of children leaving our care to be adopted. However, this coincides with a significant rise in the number of special guardianship orders (SGOs) being granted. Compared nationally, more children are leaving care through SGOs, while fewer children are being reunited with their families when leaving care. In future, we want more children to be able to safely reunite with their families, however, where family reunification is not possible, we recognise SGOs as providing a positive alternative route out of care for many children and young people.

Care exit destinations in second half of financial year (%)



Across England, since 2015, the number of children who were adopted has been dropping each year. Rates of adoption are now in line with levels last seen in 2012. This comes in the context of a **7% rise in SGOs** between 2018 and 2020².

Children looked after who were adopted, in England, 1994 to 2020



Adoption

Context

For those children, for whom returning to their family is not a viable option, adoption is the most effective way for children to find a loving, caring, and lasting place to call home.

[Adopt South West](#) (ASW) is the regional adoption agency, covering four local authorities, for which Devon County Council is the host. This creates a larger pool of potential adopters and enables each local authority to identify better matches for individual children. Adopt South West's [Annual Report 2019/20](#) sets out the agency's activity, performance, as well as future ambitions in more detail.

During 2019/20, in Devon, we increased our annual performance. This increase in Devon also came in the context of the number of children being adopted across the ASW region, as a whole, dropping by 10%. While, proportionally, the number of children in Devon being adopted remains below that of our regional and statistical neighbours, it was in line with the national average.

During the pandemic, we have seen a drop in the number of children being adopted to 29. The latest national data (Q3 2020/21) also shows a 26% drop in the number of adoption orders being granted³. This is likely a result of court delays due to COVID – something experienced right across the country.

There are currently 243 prospective adopters, who make up a total of 130 families. We have approved a third more adoptive families in 2020-21 than during 2019-20. This is allowing us to consider more matches for our children in care. Of the children who came into care in the 6 months up to October 2020, 16 children (11%) have been placed for adoption, all of whom are under 5 years old.

More information on the current context of adoption in Devon can be found in the [appendices](#).

What we will do, with Adopt South West

- Ensure children have an effective permanence plan as soon as possible when coming into our care
- Ensure more children are adopted, where effective permanence planning and social work practice shows that is the best option for the child's long-term interests
- Increase the number of prospective adopters available regionally through targeted recruitment and assessment campaigns and action, focusing on recruiting adopters to adopt older children and children in sibling groups.
- Ensure timely assessment processes for prospective adopters and children.
- Increase the number of providers and variety of therapeutic support available to adoptive families through our Framework Agreement to support the stability of adoptions.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)

For many children and young people in care, SGOs are a positive way to leave care into a loving and caring home. They often support closer links to their birth families, siblings and wider family and friend networks. Wherever possible, we want children and young people to maintain and strengthen their support networks and relationships with family and friends, that will likely remain with them for much of

³ National data from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board: [Coram-i - ASGLB Data \(coram-i.org.uk\)](#)

their lives and help them grow into independent young adults. We recognise SGOs as good practice and, where this is right for the child or young person, we will support this to happen.

What we will do

- Provide training and support for special guardians to equip them to meet the needs of the child or young person and maintain stability at home
- Expand the number of providers and variety of therapeutic support available to special guardians through our Framework Agreement to support the stability of SGOs.
- We will review our SGO Policy, including the allowances we offer Special Guardians

Leaving our care as a care leaver

We want all care-experienced young people to have safe, stable, affordable, and suitable places to live, which provide the foundations for independent life as adults. As corporate parents, we are responsible, alongside District Council Housing authorities, for taking steps to help all care experienced young adults to have access to safe, affordable and suitable places to live and call home.

Headlines

- During 2020/21, just under 80% of care experienced young people were living in suitable accommodation after leaving care
- This compares to 2019/20 published figures of 90% for 17-18 year-olds & 85% for 19-21 year-olds nationally and our comparator benchmark group is 86% for 17-18 year-olds and 88% for 19-21 year-olds in 2019/20
- While lower than the benchmarked data, we have seen an improvement on previous year's performance of 68.2% and 74.2 % for 2019/20 and 2018/19
- Since 2019, we have supported 31 young people to privately rent by acting as their guarantor
- Of the young people approaching district councils in Devon for housing support in 2019/20, 29% were care-experienced young adults who were in receipt of leaving care services from Devon

Where we are now

As a result of a shortage in housing due to growing demand for properties in the South West, exacerbated by the pandemic, there are significant pressures accessing one-bedroom properties of suitable quality. Linked to this, there have been growing numbers of care-experienced young adults approaching the housing authorities for housing support. As we emerge out of the pandemic, there is uncertainty about the future challenges for young people in the local housing market. We know that young people with care-experience are generally at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

Our Joint Care Leavers Protocol with District Councils sets out our commitment to work together to ensure young people have access to the right accommodation for them; whether that is supported lodgings, semi-independent supported accommodation, or their own home with or without floating support. Through the Protocol, we will aim to prioritise care-experienced young people for available housing, wherever possible, and make sure that no young person is in a vulnerable position with their housing needs.

What we will do

- The Care Leavers Protocol will be implemented with District Council housing authorities from Autumn 2021 to support care-experienced young people with their housing options as they become adults
- Work with housing authorities and planning teams to improve access to housing for care-experienced young adults and, through the Protocol, prioritise them for available housing.
- By April 2022, develop an offer for young people approaching adulthood to support their preparation for independence by learning key life skills
- Set development plans and targets within contracts to expand employment and training opportunities for care-experienced young people and have high aspirations for them to achieve

Supporting young people with complex needs in their own homes

A pilot project, for a small number of care-experienced young people with complex needs, is offering a more suitable alternative to temporary accommodation. The project is similar to a 'housing first' model, where young people are allocated a property on a temporary basis with wrap-around support, and this can then be converted to a full tenancy if the initial period is successful. The project can be resource-intensive however, so it is designed as an option for the young people whose needs are unable to be suitably supported through other options. Young people are not referred into the project itself, and instead, we identify young people who would benefit most from the homes..

What we will do

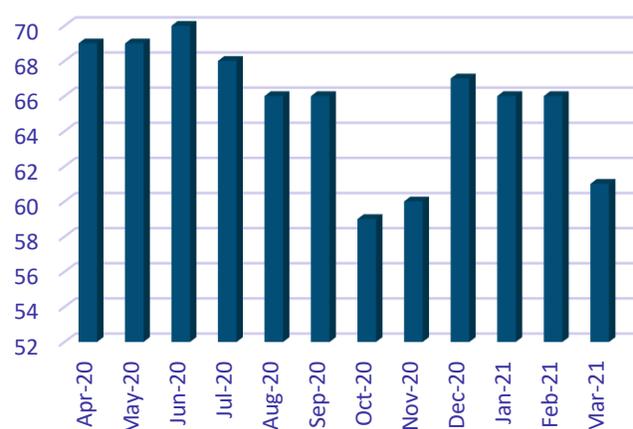
- Commission additional accommodation and support, working in partnership with District Councils, to stabilise and meet the needs of young people with complex needs.
- Evaluate impact and outcomes, and consider the development of a joint business case for continuation and expansion of the pilot

Staying put

65 young people continue to be supported through a 'staying put' arrangement with their former foster carers, beyond their 18th Birthday. Staying put arrangements are supported by both our in-house fostering service and our Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs).

IFA's remain committed to supporting long-term homes, including 'staying put', however, this has yet not materialised into a consistent increase. By March 2021, 62% of IFA's were supporting a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This dropped from 68% at the beginning of 2020/21. The overall reduction correlates with a reduction in the total number of care-experienced young people.

Staying Put arrangements



Given the recent increase in adolescent care entry, we plan to increase our Staying Put offer for 2022/23 and ensure it continues to be routinely planned for with young people and their foster carers.

Our ambition is to increase the take-up of staying put arrangements by 3% year on year through effective, outcomes-focused, and individualised permanence-planning and further increasing the availability of carers.

What we will do

- Develop options with IFA providers for carers to move to become Shared Lives Carers or to support transition to Shared Lives for disabled children.
- Review our internal Staying Put policy, including hearing from young people and foster carers about their Staying Put experiences
- Have a dedicated Staying Put worker, in our internal fostering service, to work alongside former foster carers and support them to provide homes for young people leaving care at 18
- Work with our corporate parenting service to increase the awareness and understanding of staying put among PAs and foster carers

Supported and semi-independent living options

Headlines

- There are 43 young people living in semi-independent accommodation or supported lodgings with independent sector providers at the beginning of September 2021
- Of these young people 72% were living in Devon and 76% were living in accommodation or lodgings operating on the Framework Agreement

We know that semi-independent living options can be beneficial and in the interests of some young people where they gain a supported transition to independence and adulthood. However, for most young people, living in family homes which actively support young people's independence, is the most appropriate option. In this context, our strategic intention is for more young people stay in family-based care until, and beyond, 18 through staying put arrangements to support successful transition to adulthood.

Current commissioning

Accommodation options for young people who need extra support are commissioned through the Supported Living Options Framework Agreement. This contract is with 14 providers who offer accommodation to a potential of 148 young people. This covers supported lodgings and/ or semi-independent supported accommodation. 78 (53%) of the potential accommodation options are located within Devon (including Plymouth), with the remaining 70 potential options in neighbouring authorities. The framework will be re-commissioned in June 2023.

Reducing the risk of homelessness for young people

The current offer

Devon County Council holds shared responsibility with District Council Housing authorities across the county to accommodate and support eligible young people aged 16 and 17 years old, or any care-experienced young people who are at risk of becoming homeless.

We work with the District Councils through a Joint Homelessness Protocol to fulfil our shared responsibilities. The accommodation is funded through housing benefit or rent contributions from the young people. The Council commissions 845 support hours per quarter from five providers, supporting young people at risk of homelessness, including care leavers, to remain in accommodation. This

equates to a maximum of 134 beds, depending on the support needs of young people placed. In 2020/21 we used an average of 91% of our contracted hours.

Floating support is commissioned to support move on to other accommodation or return to family and friends as part of homelessness prevention. Services are available across Devon based on 3 locality hubs (North, East, South). We also we also work with District Councils to commission a Homelessness Prevention Worker function for 16/17 year olds and care leavers across all Districts in Devon. In addition, we have in place a Homelessness Prevention Co-Ordinator working with Devon's Corporate Parenting team. The co-ordinator works with care-experienced young people who have complex support needs and are at risk of homelessness, with the aim of preventing rough sleeping.

More information on the outcomes of our homelessness prevention work can be found in the [appendices](#).

What we will do

- Review and revise the homelessness protocol for launch in November 2021. The Protocol will be reviewed every six months from December 2021 through the Housing Options Group.
- Expand our commissioned supported accommodation for young people with more complex needs or in more challenging circumstances to up to 8 young people by April 2022.
- Alongside Adult Social Care, support young adults with Autism, who are displaying challenging behaviour, to develop their independence and enable them to continue living in their local community wherever possible
- We will help young people, who are leaving care, with evidence based training and support, which will include budgeting, going into employment, and paying bills
- The Care Leavers Multi-agency forum, working with the homelessness prevention workers, will develop the multi-agency support to young people to maintain stability at home and reduce the risk of homelessness. The MDT will also support the PA with creating an effective plan for the young person and a team to support.

Local needs

- 169 eligible young people were supported by our homelessness prevention offer in 2020/21
- 63% of whom were 16/17-year-olds and 37% were care leavers
- An average of 89 young people are supported at any one time
- The average length of stay was 277 days for 16-17- year-olds, with the longest being 890 days
- For care-experienced young people, the average length of stay was 419 days, with the longest being 1651 days

Welfare Secure Children's Home

The Atkinson Welfare Secure Children's Home is one of 7 welfare-only secure homes in the country. The home has 12 beds available (only 8 beds throughout COVID-19) for young people in an environment that offers therapeutic support informed by dyadic developmental psychotherapy and therapeutic parenting model PACE, as well as schooling provided within the home. The operation of the Atkinson Children's Home is overseen by Devon County Council however, referrals made through a national referral hub.

NHS England currently funds health services for children and young people placed in the home through a Section 10 agreement with Devon County Council. This funding provides CAMHS, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a school nurse, young people's substance misuse services (Y-SMART) and sessions from a GP.

What we will do:

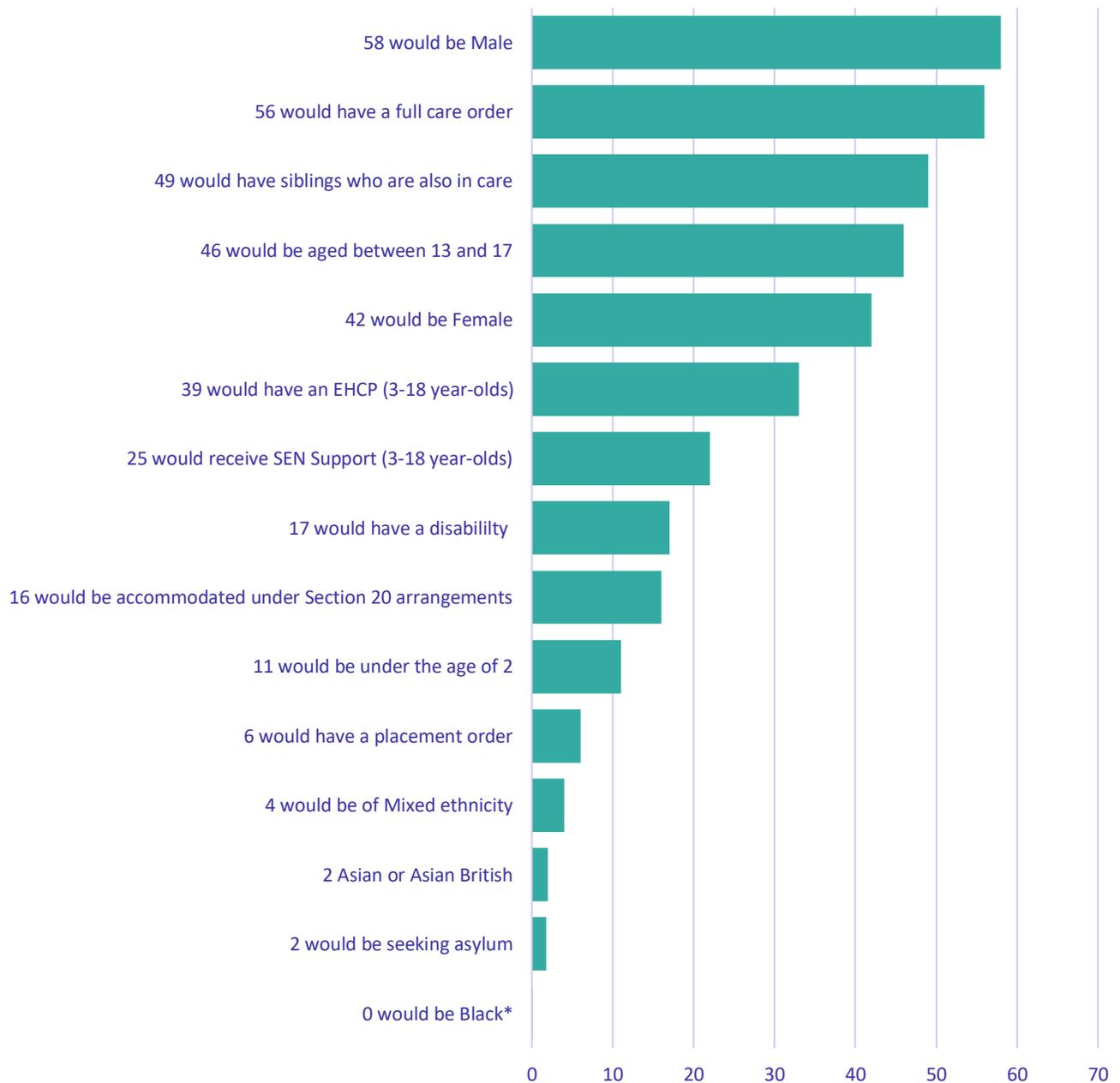
- Maintain the active recruitment and retention of key staff
- Review the service and develop a business plan to support any emerging changes
- Review the statement of purpose to ensure it is in line with the current available staffing levels
- Strengthen the health offer including nursing and CAMHS support through the contract with Children and Families Health Devon and the GP provision as part of a Section 10 agreement with NHS England

Appendices

1. Care in Devon

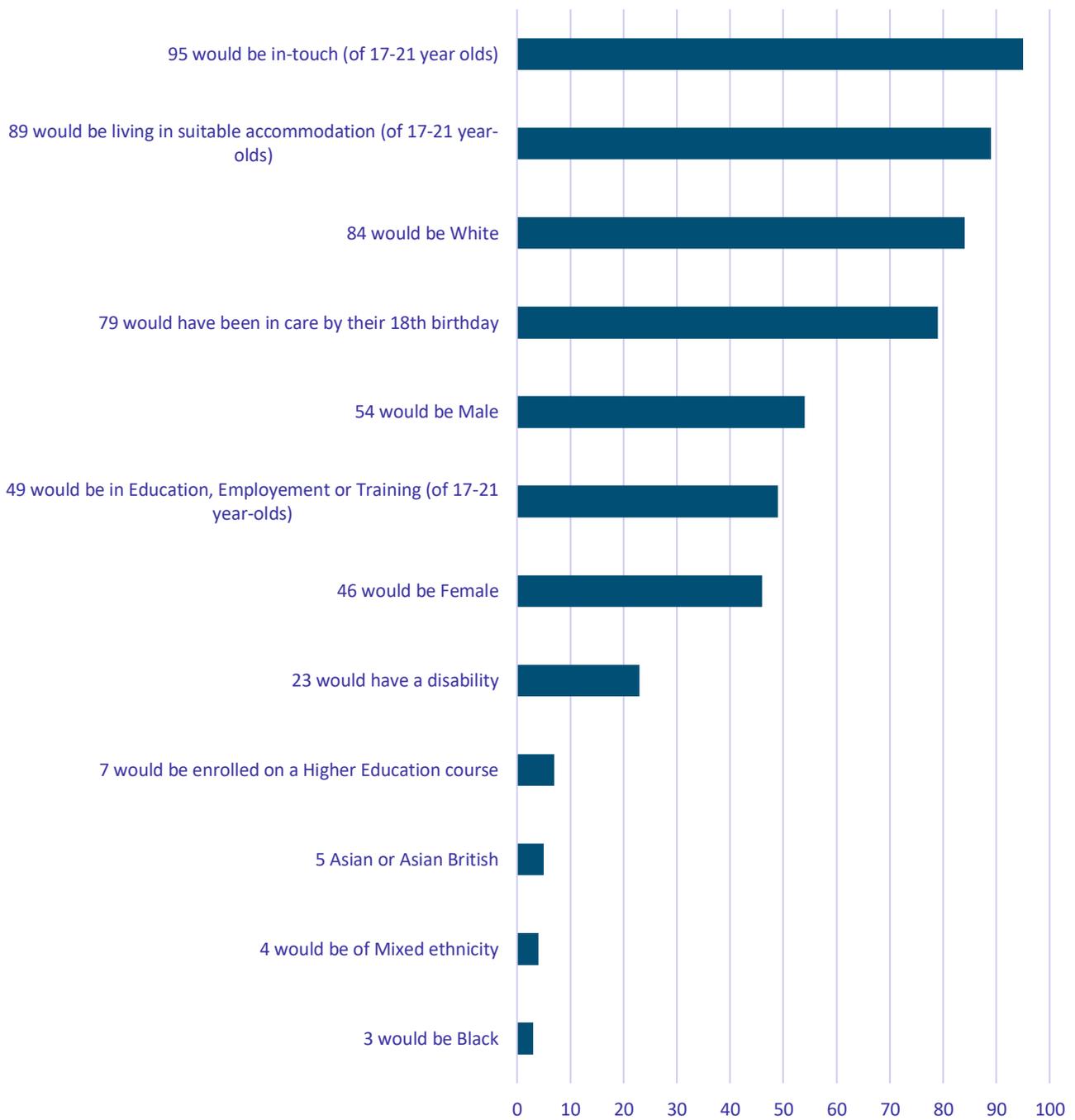
Care population characteristics

If there were 100 children in our care..



*0.1% of children and young people in our care are Black

If there were 100 young people receiving leaving care services from US..

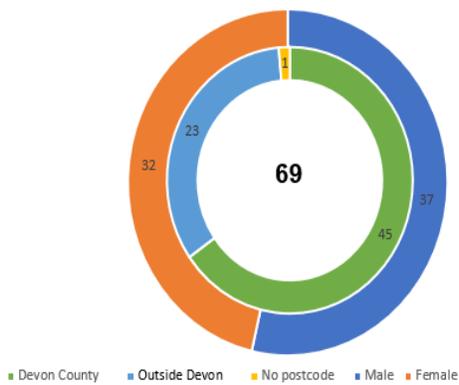


Where children in care are living

Location by age group

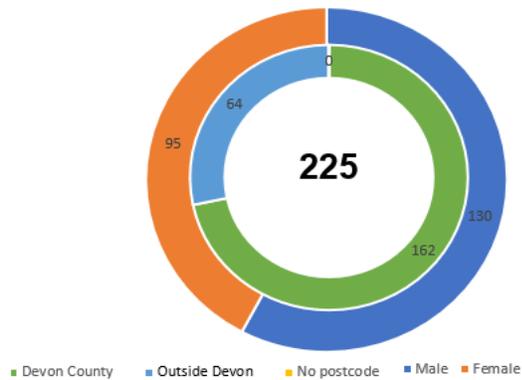
2-4 years:

Children Looked After: Gender & Location Breakdown (2-4)



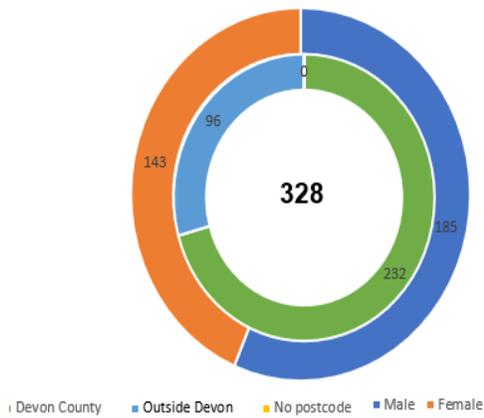
5-11 years:

Children Looked After: Gender & Location Breakdown (5-11)



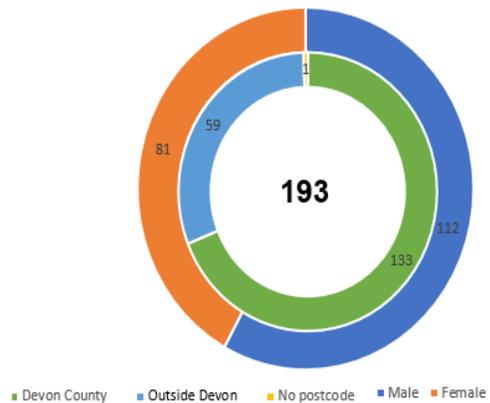
12-16 years:

Children Looked After: Gender & Location Breakdown (12-16)



16-18 years:

Children Looked After: Gender & Location Breakdown (16-18)



2. Local services

Bridges

Bridges, our Edge of Care Service in Devon, supports children and young people to live safely with their families at home. This is either through preventing the need for care entry or enabling children to return home safely and smoothly out of our care. To be eligible for the service, children and families should be:

- Living in Devon
- Aged 11-17 at point of referral
- Have an allocated Social Worker, are a Child in Need or have a Child Protection Plan, and are deemed to be at risk of coming into care; or
- Have an allocated Social Worker, have recently come into care, and are deemed to have the potential of returning home to their families safely

Young people are referred by their Social Worker, either under **Prevention** or **Reunification**.

Following the Manager's 'screening' process, eligible young people are allocated an Adolescent Worker and Family Worker, who arrange to contact the young person and their family as a 'Rapid Response' (within 24 hours), or as a 'Planned Response' (within 5 working days). An initial Support Agreement is then agreed with the young person and appropriate family members within 10 working days.

Following the completion of an Initial Support Agreement, a review of the plan is carried out every 6 weeks to monitor progress. This review continues until such time that planned outcomes have been achieved and the service is able to end their involvement, with the ultimate aim of the young person having stepped down from being a 'child in care', or a child remaining with their family and no longer needing a social care service.

Of the 92 young people Bridges has worked with so far:

- 47 have remained at home
- 14 no longer need any social care support
- 31 remained in, or came into, our care

Adoption

- Of the 163 children, for those aged 5 or over, 2.9% were adopted. This is less than half our average between 2013 and 2016
- During 2019/20, 39 children were adopted in Devon, up slightly on the previous year – the number of adoptions across the Adopt South West region dropped by 10% overall
- During 2019/20, 39 children were adopted in Devon, up slightly on the previous year – the number of adoptions across the Adopt South West region dropped by 10% overall
- In the last 12 months, children in care are being placed for adoption more quickly: 42 days compared to 67 days from first entering our care.
- In 2020/21, we approved a third more adoptive families than during 2019-20
- The average length of time spent in care by older young people (14-15 year-olds) is increasing, whereas for those under 1, it is decreasing
- The increases in the child in care population, during 2020/21, are largely under 5 years of age.
- 7% children in care have adoption listed on their permanence plan (April 2021). This is up from 3% in April 2020.

-
- 11% children in care have a return to family listed on their permanence plan (April 2021). This is down from 16% in April 2020.

Minimising the use of unregulated accommodation

Providing early multi-agency wrap-around support for families

Following a rise in the use of unregulated accommodation as an emergency option, the Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP) undertook a multi-agency review, in May 2021, to understand any lessons learned from 5 of these situations. The review found the need for children and families to receive earlier multi-disciplinary help and support to ensure better decision-making and planning. This is informing multi-agency practice development including the development of:

- Access to earlier support
- A community intensive support offer and crisis support offer for children with Autism
- Family-based care for children with Autism and complex needs
- Emergency IFA and children's home provision
- A Crisis Care business case.

Ensuring high-quality support for young people, living in unregulated accommodation, to develop their independence in early adulthood

In the unregulated market, quality assurance is conducted through commissioning and contracting activity, visits, and monitoring. We undertake this for all accommodation, however additional focus is taken to quality assure providers outside of our supported living framework agreement.

A recent analysis of our quality assurance activity has shown some ongoing challenges and a lack of preparation for young people to support the move to adulthood. In some cases, this has resulted in an increase in support for young people ahead of their 18th birthday, rather than a decrease.

Prior to COVID-19, provider development activity centred on better information sharing about criminal exploitation, as part of the recovery planning, we will re-start the provider development work to focus on missing, criminal exploitation including County Lines, supporting care experienced young people with additional needs into adulthood.

Good sufficiency, within the framework, is providing young people with a high-level of choice and varied options to support their journey to adulthood. However, there remains a use of non-framework accommodation.

What we are doing

- Where 16 and 17-year-olds are living in semi-independent accommodation, we maintain close management oversight, through monthly panel reviews, and risk assessment monitoring.
- Increasing the numbers of young people who are living in accommodation which forms part of our quality assured Supported Living Options Framework Agreement. This is currently 76% and we will increase this to 80% by April 2022 and 90% by September 2022.

Outcomes for young people at risk of homelessness

A sample of young people, at risk of homelessness, accessing accommodation support showed the following outcomes:

- 53% had successful outcomes (return home, goes to live with family/friends or becomes independent)
- 21% had unsuccessful outcomes (evicted or abandoned dwelling) – these were all followed up to check that warnings procedures had been followed and second chances given where possible
- 55% were accessing employment, education or training
- 50% improved social networks and relationships
- 30% were able to manage a tenancy and accommodation – this included all but 2 of those moving to independent accommodation
- 65% had self-care and living skills
- 45% had positive/improved emotional and mental health

Outcomes for all young people receiving accommodation-based support were as follows:

- 100% of young people have an individual support plan and an outcomes star (or equivalent) to identify appropriate support and map their progress while they are receiving support.
- 11% had been in supported accommodation for more than 2 years at the end of Q1
- 57% of those identified as needing mental health support were accessing support
- 46% of those identified as needing substance misuse support were accessing support.

Outcomes for young people working with the Homelessness Prevention Co-ordinator:

- 63% of young people supported to remain in existing accommodation preventing homelessness
- 13% supported into emergency/ temporary accommodation
- 25% supported to engage with services such as mental health service or substance misuse

Supporting children and young people in care with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)

Local needs

- Almost two-thirds of care-experienced children and young people in Devon have SEND
- Children in care in Devon have worse mental health and wellbeing than children in care nationally
- The majority (63%) of children and young people in care, who have an EHCP, have a primary need of Social , Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
- 11% of EHCPs have a primary need of speech, Language and Communication needs (SLCN), and a further 13% have a secondary need of SLCN

Our vision is for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to dream, believe and achieve, and fulfil their potential.

To achieve this vision, our care and support should be close to home, linked to local communities, and personalised wherever possible.

We want to support children and young people with SEND to meet their individual health, care, and education needs, build individual, family and community resilience and equip young people to become independent and thriving adults.

A significant proportion of children in our care and care-experienced young people have SEND. Based on identified needs, we will hold a particular focus on ensuring we provide the right support at the right time for Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, Autism and speech language and communication needs (SLCN).

Where we are now

A transformation of SEND services in Devon is currently in progress, with a new strategy in place and a re-design of SEND services in development. In this context, the [Joint SEND Commissioning Plan](#), developed during 2021, now sets out our commissioning priorities for the next four years. The views and experiences of young people with SEND and their families, as well as professionals from all agencies, have informed these strategic developments to local SEND services throughout.

Key developments to support this work, as set out in the Joint Commissioning plan, are the NHS Learning Disability and Autism Programme (LDAP) - which aims to support more young people with autism and/or learning disabilities to receive care in their community - and the Community Mental Health Framework - which will create a clearer offer for young people aged 18-25, including a priority focus on care-experienced young people.

Meeting the Health needs of children in care and care-experienced young people

Meeting the health needs of Children in Care and Care Experienced young people is a joint responsibility between the Local Authority and the NHS commissioners and providers⁴.

“Children in care have a higher incidence of many physical, behavioural, emotional and mental health issues such as speech & language difficulties, sensory issues and developmental delay. In addition, due to frequent moves, they can experience difficulties in accessing health services and may not have their health needs met, leading to further detrimental health and social outcomes both in the short and long-term.”

Promoting the Health of Looked After Children, 2015

The current offer

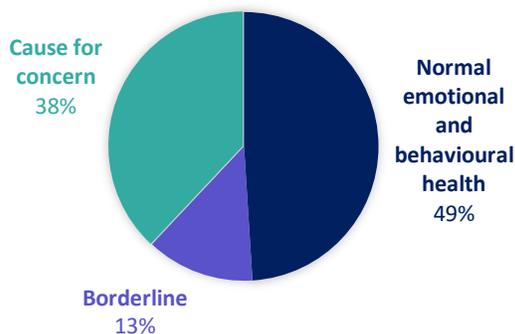
To support the health and wellbeing of children in care and care-experienced young people, NHS Devon CCG commission, from Children and Families Health Devon (CFHD), a range of Community Health Services. CFHD provides a range of services that are accessible to all children in care including: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Early Help for Mental Health, on-line counselling service (Kooth), Speech and Language Therapy Services (SALT), Occupational Therapy (OT), Physiotherapy, Autism Spectrum Diagnosis (ASD), Learning Disabilities Teams (LD), Children’s Community Nursing, Specialist Child Development services.

CFHD has two dedicated services, which are commissioned specifically to support the physical and mental health needs of children and young people in care: CFHD CIC Nursing Service,

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

Nationally, for all children in care aged 5-16 years, a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score was recorded for 81% of them.⁵ The national score of 14.1 for 2020 is marginally below that of 2019 and 2018.

NATIONAL AVERAGE SDQ SCORE OF 14.1 (2020)



⁴ [sufficiency - statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

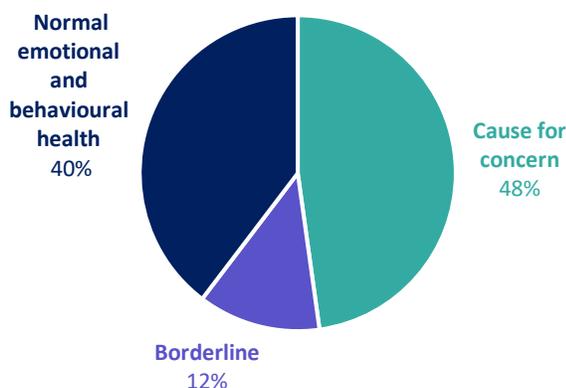
⁵ National SDQ is reported on an annual basis by the ONS. The latest figure is for the year to 31 March 2020 and is available online at: [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2020 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

The average SDQ score for children in care in Devon is currently 16.1. Locally, the score has remained high despite review and implementation of the Children in Care (CIC) pathway into CAMHS in 2017 and again in 2019. A score is currently recorded for 84% of our children in care in the relevant age group.

249 children in care are open to CAMHS as of February 2021, with all children entering care being screened by a mental health professional. As part of this, attachment disorder, impact of trauma and neglect is considered. Within the CAMHS service there is a specialist provision for Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). This service in addition to the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) and CVS Services which offer therapeutic support to children who are victims of sexual assault and abuse.

We will be reviewing our SDQ triage process during Summer 2021 to ensure we are prioritising the right children for support. We are also developing additional mental health support services for Care Leavers which will be outlined later in this Strategy.

**DEVON AVERAGE SDQ SCORE OF 16.1
(2020/21)**



CAMHS

The aim of the CAMHS CIC team is to provide support, care and treatment which promotes the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children in care in Devon. In addition to direct clinical care for CYP, the service provides training for foster carers through the Nurturing Attachments 18-week training programme, as well as running regular supervision groups for staff working with the fostering support team and offering consultation to local authority colleagues. The CAMHS CIC Team is a well-established, experienced team, providing assessment, treatment, and specialist consultation to the wider CAMHS service, social care colleagues and other agencies.

CAMHS CIC interventions can range from 6-12 in-depth sessions with assessment, report writing and multi-agency working which is adapted and designed according to the needs of each individual child, carer, and professional team. When indicated, some children and young people are offered further treatment, for example, in relation to sexual abuse and trauma.

The service has continued to be offered through COVID. During the initial COVID response period of March-August 2020 the team experienced reduced workforce capacity and higher demand. The number of children and young people entering local authority care increased over this period. As an example, in July 2020 there was a 28% increase in referrals compared to July 2019.

The average waiting times for start of treatment in CAMHS is currently 11.2 weeks. All referrals are screened and triaged within 24 hours and personalised referral responses sent to children/ young people, their parents, carers and referrers. Young people can self-refer or be referred by a parent, carer or professional. Whilst waiting, the service keeps in touch with children and their carer's and monitors their risks to keep them safe. Furthermore, care is prioritised based on vulnerability and clinical risk, with support being available 24/7 if needed through duty and crisis lines.

Mental health offer post-18

For care-experienced young people, over the age of 18, mental health support is offered from Devon Partnership Trust and ranges from Talk works to community mental health support teams including

support on admission and discharge from acute settings. There have been 6 young people admitted to an adult mental health inpatient setting during 2020. Review work identified there is more to do to support their needs prior to admission, during admission and during planning for discharge.

Children in Care Nursing Service

The Children in Care (CiC) Nursing service covers children in care in Devon and Torbay, with a Named Nurse providing senior clinical leadership and a Lead Nurse, based in North Devon. The team was brought together in September 2020, having previously been two teams serving Torbay and Devon local authorities respectively.

The CFHD CiC Nurse team work specifically with children and young people who are care experienced. They provide support, health advice and signposting to appropriate health services. The Nurses also work alongside other professionals such as Personal Advisors, Participation teams and voluntary organisations.

All children in care require statutory Review Health Assessments (RHAs) every 6 months for 0-5 years and annually for children aged over 5 years. This is a significant and key function of the service. Generally, all children in care are offered a face-to-face visit for their RHA unless a COVID risk assessment indicates that this is not advisable or if the young person chooses a virtual contact by phone or Attend Anywhere (NHS virtual platform). RHAs provide an important opportunity for children and young people to have a skilled Nurse identify and address any physical and emotional/mental health needs or issues to ensure their individual optimum well-being and health outcomes.

In addition to RHAs, the CiC nurses also offer a rolling programme of training for newly qualified SWs, Health Matters training for foster carers four times a year, The Named Nurse assists the DCC Fostering team with arranging training for Carers to address topical health issues, including forthcoming online training on dental health, development of a 2-hour health awareness training for all DCC SWs/Personal Advisors and IROs, in conjunction with the CiC CAMHS team manager and is expected to be rolled out in Spring 2021. It was delayed from 2020 due to COVID-19. An initial session has been provided to the Social Work Team in December 2020 and received good feedback.

Pregnancy and Early Years

The commissioning of Public Health nursing services and Childrens Centres both set out the priority of supporting care-experienced young people when becoming parents. This is an offer for both young women and young men. We plan to roll out the Helping Us Grow Supported (HUGS) programme during 2022. The programme has the aim of meeting the needs of young first-time parents who have low-to-moderate mental health challenges, low-level learning disabilities, potential poor parental modelling from their parents, or are young parents receiving an intensive support offer.

Substance misuse

The offer for children in care who need support to address substance misuse is provided by Y-SMART, which is a commissioned substance misuse service for children and young people under the age of 18. It is funded by Public Health Devon, alongside national funding. Between April and December 2020, almost one in five referrals were for young people in care. This compares to 13% nationally.

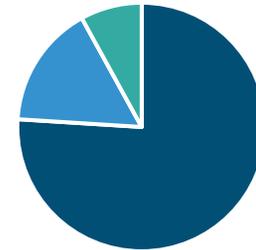
Tier 3 interventions include community-based specialist assessments, planned treatments, and specialist liaison. During 2020/21, 16% of Tier 3 interventions were for young people in care – a total of 23 individuals. The vast majority of whom – 19 of 23 – were referred between the ages of 16-18 years.

During the same period of time, 8% of Tier 2 interventions – involving an initial professional assessment and identification of support needs – were for young people in care. This amounts to 10 individual young people across the year. A total of 3 care-experienced young people received Tier 2 interventions.

For all young people, whose cases closed during 2020/21 – not only young people in care – 98% met the goals in their care plan and had successful and planned step-downs from treatment.

Y-SMART have been developing joint working arrangements with the Adult Substance Misuse service 'Together'. They are ensuring that care-experienced young people receive cohesive and continued support, in the right setting, to best meet the individual needs of each young adult. This has meant that Y-SMART are working with more 18-21 year-olds.

Tier 3 Y-SMART Interventions
by care status



■ No care status ■ Child in care
■ Child in Need

Child sexual abuse and sexually-harmful behaviour

Within the CAMHS service there is a specialist provision for Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). This service in addition to the SARC and CVS Services offer therapeutic support to children who are victims of sexual assault and abuse.

We have had several children enter care during the Summer of 2020 where sexually harmful behaviour (SHB) behaviour and the risk they posed to others was the cause for care entry. After reviewing the circumstances of these children, we are up-skilling the Youth Intervention

Team (YIT) to complete Aim 3 assessments and offer therapeutic interventions. The Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) also provide support and advice for children with sexually harmful behaviours. Increased training and resources for Social Workers and partnership staff. We are working with the CSA Centre of Expertise to run CSA and SHB training for all social work staff.

The Journey After Child Abuse Team works specifically with children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse includes engaging young people in sexual activities including sexual assault, as well as non-contact abuse such as involving young people in looking at pornographic material and sending sexually inappropriate messages (including social media).

3. Corporate Parenting governance structure

