

Kent County Council's Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028

**Making sure that Kent's Children in Care,
Children in Need and Care Leavers have
access to sufficient, high-quality
accommodation that they can call home**

CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Introduction and Our Vision	4
Introducing Kent's Children and Young Adults	6
Pillar 1: Family help provides the right support at the right time so that Children can thrive with their families	9
Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency Child protection system	11
Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks	13
Pillar 4: Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a Child in Care:	14
• Foster Care	12
• Adoption	16
• Residential Care	17
• Supported Accommodation	18
• Transitional Accommodation for Care Leavers	19
• Kent Supported Homes/Staying Put/Staying Close	21
• Reception Centres and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	22
• Children with Disabilities and Short Breaks	23
Pillar 5: A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every Child who needs one	25
Pillar 6: A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data	27
Care Leavers	29

FOREWORD



"As the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services in Kent, I feel it is important to acknowledge that all the staff within the team are already working hard and achieving outstanding results, as recognised by OFSTED. We positively continue to build upon this work by improving services to secure the future of all looked after children in Kent. I recognise the vital importance of clearly setting out how we will ensure that our Children in Care, Children in Need, and Care Leavers receive the care and support they deserve. Staff across all departments, our elected members and partnership agencies all have a corporate parenting responsibility to the children and young adults in the care of Kent County Council (KCC).

KCC has a statutory responsibility to act in the same way that any good parent would act for their own child, making sure they have a safe and happy childhood and to be given the best possible opportunities to thrive in our care. We want our Care Leavers to grow towards adulthood, equipped to lead an independent life and have the opportunity for higher education and a good career, to enable them to be financially secure. This is not just a statutory duty, it is a moral commitment to act with the same care, ambition, and love that any good parent would show their own child. Every decision we make must be rooted in the belief that our Children in Care, Children in Need and Care Leavers deserve safety, stability, and the opportunity to thrive.

The Sufficiency Strategy 2025–2028 sets out how KCC will meet its duty to ensure that every Child in Care, Child in Need and Care Leaver has access to a home that is safe, secure, and nurturing. We are determined to provide the right support at the right time, whether that means helping families stay together, finding the right Foster Care or Residential placement, or supporting Care Leavers as they transition to independence.

We know that the journey through care can be complex and challenging. That is why we are committed to placing love, relationships, and stability at the heart of everything we do. We will continue to work with our partners, carers, and communities to ensure that no child is left behind, and that every care-experienced child is given the tools and support they need to lead a fulfilling life.

Our Sufficiency Strategy reflects our shared ambition: to be the best possible parents to the children who need us most but also our plan of action to improve the sufficiency to support the children and young adults in our care. Our approach is flexible and varied, and we listen carefully to what our children and young adults tell us.”



The KCC Sufficiency Strategy for 2025 sets out our approach to meet the statutory responsibility to provide secure, safe and appropriate accommodation to Children in Care, Children in Need and Care Leavers.

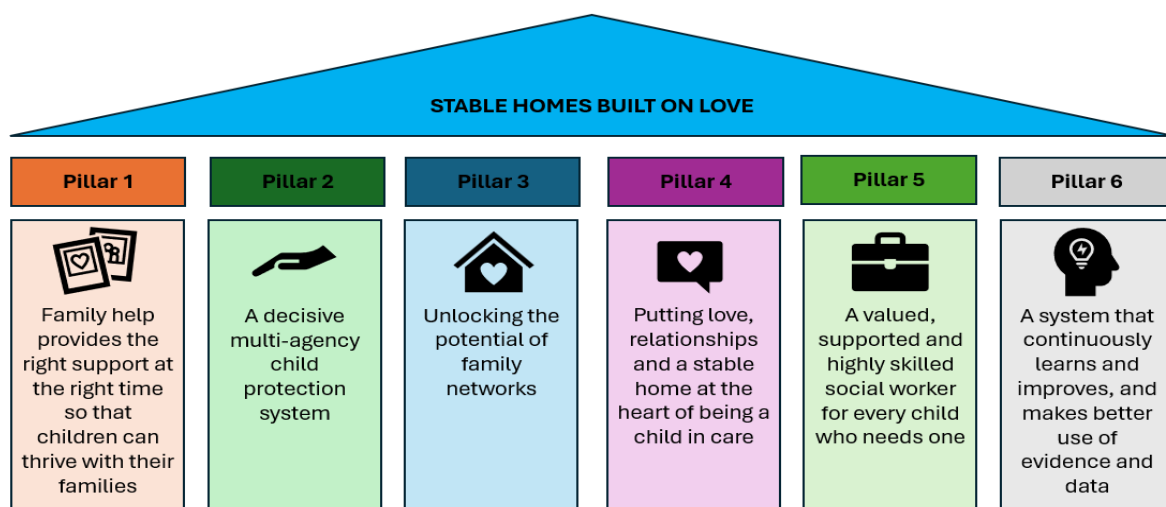
The Sufficiency Duty (Section 22G of the Children Act 1989) requires Local Authorities, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of those children they have a Corporate Parenting responsibility for within their Local Authority area.

KCC faces several challenges in delivering placement sufficiency as Kent is a large and complex county with twelve district councils and varying levels of deprivation and need. Kent has a high number of Children in Care, Children in Need and Care Leavers, particularly Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking (UAS) Children. KCC commission a high proportion of services from external providers and the services we are able to buy are significantly impacted upon by the numbers of Children in Care placed by other Local Authorities into Kent.

Whilst the sufficiency duty applies in respect of all Children in Care, it recognises the importance of earlier, preventative action to support children and families so that fewer children become looked after by targeting services to those who are on the edge of care. KCC's Kinship Service, Family Hubs and Early Help Services take action to support a child and/or their family early in the life of challenges or as soon as difficulties emerge.

KCC and the Family Hub network of partners provide services that can be accessed flexibly and in a place that suits the child and/or family.

We believe that embracing the government’s 2023 ‘**Stable Homes Built on Love**’ and implementing the six pillars of reform will lead to greater sufficiency within Kent and have therefore chosen to use these pillars as the foundation for this strategy. This vision is underpinned by the fundamental principle of the Children Act 1989 that children’s welfare is paramount. Stable Homes Built on Love outlines that the “**best way of promoting children’s welfare is very often by supporting children’s families and the loving relationships around them. To achieve this vision, we need to rebalance children’s social care away from costly crisis intervention to more meaningful and effective help for families, so that it achieves the outcomes children deserve. Achieving this will require a major reset that puts love and stable relationships at the heart of what children’s social care does**”.

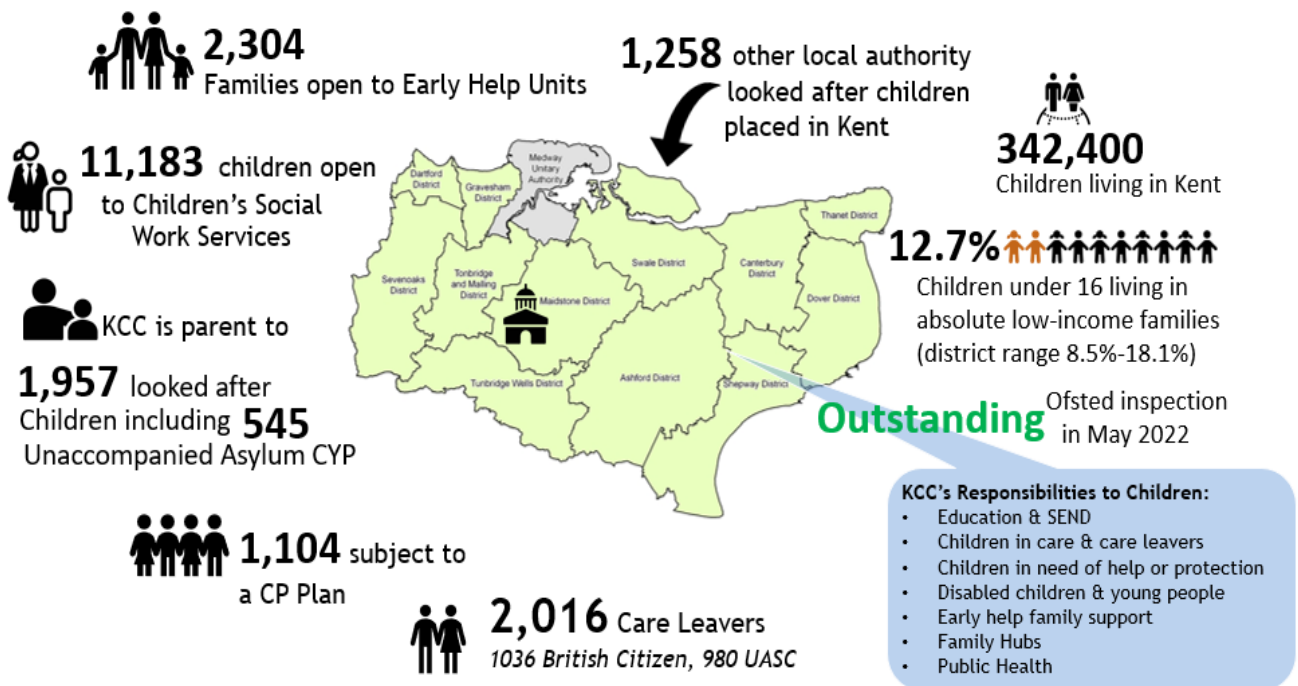
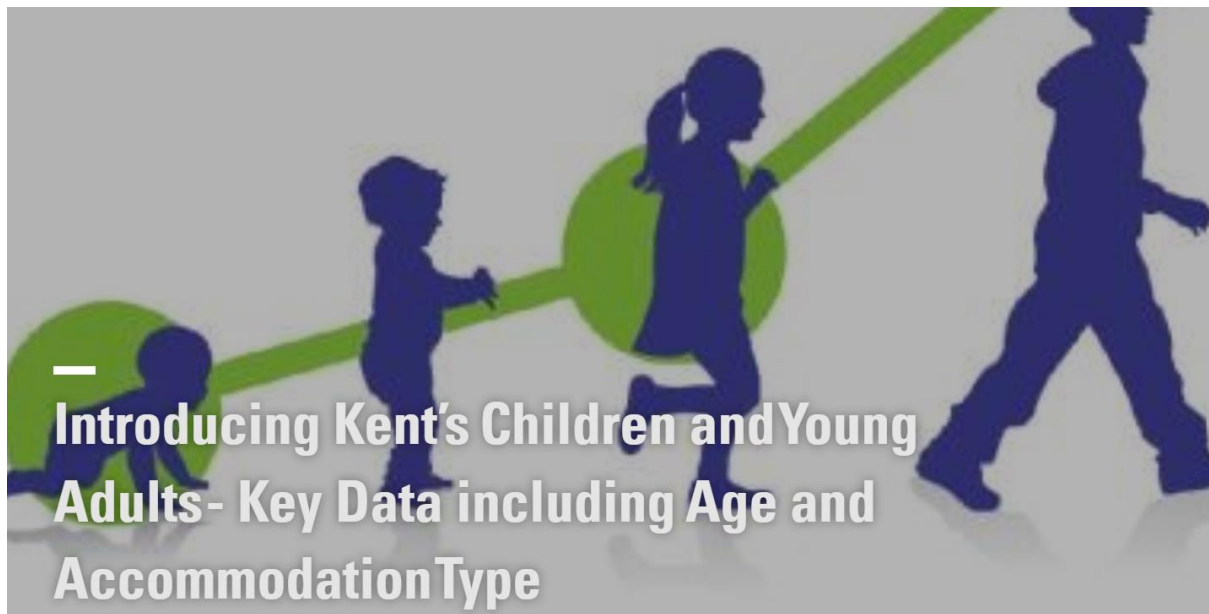


KCC is also adopting the four outcomes of the Children’s Social Care National Framework: Children’s Social Care will help your family stay together, Children’s Social Care will support your family network, Children’s Social Care helps to keep you safe and Children’s Social Care will help to give you a loving home.

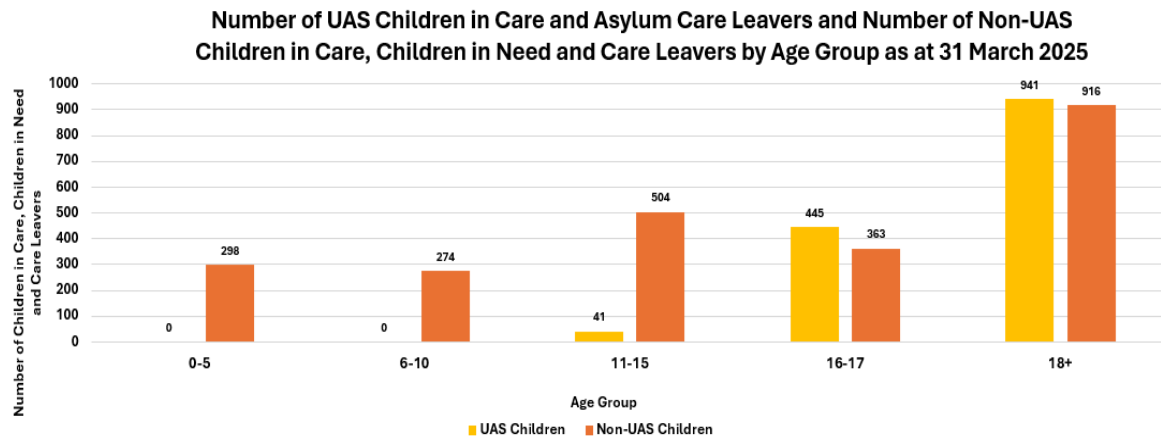
KCC have produced the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2025-2028.

As a Corporate Parent we have a statutory responsibility to act in the same way that any good parent would act for their own child, making sure that they have a safe and happy childhood and to be given the best possible opportunities to thrive in care and have the best start in life. We want our young adults who are care experienced to be equipped with the skills to lead independent lives as they grow into adulthood, by providing them with the highest possible level of support to recognise and meet their individual needs.

The Council's vision is for every Child in Care and Care Leaver to have a place they call home, feel safe and loved, until they are ready to live independently. It is recognised that not all children will be ready to move on when they reach adulthood, and we will be flexible in making sure that these children continue to be accommodated with good support provided from the age of 16, to develop their independence skills.

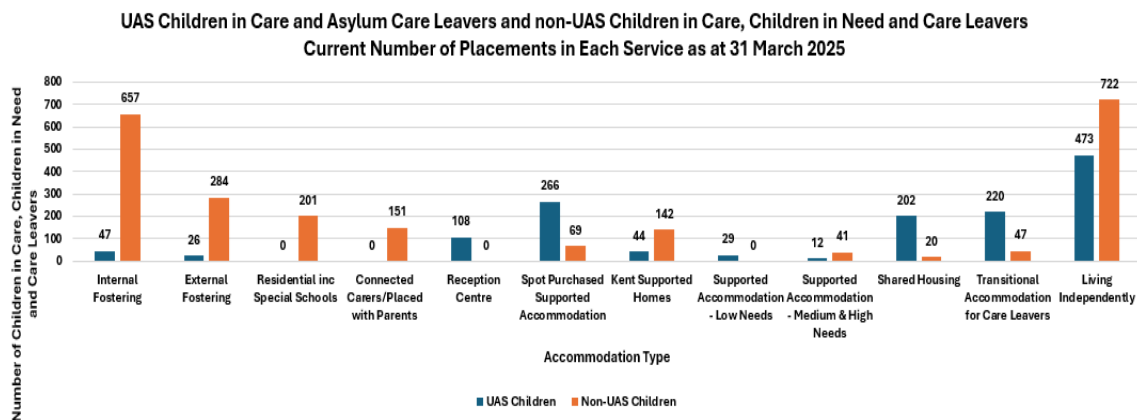


Introducing Kent's Children and Young Adults – By Age



This graph shows that age group 11-15 has the highest number of non-UAS Children in Care and age group 16/17 has the highest number of UAS Children in Care. There are no UAS Children in the 0-5 and 6-10 age groups.

Introducing Kent's Children and Young Adults – By Accommodation Type

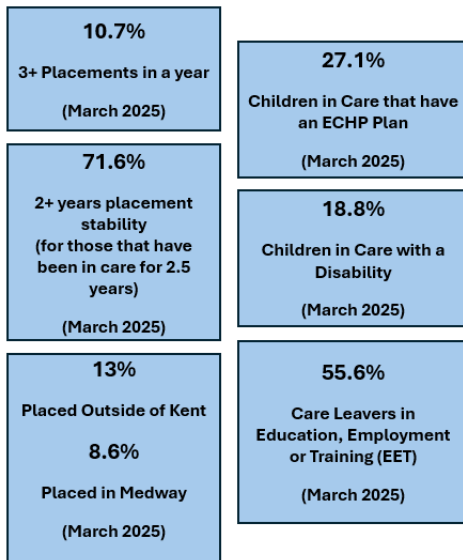


Spot purchased Supported Accommodation will decrease as Children in Care aged 16/17 will transition into the Supported Accommodation Low Needs service over the coming months as the provider now has Ofsted Registration. It is recognised that KCC will still need to place Children in Care in a spot purchased Supported Accommodation Service, however, this will be in exceptional circumstances.

The Legacy Shared Housing contract was designed to be a reducing contract to allow for the young adults aged 18+ accommodated in this provision to move on into their own independent accommodation in a planned way by 31 March 2026.

The Supported Accommodation Medium/High Needs Service is yet to be fully utilised. The service operates on an 80:20 basis of medium/high needs mix but it has been recognised that there needs to be a review by commissioning to understand if the 80:20 mix is the right model due to an increase in demand for higher needs placements.

Introducing Kent’s Children and Young Adults – Key Data including Overnight Short Breaks



IN HOUSE OVERNIGHT SHORT BREAKS DATA 2024/2025						
	BLUEBELLS	FAIRLAWN	SUNRISE	TREETOPS	WINDCHIMES	SERVICE TOTALS
Number of beds in unit	4	7	6	6	6	29
Number of admissions in year	257	579	564	609	445	2454
Number of children accessing the service	30	68	48	49	62	257
Number of children on waiting list	9	10	10	6	18	53
Children Accommodated as Emergency Placements	1	7	0	2	2	12
Total Number of nights for Emergency Placements	8	257	0	12	41	318



Pillar 1: Family help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families

KCC knows that to keep more children safely in their families and prevent escalation, we must provide interventions that create meaningful change and offer support for families with real focus around family solutions as being the key preventative answer to reduce children coming into care. The Family Hub ([Kent Family Hub - Kent County Council](#)) reaches beyond KCC's direct delivery and engages partners to ensure wrap around holistic support for family needs including Mental Health, substance misuse and domestic abuse. **Each Family Hub offers different services, depending on what people in the local area need.**

There are 56 Family Hubs across Kent that are built on three pillars:

- **Access:** All families 0-19 years (and to 25yrs with SEND) can get help through Family Hubs.
- **Connection:** Family Hubs are where all organisations and sectors work together, sharing information, data and outcomes.
- **Relationships:** Relationship strain is often an aspect of family problems. The **Reducing Parental Conflict programme** is embedded and prioritised in a local Family Hub network.

KCC have Instagram and Facebook social media platforms where we share and signpost to services such as Moodspark, Kooth, Kent Resilience Hub as well as share content around Prevent, Domestic Abuse, Drugs and Alcohol and Wellbeing posts.

KCC's practice framework guides practitioners to provide evidence-based interventions (trauma informed, solutions focused, restorative, holistic) that aim to build resilience within families and prevent entry into care.

A new outcomes framework (**Supporting Families Programme**) was launched in 2022, which enabled us to better describe the support we offer families. The programme has helped to highlight nationally the importance of Early Help support and services for families. It has influenced the development of the **Families First Partnership Programme (FFFP)** with a strengthened focus on:

- Whole family working across the system.
- The lead practitioner role.
- The importance of multi-agency working.

When a child has been identified, via a Child and Family Assessment, as a Child 'in Need' under section 17 Children Act 1989, social work practitioners need to ensure that 'Child in Need' intervention is in partnership with families. Alongside other relevant parties (both professionals and wider friends and family), the aim is to build family resilience and their ability to address life challenges and ensure their children's needs are met. Therefore, it is vital that children and families are supported to be active in their own Child in Need planning. KCC has produced guidance to ensure there is a collaborative process around Child in Need intervention. Families need to have a clear end goal, have worries explicitly discussed and be involved in bringing together their own SMART plans.

Joint Working Protocol for Young People: [Joint Working Protocol for Young People - Kent Housing Group](#)



— Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system

KCC have a proactive multi-agency approach to ensure that children and young adults in Kent feel and are safe. KCC works in partnership with partners to reduce serious youth violence including child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE). KCC aims to ensure Kent is an environment where adolescents grow up, with healthy relationships, in a safe place free from adverse situations.

The **Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill** strengthens child protection, mandates Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), enhances multi-agency safeguarding, and expands schools' duties. KCC have appointed a **project team** to look at the current model/structure of our Children's Services to facilitate change and improvements for children and families by managing the implementation of Children Services system change, as outlined in the Bill.

The Council's aim is to design, oversee, coordinate and execute a multiagency deliver plan and practice framework, to ensure that KCC's Children's Service deliver a family support offer and multiagency child protection team, which is set up as a single integrated system, that supports the wellbeing of and protection of all children from significant harm inside and outside of the home.

Government guidance for **Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme** has been produced to support safeguarding partners implementing Family Help and multi-agency child protection reforms.

It underscores the importance of multi-agency working, evidence-based interventions, and robust information-sharing protocols and has an emphasis on early intervention to prevent crisis and ensure the right help is accessible at the right time.


Kent Safeguarding Children Multiagency Partnership (KSCMP)

- KSCMP co-ordinates, scrutinises and challenges all agencies in Kent who have responsibility for effectively safeguarding children.
- The Partnership is comprised of three statutory safeguarding partners: Kent and Medway NHS ICB, KCC and Kent Police.
- They share data to understand progress and change and report barriers and challenges identified to delivery of activities.

The County Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Service and Education Safeguarding Service merged in September 2024. This decision aligns both services with the national **'Working Together to Safeguard Children'** agenda and will result in increased capacity to provide LADO and education safeguarding support to Kent education settings and the wider children's workforce.

KCC hold District Contextual Safeguarding meetings on a fortnightly or monthly basis where the aim is to assess the harm and safety that children experience within a specific context, reduce harm and increase protection.

KCC also hold Complex Adolescent Harm meetings when required.



— Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks

KCC's ethos is to support children to live within their family or community network, whenever it is safe to do so. Before any other option of care is sort, early discussions at the Family Group Conference, look to identify kinship options within the child's network. To strengthen this ethos, the child's network will be considered throughout the child's care journey, not just before entering care.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill supports kinship care, through the Family Network meetings model. In 2024, Kent Fostering Service was restructured to create Kinship Assessment and Kinship Support teams. The **Kinship Service** went live on 1 April 2024, working in collaboration with the Family Group Conferencing Service. The Kinship Service complete all assessment and support for kinship arrangements including viability assessments, Regulation 24 temporary approvals, assessment for Kinship Foster Carers, Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders.

The aim of the **Kinship Service** is to build a Children's Social Care system where more children who cannot live with their parents are supported to live with people who are known to them, who can meet their cultural and identity needs, and love them. Kinship care is now the first consideration for a child who can no longer live with their parents.

By receiving the right support at the right time, kinship carers will be empowered to provide care for children to allow them to thrive. This will reduce the number of children who require any type of state care placement and improve sufficiency for those children who are unable to live with a Kinship carer, by protecting the numbers of our mainstream foster carers available for them.

Kinship support includes oversight of Kinship Foster Carers (Connected Persons), therapeutic support, support groups and training for both kinship foster carers and special guardians. The Kinship Support team facilitates applications to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF). By strengthening the Kinship support provided, the aim is to encourage more family and friends within the child's network, to put themselves forward as a carer with the confidence they will be provided with ongoing support as identified within Support Plans.



1. Foster Care

KCC continues to have a good reputation and can attract good foster carers to its In-house service, however, to meet our Sufficiency Duty there remains a need to search externally with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) for approximately 44% (310) of our fostering placements.

Nationally, official data shows year on year declines in the number of approved foster care households in England with Councils disproportionately hit by falls in carer numbers. Existing pressures seen in the system have been compounded by a cost-of-living crisis, demographic changes in the foster carer population, and the increasing complexities of need seen in children coming into care. In response the Department for Education (DfE) has increased investment since 2023 in foster care recruitment through the rollout of Regional Hubs to support applicants through the process, which will be extended to the whole country in 2025/2026 [Budget to include 44m for kinship and foster care](#).

There are several inhouse and external foster carers who provide care to UAS Children awaiting transfer on the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which impacts on foster carers available for non-UAS Children. At times, there are a considerable number of carers on hold, required to meet demand of potential new arrivals in Kent. This then has an impact on KCC's ability to place local children within 20 miles of their community and increased use of other provisions.

When a child placed in residential is ready to live with a family, when all options of a kinship carer have been explored, KCC have implemented a **Step Across to Foster Care** process.

There has been some success in relation to moving several children out of residential care to inhouse foster care as KCC provide an incentivised package so foster carers committing to the child receive enhanced payments.

KCCs Fostering webpage can be found [Home - Kent Fostering](#)

Intentions to Improve Sufficiency

- Kinship Service to protect the numbers of our mainstream foster carers to be available to care for children who are unable to live with a kinship carer and reduce the number of external foster care.
- Early identification of Kinship Placements - Bid submitted for Kinship Allowance pilot and pending outcome.
- When a child steps across from Residential to Foster Care, practitioners to revisit the kinship offer to consider if there is a family network for them to stay with, if safe to do so.
- Raising the profile of Foster Care and increasing the number of people who want to foster through Local Authority South East Regional Hub.
- Focus on recruitment and retention of the skills and experienced carers that the council has and invest in initiatives such as the **Mockingbird programme**, a model structured around replicating the support and relationships an extended family provides, to increase our support and improve retention of our experienced foster carers.
- Children in Care are placed in a Residential Children's Home when complexities are at their highest and other services have been unable to meet the child's needs. Foster placement disruption accounts for the highest frequency of entry into Residential care.
- Work to be undertaken to identify and work with Fostering and practitioners to provide enhanced support at an earlier stage and at times of crisis, to avoid disruption for the child.
- Investigate the possibility of a Create a Room scheme or by making adaptations where financial support is offered to create an additional room within a foster carers home to increase capacity to place additional children.
- Explore new models of support to encourage more people to take their first steps into Fostering. Such an initiative is **Now Foster Weekenders program** which offers Children in Care a regular and stable home to visit at weekends, helping them explore new interests, develop skills, and build a supportive, long-term relationship. This initiative will provide Children in Care with invaluable support, stability, and positive role models while also creating new pathways for people to engage with fostering. [NowFoster](#).
- Both the **Staying Together** and **Staying Put** policy enable children to remain living with their foster carers on a permanent basis and into adulthood.

- To improve recruitment and retention of foster carers analysis of data to understand drivers has been completed, and several options have been identified as next steps, a preferred way forward is to be agreed.
- The development of **Kent Supported Homes (KSH)**, our in-house service for Supported Accommodation in a Family Environment, offers Children in Care and Care Leavers aged 16-21 years, the security and stability of a family home as they transition into independence.
- Recruitment for both foster carers and hosts (for KSH) is through a variety of methods including:
 1. Information Events.
 2. Social media advertising including Facebook, local radio, website and google.
 3. Refer a friend scheme to encourage word of mouth referrals from our experienced carers.
 4. Attendance at community events including PRIDE, Family events, Faith Groups and Service Days.
 5. National recruitment and marketing through the South East Hub, funded by the DFE.
 6. Traditional marketing through leaflets, posters and promotional materials.

2. Adoption

We aim to recruit enough adopters who can meet the needs of our children so that the best possible matches can be made for each child who needs an adoptive family within a timescale appropriate for the child. Our aim is to recruit and approve the right people who can meet the often-complex needs of our children who have a plan for adoption. We aim to ensure we have enough adopters for the children so that the best possible matches can be made for each child who needs an adoptive family within a timescale appropriate for the child.

Adoption Partnership South-East (APSE) is working together with Adoption England and other Regional Adoption Agencies on improving adoption practice and develop support services to better meet the needs of children and families. The work is focusing on:

- Improving Early Permanence placements.
- Working to modernise contact and maintaining relationships.
- Improving the adopter journey.

- Improving matching and linking.
- Improving adoption support.
- Increasing commissioning capacity pan-regionally to better understand the needs of adoptive families and share best practice.

Intentions to Improve Sufficiency

- The priority is to recruit families able to parent sibling groups, children with complex needs or disabilities, older children, children from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups and Early Permanence carers.
- The targets set for the total number of Adopters to be recruited and approved during the year will be reviewed quarterly to assess if the annual target will be met.
- APSE continue to work on embedding the recommendations in the Early Permanence National Standard.
- Continued implementation of the DfE grant funded projects focusing on siblings and early permanence.

3. Residential Care

The difficulties in finding suitable placements for children with the most complex needs is a significant challenge for KCC and nationally for most Local Authorities. Well-matched care is not readily available for children with increasingly complex needs. A large proportion of private providers of placements are making materially higher profits by using this to their advantage, by not only raising prices but also selectively choosing children with fewer complexities, pushing local authorities to resort to sourcing unregulated placements.

Spending on Residential placements for Children in Care has been increasing since 2022. This is not unique to Kent. The increase has been driven by regulation changes, increasing numbers of Children in Care, risk and complexity of children's needs, limited availability of suitable foster placements, as well as a higher requirement for expensive secure units and family assessment centres along with other local authorities placing in Kent in high numbers, usually paying more than KCC.

The current Residential market structure operates on a spot purchasing basis due to unpredictable demand and risk needs which has resulted in KCC's market power being limited. KCC may need to place a child in an unregistered provision due to the lack of a suitable regulated placement for our more complex/vulnerable children. On the rare occasion KCC makes an unregistered placement, an added layer of scrutiny

and quality assurance is in place with increased expectation on social workers to visit more regularly and have more oversight, which is constantly under review.

The government are giving new powers to Ofsted, as part of the **Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**, to repress providers who exploit Social Care and place a limit on the amount of profit a provider can make. This may affect the transparency of some providers and KCC will need to look at better ways to work with providers to build trusting and open relationships.

The **Bill** includes the provision of a statutory framework to authorise a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) for children who need it to keep them safe, in accommodation other than a Secure Children's Home. There is likely to be a number of children who will require a DOLS in place if they are deprived of their liberty. KCC is bidding for capital funding from DfE, however, regardless of success, **KCC will be opening in-house homes** (eight beds) that deliver this style of provision. KCC have also opened several **Children's Homes** for our UAS Children (refer to this section for more detail).

High-cost panels where all placements, including Residential, are reviewed monthly to assess if the child can **step across to Foster Care/Kent Supported Homes** when a child is ready to live with a family, when all options for a Kinship carer have been explored.

Analysis to be undertaken to understand the costs associated with residential placements focussing on historic and recent finance data to identify trends and cost drivers. Proof-of-concept Pilot looking at the increasing numbers of children in restrictive placements i.e. with 3:1 support or more. Action plan being developed in collaboration with K&M NHS CYP Programme Board and Strategic Commissioning sub-group.

4. Supported Accommodation

There has been a national challenge in relation to delays by Ofsted for registration of providers to meet the new **Supported Accommodation Regulations**. This challenge has also impacted KCC as the delays have resulted in a higher percentage of children having to be placed out of county and in higher cost spot-purchased Supported Accommodation due to the lack of sufficiency of registered providers. This can lead to KCC having to place in unregistered provision as there are no other options available.

Three of our Commissioned Supported Accommodation providers have been successful in their registration. There are currently 37 spot purchased Supported Accommodation providers registered in Kent, which is 4% of the providers registered nationwide (917).

The Renter's Bill, expected to pass by Summer 2025, will give tenants more protection. However, notice periods vary for those with severe Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and with no right to rent (two weeks if no longer eligible for immigration purposes).

Landlords are required to give a Section 8 notice and can be fined if they do not comply with the new law. Courts will also have to include the impact of tenant behaviour within Housing of Multiple Occupancy (HMO). Rent increases must be in line with market rates. No pet clauses are invalid and can only be refused under certain conditions. This is not yet legally defined. If a tenant is not engaging or paying rent in Supported Accommodation, there are now grounds to end tenancies.

Supported Accommodation providers are currently looking at how this might affect them. KCC need to consider the messaging around pets and notice legalities and how this might affect current contracts, assess the impact and possible contract variations.

Our Total Placement Service continue to be successful in keeping placement costs low compared to other local authority placement costs.

Intentions to Improve Sufficiency

- The Commissioning Team need to continue to work with providers to achieve registration. This will support us in reducing the number of spot purchased Supported Accommodation required.
- Commissioned providers work with KCC to deliver services and accept greater risk, which is above what we initially said we would purchase. These relationships need to continue to develop to provide services and better outcomes for our children and young adults.
- Work is being undertaken to move Children in Care from higher cost spot purchased Supported Accommodation into the Supported Accommodation Low Needs Service.

5. Transitional Accommodation for Care Leavers

KCC accommodate Care Leavers up to the age of 19 (unless they have no legal status) in this provision as we do not have a duty to accommodate after the age of 18. There is no support provided as the children are expected to have gained their independent living skills by the age of 18. However, for those who still require support, there are other options such as Kent Supported Homes or Adults Social Care for those eligible.

The Care Leaving Service have been proactive in ensuring all Care Leavers have a planned move before they reach the age of 19.

In amendments to the **Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**, there is an Extended Corporate Parenting Responsibility for Care Leavers which requires government departments to co-operate with each other and be alert to matters which adversely affect, or might adversely affect, the wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers (aged up to 25) and assess what services or support they provide. The Joint Protocol for Care Leavers between KCC and the District and Borough Councils builds on this [Joint working protocol for care leavers - Kent Housing Group](#)

The Government has decided to include an amendment to the **Bill**, to disapply the intentional homelessness test for Care Leavers up to 25, meaning no Care Leavers should be found 'to blame' for their own homelessness. This could have a positive impact to this cohort by meaning that those who breach tenancy terms (ASB/non-payment etc) would remain able to seek relief and ongoing housing duty from District and Borough Councils, which is not currently the case. Therefore, if asked to leave a provision of KCC accommodation due to such breaches, they should still have an opportunity to be housed by a District/Borough Council with whom they have a local connection. The provision does not apply to immigration and asylum and departments would only have to exercise the duty where reasonably practicable. This may affect the move on opportunities for UAS Children and as such we would need to look at how we will move them on from The 18+ Transitional Accommodation Service if they are outside of the new Bill.

As part of the **Stable Homes, Built on Love Strategy**, Care Leavers up to 25 should not be limited as to where they can apply for housing due to the removal of the local connection requirements currently placed on them. This could allow for greater choice and opportunity for housing via The District and Borough Councils, although is likely to be limited in impact by lack of availability of housing stock and resources.

The Renter's Bill, as outlined under Supported Accommodation section, will also potentially impact this service. Once the bill is passed, KCC will need to review all contracts to assess the impact and possible contract variations.

Intentions to Improve Sufficiency

- The legacy contract is to reduce to 0 for all 18+ Care Leavers.
- Currently no support is provided in this service so the commissioned provider may not accept a referral for those who may need support. KCC to look at options to provide a six-week support package, which we can test over this period to give the provider some reassurance, if they agree to accept the young adult.

6. Kent Supported Homes/Staying Put/Staying Close

This service is Ofsted Registered under the Supported Accommodation Regulations. It is a ringfenced provision of accommodation and support within private family homes for Children in Care aged 16/17 and Care Leavers aged 18-21. It also includes Staying Put arrangements to enable Care Leavers to remain in their foster home, post 18.

KSH is a service for children and young adults who are not yet ready to live independently. They have their own room in a family home and are given support by the adult(s) that live(s) in the home. Hosts offering a supported home must provide holistic support with a focus on building skills for independent living and the emotional resilience it requires.

The challenges faced by the children and young adults supported within the service include limited existing independence skills, limited options for access to ongoing accommodation post move on (local connection and affordability are both factors), stigmatisation due to care experienced status and ongoing impacts of trauma.

Recruitment of Hosts currently takes the form of online information evenings and advertising.

KSH has a new Quality Assurance Framework and audit process which is to begin in 2025 (circa September) which should allow for greater scrutiny and understanding of how best to improve the service, drive standards in line with the regulations and streamline activity, which could then impact positively on KSH's ability to better utilise resources.

The service now provides increased numbers of Kinship and Staying Put arrangements, outside of Kent, ensuring that children/young adults can remain close to networks of support in line with Staying Close principles.

The service has implemented a process for dissemination and collection of surveys from key stakeholders within the service, including children/young adults and their supporting professionals, to better understand the lived experiences and strengths/areas for improvement.

Staying Put is a challenge for KCC as there is a reduction in foster carers income when they become a Staying Put host.

When a child in Care aged 16/17 is placed in a Residential or Children's Home and is ready to live with a family, when all options of a Kinship carer have been explored, KCC have implemented a **Step Across to KSH process**.

Intentions to Improve Sufficiency

- Increasing opportunities for recruitment - Supported Lodgings National Network, could act as a single point of contact for any interested parties and would then forward the information of said individuals onto our service for follow up. KCC will continue to promote Staying Put with foster carers.
- The collection of surveys from key stakeholders within the service will guide development and future recruitment to increase sufficiency within this provision.

7. Reception Centres, Children's Homes and UAS Children

The UAS Children's Service is responsible for the care and accommodation of all newly arrived UAS Children in Kent. This is provided under Section 20 of The Children Act 1989 and the child's eligibility is the same as for non-UAS Children. It is provided until the child is transferred to another Local Authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) or to KCC's mainstream Child in Care or 18+ Services, where support continues until they reach an age where they are no longer eligible, voluntarily leaves Local Authority care or is advised by the Home Office they must return to their country of birth.

KCC currently has an agreement under the National Transfer Scheme that a maximum of 0.1% of the 0–18-year-old population in Kent are cared for by the Local Authority with any additional UAS Children being temporarily accommodated before being transferred to another Local Authority.

In July 2023, the High Court ruled just KCC must take "every possible step" to increase its capacity to accommodate and look after all UAS Children arriving in Kent. KCC and Home Office data indicated that referrals of UAS Children into KCC's care will escalate significantly going forward, so we had to expand our accommodation and services at pace as whilst KCC used Reception Centres as initial accommodation and support for UAS Children since 2008, existing provision was not sufficient to provide placements for all UAS Children who arrive to Kent.

There are currently five inhouse Reception Centres (Supported Accommodation) and two inhouse Children's Homes.

All UAS Children who arrive in Kent and are due to be placed on the National Transfer Scheme are being placed within the Children's Homes and Reception Centres, which has improved our sufficiency in other accommodation types for our non-UAS Children.

The UAS Children who will remain in Kent as part of KCC's 0.1% are placed in a spot purchased Supported Accommodation provision and passed from the UAS Children's team to the Children in Care teams within 10 working days. The UAS Children who are on the NTS will transfer to another local authority.

All UAS Children aged 16/17 who are under the care of KCC, will transfer into the Supported Accommodation Low Needs Service after an agreed period in a spot purchased Supported Accommodation Service, increasing the sufficiency in these settings.

Intentions to Improve Sufficiency

- KCC are planning to open two additional buildings, one Reception Centre and one Children's Home before the end of 2025.

8. Children with Disabilities and Short Breaks

Residential Special Schools provide care for children with physical disabilities, learning disabilities or emotional difficulties. These schools focus on education and provide teaching on-site. In some cases, they are homes for children which offer transitioning support for young adults until they reach their early 20's. To support families, our inhouse overnight short break units are registered Children's Homes that provide short breaks to disabled children who meet the eligibility criteria. The children continue to attend their school whilst accessing these units. Our offer for overnight short breaks is assessed on level of need as to whether we offer fostering to our Children in Care, or our short break units, for our Children in Need.

KCC has an overnight short breaks policy for overnight stays within the home of the child's personal assistant. A care arrangement of this nature may be a good alternative to other overnight care options for disabled children who require overnight care. Any arrangement of this nature can only be agreed by a Strengthening Independence Service Decision-Making Panel.

The Service have set out the following in their Business Plan for 2025:

1. Ensure families have access to more strengths-based community Services.
2. Embed Participation of children and their families within the service.
3. Develop an enhanced technology offer for disabled children to increase independence.

The Dynamic Support Service is a fully NHS funded service hosted within KCC whose aim is to support children with learning disabilities and/or autism to be safe and well in their family homes avoiding hospital or other types of institutional accommodation. In 2024/2025 we avoided 24 children being admitted to hospital by keeping them at home within their families and communities.

Intentions to Improve Sufficiency

- KCC do purchase external overnight short break services, however this has been reducing due to developing better usage of our inhouse overnight short breaks provision.
- The Commissioning Team have strengthened the Direct Payment Support Service offer by working with the new commissioned provider, where there is focus on developing the personal assistant market. This will provide more sufficiency within the inhouse short break units, as there will be more opportunities for the child to stay at the personal assistant's home if the market is increased.
- Continue to review our Dependency Tracker every six months to identify those children whose independence has increased which will improve capacity for those children on the waiting list.
- As outlined in the Residential section, KCC will be opening in-house homes for children with complex needs. These homes should alleviate the demand for emergency placements to be made to our overnight short break units, increasing sufficiency.
- KCC to ensure that Residential Special Schools are only used for our most complex children and young people. Our vision is to support children and young people locally within their communities and live at home, wherever possible.
- Education, Health and Social Care to work collaboratively to ensure that the right provisions are identified at the right time for children and young people in Kent with complex needs.



Workforce stability is a key component of providing good quality support to families. We know that having a consistent social worker allows children and families to build a trusting relationship which enables change and confidence.

KCC are proud of the development opportunities we offer in Kent and are committed to offering high quality continuous professional development for all our staff, which strengthens the support we offer to children, young adults and families.

The Kent Academy for the Children's and Adults' Workforce is our dedicated platform where staff are thoroughly supported and encouraged to better their knowledge, skills and practice, no matter what role they hold within social care.

The Academy is home to several facilities including Student, Professional Development and Research. It offers easy access to:

- Training courses.
- Development programmes.
- Videos.
- Resources.
- Blogs.
- Research material (including Community Care Inform).

In addition to a comprehensive strategic training and safeguarding framework we offer:

- Annual conferences and masterclass events with keynote speakers.
- Joint events with health partners and police.
- Annual practice educator qualification.
- New practice framework development programme.

Our Practice Development Team offers excellent practice related training and support, virtual communities of practice and reflective workshops.

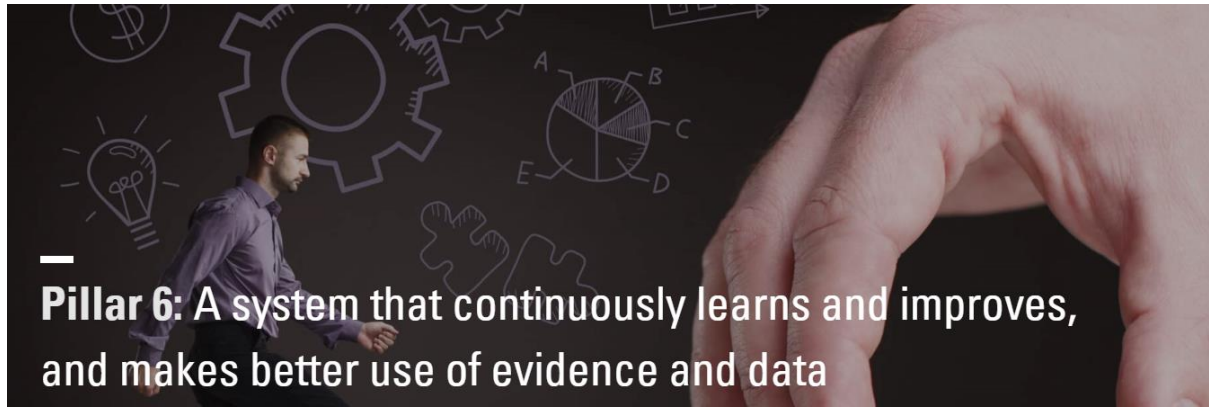
We actively encourage the use of apprenticeship training with a range of social care related apprenticeships available including the social work degree apprenticeship.

We have developed a capability framework for registered workers based on the Professional Capabilities for Social Workers and College of Occupational Therapists' Post Qualifying Framework.

All newly qualified social workers joining KCC are part of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme.

KCC's People Strategy 2022-2027 shapes the future of work at our Council. The strategic approach we have taken will create an environment that people want to be part of, continuously improving and delivering for the people of our county.

[People Strategy](#)



The council have a **Management Information and Intelligence Team** to support all services across Children's Young People and Education to effectively record their work with children and families in a way that supports practice, to ensure good data quality of that information, and to use that high quality information in reports, scorecards and dashboards that can support, inform and drive decision-making and service improvement. This wealth of information is increasingly being used in a joined-up way to provide a holistic view of children and young adults to support integrated working.

KCC have introduced Purposeful Visiting to the **Quality Assurance Framework** where visiting professionals monitor and check the suitability and safety of the Residential, Supported Accommodation and Foster Homes during the child's stay, ensuring that children are thriving and developing in their home. There are tools that support them to understand the quality of the home and what to do if there are concerns that their home is not meeting the required standards, and the child's needs. As part of our **Communities of Practice**, professionals are trained in undertaking these visits to ensure that a child's placement remains fit for purpose, meets the standards expected by KCC and delivers continuous improvement within the services.

Commissioned providers have continuous improvement logs to record lessons learnt and feedback from children and Children in Care Teams.

A working group is underway related to Child and Family Feedback which seeks to develop a county wide strategic approach to Child and Family Feedback across KCC's Integrated Children's Services in line with the Participation Framework. This Group is looking to streamline a range of feedback methods and ensure that the voice of children and families are fed back to improve practice and influence service design and delivery at local and county level.

The new Children's Young People and Education (CYPE) Audit cycle has been developed to better understand the practice of our services by incorporating more detailed and bespoke Specialist Audits, as well as a Core Form which has been adapted to incorporate the new Practice Framework and future proof with the upcoming reform. This will give us a stronger understanding of all of our services,

which will be analysed and triangulated, as well as being fed back into the Innovation, Policy and Guidance team to ensure policies and procedures are reflective of the current standards of practice.

The Children's Outcome Analysis has been designed to give an insight into the current Practice of the Integrated Children's Services teams and provides bespoke lines of inquiry aligned to the National Framework to offer more impactful insights of areas of strength and development within those services.



The **Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill** requires local authorities to provide Staying Close support to eligible Care Leavers up to the age of 25 where their welfare requires it. Staying Close means support to find and keep accommodation and to access services relating to health and wellbeing, relationships, education and training, employment and participation in society. KCC already adopt this approach by seeking Care Leavers views as to where they wish to be accommodated geographically, to enable them to stay close to their chosen network to be able to access services. It is unclear if this will affect the accommodation options given at present by KCC, which will need further review. However, we do not anticipate this having a major impact as these principals have been adopted for a number of years.

The Bill also requires local authorities to include a **Local Offer** for Care Leavers which includes information setting out its processes and procedures to ensure a planned and supportive transition between care and independent living for Care Leavers. KCCs Local Offer to Care Leavers can be found [Local-offer-to-young-people-who-are-care-leavers.pdf](#)

KCC's aim is to work with children at a much earlier stage to gain independent living skills to support their transition to independence and to manage expectations in relation to independent accommodation that will realistically be available when they move on. Every young adult has a Housing Pathway Plan to support them in securing their long-term home. KCC works in partnership with the District and Borough Councils and has developed a Joint Protocol for Care Leavers, which further supports young adults to live in independent accommodation.

Care Leavers Surveys

We will continue to undertake Care Leavers surveys to ensure views from our Care Leavers are heard and embedded into our practice improvement.

Tenancy Preparedness Training

KCC have developed a Tenancy Preparedness Training package that young adults can access independently or with the support of their Personal Advisor. This training supports them to understand how to access and sustain tenancies. This training can be accessed from the age of 16.

Pathway to Adult Social Care

Work is being undertaken with Adult Social Care colleagues to identify a pathway into adult accommodation services for those who need accommodation and care post 18, such as the Supporting Independence Service or Supported Living Services. To maximise our options for homes for young adults within these provisions especially for those with a learning disability or mental health needs. KCC has developed a **Future Planning Tool**. The Tool is a set of questions in a systems form and updated/completed by the Social Worker at key points/ages in the child's life. The aim of the form is to support commissioners to develop and shape the market to respond to future needs. The Tool will also support information flow and the planning internally between CYPE and Adults Social Care teams.