



CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVER SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

Prevention

We will support children to remain with their families wherever safe to do so by implementing a range of family support services, and developing a new Early Intervention Strategy.



More local homes

We will increase the number of children who can be cared for within our homes from 14 to 36 with scope for more, develop more 16+ supported accommodation and increase fostering provision, both internal and external. Enabling more children to stay and grow up in the city they were born.

Same day and crisis

We will create a short-term provision for children who have an urgent need for same day provision. This will enable us to assess children in crisis and stabilise and prepare them for more permanent living arrangements.



Stability

As we increase the number of children in care living in, and close to, Bristol, we will expand our therapeutic support models for carers and for our young people, including Mockingbird and Family Finding.

Reunification and step down

Using Family Finding to create lasting support networks for children in care, which in turn could lead to permanency and reunification. Using psychological assessment tools to identify those young people appropriate to step down into family based settings.



Introduction

We are dedicated, respectful, responsible, hopeful and ambitious corporate parents. Our vision for children and families in Bristol is that they get the right response and the right help at the right time. We are committed to working with families and children in need to support them to stay together where this is safe and in the child's best interest to do so. Where care becomes necessary, we will explore options for living with wider family and friends' networks wherever possible.

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

This strategy sets out our approaches to providing secure, safe and appropriate accommodation over the next three years, and is part of a broad range of activity that supports our shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care leavers.

Providers working with Bristol City Council are working with children in care and care leaver services rated "Good" by Ofsted, who hold high aspirations for the children and young people in our care.

Bristol Corporate Strategy 2022-27:

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

1. Child friendly city

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

2. Supported to thrive

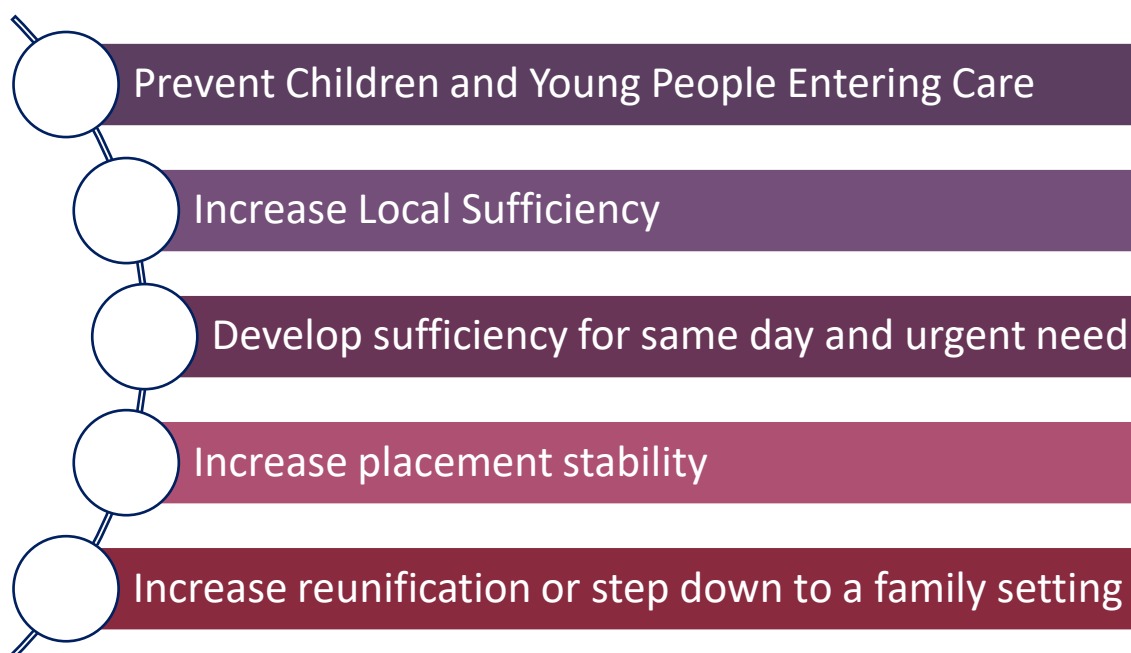
Children, young people, parents, and carers have access to and benefit from lifelong services – such as Family Hubs, parenting and community learning courses and Youth Zones – that support them to thrive.

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2029

Bristol's Corporate Parenting vision is that children in care grow up in safe and stable homes, are supported as young people leaving care and go on to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives as adults. We want Bristol to be a city where care-experienced children and young people can belong and build a successful future. This strategy sets out how in Bristol, together with our partners, we are going to deliver that ambition for our children and young people.

As part of this strategy children in care told us they want to feel safe and settled where they live. They want us to care about them as individual people and to show that we care not just because we are paid to do so. They want to be heard and valued.

Our Aims



National Context

Nationally, as of 31st March 2023 there were 83,840 children in care – up 2% from 2022. A growing demand for homes for children in care, driven by factors such as the impact of Covid-19, economic impact of the cost of living crisis and changes in family dynamics, has placed significant strain on existing resources. Lack of capacity, particularly for children with specific needs, has led to placement shortages. This is felt particularly acutely in the South-West region resulting in many children being placed at a significant distance from home; Ofsted found that there more children’s homes in North-West England than in London, the South-West and the South-East put together¹.

At the end of March 2023, there were around 43,400 fostering households in England². This total has remained fairly stable over the last 5 years; however this is in the context of a 7% increase in the number of Children in Care from 2018-2023. Since 2019, the number of mainstream LA households has fallen by 11%.

National Ofsted Findings - Children with complex needs report January 2024

Ofsted found that 91% of local authorities have difficulty in finding suitable homes for children with complex needs, and that finding homes for children in care is a challenge due to lack of suitable homes nationally. A consequence of the lack of places is that local authorities increasingly resort to using unregistered provision.

¹ [Main findings: children’s social care in England 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/main-findings-childrens-social-care-in-england-2023)

² [Fostering in England 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fostering-in-england-1-april-2022-to-31-march-2023)

Most local authorities reported that children with the greatest needs are frequently placed out of area, experience unplanned moves, have referrals rejected by homes and/or are served notice by their setting.

The Picture in Bristol

Numbers of Children in Care

Bristol has seen a progressively increasing rate of children in care over the past 18 months. As of May 2024, there are 769 children in care and approximately 800 care leavers. In addition, the age of children coming into care is weighted towards young people aged 15 and over, most of whom come in under s20 voluntary care arrangement with parents, and finding homes for teenagers is historically more difficult than for younger children.

Population Growth and Forecasts

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

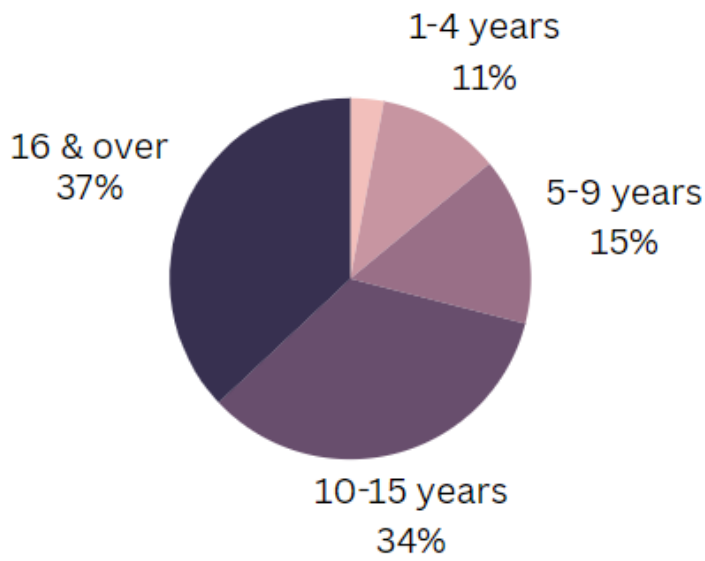
Source: [Population of Bristol](#)

Age Segment	2018	2023	5 Year Change	5 Year Growth (2023/2018)	5 Year Rollover	Projected Change	5 Year Growth (2028/2023)
0-4	29,000	28,900	-100	-0.30%	28,800	-100	-0.30%
5-9	28,200	26,300	-1,900	-6.70%	28,900	2,600	9.90%
10-15	28,500	31,700	3,200	11.20%	26,300	-5,400	-17%
16-19	22,000	24,300	2,300	10.50%	31,700	7,400	30.50%

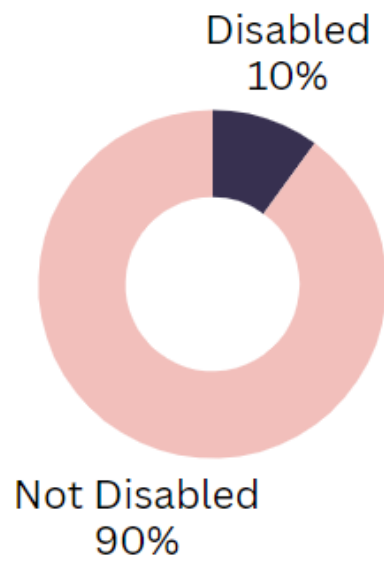
Bristol is a relatively young city and there are currently more children living in Bristol than people aged 65 and over. However, over the last decade the overall number of children living in Bristol increased by just 1,726 (2.1%), lower than the England and Wales increase of 4.3%. Within this, the number of children aged under 5 years old in Bristol fell by 18% (-5,500), whilst the number of children aged 10-15 years increased by 11%. The trends reflect the higher care entrants for teenagers compared with falling rate for 0-5 generally (recent analysis shows this to be a growth area which we are analysing). We can see that 5-year forecasts to 2028 should see 0-4s remain static, 10-15 year olds reduce significantly, but 16-19 jump by a 30.5%

Demographics

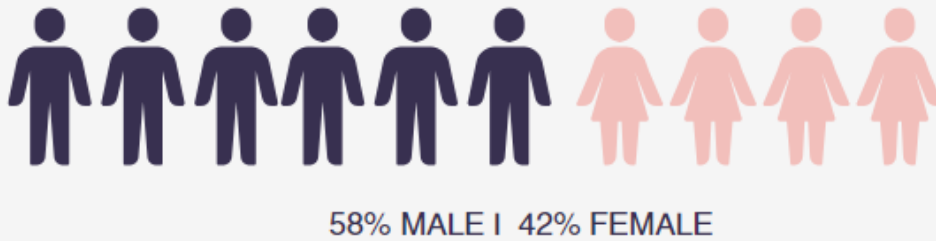
AGE



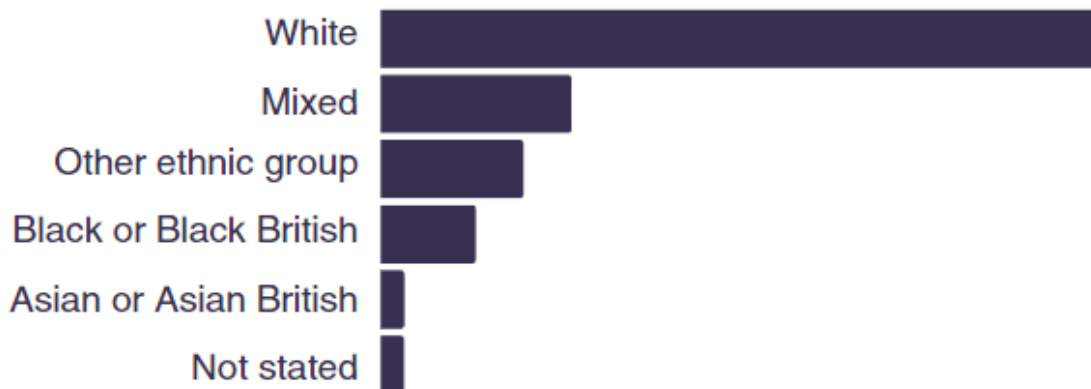
DISABILITY



GENDER



ETHNICITY



Children with Disabilities:

As of May 2024, 91 children in care are classed as disabled. As of May 2024, there are 26 children aged 5- 18 living in care in residential Independent / Non-Maintained Special School / Colleges. Of these, 19 are Social Care led, meaning the child or young person has been placed there to meet care needs and is also a child with an education, health and care plan that requires specialist education to meet need (this may be unavailable in Bristol); 3 of these young people also have specialist health provision and are tripartite funded.

Using the most recent school census data the two biggest categories of SEN primary need amongst school age children in Bristol, have been identified as 'Speech, Language and Communication' and 'Social, Emotional & Mental Health' difficulties. For children with an EHCP the largest category of need is 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder'.

Leavers and Joiners

There has been a significant increase in rate of children coming into our care – from 21 children per 10,000 in 2021 to 29 in 2023 – increasing from below the national rate to just above: England average (28).

The rate of children ceasing care has started to increase, up from 20 per 10,000 in 2021 to 25 per 10,000 in 2023. The net impact is therefore an increase in children in care.

Teenage Entrants to Care

For the past 3 years Bristol has had a higher rate of children entering care aged 10 or older than the national average - 51% in 2020 up to 59% in 2023. The national average for 2023 was 54%. When looking at the entrance to care in 2023, excluding those that were seeking asylum 48% were aged 10 or older, corresponding with the demographic for Bristol.

For 2023 75% of Bristol's total care population were aged 10 or older (higher than the national average of 64%) and are unlikely to cease care prior to their 18th birthday. At May 2024, a breakdown in the age of children in care tells us that 285 children are 16 and over and will exit care over the next three years, leading to significant pressure in the housing pathway.

Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum

At May 2024 Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum represented 10% of our children in care. Over the past four years, there has been a significant increase in numbers of children seeking asylum in our care, both through the national transfer scheme and spontaneous arrivals, however the growth in numbers has slowed over the past 12 months.

Our young people seeking asylum aged 16+ prefer to live within the city centre because of access to cultural links and services and more young people from their backgrounds.

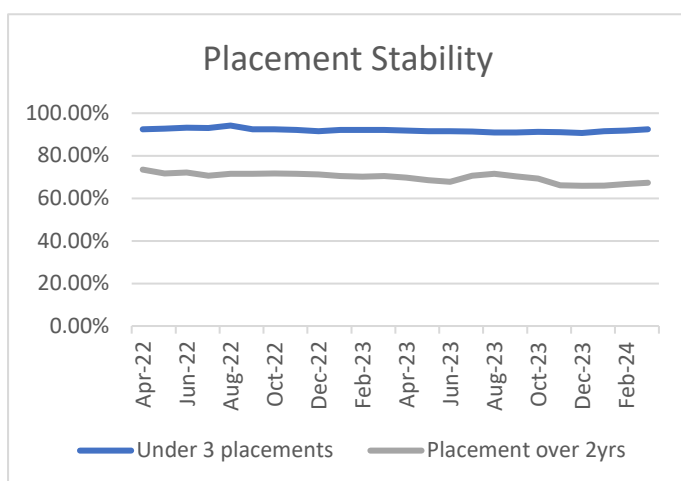
The impact of higher numbers of children seeking asylum is seen in the sufficiency pressures within independent fostering and semi-independent and independent housing for move on. Delays in children seeking asylum being granted leave to remain means a lag in move on post 18 and an increased pressure on our children's supported accommodation.

16+ Children in Care and Care Leavers

As of May 2024, there were 340 children in care aged 16 and over, and 434 Care Leavers open to services. The 16+ age group represents our highest cohort of entrants to care and is comprised of three routes to our home searching/sufficiency needs:

1. Children already in our care maturing and requiring a different sort of home;
2. Children Seeking Asylum arriving either through the national transfer scheme or as spontaneous arrivals, and
3. 16 and 17 year-olds presenting as homeless

This has meant that 76 young people over 16 are now living in 'external supported accommodation' with medium to high levels of support. Around 20 young people at any one time are over 18 and have been unable to move on either due to delays in gaining leave to remain or lack of available housing provision, or delays in adult care assessment. A new transitions team and processes should alleviate delays for those requiring adult social care within the next 6 months, and this leaves our key sufficiency need as the sourcing of appropriate supported accommodation for 18+ care leavers not yet ready to hold a tenancy.



Placement Stability

The graph shows both long term placement stability (measured by the number of children under 16, who at 31 March had been in care for at least two and a half years, and have remained in the same placement for at least two years) and Short term placement stability (measured by how many children in care have three or more placements in the space of a year). Despite the number of children in care increasing significantly, placement stability has remained fairly steady over the past two

years.

There is, however, still a cohort of young people with significant numbers of placement moves; 68 young people have had at least 3 moves in the last 12 months, with 8 young people having more than 5 moves. These children are a key focus for us as we are clearly not sourcing the right sort of homes for them, and we know that this number of moves is very detrimental to their futures.

What Children in Care Said

Bristol's Annual Children in Care Survey (August 2023) found that:







95% felt safe in the home they live in. This was highest for children aged 4-7 and our children seeking asylum and lowest for young people aged 11-18

82% of children in care trust the adults they live with, this was highest for those aged 8-11 (100%) and lowest for those aged 11-18 (67%)

80% feel happy where they live and that they are loved this was highest for those aged 4-11 (100%) and lowest for those aged 11-18 (33%).

Children seeking asylum were significantly more likely to report feeling listened to in decision making (100% vs 33% of peers in care of similar age). This is a significant increase from the last survey where only 56% of this cohort felt listened to. Improvements are a result of significant work through Welcome Wednesdays youth club and a newly established Children Social Care team specific to children seeking asylum. Our children asylum seeking reported that they preferred shared homes with other young people seeking asylum so they could support each other, and this has informed our sufficiency plans.

Key Drivers in the Development of Our Sufficiency Plans

-  Children have told us that they want to be placed near family, friends and school. We want children to live locally as we know this is better for their long term outcomes and enduring relationships with family.
-  Over the past 3 years Bristol has had an increasing percentage of children in care placed at 20 miles or more away from home, from 16% in 2019 to 20% in 2023; this compares to 17% nationally. However for our children in residential provision, this rises to 71%.
-  There has been an increased reliance on using residential children's homes - from 12% in 2019 to 19% in 2024.
-  The impact of children with very high needs is a key challenge for Bristol and for all LAs in the South-West. Numbers of children with an EHCP have increased year on year, and children with neuro disabilities whose families are unable to manage their behaviours have risen in visibility, necessitating high levels of care and support which the external market is currently unable to meet.
-  The population profile, including the intake of unaccompanied children seeking asylum shows that we need to increase our range of provision for older teenagers and care leavers.
-  Extra-familial harm for adolescents means that they may not be safe in the City. We need to work with our Strategic Partner for Exploitation Services, Barnardo's, to keep children and young people safe from and supported to overcome exploitation, including CCE, CSE, Radicalisation and Serious Youth Violence.

Our needs and intentions over the next three years

Prevent Children and Young People Entering Care

We are introducing a new adolescent service within our locality services, and a linked edge of care team. Both teams will be an intelligence led model, giving us a stronger focus on earlier support for young people and their families and linking with a re-commissioned youth homelessness pathway.

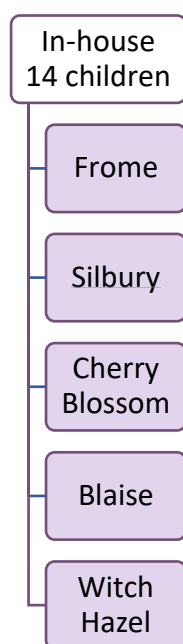
We will develop more targeted early support for families on the edge of care, exploring more community-based support such as the Safe Families model which we have implemented as a pilot. The Safe Families model works with volunteers who provide befriending to families, short stay hosting (planned and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

We are developing a refreshed Early Help framework to strengthen support to families at an earlier stage. The framework will centre around Children’s Centres, Schools and Family Hubs bringing in partners and the community. In Bristol there are three Family Hubs from which we are build our early help offer in the communities and a priority over the next 18 months is to look at how we sustain the offer brought in by the central government funding.

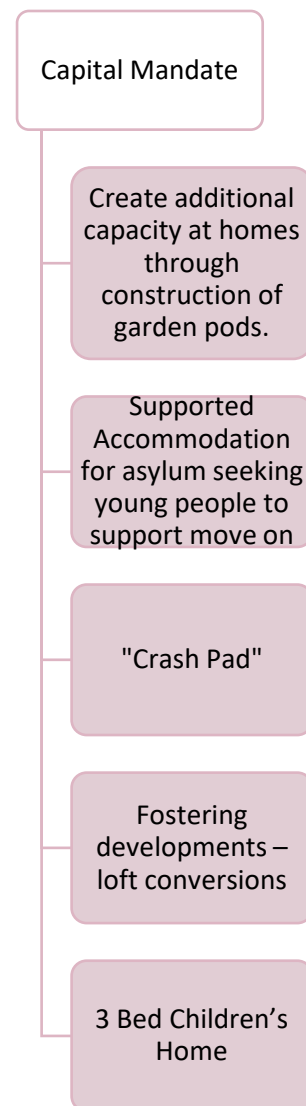
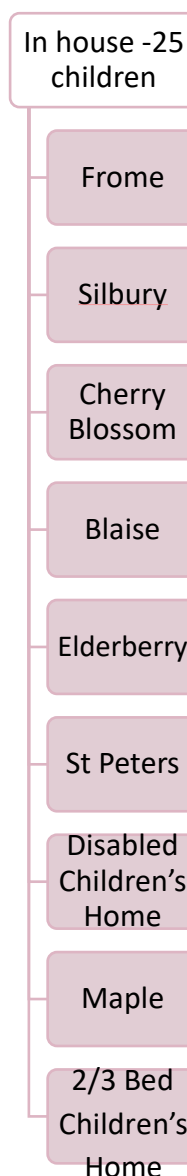
Increase Local Sufficiency of Homes for Children in Care

We have a number of growth plans to increase sufficiency of homes for children in care to live in Bristol, and intend to deliver collaboratively with a strategic partner. Capital funding has been allocated for this as a priority, since children in our care are otherwise sent miles away from their family and networks.

CURRENT PROVISION



GROWTH



Our Use of Residential Children's Homes

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

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

Bristol currently has 5 in-house children's homes, there are spaces for 14 children available currently and we plan to create another five homes for 11 children in the next two years, through both reprofiling and transformation development plans.

We are seeking a strategic provider to work with us to achieve our vision for increased sufficiency in Bristol and develop:

- A Children's home to support children with mental health needs to live in the community through a collaborative model of delivery with Health, Education and Social Care. These children will have experienced acute Health settings and require clinical and social care to enable discharge and/or to prevent hospital admission and re-admission.
- A new home for adolescent males aged 15-17+ with challenging behaviour. This will provide a therapeutic treatment setting for restorative care, for young men with criminal justice involvement and where exploitation is part of their risk profile.
- 2 x solo homes for our young people who need support to stabilise without other children for a period of time.

There is then scope for further development through the capital mandate proposals.

In spite of our development plans, we know that some children will require homes outside of Bristol as a choice. For these children and young people, we need more provision in and bordering Bristol so that they maintain networks and access to the City, including to education, health and social care services. We are interested in working with providers who are able to demonstrate a strong alignment to our trauma-informed model of care and who could support us with priority groups:

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

To meet the needs of our disabled children, a proposal has been put forward to develop existing Bristol City Council housing stock into a three bed disabled children's home, with suitable adaptations that replicates the home environment for the children. This home will allow the council to keep these children local, which would enable them to maintain family connections. Since the closure of St Christopher's in 2019 there have been no residential homes for disabled children and young people within the city so this is a key area of development for Bristol.

Our Use of Fostering

We have an incredible group of foster carers in Bristol and most children in our care live in family based fostering care. In house, there are approximately 350 households that foster with Bristol City Council.

We have recently introduced the mockingbird model in Bristol and are working on the roll out. Mockingbird is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The programme builds a resilient and caring community of six to ten satellite families called a constellation. Relationships are central to Mockingbird, the hub home carer builds strong relationships with everyone in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to breakdown, which increases protective factors around the children.

Our aim is to develop a group of foster carers who could work with children where they have previously experienced fostering break-down, or where we feel they are ready to move out of residential care and back to a family. Our data shows us that we have a number of children who could have remained in foster care if we had a differentiated service to support higher levels of need. We are interested in developing this either in-house, or with an independent provider.

We have agreement to undertake a capital works programme to further develop our fostering provision in Bristol. Bristol City Council Foster Carers will be given the opportunity to directly apply for grant and/or loan which will safely allow them the ability to care for more children through:

- Grant and Loan towards an adaption/extension/pod scheme or change to their property.
- Loan towards purchase of suitable transport or loaning a big car to a foster family for a short period of time.
- Grant towards other equipment/white goods.
- Grant to accommodate other works such as dropped kerbs, ramps, driveways etc to accommodate, a young person with a disability requiring specialist equipment and accessibility needs.

We also use a lot of independent fostering agencies to find appropriate homes for our children, and this is most effective when those homes are in and around Bristol, to enable our children to stay in local education and to access locally commissioned health care. Bristol is a member of the South-Central fostering framework for the purchase of Independent Fostering Agencies. We want to support children to spend time in a family-based care even if they have been in a residential home, as long as they are ready to make that move. We are committed to working with all foster carers and providers who are able to recruit in and around Bristol and we are willing to put in additional support to develop this and to support ongoing stability for children.

Our use of supported accommodation

Given the high number of children already in care aged 16+ and due to become care leavers in the next few years, as well as the growing population projections, this age-group is a focus of our sufficiency planning where we are looking for quality and value for money as they approach adulthood.

We have commenced a youth homelessness and housing programme internally to understand and improve internal pathways and commissioning opportunities and have also jointly published a supported housing strategy (all age) which has been launched with providers, setting out our needs for young people. We are working closely with colleagues in housing to review our accommodation offer for young people aged 16+, with a view to develop a seamless transition from children's services into the housing pathway.

The majority of our supported accommodation for those aged 16 and over is provided via a dynamic purchasing system (DPS). The current DPS is expiring in September 2024, and we are joining up with neighbouring authorities to be part of the new South Gloucestershire led Supported Accommodation Framework from August onwards. We intend to tender for a series of block contracts, to create a range of shared housing provision for our children in care aged 16+ and our young people seeking asylum. We have a care and support framework in place, from which we can call off floating support for our young people in supported accommodation who need additional support on top of what the provider offers.

We are also developing a care leaver hub. The hub will provide a safe and central space for the use of children, their families, carers and workers. Services for care leavers will be a core function of the hub which will provide computer and workspace and the opportunity to develop a 'drop-in service'. Meeting rooms will also provide a space for 1:1 and small group work including developing independence skills.

Develop Sufficiency for Same Day and Urgent Need

We need short-term provision for children in Bristol who have an urgent need for safety and with a staff team likely comprising Health and Social Care. These children may be highly emotionally dysregulated or may be stepping down from remand or other secure accommodation.

We have gained agreement for capital funding to develop a "same day" crisis home. This home could take children being placed in emergencies, where little is known about the young person and therefore a period of assessment is required both to settle and assess their needs for onwards referrals to a more permanent living arrangement that fully meets their needs.

We have agreement for investment in a "crash pad" to create capacity for assessments and prevent the commissioning of expensive External Supported Accommodation where primary need is homelessness, vulnerability has been discounted through assessment and the young people do not want to enter care.

Increase Placement Stability

Placement instability reduces a child's opportunities to develop secure attachments, and it can also compound any existing behavioural and emotional difficulties. We need to develop more resource to support children with significant placement instability, either reconciling their difficulties in their home or helping them move in a planned way. As we increase the numbers of children living in and around Bristol, we will expand our support models for carers, such as mockingbird, to handle the diverse needs of children. Therapeutic support will also be provided to our children and young people which will help to reduce the need for a child who is having a difficult time to move. We will ensure that our partners work in a trauma informed way and have a cohesive therapeutic model that aligns with our systemic practice model.

We know that school attendance is a stabilising factor for children, and we see that placements for children often disrupt when they are not attending school. Similarly, we know that education can become unstable when children come into care or move to a new home in a new area. We will work to always promote the need for inclusivity but will also review and expand our alternative learning provision to ensure that children have an education setting within a reasonable amount of time, and that it matches to the complex needs of some of our children.

Increase Reunification and Step Down into a Family Setting

We have been awarded two years funding from the DfE to deliver a Family Finding programme. We will find out who is important to our children in care, who they would like to be in contact with or who they would like to know. The team will then identify and engage relatives and other supportive adults, who are estranged from, or not yet known to, the child. This will create a lasting support network for children in care. The approach will value continuity and permanence of relationships that offer ongoing support, provide an explanation of their life story and reinforce identity and a sense of belonging. Upon completion of the process, it is aimed that children and young people will have a range of commitments from non-paid adults who are able to provide permanency, sustainable relationships within a kinship system, and support the transition to adulthood and beyond.

Additionally we are embarking on a programme to review children in residential care using a psychological assessment tool, to identify those who would be suitable for a step down to foster care or reunification home.

Summary Sufficiency Plans

Area	Plans	Timeframe
Prevention & Early Intervention	Develop Early Help framework	April 2025
	Roll out new in-house adolescent team	January 25
	Continue Safe Families and use research to review other programmes to support children within their families	April 2025
Local Residential Sufficiency	Develop short-term provision for children in Bristol who have an urgent need for safety, with a team comprising Health and Social Care staff.	April 2025
	Work creatively with providers and neighbouring authorities to increase the number and range of residential provisions in and close to Bristol.	Ongoing
	Develop a tier 3.5 home to support children with mental health needs to live in the community through a collaborative model of delivery with Health, Education and Social Care.	April 2025
	Develop a new therapeutic home for adolescent boys aged 15-17+ with challenging	April 2025

	and aggressive behaviour.	
	Develop two solo homes for children with the most complex needs.	December 2024
	Undertake Capital works to develop a range of new accommodation	2024 - 2026
Fostering	Implement the Mockingbird fostering approach.	2025
	Foster home capital development	2025
	Work with IFA providers to recruit more foster carers in or close to Bristol. Develop closer relationships to strengthen support for children.	2025
16+	Join the South West Regional 16+ Framework	August 2024
	Call off block arrangements under the new framework. Expand 16-18 supported accommodation units as well as 18+ supported accommodation for care leavers who are not tenancy ready	October 2024 – October 2025 April 2025
	Develop Care Leaver Hub	2025
Therapeutic Support and Family Networking	Expand therapeutic support models for carers and for our children and young people which will help to reduce the need for a child who is having a difficult time to move.	2024
	Embed dynamic tool to assess those children in residential care who may be suitable for fostering or supported accommodation.	2024/25
	Implement DfE funded Family Finding Service	2024/25
Education	Promote the need for inclusivity in schools and review our alternative learning provision to ensure that it matches to the complex needs of some children.	2025