



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.

Children in Care Sufficiency

The right care,
in the right
home, at the
right time.



Refresh October 2025

Contents



| Section | Title | Page |
|-------------|--|------|
| 1 | Introduction & Purpose | 3 |
| 2 | Vision and Strategic Priorities | 5 |
| 3 | Current Position | 8 |
| 4 | Projected Demand 2025-27 | 13 |
| 5 | Action Plan | 16 |
| 6 | Monitoring and Governance | 22 |
| Appendices: | | |
| | Data Sets | 23 |
| | Best Practice Compliance Summary | 27 |



Introduction and Purpose

Statutory Context



Ensuring we have sufficient stable and appropriate homes is central to improving outcomes for our children in care and fulfilling our role as their Corporate Parents.

Local authorities have a statutory duty under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, supported by the statutory guidance *Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children* (DfE, 2010), to ensure that, “so far as reasonably practicable,” sufficient accommodation is available within the authority’s area to meet the needs of its children in care. This is commonly known as the sufficiency duty.

In addition, subsequent legislation and policy developments — including the Immigration Act 2016 and the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children (UASC) Transfer Scheme, the Concordat on Children in Custody, and the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (which established the Local Offer for care leavers) — have placed further responsibilities on councils to provide suitable accommodation and services for children and young people.

This strategy has been informed not only by these statutory duties but also by what children and care leavers have told us matters most: stability, strong relationships, and being part of their communities. It sets out Nottingham City Council’s approach to fulfilling its sufficiency duty, describing how we will work with children, families, providers, and partners to ensure that children in our care have access to safe, stable homes and the right support at the right time. We will evidence, via [the action plan](#) at page 21, the contribution this strategy makes through measurable improvements in stability, outcomes and financial sustainability.

Our aim is to shape a resilient local care market that allows children to remain close to their families, schools, and communities whenever this is in their best interests.





Vision and Strategic Priorities

Our Vision and Pledges



Our Pledges

Our children in care have helped develop a set of pledges relevant to this strategy and to which our Corporate Parenting Board are committed. These pledges are the anchor for the whole strategy – every action and priority is judged by the difference it makes to children’s lives and experiences.



Our Strategic Priorities for Achieving Sufficiency

We will deliver a sustainable, child-centred sufficiency approach through four strategic priorities. Each priority is underpinned by measurable targets and is aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to ensure our commitments are ambitious, evidence-based, and achievable.

Overall Aim: To ensure every infant, child and young person in Nottingham City grows up in a safe, stable, and loving home, and has access to the right support, at the right time, in the right place.

1. Prevention, Early Help and Edge-of-Care

We will strengthen support to families - particularly those with adolescents - to reduce avoidable entry into care. Our focus is on earlier, multi-agency help, targeted interventions, and a stabilising offer around the child's natural networks.

2. Family-Based Care and Reduced Reliance on Residential Provision

We will expand and modernise our family-based care options, including fostering, kinship care, and specialist step-down provision. This will reduce the need for high-cost residential and unregulated placements and improve stability for children.

4. Transitions and Care Leavers

We will provide clear, purposeful pathways for young people leaving care, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and those moving into adulthood. Our aim is to support independence in a way that is safe, relational, and reflects the ambitions young people hold for their own futures.

3. Permanence and Timely Reunification

We will secure permanence as early as possible. This includes strengthening reunification practice, increasing use of Special Guardianship Orders where appropriate, and ensuring consistent, multi-disciplinary planning so that children do not remain in care longer than necessary.



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.





**Current
Position**

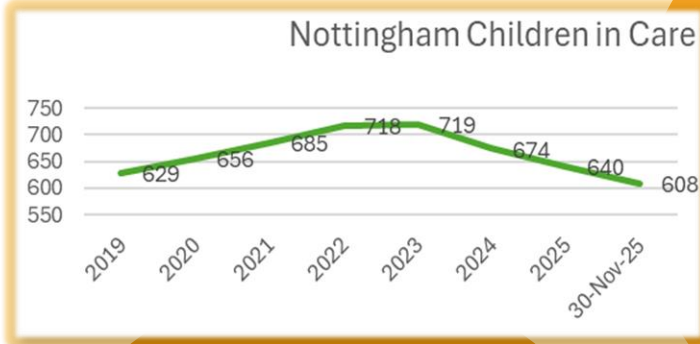
Strategic Programme

Nottingham City Council is operating within a children’s social care market that is under sustained pressure, locally and nationally. Increasing complexity of need, limited in-house capacity and historic reliance on high-cost external residential provision are challenges shared across the sector. Nationally, inflationary pressures, market fragility and provider consolidation continue to drive cost escalation, particularly within residential and specialist provision.

In response, the Council is exercising strong and proactive system leadership in how it fulfils its sufficiency duty for children in care and care leavers. Building on a robust understanding of local need and market dynamics, the Council has established a strategic programme of market reform and engagement focused on securing long-term stability, sufficiency and value for money.

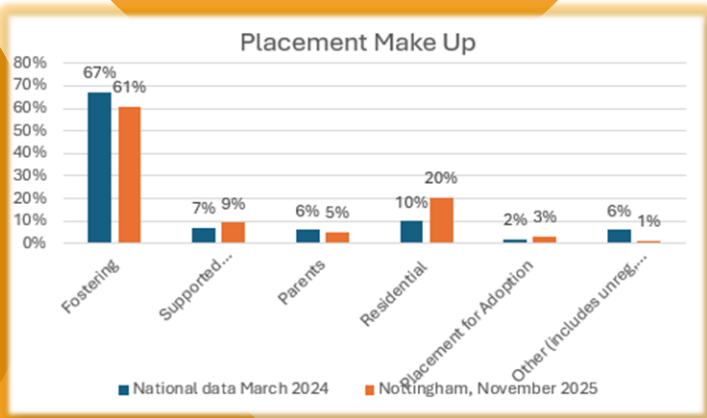
This approach includes working constructively with providers to review cost models, setting clear and transparent expectations around pricing, and strengthening referral and matching pathways so that children are supported to move into the right home, at the right time, with stability and positive outcomes at the centre of decision-making.

The Council is also working collaboratively with regional partners through the D2N2 partnership and contributing to the development of emerging Regional Care Collaboratives, recognising the role of regional approaches in shaping the market, improving sufficiency, managing cost pressures and strengthening resilience across the system.



By 30 November 2025, the number of children in care had reduced further to 608, representing approximately 88 children in care per 10,000 children and young people in Nottingham. Nottingham has an estimated around 69,000 children and young people aged 0–17 in the city, according to most recent ONS-based local insight data.

This rate is below the average of Nottingham’s statistical neighbour authorities and the Core Cities average (higher comparator benchmarks). However, experience locally and nationally demonstrates that children in care populations can fluctuate in response to changes in need, thresholds, and system pressures. As such, a lower headline number does not equate to reduced complexity, cost, or sufficiency risk.



The Council must therefore continue to plan for a range of demand scenarios and ensure the local placement market is resilient, flexible, and able to respond to changing patterns of need.

Analysis & Response



Although the overall number of children in care has reduced to pre-pandemic levels, the profile of need is becoming increasingly complex.

Too many young people are still placed far from home, separated from siblings, or experience multiple placement moves

These factors disrupt continuity of education, fracture relationships, and undermine emotional wellbeing – all of which compromise children's outcomes and longer-term life chances.

Our
strategic
response is
clear:



Increase local capacity across key areas – fostering for adolescents and siblings, therapeutic residential care, specialist disability provision, and supported accommodation.

We will rebalance the placement mix to reduce dependency on external residential provision.



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.



Strengths and Challenges

What's working well?

A committed cohort of in-house foster carers with strong local knowledge

Quality of the market is strong, 83% of residential providers rated Good or Outstanding

The council operates seven in-house children's homes.

Fostering market is robust, with 100% of Independent Fostering Agencies rated Good or Outstanding

Ongoing investment in recruitment, retention, training, and development

A short breaks home for children with disabilities supports both families and children in need of respite

Supported accommodation pathways are in place

Ongoing investment in recruitment, retention, training, and development

Foster care embedded as a core component of the long-term sufficiency plan

What challenges do we face?

Too many children with disabilities being placed out of area

Too few placement options for older children, sibling groups, and complex needs

Workforce and recruitment challenges persist for fostering and residential providers

To further reduce the proportion of emergency and spot purchased placements.

To further increase the proportion of good or outstanding residential and fostering providers



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.



Nottingham
City Council

Moving Forward



Collaboration

Work collaboratively with providers, regional partners, and health and education colleagues.

Collaboration

Programme to rebalance placement mix and reduce dependency on residential care.

Early Interventions

Strengthen fostering and kinship offer.

Early Interventions

Strategic market reform and engagement. To keep more children local.



Collaboration

Co-produce an improved Local Offer with care leavers.

How Will We Know This is Working?

- ✓ More children supported in local, appropriate placements
- ✓ Reduced reliance on high-cost external residential care
- ✓ Improved placement stability and step-down from residential provision
- ✓ Stronger outcomes for care leavers through an improved Local Offer.

Detailed success factors and baselines are set out in the Action Plan

Key Actions



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.





**Projected
Demand**

Statutory Context



Whilst Nottingham’s children in care population has reduced to 606 as of November 2025 from a high of 732 in December 2022, the reduction is likely to slow or reverse slightly, a significant proportion of children in care are in residential with a greater level of complex needs.

Our forecasting looked at two and six year trends (2020–2025) for new starters and exit rates, and the current placement mix adjusted for age, as well as national trends.

Key Demand Projections

| Cohort/Placement Type | Current November 2025 | Projected Target/Range 2027 | Trend and Commentary |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Total Children in Care | 609 | 600 | Numbers are reducing due to stronger early help, edge-of-care work and more consistent permanence planning. |
| Fostering (internal , IFA and kinship/friend)) | 364 | 385-420 | Continued growth in foster care as the primary placement type, reflecting early permanence approaches. Separate age-profile analysis shows a high proportion of 0–1 year olds placed in fostering. |
| Children’s Homes (internal + external) | 117 | 110-112 | Use of children’s homes is reducing as more children move into fostering, family-based care and step-down pathways. Children entering residential at older age than historically |
| Supported Accommodation (16–18) | 54 | 45-50 | Reduction reflects improved pathway planning and planned transitions, with a significant cohort turning 18 this year. |
| Children with Disabilities / Complex Health Needs | 28 | 28 | - |
| UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) | 27 UASC 8 Former UASC | 22 UASC 7 Former UASC | Reduction driven by a significant cohort turning 18 this year (approximately 45% of current UASC cohort) |



Demand and Response

By 2027, Nottingham City Council aims to ensure more children grow up with a strong sense of belonging within their own families and communities. We will work alongside families to keep children safe and supported at home wherever possible and ensure that care is provided only when it is needed to protect a child’s safety and wellbeing. We are committed to creating more family-based, local options that give every child the stability, love, and opportunities they need to thrive.

Drivers of Future Demand

Market Factors

Provider consolidation and rising costs may limit placement choice regionally.

System Factors

Court delays and housing pressures affecting step-down and exit to independence.



Demographic Change

Small but sustained rise in the 12–17 population (ONS forecast +3% by 2027).

Complexity

Greater prevalence of emotional and behavioural needs linked to trauma and exploitation.

Strategic Response

Strengthen support, recognition, and training to improve the retention and wellbeing of foster carers

Develop additional provision within the city to manage complex need locally

Grow and diversify local fostering capacity to meet projected demand and reduce external dependency

Embed live sufficiency dashboard (2026) to track monthly changes in demand and forecast impact

Strengthen regional market collaboration (D2N2) to manage UASC and supported accommodation demand

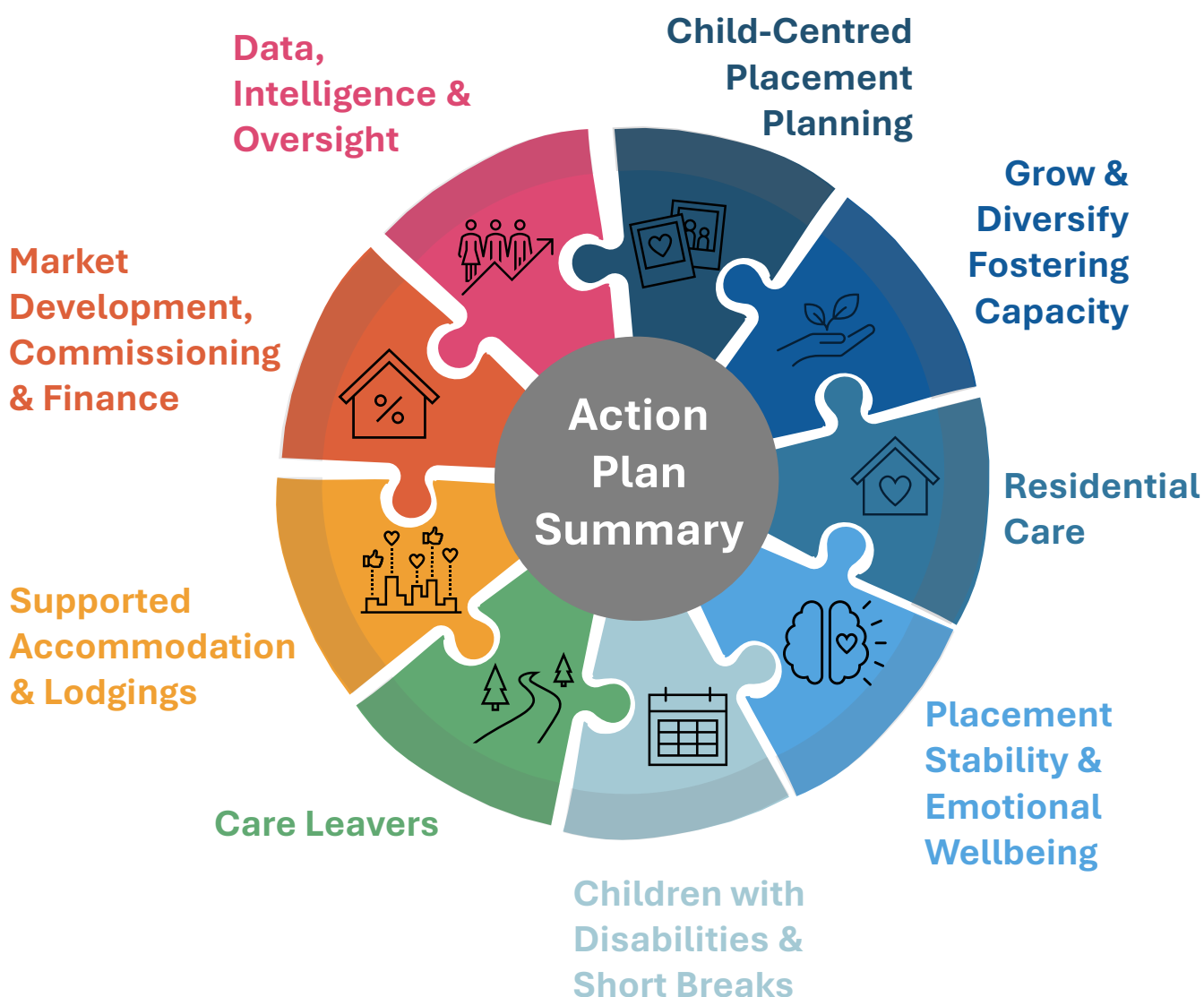


2025-2028 Action Plan

Summary

Our Commitment

Nottingham City Council is committed to ensuring all children in care have access to stable, safe, and nurturing placements close to home. This action plan sets out the next steps to improve sufficiency, stability, quality, and value for money over the next two years. It reflects national reforms, our local priorities, and the voices of children and young people.



Action Plan



Child-Centred Placement Planning

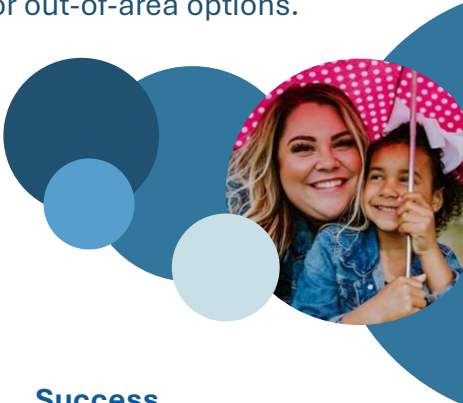
Actions

- Use strength-based child profiles to guide decisions about the most suitable home, highlighting each child’s interests and aspirations.
- Involve children and young people in shaping their care journey, making their voices central.
- Keep children local wherever suitable, enabling stability around schools, family, friends, and services.
- Launch a live placement tracker to improve timeliness and matching.
- Introduce clear planning and matching protocols for frontline teams.
- Early pilot of new targeted placement engagement approach with commissioning/social work team

Success

Baseline: 77% located in 20 miles

- Success Factors:*
- Children’s voices directly influence decisions about their care journey.
 - Every child’s strengths, interests and aspirations shape the plan for where and how they live.
 - More children live locally, maintaining stability in school, relationships and support.
 - Timely, well-matched suitable homes enabled through live tracking and clear protocols.
 - Improved home stability and reduced reliance on emergency or out-of-area options.



Grow and Diversify Fostering Capacity

Actions

- Strengthen support for kinship carers, including Special Guardianship arrangements.
- Expand the Mockingbird model to build peer networks and improve stability.
- Develop initiatives to help grow our internal fostering capacity.
- Work with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), especially via the D2N2 framework, to supplement local capacity.
- Provide training and wellbeing offers to foster carers to improve retention and reduce breakdowns.

Success

Baseline: 203 internal fostering households, 195 external (49% reliance)

- Success Factors:*
- More children living in stable, local foster families — including kinship and SGO arrangements.
 - Stronger peer networks and support models improving placement stability.
 - A larger, more diverse pool of foster carers able to meet a wide range of children’s needs.
 - Improved retention through better training, therapeutic support and wellbeing offers.
 - Effective use of IFAs to complement internal capacity without over-reliance.



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.



Action Plan






Residential Care

Actions

- Review our internal residential provision and consider future development options.
- Develop clear step-down pathways from residential care to fostering or lower-level provision.
- Provide local residential options for children with learning disabilities and complex needs.
- Collaborate with D2N2 residential providers to strengthen stability and improve planned move-on pathways.
- Use off-framework placements only for highly specialist placements.

Success Baseline: 117

- Success Factors:*
- A clear, modernised residential offer supporting more children to live locally.
 - Stronger, planned step-down pathways that reduce time spent in residential care.
 - More children supported locally, with fewer out-of-area or off-framework placements.
 - Stable partnerships arrangement with D2N2 providers enabling smoother transitions and move-on.
 - Strategic partnership arrangement with local providers enabling smoother transitions and move-on.



Home Stability and Emotional Wellbeing

Actions

- Use residential care as a short-term stabilisation option, with transition planning from day one.
- Develop a cohort of highly trained foster carers to provide short-term stabilisation placements (1–6 months).
- Ensure intensive, trauma-informed support at the point of entry to care.
- Strengthen partnerships with health (iCAMHS, community health) to embed early intervention and mental health support.

Success Baseline: 13% of children with 3+ placement moves

- Success Factors:*
- Children experience fewer placement moves and quicker stabilisation when entering care.
 - Short-term stabilisation options (residential and foster care) support safe, planned transitions from day one.
 - Intensive, trauma-informed support improves emotional wellbeing at the earliest stage.
 - Stronger partnership with health ensures timely access to mental health and therapeutic support.



Action Plan



Children with Disabilities & Short Breaks

Actions

Review the short breaks allocations statement, which is renewed annually to ensure equity and value for money.

Explore specialist respite options for children with complex health needs.

Consider shared care arrangements with families to reduce the need for full-time care.

Strengthen transition planning for disabled children and young people moving into adulthood.

Success

Baseline: 11 short breaks beds; & 4 respite beds - high out-of-area use for disabled children

Success Factors:

Equitable and transparent short breaks offer that meets need and delivers value for money.

A broader range of specialist respite options for children with complex health needs.

Stronger transition pathways into adulthood for disabled young people and their families.



Care Leavers

Actions

Provide a clear and consistent Local Offer for care leavers, co-designed with young people.

Review transition accommodation options (16–20) to ensure the right balance of independence and support.

Consider the need for floating support services for care leavers as they move into adulthood.

Strengthen pathways to education, training, and employment, ensuring housing and support are aligned.

Ensure care leavers' voices directly shape commissioning decisions about their services.

Success

Baseline: 73% in suitable accommodation; 41% NEET

Success Factors:

A stronger, clearer Local Offer that reflects what young people say they need.

Improved transition accommodation and support that promotes safe independence.

Better access to education, training, employment and stable housing.

Care leavers' voices consistently shaping commissioning and service design.



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.



Action Plan



Supported Accommodation and Supported Lodgings

Actions

Review existing supported accommodation to ensure right levels of support and value for money.

Implement a tiered support model to ensure the right help at the right time.

Introduce a clear independence pathway linked to housing, EET and wellbeing.

Develop emergency supported accommodation options to avoid unsuitable placements.

Expand supported lodgings / host family schemes to increase flexible local capacity.

Strengthen quality assurance through regular visits and young-person-led reviews.

Success

Baseline: 27 Supported Accommodation (20 internal & 7 Block Contract) and 5 Supported Lodgings

Success Factors:

Young people access high-quality, right-level support that promotes safety, stability and independence.

Clear pathways and a tiered support model ensure young people receive the right help at the right time.

Regional D2N2 framework strengthens capacity, quality and consistency across providers.

Emergency and move-on options reduce use of unsuitable or high-cost placements.

Young people's voices shape accommodation plans, improving satisfaction and outcomes.



Market Development, Commissioning and Finance

Actions

Build longer-term strategic partnerships with trusted providers to secure stability and better value.

Pilot block and multi-placement contracts to reduce reliance on spot purchasing.

Use intelligence from spot purchase activity to inform strategic negotiations.

Increase transparency of provider costs through collaborative market engagement.

Embed financial stewardship into all commissioning activity, focusing on best value for the council and sustainable returns for providers.

Provide an annual market position statement, outlining expected future needs and existing gaps in provision.

Track Financial Improvement - Commissioning and Finance review monthly

Success

Success Factors:

Stronger long-term partnerships that improve stability, quality and value for money.

Reduced reliance on high-cost spot purchasing through smarter use of block and multi-placement contracts.

Clear, transparent cost intelligence driving confident negotiation and market shaping.

Financial stewardship embedded in all commissioning decisions, ensuring best value and sustainability.

A robust annual Market Position Statement guiding providers on future need and investment priorities.



Changing Lives.
Changing Futures.



Action Plan



Data, Intelligence, & Oversight

Actions

Implement and maintain a live placement tracker for real-time sufficiency planning.

Expand analytics capability to forecast demand, track stability, and monitor provider performance.

Use sufficiency intelligence to inform strategic market shaping at local, sub-regional, and regional levels.

Report progress regularly to Corporate Parenting Board and publish annual updates for partners and young people.

Integrate Finance, HR, Performance, KPIs and A&I in a single CES Dashboard – Commissioning Page to track

Success

Success Factors:

Real-time, accurate data driving quicker decisions and improved placement matching.

Stronger forecasting and analytics enabling proactive sufficiency planning and market shaping.

Clear visibility of provider performance to support quality, stability and value for money.

Regular, transparent reporting to Corporate Parenting Board and partners, strengthening accountability.



Monitoring & Governance

Delivering sufficiency is a shared responsibility across the Council and its partners. Progress will be overseen through established governance arrangements within the Children's Improvement and Transformation Plan, ensuring alignment with wider service priorities.

Key elements include:

- **Corporate Parenting Board** – providing oversight of pledges to children in care and care leavers, ensuring their voices shape ongoing delivery.
- **Directorate Leadership and Improvement Boards** – monitoring progress, addressing risks, and ensuring sufficiency actions remain on track.
- **Provider and Partner Engagement** – maintaining regular dialogue with providers, regional frameworks, and health and education partners to shape the market and co-produce solutions.
- **Annual Public Update** – publishing progress each year so children, families, and partners can see how we are delivering on our commitments.

By embedding sufficiency within our wider improvement journey and reporting transparently, we will maintain focus on providing safe, stable homes and improving outcomes for Nottingham's children and young people.



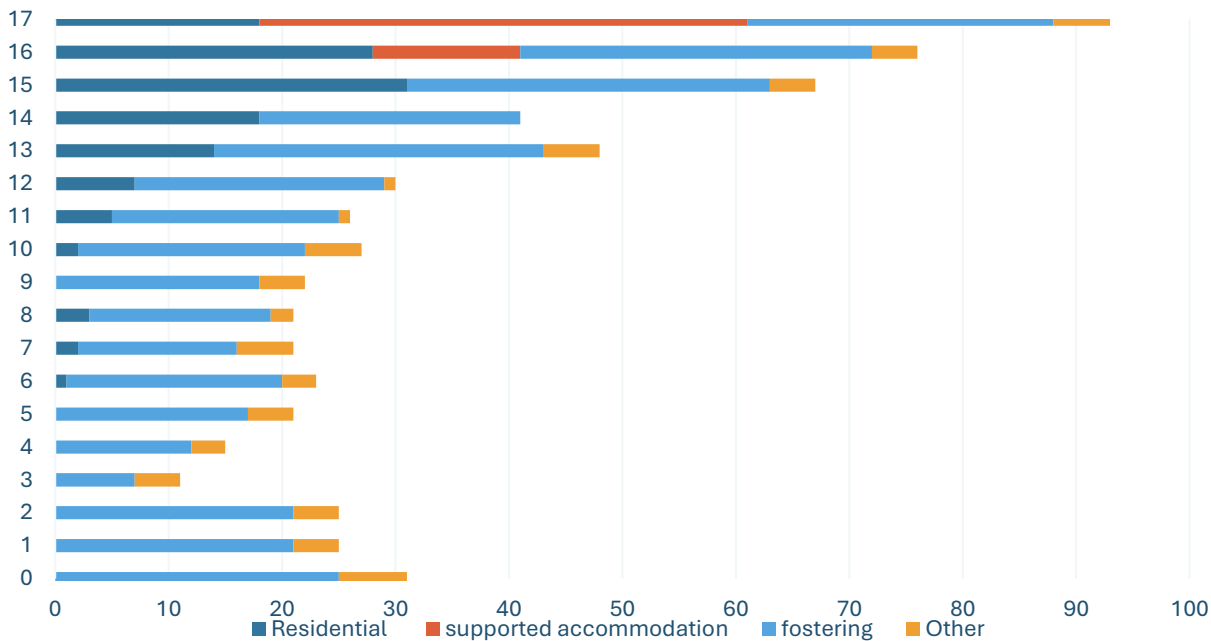
Data Sets and Appendices

Headlines – Placement Type

Placement Type: Headlines

- This chart illustrates how home type varies by age, with fostering providing stable homes for younger children, and a higher proportion of older teenagers living in residential or supported accommodation. This highlights the need to strengthen permanence and family-based options for adolescents, alongside ensuring high-quality homes for those with more complex needs.
- Adolescent demand will remain high, driven by the current age profile of children in our care. Our strategy is to broaden the range of local options — therapeutic fostering, step-down homes, and supported accommodation — so that residential care is focused on those with the most complex needs.

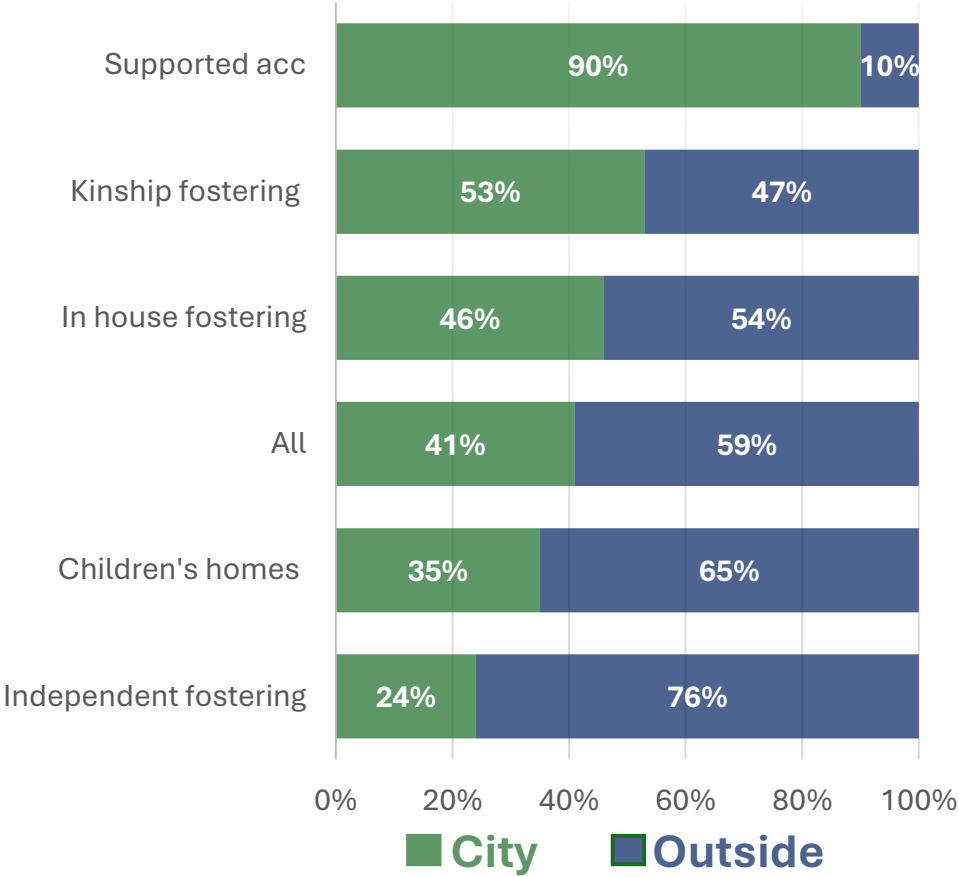
Age of Children in Care by Placement Type



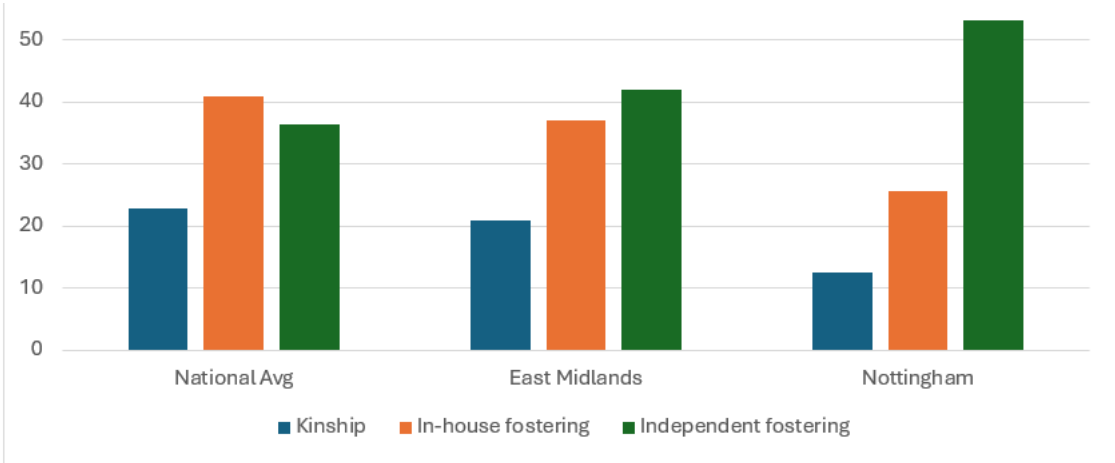
Headlines - Location

Children & Young People within the **City** vs **Outside** – by placement type

- Currently, only 41% of all the children and young people in care still live within the city.
- The lowest by placement type being those living with independent foster carers at 24% followed by children’s homes at 35%.
- The highest being those young people in supported accommodation at 90% then kinship care at 53%.
- Improving the proportion of children placed within Nottingham is one of the clearest tests of sufficiency success and will be tracked annually.



Comparative Data:

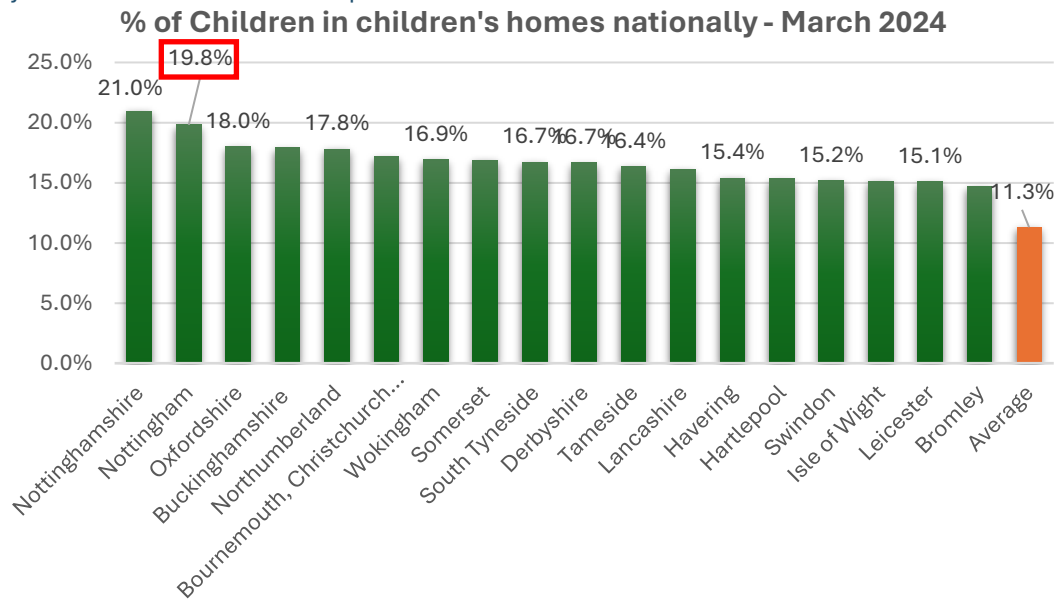


This chart highlights a strategic need to grow local kinship and in-house fostering capacity to reduce dependence on independent fostering and residential placements

Headlines – Children’s Residential

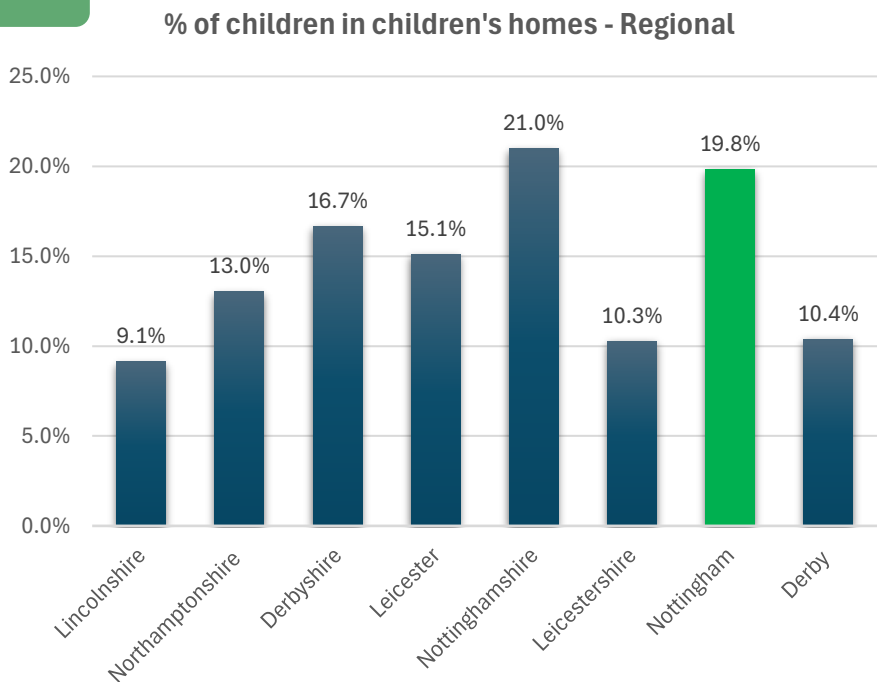
National Headlines

- Nottingham ranks 2nd highest nationally for the proportion of children in care living in children’s homes, at 19.8%, compared with the national average of 11.3%.
- This means almost 1 in 5 Nottingham children in care live in a residential placement; nearly double the national average.
- Neighbouring authorities (e.g. Nottinghamshire 21%, Derbyshire 16.7%) also show above-average residential reliance, suggesting a regional market imbalance.
- High residential use reflects a combination of complex needs, insufficient fostering capacity, and limited local step-down or therapeutic alternatives.
- This position drives higher costs, increases out-of-area placements, and may impact placement stability and continuity of education and relationships.



Regional Headlines

- Nottingham (19.8%) has one of the highest proportions of children living in children’s homes in the East Midlands, second only to Nottinghamshire (21%).
- This is almost double the regional low of 9.1% in Lincolnshire and well above Leicestershire (10.3%) and Derby (10.4%).
- The regional average sits around 13–14%, meaning Nottingham and Nottinghamshire are significant outliers.
- High residential reliance in both city and county suggests a regional supply-demand imbalance, particularly for adolescents and complex needs.
- The lower rates in Lincolnshire and Leicestershire indicate greater fostering capacity and step-down pathways, offering potential models of best practice for Nottingham to learn from.





Best Practice Compliance Summary

Reviewed
October
2025

Best Practice Compliance Summary

| Core Area | Best Practice Expectation | Our Position (Oct 2025) | RAG |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---------------|
| 1. Statutory Compliance | Clear articulation of legal duties (Section 22G, DfE 2010) and corporate parenting role. | Fully met – statutory duty, policy context and local interpretation clearly described. | |
| 2. Vision & Strategic Intent | Child-centred vision linked to prevention, stability, and permanence. | Strong and values-driven: “Right care, right place, right time.” | |
| 3. Data & Needs Analysis | Comprehensive analysis of current and forecast demand, placement mix, and cost pressures. | Data robust and up to date; forecasting to be strengthened for 2026-27. | |
| 4. Action Plan & Outcomes | SMART actions, baselines, targets, ownership, RAG ratings, and risks. | Exemplary – 9 themed priorities with measurable outcomes. | |
| 5. Commissioning & Market Development | Integrated commissioning approach; market shaping and value-for-money focus. | Embedded throughout; strong provider engagement and regional collaboration. | |
| 6. Financial Stewardship | Alignment to MTFS, efficiency, and reinvestment plan. | Needs short summary linking sufficiency savings to MTFS. | |
| 7. Voice of Children & Young People | Demonstrates how lived experience shapes delivery and review. | Strong pledges and engagement principles; evidence examples to be expanded. | |
| 8. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion | Considers seldom-heard groups (disability, UASC, ethnicity, gender). | Adequate; equality narrative to be strengthened in next refresh. | |
| 9. Governance & Oversight | Clear accountability through improvement and corporate parenting governance. | Fully embedded – DLT, Improvement Boards, Corporate Parenting Board. | |
| 10. Continuous Improvement | Transparent progress reporting, data dashboards, and annual public updates. | Best practice – quarterly review cycle and live tracker planned for 2026. | |