



CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVER
SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY
2025 - 2028

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 score for more, develop more 16+accomodation 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 short term provision for children who have an urgent need for same day provision. This will enable us to access 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 therapeutic support models for carers and 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.



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Introduction

This document is a refresh of the previous sufficiency strategy to include recent developments in this area of work. Recent key developments are a new BCC corporate strategy, the launch of the Families First Programme, BCC involvement in the newly created Southwest Children's Alliance and progress towards delivering more care homes in Bristol. The document also adds any developments occurring since publication to existing projects.

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.

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.

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.

What Has Changed Since 2024

A New Bristol Corporate Strategy 2025-2030:

In May 2025, Bristol City Council adopted a [new Corporate Strategy](#) for the period 2025-2030. The strategy sets out the council's vision for '**working together for a sustainable and equitable Bristol that enables everyone to be safe, well and thrive**' and outlines the main priorities and objectives it has for making progress towards this vision. We are refreshing our Sufficiency Strategy knowing the council's strategic focus on breaking the link between deprivation and educational outcomes, prioritising early help and support, and providing stability and independence for those who draw on care and support.

Priority 2: Supporting children's and families' health and wellbeing

- 2.1 Improve our population's health by tackling health inequalities.
- 2.2 Deliver early help which empowers people and prevents problems from worsening.
- 2.3 Provide stability and promote independence for those who draw on care and support.

The objective:

Provide stability and promote independence for those who draw on care and support -

- We'll focus on supporting families to keep vulnerable children safely at or near their homes and families.
- We'll prioritise supporting children and young people who have experienced care to live happy, healthy and fulfilled lives, making sure that this ambition is shared across the whole council.

The Families First Programme:

Bristol's Families First Programme started in April 2025 and is made up of 7 projects whose combined objective is to keep our children safe, stable and whenever possible within their families and communities.

This strategy outlines how we will increase the number of homes in Bristol and how this will contribute through commissioning activity to the stability, coming home and permanence projects.

The Families First mission statement -

'We will work to keep our children safe, stable and wherever possible, within their families and communities. We, along with our partner agencies, will provide our families, carers and workforce with the right support to enable this to happen and create lasting change, putting children and families at the heart of every decision.'



Increased Regional Sufficiency

The Southwest Children's Alliance brings together 14 local authorities across the region to tackle a common problem. The aim is to come together as a region and co-design a new purchasing arrangement (RPA), collaborating with 'preferred, ethical' providers. The ambition is to influence

and drive pace of change to achieve sufficiency in the residential placement market leading to a sustainable and diverse range of care and support providers. There are four main workstreams as follows:

- Created a regional data dashboard to better understand children’s changing needs on a regional basis.
- A refreshed regional market position statement and sufficiency strategy.
- To focus on the workforce challenges within the residential market with a key aim to increase the recruitment and retention of Registered Managers.
- To create a regional purchasing arrangement to develop the market in the southwest and create a consistent commissioning and value for money process.

It involves enticing new providers into the region and supporting local providers to expand across the region to meet local need both now and in the future. We want the right homes in the right places, able to meet the individual needs of our young people locally. We aspire to encourage providers to sign up to our new arrangement and give priority to Southwest LAs.

Increase Local Sufficiency of Homes for Children in Care

We have a number of growth plans to increase the number of homes for children in care to live in Bristol. Funded by either capital funding or external grants, Bristol is developing at least 16 more homes for children in care. We will deliver up to 8 homes collaboratively with our strategic partner, Children and Family Support Service (CFSS). Six homes will be delivered internally including the disabled children’s home. 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.

Summary of Key Developments Updated 2025

PREVENTION	
Safer Connections	Connecting Families
Managing risk factors in a multi-agency setting to keep children in the family home	Providing intensive coordinated support to keep children in their family home.
Reunification and Step Down	Increasing Stability
Family Finding Fund - We will listen to children and creates wider family networks to increase reunification and step down from care	Prevent children entering care by using better data to spot trends and identify those at risk. Improve inclusion in schools and meet the complex needs of children.
PROVIDING HOMES	
Care Homes	Fostering

We will provide high quality local care homes to meet the needs of children.

We will connect families to build resilience and problem solve

Adoption

We will work with Adoption Southwest to find permanent homes for children

National Picture (as of March 2023)

Children in Care

- Children looked after on 31 March 2024, 83,630 Down <0.5% on 2023
 - Rising demand driven by:
 - Impact of COVID-19
 - Cost of living crisis
 - Changing family dynamics
 - Shortages in placements, especially for children with complex needs
 - South-West region faces acute pressure with fewer homes than the North-West
 - Many children are placed far from their home area

Fostering Capacity

- 43,400 fostering households in England — stable over the past 5 years
- Mainstream local authority fostering households down 11% since 2019
- Number of children in care increased by 7% between 2018 and 2023

Ofsted Report (January 2024)

- 91% of local authorities struggle to place children with complex needs
- Increasing reliance on unregistered provision due to lack of suitable homes

More national data can be found here. [Statistics: looked-after children - GOV.UK](#)

The Picture in Bristol (Updated August 2025)

Children in Care

- 753 children in care (March 2025)
- Approximately 800 care leavers
- Teenagers (10-15 and 16+) dominate new entries
- Most children are under Section 20 (voluntary care) when entering care

Children with Disabilities

- 91 children in care are disabled
- 26 placed in specialist residential schools
- Top special educational needs:
 - Speech, Language & Communication

- Social, Emotional & Mental Health
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (for EHCPs)

Leavers & Joiners

- Entry rate increased from 29 to 33 per 10,000 (2023–2025)
- Exit rate increased from 25 to 31 per 10,000
- Net increase in care population

Teenage Entrants

- 59% of new entrants (159 children) were aged 10+ (2024/5)
- 70% of all children in care are aged 10+
- 225 children (29.9%) aged 16+ — creating pressure on housing

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

- Represent 6% of children in care
- Prefer city centre locations for cultural access
- Delays in leave to remain decisions contribute to housing pressure

16+ Care & Leavers

- 225 children in care aged 16+
- 509 care leavers aged 16-21
- 73 in supported accommodation
- New transitions team established to improve progression

Placement Stability

- Stability remains steady despite rising numbers
- 57 children had 3+ moves in 12 months

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.

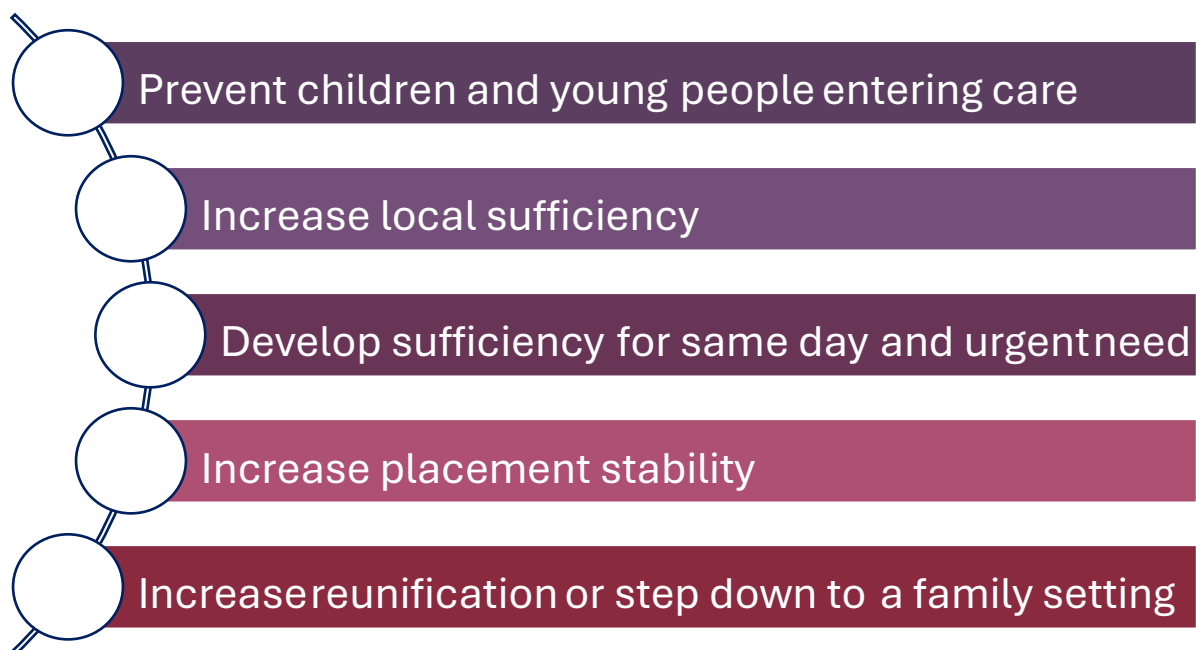
What Children in Care Said¹

²Bristol'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.


Our Aims





¹ New data will be made available December 2025


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. We will implement the Partnership Harm Outside the Home strategy published in July 2025 which sets out the partnership intent and approach to addressing exploitation and serious youth violence, focusing on both prevention and safeguarding children.

Our needs and intentions over the next three years

PREVENTION

Prevent Children and Young People Entering Care

We are introducing a new adolescent service called Safer Connections within our locality services, and a linked edge of care team called Connecting Families. 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. The team will provide intensive support to

families enabling more children to remain in the care of their existing network. This would in turn reduce the number of children needing to enter care. We will develop more targeted early support for families on the edge of care, exploring more community-based support.

Safer Connections -

- Partnership team: Support assessment and intervention of spaces and places, bringing together partnership agencies and communities to create safety within contexts, reduce incidents of exploitation and abuse and build proactive responses to situations when risks occur.
- Children's practice team: Work intensively with children and young people to disrupt harm where risks outside of the home have been identified, and/or provide support to lead professionals in developing responses to identified issues.

'Connecting Families'- is our edge of care service who work alongside lead professionals (social workers or family help key workers) to provide intensive and targeted support to children 11+ in order to enable more children to remain living within their existing family and network.

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.

STABILITY

Increase Stability for Children in Care

Instability and home moves reduce 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 instability, either reconciling their difficulties in their home or helping them move in a planned way.

Bristol Therapeutic Support Service are our dedicated in-house stability support team. Their primary focus is stability for children in care. They provide quick response for our in-house carers and children when there is a stability risk and offer a range of support including one to one, family and groups for children living in in-house provision, care leavers and children returning home to their families. BTSS have developed their own therapeutic model with the aim of embedding a trauma informed therapeutic parenting approach with in-house foster carers and all our children's homes. To help achieve this goal they facilitate a core 3-day training for all carers and children's homes teams and provide weekly support to our children's homes.

To further support the stability of children within our care, we are developing processes to identify children who are experiencing instability or challenges within their homes before they reach crisis or breakdown point. Key indicators of future breakdown have been established via case reviews for children who have previously experienced a breakdown in their home and these indicators will be embedded within our systems. This will include carer, child and wider family factors which may result in instability.

Alongside the above, a risk of escalation to children's home panel has been set up to provide a forum for discussion of children and their current homes who are at risk of entering a children's home either due to home breakdown or at the point of initial care entry.

When children do enter our care or are already in our care and have to move, we have identified that further development and work is required on our processes and referrals which support this care entry or home finding search. By streamlining our current processes around home finding and improving the quality of our referrals into potential carers we believe that we will increase the likelihood of identifying homes for our children which meet their needs in a family setting and allow for greater long term stability.

As we increase the numbers of children living in and around Bristol, we will expand our support models for carers, such as Mockingbird, to respond to the diverse needs of children. Therapeutic support will also be provided for our children and young people which will help to reduce the need for a child who is having a difficult time to move.

We know that school attendance is a stabilising factor for children, and we see that homes 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 special educational needs of our children.

REUNIFICATION AND STEP DOWN

Increase Reunification and Step Down into a Family Setting

We have been awarded two years funding from the DfE Family Finding Fund to further develop and embed our network building practice in Bristol. 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.

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.

The Mockingbird model of fostering continues to develop and expand within Bristol. 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 oversees the constellation and builds strong relationships with everyone within it, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to breakdown, which increases protective factors around the children.

The first constellation was launched in November 2024 with the second constellation launched in April 2025. Across the two constellations there are 28 carers in total, 15 satellite households plus two hub carer households.

The aim is to continue to strengthen and grow the Mockingbird programme within Bristol, and the aspiration will be to start a third constellation before the end of 2025.

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.

MORE LOCAL HOMES

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 have engaged 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+ presenting 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. We will strive to align the homes with SEND provision in order to ensure education is a priority.

In spite of our development plans, we know that some children will require homes outside of Bristol. 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, we have developed 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.

Our use of supported accommodation¹

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 develop a seamless transition from children's services into the housing pathway.

We have joined up with neighbouring authorities to be part of the new South Gloucestershire led Supported Accommodation Framework from April 2025 onwards. This is called Children's 16+ Supported Accommodation pseudo-DPS. 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 working in close collaboration with Housing Options to jointly commission supported accommodation for care leavers aged 18 and over, with a particular focus on former Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and young people with high support or complex needs.

To date, we have successfully commissioned:

- 34 shared units for 18+ former Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.
- One four-bedroom shared supported accommodation for 18+ female care leavers requiring intensive support.
- Six self-contained properties in Bristol for care leavers who remain in External Supported Accommodation due to ongoing high support and complex needs.

¹ See Appendix 1 16+ Commissioning for more detail.

These provisions aim to offer safe, appropriate housing with tailored support that enables young people to develop the skills and confidence required for independent living and to become tenancy ready.

In addition, we are progressing plans to commission a further 20 shared units for 18+ former Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers who continue to reside in External Supported Accommodation. This next phase will provide specialist support aligned with individual needs and facilitate access to cultural support within their communities. The overarching goal remains to prepare these young people for independent living and successful integration into their local environments.

We are progressing plans to jointly commission supported accommodation a new refurbished development consisting of 7 x self-contained flats in a block in Bristol, specifically for 18+ Care leavers who require a level of support to assist with “move on” into permanent accommodation via Home Choice Bristol or Private Rental Accommodation.

Due to the implementation of Ofsted registration requirements for 16+ Supported Accommodation, we have experienced the loss of existing mother and baby units. In response, we are actively progressing plans to commission new units specifically for 16+ mothers who have opted to be taken into care alongside their babies. These units will provide supported accommodation designed to assist with transition planning, promote independence, and equip young mothers with the skills needed to become tenancy-ready.

We have developed a care leaver hub to provide a safe and central space for the use of young adults, 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 and use by our partners

SAME DAY AND CRISIS

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.

Delivery has started later than planned for identifying a suitable Disabled Home property from the BCC Property Disposals list, engaging an initial requirement for the Crisis Home, and the options assessment still to take place on acquiring the Supported Accommodation property.

Summary of the Sufficiency Plans

Area	Plans	Timeframe
Prevention & Early Intervention	Develop Early Help framework Embed new in-house adolescent team and Family Help teams	2025 onwards
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 - April 2027
	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.	Spring 2026
	Develop a new therapeutic home for adolescent boys aged 15-17+ presenting with challenging and aggressive behaviour.	Spring 2026
	Undertake Capital works to develop a range of new accommodation	2025 - 2028
Fostering	Continue to strengthen and grow the Mockingbird programme within Bristol, with the aspiration to start a third constellation before the end of 2025.	2025
	Foster home capital development	2025 onwards
	Work with IFA providers to recruit more foster carers in or close to Bristol. Develop closer relationships to strengthen support for children.	2025 onwards
16+	Expand 16-18 supported Ofsted registered accommodation homes as well as 18+ supported accommodation for care leavers who are not tenancy ready	April 2025
	Develop a Temporary Care Leaver Hub	2025 -2030
	Develop a Permanent Care Leaver Hub	2026 onwards

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 to move.	2024 onwards
	Embed dynamic tool to assess those children in residential care who may be suitable for fostering or supported accommodation.	2024/25
	Further develop and embed network building practice through DfE Family Finding Fund	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 onwards

Summary of the Increase Local Sufficiency of Homes for Children in Care

Current Homes	Planned Growth		
Existing Homes:14 Children	Strategic Partner Provision: up to 10 Children	New Developments: up to 14 Children	Capital Investment Mandate
Frome	3 x care home	Elderberry: Opened September 2024	Development of supported accommodation for asylum-seeking young people
Silbury	3 x care home	Harmony House: Completed. Awaiting Ofsted approval mid-September 2025	Establishment of a complex care home
Cherry Blossom	The Leaze 1(Goram)	Disabled Children's Home: Open 2026	Development of a new 3-bed children's home
Blaise	The Leaze 2 (Goram)	Maple: TBC	
	Same Day Crisis Home	2/3 Bed Children's Home	