

Business Plan 2025-2028

together for
children
SUNDERLAND

Putting the child first

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Welcome to our plan

**A message from our Chair of
the TfC Board, Tammy Banks**



As Chair of the TfC Board since 2023, I'm proud to share our 2025-2028 Business Plan - a reflection of our commitment to children, young people, and families in Sunderland. Looking back on the 2022-2025 plan, we've achieved some real milestones, but we know there's always more to do.

We opened five Family Hubs across Sunderland, creating welcoming spaces where families can access free activities, advice, and hands-on support to improve health and education outcomes. We also launched Foster with North East, the first regional fostering hub in England, leading on behalf of all 12 local authorities in the region - something we're incredibly proud of.

Our Ofsted inspections have been strong, highlighting the dedication of our teams. Our supported lodgings were praised for providing well-planned, individualised support, while our Child Protection team was recognised for investing in workforce training, ensuring skilled, committed professionals who stay in the sector. Meanwhile, Colombo Road Children's Home secured its sixth consecutive Outstanding rating, a huge testament to the incredible progress of the young people we support.

We've also introduced practical, high-impact initiatives like Baby Boxes, ensuring families facing tough times get the support they need. We've worked with partners to strengthen support routes, and our Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme has grown, giving families access to trusted, safe providers who offer healthy food and enriching experiences.

Our young people continue to make a difference. They launched Sunderland's first Family Pride event, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community and creating a space for empowerment and belonging. Through the Youth Council, they've represented the region with pride and purpose, while Change Council, Young Commissioners, and STARS have made sure their voices are not just heard but acted on.

We remain committed to celebrating young people's achievements. The Sunderland Young Achievers' Awards (SYAA) continue to highlight their hard work, resilience, and contributions to our community.

We've also launched a new initiative to create apprenticeship opportunities for care-experienced young people, which is already rolling out across the city with the support of local businesses. We're excited to see where this takes us next.

In 2024, we welcomed Simon Marshall as our new Chief Executive. Previously our Director of Education, Simon is a nationally recognised leader in school-based mental health services and was named School Leader of the Year in the National Wellbeing School Awards. He's played a key role in TfC's transformation, and we're looking forward to what's ahead under his leadership.

We've also invested in our own people, maintaining our position as the local authority with the lowest agency staff usage in the region - something that really sets us apart as an employer.

Looking ahead, we know there are challenges, but our focus is clear. We're committed to continuous improvement, making the most of our resources, and investing in our people. Most importantly, we will continue to put children, young people, and families at the heart of every decision we make.

We are ambitious because they deserve every opportunity to thrive - and we are ready for the next phase of this journey.

Welcome to our plan

Welcome message from our youth voice groups

Working with Together for Children (TfC) has been such a privilege for us. We get to help shape and improve the support for all young people. They really listen to what we have to say, and even what we don't say out loud. They always provide guidance and treat us with respect and as individuals.

All our youth voice groups are driven by our own ideas and goals. We want to make Sunderland a better and safer place for everyone. We've grown and developed so much in our work. The Change Council has been pushing the "Change the Language" campaign and offering training and workshops for professionals.

We're also working on a guide to care booklet to help children and young people. The STARS group has been advocating for individuals with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), focusing on transitions in education.

They're working on a guide to Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) reviews and running a campaign called "Changing the View" to change how people see them. The Young Commissioners have grown since they started and are now reviewing services for young people in the city and looking at their impact.

We want to keep growing the Youth Voice, to include the voice of children and young people outside our groups. That's why we've started using broadcast channels to get more people involved and more voices heard.

We know many young people in Sunderland face challenges, but we can see real improvements in how Together for Children supports everyone - not just young people, but also our families. While we get support from staff, we lead and take responsibility for our actions. We're committed to growing and being successful, and we're proud to be from Sunderland.



About us

Together for Children was created in April 2017 to deliver Children's Services on behalf of Sunderland City Council. We provide children's social care services, early help, prevention and targeted youth services, education and SEND services and we are responsible for our own finance, workforce, property and support services.

We work closely with the Council and our partners to ensure we meet children's needs. Since 2017, we have grown our services, developed a thriving workforce, transformed how we use our property, data and intelligence, expanded our residential capacity, inspired creative practice and achieved an Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement for our children's social care services.

For our children, young people and their families, Sunderland is a fantastic, forward-looking city undergoing significant transformation and economic regeneration. It has a global reputation as a welcoming and inclusive place in which to live, work, achieve, play and belong. It has many cherished cultural assets and activities and is brimming with creative potential that can inspire our young people.



The board of directors

Our Board of Directors have wide ranging knowledge, expertise and networks in children's services and commercial and financial disciplines. The Board provides support and challenge on the direction and strategy of Together for Children and comprises:



Tammy Banks

Chair of the Board



Patrick Houghton

Sunderland City Council,
Governance & Law
Specialist



Simon Marshall

Chief Executive of Together
for Children & Director of
Children's Services

TfC Senior Leadership Team

Our Senior Leadership Team work together to manage the organisation, provide a strategic steer and set ambitious goals so that we deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people.



Simon Marshall

Chief Executive of Together for Children & Director of Children's Services



Karen Davison

Director of Early Help



Kim Richardson

Director of Education

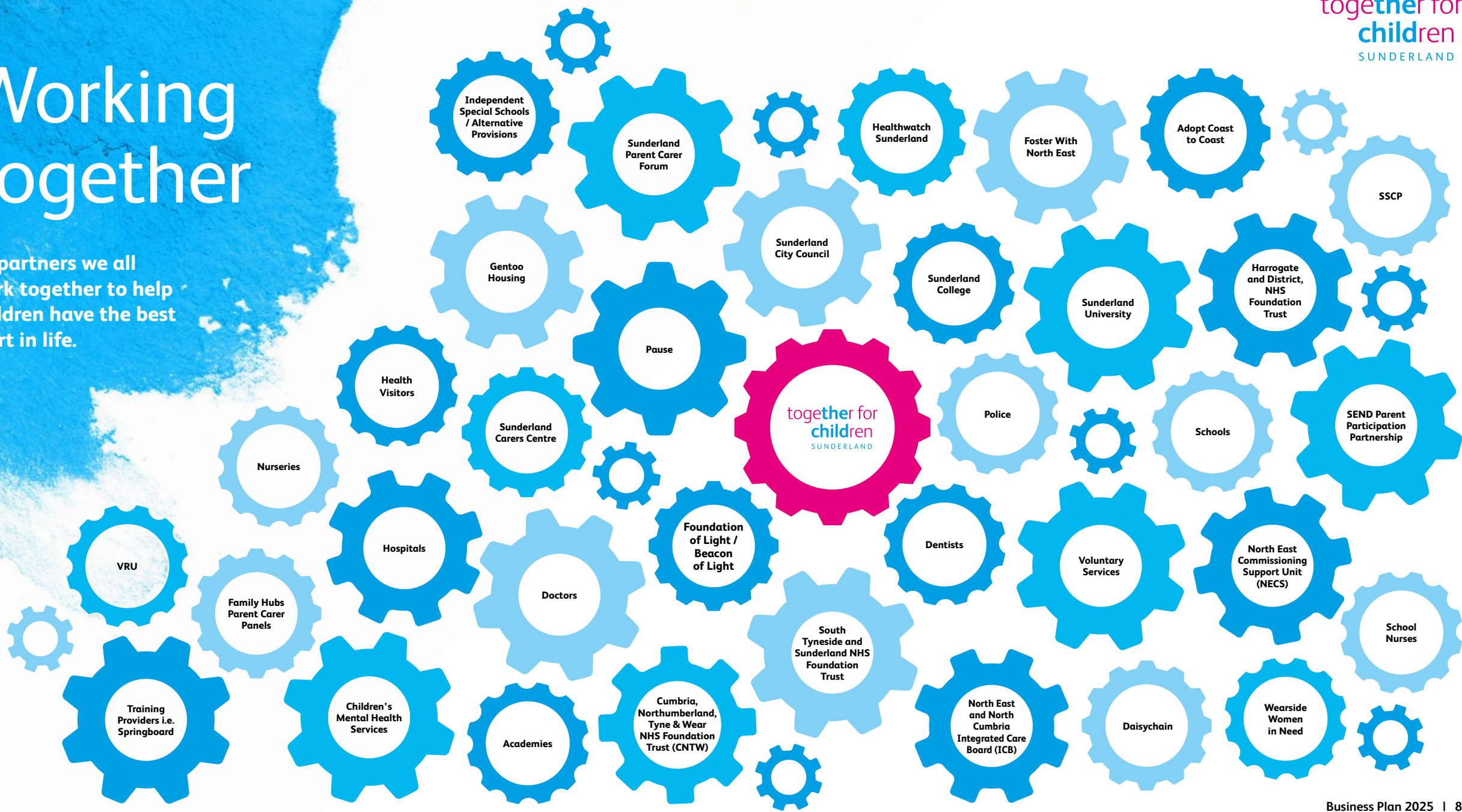


Helen Monks

Director of Children's Social Care

Working together

As partners we all
work together to help
children have the best
start in life.



Our vision and values

Our vision is to improve the lives of children and their families, keep children safe from harm and ensure they have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Throughout everything we do, we will remain true to our values to be:

- > **Child centred**
- > **Transparent**
- > **Creative**
- > **Respectful**

Youth Voice Groups ambitions for the future

Our Young People Groups have shared their ambitions to help shape our Business Plan

STARS

STARS are working hard and continuing to gather feedback with the Transition Team to develop stronger processes across the city to ensure every young person has the same level of support and understanding of their journey. We are starting to develop a guide to EHCP/SEN reviews to create a booklet from a young person view to better understand the importance and most importantly how important their voices are in the decision making. We are consulting on Red Gables the new children's home for complex needs, and they are finding that they are being valued for their opinions and how to make the short breaks, more young person friendly. Finally, we will be working further on our 'Change the view' campaign to create workshops and training for professionals.

Young Commissioners

We are creating another review to show the positive impact the Breathing Space project has had on the young people within our city. We are continuing to work on many projects and provide information to help direct and improve TfC and NHS services. Using the broadcast channels, we are accessing a much wider voice and holistic viewpoint. Young Commissioners will continue to grow in strength to ensure we can engage with as many of our areas to support in ensuring we are listening to the views and opinions of our young people.

Change Council

The council is working hard to improve things for cared for and care-experienced young people. Our Minis are developing a storybook-themed guide for young children in care, while our Midis are creating a magazine/scrapbook-themed guide and working on a training offer to reduce stigma in schools. Our older group are focusing on TfC and Sunderland Council recognising being Care Experienced as a protected characteristic and what this means to them. This campaign will look different areas of life that effects Care Experienced Young People and will start off with looking to improve the housing process. We are looking to involve young people in interviews and training so we can learn from their lived experience. Regionally, efforts are being made to enhance the local offer across the North East and organise the Regional Children in Care Council for 2025.

Sunderland Youth Council

We have compiled a questionnaire for primary and secondary schools with regards to our current campaign. A member of TfC staff visited 30 schools across the city speaking with 334 children and young people who are members of the school council or relevant group to gather their thoughts, feeling and suggestions for change. The findings from the consultation will be the focus of this year's campaign and communication will be planned to ensure that all children and young people who were involved in consultation are part of the decision making and are involved in the changes showing them that their voices are heard and can make a difference.

Our Business Plan

Created with young people



We have consulted with young people across the city to ask what they would like TfC to focus on and prioritise. We spoke to our Youth Voice Groups, took questionnaires into college and asked for views online via our social media and broadcast channels. Young people told us...

More activities and things to do...

- More free activities for all ages of kids
- More places to meet friends, community activities and fun days
- Youth groups for people of all ages and for people with disabilities
- Better SEN clubs during holidays
- More inclusive events and more accessible opportunities

More education and employment opportunities...

- More employment opportunities for young people
- Support employment for people with disabilities
- More opportunities for work experience with local businesses and council
- Training for those older children who have left school with no qualifications

More support...

- More support for families struggling so they are not left to feel alone with no help
- Advice and support and leaflets
- More face to face support that is person centred
- More in person support that's person centred
- Support young people leaving care with housing and food
- More appointments to care leavers who are vulnerable
- Maybe more feet in schools would be great

More participation...

- Enhance our voice and listen
- Let me be involved in my journey
- Come into schools and talk to us in person
- More say in my education

SEND...

- More support for schools and people with SEND
- More autism and ADHD awareness
- More information for disabled children as there's not enough available
- ASD training for escorts, would be beneficial
- A central hub for people with disabilities
- More specialist schools and less waiting times

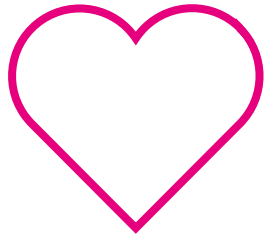
Inspired by young people's views, we will develop a Child and Family Plan that will align with our Business Plan, and we will check our progress and success using our Meaningful Measures Framework.

Our aspirations for 2025-28

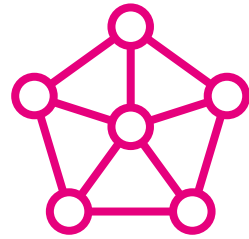
- We want Tfc to be a great place to work with a culture that drives inclusivity, togetherness and well-being and that attracts top talent and retains a thriving workforce.
- We want to build stronger connections that challenges ourselves and partners to think differently, encourage joint problem solving and create solutions to inspire creative practice and innovation.
- We want to invest in the integration and accessibility of data across Tfc and explore emerging digital technologies to enable continuous innovation, keeping Tfc competitive and positioned for future opportunities.
- We want to create environments where children and their families can fully participate, feel valued and be empowered to make positive changes that will matter to them.
- We want to increase inclusivity and accessibility so that every child and young person has equal opportunities to access spaces, services, support and information and we want to address gaps in services for young people.



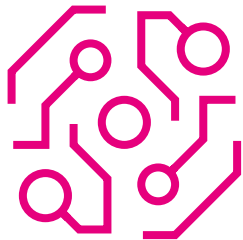
Our themes



**A great place
to work**



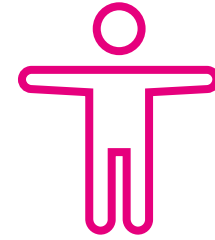
**Building
connections**



**Investing in
data & digital**



**Empowering
positive change**



**Inclusive and accessible
environments**

A great place to work

We will:

- Value our workforce and celebrate our success through recognition and reward schemes
- Provide flexible working arrangements to support our workforce, the work we do and families
- Offer equitable learning, development and career progression opportunities
- Provide wellbeing offers that are inclusive of diverse needs to promote mental and physical health
- Promote policies and practice that support diversity and inclusion
- Offer attractive and competitive recruitment campaigns
- Provide positive workspaces and infrastructures that support the workforce



Building connections

We will:

- Increase levels of regional commissioning, shared funded models and integrated working
- Demonstrate integrated working across education, health, and social care to safeguard and support children
- Undertake cross-cultural engagement and intergenerational projects to expand community cohesion
- Improve data sharing protocols with health and education partners
- Promote allyship and community collaborative opportunities
- Expand youth voice in partnerships so that young people are part of co-design
- Develop strong partnerships with schools, voluntary organisations, and families to enhance early intervention and reduce duplication



Investing in data and digital

We will:

- Design future-ready data architecture that integrates public, operational, and strategic data
- Digitise manual processes to increase data availability and integrity
- Have the right data governance, to improve data trust, access and reusability
- Lead regional pilots in the adoption of emerging AI, predictive analytics, and real-time services
- Empower the workforce with accurate insights and secure cross-domain reporting to enable better tracking of outcomes
- Digital solutions to be child and family focussed and accessible to all



Empowering positive change

We will:

- Implement the new Families First approach around early intervention and family's involvement
- Empower families to access support from their own networks and co-produce solutions
- Support families to access tailored programmes that address the root causes of difficulties
- Extend our Family Hubs provision into spoke sites across Sunderland
- Enhance accessible and person-centred ways to capture the views of children and families
- Expand feedback routes for families and children to see how their input has shaped services
- Strengthen support for transitions to adulthood for care experienced and SEND young people



Inclusive & accessible environments

We will:

- Promote and signpost children and young people to accessible and inclusive activities
- Provide children, young people and families with accessible advice and guidance and support families to access digital serves
- Capture a wider range of children's voices to design, deliver and review services that they receive
- Expand housing, education, and wellbeing support for care-experienced young people
- Work with community-based providers to reduce barriers to participation and strengthen local networks of support
- Promote diversity and inclusion to the workforce to reflect the communities we serve, improving cultural competence and trust
- Provide well-designed, inclusive work environments, particularly for employees with disabilities, neurodiverse conditions, or cultural sensitivities

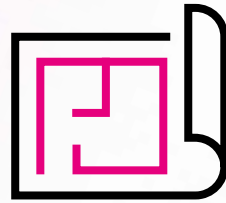


Putting it into action

Our Business Plan will run to 2028 and will be monitored by the TfC Board.

Our Delivery Plans will set out how TfC aspirations will be achieved and how priority activities will be reviewed and monitored.

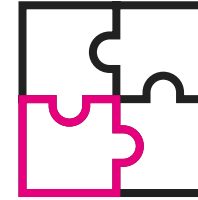
Personal Thrive Goals will create alignment between TfC aspirations and individual performance.



Transformation Programme & Project Plans



Child and Family Plan



SEND Strategy



Prevention & Early Help Strategy



People Strategy



Financial Strategy

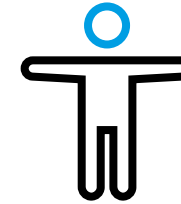


Sunderland City Plan

Measuring our success



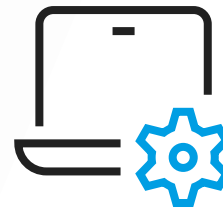
**Children and Family
Outcomes (Meaningful
Measures)**



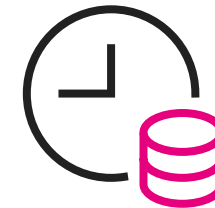
**Accessibility
& Inclusion**



**Participation,
Voice &
Influence**



**Digital,
Transformation
& Innovation**



**Finance
& Resources**



**Workforce
& Learning**



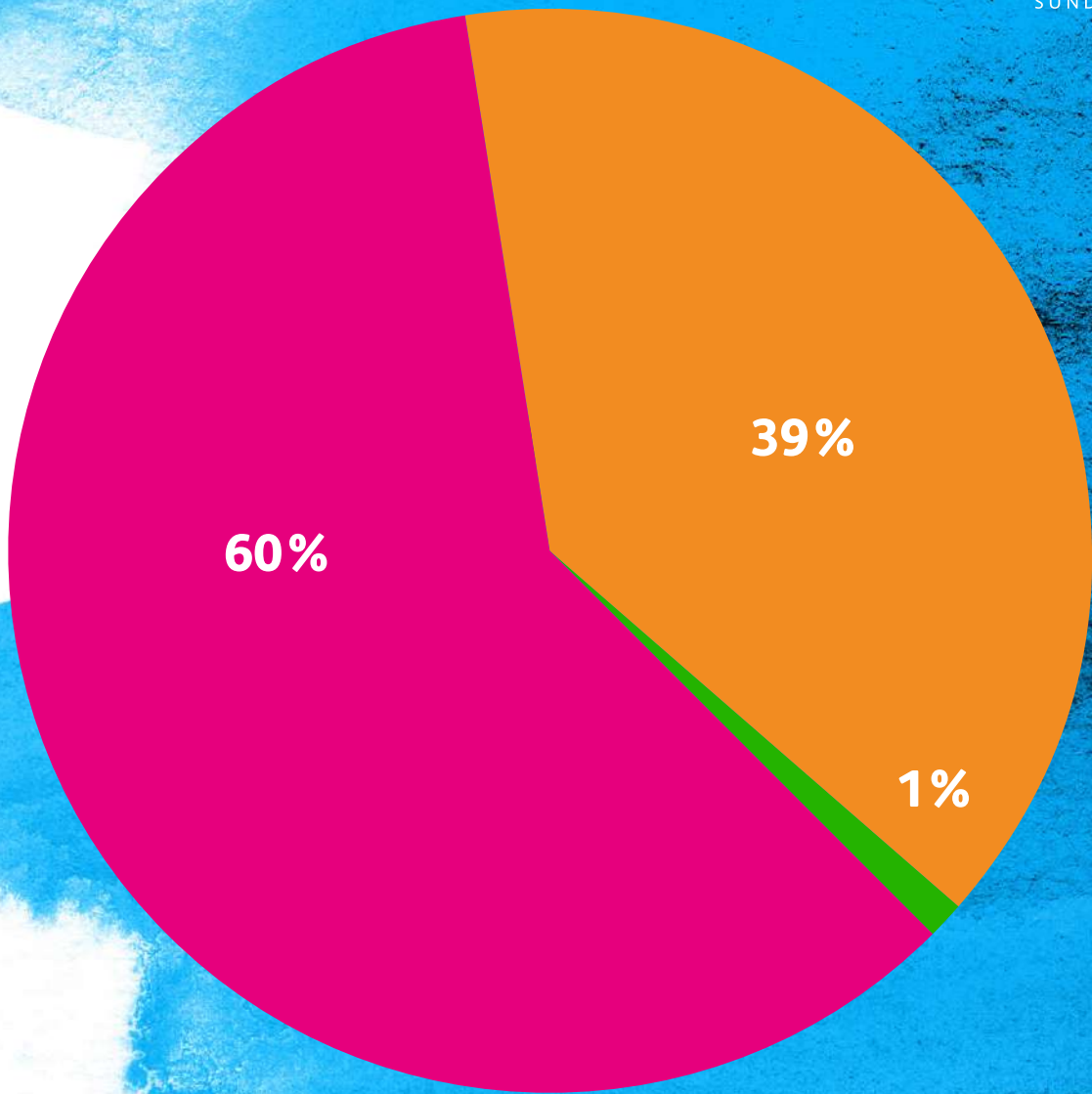
Our financial management

Expenditure 2023/24

- Contractual Income from Sunderland City Council
- Educational Income
- Other Income

How we plan to spend each pound of our Social Care Funding in 2025/26:

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|----|---|
| 56p | Cared for children | 1p | Children's Independent Reviewing Services |
| 19p | Other Children's Social Care | 3p | Chief Executive Sub Directorate |
| 5p | Early Help Services | 1p | Financial Services |
| 9p | Education | 6p | Premises and Other Support Services |



Making it happen

Our governance

Our TFC Board has overall responsibility for overseeing how TFC is run providing support and challenge on the direction and strategy of Together for Children.

Sunderland City Council retains the statutory duty for children in Sunderland.

Our Structure

