

**Creating fantastic care
and education facilities
for our young people**

**Our Spark of Genius Joint
Venture Explained**



Introduction

Stockton Council takes its duties as a corporate parent to children in its care very seriously. There can be no greater responsibility than ensuring children who cannot live with their family for whatever reason receive care and education.

“Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to thrive. We protect and support our children against the perils and risks of life. We are ambitious for them; we want them to reach their potential. We celebrate and share in their achievements. A child who is cared for by the Local Authority has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.”

– Stockton Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy

Background

Currently many looked after children from Stockton-on-Tees are living in placements in almost every ward in the Borough. Some are with foster carers who care for a number of children at one time while others are living in one of Stockton Council's four existing children's homes that provide long-term placements. These children are making a positive contribution to the communities in which they live. They are well-integrated and have been welcomed by local people.

While the majority of children in the Council's care are placed with foster carers, a growing number of children have both complex care and educational needs. Until recently we haven't had the facilities to meet their needs, which has meant that we have had to send them to places outside of the Borough to be cared for.

Thanks to our new joint venture with Spark of Genius we can now accommodate these children in placements within the Borough. This will provide them with more opportunities to integrate in communities with which they are familiar and, where appropriate, to maintain links with their family.

The joint venture between Stockton Borough Council and Spark of Genius

We've established a joint venture partnership with a company called Spark of Genius to deliver care and education to children with complex needs. The partnership is named Spark of Genius North East, it has already converted the former King Edwin School in Norton which has been developed into a specialist educational facility and is in the process of acquiring up to four properties to be converted into children's homes. The school will admit looked after and non-looked after children with special educational needs.

It is very important to be aware that the children we will be accommodating in these new homes have come into the care of the local authority because their parents were unable to care for and/or protect them and not because of any criminal behaviour by the children.

Who is Spark of Genius?

Spark of Genius provides education, residential care, autism services, community support and post-16 programmes for children and young people throughout the UK. The company has considerable experience and expertise in caring for looked after children and takes great pride in being a good neighbour. Its well-trained staff will look after the young people on a 24-hour basis so they are cared for, appropriately supervised and attend school.

What is the current status of the project?

Under the terms of the joint partnership, Stockton Council will own the children's homes and the school, whilst Spark of Genius will provide care and education services by managing and operating them (the homes and the school).

The renovation of the former King Edwin School is complete and the school opened to its first pupils in November 2013.

We will continue to work with Spark of Genius to identify and acquire properties that may be suitable for conversion to homes for our children.



Craig Kilpatrick,
Lead Teacher, King Edwin School

What happens next?

We are continuing our search for up to three additional homes.

We are fully committed to talking to and involving local people in this exciting and important project.

When we identify a property that may be suitable for conversion:

- These properties will undergo a thorough assessment and if suitable, the Council will seek to purchase them.
- Once purchased and the vendor has left the property, there will be a two-week informal public consultation during which senior Spark of Genius representatives will personally visit residents living in the immediate vicinity of the property to discuss the project on a one-to-one basis.
- Spark of Genius representatives and Council officials will also hold drop-in sessions for the wider community during these two weeks and will make their contact details widely available so residents can get in touch.
- On completion of the informal public consultation, a planning application will be submitted seeking permission for a change of use of the property.
- The formal planning process will give residents and other interested parties the opportunity to comment on the “change of use” proposal and to attend the meeting of the Planning Committee at which the application is determined – all representations will be carefully considered.
- If planning permission is granted, the conversion will take place and we will start to use the home to care for our children. We have made a commitment to hold quarterly meetings with residents during the first year after a home is opened.
- If planning permission is rejected, the Council will seek to use the asset for other purposes or put it up for sale.

For more information or enquiries about Spark of Genius North East or the development please contact:

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