

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING CABINET  
MEMBER**

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2016-19**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Children, Families and Learning Cabinet Member and seek Cabinet Member approval of the North Lincolnshire Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016 - 2019.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The council is required by The Children Act 1989 to take reasonable steps to secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of children in care, specifically the provision of foster care, children's homes and accommodation for care leavers. Local Authorities are also required to publish details of how the authority will fulfil its 'Sufficiency Duty' under s22 of the Act.
- 2.3 Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of children in care is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability. This is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children.
- 2.4 The sufficiency duty applies in respect of all children who are defined as 'looked after' under the 1989 Act. However, an important mechanism – both in improving outcomes for children and in having sufficient accommodation to meet their needs – is to take early, preventive action to support children and families so that fewer children enter care.

**3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 On the 31st of October 2016 there were 216 children in the care of the council. The large majority (89%) of these children live in foster care or are placed for adoption and are cared for locally. 40% were aged 10-15 years. During the first 7 months of 2016/17 (up to 31/10/2016) there has also been a 6% increase in those aged under 4 (from 17% to 23% of the overall population) and a decrease in those aged 5-9 (from 26% to 21%). The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in our care is increasing in North Lincolnshire.
- 3.2 On average, over the last five years, 5% of the children in care population have been placed with a family member/friend as 'Connected Persons' carers. Between March and October last year this increased from 9% to 15% of the population.
- 3.3 Placement stability in terms of the number of children experiencing three or more placement moves has fallen from 9.7% in March 2013 to 8.9% in March 2016. This

is below both the national average and statistical neighbours. So far in 2016/17 indications are that the year-end figure may further reduce.

- 3.4 The stability of children in long-term care also continues to improve. The year-end figure for 2015/16 was 83.8% of children in care for over 2.5 years, have been in the same placement for more than two years. This is a continued improvement, (increasing from 62.1% in March 2013) and higher than both statistical neighbour and national averages.
- 3.5 The Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016 – 2019 details how the council will ensure that all children and young people who require accommodation are provided with a safe, stable placement that has been matched to their needs and enables them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.
- 3.6 The sufficiency strategy has several key priorities:
- the provision of early help and effective, timely intervention to prevent children entering the group on the edge of care.
  - reducing the need for council care by effective early help support to those on the edge of care.
  - providing a range of care placements that provide choice, stability and meet children's needs that:
    - deliver the 'one placement' approach to ensuring children do not change placements and can form meaningful relationships with trusted adults
    - are able to provide stable care for children who display challenging behaviour
    - provide stability for children throughout their childhood
    - are near to home and within our own area.
    - minimise disruption to education and training and help the continuation of community ties and friendships.
    - allow siblings to live together.
    - meet the needs of disabled children.
    - meet the needs of our diverse ethnic minority populations.
  - securing permanence at the earliest point for those who do enter care.
  - Ensuring children who enter care achieve positive outcomes and are able to achieve their aspirations

#### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The purpose of the sufficiency strategy is to set out clearly and briefly the strategic intentions of North Lincolnshire Children's Services in fulfilling our sufficiency duty (S.22 Children Act 1989) towards children in care.
- 4.2 The actions necessary to fulfil these strategic intentions are set out in the Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan.
- 4.3 The strategy is underpinned by the council's commitment to support children to remain within their families wherever possible. The Placement Sufficiency Strategy works in conjunction with the 'Helping Children and Families' document which has been launched and embedded across all services to ensure that children and families are supported to remain living together. Interventions being offered in a timely manner at the lowest level to ensure that we give families the opportunity to be independent from services where it is safe to do so.
- 4.5 The Placement Sufficiency Strategy builds on the vision to increase the range and scope of in-house fostering, and adoption services to ensure we have families

available to offer placement choice to children and young people best placed to meet their needs.

- 4.6 It details how we will ensure that the use of family based care both internally and externally remains a preferred option to secure appropriate family based accommodation for children and young people and promote stability and permanency in these as appropriate for the child. Ensuring that the use of residential provision is in line with the child's needs and supports young people leaving the children's home to make successful transitions into adulthood.
- 4.7 The strategy will be monitored and reviewed through our well-established performance improvement mechanisms, including the monthly performance monitoring and tracking and the quarterly performance review process. The outcomes and impact of the strategy will be reviewed annually during the period to 2019. It will also be overseen by the Multi-Agency Looked After Children's Partnership who will monitor the progress of the actions detailed in the action plan.

## **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

- 5.1 Whilst there are no specific resource implications outlined in this report, there is increased pressure on resources due to the increase in the number of children placed with family members as Connected Persons. There are also likely to be continued challenges in meeting the needs of a projected increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the continued use of 'staying put' arrangements to meet the young person's needs and the impact of the increase in the care population.
- 5.2 The strategy sets out the vision, objectives and actions to further strengthen and build on the provision of suitable, stable and supportive placements for children and young people as they grow up and to ensure services are flexible and responsive to meet the above demands as part of an integrated framework.

## **6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

N/A

## **7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

- 7.1 Children in care and care leavers are consulted and meet with elected members and senior managers on a regular basis.
- 7.2 Foster carers are consulted regularly and provide their views and feedback on the delivery of services.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves and supports the Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016-19.

**DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE**

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**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

North Lincolnshire Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016-19



# CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

## PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY

### STRATEGY 2016-19

<b>Status</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>By Whom</b>
Approved	27 <sup>th</sup> December 2016	Ann-Marie Brierley
Last Updated	14 <sup>th</sup> December 2016	Paul Cowling/Tracy Eaden
Review Date	December 2017	

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## Introduction

The North Lincolnshire Multi Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2015-17 sets out our overall approach to looked after children in the authority. It sets out the principles and values that govern our approach to these children and young people, including our Corporate Parenting approach, and gives details of how we intend to develop the service.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2016-18, and forms an integral part of it. It should also be read in conjunction with 'Helping Children & Families' (Threshold Document 2016/20) that sets out the North Lincolnshire vision that children are safe, families are supported and lives are transformed through providing help to all children and families through access to strong universal provision, providing help at the earliest point and lowest "level" of service provision so that help is provided quickly and children and families get the help they need to become independent of services.

Throughout 2015 and 2016 we have actively worked to:

- Maintain children at home. Where this is not possible:
  - Place children in permanent or alternative family placements, and when appropriate;
  - Place children in suitable residential accommodation or in the community
- Collaborate with partners to ensure better outcomes for all children and young people in our care
- Listen to our children and young people to create services that effectively support their needs
- Support children to remain with their former foster carers beyond the age of 18 years through a "Staying Put" scheme.
- Support young people in Kingfisher Lodge reaching the age of 18 years to "Stay Close" and to develop the skills and confidence to transition into living independently when they are ready within the local community.
- Complete our locality based risk assessments and enhance our external placement process
- Specify our offer to children from other local authorities

This has required us to work with children and families to help them stay together. To achieve this we have worked with partners and communities to further develop early identification, early help and the provision of support to children and their families at the lowest level to help them develop resilience, find their own creative solutions and to achieve positive change.

When this has not been possible we have intervened decisively, giving children the best opportunity for timely permanence in an alternative family.

## Context and Drivers

Local Authorities are required to publish details of how the authority will fulfill its 'Sufficiency Duty' under s22 of the Children Act 1989. This requires all authorities to:

*“take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority’s area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority’s area (‘the sufficiency duty’)”.*

*[Sufficiency Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children (DCSF 2010)]*

Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of children in care is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability. This is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children.

The sufficiency duty applies in respect of all children who are defined as 'looked after' under the 1989 Act. However, an important mechanism – both in improving outcomes for children and in having sufficient accommodation to meet their needs – is to take earlier, preventive action to support children and families so that fewer children enter care.

### **Strengthening early help and timely effective intervention to prevent children entering the group on the edge of care**

The document 'Helping Children & Families' (Threshold Document 2016/20) sets out the North Lincolnshire vision and principles to offer help at the earliest point and lowest level of service required to improve outcomes for children;

- To Keep Children Safe
- To Support Families
- To Transform Lives

It also sets out the principles of early help:

- Help and support children and families to find their own solutions and help them build support networks within the community.
- Work with the views and experience of the child and family, be solution focused and build on the strengths of the child and family so they can be independent.
- Be clear in our work with children and families about the intended outcome and how to achieve these.
- Provide a reflective approach to supervisory oversight within each agency to enable solutions and improve outcomes for children and families.
- Identify where a child is suffering or likely to be at risk of or suffered significant harm in line with Working Together 2015 and refer to social work services where required.
- Ensure our staff understand and utilise the “Threshold” guidance and consult safeguarding leads / managers in considering next steps.
- Ensure that these principles underpin commissioning and contract management.

**Prevention from care and Early Help** - we have transformed our services to establish a strong, integrated early help service based within North Lincolnshire. These revised services operate within Families are Safe Supported and Transformed Service (FaSST), in line with the organisational model described in the Children and Young People’s Plan 2016-20. FaSST has a remit that includes a specific goal of preventing the need for care



by working with universal and early-targeted provision to support families with a range of vulnerabilities that are known to be connected with entering care.

FaSST work through collaboration and co-ordination at all levels and across all services to:

- Identify needs earlier.
- Deliver a coordinated package of support for the child/young person.
- Help to secure better outcomes.

**Families First** - we are committed to ensuring that friends and family are a first choice of care for children. We support immediate family arrangements, support step-parents and utilise other private arrangements through clear private fostering procedures and a dedicated worker for these arrangements.

Where the local authority places children with family and friends we ensure assessments are undertaken to ensure their suitability and support those placements through connected person's provisions.

**Corporate Parents** - North Lincolnshire has an established model of corporate parenting. It includes well-defined decision making processes in the council with clear links to the Children in Care Council. The council regularly reviews how we deliver these functions and that there are tangible outcomes through active and regular feedback from the children and young people. Members of the Corporate Parenting Board provide the collective leadership required to improve outcomes for children in care. Partners provide the additional commitment to children in care that a parent who is ambitious for their children would make.

The introduction of statute and Home Office transfer expectations including the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children (UASC) transfer scheme (Immigration Act 2016), the Concordat on Children in Custody and the local offer (Covenant) to care leavers (Children and Social Work Bill) has placed additional duties on Local Authorities to provide services and accommodation to applicable children and young people. North Lincolnshire's sufficiency strategy is based upon thorough knowledge of what we need to have available to continue to meet the needs of children who do need to be cared for by the local authority. It is our ambition to provide a new relationship and range of placement choice across all areas of our provision.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to set out clearly and briefly the strategic intentions of North Lincolnshire Children's Services in fulfilling our sufficiency duty (S.22 Children Act 1989) towards children in care.

The plans that it outlines are based on an analysis of the looked after population contained within the children's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and intelligence from comprehensive monthly and quarterly performance information. An analysis of this information can be found in the Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2015-17.

The actions necessary to fulfill these strategic intentions are set out in the Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2015-17 - Action Plan.

## Vision and Principles

We will:

- Work with partners and communities to help deliver early help through universal services to children and their families through the early identification of need, the provision of early help and effective, timely intervention to prevent children entering the group on the edge of care.
- Reduce the need for council care by effective early help support to those on the edge of care.
- Where children enter care, work immediately with the child and their family to return the child to their family networks - where it is safe to do so – with the support they need.
- Deliver a 'one placement' approach for all children who enter care with a clear intent that all placements are the child's only placement for as long as they need it.
- Provide a range of care placements that provide choice, stability and swift permanence and that fulfill the requirements of s22C of the Children Act 1989 i.e. placements that:
  - are near to home and within our own area.
  - minimise disruption to education and training and help the continuation of community ties and friendships.
  - allow siblings to live together.
  - meet the needs of disabled children.
  - meet the needs of our diverse ethnic minority populations.
- Continue with management arrangements that provide a tight focus on looked after children, concentrating on the journey of each individual child within the system.
- Secure permanence at the earliest point for those who do enter care.
- Provide a pattern of services that improve outcomes for children in care in the areas of safety, education and training, health, positive engagement and preparation for a successful future.
- Develop a range of accommodation options for our older children requiring alternative accommodation and for care leavers returning to North Lincolnshire from external fostering and residential placements

These principles are set within a framework of strong corporate parenting, excellent individual care planning and a firm focus on the needs and wishes of children and young people.

### Provision of Sufficient Accommodation

We will ensure that all children and young people who require accommodation are provided with a safe, stable placement that has been matched to their needs and enables them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.

We will continue to strive to increase the range and scope of in-house fostering and adoption services to ensure we have families available to offer placement choice to children and young people best placed to meet their needs. North Lincolnshire will also expand our involvement and access to external provision where this is best placed to meet the needs of children who cannot be accommodated within our provision.

We will ensure that the use of family based care both internally and externally remains a preferred option to secure appropriate family based accommodation for children and young

people and promote stability and permanency in these as appropriate for the child.

We will ensure the use of residential provision is in line with the child's needs and supports young people leaving the children's home to make successful transitions into adulthood.

## **Levels of Need - Children and Young People in Our Care**

### **The Care Population**

On the 31st of October 2016, North Lincolnshire Council "looked after" 216 children. This represented an increase on the previous year when it was 199 children at the same point (31/10/15).

Whilst the overall care population continues to be in line with or lower than statistical and national comparators, there has been a continued increase in the care population over the past 3 years. This correlates with the national picture where there has also been an increase in the number of children looked after over that period.

Whilst the number of children entering care through being accommodated on a voluntary basis (s20) has reduced slightly and remands to care or entering care under Police Protection are unchanged, there has been a significant increase in children entering care through legal proceedings (subject to an Interim Care Order (ICO)).

Two significant factors that have contributed to the increase in the care population are:

- The increased number of children placed with Connected Persons through an increase in the number of Interim Care Order's. These are being issued with a view for the child to have legal permanence within their family upon the completion of the proceedings (through the courts making a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order SGO/CAO) and enable children to remain safely within their family networks whilst the proceedings are concluded.
- The percentage of children leaving care over the age of 16 who remained looked after until their 18th birthday increased to 75% showing that young people have been supported to remain living with their carers into adulthood. This is good practice as it ensured the young person has stability through to adulthood and compares to a national average of 68%.

As at 31/10/16, 89% of children in care live in foster care or are placed for adoption. The majority of the care population is cared for locally, a small minority of children are placed out of the area and at 24%, as at 31/10/16, this is the lowest it has been in 5 years.

81% (42/52) of those placed outside of North Lincolnshire live in neighbouring authorities, some of whom reside with north Lincolnshire foster carers. In turn the percentage of children in care placed more than 20 miles from their home continues to be a small minority of the care population and at 10.6% (31/10/2016) compares well to our statistical neighbours. This is also well below the latest published figure for England of 12%. This continues to demonstrate our commitment to caring for children in our care locally.

The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in our care is low in North Lincolnshire but increasing; the latest published figure as at 31/03/15 is 1.7% of the care population being UASC, the figure for England for the same period is 3.8%. This is set to increase with the introduction of the Home Office UASC refugee transfer schemes.

North Lincolnshire's age profile of looked after children reflects that of the national picture with the largest group being the 10-15 year olds. As at 31/10/16 40% were aged 10-15 years. Over the last 2 reporting years the key care population shift has been the 16yr+ group reducing from 22% to 17% (31/10/16).

During the first 7 months of 2016/17 (up to 31/10/2016) there has also been a 6% increase in those aged under 4 (from 17% to 23% of the overall population) and a decrease in those aged 5-9 (from 26% to 21%).

100% of children in care continue to have a named qualified social worker allocated to them.

We continued to hold Looked after Children reviews 100% on time and at all of the reviews held children's views were given and taken account of.

## **Outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers**

We actively work to maintain children at home wherever possible. If this is not appropriate we seek alternative family based permanence through adoption, long-term foster care, Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders. On average over the last 5 years 5% of the children in care population have been placed with a family member/friend as 'Connected Persons' Carers, more recently this has increased, as at 31/03/16 9% of the population lived with Connected Persons and at 31/10/16 this has risen to 15%.

During 2015/16 there was a slight decrease in the number of children in care achieving permanency through adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Orders, however during 2016/17 (up to 31/10/2016) 45% of those leaving care have done so through adoption, SGO or CAO. Children whose care plan is long term fostering have also been formally matched to their foster carers at the fostering panel.

Early permanence means that children are placed with potential adopters sooner and provides for earlier building of relationships and developing attachments to their new family. The number of children being placed with their future adoptive families under early permanence arrangements continues to increase.

We are increasing stability for those in the older age ranges and increasing placement choice and stability over a prolonged period. This is being achieved through targeted recruitment, robust assessments and identification of carers who have the skills to offer long term care to older children.

Placement stability in terms of the number of children experiencing 3 or more placement moves has improved from 9.7% in March 2013 to 8.9% in March 2016 which is below both the national average and statistical neighbours. So far in 2016/17 indications are that the year-end figure may further reduce.

The stability of children in long-term care also continues to improve. The year-end figure for 2015/16 was 83.8% of children in care for over 2.5 years, have been in the same placement for more than 2 years. This is a continued improvement, (increasing from 62.1% in March 2013) and is now higher than both statistical neighbour and England averages.

The Adoption Service works to the timescales set within the Adoption Scorecard. There are challenges in identifying adoptive placements for older children with complex needs and sibling groups. A regional approach has been developed to meet the challenge of

recruiting adopters who can consider older, more complex needs and sibling groups which we have taken a lead role within the region in developing the approach to the recruitment and availability of adoptive placements and the support they receive.

North Lincolnshire council led the development of the regional Adoption Consortium where we have seen success locally and regionally in adopter recruitment, There has been a high level of success in achieving permanence for older children in the last 3years with 22% of those adopted being aged between 5-9 years. The number of children with a permanency plan of adoption achieving earlier placement with their permanent adoptive families though early permanence planning (fostering for adoption) has increased in 2016.

North Lincolnshire Council is committed to building upon the success of regional working to ensure timely placement for children by way of adoption and in ensuring that the recruitment of adopters is based upon the needs of the children who require an adoptive placement. There is a long history of regional working together in adoption and this stands us in good stead when working towards the regionalisation agenda of central government. The regional plan being developed is that the 15 local authority adoption agencies within the Yorkshire and Humber will merge to form 3 regional adoption agencies (RAA's) which are supported by a central hub. The 3 regional agencies will cover the West, South and North & Humber and will also include Voluntary Agencies (VA's). North Lincolnshire Council Adoption Services will form part of the North & Humber Regional Agency alongside North Yorkshire, York, East Riding, Hull and North East Lincolnshire Adoption Services.

Whilst in care, children's health needs have been addressed well, 95% of Initial Health Assessments are completed within 28 days of a child entering care and 97.1% (2015/16) of annual health assessments completed in time.

Supported by Corporate Parents from within the council and our partners, we have developed 'Aspirations Days' for children in care and care leavers. These provide opportunities for children and young people to experience different professions, understand opportunities and aspire to professions and roles. We have also developed supported apprenticeships for children in care and care leavers and flexible work placements to help young people achieve their aspirations. The proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training (EET) at age 19-21 has increased in 2015-16 by 10 percentage points to 67% (57% in March 2015). For the 2015-16 cohort, 17 & 18 year olds are also included, and our year end provisional figure is 73%.

The service has maintained high standards of care for children and young people in care and consistently positive outcomes, evidenced by OFSTED inspection judgements of Outstanding for Looked After Children (SLAC inspection May 2012) and Fostering Services (July 2012). Both of North Lincolnshire Council's children's homes were inspected in early 2016 and were both graded as Outstanding.

## **Delivering the Sufficiency Strategy – Progress so far**

There are several key priorities in successfully delivering the sufficiency strategy:

- the provision of early help and effective, timely intervention to prevent children entering the group on the edge of care.
- reducing the need for council care by effective early help support to those on the edge of care.
- providing a range of care placements that provide choice, stability and meet children's needs that:
  - deliver the 'one placement' approach to ensuring children do not change placements and can form meaningful relationships with trusted adults
  - are able to provide stable care for children who display challenging behaviour
  - provide stability for children throughout their childhood
  - are near to home and within our own area.
  - minimise disruption to education and training and help the continuation of community ties and friendships.
  - allow siblings to live together.
  - meet the needs of disabled children.
  - meet the needs of our diverse ethnic minority populations.
- securing permanence at the earliest point for those who do enter care.
- Ensuring children who enter care achieve positive outcomes and are able to achieve their aspirations

To achieve these priorities, the successful delivery of the sufficiency strategy has been through the following key areas:

### **Reducing the need for council care by strengthening early help to those on the edge of care**

We have continued to develop practice and strengthen delivery to support children to remain living within their own families, avoiding the need for Local Authority care. This includes:

- The 'Helping Children and Families' has been launched and embedded across all services to ensure that children and families are supported to remain living together. Interventions being offered in a timely manner at the lowest level to ensure that we give families the opportunity to be independent from services where it is safe to do so.
- Ensure the effective use of targeted interventions to prevent the need to intervene through court processes including the use of immediate restoration plans that have effective packages of support to help the child return to their family networks.
- Further embedded and refreshed the use of the Risk Analysis Framework to focus on the effective use of resources and partnership approaches to enable children to remain within or return to their family networks.
- Continued to contribute to the Local Family Justice Board (LFJB) in order to develop positive relationships with courts and shape and influence practice developments across the Humber region.

- Ensured that training, support and oversight is provided to ensure that the completion of care proceedings is timely and continues to be monitored closely
- Reviewed and further developed the Corporate Parenting 'Promise' to further strengthen the existing positive partnership working to support children to remain in their families, achieve permanence and collectively manage risk in the community through a partnership approach.
- Undertaken a review and re-design of key decision making and quality assurance points in the child's journey to oversee the flexible use of resources and support to enable children to remain within their families will ensure that services are scrutinised, challenged and effectively targeted to achieve this. Where this is not possible the PLO process and decisions to enter proceedings will also be subject to close monitoring, decision making and challenge to ensure this is timely, effective and focused on achieving permanence.

### **Providing Support to Families when they need it**

Built into the Families are Safe Supported and Transformed Services (FaSST) are intensive support staff within a crisis team, whose remit includes providing effective interventions to children who are on the edge of care, to prevent their admission. These staff use a range of approaches, including parenting and boundary work, solution-focused interventions and strong engagement skills to maintain or restore them with to their family.

When taken together with the preventive work of our Social Work Service resource, the development of a 13-19 years strategy to effectively manage risk in the community and the increasing use of short breaks to prevent breakdown, we expect to see a return to and continuation in our long-term trend towards fewer children in care.

Revised performance/compliance management processes have been embedded by both legal services and children's services to ensure proceedings are effective and timely. In addition, we have developed Public Law Outline (PLO) tracking processes. We have also embedded family solutions meetings within practice enabling families to find their own solutions with the support of services. Within the PLO process, family solutions meetings also provide parents the benefit of their legal representatives being made fully aware at the earliest possible time of the local authority concerns and subsequent expectations. It is hoped that by continuing this early intervention matters will be dealt with outside of court hearings. Failing that they can be expedited through the court process

### **Providing a range of care placements that provide choice, stability, diversity and swift permanence**

Our ambition is to provide early permanent placements of a type that best suits the needs of the child, within the shortest feasible timescale. This will happen in a variety of settings, from returning to the family home, through placements with family and friends ('connected persons' in the 2010 Care Planning Regulations), to foster care, adoption or residential care. Where the journey to permanence includes a placement in a setting that meets complex needs that cannot be met locally, we will continue to use our multi-agency commissioning arrangements to determine the best place for the child. These placements are subject to regular reviews and transition planning. To continue to provide sufficient, safe, stable placements we have:

- Further invested in fostering and increased the ratio of foster care placements to

residential placements, based on extensive research that shows that the majority of children do best in family placements. As of 31/10/2016, 89% of our children in care were in foster care or placed for adoption

- The North Lincolnshire Fostering Service has in the last few years increased staffing capacity to enable it to increase its recruitment and approval capability and to provide higher levels of support to carers.
- We set an ambitious target to increase the number of foster placements available to us by 20 in 2015-16 we exceeded that target and have set an equally ambitious target of 20 foster carers for 2016-17. This target is based on the number of placements required to reduce reliance on residential care both internally and externally and reduce the need for external agency foster care. This has increased placement choice, reduced the number of young people placed out of area and enabled better responses to the needs of ethnic minority children. It allows us to reduce the use of local residential care for all except those children whose needs are clearly best met within residential provision. Increasing the overall number of carers will continue to be achieved by increasing the recruitment and approval effort, but also by retention of carers.
- Embarked on a new relationship with our carers, offering improved and bespoke training and increased support by foster placement staff and the use of FaSST staff including the co-location of a FaSST team member into the fostering service to provide immediate support to foster carers when a fragile placement is identified. We are continuing to offer existing support initiatives such as special car loans, Looked after Children's Education Service and CAMHS support to maintain placements and increase placement stability for our children in care.
- Increasing the number of available carers is important, but so is increasing the range of placement skills and types on offer. We have successfully recruited carers who have the skills to care for teenagers and children with more complex needs which have enabled us to maintain our children within our own foster carers in the local community.
- Following consultation events with our foster carers held in the last 12 months, we have revised our fostering allowances to recognise the training and development of Foster Carers:
  - For older children with complex care needs requiring more specialist family based care.
  - For children with disabilities requiring overnight short break family based care as opposed to short break residential care.
  - To support and prevent young people being remanded to a secure setting or to local authority accommodation where possible.
  - To support parents and their babies requiring family based care and support
- Improved our training programme to reflect the needs of the carers and the children we look after. Examples of this are "Understanding Behaviour" which builds upon and complements the attachment and development training run by the CAMHS service. We have delivered training for foster carers jointly with the adoption service to support successful moves to adoptive placements. We have developed flexible training programmes to fit in with foster carers busy schedules such as evenings and on line training.
- Provided training and 1:1 sessions to continue to enable all carers to achieve the Training Support and development (TSD) minimum standards. In addition the



programme will provide more specialist training on issues including attachment, advanced child development, engaging parents and children, dealing with mental health issues, and working with offenders.

- Revised the foster payments scheme to reflect increased responsibilities and skill levels for certain carers whilst maintaining fair allowance rates for the majority of 'mainstream' carers. This is reviewed annually.
- Developed our in-house adoption service and invested in social workers to increase the number of available adopters to give children the quickest access to adoption services to provide adoption within the child's timescales. Again, this will be subject to value-for-money examination at regular intervals.
- Successfully recruited adopters with whom we have been able to place our own children, this has resulted in more timely matching and placement as well as reducing the inter agency fee.
- All potential new adopters are encouraged to consider becoming Early Permanence carers enabling them to care for a child matched to them under a fostering arrangement prior to Placement Order being made.
- The Social Work service has developed the use of 'pods' to provide supportive environments where workers share knowledge, provide peer support and enable less experienced social workers to benefit from access to the 'practice experience' available from other team members. This enables a clear focus upon interventions and methods of change and clarity about the theoretical underpinnings of work undertaken. There is also a clear focus on ensuring cases have a high quality social work assessment to ensure that permanency is achieved with without any unnecessary delay
- We have revised our internal process to assess the needs of children who may find themselves in longer term health care and who become in need of assessment and support.

### **Providing an increased range and choice of provision for care leavers and other post-16 provision**

Ensuring that young people have the support they need to remain living in safe stable placements with adults they have positive and meaningful relationships with and with the support they need is a vital part of ensuring the sufficiency of placements. To ensure this is achieved in North Lincolnshire we have:

- Committed to children in our care remaining with their foster carers as part of our "Staying Put" scheme and in line with Government policy. We support all of our children in care post 16 currently in a fostering arrangement "to remain with their foster carers until
  - they are prepared for adulthood,
  - can experience a transition akin to their peers,
  - avoid social exclusion and
  - be more likely to avoid a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown". (Staying Put. HM Govt. May 2013).
- Reconfigured our services to provide greater specialist support to care leavers and children post-16 including the dedicated accommodation and support provided by the PHASE Social Enterprise. The support service dedicated to those groups,

includes supported lodgings and other supported accommodation.

- Provided specialist accommodation for young mothers in a 6-unit facility with support on site.
- Enabled young people leaving Kingfisher Lodge at the age of 18 to 'stay close' in our adjoining facility of independent studios to support them to make successful transitions into adulthood.
- Reviewed and updated our Corporate Parenting Pledge and put in place a Care Leaver's Charter which has been compiled with our young people and signed and supported by corporate parents.

## Building on Success – Next Steps

To build on the sustained success of the Sufficiency Strategy over a number of years, we will build on the key priorities. To deliver this means:

Ensuring that families are supported to find their own solutions and that services are provided at the earliest opportunity and lowest level. This includes continuing to build on the principles and focus of restorative and Family Solutions Meeting models across to utilise within the early help arena to enable children to live safely within their families.

Further developing the provision of family placements for harder to place young people to ensure that all children and young people are able to live in safe, stable placements where they are able to remain into adulthood.

Further strengthen and build on stable and supportive placements for young people as they progress into adulthood. Including outcome based support and commissioned arrangements to support children and young people into adulthood. This includes supporting carers and continuing to build on the range of supported accommodation to increase choice and further enable young people to “stay put”.

Continue a regular programme of recruitment activities to increase the number of foster carers and adoptive placements to meet the projected needs of children and young people.

To achieve these we will:

- Continue to ensure that all children who require accommodation are provided with a safe, stable placement that has been matched to their needs and enables them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them. This includes ensuring that:
  - placement matching is robust and effective
  - the ‘one placement’ approach is taken in all placements made
  - the ‘new relationship’ with carers emphasises the focus on ‘stickability’ and placement stability
  - all placements have an up-to-date and robust support plan that focuses on early action, support and interventions based on the child’s needs and stability
- Strive to continue to increase the range and scope of in-house fostering, and adoption services to ensure we have families available to offer placement choice to children and young people best placed to meet their need and who are committed to delivering a ‘one placement’ approach.
- Continue to participate in the development of the Regional Adoption Agency business arrangements to encourage local authorities to increase activity and contribute to adding value to expand our recruitment strategy for prospective adopters to meet the needs of our children awaiting adoption.
- Reduce the number of agency and out of area placements by focusing on local provision for all but a small number of children and young people with specialist needs. Do this by continuing to support the training and development of skills of foster carers for children and young people with specialist needs including parent and child placements, remand carers and older young people with complex care needs with the ‘one placement’ approach as the key driver.

- For those children and young people whose specialist, complex needs cannot be met within our own provision, we will continue with our effective joint commissioning arrangements, in conjunction with our health partners, to meet children's education, health and care needs and support placement stability.
- Work with the North Lincolnshire Youth Offending Service (YOS) to provide suitable packages as alternatives to custody and ensure the availability of emergency foster carers as an alternative to remand or overnight detention should this be required in line with the Custody Concordat.
- We will retain a local children's home capacity to meet the needs of a small number of young people who choose not to live in a family. The role of the children's home will be reviewed to ensure best value and will adapt to provide a new relationship with a population of older young people that reflects their rights and decision making whilst working to keep them as safe as possible.
- Develop our local offer to care leavers as required under the Children and Social Work Bill "Care Leavers covenant".
- Work with partners to develop a range of accommodation options to support older young people and for care leavers returning to North Lincolnshire from external fostering and residential placements
- Continue the new relationship with carers that includes:
  - Continuing to provide a comprehensive training and development service for our foster carers to develop the range of skill and expertise we will require into the future and promote the 'one placement' approach.
  - Review and update our Foster Care Charter as an up-to-date and relevant agreement between carers and the service with a focus on placement stability for children throughout their journey through childhood.
  - We will continue to pay allowances above the National Minimum recommended rate (post completion of TSD's and required training) in order for North Lincolnshire to provide competitive allowances that are adjusted according to skill levels and the demands of individual placements.
  - We will maintain the level of support benefits for foster carers that exist currently e.g. payment for insurance cover, the availability of car loans at a zero repayment rate, privileged access to sports facilities etc. We will look to improve these support benefits as opportunities arise.
  - We will continue to build special support arrangements for foster carers, such as the tiered fostering scheme, with its layered approach to the provision of CAMHS support and the commissioned consultation and support service to foster carers caring for young people experiencing or at risk of CSE with a focus on placement stability and supporting carers to achieve the 'one placement' approach.

## **Reviewing the Strategy**

This strategy will form the basis of an action plan (see below), and contributes to the Multi-Agency Children in Care Plan 2016-2018. Those actions are set out in terms of what needs to be done, by whom and by when.

The strategy – including the specific actions in the action plan - will be monitored through our well-established performance improvement mechanisms, including the monthly performance monitoring and tracking and the quarterly performance review process.

The outcomes and impact of the strategy will be reviewed annually during the period to 2019. It will also be overseen by the Multi-Agency Looked After Children's Partnership who will monitor the progress of the actions detailed in the action plan below.

The change in provision will be managed and reviewed as part of the transformation agenda under the 'Operational Fitness' strand.

## What will success look like?

By 2019, we will expect to see:

- Further reductions in the looked after population as a result of:
  - Early effective identification and intervention.
  - Increased use of Adoption and Special Guardianship – achieved in a timely manner.
  - Permanence in families where they are independent of the local authority.
- A greater proportion of the care population cared for within a family setting rather than a residential one.
- All placements made on the understanding that it is the child's only placement and is for as long as they need it.
- A reduction in the use of external provision by improving our ability to meet a wider range of needs locally.
- A reduction in the number of children experiencing three or more moves, and greater stability of placement in the longer term through the 'one placement' approach.
- Children and young people report high levels of satisfaction with their placements in exit interviews and other surveys.
- A reduction in the amount of time that children and young people spend in care before a permanent solution is found.
- Increased choice of placements for children and young people resulting from reductions in numbers coupled with increases in approved placements.
- Increase in children in care remaining with their former foster carers beyond the age of 18 years through "staying put" placements.
- An Increased choice of accommodation options for older young people and for care leavers returning from external fostering and residential placements.

## Sufficiency Action Plan 2016-17

Children's Service Partnership Priority - Ensuring children and young people feel safe and are safe	Action Focus	Milestones / target	Lead/Linked Indicators	Lead/Lead Group
Sufficiency	Further strengthen and monitor outcome based commissioners arrangements with the PHASE Social Enterprise	Feb 2017	Young people in suitable accommodation Young people in EET Young people's satisfaction with service delivery	Service Manager CiC/Prevention and Commissioning
Sufficiency	Fully embed and deliver the 'one placement' approach so that all placements made or on the basis that it is the child's only placement for as long as is needed – either to return to their family, achieve alternative legal permanence or remain in the placement into adulthood.	Feb 2017	Children live in stable placements Reduction in the number of children placed externally % with 3 or more placement moves % in the same placement 2+ years	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services
Sufficiency	Further developing schemes for older young people and as alternatives to external placement's and or secure remand placements including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carers with the skills to take older young people and those with complex needs</li> <li>• Supported placements for older young people as stepping stones to</li> </ul>	March 2017	Children live in stable placements Reduction in the number of children placed externally % with 3 or more	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services

	<p>independent living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent and baby family based provision</li> <li>• Continue to build on the range of accommodation and placements to increase choice and further enable children to “stay put”.</li> </ul>		<p>placement moves</p> <p>% in the same placement 2+ years</p>	
Sufficiency	<p>Increase the number of NL Foster carers for older children and UASC</p> <p>Continue to build on the range of Supported Accommodation to increase choice and further enable children to “stay put”.</p> <p>Continue a regular programme of recruitment activities to increase the number of foster carers to meet the projected needs for local authority accommodation and where there may be a surplus, develop a business model to contract out surplus beds/places.</p>	<p>Increase in the number of young people remaining with their former foster carers when they reach the age of 18 and leave care.</p> <p>20 new fostering families plus 10 for UASC, with at least 22 additional foster placements for older/difficult to place children</p>	<p>Regulated service judged good or better through inspection - Stability</p> <p>Older young people remain in the same placements</p> <p>Reduction in the use of external placements</p> <p>Improved stability of placements – reduction in the % of children with 3 or more placements and increase in % in long-term stable placements (2 yrs +)</p>	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services
Sufficiency	<p>Continue to manage timeliness of adoption</p> <p>Continued focus on monitoring and reducing delays in the adoption recruitment process and the number of available adopters, using current staff and independent social workers</p>	March 2017	10 new carers in 2016 / 2017	Principal Officer Case Management
Sufficiency	Review the impact and outcomes of the “staying close” policy to children’s homes	February 2017	<p>Placement stability</p> <p>Reduced numbers who leave care aged 16/17</p>	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services
	Maintain the robustness of pre-placement planning		Placement stability	Principal Social



Sufficiency	meetings, at earliest opportunity, to include clear support plan to include activities for the child.	January 2017	Children's feedback and perception Foster carers views and feedback	Worker
Sufficiency	Maintain the panel of 'experts' for professional consultancy for children with more complex needs	January 2017	Placement stability Reduced disruptions Improved SDQ scores	Principal Officer Case Management
Sufficiency	Develop an integrated, targeted intervention team in partnership with the police.	April 2017	Reduced offending of young people Increased numbers of children remaining living within their own families Reduced substance misuse Reduced domestic abuse within families	Principal Officer Case Management
Sufficiency	Develop the Family Solutions Meeting Model and restorative practices across targeted family support services to utilise it as part of early help to enable children to live safely within their families.	January 2017	The age profile and number of children entering care	Service Manager – Targeted Family Support
Sufficiency	Review and update fostering procedures to include financial, recruitment and fostering friendly policies	March 2017	Recruitment and retention of carers	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services
Sufficiency	Ensure staff have the skills, knowledge and support to continue to meet the requirements of the PLO framework and are updated with developments and changes through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued programme of training for Social Workers and other staff</li> <li>Continue to ensure the early</li> </ul>	April 2017	PLO timescales - % of court cases completed within 26 weeks % children in care who progress to legal permanence	Principal Officer – Case Management

	<p>identification and assessment of extended family members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to contribute to the LFJB in order to shape and influence developing practice.</li> </ul>		Adoption scorecard indicators	
Sufficiency	<p>Establish a dedicated, highly skilled response to cases in a court process (dedicated court team),</p>	November 2016	<p>PLO timescales - % of court cases completed within 26 weeks</p> <p>Outcome of proceedings – children achieving legal permanence</p>	Principal Officer – Case Management
Sufficiency	<p>Review and further develop the decision making and QA processes in relation to entry to care and PLO processes to ensure continued robust scrutiny, challenge and oversight</p> <p>Regular review of the effectiveness of these processes.</p>	<p>November 2016</p> <p>6 monthly</p>	<p>PLO timescales - % of court cases completed within 26 weeks</p> <p>% children in care who progress to legal permanence</p> <p>Profile of Care Population</p>	Principal Officer – Case Management
Sufficiency	<p>Ensure foster carers and staff have the knowledge and skills to provide care and support to UASC arriving in North Lincolnshire</p>	April 2017	<p>The individual needs and outcomes of UASC are met.</p> <p>UASC are integrated successfully into the local community.</p> <p>UASC are supported to reunite with family members living in the UK.</p>	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services
Sufficiency	<p>Maintain the robustness of placement support processes, at earliest opportunity, to include a clear support plan to maintain the placement</p>	April 2017	<p>Children and young people will remain in their placement with no subsequent placement moves</p>	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services
Sufficiency	<p>Provide an offer to support the stability of children</p>	Dec 2016	<p>Children live in stable</p>	Principal Officer Regulatory and

	subject to SGO/Care Arrangements		placements	Support Services
Sufficiency	<p>Review the cohort and projected accommodation and support needs of older young people who are on the edge of care or remain in care into adulthood. This to include the age and gender profile, complex needs and support requirements</p> <p>Based on this, further develop accommodation for this cohort including consideration of alternatives such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 hour warden supported accommodation.</li> <li>• single sex accommodation</li> <li>• The accommodation of older UASC</li> </ul>	<p>March 2017</p> <p>September 2017</p>	<p>Placement stability</p> <p>Reduced numbers who leave care aged 16/17</p> <p>Reduced older young people entering care</p> <p>The individual needs and outcomes of UASC are met. UASC are integrated successfully into the local community.</p>	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services
Sufficiency	Develop commissioning relationships with local partners and providers to develop a range of accommodation options for older young people including UASC and for Care Leavers returning from external placements post 18	April 2017	to develop a range of accommodation options for older young people including UASC and for Care Leavers returning from external placements post 18	Principal Officer Regulatory and Support Services