

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
CABINET MEMBER**

**CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY
2020 - 2022**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform and seek the Cabinet Member's endorsement of the revised Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2020-2022.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The **Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children (2010)** requires local authorities to take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of its children in care, ('the sufficiency duty').
- 2.2 As reflected in the Ofsted 2017 report and further endorsed in their visit in 2019, there is long-standing political and strategic commitment to children and families in North Lincolnshire. The sufficiency strategy is underpinned by, continues and builds on our ambition and belief that children should live with their own or extended family networks.
- 2.3 Where it is not possible for children to remain within or return to their own family networks in a timely and supportive way, we want children who enter care to live within an alternative family setting where they are able to build positive relationships with trusted adults. Where it is in the child's interests to live in a residential children's home we expect this to be the best provision that provides the best care.
- 2.4 We want children to be able to remain in their home as long as they wish in line with their needs and wishes and seek to provide high quality supported and independent accommodation for care leavers as they progress on to adulthood that enables them to build their resilience, confidence and life skills as independent adults.

- 2.5 North Lincolnshire Council's sufficiency strategy is based upon thorough knowledge of our children in care and care leavers and what we need to have available to continue to meet the needs of children who need to be cared for by the Local Authority. The strategy also complements and works in conjunction with the 'North Lincolnshire Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2020 – 2022'.
- 2.6 There is long-standing Elected Member support and investment for children in care and care leavers and this strategy reflects the commitment of the Council to achieve the best outcomes for the children who enter our care.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2022 details the progress made in delivery sufficient high-quality provision to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers.

This includes:

- Investment in local provision to build on and develop North Lincolnshire Fostering, Adoption and family support provision
 - Developed a range of provision suitable to the needs of care leavers as they progress into adulthood that include:
 - Staying Put arrangements with carers
 - staying close to their carers so they can be supported
 - independent supported accommodation
 - tenancies within social housing
 - Robust recruitment plans and actions to increase the availability and choice of foster and adoptive carers
 - Enhanced training, support and development for all carers
 - Increased availability and choice of foster families
 - Low numbers of children placed with external providers
 - Increased and improving stability for children in care and care leavers
- 3.2 The strategy projects and is informed by the current and anticipated care and care leavers population to identify further developments and build on the progress to date.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 The strategy includes the '2020 – 2022 Sufficiency Delivery Plan' detailing the plans, developments and actions to continue to provide sufficiency and choice during the lifetime of the plan. Systems and practice in North Lincolnshire have consistently delivered a range of good and outstanding services for children and families. This has benefitted from the ongoing Elected Member support of children in care and care leavers.

4.2 Children in Care numbers have historically been lower than comparator authorities, and the vast majority of children in care are placed locally. To build on this success and continue to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers through achieving the key aims in relation to placement sufficiency, the Council has made a commitment to:

- Strengthen the 'edge of care' offer through the One Family Approach
- Continue and build on the recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure placement availability and choice – including additional capacity within the Fostering Service
- Continue and prioritise the focus on improving stability for children in care and care leavers through development of family solutions approaches and enhanced training for carers.
- Build on and further develop the integrated service for care leavers including:
 - Pathway Planning that creates a tiered approach to intervention based on the individual needs of young people.
 - Increased portfolio of high-quality accommodation
 - All accommodation to include broadband internet at no cost to the young people.
 - Implementation of a dynamic housing model, which enables young people to reside within semi-independent accommodation provided by the Council,
 - Working closely with our corporate parents to expand the amount of opportunities available for work experience, training and employment

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)

5.1 Financial – whilst there are no additional costs to the Council identified within the strategy, it is underpinned by the continuing financial commitment of the Council to children in care and care leavers.

The belief that children should live in their families, schools and communities is also further demonstrated by the Council in supporting the development of the One Family Approach Hub.

- 5.2 Legal - the Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2020 – 2022 sets out the strategic intentions of North Lincolnshire Council in fulfilling our sufficiency duty (S.22 Children Act 1989) towards these children.

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

- 6.1 In ensuring there is sufficiency of provision, the strategy contributes to the Council Priorities in achieving positive outcomes for children and young people that will have a positive impact in:

Prosperous - through providing an environment that supports children's confidence, success and engagement with education, employment and training. Providing local provision that is cost-effective in reducing the need for expensive external provision.

Safe and well - through the provision of sufficient accommodation that supports positive outcomes and success for children in care and care leavers. Enabling safe and successful transitions to their own accommodation.

Connected - though enabling children in care and care leavers to take an active part in their communities through the support of their carers and workers, building community resilience and social capital.

7. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

- 7.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment Stage 1 Initial Screening Template has been completed in relation to this strategy and did not identify any negative potential impacts.

8. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

- 8.1 Children in care and care leavers are consulted in relation to all aspects of their care, accommodation and support. The strategy takes into account the feedback from children and young people in developing the provision of accommodation.

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That the Cabinet Member welcomes the positive review of the strategy and approves the revised Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2020 – 2022.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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Date: 04/09/2020

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report –

- Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2020 – 2022

SAFE WELL PROSPEROUS CONNECTED

Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2022

| STATUS | DATE | BY WHOM |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Approved | | |
| Lead | July 2020 | Paul Cowling |
| Head Of Children's Social Care | Sept 2020 | Ann-Marie Brierley |
| Review date | Annual refresh/update June 2021 | |

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Purpose

The **Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children (2010)** requires local authorities to take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of its children in care, whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation ('the sufficiency duty').

This document sets out the strategic intentions of North Lincolnshire Council in fulfilling our sufficiency duty (S.22 Children Act 1989) towards children in care and care leavers. Securing sufficient accommodation that provides the best care, promotes self-confidence, resilience and emotional well-being for children in care and care leavers is vital in achieving the best possible outcomes for this vulnerable group.

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 Council's sufficiency strategy is based upon thorough knowledge of our children in care and care leavers and 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.

The sufficiency duty applies in respect of all children who enter the Council's care under the 1989 Act.

Vision and Principles

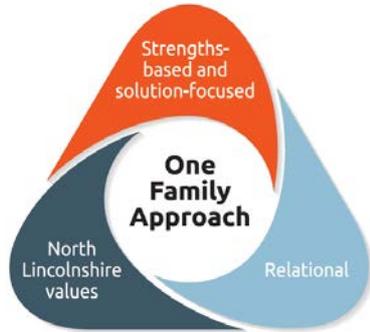
All children and young people should be able to have a sense of belonging and experience equality of opportunity. With this in mind, we will make the best decisions regarding local services and support, to help achieve the best for our children and young people ensuring sufficiency, quality and creativity.

Our vision for North Lincolnshire is for our children, families, vulnerable adults and communities to be:

- ▶ Prosperous
- ▶ Well
- ▶ Safe
- ▶ Connected

Central to this strategy is a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This commitment is inherent in our council values of equality of opportunity, excellence, self-responsibility, and integrity, and underpins our focus on prioritising the most vulnerable. Additionally, North Lincolnshire Council believes that it is our role, and indeed our responsibility alongside our partners, to challenge racism and prejudice in all its forms by upholding our values and the highest standards of behaviour, and by committing to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices to reduce inequalities.

Developed and endorsed by the Integrated Children’s Trust, the **One Family Approach** is how we respond to the needs of children and families in North Lincolnshire in the context of integrated services for children. It provides a vision and framework for a system that places children and families at the centre – a One Family Approach to strategy, commissioning, planning, and practice.



The One Family Approach is founded upon our North Lincolnshire values and beliefs, capturing our intent to keep children in their families, their schools and their communities. It provides a model for innovative, integrated working which builds upon strengths, find solutions in families and communities, builds resilience and confidence, and enables independence.

Where children enter care our aim is wherever possible to reunite children with their families or extended families in a timely and supportive way. Where it is not possible for children to remain within or return to their own family, we want children who enter the care of the Council to live within an alternative family setting where they are able to build positive relationships with trusted adults. Where it is in the child’s interests to live in a residential children’s home we expect this to be the best provision that provides the best care.

We want children to be able to remain in their home as long as they wish in line with their needs and wishes and seek to provide high quality supported and independent accommodation for care leavers as they progress on to adulthood that enables them to build their resilience, confidence and life skills as independent adults.

For those children who enter care, securing sufficient accommodation that meets their needs is a critical step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right home to live in at the right time where no additional moves are made, is a vital factor in improving stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in achieving better outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

There is long-standing Elected Member support for children in care and care leavers and this strategy reflects the commitment of the Council to achieve the best outcomes for the children who enter our care.

The strategy, it is underpinned by the continuing financial commitment of the Council to children in care and care leavers shown through the ongoing and increased investment in the fostering service. The commitment to the belief that children should live in their families, schools and communities is also further demonstrated by the Council in financially supporting the development of the One Family Approach Hub.

Sufficiency to achieve the best Outcomes

To enable children to achieve the best outcomes possible within their own families and local communities, or within a suitable care environment we will ensure sufficiency of care and leaving care provision that:

- Continues and builds on our ambition and belief that children should live with their own or extended family wherever possible.

- Promotes permanence and the importance of family and community by seeking to strengthen and improve parent/families ability to care.
- Ensures there is choice and flexibility of placement options that enables children who enter care to live in a family setting where they feel cared for, valued and where their needs are fully met for as long as is needed.
- Is creative, flexible and developmental in being responsive to the changing environment in response to Covid-19.
- Has a thorough understanding of the individual needs of children and young people entering care, living in care or leaving care.
- Ensures that we listen to and learn from the voice of children in care and care leavers
- Continue to achieve timely permanence for children and young people who do enter care.
- Provide excellent support and training to all North Lincolnshire carers including to children whose parents foster as we recognise that this support helps to maintain stability within the family home.
- Carry out detailed assessments of prospective carers (including family and friends – Connected Persons - carers) to ensure their suitability and to ascertain the level of support the carers need to meet the child(ren)s needs.
- Deliver a 'no moves' approach for all children who are in care with a clear intent that they will remain in their foster family home or with connected persons for as long as they need to.
- Ensure that where a child or young persons identified needs are best met within residential care, we proactively work with the child and the relevant professionals to provide them with stability and when they are ready prepare them for family life either with their birth or extended family or with a foster family.
- Develop an agreed range of accommodation options for our young people leaving care requiring alternative accommodation and for care leavers returning to North Lincolnshire from out of area.

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

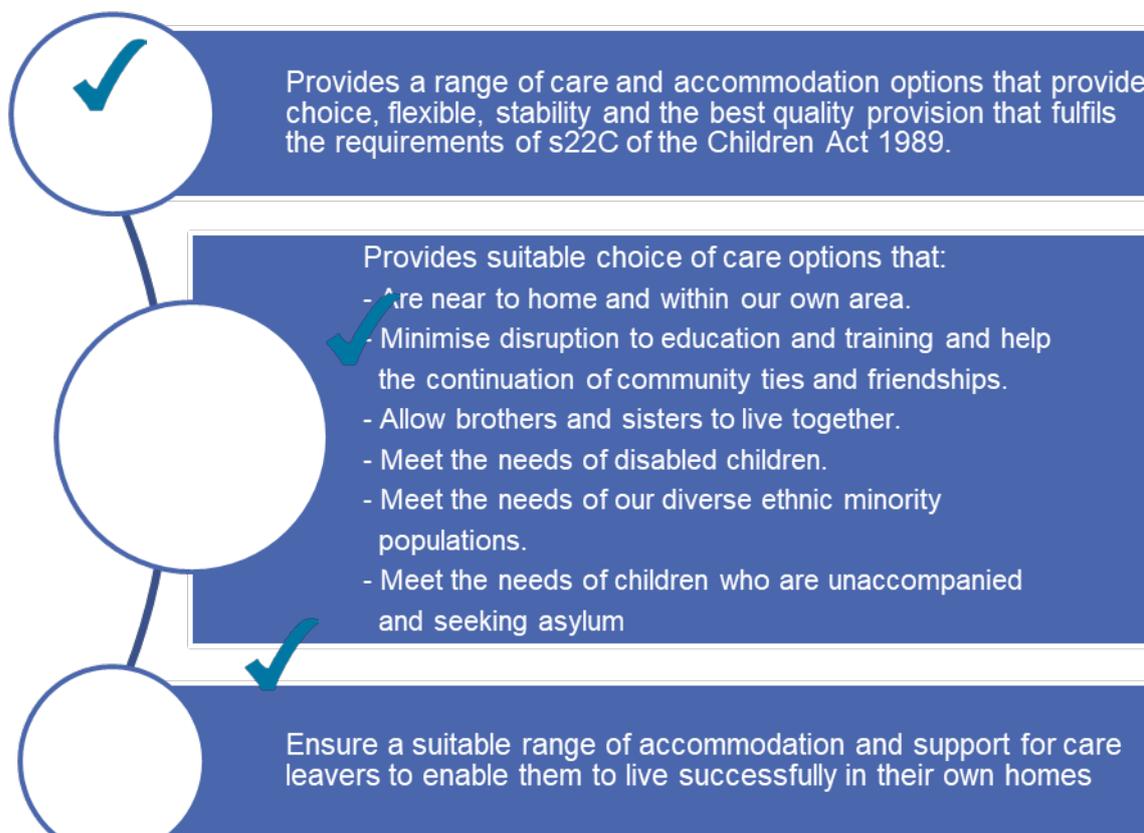
This strategy, in conjunction with the **Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2020-2022**, is monitored and reviewed through our well-established performance improvement mechanisms, including monthly performance monitoring and tracking and the quarterly self-evaluation and review process.



Provision of Sufficient Accommodation

We have high aspirations for our children in care and care leavers which is evidenced by our outstanding Ofsted rating. We want children, young people and families to be able to build upon their strengths, their resilience to find or be enabled to find solutions when things are not going so well and always strive for children to be cared for by their family. Where this is not possible we will ensure that all children and young people who require care are provided with a safe, stable foster family, residential children’s home or supported living options that have been matched to their needs and enable them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.

To achieve this, the Council:



We will continue to strive to increase the range and scope of in-house provision to ensure we have families available to offer choice to children and young people best placed to meet their needs.

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 return to a family living arrangement at the earliest opportunity. Where it continues to be in the child’s needs to remain in care through to adulthood we will proactively support young people to successfully move to suitable provision that is in line with their wishes and needs supporting them to make the successful transition to adulthood and their own home including through the use of our own staying close provision.

North Lincolnshire Council will also continue to develop positive relationships with external providers where this is best placed to meet the individual needs of the small number of children who cannot be accommodated within our provision.

We will continue to enhance the contribution that IRO's make to sufficiency by ensuring the IRO's continue to develop high support/ challenge and to continue asking difficult questions to encourage reflection, review and creativity.

The Needs of Children in our Care and Care Leavers

Profile

Through consistent and effective delivery of early help and a partnership approach that builds resilience and is strengths based, North Lincolnshire continues to enable children to successfully remain within their family networks. As a result of this, children only enter care when it is necessary, with achievable and consistent engagement, planning and support across the partnership to enable children to return to their family where possible.

We use detailed analysis of this data to plan current and future sufficiency needs.

The care and care leavers population:

As at 31 March 2020, the child in care population was 231, showing a sustained reduction throughout 2019/20 (from 251 on 31/03/2019).

During 2019/20 only 54 children entered care which is a significant decrease on the previous year when 132 children entered care. This has continued at a consistent level during the Covid-19 period. Demonstrating that the support provided to families continues to be robust and enables children to remain within their families, schools and communities.

Within this context, the number of children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum has continued to reduce to 16 at the end of 2019/20 (compared with 29 at the end of 2018/19), equating to 6% of the CIC population.

The number of Care Leavers, however, has continued to increase – reflecting the increased children in care population during 2018/19. This has increased to 99 at the end of 2019/20 compared to 83 at the end of 2018/19 and is projected to increase further.

There continue to be a small number of children placed with external providers. The number of children placed in agency placements has reduced year on year. As at 31/02/20, 7.4% of the care population lived in externally commissioned provision.

94% of children in care live with foster carers or are placed for adoption with 94% of children in foster care living with North Lincolnshire approved carers.

The largest group of children in care is 10-15 year olds.

29 children lived with Connected Persons as at 31/03/20, equating to 13% of the care population and in line with the latest national comparator of 13%

Outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers

We know our children and young people well and are therefore able to respond to their individual and wider needs quickly and effectively. The strength of knowing and listening to the children and young people is enhanced by comprehensive performance data and a systematic approach to the analysis of this. Management oversight is embedded at all levels within a comprehensive performance and quality assurance framework.

We actively work to maintain children at home wherever possible. If this is not possible we seek alternative family based permanence through, adoption, foster care, Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders at the earliest opportunity.

Key measures highlight the successful and improving outcomes achieved by children in care and care leavers during 2019/20. These include:

More children experiencing stability within families

The stability of children in care improved during 2019/20 and continues to improve with 9.5% of children experiencing 3 placements and 69% of children who have been in care for 2.5 years+ living in the same home for the last 2 years.

Children experience sustained and meaningful relationships

In 2018/19, 9.2% of children experienced 2 or more changes of social worker over the previous 12 months. This was an improvement on 31/03/18 when it was 18.1%. Performance is better than the national figure of 27%.

Children in care are able to be part of their communities in North Lincolnshire

As at the year-end 2019/20 19% of the CIC population were placed out of the area. This compares very well to the latest published National figure of 41%.

All care leavers who live in the community live in suitable accommodation with support in line with their needs

The majority of care leavers are in education, employment and training and this continues to improve.

The 2019/20 year end provisional figure for those aged 19-21 years in EET is 61%. This compares well to the latest National figure of 52% and Statistical Neighbours at 51%.

The provisional figure for 17 and 18 year olds in EET is 79%, compared to the latest National figure of 64% and Statistical Neighbour figure of 62%.

Very low numbers of children in care are engaged in criminal behaviour

Only 1.5% of children in care over a year received a final warning or conviction during 2019/20 compared to the latest national figure of 3%

Children in Care continue to make more progress in Reading and Writing between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 than the national average.

Children progress to timely permanence

The North Lincolnshire 3 year average for 2016-19 was 318 days, compared to the England average of 391 days. This has improved to 274 days in 2017-20

We are successful in finding permanent families for children through adoption, including those with complex needs and older children. We strongly believe in the right plan for the right child.

During the Covid-19 period, appropriate matches have continued to be found for children with adoptive and foster carers – including returning children to local carers as part of their plan who were placed in external settings.

Children in care and care leavers consistently say that they feel listened to and are able to articulate any issues or concerns.

Performance information highlights that a significant outcome achieved is around that of both the one family approach and early permanence planning meaning that children do not change placements. This means that we are enabling children to live with a family who can offer both support to return to their birth family or stability and permanency where this is not possible.

Adoption

We continue to and have consistently achieved excellent outcomes for children where adoption is their plan. We can evidence our success in finding permanent families for children, including those with complex needs and older children. We strongly believe in the right plan for the right child, we would not make an adoption decision based upon the child's age or complexities. If adoption is deemed to be the right plan for the child in securing permanency, then this is the plan that is progressed with our search for a family taking into account how a child's needs will be met. Our figures tell us that we do consider adoption for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home. We are able to demonstrate timely planning and placement in all adoption work.

North Lincolnshire Council continues to be 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, not only locally but regionally and nationally. North Lincolnshire have formally joined with other Local Authorities as part of the **Regional Adoption Agency 'Family Adoption Links'**.

Stable Relationships

Extensive support and oversight is in place to prevent children moving placements. This includes Family Solutions Meetings, oversight by managers, regular stability meetings and review. Carers

receive the training, support and communication they need to continue to provide a stable home for children where they can build and develop relationships. The number of children in care experiencing no or only one move continues to improve and increased further over the year.

During 2019/20 the multi-agency 'You Say Who' practice framework was further embedded in practice to continue to place sustainable relationships at the heart of planning for children. This includes building on the strengthened practice in relation to reunification of children in long-term care to their family utilising the NSPCC Reunification Framework highlighted in the Care Crisis Review.

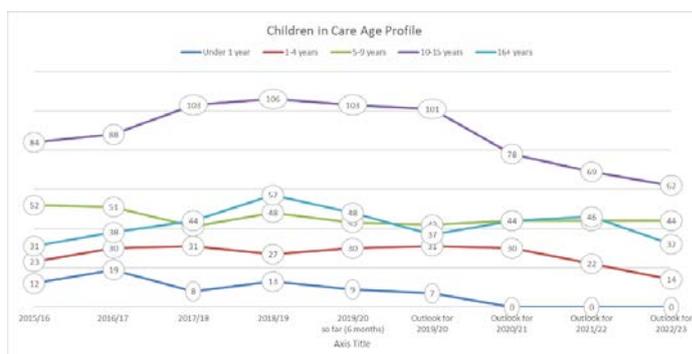
Projecting the Needs of the Children in Care and Care Leaver Population

Children in Care

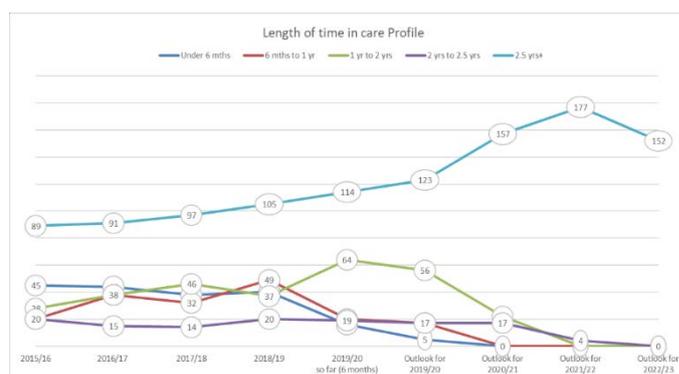
Over the last year the number of children entering care has reduced and the overall population has also shown a decrease. The anticipated future trend is that this will continue, and potentially decrease further through the development of the One Family Approach. It is, however also anticipated that, whilst a smaller number, those children who enter care and those who remain within the care system will have increasingly complex needs, emphasising the importance of continuing to build the choice, support, skills and availability of carers.

Whilst future trends in relation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are subject to variation, the substantial increase during 2018/19 has subsequently reduced. Alongside this, there has been an increase in younger children remaining within their family through the effective use of the family solutions approach, the PLO process and alternatives within wider family being identified. This is likely to be further increased through the One Family Approach.

If this continues then the age profile of the care population is projected to have the majority of children continuing to be aged 10-15 with a reduction in young people aged 16+ living in supported accommodation and fewer younger children entering care as solutions within their own family or alternative family arrangements are identified. This highlights the ongoing need for carers to care for older children and provide stability through to adulthood.



As a consequence of the increase in the age profile over the last 3 years, there has also been an increase in the length of time children remain in the care system as it is more likely that older children will remain in care. To ensure stability for these children it continues to be a priority to recruit sufficient carers to provide choice and suitable care that enables good matching and the children to remain within the same family for as long as is needed.



Care Leavers

Over the past 6 years, in North Lincolnshire we have seen a change in our population of young people leaving care. This change is both significant in terms of the overall number, but also the demographic.

Since 2014/15, the overall Care Leaving population has increased by 63%. This increase can be correlated to the increase in young people entering care who are unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees, alongside the clear practice principles around young people remaining in care until 18 where required.

With this increase and change in the population, the complexity of the work of the service has naturally diversified. Key areas of recent practice development has included the work with young people who face risks relating to exploitation/CCE and contextual safeguarding. We have also built on and developed the support to our unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children who have arrived in North Lincolnshire and navigating the cultural changes, asylum and immigration systems.

We have listened to what young people have told us about their experiences within and leaving care and, in order to enhance the services to young people as they progress to adulthood, are bringing the accommodation and support offer to care leavers 'in-house' to the Council. This will enable us to further develop services to care leavers that provide them with the best accommodation and support.

To support this developing population, and the increased challenges faced, we have reviewed the service offer to our young people and considered how our services can closely align with our ambitions for our young people. Therefore, a key decision was taken for the care leaving services previously delivered by PHASE CIC to return 'in house', to support and build on the council wide integrated care leaving service and maximise our ambitions utilising the combined skills, experience and resources of the corporate family and partnership.

The accommodation of care leavers includes the provision of a range of accommodation. As the population increases, the choice and flexibility of accommodation will need to reflect their diverse needs.

The current position in relation to their accommodation shows that the biggest proportion of our young people reside within semi-independent accommodation, with the majority of these being provided directly by North Lincolnshire Council

Of the current population of 109 Care Leavers:

- 42% live in semi-independent (supported accommodation)
- 37% live in their own (independent) accommodation
- 3% live in Supported Lodgings
- 8% live with their former foster carers in 'Staying Put' arrangements

The remaining 10% of care leavers live in alternative settings including with their family, residential care and in a very small number of cases, custody.

Delivering the Sufficiency Strategy – Progress so far

Helping Children to remain in their family networks

The preventive work of our Social Work Service resource, the development of the contextual safeguarding approach to effectively manage risk in the community and the flexible use of creative short breaks has meant fewer children entering and remaining in care.

The Children's MARS Board provides a line of sight on early help performance, focusing on the Children's MARS Local Arrangements intent on building children, young people and family's resilience, working to implement and embed early help related interventions and facilitating a supportive environment for developments.

The FaSST (Families are Safe, Supported and Transformed) service offer has been built upon in order to further develop the 7-day service that focuses on restoration work and strengthening parenting relationships and the family's resilience where children are on 'the edge' of care and supporting children and young people to be reunited with their families.

The FaSST service continues to provide targeted help to families, successfully maintaining children and young people safely within their families. During 2019/20, of 268 families receiving a service from FaSST localities, only 9 children (1.5%) entered care during their involvement.

Targeted family support from FaSST and children's centres results in effective help for families, evidenced through feedback and data showing that 91% of FaSST cases were stepped down successfully to universal services.

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

Building on our understanding of the populations in North Lincolnshire, including children in care, care leavers and wider populations our aim is to enable children to remain in or return to their own families, schools and communities. Where this is not possible to achieve the best choice of care and leaving care options that are local, provide choice, flexibility and stability and are there for as long as the child needs it. We have therefore invested extensively in local provision and continue to build on and develop North Lincolnshire Fostering, Adoption and family support provision that both prevents children needing to enter care, supports children to return to their families and supports children and their carers when children remain in care.

We have also developed a range of provision suitable to the needs of Care Leavers as they progress in to adulthood, with accommodation choices that include through Staying Put arrangements with their carers; staying close to their carers so they can be supported; independent supported accommodation and their own tenancies within social housing. All care leavers have a plan and support to help them succeed within their home.

Sufficiency of Placements – Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention

Ensuring there is sufficiency of family placements is a key priority to promote choice, matching and stability for children in care. To build on and develop this further during 2019/20 the activities to recruit and retain foster carers were updated and refreshed.

A robust plan to recruit foster carers. To achieve the ambition to recruit new carers and increase the availability of places, strategies were implemented to increase the recruitment and retention of

both mainstream and short break foster carers. This has shown a continued improvement in recruitment activity and statistics. This includes:

- Planned local events in different areas across North Lincolnshire throughout the year;
- Increased the frequency of open evenings which to be held monthly throughout the region;
- Developed a revised media strategy in relation advertising from October 19 - this promotes fostering recruitment and local open evenings and is targeted to specific media outlets relevant to the area where the open evening is held.
- Posters and banners advertising fostering re-designed and placed throughout the North Lincolnshire area
- Using local shops / public venues to promote specific open evenings
- Link with local businesses to promote awareness of fostering

Fostering recruitment now works closely with the area representative from Migration Yorkshire in relation to the recruitment of carers for children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum. The designated worker for recruitment has attended a recruitment event and this joint close working at recruitment events is scheduled to continue.

Skills to foster Training - to further improve the recruitment and assessment of new carers, the Skills to Foster training course was updated in August 2019. The course now reflects more the themes and content of the 'Fostering Network' course. To improve this further and ensure the course is holistic and comprehensive and ensures that the carers recruited have the knowledge, skills and understanding to provide the best care, this has been developed to a bespoke North Lincolnshire package. This includes contributions as part of the course by the designated Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer, existing Foster Carers and care experienced young people. Oversight of this course, as well as the course facilitation is provided by managers within the Fostering Service.

The benefit to the service is that carers are now better informed concerning the fostering task and are able to discuss potential issues / concerns with their assessing social workers prior to assessment completion leading to improved matching and a reduced likelihood of newer carers requesting placements end.

Fostering Recruitment Officer - to continue to improve the recruitment process and ensure a speedy and effective response to all enquiries, a designated role was piloted within the service. This enhances the initial response to all fostering enquiries, and is responsible for enquires through stage 1 of the assessment process up until an assessing social worker is allocated the case to undertake the home study. It ensures consistency in the response and has contributed to an increase in the proportion who progress from enquiry to assessment.

Retention of fostering families has continued to improve in 19/20 with only 9 households resigning within the year which is an improvement on 17 in 18/19. North Lincolnshire offers a range of community events which supports the service as a community. This enhances peer support in addition the buddy processes in place. The service has a strong Foster Carer Association which is passionate about maintaining a sense of community and they also offer events and coffee mornings.

Enhanced training – to further enhance foster carers skills and confidence to support children and young people throughout their life journey the service offers a mixture of direct and online training. The service continues to deliver “bite size” learning where foster carers can attend 2 hour training sessions on topics pertinent to providing safe and nurturing care. This includes attachment, therapeutic parenting, UASC, understanding allegations, and NVR. This is part of a developing suite

of opportunities for foster carers to access training appropriate to their work and family commitments.

During the year the service launched a range of 'carer and child joint training' sessions. Carers had feedback that the training they receive is valuable and the children would benefit from hearing this alongside them. By attending training together there will be shared language, understanding and discussions will be stimulated. The topics chosen were online safety, exploitation and attachment. The training plan spans the school breaks in 2020 with the first session on online safety having taken place in February.

Fostering allowances recognise the skills, training and development of foster carers. Carers receive an enhanced rate alongside the support, expectation and opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills as carers. Enhanced allowances ensure the sufficiency of 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.

Increased number of fostering households – The combination of recruitment and retention has increased the number of approved fostering households' available thus increasing placement flexibility and choice and contributing to improved stability for children.

At the end of March 2020, the Fostering Service was supporting **133 fostering households** which is an increase from 126 the previous year.

In line with the North Lincolnshire Council Sufficiency Strategy, the Fostering Service was ambitious for 2019-20 in prioritising recruiting new foster carers. Consequently during the year there were 16 approvals (including connected persons) and the number of carers and places available showed an increase during the year.

This means that on 31st March 2020 there were **288 foster places available** for children which had increased from 275 the previous year.

The improved recruitment also meant that by the end of the year, building on the increase in carers during the year, there were a further 14 households in the assessment process (31st March 2020). This has also meant further improvement on the excellent ratio of children living in a family rather than residential setting.

Placement support meetings, now referred to as Family Solutions Meetings, have been reviewed to embed the strengths-based approach of signs of safety whilst considering the impact upon the foster family as a whole. Family solutions meeting processes have also been reviewed to ensure that each family has a support plan which is regularly reviewed by all the services around them. The support plan and review will be tailored to the individual family. Workshops around placement stability took place with all social work teams to ensure a joint approach.

Support to carers to maintain stability includes 1.5 Fostering Support Worker posts to provide immediate support to foster carers when a potential fostering family disruption is identified. Carers continue to be offered existing support initiatives such as car loans, Children in care's Education

Service and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) support to maintain placements and increase family stability for children in care.

Partnership with Carers - further developed the relationship with our foster carers as partners including building on the role of the North Lincolnshire Foster Carers Association in co-chairing bi-monthly meetings with senior managers, carers taking a lead in developing activities and events and FCA members acting as Fostering Ambassadors. The strength of the fostering community is a key element in continuing to increase and support carers and ensure sufficient placement choice.

Consistently low number of children living with external providers – on 31st of March 2020 the number of CiC living in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) fostering families was 9 maintaining the high performance in placing children within North Lincolnshire.

This has shown a positive trend over the last 5 years:

Children placed externally;
 2018/19 - 7 (2.8%)
 2017/18 - 11 (4.8%)
 2016/17 - 15 (6.7%)
 2015/16 - 19 (9.4%)

The low number placed externally reflects the availability and choice of carers in North Lincolnshire and prior to consideration of any child for a commissioned placement all options within local provision must have been fully explored with robust management oversight, the flexible use of resources and formal decision making to ensure it is fully in line with the child's needs. Extensive checks are carried out on any identified external provision prior to agreement to place.

Less than 4% of the children in care population live with externally commissioned carers.

Invested in our in-house adoption service through investment in social workers to build the sufficiency of available adopters to give children the quickest access to adoption services and provide adoption within the child's timescales. This has meant that North Lincolnshire continues to successfully recruit adopters with whom we have been able to place our own children, this has resulted in timely matching and placement as well as reducing the inter-agency fee. It has also meant that we have been successful in matching and placing children identified as 'harder to place'.

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.

As the numbers of children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum increased, accommodation options were strengthened leading to good outcomes

At the end of March 2020 there were 16 children in care who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum, and 33 who were previously unaccompanied children seeking asylum who are now care leavers. All of these young people have received an immediate response where their diverse needs were assessed in line with guidance

Suitable accommodation has been provided for all unaccompanied young people who present within North Lincolnshire. This includes within foster families, residential provision and supported accommodation matched to their needs. This has meant all unaccompanied young people being placed within North Lincolnshire provision from the point of arrival.

The 'Children who are Unaccompanied and Seeking Asylum Pathway' has been developed alongside partners to promote consistent and timely responses to young people as they present. As

a result, all children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum live locally in suitable accommodation with an identified package that meets their needs.

The 'Holding On' multi-agency practice approach is ongoing and continues to adapt and develop

The 'Holding On' approach is a voluntary offer of support for mothers and fathers who have experienced children being removed from their care and / or who are at risk of repeat removals of children from their care. The approach provides an opportunity for the adults to focus on their own needs and to learn new ways to adapt to challenges and stresses. The model is based on the premise that resilience is something that can be learned and developed, if the adult is given the opportunity to discover their strengths and abilities.

The North Lincolnshire model has been developed following consultation with parents of children no longer in their care, and with extended family members. It aims to be an inclusive and sustainable model, whereby a 'support offer' can be made to both Mothers and Fathers, resourced through the collaborative efforts of existing agencies and services working together.

We have continued to build on and strengthen early help, including to those potentially on the edge of entering care – the investment in and prioritisation of early help across the partnership ensures that families are enabled and empowered to build upon their strengths and develop their resilience to find or be enabled to find solutions when things are not going so well.

Sufficiency of accommodation for care leavers

We continue to provide a range and choice of provision for care leavers and other post-16 provision that ensures young people have the support they need to remain living in safe stable placements with adults they have positive and meaningful relationships with. This includes:

- Ongoing commitment to children in our care remaining with their foster carers as part of "Staying Put".
- Built on and developed the provision of safe, suitable and sustainable accommodation with the support young people need to progress successfully to adulthood
- Enabled young people leaving Kingfisher Lodge at the age of 18 to 'stay close' in the adjoining facility of independent studios to support them to make successful transitions into adulthood.

There is an ongoing development work in relation to Care Leavers. This includes comprehensive accommodation and support services provided 'in house' across the Council with continuing prioritisation and support from partners. Building on our offer to meet the needs of the care leaving population in North Lincolnshire, ensuring that we offer the highest quality services to our young people.

Building on Success – Next Steps

The sufficiency, choice and quality of care, accommodation and provision for children in care and care leavers continues to be a key priority underpinned by the belief that all children should have the opportunity wherever possible to remain within their family or, if this is not possible a well-matched alternative family. To continue to achieve this we will:

- ▶ Continue to provide choice of high quality safe, stable care and leaving care placements and accommodation that is matched to the needs of the children and young people and enables them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.
- ▶ Continue to build on the range and scope of in-house fostering and adoption carers to offer choice to children and young people best matched their needs.
- ▶ Develop short break foster carers as part of the preventative 'One Family' approach so that children are able to remain with their own family.
- ▶ Further develop accommodation options, choice and support for Care Leavers as part of an enhanced integrated service.
- ▶ Take an active role in the Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Agency to ensure the prioritisation of recruitment, availability and support to adoptive carers is enhanced by the regional model, adding value to meet the needs of our children awaiting adoption.
- ▶ Continue to reduce the number of agency and out of area placements by increasing and utilising local provision.
- ▶ Continue to challenge ourselves and each other to build and develop choice in care and supported accommodation that reflects our council values of equality of opportunity, excellence, self-responsibility, and integrity, and underpins our focus on prioritising the most vulnerable.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Continue to provide suitable packages as alternatives to custody and ensure the availability of foster carers as an alternative to remand or overnight detention in line with the Custody Concordat.
- ▶ Provide local children's home capacity for the small number of children whose needs are best met in residential care. The role of the children's home will have a strong emphasis on enabling children to return to family living either with their own family or within a foster family through a partnership approach.
- ▶ Continue to develop further opportunities to involve children and young people in the planning and delivery of services including the provision of care and accommodation.

Key Developments

To continue the sustained success of the Sufficiency Strategy over a number of years, we will build on the key priorities. We will deliver this through the following key developments:

Strengthen the ‘edge of care’ offer through the One Family Approach

Developed and endorsed by the Integrated Children’s Trust, a One Family Approach to strategy, commissioning, planning, and practice provides a vision and framework for a new system that places children and families at the centre.

The One Family Approach is founded upon our North Lincolnshire values and beliefs, capturing our intent to keep children in their families, their schools and their communities. It provides a model for innovative, integrated working which builds upon strengths, find solutions in families and communities, builds resilience and confidence, and enables independence.

This is planned to be enhanced during 2020 – 2022 through the creation of an integrated One Family Approach Hub. The Hub will be central to our work helping children stay with their families, return to their families, in their communities, and retain independence.

The One Family Approach Hub will enable families and facilitate targeted help so that children and families can build resilience, confidence, and stronger relationships to reduce conflict and stresses that lead to harm and family breakdown. This help will be responsive to need, and build upon family strengths, to improve family outcomes. During 2020/2021 this includes:

- Development of a One Family Approach Hub including the ability to offer registered care.
- Integration of the existing residential teams alongside targeted help staff to bring together expertise and skills around working with adolescents and their families, in order to create a core offer based on the One Family Approach to helping children remain with their families, return swiftly and safely, and to achieve family-based care where possible.
- Additional management and staff capacity to deliver the One Family Hub through the development of staff resources to deliver the hub.

The One Family Hub will support local communities by helping families experiencing challenges and distress to cope, to stay together, and to work towards improvements in relationships. Working with the whole family, often including wider family members and friends, the One Family Hub will bring together a range of professionals to enable positive change.

Working closely with partners, other council services, and community groups, the One Family Hub team will seek to involve families as far as possible with the things that are universally available to them in order to secure sustainable change into the future.

The One Family Hub, in helping to keep families together, will contribute to reducing the number of children placed externally, maximising the use of local provision for children in care.

Recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure placement availability and choice

Enhanced recruitment, support and retention to carers through investment in the service will reduce the need to use external provision. This is planned to include:

- Investment in Fostering Recruitment Officers to build on the successful pilot of this role and further improve the initial response when members of the public enquire about fostering

- A Marketing Officer with a dedicated lead in fostering publicity, information and recruitment to further develop the recruitment of carers and ensure there is a strong presence within the local and wider communities that encourages people to consider fostering.
- **Integration of Supported Lodgings** within the fostering service and increased staffing capacity within the service. This will increase the choice and availability of accommodation for older children who either move on from fostering, have been cared for in other ways or present as homeless. The recruitment of Supported Lodgings providers will form an integral part of the recruitment campaigns and the offer to children in care and care leavers.
- **Recruitment – building on the progress over the year**, services will work together to develop creative methods and resources to increase the availability of carers through a modernised approach to the recruitment of new foster carers. The revised recruitment strategy includes:
 - Annual programme of recruitment activity that targets both mainstream carers as a priority group and also targeted campaigns that focus on specific groups including:
 - Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
 - Sibling groups
 - Older children
 - Supported Lodgings
 - Children with disabilities
 - Creative use of technology media and physical recruitment campaigns including:
 - the use of social media, newspaper, radio and other on-line opportunities including Facebook, Twitter and web-based activity.
 - Working with local communities and businesses to raise awareness, distribute information, raise awareness and target specific areas.
 - Re-designing and enhancing web tools and the website
 - Targeted events and opportunities to publicise in the community
 - Support from the foster carer community to share their experience and enthusiasm, for fostering

Continued Focus on Improving Stability

Whilst the placement stability of Children in Care has improved, there is a continued focus on ensuring that children achieve stability where they are able to form meaningful and permanent relationships with carers. To continue to build on this, services will:

- Embed and build on the 'You Say Who...' model to enable and support children to identify and build relationships with those who are important to them
- Continue to work with carers to support them to continue to provide stability through a multi-agency team around the child approach; the use of family solutions meetings; training and development, peer support and dedicated support workers.
- Continue to focus on building and supporting relationships within families at all stages in the child's journey with a view to enabling children to remain within and return to their family where this is possible
- Continue to develop and build on the 'Holding On' model

- Continue to prioritise stability within educational settings that minimises changes in educational provision and ensures children have the support they need to be successful.

Further Development of our offer to Care Leavers

The 2016 Government publication *'Keep on Caring – Supporting young people from Care to Independence, 2016'* clearly outlines the Government's commitment to promoting and improving outcomes for Care Leavers. They set out 5 key outcomes that need to be achieved through effective corporate parenting. They are:

- ▶ All young people should be better prepared and supported to live independently
- ▶ Improve access to education, employment and training.
- ▶ care leavers should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure
- ▶ improved access to health support
- ▶ care leavers should achieve financial stability

The service for Care Leavers is an ambitious project which aims to redesign the service offer to our young people who have left our care. The service development is an essential component in ensuring that we continue to offer the highest level of service to our young people in line with the increased care leaver population over the last 5 years, and the predicted future increase.

It involves the development of the services providing support and accommodation to care leavers and homeless young people. This includes prioritisation and integration within the Council's Housing Advice services and across the Council and partners to provide a unified, holistic response. This ensures our service is aligned with the Council's wider ambitions, and also ensures that our young people can benefit from the additional resources that come with the further integration of services.

Other key aspects to be developed within the service include:

- Further review of the current Pathway Planning practices, to create a tiered approach to intervention which is based upon individual needs of young people.
- Increase the portfolio of high quality accommodation that ensures young people have a wider choice of where they would like to live. All accommodation to include broadband internet at no cost to the young people.
- Implementation of a dynamic housing model, which enables young people to reside within semi-independent accommodation provided by the Council, but which gives the opportunity for the young people to take on the tenancy in their own right when they are ready. This will ensure that young people do not have to move from their home if they do not want to.
- Develop a new suite of practice standards that enable us to capture the progress made by our young people, and better understand their current experiences.
- Work closely with our corporate parents to expand the amount of opportunities available for work experience, training and employment, and have a robust incentive programme in place to support young people in their engagement with such offers.

What will Success Look Like?

By 2022, we will expect to see:

- ▶ Further reduction in the overall care population as a result of:
 - Developing and embedding the One Family Approach to enable children and young people to be cared for within their family.
 - Continued increased use of Adoption and Special Guardianship – achieved in a timely manner.
 - Continued focus on reunification for children in care where it is in their interests
- ▶ A further increase in the number of North Lincolnshire foster carers in particular mainstream carers and carers for older children and those with more complex needs.
- ▶ A reduction in the use of external provision by building on and increasing our ability to meet a wide range of needs locally.
- ▶ Increased choice of placements for children resulting from reductions in numbers coupled with increases in approved placements.
- ▶ Continued increase in the proportion of the children in care cared for within a family setting rather than a residential one.
- ▶ A continued reduction in the use of external provision by improving our ability to meet a wider range of needs locally.
- ▶ Continuation of the downward trend in children experiencing changes of carer and greater stability for those in care longer-term.
- ▶ Children continuing to report high levels of satisfaction with their accommodation in exit interviews and other surveys.
- ▶ Children and young people who enter care continue to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity.
- ▶ Increased choice for children in care and care leavers in relation to the home that they live in.
- ▶ An increased choice of care and accommodation options for older young people and for care leavers returning from external fostering and residential homes.

Care Leavers

It is important that our young people are able to hold us to account against our priorities, and that we ensure that we achieve our collective goals as corporate parents. We have, therefore, identified success measures against each of our priorities that we will be striving to achieve.

- ▶ Continued increase in care leavers remaining in ‘Staying Put’ placements post 18
- ▶ All care leavers are supported to successfully live in their home by a suitable qualified and experienced personal advisor, and this personal advisor remains the lead worker for the duration of the young person’s journey as a care leaver.
- ▶ All care leavers are offered the opportunity to attend suitable drop-in support sessions, access advocacy support, and are aware of their rights to make a complaint if required.
- ▶ All young people should be able to share ideas or comments regarding future service deliver through a centralised electronic system.
- ▶ All care leavers living in the community are living in suitable accommodation.

- ▶ Young people do not experience changes of accommodation that is not in line with their Pathway Plan.
- ▶ More care Leavers are in Education, Employment and Training.
- ▶ More care Leavers are accessing Higher Education/University
- ▶ All our care leavers have an identified 'team' of social and professional support that enables them to live successfully in their accommodation.
- ▶ All our care leavers in supported accommodation have access to the internet.
- ▶ Young people are empowered and enabled to participate in their community, have equality of opportunity, and access to creative, flexible support at the earliest point, in the right place by the right people
- ▶ All care leavers have a health passport and are registered with local health services in their community.

Appendix 1: 2020 – 2022 Sufficiency Delivery Plan

| Key Development | Action(s) | Milestones / target | When by? | Lead/Lead Group |
|---|--|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Strengthen the 'edge of care' offer through the One Family Approach | Development of a One Family Approach Hub including a second registered children's home | Dedicated staffing capacity to deliver the OFA Hub Approval of the proposed development of the hub with agreement to progress | March 2021 | Head of Service, Early Help and Protection / Project Lead and KFL |
| | Integration of the existing residential teams alongside targeted help staff | Subject to the above – designation of staffing teams to the new hub | October 2020 | Head of Service, Early Help and Protection / Project Lead and KFL |
| | Create a core offer based on the One Family Approach | Core offer in place Core offer communicated with staff and families | September 2020 October 2020 | Head of Service, Early Help and Protection / Project Lead and KFL |
| Recruitment and retention of foster carers | Annual targeted recruitment campaign | Recruitment plan in place | June 2020 | Service Lead, Resources / Project Lead and KFL |
| | | Increase in the number of enquiries relation to target groups | July 2020 | |
| | | Increased proportion progressing to assessment / approval | November 2020 | |
| | Re-design web pages and develop foster carer portal | Updated web page in place | October 2020 | Service Lead, Resources |
| | | Consultation / feedback from prospective carers regarding the accessibility and use of web page Increased number of carers who use web-page and access the portal | January 2021 March 2021 | |
| | Establish marketing role to enhance foster carer recruitment | Post in place and appointed to | October 2020 | Service Lead, Resources |
| Develop and build Supported Lodgings within fostering service including increased staffing capacity | Supported Lodgings established within fostering service | May 2020 | Service Lead, Resources | |
| Increase Recruitment Officer capacity in fostering service | Post established within fostering service | October 2020 | Service Lead, Resources | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|---------------------------------|--|
| Continued Focus on Improving Stability | Review and develop support offer to foster carers utilising 'Family Solutions' approach | Increased use of Family Solutions Meetings to support and increase stability | November 2020 | Service Lead, Resources / Service Lead, Social Work |
| Development of the Integrated Service for Care Leavers | Develop leaving care service 'in-house' provision | Leaving care provision of accommodation and support established as 'in-house' to the Council | July 2020 | Group Manager - Environmental Health and Housing / Service Lead, Social Work |
| | Implementation of dynamic housing model Establish accommodation pathway with colleagues across the Council | Model established and agreed with partners | October 2020 | Group Manager - Environmental Health and Housing / Service Lead, Social Work |
| | | Implementation of integrated model Increase in availability and choice of high-quality accommodation for care leavers | December 2020 March 2021 | |
| | Review and refresh Care Leavers Offer | Updated offer in place and agreed with partners Updated offer published and shared with care leavers | September 2020 | Service Lead, Social Work |
| | | | October 2020 | |
| | Build capacity within the Leaving Care Service | Review and revise staffing capacity within the service New structure agreed and implemented | September 2020 | Service Lead, Social Work |
| November 2020 | | | | |
| Further review of the current Pathway Planning practices to create a tiered approach | Review of existing Pathway Planning process undertaken including engagement and feedback from care leavers New approach developed and agreed New approach implemented and embedded within practice | October 2020 | Service Lead, Social Work | |
| | | November 2020 | | |
| | | January 2021 | | |