

North Lincolnshire Council

Children in Care and Care Leavers

Sufficiency Strategy

2018-2020



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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set 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 for children in care is vital in supporting the delivery of improved 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.

As an outstanding Local Authority for Children's Services (Ofsted 2017) North Lincolnshire council has a strong ambition to drive forward improvements to the children in care system. To lead the sector in finding new and innovative ways to find the right home for children in care and care leavers, which reduces the stigma associated with being in care and is predicated on the notion of "Ordinary lives" for our most vulnerable children and young people.

"North Lincolnshire Council has impressively sustained good and outstanding services for children and families since the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. Its focus on keeping children and young people at the heart of everything is the most striking element of this outstanding local authority. The voice and views of children and young people are effectively sought and considered, in a range of creative ways to inform and evaluate strategic developments, and this is making a significant difference to their experiences. Effective direct work undertaken by a well-trained and stable workforce ensures that children are engaged fully, and this leads to measurably improved outcomes. This is evident across the full range of social work services". Ofsted final report on the inspection of Children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, September 2017.

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 in the community so that fewer children enter care. Where children do enter care our aim is wherever possible to reunify children with their families or extended families in a timely and supportive way.

For those children who do 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 relation to better outcomes for children in care.

We achieve this by:

- Listening to children and families and we place a great emphasis on what they say in our service development.
- By having a thorough understanding of the individual needs of children and young people in care or entering care.
- Having comprehensive performance data which is used in a range of regular planned meetings to ensure our sufficiency duty is managed in real time throughout the year. A list of these meetings is listed at appendix 2.
- We use detailed analysis of this data to plan sufficiency needs at the current time and to help forecast sufficiency needs into the future.
- Service Managers across all parts of the service, attend the weekly Legal, Decision Making and Tracking Meeting and specific cohorts meetings where we track all children and young people in care and entering care to ensure that every child is living in a home that best meets their individual needs.
- There is weekly oversight of the permanency tracker by Service Managers from across the service which prevents drift occurring and provides senior management oversight for all children and young people in care.
- We provide excellent support and training to all North Lincolnshire carers and we specifically provide support to children whose parents foster as we recognise that this support helps to maintain the stability within the family home.
- Where the local authority places children with family and friends we carry out detailed assessments of the prospective carers to ensure their suitability and to ascertain the level of support the carers will need to care for the children in the long term.
- 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.
- Through a culture of high support and challenge and robust oversight by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service.

This strategy; including the specific actions in the action plan, is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis through our well-established performance improvement mechanisms, including the monthly performance monitoring and tracking and the quarterly performance review process.

Vision and Principles

We will:

- Continue with our ambition and belief that children should live with their own or extended family wherever possible. We will achieve this by our continued investment in early help and targeted support which is set in a broader context of outstanding social work practice and highly effective partnership arrangements.
- Take a long term view of permanence and the importance of family and community networks by seeking to strengthen and improve parent/families ability to care.
- Where a child or young person does enter care we will continue to strive to ensure that they live in a family setting where they feel cared for, valued and where their needs can be fully met.
- Continue to have strong ambitions and high aspirations for all of our children and young people in care and leaving care as a good parent should.
- Ensure that practice is informed by the voice of children and young people in care and our continued ambition to improve our offer to children in care and care leavers will be co-produced with our children and young people.
- 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 continuing to target our specialist resources 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.
- Continue to achieve permanence at the earliest point for children and young people who do enter care.
- Deliver a 'no moves' approach for all children who enter care with a clear intent that when a child enters care 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.

- Provide a range of care options that provide choice, stability and swift permanence and that fulfil the requirements of s22C of the Children Act 1989 ie, care options 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 brothers and sisters to live together.
 - Meet the needs of disabled children.
 - Meet the needs of our diverse ethnic minority populations.
- Continue with management arrangements that provides a robust and bespoke focus on looked after children, concentrating on the journey of each individual child and young person.
- Provide a wide range of services that help improve outcomes for children in care in the areas of safety, education and training, health, having fun, building relationships, positive engagement and preparation for a successful adulthood. We do this through a new “ordinary lives” approach that aims to reduce the stigma of being in care and enables children and young people in care to lead lives that replicate that of their peers who are not in care. This new approach will be led and overseen by the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP).
- 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 needs and wishes of children and young people.

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 always strive for children to be cared for by their family or extended family. Where this is not possible we will ensure that all children and young people who require accommodation are provided with a safe, stable foster family, residential children’s home or independent 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.

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 family choice to children and young people best placed to meet their needs. North Lincolnshire Council will also continue to develop our excellent relationship with external provision where this is best placed to meet the needs of children who cannot be accommodated within our provision.

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 longer term residential care through to independence is needed we will proactively support young people to successfully move to independence through the use of our own staying close 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.

Levels of Need for Children and Young People in Our Care

Whilst the overall care population continues to be in-line with or lower than statistical and national comparators, there has been an 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 in care over that period. We know from statistics collated that:

- There have been an increased number of children entering care who are UASC and older children.
- There has been a substantial reduction in children in care entering care under s20 with only 40 of the children in care cohort subject to s20 (17% of the care population). Of these, 17 are UASC.
- The proportion, therefore, of children in care subject to a legal order has increased, we understand the reasons for this increase and continually review the reasons for children entering care to inform our sufficiency strategy.
- 84% of children in care live in foster care or are placed for adoption.
- 94% of all children living in a foster family are living with North Lincolnshire Council approved foster carers.
- The majority of the care population is cared for locally, a small minority of children are placed out of the area and, this is the lowest it has been in 5 years. There has been a slight increase in children living out of the area and more than 20 miles.
- The largest group of children in care is 10-15 year olds. There has been a reduction of children in care aged under 10 years.
- The number of children leaving care was similar to the number of children entering care bucking the trend of more children entering than leaving care in the past.

See appendix 1 for full profile data for 2017/2018.

Outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers

We know our children and young people in care well and we are able to respond to assessed needs on an individual basis, this is supported by comprehensive performance data and a number of very effective meetings which provide clear management oversight of our 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, permanent foster care, Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders at the earliest opportunity.

Overall, we are achieving 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.

Performance information highlights that a significant outcome achieved is around that of early permanence planning. Where it is appropriate to provide an early permanence placement we are doing so. This means that for many of our cohort of children we are enabling them to live at the earliest opportunity with a family who can offer them permanency and who are able to meet their needs, should they not be able to return to birth family.

In 2017/18 all, bar one child where the plan was adoption, was placed with North Lincolnshire approved adopters which evidences the understanding we had around our sufficiency needs.

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.

The number of children in care experiencing no or only one move has increased over the last 12 months. The challenge currently is to achieve stability for a small cohort of children who have moved twice or more and for those children who have been in care for over 2.5 years, a robust plan is in place to meet this challenge based on a thorough understanding of individual child's needs.

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 is better than SN and England comparators.

The service has maintained high standards of care for children and young people in care and consistently achieved positive outcomes, evidenced by the 2017 Ofsted Outstanding judgement.

Over the last 12 months four young people have moved from Kingfisher Lodge into the adjoining “Staying Close” provision to support them to transition into living independently in the community. One young person has now moved into their own accommodation within the local area and another young person has left the area to live independently.

Delivering the Sufficiency Strategy – Progress so far

Live performance data and reports that support managers to understand and manage sufficiency across the continuum - We have developed a suite of performance data and reports that allow us to look at our sufficiency needs on a weekly basis, this data is used by front line managers from across the service to plan the work that is needed in relation to sufficiency and also is used by senior leaders to support the development of the sufficiency strategy.

Reducing the need for council care by strengthening early help to those on the edge of care - We have continued to invest in early help to further develop practice and strengthen delivery to support children to remain living within their own families, avoiding the need for Local Authority care. Built into the Families are Safe Supported and Transformed Services (FaSST) are intensive support staff whose remit includes providing effective interventions to children who are on the edge of care, to prevent their admission or restore back to their families quickly when appropriate. 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. We have also embedded family solutions meetings within practice enabling families to find their own solutions with the support of services.

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 living 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.
- 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.
- Set ambitious targets annually to increase the number of in-house foster placements. This target is informed by 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

historically 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 foster carers, offering improved and bespoke training and increased support by fostering service staff and the creation of 1.5 Fostering Support Worker posts to provide immediate support to foster carers when a potential fostering family breakdown is identified. We are continuing to offer existing support initiatives such as special car loans, Looked after Children's Education Service and Children & Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS) support to maintain placements and increase family stability for our children in care.
- Following consultation events with our foster carers we have revised our fostering allowances to recognise the skills, 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 foster 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 CAMHS. We have delivered training for foster carers jointly with the adoption service to support successful moves to adoptive placements and to support foster carers and adopters to care for adolescents. We have developed flexible training programmes to fit in with foster carers busy schedules such as evenings, "bite size" and online training.
- Provided training and 1:1 sessions to continue to enable all foster 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.
- 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 without any unnecessary delay.

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 alternative care. 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.
- To ensure that care leavers have the accommodation and support they need the Council commission's accommodation and support for care leavers from the PHASE social enterprise. This includes the provision of accommodation and a variety of support depending on individual needs. Accommodation provided includes, Supported lodgings, Shared living, Self-contained accommodation and the PASTURE – supported accommodation for vulnerable young parents who are care leavers.
- This ensures that care leavers have safe, suitable and sustainable accommodation in order to give them stability and an opportunity to realise their potential as young adults.
- If young people have difficulties maintaining their accommodation for any reason they have the option to move within the PHASE accommodation portfolio. The outcome for young people is that they can make mistakes and learn from them without being penalised through eviction which would have a negative impact on their future accommodation options. A programme of activities is offered to help the young people develop skills and provide experiences to encourage and support them in maintaining their accommodation and support them into education, training and employment.
- 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.

- Published the Local Offer to Care Leavers to detail the services and support that care leavers receive in North Lincolnshire. This was prepared and agreed with young people in the Children in Care Council and agencies from across the partnership.

Building on Success – Next Steps

To continue 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 within the early help arena to enable children to live safely within their families.
- Further developing the provision of families for harder to place young people with more complex needs to ensure that all children and young people live in safe, stable fostering families.
- Continue to provide and develop stable and supportive placements for young people as they progress into adulthood, including the provision of support that focusses on achieving positive outcomes and continuing to develop commissioned arrangements that support children and young people into adulthood. This includes continuing to build on the range of supported accommodation to increase choice and further enable young people to “stay put” with or “stay close” to their carers.
- 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.
- Support young people on the edge of care to remain at home with their families and where they have entered care work with them and their families to successfully restore them back home in a timely and supported way.
- Seeking and listening to the views of children and young people regarding their experiences, choices and wishes in relation to their accommodation and care.

To achieve the above 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.
- 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 ‘no move’ approach.

- Expand our short break fostering service to recruit additional carers who are able to provide planned respite to children and young people on the edge of care so that they can be safely supported to remain with their own family.
- 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.
- Continue to 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. We will 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 'no move' 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 whose needs are best met in residential care. The role of the children's home will be reviewed to ensure it continues to meet our sufficiency requirements. There will be a strong emphasis on supporting young people to return to family living either with their own family or within a foster family within a realistic but short term timeframe reflecting our values that Children are better cared for in a family setting.
- Recruit a bank of relief staff who will be trained, supported and supervised by KFL who are able to provide outreach support to foster carers where difficulties are emerging in order to support stability at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Work with partners to further develop our range of accommodation options to support older young people and for care leavers returning to North Lincolnshire from external fostering and residential placements.
- Continue to develop our relationships with foster carers and professionals that reflect our ambition of "no moves". This includes the use of the "secure base model" across all areas of fostering from recruitment, assessment, approval and supervision and support of foster carers and a change of language focussing on children joining families and living ordinary family lives.

- 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.
- Continue to develop our links to the business sector to develop our foster friendly employer approach.

What Will Success Look Like?

By 2019, we will expect to see:

- Further reductions in the looked after population as a result of:
 - Continued early effective identification and intervention to enable children and young people to be cared for within their family or wider family network.
 - Continued increased use of Adoption and Special Guardianship – achieved in a timely manner.
 - A renewed focus on reunification for some of our longer term children in care where it is safe to do so.
- A further increase in the number of North Lincolnshire foster carers in particular mainstream carers and short break carers.
- A greater proportion of the care population 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.
- A reduction in the number of children experiencing three or more moves, and greater stability in the longer term through the ‘no move’ approach.
- Children and young people continue 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 and an increase in young people choosing “staying put” into adulthood.
- An increased choice of accommodation options for older young people and for care leavers returning from external fostering and residential homes.

See Appendix 3 for further information

North Lincolnshire Council has evidenced our sustained commitment to looked after children and care leavers over many years, our Outstanding Ofsted inspection in 2017 recognised our achievements in this area. We have taken the view that the work we are doing in relation to looked after children and care leavers needs to continue to develop and we are using our well established and effective management oversight of children, combined with new and innovative approaches to be a sector leader for this vulnerable group of children and young people. We will continue to focus on our priorities of children remaining with their family or extended family where it is safe to do so. We will secure permanence for children in care at the earliest opportunity using a “no move” approach and using the voice of the child/young person to guide our decision making. We will continue to obsess about outcomes for looked after children and care leavers using an “ordinary lives” approach that will help our children to narrow the gap between looked after children and young people and their non-looked after peers.