

Annex 1

**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY
2016-18**

DRAFT v3

WORK IN PROGRESS DRAFT

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Our vision

We believe that children and young people for whom we are corporate parents are talented, resourceful, are articulate and have huge potential. Many will lead successful adult lives. However, we also recognise that often as a result of their early life experiences some will be at greater risk of poor outcomes as they grow up.

Our aim is to create a home and community environment that provides every child and young person with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential.

Our approach

We have refreshed our strategy for 2016-18 to make it shorter, sharper and more partnership and outcomes focused.

Our approach includes the following:

1. A refreshed **pledge** to children and young people in care and care leavers.
2. A **strategy** document, this document. The audience for this is mainly the range of partners who together make up the extended family for corporate parenting.
3. A **sufficiency statement and strategy** – which sets out how we are meeting our duty to ensure there are homes for every child and young person in our care, and includes a range of facts and figures as the profile of young people in care and care leavers.

Our children and young people in care

This section will include a summary of the information contained in the more detailed sufficiency document.

It will be presented in an infographic format

It will include

- **Total numbers**
- **Gender breakdown**
- **Age breakdown**
- **Categories of need**
- **Legal status**
- **Placement type – foster care / residential**
- **Educational attainment**
- **Health assessments**
- **Care leavers**

It will be compiled from the statutory returns as at March 2016, and will include comparisons with geographical and statistical neighbours – note these are not yet available.

WORK IN PROGRESS DRAFT

Delivery priorities

We have identified four key priorities around delivery:

1. Reduce the number of children and young people in care
2. Ensure the best value for money for children and young people in care
3. Ensure the right permanence option is in place for children and young people as soon as possible, including a focus on returning home
4. Assessing the impact on LAC from all decisions

We want to avoid children having to come into care wherever possible. This is better for many children young people and families as their own family is best placed to provide the care and support needed. Many children and young people come into our care at times of family crisis and stay in care for short periods before going home. We want to look at whether we could do more to prevent children and young people from having to come into care, by looking at the ways in which we can support families at times of crisis.

When children and young people do come into care, we want to do as much as we can to ensure we receive value for money in the delivery of care, by thinking about how we can work more efficiently, and how we can ensure a reduced need for out of borough residential placements.

We want to make sure that children and young people are clear about the right long term option for them. We want to enable children and young people to be able to return home as soon as it is safe and practical for them to do so as for the majority of children and young people this will be the best option. This means we will look at how we can provide work with families and children and young people to ensure that reconciliation is pursued as a permanence option.

The Council is undertaking a review of its approach to children and young people in care in 2016 which will explore these issues and support the development of an updated sufficiency strategy.

We will ensure that all key decisions taken by partners will include an assessment of the impact on children in care and care leavers. This is already standard practice for the Council, and will be rolled out to all partners, based on the priorities identified in this partnership strategy.

Outcome priorities

Be involved in their care and treated as individuals

Our commitment

We want children and young people in care to be involved in all aspects of their life, and have the opportunity to contribute in a variety of ways to ensure that the care and support they receive is tailored to their needs and wishes.

Actions

1. We will support the role of the Children in Care Council (CiCC): Let's Take Action Group and Positive Activities Group (including whether further age range approaches are necessary). This will include implementing the outcomes of the current Inspiring Voices project to increase the awareness of the CiCC.
2. We will ensure that all LAC know their IRO, and their role, and that there are face to face meetings between reviews wherever possible.
3. We will provide opportunities for children and young people to feed in their views about their care, including through technology such as instant messaging, apps.
4. We will ensure that there are a range of additional ways to be involved and to give views, including through school based opportunities
5. We will ensure that reviews, meetings and plans are clear about the voice of the child, make sense and are understood as documents by children and young people
6. We will ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity for an advocate if they want one.

Have productive relationships: family, friends and community life

Our commitment

We want all children and young people to feel part of a family, to have friends and to be part of a community. Building up stable and trusting relationships, and feeling part of a community is an essential ingredient for emotional wellbeing.

Actions

1. We will continue to support the training and development of foster carers to ensure they have the right skills and confidence to create a stable family home for children and young people in care
2. We will continue to support the training and development of residential care staff to enable them to provide the best care possible in a safe and nurturing environment.
3. We recognise the particular issues children and young people in care face around the development of safe and trusting relationships, and the specific support which might be needed to support personal resilience.
4. We will ensure there are opportunities to become involved in community activity, including leisure, sport and cultural activity, including opportunities for volunteering.

Suitable accommodation and support to meet assessed needs

Our commitment

We will ensure that every child and young person in care in Stockton experiences high quality care based on an appropriate and detailed assessment of needs.

When a child becomes looked after, this will be a positive choice and the decision will have been made wherever possible with the agreement of the child or young person, their family and significant others.

When a child becomes looked after, or leaves our care, there will be a sufficient range and choice of provision and support.

Actions

1. We will ensure there is a comprehensive and up to date assessment of needs in place
2. We will ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet the needs of children in care
3. We will ensure a range of accommodation options are available including support to families where this may avoid the need for children to come into care
4. We will ensure that there is a range of education options in place which recognises need

(a more detailed sufficiency statement will be developed as part of the suite of documents)

Be Safe

Our commitment

We want all children and young people in our care to be and feel safe. Whilst taking some risks is part of growing up, we know that children and young people in care can sometimes be exposed to more risks and become more vulnerable. This can lead on to anti-social behaviour and offending or to increased risk of harm. We will work to reduce offending by children and young people in care.

Actions

1. We will ensure advice and guidance / support especially on e-safety and risky behaviour is in place
2. We will continue to review individual plans to ensure there is a focus on actions to keep children and young people safe
3. We will prioritise the needs of children and young people in care in the work of the preventions and YOT teams
4. We will monitor all children missing from care episodes, ensure that there are suitable plans in place and that we listen to the reasons for going missing and take action to reduce risks
5. We will reduce anti-social behaviour, through a focus on relationships and restorative approaches, and sanctions if appropriate.

Be healthy

Our commitment

We want all children and young people in care to be healthy, and will ensure that they receive assessments, provision and priority.

Actions

1. We will ensure all health assessments / dental assessments are undertaken in timescales, and that action is taken to address health concerns and issues identified.
2. We will prioritise children and young people in care in our work on managing potentially harmful behaviour: smoking, alcohol, substance misuse
3. We will ensure that all children and young people in care have access to information, advice and support on sexual health
4. We will prioritise the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people in care – using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires and other tools to measure progress
5. We will review the emotional wellbeing and mental health services provided to children in care. We will challenge the role of schools in using Pupil Premium to access TAMHS
6. We will work with GPs to support their skills and awareness of the needs of children and young people in care
7. We will give priority access to all commissioned services – initially focusing on therapeutic services such as Speech and language Therapy, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy.

Get the best education and skills

Commitment

All children and young people in care will be encouraged and supported to achieve success and realise their ambitions. We will be ambitious and aspirational in helping CYP to believe in themselves and to aim high.

Actions

1. We will continue to prioritise the needs of children and young people in care in our coordinated school admissions process
2. We will continue to deliver a high quality Virtual School
3. We will continue to focus on improving the quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
4. We will focus on improving the attendance of children and young people in care
5. We will ensure that alternative provision is of sufficient quality
6. We will support young people to access further and higher education and to develop their skills

Be supported in the transition to adulthood and as care leavers

Our commitment

We are committed to support young people who have experienced care to move towards independence at a time that reflects their individual needs, emotional maturity and coping skills

Actions

1. We will refresh our Care Leavers Charter
2. We will ensure that appropriate guidance and advice is in place through dedicated Personal Adviser support
3. All children and young people will have an up to date and comprehensive Pathway Plan
4. We will ensure there are a range of accommodation options, including Staying Put and supported lodgings
5. We will support care leavers into employment, education and training
6. We will commit to the longer term tracking of care leavers
7. We will continue to identify and support care leavers who are parents

Our corporate parenting commitment

What do we mean by corporate parenting?

We are determined to ensure that the children and young people in our care feel that their needs are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about not only by those who look after them on a daily basis but also by those who make decisions, politically, corporately and operationally. This means...

- That we will work to deliver the priorities in this strategy, and that we will be open and honest about progress;
- But that we want to do more, and recognise the many individual and organisational ways in which we can achieve much more than our service or thematic roles as defined in our priorities;
- Our elected members will be clear about their roles, and the actions they can take to be good corporate parents;
- That senior officers in the Council will go above and beyond their roles to achieve the best for children and young people in care, using their personal authority and resources to do more
- That all of our partners in Stockton will take their corporate parenting role seriously, and will commit to do the best they can, as part of an extended family. We will do this by requiring all agencies to sign a corporate parenting pledge.

Where we think we can make a difference

We will develop the following aspects of corporate parenting:

- We will work to ensure every child and young person has the chance to have an independent supporter
- That we work together to raise additional resources, either in cash or in kind to support the children and young people in our care
- That we will place a particular emphasis on supporting care leavers to prepare for independence
- That we will do everything we can to support the education of children and young people in care, by creating a Governing body for the Virtual school, and a parent teacher association
- That we will do all we can to ease the transition for care leavers, by establishing a commitment to work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships in our organisations
- That every care leaver who wants one will have a volunteer mentor

How we will deliver

The delivery of this strategy will be overseen by MALAP – the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership

The operational lead for delivery will be via the Service Development Group

We will continue to engage with children and young people in care throughout, including:

- Let's take Action, Positive Activities, Young Inspectors Group and Inspiring Voices
- Specific events and activities for all Looked After Children coordinated through our Children's Rights and Participation Officer.
- Feedback from other engagement such as through schools and learning from the outcomes of statutory reviews

How we will report and communicate on progress

Progress will be reported into the Children and Young people's partnership every quarter, based both on the update on actions, and quarterly reporting on the key performance indicators associated with this strategy.

We will feed back to children and young people in care on progress, using methods which we will agree with them.

We will ensure every carer gets feedback on progress.