

Children in Care Strategy 2018 - 2021



Our Vision

"We are ambitious for our district's children and young people. Our vision is for children and young people to tell us they are happy, healthy and safe and thriving in communities where families and services work together to help them achieve their potential and dreams".

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1. Foreword

Dear children, young people, parents, carers and colleagues

We are delighted to be able to launch our new children in care strategy which has been co-produced between our Build our Future's group and the staff and partners who work with most closely with them and other children and young people in care, as well as their key strategic leaders. It expresses our commitment to and ambitions for our Wakefield children in care for whom we all carry a joint corporate parenting responsibility and who deserve the best from us to ensure we get them best from and for them.

We are very proud to be the corporate parents of our children in care and always impressed with their ambition, drive and determination when we meet them. But bringing up children is a team effort and we are pleased that the commitment expressed in our strategy bears testament to what everyone has committed to do to promote the very best outcomes for our children. Our Corporate Parenting Committee has an important job to do in holding us all to account to make sure we do not just promise, but deliver.

On that note, I commend the strategy to your reading, but more importantly to your actions to make sure we really help to jointly build the futures of our children in care.



Wood

Portfolio Holder

Children and Young People



Beate Wagner

Corporate Director

**Children and Young People
Services**

4th January 2019

2. Vision, Values and Context

Our Vision

“We are ambitious for our district’s children and young people. Our vision is for children and young people to tell us they are happy, healthy and safe and thriving in communities where families and services work together to help them achieve their potential and dreams”.



Children only have one childhood, so this strategy commits us to realise our vision for all children and young people and, as corporate parents, to achieve the best possible outcomes for all of our Children in Care and Care Leavers in Wakefield.

In developing this strategy, we acknowledge that a child or young person in care is more likely to be vulnerable and face increased challenges, compared to their peers, to achieve positive outcomes.

This strategy sets out the commitments of Wakefield Council, working with our partners, to continue to improve the outcomes for our Children in Care and care leavers. We are committed to ensuring every child or young person in care has the best possible start in life, experience safe and positive care and is given every opportunity to achieve their potential.

The priorities in this document reflect and build on our work from the previous 'Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2014 -2017' but more importantly what our children and young people have told us is important to them now and going forward.

Our vision promotes our Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers; a promise given by the Council, with support from our partners, about the quality and nature of care that any child or young person can expect if they become looked after. The Pledge was developed in consultation with young people, facilitated by the Participation Workers, the Advocacy Service and the Children in Care Council who have told us how we can improve their experiences within the care system.

Our vision and priorities are shaped by our understanding of local needs and by national priorities. Our understanding of local needs and national priorities enables us to identify what our challenges are and will be, as we set out to achieve the best possible outcomes for all our Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Family finding for the right Adoptive Families and the recruitment and retention of Fostering Families are an example of the challenges we face in our commitment to improving the outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers. However, we are firmly committed to working with the Regional Adoption and our own Fostering Service to meet this challenge.

The national and regional pressures can at times make finding the right placement for children challenging. Despite ongoing work internally and with the external market and a range of providers, sufficiency of local provision can still be limited, particularly for those children and young people with more complex needs. It is important that this strategy is, therefore, read in conjunction with our Sufficiency Strategy 2018 - 2021.

The scope of this strategy also positively acknowledges children and young people in care from other local authorities that come to live in Wakefield. In doing so, it also recognises that the availability of local provision is also affected by the number of other local authorities who have Children in Care placed in the Wakefield District.

Our Values that underpin our vision for children in care are:

Support Families to Stay Together

Early intervention and prevention plays a critical role in de-escalating family problems and keeping children out of the care system. This way we will ensure only those who really need to come into care do so and at the right time.



Place Children in Family Settings

We will use family/kinship carers wherever possible to minimise disruption for the young person. It is usual that a child will be placed with siblings wherever possible unless it has been assessed that this is not appropriate.

Where family carers are not possible, in-house foster care is our preferred solution. Where in-house foster care is not available Independent Foster Care Agencies will be our next option. Residential placements will be used where the complexity of need means a child cannot or does not want to live in a family setting.

Place Children Locally Wherever Possible

We will strive to ensure that placements allow young people to remain close to their communities and networks where safe and appropriate. Out of area placements will only be used when all other options have been explored, or there are reasons why it is necessary for some children or young people, we will then work with providers to ensure that support is available for the young person to maintain links to their home networks.

Planning for Permanence

To identify at the earliest possible stage the permanence plan for children, including, for example, options of:

- Returning home to birth parents
- Care within the child's wider family or with friends
- Fostering for adoption
- Adoption
- Long-term Fostering
- Residential placement until independence

Ensure Placements Deliver Positive Outcomes

We will work with children and young people, as well as other professionals, to ensure that placements meet the full range of the child or young person's needs and wishes, including education and health and they deliver positive outcomes and support transition into adulthood.

Corporate Parenting

Throughout our strategy we aim to demonstrate our commitment to the seven corporate parenting principles as set out in The Children and Social Work Act 2017. They are:

- To act in the best interests of young people and promote your physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- To encourage young people to express your views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account young people's views, wishes and feelings.
- To help young people to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and the organisations it works with.
- To have high aspirations for young people and help them to achieve the best outcomes they can.
- For young people to be safe, and to have stability in their home lives, relationships, education, work and financially.
- To prepare young people for adulthood and independent living.



National Context

The latest national data shows that across England, in March 2017, there were 72,670 children in care, this continues the year on year rises seen in the past decade. From 2016 to 2017 this has also shown a marked increase of 3%. Over the period 2011 to 2017 the actual percentage increase is over 10%.

The national trend has been associated with a number of factors:

- Increasing numbers of child protection cases which lead to an increase in court proceedings and Children in Care.
- Older children coming into care with increasingly complex needs.
- An increase in numbers of unaccompanied child asylum seekers.

- Changes in guidance and regulations regarding Local Authority responsibilities towards homeless young people aged 16 and 17.
- Emerging legal duty on councils to provide financial support for those who want to stay longer with foster carers.

Local Context

Wakefield is echoing the national picture in terms of rising children in care numbers, and as at 31st March 2018 there were 562, which equated to a rate of 75.7 per 10,000 children, an increase from 69 per 10,000 in March 2016 and 74 in 2017 showing the upward trajectory. In Wakefield the rate per 10,000 figure remains significantly higher than the England average, although it is lower than our statistical neighbours, which stood at 86 per 10,000 in March 2017, a marked increase itself from the 80 recorded in 2016.

We want our children and young people to achieve their potential, having positive learning opportunities with the chance to participate in decisions. We want the very best for every child and young person and will work in partnership to remove barriers to achievement. This includes making decisions in a timely manner and in their best interest.

We aim to achieve permanence and stable placements. This includes making a smooth transition to adulthood with continuity of support, access to employment and higher education and training, while continuing to live within a supportive and enabling environment or independently in good housing and experiencing financial security.

We will harness the talent and enthusiasm of young people to ensure that all our services meet their needs.

3. Contribution from ‘Build our Futures’

(The Children in Care Council, representing the voice of Wakefield children and young people in care, a voice and a choice for children and young people”.

We are the voice of young people in care, and we are hoping to make a difference through our ‘Build our Futures’ Group which is Wakefield’s Children in Care Council.

The Children in Care Council has been firmly established for 9 years and so in 2019, we celebrate our 10 year anniversary. That is why we decided to re-brand our group in 2018 to become known as the ‘Build our Futures’ Group.



The 'Build our Futures' group are pivotal in helping Wakefield improve its services for children in care, leading on many key projects over the years, such as our contribution to this strategy.

We feel we are able to work with Corporate Parents to make sure we continually develop services. We have developed a new way of engaging with Corporate Parents, having a regular place on the committee where young people set and run the agenda and develop projects with elected members.

We are also in the process of developing an 'Improvement Group' in which four 'Build our Futures' reps will be linking with the Corporate Director to tackle the following issues for improvement:

- Voice of the Child
- Children in Care Strategy and the new 'Local Offer for Care Leavers'
- CAMHS access / emotional health support for those in care / care leavers
- Development of the Early Help Offer

Young people are involved in promoting the improvement journey and we have developed links with the Youth Work Team to make sure our participation methods link-up across all of children's services.

Throughout the work we do, our goals are the same as those for the Wakefield Participation Strategy:

- Make sure workers don't judge us, welcome our views.
- Involve us in a range of ways.
- Communicate with us in a way that we can understand, that is accessible and interesting.
- Make participation opportunities rewarding, fun and an opportunity to build our confidence.
- Celebrate our achievements.
- Make participation meaningful, if you listen then please feedback.

- Use our information to make informed decisions and look for opportunities to involve us from the beginning of designing or improving services.

The Improvement Group and the Build our Futures group questions and challenges the Council's decision makers, to make sure we are getting the best deal for children in care, making sure they are giving us all the support we need so we can do well in our futures.

We are developing a way of working that makes us feel respected and valued, we need to keep moving and not to stall while we are going forward. To do this Wakefield Council need to ensure they continue their commitment to participation, as this shows managers are serious about learning from care experienced young people.

We need you to listen to our views, we need you to know what we want, don't guess or assume – ask!

Listening is really powerful, it helps us to think through answers to our own questions, and this creates a great environment to learn from each other – we believe this is the way great things begin to happen!

Our plans for this year include:

- Improving relationships with social workers.
- Implementing the Improvement group.
- Making a DVD about our experiences for the 'Early Help' summit.
- Launching the 'Build our Futures' brand council wide!

4. Our Priorities

1. Stay Safe.
2. Stable Placements
3. Health and Well-being
4. Education and Enjoyment
5. Positive Contribution
6. Economic Stability and Well-Being



For each of our six priorities, we have a view of where we want to be, which has been developed as a direct result of what children and young people told us and our Pledge to them.

Much of the delivery of this strategy is embedded in the way we work and is set out in operational delivery plans to ensure each promise is kept. However, some promises will require a more strategic and longer term approach, particularly where they are responding to local or national challenges and a changing legislative framework.

1. Stay Safe

What Children and Young People Told Us

Children told us that, for them, feeling safe is about feeling that they belong in the home and the community where they live. Children said that spending more time with their social worker and planning and settling into where they live or go to school is what helps to make them feel safer and included in ways that their views are taken into account.

We will ensure that we know our children well by developing and keeping good relationships with them through social workers, carers, family members, teachers and others involved in their lives.

Through our direct work with children and their families we will ensure that we value their lives before they came into care and who or what is important to them about their history.

We will ensure that social workers work to our practice standards and that children feel able to tell us if they are unhappy about anything.

We will make sure that through regular contact with children, including visits to see them at home, we actively involve them in any discussions, plans and decisions that affect them by being open and honest and by listening to their views.

2. Stable Placements

What Children and Young People Told Us

Children told us that working closely with their social worker was the first important step in helping them to feel that their placement was a good match for them based on their needs and wishes. They also said that being open and honest about finding the right carers was equally important to them and that, wherever possible, involving them in any choice about their carers would be best.

We will work directly with children to involve them and understand their wishes and feelings about where they live.

Through positive relationships with social workers, foster carers and other carers we will ensure that children feel that they have been involved in deciding where they live and that they feel safe and cared about.



We will respect the relationships that children have with siblings and other family members when finding the best place for them to live.

We will also ensure that wherever children live, we take into account their education and make sure that this is fully considered and discussed with them.

We will continue to involve children in developing placement options through recruiting more foster carers and prospective adopters, as well as developing residential care options for some children.

We will ensure that placements are of good or better quality and that carers work with us to achieve permanence for children as well as good outcomes in all areas of their life.

3. Health and Well-being

What Children and Young People Told Us

Children told us that working with social workers and other professionals about understanding their health and well-being needs is important to them. They also said that having access to people who can provide the right support and the right services available to meet their needs is equally important and that where services could be accessed in one place would be even better. They were particularly focused on having access to emotional and mental health support quickly and felt that equipping their carers, teachers and social workers with skills of increased awareness, support and confidence around emotional wellbeing would be helpful and less stigmatising. They said that if early strategies were in place to support them it may not avoid the need to be referred for specialist mental health support through CAMHS.

Through our direct work with children we will know what we want and need to support them to be healthy. We will make sure that social workers, carers and other people supporting the child understand their health needs and that they work with them to access the right support.

We will make sure that timely consent ensure that's children have access to the right, good quality health care and services to meet their needs. This will respectfully take into account the child's history and what they tell us about their thoughts, wishes and feelings about their earlier life experiences.

We will ensure that children have access to healthy lifestyle choices including a range of leisure activities and emotional well-being support, including from social workers, foster carers and teachers.

We will continue to work with children to ensure that they remain healthy and that we take the relevant steps to adapt to any changes to their needs.

4. Education and Enjoyment

What Children and Young People Told Us

Children told us that having positive experiences in school is really important to them. This includes Teacher awareness and sensitivity around care issues and for children to be feel included and to be treated like any other child in their school.

We have high aspirations for children and ensure that they are in good or better schools with support from people that understand and respect their care experience.

We will also make sure that children have good quality personal education plans that are tailored to their unique and individual ambitions, needs and abilities. We will also ensure that children have access to the right

resources and support to enable them to thrive in their educational attainment and prepare for life beyond school.

Through our work with schools we will make sure that children's education is not disrupted as a result of being in care, for example, by not holding reviews at times that impact on lessons. Wherever possible we will make sure that a child's school place is maintained.

We will ensure that children have access to leisure activities through school clubs and after school activities to promote their emotional well-being.

We recognise that each child is unique and so we will ensure that we celebrate their achievements in ways that are in keeping with their wishes



and feelings.

5. Positive Contribution

What Children and Young People Told Us

Children told us that positive relationships with adults who get to know them and build their confidence in us is important to them in order to enable and support them to be more involved, both as individuals and groups. They also said that having their voices heard and acted upon, such as through the Build our Futures group, was equally important to them to show that they are listened to.

We will ensure that children are able to influence control of their lives, enable them to make a positive contribution to their day to day living and make their own informed choices about what they do, appropriate to their age and understanding.

Children will be central to developing their Care Plan or Pathway Plan and make sure it reflects their views, wishes and feelings. Plans will be reviewed with young people by Independent Reviewing Officers based on them having good relationships that advocate for positive outcomes being achieved.

We will encourage and support children to contribute and have a say in the future direction of service provision, including working together with 'Build our Futures', the Children in Care Council represent their views along with other children and young people in care.

Through our corporate parenting arrangements we will make sure that there are regular meetings between Leaders, senior managers and other people who make decisions, for example, through our work with 'Build our Futures'. Through this work we will review how we are meeting our commitments to children.

6. Economic Stability and Well-Being

What Children and Young People Told Us

Children told us that having access to financial support, including pocket money and other support for activities and holidays is important to them to enable them to feel equal to their peers.

We will make sure that social workers and carers offer children choices about what to do with pocket money and other resources to support their hobbies and access activities.

We want children to learn about money and so we will ensure that adults involved with children support them by helping them to have a bank account and / or savings account.

We will ensure that young people are supported by social workers to develop their Pathway Plans taking into account what they want or need to fulfil their potential. Through this we will make sure young people are able to access careers advice, guidance and support, including access to information relating to benefits.

5. Governance and Accountability

The responsibility for implementation of this strategy, and its ambition to improve outcomes rests with the multi-agency partnership for Children in Care, coordinated by the CYPS Children in Care and Leaving Care Service.

A detailed annual implementation plan accompanies the strategy which, along with our partners, supports the delivery of the 6 priorities set out in this strategy and it identifies key lead officers and various timeframes for the completion of all actions.

The implementation plan specifies an outcome for each action and references recognised national performance measures that our actions will impact on. The partnership will continue to evolve and develop to ensure the needs of Children in Care and Care Leavers are prioritised within all partner agencies and a joined up approach is adopted in identifying and providing services for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The implementation of this strategy and the work of the partnership will be reported to the CYPS Safeguarding and Family Support Senior Management Team and, in turn, the Directorate Management Team.

Subsequently, the work of the multi-agency partnership will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee which also includes representatives from 'Build our Futures', the Children in Care Council.

Any work considered by the Corporate Parenting Committee, including this strategy, will also report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to demonstrate how satisfactory progress is being made across each of the outcome areas strengthening the governance of the multi-agency partnership.

Links to Key Documents

This strategy should be read in conjunction with Wakefield Council's:

- Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Sufficiency Strategy 2018 -2021
- Wakefield Safeguarding Children's Board Business Plan