



# Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan Derbyshire 2019 - 2021



*Stronger Families Safer Children*

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### **Pre- approval included:**

- Consideration of what is important for children at Big Conversation
- Multi-agency scrutiny at Children in Care Strategic Governance Group
- Children’s Services Senior Management Team

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## **Foreword**

We are pleased to introduce this 2019 - 21 Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy. It describes how all partners in Derbyshire are committed to improving the outcomes of all our children in care and care leavers who live both in Derbyshire and those who may live elsewhere.

As described in recent guidance, *'The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers'*.

In Derbyshire, we have high aspirations for our children in care and care leavers which is why their progress is a key priority for Derbyshire County Council including the Corporate Parenting Board, and the Derbyshire Safeguarding Children's Board.

This document describes our strategy and how we are going to continue improving practice and developing services for our children in care and care leavers. The priority areas are shaped by what children in care and care leavers have told us as well as feedback from others such as families, foster carers and frontline staff. We have also focussed on where we felt our progress in the past was not as good as we wanted for our children.

The strategy has been written in consultation with the Children in Care Council and with care leavers.



**Councillor Alex Dale**  
Lead member for Young People



**Jane Parfremment**  
Executive Director for Children's Services



## Section One – Introduction

Most children and young people in Derbyshire enjoy happy and successful lives living within their own families.

If, however, families experience particular problems or stress, they can call upon a wide variety of additional support, offered by a range of agencies, to help keep the family living and working together.

Through local partnerships, preventative approaches and early intervention strategies are used to prevent family breakdown and support parenting. Derbyshire is committed to providing the right support to improve outcomes for children and young people throughout the ‘child’s journey’.

For some children and young people though, this might not be enough to ensure their safety and well-being so, either through agreement with their parents, or through court proceedings, these children might come to be cared for by the Local Authority.

Sometimes, with support, children can be quickly returned home, or to family members or friends. Also, again often with support, children or young people can leave care (prior to independence) after a longer period and return home, or to family members or friends.

We know that children in care are at risk of experiencing poor outcomes compared to their peers who are not in care: a disproportionate number become unemployed; on benefits; teenage parents; in receipt of mental health services or involved with the criminal justice system and too few go on to university or satisfying careers.

When children come into care the Local Authority becomes the ‘Corporate Parent’ and as Corporate Parents, we are determined to improve the life chances of our children in care and care leavers, to close this gap and actively safeguard and promote their welfare.

On-going leadership and challenge to improve is essential; supporting children in care and care leavers to meet their potential requires every adult involved in offering support to a child in care committing to this moral responsibility.

The aim of this strategy is to continue getting better at how we look after our children in care and care leavers in Derbyshire, building on some outstanding developments currently underway.

It is about transforming the lives of our children through a combination of high quality professional practice and innovative ways of working which make a difference. Practice improvement and service development is informed by the views and participation of children in care and care leavers. As described in Person Centred approaches – the strategy describes both what is important for children and young people as well as what is important to children and young people.

Our ambition is to be excellent Corporate parents for our children and young people in

care and care leavers, having the same high aspiration as we have for our own children.

## Section Two – Context

When children come into care the Local Authority becomes the ‘Corporate Parent’ – with the role of delivering the outcomes that every good parent would wish for their children.

Our Corporate Parenting Board vision is:

As Corporate Parents and Family we will work together to be creative and inspire our children in care and care leavers to be the best they can be: Safe, healthy, happy, learning, working, and be prepared for adulthood and independent living.

Corporate parenting principles are applicable to all Local Authorities in England whether they are or were the Local Authority looking after a particular child/young person. They are described in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and apply to the whole Local Authority and not just to children’s services functions.

They are:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the Local Authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Practice based on the views and experiences of children and young people, combined with strengths based approaches with a clear evidence base enable good outcomes for children on the edge of care, children in care and care leavers.

In 2015, Derbyshire developed Stronger Families Safer Children® approach (<http://derbyshirecaya.proceduresonline.com/chapters/documents>) which is a strength based framework designed to give all practitioners and managers the tools and skills to be as effective as possible. It has been developed in Derbyshire by Children and

Families staff and is now transforming the way we provide services. It incorporates:

- Systemic Practice.
- Social Pedagogy - an approach to caring for children which combines education and care.
- Person Centred Approaches - particularly in Disabled Children's Services.

Guiding Principles underpinning Derbyshire's Operating Model, Stronger Families Safer Children include:

- Being respectful, inclusive and empowering families and children to participate.
- Using straightforward, clear, jargon free language that is understood by all.
- Having a collaborative approach with children, families and partner agencies.
- Developing honest, positive and productive working relationships with families.

National guidance and research such as Putting Children First (2016), and Care Leaver Strategy 'Keep on Caring – Supporting Young People from Care to Independence (2016) all identify the key importance of relationships in enabling young people in care to develop resilience and reach their potential. We believe that social pedagogical and related approaches achieve this.

Over 2016–18, Derbyshire County Council undertook work with Dartington Research unit to help us better understand our 'Looked After' cohort. This work has led to the development of a new children's home so we can meet the needs of some young people currently placed away from Derbyshire and also a stronger focus on good practice on successfully returning children home to their families.

Our strategic objectives are to deliver the following:

- Better outcomes for children and young people in care, and care leavers.
- Improved performance by excellent services.
- Cost effective, sustainable provision.

To support the delivery of these strategic objectives, our governance arrangements have been reviewed. They entail revised structures for the scrutiny and improvement of children in care services and outcomes, with the voice of children and young people as a cross-cutting underpinning for all aspects of the structure. The strategy is delivered through these structures, and related operational groups, with the Children's Services Senior Management Team (SMT), Strategic Director of Children's Services and Corporate Parenting Board holding services to account.

As part of the governance structure:

- The Improving Health Outcomes Group leads on ensuring that children in care are as healthy as any child in Derbyshire; that children are healthier when they leave care than when they entered care and children and young people in care are healthy in body and mind and live in healthy places.

- Child protection, safety and placement stability is addressed by increasingly robust quality assurance approaches, the Placement Sufficiency Strategy and a range of actions related to safeguarding.
- The Virtual School Governance Group seeks to ensure that all children in care are encouraged and supported to do their best at school, from early years through to further and higher education; through maintaining a strong focus on attainment and progress, providing targeted support, delivering high quality training to teachers, raising aspiration and reducing both absence and exclusions.
- The Employment, Education and Training strategy group focusses on access to work experience, related training and opportunities.
- The Care Leaver Group focusses on broader leaving care elements as described in Keep on Caring ( July 2016) such as increasing suitable accommodation, supporting well-being, providing support developing young people's financial skills and ensuring care leavers can access key information.

All of the above is overseen at the highest strategic level in Derbyshire, to ensure that the Council delivers on its ambition to be a great Corporate Parent, so that each child in our care is able to be the best that they can be.

This Strategy runs in parallel with the Sufficiency Strategy at [www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social\\_health/services\\_for\\_children/children\\_we\\_look\\_after](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social_health/services_for_children/children_we_look_after) and sets out our approach to providing secure, safe and appropriate accommodation to children in care and care leavers over the next 2 years. The quality, range, location and stability of the homes where children in care and care leavers live are fundamental to enable them to make the most of the opportunities available to them and thus to be 'the best they can be'.

The successful implementation of the strategy will achieve the following benefits:

- Improved health and well-being, both physical and emotional.
- Greater resilience.
- Improved placement stability, safety and quality.
- Better attainment at school for children and young people.
- Young people leaving care on an educational and/or work route that meets their ambitions.
- Positive feedback from young people.
- The best use of available resources.

We want all children in care and care leavers to:

- Enjoy good physical and emotional health.
- Feel safe.
- Have fun.
- Do well at school, college or work.
- Stay out of trouble.



- Contribute to their communities.
- Achieve well as adults.

Our ambition is to be excellent parents for children and young people in care and care leavers, and this document sets out how we plan to achieve this.

## **Section Three - Involvement and Participation of Children in Care and Care Leavers**

The Children in Care Pledge is regularly reviewed, the 2019 pledge is:

### **We (Derbyshire County Council) promise to:**

- Help you know your rights
- Do what we say we will do
- Help you gain independence.

### **We expect you to:**

- Do your best at school, college and work
- Tell us when there's a problem.

### **Together we will:**

- Listen to and understand each other
- Be honest with each other
- Show each other respect
- Be reliable
- Do our best to keep you safe.

## **Derbyshire Children in Care Council Activities**

- Half termly meetings for members of the Children in Care Council, 'Our Voice', along with involved professionals
- 4 newsletters a year to be sent out to all Children in Care aged 8 and over.
- Remuneration for the young people's commitment to the Children in Care Council is 3 outings a year bringing together young people across the whole of Derbyshire
- 2 Big Conversations per year with Corporate Parents with the latest one in April 2019 organised and facilitated by Care leavers
- Interviewing staff.

The Big Conversation is where children and young people meet with key decision makers and can hold them to account for specific issues which can make a real difference to their lives and well-being such as whether they can have a pet or what should happen when their social worker changes.

Significant levels of consultation and engagement with care leavers has been undertaken over the last 18 months, especially over summer 2018 which explored what services and support care leavers currently receive, what they think of services

generally and specifically their perception of the value of services to their own life chances.

A strong desire was expressed for more Personal Advisor support, for it to be more consistent, and more effective particularly at the point when young people are preparing for, and transitioning, between care and the current Aftercare Service. These views have shaped our plans described under Priority Five.

At all levels we seek to make the views and feelings of our children an integral part of the planning process, challenging preconceived ideas of what is best for them, offering new and innovative ways of setting and monitoring priorities for service design and in maintaining control over their own lives, now and in the future.

The Corporate Parenting Board provides a scrutiny role, and analyses performance and policy in relation to the Children in Care Strategy. Terms of Reference for these, and the other functions within the governance arrangements are attached in the Appendices.

The Corporate Parenting Board recognises that all elected Members of a Local Authority have a critical role in both setting the strategic direction of a Council's services and in determining policy priorities for the local community. As such they have it in their power to affect the lives of the children in their community for the better. This duty and power has the greatest significance for children in their care given that the Council as a whole has the responsibility of acting as Corporate Parents.

**Building a meaningful sense of Corporate Parenting, demonstrated by concrete actions, across the Council as a means of improving outcomes for children in care includes:**

- The active involvement of Elected Members throughout the range of operational practice from presenting awards to celebrate the achievements of children and young people to participation in the Virtual School Governance group.
- Chief Officers attending Corporate Parenting Board to explain their actions to support Corporate Parenting such as prioritising building work required in Children's Homes.
- In 2016 the Chief Officer Pledge was launched which has 2 dimensions for Chief Officers and Senior Managers across the council; commitment to providing work experience placements for children in care and care leavers, and undertaking an arm's length challenge and obstacle tackling role for any care leavers who may be not in education, employment or training. Over 2018/19 this was reviewed and then later in 2019, will be relaunched.
- Ensuring scrutiny and governance of service plans, outcomes and impact.

**Quality assurance is an integral aspect of governance, thus supporting the achievement of our vision. A number of approaches are used including:**

- Challenge days; these bring together a range of people: practitioners, senior managers, partners, and often children and families or sometimes foster carers to understand strengths within a service and any areas for development.
- A range of scrutiny and improvement boards for Heads of Service, supported by clear expectations.
- Visits to children's homes and direct contact with children in care and care leavers by senior managers.
- Robust challenge by Quality Assurance Managers and Independent Reviewing Officers.
- Scrutiny group chaired by Head of Performance, focussing on the reports compiled to meet Regulation 44 and 45 of the Children's Homes Standards 2015.
- File audits; not just to meet departmental standards but also enabling children who are, or have been in our care, to be able to access accurate records.

## Section Four – Data set

There were 805 children in care at end March 2019 of whom:

- 379 live with DCC foster carers.
- 222 live with private fostering agency carers.
- 32 are placed for adoption.
- 34 live in DCC children's homes.
- 59 live in agency children's homes - some with education on site.
- 32 live with parents.
- 41 live independently or in supported accommodation.
- \* in other forms of accommodation.

\* Numbers less than 5 have been suppressed to prevent identification of individuals.

Key information relating to what children in care have told us is important to them includes:

- 5.59% had 3 or more placements within a year – this is better than 7.9% in March 2018 but still something we want to improve on.
- 39.4 % are living outside the Derbyshire boundaries – this is higher than 34.5% in March 2018 and so developing more quality care placements within Derbyshire is a high priority.
- 13.42% (March 19) of children in care had 3 or more social workers within the last 12 months – this is slightly less than the 14.15% in March 2018 and something we are continuing to try to reduce as we know how important it is both to and for our children in care.

There were 379 Care leavers aged 17-21 at end March 2019. Care leavers have told us that one of the most important things for them is having a safe home, not just a place to live. Over 94% live in suitable accommodation, our aim is for that to

increase to 100%.

Key data is shared on a regular basis with:

- Corporate Parenting Board.
- Performance Improvement Board.
- Foster Care Council.
- Focussed groups such as the multi-disciplinary Virtual School Governance Board and Improving Health Outcomes Group.

Specific information regarding placement sufficiency, the Sufficiency Strategy, can be accessed here.

[www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social\\_health/services\\_for\\_children/children\\_we\\_look\\_after](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social_health/services_for_children/children_we_look_after)

## Section Five – Priority One - Being a Good Corporate Parent

The role of a good Corporate Parent is to enable the outcomes that every good parent would want for their own children. A good parent puts their child first; keeps them safe and advocates for them; meets all their needs; helps them to 'be the best they can be' and supports them through to adulthood and independence.

The participation, involvement and contribution of children who receive support from Derbyshire Children's Services, including children in care and care leavers is therefore crucial. We are committed to listening to children and young people about their experience of the services they receive and the issues which are important to them; and work with them to deliver the improvements that reflect their views.

Our work focusses on improving outcomes for the children and young people in our care. To achieve this, participation must run throughout all the work we do with them.

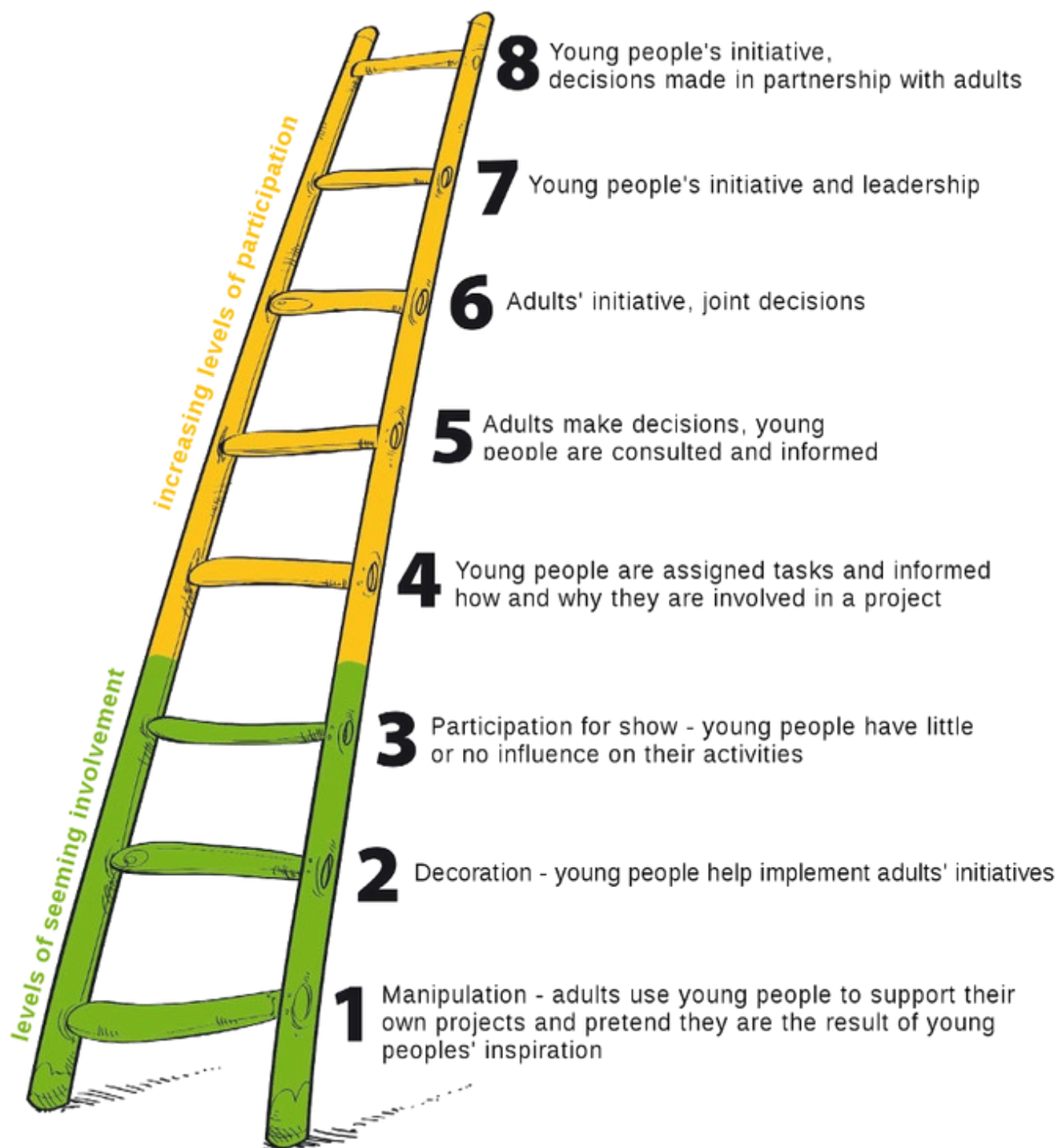
We want to ensure that our children and young people are inspired to be the best they can be; healthy, happy, learning and working. We can achieve this by making sure children and young people and their families are:

- Involved in shaping the services that they need.
  - Participating in decisions which affect their lives.
- And
- When children and young people's rights are understood and upheld.
  - When children and young people feel safe and happy and given opportunities to positively contribute to their local communities.

**#Children have a Right** ~ to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them.....adults have a responsibility to listen to children and take their views into account. **Article 12. UNCRC.**

Participation is the process of involving children and young people in decision making. Participation can happen in many different ways, as one off events and it can run through all the work we do with children and young people.

Hart's ladder of participation below, with more information available in the link, is a way to measure how well young people are really involved in decision-making. We feel that in Derbyshire we have much good practice to evidence that we routinely perform at ladder rungs 4 and 5.



For more information about Hart's ladder of participation, follow the link [here](#). We are currently strengthening how the Children in Care Council informs the Corporate Parenting Board; increasing the involvement of children and young people at a strategic level; this will enable us to ensure that their views and voices are heard and inform the work of the board and thus climb further up the ladder.

Children have told us that they want everyone who works with and alongside them to not use jargon and reduce stigmatisation. So, for instance, social workers are now talking about 'family time' not 'contact' and when out and about with young people, staff have been reminded not to wear their ID badge.

Derbyshire has a Children's Independent Advocacy Service. The Independent Advocates work to make sure children and young people are treated fairly and looked after properly. The Independent Advocates ensure that children and young people know and understand what their rights are and make sure that they have all the information they need to make a decision or a choice. The Advocacy service is well known to young people and practitioners and referrals can be made via Derbyshire's case management system, thus resulting in a swift response.

### **What we are already doing**

Young people are frequently involved in the recruitment of staff for our Children's Homes and senior management appointments and have devised questions which are used when considering approval of new foster carers.

The leaving care service has been reviewed and young people's views and experiences have shaped the new service design.

Every year we hold Derbyshire Believes in Me Awards event for children in care which celebrates their achievements and encourages them to continue to strive to reach their potential. The birth children of foster carers are also recognised for their important role in the Fostering family.

Bi-annually we hold the Care Leavers Achievement Awards event, jointly organised with care leavers, which celebrates a wide range of achievements such as going to university, completing an apprenticeship or being a good parent.

### **What we plan to do over the next 2 years**

1. To implement new arrangements for the Lead Member for Young People to meet regularly with the Children in Care and Care Leavers council/s enabling clear two way communication and that young people's views inform the Corporate Parenting Board.
2. Through the Corporate Parenting Board, ensure that all departments of the Council and all partners fulfil their roles as Corporate Parents.

3. A low percentage of children in care are taking part in the Children in Care Council compared to the number of children and young people we have in care and so we have started developing a range of other opportunities for young people to express their views.
4. Improve the information we give to children and young people in care about being in care.
5. As part of the development work around participation we have identified that the information we give to children and young people in care requires improvement and updating. We have reviewed what the different services provide for children and young people in our care and we think that we can do a lot better. Therefore we plan that all services for our children in care develop information about who they are, what they do, how they can be contacted and what a young person should do if they wish to complain.

## **Section Five – Priority Two – Quality Care experience**

We are committed to ensuring that children have a positive experience whilst being in care – that they live in a home which provides good quality care and support and enables them to build resilience and to be the 'best they can be'.

In caring for children and young people of varying ages and with different interests, experiences and needs, there is a need for a wide range of homes within Derbyshire so there is sufficient choice.

Children need to build a positive relationship with their social worker which enables them to be confident that they are heard and that their wishes and needs direct their care plan.

Children in care have told us about the importance of recognising their families – and that they value staff enabling them to have quality family time whenever that is possible. As part of supporting young people to have a clear sense of their identity, we recognise that life story work is needed for all children and young people in our care, not just those with a plan for adoption.

We are committed to ensure that Derbyshire has the right children in care and that those who can be are supported to remain with, or return to family or connected people.

Children need security and stability – for some that is best achieved by timely adoption, for others by long-term/permanent fostering or living in a children's home and some children and young people's outcomes are best met by moving to live with family or friends.

Children in care and care leavers have been clear with us that anyone involved in looking after them needs to recognise and value their diversity – whether that be cultural, religious, disability, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

As described in the Ofsted Annual Report 2016, good work with UASC is characterised by:

- Access to specialist support from workers who have good knowledge of legal rights and processes.
- Effective matching to suitable, high-quality accommodation.
- Tailored, creative packages of support for children that address their cultural, religious, learning and social needs, carefully based on robust assessments.

To ensure Derbyshire met this standard, in September 2016 a new small specialist team was established using the systemic practice model with 3 social workers and a team manager, supported by a team co-ordinator. This team works closely with health and education colleagues to enable UASC to achieve the best possible outcomes and indeed was commended for their strong practice.

Essential in providing quality care is to ensure that staff and foster carers can access relevant training and development. Some of our most effective training has been presented by care leavers.

Training plans are included in the Fostering Service plan, the Foster Care training manual and the Residential Service plan. Key development activities include:

- Social pedagogy.
- Training for foster carers and contract carers about therapeutic parenting.
- Person-centred approaches.
- Emotional well-being.

We recognise the importance of listening to children and young people and actively responding to them. We will continue to seek their views and explore with them how we can improve their lived experiences.

### **What we are already doing**

1. We are working hard to build and maintain relationships with the children we care for. The Council's Recruitment and Retention Strategy for social workers, and the recent 'Remodelling Social Work' initiative promote a stable and well supported workforce to ensure changes of social worker are avoided whenever possible and children have the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with them.
2. We recognised that the Authority needed to strengthen its response to children and young people on the edge of care and so established the Preventing Family Breakdown team and the Time Out team to have a focus on enabling a sustainable return home, or remaining at home, with family/carers or a robust planned transition to high quality care. This supports the NICE recommendation in 2016, 'Ensure that, wherever possible, children and young people enter the care system in a planned manner rather than as a response to a crisis'.



3. Currently 62% of fostered children live with Derbyshire Foster carers, and all of our Children's Homes are judged by Ofsted to be Good or Outstanding.
4. Derbyshire has a strong and effective Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) team. Staff working directly with children have maintained a high level of children's participation in their care plan reviews. Consistently over 95% of children and young people attend or participate in their reviews. As our numbers of children in care have increased, we have employed more Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure children's care plans reflect their wishes and feelings, are as good as possible and are followed.
5. IROs have maintained a strong influence in the use of secure accommodation by chairing pre-secure panels and reviewing those in secure placements through the Secure Criteria Panel. This has led to a stronger gatekeeping and consistency in the way young people are admitted to this form of accommodation. They also play a primary role in chairing the secure criteria reviews once they are in secure, this ensure no young person's liberty is withheld for any longer than necessary.
6. We have established practice whereby the Commissioning team work proactively with agency fostering and residential providers, including visits where there are quality concerns.
7. Derbyshire recognised that it needed to improve on achieving timely adoption and so developed new ways to track and reduce delays and also established an Adoption and Permanence team to support timeliness and focus on good quality adoption more generally. These have led to significant improvement. We have also been working with regional Local Authorities to establish the new Adoption East Midlands Regional Adoption Agency.
8. Derbyshire has a Sufficiency Strategy to develop a greater number and range of placements within and very near to Derbyshire. This is to ensure that, unless they need to, for good reasons, they do not live far from their home community. Our Fostering Strategy forms part of this and focusses on increasing the quantity and quality of foster homes so we can meet the needs of children and young people. Our residential homes and related teams have been steadily improving and we are re-designing some to meet a range of different needs.
9. We have improved on our management information to enable us to make best use of available fostering vacancies.
10. Derbyshire has recommissioned supported accommodation provision for care leavers.
11. We have robust protocols and practice to safeguard those children and young people at risk of becoming 'runaways' (children missing from care), and those young people at risk of exploitation.

12. We reduce the criminalisation of children in care by: promoting the use of restorative justice approaches in residential care; maintaining the protocol with the Police which applies the 'reasonable parent' test to minor offending by children in care so as to reduce formal reprimands; inform staff and foster carers on how legal processes work within the youth crime arena; diversion from crime activities.
13. The frequency of visits to children placed outside Derbyshire is reported on specifically to performance and scrutiny fora in recognition of their potential vulnerability.

### **What we plan to do over the next 2 years**

1. Further improve on the stability and quality of the social work workforce through the council's Recruitment and Retention Strategy for social workers, 'remodelling social work' programme and developing a number of initiatives to increase the number of social workers across the county.
2. We are refreshing how IROs challenge care plans where necessary and how relevant senior managers have oversight of this.
3. Continue to strengthen responses to children who go missing from care and those at risk of exploitation. An analysis has been undertaken to understand the prevalence of missing and repeat missing for children in care and the learnings from this include the strengthening of intelligence sharing across the partnership and strengthening the quality of return home visits.
4. Continue to improve the timeliness of adoption with the target of achieving the national government threshold.
5. Review the Sufficiency strategy 2017-21 on a regular basis (latest refresh April /May 2019) and develop more opportunities for children and young people to live in homes that are high quality and suitable in location.
6. Prevent placement breakdowns wherever possible by continuing and developing the support and training for our Foster Carers and Residential staff and by undertaking good matching practice.
7. Review the effectiveness of the Time Out Team and consider any further development.
8. Establish greater links with housing providers.
9. Continue to develop Performance Management reports to enable us to forecast placement need, make the best use of available provision and identify areas for development in order to meet our sufficiency duty more effectively.
10. Improve on the completion of life story work for all children and young people.

## Section Five – Priority Three – Good Health and Wellbeing

Through the delivery of this strategy, we will promote the health and well-being of all our children, young people and care leavers with the objectives that:

- Children in Care are as healthy as any child in Derbyshire.
- Children are healthier when they leave care than when they entered care.
- Children and young people in care are healthy in body and mind and live in healthy places.
- Children and young people in care should know how to access health care and what they need to do to achieve a healthy lifestyle.
- Young people leaving care should be aware of how to access adult health services.

The main guidance we follow is the Statutory Guidance on *Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children* (Department for Education, Department of Health 2015). The overarching principle of the guidance is that as Corporate Parents those involved in providing services for children in care should be striving for children to be happy, healthy and to reach their full potential. Children and Social Work Act (2017) and the Health and Social Care Act (2012), outline the duties of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) and Local Authorities to promote the child's physical, emotional and mental health and to act on any early signs of health issues.

The Derbyshire Improving Health Outcomes and Governance Group sets the strategic direction, priorities for the work and oversees performance to improve the physical and emotional health outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers. The meeting also provides a forum for escalation of risks and issues that have not been resolved at service level. The group have identified 15 standards for priority attention.

The Children in Care Standards are as follows:

- Standard 1 Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- Standard 2 Statutory health assessments
- Standard 3 Dental Health and Hygiene
- Standard 4 Optical Health and Eye Tests
- Standard 5 Hearing Screening
- Standard 6 Immunisations and Vaccinations
- Standard 7 Children with additional needs and/or a disability
- Standard 8 Smoking Cessation
- Standard 9 Substance Misuse
- Standard 10 Sexual health and Teenage Pregnancy
- Standard 11 Children and Young People at risk of experiencing exploitation
- Standard 12 Healthy Eating and Fitness
- Standard 13 Care Leavers
- Standard 14 Adoption
- Standard 15 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

## **What we are already doing**

We have reviewed the Derbyshire Children in Care Health Service specification to ensure it reflects changing needs and challenges.

Under Responsible Commissioner arrangements, we seek to ensure that when children in care move placement or move into another CCG area and are currently receiving, or on a waiting list for, health services, their treatment continues uninterrupted. Children in care should be seen without delay or wait no longer than a child in a local area with an equivalent need who requires an equivalent service.

We acknowledge that our performance is not as good as we want on Initial Health Assessments being completed within 20 working days of a child coming into care. We therefore have analysed this to identify and tackle practice obstacles to improve on this. A multi-agency task and finish group has therefore been arranged to oversee a multi-agency pathway plan.

The service has consulted care leavers and developed health history summaries to ensure that those leaving care understand their health history including how to care for their own health needs and be able to access further signposting support to relevant healthcare services.

We are concerned in how we use the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and that this may be contributing to having borderline/high scores. We also judge that how we use both the process and the completed SDQs needs to better inform care plans. We have initiated a related programme of work on this.

Each child in care and care leaver is entitled to free access to a range of sports and leisure opportunities. This has contributed to increases in the percentage of children in care involved in sports/activities, and a decrease in the percentage of children in care with Body Mass Index (BMI) 91%-98%.

We have established a short life task group to improve emotional well-being services and support for care leavers.

Public Health fully recognise their role in contributing to improving the health and well-being of all our children, young people and care leavers and demonstrate this by contributing to the leisure offer and providing access to Mental Health First Aid Youth which contains elements on general and specific mental health, self-harm and suicide for foster carers, residential care home workers and others working with children in care and care leavers.

The special health needs of individual children and young people, particularly those with disabilities, are recognised and specialist services provided as required. Derbyshire is committed to ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity to meet their full potential.

### **What we plan to do over the next 2 years**

1. Ensure there are timely notifications to health of children coming into care, alongside sufficient capacity for assessments and timely appointments. This will be done via a multi-agency task and finish group to take through a multi-agency pathway plan.
2. Ensure we offer a Health History Summary to all young people with their consent and that there is completion of a transition health check in the year between 18 and 19 years to ensure young people know how to and are accessing relevant health services, this can be done by phone or email and in conjunction with the leaving care worker for the young person.
3. Strengthen practice on the use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) through a pilot in which questionnaires are completed by carers, young person/social worker and school with the plan that the results can then be interpreted and accessed by practitioners to inform the child's care plan, be available for the child's initial and annual health assessments and allow for discussion in children in care reviews throughout the year and ensure that targeted support can be identified.
4. Consult on and recommission Emotional well-being services for children in care.
5. Improve emotional well-being services and support for care leavers via a task group chaired by the Service Director, Children's Services, Commissioning and Transformation.

### **Section Five – Priority Four – Achieving potential**

We have high aspirations for the children we care for and our care leavers and we believe that achieving good educational outcomes will significantly improve life chances and well-being for all our children in care and care leavers. Education is crucial to ensure that our children in care are prepared for a successful future life and work.

All children in care are to be encouraged and supported to do their very best at school by staff and carers who take a real interest in the children's aspirations and achievements in education, as well as their concerns or difficulties. Staff and carers should have close relationships with the young person's school and the Virtual School and undertake to work in partnership with them.

Disruptions to a young person's schooling should be avoided and any transitions must be well planned to ensure the necessary support can be put in place. The Virtual School is a member of the Placement Matching Panel and Complex Cases Panel and so contributes to decision-making. Senior management agreement has to be gained before a young person in Key Stage 4 moves care placement where this means a change in school.

Attendance at school is closely monitored and challenged using the new Governance approach. Additionally:

- We have taken a decision corporately that any request to take a child in care out of school during term time must have the written approval of the Service Director, Early Help and Safeguarding.
- Head teachers have been individually written to stressing our commitment as Corporate Parents to ensure our children are in school and learning - accessing the curriculum they need to make good progress which has often been lost due to their early childhood experiences.

Derbyshire recognises the importance of improving the educational outcomes for our children in care and that achieving good educational outcomes will significantly improve life chances and well-being for all our children in care and care leavers.

### **What we are already doing as a Virtual School includes:**

- Providing children in care with advice, guidance and educational support to enable each young person to reach their full potential.
- Tracking and monitoring attendance, exclusions and progress.
- Providing specific training for schools, designated teachers and carers.
- Challenging schools and educational settings to raise attainment of children in care.
- Providing educational advice and guidance to young people and their carers.
- Recognising and celebrating achievement.
- Providing advice and guidance on future pathways.
- Encouraging the participation of our children and young people in out of school experiences to raise self-esteem.
- Ensuring all children in care receive their core mainstream offer of education, providing access to educational resources and offering support with studies.
- Providing personalised support packages to young people, to support behaviour and social development.
- Providing an allocated education support officer for every young person.
- Working in partnership with others to support the educational needs of individual pupils.
- Providing access to IT support, tuition or tailored services to promote achievement and success.
- Working with schools to ensure Pupil Premium Plus is used effectively to narrow the gap.

### **What we plan to do over the next 2 years**

From the Virtual School service plan:

#### **1. Reduce the number of children in care with at least one fixed term exclusion.**

Exclusions of pupils within Derbyshire are high in comparison to National figures. We therefore plan to reduce the number of our children in care with at least one

fixed term exclusion. The numbers of children in care with at least one fixed term exclusion has continued to reduce year on year and the Virtual School continues to develop a variety of strategies, including linking with other services within Derbyshire to ensure schools work with us on this important factor in raising attainment, progress and esteem of children in care; to ensure there are other positive strategies in place for schools, schools have a good understanding of inclusive practice, through our own training to schools; ensuring other Derbyshire services are accessed easily, through our commitment to corporate parenting; that appropriate plans are in place for each individual experiencing difficulty, to ensure these difficulties are overcome.

**2. Reduce the number of children in care classed as persistent absentees.**

The numbers of our children in care whose attendance is below 90% has continued to rise year on year from 9.8% in 2015 – 2016 to 17.09% in 2017 – 2018, as at February 2019 the percentage was 9.12%. The Virtual School monitors attendance on a monthly basis and shares data on children in care who are persistent absentees; there has been a significant reduction in the number of children taking holidays in term time. Good attendance is closely linked to attainment, so ensuring attendance is good is paramount to raising attainment. Virtual School works with all partners to have effective plans in place where attendance is less than good.

**3. Improve the % of children in care achieving the required standard at Key Stage 2 in combined reading, writing and maths and all pupils.**

The gap between children in care and all Derbyshire pupils has narrowed from 43 percentage points in 2015 -2016 to 31.8 percentage points in 2017 – 2018 in combined reading, writing and maths. Virtual School monitors, tracks and supports schools to identify appropriate interventions for children below age-related expectations by effectively using pupil premium plus. Current data predicts the number of children in care which will achieve expected standards in reading, writing and maths is 4 (15%) for 2018 – 2019 academic year. As numbers are small, patterns are difficult to establish, therefore ensuring each individual does the best they can is an important factor.

**4. Narrow the % point gap between children in care achieving standard pass in English and Maths at GCSE and all pupils.**

The gap between the children who have been in care for over a year and all Derbyshire pupils has widened from 46 percentage point in 2016 -2017 to 51 percentage points in 2017 – 2018 in achieving standard pass in English and maths at GCSE. Patterns are difficult to see due to changes in measures in data, however, closing the gap is still an important aspiration. Virtual School monitors, tracks and supports schools to identify appropriate interventions for young people below their target grades by effectively using pupil premium plus, supporting revision programmes and support to young people to sit their exams with arrangements appropriate to meet their needs.

## Section Five - Priority Five – Successful transition to adulthood

As Corporate Parents we want to support care leavers to progress into adulthood in a planned way, with stable and secure homes, having the skills and resilience to look after themselves and being able to earn a living or continue in education.

During 2018, we reviewed how our externally commissioned service and internal services were together meeting the needs and desired outcomes for our care leavers. This review took account of:

- Performance to date.
- The Care Leavers' Strategy 2016 - "Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence," and the new duties detailed in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- Learning from other Local Authorities with a high quality Care Leaver Service.

And, most importantly sought the views of care leavers, focussing on the five key outcomes as set out in 'Keep on Caring' to help determine how well Derbyshire County Council was performing as a Corporate Parent for our care leavers.

The findings from the consultation were:

- Young people leaving care are better prepared and supported to live independently.
- The majority of young people felt they were involved in their independence planning with 63% stating they were "Always involved" (32%) or "Mostly involved" (31%).
- Improved access to education, employment and training; 61% of care leavers felt that Derbyshire was "Very good" or "Good" at supporting young people with an offer of education, employment or training.
- Care leavers should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure.
  - 73% of young people felt either "Very settled" or "Settled".
  - 91% of young people felt either "Very safe" or "Safe".
  - 88% of young people felt either "Very secure" or "Secure".
- Improved access to health support.
  - Physical health of care leavers was generally good with 67% of young people feeling either very well or well and 24% of young people feeling "OK".
  - Mental health was more concerning with only 51% of young people feeling either "Very well" or "Well" and 30% of young people feeling "Unwell" or "Very unwell".
- Care leavers should achieve financial stability
  - Only 28% of young people felt they received appropriate financial independence information, whilst 68% indicated they had not.
  - 63% of young people felt they were either "Very well" prepared or



“Fairly well” prepared for budgeting expenses whilst 33% of young felt they were either “Not that well” or “Not at all prepared” for budgeting expenses.

- 45% of young people worried about money either “All the time” or “Regularly”.
- A further 33% of young people “Sometimes” worried about money with only 18% saying they “Never” worried about money.

Particular service areas highlighted for improvement were:

- Preparedness to leave care.
- Having more consistent professionals involved so care leavers can form and maintain good relationships.
- Reducing the insecurity and changes that can exacerbate mental health issues and other vulnerabilities.
- Access to relevant health and adult social care services.
- Activity to alleviate financial stress.
- Greater fairness in what different care leaver cohorts can access.

Derbyshire recognised that an improved service offer was required to ensure we met our full responsibilities and ambitions as Corporate Parents.

### **What we are already doing**

We are in the process of establishing a one service approach for all children in care transitioning to adulthood. This will be from age 16 to 25 and enable more consistency for care leavers, clearer lines of accountability, closer focused performance management, and integrated leadership through the post of an operational and strategic lead for care leavers.

We have already appointed the Strategic Lead for Care Leavers and staff to work with young people from 16, instead of the current allocation at 17.5.

In November 2018, Cabinet decided that the core components of the Aftercare Support Service, currently commissioned externally, should be brought ‘in-house’ to be delivered by the Council from 30 June 2019 at the latest. Work is underway to achieve this. In the interim we have amended the specification to include offering support to care leavers from 21 to 25.

Consultation with care leavers and audit work has shown scope for improvement in how pathway plans are currently completed by social workers and leaving care staff with young people. A new format has been developed and pathway practice guidance is being developed.

We have consulted care leavers about what type of accommodation they prefer and used that feedback to commission housing for young people in communities across Derbyshire, providing a mixture of:

- 24 hour staffed accommodation.
- Dispersed accommodation with visiting support.
- Resettlement and move-on support for young people referred by Children's Services.
- Tenancy sustainment for over 18 to 24 year-olds who are referred by local authorities and any other statutory or voluntary organisation.

Work is underway with Tier 2 councils to achieve Council Tax exemption for care leavers.

We have strong provision of Apprenticeships and Internships within the Local Authority and externally but recognised that despite an Education, Employment and Training (EET) Strategy and range of teams and approaches to support young people to be in Education, Employment or Training, as Corporate Parents we were not effective in enabling our care leavers to achieving their full potential in the same way we would wish for our own children. We have established an EET Task group, chaired by the Assistant Director, to drive through improvements which can then be embedded within the care leaver service.

We have implemented new processes to enable better reporting on key measures, and thus allow focussed work to improve on those areas young people have told us are important to and for them.

We have published two key documents:

- The Local Offer for Care Leavers in Derbyshire.
- Care Leavers 16-25 year old Financial Entitlements.

### **What we plan to do over the next 2 years**

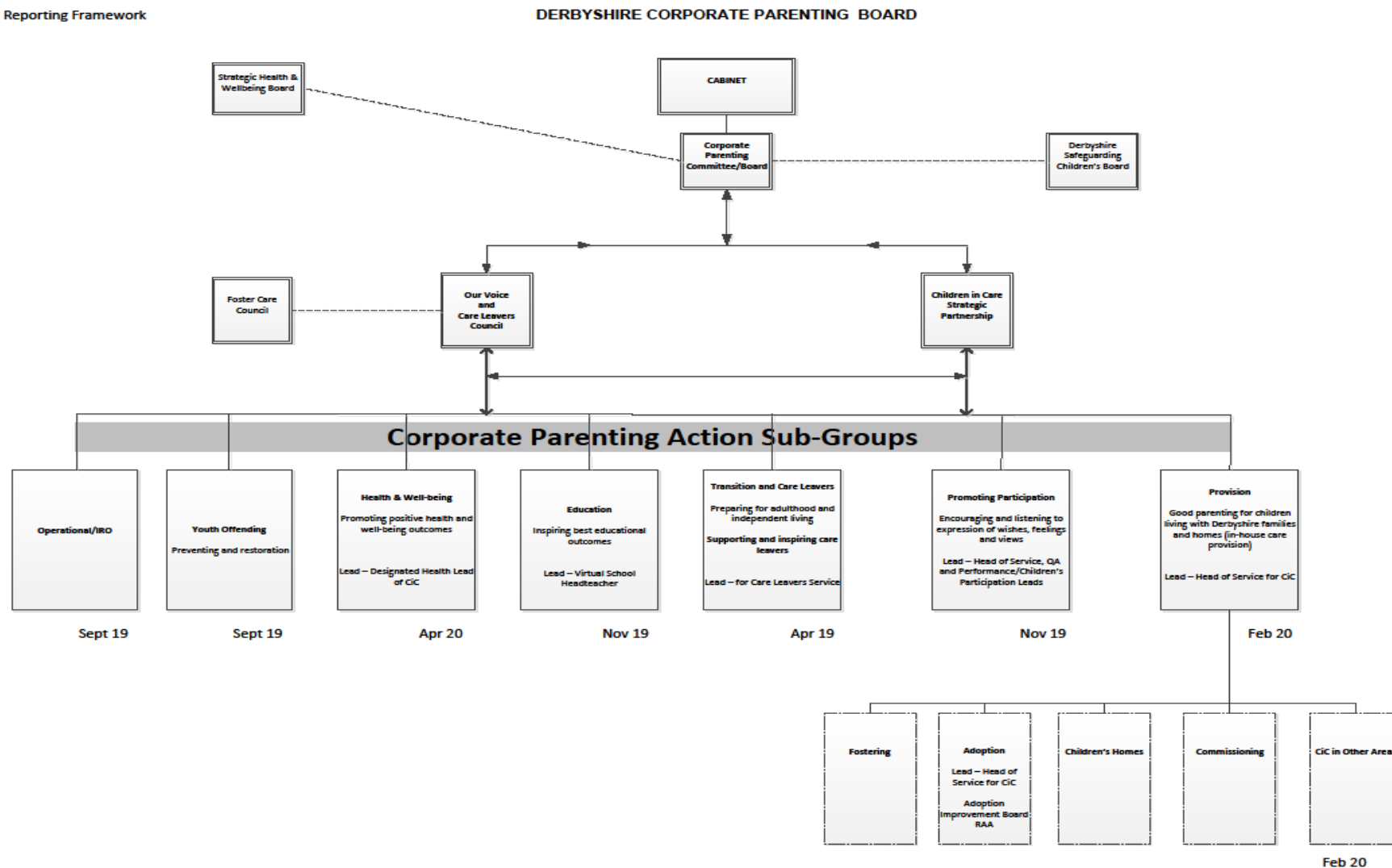
1. Establish the new 16 to 25 Care Leaver Service.
2. Continue to consult care leavers and involve them in service development.
3. Continue to work with care leavers to plan their future using their Pathway Plan, ensuring that their transition to adulthood meets their aspirations and reflects their needs and individual circumstances.
4. Revise the Transition Policy to ensure seamless practice between Adult and Children's services in respect of care planning and funding for those young people who may meet the criteria for Adult Services.
5. Finalise and roll out Council Tax exemption.
6. Strengthen how we support foster carers and residential staff, both DCC and independent, to help our young people prepare for independence, for instance by the use of the DCC Independent Living Skills and Tenancy Preparation Workbook.
7. Maintain a high % of care leavers in suitable accommodation.
8. Increase the % of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 in Education, Employment or Training.

## **Section Six – Monitoring the Strategy and Action Plan**

The Corporate Parenting Board will oversee the strategy, monitoring priority areas on a bi-monthly basis, with the actions being progressed via the Children in Care Council, Care Leaver forum and groups below.

The underpinning structure is described below, together with provisional dates for focussed scrutiny at Corporate Parenting Board.

Reporting Framework



## Action plan

### Priority One – being a good corporate parent

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible person and/or group</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Impact – how can we tell</b>
1.	To implement the new arrangements for the lead member for Young People enabling clear two way communication between the Children in Care Council to inform the Corporate Parenting Board.	Lead member for Young People, Strategic Director  Assistant Director, Specialist services	June 2019	Evidence of how CiC views have shaped decision making
2.	Through the Corporate Parenting Board, ensure that all departments of the Council and all partners fulfil their roles as Corporate Parents.	Corporate Parenting Board	June 2019	Evidenced in a range of performance data
3.	Increase the ways young people can express their views so children in care can take part in the Children in Care Council's work.	Head of Service, Quality and performance and Participation team	April 2019	More young people's views
4.	Improve the information we give to children and young people in care about being in care.	Assistant Director, early help and safeguarding and lead HoSL	September 2019	Young people report being better informed
5.	All services for our children in care to develop information about who they are, what they do, how they can be contacted and what a young person should do if they wish to complain.	All – scrutinised by Corporate Parenting Board	Sept 2019	Young people report being better informed

**Priority Two – Quality Care experience**

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible person and/or group</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Impact – how can we tell</b>
1.	Further improve on the stability and quality of the social work workforce.	Assistant Director, Early Help and Safeguarding	April 2020	Fewer changes in social worker
2.	Review how IROs challenge care plans where necessary and how relevant senior managers have oversight of this.	Head of Child Protection and Independent Reviewing Officers	Sept 2019	Effective tracker leading to better care plans
3.	Launch new Children at Risk of Exploitation and Missing procedures, guidance and toolkit; supported by workforce development to enhance quality of return home interviews and how the information gathered is used	Head of Child Protection and IRO service	September 2019	Fewer children going missing and fewer missing episodes.
3.	Continue to improve the timeliness of adoption with the target of achieving the national government threshold.	Adoption Improvement Board, together with AEM.	March 2020	Children achieve earlier permanence
4.	Review the Sufficiency strategy 2017-21 on an annual basis – review April /May 2019 and again 2020.	Head of Children in Care provision and Head of Commissioning	May 2019 then May 2020	Good information which steers activity
5.	Prevent placement breakdowns wherever possible by continuing and developing the support and training for our Foster Carers and Residential staff and by undertaking good matching practice.	Head of Children in Care provision	Sept 2019	Reduced placement breakdowns
6.	Review the effectiveness of the Time Out Team and consider any further development.	Service Director – Commissioning & Transformation	Nov 2019	Flexible response capacity and thus better outcomes for young people
7.	Establish greater links with housing providers.	Commissioning team and Care leaver strategic lead	March 2020	More care leavers in stable, long term housing

8.	Continue to develop Performance Management reports for fostering enable us to forecast placement need, make the best use of available provision and identify areas for development.	Head of Service and Operation's manager – with MIT and Mosaic teams	Sept 2019	More children living with DCC foster carers
9.	Improve on the completion of life story work for all children and young people.	Assistant Director- Early Help and Safeguarding	March 2020	Better emotional well - being and understanding of their identity

### Priority Three – Good Health and Wellbeing

	Action	Responsible person and/or group	By when	Impact – how can we tell
1.	Improve on timely Initial health assessments – follow action plan.	Improving health outcomes group and Designated Nurse for Looked after Children	Sept 2019	Improved performance
2.	Ensure we offer a Health History Summary to all young people with their consent and that there is completion of a transition health check in the year between 18 and 19 years to ensure young people know how to and are accessing relevant health services, develop new reporting mechanism	Designated Nurse for Looked after Children, Strategic lead for care leavers and Head of Service, YOS and Care leavers	Sept 2019	Evidence on Mosaic and via feedback from care leavers
3.	Strengthen practice on the use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).	Lead HoS and Improving health outcomes group	May 2019	Improved performance with positive evaluation leading to county wide roll-out
4.	Consult on and recommission Emotional well- being services for children in care.	Head of Commissioning team	April 2020	Needs better met consistently
5.	Improve emotional well-being services and support for care leavers via a task group chaired by Service Director.	Service Director, Commissioning and Transformation	Sept 2019	Young people experience better emotional well-being

**Priority Four – Achieving potential**

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible person and/or group</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Impact – how can we tell</b>
1.	Reduce the number of children in care with at least one fixed term exclusion.	Virtual head	Aug 2019	Children have better outcomes – evidenced by performance data
2.	Reduce the number of children in care classed as Persistent absentees.	Virtual head	Aug 2019	Children have better outcomes – evidenced by performance data
3.	Improve the % of Children in Care achieving the required standard at key stage 2 in combined reading, writing and maths and all pupils.	Virtual head	Aug 2019	Children have better outcomes – evidenced by performance data
4.	Narrow the % point gap between children in care and those not in care achieving standard pass in English and Maths at GCSE and all pupils.	Virtual head	Aug 2019	Children have better outcomes – evidenced by performance data

**Priority Five – Successful transition to adulthood**

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible person and/or group</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Impact – how can we tell</b>
1.	Establish the new 16 to 25 Care Leaver Service.	Strategic lead, care leavers; Assistant Director, specialist services	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2019	Care leavers receive holistic service
2.	Continue to consult care leavers and involve them in service development.	Strategic lead, care leavers Assistant Director, specialist services	May 2019	Better outcomes evidenced by care leavers feedback and performance data
3.	Continue to work with care leavers to plan their future using their Pathway Plan, ensuring that their transition to adulthood meets their aspirations and reflects their needs and individual circumstances.	Strategic lead, care leavers; Head of YOS and care leavers; Assistant Director, specialist services	May 2019	Better outcomes evidenced by care leavers feedback and performance data
4.	Revise the Transition Policy to ensure seamless practice between Adult and Children's services in	Head of Service, Disabled Children and nominated Adult	April 2020	



	respect of care planning and funding for those young people who may meet the criteria for Adult Services.	Care lead		
5.	Finalise and roll- out Council Tax eligibility.	Commissioning manager and Strategic lead, care leavers	Oct 2019	Care leavers have Council Tax exemption.
6.	Strengthen how we support foster carers and residential staff, both DCC and independent, to help our young people prepare for independence	Head of children in care provision; Strategic lead, care leavers; Commissioning and Contracts team	Sept 2019	Young people report better preparation and their records evidence related work done with them; toolkits, key worker sessions etc.
7.	Maintain a high % of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation.	Strategic lead, care leavers; Commissioning and Contracts team	Sept 2019	
8.	Increase the % of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 in Education, Employment or Training.	Strategic lead, care leavers; HoS YOS and Young people; Asst Director, Specialist services	March 2020	More care leavers in Education, Employment or Training, increasing their emotional and financial wellbeing, enabling them to build rewarding careers

## Children in Care Council Action Plan

- Ask workers to talk to the children and young people they work with and tell them about the benefits of being part of the Children in Care Council.
- Children in Care Teams, Fostering Teams, social work teams, Virtual School, Independent Reviewing Officers and Children in Care Health Teams to identify a Children in Care Council Champion for their team.
- The Participation Team will attend relevant team meetings and fostering support groups to talk about the work of the Children in Care Council.

### And how will we judge impact

- Increased numbers at the Children in Care Council Activities.
- We can evidence the impact of the Children in Care Council through impact on policy and practice.
- Those who do not wish to attend are engaged in other ways.

### Information for young people - What needs to happen?

- We have already undertaken a review of existing information.
- We have looked at what other Local Authorities do.
- We need to undertake a joint piece of work with services and young people to develop this in Derbyshire.
- Children and young people in our care should be routinely provided with information about the services and individuals working with them.

### And how will we judge impact?

- Ask children and young people if they were given information which was helpful and easy to understand.
- Ask children and young people if they know where to find information about the services they need on the internet.
- Ask young people for feedback on the information and if there is any further information they would find useful.

### **Related documents**

Adoption Annual report and Statement of Purpose

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/children-and-families/adoption-and-fostering/adoption/adoption.aspx>

Fostering Statement of Purpose and other information at

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/children-and-families/adoption-and-fostering/fostering/change-lives-foster-for-derbyshire.aspx>

Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/children-and-families/children-we-look-after/children-we-look-after.aspx>