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# A Partnership Strategy for Children Looked After & Care Leavers In North East Lincolnshire 2019 - 2022

## FOREWORD

North East Lincolnshire Council's priorities are clear: **'Stronger economy and stronger communities'**

To achieve this vision we need to work in new ways with partners in the public and private sectors, the voluntary and community sector, and with individuals, families and communities. We must support and enable the achievement of improved community outcomes with creativity and innovation.

We want North East Lincolnshire to be seen as an attractive place to live, work, visit and invest. We know that we have significant and exciting opportunities for investment and growth in North East Lincolnshire.

The Council's stronger economy / stronger communities priorities are underpinned by a key strategic framework comprising the following:

- health and wellbeing strategy
- economic strategy
- prevention and early intervention strategy
- financial strategy
- safeguarding

Our [outcomes framework](#) is the means by which our priorities will be translated into action and delivered, developed and achieved in conjunction with our partners across sectors. This is intended to drive a culture of evidence-based decision-making that will enable elected members to take informed key decisions, knowing the risks and the opportunities for citizens, communities and businesses. Our commissioning plan will ensure and foster clear links between the outcomes framework and the resources available to achieve them.

The framework, sets out the five high level outcomes that we and our partners aspire to achieve to ensure prosperity and wellbeing for the residents of North East Lincolnshire.

The five outcomes are that all people in North East Lincolnshire will:

- Enjoy and benefit from a strong economy
- Feel safe and are safe
- Enjoy good health and well being
- Benefit from sustainable communities
- Fulfil their potential through skills and learning

North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) is the corporate parent of all children looked after in our borough. These are our children, and we have high aspirations for them and want our children to achieve the best outcomes.

As with any good parent, we want to provide our children and young people with the best possible start in life, so that they can enjoy their childhood. As they prepare for adulthood, we want to inspire and support our young people to fulfil their own ambitions and dreams. For this reason, we have integrated our strategy for our children looked after and care leavers, to ensure the best possible support is provided as they reach adulthood.

In collaboration with key partners, which include health, education, police, housing, Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, we will use our collective commitment to give every child looked after strong foundations and support to thrive in adulthood.

As corporate parents, we strive to ensure that children looked after and care leavers:

- Feel safe and are safe
- Enjoy good physical and emotional health and well being
- Fulfil their potential through skills and learning
- Enjoy and benefit from a strong economy, in which they sustain fulfilling employment
- Benefit from sustainable communities, of which they have made a positive contribution

Our ambitions exceed our statutory roles and responsibilities, and our vision has been shaped by the children and young people we look after.

They are at the heart of everything we do as a Council and we expect all partners to share this commitment for our young people.

- We will deliver a genuine, multi-agency, child-centred strategy, accepting that there is more to do to ensure that all partners are equally accountable for all outcomes. We want to make best possible use of our collective resources to achieve our shared ambitions.
- Where it is safe to do so, we will support our children to remain with their families. When this is not possible, we are committed to providing family-based placements wherever possible – a place that our young people can call home. At all times, we will support the stability of children’s education and ensure that those young people who have special educational needs receive the additional support they need to succeed.
- We will carefully plan the journey into adulthood for our young people, to ensure there is no ‘cliff edge’ once young people reach 18 years of age. We aspire to offer all children in

care who are aged 14+ work experience, and care leavers will be supported to access apprenticeships and employment.

## **OUR VISION**

- We want our children and young people to have every opportunity and the support they need to be the best they possibly can be.
- We will give our children stability, understanding, encouragement, positive relationships and healing from past harm.
- We will support our children to build resilience, ambition and aspirational goals and we will provide practical and emotional support to help our young people successfully transition into adulthood where they will thrive.
- We will support young people to build meaningful and lasting relationships with people they live with and who support them

## **THE VOICE OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – WHAT DO THEY WANT US TO DO?**

We engage regularly with our children and young people to understand what they would like to happen and we ensure that their voices shape the way we deliver our services. We have a range of ways that we support and encourage young people to have their voices heard and these include:

- Attendance at Our Voice; Listen Up – a monthly council meeting for children looked after
- Attendance at the Regional Council for Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Attendance at the weekly Sunday and Wednesday drop-in's for care leavers
- Question Time events with Leadership Team

- Viewpoint electronic survey for children looked after and care leavers
- Advocacy Service for children looked after and care leavers – to support children's voices to be heard at meetings where decisions are made about them
- Annual Children Looked After (CLA) Health Fun Day
- Participation events; i.e., Art Day
- Fostering reviews
- Foster placement exit interviews
- Annual questionnaires for CLA and care leavers

Our commitment to listening and acting on the voices of children looked after and care leavers is made clear in our Corporate Parenting Pledge and our Local Offer for Care Leavers.

**The key things that young people have told us they would like us to make happen are:**

### **SUPPORT US – how you deliver our services**

- Consider the impact of any decisions on looked after children and care leavers that you make as a Council
- Value our views and always try to give us opportunities to be heard. If you cannot make the decision we wanted, please explain why as soon as possible
- Make sure we don't leave care until we are ready and look upon care leavers as with special consideration even after we are 21
- Make sure the pledges are carried through

**EDUCATION, TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT – be ambitious for our future**

- Find the right school for us that will make time to support us as well as teach us.
- Give us opportunities for work experience and employment and support us in the workplace to increase our chances of success
- Try to keep us safe from bullying but, if we are bullied, support us to find the right help.
- Encourage and support us into college / university or apprenticeships / traineeships.

#### **HEALTH & WELLBEING – know that we are well**

- Provide us with information about our health histories
- Enable us to have access to the local leisure centres
- Recognise that we might need more health care and ensure we receive it – no matter how old we are.
- Hold an annual fun/ health day
- Ensure annual medicals meet our needs

#### **RELATIONSHIPS – show that you care about our future**

- Recognise that relationships are important for our experience in care and leaving care
- Make sure that we can contact our workers whenever we need them (within reason), and let us know who to contact when our usual worker is not available
- Celebrate our achievements and pick us up when things don't quite work out
- Support our workers to build a positive relationship with us

#### **WHERE WE LIVE NOW & IN THE FUTURE – keep us safe**

- Help us feel secure and make sure that the people who look after us are well prepared, trained and supported so that they care for us in the best way

- Arrange quality training for people working and living with us
- Involve us in recruitment of the staff who will work with us and be a good employer to encourage staff to stay so we don't have lots of changes of worker
- Ensure placements are always of a good standard

#### **HELPING US TO BE READY FOR OUR FUTURE**

- As we get older, make sure that emotional support is there for us as well as financial and practical support
- Support us to make a smooth transition through care to independence when we are ready – don't force anyone out of a care setting

#### **PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY – help us feel we belong**

- Involve children and young people in key council decisions
- Help us to access our files when we are ready to see them

### Young People's views to our social workers:

Statement: "How you can make a difference for me"

Help me understand my story and why I am in care at each stage of my life

Time with my family should be about making new memories. It might help if we are involved in the planning of when and where. Could we meet the contact supervisor so we can build trust?

Make sure that you understand my needs as an individual - show that I matter.

Keep me safe as a child and work with me as a young adult to make the choices which will keep me safe

I need to know who is talking about me and what they are talking about; sometimes I don't know this and want to have a say.

Allow me to ask for help when I need it, though I might not always make this clear

Make sure I learn the skills I need for adult life including cooking and using the washing machine, making friends, making appointments, getting on with neighbours and paying bills

### Our Progress

Our commitment to partnership working to improve outcomes for children looked after and care leavers has resulted in some exciting developments over the last 18 months:

- We have completed a project called Valuing Care, which has helped us to understand the nuanced needs of our children looked after so that we can ensure all young people live in a home that ensures they achieve the best outcomes.
- A reunification project has commenced and will begin with the children and young people who are already placed with family members on orders. We have identified 54 children and have appointed a Reunification Social Worker who will be reviewing how we will achieve the best permanence option for our children.
- We have recently made significant developments to our Contact Supervision service, as part of an improvement project in partnership with FutureGov. This project has changed the way we operate the contact service, from a process to an experience for families, heavily developed using the 'Trauma Informed' model.
- We have commenced a revamp of our digital offer – SWs now have Whats App available on their phones so that they can communicate effectively with young people using a media that they prefer to engage with.
- We have supported the development of our Council for Children in Care (CfCiC) to be able to influence senior decision makers more effectively. The group have expanded and rebranded themselves to 'Our Voice; Listen Up!' (OVLU) to encourage increased membership (and have also designed a new logo and had t-shirts printed as a further way to strengthen the brand and increase membership).
- Young people from Our Voice Listen Up met with NELC Leadership team for a takeover challenge and to discuss key

issues for them Actions were agreed and captured to follow up throughout the coming year.

- In 2018 we relaunched and rebranded our Independent Visitor Scheme as “NELBuddies”. We have recruited and trained 24 volunteers and 15 children are now linked with a Buddy.
- Following consultation with young people, we extended our non-statutory entitlements offer to make care leavers living in NEL exempt from council tax up to the age of 25.
- We were successful in our bid to the Innovation Fund for our Staying Close project which provides support to young people moving on from residential foster care. Key elements of the project are:
  - A tenancy training program to support care leavers to live independently
  - Weekly “drop in” Sundays and Wednesdays bringing together other care leavers, to meet, eat and chat in groups. One to one support is available such as advice from a substance misuse worker, careers advisor and a health and well-being practitioner.
  - A ‘food pantry’ for care leavers

### **Related Policies, Strategies & Plans to support all aims & objectives for CLA**

#### **Current strategies:**

1. Children, young people and families workforce development strategy
2. NELSCP learning, development and evaluation strategy
3. NELC placement commissioning and sufficiency strategy
4. Care leavers accommodation strategy
5. Prevention and early help strategy
6. Corporate parenting strategy and pledge
7. CSE strategy

8. CCE Strategy
9. Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Protocol
10. Neglect strategy
11. Voice and influence strategy
12. CLA Sufficiency Strategy

#### **Current policies:**

1. Permanency policy
2. Policy for CLA placed out of area
3. LACE policy
4. Special needs and disability provision policy
5. Whistleblowing policy
6. Additional policies listed on the LSCB website

## **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS FEEL SAFE AND ARE SAFE**

We will embed a nurturing culture which builds resilience in children and young people across all services, settings and partners by;

- supporting permanence through appropriate use of court processes;
- supporting children and young people to remain in contact with their birth family and community wherever it is safe to do so, providing appropriate support when needed;
- preparing our children and young people for adulthood by allowing them to take risks in a safe environment;
- ensuring that young people have access to an independent advocate;
- providing every care leaver with the opportunity to 'stay put' or have regular contact with foster carers and/or children's homes (Staying Close) as they move towards adulthood.

## **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS EXPERIENCE GOOD PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

**We will:**

- work better to meet the health needs of CLA and care leavers, using a toolkit developed by the Department of Health and the Care Leavers Association to identify specific services that we need to provide, make better our data collection and data analysis about the lives of our young people – the development of a data set for CLA and care leavers is a priority, so that we are fully aware of the profile of the health and wellbeing of these young people and can then plan actions to improve outcomes
- ensure that more general services must take into account the needs of CLA and care leavers

- complete a comprehensive health assessment at entry into care which is then monitored and updated on a regular basis and be more flexible with health appointments – further, improve timely access to all health services for care leavers, with protocols for transitions
- continue to improve access to mental health services for children looked after
- continue to provide free access to health records alongside social care files for all care leavers
- offer better education, advice and support, particularly in key areas such as substance misuse, relationships and pregnancy
- develop a protocol to support placement stability to ensure that health needs are fully considered
- offer improved training for the workforce to respond to a young person's health needs and to be trauma-informed
- continue to explore the needs for therapeutic placements
- offer a mentoring / befriending / coaching service for all care leavers
- convene multi-agency SDQ meetings are held for those young people scoring over 17, which supports identification of issues young people may currently be experiencing. In addition Annual Health assessments are able to pick up issues and refer to appropriate professionals
- provide a dedicated CLA health service
- support young people to understand their history

## **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS ARE SUPPORTED IN THEIR EDUCATION TO FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL**

**We will:**

- maintain the successful Virtual School in order that the educational progress and outcomes of all children of statutory

school age continues to improve, as though they attended a single school.

- ensure each CLA has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in order to monitor and review educational progress
- act as Corporate Parents, requiring the highest of aspirations and advocating for the needs of CLA, providing challenge and support to schools and academies
- ensure that a higher proportion of Year 10 and 11 students remain in mainstream education in local academies so that they are able to access and complete GCSE courses

#### **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS ACHIEVE SUSTAINED AND FULFILLING EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE**

##### **We will:**

- consolidate the Partnership Agreements already in place with all secondary academies ensuring access to independent careers, information, advice and guidance for all children looked after and young people and those who have been previously looked after. Partnership Agreements to obtain vulnerable lists (including CLA) termly
- offer support from a NEET Practitioner/Careers Adviser for those CLA and care leavers who become NEET in order to reengage into education, employment or training
- offer work experience and work placements, within an appropriate bespoke curriculum pathway plan, that supports children and young people, as far as they are able, to aspire to access the most appropriate route into future education, employment or training from Year 9 onwards
- exempt care leavers from council tax up to age 25
- provide initial work experience from Year 9, leading into work placements and employment from 16 years, to ensure that all

CLA and care leavers have opportunities for learning and developing the appropriate skills that will support them in their future careers

- link NEET Practitioner with the Through Care team to support NEET children who are or who have been previously looked after to help them re-engage into education, employment or training
- further integrate YPSS with Through Care in order to promote services and projects and awareness of the current offer

#### **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION**

##### **We will:**

- offer, via the Young & Safe universal youth engagement programme, a host of free activities that all young people can be signposted towards to ensure they access a wide range of activities within their own communities, including sports, arts and culture
- provide access to the Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Award Scheme at all levels (Bronze, Silver and Gold) to CLA, as it is accessible to all young people across the borough.
- support access to Diamond funding to enable accredited but not purist DofE schemes for young people identified as vulnerable or disadvantaged. This funding will support activities, residentials, training and staffing costs to ensure young people complete the award.
- dedicate a member of the DofE team to be a Diamond fund champion to ensure that this model is developed and further young people identified as CLA / Care leavers are signposted into both elements of DofE

- Continue regular activity days, supported by the street-based team, and developed and delivered bespoke to CLA individuals

### **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS HAVE A POSITIVE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

#### **We will:**

- continue to make sure residential staff, social workers and foster carers have an awareness of the issues for young people through awareness raising, training and a culture of restorative practice within NELC's own homes.
- use restorative working practices to support mediation and conflict resolution and appropriate ways of dealing with all types of behaviours
- strive to maintain 100% of NELC Children's Homes are judged by Ofsted to Good or Outstanding
- offer training opportunities to foster carers and residential workers that support them to identify and address the particular vulnerability of children and young people who are looked after
- aim to engage young people in activities to divert away from risky behaviour. However, in the most extreme cases we will place a child in secure accommodation to protect them from themselves, with a package of support to address emotional issues, plus educational needs which may have contributed to the situation. Safety planning ensures a proportionate and timely response to safety issues
- maintain the high levels of placement stability, a stable educational experience and consistency with the workers, helping relationship building
- embed the Staying Put project for those in foster care reaching age 18, and use the Staying Close project with an offer of a

continuing relationship for our residential care leavers. The Staying Close Project and Through Care service provides a weekly "drop in" Sundays and Wednesdays to meet, eat and chat in groups. One to one support is available such as advice from a substance misuse worker, careers advisor and a health and well-being practitioner

- offer a 'food pantry' for care leavers. Care leavers pay a nominal fee for a membership, for which they will receive a weekly food parcel. Food parcels will also be available to care leavers in crisis / emergency situations in partnership with a charity aimed at relieving food poverty and reducing food waste in the UK
- publish the initial Local Offer to care leavers and to build on this into the future
- publishing the revised Corporate Parenting Pledge and develop a performance framework for the promises made therein
- offer training in relation to supporting children in placement on a long term basis and care leavers

### **HOW WE ENSURE SUFFICIENCY OF PLACES FOR OUR CHILDREN**

#### **We will:**

- audit and review the outgoing strategy, to test if we did what we said we would do
- publish a revised CLA Sufficiency strategy, focusing on current, analysed and identified needs, including input from young people
- regularly monitor and publish our progress against the aims set out in the new strategy

- be held to account on delivery of the aims and objectives by the CLA strategic board and the Corporate Parenting Board and CLA representatives
- We will keep our children safe and settled
- improve the quality of provision and ensure there is more choice in suitability of accommodation
- apply new governance arrangements through the Corporate Parenting Board
- expect all placement settings will have Good or Outstanding ratings from Ofsted
- ensure succession planning for carers
- reduce the need for council care through effective early support to minimise entry into the care system with in-house preventative services
- establish clear intent that all placements are the only placement for as long as needed
- endeavour, where possible to offer placements
  - nearer to home and within our area
  - cause minimal disruption to education, training and social / community needs and ties
  - that let brothers and sisters live together
  - that meet the needs of disabled children and children from ethnic minority backgrounds

**HOW WILL WE DELIVER OUR STRATEGY?**

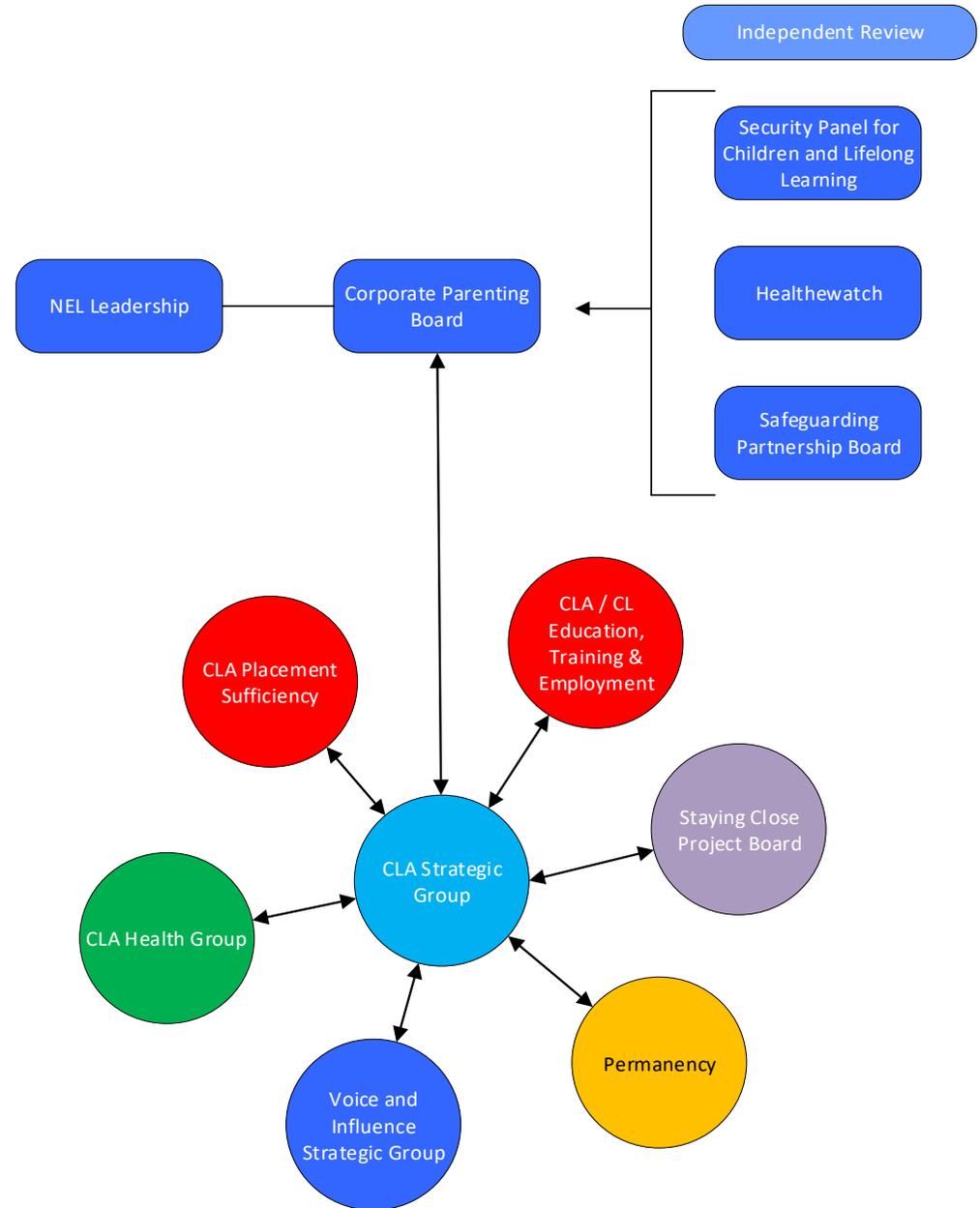
This renewed vision and strategy is driven by an aspiration that all agencies working with children and young people will take ownership of their responsibility for those who are in care or leaving care. We have developed a new governance structure to ensure that all partners recognise and act on their responsibilities and our shared ambitions for children looked after and care leavers.

The Director of Children and Family Services chairs a multi-agency group CLA Strategic Group of senior officers responsible for planning, reviewing and developing all aspects of our work with children looked after and care leavers, and providing support and challenge across the partnership.

This board’s membership will comprise: Assistant Director for Children and Family Services (LA); Assistant Director for Education (LA); Assistant Director for Skills (LA); Assistant Director for Women and Children’s Services (CCG).

The views of children and young people in care are expressed through the Voice and Influence Strategic Group, of which the ‘Our Voice; Listen Up!’ group (Children in Care Council) is a sub group. Feedback is also achieved via engagement activity that forms part of our quality assurance framework, as well as via Independent Reviewing Officers.

The partnership strategy for children looked after and care leavers will be underpinned by a partnership delivery plan, which will outline the strategy’s key actions and activity. It will be developed, monitored and reviewed by the CLA Strategic Group.



## **Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting**

The monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements will be underpinned by robust and comprehensive data gathering and analysis across all partners. All partners will use data to monitor that appropriate actions are being taken, which are likely to improve outcomes and make best use of available resources.

All partners will use outcomes from monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken and will report improved outcomes and areas for further development to the CLA Strategic Group. The group will use these evaluations to hold all partners to account for implementing additional actions to address the areas for further improvement.

The CLA Strategic Group will report to the Corporate Parenting Board, as champions for all children looked after and care leavers in North East Lincolnshire. The Place Board and Union Board will have oversight of the key deliverables of the CLA Strategic Group. Independent oversight and scrutiny affecting the safety of all children and young people in North East Lincolnshire is the responsibility of NEL Children's Safeguarding Board.

The Voice and Influence Strategic Group (incorporating the 'Our Voice; Listen Up!' Children in Care Council) will provide scrutiny and challenge for the work of the CLA Strategic Group, to ensure that the voice of children and young people shapes and informs all actions.

The CLA Strategic Group will also oversee a number of operational groups established to deliver the strategy, including:

- CLA Health Group
- CCG Women and Children's Governance Group

- Staying Close Project Board
- CLA Education (including the Virtual Head's Quarterly Report)
- Multi-Disciplinary Team Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Review Group