

**Hampshire County Council**  
**Children's Services**  
**Department**  
**Children in Care Strategy**  
**2018 - 2021**

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## **1. Introduction**

This strategy sets out how Hampshire County Council Children's Services Department, together with partner agencies, will meet the needs of all children who are in the Council's care.

## **2. Principles**

In accordance with the principles set out in the Children Act 1989, the County Council's services for children are premised upon the belief that in most circumstances children and young people are best looked after within their own families. The Human Rights Act 1998, Right to Family Life, supports this, legislating that children have the right to a private family life wherever possible.

However, there will always be some children and young people, for reasons of abuse, neglect or for other reasons, for whom being in the care of Hampshire County Council will be in their best interests.

These same children and young people deserve the highest quality service that not only does not disadvantage them amongst their peers, but also seeks to redress the disadvantages that they may already have suffered prior to coming into care and which will enable them to have the best possible start in life.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 clearly states seven corporate principles:

- 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

These principles apply to:

- Children looked after by a local authority within the meaning given by section 22 (1) of the Children Act 1989
- Relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A (2) of that Act
- Persons aged under 25 years who are former relevant children within the meaning given by section 23C (1) of that Act.

Hampshire County Council, as a corporate parent, seeks to remove any and all barriers that may exist in order to enable looked after children and young people to achieve their full potential.

We want children and young people in our care to take a full and active part within their communities both now and in future years. We want them to have the best possible life experiences, to be safe, happy and healthy, and achieve their full potential at school.

### **3. Strategic Goals**

Hampshire has a set of strategic goals to support the delivery of the children in care strategy.

- Children will be, where ever possible, supported to remain in their family through the provision of targeted support services.
- Children who do enter care will be provided with a quality placement identified to meet their needs.
- Children in care will be encouraged and supported to participate in the decisions and plans about their care.
- Permanency of placements for children will be decided at the earliest opportunity.
- Young people leaving care will receive help support and guidance to support their transition in to adulthood.

The strategy sets out how Hampshire Children's Services Department, along with its partners, intends to deliver these improved outcomes for all children and young people in our care.

## **4. Components of Hampshire Children's Services Children in Care Strategy**

### **4.1 Early Help**

#### **Why is this important?**

One of the best ways to ensure that we can deliver high quality services to children in care is to ensure that we have the right children in care, those most vulnerable and at risk, whilst ensuring that we support those children who can be supported at home effectively.

#### **What are we doing to improve this?**

Hampshire Children's Services developed an "Early Help Offer" and a revised "Thresholds Matrix" is in place to ensure children and young people receive the best possible targeted multi agency advice, guidance and support through the Early Help Hub before any need to refer to social care is actioned.

### **4.2 A Strong and Consistent 'Front Door'**

#### **Why is this important?**

Establishing a strong and consistent 'front door' (i.e. the part of children's social care services that provide the first contact and assessment for vulnerable children and families) that ensures we look after the right children at the right time is a crucial starting point in the child's journey. The Children's Services Department front door will ensure those children who meet our threshold of intervention will be offered an assessment and subsequent service and a support package provided by our front line teams. Where appropriate our Intensive Support Service will engage with families to, wherever possible and appropriate, prevent children needing to enter the care system.

#### **What do we need to do to improve this?**

The demand on Children's Services has increased significantly in line with the national picture. Hampshire County Council secured Innovation funding to invest in social work support and services to address this demand over 2015-2017. This additional resource enabled the development of shared care support, building capacity and resilience in social workers, a holistic approach to case managing families and providing families with targeted intervention and support.

Partners in Practice funding has enabled Hampshire Children's Services to develop models of intervention using a systemic and holistic approach with children and families whilst maintaining the child as central to all decision making. In addition we have been able to provide improved and increased admin support to our workforce to reduce the time spent on office based tasks

and increase the time available to for direct work with families, children in care and their carers.

This funding has also enable Children's Services to restructure our front line teams which reduces the need to transfer a case from an assessment team to a longer term team and thereby reduce the number of changes of social worker a child/family experience as a direct result of feedback from children and parents/carers.

In addition our workforce has been provided with 'tablets' to enable more productive and effective mobile working arrangements. These devices will enable staff to access policies, procedures and practice guidance even when absent from the office and direct working tools to support direct work with families within their homes.

Our workforce will promote the engagement of children and their families to shape and develop the services they receive and those Hampshire can offer in the future.

### **4.3 Early Permanency**

#### **Why is this important?**

When we do need to take a child in to care we need to act quickly and decisively at an early stage in the child's journey through the care system in order to give the child security and consistency of care. Acting within existing legislation, we will adopt the 'golden thread' of permanency throughout our decision making that starts at the front door.

Permanency requires us to make decisions that reflect the longer term needs of every child at every point in their journey and ensures we do not take decisions that are only based on short term requirements or the 'here and now'.

#### **What are we doing to improve this?**

In line with our need to offer permanent solutions for the children and families we serve we are further developing our 'Permanency Planning' policy and associated practice guidance. In addition we have developed a clear pre-entry to care process with an emphasis on support to enable children to achieve permanency at home with their parents/family wherever it is appropriate and safe to do so.

### **4.4 Support and Help**

#### **Why is this important?**

Being in care itself can be worrying and unsettling for children and young people, that may be exacerbated by being some distance away from home (or

sometimes vice versa). We will support all our children in care wherever they are placed and whoever they are placed with. We support contact with their siblings where placed separately often supported by their carers and with parents/birth family which will be provided by the Contact Team where necessary to ensure a safe and appropriate environment. The help and support children receive is managed and monitored by Hampshire's Corporate Parenting Board.

### **What are we doing to improve this?**

Children in care are being supported to attend their children looked after statutory reviews, to express their views during statutory reviews and visits and at participation events to ensure their wishes and feelings are heard and they are able to influence practice and service provision in the future.

Direct work is undertaken by social workers and child and family support worker who have been provided with 'tablets' that are able to access direct work tools wherever they are working with the child. In this electronic age children and young people feel comfortable expressing themselves in an electronic format.

Pillars of Parenting continue to be used within our residential children's homes to support and meet the emotional needs. Education Welfare Officers are able to use the 'Thrive' model to support children looked after within schools to aid them achieving their potential.

## **4.5 Participation**

### **Why is this important?**

Every child has the Right to be Heard (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, article 12 states). The voice of children and young people is a fundamental element which must remain at the heart of service delivery and development in order to provide a needs-led and aspirational service to our community.

### **What are we doing to improve this?**

To guarantee the effective participation of Children in Care and Care Leavers, Hampshire Children's Services makes an ongoing commitment to support and sufficiently resource the Care Ambassadors and other participation initiatives. This is reflected in the coordination of this Strategy, the Participation Strategy, and the Children and Young People's Plan. Further, through the re-introduction of the Corporate Parenting Board and its Strategy and action plan, Elected Members (supported by Officers) of Hampshire County Council and partner agencies such as LSCB, Health, Police and Education will commit to practically scrutinising, challenging and supporting the participation agenda.

Social work teams are arranging participations events within their district to cover a range of areas on which children are able to feedback regarding their experiences in order to influence change in working practices.

#### **4.6 The Intelligent Use of Data**

##### **Why is this important?**

Management information and performance management are key to any informing evidence based decisions about developing our strategy and ensuring that resources will be used effectively based on reliable data.

What are we going to do to improve this?

Our “Children in Care Trend Report” will be updated six monthly and our “County Performance” will be updated monthly. Both data sets will be subject to scrutiny and action planning through County and District Performance and Action Groups which will identify strengths and create action plans to address any areas requiring improvement.

#### **4.7 Sufficiency**

##### **Why is this important?**

In order to care for our children well, we need a good supply of high quality placements. Our response to the Government’s ‘Sufficiency Duty’ will ensure we have the right provision in the right place for all our children in care. We will ensure that in order to meet our duty to provide sufficient placements, we will continue to deliver a mixed market of placement provision including foster care and residential children’s homes placements provided by Hampshire County Council as well as similar placements in the private and voluntary sector.

Hampshire Children Services can access supported accommodation for young people aged 16 to 21 through the 16+ Accommodation and Support contract. The support offered is centered on the young person developing their independent living skills. As part of the accommodation offer young people need to engage with the service and the support provided. There are different types of accommodation available under this contract depending on the needs of the child/young person.

##### **What are going to do to improve this?**

In support of our sufficiency duty Hampshire Children’s Services has developed a range of policies and procedures that will support our ability to provide alternative care for those children whose needs are best met away from their home. Our overarching “friends and family policy” is designed to offer a range of support to children and young people whose needs can be met by connected persons rather than having to enter the care system.

There are a range of associated procedures which detail the financial and practical support available to these alternative arrangements.

For those children and young people who become looked after we have invested in the carers to be able to offer quality care. Our foster carer's receive a comprehensive training and support programme, both pre and post approval to provide them with the knowledge, skills and understanding to enable them to give the best possible care to young people. They also have access to the 'Fostering Changes' programme which is an intensive 12 week programme that looks at the practical tools and strategies needed in day to day fostering. We have our own foster carers charter and work closely to ensure that we deliver this.

We are working closely with providers to ensure that the number of unplanned endings is low and that IFAs contact the Council as soon as they are aware of potential issues that could escalate to discuss what support could be put around the placement, either for the carer or for the child, in order to help stabilise the placement, identify any additional needs and plan for move on/transition if this is deemed necessary.

#### **4.8 Residential Care**

##### **Why is this important?**

Hampshire has developed a residential strategy that will promote residential care as a placement of choice for children and young people who do not want to be in alternative family placements. This is particularly important for older children coming into care that may identify strongly with their birth family and who are not comfortable living with a foster family.

##### **What are we going to do to improve this?**

We have reduced the size of our residential units through the building of new 'children's homes' which better meet the needs of the children and make it a safer environment for children and staff. The child care model of parenting, 'Pillars of Parenting', will continue to be the focus within our children's homes and engender a family living environment and positive outcomes for young people. The homes are sited in areas that encourages contact with family and friends and supports continued education in their local area however it is also important that, through the assessment and matching criteria we are able to establish a home that is able to manage the individual needs of each child without compromising on the needs of another .

#### **4.9 Placement Stability**

##### **Why is this important?**

Looked after children deserve the best experiences in life, from excellent parenting which promotes good health and, educational attainment, to a wide

range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills in order to have an enjoyable childhood and successful adult life. Stable placements, good health and support during transition are all essential elements, but children will only achieve their potential through the ambition and high expectation of all those involved in their lives. (The Children Act 1989: Guidance and Regulations Vol. 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review. June 2015). We know that outcomes for children are better when they are able to form long term relationships with primary carers.

### **What are we going to do to improve this?**

We know that outcomes for children are better when they are able to form long term relationships with primary carers. We are updating our Placement Stability policy and updating and re-introducing practice guidance. There will be a clear process to respond to issues that may indicate placement instability in order to resolve these quickly with a clear multi agency action plan.

## **4.10 Education**

### **Why is this important?**

We recognize the vulnerability and poor outcomes of children in the care system. These children, when compared to their peers living at home, were at greater risk of lower educational achievement.

### **What we are doing to improve this?**

In working closely with our virtual school, we are ensuring that education attainment for all our children in care receives our highest priority and we aim to narrow the gap between the achievements of children who are not in care and those who are looked after by Hampshire County Council. We are also committed to ensuring that all children looked after by Hampshire County Council are able to fulfill their educational potential.

Tracking the attendance and attainment of children in care throughout their formal education enables the virtual school and social workers to identify potential issues at the earliest opportunity and a support plan can be actioned.

Our Education Welfare Officers for looked after children are able to undertake direct work with children in care and work in partnership with schools and carers to ensure that children receive the most appropriate support to enable them to achieve.

They use 'THRIVE' a systematic approach to the early identification of emotional developmental need in children and young people so that differentiated provision can be put in place quickly by the adults working closely with the child or young person. It is preventative, reparative, pragmatic and easy to use. It is used to build resilience and resourcefulness, decreases the risk of mental illness, reinvigorates the learning provision and helps those

children who are at risk of underachieving or exclusion to stay in school and re-engage with learning.

#### **4.11 Health**

##### **Why is this important?**

Most children become looked after as a result of abuse and neglect. Although they have many of the same health issues as their peers, the extent of these is often greater because of their past experiences. For example, almost half of children in care have a diagnosable mental health disorder and two-thirds have special educational needs. Delays in identifying and meeting their emotional well-being and mental health needs can have far reaching effects on all aspects of their lives, including their chances of reaching their potential and leading happy and healthy lives as adults. (Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of looked after children- DoE 2015)

This guidance represents a shift away from a health care system based on annual 'medicals' towards a more holistic assessment of an individual child and young person's health care needs. These assessed needs refer to both physical and mental health including health promotion and dentistry.

##### **What are we going to do to improve this?**

We are working with the Designated Nurse for Children in Care, Hampshire Clinical Commissioning Groups Safeguarding Services and CAMHS to ensure that processes for assessing children's health are clear and meet the child's needs by ensuring that clear health plans are evident on the child's record.

Children in care have their emotional wellbeing assessed using SDQ's using data gained from their carer and where concern is raised this is triangulated with data from the child's school and allocated social worker. Where concern remains a referral to CAMHS can be made for assessment and services where required.

#### **4.12 Leaving Care**

##### **Why is this important?**

Hampshire Children's Services recognizes the vulnerability and poor outcomes of those young people leaving the care system who, when compared to their peers living at home, were at greater risk of poverty, lower educational achievement, becoming a teenage parent, having poor mental and physical health, being involved in crime and being street homeless. Young people should not be disadvantaged in their adult lives as an outcome of having been within the care system.

### **What are we going to do to improve this?**

In keeping with legislative requirements Hampshire will publish its 'Local Offer' for Care Leavers to ensure that the services and support that will be available for care leavers is clearly stated.

Hampshire recognizes that young people in placement should remain with their carer's beyond the age of 18 if that is the best decision for them. We have a 'Staying Put' policy 'that enables young people to remain with their carer's beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We have Care Leaver Teams to focus on the needs of our 16 + children in care by providing an independent personal assistant, who will work alongside the social worker until the child's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, when they will assume full responsibility for supporting the care leaver. Our Care Leavers Service will support our care leavers and equip them for the transition into adulthood. Commissioned Youth Support Services work alongside Care Leavers to enhance the range of provision on offer to this group.

Hampshire is committed to a range of activities to ensure that all our children in care are able to access education, employment or training. As one of the county's largest employers we are committed to ensuring that there are work based opportunities including an ambitious apprenticeship scheme and traineeships that are specifically targeted at young people leaving care.

## **4.13 Children in Care and the Criminal Justice System**

### **Why is this important?**

Hampshire Children's Services recognize that children and care leavers are at greater risk of becoming involved in crime than their peers who remain residing with their family and this can impact on their life chances as an adult in terms of emotional wellbeing, education and employment opportunities.

### **What are we doing to improve this?**

Hampshire children's services take a preventative approach to working with children and young people and their carers and other professionals where the child/young person has been assessed as being at risk of offending behavior.

Where children or young people are already within the criminal justice system Hampshire's children's services will work in partnership with professionals including the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and prison or young offenders unit staff to ensure the child's needs are met, their welfare is being promoted, to reduce the likelihood of re-offending and ensure a purposeful plan for accommodation and support is in place prior to their release.

#### **4.14 Children with Disabilities**

**Why is this important?** Children who also have disabilities or special educational needs have the same needs as any other child and are able to access the same services. However many may be in need of specific tailored services to meet their specific needs and these are assessed and actioned upon to support them to achieve their potential. Hampshire Children's Services have specific teams to work with disabled children and their families or carers.

**What are we doing to improve this?** We have a number of specific services to support disabled children to remain in the care of their families and this may include personal budgets/direct payments, 'short breaks' in various forms, shared care or specialist boarding schools on a termly basis or full time depending on the assessed needs of the child. Some disabled children also come into the care system due to neglect or abuse when Hampshire Children's Services will identify an appropriate placement to meet their specific and assessed needs. We will continue to assess these children and ensure that their care provision meets their changing needs.

#### **4.15 Reunification**

##### **Why is this Important?**

Whilst some children need to remain in the care of the local authority throughout their minority this is not necessarily the case for all children in care whose circumstances or their parents/family circumstances may change. We remain committed to the principles set out above (see section 2).

##### **What are we doing to improve this?**

Hampshire Children's Services are developing and promoting a programme of reunification to parents or extended family based upon the Reunification Practice Framework by the NSPCC. There is a clear process around assessing children's needs and their parents capacity to meet their child's needs paying particular attention to risk and the services that may be required to support any plan for reunification to ensure that this is not a revolving door back into care, but that the child will gain permanency back in the care of their parents that will be safe, secure and promote their wellbeing.

#### **5. How will we know if we have been successful?**

We will know if our strategy for children in care has been successful by triangulating evidence from a number of sources which will enable us to 'fix a position' which the evidence points to and thus chart our progress.

## **5.1 Feedback from children and young people**

It is important that children are able to tell us about their experiences of the care system, whether they have experienced any improvement and what needs to change. Our Participation Officer works with our Care Ambassadors (children in care and care leavers) to ensure the Children in Care Pledge remains up to date and relevant. Our Participation Officer is also seeking to develop a group for younger children who may be Looked After or subject to child protection of child in needs plans to ensure that children across the range of services and able to have a voice and shape future practice.

Each district arrange local opportunities for children and young people, including children in care and care leavers to express their views and feelings on their experiences of working with children's services and amend practice which evidences the importance of the 'voice of the child'.

## **5.2 Feedback from professionals**

Feedback from practitioners who are engaged in direct work with children in care is sought in order to identify what is working well and what may need improvement through the Principle Social Work Role.

## **5.3 Feedback from Foster Carers**

Foster carers provide the 24/7 care children and young people need. It is important that we fulfill our duty to support them in this task. Their feedback is sought through a number of means, including their supervision, when placements end, children's reviews and an annual foster carer survey. The Hampshire Fostering Network also works closely with Hampshire Children's Services to provide a voice for foster carers and ensure any changes and developments are implemented in partnership.

## **5.4 Performance Data**

A range of key performance indicators are monitored on a monthly basis by district managers in district performance action groups (DPAG) and by the wider senior management team through the County Performance Action Group (CPAG). These groups utilise monthly performance data, which team managers can drill down to child level detail, and which is used to ask questions of teams regarding performance and produce actions to address any issues.

## **5.5 Quality Assurance**

A continuous process of audit, feedback and progress checking is in place and this is underpinned by regular supervision at all levels of the department.

This enables the social workers and/or personal advisors to discuss and reflect on the progression of the child's plan.

Supervision file audits are also undertaken to ensure that the supervision policy is applied consistently. In addition peer reviews of each District's teams will continue and managers will be required to have a team plan in place developed from the service plan which can be actively driven within team meetings and supervision to drive improvements forward.

Case file audits are undertaken on a monthly basis to ensure not only compliance with statutory and departmental requirements but to also quality assure the work of social workers, family support workers and personal advisors. In addition themes around practice issues or positive practice can be identified and addressed or promoted where appropriate.