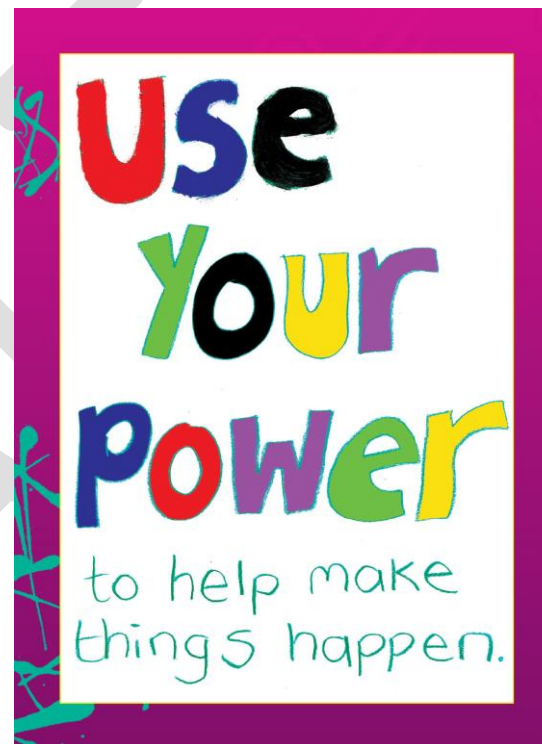


KNOWSLEY CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

2017-2020

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FOREWORD

Why is this strategy important to me and other young people in care and care leavers?

Well, personally for me, my carers and family are important because they give me all the hope I need and much more, and that is all I can ask for. My friends are important because they give me confidence and courage. Knowsley Council are important to me because they are my corporate parents and they make sure I'm being cared for and encourage me to get my views and ideas across. M.A.D.E is also important to me because that is where the ideas are discussed and are evolved.

I'm confident that our views are at the heart of this strategy and I can see how they have been taken in to account, so this means that we are continuing to do the right thing. We are happy to be involved in planning and reviewing this strategy and glad that children and young people through the M.A.D.E group have been so heavily involved. I feel we have been listened to and most importantly our suggestions have been heard to help make care better for children and young people.

As Chair to the M.A.D.E group I really do believe in this strategy and feel it can help children in care especially later on in life. I am confident about this because I know that if you have a good placement with good carers this really helps when you complete your GCSE's or education placement, because it can give you a real confidence boost. If young people don't have people who they feel care or put faith in them, then this affects them in the future.

For me having corporate parents who have high aspirations for their children, is very important. Encouraging us to get involved and participate is really important because this gives us a voice and it makes sure that we are listened to. We all have ideas and views about service improvements and having this strategy will help for those views to be heard in the right way and by the right people.

Justin

**M.A.D.E (Making A Difference Everywhere) Chair
Knowsley's Children in Care Council**

STATEMENT FROM CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

I am pleased to introduce Knowsley's Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan, which sets out our commitment to ensure children and young people in our borough receive the very best care, support and outcomes.

There are many reasons why a child may come into care. In Knowsley, we work very closely with our children and young people to ensure they are listened to, engaged with, that they are safe, healthy and happy and that they achieve the very best at school and in later life. This close partnership working is reflected throughout this plan.

As corporate parents to the young people in our care we want the very best for them. It is our responsibility to make sure they receive a standard of care that we would consider to be good enough for our own children.

My colleagues across the council and I take this responsibility extremely seriously and we have been working to ensure children and young people are more actively involved in the care they receive. This can include where they are placed, who with and what support they need.

I am very proud of the progress we have made, and will continue to make, which has been achieved by listening to our children and young people and acting on their feedback regarding their care experience. Our Making a Difference Everywhere (MADE) group has been instrumental in this process. MADE was formed in 2010 and provides a safe and secure forum for young people to express their views informally about life in care and life as a care leaver. Working with staff in our Children's Services and partners, they do a fantastic job to ensure the voice of the child is heard.

This plan reiterates our commitment to our children and young people, along with our priorities for working together to ensure we achieve the best outcomes for them - both whilst in our care, but also to ensure they continue to prosper when they leave care.

Councillor Joan Lilly
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

INTRODUCTION

Most children and young people in Knowsley live and thrive with their families, but for some this is not possible. There are all sorts of reasons why a child cannot be cared for in the family home, but primarily this is because they are at risk from harm. In such circumstances Knowsley Council has responsibility to intervene and ensure that all of the child's needs are met and that they are protected. If it is believed that they cannot be protected they will be placed in the care of the Council.

When a child or young person comes into care, Knowsley Council becomes their corporate parent. The term 'corporate parent' means a collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees and partner agencies for providing the best possible care, whilst safeguarding the child or young person.

Children Looked After will therefore look to the whole council and partners to provide them with the best possible parenting and care. Every member has the statutory responsibility to act as a good parent. As corporate parents we want our children and young people to have the best experiences in life and meet their individual potential that leads them to having independent and secure lives as adults.

Our role as corporate parents does not end when a child reaches 18 and leaves care - our responsibilities continue until the age of 21 or up to 25 if care leavers are in higher education or training.

Knowsley Council has high aspirations and goals for the children it looks after and wants to ensure that they are enabled to lead fulfilling lives as adults.

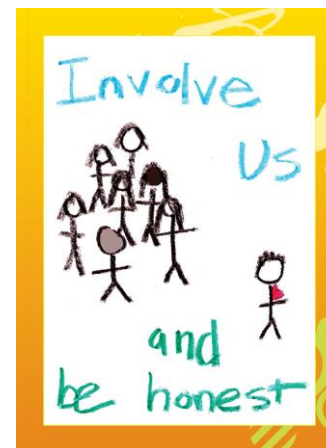
OUR STRATEGY

The Children Looked after and Care Leavers Strategy 2017-2020 sets out the Corporate Parenting Boards priorities for children looked after and care leavers. It is intended to guide the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and all professionals who work with children looked after and care leavers and to support Knowsley corporate parents to make a difference and improve the lives of children and young people in our care and care leavers.

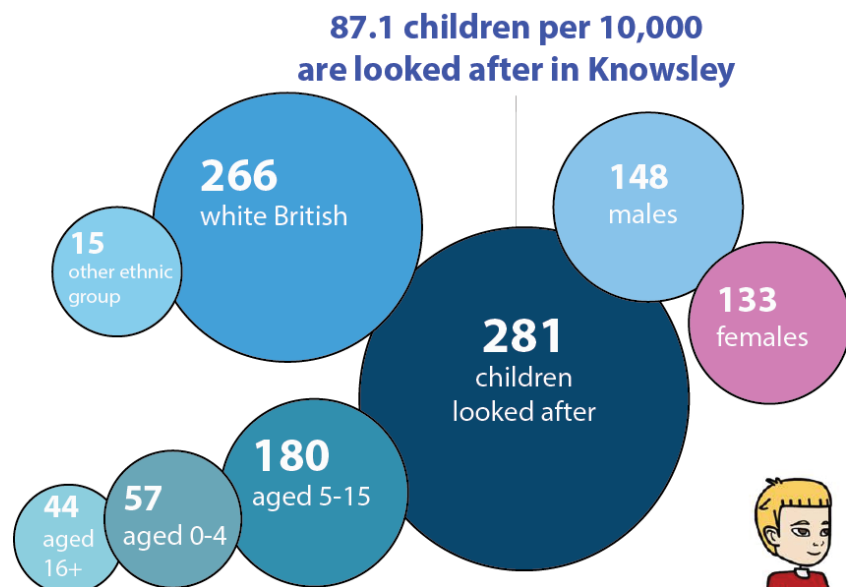
This strategy sets out the priority areas for action on the most important issues for children looked after and care leavers for the next three years. These priorities are based on The Charter – a promise given by the Council to all Knowsley children looked after and its partners about the quality and nature of care that any child or young person can expect from us.

The priorities of the children looked after and Care Leavers Strategy 2017-2020 are aligned with and support Knowsley's Children and Young People's Plan 2017-2020. They also support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan priority to deliver sustainable children's services and ultimately the Strategy for Knowsley's vision to make Knowsley 'the borough of choice for 2023'.

To drive the delivery of this strategy, an action plan has been developed to set out clearly how we will deliver our priorities, who will lead this work and how it will be monitored and reviewed.



WHERE ARE WE NOW



88.9%

children looked after achieved a good level of development at Early Years Foundation Stage compared to 65.9% of other children in Knowsley



10%

children looked after achieved 5A*-C GCSEs including english and maths in 2015/16, compared to **35.7%** of other children in Knowsley



12.4%

children looked after had 3 or more placements during 2015/16

Children looked after with at least one missing from care incident 2015/16

9%

Knowsley

9.7%

statistical neighbour

68.3%

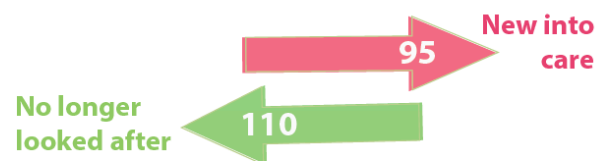
children looked after for 2.5 years+ remained in the same placement for 2 years or more



93%

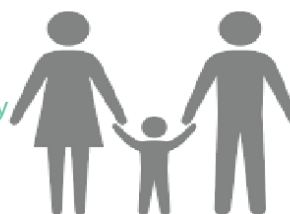
care leavers in suitable accommodation, 81% nationally

During 2015/16...



134

children are cared for by Special Guardians and supported by the Local Authority



70

children are subject to a Residence Order and supported by the Local Authority

9.1%

children looked after were adopted

OUR PRINCIPLES

Children Looked After and care leavers are at the heart of this strategy. As such we have adopted the principles set out within the Children's Charter as the guiding principles by which we will work and deliver our priorities.

Children looked after have told us that:

- Parents, siblings and other significant friends and family are important and they want to stay in contact with them.
- They want somewhere they can live, settle and belong, to help them to achieve and grow.
- They want to be heard and listened to.

The Charter has been designed and written by children looked after who are part of the Children in care council, known as MADE (Making a Difference everywhere) to provide a collective message to all agencies involved in working with children looked after and care leavers. Each Charter statement relates to the experiences of young people and reflects their views of the relationships they have with those who care for them and the communication, understanding and support they want from those agencies that come into contact with them.

MADE charter:

- ✓ Get to know us
- ✓ Listen with your heart as well as your ears
- ✓ Make us aware of our rights
- ✓ Respect our privacy
- ✓ Think about our lives as a whole
- ✓ Treat me as an individual, we are all different
- ✓ Use your power to make things happen when they should
- ✓ Help us to be safe
- ✓ Help us to be like kids who are not in care
- ✓ Take us seriously
- ✓ Involve us and be honest
- ✓ Think about how you share our information
- ✓ Put us in touch with the right people
- ✓ Give us a chance to tell you what's on our mind
- ✓ If you tell me 'no' explain why



Fundamental to the delivery of this Strategy will be the Co-operative principles which underpin much of the work that we will carry out to support our children and young people.

These principles are:

- Community Leadership:
- Partnership and co-operation:
- Retaining jobs and investment locally:
- Building social value:
- Empowering residents to take an active role in communities

These important messages from children and young people have informed our vision and priorities.

OUR VISION AND PRIORITIES

The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2017-2020 supports the Children and Families Partnership's vision as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan 2017-2020:

"Knowsley – a place where all our children have the best start in life, where every family thrives and where all our young people aim high and achieve their potential"

In support of this and to focus the strategy on looked after children and care leavers, the Corporate Parenting Board has set out its own vision:

"We want all corporate parents to enable all of our children looked after and care leavers to be happy, healthy and fully reach their individual potential"

The following priorities are based upon listening to our children and young people.

Priority 1: Good parenting

- Provide positive parents who provide children with aspirations
- Learning directly from the experiences of children looked after
- Individually plan for the future

Priority 2: Good safe placements

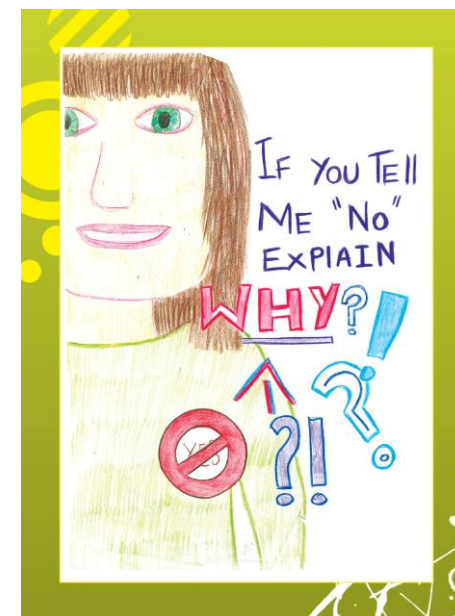
- Match children to their placements which are stable and secure
- Provide security in placements and match children to ensure they can develop strong relationships
- Provide timely adoptive placements for children who can no longer grow up in their own family

Priority 3: High aspirations

- Ensuring children and care leavers have the opportunities to have the best experiences and chances
- Celebrating individual successes of our children and young people

Priority 4: Successful adult lives

- Supporting care leavers to live independently
- Ensuring all young people live in suitable accommodation
- Helping them to form positive relationships



PRIORITY ONE: GOOD PARENTING

Good parenting is important because children and young people in care have usually experienced adversity in their earlier lives; they need good parenting to address any specific and outstanding needs. Good parenting will provide security and stability; ensuring young people reach their potential.

- **Provide positive parents who provide children with aspirations**

Children who are looked after need stable placements with committed and skilled carers who can recognise and encourage their potential. This will help ensure that they become independent adults who both contribute and benefit from being part of their communities.

- **Learning directly from the experiences of children looked after**

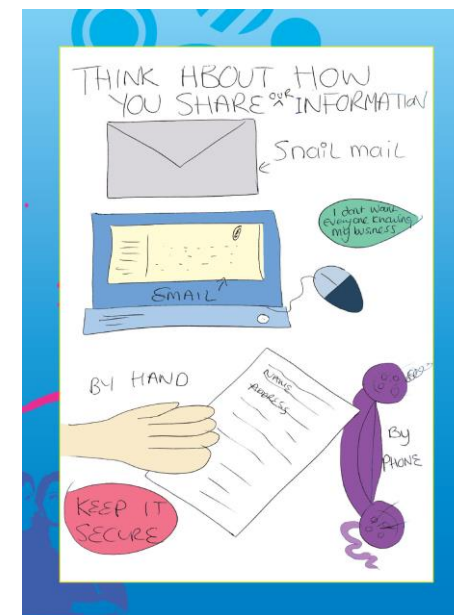
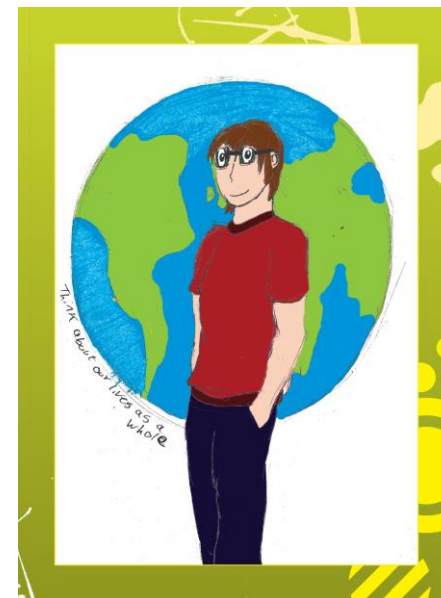
In Knowsley we are committed to capturing the views and experiences of young people in care. MADE was formed in 2010 and provides a safe and secure forum for young people to express their views informally about life in care and life as a care leaver. Our partners and staff in children's services do a fantastic job to ensure the voice of the child is heard. The MADE group are committed to gathering and sharing the voice of children looked after in Knowsley and provide children with a collective voice.

- **Individually plan for the future**

Children looked after are able to influence their care planning and take part in their own reviews. Children and young people need to be supported by good carers to focus on this so that they can complete a successful journey to independence. Independent reviewing officers have an important role in ensuring children's plans reflect their wishes and feelings.

What difference will it make?

- ✓ Service development will be informed by the views of those most affected by the changes.
- ✓ The care provided to children and young people will be more responsive and the skills of carers will develop.
- ✓ Support for placements will be available to those who need it.
- ✓ Children and young people will experience greater placement stability.



PRIORITY TWO: GOOD, SAFE PLACEMENTS

Good, safe placements are important because we know that children and young people have better chances in life when they are living in secure and stable homes, with people who they trust and who care for them.

- **Match children to their placements, which are stable and secure**

We want to match children carefully with their carers, ensure that placements are stable and provide security in placements so that children looked after can develop strong relationships and resilience. We also want to ensure that we keep our children within the local areas, so that we can respond to their needs more immediately. In 2016 Knowsley had approximately 10% of children looked after who lived over 20 miles away. We are committed to ensuring that our children are close and that we have sufficient placement choice. This is demonstrated with the increase of residential homes in the borough and the introduction of an edge of care service to provide more support to keep families together.

- **Provide security in placements and match children to ensure they can develop strong relationships**

We know that children looked after want relationships with people who; listen to them and understand their feelings, views and thoughts; love and respect them as individuals; stand by them through hard times as well as good; and are aspirational about them and ensure they have the opportunities to grow and develop. Having matched children and carers well we need to support carers to continue to look after children whilst ensuring they have the correct knowledge and skills. This can be further enhanced as we recruit more foster carers particularly for children with disabilities, teenagers and for parents and children.

- **Provide timely adoptive placements for children who can no longer grow up in their own family**

Knowsley Council has significantly improved the timescales between a child having a plan for adoption and being placed for adoption. In 2015/16 this was 169 days which is an improvement from 234 days in 2014/15. However, we need to continue to ensure that we plan to match children carefully and place without delay in order to ensure children achieve permanence.



What difference will it make?

- ✓ There will be a greater choice of placement and so there will be improved matching of children and young people to placement.
- ✓ Children will continue to be placed for adoption in a timely manner.
- ✓ More children will be placed closer to home.

PRIORITY THREE: HIGH ASPIRATIONS

It is important that children looked after have high aspirations because we know that children looked after often do not reach their potential in school and often do not have high aspirations for themselves, so require more encouragement. Aspirations are key to educational achievement, engagement in employment and successful independence.

All of our children looked after and care leavers should receive good education which enables them to fulfill their potential. They should also be able to live successful independent lives.

- **Ensuring children and care leavers have the opportunities to have the best experiences and chances**

The virtual school has a statutory responsibility to promote and support the education of children looked after. The virtual school is championing the achievements of children looked after and strengthening the work completed to collect information for all of our children including those placed outside of the borough. The virtual school is also securing additional opportunities for young people to be able to gain qualifications in further or higher education once they have passed compulsory school age.

- **Celebrating individual successes of our children and young people**

Annually in October, Knowsley council hosts a celebration event to applaud and mark the individual success and achievements of our children and young people who are looked after. Awards are made for positive contributions, excelling in sports, participation, educational achievement and school attendance.

What difference will it make?

- ✓ Children looked after will have their personal achievements recognised.
- ✓ Children should reach their potential in education and have this monitored on an individual basis.
- ✓ Young people will have adequate opportunities to remain in education, training and or employment



PRIORITY FOUR: SUCCESSFUL ADULT LIVES

We know from research that our children need to build resilience to have successful relationships and adult lives. As corporate parents we can enable children and young people to be resilient in all aspects of their lives and have experiences that provide them with the skills to achieve.

- **Supporting care leavers to live independently**

Young people need to prepare to live independently by gaining skills in looking after themselves and a future home. This will ensure that when they want their own accommodation they are able to successfully manage a tenancy. Pathway plans will demonstrate progress in the development of independence skills.

- **Ensuring all young people live in suitable accommodation**

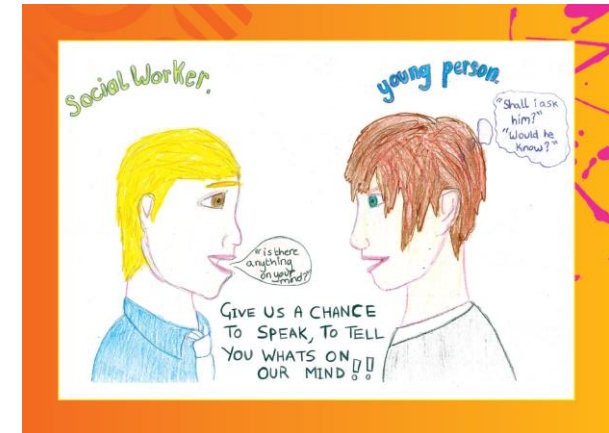
Young care leavers have the right to feel safe and as such should be in accommodation which is permanent and does not involve them sharing facilities with strangers. This will involve continuing to work with social registered landlords to ensure the availability of affordable and good quality housing options.

- **Helping them to form positive relationships**

Young people who are leaving care will have Personal Advisors (PAs) from their 17th birthday in order to ensure that they have relationships with their PAs and that their PAs have a good understanding of their needs prior to their leaving care. This will facilitate keeping in touch.

What difference will it make?

- ✓ Young people will have better quality pathway plans which will enable them to live successful adult lives



DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

This strategy covers a three year period from the 1st April 2017 to the 30th March 2020. Delivery of the strategy will be underpinned by an action plan which will enable us to measure the difference we have made to the lives of children and young people in care and care leavers.

Progress against the action plan will be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board..

The MADE chairperson will provide feedback within this process, ensuring the voice of the children and young people is heard.

A schedule for the monitoring and review of the action plan will be agreed with the Corporate Parenting Board.

Knowsley Safeguarding Children Board also takes a lead role in challenging the work of all partners as corporate parents.



ACTION PLAN

PRIORITY ONE: GOOD PARENTING				
Priority	Activity	Lead service	Timescale	Success measure
Provide positive parents who provide children with aspirations	Ensure all children are matched with carers by social workers and supervising social workers prior to placement.	Permanence and Provision / Child Protection Service.	April 2017	Increased placement stability.
	Support carers to care for children and young people by ensuring services (such as family support and intensive support from supervising social worker) are available as soon as a placement becomes challenging.	Permanence and Provision.	April 2017	Increased placement stability.
	Continued suitability of residential placements to be scrutinised at permanence panel to ensure the placement remains appropriate.	Permanence Panel	April 2017	Fewer children will be placed out of borough.
	Develop a clear pathway to meet the emotional health needs of children who are looked after to ensure swift and easy access.	Permanence Service	April 2017	Report of average SDQ scores will improve
Learning directly from the experiences of children looked after	Enable MADE to relaunch the pledge and Charter to ensure all new staff members embed this within everyday practice.	Participation officer, Quality Assurance Unit and Permanence and Provision	December 2016	Young people will report that corporate parents, staff and partner agencies deliver according to the pledge and Charter.
	Annually review the pledge to ensure that promises are delivered	Participation officer, Quality Assurance Unit and Permanence and Provision Corporate Parenting	March 2018	There will be evidence that corporate parents have delivered on the pledge.

		Board.		
	Include young people in the development of services	MADE Permanence and Provision		100% Social work interviews include young people Where possible policies and procedures are developed in consultation with MADE.
	Join the National care leavers benchmarking forum to enable better quality service development and ability for self-assessment.	Permanence and Provision	November 2016	Service improvement will impact on performance – no of care leavers EET and in suitable accommodation.
	Continue to provide support to MADE to make sure that they can meet on a regular basis with senior staff.	Participation officer, Quality Assurance Unit and Permanence and Provision	Bimonthly review until next plan – March 2020	Bi monthly meetings with Corporate Parenting Board
	Support participation to gain the wider voice of children looked after and care leavers by development of MADE4US website and care leavers' forum becoming established.	Participation officer, Quality Assurance Unit and Permanence and Provision	April 2017	Evidence of different ways of involving children and young people and examples of resulting service developments
Individually plan for the future	Ensure all children looked after know their entitlements by production of leaving care leaflet for all young people over 14 years.	Permanence and Provision	April 2017	Young people will be confident in their knowledge of their entitlements and will benefit as a result.
	Improve the quality of care plans by focusing on outcome based planning and team managers raising the standard expected prior to authorisation.	Permanence and Provision	November 2017	80% of children have care plans that are regarded as "good" or better – demonstrated by audit
	Increase the proportion of children looked after having an annual health and dental assessment	CLA health	April 2017	90% of children looked after have had an annual health and dental assessment

PRIORITY TWO: GOOD SAFE PLACEMENTS

Priority	Activity	Lead agency/ department	Timescale	Success measure
Match children to their placements which are stable and secure	Improve the quality of placements commissioned by the council from private providers by better use of Independent Placement Agreements.	Commissioning Team	March 2017	100% of commissioned placements will be judged by Ofsted as "good" or better
	Increase the number of in-house foster carers by the work of the fostering recruitment and marketing co-ordinator.	Fostering service	March 2017, 2018, 2019	10 more new placements every year for 3 years
	Process will be embedded to ensure initial viability assessments are completed in pre proceedings and placements identified prior to the conclusion of care proceedings.	Child Protection and Permanence and Provision Legal Services	April 2017	Final care plans will be informed by proportionate but quality assessments of family members.
Provide security in placements and match children to ensure they can develop strong relationships	Improve placement stability by better support for placements, use of pre disruption meetings, better contingency planning.	Permanence and Provision	March 2018	70% of children looked after live in the same placement for two and a half years or more
Provide timely adoptive placements for children who can no longer grow up in their own family	Continue to family find for children requiring adoptive families on a regional and national basis. This will be supported by the development of the Regional Adoption Agency.	Adoption team and RAA	March 2017, 2018, 2019M	Adoption score card will evidence children are placed for adoption in a timely way

PRIORITY THREE: HIGH ASPIRATIONS

Priority	Activity	Lead agency/ department	Timescale	Success measure
Ensuring children and care leavers have the opportunities to have the best experiences and chances.	Improve attendance of children looked after at school and reduce persistent absence through regular monitoring and targeted intervention by the Virtual School	Virtual School	March 2019	Overall attendance of children looked after at school will be at least the national average
	Increase attainment of children at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 through regular monitoring of educational progress; by ensuring that all school aged CLA have a high quality PEP and that Pupil Premium funding is used to support improved educational outcomes	Virtual School	March 2018	An increase in the percentage of children achieving the expected standard at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4
	Ensure that PEPs are high good quality and support and enable children and young people to achieve individual goals	Virtual School	Sept 2017	Auditing shows that 90% PEPs are of a good or outstanding quality.
	Increase the number of young people who are in employment, training or education by working with partners to develop and establish programmes tailored to meet individual needs (Knowsley Community College, Knowsley Works etc.)	Virtual School Permanence and Provision	March 2019	80% of 19 year olds are in employment, training or education
	Develop wider links with universities to build on the good practice with University of Liverpool	Virtual School	June 2018	More young people attend university.
Celebrating individual successes of our children and young people	Continue to celebrate success at every opportunity but specifically at annual celebration of achievement event	Virtual school Permanence and Provision	Annually in October	Young People will know that we are proud of their achievements and so will be aspirational

PRIORITY FOUR: SUCCESSFUL ADULT LIVES

Priority	Activity	Lead agency/ department	Timescale	Success measure
Supporting care leavers to live independently	Support care leavers in gaining apprenticeships in their chosen occupation.	Knowsley works 16 – 19 team Regeneration dept. Permanence and Provision	March 2019	60% of 21 year olds EET (March 2016 – 43%)
	Ensure young people know their entitlements and use them to achieve better outcomes	Permanence and Provision		Information is provided and used by young people to inform future decisions.
Ensuring all young people live in suitable accommodation	Continue to enable young people to have stable lives by providing suitable housing options, including staying put arrangements	Social Landlords Knowsley Housing support and commissioning Permanence and Provision	March 2019	Good quality affordable housing will be available to all care leavers who want it. Knowsley will have a shared semi-independent living placement for care leavers.
Helping them to form positive relationships	Ensure that emotional wellbeing and resilience is considered for all children looked after and care leavers via regular SDQ tests and referral to specific services in relation to emotional wellbeing.	Health services Permanence and Provision CCG Knowsley council commissioning team		100% CLA have regular SDQ tests completed 100% CLA have a referral made to commissioned services for their emotional well-being to be considered.