

Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy document

Last updated: 01 February, 2019



Forward

We have high hopes for all of our children and young people in care and a belief that with the right support, you can achieve incredible things. We want to give you the stability and support you need to make progress. We will help you to access new resources and experiences that will inspire you to set ambitious goals.

We will celebrate your successes but also understand that you will sometimes make mistakes and need help to get back on track. You may need support to gain the skills and confidence to live an independent life but we will assist you when the going gets tough.

It is our responsibility to protect you and promote the welfare of the children and young people in our care. Working closely with groups across Milton Keynes, we have a clear plan to achieve this but will never feel that our job is 'done'.

We must continue to listen to our children and young people, involving you in the decisions we take and ensuring you understand how the choices we make will affect you personally.

Whether you are in care, on the edge of care or leaving care, we want the very best for you just as we do for our own children. We hope you'll be able to look back at your time in care as a positive experience, full of good memories and new opportunities.



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Cllr Zoe Nolan
Lead member
Children's Services



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Mac Heath
Director
Children's Services



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Cllr Norman Miles
Chair
Corporate Parenting Panel

Introduction

The Looked After Children Strategy outlines the values, principles and key priorities to support children and young people who are looked after in Milton Keynes.

As the Corporate Parent to the children in our care (and Care Leavers) we have a responsibility to make sure that we work together with our partners to provide the best possible care and protection for them by protecting them from harm and neglect and providing them support so every child has opportunity to succeed.

We as Corporate Parents along with our partners in Milton Keynes are committed to meeting the needs of the children in our care in order that they reach their potential and thrive. This commitment is as if it was for our own children and encompasses all areas to ensure they are healthy and safe, have the same opportunities as their peers and are ready to lead successful adult lives.

In order to do this, we have adopted the seven Corporate Parenting Principles introduced as part of the Children and Social Work Act in 2017.

1. To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in care.
2. To encourage children and young people in care to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. To take account of their views, wishes, and feelings.
4. To help children and young people in care gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the Local Authority and its relevant partners.
5. To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people in care.
6. To make sure that children and young people in care are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education or work.
7. To prepare children and young people in care for adulthood and independent living.

Purpose

The purpose of this strategy document is to set out our strategic vision and focus on achieving our priorities.

- Always prioritising protecting vulnerable children from harm and neglect including child sexual exploitation.
- Ensuring our workforce is robust by continuing initiatives to recruit, retain and to recognise the contribution of social work teams and so ensure continuity of social workers for our children in care.
- Increasing the number of high-quality placements for children and young people and by so doing reduce placement breakdown and increase permanence.
- Continuing to invest in preventative work, including our Children and Families Practices and maintaining all Children's Centres and by doing so safely reduce numbers of children who need to come into public care.
- Remaining committed to maintaining a council-tax exemption for care leavers.

Our key responsibilities as Corporate Parents

To keep children and young people at the heart of what we do we will:

- Make sure that children and young people have a say and their voice is heard.
- Develop our support and interventions with families to keep children and young people safe, enabling them to remain with or return to their families.
- Achieve timely, permanent care arrangements in safe, secure and loving homes.
- Help children and young people feel safe and secure in their placements and live closer to home in provision that meets their needs.
- Increase the focus on physical and mental health and social and emotional wellbeing through the development and delivery of our services.
- Ensure foster carers, adoptive parents and special guardians feel well supported to deliver the best care.
- Support children and young people to make good educational progress and achieve the best possible outcomes at Key Stage 2 and 4.
- Continue to safeguard children and young people who are risk of exploitation, go missing, criminal activity and radicalisation.
- Ensure young people leave care well prepared for independent living.
- Ensure more care leavers are in education, employment and/or training.
- Scrutinise the feedback reports from services for children in care, including independent reviewing officers about what they know about life in care for children in Milton Keynes.

- Monitor the quality of care delivered by Milton Keynes residential children's homes and fostering service.
- Have oversight of the performance of the adoption service and forming of a Regional Adoption Agency with Central Bedfordshire.
- Review the performance of the council and its partners around education and health outcomes.
- Scrutinise the key strategic plans for Children in Care and Care Leavers including the Sufficiency statement, the Local Offer to Care Leavers and the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategies.
- Promote a partnership approach to the delivery and development of services for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Celebrate the individual and collective successes of Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The questions we continuously ask:

- Is this good enough for my child?
- Have we achieved the best we can?
- Have we asked young people what they think?

The demographic picture of children in care in Milton Keynes

In MK there are an estimated 74200 children aged up to 19 years making up over 27% of the population:

- 36,200 (49%) girls and 38,000 (51%) boys
- 391 children in care as of 31.3.18 (using SSDA903 return data)
- 234 (60%) recorded as White British
- 124 (31.7%) recorded as from an ethnic minority (BAME)
- 166 Care Leavers being worked with (at 31.03.18)
- 259 children living in MK, in the care of another council (at 31.03.18).

Our vision and values

In all our work with children and their families, the child's welfare is paramount. In Milton Keynes we use the "Signs of Safety" approach, which provides a framework to support our work with children, young people and their families.

We believe in putting children and young people first by always prioritising and protecting our vulnerable children from harm and neglect and provide support so every child has opportunities to succeed.

Wherever possible we believe the most effective route is through working in partnership with parents to meet the needs of children and young people and maximise participation. This means working honestly and openly, acknowledging and respecting the contribution of parents, carers and other family members and involving them in decisions about their children. We are therefore continuing to invest in our preventative work including our Children and Family Practices.

There are unique advantages for children experiencing family life in their own birth family and in most circumstances, we believe children's needs are best met by being cared for within their immediate or extended families unless there are clear reasons why this might not be consistent with their safety and wellbeing.

If a child must come into our care, we will provide a safe and positive experience that preserves and promotes their identity, culture and religion. We will start permanency planning from the decision to bring a child into care and continue until the child's future is secure, so that children are in the care system for the minimum amount of time necessary to make permanent and sustainable decisions. Our aim is to increase the number of high-quality local placements for children and young people so that they are maintained where possible within their communities.

We believe children are entitled to be listened to and respected as individuals and are entitled to participate, as fully as their age and understanding enables, in decisions that affect them. We will ensure that children's views and individual needs are considered when making decisions that affect their lives.

Disabled children have the same rights as all other children; we recognise their additional vulnerabilities and will use a wide range of communication methods to ensure their voice is heard and lived experience understood.

What children in Care and Care Leavers have told us and our Pledge

In Milton Keynes we have worked with the Children in Care Council who have told us what is important to them. This is what we pledge to them:

Listen

Let our voice be heard, listen to what children and young people want and involve us in decisions about our lives. Be honest when something can't happen and tell us about change in plenty of time.

We will:

- Make sure that you have a named Social Worker and an Independent Reviewing Officer and know how you can contact them
- Make sure that we hold Children Care Review meetings and encourage you to be actively involved
- Make sure that you see your Social Worker on your own and in private
- Make sure that you are able to tell us your wishes, feelings and interests, taking into account any disabilities you have
- Ensure that we listen to you about keeping in contact with your family
- Listen to your wishes and feelings before making decisions that affect you and support you if you need help to do this
- Work with you and your family to make sure that plans for your care are up to date and meet your educational, health and care needs
- Make sure that you know how to complain and how to get in touch with the Advocacy Service, who can give you support to help you make a complaint

Respect

Be honest and trust us; as you want us to be honest and trust you. It's important that you try to keep your promises, show understanding when things are not good and praise us when things are going well.

We will:

- Make sure that we get back to you with answers to your questions as soon as possible (in a week if possible)
- Make sure that you know what is going to happen to you and be involved in plans for your future
- Treat you like an individual

- We will support your right to your religion and culture if that is your wish
- We will only share information about you to the people that need to know it
- Make sure that your Social Worker is changed as little as possible

High aspirations for us

Help us to achieve our goals by supporting and encouraging us through challenging times. We all have dreams about what we want to achieve and do in life and we need your support to make these come true by believing in us and giving us the right opportunities at the right time.

We will:

- Make sure that you have a place at a school that will help you to do your best
- Make sure that you have a named Virtual School Officer and know how you can contact them
- Make sure you have a personal education
- Make sure that we hold Personal Education Plan Review meetings and encourage you to be actively involved
- Work with your school and the 'designated' teacher to help you do your best (all schools have a teacher who supports children in care)
- Help you to make the best possible choices in education, employment or training beyond 16 and support you in your work or studies including help going on to university if you choose to do this
- Expect your carers to take an active interest in your education and make good links with your school, including going to parent's evenings and other school events
- Celebrate your achievements and success
- Encourage your carers to create links with other community opportunities and Youth Faculty

Happy and healthy

Help us to access all the services we need to keep us healthy. Help us maintain relationships with family and friends, join in hobbies and activities. Help create positive memories.

We will

- Make sure that you have regular health checks

- Make sure that you have a named nurse that you can contact if you have any questions about your health
- Make sure that you go to see the optician and dentist
- Help you keep in contact with family and friends and, when this is not possible, give you a clear reason why
- Provide opportunities for you to take part in hobbies and activities (including sports, art and music)
- Help you build a photo album of important people in your life and places you have been to while in care

Becoming independent

Help us to prepare for leaving care and becoming independent by teaching us the skills that we will need in the future. Help us plan for what our future will look like.

We will:

- Arrange for you to get your National Insurance number for your 16th birthday or as soon as possible after being entitled to have one
- Get you a passport by your 16th birthday if you are legally allowed to have one - sooner if you need one to go on holidays with your carers and take part in school activities
- Make sure that we ask you about important decisions we make in your life
- Make sure that your move to adult services, if you need them, is as smooth as possible
- Make sure that you have a Personal Advisor when you reach 18 and that you meet them before turning 18
- Start to prepare you early for independence by encouraging carers to teach us life skills
- Recognise the independence skills that you have
- Get a bank account and help you save money for the future
- Help apply for a driving licence when we reach 17
- Talk to us about options for accommodation including 'staying put'
- Help you to get a 'bus pass' and support you to use public transport
- Talk to you about the Care Leaver Offer and Financial Policy before you reach 18

Continue to get the best

Be the best corporate parents you can be by getting us the best social workers, foster carers and other professionals to support us. Challenge everyone in the Council and in Milton Keynes to also be good corporate parents.

We will:

- Help you to make the best possible choices in education, employment or training beyond 16 and support you in your work or studies including help going on to university if you choose to do this
- Help provide opportunities for you including apprenticeships and work experience
- Find the best foster carers to look after you
- Help professionals understand what being in care is like
- Help get the best social workers and other professionals

What we have achieved since our first strategy

We have worked hard to build and retain our workforce which means that our children and young people keep the same social worker for a longer time helping to build trusting relationships. We know we have more to do and will continue to focus on this.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are allocated to review care plans when children and young people first come into care. We make every effort to make sure the same IRO remains allocated so that plans are progressed in a timely way.

We have looked at how we recruit foster carers and reviewed the structure of the service so that there is now a team whose sole focus is to make sure we have enough good quality local placements to meet the needs of our children and young people.

We are improving the stability of foster placements through a dedicated team which supports fosters carers from approval to ensure a consistent and focused approach to their training and support needs.

We have significantly increased the number of children who are placed with their families and friends under special guardianship orders and have successfully maintained children in their communities and networks.

Where this is not possible, we try to make sure children are placed together with their brothers and sisters or near each other.

We make sure children with a plan for adoption are adopted in a timely way. The most recent Adoption scorecards for March 2017 show Milton Keynes Council well positioned both nationally and compared to our statistical neighbours against the major timeliness indicators. Compared to our statistical neighbours, our average time from a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family was the lowest and 90 days faster than the national average.

We have selected Central Bedfordshire as an appropriate adoption agency partner to develop a regional adoption agency.

As of March 2018, 94% children had a health assessment and 90% had a dental check. By comparison, the national figures at March 2018 were 88% for health assessments and 84% for dental checks.

We support our children in care to do well at school. Outcomes for 2018 are not yet available, however for 2017 the number of eligible children reaching expected standards in KS2 reading, writing and mathematics was 40% (32% nationally). For Key stage 4 the average Attainment 8 score for eligible children was 13 (national average 19.3). With all these results it is important to note that these are very small cohorts and so difficult to compare.

We have increased our Staying Put arrangements, which make it possible for young people to remain with their foster carers. Six young people were in Staying Put arrangements at March 2018.

National care leaver data counts anyone who would qualify to be a care leaver regardless of whether we are in touch with them or not. Around 10% of care leavers nationally do not stay in touch with social care for a variety of reasons, either by choice or for example they may leave the country.

As of March 2018, a reported 83% of our care leavers were in suitable accommodation, and local monitoring (where information is known because we are in touch with a care leaver) shows 93% were in suitable accommodation. The national figures at March 2018 were 84% and 92% where known respectively.

As of March 2018, 46% of children were in education, employment and training. We know this is not good enough and have more work to do in this area. Local monitoring (where information is known) shows 52% were in education, employment and training. The national figures at March 2018 were 51% and 57% where known.

Our new priorities

Although we have made steady progress over the last five years, we believe it is time to refresh our strategic priorities in line with the changes that have happened locally and nationally since the last strategy was developed. Our priorities are described as strategic outcomes and provide a useful framework for explaining what actions we will take to address the areas that require development to improve the lives of our children in care and care leavers.

These strategic outcomes are based on what we know about:

- The needs of our children and young people
- What they have told us will make a positive difference to their lives
- The changes we need to make to our services for children in care and care leavers

Our strategic outcomes are:

1. Our children live in settled families and are safe
2. Placement stability is increased
3. Our children are happy and healthy
4. Our children get the best from school and college
5. Our children are prepared for independence
6. Our children have successful adult lives

Workforce stability

We believe in the importance of consistent relationships with the children we care for and as part of this commitment we try to make sure they have the least number of changes of worker as possible. We have made sure Milton Keynes is a great place to work and have good plans in place to encourage those who come here to stay, so that children and young people do not have to change their social worker if they do not want to.

Managing our money (living within our means)

We prioritise services for the children in our care within the council budget. However, given the rise of children being brought into care, our resource has not increased so we have to do more with the same money. Going forward we are continuously looking at how we do things so that we balance our income and spend by working more efficiently and effectively.

Outcome one: Our children live in settled families and are safe

Being a good corporate means we have a responsibility to make sure that our children and young people are safe live in settled families where they have every opportunity to reach their full potential. We want our children and young people to be protected from harm and get help and get help and support if they need if they are at risk. This includes addressing the needs of children and young people, who are seeking refuge, are at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and run away or are missing from home or care. This requires good early decision making and robust parallel planning so that there is no delay for children in the care system and we achieve legal permanence at the earliest opportunity.

Why is it important

We know that children and young people in care have the best chance when they have settled families; feel cared for and have opportunities to build relationships with people they can rely on to look out for them now and in the future.

How well we are doing?

<p>As at 31.03.2016 we only had 10 children matched with adopters and less than 5 waiting to be matched, by 31.03.2018 we had 12 children already matched to adopters and a further 22 waiting to be matched. While this meant that number of children adopted in 2017/18 had reduced, we are seeing the results of the efforts in 2018/19 with more adoptions in by September 2018 than in 2017/18 in total.</p>	<p>Children living in the same placement for two years have steadily increased. The figures are as follows: 55% at 31.03.2016, 65% at 31.03.2017, 57% at 31.03.2018. Currently at 63%, there are noticeably more children in longer term placements than previously.</p>
<p>It is important for children and young people to live with their brother and sisters wherever possible. When this cannot happen, we try hard for them to live near each other.</p>	<p>In 2017/18 there were 36 periods of care ended due to SGO arrangements, up from 26 in 2016/17 and 19 in 2015/16.</p>
<p>We continue to commission and provide services which support young people to reflect upon and recognise Child Sexual Exploitation.</p>	<p>We have developed and are increasing our Staying Put Provision</p>

What we will do:

- Make sure we parallel plan and get legal permanence for children and young people as early as possible, including exploring foster to adopt placements.
- Where we are in the Public Law Outline (PLO) process, we will explore all family and friends to make sure wherever possible children can stay within their families and networks.
- Continue to work with children and young people to plan what is important in their lives and where they should best be living.
- Where adoption is the best plan, we start to plan for early permanence as soon as possible.
- Where children and young people are going to be living with family or connected people, we will make sure we explore the possibility of achieving placements as soon as possible under special guardianship arrangements so that legal permanence can be achieved.
- People who engage in criminal and sexual exploitation of children and young people will be held to account through improved disruption and prevention activity.

What difference will we make?

We will make sure:

- We have an early permanence plan for every child and young person by their first review.
- All children and young people are involved in the review of their plan.
- We continue to increase the number of children and young people who are adopted.
- We continue to increase the number of arrangements for children and young people subject to special guardianship arrangements.
- We continue to provide more Staying Put arrangements.
- We have an increased pool of foster carers to draw on to ensure better matches.
- We reduce the number of children who are repeatedly missing by at least 10%.
- We continue to work with partners to reduce the number of children and young people at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation by at least 10%.

Outcome two: Increase placement stability

As good parents we are committed to ensuring that our children and young people experience the best possible care with adults whose skills match their needs and who have the resilience to work through the challenges that early harmful experiences bring. We are therefore committed to improving placement choice by increasing the number of foster carers recruited, so we can maximise the certainty of a good match from a wider pool. This in turn reduces the risk of placement breakdown, as we are able support our carers locally with skilled social care staff and well-established local partnerships in health and education, providing a team around the placement that is focussed on achieving shared outcomes.

We recognise the importance of consistent, well-trained social workers to support placements and the importance of training our workforce including foster carers to deal with the complex challenges they can face. We are committed to rolling out the 'Secure Base Model' which provides a framework for care givers and those who support them to think about the different but connected caregiving approaches that can help a child to move towards greater security.

Why is it important?

Repeated moves are associated with a range of negative outcomes. There is enough known about the need for children to build secure relationships in care to know that a lot more can be done to support stability. Residential care at a distance does not deliver the outcomes we wish to achieve; the likelihood of placement instability increases further where residential care is the first placement. The age profile of our looked after children has changed; on average younger children are entering care with the likelihood of them remaining longer in the care system, which is a factor that can increase the risk of placement breakdown. The importance of consistent relationships in school, with social workers and supervising social workers all contribute to maintaining stability for our children and young people in placement. There is a strong evidence for an association between child mental health problems and placement instability, most evident in relation to externalising problems. Consistent relationships with social workers support stability as does involving children in decision making.

How well we are doing?

We have a robust workforce development policy which supports the recruitment and retention of a skilled staff group. Our Corporate Parenting Teams have been restructured to support the growth of specialisms in recruitment, retention and ongoing development of foster carers. We have recently appointed an experienced Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer, experienced legal adviser to Fostering Panel and a new Panel Chair - all of which strengthen both the regulatory functions and oversight of the quality of our foster carers.

What we will do?

- Improve the timeliness of household reviews.
- Increase panel sitting days to deal with backlog of household reviews.
- Review and enhance the quality of training for foster carers.
- Review the fee structure to reward highly trained foster carers who take children with multiple complexities.
- Hold regular pre-disruption meetings to identify triggers leading to placement breakdowns.
- Identify trends contributing to placement stress and breakdown.
- Use learning to make better matched placements and improve the training and development offer.
- Continue to develop training for our social workers linked to the Key Knowledge and Skills Statement.
- Complete the social work health check to understand what factors support and what factors hinder effective practice and put plans in place to address this so that we maximise the quality of practice.
- Roll out the Secure Base Model training for foster cares and social workers.
- Head of Service for Corporate Parenting will work with the Safeguarding and Quality Service to introduce an additional level of scrutiny through reviewing residential placements and care plans on a quarterly basis to ensure they remain in children and young people's best interests.

What difference we will make?

- Reduce the % of children with two moves by 10%
- Reduce the % of children with three moves or more by 10%
- Increase the timeliness of household reviews by 40%
- Disseminate learning from disruption meetings to increase an understanding of stability factors when making key decisions
- Allocate a family finder for all children in care who are not yet matched aged 14 ½ and below
- Increase the % of children placed within a 20-mile radius by 10%
- Decrease by 25% the number of children and young people placed in residential care

Outcome three: Our children are happy and healthy

Why is it important?

Children often enter care with poor levels of physical and mental health compared to children in the general population. Two thirds have at least one physical complaint and nearly half have a mental health issue. As corporate parents, we want our children to have the best start in life, be healthy and receive the care and support they need to thrive.

How well we are doing?

- 90% of our children have had a dental check at 31.03.18
- 94% of our children had a health assessment at 31.03.18
- 88% of our children's immunisations are up to date at 31.03.18
- 86% in care aged 3 to 16 years completed a Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) which is used to identify children and young people with mental health needs.
- We have recruited to the Primary Mental Health Worker (PMHW) post which is a jointly funded post between MKC and CNWL. The worker is embedded in the Corporate Parenting Service. This ensures that Looked After Children are prioritised by CAMHS for assessment and intervention.
- The PMHW can provide a range of specialist interventions, advice and support to young people who are identified as having, or at risk, of developing emotional, psychological or mental health issues within the current scope of MK Specialist CAMHS service provision and provide advice and consultation support to social workers, foster carers and others working with children/young people in Children's Social Care, or school staff.

What we will do?

- Improve the timeliness of initial and review health assessments so health plans are focused and up to date to ensure immediate treatment of emerging issues.
- Improve the numbers of children who have regular dental check-ups and treatment when they need it.
- Improve the uptake and recording of immunisation records for all children and young people in care.
- Continue to improve the treatment of children in care with substance misuse issues and provide appropriate interventions and treatment as required.
- Where children are identified as having mental health needs, ensure timely responses from CAMHS.

What difference we will make?

- 100% of children in care will be registered with a dentist
- 95% of children will be registered with a permanent GP
- 95% of children will have dental checks on time
- 96% will have annual health assessments on time
- 95% of children will have immunisations on time
- 100% of the children identified with substance misuse issues will have timely and appropriate treatment
- 100% of children referred to CAMHS will be assessed within 6 weeks of the referral

Outcome four: Our children get the best from school and college

As good parents we are ambitious for the children and young people in our care and our care leavers. We have high aspirations for them which, means children and young people receive a planned and stable education that enables them to fulfil their educational, social and emotional potential so that they have the qualifications they need to pursue their career aspirations.

Why is it important?

We know it is important for young people to go to school, get qualifications, take part in training and secure employment after leaving care because these are important steps in helping young people to lead successful adult lives. For some young people the qualifications and careers they aspire to means going to university. We want to make sure our children and young people have the same opportunities available as other children and young people in Milton Keynes.

How well we are doing?

- The Head teacher for our Virtual School makes sure that all our children and young people in care attend good and outstanding schools so that we can be assured of their access to good quality education provision
- 90% (January 2019) of the children on roll in Milton Keynes Virtual School attend good or outstanding schools. Where the school is judged requires improvement or inadequate appropriate additional monitoring is in place through PEP meetings.
- Our children and young people attain well at key Stage 2. 32% reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined which is in line with the National data 2017.
- At Key Stage 4; 24% of the entered group achieved English and Maths at grade 4 and above. This is above the 2017 national data.
- Overall attendance for academic year 2017-2018 was 92%. There were less than 10 exclusions per month for 7/9 months in the academic year 2017-2018.
- We make sure 100 % of our children and young people in care aged four years and above have a personal education plan which is reviewed every six months through monthly monitoring. The compliance rates have been over 90% month on month.

What we will do?

- Provide support to children and young people so that they make good progress at Key stage 2 and Key Stage 4 assessments.
- Work with children in care, schools, colleges and with other professionals to make plans to help them get to school and to reduce persistent absenteeism and exclusions.

- Work with children and young people in care to make sure that more are in education, training and employment when they reach 18 years of age, or sooner if it is right for them.
- Continue to offer help and support to young people who want to go to university and offer a bursary of £2000 for up to four years unless the degree is longer for example, medicine.
- With unaccompanied asylum seekers where English is not their first language, make sure they have access to language line, welfare calls, orientation programme for new arrivals and a 'New to UK Group'.
- Work with Council partners to make sure a range of apprenticeships is available to our care leavers, including provision in areas where services are sub-contracted.
- Support our care leavers with preparation for the work environment, including help with CV writing, interview skills and work experience.
- If starting work, college or going for an interview, we support young people with a one-off grant of £150 until the age of 21 years.

What difference we will make?

- Make sure 97% of children 3 years and above are attending good and outstanding pre-school and nursery provision.
- Increase school attendance to 95%
- All our children including those placed out of area attend good and outstanding schools
- Increase the children in care reaching the expected level 4 in reading, writing and Maths at Key Stage 2 to at least 55%.
- Increase children in care achieving five A* to C GCSE grades (or equivalent at Key Stage 4), including English and Maths to at least 45%
- Increase the proportion of care leavers at the age of 19 years in education, training and employment to at least 70%
- Continue to increase high numbers of children going into university.
- Provide all children in care opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities to support their wider learning.

Outcome five: Our children are prepared for independence

As other parents prepare their children gradually to leave home at 18 or at some later point in life, it is our job to prepare our young people to move on. This means teaching them independence skills that will assist them to be prepared for adulthood, including how to manage money and to help and support them with choices they make about their future education or employment.

Why is it important?

The transition to adulthood can be difficult for young people in care as, unlike their peers, most will move on to live independently at 18 years of age. It is our job as good parents to make sure that we offer the same level of care and support other young people will get from their parents.

In Milton Keynes we have a commitment to removing practical barriers that care leavers face and supporting them to develop practical self-care skills such as cleaning, cooking, budgeting and managing safe relationships, which once acquired are good indicators of young people being able to manage independent living.

How well we are doing?

- Our foster carers work with young people to support their independence skills from age 15 onwards.
- We encourage young people post 16 to attend the independence living skills programmes on offer.
- We make sure every young person has a pathway plan.
- We work with residential homes to make sure young people have an independence plan post 16.
- Every young person has a housing plan when approaching their 16th birthday.
- Most of our young people have passports if they are eligible.

What we will do?

- Continue to support our foster carers in working with children in care to develop the life skills they will need for living independently.
- Explore different supported housing models for those leaving care that are not ready to set up on their own.
- Use Family Group Conferences to make sure young people and their families have support to rebuild relationships and develop networks in the community.

- Continue to increase staying put arrangements wherever it is in the interests of young people.
- 100% of our children who are eligible for passports will have them by the age of 16.
- 100% of young people entitled to their National Insurance number will have them for their 16th birthday or as soon as possible after they become entitled to have one.
- Allocate a Personal Adviser before young people turn 18.
- Help young people get a bank account and help them to save money for the future.
- Support young people with driving lessons if they are interested in learning to drive as they turn 18.
- Ensure a Housing Plan is in place as young people turn 16.
- Help to reunite young people with family and friends if they have lost touch.
- Ensure a health passport is provided as young people leave care, so they understand their health history.

What difference we will make?

- Make sure every young person post- 16 has an Independence Plan.
- 50% of care leavers will have a Family Group Conference before they leave care.
- Reconnect young people to their families if possible, to support help increase their resilience as they move towards independence.
- Have different types of accommodation for young people not yet ready to set up on their own.
- Access to Staying Put arrangements will ensure continuity and stability whilst young people begin to establish themselves in employment or higher education.

Outcome Six: Our children have successful adult lives

We are committed to ensuring our young people enter adulthood in a planned way - with a home to live in, skills to look after themselves and the ability to earn a living or continue in education so that they feel confident about their future. If our young people are pregnant or are parents, we will as corporate grandparents work with them to provide support through mother and baby placements in residential or foster care, along with fathers, just before and after the birth of the baby.

Why is it important?

Having a secure and stable place to live and call home is important for young people as it provides a secure base from which to operate as a successful young adult. For some this will mean a return home to live with their families if it is best for them to do so and for others to live in their own home for the first time. For those young people continuing in higher education they will need to know where home is for holiday periods. Being with and around connected people gives young people a sense of belonging and community and stops them from being isolated when things get difficult.

How well we are doing?

- Our care leavers and those bodies that inspect us tell us that we help young people to make safe transitions.
- We make sure every young person up to the age of 21, or 25 if in full time education, has a personal advisor who keeps in touch at least every eight weeks and more often if it is required.
- If our young people secure education, employment or training they receive an incentive payment of £100. If this is maintained for 6 months a further £100 is paid, which is available until the age of 21.
- If young people are in education, then we assist them to purchase a laptop or computer, providing up to £300 until the age of 21.
- If our young people secure a place at university, we provide £5000 per year to pay for accommodation, travel and equipment paid over the duration of the degree course.
- We have in place drop-in sessions for our care leavers to provide practical support with claiming benefits and looking for employment and housing.
- Milton Keynes care leavers do not need to pay council tax until they reach the age of 25.
- All our young people have special plans called Pathway Plans to support them through times of change as they move on from our care.
- All our care leavers find suitable places to live.
- The leaving care grant is now £2000.

What we will do?

- Help care leavers to apply for apprenticeships and prepare for interviews.
- Work with partners in the Council and MK businesses to improve the range of training, employment and education opportunities for care leavers.
- Work with partners, foster carers and the Housing team to make sure we have enough suitable housing for our young people leaving care.
- Continue to work in a tailored way with every individual care leaver so their pathway plans are focused and progressive.

What difference we will make?

- Make sure that 70 % of our care leavers are in education, employment and training
- Make sure that at least 95% of relevant young people have up to date pathway plans.
- Work with the Council and partners to make sure we have a range of supported accommodation options.
- Continue to ask care leavers about how supported they have felt moving into independence and use the feedback to improve the design and delivery of our offer.
- Make sure all our care leavers who are parents, or who are about to become parents, are fully supported by us as corporate grandparents to give them the maximum chance to succeed as parents.

References and useful links

Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2000 3 Children and Young Persons Act, 2008 4 Care Leaver Strategy - A cross-departmental strategy for children leaving care, 2013, Children and Families Act, 2014

Rock, S; Michelson, D; Thomson, S; and Day, C. (2015) Understanding foster placement instability for looked after children; a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence, British Journal of Social Work, 45 (1) pp. 177-203 [Abstract].

The Rees Centre Report into Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children in England
The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme
Recent Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well Being of Looked After Children

Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services

The Care Standards Act, 2000

The Adoption and Children Act, 2002

The Care Planning, Placement and Care Review Regulations 2010

Review of Children's cases (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2005

Children and Social Work Act 2017

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf

Delivering the strategy

The strategy covers a three-year period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2022

ACTION PLAN

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
1. Our children live in settled families are safe	1. Legal permanence will be sought for all children and young people at the earliest opportunity	Family Support Teams and Children in Care Team. Fostering and Adoption Service IROs	6 weekly review	100% of children in care will have a plan for permanence at their 2 nd review
	2. Support children and young people to engage and participate in their plans.	IROs Social Work Teams	April 2019 onwards	100% of children in care will contribute to their review
	3. Prevent placement breakdowns by offering tailored support to the carers who look after our children	Children in Care Teams Fostering Teams	April 2019 onwards	75% of children and young people will have been in the same placement for two years or more
	4. Where adoption is the best plan, make plans for early permanence	Locality Teams Adoption team	April 2019 onwards	Increase the numbers of adoptions annually

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
	5. Where possible Special Guardianship orders will be sought for children who are placed with or will be placed with connected persons	Locality teams Fostering Service IROs	April 2019 onwards	Increase the number of SGOs annually.
2. Placement stability is increased	1. Improve timeliness of Household Reviews by increasing panel capacity	Team Manager Fostering	By August 2019	Increase timeliness of household reviews to 90%
	2. Enhance quality of training for foster carers	Team Manager Fostering	Sept 2019	Reduce placement breakdown by 10%.
	3. Review the fee structure to reward highly trained carers who take children with complex needs	Head of Service Corporate Parenting	May 2019	Increase in house provision of hard to place children with complex needs by 10%.
	4. Hold regular placement stability meetings	Team Manager Safeguarding (IRO)	April 2019	Disseminate learning from disruption meetings to increase understanding of stability factors when making decisions which in turn will reduce disruption by 10%

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
	5. Roll out Secure Base Model for training for social workers and foster carers	Head of Corporate Parenting	Sept 2019	Reduce % of children with two moves by 10%. Reduce % of children with 3 moves by 10%
	6. Review residential placements on a monthly basis to ensure they remain in YP's interest	Head of Corporate Parenting	Quarterly	Decrease by 20% the number of children placed in residential care.
	7. Allocate a Family Finder for all children with a plan of LTF not yet matched aged 14 ½ and below.	Team Manager Fostering	Sept 2019	Increase by 10 % children placed within a 20-mile radius
3. Our children are happy and healthy	1. Regular dental and optician checks and treatment booked within timescales	Team Managers for Locality teams, CWD and Corporate parenting	April 2019 onwards	95% annual health assessments on time.
	2. Initial and review health assessment booked within timescales.	Team Managers for Locality teams, CWD and Corporate parenting	April 2019 onwards	95% of children will have immunisations on time.

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
	3. Completed SDQs to inform health action plans including children with disability	LAC Health Nurse	April 2019 onwards	100% of children identified with substance misuse issues will have timely and appropriate treatment
	4. All children with mental health needs to be referred to CAMHs	Team Managers for Locality teams, CWD and Corporate parenting	April 2019 onwards	100% of children referred to CAMHS will be assessed within 6 weeks of a referral
	5. Source appropriate treatments for children and YP with substance misuse issues	Team Managers for Locality teams, CWD and Corporate parenting	April 2019 onwards	100% of children will be encouraged to take up hobbies and explore interests
	6. Hobbies and interest promoted for all children & YP	Head of Corporate parenting IROs	To begin by second LAC Review	
	7. Life story work to be compiled for every young person	Team Managers for Locality teams, CWD and Corporate Parenting. Social workers in locality teams and Corporate Parenting		100% of long term looked after children and 100% of children being placed for adoption will have life story work compiled

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
4. Our children get the best from school and college	1. Provide individual support to children & YP to at key Stage 2 and 4 assessments.	Virtual School Head of Corporate Parenting	April 2019 onwards	50 % of children reach the expected level 4 in reading, writing and Maths at Key Stage 2. 35 % of children attain grade 4 or above English and Maths.
	2. Work with schools to improve attendance and reduce exclusion.	Head of Corporate Parenting Virtual Head	April 2019 onwards	Reduce school exclusions to less than 5 every month and ensure every child has attendance 95%
	3. Make sure all children and YP are attending good or outstanding provision	Virtual School Head of Corporate Parenting	March 2019 onwards	97% of children and YP will attend good and outstanding provision including those placed outside of area.

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
	4. Continue to develop the careers offer to year 9+	Virtual School Youth Faculty	September 2019	100% of YP aged 16-18 offered a careers interview. By 2022 100% of YP from year 9+ offered a careers interview. 70% of young people between 16 and 18 are in employment, education and training.
	5. Widen opportunities for young people to be in education, employment and training.	Virtual Head Corporate Parenting Panel Head of Corporate Parenting	March 2019 onwards	Increase numbers of YP going to university by 10%
	6. Work with Council Partners to increase number of apprenticeships for 16+.	Corporate Parenting Panel TM's for localities, CWD, Corporate Parenting, Virtual School and Youth Faculty	September 2019	Increase routes into apprenticeship by 20% to children in care and care leavers.
	7. Provide opportunities For all children & YP to participate in extra- curricular opportunities.	Corporate Parenting Panel Personal Advisers Foster Carers, Youth Faculty and Social Workers	January 2019 ongoing	100% of children have opportunities for extra-curricular learning.

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
	8. Support care leavers with preparation for the work environment including CV writing, interview skills and work experience.	Corporate Parenting Team Youth Faculty	January 2019 ongoing	100% of care leavers for whom it is appropriate.
	9. Where English is not the first language provide interpreters and tailored provision to enable YP to catch up.	Virtual School Head of Corporate Parenting	January 2019 ongoing	100% of the YP for whom it is appropriate achieve ESOL qualifications.
5. Our children are prepared for independence	1. Foster carers to work with YP from 15 onwards to support independence skills	Fostering Team	April 2019 onwards	100% of care leavers have an independence plan post 16
	2. All YP to have access to independence living skills programmes	Corporate Parenting Team	April 2019 onwards	100% young people will have a plan to prepare them for independence at the appropriate stage.
	3. Work with residential provision to make sure young people have an independence plan aged 15+.	Independent Reviewing Officers Corporate Parenting Team	April 2019 onwards	Increase by 10% different types of provision for YP not ready to live independently.

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
	4. Housing plans to be in place for all YP approaching their 16th birthday.	Corporate Parenting Team Housing	April 2019 onwards	Increase Staying Put arrangements by 10% on an annual basis.
	5. All young people who are eligible to have passports by age 16 and earlier if possible.	Corporate Parenting Team	April 2019 onwards	100% YP will have passports if entitled.
	6. Apply for National Insurance number approaching 16 th birthday	Corporate Parenting Team	April 2019 onwards	100% of YP will have NI numbers if entitled.
	7. YP to have a bank account.	Corporate Parenting Team	April 2019 onwards	100% YP have a bank account.
	8. Support with driving lessons when they reach 18 years of age.	Corporate Parenting Team	April 2019 onwards	100% of YP will have support if appropriate.
6. Our children have successful adult lives	1. Ensure a personal adviser is allocated to every Care Leaver.	Team Manager Corporate Parenting Team.	April 2019 onwards	100% of Care Leavers will have an allocated Personal Adviser.

Strategic outcome	Activity	Leads	Timescale	Success Measure
	2. Help Care Leavers to apply for apprenticeships and prepare for interviews.	Personal Advisers	April 2019 onwards	Range of apprenticeships are increased by 20%
	3. Work with partners in the Council and Businesses in MK to improve the range of training, employment and education opportunities available.	Head of Service Corporate Parenting. Corporate Parenting Panel. Service Director	April 2019 onwards	70% of Care Leavers will be in education employment or training.
	4. Every Child in Care has a Housing Plan by the age of 16.	Corporate Parenting Team and Housing Team	April 2019 onwards	100% of Care Leavers will have a Housing Plan in place.
	5. All young people have an up to date pathway plan as they approach their 16 th birthday.	Head of Service Corporate Parenting	April 2019 onwards	95% of Pathway Plans will be in place.
	6. Work with Housing to increase the range of supported accommodation options.	Corporate Parenting Panel	April 2019 onwards	90% of Care Leavers who are parents or about to become parents are fully supported through a range of supported living arrangements.

Useful Links

2 Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2000 3 Children and Young Persons Act, 2008 4 Care Leaver Strategy - A cross-departmental strategy for children leaving care, 2013 5 Children and Families Act, 2014

Rock, S; Michelson, D; Thomson, S; and Day, C. (2015) Understanding foster placement instability for looked after children; a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence, *British Journal of Social Work*, 45 (1) pp. 177-203 [Abstract].

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