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Foreword



As the Strategic Director of Peoples Services, I am in the privileged position of being responsible and accountable for the services we provide to cared for children and young people leaving care. I am proud to be a Corporate Parent and determined to drive improvements that will improve outcomes for our children and young people.

This is an interim strategy that has been put in place to set out our vision and priorities for cared for children and young people leaving care whilst we work closely with partners and children and young people to develop a three-year strategy.

Our Vision is for our children and young people leaving care to be healthy, safe, happy, make a positive contribution and achieve.

Cared for children and young people leaving care have a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences, but each of them has a huge amount to contribute and deserve to be safe, healthy and supported to achieve their full potential. Some of our children and young people have already outlined for us what is important to them and this informs this strategy.

I will continue to meet with cared for children and young people leaving care and carefully listen to what they tell us. Via strong leadership Children's Services will be relentless in its focus to deliver on its Promise.

This strategy sets out priority areas for action in the next 12 months.

S O'Brien

Professor Sarah O'Brien
Strategic Director People's Services

1. Introduction

- 1.1. St Helen's Council and its partners are committed to delivering improved outcomes for cared for children and young people leaving care. Our vision is to build a safe, happy, healthy and successful future for children and young people.
- 1.2. This strategy sets out in further detail what this vision means specifically for cared for children and young people leaving care, as well as those on the edge of care, and how we, working with children and young people, will deliver improved outcomes. It sets out the key priority actions, the principles by which we will work together and the key measures we will track to understand how outcomes are improving for children and young people.
- 1.3. First and foremost, the strategy is about working with children and young people to improve their lives and the services they receive - listening to and acting on what they tell us about their everyday experiences of being looked after and how they think our services should be run. One of our key objectives in this strategy is to ensure we listen to children and young people and support them to participate in and influence practice and service development, delivery and evaluation. The strategy therefore is partly about ensuring that we properly understand what outcomes matter to cared for children and young people leaving care, informed by their voice and influence, and supported by an analysis of statistical data such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and research.
- 1.4. This *working with* children and young people starts with the Promise, which was written by children and young people, and which forms the framework for the strategy. The Promise ambition is well aligned to our vision of building a safe, happy, healthy and successful future for cared for children and young people leaving care. The priority actions contained in this strategy stem from the Promise.
- 1.5. This strategy which now extends to care leavers under the age of 25 as a consequence of recent legislative change, then sets out how we as corporate parents for cared for children and young people leaving care, will work with them, their families, our partners and local communities. We know that achieving the best outcomes relies on strong and effective partnership working and this strategy and St Helen's and its partners are working together to develop a strong three-year multi-agency strategy. When taken together - the scale of our collective influence, the range of expertise available, the local knowledge of communities, the links with local businesses, the research base and the opportunity and willingness to work collaboratively - we have enormous potential to open up further opportunities for our cared for children and young people leaving care. All partner agencies are committed to developing and implementing a refreshed strategy in co-operation with each other.
- 1.6. The strategy concludes with looking at how we will measure the impact of changes, ensuring that our actions make a meaningful and positive improvement to children and young people's lives. As well as what children and young people tell us, we will use key

performance indicators to measure how well we are delivering services and to ensure we do what works to improve outcomes. The Corporate Parenting Forum will continue to play a key role in supporting the work of all partners in delivering services to cared for children and young people leaving care and also in calling services to account as part of our governance arrangements to ensure the care provided is positive and protective.

2. Our Parenting Role

- 2.1. Most children and young people in St Helen's live with their families, but for a smaller number this is not always possible. When a child becomes cared for by St Helen's Council the Council becomes the 'Corporate Parent.' The term means the collective responsibility of the council, elected Members, employees and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after and care leavers. A good corporate parent must share the aspirations, commitment, moral and legal responsibility for enabling the cared for children and young people leaving care to experience happy and fulfilling lives. We should want the very best for cared for children and young people leaving care just as any good parent would for their own children.
- 2.2. It is our individual and collective responsibility to champion the needs, wishes and feelings of our children; provide them with the stable, secure and loving environment they need to flourish; advocate for, and secure them the access to opportunity that any good parent would want and offer to their children, in order to inspire them to achieve the future they want for themselves.
- 2.3. We share the principles of the government's 'Putting children first' and 'Keep on caring' strategies, that corporate parenting is the responsibility of the whole public, voluntary and associated private sector and that these duties do not end when a child leaves care but continue throughout the journey to successful independence. All services will have mechanisms in place to continually monitor and review the contribution they make to cared for children and young people leaving care.
- 2.4. Our vision for our role as parents is to ensure happiness, health, safety and success for the children in our care and after they have left care. We want them to have improved emotional wellbeing and to remain safe and protected from harm and exploitation. We want them to achieve their potential, secure improved educational attainment and participate in decisions affecting their care and lives.
- 2.5. St Helen's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership has a role in seeking assurance about the quality of practice, plans and arrangements for cared for children and young people leaving care.
- 2.6. As cared for children move into adulthood, we want to provide a continuity of support, to help our young people to access good quality affordable housing, health care services,

succeed in higher education or secure a good job and attain financial security. As a parent we want our young people to engage in leisure activities and build friendships and links. We want our young people to tell us they feel well supported and for them to have somewhere to turn to.

- 2.7. In short, we want the best for our children and will work relentlessly to achieve the very best for them.

3. Our Promise to Cared for Children and Young People.

- 3.1. We are committed to ensuring that all cared for children and young people leaving care have the same life chances and outcomes that all good parents would want for their own children. It is important that cared for children and young people leaving care, understand what they can expect from us as their Corporate Parents and what they should do if we are not delivering on the promise to them.
- 3.2. Our promise to cared for children and young people leaving care makes four key commitments Respect us, Skills for Life, Support Us and Help us to keep healthy. These have been written by children and young people and agreed by the Corporate Parenting Panel and presented to elected members and senior managers via Corporate Parenting workshops held in January and February 2019. They focus on what matters to children and young people - their voice and influence, their safety, their health, their education, their happiness, their success in adulthood. This strategy has been refreshed so that it is aligned with and sufficient to deliver on that promise.

Our Promise to Cared for Children and Young People Leaving Care

RESPECT US

Children and young people told us they wanted:

- A place to keep all my very special things safe;
- My own bedroom wherever possible;
- Nice, clean clothes;
- Proper healthy food;
- Have a fun life (Treat us the same as you birth children);
- Suitable accommodation for the next move on;
- Somewhere I feel safe and secure;
- Social Worker left as soon as I turned 18, I felt betrayed;
- One stable home with our own privacy;
- Privacy regarding flat checks;
- In care homes, they check our rooms and take money out.

SKILL US FOR LIFE

Children and young people told us they wanted:

- How to iron clothes;
- Being taught life skills i.e. cooking and cleaning;
- Educate yourself;
- Make sure I get an education/good education;
- Increase independence;
- Help with choosing the right course;
- Being taught how to budget properly;
- A course for us to plan for independence - age 16;
- Help getting a job;
- Give more support in helping young people to get into work;
- Driving lessons at the age of 17 years;
- Help with understanding bills once I leave care.

SUPPORT US

Children and young people told us they wanted:

- When you are 18, decide with carers how to celebrate;
- Have the right people to talk to/someone to talk to if I'm worried;
- Listen to our thoughts and feelings;
- Spend time with foster carers;
- To be able to try new activities;
- Someone who is approachable;
- Help to read our mail;
- More help for dyslexic children and young people;
- Be interested in school work;
- Help understanding tenancy agreements;
- Being able to access my leaving goods and having enough money for white goods;
- Having my future home set up for when I'm 18 to take off pressure;
- Housing places for them to visit us rather than the other way around.

HELP US TO KEEP HEALTHY

Children and young people told us they wanted:

- A hot shower;
- Make sure I go to health appointments;
- Understand mental health;
- Education should have more understanding of mental health;
- Being looked after when I'm ill;
- A good CAMHs service/more staff in mental health services;
- Be sporty.

4. How we will deliver on the promise

4.1 We have set out the following key priorities for action to deliver on each element of the Promise to cared for children and young people leaving care.

We will RESPECT YOU

We will:

- make sure our children and young people are treated respectfully by those involved with them and if they are not we will challenge that and/or support them to challenge;
- value, respect and take into account our children and young people's diversity;
- involve our children and young people in decisions that affect their lives and if we cannot do that we will explain why;

- provide opportunities for our children and young people to be involved in meaningful participation and engagement opportunities so their voice is heard, and they can influence practice and service development. We recognize if we do this well children and young people will be enabled to develop key skills and a sense of confidence whilst helping other cared for children or young people leaving care;
- support our children and young people to attend and play an active part in their reviews and pathway planning and ensure their views, opinions, wishes and feelings are taken into account;
- support our children and young people to have a role in overseeing the development and delivery of this strategy in a meaningful way through engagement and a strong voice;
- make sure all those who work with and care for our children and young people are aware of our Promise to them and that we review how well we are doing to deliver on our Promise;
- regularly collect, feedback from our children and young people and use this to develop and improve our practice and services;
- work with children and young people in a way that recognises and builds on their strengths and provides them with the support they need to build resilience, overcome obstacles and help you to build trusting relationships;
- ensure we only change social workers or personal advisors when it is unavoidable. And, when we do need to make a change we will make sure our children and young people know what is going to happen and why;
- make sure you know how to contact your social worker or personal advisor and that you get a prompt response when you do;
- offer children and young people a locked box so they can keep their special things safe.

We will help you to develop SKILLS FOR LIFE

We will:

- make sure you have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) where appropriate; this will set out how your educational needs will be met. We will have a focus on those placed in schools outside of St Helen's;
- ensure all cared for children have the opportunity to attend a good quality school, with an Ofsted rating of Good or better. If a child or young person is attending a school that gets a poor Ofsted rating we will consider what is in their best interests;
- support and challenge schools to ensure our children and young people are fully supported to attend, make good progress and achieve well and to intervene when this is not in place;

- track our children and young people's progress at school via the Virtual School to make sure you are achieving your full potential and if needed we will provide additional support;
- make sure schools and others working with our children and young people understand the impact of early trauma and attachment may have on them;
- work closely with schools to avoid the use of exclusion of our children and young people;
- develop good working relationships between social workers, personal advisors, schools, health care and those working with our children and young people to make sure they receive the best support;
- work to reduce the number of young people leaving care who are not in education, employment and training (NEET).
- work with the council's Employment and Skills Team and partners agencies to ensure all work placement, traineeship, apprenticeship and employment opportunities are available to our young people;
- work with carers to support our young people to prepare for independence help them to develop key skills such as budgeting, shopping and cooking;
- help young people prepare for job interviews and the world of work;
- work with the Council and housing providers to ensure there is a good range of good quality affordable housing support and accommodation available to young people when they are ready to move on;

We will SUPPORT YOU

We will:

- do everything in our control to keep our children and young people safe from harm and to reduce the risk of them being missing from care and seek to understand and address the causes and risks of this;
- be there to celebrate our children and young people's successes however big or small and support them when things are not going well;
- celebrate key events in our young people's lives such as birthdays and passing exams;
- promote and support our children and young people to maintain contact with their families and people who are important to them when it is in keeping with their wishes, safe to do so and in their best interests;
- be honest with our children and young people and speak to them openly when we are concerned about the things they are doing or the choices they are making;

- ensure our children and young people are supported to understand their life-story in a way and at a time that is right for them;
- take time to listen to you and understand our children and young people's views, opinions, wishes and feelings and provide them with an independent visitor or advocate when they want one;
- ensure our children and young people have a Care Plan or Pathway Plan that contains an up-to-date assessment of their needs and a clear plan with specific and measurable objectives that are understood and agreed with them and those supporting them;
- work hard to maintain meaningful relationships with our young people when they leave care and we will do everything possible to re-establish contact with young people who are not in touch and take steps to ensure they are all safe;

We will HELP YOU TO KEEP HEALTHY

We will:

- do all we can to improve physical, emotional and mental health outcomes for our children and young people and make sure they get the right help and support;
- let health colleagues know when children and young people have become cared for in a timely manner and make sure they have regular health assessments and immunisations when needed and that their holistic health needs are met;
- ensure our children and young people have regular dental checkups and the right dental care when you need it;
- ensure young people leaving care are aware of their health history and are enabled to access GP and other health services (including mental health) as they transition to adulthood.

ACHIEVING PERMANENCE

We will:

- work hard to ensure we achieve permanence for our children and young people at the earliest opportunity so they know who will be caring for them throughout your childhood;
- support children and young people to return to their families when it safe to do so and in their best interests;

- when it is in a child's best interest ensure they are adopted and have a forever family in a timely way. We will make sure we find adopters for our children who can love and support them throughout their childhood and into adulthood.
- whenever possible promote fostering for adoption to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity;
- offer children and young people living with connected person foster carers in care to be supported to live outside of care under Special Guardianship Orders where this is safe and appropriate;
- support children to live in local, stable, foster family placements (and reduce the number of placement moves for children and young people) by recruiting more local foster carers to reflect the diversity of our cared for children population. We will recruit more local skilled and able foster carers by offering consistently good support, supervision and training opportunities.
- include 'secure base' therapeutic support model (Beek and Schofield) training across the fostering service in 2019/2020, working in partnership with CAMHS and health colleagues to support carers and children therapeutically;

Cross-cutting enablers to deliver the Promise

We will:

- always strive to achieve the best for each and every one of our children and young people and we will place them at the centre of everything that we do;
- we will consistently set high aspirations for them and undertake our responsibilities as Corporate Parents with as much enthusiasm, passion and commitment as any parent would for their child. We will want to achieve the best for them and in turn encourage them to have high aspirations for themselves.
- adopt an outcomes-based approach across everything we do, to encourage a focus on the difference that we make to the lives of our children and young people - we will always ask ourselves the so what?' question so we retain a focus on the impact we are having;
- measure the impact of our strategy and our work by the extent to which it improves outcomes and by the extent that children and young people tell us we are making a positive difference;
- work together to provide help to children and families at the earliest opportunity to avoid the need for children to become cared for wherever possible.

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- seek to safely reduce the number of children and young people who are cared for by the local authority;
- continue our improvement plan to safely reduce and maintain manageable caseloads for social workers and personal advisors in order to make sure they have the time needed to support you well and engage with you;
- Embed organisational structures that reduce the number of changes of social workers that children and young people experience;
- invest in our workforce, improve multi-agency training and develop our staff and carers to effectively respond to the needs of our children and young people.
- ensure we have an experienced, trained and suitably supported workforce that is able to fulfill its role effectively and provide consistently high-quality service to children and young people;
- ensure cared for children are visited and seen alone by their social workers, and that allocated social workers do their very best to form good relationships with them;
- make sure multi-agency partners are working together effectively to improve outcomes for our children and young people;
- regularly review care plans and pathway plans;
- improve management supervision and oversight of case work;
- ensure there is a robust Independent Reviewing Officer Service that scrutinises and when required challenges practice, plans and arrangements for you and ensures the local authority is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities to you.
- publish a 'local offer' and be available to support young people leaving care up to the age of 25 years.

5. How we will track progress, evaluate and measure success

- 5.1 Establish a multi-agency partnership board group to oversee the delivery of this strategy. Chaired by Senior Assistant Director for Social Work and Community. This group will meet on a bi monthly basis.
- 5.2 Further strengthen our Corporate Parenting Forum that has responsibility for monitoring the quality of services and arrangements for our children and young people.

- 5.3 Routinely seek to understand the quality of practice for cared for children and young people leaving care as part of the Quality Assurance Framework.
- 5.4 Hold weekly Performance Clinics to drive continuous development and improvement in practice, plans and arrangements for cared for children and young people leaving care.

The table below sets out desired outcomes and the performance indicators that we will set targets for in our Performance Management Framework.

Desired outcomes	Performance Indicators and Qualitative Practice
Cared for children and young people leaving care feel they are being listened to and that they can influence development and delivery of services	Care for Children and Care Leaver Council half-yearly reports % of cared for children attending and taking an active part in their review % of cared for children with a review who were visited by their IRO in the 6 weeks prior to the review. % of cared for children who have been visited and seen along in
St Helen's has a strong and active Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Group, whose membership is representative of the wider population	Feedback from children and young people
Increase in the number of children adopted and the timeliness of adoption	Annual adoption targets. A1 expected target of 426 days between coming into care and placement with adopters. A2 expected target of 121 days for Placement Order to matching decision
Increase in percentage of cared for children in local, long-term family placements	Percentage of cared for children placed within St Helen's and those within 20 miles of St Helen's. Percentage of children who have been cared for, for at least 2.5 years and who have been in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption. Reduction in the number of children placed in residential care with a focus on children under 12 years of age.

<p>Ensure the physical, emotional and mental health of looked after children, enabling them to lead healthy, active lives</p>	<p>Number and percentage of looked after children who are overweight or underweight 100% of cared for children to have a completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; SDQ score for emotional and behavioural health</p> <p>Timeliness of health assessments, dental checks, immunisations</p> <p>All cared for children and young people leaving care have access to the health services they need (as measured by feedback from them).</p>
<p>Cared for children and young people leaving care are safe and report that they feel cared for, are safe, and are supported to stay healthy</p>	<p>Number of cared for children that go missing from care.</p> <p>Feedback collected reviews and surveys of cared for children and young people leaving care.</p>
<p>Every child and young person in our care is effectively supported to have good attendance at a good school or provision</p>	<p>Cared for children attendance at school.</p> <p>% of cared for children placed in a good or outstanding schools or provision.</p> <p>Number of cared for children excluded from school.</p> <p>Number of cared for children on a part-time curriculum.</p>
<p>Every cared for child and young person in our care is supported to achieve the highest educational standards they can, whether they attend school, college or training and at each stage of their education</p>	<p>% of cared for children with PEPs (where applicable) including 16 plus PEPS.</p> <p>Cared for children have a good achievement at the end of primary school</p> <p>% of cared for children gaining 5 good GCSEs including English and math's.</p> <p>Level 3 qualifications at 19.</p>
<p>Percentage of young people who are leaving care are in suitable accommodation</p>	<p>% of young people who tell us they are in suitable accommodation and we judge the same.</p> <p>% of young people with an up to date pathway plan.</p>
<p>Percentage of young people who are leaving care are in Employment, Education or Training.</p>	<p>% of young people in Higher Education.</p> <p>% of young people who have an apprenticeship or are</p>

	in employment.
Decrease in the number of cared for children and young people leaving care who offend and are in the Youth Justice system	Decrease in the number of children and young people in the Youth Justice System.