Strategic Plan for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

2016 - 2018
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Forward

Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services Craig Hannaway:

Nothing is more important to Redcar and Cleveland Council than how we look after the children in our care. The Council’s commitment to our corporate parenting duties, as well as our values, principles and standards, are set out in this strategic plan.

We have a strong ambition in Redcar and Cleveland. We want our looked after children and care leavers to have everything that any good parent would want for their children. We want each child to be happy, healthy and safe, and to reach their full potential. We will also make sure that children and young people are fully engaged in reviews of our progress and implementation of our strategies.

This plan is owned by us, our partner agencies, our corporate parenting board, our managers, workers and foster carers. Everyone involved has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. It sets out how the Council and our partners, working together, will work to improve the life chances of young people in care, to ensure that each child and young person experiences high quality care and services that are matched to their individual needs.

Why children are in care
There are numerous reasons why children might live in care. They could live in care because of abuse or neglect, or because their parents are unable to look after them due to illness. If it is deemed that home is not a safe place for them to live or it is believed that they are putting either themselves or others at significant risk then a court may decide to place the child in care. Children may live in care for a short period of time or a more permanent basis.

Cllr Craig Hannaway
Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services
Introduction

The strategic plan for looked after children and care leavers outlines the vision of the Looked After Children service within the People Services Directorate. It identifies how we will improve the quality of services, support and care we offer to our looked after children and care leavers.

It has been developed by the Corporate Parenting Board and Council partners to set out our determination to improve the life chances and quality of life for all those children and young people in our care. It is focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for looked after children and care leavers for whom we are corporate parents and ensure that they receive the same care that a good parent would give their own child based on the principle:

"Is this good enough for my child?"

We know that the best outcomes for looked after children and care leavers can only be achieved by effective partnership working. Every elected Member and officer of the council is a corporate parent, as is any other person involved in their care.
Corporate Parenting

Corporate parenting is a term used to describe the responsibility of a Local Authority to all looked after children and care leavers. A corporate parent has a legal responsibility to ensure that the needs of looked after children and care leavers are prioritised, in the same way as any good parent would do for their own child or children. The term covers all Members and officers of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and includes support from partner agencies to fulfil its duties.

Corporate Parenting Board
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council’s corporate parenting board has a membership of 12 Elected Members including the Lead Members for Children and Health and Housing. Other members of the Board include the Director of People Services, the Assistant Director for Children and Families and other officers.

The Board’s remit is to:

2. Develop effective corporate responses to fulfil the Council’s responsibilities as a corporate parent.
3. Review the Council’s corporate parenting policy.
4. Implement changes to policy and practice and to inform services development in the context of corporate parenting.
5. Ensure the education, health and social needs of looked after children and care leavers are met.
6. Promote and safeguard the welfare of all looked after children and care leavers, including those placed outside the Borough.
7. Review the Council’s arrangements for rota visits to looked after children.

“The health and wellbeing of our looked after children is a huge priority for us. Now that we have transferred school nursing and health visiting services into the Council we have a greater opportunity to ensure the health and wellbeing needs of looked after children are fully met”

Cllr Pallister

“Employment:
My foster carer and personal advisor helped me a lot with employment, my foster carer helped me secure a part time job working in a club which then led on to me gaining work experience with a supermarket thanks to my PA who put me on the course which has led to permanent job with them.”

Leaving care young person

“Accommodation:
My foster carer and PA talked me through what I could do once I was 18 accommodation wise. Together we came to the conclusion that ‘Staying Put’ was the best option for me as this would help in the long run whilst I tried to get settled with a stable job etc. This has helped a lot financially and I thank my foster carer for letting me stay.”

Leaving care young person
Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP)

Building on the good partnership arrangements that are in place in Redcar and Cleveland, a Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership was formed, bringing together the Local Authority responsibility and that of other agencies represented by the involvement of key people, to ensure the needs of looked after children and care leavers are met. This provides a common understanding of each agency’s responsibility, as referenced in their organisation’s strategic plans, culminating in better outcomes for children and young people who are looked after and leaving care.

1 Aim

To take a Multi-Agency approach to challenging outcomes, improving systems and promoting the needs and interests of looked after children, young people and care leavers, who are a priority group in Redcar and Cleveland Council Shaping our Futures, Best Start in Life strategic plan.
2. Objectives

2.1 Identifying opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

2.2 Seeking to improve outcomes through sharing good practice, experience and approaches.

2.3 Further development of a coherent approach to issues relating to looked after children, young people and care leavers.

2.4 Work within the Joint Commissioning Unit Principles and Framework to improve and co-ordinate commissioning across all of the services for looked after children & young people.

2.5 Making recommendations to the Assistant Director of People’s Services, Chair of RCBC Corporate Parenting Board, Redcar’s Safeguarding Children Board and all other relevant partnership boards as appropriate.

2.6 Pro-actively celebrating success and achievement of LAC.

2.7 Forging productive links with other local, regional and national groups with a focus on looked after children.

2.8 Ensure actions, targets, outcomes and reporting arrangements reflect the strategic structure of RCBC People’s Services Shaping our Futures, Best Start in life, the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the MALAP Work Plan.

“The MALAP is a great way of everyone getting together to discuss the strategic development of services for our Looked After Children and Care Leavers, having foster carers on this panel along with the many other professionals involved is essential in making sure we are always looking at improving the experiences and prospects of all the young people we look after by including the people who see them every day and know the challenges and rewards this can bring.”

Redcar and Cleveland Staying Put Host

The LAC Achievement Awards, the best night of the year.

LAC young person

Taking part in the Regional looked after council, has helped me gain confidence and new skills.

LAC young person
Redcar and Cleveland Multi Agency
Looked After Partnership
The Government requires every local authority as corporate parents to set out a pledge to looked after children and care leavers detailing the support and care children and young people can expect to receive. Together with our looked after children’s council and Corporate Parenting Board we devised a set of promises.

LISTEN, ACHIEVE, COMMUNICATE, ENGAGE and SUPPORT

LACES - tying up our promises to looked after children and care leavers
As corporate parents we promise to...

LISTEN
We promise to listen to the voices of all looked after children and care leavers, ensuring they are not only listened to but where appropriate, acted upon.

ACHIEVE
We promise to offer you incentives to stay in education, employment and training, celebrating your achievements and successes.

COMMUNICATE
We promise to support you in expressing your opinions about your care, whether that is having access to the support from your independent reviewing Officer, or the information needed so that you can make a comment or complaint.

ENGAGE
We promise to give you opportunities to engage with other looked after children, young people and care leavers via our looked after children council groups. Where appropriate to do so we will support you with contact with your family and friends.

SUPPORT
We promise to support you with all of your needs, keep you safe and healthy, and give you all the advice, guidance and support you need so that you can achieve your full potential and when ready to do so live independently.

Barbara Shaw
Corporate Director of Children’s Services

Cllr Craig Hannaway
Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services
Priorities and Actions

The Looked After Children Unit will improve the quality of services, support and care we offer to our looked after children and care leavers by focusing on the following four priorities:

**PRIORITY ONE**
Every looked after child will be nurtured and grow up with a sense of identity and belonging, in a safe and stable placement in a family setting within our borough wherever possible.

**PRIORITY TWO**
Every looked after child and care leaver will feel their needs are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about, not just cared for.

**PRIORITY THREE**
Every looked after child and care leaver will have opportunities and support to achieve their full potential.

**PRIORITY FOUR**
We will ensure that young people leaving care have the stability and support that they need to become independent successful adults.
**PRIORITY ONE**

Every looked after child will be nurtured and grow up with a sense of identity and belonging, in a safe and stable placement in a family setting within our borough wherever possible.

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<tr>
<th>Achievements</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior officers, senior representatives of our strategic partners and members of the Corporate Parenting board meet regularly to scrutinise performance and drive our strategic developments for looked after children and care leavers.</td>
<td>Ensure looked after children and care leavers are safeguarded</td>
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<tr>
<td>A robust process for transferring children and young people who have a plan of permanence from the field social work and disability teams to the looked after children teams, to ensure good planning and continuity of care.</td>
<td>Monitor and identify any actions needed to promote foster carer retention.</td>
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<td>A foster care recruitment and marketing strategy which is reviewed and updated annually. This identifies activities and media opportunities to promote foster care recruitment.</td>
<td>Predicting and planning for future needs – e.g. we stopped recruiting ‘baby’ carers then had an influx of babies needing placements</td>
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<td>Good management oversight and decision-making with regard to children and young people becoming looked after.</td>
<td>Monitor and review processes to demonstrate continuous improvement in services for looked after children and care leavers.</td>
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<td>Strategic, needs led approach to recruitment and marketing</td>
<td>Map current adoption timescales and identify and address areas for improvement.</td>
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<td>Increasing the number and range of sustainable placements for adolescents and other ‘harder to place’ children</td>
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<td>Attracting foster carers to Redcar and Cleveland within a very competitive market place</td>
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<td>Demonstrate a year on year increase in the number and range of in-house foster carers that will reduce the number of out of borough and independent fostering agency placements made.</td>
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PRIORITY TWO

Every looked after child and care leaver will feel their needs are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about, not just cared for.

**Achievements**
- The Looked After Children’s Council participates in local, regional and national consultations. Representatives also attend the regional looked after children council meetings.
- Rota visits are embraced by Members and feedback given at Corporate Parenting boards meetings.
- LAC contributions to Foster Carer reviews
- We have established an effective Corporate Parenting Board and Looked After Children’s Council

**Challenges**
- Support children and young people to help shape our services with regular consultation and participation
- Support the Looked After Children’s Council to represent the views of all looked after children and care leavers
- Support members, officers of the council, partner organisations and those who care for looked after children and care leavers, to work together to achieve our aspirations for our children and young people.
- Children involved in placement planning

www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk
PRIORITY THREE

Every looked after child and care leaver will have opportunities and support to achieve their full potential.

### Achievements

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<tr>
<td>No looked after children in Redcar &amp; Cleveland have been permanently excluded from school since September 2011</td>
<td>Increase the number of Personal Education Plans completed within the required timescales and to improve their quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools are effectively challenged to raise the achievement of looked after children</td>
<td>Closely monitor the use of the pupil premium grants and their impact on improving the achievement of our looked after children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attainments in national tests in Year 6 and in GCSE examinations in Year 11 for looked after children are good. The school attendance of our looked after children has been consistently good over recent years and better than both regional and national averages - there have been no persistent absentee (i.e. with 15% or more recorded absences in the last two years).</td>
<td>Take steps to ensure a smooth transition for young people into post 16 education, employment and training.</td>
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<td>Wherever possible our looked after children are placed in schools graded as ‘good’ or better by Ofsted and particular consideration is given to the school’s inclusiveness</td>
<td>Remove practical and perceived barriers so that all LAC have same opportunities as any other child would – carers transporting to school, able to attend after school activities, participate in leisure activities, friends for tea and sleepovers</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have up to date and effective policies and protocols for the education of looked after children that are regularly reviewed and updated</td>
<td>Improve the attainments of looked after children at the end of Key Stage 2, and Key Stage 4.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placement planning and review that reflect a ‘normal’ childhood</td>
<td>Implement improved mechanisms for monitoring and supporting the progress of looked after children and care leavers, after they leave school.</td>
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<td>A new tracking system has been introduced which is more effective for monitoring the educational progress of our looked after children, including their attainments, attendance and exclusions, and provides us with real time data which allows prompt action and support to be provided where concerns arise.</td>
<td>Reduce the number of looked after children receiving fixed term exclusions from their schools</td>
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Annual training is delivered to designated teachers and school governors to raise their awareness of the needs of looked after children and to ensure they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in supporting their education.
PRIORITY FOUR

We will ensure that young people leaving care have the stability and support that they need to become independent successful adults.

### Achievements

- A dedicated leaving care service with a strong commitment to improve the outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.
- The successful implementation of the Staying Put initiative has been the catalyst to improved post 18 placement stability for many care leavers. Care leavers who are Staying Put with their foster carers have told us that this initiative has helped them remain in education and gain employment.
- A joint working protocol with Coast and Country Housing with quarterly review meetings.
- Partnership working with agencies from the statutory, voluntary and charitable sectors to improve outcomes and raise the profile of looked after children and care leavers.
- Active members of the Care Leavers Health Project, South Tees CCG Clinical Commissioning Group.
- A post 18 education, employment and training monitoring group is in place, chaired by the virtual school head.

### Challenges

- To strengthen links with accommodation providers to enable care leavers to access good quality accommodation outside of the Tees Valley.
- To assess the level of need for a supported lodgings scheme, and implement such a scheme at a level that is deemed necessary.
- Explore opportunities to increase engagement with CAMHS, such as the introduction of a drop in session at Target.
- Develop an exit strategy for care leavers that, where applicable ensures a smooth transition to other services and support.
- Develop a consistent approach for assessing independent living skills and offer a variety of opportunities to develop these skills.
- Increase the number of looked after children and care leavers who are in employment, education or training, and work collaboratively with partners to improve their employability skills.
- When foster carers convert to Staying Put hosts this can adversely affect the number of placements available for looked after children. Careful consideration needs to be taken so that the foster carer to Staying Put host transition has minimal impact on looked after children.
Delivering, Monitoring and Reviewing our Action Plan

A detailed annual action plan has been produced by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council’s Looked After Children’s Unit. This action plan has been shared with all members of Redcar and Cleveland’s Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) who have been given the opportunity to support the plans priorities and actions, as appropriate.

This action plan addresses the four priority areas, with agreed actions, and lead officers, agencies and timescales put in place to support the successful completion of each specified action. In order to monitor the progress made against each action, performance measures have been identified, and are displayed in the Looked After Children’s Unit Strategic Action Plan. Our progress towards achieving our performance measures will be monitored by the strategic partnership on a quarterly basis with progress reported to the authorities Corporate Parenting Board. Annually the action plan will be reviewed, with quantitative and qualitative data, including feedback from looked after children and care leavers used to assess our progress made against our priorities. Findings from the annual review will inform and direct revised actions that will form the basis of a reviewed annual plan. Monitoring and reviewing the annual review will be facilitated by Redcar’s MALAP, with all strategic partners and the Looked After Children’s Council contributing to this process.
My Guide

WE CARE, WE SHARE, WE STICK TOGETHER

www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/lookedafterchildren
Why am I in care?
There are a number of reasons, it could be because;
- Your family found it hard to cope
- You were at risk of some sort of harm.
Someone in your family was abused.

Feelings
You might feel confused, sad,
happy, scared, sometimes all
times when you come into care.

All these feelings are normal.
It is important you let the care
worker who looks after you know.

How long will I be in care?
Your time in care might be for a
short time or a few weeks or for a
long time e.g. months and years.
Your social worker will be doing all
they can to make sure all decisions
made about you are in your
BEST interest.

Health
Your health is very important.
We will help you to stay fit and
healthy. We will support you with
your hobbies and interests and
things you enjoy doing.

Where will I live?
This might be with;
- Other family members
- Foster carers.
- Children's homes.
This decision will be made by lots
of people, including your social
worker based on what is best
for you.

What does a social worker do?
They are there to help keep you safe,
listen to you and support you
through your time in care.

Can I see my family and friends?
Contact with your family and friends
and anybody you trust about
is very important.
Your social worker will let you know
how and when this will take place.

Where will I go to school?
If there isn’t a reason for you to
change schools you won’t.
If you do have a change school you
will be able to talk about this with
your social worker.

What will I be doing all day?
They can make sure all decisions
made about you are in your
BEST interest.

Meetings can take place with a lot
of different people, including you
and your family. To make sure you
are well cared for. A person
called an Independent Reviewing
Officer helps make sure your
thoughts and feelings are
listened to.

Compliments, comments
and Complaints
It’s important to have the chance
to let people know how you feel.
You should talk to your care or
social worker if you are unhappy
with anything. We also like to hear
if things are going well too!

Check out
https://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/lookedafterchildren