

Our Lives, Our Hopes, Our Future

CUMBRIA CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STRATEGY – 2019-23 DRAFT2



My dream is to



*Remember don't be afraid to speak out
You are who you are for a reason.
Thinking about what happened in the past made me realise,
how grateful I am for who I am.*

From a poem by Cumbrian child looked after

I. Our Vision

The vision for the strategy was developed by children looked after during the summer holidays in 2018. It says:

*“We think children looked after in **Cumbria need love and to have a good life** and the chance to make friends. Keeping the same social worker really helps. Keep talking to us about contact with our family. We need a good education.”*

“Keep us safe, let us make our own decisions. Help us live more freely.”

“We believe that children who are looked after in Cumbria need to be given the same adventures and opportunities as any other child, and have all the love they need to have a good life. They should be cared for in a home where they are treated as part of the family.”

“Children looked after need love because if they did not have love they will not have a nice family.”

Children and Young People who are Looked After said:

If we could send a text to Children’s Services it would say:

- We all want to feel safe and loved like other children and not ashamed of being in care
- We all want to feel safe inside and outside
- We want to be happy
- Not so many rules – Let me make some decisions
- Stop making us change to new social workers. Soon as I get used to one I get a new one. We’re going to run out!
- We don’t want to feel different to other children who are not in care

2. Why do we need a strategy?

Cumbria County Council is committed to making sure that all people are healthy and safe. For children in Cumbria, this means that we support them to have the best possible start in life. In a small number of cases this means taking children into care, supporting them to be adopted, fostered or placed with wider family.

When this happens we want for every child what a loving parent would want for their own. This means that we need to set out what our plans are to make sure that every child in care can achieve the best they can, and be the person they want to be.

Not only does this apply to children in care, it also applies when a child leaves care. Therefore alongside this strategy we are publishing a Local Offer for Care Leavers. This will help care leavers see what advice, information and support is available to them up to the age of 25.

We recognise that the decision to take a child into care is a serious one. We are keen in this strategy to set out how we plan to prevent children being in care, and, where possible, to ensure they can stay with their families.

The Children Looked After Strategy describes what we want to achieve over the next 4 years and the action we will be taking to make sure all children looked after and care leavers get to maximise their potential.

3. Who is this strategy for?

The strategy is for all of Cumbria's children looked after and care leavers. This includes everyone from birth to age 25 who continues to be supported by the Council and partner organisations. It includes children from Cumbria placed outside the county and focuses on all aspects of their lives.

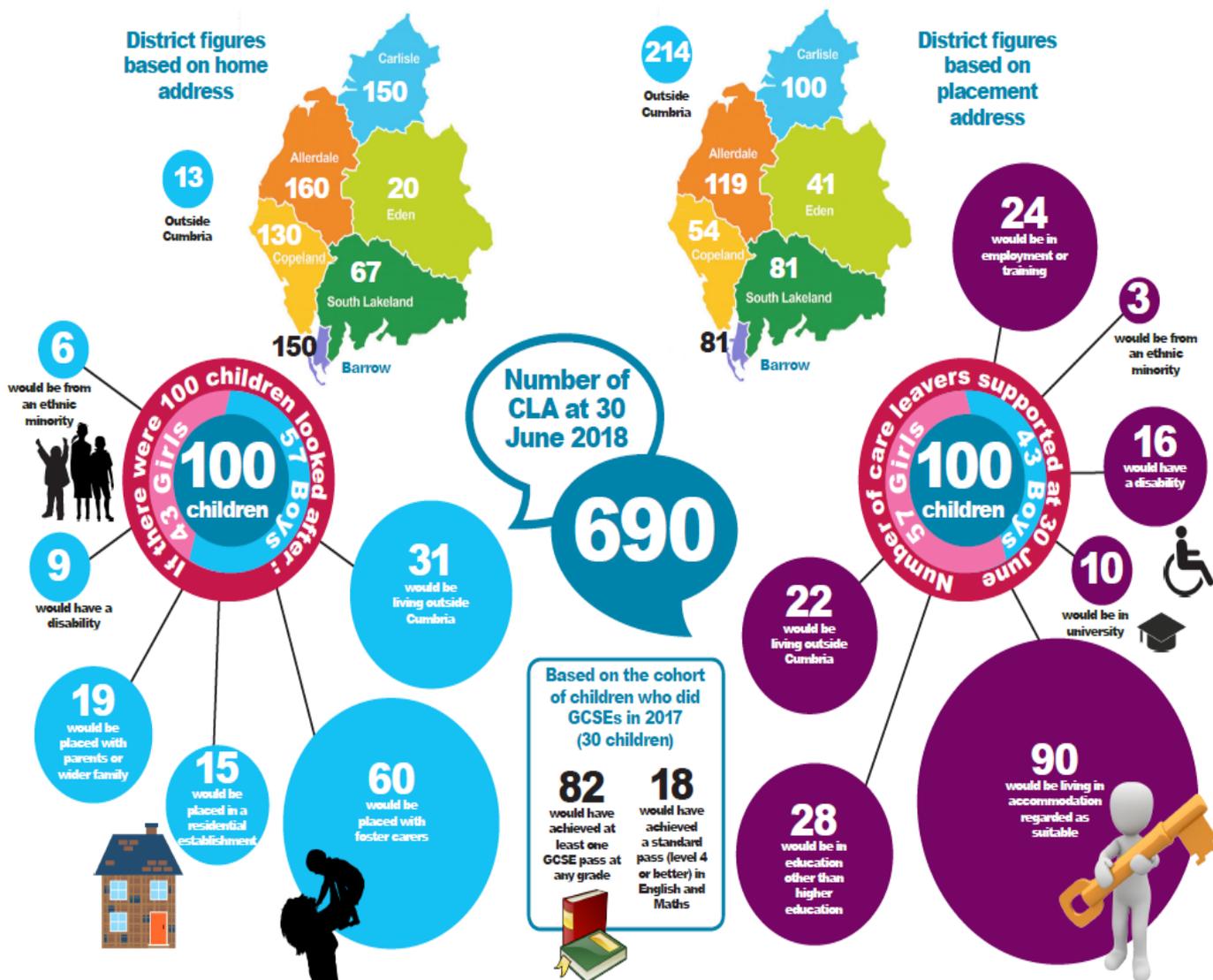
Who am I?

I am someone who....

Likes reading; Likes animals; Likes eating; Likes fish; Likes fish and chips; Likes gaming; Likes being me; Is a good horse rider; Is a person; Is good at painting; Is good and nice; An individual; Unique; Like a super hero; Eats ham to keep me strong; Me; Beautiful; Funny; Is nice; Is fast; Is good at Lego Ninjago (go on adventures and get baddies)

From Blue Jam consultation session with children looked after about the strategy

In June 2018 we had 690 children looked after, to give an idea of where they live, how they are placed and how they are getting on, we have produced the I in 100 chart below.



4. Where are we now?

Successes

Currently Cumbria is improving its services for children looked after. Our original Children Looked After Strategy (2015) set out our ambition to make improvements by 2018. This meant addressing parts of the service that were not working well and putting in place new systems and practices. For children the following things have improved since 2015:

- On coming into care a child has a Permanence Plan in place that says where they are going to go. This means less children are staying in the care system unnecessarily;
- Children have a much greater say in how they want to be treated and this is strongly reflected in their reviews.
- The voice of children is much stronger thanks to improvements in the use of advocacy and the Independent Reviewing Officer service, who can speak up on behalf of the child;

- We are seeing more children in care being supported into university and have opened up access to apprenticeships and traineeships on a scale providing better future opportunities;
- We have more in-house foster carers and are building a stronger relationship between the foster carers and the Council;
- Children in care are benefitting from much better management oversight, which means social workers are being better supported to provide the best possible care for the child;

Children's Improvement Plan – getting to good

Following the 2017 Ofsted inspection, Cumbria moved from a rating of Inadequate to Requires Improvement. There were many aspects of the service which were rated as Good, and the Children's Improvement Plan sets out what we need to do to make sure that we reach a rating of Good or Outstanding in future. The actions from the Improvement Plan have been included in this strategy.

Signs of Safety

In delivery of the strategy we have adopted the Signs of Safety model. This is a particular method of working with children and families at the earliest point when they come into contact with our services. Using Signs of Safety will enable us to build a more relationship and solution focused approach. It help us to work more in partnership with children and their families/networks and enable them to find their own solutions.

CLA Recovery Plan

While we celebrate the progress we have made, we still have a number of challenges if we are to reach our goal of being an outstanding local authority for children looked after and our care leavers.

High numbers of children looked after: Our number of children looked after remains above the average for local authorities with similar populations to Cumbria. In June 2018 we had:

- 690 children looked after
- 294 in foster care (own provision)
- 10 in Cumbria County Council residential care
- 78 in other arrangements placed for adoption or placed with parents for example
- 308 were in externally provided placements (95 in residential homes and 213 through Independent Fostering Agencies).
- There has been a decrease in children under 1 year's old coming into care, but an increase in 10-15 year olds, who are harder to place.

The spread of children looked after across Cumbria is also a challenge. This is shown with the rate of children looked after per 10,000 population (the average for the North West is 91 per 10,000). Looking at these figures there are large gaps between the rates of children

looked after in Barrow and Copeland than Eden and South Lakeland, even when accounting for rurality and differences in population:

- Allerdale 160 (88.4 per 10,000 children)
- Copeland 130 (99.6 per 10,000 children)
- Carlisle 150 (70.5 per 10,000 children)
- Eden 20 (21.8 per 10,000 children)
- Barrow 150 (111.9 per 10,000 children)
- South Lakeland 67 (38.1 per 10,000 children).

Sufficiency of placements within Cumbria: Sufficiency of placements is about there being the right amount of foster placements and specialist placements for children looked after in the local area. Throughout much of the country Councils are struggling to meet their sufficiency requirements, **resulting in** more children being placed out of their local area. This is happening in Cumbria and has been driven by the increased complexity of the needs of children entering the system. Across the North West this can be seen in terms of the increased numbers of purchased placements in the North West from 571 in 2015 to 836 in 2018.

To address these challenges, the CLA Recovery Plan has been developed to

- Increase availability of local residential placements.
- Increase number of in-house foster carers.
- Explore the market for a range of supported and independent living options for 16-18 year olds including increase use of Homestays.
- Provide good management oversight of placements.
- Strengthen the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer to provide oversight and challenge.
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5. Where do we want to be?

We want to be known as one of the best local authorities for supporting our children looked after and care leavers. To achieve this ambition, we need not only to address the challenges we face, but to set out a positive vision based on better outcomes.

The Government have produced new guidance on Corporate Parenting Principles that local authorities should follow when making plans for children looked after and care leavers.

These principles are:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children looked after and care leavers. (Best Interests)
2. To encourage children looked after and care leavers to express their views, wishes and feelings. (Voice of the child and young person)
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of children looked after and care leavers. (Voice of the child and young person)

4. To help children looked after and care leavers gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners. (Access to services)
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for children looked after and care leavers. (Aspirations and outcomes)
6. For children looked after and care leavers to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work. (Safe and stable)
7. To prepare children looked after and care leavers for adulthood and independent living. (Preparation for adulthood).

In making this strategy we worked with children looked after, care leavers, our staff and our elected Members about where we want to be.

To act in the person's best interests and promote their physical and emotional health and well being

Children looked after have been very clear that emotional health and mental health is one of their top priorities. They would like to see an improved CAMHS service, better information about what is available and for us to continue to provide online support so they get instant help. Children and young people in the engagement event talked about things they like to do and opportunities to do more things like exercise and healthy living.

Outcome: We will review the fast track arrangements into CAMHS and ensure Children looked after and care leavers will have better access to and experience of emotional health and wellbeing and mental health support across the system. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Smooth transitions for people accessing CAMHS services into adult mental health services.
- Early help and intervention around emotional health and wellbeing is consistent for all children looked after, and that there is effective signposting and referral to a range of health and therapeutic support where CAMHS is not appropriate.

Outcome: We will work with children looked after, foster carers and care leavers to uptake opportunities for sport and physical exercise, recreation and healthy lifestyles (including food). The impact of this will be seen by:

- Increased uptake of leisure passes as a result of this being in the Care Leaver Offer;
- Children looked after and care leavers participating in a mixture of targeted and universal activity to improve physical health, fitness and active leisure.

Voice of the child and young person

Children looked after have told us how important it is to have people who are trustworthy and do not put them under pressure. That people speak to them about the good things and not just when there is an emergency. They have also said that they do not like being asked the same questions again and again, and that it is really important that professionals treat

them with respect, and understand the stress caused by changing appointments and being late.

Outcome: There will be a stable and meaningful relationship between every child looked after and the team that supports them. This will include the social worker, carers, foster carers and partners involved in the child's life – including school, health, third sector and others involved. Children and young people are engaged in the role out of Signs of Safety and can say whether it is making a difference to them. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Children's plans are simple, accessible and show the child or young person has ownership of them;
- There is evidence of meaningful direct work with the child or young person which informs planning, and is based on their life story.

Outcome: Young people will be able to tell us how things are improving. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Young people directly reporting that the voice of the child is being heard and acted on.
- Greater participation in Children in Care Councils, Care Leaver Forums and through a variety of channels including greater use of digital support.
- Our elected Councillors (or Members) would be able to promote the interests of children looked after and care leavers in their local communities (this could be done by promoting foster carer campaigns, encouraging local businesses to provide work experience opportunities and let them know about apprenticeship schemes, and generally raising questions about whether people and organisations are thinking about children looked after and care leavers, or could do more for them).

Access to services

Children looked after and care leavers want to have access to a full range of services, from transport, leisure, advice and information, and access to cultural, sporting and physical activity.

Outcome: Children looked after and care leavers benefit from access to a wide range of support from district councils, health partners and the third sector. For Care Leavers this will be published in the Care Leaver Offer. The impact of this will be seen by:

- District councils, NHS and third sector organisations contributing to the Care Leaver Offer.
- Greater involvement in sports, culture, and social activity, for example access to leisure passes.
- Better provision of advice and information.
- Financial support and relief, i.e. Council Tax relief for care leavers, and similar kinds of support targeted at foster carers.
- Support to access transport to get about, i.e. through travel passes or additional support in learning to travel independently i.e. for young people with a learning disability or autism).

Aspirations and outcomes

Children looked after and care leavers have highlighted the importance of about having positive aspirations for their future. In particular they wanted to be able to access a wide range of post-16 learning, training and work opportunities, including universities and apprenticeships.

Outcome: We will develop an Aspiration Programme that will provide a joined up pathway towards people having a positive destination at 18 and beyond in relation to employment, education, training or participation in society. This will include a scheme of work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships, so that all children looked after and care leavers have a clear plan to ensure that they can access employment, learning and training suited to their aspirations. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Children are supported to think about their future in terms of learning and employment and a plan is put into place to help them reach their aspirations.
- Increased rate of care leavers in employment, education and training up to 25 years old.
- Increase in rates of children looked after and care leavers accessing work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships as well as Higher Education.
- All departments of the County Council offering work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships to children looked after and care leavers.
- Children looked after and care leavers actively supported to access work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships across the public sector.
- Increase in private sector employers signing up to the Care Leaver Charter and offering work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships to children looked after and care leavers.
- Adult and Community Education supporting care leavers up to age 25 to meet level 1 and 2 skills gaps.
- All care leavers who are not in employment, education and training, benefit from positive opportunities to participate through volunteering, social activities and do not experience isolation.
- Young parents as care givers who are not accessing education, employment and training do not feel stigmatised and are supported to plan for their future in terms of education, employment and training.

Safe and stable

Children looked after clearly say they value their placements with foster carers, and see the social worker as an important person in their life. They value their siblings and close family, but also their friends and their pets. Having a secure home life, knowing the people involved in their care and being respected are vitally important to them. Tracking placements and making sure that all plans address this is vital in supporting stability.

Outcome: Children looked after will experience less moves, live closer to where they grew up, and benefit from the loving support of foster carers, who are supported by the Council. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Children report feeling safe and being well-looked after.
- Increased number of in-house foster carers.
- Use of Signs of Safety to strengthen the relationship between the foster carer and social worker in planning more jointly with the child.

- Foster-carers supported and trained so they can deal with the complex needs of children, reducing the risk of a placement breakdown.
- Foster-carer networks stronger and having more impact on policy.
- Foster-carers feel more supported by the services and through peer networks.
- Children are placed according to their assessed needs, and that matching with foster carers, contact and placement support are effective.

Outcome: Children placed with extended family and ‘connected people’ will receive a high standard of support. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Children say their social worker supports them well when they are living with extended family and friends.
- Where a child is placed with their family there will be a review to see if the child still needs to be looked after and whether other legal options are more appropriate.

Outcome: Children at risk of child exploitation will be safer and services will be better able to prevent children at risk. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Children at risk of exploitation and their families and carers get the support they need.
- Practitioners confident in identifying children at risk and working effectively with them to prevent harm.

Outcome: Children looked after and care leavers will get the same quality of service that respects their diversity and identity. This means culturally sensitive services that respond to diversity in relation to gender, sexuality, transgender, ethnicity, faith and disability. This will mean that Equality is embedded across the whole delivery of this strategy. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Effective training and support in place for foster carers and professionals on Equality issues.
- Participation activities reflective of the diversity of children looked after and care leavers.
- That there is the cultural infrastructure in Cumbria to provide support around Disability, LGBT and BME groups, especially in relation to the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Programme (UASC). This can be done through promotion of foster caring recruitment among BME and LGBT groups, working with AWAZ and other community infrastructure organisations that reach minority groups and mapping local resources including places of worship, Halal shops and other support.

Preparation for adulthood

Care leavers have fed back their priorities in terms of relationships, housing, managing their finances and access to education, work and training.

Outcome: We have produced a Care Leaver Offer that lets care leavers know what support they can receive around health, accommodation, relationships and social participation, access to training and employment and support around finances. This has been put together by the Council, NHS, District Councils and we will continue to add to the Care Leaver Offer. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Care leavers given support to take time to discover more about themselves and what they want from life when making decisions.

- Care leavers feel socially and emotionally connected to friends, family and the community, reducing loneliness and promoting good wellbeing.
- Increases in care leavers living in suitable accommodation.
- Care leavers managing their finances and benefitting from good financial support and advice.
- Decreases in care leavers involved in the criminal justice system.
- Care leavers reporting satisfaction with the support they are receiving in their transition to independence.
- Care leavers feeling confident to be open with friends, employers and others about being able to be open about their past without fear of stigma.

Outcome: Care Leavers who require adult social care and specialist health services, will benefit from a smooth transition from children’s services, and continue to receive the support they need. The impact of this will be seen by:

- Effective transition plans in place for all children, based on funding secured and in place, and early involvement of transitions workers.
- Young people reporting they have been involved in their transition plan, understand the options and how they will be supported.
- Parents and carers report positive experiences in being engaged in the shaping of the plans.
- Transition points into post 18 services are well managed and part of a clear pathway, with young people and families feeling that they were well informed and supported into new services and decisions were clear and timely.

5. How will we get there?

While Cumbria County Council has lead responsibility for the strategy, making it happen will involve health services, district councils, police, schools and third sector organisations playing a crucial part. We will also be working with the Local Enterprise Partnership and employers to make sure that the needs of children looked after and care leavers are being addressed in the Cumbrian economy.

6. Delivering the plan

The Strategy will be delivered over 4 years. There will be an annual Delivery Plan setting out what we will be doing and when, with actions informed by what children and young people have told us and the Equality Impact Assessment.

The Corporate Parenting Board will be responsible for making sure that services are delivering against the strategy. They will receive quarterly a report updating progress. They will also carry out an annual ‘deep dive’ on the Equality Impact Assessment.

Every other year there will be a RESPECT assessment that will look at how we are doing against the standards they have set. The RESPECT assessment is led by young researchers with direct experience of care and care leaving. They interview senior managers, front line staff, foster carers and consult with children (including children placed out of county). They will present their report to Corporate Parenting Board.

