

**West Sussex
County Council
Children Young People
and Learning**

**Children Looked After
and Care Leavers
Strategic Framework**



West Sussex County Council - Children, Young People and Learning

Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategic Framework

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1. Foreword

Jacquie Russell
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People



There is nothing more important than the future of our children.

I am delighted to be able to introduce what I think is a very clear statement about our ideals, our objectives and our methods for improving outcomes for children looked after and care leavers in West Sussex.

We have repeatedly spoken about our intention to put children and young people at the centre of everything we do: this is especially so for our most vulnerable children who are in the care of the County Council, together with its partners; and for those who have left care and are making their way in the world, but still need our help and support.

This document gives effect to the principle of really listening to what they are telling us about their experiences, their feelings, needs and wishes, and their dreams for the future; and then giving them the best care and encouragement that we can, in a way that works for them.

Through chairing the County Council's Corporate Parenting Panel, I have come to have a keen sense of this responsibility that is also a privilege, as we ask ourselves the question: would this care that we are providing be good enough for my child?

This is not a document that will sit on a shelf. It will continuously inform our approach, and it sets standards that we expect to be judged against, as we strive to be excellent Corporate Parents. I am deeply grateful to everyone who assists us in this undertaking.

Lucy Butler

Executive Director of Children, Young People & Learning



In West Sussex there are around 800 children in the care of the local authority, and nearly 500 care leavers who have the right to continuing support up to the age of 25. These numbers are continuing to rise, both locally and nationally. Children in care and care leavers are *our children*, and each one of us is a

corporate parent. Behind this formal statement is the passion I know we share - from elected members through to our staff, foster carers and other partners - to achieve excellence for our children.

We pledge to work compassionately with some of our most disadvantaged young people in our community. Children in care are known to be so much more vulnerable to a whole range of factors that can adversely affect their health, their education, their employment prospects and their chances of forming stable relationships now and in their future life. We want to change that.

If we do our job properly, listening carefully to what our children and young people tell us, and by acting upon it, we will be supporting these young people to experience happiness, fulfilment, and a positive future. This is their birth-right – to have the same opportunities as everyone else to reach their potential. Our document explains how we are going to do this job. We have set ourselves some exacting standards, but I am confident that with this shared commitment, together with the plans laid out here, we will be able to achieve our goal of transforming the lives of the children and young people in our care.

Jack

Chair of the Children in Care Council

(14 years old)



I am excited to be the Chair of the Children in Care Council and to be part of the working group who will deliver this strategy over the next three years. I want to make every journey through care a good one and ensure that our voices and participation are heard to help drive change.

2. Introduction

We will have the child at the heart of everything we do and every decision we make

We will work together to ensure that children and young people in West Sussex are safe, healthy, resilient, able to learn and fulfil their aspirations and have their voices heard, valued and acted on.

This Strategic Framework sets out West Sussex County Council's **principles and priorities to improve outcomes for children looked after and care leavers**. It relates to all children looked after and care leavers in West Sussex, including those placed out of our geographical area, up to the age of 25.

Corporate Parent is a term used to describe the role that local authorities and their partners play in relation to children and young people in and leaving care. The concept was first introduced in 1998 and has since been enshrined in legislation and statutory guidance. A summary of the legislation that has helped shape this Framework is provided at Appendix 1.

In West Sussex we **strive to be excellent Corporate Parents**, and to work tirelessly for and with our children looked after and our care leavers, to help them **achieve their potential** and to ensure that **their voice** is sought out, heard and responded to.

We will do this by **making sure that we take our powers** to take a child into care **very seriously**. We will make sure that we make these decisions in a **timely way** and that we do so **only after all appropriate alternatives**, including opportunities to be cared for within a child's own family, have been considered.

When a child becomes looked after, or leaves care, **we will ensure that they experience:**

- **high quality help from their social worker** and other practitioners
- access to **good quality education, health, play and leisure facilities**
- **support to move confidently into adulthood**, including support for employment or training, and access to appropriate housing.

The Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning, together with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, holds overall strategic responsibility for corporate parenting. This includes the responsibility to ensure that children looked after, and care leavers, are **a priority for the local authority and its partners**.

We will **work effectively with our partners**, through the statutory Corporate Parenting Panel, to ensure that there is:

- a **clear and consistent understanding of the roles and responsibilities** for corporate parenting across social care, education and health services
- a **solid commitment to act on the principles and priorities set out in this Framework.**

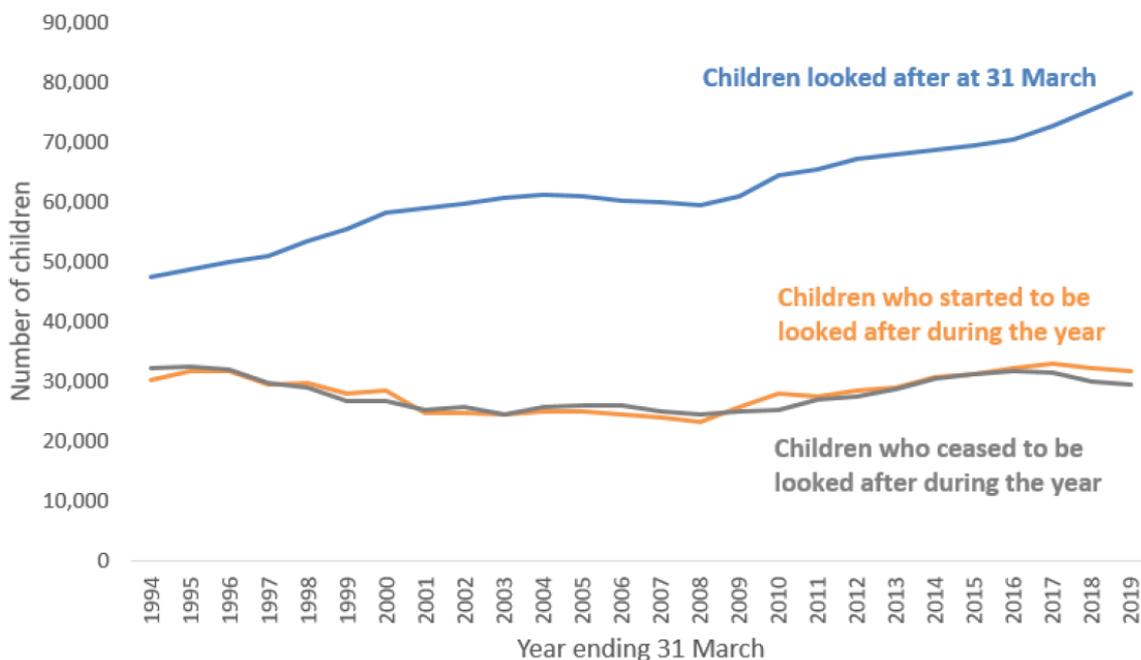
3. National and Local Context

National Context

At 31 March 2019 there were 78,150 looked after children in England, up by 4% on March 2018.

The overall rise in looked after children in England at 31.3.2019 is substantially due to a decrease in the number of young people ceasing to be looked after.

Figure 1: National number of children starting and ceasing to be looked after in the year, and the number looked after at 31 March

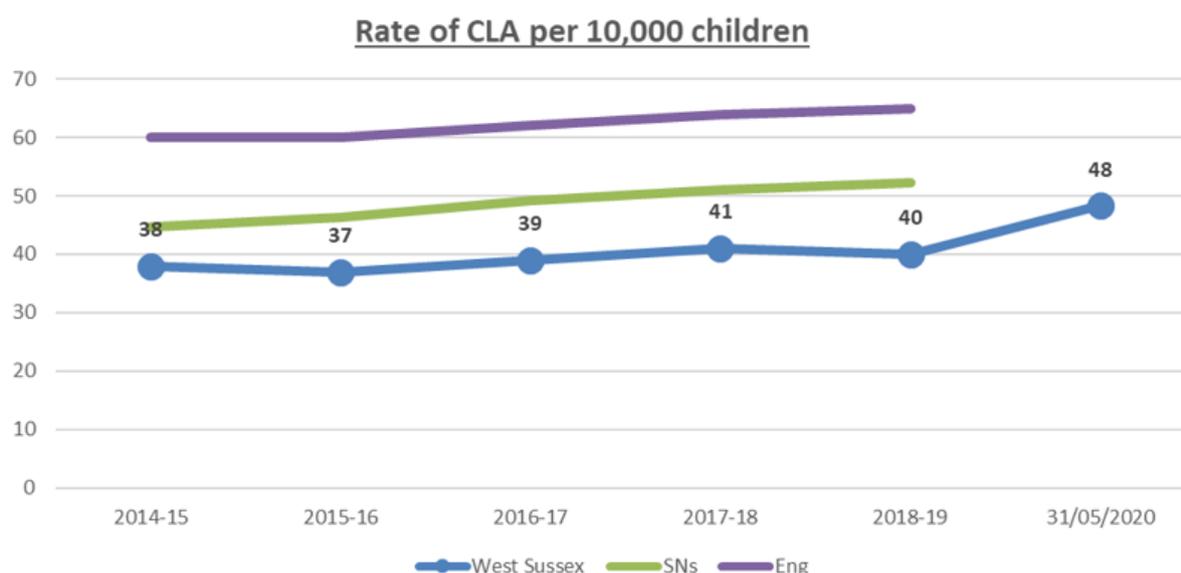


Local Context

There has been a **significant rise in the number of children looked after by West Sussex** County Council between 2014 and 2020 (Table 2 below refers). This has placed increasing pressure on the number of placements required, either internally, or through commissioned services.

Our latest figures for 31.5.2020 show that West Sussex has a rate of CLA per 10,000 at 48; this is compared to the National rate per 10,000 of 65 and our Statistical Neighbours at 52.

Figure 2: Rate of CLA per 10,000 children



The actual numbers of children looked after in West Sussex are as follows:

Table 1: Number of CLA WSCC - 2014-2020

Year	Total CLA
2014	603
2015	644
2016	642
2017	666
2018	705
2019	702
May 2020	841

However, even with this rise we still fall below our statistical neighbours in the rate of children looked after per 10,000 population. (In 2018/19, 20 children per 10,000 in West Sussex started to be looked after, compared with a National figure of 27 children per 10,000.)

Placement type – Nationally

Table 2 below shows the national trends for placement type. Between March 2014 and March 2019 there has been a slight decrease (2%) in the percentage of children looked after placed with a foster carer, and a corresponding increase in the percentage placed in a residential setting.

Table 2: National Type of Placement

Year	Number	Fostering %	Residential %
on 31/3/2014	68,810	74%	10%
On 31/3/2015	69,590	74%	10%
On 31/3/2016	70,400	73%	11%
On 31/3/2017	72,590	73%	11%
On 31/3/2018	75,420	73%	11%
On 31/3/2019	78,150	72%	12%

Placement type - Locally

West Sussex ensures that all children are placed in the best possible placement to meet their needs and aspirations. As shown in Table 3 below, West Sussex places **fewer children looked after with foster carers than the national average** (2019 - 67% compared to 72%), and more in residential settings (2019 - 15.7% compared to 12%).

Table 3: West Sussex Type of Placement

Year	Fostering incl. Family and friends	% of total CLA	Residential	% of total CLA
2014	425	70.5%	74	11.8%
2015	461	71.6%	80	12.4%
2016	426	66.4%	90	14%
2017	452	67.9%	86	12.9%
2018	470	66.7%	103	14.6%
2019	471	67%	110	15.7%
Present	541	68%	121	15.2%

As shown in Tables 4 and 5 below, the number of care leavers in West Sussex living in suitable accommodation is slightly higher than national figures.

Table 4: National Numbers of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation

Age group	Number of Care Leavers	Number In Suitable Accommodation	% In Suitable Accommodation	Number Not in Suitable Accommodation	% Not in Suitable Accommodation
17 to 18Yrs	11,200	9,890	88	590	5%
19 to 21Yrs	29,480	25,050	85	1,880	6%

Table 5: West Sussex Numbers of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation

Age group	Number of Care Leavers	Number In Suitable Accommodation	% In Suitable Accommodation	Number Not in Suitable Accommodation	% Not in Suitable Accommodation
17 to 18Yrs	129	123	95	0	0
19 to 21Yrs	359	318	89	17	5%

As shown in Table 6 below, West Sussex has a range of placement options for older looked after children and care leavers, prior to them moving to independent living. Locally 94.9% of young people aged 18 and over who move to live independently are in suitable accommodation against a national average of 84%.

Table 6: Care Leavers Accommodation Type

Accommodation Type	Number
Agency Residential	32
Halls of Residence	4
Independent Fostering Agency	42
In-House Foster Care	51
In-House Residential	4
Kinship	6
Non-planned Accommodation	3
Placed with Parents	6
Residential School	4
Supported Accommodation with Outreach	43
Supported Accommodation with On-site Support	100
Staying Put with Foster Carers	83
Supported Lodgings	24
Grand Total	402

4. Promise to Children Looked After & Care Leavers

Our Promise has been updated with young people and launched in June 2020

INVOLVING YOU

WE PROMISE

- To ask your views, listen and act on what you tell us
- To tell you what you need to know
- To give you information you need at the right time, to help you make the right decisions
- To be a good friend

HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

WE PROMISE

- That you will have somewhere safe to live
- To help you stay in touch with people who are important to you
- To support you to be happy and healthy

SUPPORT AND ADVICE

WE PROMISE

- To avoid unnecessary changes
- To make sure you know who will support you and that important people keep in touch with each other to help you
- You will get the support and resources you need to help toward your goals
- You will have a social worker and have access to other professionals you might need

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK

WE PROMISE

- We will help you develop skills for life and work
- To celebrate your successes with you
- To champion your education
- To help you get the qualifications, interview skills, training and opportunities you want

LEAVING CARE

WE PROMISE

- To put in place what you need when you leave care
- To help you make a clear plan for your life ahead after care

5. Strategic Aims

We will have the child at the heart of everything we do and every decision we make.

We will work together to ensure that children and young people in West Sussex are safe, healthy, resilient, able to learn and fulfil their aspirations and have their voices heard, valued and acted on.

To ensure that this Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategic Framework is both coherent and relevant it is **aligned to the core aims developed for Children's Services**:

- **To support families to stay together** and reduce the need for children to be looked after, by focusing on services that provide timely help, build on a family's strengths and prevent greater problems arising.
- **To manage risks for children and young people confidently and effectively when providing support to families where they need to be safeguarded.**
- **To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality placements for children who are looked after**, to meet the diverse range of their needs and circumstances.
- **To ensure children have effective plans that remain focussed on achieving timely permanence and stability** in their lives.

6. Principles: The Way we will Work

The Principles, which set the baseline for how we will work, underpinning this Strategic Framework are as follows:

- We will **empower children, young people and families** to be self-sufficient, and respect their right to confidentiality.
- The **United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) will be upheld and we will promote awareness of these rights to our children looked after.
- We will listen to the views and experiences of children and young people, **involving them in decisions that affect their lives**, recognising that their views must inform our practice and shape service delivery.

- We recognise that responsibility for meeting the needs of children and young people looked after, or at risk of becoming looked after, **rests across all services for children**, including statutory and independent providers, and that partners must work together to meet these needs.
- We will use a relationship-based approach to work with children and families that is child-centred. This approach will **promote good quality social work practice and enable reflection on practice experiences and learning**. One of the practice tools we will use is the **Signs of Safety approach**. **Signs of Safety** is the underpinning strengths-based approach adopted in our work with children and families at West Sussex County Council. It supports our aspiration to achieve permanence through its emphasis on working collaboratively and transparently with families, and can act as the catalyst that initiates behaviour change by families.
- **We will ensure preventative services and early help to support children in need and their families** are provided on a multi-agency basis that gives them every chance to stay together, including for those children on the edge of care.
- Children are **most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are permanently cared for within a family environment**. Residential care placements will be made only where the complexity of a child or young person's needs means they are unable to live within a family setting.
- We will strive to ensure that children and young people live in, or close to, their communities to **maintain their family networks and education, and to minimise disruption** in their lives.
- Where children and young people live will be **determined according to their needs** and must support **a positive transition to independence and adulthood**.

7. Strategic Priorities for Children Looked After & Care Leavers

Our strategic priorities for our children looked after and care leavers are as follows:

1. **Supporting** children and their families when there is a **risk of children becoming looked after**, and where possible **enabling them to live with their families**
2. Ensuring we have a **sufficiency of high-quality placements**, in the right places to meet children's and care leavers' needs

3. The child's need for **permanence** will best be met by being brought up within a secure, stable and loving family environment, that can support them through childhood and beyond
4. Children looked after and care leavers are **happy and healthy**
5. Children looked after and care leavers are **supported to achieve in education** and to **access leisure opportunities**
6. Children looked after and care leavers can **participate in decisions** that affect their lives, and have their views sought and responded to
7. Children looked after are **supported to leave care and transition** into adulthood

7.1 Supporting children and their families when there is a risk of children becoming looked after, and where possible enable them to live with their families

Background

We ensure that children benefit from timely and effective help, support and protection when risks escalate, to enable them to live safely with their families or extended families wherever this is possible. We work closely together with a range of professionals including health, police, youth services and education colleagues to achieve this priority.

When children do become looked after, social workers and other practitioners work together with children and their families to understand and assess their circumstances and needs, and plan effectively for their future.

Ofsted Report (May 2019)

'Too few children in care have an up-to-date, good-quality care plan, and children wait too long for assessments of their health needs and for permanent homes. Issues in how social workers, managers and partner agencies respond to neglect lead to children coming into care too late, and when their needs have become complex and challenging.'

West Sussex's Commitment to Improvement

1. We will undertake a detailed review of our placement sufficiency strategy to ensure that we are able to meet the changing needs of our children and young people.
2. We will improve the quality of help and support to children before they become looked after or are on the 'edge of care' including addressing issues of neglect, parenting and parental mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse.

3. We launched the Neglect Strategy in May 2020 with improved professional guidance, toolkits and training in relation to Neglect.
4. We will ensure timeliness of decision-making when risks escalate for children, including the use of pre-proceedings and the public law outline.
5. We will improve quality of provision for emergency and short-term support for children, such as fostering and residential provision.
6. We will build positive working relationships with families, using the strengths-based approach, in response to crises, helping families to remain together around their children.

7.2 Ensuring we have a sufficiency of high-quality placements, in the right places to meet children's and care leavers' needs

Background

Placements in West Sussex are made through either in-house foster carers or in our residential provision, or through independent providers of foster care or residential provision. We are committed to all children looked after living as close to home as possible, where this is in their best interests. Independent placements are largely managed through a dynamic purchasing system (DPS); those that are spot purchased use the same contracting arrangements as the DPS. In West Sussex we have:

- A long-standing in-house fostering service that provides 475 approved fostering placements for children looked after by 288 foster carers (31.5.2020). We are currently reviewing the fostering service to enhance and broaden the breadth of placements to provide more placement choice. We also use independent fostering agencies to provide further fostering placements. See table 8 below.
- 25 places in our in-house residential provision, 20 of which are specifically for children with disabilities. Three of our residential services are currently suspended. Following repurposing and refurbishing work they will re-open in 2021 and will provide an additional 19 placements in-house.
- As of 31.5.2020, 107 placements in children's homes in the independent sector. Whilst this is a significant number of placements, it must be noted that some are for specialist services (for which our demand is low); we are competing for placements with other local authorities, and for some children and young people it is consistent with their welfare that they are placed away from the county area.

- As of 31.5.2020, 268 placements for supported accommodation (for older children in care and care leavers) of which 116 placements were for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people (UASC).

The number of West Sussex children in residential care on 31.3.2019 was above the national average (15.7% vs 12%); 61.5% of children placed in independent residential care are either out of area, or more than 20 miles from their home, although it should be noted that there are often child-centred reasons for this.

There continues to be significant pressure on placement numbers, and placements have had to be sought at a distance from WSCC. However, the standard overall for our placements remains very high, and in excess of the national picture. See table 9 below.

75% of supported accommodation for older looked after children and care leavers is in West Sussex and along the coastal strip, close to colleges and other amenities. 25% of supported accommodation placements for older looked after children and care leavers are outside of West Sussex; this is predominantly in East Sussex and London. Most young people placed out of county are UASC, where the authority has placed them within areas which meet their cultural or educational needs.

Ofsted does not regulate supported accommodation; however West Sussex Children's Commissioning and Contracts Team have rigorous monitoring programmes in place for all 16+ supported accommodation to ensure accommodation is of a high standard, well maintained and to ensure young people receive the support they need to adequately prepare them for living independently.

All children's homes are regulated by Ofsted, and all providers who apply to join the DPS must have a rating of 'Requires improvement to be good' as a minimum. The number of children placed in Good or Outstanding provision is 95% overall, compared to a national figure of 89%.

Table 7: Independent Fostering Placements as of May 2020

National or local	Inadequate	Requires improvement to be good	Good	Outstanding
National picture	1%	8%	74%	18%
West Sussex placements	0%	0.91% =2 placements 1 provider	55.46% =122 placements 19 providers	43.6%=96 placements 7 providers

Table 8: Independent Residential Placements as of May 2020

National or local	Inadequate	Requires improvement to be good	Good	Outstanding
National picture	6%	17%	59%	18%
West Sussex placements	0%	4.2%	72.9%	22%

In addition to the Ofsted monitoring visits, the Children’s Commissioning and Contract Team carry out regular quality assurance visits through the Children’s Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG).

For post-16 provision that is not regulated by Ofsted, the team carry out more regular quality assurance visits – typically quarterly.

The team hold quarterly forums with fostering and residential providers. These are used to focus on a range of practice and business issues, including training and sufficiency, and are attended by a range of partners, including health, education and police colleagues.

Ofsted Report (May 2019)

‘A clear, targeted sufficiency strategy provides a coherent analysis, effectively forecasting future placement need. The high number of children placed in the West Sussex area by other local authorities adversely impacts on the sufficiency of local placements, particularly for high-risk adolescents. Leaders have responded to this by monitoring the local market and seeking to engage more proactively with existing and emerging providers, but challenges in demand remain.’

West Sussex’s Commitment to Improvement

- We will ensure that the child or young person is at the centre of the referral process, and we will strengthen the use of an outcome-based model to identify suitable placements.
- We will increase the availability of fostering placements within WSCC, both internally and externally, so that the percentage of children placed with a foster caring household is at least in line with the national average.
- We will work with our independent providers to increase the occupancy of residential provision in WSCC with WSCC children, and will strengthen and maintain positive working relationships.

- We will deliver a revised in-house residential service which will aim to reduce the need for residential care overall by focusing on providing support for children on the edge of care.
- We will re-commission our post-16 support and accommodation DPS to ensure that we have access to the right services, in the right places for our young people, including those who have complex and high-risk behaviours.
- We will ensure that all accommodation for care leavers is safe, secure and affordable, including setting out in our entitlements offer, the exemptions that can be considered, e.g. the shared accommodation exemption and the universal credit housing support, from which care leavers are exempt.

7.3 The child's need for permanence will best be met by being brought up within a secure, stable and loving family environment, that can support them through childhood and beyond

Background

Children and young people need to live somewhere they feel safe and cared for - a place they can call home; a place free from abuse and harm; and a place where they feel confident to express their views.

Providing stability relies on early permanence planning, identifying the right placements for children early and ensuring that individuals and family needs are properly assessed; high quality support services are provided to enable a safe return home or to ensure that appropriate alternative arrangements are in place to achieve early permanence.

For many children, returning home to their family after a period in care will be the route to permanence and stability. For others, the home of other family members or friends will be the setting they need in order to thrive. Other routes for children to achieve permanence include adoption, Special Guardianship, Child arrangement orders, or long-term fostering. For some young people, residential care or appropriate arrangements for achieving permanence and independence will be appropriate for them.

We have made changes in social work practice, so that permanence planning is integral to all decisions made for children. We have strengthened management oversight and practice expectations for social workers and managers, so that effective scrutiny and monitoring of planning is in place for all children.

Ofsted Report (May 2019)

'Concerns regarding permanence planning for children, including the availability and use of foster-to-adopt placements, timeliness of assessments and planning for unborn babies'

'The importance of permanence planning for children is not understood across the service and is not effective enough for too many children'

'managers' tracking and oversight of the permanence process are not robust enough. The current local authority policy for children to remain in placement for 12 months before being eligible for a match with permanent carers prevents children from living in situations in which they feel confident they will stay for the remainder of their childhood'

West Sussex's Commitment to Improvement:

- We will ensure that there is an early focus on permanence for all children, before they are looked after, so that effective and timely plans are put in place for them. We have introduced permanence panels in March 2020 to improve management oversight and planning for children.
- We will ensure that all children and young people will have a permanence plan 4 months after becoming looked after, and agreed at their 2nd Children Looked After review.
- Independent Reviewing Officers will escalate the case of any child where permanence has not been achieved in the time agreed.
- All children who are looked after will be reviewed by the Permanence Panel.
- Corporate Parenting Panel will hold officers to account where drift and delay is evident in making permanent arrangements for children and young people.
- We will continue to support and promote the use of 'staying put' and 'staying close' arrangements.
- Make sure that Children Looked After living in residential establishments are also helped to focus on their future hopes and dreams and can say that there are permanent plans for them that they understand.

7.4 Our children and care leavers are happy and healthy

Background

Looked after children have many of the same health issues as their peers, but they often experience these issues to a greater degree. This can result in poorer levels of long-term health after they leave care.

We believe that looked after children and young people should expect to have the same opportunities as others, especially when it comes to being healthy and

happy. Individual looked after children will have varying levels of need, and we will work collaboratively to offer each child the best support we can.

Our Designated Children Looked After Nurse and Designated Doctor have both a clinical and a strategic role for all children looked after by the Council. The Children Looked After Health team are commissioned by West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to improve health services for all our children looked after, in line with statutory guidance for promoting the health and wellbeing of children looked after and NICE quality standards.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing services are jointly commissioned by West Sussex County Council and the local CCGs.

Health is moving towards a recommissioning of provision, and this will be a new pan-Sussex service. Children's Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) will be undertaken combining Nurse and Paediatrician assessment and will effectively utilise administration support.

Ofsted Report (May 2019)

'The quality of health provision for children in care is poor. Serious shortfalls remain in the timeliness in which children's health needs are assessed when they first come into care'.

'Strengths and difficulties questionnaires are now completed for children in care, but they are not routinely used to inform care planning'.

'The child and adolescent mental health service for children in care is currently being recommissioned to deliver more timely mental health support for children, who currently have to wait several months for treatment'.

West Sussex's Commitment to Improvement

- A medical practitioner will complete a full, thorough and timely health assessment for all children coming into care; this will be followed by a review health assessment every six months for children under five, and annually for children and young people aged over five. This will be closely monitored.
- We will support all looked after children to have good mental health, as well as good physical health and will ensure that Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) are used to inform care planning.
- We will ensure all children looked after with mental health concerns are identified and supported by our joint commissioned CLA Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) Service.
- We will work with partners to secure fast-tracking of relevant medical and clinical appointments for children looked after.

- We will ensure all children looked after receive all the immunisations that they require.
- We will support all children looked after, and care leavers, to live healthy lifestyles and make healthy choices, including by giving information and guidance on emotional and mental health, sexual health, alcohol/substance misuse, healthy eating and recreational activities.
- We will provide all young people leaving care with their health details and support them to look after their health and emotional wellbeing.

7.5 Children looked after and care leavers are supported to achieve in education and to access leisure opportunities

Background

As corporate parents we are ambitious in our desire that all children looked after, achieve their academic potential.

We have a statutory duty to promote a child's educational attainment regardless of where children live or are educated. The Virtual School Head is responsible for this duty for children who are looked after. Every child looked after must have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is part of a child's care plan.

Children who are looked after will be supported and helped to attend school regularly and reach expected levels of educational attainment. As corporate parents, we need to ensure that joint planning enables children looked after, wherever possible, to stay in their local school to minimise disruption during their education. We must ensure that children have access to a range of leisure, social and recreational activities.

The Virtual School Head also provides a yearly report to the Corporate Parenting Panel which covers all aspects of education for Children Looked After.

We will actively promote the special educational needs of Children Looked After, including when they live with a disability, making sure that their education, health and care plans set out an effective pathway towards success and independence.

We will seek, and obtain feedback using creative tools, to work with children who have different ways of communicating.

We will work in close partnership with the special educational needs officers and the placement team, so that children are well matched to the local places they will live and the local schools where they will be educated.

We will maintain education, health and care plans until Children Looked After and care leavers are aged 25, so that their transitions to employment or further/higher education are well supported and they are helped to achieve their Level 3 and higher qualifications.

Ofsted Report (May 2019)

'The virtual school is working to improve the number of personal education plans that are completed. While there has been some improvement in the completion rate, too many are still not produced within the expected timescales or to a sufficiently high standard'.

'The number of children in care who are persistently absent from school remains high. Exclusions have risen over time'. The local authority is tackling this issue strategically, working with schools and governors to develop their work around pupil exclusion as part of the promotion of a broader approach to safeguarding. This is supporting an emerging culture of inclusion.

West Sussex's Commitment to Improvement

- We will improve the quality of personal education plans (PEPs).
- We will develop the PEP documentation to ensure we better measure the progress of children in care.
- We will work to improve the school attendance rates of all children looked after.
- We will rigorously monitor and evaluate the impact of the pupil premium plus spend to ensure that children have the right support to learn and achieve.
- We will provide advice and guidance to all children in care and care leavers and support them to access further and higher education.

7.6 Children looked after and care leavers can participate in decisions that affect their lives, and have their views sought and responded to

Background

All children in care have a right to have their wishes and feelings heard when decisions about their futures are being made. This right is enshrined in international law in Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in domestic law under the Children Act 1989.

Meaningful engagement, negotiation and interaction leads to more successful outcomes. This approach should therefore be from the perspective of relating to children and young people as individuals.

In West Sussex we have a Children in Care Council, Children & Young People Voice Group MOMO (Mind of My Own), and a participation team which contribute to ensuring we capture and action the voice of the child in our care.

Ofsted Report (May 2019)

'The local authority has an established Children in Care Council that is supported by participation officers. The council champions the views of all children in care and care leavers. Children in care are listened to through this forum and their voice has influenced the development of services, for example through the campaign 'treat us the same' where children expressed their concerns about being taken out of classes for statutory reviews and meetings'.

West Sussex's Commitment to Improvement

- We will work to ensure that a broader range of children and young people are involved in our participation work.
- Social workers will ensure that there is good quality recording and reporting of children and young people's circumstances in plans and assessments which include their views.
- Children and young people will be able to build strong relationships with their social worker so that there is a feeling of trust and that they are encouraged to express their views.
- Children and young people can take part in decisions made about them and are aware of their right to be heard and the process that supports this. They will have a full understanding of their situation and the options available to them for the future.

7.7 Children looked after are supported to leave care and transition to adulthood

Background

A vital part of our role as corporate parents is to prepare the children and young people we look after for their independent adult lives.

The statutory responsibility of corporate parents extends beyond age 18 until 25 years old.

We provide support to care leavers to help them access the opportunities they need to succeed in life and to help them achieve their ambitions. This includes help to access work, training or education, timely access to housing that is safe and in local communities, including 'staying put', and effective support towards independent living, and access to their health information.

All care leavers should have access to a personal advisor who effectively supports them when they are preparing to manage the demands of living on their own at a young age, including having to manage finances, maintain a home and manage their lives independently.

Ofsted Report (May 2019)

'Young people are involved in their pathway planning. The quality of these plans varies, and some are more detailed than others. Plans are regularly updated, but actions arising from them are not always clear and timebound. Consideration is given to young people's day-to-day health needs. Although the local authority asserts that young people are provided with information about their health histories, this information is not held by the local authority. Should young people require access to this information in the future, it would not be easily available to them'.

'The local authority has taken action to raise young people's awareness of post16 opportunities, such as apprenticeships, colleges and universities, using well established local networks. As a result, the proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training has improved and is now broadly in line with national averages.

West Sussex's Commitment to Improvement

- All young people will have access to their health record/histories when they leave care.
- We will provide advice and support for young people to access education and training up until 25 years old, and to access further and higher education.
- We will work to improve and strengthen our local offer to care leavers and involve them in how we do this.
- We will improve our offer to strengthen access to careers advisors and Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) work coaches, career tasters and apprenticeships.
- We will support care leavers to develop their skills and readiness for work and education.
- We will develop a guaranteed interview scheme and access employment within the County Council for care leavers, and promote this with our partners.
- We will work in partnership with District and Borough Councils to improve the housing offer for care leavers.
- We will continue to promote and support the 'staying put' offer for our care leavers.

8. Consultation

The Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy has been consulted on and written in collaboration with staff, children and practitioners.

The draft document was consulted on as follows:

- Through the Voice and Participation service, where the Children in Care Council (CiCC) was engaged with and invited to participate in its development.
- It was signed off at the Corporate Parenting Panel on 25 June 2020 and agreed by the Children's Services Departmental Leadership Team.
- All key partners were contacted within the consultation process and its development aligned with the appropriate governance arrangements.
- Between 19 August and 16 September 2020 a public [consultation](#) was published on the County Council website using the 'Have your say' facility. This was made available to professionals, children and young people and carers, where a total of 71 responses from all sources was received.
- The full set of consultation responses has been made available to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

Feedback from the findings was supportive and positive, and welcomed the strategic approach. A response to update those young people who provided feedback on how their comments have shaped the Strategy has been published on the County Council [website](#).

The effect of the consultation was a full endorsement of the content of the draft Strategy document.

Some actions have been taken to ensure all priorities are progressed such as:

- employing a specific partnership officer to progress the improvements needed.
- A thorough improvement and action plan has been created.
- New work has commenced with the Care Leaders Fellowship to improve the local offer and further embed the voice of children and young people in the service's work with them.

9. Action Plan and Governance

We have used the Consultation process to develop with stakeholders an Action Plan. This Action Plan will have clear actions and timelines and will be regularly

monitored by the Corporate Parenting Panel and its associated subgroups.

Legislation

The legislation that primarily impacts on children looked after and children looked after services, and that has influenced the development of this Strategic Framework is as follows:

- Children Act (1989) – the Act sets out many of the duties, powers and responsibilities local authorities hold in respect of their children looked after and care leavers.
(www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents)
- Children (Leaving Care) 2000 – Sets out duties that local authorities must undertake to support young people leaving care from 16 to 21 years of age. (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents)
- Adoption and Children Act 2002 – This Act updated the legal framework for domestic and inter-county adoption and places a duty on local authorities to maintain an adoption service and provide adoption support services. (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents)
- Children and Adoption Act 2006 – This Act gives courts more flexible powers to facilitate child contact and enforce contact orders when separated parents are in dispute.
(www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/20/contents)
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008 – Legislates for the recommendations in the Department for Education and Skill’s 2007 Care Matters White Paper to provide high quality care and services for children in care. (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents)
- Children and Families Act 2014 – Encourages ‘fostering for adoption’ which allows approved adopters to foster children while they wait for court approval to adopt. Introduces a 26-week time limit for the courts to decide whether a child should be taken into care. In some cases, this limit may be extended by eight weeks. Introduces ‘staying put’ arrangements which allow children in care to stay with their foster families until the age of 21 years old. This is provided that both the young person and the foster family are happy to do so.
(www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted)
- Children and Social Work Act 2017 - Improves the support for looked after children and care leavers, promoting welfare and safeguarding for children.
(<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted>)
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
(https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf)