

A Partnership Strategy for Looked After Children and Care leavers 2022-2025

v0.6 (for consultation)

Foreword by No Labels – Nottinghamshire Children in Care Council

This partnership strategy for children who are looked after and care leavers in Nottinghamshire has been informed by children, young people and care leavers working together with Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) and partners through a county-wide consultation.

It is important that our voice as children, young people and care leavers is considered both in documents written about us and the words spoken with us.

We feel that the ambitions and promises within this strategy are relevant to our lives and should be a priority of those who care for us within Nottinghamshire County Council and partner organisations such as education, health, police, housing, adult social care and children's social care.

As individuals we all matter, and every young person's care experience will be different. Having access to this strategy will enable any child, young person or care leaver to find out information, understand the reasons why some decisions are made and ask questions.

We would respectfully request that all children, young people and care leavers are made aware of this strategy and how they can access a copy whilst in the care of Nottinghamshire County Council and partners, to support a trusting relationship with those who look after us.

Our Partnership Vision:

"We want our children and young people who are care experienced to have every opportunity and the support they need to be the best they possibly can be.

We want our children and young people to have the best start in life and we will encourage and promote our children and young people to have resilience, ambition, aspirational goals and practical and emotional support for their successful journey into adulthood.

We will nurture strong roots of stability, love, encouragement, positive relationships, and healing from past harm."

Who is the strategy for?

This strategy is for looked after children and care leavers. This includes children in the care of Nottinghamshire County Council living both in and out of Nottinghamshire, and children looked after by other local authorities, living in Nottinghamshire, where partners are able, through their statutory responsibilities, to provide support. This reflects that children looked after by other local authorities will continue to be supported by their “home” authorities in the same way that Nottinghamshire children living out of the County continue to be supported by Nottinghamshire County Council. All care leavers living in Nottinghamshire will be supported through this strategy regardless of the location of their home when they were in care.

Introduction

This strategy has been developed by the Nottinghamshire Looked After Children and Care Leavers Partnership Board, in collaboration with our children and young people. The Partnership Board includes the following organisations:

- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Newark and Sherwood District Council and Gedling Borough Council on behalf of the seven Nottinghamshire District and Borough Councils
- Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- D2N2 and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce
- Nottingham Trent University
- Nottinghamshire Futures
- Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Bassetlaw Clinical Commissioning Group
- Nottinghamshire Police
- Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust on behalf of Nottinghamshire Designated Doctors
- National Probation Service
- West Nottinghamshire College on behalf of further education colleges
- A care leaver champion

Partners have a range of statutory responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers, with Nottinghamshire County Council and the seven Nottinghamshire district and borough councils acting as the ‘corporate parent’ for any child that becomes looked after. This means that the Councils are jointly accountable for the experiences and support that the child receives. This responsibility is also shared by all organisations within the Partnership.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 outlines the seven corporate parenting principles that help enable better outcomes for looked after children and young people. These principles apply throughout the child’s upbringing and into adulthood.

1. *To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.*
2. *To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.*
3. *To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.*
4. *To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.*
5. *To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.*
6. *For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.*

7. *To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

Over the life of the last strategy and as this strategy has been developed, the partnership structures supporting children and young people continue to evolve, whether that is the development of the Integrated Care System, the introduction of new safeguarding arrangements through the move to the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, or the development of locality working forums to support young people in schools. As such, the Partnership Board continues to flex and be responsive to the changing landscape, whilst proactively taking the opportunity this presents to promote and act in the best interests of looked after children and care leavers.

When we developed the last partnership strategy for Nottinghamshire looked after children and care in 2018 we could not have anticipated the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it would have on the life experiences of our children and young people. Despite the challenges of the last 18 months, the Partnership has retained a focus on what young people say matters most to them – feeling safe, support with health needs, accessing good education or training, securing well-paid employed and permanent housing, and feeling like valued members of society. This strategy was developed prior to Nottinghamshire County Council participating in the Independent Review of Care, which we are sure will further enhance the strategy in the future.

Looking Back

Over the life of the last strategy, our partnership working has made a significant impact on support available to our young people and to the outcomes they have achieved:

What the Partnership has achieved	What this has meant for our looked after children, young people and care leavers
<p>In 2019, Nottinghamshire’s Local Offer for Care Leavers was published. The involvement of the seven district councils working alongside other partners, including Integrated Care System (ICS) partners, led to a comprehensive offer which goes beyond the statutory expected requirements, providing a platform from which our care leavers can thrive. The Offer includes council tax exemption, local authority housing priority, free access to local authority leisure services, and ongoing support for 21 to 24-year-old care leavers from NCC’s 21Plus Service.</p>	<p><i>“It’s nice to know people care about me, and I’m not just a dusty file on a shelf” – 22-year-old care leaver on the Local Offer for Care Leavers</i></p> <p><i>A young person made use of the free leisure centre access to attend keep-fit sessions and relax when she wasn’t at university. She also attended swimming sessions with her child and made friends with some other local mums.</i></p> <p><i>A Personal Advisor received a photograph from a care leaver showing their beautiful Christmas decorations they’d put up in their first council tenancy.</i></p>
<p>A joint initiative between NHS England, CCGs and NCC Children’s Services called <i>You Know Your Mind</i> provides personal health budgets for looked after young people with mental health needs, enabling support to be provided in a person-centred, creative and flexible way.</p>	<p>62.2% of young people who received support through <i>You Know Your Mind</i> said they feel happier and have better mental health and wellbeing</p> <p><i>One young person who experiences anxiety leaving their care home, had photography equipment provided by You Know Your Mind, which they used</i></p>

	<p><i>to take pictures of the local nature reserve and go for walks during lockdown.</i></p>
<p>Strengths-based personal education plans (PEPs) have been co-produced with young people and put in place by NCC Children’s Services, local schools and other education providers, enabling our young people to set clearer goals for what they want to achieve and how they can access support to achieve it.</p>	<p><i>“Children and young people seem much more interested in these plans, especially when talking about their hopes and dreams” – social worker (NCC Looked After Children’s Service)</i></p> <p>Here’s what one of our children (aged 10) told us in their recent PEP:</p> <p>My hopes, dreams and future goals: I would like to do science and drama. I’d like to be a voice actor or an actor I’d like to like carrots like everyone else does If I can’t go back to mum, I’d like to live with xxx and xxx – we get on very well- until I’m 18 years old</p> <p>What is going well? Having my sister coming to stay (but she has been a pain in the last few days). My older brother gave me a hug at contact – brother/sister love means we hug but say an insult (to bond). I have made a few friends. I like frogs, ducks, lemons and limes I am strong at talking out loud, I am good at science – the experiment bit.</p> <p>Do you feel safe and able to relax at school – yes</p> <p>What things could be better? I’d like to get better at reading aloud (don’t like the sound of my voice; feel awkward), I’d like to get better at working faster</p> <p>Dislikes – reading aloud – but I’ll have to get over this if I want to be an actor</p>
<p>There has been a real focus on improving young people’s access to alternative routes into employment and training. The establishment of NCC’s Achievement Service has enabled greater partnership working with local businesses, careers advice and training providers, with a particular focus on supporting 16- to 24-year-olds.</p>	<p>80% of looked after children are currently in employment, education, and training and all have access for support to explore and plan for their career aspirations.</p> <p>Together we are prioritising opportunities for care leavers. For example, Nottinghamshire County Council and Newark & Sherwood District Council have recruited care leavers into apprenticeship posts.</p>
<p>Through the pandemic, West Nottinghamshire College and NCC Children’s Services worked together to support young people to continue their education remotely, including providing WI-FI</p>	<p><i>“For example, one of our young people, who was in their final year of a level 3 programme and needed specialist equipment, tried coming into college during the first Lockdown in March 2020. They</i></p>

<p>dongles through partnerships with accommodation providers</p>	<p><i>found that doing so significantly increased their anxiety and it started to affect their mental health. They asked what we could do to help, so the college worked with NCC Looked After Children's and Leaving Care Services to jointly fund a specialist laptop and software so they could do their college work from home. We also worked together to boost their home WiFi (as uploading projects was a significant challenge for them) by funding a WiFi hub hotspot at home. Our young person successfully completed their course is now at university."</i> Louise Knott, Vice principal, West Nottinghamshire College</p>
<p>There has been an increased focus on supporting young people at risk of offending or criminal exploitation. Nottinghamshire Police and Children's Social Care have been working in partnership through the recruitment of a dedicated police officer to develop an improve police colleagues' understanding of how to work in a trauma-informed way</p>	<p>By working together across our partnership, we have been able to implement support and disruption plans for young people at risk of criminal exploitation and actively minimise risk</p> <p>Nottinghamshire Police received a call from a Nottinghamshire Children's Services residential care home about cannabis one of our young people using cannabis. Although currently doing well, she had experienced trauma and had highly complex needs. Following calls to the Looked After Children Police Officer from the care home and to the young person's Youth Justice worker , a discussion with the Police's local beat manager, and a visit to the young woman by the Looked After Children Police Officer, a partnership approach was taken. Not only did this approach highlight a potential risk of CSE for our young person, as she told us that she was being supplied cannabis free of charge (a technique used by perpetrators of CSE), providing insight to the beat manager about the circumstances of our young person meant that the Police took the advice not to prosecute and instead offered a sanction. Without the support of the Looked After Children's Police Officer, the young woman would have been prosecuted in a very matter of fact way as this offence usually is, adding more complexity to her life and the risk of CSE going unnoticed.</p>

There are also some areas in which we have not made as much progress as we would have liked over the last three years, with the pandemic contributing to this. For example we have more to do to ensure that young people have responsive and effective mental health support (particularly if they are living out of Nottinghamshire) to ensure that young people have timely and good quality health assessments when they

come into care, and to ensure that there are enough of the right kind of homes in Nottinghamshire for our young people to live. We will continue to focus on these areas in this next strategy.

Looking Forward

The achievements of the last three years give us a strong foundation upon which to build further. As a Partnership we are ambitious and aspirational for our looked after children and care leavers and we will continue to work together to ensure that they have access to the same opportunities, support and outcomes that we would want for our own children. At the heart of the strategy is the lived experiences of our children and young people. Over the course of the last three years, and through the development of this strategy, young people have told us what matters most to them:

- Having a voice that is listened to, heard, and has influence
- Being and feeling safe
- Feeling understood by professionals in our lives, and those professionals remaining consistent where possible
- Experiencing stability, at home and at school
- Remaining in contact with friends, family, others who are important in our lives, including our pets
- Being able to take part in social and extra-curricular activities and celebrations like other children and young people
- Having safe and regular time with our birth family
- Having the time and support to prepare for changes that need to happen
- Knowing what services and support are available
- Learning 'real-life' skills

They have told us some things that they don't want:

- Having lots of paperwork
- Having to tell our 'story' over and over
- Feeling blamed for change and challenges whilst in care or after leaving care, such as placements breaking down

These views and wishes will drive our both our priorities and our behaviours through the course of this strategy.

Our Partnership Ambitions and Commitments:

The ambitions we held within our previous strategy remain as relevant today. As corporate parents, we have high aspirations and expectations that every looked after child and care leaver:

- Is safe and feels safe
- Experiences good physical, emotional and mental health & wellbeing
- Fulfils their potential
- Makes a positive contribution to their communities
- Has a successful transition to adulthood
- Achieves sustained and fulfilling employment & economic independence

In addition, we have developed four commitments that we make to every looked after child and care leaver:

- We will ensure that your voice is heard and has influence
- We will help you to experience stability as much as possible – at home, at school and in relationships which matter to you
- We will seek to understand and recognise your individual needs
- We will encourage you to dream and be aspirational and ambitious about now and about the future

In delivering this strategy, each partner organisation will be asked to pledge how they will meet these commitments in the way that they provide services, and in the decisions they take.

Realising the Ambitions and Commitments

The action plan to deliver this strategy does not look to replicate all of the positive activity that individual organisations are taking to support looked after children and care leavers, rather to identify where the Partnership, as a collective, can add value and focus on those areas that our children and young people have identified matter most.

Looked After Children and Care Leavers are safe and feel safe:

We will:

- raise awareness with key stakeholders of the additional vulnerabilities of looked after children in the context of the criminal justice system to reduce the disproportionate representation of our children and young people in the First Time Entrant, re-offending and custody data
- raise awareness with key stakeholders of the additional vulnerabilities of looked after children to the risks of becoming victims of criminal sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation
- develop a framework for enabling and encouraging our children and young people to have voice, agency and a positive sense of self, which will be used in all significant interactions with them
- recognise that our children in care and care leavers will have different care experiences and may need some additional support, consideration and flexibility when navigating services and provision to be safe and feel safe
- promote and encourage safeguarding for care leavers

Looked After Children and Care Leavers experience good physical, emotional and mental health & wellbeing

We will:

- develop a cross-partnership relational approach to all work with our children and young people
- review our local approaches to trauma informed practice across the Integrated Care System and within our schools and education providers and develop a programme that ensures all professionals have the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of our children and young people in a strengths-based and trauma informed way
- work to ensure organisations work together to provide high quality care within statutory timescales
- work with regional and national partners to ensure children placed in Nottinghamshire receive the same quality of support that they would receive if they were living in Nottinghamshire, to and ensure when Nottinghamshire children and young people are placed out of Nottinghamshire they receive this same quality of care
- evaluate the impact of the pandemic on children and young people and use this to shape the support and services provided

Looked After Children and Care Leavers fulfil their potential

We will:

- work together to ensure our children and young people's education is appropriate and meeting their needs, as well as providing pastoral support with compassion and understanding
- work with schools and education and training providers to provide access to courses and qualifications that meet the needs for our young people to achieve their aspirations for higher education, work or training
- work together to offer a curriculum and training opportunities that will accelerate progress and attainment for ALL our children and young people up to the age of 24
- extend the Virtual School training offer to other relevant services across the Partnership

Looked After Children and Care Leavers make a positive contribution to their communities

We will:

- support children in care and care leavers to feel they belong in their communities, and we will recognise, celebrate, and share their successes and achievements
- advocate for our children in care and care leavers within our organisations and those we work alongside, to help inform practice and remove barriers and myths linked to being care experienced
- promote community activities, events, and opportunities to our children and young people using a variety of communication tools including the Notts Next Steps App

Looked After Children and Care Leavers have a successful transition to adulthood

We will:

- strengthen our Local Offer for Care Leavers and extend the Offer to looked after children
- strengthen our support for young people to develop the life skills they need to live successful adult lives
- support our young people to make a positive move from statutory schooling to post-16 education or training and beyond, with a focus on preparing for adulthood
- as they become independent, provide good quality homes that meet our young people's needs and provide a foundation to achieve their goals
- develop a robust and aspirational cross-partnership framework to evaluate the effectiveness of our strategy

Looked After Children and Care Leavers achieve sustained and fulfilling employment & economic independence

We will:

- be even more ambitious in the number of organisations offering work experience, internships, apprenticeships and guaranteed interviews, with partners to the strategy leading the way
- prepare our children and young people for employment work, recognising the additional support and experiences we must provide to ensure they have the skills and understanding to succeed
- ensure our young people achieve economic independence by providing stability and physical assets to help them move into and sustain employment. For example, a nice place to live, a way to get to work and suitable clothes to wear

What will success look like in three years' time?

- Our local workforce will have the skills and training to better meet the needs of all looked after children and care leavers living in Nottinghamshire
- More of our children and young people will experience stability, in relationships that matter, in school and at home
- More of our young people will be in education, employment or training that meets their aspirations
- Our children and young people will have equitable access to health services, regardless of where they are living
- More of our young people will take part in extra-curricular and community activities
- Children in care will be no more likely to be criminalised than other children and young people in Nottinghamshire

Governance

This strategy will be supported by a delivery plan, with progress overseen by the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Partnership Board. The Board will report into the No Labels Children in Care Council every six months, on progress in achieving the ambitions within the strategy, and on the way that partners are meeting the commitments outlined in the strategy. No Labels will be able to set new priorities for the Partnership Board, as they emerge through the life of the strategy.

The Board will also report into the Children and Young People's Committee, and Governance Board for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Individual Board members will be responsible for reporting progress through their respective governance arrangements.

The Board will ensure all members of the Partnership are held to account on their commitments within the strategy.

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