



Northumberland
County Council

Care Leavers Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

In Northumberland, we want all children and young people to live happy and healthy lives that enable them to grow and thrive. As a good parent, we want to raise the aspirations of young people in our care, supporting them to fulfil their own ambitions and dreams by supporting young people to overcome the difficulties they may face, particularly in relation to education and training; as well as ensuring their transition into adulthood is positive and that all young people have the necessary life-skills, confidence and experience to enable them to thrive.

In order to meet the wider needs of care leavers, a collaborative approach involving Northumberland Adolescent Service, our partners and the council as a whole is required to achieve the best possible outcomes for our young people.

This Strategy is part of the wider Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy which reflects the desire to holistically support young people leaving care and sets out the plans to further improve the support we offer to young people. It provides a framework for the Council, elected members, officers and partners to fulfil our duties and responsibilities as Corporate Parents of Care Leavers.

Which Young People are Care Leavers?

For a young person to be considered a care leaver, they need to be aged between 16 and 25, have been looked after by the local authority for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and have left care sometime after their 16th birthday.



Cath McEvoy-Carr
Executive Director of Children's & Adult Services



Councillor Wayne Daley
Cabinet Member for Children's Services

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Nationally, around 11,000 young people leave care in England each year aged between 16-18 years old. They generally leave home at a younger age and may experience a more difficult journey towards adulthood than their peers.

In 2013, The Department for Education set out its vision for care leavers, in which it said that care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that other young people get from their parents. They want to remove some of the practical barriers that care leavers face and they outlined the principles of good corporate parenting.

“Keep On Caring” (2016), further cemented the support young people should receive as they transition from care. ‘Keep on Caring’ identified 5 key outcomes that the government believe young people leaving care should be supported to achieve:

- all young people leaving care should be better prepared and supported to live independently.
- improved access to education, employment and training.
- All young people should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure.
- improved access to health support.
- care leavers should achieve financial stability.

These 5 key outcomes form the basis of our strategy and provide a holistic approach to the support we offer to young people leaving care.

LOCAL CONTEXT

As of 31st March 2019, Northumberland County Council were actively supporting 161 care leavers across various teams within Children’s Services. 47 young people were aged 17-18 and 114 young people were aged 19-21.

NUMBER YOUNG PEOPLE	% OF YOUNG PEOPLE	CHILDREN SERVICES TEAM
137	85	Northumberland Adolescent Service
16	10	Locality Social Work Teams
8	5	Disabled Children’s Team

Northumberland Adolescent Service

Northumberland Adolescent Service (NAS) is a multi-disciplinary service offering support to young people 14+ including children in need, looked after young people and care leavers. The 14+ Team and the 18+ Team for care leavers are co-located, which ensures there is a seamless transition between the teams when a young person turns 18.

The service includes:

- 14+ Social Work Team
- 18+ Team for Care Leavers
- SORTED Substance Misuse Service
- Youth Justice Service
- Youth Service
- Participation & Advocacy Service
- Accommodation Team

Having the range of services co-located enables a shared responsibility to ensure that all young people receive a holistic service that meets their needs and promotes effective communication and joined up working between the individual services.

When the young person reaches the age of 18, they are assigned a Leaving Care Support Worker, who will support the young person in their life choices and provide them with practical support.

As a service, we will work with young people to determine their on-going support needs beyond the age of 21, recognising that the needs of young people vary considerably at this age.

OUR PERFORMANCE

In 2018/2019, 47% of our Care Leavers were in education, employment and training (EET), in comparison to the England Average of 52% and the regional average of 50%.

In 2018/2019, 93% of our Care Leavers were in suitable accommodation, in comparison to the England Average of 85% and the regional average of 90%.

The Local Offer for Care Leavers

As a County Council, we are committed to ensuring that young people leaving care have access to advice and guidance around their entitlements and support available to them. This information is included within the local offer and the key elements of the offer are to provide advice and guidance around:

- Health & Well-being
- Relationships
- Education, Employment & Training
- Accommodation
- Setting Up Home
- Participation in Society
- Practical Support
- Pathway Planning
- Care Leavers Rights
- Important Documents

In order to develop our local offer for care leavers, we have listened to what young people had to say about what we do and what is important to them. The feedback they gave helped us create the core offer to care leavers.

Leaving care support workers will talk to young people about the information in the local offer and answer any questions young people have, about the support available to them.

The local offer can be found on Northumberland County Council's website:

<https://bit.ly/2NrXxhq>



CARE LEAVERS COVENANT

The Care Leavers Covenant is a promise made by private, public or voluntary organisations to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently and reflects the key outcomes mapped in Keep On Caring (2016).

The aim of the Care Leavers Covenant, to which organisations commit, is to provide additional support over and above the statutory local offer for those leaving care, making available a different type of support and expertise as young people move forward successfully to the next phase of their lives.

Within Northumberland, the covenant will offer a range of additional support to young people leaving care.

This will include:

- Bespoke leisure offer, supported by Active Northumberland, giving care leavers free and reduced price access to sports and leisure centres within Northumberland.
- Enhanced apprenticeship opportunities within Northumberland County Council and additional support to seek opportunities with employers outside of Northumberland County Council.



KEY PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

Within Northumberland we have identified the following key priorities for the service ensuring that young people are fully supported to aspire and achieve.

Promoting the Health & Well-being of Care Leavers

In order to help improve the health outcomes for young people leaving care, particularly around mental health and trauma, a mental health practitioner will be recruited and based within NAS to offer therapeutic input to young people open to the service. They will also provide advice and guidance to staff as young people transition from Children's Services to Adult Services, ensuring a seamless transition.

There is also a weekly presence within the service of an Adult Mental Health Senior Social Worker to provide a clinic, offering guidance, advice and support to NAS practitioners. This will ensure there is a transitional system in place so that those young people requiring adult service support in any area will be referred to the most appropriate service to avoid delay for those young people approaching 18 years

We will ensure that a young person's health plan and pathway plan enables them to understand how they can promote their own health in the future by adopting healthy lifestyle choices.

Promoting Accommodation & Placement Stability

Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults who have particular needs in relation to housing and homelessness, therefore Northumberland are committed to ensuring that young people are fully prepared as they make this transition to independence, supporting them to have all the skills necessary to live independently.

In 2017/18, 91% of Care Leavers in Northumberland lived in suitable accommodation, in comparison to the England average of 84%. In order to increase our aspirations for all young people to have access to suitable accommodation, we have set a target of 95% for 2019/2020 and this target will be reviewed on an annual basis.

As part of our wider placement stability priorities, we aim to improve the number of young people accessing 'Staying Put' arrangements as well as developing a 'Staying Close' offer for young people.

We are developing a care leavers accommodation and support protocol with housing services to promote the advice and guidance young people receive when transitioning to independence.

Promoting Education, Employment & Training

On a national level, the educational attainment of care leavers continues to be lower than those of their peers. In 2018/2019, 47% of Northumberland's care leavers were in education, employment or training (52% England average).

Care leavers are also less likely to achieve good GCSEs (level 4 or above). In 2018/2019, 12% of Northumberland's children continuously looked after for 12 months achieved the basics (grade 4 or above in English and maths GCSE) (10% England average), in comparison to 59% of all non-looked after children nationally.

It is a priority that young people leaving care receive the support they need from schools, colleges and universities to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Employment and training not only provides the best route out of poverty, it also delivers positive life opportunities. Having a job or accessing appropriate training provides structure, a sense of purpose, progress, achievement, encourages self confidence and personal responsibility for young people.

In order to improve the opportunities available to young people, we recognise that it is also important to ensure that young people receive additional support to enable them to progress through learning and into sustainable employment. Therefore, through support and partnership with other agencies and council departments, we aim to increase the number of care leavers who are in employment, education and training.

KEY PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS CONTINUED

Promoting Financial Stability

For young people transitioning to independence one of the biggest hurdles they need to overcome is the ability to manage and budget their finances appropriately. In order to promote the financial stability of young people, work around independent living skills will take place prior to a young person leaving care, ensuring young people receive financial support and guidance, so that they are able to manage their income and reduce the risks of falling into debt.

Promoting the Participation and Voice of Young People

Within Northumberland, the Children and Young People's Strategic Participation Group aims to enable children and young people to have a voice that informs decisions and to be proactively involved in the delivery of those decisions. See diagram below.

We will ensure that:

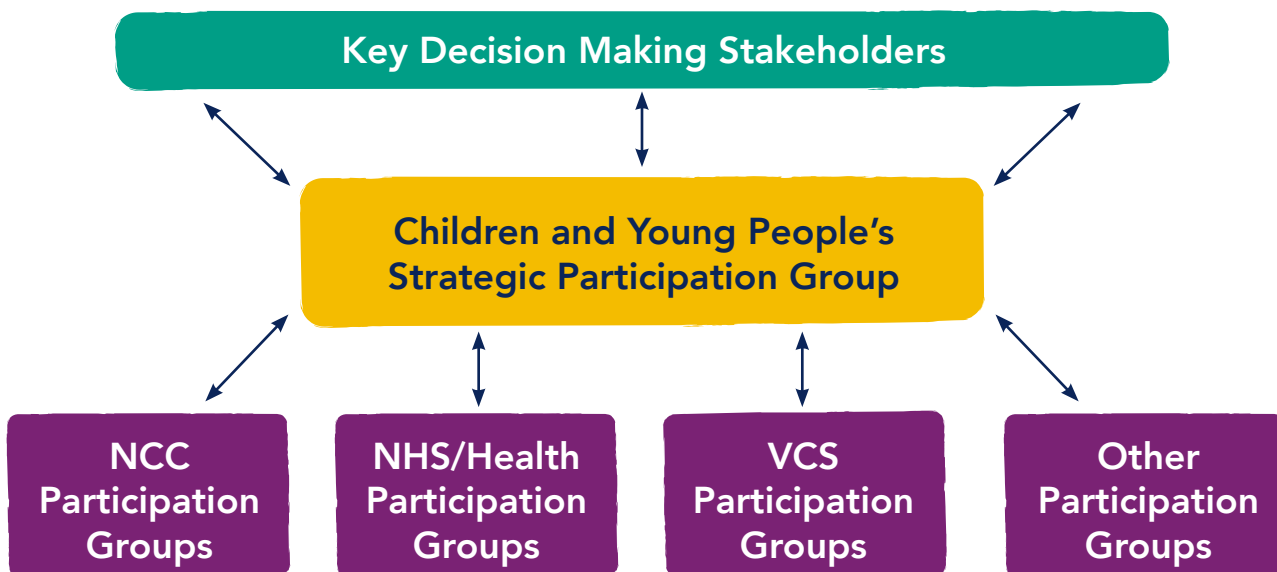
- Children and young people will be proactively involved in strategic and political decision making to inform policy and delivery
- Service delivery and policy will respond to the views of children and young people and will be based on their views, needs and aspirations
- Children and young people will be proactively involved in the implementation and delivery of the participation strategy.

Reducing the criminalisation of Young People

We recognise that young people who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system. They are also particularly vulnerable to the risk of being drawn into crime or exploited by others, for purposes of committing crimes.

As a wider county council, Northumberland has established a local multi-agency protocol that seeks to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers. As a service, we want to give young people the best chance possible to succeed in life. As a good corporate parent this includes ensuring that as far as we are possibly able we prevent Looked After Children and care leavers from entering the criminal justice system.

The protocol reflects the principles and ambition of the National Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked-After Children and Care Leavers and sets out 'how' the national protocol will be implemented locally.





APPENDIX 1

OVERVIEW OF SERVICES WITHIN NORTHUMBERLAND ADOLESCENT SERVICE

SORTED - Sorted are the substance misuse service for young people in Northumberland. The service provides intervention for young people up to age 18 delivered by Northumberland County Council and commissioned by Northumberland Public Health.

The primary aim of the service is to provide direct harm reduction and interventions to young people under the age of 18 who have complex needs with regard to their substance use. Sorted also provide advice, training and support to professionals to raise awareness and reduce the associated risks from substance misuse with young people with whom they work.

The Sorted service is available to all young people within the Northumberland area and also operates within Kyloe House secure children's home.

Youth Justice Service (YJS) - The YJS currently has a Liaison and Diversion service which screen young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system for unmet or hidden health needs such as ADHD, trauma and speech and language difficulties. This is part of the national NHS England programme to identify, at the earliest opportunity health vulnerabilities that may increase the risk of further offending so interventions can be offered to reduce risk and improve outcomes at the earliest opportunity. This screening is employed at Community Resolution, Triage and Youth Caution One.

The YJS use the "ASSETPlus" assessment and planning tool for statutory work. The intervention plan promotes desistance from offending and where appropriate also manages risk of harm; safety and well-being.

14+ and 18+ Service - The 14+ Team is a children's social work team based within the adolescent service. They work with 14+ looked after children (LAC) and care leavers under the age of 18. The role of the team is to provide support to this group of young people while they are looked after in line with LAC statutory requirements and provide pathway planning support as part of their transition to adulthood and independence.

The 14+ Team also work with young people 16 years and of post statutory school age where there is an identified need for ongoing children's services support following a child and family assessment being completed. This is primarily support where a young person may be experiencing homelessness, exploitation, substance misuse issues, mental health issues and / or family breakdown.

The 18+ Team provide advice, guidance and support to 18+ Care Leavers. This includes reviewing pathway plans with care leavers every 6 months (or when there is

a significant change in circumstances). This ensures that this group of young people receive ongoing support as adults when they have left care up to the age of 25 years. This includes independent living, housing, ETE and Health support.

All young people involved with the 14+ and 18+ Teams receive health support and there is a designated LAC health team who carry out regular health assessments and provide health support, advice and guidance to young people.

The Accommodation Service - The Accommodation Service sits within NAS and works across children's services to meet the accommodation needs of young people and consists of an accommodation lead and 2 accommodation support workers.

We accept accommodation referrals for young people who are:

- Child In Need 16+
- Looked After Young People 16+
- Care Leavers

The main remit of the Service is to:

- Ensure young people have access to suitable and appropriate accommodation.
- Maintain placement stability and sufficiency.
- Provide support to young people moving to independence; as well as developing independent living skills.
- Develop and maintain partnership working with housing and external providers to reach positive outcomes for young people.
- Involvement in Return Home Interviews for young people who have been reported missing.
- Development of joint protocols around the accommodation and support needs of young people.
- Provide accommodation advice and supervision to staff in relation to accommodation issues and move on plan.

Youth Service - Northumberland youth service provision now operates around the following :

- A clearly defined role, purpose and function of the youth service. This is allied to clear outcomes for young people which are evidenced by a completely re-designed Management Information System which measures performance and impact.
- A focused youth service which provides targeted support to the most disadvantaged young people in Northumberland. This is provided through a dual context of prevention and early help.



- Establishment of an effective analysis of data which identifies areas most in need of that targeted work.
- The provision of universal youth services, developed and delivered across Northumberland through a 'Grow Your Own' approach with short and long term goals to ensure sustainability. This work is undertaken in partnership with the voluntary sector.
- Coordinating and delivering Return Home Interviews for young people who are reported missing to the Police. Staff use a young person centred approach to ascertain risk and vulnerability and then formulate support mechanisms to reduce repeat incidences. The position of the youth service within Northumberland Adolescent Service ensures a linked up approach to a young person's welfare.

Participation & Advocacy Service - The Participation and Advocacy team are based within the youth service as part of Northumberland Adolescent Service. The work of the team focuses on ensuring that all young people are listened to and the opinions taken seriously. To achieve this the participation team deliver a number of Specific groups and countywide projects; these can be identified as:

- Universal Participation - Youth Cabinet, Youth Parliament, Annual Youth Elections, Make Your Mark national ballot, Children and Young People's Plan development and the development of Young Inspectors group.

- Specific Groups - Voices Making Choices (VMC), Care Leavers Group, Respect Equals Change (REC).
- Advocacy - Advocacy support for young people open to Children's Services to ensure their voice is heard with the development and implementation of their plans.

Young Evaluators - This is currently being developed. The idea is that teams of young people will be trained and supported to evaluate how well organisations in Northumberland, including all aspects of the Council, treat young people. This may include how welcoming they are, how suitable their service is for young people or how accessible their service is.

Voices Making Choices - This is Northumberland's Children in Care Council for young people aged 12 - 15. The young people in VMC look to use their position to promote opportunities for Looked After Children and be their voice on issues that concern them.

Care Leavers Group - Similar to VMC, but specifically for young people who have left care or are preparing to leave in the near future. This group has a focus on issues that impact directly on young people leaving care, such as independence skills for all care leavers.

Both VMC and the Care Leavers Group regularly attend the Corporate Parenting Board to feedback their views.

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