

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

Corporate Parenting Strategy



2017-2020

Foreword by Cath Mcevoy-Carr, Executive Director of Children's and Adults Services and Councillor Wayne Daley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

It is a top priority for Northumberland County Council to ensure that we provide high quality care and support to our looked after children . We recognise the importance of safe and secure placements and of securing good outcomes for all children who are in care or have been in care. We are working hard to ensure that where children are best cared for within their own families that we have good and effective support arrangements to help those families to provide for their children. Where children's need for permanence is best met through adoption, special guardianship or foster care we aim to provide high quality, well supported placements which will allow children to thrive and enjoy their childhoods and achieve optimum health, social and education outcomes.

We can only achieve this by working closely with our partners and by taking an active approach to our corporate parenting responsibilities. This strategy outlines our ambitions for the next three years and includes the sufficiency statement and our permanence strategy. It also outlines the actions the council needs to take to promote continuous improvement for looked after children and care leavers.

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Councillor Wayne Daley
Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Introduction

Northumberland County Council (NCC) has seen a continuous increase in the number of looked after children since March 2011. Until 2014 Northumberland had fewer CLA per 10,000 than the national average, since then we have exceeded the average and the figures are continuing to rise. This is placing pressure on the social work teams, legal services and the family placement service and on placements as more children are placed in care. Despite this children in care generally do well in Northumberland.

Ofsted undertook an inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers in 2016. They found that overall services for children looked after and achieving permanence required improvement, as did services for care leavers.

However they noted that children came into care appropriately and most children lived in stable placements with appropriate health and education provision. Placement stability is good and adoption was identified as an area of strength. *Children requiring adoption receive good quality planning and support. The quality of lifestory work is outstanding. Prospective adopters are assessed, trained and supported well and the quality of post adoption work is consistently good. (OFSTED 2016)*

All of Northumberland's Children Homes are consistently judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted and we are confident that they play an important role in providing high quality care and security to a small cohort of children who cannot live with foster carers.

Northumberland successfully places more children and in particular more children over the age of 5 years old for adoption than most councils, (40% compared to 23% nationally). This impacts negatively on the performance around adoption timescales but Ofsted noted that in Northumberland: - *Social workers do not give up on children. They are tenacious in finding the right match.* We intend to continue to be ambitious around adopting older children, children with special needs and sibling groups.

During 2016 Children's Services have developed robust tracking systems for all looked after children and children subject to Family Court proceedings. This is to address delay and drift in care planning and to ensure that services are responding appropriately to children's needs. A High Level Resource Panel has been set up to cost effectively address the needs of looked after children with complex or particular needs.

Due to the increase in looked after children the Council placed a significant number of children with Independent Foster Care Agencies IFAS, particularly in 2014. This led to a peak in numbers of IFA placements of over 100 in early 2015. There has been a strategy to reduce the number of placements whilst not disrupting placements which were succeeding in providing a secure long term for children. About 40 children are now matched into IFAs as long term placements. Another 20

children are in IFAs on a short term basis.

Northumberland provides an effective service for young people on the edge of care, successfully diverting many away from being looked after through intensive support and work with the young person and their family. Children's Services are currently reviewing cases, auditing and analysing practice and decision making to gain a fuller understanding of why the number of looked after children is continuing to rise in Northumberland.

Over the past year there has been intensive management activity to reduce social workers caseloads, to rationalise office bases and to create more efficient and effective referral and assessment responses. Training and support for social workers and IROs on good practice and planning for looked after children has been developed and was delivered to all staff by January 2017 with more specific mandatory permanence planning training being delivered in 2017.

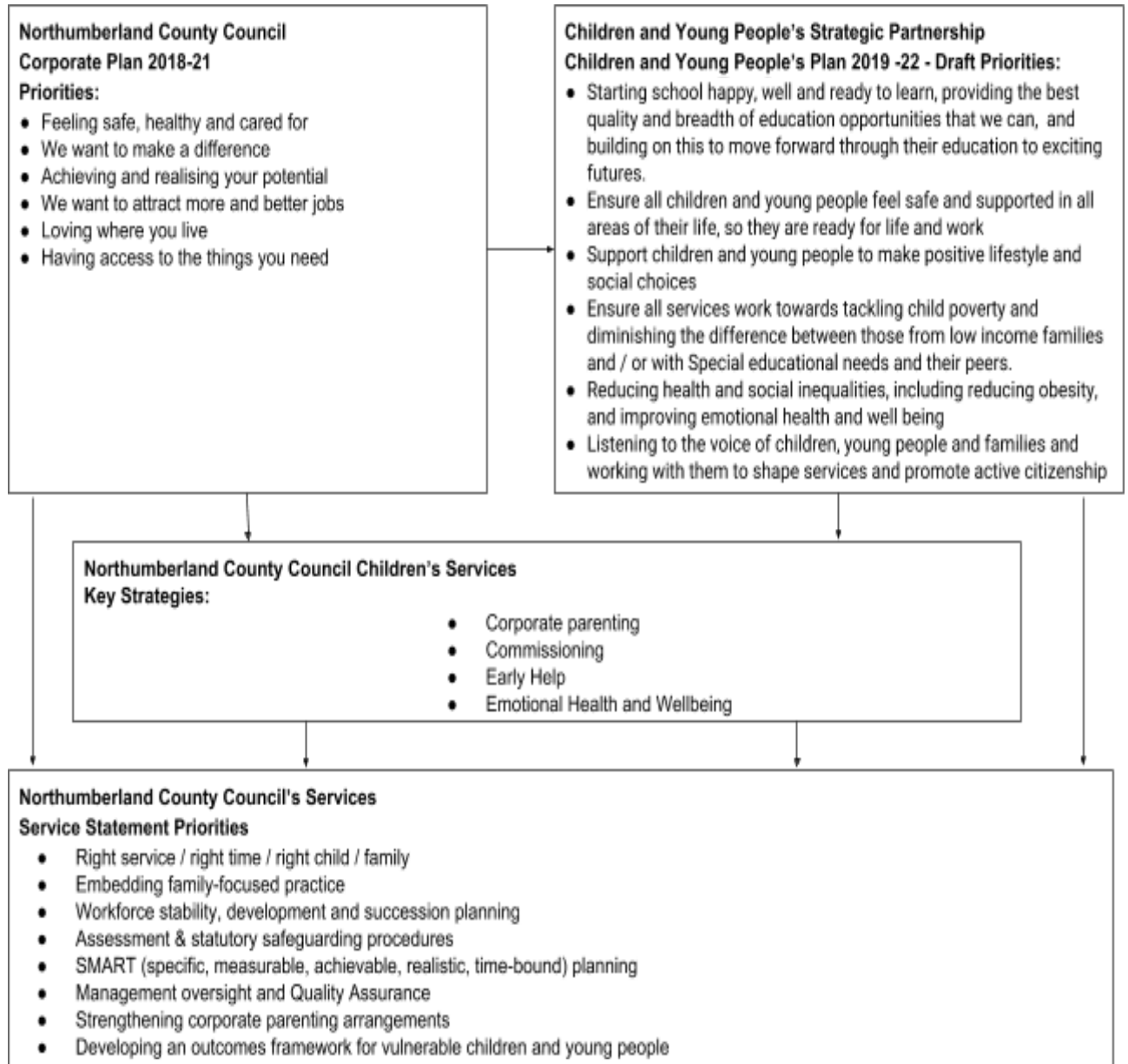
The 14+ service is improving planning and support to young people through reviewing the pathway plan, reducing duplication of plans and through reviewing the team structures to create support workers for care leavers, 18 years old plus. There will be a new focus on engaging families and using community resources more effectively. The Accommodation Service is also being reviewed to develop the best possible model for providing accommodation and support.

There are four Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in Northumberland who are settled and receiving good quality support. They are all making excellent educational progress. Due to their success there is a second cohort of 3 young people who will arrive in Northumberland in December 2018.

This strategy has been endorsed by the Multi Agency Looked After Children Partnership (MALAP) and was agreed by the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Advisory Group (CPCAG) in April 2017. The strategy has been shared with the Voices Making Choices Group (VCM).

SECTION ONE: GOVERNANCE, VISION, VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1.1 Children's Services Strategic Planning



1.2 Our Vision

1. To provide safety and stability for and with all looked after children in Northumberland through the delivery of high quality and timely assessment and planning for children.
2. We will provide or commission high quality placements and work in partnership with family and friends to review and support arrangements for children to ensure their needs are being met. We will be aspirational for our looked after children in respect of their physical and mental health, education and social development

1.3 Our Values

1. Focusing on outcomes for children

We will have aspirations for all our looked after children. We recognise that many of these children are overcoming abuse, neglect and exploitation. As well as providing safety and security we want our children to enjoy optimum health, good educational attainment, good relationships and to be happy and active.

2. Teamwork

To provide the best for children we will work positively with other professionals, foster carers, volunteers, family and friends. Their contribution and efforts will be valued and recognised. Good teamwork recognises that children may form attachments with any of the team and this should be reflected in the care plan.

3. Valuing equality and diversity

We will promote opportunities for all and central to practice, we will consider the ability, cultural, racial and gender needs of all children.

4. Striving for excellence

We will create a culture of excellence where we will strive to ensure that the needs of looked after children are fully met and that they enjoy the best childhoods possible leading to positive adult lives.

1.4 Our Principles

1. Child centred practice

We will keep the child and young person central to all assessments, planning and reviews and will work to understand their needs and wishes and ensure that they are reflected in the decisions we make about their lives. Children and young people will be encouraged to participate in all meetings where decisions are made about them where this is appropriate and we will support children and young people in expressing themselves in all circumstances.

2. Children and young people are part of their families

We will recognise the importance of the child's family of origin and help to maintain relationships with their families unless this is not in the child's interest. We will work hard to understand the child's attachments and make sure we do not disrupt them unnecessarily.

3. Children need stability

Uncertainty, poor attachments and lack of communication have a negative and disruptive impact on children's development and on their lives. Permanence planning and the elimination of delay in decision making will be central to the way we work with looked after children.

4. Corporate Parenting

We recognise the importance for all elected members and staff of NCC of their responsibilities to looked after children. Elected members and Senior Officers have a key leadership role in prioritising looked after children. The council's resources will be used to their fullest to promote good outcomes for looked after children.

5. Continuous learning

We will learn from experience and make sure that we duplicate practice where we have achieved good outcomes for children and learn lessons from mistakes and poor practice to avoid repeating it.

1.5 Strategic Priorities for the Corporate Parenting Strategy

These are the priorities agreed by the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Advisory Group for 2017-2020:-

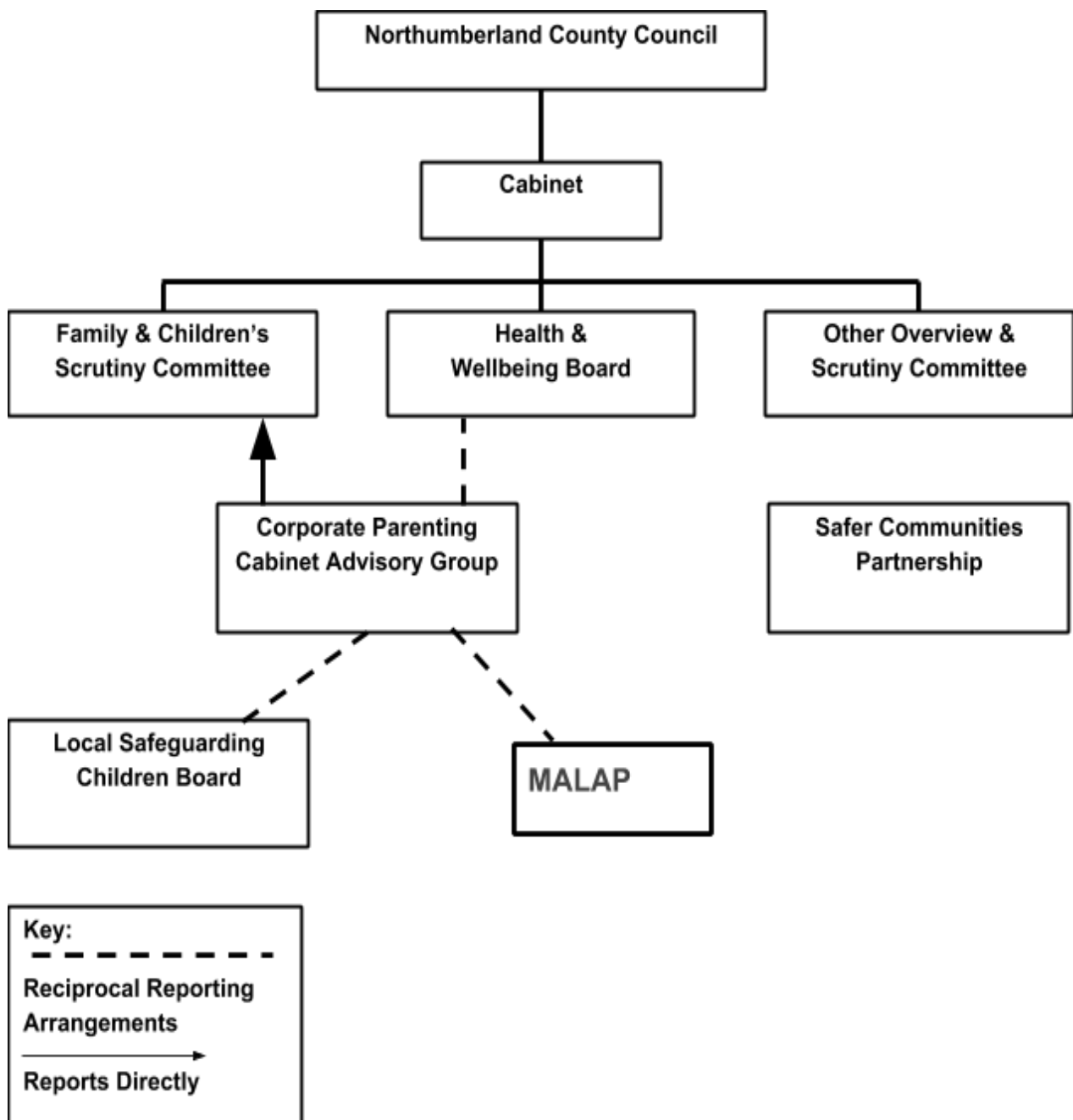
1. Maximise the effectiveness of early help to prevent the need for children to be looked after where there are appropriate alternatives
2. Develop a reunification policy to promote the timely return of children home where this is in the child's best interest.
3. Ensure the provision of sufficient high quality placements with an increased reliance on in- house provision
4. Improve the quality and timeliness of planning for permanence for looked after children.
5. Improve the access of looked after children to mental health services and ensure that the service is responsive to the particular needs of the child.
6. Support Family and Friends Carers and Special Guardians to provide quality and sustainable placements.
7. Improve services to Care Leavers.

These priorities link to the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (SIF) Action Plan which was developed following the Ofsted inspection in early 2016. The inspection concluded that Northumberland Children's Services delivered good adoption services but required improvement in services to both looked after children and achieving permanence and to care leavers. Safeguarding also require improvement. Since 2016 progress has been made in making the improvements identified in the action plan.

1.6 Governance

The Council has a **Corporate Parenting Cabinet Advisory Group** (CPCAG) to ensure that it can fulfil its legal responsibilities to looked after children, monitor performance and outcomes and to provide challenge to the local authority and its partners in meeting its obligation to provide outstanding services to looked after children. Ofsted (2016) judged that the CPCAG required improvement in fulfilling this role. In December 2016 the CPCAG agreed new terms of reference and membership structure which will promote more effective scrutiny.

Governance Structure



1.6.1 Role and Responsibilities

It is the role of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Advisory Group to set the priorities for children in care and to monitor and scrutinise service delivery. It will also:

- Ensure that the commitments outlined in the Northumberland Promise for Looked After Children and young people are delivered.
- Oversee the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and other associated strategies with delegated responsibilities to Directors or Senior Managers within all Departments and partner agencies.
- Monitor the delivery of good, safe, high quality services through quality assurance and performance management frameworks in line with relevant legislation and government guidance.

1.6.2 Terms of Reference

The Corporate Parenting Cabinet advisory Group will work to an annual work programme within its terms of reference, which are as follows:

- Provide a forum for children in care to influence policy, service developments and practice so that there is continuous improvement.
- To directly receive the views of children and young people looked after and leaving care via the Children in Care Council and ensure their views directly influence the decisions of the CPCAG.
- Take a strategic view of Northumberland County Council's and partner agencies responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers.
- Ensure there are good joint working arrangements between Council Departments and with partner agencies and hold them to account for good, high quality service delivery.
- Ensure that relevant new initiatives, plans, policies and service developments are presented to the Committee for consultation.
- Monitor and review the quality and effectiveness and the performance of all the key stakeholders by receiving quarterly progress reports in relation to the key outcome areas for children in care and care leavers.
- To monitor the performance of the council by receiving progress reports on the dashboard of key performance indicators relating to looked after children and care leavers.
- Receive bi-annual reports from the Adoption and Fostering Services in relation to recruitment and retention of carers, placement stability, etc.
- Receive bi-annual reports in relation to regulation 44 visits.

1.6.3 Requirements

- The leadership and governance of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Advisory Group must be clear in relation to the Committee's power to deploy resources and hold officers to account.
- Individual Committee members must be trained and prepared for their task, and be clear about the authority they carry.
- The relationship of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Advisory Group to other Boards, partnership arrangements and scrutiny committees must be clear.
- The Corporate Parenting cabinet Advisory Group must have access to robust qualitative and quantitative management information in order to effectively monitor performance against outcomes and track delivery of Promise commitments.
- The CPCAG will, therefore, receive quarterly reports on a range of local and national performance indicators in relation to children in care, e.g. health, education, participation and inspection outcomes.
- Frequency of meetings: bi monthly.

1.6.4 The Council and key partners have a **Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) Strategic Group**

This is a multi agency partnership. it's primary function is to set the strategic direction for the development of services for looked after children and to monitor progress in service development and performance. The MALAP also functions as the Governing Body for the Virtual School.

The Partnership meets 4 times a year, has an agreed workplan which is informed by this strategy and informs the workplan of the CPCAG.

The Terms of Reference and membership are currently under review. All key agencies are and will continue to be represented including the Virtual School Head, Designated Doctor and Nurse, Mental Health Services, Youth Offending Team, Family Placement Service, Social Work Teams and Leaving Care Services.

The MALAP is chaired by the Service Director, Children's Services.

1.6.5 Children's Services hold a weekly **High Level Resource Panel**.

The purpose of this group is to consider and make decisions about children who have complex or specific needs for accommodation. This panel considers how best to meet those needs and whether the child needs a residential or specialist foster care placement as well as any additional supports or assessments. The Panel tracks the progress of all children placed in external or high cost placements to ensure they are making good progress and that the arrangement is value for money.

The High Level Resource Panel is chaired by the Service Director, Children's Services.

1.6.6 Children's Services hold a monthly **Legal Cases Tracking Meeting** with legal Services.

This meeting is designed to monitor the progress of all children subject to Family Proceedings to assist in the meeting of court deadlines and to monitor the oversight of the quality of assessments and plans being presented to the court. This Group is contributing to the improved performance around timescales.

The Legal Planning Meeting is chaired by the Principle Children's Social Worker.

1.7 **Children and Young People's Voice**

Children and young people have worked with the Council to produce and agree a pledge to Looked After Children. This is called **Our Promise** and was agreed in August 2016. Young People regularly attend CPCAG to engage in discussions about issues relevant to them. Elected members actively welcome this engagement and have agreed a benchmark of **would this be good enough for my child** to underpin their challenge and scrutiny.

The Promise was launched in April 2017.

1.7.1 **Our Promise**

Be honest with you and only promise things we know we can deliver. We promise to be honest and clear with you and to keep our promise. We will tell you about your rights and what services you are entitled to.

Expect every professional to treat you with **respect**, to be reliable and consistent and be prepared to listen to your views.

Listen to you and build plans around you, not simply build you into our plans, including asking your opinion about where and who you live with and the plans for your care and for the development of services. You can talk to someone independent if you'd like to.

Make sure the right people are there to **support you** and to make sure that only the people who really need to know about you and your situation actually do know about you and your situation. We won't change your social worker or IRO without good reason.

Help you to **achieve your best**, and support you to learn in and out of school and develop skills. You will have everything you need for school like your uniform, books, PE kit. You will also have access to a computer to help you do your school work
Your carers will talk to you about clothing and help you either buy your clothes or help you to learn to manage a budget to buy your own.

Recognise that your **family and other people are important to you** and make arrangements for you to stay in touch with them safely. You can also ask for an Independent Visitor. This is someone who doesn't work for Northumberland County Council. They are a volunteer who would visit you, get to know you and spend time with you doing the things you like doing.

Support you to be **healthy**, to follow your leisure interests and to keep in touch with your friends. You should be given healthy food, things that you like and that fit with your religion or culture. Make sure you have someone to talk to about your physical and emotional health and make sure you are able to attend appointments.

Leaving Care - We will help and support you practically, financially and emotionally to prepare for your future. We will draw up an easy to understand **Pathway Plan** with you to identify support you will need before you leave care. We will provide you with good careers advice and help apply for jobs and training. We will support you if you choose to move on to further or higher education. We will help find somewhere suitable to live and support you after you have left care.

1.7.2 Advocacy

The council has an advocacy service which is based in the Northumberland Adolescent Service. (NAS). It provides a service to a range of children including looked after children.

Between April and November 2016, 48 looked after children and 15 care leavers were referred for advocacy services.

Issues frequently raised by children and young people include, placement move issues, contact with siblings and family members, entitlements as care leavers, to services, support and advice, relationship with Social Workers and support at key meetings.

1.7.3 Surveys of looked after children

The advocacy officer supports all children in children's homes run by NCC to complete a survey every 6 months. The results are reported to the CPCAG and are also used by the managers of the homes to fulfil their duties under Regulation 45 (Children's Homes Quality Standards).

Children in foster care are surveyed at the end of their placement for feedback. This is in addition to being regularly asked about their experiences by their Social Worker and IRO and contributing to foster care reviews.

1.7.4 Independent visitors

The local Authority has a duty to appoint an independent person for a looked after child where their circumstances warrant it. This is usually where a child has no contact with any family member. Few children are in this position.

Northumberland is works with five other authorities to jointly commission the independent person service which is currently provided by Action for Children. The council has 7 children currently using this service. (Dec 2016)

1.7.5 MOMO (Mind of my Own)

This is an app which has been developed to allow children and young people to contribute to their reviews and Child Protection Conferences through self advocacy. IROs and Social Workers are starting to use this form of communication to enhance the contribution made to the meeting by the child. Children and young people report that they feel more confident and in control of decision making about them when they use the app.

1.7.6 Voices Making Choices (VCM) are Northumberland's Children in Care Council

It was set up in 2009 and is made up usually of about 70 children and young people age 8 to 22 years old who have had various experiences of being in care, Some members are from families who foster children. The group meets every four weeks as well as other times to work on projects. Managers and Councillors from the Council are regularly invited to meet with young people to discuss issues and share views. VCM members regularly attend the CPCAG, Scrutiny Meetings and the Children's Trust Board. They have produced Our Promise. VCM play a major role in planning the Looked After Children Annual Award Event.

1.7.6 Complaints

There are clear mechanisms for looked after children to make a complaint should they wish. In the residential units children are encouraged to express their gripes and they are resolved with staff and social workers as quickly as possible reducing the need for more formal complaints to be made. Six formal complaints were made in 15/16 by children living in residential care, they related to delays in accessing services, staff attitude, disagreement with decisions and impact of behaviour of other residents, the latter were partially upheld. Very few children living in foster care or parents of children in foster care made a complaint in 2015/16. This is the usual pattern and in keeping with the regional picture.

1.8 Children's Services Commissioning Strategy

This strategy sets out the Council's strategic approach to the commissioning of services to meet the social care needs of children in Northumberland. It is being refreshed for April 2017 and is subject to annual review.

Key commissioning activity for looked after children includes:

1. Independent Fostering Agency Framework (NE7)

Seven local authorities (Northumberland, Tyne and Wear authorities and Durham) collaborate to establish a framework of approved IFAs. This agreement allows the local authorities to more efficiently and effectively standardise contracts, control price, and monitor standards and outcomes. The framework will operate from 2015 -2018 with an option to extend for a year.

2. Approved Provider List for the Provision of Children's Residential Care Homes (NE6)

Six local authorities (Northumberland and Tyne and Wear authorities) collaborate on an approved list for the purchase of placements in children's residential care homes. The list can be added to or providers removed. This arrangement allows the local authorities to more efficiently and effectively manage price, standardise contract and monitor standards.

3. Preventing Child Sexual Exploitation

There are a range of commissioned arrangements to safeguard children at risk of going missing and or of sexual exploitation. This includes spot purchasing assessments of vulnerable young people, spot purchasing therapeutic interventions who are at risk of exploitation and secondment of a worker to the council from a voluntary agency to interview and work with children who go missing and or are at risk of exploitation.

4. Accommodation Framework

This framework offers Leaving Care Leavers an offer of:

- Supported lodgings
- Group accommodation
- Floating Support
- Mediation

The new framework has been reviewed and is currently being implemented, this also includes more robust support and preparation to young people who

are preparing to leave care to live in both supported and independent accommodation. There is more of a focus on the standards of intensive support to young people both in foster care and in residential children's homes. Care Leavers have begun recently developing a plan/checklist of what they will equip them to live semi/independent lives.

5. Regional Adoption Agency

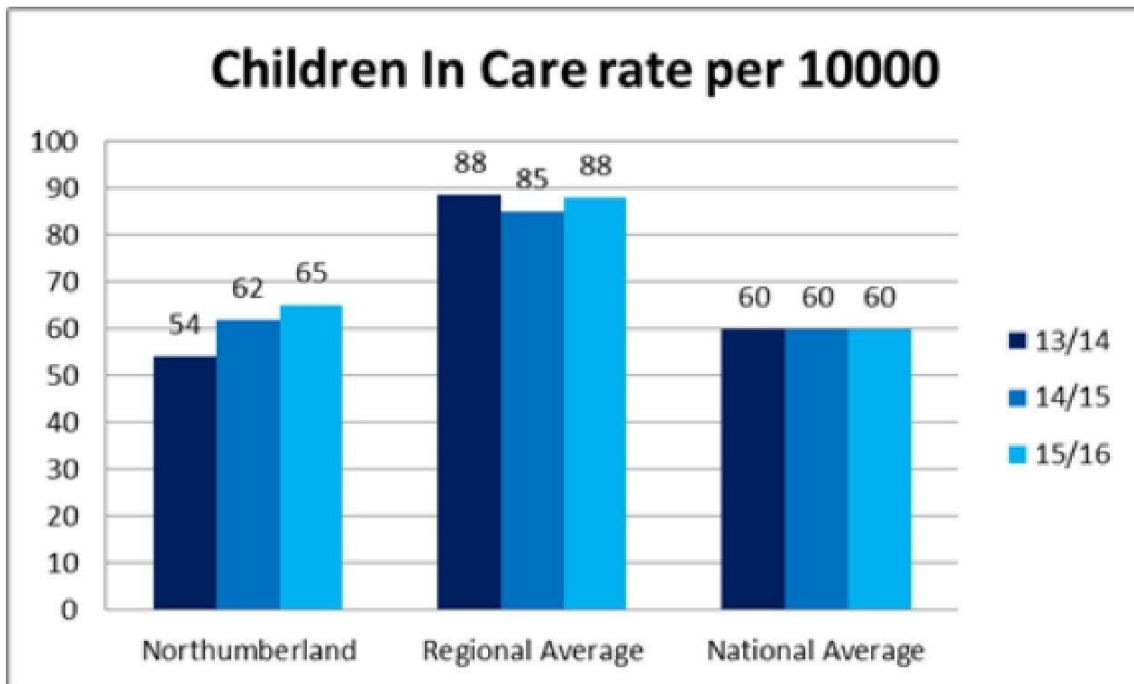
Northumberland is working with Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Gateshead to develop a sub regional agency to deliver adoption services. It is expected that it will commence delivery in 2018 through a Community Interest Company.

SECTION TWO: SUFFICIENCY STATEMENT

Since 2011 Local Authorities have had a statutory duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure that there are sufficient and appropriate placements for Looked After Children. (Children and Young People Act 2008).

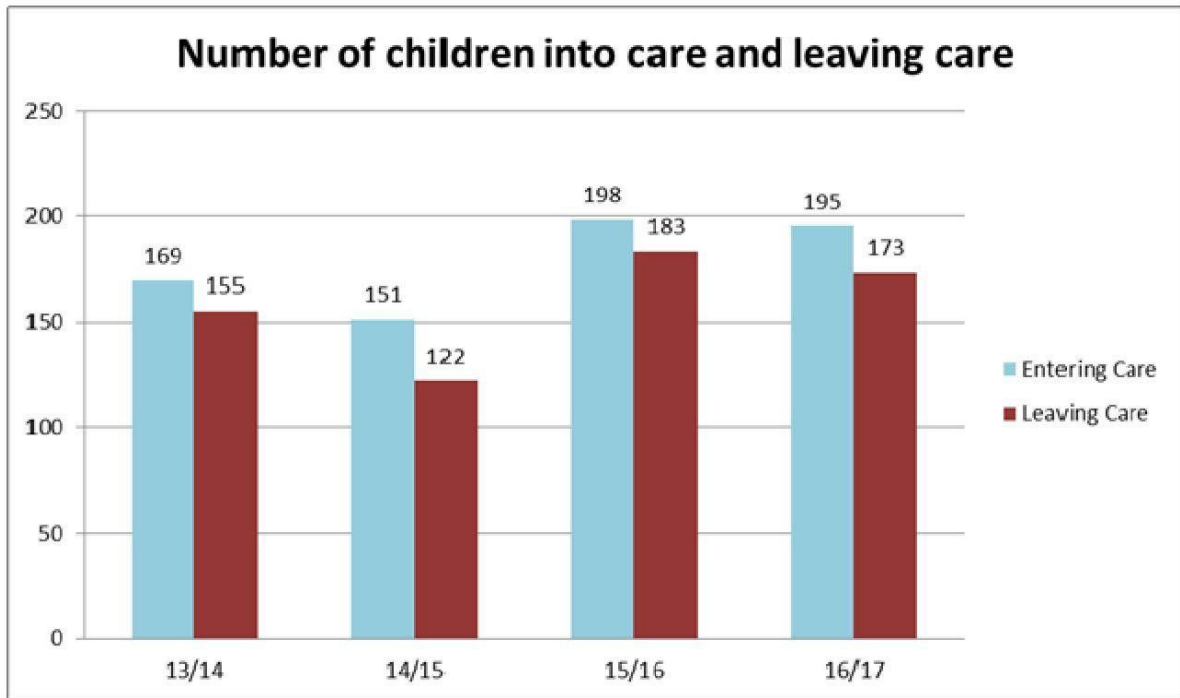
2.1 Numbers of Looked After Children

	2013 / 14	2014 / 15	2015 / 16	2016 / Jan 2017
No. of LAC	330	365	385	415

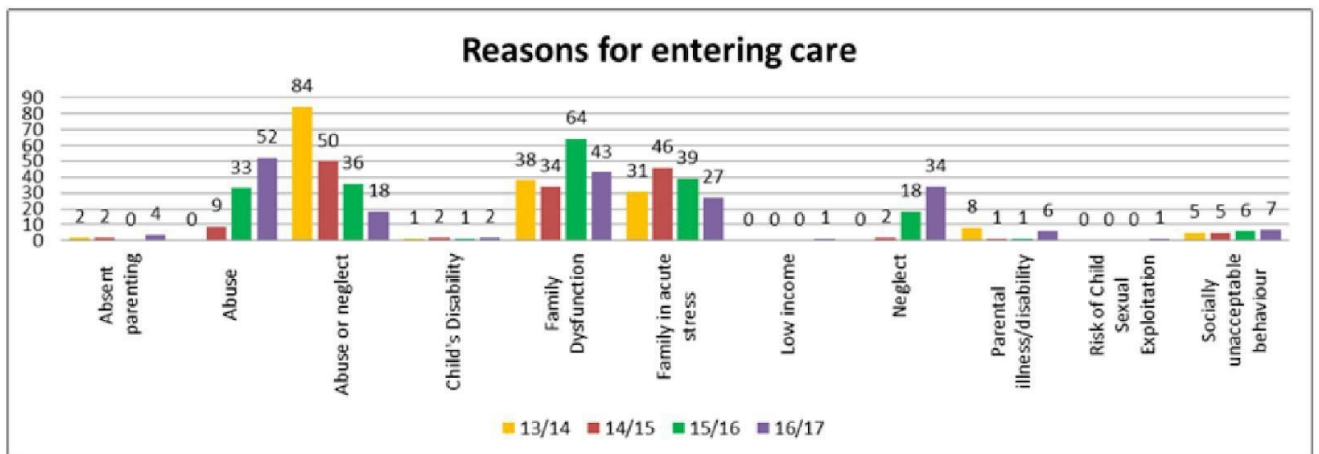


2.1.2 Numbers of Children Into and Leaving Care

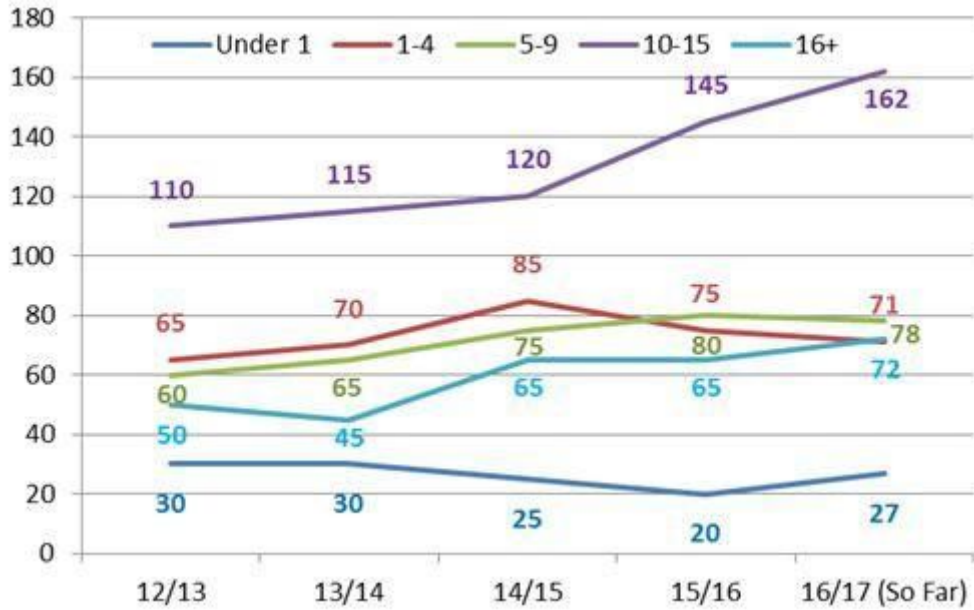
	Entering Care	Leaving Care
13/14	169	155
14/15	151	122
15/16	198	183
16/17	195	173



2.1.3 Reasons for Entering Care



2.1.4 Age of Children in Care



2.2 Residential Care

	2013 / 14	2014 / 15	2015 / 16	2016 / 17 (Nov 16)
No. of NCC places	16	11	11	11
No. of out of county placements	16	14	29	32
Total no. of children in residential placements	32	25	40	43

2.2.1 Summary

- 100% increase in use of Out of County Residential Placements (OOC) since 2013/14.
- Due to Children’s Home closures, NCC has 5 places fewer than in 2014/15.
- There is a deficiency in the number of in-house residential placements in that there is insufficient diversity in the residential offer. Children are being placed in OOC placements due to mental health problems, behavioural difficulties, severe attachment disorders, to protect from exploitation and poor ability to develop positive relationships. Also children with specific needs e.g. autism cannot always be accommodated in - house.
- A Business case has been prepared for approval in 2017 for future investment in in-house provision from the Netherton site sale. once capital is released this will allow for the development of further small

residential units with specific focus and specialities.

2.3 Adoption

	2013 / 14	2014 / 15	2015 / 16	2016 / Jan 2017
ADM SHOBPA*	43	36	36	40
Placed for adoption	32	34	36	19
Placed with NCC adopters	23	21	19	8
Placed with OLA	2	9	10	4
Placed with VAA	7	4	7	7
Adoption orders	23	25	38	29
Adopters approved	26	31	18	10

***ADM SHOBPA** - Children where Agency Decision Maker has agreed that the child should be placed for adoption.

2.3.1 Summary

- Nationally there has been a decline in the number of children with an adoption plan and Northumberland is following this trend.
- Performance around placing children for adoption in Northumberland is good, with a higher percentage of children being adopted than the national average, (16% in Northumberland; 15% nationally).
- In 2014/15 the Family Placement Service (FPS) recruited and approved a significantly high number of adopters, this means the service is in a strong position to match children and also release some of those carers for inter-agency placements.
- The FPS effectively manages the availability of adopters through local recruitment and inter-agency arrangements.
- Performance in 2016/17 continues to be strong, it is anticipated that a further 9 children will be matched and placed before the year end and the number of Adoption Orders will rise from 29.
- A further 11 adopters are expected to be approved in 2016/17 taking the total to 21 which exceeds last year's recruitment.
- Northumberland is a partner in the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency involving five local authorities. This will promote further inter-agency cooperation in securing quality adoptive placements.
- The FPS and subsequently the Regional Adoption Agency need to maintain the current performance around recruiting adopters and placing

children for adoption.

2.4 Foster Care

Mainstream Foster Care Placements as at 31st March

	2013 / 14	2014 / 15	2015 / 16	2016 / Jan 2017
No. of children placed with NCC carers	104	109	125	138
No. of approved foster carers	114	116	122	126
No. of children in IFAs	100	100	86	61
Percentage of children in IFAs	30%	27%	22%	15%

Recruitment of Mainstream Foster Carers

	2013 / 14	2014 / 15	2015 / 16	2016 / Jan 2017
Foster care approvals	10	22	23	9
Foster care termination of approvals	20	20	18	7
Net gain	-10	+2	+5	+2

2.4.1 Summary and analysis

- There has been a 9.5% increase in the number of approved mainstream foster carers over the past 4 years. In the same period there has been a 32% increase in the number of foster care placements. This is the result of a strategy to maximise capacity of the carers and to ensure approval categories are flexible yet appropriate for those carers. Nationally the number of fostering households has remained the same between 2014/15 and 2015/16.
- Although fewer carers have been recruited in 2016/17, the retention rate has improved significantly ensuring a more stable and experienced cohort of carers. Nationally there has been a 33% drop in the number of foster care applications between 2014/15 and 2015/16.
- The capacity of the service to offer parent and baby placements has been enhanced by the training of a number of mainstream carers to offer time limited parent and baby placements.

- Fostering to adopt is in its early stages of development. Ofsted highlighted the need for this to be progressed during the 2106 inspection. Realistic progress cannot be made until the improvements in care planning for unborn babies and young babies, reduction in care proceeding delays and improved performance planning become more evident. This will allow improved twin tracking and the confidence required to engage carers in fostering to adopt.
- Comparison nationally and with our regional neighbours indicates that in Northumberland we are not using our foster care capacity to its full. All other local authorities in the North East have more foster carers approved for two children than for one and two authorities have more approvals for three children than for one. Nationally more carers are approved for three children than for one. This is not the case in Northumberland although the national figure also includes IFAs who are more likely to approve carers to take larger sibling groups.
- Northumberland has a relatively low level of unplanned endings compared to other local authorities which indicates that placements are generally well supported.
- Only two children were assessed to be placed together but were placed separately in 2015/16. Compared to other local authorities this is low and good performance.

2.5 Family and Friends Carers and Regulation 24

Family and friends carers sometimes known as connected persons or kinship carers are people who have a prior relationship with a child and become approved foster carers in order to care for them.

Regulation 24 carers are people who have a prior relationship with a child and are given approved foster care status on an emergency basis in order to care for a child whilst they are assessed in order to be approved as a foster carer.

Family and Friends and Reg 24 Placements as at 31st March

	2013 / 14	2014 / 15	2015 / 16	2016 / Jan 2017
No. of children with F&F carers	45	41	37	46
No. of children with Reg 24 carers	12	37	54	58
No. of F&F carers	37	31	28	36
No. of Reg 24 carers	10	28	37	49

Family and Friends Recruitment

	2013 / 14	2014 / 15	2015 / 16	2016 / Jan 2017
No. of F&F approvals during the year	16	11	15	13
No. of F&F deregistrations during the year	10	17	17	7

Note: many Family and Friend deregistrations are the result of carers being awarded a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order.

2.5.1 Summary

- The number of Family and Friend approvals has remained at a steady rate with no significant increases or variations over the past 4 years. Nationally there has been a 13% increase in the number of Family and Friend approvals from 2014/15 to 2015/16.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of Regulation 24 placements. This has resource implications for the FPS as they all have to be screened, approved and assessed.
- Some Regulation 24 placements do not result in Family and Friends approval as other orders are granted before the assessment is complete. Children's Services is auditing and reviewing the use of Regulation 24 placements to ensure that they are used appropriately.

2.6 Ethnicity of Looked After Children

Nationally 75% of looked after children are white british, in Northumberland this figure is 94% which reflects the demographic profile of Northumberland. 2% are mixed race compared to 9% nationally.

2.7 Age Profile

The age profile of looked after children has changed over the past few years with 57% of children currently aged 10 years or older compared to 50% in 2014/15 and 55% in 2015/16. This follows a national trend, currently 62% looked after children are age 10 or over compared to 56% in 2012. There has been a reduction in Northumberland of the proportion of children age 1 to 4 years from 23% in 2014/15 to 17% currently, again this reflects the national trend.

2.8 Analysis of Sufficiency

Northumberland has seen a growing number of looked after children. The increase in 2016 can partly be explained by a readjustment of numbers following the the Ofsted inspection in January/february 2016. when a number of placements of children with family members were identified as not having being made under Regulation 24. Once this was rectified, those children were deemed to be looked after and the figures increased. Also a review of of children in care under Section 20 CA89 led to an increase in care proceedings . This has led to an increase in the number of children placed at home on a Care Order, currently 30 children,

During 2014/15 Northumberland relied heavily on IFAs to accommodate children coming into care. To address this there have been changes made within the FPS to change that reliance to in house foster carers and to manage down the number of children in IFAs. This has been successful in reducing the number of new IFA placements and long term IFA placements have been formally approved providing certainty and security for those children. IFAs are still used where children have specific needs and these can be best met within an IFA placement. at the same time FPS has increased in house capacity by increasing the number of foster care placement carers can offer.

There is further scope for FPS to increase the number of placements offered by the current cohort of foster carers. Northumberland has far more carers approved for only one child than other local authorities. The potential to rebalance this is being explored through a review of the Core offer to carers which will incentivise some carers to take more children and through the annual review process of carers as well as the assessment and approval of new carers. Despite this Northumberland performs well in placing siblings together in foster care and in having a low rate of unplanned endings of foster placements.

The FPS needs to increase the number of mainstream foster care placements over the next three years to

- i) meet anticipated growth in the looked after population.
- ii) offer more placement choice
- iii) facilitate the timely movement of children into long term foster care where this is their best way of providing permanence.

Northumberland has a high level of initial enquiries from potential foster carers and performed well in the number of approvals of new carers in 2015/16.

There has been a significant increase in the number of children placed on an emergency basis with family or friends (Regulation 24) since 2013/14. however the number of Regulation 24 arrangements resulting in approval as family and friend carers has remained static over the same period. This can partly be explained by the progress of care proceedings resulting in a Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) or a

Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) being granted and therefore the child ceasing to be looked after. During 2016 improvements were made to the policy and practice around the making of a Regulation 24 placement and we can anticipate a small reduction in the number of Regulation 24 placements and speedier assessments resulting in more Family and Friend approvals. Family Courts are favouring long term placements of children within their existing family network and it can be anticipated that this is an area which will continue to grow and require resources. More children are now leaving care through SGO or CAO, these children therefore cease to be looked after children. The local authority recognises that, like adoption, ongoing support will be needed by some families and others may require support and advice in the future as the children's needs change and the Special Guardian needs support with parenting.

Northumberland performs well in securing adoption for children where this is the best plan for the child. Through the effective use of in house assessments and inter-agency placements the FPS is successful in making placements and outperforms many authorities in placing older children and sibling groups. The local authority will aim to continue this performance into 2018 and for this performance to be at least maintained by the Regional Adoption Agency once it is established and is responsible for assessment, family finding and matching.

Current demand for residential placements is increasing and more children are being placed in OOC residential provision. Intelligence gathered through the High Level Resource Panel will be used in 2017 to inform the Business Plan for residential care and the Children's Commissioning Strategy refresh.

What is required to improve our placement sufficiency?

- **Placements, both residential and foster care, for 10-15 year olds who display challenging behaviour.**
- **More foster care placements to improve placement choice for all children.**
- **Increased capacity to undertake Regulation 24 and Family and Friend assessments.**
- **Increased choice on move on accommodation for care leavers.**

SECTION THREE: PERMANENCE POLICY

Permanence is the framework of emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence (the carer has parental responsibility for the child) which gives the child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. ((Children Act 1989, Care Planning Regulations: Volume 2, 2010)

Where children are in care and are not able to return home within 6 to 9 months maximum it is important that there is a plan to secure permanence for the child which is achievable, can be made within a reasonable timescale and where appropriate is underpinned by a care order and/or another appropriate order.

The planning for permanence should be under consideration from before the child comes into care or from the time that the child comes into care, where this is unplanned.

3.1 Permanence Framework

Assessment	Early Help	Safeguarding	Planning for Permanence	Achieving Permanence
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Permanence planning and achieving permanence are significant stages in the journey of looked after children. The statutory guidance on Care Planning requires that by the time of the second Looked After Review at four months that there should be a clearly identified plan for achieving permanence for the child. The guidance states five options for permanence:

1. Return to the child's birth family
2. Care within the extended family or with friends
3. Adoption
4. Long term foster care
5. Residential care

3.2 Characteristics of success in securing and maintaining permanence for children in Northumberland are:

- **Stable and secure placements**

Children should be able to develop good quality attachments to their carers which allow the child to thrive and enjoy the benefits of being nurtured, having a sense of belonging and good attachments. Planning should ensure that children have as few placement moves as possible and are

placed in a permanent placement in a timely way. Contact arrangements should be agreed which both supports the placement and the child's need to have contact with their family where this is in the child's best interest. In Northumberland performance around placement stability is good and improving and is slightly above national average. Carers should receive the appropriate level of support to assist them providing stable and secure placements which meet the needs of the child.

- **Plan is underpinned by an appropriate Court Order**

Children should only be looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 where there is clear evidence that the Local Authority and the people with parental responsibility are working in partnership to secure the best interests of the child and that those people have capacity to determine the child's best interests. There has been already been a reduction in the number of children looked after under Section 20 from 42% in March 2015 to 33% currently. Children's Services need to improve performance and practice around care proceedings, currently there is unacceptable delay and drift both in the time taken to issue care proceedings and the length of time it takes to conclude those proceedings. Addressing this will be a key priority of this strategy.

- **Children attend their local school**

During the initial stages of being looked after many children continue to attend the school in their area of origin. Often this involves long journeys to school by taxi or car. Once a permanent placement has been secured children should transfer to their local school or the nearest school where their needs can be met. This is important for the child's social development to develop friendships and relationships within their local community. Planning for school placement is an integral part of permanence planning as children are more likely to experience a change in educational placement if they also experience an unplanned ending of a placement. The Personal Education Plan should support the plan of permanence and reflect the long term educational needs of the child.

- **Child is appropriately placed with siblings or has contact with them**

Most children who are in care with a sibling or siblings benefit from being placed together, this supports the child(ren)'s sense of identity, maintains significant bonds and attachments and promotes long term relationships between the children. The Courts usually require Children Together or Apart assessments (referred to locally as Sibling assessments) to advise the Court and local authority on this issue. Occasionally assessments indicate that children are best placed separately, usually the result of neglect and abuse which has damaged the children's relationships with each other. Where siblings are not placed together good quality contact is usually required to maintain the relationships.

The Contact Service plays an important role in contact arrangements when children are first into care. Once a plan for permanence is agreed and achieved social workers and foster carers will usually take responsibility for the contacts. The IRO plays a critical role in reviewing contact to make sure the frequency and quality of the contact is meeting the children's needs.

- **Child understands their plan and how they can influence it**

The roles of the Independent Reviewing Officer and of the child's Social Worker are critical in making sure that in an age appropriate way the child understands their plan, the reasons behind it and through the LAC reviews how their voice can be heard. Life Story work, Later Life Letters, Memory Boxes and regular conversations with the child about their journey are important as well as with some children therapeutic or specialist work to help them understand and articulate their views.

- **Parents are involved and informed**

Regardless of whether parents are able to care for their children they are still usually significant adults in the child's life. Parents should be informed and consulted other than where this is clearly not in the child's best interest. When a child is adopted post box arrangements are available. The continued engagement of parents by the child's Social Worker is important but is often undermined by changes in Social Workers and parents' disengagement. Care plans should be explicit in how this will be addressed.

- **Plan is regularly reviewed and the Care Plan changed where appropriate**

Reviews should be based on an up to date assessment of changes in the family's circumstances as well as the child's progress in placement. The child's views should be well understood, taken into account and recorded. Where the plan is changed the reasons and the views of the child, carer and parent(s) should be clearly recorded.

3.3 Current Performance and Practice around Permanence Planning

- **Care Proceedings**

The Government's target for the timescale for the conclusion of Care Proceedings is 26 weeks. Northumberland is currently performing at 33 weeks. This is improving from 35 weeks in October 2015 but further and rapid improvement is required. This is an area requiring improvement.

- **Independent Reviewing Officers' Caseloads**

These have significantly improved and are now below the required 70 or below. This is giving IROs more time to focus on individual children and to challenge

where there is delay in developing and agreeing the Care Plan or the care plan is not being progressed.

- **Outcome of Care Proceedings**

Only 31% of Care Proceedings are resulting in a Care Order and/or a placement Order. The regional average is 46%. 42% result in either a Supervision Order or another order with a Supervision Order. This suggests that the thresholds for initiating proceedings need to be reviewed and that this is an area for improvement.

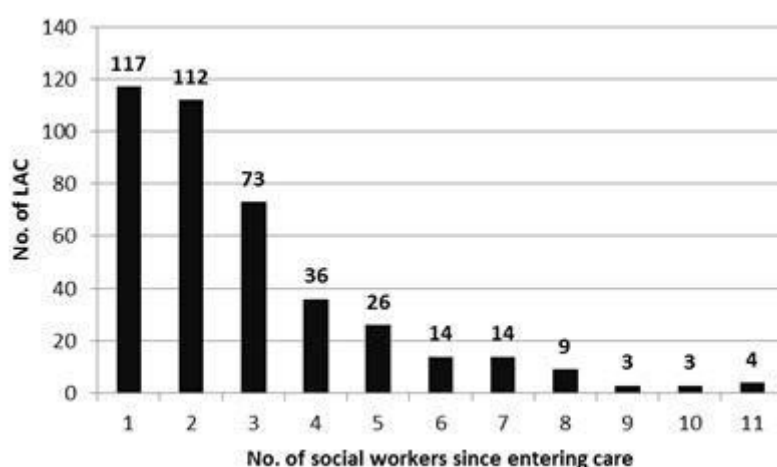
- **Social Workers' Caseloads**

This is an improving picture, the target is for no Social Worker to have a caseload higher than 20. The current figure is 22.6; work is ongoing around recruitment and increased support for newly qualified workers. Retention of experienced social workers is critical to the Council's success in improving permanence planning for looked after children. This requires continual monitoring to ensure the target is met and performance maintained.

- **Changes in Social Workers**

Changes in worker impacts on the quality of the relationship with the child, their carer and the child's family. This is monitored and as of the 31st October 2016 the number of Social Workers per Looked After Child was as below. 109 children have had more than 3 Social Workers. This is an area which requires ongoing monitoring.

Number of social workers per LAC since entering care



Young People are transferred to the 14 + team around their 14th birthday. This involves a change of Social Worker but provides the young person with a more specialist worker who has a wider knowledge of supports to young

people preparing for transition to adulthood.

- **Timescales for Adoption**

Performance is good for the number of children who are adopted; 21% in Northumberland which is better than the national average of 13%. 40% of those adopted between April and October 2016 were age 5 or over compared with the latest national average of 23%. Timescales for achieving adoption require improvement. Partially performance is affected by the fact that Northumberland adopts more older children as they usually take longer to match and adopters take longer to apply for the adoption order. The length of time it takes for a child to be placed for adoption from coming into care is currently 627 days as compared to national average of 573. This links to delay in care proceedings and drift in permanence planning in the first six months of the child being in care. Northumberland also performs less well, 248 days, than the national average, 223 days in matching the child with adopters once the Placement Order has been made. This will be an area for improvement during the course of this strategy.

- **Placement Stability**

9% of children have three placement moves or more which is better than the national average of 10% and 71% of children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more which again is better than the national average of 68%. This performance needs to be at least maintained and can be improved.

- **Permanence Plan at Second Looked After Review**

This meeting is critical in driving the permanence plan for children. At this stage assessments are complete and working to ensure the child is in a permanent placement should be starting at this time if the child is to be protected from the impact of delay in forming or maintaining attachments and stability. In Northumberland this is an area for improvement and work is ongoing to improve both practice and performance. 46% of LAC Permanence Reviews had had a Care Team Meeting held before the Review before against a target of 100%. It is at the Care Team Meeting that the plan is formed for review and confirmation at the review. This is a new target and work and training will be ongoing during 2017 to improve it. The progression of children's plans towards permanence is a key priority for the success of this Corporate Parenting Strategy.

- **Reunification**

Fewer children return home to the care of their parent(s) in Northumberland than in other authorities. The reason for this need to be understood and the authority would benefit from a Reunification Policy which informs good practice and sets timescales for assessment and decision making and allows for a plan of support to enable the child to return home. It is recognised that if a child is to return home successfully that the sooner it can be achieved then

the greater the success of the plan.

- **Role of the Adoption Panel and Fostering Panel**

These panels play an important role in making recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker about approval of carers including Family and Friends carers and matches of children to carers. They provide scrutiny and quality assurance around these stages in securing permanence. The panels are chaired by an independent chair and are made up, in accordance with regulations by a range of individuals including carers, professionals and elected members.

- **Agency Decision Maker**

The ADM makes all major decisions about the placements of Looked After Children on behalf of the Local Authority. They need to be satisfied that the plan and arrangements are suitable for the child and that sufficient consideration has been given to contact, support, education and record keeping for the child.

3.4 Achieving Permanence Performance and Practice

- **Support to Foster Carers**

Foster Carers are supported through their supervising Social Worker, annual foster care review process and by the child's Social Worker. They have access to a comprehensive training programme and to peer support. All foster carers are linked to the Fostering Network where they have access to independent support and educational materials. The Council recognises the critical work done by carers to provide stable and secure placements to children requiring permanence by making them part of their family and giving them a positive family life.

- **Quality of Residential Workers**

Northumberland prides itself on the quality of in house residential provision for children and this is validated by Ofsted judgements. The staff are professional, use Pillars of Parenting as their theoretical framework and understand the importance of giving high quality parenting to children who are not ready to embrace family life.

- **Placement Disruptions**

Disruptions can be minimised by good assessment, matching and reviewing. However disruptions do sometimes occur and the FPS is developing a comprehensive framework for monitoring the rates of disruption and for

ensuring that lessons are learnt and changes are made to practice to minimise future disruptions. This practice is well established with adoptive placements where there are clear mechanisms to capture lessons learned.

- **Post Adoption Support**

There is a dedicated worker for families to contact within the FPS. Some support is offered in house, some is commissioned through the Adoption Support Fund and some is delivered by other agencies, e.g. mental health support, counselling. Post adoption support will be kept under review as the Regional Adoption Agency is developed with the responsibility for delivery of post adoption support to be agreed.

- **Moving Towards Adulthood**

There are currently 11 children in Staying Put arrangements whereby young people can remain in the foster care placement beyond the age of 18 years. Nationally there has been a 22% increase in the number of children staying with their former foster carers. Leaving Care Services ensure that young people have a pathway plan, gain access to employment, training or education and are living in suitable accommodation. Young People's confidence that they will continue to be supported is important to ensure that they can remain settled in the long term placement until they are ready to move. This is an area for continued development to ensure year on year increase in take up of Staying put places. Nationally 22% of care leavers are staying put with their former foster carers.

- **Reviewing Arrangements and the Plan**

When Looked After Children are settled and making good progress in their placement the IRO can agree to reduce the number of LAC Review meetings. They will maintain regular contact with the child and will also track any changes to the child's circumstances. Where the Care Plan needs to change the IRO and the child's Social Worker will be responsible for discussing this with carers, the child's family and other significant people. The child's Social Worker is responsible for helping the child to understand any changes to their plan. This is an area for improved practice by IROs and children's social workers.

- **Building Resilience, Emotional and Mental Health Support.**

Many children who are in care have been affected by trauma, loss, abuse and or neglect. It is important that the children have access to good quality support and treatment to address the impact on their emotional and mental health. Currently children access a Children and Young People (CYPS) Mental Health Service. The Emotional Health and wellbeing strategy is being reviewed to ensure early identification of need. A new pathway for looked after children was agreed in March 2017 which will lead to a quicker and more appropriate response to children needing the support of mental health

services. This is an area for significant improvement. Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires are currently completed by carers on individual children and shared with the Looked After Children Health Team.

Case example 1

Child A and B are siblings who came into care as a result of neglect and abuse, they were initially placed together in foster care to allow for care proceedings and permanence planning. The plan became one of adoption for the children although the eldest child was less committed to moving to a forever family. Intensive direct work was undertaken with the child by the Child Permanence Worker, the Foster Carers and the Children's Social worker to work through the attachments and the plan for the future which allowed the siblings to be placed together for adoption. They are now very settled together and the Adoption Order was granted when the children were aged 6 and 8 respectively.

3.5 Summary of priorities for improving planning for and achieving permanence.

Priorities, these are reflected in the improvement targets Section 5:-

1. Improve timescales for care proceedings
2. Improve timescales for adoption (care to placement)
3. Permanence Plan available at second review
4. Improve long term placement stability
5. Improve reunification plan timescales
6. Reduce the number of emergency (Regulation 24) placements

Areas for improvement.

1. Social Work and Independent Reviewing Officer Caseloads
2. Increase the percentage of care proceedings resulting in a Care Order
3. Involvement of parents in planning for their children and in reviewing their plans.
4. Increase the number of Staying Put and Staying Close arrangements for care leavers
5. Helping children to contribute to and understand their plan and the reason for changes to it.
6. Long term support for families where children are placed on a Special Guardianship Order and support is required to maintain permanence.

3.6 Workforce

To achieve these improvements and priorities the development of the workforce needs to:-

1. establish a stable workforce of children's social workers, fostering and adoption social workers and IROs.
2. develop the skill base of workers to improve the quality of permanence planning.
3. build on the levels of experience of workers to develop a level of expertise in achieving permanence for children.

A Northumberland Workforce Development Strategy for both Adult and Children's Services is being developed and will be complete in May 2017.

SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

4.1 Educational Outcomes

The Council supports Looked After Children in their educational achievement through a Virtual School Headteacher and a Virtual School workforce. The Virtual School Headteacher is a senior manager and is dedicated full time to supporting schools, carers and individual children to ensure that vulnerable learners, including looked after children, achieve their full potential. The Headteacher is supported in this by a data officer, education support workers, a careers advisor, a Key Stage 4 inclusion support worker and an educational psychologist. The Governing Body for the Virtual School is the MALAP. The Virtual School Headteacher publishes an Annual Report and a School Improvement Plan.

The current priorities described in the school improvement plan are:

1. To fully implement the revised and additional statutory requirements of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 regarding education outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children.
2. Work with schools to ensure there are high expectations for the achievement for all looked after pupils and that the majority make better than expected progress from their starting point in care.
3. Promote clear and well understood pathways of support which meet the diverse and urgent emotional needs of looked after and previously looked after children.
4. To improve engagement in education and school placement stability by supporting school transitions and reducing fixed term exclusions.
5. Fully implement our new pathway planning process to create clear academic and vocational pathways into further education, training and employment at 16.

4.1.1 Current Performance: Educational Outcomes

Current performance in all key areas of education is at least in line with national averages for looked after children with some performing well above, although year on year this does change depending on the numbers in each cohort, the length of time the pupils have been in care, and their diverse needs.

- No looked after children have been **permanently excluded** from school since 2008.
- There has been a significant rise in the number of looked after children experiencing fixed term exclusions from school and this has affected school placement stability and attendance.

- Overall absence from school has remained constant for the last three years but persistent absence (or pupils with attendance at 90% or below) is steadily rising.
- For 3 consecutive years the proportion of looked after children achieving a good level of development in the Early Years Stage has increased, similar to the proportion achieving the national standard for Phonics. Attainment at Key Stage 1 is improving significantly over time.
- Attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 has remained constant for the last two years and is in line with national averages for looked after children.
- Numbers of learners progressing into further education at 16 has remained consistently high over for the last three years and is significantly above the national average.
- The majority of looked after pupils make good progress in English and mathematics from their starting point in care.

4.1.2 2 Case Example 2

Chas worked with the Participation Team for over 5 years, initially she was a very difficult to engage with young person. C has now matured into a very confident young lady and has excelled in all areas of participation work in recent years and has become a very confident public speaker. C has suffered from significant mental health issues over the years but has continued with her participation work and gone on to develop some excellent resources for other care leavers. C now lives in her own property and is leading a full and active life.

Chas just applied for an apprenticeship with the team and is in with a very good position to be successful and she will also be going on to complete the Level 3 Award in Public Services over the next 2 years.

4.2 Safeguarding

Looked After Children in Northumberland are safeguarded by:

- Ensuring all placements are robustly assessed monitored and reviewed and comply with the relevant regulations and guidance.
- Regulation 44 visits to Children's Homes.
- Regular visits by the child's Social Worker to see the child, alone when possible, to talk to them about their circumstances.
- IROs ensure that at every review the safety and wellbeing of the child is considered and actions taken to safeguard the child or young person when required.

- Ensuring carers are trained and equipped to understand their safeguarding responsibilities and how to raise concerns.
- Ensuring children are encouraged to express themselves and understand how to make a complaint or ask for independent support.

4.2.1 Children Who go Missing

Children's Services commission a dedicated Social Worker from the voluntary sector to assist when children go missing and to interview the child on their return. The worker liaises with Northumbria Police, health agencies as well as the child's family, carer and Social Worker where they are involved.

All Looked After Children are offered a return interview primarily to safeguard the child / young person but also to gain intelligence on risk in the community to children including child sexual exploitation.

In 2015/16 289 children went missing, Of these 35% were looked after children (102). The majority of the children were 14-15 years of age. Of those children, Looked After Children tend to go missing more often than non looked after children with 28% going missing more than 4 times compared to non looked after (18%). Only 13% of looked after children were missing for more than 24 hours compared to 14% of non looked after children.

All looked after children are offered a return interview. In 2016 86% of children accepted an interview and 65% were held within 72 hours of the return of the young person.

4.2.2 Adolescent Risk Management

In 2008 Children's Services implemented a risk management model for adolescents who were at risk through their own behaviours or the exploitation of others. This is a multi-agency response which places intense intervention and monitoring of young people until the risk is reduced and the young person is safe. The model has developed over time, Ofsted considered it to be a *highly effective mechanism*. (Ofsted 2016) The Risk Management Group also holds complex abuse strategy meetings where there are circumstances involving more than one young person.

In 2014, 38 children were assessed under this model of whom 11 were looked after (28%), in 2015 44 children were assessed of whom 12 were looked after (27%) and in 2016, 39 children of whom 14 were looked after (35%).

4.2.3 E-safety

There is a section of the NCC website about e-safety which is intended for all children and provides a link to the National Crime Agency. This has recently been updated so that it also links to the Looked After Children webpage.

The VMC are currently doing a project on the dark web and keeping safe

online which will be shared with all Looked After Children.

All NCC Children's Homes have an e-safety / online file which they go through with young people when they move in. It includes:

- The policy
- Risk assessment
- Contract / agreement which young people sign to say they understand how to stay safe online
- All PCs have a lightspeed web filter
- Information about staying safe / exploitation / safe selfies
- Local media guidance
- Log for concerns and incidents

All foster carers are offered e-safety training. E-safety is discussed with young people at the placement planning meeting.

4.3 Health Outcomes

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is responsible for securing the expertise of designated health professionals for Looked After Children. There is a Designated Nurse and a Designated Doctor in post, they are both members of MALAP and are accountable to the Director of Nursing, Quality and Patient Safety.

The Looked After Children Health Team is commissioned by the CCG from the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHCFT). The Designated Doctor is also Medical Advisor in adoption and fostering which involves reviewing adult health assessments as well as advising both panels and prospective adopters on children's current and future health needs. Both the CCG and the NHCFT produce an Annual Report on health services to Looked after Children. The Clinical Quality Commission (CQC) inspection in November 2015 judged the service as *outstanding*.

4.3.1 Current Performance: Health Outcomes

- 96% of children have had their scheduled immunisations
- 97% of children have had a dental check
- 79% of Initial Health Assessments were held in time
- 67% of Review Health assessments were held in time
- Reasons for delays in health assessments are robustly monitored and are being addressed, children's circumstances changing and records not being updated or communicated to the health team is a frequent cause of delay.
- The LAC Health Team ensure that where young people require it they are supported in accessing:
 - Sexual health service
 - Substance misuse services
 - Smoking cessation
 - Counselling
 - CAMHS (CYPS)
 - Weight management
- Significant progress is being made in ensuring all care leavers have a Health Passport.
- Nearly 100 Looked After Children are placed outside Northumberland. The North East LAC Regional Nurse Group is developing a pathway and process to ensure that all Looked After Children are notified to the relevant LAC Nurse in the geographic area in which they are placed.
- 120 prospective foster and adoptive carers had their medical assessments reviewed by the Medical Advisor.
- 91.6% (176) of qualifying carers returned their Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaires to the LAC Health Team for analysis and then

discussion at the monthly liaison meeting which includes psychologist and clinical staff.

4.3.2 Current Priorities of LAC Health Provision

1. Implement SIF action Plan in partnership with NCC
2. Ensure robust process in place to monitor quality of health assessments in Northumberland and placed out of area
3. Monitor quality of health information provided to care leavers in their health passports
4. Designated professionals to receive assurance from NTW on how they monitor service provided to looked after children
5. Audit GP records to ensure looked after children are correctly coded
6. Improve profiling of population to inform commissioning.

4.4 Achieving Independence

The 14+ Team is responsible for planning and supporting young people to move to independence. The team are working on improving pathway planning, reviewing, engaging families and the support available to young people. This includes reviewing the Accommodation Service to improve choice, accessibility, suitability and support for young people as they move into their own accommodation. The Over 18 Team is being reconfigured to promote better support and use of community resources.

4.4.1 Current Performance; Care Leavers

- 47% of care leavers are in ETE
- 78% of care leavers are in Suitable accommodation
- 58% of Looked After Children have a Pathway Plan at 16
- 100% of 18 and 19 year olds have a Pathway Plan
- 11% of care leavers are at University.
- Priorities for achieving independence:
 - Improve Pathway Plans and ensure they are regularly reviewed and updated
 - Review Accommodation Service.
 - Improve access for care leavers to apprenticeships.
 - Continue to develop Staying Put placements and Staying Close placements.

SECTION FIVE: IMPROVEMENT TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

5.1 Improvement Targets

These are the **key Corporate Parenting areas for improvement** for the next three years which will be proxy indicators of progress for the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Targets will be reviewed annually and progress reported to MALAP and CPAG quarterly.

Improvement	Current Performance	Target by March 2018	Target by March 2020
Increase number of Foster Care placements	134	150	175
Improve timescales for Adoption (care to placement)	627	570	547
Improve timescales for Care Proceedings (weeks)	33	26	26
Reduce number of Regulation 24 placements made in the year	60	>50	>40
Review all Section 20 cases by 6 weeks into care.	N/A	100%	100%
Permanence Plan is available at second LAC Review	N/A	90%	100%
Improve percentage of children who have been in Care for 2.5 years and in the same placement for at least 2 years	71%	73%	75%
Children with a plan of reunification home achieved within 6 months of coming into care	N/A	75%	80%
Care Leavers in ETE	46%	50%	55%

5.2 Performance Framework

This framework supports the Corporate Parenting Strategy and gives a comprehensive overview of progress in the key areas. This will be reported to CPAG six monthly.

Early Help

- The % children who come into care within 12 months of intervention from Community Support Team.
- Number of newborn babies into care (2017 set baseline for reduction over 2018-2020)

Sufficiency

- Number of foster care assessments undertaken in year
- Number of prospective adopter assessments undertaken in year
- Number of foster care assessments which are presented to panel within 26 weeks.
- Number of prospective adopter assessments which are presented to panel within 26 weeks.
- Number of IFAs
- Number of independent residential placements
- Number of adoptions
- Number of unauthorised Regulation 24 placements
- Number of unplanned foster care placement moves.
- Number of siblings assessed to be placed together and placed apart.

Permanence

- Percentage of children leaving care for adoption
- Percentage of children who are placed for adoption within 15 months of coming into care
- Percentage of cases where at second review there is a permanence plan
- Percentage of cases where there has been a care team meeting before second review
- Number of long term fostering placements matched through Fostering Panel
- Percentage of LAC reviews held in timescale.
- Number of care leavers in staying put placements.
- Percentage of children leaving care through an SGO.
- Placement stability, three placements or more
- Placement stability 2.5 years, same placement for 2 years
- % of care proceedings resulting in a Care Order.
- Social Work Caseloads
- IRO Caseloads

Outcomes

1. Education

- School attendance
- Destination post 16
- KS2 attainment
- KS4 attainment
- Academic progress from point of entering care (all years)
- Fixed and permanent exclusions from school
- Completion of PEPs

2. Health

- Percentage of Looked After Children who have had an Initial Health Assessment within timescale
- Percentage of Looked After Children who have had a Review Health Assessment within timescale.
- Percentage of children who have had dental check within the past year
- Percentage of children with up to date immunisations
- Percentage of Looked After Children where the eligible carer has completed SDQ
- Length of time Looked After Children wait for a CYPS initial assessment

3. Safeguarding

- Percentage of LAC offered a return interview when they have been missing
- Percentage of foster care reviews completed in time
- Percentage of LAC visited by Social Worker in timescale
- Percentage of LAC reviews held in timescale
- Percentage of LAC subject to a S47 enquiry.
- Percentage of LAC subject to Risk Management Group Regulation 44 visits.

4. Involvement

- Percentage of LAC who contribute to their LAC review
- Percentage of children who qualify for an independent visitor who have one.
- Number of LAC accessing Advocacy Services
- Number of complaints made by LAC

SECTION SIX: ACTION PLAN

This Action Plan links to the strategic priorities identified by the Corporate Parenting Advisory Group and the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (SIF) Action Plan.

The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually. It will inform the work programme for the MALAP and for the Corporate Parenting Advisory Group.

See Appendix One.

This strategy should be read in conjunction with the following:-

Northumberland documents :

- Early Help Strategy 2014-17
- Children's Commissioning and Public Health Strategy 2017-18
- Parental Neglect Multi-Agency Strategy (NSCB) 2015-18
- Virtual Headteacher's' Annual Report 2017
- Virtual School Improvement Plan 2017
- CCG annual Report – Health of LAC 2015-16
- NHCFT Annual Report – Health of LAC 2015-16.
- Family and Friends Policy 2017-2020
- Ofsted SIF 2016
- Workforce Development Strategy 2017-20

National Documents:

- Children Act 1989, Care Planning Regulations, Volume 2 (2010)
- DCSF Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children. (2010)