

Children Looked After Strategy 2014-2017






Child Looked After Strategy

This strategy outlines the vision of Hartlepool Borough Council for its children and young people in care and care leavers. Hartlepool Children's Services is committed to improving the experiences and outcomes for children looked after and care leavers in the town and is aspirational in its plan to deliver continuous improvement and remove the gap between children in care and their peers.

This strategy builds upon to 2010 to 2013 Children Looked After Strategy recognising the achievements realised through the delivery of the strategy and setting new priorities to deliver continuous improvement for the care of children looked after and care leavers in Hartlepool.

The delivery of the 2014-2017 strategy will be achieved with the active commitment and involvement of all partners which form the Children's Strategic Partnership and Corporate Parent Forum under the leadership of the Chief Executive, Director of Child and Adult Services and Lead Member for Children's Services.

This strategy is based upon the principle question of whether the care and parenting provided would be good enough for one of our own children.



Children in Need and Family Support Vision

The vision is to support children and their families who are at risk of becoming looked after and to deliver a wide range of universal, targeted and specialist services. This will enable children to be safely looked after within their families and receive the right services at the right time.

The provision of tailored family support packages will be based upon a sound assessment of need with clearly defined outcomes to be achieved. Children should only become looked after where this has been assessed as being in their best interest and all available resources within the family and social network have been explored.

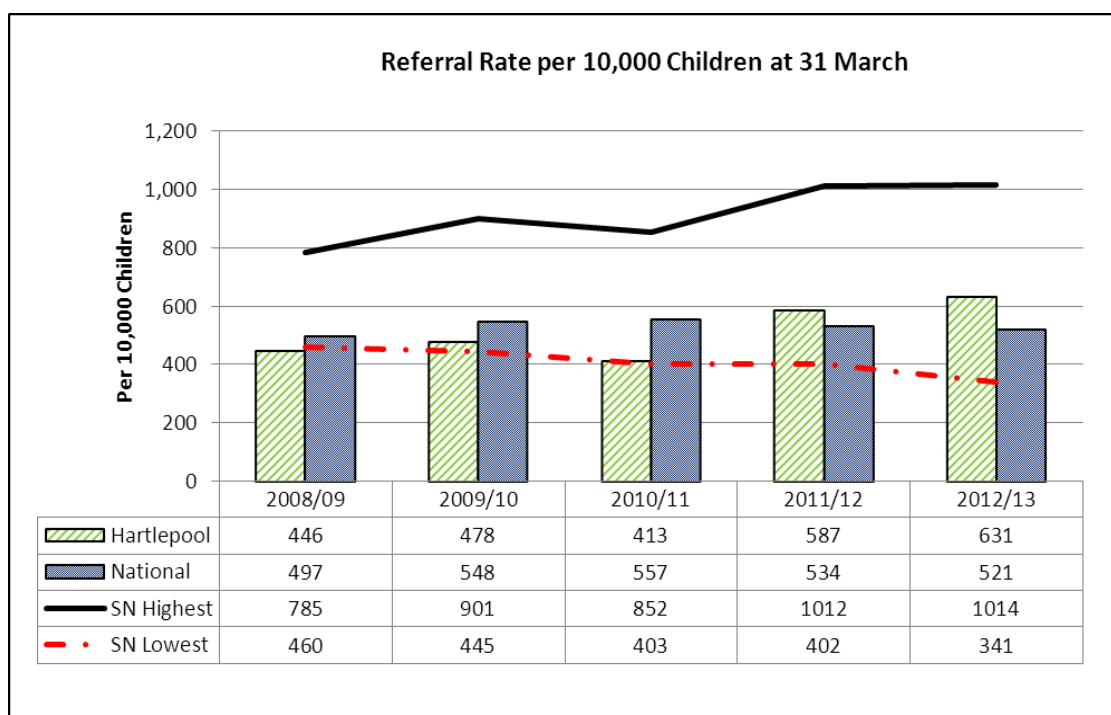
What we have done

- Developed and implemented the Early Intervention Strategy 'A Better Childhood in Hartlepool' 2011-2013.
- Commissioned a range of services to support children and their families including, amongst other things, Parenting Programmes and 1:1 parenting support; activities for children aged 5-19; mentoring for children and young people and substance misuse services.
- Facilitated Family Group Conferences delivered in partnership with Action for Children.
- Developed and implemented an intensive support service for young people who are at risk of becoming looked after including the provision of a support foster carer service.
- Developed and implemented the Hartlepool Think Family, Think Communities Programme, delivering intensive family intervention programmes to children and families who meet the 'Troubled Families' criteria and making a commitment to turn around 290 families by March 2015.
- Implemented the recommendations of the Family Justice Review through local Public Law Outline arrangements and realigned services to strengthen pre-proceedings work with families.
- Completed an annual Matching Needs and Services analysis of all children who become looked after providing longitudinal data to inform service planning and development.
- Reviewed and updated the policy and procedures in relation to Special Guardianship and Residence Order arrangements.
- Completed an audit of children who become looked after to inform service planning and development.

Needs Analysis

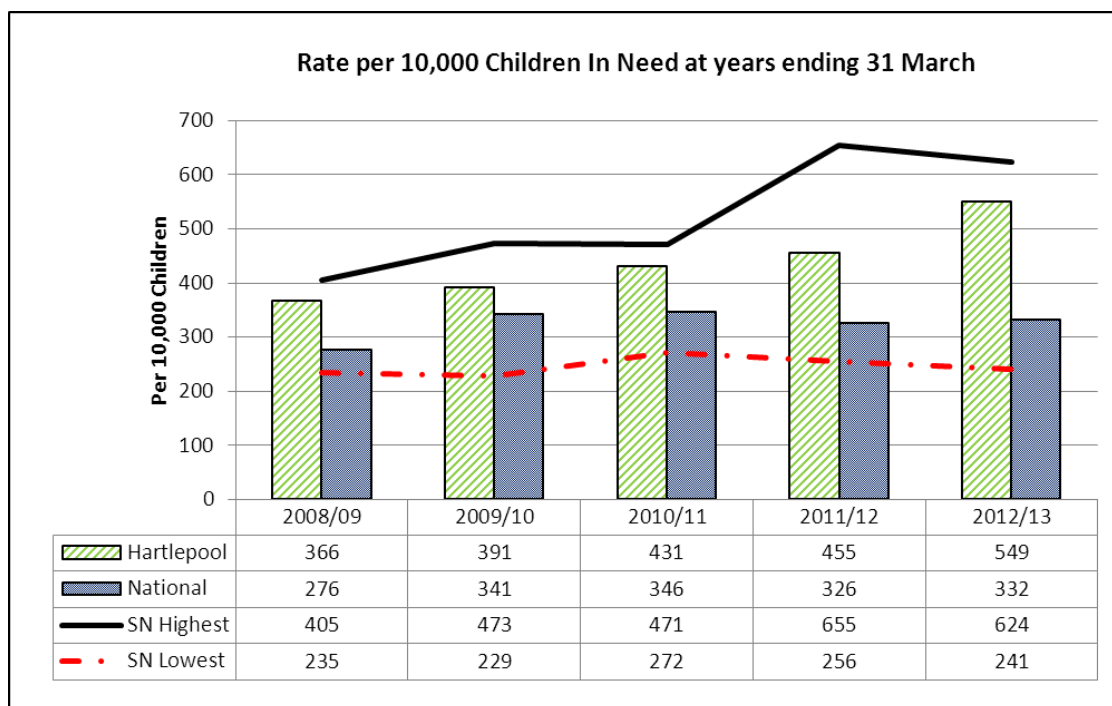
As the graph below shows, Hartlepool has a higher than average number of children looked after when considering the rate per 10,000 of the population.

In the last three years there has been a significant increase in the number of children looked after by the Council which is reflective of the national picture of rising numbers of looked after children for the majority of local authorities.




The increase in the numbers of children looked after in Hartlepool is reflective of the wider picture of increasing demand for services for children in need in Hartlepool. As the table below shows, between 2010 and 2013 there has been a 31% increase in the number of children receiving social care services and more families than ever are receiving help and support. The number of children looked after has increased by 25% in the same period. The increase in demand for services is multi faceted and has no one single causation factor, it is attributable to, for example:

- The increased awareness of the needs of vulnerable children;
- The pressures on families associated with the economic downturn;
- Welfare reforms with the associated increases in child poverty; and
- More families are receiving preventative services than before which are uncovering significantly high levels of need and vulnerability.

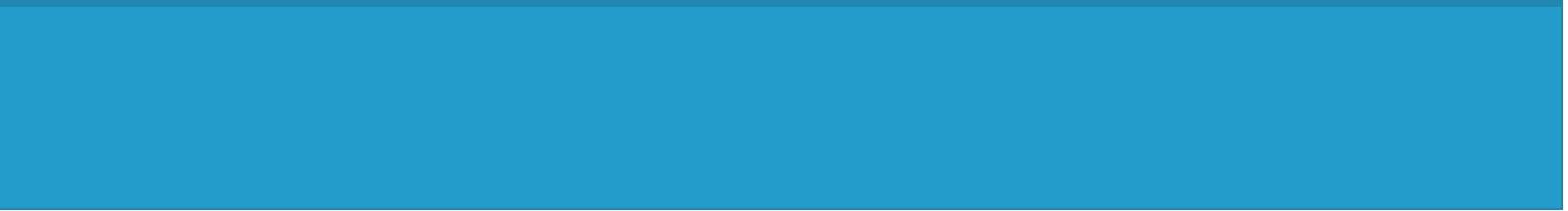


What will we do?

- Review the Early Intervention Strategy in light of budget reductions investing in services which meet the needs of children and their families and prevent the need for statutory services.
- Reduce the care population and realign resources to preventative work by:
 - Increasing the uptake of Family Group Conferences;
 - Implementing system change arising from learning from the Think Family, Think Communities Programme rolling out delivery of intensive family support across early intervention and social care services;
 - Increase the delivery of intensive community support packages across the 0-17 age range.
- Develop and implement a reunification policy for children returning to their families from care;
- Improve care planning arrangements to ensure all admissions to care are underpinned by robust assessments and proactive planning.



Impact of Measures

- There will be a reduction in the number of children who become looked after and for those who do, their placements will be planned and underpinned by a robust assessment of need. Emergency admissions to care will only occur as a result of an immediate child protection situation.
 - There will be an improvement in the stability of placements for children looked after as placements will be better planned and matched.
 - There will be a reduction in the number of children who become looked after for a second or subsequent time.
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Corporate Parenting

Vision

The vision is to ensure that every looked after child in Hartlepool experiences high quality care and stable relationships, is nurtured and grows up with a sense of identity and belonging. Children in care will feel their needs are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about not only by those who look after them on a daily basis but also by those who make decisions politically, corporately and operationally in the town.

What we have done


- Hartlepool Borough Council has a long-standing Corporate Parent Forum made up of Elected Members and representatives from the Children in Care Council and foster carers. The Forum receives reports on all aspects of corporate parenting responsibility including, among other things, education and health of children looked after, fostering and adoptions and education, employment and training of care leavers. The Forum provides its members with the opportunity to challenge how services are delivered to children in care and measure the effectiveness of these services. The Corporate Parenting Forum has a pivotal role in listening to the voices of children and young people in care, speaking out on their behalf and being aspirational to make sure that future generations in Hartlepool have grown up happy, healthy, with stable relationships and a first class education.
- Established an effective Children in Care Council, supported by dedicated officers, to ensure the voices of children and young people influence service development at a national, regional, local and personal level.
- Established joint meetings between the Corporate Parent Forum and Children in Care Council.
- Undertaken a full Children's Services Scrutiny Investigation into services for children looked after for which Hartlepool Borough Council was nominated for a National Scrutiny Award.
- The Children in Care Council has reviewed and produced a revised Pledge for Children Looked After.
- Trained groups of looked after children and young people as Young Inspectors and Junior Inspectors so they can inspect the quality of aspects of their care and other local services for children.
- Implemented a 'Bring A Gift' scheme through the Children's Strategic Partnership where organisations are encouraged to offer something within their gift to children looked after.

What will we do?

- Strengthen the governance arrangements around the delivery of the Children Looked After Strategy through the Corporate Parent Forum and Children's Strategic Partnership.
- Strengthen service user engagement for children looked after through, for example, the development of focus groups and specific participatory opportunities including consultation and project groups.
- Empower and support the Children's Care Council to be a widely recognised voice of and lobby for children looked after in Hartlepool and ensure that this group is representative of the views of all children looked after including children with disabilities and younger children by:
 - Exploring innovative ways of ensuring the Children in Care Council can communicate with and receive the views of children looked after who choose not to be members of the Council (websites, e-mail, newsletter, consultation events/activities);
 - Enabling other participation groups to feed into the Children in Care Council either through reports, presentations or joint project, activity events and residential experiences.
 - Ensuring that the findings of both the Junior and Young Inspectors are fed into the work of the Children in Care Council so they can act upon recommendations and instigate change and improvement in the services for looked after child.
- Elected Members will promote the interests of children looked after and care leavers in all aspects of their Council responsibilities.
- Implement the Children in Care Council "Quality Mark" for all reports prepared for Corporate Parent Forum, Children Services Committee and Children's Strategic Partnership.

Impact of Measures

- The Corporate Parent Forum (in partnership with the Children in Care Council) will drive the change agenda to achieve the vision laid out within this strategy and hold officers and other partners to account.
- There will be an overall improvement in the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes achieved for children looked after and care leavers.
- Children and young people will report that they have influenced and shaped the services of the Council.

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- The needs of the children looked after and care leavers will be reflected throughout the business of the Council.

Sufficiency

The Vision

Each child or young person has a right to be looked after in accordance with an appropriate and full assessment of need. When a child becomes looked after, this will be a positive choice which is intended to meet their assessed needs and this decision will have been made, wherever possible, with the agreement of the child/young person, their family and significant others.

When a child becomes looked after, there must be a sufficient range of accommodation options available to be able to match the child to a placement that will meet his/her needs. Once placed, the child will experience stability, continuity and a plan for permanence developed and implemented at the earliest opportunity.

Any placement for a child looked after will, so far as possible and in the child's best interests, enable the child to remain close to home, have continuity of education and health care provision, enable siblings to live together and ensure suitability of accommodation if the child or young person is disabled. The education and health needs of a child should be given a priority consideration where accommodation or placement change is being considered.

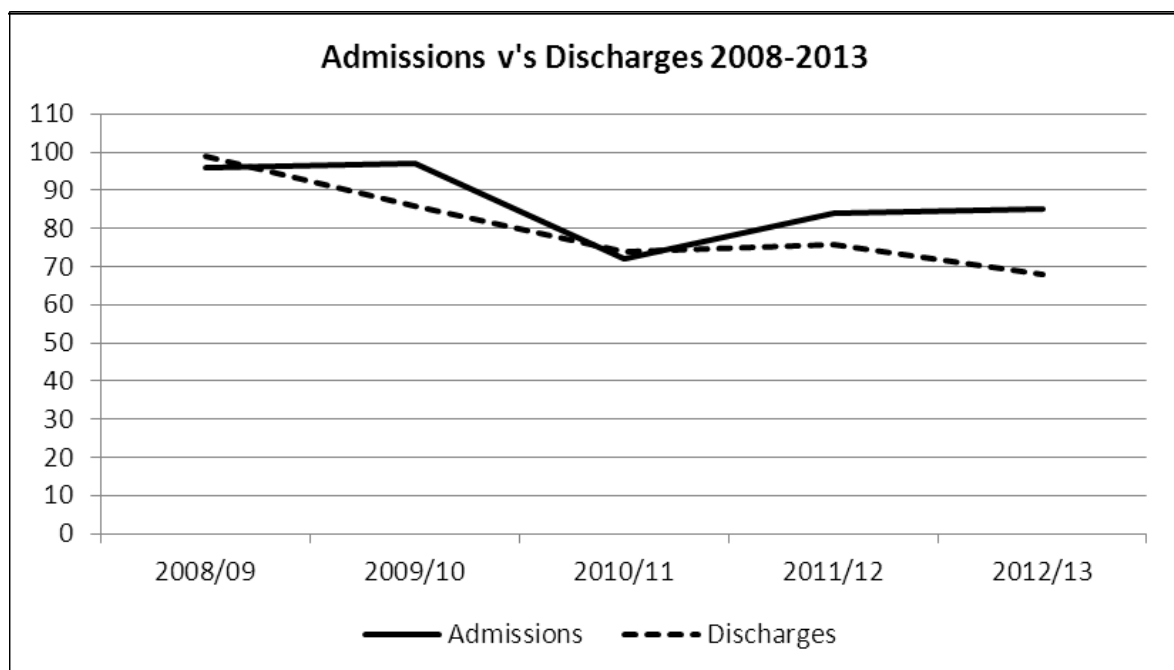
Statutory guidance places a general duty on local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of looked after children (the "sufficiency duty").

What we have done

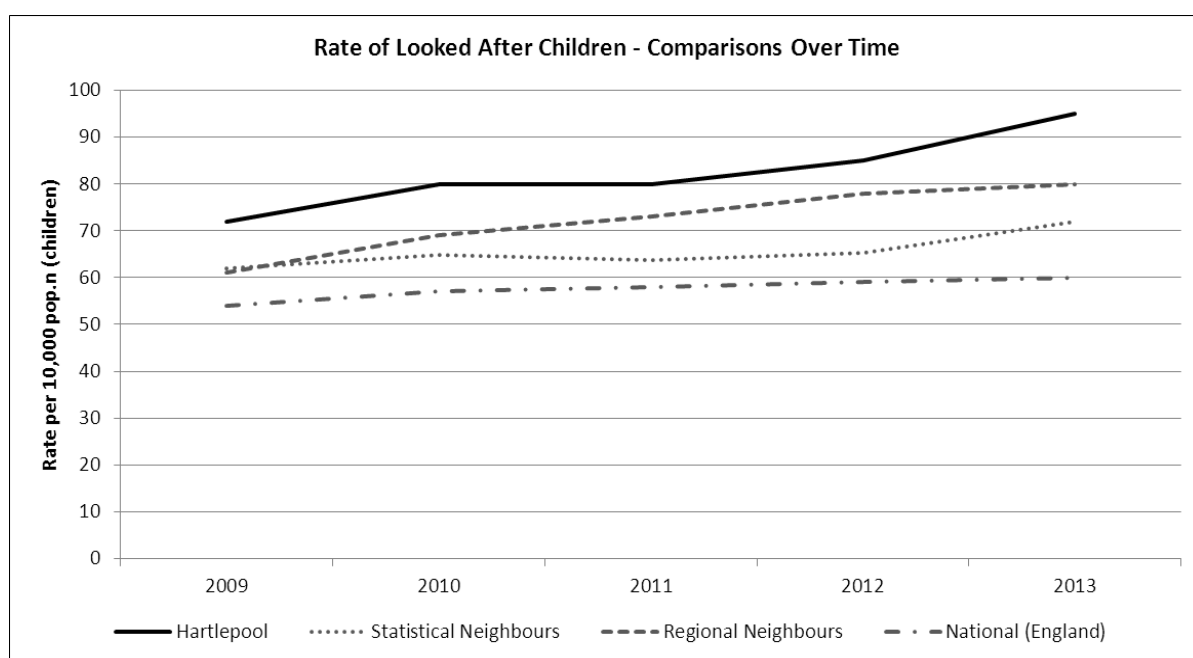
- Developed and implemented plans to open a Children's Home in Hartlepool to ensure that children needing residential care can be cared for within their home town promoting continuity of health education and family and social relationships.
- Re-configured provision at Exmoor Grove Children's Home to offer permanent and short break care to children with a learning disability and associated challenging behaviours.
- Increased in house foster care provision by 20% since 2010.
- Implemented a Connected Person's Policy for children looked after by family or friends.
- Reviewed and implemented a revised banded payment scheme and maintained foster carers allowances in line with Fostering Network recommended rates.
- Designed and delivered an annual foster carers' training programme in consultation with carers.

- Recruited trained and assessed adopters to provide adoptive placements for Hartlepool children.
- Facilitated existing foster carers to adopt children in their care.
- Ensured children are placed for adoption at the earliest opportunity through 'Foster to Adopt' arrangements.
- Led the development of a "Market Position Statement" and a sub-regional "Framework Agreement" for the commissioning of independent fostering agency placements.
- Engaged with independent fostering agencies to identify and communicate the needs of Hartlepool children with a view to influencing their recruitment strategies.
- Made use of national data in relation to the availability of residential placements when searching for placements to meet needs of an individual child.
- Implemented systems to ensure that decisions relating to the placement of children within the independent sector are subject to multi agency decision making through a shared Panel.
- Introduced a "Family Finder" social work post whose role is exclusively to provide permanent families for children waiting for long term foster care or adoption and avoid delay.

Needs Analysis

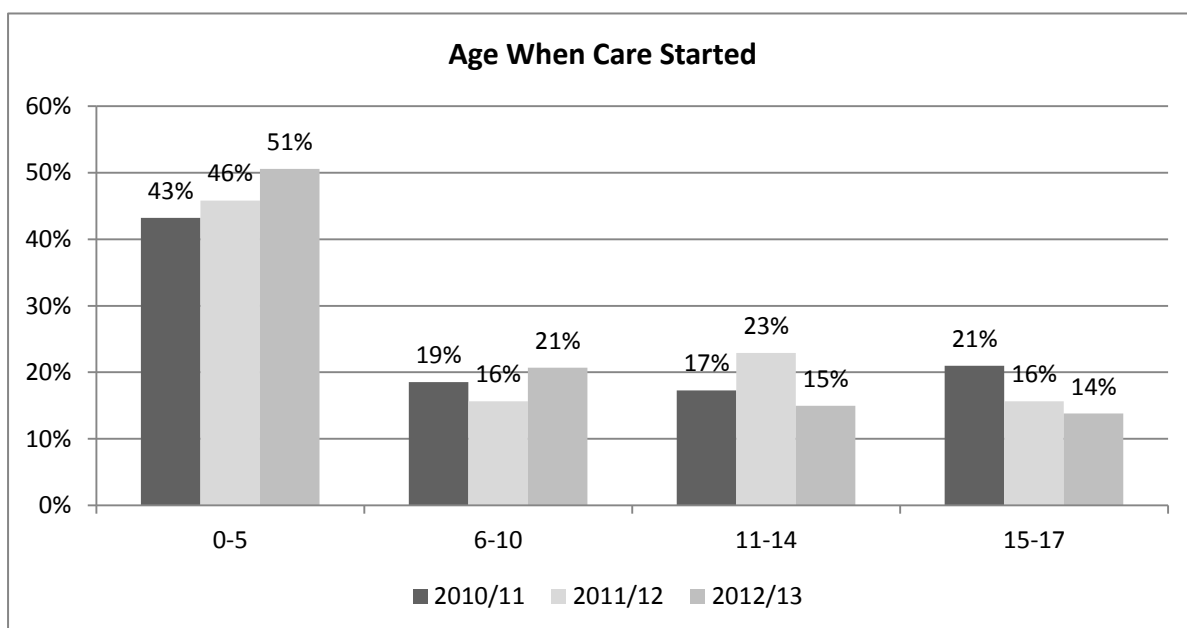
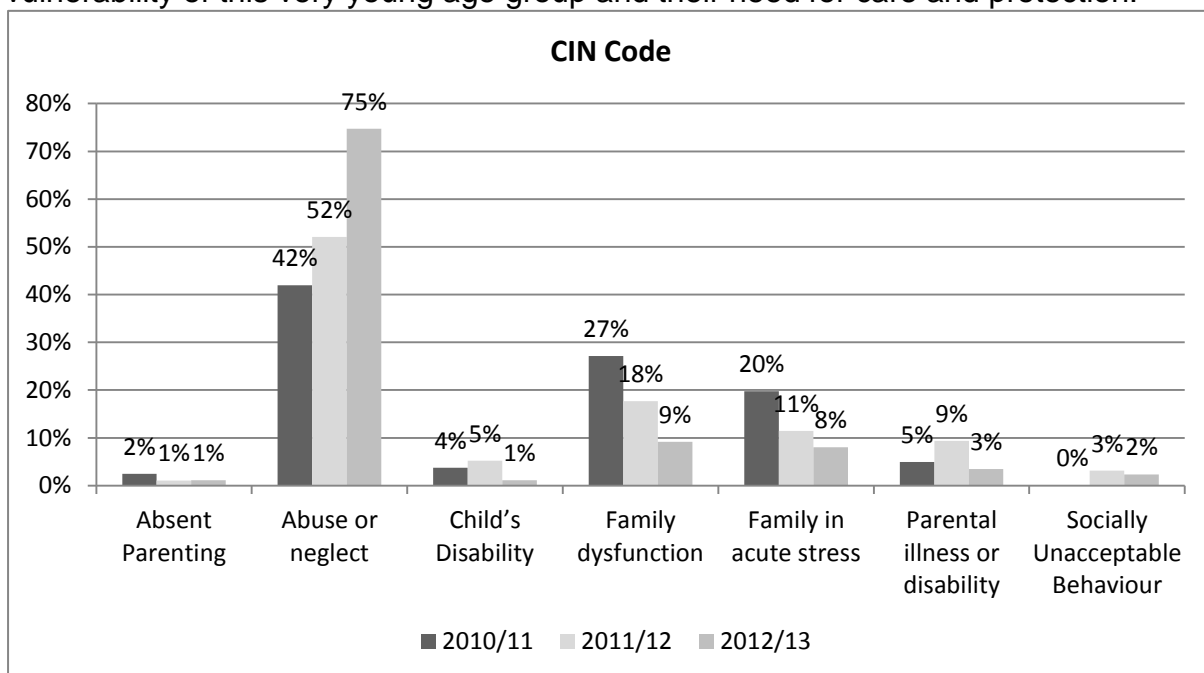



In the context of rising numbers of children looked after, it should be noted that the number of children becoming looked after each year is reducing. In 2012/13, a total of 87 children became looked after (from 50 families) compared with 107 children in 2009/10 (64 families). As the above graph shows, there is a reducing trendline for children becoming looked after. This reducing number in the context of an increasing number of children looked after means that for those children who become looked after, they remain in care long term and fewer children leave care than enter. This is attributable, in part, to the local authority policy to support young people in transition to adulthood to remain looked after through to 18 years of age. The authority is seeking to strengthen its performance in relation to adoption and increase the numbers of children leaving care through adoption or permanence offered by Residence or Special Guardianship Orders.



Hartlepool has higher than average numbers of children looked after when compared with other authorities nationally, regionally and statistical neighbours. There are very high levels of deprivation within the town with Hartlepool being second highest in the North East region with only Middlesbrough having greater levels of deprivation. Child poverty is increasing and there are high levels of need within the town. This is impacting significantly on how families are functioning and at times placing children in vulnerable situations necessitating their admission to care. Hartlepool Borough Council provides prevention services to support families at the earliest point when need arises, as well as intensive family support services for those children who are on the edge of care or care proceedings, nevertheless there are an above average number of children who need to be cared for by the local authority.

Over the past three years, abuse and neglect has been the primary reason why children have become looked after followed by family dysfunction and family in acute stress. During 2012/13, there was a significant increase in the number of children and young people who became looked after due to abuse and neglect accounting for 75% of the admissions to care. This led to a corresponding reduction in the other two need categories. When taken in the context of the age profile detailed below, with 51% of children becoming looked after being aged between 0 and 5 years, this highlights the vulnerability of this very young age group and their need for care and protection.




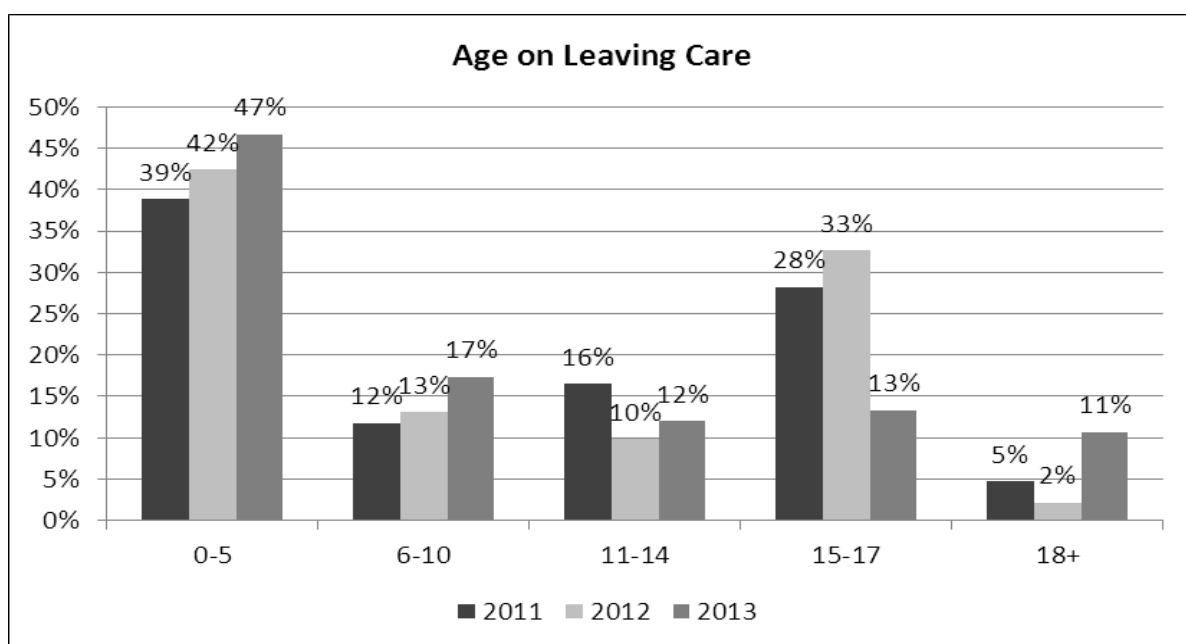


As the graph above shows, in 2012/13 just over 50% of the children who become looked after were aged 0-5 years with those under the age of 1 being the highest proportion at 17%. The need to become looked after at the younger end of the age range reflects the increase in the numbers of children subject to child protection plans and care proceedings in the past year. The high demand for looked after placements for the younger age group is met effectively within in house fostering provision and the local authority will continue to ensure that it has a sufficient supply of foster carers to meet this need.

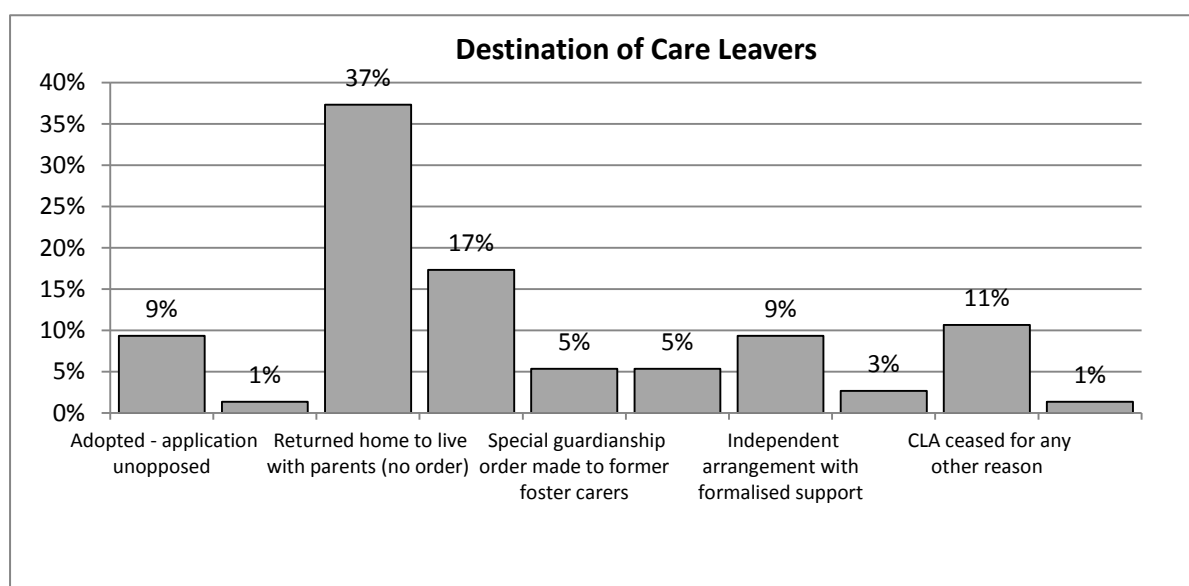
There has been a shift in the age profile of children becoming looked after in Hartlepool with a reduction in the number of adolescents becoming looked after when compared with previous years. This is attributable to the implementation of the Edge of Care Service from September 2012 where families with adolescents on the edge of care have received intense support packages to prevent family breakdown, including the provision of support foster care for families. Evaluation of this scheme has highlighted that the numbers of adolescents becoming looked after has reduced in the last 18 months. Going forward, the local authority intends to further develop this initiative to provide intensive support to children on the edge of care across the whole 0-17 age.

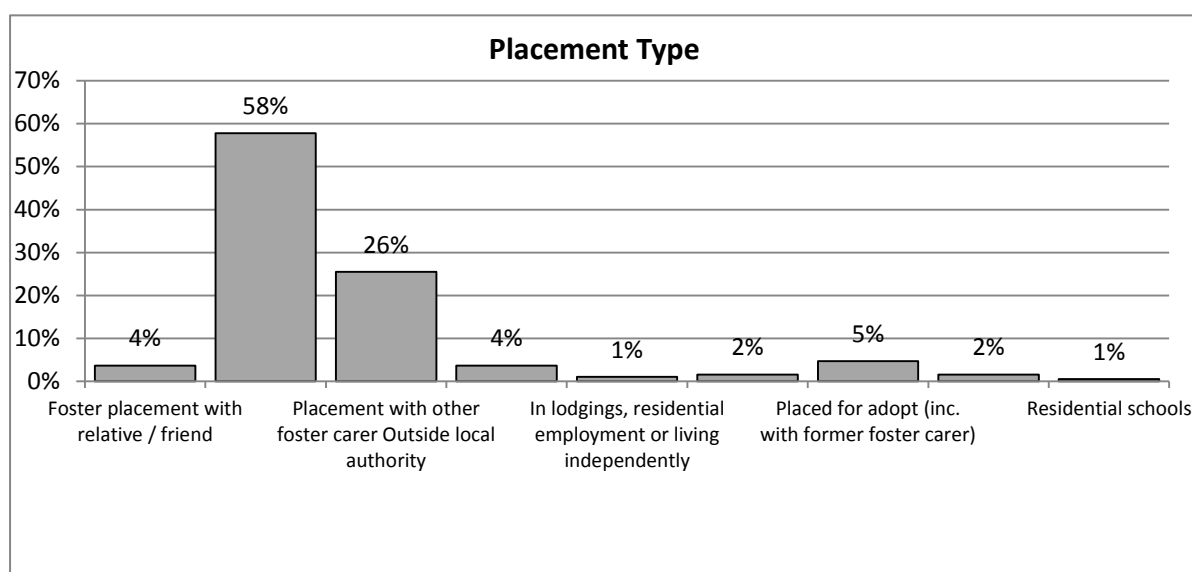
With regard to ethnicity, over the past five years the vast majority of children (average 91%) who have become looked after are of White British origin which is reflective of the local population. As at 30 November 2013, 97% of the children looked after were of white British origin, the remaining 3% were of mixed heritage, black/black British and other ethnic groups. Despite efforts to recruit foster carers from the BME community within Hartlepool, all of the authority foster carers are of white European origin and therefore there is a gap within in house provision for children from BME backgrounds. Targeted recruitment will continue to seek to ensure the authority is able to provide placements for children which are ethnically matched. Where required, it will also commission placements from independent fostering sector to meet ethnic and cultural needs.





Of those leaving care, as would be anticipated, the highest numbers are at the 0-5 years age range and those aged over 16. For the younger age group, as the table below shows, in 2012/13, 37% of children returned to their care of their parents, 9% left care through adoption and 27% have secured permanence through the making of Residence or Special Guardianship Orders. For this age range of children securing permanence is a priority for the Council ensuring that children are afforded, wherever possible, their right to a private family life and stability and consistency where their needs are fully met.



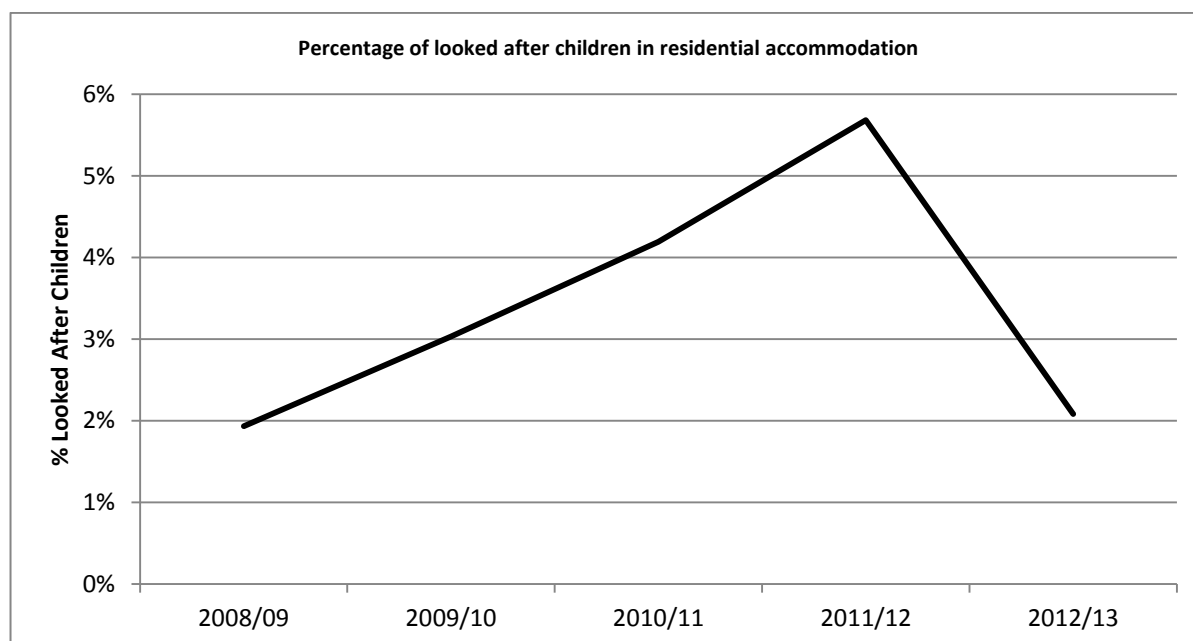


It is the policy of Hartlepool Borough Council, as part of its strategy for children looked after to, as far as possible care, provide for placements for children through its own fostering agency. This ensures that children looked after are cared for within their home community and have continuity of education, health and family and social relationships. Hartlepool Fostering Agency has a good cohort of in house foster carers and, when compared with other areas, a very high rate of foster carers per head of the local population. There are currently 99 foster carers approved by the Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Agency and this number has increased by 20% since 2010. As the table demonstrates, 88% of children looked after are placed in foster care of whom, 86% are placed with in house foster carers. Just over 70% of children looked after live within the local authority boundary.


The authority has low reliance on independent fostering agencies to care for looked after children and for the vast majority of children, their needs can be best met within in house provision. Where placements are commissioned from the independent sector, this arises from the individual needs of the young person either through a plan for permanence that cannot be met within in house provision, or placements for adolescents with some associated challenging behaviours. Despite targeted recruitment activity, the Council has struggled to recruit foster carers able to offer placements for adolescents and as the data shows, the placements commissioned from the independent sector are all for children and young people aged 11-15.

In house foster care provision, underpinned by the increased placement capacity provided by the Independent Fostering Agency Framework ensures that the authority has a sufficient supply of foster placements to meet the needs of children looked after by the Council. The local authority will continue to undertake targeted recruitment to increase the number of foster carers able to offer placements for sibling groups, children with disabilities and adolescents. A fostering recruitment strategy is prepared and implemented annually.

Foster care is appropriate to meet the needs of most children in care and is the right placement type for them. However, some children and young people, find significant difficulties residing within a family home setting and residential care offers a positive choice for them. 2% of the children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council live in residential care and 1% are placed in residential school. The council has a low reliance upon residential care; however for many of the children who require residential provision, they are placed in provision outside of Hartlepool. Decisions to commission residential placements for children are made through a strategic Commissioned Placements Panel which is made up of senior officers from health, education and social care. This Panel makes decisions on joint commissioning and joint funding arrangements.



Between 2003 and 2006, the local authority took the decision to cease to be a provider of residential care, closed children's homes in the town and moved to an arrangement where all residential placements were commissioned from the independent sector. As Hartlepool is a small town, in effect, this meant that children had to move away to live. In 2011/12, Children's Services Scrutiny Forum undertook an investigation into services for children looked after. Children and young people, foster carers as well as officers were invited to give evidence to the Forum about their views on the services provided. Members heard strongly from children and young people that they wanted to live with their brothers and sisters and that they wanted to remain in Hartlepool. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Members of the Scrutiny Forum made a recommendation that officers should seek to open a 3 to 4 bed children's home in Hartlepool and this led to the development of the children's home at 302 Stockton Road.




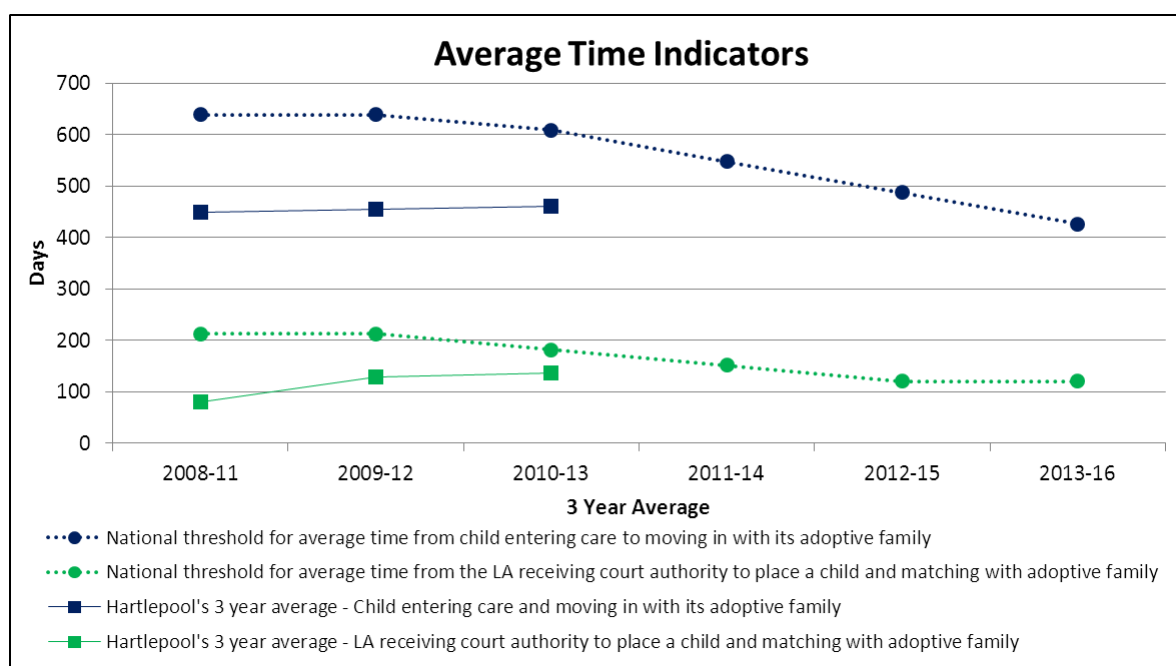
The children's homes at Stockton Road and Exmoor Grove will be sufficient to meet the needs of children in Hartlepool who require residential care based on current and historical levels of demand. However, for those children who require residential care and education, there is a very low density of provision within the north east. Some local authorities are entering into partnership with independent providers to commission residential care with education and Hartlepool hope to capitalise on any opportunity this may offer. Currently the local authority commissions placements in residential schools on a needs basis agreed with partners through the Commissioned Placements Panel. Placements are spot purchased once a child or young person has been matched with the most appropriate provision. This approach ensures that individual children's needs are at the forefront of the commissioning process and the primary consideration.

Adoption

In line with the Government's Adoption Reforms, it is strategic priority for Hartlepool Borough Council to increase the number of children leaving care through adoption. The local authority recognises its small size, however, over the past three years has had very successful performance in relation to recruiting adopters and finding families for children for whom there is a plan for adoption. The local authority annually plans and implements a recruitment strategy for adopters and this has been successful in year on year increasing the numbers of adopters approved by the local authority. Where matches for children cannot be found within existing provision, placements are sought without delay through the Adoption Register, regional Consortium and national advertising. This mixed economy approach to adoption ensures that children are matched as early as possible, they experience minimal delay and permanence is secured at the earliest opportunity. This approach to adoption is effective for Hartlepool and meets the needs of local children.


The table below outlines the performance of the local authority in relation to the Government's adoption scorecard. Hartlepool Borough Council performs well against the national targets and for the last three years has exceeded the thresholds for performance in adoption.



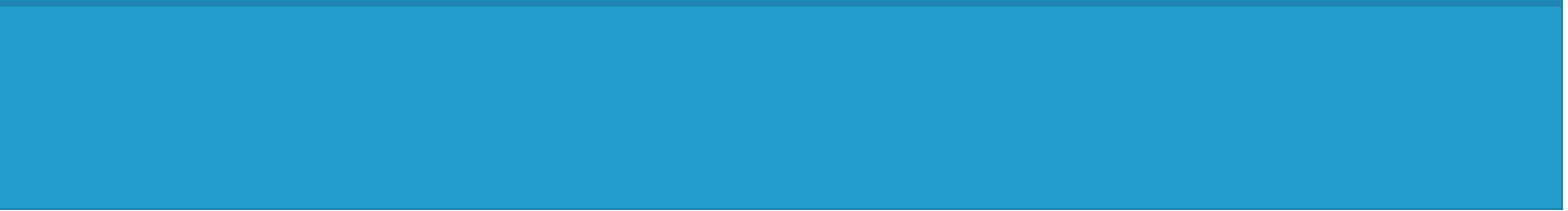


What Will We Do?

- Provide high quality residential care for children looked after who require this type of placement within Hartlepool.
- Implement recruitment strategies for fostering and adoption with a specific focus on sibling groups, teenagers and children with disabilities.
- Implement adoption reforms to increase the number of children leaving care through adoption, increase the number of adopters approved by the Council and reduce timescales for assessment and recruitment of adopters.
- Improve performance in finding permanent families for children and young people looked after.
- Determine commissioning intentions in relation to local residential care with education and specialist residential provision for children with complex needs.
- Develop the provision at Exmoor Grove to ensure the individual needs of all children who are cared for within the home are met, affording privacy and space for those who live there permanently.
- Work in partnership to proactively manage the independent fostering and residential care market to increase placement capacity quality and choice.



Measure of Impact

- Children and young people will experience improved placement stability and have their needs met within their home town area.
 - There will be an increase in the number of foster carers and adopters approved by Hartlepool Borough Council.
 - There will be an improvement in the Hartlepool Borough Adoption Scorecard performance.
 - There will be an increase in placement capacity and the range of placement choice to match children with carers.
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Care Planning for Children and Young People in Care

Vision

The vision of Hartlepool Borough Council is to ensure children and young people in care benefit from stability and security to enable them to live and enjoy a happy secure childhood and become confident adults who achieve their aspirations.

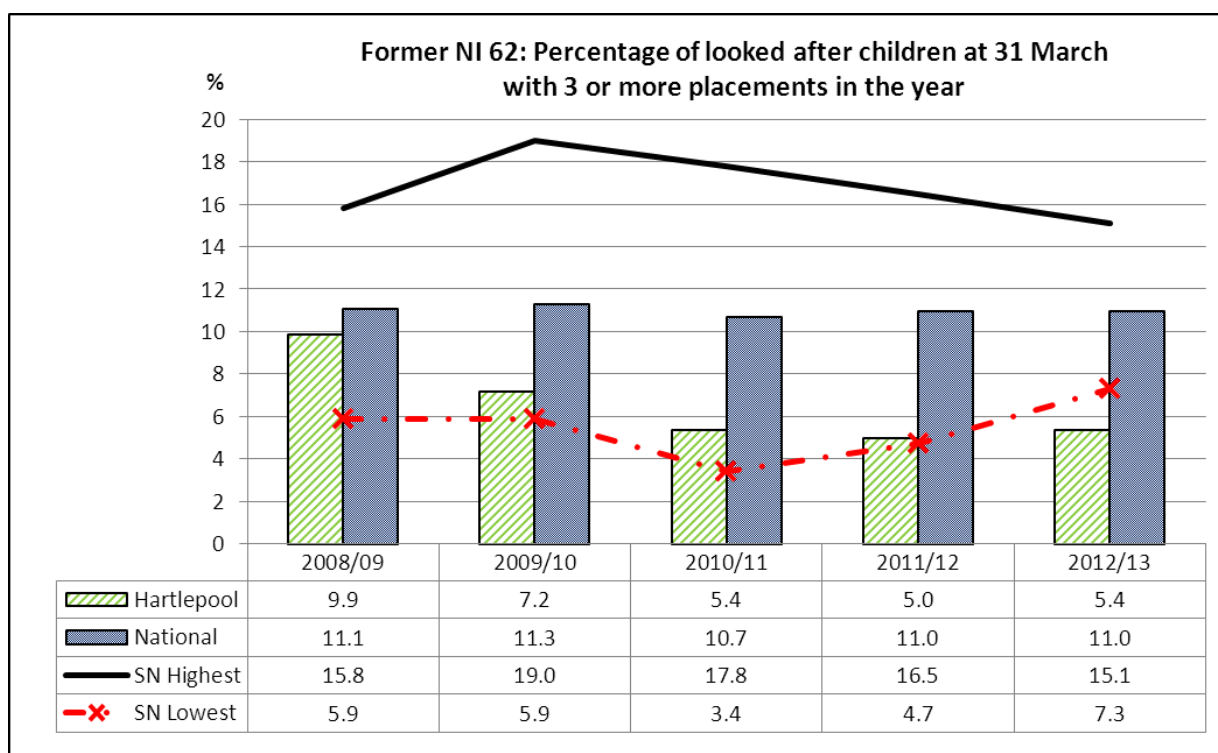
What have we done

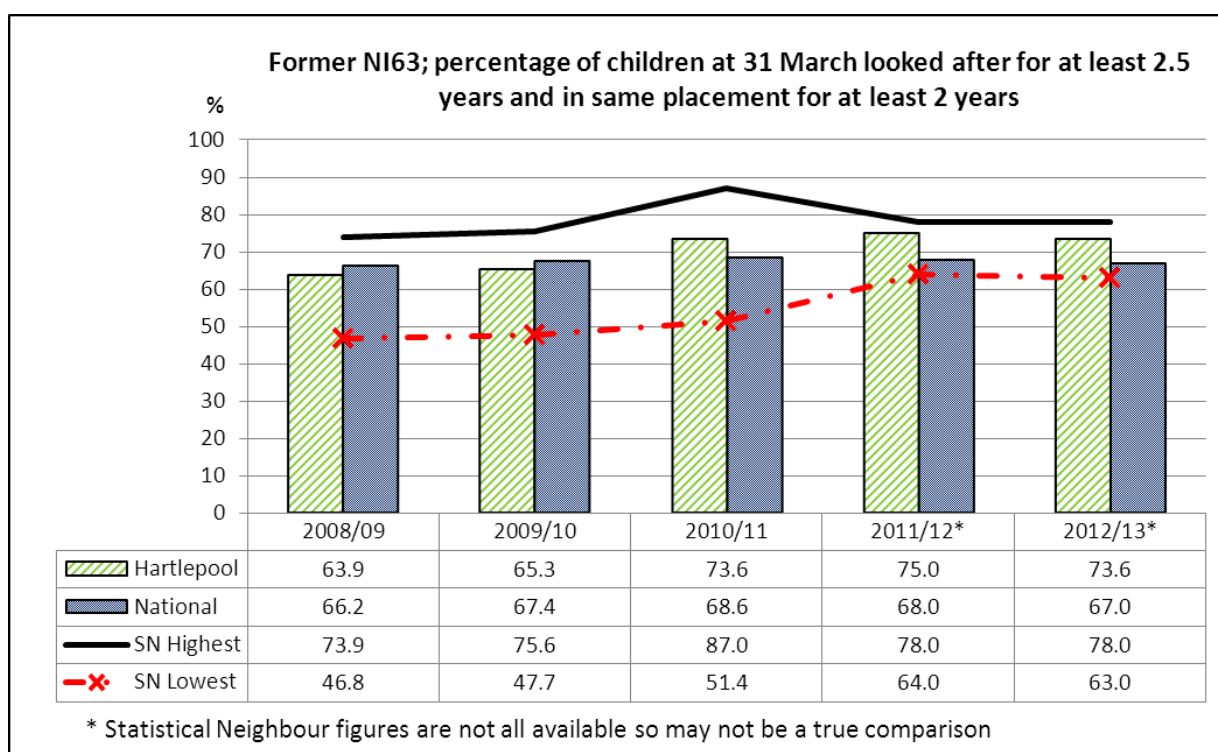
- Implemented a Care Planning Panel which considers all requests for children to become looked after, scrutinising the plan and determining what action is required. It also provides decision making in relation to emergency regulations of connected person placement, Residence Orders and Special Guardianship support and approves the match of permanent foster placement for young people aged 14 years and older. The membership of this panel includes service managers responsible for safeguarding and services for looked after children as well as the Resource Manager and a Legal Advisor to enable appropriate packages of support to be determined.
- Developed an overarching Permanence Policy and Procedure, and policies and procedures in relation to Special Guardianship and Residence Order to enable social workers to make the right decision when planning for the needs of a child.
- Undertaken a review and re-commissioning of Independent Visitor and Advocacy Services for children in care.
- Developed a placement support team to work with children looked after and foster carers where placements are fragile. This multi disciplinary team includes services provided by family support workers, CAMHS/clinician, play and filial therapists, the looked after nurse and an education, employment and training personal advisor.
- Implemented revised Care Planning, Placement and Review regulations.
- Strengthened the role and relationship of the Independent Reviewing Officer as a critical friend in care planning and review arrangements.
- Completed audits in relation to placement stability and drift and delay to inform service development and deliver continuous improvement.
- Developed, in partnership with the Children in Care Council, a Welcome Pack for children who become looked after.
- Developed, published and annually reviewed the Short Break Care Statement for children with additional needs and their families.

- Delivered annual training programme for social workers which focuses on the quality of care plans with an emphasis on the voice of the child being included in the process and underpinned this with regular practice clinics to embed learning.
- Implemented bi-monthly performance clinics for managers which challenge and scrutinise performance in relation to assessments, care planning and review arrangements.

Needs Analysis

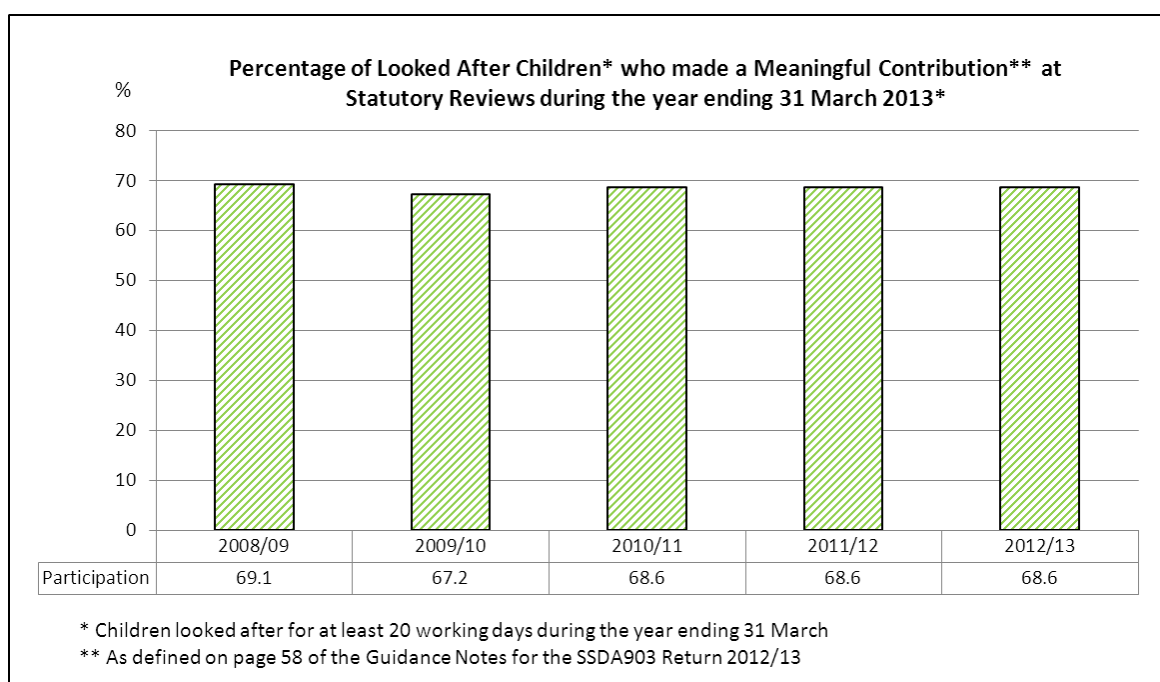
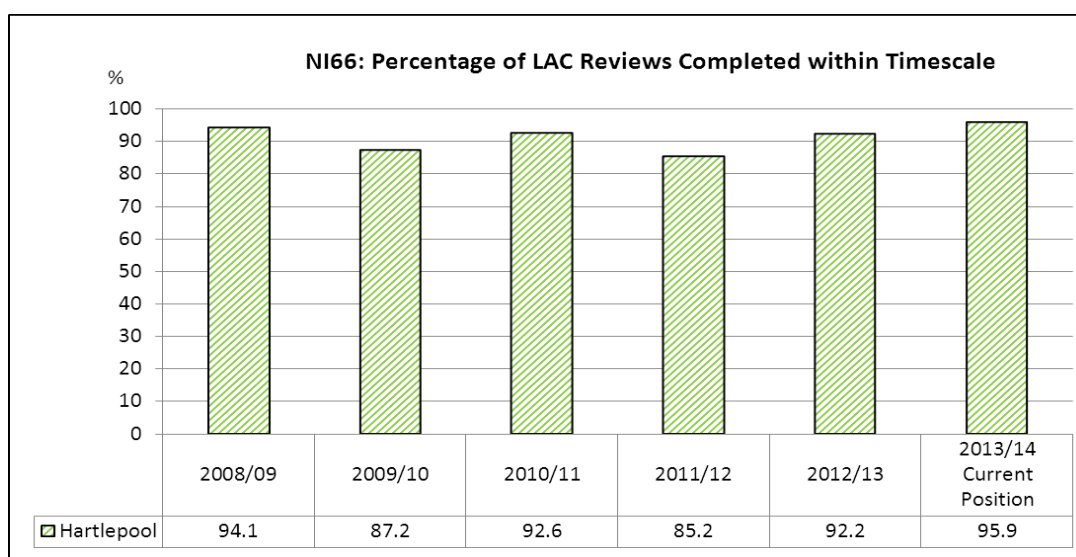
Placement stability has shown excellent performance against the national indicator set. There are two measures in relation to short term and long term stability and in both of these measures performance has been below the target set and in the top performing quartile nationally.






Completion of looked after reviews within timescales shows an improving picture. Timely and responsive looked after reviews are an essential part of planning and decision making for children and vital for securing permanence for children. Where reviews take place out of timescales, the reasons for this are monitored and regularly reported to ensure there is no drift in planning for children.

Performance for children looked after actively contributing to and participating in their looked after review is consistently just below 70%. Increasing meaningful participation and encouraging children to engage in decisions that are made about them is an identified area for development.




What will we do?

- Find permanent families for children without delay.
- Work to continuously improve placement stability for children in care ensuring children receive consistency and continuity of relationships, care, education and health.
- Re-commission independent visitors service working with local voluntary and community sector to deliver a more responsive, effective and localised service.

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- Work with Children in Care Council to review and strengthen voice of child in looked after review arrangements.
 - Benchmark local practice against Government document 'Improving Permanence for Looked After Children once final version published.
 - Develop and implement training and support programme for connected person carers.
 - Improve the quality of care plans in relation to children and young people's participation and evidencing the child's journey.
 - Develop the skills of the children's workforce, in particular, foster carers, social workers and residential child care officers to strengthen their practice in relation to understanding and responding to the individual needs of children.
 - Embed Child Appreciation Days for all children moving to permanent placements.
 - Improve preparation for and post adoption support planning and the range of services to prevent disruption.

Measures of Impact

- Improved performance in relation to short term and long term placement stability and care leavers report positive care experiences.
 - Improved performance against the national indicator set for children looked after.
 - Improved quality of care for children and inspections consistently judge services as being good as a minimum.
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A First Class Education

Vision

Children looked after will be encouraged and helped to achieve success in learning to realise their ambitions. As corporate parents we will be aspirational in supporting children and young people to believe in themselves and aim high.

What have we done

- Created a virtual team to promote the achievement and attainment of children looked after.
- Provided support and challenge to Head teachers, designated teachers and social workers to prioritise educational outcomes for children looked after.
- Monitored pupil progress, achievement, attendance and exclusions of statutory school age children and use this information to identify appropriate intervention for those children who are experiencing difficulties.
- Embedded personal education plans that are led by social workers in partnership with teachers, reviewed each term and document the child's educational journey. Six monthly dip sample quality audits are completed.
- Been a pathfinder and pathfinder champion authority for Special Education Needs and Disabilities.
- Facilitated termly designated teacher meeting.
- Presented annual reports of the Virtual Head Teacher to the Corporate Parent Forum.
- Improved performance in relation to the school attendance of children looked after and reduced exclusions.
- Supported schools to use pupil premium funding effectively to target appropriate support so that the majority of children looked after make more than expected progress from entering care.
- Engaged with local Higher Education Institutes to inspire young people to consider university and deliver training to foster carers.

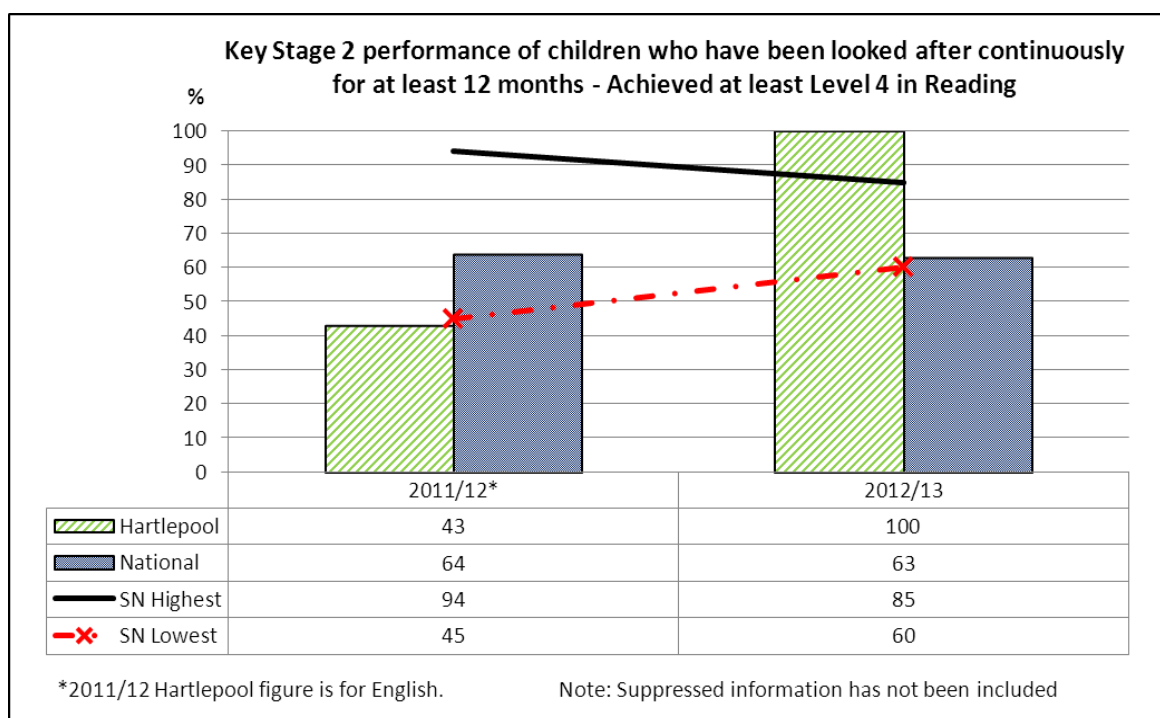
Needs Analysis

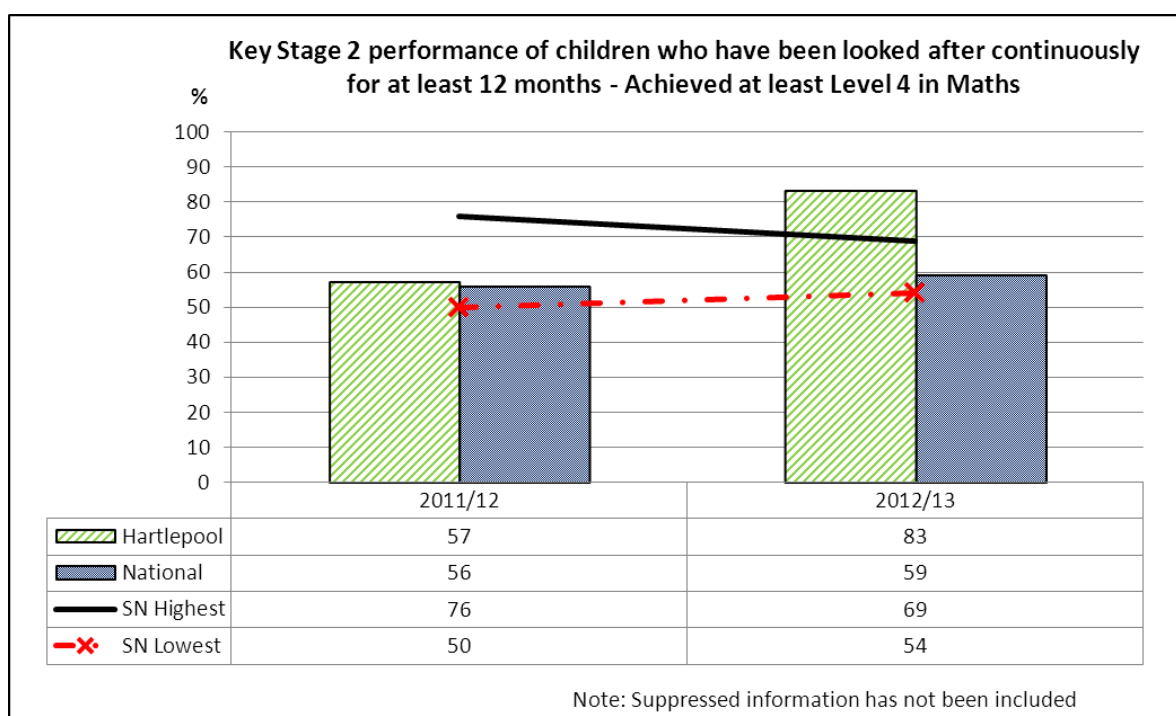
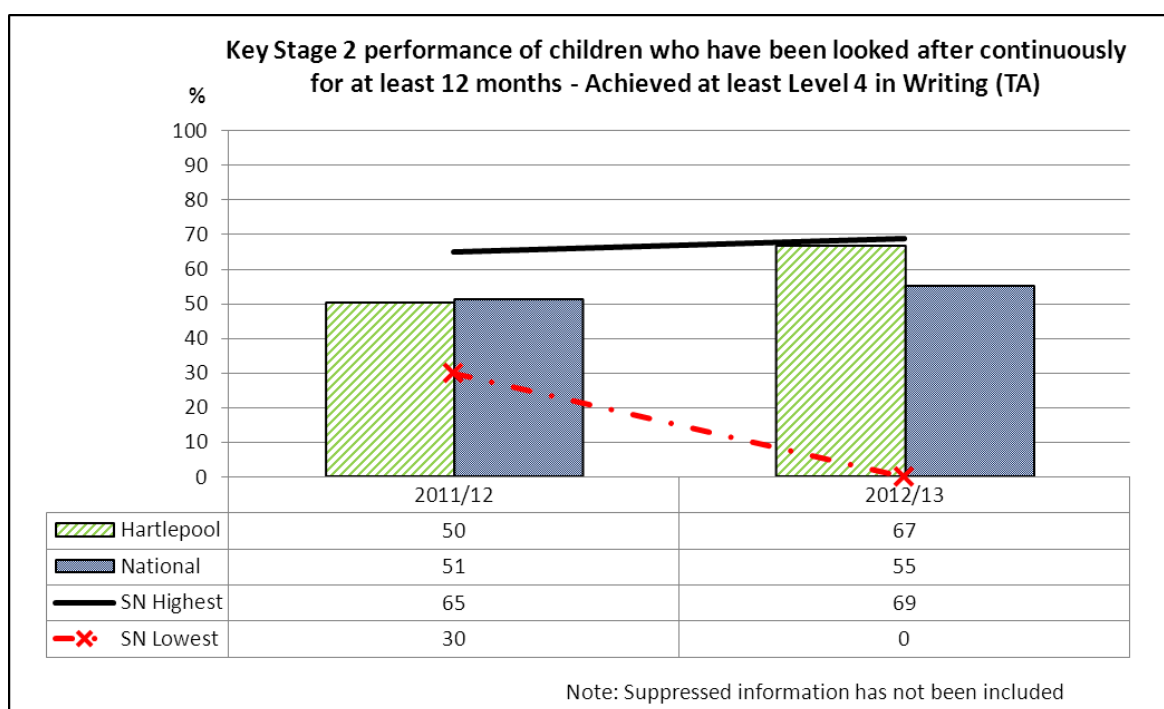
The school attendance of children looked after in Hartlepool has improved over the last three years at a faster rate than both its statistical neighbours and the national average figures.

Over the last 3 years data indicates that on average only 19% of children entering care in Hartlepool were working in line or above national averages. Whilst in care the majority of the children and young people therefore needed to make above average progress in order to reach expected levels and to narrow the gap with their peers. Despite low attainment on entry to care children looked after in Hartlepool make at least good progress and achieve well. Significant numbers of children make better than expected progress from entry to care. During the school year 2012/13 the majority of children in all year groups made at least expected progress based on prior attainment at the end of the previous key stage.

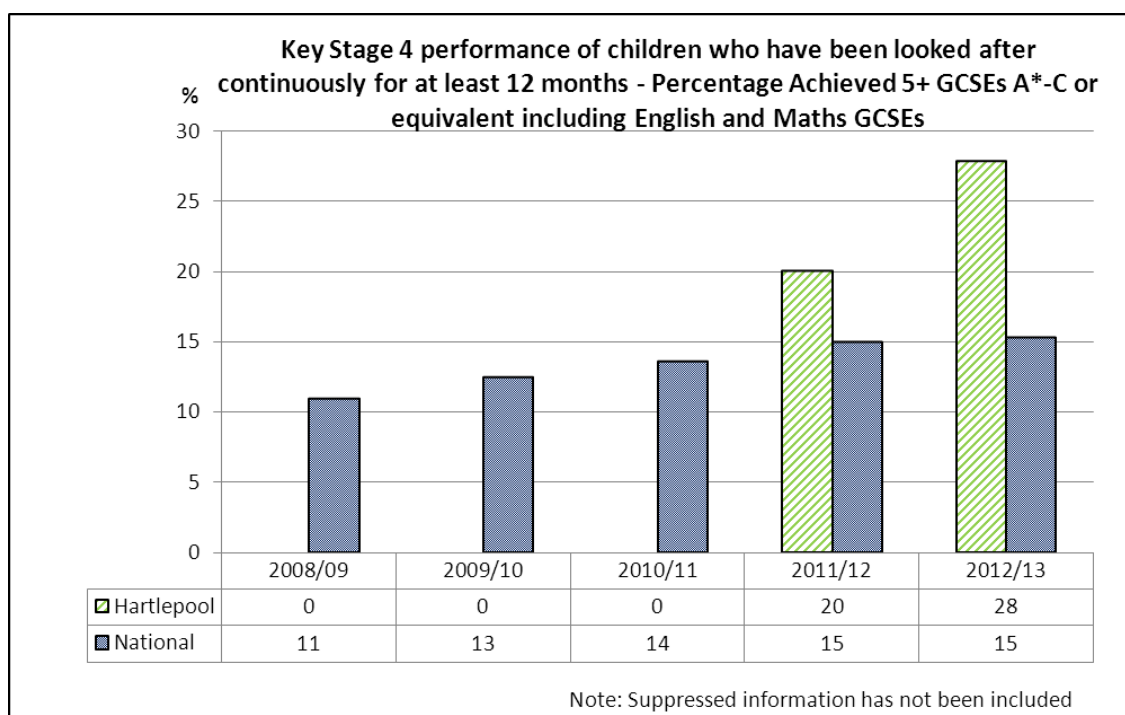
Although the 2013 results show an improving trend over the last 3 years in all subjects, attainment in Key Stage 1 for children looked after is below the national average. However, the gap is closing between looked after children and all Hartlepool children in reading and writing.

At Key Stage 2, the results show an improving trend over the last 3 years in all subjects and the gap has narrowed between Hartlepool children looked after and all Hartlepool children. Attainment at Key Stage 2 for looked after children is in line with the national average.





The 2013 Key Stage 4 results are the best ever recorded for Hartlepool children looked after and show an improving trend over 3 years. The gap between those looked after and all Hartlepool pupils has narrowed for the 5 A*-C indicators. Attainment in Key Stage 4 for children looked after is above the national average.



What will we do?

- Ensure all children attend and receive the highest quality education to reach their potential.
- Improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1.
- Improve the rate of pupil progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4.
- Support all schools to ensure they are judged to be good or outstanding by December 2015.
- Close the achievement gap between looked after pupils and all other pupils.

Measures of Impact

- There will be a further improvement in the attainment and achievement of children looked after and the gap between them and their peers will continue to close.
- There will be an increase in the numbers of looked after and care leavers in further and higher education.

Promoting Health and Wellbeing

The Vision

Children looked after in Hartlepool will enjoy good physical, mental, emotional and sexual health; have access to a range of services to meet their health needs in a timely and responsive manner. Most of these needs will be met through universal provision, however, where it is required, children looked after will have access to specialist services some of which will be delivered by dedicated staff to promote the health and wellbeing of children in care.

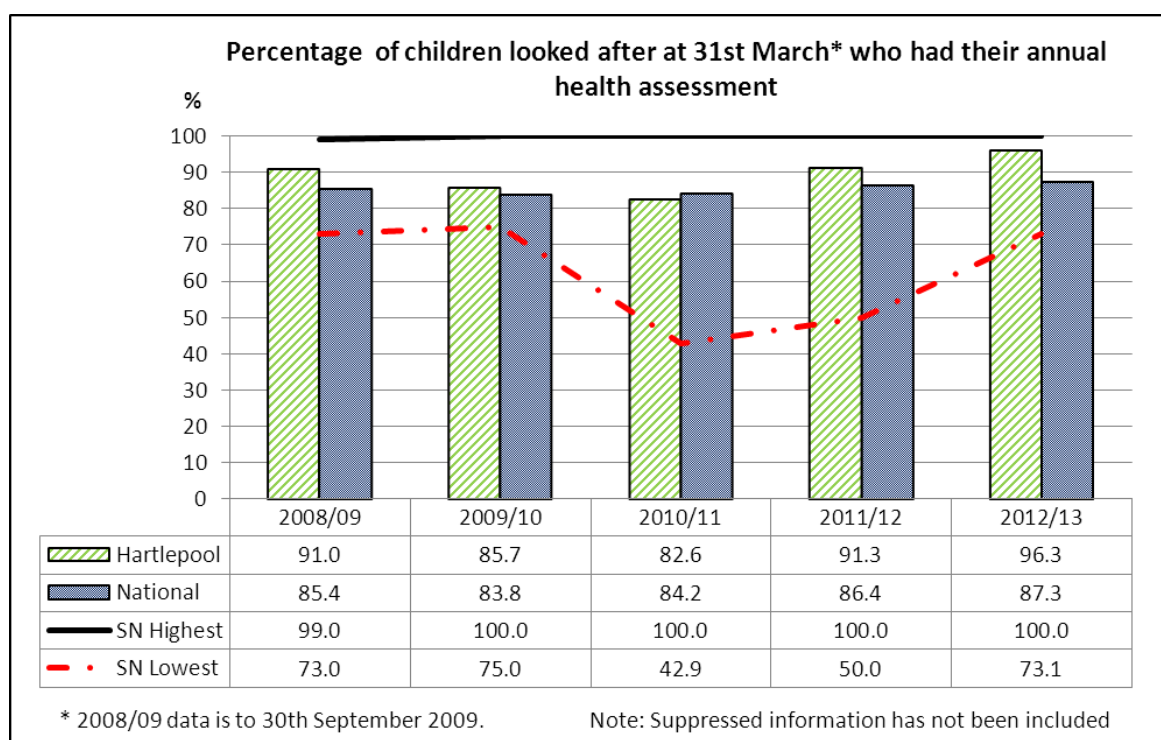
What we have done

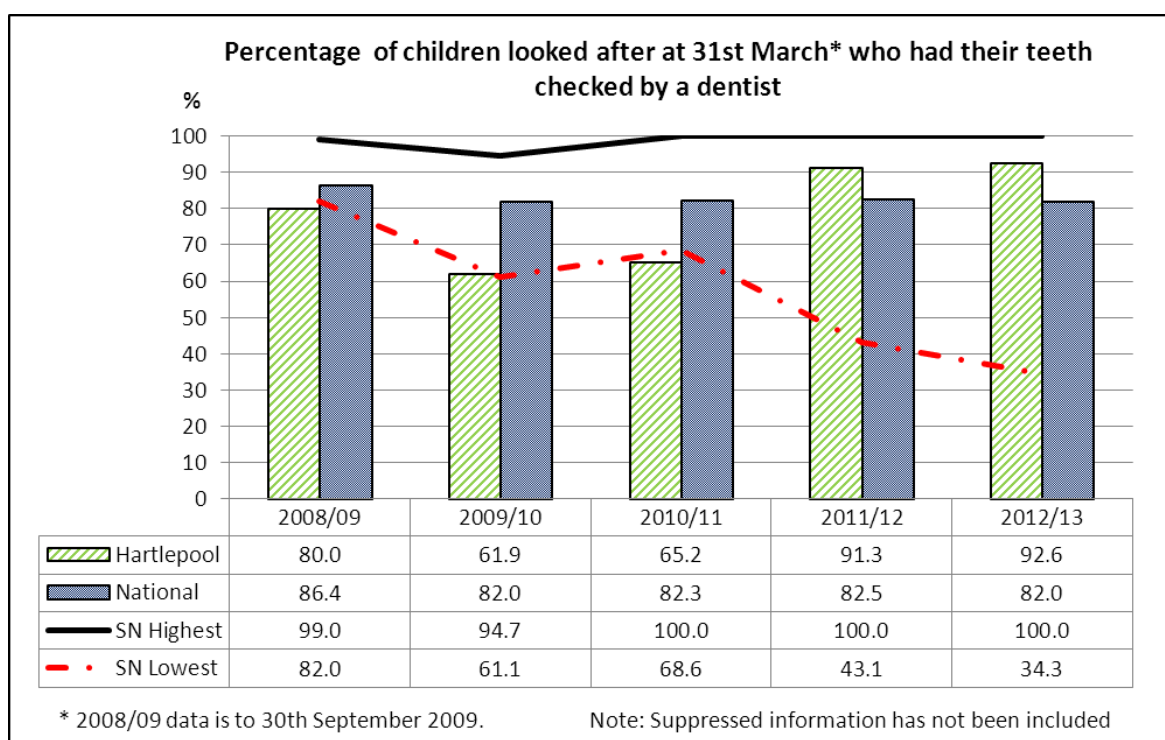
- Developed and implemented a Service Specification in partnership with Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust to deliver dedicated Child and Adolescent Mental Health support for Children Looked After.
- Developed and implemented a dedicated therapeutic team for looked after children that provides amongst other interventions, play therapy, filial therapy and direct work.
- Continued to gather Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires data from carers, teachers and for 2013/14 collect data directly from young people.
- Facilitated training and support to foster carers in relation to attachment theory, filial therapy and how to manage children's emotions and behaviour.
- Proactively ensured that children looked after living outside of Hartlepool have their health needs met.
- Delivered, through the looked after children's nurse, individual, group and drop in services for young people at Number Nine Church Street and in supported housing projects where she is able to prescribe and advise on sexual health issues, smoking cessation and offer appropriate sign posting or facilitate access to dedicated drug and alcohol services.
- Ensured all looked after children and young people are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician.
- Ensured all children receive an initial health assessment upon entering care by a suitably qualified doctor.
- Ensured all children looked after receive either a 6 monthly or annual health assessment depending on their age, which is undertaken by a suitably qualified professional. All children have a dedicated health plan.
- Provided care leavers with access to advice, support and prescribing for smoking cessation, contraception and minor ailments from the looked after children nurse.

- Ensured all children, where there is a plan for adoption, receive a health assessment from a Consultant Paediatrician who is also available to discuss any medical or development concerns with prospective adopters.
- Provided children looked after, care leavers, foster carers and residential staff with free access to swimming and discounted activities available within the council Leisure, Sport and Recreation Services.
- Delivered training to foster carers and children's residential staff on a variety of health topics, including dental health promotion.
- In conjunction with young people developed and implemented a Health Passport.

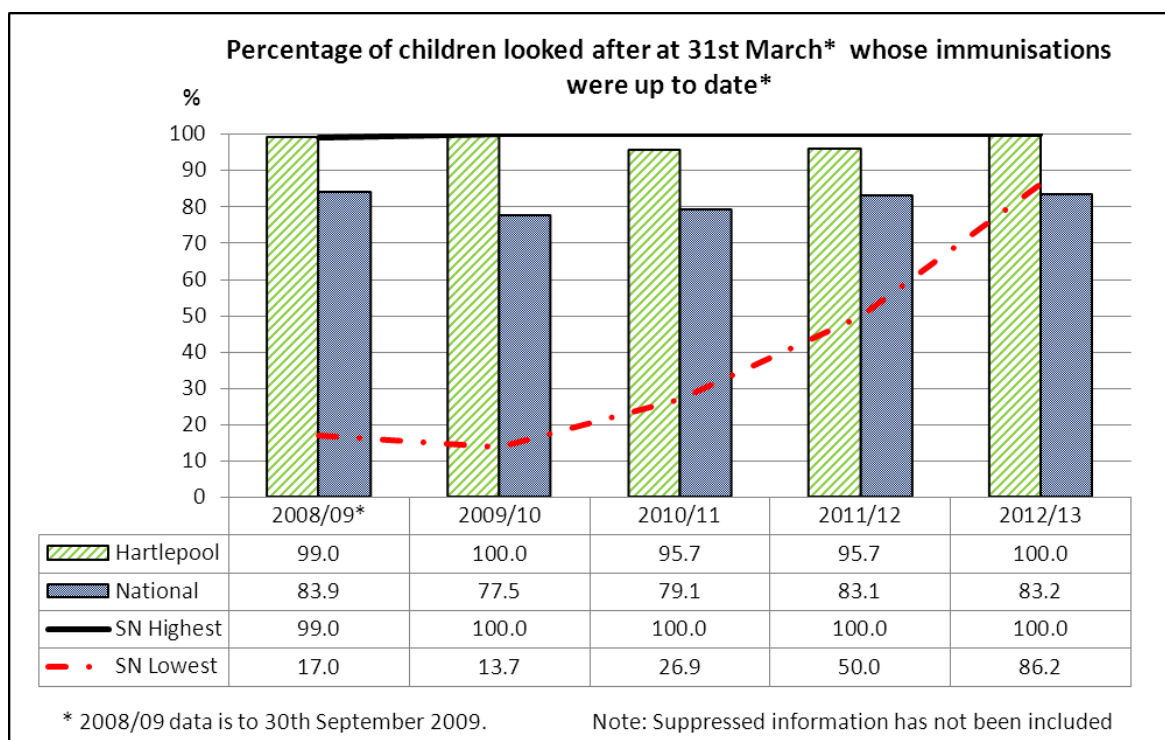
Needs analysis

The number of children who have their annual health assessment in Hartlepool is above the national average and shows good performance. A similar picture emerges when considering performance in relation to dental checks for children looked after.





For children who become looked after, the local authority ensures that any outstanding immunisations are brought up to date realising a 100% performance against this indicator which shows an improving picture over the last three years.



What will we do?

- Ensure that all looked after children receive an initial and review health assessments, are registered with a GP, Dentist and Optician and are up to date with their immunisations. They will have an appropriate, dedicated health plan which is integrated within the child's looked after plan.
- Further embed the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire, with a focus on young people's self reporting and we will ensure that any identified needs are met and services accessed in a timely way.
- Monitor and adapt the service specification with Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust in relation to child and adolescent mental health services to ensure it is meeting the needs of looked after children.
- Implement a training programme for foster carers and residential social care officers to ensure the emotional and mental health needs of looked after children are met.
- Consult with the Children in Care Council, children and young people looked after and care leavers to gather their views on how to further develop health promotion, advice and support.
- Further embed and improve the quality of health passport information in partnership with young people.
- Explore innovative ways of engaging the minority of young people who decline a health assessment.
- Ensure there is an assessment of the emotional needs of children being placed for adoption and this is considered in their adoption support plan.

Measure of Impact

- There will be an increase in the number of children and young people who have an up to date health assessment.
- All children looked after will have up to date immunisations and dental checks.
- All children placed for permanence will have an assessment of emotional health and well being and there will be a decrease in placement disruption.

Care Leavers

The Vision

To support young people who have experienced care to move towards independence at a time that reflects the individual needs of the young person in relation to emotional maturity and coping skills without creating artificial barriers driven by age.

Hartlepool Borough Council is aspirational and inspirational for the care leavers for whom the authority has corporate parenting responsibility. To achieve this, the council must ensure that the aspirations of care leavers are high and services are configured to support young people to achieve their goals.

What have we done

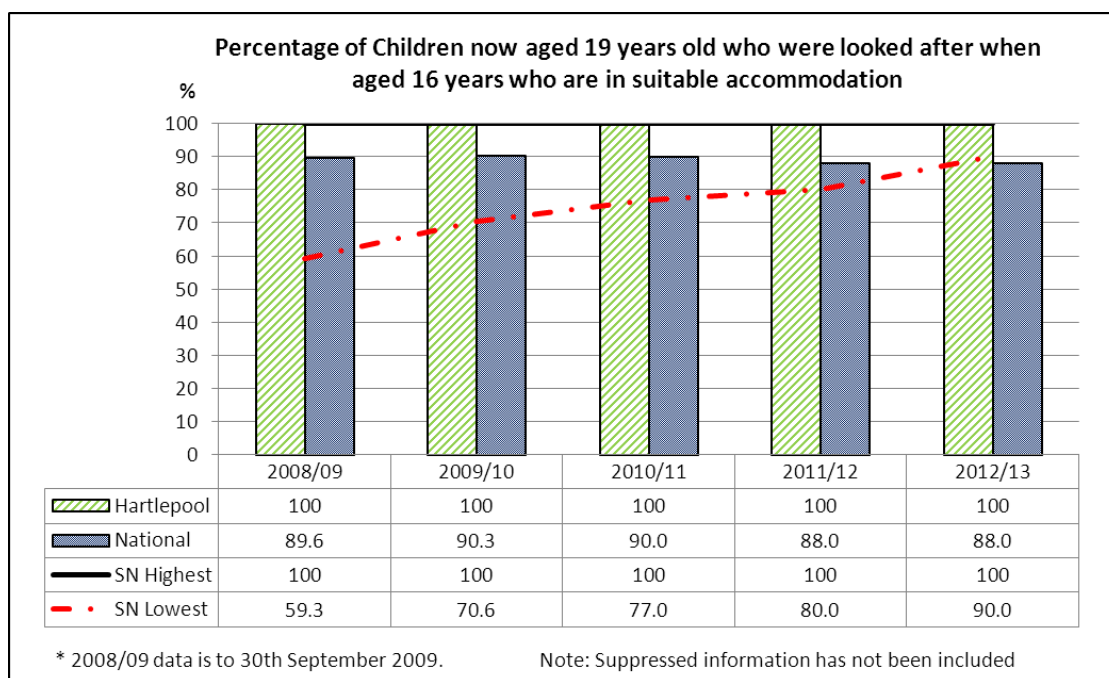
- Developed and implemented a 'Staying Put' policy supporting young people to stay with their carers beyond their 18th birthday.
- Developed a town centre based provision at 'Number Nine' Church Street where young people can access social work support, services from the looked after children's nurse, employment, education and training advice and group work activities for example a young parent and child group.
- Developed supported accommodation at Rose House. Young people told us they wanted 'their own front door' and good quality supported housing. Young people were involved in the tender process for the providers and agreed on the outcomes to be achieved from the provision, Rose House opened in July 2013.
- Employed a care leaver as an apprentice within the Placement Support Team as a participation worker; she was successful in winning an Adult Learners Award both regionally and nationally.
- Worked closely with Economic Regeneration Department to facilitate apprenticeship opportunities across council departments including in schools, the Youth Support Services and the Economic Development Department.
- Participated in the 'From Care to Work' Scheme working closely with National Care Advisory Service.
- Provided financial support to all young people in higher education including the provision of a home base during holiday times.
- Been active members of the Leave Care Benchmarking Forum and two care leavers are members of the Young People's Benchmarking Forum. Hartlepool young people have been actively involved in national work to improve services for looked after children and care leavers.
- Care leavers are active and supportive members of the Children in Care Council.

- Adopted the Care Leavers Charter which was reviewed by the Children in Care Council who decided that Hartlepool's Pledge to children in care and care leavers encompassed the actions within the Care Leavers Charter.

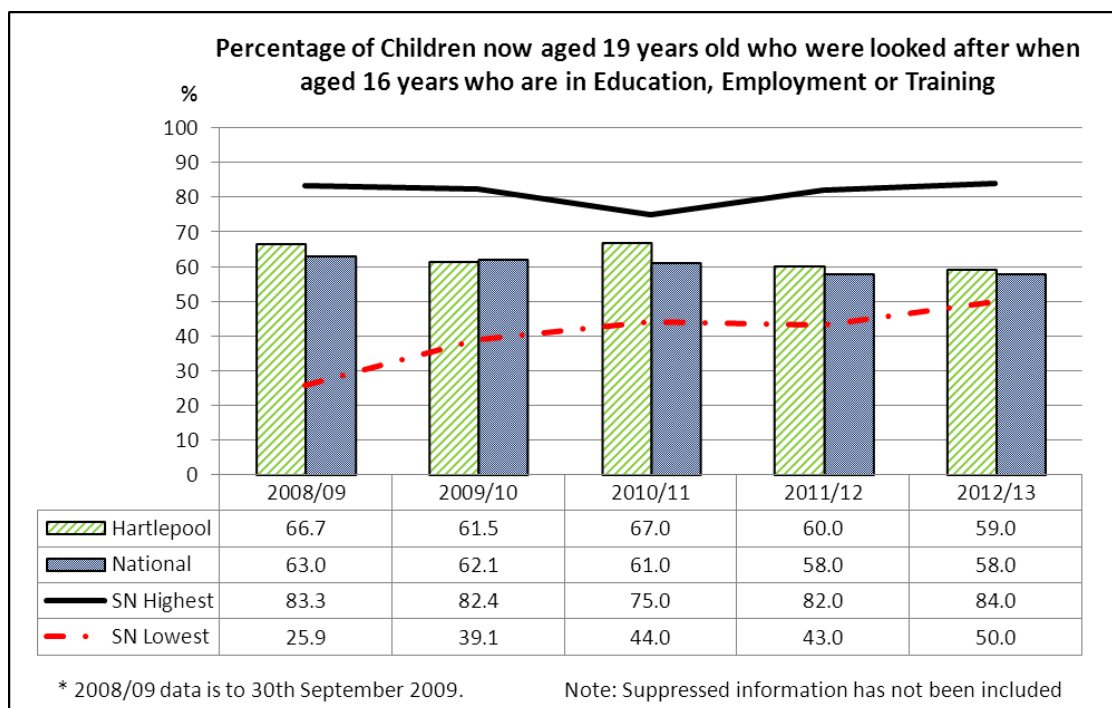
Needs Analysis

Young people leaving care in Hartlepool receive high levels of support which ensures they make successful transitions to adulthood. For the past 5 years Hartlepool has achieved a 100% return for the national indicator in relation to young people in suitable accommodation. This has been achieved through partnership working with the voluntary and community sector and housing providers to ensure care leavers have access to appropriate accommodation suitable to their individual needs.

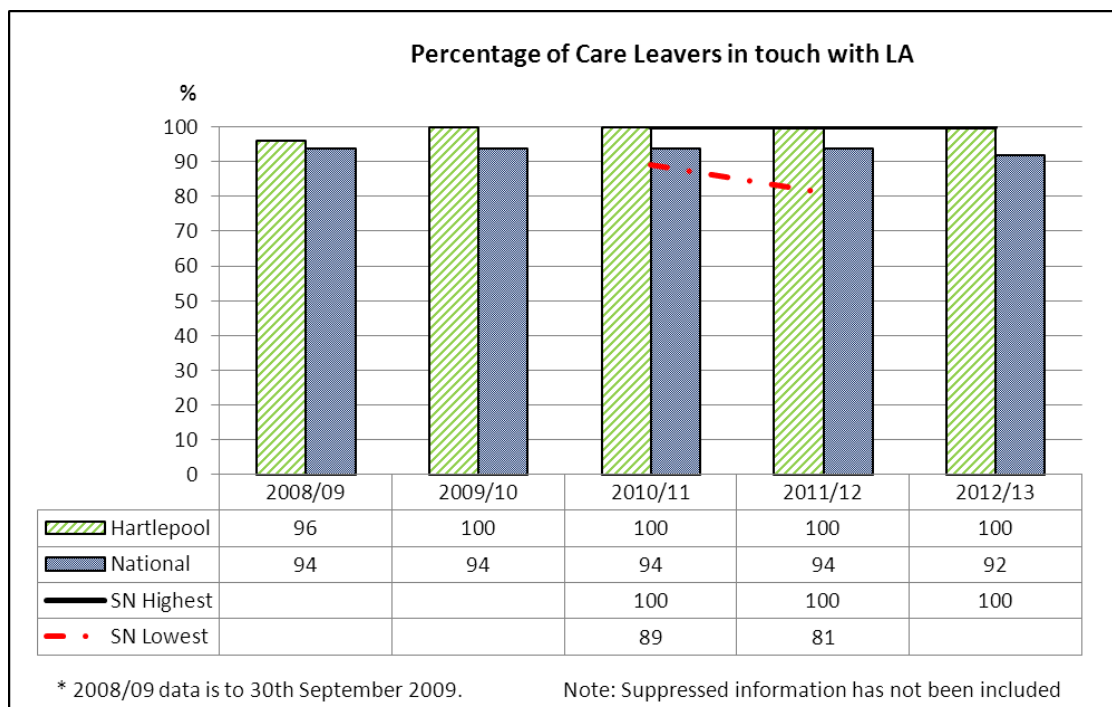
As young people approach adulthood, the priority for the Council is to ensure that children leave care at a time that reflects their individual needs, emotional maturity and coping skills. To this end, the Council has implemented a Staying Put policy which enables young people looked after to remain with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday. Currently, just over 30% of children previously looked after by the Council are supported in Staying Put arrangements.




The proportion of care leavers not engaged in education, employment and training is in line with the national average. Despite the local challenges of very high unemployment, the care leavers in education, employment and training are in line with the average for the local population.



The table below outlines the local authority performance in maintaining contact and support to care leavers on their 19th birthday. Performance has been consistently high for the past four years and is reflective of the cohort as a whole, i.e. those up to the age of 21 years.





What will we do?

- Review and refresh from Care 2 Work Programme.
- Continue to encourage, support and facilitate young people to access further and higher education.
- Ensure all young people are able to stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday.
- Develop and implement post 16 Personal Education Plans.
- Work with housing providers to ensure young people have access to permanent housing in an area of their choice and close to their support networks.
- Deliver support and training to ensure young people are equipped with the practical and financial skills needed in adulthood and that they have emotional support through their transitions.
- Provide opportunities for care leavers to inform and lead service development.
- Complete interviews with young people at key stages through their transition to adulthood.
- Benchmark local arrangements against the government's Care Leaver Strategy to ensure we are meeting their vision and aspirations

Measures of Impact

- Sustained performance in suitable accommodation.
 - Young people will report that they feel encouraged and supported to achieve their aspirations.
 - Young people will report that they felt supported through their transition to adulthood and helped when they made mistakes.
 - Increased numbers of care leavers in further and higher education.
 - Evidence of care leavers impacting on service development.
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