

Medway is Promoting Practice

It's our practice that will make the difference

Medway Council

***Medway Council Looked
After Children Strategy
2018 - 2021***

September 2018



| Contents | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Our Vision for Children’s Services in Medway | 2 |
| Statement from Children in Care Council | 3 |
| 1 Introduction | 4 |
| 2 Values and Principles | |
| 3 Local Context | 5 |
| 4 Key Objectives | 6 |
| 4.1 Provide timely and high quality interventions to help children remain with or return to their families, as long as it is safe to do so | |
| 4.2 Provide and Commission the right mix of Placements | 7 |
| 4.3 Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs | 8 |

| | | |
|------------|---|-----------|
| 4.4 | Ensure that looked after young people achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training | 9 |
| 4.5 | Improve the health and well-being of looked after young people and care leavers | 10 |
| 4.6 | Ensure all looked after young people and care leavers are safeguarded through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time | 11 |
| 4.7 | Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood | 12 |
| 4.8 | Ensure that children looked after and care leaver's views and experiences inform current and future service delivery | 13 |

5. Making the Strategy Work 14

6. Monitoring Progress on the Strategy

7. Action Plan

Appendices 16

Our Vision for Children's Services in Medway

Medway Council holds the highest ambition for all the children and young people under our care and for those young people who are leaving our care. Supporting our children and young people is one of our key priorities and we want to make sure we support all those we care for to the very best of our ability. We want our children to be confident and resilient individuals, successful learners, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Children are best supported to achieve this through resilient families, who in turn contribute to thriving communities. We want all our children to grow up in circumstances where parents or carers provide safe and effective care.

Looked after children/young people are among the most vulnerable in our community. They are unable to live at home with their immediate family, for any number of reasons, and they become looked after by Medway Council. This may be through a voluntary agreement with the child's parents or through a court order. Whatever their journey into care looks like, most looked after children will have experienced some form of neglect, harm or emotional distress in their lives before becoming looked after.

Nationally the outcomes for Children and young people in care are significantly poorer than their peers. Many young people who leave the care of the Local Authority, struggle to make a positive transition to independent living or to gain sustainable employment, training and/or further education. Many are also vulnerable to exploitation and at risk of being criminalised.

These poorer outcomes are related to their experiences that led them to being in care and subsequently intensified by instability, placement movement and disruption whilst in care. A successful transition to independence is inevitably linked both to the quality of the care experience in general and the specific support offered at the point of transition and afterwards.

Medway Council is committed to supporting the young people in its care achieve the best possible start into adult life. Safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility and Medway Council is clear that it has a unique role in the leadership and co-ordination of this locally. All our work will be focused on gaining the best outcomes for those we care for and we will listen to the views of children, ensuring we balance the rights of parents whilst maintaining a focus on the child.

Universal services have an important role in enabling children to thrive and we will work closely with all our partner agencies to improve outcomes through outstanding health services, schools and children's centres. Our local Early Help offer will focus on supporting children and families in

Medway to overcome challenges in their lives, and where necessary seek to prevent a further escalation of concerns.

Our specialist children's services will provide responsive support and intervention for the minority of children who will need to be directly protected from harm and abuse, recognising that children of different ages or with special needs will need a differentiated approach. We will seek to ensure all professionals are clear about their roles and accountabilities so we can in turn be clear to children and their families.

We will support our social workers to be confident and capable professionals, proud of their work and proud to be working in Medway.

We will seek to build an open culture across professional boundaries, where there is an acknowledgement about the uncertainties and risks inherent in safeguarding children, and an absolute commitment to sharing information and to learning together.

Councillor A. Mackness / Ann Domeney

Services

Statement from Children in Care Council

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) continue to support this LAC strategy. Our main objectives are:

Encourage our children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings, which we will take account of

Help our children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners

Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for our children and young people

Support our children and young people to be safe, and enable stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work

Prepare our children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of our children and young people

The above principles will be promoted across all of the Local Authority Services, and with our partners to shape and develop the mind-set and culture of every part of our organisation in how it carries out all of its functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers. Essentially every department and service we provide should hold the highest ambitions possible for our children and young people and respond in a way that acknowledges the individual needs, vulnerabilities or disadvantages of looked after children and care leavers. Ensuring our children and young people are not placed at significant disadvantage when compared with the support a non-looked after child or young person may receive from their family.

The CiCC are committed to monitoring the progress of this strategy and the Corporate Parenting Strategy (*See Appendix 1*) and are keen to be proactively involved in future opportunities to do so.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out how Medway Council will fulfil its role as a Corporate Parent and provide good and effective parenting to children in care and care leavers, which helps them to develop permanent and caring relationships, achieve their potential and improve their outcomes.

This includes doing everything possible to ensure that their time in care is a positive experience, with access to stable placements, good health and education provision, and that they are given every opportunity to develop strong, supportive relationships that extend well in to their adult life.

We are ambitious for our services and for our looked after children and young people and we believe that they deserve the best opportunities we can provide. Over the life of this strategy we will be striving to provide them with the best possible care and support, in placements that are as close as possible to their home, which prepare them to be independent and succeed in their adult lives.

Achieving this goal requires the collective engagement of all parts of the local authority and its partners to work together, under the oversight and governance of our Corporate Parenting Board. It also requires involving children and young people in the decisions being made about them.

This strategy document sets out the values and principles that underpin our work with looked after children and the key objectives that we will need to address in order to achieve this.

It is based on eight objectives, which reflect the key issues impacting on the lives of looked after children, young people and care leavers in Medway:

1. Provide timely and high quality interventions to help children remain with or return to their families, as long as it is safe to do so
2. Provide and commission the right mix of placements
3. Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs
4. Ensure that looked after children and young people achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training
5. Improve the health and well-being of looked after children, young people and care leavers
6. Ensure all looked after young people and care leavers are safeguarded through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time
7. Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood

8. Ensure that looked after children, young people and care leavers' views and experiences

inform current and future service delivery

This strategy is set within the context of national policy, legislation and guidance. Addressing the needs of children and young people from birth to the age of 18, (or 25 where children's services continue to have statutory responsibility) who are, or who may be, looked after by Medway Council.

2. Values and Principles

The successful delivery of this strategy will result in Medway's children and young people who are looked after having the best start in life. It will mean that they are living lives that are healthy and safe, that they are getting the best possible education, feel happy and are progressing into a productive and fulfilling adult life. Above all else we will know we have achieved these goals when children and young people themselves tell us that we have got it right. To this end we will adhere to the following values and principles.

- ❖ We will work honestly and openly with families, involve them in decisions about their children and recognise when they need support

- ❖ In most circumstances, children's needs are best met by being cared for within their families.

We will actively promote family contact unless there are clear reasons why this is not in their interests

- ❖ We will promote the cultural inheritance, religion and racial identity of children in care and challenge racism and discrimination

- ❖ Children should only be in care for the minimum amount of time that is required to make permanent and sustainable plans for them. Permanency planning starts from the decision that a child needs to come into care and continues until the child's future is secure

- ❖ Children are entitled to protection from harm through abuse, neglect or exploitation. We will investigate and assess thoroughly all situations where child abuse is suspected or alleged

- ❖ Children are entitled to be listened to and respected as individuals. We will ensure that children's views and individual needs are considered when making decisions that affect their lives

- ❖ We will aim to reduce the involvement of children and young people in criminal activities and to ensure children are not deprived of their liberty except in exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with legal and departmental processes

- ❖ Young people leaving care should receive positive preparation and support so that they are enabled to participate fully as active citizens once they reach adulthood
- ❖ Disabled children should have the same rights as all other children and the principles above will apply equally to them
- ❖ All social work staff and carers should be appropriately qualified, skilled and supported to do their work

3. Local Context

At the time of writing this strategy there are approximately just under 400 looked after children and young people in the care of the Authority, with a population of approximately 157 young people receiving leaving care services. There were also approximately 340 children and young people on an open Child in Need Plan.

The Medway referral rate in 2017/18 fell to 410 per 10,000 children, from 429 in the previous year.

This rate is significantly below the average rate for England (548), the South East (554) and our statistical neighbours (658). However, following the introduction of the Single Point of Access and the MASH, the referral rate in Medway observed for the first 3 months of 2018/19 has been 512 per 10,000 children, which is much more in line with our comparator groups. Additionally, the

introduction of the Single Point of Access and the MASH has raised our referral rate by around 25% which we should expect to raise our assessment rate by a similar rate. This leads us to an expected assessment rate in 2018/19 of 515 per 10,000, identical to the rate for England and above the South East average.

The children in need rate in Medway in 2017/18 rose to 305 per 10,000 children from 279 in 2016/17. This latest rate is higher than in the South East (303), but lower than England (330) and our statistical neighbours (357). As the DfE's counting rules for children in need include open assessments, we should expect to see a further increase in the rate of CIN in line with our increasing rate of assessments.

Medway's S47 rate in 2017/18 rose to 186 per 10,000 children, from 168 in the previous year. This rate is higher than the average rate in England (157) and the South East (159), but lower than the 216 average in our statistical neighbours. The conversion rate from S47 investigation to CP plan remained at 31%, and is in line with our comparator groups; England (36%), the South East (32%) and our statistical neighbours (33%), and is suggestive that we are undertaking an appropriate number of S47s.

Medway's rate of CP plans in 2017/18 rose to 54.0 per 10,000 children from 49.1 in the previous year. While this figure is higher than both the England (43.3) and the South East (41.3), it is below the rate of our statistical neighbours (56.4).

Our figure of 22% for repeat CP is in line with our comparators; England (19%), the South East (22%) and our statistical neighbours (19%).

In regards to the current needs being presented in Medway, analysis of the previous 12 months of contact and referrals show the most common stated reasons for contact were those of Abuse and Neglect, totalling 48% of all contacts made. The second most common reason was Family Dysfunction and Acute Stress, totalling 24% of all contacts made combined. The sub-categories of contacts made can provide further detail; 21% of all contacts, stated Domestic Abuse as the main reason for contact, with 9% and 8% of all contacts stating neglect and physical abuse as the main reason for contact, respectively. There does not seem to be any significant differential between age groups in regards to reason for contact, with the exception of Socially Unacceptable Behaviour which rose significantly in the 14-17 years age range, which may be reflective of the potential for increased periods of stress which often occur as the young person in the family reaches adolescence. Overall given, the high levels of domestic abuse, resulting in neglect and/or abuse with challenging behaviour are the most common reason for contact.

For a complete breakdown of Medway's demographic and children in care profiles please refer to Medway's Sufficiency Strategy. *(See Appendix2)*

4. Key Objectives

4.1 Provide timely and high quality interventions to help children remain with or return to their families, as long as it is safe to do so

Children's needs are best served in their own families if this can be safely supported. Helping families stay together must therefore be a key focus for all Children's Services. In particular we want to improve the outcomes of children who are disadvantaged and so narrow the gap between their life chances and those who do not experience such levels of disadvantage. Early identification of need and effective early intervention is essential. Early intervention and prevention services can reduce the number of children and young people needing to become looked after avoid repeat entry into care or support them to return safely to their families in a timely manner. To this end Medway has redesigned its Early Help Offer detailed within the Early Help Strategy. *(See Appendix 3)*

In acknowledgement of the levels of neglect experienced within the community, Medway has developed a specific [Neglect Strategy](#). The vision is for Medway to be a place where children are safe from harm in their homes, families and communities. We want to enhance the understanding of neglect, reduce the prevalence of neglect and ensure children experiencing neglect receive timely and effective support.

To achieve this we will focus on:

- ❖ Children having strong and effective parents
- ❖ Enabling young children to be healthy and are ready to thrive at school
- ❖ Improved participation in education (and training/ employment) for those young people leaving secondary education
- ❖ The prevention of harm and keeping children on the edge of care safe from harm
- ❖ The prevention of crime and serious youth violence
- ❖ To secure collective commitment to addressing Neglect across all partner agencies and to demonstrate effective leadership in driving forward the appropriate systems, cultures and processes including the use of the Graded Care Profile (GCP2).

The principles we uphold, in achieving our vision are to promote the wellbeing and resilience of families with children from conception to 17, in a timely way by offering high quality and effective services.

By working together with all the key stakeholders we will ensure individuals and families receive the right support, at the right time in the right place to build resilience and achieve their maximum potential.

Through working in this way we will also seek to;

- ❖ Reduce demand on high need/high cost services – above all by reducing numbers of children whom are looked after by the Local Authority and to support restoration of children to their families
- ❖ Improve outcomes for children, young people and families by ensuring the quality and effectiveness of service provision. This will include consultation with young people and their families to evidence their views about the services being offered and their effectiveness.
- ❖ Improved range of intervention offered via Early Help, Children's Social Care and Partners
- ❖ Target our spending upon priority outcomes, developing a crisis intervention response to prevent unnecessary admission of adolescents

- ❖ Build skills of foster carers to work with natural parents and family members if the objective is return to family
- ❖ To improve the recognition, identification, assessment and intervention for children and young people living in neglectful situations.
- ❖ Work with colleagues and partners to deliver integrated services for shared outcomes: in particular work in partnership and alongside health, education, employment and adult services.

Key success criteria

- ✓ Reduction in the number of children looked after
- ✓ Reduction in the length of time spent in care
- ✓ Increase in numbers of children with a children in need plan.
- ✓ Families report being better supported through earlier interventions

4.2 Provide and Commission the right mix of Placements

We need to be sure that we have the right range of placements to meet the assessed needs of our looked after children as outlined in the Sufficiency Strategy, and offer placement choice. We want to ensure that placements provide quality services and good value for money.

In order to support this we will:

- ❖ Increase the number of good quality foster placements close to Medway through targeted recruitment
- ❖ Ensure the service maximises the use of in house placements, especially for young people with complex and challenging needs, sibling groups, long term care, parent & child and disabled children placements
- ❖ Continue to work with other providers to develop appropriate external
- ❖ placements at lower cost and higher quality
- ❖ Analyse information to better understand the reasons for placement breakdown and plan to reduce frequency
- ❖ Improve sufficiency data and use in planning to meet demand

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Increase in the number of in house foster placements, particularly those able to meet complex needs.
- ✓ Improved performance in relation to the distance of placements from the child's home area.
- ✓ Reduction in placement breakdowns

- ✓ Lower unit costs of placements
- ✓ Increase in availability of supported accommodation

4.3 Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs

Having a clear Care Plan in place is essential for children and young people in care, not only to ensure that they come into and exit care at the right times, but to meet our statutory obligations.

We need to ensure that children do not 'drift' through care, but have clearly-planned processes which allow them to be reunited with family and friends where possible. Providing stable, supported and well matched placements with alternative carers, enabling decisions to be made in a timely manner relevant to their age and development. To ensure young people exiting the care system do so in a timely and positive way at whatever age this happens. When we work with families to provide care with their agreement under S20 of the Children Act, we will ensure these cases are closely monitored and either progress to permanence in a timely way using legal processes appropriately, or that children are supported to return to their families.

In order to support this we will:

- ❖ Plan to increase the number of looked after children who achieve permanence through adoption, special guardianship orders or placement with family and friends (connected carers)
- ❖ Plan to extend placements to care for young people up to age 21 and beyond in appropriate cases, fully implementing the 'Staying Put' scheme
- ❖ Hold monthly Permanence Panels to monitor and track permanence plans and provide staff briefings on our Permanence Policy so all staff are aware of our aims and aspirations for the children we look after
- ❖ Provide practical support for permanence, including training for staff on attachment and life story work which will be undertaken with all children and young people at an age, pace and time that is appropriate for them.
- ❖ Explore peer-mentoring schemes using care leavers for other children and looked after young people to support young people where their placements may be challenged, to support placement stability.

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Percentage increase of children looked after in permanent placements including SGOs
- ✓ Improved performance in adoption

- ✓ Plans are clear with all actions set against the identified needs and desired outcomes set within a specific timescale, with progression clearly shown.

- ✓ Reduction in the proportion of CP cases open longer than 12 months

4.4 Ensure that looked after young people achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training

Children in Care are amongst the most vulnerable in our society and are at risk of achieving poor outcomes and failing to meet their potential. Our aim is to narrow the gap between children and young people in care and all children in educational achievement, health outcomes, criminal behaviours, and employability.

The Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) and a Board of Governors will support the Medway Virtual School.

Their role is to champion the attainment of young people and the provision of high quality support according to assessed needs. All Medway schools have a Designated Teacher responsible for meeting the needs of looked after young people in their school and the VHT has established links with every Designated Teacher.

To support the educational attainment of looked after young people we will:

- ❖ Provide additional tuition to support attainment where required and identified in the child's PEP, fully utilising the Pupil Premium
- ❖ Ensure the right educational setting is chosen for each young person, according to their individual assessed needs maintaining as far as possible the child's current school placement.
- ❖ Ensure young people are placed in schools rated by Ofsted as good or better depending on their assessed needs and in accordance with the recommendation of the VHT. Where the grade of a school changes we will record on file whether the VHT recommends a change of school or not, and how the young person can be supported to achieve at that school
- ❖ Promote joint working between all schools, colleges and academies in Medway and ensure each child has clear and realistic progress targets.
- ❖ Foster carers will be supported to create a suitable environment to learn and to engage proactively with schools to secure the young person's attainment

- ❖ Ensure that looked after children, young people and care leavers are supported to achieve their full potential at any age and that they maintain comparable results and progress to their non-looked after peers.
- ❖ Each young person aged 16-18 will have a PEP regardless of their educational setting and we will continue with our engagement with the Care2Work scheme to increase internal and external apprenticeships, traineeship and work opportunities for young people
- ❖ Ensure all children in care are supported to set up savings accounts, including those in externally commissioning placements

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Higher percentage of children and young people in schools or educational facilities graded as good or above
- ✓ Reduction in persistent absence and overall absence
- ✓ Reduction in the number of children changing school when they become looked after or following a change of placement
- ✓ Numbers of children with compliant and good quality PEP
- ✓ Improvement in the percentage of children leaving care who are in education, employment or training

- ✓ Increase in the percentage of young people achieving 5A*-C including English and Maths at GCSE in all placements
- ✓ Narrow the gap at Key Stage 4 between those looked after and their peers
- ✓ Ensure that all children receive a minimum of 25 hours education
- ✓ Reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions

4.5 Improve the health and well-being of looked after young people and care leavers

Positive emotional wellbeing (which includes mental health) is fundamental to improved physical and cognitive development, better relationships with family members and peers and a smoother transition to adult independence. However in today's fast-paced, ever-changing society, young people are faced with increasingly complex lives and a diverse set of challenges. For some children and young people, this can lead to emotional problems and mental ill health. Evidence shows that children and young people entering and leaving care have poorer health outcomes than their peers. To this end Medway Council working with the Medway CCG and our partner agencies have developed the [Medway Local Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing](#). Our objective is to support children and young people to have a healthy lifestyle and

access to good quality health and emotional care when needed, in a location and format that best suits their identified needs.

To achieve this objective we will:

- ❖ Ensure that health assessments are completed in a timely manner and in ways that engage young people, and that all care leavers have an up to health history and health plan
- ❖ Improve young people's awareness of the importance of good health and ensure that physical and emotional health are key areas for review in LAC reviews and monthly audits
- ❖ Support young people to make positive choices about the use of contraception and sexual health services.
- ❖ Ensure specialist assessment of our most vulnerable children and young people's emotional wellbeing needs including looked after children (children in care), care leavers, children and young people in transition, young offenders, children with disabilities and children and young people who have been the victims of sexual abuse and are at risk of developing harmful behaviours
- ❖ Provide support for young people in partnership with police and youth justice colleagues to divert them from criminal activity

- ❖ Support the whole family in relation to emotional wellbeing, helping parents/carers to build resilience within the family, identify early signs of problems and to access expert advice and support
- ❖ Develop emotional wellbeing services in children’s centres, primary and secondary schools and community settings
- ❖ Ensure those working with children and young people have skills and confidence to identify, seek advice and respond appropriately to emotional wellbeing issues through a multi-agency workforce development programme
- ❖ Develop a clear and joined up emotional wellbeing pathway with qualified, supervised mental health practitioners available through a single point of access to assess underlying needs and potential risks at the earliest possible stage before recommending support options

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Children, young people and families receive information as and when they need it and in the best way(s) for the child /young person. This means the child or young person can make

informed decisions/choices at all stages of their life and feel listened to and valued

throughout the process.

- ✓ Children, young people and families report an increased ability to cope with future problems and know where to go to get help if they need it.
- ✓ Children and young people consistently see the same team of people who work with them and get to know them.
- ✓ Children and young people are supported to feel confident and to develop their own goals based outcomes.
- ✓ Children and young people experience improvements in their emotional wellbeing and mental health using appropriate clinical measures.
- ✓ There is a reduction in the number of A&E presentations for mental health and self-harm
- ✓ There is a reduction in the number of children and young people who are admitted to Tier 4 hospitals for mental health
- ✓ Fewer young people misuse drugs and alcohol following engagement with the service.
- ✓ Young people reduce their drug and alcohol use following engagement with the service.
- ✓ Young people reduce harmful and risky behaviour following engagement with the service

4.6 Ensure all looked after young people and care leavers are safeguarded through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time

Children’s Social Care places the safety and well-being of its young people at the forefront of everything we do. We want nothing but the best for our young people and that includes keeping them safe from those who would exploit or abuse them. We have clear safeguarding policies and processes which will be delivered to all staff to ensure social work assessment and intervention tools available in Medway are known and applied. Medway has also reviewed and launched a new [Medway Inter-Agency Threshold Criteria for Children in Need](#).

To ensure that we continue to develop and expand our services and expertise to keep young people safe we will:

- ❖ Thresholds are clearly understood and used by all agencies and partners when working to safeguard children and young people
- ❖ Ensure that all staff are supported and trained to recognise young people who are being sexually exploited or who are vulnerable to being exploited:

- ❖ Assessments are timely, informed by history, capture risk and action to reduce risk. Inform a purposeful plan, SMART.
- ❖ Work with partner agencies to ensure that they have in place good safeguarding policies which encompass sexual exploitation and which ensures that where there are known risks about specific young people these risks are shared in a timely manner with the appropriate action taken.
- ❖ Strengthen independent return to home interview process to improve engagement of young people. Analysis of information gained from the return interviews held to help identification of potential to inform intervention to reduce risk
- ❖ Expand the At Risk Panel remit to cover gangs and exploitation and include other areas of risk, agreeing purpose and processes and how the panel links to and communicates with other relevant bodies, partners, agencies etc.
- ❖ Update Policy and Process for Children going missing from Home, Care and School

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Safeguarding contacts and referrals are concluded in a timely manor including those processed through the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- ✓ Enhanced multi-agency working on contextual safeguarding issues evidenced through multi-agency safety plans
- ✓ Reduction in the number of young people known to be at risk of sexual or other forms of exploitation
- ✓ Increase in the number of children and young people who report feeling safe in their placement
- ✓ Improved range of intervention offered via Early Help, Children's Social Care and Partners
- ✓ Increased uptake of return home interviews
- ✓ Increase in the number of carers (including those from commissioned services) who have attended relevant training

4.7 Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood

All young people need to be able to develop practical, social and emotional skills in order to live independently. Young people in care are particularly vulnerable and will need additional support to make this move. Important requirements of successful transition are access to suitable accommodation, and engagement in education, training and employment. As Corporate Parents, Medway Local Authority holds the highest ambition for all the children and young people under our care and especially for those young people who are leaving our care. We know that it is a big step to

move out of care and start living independently or with friends, but that doesn't mean, when a young person leaves our care we have stopped caring. Supporting young people exiting out of our care is one of our key priorities and we want to make sure we support all care leavers to the very best of our ability.

It is our ambition for every care leaver to make a successful transition into independent living and have the stability and security they need to progress and develop in all aspects of life. We believe care leavers should be provided with a safety net when they fail or make mistakes and they should be equipped with the necessary social skills, emotional resilience and practical skills to make a successful transition into adulthood and independent living. This will be achieved in line with Medway Council's Care Leaver Strategy and Care Leavers Offer. *(See Appendix 4)*

To support young people make a successful transition to adulthood and independence we will:

- ❖ Ensure young people have access to the good quality accommodation with support and assistance according to their assessed needs
- ❖ Listen and hear the voices of our Looked after Children and Care Leavers to influence the development of services into the future
- ❖ Ensure that Care Leavers are knowledgeable about their entitlements, through the Local Authority website, the Care Leavers Charter and comprehensive guides to leaving care

- ❖ Re-launch the Staying Put Policy to social workers, PA's, SSW's, IROs and foster carers
- ❖ Support care leavers to access employment, traineeships and apprenticeships
- ❖ Support foster carers to teach independent living skills and see this as an integral part of their role
- ❖ We will enable Care Leavers to access health services wherever they live, particularly during the transition period and between the ages of 18 and 25 for young people who have Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND)
- ❖ Review the existing Leaving Care Service to meet the needs of care leavers in line with the local Care Leaver Offer and national statutory legislative duties

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Increase in percentage of care leavers aged up to 21 in suitable accommodation
- ✓ Increase in percentage of care leavers aged up to 21 in employment, education or training
- ✓ Increase in capacity of supported accommodation
- ✓ Increase access to health services including mental health and well-being services
- ✓ Increased support for those care leavers aged 21-25yrs

4.8 Ensure that children looked after and care leaver's views and experiences inform current and future service delivery

Listening to the views of children and young people, and involving them in decisions about their lives is an important part of the work of all professionals involved in caring for children and young people. We actively seek input from our young people and this is evidenced through a range of opportunities including attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board, an invitation to the Chair of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to address full Council, senior officer attendance at the CiCC and a range of workshops with young people. In addition the creation of as many opportunities as possible for children and young people to be engaged, including the use of MOMO and other such engagement mechanisms is a key objective.

Our ambition is to ensure that not just the voice of young people but their experiences are captured in our assessments, plans and audits and that all staff within Children's Social Care and our partner agencies actively consider the voice and experience of young people within all aspects of their work.

To achieve this we will:

- ❖ Develop a range of young person friendly mechanisms using social media where possible to enable young people, including younger children and those with disabilities, to provide feedback about their experience of being looked after by Medway and their wishes and feelings about their future

- ❖ Ensure that the voice and experience of young people is explored during supervision and that is a key part of all case audits. Feedback from these audits will be reviewed at a management level to ensure that training and development opportunities are developed as required
- ❖ Ensure that the information provided to young people when they become LAC, at their first LAC review and at subsequent LAC reviews actively addresses their rights including how to obtain support and how to make a complaint
- ❖ Utilise the information from complaints and representations and feedback from parents to support service development and improvement. We will review on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints received across CSC to ensure that learning is shared across the service
- ❖ Consult more with the parents of looked after young people
- ❖ Work with our partners in Commissioning to ensure that the Advocacy service reaches looked after young people and care leavers as required, and develop peer-mentoring services for looked after young people and care leavers.

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Increase in the percentage of children and young people who actively contribute to their reviews and increase attendance at their conferences
- ✓ Strengthening constructive challenge on behalf of children at all management levels.
- ✓ Evidence that children and young people are aware of and know how to use the complaints process
- ✓ Monitoring of complaints made by children and young people
- ✓ Increase in percentage of audits that are judged good or better in relation to the recording of the views of children and young people
- ✓ Extend the ways we engage with children and young people both in practice and to support service review, design and innovation

5. Making the Strategy Work

Making the strategy work will require not only the development or improvement of services but also ensuring that planning is based on good, accurate information, key data, professional intelligence and judgement. Ensuring professionals are held to account and that the governance and oversight by the Corporate Parenting Board is effective in maintaining and improving required outcomes for

our children and young people and their families and carers. The strategy should be clearly communicated to all who have an interest, and who it affects.

The key elements which will need to be in place to make the strategy work are:

- ❖ Good management information and localised data about the current needs and predicted levels of demand. This information can be used to identify emerging trends, service effectiveness against the required outcomes and opportunities for new and innovative services
- ❖ Effective structures for the engagement with the views of children & young people in care, including those in younger age groups, and those with specific needs and disabilities.
- ❖ Review of the strategy and action plan at the internal Children's Services Delivery Board and at Children's Social Care Management Team meetings to ensure compliance with targets.
- ❖ Engagement of the Children in Care Council in all key decisions effecting our children and opportunities for innovation

6. Monitoring Progress on the Strategy

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) chaired by the Lead Portfolio holder for Children's Services will monitor and review this strategy. The CPB will review progress against the key success criteria and present progress annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Cabinet.

All partners should be supported to recognise their role in implementation, through leadership, communication, and supervision to promote good care planning practice, and clear accountability frameworks.

Ongoing engagement with children and young people is key to ensuring that our strategies and policies are child-centred.

7. Action Plan

Where it is traditional to feature a particular Action Plan for this strategy the aims and objectives contained within this strategy span, as you can see, a wide range of strategies. If you then include the various inspections and peer reviews that have been conducted in the last 6 months, there are over 200 identified actions that are currently in focus working to improve services to the children, young people and families of Medway.

In light of the above a comprehensive Delivery Plan has been drawn together identifying the major service improvements ongoing at this current time. This Delivery Plan is reviewed bi-monthly by the Children's Services Delivery Board, chaired by the lead member and Chief Executive of the Council. It is this Delivery Plan that is the driving force of this strategy, enabling the progression and development of services and innovation in Medway.

All of which will serve to make Medway a place where children, young people and families can thrive and achieve the best possible outcomes for both themselves and the communities they live in.

END

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Corporate Parenting Strategy

Appendix 2 - Sufficiency Strategy

Appendix 3 - Early Help Strategy

Appendix 4 - Care Leaver Strategy & Care Leavers Offer