

# **York's Strategy for Children who are Looked After [2016-2020]**

*including children on the edge of care, children who are adopted,  
and Care Leavers*

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## Foreword

Welcome to York's new Strategy for Children who are Looked After.

Since we published our last Strategy in 2012, York has made enormous progress in this area. There are more details in Chapter 4, but the highlights include: a significant reduction in the overall numbers Looked After (below 200 at the time of writing), improvements in the stability of placements, better health and educational outcomes, and excellent work with those leaving care.

Most important of all, the children themselves tell us that, in the vast majority of cases, their placements are of good quality and that they feel safe.

We should be proud of this performance, which would be the envy of many cities.

And yet no organisation or individual who has been associated with the production of this new Strategy believes that we should stand still. Far from it, we want to refresh and re-energise our work with Children who are Looked After - and with their families. Our Vision and our Strategic Goals have not changed - but the way we are going to approach them will be very different from 2016 onwards. This strategy introduces five new *strategic themes* that are deliberately intended to challenge and inspire everyone who works with such children. We have also set ourselves some ambitious new targets and milestones.

It could be said that our present work with Children who are Looked After is "good enough". But our mantra in York is that "*good enough is not good enough*". We should be doing much better than this. We want the very best for every single Child who is Looked After - just as we do for our own children. This Strategy sets out how we will achieve this.

[Co-signed by:

Cllr Jenny Brooks  
Steve Stewart  
Jon Stonehouse]

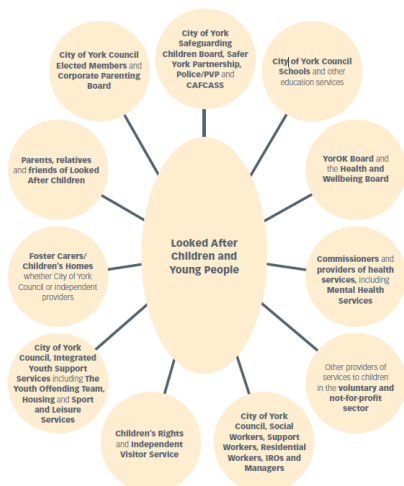
## The new Strategy on a Page

Our vision for York’s children and young people who are Looked After is the same as that for any other child in the city: *we want the very best*. In other words, we want our children and young people to have everything that good parents want for their children: to be happy and healthy, safe and protected, and supported each step of the way to adult life.

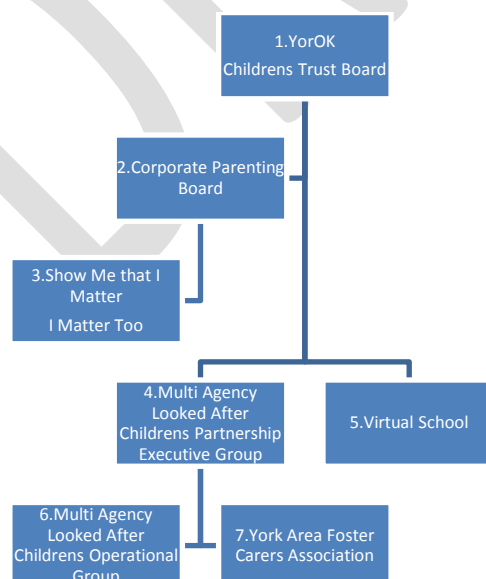
Strategic Outcomes	Things we still need to do	New Strategic Themes	New Strategic milestones	Measures and Stretch Targets
Respect and Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistency and accessibility of caseworkers</li> <li>Involvement work with Care Leavers</li> <li>Responding consistently</li> <li>Recording casework</li> </ul>	<p><b>Normality</b></p> <p><b>Ambition</b></p> <p><b>Trust</b></p> <p><b>Accountability</b></p> <p><b>Efficiency</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Every child placed outside the city reviewed and - where in their best interests - brought back</li> <li>New vision, roles and responsibilities for foster care in York</li> <li>New protocol for contact with birth families</li> <li>Remodelled support team</li> <li>Revised data-sharing arrangements</li> <li>New scorecard, taking account of MOSAIC</li> <li>New governance arrangements, especially the role of the Corporate Parenting Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No child placed outside York other than in exceptional circumstances</li> </ul>
Good, Safe Placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placement stability still too low...</li> <li>...especially 3 or more placements</li> <li>Increase numbers and skills of Foster Carers...</li> <li>...and plan for an ageing workforce</li> </ul>			
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We could be doing more work with birth families</li> </ul>			
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We need to respond to young people’s views, especially around the use of jargon</li> </ul>			
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attainment still well below optimum...</li> <li>Need 100% PEP completion, and improvements in their quality</li> <li>Need wholly to embed the Virtual School</li> </ul>			
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dental checks still too low</li> <li>Need to benchmark all health outcomes against comparators</li> <li>Self-harm still an issue</li> <li>Explore a “Virtual Clinic”</li> </ul>			
Emotional Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to work with new CAMHS provider</li> <li>Data in this area still too limited</li> </ul>			
Moving to Adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EET rate still below optimum</li> <li>Could we do more, as a city, to promote apprenticeships and other opportunities?</li> </ul>			
Corporate Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrangements need review to ensure Member accountability is meaningful</li> </ul>			

## About the Strategy - scope, content and ownership

This strategy has been produced by the Executive of the Multi-Agency Partnership for Children Looked After in York (MALAP). References to "we" in the document should be taken to mean all of the Agencies who are represented on MALAP. A full list of Members, current at the time of writing, is at **Annex C**.



MALAP is answerable to York's Children's Trust, known as YorOK, and through them to the Health and Wellbeing Board. Oversight and challenge is also provided by York's Corporate Parenting Board. Independent scrutiny of all issues affecting the safety of Children and Young People is provided by the City of York Safeguarding Children Board. The views of Children and Young People are articulated through two panels: Show Me That I Matter, and (for younger children) I Matter Too. Their educational progress is tracked through a Virtual School.



The YorOK Board is responsible for the over-arching Children and Young People's Plan for the city. The current plan, *Dream Again*, was being revised at the same time as this Strategy; care was therefore taken to ensure consistency between the two documents. In particular, this Strategy is consistent with the theme of *early help* within the new Plan. Children who are Looked After are identified within the Plan as one of the *vulnerable groups* meriting special attention.

This strategy is intended to apply to all of the Children Looked After by the City of York, including those placed outside the city. It is also relevant to children placed for adoption, children on the edge of care, and Care Leavers.

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## Progress since the last Strategy - including the things we still need to do

### Vision and Strategic Outcomes

The last strategy set out a Vision for Children Looked After in York, which we believe still holds good:

*“The vision of the York Strategy for Looked After Children is simple: we want our children and young people to have everything that good parents want for their children.”*

The previous strategy also set out nine strategic outcomes which still provide a useful framework:

#### 1. Respect And Involvement

All those involved with children and young people treat them with respect, listen to their views and are reliable and trustworthy. Children and young people are involved in, and understand, the decisions made about their lives. They know how to get the information, advice and support they need, and how to complain.

#### 2. Good, Safe Placements

Children and young people are in good placements where they feel safe and supported, and can remain for as long as they need to. They receive information about their placement in advance and are listened to if they have concerns about it at any time. The placement feels like home and provides them with a positive experience of family life or residential care.

#### 3. Relationships

Children and young people are supported to maintain, build and sustain positive relationships with others, including their birth families, siblings in care, carers and their peers.

#### 4. Identity

Children and young people know who they are, why they are looked after and understand their heritage. They feel valued by others, and their individual needs arising from race, culture, religion, sexual orientation or disability are understood and met.

#### 5. Education

Children and young people receive a planned and stable education which enables them to fulfil their educational, social and emotional potential, and to have high aspirations for their future.

#### 6. Health

The health needs of children and young people are assessed and planned for, and they have appropriate access to all the health services they require. They are well and happy, and choosing healthy and active lifestyles.

#### 7. Emotional Wellbeing

Children and young people have any need for additional emotional support recognised and addressed, and have the knowledge and skills to achieve emotional stability, resilience and self-confidence.

#### 8. Moving To Adulthood

Children and young people enter adulthood in a planned way, with a home to live in, the skills to look after themselves and the ability to earn a living or continue in education. They feel confident about the future.

#### 9. Corporate Parenting

City of York Council and its partners recognise and act upon their responsibilities to children and young people, particularly in relation to access to leisure and cultural activities, housing, work experience and employment opportunities. They act towards Looked After Children and Young People as good parents would in any family.

## Progress

Year end Looked After population	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
<b>Total</b>	255	259	237	219	198

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
<b>Local placements</b>	225	230	212	197	178
<b>Out of city</b>	30	29	25	22	20
<b>Total</b>	255	259	237	219	198

- YorOK Voice and Involvement Forum
- Children in Care council (age 14+), and younger sub-group (age 10-14),
- Range of consultation taking place, eg U matter Survey; Speak up event
- Show Me That I Matter; I Matter Too
- The Looked After Children handbook
- Children's Rights & Advocacy service
- Expansion of Independent Visitors
- Improvements in Independent Reviewing Service
- The Pledge for Children Looked After (reproduced at **Annex A**)
- Youth Club and Max Cards
- Placement stability better than regional and national figures - the percentage of children living in the same foster placement for at least 2 years or placed for adoption is 58.3%
- As at March 2015 , 24 children were placed with connected carers; 25 sibling groups were all placed together (93 children in total)
- New Deal for Foster Carers
- Strong performance in placing children for adoption. No children currently waiting for adoption - 25 were waiting 18 months ago
- Approval of adopters increased by 50%
- Contact Centre
- Hamilton House
- Training for Foster Carers and Adopters, especially Trauma and Attachment Training with CAMHS



- Virtual School established – appointment of Assistant Head, SEF, Integris
- Individual scrutiny of all children placed outside York
- Completion of Personal Education Plans
- Unauthorised absence from school for children in care fell from 1.5% to 1.1%. Persistent absentees also fell from 7.3% to 5%
- Timely completion rates of initial health assessments
- New MOSAIC case management system
- CAMHS work with Children Looked After
- Higher numbers of children going onto Higher Education including three returning after their 21st birthday;
- The % of care leavers in suitable accommodation was 96%
- All young people are in care until their 18 birthday unless there are exceptional circumstances
- Outcomes for carer leavers at age 19, 20 21 are positive: two thirds will have their own tenancy, return to their own family, take up the offer of a taster flat or are living with friends;
- Staying Put a great success
- Relatively low numbers of care leavers who are NEET
- CYC actively promoting apprenticeships for care leavers
- Corporate Parenting Board established

### **Things we still need to do**

All the professionals, carers and organisations that work with children who are Looked After in York are passionate about their work and committed to a culture of continuous improvement. In that spirit, we recognise that there are still many things to do under each of the strategic outcomes:

#### **1. Respect And Involvement**

- Consistency/continuity of case workers is a problem for us, as it is for other areas
- Feedback from looked after young people needs to be considered by their social workers and their managers to ensure that social workers are more easily contactable – this is their most common complaint (the little things that matter)
- Need still to improve consistency in quality of recording
- The link between the care leavers' consultation group and the Show Me That I Matter panel needs to be strengthened
- The Looked after Children pack needs to be updated and comments from the young people fed into the complaints leaflet

#### **2. Good, Safe Placements**

- Placement stability is worse than previous years and well short of where we would want it
- 25% of children have received written information about their new foster carers prior to placement; this progress needs to be maintained to achieve 100%.

- We need further work to ensure that all of York's children are being placed with providers/ settings/schools with good or outstanding judgments from Ofsted
- Continue to work with York's foster carers and York Area Foster Carers Association to develop and promote the vision for fostering outlined in the New Deal for Foster Carers 2014
- Ensure that permanence planning for looked after children is promptly actioned
- Succession planning for foster carers: the demographic profile of the fostering community indicates that a significant proportion of York foster carers may retire from fostering during the coming years
- Development of specialist provision locally.

### 3. Relationships

- We need to consider more work with the birth family, and the possibilities of using our more experienced foster carers to help with this.

### 4. Identity

- The consistent message from young people at the Show Me That I Matter panel and in the two U Matter surveys is that they want an experience which *does not differentiate them from their peers*;
- Young people have expressed concern about the use of abbreviations and jargon, such as *LAC*, *contact* and *siblings*: everyone needs to be take care to use jargon-free language.

### 5. Education

- There is a key area of challenge around attainment. Attainment for the most disadvantaged students is inconsistent across key stages;
- Gaps fluctuate but the KS4 gap has widened in 2014 due to impact of Wolf reforms, because vocational qualifications tend to be taken by more disadvantaged students;
- Also issues for particular groups of girls in certain schools (anecdotally links with emotional health and wellbeing);
- The gap is wide for KS1&2 especially in Maths and Reading although some significant improvements can be seen in Reading outcomes in 2014.
- Despite the significant improvement in the PEP completion rate, the target is 100%. Need to ensure PEPs are produced and maintained within and outside the city.

### 6. Health

- Ensure initial and review health assessments are promptly undertaken
- Gain greater understanding of young people's reluctance to engage with health action plans
- Improve the uptake and recording of immunisation records for all children and young people
- Establish a health passport for care leavers
- Ensure that the need for health assessments is proportionate, and Looked After Children are not made to feel different
- Only 63% of looked after children are recorded as having received a dental check which is far too low
- Implement the recommendations arising from the recent local review of compliance with national guidance for Health of Looked After Children is being refreshed for September 2015.

## 7. Emotional Wellbeing

- There is limited data collected about the emotional wellbeing of Looked After Children though we can do more to interrogate the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire
- We need to review the incidence of self-harm for looked after young people and post discharge follow up CAMHS services
- Children and young people, who are on the 'edge of care' will often benefit from targeted input from the CAMHS service. It is crucial that these children are a priority for prompt intervention and support to prevent the need for children to leave their families and communities.

## 8. Moving To Adulthood

- Continue to promote Staying Put with foster carers for the majority of looked after young people aged 18
- Ensure continued progress in the range of moving on accommodation options for care leavers
- Ensure advice , guidance and support for young people promotes the optimum education, training and employment options
- Ensure that young people aged 21-25 are enabled and supported to return to learn with financial support , if they are planning to
- Ensure that all care leavers are prioritised for work experience, training, apprenticeship and employment in the council
- 56% of Care Leavers were in Education, training and employment at 19. Whilst this rates as good performance, this area remains a priority.

## 9. Corporate Parenting

- We need to review our Corporate Parenting arrangements to ensure they are as effective as possible
- Elected members on the Corporate Parenting Board are expected to undertake quarterly visits to both the Glen and Wenlock children's homes – performance needs to be improved.

## The Views of Children who are Looked After

Through the 'U Matter Survey' (May 2014) Looked After Children and Young People have told us the following:

- 90% agreed with the statement that 'City of York Council provides good quality placements;
- Most young people were positive about their placements and felt listened to by their foster carers;
- Most young people feel they have been treated as an individual, with respect, have had a say in decisions that have been made about them, and were positive about the relationship they had with their social worker;
- However making contact with social workers wasn't always easy – this is the most frequent complaint from Children Looked After;
- Most young people were happy with their contact arrangements with family;
- Young people were positive about the support they had received in accessing health services and reported that they were encouraged to take part in leisure activities;
- Many young people didn't know who their Independent Reviewing officer was, this tended to be because their IRO had not visited them between review meetings;
- Young people generally felt well supported in their education, yet nearly half of young people thought that they didn't have a Personal Education Plan;
- More than half of young people were unaware of the Rights and Advocacy Service, however most young people knew they had a right to complain;
- Overall young people were very positive about their experience of being Looked After by City of York Council with 76% said their experience of being looked after as either 'good' or 'very good';
- 58% gave City of York 5/5 for the quality of placements.

The U Matter Survey is coordinated through the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and 'Show Me I Matter' panel (children in care council, ages 14+). The York 2014 Guarantee for Looked After Children has also been produced through this service and the panel.

## Five new Strategic Themes

Although York has made great progress during the period covered by the previous strategy, and can continue to make improvements on a continuous basis as set out in previous chapters, we do not think that this approach is sufficiently creative or ambitious. We believe the time is right for a step change in our work with Children who are Looked After.

To be clear: this does not mean abandoning the Vision or Strategic Outcomes, which still hold good; and we will continue to make incremental improvements as previously described. However, we will overlay onto this some fresh thinking on the basis of five new *strategic themes*:

- **Normality** – *every child and young person is entitled to a normal, stable, caring family life*  
 We recognise that this word will be challenging for some – this is deliberate. We need to ask ourselves in relation to every policy we introduce, and every process we operate, *is this normal?* Obviously, being taken into care can never be completely “normal” – but, for example, having to go through bureaucratic loops to organise a sleepover is certainly not normal. Points like these are raised with us very often by the young people themselves – the thing they most dislike is being differentiated from their peers. We need to consider everything we do from the young person’s point of view, and to recognise that they are all unique individuals, not a homogenous group.
- **Ambition** – *‘good enough’ is not good enough*  
 We want to introduce a fresh spirit of ambition into our work. Are we truly being as ambitious for the young people in our care as we would be for our own children? How can we ever be satisfied until educational and employment outcomes for Children Looked After match those of their peers? We need to ensure there is a spirit of constructive challenge in our debates about the way forward, and to reinvigorate our whole approach.
- **Trust** – *as professionals we need to trust each other better, and young people even more*  
 Many of our systems and processes are designed to minimise risk. However this is sometimes at the expense of commonsense, and certainly of “normality”. We also, inevitably, on occasions retreat behind organisational boundaries. We can’t afford to do this in the future – we need to ensure that all decisions relating to Children Looked After are delegated to the level closest to the child wherever possible. There can be no room for professional preciousness or organisational silos.
- **Accountability** - *we need to be clear who is responsible for what*  
 In York we are rightly proud of our multi-agency working. However, sometimes this can be at the expense of complete clarity around accountability. We need to review our present governance structures, as well as job descriptions and protocols for certain professionals, to ensure that accountability is never in doubt. We need to ask ourselves what elements of responsibility are genuinely best shared, and what better owned by a single person or agency?

- **Efficiency** – *we have to live within our means*

Whilst services for children in York have been prioritised within Council and other Agencies' budgets, they cannot be completely immune from the downward pressure on public expenditure. We would be being dishonest if we failed to recognise that saving money must also be a driver for us over the period covered by this Strategy.

We believe that these five themes will prompt us to **remodel** significant elements of the current "system" that surrounds Children who are Looked After in York. In particular, we want to take a fresh look at foster care:

- the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of foster carers;
- their relationship with birth families;
- their relationship with Children's Social Care;
- professional development and support for this key group of people.

This will have knock-on consequences for the responsibilities of those within Children's Social Care.

We also intend to reconfigure the behind-the-scenes support arrangements for Children Looked After, with the intention of ensuring that there is a multi-Agency team behind every child.

At the same time we will review all of the governance arrangements in this area, including the role of the Corporate Parenting Board.

We will greatly improve the quality of the data we share and that we scrutinise. We recognise the need for a comprehensive Scorecard for Children Looked After. This will enable us to set a series of challenging targets and milestones, which are discussed in more detail in the next Chapter.

## Milestones, Measures and Monitoring

[For discussion at MALAP on 11 November using the draft scorecard as a starting point]

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