

Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2021 - 2024

Introduction

When children are cared for by North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) they mostly live-in great homes with great carers and get the help they need to live happy, healthy lives.

However, we know that not all our children and young people in North East Lincolnshire are living in the right homes and getting the right support for them to thrive.

This strategy sets out how we plan to make sure that everyone we care for, gets the homes, help, care and support that they need, when they need it.

However, this strategy and plan only form one part of the work we are doing to improve how well our children and young people do when in care. For example, we are also working closely with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to improve how children and young people get support for any mental health difficulties they experience.

Covid 19 is putting additional pressures on our children, young people, and families. They are finding that their finances, mental health, and resilience can all be harmed by isolation and long periods of time living in lockdown. This Sufficiency Strategy recognises that for many of our young people, children, families, staff, and carers the previous months have been difficult and with the pressures set to continue for some time, we will need to be alert to signs of distress and ready to support people when needed.

1.0 Vision and Values

North East Lincolnshire Council has made a [Corporate Parenting Pledge](#) that sets out our commitment to those we look after. This Strategy is part of our response to this pledge.

This plan is part of our vision for our cared for children as set out in the *Partnership Strategy for Children Looked After & Care Leavers*:

- We want our children to live in local homes, in local communities and to be attending local schools and colleges, wherever it is safe for them to do so.
- We want our children and young people to have every opportunity and the support they need to be the best they possibly can be.
- We will give our children stability, understanding, encouragement, positive relationships, and healing from past harm.
- We will support our children to build resilience, ambition and aspirational goals and we will provide practical and emotional support to help our young people successfully transition into adulthood where they will thrive.
- We will support young people to build meaningful and lasting relationships with people they live with and who support them.

To achieve our vision, NELC and its partners will embrace the following values:

1. Children and young people's safety are the most important thing for us.
2. We listen to children and young people's needs and wishes and try to act on what they tell us.
3. Children and young people should feel loved and cared for.
4. We believe in our children and young people, especially when they appear not to believe in themselves and will work relentlessly to help them all to fulfil their potential.
5. Things can always get better!
6. Children and Young people's behaviour is a form of communication. Our role is to understand what is being communicated and to respond in a way that helps; we do not just react.
7. We expect that some children and young people will struggle to form trusting relationships with us because of their past experiences. We will show to our children and young people that we are adults that can be trusted and who are worth investing in relationships with. We expect that young people may repeatedly need us to prove this before they are willing to let us in.
8. We recognise that children and young people are the experts in their own lives and our job is to work with them to build on this expertise so they can grow into happy, healthy, fulfilled adults.

We will promote these values and our vision with all those who help our children and young people.

2.0 Homes

We want our children and young people to live in happy homes with people who are there for them, for as long as they need them.

All the homes we provide for our children will be ones that would be good enough for us or our families.

Our children and young people should be able to live locally wherever it is safe for them to do so.

To achieve this, NELC and its partners will:

- Make sure we have enough children's homes, foster care, and semi-independent living for everyone who needs it.
- Make sure that there are enough local homes for children not to have to live far away from friends and family.
- Make sure we have homes that allow brothers and sisters to live together even when they come from big families.
- Make sure that we have enough homes for children with additional needs.
- Make sure we work with Housing so that young adults leaving care get the help and support they need.

What homes do we need?

If the number of children we care for stays at about 600, we think we will need.

- 360 foster homes made up of
 - 325 local NELC carers
 - 35 independent (IFA) carers

- 60 children's home places made up of
 - 30 beds in NELC homes
 - 30 beds in independent homes

- 30 beds in semi-independent living

We think we have too many children and young people in care across North East Lincolnshire.

We will give more help to families in future so that their children and young people can stay with them, instead of coming into care.

We expect that this will mean the number of children we care for goes down to 450.

When this happens, we think we will need:

- 270 foster homes made up of
 - 240 local NELC carers
 - 30 independent (IFA) carers

- 45 children's home places, made up of
 - 30 NELC homes
 - 15 independent homes

- 23 beds in semi-independent living

We will also carry on asking friends and family to look after children and young people wherever it is the right thing to do.

At the current time we do not have enough foster carers so we are going to have a recruitment campaign to attract some more. Where possible, new foster carers should be able to care for teenagers.

We have relatively few young people choosing to stay with former carers under Staying Put arrangements. Staying Put is in place for just 9% of NELC care leavers. Nationally 58% of young people stay with local authority carers when they reach 18 and 42% stay with IFA carers. This means that many of our young people are missing out on the potential benefits of continuing to live in a family setting during their early adulthood.

We will review our Staying Put policy and procedures to try and make this a more attractive option for young people and carers.

We have enough places in children's homes that we run, but we need to make sure that we make the best use of them.

We will monitor our children's homes to make sure we have the right number of beds and that children do well when they live with us.

Whilst we expect that most children in care will live in regulated settings (children's homes or foster care), there will be times when young people's needs are best met through semi-independent living (SIL).

Current options for these children include:

- Staying Close pilot – five places and soon to be expanded to include three eco-pods.
- Willows project – 20 places, primarily for UASC
- Humbercare – eight places in supported lodgings
- YMCA – two places but can be expanded up to four.

Whilst the total number of places available through these schemes is sufficient for young people in care who need to live in SIL, there is no capacity for those leaving care as young adults.

Over the last 12 months we have struggled to keep all these available places in use, especially supported lodgings with Humbercare.

This seems to be in part because not all social care staff are aware of all options for children and young people resulting in some of our children living in homes that they are not always best suited to.

We will establish a Commissioning and Homes for Children Team (CHCT) who will lead on finding homes for all children in care and care leavers, regardless of the type of home being sought. This will ensure that there are experienced staff, who are aware of all available homes, leading on finding each home for our children and young people.

Currently, almost all our 18+ care leavers move into fully independent living. It is likely that not all these young people will be ready to live fully independently at 18.

Consequently, we need to review outcomes for young people 18+ to be assured that all our young people are getting the support that they need.

Gaps that we are aware of in our local provision include:

- Emergency foster care and PACE bed

- Protected emergency children's home place – whilst this exists, it is often occupied because of difficulties in moving children on to more permanent arrangements.
- Trainer flat
- Community based parenting assessments
- Respite places for families being supported through edge of care service.
- Emergency short term home for UASC whilst we undertake initial assessment of need.

We have developed a detailed plan that shows how we will address all of the issues raised in this strategy. We will update our action plan every year so that it is always as relevant as possible.

3.0 Value

During 2021 / 22 we will review all our CLA placements, focusing first on those that are highest cost. The review will identify whether the level of care provided is appropriate for the needs of the young person. Opportunities to move young people to packages of care that better align with their needs will be explored and where appropriate changes to care packages will be made.

The information from the Valuing Care project, will provide a useful starting point for this review but we will also seek to embed regular consideration of vfm within our processes.

We want to be confident that whenever we purchase a service, we get the best possible value from it. We also want to make it easier for social care staff to raise any issues about a provider.

As part of the Commissioning and Homes for Children Team (CHCT) we will create a contract and relationship management function to ensure that we build and maintain effective partnerships with our providers. We will also update the process to make it easy for social workers and PAs to let the Commissioning and Homes for Children Team know how they find provider services.

5.0 Children and Young People's influence

We are fortunate to have a vibrant and enthusiastic Children in Care Council – *Our Voice, Listen Up!*

There is also a Young Advisors Inspection Team that work with the Safeguarding Partnership to inspect local services.

To date we have not taken full advantage of this or other opportunities to fully involve children and young people in the development of our plans.

Over the next 12 months we will liaise with the Voice and Influence Coordinator to ensure that our children and young people are integral to the development of our services.

We will also extend the Young Inspectors scheme to create a small number of Youth Commissioners who will be able to support us with contract management, service improvement and tender evaluation.

6.0 What will success look like?

We are highly ambitious for our children and young people and to ensure that our plans are successful we will put in place regular monitoring of our performance against this plan, which will be scrutinised by senior managers and elected members. We will also ask our Young Inspectors to work with us to understand what difference we are making.

Each of our actions is accompanied by success criteria that clearly set out our expectations for each action.

7.0 Review

This strategy and plan will be reviewed and updated every 12 months to ensure that it is making the difference we want it to and that we plan for any new issues that crop up.