



Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021 – 2023

Valuing the Future of Our Children in Care and Care Leavers



Safer, cleaner
Nottingham
A city we're a



Nottingham
City Council

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Our Leadership Team



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Head of Early Help
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Sophie Russell
Head of Children's
Strategy and
Improvement

Following the sad loss earlier this year of our Director Helen Blackman, Helen Watson has been serving as the Interim Director and we are grateful to her for her leadership during these difficult times. We are pleased to announce the appointment of the new Director for Children's Integrated Services, Ailsa Barr, who will be joining us in January 2022. In addition, Tajinder Madahar who is the Head of Service for Children's Duty, Children in Care, Leaving Care and Housing Aid will be retiring at the end of this year, a replacement will be recruited to this position.

Covid 19

During the Covid19 Pandemic and resulting lockdowns the Local Authority has followed Government guidance to ensure the safety of our children and young people, our staff, the professional network has remained our priority. There has been continued and managed use of PPE in day to day practice. The workforce is now continuing a hybrid model of working which means colleagues are coming into the office once or twice a week.

The statutory visits by social workers have continued face to face, however during the restricted measures of Lockdown, some young people expressed preference to continue with virtual means, where the engagement has improved. However, social workers have expressed the importance of seeing their young people, completing direct work with them when undertaking visits as a way of capturing 'the voice of the child'.

Welcome to our Plan

In Nottingham we recognise children are ordinarily best cared for within their birth family and we have developed a range of services to help where families are struggling. Some children cannot be cared for in their birth families or wider network, and come into the care of the local authority. For this group of children and young people we have a responsibility, as corporate parents, to provide care and to work with partner agencies to best meet their needs and prepare them for their future.

As corporate parents, we are responsible for ensuring children who come into our care experience safe and positive parenting, are helped to achieve their full potential and pursue their aspirations.

In order for our children to achieve the best possible outcomes, it is essential that all agencies involved in caring and supporting them work together effectively. This requires a strategy that clearly states areas that require improvement or attention (i.e. our strategic priorities) and what actions will be taken to address these. Ensuring that children in care and care leavers are happy, cared for and properly supported is one of the most important things that we do at Nottingham City Council.

This strategy is based on areas where we have made promises to children in care and care leavers, and have been developed in partnership with our young people. The strategic priorities identified within this strategy have also been aligned to Children's Integrated Services Directorate priorities and to statutory guidance. Working together in this way will help us to ensure that our children and young people, and those who care for them, get the right help at the right time. In order to do this, we have condensed our strategic priorities set out below into seven areas of promise for our children and care leavers.

Our vision is for a city where every child and young person can enjoy their childhood in a warm and supporting environment, free from poverty and safe from harm; a city where every child grows up to achieve their full potential. We want to ensure that all of our children in care and care leavers have the right home and support to keep them safe and well. We strive to help them grow into happy, healthy, successful and fulfilled young adults who are optimistic about their future. We recognise that it is essential we help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by Nottingham City Council and our partners.

Helen Watson
Interim Director, Children's Integrated Services



Tajinder Madahar
Head of Children in Care

Councillor Cheryl Barnard

Catherine Underwood

What Is Corporate Parenting?

In Nottingham City we support the view set out by the Department for Education (DfE) regarding Corporate Parenting principles, which states:

The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers (relevant and former relevant children). In this context local authorities are often referred to as being the ‘corporate parent’ of these children and young people, and the critical question that local authorities should ask in adopting such an approach is: **‘would this be good enough for my child?’**.



We believe that children in care have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe - as other children. We also recognise that there are unique challenges that children in care and care leavers face. We are committed to ensuring that corporate parenting principles are embedded in the wider work of the City Council so we work collectively to address these challenges.

It is our role as corporate parents, to advocate on behalf of children in care and care leavers, and to empower them to make their own decisions in preparation for adulthood. We want all of our children in care and care leavers to achieve their full potential and obtain the best possible outcomes, the same outcomes that we would expect for our own children.

Nottingham City Council has around 700 children in its care at any one time for whom we are the Corporate Parent. Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, chairs the Corporate Parenting Board that provides oversight and challenge in relation to all matters involving children in Nottingham City Council's care.

The Corporate Parenting Board is held six times each civic year and is attended by elected members, relevant internal colleagues and contributors from external agencies. The Corporate Parenting Board is informed annually by the Have Your Say survey, which is distributed to all children in care and care leavers for feedback on how they think Children's Services are performing.

Target areas for deeper analysis and action are identified through the survey, which shapes the priorities of the Corporate Parenting Board over the following year.

The guidance from the DfE identifies seven principles which should underpin the role of the Corporate Parent:

- 1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.**
- 2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.**
- 3. to consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.**
- 4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.**
- 5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.**
- 6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.**
- 7. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.**

It is important to set the Corporate Parenting principles in the context of our wider priorities for the work we do with children and families.

Our Priorities.

- 1. Ensure the right children get the right support at the right time**

We want to ensure issues are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity. Our response will be proportionate and solution-focused.

2. Create a responsive and flexible system

We want to ensure that children and their families experience a system that does not stop and start but is simple and streamlined.

3. Help families help themselves

We want to build resilience in families, not dependence.

4. Work in partnership with children and their families

We will listen to the views of children and their families. To address challenges, we will work to build on a family's strengths.

5. Focus resources on what will make a positive difference

We will work more smartly, ensuring our resources (workforce and finance) efficiently deliver a measurable improvement.

To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.

Have Your Say Survey 2018- 2019

Each year, we circulate the Have Your Say Survey to all of our children in care and care leavers. Launched in 2011, responses to the survey help us gauge how well we are performing against our priorities in the Children in Care and Care Leavers Charter. The survey can be returned by the social worker or completed online. There is also an 'easy read' version available to all of our children, to allow all of them to complete the survey.

Survey Feedback

There is a meeting scheduled for 18th October 2021 with the Children in Care Council, (this was briefly discussed at their last meeting on 27th September 2021), with good representation of young people of all ages, and which is being held during half term at Loxley.

Although each year the survey helps us focus on the key issues for children in care and care leavers there are some issues which are regularly highlighted as being important:

- Ensuring young people know about advocacy and complaints services so that we can be confident they have the support to make their voice heard.
- Ensuring that young people have the right place to live as quickly as possible.
- Ensuring that we do all we can to prevent changes in a young person's life unless they are absolutely necessary to keep the child or young person safe and well. We know that a change of home, carer, social worker or school can be a difficult experience for children and young people.

- Ensuring we provide all the help our children and young people need, to plan for and achieve a successful journey into independent adulthood.
 - Based on the 18/19 results, three specific areas were identified for further focus through Children in Care Council meetings. Whilst progress against these have been impacted by Covid, they remain our focus:
1. **Changing the culture of care**, we are working towards ensuring that children in care have stability through permanent living arrangements. We have established a way in which we identify children who have been in a stable foster placement, for instance, for 12 months to consider if the carer is able to offer permanency through long term fostering for the children if it is something they wish for and is in their interest. We are able to address any barriers to achieving this. We are assessing the potential for children to return to their parents or wider family through 2 projects; STARS and Reunification, each one has colleagues who work closely with children, young people and families to support with transition and permanency. We are spreading the responsibility for being corporate parents to more agencies and partners, so that everyone plays their part in helping our children in care and care leavers do well in life.
 2. **Improving opportunities for children in care and care leavers** to prepare for independent living and successful adulthood, through greater support and access to services that help improve their life skills, achieve academic attainment and experiences of work; and develop their social confidence, positive friendships and supportive networks. Through a newly established Transitions Panel we are identifying the support young people may need to assist with their independence plan. Through this work we are identifying additional support that can be accessed with referrals to Adult Services post 18, Aspirations Champion, ASDAN, and the Local Offer
 3. **Older children in care and care leavers**- supporting the completion of the Have your Say Survey as peer interviewers, to encourage more children in care and care leavers to share their views, experiences and ideas for change. More opportunities for care experienced young people to be involved in training of social workers and foster carers, and participate in recruitment processes for Children's Social Care staff. Although this survey was an electronic version due to Covid 19, it had limited success, therefore the PA's have encouraged care leavers to visit the office and speak to them on a 1-1 level to complete their survey. Going forward we are recognising that a range of approaches to seek feedback is necessary.

Mind of My Own App

Nottingham City is currently also using Mind Of My Own, an app designed to help further capture children and young people's voice in a digital forum. The use of the app by children in care remains low and we need to understand the barriers. We are continuing to roll out training on the use of Mind of My Own to frontline staff, including the training for Independent Reviewing Officers who chair our Children in Care Reviews so that they can promote the use of the App. We have also worked with foster carers to increase their confidence in the use of the App so that they can

support children in care to have their wishes and feelings heard. We have regular monthly meetings, to support the use of Mind of My Own.

Our Internal Services and Partner Agencies

Social Work Support for Children in Care

The Local Authority's social work support for children in care is provided by one of four types of social care teams. These are:

- Children's Social Care Duty
- Children's Social Care Fieldwork Teams
- Children in Care Teams
- The Whole Life Disability Service

Children's Social Care Duty teams work with children and young people for short periods of time when they are first identified as needing a social worker. Where a child or young person needs longer-term support they will move to Children's Fieldwork, who, amongst other areas of work, support children in need of social work support, children subject to a child protection plan and those children and young people subject to care proceedings.

Nottingham City has three Children in Care Teams. They work solely with children in care from 0 up to 18 years old who have a long term plan of remaining in care. Having dedicated children in care teams promotes specialism and expertise. This, we believe, leads to better outcomes for our young people. We also have a dedicated Permanency Team which primarily supports those children for whom the best outcome is adoption, or another form of permanence.

The Whole Life Disability Services is an integrated service, which includes social workers with specialist knowledge in the area of childhood disability. The team undertake a number of duties, including those associated with meeting the Authority's statutory requirements in relation to severely disabled children in care. The Whole Life Disability team only work with a relatively small number of children in care.

Children in Care Services

We are always trying to do more to ensure that all children in care are healthy and safe, have the same opportunities as their peers and can move successfully into adulthood. Children, young people and carers are likely to be supported by a number of different teams as they move through the care process. Whilst we know that this can cause some disruption we think it is important that the support on offer changes as the needs of the child or young person develop.

This section seeks to outline the roles and responsibilities of those teams that work with our children in care and care leavers.

Residential Services

Nottingham City currently has six mainstream residential homes, one home dedicated to children with complex needs and 5 semi-independent units for young people who are 16 years and over. Additionally, we have a dedicated short breaks home for 11 children and young adults with learning and physical disabilities.

All our homes are safe and welcoming and we are proud to provide high quality care. In October 2021 all of our homes are judged good or outstanding by Ofsted.

Every effort is made to provide children and young people with the necessary support needed for them to achieve the best outcomes possible. All units are subject to regular quality assurance, both internally and externally, in order to ensure all young people, receive the same high quality care.

Looked After Reviews

Children in care have regular reviews taking place to make sure the care arrangements are meeting their needs and to make sure their care plans are progressing at the pace they should. In May 2020 91.7% of reviews were taking place in timescale and in September this rose 94.6% which is good.

Children and young people participate in their reviews in a number of ways including attending the meeting, completing the contribution paper or for some having contact either by telephone, email or a home visit with the Independent Reviewing Officer before their review was held. The Independent Reviewing Officer is responsible for chairing these reviews.

During the period affected by Covid, face to face contact was restricted and therefore an increasing number of meetings took place through virtual meetings. Feedback from children in care suggests that some young people preferred this method of engagement.

Independent Reviewing Officers continue to support and encourage young people to chair their own meetings or set their own agenda's where appropriate. Independent Reviewing Officers make a conscious effort to further increase the participation of children by undertaking child friendly reviews, which are individualised to each child's needs and abilities. Furthermore, children are reassured in between reviews or before the review starts to give them the confidence needed to participate fully in their own review.

To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people, we believe that aspiration is really important for children in care and care leavers. We know that many of these young people will achieve great things and make a fantastic contribution to society. That said, some young people will have had life experiences that make it

difficult for them to recognise their potential and we have put in place a series of measures to help young people and their Carers with this.

Each year we have two events that celebrate the achievements of children in care and a further event that celebrates the achievements of care leavers. These events are called “Big it up” and really positive experiences for all of those who are involved.

To complement ‘Big it Up’ our Virtual School have engaged us with a national organisation who deliver a project called Unlock. This is led by someone who was in care themselves and connects children in care and puts young people in contact with national leaders from a range of industries. Young people then go on to speak to local people about the support they may be able to offer with their aspirations. The final element of the process involves young people delivering a presentation about their experience to a group including carers, social workers and teaching staff.

The impact of the Virtual School

The role of the Virtual School is to monitor, support and provide interventions to ensure that children in care achieve the best possible educational outcomes.

The Virtual School works with a network of Designated Teachers who are dedicated to ensuring that our children achieve the best they can in line with all other children.

Nottingham City Virtual School is a statutory service that supports and monitors the education of children in care and previously looked-after children. Their mission is to champion the educational needs of these children, helping them to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The Virtual School provides advice and support to professionals working with Nottingham City children in care and children who reside in the Nottingham local authority area who have previously been looked-after. They work closely with teachers, school governors, social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, parents and carers.

The service monitors the educational provision, attendance, progress and attainment for all Nottingham City children in care, irrespective of where they are placed. The Virtual School aims to: promote achievement, raise attainment and ensure equality of opportunity to enhance the life chances of all children in care. They play a strategic role in ensuring the corporate parenting responsibilities of the local authority are met, with regard to the education of children in care.

2019 saw a significant decline in the number of children achieving expected educational levels at Key stage 2. This decrease was seen to be across all academic areas of achievement. The Virtual School will be looking to capture the journey/progress of children through the system starting at Key stage 1, this should address this issue for future cohorts. The head of the virtual school is currently in the process of exploring the contextual information for each child in this

cohort in order to develop strategies to address this gap for these children in order to support them in their educational attainment moving forward.

Virtual School moved to having an electronic Personal Education Plan (ePEP) in November 2020, which requires the PEP to be updated each term. Full training has been provided to frontline social workers and we have seen significant improvement with the latest performance for ePEPs in the Summer of 2021 report 88% of pupils had completed a PEP this is an improvement from our Spring 2021 at 86%.

Social workers and Virtual School colleagues have found that the electronic version has improved the engagement and performance with young people and our education partners.

The Virtual school have identified key areas for improvement as follows:

To get PEPs for 16 year olds onto the ePEP portal, as these are still done on paper

Training to be provided to colleagues in respect to the education of children in care and previously looked after children and includes information on the roles and responsibilities of professionals, PEPs, SEND, exclusions, attendance and Pupil Premium Plus (PPP).

Result (CLA 12 months plus)	2017	2018	2019	2020
Attainment 8 Average Point	21.1	18.9	20.5	17.9
Progress 8 Average	-0.93	-1.09	-1.10	NR
KS4 % achieving level 4 pass in English and Maths	26.7%	17.9%	20.5%	19.2%
KS4 % achieving level 5 pass in English and Maths	c	c	c	c

c = suppressed due to low number of pupils attaining

NR = Not Recorded

Data source

SFR - CLA outcomes (25th March 2021)

Data for 2021 will be made available March 2022

As of October 2021, 64.97% of care leavers (aged 17 to 21 years) are in employment, education or training; this was above our local target of 55% and the most up to date comparative data from other authorities. This is an improvement from July 2020 when 53.9% were in employment, education or training.



Further and Higher Education.

We have worked with local providers to develop support for children in care who may want to attend university and/or college:

We understand that sometimes it is hard for our young people to enrol at college so Nottingham College offers them the chance to enrol at a different time if they want to. Nottingham College will also provide the following:

- Access to an Achievement Coach, wellbeing support and health advice.
- Support through the college and the personal advisor to support attendance.
- A named person to support in getting an appropriate work placement or work experience.
- Support to visit the colleges to find out more.

For young people who want to go to university:

- We provide a Higher Education (HE) bursary of at least £2,000 and we will help to consider how this is best spent.
- We provide somewhere for young people to stay during University holidays (or funding for this if they prefer to make their own arrangements in the holidays). This is for 21 weeks of non-term time rent.

Nottingham Trent University and Nottingham University offer the following through their Growing Lives Programme:

- Campus visits and/or additional welcome activities.
- Bursary for financial support of £500.
- Dedicated support officer to help you while you are at University.
- A guaranteed offer of University-allocated accommodation for those who accept a place at Nottingham Trent University as their first choice.

Further information about this support is available in our Care Leavers Local Offer, This was developed with and for Care Leavers during 2018. The Care Leavers Local Offer can be found here: www.asklion.co.uk/careleavers.

Jobs

If a young person feels ready to find a job we will support them by:

- Making sure they have access to the Leaving Care Service employability programme to make positive steps towards training and employment. The programme is recognised by the DWP as a genuine job seeking provision for care leavers. The programme provides opportunities that aim to build confidence so that young people feel able to move onto training or employment. They are involved in all aspects of planning programmes which could involve a mentor.
- Offering delivery of ASDAN courses where young people will have the opportunity to achieve employability qualifications (from entry level to level 2).

Work Experience

Sometimes if a young person is not quite sure what they want to do, work experience can help them make a decision. Our care leavers thought this would be a good idea so we have worked with education providers in the city to help give them a range of work experience opportunities. For example, the Work Inspiration scheme at Nottingham Trent University runs throughout the year and provides opportunities across a wide range of work experiences. In addition, Nottingham College will, where possible, seek work placement or experience opportunities for care leavers not enrolled at the college. The DWP also offer work experience and we are continually looking to expand the range of opportunities we are able to offer.

We will be able to set up more work experience and work tasters internally within the City Council. This will be coordinated via the Aspirations Champion referrals and our internal education, employment and training co-ordinator, ETSCO, with support from our dedicated Futures workers at Leaving Care.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a really good way of getting into work. In Nottingham there are lots of opportunities for apprenticeships with Nottingham City Council, Nottingham City Homes as well as other businesses. Nottingham City Council know that these are hard to get so will make sure that young people and their Personal Advisors are told about any apprenticeship opportunities within the City Council at the same time as going to our recruitment agency. Young people will also be offered support. This would include regular review meetings with apprentice managers and Personal Advisers; and where needed, access to the additional support e.g. Maths / English support, resilience coaching and mentoring sessions.

We will also provide additional support by:

- Making sure that any apprenticeship assessments or interviews are at a place that is right for the young person.
- Helping with transport costs to attend interviews for training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- Preparation for interviews and where appropriate financial support to purchase suitable interview clothing.



Health Provision

The Greater Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) commission the specialist Children in Care medical and nursing teams to undertake statutory health assessments. This ensures that any physical or emotional needs are addressed as part of the care plan. The health professional will share recommendations for the plan with the child and / or young person's social

worker and advise on how to meet any outstanding health needs. For those children and young people placed too far out of Nottingham City boundaries, arrangements will be made with an external health provider to complete assessments and those assessments will be quality assured to ensure they meet an accepted standard. The teams also contribute to supporting the health assessments for those children and young people who are placed in Nottinghamshire from other local authorities.

Nottingham City Council commission public health services for children and young people, including the 0 – 19 programme which incorporates the delivery of the Department of Health “healthy child programme”. This service works with the specialist Children in Care teams. This ensures that the universal and public health needs of children in care are met by appropriately skilled and knowledgeable practitioners.

Health Outcomes

Making sure that children in care have had a health assessment and dental and opticians check in timescale has been a particular challenge during the Covid pandemic. Dental practices were shut for a significant period and whilst treatment continued to be offered, dental checks were not possible. We are committed to ensuring that this improves with the relaxing of some restrictions.

In Sept 2021, our performance headlines in relation to health were as follows:

- 80.0% of children in care have had a health assessment recorded in the last 12 months (6 months if they are 5years and under).
- 61.5% of children in care have had a dental check recorded in the last 12 months
- 75% of children in care have had a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) recorded in the last 12 months.

Social Workers and carers are following through with appointments for health assessments, we have seen some improvement in dental checks, but this needs to be further improved, there has been positive dialogue with our health partners, to rectify this, now restriction have been lifted. Our fostering service are looking at how they can support through our foster carers making sure these checks occur in a timely way.

Children in Care CAMHS

A dedicated Children in Care CAMHS service is jointly commissioned by the Greater Notts CCG and Nottingham City Local Authority to support with emotional and mental health needs of children in care. The team provides a specialist service and training to support and maintain the emotional and mental health needs of our young people. The team also ensures the emotional health needs of young people are reflected in care planning.

The CAMHS Children in Care team comprises of social workers as well as staff from other disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry and other health disciplines. The CAMHS Children in Care team provides a specialist service and training to support and maintain the emotional and mental health needs of our young people. The team ensures the emotional health needs of young people are reflected in Health Plans and are part of the review process.

They work in a range of different ways including offering consultation support for the network that supports children in care, offering a reflective space to think about the child's history. They also offer direct therapeutic support for some children in care, support groups for foster carers and training. They will also offer support to identify individual therapy for children, where this is needed.

Care Leavers have been identified as a priority group for the Nottingham City Integrated Care Partnership, which is joint City Council/Health led body that coordinates strategic development work across local services. One of the priorities we have just begun to work on is to revise the process for transitions for young people from CAMHS to adult mental health services.

In Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City a CIC Multi-Agency Service Improvement Forum coordinates activity to improve the health outcomes of children and young people from entering to leaving care. The forum consists of representatives from the clinical commissioning groups, both local authorities, health providers and commissioners of services and an action plan supports the outcomes being achieved. The forum acknowledges that to meet the health needs of children in care and care leavers a partnership approach is required.



For children and young people to experience good physical, emotional and mental health and well-being we will:

- Ensure timely referrals are made for statutory health assessments including those young people who are close to leaving care

- Ensure any health recommendations identified within the statutory health assessment are actioned and monitored as part of the children in care review process
- Ensure the health needs of those children and young people placed out of area are met equally to those remaining in Nottingham City
- Ensure that those young people leaving care receive their health history and know where to access their own health information in the future
- Ensure those young people leaving care receive support around meeting their own emotional and physical health needs into adulthood.
- Undertake a strategic health needs assessment for looked after children and care leavers, and use the assessment to inform the design and delivery of services.

Fostering

The Fostering Service aims to provide high quality family based care that ensures that children in care receive a positive experience of home and family life.

To achieve this, we recruit, assess, train and support foster carers to care for children so they achieve the best possible outcomes in regards to their physical, emotional and intellectual development. A variety of foster carers are recruited and trained to meet the diverse needs of children and reflect the ethnic and cultural background of the community we serve. We offer a full and comprehensive training programme to equip carers to be able to meet the complex needs of children in our care.

All foster carer rigorously screened, and carefully trained provide safe and supportive homes for children in care and adoption.

applicants are thoroughly assessed so that they can provide supportive homes for children placed for



Permanence

We understand that when children come into care it is really important that we make decisions about the long term plan for them as soon as possible. Where possible we will work with their immediate and extended family to support them to return home. This may be supported by one of our specialist services such as Multi-Systemic Therapy, Targeted Family Support Team or by organising a Family Network Meeting, which brings family members together to develop their own plan.

If a child cannot return home, then we will try to find a family who can care for them throughout their childhood. For those who are young enough we will pursue adoption as the best outcome for them.

In order to increase the number of potential adoptive families available for our children we have worked with colleagues across the East Midlands, particularly with colleagues from Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Derby City, to develop a Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption East Midlands. This became operational in April 2019. Adoption East Midlands leads on work to recruit, train, approve and support adoptive carers. Nottingham City Council will remain responsible for supporting children and young people with adoption plans and helping them move on. To help us with this work we have developed a Permanence Team, who lead on our work with children with adoption plans.

Where adoption is not the right plan for a child we will try to provide them with a long-term foster placement. This



requires the young person and foster carer agreeing that this is the right place for them to live throughout their childhood. Plans are considered and agreed by the Head of Service for Children in Care or in some circumstances the Director for Children's Integrated Services, who signs a certificate for the young person to confirm that this is where they will live throughout their childhood.

Permanence is our aspiration for children and young people that will give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

We strive to promote permanence which ensures that young people have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. It is also important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives although they may not wish (for a variety of reasons) to be in a foster home or to be adopted. For example, they may prefer to live in a children's home where they can also achieve a sense of security and belonging.

Twin Track or Concurrent Planning - Social workers are encouraged to work towards a child's return home whilst at the same time developing an alternative Permanence Plan, within tight timescales.

Long-term Care

For those children who remain in care, an important route to permanence is long-term foster care. Where the permanence plan for the child is long-term foster care this may be where the current short-term foster placement is assessed to meet the long term needs of the child for permanence or where a new placement is identified for a child as a result of an assessment and matching process. Where a child is placed with long term carers, it is important that the child has access to the friends, family or community within which they were brought up if possible and which form part of their identity and their long term support network.

Reunification

The aim:

- To identify those children who have a long term plan of remaining in care until independence, and to consider for them if reunification back to parents/wide family may be achieved.
- Track progress for each young person referred to the Reunification team where a plan to consider reunification is agreed.
- Provide reports to Sustainability Board on the programme's success.
- Highlight any risks to identify any mitigations/resolutions.

The Reunification Social Worker and the therapeutic Family Support Worker work closely with families and young person to ensure a smooth transition home, whilst assessments are being completed as part of parallel planning.

STARS Project

The project aims to support stepping down from residential care to foster care to enable children and young people to experience family life. They will offer support to stabilise foster placements at risk of disrupting which could lead to children or young people entering residential care placements. The project also supports those children at risk of entering care by supporting them and their families to maintain them at home. They will support the reunification of children and young people from care. They provide an intensive support service up to 2 years in some cases.

Connected Person

We plan early to identify with parents, their wider family or friends who may be able to offer permanence if a return home is clearly not in a child's best interests. We do this to avoid delays later during court proceedings.

Special Guardianship

Special Guardianship addresses the needs of a significant group of children, who need a sense of stability and security within a placement away from their parents but not the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption. It can also provide an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

Post order support

Support for adopters post order transferred to the Regional Adoption Agency in April 2019. This includes support for adoptive families after the order is granted. We have retained responsibility for support for young people who leave care having been made the subject of a Special Guardianship Order. This function is based in the Permanence team.

Stability in our workforce

We understand that children in care find changes of social worker and independent reviewing officer difficult. We work hard to try to recruit permanent staff. There is a national shortage of social workers that makes it difficult for all Local Authorities to recruit and retain staff, and we are impacted by this challenge.

We have developed a range of initiatives to address this such as encouraging staff from other areas of children's services to undertake social work training, this was through a Grow our own social work development scheme. We have also invested in something called a Frontline programme which supports in the training of social workers who join the authority as paid employees after the first year.

We have also worked on remodelling social work pay to attract more social workers to the Council.

We are starting to see the benefits of these measures but we anticipate that social work recruitment is something we are going to have to continue to focus on for the foreseeable future.

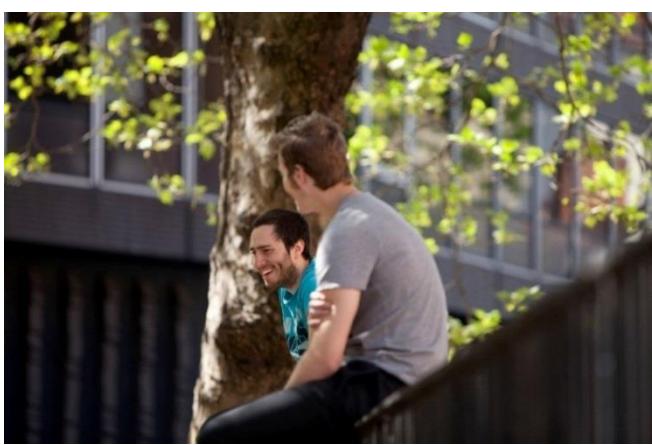
Independent Reviewing Officer Service

The Independent Reviewing Officers Service operates within the framework of the updated version of the IRO handbook, the national guidance of Working Together 2018 and the national guidance for Fostering. We provide each child in care with an independent reviewing officer, to ensure their Human Rights are respected.

The main focus of the IRO is to critically examine and quality assure the Care Planning and interventions of the Local Authority in respect of each child or young person in care. Central to this is ensuring that the child's wishes and feelings are given full consideration in planning and enabling by their role, improved outcomes.

Independent reviewing officers therefore ensure:

- There is robust scrutiny and challenge regarding decisions.
- To challenge the quality of analysis being undertaken, to ensure that plans meets the children's needs.
- That views of children, parents, carers and other professionals are given sufficient weight in care planning.
- That informed reflection occurs on the child's progress and planning for the future.



CIC Police Officers and Youth Justice Service

Since 2006 Nottingham City have had an established Children in Care Police Officer (CICPO) post which continues to be jointly funded by Nottinghamshire Police and

Nottingham City Council. In January 2018 a second CICPO joined us and we are pleased to report that capacity for the role in the City has now been permanently expanded to two Police Officers. It may be noted that in March 2020. Nottinghamshire Police also successfully recruited a CICPO for the County, jointly funded by Nottinghamshire County Council. This provides parity of service and improves outcomes for children across Nottinghamshire.

All of our young people in care have an allocated social worker who will work with a range of services to keep them safe. These services will depend on the needs of the child or young person but could include the Police or Youth Justice Service. If children go missing they will be offered return interviews by someone independent of their placement, so we can try to understand what is causing this behaviour.

The Youth Justice Service work closely with young people who have, or are at risk of getting into trouble as a consequence of criminal behaviour. The Youth Justice Service (and its partners) work hard to prevent offending and re-offending behaviour. It has been effective in its efforts to do this through its use of Restorative Justice (RJ).

Restorative Justice is used to help young people who commit crime to make amends in an effort to repair the damage done and find a positive way forward. Research shows that restorative practice delivers better outcomes for young people across schools, care, community and the Criminal Justice System. In 2016, the Youth Justice Service was awarded the Restorative Justice Council's Restorative Service Quality Mark (RSQM), which recognises professionalism and high standards in RJ practice.

Accommodation

The Placement Service

The Children's Placement Service is the single point of access for the formation and quality assurance of care placements. The Service is responsible for providing every child and young person with the best possible placement, which meets their needs, wishes and feelings and provides them with the opportunity to thrive and achieve.

The Placement Service undertakes activities to ensure that all children and young people are accessing high quality care placements. There is a dedicated Quality Assurance officer post based in the Placement Service

We use a mix of internal local authority recruited foster carers and local authority managed residential homes, as well as commissioned independent fostering agencies (IFAs) and external residential homes. Wherever possible we will place children with our carers or homes as we believe this strengthens the partnership that supports them. In August 2021, 67% of children in

care were placed in foster placements. Of those placements, 54.1% were with City Council Foster Carers. This is a consequence of focussed recruitment activity and a recent appointed team manager overseeing the service who will maintain and increase in the number of children placed with family members.

Residential Provision

At Nottingham City Council during the course of 2018/19 we expanded our internal residential and semi-independent provision. As with internal fostering, internal residential care promotes more effective collaboration between the network of colleagues working with the child, as they will all work for the local authority and share the same working methods required to help children thrive.



possible and safe.

When we are looking to place a child in care, our placement service leads to identify the best match for the child. Wherever possible we will prioritise matches with internal services but if this is not possible we have a commissioning framework that helps us identify external options. In February 2020 we moved from a framework that operated across the East Midlands to a more local model that we share with Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Derby City. This is part of our work to try to keep children within their own communities where

To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Leaving Care Service

The Leaving Care Service fulfils the Local Authority's statutory duties to young people who are transitioning towards, or have left care. The service provides intensive support and befriending, as well as offering advice, guidance, information, and practical help around all areas of independence, to help them make positive transitions and thrive in adulthood.

As at October 2021, the service is actively supporting 293 care leavers (aged between 16-21 years). This includes some of our most vulnerable care leavers, including 68 asylum seeking young people and a further 14 young people in custody.

Following the extension of statutory duties in 2018, the service continues to support care leavers aged 21-25 years, with approximately 60 young people returning to request support between April and October 2021.

The service aims are:

- To ensure young people are prepared & ready to leave the care system.
- To build positive relationships and offer personal support, where required.
- Listen to young people and include their views in the preparation & planning for leaving care.
- To be honest and realistic in terms of what responsibilities we have towards young people
- To be clear on expectations about money and entitlements.
- Promote opportunities for young people to gain independence and control their own life choices.

Care Leavers Local Offer

The Local Offer is uploaded to the Ask Lion webpage to support Care Leavers, setting out the services on offer from both the Local Authority and its partners <https://www.asklion.co.uk/kb5/nottingham/directory/advice.page?id=wtrOoglUhDY>. The offer continues to develop, with opportunities such as the Aspirations Champions Network now being added (see below).

Following changes introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, Care Leavers will be able to ask for support from a Personal Advisor up to the age of 25, whether they are in education or training or not. We have been asked to complete a survey, something the DfES had committed to review at the time the new requirements came into force. Whilst the DfES had undertaken an assessment of the financial burden, it had been difficult to assess how many young people would continue to want Personal Advisor support. This survey concluded on 27th July 2021 and we await the findings, in addition to continuing to monitor the number of care leavers that are returning to us for support post 21. In addition to this survey the DfES have had a series of “deep dive” discussions with a number of local authorities to collect more detailed information.

Independent Living Skills

The Leaving Care Service is a registered centre for the delivery of ASDAN courses and awards. These provide young people with the opportunity to develop their skills and achieve a wide range of accredited certificates that support their aspirations, and to date has predominantly focused on developing young people’s employability skills. However, this focus has now extended to supporting our Care Leavers to be best prepared and making successful transitions to independent living.

The Independent Living short course provides a structure for young people to develop the knowledge and key skills required to live independently through a series of activities and challenges. The Leaving Care Service have been involved in the development of this course with ASDAN, and a series of training to initially support our internal foster carers and children’s residential staff is being rolled out between September and November 2021. The training will enable foster carers and residential staff to guide and support young people through the course, as well as how to capture the evidence required that can be used to support a young person’s housing application / appointment prior to them turning 18.

Further briefing sessions for IRO’s and Social Workers (Children in Care) are also being rolled out at this time, to ensure that the programme is embedded in our support to young people as

they approach adulthood, better equipping them to leave care with confidence and increased resilience.

Nottingham Works 4 You (NW4U)

The Leaving Care Service have been a delivery partner for the Nottingham Works 4 You (NW4U) programme since April 2021. The programme is recognised and supported by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) and supports Nottingham City Care Leavers to engage in activities to help them progress into sustainable Education, Employment and Training (EET).

The Employability Training & Support Coordinator identifies our care leavers who are in most need of support and manages referrals, creating a package of appropriate activities and support around each young person that best meets their needs. The programme supports our most vulnerable care leavers by ensuring they are able to meet the criteria for maintaining their Universal Credit claims. The Coordinator works in partnership with a wide range of internal departments, voluntary and community sector organisations to extend training, mentoring and employment opportunities for Nottingham City Care leavers. This has also included close links with alternative provision providers to support young people into college and training, such as Catch 22, Enable, People Plus, and Access Training.

Whilst opportunities were restricted by Covid-19 over the past 18 months, the programme is currently performing well above expected outcomes, with 86 young people accessing the NW4U programme since April 2021 (exceeding the contracted target of 43 by the end of September 2021). 31 of these young people have now moved into Education, Employment or Training (exceeding contracted targets three times over.) This has included a number of young people being supported to apply for 'Kick-start' roles / opportunities within the Local Authority. One care leaver has been offered a 4-week paid placement at Nottingham City Council in the Business Support team, and has aspirations of training to be a social worker in the near future.

Equipped2Succeed

The Leaving Care Service have partnered with Equipped2succeed, a personal development programme with taster sessions in the arts and physical activity that aim to support participants towards a positive future by building confidence and self-belief, communication skills and goal setting. 3 care leavers have completed the last recent 12-week programme.

Quotes from the young people:

"Equipped to succeed has given me tools to manage stress and emotions. It has motivated me to get out of bed and travel to town to attend and engage with the group."

"I have learnt how to be confident and how to build up my future goals to use in my future and how this course has pushed me to ... believe in myself and not put myself down."

"This program has reinforced my self-confidence and belief that my writing is worth sharing and publishing. I also feel more able to manage my stress and mental state."

University

9 young people started University this September, increasing the total number of Nottingham City Care Leavers currently studying at university to 27. This is an exciting time for the Leaving Care Service, as young people are being supported in getting ready to start their journey into Further Education in a wide range of areas, including Biomedical Science, Sports Journalism and Health & Social Care.

Aspiration Champions Network

Development of the Aspiration Champions Network continues to progress, which has now recruited 18 volunteer “Aspiration Champions” from across the Council and its partners. The scheme aims to support care leavers by providing bespoke one-to-one guidance and support around careers and education choices. The 18 Aspiration Champions have now fully signed up and have received training, whilst recruitment for further champions continues. The programme is ready to go live and referrals for young people to be matched are underway.

The scheme will support our work around increasing opportunities for Nottingham City Care Leavers to progress into sustained education, training and employment, by creating more work experience and work tasters internally within the City Council. This will be coordinated through the network referrals and our internal Employability Training & Support Coordinator (ETSC) with support from our dedicated FUTURES workers in the Leaving Care Service.

Care Leaver Participation

17 Care Leavers have actively participated in recent commissioning work to identify new providers of semi-independent placements. All young people took part in discussions with their Personal Advisors about their experiences of living in semi-independent homes and provided their views on what they feel is most important when selecting a provider. 7 young people went on to participate in the next stage of the commissioning process earlier this month, looking at the collective responses and agreeing questions to ask potential providers. These young people will reconvene in October 2021, to participate in marking tender submissions from potential semi-independent providers. All young people have been provided with gift vouchers to thank them for their time.

In addition, a number of Care Leavers who have experienced struggles with their mental health have participated in recent commissioning work to improve the Local Authority's offer in respect of placement choice / providers; in particular, for those who may have experienced a period of detention under the Mental Health Act and require a community setting upon discharge. Personal Advisors have undertaken work with identified young people in supportive environments, to ensure their views are meaningfully represented within this process.

Local Data

92.8% of Care leavers were in suitable accommodation at the start of October 2021. The remaining 7.2% were young people in custody or missing. As at 16th October 2021, 89% of care leavers have had Pathway Plans completed within the 6 months preceding this date.

In 2019/2020 there were a total of 22 young people who remained with their foster carers. As at 15th October 2021, there were 27 young people in ‘Staying Put’ arrangements, which tells us that more young people (post 18) are being encouraged to stay with their former foster carer as per government guidelines.

Care Leavers Local Offer

As already mentioned, since 2018, the duty on local authorities to provide Personal Advisor support to all care leavers was extended from 21, to the age of 25. In addition, a duty to consult on and publish their 'local offer' for care leavers, which sets out both care leavers legal entitlements and the additional discretionary support that the local authority provides.

The Leaving Care Service have worked in partnership with a range of internal departments, local organisations, and most importantly children and young people themselves, in developing our local offer. This is now published online, on the Ask Lion website. The offer is continuously developing and regularly bench-marked against the offers of similar authorities. Recent developments include the addition of our Aspiration Champion Network and work experience opportunities within the city council.

When asked for their views, care leavers have commented that they had benefited widely from the Local Offer, including Council Tax exemption, YEI, Staying Put, 'Setting Up Home' allowances, priority access to housing and University support. Several specifically mentioned that they appreciated the support of their PA. One care leaver said "*I think it's [the Local Offer] brilliant, really good; I actually searched online to find out more about the Local Offer*".



Futures

Futures are a not-for-profit provider of jobs and skills advice, training, apprenticeships and support to young people and adults who need help preparing for work or training. Rated by Ofsted as Outstanding, all of their services are clear, enterprising and bespoke as stated on their website: <https://www.the-futures-group.com/what-we-do/> .

Catch 22

A fully funded Department for Education initiative for young people in Nottingham, providing an individual learning and training experience while enhancing employability skills for young people aged 16 to 19-years-old. <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/services/nottingham-study-programme/> .

Enable

A voluntary and Community Sector Learning and Skills Consortium serving the East Midlands and the UK. Enable is a charity which provides training, skills development and education for people who want to start or further their career. They do this through providing opportunities that address local learning, skills and employment needs. <https://enable.uk.net/> .

People Plus

A leading skills and training business helping people to transform their lives and businesses through work, training, education and financial advice. They help people source and retain sustainable employment, whilst working with employers to develop work forces of the future. <https://peopleplus.co.uk/> .

Access Training

Access Training provide high-quality training, apprenticeships and recruitment support to businesses and individuals throughout the Midlands. They leverage government funding to provide free or low cost support helping people to progress in work, improve productivity and enhance recruitment and retention rates. <https://www.atem.co.uk/> .

Social Care Complaints

The Social Care Complaints Service facilitates the resolution of service user dissatisfaction and learns from complaints in order to improve service delivery. There is a concerted effort to ensure that our young people know how to make a complaint if they are dissatisfied with the support they receive. Regular monitoring of complaints mean trends can be identified and service improvements can be made.

Support Services and Partner Agencies

We work with partner agencies external to the Authority, including:

Independent Visitor and Advocacy Service

The Children's Society and Change Grow Live are the current advocacy and independent visitor providers for Nottingham City Council, and they provide the following to our young people:

- Advice and information for children and young people about their rights. Services include
- Independent Persons service is for all eligible children and young people subject to current Secure Accommodation Orders.
- Independent Visitor service provides suitable appointed volunteers to visit any child or young person who is in care where it is deemed to be in the child or young person's best interests. This includes children placed out of the local authority area.
- Residential Visiting Advocacy service provides visits to all residential children's homes and residential schools wherever one of our young people is placed. This includes secure accommodation.



Governance and Monitoring Framework

The Corporate Parenting Board endorses this strategy. The Board also receives a Performance report each quarter from the Head of Children in Care and Leaving Care. Strategic Priorities (SPs) and their corresponding actions will be reviewed in response to updates of the Children in Care Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the annual children in care and care leavers 'Have Your Say' (HYS) survey, and priorities set by central government. The next scheduled update of this strategy will take place in 2023.

The Children in Care Council (CICC) will assist in the evaluation of progress against identified priorities. The CICC are involved in analysing performance data generated by the annual HYS survey and comparing it against the previous year. Priorities for future action are then recommended.

The diagram below shows the relationship between corporate parenting forums within the Authority.

