



**Looked After Children
and Care Leavers**

STRATEGY

2019 – 2022





We recognise that our role is that of any good parent, to help children and young people to access opportunities and have high aspirations...

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Looked After Children and Care Leavers STRATEGY

2019 – 2022

The voice of the child and young person is central to all we do, and our children in care council is vital in expressing that voice.

FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce this strategy aimed at maximising the outcomes for the children and young people looked after by Bedford Borough and those leaving our care. Being a corporate parent means both caring about and taking responsibility for the young people in our care, both their current welfare and future opportunities.

We are determined to be the very best corporate parents that we can be.

We recognise that our role is that of any good parent, to help children and young people to access opportunities and have high aspirations, but also to step in when things are not going well or when there's that need for extra support to get things back on track. We want all of the services we offer to enable children to develop the life skills and qualities they need to lead independent lives. This will help us to achieve our ambition, where every looked after child or care leaver is happy, healthy and has a promising future.

Our Looked After Children and Care Leavers rely on all agencies to work together to meet their needs. Such a joined up approach is only possible when everyone understands and accepts their responsibilities for this group of children and young people. This strategy describes the contributions of all partner agencies that are required to further improve outcomes for this group of children and young people.

The voice of the child and young person is central to all we do, and our children in care council is vital in expressing that voice. I am proud of all our young people and their achievements and it is a privilege to work with them. We must take every opportunity to champion for them.



Cllr Shan Hunt



OUR VISION

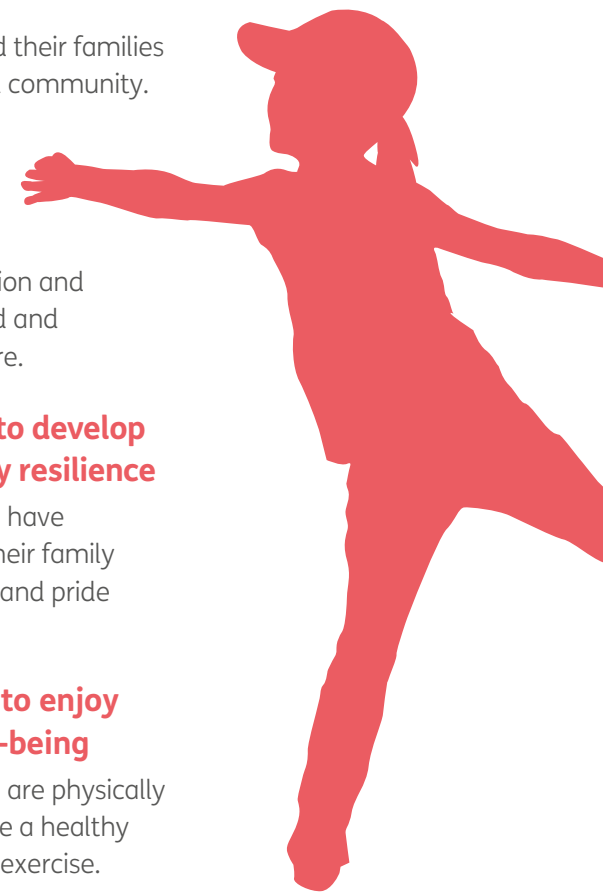
The highest quality of social care can transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children in Bedford Borough. It can offer every child who has had a difficult start the promise of a brighter future, with every prospect of success.

We want all of our children and young people in or leaving our care to be safe, happy and healthy and to enjoy life. We will give them the support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence. We will provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure that they get the opportunities they deserve.

It is the vision of Bedford Borough Council for all of our children and young people to be provided with a safe and dependable foundation from which they can grow and achieve.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

- ✓ **Enable young people to live safe, be safe**
Children, young people and their families feel safe in their home and community.
- ✓ **Enable young people to fulfil potential**
Children and young people access high quality education and training and feel motivated and ambitious about their future.
- ✓ **Enable young people to develop family and community resilience**
Children and young people have strong relationships with their family members and feel part of, and pride in, their communities.
- ✓ **Enable young people to enjoy good health and well-being**
Children and young people are physically and mentally well and have a healthy lifestyle including diet and exercise.





CORPORATE PARENTING

The local authority has a unique responsibility to the children we look after and care leavers and the role we play in their lives is one of the most important things we do.

Our strong ethos of corporate parenting means that across the Council there is a strong sense of responsibility towards looked after children and care leavers and this is a priority within the work undertaken. We recognise that children who are or have been in care have the same needs as other children but also face unique challenges.

The corporate parenting task must be shared by the Council as a whole and with partner agencies who work with looked after children and care leavers. Corporate parenting is more than just providing food and shelter. It is about doing the same for looked after children and care leavers and caring parents would do for their own children.

CORPORATE PARENTING PRINCIPLES

- ✓ To act in the best interests, and promote physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.
- ✓ To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- ✓ To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- ✓ For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- ✓ To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The local authority has a unique responsibility to the children we look after and care leavers and the role we play in their lives is one of the most important things we do.





OUR PLEDGE

TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

We will help and support you to be as healthy as possible, by:

- ✓ Supporting you to have regular health and dental checks.
- ✓ Making sure you are given the right support for any health issues or concerns you might have.
- ✓ Supporting you to make healthy choices and stay fit and well.

We will help and support you to be/stay as safe as possible, by:

- ✓ Making sure you know your social worker well.
- ✓ Making sure you see your social worker on a regular basis.
- ✓ Making sure you keep your social worker for as long as possible.
- ✓ Making sure you know how to contact your social worker.
- ✓ Working hard to make sure where you live is secure and helps you feel safe and happy.
- ✓ Working with you to create a plan if things go wrong or you become unsafe.

We will support you to achieve your goals and enjoy life, by:

- ✓ Supporting you to carry on with your everyday life as much as possible, like; going to school/college/work or training, seeing your friends and doing your hobbies and activities.

- ✓ Helping you to attend and do your very best in your training, education or employment. We will work hard to make sure you have extra support if you need it.
- ✓ Supporting you to take part in new hobbies and activities to help you learn new skills and enjoy new experiences.
- ✓ Celebrating your achievements.

We will support you to get your voice heard and involve you in decisions about your life, by:

- ✓ Always making sure your views, wishes and feelings are included when we are planning anything about your life or your future.
- ✓ Talking to you about decisions that have been made and helping you understand what they mean for you.
- ✓ Having a forum for young people who are leaving care to help have your say about the issues that are important to you and to help us improve our service and making sure we are doing the very best we can for young people.
- ✓ Making sure it is simple and easy for you to make a complaint, compliment or comment.
- ✓ Making it easy for you to access an independent advocate to talk to about any problems or issues you may have.

- ✓ Making it easy for you to attend and take part in your reviews, we will make sure there are different ways for you to be involved in your review meetings; in person, in writing or online via MOMO.

We will support you to understand your journey and remember your history, by:

- ✓ Answering any questions you might have about your time in care and what happens next.
- ✓ Talking to you about the best and safest ways to stay in touch with your family.
- ✓ Helping you learn about and understand your family history and life story.

We will support you to get ready for your future, by:

- ✓ Making sure we learn about your wishes and aspirations for your future and leaving care.
- ✓ Working with you to create a Pathway Plan that shows how we will support you in your journey to leaving care.
- ✓ Helping you to learn the skills you need to be confident and independent, such as cooking, cleaning and managing money.
- ✓ Making sure you are aware of all of the options, rights and entitlements available to you as a care leaver.

TO CARE LEAVERS

We will help and support you to be as healthy as possible, by:

- ✓ Helping you to have regular health and dental checks. We will try hard to make sure these checks are at times and in places that are good for you.
- ✓ Making sure you are given the right information and support for any health issues you might have.
- ✓ Supporting you to make healthy choices and stay fit and well.

We will help and support you to be as safe as possible, by:

- ✓ Making sure you know your social worker well.
- ✓ Making sure you see your social worker on your own on a regular basis.
- ✓ Making sure you keep your social worker for as long as possible.
- ✓ Making sure you know how to contact your social worker if you need to.
- ✓ Working hard to make sure you feel safe and happy where you live, and that you are treated fairly.
- ✓ Working with you to create a plan if things go wrong or you become unsafe.

We will support you to achieve your goals and enjoy life, by:

- ✓ Supporting you to carry on with your everyday life as much as possible. This includes things like going to school, seeing your friends and doing your hobbies and activities.
- ✓ Helping do your very best at school. We will work hard to make sure you have extra support if you need it.
- ✓ Helping you learn new skills and enjoy new experiences.
- ✓ Celebrating your achievements.

We will support you to get your voice heard and involve you in decisions about your life, by:

- ✓ Always making sure that your views, wishes and feelings are included when we are planning anything about your life or your future.
- ✓ Talking to you about decisions that have been made and helping you understand what they mean for you.
- ✓ Making sure it is simple and easy for you to make a complaint, compliment or comment.
- ✓ Making sure you have someone independent to talk to about any problems or issues you may have.

- ✓ Making it easy for you to attend and take part in your reviews. We will make sure there are different ways for you to be involved in your review meetings; in person, in writing or online with MOMO.
- ✓ We will make it easy for you to take part in the Children in Care Council (CiCC.) You can use this to; have your say about the issues that are important to you.
- ✓ Help us make sure we are doing the best we can for all children and young people in care.

We will support you to understand your journey and remember your history, by:

- ✓ Supporting you to understand why you are in care and answering any questions you might have.
- ✓ Talking to you about the best and safest ways for you to stay in touch with your family. We will make sure the rules about contact are explained to you and easy to understand.
- ✓ Helping you learn about and understand your family history and life story.



Supporting you to make healthy choices and stay fit and well.

01

PRIORITY ONE

Improve outcomes for children in care through high quality social work practice.



PRIORITY ONE

How we achieve this in practice

- ✓ We will demonstrate strong leadership, challenge and accountability at every level.
- ✓ We will complete care proceedings within statutory timescales leading to increased timely permanency for children.
- ✓ We will improve the quality of care planning and assessments, reducing drift and delay, leading to an increase in timely and effective decision making and permanent placements for children.
- ✓ We will increase Independent Reviewing Officers' impact on outcomes through contact with children, highlight their views and challenge and quality assure practice.
- ✓ We will improve the consistency of social work support for children in care.
- ✓ We will understand better those children who have multiple placement moves and offer greater support to improve stability and permanence.
- ✓ We will explain to our children who are looked after why they are coming into care and be honest and clear with them about the plans for them, including about whether or not they are likely to be returning home.
- ✓ We will ensure that our children know where to access information, advice and guidance and how to make a formal complaint.

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Children's experiences and progress are well documented in case records, illustrating strong commitment to best practice in case records.
- ✓ Children and young people's wishes and feelings are documented on case files and influence their care planning.
- ✓ The child's journey before, entering and during their time being looked after is understood and considered within assessments and care plans.
- ✓ Culturally competent practice is evident and informs care planning.
- ✓ Decision making is timely and there is a sense of urgency in establishing permanent and stable homes for children who are unable to live in their own families.
- ✓ Children are matched to the right placements to meet their needs.
- ✓ Number of placement moves are reduced.



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PRIORITY TWO

Improve outcomes for care leavers through high quality social work practice.



PRIORITY TWO

How we achieve this in practice

- ✓ We will improve the quality of service to care leavers through robust Pathway Plans written by and with young people, and stronger partnership working.
- ✓ We will support and encourage more young people to access education, employment and training.
- ✓ We will improve the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation.
- ✓ We will strengthen transition arrangements to adulthood.



Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Transitions to and within the Leaving and After Care Team are planned and occur at the young person's pace, facilitating transfer of trust and avoiding young people having to repeat their story.
- ✓ Local authority is in touch with care leavers up to the age of 25 and they are fully aware of their entitlements and receive support if requested.
- ✓ Care leavers have the opportunity to maintain relationships with significant people in their lives.
- ✓ Care leavers are prepared for the challenge of living independently and are equipped with the appropriate skills to achieve this.
- ✓ Ensure there is a mix of accommodation options for 16-24 year olds.
- ✓ Support care leavers' access to, and achievement in, further and higher education, employment and apprenticeships.
- ✓ Employment opportunities for care leavers are promoted within the Borough Council, within partner agency organisations and local businesses.

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PRIORITY THREE

Improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers through health and education.



PRIORITY THREE

How we achieve this in practice

- ✓ We will give our children who are looked after guidance about healthy living and lifestyle choices.
- ✓ We will give access to appropriate emotional and mental health support for children who are looked after when they need it.
- ✓ We will make sure our children who are looked after can access their health records and history.
- ✓ All children coming into care will have a timely Children Looked After health assessment with a medical practitioner.
- ✓ Children who are looked after with disabilities will have access to integrated services.
- ✓ We will aim to improve the achievement of children in care at Key Stage 2 and GCSE attainment.
- ✓ We will aim to increase numbers of children in care and care leavers undertaking higher and further education.
- ✓ We will increase apprenticeships and work experience opportunities across Bedford Borough Council, partners and the private sector for care leavers.



Key Success Criteria

- ✓ All looked after children will have an up to date PEP supported by a daily monitoring call to each school where a child attends to ensure attendance.
- ✓ Educational needs or requirements of the child will be considered at the outset as part of any placement.
- ✓ All children achieve expected levels of progress and where this is identified as not occurring a plan is in place to address identified challenges.
- ✓ Care leavers do well in education, employment or training and all their health needs are met.
- ✓ Children identify themselves as healthy and happy.
- ✓ Children who are looked after receive appropriate and dedicated services within agreed timescales including access to initial and review health assessments, dental appointments and emotional health and well-being services.
- ✓ Looked after children who have complex health needs and disabilities will have access to specialist services and equipment and where appropriate short breaks and specialist placements.

PRIORITY FOUR

Increase placement choice, stability and support.

PRIORITY FOUR

How we achieve this in practice

- ✓ We will work with communities, businesses and partner agencies to recruit more foster placements to meet the needs of the looked after children cohort and increase placement choices.
- ✓ We will give our children who are looked after an information profile about their carer, which gives them an idea of the family/placement they are going to, the set-up of the household, hobbies and interests.
- ✓ If a child or young person has to move from where they are living, we will involve them in the decision making as much as possible and give them an information profile of the placement they are moving to.
- ✓ If possible, we will keep our children who are looked after with their brothers and sisters when they come into care.
- ✓ Families and friends are always considered in the planning process and our children are placed with family and friends in instances where it is safe to do so.
- ✓ We will develop support offers to foster carers including access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), improving children's emotional well-being.
- ✓ We will improve quality of accommodation and support for older young people in care and care leavers.
- ✓ We will offer support to care leavers moving to independence to maintain tenancies.
- ✓ We will help our children who are looked after to do the things that are important to them in terms of culture and religion.
- ✓ We will give our children who are looked after an information pack when they come into care which will include all useful information including finances they are entitled to, such as pocket money, savings, clothing allowance and setting up home allowance.

Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Strong assessments and good quality chronologies which support care planning, ensure that decision making processes are robust when children become looked after.
- ✓ Children are matched to the right placements to meet their needs including their health, education and well-being needs.
- ✓ Principles of staying close to home are embedded in placement finding.
- ✓ A careful matching process confirms that placements are in the longer-term interest of children, with outcomes based planning relevant to the specific needs of that child.
- ✓ Increased placement stability so children are able to develop and maintain lasting networks and relationships.
- ✓ Placements provide value for money.

05

PRIORITY FIVE

Increase children and young people's impact on service design and delivery.



PRIORITY FIVE

How we achieve this in practice

- ✓ We will build relationships with our children who are looked after and listen to their views about:
 - Their care plan.
 - The best place for them to live.
 - School or educational setting.
 - Keeping in contact with their family.
- ✓ We will meet with every child who is looked after at least every six weeks and ensure that we see them alone; adapting this in line with their permanency plan.
- ✓ We will ensure that every child who is looked after plays an active role in their review including, wherever possible, identifying the location. They will also, where possible, have the opportunity to meet their Independent Reviewing Officer prior to their review. We will support young people to chair their own review if they choose to.
- ✓ We will continue to have a robust and active Child in Care Council (CICC) who are able to influence and shape the delivery of services and that our looked after children know how to get involved with.



Key Success Criteria

- ✓ There is an active Children in Care Council (CICC), which enables children and young people to have a say about the things that really matter in their lives, helping to shape the overall strategy for looked after children and young people.
- ✓ There is a culture of celebrating the success of looked after children and care leavers.
- ✓ The voice of the child is meaningfully engaged in the commissioning of services which impact them.
- ✓ Members of the CICC have regular, positive contact with senior managers and members.
- ✓ Corporate Parenting Partnership Group provides strong leadership and champions the needs of all children.

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PRIORITY SIX

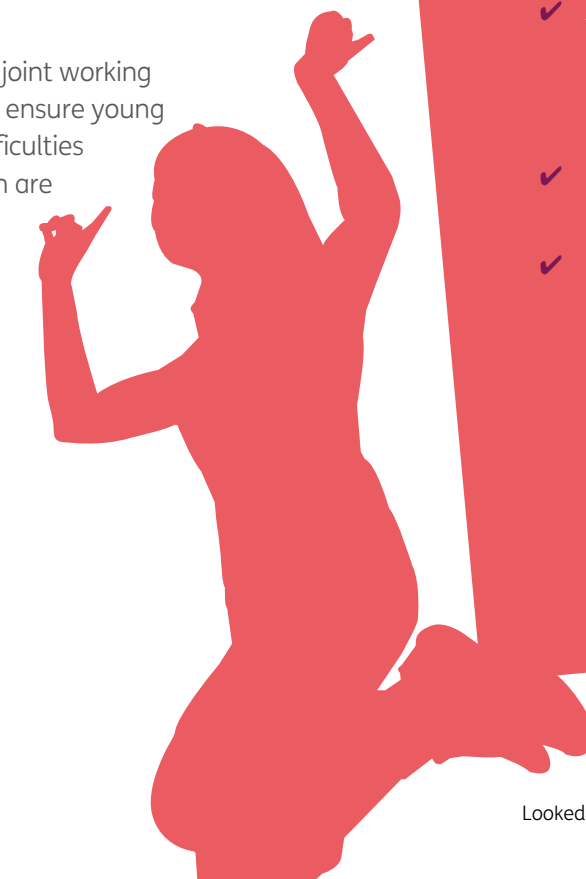
Ensure children in care and care leavers are safeguarded.



PRIORITY SIX

How we achieve this in practice

- ✓ We will continue to build positive relationships with our children and never give up on them.
- ✓ We will ensure that children and young people have a variety of means to express any concerns that they may have and that these are acted on promptly.
- ✓ We will aim to make placements feel like home to our children who are looked after.
- ✓ We will aim to keep changes for our looked after children to a minimum.
- ✓ We will continue to develop clear service pathways for children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) supported by a multi-agency process.
- ✓ We will continue to ensure that all children and young people who go missing receive return interviews, a completed risk assessment and timely management of identified risks.
- ✓ We will further develop a multi-agency response to serious youth violence enabling early identification of young people at risk and the completion of preventative work.
- ✓ We will develop further joint working protocol with CAMHS to ensure young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health are assessed swiftly.



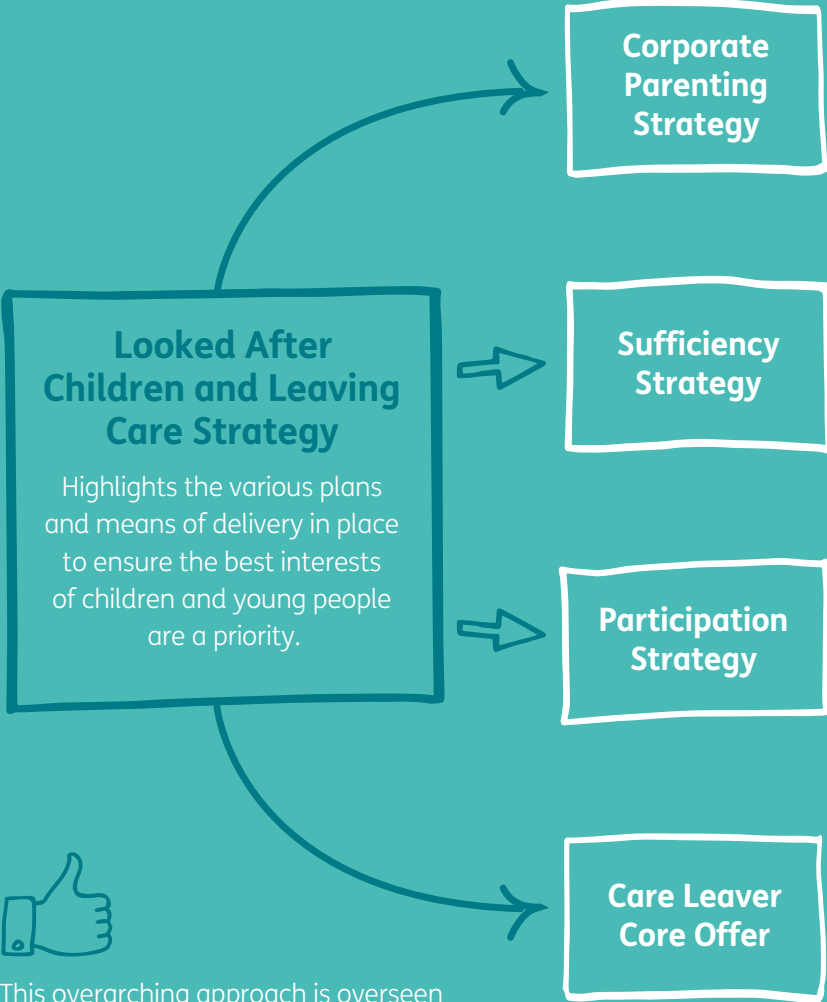
Key Success Criteria

- ✓ Swift identification of risk and effective multi-agency response to ensure children are safe and their immediate needs are met.
- ✓ Children with specific needs such as risk of FGM, sexual exploitation, going missing or youth violence are identified early and a safety plan is in place.
- ✓ Appropriate, timely and sensitive services are available for children who have been victims of child abuse, CSE and other forms of exploitative behaviour.
- ✓ Multi-agency commitment to safeguarding through LSCB.
- ✓ Return interviews are analysed and inform individual care plan and wider service delivery.

OUR ASSOCIATED
**PLANS,
PROCEDURES
AND POLICIES**

Improving outcomes

The Children Looked After Strategy forms part of a suite of documents that help inform our work and ensures that outcomes and achievements of our looked after children are at the centre of our operations. This strategy along with our sufficiency statement and corporate parenting strategy sets out how Bedford Borough Council aims to meet our promise/priorities and improve outcomes for both the organisation and our children who are looked after.



This overarching approach is overseen by members of the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board and is aligned with our statutory duties and responsibilities.



**Looked After Children
and Care Leavers**

STRATEGY

2019 – 2022