

Children in Care & Care Leavers Strategy 2026 - 2028

OUR VISION FOR OUR CHILDREN:

“We are ambitious for our district’s children and young people. Our vision is for children and young people to tell us they are happy, healthy and safe and thriving in communities where families and services work together to help them achieve their potential and dreams.”

Wakefield Children & Young People Plan 2025 - 2028



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Foreword

Dear children, young people, parents, carers and colleagues,

We are pleased to introduce Wakefield's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2026–2028. This strategy has been shaped by the voices of our children and young people, and co-produced with the Children in Care Council, CiCC Juniors and the 16+ Forum.

Our ambition is simple: every child in our care should feel safe, loved, supported and able to thrive, and every care leaver should enter adulthood with confidence, stability and opportunities that match their potential. As corporate parents, we remain deeply committed to ensuring that our children experience the same care, ambition and advocacy that any good parent would provide.

This strategy builds on the strong foundations of previous years and responds to national reform, including the emerging Families First Partnership programme. We are strengthening early family support, investing in trauma-informed and relational practice, expanding our fostering and Mockingbird networks, increasing local residential and 16+ supported accommodation, and making sure children grow up in homes that offer stability, love and belonging.

The voices of our children and young people shape the heart of this strategy. They have told us what matters most: feeling safe, being listened to, having stable relationships, good health, strong education, and a bright future.

We are proud of the achievements made so far, from improving placement stability and supporting more children to live in family-based homes, to celebrating the success of our young people at Care4Us events and expanding participation, training, and leadership roles for care-experienced young people.

We thank all our children, young people, carers, staff and partners for their contributions, honesty and leadership. Together, we will build a Wakefield where every child in care and every care leaver experiences love, stability and opportunity.

Thank you for your continued commitment and care.



Cllr Margaret Isherwood
Portfolio Holder
Children and Young People Services



Victoria Schofield
Corporate Director
Children and Young People Services

Introduction & Context

This strategy outlines our vision for our children and young people and, as corporate parents, to achieve the best possible experiences for all our Children in Care and Care Leavers in Wakefield.

This strategy shows what Wakefield Council and our partners promise to do to help children in care and care leavers. We want every child and young person in care to have the best start in life, feel safe, and have positive experiences. We will give you every chance to learn, grow, and reach your goals.

For children in care, we know that you might face extra challenges, and we want to make sure you have the love and support you need to do well and feel happy. For care leavers, we promise to give you the right help and support so you can be ambitious and confident as you move into adult life.

Our ambitions reflect and build on our work from the previous 'Children in Care Strategy 2024-2026' but more importantly what our children and young people and care leavers have told us is important to them now and going forward.

Guided by the national vision set out in *Stable Homes, Built on Love* (2023), Wakefield is embedding a series of nationally endorsed, evidence-informed approaches that strengthen stability and loving relationships for children. This includes adopting the emerging Families First for Children model (2025), which brings multi-disciplinary support together into one Family Help service to ensure families receive joined-up support earlier in their journey. We are strengthening early family group decision-making so that wider family networks can play a meaningful role sooner, helping more children remain safely within their families and supporting the national shift towards kinship care, now backed by the first ever national kinship strategy. Alongside this, we have created placement stability through our residential transformation and increase of in house 16+ supported accommodation.

We continue to invest in relational, trauma-informed practice and to expand supportive fostering models such as Mockingbird, which align with government priorities to strengthen recruitment and retention of foster carers and provide children with the consistent, nurturing relationships they deserve. Together, these developments ensure that our children, young people, and families experience a system built on love, stability and high-quality support.

This strategy also acknowledges and supports children in care who come to live in Wakefield from other local authorities. We recognise that the availability of local services and provision can be influenced by the number of children placed in the district by other authorities. Our commitment is to work collaboratively to ensure that all children and young people living in Wakefield receive the support they need to thrive.

This strategy should be read alongside our Sufficiency Strategy 2026 – 2028.

The National Context

National children's social care data for the year ending 31 March 2025 shows that demand remains extremely high. According to Ofsted, nearly 84,000 children were in care in England during the 2024-25 inspection year, reflecting a small increase from 2024 and continuing the long-term upward trend over the past decade.

The overall trajectory demonstrates sustained growth in the number of children requiring care. National datasets indicate that numbers rose from 69,460 in 2015 to a peak of 83,760 in 2023, followed by a stable position in 2024, when 83,630 children were in care, before rising again to 84,000 in 2025. Despite this moderation, system pressure remains significant, driven by the increasing complexity of children's needs and demographic shifts, particularly among older children entering or remaining in the care system. Local authorities continue to report higher levels of serious harm and complex presenting needs, alongside persistent shortages of homes for teenagers with the highest levels of need, an issue highlighted by the Children's Commissioner, who notes that children are not offered stable placements and may enter restrictive Deprivation of Liberty and Unregulated settings.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children make up a significant proportion of our older care population. Adoption numbers remain comparatively low, with 2,980 adoptions in 2024, continuing the national downward trend.

These dynamics reflect ongoing strain on placement sufficiency, workforce capacity and financial sustainability. The stabilisation seen since 2023 does not indicate a shift in trajectory; rather, the system continues to operate at historically high levels of demand.

The Local Context

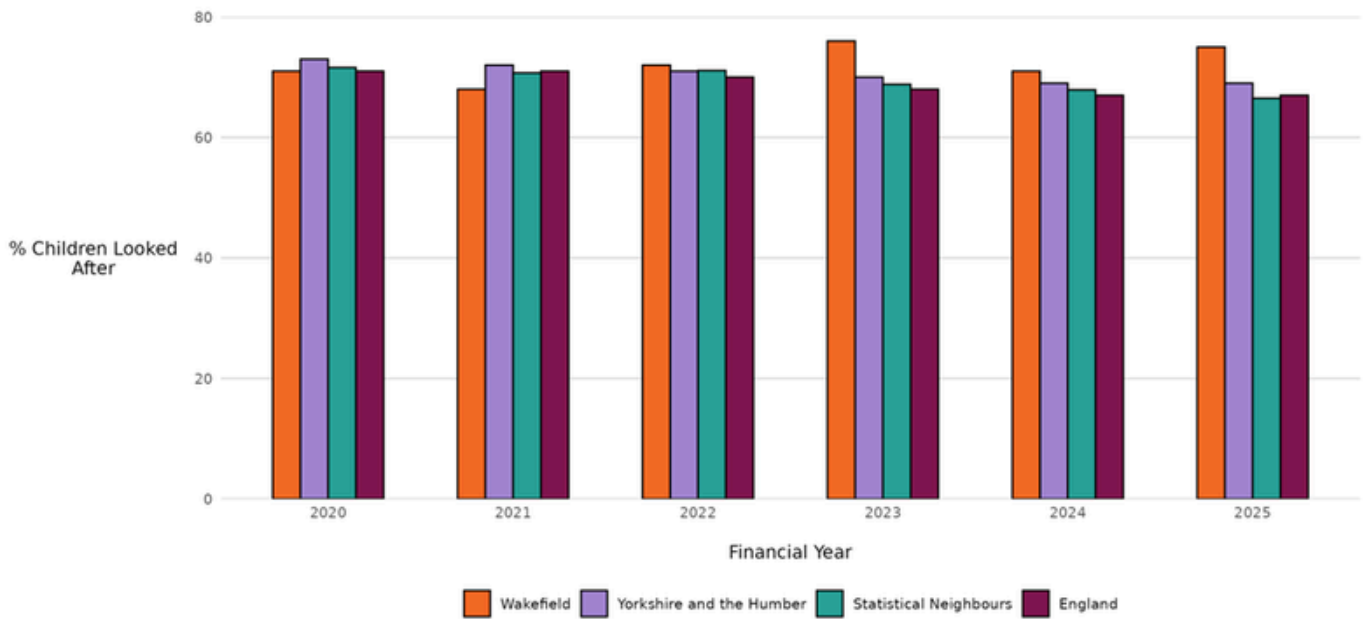
At the end of March 2025, there were 690 Children in Care in Wakefield and the rate per 10,000 population stood at 89.00. This is above the latest available statistical neighbour rate of 82.00, and the national rate of 67.00.

The majority of our Children in Care live in a family-based setting. We believe that this is the best arrangement for children, allowing for the development of relationships with their carers, and closely matching the experience of most children in the general population.

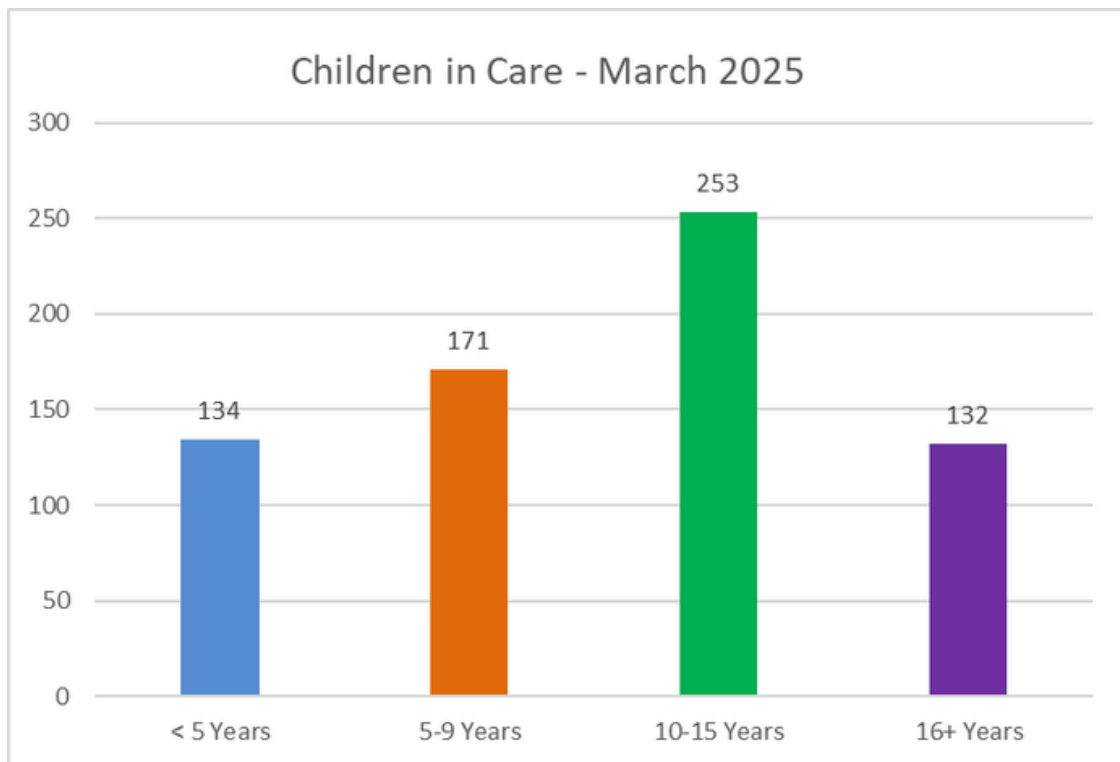
More recent data evidence that as of January 2026, 84% of Wakefield children in care were living in a family environment. This is an increase of 3% from March 2024.

The chart below shows that at the end of March 2025, 71% of children in care were living in a foster placement. This is higher than the National Average of 67% and higher than our Statistical Neighbours, at 66.5%. More recent data as of January 2026 shows that 75% of children in care in Wakefield were living in a foster placement and 56% of children in care were placed within our in house foster families.

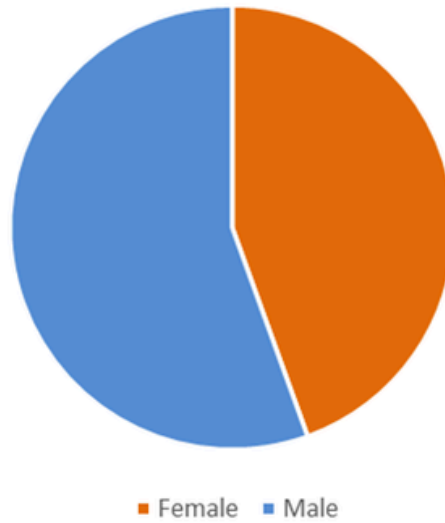
Children looked after at 31 March placed in foster care (%)



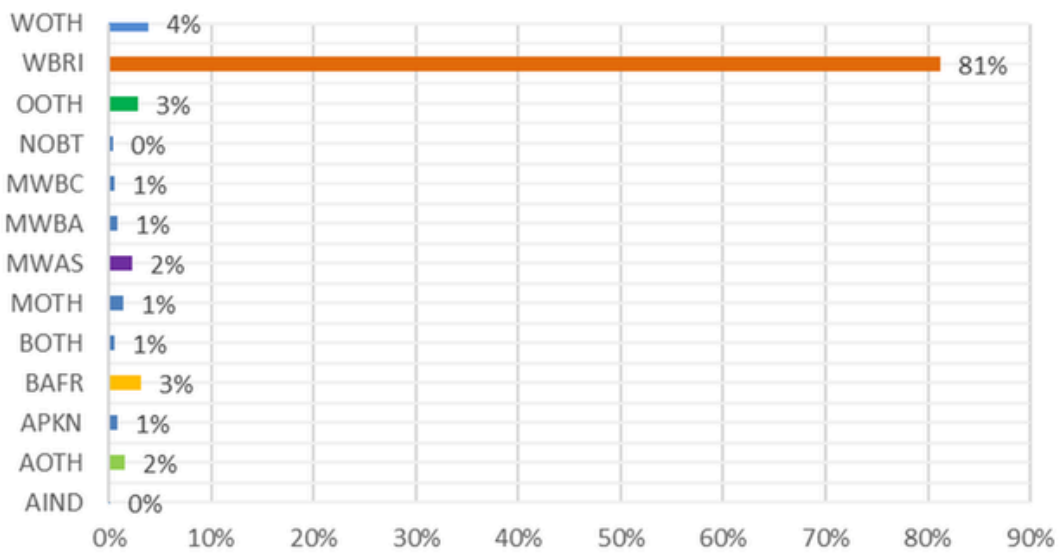
The table below provides a breakdown of the ages of children in care as of March 2025 along with gender and ethnicity. There is a high proportion of children in care aged 10 – 15 years which is 36%. 54% of children in care are male.



Gender of Children in Care - March 2025



Ethnicity of Children in Care - March 2025



Most children in care in Wakefield are white British. Our strategy and plans take account of cultural differences with a focus through our sufficiency planning, on securing enough of the right kinds of homes and support in place for children in care.

Our Vision, Ambitions & Achievements

Building a Fairer Future

- The Council's Corporate Plan 'Building a Fairer Future' sets out how we will work with communities and partners to deliver our ambitions for the district. The plan sets out the priorities that will make Wakefield an even better place to live, work, visit and study. At the heart the plan is the priority the Council has given to support our children and families to thrive by creating the best possible learning environment and making sure that children and families receive the right support at the right time.
- Our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy plays a vital role in achieving this priority. It ensures that every child for whom we hold corporate parenting responsibility lives in a home where they feel safe, are well cared for, and have access to the right support and opportunities to build a bright and successful future.

Wakefield Children and Young Peoples Plan 2025 - 2028

Children and young people from across the Wakefield district led the development and creation of this overarching plan for Wakefield Children. It sets out an ambitious vision and focusses on the things that are most important to them. In summary:

"We are ambitious for our district's children and young people. Our vision is for children and young people to tell us they are happy, healthy and safe and thriving in communities where families and services work together to help them achieve their potential and dreams."

The plan has been agreed by the Children's and Young Peoples Partnership and endorsed by full Council. All partners are committed to a range of actions to improve the lives of children with the focus on four key priorities for children which are:

- Our Safety and Feeling Loved
- Our Health
- Our Education
- Our Futures

Our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy plays a vital role in achieving these priorities. It ensures that every child for whom we hold corporate parenting responsibility lives in a home where they feel safe, are well cared for, and have access to the right support and opportunities to build a bright and successful future.

Our Pledge to Children in Care & Care Leavers

Created with young people, based on what matters to them.

Our promise to you is that we will:



CELEBRATE YOU

Our promise to you is that we will:

Keep you safe, supported and accepted:

We will make sure you feel safe, comfortable, free from judgement and enable you to have a place where you can be yourself. We will always act in your best interests, promoting your physical and mental health, wellbeing, and happiness.

Listen to you and involve you in all decisions about your life:

Your voice, your wishes and your experiences will shape your plans and your future, not just in theory, but in reality. You are the expert in your own life. We will listen carefully to what you tell us, take you seriously, and act on it.

We want you to feel loved, included and valued:

We want you to feel loved, respected and treated with kindness. You will have trusted adults who are consistent, show up and stick with you. We will keep in touch with you, not just because we have to, but because we care.

Be honest and kind with you, always:

No sugar-coating, no hiding things, no mixed messages. We will tell you the truth and explain decisions clearly. Adults get things wrong too and if this happens, we will apologise and make it right.

Get you the very best support:

We will listen to you and get you the very best support that is right for you. That includes the right foster carers, social workers, homes, and all the opportunities and services available to you while you are in care.

Protect your health, education and your future:

We will support you to maintain good physical health and emotional wellbeing. We will support you to stay in your school where possible, and make sure you have the right help, transport and encouragement to learn, achieve and aim high. We will prepare you for adulthood and independent living when you are ready for this.

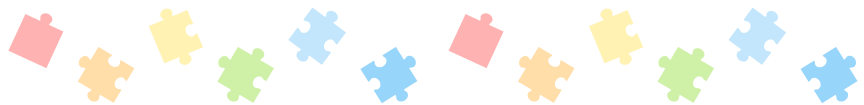
Celebrate you:

We will encourage and support you. Your achievements, big or small, will be noticed, recognised and celebrated. We see your strengths, your talents and your future. We champion your ambitions, have high aspirations for you and will work together to secure the best outcome for you possible.

If we aren't doing what we said we would do:

No sugar-coating, no hiding things, no mixed messages. We will tell you the truth and explain decisions clearly. Adults get things wrong too and if this happens, we will apologise and make it right.

Our Focus



We are committed to ensuring that children and young people in care grow up in loving, stable homes. We know that stable homes and relationships are the foundation for our children's healthy development and future success.

To ensure we achieve the best outcomes for children in care and care leavers our ambitions are:

Support Families to Stay Together

Early intervention and prevention play a critical role in keeping children within their family and community networks. This way, we will ensure only those who really need to come into care do so and at the right time. A key part of our approach is the use of Family Network Meetings, which bring together the people who matter most in a child's life. These meetings empower families to identify solutions, strengthen support networks, and create plans that keep children safe and connected to those who love them. By working in partnership with families and their wider networks, we are ensuring that every child has the best possible chance to thrive at home. Through Family Network Meetings, Targeted Early Help and early intervention, we will empower families to create plans that support stability and nurture strong relationships. In addition, we will be focussing on differential planning with our Families Achieving Change Team, which seeks to enable older children to remain living at home with their Parents where being in care does not improve their outcomes.

Social Care Reforms:

The children's social care reforms are now being implemented across England which place keeping families together at the centre of the national strategy. They give local authorities new expectations, tools, funding streams and statutory duties that can be used to strengthen family support in Wakefield and beyond.

In Wakefield, Multi-agency child protection teams will be designed in response to social care reforms to ensure that children at risk of harm and their families are well-supported to achieve positive, sustainable changes and to prevent the need for care. In addition, we will merge early help and child in need pathways into a single, more coherent Family Help system. This is intended to provide earlier, multi-disciplinary support that prevents escalation.

Supporting Children into Family Settings:

Our ambition is to ensure that every child in care grows up in a loving, stable environment that feels like home. Wherever possible, we want children to remain connected to their families, their culture, and their communities. To achieve this, we place a strong emphasis on kinship care and family-based settings, recognising the vital role that relatives and trusted adults play in a child's sense of belonging and identity.

We work closely with families and extended networks to explore all options that keep children safe within their own family environment. By prioritising kinship care and family settings, we aim to give children the security and love they need to thrive, both now and in the future. This includes remaining with their siblings wherever possible.

Supporting Children to Live Locally:

Our ambition is to ensure that when children are unable to remain within their families, placements allow young people to remain close to their communities and networks where safe and appropriate. Out of area placement options are a last resort that we will consider and only used when all other options locally have been explored, or there are individual reasons as to why this is necessary for some children or young people.

Planning for Permanence:

Our ambition is to ensure that each child has a plan to achieve permanence. Wherever possible, this will include physical, emotional and legal permanence. Our ambition is for children to grow up in a lasting family environment, whether children move on to family carers, either within their birth family, broader kinship network, fostering family or through adoption.

We have arrangements that help us to oversee the permanence planning for our children and young people, driving permanent outcomes from the earliest possible stage, including:

- Care within the child's wider family or with friends (including with associated Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship orders)
- Returns home to birth parents (where safe to do so)
- Fostering
- Adoption
- Supporting care leavers to source safe and suitable accommodation and safe, supportive networks when they reach adulthood

Ensure Placements Deliver Positive Outcomes:

We work collaboratively with children, young people, and professionals to ensure that every placement fully meets the child's needs, wishes, and aspirations, including education, health, emotional well-being and placement stability. Our goal is to deliver positive outcomes and support a smooth transition into adulthood. This will be achieved through regular reviews, strong oversight, and active involvement of the Local Authority's placements team, holding providers accountable to maximise opportunities and promote the best possible outcomes for every child.

Key Achievements - what we have done since 2024:

- Achieved recognition from OFSTED in the latest social care inspection (2025) for providing 'Outstanding' services for children in care.
- Children in Care teams were praised by OFSTED (2025) for highly creative and skilled life-story work, and strong direct work with children.
- Successfully long term matched 220 children to live with their foster families until 18 or beyond.
- Achieved permanence for 99 children, via Special Guardianship Orders / Child Arrangement Orders.
- Approved 19 new in-house foster carers providing 23 placements.
- Added to our portfolio a range of accommodation across the district. A total of 20 internal residential placements are available for children and we have 75 supported accommodation (16+) places available in-house for our care leavers.
- Driven staying put arrangements with foster carers for children leaving care. As at the end of 2025, 10.7% of young people were in Staying Put arrangements, enabling them to stay with their foster family post 18.
- Developed relationships with adult social care and accommodation providers to jointly plan and support a collaborative transition for young people's post 18 provision for those with complex needs who require more supportive accommodation.
- All our Internal Residential children's homes have been judged by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding'.
- Worked with our housing colleagues to secure two social housing homes, successfully building upon our mainstream residential estate capacity.
- Opened the new 'Foster Hub Home', a bespoke model for children to step down in to foster care homes from residential settings, offering support akin to the Mockingbird model, including respite care for foster carers. To date, we have successfully moved on 2 children since the home opened in March 2025.
- Received Ofsted outcomes of 'Good' for all our SEND homes.
- Increased the number of Fostering Mockingbird Constellations from 1 to 3. This approach links several fostering households to one experienced "hub" foster carer, who offers practical and emotional support to the group as a whole.
- Significantly reduced the number of children living in external residential provision by 50%, enabling children to be cared for in their own communities.
- Extension of services and support offered by our Emotional Wellbeing Team (EWBT) including the stability and disruption pathway, consultation for carers and a dedicated 16-25 worker.

- Introduction of a specialist care navigator to work with care leavers aged 16-25 to support care leavers to achieve permanence in the right home.
- Continued to improve placement stability, with the number of children with 3 or more homes down to 8.72% as of December 2025 which is lower than the national rate of 10.00% and the statistical neighbour rate of 9.60%.
- Achieved long term stability for 64.18% (December 2025) of our children in care. This means for these children, they lived in the same home for 2 or more years.
- Refreshed the Local Offer for care leavers has been refreshed and we re-designed how this is shared with our children leaving care.
- An increase in the number of care leavers gaining suitable independent accommodation
- We have strengthened the matching process for children. Our proforma has been updated following consultation across the service with the Placements team and ensures that the carers are best able to meet the needs of our children.
- Undertaken significant quality assurance activity with outcomes from our audits evidencing that care plans capture a child's current and upcoming needs and provide targets around achieving the best outcomes possible. All plans are written to the child in a way that they understand to ensure that they would be able to access their files and comprehend the planning and decision making.
- We have strengthened our arrangements in respect of young people nearing independence with 16+ care and support assessments / checklists completed to determine if they require care or support. This assists in early planning and transition preparation.

The Voice of Children in Care and Care Leavers

Build Our Futures, (BOF) established in 2019, is Wakefield's central youth forum, bringing together members from all voice and participation groups, and youth groups across the district, including the Children in Care Council (CiCC), CiCC Juniors and the 16+ Forum.

Our children in care wanted to, in their own words tell you what they do:

We are the Children in Care Council (CiCC), CiCC Juniors, and the 16+ Forum. Together, we represent the voices of care experienced young people in Wakefield. We work collaboratively to improve experiences, influence decision-making, and shape services. We meet monthly through council meetings and activity groups, building strong, honest relationships with each other and with our corporate parents. Many members of the 16+ Forum began their journey through CiCC Juniors, showing a clear pathway for continued involvement and leadership.

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Our Groups

CiCC Juniors

CiCC Juniors meets monthly and focuses on fun and creative activities while encouraging younger children to learn to express their views.

In 2025, members explored the elements and created artwork for an exhibition as part of Wakefield Council's "Our Year" initiative.

"I think others should join CiCC Juniors because you make good friends and you don't feel left-out or lonely."

McKenzie

Children in Care Council (CiCC)

CiCC plays a vital role in shaping services for children in care and leads on major projects, including this strategy. Members work closely with professionals to improve services and now set and lead the agenda at Corporate Parenting Committee meetings.

16+ Forum

The 16+ Forum supports care-experienced young people aged 16 and over. Members represent the views of older children in care and care leavers, ensuring lived experience directly informs services. The forum consults on the Local Offer, works on priority areas, and leads training for professionals.

Advisory Group

In 2026, members from each group formed an Advisory Group that will meet regularly with the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting to address priorities, monitor progress, and track improvements.

Our Groups

Care4Us Awards

- Wakefield celebrated the achievements of over 140 young people
- Recognised kindness, education, recreation, and positive change
- Hosted an event featuring performances from across the community

Care4Us Fun Days

- 100 families enjoyed art, music, and activities at Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- Children's achievements were celebrated through awards
- Foster families collaborated with artists to create sculptures and won summer passes

Care Leaver Awards

- We celebrated the achievements of care experienced young adults,
- Recognised learning, confidence, kindness, and all the positive steps they have taken
- Young adults, carers, and workers came together to enjoy time with one another and share in everyone's successes

Evidencing Impact

In 2024, we told everyone what matters most to us:

- Better emotional wellbeing for foster carers, workers, and young people.
- Better communication and information so everyone understands what's happening.
- More support for care leavers to help us thrive.

We are proud to have turned these priorities into action. Here is what we achieved:

Better Emotional Wellbeing

- We spoke at Corporate Parenting Committee about supporting foster carers, workers, and children.
- We created memory books and shared life stories at Pontefract Castle.
- We launched an Emotional Wellbeing Survey at the CIC Awards.
- We explored emotional wellbeing with workers in training.
- We produced podcasts about life story work and emotional support.

Better Communication and Information

We co-produced and designed new paperwork for children in care, including:

- One Minute Guides
- Children's Guide to Making a Complaint
- Updated review forms and documents.
- We delivered training to staff and Wakefield Families Together partners.



Training Led by Us

- We delivered Challenging Stereotypes and Participation and Voices training to over 100 professionals.
- We assessed potential foster carers through Preparation to Fostering Training.
- We delivered training to first-year Social Work students at Leeds University.
- Our training scored 10/10 from almost everyone!
- We also delivered listening training at the Foster Carer Celebration Event.

**"It is the best safeguarding
training I have ever attended."
CiCC Nurse**

Support for Care Leavers

- We met monthly to improve the Local Offer and plan Care Leavers Month.
- We helped select activities, joined interview panels, and built social networks.
- We took part in a regional football tournament and launched the Wakefield Warriors team (sponsored by Pontefract and Castleford Lions).
- Launched the "Wakefield Warriors" football team. Took part in a regional football tournament and played a charity football match against a Police team

Creative & Cultural Projects

We Are... Exhibition

- Our art and videos were displayed at Anglers Country Park and Create Café.
- We challenged stereotypes and showcased creativity and strength.
- Visitors described it as "empowering and inspiring."
- We designed and hosted an Escape the Dungeon event at Pontefract Castle.
- We buried a Time Capsule to be opened in 100 years, showing life for children in care in 2025.
- We performed at awards and created podcasts about life story work.
- One of us shared her poem at the Net Zero Climate Summit and received a standing ovation!





Big Wins

- We chaired the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the Youth Voice Steering Group.
- Our priorities shaped the Children and Young People's Plan 2025-2028.
- One of us was appointed as a National Children's Bureau Ambassador.
- Six of us hosted the Awards Ceremonies Build Our Futures Summit.
- Six of us delivered Children's Rights Training at the Regional Children in Care Council.
- Our training was commissioned by the University of Leeds.

As said by one of our children in care:

"We are leading change in Wakefield. We shape services, challenge stereotypes, and build a stronger community."



Find out more in our Care4Us Website for care experienced young people in Wakefield

The CARE4US Website



I'm 4-11

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



I'm 11-18

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



Care Leavers 16-25

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

www.Care4Us.co.uk is a place we contribute our ideas, share our achievements, and post news about what's happening for children in care and care leavers. It helps us stay connected, find support, and make sure our voices are heard in the things that matter to us.



Mind Of My Own

We have an app, called Mind Of My Own that you can use to share your views, feelings, and experiences in a way that's easy and secure. It helps you communicate digitally with the professionals who support you, making sure your voice is heard in decisions that affect you.



Our Messages to Decision Makers

Listen to us respect us, trust us

By understanding emerging risks, need and offering early help to avoid unnecessary escalation of challenges leading to additional harm and higher levels of intervention. This will involve working with a range of people who support children including wider family / kinship networks and the broader partnership across our communities.

Plan ahead and be creative

Placing our voices at the centre of decision-making is worth it in the long term.

Attend Our Training and Events

Please attend our Participation and Voices and Challenging Stereotypes training and celebration events, to help strengthen how you hear, include, and champion young people's views. By taking part, you'll build practical skills and experiences that support more positive, inclusive, and confident relationships with the young people you work with.

Use language we understand

We live in homes, not placements. We spend time with our families, not contact. Avoid jargon and abbreviations and give us time and space to share our views. Keep us informed.

Stick with us

Build long-term relationships. Frequent changes in workers mean we, our carers, and our families have to repeatedly retell our stories.

Help us feel a sense of belonging and love

Support us to maintain relationships with siblings and those who matter most. Give us time to learn and space to grow.

Please use this strategy as a guide to the way you work

And please let the Children in Care Council and the 16+ Next Steps Forum know about all the good things you are doing.

What Children & Young People Told Us & Our Priorities

Children and young people have told us what matters most to them as they grow up in our care. They want to be healthy, safe, loved, listened to and supported to achieve their ambitions, and they are clear about the changes and commitments they need from us to make this happen.

Our priorities for the next two years have been developed entirely on the voices and experiences of our children and young people. Their voices shape our priorities and guide every decision we make about their lives, aligned with the overarching priorities of the Children and Young Peoples Plan 2025-2028.

Our Health

Children want support that protects both their physical and emotional wellbeing.

They tell us they need:

- Access to healthy food and encouragement to live active, healthy lives.
- Stability, because frequent moves bring disruption and emotional distress.
- Access to mental health support when experiencing anxiety, low mood or uncertainty.
- Trusted adults who listen, check in regularly and understand their individual needs.
- Clear information to help them stay safe and make positive choices.
- Carers who understand their health needs and support them consistently.

Our Priorities for the Next Two Years

Over the next two years, we will:

- Continue to strengthen mental health and emotional well-being support for children in care, including targeted intervention for anxiety and low mood.
- Reduce changes to living arrangements to minimise stress and disruption.
- Ensure all children have access to healthy food, active lifestyles and carers who understand their health needs.
- Strengthen trusted-adult relationships
- Increase support and guidance for children and carers in relation to health needs.
- Develop improved training for carers around mental health first aid and trauma informed practice.
- In partnership with our Health colleagues ensure health assessment timeliness and follow up, to support children's physical, emotional, and developmental needs are met in a timely way.
- Promote healthy lifestyles and emotional resilience through carers, schools, and support networks.

Our Education

Children and young people want an education that is stable, aspirational and barrier-free.

They tell us they need:

- Extra learning resources and support during transitions.
- Continuity in education during any changes to living arrangements and limited disruption to lessons.
- Access to good schools, routes into further and higher education and preparation for employment.
- Practical skills including financial skills, travel, confidence and job-readiness.

Our Priorities for the Next Two Years

Over the next two years, we will:

- Prevent disruption in relation to school changes and lesson disruption wherever possible and avoidable.
- Expand access to life-skills education: confidence-building, financial support / knowledge, travel and job-readiness.
- Support clear pathways into further education, apprenticeships and employment.
- Maintain a strong focus on education stability and attendance.
- Continued strong partnership working with schools and virtual school services to improve attainment and aspirations.
- Increase collaboration with the Virtual School to ensure foster carers receive clearer guidance on supporting learning and attendance.
- Improve transition support for young people moving between school stages or into post 16 education.

Our Safety

Feeling safe is essential, and children want practical and emotional safety built into their daily lives.

They tell us they need:

- To feel protected and be able to speak up when something is wrong.
- Safe spaces with and secure environments.
- Clear expectations and rules that feel fair and easy to understand.
- Support to avoid harmful behaviours, such as substance misuse.
- Professionals whose personalities and approaches match theirs, helping them build trust and confidence.

Our Priorities for the Next Two Years

Over the next two years, we will:

- Continue to provide home environments that are safe and nurturing
- Strengthen risk-awareness support (online safety, healthy relationships, substance misuse), vulnerability to exploitation and continue to embed safeguarding practice and contextual safeguarding approaches.
- Improve matching between children and professionals to build trust whilst maintain a robust stability pathway and support when challenges arise
- Support carers and workers to confidently manage risk while promoting children's independence, through training and consultation with carers and professionals
- Strengthen safer care planning, including updated risk assessment tools and guidance for carers.
- Work with young people to co design information on staying safe online and in the community.

Feeling Loved

Children want to feel cared for, valued and understood.

They tell us they need:

- Stability, fewer living arrangement changes and consistent workers to reduce stress and help them feel secure and loved.
- Carers and those around them to be kind-hearted, approachable and able to listen without judgement.
- Small acts of care, such as baking, helping with tasks or buying a small treat which make a big difference.
- Long-term, trusting relationships with carers and social workers are vital, without unnecessary changes.
- Services should be reliable, easy to access and consistently communicated.

Our Priorities for the Next Two Years

Over the next two years, we will:

- Increase the number of local family-based foster carers so children can stay close to friends, schools and communities.
- Continue to reduce out-of-area homes except where strongly justified which will support children to feel they belong to their community
- Strengthen matching processes to ensure homes our children live in, meet children's personalities, needs and identities.
- Build capacity in specialist and therapeutic homes to prevent moves.
- Strengthen the "team around the child" approach to maintain stability when challenges arise.
- Prioritise relationship stability including fewer living arrangement / home changes, fewer changes of worker.
- Support carers to provide the small, everyday acts of care that mean so much to children.
- Maintain consistency in services so support is reliable, predictable and accessible.
- Further embed relationship-based and trauma informed practice, valuing continuity of care and trusted adults including life long links as they reach adulthood.
- Support permanence planning, including long term foster care and family based options supported by permanence panel and matching panels.
- Encourage carers and workers to provide consistent, nurturing care that helps children feel valued and secure.
- Continue to ensure children are supported to keep in touch with important people in their lives by ensuring Family time arrangements are in line with children's needs and safety and continued use of family network meetings to make sure children feel connected, supported, and valued and bring together the people who matter most in a child's life to help make safe and loving plans for their care.

Our Futures

Children and young people want ambition from the services that supports them.

They tell us they need:

- Good education that opens the door to good jobs and financial stability.
- Safe, secure housing, a “roof over their head” they can rely on.
- Support to become independent
- Practical help with driving lessons and access to a car.
- Opportunities to enjoy holidays, hobbies and the “nice things” other children experience.
- Support to settle into new homes and guidance as they move toward adulthood.

Our Priorities for the Next Two Years

Over the next two years, we will:

- Provide early, structured preparation support for adulthood, including financial skills, education, employment, training, life skills and confidence-building.
- Ensure safe, stable housing and reduce moves for care leavers.
- Increase access to hobbies, enrichment activities, holidays and practical opportunities
- Strengthen support when settling into new homes and at key transition points.
- Expand Staying Put and explore Staying Close style arrangements for young people moving into semi independent living.
- Strengthen pathway planning with earlier career discussions and improved access to work experience and apprenticeships.
- Develop clearer preparation for adulthood resources for carers and young people
- Support care experienced young people to develop aspirations and confidence in their future.

And, throughout all, Participation & Voice

Children want to be listened to, genuinely and consistently.

They tell us they need:

- To be involved in decisions that affect their lives, with their views taken seriously.
- Clear explanations about decisions, including what choices they can and cannot make with meetings held that do not feel intimidating.
- Guides, support and adapted opportunities for disabled young people.
- Fair, clearly explained procedures with a comments and complaints pathway where this is necessary

Our Priorities for the Next Two Years

Over the next two years, we will:

- Continue to involve children in all decisions that affect their lives and respond meaningfully to their views.
- Provide opportunities to meet with senior leaders, be involved in the recruitment of staff and act as experts designing and delivering training to our workforce
- Provide clear explanations about decisions, including what choices are available and why, with meetings taking a child-friendly approach and being less formal
- Improve accessibility for disabled young people, including adapted materials and additional support.
- Promote participation by ensuring young people's voices shape decisions about their home, routines, and future plans.

Our Offer of Support for Our Care Leavers

As a corporate parent, Wakefield Council is committed to ensuring that every care leaver is supported into adulthood with the same commitment, love, stability and ambition that any good parent would provide. By embedding statutory duties, our local priorities, and the voices of young people, we provide a comprehensive, compassionate and ambitious offer, one that reflects our belief that care leavers deserve the very best of us.

Our offer sets out the practical and emotional support available to young people aged 16 to 25 and beyond, recognising their individual needs, aspirations, and identities.

This offer is shaped by The Corporate Parenting Principles (Children and Social Work Act 2017), our statutory Local Offer for Care Leavers and Wakefield's strategic priorities for children in care and care leavers. Together, these form the foundation of our promise to young people as they move into independence.

Relationships, Belonging and Staying Connected

We will help young people build strong, safe, enduring relationships by offering:

- A consistent Personal Adviser (PA) from the age of 16, up to the age of 25
- Support to maintain or reconnect with family, friends, former carers, or trusted adults
- Opportunities to stay involved in activities, groups, and community networks
- Access to advocacy and independent visitors where appropriate
- Our goal is for every young person to feel they belong, are heard, and remain connected.

Education, Employment and Training (EET)

We will support care leavers to achieve their aspirations through:

- A dedicated EET support pathway including access to apprenticeships
- Help applying for courses, training, work experience and apprenticeships
- Support with CVs, interview skills, and confidence-building
- Financial support for education-related costs (e.g. materials, travel, digital access)
- Priority access to local authority apprenticeship opportunities
- We aim to improve access, sustainment, and progression in learning and work.

Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Care leavers in Wakefield can access:

- Information, advice, and support for physical and mental health needs
- Assistance registering with a GP, dentist, optician or other health services
- Support for emotional wellbeing, counselling, and therapeutic services
- Guidance on substance misuse, sexual health, and healthy relationships
- We are committed to promoting lifelong wellbeing through accessible, timely health support.

Safe, Secure and Suitable Accommodation

We provide accommodation support, including:

- A pathway plan that prepares young people well before age 18
- Access to a range of housing options, including Staying Put (where children in care stay with their foster carer beyond 18), supported accommodation, and tenancy-ready housing
- Help securing and sustaining a tenancy, including financial guidance
- Support with council tax exemptions, budgeting, and essential household items
- Our ambition is that every care leaver feels safe, settled, and supported in their home.
- The joint housing needs protocol ensures all care leavers are automatically provided with the highest banding priority, enabling them swift access to stable, independent accommodation when they leave care if this is a suitable option for them.

Financial Support and Practical Independence

We offer practical and financial help to make the transition to adult life manageable, including:

- Support with setting up home (Setting Up Home Allowance)
- Advice on budgeting, benefits, banking, and managing money
- Support with travel costs, ID documents, and essential clothing
- Emergency financial assistance when needed and appropriate
- Removing unnecessary barriers and promote confident independence.

Voice, Influence and Participation

Care leavers have a right to influence the services they receive. We will ensure:

- Regular opportunities to participate in shaping services
- Representation through groups such as Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forums
- Co-production of policies, strategies, and service improvements
- Involvement in recruitment and training of staff and foster carers
- We want services to be built with young people, not just for them.

Rights, Entitlements and Advocacy

We ensure all care leavers understand their rights, including:

- Entitlements up to age 25
- How to access advocacy and independent support
- How to challenge decisions or raise concerns
- Support with legal advice when required
- We will always champion and protect our young people's rights.

The Local Offer for Care Leavers

Wakefield's Local Offer to care leavers has been developed together with children and young people from the Children in Care Council and the Leaving Care Forum. Feedback from recent surveys of children and young people who are in care have also informed the Local Offer.

The comprehensive Local Offer provides young people with information to enable them to understand their entitlements, access appropriate services and utilise any offers unique to care leavers. The Local Offer also explains support and services available, based on specific need including care leavers who are parents, and care leavers leaving custody for example.

Multi-Agency Working

We continue to work with partner agencies and support each other, to ensure that care leavers achieve happy and fulfilling lives. Alongside our own Children's Service practitioners there is a dedicated team of multi-agency professionals all seeking to ensure that the needs of our care leavers are met.



Governance & Accountability

The responsibility for implementation of this strategy, and its ambition to improve outcomes rests with the multi-agency partnership for Children in Care, coordinated at an operational level by the Wakefield Children in Care and Leaving Care Service.

A detailed annual implementation plan accompanies the strategy which, along with our partners, supports the delivery of the priorities set out in this strategy and it identifies key lead officers and various timeframes for the completion of all actions. The implementation of this strategy and the work of the partnership will be reported to the Children's Social Care Senior Management Team and, in turn, the Directorate Management Team on a quarterly basis.

Subsequently, the work of the multi-agency partnership will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee which also includes representatives from Build our Futures Children in Care Council and the 16+ forum.

Any work considered by the Corporate Parenting Committee, including this strategy, will also report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to demonstrate how satisfactory progress is being made across each of the outcome areas strengthening the governance of the multi-agency partnership.

Links to Key Documents

This strategy can be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Sufficiency Strategy 2026 - 2028
- The Care Leaver Local Offer