Medway Council

Looked After Children Strategy
2015-2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>December 2014</td>
<td>Refreshed</td>
<td>Jo Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>January 2015</td>
<td>Refreshed</td>
<td>Sue Brunton-Reed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date Agreed by DMT: 20th January 2015

Date Agreed by Cabinet/MSCB/Improvement Board (if appropriate): January 2016

Date of Review: January 2016

Person Responsible: Phil Watson
# INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision for Children’s Services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement from Children in Care Council</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Values and Principles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Key Objectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Making the Strategy Work</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Monitoring Progress on the Strategy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Engaging with Children and Young People</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Vision for Children’s Services in Medway

Medway Council is ambitious for all its children and strives to support our children to have the best start in life. We want our children to be confident and resilient individuals, successful learners, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Children are best supported to achieve this through resilient families, who in turn contribute to thriving communities. We want all our children to grow up in circumstances where parents or carers provide safe and effective care.

Safeguarding children is everybody’s responsibility and Medway Council is clear that it has a unique role in the leadership and co-ordination of this locally. All our work will be child centred and we will listen to the views of children, ensuring we balance the rights of parents whilst maintaining a focus on the child.

Universal services have an important role in enabling children to thrive and we will work closely with all our partner agencies to improve outcomes through outstanding health services, schools and children’s centres. Our local Early Help offer will focus on supporting children and families in Medway to overcome challenges in their lives, and where necessary seek to prevent a further escalation of concerns.

Our specialist children’s services will provide responsive support and intervention for the minority of children who will need to be directly protected from harm and abuse, recognising that children of different ages or with special needs will need a differentiated approach. We will seek to ensure all professionals are clear about their roles and accountabilities so we can in turn be clear to children and their families.

We will support our social workers to be confident and capable professionals, proud of their work and proud to be working in Medway.

We will seek to build an open culture across professional boundaries, where there is an acknowledgement about the uncertainties and risks inherent in safeguarding children, and an absolute commitment to sharing information and to learning together.

Cllr Mike O’Brien
Lead Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

Barbara Peacock
Director of Children and Adults Services
Statement from Children in Care Council – January 2015

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) continue to support this LAC strategy. Our main objectives are:

- Additional and ongoing support for parents/families when children remain living or return to living with them.

- A commitment to young people being kept in the same school to reduce disruption to their education.

- Help young people access social and leisure opportunities and to ensure these are affordable.

- Standard of social workers must improve and they must be motivated and trained to an acceptable standard

- There must be a certain standard that social workers are measured against and young people should be involved in spot checks and appraisals.

The CiCC are committed to monitoring the progress of this strategy and are keen to be proactively involved in future opportunities to do so.
1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out how Medway Council will fulfil its role as a Corporate Parent and provide good and effective parenting to children in care and care leavers, which helps them to develop permanent and caring relationships, achieve their potential and improve their outcomes.

This includes doing everything possible to ensure that their time in care is a positive experience, with access to stable placements, good health and education provision, and that they are given every opportunity to develop strong, supportive relationships that extend well into their adult life.

We are ambitious for our services and for our looked after children and young people and we believe that they deserve the best opportunities we can provide. Over the life of this strategy we will be striving to provide them with the best possible care and support, in placements that are as close as possible to their home, which prepare them to be independent and succeed in their adult lives.

Achieving this goal requires the collective engagement of all parts of the local authority and its partners to work together, under the oversight and governance of our Corporate Parenting Board. It also requires involving children and young people in the decisions being made about them.

This strategy document sets out the values and principles that underpin our work with looked after children and the key objectives that we will need to address in order to achieve this.

It is based on eight objectives, which reflect the key issues impacting on the lives of looked after children and care leavers in Medway:

1. Provide timely and high quality intervention to help children remain with or return to their families, as long as it is safe to do so
2. Provide and commission the right mix of placements
3. Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs
4. Ensure that looked after children and young people achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training
5. Improve the health and emotional well-being of looked after children and young people and care leavers
6. Aim to keep looked after young people and care leavers safe through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time
7. Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood
8. Ensure that looked after children and care leavers’ views and experiences inform current and future service delivery.

This strategy is set within the context of national policy, legislation and guidance. It is linked to key local planning documents, in particular to the Children’s Improvement Plan, the Sufficiency Report and the Pledge. The objectives have been developed using:

- the needs data which is included in the Sufficiency Strategy 2014-6 and accompanying LAC Commissioning Plan, including the profile of our current children in care population
- consultation with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and our multi agency partners
- the stated commissioning priorities\(^1\).

They reflect our ambitions outlined in the Improvement Plan to provide high quality services to the right children at the right time.

The strategy addresses the needs of children and young people from birth to the age of 21, (or 25 where children’s services continue to have statutory responsibility) who are, or who may be, looked after by Medway Council.

The service will develop an annual action plan with clearly stated tasks, timescales and specific targets for improvement relating to the objective in this strategy and the stated success criteria. This will be overseen by the service and the Corporate Parenting Board sub-groups.

2. **Values and Principles**

- We will work honestly and openly with families, involve them in decisions about their children and recognise when they need support

- In most circumstances, children’s needs are best met by being cared for within their families. We will actively promote family contact unless there are clear reasons why this is not in their interests

- We will promote the cultural inheritance, religion and racial identity of children in care and challenge racism and discrimination

- Children should only be in care for the minimum amount of time that is required to make permanent and sustainable plans for them. Permanency planning starts from the decision that a child needs to come into care and continues until the child’s future is secure

\(^1\) Medway LAC Sufficiency Strategy 2014-16 and LAC Commissioning Plan 2014
• Children are entitled to protection from harm through abuse, neglect or exploitation. We will investigate and assess thoroughly all situations where child abuse is suspected or alleged.

• Children are entitled to be listened to and respected as individuals. We will ensure that children’s views and individual needs are considered when making decisions that affect their lives.

• We will aim to reduce the involvement of children and young people in criminal activities and to ensure children are not deprived of their liberty except in exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with legal and departmental processes.

• Young people leaving care should receive positive preparation and support so that they are enabled to participate fully as active citizens once they reach adulthood.

• Disabled children should have the same rights as all other children and the principles above will apply equally to them.

• All social work staff and carers should be appropriately qualified, skilled and supported to do their work.

3. Key Objectives

3.1 Provide timely and high quality intervention to help children remain with or return to their families.

Children’s needs are best served in their own families if this can be safely supported. Helping families stay together must therefore be a key focus for all Children’s Services. Early identification of need and effective early intervention is essential. Early intervention and prevention services can reduce the number of children and young people needing to become looked after, avoid repeat entry into care or support them to return safely to their families in a timely manner.

In order to support this we will:
• Develop services in conjunction with our Early Help service to support parents and develop their parenting skills, both to prevent the need for care and to support restoration of children to their families.
• Make more effective and consistent use of Family Group Conferences to help prevent unnecessary admissions.
• Develop a crisis intervention response to prevent unnecessary admission of adolescents
• Improve accountability of professionals, including IROs, social workers and partner agency staff, to support safe return to families
• Build skills of foster carers to work with natural parents and family members if the objective is return to family

**Key success criteria**

• Reduction in the number of children looked after
• Reduction in the number of days spent in care
• Increase in numbers of children with a children in need plan.
• Families report being better supported through earlier interventions

### 3.2 Provide and commission the right mix of placements

We need to be sure that we have the right range of placements to meet the assessed needs of our looked after children as outlined in the Sufficiency Strategy, and offer placement choice. We want to ensure that placements provide quality services and good value for money.

In order to support this we will:

• Increase the number of good quality foster placements close to Medway through targeted recruitment
• Complete our Fostering review to ensure that the service maximises the use of in house placements, especially for young people with complex and challenging needs, sibling groups, long term care, parent & child and disabled children placements
• Continue to work with other providers to develop appropriate external placements at lower cost and higher quality
• Ensure that all placements more than 20 miles away have the required Director approval
• Analyse information to better understand the reasons for placement breakdown and plan to reduce frequency
• Improve sufficiency data and use in planning to meet demand

**Key Success Criteria**

• Increase in the number of in house foster placements, particularly those able to meet complex needs.
• Improved performance in relation to the distance of placements from the child’s home area.
• Reduction in placement breakdowns
• Lower unit costs of placements
• Increase in availability of supported accommodation
3.3  **Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs**

Having a clear Care Plan in place is essential for children and young people in care, not only to ensure that they come into and exit care at the right times, but to meet our statutory obligations under the Care Planning Regulations. We need to ensure that children do not ‘drift’ through care, but have clearly-planned processes which allow them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable, supported and well matched placements with alternative carers, decisions are made in a timely way relevant to their age and development and they exit the care system in a timely and positive way at whatever age this happens. When we work with families to provide care with their agreement under S20 of the Children Act, we will ensure these cases are closely monitored and either progress to permanence in a timely way using legal processes appropriately, or that children are supported to return to their families.

In order to support this we will:

- Plan to increase the number of looked after children who achieve permanence through adoption, special guardianship orders or placement with family and friends (connected carers)
- Plan to extend placements to care for young people up to age 21 and beyond in appropriate cases, fully implementing the ‘Staying Put’ scheme
- Hold monthly Permanence Panels to monitor and track permanence plans and provide staff briefings on our Permanence Policy so all staff are aware of our aims and aspirations for the children we look after
- Provide practical support for permanence, including training for staff on attachment and life story work which will be undertaken with all children and young people at an age, pace and time that is appropriate for them.
- Explore peer-mentoring schemes using care leavers for other children and looked after young people to support young people where their placements may be challenged, to support placement stability.

**Key Success Criteria**

- Percentage increase of children looked after in permanent placements including SGOs
- Improved performance in adoption
- Reduction in the time spent in care by children aged under 10 years
- Reduction in proportion of children cared for under S20
3.4 Ensure that looked after young people achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training

Children in Care are amongst the most vulnerable in our society and are at risk of achieving poor outcomes and failing to meet their potential. Our aim is to narrow the gap between children and young people in care and all children in educational achievement, health outcomes, criminal behaviours, and employability.

We have a Virtual Head Teacher and a Board of Governors to support the Medway Virtual School. Their role is to champion the attainment of young people and the provision of high quality support according to assessed needs. All Medway schools have a Designated Teacher responsible for meeting the needs of looked after young people in their school and the VHT has established excellent links with every Designated Teacher.

To assist children and young people to understand the importance of savings and money management, we will ensure all looked after children are supported to have individual savings accounts.

To support the educational attainment of looked after young people we will:

- Provide additional tuition to support attainment where required and identified in the child’s PEP, fully utilising the Pupil Premium
- Ensure the right educational setting is chosen for each young person, according to their individual assessed needs maintaining as far as possible the child’s current school placement. We will ensure young people are placed in schools rated by Ofsted as good or better depending on their assessed needs and in accordance with the recommendation of the VHT. Where the grade of a school changes we will record on file whether the VHT recommends a change of school or not, and how the young person can be supported to achieve at that school
- Promote joint working between all schools, colleges and academies in Medway and ensure each child has clear and realistic progress targets. Foster carers will be supported to create a suitable environment to learn and to engage proactively with schools to secure the young person’s attainment
- Ensure that looked after young people and care leavers are supported to achieve their full potential at any age and that they maintain comparable results and progress to their non-looked after peers. Each young person aged 16-18 will have a PEP regardless of their educational setting and we will continue with our engagement with the Care2Work scheme to increase internal and external apprenticeships, traineeship and work opportunities for young people
• Ensure all children in care are supported to set up savings accounts, including those in externally commissioning placements

**Key Success Criteria**

• Higher percentage of children and young people in schools or educational facilities graded as good or above
• Reduction in persistent absence and overall absence
• Reduction in the number of children changing school when they become looked after or following a change of placement
• Numbers of children with compliant and good quality PEP
• Improvement in the percentage of children leaving care who are in education, employment or training
• Increase in the percentage of young people achieving 5A*-C including English and Maths at GCSE in all placements
• Ensure that all children receive a minimum of 25 hours education
• Reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions.

**3.5 Improve the health and well-being of looked after young people and care leavers**

Evidence shows that children and young people entering and leaving care have poorer health outcomes than their peers. Medway is ambitious for our young people and we believe that a key aspect of our Corporate Parenting duties is to ensure that these inequalities are reversed. We will support children and young people to have a healthy lifestyle and access to good quality health and emotional care when needed, in a location and format that best suits their assessed needs.

We believe that supporting a child or young person’s well-being takes many forms, including supporting them to end their offending behaviour or diverting them from the criminal justice system when they do.

To achieve these objectives we will:

• Ensure that health assessments are completed in a timely manner and in ways that engage young people, and that all care leavers have an up to health history and health plan

• Improve young people’s awareness of the importance of good health and ensure that physical and emotional health are key areas for review in LAC reviews and monthly audits:

• Support young people to make positive choices about the use of contraception and sexual health services.
• Promote positive emotional and mental health amongst looked after children, young people and care leavers.

• Review our CAMHS services to ensure that it provides timely access to emotional health services for children and young people in a manner that meets their assessed need.

• Implement an all age Emotional Well-Being Strategy working jointly with Kent County Council and Kent’s Clinical Commissioning Groups – commissioned services to be in place from September 2015

• Re-launch the Access to Leisure scheme and strengthen our links with the Youth Service to ensure that young people access positive community resources.

• Provide support for young people in partnership with police and youth justice colleagues to divert them from criminal activity

**Key Success Criteria**

• Increase the timeliness of initial and annual health assessments
• Increase in take up of CAMHS services at all tiers
• Reduction in waiting times for CAMHS and monitoring of improved access to CAHMS
• Reduction in incidence of self-harming behaviours in LAC
• Reduction of teenage pregnancy in children looked after
• Feedback from foster carers and children and young people about the timeliness and quality of health assessments and interventions
• Reduction in number of young people with a criminal conviction

### 3.6 Keep looked after children, young people and care leavers safe through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time

Children’s Social Care places the safety and well-being of its young people at the forefront of everything we do. We want nothing but the best for our young people and that includes keeping them safe from those who would exploit or abuse them. We have clear safeguarding policies and a Child Sexual exploitation (CSE) strategy and toolkit, which has been introduced to staff from across all service areas and partner agencies.

To ensure that we continue to develop and expand our services and expertise to keep young people safe we will:
• Ensure only those IFAs and residential placement providers judged as good or above are utilised. Where the grading of a placement changes whilst a Medway young person is placed therein the case will be presented within one week to the Access to Resource Panel with the Head of Service in attendance and an appropriate plan agreed and signed off by the Assistant Director.

• Ensure that all staff are supported and trained to recognise young people who are being sexually exploited or who are vulnerable to being exploited:

• Establish the multi-agency CSE Champions group which will meet quarterly to ensure that robust planning, mapping and training is in place to safeguard young people from CSE.

• Work with partner agencies to ensure that they have in place good safeguarding policies which encompass sexual exploitation and which ensures that where there are known risks about specific young people these risks are shared in a timely manner with the appropriate action taken.

Key Success Criteria

• Reduction in the number of young people known to be at risk of sexual exploitation
• Increase in the number of children and young people who report feeling safe in their placement
• Increase in the number of carers (including those from commissioned services) who have attended relevant training

3.7 Promote a successful transition to adulthood

All young people need to be able to develop practical, social and emotional skills in order to live independently. Young people in care are particularly vulnerable and will need additional support to make this move. Important requirements of successful transition are access to suitable accommodation, and engagement in education, training and employment. We do this through the provision of a trained and motivated staff team, training and development to other social care staff, the planned transfer of cases to the Leaving Care service and support to young people to develop independence skills at their own pace and with the required support. We believe that like their no-looked after peers, care leavers should be provided with a safety net when they fail or make mistakes and they should be equipped with the necessary social skills, emotional resilience and practical skills to make a successful transition into adulthood and independent living.

To support young people make a successful transition to adulthood and independence we will:
• Ensure young people have access to the good quality accommodation with support and assistance according to their assessed needs.

• Work with partners including Commissioning to ensure that there is a range of semi-independent accommodation with appropriate support packages available.

• Re-launch the Staying Put Policy to social workers, PA’s, SSW’s, IROs and foster carers.

• Support our care leavers to access employment, traineeships and apprenticeships within the Council and with partner agencies.

• Develop peer mentoring for care leavers.

• Support foster carers to teach independent living skills and see this as an integral part of their role.

• Improve support for placement transition including “taster” periods in semi-independent provision.

Key Success Criteria

• Increase in percentage of care leavers aged up to 21 in suitable accommodation
• Increase in percentage of care leavers aged up to 21 in employment, education or training
• Increase in capacity of supported accommodation
• Increase in opportunities for apprenticeships across council departments

3.7 Ensure that children looked after and care leaver’s views and experiences inform current and future service delivery

Listening to the views of children and young people, and involving them in decisions about their lives is an important part of the work of all professionals involved in caring for children and young people.

We actively seek input from our young people and this is evidenced through a range of opportunities including attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board, an invitation to the Chair of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to address full Council, senior officer attendance at the CiCC and a range of workshops with young people.

Our ambition is to ensure that not just the voice of young people but their experiences are captured in our assessments, plans and audits and that all staff within Children’s Social Care and our partner agencies actively consider the voice and experience of young people within all aspects of their work.

To achieve this we will:
• Develop a range of young person friendly mechanisms using social media where possible to enable young people, including younger children and those with disabilities, to provide feedback about their experience of being looked after by Medway and their wishes and feelings about their future.

• Ensure that the voice and experience of young people is explored during supervision and that this is a key part of all case audits. Feedback from these audits will be reviewed at a management level to ensure that training and development opportunities are developed as required.

• Develop a Facebook page for the Fostering service which not only enables us to promote our service to potential carers but which provides an opportunity for young people to contribute to service development.

• Ensure that the information provided to young people when they become LAC, at their first LAC review and at subsequent LAC reviews actively addresses their rights including how to obtain support and how to make a complaint.

• Utilise the information from complaints and representations and feedback from parents to support service development and improvement. We will ensure that feedback and outcomes from complaints is on the agenda of every team meeting across the LAC service and that the service records how it will address the issues raised. We will review on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints received across CSC to ensure that learning is shared across the service.

• Consult more with the parents of looked after young people.

• Develop a participation strategy in partnership with young people.

• Work with our partners in Commissioning to ensure that the Advocacy service reaches looked after young people and care leavers as required, and develop peer-mentoring services for looked after young people and care leavers.

**Key Success Criteria**

• Increase in the percentage of children and young people who actively contribute to their reviews.

• Evidence that children and young people are aware of and know how to use the complaints process.

• Monitoring of complaints made by children and young people.

• Increase in percentage of audits that are judged good or better in relation to the recording of the views of children and young people.

**4. Making the strategy work**

Making the strategy work will require not only the development or improvement of services but also ensuring that planning is based on good, accurate information,
professionals are held to account, and that the governance and oversight by the Corporate Parenting Board is effective in maintaining and improving standards. The strategy should be clearly communicated to all who have an interest, and who it affects.
The key elements which will need to be in place to make the strategy work are:

- Good management information about the current use of care placements and the current and predicted levels of demand. This information can be used to develop and update the required Sufficiency Strategy, and drive the LAC Commissioning Strategy and 16+ Homelessness and Leaving Care Commissioning Action Plan.

- Effective structures for engaging with the views of young people in care, including those in younger age groups, and those with specific needs and disabilities. This will include Children in Care Council, consultation processes and involvement in the Corporate Parenting Board

- Effective oversight and governance: This will include:
  o Review of the strategy and action plan at the internal LAC Improvement Board and at Children’s Social Care Management Team annually to ensure compliance with targets. Where there is slippage, corporate and service based resources can be utilised to ensure service improvement is sustained.
  o The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) chaired by the Lead Portfolio holder for Children’s Social Care, has reviewed and agreed this 3-year strategy.
  o The Sub-groups of the CPB will take responsibly for monitoring and driving forward this strategy and overseeing progress on the action plan. The relevant groups are: Education, Health, Housing and Accommodation, Youth Justice, Children in Care Council. The CPB will review progress annually.
  o Progress against this 3-year Strategy and the Action Plan, and on the work of the CPB sub-groups, will be presented annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Cabinet.

5. Monitoring progress on the strategy

The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis as outlined above and the Action Plan updated annually to reflect changes in needs or supply information, and respond to emerging policy initiatives.

All partners should be supported to recognise their role in implementation, through leadership, communication, and supervision to promote good care planning practice, and clear accountability frameworks.
6. Engaging with looked after young people

Ongoing engagement with children and young people is key to ensuring that our strategies and polices are child-centred. As well as agreeing the Strategy with our Children in Care Council, progress against this Strategy will be reviewed by the CiCC annually.

..............................................................................................................................................

Councillor Mike O’Brien: Lead Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

..............................................................................................................................................

Barbara Peacock: Director Children & Adult Services