

Hertfordshire Children Looked After Strategy 2019 – 2022



Welcome to Hertfordshire's Children Looked After Strategy (2019 – 2022). Coming into care is usually a traumatic experience and a great majority of children who become looked after do so because of abuse, neglect or family difficulties.

Hertfordshire's vision is to give every child, young person and their family the opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives. We are ambitious for our most vulnerable group of children and young people and continually seek to ensure every child and young person who is looked after has the opportunity to thrive; be safe and protected from harm and exploitation; reach their potential; be emotionally and physically healthy and be supported and prepared for adulthood.

We want to ensure that the right children come into our care and that those that do become looked after feel settled in their placements and supported to leave care when they are ready. For those children and young people who remain in long-term care we want to create a sense of belonging, emotional security and ambition to succeed.

The priorities in this strategy are a response to what our children and young people who are looked after have told us is important to them, as our children are the best experts and we value their experiences. All activities are aligned with our Outcome Bees which provide a single-vision framework which allows us to measure our progress and see how well we are meeting our targets.

Our Pledge shows our on-going commitment to listen to our young people in care so that we make sure their needs are at the heart of what we do.

By working together we are confident that we can deliver this strategy and give children and young people who are looked after the opportunity to live a happy and fulfilling life.



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Introduction

Hertfordshire's Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy outlines our vision, priorities and work streams to support our looked after children and young people. This strategy outlines key pieces of work we are doing to ensure our looked after children and young people have the best possible chances in life, experience safe and positive parenting and are given every opportunity to achieve their potential.

Alongside our partners, we are committed to creating opportunities for our looked after children, young people and care leavers to reach their potential and have created a shared vision to promote positive outcomes.

Our priorities for children and young people looked after are underpinned by our Pledge and are endorsed by the County Council and our Partners through the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The pledges were developed in consultation with young people, facilitated by the Participation Team and Children in Care Council (CHICC). During the development of the Pledges our children and young people told us what is important to them and how we can improve their experience within the care system.

Our vision is underpinned by the vision set out in the Children's Services Strategic Plan 2018 - 2021 of giving every child, young person and their family the opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives. This is underpinned by four ambitions which shape the work of the whole County Council, the: Opportunity to Thrive; Opportunity to Prosper; Opportunity to be Healthy and Safe; and Opportunity to Take Part.

Our vision and priorities are shaped by an understanding of our local needs in Hertfordshire and by national priorities. This understanding has helped us to identify what our key challenges are and will be, so that we can set out to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children looked after and care leavers. Some of the challenges currently faced in improving outcomes for our children looked after and care leavers include the recruitment of Foster Carers and the provision of placement choice.

For ease, this document presents a high-level strategic overview of the projects and pieces of work underway across Children's Services. Under this umbrella there is a significant amount of activity underway and planned within individual services, seeking to deliver Hertfordshire's vision for all our children and young people looked after.

Our Vision

Hertfordshire gives every child and young person looked after the opportunity to live a happy and fulfilling life.



Outcome Bees

A single-vision Outcome Framework known as the 'Six Outcome Bees' has been developed to enable us to assess and evidence our impact across service areas.

This framework was developed with the involvement of young people and partner organisations to ensure those things which are most important to young people are identified and our performance against these are measured.

The outcomes are inter-linked with all the 'bees' being important for the child or young person. Each outcome area means many different things depending on the individual so is used holistically on every occasion. This framework enables us to set clear and measurable targets across the six domains.



The Pledge is our promise to all our children and young people looked after by Hertfordshire and is structured around the six outcome bees. It is based on what children and young people in Hertfordshire said was important to them.

We have also made a promise to our young people leaving care which was developed by listening to individual experiences of leaving care and moving into adulthood.

Our Pledge to children and young people in our care can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/rights-responsibilities-and-entitlements/our-pledge.aspx>

Our Care Leavers Pledge can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/rights-responsibilities-and-entitlements/our-pledge.aspx>

We have also published our Local Offer to Care Leavers which explains what services are available to those leaving care.

Easy-read and picture versions of both Pledges are also available.



Focusing on achieving our priorities



Residential Strategy

Cross-Service Placement Stability Priority Area

Achieving Stability for Children & Young People

Sufficiency Statement

Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Strategy

How we achieve this in practice:

- 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
- When children first come into care we will help them understand why they are coming into care and the plans for them, including whether or not they are likely to return home
- All children and young people coming into care will receive a 'Coming into Care' information pack
- We will ensure that no child moves to a home they have not seen or had information about, as a minimum we will provide a picture or video.
- We will ensure we have a range of placement options that are available for our children looked after
- We will aim to make placements feel like home to our children looked after
- We will aim to keep changes for our looked after children to a minimum
- If a child or young person moves from where they are living, we will involve them in the decision making as much as possible
- All our residential providers will be Ofsted graded 'Good' or 'Outstanding'

How will we monitor our performance?

- Increase sufficiency of local placements to increase choice for CLA
- Increase in the number of CLA in foster placements who turn 18 and stay put in their placement
- Reduction in the number of CLA with 3+ placement moves
- Reduction in the number of children returning to care within one year of previous period of care
- Increase in the number of CLA in long-term placements (fostering)
- Percentage of CLA during the year who were placed within 12m of the decision (adoption)



**BE
HEALTHY**

Clinical Commissioning Group CLA & Safeguarding Strategy

Mental Health & Wellbeing Transformation Plan

Health & Children's Services Joint Strategy for CLA

Health of LAC Strategy

How we achieve this in practice:

- All children coming into care will have a timely Children Looked After health assessment with a medical practitioner
- We will give our children looked after guidance about healthy living and lifestyle choices, including sexual health and substance misuse
- We will make sure our children looked after can access their health records and history
- Children looked after with disabilities will have access to integrated services
- We will ensure all children and young people in our care are able to access appropriate emotional and mental health support when they need it

How will we monitor our performance?

- Percentage of children with an up to date dental and health check
- Percentage of CLA with Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores



Virtual School

Care Leavers Strategy

SEND Strategy and Transformation Programme

How we achieve this in practice:

- We will support our children looked after with education, training and employment options to help them achieve the best they can
- Children looked after will be supported to make good progress in education
- Our looked after children with additional needs will be supported to have appropriate provision so they can achieve their potential
- All children looked after will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP)
- Young people leaving care will be encouraged and supported with accessing further and higher education, employment and training opportunities, including apprenticeships

How will we monitor our performance?

- Percentage of children with an up to date Personal Education Plan
- Increase in percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training (aged 17-21)
- Improvement in CLA educational attainment





Lifelong Links

Return Home Framework

How we achieve this in practice:

- We will help our children looked after to learn about who they are and important events and people in their life
- We will ensure all necessary information and paperwork is obtained in a timely way such as passport, birth certificate and national insurance number
- We will support children looked after to reconnect with family members and other trusted adults in a safe way and learn about their family history
- We will work with children, young people and families to ensure that there is effective support in place to support and maintain a return home

How will we monitor our performance?

- Number of children for whom Lifelong Link networks have been created
- Increase in CLA finishers and number of children returning home

Focusing on achieving our priorities



Care Leavers Strategy

Joint Housing Protocol

YC Hertfordshire Local Youth Offer

How we achieve this in practice:

- We will provide our looked after children with opportunities for them to take part in activities that prepare them for independence, such as Independent Living Skills
- We will tell our children looked after about their entitlements such as pocket money and savings
- We will ensure smooth transitions between workers, particularly from the CLA teams to Care Leaver teams
- We will support our young people to register on a housing list and plan early for the accommodation budding process

How will we monitor our performance?

- Number of children and young people attending Independent Living Skills courses
- Percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation



**BE
HAPPY**

Corporate Parenting Strategy

CHICC

Valuing Care

Voice of the Child, Young Person & Family

How we achieve this in practice:

- We will build positive relationships with our children and young people and listen to their views
- 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 ensure that our children and young people can maintain relationships with family and friends, so long as this is safe
- We will make certain that we have a robust and active Child in Care Council (CHICC) who are able to influence and shape the delivery of services
- We will make sure we meet with all children and young people looked after at least every six weeks and that we see them alone

How will we monitor our performance?

- Number of children and young people engaging in CHICC events
- Reduction in Valuing Care scores over time
- Feedback from CLA and Care Leavers
- Percentage of CLA seen alone within timescale

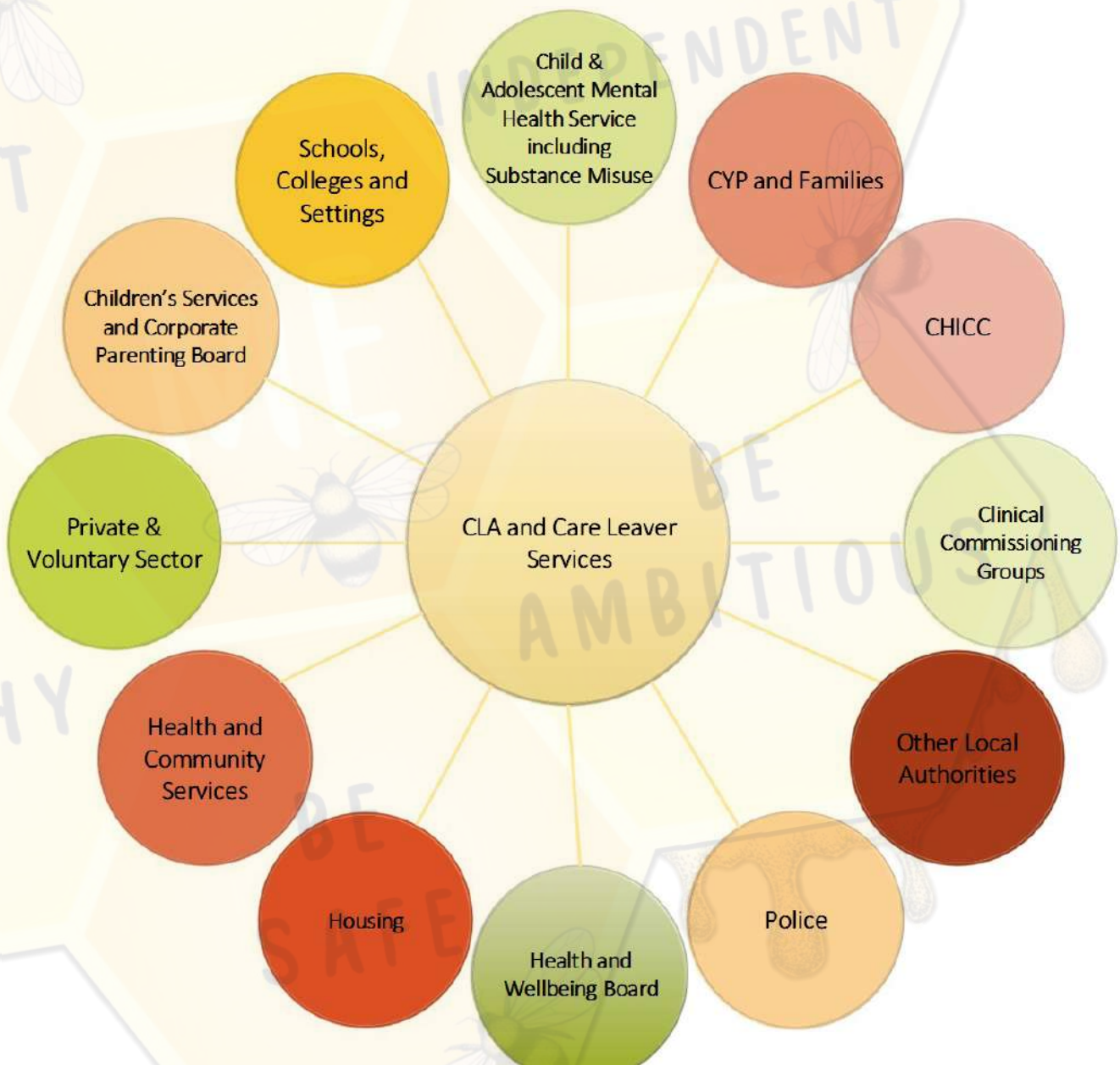
Multi-Agency Working and CHICC

Multi-Agency Working

Our aim is to work in partnership with other organisations to deliver holistic support to all children and young people in our care, ensuring they are receiving the appropriate support for their individual needs.

We will continue to work with partner agencies and support them in their roles to ensure that children and young people who are looked after and care leavers are able to achieve their full potential.

Alongside our own Children Services practitioners there is a dedicated team of multi-agency professionals from health and education all seeking to ensure that the needs of our looked after children are met:



CHICC

The Children in Care Council (CHICC) is run by and for young people in care and care leavers in Hertfordshire. The purpose of the CHICC is to listen to the views of young people and help improve being in care.

There are three main groups within CHICC:

- Junior CHICC (7-11 years)
- The Deputies (12-18 years)
- Care Leavers group (18+)

CHICC organise regular events and activities where young people can share their views and meet others who understand what it is like to be in care. They also meet regularly with senior managers including the Director and Lead Member for Children's Services to put young people's views forward and agree what needs to change.

More information about CHICC can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/chicc/children-in-care-council-chicc.aspx>



Recent achievements for CHICC have included:

- The development of 'Top 10 Tips' for social workers on how to work with young people
- Improving the way young people are referred to placements, ensuring a focus on positive things
- Ensuring refreshments are available for young people at review meetings
- Developing guidance for carers of teenagers
- Helping to change policy so that young people in residential care can stay in touch with previous workers
- Monitoring private residential homes, crash pads and semi-independent accommodation
- Running a Christmas appeal for care leavers



Hertfordshire