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# Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2024



**North  
Lincolnshire  
Council**

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## Purpose

The **Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children (2010)** requires local authorities to take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of its children in care, whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation ('the sufficiency duty').

This document sets out the strategic intentions of North Lincolnshire Council in fulfilling our sufficiency duty (S.22 Children Act 1989) towards children in care and care leavers. Securing sufficient accommodation that provides the best care, promotes self-confidence, resilience and emotional well-being for children in care and care leavers is vital in achieving the best possible outcomes for this vulnerable group.

The introduction of statute and Home Office transfer expectations including the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children (UASC) transfer scheme (Immigration Act 2016), the Concordat on Children in Custody and the local offer to care leavers (Children and Social Work Act 2017) has placed additional duties on Local Authorities to provide services and accommodation to those children who need it.

North Lincolnshire Council's sufficiency strategy is based upon thorough knowledge of our children in care and care leavers and what we need to have available to enable strong and safe communities through an approach embedded in One Council, One Family, One Place.

The sufficiency duty applies in respect of all children who enter the Council's care under the 1989 Act.





## Vision and Principles

We are proud of our place and our people and our **One Family Approach** aims to create a system that works for all children, young people and families, where we work together to enhance our partnerships and commission integrated services for children and young people.

Our ambition is for children to be in their families, their schools and their communities.



Within this, the **One Family Approach - Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire 2020-2024** document sets out how services support children, young people and families to participate, find help online and in their networks and communities, promoting independence and maximising opportunities. With a focus on one Council, one family and one place, and enabling strong and safe communities, North Lincolnshire Council has agreed with its partners a vision for all children and young people living in North Lincolnshire and this vision is expressed through the **North Lincolnshire Children's Strategy 2020 – 'Children and Young People's Challenge'**.

Central to this strategy is a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This commitment is inherent in our council values of equality of opportunity, excellence, self-responsibility, and integrity, and underpins our focus on prioritising the most vulnerable. Additionally, North Lincolnshire Council believes that it is our role, and indeed our responsibility alongside our partners, to challenge racism and prejudice in all its forms by upholding our values and the highest standards of behaviour, and by committing to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices to reduce inequalities.

**North Lincolnshire Council believes that place based family care is the best provision of care for most children or young people who enter the care of the Council.** It has therefore invested heavily in the development and expansion of its fostering provision.

Furthermore we are of the view that a high quality of care is best achieved by providing a foster care service that protects children, promotes their rights and maximises their life chances.

We have high expectations of ourselves as partners with families and communities to deliver positive outcomes and we have high aspirations for our children and young people. Using their strengths, assets, views and experiences and by working together using our values, influence and statutory roles, we will make the best decisions regarding local services and support, to help achieve the very best for our children and young people through the fewest, best interventions.

We hold a long-standing and deeply held ambition for all children and young people within North Lincolnshire. Being the champion for the vulnerable child is our over-riding purpose. We ensure that every child has equitable opportunities to be the best they can be irrespective of their individual backgrounds or circumstances. We use our values, influence and authority to engender greater aspiration for children across our partner agencies - so that all children can achieve outstanding outcomes.

Where children enter care our aim is wherever possible to reunite children with their families or extended families in a timely and supportive way through holistic and strengths based approaches. Where it is not possible for children to remain within or return to their own family, we want children who enter the care of the Council to live within a family setting where they are able to build positive relationships with trusted adults. Where it is in the child's interests to live in a residential children's home we expect this to be the best provision that provides the best care.

We want children to be able to remain in their home as long as they wish in line with their needs and wishes and seek to provide high quality supported and independent accommodation for care leavers as they progress on to adulthood that enables them to build their resilience, confidence and life skills as independent adults who access opportunities and contribute to a vibrant local economy.

**For those children who enter care, securing sufficient local accommodation that meets their needs is a critical step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group.**

**Having the right home to live in at the right time where no additional moves are made, is a vital factor in improving stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in achieving better outcomes for children in care and care leavers.**

There is long-standing Elected Member support for children in care and care leavers and this strategy reflects the commitment of the Council to achieve the best outcomes for the children who enter our care as one Council.

The strategy, it is underpinned by the continuing commitment of the Council to children in care and care leavers shown through the ongoing investment in the fostering service. The commitment to the belief that children should live in their families, schools and communities is also further demonstrated by the Council supporting the development of the One Family Approach Hub that provides help to enable families to remain together including the use of overnight accommodation as part of our prevention work.



## Sufficiency to achieve the best Outcomes

To enable children to achieve the best outcomes possible within their own families and local communities, or within a suitable care environment we will ensure sufficiency of care and leaving care provision that:

Continues and builds on our ambition and belief that children should live with their own or extended family wherever possible.

Promotes permanence and the importance of family and community by seeking to strengthen and improve parent/families ability to care.

Ensures there is place based choice and flexibility of placement options that enables children who enter care to live in a family setting where they feel cared for, valued and where their needs are fully met for as long as is needed.

Is creative, flexible and developmental in being responsive to a changing environment

Has a thorough understanding of the individual needs of children and young people entering care, living in care or leaving care.

Ensures that we listen to, hear and learn from the voice of children in care and care leavers

Provides excellent support and training to all North Lincolnshire carers including to children whose parents foster as we recognise that this support helps to maintain stability within the family home.

Carries out detailed assessments of prospective carers (including family and friends – Connected Persons - carers) to ensure their suitability and to ascertain the level of support the carers need to meet the child(ren)s needs.

Delivers a 'no moves' approach for all children who are in care with a clear intent that they will remain in their foster family home or with connected persons for as long as they need to.

Ensures that where a child or young person's identified needs are best met within residential care, we proactively work with the child and the relevant professionals to provide them with stability and when they are ready prepare them for family life either with their birth or extended family or with a foster family.

Develops an agreed range of place based accommodation options for our young people leaving care requiring alternative accommodation and for care leavers returning to North Lincolnshire from out of area.

Continues to achieve timely permanence for children and young people who do enter care.

These principles are set within a framework of strong corporate parenting, excellent individual care planning and a focus on the voice, needs and wishes of children and young people.

This strategy, in conjunction with the **Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2022-2024**, is monitored and reviewed through our well-established performance improvement mechanisms, including monthly performance monitoring and tracking and the quarterly self-evaluation and review process.





## Provision of Sufficient Accommodation

**We have high aspirations** for our children in care and care leavers. In line with our Practice Model, we want children, young people and families to be able to build upon their strengths, their resilience to find or be enabled to find solutions when things are not going so well and always strive for children to be cared for by their family. Where this is not possible we will ensure that all children and young people who require care are provided with a local, safe, stable foster family, residential children's home or supported living options that have been matched to their needs and enable them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.

To achieve this, the Council:



We will continue to work hard to increase the range and scope of in-house provision and ensure we have families available to offer choice to children and young people who are best placed to meet their needs.

We will ensure the use of residential provision is in line with the child's needs and supports young people leaving the children's home to return to a family living arrangement at the earliest opportunity. Where it continues to be in the child's needs to remain in care through to adulthood we will proactively support young people to successfully move to suitable provision that is in line with their wishes and needs, supporting them to make the successful transition to adulthood and their own home including through the use of our own staying close provision.

North Lincolnshire Council will also continue to develop relationships with external providers where this is best placed to meet the individual needs of the small number of children who cannot be

accommodated within our provision. This includes close scrutiny, high expectations and rigorous oversight of the quality of care provided.

We will continue to ensure the contribution that IRO's make to sufficiency by ensuring the IRO's continue to develop high support/ challenge and to continue asking difficult questions to encourage reflection, review and creativity.







## The Needs of Children in our Care and Care Leavers

### Profile

Through consistent and effective delivery of early help and a partnership approach that builds resilience and is strengths based, North Lincolnshire continues to enable children to successfully remain within their family networks. As a result of this, children only enter care when it is necessary, with achievable and consistent engagement, planning and support across the partnership to enable children to return to their family where possible.

We use detailed analysis of this data to plan current and future sufficiency needs.

The care and care leavers population:

- ✓ As at 31 March 2022, the child in care population was 190, showing a sustained reduction throughout 2021/22 (from 207 on 31/03/2021).
- ✓ During 2021/22 only 61 children entered care which has continued the reduction in children entering care and demonstrating that the families continue to receive the right help, at the right time that is holistic and enables children to remain within their families, schools and communities.
- ✓ Within this context, the number of children in care who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum has continued to reduce to 6 at the end of 2021/22 (compared with 9 at the end of 2020/21), equating to 3% of the CIC population.
- ✓ The number of Care Leavers has continued to increase – reflecting the previous increased children in care population during 2018/19. This has increased to 115 at the end of 2021/22 compared to 109 at the end of 2020/21.
- ✓ There continue to be a small number of children placed with external providers. The number of children placed in agency placements has reduced year on year. As at 31/03/22 only 7 children are placed in externally commissioned provision which is 3.7% of the care population.
- ✓ 84% of children in care live with foster carers or are placed for adoption with 98% of children in foster care living with North Lincolnshire approved carers.
- ✓ The largest group of children in care continues to be the 10-15 year olds.
- ✓ 20 children lived with Connected Persons as at 31/03/22, equating to 11% of the care population and in line with the latest national comparator of 13%





## Outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers

We know our children and young people well and are therefore able to respond to their individual and wider needs quickly and effectively. The strength of knowing and listening to the children and young people is enhanced by comprehensive performance data and a systematic approach to the analysis of this. Management oversight is embedded at all levels within a comprehensive performance and quality assurance framework.

We actively work to maintain children at home wherever possible. If this is not possible we seek alternative family based permanence through, adoption, foster care, Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders at the earliest opportunity.

Key measures highlight the successful and improving outcomes achieved by children in care and care leavers during 2021/22. These include:



### More children experiencing stability within families

*The stability of children in care improved during 2021/22 and continues to improve with 8% of children experiencing 3 placements and 74% of children who have been in care for 2.5 years+ living in the same home for the last 2 years.*



### Children experience sustained and meaningful relationships

*In 2021, 2% of children experienced 2 or more changes of social worker over the previous 12 months. This was an improvement on 2020 figure when it was 8%. Performance is better than the latest national figure of 27%.*



### Children in care are able to be part of their communities in North Lincolnshire

*As at the year-end 2021/22 13% of the CIC population were placed out of the area. This compares very well to the latest published National figure of 42%.*



### All care leavers who live in the community live in suitable accommodation with support in line with their needs



### The majority of care leavers are in education, employment and training and this continues to improve.

*The 2021/22 year end figure for those aged 19-21 years in EET is 75%. This compares well to the latest National figure of 52% and Statistical Neighbours at 50%.*

*The figure for 17 and 18 year olds in EET is 79%, compared to the latest National figure of 65% and Statistical Neighbour figure of 63%.*



### Very low numbers of children in care are engaged in criminal behaviour

*Only 2.8% of children in care over a year received a final warning or conviction during 2021/22 compared to the latest national figure of 2% and Statistical Neighbour figure of 3%.*



### Children in Care continue to make more progress in Reading and Writing between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 than the national average.



Children progress to permanence through adoption if it is the right thing for them whatever their age and needs. This has meant that in some cases this has taken longer and the 3-year average timescale from entering care to placement has risen to 406 days compared to the England average of 367 days and statistical neighbours of 338 days.



More children progress from care to permanence. During 2021/22, 44% (34/78) of children leaving care did so to legal permanence via adoption, SGO or CAO. This compares to 28% nationally and statistical neighbours at 37%. In addition, 28% returned to their families and 10% remained with their foster carer as a 'Staying Put' arrangement



During the Covid-19 period, appropriate matches continued to be found for children with adoptive and foster carers – including returning children to local carers as part of their plan who were placed in external settings.



Children in care and care leavers consistently say that they feel listened to and are able to articulate any issues or concerns.

The above information highlights the success of both the One Family Approach which is fully embedded in practice and early permanence planning, meaning that children do not change placements. This means that we are enabling children to live with a family who can offer both support to return to their birth family or stability and permanency where this is not possible.

### Stable Relationships



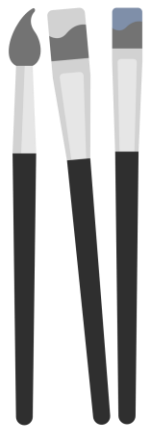
Extensive support and oversight is in place to prevent children experiencing unplanned changes in their care. This includes Family Support Meetings, oversight by managers, regular stability meetings and review. Carers receive the training, support and communication they need to continue to provide a stable home for children where they can build and develop relationships. The number of children in care experiencing no or only one move continues to improve and increased further over the year.

During 2021/22 the multi-agency 'You Say Who' practice framework, enabling children to identify who is important to them and be supported to make reconnections with family members and others, continued to be embedded in practice to place sustainable relationships at the heart of planning for children. This includes building on the strengthened practice in relation to reunification of children in long-term care to their family utilising the NSPCC Reunification Framework.

Further strengthening of practice in this area has enabled a workforce culture that is aligned to our practice model of children being within their families, their schools and their communities. We focus on who is important to a young person and support the notion that if they say they are important to

them, then we have a duty to work towards promoting such contact, addressing any barriers to this. This has actively expanded the support networks of many of our young people over the last 3 years and reconnected some young people with important adults whom they may have otherwise lost contact with.

The implementation and development of You Say Who has also supported our work in embedding the NSPCC reunification practice framework into care planning. Having greater and more sustainable support networks has enabled us to objectively consider whether any of these members of the child's 'team' can offer increased levels of support and care to our young people, and even full time care in some cases.



Achieving permanence for our children in care has also been supported by the use of the You Say Who Model and reunification work. During 2021/22 we have successfully restored home 7 children who may not otherwise have returned to their families through the use of this model and successfully discharged their care orders. Six of the seven children had an original care plan of long term foster care and subsequently been successfully restored home to their parents through work that enabled parental change and a Reunification Assessment. The model has enabled social workers to work holistically with children and parents and to support, monitor and enable the parental changes, and reassess previous risk. These children have been able to return to live within their birth family and community and no longer require social work intervention. Using the You Say Who/reunification assessment framework has strengthened the child's and parents relationships and enabled them to be one family unit again.

## Adoption

We continue to and have consistently achieved excellent outcomes for children where adoption is their plan. We can evidence our success in finding permanent families for children with complex needs and older children. Whilst the increased proportion of children we have placed who are older or have more complex needs has adversely affected our Adoption Scorecard performance, we strongly

believe in the right plan for the right child and ensure that adoption decisions are based on the child's needs not their age or complexities.

If adoption is deemed to be the right plan for the child in securing permanency, then this is the plan that is progressed with our search for a family taking into account how a child's needs will be met. Our figures tell us that we do consider adoption for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home.

North Lincolnshire Council continues to be committed to building upon the success of regional working to ensure timely placement for children by way of adoption and in ensuring that the recruitment of adopters is based upon the needs of the children who require an adoptive placement, not only locally but regionally and nationally. North Lincolnshire continue to be a part of the **Regional Adoption Agency 'Family Adoption Links'**.





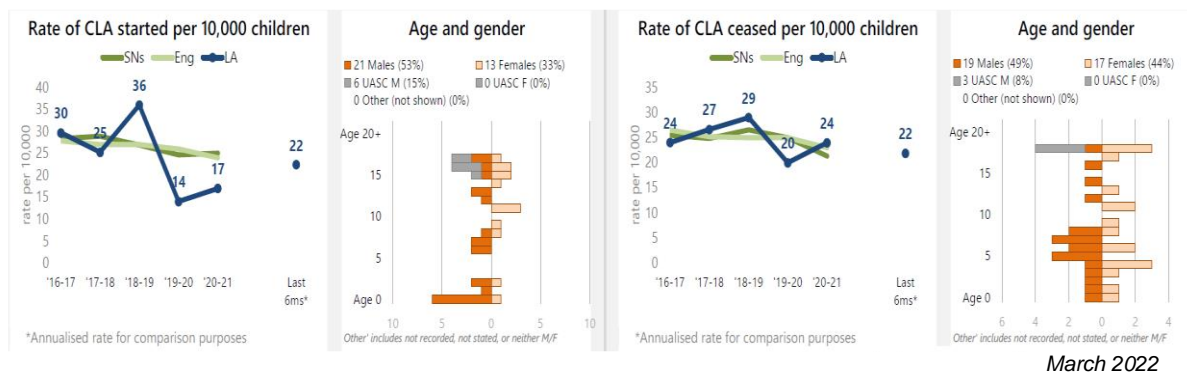
## Projecting the Needs of the Children in Care and Care Leaver Population

### Children in Care

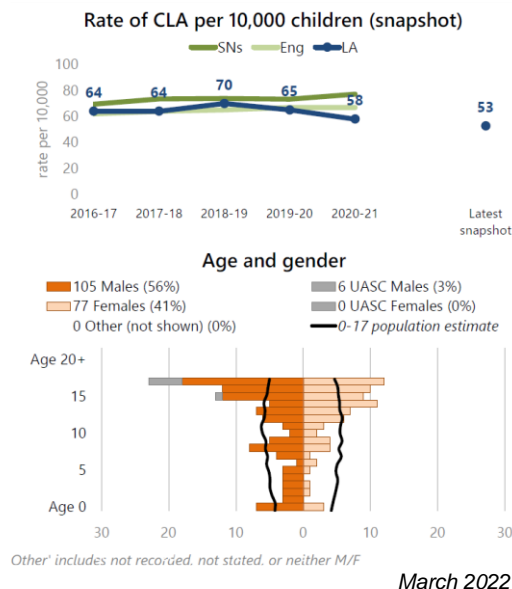
Over the last year the number of children entering care has continued to be low and the overall population has continued the decrease in line with the trend over the last 3 years evidencing the success of the One Family Approach. Those children who do enter care and those who remain within the care system have increasingly complex needs, emphasising the importance of continuing to build the choice, support, skills and availability of carers.

Whilst future trends in relation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are subject to variation, the significant increase during 2018/19 has subsequently reduced. Alongside this, there has been an increase in children remaining within their family through the effective use of family solutions, the PLO process and alternatives within wider family being identified.

The age profile of the care population is projected to continue to have the majority of children aged 10-15. However there are fewer older children entering care and more returning to their family networks as solutions within their own family or alternative family arrangements are identified. This highlights the continuing need for carers to care for children of all ages and provide stability for as long as is needed to match the child's needs.



The care population continues to have the largest group being those aged 15+, reflecting the importance of ensuring stability, carers able to provide care for older children and the support provided to foster families and other care providers to meet the needs of children as they progress to adulthood. To ensure stability for these children it continues to be a priority to recruit sufficient carers to provide choice and suitable care that enables good matching and the children to remain within the same family for as long as is needed.



## Care Leavers

Since 2014/15, the overall North Lincolnshire Care Leaving population has increased by 95%. This increase can be correlated to the increase in young people entering care who are unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees, alongside the practice principles around young people remaining in care until 18 where required.

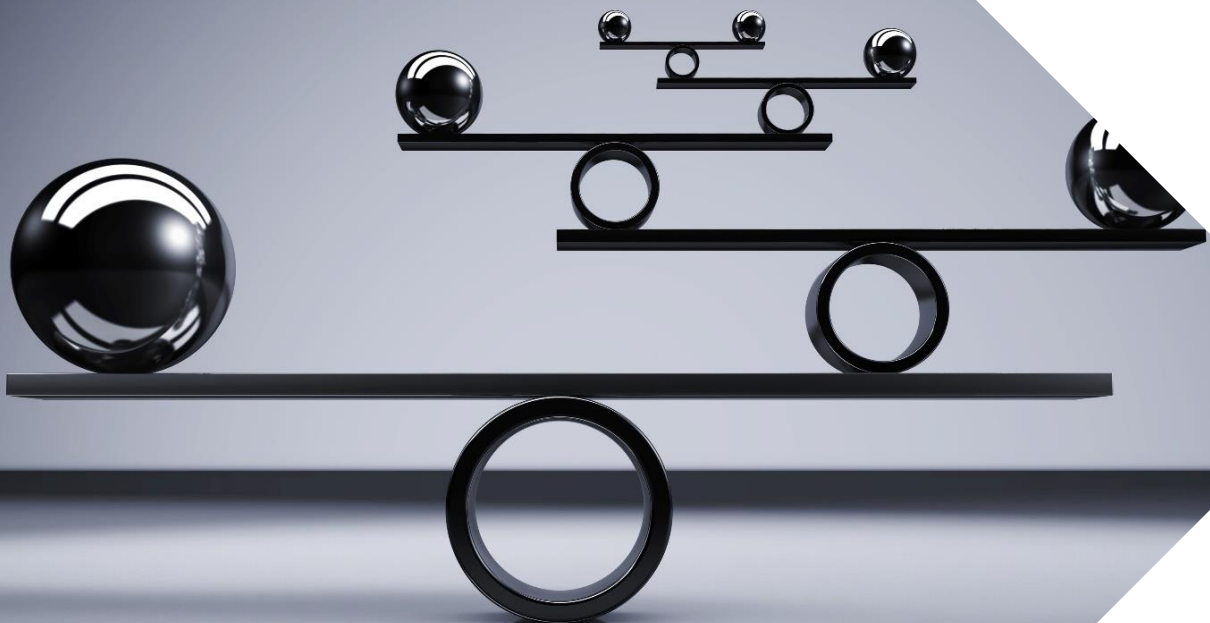
With this increase and change in the population, the complexity of the work of the service has diversified. Key areas of recent practice development include the work with young people who face risks relating to exploitation/CCE and other Risks Outside the Home. We have also built on and developed the partnership support to our unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children including navigating the cultural changes, asylum and immigration systems.

The current position in relation to their accommodation shows that the biggest proportion of our young people reside within supported accommodation, with the majority of these being provided directly by North Lincolnshire Council as part of our service offer to the young people.

Of the current population of 115 Care Leavers:

- 42% live in supported accommodation
- 39% live in their own (independent) accommodation
- 10% live with their former foster carers in 'Staying Put' arrangements

The remaining 9% of care leavers live in alternative settings including with their family or friends, residential care and in a very small number of cases, custody.





## Delivering the 2020 – 2022 Sufficiency Strategy – Progress so far

The 2020 – 2022 Sufficiency Strategy identified 4 key areas of further development:

- Strengthen the 'edge of care' offer through the One Family Approach
- Recruitment and retention of foster carers
- Continued Focus on Improving Stability
- Development of the Integrated Service for Care Leavers

Progress during the lifetime of the strategy includes:

**Strengthen the 'edge of care' offer through the One Family Approach** - helping children to remain in their families, schools and communities

The development and embedding of the One Family Approach, preventive work of our targeted and specialist services, the development and understanding of the response to Risk Outside the Home and the flexible use of creative short breaks has meant that help is provided in line with need at the right time to enable children to remain in their families, schools and communities. The success of this has continued to have an impact on the care population both in children being supported to remain in or return to their family networks and low numbers of children entering care.

**The Children's MARS Board** provides a line of sight on early help performance, focusing on the Children's MARS Local Arrangements intent on building children, young people and family's resilience, working to implement and embed early help related interventions and facilitating a supportive environment for developments.

The family support offer has been built upon in order to further develop the 7-day service that focuses on restoration work, strengthening parenting relationships and the family's resilience where children are on 'the edge' of care and supporting children and young people to be reunited with their families.

Family support continues to provide targeted help to families, successfully maintaining children and young people safely within their families. During 2021/22 of 945 families receiving a service from Family Support Service, only 29 children (1.4%) entered care during their involvement.

**Recruitment and retention of foster carers** - sufficiency of placements

**Increased Capacity for Fostering Recruitment** – An additional Fostering Recruitment Officer post was established in 2020 within the Fostering Service, this is a designated role that ensures a speedy and effective response to all enquiries and is responsible for enquires through stage 1 of the assessment process up until an assessing social worker is allocated the case to undertake the home study. This ensures a consistency in the response and has contributed to the increase in the proportion who progress from enquiry to assessment. Building on the success of this and further enhancing the initial response when members of the public enquire about fostering, a second Fostering Recruitment Officer was appointed to in January 2021.

A new Marketing Officer post was also appointed in January 2021 to take a dedicated lead in fostering publicity, information and recruitment and further develop the recruitment of carers to ensure there is a strong presence within the local and wider communities that encourages people to consider fostering.



**Further expansion of recruitment capacity** was also supported by the creation of a Recruitment Manager post in August 2021 with direct management responsibility for the recruitment, assessment and approval of carers.

**Activities to recruit and retain foster carers**, included an increased social media presence, has shown a continued commitment to family based care. This includes:

- Local events in different areas across North Lincolnshire throughout the year;
- An increased frequency of open evenings and phone-in events have been held throughout, both virtually and, where possible, in person.
- The use of foster carers to 'spread the word' including on websites, social media campaigns and drop in events.
- A comprehensive media strategy in relation information, promotion, awareness raising and advertising has been delivered throughout – this includes radio, social media, new paper, community groups and media boards.
- Posters and banners advertising fostering have been re-designed and placed in increased numbers throughout the North Lincolnshire area. Billboards were also commissioned and placed outside 7 Supermarkets across North Lincolnshire
- Continued use of local shops / public venues to promote specific open evenings
- Links have continued with local businesses to promote awareness of fostering and build fostering friendly businesses who offer rewards and discounts to the community.

The Fostering Service worked closely with Migration Yorkshire in relation to the recruitment of carers for children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum. This has included targeted advertising focused on carers to care for children who are unaccompanied.

**Skills to foster Training** - the Skills to Foster training course was updated in August 2019 to reflect the themes and content of the 'Fostering Network' course. To improve this further and ensure the course is holistic and comprehensive and ensure that the carers recruited have the knowledge, skills and understanding to provide the best care, this has been developed to a bespoke North Lincolnshire package. This includes contributions as part of the course by the designated Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer, existing Foster Carers and care experienced young people.

The Skills to Foster course feeds well in to the comprehensive training plan which skills up foster carers to successfully undertake the role. 2021 saw the development and delivery of the North Lincs 'induction day'. This is a multi-agency training day which builds on key topics in the skills to foster and enhances their understanding within the first stages of their journey as approved foster carers. The day includes input from social workers, approved foster carers, nurses and support officers helping carers develop skills in recording, addressing health needs. The course also includes practical examples of a child entering their home and North Lincolnshire principles such as You Say Who.

The benefit to the service is that carers are fully informed concerning the fostering task pre-approval and are able to discuss potential issues or concerns with their assessing social workers. The induction day offers the practical skills and understanding post-approval which demonstrates their commitment to learning, broadening their skillset and improving matching and support planning.

**During 2020/2021, the Supported Lodgings service** was integrated within the fostering service. This has enabled shared recruitment, consistent processes and has increased the choice and availability of accommodation for older children who either move on from fostering, have been cared for in other ways or present as homeless. The recruitment of Supported Lodgings providers has formed an integral part of the recruitment campaign over 2020 - 2022 and has resulted in an

increase in provider numbers and therefore the offer to young people in need of supported accommodation.

**We have continued to provide and develop short-breaks** - the service has continued to offer a range of support to continue to improve the stability of children in care and in the community. The Fostering Service have a s17 short-breaks lead working alongside the Children's Disability Service enabling early identification of children who require short-breaks and effective matching. The dedicated worker leads on the matching process ensuring that parents and children have a clear and strong voice throughout the process.

**Matching** is essential to our 'no moves' ethos ensuring that children are matched to the right family at the earliest opportunity. Matching processes including assessments, meetings and robust planning have been strengthened in the period ensuring that children have the best matches to carers who are able to meet their needs. This leads to fully informed decision making and support planning.

**Placement support meetings** have been regularly reviewed and refreshed and are now referred to as **Family Support Meetings**. They embed the strengths-based approach whilst considering the impact upon the foster family as a whole. Family support meeting processes have also been reviewed to ensure that each family has a support plan which is regularly reviewed by all the services around them taking a pro-active approach to ensure holistic support. Meetings are essential to co-ordinating support from education, therapeutic provision and social care. Family support meetings are bespoke to the family and have a pivotal role in ensuring children's needs are met and carers are heard.

**Support to carers** includes 1.5 Fostering Support Worker posts that provide immediate support to foster carers when a potential fostering family disruption is identified. The support officers have built very supportive relationships with young people over the period, including throughout Covid-19 restrictions where they provided additional support through a number of virtual competitions and groups to engage young people. Many young people benefitted from this virtual interaction and carers praised the impact of this support.

Support officers continue to work directly with young people in the community and are creative in the activities they undertake. Support officers offer a range of support groups including Come and Join Us support group for children who foster and Take Part Thursday, a school holiday group offering children an opportunity to try a new activity in a supportive group whilst offering a break to carers.

**Retention of fostering families** continued to be excellent during 2020 – 2022 with only 24 resigning over the 2 year period mostly due to retirement or personal changes within families including ill-health. North Lincolnshire offers a range of community events which supports the service as a community. This enhances peer support in addition the buddy processes in place. The service has a strong Foster Carer Association which is passionate about maintaining a sense of community.

**The fostering community** has remained strong and is supported by a committed foster carer association, regular coffee mornings, Bi monthly meetings with management and community events. Events have been adapted when Covid 19 restrictions dictated including virtual Christmas parties and celebration events. The community came together to offer the essential support including corporate parenting events, Christmas pantomime, 20:21 take over day and the Awesome Autumn Factor and Awesome Kidz Awards.

**Connected person** support has progressed through the adaptation of the skills to foster training to suit their additional needs and through development of connected person support groups.

**Impact:**

At the end of March 2022, the Fostering Service was supporting **124 fostering households**.

The North Lincolnshire Council Sufficiency Strategy 2020 – 2022 was ambitious in prioritising recruiting new foster carers. Consequently, during the lifetime of the plan there were 25 mainstream approvals (excluding connected persons) increasing the number of mainstream foster carers. The increase in local availability has ensured that 98% of children in foster care are placed with North Lincs foster carers.

**Fostering sufficiency** – the combination of recruitment, retention and reduction of children entering mainstream care has ensured that children entering care are placed with North Lincs Foster carers and no children were placed in externally commissioned placements throughout the period of the 2020-2022 strategy. Children previously placed with agency providers have also returned to North Lincs carers during the period helping to keep children in their local community.

On 31st of March 2022 the number of CiC living in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) fostering families was 3 (<2% of the care population) maintaining the high performance in placing children within North Lincolnshire.

**This has shown a positive trend over the last 5 years.  
Children placed with external foster carers:**

2021/22	– 3 (2%)
2020/21	– 7 (3%)
2019/20	– 9 (4%)
2018/19	- 7 (3%)
2017/18	- 11 (5%)
2016/17	- 15 (7%)
2015/16	- 19 (9%)

The low number of children placed externally reflects the availability and choice of carers in North Lincolnshire and prior to consideration of any child for a commissioned placement all options within local provision must have been fully explored with robust management oversight, the flexible use of resources and formal decision making to ensure it is fully in line with the child’s needs. Extensive checks are carried out on any identified external provision prior to agreement to place.

**Family Finding**

An innovative approach to family finding has taken place in order to match children who are older or have more complex needs. This has helped improve stability and examples include:

- Successfully matching a child with significantly complex medical needs to an internal foster carer. The nurses, doctors and other medical professionals who had been working with and caring for the young person were enabled to talk to carers about her personality, medical needs and long-term care requirements. An enhanced multi-agency support package was also established. Four foster families expressed interest and a match was identified. This also

enabled a match for a support family for the carer enabling the authority to work towards providing short-breaks.

- Successfully returning two young people, aged 16, into North Lincolnshire foster care, one of whom had resided in agency residential care for three years. Matching processes were adapted based on the different needs of the two young people. One of the young people was offered a placement choice between three foster families. Each foster family created a Family Video to introduce themselves, their home and their lifestyles. The child was able to review each, hear about each family and chose the foster family she wanted to live with.
- To enable an appropriate match to be found for the other child, an extensive support package of therapeutic and practical support was collated. An appropriate match was identified and the introductions took place in a child led way over a period of two months. The family created a personalised family book for the young person and they met virtually several times sharing jokes and playing games. The innovative approach meant that relationships building could take place and not be hindered by Covid-19.

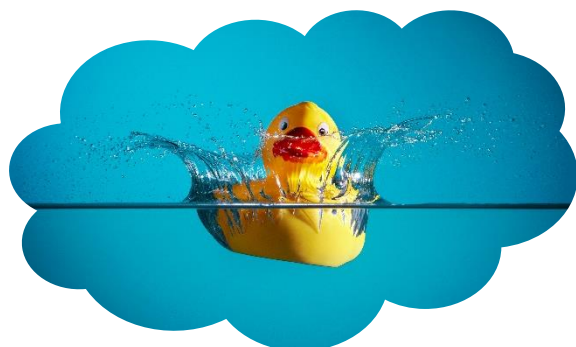
During 2021/2022 the fostering service accommodated 55 children who entered care with North Lincolnshire foster carers.(91% of entries to care)

Quarter	Connected person	Foster care	total
1	1	13	14
2	1	4	5
3	1	12	13
4	4	19	23

**Continued Focus on Improving Stability** - providing a range of care and leaving care placements that provide choice, stability, diversity and swift permanence

We have continued to invest in local provision and continue to build on and develop North Lincolnshire Fostering, Adoption and family support provision that both prevents children needing to enter care, supports children to return to their families and supports children and their carers when children remain in care.

We have also developed a range of provision suitable to the needs of Care Leavers as they progress in to adulthood, with accommodation choices that include through Staying Put arrangements with their carers; staying close to their carers so they can be supported; independent supported accommodation and their own tenancies within social housing. All care leavers have a plan and support to help them succeed within their home.



## Partnership with Foster Carers

**The Fostering Bi-Monthly meetings** continued to take place both virtually and where possible face-to-face. To further develop the role of the meetings, the chair of the Foster Carer Association has taken on the chairing role for the meetings ensuring topics important to carers are covered and carers feel empowered. Carers are positive about the support offered and provide feedback regarding the needs of the community.

**Training** was adapted to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions as needed. This includes a range of electronic learning including E-learning modules and virtual training workshops. Examples include over 30 households attending the virtual attachment training in the year and Bitesize training continuing to run virtually on a regular basis. Topics covered include; therapeutic parenting, NVR, Managing Allegations and 'watch your language'. Good attendance and positive feedback has been received as many carers have felt that the virtual training offers the flexibility they need in order to attend around their other commitments. Feedback from carers and learning from practice has informed the training plan for 2022 including carer led workshops on caring for UASC, Supporting LGBTplus children and Caring for children of a different ethnicity.

**Fostering allowances** recognise the skills, training and development of foster carers. Carers receive an enhanced rate alongside the support, expectation and opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills as carers. Enhanced allowances ensure the sufficiency of carers:

- For older children with complex care needs requiring more specialist family-based care.
- For children with disabilities requiring overnight short break family-based care as opposed to short break residential care.
- To support and prevent young people being remanded to a secure setting or to local authority accommodation where possible.
- To support parents and their babies requiring family-based care and support.

Foster families received an uplift of 3% in the year to ensure the allowance covers relevant living costs. A one off payment to families caring for children during the Covid-19 national lockdown was also made in recognition of the additional support, commitment and resilience shown by foster carers and the financial impact adaptations due to the pandemic may have. Any requests for financial assistance is considered in line with our offer and the needs of the children in their care.

## Adoption

We are committed to ensuring we have sufficient, high quality adoptive placements for those children where adoption is the right plan. This strategy is set within the context of the **One Family Approach** founded upon our North Lincolnshire values and beliefs, capturing our intent to keep children in their families, their schools and their communities.

It sets out our approach to ensuring we have the best adoptive placements available for those children who require such permanence to meet their needs.

North Lincolnshire has a strong record with regards to our adopter sufficiency, this is evidenced by our record in placing children with our own adoptive carers:

- 2017/18 of the 14 children placed 13 were with NL families (93%)
- 2018/19 of the 6 children placed 6 were with NL families (100%)
- 2019/20 of the 16 children placed 12 were with NL families (75%)
- 2020/21 of the 13 children placed 12 were with NL families. (92%)
- 2021 / 22 - 100% of all children placed have been within Family Adoption Links

A number of the children above were older, had more complex needs and were part of sibling groups and nationally it is a challenge to identify adopters for these children. This has meant we have had to be creative and innovative in our recruitment and as a result of this the majority of our children with more complex needs have been placed with North Lincolnshire approved adopters.

We continue to be committed to building upon the success of regional working to ensure timely placement for children by way of adoption and in ensuring that the recruitment of adopters is based upon the needs of the children who require an adoptive placement, not only locally but regionally and nationally.

In October 2020, North Lincolnshire Council formally joined **Family Adoption Links (FAL)**, a regional partnership of Adoption Services comprising of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, Northamptonshire Children's Trust and North Lincolnshire Council. Lincolnshire County Council act as host for the arrangement. Agency decision making for adults and children is maintained within the Local Authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

A key area of focus is **the recruitment and assessment** of adopters and our **local recruitment** is underpinned by both the **Regional Recruitment Strategy** and the **National Adoption Recruitment Strategy January 2021 – December 2023** for adoption.

### **Regional Recruitment Strategy – Family Adoption Links**

Alongside the National Strategy, the **Family Adoption Links Marketing Plan** sets out the regional steps with regards to adopter recruitment.

The **Regional Strategy** identifies that by working closely together we can achieve the overarching aims as defined in the '**Regionalising Adoption**' document. Those aims being;

- A **larger adopter pool** – created by sharing resources and better targeted recruitment activities.
- **Speedier and more effective matching** of children with adoptive families.
- Opportunities to **reassess approaches to adoption support**, address gaps and to develop a more comprehensive training package for adoptive parents.
- **Improved collaboration** between RAA's, LA's and other agencies in some RAA's.

Since April 2021 there have been 16 approvals of adopter households, which means we have successfully met the local target that we set.

**To ensure effective local delivery, the North Lincolnshire Adoption Service:**

- Ensures that the children and young people are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay.
- Treats prospective adopters and adopters with openness, fairness and respect.
- Makes prospective adopters first points of contact informative and welcoming.
- Approaches adopter recruitment in the spirit of inclusiveness with a view to identifying potential and opportunity – no one will be automatically excluded.
- Recruits prospective adopters who can meet all or most of the needs of children and young people waiting for, or likely to need, adoption and signpost prospective adopters to other agencies if there is insufficient local demand.
- Explains to prospective adopters the needs and profiles of the children and young people waiting to be adopted.
- Ensures preparation and training, the assessment and approval processes are explained and proceed efficiently.
- Regularly reviews progress on matching with prospective adopters.
- Provides adopters and prospective adopters with information, counselling and support, as and when needed, throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- Provides prospective adopters with information about the Independent Review Mechanism.
- Works in partnership, and with other agencies and the Courts, to ensure that all decisions are timely and joined up.

**Development of the Integrated Service for Care Leavers** - sufficiency of accommodation for care leavers

The accommodation offer for care leavers includes the provision of a range of accommodation, as well as clear assurance processes to ensure that this accommodation remains suitable for young people. This includes prioritisation and integration within the Council's Housing Advice services and across the Council and partners to provide a unified, holistic response.



We have developed pathways that provide the support each young person needs as they grow and develop their confidence and independence in our community. This includes:

- Ongoing commitment to children in our care remaining with their foster carers as part of “Staying Put”.
- Built on and developed the provision of safe, suitable and sustainable accommodation with the support young people need to progress successfully to adulthood
- Enabled young people leaving Kingfisher Lodge to ‘stay close’ in the adjoining facility of independent studios to support them to make successful transitions into adulthood.
- Develop further pathways within the Integrated Care Leaving Service to support young people make the transition from supported to independent accommodation, ensuring they can live successfully in our community.

Progress during 2020 - 2022 included:

- We have continued to develop our service offer in line with the ambitions set out within the sufficiency strategy. We have continued to provide a range and choice of provision for care leavers and other post-16 provision that ensures young people have the support they need to remain living in safe stable placements supported by adults they have positive and meaningful relationships with.
- To ensure that our service offer and design is aligned to changing needs and populations, we have transformed our Care Leaving Service. We have listened to what young people have told us about their experiences within and leaving care and acted upon this. A significant part of this development has been to create an integrated Care Leaving Service with our partners, including returning externally commissioned accommodation and support services to care leavers ‘in-house’. This has enabled us to develop a flexible accommodation and support offer to care leavers that provides the best accommodation and support as they transition into adulthood.
- This is now fully implemented and has enabled us to develop a flexible accommodation and support offer to care leavers that provide them with the best accommodation and support as they transition into adulthood.
- Through the development of our integrated offer, we have been able to ensure that the standard of accommodation is of the highest quality, including removing any provision from the portfolio that didn’t meet the revised accommodation standards we have jointly implemented, and replacing with new accommodation. This has been undertaken in collaboration with partners within the Housing Advice Service.
- The increased portfolio of high-quality accommodation is ensuring that young people have a choice of where they would like to live. Accommodation is installed with broadband internet at no cost to the young people.
- Implementation of a joint pathway with Housing Advice Service that actively supports young people to make the transition from supported to independent accommodation, with the right support, when they are ready.
- We have developed new types of accommodation that meet the varied needs of our young people. This includes the introduction of bespoke shared living accommodation, whereby young people can develop their independent living skills alongside other young people with shared



experiences, as a method of bridging the gap between care and residing alone in supported living.

**Accommodation options were strengthened leading to good outcomes for those children who were unaccompanied and seeking asylum and progressed to become care leavers**

At the end of March 2022 there were 6 children in care who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum, and 44 who were previously unaccompanied children seeking asylum who are now care leavers. All of these young people have received an immediate response where their diverse needs were assessed in line with guidance

Suitable accommodation has been provided for all unaccompanied young people who present within North Lincolnshire. This includes within foster families, residential provision and supported accommodation matched to their needs. This has meant all unaccompanied young people being placed within North Lincolnshire provision from the point of arrival.

The 'Children who are Unaccompanied and Seeking Asylum Pathway' was developed alongside partners to promote consistent and timely responses to young people as they present. As a result, all children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum live locally in suitable accommodation with an identified package that meets their needs as they progress into adulthood.

Care Leavers who were also unaccompanied and Refugee young people having access to high quality and stable accommodation within our community has also enabled them to significantly benefit from the wider service developments within the care leaving service. This includes the significant work undertaken to improve the education, employment and training (EET) achievement and attainments of the young people in collaboration with partners as well as the revisions to our financial policy and overall care leaver offer which provides greater resources and tools to support young people. This has resulted in 77% of our unaccompanied and Refugee young people currently being actively engaged in EET as of March 2022.

Alongside this, our unaccompanied and Refugee young people have benefited from the introduction of supported to independent living pathway, with currently 33% of our refugee young people living in their own independent accommodation in our local community.





## Building on Success – Next Steps

The sufficiency, choice and quality of care, accommodation and provision for children in care and care leavers continues to be a key priority underpinned by the belief that all children should have the opportunity wherever possible to remain within their family or, if this is not possible a well-matched alternative family. To continue to achieve this we will:

- ▶ Continue to provide choice of high quality safe, stable care and leaving care provision that is matched to the needs of the children and young people and enables them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.
- ▶ Develop fostering recruitment through understanding and analysing the outcomes and successes of the 2020 – 2022 recruitment activity.
- ▶ Build on and take an active role in the Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Agency
- ▶ Minimise the use of agency and out of area placements through building on and utilising local provision.
- ▶ Challenge ourselves and each other to build and develop choice in care and supported accommodation.
- ▶ Led by their voice, update the Care Leaving Offer for young people for 2022-2024, ensuring that the offer matches our ambition for young people.
- ▶ In partnership with the Housing Advice Service embed a transitional pathway that supports young people into accommodation that meets their needs in our community.
- ▶ For those children and young people whose specialist, complex needs cannot be met within our own provision, we will continue with our effective joint commissioning and oversight arrangements, in conjunction with our partners, to meet children’s education, health and care needs and support placement stability.
- ▶ Continue to provide suitable packages as alternatives to custody and ensure the availability of foster carers as an alternative to remand or overnight detention in line with the Custody Concordat.
- ▶ Provide local children’s home capacity for the small number of children whose needs are best met in residential care.
- ▶ Build on and develop further opportunities to co-produce with children and young people in the planning and delivery of services including the provision of care and accommodation

### Key Developments

To continue the sustained success of the Sufficiency Strategy, we will build on the key priorities through the following key developments:

#### **Recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure placement availability and choice**

Enhanced recruitment, support and retention to carers through investment in the service will reduce the need to use external provision. This is planned to include:

- **Focus on the local community** - as we want all of our children to remain in their community, we are focusing on engaging the community in our recruitment and retention strategy. 2021 saw the beginning of broadening our ‘fostering friendly business’ engagement and this will be driven forward in to 2022. Having targeted local areas we aim to bring the businesses together

to support with advertising, hosting events, offering discounts to carers and opportunities to children.

- **Utilise the corporate parenting offer** – Corporate Parenting is strong in North Lincolnshire and we have a proactive and through relaunching our ambassador scheme and utilising the skills across the Council and partners we will broaden our reach for potential foster carers and promoting the fostering friendly employment scheme.
- **Targeted impact weeks-** Marketing takes place throughout the year through a range of media. Highlighting dedicated parts of the year for larger scale publicity will allow us to create a bigger impact through co-ordinated campaigns and events. Fostering Fortnight will ensure large coverage across newspapers, social media and in person events with a clear message about fostering for your local community. The Council's short-breaks week in November will also offer significant publicity to our short-breaks offer. The first Supported Lodgings week will take place in 2022 and publicity and marketing will showcase the successes of supporting young people and care leavers.
- **Continued development of Supported Lodgings** – Since integrating with fostering this provision has increased significantly. The first Supported Lodgings Week will provide the level of impact and strategy that Fostering Fortnight receives.
- **Recruitment – building on the progress over the year..** The revised recruitment strategy includes an annual programme of recruitment activity. Throughout the year monthly marketing strategies will include:
  - Poster campaigns
  - Social media videos and campaigns
  - How to apply video advertising
  - Day in the life of vlog- story of an experienced carer
  - Increase in drop in events across a range of community venues
  - Utilising social media following of local businesses
  - Recruitment stalls and roadshows
  - Shop windows
  - Radio advertising
  - Engage local business in events and advertising as fostering friendly businesses
  - Roundabout advertising
  - Council vehicle advertising
  - Art displays (by children in foster care)
  - Fostering ambassador promotion



## Continued Focus on Improving Stability

Whilst the placement stability of Children in Care has improved, there is a continued focus on ensuring that children achieve stability where they are able to form meaningful and permanent relationships with carers. To continue to build on this, services will:

- Promote therapeutic parenting through an enhanced range of training opportunities in person and virtually
- Deliver joint training to carers and children helping them to share learning and communicate about important issues which may impact upon stability
- Community events will ensure that carers develop relationships with peers as mentor carers highlight themselves and their offer of support
- Continue to work with carers to support them to continue to provide stability through a multi-agency team around the child approach; the use of family support meetings; training and development, peer support and dedicated support workers.
- Continue to focus on building and supporting relationships within families at all stages in the child's journey with a view to enabling children to remain within and return to their family where this is possible
- Ensure we build upon and work with the children in care council, listen to them and act.
- Ensure carers feel their voice is heard and valued through a range of feedback approaches
- Take Part Thursday will create opportunities for children to learn new skills and develop meaningful relationships.
- Work closely with Corporate Parents to offer carers and children a whole council approach to support
- Continue to prioritise stability and achievement within educational settings that minimises changes in educational provision and ensures children have the support they need to be successful.

## Further Development of our offer to Care Leavers

Through our Integrated Service for Care Leavers, we will continue to work towards high quality, sustainable accommodation options for young people who leave care, as well as dedicated pathways to ensure that young people can quickly and effectively make the transition from semi-independent, to independent living in our communities. The service development is an essential component in ensuring that we continue to offer the highest level of service to our young people in line with the increase to the care leaver population over the last 5 years.



We will achieve this through ongoing partnership and joined up working, with the aim of continually reviewing and analysing the strength of our accommodation options for young people, utilising our quality assurance frameworks to do so, and updating the accommodation offer in line with this. This may include the addition of new accommodation and new accommodation types, if identified as a need for our young people.

Alongside this, we will continue to utilise our Practice Standards for Care Leavers that were developed across 2020-22, to ensure that we are collectively understanding the lived experiences of young people that leave care and benefit from the accommodation aspects of our Care Leaver Offer. We will utilise our existing participation and engagement frameworks to gather the voice of our young people and ensure that our offer to young people meets their individual and collective needs.

Also, we aim to develop new methods of engaging with young people using digital technologies, with a key aim of this being to support us in consistently engaging with young people regarding the experiences of the services they receive.





## What will Success Look Like?

By 2024, we will expect to see:

- ▶ Sustained reduction in the overall care population as a result of:
  - The One Family Approach enabling children and young people to be cared for within their family.
  - Continued increased use of Adoption and Special Guardianship – achieved in a timely manner.
  - Continued focus on reunification for children in care where it is in their interests
- ▶ Continuing to build the number of North Lincolnshire foster carers in particular mainstream carers and carers for older children and those with more complex needs.
- ▶ Sustained reduction in the use of external provision through building on our ability to meet a wide range of needs locally.
- ▶ The best matches for children through choice of placements resulting from sustained managed care population and increased choice and availability of carers.
- ▶ Sustained the increase in the proportion of the children in care cared for within a family setting rather than a residential one.
- ▶ Continuation of the downward trend in children experiencing changes of carer and greater stability for those in care longer-term.
- ▶ Children continuing to report high levels of satisfaction with their accommodation in exit interviews and other surveys.
- ▶ Children and young people who enter care continue to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity.
- ▶ Increased choice for children in care and care leavers in relation to the home that they live in.

### Care Leavers

It is important that our young people are able to hold us to account against our priorities, and that we ensure that we achieve our collective goals as corporate parents. We have, therefore, identified success measures against each of our priorities that we will be striving to achieve.

- ▶ Increase in care leavers remaining in 'Staying Put' placements post 18
- ▶ All care leavers are supported to successfully live in their home by a suitable qualified and experienced personal advisor, and this personal advisor remains the lead worker for the duration of the young person's journey as a care leaver.
- ▶ The voice of care leavers is at the forefront of everything we do and opportunities include attending suitable drop-in support sessions, accessing advocacy support, the children in care council and co-production opportunities.
- ▶ All care leavers living in the community are living in high quality suitable accommodation.
- ▶ Young people do not experience changes of accommodation that is not in line with their Pathway Plan.
- ▶ More care Leavers are in Education, Employment and Training.

- ▶ More care Leavers are accessing Higher Education/University
- ▶ All our care leavers have an identified ‘team’ of social and professional support that enables them to live successfully in their accommodation.
- ▶ All our care leavers in supported accommodation have access to the internet.
- ▶ Young people are empowered and enabled to participate in their community, have equality of opportunity, and access to creative, flexible support at the earliest point, in the right place by the right people
- ▶ All care leavers are registered with local health services in their community.

STATUS	DATE	BY WHOM
Approved	April 2022	Paul Cowling
Lead	March 2022	Jane Brennan/Ben Dent/Karen Everatt
Review date	Annual refresh/update April 2023	



## Appendix 1: 2022 – 2024 Sufficiency Delivery Plan



Key Priority	Area of Focus	Milestones / target	When by	Lead/Lead Group
	Recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care	Review, understand and take action in relation to the recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and subsequent guidance and legislation including in relation to the provision of care and support to children in care and care leavers (see also separate development and action plan)	Immediate and Ongoing from May 2022	Assistant Director, Standards and Regulation  Assistant Director, Help and Protection
Safe	Continue to provide choice of high quality safe, stable care and leaving care provision that is matched to the needs of the children and young people and enables them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.  Minimise the use of agency and out of area placements through building on and utilising local provision.	Children matched to N Lincs carers – all children placed with N Lincs carers at point of entry to care  Continue to improve stability performance: 3 placements <8% Children in same placement 2+ yrs >71%  Foster carer capacity – 100+ mainstream carers	Ongoing  2022/2023 end of year	Assistant Director, Standards and Regulation
Safe	Develop fostering recruitment through understanding and analysing the outcomes and successes of the 2020 – 2022 recruitment activity.	Increase in fostering enquiries >100 at year end  15 new foster care approvals during each year of the strategy	2022/2023 end of year	Assistant Director, Standards and Regulation
Prosperous	Led by their voice, update the Care Leaving Offer for young people for 2022-2024, ensuring that the offer matches our ambition for young people.	Local offer to care leavers updated annually	Annually	Assistant Director, Help and Protection
Prosperous	In partnership with the Housing Advice Service embed a transitional pathway that supports young people into accommodation that meets their needs in our community.	Stability within accommodation for care leavers – reduced unplanned changes in accommodation  Increase in portfolio of accommodation options for care leavers	Ongoing  Year end	Assistant Director, Help and Protection  Group Manager - Environmental Health and Housing • Economy & Environment



Connected	Build on and develop further opportunities to co-produce with children and young people in the planning and delivery of services including the provision of care and accommodation.	<p>Feedback from children and young people reflects ownership of planning and development</p> <p>Young people's involvement in the development and delivery of the local offer to care leavers</p>	Ongoing	<p>Assistant Director, Standards and Regulation</p> <p>Assistant Director, Help and Protection</p>
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## Appendix 2: Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy 2022 - 2024

### Context

Currently there are approximately 154 children placed with our own foster carers. The fostering Recruitment approach outlines our approach to ensuring there is sufficient, high quality, flexible and responsive foster care provision to meet the needs of the care population in North Lincolnshire. Fostering marketing and recruitment is a key priority for the Council's communication plan with a view to continuing to increase and retain the number of in house foster carers. This builds on our success whereby:

- most children are placed locally with North Lincolnshire foster carers
- There are very low – and reducing – numbers of children placed with commissioned providers
- Retention of foster carers is high
- The number of new carers recruited throughout the year is increasing

### Objectives.

The fostering recruitment service's key objective / aim is to increase the number of in house foster carers and retain foster carers that we currently have approved to us. The objectives will be aimed at helping the Fostering service meet its aims. Below are the six key communications objectives for the fostering marketing. These are linked to individual campaigns and initiatives in the months ahead.

- Encourage take up of Fostering within North Lincolnshire
- Ensure the process from application to approval is swift and simple for carers
- To develop a greater awareness and knowledge of fostering /Supported Lodgings
- To overcome any concerns surrounding who can foster – dispelling any myths
- To encourage belief and support for foster carers and the role they undertake
- To communicate the role, rewards and benefits to encourage prospective carers to come forward
- To encourage retention of existing foster carers.

We have set ambitious local targets to recruit at least 20 'mainstream' foster care households over a 12 month period.

To meet the local needs for foster carers, our targeted recruitment includes:

- Foster carers specifically for children aged 11+
- Foster carers who can care for sibling groups
- Supported Lodging providers
- Foster carers for children with disabilities
- Geographically targeted activity. Although there is demand for foster carers across the council, consideration during campaign planning will be given to specific demands in any key identified areas. This will form the basis of the grassroots campaign within communities

### Delivering the Strategy

There are a number of key areas that have a key focus in the delivery of the recruitment strategy:

- Use of stakeholders and key influencers – ensuring communities, stakeholders and influencers have an understanding of the role of foster carers and why they should support it and encourage people to consider fostering.
- Using ‘word of mouth’ – ‘word of mouth’ is an important vehicle to encourage and raise awareness of fostering to potential carers. Existing foster carers can be the best vehicle to ensuring this happens and work will continue with current foster carers to help recruit new foster carers.
- Foster carers assist in recruitment events, in the training of potential new foster carers in providing support and encouragement and have a key role in the recruitment of new carers
- Research – recruitment planning uses research to gain clear insight into people who foster and in identifying and targeting potential new carers
- Visibility – the recruitment campaign will continue to be delivered all year round with targeted campaigns at peak times and in relation to specific groups.
- The use of online tools, media and websites is an essential part of successful recruitment. The Councils website has been re-designed and will continue to be developed with further updates to include case studies and videos featuring our foster carers.
- Positive and responsive initial contact with foster carers is vital. The development of Recruitment Support Officers within the service has developed the main point of contact for prospective foster carers, thus establishing a consistent approach to enquiries.

### **Foster Carers as Key Partners in Delivering the Strategy**

Utilising existing foster carers, word of mouth is a key tool. Therefore we will continue to use our existing foster carers and continue to encourage them to be active advocates. This also helps the retention of foster carers in demonstrating how much our carers are valued. Many already see themselves as having a clear role in terms of the recruitment of new carers.

Existing foster carers will continue to be an integral part of recruitment through;

- Case studies – updating case studies for use across the website and other events and opportunities.
- Fostering events – feedback informs us that direct two way communication is preferred over other methods of communication by people interested in fostering. We will continue to deliver both virtual and – subject to Covid rules face-to- face open events and road shows
  - + the events will be scheduled on a variety of days / times to enable the potential carers to find a time to suit them – including fitting around existing career commitments
  - + We will continue to promote the fact that these are an opportunity to engage with current foster carers, to hear their first-hand experiences

### **Recruitment Activity**

The recruitment of carers is in the context of our One Family Approach and is built upon:

- Identifying the key areas of demand
- Creating a community level recruitment campaign such as use of neighbourhood hubs, libraries and children’s centres
- Research into the motivations of foster carers to enhance a targeted recruitment approach

- Key communication messages that will appeal to the motivations of the target group – planned campaigns to meet the needs of the profile of children needing foster care in N Lincs. Examples include carers for under 5's, sibling groups, teenagers and children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum.
- Developing the communication mix of channels to reach our target market including newsprint, radio, social media, professional groups apps (such as NHS app), displays and community information.

A continued feature of the work is keeping in touch with persons who have made contact expressing a potential future interest in becoming foster carers. Enquiries that may progress to assessment are kept in touch with by Recruitment Support Officers. This has been further expanded by the addition of a second RSO. It is anticipated that this contact will build relationships and familiarity to lead to a formal enquiry when the time is right and then on to foster carer approval.

Key events and activities throughout the year incorporated into the recruitment campaign incorporate:

- Foster care fortnight
- Food fayres
- Campaigns around religious festivals – including Eid al-Adha and Christmas
- Supported Lodgings campaigns
- Short-breaks week
- Monthly open evenings (Quarterly in Brigg, Epworth and Scunthorpe) – both virtual and face-to-face as appropriate
- Monthly phone-ins based on our monthly specific campaigns
- 'Event Brite' online recruitment events
- Local events throughout the year
- Use of local Markets (such as a presence at Scunthorpe, Brigg and Hemswell markets).

All recruitment workers and foster carers provide information and discussion at events on the benefits of fostering for North Lincolnshire.

Information packs are posted out to potential foster carers following initial enquiries. The information booklet contains the key messages of the recruitment campaign and is relevant to the target audience. The information pack will also feature prominently on new web pages so potential foster carers are able to find out the information they need easily on the website and receive an electronic version once an online enquiry has been submitted.

Core media utilised to promote fostering recruitment include:

- Local and Regional newspapers
  - + Scunthorpe Telegraph
  - + Epworth Times
  - + Market Rasen Mail
- Local broadcast – Radio
  - + BBC Humberside
  - + Lincs FM
  - + Greatest Hits radio
- Online
  - + Twitter

- + Facebook
- + NHS app
- + North Lincs website
- + The Council's Direct News magazine

### **Increasing opportunities for two way engagement**

We will continue to build and develop opportunities for potential foster carers to engage with us in a two way dialogue. This will include:

- Engaging with North Lincolnshire Community Hubs – to enable them to talk knowledgeably on fostering. This reinforces the fact that Libraries and Community Hubs are increasingly the 'front door' to Council customers and gives potential foster carers a friendly way to ask questions before taking the next step.
- Use of 'Event Brite' – as a means to offer carers who cannot attend drop ins to web chat with fostering recruitment staff and current carers.
- Resumption of supermarket road shows – Pitching our stand in store car parks and having store staff direct customers to our location, supported by pop up banners located at store entries and exits. We will resume this when Covid-safe across the area. This will allow active engagement with supermarket customers but will also allow staff stacking shelves or working on the tills to promote fostering and to encourage them to come and visit the stand during their lunch breaks

### **Wide reaching Marketing activity.**

In addition to targeted aspects to the recruitment campaign we will also undertake further wide ranging marketing activities designed to reach a large number of people. We will ensure the language used taps into the motivations but we will deliver this across channels designed to reach as many people in the area as possible.

This will be achieved through;

- The continuation of placing adverts in local newspapers which the community widely read. This provides good coverage across the area but also taps into the community mindedness of potential carers
- Online advertising – Over 2022 fostering recruitment will further develop a growing online presence across social media. We will look at enhancing the reach of these social media channels by considering further use of paid online advertising. We will consider utilising a variety of options, advertising generally to the local community, but also targeted and re-targeted online advertising to reach the local people who have experience of working with children. This will include through Facebook and using Twitter and other relevant social media channels.
- Foster carers remain our best advocates and advertisers. Through engaging them in our video adverts, attendance at training and drop in events and offering foster buddies through the recruitment process we will successfully utilise the voice and experience of the community.
- Poster Campaigns – we will continue to develop our existing poster campaigns running in many doctor's surgeries, Children's centres, libraries and Community Hubs, various internal staff rooms, local shops and post offices. These are places where we are likely to attract people who currently work with children and young people or who have experience of raising families. We will also ensure enough posters are produced so that following any roadshow event, are displayed to act as a reminder of the key message and 'call to action'.

- Radio advertising – radio advertising is very effective at reaching large numbers of people across our area. At key campaign points throughout the year we will utilise radio to communicate our experience and the support we provide.

### **Our messages will be communicated through**

- Advertising - managed and produced by the communications team, using our marketing officer we will continue to work jointly organising specific campaigns, projects and initiatives. These in future will include, council owed billboards, council vehicles, partners websites and within radio and print media as appropriate
- Local businesses and employers- Through developing connections within the local area businesses can promote the recruitment of carers through posters, flyers, social media, events and 'drop in' spaces.
- Fostering Ambassadors- The relaunch of fostering ambassadors will mean that all council employees and corporate parenting partners are able to promote fostering in their roles and community settings.
- Council branding / Fostering branding – Promotion of the Council must be aided by having a strong identity and brand from which the public can identify. The brand is used in all communication tools the council uses, from website to presentations, letterheads to leaflets. The fostering service also has an identifiable fostering brand and strap lines (such as with Supported Lodgings – 'Room to Spare, Home to share') which will continue to be used in conjunction with the Council's logo
- The Council website / social media – The Council website content is managed so that it communicates appropriate information surrounding Council projects, initiatives and in support of agreed key messages. Messages are also conveyed through the existing Council Twitter, Instagram and Facebook functions.
- The Council publication, 'Direct News' – This council publication is used to communicate Council news and events to residents in the area. This continues to be used by Fostering to promote the need for foster carers. The success of this can continue to be analysed in terms of how many applications are opened, which helps with evaluation purposes, and can help engage with passive audiences.
- Qmatic screens in public areas managed by the Council – These screens are used as part of ongoing campaigns and help raise awareness of these with key Council messages. They carry images which would support the various specific recruitment campaigns over the next 12 months.

### **Further targeted activity.**

This involves groups who may not have thought about fostering before and are key target groups. This includes those working with children in caring professions like teachers, nurses, youth workers, police and others. The messaging will focus on their capacity to perform the role of fostering.

This will be achieved by:

- Targeting key workplaces, work is ongoing re communication with those deemed most appropriate such as residential units, nurseries, schools, hospitals and children's centres
- Mapping social media sites. As the target market is likely to be active in the local community our marketing officer will map social media sites for local schools, hospitals, community groups, etc. Social media forums will appeal to some potential foster carers as it presents the

opportunity for the preferred two way dialogue. We will actively promote fostering to the target market utilising our own Council and fostering social media sites.

- Targeting local areas through local businesses. Encouraging their promotion of fostering and support in retaining foster carers through rewards.

### **Measuring Success**

The success of the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy will be measured by:

- The number of prospective carer enquiries throughout the year – monitored monthly
- The proportion of these who progress to assessment
- The proportion who progress to approval through the Foster Panel / ADM
- The number of new carers approved throughout the year
- The overall number of Foster Carers available – including those for specific targeted groups
- The number and proportion of children in care who live with North Lincolnshire Foster Carers
- The number of Supported Lodgings enquiries, assessments and approvals
- The number of Supported Lodgings providers available and providing accommodation
- The stability of the children in care and leaving care populations
- The feedback / perceptions of carers throughout the process

## Foster Carer Recruitment Timetable 2022 - 2023

MARCH
Skills to foster course
Scunthorpe market drop in
Drop in info event. Advertise on Facebook.
Adverts on refuse lorries x6
Scunthorpe Market mother's day event. Advertise on Facebook and website.
Fostering tour
Advert in Scunthorpe Telegraph
Digital screens - town centre and Britannia corner
APRIL
Scunthorpe market drop in. Advertise on social media and website.
Normanby Hall 'paws in the park'. Advertise on Facebook and website.
Drop in info event and social media adverts
Poster Drop
Social media campaign
Print advert in Market Rasen Mail, Epworth Times and Gainsborough Standard.
MAY
Promotional talks – Women's institute, new life and Crosby one
Drop in info event –to Brigg- Advertised on the website and on social media
Foster care fortnight- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NLC screensavers</li> <li>• Radio advert Lincs FM.</li> <li>• Print advert in Scunthorpe Telegraph with mention of foster care fortnight. (9-22 May).</li> <li>• Digital screens in town</li> <li>• Google advert.</li> <li>• 7 Drop in events</li> <li>• Foster carer skydive event</li> <li>• Social media campaign</li> <li>• Send #FCF social media campaign to workers and foster carers</li> <li>• Mentions in Early Years, Families Direct, Community Champions and News Direct.</li> <li>• Interviews with foster carers about #fosteringcommunities</li> </ul>
'Fostering' flower bed installation – Kingsway, Scunthorpe
JUNE
Messingham show
Summer fayres
Drop in info event. Advertise on Facebook and website.
Poster drop
Crosby international day
Supermarket trolley station adverts.
Mentions in Early Years, Families Direct, Community Champions and News Direct.
Window signs in empty shop premises – Scunthorpe town centre.
Advertising on fleet vehicles
JULY
Stall at Winterton show
Crowle Rescue Day
Broughton show
Party in the park – Normanby hall
Water's Edge wildlife family day
Talk with WI, faith groups etc
Fostering business targeting
Info event. Promote on Facebook and website.
Print advert in Market Rasen Mail, Epworth Times and Gainsborough Standard.



AUGUST
Supported Lodgings week. #whotaughtyou in shops relating to specific skills. QR code to SL website. Article in local print media and NLC Facebook.
Country fair – Normanby hall
Stall at St Johns Market – crafts table for children. Promote awareness of fostering and supported lodgings.
Fostering business targeting
Info event
New roundabout adverts (fostering and supported lodgings, Tesco/ Asda)
Poster drops
SEPTEMBER
Private fostering week –Update digital screens in town. Print advert in Scunthorpe Telegraph and News Direct about private fostering awareness. Print advert Scunthorpe United Magazine for fostering and supported lodgings (start of new season).
Info event – Advertise on Facebook and website
Facebook – Celebrating private fostering
Virtual training for LA, local businesses and for members of the public
'information hotline' advertised on social media.
OCTOBER
Print advert in News Direct, Early Years, Families Direct, Community Champions
Info event - Advertise on Facebook and website
Poster drops
NOVEMBER
'Short breaks week'. Radio advert Lincs FM/ Viking FM/ Capital. Update digital screens in town.
Treasure hunt - #shortbreaks #butterflies #NLCfostering (Gift bags hidden around visitor attractions/ dog walk spots with a card to post photos of what you found and a hashtag for our social media. QR code to website to find out more about fostering.
Scunthorpe telegraph – interview with short breaks/butterflies carer.
Pop up event at St Johns Market – focus on short breaks/ butterflies
Info event – focus on short breaks. Advertise on Facebook and Website.
DECEMBER
Stall at Normanby hall Christmas market. Provide merchandise and leaflets.
Poster drops
Drop ins with stall set up and merchandise– busy shopping locations e.g. coffee shops, supermarket cafes, The Foundry etc.
Radio and social media advertising
JANUARY
TBC
FEBRUARY
TBC
MARCH
TBC