

# Children in Care & Care Leavers Strategy 2022 - 2025



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# 01

## Foreword



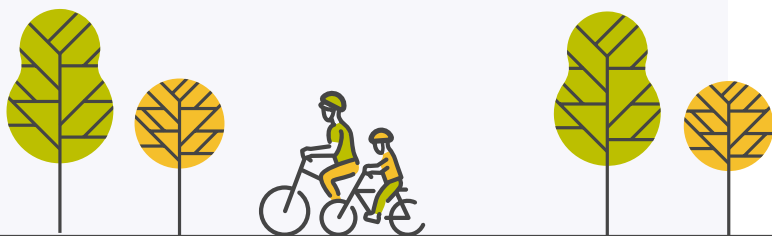
# Foreword

On behalf of Lincolnshire County Council as Corporate Parents, we are delighted to introduce our refreshed Children in Care and Care Leaver's Strategy, which has been developed in collaboration with children and young people, Children's Services, and our partner agencies.

**This strategy represents our joint commitment and ambition to provide the very best care and support for children and young people, so they can be safe, happy, healthy and be the best they can be.**

We are very proud of the excellent services we provide to the children in care and care leavers of Lincolnshire. We have an outstanding Children in Care and Leaving Care Service, but we know that there is more we can do to deliver excellent outcomes for children and young adults. **We know that we need to continue to:**

- Reduce the need for statutory intervention in lives, by providing the right help to the right children at the right time and for the right duration.
- Support families and care leavers to find and grow their own solutions by focusing upon building the personal networks which they have in place.
- Improve outcomes for our Children in Care and Care Leavers, by providing care and access to good quality education locally or within their own communities where they can be close to their networks.







As we continue our recovery from the global pandemic, it is necessary to rethink how the whole system works to give children and families the most co-ordinated and effective services. Like most local authorities across the region, our children in care numbers rose during the pandemic, as we saw more children starting care than those leaving.

**Despite this increase, we remain really proud that our children in care numbers continue to remain lower than the national average and those of statistical neighbours.**

We firmly believe that where safe and possible to do so, children and young people should be cared for at home or within their extended network of friends and family. For children who do need care outside of the family home and networks, we want to ensure that they receive the best possible care and education to thrive and succeed and the very best support as they leave our care at 18 and transition to adulthood. Whilst we strive to place children who need care in local foster care first, we have seen an increase in the need for externally commissioned placements and children being placed at a distance from their communities.



**In response to this, we launched our ambitious Children in Care Transformation Programme in 2021. The programme has a sharp focus upon increasing the availability of local placements through the development of two new children's residential homes and our new core offer for Lincolnshire foster carers.**

We need to continue to think big when it comes to a vision of what being in care means and what it means to leave our care. To deliver great care and support when leaving care, it means being ambitious in all that we do as practitioners, and Corporate Parents. We all need to be aspirational for our children and young people, continually celebrating their achievements and encouraging them to reach their full potential. We would like to express our thanks to our staff and our children, young people and families who have helped to shape this strategy.



**Councillor Mrs P A Bradwell OBE**  
Deputy Leader

Executive Councillor for Children's Services,  
Community Safety and Procurement



**Councillor Stephen Peter Roe**  
Corporate Parenting Panel Chairman



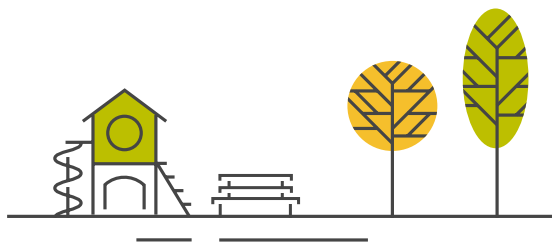
**Heather Sandy**  
Executive Director for Children's  
Services

# 02

## Who are our children in care?

Children in Care

Care Leavers





# Who are our children in care?

## Children in Care

In England and Wales the term 'looked after children' is defined in law under the Children Act 1989. Our children in Lincolnshire prefer us to use the term children in care and care leavers and therefore this terminology is used throughout this strategy, except for legal definitions.

A child is looked after by a local authority if he or she is in their care or is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by the authority. Looked after children fall into four main groups:

- Children who are accommodated under voluntary agreement with their parents (section 20)

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- Children who are the subject of a care order (section 31) or interim care order (section 38)

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- Children who are the subject of emergency orders for their protection (section 44 and 46)

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- Children who are compulsorily accommodated. This includes children remanded to the local authority or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement (section 21)

The term 'looked after children' includes unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children in friends and family placements, and those children where the agency has authority to place the child for adoption. It does not include those children who have been permanently adopted or who are subject to a special guardianship order.



## Care Leavers

Care leavers are those children and young people who were formerly in care and are aged from 16 through to 25. Care leavers may have left foster care, residential care (mainly children's homes), or other arrangements outside the immediate or extended family. Our care leavers live across the UK, and although they are adults and can make the choices they wish, our leaving care teams remain in contact with all our care leavers and support them with securing accommodation, finding education training and employment and making sure their health and emotional needs are met.

# 03

## Corporate Parent

Our Responsibilities

Corporate Parenting



# Corporate Parent

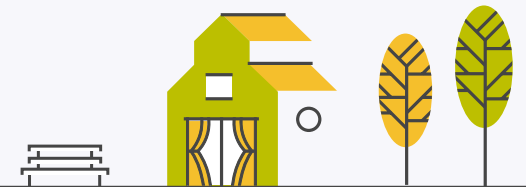
## Our Responsibilities

When a child comes into our care, the Council becomes the corporate parent. Put simply, the term 'corporate parent' means that it is the collective responsibility of the Council, its elected members, all employees, and its partner agencies to be ambitious and provide the best possible services for the children in our care.

A child in the care of the council should be able to look to the council to be the best parent it can be. Every member and employee of the council has the statutory responsibility to act for that child in the same way that a good parent would act for their own child. Our partners also share this responsibility to be a good, caring corporate parent and our members and officers recognise this.

**Every good parent wants the best for their child, to see their child flourish with good health, to be safe and happy, to do well at school, and enjoy healthy relationships with their peers.**

We want young people to make the most of leisure opportunities, gain hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood well equipped to lead independent lives. We want our young people to make their way as adults in higher education, to have good careers and jobs, and to be financially secure. That is why, across the corporate parenting partnership, we have the same aspirations for our children and young people in care and care leavers as we would for our own children, taking seriously our moral and legal responsibility for enabling them to experience happy and fulfilling lives.





## Corporate Parenting Principles

- **For those children and young people to be safe,** and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- **To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being,** of those children and young people.
- **To consider the views,** wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- **To encourage those children and young people to express their views,** wishes and feelings.
- **To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of,** services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- **To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.**
- **To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes,** for those children and young people.



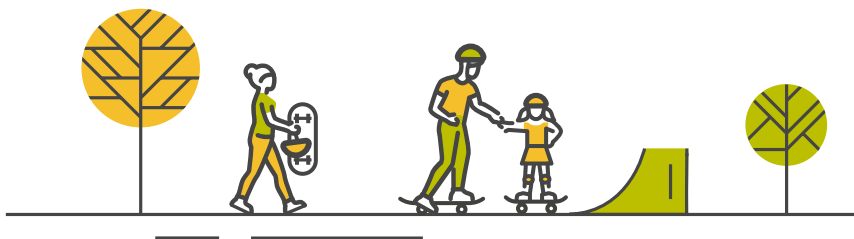
# 04

## Our Partners



# Our Partners

We work collaboratively with a range of partners from the public, private and third sectors to further our shared commitment and ambition to provide the very best care and support for children and young people in Lincolnshire. Our partners and the combined approach to all our young people is essential to ensuing good outcomes and services for our children and young people. Our Partners understand their duties and work with us to support all of those young people we are the parents for.





# 05

## Vision



# Vision

**Our vision for Children and their families in Lincolnshire is Putting Children First**



## Children, Young People and Families will be:

- Helped to make changes for themselves

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- Seen as a positive solution to the challenges they face

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- Able to get the right service at the right time

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- Understood as a whole family

## Supported by skilled professionals that:

- Understand and apply Relationship Based Practice

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- Is restorative in approach

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- Is well trained and supported

## Enabled and equipped by:

- Clear governance that puts children and families at the heart of how we plan and deliver support for them

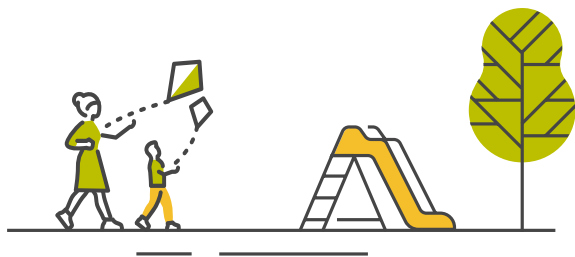
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- Clear framework and set of tools which includes using Signs of Safety as a methodology which builds on families strengths



# 06

## Ambition





# Ambition

**It is the ambition of Lincolnshire County Council for our children and young people in or leaving care to be safe, happy, and healthy, to enjoy life and realise their potential.**

Where they are provided with a safe and dependable foundation from which they can grow and achieve as this offers every child who has had a difficult start, the promise of a brighter future, with every prospect of success.

We will provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure that they get the opportunities they deserve, as we know the highest quality of social care can transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children in Lincolnshire. Through relationship-based interactions, we will give them the support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence.



# 07

## The Landscape

National Drivers

Local Drivers





# The Landscape

## National Drivers

On 15th January 2021, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care was announced, and Josh MacAlister was appointed as chair. The terms of reference of the Review set out its wide ranging and ambitious scope.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the children's social care system and improve the lives of children and their families. This review is a chance to look afresh at the system and ask how we can ensure that children grow up in loving, stable, safe families and, where that is not possible, care provides the same foundations.

The review has a number of early recommendations and proposes reforms that shift the care system to start by asking 'who loves this child?' and then act by bringing these people around a child and nurturing these relationships over the long term. In short, build not break relationships.





For children who do move into care the review has highlighted the need to be a lot more ambitious – from demanding higher standards for children in care, to encouraging more people to step up as foster carers who wouldn't previously have considered it and re-focussing the role of residential care

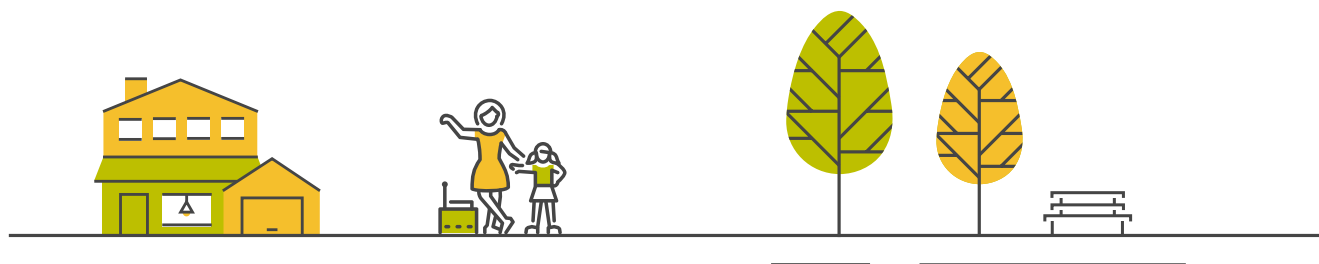
**as a place for specialist support and recovery rather than as facilities to contain children with 'complex needs'.**

The numbers of young people accessing leaving care services across the UK is slowly increasing and placing increasing strain on placement sufficiency in the country. The extension of the leaving care service up to the age of 25 has meant many thousands more young people are benefiting from having the advice and support of a Personal Advisor if they are not in full time education or training. A larger number of young people are coming into care over the age of 16, and the National Transfer Scheme has seen the numbers of former unaccompanied asylum seekers growing across the country. UASC now make up one sixth of all care leavers in the UK.

## National Context

In 2021, the number of children in care (CIC) by local authorities in England rose to 80,850, up 1% on last year and continuing the rise seen in recent years. The CIC per 10,000 has remained the same as 2020 at 67. The increase was driven by there being slightly more CIC starting during the year than those ceasing. However, both starters and leavers were down, and monthly figures show that:

- The numbers of CIC starting were consistently lower than we might usually expect throughout the year but were particularly low during periods when national lockdowns or restrictions were in place.
- The numbers of CIC ceasing were similarly affected by the first national lockdown but returned to the levels we might expect from September onwards. This fall is likely to have driven an increase in the average duration of care for those CIC ceasing, which increased by a further 79 days (more than two and half months) compared to last year.



## Local Drivers

### Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan underpins our 'One Council' approach, which ensures all services are working towards shared goals and will help different areas of the council work together more effectively. One of the Council's four key ambitions is to enable everyone to enjoy life to the full, with a specific objective to

*intervene effectively to keep vulnerable people safe, making sure children in care and care leavers get the best opportunities.*

Collaborating and working with partners across the county, we want Lincolnshire to be a place where children in care and care leavers have the opportunity to live their lives to the full and have access to the right support at the right time.



Performance against the plan is assessed quarterly using these **5 measures:**

- 1 **49.3** children per **10,000** are in care in Lincolnshire
- 2 **77%** of children in care are living within a family environment
- 3 **95%** of care leavers are living in suitable accommodation
- 4 **56%** of young people and care leavers are in Educations, Training and Employment (EET)
- 5 **99%** of young people are choosing to engage with the leaving care service after the age of 18

We continue to improve how we support children in care and care leavers to thrive through the delivery of the children in care transformation programme.

## Local Context

Despite good work with families where children and young people are 'on the edge of care' the numbers of children in the care of Lincolnshire has continued to rise in recent years. At the end of March 2022 there were 731 children and young people in our care. Our rate of the number of children and young people in care at 49.3 per 10,000 population is lower than other local authorities in similar circumstances and nationally where the figure is 67 per 10,000 population.

Our aim will always be for the right children and young people to be in our care, for as short a period of time as possible and decisions to bring a child or young person into care will be based on their needs and how we might make things better for them.

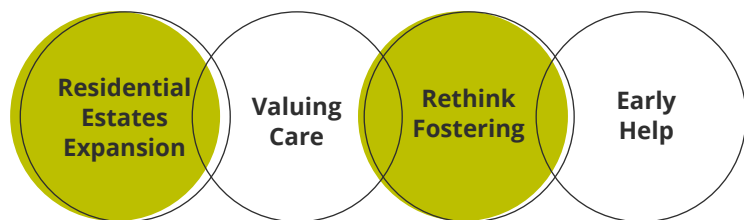
# 08

## Transformation Programme





# Transformation Programme



The Children in Care Transformation Programme has been created to ensure that we are providing the right help to the right children at the right time and for the right duration.

We have a Children's Services system which is working well and a Children in Care Service which is outstanding, although there is more, we can do to improve outcomes for children and families, particularly taking into account the impact of pandemic and recovery. More specifically the rise in the numbers of children needing care and the national availability of high-quality placements, demonstrates that the placements market,

particularly in England and Wales, is failing to provide sufficient supply of the right type of placement, so that children in care can consistently access placements that properly meet their needs, when and where they require them. This means that some children are being placed in settings that are not appropriate for their own circumstances and are too often being placed far from their established communities, siblings being separated or placements failing to meet the needs of children. This may also result in the necessity to change schools which can have a detrimental impact on children's educational outcomes.

**The Children in Care Transformation Programme was developed to explore and identify the opportunities and solutions to improving outcomes, across the child's journey from Edge of Care to Leaving Care.**

## Programme Aims

- To reduce the need for statutory intervention in families lives, by providing the right help to the right children, at the right time and for the right duration.
- To support families to come to their own solutions by focussing upon building networks which they have in place.
- To improve outcomes for our children in care by providing care and education locally within Lincolnshire, rather than care at a distance to keep children and young people within their own communities, where they can be close to their networks.

09

How are children and young people involved in the strategy?



# How are children and young people involved in the strategy?

Overseen by a dedicated Participation Team, **Voices 4 Choices** is the children in care council focussing on improving services and outcomes for children in care.

Children in care are also encouraged to share their views through an annual Children in Care survey and Big Conversation. This has lead to the creation of the **Caring Promise** (our promise all of our children in care and care leavers):

## Involve you



- Listen to you
- Give you what you need
- Make sure you understand decisions we make about your life

## Support you



- Do our best to make sure you are happy, and to keep you in the same home & school
- Help you understand why you are in care
- Help you see your family if it's safe

## Helping you in school



- Help you do your best at school
- Expect your carers to be interested in your education

## Work with you



- Make sure you know how to contact the people who work with you
- Answer any questions you have

## Healthy and safe



- Help you to be healthy in every way
- Keep you safe

## Your rights



- Tell you about the help you can get
- Give you someone to speak for you if you need them
- Tell you how to complain if you need to



# 10

How well are we supporting our children in care and care leavers?



# How well are we supporting our children in care and care leavers?

As Corporate Parents, we and our partners have high ambitions for children in care and care leavers. We are continuously striving to improve outcomes for children and young people, so that they can be the best that they can be.



## What is working well?

- The majority of our children in care are placed within our own provision, ensuring that they remain living in Lincolnshire, close to their communities and networks.

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- A high percentage of our children in care are placed with foster carers and many remain in the same placement for two years or more.

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- Our priority focus in supporting children through Family Networks and our investment in kinship arrangements remains strong, ensuring that children can be placed with extended family and friends wherever possible.

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- Personal Education Plans are reviewed termly with the young person to ensure they are receiving the appropriate support to engage and make progress in learning.

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- Care leavers in Lincolnshire are more likely to be in Education, Employment or Training than the national average.

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- Our adoption service achieves higher than statistical neighbours and the national average across all measures.

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- We have a strong Fostering Service Strategy in place which means that foster carers are well supported and the majority of children and young people in care live with Lincolnshire foster carers.

- The support offered to our care leavers is good and we are ambitious for all of them to do well. Our care leavers praise the apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship work preparation scheme which is delivered through our partner Barnardo's. We are focusing hard, post pandemic on raising the attainment of our young people.
- 
- In January 2022, we had 18 care leavers in University.
- 
- The 'Caring2Learn' approach (winner of the 2019 Children and Young People Now Awards), which supports schools to provide a nurturing environment and foster carers to champion education is highly valued across the partnership. This means that everyone is committed to providing the best possible opportunity for children to thrive in both settings.

- The Integrated Care Board is committed to supporting and prioritising the physical health and emotional well-being of children and young people in care and care leavers.
- 
- V4C (our Children and Young People in Care Council) and other mechanisms to hear the voice of our children and young people in care and care leavers all work tirelessly to ensure their voice is heard. We have recently appointed a participation role dedicated to the Leaving Care Service.
- 
- Lincolnshire's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service has been judged as outstanding by the CQC in their inspection. We have a specific mental health nurse role dedicated to our care leavers.
- 
- We have maintained exceptionally high levels of direct contact and support with all of our families, young people and care leavers during the pandemic and we continue to utilise technology in creatively delivering services post pandemic.





## Ofsted

- Lincolnshire Children's Services had a full Ofsted inspection in 2019 and received an overall judgement of 'Outstanding'.
- In May 2022, all Lincolnshire children's homes were judged by Ofsted to be outstanding or good.
- An Ofsted focused visit in Spring 2022 found that:  
*"Children are supported highly effectively to make good progress. Strong relationship based social work practice underpins all of the local authority services. This approach ensures families receive the right help at the right time, with a clear focus on the needs of children evidenced throughout planning and interventions. This ensures a strong focus on progressing the life chances and the reduction of risk for children. Social workers know their children well and speak with great warmth about them. Experienced and committed senior managers have continued to provide inspirational leadership for children's services. The children's services also benefit from stable and experienced political corporate leadership. Services for children have remained a high priority throughout the pandemic and resources have been protected and enhanced since the last Ofsted inspection in 2019."*



## Where we need to focus to improve success

- Through our practice framework Signs of Safety (SOS) and relationship-based practice, we will continue to support children, young people and care leavers to build enduring relationships with the people who matter to them most.
- We will continue to invest in kinship care to try and keep every child when safe to do so, within their extended family and network.



- We will work hard to ensure that there are the right placements in the right place, by expanding our therapeutic residential children's homes and create more foster placements through our enhanced foster carer core offer.
- We will strive to achieve the right placement first time for children, young people and care leavers by using the valuing care tool to support better matching of placements for children.
- We will support our workforce through enhanced trauma informed and recovery models in partnership with our child and family adolescent service and ensure all children in care and care leavers have swift access to services to support their emotional and mental health.
- We will make sure that we work in a respectful way with all children and young people by listening to their views and including them in all decisions made that will affect their lives.

- We will work with Adult Social Care to improve transitions for young people with long term care and support needs.
- We will support our education settings to be more trauma aware to understand the impact of early adversity upon children in care and care leavers.
- We will grow the partnership offer and the role of corporate parenting within our partner agencies to give our children in care and care leavers the best possible support.
- Support our young people to overcome the geographical difficulties of living in a large county like Lincolnshire





# 11

What are children,  
young people and care  
leavers telling us?





# What are children, young people and care leavers telling us?

## Support to remain with family



- Children and young people to be listened to more and have a safe space to talk.
- For family friends to be incorporated into support of families more.
- For schools and other services to be able to pick up on concerns more quickly so support can be put in place sooner.
- For parents/ families to feel more comfortable to ask for support if struggling, and to be supported with what they need to do, not told what to do.

## Stability and permanence



- Better discussion with young people to identify individual needs, and who they want to care for them before moving into a placement to support a smoother transition.
- Placements that will better match the young person with other young people in the home and to speak to young people about who else might live there.
- Earlier discussions to properly understand/resolve incidents in order to avoid placement break down.
- Ensuring when children or young people move their personal belongings, they are supported with the right facilities to have a sense of ownership.
- More time with staff in supported housing teaching young people skills to live independently.

## Build not break relationships



- More regular time with parents/ family/siblings and friends, keep us connected.
- To keep the same worker of for there to be a better introduction for a new worker and time to build a relationship.
- Workers to explain why they may be leaving (so young person doesn't feel it's because of them).
- To include those adults who want to help in the support to be involved and recognised by services.
- A positive environment and activities to support time with family.

## Learning and aspirations



- Children and young people should have the financial support to engage in all the activities other children and families have the opportunity to participate in.
- Personal tutors to be introduced to the young person and their role explained.
- Young people should be able to speak to their teachers in a safe space to explain some of the difficulties they are experiencing and how it is impacting on school.
- For young people to not be made to feel different in school or college – for meetings to be discreet and for teachers to better understand children in care and their circumstances- ‘we are not all the same’
- More training and guidance to staff about care experienced young pupils so they are more understood.
- For young people to routinely attend school is statutory school age.

## Healthy and resilient



- For better support to teach young people how to cook healthy food and shop- maybe a worker who can go into homes or supported living.
- For young people to be encouraged (where possible) to get part time/ Saturday jobs.
- For workers to do more informal check-ins just to see how young people are doing.
- More opportunities for young people to get fit and do activities.
- For more therapeutic non-clinical spaces for young people to be able to talk comfortably.

## Safe and suitable accommodation



- Young people to be actively engaged in the decisions about where they want to live and that suits their needs.
- Better matching on who else is in shared accommodation, so everyone feels happy.
- Ensure young people know where there is support, to help people learn the skills to live independently- especially with money.
- Good support and preparation for young people if they decide to live semi-independently at 16 so they know what to expect and how to cope with more independence.

# 12

## Priorities

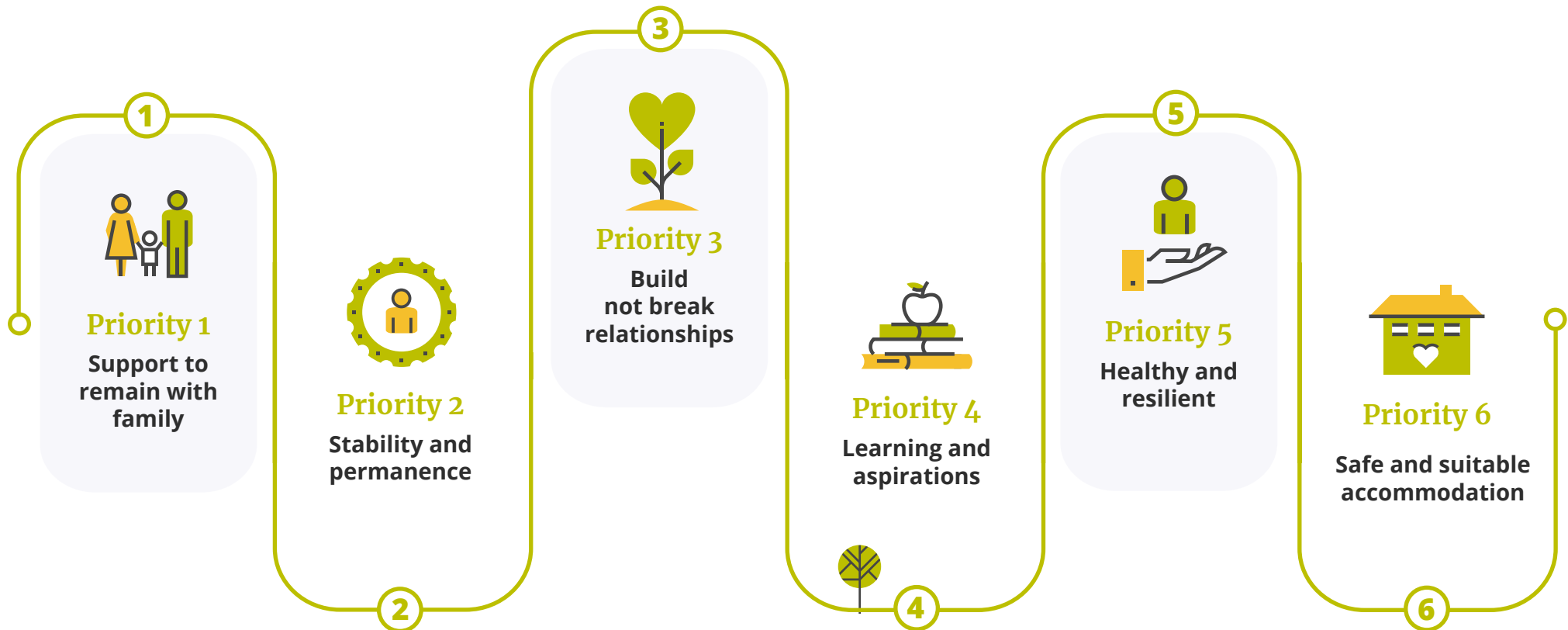




# Priorities

## What are our priorities moving forward?

In order to continue to do better for children, young people and families, research and practice tell us we need to concentrate on **6 main areas**:



## 1 Goal



### Priority 1 Support to remain with family

We support families to improve their relationships and avoid preventable difficulties by providing them with the right support in their community, from the right person at the right time. We only bring children into care when it cannot be made safe for them to stay in their home, family network or community.

### How do we achieve this in practice?

- Adopt a whole family approach, which places the child/young person at the centre.

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- Building trust and working collaboratively with families and those important networks.

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- Children and young people will be supported to live within families wherever possible.

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- Promoting healthy, good quality relationships.

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- Identifying and building strong extended support networks.

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- Developing effective diversion and exit strategies.





## Priority 2

### Stability and permanence

## 2 Goal

When children and young people need long term care outside of the family network, they will have stability and be safe from harm. All placements for children and young people will be targeted to support their needs, whether this is foster care or residential provision.

### How do we achieve this in practice?

- Use the valuing care approach to better understand children and care leavers strengths and needs so carers and the network can best support them.

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- Lincolnshire children will be cared for whenever possible within Lincolnshire.

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- Ensure Care Leavers have access to safe and supportive accommodation.

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- Empowering children, young people and care leavers beyond just hearing their voice.

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- Protecting the stability of placements through co- produced, child centred care and pathway plans.

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- Giving placement support to the family and/or network.

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- Building strengths to ensure a positive transition to adulthood.







**Priority 3**  
**Build  
 not break  
 relationships**

**3 Goal**

All children, young people and care leavers can build enduring relationships with consistent people and they have a trusted, stable relationship with an adult who is important to them.

**How do we achieve this in practice?**

- Providing continued support into adulthood.

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- Helping establish those lifelong connections.

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- Promoting a sense of identity and belonging

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- Helping build, re-establish, repair or strengthen those key relationships.

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- Helping young people identify their trusted person/ greatest advocate.



## 4 Goal



### Priority 4 Learning and aspirations

We want our children, young people and care leavers to succeed in their educational setting and continue with lifelong learning so that they can realise their aspirations.

### How do we achieve this in practice?

- Giving access to high quality educational opportunities where staff understand the needs of children in care

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- Ensuring our young people are supported in overcoming barriers to learning to help them become more emotionally resilient.

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- Empowering young people to find the learning in life events

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- Helping young people identify and remove barriers to learning.

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- Encourage young people to be aspirational.

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- Encouraging young people to fulfill their aspirations.

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- Ensure young people attend school if they are statutory school age





## 5 Goal



### Priority 5 Healthy and resilient

We promote good long term physical and emotional health and want to enable our children, young people and care leavers to have contented and healthy lives and be helped to evolve from what has happened in the past.

### How do we achieve this in practice?

- Developing the workforce to increase understanding of the widespread impact of trauma and potential paths to promote healing and recovery.
- Fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.
- Ensure there are robust, holistic chronologies of events leading up to a child requiring care.
- Promoting the importance of emotional, physical and mental wellbeing.
- Enabling priority access to healthcare and wellbeing services.
- Ensuring services are sensitive to past harm and trauma.
- Keeping young people safe, and helping young people to navigate the world in a way that promotes their safety when we are not around.
- Supporting interpersonal skills development.





## 6 Goal



### Priority 6 Safe and suitable accommodation

We support our children, young people and care leavers to access and sustain suitable accommodation which meets their needs, helps them feel safe and supports their growth to independence.

### How do we achieve this in practice?

- Finding suitable accommodation to meet young peoples' needs.

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- Ensuring a sustainable plan is in place to maintain accommodation.

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- Supporting young people in their home, and to feel a sense of belonging.

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- Increase sufficiency of accommodation/placements through the CIC Transformation Programme and NEST accommodation pathway.

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- Better prepare and support young people to be confident and resilient and move towards independence when ready.

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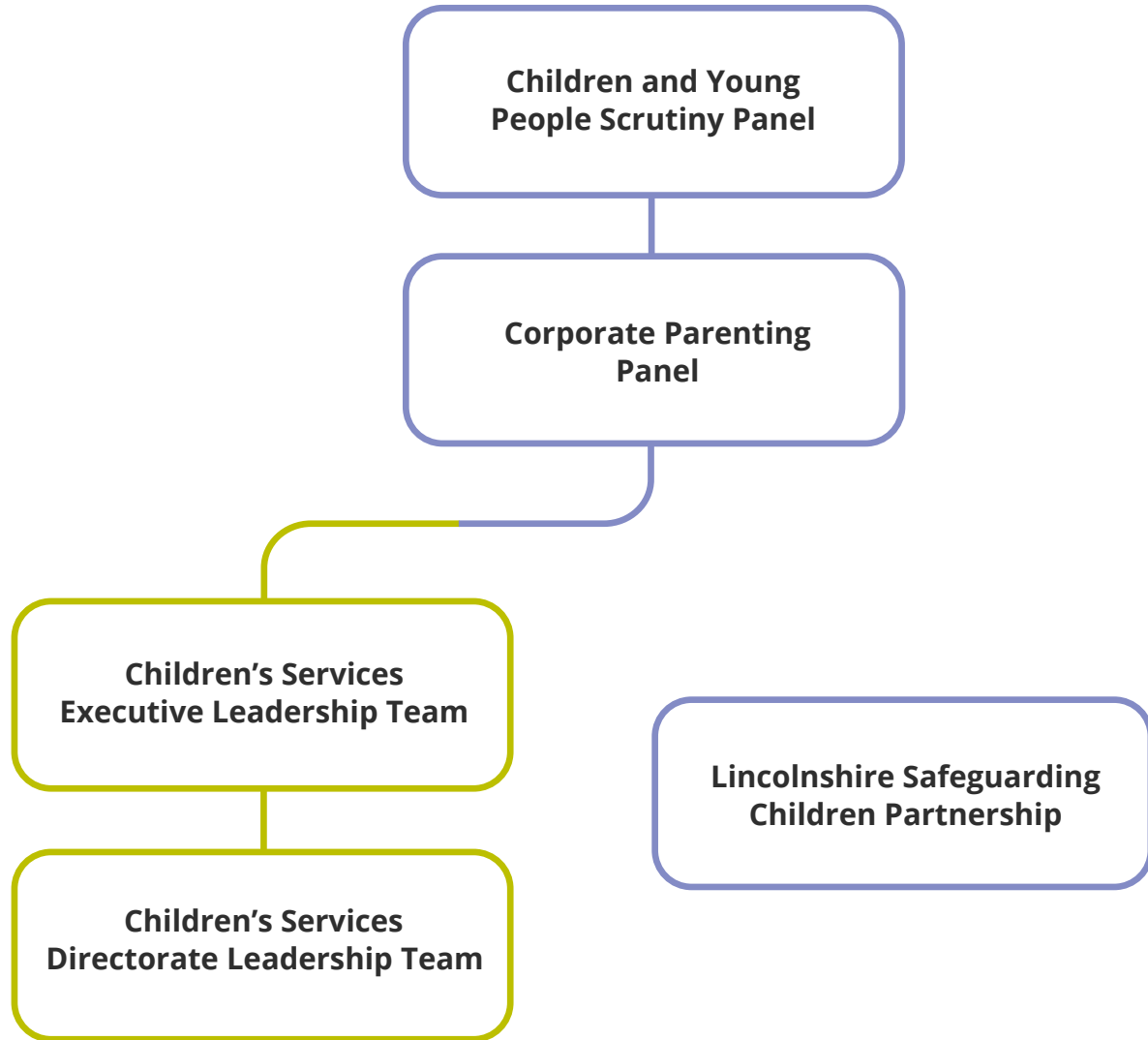



# 13

## Governance



# Governance





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## Acknowledgements



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We would like to thank the following people for their contribution to this strategy.

- **All the children, young people and care leavers, who spent time giving us their views**

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- **Barnardo's Leaving Care Service**

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- **The Lincolnshire Safeguarding Partnership Board**

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- **Corporate Parenting Panel**

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- **Lincolnshire Participation Team**

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- **Andrew Morris – Corporate Parenting Manager**

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- **Tara Jones – Head of Service – Children in Care Transformation**

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- **Tracey Robinson & Rachel Hair of the Children in Care Transformation Programme Office**

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- **The Virtual School**



## Supporting Reports

- **Corporate Parenting Strategy**

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- **Virtual School Strategy 2022- 2025**

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- **Early Help Strategy**

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- **Fostering Annual Report**



**Lincolnshire**

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