

Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People Strategy

2013 – 2016

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Abbreviations

CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCS	Children's Commissioning Service
CQC	Care Quality Commission
CYPPE	Children and Young People Partnership Executive
ETE/EET	Education, Employment and Training
IHA	Initial Health Assessment
RHA	Review Health Assessment
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LAACH	Team – Looked After and Adoptive Children's Health team
LASPO	Legal aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
Ofsted	The Office for Standards for Education Children's Services and Skills
PEP	Personal Education Plan
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children
VST	Virtual School Team
YOT	Youth Offending Team

Executive Summary

This is a Multi-Agency Strategy which sets out all the partners' commitment to improving the life chances of our Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People, and those leaving care. This strategy will support the Children and Young People's Plan and the overarching Strategy and sets out our ambitions and our actions under key priority themes:

It aims to set out our ambitions and our actions to achieve these under five key priorities themes:

- Start Healthy and Stay Healthy
- Are Safe at Home, at School and in the Community
- Enjoy School and Achieve their Best
- Make Friends and Take Part in Activities
- Stay in Education and Get a Job

Our ambitions will also be supported and achieved through our commitment to:

- Placement Sufficiency and Stability
- Adoption and Post Adoption Support

Start Healthy and Stay Healthy

Improving the health outcomes for our Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers is not the sole responsibility of the health agencies, but also requires enhancing our commissioning and delivery processes across the local authority and other partner agencies.

Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers have historically received less well coordinated health care than their non looked after peers. Whilst we have reviewed and have improved both the joint commissioning arrangements and delivery of health care we continue to face challenges with some of our processes, service capacity and health needs intelligence.

We will continue to improve our Initial and Review Health Assessment processes with agreed cross agency working, and our monitoring of Health, Education and Care Plans within a formal care review process.

We also wish to enhance the capabilities for and support the early identification of emotional and mental health problems, early intervention and health promotion for our children placed in Calderdale, and for our children and young people placed out of Calderdale and to raise the practice of our partners in relation to accessing secondary health care. We are investing significantly in the use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) as a model for measuring emotional health and well being.

Are Safe at Home, at School and in the Community

Safeguarding and vulnerability measures apply to all children, especially those who are 'looked after' in public care. For some looked after children and care leavers there are factors that have the potential to increase their vulnerability and require additional safeguarding measures to be taken. These include Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers who are, or at risk of

- 'Missing from Home, Care or Education'
- Sexual Exploitation
- Offending or in Custody
- Placed out of borough, including secure welfare placements
- Some care leavers and those in need of additional transition support services can also be equally vulnerable

We aim to move forwards our strategic planning, strategic response, partnership working and multi agency responses to improve the outcomes for our more vulnerable children and young people.

Enjoy School and Achieve their Best

The educational attainment and achievement of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers is critical if they are to lead fulfilled and successful lives and we consider this to be an issue of vital importance.

We will continue to prioritise educational attainment and aim to continue to raise attainment and achievement at all key stages, especially for children and young people with more complex needs and who are sometimes placed out of borough.

We aim to ensure that schools and early years' settings meet the needs of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers, that we have quality processes - such as Personal Education Plans and tracking systems - in place, and that Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers have stable experiences of learning settings.

In addition we aim to provide advice and support to schools working with those placed for adoption.

Make Friends and Take Part in Activities

We believe that Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers should and will be at the centre of this strategy.

It is vital that the experiences, views and ideas of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers are captured, listened to and responded to in this strategy.

We believe that the future support and outcomes for care services will be improved and enhanced through effective engagement and influence of looked after children, young people and care leavers.

We will continue to work with Calderdale's Voice and Influence Team and other partners to drive forward this agenda.

Stay in Education and Get a Job

Young people who are looked after or care leavers often have lower attainment levels on leaving statutory education than their peers because they have faced multiple challenges, have low expectations and low self esteem. Improving the life chances of these young people by encouraging staying in education or training is a key priority for the Local Authority in the role of corporate parent.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to enable, encourage and assist young people's participation in education and training. The Education and Skills Act 2008 increases the minimum age at which young people in England can leave learning; requiring them to continue in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015.

Raising the participation age (RPA) does not mean young people must stay in school; they will be able to choose one of the following options:

- full-time education, such as school, college or home education
- work-based learning, such as an apprenticeship
- part-time education or training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for more than 20 hours a week

In order to take forward our statutory responsibilities and respond to the particular challenges that young people who are, or were, looked after face, a targeted service of careers information advice and

guidance has been commissioned. This service provides additional support for vulnerable young people, including looked after young people and care leavers, at serious risk of or not engaging or being socially excluded. These activities may include:

- Case loaded Personal Advisers
- Intensive support to remove barriers to participation
- Regular contact: texts, emails, evening appointments
- Specific support tailored to individual need
- Advocacy services
- Outreach work for hard to reach young people
- Locally managed events
- Support to access benefits and liaison with Job Centre Plus

Placement Sufficiency and Stability

Calderdale has a commitment to improving local placement sufficiency and we know that longer term stability in placement is achieved through improved multi-agency commissioning and delivery of a wide range of services.

A key aim is to ensure that we have the right mix of flexible, quality, cost effective placements to meet the need of our Looked After population which is constantly fluctuating.

The stability of placements for Calderdale children and young people who are looked after is improving; however, we need to continue to improve further.

It is important that we strengthen the Resources for Children Panel and a robust collaborative support system for Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers placements both within and out of the borough.

We aim to increase our number of Local Authority Foster Carers as well as our adoption opportunities.

We also need to improve our position in relation to specific placement needs, such as those for Care Leavers, and improving our understanding of the position for disabled children.

Adoption and Post Adoption Support

A number of children and young people who are Looked After will go on to be placed for adoption in a permanent family setting. Children and young people who are adopted have nearly always spent some time in the care of the local authority, and can continue to experience difficulties similar to Looked After Children.

Consequently it is important to support prospective and adoptive families and ensure that their assessed needs are incorporated into longer term intervention planning which will include developing the partnerships across social care, health and education.

It is important that we develop and enhance our engagement of both Adopted Children and Young People and their parents, enhance practitioner awareness of the needs of children with an adoption plan and strengthen the assessment of children's needs.

We also need to work to place children with Calderdale adopters where appropriate and recruit more adopters that reflect the diversity of Calderdale's children.

Governance Process: A clear governance structure has been agreed whereby the strategy will be monitored and reviewed at a senior level by the 'Looked After and Adopted Children Strategy Group',

chaired by the Service Manager – Looked After Children. The Group will have representatives from commissioners, providers and managers and will report to the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel, the Children and Young People's Partnership Executive (CYPPE) and Cabinet.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As corporate parents of our Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers, local authorities and partner agencies have complex and challenging roles and responsibilities. Being aware of and responding to the needs of our children and young people is a key priority and those needs must be at the centre of everything we do. Equally important are the views and wishes of our children and young people and making sure that they are involved in everything we do that has an impact on their lives. It is essential that both as individuals and agencies we work together and ensure that we deliver as good corporate parents for Calderdale's Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers.
- 1.2 Calderdale's Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People Strategy demonstrates the Council's and Partnership's commitment to ensuring that the life chances of every child and young person in its care are improved, in line with their peers. Through the provision of quality services and effective support it will address disadvantage and enable them to reach their full potential.
- 1.3 The overall aim of the strategy is to reinforce the corporate responsibility of the whole council, and of its partner agencies, through commitment to a range of initiatives which reflect national and local policies and best practice. The strategy requires the active engagement of all Council services, its elected members, as well as its partner agencies.
- 1.4 The Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People Strategy is a 3 year strategy that will be reviewed annually by the LAAC Strategy Operation Group. The group will report and make any recommendations for change to the executive side of the council, initially through the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2. Calderdale Vision

- 2.1 We believe that Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People, like all other Calderdale children and young people, have the right to start healthy and stay healthy, happy and safe, to be loved, valued and respected, and to have high aspirations for the future. We want to make sure that Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People and care leavers have improved educational outcomes, are achieving as well as their peers, are emotionally stable and resilient, and enabled to move successfully into adulthood.
- 2.2 We will achieve this by making the right services available to Looked After and Adopted Children and Young people and care leavers at the right time and until they no longer require or need them. These services will be personalised to meet the individual needs of the child / young person.
- 2.3 Our vision will be achieved through
 - strong leadership and robust performance management
 - ensuring that the engagement and participation of service users in developing and implementing this strategy is and continues to be at the heart of this strategy
 - inclusive and effective partnership working across Calderdale Council services and those provided by partner agencies

3. The Scope and Structure of this Strategy

- 3.1 This strategy sets out the key priorities and actions that, as partners, we will deliver to improve the outcomes for Looked After, Adopted Children and Young People and care leavers who are our responsibility, whether they live in or out of Calderdale.
- 3.2 While we will seek to offer the same level of service for Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People and care leavers who are living in Calderdale but not our responsibility, as we would want other authorities to treat our children, services for these children are not considered within the scope of this strategy.
- 3.3 Key priorities and actions form the main focus of this strategy and have been informed by local consultation with Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People and care leavers and key stakeholders, consideration of our performance in delivering both local and national priorities, achievements to date and current challenges. They are structured under five main elements:
- Start Healthy and Stay Healthy
 - Are Safe at Home, at School and in the Community
 - Enjoy School and Achieve their best
 - Make Friends and take part in activities
 - Stay in education and get a job

4. The Local Picture

A Profile of our Calderdale Looked After Children

- 4.1 At the end of March 2013 there were 342 Looked after Children in the care of Calderdale local authority. The breakdown by age group is presented below.

Age band	Number of children	%
Under 1	22	6%
1 - 4 years	74	22%
5 - 9 years	87	25%
10 - 15 years	116	34%
Age 16 or over	43	13%
Unknown	0	0%
Total	342	

4.2 The age at which children became looked after in Calderdale is as follows

**Age when became
LAC:**

Age band	Number of children	%
Under 1	80	23%
1 - 4 years	97	28%
5 - 9 years	105	31%
10 - 15 years	57	17%
Age 16 or over	3	1%
Unknown	0	0%
Total	342	

4.3 The legal status by which children and young people are looked after by Calderdale Council was

Legal Status	Number of children	%
C1 Interim Care Order	54	15.8%
C2 Full Care Order	192	56.1%
Care Order S31.1(a) CA 1989.	2	0.6%
D1 Freed for Adoption: Freeing order granted	6	1.8%
E1 Placement Order granted	49	14.3%
J1 On remand or committed for trial or sentence & in LA accommodation	0	0.0%
J3 Sentenced to CYPA 1969 supervision order with residence	2	0.6%
V2 Single period of accommodation under S20	37	10.8%
Total	342	

4.4 Calderdale children who are looked after live in a variety of placements as indicated in the table below

Placement	Parents or other person with PR	Own Provision (by LA)	Other LA Provision	Other Public Provision	Private Provision	Voluntary/third sector Provision	Placement type not recorded	Total
A - Placed for adoption	2	6	5		2			15
F1 Foster placement with relative or friend		3						3
F2 Placement with other foster carer provided by Council		3						3
F4 Fostering with relative/friend in another Council area		1						1
F5 Foster placement by Council but in another Council area		1						1
F6 Foster placement by Agency but in another Council area					3			3
K2/R1 Homes and Hostels		13			8			21
M3 Whereabouts unknown - missing from placement								0
P1 Placed with parents / others with parental responsibility	34	1						35
P2 Independent living with or without formal support staff		3			4			7
Q1 Foster placement with relative or friend		43	2			1		46
Q2 Placement with other foster carer		122	6	1	73			202
R5 Young offender institution or prison					1			1
S1 Residential school except if dual registered as child's home					3			3
T0 All types of temporary move					1			1
Total	36	196	13	1	95	1	0	342

5. Legal Framework

The legal context within which this strategy is set is described below.

The term 'looked after children' refers, under the 1989 Children Act, to all children and young people being looked after by a local authority, namely:

- those subject to care orders or interim care orders (under sections 31 and 38 of the 1989 Act)
- those children who have been placed, or are authorised to be placed, with prospective adopters by a local authority (section 18(3) of the 2002 Act)
- those who are voluntarily accommodated under section 20 of the 1989 Act including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Where children are accommodated under this provision, parental responsibility remains with the parents; and
- those who are subject to court orders with residence requirements (for example secure remand or remand to local authority accommodation), in accordance with section 21 of the 1989 Act

Local Authorities' duties to Looked After and Adopted Children and Care Leavers are set out in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the Children and Young People's Act 2008 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The Quality Protects Programme, launched in 1998, was designed to ensure that local authorities improved the life chances of Looked After Children and Care Leavers. In a letter to local authorities, the then Secretary of State for Health emphasised that:

"One of the aims of the Quality Protects Programme is to assist councils to adopt a truly corporate outcome-orientated approach to parenting children who are looked after by them and support the parenting of other children in need."

The concept of 'whole' council responsibility for the quality of care for Looked After and Adopted Children and Care Leavers became known as "Corporate Parenting," in the acknowledgement that councils as a whole, and their partners, shared the task of improving outcomes for this vulnerable group of children and young people.

The advent of the Children Act 2004 saw Corporate Parenting underpinned by statute. Section 10 of the Act places a duty on local authorities and strategic partners, such as health and police, to co-operate to secure the welfare of children. Section 52 states the duty to promote education.

Care Matters legislation – the Children and Young People's Act 2008 – further sharpened the focus on Looked After and Adopted Children and Care Leavers, setting out the key elements of effective corporate parenting, strengthening the role of Independent Reviewing Officers, and on the whole, challenging local authorities to 'get it right' for Looked After and Adopted Children and Care Leavers.

Statutory Guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children (DCSF 2009) aimed to promote better co-ordinated care and local authorities and primary care trusts should implement this in accordance with sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004.

In 2009 'Healthy Lives, Bright Futures – the strategy for children and young people's health' (DH2009) restated the commitment in *Care Matters*

Statutory Guidance (DCSF 2009) on the role of the designated teacher requires the governing bodies of all maintained schools under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children who are on the school roll.

In 2010 Statutory Guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children was published, which provides guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 1989. This guidance sets out the requirements of local authorities in relation to children they look after, for whom it

would be consistent with their welfare to be accommodated locally, to ensure there is sufficient capacity and a sufficient range of accommodation that meets children's needs. There is a clear expectation of effective partnerships with 'Children's Trust' partners.

Statutory Guidance Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Handbook (DFE Implementation April 2011) - which describes how IRO's and local authorities should discharge their distinct responsibilities to looked after children in relation to care planning and reviews. It also gives guidance to local authorities on establishing an effective IRO service. This guidance replaces the 2002 guidance 'Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance: Adoption and Children Act 2002'.

Statutory Guidance on Short Breaks (DFE Implementation 2011) - which clarifies the legal framework for short breaks under Part 3 Children Act 1989, and the requirement for assessment, planning and review for children having short breaks. It also makes provision as to the legal status of the child in receipt of short breaks

In 2002 the government sought to overhaul and modernise the existing adoption legislation. Adoption law was developed to reflect the provisions of the Children Act 1989 to ensure that the child's welfare is paramount in all decisions relating to adoption. The Act placed a duty on local authorities to maintain an adoption service and to provide an adoption support service to all those, whose lives are directly touched by adoption including birth parents, adopters, children and adopted adults.

Calderdale will implement further changes in 2013 through the effective design, development and delivery of an Adoption Action Plan.

Statutory Guidance Care Planning (DFE 2010) - The regulations and guidance consolidate existing regulations and guidance into one coherent framework relating to care planning and review for all Looked After Children. This also builds on good practice, which has developed since the Children Act 1989 was implemented.

6.1 Our Strategic Aims

That all children and young people;

SA.1: Start Healthy and Stay Healthy

Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but often to a greater degree. They often enter care with a worse level of health than their peers in part due to the impact of poverty, abuse and neglect.

Young people who are looked after are recognised as being vulnerable to risk taking behaviour, including early and unprotected sexual activity, self-harming, misusing illegal and/or volatile substances and alcohol. These early risk-taking behaviours are very often indicators of poor emotional health and well-being and may be the forerunner of wider social exclusion such as homelessness and unemployment.

Health of children looked after continuously for 12 months at 31st March 2012	National	Calderdale
Substance misuse problem during the year	4.1%	4.2%
Immunisations up to date	83.1%	94.8%
Had teeth checked by Dentist within last 12 months	82.4%	94.8%
Had annual health assessment in last 12 months	86.3%	97.2%

As specified in the statutory guidance '*Promoting the Health of Looked after Children*', (Department of Health 2009) it is a statutory requirement that all Children coming into care receive a medically led initial

health assessment (IHA). This assessment should be completed within 20 working days of a child becoming looked after and the recommendations from the assessment should be available at the child's first looked after review, by way of the Health Recommendation Plan (HRP).

Emotional Health

A national survey undertaken by Meltzer and colleagues for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) confirmed findings of earlier research about the high level of mental health need amongst looked after children, particularly those in residential care. 45% of looked after children were assessed as having a mental health disorder, rising to 72% of those in residential care. Among 5-10 year olds, 50% of boys and 33% of girls had an identifiable mental disorder. Among 11-15 year olds, the rates were 55% for boys and 43% for girls. This compares to around 10% of the general population aged 5 to 15.

Local authorities are no longer required to screen for emotional health disorder using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), the SDQ is a reliable and valuable screening tool for mental health problems and can therefore be helpful in uncovering previously unidentified mental health problems. Calderdale continues to endorse this screening as a marker of good practice to assess for emotional health problems and where appropriate refer into specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), providing a dedicated specialist service for Calderdale Looked After and Adopted Children, care leavers, carers and professionals who are responsible for promoting emotional wellbeing.

Local authorities should ensure that they follow the DCSF guidance on this process and health partners should support local authorities in doing this, by ensuring that SDQs are built into the annual health assessment and are used when new placements commence.

Achievements

The looked after children health team have secured additional funding through NHS Calderdale to increase the medical capacity of the service in line with increased cohort numbers.

The looked after children health team have significantly improved performance around initial health assessment process, ensuring that the majority of assessments are completed within 20 working days of a child becoming looked after.

The looked after children health team continue to improve processes and performance in delivering holistic health assessments (IHA and RHA), dental checks and immunisations (this is part of the health assessment) for Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers.

The use of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires for children aged 4 – 16 who have been in our care for 12 months will continue, and we will continue to identify further areas to support the analysis of health need.

The looked after children health team are an accredited 'Your Welcome' health service provider. Demonstrating our commitment to listening and involving Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers in service development.

The looked after children health team have embedded into practice standards and quality control guidelines for health practitioners undertaking RHA's. Ensuring a consistently high quality assessment process.

Challenges

One third of the Calderdale looked after children cohort is placed out of area. There are difficulties in ensuring Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers who live outside of Calderdale have access to appropriate health services. This in part reflects national inconsistencies and a lack of clarity relating to the governance and responsibility for the provision of health services for Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers who are placed out of area.

We need to ensure that the health recommendation plans (HRP) for looked after children are embedded and integrated into care planning.

We need to work in partnership with the 'pathway' service provider to ensure that care leavers have a seamless transition from child to adult health services, including mental health services.

We need to ensure that partnership working between health and children's social care services is based upon shared vision and values to improve the health outcomes and life chances of Calderdale looked after children.

Objectives 2013 – 2016

Over the life of this strategy we will:

- Continue to review arrangements for statutory health assessments, ensuring timely and efficient Review Health Assessments are undertaken by all health care providers that meet quality standards, and are supported through access to GP Patient Held Records. The resulting HRP will be shared with professionals involved in care planning and reviewing of care plans
- Align health recommendation plans within statutory review timescales and implement effective monitoring processes and embed this within the formal care review process
- Improve our understanding of the issues around transition arrangements for care leavers requiring access to specialist support and services (including adult mental health services) and identify if, and where, there are deliverable service improvements. Work in partnership with the 'pathway' service provider, undertaking joint working of complex cases and providing support and training to the 'pathway' team as required
- Monitor the progress made against the Single Integrated Improvement Plan (SIIP) and recommendations made through peer review and Ofsted/CQC inspection

Outcomes

- Initial and Review Health Assessments are timely and aligned to care planning and statutory reviews
- Children and young people who meet the criteria will have a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to screen for emotional health and well being.
- Children and young people living away from Calderdale have improved access to appropriate health services
- Care Leavers have identified health needs in Pathway Plans and these are met including direct referral and access to adult services at the appropriate transition points

SA.2: Are Safe at Home, in School and in the Community

For some Looked After Children (LAC) there are factors that have the potential to increase their vulnerability and they require additional, coordinated and timely interventions and safeguarding measures to be put in place to reduce the risk, in particular we need to be mindful that LAC are an overly represented group in relation to:

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Missing from Home, Care or Education
- Offending or Custody

In addition Care Leavers and those with needs e.g. care leavers who are disabled or have Special Educational Needs (SEN) can be equally vulnerable. Reducing vulnerability and ensuring positive outcomes for LAC relies on effective partnership working to address areas specific areas of risk.

Each child or young person LAC by the Local Authority has a designated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The role of the IRO is to provide effective, timely and robust scrutiny of all planning relating to LAC by:

- Ensuring each child has a detailed and up to date multi-agency care plan
- Ensuring each child has their individual needs assessed and identified via a core assessment
- Ensuring the care plan identifies how their needs will be met in order to achieve positive outcomes and;
- The allocated IRO provides effective monitoring of progress against the child's care plans, tracking progress and ensuring that cases are effectively managed to avoid drift and delay

The risks of **Child Sexual Exploitation** are significantly increased for looked after children and care leavers, particularly those involved in running away. Issues around attachment and developing relationships, access to internet based information, including social networking and past care experiences can all be instrumental in increasing risk to LAC and care leavers.

The Calderdale Safeguarding Children Board in 2006 established a multi-agency operational group, with representation from Housing, Substance Misuse Services, Voluntary Sector and Children's Social Care to share intelligence regarding victims of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in order to assess risk and a coordinated response.

The operational group is chaired and hosted by West Yorkshire Police and provides regular reports to the Prevention of Harm sub- group and the Safeguarding Board. A significant proportion of the work and intelligence gathering occurs across local authority boundaries and there has been a move toward more collaborative work across the regional at both a strategic and operational level.

Since September 2011 the CSE Operation Group in addition to CSE cases discusses **Children and Young People reported Missing**, in order to identify and respond to the needs of this vulnerable group. To date 7 young people were discussed aged between 13 and 16, 3 were male, and 4 female, the majority of the missing children discussed were LAC.

Since 2013 a separate Missing Operation Group was established and works alongside the CSE Operation Group to focus on missing children. Where missing and CSE is jointly an identified risk the CSE Operation Group assumes the lead for the most vulnerable children and young people. Both groups report into the CSE and Missing Strategic Group and through to the overarching Protection from Harm group.

Care Leavers often face a number of challenges making the transition to adult services, accessing further education, training, employment, accommodation, welfare benefits and healthcare.

Calderdale Council has, since January 2012, commissioned a specialist service, the Pathways Service, as the Council recognised the need to ensure that young people who have been LAC and who leave care should receive high quality services which are co-ordinated in order to achieve a positive transition from care to independence and to maximise life opportunities. The Pathways Service is designed to support care leavers through tailored support and guidance.

LAC at risk of Offending or Custody are supported by the Calderdale Youth Offending Team (YOT) working in partnership with Children's Social Care when they are either remanded into custody or receive custodial sentences. The multi-agency YOT team and long established joint working arrangements in Calderdale ensure that there is effective liaison, assessment and tailored intervention to address offending behaviour; in addition the YOT offers support for young people displaying offending behaviour or where there is a possible risk of offending through provision of additional support and guidance; underpinned by a restorative approach. Currently the YOT is engaged with 15 young people who are LAC, there 2 cases pending and 7 young people who are LAC and have been placed by other authorities.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) means all young people under 18 years of age remanded by a court to either Local Authority Accommodation or Youth Detention Accommodation all now have Looked After Children Status. The relevant policies and procedures must be followed in relation to their Looked After Status.

Achievements

Children and Young People who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or Missing

- The CSE Operational Group has high levels of commitment and a strong multi-agency representation and it has developed collaborative working with other West Yorkshire authorities. The Group has discussed 21 young people over the last year, although the maximum number discussed at any time was 14. The age of young people discussed varied between 11 and 17, and all of them were female

A new Calderdale CSE Threshold Assessment form was introduced in November 2011. The introduction of the enhanced risk assessment matrix has led to improved assurance that those at risk are more easily identified.

A recent benchmarking exercise was carried out in Calderdale based on the Child Electronic Online Protection Report 'Out of sight, out of mind' and Calderdale was found to be performing well. An action plan and strategic plan have been completed and will offer ongoing focus to the work of the group

- Establishing the Calderdale CSE Service, launched and operational from 1 September 2012, a commissioned service from The Children's Society which aims to;
 - a) Raise the awareness of CSE by developing and implementing preventative strategies with children, young people, parents / carers and professional groups
 - b) Provide appropriate support for young people and their families affected by CSE with the main aim being successful exit from abuse
 - c) Be the Calderdale 'expert' on the issue of CSE and co-ordinate multi agency work to prevent, protect, prosecute and exit

- The Calderdale education resource “**Friend or Foe**” has been distributed to all secondary maintained schools and academies in Calderdale. The resource explores positive and negative relationships, peer pressure and sexual exploitation

Children and Young People Missing from Home, Care or Education

- Calderdale Council, Children and Young People’s Service procedures for Children and Young People Missing from Education has a clear commitment as the corporate parent to ensure that educational needs are being met. In Calderdale the Virtual School leads on monitoring the educational provision, attendance, progress and attainment of all Calderdale LAC, irrespective of where they are placed
- A West Yorkshire Joint Procedure for Children Missing from Home and from Local Authority Care which applies to all children and young people that go absent without permission from their parents, carers, residential carers or foster carers has been developed and was launched in November 2012

Since 2013 a separate Missing Operation Group was established and works alongside the CSE Operation Group to focus on missing children. Where missing and CSE is jointly an identified risk the CSE Operation Group assumes the lead for the most vulnerable children and young people. Both groups report into the CSE and Missing Strategic Group and through to the overarching Prevention from Harm group.

LAC at risk of Offending or Custody

- There is a Service Level Agreement between Children’s Social Care and the Youth Offending Team that is reviewed annually in place. This aims to provide a consistent approach for all young people who are either Looked After and involved in offending behaviour or become Looked After via the criminal court process
- The YOT employs a range of innovative approaches in meeting statutory Court Order requirements to divert young people from further offending or from receiving a custodial sentence
- The YOT supports LAC processes by attending all meetings whereby they are involved with LAC or offering preventative support to either the young person or their families

Care Leavers

- Leaving Care legislation requires that children and young people have a Pathway Plan from the age of 16 years enabling them to become more resilient and achieve independence as they move towards adulthood.
- Young people who are voluntarily accommodated may also, by right, discharge themselves from local authority care at 16 years of age. Young people who are cared for by way of a Care Order will remain a looked after young person until they reach 18 years of age.
- For some young people, especially those with a disability this can be extended up until they reach 25 years of age.
- However, it is not an automatic requirement of Calderdale Council that our children and young people will leave our care at the points outlined above.

- For most young people the age at which they leave home is extending into their twenties and beyond. For our children and young people preparing to leave care we will continue to be corporate parents as in any other family. Therefore, we will make the necessary arrangements for our children and young people based on their individual and identified needs, wishes and feelings in accordance with our duties and responsibilities.
- The Pathways Service has been established to facilitate, support and improve outcomes for care leavers. Preparation for independent living, including creating opportunities to strengthen resilience and work closely with carers and colleagues in Children's Social Care, Young People's Service and Adult Services; supporting education, training and employment opportunities, including support into further or higher education and achieving a choice of suitable accommodation. In addition, promoting healthy living and emotional wellbeing; maximising life chances in the pursuit of sport and leisure; developing special talents, hobbies and involvement in the local community

Challenges

Pathways Service

The service has been commissioned to deliver a service over and above minimum requirements through high quality supervision to staff and care leavers and active engagement and partnership working in order to achieve the best outcomes possible for young people leaving care.

Children and young people placed out the Local Authority are reviewed by IRO's and a QA framework is being established to monitor the quality of the placements.

Objectives 2013 – 2016

Over the life of this strategy we will:

- Develop and maintain a range of flexible and accessible services for care leavers delivered by the Pathway Service
- Undertake a media campaign to raise awareness of issues relating to males who are underrepresented in terms of referrals for CSE
- Develop the Calderdale Strategic plan for CSE including the four key areas identified in the Home Office Action Plan of awareness raising, promoting multi-agency working, improving justice and ensuring support
- Increase the focus on the needs of missing children in order to improve practice and reduce risk
- Raise the awareness of CSE by developing and implementing preventative strategies with children, young people, parents / carers and professional groups
- Provide appropriate support for young people and their families affected by CSE with the main aim being successful exit from abuse
- Be the Calderdale 'expert' on the issue of CSE and co-ordinate multi agency work to prevent, protect, prosecute and exit

YOT will

- Work together to improve outcomes for older young people within the LAC and criminal Justice system, particularly in relation to accommodation, health and the use of restorative approaches in dealing with behaviour management issues
- Develop a co-ordinated response to the LASPO Act, due to the extension in the availability of Remands to local authority accommodation and therefore the legal entitlements of an increasing population of young people
- Work with carers to reduce the incidents of behaviour that is reported as an offence using restorative approaches

IRO service plan is extensive and challenging and includes:

- Establishing and embedding service standards
- Improving care planning for LAC
- Completing thematic audits of LAC to ensure that their holistic needs are being met
- Incorporating feedback from children, young people, carers, families and other professionals into our service standards and service planning
- Effective and timely monitoring of all LAC and child protection plans

Outcomes

- Pathway Plans are influenced and shaped by young people
- Pathway Plans are SMART
- CSE Media campaign has been developed and delivered
- Reduced episodes of missing for LAC as acknowledged through statutory reviews
- Project delivered to target awareness around CSE and their services with Secondary Schools
- Reduced number of remands for 16 and 17 years olds

SA.3: Enjoy School and achieve their best

Looked After Children as a group are no less able than their peers, but they often underachieve. Circumstances outside their control mean that they can face a number of barriers to educational success which may include: time out of school, lack of stability with placements (care and school), low expectations, lack of self esteem, insufficient help with education, damaging experiences pre-care and a lack of cohesive care and educational planning.

Improving the educational attainment of Looked After Children is key to enhancing their life chances. Education should be an intrinsic part of the care environment, where all key people in looked after children lives understand and actively participate in their education.

In Calderdale, the Virtual School (previously the Looked After Children Education Service) provides advice and support to children and young people 3-19 years who are Looked After, teachers, governors, support services, social workers and carers.

The Service monitors the educational provision, attendance, progress and attainment of all Calderdale LAC, irrespective of where they are placed. The aims of the Virtual School are to promote achievement, raise attainment and ensure equality of opportunity to enhance the life chances of all our Looked After Children.

The Virtual School plays a key strategic role in ensuring that the corporate parenting responsibilities of the Local Authority, with regard to the education of LAC, are met.

Achievements

Virtual School Key Performance Indicators (children in care for a year)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Year 11 pupils who achieved 5 A*-Cs – GCSE	21%	6%	18%	20%	30%	11.8%	33%
Year 11 pupils who achieved 5 A*-Cs – GCSE inc Maths and English	N/A	N/A	18%	6.7%	10%	0%	25%
Year 11 pupils who achieved 5 A*-G GCSEs.	46%	29%	45%	40%	65%	58.8%	58%
Year 11 pupils who achieved 1 A*-G GCSEs	75%	94%	86%	87%	95%	76.5%	83%
Year 11 continuing into full time education, training or employment	79%	100%	82%	87%	89%	88%	95%
Number of pupils who received a permanent exclusion from school	0.7%	0.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Year 6 pupils who achieved level 4 or above in English	23%	83%	88%	64%	44% (national tests- boycott)	71%	60%
Year 6 pupils who achieved Level 4 or above in Maths	38%	50%	63%	64%	50% (national test -boycott)	71%	60%
Number of pupils who missed at least 25 days at school	12.6%	17.3%	11.9%	8.3%	8.2%	8.1%	3.8%

- Since 2006, the achievement of Calderdale Looked After Children has continued to improve and compares very well with the national picture for LAC, either around the national average or above (with the exception of 2011 when the Year 11 cohort had 47% LAC with a statement of special educational needs)
- The 2012 results at Key Stage 4 are the most successful to date, with 25% of the cohort achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs including Maths and English, and 33% achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs without Maths and English. These outcomes are impressive as the national average for LAC was 12.5% and 31.2% respectively last year
- The majority of our young people achieved a number of qualifications, including GCSEs and BTECs, resulting in 58% achieving 5 A-G GCSEs. Of the cohort in care for a year, 83% achieved a minimum of 1 GCSE
- Engagement with education, training or employment post 16 has continued to be high: post 16 destinations for the 2012 cohort confirmed that 95% are currently in education, training or employment. However the education, employment and training opportunities for care leavers will be prioritised as the focus for joint working with the Pathway Service in order to ensure that effective monitoring systems are in place to avoid young people becoming NEET
- Calderdale are currently supporting 12 LAC/care leavers in Higher Education at University which is the highest number to date since 2000
- Data for Key Stage 2 Looked After Children shows a dip in performance in 2012, with 60% achieving Level 4+ in Maths, and 60% achieving Level 4+ in English. However, these outcomes have been significantly affected by the small cohort and high percentage of LAC with special needs in the cohort (30%). Generally our KS2 results have been far higher than both statistical neighbours and national outcomes for LAC
- Inclusion remains a high priority for our Looked After Children in schools: no Looked After Children have been permanently excluded since 2006/2007. Fixed term exclusions have reduced from 37 exclusions (totalling 77 days) in 2010/11 to 36 exclusions (totalling 67 days). Exclusions are reduced through proactive intervention, intensive support packages and partnership working with schools
- Overall school attendance for Looked After Children continues to improve: of the cohort of 207 children who had been in care for a full academic year only 8 children missed 25 days resulting in an excellent outcome of 3.8% and a significant improvement from 8.1% in 2011
- The Virtual School undertook lead responsibility for Personal Education Plans in September 2010. Completion rates are high: 96% September-July 2011 and 97% September-July 2012. We have established a robust monitoring system and ensure quality assurance through a weekly audit of PEPs by the Virtual School Head and the Virtual School Team Manager
- We have developed a Virtual School database to track attainment, attendance, PEPs and exclusions. Systems with schools are now in place to ensure regular data sharing: our tracking systems determine 1:1 interventions by the Virtual School as appropriate (numeracy, literacy and social skills)
- We have continued to maintain a high level of school placement stability, despite having a number of our Looked After Children in external placements. Wherever possible and appropriate, Children's Social Care has worked in partnership to fund transport to enable Looked After Children to remain in their school placement
- Feedback from Ofsted in 2010 judged "enjoy and achieve for LAC" to be "Good". Subsequent Ofsted inspections, through the Thematic Inspection of the Virtual School in May 2012, and the Fostering Inspection September 2012, have been very positive on the work of the Virtual School and our educational outcomes for LAC in Calderdale

Challenges

We are aware that we face challenges with some of our systems, service capacity and data sharing. Our key challenges include:

- Continuing the improving trend in raising attainment and achievement at all Key Stages and narrowing the gap
- Ensuring that we profile the needs of Looked After Children to schools and settings and that we provide appropriate support and challenge to schools
- Raising the profile of education through leading on PEPs, and ensuring these are of high quality through quality assurance
- Maintaining stability of school placements
- Developing new systems with the Pathway Service to ensure improved transition and educational support post 16
- Extending the range of foster care training to include specialist workshops on education to increase awareness and raise the profile of education
- Ensuring young people's views and experiences of education are captured through the PEP process

Objectives 2013 – 2016

Over the life of this strategy we will:

- Continue the improving trend in raising attainment and achievement at all Key Stages and focus on narrowing the gap between our Looked After Children and their peers
- We will ensure through effective partnership working with schools that we profile the individual needs of our Looked After Children, offer advice, support and challenge
- We will use the Personal Education Plan as the focus for identification of needs, support, interventions and tracking progress
- Greater emphasis will be placed on participation by children and young people to have their views recorded through the PEP process
- Links with other key partners e.g. Pathway Service
- Fostering Service will be strengthened to ensure that education is a high priority in meeting our corporate parenting responsibilities

Reference: Virtual School Service Plan 2012/2013

Outcomes

- High quality PEPs which detail “the journey of the child” and provide a tool to monitor and challenge progress (as a “pushy parent”).
- Improved attainment - 5 A*-Cs including Maths and English.
- Reduction in NEET - Number of LAC increasing and sustaining post 16 education, training or employment.
- Increased number of LAC having their views on education recorded through PEP process/pupil voice proformas consultation.

SA.4: Make friends and take part in activities

We believe that Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers should and will beat the centre of this strategy.

It is vital that the experiences, views and ideas of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers are captured, listened to and responded to in this strategy. We believe that the future support and outcomes for Care Services will be improved and enhanced through effective engagement and influence of looked after children, young people and care leavers.

We will continue to work with Calderdale’s Voice and Influence team and other partners to drive forward this agenda.

Achievements

12 adopted young people have been trained to become Young Inspectors 2012/2013. These young people will be involved in inspections specific to the adoption service and Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers.

Living on the Frontline – a report produced by the Voice and Influence Team in June 2011. This report describes the experiences of 25 children and young people from Calderdale. The initial questionnaire which forms the basis of the report was designed by young people. For a copy of the report contact anne.gomersall@calderdale.gov.uk

Children in Care Council – this council was developed in partnership with Barnardos and the Voice and Influence Team in Calderdale. Regular meetings were arranged with corporate parents and the young people designed a 3 monthly newsletter which was sent to all looked after young people from Calderdale.

Care Leavers – December 2011 - focus groups were run prior to the tendering and procurement of the service delivering this work. Looked after young people were involved in the design of the service specification and the tender presentations. 2 meetings were held in 2012 with Care Leavers in order to hear their concerns and issues.

Looked after young people are represented on the recently formed Calderdale Young People's Assembly.

Adopted children and young people have been involved in the design and development of a handbook for adoption services.

10 Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers from a variety of settings, children's homes and foster care, were involved in a focus group day with Centre for Excellence in Outcomes (C4EO). C4EO has quickly established itself as a best practice hub for 'what works' in children's services and is used by all Local Authorities across England. The aim of activity was to produce a DVD about the experiences of children and young people in care in Calderdale.

From 2010 to 2011, 12-15 children and young people were involved in the development and launch of a pledge for Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers from Calderdale. This pledge was re-launched in September 2012 with a further refresh expected in 2013.

Challenges

The Voice and Influence Strategy needs to be further embedded in practice to ensure Care Services move beyond consultation towards real and meaningful involvement of children and young people in all aspects of their lives as Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers in Calderdale.

Improvements and changes which happen as a direct result of the active involvement of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers need to be feedback to them in a timely manner so they can see they have made a difference.

Stability and continuity of a strong leadership team and engagement 'champion' is needed within Care Services to enable the voice and influence of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers to be effective.

We need to ensure that children and young people who are accommodated outside Calderdale have equal access to voice and influence mechanisms.

We need to ensure that Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers with complex needs have equal access to voice and influence opportunities and mechanisms.

We need to ensure that all Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers and adopted children and young people have appropriate mechanisms through which they can voice their issues and concerns and can influence decisions.

We need to ensure that consultation outcomes and actions are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART)

Objectives 2013 – 2016

Over the life of this strategy we will:

- Ensure that the co-ordination of engagement, voice and influence of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers so that this is aligned to service improvements
- Develop the involvement of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers in the planning and delivery of 'Total Respect' training for corporate parents appropriate staff, adoptive parents and foster carers
- Ensure the involvement of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers in the recruitment of staff at all levels
- Ensure the involvement of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers in procurement and commissioning processes for relevant services
- Improve and strengthen the role of the Children in Care Council
- Ensure all policies, strategies and relevant documents are child and young person friendly
- Ensure the voice of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers is heard and influences decisions at Child Protection Conferences
- Involve Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers in peer consultation as appropriate
- Develop a regular cycle of consultation with clear reporting processes and feedback mechanisms to the Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers involved

Outcomes

- The views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are recorded in statutory reviews
- The views of children and young people directly influence service improvements including changes to policies and procedures that are child and young person friendly
- The Children in Care Council is proactive in engaging and canvassing the views of the wider looked after and care leaver population and in providing feedback to children and young people on key matters
- Children and young people are actively involved in the recruitment and commissioning procedures for looked after services and staff

SA.5: Stay in Education and get a job

Young people who are looked after or care leavers often have lower attainment levels on leaving statutory education than their peers because they have faced multiple challenges, have low expectations and low self esteem. Improving the life chances of these young people by encouraging staying in education or training is a key priority for the Local Authority in the role of corporate parent.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to enable, encourage and assist young people's participation in education and training. The Education and Skills Act 2008 increases the minimum age at which young people in England can leave learning; requiring them to continue in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015.

Raising the participation age (RPA) does not mean young people must stay in school; they will be able to choose one of the following options:

- full-time education, such as school, college or home education
- work-based learning, such as an Apprenticeship
- part-time education or training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for more than 20 hours a week

In order to take forward our statutory responsibilities and respond to the particular challenges that young people who are, or were, looked after a targeted service of careers information advice and guidance has been commissioned. This service provides additional support for vulnerable young people, including looked after young people and care leavers, at serious risk of or not engaging or being socially excluded. These activities may include:

- Case loaded Personal Advisers
- Intensive support to remove barriers to participation
- Regular contact: texts, emails, evening appointments
- Specific support tailored to individual need
- Advocacy services
- Outreach work for hard to reach young people
- Locally managed events
- Support to access benefits and liaison with JCP

Achievements

- The staying on rate for young who are looked after or care leavers has continued to rise. Immediate post 16 destinations for 2012 show that 95% continued in education, training or employment
- The Pathways Service focus on positive outcomes for young care leavers, prioritising education, training and jobs to avoid young people becoming NEET
- Young people who are looked after or care leavers are quickly identified for eligibility for the post 16 bursary
- Calderdale has a high percentage of young people who were looked after in higher education (11%)
- Number who were looked after at age 16 who are not in education, training or employment at age 19 is continuing to decline
- A targeted service to support vulnerable young people to make positive decisions and transition in to further learning or work

Challenges

To build on the outcomes at Key Stage 4 where 25% achieve 5 A* to C grades at GCSE, by offering suitable programmes of study linked to progression and employment.

Ensure that we provide appropriate support for young people at the transition point between compulsory education and the requirement to remain in learning until age 17 in 2013.

To provide appropriate pathways to enable young people to reach their potential.

To narrow the post 16 achievement gap between looked after young people and those who are not.

To work in partnership with other agencies to secure positive destinations for young people leaving care.

To capture the views of young people on their experiences of education and training opportunities, to inform improvement.

Identify LAC young people as suitable for work experience or apprenticeships

Objectives 2013 – 2016

Over the life of this strategy we will:

- Increase the number of looked after children or care leavers participating in education or training post 16
- Review and re-launch the support available for young people in further or higher education
- Develop a focus on work experience, placements and apprenticeships for young people who are LAC (10% of Council Apprentices to be LAC or Care Leavers)
- Work with partners to identify and develop appropriate progression routes
- Develop a managed move process for young people who are at risk of dropping out of learning
- Implement the Calderdale Raising participation Strategy

Reference: Post 16 Service Plan

Outcomes

- Reduction in NEET – Number of LAC in post 16 education, training or employment increased and is sustained
- Specific support for young people in further or higher education is appropriate to their assessed needs and is recorded and reviewed within their Pathway Plan
- Increased numbers of children and young people are in Council apprenticeships

7. Placement Sufficiency and Stability

In Calderdale, admissions to the looked after system are monitored and agreed by the Head of Children's Social Care Service who maintains a gate keeping role via the Gateway panel.

We have made a firm commitment to achieving stability for looked after children and young people and care leavers. This will be achieved in a number of ways including a commitment to reduce the number of

changes in social worker and promoting permanence through care placements including additional and appropriate placement support.

Placements for looked after children and care leavers are monitored and reviewed by the Multi-agency Resources for Children Panel .

Joint funding arrangements for placements for children and young people with complex needs are agreed through the Extended Resources for Children Panel which is attended by commissioners and other representatives from education, health and social care.

Calderdale's Children's Social Care Service has a structure for the core delivery of services based upon a First Response Team, 4 locality Social Work teams, Commissioning Services and Looked After Children Services which includes fostering, adoption, and residential care.

These services are supported by, leaving care (Pathway), the Virtual School Team, designated health services, the Youth Offending Team (YOT), the Independent Visitors Scheme and the Children's Rights Service.

The development of the Early Intervention Locality Teams has enabled greater emphasis to be placed on early intervention or 'early help' and intensive short-medium term support to children and families with complex needs, which is vital in reducing the risk of children entering the Looked after system.

There are strong links between other council services (e.g. housing and targeted youth services) and strong networks have been developed with the third sector and other providers to ensure that children looked after and their carers have access to a good range of support services.

In relation to the strategy, there have been historical gaps for remand and fostering beds. Remands in custody remain high despite some reductions over the recent years. Previously the cost of such placements had been met by the Youth Justice Board. Government plans to charge local authorities the full cost for young people who are remanded to custody will have a direct impact on local services and have been considered in this strategy. This will place additional financial pressures on the looked after children's budget in the future as these proposals took effect from 1st April 2013

Additionally, the Southwark Judgment places statutory responsibilities on all local authorities to support homeless teenagers aged 16 – 17 years, including supporting them to find appropriate accommodation. The opportunities and choices for young people to be assessed as needing to be, or electing to be, voluntarily 'looked after' under s.20 of the Children Act 1989 will add further financial pressure and demand on Placement Services.

Achievements

- Placement finding service
- Resources for Children Panel
- CASS development
- Children's Commissioning Service
- Permanency Planning
- Fostering recruitment
- Adoption recruitment
- Fostering and Adoption service redesign
- Residential service redesign
- Launch of the Foster Carers Charter

Challenges

- Shortages of local foster carers nationally and locally. Calderdale's neighbouring authorities are currently competitors when it comes to Fostering recruitment. The recent investment in a local Fostering recruitment campaign has produced high quality publicity materials, raising the

professional profile and is producing favourable outcomes that will need to be sustained

- Calderdale is continuously improving Looked After Children Services and the interface with potential carers, which is likely to improve the ability of prospective and approved carers or adopters to contact the service
- There is competition from independent agencies with a number of Independent agencies operating within or near Calderdale's boundaries
- Independent agencies are becoming inundated with requests from Local Authorities which increases the risk of commissioning external residential care at much higher cost
- Foster carers reaching retirement age. Throughout the UK this is 10-15% pa. In Calderdale we expect a number of foster carers to have retired or resigned over the next twelve months
- In the year to March 2012, 9 fostering households had their approval terminated. The reasons for termination vary from retirement, leaving Calderdale and for issues around the quality of care
- Ensuring that with increased interest foster carer assessments are not delayed or incomplete due to pressure of demand on the duty service for placements and for increased numbers of viability and temporary approval assessments relating to emergency placements with relatives
- Increase in numbers of looked after children in Calderdale; in the decade from 2001 to 2011 this has risen from around 126 children to 342 at the time of writing (April 2013)
- The interpretation of the Southwark Judgment is placing additional pressure to find suitable placements for older children aged 16-17
- A potential increase in the take up of Special Guardianship by foster carers will reduce the number of looked after children but may impact on a future fostering resource
- An increase in the use of family and friends carers who are offered the same resources from the fostering service, but who may not offer a general resource to the wider looked after population. In some cases this has been considered but in most cases would be deemed unsuitable

Objectives 2013 – 2016

Over the life of this strategy we will:

- Increase the number of foster carers
- Increase the number of adoptive families
- Further improve the support for foster carers
- Increase support for family and friend carers
- Fully implement the White Rose Agreement – Fostering and Residential
- Implement the Adoption Action Plan
- Increase placement choice for children and young people
- Improve placement stability through effective partnership support

Reference: Placement Strategy 2012 - 2015

Outcomes

- Increased number of appropriate Foster Carers are approved in Calderdale
- Increased number of appropriate Adoptive families are approved in Calderdale

- Reduced numbers of children and young people living in placements outside of Calderdale
- The Foster Carers Charter review recognises increased support for foster carers through their feedback
- Family and Friends carers report increased support through feedback
- Children and young people's views about placements and support are positive

8. Adoption and post adoption support

Achievements

- Permanency through adoption is improving for children where that is the plan
- The percentage of Calderdale children who ceased to be looked after, where the outcome reason is "adopted" - 21% against national and statistical neighbour comparators of below 14%
- Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is improving. In 2011/12 we achieved a 7% improvement in Calderdale based on 3-yearly average compared to the previous scorecard of 41% (2008- 2011). Year to the end of Mar 13 performance in 2012/13 is 58% (national average of 56%)
- Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family is improving. Calderdale's average for 2009-12 was 297, but had gone up to 441 in 2011/12. Current year performance at the 31st March 2013 was 274 in respect to 19 children matched (DfE threshold is 213 days)
- Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted is improving. Calderdale's average figure for 2012/13 was 819 days for 22 children (DfE threshold is 639). 5 plans for children contributed to drift, impacting on this achievement. Without this drift the DfE threshold would have been exceeded (average would have been 626 days)
- Adopter recruitment is starting to improve (as at 31st March 2013)
- 10 adopters were approved for 2012/13. Since 1st April 2013, 7 prospective adopters are currently undergoing training and assessment and 4 prospective adopters are undergoing the new pilot assessment process
- We have enhanced staffing within the adoption team by 1 practice supervisor, 4 social workers and a dedicated recruitment and training officer
- We have planned and set in motion adopter recruitment campaign modelled on successful foster carer recruitment campaign last year

Challenges

- The pace for Adopter recruitment requires significant change in line with changes to national guidance
- Permanency policy has recently been launched and needs to be embedded and monitored
- Set recruitment target for adoption at 30 new families for 2013/14

- Pilot of new assessment timescales and Prospective Adopter Report format

Objectives 2013 – 2016

Over the life of this strategy we will:

- Increase and diversify the number and range of Prospective Adopters for Calderdale
- Improve sufficiency and quality through Prospective Adopter Recruitment
- Reduce the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family
- Reduce the average time between the Placement Order being granted and decision to match to an adoptive family
- Increase the number and percentage of children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family
- Continue to improve Adoption Support Services
- Increase and further improve children and young people's participation

Reference: Adoption Service Plan 2013

Outcomes

- Increased numbers of appropriate Adoptive families are approved in Calderdale
- The time between a child becoming looked after and moving in with their adoptive family is reduced
- The time between the making of the Placement Order and being matched with the adoptive family is reduced
- More children for whom the plan is adoption are found permanent families and within the required timescales
- Children being placed for adoption have life story work and later life letters within the required timescales

9. Governance and Accountability

There is a wider and enhanced commitment across the Children and Young People Partnership Executive (CYPPE) agencies to the Corporate Parenting of children who are looked after by Calderdale Council. The commitment of the Children and Young People Partnership Executive (CYPPE) provides guidance and support for this strategy.

The strategy provides clear leadership, action and required outcomes across five overarching priorities, which are

- Start Healthy and Stay Healthy
- Are Safe at Home, at School and in the Community

- Enjoy School and Achieve their best
- Make Friends and take part in activities
- Stay in education and get a job

The Looked After, Adopted Children and Young People Strategy has been produced by the local authority in partnership with other statutory partners, including NHS Calderdale and healthcare providers and West Yorkshire Police as well as partners from the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector. The involvement of children and young people in producing this strategy was achieved through several opportunities, with direct input from Calderdale's Children in Care Council being the most significant.

The strategy is monitored and reviewed at a senior level by the 'Looked After and Adopted Children Strategy Group', chaired by the Service Manager, Looked After Children, Children and Young People's Service. The group will have representatives from commissioners, providers and managers to ensure that legislative compliance and best practice and value for money are achieved. The group reports progress to Cabinet, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel, the CYPPE and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Priority focus groups, aligned to the 5 key areas, oversee the implementation of the strategic action plans and report progress against outcomes to the Looked After and Adopted Children Strategy group.

The local Children in Care Council (CiCC), improves the voice and influence of Looked After Children and Young People and care leavers on service planning, delivery and evaluation. Representatives of CiCC have dedicated meetings with Senior Managers, Elected Members and front line staff to ensure that progress is monitored and reviewed, taking into account the views and wishes of children and young people who are in care. This includes holding the LAAC Strategy group, Corporate Parenting Panel and the CYPPE meetings at times suitable to young people without impacting on their course of education, employment or training.