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# CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY

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Improving services and outcomes for children in care and young adults who are care experienced through good and effective Corporate Parenting



2022-2025  
KENT COUNTY COUNCIL  
Children in Care and Care Leavers

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## Opening statements

### Alisha Church & Kayleigh Leonard: Apprentice Participation Workers and Co-Chairs of our Children in Care Councils



Hello, our names are Alisha and Kayleigh, we work in The Participation Team and facilitate Kent's Children in Care Councils.



We work as Apprentice Participation Workers, but also are care experienced young people ourselves and are very passionate about ensuring that

Kent County Council (KCC) has strong, vibrant, and diverse Children in Care Councils.

In Kent we have three Children in Care Councils to ensure we hear the views and opinions of all age groups. Through our work we have seen how children and young people's views and opinions can make a positive difference and help shape the service Kent children and young people receive.

Our children and young people have told us that they feel empowered by our council groups, and that decision makers really do listen to them.

### Matt Dunkley, CBE - Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

Within KCC we are proud to be the corporate parents to our children in care and care leavers and as such it is our responsibility and duty to treat them as we would our own, taking every opportunity to champion their successes and supporting them to achieve in all

areas of their lives.



This strategy has been written to demonstrate our commitment to safeguard and promote the welfare of our children in care and care leavers and

make Kent a county that works for *all* children. It sets out the key services that are provided as we support them through their transition to adulthood and we are committed to ensuring that our young people are involved in decision-making and the development of services that are relevant to them.

As Corporate Director, I am committed to our children being able to look back at their time in care as a positive and fulfilling experience, full of good childhood memories and having gained the confidence to go forward and succeed in their adult life

## Sue Chandler, MEM Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services



As a corporate parent, and the cabinet member responsible for the services that KCC provides to children in care and care leavers, I welcome this strategy.

Being a corporate parent means both caring about and taking responsibility for the young people in our care, both their current welfare and future opportunities.

We are determined to be the very best corporate parents that we can be. The voice of the child and young person is central to all we do, and our children in care councils are vital in expressing that voice.

## Caroline Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting



I am very proud to be a Corporate Parent to both the children and care experienced young adults in the care of Kent County Council.

I am committed to providing them a positive care experience, with a childhood full of good memories and support, as they transition into independence. I want all our young people to thrive and achieve great things in their adult life, aiming high for them and working together to provide them with opportunities.

## Dirk Ross, MEM Chairman of the Corporate Parenting panel

The voice of the child is paramount and at the very heart of why we are here to service our community.



We must seek to listen and give everyone the chance to say their truth and

work to make life better by challenging conventions and be creative to allow all voices a say in how they live.

I truly value the contributions from children in care, our apprentices along with dedicated officers who can advise the panel to know the real issues so we can shape policy and provide more positive attitudes and reach out to charities, support groups and parents for their knowledge and life experiences.

We on the Corporate Parenting Panel are here to strive to enhance young people's chances, we have a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences with one common aim 'To ensure young people live their best life and enjoy every option available to succeed as adults'.

Our passion is to make all children feel loved, cared for and to feel safe to be themselves knowing a protective family of corporate parents are here to be your guardian.

You deserve the best Kent can offer you, however your background, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability etc. There is no barrier to your ambitions and successes. Be you, be proud.

# Good and effective Corporate Parenting in Kent

## Our vision

The role of the Corporate Parenting panel is to lead on, and ensure, that the corporate parenting roles and responsibilities of the council are being met.

The panel is chaired by a county councillor cabinet member. It is the responsibility of all members, not just the lead members for children's services, to be a corporate parent by ensuring that our children receive the right support to enable them to reach their full potential. At KCC we take seriously our moral duty as well as our legal responsibilities to our children and we will continue to strive to improve our services so that our children and young people can experience happy and fulfilling lives by providing warm and nurturing care.

Good corporate parents, just like all good parents need to understand and know what is happening to their children and young people. In Kent this means continuing our improvement journey in ensuring the information that all agencies collect about children in care and care leavers is used to the best advantage, sharing information with each other appropriately.

Performance scorecards for children in care and care leavers are reported to the corporate parenting panel for scrutiny, oversight, and future work planning to help ensure improved management of performance and outcomes delivered by our services as well as ensuring our children are not disadvantaged by their characteristics or background.

Good corporate parenting is about doing what any parent should do to promote the safety and welfare of their child by:

- Keeping children at the centre of everything that we do
- Ensuring good results through the support needed to fulfil their potential in life especially in relation to education and health
- Providing the quality of care necessary in achieving the best possible outcomes
- Effective partnership working including working across agency boundaries
- Knowing how many children and young people are in care
- Knowing the profiles of the children and young people (gender, age, race, religion, sex, disability) they have responsibility for within their local authority
- Being ambitious for our children and celebrating their achievements
- Providing good quality local options for a home environment, through a range of services including Kent Fostering, Adoption Partnership *southeast*, Virtual School Kent (VSK), Kent Supported Homes (KSH) and the Care Leavers Service, taking into consideration the needs of the child, their background and where they would like to live.

The delivery of warm and nurturing corporate parenting can refer to the functions undertaken by staff in the local authority, district councils, health services, police, schools and further education establishments and other partners working to promote the welfare and safety of children and young people. This means:

- The provision of suitable homes for children who cannot live with their birth families
- Suitable accommodation and support for young people aged 16 and over.
- The opportunity for young people in foster care to remain with their carers after the age of 18 (Staying Put or Shared Lives for young people with eligible care needs under the Care Act).
- Ensuring education needs are appropriately assessed, supported, and maximized for future life chances through further education, training, and employment.
- Ensuring health needs are appropriately assessed and supported, and the opportunity to maximize their health through life skills development and healthy choices, with guidance and support around healthy sexual relationships and reducing risks associated with using alcohol and substances.
- Ensure the emotional needs are assessed and supported to minimize the impact of adverse life experiences such as access to mental health and offering support or treatment and the opportunities to build protective relationships such as contact with siblings.
- Identify social needs and ensure support is given through opportunities to make peer relationships, undertake positive activities and contribute more widely to their communities.

## What it means to be 'in care'

There are 3 main routes by which children can be taken into care:

- Care orders made by the courts under section 31 of the Children Act 1989
- Voluntary accommodation arrangements under section 20 of the Children Act 1989
- Police protection or involvement with the youth justice system and since 2013 all young people who are remanded into custody within the youth justice system

The term 'children looked after' has a specific legal meaning based on the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a local authority if he or she has been provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, in the circumstances set out in sections 20 and 21 of the Children Act 1989 or is placed in the care of a local authority by an order made under part IV of the Act.

## What it means to be a 'care leaver'

A care leaver is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday. A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.

- Former relevant child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.
- Qualifying young people, aged 16 and over and under the age of 21, and are, subject to a special guardianship order (or were when they reached 18) and were looked after at any time after 16 (but whilst still a child), accommodated or fostered but for less than 13 weeks. Qualifying young adults can seek advice and guidance when and if needed.

The Children Act 1989 and 2004 requires local authorities to provide all eligible care leavers with a pathway plan and both a personal adviser and ongoing financial assistance. In May 2013 the government published further guidance for local authorities with regards to arrangements for facilitating care leavers to “stay put” in their foster placements after they reach the age of 18 years.

The children and Social Work Act 2017 extended the right for former relevant young people to request the continued support of a Personal Advisor (PA) up until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday should they wish. As a result of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Local Authority has published its Local Offer to care leavers<sup>1</sup>.

The Local Offer sets out what support and services care experienced young adults can expect from KCC and includes the offer to make an application to the Rent Guarantor scheme, as well as our council tax payment offer.

## What it means to be an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people have often faced significant hardship and trauma, due to their travel and cultural heritage before arriving in this country.

Arrival is by various means and methods, from families paying agents to facilitate their travel by aeroplane or car, or by being smuggled, trafficked, and hidden in vehicles, boats or shipping containers.

On arrival, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people are considered as extremely vulnerable as they often have no identified parent or family member providing care or support, making them vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, offending and ill health. The local authority is responsible to provide care for them and consider them as children looked-after. Over recent years, Kent has seen the highest number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. KCC must ascertain or determine their age and may undertake an age assessment to support their circumstances and future needs of support.

In 2016 the government introduced a voluntary National Transfer Scheme (NTS) to allow local authorities, whose percentage of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children per its Child in Care population was above 0.07%, to transfer these children to the care of other local

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/117761/Local-offer-to-young-people-who-are-care-leavers.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/117761/Local-offer-to-young-people-who-are-care-leavers.pdf)

authorities. In 2021, the NTS was made mandatory and now any local authority, whose percentage of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children per its Child in Care population is under 0.07%, is legally required to accept NTS transfers from local authorities above their 0.07% threshold. Kent works closely with the Home Office and Department for Education to support the NTS and respond to continued large numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving to the UK. Since September 2021 Kent has developed a Reception and Safe Care Service, which can safely accommodate 120 children whilst they wait to be transferred to other Local Authorities under the NTS.

## Children Looked After by other Local Authorities

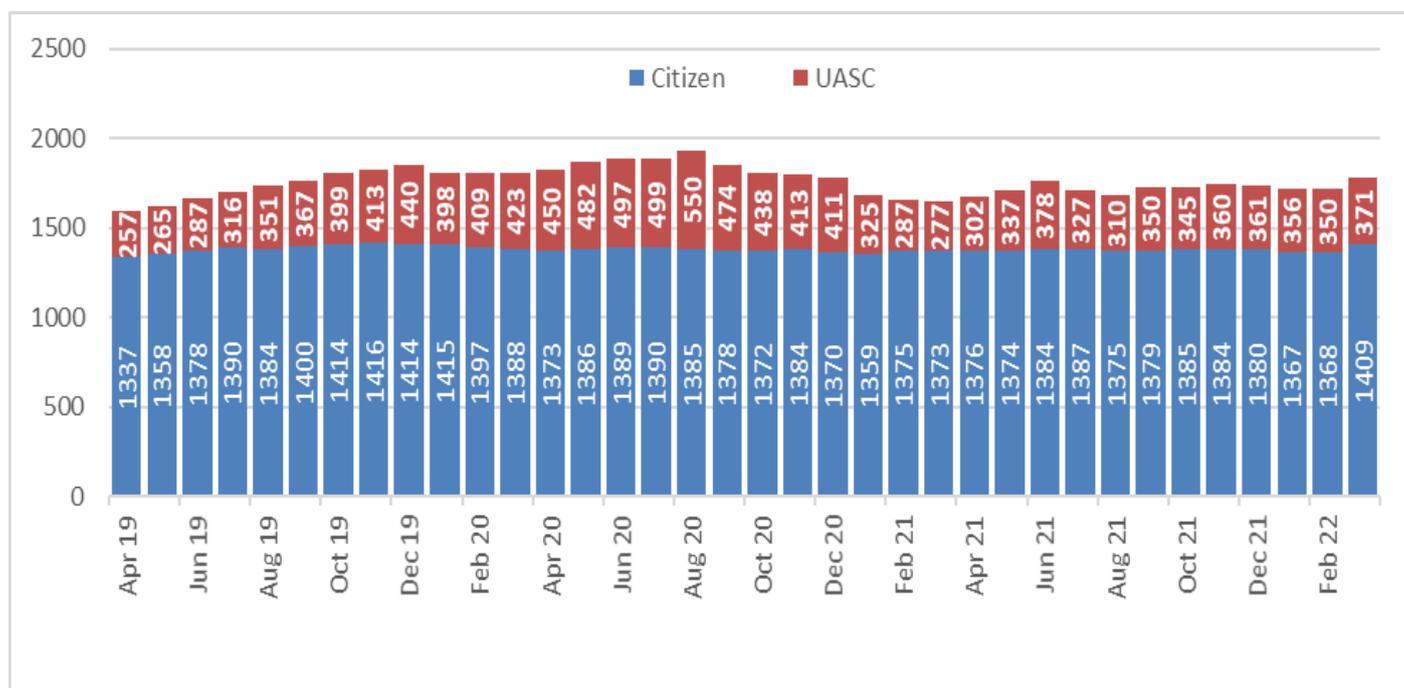
In addition to children and young people looked after by KCC more than 1200 children are placed in Kent by other local authorities largely because Kent has relatively inexpensive housing stock compared to the rest of the London and South-East region.

The Kent Safeguarding Children multi agency Partnership (KSCMP) recognises that the number of children and young people placed in Kent by other local authorities is extremely high. Work is ongoing to ensure they are safeguarded, and the placing authorities are aware of the challenges associated with the high number of children in care in Kent and to ensure contextual safeguarding. This is especially relevant to ensure children who go missing are protected from exploitation such as child sexual exploitation, gang related activity, extremist ideology, and modern slavery.

KCC and its partners have levels of responsibility to meet the needs of these children and young people, and will work together to ensure that we continue to:

- Work with the corporate parents of (the placing local authorities) of these children and young people to ensure effective communication about where children and young people are living in Kent.
- Ensure placing authorities know the areas of Kent which have high numbers of children in care (such as Thanet) and the additional challenges that further placements in these areas would bring as set out in the 'out of authority placement of children in care' Supplement to the Children Act 1989, Volume 2: care planning, placement, and case review guidance July 2014.
- Be proactive in encouraging placing authorities to identify ways in which more children and young people can be enabled to remain living closer to their families, friends and local communities.
- Challenging other local authorities when it has been identified the children placed in Kent are not having their needs met.

## A profile of Kent's children in care cohort



Children looked after from 31 March 2018 to 31 March 2022

	Numbers and rates per 10,000 children in care									
	Numbers					Rates per 10,000				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
England	75370	78140	80000	80850	N/A	64	65	67	67	N/A
Kent	1641	1588	1806	1662	1780	49	47	53	48	51

## Placement types

Children looked after as of 31 March 2022 by percentage in placement

	IFA	KCC Foster Care	Residential	Leaving Care	Other	P&V	Placed for Adoption	Placed with Parents	Relatives and Friends	Grand Total
Number	324	829	71	128	49	222	53	18	86	1780
Percentage	18%	47%	4%	7%	3%	12%	3%	1%	5%	100%

Children looked after as of 31 March 2022 by percentage of legal status

Legal status	Number	Percentage
CLA - C1 - Interim Care Order	261	15%
CLA - C2 - Care Order	826	46%
CLA - E1 - Placement order granted	69	4%
CLA - J1 - In local authority on remand, or committed for trial or sentence	4	0%
CLA - L2 - Subject to emergency protection order	1	0%
CLA - V2 - Single period of accommodation under Section 20	619	35%
Grand Total	1780	100%

Children looked after as of 31 March 2022 by percentage age and gender

	Gender			Age					Grand Total
	Males	Females	Indeterminate	Under 1	1 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 15	16 plus	
Number	1125	652	3	88	148	196	715	633	1780
Percentage	63%	37%	0%	5%	8%	11%	40%	36%	100%

Reasons in percentages for care entry for children who started to be looked after between April 21 to March 2022

Children starting to be looked after	Abuse or neglect	Child's Disability	Parental illness or disability	Family in acute stress	Family dysfunction	Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	Absent Parenting	Absent Parenting UASC only	Grand Total
Number	199	15	8	119	234	10	16	921	1522
Percentage	13%	1%	1%	8%	15%	1%	1%	61%	100%

Children looked after as of 31 March 2022 by ethnic origin percentage

	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	White	Information not yet obtained	Grand Total
Number	54	43	104	339	1235	5	1780
Percentage	3%	2%	6%	19%	69%	0%	100%

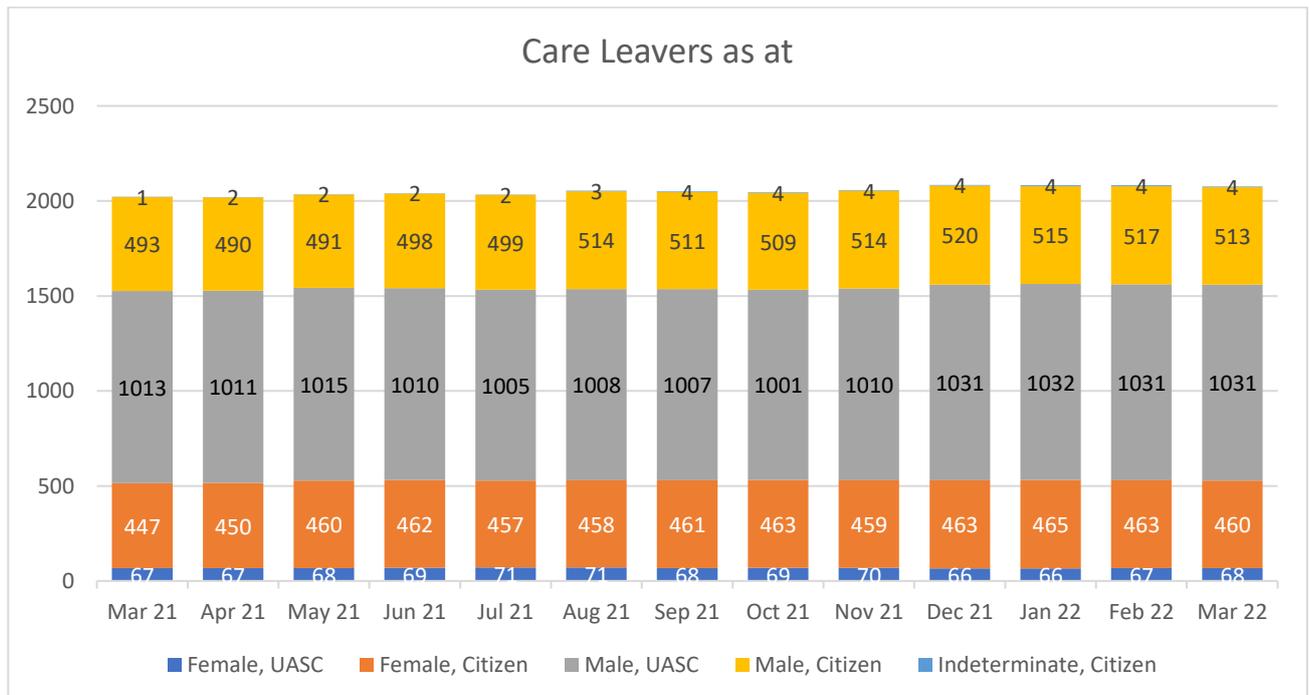
Ethnicity of Care Leavers as at 31 March 2022

Age of Care Leavers as of 31 March 2022

Ethnicity	Total
A1 - White British	843
A2 - White Irish	2
A3 - Any other White background	45
A5 - Gypsy/Roma	6
B1 - White and Black Caribbean	18
B2 - White and Black African	7
B3 - White and Asian	7
B4 - Any other mixed background	24
C1 - Indian	1
C2 - Pakistani	2
C3 - Bangladeshi	3
C4 - Any other Asian background	131
D1 - Caribbean	3
D2 - African	445
D3 - Any other Black background	5
E1 - Chinese	1
E2 - Any other ethnic group	533
Grand Total	2076

Age	Total
16	11
17	18
18	369
19	450
20	351
21	249
22	250
23	240
24	131
25	7
Grand Total	2076

Care Leavers cohort as of 31 March 2022



# Vulnerabilities of children in care and care leavers

## Exploitation

KCC acknowledges that children in care and young adults who are care experienced, due to their life experiences, are potentially more vulnerable and therefore more at risk of being exploited. Children and vulnerable young adults can be exploited through many ways and children in care teams and the leaving care service work closely within Kent's safeguarding children and adult procedures to ensure that both children and adults are protected from this and all forms of abuse.

## Children who go missing

Looked after children missing from their home are particularly vulnerable. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. There are often links between children running away and exploitation. Missing children may be vulnerable to criminal and sexual exploitation, to violent crime, or to drug and alcohol misuse.

Kent uses its Missing Children protocol and offers a return conversation to all children and young people within 72 hours of their return from a missing episode. The 18+ Care Leavers Service take a similar approach where young people are monitored and supported by their Personal Adviser who will address the needs of citizen young people who go missing. Asylum care leavers who go missing are triaged with the police and home office and often due to the need of this service group, are robustly monitored by Team Managers.

## Child sexual exploitation

Kent Safeguarding Children multi agency Partnership has implemented a strategic action plan to improve identification and protection of all children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation, including children in care and care leavers. Significant multi-agency work has been undertaken including training, the implementation of an exploitation toolkit and data analysis to support multi-agency partners to be aware of and to respond to child sexual exploitation.

Quality assurance work, training for foster carers, support and interventions are in place to improve Kent's overall response to child sexual exploitation. This remains a key priority for Kent's Safeguarding partnership, working together with all agencies to address child sexual exploitation.

## Contextual Safeguarding

KCC are a leading Local Authority in recognising the impact of extra-familial harm and serious youth violence in the community, which disproportionately impacts on Children in Care and Care Leavers. We work closely with partner agencies including Police, Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), Missing Child Exploitation Team, and Community Safety, to identify locations, spaces, and groups (including gangs and county lines) that present a risk to children. These contextual risks are assessed and responded to by multi-agency partners through the District Contextual Safeguarding framework. High risk and complex extra-

familial risks, including those that straddle multiple districts, are explored in the multi-agency Complex Adolescent Harm processes to enhance protection for children.

Innovative projects have been created to engage children while in the community including collaborations with fast food chains to encourage community guardianship, and with local football clubs to provide 'pop up football' events. These encourage children 'on the street' to engage with youth workers to ensure our children have 'safe spaces' in the community. In collaboration with VRU, KCC are delivering a 'Reachable Moment' pilot at Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, Margate.

Our aim is to engage with children who present in A&E where relevant and explore if they have been a victim of violence in the community or as a result of exploitation. Children are often too scared to tell Police or other authorities the reason for their injuries but at that moment of needing medical attention within an A&E setting, children can recognise the seriousness of the situation, feel safe and be more likely to respond in that 'reachable moment.'



PREVENT

As Corporate Parents we are committed to ensure the safety of our children in care and care leavers. The prevent strategy is focused on safeguarding people from radicalisation and extremism. We all have a lead role in delivering the prevent strategy in Kent in accordance to the guidance and working with key partners, the police, health, district councils and home office. Prevent has 3 key themes:

- Respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism
- Support vulnerable people and prevent them from being drawn into terrorism
- Work with key sectors and institutions to address risks and issues

Our responsibilities include us to regularly challenge and scrutinise circumstances and liaise with partner agencies accordingly, following the prevent guidance. PREVENT training is mandatory for all staff and foster carers.

## Modern slavery

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was legislated in March 2015 as an instrument to combat the growing issue of human slavery by bringing perpetrators to justice and protecting and supporting victims. The modern slavery act brings together trafficking, facilitation, and exploitation offences under one Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) bill.

As Corporate Parents we have a responsibility to ensure that children in our care or who are leaving our care, (both unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and Kent citizen) are

not exploited through being trafficked or made to work illegally or to work in poor conditions through modern slavery.

Any child that is transported for exploitative reasons is considered a trafficking victim, because it is not considered possible for children to give informed consent. It is therefore important that all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are considered to possibly being at greater risk of being trafficked either from other countries into the UK or from one part of the UK to another.

All social workers and personal advisers can access the KSCMAP training on trafficking and will follow the procedures on any child, (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or citizen) believed to be risk.

## Youth Justice Service (YJ)

As corporate parents we recognise how the vulnerability of our children looked after and care leavers can make them at risk of becoming involved in offending. We collaborate closely with the police and Youth Justice service to ensure that looked after children are not unnecessarily criminalised, especially for incidents which can be resolved through informal diversionary and restorative approaches outside of the criminal justice system. We expect foster carers and residential placements to manage challenging behaviour and not involve the police unless necessary.

We have partnership agreements that ensure that, when a child in care or care leaver offends, they have a coordinated plan that offers support, challenge, and the opportunity to repair harm. This includes those young people in custody, who have a plan for transition, upon their release, into timely and suitable accommodation; education, employment, or training; health provision and other support to enhance their successful desistance from offending.

## Our promise to young adults who are care leavers

KCC has set out its support to our young adults who are care experienced within the Local Offer<sup>2</sup>. This gives detailed information about the rights, and entitlements balanced with responsibilities, that all young people leave care can expect from the Local Authority as their Corporate Parent. Kent wants all our young adults to reach their full potential and to provide them with the support they need to achieve successful independent adult lives.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/117761/Local-offer-to-young-people-who-are-care-leavers.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/117761/Local-offer-to-young-people-who-are-care-leavers.pdf)

# Virtual School Kent (VSK)

## What does a Virtual School do?

The school does not exist as a building! VSK is an organisation to coordinate educational services at a strategic & operational level. We work with schools as if we are a 'single school'. We influence policy for CIC/Care Leavers- and develop delivery of services.

The school promote individual achievement & wellbeing, which we deliver in part through our Kent Pledge responsibilities. We also provide advice, support, and training to professionals on education, training & employment. We provide signposting information & advice to practitioners supporting Children in Care, Care Leavers, Previously Looked After Children and young people with a social worker.

Finally, VSK works hard to improve access to specialist services, provide additional opportunities to 'out of school' learning and leisure and facilitate access to early education & childcare.

## The core purpose of a Virtual School is:

- To be a LA champion to promote progress and educational attainment of Kent CIC/Care Leavers, previously looked after children (PLAC) and children with a social worker
- Ensuring they receive a good quality education, which is the foundation for improving the lives
- To encourage the voice of our young people to be heard (which we do through our Participation and Engagement Team)
- Diminishing the difference – we are relentless in driving up progress/attainment

KCC's Virtual School Kent (VSK) has become the first virtual school to be awarded the National Nurturing Virtual School Programme Award. The NurtureUK award follows the school's completion of the National Nurturing Schools Programme and recognises the high-quality whole school nurturing approach.

VSK provides co-ordinated educational services to support both children and professionals promoting the progress and educational attainment of children and young people who are or who have been in care as well as those who have had a social worker, so that they achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers and the foundation for improving their lives.

Achieving the award is an endorsement of the extensive work VSK has undertaken to ensure that the six principals of Nurture are embedded throughout its everyday practice in how young people, partners and staff are supported.



1. No matter what age, everyone is at a different stage
2. VSK (KCC) can be your safe space
3. Nurture helps you feel happy and healthy
4. VSK (KCC) can help you find your voice
5. How you behave tells us how you feel
6. Whatever changes you face we are here to guide you

An essential part of this development is how VSK are using the Boxall Profile, an assessment tool for social emotional and behavioural difficulties for children and young people. This has improved the understanding of young people and enhanced their work with schools, social workers and foster carers to create better outcomes for children from early years all the way to those post 16 years.

NurtureUK noted the dedication and determination of VSK to develop the National Nurturing Virtual Schools Award Programme and ensure the child's voice is at the heart of the service in the award assessment: "VSK is passionate and driven by their unwavering support for their children and Young People. This pilot National Nurturing Virtual Schools Award Programme (NNVSP), the first for a Virtual School has seen adaptations by the extended Leadership Team and the programme and its framework has evolved through reflective practice, collaboration, and sheer determination. This has resulted in an inspiring version of the NNVSP programme, the result of which has empowered not just the VSK's pupils and staff but also their stakeholders such as Fostering Services, Kent County Council and Social Care services. The ripple effect of VSK's hard work is tangible across the whole county of Kent and is a testament to their understanding of the power of the 6 Principles of Nurture. This pilot NNVSP was developed during a pandemic with all the extra issues and challenges that this had created and still creates. This is most impressive, and the commitment, creativity and passion involved shine through.

## Voice of the children and young people

### Our children and young people in care council (OCYPC) and the super council

KCC and VSK support OCYPC (for 11 to 16 year olds) and the super council (for 7- to 11-year-olds).

In Kent, our council meetings for children and young people in care have flourished over several years. The groups meet regularly and are facilitated and supported by staff from VSK and apprentices, who have been in care themselves, so have real empathy for our young people.



They have a good understanding of the care system and want to work to assist other young people to help ensure their experience of being in care is as good as it can possibly be.

Elected members, Directors and Heads of Service are also regularly invited to attend meetings, giving our young people opportunities to discuss their individual circumstances and wider issues directly.



OCYPC has expanded over recent years to engage more with children in care and ensure its representatives reflect all children in care and include the diverse needs and back grounds of children and young people. Meetings take place face to face and virtually to reach as many young people as possible

## The young adult council (YAC)



This is the Children in Care Council's older representative group of young people, facilitated by our Apprentices and predominantly attended by young people aged 16 – 25. The purpose of YAC is to help change things for the better for children in care and for those who have left care, to help ensure they have a good experience and become happy successful adults. YAC responds to commitments in the Kent Pledge and Care Leaver's Local Offer enabling young people's views to be heard and are involved in consultations about the service they receive. The meetings give young people a chance to have their say on improvements to be made to help them and others.

They also get the chance to socialise, take part in activities and events, and meet other young people and staff in KCC who make the decisions about their future.

All of our council groups use our 'Challenge Card' process, which is a formal way for them to question or make suggestions about service delivery and ways of working with children and young people in care. They ensure that children and young people's view are heard formally and are acted upon

For further information about all our councils, please click [here](#).



## Advocacy

The Young Lives Foundation is commissioned to deliver the representation rights and advocacy service, based locally in Kent. Advocacy for children:

- Children in care
- Care leavers aged 18 – 25
- Children in need
- Children subject to a child protection plan
- Independent visitors for children in care aged 8 – 18 years

- Independent person for stage 2 complaints under Children Act 1989
- Accompanying adult's service for age assessment interviews for unaccompanied asylum young people.

Children and young people can make self-referrals or be referred by their carers, key worker, social worker or personal advisor.

For further information please click [here](#).

## Independent Reviewing Officers

The role of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is to scrutinise and monitor the implementation of care plans for children in care until the age of 18. IRO's provide independent oversight of the quality of services being provided for children in care and record their "footprint" on the child's file. They provide challenge where there is drift, delay or poor outcomes for children and young people. In doing so, IRO service analyses service wide trends and experiences and is responsible for advising senior leaders regarding any concerning collective children's experiences and identified themes.

IRO's champion the voice of the child and ensure that their views are listened to and will meet children before their review meetings. They will also encourage the child's participation in review meetings and ensure that children understand their plan, rights and entitlements. IRO's may also meet the child and the professionals supporting the child between reviews to help ensure that the plan is understood and is being progressed.

## Accommodation and Sufficiency

The government has made it a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities to have a Sufficiency Strategy since 2011. The sufficiency strategy will review, evaluate and project accommodation and support needs required for children in care and care leavers. Kent has faced significant challenge over recent years in respect of the rise of unaccompanied asylum seekers, as well as intensifying financial challenges and demands within the local market.

The dedicated Accommodation Team in the 18+ care leaver's service manages this transition, supporting Personal Advisors and providing advice regarding available accommodation as well as ensuring both quality and standards of such accommodation is acceptable to KCC.

The requirement for local authorities to support and monitor arrangements whereby young people remain with their former foster carers beyond their eighteenth birthday is set out in S.12 of the Children Act 1989. 'Staying Put' arrangements enable young people to remain with their former foster carers to help ensure that they are adequately prepared for adulthood.

Young people with eligible Care Act needs who are open to the Disabled Young People's Teams may have the option to remain with their foster carers under 'Shared Lives.'

In February 2021, KCC took the decision to bring in house its previously commissioned supported lodgings accommodation, which was provided by Catch22. This is now an in-house service Kent Supported Homes; this decision was made to improve and expand the provision and to make it more flexible to the changing needs of the young adults supported by the 18+ Care Leavers service.

For further information on Staying Put click [here](#).

## The transition to adulthood

We want to actively ensure effective transitions to support young people to become valued young adults and contributing to their communities. As some children in care and care leavers have additional needs, we must ensure that we work in partnership with colleagues in Adult Services and Disabled Young People's Teams for the success of our young people with care and support needs who are leaving care.

Contact should be made with the relevant Team (Disabled Young People's Team or other Adult Services Team) as per the "KCC Joint Transition Policy for Young People aged 16-25 years who are Care Leavers" to ensure that an assessment of the Young Person's care needs is completed in a timely manner prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This applies to individuals who appear to require care and support.

ASCH Joint Working Protocol / Everybody Counts has agreed that the key services for young adults will have an identified lead to improve communication and work together to ensure support with transitional arrangements and implement a shared approach to implementing support care plans and lead responsibilities with packages of support, such as accommodation.

## Our future aspirations

Together with service user feedback, Ofsted Report (2017) and our analysis of our data profile, these have informed our areas of priority for our children in care and care leavers:

- Reducing the number of children and young people who need to become looked after through early intervention from our Open Access and Early Help Service.
- Ensure National Transfer Scheme implementation and the timely dispersal of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.
- Improving our response to 16 and 17-year old's who present as homeless, through improving integration with our Early Help service and working closely with Local Housing Districts.
- Develop a stable social work workforce through recruiting sufficiently skilled and experienced permanent Social Work staff and Personal Advisers.
- Provide a comprehensive learning and development offer to Social Workers and Personal Advisers to support them in their interventions with children and young people.
- Ensure equitable and manageable caseloads across Integrated children's services.

- Ensuring wherever possible, children and young people are enabled to return home to live with their parents, extended family or achieve permanency through Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders.
- Recruiting and retaining foster carers with the right skills, in sufficient numbers and in the right areas of the county.
- Ensuring timely and effective support for the emotional and mental health needs of our children in care and care leavers.
- Develop effective accredited transition skills programme to support children in care and care leavers.
- Ensure placement sufficiency and good quality accommodation with support for care leavers working with District Councils and providers.
- Increase the number of children and young people who are in education, training and employment.
- Increase apprenticeship opportunities for all our young adults, across a wide range of KCC departments, partner agencies and local Kent Businesses.
- Ensure effective data information regarding care leavers to support their longer term support needs.
- Develop effective young parents' assessment programme and support offer.
- Improving restorative responses to children in care who offend and improving joint working with youth justice and, for care leavers, with probation services.
- Provide intervention and strengthen the support to children in custody and release from custody.
- Develop a creative and innovative approach to build on statutory practice and improve outcomes for children in care and young people leaving care; include drop-ins and open days enabling access to information and services.
- Increase Staying Put and Shared Lives arrangements within Kent.
- Improving transitions from children in care to leaving care and where appropriate transferring to or accessing additional support from Adult Services, including the Disabled Young People's Teams.
- The IRO to undertake QA audits and if necessary, trigger an alert escalation process to ensure children's individual needs are met and service wide analysis is considered.
- Increase our supported accommodation through the expansion of Kent Supported Homes and increase the number of hosts.
- Implement the Step Across to Fostering Scheme and Step Across to Kent Supported Homes, to reduce the numbers of children in residential care and provide a support package to carers within a family environment.

## Our strategic priorities and plan

How will we commission or provide services for looked after children and care leavers.

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
<p>Effective sufficiency strategy and resource enabling good transitions with housing support to children in care and care leavers.</p> <p>Recruit 120 Kent Foster Carers of which 80 will be mainstream, to achieve a net gain of 20 carers to increase provision to 700 foster carers.</p>	<p>Implement Sufficiency Strategy (1<sup>st</sup> June 2022)</p> <p>Implement Recruitment strategy to increase in house foster carer provision</p>	<p>Commissioning service Corporate parenting service Kent Fostering</p>
<p>Integrated Children's Services partnership with district councils to provide:</p> <p>Effective response to homelessness for 16- and 17-year-olds.</p> <p>Care leavers with sustainable housing and accommodation options, securing permanent tenancy and avoiding the use of bed &amp; breakfast.</p> <p>Increase the provision of Kent Supported Homes by recruiting 50 additional hosts per year (which includes foster carers becoming hosts through a Staying Put arrangement).</p> <p>Embed housing related support to provide accommodation options.</p>	<p>Work together using the 16 &amp; 17-year-old joint housing protocol.</p> <p>Develop housing related support.</p> <p>Recruit more Kent Supported Homes hosts to provide good quality supported lodgings for young people to support their transition to adult independence. Marketing campaign to launch March 2022.</p> <p>Care leavers to be in suitable accommodation</p> <p>Continue the provision of the Corporate Parenting Rent Guarantor Scheme</p> <p>Use panels to review ensure accommodation and support options are sufficient for all young people leaving care and reduce cost to 18+ care leavers service</p>	<p>ICS</p> <p>Commissioning 18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>Kent Fostering Service</p> <p>District Councils Commissioning 18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service Commissioning</p>

	Strengthen partnership between Total Placement Service (TPS) and 18+ accommodation team	TPS and 18+ Care leavers service
Support independent and proactive Advocacy	Young Lives Foundation advocacy service is commissioned to provide service to all children in care and care leavers	Commissioning service
Improve access to community services for care leavers	Establish drop-ins with Open access and Early Help services using youth hubs and children's centres.	18+ Care leavers service

How can our children and young people in care improve at school, both academically and in terms of other achievements.

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Reduce the number of children looked-after and care leavers who are not in employment education or training (NEET)	<p>NEET inter-dependency meeting to target vulnerable groups</p> <p>Explore support and access to ESOL</p> <p>Explore intensive support to complex NEET cases</p> <p>Maintain 2 dedicated ETE workers within the 18Plus service</p>	<p>VSK</p> <p>18+ Care Leavers Service</p>

	to assist Personal Advisors and young adults in exploring their training, employment and or education needs and promote young adults' engagement to reduce NEET figures.	
Nil exclusions of children looked-after	VSK to work in partnership with school's key workers to avoid permanent exclusions.  Monitor and review fixed term exclusion cases, explore patterns and look at addressing any learning.	VSK  VSK
Becoming effective lifelong learners and reaching aspirations	VSK to monitor and target children and young people not achieving their potential and provide support and services to address this. Reduce the number of NEET cases  VSK NEET officer to support staff with enabling access to apprenticeships	VSK  18+ Care leavers service
Recognise and celebrate the achievements	Regular recognition and annual celebration of academic achievements	Corporate parenting service VSK 18+ Care leavers service Disabled Young People's Teams and Adult Social Care
Embed the Nurture principles into our practice with children and young people in our care.	Sufficiency Strategy to include Nurture Principles.	ICS

Improve the health and wellbeing of the children in our care.

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Greater understanding of health needs for all children looked-after with timely completion of initial and review health assessments and Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQs)	Ensure process for health assessments is adhered to  Review SDQs to establish support with procurement of training, services and support to staff, foster carers and key	LAC health service 18+ Care leavers service Disabled Children and Young People Service

	workers. Review emotional wellbeing strategy	Corporate parenting service Children in care teams VSK
Care leavers to understand health needs with good quality health summaries	Ensure all care leavers have a health summary and history	LAC health service
Access to good quality health care, advice and guidance	Promote and enable access to sexual health services and anti-natal support Promote and enable access to alcohol and substance misuse support  Develop preparation for parenthood guidance	LAC health service Commissioned sexual health services Commissioned alcohol and substance services 18+ Care leavers service Corporate parenting service Disabled Young People's Teams and Adult Social Care
Improve mental health services for all children looked-after and care leavers with responsive CAMHS	Evaluate health needs and identify complex issues to streamline CAMHS involvement	LAC health service CAMHS

How stable and secure are the lives of our children in care and for young adults moving into independence?

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Effective match of placements and permanency leading to cost effective sustainable placements.  All children in care and care leavers to be in stable accommodation, which they can call their home.	TPS to ensure placement suitability and rising 18 placements are reviewed.  TPS to undertake matching of all placements for children in care.  Accommodation Team to assess post 18 accommodation needs and support through Personal Housing Plan.	TPS, 18+ Care leavers service; Accommodation team  TPS  18+ Care leavers service Accommodation team

	<p>Accommodation team to monitor in collaboration with other teams and Ready Homes the quality of the accommodation sourced and provided by Clearsprings Ready Homes.</p> <p>The Accommodation Team through the Rough Sleeping project to continue to develop housing plans with care experienced young adults to ensure they are aware of their options and provide some tenant/ landlord liaison to support young adults stability in their private rented accommodation.</p> <p>Development of a tenancy training programme to support young adults readiness to take on the legal obligations of a tenancy.</p> <p>Improve further placement stability indicators.</p> <p>All 16+ children in foster care are considered for Staying Put.</p> <p>All 16+ children with disabilities in foster care who are open to the Disabled Young People Service are considered for Shared Lives.</p>	<p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>Children in care teams</p> <p>Disabled Young People's Teams</p>
<p>Ensure accommodation sufficiency and working in partnership with district councils and providers</p>	<p>Implement sufficiency strategy</p>	<p>Commissioning service</p> <p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service</p>
<p>Provide support to young parents with access to early help services</p>	<p>Develop preparation for parenthood guidance</p> <p>Develop early help services to target vulnerable groups</p> <p>Drop-in services to be establish support in youth hubs</p> <p>New 3 year lottery funded Care experienced parenting project to be rolled out</p>	<p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>Early help service</p> <p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>Early help service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service</p>

How well we do at finding appropriate adoptive families for children for whom it is decided this is the right option.

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Sufficient number of adopters	Ensure recruitment of adopters and timelines of progressing adoption plans Provide support to adopters and reduce adoption breakdowns	Head of Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)
Continue to improve and implement foster to adopt initiative	Develop recruitment campaign to target diverse adopters in identified areas of Bexley, Kent and Medway.  Ensure timely assessment of prospective adopters	Head of RAA
Adoption orders granted	Ensure timeliness of application and support to complete process to reach expected targets, that maintain Bexley, Kent and Medway, as a <b>GOOD</b> adoption agency.	Head of RAA

How well our foster care arrangements work.

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Transparent staying put arrangements and support with transitions. This also includes transitions to Shared Lives, when appropriate for young people with disabilities/ eligible care needs.	Transitions workshops to review Staying Put arrangements  Kent Fostering Service Day to deliver training to staff on Staying Put, role of the Personal Advisor and 18+ service.	Corporate parenting service Fostering service 18+ Care leavers service
Increase number of foster carers recruited and trained to provide good quality care. Recruit 120 Kent Foster Carers of which 80 will be mainstream,	Targeted recruitment for carers who can offer permanency through to adulthood and commit to keeping young people under staying put/ Shared Lives. Comprehensive training programme for all foster carers and	

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
<p>to achieve a net gain of 20 carers to increase provision to 700 foster carers.</p> <p>Recruit additional carers who can support disabled children</p>	<p>individual personal development plans. Monitored through the Fostering Independent Review Team undertaking all foster carer annual reviews.</p>	<p>Fostering service</p>
<p>High quality foster carers providing safe and proactive care to children looked-after</p>	<p>Ensure safe care practice in Kent Fostering through Mandatory training for all staff:            Keeping children safe: sexual abuse in foster care.            Panel training and workshops.            Risk and Vulnerability Assessment completed for all new foster carer applicants and registered carers.            PREVENT strategy            Safe Care Plan for every fostering household and individual plans for children in care.</p>	<p>Fostering service</p>
<p>Increase the number of special guardianship orders</p>	<p>Focus on early permanency planning for children prior to entry into care to reduce placement moves and secure early permanency options.</p>	<p>IRO service</p> <p>Children in care social workers, Disabled Children and Young People's Team            Social Workers</p>
<p>Effective safeguarding; recruitment and retention of high-quality carers</p>	<p>Retention of foster carers through our Placement Stability and Sense of Belonging project, our offer to improve placement stability and retain our experienced foster carers</p>	<p>Fostering service</p>

How good is the standard of residential care and supported accommodation used by Kent for children in care?

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Monitoring of other local authority children looked-after placed in Kent	Local authorities to follow process to alert KCC of any child placed into Kent	Safeguarding unit
Reduce high-cost placements for adults by reviewing accommodation and support needs for all 18+ adults who transfer into the service. To work to a model of achieving independence for all adult care leavers.	18+ Care leavers service high-cost placement panels to review placement expenditure. Heads of Service to review all plans for 17.5 year olds transferring to 18+ teams.	Commissioning 18+ Care leavers service Accommodation team TPS CIC service managers
Ensure good quality standards are achieved with all accommodation provision	Accommodation team to ensure regular monitoring and reviews of accommodation for over 18's. Quality Assurance visits completed by Child in care teams for semi-independent provisions for 16-18 year olds.	Accommodation team CIC teams
Identify in county and in-house accommodation provision for children in care	Sufficiency strategy	Commissioning service Corporate parenting service
Use of unregulated provision is monitored and scrutinised by senior leadership team.	Weekly report provided by TPS to Directors detailing children in unregulated placements and plan for regulating these arrangements.	TPS ICS Director and Corporate Director

What support does your authority provide to young people leaving care and how effective is it?

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
<p>Good quality Pathway Plans completed with young people by Personal Advisors and social workers.</p> <p>Publish Local Offer setting out Care Experienced young people's entitlements.</p>	<p>Exemplar pathway plans in staff induction.</p> <p>Ongoing workshops and 18+ Care Leavers training programme and handbook.</p> <p>Keeping Local Offer under regular review.</p>	<p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>Disabled Young People's Teams</p> <p>Children in care teams</p> <p>Practice development officers</p>
<p>Entitlements and Local Offer to be promoted to all children in care and care leavers</p>	<p>Establish locality open days to promote resources, available service and local offer.</p>	<p>18+ Care leavers service</p>
<p>Personal advisors to ensure relationship building and support to care leavers, allocation of PA at age of 17.5 years.</p>	<p>Recruitment of good quality personal advisors</p> <p>Personal advisors to attend penultimate CIC review and handover meeting, prior to young person turning 18</p>	<p>18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service</p>
<p>All young people in custody to be afforded same level of support and entitlements to services</p>	<p>Ensure effective monitoring, tracking and care planning</p>	<p>18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>YOS</p> <p>Children in care teams</p>
<p>Effective transition pathways with adult's services/ Disabled Young People's Teams</p>	<p>Implement joint working transition policy</p>	<p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service</p>
<p>Ensure access to services for all care leavers in Kent</p>	<p>Establish drop-ins with early help service at youth hubs in all areas of Kent</p>	<p>18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>Early help services</p>

How effective is our professional workforce of Social Workers, Personal Advisors, Early Help workers and others responsible for running services for and working with children in care and care leavers.

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
<p>Good quality training provision for all staff</p> <p>Implementation of the Practice Framework.</p>	<p>Mandatory eLearning</p> <p>Use of embedding research in practice</p> <p>Implement induction programme</p> <p>Support CPD online</p> <p>18+ Care Leavers staff Handbook and programme of training.</p> <p>Development of 18+ Communities of practice series of workshops to support and develop workers understanding of the role of a Personal Advisor and the delivery of a quality service.</p> <p>Kent Practice Framework embedded within Corporate Parenting Services</p>	<p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>Children in care teams</p> <p>Disabled Children and Young People Service</p> <p>Practice development officers</p>
<p>Recruitment of high quality professional staff</p>	<p>Ensure our children in care and care leavers contribute to interview panels, through the Participation team.</p>	<p>Corporate parenting service</p> <p>18+ Care leavers service</p> <p>Children in care teams</p> <p>Practice development officers</p>
<p>Practice meetings to capture feedback from audit activity</p>	<p>Monthly practice meetings and audit activity by team managers</p> <p>Senior Personal Advisors to undertaken monthly reflective practice group work</p>	<p>18+ Care leavers service</p>

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Effective quality assurance	Regular auditing	Corporate parenting service
	Cycle of continuous service development/feedback	Practice development officers

What more could be done to fulfil the council's responsibilities as a 'corporate parent'?

Outcome	Actions	Responsibility
Responsive, warm and nurturing leadership and management to ensure best possible life chances for children in care and care leavers	Ensure vision and support to all staff working with vulnerable groups promoting the expectations to be good and effective corporate parents  Deliver strategy through Children in Care monthly management meeting.	Corporate parenting service
The voice of the child/young person is evident throughout work	Recognition of achievements on individual basis and events	Corporate parenting service VSK
Robust partnership and joint working with other stakeholders and agencies	Ensure corporate parenting is representative and evidenced in all policies and procedures working with vulnerable children and young people  Employment, Education and Training Event (EET) April 2022, to seek offers for care leavers from partner agencies.	Corporate parenting service
Annual corporate parenting report on progress	Annual report to be presented to cabinet committee on corporate parenting progress	Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting