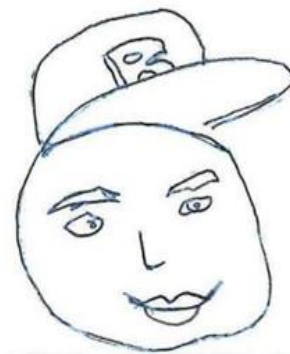




# Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy

2017-2021

**LISTEN... To us**



[Artwork by a young person in care in Northamptonshire]

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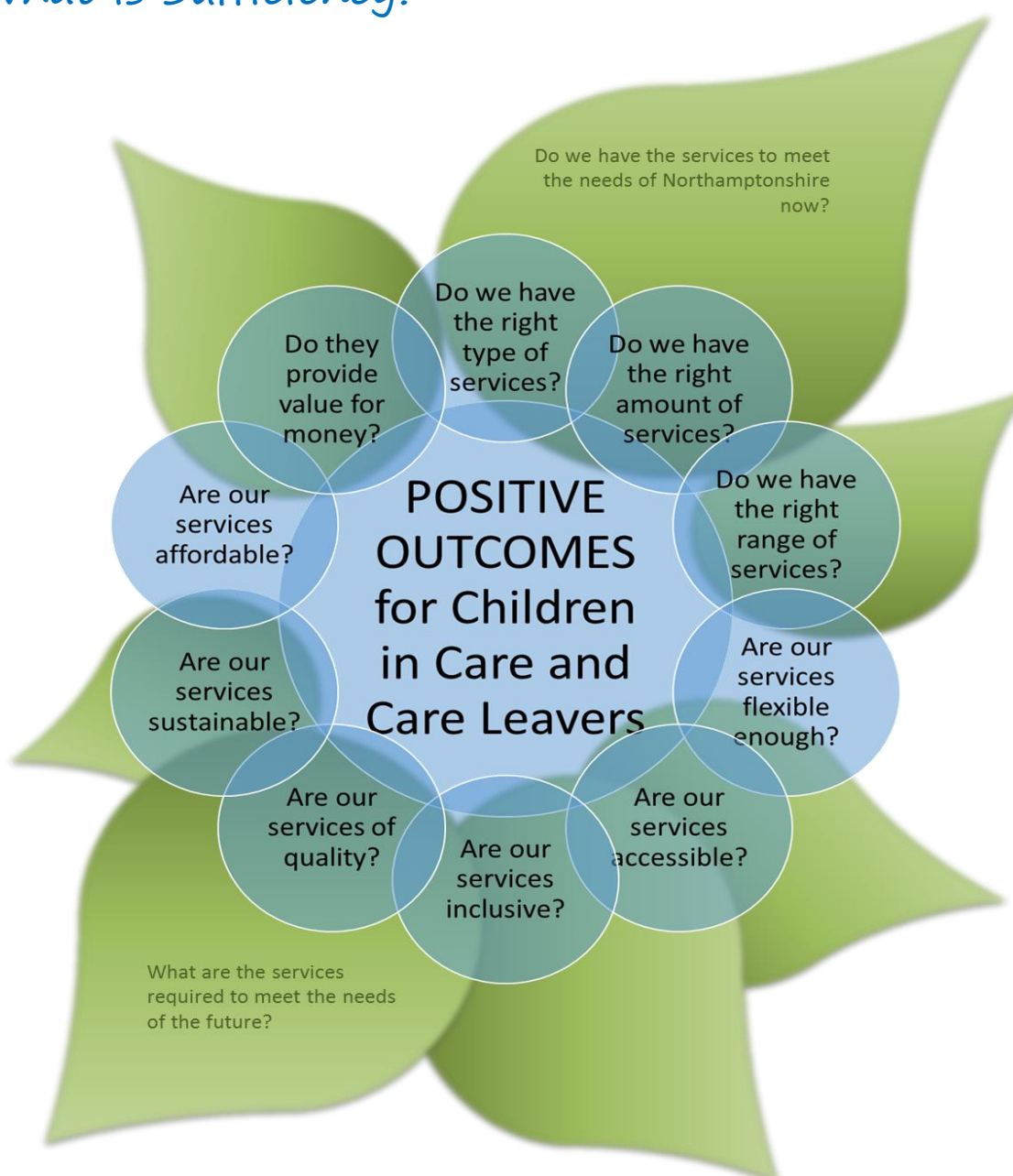
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## Introduction

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Local Authorities are required to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for Children in Care within their local area. In 2010, the Statutory Guidance for the Sufficiency Duty was issued. This guidance is explicit in placing a duty on Local Authorities to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring that they include, in relevant commissioning strategies, their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.

## What is Sufficiency?



The Children Act 2008 defines Sufficiency as “a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after. For

those who are looked after, Local Authorities and their Children's Organisation partners should seek to secure a number of providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of looked after children and young people within their local area.”

*We are Corporate Parent to 1,054 Children in Care (August 2017)*

The scope, therefore, is not just restricted to just making good quality placements; the intention is to co-ordinate the range of activity across Children's Services, first and foremost with a clear focus and commitment towards

supporting families to stay together, wherever it is safe to do so, thus minimising the need for children to come into care, and where possible should the need for a care episode arise that services support a timely return to their families wherever possible. Quality and appropriate placements therefore clearly have significance when children might need to come into care; but importantly it means that from early help right through to edge of care, services for Children in Care must be focused on the best outcomes for children and young people in Northamptonshire.

*We are supporting 696 Care Leavers during 2017/18*

*In our care there are 115 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (August 2017)*

In order to address this, Northamptonshire has developed this strategy to improve its services and its offer to children and young people. The improvements set out in this strategy are ambitious, as they should be. Northamptonshire County Council has improved its compliance and processes for Children in Care, and has now been judged as “requires improvement” by Ofsted. During the Ofsted Inspection in February 2016, the organisation was told:

- That a stronger edge of care system is needed to prevent where appropriate the escalation of children into the care system;
- That the organisation must reduce the number of children and young people with an out of county placement;
- That the organisation must reduce the number of children and young people placed in a residential setting;
- That Northamptonshire placements do not always meet the needs of its most vulnerable children; and
- That the organisation must improve the outcomes for children and young people in its care.

*This year (17/18) we will spend around £48m on residential care and/or education placements*

Alongside wider changes in policy, process and the service landscape, these will feature as priority areas of work.

## The Children's Services Organisation in Northamptonshire

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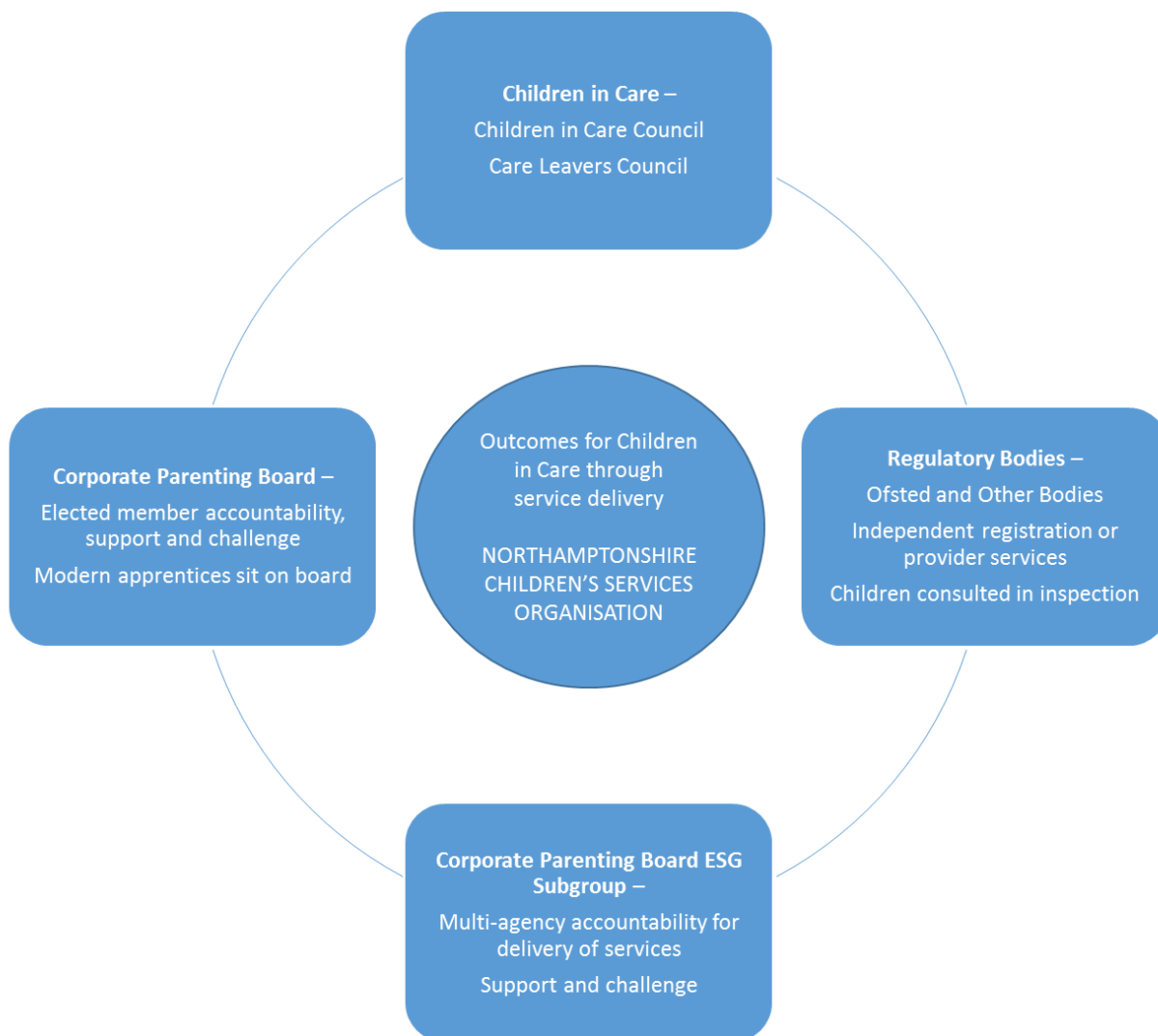
Northamptonshire Children's Services is currently going through significant change. It will be developing into an organisation separate from, but accountable to, Northamptonshire County Council. The work to shape the teams and resources will place children at the centre of design and delivery; and achieving positive outcomes for all of children will underpin everything that Northamptonshire does.

It is recognised, however, that other people are important to children and young people; and it will be essential to work in partnership to ensure they have the best possible opportunities in life.



## Accountability in Northamptonshire

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## Northamptonshire's Children in Care and Care Leavers

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This section will explore key data and local characteristics of Children in Care and Care Leavers in Northamptonshire to contextualise the following chapters; and the work and priorities that need to be focused on.

Northamptonshire has been on a significant and challenging improvement journey. In 2013, three successive Ofsted inspections judged services for children and young people in Northamptonshire to be inadequate. Inspectors found serious and widespread weaknesses across all services, including child protection, children looked after and adoption.

On re-inspection in February 2016 the overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in Northamptonshire was judged to "require improvement" to be good. The improvement journey has been substantial in scope and work continues; acknowledging that many of the improvements are still in their infancy, the increased focus on Children in Care will necessarily impact Northamptonshire's practice at Edge of Care and beyond.

The number of Children in Care in Northamptonshire has increased from 767 in September 2013 to 1054 in August 2017, accounting for a 37% increase in 4 years. Ofsted has reported that "[t]he significant increase is due to a more rigorous response to risk and concern since the previous inspection, as well as a recent increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children..." (Ofsted report, p.20); but there are still substantial changes in practice that are required to ensure that Northamptonshire achieves the best outcomes for children and to embed a stronger edge of care offer.

Whilst at the end of 2016/17 Northamptonshire had 998 Children in Care, as of 31st August 2017 the organisation was Corporate Parent to 1,054 children and young people; and 696 Care Leavers. At a rate of 63.8 per 10,000 population this is now well above national (60.0) and statistical neighbour comparators (57.4).

By far the largest cohort in our care are young people aged 15 and over, making up a third of all Children in Care. At 31st March 2017 males make up 22% of this third, equating to a nearly quarter of all of the cases that Northamptonshire is responsible for and by far the largest group (larger by a minimum of 6% across other genders and all other age groups).

In terms of the profile of children coming into care in Northamptonshire, the majority of new care entrants are under 1 and over 14 years old. Although there have been slightly less entrants aged 14+ in 2016/17, the numbers are still high enough to result in needing a substantial number of placements for this group of young people, which are often more expensive and/or difficult to identify. This also



means higher volumes of independent supported accommodation placements required once they have left care and additional pressures on the Leaving Care service.

Volume alone does not account for the challenge facing services in the County. Although Northamptonshire's 2016/17 year end snapshot figure for Children in Care was 998, the actual number of young people who had been in care at some point during the year was 1477. Comparing the change in throughput to that nationally from 2012, the organisation has seen a 31% increase in Northamptonshire compared to just 8% nationally.

In terms of placement types, 75% of admissions into care in 2016/17 were placed within foster care (including in-house and agency provision); the majority for all age groups are in foster care and at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 56% of children continued to reside in foster care. Of those within foster care, 46% of children are in internal provision with 54% in independent agency foster care and nearly 70% of children over 10 years old are in agency placement. Given that current estimates show that agency foster care is slightly more expensive, an expansion of in-house provision both in terms of volume and in terms of the complexity of cases would greatly assist both sufficiency and cost dynamics for Northamptonshire's Children in Care.

Within the recommendations from Ofsted resulting from the last inspection, it was noted that Northamptonshire needs to reduce the number of children and young people in a residential setting; again, increasing and developing our internal foster care provision would assist in this task. 194 young people were in a residential placement at some point in 2016/17, with 124 still being in the placement at year end. Of the 194 young people, the majority were males aged 10-15 years old when they started the residential placement with the age split between agency and in house residential being largely the same, with the over 15 cohort making up the majority in both.

In addition to a drive towards reducing the number of children in residential settings, Ofsted also highlighted that Northamptonshire needs to reduce the number of children and young people with an out of county placement. Performance for placing children outside the county boundary and more than 20 miles from home has deteriorated over the last few years, with an increase from 13% in 2013 to 19% in 2017. Nationally the average is 14%, with statistical neighbours at 13%. The majority of these young people are placed in foster care or residential care/schools. This is due to a lack of sufficient foster and residential placements in county and shows that there is a significant task ahead in order to respond to Ofsted's recommendation.

This strategy will now lay out the improvements required to affect change based on the values, standards or 'rights' that Children in Care are entitled to in Northamptonshire.



## Northamptonshire's Principles

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Our vision is that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential. This means that:

- All children are safe;
- All children achieve their best in education, are ready for work, and have skills for life;
- All children grow up healthy and have improved life chances; and
- The best possible outcomes for vulnerable children, especially those who are looked after.

Ensuring Northamptonshire's Children in Care and Care Leavers are happy, safe, confident, listened to and able to prosper is therefore a priority for Northamptonshire Children's Service organisation.

The new Children and Social Work Act includes a set of corporate parenting principles to support Children in Care and as they move into adult life. The welfare and life chances of Looked After Children is one of the key issues addressed in the Children and Social Work Bill, with new guidelines for the first time enshrining in law the responsibilities of a 'corporate parent'. The corporate parenting principles are as follows –

*A local authority in England must have regard to the need:*

*(a) to act in the best interests, and promote the health and well-being, of those children and young people;*

*(b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;*

*(c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;*

*(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;*

*(e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;*

*(f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and*

*(g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

In response to the corporate parenting principles, and in keeping with the local overall approach, this strategy will be guided by a series of values; standards or 'rights' that Children in Care are entitled to in Northamptonshire. These are:

1. The right to family life;
2. The right place to live;
3. The right support;
4. The right to achieve;
5. The right to a positive transition; and
6. The right to a well-planned service with strong leadership and governance.

## The right to family life

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### Vision

All children have a right to a family life and wherever possible they will be supported to live with their parents or family. To enable this to happen Northamptonshire's Edge of Care offer will be robust, outwards-reaching and family-based. When staying at home is not possible, children will live with nurturing and supportive families. If they cannot live in a family home (fostering or kinship arrangement) they will live in a children's home which replicates family life as closely as possible.

In line with care planning regulation and guidance, ongoing consideration will be made to whether children can safely return children to their families or ensure they have a permanent alternative family as soon as possible.

### What we know

*The effectiveness of any Edge of Care response substantially impacts the ability to keep children out of care and prevents more children to return home.*

*Far too frequently Northamptonshire admits children into care without robust family-centred and community-based social work.*

*Once in care many children will remain there for a considerable period of time without sufficient activity to enable children to return home.*

*There is an insufficient number of foster placements to meet current demand.*

*It is essential to ensure that the fostering service effectively and locally meets the needs of children to be placed in care in a setting that is as close to normal family life as possible.*

**What we have done so far**

- Northamptonshire has introduced a Best Match process within the Placement Management Service to help find the right placement for each individual child or young person.
- Introduced Assistant Director level approval for taking children over the age of 14 into Care and Director sign off for all out of county placements to ensure rigorous challenge and visibility when these decisions are being made.
- Established and lead on the East Midlands Framework, which offers a list of providers to approach to try and find the best match for children and young people.
- Sought to recruit a wider variety of foster carers to offer a variety of family environments for children and young people.
- Released funds to recruit a family finder post within the Fostering Service to seek to place more children in permanent foster homes.
- Held market events with providers to share the needs of Northamptonshire's children and seek to recruit providers who can meet these needs in the most appropriate way.
- Established block contracts for residential placements, which has enabled Northamptonshire to bring more children back in county; enabling them to be closer to their own families and networks.
- A programme has been established that uses Multi Systemic Therapy for Family Integrated Transitions (MST-FIT) in a phased approach, starting with residential support for the young person then support in the family home, with the goal to stabilise placements and reunify families where possible.

**Key Priorities for Sufficiency**

1. All children have a right to a family life and wherever possible they will be supported to live with their parents or family.
  - a. In order to strengthen the approach to keeping children at home, Northamptonshire will develop its Edge of Care service.
  - b. In particular develop a stronger edge of care and assessment response for adolescents.
  - c. Strengthen social work practice through implementing and embedding "Signs of Safety" to ensure an approach that is strengths-based.
  - d. Implement the Target Operating Model to allow for localised and joined up delivery of services to children and families.
  - e. Increase the number of children and young people who can return home from care successfully.
2. Where children and young people cannot stay at home, all of Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be placed within family environments wherever possible.
  - a. Increase the number of in-house Foster Carers available.
  - b. Conduct an audit of in-house foster care provision with a view to understanding what can be offered and plan how the gaps might be remedied.
  - c. Review in-house residential placement supply to look at whether there is the scope and variety of places required.
  - d. Reduce the number of children and young people in residential settings.
  - e. Reduce the number of children and young people in agency placements.

## The right place to live

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### The Vision

Northamptonshire wants all children and young people to live in good placements both in care and when they leave care. Within these placements it is expected that children feel safe and supported and can remain there for as long as they need to. Children in Care must receive information about their placement in advance and will be listened to if they have concerns about it at any time.

### What we know

*In common with other areas, the majority of Children in Care in Northamptonshire are in a foster placement (70%). The England and statistical neighbour average in March 2016 was 74% and 73% respectively.*

*Just over half (56%) of all foster placements are made with in-house Foster Carers. This is a contrast with national data (2016) showing that 66% of children in foster care were living in local authority placements.*

*In July 2017, a quarter of all Children in Care (24%) were placed out of county, with 195 of those being placed over 20 miles from their home (19%) compared to Statistical Neighbour average for 2015-16 which was 13%.*

*Of these 195 children, 65% are in agency placements compared with 44% of Children in Care overall; 43% of children placed out of county are in residential placements compared with only 9% of Children in Care overall; and 52% of children placed out of county have been in care for more than 2 years compared with 40% of all Children in Care.*

### **What we have done so far**

- Introduced a Best Match process within the Placement Management Service to help find the right placement for each individual child or young person.
- Introduced a quality assurance process for referrals being made to the Placements Team to ensure that all the required information is available to the Team to find that Best Match.
- Introduced the principle of a Placement Brokerage Officer into the Placements Team to put more resource into getting the right placement and this will be built on further as it is embedded.
- Implemented a quality and monitoring timetable to review the quality of placements; and a standard outcomes monitoring tool is now used in these reviews. This tool has been reviewed and extended to now include additional information including review of missing episodes, outcomes being achieved by and for children and staff consistency in the placement.
- The East Midlands Framework is reopened annually to increase the capacity and variety of placements available.
- Established a Placement Outcomes Review Group where individual placements are regularly reviewed, key issues identified by a panel of professionals and chaired by an Assistant Director to ensure accountability and robust leadership.
- The organisation has been working on implementing “Staying Put” and “Staying Close,” and the Leaving Care Strategy includes the development of a policy on staying put.

### **Key Priorities for Sufficiency**

3. All of Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be placed in County, unless there are valid and extenuating circumstances that demand an Out of County response.
  - a. Reduce the number of children and young people with an out of county placement.
  - b. Develop appropriate placement options in county for those young people that are most difficult to place.
  - c. In particular, develop a wider range of options for adolescents taken into Care or at Edge of Care.
4. All of Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be in placements that meet their needs (including meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children; and ensuring different care types needed are available).
  - a. Increase the range and complexity of needs that can be met by Foster Carers through robust training.
  - b. In particular, focus recruitment and training for Foster Carers who can support older children with more complex needs and parent and baby provision.
  - c. Develop specialist foster care positions to provide improved direct support for children with most complex needs including children with mental health issues.
  - d. Develop more appropriate options to respond to sibling groups where appropriate.
  - e. Increase the services available responding to emergency protection orders and crisis placement requirements.

## The right to achieve

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### Vision

As Corporate Parent, Northamptonshire believes that all Children in Care have the right to be the best they can. Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. Children in Care and Care Leavers face many challenges as they grow up and develop in care, then move to independence; and colleagues across all services must work together to ensure that our young people have the same opportunities as their peers. Northamptonshire commits to value the strengths, gifts and talents of children and young people and encourage their aspirations. As part of this, suitable and accessible education is an entitlement and not just one element of support.

### What we know

*In 2016, 38% of Children in Care were attaining expected standards or above in KS2 reading, writing and maths, compared to a national average of 24% and a statistical comparator of 25%.*

*In terms of Children in Care who achieved the equivalent of at least A\* to C grades at GCSE English and Maths, however, Northamptonshire's performance is well below the national average and below that of its statistical neighbours (17% and 18% respectively).*

*Whilst in 2015 nearly 15% of Children in Care Northamptonshire achieved A\* to C grades in English and Maths GCSEs; in 2016 this had dropped to only 10%.*

Completion of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) increased substantially last year from 68% in 2015/16 to 90% in 2016/17.

Large numbers of the care population have an identified special educational need (SEN) and they are disproportionately represented in a comparison with all pupils in Northamptonshire, with 11% of girls and 20% of boys having a Statement or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in March 2017.

A further 16% of girls and 21% of boys required SEN support in 2016/17.

In the wider cohort for all pupils, 2.8% of pupils nationally have statements/EHCPs, and 11.6% SEN support, and for all Northamptonshire pupils it's 2.5% and 9.8% respectively; compared to 31% and 37% in Northamptonshire's Children in Care.

The increase in the proportions of SEN for males has been significantly higher than in females. Whilst increase between 2014/15 to 2016/17 was only 1% for females, the number of EHCPs for male increased by 6%; similarly for SEN support, whilst the increase for females was 4%, the number of males that required SEN support increased by 9% over the same time period.

In the last 3 published years of information there has been a decrease in the percentage of Children in Care with at least one fixed term exclusion, from 13.6% in 2013 to 10.3% in 2015. This compares favourably to the national average, which went from 10.3% in 2013 to 10.4% over the same period.

In terms of absences, 9.3% of Children in Care are classed as having persistent absence (missing over 10% of lessons in a year) compared to a national average of 9.1% and statistical neighbour average of 8.5%.



**What we have done so far**

- Successfully recruited to the role of Head of Virtual School and now have a substantive Head Teacher in place for the first time in over two years.
- Begun to expand the Virtual School team which will enable greater focus on the educational progress and attainment of Children in Care.
- The Virtual Head is working strategically with key services and partners to highlight and address identified priorities in order that Northamptonshire can together improve educational stability and quality for Children in Care.
- A Looked After Children NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) focus group has been established, giving a greater concentration on Children in Care who have disengaged from education and training.
- The organisation's NEET contract has been reoriented to support vulnerable learners and, as part of this, Children in Care of statutory school age at risk of becoming NEET and Care Leavers who are NEET are supported.

**Key Priorities for Sufficiency**

5. All placements will be close enough to the child's community to enable them to remain at their school and involved in their networks.
  - a. Work to reduce the number of school/education changes that take place for children and young people (linked to Priority 3).
6. All of Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be in receipt of their entitlement of suitable, full time (25 hours) of education wherever possible.
  - a. Further study to understand the relationship between the exclusion data and the experience of children and young people on the ground.
  - b. Review and improve Early Help offer to Children in Care at point of exclusion.

## The right support

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### Vision

All children need support from a range of adults, from teachers to healthcare professionals. Often, Children in Care have had a poor start in life and may need additional support to live happy lives and achieve their potential. Many of the Children in Care have highly complex needs and behaviours and require individual wrap around support from a number of agencies in order for them to reach their potential. Northamptonshire will provide care which meets each child's unique individual strengths and needs.

### What we know

*In 2015/16, Northamptonshire was achieving only 70% of Initial Health Assessments within the required timescales but in 2016/17 this had increased to 85%, which is the performance target for completion locally.*

*In terms of Review Health Assessments in 2015/16, 92% of assessments were taking place within the required timescales in county although recently Northamptonshire has witnessed a decline in performance with only 82% achieved in August 2017.*

*Figures show a decrease in the number of dental checks with only 57% of our Children in Care having their teeth checked by a Dentist in August 2017, compared to 76% last year.*

*According to Northamptonshire JSNA data from March 2016, the county is below statistical neighbours for health checks and dental checks.*

Analysis of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) (which is a short behavioural screening questionnaire that measures psychological wellbeing) shows that 72% of the eligible Northamptonshire Children in Care population had an SDQ score submitted in 2016/17, compared to 68% from the most recent National figures (2014). While this shows a higher completion rate for Northamptonshire, it still means that over a quarter of Children in Care have not been assessed.

In 2016/17, 56% of children and young people scored "normally" in their SDQ, 12% were borderline and 33% were in the range of cause for concern, which is lower than the last recorded national average of 37%. However, this still means that one third of children's wellbeing levels are of concern.

In terms of Children in Care subject to a conviction, final warning or reprimand the year, Northamptonshire was above the national average, above those of statistical neighbours (both at 5%) and above the East Midlands average (6%) at 8% (JSNA, March 2016).

In terms of substance misuse, 10% of Children in Care in Northamptonshire were identified as having a drug problem, over twice the prevalence seen nationally, regionally and related to statistical neighbours (all at 4%).

There is insufficient access to respite or outreach support services.

Anecdotally it has been noted that Northamptonshire does not always have the right support in place for Children in Care to help them recover from early trauma, which could exacerbate placement breakdowns.

In terms of completion rates for Independent Return Interviews (which are conducted when a child in care goes missing), whilst improvements have been seen, these remain lower than we expect (ranging from 52% to 63% over the past 6 months).

**What we have done so far**

- Northamptonshire has restructured the CAMHS LAC offer into an integrated approach to health and wellbeing, including administrators from both organisations, building on the co-located practices already in place. The Integrated Health and Wellbeing Service for Looked After and Adopted Children brings together the physical health, mental health and administrative roles and functions of the services for LAC.
- A Named Nurse for LAC was appointed and supports and facilitates clinical practice relating to Children in Care which is consistent with current professional standards and promotes best practice.
- The ATLAS panel (Associated Teams for Looked after Services) has been running successfully and is a multi-agency group with representatives from health, education and social care. A range of interventions are offered to support the management of behaviours underpinned by attachment issues in our looked after children.
- Health providers have successfully completed the provision of health passports for all the identified children leaving care (in the reporting year 2016/17).
- A Placement Outcomes Review Group (PORG) has been established where placements of concern are reviewed by a multi-agency panel, chaired by an Assistant Director, allowing for identification of key issues and clear escalation. This panel includes Social Care, Placements, Education, Health and Independent Reviewing Officer representation.
- Introduced an “uplift” process within the Placements Service to enable Social Workers to request changes to the care package in place.
- To further enable getting the right support to children Northamptonshire has recently adopted a new commissioning process where Commissioning will source and arrange spot purchases required. A Children and Families Framework will be implemented to allow a more streamlined process through which to secure the services required.
- Developed the “in-house” Independent Visitors (IV) service to improve and standardise the IV offer; and produced a handbook for IVs.
- Young Northants has been successfully launched and has a section dedicated to children coming into care and Care Leavers giving information about what they can expect, what they are entitled to and support available to them.

**Key Priorities for Sufficiency**

7. Northamptonshire will provide all children with good quality wrap around care and provide excellent support to the people who care for them on a daily basis.
  - a. Implement the children and families operational framework to allow for sufficient support services to be accessed in a timely manner.
  - b. Review the provision of engagement programmes, youth services in the county and access to positive adult role models for Children in Care to increase levels of engagement and raise aspirations.
  - c. Work will continue on Northamptonshire's in-house Independent Visitors offer and improvements will be driven forward for the commissioning of provision for those children and young people placed out of county.

## The right to a positive transition

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### Vision

All young people leaving care will be better prepared and supported to live independently. Care Leavers will have improved access to education, employment and training opportunities; should achieve financial stability, be housed suitably and will have improved access to health support. Northamptonshire's Care Leavers will experience stability in their lives, feel safe and secure and will be supported to become aspirant, resilient, confident and responsible citizens.

### What we know

*In 2016/17, 42% Care Leavers aged 17-21 were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), against a national performance of 48% and statistical neighbour comparator of 42.2%. This was an increase from the previous year of 10%. Results as of August 2017 show that 56% of young people now aged 17-21 (who were looked after when aged 16) are in employment, education or training.*

*At March 2017, 70% Care Leavers aged between 17 and 21 were evidenced to be in suitable accommodation compared to only 63% in 2015/16. However with Northamptonshire's statistical neighbour at 75% and the national rate of 81% it is clear there is further work to do.*

*Young people with up-to-date Pathway Plans has increased from 80% in 2015/16 to 87% in 2016/17; with results at August 2017 showing this performance has been maintained at 87%.*

*In terms of Personal Advisors (PAs), 99.5% of Children in Care and Care Leavers aged 16+ have a PA.*

### **What we have done so far**

- Implemented an Independent Supported Accommodation Framework to offer more options in terms of placing young people who are ready and able to grow their independence and be prepared for adult life.
- Introduced a Transitions Panel that works at case-level; however cases often go to panel too late so this is still identified as an area of improvement. The Placement Management Service now sit on this panel supporting planned transitions to adulthood.
- Joint training has been completed with Leaving Care Team, Social Care Teams and Housing staff at the district and borough councils on 16+ and leaving care protocol.
- To provide a seamless model of care and support onto independence for leaving care young people Northamptonshire has initiated a project, invested in a property and developed a specification for Belinda Ferrison House, which will offer accommodation and support across 19 flats for leaving care young people from 17 years plus as part of their planned move to independence.
- A Staying Close pilot is taking place and once complete will look to expand this work.
- Introduced a contract change around housing benefit where Independent Supported Accommodation providers have to claim housing benefit on behalf of young people.
- Strengthened our Leaving Care Team, however the team are still experiencing challenge regarding capacity due to the change in legislation that means that support for Care Leavers is required for longer.
- Refocused Welford House Children's Home to work with young people preparing for independence through the development of a transition programme.

### **Key Priorities for Sufficiency**

8. All of Northamptonshire's Care Leavers will be supported to achieve independence.
  - a. Deliver the Belinda Ferrison House service.
  - b. Develop a new Independent Supported Accommodation framework.
  - c. Implementation of changes in accordance with the Children and Social Work Act.
  - d. Increase numbers of Care Leavers "Staying Put."

## The right to a well-planned service with strong leadership and governance

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### Vision

All children have the right to the best possible nurturing care which reflects their unique identity, meets all their needs and helps them to achieve their potential. This can only be achieved through effective multi-agency service planning and service development through listening to the voice of children and young people.

### What we know

*Referrals to Social Care in Northamptonshire (per 10,000 children aged under 18 years) are twice that of national figures and double that of statistical neighbours*

*Re-referrals to Social Care (referrals within 12 months of a previous referral) are substantially higher than those seen by other Authorities*

*Advance planning for individual cases and a proactive approach is frequently lacking, leading to crisis and rushed responses; thus far in 2017 (April to August), nearly 10% of placements sourced were emergency fostering or residential.*

*In some cases multi-agency planning is missing. There is currently not enough partnership working on cases across Children's Services, Education and Health.*



### **What we have done so far**

- Work has already started to shape the new Children's Services Organisation, putting the voice of the child in the centre of these developments and ensuring that the role of Corporate Parent is prioritised throughout.
- Improved participation of Children in Care and Care Leavers is taking place and has strengthened their link to leadership and governance. The Director of Children's Services attends all Children in Care Council meetings so that the children and young people have a direct line to and are heard by the highest levels of the organisation.
- Inductions for all new Councillors include training on the role of Corporate Parents and more widely on the intricacies and priorities of Children's Services.
- The leadership team for Children's Services has now been permanently recruited to. This provides stable and robust governance and direction.
- The Placement Management Service now attends the Bed Management Panel for children and young people's mental health beds alongside NHS England, the CCGs and CAMHS to improve our transition planning for children and young people who are due to be discharged from their inpatient setting.

### **Key Priorities for Sufficiency**

9. Northamptonshire partners, through the Corporate Parenting Board, will be held to account for improvements to the local offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
  - a. Improve the governance and scrutiny attached to this strategy and action plan.
  - b. Establish a robust reporting framework to both the Council and Corporate Parenting Board on progress and outcomes.
10. Northamptonshire will have the processes, information systems and infrastructure in place to support achieving the best outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
  - a. Develop systems to enable reliable data and tracking.

## Key Recommendations

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All of the key priorities in this document will be featured in a more detailed sufficiency action plan to ensure we achieve improvements across the county. These priorities, as set out at the end of each section in this strategy, are:

1. All children have a right to a family life and wherever possible they will be supported to live with their parents or family.
2. Where children and young people cannot stay at home, all of Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be placed within family environments wherever possible.
3. All Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be placed in County, unless there are valid and extenuating circumstances that demand an Out of County response.
4. All of Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be in placements that meet their needs (including meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children; and ensuring different care types needed are available).
5. All placements will be close enough to the child's community to enable them to remain at their school and involved in their networks.
6. All of Northamptonshire's Children in Care will be in receipt of their entitlement of suitable, full time (25 hours) of education wherever possible.
7. Northamptonshire will provide all children with good quality wrap around care and provide excellent support to the people who care for them on a daily basis.
8. All of Northamptonshire's Care Leavers will be supported to achieve independence.
9. Northamptonshire will have the processes, information systems and infrastructure in place to support achieving the best outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
10. Northamptonshire partners, through the Corporate Parenting Board, will be held to account for improvements to the local offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

As with any document this strategy will only be of benefit if it is owned (and the associated actions monitored and driven) by key decision makers and used to inform service planning and development.

Consequently, the Corporate Parenting Board will be responsible for the oversight and challenges of the progress against the strategy and plan. The Corporate Parenting Board will ensure that these are living documents that are regularly revised and refined as knowledge and understanding of the needs of Children in Care in Northamptonshire develop.