

Looked After Children & Leaving Care Strategy 2017 – 2020

Summary version November 2017

a mile
in my shoes



For review November 2018



Foreword

We want Bexley to be one of the best places for all our children and young people to grow up and we want them to have the best possible start in life.

Children and young people, who are not able to live with their families, whether for long or short periods, or sometimes permanently, face more challenges than most. When they feel safe, secure, cared for, understood and happy, looked after children can thrive and succeed. When they leave our care, they can go on to lead, independent and fulfilled lives.

We are trying hard to serve our looked after children and care leavers well and to support them as well as any good parent would. We have improved our help and care over the past year, but there is still more to do.

Our challenge now is threefold. When children become looked after, we do not want them to become more disadvantaged. We want to make sure, that where possible and when in their best interests, they can safely and happily return to their families. But when children remain in our care, we want to make sure that we are providing the care and support we would want for our own children. When they become young adults, we want to be sure that they can excel at work or in education, have positive relationships and stable lives in warm and comfortable housing. We need to be even more ambitious and work to make a real and lasting difference to their lives, present and future.

The strategy sets out our five 'good for me' priorities to improve the lives of looked after children and care leavers. It has relationships at its heart. When looked after children and young people talk about what makes a difference for them it is always about people and relationships. They talk about the carer who made them feel safe and loved; a social worker who listened to them, a headteacher who believed in them and helped them to understand something they never had, a personal adviser who sorted out Christmas, an advocate or mentor who valued them for who they were or an adult who simply showed how they held them in their mind and respected them enough to remember something they said last week. We want every looked after child and care leaver to have these sorts of relationships.

Our plan through this strategy is to set out:

- what we are striving for
- what we are doing to get there
- how we will continue to improve
- new ideas we are considering

This strategy is a statement of our intention to continue to collaborate with families, carers, schools, and all professionals, in pursuit of what our looked after children and care leavers need. We have taken strong account of government guidance, including the newly published strategy for care leavers, 'Keep on Caring', and the consultation documents published in October 2017 as part of the Children and Social Work Act requirement for care leavers.

This strategy is a large document published in two parts, this element is a summary of our key priorities for the next three years for the children in our care and care leavers.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in developing this strategy, our staff, carers, partners and residents who do something every day to support and help a looked after child or care leaver.

Councillor Teresa O'Neill,
Leader, London Borough of Bexley

Councillor Philip Read,
*Lead Member for children's services,
London Borough of Bexley*

Councillor John Fuller,
*Lead Member for Education and services
for children, London Borough of Bexley*

Gill Steward, Chief Executive, *London
Borough of Bexley*

Jacky Tiotto,
*Director of children's services
London Borough of Bexley*



Foreword from the Young Director

I am really excited to be the Apprentice Young Director of Children's Services and to be part of the working group who will deliver this strategy over the next three years. The commitment to looked after children and care leavers in Bexley set out in this strategy is heartening. I want to make every journey through care a good one and ensure that our voices are heard and they continue to help drive the changes that will make that happen.

Shannon, Young Director



1. Our looked after children told us in 2017.....

Over the Summer of 2017 the Young Director undertook some engagement work with looked after children. A survey for under 11's and another for over 11's was used to gain some insight into how young people felt we had delivered on our Bexley Pledge that we had included in our previous Strategy for Looked after Children. A summary of their comments is listed below.

"My social worker listens to me and helps me when he can"

"My social worker is the best"

"I want my IRO and social worker to help me in my life"

"I don't know who my IRO is"

"My social worker does not see me much"

"I have had 19 social workers, it is horrible when things change and you have put your trust in people and worse when nobody lets you know it is happening"

"I rely on my foster carer to let me know when I have contact with my sisters as I have never been spoken to about it"

"I am not involved in the plan for me, I don't really understand it"

"I want to do more activities after school and play with my friends"

"I want to go to clubs after school and on the weekend"

"I want more informal time with my social worker"

"I feel happy and well cared for".

Some of the actions from this engagement work included reviewing the Bexley Pledge and the way in which we engage young people. Positive Journey's, the new children in Care Council was launched in early May 2017 along with a new set of Good for me priorities, developed by them. These are included in section 6 of the strategy and we will seek views from Positive Journeys over the lifetime of this strategy to see how they feel we are doing in delivering on those commitments.

2. Our independent reviewing officers told us in 2017.....

We have 5 permanent Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) who have been with Bexley for between 2-10 years. This means that all our looked after children have had named IROs for a significant period of the time they have been in our care. Over the past year our work with young people told us that they wanted us to:

"Help me to understand my past"

In 2017 we reviewed our consultation forms and introduced feedback forms for their reviews. This has increased their involvement in preparing for their reviews and the IRO's have reported that more children and young people are telling them that they understand their care plans and feel that they have been listened to.

"Be there for me when I'm happy or sad"

- Children and young people were concerned about their social workers being changed without them being made aware until the new social worker visited them. They did not want to keep telling their story to new people. This has improved because we now have a dedicated service for looked after children and care leavers, and 85% of our staff are now permanently employed in Bexley. IRO's are saying that relationships between social workers and young people have improved which they observed when undertaking reviews and with improved social work reports.
- As the population of the children we look after become older, young people were contacting their IRO's with concerns about moving placements and arrangements for leaving care. This has been addressed by the IRO's working closely with Looked after Children service managers to ensure the voice of the child is heard and moves are well planned and understood by everyone including families where this is in the children's best interests.
- More recently, a group of very settled young people have requested that the visits by their social workers are reduced, as they find them intrusive into their family lives with their carers. They feel their significant relationships do not have to be with the social worker. The IRO's have advocated on their behalf and also signposted them to our advocacy service the National Youth Advisory Service to give them support in making such a request, which we will take seriously.

“Help to keep me safe, succeed in school and understand how to lead a healthy life”

We have had positive feedback on using signs of success in the review process where safety, education and health are discussed regularly at reviews. With well managed caseloads, the IRO’s have become more involved in additional meetings for children and young people when they have gone missing, placement disruptions and education and resource panel discussions. In addition, the IRO’s have been able to be available for consultation and been able to provide guidance and advice on practice issues.

3. Our local context

At the end of September 2017, our rate of looked after children, per 10000 of the population was 43. This is positively below the England average and among the lowest of our statistical neighbour authorities. It means that we look after approximately 262 children at any one time. This position reflects our strategic intention, which is to work closely and collaboratively with families in difficulty, so that their capacity to parent is strengthened and children remain with them where it is in their best interests and it is safe enough.

Since 2015, the rate and number of looked after children has safely reduced in response to a number of new initiatives including, the development of a ‘staying together’ service, helping families in crisis, improved longer term planning and stronger management oversight focused on children’s futures. Still in development over the next two years, is our ‘back together’ service, supporting the reunification of children home through a clear plan to support parents to change and a ‘pioneer’ fostering scheme providing intensive help for adolescents who have come into our care.

This strategy sets out our continued intention to work alongside families to enable them to strengthen and their communities to actively support children and young people. When we do look after children, we will make sure we have experienced social workers to help and support them, an adequate number of families who can offer permanent alternatives for them and exemplary provision when they leave our care.



Data: End of September 2017

Number of Children Looked After:	252
Male	151
Female	101

Ages:	Number	Percentage
Under 1	15	6.0%
Aged 1 - 4	20	7.9%
Aged 5 - 9	33	13.1%
Aged 10 - 15	102	40.5%
Aged 16+	82	32.5%
	252	100%

Ethnicity:	Number	Percentage
White British	135	53.6%
White Irish	2	0.8%
Any other White background	11	4.4%
White and Black Caribbean	8	3.2%
White and Black African	7	2.8%
White and Asian	1	0.4%
Any other mixed background	11	4.4%
Any other Asian background	14	5.6%
Black Caribbean	5	2.0%
Black African	35	13.9%
Any other Black background	3	1.2%
Chinese	2	0.8%
Any other ethnic group	15	6.0%
Unborn	3	1.2%
	252	100%

Children with a disability		
Yes	25	9.9%
No	227	90.1%

Children with Special Educational Needs	Number	Percentage
EHCP/Statement	44	17.5%
Special Educational Needs Support	34	13.5%
No Special Educational Needs Support	143	56.7%
Not of School Age	31	12.3%

Average length of time looked after	36.3 Months
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Status:	Number	Percentage
Unaccompanied and seeking asylum	30	11.9%

Where do our young people live?	Number	Percentage
Foster Families	184	73.0%
Residential - Schools	4	1.6%
Residential - Homes	22	8.7%
Residential - Secure accommodation and/or remand	2	0.8%
Live at home - placed with own parents	1	0.4%
Independent Living	36	14.3%
Family centre or mother and baby unit	1	0.4%
Placed for adoption	2	0.8%
	252	100%

2016 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis:	
Number of Children Looked After of School Age:	147

2016 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis:	Bexley	National
Key Stage 2 Attainment Cohort	11	2820
Reading, Writing & Maths combined EXS+	27%	25%
Key Stage 2 Progress Cohort	10	2570
Average KSI-2 Progress Reading	0.4	-0.5
Average KSI-2 Progress Writing	-3.0	-1.0
Average KSI-2 Progress Maths	-3.5	-1.3

From 2016, primary progress is reported as a number and continues to measure the attainment from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2. A positive progress number means progress made is better than expected and a negative progress number means progress is less than expected.

2016 Key Stage 4 Exam Analysis:	Bexley	National
Key Stage 4 Attainment Cohort	20	4,890
Attainment 8 Score	18.3	22.8
A*-C in English and Maths GCSEs	20%	17.5%
Key Stage 4 Progress Cohort	15	3,770
Progress 8	-0.85	-1.14

Secondary progress continues to measure the attainment from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4. A positive progress number means progress made is better than expected and a negative progress number means progress is less than expected.

Attending university:	8
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Attendance & Absence 2015-16	
Average attendance:	97.3%

Adoptions:	Number
Adopted in 2015/16	30
Adopted in 2016/17	16
Adopted in 2017/18 YTD	9
Live with special guardians 2015/16	10
Live with special guardians 2016/17	16
Live with special guardians 2017/18 YTD	8

Health:	Number	Percentage
Annual Health Assessments 2015/16		100.0%
Annual Health Assessments 2016/17	164	98.2%
Annual Dental Checks 2015/16		97.7%
Annual Dental Checks 2016/17	144	87.0%
Up to Date immunisations 2015/16		83.9%
Up to Date immunisations 2016/17	140	85.0%
Under 5 years and had a development assessment 2015-16		100.0%

N.B. Only includes Children Looked After in care for 12 months or more

Care Leavers:	
	217
Eligible	70
Relevant	7
Former	140

Number of 16 year olds who will become care leavers in the next two years:	52
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Care leavers who have been contacted within 3 months of birthday:	52
Care leavers who are not in employment, education or training:	18
Care leavers who we are no longer in touch with	2

The definition care leavers includes young people who have left care post 18 but also children who have not left care but have become eligible for support post the age of 18.

Eligible children within the meaning given by paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989. Eligible children are young people aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still being looked after.

Relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A(2) of the children Act are children who are not being looked after by a local authority, but was, before last ceasing to be looked after, an eligible child, and is aged 16 or 17.

Former relevant persons within the meaning given by Section 23C(1) of the Children Act 1989 are young people aged between 18 – 25 who have been either eligible or relevant children or both.

Virtual School results 2017

In 2017 we celebrated some excellent exam results. Our year 6 pupils did really well in their SATs with five of the six who took their SATs exceeding the national benchmark and making above expected progress. Their average scores are above those of Bexley (all children), London (all children) and national (all children). These results put us in the top 10% of virtual schools in England.

Our GCSE results were also very good. For the first year ever we had two pupils gaining four grade 9 results, which is outstanding.

In 2017 English and maths are reported on the grade 1 to 9 scale and all other subjects are on the A* to G scale. A summary of our results is listed below:

Of the 17 pupils	% (number)
Gaining a 4 or higher in English	29% (5)
Gaining a 4 or higher in maths	29% (5)
Gaining a 5 or higher in English	29% (5)
Gaining a 5 or higher in maths	23.5% (4)
Gaining a 4 or higher in English AND maths	23.5% (4)
Gaining a 5 or higher in English AND maths	17.6% (3)
Gaining three other grade 5 or higher	23.5% (4)
Gaining five grade C or 5 or higher including English and maths.	17.6% (3)

In 2017 we had four A-level equivalent students and all four passed their exams with grades that meant they were offered places in their first choice of University. This is a first for our students.

This strategy gives us a strong framework to continue to build on our success, supporting young people to have high aspirations and achieve well at school.



4. Our Vision

In Bexley, we believe that **where it is in children's best interests, they should grow up living with their families** and in communities that they know. **In our work with families**, we are **committed to working collaboratively to strengthen and support the love and care** that is provided by parents, carers and extended family members to their children.

Sometimes, however, children cannot remain with their families, because they are harmed or the risk of their being harmed becomes too great. When this happens, the local authority has a duty to look after them, to keep them safe and to promote their well-being. During these times, we work very closely with families and children because we believe this will help everyone to come to the right decision about what to do next.

Children, who are not able to live with their families, might be in this circumstance for a very short or a longer period. For some, they will not return to live with their parents because to do so would mean that they would suffer further harm, abuse and/or neglect. When **children do become looked after in Bexley, we will work tirelessly to make sure that they are not further disadvantaged** and that **the care we provide is better than the care they had previously received** at home. We will **provide high quality care in a foster family or where necessary, a high quality residential setting.** We expect to make these

alternative **care arrangements as geographically close** as possible to children's families and communities.

We want **children who are looked after to understand the long term plan for them as soon as possible.** We will work hard to **understand their experiences, their wishes and feelings and their hopes for the future.** We will also **work closely with their families to understand the difficulties** they have in looking after their children. We will **carefully consider the help that is available from us to enable them to change** so that their children can return home if it is safe and in their best interests to do so.

Our looked after children and care leavers will have **social workers and personal advisors who spend time with them, understand their needs, build positive relationships with them and ensure they have opportunities and the required support in order to succeed.** These relationships will focus on our looked after children and care leavers understanding the decisions that are being made, why they are being made and when they disagree, they will be able to express their views and have a clear response which they understand.

We will **ask looked after children and care leavers about the relationships they have with us**, including whether we are making a difference in their lives and what we need to do to improve. **We will embrace this feedback and seek it out so that we build honest**



Thoughts from our staff and speakers at our bi-annual conference – A mile in my shoes.

relationships that can be trusted and used to help children to rebuild their lives and futures.

We **prioritise the making of a permanent care arrangement** for children in the shortest time possible and our most senior managers oversee how well this is working for every child.

As any **good parent** would, **we want the children and young people we look after to have the same nurturing experiences as other children.** We want them to have **healthy and happy childhoods, to be safe and to feel secure.** We will make every effort to ensure that they are able to **grow up in a stable and supportive environment with a sense of belonging and identity,** able to follow their chosen religion and customs wherever they are living.

We will **prioritise education, training and employment for looked after children and care leavers.** Our senior managers in **partnership with our Virtual School Headteacher** will oversee the progress children and young people make and the support they are offered to catch up if they have fallen behind. Our **social workers will prioritise relationships with the schools** their children attend and are expected to keep a close watching brief on progress and attainment, intervening where necessary to offer support and guidance.

Our **looked after children will grow and develop into young adults who have a good education, emerging skills to be independent, feel confident about themselves** and are able to reach their full potential. The **transition between being a looked after child and a young care leaver will begin early** and will have our serious attention. When they **leave our care,** our children will be able to **live independently, accepting support** from personal advisors who have **meaningful relationships** with them, so that they are able to have **stable, secure lives and hopeful futures.**

We expect everyone working with looked after children and care leavers, in every agency and every part of our service, to expect the best and go the extra mile to safeguard a looked after child and care leaver and to promote their wellbeing. Our role as corporate parents is significant and far reaching and we will exercise this with commitment and full accountability. We will aim high, share children's aspirations and support them for as long as they need and benefit from our care. 'Staying Put' is a policy and delivery priority for us so that looked after children have the same longer term opportunities to live within families as all children. The government's **'keep on caring'** policy is at the heart of this strategy and our commitments to our looked after children leaving care.

Our **Young Director and Children in Care Council (Positive Journeys)** have important conversations that need to become **more central to our work and decision making.** We want to make sure that both these 'listening and influencing' moments are properly and honestly considered by everyone working with our looked after children and care leavers. **We will be listening more carefully, responding more clearly and improving things more quickly.**



Five 'good for me' priorities – a summary

I. BEING LOOKED AFTER WILL BE 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>i) only in their best interests 'the right children become looked after, good long terms plans are made for them and the length of time they remain in our care is safely reduced'</p>
<p>ii) respecting families and working closely with them 'keeping parents and family members involved in decisions where it is safe to do so, making sure families and carers understand plans for the future, enabling children to have contact with their families when they want and need to and supporting families to change'</p>
<p>iii) building a 'safe network' around children we look after 'managers, social workers, independent reviewing officers, carers and keyworkers spend time planning and thinking together about how to help the children we look after and keep them safe, including making strong responses and plans to protect them if they become unsafe or are at risk of being so'</p>
2. SAFE AND CARING RELATIONSHIPS ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>iv) permanent choices that last 'making permanent and secure plans with looked after children and care leavers about their futures. The plans are understood by them, their families and carers and we work to prioritise stability where looked after children and care leavers are living'</p>
<p>v) listening well, learning from feedback and doing something in response 'on every meeting with looked after children and care leavers, listen to their experiences, wishes and feelings. Take into full account what they are saying and make clear responses that they can understand'</p>
<p>vi) strong relationships that help recovery 'our work and the work of carers and keyworkers with looked after children and care leavers, helps them to understand and recover from the harm they have suffered'</p>
3. EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SAFE BEHAVIOURS ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>vii) health matters 'looked after children and care leavers physical, emotional and psychological health is prioritised by social workers, keyworkers and carers'</p>
<p>viii) education, employment, training and learning matter 'looked after children and care leavers schooling, learning and skills are prioritised by social workers, keyworkers, carers and the virtual school'</p>
<p>ix) If I have a special educational need or disability 'looked after children and care leavers who have special needs and/or disabilities, understand the help they will receive, the plans for their futures and their progress is closely and regularly assessed'</p>
<p>x) running away and being a missing person 'looked after children and care leavers who run away or who go missing are considered by managers, social workers, carers and keyworkers as being at risk of harm or significant harm. The action we take will recognise this degree of risk at all times'</p>
<p>xi) crime, violence and gangs 'looked after children and care leavers who are at risk of or who are involved in crime, violence or are associated with or are gang members, benefit from effective support from youth offending colleagues and good partnerships with the police and local justice system'</p>
4. BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL, INDEPENDENT, SECURE AND SAFE ADULT IS 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>xii) leaving care and living independently 'young people leaving our care as adults are given the early support they need to continue to be independent and to sustain independence, choice and control of their lives. This includes 'staying put' if that is in their best interests'</p>
<p>xiii) housing, financial stability and things to do 'our care leavers will have access to high quality accommodation that any good parent would expect for their child/ren. We will make sure they do not become homeless and they will have also have access to resources to support their hobbies and interests'</p>
<p>xiv) staying safe from harm 'our care leavers will be protected from the further harm and abuse caused by criminal and sexual exploitation, drugs, trafficking and being targeted by organised 'county lines'.</p>
5. SOCIAL WORKERS WHO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>xv) how well we do things and the difference we make 'the quality of our professional practice with looked after children and care leavers will be exceptional, being characterised by relationships that make a positive and enduring difference for them and sustain over time'</p>

Our 'GOOD FOR ME' priorities and actions

I. BEING LOOKED AFTER WILL BE 'GOOD FOR ME'

Priority i) only in their best interests:

'children become looked after because it is right for them, good long terms plans are made for them and the length of time they remain in our care is safely reduced'

We will:

- identify children and young people on the edge of care, supporting their families and preventing the need for them to become looked after when this is in their best interests.
- build positive working relationships with families, using a the strengths based approach, 'Signs of Safety' with support from the 'Staying Together' specialist team who work alongside the allocated social worker in response to crises, helping families to remain together around their children.
- utilise the senior management oversight and support available at the resource and care panel to make the right decisions about children becoming looked after.
- work relentlessly to ensure we look after the right children, assessing well and regularly, making plans that focus on children's futures and reviewing those plans with integrity.
- ensure that senior managers, reviewing officers, team managers and social workers collaborate together and with other professionals and agencies to develop, oversee and implement ambitious plans, including reunification where this is agreed, for looked after children and care leavers.
- reunify children and young people with their families where this is identified as being in their best interests.

Priority ii) respecting families and working closely with carers:

'keeping parents and family members involved in decisions where it is safe to do so, making sure families and carers understand plans for the future, enabling children to have contact with their families when they want and need to and supporting families to change'

We will:

- develop and maintain positive working relationships with parents and important family members identified by the child /children in accordance with their care plan.
- provide clearly written care plans to parents, families and children where this is in everyone's best interests.
- promote, support, facilitate and review contact between the child/children and their key family members, making sure that children's views and wishes about this contact is well explored, understood and taken into full account.
- help parents to change and create solutions so that children can be safely reunited when this is in their best interests and they can flourish living at home.
- commit to looked after children, living as close to home as possible, where this is in their best interests.
- provide family therapy through the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), 'Positive Parenting and discipline' with our Think Family Service and specialist support from the 'Back Together' social work service to strengthen the support, love and care that families give to their children.

Priority iii) building a 'safe network' around children we look after:

'managers, social workers, independent reviewing officers, carers and keyworkers spend time planning and thinking together about how to help the children we look after and keep them safe including making strong responses and plans to protect them if they become unsafe or are at risk of being so'

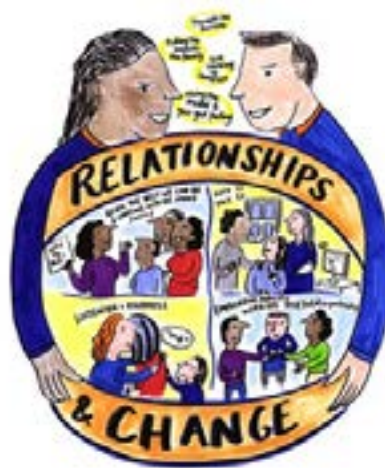
We will:

- work closely as a professional team when we look after children or when they leave our care to make sure everyone is clear about what is working, what we are worried about and our next steps set out in the care or pathway plan.
- respond quickly when children we are looking after are in difficulty where they are living, making sure that rapid looked after children or care leaver reviews are established so that stability can be prioritised and the needs of children and young people are recognised and met.

Care is just a SYSTEM give them the SPACE OF TIME with ONE social worker!



2. SAFE AND CARING RELATIONSHIPS ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'



Priority iv) permanent choices that last:

'making permanent and secure plans with looked after children and care leavers about their futures. The plans are understood by them, their families and carers and we work to prioritise stability where looked after children and care leavers are living'

We will:

- achieve legal permanence for looked after children in a timeframe that is in their best interest, where it is identified that the child or children will not be able to return to their birth parents.
- enable brothers and sisters to live together wherever possible and in their best interests. When it is not possible, we will assess and promote positive and lasting relationships through regular contact and review.
- ensure that if legal permanence is not achievable, looked after children have good quality foster families to live with and carers offering them love and support for the remainder of their minority with the option to 'stay put' if that is in their best interest and is what they would like to happen.
- make sure that looked after children living in residential establishments are also helped to focus on their future hopes and dreams and can say that there are permanent plans for them that they understand.
- prioritise children living in residential settings to make sure that they have the same possibility of permanence away from residential care if that is what they want and it is in their best interests.
- provide looked after children living in residential settings with access to independent visitors, the work of Positive Journeys and events that are hosted by the Council as corporate parents.
- Consult with care leavers about the development of an initiative enabling them to stay in touch with an adult who they consider has helped them significantly, including staying put, mentoring and personal advisors who may provide them with additional support.

Priority v) listening well, learning from feedback and doing something in response:

'on every meeting with looked after children and care leavers, listen to their experiences, wishes and feelings. Take into full account what they are saying and make clear responses that they can understand'

We will:

- learn to listen to the words that our children and young people use about their experiences so that we can try to help them well, think about what they say and make sure we hold this in mind when we are together.
- ask children and young people regularly, if we are making a difference to their lives and ask what they would like us to do differently.
- promote and support children and young people to actively participate in the reviews about their care, making sure that they have contributed fully to the plans for their care and futures.
- use the feedback we receive from children, young people, care leavers, carers and their families to improve and design our services.
- promote membership of Positive Journeys, making sure the feedback is part of our system and is something with which children and young people want to and do engage.
- establish a care leaver advisory forum, with dedicated leadership from a personal adviser and our dedicated participation officer with good oversight from senior managers, to ensure that the important developments in this strategy are undertaken safely, in good time and with young people's best interests at the heart.

Priority vi) strong relationships that help recovery:

‘our work and the work of carers and keyworkers with looked after children and care leavers, helps them to understand and recover from the harm they have suffered’

We will:

- remember that when children and young people cannot live with their families, this will be painful and difficult to understand. We have to help them to manage this hurt and the memories they may have about the abuse and neglect they have experienced. They have to get better when they are looked after by us.
- provide support and partnership for all our carers and keyworkers so that they can also understand the experiences of children and young people and use this knowledge to help them as they grow up.
- ask our care leavers who are young adults, what type of and whether they need specific support to help them manage the experiences of their childhoods.

3. EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SAFE BEHAVIOURS ARE ‘GOOD FOR ME’

Priority vii) health matters:

‘looked after children and care leavers physical, emotional and psychological health is prioritised by social workers, keyworkers and carers’

We will:

- ensure that all looked after children and care leavers are registered with a GP and have regular health checks.
- ensure looked after children and care leavers are registered with a dentist and have regular dental check ups and treatment where it is required.
- ensure looked after children and care leavers have or have had all their immunisations
- ensure that looked after children and care leavers have regular sight checks with a registered optician.
- ensure the sexual health of looked after children and care leavers is considered and discussed by social workers, keyworkers and carers.

- ensure that looked after children and care leavers can access mental health support when they need it, regardless of where they live and that if they score highly on the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ), an urgent consultation meeting is called with the CAMHS team and the allocated social worker.
- ensure that waiting times for access to mental health services are reduced, appointment times are improved and senior managers regularly review these services to make sure they are delivering effectively.
- focus specifically on the possibility of care leavers becoming lonely, isolated or lacking in confidence and provide good support if this starts to happen, including referring to and discussing vulnerable care leavers with adult social care services and local health colleagues.
- ensure that young people leaving our care are given their health history and a copy of their last health assessment.
- provide robust and effective management oversight and leadership to looked after children in transition to care leaving services, especially for those who need help with their mental and psychological health.
- develop effective services and relationships with substance misuse services for care leavers to ensure that there is targeted supported where this is required.
- ensure that unaccompanied asylum seeking children are supported in order to have their immunisations completed and health needs met. Carers and GP’s are notified of outstanding immunisations.
- continue to provide the help and support that our children ‘looked after’ nurse arranges for foster carers.





Priority xiii) education, employment, training and learning matter:

'looked after children and care leavers schooling, learning and skills are prioritised by social workers, keyworkers, carers and the virtual school'

We will:

- provide training and knowledge sessions for all social work staff so that they understand each developmental and curriculum stage and recognise when children are not making their expected levels of progress, intervening actively to help.
- provide good or outstanding early years provision for looked after children, making sure they meet their milestones and achieve good levels of development.
- support parents and carers so that their child's early learning and development is understood.
- try to identify a good or outstanding school for all looked after children such that it meets their needs.
- aim to support a place in a single school to avoid changing schools, if a child moves within Bexley we will try to identify a good or outstanding school for all looked after children such that it meets their needs. If their school needs to change, promote the importance of their education, through the care planning process and in partnership with the virtual school headteacher.
- monitor the progress of all Looked after Children, making sure they make the expected or accelerated levels of progress according to their abilities and prior attainment levels.
- reduce levels of absenteeism at school whether intermittent, persistent or complete absence, taking rapid action when this is identified.
- reduce the number of looked after children who are excluded from school on a fixed term basis, working in close partnership with schools and headteachers. There must be no permanent exclusions from school for looked after children.
- work in partnership with schools and Special Educational Needs colleagues to prioritise the early identification of any special need or disability and to make sure the proper assessment is made quickly so that support and equipment is provided to our looked after children.
- work closely with the virtual headteacher, to make sure that the Pupil Premium is used to provide additional support (especially for english and maths), clearly specified in the personal education plan so that looked after children achieve good educational outcomes.
- provide early advice to looked after children from year 9, making sure that they access information, work experience, advice and guidance about skills, subject and career options.
- Use our specialist personal adviser for employment, training and learning to advise the teams about our responsibilities and opportunities for care leavers and looked after children.
- provide access to the Council's apprenticeship scheme at least one year before our looked after children and care leavers become eligible, making sure that the apprenticeship levy benefits our young people.
- consider the Council developing the Personal Adviser Apprenticeship to offer former care leavers the opportunity to train and become an Adviser.
- develop an internship scheme for looked after children and care leavers to support transition from education to employment.
- develop an education, employment and training passport, so that looked after children and care leavers know what is available to them, what support will be offered and how to make progress towards the pathway of their choice.
- develop as part of the local offer for care leavers, links with the Government's National Network for the education of care leavers, <https://www.nnecl.org/>
- work in partnership with local skills colleagues to access job centre plus options, including the possibility of surgeries or a regular presence in the leaving care service from a specialist job centre coach or adviser.

Priority ix) If I have a special educational need or disability:

'looked after children and care leavers who have special needs and/or disabilities, understand the help they will receive, the plans for their futures and their progress is closely and regularly assessed'

We will:

- actively promote the special educational needs of looked after children, including when they live with a disability, making sure that their education, health and care plans set out an effective pathway towards success and independence.
- seek and obtain feedback using creative tools to work with children who have different ways of communicating.
- work in close partnership with the special educational needs officers and the placement team, so that children are well matched to the local places they will live and the local schools where they will be educated.
- maintain education, health and care plans until looked after children and care leavers are aged 25, so that their transitions to employment or further/higher education are well supported and they are helped to achieve their level 3 and higher qualifications.
- support the families and carers of children living with a disability, so that they can remain fully involved in their children's lives where this is in the child's best interest.
- provide a wide range of short breaks to our looked after children living with a disability so that their carers are able to have regular respite.

Priority x) running away and being a missing person:

'looked after children and care leavers who run away or who go missing are considered by managers, social workers, carers and keyworkers as being at risk of harm or significant harm. The action we take will recognise this degree of risk at all times.'

We will:

- make our responses to looked after children who are missing, urgent and formal, in order that the risk to them is understood, documented and there is a secure action plan in place to find them quickly.
- work collaboratively with all key agencies and partners, formally reviewing every week with a manager, information and risks about looked after children who are missing.
- consider all the risks and behaviours that are known, so that the possibility of sexual and/or criminal exploitation is quickly realised and urgent action is taken with the police.
- when it is a child's best interest and it is safe to do so, keep parents informed that their child/ren is/are missing and explain the actions that are being taken to find and protect them.
- make sure 'Return home' interviews are requested from NYAS within 72 hours and if an independent advocate is not likely to be the best help for a child or young person, identify the, allocated social worker or a trusted adult who will be able to engage the child/young person to understand why they are running away.
- for looked after children or care leavers who are persistently missing, convene a multi-agency review of the care or pathway plan to ensure that all adults who know the child or young person are able to make decisions about the safety plan and best next steps.
- senior managers to consider a quarterly report from NYAS and the targeted youth team on missing children and to incorporate those recommendations into this strategy twice yearly.



Priority xi) crime, violence and gangs:

'looked after children and care leavers who are at risk of or who are involved in crime, violence or are associated with or are gang members, benefit from effective support from youth offending colleagues and good partnership with the police and local justice system'

We will:

- reduce the number of Looked after Children and care leavers involved in the youth justice system through effective joint working with the Police, Youth Offending Service, Youth Inclusion and Crown Prosecution Service.
- reduce the criminalisation of Looked after Children or care leavers through restorative practice and good joint work with the Youth Offending Team.
- ensure that the most suitably qualified members of staff within the Youth Offending Service are supporting looked after children to reduce their offending behaviour through effective interventions.
- promote the local protocol for children in custody, ensuring that all social workers and senior managers understand and implement it, taking action to escalate where necessary.

4. BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL, INDEPENDENT, SECURE AND SAFE ADULT IS 'GOOD FOR ME'

Priority xii) Leaving care and living independently (cross refer to the education and employment matters priority)

'young people leaving our care as adults are given the early support they need to continue to be independent and to sustain independence, choice and control of their lives. This includes 'staying put' if that is in their best interests'

We will:

- plan for the transition to adulthood at the age of 17 years so that young people understand the plans for them, they can contribute to and influence decisions about their futures and there is effective collaboration between their social worker and the leaving care personal advisor with support provided up to the age of 25 years.
- plan and work in partnership with housing and adult services to ensure that our care leavers have the support and accommodation they need.
- prioritise 'Staying Put' arrangements where this is in young people's best interests.
- ensure that pathway planning for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people must take account of their immigration status and prioritise outstanding immigration issues with the home office to secure their future plans.
- ensure that provision must be made to support unaccompanied asylum seeking young people who are not given leave to remain, to ensure that they are safe and well cared for whilst plans are made for their departure from the UK.



- collaborate for all care leavers with our specialist personal advisor who assists young people not in education and employment or training and reduce the number of care leavers in Bexley whose life chances are compromised.
- support all care leavers who are to become or are already parents and ensure they are engaged in ante natal, health visitor and social work support.
- provide care leavers with a summary of their health histories and information about how to access health services independently.

Priority xiii) housing, financial stability and things to do:

‘our care leavers will have access to high quality accommodation that any good parent would expect for their children. We will make sure they do not become homeless and they will have also have access to resources to support their hobbies and interests’

We will:

- provide places for looked after children to live when they leave care, where the quality of accommodation, not just the care, is warm and comfortable.
- ensure that all accommodation for care leavers is safe, secure and affordable, including setting out in our entitlements offer, the exemptions that can be considered, e.g. the shared accommodation exemption and the universal credit housing support, from which care leavers are exempt.
- improve the shared housing protocol (including for 16 and 17 year olds), taking full account of the ‘supported accommodation framework’ produced by Barnado’s such that priority housing status is given to all care leavers and if they become homeless, that this status becomes a priority.
- provide access to and support looked after children in taking up a free place on the national citizenship scheme (NCS) only for 16-18 year olds.
- reduce the number of looked after young people and care leavers living in semi-independent accommodation unless it has been assessed as specifically meeting their needs and instead prioritise staying put with carers.

- complete the social needs quota (SNQ) well in advance of a looked after child becoming 18, in order to prepare and plan with housing, the most suitable accommodation, including agreeing clear expectations for them to be treated preferentially in accordance with s166A Housing Act 1996.
- explore options for starting Junior ISAs for all looked after children who are likely to be looked after for over 12 months.
- ensure that the ‘local offer’ for care leavers is developed, make sure that the entitlement to a leaving care grant and higher or further education bursary is included.
- ensure that the development of the local offer should also consider the option for relief of council tax for care leavers, the provision of free travel and also free access to leisure facilities, where such support will help them to become independent and to find and sustain employment.
- offer continued support from personal advisors to assist care leavers in continued success and especially to maintain their tenancy.
- ensure looked after children and care leavers have access to leisure activities in their local communities and where necessary are supported by their carers to attend activities of their choice regardless of disability or where they are living.

Priority xiv): Staying safe from harm

‘our care leavers will be protected from the further harm and abuse caused by criminal and sexual exploitation, drugs, trafficking and being targeted by organised ‘county lines’.

We will:

- develop clear procedures to protect care leavers from criminal or sexual exploitation, working closely with the forum in the way these are written.
- ensure that care leavers who have experienced abuse and exploitation previously, know how to access continued support, feel able to talk to personal advisers if they are at risk and are sure that we will trigger the safeguarding vulnerable adult protection process if they are at risk of or are being harmed.

5. SOCIAL WORKERS WHO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'

Priority xv) how well we do things and the difference we make:

'the quality of our professional practice with looked after children and care leavers will be exceptional, being characterised by relationships that make a positive and enduring difference for them and sustain over time'

We will:

- work to make genuine relationships with our looked after children and care leavers over time, so that they can trust the social workers and personal advisors supporting their care and futures and are able to honestly share their hopes and worries.
- regularly ask how well we are looking after our children and care leavers and whether we are making the right difference for them.
- work closely with carers, families and keyworkers so that we create a network of support and thought around our looked after children and care leavers.

5. 'Keeping on caring' – our local offer for care leavers

We will be working closely with our care leavers to respond to the requirements in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. We will review the information we produce for care leavers and co-produce our Local Offer to ensure care leavers understand what and how they can access all of the support, to which they are entitled. This new legislation gives us an opportunity to reinforce across the organisation the new Corporate Parenting principles and ensure that corporately we are delivering the best outcomes for looked after children and care leavers, through the high aspirations we have set for ourselves in this strategy.



6. Bexley COMMITMENTS

Our “Good for me” commitments are listed below along with ‘99 Ways’, developed by Positive Journeys, our Children in Care Council.

COMMITMENTS

Bexley Looked After Children ‘Our Commitment to you is’

As a Bexley child who is ‘Looked After’ - The following commitments will be ‘good for me’

1. Be there for me when I’m happy or sad

Understanding that I will have good and bad days, but what’s important to me is that I always know you will be there for me, when I need you and be understanding of me when I don’t want you there.

2. Help me to understand my past

As I get older and when the time is right, it is important you help me understand why I am in care, where my family are, and how I can contact them if it is safe enough and in my best interest to do so. It is important for us to have a family tree, a life storybook with photos and text which will help us to talk when processing our past.

3. Help to keep me safe and to understand safe relationships

I will make mistakes and take risks as all children and young people do. But I need you to help me make better choices and keep me as safe as possible from harm and neglect. We need you to build a bond with us so that we feel safe to talk about our feelings. I need you to build a bond with me and for you to be honest about the secrets you can’t keep, like personal secrets or secrets which will cause me or others harm, but tell me clearly what you will do with my secret.

4. Help me succeed at school

My education is important to my future success. As I get older I need your help to identify my future life and career goals, and how my education plans will help meet them. All through my education help me, in turn this will help me

understand the plan for me. I need to know that you will always have my back through my education. It is important that the fact that I am looked after is kept confidential from my school friends, unless I wish to share this.

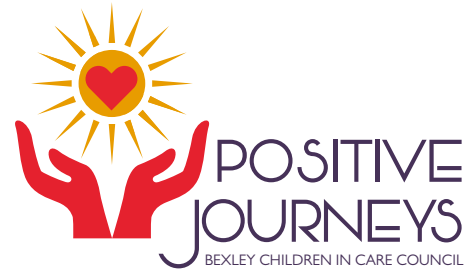
5. Help me to understand how to lead a healthy life

Keeping as healthy and fit as possible is important to me. To help me I need to have regular health and dental check-ups and care, a varied and balanced diet, and regular activities. I also need people talk to me about my health needs as clearly as possible according to my age and understanding to allow me to make informed decisions about my healthcare as I get older.

6. Help me to understand my Rights and Responsibilities

I need to know what my rights and responsibilities are to make my own choices, as I grow older. Even when we do not agree with each other, I still want my views to be heard. This means providing the right people who can support me to say what my views are and that you do not get offended with me when you do not agree with me.

In turn, I know that I must be responsible in how I use my rights and listen when I am given advice, even when I do not accept it.



99 Ways

for professionals to build positive relationships with looked after children and young people and their families in Bexley

1 Love me 2 Be trustworthy 3 **SUPPORT ME** 4 Make time to build strong bonds with me 5 Educate me 6 Listen to me
7 Communicate with me 8 **ALLOW ME TO TALK ABOUT MY DIFFICULTIES**
9 Be kind 10 CARE FOR ME 11 Understand me 12 Do what you say you're going to do 13 **SPEND
QUALITY TIME WITH ME** 14 Make my trips and activities fun 15 Know the little things about me 16 **TALK TO
ME AND HELP ME UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON** 17 Make me feel welcome 18 Tell me
about my past 19 Turn up when you say you will 20 Remember my birthday 21 **FORGIVE ME** 22 Trust me
23 Make sure I receive a letter and photo profiles of the foster family 24 **SUPPORT ME
TO BUILD STRONG BONDS WITH OTHER CHILDREN OF THE FOSTER CARERS** 25 Help me succeed at school
26 Support my career path 27 Support my transition into independence 28 REMEMBER THAT CHRISTMAS
IS PAINFUL 29 **REMEMBER THAT MOTHER'S DAY IS HARD** 30 Remember that
Father's Day is hard 31 Don't prejudge me 32 **See me, not my past** 33 Remember my hobbies 34
REMEMBER WHAT FOOD I LIKE 35 Help me understand why I am looked after 36 Help me contact
my family if it is safe enough and in my best interest to do so 37 **KEEP ME SAFE FROM HARM AND
NEGLECT** 38 Help me make better choices 39 Be understanding of me when I don't want you there 40 Build
a safe network around me of professionals who will care for me 41 **MAKE SECURE AND PERMANENT PLANS
FOR MY FUTURE** 42 Listen to my experiences and respond in ways I can understand
43 Help me recover from the harm I have suffered 44 Take care of my physical health 45 If I have special needs or
disabilities, help me understand the help I will receive 46 **If I go missing or run away,
consider me at risk of harm or significant harm** 47 If I am at risk of involvement in crime,
violence or gangs, provide support for me to work closely with the police 48 Help me to be independent, have
choices and control over my life 49 Be interested in me 50 KEEP ME ALIVE IN YOUR MIND 51 Have
a laugh with me 52 Know how to spell my name 53 **Smile!** 54 **SHOW WARMTH**
55 Love me even when I'm naughty 56 Take me to nice places not just meetings 57 **HAVE FUN WITH ME** 58
Praise my school work 59 Don't keep on changing your mind 60 **TELL ME ABOUT YOU!** 61 Smile from your heart 62
Call me to just say hello! 63 Don't feel sorry for me 64 Don't judge me 65 **Don't judge my
parents** 66 DON'T TALK BAD ABOUT MY PARENTS 67 Be truthful with me 68 Try
to understand me 69 Like me even when I'm naughty 70 Say sorry when you get it wrong 71 Aim high for me
72 Visit my mum when arranged 73 Be kind to my parents 74 Listen to me and my parents
75 Understand my anger 76 Be my champion 77 Forgive me when I upset you 78 **SHARE THE TOUGH
STUFF WITH ME** 79 Remember important dates 80 **DON'T TAKE STUFF PERSONALLY**
81 **DON'T FORGET ME** 82 Share my good stuff with my parents 83 Never use sarcasm 84 Tell us your kids
names 85 LISTEN TO US WHEN WE ARE SILENT 86 Show us how to do our hair 87 Take us to nice
places with our parents for contact 88 **MAKE SLEEPOVERS POSSIBLE** 89 **HELP US TO
SEE OUR SCHOOL FRIENDS** 90 Know what trainers kids wear 91 HELP OUR PARENTS TO KEEP US
SAFE 92 **INCLUDE US IN OUR CARERS HOLIDAYS** 93 **ONLY GIVE US 1 RESPITE CARER** 94 **KNOW
WHAT MUSIC WE LIKE** 95 WATCH TV WITH US 96 GET A TAKEAWAY WITH US 97 DECORATE OUR
ROOM WITH US 98 Take us to the park 99 HELP ME TO HAVE MY FRIENDS OVER FOR TEA

Child Friendly Guide to our Strategy

1. BEING LOOKED AFTER WILL BE 'GOOD FOR ME'

If you tell me why I am in care so I understand.

If you tell me what the plan is – what is going to happen to me now and in the future and let me have a say in that

If I want contact with my family or want to know if they are ok, I can speak to them

If I have one person around me that I trust – not a crowd that I don't know

When you communicate with me, in words I understand



2. SAFE AND CARING RELATIONSHIPS ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'

If I have a say in where I live

When it is up to me whether I attend a meeting or not

When I have a say in my plan and you listen and acknowledge me

When you listen to what I am thinking and help me process what is going on in my head



3. EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SAFE BEHAVIOURS ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'

If you listen to what I need, my well-being is important to me

If you support me in school, make sure my school is where I want to go and it suits me

If I have support to achieve in school and additional help is there if I need it

If you help me set goals to achieve and help me get there



4. BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL, INDEPENDENT, SECURE AND SAFE ADULT IS 'GOOD FOR ME'

I am able to "Stay Put" if I want to and am supported to move to my own place when I am ready

If you help me access all of the support I am entitled to and that I know where to go for help when I am struggling

If you don't judge me when I make bad choices, it doesn't make me a bad person.

Help me find a better path, talk to me don't judge me

5. SOCIAL WORKERS WHO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'

If you are kind, caring and warm. You connect with me and what I am going through.

I need a positive relationship – no more negatives

LOOK AT
BIG + SMALL
DIFFERENCES



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