

Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-2023





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Foreword

We are passionate about supporting children in North Tyneside to grow up in communities that support them to thrive and achieve their full potential. We want them to have happy and safe childhoods that support them to be successful and contented adults.

Sometimes children and young people, are not able to live with their parents, in these circumstances we will always work hard to support the child to live within their family network if this is possible and safe to do so. There are times when children need to be cared for outside of their families, and when this needs to happen we want to make sure that children are offered the best care. We know that when children feel safe, secure, cared for, understood and happy, children can thrive and succeed. This is shown when they leave our care, and they can go on to lead, fulfilled lives supported by lifelong relationships of trust and respect.

We believe that relationships are key to supporting children to thrive and to make sense of the reasons they may be in our care. We try to work openly with children in our care and their families to improve the child's circumstances with our efforts. Being in care should improve a child's circumstances and we need to remain focused that our actions do this for each child. No child should feel disadvantaged by being in care.

We want to make sure, that where possible and when in their best interests, they can safely and happily return to their families. If this is not possible and children remain in our care, we want to make sure that we as corporate parents 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 feel able to achieve their best at work or in education, have positive relationships and stable lives in warm and comfortable housing. We need to be ambitious with them and work to make a real and lasting difference to their lives, with enduring positive relationships.

This strategy has relationships at its heart. When children in our care talk about what makes a difference for them it is the people and relationships, they have been able to make, and sustain, that make the difference.

Our children and young people have told us that the relationships they have made with the people who have cared for them have supported them to gain employment, they have shared with us their first car, and their achievements when graduating, and when becoming successful and loving parents. As corporate parents these achievements and the young people choosing to share them with us, as they mature into their potential, demonstrates the impact of positive relationships and excellent care.

Our challenge is to provide this experience to every child who comes into our care. This strategy is a statement of our intention to continue to work with families, carers, schools, and all professionals, to create the culture in our communities to help children in our care and care leavers get the help and support they need.



Peter Earley
Lead Member for
Children's Services



Paul Hanson
Chief Executive

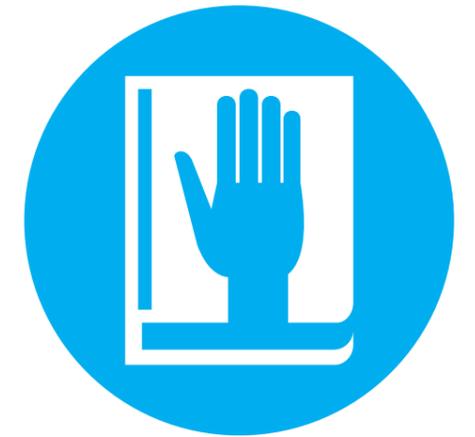


Jacqui Old
Director of Adult
and Children Services



Julie Firth
Assistant Director
Children's Services

Our Pledges



1

We will intervene early with evidence based, family focussed services

2

We will work in partnership to keep children in school

3

We will keep children and young safe at home, healthy and connected to their local communities

Our Vision

In North Tyneside we want to make sure that children only come into our care when they must do so. When they cannot remain with their families, because they are being harmed or the risk of their being harmed becomes too great. We will work relentlessly to support children to remain living with their families, and if a child needs to leave their parents care we will work with the child and their network to support the child to remain living with safe familiar adults.

When children are cared for within their networks, we will support the adults who care for them. We will work with the child and their family to gain a shared understanding of what has happened in their family and why the child has been cared for away from their parents.

We want any child who is unable to live at home to live in a homely and comfortable environment. With care provided by foster carers, or staff teams who are committed to helping them enjoy their childhoods and grow with positive experiences of loving care by trusted and dependable adults.

We want children in our care to have consistent adult support with stable and positive social work relationships so that they don't feel the need to repeat their story. We want them to thrive with adults who have walked beside them during their care journey.

Children in our care and care leavers will be supported to achieve their potential in education with dedicated support and detailed personal education plans. This support will continue into adulthood with specialised support from connexions workers and targeted work across the borough to increase employment and educational opportunities for care leavers.

We want children in our care and care leavers be sure that their voices will be heard on an individual and collective basis. We want all children who need support to be heard and to have access to advocacy. We want to make sure that regardless of communication challenges, language barriers, every child is supported to share their views.

We want to provide the children in our care and care leavers with safe boundaries and loving care provided by all corporate parents to make sure that the care we offer improves their circumstances now and in the future.

We want to make sure that the communities in North Tyneside work with us to help children who have needed to be in care to continue to feel they are valued as they grow.

Key points for action

- **We will only bring children into care when it cannot be made safe for them to stay at home.**
- **We will work with each child's network to try and keep every child within their network.**
- **We will support all adults who care for children to do so safely.**
- **We want all children to live in safe homely and comfortable homes.**
- **We want all children to be able to build enduring relationships with consistent adults.**
- **We want to walk alongside children who are unable to stay living at home to stop them having to tell their story over and over.**
- **We want all children to achieve their best in education, and will work with them and their school, college or workplace to support this.**
- **We want all children in our care, and those who have left our care help us to get better at caring for children.**



North Tyneside Context

In North Tyneside we have maintained relative stability in the numbers of children in care but as with all North East Local Authorities, we have a higher proportion of children in care than the national average. This means we have around 300 children in our care at any one time.

This is a lower rate than our statistical neighbours and reflects our strategic intention to make sure that we have robust mechanisms to challenge thinking and seek ways of maintaining children within their families if it is safe, or can be made safe, to do so.

This is supported by our strengths-based model of social work practice, Signs of Safety which has been implemented across children's services. This supports consistency in approach and aids creative and child focused practice.

The development of the 'Keeping Families Connected' service with innovation funding from the DfE provides intensive intervention with families to maintain children in their families.

We have a corporate parenting forum which holds to account the services delivered to children on the edge of care, in care and care leavers. This forum has highlighted priorities for the coming 12 months. These are:

- stability of social worker for children and care leavers.
- Reduction in numbers of children who are missing from care.
- Improving life story work for children in care and care leavers.

Within North Tyneside children's statutory social work services have been structured to provide small teams with increased management oversight to better support social work practice. This model was selected in support of the model of social work practice, to reduce the case transfers for children between teams and promote managers capacity to know children's circumstances better.

It is acknowledged that we have been told by our Children in Care Council that further work is required to progress the transition from children's social work teams to leaving care services. It is accepted while a leaving care member of staff sits alongside the child's social worker from 17 that a transfer at 18 is not appropriate as this does not support the development of relationships with leaving care staff. We have accepted this challenge from our children in care council and will make this a priority development for the next 12 months.

Our Children and Young People

The children who come into our care do so because they have suffered loss and/or harm. They need to be supported by all the adults in their lives to understand what has happened in a way that makes sure they do not assume blame or shame for what has happened. As a result of the challenges the children in our care have faced, we need to be assured that being in our care makes things better for them.

Our children have amazing talents and skills and it is our role to help them to explore these. We will provide the environment that supports each child to feel loved and confident to learn and to make mistakes. The children in our care will feel able to have all the opportunities their friends have, without being concerned that they are in our care.

In doing this we work with all of the services that are in contact with the children in our care and care leavers to seek to remove any barriers or prejudices them. The children in our care and care leavers will be aware that we are proud of their achievements and that we celebrate these with them.

Children are supported in having their achievements acknowledged in all manner of ways, linked to their choices. Children are supported to participate in all celebration events in their school and colleges. Individual talents in arts and sports are supported along side support for children and care leavers who choose an academic pathway into adulthood via university.

Key points for action

- **We will hold annual celebration events for children in care and care leavers.**
- **We will always try to provide warm and loving care to children and young people.**
- **We will challenge discrimination towards any child in care or a care leaver.**



Relationships

In North Tyneside we believe that every child needs to be supported to develop relationships with people that sustain them through challenges in life and to share happy times.

We know, because they have told us, that the children we care for value the relationships they have with the people who care for them. Foster carers, social workers, residential staff teams, teachers and, nurses can all have a huge impact on a child's life. It is our responsibility to make the impact positive. The children we have cared for have told us that this makes the difference to them as they have grown up.

These relationships need to be nurtured and acknowledged as special in supporting each child to understand their place in the world and to feel confident to learn and to grow.

The children in our care have families and histories that we must respect. We must work cooperatively with each child's family as co-parents in the best interests of each child. We must allow the possibility for change and growth in families and with enduring supportive relationships help each child to maintain all positive relationships in their lives.

In North Tyneside we do not believe that any person progresses to independence, As social beings' humans require loving supportive relationships throughout their lives to thrive. We want to support children who are, or have been, in our care to develop and sustain these relationships.

Key points for action

- **We will always try to support children and young people to keep the relationships that matter to them.**
- **We will continue to improve the way we work with birth families.**
- **We will stick with children and young people through good and challenging times.**

Health, Information and Advice, Virtual School and Emotional Wellbeing (HIVE)

We want our children to succeed at school, have the support they need to keep healthy and be helped to recover from what has happened to them in the past. Our multi-agency HIVE Team is a one stop shop for children, young people and their network to get the advice and support they need.

We know that some of our children have gaps in their learning and so our teachers will take the time to fill those knowledge gaps and support them to not only catch up with their peers but believe they can achieve their dreams, whatever they might be. Many of our children have special educational needs and we work to understand ways to enable them to have those needs met effectively.

We believe every child should have access to books and develop a love of reading, so we are part of The Letterbox Club and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. We have a Reading Recovery teacher who provides intensive support to any child in Yr 2 who has not yet grasped reading. We know reading is the gateway to learning but also a way to share special time with carers and family members and later, discover new worlds.

We want our children to be healthy and active, so we provide all children in our care with an Ease card so they can access our sports facilities free of charge. As we want them to be supported in their friendships their Ease card allows them to take another person with them. We also want our children to enjoy arts and culture and some were recently involved in a dance project. We regularly take children to the theatre to develop their interests and passion.

We have developed our mental health support beyond CAMHS to include counsellors, an occupational therapist and educational psychologists. We offer a range of trauma-informed interventions aimed at helping the children in our care manage their sensory needs and regulation, have positive relationships at home and school and have people to talk to when the time is right. Whilst we are unable to take away the harm or loss, we are able to provide a safe space to talk to trauma-trained counsellors who are able to offer support to the child and their network.



Learning from Care Experienced Young People

The care experienced young people conference in 2019, developed 10 principles to underpin the way in which services to children in care and care leavers should be delivered. We are committed to these and will endeavour to deliver on these in the following ways:

1 Promote more love in the care system including displays of positive physical affection;

We have a clear expectation that the adults providing care to children and young people will do so with genuine affection. Our policies regarding physical contact and displays of affection include the need for this to build safe and sustaining relationships. We are working with Barnardo's to consider the ways in which our organisation responds to trauma, Not only across the staff team but with all our service users. This is acknowledged as hugely significant to the development of relationships of trust that support adults to be emotionally responsive to children's needs.

2 Ensure care experience people are regarded and treated as individuals worthy of respect and to promote that respect wherever we can;

Every person who comes into contact with services provided by North Tyneside Council deserves respect. The demonstration of this respect is in the interactions between individuals. It is in the thought and consideration of each other's needs and is underpinned by the quality of relationships we can build with each other.

Key points for action

- We will show respect to children in our care and care experienced people by including them in all decisions about care planning as soon as they are old enough to understand.
- We will make sure that we explain decisions to them and that we challenge any preconceived views about children in care.
- We will listen to each child's views and avoid a one size fits all service that doesn't allow space for individual choices and experiences.
- We will work with each child in care and care leaver to explore their potential and support them to continue to develop skills.

3 Ensure that relationships are central to all our policies and procedures to support children in care and care experienced people;

Without relationships human beings are unable to function. We are social beings who require the interaction with others to thrive. We believe that the consistency of relationships is central to our ability to build trust and confidence in each other. We seek to provide this stability in carer and social worker, but acknowledge we have work to progress to recruit and retain foster carers, residential staff and social workers in order to provide the stability of relationship the children and young people we care for require.

Key points for action

- We will make sure that all policies, and processes will consider the need to support enduring positive relationships with children in care and care leavers.
- This will include the policies for foster carers and children's home staff as well as for children's social workers.
- We will support our staff to understand the impact of relationship-based working with dedicated training, and reflective supervision to support their capacity to build and sustain meaningful relationships with children in our care and care leavers.

4 Take clear steps to improve stability and continuity in the lived experiences of people in care;

We have a large proportion of children in care who live in stable foster care homes. For most children and young people these homes sustain throughout the children and young people's lives with relationships that endure.

There are some children and young people who do not have this stability and we are working to increase our foster care offer so that we can provide a greater matching choice at the outset of coming into care. We acknowledge that we have too many children and young people who have moved in our care too many times. This prevents them from building the relationships that they need. We are seeking to establish smaller residential homes for children who may need care to be provided in this way. It is hoped that in doing this we will be better able to build relationships that can endure.



5 Work with our partners and young people to raise awareness of need and improve support for the mental health and well-being of children in care and care experienced people in our local area;

We have an established mental health and wellbeing board that works to promote the positive mental health of young people in North Tyneside.

We have worked with young people to develop Kooth as an online resource for children to support emotional wellbeing.

We have a virtual mental health lead for children in care this dedicated post is in place to remove barriers for children in care in accessing support and working to raise mental well being amongst children in care and care leavers.



6 Recognise in our daily work that the impact of care experience does not end at 18 or 21 or even 25, and review our practice to remove age restrictions on support wherever we can;

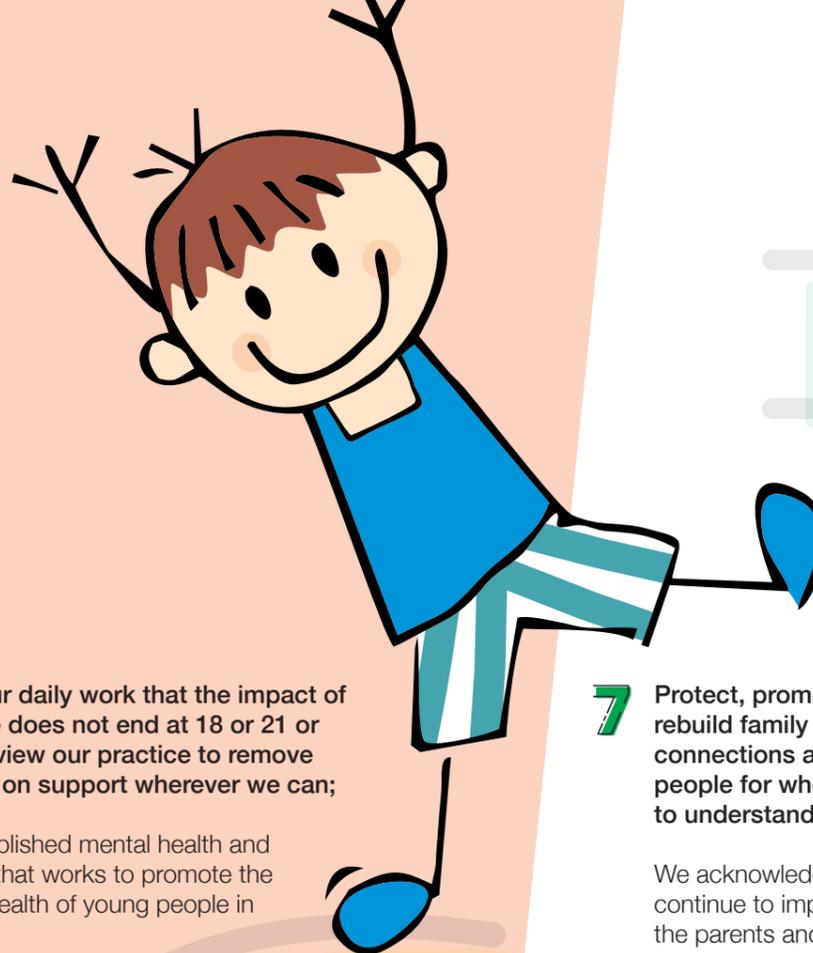
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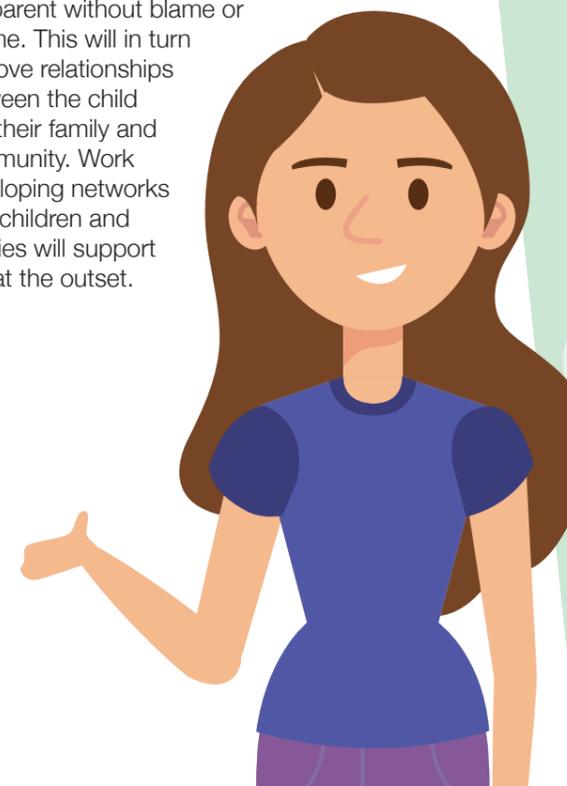
- **We retain relationships with children and young people for as long as the young person wants to. While the Local Authority is not resourced to provide financial support to care leavers over 25 we always provide emotional support and sign posting to services regardless of age.**
- **We respect the right of all care experienced people to retain the positive relationships they have established throughout their lives and accept that there may be periods of time when care leavers choose to have no communication with us, and times in their lives when they wish to do so.**
- **We encourage all care leavers to share their experiences, achievements and challenges with the people they have the most positive relationships with regardless of work role.**



7 Protect, promote and where necessary rebuild family and community connections and help those young people for whom we are responsible to understand their personal history;

We acknowledge that we need to continue to improve our relationships with the parents and families of some of the children and young people we care for.

We need to co-parent in a more productive manner to support parents and families where children cannot safely live with them to provide their children with as much positive support as they can. Always demonstrating respect for the sharing of parental responsibility with birth parents. This will aid the ability to develop a shared understanding of why a child or young person is not living with the parent without blame or shame. This will in turn improve relationships between the child and their family and community. Work developing networks with children and families will support this at the outset.



8 Make sure that young people in our care are routinely engaged, consulted and have a real say in their own lives;

We commit to listening to children and young people's views and responding to these or explaining why we are not able to and seeking shared ways forward. This will be supported by each child's IRO who will monitor the plan for each child and their involvement with this.

The impact of really listening and considering the views of each child will need to be monitored on an individual basis. We have small social work teams to support increased oversight and support to social work. This will enable managers to monitor this in supervision with social workers and support genuine reflection on the extent to which the child's wishes are included in the plan and the difference they make.

There will be times when we are not able to do what a child wants us to do, either because it is not safe, or we cannot support the risk involved. In these circumstances the child's allocated social worker will explain this to the child. If we can, we will find a negotiated way forward, often with the support of an independent advocate.

Key points for action

- **We will support children to explore how they make choices and express their views.**
- **We accept that this involves a degree of risk-taking behaviour and will work with children and young people to support this within age appropriate limits.**



9 Ensure that young people in our care are properly and fully informed of their rights and offer advocacy to ensure they receive them; and

Every child in the care of North Tyneside Council has the right to access advocacy support and we commit to promoting this right to all children who come into our care.

We have a dedicated participation team who work with children and young people to explore their rights. We will provide every child who comes into our care aged 8 and over with information about their rights as a child in care and entitlements that may remain with them even if they return to their parents' care.

We commit to informing all young people aged 16 and above who contact the Local Authority and declare themselves as homeless of their right to be a child in care, and the implications of doing this or choosing not to do so.

10 Listen to the voice of children in care and care experience people of all ages and always consult them about changes to services and support.

We continue to work with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to understand the care experience of children in North Tyneside. We are committed to the views of the CiCC being presented regularly to the Corporate Parenting Forum to direct the work of the service, Senior Leaders will meet with the CiCC no less than quarterly and information from the CiCC will be circulated to all staff as required.

The active role of the CiCC in the region and nationally is acknowledged as a significant strength and we are keen to continue to work together to improve services.

Key points for action

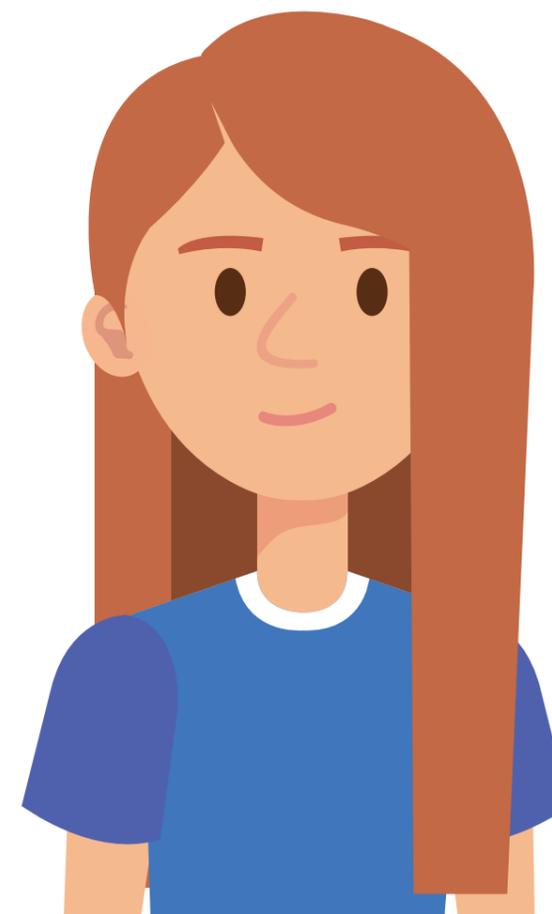
- We will consult with children in care and care leavers about any change in policy or practice that has a direct impact on them and;
- We will listen to their views when determining what to do next and how to improve the services we provide for them.

Model of Practice

Within North Tyneside children's services, a strengths-based model of social work practice has been agreed as the chosen model across all service areas. All front line staff have been trained in Signs of Safety and partners are supported with introductory training. This is an innovative strength based, safety organised approach to social work.

The approach focuses on "How can workers build relationships with children and their networks in situations where children may have been harmed and continue to safeguard children and work in partnership to meet the child's needs overall". This strengths-based and safety-focused approach to child protection work is grounded in partnership and collaboration.

We will work with children and young people to develop ways of expressing themselves within supportive and consistent relationships. Working through with their social worker what they think is going well in their life, what are the worries what needs to happen as a result.



Key points for action

- We will continue to work to establish stability in workers for children in care and care leavers. We know that this best aids children and young people to feel that they are valued and reduce the need to repeat their stories.
- We will help children in care and care leavers to understand why they have been cared for outside of their parents' care. This will be done using 'words and pictures' with the parents to establish a shared understanding that the whole family can accept that explains in simple terms what happened. This is then shared with the child. This is further supported with a record of the child's experiences in care which together form the child's life story record.
- For children and young people in our care, or care leavers we work using this model to identify signs of stability and wellbeing. Focusing upon the achievements and strengths in each child's situation to grow positives and reduce the challenges. There are a number of tools within signs of safety which support this.

Care Leavers

Young People who have remained in our care into adult life continue to require the nurture and support of consistent relationships. We want the children and young people who have experienced our care to have been cared for in stable and supportive homes. Where possible we want these to be foster homes that have been able to work alongside the child's family and network to support the child to believe in themselves and their abilities.

We are proud of the accommodation offer we have for care leavers with a commitment to 'Staying Put' in foster carer, through our dedicated Staying Close provision for young people leaving children's homes into our 'Starting Point' supported accommodation offer.

We believe that the ambitions and aspirations of the young people we care for or have cared for need to be supported and nourished to help each young person fulfill their potential. This includes support with education and employment but also support to become happy and contented members of our communities as they mature.

Key points for action

- **We will provide a dedicated personal assistant to all young people who are eligible for leaving care services.**
- **We will have clear mechanisms for determining leaving care status and will explain this to care leavers and their families.**
- **We are committed to supporting care leavers to engage in education and employment.**
- **We work within the Local Authority and with business partners to support.**



Children in Care Council

The Participation, Advocacy and Engagement team work to support children and young people living and attending schools in North Tyneside have their voices heard and their views taken into account and taken seriously.

The team supports a number of children and young people's forums such as the Elected Young Mayor, Elected Member of UK Youth Parliament, Young Cabinet, Youth Council, Children in Care Councils, Children's Council and a variety of themed working groups, including Young People's Health & Wellbeing, Anti Bullying, Ready for Life, Young People's Activities and Environment.

The Children in Care Council is a group of care experienced children and young people who have the aim of ensuring that all children who are in the care of North Tyneside and our care leavers are able to give their views on the services they receive. In North Tyneside we have one main group that meets on a weekly basis, with some specific working groups working on leaving care and small events held as part of the Junior Children in Care Council project.

The Children in Care Council are involved in planning and delivering conferences for professionals led by young people. These are promoted to Directors of Children's Services, Senior Leaders and across social media with changes being reported on an annual basis.

North Tyneside Children in Care Council works on monthly themes which link to the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The young people were supported to give their views on these themes and ensure senior managers are listening to these on a strategic level and including them in service changes where possible.

North Tyneside Children in Care Council works with the Regional Children in Care Council and over the last years have used this as a positive way to find out the views of the wider population of children in care and care leavers.

The service supports children in care to be introduced to an independent visitor to support them building positive and enduring relationships.

Key points for action

- **Support Regional Children in Care Council campaigns.**
- **Support North Tyneside Children in Care Council to achieve change on their monthly themes**
- **Support the Children in Care Council to find out the views of more children in care and care leavers.**
- **Hold two Children in Care and Corporate Parent events each year? .**
- **Increase the number of children and young people who have an Independent Visitor.**





North Tyneside Council

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