NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL



Children in Care & Care Leaver Strategy 2026 - 2029

Foreword



Councillor Janet Sanderson
Executive Member for Children & Families



El Mayhew
Corporate Director Children & Young People Services

We are proud to present North Yorkshire's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy—a refreshed and ambitious plan that builds on the foundations of our 2022–2024 strategy. This updated strategy reaffirms our commitment as corporate parents to ensure every child and young person in our care, and those transitioning to independence, receive the support, stability, and opportunities they deserve.

Our approach is firmly grounded in statutory duties and national guidance, including the Children Act 1989, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the Children and Families Act 2014, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010, and the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, alongside principles set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, The Children's Social Care National Framework and the IRO Handbook. These frameworks shape our responsibilities and underpin the policies and procedures that guide our practice.

This strategy aligns with North Yorkshire's Strength in Relationships Practice Model, placing relationships at the heart of everything we do. Through collaborative working with children, families, and partners—and by using strength-based approaches such as Signs of Safety (a way of working that helps children, families and professionals identify strengths, worries and plans for change) - we aim to create lasting positive outcomes that continue beyond our involvement.

Our ambition is clear: to provide safe, loving homes for children who cannot live with their families; to champion their education, health, and wellbeing; and to ensure care leavers are supported to thrive in adulthood. Where it is safe and right to do so, we are committed to promoting reunification with birth families and ensuring children remain connected to their family and networks, recognising the importance of identity, belonging, and lifelong relationships.

Central to this ambition is our unwavering commitment to co-production with children, young people, their carers and their families. Their voices, experiences, and aspirations are not only heard but actively shape our policies, services, and decisions. We believe that true partnerships are essential to delivering meaningful change and achieving the best possible outcomes.

We are equally committed to celebrating the achievements of children and young people in care and care leavers, recognising and valuing their successes—big and small—as a vital part of building confidence, resilience, and ambition for the future.

This strategy should be considered alongside North Yorkshire Council's Virtual School Strategy, which sets out our approach to supporting the education of children in care and care leavers.

Together, as a partnership and as corporate parents, we reaffirm our pledge to deliver the very best outcomes for North Yorkshire's children in care and care leavers.

Our vision

Our vision is that every child in care and care leaver in North Yorkshire grows up safe, loved, healthy and connected, with the support, opportunities and relationships they need to achieve their full potential.

We will be ambitious corporate parents, ensuring children and young people experience stability, belonging and lifelong relationships, and are supported to thrive throughout childhood and into adulthood.

This strategy supports the Children and Young People's Plan vision of "With You. Your Place. When it Matters." This means ensuring children and young people receive the right help, in the right place, at the time they need it most.

Our Five Promises:



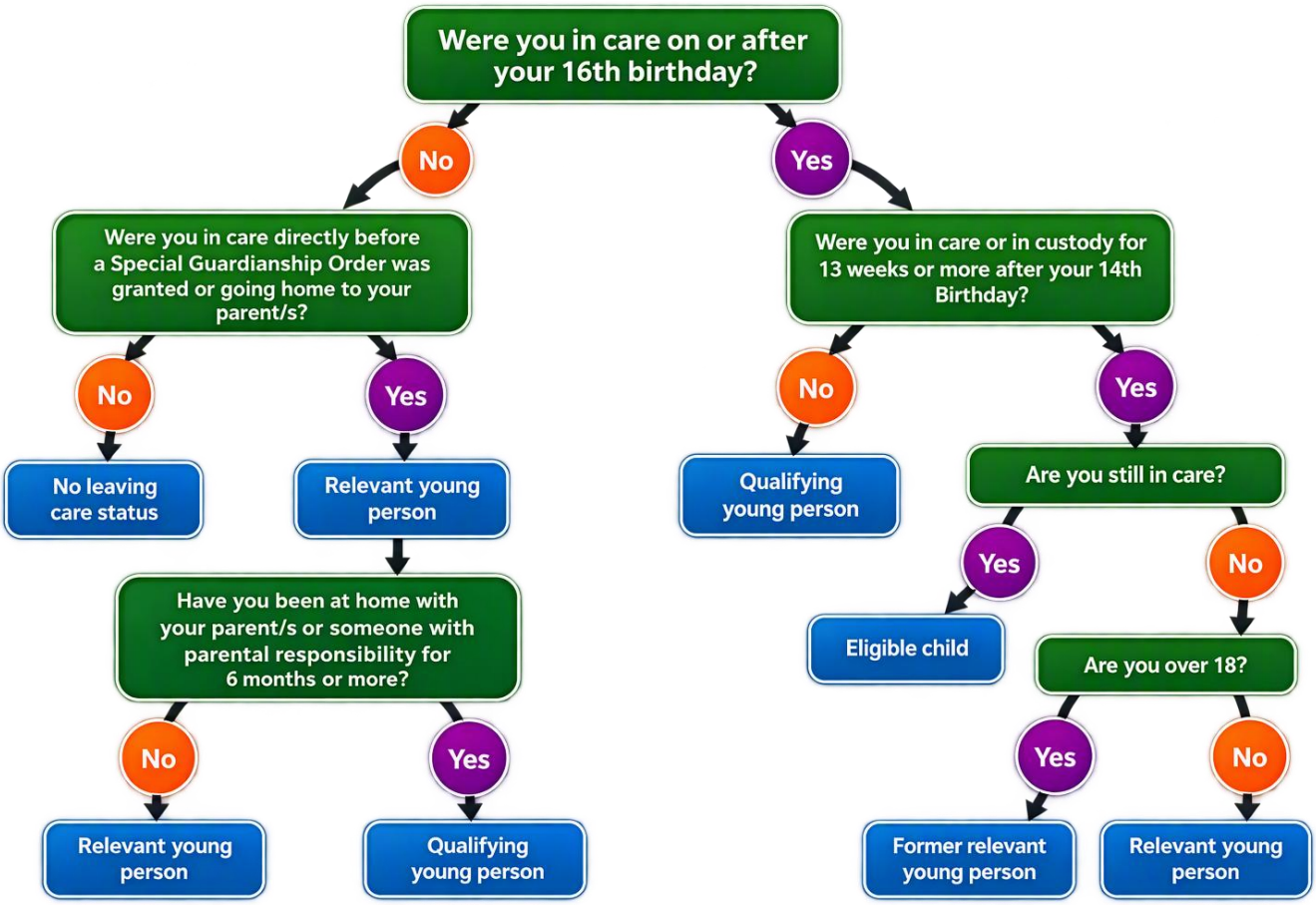
Who are Children in Care and Care Leavers?

This strategy relates to any child who is “looked after” by North Yorkshire Council, or to any child who is defined as a “care leaver” by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Some children are “looked after” because their parents have agreed with North Yorkshire Council for them to stay somewhere safe under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (this can include children with disabilities who need accommodation). Others are “looked after” because a court has decided this is the right thing for them, through a Care Order or Placement Order.

Children will live with foster carers, in residential homes or with their parents or other relatives. A “care leaver” generally refers to a young person aged 16–25 who has been in care for at least 13 weeks since age 14 and was in care on or after their 16th birthday.

What's my Care Leavers Status?



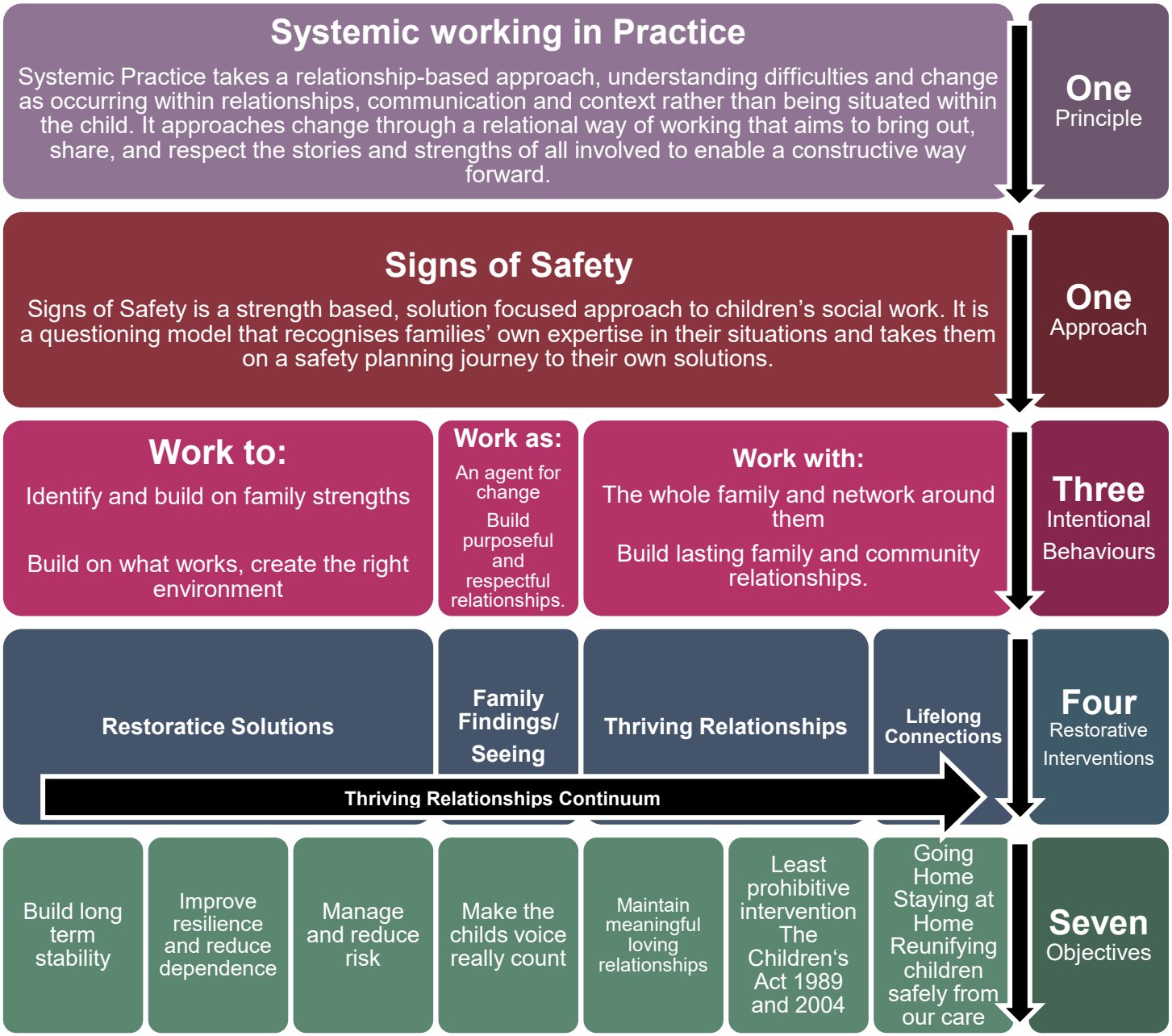


How we provide support – our promise to you

The diagram below illustrates our **'Strength in Relationships' practice model**. We believe that stable relationships should be established between workers, children, young people and their families and networks. We look for strengths in people and work with these to develop solutions and ways forward. This model of practice acts as the foundation upon which we develop individual plans to ensure the children and young people we support achieve the best possible outcomes.

Our Purpose:

To support positive change that continues after we no longer need to be involved. We will create conditions that allow relationships to flourish. Our collaboration in practice with you is built to deliver this outcome.



What Strength in Relationships means for Children in Care and Care Leavers

Our practice model recognises that positive and lasting relationships are the foundation for safety, wellbeing and success. We work with children, their families, carers and wider support networks to identify strengths, build on what is working well, and create sustainable solutions.

This means:

- Working with families and networks wherever it is safe to do so.
- Keeping children connected to the people who matter most.
- Involving children and young people in decisions about their lives.
- Building on strengths rather than focusing solely on difficulties.
- Creating plans with families, not for families.
- Supporting lifelong relationships that continue beyond our involvement.

We recognise that every child and young person is unique. We are committed to helping children in care and care leavers understand and celebrate their identity, culture, heritage, faith, sexuality, language and lived experience. We want all children and young people to feel respected, represented, valued and to have a strong sense of belonging within their family, community and North Yorkshire.



Our Priorities

1. Permanence (Stable Loving Homes)

What is our aim?

We want every child in North Yorkshire to grow up happy, healthy, safe, achieving and, most importantly, feeling loved. We want you to live in a stable, secure home with people who care about you and meet your needs.

Where possible, we will support you to remain with your family or wider network. When this is not possible, we will ensure you are cared for in a local foster home or, if needed, in a children's home that is right for you, including through our No Wrong Door service.

As you move towards adulthood, we want you to feel hopeful and confident about your future. We will support you to achieve your goals—whether that is through education, employment, training or other opportunities—and to develop the skills you need for independent living.

We want you to stay with your foster carers or kinship carers for as long as you need. When you are ready to move on, we will support you into accommodation where you feel safe, settled and happy.

We also want you to build lifelong relationships and a strong support network, so you have people to turn to and people you can support in return.

How are we doing it?

- We will prioritise family-led and network approaches, including regular network meetings.
- We will strengthen and value kinship care, with a clear Kinship Offer including financial support, training and advice.
- We will support you to maintain relationships with the people who matter to you in ways that feel natural and safe. This includes supporting meaningful time with parents, siblings, family members, friends and other important people wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- We will support care leavers through Staying Put, Staying Close and structured preparation for adulthood.
- We will help you build life skills such as budgeting, cooking and managing a home.
- Through 'Always Here', you can return for support at any time, at any age.

What does success look like?

- You live in a stable home, close to your community and network.
- You maintain meaningful relationships with people important to you.
- You have a clear plan for your future, including independence.
- You feel safe, settled and supported into adulthood.

2. Child's Voice

What is our aim?

We know that your voice matters. We want you to be listened to, involved in decisions about your life, and able to influence the services you receive.

We want to understand what matters to you—your family, friends, interests, identity and goals—and make sure these are reflected in your plans. We want you to feel heard, valued and empowered.

How are we doing it?

- We will ensure children and young people of all ages are supported to share their views and influence decisions affecting their lives.
- We will support you to take part in reviews, pathway planning and decision-making.
- You will have access to advocacy, Independent Visitors and tools such as Mind of My Own.
- We will prioritise network meetings so the people important to you are involved.
- We will support strong youth voice opportunities, including Care Champions and the Care Leaver Forum.
- We will actively involve you in service design, recruitment and improvement work.

What does success look like?

- You feel listened to and involved in decisions about your life.
- Your plans reflect your views, relationships and aspirations.
- You are supported to share your voice in ways that work for you.
- Services change and improve based on what you tell us.



3. Sufficiency

(Having the right home, in the right place, at the right time)

What is our aim?

We want to make sure there are enough high-quality homes and support so that every child and young person can live in the right place, with the right support, at the right time. This means having enough homes within your local community, so you do not have to live far away from the people, places and connections that matter to you. This includes making sure we have strong local provision and meaningful support offers.

How are we doing it?

- We will increase our in-house fostering provision, growing and supporting our foster carers. This will include targeted recruitment for short-break foster carers who wish to support disabled children and young people.
- We will expand our in-house residential provision, including developing more local children's homes.
- We will continue to strengthen No Wrong Door as a key model of support.
- We will implement a strong Kinship Care Offer, ensuring carers receive the support they need.
- We will work with partners through MALAP and across the council to ensure services meet your needs.

What does success look like?

- You will live in the right home, close to your community.
- There are enough foster carers and local homes to meet needs.
- All children live in registered homes that meet required standards and provide safe, high-quality care.
- Kinship carers feel supported and valued.



4. Health and Emotional Wellbeing

What is our aim?

We want you to be healthy in every way — physically, emotionally and mentally. We want you to feel safe, supported and able to understand your own wellbeing. Our aim is that you get the right help, at the right time, from the right people.

How are we doing it?

- When you first come into care, we will carry out a health assessment to understand your needs, and we will continue to review this regularly.
- You will have access to a nurse and support from a range of health professionals, including GPs, dentists, opticians and mental health services.
- Our PIPA service (Psychologically Informed Partnership Approach) provides therapeutic support to help you understand your experiences, build resilience and feel emotionally safe. They can also work with foster carers to ensure they are supported in giving you the very best care.
- We will help you to stay healthy by supporting you to eat well, stay active and access activities, clubs and opportunities that you enjoy.
- We will also support the people who care for you to understand your needs so they can help you feel safe, secure and happy.
- As a care leaver, you will receive a health passport — a personal, portable record of your key health information — so you can manage your own health as you move into adulthood.

What does success look like?

- You are up to date with your health assessments, immunisations and checks.
- You are registered with a GP, dentist and optician.
- You can access the support you need for your physical and emotional health.
- You feel supported with your emotional wellbeing and able to ask for help.
- You understand your own health needs and, as a care leaver, have a health passport to support you into adulthood.





5. Education, Employment & Training

What is our aim?

We want to make sure every child in care and care leaver is supported to achieve their full potential in education, employment and training. This means helping you to enjoy learning, build your skills and confidence, and access opportunities that match your interests and aspirations. We will work alongside you to remove barriers, celebrate your achievements, and ensure you have the support you need to succeed and move into a positive and fulfilling future.

We have high aspirations for you and want you to be prepared for adulthood, independence and long-term success — whatever path you choose.

How are we doing it?

- We will make sure you have a high-quality Personal Education Plan (PEP) that reflects your needs, strengths and ambitions.
- We will support good attendance, enjoyment of learning and prevent you from becoming 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET).
- We will support your emotional wellbeing through trauma-informed and nurturing approaches.
- We will make sure your voice is central in your education, including PEPs, EHCPs and planning for your future.
- Through the Virtual School, we will oversee your education as if you are part of one school, making sure you get the support you need.
- We will offer careers advice, mentoring, work experience and ongoing support into education, training and employment up to age 25. We will help you to think about future goals.
- We will work closely with schools, colleges and partners to make sure support is joined up and consistent.
- We will support digital inclusion by helping you access technology, develop digital skills and stay safe online.

What does success look like?

- You feel supported, valued and able to achieve your potential.
- You attend and engage in education, training or work.
- You make progress and achieve outcomes you are proud of.
- You experience stability in your education and fewer disruptions.
- You move successfully into further education, employment or training with a clear pathway for your future.



6. Transitions to Adulthood

What is our aim?

We want to make sure you are supported as you move into adulthood, with clear pathways, opportunities and support to help you feel confident, independent and prepared for your future.

How are we doing it?

- You will have an allocated Leaving Care Worker who will work with you to develop your Pathway Plan, making sure it reflects your goals and aspirations, and is reviewed regularly.
- We will continue to develop and deliver a clear Care Leaver Offer, supporting you up to age 25.
- We will ensure access to education, health, housing and employment opportunities that support your future.
- Where needed, we will work closely with Health and Adult Services at the earliest opportunity to ensure you receive timely and joined-up support as you transition into adulthood.
- As a care leaver, you will have access to an Opportunity Broker who will support you to plan for your future in line with your goals and aspirations

What does success look like?

- Care leavers have access to clear, consistent support through the Local Offer.
- All care leavers have an up-to-date Pathway Plan that reflects their views, wishes and aspirations.
- Care Leavers will feel safe, happy and will be reaching their potential.



Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people are a particularly vulnerable group within our care population. Many have experienced trauma, loss, separation, and uncertainty before arriving in the UK. We recognise the additional complexities they may face, including language barriers, cultural adjustment, and navigating the immigration system. Our approach is rooted in safeguarding, trauma-informed practice, and a commitment to providing stability, safety, and opportunity.

Our commitment:

We are committed to ensuring that unaccompanied and asylum-seeking children and young people:

- Feel safe, welcomed, and supported as they settle into their new environment
- Receive timely and high-quality assessments and support
- Have access to education, health services, and legal advice
- Are supported to rebuild their lives and achieve positive outcomes

How we will deliver this:

1. **Skilled and Specialist Workforce**: We have dedicated social workers with expertise and experience in working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. They bring specialist knowledge of asylum processes, cultural awareness, and trauma-informed practice to ensure children and young people receive high-quality, sensitive support.
2. **Holistic Assessment and Care Planning:** We will ensure timely, thorough, and culturally informed assessments that recognise each young person's experiences, needs, and strengths. Care planning will take account of immigration status, emotional wellbeing, identity, and long-term outcomes.
3. **Access to Education and Integration Support**: We will prioritise access to suitable education and English language (ESOL) support to enable children and young people to achieve and integrate into their communities. We will also support opportunities for social connection and participation in community life.
4. **Emotional Wellbeing and Trauma-Informed Support**: We recognise the impact of trauma and loss. Children and young people will have access to appropriate mental health and therapeutic services, alongside consistent, trusting relationships with professionals and carers.
5. **Immigration and Legal Support**: We will ensure that children and young people have access to high-quality legal advice and advocacy throughout the asylum process, helping them to understand their rights and navigate complex systems.
6. **Preparing for Adulthood and Independence**: For those moving towards adulthood, we will provide tailored pathway planning that reflects their unique circumstances, including immigration status. This will include support with education, employment, housing, and developing independence skills.
7. **Strong Partnership Working**: We will work closely with carers, education providers, health services, voluntary sector organisations, and legal professionals to provide a coordinated and responsive approach to meeting the needs of this group.

Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Children in care and care leavers with SEND are among our most vulnerable and may face additional barriers to stability, achievement, and independence. Our approach aligns with SEND reforms, focusing on early identification, inclusive practice, and strong multi-agency working to deliver personalised, child-centred support.

We will ensure that children and young people with SEND:

- Have needs identified early through a clear graduated approach
- Receive timely, coordinated support across education, health, and care
- Access stable, high-quality and inclusive education provision
- Are supported to achieve their potential and prepare for adulthood
- Are provided with needs-led short breaks where needed

We will deliver this by:

- Embedding early assessment and timely EHCP processes where needed
- Aligning care plans, PEPs, and EHCPs to create a joined-up approach
- Promoting inclusive practice and stability in education, supported by the Virtual School
- Equipping our workforce, carers, and partners with SEND knowledge and skills
- Ensuring children's voices shape all decisions in accessible ways
- Starting early, ambitious preparation for adulthood for care leavers with SEND
- Working in strong partnership with carers, families, and the wider SEND system
- Considering the need for short breaks services within our Sufficiency Strategy



Youth Voice & Creative Engagement

As Corporate Parents, we know that we cannot make effective decisions for children and young people and provide the support they need without listening to what they say. Care Champions is a voice group for care experienced children and young people, aged between 12 and 25, who are, or have been looked after in North Yorkshire. The group comes together monthly, to work on projects relating to their care experience, that they have chosen to focus on. In addition, the Care Leaver Forum offers a fortnightly space for care leavers to come together to discuss issues specific to them, linking into regional and national campaigns, such as those led by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and Coram.

Care Champions offer an open invitation to Senior Leaders and Councillors, to join them at their regular meetings, which provides a direct pathway for group members to our key decision makers and allowing for mutual challenge and the sharing of projects Care Champions have worked on. Care Champions are supported by the Youth Voice & Creative Engagement Team to ensure that children and young people are consulted on matters that affect their lives.

Members of Care Champions are regularly involved in improvement projects and decision making at various levels. They play a key role in recruitment across CYPS and hold our leaders to account with co-production prioritised within all service development.

Children and young people have already made a significant contribution to shaping services and improving experiences for others in care. Through the Care Champions programme, they co-developed the *My First Night in Care* project, designed to make a child's first experience of care less daunting. This includes accessible booklets for children to share important information about themselves with their carers, alongside information for carers to introduce their household and routines. Care Champions have also influenced fostering processes through a project exploring how people become foster carers. As a result, questions developed by young people are now embedded within fostering panels, and a care experienced young person has been supported to train and participate directly in panel decision-making.

The Care Leaver Forum has also demonstrated the impact of young people's voices in shaping both local and wider developments. Members have contributed to regional and national initiatives, including a young parents' project, and have played a key role in informing North Yorkshire's financial framework for care leavers. They have also supported foster carer recruitment by participating in promotional activity, helping to share authentic experiences and highlight the difference that foster carers make in the lives of children and young people.



Children in care and care leavers will continue to play an active role in shaping and reviewing services across North Yorkshire. Through participation groups, Care Champions, the Care Leaver Forum and other engagement opportunities, children and young people will be involved in reviewing progress against this strategy and helping to shape future priorities.

Support for Foster Carers & Kinship Carers

We recognise the vital role that foster carers play in providing children with safe, stable and nurturing homes. We are committed to ensuring carers receive the support, recognition and high-quality training they need to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in their care.

We also recognise the important role that kinship carers play in providing loving and stable homes for children within their family and network. Through our Kinship Offer we will ensure carers can access advice, training, practical support and opportunities to connect with other kinship families.

Foster carers benefit from a comprehensive training offer and ongoing support from Supervising Social Workers, alongside input from the wider professional network around the child. Opportunities for peer support are also embedded through area-based Foster Carer Associations, regular support groups, and specialist development opportunities, including events for advanced and specialist carers.

We value and celebrate the dedication and commitment of our foster carers through recognition events such as *Celebrating You* and Foster Carer Fortnight, ensuring their contribution is acknowledged and supported.



Mockingbird

The Mockingbird model, led by The Fostering Network in the UK, is an evidence-based approach that strengthens foster care through the creation of extended family-style support networks. It continues to demonstrate strong impact across North Yorkshire, enhancing placement stability, increasing peer support for carers, and improving outcomes for children and young people.

There are currently four established Mockingbird constellations across the county, supporting 34 fostering households and 59 children and young people. These constellations provide a structured network of relationships that help children develop a sense of belonging and enable carers to feel better supported and more resilient.

Building on this success, a fifth constellation is in development with a strategic focus on supporting teenagers. This reflects the Council's ambition to increase access to family-based care for adolescents, reduce reliance on residential provision, and support transitions from residential care into fostering where appropriate. A Hub Home carer has been recruited and five families identified, with the constellation expected to launch later this year.

The continued expansion of Mockingbird demonstrates North Yorkshire's commitment to innovative, relationship-based practice that strengthens carer retention, improves placement stability, and provides children and young people with stable, nurturing environments in which they can thrive.

How We Will Measure Success

We will regularly review the impact of this strategy through performance information, feedback from children and young people, and scrutiny through our Corporate Parenting arrangements.

We will monitor:

- Placement stability.
- Children living close to home and their communities.
- Educational attendance, achievement and progression.
- Timely access to health and wellbeing services.
- Participation and influence of children and young people.
- Stable accommodation for care leavers.
- Participation in education, employment and training.
- Children and young people's experience of care and support.
- The number of children successfully reunified with family where this is safe and appropriate.
- The number of children supported through kinship care arrangements.

Governance Arrangements for Corporate Parenting

When a child becomes looked after, North Yorkshire Council becomes the 'corporate parent'. This means that we must do our best to meet your needs in the same way as any good parent would and ensure we use our resources to promote your wellbeing. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 set out **seven corporate parenting principles** that guide how we do this and help us achieve the best possible outcomes for children in care and care leavers:

1. •To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.
2. •To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. •To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. •To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. •To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
6. •For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
7. •To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

We recognise that we cannot achieve the best outcomes for children in care and care leavers on our own. This requires the ongoing commitment of partners across health, education, the police and voluntary agencies, as well as the wider council. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 strengthens this further by extending corporate parenting responsibilities beyond councils to a wider range of public bodies and introducing a new legal duty for organisations to work together to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children in care and care leavers. Every service and partner has a role to play, and we all share responsibility for supporting children in care and care leavers to thrive.

North Yorkshire Council has a Corporate Parenting Member's Group, comprising of elected council members (councillors) and senior leaders from across the partnership, whose primary role is to make sure the council and its partners provide the same love, stability and opportunities that any good parent would want for their own child. The group provides challenge, scrutiny and accountability, drives strategic improvement, champions the voice of children in care and care leavers, and helps raise awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities across the council.



Progress against this strategy will be reviewed through Corporate Parenting governance arrangements and considered alongside feedback from children in care and care leavers.

MALAP

MALAP stands for the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership. This is a group of people from different organisations, like health, education, the police and the council, who work together to improve support for children in care and care leavers.

MALAP was relaunched in June 2026, with an event bringing together teams from across the council and wider partners. This reflects the expansion of corporate parenting responsibilities to a broader range of organisations under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. The event gave everyone the opportunity to learn more about their corporate parenting responsibilities, or build on what they already knew, and to sign up to be part of MALAP moving forward. We want these meetings to feel refreshed, energised and dynamic, with the right people involved to make a difference.

The group meets every three months, focusing on taking action to keep improving services and support for children and young people, and making a real difference to their lives.

Celebrating Success



Children & Families worked with Culture, Leisure & Tourism Directorate to secure free tickets for children in care, foster carers and care leavers to Scarborough Open Air Theatre gigs, pantomime tickets at Scarborough Spa and activities at Peasholm Park.



In partnership with our Leisure Centres we were able to extend our gym offer to two care leavers who were parents, so they could take their children (our corporate grandchildren) swimming on a regular basis.



A care leaver, who joined North Yorkshire Council as an apprentice, and then progressed to a permanent position fulfilled her dream of going to university but almost had to drop out in her second year, due to the cost of childcare. Through our Director's Grant, we were able to fund her childcare for the duration of her degree, and she has just received the Dean's Award for Academic Achievement in her final year.



One of our care leavers, who was a responsible dog owner was unable to walk her dog during her pregnancy, due to additional health issues, so we used our Director's Grant to fund a dog walker until she was able to resume walks herself after the birth of her child. This meant she felt listened to and understood that our commitment to her was real.



With the support of our Resourcing Solutions Team we created 4 Kickstart positions within the Leaving Care Team that were ringfenced for Care Leavers. All four young people are now in paid employment or attending university.