

Rotherham Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027

'You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending'
(CS Lewis)

Caring

Honest

Proud

(Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Values, 2024)

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About this document

Title: Rotherham Leaving Care Strategy

Purpose: To set out Rotherham's strategy for Care Leavers for the next 3 years

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Introduction

In Rotherham, we are committed to ensuring that our Care Leavers achieve their aspirations and the best possible outcomes for their future.

This strategy sits and should be read alongside Rotherham Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027, which sets out Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's vision, priorities and commitments for children in care and Care Leavers. The Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines our Corporate Parenting Principles and Promise to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework for Children's Services and partner agencies outlining our responsibilities as Corporate Parents to Care Leavers. This Leaving Care Strategy provides more detailed strategic priorities for our Care Leavers and outlines our dedication to providing bespoke and robust support and services to all young people aged 16-25 who have been 'looked after' at some point since they were 14 years old and were in care on or after their 16th birthday.

Rotherham Council are ambitious for our Care Leavers and want to ensure that when they leave care, they are prepared for independence and ready to achieve their ambitions. We need to recognise the unique characteristics and experiences of our Care Leavers, in order to support them to achieve their potential and to be successful in adulthood.

Care Leavers have had diverse and complex experiences and we must listen to their views, wishes and experiences, in order to understand their needs. Young people with care experience often have to grow up sooner than their peers who have not had experience of being in care, which makes them more vulnerable. As Corporate Parents we must ensure that we

reduce barriers and support Care Leavers to overcome adversity, to help them to transition effectively to adulthood.

We want to ensure that Care Leavers contribute to service delivery and decision making, by hearing their voice and providing them with creative consultation opportunities. We recognise that Care Leavers are the experts in what they need and want in order to be successful.

An operational and a strategic Care Leavers Action Plan compliment this strategy, which will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that we are achieving our aspirations for Care Leavers and tracking progress. The Care Leavers Local Offer was also reviewed in 2024, which outlines the Local Authority's support and services for Care Leavers.

The Corporate Parenting Partnership Board is responsible for overseeing the delivery of Rotherham Leaving Care Strategy and associated service plans. The Board meets four to six times per year and is responsible for ensuring that the council fulfils its role as corporate parent. The Board will ensure that officers are held to account for the outcomes of children in care and Care Leavers and that their best interests are at the centre of decision making. Plans will also have oversight through performance meetings and boards.



Foreword – Nicola Curley, Strategic Director for Children’s Services

This Care Leavers Strategy has been created to demonstrate how we will meet the needs of young people who are or have been looked after in Rotherham. We know it can be hard for young people to transition to adulthood and that young people who have been in care find this harder than their peers. For this reason, we have set out our priorities to ensure that young people are supported to become successful adults, with support both personally and professionally. We want all young people to have ambitions and we will support them to achieve their goals. We will work as a whole council to meet the needs of care leavers and provide them with high quality and accessible services. We will involve care leavers in service development and listen to their views and suggestions, to make sure services meet their needs. We will learn from their experiences and be good corporate parents and grandparents. We will support care leavers to be resilient and hardworking and will help them when they become parents themselves.

Foreword – Cllr. Victoria Cusworth, Cabinet Member for children and young people.

Leaving care is a significant milestone in the lives of young people, marking the transition from a structured environment to the broader world of independence. As Corporate Parents, we have a collective responsibility to ensure that this transition is as smooth and supportive as possible. Our care leavers deserve the same opportunities, support, and encouragement that any young person would expect from their family. This strategy is a testament to our commitment to our young people. It outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing the unique challenges faced by care leavers, from securing stable housing and employment to accessing education and healthcare. By working collaboratively across the Council and with our partners, not forgetting the invaluable input of our care leavers themselves, we aim to create a robust support system that empowers these young people to thrive. Our vision is clear: to provide care leavers with the tools, resources, and support they need to build fulfilling, independent lives. This strategy is not just a document; it is a promise to our care leavers that we will stand by them, advocate for them, and ensure that their voices are heard and their needs met. Together, we can make a difference. Together, we can help our care leavers achieve their full potential.

Definition of a Care Leaver

A Care Leaver is a young person aged between 16 and 25 who has previously been in the care of the local authority. A young person is considered to be a Care Leaver when they reach 16 years old, even though they may not yet have left the care of the Local Authority.

The term 'Care Leaver' as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, refers to eligible, relevant and former relevant children:

- **Eligible** children are those young people aged 16-17 who are still in care and have been 'looked after' for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 and including their 16th birthday.
- **Relevant** children are those young people aged 16 and 17 who have already left care, and who were 'looked after' for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 and have been 'looked after' at some time while they were 16 or 17.
- **Former relevant** children are those young people aged 18, 19 or 20 who have been eligible and/or relevant.

A Care Leaver can also be considered as a '**qualifying**' care leaver.

- This applies to young people who: Left care after they had turned 16, but who are not 'eligible' or 'relevant' because they were not looked after for 13 weeks.
- Were not looked after on their 16th birthday but lived in residential education or a mental health establishment, or in private fostering or Special Guardianship.

For this category of care leaver, local authority help is discretionary, but can include advice, assistance, befriending, help with education and training costs and the provision of accommodation during college/university vacations.

National and Local Context

'In 2023 12,200 young people in England aged out of the care system on their 18th Birthday. This has increased by 2% since 2022 and increased by 7% since 2019'. Care leavers make up 25% of the adult homeless population (Home for Good, 2024).

The average age for young people leaving home is 23 years old. For Care Leavers this is much lower, with 1 out of 3 Care Leavers living independently aged 18 (Barnardo's, 2024). Young people leaving care, leave home much younger and more sudden transition to adulthood.

The Local Authority are now required to provide ongoing support to young people beyond 21 until they are 25 years old, if they require this. Local Authorities are also required to publish a Local Offer, outlining their support and services to Care Leavers. These services include health and wellbeing, education, training and employment, accommodation and financial support.

Stable Homes Built on Love Consultation (2023) outlined the need for Care Leavers to have the same level of support and care as any other young person. This addresses the need for stable and suitable accommodation for Care Leavers and to have access to appropriate networks, education, training and employment.

In Rotherham we have seen an increase in the numbers of Care Leavers by 11% in 18 months. The current number of Care Leavers aged 16-21 is 357 as at July 2024 and is expected to increase further temporarily. The service also provides ad hoc support and groups for Care Leavers aged 21-25. Forecasting predicts that numbers will start to steadily reduce after 2 years, based on the numbers of children in care currently. Of note is the rising numbers of unaccompanied young people, who currently represent 9% of our children in care population.

The Vision



Bright Spots Indicators, Coram Voice (2024)

Our Care Leavers deserve the best opportunities in life, to be successful, independent and to transition positively to adulthood. It is important that young people have the life skills, confidence and support required to thrive in everything they do.

Meeting the needs of Care Leavers requires a multi-agency approach with Rotherham Children's Services and all partner agencies. We commit to being good Corporate Parents and to ensuring that our support and services for Care Leavers are the best they can be.

We want Care Leavers to have easy access to emotional and practical support from family, friends, networks and professionals. We expect young people to have a good understanding of their journey and life story and to have aspirations for their future.

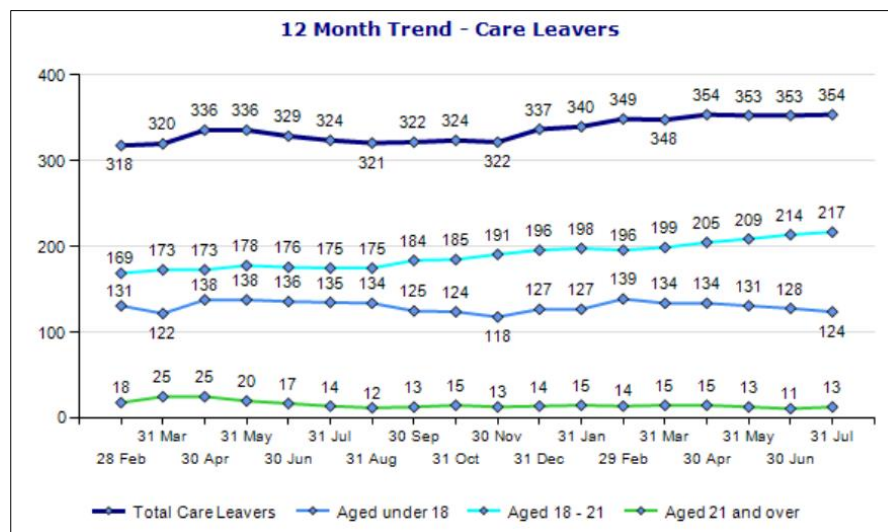
It is our vision for all Care Leavers to:

- Be healthy and have easy access to health care.
- Be safe and understand how to keep themselves safe.
- Have long lasting and supportive relationships.
- Engage in Education, Employment or Training.
- Access and sustain long term, good quality accommodation.
- Access their information and be supported to understand their history.
- Participate in society and influence services.
- Be in control of their own finances.
- Have positive emotional wellbeing and sense of self.
- Have access to ongoing support and advice.
- Be ambitious for their future.
- Make positive and safe choices.
- Be resilient.
- Be independent.

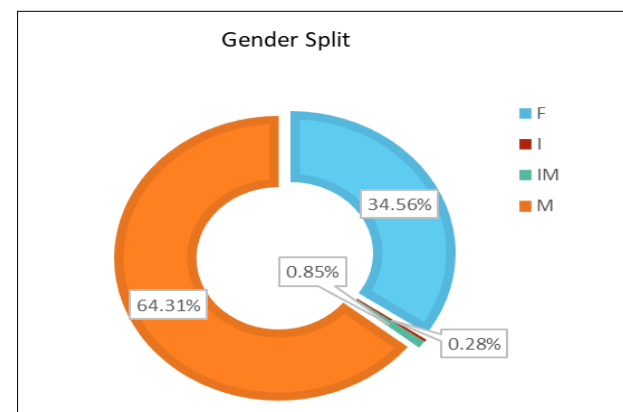
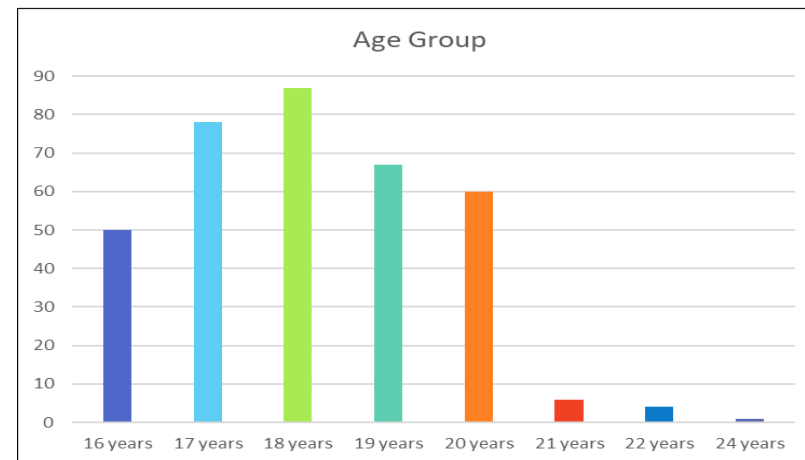
Leaving Care Data – Demographics

There are currently 357 Rotherham Care Leavers. This includes any young person 16 and over who have previously been or continue to be in the care of the Local Authority and who has an allocated Social Worker or Personal Advisor. This does not include those young people over 21 who no longer have an allocated Personal Advisor, though who may keep in touch with the service and access support from the leaving care team on an ad hoc basis until they are 25 years of age. The data below is set at the end of Quarter 1 on 30.6.24.

The chart below outlines how the number of Care Leavers has risen over the last 18 months and indicates a steady rise in numbers. Forecasting projects that after a further peak, over time this number will reduce, though this will be influenced by any changes in the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied young people.

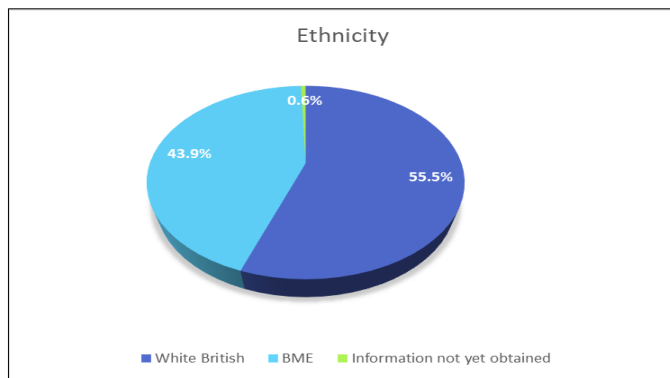
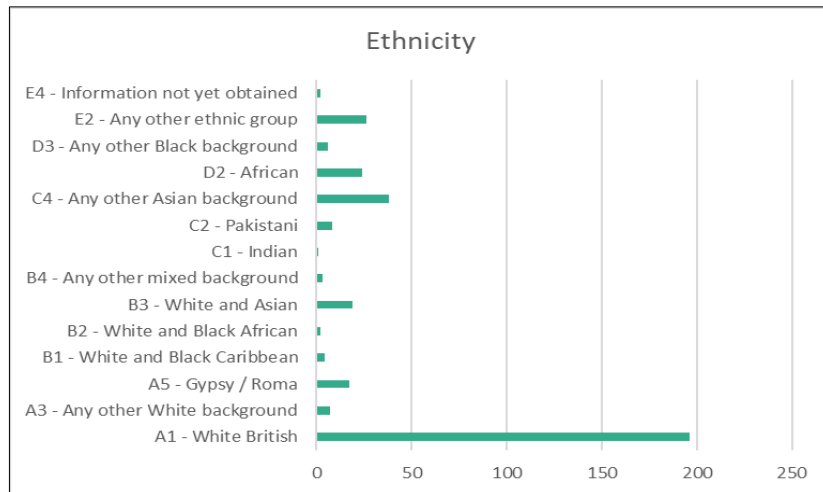


The age and gender profiles of Care Leavers is shown below. Due to the high numbers of unaccompanied young males, it is not unexpected that there is a higher proportion of males to females. The age profile of Care Leavers also identifies trends in increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people over the last 3-4 years.

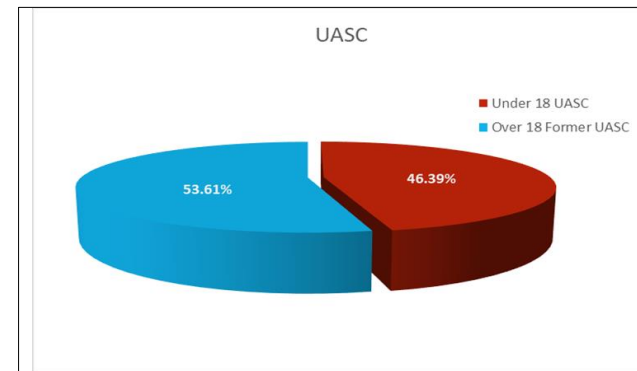


Leaving Care Data – Demographics

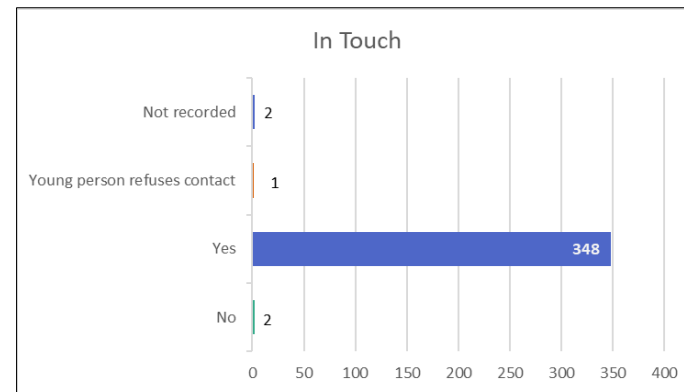
The charts below demonstrate the ethnicity and cultural background of the current Care Leaver population. This evidences that Rotherham's Care Leavers are a diverse group and that this does not reflect the wider population of Rotherham. As such ensuring that the cultural and identity needs of young people leaving care are met should be a priority.



There are 95 Care Leavers aged between 16 and 21 years of age, who presented as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child on arrival. These numbers include young people open to the service and they make up 26% of the Leaving Care population. The breakdown of those over 18 and under 18 is shown below.



Almost all Care Leavers choose to continue to be in touch with the Local Authority. This is testament to the effort of Social Workers and Personal Advisors, who establish and sustain relationships with children and young people into adulthood and beyond.



Strategic Priority One: Family and Connections

Family and friends are undoubtedly the most important people for Care Leavers as they reach adulthood and start to navigate their way through adult life. Care Leavers need strong and supportive networks, who will be there for them whatever happens. It is our job to make sure that Care Leavers maintain contact with family, friends and connections and that these are not severed as they become adults.

What will we do?

- Support children in care and care leavers to maintain relationships with birth family and wider family or friend networks to ensure that they have sustainable support in adulthood.
- Utilise family network meetings and family group conferencing at specific points in a child's journey to promote lifelong links.
- Use the Caring Connections Family Group Conferencing, to work with care leavers to explore their networks and people who they want to stay in contact with from various points in their lives.
- Support Care Leavers to return to the care of their family, wherever this is possible, with the support they need to be safe and stable.
- Try not to change Personal Advisors unless this is unavoidable.
- Make sure that Care Leavers have safe and suitable accommodation in Rotherham, to ensure that they can remain, or return to Rotherham to be close to family and friends.
- Offer group activities to young people and signpost them to events, to support them to make friends and develop networks, as well as gain new hobbies.
- Encourage contact with previous foster carers or residential care workers.

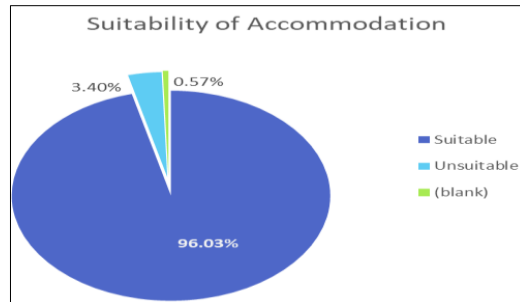
What will success look like?

- As adults, those with care experience will have sustainable family and friend support networks, who will be there in the long term to support them.
- Care leavers will have broader networks, who they can call upon for a range of support.
- Care leavers will keep in touch with services and share their experiences, seeking support and advice when they need this.
- Care leavers will be well prepared to live independently, or to gain as much independence as possible.
- Young people will not feel isolated and will feel supported to achieve their ambitions.
- Care leavers will feel safe and experience stability in their lives.



Strategic Priority Two: Safe and Affordable Homes

Currently 96% of Care Leavers are in suitable accommodation, which is a high number. We know that sourcing suitable accommodation, which meets the needs of Care Leavers is becoming more challenging. This is due to the national shortage of housing. We want to ensure that all of our Care Leavers can access suitable and affordable accommodation.



What will we do:

- Ensure there is a range of suitable, affordable accommodation options, including staying put, supported lodgings, semi supported, shared accommodation, houses of multiple occupancy and independent.
- Expand our in house supported accommodation to 20 dispersed properties, linked to dedicated 16 plus supported accommodation, which is staffed 24/7. These properties will help young people to get ready for independent living.
- Maintain close links between commissioning, children in care, leaving care, residential and 16 plus supported accommodation to forecast accommodation needs and commission appropriate services.
- Ensure that all of our commissioned accommodation is high quality, compliant, regulated and best cost value.

- Establish a 16+ Panel to track young people to appropriate destinations.
- Work with trusted providers to ensure accommodation and support is of good quality.
- Care Leavers will be supported to develop independence skills, to ensure they transition positively to independent living, including budgeting, paying bills, food shopping, cooking and prioritising.
- Pathway plans will be jointly created and will consider future living arrangements for young people, including what support will be offered to help to get them there.

What Will Success Look Like:

- All agencies will work together to secure, suitable, affordable and high-quality accommodation options for Care Leavers.
- There will be more options for young people to remain with carers, family or friends and where this is not possible to access a range of other accommodation options.
- More young people will be able to access in house supported accommodation.
- All Care Leavers will be able to articulate their destination goal and understand how they will get there.
- All Care Leavers will be better prepared for independence, without feeling rushed.
- Young people will be able to manage everyday issues and will know who to contact if they need help.



Strategic Priority Three: Education, Training and Employment

We are aspirational for Care Leavers and want them to access education, training, and employment. We know that this can sometimes be difficult for care leavers, who have sometimes experienced lots of transitions and may have lost time in education. We are committed to making sure that our young people are nurtured, supported and encouraged to reach their potential.

What will we do?

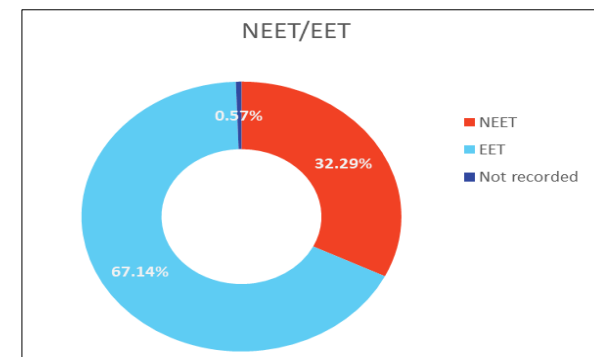
- Continue to ensure close links between the Virtual School and Leaving Care services by having a lead Personal Advisor for education, employment and training.
- Track young people who do not have an education, employment or training destination and offer bespoke support to them.
- Be aspirational with and for young people, helping them to identify their next steps and to reach their potential.
- Support young people who speak English as a second language to gain the skills they need to make progress in education, training or employment.
- Support our unaccompanied young people to enter education and to understand the education system in the UK.
- Support young people who have aspirations of further and higher education to reach their goals.
- Work with partner agencies to ensure that young people can access all the opportunities available to them and have priority for some services.
- Have a lead Personal Advisor for education, employment and training; working with partner agencies and developing ways to support our young people.
- Provide drop-in session at the Journey with the Department for Work and Pensions.
- Prepare a care leavers covenant, with partner agencies, to increase access to apprenticeship opportunities.

- Work with partner agencies and the private sector to encourage innovative opportunities for Care Leavers.
- Promote our entrepreneurial Care Leavers with self-employment opportunities, with local authority and external support.

What will success look like?

- More of our young people will take part in further and higher education courses.
- Pathway plans will have achievable, specific and measurable educational/work targets.
- Education, employment and training will be accessible for all care leavers, regardless of barriers.
- Care Leavers will have priority access to some apprenticeships, with Rotherham Council, the NHS and other partners, which will support them towards qualifications and careers.
- Young people aged 16 and 17 will be able to articulate aspirations and goals in personal education plan meetings.
- Schools and colleges will be instrumental in supporting students to be ambitious.
- Care Leavers will have easy access to appropriate support.

The charts below outline the numbers of Care Leavers currently in education, employment and training.



Strategic Priority Four: Health and Wellbeing

We know how important it is for our Care Leavers to have timely access to appropriate health and wellbeing services. We want all young people to be healthy, happy and to have positive mental wellbeing.

What will we do?

- We will ensure that there are effective links between designated health professionals and leaving care services, which will help to prioritise services.
- Young people can access support from their looked after nurses up to the age of 19.
- Named nurses will develop a final Review Health Assessment process for 17-year-olds, which will include a health passport and give details of local services. Young people will be asked if they would like a marker on their GP record which will tell their GP that they are care experienced.
- The specialist nursing team will work with GPs to help them to understand the experiences of Care Leavers.
- Work with adult social care and mental health services to make sure that young people transition well when they reach 18.
- Work with CAMHS colleagues to develop a trauma pathway where our young people can access intervention.
- We will ensure that services such as Support for Change, the Young Parent Service, substance misuse services and Sexual Health Services are easily accessible for Care Leavers.
- Care Leavers will be better supported to access initial health assessments, with individual intervention or longer appointment slots where needed.
- Strengthen the transition for care leavers between children's and adult's services by improving pathway assessments and joined up services.

What will success look like?

- Care Leavers will be able to quickly access services they need to support their health or wellbeing.
- Care experienced parents will be able to access specialist services to support them to be good parents.
- Health and wellbeing services will be aware of the impact of being care-experienced and will be able to offer empathic and specific support to Care Leavers.
- Young people will know where and how to access health and wellbeing and will have a health passport that can support them through adulthood.
- Unaccompanied and separated young people will have health needs identified at the earliest opportunity when they come into care.
- Care Leavers will transition successfully to adult services, without gaps in service.
- Young people who need trauma therapy will have better access to this, so that their emotional health can be supported and stabilised.
- Young people will understand their journey and will be supported to overcome adversity.



Strategic Priority Five: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People

We know that our unaccompanied and separated children and young people endure difficult and traumatic journeys to the UK and need our support to adapt to life in the UK. We hope to support young people to develop new networks whilst maintaining as many family links as we can.

What will we do?

- Ensure that children and young people are supported by workers who understand their life experiences.
 - Support children and young people to maintain their important relationships with people who may not live in the same country as they do.
 - We will work with health providers and voluntary organisations to identify pathways for emotional support.
 - We will develop practice guidance to support social workers to do the right work, at the right time, with our children and young people.
 - We will make sure that we have more social workers who are trained in age assessments to ensure that we are completing timely age assessments.
 - Support children and young people to identify what makes them unique and work together to understand their cultural and identity needs and how to support these needs.
 - Continue to work with other local authorities, migration organisations and partner agencies; both across the region and nationwide, to understand more about our young people's journey and the legal and political frameworks which affect our young people.
 - We will have a directory of support available for children and young people, and our partners.
- With our accommodation providers, we will help our young people to understand what life in the UK is like and support them to have a successful life.
 - Our Virtual School will offer additional support to our young people who speak English as a second language.
 - Our health partners will ensure health needs are identified at the young person's first health appointment and will offer, as standard, additional time for the young person's appointment.
- **What will success look like?**
 - Young people will have been able to talk about their life in their home country and their journey with their social worker or PA if they want to.
 - Our young people will be able to sustain the relationships that are important to them and will feel a sense of connection even if they live in different countries.
 - Young people will be able to access specialist support to help them make sense of their life experiences.
 - Young people will be able to access support from their workers to understand how to access resources in their community, such as places of worship, social activities, and housing.
 - Young people will work with their social worker or personal advisor to write a triple plan, which will help them understand their next steps, dependent on the outcome of their asylum application.
 - More social workers will be able to undertake age assessments and will have the knowledge to support young people through their asylum applications.
 - We will have a skilled workforce, who understand the local and regional context for our separated young people and can support our young people effectively with this knowledge.
 - Young people will know which agencies can support them in specific areas of their lives.

Strategic Priority Six: Engagement and Participation

We want to hear the voice of all Care Leavers, who are the experts on what they need. We want Care Leavers to influence and shape services and contribute to decisions which are made about their future. We want to work in partnership with all children and young people, to influence and shape service delivery and review. Young people will have a forum where they can work in partnership with services to translate this collective voice into service delivery and review.

What will we do?

- Upskill the workforce to be creative about seeking the voice of young people, in a variety of forums. We will ask our Care Leavers to support with training the workforce.
- Work with the newly established care leavers forum, we will consult with the care leavers community to understand what they want from the forum moving forward and how we can best engage them to maximise their voice.
- Build on the numbers of young people attending the leaving care forum to create a group that is diverse and representative.
- Review the use of 'The Journey' which is the hub to support care leavers to develop new skills, access support and socialise. All of these services will be evaluated to source feedback from young people.
- Create a visible pledge to our children and young people setting out how we will work with them as equals to design, review, and influence services.
- Continue to involve Care Leavers in recruitment and training of Children's workforce, foster carers and residential staff.
- Continue to and expand upon Care Leavers participation in the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board.

- Develop online surveys to capture the views, experience and feedback of care leavers, including around transitions.

Produce six monthly reports, which evidence good practice across the service and capture the progress of voice and participation for Care Leavers. These reports will be shared with the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board and the wider workforce.

What will success look like?

- The workforce and managers will feel confident about supporting young people to express their views, wishes and feelings and to participate in decisions about their plan.
- There will be an active and vibrant care leavers forum. The group will tell us that they feel represented and heard.
- Care Leavers will understand and agree with their care plan.
- Good quality feedback will be collated frequently and used to inform the wider workforce.
- The voice of care leavers will be evident in the policies and services that are delivered by agencies.
- The Council will deliver high quality services, which are led by Care Leavers
- The Corporate Parenting Partnership Board will lead on priorities which are set by Care Leavers.
- We will have links regionally and nationally to be part of the greater carer leavers voice community.



Three Year Priorities: Summary



Family and Connections

Relationships
Networks
Support
Stability
Friendships
Sustainable Links
Social Activities



Safe and Affordable Homes

Types of Accommodation and Arrangements
Support to Develop Independence
More In-house Provision
Tenancy Ready



Education, Training and Employment

Aspirational and Ambitious
Range of Apprenticeships
Qualifications
Employment Options
Drop in Clinics
Covenant
Accessibility



Health and Wellbeing

Access to services
Specialist support
Mental Health Services
Transition to Adults Services
Health Passport
Young Parents



Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People

Support
Pathways
Guidance
Timely age assessments
National and Regional Links
Education Opportunities
Relationships and Connections



Engagement and Participation

Care Leaver Forum
Consultation
Representation
Pledge
Surveys
Feedback
Training
Priorities



Working with Rotherham's children, young people and families to be resilient, successful and safe.